

our lives

I

THE PREMIER ISSUE

July/August 2007

free!

Madison's LGBTQA Magazine

## Gay Hockey

Inside the Trojan Horse  
at the Madison Ice Arena

## Why PFLAG is So Important

A mother talks about  
her love for her son

## Do You Know Felicia?

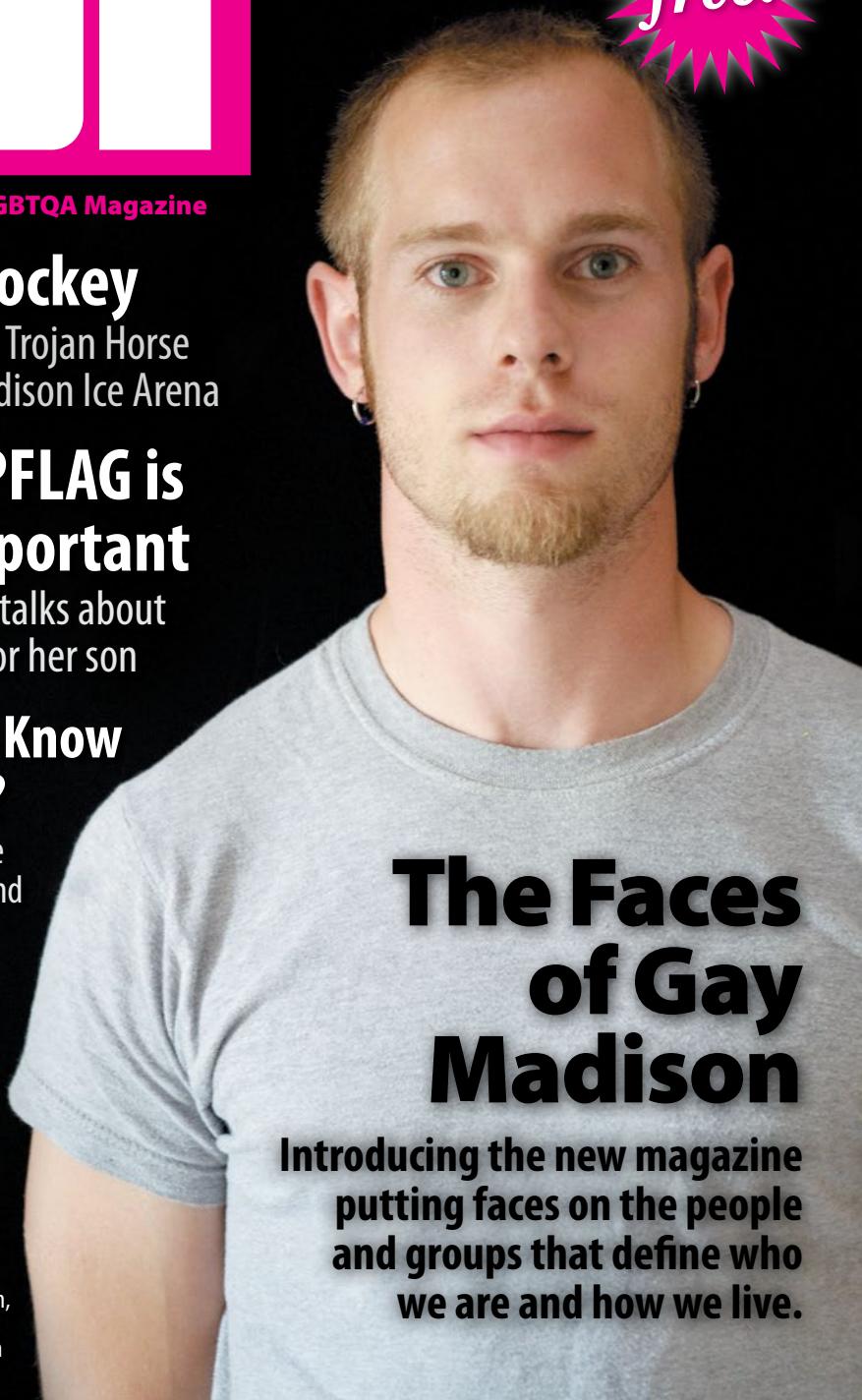
We meet the  
person behind  
the persona

**Mark Sadowski**

Team Black Captain,  
Madison Gay  
Hockey Association

# The Faces of Gay Madison

Introducing the new magazine  
putting faces on the people  
and groups that define who  
we are and how we live.





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**Kesslers**  
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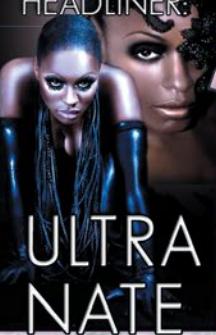


**JULY 21st and 22nd**

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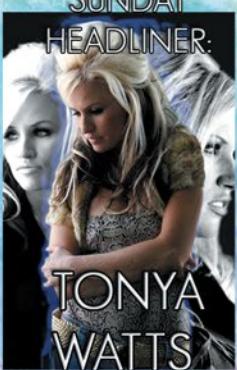
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**FOR MORE INFO GO TO:  
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**LADIES Nite**

THIRD SATURDAY

OF THE MONTH

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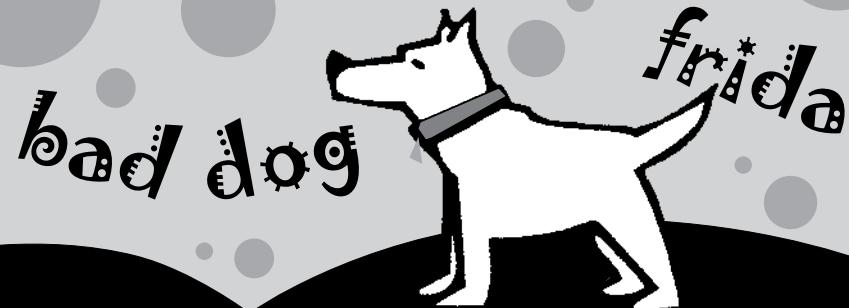


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## The Faces of Our Community

ONE YEAR AGO THIS MONTH I BEGAN WORK ON the Madison Gay Hockey Association. The MGHA became a tool that empowers individuals to recognize their value to themselves, their team, league and to our community. As that happened something remarkable started occurring. People became willing to come forward and contribute to building what Outsports.com since has called "the premiere gay hockey league in the Midwest, if not the nation, built on diversity and inclusion."



With a conviction I've never before had in my life I believe that each of us, as individuals, are incredibly special people. We each have a delicately original perspective to both nurture and offer. I believe we start to discover our value when we begin recognizing that. In his open letter about the MGHA (*A Culmination of Community*, p25) Mark Sadowski writes, "Personally, I've grown into someone I never thought I could be, a leader, someone who doesn't just sit back and roll with the punches but, rather, one who is responsible for

what he says and does." In accepting this responsibility I believe each of us become the face of our community.

