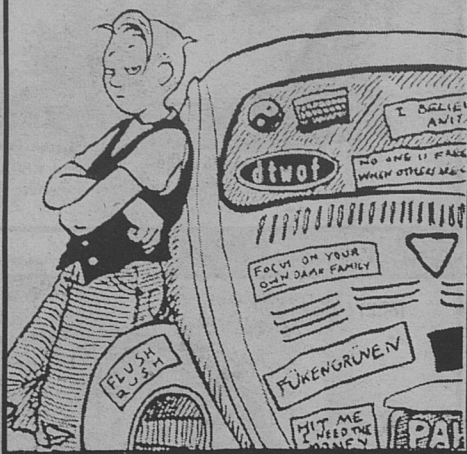


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BY REV. CHRISTINE LESLIE

On January 27, 1997 Martha and I packed up the balance of our belongings in our Jeep Cherokee wagons so we could caravan our way north to our new home here in Vermont. We made quite an entourage with our wagons full of clothes, sleeping blankets, and mildly sedated animals all safely stowed in various accommodations in our two vehicles. We arrived that evening and were warmly met by our new neighbors who welcomed us with a pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, two beeswax candles, and a six pack of Vermont beer.

While we ate dinner at Evergreen Eddy's, we watched the snow fall and bemoaned the fact that we had packed the snow shovels on the moving van. When we went to the grocery store we couldn't figure out where everybody was. In New Jersey the mere hint of snow sends people streaming into the local grocery stores to stock up.

The six weeks prior to our move had been a whirlwind filled with travel (two trips to Burlington for Martha to interview at St. Paul's and ten days in Houston to celebrate Martha's parents' 50th wedding anniversary), packing, resignations from our jobs, and saying "good-bye" to dear friends in New Jersey. Little did we know then what a difference a year in Vermont would make in our lives!

The first few months here were tough for us. We had the house to settle, new jobs to start, and no time to network and make new friends. We were lonesome and homesick. But once we got through Martha's first two months on the job at St. Paul's and I had figured out what I was going to do with myself, we were able to explore ways to meet new people and make friends.

This began in late March when I dropped off my first Triangle Ministries ad to Hugh Coyle at the *Out in the Mountains* office. As Hugh and I talked about OITM, he suggested that I write a monthly column for the paper, which I have done since last May. That same morning, as I helped get the April issue of *Out in the Mountains* ready for mailing, I met a number of wonderful people. Among them were Sarah

Harrington, Judy Beaulac, Roy Hedrick, Margrit Dutta, Donna Freeman, and Joy Griffith. I decided to have lunch with several of these folks, who wound up introducing me to the Rainbow Business Association. This proved to be very helpful to me personally and professionally. Several of these same folks also loved the idea of being in a sacred music chorale for friends and members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community.

The other organization I became involved with last spring was the Greater Burlington Area Ministerial Association. This lively group of clergy colleagues was thrilled that Martha had been hired to serve at St. Paul's as the Assistant to the Interim Rector. They were also delighted to have me, an out ordained lesbian, as a pastoral counseling colleague, to whom they could refer parishioners struggling with spirituality and sexual-identity issues.

Of this group I am especially grateful to Dr. Roddy O'Neil Cleary, and the Revs. Michael Brown and Becky Strader. These ministerial colleagues got me involved with the G/L/B/T/ Pride Day Interfaith Worship Service Planning Committee and the UVM National Coming Out Week Planning Committee. Helping to plan and lead the 1997 G/L/B/T Pride Day Interfaith Worship Service connected me to more people interested in forming a sacred music chorale for friends and members of the g/l/b/t community. The interest of these new people, along with the original dreamers mentioned above, motivated me to organize The Samadhi Singers during the summer so we could perform a concert as part of UVM's observances of 1997's National Coming Out Week. And perform we did on October 11th to a packed house of 250+ people jammed into St. Paul's magnificent sanctuary!

The Samadhi Singers are blessed to have Michael Brown and Becky Strader involved. The support of their loving congregation, Christ Church, Presbyterian, where they are co-pastors, and Michael and Becky's membership in the choir, have helped The Samadhi Singers to succeed and flourish. I am deeply grateful for their love and friendship, and for their faith in the g/l/b/t/ sacred music chorale idea from the get go.

During the summer I began scanning the newspapers for positions for which I might be qualified. In mid-November I accepted the Women's Rape Crisis Center's invitation to become their executive director. This new job is giving me the opportunity to use my skills and talents in non-profit management for a cause I care about. It has also introduced me to yet another wonderful group of people, with whom I am honored to work and serve. WRCC's faith

in me means a great deal to me. I already feel very much at home in this organization and look forward to all that we will accomplish together.

When Martha and I arrived here a year ago, I didn't have a clue about what our first year in Vermont would be like. As I look back on all that has ensued these 12 months, I am reminded once again just how much faith matters and just how much love matters. Without the faith we have in ourselves, each other, and The Holy One, I don't think Martha and I would have dared move to Vermont for the reasons we did. And were it not for the love and support of all of our new friends, straight and g/l/b/t alike, we couldn't have weathered the darker hours of our first year in Vermont as well as we did.

What a year different experiences and new people have made in my life! I am already looking forward to pondering what events of 1998 will have strengthened my faith, and what relationships will have widened the circle of love in my life. May it be so for all of us.

Rev. Christine Leslie, the first openly ordained lesbian in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is founder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center For Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development near Burlington, VT. Rev. Leslie is available for individual and couple counseling, workshops, retreats, and commitment ceremonies. Triangle Ministries at: <http://members.aol.com/revcs/> or email at revcs@aol.com or call at 802-860-7106.

Voices from the Mountains

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as his grunts of exertion became louder. Soon the noises ceased and the pain in my butt subsided a great deal, as I was finally permitted to roll over. Christian's breathing was erratic, but I could tell from the smile on his face that, while unprotected, he had thoroughly enjoyed the morning activity, even if I had been excluded. Even if I felt dirty, cheap and violated. Even if it was rape.

Rapidly approaching the one year anniversary of my "coming out," I am sad to notice that little has changed in Virginia. In my hometown, there are still virtually no youth organizations for gays, and the fledgling community paper appears to be hiding in the wake of constant assaults by the Radical Right, headquartered in the southern part of the state. The absence of gay role models is as great as ever, and questioning youth have nowhere to turn except a collection of sleazy bookstores and equally repulsive bars, located among the area's most undesirable sections. Of course, there is always the internet and more experienced people to meet like Christian and the man who persuaded Peter to have sex in a parked car after talking with him for merely five minutes.

When compared to Vermont, a state with local chapters of OutRight, a youth organization, as well as the presence of Nina Beck, Stacy Jolles, Andrew Smith, Stan Baker and others, the plight of Virginia becomes even more

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