

# NETWORK NEWS

Vol. 2, No. 2

*The Newsletter of the Maine Rural Network*

Summer 1999

## **Bright, Broke and Bi in Rural Maine**

Name Withheld by Request

*This is the first issue to feature a story written by someone living in rural Maine. We would like to cover a wide and varied perspective on living in rural Maine. Please contact Naomi at 642-2015 or nomad@watchic.net if you would like to contribute to this series.*



A brisk walk through the business district takes 14 minutes. The local library would fit into my apartment. The newspaper from the closest city has personal ads captioned "Women Looking for Men" and "Men Looking for Women." Period. For several months, all I ever saw was a small sea of mind-numbingly Caucasian faces. When I did see someone whose skin tones were relatively duskier, I had an inappropriate urge to rush over and delightedly introduce myself. One day while in the local grocery with my adult daughter, as we laughed over one of her wry observations, I affectionately kissed her and patted her butt, as I have done since she was born... and noticed several people looking askance.

I'm back in small-town, rural Maine. I was raised in "Peyton Place, Maine," was educated in southern Maine and New York, traveled some on this continent and abroad, and lived in Montreal. Now I'm here. It's a case of Cultural Whiplash. My return was occasioned by a physical disability preventing further employment and a desire to live near my only child.

I have met three kind, tolerant, gentle friends here. When I walk through town, I exchange smiles and pass the time of day with several folks. I know my neighbors and we are friendly. If I screamed, the folks upstairs would care enough to check on me and/or call 911. I sleep with the windows open. I enjoy being so intimately connected with nature again; it was difficult to see the stars at night in downtown Montreal.

It is equally true that I am intellectually lonely. I miss desperately the cosmopolitan nature of Places Away. It is like being unexpectedly shot in the gut when I hear casually-stated remarks (frequently!) in otherwise innocuous conversation that screech of commonplace bigotry, racism and prejudice. When I speak up and state I feel the remark is false or offensive, then I become the odd one out and am identified as having 'high-falutin,' funny ideas. If s/he could quote Dickinson, s/he'd say straightway I was dangerous and handle me

with a chain (They DO it; they just can't QUOTE it). And I'm just tired of answering the phone to be informed that I "sure do listen to weird shit" when a "friendly" caller overhears Mozart, Billie Holiday or Koko Taylor on the stereo.

I've had an ambiguous love/hate relationship with this entire state since I was young. Dad thought Archie Bunker was a national hero. I wrote an op-ed piece in the weekly paper, at the tender age of 14 or so, relating how I just could not understand how one set of people could conceivably be defined as different (read: inferior) by another set of people. By definition, we are always and ONLY just US; WE are ALL WE HAVE. My father and my town punished and shunned me for publicly stating what was, to me, the most obvious of facts.

The general consensus, it always seemed, was that I was "wrong" and "peculiar." Whenever I live in Maine, this replays in its various themes and variations. I had to get out of here and live in glorious freedom in Montreal to gain some astonishing knowledge and confidence in the idea that perhaps, in the larger world, THEY were "wrong" and "peculiar." But by identifying that, I buy the selfsame We-They reality distortion, making me precious little more correct!

Some of my volunteer work involves providing food for "the disadvantaged" (the words of the organization...not mine: I'd use "oppressed, disempowered, disenfranchised, despised, etc."). Folks I admired and enjoyed working with (initially) had no notion that I also qualify to be a recipient. It was edifying and painful to hear some of the volunteer samaritans talking disparagingly about "THEM." Apparently, if you find yourself in need of food, you are NOT ALLOWED to have the audacity to dislike and refuse turnips. It apparently tells something about you (and me) and defines our lack of character. Altruism isn't thoroughly alive and well.

In sum, here I sit. Lonely. Confused and raging at times; resigned and borderline depressed at times. Yet my soul keens the longing for the beloved times when I felt alive, aware, active and valuable in places far away. Until I was introduced to MRN I felt like a quiet, stultifying voice alone in the wilderness. And now, I feel...hope. And that makes all the difference.