You'll see this as I sit down with Felicia Melton-Smyth. Transcribing her description about care giving for her closest friends during the AIDS crisis left me in tears and having to turn the recording device off. Felicia's story is a powerful one about how more often than not, our cause in life shapes and selects us.

I've spent 9 months of my life crafting *Our Lives* to show that long before any facet of our identity has a chance to divide us, what matters above all is that all of us are people first—we are individuals contributing to a larger community. In your hands now are some of those common threads from our experiences that make all of our stories real and valid and well worth sharing.

Welcome to *Our Lives*.

With love,  
**Patrick Farabaugh**  
EDITOR / PUBLISHER

This is dedicated to Jay.

## CONTRIBUTORS



**CONSCIOUS LIVING**  
**Dale Decker**  
provides psychotherapy and substance abuse

counseling at Moontree Psychotherapy Center in Madison, WI. When not in his office, you'll find him relaxing with his husband and cats, gardening until twilight, or producing community theater with StageQ.



**HOW I CAME OUT**  
**Amanda Hunter**  
is a senior at UW-Madison double majoring in

French and Creative Writing, and is also a co-president of the Allies Program, a gay-straight student alliance org. She is working on a memoir-in-vignettes detailing her coming out experience, the entirety of which cannot be compressed into a few hundred words.



**OUR FAVORITE PLACES**  
**Bjørn Holtan**  
returned to Madison after living in San

Francisco for 8 years. He started a gay hikers group there that he's already expanded to Wisconsin and will be taking them to the Farmers' Market on the Square on July 7th. He is a certified Meridian Strengthening and Stretching Trainer and the owner of Training With Bjørn, a studio established in 2003.

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our lives



## Discuss What Matters.

Use and help build the **forums** at **OURLIVESMADISON.COM** to share ideas. Use them to ask questions. Use them to start discussions about anything that can help us build healthier lives and a stronger, constructive and more supportive community.

## Madison's LGBTQ Magazine



**PFLAG**  
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Madison, Wisconsin

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## INTRODUCING OUR LIVES

### The Lesbian Thespian

Four Seasons Theatre Artistic Director Andrew Abrams introduces us to UW theatre major **Angela Birrittella**

**When did you have that "moment" when you knew this is what you wanted to do?** I ended up doing a lot of musicals and children's theater in high school, (which is what I'm really good at, children's theater). I don't think I ever really had a "moment."

**Why did you decide theater and not something more lucrative?** When I'd talk about my theater classes to my advisor I got really animated. He said,

"I think you should start doing theater." Hey, that could have been my "moment" when I decided to do theater.

**What have we seen you in at the University Theater?**

You would have seen me in Hibernation, Vagina Monologues..twice..., and Patrick Sims' theater for social and cultural awareness...

**What are some of your dream roles?**

The Nurse in Romeo and Juliet.

**Ha ha ..why?** My uncle always told me "you have to know who you are, Angela, Juliet or the Nurse."

..and I'm like "I'm the Nurse!"

**Ok, so what musical theater roles have you enjoyed playing?** I really liked being Eponine in Les Miz in High School.

Photo by Paul Swanson

Chippewa Falls Senior High School..big town (she says sarcastically).

**How old were you when you came out?** To myself? About 17. I came out to the rest of the world between then and now because...you know...you come out everyday.

**Do you think that theater helps that at all..being around people doing what you love?** Well, I was

always surrounded by gay men in the theater. I could always look to them because they were comfortable with who they were at a younger age.

**Have you had any crushes on anyone in the shows you've done?** Ok, yeah, Vagina Monologues... hello, lesbian heaven.

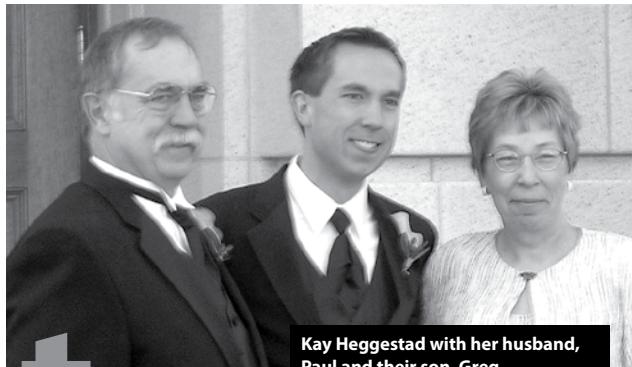
So there are 30 women and they're all talking about their vaginas so I have a crush on like half of them.

**Anything else you'd like to say to our readers?** Go and watch shows so we can keep putting them on for you... and if they need an actress... ■

Introduce yourself at: [OURLIVESMADISON.COM](http://OURLIVESMADISON.COM)

# Why PFLAG is So Important

After talking with the Madison chapter President Kay Heggestad, the value of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays becomes as real as the love a mother has for her son



Kay Heggestad with her husband, Paul and their son, Greg.

were out to me and they were having lots and lots of problems." Those few isolated examples were enough to shape her ideas about gay people into something traumatic.

Most parents still feel that if their kids are gay it is because they did something wrong. In the PFLAG meetings, she recalls how it took one woman almost a year to become comfortable using "the L word." Now, Kay is convinced that PFLAG helped foster the healing that she needed so that she could be able to be there for her son. She very openly says that, "PFLAG helped me initially get into the acceptance part. At this time, I applaud it, and advocate it like crazy."

It took Kay's son a few years to come out to his mom and dad. Kay says it took him that long "because he didn't know how we would respond." A very deep and strong fear of losing their family keeps many gay youth in the closet during a time when they desperately need their family and especially their parents' love and support the most. Gay children will hide their identity in ways that challenge their ability to love themselves and to believe that they can be loved by their parents and family for who they are. And parents often feel helpless

**H**E FIRST THING YOU might notice about Kay Heggestad is the rainbow pride bracelet around her wrist. This shouldn't be too unusual really except that Kay is a mature, straight, retired family doctor. So it is surprising to see her wearing such a visible sign of support with, well, pride. On the surface is a woman who might not have the same kind of personal investment in gay rights that a LGBT individual directly affected by them would, but Kay is also a mother—and her son Greg is gay. And like many

other families, Kay found the initial support that she needed when she discovered PFLAG—Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

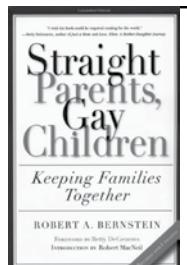
When her son came out to her, it took Kay a few months to begin coming to terms. She found a note about PFLAG in a little newspaper blurb and made the decision to go. "When I went to my first meeting I know I cried. I couldn't talk. A couple of the moms were giving very sad stories of drug addiction, of people with AIDS and all this really bad stuff," Kay says, "I couldn't get my husband to a meeting in over a year."

Many families, prior to their children or relatives coming out, have very little exposure to LGBT people and communities. As a physician, Kay was aware that she had a few lesbian patients, but she is also quick to note that "they were the ones that

when it comes to giving solid, useful advice to their children about the choices they will have to make. PFLAG offers support, understanding and community that can help parents heal and cope with their children's sexuality. It also offers the education a parent needs to be able to help his or her child accept himself, too.

