

Out in the Mountains
established in 1986

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Out In The Mountains (ISSN 1081-5562) is published monthly by Mountain Pride Media 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 OITM@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, transgendered people, 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, bisexual, and transgendered 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, bisexuals and transgendered persons.

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, bisexual and transgendered 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!

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Editorial

The True Recruiters

by Hugh Coyle, Editor of *OITM*

They have groups all over the country, and they work aggressively to lure children into them. Then they get into the school system and demand that their special agenda be included in the curriculum. They want to make children act and behave just like they do. They'd like nothing more than to have kids engage in the same practices, even if they have to force the children to do things against their own free will.

Sound familiar? That's actually a fair description of how radical right-wing groups like the Christian Coalition operate in our society today. But who plays fair in this day and age?

When it comes to discussing gay and lesbian youth, groups like the Christian Coalition are the first to conjure up the specter of recruitment and level blame on groups like Outright Vermont and high school Allies. The very mention of the words "gay" or "lesbian" in schools "promotes" homosexuality and lures "innocent" children down the dark corridors of "satanic" sexuality.

What's even more disturbing is the significant effect such accusations have within the gay, lesbian, bi, and trans communities themselves. Often, some of us do all we can to avoid the recruitment charge. We cringe at "Lesbian Avengers" posters that proclaim "We Recruit," and criticize the group's political incorrectness. When we do address youth issues, we often approach them from a "victim" perspective: we want to be there for youth because they're at risk for suicide, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS — not because we actually consider them to be sexual beings.

At the recent "Building Bridges to Equity" conference in Montpelier, high school and college youth discussed their own gay, lesbian, and bisexual experiences. One woman, a self-proclaimed "bisexual dyke" from Middlebury College, spoke of flirting with "straight" women, and of succeeding sometimes in getting a kiss and maybe more.

Adults in the audience fidgeted, and before long, the recruitment issue surfaced. Weren't these young people, and those who work in support and ally groups with them, afraid that they were "recruiting" young people who were simply confused or uncertain about their own sexualities?

The bi/dyke from Middlebury jumped at the chance to respond. "If I go up to a guy and ask him out," she countered, "Does that mean I'm 'recruiting' him to be a heterosexual? And if I was, what's so bad about it if that's what he wants?"

Perhaps some straight people are worried by the all-too-real possibility that they *could* be recruited the "other" way. They desperately want sexuality to be an either/or kind of thing; you're either straight or you're gay, and there's nothing in between.

That's why for some people, it's important that scientists find the gay gene, if only to prove that we don't choose homosexuality; we're born that way (read "victim" again). Likewise, heterosexuals don't have to "choose" heterosexuality.

But what of that pesky "bisexual" from Middlebury who "chose" to be a dyke?

The notions of recruitment and choice ride the same rails; they're closely bound together. If we do have the freedom of choice (and even the Bible tells us we do), then recruitment becomes a possibility, as long as you choose to perceive it as such. If we don't have the freedom of choice, then recruitment shouldn't be an issue.

Consider religion. Religion is, as far as we know, a choice. Scientists to date haven't even theorized about the existence of a Buddhist or Catholic gene. Since we aren't born Buddhist or Catholic, we have to be recruited somehow. Our families and childhood environments play a great part in this process, though even that isn't a certain indicator of the faith we will choose in adulthood.

I recall an incident from my high school days. My Spanish class had saved up enough money to venture overseas to Spain, and I was determined to join them, despite my very strong fear of heights. I had never been on a plane before then, and as I sat in my assigned seat facing the prospect of many hours aloft, I took some comfort in the gentle hellos of the kindly older man and woman seated next to me.

Just as the plane charged down the runway and began its leap heavenward, the woman leaned in close, touched my arm, and asked me, "Have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Personal Savior?" She had a brochure at the ready, along with some other pamphlets she thought I might be able to read before we touched down in Madrid.

I chose not to be recruited into her Lord's service that day, despite her insistent protests. She did not accept my refusal gracefully, just as many evangelical fundamentalists don't let you close the door too soon when they show up on your doorstep looking to change your life. They are masters of fast talk, quick to make a bid on your soul, the true recruiters among us.

Let us remember that fact whenever our opponents level charges against us. Let us also realize that our own discomfort with recruitment may be some form of internalized homophobia, a lingering dread that we are luring youth into something bad or evil.

And finally, let's look where the real recruitment problem lies in our society: with those who continue to prey on the fears and frustrations of others as they gather around them the legions of hatred and intolerance. May we reach our nation's youth with an alternative promise of acceptance and understanding — before it's too late. ▼

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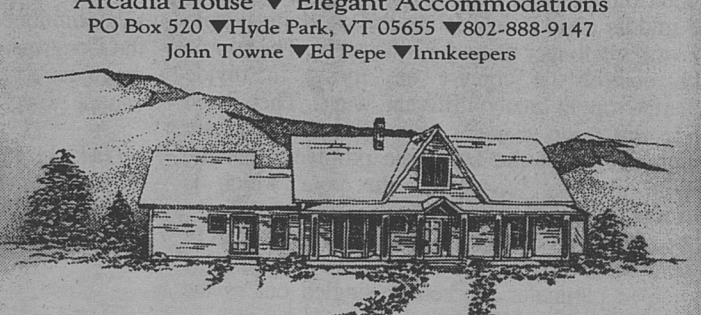
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