

NETWORK NEWS

Vol. 2, No. 3

The Newsletter of the Maine Rural Network

Fall 1999

Almost Out in Whitefield by Richard Steinman

Not a native Mainer, not a tourist, I am "from away." Since 1965 I have lived half of each year in the village of Kings Mills, in Whitefield, 10 miles east of Gardiner.

From early childhood my family vacationed each summer in Massachusetts. That's when my powerful emotional affinity to New England began, not only for its beauty and utter contrast to Brooklyn, New York (my native place), but also because those heavenly summers contrasted with the emotional pain of my growing up. Until I finally became, at age 48, an "insider" in the LGBT world, I cannot remember a time when I was not an outsider. And at the center of that condition was my then-forbidden sexual passion for some males. As with many men of my generation (I was born in 1925) and some still, today, my longing to belong led me to resort to two devices: psychotherapy, and marriage to a lovely, brilliant and vulnerable woman, "Ann". I came out to Ann during our courtship at the University of Missouri and she rejected my proposal, which motivated me to "prove" to her that I could develop the capacity to make love with her.

Over many years and the arrival of four children, something was gradually stirring deeply within me, even long before Stonewall: Supported and motivated by two novels (*The Last of the Wine* and *Advise and Consent*) - both of which conveyed the beauty of love between men and that I had a right to it - I felt exhilarated, and an increasingly powerful drive, to be liberated from hiding the whole of me. This was all

very upsetting to Ann. I gradually came out to selected individuals.

Throughout my marriage I tried to hide but inevitably inflicted my infidelities with men upon Ann. She tried to end the marriage but, despite separations, I clung. Ann had come to love the contrast between Missouri (her native place) and New England. During the final phase of our marriage she movingly (and naively) concluded that if we bought a place in rural Maine I would be removed from temptation. Instead I was liberated here - here and in Scotland where I spent a year (1974-75) studying, among other things, the dynamics of coming out to straights.

Many complex and profound reasons, not only my sexual orientation, led to Ann's ending the 23 year marriage in 1970. Only then did I "permit" Stonewall, and new relationships with Maine lesbians and gay men, rural and urban, to legitimize my longings to be whole.

While living in Scotland I came out - "a trial run" at a safe distance from home - with the objective that I would stay "out" upon returning to Maine. This I did but - surprise - the only inhibitions I felt were about doing so in Whitefield. Though I became very actively gay in many parts of the state, and in many contexts, I did nothing in Whitefield and felt mildly ashamed.

Years ago a straight acquaintance, a Whitefield native with lots of candor, spontaneously revealed how I was perceived then: "I don't know how you do it! You're a radical! You're an intellectual! You don't shave. You ride around town

on an old bicycle, in raggedy clothes. You're a Jew! But everybody likes you!" Had I already come out at that time, I'm sure one more descriptor would've headed his list.

So, except for coming out to a few trusted friends, and for a couple of Whitefield gays who have come out to me, I've resorted to coming out to Whitefield via the media. I was featured in a *Kennebec Journal* story about older, rural gays; quoted in the *Maine Sunday Telegram* at Portland Pride (1999). Thus I lazily concluded that the media had done it for me: at last I was out to Whitefield. No doubt to a considerable extent, this was true. And with characteristic Maine taciturnity, nobody mentions it to me. But about being out to the whole town, I was wrong: I have a neighbor whose land abuts mine. Because of boundary dealings down the years, we have gradually become friends. Recently she fixed up her house beautifully, both inside and out. At the time of the *Kennebec Journal* story I came out to her so that she would be prepared in case her ex-husband should conclude that their teen-age son, my then-handyman, was at risk of being "corrupted." We have lunch together in North Whitefield roughly each month that I'm living in Maine. To our surprise and amusement we learned that the restaurant staff had spread the word that I am her "sugar daddy," having paid for her renovations in return for you know what! Do we need any further proof that coming out - rural and otherwise - is a lifelong process?

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 15th of the month prior to the quarterly publication date.

Maine Rural Network
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Thank You Everyone!