After years of involvement, Kay is now the president of the Madison PFLAG chapter and publishes her e-mail address on their website ([www.pflag-madison.org](http://www.pflag-madison.org)). She also has a telephone number listed where she can be reached by anyone who needs to talk or would just like to know more. Kay runs the PFLAG meeting on the third Sunday of each month (September through May) and organizes a speaker to come in and talk to the parents candidly and take questions about the different issues involved with acceptance. In the summers her and other PFLAG parents always have a table at the Dane County Farmers' Market on Capital Square where they have literature available and ready to hand out.

There are many reasons that prove why PFLAG is critical to a parent's development and solidifying with love the foundation of a family. The true testament would be Kay herself, and her son Greg, who she is proud to inform us now lives happily committed with his life partner in Denver. ■



read  
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Madison's LGBTQ Magazine

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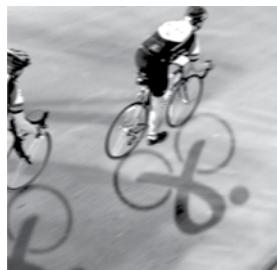
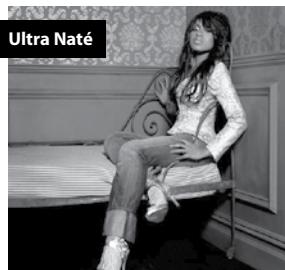
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## LIVING OUR LIVES

Cultural, Social, Service and Nightlife listings edited by Amanda Hunter



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**Madison Pride, July 21-22**  
 DIVA! opens pride at 1pm on Saturday. Ultra Naté, Tanya Watts, Ronnie Nyles, Pulsation, and Lexi Ravyn Productions will also perform. \$5 admission on Saturday, free on Sunday. Also in pride: a parade, rally, and vendors of all varieties.  
[madisonpride.org](http://madisonpride.org)

**ACT5 AIDS Ride, August 2-5**  
 The 5th annual Wisconsin AIDS bike ride covers 300 miles over 4 days, and seeks to raise \$275,000 for the AIDS Network. Trivia: the ride is the nation's third largest HIV/AIDS ride, after California's LifeCycle and Minnesota's Red Ribbon Ride.  
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OUT on the Terrace	<b>S</b>	Tuesdays	6-10p	Mem. Union Terrace	<a href="http://wisc.edu/lgbt">wisc.edu/lgbt</a>
Mad Women Softball	<b>A, S</b>	Tuesdays	6:30-9:30p	Olbrich Park	<a href="http://madwomenseftball.com">madwomenseftball.com</a>
Rainbow Connection	<b>S</b>	2nd & 4th Thursdays	4-6p	Mem. Union Terrace	<a href="http://outreachinc.com">outreachinc.com</a>
Transgender Group	<b>u</b>	2nd & 4th Fridays	7-9p	Outeach	<a href="http://outreachinc.com">outreachinc.com</a>
Volleyball	<b>A, S</b>	Sundays	5-7p	Bowl-A-Vard	
MGHA Hockey	<b>A, S</b>	Sundays	5-5:50p	Madison Ice Arena	<a href="http://madisongayhockey.org">madisongayhockey.org</a>

### upcoming

Once on this Island	<b>T/D</b>	7/3	7:30p	Mitby Theater, MATC	<a href="http://fourseasonstheater.com">fourseasonstheater.com</a>
ExpressIt: Kites	<b>r, S</b>	7/6	6-8p	MMoCA	<a href="http://mmoca.org">mmoca.org</a>
Transgender Book Club	<b>L</b>	7/10	6p	Room of One's Own	<a href="http://roomofonesown.com">roomofonesown.com</a>
Sunset Watching (ACT5)	<b>s, v, Np</b>	7/12	7p	Memorial Union Terrace	<a href="http://actride.org">actride.org</a>
Art Fair on the Square	<b>r</b>	7/14-15	9a-6p	Capitol Square	<a href="http://mmoca.org">mmoca.org</a>
Awards Banquet (Outreach)	<b>s, NI, u</b>	7/20	5:45p	Monona Terrace	<a href="http://outreachinc.com">outreachinc.com</a>
iQ*	<b>NI</b>	7/19	9p	King Club	<a href="http://myspace.com/indiequeermadison">myspace.com/indiequeermadison</a>
Send-off Party (ACT5)	<b>S, v</b>	7/25	tba	Nau-ti-gal	<a href="http://actride.org">actride.org</a>
iQ*	<b>NI</b>	8/8	9p	King Club	<a href="http://myspace.com/indiequeermadison">myspace.com/indiequeermadison</a>
SSBL Social Night	<b>s, NI, a</b>	8/17	9p	Hookah Lounge & Café	<a href="http://ssblmadison.com/index.htm">ssblmadison.com/index.htm</a>
iQ School SUCKS*	<b>NI</b>	8/29	9p	King Club	<a href="http://myspace.com/indiequeermadison">myspace.com/indiequeermadison</a>

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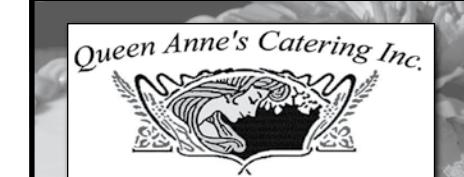
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## The Invitation

When a wedding invitation arrives in his mailbox, Patrick Farabaugh is left pondering about homecomings and bridesmaids

**I** received a wedding invitation in the mail today from my cousin Jessie and her fiancé, a guy I've never met before named Matthew. It wasn't supposed to surprise me, since last week Jessie e-mailed asking for my address. Still, I was caught off-guard when I opened the mailbox to find an envelope sitting there formally requesting "the honor of my presence."

What I noticed as I opened it was the envelope the invitation itself came in. It was nicer than I expected. The colors were modest and elegant and the day it was celebrating was the wedding of my cousin to the man she is choosing to spend her life with. It made me think of my hometown back in Valparaiso, Indiana. It's not much more than a bunch of farms, a few roads, and a University that I think sometimes prefers the minimal attention it gets from its location. I thought again about the lives there, that I notice I've sometimes forgotten. I thought about the small businesses along Route 30 when I saw the business cards for the two hotels they have registered at, and my mind drifted into nostalgia as I understood the idea of a homecoming a little more than I did when I was back there in high school.

Within moments of reading the invitation I had pictures in my head of her and Matthew on the day they have been planning. I pictured how surreal it must be for them to see all these people gather for them, just to see the two of them happy, to see them make such a significant commitment to their future. I pictured the couple's anxiety the night before and the mountain of thoughts that must race through their heads about



all the preparations, about for the first time getting a physical sight of the whole of their partner's world and family. I imagined that the only relief could be the idea that even with all this the only thing that matters is whom they are marrying.

