

July/August
2012

our lives



our fifth anniversary

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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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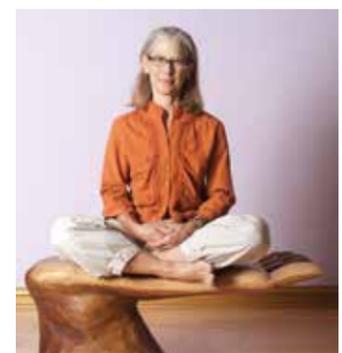
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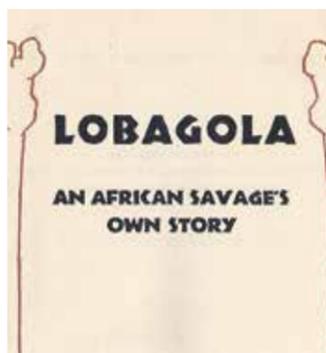
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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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What I Have Learned After Five Years

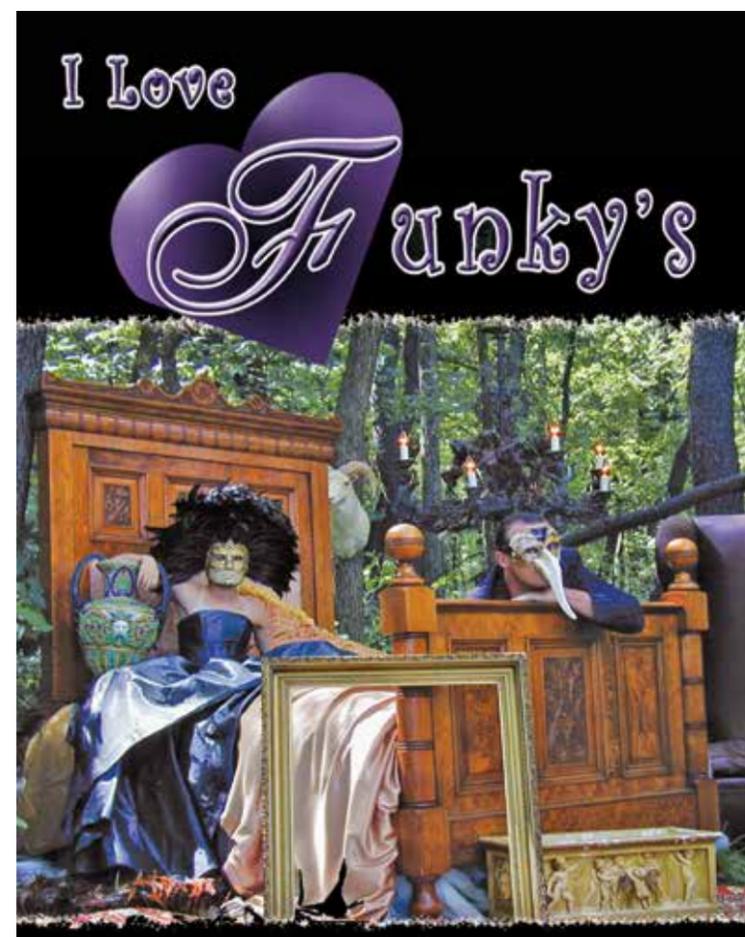


Five years ago I was a very passionate and a very terrified 29-year-old. I needed a way to identify local leaders and role models who could help show me how to expect more from all the facets of my life. The bold idea that perhaps I wasn't the only one who needed that was what gave birth to this magazine. And as a result of taking those terrifying first steps towards creating that first issue, I have grown more as person than I ever knew was emotionally or intellectually possible. It is directly because of you that I've learned that there is a beautiful, diverse community of people right here in the Madison area who are able to help foster new ways of seeing and understanding the LGBTQ experience. You have helped me discover groups and organizations that have become the tools I've used to construct my own identity and that give me a deep sense of pride for where I live. As a teenage runaway, for the first time in my life you also have given me a community that I am a part of and feel I belong to. Thank you for seeing the potential in this. Thank you for helping to give it the resources, patience, and love it has needed to be able to stand up and be visible for others to find and connect. And especially thank you to the leaders who have found the courage to step out and share their stories. I deeply believe that it takes a village to raise a child, and it's my best hope that together we've nurtured and supported that child in us all. Now, because of Our Lives, I stand here today thankful and grateful as a 34-year-old man who is still very passionate, but who's fear has been replaced by hope with love.

Patrick Farabaugh PUBLISHER

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letters

Dear Editor:

I read with interest Nyle Biondi's article in the May/June 2012 edition of *Our Lives* regarding the outing of trans people. This, like many trans issues, is something that needs to be discussed in more detail, even (particularly?) in the LGBTQ community. To that end, I want to thank Nyle for starting the conversation and bringing to the fore some of the ways being out is potentially a different experience for trans people than it is for members of the LGBTQ community.

However, I am concerned that Nyle may have left some readers with the impression that if one is careful, it might be all right to out trans people. While I want to affirm Nyle's comments, I want to also go one step farther and explicitly state that it is almost never acceptable to out trans people. The only two exceptions I can think of would be where a specific trans person has given consent (or requested) to be outed to a particular person in a particular context, OR in the case of a life-threatening emergency in which that person's trans status would be relevant (some medical emergencies, for example). Even under those conditions, I might be hesitant to out a trans person.

Even as a very out transsexual woman, I consider being outed by others to be an act of violence. The reason, in addition to all of the concrete reasons Nyle raised, is that as trans people, we work, struggle, and fight very hard to claim our identities as people gendered in the ways we identify and present ourselves to the world.

Yet the instant our statuses as trans people are disclosed, those hard-won identities are immediately, almost universally, and irrevocably called into question. After being outed, I have had friends who previously had no trouble with pronouns stumble and call me "he." I have heard supposed allies make a distinction between myself and "real" women, I have been asked what my genitalia looks like. Being outed makes it almost impossible to have a core part of my identity accepted without hesitation or investigation. Outside of a critical, pressing need in which a trans person cannot disclose her gender status for herself, or unless a trans person has given explicit consent, there is never a reason to out a trans person.

-Vivienne Andersen, Madison

OUR KITCHEN by Leanne Cordisco

Celebrating what's in season at our local farmers' market



Stuffed Zucchini Flowers

We all have our share of zucchini horror stories—wait one day too long and they morph from lovely, tender vegetables into Facebook-worthy torpedoes. I like to do my part to save Madison from overgrown zucchini by cooking them in their flower state. This is a lovely and elegant appetizer that can be served alone or with this salad. Served together, it has a wonderful contrast of hot and cold, crunchy and soft, and creamy and zesty. An additional benefit is that the zucchini flowers are really cheap, too!

For the Salad

Slice 2 tomatoes into wedges and place in a bowl. Add the zest and juice of one lemon, 1/2 teaspoon of fennel pollen (or 1/4 teaspoon ground fennel seeds if you can't find fennel pollen), salt, pepper, and 1/4 cup olive oil. Set aside for one hour to allow the juice of the tomatoes to mix with the other ingredients to make a light dressing. Clean 1 bunch of baby arugula, pat dry, and set aside.

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contributors

Roberto Amezcua has a love for meeting new people. He believes that everyone hums their own tune. By simply engaging in a conversation, he looks for the melody the person is humming. It is all about making the person feel comfortable and letting their personality come out in the photographs. That is all it takes to find that tune and capture it in a split second. If you'd like to have Roberto cover your photography needs, please feel free to go to amezcua.com for contact information.



Ellen Barnard, MSSW, is a social worker, sex educator, and counselor, and the co-owner of A Woman's Touch Sexuality Resource Center. She thinks she has one of the best jobs in the world because she gets to help everyone have the intimate relationships they desire. She lives in Madison on an urban farm with her partner, dogs, cat, and chickens.



Timothy Hughes was born and raised in Madison, and learned traditional film photography and darkroom work while attending MATC. In 1997, Timothy earned his B.S. in art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For the next eight years, he worked at The Onion, designing print advertisements. In 2005, he decided to shift gears and begin full-time work as a professional photographer. A collection of his photographs was obtained by the Wisconsin Historical Society in 2011. Timothy maintains a photo studio in downtown Madison and lives in the city's Spring Harbor neighborhood. Learn more at timothyhughes.com.