The MRN Raffle, Yard & Bake Sale was a huge success!! MRN is indebted to the many people who helped make this a successful fundraiser. It was very much a community effort from raffle ticket sales to donation of bake and yard sale items and donations of time. We also want to acknowledge those who contributed prizes for the raffle: Maple Hill Farms donated a night for two; Maine Mosaics contributed a mosaic mirror and Dave Fisher contributed a washstand pitcher and bowl. Thank you Christy and Madeleine for envisioning the event and turning it into reality, Winnie and Steve Kierstead for their tireless efforts in support of the sale, Val Howard for her wonderful portraits, the Greater Waterville Fairness Alliance for sponsorship of the event and all the help in running the sale, the

UU Church which donated the use of the church, Dee's Bakery in Fairfield for donating baked goods, the MRN Southern Kennebec Group and MRN Board for raffle ticket sales, Rick Gowen for donating and finding and transporting yard sale items and making himself and his truck available for moving things for people on the day of the sale. The list is endless, so I will stop here.

Results:

The raffle, yard and bake sale netted \$2,659.63.

The raffle winners are:

Bed and Breakfast - Kent Ryden of So. Portland
Mosaic Mirror - Sandy Wachholz of Portland
Washstand Pitcher and Bowl - Kathy Low of Lewiston

Naomi

THIRD GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS WORKSHOPS MAKES GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

"Making the Connections," the 3rd Grass Roots Organizers Workshops (GROW) Conference will be held October 22, 23, and 24th at Tanglewood Learning Center, Lincolnville, Maine. It is through "Making the Connections," learning the skill of drawing the line from our daily lives, through the political process, to the policies, and to the source that we will discover strategies for change. We have lined up some exciting workshops for the weekend:

"Lessons from the Third World" will be an interactive panel of people who have spent extensive time in Central America and have a grasp on how our connections there can transform our lives.

"Communication: Agent of Change" with Rae Sikora of the Center for Compassionate Living, will train us in how to educate instead of argue, how to respond to differing viewpoints, and how to stimulate critical thinking.

"Building Mobilization Networks" with Rodney Hiltze, who is coordinating an action-based network among unions and community groups in Kennebec and Somerset Counties, will help us to put together a mobilization network of our own, "GROWNED."

"Direct Action: Why and How," a hands-on training with seasoned and respected activists, including street theater, sit-ins and civil disobedience.

"Conscious Living," a forum for visioning and actualizing conscious choices that can build working alternatives to the way we do things.

For more information, write or call: G.R.O.W., c/o Nancy Galland, RR1 Box 1013, Stockton Springs, ME 04981; Tel. 567-4075; e-mail: gallander@acadia.net

Community Bulletin Board

Tues., 9/7 - The Maine Choice Coalition meets from 5:30-7:30pm at Robinson Hall at UMA. For more info. call 623-2661.

Sat., 9/11 - Labor Solidarity Day. Presentations from multi-cultural communities involved in the labor struggle. Discussion groups, food (5-7pm), refreshments and childcare available throughout the day. 1-9pm, Twitchell Rd. Farm, So. Paris. FMI and directions ☎ 743-2183 (Tom) or 375-8425 (Bill). Contributions toward expenses/speakers' costs welcome.

Mon. 9/13 - Western Maine Rural Network meeting to finalize preparations for the 9/16 community forum. 7pm, Alder River Grange, E. Bethel Rd., East Bethel. FMI ☎ Naomi at 642-201 or nomad@watchic.net.

Thurs. 9/16 - Western Maine Rural Network, the Alder River Grange & MLGPA are sponsoring a community forum on the anti-abortion referendum. Join the discussion about self-determination & the attempt to control women's bodies by the radical right. 7pm, Alder River Grange, E. Bethel Rd., East Bethel. Snacks will be served. FMI ☎ Naomi at 642-2015 or e-mail: nomad@watchic.net.

Sat. 9/18 - MRN's So. Kennebec County group meeting. 4-6 PM, MEA Offices, 35 Community Drive, Augusta. FMI Naomi 642-2015.

Thurs. 9/23 - Sarah Weddington, nationally known attorney, author, and speaker on public issues, who won the landmark Roe v. Wade case in 1973 will speak and hold a question & answer period. Also, Planned Parenthood will hold a discussion about the language of the anti-abortion referendum. Noon, Luther Bonny Hall, USM Portland campus. Sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and USM Women's Studies Dept.