At this point I notice something. I am incredibly happy for Jessie and oddly even feel some relief that this could lift some of the uncertainties in life for her. It could give her someone to share in the joy of those moments I can only compare to when a child first discovers something new about life. I'm also happy she has someone to love and comfort her when darker thoughts make fear feel stronger than hope. But this is not what I'm feeling now.

As a boy I remember never understanding why people would cry at weddings. For me, now it is hard not to. I remember specifically four years ago traveling from Las Vegas to a little New England redbrick church outside Boston for the wedding of a good friend. He was marrying a girl he had been with for over 5 years and in that time I'd grown to know both of them relatively well and care for them equally. As Maria walked down the aisle I could see love in both the eyes of the bride and her groom. That day I understood tradition with a new clarity and what makes it so important. I could see the way Brian was looking at her too, completely exposed to all the witnesses there that this was the woman he had given his heart to.

When Maria entered into the church my eyes began to swell. She looked beautiful and like she was completely aware of the moment in her life and was both humbled by and embracing it. The only thing that felt appropriate to me was crying. When the

tears began I noticed another feeling stirring that I didn't ever think to expect before that moment. I think every girl probably feels this when they go to a wedding. There's even the saying for it, "always a bridesmaid." It's a bit different when you are gay... somehow the humor in that expression gets lost. I was alone in a church pew feeling an incredibly blissful feeling for my friend that was countered by a realization that this day, this feeling and this experience might never exist for me.

A few weeks ago a friend said something that struck me as profound. He said, "Other minorities, whether it be race or a disability, generally can grow up knowing they are wanted and loved by their families. Gay kids can't do that. Sure, you're loved, but the damage is done when you grow up believing your family might not want you... that you cannot be accepted as who you are." He was right. As a boy I could never let myself feel comfortable trusting my feelings. I didn't feel safe revealing what I was beginning to discover about myself. That time in my life was about survival, although I didn't have the perspective I do now to know that all my actions and the behaviors I was learning were far less about creating a future, as they were just surviving the day. Now, with time, I can see the most damaging part of my coming out was my inability to do it sooner.

Back when I used to walk down the streets of New York City, and through its gay ghettos, that same feeling of being an outsider that I felt with my family sat inside me there, too. I was discouraged by the amount of people I saw absent of the insight needed to craft a life above whatever addiction or escape is temporarily filling the void created in their adolescence. I notice myself envying my straight friends lives as I try to remind myself the grass is not always greener. I often wonder if the life that keeps me single and alone would be any different if it were just a little easier for a gay boy to grow up knowing it was clearly OK to believe in who he is.

All this, from a wedding invitation that came in the mail. ■

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# Living with Purpose

**Felicia Melton-Smyth talks candidly to *Our Lives* about transitioning, her AIDS philanthropy work and the most important thing she's ever done.**

**j**oseph Campbell used the expression, “Follow your bliss,” to encourage people to embrace who they are, to follow what they feel, and above all to quite simply just live. As children, we all did this. Even as a boy, Felicia Melton-Smyth could never think of living any other way than what felt completely honest and natural to her. That meant, of course, playing patty cake and catching butterflies with other girls, instead of trying out for sports with the other boys.

Being born a boy in Blue Mounds, and raised on her grandparents' farm by her father and stepmother, helped prepare Felicia for some of the challenges she was going to face later in life. In her first grade play, she was forced into playing Prince Charming but got in trouble for refusing to kiss the girl. She jumped at playing a female part in fourth grade because it provided her the opportunity to wear her first dress. Felicia's always had the strength to be herself.

In her youth, Felicia had the word ‘sample’ tattooed on her hip because it echoed a nick-name that her best friends had given her. Even back then they considered her the *sample of a woman*. “I already had long nails and long hair,” she says. “I wasn’t fitting into society because I was too feminine. I almost looked like a girl, but didn’t wear any makeup, and I was still wearing men’s clothes... I was starting to change over.”

Felicia’s never considered the decision to switch genders a choice. For her, becoming a transsexual was just natural evolution. So, when the time came to go through the surgical transition, she had no hesitation about becoming who she already knew she

was. After all, this was the place she had spent years trying to reach.

At about the same time that she started her coming out process though, the AIDS epidemic broke. Felicia, like many, now had to face something that would send her life in a different direction. For the first time she began to feel scared of how she was living.

“AIDS struck fear in me and I did not have sex with anyone for three or four years... I was so scared of it. Nobody knew what it was. It wasn’t called AIDS yet. They gave it a name though... It was the ‘Gay Disease.’”

Felicia’s voice became emotional after what she revealed next. “My two best friends when I came out in high school, the two people who took me in their arms, loved me and protected me, the two who showed me the gay ways, those were the first two I knew who were infected with this disease.”

“Back then you didn’t want to be gay. You didn’t want to know anyone who was gay. You didn’t want to touch anyone who’s gay because you were afraid you were going to get it. You would look around the room and wonder who has it. Some people didn’t care. I remember people not caring if they were going to get it or not. They didn’t see what I saw.”

Her emotions quickly turned to anger when asked, “Why?” Felicia sharply replied, “Because it’s personal. I had personal relationships with them. These were my two best friends. I kept crying because I was going to lose them. They were going to die.”

The pain she was feeling lead Felicia to a new role. She took on the position of caregiver to her two best friends.

“I stuck there with them through it. I



**Felicia, attending the AIDS Network's Red Ribbon Affair this past March.**

**"If there is one thing I want people to know about me, it is how much I love being alive."**

watched over them. I nursed them as their bodies would just stop working. I stayed by their side to a point when they were moved to the hospital and then that was...goodbye."

After that, in her own words, “People started dying left and right around me.”

Felicia points out how back then there were no drugs available to fight it. She talks about how the feces in kitty litter caused one of her infected friends to get sick. "That killed him," she says, followed by a dead silence.

"You watched them lose weight to where they would have dementia. You watch them as they don't even know what they're doing." She says as her voice reveals a kind of helplessness, "You wake up one morning and learn they have to wear diapers now. You try to talk to them like nothing has changed, but then they can't walk anymore. Three months... I lost one of them in three months

**Felicia** would like to encourage anyone who reads this to consider making a donation to the AIDS Network. You can either do it online at [www.aidsnetwork.org/donate.html](http://www.aidsnetwork.org/donate.html) or by mailing it to: AIDS Network, 600 Williamson St., Madison, WI 53703

after he found out he had it. It scared me, and no one ever knew what it was."

Felicia continued caretaking after her two best friends' deaths. She cared for two more who died, followed by one last friend, before she had to stop.

"I couldn't do it anymore. I was losing everyone I knew. think I lost almost everyone... and to be able..." After a pause, she continues with tears in her eyes, "I'd just go home so I could cry alone."

If strength comes from pain, then the amount of loss Felicia endured is what prompted another positive transition in her life. She

became an activist. The fear of AIDS that initially scared her, is now what she uses to improve the lives of anyone affected by the disease. Each year, Felicia has a tradition of spending her holidays with AIDS patients. Last year she even pushed herself through the 300 mile ACT ride. Almost all of her charity work is designed around fundraising for the AIDS Network. Just recently, she's set her sights on educating our youth.

