

VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAINS: Open Letter to Vt Coalition for Lesbian & Gay Rights

Mary Hurlie

HINESBURG -- Quick! ... Somebody explain the meaning of the word *coalition* to VCLGR Co-Liaison Susan Aranoff. Be sure to point out that nowhere in the definition will you find words like: 'competition', 'empire-building', or 'selling-out of allies'.

The Co-Liaison has publicly humiliated the VT Pride Committee, not once ... but twice, in the print media over the issue of Barbara Snelling and Pride Day. This was done, not only in our community newspaper (*OITM*), but also in the mainstream press (i.e., *Rutland Herald* and *Barre Times-Argus*). In separate articles in these newspapers, the VCLGR Co-Liaison opines that the VT Pride Committee 'bungled' the situation with Snelling, and called their actions "politically crazy." This is hardly the kind of respectful disagreement that one would expect from a true ally. It is self-serving and insensitive. And what's worse, it's ignorant. Apparently, the Co-Liaison has never spoken to the Pride Committee to get the real facts about the Snelling invitation (nor did *OITM*, by the way, which resulted in an ill-informed article and editorial). What's more, VT Pride requested a meeting with Aranoff after seeing themselves blindsided by VCLGR in the media, but the Co-Liaison could not find the time.

This sort of treatment continued at a meeting between four VCLGR board members and Barbara Snelling, scheduled (at VCLGR request) to discuss liaison with her office and to address her position on the Adoption Reform bill. This same Co-Liaison opened the meeting by falling all over herself to assure the Lt. Governor that VCLGR is not the same group as the VT Pride Committee (which is true), and that we were "very disturbed at the unprofessional way that they handled" the recent situation (I don't know that that's true ... is this the VCLGR position?). Snelling was quite gracious, said that she wasn't at all offended and that it really wasn't a big deal to her. But it seems the Co-Liaison couldn't stop herself. She then proudly whipped out a copy of the *Rutland Herald* article to point out to Snelling what a good friend we are to her by selling-out the VT Pride Committee. I suppose that the Co-Liaison thinks that this is what it takes to create a relationship with the Lt. Governor's office and to build credibility in the legislature. I think it makes us look like unscrupulous amateurs. Co-Liaison Aranoff would do well to apprentice with Keith Goslant for a year or so to learn the art of lobbying with integrity. (The meeting, by the way, was successful in spite of the opener).

Is this to be the operating style of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights? My concern here is not about what may or may not have happened between VT Pride and Snelling. My outrage is about how the VCLGR Co-Liaison is so quick to sell-out a community group with whom VCLGR should be in alliance. When VCLGR was restructured 3 years ago, the goal was to create a broader-based, more-representative, more-inclusive organization that would stand with other g/l/b/t groups in Vermont. We were fanatical about not creating a monster that would overshadow or usurp or undermine the work of ally organizations around the state. The ideals were to create a partnership, ... not to build an empire. These are the ideals that are at the cornerstone of the Vermont *Coalition* for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

If the recent actions by Co-Liaison Aranoff are representative of the VCLGR board, then I mourn the apparent death of these ideals within the board. If her actions are maverick and not endorsed by the VCLGR board, then I question why the board has allowed them to continue. These types of concerns have been presented before to the board, but no action has been taken. And so, I raise the concerns again here in hopes that the board will step up to its responsibility to deal with this important internal issue.

As a card-carrying VCLGR member (and former board member), I cannot continue my membership or my involvement in the organization unless I see evidence that the organization has taken steps to stop this nonsense. I hope that you can get things back on track.

Mary Hurlie is former Co-Chair of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Editor's note: VT Pride organizer Jennifer Muncil was contacted in preparation for the article that ran in the June 1995 issue of *OITM* concerning the 'disinvitation' of Barbara Snelling. Muncil declined comment. Co-organizer Peter Thomas was willing to talk on the record and was quoted in the article.

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. ▼

Letters to the Editor

Continuing the Babsgate Debate

The two editorials written by Fred Kuhr and Mary Hurlie in the June issue of *OITM* more than echo my concerned and even angry feelings regarding Barbara Snelling's pulled invitation to the annual Vermont Queer Pride event. I hope in the future when our community is met with difficult decisions, we can take a higher road than the one taken that day.

I am concerned that the g/l/b/t community continues to send mixed messages to people outside the community regarding the issues in which we believe, what laws we want passed, and how we would like others to treat us. Even though the g/l/b/t community is a very diverse one, we should be able to come together and agree on what the central key issues are. The Barbara Snelling controversy is about the unfairness in assuming too much about a person based on broad labels. So I'm confused, shouldn't our community be fighting this kind of bigoted practice? I fear that if we cannot come together as a community with some consistent messages about our basic beliefs, we are not only going to lose our fight for equal rights, but the community as well.

Brad Daughtry
Burlington

How unfortunate that Barbara Snelling was disinvited from being the featured speaker at the Pride Day rally. I for one would have found it interesting to hear what she had to say. In addition, it would have been a perfect opportunity for her to speak on the record as to where she stands on issues important to our community. We as a community would then have been better informed and better able to appropriately respond through focused education and political organizing ...

Roger J. Monette
Colchester

... In my view, when a group of the Pride Day organizers invited Mrs. Snelling to an event and then told her not to come when she accepted the invitation, they were not only impolite, they were short-sighted politically, and destructive of the acceptance of different views that gays and lesbians have been demanding for years.

Living and thinking within one's own group, like rooting for one's home team, provide identity and comfort, but in politics engaging in honest debate with those of differing views or emphases is much harder. The next steps in fuller acceptance of gays and lesbians in both Vermont and the nation will not be taken overnight. Gains will best be made by presenting our important needs clearly, even among people who are not yet inclined to accept them fully.

... There is a long-term advantage for all gays and lesbians to discuss issues, and, if possible, support those moderate Republicans who need us to strengthen their voices in the larger GOP debate ...

Ray Stevens
Montpelier

... Should Mrs. Snelling have been invited to speak at the Pride Day rally in the first place? Yes. Since Governor Dean was unavailable, asking the second highest elected official in our state government to speak to us was the only option. No matter what Mrs. Snelling's political affiliation happens to be, she is still the Lieutenant Governor of our state. And, as no one knows better than she, she is just a heartbeat away from occupying the Governor's chair. We are her constituents and shouldn't have to ask her to speak to us, we should expect it.

Why do some members of our community insist on using a label (Republican) to deny Mrs. Snelling an opportunity to speak to us, when we refuse to be labeled for our sexual orientation? A label is a label -- it's what's inside that counts.

Personally, I wouldn't care if Ms. (Peggy) Luhrs, with her continual intolerance of anyone who does not follow lockstep behind her, were ever invited to speak at a Pride Day rally again. But if she does speak, since I don't agree with much of what she says, should I protest, picket, boycott? I would hope that I would look at the positive -- what we as members of our community have in common -- and try to build unity beyond that.

If indeed we are teachers, laborers, lawyers, sales clerks, technicians, doctors, managers, mechanics, business owners and unemployed, then we must also be Progressives, Independents, Libertarians, Communists, Socialists, Democrats, and yes, Republicans. Questioning another one's "gayness" because of differing views on matters having nothing to do with sexuality diminishes our diversity. There are many bands in the rainbow -- let us not be color blind lest we become unable to appreciate the full spectrum of our community.

Bob Bolyard
Burlington ▼

Next month in *OITM* ...
Vermont's State Auditor,

Edward Flanagan,

discusses his decision to disclose
his sexuality.

Out in the Mountains

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