### **Maine Rural Network**

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### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Maine Rural Network is to promote visibility and security for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people living in rural Maine, and to work for social, educational and economic justice for all Maine people. The Maine Rural Network seeks to accomplish this by empowering individuals living in rural Maine to organize, establish and support autonomous groups locally and to create a network statewide.

### **Publication Information**

*Network News* is published quarterly in March, June, September and December. If you would like to contribute a calendar item or short article please send it to us by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to the quarterly publication date.

Maine Rural Network  
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## **MRN Moves Forward**

As summer begins and MRN finishes its first year, all is going well as we move the organization from theory to practice. Six social justice groups have formed and the organization of several more groups is planned.

Western Maine Rural Network (WMRN), based in central Oxford County, has, in a few short months, gone from an initial meeting, to naming themselves and determining the work needed in their community. They are actively opposing the anti-abortion referendum on the ballot in Maine this fall. Nancy Foss, of the Maine Civil Liberties Union, Reproductive Rights Project, has been working with WMRN, talking about the pending referendum and helping the group focus on a project. The result is that WMRN will sponsor a community forum on the referendum in Bethel this summer.

The Northern Kennebec group is focusing on education about homophobia. Peter Rees will speak at the 6/13 meeting about the current situation and how Hancock County has addressed this issue.

The Foothills Fairness Project in Franklin County held a panel discussion on transgender identity at U/M-Farmington in April. The Northern Oxford County group has lined up speakers to address topics ranging from local paper workers to the attempt to ban abortion in Maine.

MRN continues to do outreach to communities across Maine. We presented a rural organizing workshop and took part in a town meeting about the future of civil rights in Maine, at Symposium XXV in Presque Isle over Memorial

Day weekend. MRN will present a rural organizing workshop at the PFLAG Regional Conference in Portsmouth, NH this fall. We are also collaborating with the Roundtable Center on a pilot project addressing hate crimes and discrimination in York County. Our network has also begun operation. All social justice group and Board members who have e-mail, are now linked through a modified list serve. This makes it possible to communicate in any direction if you are part of the network. We are also using our contacts in each county to establish a statewide phone tree for quick mobilization of people either regionally or statewide. If you are interested in joining or starting a social justice group in your county or establishing a phone tree, please call Naomi at 642-2015 or by e-mail at nomad@watchic.net. Please also consider becoming a member, we need everyone to contribute what they can to create a safer and more democratic Maine.

### **CHOICE NEWS**

Reproductive rights activists in Maine stopped legislative efforts to restrict reproductive choice this spring by defeating a bill that would have imposed parental notification for minors seeking abortions. Another bill that would have forced women to hear state scripted pregnancy options information and wait 24 hours before having an abortion was also rejected. The legislature rejected a bill claiming to restrict so-called "partial birth abortions." Rejecting this citizen initiated bill means that Maine is officially facing a referendum in November to vote on this confusing and divisive issue. The pro-choice community has organized The Campaign to Protect Women's Health (CPWH) to help educate voters about this issue and encourage a **NO vote on Nov. 2**. CPWH can be reached at 842-6461, or write: PO Box 10899 Portland, ME 04104.



## Community Bulletin Board

**Fri. & Sat. 6/4 & 6/5** - Gill Foundation and Maine Equity Fund offer two workshops on fundraising and leadership. 6/4: Portland Public Library, 9:30am-4:30pm. 6/5: Bangor Public Library, 9am-4pm. Workshops and lunch are free. Limited amount of time available at the end of each day for individual consultations. FMI ☎ Sam Sherman 780-6783.

**Sat. 6/5** - 11-4, MRN Picnic/Gathering. Celebrate our first anniversary and find out what's happening with MRN. The picnic is on idyllic Kezar Lake in Lovell. FMI and directions ☎ Naomi at 642-2015.

**Sun. 6/6** - 4pm, So. Kennebec Co. Group meets at Campus Center Conference room, UM/Augusta. Conference Room is located over bookstore. FMI/directions ☎ Naomi at 642-2015.

**Mon. 6/7** - 5:30-7:30pm, Maine Choice Coalition meeting, Robinson Hall at the UM/Augusta. FMI ☎ Lucy Stinson 623-2661/ MTLA@ime.net.

