

On and On, Better and Better Thoughts from a former editor

Continued from page 1

received a note via campus mail expressing surprise and joy at the article, along with a brave confession: "I've read those books too!"

Within weeks we were gathered together officially for the first time, and OITM's pending demise was high on our list of topics to discuss. (Actually, it was the only topic we had to discuss, other than how good the brownies were that our hostess served. Just what had we hoped to accomplish by meeting like that anyway?) We ventured off to Burlington together, at that time content just to listen and marvel at the strength and commitment displayed by those who had previously been associated with the newspaper.

A follow-up meeting was scheduled, and that's when it happened. Somehow, for reasons I cannot fully recall or explain, my right hand went up in the air when the facilitators asked if anyone was interested in becoming the new editor. Several other people offered to help out, and a month or so later, the "Phoenix" issue of the paper rose from the ashes. Though that issue was only four pages long and somewhat rough in its conception, the crisis had been averted, and OITM lived to see its fifth year.

One cannot say enough good things about the group of people that came together in those years with the common mission of saving the paper. I recall long meetings and sometimes heated discussions about form and content. Likewise, I remember the follow-up socializing over pizza at Zachary's or ice cream at Ben and Jerry's. Soon, we were stuffing newspapers once a month on a Saturday morning, then heading off to stuff ourselves with lunch somewhere in Burlington, then returning to have two or three hour business meetings in the afternoon.

The men and women volunteering to work on the paper with me quickly became more than just acquaintances or colleagues, more even than simply friends. We had become a family. Together we wrestled with organizational by-laws and articles of incorporation, puzzled over postal rates and processes, and moved to include bisexuals in the masthead (ever a controversy, but with two bisexuals, myself included, putting in a great deal of time and effort, we felt it entirely justified).

While covering stories like the brutal beating of a gay man outside of Pearls, we supported one another and mustered the courage to cry in sympathy in the morning, then speak up loudly at hearings on the Hate Crimes Bill (then in legislation) in the evening. As journalists, we were all hyper-sensitive to the state of gay affairs in the state. That translated into moments of extreme frustration and disappointment as well as times of great delight and happiness. The latter have lasted the longest for me.

Receiving explicit "safe sex" articles on the fax machine in my daytime office (and having the secretary read them before delivering them to me) always left me wondering about this new



OITM staff coming out in 1990.
(OITM file photo)

extracurricular activity of mine. Opening letters from people who thought Out In The Mountains was a backpacking newspaper always brought a smile. Listening to jokes on Alison Bechdel's answering machine as we discussed the inclusion of "Dykes To Watch Out For" in the paper also amused me. Unveiling our official OITM T-shirts during a cloudburst at the 1990 Gay Pride Day in Montpelier made an otherwise stormy day seem full of light.

Most of all, though, I remember the people who volunteered long hours (and plenty of muscle moving boxes of papers up and down stairs). To think that such a staff of unpaid and often dissimilar individuals could come together to create something so meaningful each month. It was truly the first time I ever felt optimistic about the power of community.

When we gathered on the steps outside our 30 Elmwood Avenue offices in Burlington (rented to us by Vermont CARES at the time) for a holiday greeting photo, I felt an incredible upswell of joy and pride. That photo, which appeared in the December 1990 issue, means a great deal to me as I consider the newspaper's history. For the first time, we were willing to include our own photos in the paper. At the time, it seemed like such an incredible risk given the events of the previous year. Today, I am excited to see so many more faces appearing in the paper with each issue, smiling faces, proud faces, beautiful faces.

One gesture stands alone as the most significant moment of my tenure as editor. For the "Coming Out" issue of the paper in October of 1990, we as an editorial board also "came out" and, for the first time in the newspaper's history, printed our names in the masthead for all to see. Bylines began to appear more and more regularly, and those writers who had once resorted to pseudonyms began requesting that their real names be used. Subscribers even wrote in requesting that we stop hiding the paper in manilla mailing envelopes.

Even then, you could feel something momentous happening in the state, and that impetus continues to this day. We had rescued the paper from a critical time, built it up into a much larger, more inclusive, and more comprehensive publication, and we were proud to stand behind our accomplishment. Likewise, we were proud to report on the accomplishments of all those who were featured in our pages. As gay people, we were still learning how to stand up and be counted in our state. That lesson, taught to me during my editorship, has changed my life for the better, and I thank the paper for having provided me with the opportunity.

Looking at the paper today, I remain amazed at how much we continue to accomplish in this state, and at the high level of grace and dignity with which we achieve our goals. Vermont continues to be a place like no other in the country, with its natural beauty and commitment to values enhanced by the strength of its gay, lesbian, and bisexual residents. Therefore, we demand and continue to produce a quality publication that reflects the joys and sorrows of our community.

May OITM live on for another decade, and another beyond that ... and on and on through the entire 21st century ... and may the news get better and better with every glorious issue. ▼

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