Watch Leanne make this recipe on ourlivesmadison.com!

For the Zucchini Flowers

Mix 12 teaspoons of soft goat cheese with 1/2 teaspoon herb de provence, salt, and pepper. In a small bowl, whisk together 1 egg and 2 Tbls water. Place 2 cups of panko breadcrumbs in a separate bowl. Heat oil in a high-walled frying pan to 350 degrees. Gently pry open the zucchini flowers and inspect the interiors for debris or bugs, and clean as necessary. Gently stuff each flower with 1 teaspoon of the cheese mixture. Dredge the flower through the egg wash, then dredge the flower in the panko breadcrumbs. Set aside. Repeat for all the remaining flowers. Working in batches of 3-4, fry the zucchini flowers until golden brown, 1 minute each. Remove the flowers and drain them on paper towels; salt each flower while they are still hot. Repeat for the remaining flowers.

Assembly

Toss the arugula in the tomatoes, and place a handful of the arugula/tomato mixture on a salad plate. Place 2 zucchini flowers on each salad plate. Serve immediately.

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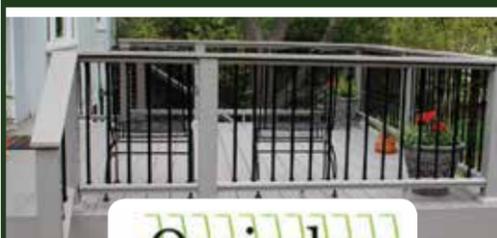
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community

OUR ORGANIZERS

ACTs of Kindness

It only took one Ride to hook **Amy Wiegand**, now ACT 10 Steering Committee Chair, on the caring community that is the ACT Ride.



Who are you and where are you from? I am a native of Door County, but left Sturgeon Bay almost 13 years ago to enjoy the “big city” of Madison. Currently an Inventory Control Coordinator for a power-solutions company, my heart lies in the non-profit world of the arts. When not spending time with the ACT Ride community, I am a member of the AIDS Network Board and perform regularly with the Madison Flute Club.

How did you come to be involved with the ACT Ride? **What is your ACT Ride stat sheet?** I watched from afar as my friend, an AIDS Network case-worker at that time, rode in ACT 1 through 4. As she rode hundreds of miles each year, I thought that she had lost her mind and that it was something I could never do. When ACT 5 rolled around, I signed up on a whim, bought a bike, and started training as soon as the snow was gone. I’ve been hooked ever since! Now I am PROUD to say that I have ridden over 1,500 miles in the last five ACT Rides, and that I have been welcomed into the most amazing community of people that I have ever met. I’ve also been a member of the ACT Ride Steering Committee for the last four years—this year as Chair.

How has your involvement with the Ride changed you? How does the ACT Ride benefit the community (beyond the funds raised for AIDS Network)? The ACT Ride reminds me to be true to myself, to share kindness, and to appreciate

every person and every moment every day. Our day-to-day lives can be stressful, but the during the four days of the ACT Ride, we celebrate acts of kindness, encouragement, and acceptance; no matter who you are or where you come from, you are part of us. What I find most amazing is that the ACT Ride community continues to share these values during the other 361 days of the year as well. Whether you are biking and hear someone randomly yell “GO RIDER!” or you have an impromptu reunion at your local coffee shop, you know you are part of something bigger.

This year we started ACT Ride Days of Caring, where our participants volunteer their time to give back to the community. So far this year we’ve sorted food at Second Harvest Food Bank and served on the crews for the Tour de Cure and GSA RUN WALK EAT. We look forward to more of these opportunities!

This year’s Ride is ACT 10. How has the Ride grown and changed over the years? What has stayed the same? Since ACT 1, the Ride has definitely evolved, but the core values and goals have remained strong. In the past nine years, more than \$2.5 million in unrestricted funds have been raised for the AIDS Network, and been used to keep the day-to-day operations running, keep amazing staff available to clients, support many services, and MUCH more.

Some traditions that have stood the test of time are our funky theme days, random acts of kindness, giant blow-up animals on crew cars, and amazing examples of courage, compassion, and commitment along the way.

Will there be any special celebrations or acknowledgments of this being the tenth ACT Ride? What will those be? We invite everyone to join us in our send-off at Opening Ceremonies and celebrating our homecoming at Closing Ceremonies. With almost 200 riders and many more crew and volunteers, these should be our biggest celebrations yet! We are very excited to have Aaron Williams and the Hoodoo performing from 1:30–2:30 p.m. before Closing Ceremonies. At each of these events, as well as throughout all of the communities we visit along our 300-mile ride, we will celebrate those living with HIV/AIDS and honor those we have lost. Visit our website

ACT Ride and Wisconsin HIV/AIDS Facts & Figures

AIDS Network Cycles Together—The Wisconsin AIDS Ride is heralded as a shining national example of grassroots fundraising and community in action. The ACT Ride continues the mission of the former Heartland AIDS Ride, which ran 500 miles from Minneapolis to Chicago. With ACT 10 we celebrate a decade of bringing inspirational fundraising even closer to home with a ride that begins and ends in Madison, and travels through AIDS Network’s service area in southern Wisconsin.

Since 2003 the ACT Ride has had more than 1,000 Riders and 750 Crew Members travel through small towns and cities, raising both awareness and needed funds. To date the ACT Ride has brought in more than \$2.7 million in donations. Thanks to our generous sponsors and volunteers, approximately 85% of those funds have been returned to AIDS Network. This money supports essential services the agency provides to clients and the community as a whole, with over 6,000 people in Wisconsin now estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS.

Statistics for AIDS Network/Wisconsin

- Number of AIDS Network clients: 427
- New clients in 2011: 52
- Number of people in WI living with HIV/AIDS who have been diagnosed: 6,550
- Number expected to be positive and unaware of their status: 1,750* *Estimated by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

MSM* Numbers in Wisconsin

- 1 in 3 African American, 1 in 10 Hispanic/Latino, and 1 in 20 White are estimated to be HIV+.
- HIV rates more than doubled for MSM ages 15–29 between 2002 and 2011.
- HIV rates declined for MSM ages 30+ in that same time period.

*Men who have Sex with Men

Editor’s Note: The above information was supplied by AIDS Network.

to see where you can visit a cheering station along our route to join in the fun!

OPENING CEREMONIES:

August 2, 7:00 a.m., Olbrich Park

CLOSING CEREMONIES:

August 5, 3:00 p.m., MLK Blvd.
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How can readers learn more about getting involved? The ACT Ride is always looking for riders, crew, and day crew. Visit ActRide.org to get involved!



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What Gay Hockey Means to Me

Each year the Madison Gay Hockey Association invites its members to write about the role that the MGHA plays in building their identity. 2012 scholarship winner **James (Sutherland) Parens** shares his essay.

highly curious, albeit skeptical, about whether being in a hockey league, gay or not, was a good fit for me.

My three years with this league have surpassed any expectations I had for the organization and for myself. Three years of highs and lows, wins and losses, successes and failures. I have been on the first-place team, the last-place team, and this past season with a team that finished in the standings somewhere in the middle. But this only scratches the surface of my experience. The community of folks in the league has been a big reason why I choose to come back each season. It's a slightly different definition of community than I have felt in other places. There are still people in this league whom I don't know at all, or very little. There are folks who come from different backgrounds and have different life realities than my own. I never thought about that much the first two seasons I played. I was just happy to meet new people and work at learning how to play hockey.

Entering this season of hockey, I learned even more about this group, and even more about myself.

In the off-season, I started taking steps to change my gender from female to male. There were definitely some anxieties about this in different areas of my life, and starting a new season with the hockey league, where last year I was one name, and now registering under another (but as a returning player) was one of them. It's not that the hockey league doesn't have any transgender individuals—we do. I just didn't know of anyone who started transitioning after playing hockey for a couple of years. From the very beginning of the season, emailing the Operations Committee about this change, as well as the very first practice, I felt immediately at ease. People were almost seamless in changing my name and pronoun in their heads and in speaking with me. Any questions that people asked me were incredibly kind and respectful. I have felt incredibly supported in all

areas of my life regarding this change, but I really needed this organization to be a place where I didn't have to explain myself. Not only did this league accept and support me, playing hockey this season has increased my own acceptance of me, and how I define myself.