"I've noticed that the younger generation doesn't think that they're ever going to get AIDS. They don't seem scared of it... They don't know anybody that has it... They think it is this thing that happened years ago." Not long after she says this, Felicia mentions how a very young man recently came up to her and confided that he was HIV positive. "He was devastated," she says. "God, he was just a child!"

Years later, how does she continue to handle hearing these kinds of emotionally draining stories? Felicia states, "Every time you hear my name, every time I write it on a check... I think of... them."

Them, of course, were her two best friends, Gary Melton and Lyon Smith. She says of adopting their names, "it's the most important thing I could have ever done." ■

PHOTO BY DIMITRIE FARADJIAN

A large, bold, black and white poster for the ACT 5 AIDS Ride. The top half features the word "ACT" in a large, blocky font, followed by a stylized ampersand symbol formed by two interlocking bicycle wheels, and then the number "5". Below this, a grey horizontal band contains the text "THE WISCONSIN AIDS RIDE" in a large serif font, followed by "AUGUST 2-5 2007" in a large sans-serif font. At the bottom, there is a white rectangular area containing the website "WWW.ACTRIDE.ORG" in large, bold, white letters, the phone number "608.252.6540", and the location "MADISON, WI". The bottom edge of the poster lists various sponsors and partners, including AIDS Network, Williamson, Malcolm, Isthmus, 105.5 FM, US Cellular, SprintPrint, Budget Signs, Haggard, Cold Rock 94.1 FM, WTOP, WTUX, Major 103, Mid-West Family Broadcasting, Madison 107.0, and 106. The poster also includes the "COLLECTED" logo and the "BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU" seal.

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# waking up the sleeping giant

**"If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants." —Isaac Newton**

**Madison Gay Hockey Association Founder and OL Publisher Patrick Farabaugh shares his personal story and experience behind the birth of the MGHA**

**f**ebruary 18, 2007 will forever be one of the most important days of my life. It was the championships at the Madison Ice Arena for the Madison Gay Hockey Association, and the buzz surrounding the games had reached a fever pitch. Red. Grey. Teal. Black. All four teams had spent an entire season riding a wave of precedents and a momentum that the word "Unbelievable" isn't strong enough to describe. Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton RSVP'd and so did Supreme Court candidate Linda Clifford. Both were scheduled to drop the first puck in one of the two championship games. Governor Jim Doyle and Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz sent published letters of endorsement and applause. And me? I was tucked

BOTTOM PHOTO BY ANDREW BUTTITA

away in the ref's closet drying the tears that slipped out of my eyes before calling in to John Quinlan's live radio show *Forward Forum*. What was happening was truly surreal. Team Black captain Mark Sadowski was out in the lobby talking to News Channel 3. The crowd in the stands was slowly swelling to what would end up being well over 300 people armed with posters, winter coats and sequined teal scarves that Team Teal fans brought to support their friends out on the ice. Through all of the hype and excitement, it's easy to forget that everyone collected to see a hockey league where the majority of its players had barely learned how to stand on ice skates just this season.

How does something like this happen???

**Family Portrait:  
The Madison Gay  
Hockey Association  
together just after  
the conclusion of  
the inaugural  
championship games**

I spent the majority of February 18th crying. I didn't sleep much the night before, or the week before, for that matter. Writing the speech I planned to read at the championships was weighing heavily on my mind. It felt like the most important thing I would ever do in my life to date. The introspection this caused released something from deep within me that was absolutely terrifying to take. I procrastinated as long as possible before putting any words onto paper. And when words from my reflection did finally pour out, they came with tears. I cried more frequently than I've ever experienced before, from how honest I was being with myself.

Writing that speech gave me time to think about and recognize what had happened to me over the past year, and how much I grew because of it. That night as I read the speech to the players and our community, I felt like I was carrying on my shoulders the words of everyone who went through this experience with me.

In the course of a couple months, I watched Mark Sadowski engage himself enough to lead one of our teams each week—a role that led him to coming out to his father. Out on a cold night at Tenney Pond, I stood there just to see him and his sister Angie working on positioning and basic drills with a group of hockey rookies that you could see had never considered the sport prior to this group. I learned about how Sarah Covington spent hours writing to some of her teammates to help keep their morale and support high enough to continue. I watched Jay Potash arrive each week with the most real and beautiful idea of hope in his eyes that was beginning to replace the fear of being gay he had when I first met him. I watched Tony Teit grow, from cautiously placing his name on the MGHA website to becoming one of our poster boys. I watched Michelle Watkins step up and challenge herself to materialize a hockey brunch idea into what became one of the best New Years parties in Madison. All of the people on the ice, and all of the people in the stands had come for more than just a hockey league. They came to embrace who they are.

**Kristina Kosnick,  
one of the first  
women to sign  
up, focuses on  
the basics with  
her peers.**



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL SWANSON

## New York City in 2002.

Gay hockey. Did I have any idea what I was signing up for? I had never played hockey before. I'd only been on ice skates maybe once or twice. I came out to my mother only a few years earlier, but never found a way I considered safe to enter New York's gay community, until a friend mentioned a gay ice hockey team that plays in Chelsea.

'Gay' and 'ice hockey' adjacent to each other. That was a challenging dichotomy for me to wrap my head around. Part of what kept me so isolated, so lonely, and so away from anything gay, was my very underdeveloped understanding of sexuality. I had such a narrow understanding of gender. I always identified as masculine. In fact, looking back, I am certain I overcompensated in counter-productive and unnecessary ways just to be certain I was being seen as masculine. But 'gay hockey'? It sounded like such an oxymoron, yet such a draw to me, so as soon as I could, I found a way to gather up the money and the gear, and I signed up.

When I stepped into the Sky Rink at Chelsea Piers for the first time, I was all nerves from the repressed excitement I was holding inside. With my hockey bag over my shoulder and this awkward stick in my hand, I walked into the locker room and got my first sight of the faces of the men who were about to become my teammates...for life. I felt so incredibly out of my comfort zone. I was vulnerable to them. I needed to trust that the guys in this room with me were here for the same reason I was. I needed community. I needed to grow. The way I was seeing life presently left too much to be desired.

Well, I spent the next 4 years of my life growing. I proudly played inside the New York City Gay Hockey Association. The experience I had with this group gave me essential reasons for valuing community. But, more importantly, community that was constructive and able to foster positive personal growth. I needed people like me who could help me feel safe and could challenge me to find and become who I am, more than I had ever been able to before I joined. When I initially signed up, though, I'd convinced myself that I was



only signing up to learn to play hockey. Thats what got me in the door. Inside, I found a subtle, yet incredibly potent something more. I discovered how to be proud of being gay.

