

Voices from the Mountains: A Gay Youth Speaks Out at the State House

by Matthew Pinsonneault

On March 27th, I was awake and dressed by six o'clock. I could see that the gray morning would be beautiful no matter what happened or how the weather was, because today would be a day I knew I'd remember for quite a long time.

As I walked slowly to the end of the driveway to be picked up, I decided to light a cigarette to calm myself down. I was both nervous and excited. I had received a phone call from a friend of mine asking me if I would be on a panel of speakers for a thing called Teen or Youth Advocacy Day. It was a day for young adults to gather in the state capitol and talk about teen problems, and maybe even give suggestions on how to fix some of them.

I had been asked to talk about my being an openly gay teen in high school. I have been out and blatantly proud for about a year now, and doing this was a great way to help others who might have dealt with or are dealing with the same issues I face. But I didn't really know what to expect.

I was picked up around six thirty and went with my ride to pick up my fag-hag/best friend Christina. She is probably the best straight friend I have, and I needed her support.

So we all went from Fair Haven to Rutland in around twenty minutes or so. In Rutland, groups of other kids waited for the bus to take them away. Christina and I, along with another friend I had made through the teen dance group of Vermont called Teen Two Step (who, by the way, perform self-choreographed dances and travel abroad in a cultural exchange type deal)

waited patiently for our ride to take us away to our destination.

We arrived and signed in and were given schedules of the day's events. I was informed that since I was the only gay teen advocate open enough to speak, they had decided that they'd have me on two panels for the day instead of just one. I agreed readily. I wanted to be heard, so saying the same thing twice was a good opportunity to get the message across.

The first panel was teens talking to teens. I was placed to speak after a girl who was quite a bit younger than I was, and SHE was going to talk about getting pregnant. This was a real shock to me - that there could be someone so sweet who actually HAD that kind of problem. We really have to listen to THOSE stories with a sympathetic and supportive ear, too.

When I finally spoke, I felt comfortable enough to say, "My name is Matthew Pinsonneault and I'm 19 and gay. I knew when I was ten and came out last year..." From there, I quickly talked about as much as I could, from homophobia to having things thrown at me in the locker room. The reaction to my speech was utter silence, until I said that I didn't want others to go through what I had, and because of that, I had begun to bring flyers and pamphlets into the school and to talk to people about the issue.

The audience began clapping and applauding my efforts, and I felt good for going and being as out as I am. I also told the audience that one of my best friends deserved recognition for loving me for who I was. Christina was made to stand up, and she received a round of

applause despite her red face and sheepish grin.

I closed by saying words to motivate people to help with homophobia: "I'm not going anywhere, so stop repressing me!" I got another round of applause; some members of the audience even yelled supportive things to me.

The next panel was going to be talking with Representatives, and after making my way through a crowd of kids, I walked to the State House with my friends. Since that first speech, all these kids came up to introduce themselves and to tell me that they thought I am one of the gutsiest people they had ever seen. I guess I am gutsy, having worn bright red pants and shirt with a black vest. I looked something like a giant STOP sign or something walking all around the town. My nails were also black that day, thanks to my stash of nail polish in my satchel or purse or whatever you want to call the darned thing.

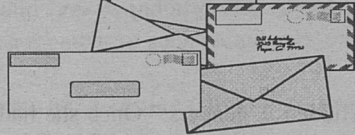
I sat down at a table with some other kids. Some had heard me and talked to me about what I had said, and I in turn talked to them about their issues. When it came time for my presentation, I gave the same type of speech and got the same reaction again.

The only thing that annoyed me and some of the other kids was that when they finally opened the floor for questions, the Representatives switched the conversation around to underage smoking - not a bad topic, per se, but we weren't there to discuss that issue. Most of the students thought it was quite rude.

When it was over, more people came up to me with the same type of compliments. Then, after a gathering on the State House steps, it was time to leave and return to my humdrum life. I'll let you ponder what "humdrum" means to you.

In closing I must say that teens on the whole are more open-minded and ready to accept new and different things than you might expect. (Those meanies who yell at you aren't a good representative of the rest of us teens.) I would also like to comment about the stiff awkwardness with which some of the Representatives reacted to my speech. They seemed scared, and I don't think that's the way it should be. ▼

Letter to the Editor



Women's Resource Addendum

Dear OITM:

We were pleased to see your report on Vermont rape statistics in the April '97 issue (page 5). However, we noticed that we had been left off the list as a possible resource. We would appreciate being included if your were to publish such a list again.

New Beginnings Women's Support Network is Windsor County's area crisis team, providing services for women and their children who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and related substance abuse. We are committed to educating and empowering women in order that they may take charge of their lives.

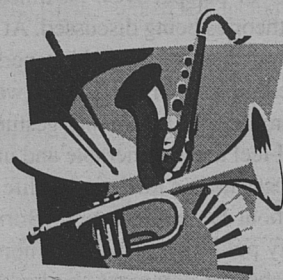
Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,
New Beginnings
Women's Support Network
5 Main Street
Springfield, Vermont 05156
(802) 885-2368

Out and About

Josh Noble has been hired to replace **Terje Andersen** as Vermont's AIDS Chief at the Department of Health. Andersen recently took a position working with HIV/AIDS groups in Colorado Springs ... **Jim Morgan** has resigned from the Vermont Human Rights Commission after serving for nine years ... **Brattleboro Union High School** has formed a **Gay/Straight Alliance** group. For more info, contact Youth Services of Windham County at 257-0361 ... **Francy Magee**, the Associate Director of Student Activities at Middlebury College, has been elected Vice President of the Vermont College Student Personnel Association. **Byron McCrae**, the Complex Coordinator at the University of Vermont, has been named to the Advisory Board of the organization ... **John Olson** and **Chris Tebbetts** have both announced their departure from Vermont CARES. Olson was the Director of the Education Program; Tebbetts coordinated the Men's Health Program.

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.



MUSICIANS WANTED

Marching Band now forming in order to perform in Vermont's Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Pride March on Saturday, June 21st. All instruments and levels of proficiency welcome. Flexible rehearsal schedule. Please call Peter at 862-2600.

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OITM is now online!

For up to date calendar listings and the latest news:
<http://members.aol.com/oitm/>

E-mail your group's schedule to oitm@together.net



Lori E. Rowe
Proprietor

Flowers for all occasions. We welcome your business.

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