I have a special love for this league and the people associated with it because it's been a constant for me over the past three years when my life outside of hockey has been anything but constant. In the past three-plus years, I have found the love of my life, bought a house, got engaged, began co-parenting two boys, quit my job to start a new career, and started transitioning my gender. I am the happiest I have ever been in my life, but large changes create anxiety; stress; and sometimes, shaky confidence. My Sunday nights in the fall and winter months have become an outlet for stress, as well as a familiar place to see friends and the chance to play hockey with some outstanding individuals. Playing hockey has been both

a reset from the week and a place to celebrate accomplishments. (Heck, I celebrate the fact that at the age of 41, I am healthy and able to play hockey and plan to do so for as long as I can.)

This last season has been the most rewarding for me as a person. My team is an exceptional group of people, and I appreciate and respect each and every one of them. I admire how we developed into a group that really cares about one another, and that we all worked together to become a united team when faced with adversity. Being able to walk into a locker room and be greeted by teammates, getting to hear little bits about people's lives and just engage in overall banter, shows how special the league can be for a person. Total team acceptance. The Violet Offenders will always have a special place in my heart when I look back at my hockey history with this league. Not only did I have a fantastic season with them, but this season is also when I learned to define and accept myself, learned how transitioning gender affects one's hockey game, and learned how this league really has the potential to be everything that has been envisioned.

This league's newly adopted mission states: *"The Madison Gay Hockey Association is an adult developmental ice hockey league for people of all sexualities and gender identifications. We are especially committed to providing opportunities for those who have historically felt uncomfortable in traditional sports settings to learn and teach ice hockey in a safe, supportive, and fun environment. We aspire to the highest standards of sportsmanship and promote integration of the wider Madison community into the gay community."*

We are a diverse group, and I love that we have people who identify themselves in so many different ways. It goes way beyond "gay" or "straight"—the diversity of our players in this league include ages 22–60, single, married, in a relationship, parents, grandparents, students, professionals, working class, middle class, and unemployed. A player might be highly skilled at the sport, a complete beginner, or anything in between. Our diversity goes way beyond our mission statement.

In the six years of this young organization, several different issues have shown themselves. It is expected with a league of this size and diversity that there will always be a problem that seems impossible to solve, a conflict that seems too daunting to deal with. What is special about this organization is that people step up to these challenges, face them head on, and work to find a solution. Board members ask for input, whether it's an official invitation or survey, or just a board member asking another player for an opinion about something. I think some of the best problem solving takes place when watching hockey games, talking about what is happening on the ice, or talking about a particular issue that has come to light.

I really needed this organization to be a place where I didn't have to explain myself. Not only did this league accept and support me, playing hockey this season has increased my own acceptance of me, and how I define myself.

This league continues to teach me how to work with people and understand different points of view. Different people bring different opinions; some that I don't immediately understand, but strive to try. I feel constantly challenged—whether it's learning more about hockey, developing my game, or learning about the strengths and weaknesses in my own character. This is the kind of challenge that extends into the rest of life, and this league and its people have continued to teach me about acceptance and perspective, both in my own learning and by their example.

I am a proud member of the MGHA, and this is what it means to me. ■



I joined the league three years ago, wondering if this was a way to mentally and physically get through the winter months. Having lived in Madison my entire life, one would think that I was at least relatively accepting of the ice, snow, and cold; in reality, my tolerance of the cold weather and the elements has dwindled over the years, and with that came an addition of a little seasonal-affective depression and some serious hibernation and hermitage. I was also feeling a little isolated from the queer community, and wanted a way to see people every week and get to meet new friends.

I had never played any organized hockey before. When I was younger (20+ years ago), I played a bit on the outdoor rinks on Madison's east side. I wouldn't say that any of those games helped much in the way of developing any real skills or strategic understanding of the game. It really looked more like a cross between ice-fencing and unsynchronized ice ballet. Not a lot of actual hockey was happening, just inflated egos and bruised shins. It was also not a sport I watched a lot, other than being a fan of Badger hockey and maybe going to one or two games a season. I was

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community

OUR PROSE

A Piece from the LGBTQ Narratives Group

lgbtqnarratives.blogspot.com

Mark R. Albright is one of the original members of LGBTQ Narratives. He studied theater at UW-River Falls and graduated with honors from Beloit College with a communications major and a lesbian & gay studies minor. He utilizes his theater background as well as his love for gay theater for inspiration.



September 23, 2005

My heart broke earlier today. I found out Sean moved away. He sent an email to everyone on his friends list, stating how welcome he felt when he moved here years ago and how he wished he didn't have to leave. New jobs lead to new opportunities and this job was too good to pass up. He then thanked everyone for welcoming him into their hearts and for how much their friendship meant to him over the years. He also included his new address, which is on the other side of the country, with the wish for all of us to keep in touch, maybe take in a visit once he gets settled.

Was it too much to ask for a moment to meet face-to-face one last time? Say a personal good-bye? Maybe hug and kiss? Maybe he had to leave this way, with an email sent after he left, so his heart didn't break. I could understand that.

I wish we were more than just friends. He's sweet, kind, smart, funny, caring ... all the things a guy like me would want in a boyfriend wrapped in a handsome, lovable person. But it wasn't his path to stay here. It's my path to stay here. We had our moments and they will live in my heart.

Neal read that journal passage today after going through his drawer of old pictures he'd promised to scan into his computer and post in an album on Facebook in one of those "Remember When"

**I wish we were more than just friends.
He's sweet, kind, smart, funny, caring ...
But it wasn't his path to stay here.
It's my path to stay here.**

picture albums. Never without his camera, he'd almost forgotten about that picture of Sean he'd taken at the annual pool party. In the photo, Sean is taking a quick dip in the pool to cool off. His bald head and shoulders are shiny and his chest hair soaking. Seeing the photo again, Neal's memories and feelings awoke after years of dormancy. The movie dates because both were dateless. Sean passing out really bad cigars at his 33rd birthday party. The night he had a spare ticket to the symphony and invited Neal to go. He wondered why neither of them ever suggested being more than friends.

The last Neal heard of Sean, he had bought a new house with his boyfriend of three years. They and the cats outgrew the old place. He pulled out the picture he got of them this past Christmas. Sean had put on a little weight, but was still as handsome as ever.

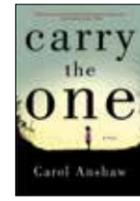
Neal set those pictures aside, poured himself another cup of oolong tea, and turned on the classical music channel. He'll always be thankful for living under the rainbow, but this is one of those times where a cloud came in. ■

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OUR PAGES & POEMS

Our Lives Recommends:

Reading *Carry the One* by Carol Anshaw and *In One Person* by John Irving (both Simon & Schuster, 2012).



I am here while the sun is still hot to recommend two excellent summer reads. The fact that both happen to have bi characters (Irving's is the main character, while Anshaw's is an on-again/off-again love interest) is not the point. The point is to praise these books!

Irving's "one person" is Billy, a bisexual boy growing up pre-Stonewall in the most unsterotypical small New England town imaginable. Which isn't to say I didn't believe that there would be cross-dressing in an amateur theater troupe. Or that certain boarding school students' Oedipal yearnings might become extremely complex. Or that the town librarian could possibly turn out to be a transgender ex-wrestler. Frankly, if we are to believe not only that Billy never seems to despise himself, but also that he never seems terribly confused about who he is or how to handle it—well, perhaps if there were more towns like this one, Billy wouldn't be so unusual either.

In Anshaw's book, the "one" is Casey Redman, a ten-year-old girl walking home early from a sleepover who is struck and killed in the wee hours of the morning by the car driven by the partner of one of three siblings: Carmine, Nick, and Alice. We follow their trajectories, along with those of the others in the car, for several decades. As one remarks years later, "When you add us up, you always have to carry the one."