### Sometimes, you don't appreciate what you have until you leave it.

All the growth I was experiencing during that time, on and off the ice, lead to a deep realization...I realized I had to leave New York for my own good. Acting on my decision to move to Wisconsin was one of the scariest things I've ever done in my life. It took over a year for me to make. I left a very comfortable job in New York with the world's premiere magazine company. I left a huge apartment in Manhattan, that anyone who visited described as "having a soul", and more. I lost years trying to understand why none of those material milestones measured up to happiness. Then one morning, I quite literally just woke, sat up in my bed, opened my mouth and said, "This is not me." This is not what I value. This is not what I believe in. This is not who I am. Who I am is a guy from a small midwestern town. Who I am is a guy who does not value money or material things the way most people seem to. I am someone who puts love before any-

thing, but here in NYC I was someone who didn't love himself enough to embrace that. I knew leaving New York meant walking away from a safe, prestigious career that would level me professionally. I knew that meant leaving the NYCGHA.

I moved to Madison about 2 years ago. When I got here I was incredibly lonely again and perhaps naively, didn't anticipate it to be such a challenge to establish real friendships. Because of hockey, I had begun to inch away from my self-imposed isolation in New York. Subconsciously, the fear of leaving drove me right back and even deeper into it. Although I felt certain I made an honest decision, the path of that choice pushed my life into a new low. Two steps forward, one back... until last July, when a friend took me to the Gay Games in Chicago. The thought of potentially seeing my old teammates again was just what the doctor ordered. When we arrived, I went straight to the ice rink. As soon as I walked through the doors and felt that crisp chill of the air on my breath; as soon as I heard the sound of hockey sticks slapping the pucks echo off the rink boards, and the scratches from skate blades cutting the ice, something inside of me woke up again. It had been about a week shy of one

**Blades Against AIDS, an MGHA fundraiser for the AIDS Network brings together Matt Jelinek and a coiffed Daniella de la Croix**

Above: The weekly crowds at the Madison Ice Arena. Below: An emotional Patrick Farabaugh congratulates Jay Potash after giving him his medal.



full calendar year since I walked out of the Sky Rink in NYC for the last time, as part of a NYCGHA team, and retired my stick and skates. The time away, plus my impending return to isolation had created new focus that I had never felt before. I came back to Madison on a mission. My motivation for building the Madison Gay Hockey Association was born.

I recognized how much this group in New York had affected me. I knew how critical the people in it were. They helped me learn a healthy way of looking at myself and at the world. I knew I needed it here.

By the time the MGHA took the ice on October 15th, 2006, about 60 people had made a faith commitment to a league that cost many of them over \$300 to join (the initial purchase of all that gear was the toughest part!). On that Sunday night, the Madison Gay Hockey Association became the first LGBTQIA ice hockey league ever built, from the ground up, as developmental. We opened our doors as the largest inaugural season in the world for any LGBTQIA group of this kind.

I suppose there comes a time in the writing of a book when the story starts to tell itself. Watching the MGHA take on its own life, and flourish, has become one of the most humbling experiences of my life. The child that was brought to life a little less than a year ago has already proven to be a capable teacher. The great people this group has welcomed into my life has, like in New York, helped to extend my understanding of who I am, and broaden my sense of community even farther than I've ever known to look.

After the medals from our last games had been given out, we took a group photo that I

posted on the front page of the hockey website. I also tacked it above my desk. That picture speaks volumes about what has happened here. The total absence of personal space between teammates, the smiles and embraces between players, and all the emotion in that picture show me proof, each time I see it, that with encouragement and support, when our walls come down, what we create is a family.

#### "You're a giant."

A few days after the season ended, I received an e-mail from one of our goalies, Bazil. All it said was that wonderfully basic and simple, "You're a giant" quote, which is based on another by Isaac Newton who said, "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants."

I never replied to that e-mail because of how profound it felt to me. However, it did leave me certain of what *needed* to be said in return:

"When we come together, aren't we all?" ■



TOP PHOTO BY PAUL SWANSON. BOTTOM PHOTO BY ANDREW BUTTA

## A Culmination of Community by Mark Sadowski

Let me just start by saying, whoa. This whole season has continued to impress me and grow me as a person as well as change every expectation I've ever had about people's motivation to learn, in this case, a sport they may have never thought they could and also those people's yearning to build a community. Through this all, I have not only made 4 or 5 amazing friends all of whom I have no doubt in calling a best friend (yeah, I have more than one), but also 50 some other people who have a common interest, creating a sense of common identity.

When Patrick Farabaugh approached me to help start this league back in July, I was immediately on board. I never knew that gay hockey leagues existed before I met him. Of course I was in on it; I grew up playing hockey and had identified as a hockey player seven years before I realized that I was gay. In that sense, I never really could see any reason why a gay person couldn't or shouldn't be capable of playing a sport.

After learning more about expectations that are put on many people with regards to their sexuality, my views changed. Many of this year's new players never felt that they fit into sports because as gay men, they never saw themselves as manly men, or as women, were afraid or ostracized by men who forced masculinity on the sport. The latter, I always saw. My sister started playing hockey when women in the sport were few and far between. There were coaches who wanted her injured and off the ice because they felt hockey was a man's sport.

Why? Why is a sport any different than any other part of our lives? Sure, because of biological reasons, men tend to be bigger than women, but as a smaller person myself, I played against scores of guys twice my size. Does your physical make-up define your ability to play? In turn, does your sexuality define your ability to play? I never saw that, so I came into this as a beacon to show the new players that anyone can play the sport as long as they have the dedication to learn.

Personally, I've grown into someone I never thought I could be, a leader, someone who doesn't just sit back and roll with the punches but, rather, one who is responsible for what he says and does. I've always fostered in my team the notion that in hockey, you have to make the plays, not wait for them to happen.

I've grown into a person who willingly takes on that responsibility. That notion that passing on a

great love in my life to others is a contribution to my community and beyond. By offering up whatever I knew about hockey and skating, I was able to become more comfortable talking to people. I have seen what this league has done for so many people and it literally brings a tear of joy to my eye - the friendships that have been created, the confidence people have learned, the passion to win (we know we all have it), and overall, the smaller sense of community built team by team that has generated what in my opinion is a rebirth of Madison's gay community or at least given a much stronger, visible sense of it.

Enough about me. This league is not about one person in particular. It's about a player who played hockey for 13 years but didn't until this year come fully to terms with his homosexuality until he found the strength through leadership. It's about his sister, who would do anything for him. It's about a man who for years wanted to see this happen in Madison and jumped on board as soon as he saw it could. It's about a transgender person who since coming out had never before felt a sense of acceptance until playing in this league. It's about a young out male who has never before identified with the gay community who now finds himself friends with some of the best in it. It's about an 19 year old student who only came out this year and found a positive outlet where more dangerous ones loomed. It's about a college graduate looking to soon go back who is so humble, yet so good that all I want to do is tell him over and over how good he is. It's about a player who never was into team sports but has learned that through the spirit of teamwork, you can have that personal sense of achievement. It's about a man who saw a gap in his life and took it upon himself to initiate what now has become something we all can cherish.

