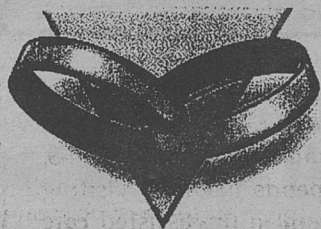


## Notes From The Task Force



BY BARI SHAMAS

### Media Coverage

This month's column begins with a brief look at the visibility of the freedom to marry issue around the state. There follows a brief update on Baker v. State and a wonderful narrative by Angie Dodd. She prepared it for a panel and discussion evening held in Brattleboro on May 1st. I've chosen to reprint it here in part because there was no local media coverage of this event.

In fact, media coverage and general visibility around the state leaves much to be desired. Although 29 people attended the panel discussion in Brattleboro, one of which was a reporter from the *Brattleboro Reformer*, the event was not covered by the paper. Organizers in the southeastern corner have noticed a rash of disappearing flyers. Posters advertising Gay Bingo were removed from public places on repeated occasions. Press releases to the local free *Town Crier* are repeatedly rejected for publication. And after agreeing to broadcast the VFMTF video *The Freedom to Marry: A Green Mountain View* on a regular basis, Brattleboro Community Television claims to have lost the tape after a single showing. This is a disturbing trend which we hope is not occurring everywhere.

On a positive note, Lois Farnham and Holly Puterbaugh, two of the plaintiffs suing Vermont for the right to be civilly married, and Susan Murray, one of their lawyers, appeared on Jeff Kaufman's *Talk of Vermont* TV show on ETV on Thursday, May 21. Beth Robinson, another of the attorneys, is scheduled to appear on the same show on June 2.

If you know of other instances of media obstruction, please pass them on to the Task Force. If you have attempted to secure local media coverage or have simply posted for an upcoming event, take some extra time to check up on your publicity. We are grateful to *Out In The Mountains* for its coverage of this issue and for this space to keep you informed of Task Force happenings.

Many of you are asking, "What is up with Baker v. State?". The case is still in the Vermont Supreme Court. There is one more stage of written briefs waiting to be presented. The plaintiffs (that's who we are cheering for) have

an opportunity to respond to the state's arguments. There are now also ten amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs supporting the state's position. Lawyers Beth Robinson, Susan Murray and Mary Bonato have a BIG and sometimes overwhelming job in front of them. When will the oral arguments happen? Nobody knows for sure. The arguments are likely to be scheduled for the fall. We are in the process of loading the various briefs in the case onto our web site. Check <http://www.vtfreetomarry.org> to look them over.

### A Personal Story

Following is a story shared by Angie Dodd at the May 1st panel discussion in Brattleboro. She and her fellow panelists Michael Gigante and Rev. Catherine Cadieux be speaking again in Bellows Falls on Friday, June 26. See the calendar for this and other VFMTF events and meetings.

*I came to Vermont in 1983 with my family when I was 13 years old. My primary interest in life is farming and gardening, and I have worked in various aspects of Vermont agriculture for the past 11 years. My passion is to participate in and promote local, sustainable food production. As a farmer and a gardener I have studied about and seen first-hand the benefit and necessity of biological diversity to living systems. I like to think of different varieties of humans as similar to plant varieties, each with their proper niche and fulfilling their destiny as part of the infinitely complex web of life. We all play off each other and depend on one another, both physically and ideologically.*

*I love weddings. In my experience, weddings are the most honest and heartfelt ways that our society publicly celebrates love. Generations come together, hope and optimism rule the day, and the spirit of love is ceremonially called forth for everyone to witness and to share.*

*A couple of years ago I attended my first lesbian wedding. The bride I was connected with was Sarada, and old friend from Bellows Falls High who at the time was in chiropractic school down in Georgia. She and her partner put their wedding together in between classes, work and homework. It was a beautiful event. Chairs were set up in the backyard of a friend, and when the stereo started to play 'Your love is sweeter than chocolate...' the two brides emerged from the house. As*

*I looked from their beaming faces to the small crowd of friends, to the waiting minister, I wept.*

*No family was present from either side. I felt such sadness, and such pride in Sarada's strength and determination. I never felt the true essence of a wedding so strongly - two people joining their lives together to shelter one another with their love from the meanness of the world.*

*My tears turned to laughter later in the day as I watched Sarada, in full wedding regalia, pacing up and down the porch and chewing out the manager of the local deli over the cordless phone. It seemed that a plate of hors d'oeuvres had failed to arrive. The platter soon showed up, with apologies and a steep discount.*