Anshaw evokes relationships that are instantly recognizable. Her characters—the physicist addict, the lesbian artist, the partially deaf activist, the bisexual fashion model—are fully realized, complex individuals, not tokens whose secrets are revealed slowly and dramatically (and annoyingly, as in so many lesser books with queer characters).

For me, the most provocative line in either book is from Irving's, when a beloved transwoman in Billy's life quits him, saying she can't handle not knowing "who or what you're going to leave me for."

Knowing. Leaving. Loving. Losing. None of it is any less unique for any of the characters in either book. Which is what made, for me, the experience of reading them quite unique and deeply satisfying.

—Alison Jones Chaim, Director, Wisconsin Book Festival

UNTITLED

I have fallen in love the most at least twice.
Firstly,
I was wrinkled and pink-palmed slap-assed and screaming as the first non-wombed breaths stoked my lungcoals. It's an almost unbearable first love, makes your gut a universe of impossibilities.
Secondly,
was the mouth whose spit dissolved the skin on my breastplate, exposing the warped trapped door to my boiling room chest, took a coal onto their tongue, and did not wince.



MISIAN TAYLOR has been a part of the Madison Slam Team and went with them to Boston, MA, to represent Madison in the National Poetry Slam in 2011. She has also been published in *The Yahara Journal* and has shared the stage with spoken word poet Andrea Gibson.

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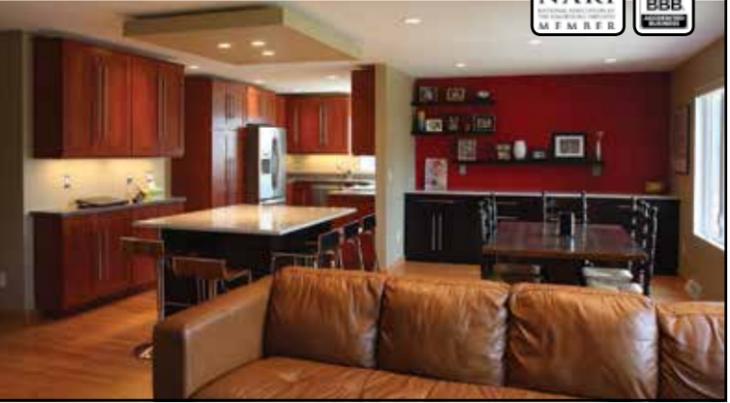
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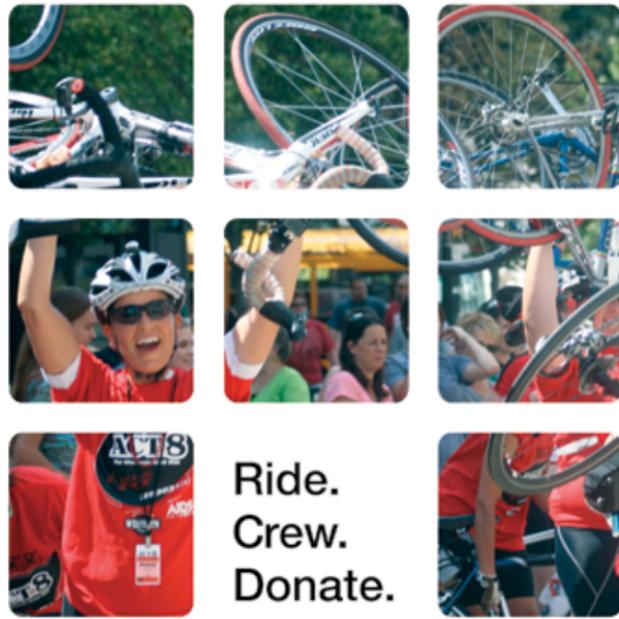
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community

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: When I made the decision to introduce Felicia Melton-Smyth as our first profile in the first issue of *Our Lives*, it was because I saw someone personally committed to something larger than herself, and I wanted to understand why. What she shared was profound. **Fundamentally, her story is about love.** Life put a heartbreaking and demanding path in front of her, and somehow she found the courage to follow it. It is with a heavy heart that I write this—now in our fifth anniversary issue—to invite you to read this excerpt and either remember an old friend or meet a new one. I love and miss you, Felicia. —Patrick Farabaugh

A Confluence of Voices

Kristina Kosnick reflects on Felicia Melton-Smyth and how Felicia's life contributed to the creation of the new play *Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed*.

An Excerpt from "If Knives Were Butterflies"

My friend always said she wanted to write a book about her life. She was a fierce activist, entertainer, and community organizer who fund-raised tirelessly for people affected by HIV/AIDS. In the '80s, she cared for friends who had contracted the virus before anyone knew what it was. She held their hands on their deathbeds, pressing cool towels against their temples while the media reported on "gay cancer." My friend later changed her name in honor of the loved ones she had lost.

Each holiday season, she would cut thousands of multicolored lights from construction paper, sell them for a dollar apiece, and use the proceeds to purchase gifts for families affected by HIV. The dreary walls of our favorite bar quickly transformed into a rainbow mosaic of festive greetings, shout-outs, and love confessions. But what those walls did not reveal is that my friend was spending sleepless nights scouring the city for coveted sold-out toys and items like "pink jeans, girl, size 8." What they did not reveal is that after bar time, my friend could be found stuffing her tiny seafoam-green car full of bags of plush cotton sheets, wool sweaters, and gift cards for groceries and gasoline. These families always wished for the simplest of things.

When someone in our community had a birthday, my friend would sneak a cake into the bar or onto the ballfields, interrupt the jukebox or game, and make an announcement. I lost count of the number of times I watched her cut a sheet cake. It was always dozens of tiny paper plates, icing flowers, and the flicker of candles in her eyes. My friend impacted the lives of so many people.

Remembering Felicia

Felicia's impact on my life is immeasurable. I learned so much from her about community, compassion, joy, grace, diligence, and generosity. But I also became aware of some of the tensions within the LGBTQ community and the ways we too often disregard each other's unique struggles in favor of a callous laugh or less complicated topic of conversation. I frequently witnessed Felicia turn indifference on its head, embracing the opportunity to create positive change, and I never saw her get discouraged. She was an inspiration to me.

On Memorial Day 2008, Felicia was murdered while vacationing in Mexico. Her death was a deep personal loss for many of us, but it also left a void in the fabric of our community as we wondered what Madison would be like without her. It has been four years since her death, and her memory lives on in the Felicia Melton-Smyth Holiday Gift Drive, the Felicia Melton-Smyth Memorial Softball Tournament, and in our everyday thoughts and interactions.

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OUR STAGES

In Loving Memory
Felicia Melton-Smyth
February 28, 1967 –
May 26, 2008



Relating Our Stories: Queers Exposed

My friendship with Felicia helped me more fully appreciate how important it is to intentionally nurture the conversations we frequently resist. With this in mind, I started the LGBTQ Narratives activist-writers' group, which brings LGBTQ-identified individuals together to produce and share personal narratives—a process we view as both inherently political and crucial. Over the past two years, members of LGBTQ Narratives have been working on a full-length theatrical production featuring original monologues inspired by the experiences of our lives. We named the show *Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed* because our aim is to make visible the parts of ourselves that might otherwise go unnoticed, to put into words the very things that are the most difficult to say, and to share with the world the pain, fear, horror, beauty, love, and hope of our queer lives. The monologue I wrote about Felicia's life and death (excerpted above) will be part of the performance of *Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed* being produced at Broom Street Theater July 20–22. For more information about the project, please visit our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/conceal.and.carry2012), and join us for the show.

Writing about Felicia has helped me remember her. Because I believe we all have many stories to share, in collaboration with UW-Madison's Oral History Program, I have started a project to record the memories of people who knew Felicia so that they will always be available to us and to future generations. My ultimate goal is to use the interviews collected to write a book about Felicia's life. If you are interested in contributing to this project, contact me at ifkniveswerebutterflies@gmail.com.