So, I thank Patrick. I thank you David. I thank you Matt. I thank you Galen. I thank you Vivian, Sarah, Michelle, Angie, Kevin, Jay, Steve, Emily, Derrick, Tim, Austin, Jen, Gilbert, Kristen, Max, Angie A., Dan, Caity, Joyce, Jason, Darren, Shawn, Lora, Kim, Tammy, Wendy, Bri, Greg, Sherry, Glenn, Brian, Kristina, David, Tim S., Christopher Z., Bill, Tim F., Chris G., Gerry, Peter, Mike, Laura, Terrance, Sean, Tony, Christopher, Michelle W., Bazil, Deb, Andrew, Cory, and Paul. Thank you to all of the fans who came out to see us play and supported us. Thank you to our sponsors and all of the community groups that have come together. Together we are all the MGHA and we are all a community. ■

To read the full championship night speech, along with all of the MGHA scholarship essays, please visit [www.madisongayhockey.org/scholarship](http://www.madisongayhockey.org/scholarship)

## OUR FAVORITE PLACES

## Friendly Faces in Familiar Places

Returning home helps **Bjørn Holtan** discover that Midwestern values have grown to include our family values at one of Madison's most endeared traditions.

**a**fter an eight year hiatus in San Francisco, I moved back to Madison six months ago. As a young gay man, San Francisco represented a sense of freedom; A place where I could be comfortable in my own skin and I could embrace my sexuality. The bay area was great to me and I loved my life in 'The City.' I appreciated what California had to offer, but there was always something missing and it took moving there to realize what it was: my family.

Two years ago, my family and my own desire to start a family became more of a priority for me. I wanted to live closer to my three sisters and to develop a stronger relationship with my nieces and nephews. I decided now was as good a time as any to make the move back to Madison.

Last Saturday, I took my Mom, my sister and my niece to The Farmers' Market. I sipped lavender Fuji green tea while walking from vendor to vendor—easily entertained as I snacked and people watched. I admired the views of the capital and I really noticed how much I valued how warm each of the vendors were. It was effortless to make healthy choices as I bought my produce and

I was anxious to get home to make my arugula salad with fresh nuts, fruits, vegetables and honey.

When I moved to San Francisco I never thought I would move back to Wisconsin. When I would come home to visit, I always felt as if I was walking around with a big spotlight on me and it was such a "big deal" to be gay. After many years, I

have grown and so has Madison. The community here is becoming even more accepting of different sexual orientations and that's uplifting to me. Places like the Farmers' Market have helped make my transition easier and shown me that our community can be accepted. It warms my heart as I walk around the Saturday morning tradition and notice same-sex couples shopping together, pushing their kids in strollers, holding hands and even couples on double dates over an apple cart!

The Farmers' Market on the Square is a great place to shop for your groceries for the week, meet up with friends, enjoy the beautiful scenery, hang with your partner (and kids) or even go on a date. I look forward to spending many Saturday mornings up on the Square as I reacquaint myself with Madison.

The Farmers' Market on the Square opens up at 6:00 a.m. and stays open to 2:00 p.m.

If you want further information you can go to: [www.madfarmmkrt.org](http://www.madfarmmkrt.org). ■

Bjørn Holtan founded the Madison Gay Outdoors Group. He's also a meridian strengthening and stretching trainer and owns Training with Bjørn (<http://trainingwithbjorn.com>).

Where in Madison is truly special for you? Share it at: [OURLIVESMADISON.COM](http://OURLIVESMADISON.COM)

[madisongayhockey.org](http://madisongayhockey.org)

## An Individual Journey

The road to self-acceptance is full of speed bumps and landmarks along the way.

Dale Decker helps you steer clear of wrong turns.

I remember the first time I realized that I was gay. The feeling was a lot like that first drop on a roller coaster: exhilarating, terrifying and unstoppable. Finally I'd discovered myself and had an explanation for the feelings I'd struggled to understand. It was a great relief to be able to identify the source of my longing, isolation, confusion, pain, and depression.

Growing up gay in a small farming community wasn't exactly easy. Everyone seemed to know I was gay far before I did. My initial reaction to coming out to myself was pure shock. When I was 14 there were few gay role models. Will and Grace were a decade away. There was no such thing as a Gay/Straight Alliance. Sermons from the pulpit were hellfire and brimstone. Daily news reports on the mysterious illness that was eventually named AIDS were the only mention I heard of gays. I never knowingly spoke to another gay person until I was in college.

It's easy to know the exact time you came out to yourself. However, simply knowing your sexual orientation doesn't give you much information about how to cope with those feelings and how to navigate the worlds of sex and love. Pinpointing the moment you truly accepted and embraced your sexuality is quite another matter. Was it the first time you had sex and didn't feel guilty afterward? Was it the time you refused to accept an anti-gay slur at Thanksgiving?

My answer might surprise you. It was the first time you felt defiant. After the shock



### I was ecstatic and felt like I had just done something very wrong.

and amazement of coming out passes, we start to notice how much is wrong with how our society treats us. Anger rises and begins to compete with our old feelings of shame about being gay. Defiance follows quickly and we have the urge to rebel.

And rebel we do. We start to challenge gay jokes and confront prejudice in our families. We attend our first gay rally. We walk into a gay bar to feel a part of a community and to be away from the straight world for awhile. We fall in love. We have sex.

Think about that last one. What could be more defiant than rejecting the taboo against gay sex? I can certainly remember the first time I had sex with a man. It ranks among the most

intense experiences of my life. I was ecstatic and I felt like I had just done something very wrong. I had to unlearn the attitudes that gay sex is wrong and dirty. We have to fight to learn that our expression of affection is just as valid as the culturally prized heterosexual model.

Defiance goes a long way toward giving us the energy to form a positive image of ourselves and to reject societal attitudes. However, like any sharp tool it's easy to cut yourself with it. If we lose our footing, we get lost in being defiant without actually changing ourselves or the world. It takes courage to look at the warts of your society. It's also draining and infuriating. It's no surprise that minorities have increased problems with depression, addictions and compulsive behavior. Gay people are no exception.

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Alta with her parents, Susan & Mary Jane

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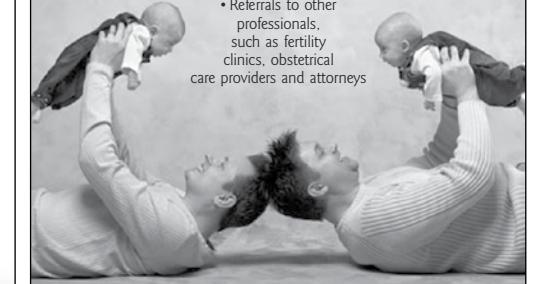
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**It's no surprise that minorities have increased problems with depression, addictions and compulsive behavior. Gay people are no exception.**

### Some of Our Challenges

• **Depression** is caused by many factors; genetics, stress, lack of social support to name a few. Everyone knows that depressed people feel depressed but did you know that irritability is also a sign of depression? Depression is marked by disturbances in sleep, appetite, sex drive, concentration and motivation. If you've had trouble feeling sad or irritable for more than 2 weeks, it's a good idea to call a counselor or see your doctor. If you are having suicidal thoughts, call a professional immediately. Quick treatment can prevent depression from becoming severe and causing more problems later.

