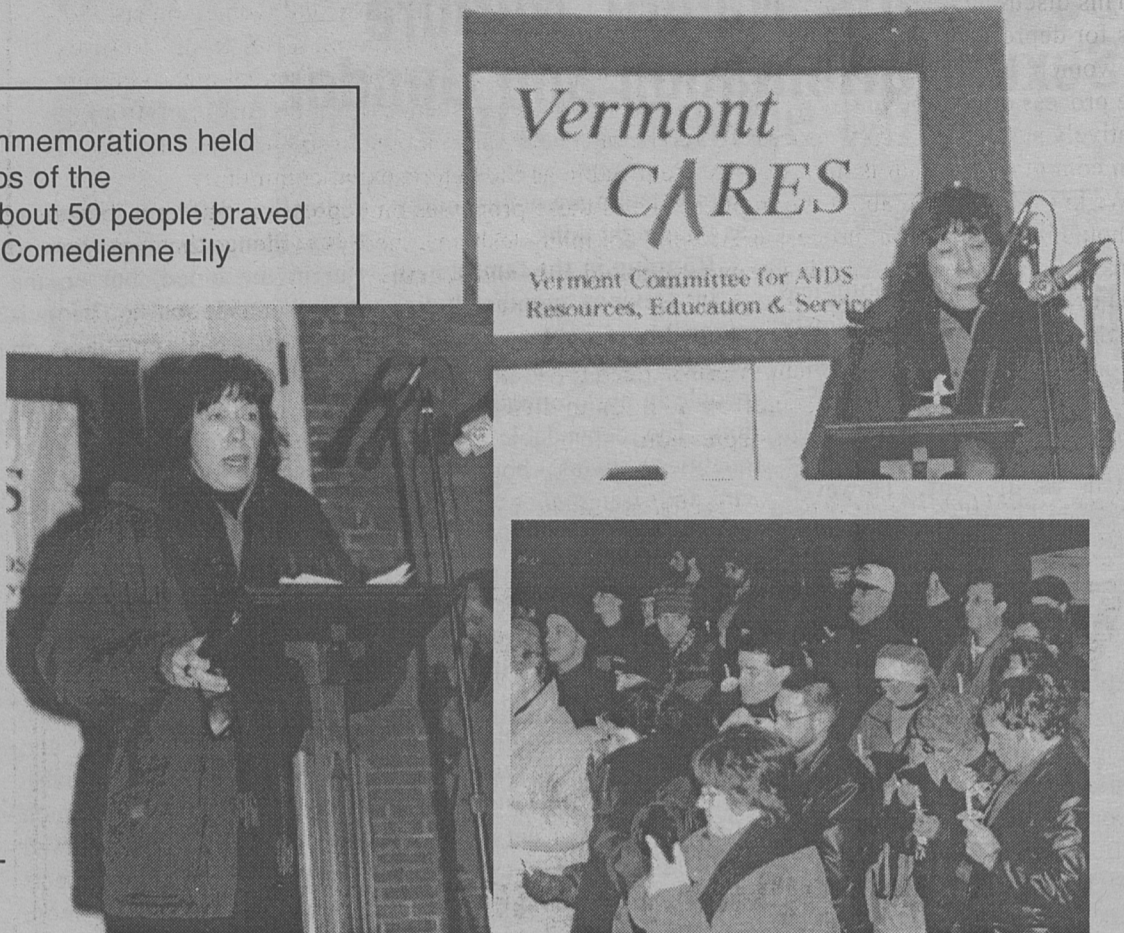


health & wellbeing

Lily Tomlin Makes World AIDS Day appearance in Burlington

World AIDS Day was December 1. Among the commemorations held around the state was a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Congregational Church in Burlington. A crowd of about 50 people braved the cold to share light and hope with one another. Comedienne Lily Tomlin, writer Peter Kurth, and Vermont CARES executive director Tim Palmer were among the speakers who addressed the crowd during the gathering.

The vigil was preceded by a short reception with Tomlin, who was in town to perform her *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*.



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not know this, but the men in my age range are pathetic. So I assume that my next lover will be a woman."

Now does she sound like fun or what? Like so many women who transition in and out of sexual identities, Margaret's flexibility is admirable (along with her salty humor). But maybe, even for women as a group, it's also unusual. Most women (and men) start out and stay heterosexual. It seems the rest of us do it differently depending on our gender.

Still no recipes

If learning to be open to the world is the first step toward lesbianism, then the religious fundamentalists may be on to something. Parenting that encourages girls to be independent may opens more of them up to a range of options - sexual and otherwise. If, in a general fashion, teaching girls to resist conformity leads more of them to a lesbian identity, then I shudder to think about how it might be prevented.

For boys, and for reasons that do not fit very well into

any theoretical scheme, we can say with some confidence that 'it's genetic.' But although some interesting preliminary work has provided some details, they are a long way from implying any sort of intervention, the dreaded type of prenatal testing that might predict a boy's adult sexuality.

Although some small studies have found the right sort of preliminary evidence, the results are not quite conclusive: many of the gay men lack the 'critical' gene, suggesting more than one is operating on sexual orientation. Moreover, how any number of genes operates in the regard leads to

further questions. What exactly do they do? Does it involve hormonal regulation or some other aspect of brain chemistry?

And because genes interact with the environment, and sexual orientation itself is so complex, chances are good that we're not looking at a one-to-one, gene-to-behavior relationship. However, as is the case with other complex clusters of behavior, that does not then mean that genes are unimportant, only that the mechanisms may be impossible to fully explain.

What's more, as I mentioned before, the sort of

research that might answer such questions is probably a long way from being conducted: it's too expensive, and the pay-off, compared with the pressing questions of detecting bona fide genetic disease, is questionable.

That's not to say that the ethical questions posed by genetic research are resolved. But given what we know so far, I do not see a day when, like in *The Twilight of the Gods*, prenatal testing will reveal a child's sexual orientation any more than it would predict her occupation. It's just not that simple. ▼

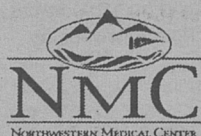
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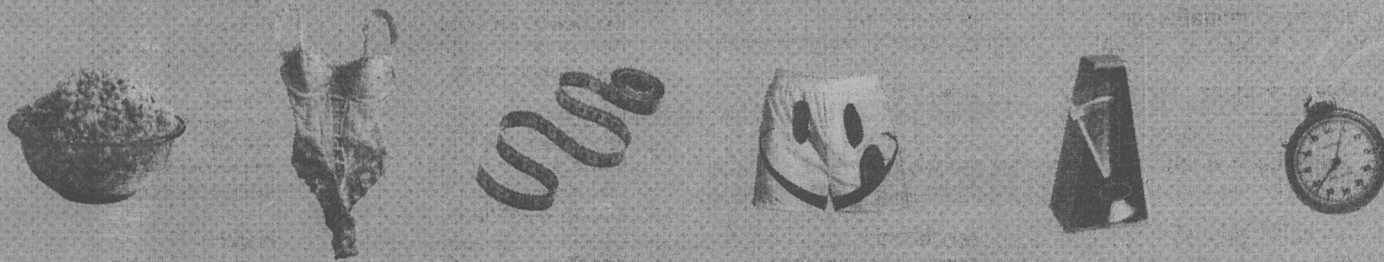
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What do you take to bed?



Whatever you take along for pleasure, consider this: We may feel safe in Vermont, but we're not immune to AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Don't take a chance...
take a condom.

