

On the Bus with Stan Baker

BY SENATOR ELIZABETH
READY

*How she sat there,
the time right inside a
place*

so wrong it was ready.
From *Rosa* by Rita Dove

These words describe the historic ride of Rosa Parks the day she refused to yield her seat to a white person. It was a simple act. She wouldn't get up. Not because she was radical, but because she was tired. Rosa Parks had enough of what was wrong-minded. It was time for a change.

Stan Baker is one of the plaintiffs who petitioned for equal rights under the Vermont Constitution. He is my friend and neighbor. I first met Stan when he and his wife, Priscilla, ran a little school on the banks of the Otter Creek. There, my oldest son, Ethan, learned to read and write.

The time came recently

that I was in a special seat at a special time. I voted for H.847, the bill on civil unions. Now Stan and his partner, Peter, will be treated with the same decency and respect that Stan has always shown to my family and me.

I have learned so much in coming to this vote, and I am grateful to all the Vermonters who called and wrote. I learned how fervent people are about their religion, their marriages, and their families. I learned the power of bigotry, my own and that of others. I learned that prejudice is terrifying like darkness.

And in every person, there is the capacity for kindness. I learned that the issue of civil unions has very little to do with gay rights and marriage and everything to do with overcoming a basic human fear of people who are unfamiliar, "other." I learned how we are terrified of those who look or

act or live differently, how we want to change them or hate them, or at least refuse to see. I learned how each of us is different — one way or the other — and we all know the pain of being separate the same way we know the beating of our hearts.

Throughout this debate, I have stood in the shoes of our gay and lesbian neighbors, learned their children are laughed at, their property vandalized, their lives threatened. I have learned that they experience hate and separation, because of whom they love.

This hatred is like awakening in a storm to feel the fear, hear the awful night singing. And so, because we have stood in their place, we have drawn together with them, as if to build a fire, to kindle a response. We have written this bill and approved our work. We have said "no more" to the separation and

to creating "the other," not because we are so strong and good, but because it is what we must do for ourselves, for our children, and for the future. Vermont is our home, Stan and Peter our neighbors. The time is right inside a place that is ready. ▼

Elizabeth Ready is a Democratic state senator from Addison County.



Photo: Barbara Dozetos

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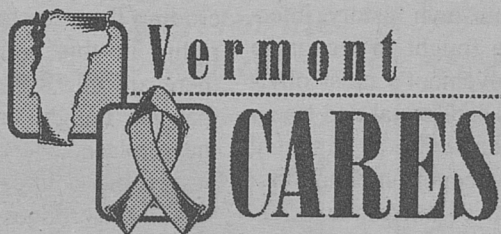
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