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Osborn Comes Home to Vermont (cont. from page one)

OITM: What impact did Vermont have on your development as a political activist?

Osborn: At Middlebury I learned how to be an organizer. I started the Middlebury College Women's Union and I think I was the first feminist in Addison County in 1970 when I came here. What Vermont taught me in the next six years was that one person *can* make a difference. It's such a small state...it's a place where you can watch the ripples of your activism, whatever it is, really have an impact on your neighbors, on your town, on your community. What I learned at college was how to organize and about leadership. It was a wonderful, vibrant time. Vermont was very formative for me. It was the seed bed of much of my sense of self.

OITM: Why did you write *Coming Home to America*?

Osborn: There are really two main reasons. One was I wanted to counteract the confusion that came after the March on Washington and the crash after the "gays in the military" betrayal by the President. I wanted to counteract the discouragement and hold a mirror up to the community and say "look how fabulous you are."

The other piece and more philosophical part was this whole conversation about values. I would find myself getting outraged, not simply at the homophobia, but by the gap between (the radical right's) accusations that gay people were destroying American society and the reality that I saw day to day in my life of this incredible family, this incredible love, this incredible community, this response to AIDS that was so compassionate and so caring, and the love that I saw between partners and among friends.

OITM: You discuss "oppression sickness" and the cannibalization of g/l/b/t leaders. What can members of Vermont's g/l/b/t community do to avoid this problem?

Osborn: I think the most important thing is to start a conversation about it. I write in the book about this code of ethics we adopted that really became a major thing in Los Angeles. It changed the culture of activism. It started to not be OK to bash leaders. You have to break silence on the issue. If you come from a sense of responsibility and lead from respect, you can work through internalized self-hatred and oppression sickness.

OITM: You also write about the "Clinton conundrum." With all Clinton's blemishes, how do you suggest we make peace with his administration?

Osborn: We have to do our best to get more out of him. Let's pass ENDA in the next four years. But it's much more important that we build our own movement, empower ourselves and build a force that's so powerful to be reckoned with. We need to make peace by doing our job and building our movement, supporting him but being very clear about whatever the goals are.

OITM: What advice do you have for gay rights activists in Vermont?

Osborn: Gay marriage certainly. Youth and workplace organizing, not just for laws, but for cultural change. There are always gay kids out there that are lonely, isolated, afraid and ashamed. Create a community center that would have more drop-in support groups and programs to support coming out. ▼

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