

Out in the Mountains
Established in 1986

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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 or actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons.

We reserve the right not to 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, letters, and artwork should be sent to us by the 15th of the month prior to the month of publication (i.e. January 15th for the February issue). We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper which truly represents the many voices of our communities.

Materials should be sent to:

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Editorial

A Mother's Final Gift to Her Son

By Hugh Coyle

Since we now have "National Coming Out Day" in October, it's only fair that we create a new tradition, "National Going Back In Day" for December. After all, that's the time of year when a large number of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people do anything *but* "don their gay apparel" as they head home for the holidays.

I recall my mother prepping me years ago on Christmas day: "Now, whatever you do, do not talk about environmentalism, nuclear war, politics, religion, or gay rights at the dinner table." Instead, I would have to suffer through my sister's conservative commentaries and deal with Dad's anti-cultural condemnations in silence. My grandmother, bless her soul, would always try to swing the conversation back to the food or the weather, while I'd distract myself by feeding scraps to the dog under the table.

That all changed when I started bringing my boyfriend home for the holidays. By that time, we had also given up our sit-down dinners for buffet style meals, since there were children (my sister's) on the scene. Often, they'd gawk at their two uncles in stunned fear.

In a matter of hours, however, the kids would warm up to us, and even confide secrets in us. I'll never forget the glee in my niece's voice one day when she told me that her mother thought my partner and I were "weird."

Weird, queer, whatever. The family dynamic remained unchanged for quite a while. In some ways, Christmas seemed like an extension of Halloween, and I'd just put on my see-through "straight" costume for a few days each December.

When my mother developed cancer, however, the stakes during family gatherings increased

considerably. There were home health aides coming to the house, along with a parade of family friends and relatives. With all the commotion, there was little room left for secrecy. My family had entered one of the most intimate periods any family could possibly face: the prolonged death of a loved one.

My mother had suffered with cancer for two years, despite repeated operations on her brain and lungs. In 1992, when my partner and I returned to New England from Montana, my mother was confined to a hospital bed set in the center of the living/dining room. Her meals consisted of canned high-protein milk shakes and ice cream, the latter often laced with her medication. But on Christmas Day, Mom miraculously rallied, and managed to eat a slice of the turkey my grandmother (her mother) had brought, along with some mashed potatoes and gravy.

The next day, after my grandmother had returned home, I asked my mother if she wanted some of the leftovers for lunch. She was quick to respond "No." When I asked her why not, she answered that she hated turkey, and that she had only eaten some the day before because she knew it would make her own mother feel better. It touched me deeply to hear those words.

For years my mother had lived in a relationship in which her own desires and interests were subservient to those of her husband and her family. She was, as many women continue to be in our society, a domestic martyr. I didn't fully understand the depth of her sacrifices until a month later, when the cancer finally claimed her.

My father had always insisted (and still does) that I keep my sexual orientation hidden, "in the closet." He didn't want anyone beyond our immediate family to

know, particularly not my uncle (his brother) and his wife.

When he tried to discuss the matter with my mother's favorite nurse, a wonderful woman named Eileen, he fumbled over his words. Finally, Eileen looked him in the eye. "If you're trying to tell me that your son is gay, forget it. Your wife beat you to it," she told him. "And besides, what's the big deal? It makes no difference to her or to me."

At my mother's wake and funeral, my partner was beside me to provide the comfort he knew I would need in a time of such grief. At one point, my aunt and uncle approached us. "It's so wonderful that your partner can be here," my aunt told me. "Your uncle and I are so happy to see the two of you together."

I was dumbfounded (as was my partner). It became apparent that in the months preceding my return home, my mother had been preparing the way, anxious to help in any way she could during a stressful time for her family. She was well aware that the time for lies and secrecy had passed, and that my sexual orientation should no longer be considered an "issue." It was a fact, and as such, needed acceptance and understanding. Without that, the funeral would have been far worse for all of us as we avoided the topic, and unbearable for me if I had to sacrifice the greatest source of comfort I could have in a time of great distress.

In her final days, my mother taught me the importance and the value of the truth. This was a lesson she had struggled with herself over the course of many years. When faced with the her own mortality, she came to realize how all else fell away where love and caring were concerned, no matter the nature and object of that love.

For me, this has become a Christmas story I will remember every year. Though it is one of sadness and great loss, it has strengthened the love and admiration I feel for my mother, now gone nearly four years. It has also shown me that we need not and should not have to hide away our love, particularly at home with our own families.

As many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people know, we often face the fear of losing our families (along with our religious communities and, to a great extent, our own sense of happiness and self-worth) when we come out of the closet. On her deathbed, my mother realized that this should not be so. To know that one of her final wishes was to make it easier for her son and his partner to attend her funeral is one of the most remarkable gifts I have ever received. To my mother, then, I am eternally grateful. May her spirit of love and understanding shine in all our hearts as the seasons change, and as one year gives way to another. ▼



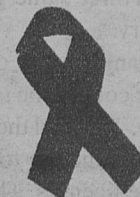
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wish all our readers
a Happy Holiday Season!**

*We also offer our special gratitude to staff members
David Grist and Steven West for their commitment to the paper!*

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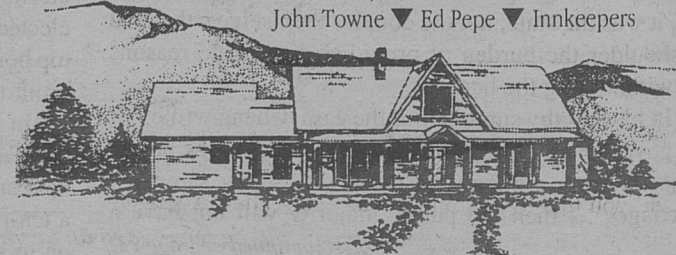
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