Kristina "kiki" Kosnick's days and nights are steeped in narrative. Currently a PhD candidate at UW-Madison, she is finishing a dissertation on contemporary queer women's writing in French—but she also likes to write about her own queer life and encourage others to write about theirs.

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OUR ARTISTS

Everyday People

Jen Clausen's Queer Portrait Project captures the community.



Everywhere from cave paintings to cathedrals and castles to coffeehouses, portraits have been used to tell the stories of cultures, to memorialize important people, and to venerate sacred figures. That historical tradition of portrait painting provides perspective for what Jen Clausen is doing in creating The Queer Portrait Project. However, while traditional portrait painting is focused on the rich and powerful, Clausen is illustrating everyday people in the queer community. She is telling a story of our culture and immortalizing our members, and will inevitably capture a few of our divas and saints.

Clausen, of Madison, has completed 27 portraits of what she hopes will be 100 or more oil paintings of queer-identified people. She has known about half of her subjects, and others have come to her through Facebook or other personal networks. On her blog she writes, "I am painting gay people, bi people, trans people, old people, young people, outgoing people, shy people, tall people, short people ... queer people. I seek to illustrate the diversity, breadth, and variety that is the queer community."

The Queer Portrait Project now resides in the blogosphere at queer-portraitproject.blogspot.com, but Clausen hopes to create a book that contains both her paintings and short autobiographies of her subjects. She paints her portraits exclusively from life. Each portrait takes about three hours. Through this method of painting, she is better able to capture not only the likeness of her subjects, but something of their character as well.

Clausen sums up the poetic collaboration between her and the people she paints succinctly, as "my paint" and "their words."

All the people who pose for her submit a written bio to be displayed with their portrait. To Clausen, the personal stories are as important as the paintings themselves, and indeed they often provide context to consider with the image. The portrait "Chuck," for example, includes the following statement: "For me, no different from millions of others, my youth's greatest burden was the emotional pain of isolation in the closet which quickly becomes despair alternating with panic. (It's still a wonder to me anyone survives it.) ..." Clausen sums up the poetic collaboration between her and the people she paints succinctly, as "my paint" and "their words."

Clausen is doing the work she loves: connecting members of a community who are, in her words, "tight-knit, yet disparate" through art. In so doing, she demonstrates the power of the community of artists, queers, and others to support and sustain one another.

If you are interested in posing for the project, send an email to jen@paintpunk.com or see the Facebook event: [facebook.com/events/206993919377164](https://www.facebook.com/events/206993919377164).



Karin Wolf is the Arts Program Administrator for the City of Madison Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development and the Madison Arts Commission. Her freelance arts writing has appeared in *Sculpture Magazine*, *Public Art Review*, and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

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Coaching with Pride
 DeForest Aquatic Club's **Brett Wilson** finds that being "the gay swim coach" is something to be proud of.

I am a swim coach and an educator. My identity to most people is as a swim coach. What I do defines not only my vocation, but also my passion. When I took over the DeForest Aquatic Club five years ago, 60 swimmers swam two hours a night at one facility. The team finished sixty-first in the state the year before I arrived. Now we have 180 swimmers swimming at four pools throughout the area, using 40 to 50 hours of pool time per week. We finished fifth at the recent state meet and consistently qualify swimmers for the national championships. Because of the team's recent success, I am proud to have been named Wisconsin Swimming Coach of the Year in 2009 and 2011.

The reason I give these statistics was that for years I felt I had to be better than everyone else because I am gay. I coached in constant fear that my good wasn't good enough; that

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my sexuality would give someone a reason not to allow me to do what I love. I felt I could not give anyone a reason to be critical. For me, I had to do better work than everyone else out there.

Athletics—The Final Frontier

One goal of mine is that both the athletic community and the gay community stop viewing themselves as separate entities. I truly believe athletics is one of the last areas where many members of the gay community feel uncomfortable. One reason I feel that is the lack of role models young gay athletes have. There have always been gay coaches, just mainly gay coaches who did not identify as gay. I used to think I did not want to be a role model; I just wanted to be judged on my record. Then I realized I have 180 swimmers whom I influence daily. I am a role model because I help children achieve their dreams. They trust me with their futures.

"The Gay Swim Coach"

When I moved up here from Freeport, IL, I was open about having a partner. Everyone met my partner, and I did not marginalize him. If any career needs an understanding partner, it is a swim coach. Six a.m. practices, dinner at 9:30 p.m., three-day meets most weekends, and constant parent phone calls mean my partner is basically on a coach's schedule without getting paid. My swimmers all know my partner as well. They see their coach in an open gay relationship and they have no qualms. It is ironic that I tried so hard to not be known as "the gay swim

I truly believe athletics is one of the last areas where many members of the gay community feel uncomfortable. One reason I feel that is the lack of role models young gay athletes have.

coach," but then realized being "the gay swim coach" is one of the reasons I am a role model.

An Ambassador Within the Coaching Community

I also find myself being an ambassador for our community. Other coaches will seek my advice when they have a gay athlete. This makes me proud on two fronts. First, athletes are now comfortable to come out and stay involved in sports. When I was swimming in high school and college, my teammates used the word "fag" as a noun, verb, and adjective, and many declared they wouldn't be in a locker room with one. There I was at the Olympic Trials, more concerned about whether a guy whom I was dating in secret would show up than I was concerned about my performance. Second, coaches are now acknowledging that gay athletes have some special needs and they want to help them. Is it easy for a young athlete to come out? Absolutely not, but it is possible today for a young athlete to come out without losing that part of his/her identity.

"Coach" is a word with some negative stereotypes—dumb jock, win at all costs, borderline abusive—and there are bad coaches out there. I even have had some bad coaches, yet for years I felt I should not be a coach because of who I am. Now I realize what a coach really is to the athletes—surrogate parent, psychologist, and yes, role model. It is daunting to embrace being a role model, but not because I am gay, but because I hope to live up to my athletes' expectations and be the role model they deserve. ■

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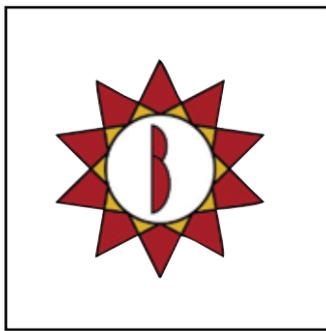
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Wisconsin Celebrates 30 Years of Gay Civil Rights, July 12, Quivey's Grove, 6261 Nesbitt Rd, Fitchburg

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ORGANIZATIONS

A representative sampling

AIDS Network
600 Williamson St., Madison (608) 252-6540
aidsnetwork.org

Alianza Latina
facebook.com/alianzalatnamadison

Bowling Out Loud
beckwith.matt@yahoo.com

Dairyland Cowboys & Cowgirls
dcandc.org

Fair Wisconsin
203 S. Paterson Street, Madison (608) 441-0143
fairwisconsin.com

Frontrunners/Frontwalkers
personalpages.tds.net/~tmcdurg

Gay/Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE)
301 S. Bedford St., Madison (608) 661-4141
gsaforsafeschools.com

Gay Softball League
ssblmadison.com

Gay Volleyball League
madisongayvolleyball.com

Hermanos Latinos
sneal@aidsnetwork.org

Lez In Color Yahoo Group
LezInColor@yahoo.com

Lez Talk Yahoo Group
leztalkmadison@yahoo.com

Madison Gay Hockey Association
madisongayhockey.org

Madison Minotaurs Gay Rugby
minotaursrugby.org

New Harvest Foundation
newharvestfoundation.org

Out Professional and Executive Network (O.P.E.N.)
openmadison.org

OutReach Community Center
600 Williamson St., Madison (608) 255-8582
lgbtoutreach.org

PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
(608) 848-2333
pflag-madison.org

Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus
perfectharmonychorus.org

StageQ - Madison's Queer Theater
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- November** | OPEN Arts Reception
- January** | AIDS Network Camp Bingo
- January** | OPEN Annual Dinner
- March** | New Harvest Dinner
- April** | AIDS Network's Red Ribbon Affair
- May** | GSAFE Celebration of Leadership

