

## ON THE OTHER HAND...

### Organization in the Bisexual Community in Vermont

BY KIMBERLY A. WARD

Each year, as I work at the network of BiNet Vermont, I see the colors of the threads, the numbers of needles working, and how tightly woven they may or may not be at the time. I look at the fabric of the community and work over it, crazily, piecing together for myself the essential quilt, as it were.

When I first encountered Binet, Vermont, it was 1993, I was married, just coming out to people outside of my close personal circles, and just finally coming out to myself completely. The act of sluffing off the ragged coat of the purely heterosexual main stream world was one I could liken to being Lucille Ball trying to get out of a straight jacket. It had it's painful moments, it was embarrassing at times, and it often showed me how absolutely foolish I had to be willing to look to get an audiences' attention.

Since that day four years ago when I attended an open house on bisexuality at the UVM campus, I have met many wonderful people in the bisexual/ transgendered/lesbian and gay communities and made good friends, but it was a long road, fraught with a lot of the same feelings I remembered having in the school yard, ( many of the same questions and uncertainties as to whether people really cared whether I was in a room).

And what has become of BiNet Vermont? How has that organization grown? Well, first of all, we have had the wonderful opportunity to set our annual BiNet meetings for the past four years, three of those years it has taken place at the VCGLR's annual Town Meeting. We have had the support of OITM in running this column and announcing our monthly meetings and we have met at gay pride each year to march, sometimes in small, disparate numbers, sometimes as a large group.

These monthly meetings have been sparse, and inconsistent, the weather and length of Vermont being a hard thing to overcome for people flung from as far as an hour south of Montreal to an hour North of Boston. Here and there, though, small numbers of bisexuals have been able to meet, share a cup of coffee and an experience or two, support each other through hard times, and have a laugh or a hug.

Unfortunately that has been almost the entire extent of our group. We have no money in our coffers, we have no official logo, we have a small mailbox which a few diligently check and try to send out information from. We have no ruling body to help guide the group in new goals and be sure the old tasks are completed.

We are young, just getting out of our crawling stage, and we who have been trying to weave that quilt a bit larger, so that it may at least cover a shoulder or two in the cold, are asking for more of you to come forward and give us an old piece of cloth to add to the pile. We realize the need to organize ourselves, so that you can contribute, as well, to take the steps necessary to create a shape to the organization and therefore allow all of us to give more.

What I do today is put forth a challenge. To all of you who have received a benefit in the past from BiNet, I say to you, give an hour or two of your time this spring. Agree to keep our mailing list, or put up flyers, or sell raffle tickets when we call. Send us a letter before we ask with your current address and phone number. Let us know what amount of time you can give. We will get back to you by the end of March with a plan, a meeting date, a potluck time, whatever is needed. We would like people from the Northern, Central or Southern part of the state to work together this year, answering mail, setting up potlucks, selling raffle tickets for our first ever spring fund-raiser. We need people to attend and facilitate our social group and support group, respectively, on the last Saturday of each month.

This coming April there will be in Boston the 5th international Bisexual Conference. So, from April 3-5th on the campus of Harvard University, I propose that Vermont Bisexuals come together as well. We will work more on a plan for the coming year, attend workshops with bisexuals from all over the world, and come back with a renewed sense of our community.

There is a lot of work to do. There is a sense I have that what we need is less egalitarian anarchy for now and more of a consensus on what we can each do to contribute to the community. Otherwise, I fear that the noble cause of BiNet Vermont will begin sucking itself into the deep black hole of its own lack of momentum. And I know there are people out there, isolated, waiting for someone to say, " Hey, it's OK, we're here, come to our meeting on..."

For more info, or to help, write to BiNet VT, c/o Kim Ward 45 State Street, Montpelier, VT, 05602, or e-mail: kimw@earth.goddard.edu

"Radical Feminism Alive and Kicking" was the name of the inspiring grassroots week-end gathering I just returned from in Deerfield, Mass. I was reluctant to go. I couldn't get any women from Burlington to drive down with me. I heard it referred to as a "dinosaur conference" in the local Northampton area. But I pushed myself to go because conferences like these virtually don't exist anymore. You can barely find a workshop with

Radical Feminist Agenda (including external and internal impediments); "Act of Resistance in Our Everyday Lives"; "Principles Learned from Martial Arts (to help us do more effective politics)"; and many side discussions about the changes in radical feminism over the years.

What were the differences between this gathering and those we've had in the past? Two factors stood out for me. The first is we now have a

## Crow's Nest Radical Feminism

BY CROW COHEN

the words "radical feminist" in the title even at women's music festivals. From the moment I arrived I knew I was "home."