Sat. 9/25 - Educational house party in Lovell to demystify this fall's anti-abortion referendum. 4-6pm with coffee. FMI ☎ Paul 925-1034

Thurs. 10/7 - On the anniversary of Mathew Shepard's murder the Interfaith Alliance is calling for a Vision of Healing, Voice of Hope - a call for people to act nonviolently as agents of healing in their communities: to stand up to hate violence directed at anyone. To speak out when people are attacked due to their race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, gender, or disability. Check your community for local activities.

Thurs. 10/14 - A second community forum about the proposed ban on late-term abortion on the ballot this November. Sponsored by the Public Interest Forum, Western Maine Rural Network & MLGPA. 7-9pm, Norway Public Library, Main Street, Norway. FMI ☎ Naomi 642-2015 or e-mail: nomad@watchic.net.

Sat. 10/16 - Suzanne Pharr, rural & community organizer speaks at Bangor Public Library, Bangor, 9am-1pm.

Sun. 10/17 - Suzanne Pharr, rural and community organizer speaks at Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland, 9am-1pm.

Fri.-Sun. 10/22-24 - "Making the Connections," third Grass Roots Organizers Workshops (GROW) Conference, Tanglewood Learning Ctr, Lincolnville, ME. FMI: GROW, c/o Nancy Galland, RR1 Box 1013, Stockton Springs, ME 04981; Tel. 567-4075; e-mail: gallander@acadia.net (see box on p. 2).

Fri.-Sun. 11/5-7 - Sappho Sisters' Conference. Three days of peace, love & music... no, no this is 1999, not 1969... a variety of workshops & activities. Open to all women loving women. Campus Center, USM Portland Campus. FMI ☎ 775-2184.

RESIST! Grant Award

MRN has just received our second grant from RESIST! RESIST! has been a consistent and early supporter of MRN. To donate or for a grant application please contact:

RESIST!

259 Elm Street, Suite 201,
Somerville, MA 02144
(617) 623-5110

I believe that human dignity is the basic right of every person.
I want Maine Rural Network to bring that message to all parts of Maine.

Individual <input type="checkbox"/> \$20	Household <input type="checkbox"/> \$35	Activist <input type="checkbox"/> \$50	Organizer <input type="checkbox"/> \$100	Visionary <input type="checkbox"/> \$250	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____
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Your contribution for our educational efforts is tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to MRN..

☐ I'd like to join a local social justice group. Please contact me.

Multi-Issue Networking

by Erica Rand

In 1996, after my third Maine encounter with anti-gay referendums, I was giving a talk about referendum activism. I argued that since the Right is using referendums - against queers, against immigrants, against affirmative action, against reproductive rights - to drain our resources of time, energy, and money, we had to be getting more out of our referendum activism than a bunch of votes on one issue. Someone asked, "more like what?" I gave the example of a recent cross-burning in Augusta, and suggested that if we had been organizing well on these recent referendums, we would have been expanding a political base of activists who could have been mobilized on short notice for emergencies like this, and who would be working in our communities all the time to achieve social and economic justice for all Maine people. Yes, Maine already has many committed activists doing great work. Yes, activists pulled together a great demonstration after that cross-burning. But what I didn't see at that demonstration were a lot of people I recognized from LGBT activism. Some people, I'm

sure, didn't know it was happening (I'd found out by a chance glance at the TV news). Some, I sadly suspected, might not have seen why anti-racist activism must be part of all justice work.

So fast-forward to 1999, when I get the following email from MRN:

There is a demonstration today, June 30th by a white supremacist group in Augusta. Peace Action Maine is sponsoring a counter demonstration at 4:30 at Capitol Park in Augusta. Please participate if you can.

I called a friend and we went. Well, those white supremacists didn't show up. Or maybe they showed up, took a look, and left. But, in any case, I was very glad to be there, with 40-50 people who had come together on very short notice to stand up against racism. And I was very thrilled that MRN was part of bringing people there. To me, this is one of MRN's central goals: to expand the connections between issues, between groups, between people.



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