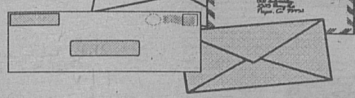


Letters to the Editor



Domestic Violence Deserves Better Coverage

Dear OITM,

I can't presume to know, or name, the specific situation of Roberta MacDonald and Estella Davis ("From Insult to Injury," February 1997). However, my years of experience in both Massachusetts and Vermont, working with and developing services for survivors of same-sex domestic violence, compels me to name OITM's coverage of the situation as dangerous, in what remains unexamined and unquestioned.

Most disturbing in this article is the complete absence of the voice of MacDonald, who asserts that she was struck by Davis. Davis is allowed a tremendous amount of room to excuse and explain her actions. While I appreciate the enormous hurt of their recent experience of being subjected to hate crimes, the logo of the battered women's movement — "There is no excuse for domestic violence" — does not remain contingent on a straight sexual orientation of the abuser. Nowhere in this article does MacDonald name her own experience. Was she offered the opportunity?

I am also deeply troubled by the perpetuation of myths about same-sex domestic assault in this article. The author notes that "MacDonald is evidently much larger and stronger than (Davis) is." Gay and lesbian batterers have often exploited assumptions that we can spot an abuser at a dozen paces; that he/she will be the one who is bigger or butcher, and that this is a problem only for bar dykes/SM boys/non-feminist lesbians, etc.

I have talked with women whose abusers worked at battered women's shelters, or appeared physically small and harmless, or (commonly) proclaimed themselves to be victims of "mutual abuse." In my experience, clarity can come from careful listening: who is afraid in the relationship? Where, and how, does each individual place the responsibility for violent acts? Who is trying to change for her/his partner? Who is insisting, overtly or not, on those changes? Domestic abuse is about power and control, and these can take many shapes.

Our responsibility, in our community, must be to provide support and safety to individuals who have been victimized by their gay and lesbian partners. Two books which are helpful in understanding same-sex domestic violence are: *Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them* by David Island and Patrick Letellier, and *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering* by Kerry Lobel.

Sincerely,
Celia Cuddy
Jeffersonville VT

The Editor responds: Many thanks for the helpful suggestions and additional resources on this important yet often overlooked problem.

To clarify matters, both MacDonald and Davis contacted OITM about their story, and both were given the chance to explain what happened in subsequent interviews. Both were upset that Davis's suicidal outburst was labeled as domestic violence by the courts and the newspapers; their intention in contacting OITM was to clarify the context of the incident. Both reported that Davis struck MacDonald; both also described the extreme circumstances which contributed to the violence and the subsequent call to the police for assistance in preventing Davis's suicide.

In noting that MacDonald was "evidently much larger and stronger than Davis," the author intended the word "evidently" to be read literally and not presumptively — i.e. to mean that MacDonald is visibly and unquestionably larger and stronger. No assumptions were being made beyond that statement of fact; both women discussed this apparent mismatch of size and strength as a crucial component in understanding the context of the incident and the policemen's response at the scene.

OITM does not wish or intend to judge whether or not this particular incident qualifies as "domestic violence." Such an investigation is beyond the scope of the paper and the capabilities of its volunteer staff. We do, however, welcome discussion on the general topic of domestic violence in future issues, and are pleased that the story may have allowed for a greater understanding of and sensitivity to the matter as it applies to our communities. — Ed.

Letter of Concern

From the Board of Directors

Is this newspaper important to you? Whether it is or isn't, it should be. It is the only forum in Vermont that speaks to, about, and for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities. Everyone from the political activist who sees his or her name in these pages every month to the closeted queen living quietly on a remote dirt road depends on *Out in the Mountains* for a connection to our community.

And *Out in the Mountains* depends on each of you. This newspaper is struggling to put out each issue — and it always has. We, the Board of Directors of Mountain Pride Media, publisher of *Out in the Mountains* — are slowly trying to transform this all-volunteer organization into something more professional and ultimately sustainable. We believe in the mission of this newspaper: to provide news and views of the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgendered community to everyone, both gay and gay-friendly.

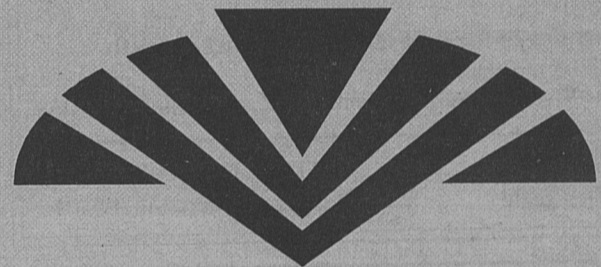
But it's not easy, and we need your help. Unfortunately, so much depends on money and we haven't got much. We need equipment — a computer of our own would be nice. And if we could pay an editor even part time, we could do an even better job of covering this community.

So consider this a challenge. Do you own a gay or gay-friendly business? Advertise with us. You'll be surprised how many people will patronize you simply because of your support of the community. And do you subscribe to this newspaper? It doesn't cost much to you, but it is expensive to mail it out or to get it to distribution points. And, finally, do you have news that should be shared with the rest of the community? We should know about it, but we may not unless you communicate with us.

We know that every organization struggles. That's the nature of our community, given how relatively small it is. But we believe this one serves a unique purpose in speaking to this diverse community. After all, our strength is our diversity. Help us to celebrate it.

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Out in the Mountains

VERMONT'S FORUM FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

By subscribing now to *Out in the Mountains*, not only will you guarantee delivery to your mailbox (in a discreet envelope), but you will also help us to underwrite the rising costs of publishing and distributing the newspaper. We welcome any additional contributions you can make to support our continuing existence. Checks should be made payable to our publisher, Mountain Pride Media, and sent, along with this form, to: OITM • PO Box 177 • Burlington VT 05402-0177.

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Sponsors who contribute \$30 or more will be honored in an upcoming list in the paper. 3/97

Out and About

E. Ingrid Anderson of Weathersfield Bow was recently re-elected Co-Chair of the Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). The group exists to "advance the equality with which people with disabilities enjoy, participate in, and contribute to the lives of their communities, families, and friends...**Steph Pappas**, frequent hostess of the Women's Cabaret at 135 Pearl, recently released a CD of her critically acclaimed music entitled "not on the map", and keep an eye out for the release of 135 Pearl DJ **cRAIG mITCHELL's** disc "Naked" on April 1st. cRAIG has also recently published a book of poetry and essays entitled "The Steady Stream of Unconsciousness"...**"Love Makes a Family,"** a photo essay on "Living in Lesbian and Gay Families," was recently shown at The Gallery of the Living/Learning Center at the University of Vermont. The presentation was co-sponsored in part by the UVM GLB Alliance...**StaciAnne Visco** has become the Production Manager for *Out in the Mountains*. In addition to layout, Staci will also continue to grace our pages with her photography, which was recently presented in a one-woman show entitled "With Open Eyes" at the Fletcher Free Library. ▼

If you have news you'd like to include in our monthly "Out and About" column (weddings, anniversaries, births, deaths, awards, promotions, etc.), please send them in to us at PO Box 177, Burlington VT 05402 or e-mail us at oitm@together.net. Don't forget to include your name and phone number in case we need to contact you for clarification or verification.