The Mousetrap, July 13–29, Mitchell Theatre, UW Campus Tired of watching reruns of all of your favorite television crime-solving heroes? If so, stop by the UW-Madison campus for Agatha Christie's murder-mystery masterpiece, *The Mousetrap*. utmadison.com

Midwest Stand-Up Paddle Festival, July 13–15, Bishops Bay, Middleton, Wisconsin The festival includes lessons, demos, paddleboard yoga, and clinics for all ability levels, plus a World Paddle Association-sanctioned race, recreational race, and more. paddleboardspecialists.com

Art Fair OFF the Square, July 14–15, Monona Terrace and Martin Luther King Blvd. This two-day event is a showcase for about 140 Wisconsin exhibitors and features ceramics, art glass, painting, drawings, sculpture, jewelry, engravings, serigraphs, paper-making, and more. artcraftwis.org

Pride Alive, July 14, Joannes Park, Green Bay Community. Diversity. Equality. Now in its fifth year, NEWPride's Pride Alive offers even more entertainment and activities than ever. newpride.org

Olbrich's Blooming Butterflies, July 18–August 12, Olbrich Botanical Gardens More than a dozen species of butterflies, including low-flyers like the playful yellow and black striped zebra and bright orange julias, can be seen at various times during the exhibit. olbrich.org/events/butterflies.cfm

Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed, July 20–22, Broom Street Theater, Madison *Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed* is a full-length theatrical production featuring original monologues written, directed, and performed by members and allies of LGBTQ Narratives activist-writers. facebook.com/conceal.and.carry2012

Opera in the Park: 10th Anniversary Concert, July 21, Garner Park, Madison's West Side A beloved summer tradition, Opera in the Park features familiar opera hits, selections from Broadway, and highlights from the upcoming Madison Opera season. Opera in the Park is a FREE community event! madisonopera.org

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Wisconsin Capitol Pride Parade & Rally, August 19, Capitol Square

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facebook.com/alianzalatnamadison
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ssblmadison.com
 - Gay Volleyball League**
madisongayvolleyball.com
 - Hermanos Latinos**
sneal@aidsnetwork.org
 - Lez In Color Yahoo Group**
LezInColor@yahoo.com
 - Lez Talk Yahoo Group**
leztalkmadison@yahoo.com
 - Madison Gay Hockey Association**
madisongayhockey.org
 - Madison Minotaurs Gay Rugby**
minotaursrugby.org
 - New Harvest Foundation**
newharvestfoundation.org
 - Out Professional and Executive Network (O.P.E.N.)**
openmadison.org
 - OutReach Community Center**
600 Williamson St., Madison (608) 255-8582
lgbt Outreach.org
 - PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**
(608) 848-2333
pflag-madison.org
 - Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus**
perfectharmonychorus.org
 - StageQ - Madison's Queer Theater**
stageq.com
 - UW - Madison LGBT Campus Center**
800 Langdon St., Madison (608) 265-3344
wisc.edu/lgbt
 - Wisconsin Rainbow Families**
wirainbowfamilies.com

May 21 | Fair Wisconsin Leadership Awards at Capitol West



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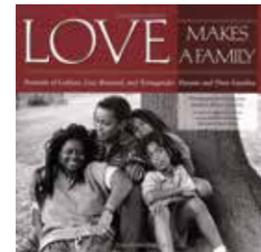
GET LISTED To see your event on this page, be sure to post it on our community calendar ourlivesmadison.com

save the date

- August 19** | Pride Brunch, Parade
- September 14** | OutReach's 20th Anniversary Awards Banquet
- October 6** | OPEN Career Fair
- October 14** | GSAFE Walk, Run, Eat
- October** | Wisconsin Book Festival
- November** | OPEN Arts Reception
- January** | AIDS Network Camp Bingo
- January** | OPEN Annual Dinner
- March** | New Harvest Dinner
- April** | AIDS Network's Red Ribbon Affair
- May** | GSAFE Celebration of Leadership
- June** | Plan B's FruitFest

"Love Makes a Family" Special Exhibition, August 5-26, First United Methodist Church

This museum-quality traveling exhibit including photographs and interviews with families that have LGBT members. Through first-person accounts and positive images, this exhibit seeks to challenge and change damaging myths and stereotypes about LGBT people and their families. firstunitedmethodistmadison.org



Dane Dances!, Fridays in August, Monona Terrace Rooftop Dane Dances! showcases local and regional bands, great music, and wonderful food. Funk, latin, R&B, jazz, hip-hop, and reggae are all in the mix. This year, they will be bringing back some "old favorite" bands, as well as a couple of new ones for your dancing pleasure. danedances.org

Jazz at Five, Wednesdays, August 8-September 5, 100 block of State Street The Midwest's premier free live jazz concert series features five nights of top national, regional, and local jazz artists. jazzat5.org

WOOF'S King Street Pride Block Party, August 18, 4PM - Midnight The block party returns for a second year with live music, DJs, dancing, and comedy. Entertainment includes Furrlesque, Dick & Duane, DJJM ... and more! \$5 suggested donation benefiting various local charities woofsmadison.com

OPEN Brunch prior to Wisconsin Capitol Pride, August 19, 10:45 - 12:45, Join OPEN for networking and a buffet brunch prior to the Pride Parade! The cost is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members and includes one complimentary drink per person. openmadison.org

Taste of Madison, September 1-2, Capitol Square Taste of Madison showcases more than 80 local restaurants, 20 beverage stands, and three entertainment stages. The participating restaurants sell a vast variety of unique and traditional dishes to the estimated 250,000 attendees over the two-day period. Free and open to the public. tasteofmadison.com

Pride is Faith in Our Belovedness

Join us: Sunday, August 19 at 8, 9:30 or 11 a.m.

Rev. Scott Anderson, Guest Preacher
(Read about him in May/June *Our Lives*)
Special Music: Perfect Harmony
Special Exhibition: *Love Makes a Family* on display August 5-26



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Advertise in *Our Lives*. For rates and info, contact us at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM

