

# VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAINS: AIDS - Less Than Fabulous

Tom Aloisi

While Greg Louganis bravely comes forward about his AIDS diagnosis, the jury is still out on how the public will ultimately perceive him. Is he a good, "innocent victim" like Ryan White and Magic Johnson? Or will he be perceived forever as someone evil - deserving of AIDS - a gay man who may have put the entire 1988 Olympic Games at risk for AIDS with a few drops of blood in a chlorine-filled pool? One person I know called Greg Louganis an "asshole" for not telling anyone that he was putting other divers at risk. When I explained that there was no possibility that another diver could have been infected, she responded, "So what's the big deal?" Exactly.

Fifteen years into the AIDS epidemic, the straight world seems to be more concerned (paranoid?) about AIDS than ever. The myths and misconceptions seem to linger, and the media always enjoys stirring up the pot of paranoia about AIDS. As gay men, we need to continue to fight for each other's lives. We can't depend on the straight population (especially the straight media) for accurate, non-incendiary information. Unfortunately, there has been a drastic decline in AIDS activism among gay men. Why is this? Is it because HIV is no longer the hip new disease? What ever happened to ACT-UP, did they run out of combat boots? Did electing a president who was supposed to be our friend make us all complacent? It seems to me that this apathy may be caused by the proliferation of AIDS among people who are already disenfranchised in the gay community - injection drug users, the poor, gay men of color - those invisible men for whom no one seems to advocate in our community.

We have a responsibility as gay men to acknowledge the changing faces of AIDS. Not all of us are Greg Louganises or Rock Hudsons. The hysteria of the Louganis story spread by the straight media has shown us once again that we need to continue to rely on our own community for support. In 1995, most educated, informed gay/bisexual men have access to risk reduction information, and many have the ability to negotiate safer sex practices. It is often the closeted or disenfranchised members of our community who are still becoming infected. If you are reading

this article you are much more likely to be able to get the education and on-going support to protect yourself from HIV infection. We cannot continue to turn our backs on those of us who are not constantly hearing the safer sex message. We have to acknowledge that this virus is primarily still infecting men who have sex with men, and we need to develop prevention programs and methods of support for all members of the gay community, regardless of race, wealth, personality, culture, or physical appearance.

Too often, I read obituaries of people who have died of AIDS, mostly men, in local Vermont newspapers. Who are these people? No one in the out, politically active gay community seems to know who these people are. Many of these people are gay men on the fringe of our community; if they're not at all the fabulous parties or political events they don't really matter to us. In these instances, it's easy for us to ignore their existence until we read their obituaries, and wonder, "who?"

In San Francisco, it is widely known in the gay community that most AIDS obituaries are reserved for the "A-list" gay men. The young and fabulous set. Even in death, many disenfranchised San Franciscans remain invisible. This must not happen in Vermont. The next less-than-fabulous man you see at 135 Pearl may be living with HIV/AIDS or may be on the path to becoming infected. It is time for all of us to put down our biases and get involved to support all members of our community. After all, you never know who our next "innocent victim" may be.

*Tom Aloisi currently works with the Vermont Department of Health AIDS Program. His views do not necessarily reflect those of the Vermont Department of Health.*

*All readers are encouraged to take their turn at the editorial bat and let their voices be heard on the topic of their choice. Send articles/columns to **Out In The Mountains**, P.O. Box 177, Burlington, VT 05402, or via the Internet at [OutVermont@aol.com](mailto:OutVermont@aol.com).* ▼

COUNT US OUT!  
VCLGR  
COALITION NOTES

**Tom Fleury has resigned** as Co-Liaison of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights because work and career demands prevent his continued time commitment on behalf of our community. Keith Goslant, former Co-Liaison, has willingly and effectively stepped in as interim Co-Liaison along with Susan Aranoff. His energy and knowledge are highly appreciated. Keith has not set a firm time limit on his work except to say that he will serve through the end of the current legislative session and then re-evaluate at the end of May. Are there any men interested in this position which requires a time commitment through November 1996!? If interested, call Susan Aranoff at (802)728-4121.

**Continuing on the legislative front**, we and all the other organizations concerned about the Adoption Reform Bill were surprised by the Senate Health and Welfare Committee's amendment to limit adoptive parents to either a single individual or to a husband and wife. The bill then went to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Coalition was able to respond quickly by organizing an impressive and effective group of professionals and concerned members of our community who informed, educated and testified before the Senate Judicial Committee. This public testimony was focused with 35 individuals speaking in favor of fully-inclusive adoption. Of the others testifying, 13 opposed inclusive adoption and 29 spoke to other adoption bill concerns. The Senate Judicial Committee has voted to not concur with the Health and Welfare Committee amendment language, but has not yet worked out their own language on who can adopt. The Coalition is remaining active on this issue, submitting proposed language and assisting the Senate committee with their deliberations as they work to have the bill ready to present to the whole Senate next January.

**The Senate Judicial Committee** also held a public hearing on three proposals affecting the Human Rights Commission. Two proposals would effectively abolish the Human Rights Commission, one absolutely and the other one would keep a commission to review the Attorney General's decisions, but both move all human rights functions (without funding) to the Attorney General's Office. The other proposal would make both positive and negative changes to the Human Rights Commission, especially concerning staff functions and procedures. Susan Aranoff, Co-Liaison, and other members of the Coalition testified on behalf of a strengthened and independent Human Rights Commission and against eliminating it and moving its functions to the Attorney General's Office. The public testimony was fairly balanced between those in favor of the commission and those against the commission. This was a vast improvement over the summer study committee's public hearings where most of the testimony was against the commission.

**The VCLGR board** has another unfilled seat and would appreciate hearing from persons who might be interested in serving until the next election. A female from northwest Vermont perhaps? Anyone interested should call Mary Hurlie at (802)482-3927 or Christopher Wesolowski at (802)365-9139.

**VCLGR is expanding** its educational outreach by presenting a workshop entitled "From Homophobia to Coalition Building". This workshop, which was presented in April at the statewide NOW conference, is being repeated at the Conference on Economic and Social Justice on May 6th, 11:30 am - 5 pm, at Burlington High School. The Coalition is one of the co-sponsors of this conference which is being organized by Congressman Bernie Sanders. For further information call Laurie Labarthe at (802)223-8962.

**As the Coalition matures** and embarks on new tasks and assumes new responsibilities in the name of our community, volunteers are needed to provide assistance in getting big and small jobs accomplished. You are the coalition that will advance our rights and place in society. If you would like to be involved please call Laurie Labarthe at (802)223-8962. Thanks to those who have volunteered their services already - more volunteers are needed!

*If you need to contact the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VCLGR), you may write to PO Box 1125, Montpelier, VT 05602, or you may call (802) 365-9139 or (802) 482-3927.*

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