*I grinned broadly to see Sarada and Sandee Linn, her new wife, posing for campy wedding photos. I took my souvenir pin from a basket proffered by one of Rada's friends, and it read "I attended a lesbian wedding in Cobb County, Georgia!"*

*It was a wonderful day, and the fact that this event was completely illegal gave me such a feeling of flat despair that I wondered if I'd ever have the courage to do what Sarada did. When we were in high school together, she was harassed and even assaulted because other kids suspected her lesbianism. We all knew that coming out in Bellows Falls was a dangerous act. Not too much has changed, but there are places in Vermont today where people can express different sexualities in relative safety.*

*For our society to deny acceptance to people's different sexualities is like trying to grow a mono crop of one plant variety. In farming we learn that without the checks and balances provided by a diverse biological community, pathogens build up in the soil and its fertility becomes depleted. Soil is the basis for all life on earth; we depend on its health for our survival.*

*Diverse expressions of life are good for Earth's soil, and similarly diverse expressions of love are healthy for the human soul. My belief is that if two same-gender people want to get married and the society denies them acceptance, there is a certain amount of soul-depletion suffered there. In farming, we debate and experiment with soil-building techniques. In this case, we are experimenting with techniques in soul-building. In my opinion, civil marriage for same-gender couples should be legal and respected in our society.*

## Safe Schools: Youth Fight Back

■ Gov. Dean & Commissioner of Education Advocate for GLBTQ Youth

BY ANDREW J. CAMPBELL OITM YOUTH EDITOR

MONTPELIER - Vermont's GLBTQ youth are fighting hard for safer schools. Through meetings with the Governor, the Commissioner of Education and State Legislators, our youth have made a positive impact on the lives of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning people. Because of these wonderful achievements, among others, *Out in the Mountains* found it necessary to appoint a Youth Editor. As a premiere, I will backtrack slightly to report the amazing accomplishments already made by GLBTQ youth and the people who work with them, then follow up on recent events.

As I reported in the January edition of *Out in the Mountains*, seventeen GLBTQ youth met with Governor Howard Dean this past November. He expressed great support for gay/straight alliances and took a firm stand against homophobic harassment in schools. "At the meeting with Governor Dean," accounts Cindy Marcelle, a teenager from New Haven, "I stopped seeing him as a man on the 6:00 news. I started seeing him as a father, an ally; and most of all, as a friend." Since then, Dean has written a letter to school principals in support of GLBTQ youth and worked with Marc Hull, the Commissioner of Education.

On March 11, several GLBTQ teenagers from around the state met with Marc Hull. The discussion was held at the home of Jean and George Olson and organized by Outright Vermont. In the first hour of the meeting, youth discussed important issues they face every day. They described their experience in public schools, drawing a powerful picture of the harassment occurring and the traumatic effects of it. The Commissioner appeared enlightened and concerned about the issues facing GLBTQ youth.

Later, the teenagers were joined by GLBT and ally adults - among them: teachers, school nurses, a principal, State personnel, direct service providers, parents and other concerned people. Gay and lesbian teachers talked about the difficulties they have had with homophobic coworkers, students and community members. They accounted experiences where GLBTQ students have come to them for support, but they weren't able to come out or provide support in fear of losing their jobs. Staff from Outright Vermont and other service providers expressed concern about the difficulty getting information, resources and support into public schools.

An important topic of the evening with Marc Hull was non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. Using Vergennes Union High School as an example, youth demonstrated to the Commissioner how non-discrimination policies often fail to include "sexual orientation" in the clause, even though State Law requires it. In the case of Middlebury UHS, among others, this basis was included in the official policy, but left out on public printed material. Even more detrimental, some schools don't include "sexual orientation" in their anti-harassment policies, also required by law. The Commissioner is committed to seeing this is changed as soon as possible. Currently, both of the above mentioned schools have been notified; Vergennes has updated their policy, but Middlebury has failed to take action.

Marc Hull, a man from a conservative religious background, explained that he is going through a learning process. He has a close personal connection with someone who is gay, and has seen this person struggle through difficult times. In the discussion, he listened and responded, not on a political basis, but on a caring personal level. Marc felt that this meeting was about "learning, and loving, and caring."

In related news, GLBTQ youth and their allies assembled at the State House on Wednesday, April 15 for Visibility Day. They talked with legislators and other representatives about GLBT issues. Additionally, there was another meeting with the Governor. Dean proclaimed that he would stand up for GLBTQ youth. By request, he will visit schools to speak out against homophobia and speak up for gay/straight alliances. He also agreed to make a personal telephone call to any school dealing with serious homophobic conflicts. The Governor expressed

**"These are really exciting times for GLBTQ youth"**  
**Tami Eldridge,**  
**Outright Vermont.**