

## Voices from the Mountains: Take-Out Chinese

from a work in progress by David B. Boyce

My arrival home was unexceptional. Mother had begun to decorate the house with the familiar objects from our Christmas storage, Noël knickknacks the family had collected over many years. Asked what I might prefer for dinner on my first night home, I requested take-out Chinese food from the local restaurant, knowing it had become a tradition for them on Friday nights. Since I also knew my announcement was to break all traditions, I figured the more traditionally comfortable the setting, the better.

Sitting around eating in the family den, I reiterated the unhappiness I was feeling in being at school. Dad and Mother listened patiently to my complaints, several of which they had heard before. Dad played the devil's advocate and asked what I planned to do if I dropped out; I said I would go to New York and find work.

"Where will you live?" Mother asked, and I quickly responded, "I can stay with Miguel."

Miguel had visited the previous summer, as I'd wanted him to see the family home and meet my folks. He had liked my father, but was not overly keen on Mother and her manipulating behavior. He found her expectation for deferential regard unsettling, annoying, and unattractive. He and Dad had little in common, but as Dad had been to St. Thomas, they talked about the beauty of old Charlotte Amalie. It had been a okay visit, I thought, and when I later asked how they felt about Miguel, it had been Mother who seemed somewhat wary.

Turning toward me, and fixing her gaze, she had asked, "Is there something going on between you two?" She surprised me with her boldness, but I wasn't about to cower in the face of her implied judgment. My moment of ultimate courage had arrived, and my response came from fierce pride.

"Yes," I stated quite simply. "A love affair."

Slowly lowering his fork to his plate, Dad stood up and walked out of the room. In that fraction of a moment, I knew I had crushed him, whereas Mother was merely offended and sickened.

It had all the drama and cliché of a 40's movie, with me in the Bette Davis role. Obstinate and proud, I sat hearing the distant swelling of a Max Steiner underscore, but I hadn't wanted to hurt my father. I'd wanted a more subtle and understanding interchange with him, so I wouldn't destroy

his faith in me, his hopes, and his generous, though perhaps narrow, expectations. I hated Mother in that moment, hated that she'd pushed too hard and too fast, and that I had reacted from defense rather than concern and compassion.

I glanced at her, wanting to see some sign that she hadn't spoken so quickly to manipulate me into making a statement she knew would drive a wedge between my father and me. But I saw instead a kind of detachment and disdain, the sort of look one might give a total stranger if he had insulted a beloved companion. There was no love or compassion in her eyes, not the slightest indication we were even related.

Dad returned to his chair across from me, but wouldn't meet my gaze. He said nothing. Mother inquired, "So how long has this been going on?" I took her query as it applied to my life rather than just my relationship with Miguel. I chose my words carefully, explaining that I had always felt this way, had always felt an attraction to men, that I had tried to fight it and overcome it, but that it had persisted, and I now felt it to be normal.

Almost imperceptibly, my father winced. "I suppose we could send you to a doctor," my mother said. "There are doctors who can cure you."

I countered by saying I wasn't sick, that I had consulted a psychologist at school who had told me from our rather cursory meeting that I appeared to be a relatively well-adjusted homosexual.

I leveled my eyes at Mother and spoke each word deliberately. Being gay isn't like having a cold. I wasn't confused about my feelings, nor was I seeking relief from any pain or anguish. Then she uttered the words I would later hear or read in nearly all coming out stories: "But where did we go wrong?"

Taking a deep breath, I told her it was my feeling they had done nothing wrong, that in fact, this had nothing to do with them, that it was my situation, and not about them.

I didn't handle this as well as I could have, hindsight being 20/20. I was insensitive to their lack of understanding and impatient with my inability to counter the generations of cultural bias.

Coming out is generally a long and arduous process for a gay person, often self-absorbing, but the people in their immediate sphere who care must also go through a kind of coming out. They themselves need to learn, to understand, to accept, and those processes take time.

The next day, Mother seemed to have calmed herself, but Dad was conspicuously quiet and distant. He had always been a thoughtful ruminator, weighing all arguments carefully before reaching any decision. I had overwhelmed his plate with food for thought, and had to practice my patience until he could sort it all out.

But he had made one decision. If my choice was to leave school, the monies they had earmarked for my education were not available to me for any other purpose. I would be on my own, financially.

That didn't trouble me. I had received a job offer from a good company, a beginning position but a solid proposal which I planned to accept. That seemed to quell an immediate fear.

Finally he looked at me. "You've chosen a path to happiness so different from mine. I'm worried for you."

His words touch me more now than at the time, but I said to him, "I'm not you, Dad, and I couldn't have walked that path. I'll be all right, even better if I know I have your trust."