May 12 | GSAFE Celebration of Leadership at Monona Terrace

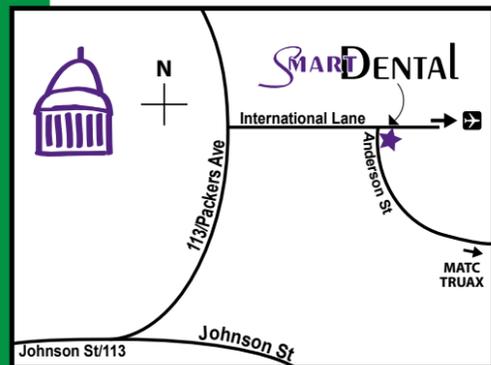


June 16 | 3rd Annual Fruit Fest at Plan B



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Tamim Sifri, DDS

5:30-10a: **CONNIE & CURTIS**

10a-12p: **KATIE KRUZ**

12p-04: **RYAN SEACREST**

04p-07: **HUNTER**

07p-12a:
AARON ROGERS

12a-5:30a: **DUSTIN WEBER**

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DANCE MUSIC**

sat 10p-1a:
**CLUB Z WITH
KIDD LEOW**

sun 7p-10p:
CLUB KANE



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also on



New Harvest Foundation

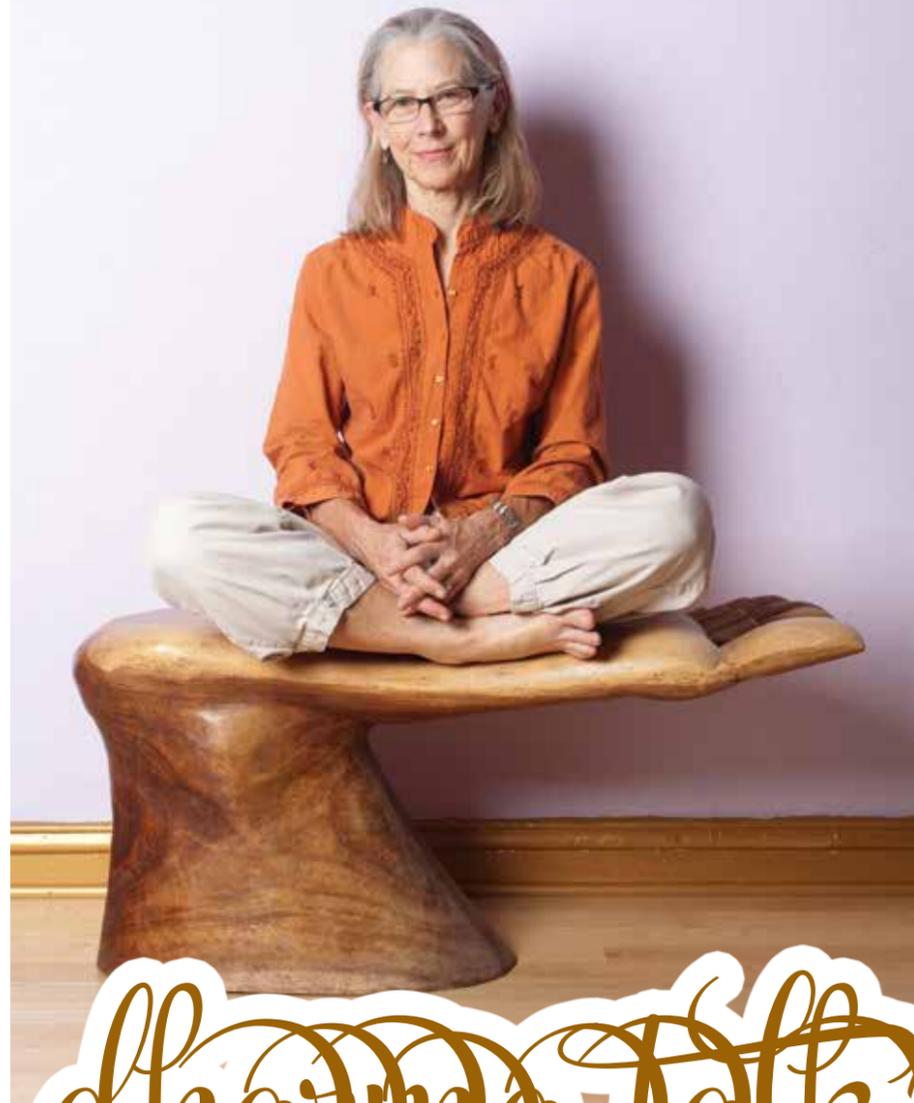
is the only foundation in South Central Wisconsin that channels charitable contributions exclusively to organizations working to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, services, culture and community development. Founded in 1984, New Harvest Foundation is operated by a 12-member Board of Directors, along with other volunteers. It pools contributions of hundreds of donors each year to provide grant money to LGBT causes. We raise money to give back!

Recent Grant Recipient

With funding from New Harvest, the **Monona Public Library** – Wisconsin’s 2010 Library of the Year – has established a multimedia, young adult/teen LGBTQ collection. The materials are wide ranging, from anti-bullying guides to middle grade fiction with strong LGBTQ characters. There are more than 150 items in the collection, including fiction and nonfiction resources, biographies, health and wellness books, graphic novels, CDs and DVDs.

Support Us

You can make a secure donation on our website or contact us for information about planned giving. Please consider joining one of our committees, volunteering at an event, or becoming a member of our board.



Charmatalk

In a world full of self-doubt and the lure of distracted living, Lives Unlimited’s **Mare Chapman** discovered that radical self-acceptance is the path to freedom. Let her show you how.

before I die, I want to be completely free to be my authentic self in every moment of my life. I want to be transparent, with absolutely nothing to hide, nothing to protect, nothing to fear, expressing whatever is true for me in the moment. This, to me, would be complete freedom. I’d be free from all internal limitations, all my “neuroses.” Does this sound appealing to you? Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be free from all the ways we hold ourselves back, and instead trust that however we are in this moment is exactly right, and enough? We’d be free to be our true full and amazing selves, and the potential impact on the world would be amazing.

To grow toward this essential goal requires radical self-acceptance: the ability to recognize and accept whatever we’re experiencing in the moment, no matter how difficult or painful it is.

HAIR BY SCOTT STAPLES. PHOTOGRAPHED AT JEWEL IN THE LOTUS YOGA.

I’ve learned that, paradoxically, by truly accepting whatever I’m feeling in the moment—like grumpiness, anxiety, or sadness—the feeling organically transforms, and I often learn more about myself in the process. I’ve been working with this process for some years now, and I’m happy to say I’m way more comfortable living in my own skin. I’ve learned this through the help of some very wise teachers along the way, and the great good fortune of discovering the practice of mindfulness.

Fear of Coming Out

Coming out, or more accurately fear of coming out, was the catalyst for realizing self-acceptance had to be the path for me. When I discovered I was in love with a woman, my children were little and I was ending my marriage to my high school sweetheart. Although I was a dedicated feminist by then and was struggling with conditioned gender oppression, the surprise of falling in love with a woman both blew my mind and was deeply liberating. At the same time I was terrified by the prospect of being so different from the norm, afraid I might lose my kids in a custody battle, and afraid everyone, in general, would turn against me.

Growing up, I had always struggled with feeling I didn’t belong. I suffered from terrible shyness, and believed I just wasn’t how I was supposed to be. I longed to be “normal,” whatever that was. But discovering my new sexuality confirmed that I indeed wasn’t normal after all. And, in my heart of hearts, I realized I was truly lesbian. This was my first act of radical self-acceptance, and I felt substantial relief. However, I didn’t want to live my life in a self-imposed prison, confined to hiding my sexuality by living in shame and fear. So I planted the seed of committing to learn how to free myself from these restraints, heal my own limiting conditioned patterns and beliefs, and learn how to accept myself completely.

Health Care

Local doctors and other health care providers share recent trends and identify current needs.

Clearly, what is needed most—and is thankfully on the rise—is sensitivity training among health care practitioners to the unique needs and concerns of LGBTQ patients and clientele. Additionally, relaxation, meditation, and mindfulness are part of increasingly more recommended courses of treatment for a variety of ailments.

More LGBTQ Clinicians



AIDS NETWORK
DAN GUINN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Increased LGBTQ representation among clinicians is the obvious greatest need. Over the years, clients and community members have asked AIDS Network for referrals to LGBTQ physicians and clinicians. This is always a difficult request even in the Madison area, which has plenty of LGBTQ-friendly clinicians. Wisconsin and Madison could attract more talented LGBTQ clinicians if we could move forward recognizing same-sex couples, offer partner benefits, and move beyond our unfair laws. At the same time, LGBTQ patients would perhaps not need to seek care only from LGBTQ clinicians if they did not feel stigmatized by their sexuality or gender identity. Appropriate civil rights and acceptance would go a long way in making health care welcoming to the LGBTQ community. How long will it take? aidsnetwork.org

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¹ 36 monthly payments of \$29.08 per \$1000 borrowed. 48 monthly payments of \$22.13 per \$1000 borrowed. 60 monthly payments of \$17.96 per \$1000 borrowed.



Preventive Care



MAREK CLINIC OF CHIROPRACTIC
BRIAN LEE MAREK, D.C.

