

Out in the Mountains
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Out in the Mountains is published monthly except for a combined July/August issue. The newspaper maintains offices at 109 South Winooski Avenue in Burlington. Our mailing address is PO Box 177, Burlington VT 05402. Our e-mail address is OutVermont@aol.com. Bulk rate postage for the mailing of the newspaper is paid in Burlington. The subscription rate is \$20 per year within the United States.

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, support and affirmation. We also see *OITM* as a vehicle for celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of the staff. This paper cannot and will not endorse any candidates and actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

We will not publish any material which is overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, or homophobic.

All materials submitted must be signed. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously, upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

To Submit Articles & Letters

We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper both for and by gay, lesbian, and bisexual Vermonters. Please assist us by typing your articles and letters double-spaced and including your name and phone number in case we have any questions. Thank you for helping out!

Materials should be sent to:
Out in the Mountains
PO Box 177
Burlington, VT 05402

How to Advertise

If you would like to run an ad in *OITM*, please contact us for rates, sizes, and information. Copy can be mailed to: *OITM*, P.O. Box 177, Burlington, VT 05402, or call Ellen at (802) 860-1922 Steven West at (802) 864-6399 or Bruce at BMH graphic design at (802) 658-1556.

Read *OITM*
Monthly

**From the Editor:
Condom Sense? or Dental Dam It!**

Fred Kuhr

WINOOSKI -- I have always been the kind of person who is willing to follow the rules as long as I know what the rules are. One problem with the AIDS epidemic, however, is that the rules keep changing. When I first came out, the rules were "always use a condom" and "never swallow". Then came the rumors from Canada saying that you could swallow north of the border. (Was this geography, politics, or pure falsehood?) Oh, and then came the reports that you could get HIV through oral sex even if you did not swallow. *Out* magazine recently reported the cases of men in the U.S. who followed the supposed "rules" of safer sex and still became infected. And now comes the latest change in the rules, "negotiated safety". Although not endorsed by any AIDS groups in the U.S., the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Centre of Australia is getting a great deal of media attention in the American gay press because of a series of full-page ads the group is running in the Australian gay press promoting "negotiated safety".

Negotiated what??? ... According to this idea, a gay couple can throw their condoms to the wind (or just paint rainbow stripes on them and hang them out the window) if they follow eight steps. As outlined by *New York Newsday* columnist Gabriel Rotello in a recent issue of *The Advocate*, negotiated safety goes something like this. "Step 1 is to discuss whether having sex without condoms is an important issue to both of you. If it's not that important, keep using condoms. But if you decide it is important, Steps 2, 3, and 4 are to get tested, wait several months, then get tested again. If one partner tests positive while the other tests negative ... continue to use condoms every time. If you both test positive, you are advised that unprotected sex can lead to additional infections."

If both partners test negative "you can proceed to Step 5: Promise each other that you won't have unsafe sex outside the relationship ... Step 6 reads, 'Discuss and promise each other that if either of you slips up or has an accident with unsafe sex outside the relationship, you will tell the other immediately and go back to safe sex until you've both been tested again' several months later. Step 7: You both must agree that either partner can insist on using condoms again at any time. Step 8 ... You both have to agree that if one of

you has unsafe sex outside the relationship and then admits it to the other, it won't mean the end of the relationship." Could you promise your partner that kind of punishment-free honesty? Well, this Australian system has a disclaimer, "If this feels like too much to expect, then keep using condoms, always."

Condom nation ... No statewide or national AIDS agencies yet endorse negotiated safety. So why bring it up? The better question is why are Australians looking for and promoting this new twist on safer sex practices? Could it be that the conventional wisdom of "just use your latex" is not working? According to an informal survey from last year, sponsored by Vermont CARES and the Vermont Department of Health, of less than 100 MSM (men who have sex with men), 68% said they had unprotected anal sex in the last six months. According to Chris Tebbets, Vermont CARES' Men's Health Project Coordinator, "by and large, men who have sex with men know how to use a condom but that doesn't mean they'll use one when they need to." He also feels that the "just use your latex" message gives people a "false sense of security ... It's more than 'just wear a condom'." Tebbets speaks of a holistic approach to safer sex of which "honesty is a part."

Just for the taste of it ... One of the reasons unsafe sex is making a comeback, according to Carey Johnson, Outreach Coordinator of the Brattleboro Area AIDS Project, is that "prevention efforts haven't been sustained ... Part of it is the temporariness of the media (looking) from crisis to crisis (with) no sustained effort and devotion of resources." Johnson cites the advertising campaign of the Coca-Cola company, whose product is arguably the number one product in the world, yet the company spends obscene amounts of money to keep you thirsty for more. Tebbets agrees, "Studies show that if you take away the constant message, the behavior goes away."

Condom and dumber ... Is negotiated safety a dumb idea? According to Johnson, "individuals have been negotiating what they consider safer sex situations" for as long as safe sex has been around. "The concept of negotiating sex is nothing new." The challenge for groups such as Brattleboro Area

AIDS Project is to convey "a sense of personal safety and personal responsibility." Tebbets says that AIDS groups "need to give gay men a sense of future."

I must admit that my little foray into the intellectual land of AIDS and latex did not give me the answers I wanted to hear. But maybe the point is that no easy answers exist. Negotiated safety may indeed be a great idea then,

helping people of all sexual orientations through the maze of safer sex choices that they have been stumbling through, successfully or unsuccessfully, over the past fifteen years. Before you can be honest with your partners, however, you must be honest with yourself. How much is your future, your life, worth to you? Each of us must answer that question for ourselves. And maybe that is the answer I knew all along. ▼

Letters to the Editor

Longer and More Human Feel

Congratulations to you and the staff of *OITM* on recent improvements ... The addition of "Opinions In The Mountains," longer, more personal editorials, "Coalition Notes", and the use of humor in articles (like the condom-wearing Sasquatch!) give the paper a livelier, more human feel. It's wonderful to see our community using *OITM* to discuss (and argue about!) the issues facing us today. The ongoing debate taking place by your readers is testament to the effectiveness of *OITM*'s outreach into the g/l/b/t community. Congratulations, and keep up the great work. We all definitely appreciate it.

Tom Aloisi
Burlington

Was It The Caffeine?

Having never really been much of a conspiracy theorist, I was incredulous when I read Gene Barfield's letter in the March 1995 issue of *OITM*. After thinking about the letter, I realized that Gene simply must have had too much coffee prior to writing it or had just seen the movie JFK.

In his letter, Gene outlined the (alleged) statewide g/l/b plot to ignore and, essentially, be mean to former VCLGR Co-Liaisons Keith Goslant and Holly Perdue. According to Barfield, while *OITM* and members of the VCLGR are the leaders of this conspiracy, co-conspirators include thousands of ungrateful gay, lesbian, and bisexual Vermonters.

Ironically, with his irrational attacks on the VCLGR and *OITM*, Barfield is the only person appearing ungrateful and, unfortunately, performing a great disservice to Keith and Holly. It seems to me that the time Barfield spent concocting his hair-brained fantasy and writing to *OITM* would have been better spent writing a well-deserved and fitting tribute about Keith and Holly to share with the readers of *OITM*. Gene, switch to decaf and leave the conspiracy theories to Oliver Stone.

Paul Olsen
Colchester ▼

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