I somehow didn't see the moment for what it was - that extraordinary and inevitable instant when a father must look back over his relationship with his son, then judge himself. Had he prepared me with what I would require to face life? By taking a divergent path he had not foreseen, was I adequately equipped?

I returned to school with the family car, made my withdrawal from the university official, packed my belongings, and drove back to deposit them before leaving for the city that was to become home. There was little I needed to take other than some clothes.

Standing in the room that contained and sheltered all of the objects and memories of my boyhood and youth, I felt no sadness in bidding goodbye. I knew I was heading to a place that offered greater opportunity, a more receptive and understanding social milieu, and a man who wanted to lovingly participate with me in it all.

I had no real regrets, except for the culture that had molded my parents into thinking that the very core of my being was suspect.

For that, I had some contempt. ▼

## Health Resources

### HIV/AIDS HOTLINES

Vermont: (800) 882-2437  
New Hampshire: (800) 752-2437  
New York State: (800) 541-2437  
Massachusetts: (617) 522-4090  
Maine: (800) 851-2437  
National: (800) 342-2437  
National TTY: (800) 243-7889  
Teen Hotline: (800) 234-TEEN

### Addison County AIDS Network (ACAN)

Call Dick at 352-6679 or Kate at 388-4193

### AIDS Community Awareness Project (ACAP)

PO Box 608 • St. Johnsbury VT 05819 • 748-1149

### AIDS Community Resource Network (ACoRN)

PO Box 2057 • Lebanon NH 03766 (603) 448-2220 or (800) 816-2220

### Bennington Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1486 • Bennington VT 05201 • 442-4481 or (800) 845-2437

### Brattleboro AIDS Project

PO Box 1486 • Brattleboro VT 05302 • 254-8263 or 254-4444 (Helpline)

### Comprehensive Care Clinics (for HIV/AIDS)

Hotline: (800) 763-2460  
Brattleboro: 257-8860  
Burlington: 656-4594  
Rutland: 747-1831

### Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous

PO Box 5653 • Burlington VT 05402 • 658-4221

### Lesbian Cancer Support Group

660-8386

### Men's Health Project

see Vermont CARES listing

### National Association for People With AIDS

(202) 898-0414

### North Star Holistic Health Care

RR2 Box 3255 • Morrisville VT 05661 • 888-2858

### Vermont AIDS Council

PO Box 275 • Montpelier VT 05601 229-2557

### Vermont CARES

PO Box 5248 • Burlington VT 05401 • 863-2437 or (800) 649-2437  
PO Box 6033 • Rutland VT 05702 775-5884

### Vermont Department of Health

AIDS Program Office: 863-7245  
AIDS Hotline: (800) 882-2437

### Vermont People With AIDS Coalition

PO Box 1055 • Brattleboro VT 05302 • (802) 257-9277  
(800) 69-VT-PWA

### Vermont Women's Health Center

336 North Avenue • Burlington VT 05401 • 863-1386

## Youth 'zine "Reaching Out" Returns

**BURLINGTON** — Outright Vermont, a resource agency for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning youth, announces the re-launching of the 'zine *Reaching Out*, a newsletter written by and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth ages 22 and under. The 'zine, published quarterly, re-appeared in early November.

"This is an opportunity for GLB youth to help build and promote respect for themselves and others," said Pam Unger, a student intern from Goddard College who will coordinate the publication.

*Reaching Out* will be distributed at select locations statewide. Its content will reflect a diversity of expression, including both the written word and graphic images.

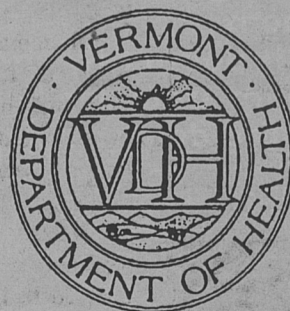
The publication also seeks young people to become part of its staff. This team of people will work on designing, editing and publishing the 'zine. Monthly meet-

ings will be held at the Outright Vermont office in Burlington on the first Wednesday of every month from 7-9 p.m. The first staff meeting will take place on Wednesday, November 6. Any gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning youth, 22 and under, is welcome to attend.

At this time, submissions are being accepted for the next issue, due out on January 1, 1997. The deadline for submissions is December 5. *Reaching Out* acknowledges and respects people's varying levels of being "out of the closet;" therefore, materials may be submitted anonymously.

For more information about subscriptions, submissions, and/or participation, contact Outright Vermont at (800) GLB-CHAT. Send submissions to the attention of *Reaching Out* Staff, PO Box 5235, Burlington, VT 05401 or e-mail *Reaching Out* at [OutrightVt@aol.com](mailto:OutrightVt@aol.com). ▼

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Information



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