**Tues. 6/8** - 6pm, Foothills Fairness Project meeting at UM/Farmington Psych. Bldg. FMI ☎ Brian 778-7379.

**Thurs. 6/10** - 9am-noon, free workshop to assist Maine Employers to develop/implement workplace equity policies to protect Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual employees. Holiday Inn, Augusta Civic Center. To register ☎

771-8853, leave name, address, daytime phone number.

**Sun. 6/13** - 10:45am, No. Kennebec Co. meeting. Peter Rees will talk about MCER and his organizing experience regarding gay rights. UU Church, 84 Silver Street, Waterville.

**Thurs. 6/17** - 1-4pm, free workshop to assist Maine Employers to develop/implement workplace equity policies to protect Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual employees. Ellsworth City Hall, Main St., Ellsworth. To register ☎ 771-8853, leave name, address, daytime phone.

**Sat. 6/19** - Portland Pride Parade, noon, Monument Sq. Join the MRN contingent and celebrate Pride and our 1st year of rural organizing. Rally, Deering Oaks 1-4pm. FMI ☎ 774-7800.

**Sun. 6/27** - 6pm. Western Maine Rural Network meeting at E. Bethel Grange, E. Bethel Rd., Bethel. Focus of meeting is to plan a community forum for this summer on the anti-abortion referendum. Join the opposition to the latest initiative of the religious right. Snacks included. For directions contact Naomi 642-2015.

**Wed. 6/30** - 6:30pm. No. Oxford Co. group meets in Rumford Public Lib. basement. Nancy Foss of MCLU Reproductive Choice Project, will be discussing the upcoming anti-abortion referendum. Group meets last Wed.

of month, same time, same place. FMI ☎ Jon 562-4519.

**Fri., Sat., Sun. 7/9, 7/10, 7/11** - Maine Rural Workers Coalition sponsors 3 evening workshops - Organizing & Fundraising presented by Ruben Solic. 7pm, St. Philip's Church in Auburn. FMI ☎ Jose 753-1922.

**Sat. 7/10** - Bangor Pride - celebrate the 7th annual Pride Parade, 11:30am in front of Fleet Bank on Exchange St. Parade will wind through downtown to Paul Bunyan Park. Festival 12-3pm.

**Thurs. 7/15** - 6pm. So. Kennebec Co. meeting, Maine Education Association (MEA) Offices. See *Not In Our Town*, Billings Montana's response to hate crimes and talk about local acts of hate and discrimination. Share your stories/concerns about the quality of life in Kennebec Co. Followed with social time at the Thai Star Restaurant, Augusta. FMI ☎ Naomi at 642-2015.

**Sat. 8/28** - 8am-1pm. MRN raffle, Yard & Bake Sale. Check it out! To donate yard sale items, baked goods, sell raffle tickets, or staff a table, ☎ Madeleine 642-2015. Waterville UU Church, 84 Silver Street, Waterville.



### Sam Cox 1926-1999

One of the first members of MRN, Sam Cox, died on Tuesday, May 25, 1999 at the age of 72. He was our (Madeleine and Naomi) neighbor on Bonney Eagle Pond in Standish. Upon reading MRN's first newsletter, Sam wrote a membership check, unsolicited. It was very much in character for him to find a way to help out. He and his wife, Lee, obtained absentee ballots before they went to Florida, in order to vote in support of civil rights on February 10, 1998. Sam sent us an e-mail stating, "Here's two more votes for the good guys." He will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him.



# **The future of civil rights in Maine is in your hands... or in your closet!**

Join us for a yard sale/bake sale/raffle to benefit MRN

Saturday, August 28

8am-1pm

U.U. Church in Waterville

84 Silver Street

We need your help!!!

- clean out your attic and closet and donate that unwanted yet useful items
- staff a table
- pickup donations
- donate baked goods
- sell/buy raffle tickets for great prizes
- attend and help make this event a huge success

Call 642-2015 for more information or to arrange pickup of donations.

If you would like to help sponsor this event, call Madeleine for sponsorship information at 642-2015.

**Maine Rural Network  
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