

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, Inc. The newspaper maintains offices at 109 South Winooski Avenue in Burlington, Vermont. Our mailing address is PO Box 177, Burlington VT 05402-0177. Our e-mail address is Oitm@aol.com. Bulk rate postage for the mailing of the newspaper is paid in Burlington, Vermont. 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, insight, and affirmation. We also see *OITM* as a vehicle for the celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

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 deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic or homophobic.

Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

Articles and letters should be sent to us by the 10th of the month prior to the month of publication (i.e. March 10th for the April issue). We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper which represents the many voices of our communities. Photographs and artwork are also welcome.

Materials should be sent to:
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Editorial

What Frightens Me Most

by Hugh Coyle

Here in Vermont, you get used to the holidays arriving ahead of time. Already, department stores are carting out their Christmas displays, and before those have left the shelves, you can bet that Valentine's Day candy boxes will be dressing the aisles with their imitation pink and crimson satin.

The one holiday I didn't expect to come quite so soon, however, was Halloween. Watching Bob Dole and Jack Kemp gussy themselves up as the "Kings of Inclusiveness" during the Republican National Convention sent shivers up and down my spine a little bit earlier than I had anticipated. And maybe it was just a "cabbage night" prank that President Clinton pulled when he signed the latest Welfare bill and stole from the food bags of the poor, the struggling, and the sick (including a number of people affected by HIV/AIDS).

Then again, I've had the impression for a while now that Clinton is beginning to like the fit of his "Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde" costume a little more each day. Why else would his eyes sparkle with righteousness whenever he talked about "the fundamental values of fairness and equality" in his support of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, when a few moments later he's be foaming at the mouth while fumbling over contradictory excuses for his strong support of the "Defense of Marriage" Act?

Perhaps our communities might do well to remind the President that on the calendar, National Coming Out Day comes before Halloween. In other words, first we grapple with that maxim "to thine own self be true" and tell the public who we really are, then we put on the makeup and outrageous costumes.

But perhaps I betray my own naivete. This is an election year, after all. First comes the extravagant finery of conventions and campaign speeches, and then we get to see who or what we actually voted for. What frightens me most, however, isn't the fact that some Democrats are dressing up as Republicans and vice versa, but the fact that they honestly think the American people can't tell a costume from the real thing. Do we as a nation really come across as being that stupid? (Wait a minute...don't answer that question. Maybe it's the answer that scares me most.)

Actually, with Halloween on the way, I've been thinking a lot about what really frightens me. Political bogeymen and corporate goblins are, after all, only a small section of our society, even if they do make for easy targets in editorials like this one. What would really make my hair stand on end would be if there were nothing to comment about in this column, if there were actually a month in the year without some piece of lamebrained legislation like the "Defense of Marriage Act" stalking the congressional corridors.

This month, it was the opposite situation that shocked the pants off me (well, maybe that's not such a great figure of speech to use in a paper like this one, but what the heck...). This month, I was faced with the dilemma of having too many things to rage about, and trying to find a way to include them all in one editorial.

So, in the end, I gave in to my fears. I decided to talk about the specters I live with on a daily basis, the ones that lurk both inside and outside of our closets, the ones that sneak up on us when we're not looking and shock us with their revelations.

The least of those fears is that on National Coming Out Day, even the brightest of pink triangles can get lost amidst the blaze of fall

colors here in Vermont. Moving on from there, I worry that some people still inside their closets might feel worse on a day like NCOD, that they might feel an extra layer of guilt and blame placed on them that pushes them further into reclusion. I'm concerned that our communities spend so much time moving forward with our political agendas that we often forget the ever-growing masses of people who are struggling with complex personal issues in the rear.

Years ago, I wrote in these same pages that we need to do more to welcome people "in" to our community when they do finally choose to come "out," and yet I find many of us still hell-bent on the tactics of shock and intimidation on both social and political fronts. It frightens me that there are probably equal numbers of "straight-acting" and "gay-acting" people within our communities, with both parties wearing costumes. I'm deeply concerned that we are creating hierarchies based on a person's perceived "queerness" or "outness," and that we applaud such grandstanding in our own community while decrying it at events like the recent political conventions.

It scares me to realize that some of the most influential figures in our society are also our most insecure. Even more frightening is the tendency within our own communities to criticize rather than help or assist, particularly when many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people must rely almost exclusively on those communities for any kind of support at all.

I'm shocked by reports that when the youth in our community finally come to terms with their sexual orientation, they flock to the bars or the rest stops and, to some degree, have very few other options for social interaction. I'm horrified that HIV and other SDI's continue to run rampant in this age group, despite our best efforts to get information out there about transmission and prevention.

So many fears...and so many of them unfortunately real. As Editor of *Out in the Mountains*, I'm faced with nearly all of these fears, both inside and out, on a daily basis. News stories like the recent murders in Virginia lead to a kind of shell shock, a numbness that lessens one's sensitivity as time goes on. The endless diatribes from all angles and factions wears one down and tests one's resolve. In activist circles we call that "burnout," and that's perhaps my greatest fear of all.

When I was in my teens, I couldn't watch violence or even hear about pain without feeling physically and emotionally sick — an empathic reaction, if you will, that I've found rather common in the younger members of our communities. Years passed; thousands of hours of television broadcasting beamed its way into my skull; endless movies splashed blood and brutality across screens in front of me. By the time I was in college, I felt grateful that I could finally watch "Friday the 13th" without throwing up in my date's lap. Now, I'm not so sure I should be so grateful, and I'm afraid of what I (and most of my fellow Americans) have become. Add "Desensitized Zombies" to my growing list of Halloween horrors.

"Be guided by your faith and not your fears." That benediction is often offered by Gary Kowalski as he closes services at the Unitarian Universalist Society in Burlington, and his words have resonated strongly as I continue along in my life. Perhaps, as this editorial hopes to show, we need to have faith in our own ability to face our fears, to stand up to those things which test and challenge our resolve.

In this respect, we begin to see a parallel between National Coming Out Day and Halloween. In both, we grapple with masks. We look for ways to be true to ourselves, either by honest confession or creative expression. We face up to what frightens us most, and we commit ourselves to living fully despite those fears. ▼

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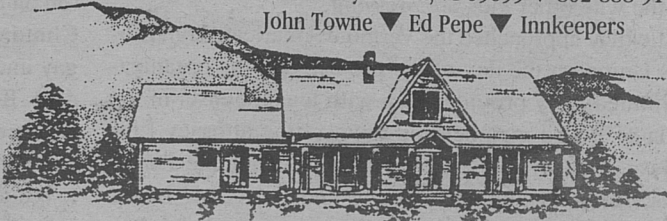
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