• **Alcohol** is definitely part of the social scene here in Wisconsin. You can certainly find other drugs but for most folks alcohol is the chosen social lubricant. The up side is that alcohol and drugs heighten our senses and relax us. Unfortunately, they also numb emotions and inflate sense of self-esteem chemically. Finding the line between healthy use and abuse is difficult. If your loved ones are concerned or you are having trouble cutting down on your use, seek out a professional who is specially trained in substance abuse counseling. They can help you decide if you have a problem and what you can do about it.

• **Sex and romance.** The things we are fighting so hard to have accepted, can also lose their meaning. Sex can become a way to submerge our inner conflict and guilt. When you start to neglect friends, family and your responsibilities to pursue the next conquest, sex has become a compulsion. Conversely, others avoid sex out of shame and fear.

### How We Can Help Ourselves

So how do you avoid falling into these traps? There is no substitute for the supportive ear of a trusted confidant. Many of us at

least temporarily lose contact with our families at the very moment we need the most support. Reach out to friends. Some people find seeing a counselor helpful especially if they are isolated. It doesn't matter so much what you do, just do something with that energy. So many times when stress arises we forget to schedule time to relax and let it all hang out. Make time for hobbies and socializing.

Taking care of your body is another way to inoculate yourself against stress. Exercise is very effective for blowing off steam and keeping depression at bay. It also greatly improves sleep. Eating well increases energy and stamina to forge ahead. Not exactly rocket science but we could all do better on these fronts.

Keep an open mind about the many facets of the LGBTQIA community. Humans instinctively respond with anxiety when presented with something new. Just make certain that you aren't mistaking anxiety for dislike. We are already working to escape the prejudice of the world, let's not set up more barriers within our community. Try out all the scenes: sports teams, non-profit groups, political campaigns and pageants just to name a few.

The changes that come with identifying your sexuality and accepting yourself can be overwhelming. Even people who've been out for decades come across pockets of homophobia inside themselves. By creating a circle of support and taking good care of ourselves mentally and physically, we can create a healthy community. It is that community that eventually topples the prejudice and bigotry we all face every day. ■

Dale Decker has been a psychotherapist and substance abuse counselor in our community since 1994. He can be found online at [www.daledecker.net](http://www.daledecker.net)

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### Building Support

**Tim Foster** treats himself to some little treasures from businesses in our community.



#### Tickled Pink

1827 Parmenter Street Middleton

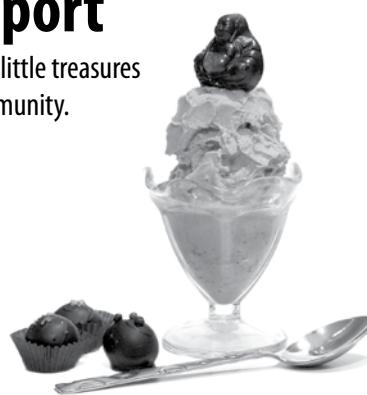
Tickled Pink is a treasure trove of decorating fun. For sinful martinis, in glassware that makes them look just as good, **blush colored glasses with polka dots** sure to do the trick. (\$44.00 set of 2). Pair them up with a **palm tree napkin holder** and matching **polka dot napkins** (\$42.00) and you'll have cool drinks that everyone will be talking about.



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Mary McCarthy said, "We are the hero of our own story." Unleash the hidden poet. Because, if you don't tell your story, no one else will. Just make sure you do it in a **journal** (\$10.95 each) that has a true sense of style.



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3918 Monona Drive Madison

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PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL SWANSON, PRODUCT STYLING BY TIM FOSTER

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### V for Valuation

UW Allies Program co-president **Amanda Hunter** opens up about the friend that helped her find the courage to step out and stand up for herself.

I've always felt fundamentally *different*. Looking back, there were signs. In sixth grade, my friends would rank the cutest guys in class, debating if Mike's eyes made up for that zit on his chin (no), if Paul's hair made up for his lack of personality (yes); I didn't know or care either way. One year, the swimsuit edition of a popular sports magazine went missing from my parent's bedroom; neither of my brothers knew anything about it. No one knew it was me sneaking peaks at night, under the covers with a flashlight.

A part of me knew I liked girls. But an enormous part of me believed the implicit messages I had received about homosexuality: it's a terrible thing, that no one important had ever been gay, gay people are severely beaten and left to die (this was shortly after Matthew Shepherd). I did everything I could to become straight.

I tried to date boys but something just felt wrong. The first time a boy kissed me, I laughed. In his face. As he was kissing me. I felt nothing.

I came out to myself gradually, over my sophomore year in college: "I might be gay," then "maybe I'm bi" and eventually, "I'm a lesbian." I confided in a good friend, V, whom I knew would be supportive. V was there to tell me there's nothing innately wrong with me, which I really needed to hear. Coincidentally, V was also one-half of a duo that founded a gay-straight student alliance, the Allies Program, in which I became active.

Through Allies, I surrounded myself with an accepting environment that allowed me the breathing room to figure out and to come to terms with myself.

But it was still a well-kept secret until my twenty-first birthday. My mom and aunts came to town to celebrate; we were having a drink on a patio on State Street when an especially conservative aunt asked if I was involved in any extra-curriculars. "I'm co-president of the gay-straight alliance." She was shocked, asking, "So you...support...that lifestyle?"

"It's not a lifestyle, and yes."

This upset me. It was confirmation that my family would not accept my true self. The previous Christmas, we changed the lyrics to "Deck the Halls" because, "gay doesn't mean happy anymore." My mother knew I was angry. After repeated phone calls I wasn't talking. Finally, I came out to her,

in an email. When we spoke the next night, she said, "I love you, but I hope one day you'll be straight again."

Mom didn't get her wish, but she's coming around.

She and Dad are joining their local PFLAG chapter. One day soon I'm hoping to tell them about my girlfriend, and eventually introduce them. We've agreed that I won't come out to the extended family, because they're very conservative, religious, and anti-gay. And they've accepted the trade-off: that the family will have a diminished role in my life. I'm not coming home for Christmases if I can't bring my partner; As long as "I" is the subject of the previous sentence, I'm the one in control, it's on my terms.

Now, I feel freer. I no longer worry about who knows or may know. I'm still active in Allies, so that maybe I can be someone else's V, but more importantly, to help make the world a more welcoming place for us all. ■



**V was there to tell me  
there's nothing innately  
wrong about me**

Have an interesting coming out story? Share it at: [OURLIVESMADISON.COM](http://OURLIVESMADISON.COM)

Jay Potash

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