Due to a snowstorm there were several cancellations so there were only about 15 of us - the perfect number to bond as a group. Most of the women were in their 20's and 30's, about 4 or 5 of us in our 40's and 50's. We were from Massachusetts, Vermont, Chicago, Manhattan, North Carolina, Philly. (And yes, those women verified that these conferences aren't happening anywhere. The workshops included: "Goals for a

herstory to draw on, models, pioneers, a wealth of experience to analyze what went wrong, what was "right on." Back in the 70's lesbian feminism was a brand new phenomenon - no movement in history had put those two concepts together before. We invented as we went along, and as in any adolescent search for identity we tended to be arrogant, self-righteous, simplistic and intolerant of differences. Apparently learning to embrace diversity in the last 10 years has opened our hearts and minds to accept more variations or interpretations of radical feminism.

The second factor is that due to the strong emphasis on spirituality and personal healing work in the last decade, we have learned to be more compassionate, better communicators, more affirming, less contentious. This conference was not an endless debate. This was an opportunity to share our stories, a meeting of minds hungry after so many years of feeling our communities either dissolve or (having come of age in the late 80's or 90's) never having radical feminist communities to join in the first place.

This gathering has given me hope that radical feminist communities can be revived and learn to operate on a more mature, ethical level. I'm not suggesting that only dykes can embrace radical feminist concepts. Part of what I've learned over the years is that I'll take my radical feminist advocates in any form. What is radical feminist? For me it's a deep recognition that male dominance has infiltrated our global consciousness, and it is not rooted out both within ourselves and in our societies, then this planet is lost. And as far as I'm concerned, if any human being cares to entertain that notion and build a community around it, then welcome aboard!

## around vermont

### FROM JULIE PARADIS:

**Bisexual women sought to participate in a Master's level thesis** on identity formation and bisexual women's experience of community. Very exciting project in a previously understudied area. Involves a one hour, confidential, taped interview. Participants must self-identify as bisexual for at least five years, and can not be currently involved in a long-term relationship with a person of either gender. I will travel to you for the interviews. Our voices need to be heard, help me tell our stories. Please contact Julie Paradis at (413) 586-8349 or jparadis@sophia.smith.edu.

### FROM TRANS:

**The American Boyz present True Spirit Conference '98** at The Best Western-Maryland Inn, Laurel, Maryland, February 20-22, 1998. The organizing committee of True Spirit Conference '98 invites all gender variant people on the f2m spectrum, and our significant others, friends, families, and allies to come celebrate the spirit within. The three-day event will include:  
- Workshops with panelists reknowned in the gender community  
- Latin/Club Dance with DJ Calico Rechy  
- Film Festival

- Transgendered readings by authors and playwrights (last year we had Leslie Feinberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Laura Antoniou, Cecilia Tan, Gary Bowen, and many others) Another chance to network and meet new (and old) friends.

Conference registration: \$45 until December 31, 1997. \$65 thereafter. Price includes lunch on Sunday. Hotel Registration: Call 301-776-5300 for reservations. Rates (until January 31, 1998): Single/Double: \$75; Triple/Quad: \$85. Price includes a complimentary lunch on Saturday to all registered guests of the hotel. To get conference rates and complimentary Saturday lunch, you must mention True Spirit Conference when registering. After 31 January, standard hotel rates apply and lunch is not included.

Registration info: The American Boyz/True Spirit Conference 98, P O Box 1118, Elkton, MD, 21922-1118, or visit the website at [www.netgski.com/~listwangler/tsc98.html](http://www.netgski.com/~listwangler/tsc98.html)

The American Boyz is an organization for gender variant people of any orientation, including but not limited to tomboys, butches, f2ms, transmen, drag kings, crossdressers, intersexuals, and those who support us, including our Significant Others, Friends, Families, and Allies (SOFFA). Write us at: P O Box 1118, Elkton, MD, 21922-1118 or email us at: [transman@netgski.com](mailto:transman@netgski.com).

### FROM BRATTLEBORO AREA AIDS PROJECT:

**Pearls & Politics Accessorize for a Successful Evening!** "Who Says Politics Is a Drag!", a fund-raiser for the Brattleboro Area AIDS Project held last month at Michael's Seafood & Steak Tavern in Ludlow VT, was a fabulous success. The evening featured inspiring personal remarks by two of Vermont's openly-gay elected officials, State Auditor Ed Flanagan & State Representative Steve Howard (D-Rutland Town), and a musical revue by the Burlington-based drag duo, the Sisters LeMay, with accompaniment by JJ LeMay & Craig Hilliard. The intimate, cabaret setting, with tiny, candlelit tables & complimentary hors d'oeuvres, drew 50 folks out on a cold Sunday evening and raised almost \$300 for the Project's Gay & Bisexual Men's Program.

Heartfelt gratitude to the following contributors: 1997-98 Men's Program Advisory Board (Michael Benjamin, Larry Bloch, Michael Greenfield, Bruce Johnson, Karl Latham, Jim Malley, Mike Powers, Dan Taylor, Tom Ziniti); Amber, Margaurite, & JJ LeMay; Louis Bazzano; Michael Fannon; Ed Flanagan; Craig Hilliard; Steve Howard; Marc Siegal of the Rutland Herald; & Michael Greenfield, Suzanne Clemons & the staff at Michael's Seafood & Steak Tavern.

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