An increasing demand for affordable health care has ushered in a focus on preventive care services. One of the primary goals is to reduce outpatient visits and lower spending. Active care, especially in the area of rehabilitation, has long played a role in successfully reducing outpatient visits through better patient education and media-driven rehab programs designed for use at home. Now health care providers are looking for solutions to further curtail outpatient visits for minor, or self-limiting symptoms. Recently there's been an introduction of highly innovative spinal support device to optimize the spinal biomechanics of prolonged sitting. With it, working at a desk can now be a little less painful. spinednicmadison.com

Agrace Care Navigation



AGRACE HOSPICE CARE
JOHN VAN DYKE, RN CARE MANAGER

LGBTQ individuals sometimes find themselves in a position of caring for ill or aging parents, family members, or partners with no handbook for the unique challenges of that experience. That's why I'm excited to be leading a new service called Agrace Care Navigation that supports caregivers by addressing common health concerns of their loved ones in order to improve symptoms, reduce stress, avoid hospitalizations, and save money. Care Navigation empowers caregivers to confidently manage their loved one's health and navigate the health care system. Through the program, I provide education, regular coordination of appointments, physician communication, and around-the-clock phone support. Working together, these simple steps help patients remain independent at home while reducing the burden on their caregivers. agracecarenavigation.org

Always Advocates



COMMUNITY PHARMACY
LINDA WILLSEY, PHARM D, RPH

Community Pharmacy has embraced the LGBTQ community since its founding in 1972. From the beginning, our pharmacy advocated for sexual health, education, and freedom; we dispensed birth control to young adults and displayed condoms on store shelves before it was legal. Today, we are still fighting for access to birth control, HIV drugs, and affordable hormones for transgender people. We oppose laws that would allow pharmacists to refuse to dispense prescriptions they consider "morally objectionable." We helped pass Wisconsin's Expedited Partner Therapy Law, which allows medical providers to prescribe antibiotics for sexually transmitted infections to their patient and the patient's partner so that both receive treatment at the same time. communitypharmacy.coop

Better LGBTQ Patient Care



DIVERSE AND RESILIENT, INC.
GARY HOLLANDER, PHD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Two years after my heart attack and 10 years into my partner's MS diagnosis, we have become more frequent users of health care in offices, clinics, emergency departments, and hospitals. On the positive side, we have seen the benefits of more than a decade of physician training in cultural competency. We have enjoyed the benefits of improved

Mindfulness Begets Self-acceptance

Since then, through intrapersonal work and my profession of psychotherapy, the most potent fertilizer I found for watering the seeds of self-acceptance is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of compassionate awareness, and the root intention, as taught by the Buddha some 2,600 years ago, is to free our minds from the habits of conditioning so that we can access our true nature and see reality clearly. It's a profoundly radical and revolutionary practice! Mindfulness trains your mind to be your friend instead of your bully.

The basic view is that our true nature as human beings is wise, kind, compassionate, generous, and loving. It's like the blue sky, which is always here, spacious and stable, regardless of the weather. But through conditioning, we develop habitual ways of viewing, believing, and reacting to what's happening in our world. We unconsciously develop ideas about ourselves and reality; beliefs about how life's supposed to be. These habits and views shape our minds, and consequently our brains, and distort our experience of reality. We get caught up in the "weather" of our conditioning and the emotional storms that pass through, and we lose connection with the blue sky, our true nature. It's like we put on a pair of sunglasses at some very early age, and get so used to wearing them that we never take them off. Everything we experience is filtered and distorted through those colored lenses. This creates neural patterns in the brain that become our default programming and the autopilot we all drop into when we're not fully present.

Habits, Patterns, and Conditioning

We develop these habits and patterns through our families of origin, societal messages, and our experiences growing up. For sure, some of these habits and views do serve us well, like believing in equality, treating each other respectfully, brushing our teeth, and making sure we eat enough veggies every day. But some, like internalized homophobia, sexism, racism, and gender conditioning, cause us enormous suffering. They lead to painful beliefs like, "I'm not good enough," or "There's something wrong with me," or "I'll never belong," to name a few. I prefer to call these kinds of conditioned beliefs "pretends," or more accurately, "lies," which we acquire unconsciously as we're trying to make sense out of our world growing up. Until we become aware of these beliefs, they have the hidden power to run a good portion of our lives, causing us to be stuck in very painful, limiting patterns.

Mindfulness is a method for being able to take off those old sunglasses and see clearly what is actually going on. It's a way to poke holes through the cloud cover of our conditioning and access our blue-sky nature. With practice, these painful habits begin to weaken and lose their power. Neuroscience tells us that mindfulness literally changes the neural grooves in the brain, and little by little we become more able to access our authentic self. Practicing mindfulness changes the brain, which in turn changes the mind.

Without being aware of it, many of us grow up with the belief that we have to be perfect in order to be lovable, accepted, and successful. I certainly got that message and fully internalized it. I thought I had to be not only "normal" but also "perfect." So my mind developed tenacious habits of judgment and criticism. I constantly assessed myself, comparing myself to others, and felt inadequate and not good enough. This created habits of overworking, feeling like I was never doing enough, always wondering what others were thinking about me and assuming they disapproved. My relationship to myself was rigid, correcting, and downright mean. As I was waking up to this, I realized the cruel things I said to myself were things I would never ever say to anyone else. Of course, all this trying to be perfect and normal

served to keep me locked in the habit of shyness, and created lots of self-loathing and anxiety, all of which I worked to keep under the surface so no one would see how really imperfect I was. I felt like a fraud and lived in fear of being found out at any moment. Whenever I'd catch a sense of how painful all this was, I'd flee as fast as I could, using whatever distractions would work to get away from the discomfort: have a smoke, a drink, go shopping, eat something, start a new

Whenever I'd catch a sense of how painful all this was, I'd flee as fast as I could, using whatever distractions would work to get away from the discomfort: have a smoke, a drink, go shopping, eat something, start a new project, pay attention to someone else.

project, pay attention to someone else. So round and round I'd go, perpetually caught in the "bad weather" of these painful beliefs and patterns. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Openness and Curiosity Validates and Dissipates Negative Conditioning

But inherent in mindfulness is the view that whatever you're experiencing is valid and worthy of your attention, simply because that is what's happening right now. So you accept whatever you notice—like feeling anxious, angry, sad, disappointed, lonely, ashamed, or shy—no matter how messy or uncomfortable it feels—and you open to it with lots of curiosity and kindness, letting it be here, giving it a lot of space, refraining from judging it and taking it so personally. This

patient rights policies and organizational efforts at cultural competency. In the best scenarios we have found ourselves treated humanely—fully accepted as gay individuals and as a same-sex couple. But what LGBTQ people must attend to is avoidant and barely tolerant treatment we still get. Paul still gets released from the hospital without a family consultation that involves me (once he was left at the front door in a wheelchair). We still get asked more than once about our HIV status in emergency room visits when no blood or body fluids are involved. We still have staff who verbally and visibly express discomfort with touching us, even when applying leads for an EKG. The two of us do not put up with this behavior and generally follow up with calls or letters respectfully asking for improvements. diverseandresilient.org

Empowered Patients



MERITER MEDICAL GROUP
SUSAN TOTH, MD, GENERAL SURGEON

As a surgeon, my role is sometimes seen as a "fixer of things"...helping people get back to their "normal" lives or embark on a new path. This, however, has its limitations—the most obvious one being the patient's health and lifestyle prior to surgery. While a surgeon plays a critical role, healing in general is a true collaborative process. Sometimes patients are overwhelmed with all the recommendations out there on how to be healthier. Meriter Medical Group and Physicians Plus have begun a true team approach to ongoing health maintenance and improvement. The more a person is empowered to keep themselves healthy, the better they will heal after surgery. meriter.com

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Contextually Based Care



STEPHANIE GRAHAM, PHD, LICENSED PSYCHOLOGIST

I feel hopeful about the increased recognition of mental-health needs at the local, state, and national level (e.g., anti-bullying campaigns, suicide-prevention efforts, increased federal funding for veteran's mental health services). This focused attention and resource allocation could potentially decrease the stigma of seeking mental-health assistance and provide access to services for many individuals in the LGBTQ community. In addition, the recognition of mental-health challenges as real and manageable has empowered struggling members of the LGBTQ community to seek help while, at the same time, increasing the pressure on mental-health clinicians to respond with effective and contextually based care. Mental-health clinicians could develop their awareness and knowledge of the LGBTQ community's needs and best practices. There are many training opportunities at the state and national level, so get informed. drstephaniegraham.com

Positive Psychology



DAVID LACOQUE, PSYD, PSYCHOLOGIST/PSYCHOTHERAPIST

"What's wrong with you?" "What makes you thrive?" The difference between these two questions is at the core of a newer, health-focused branch in psychology. Pioneered by Drs. Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Positive Psychology" is the study of human strengths. The subject matter—"Happiness"—is anything but light fare as psychologists apply the scientific method to

radical acceptance of experience naturally allows the wisdom of your true nature to come through, and you're able to respond to yourself with more kindness and skill.

When I first began mindfulness, I'd practice noticing the habit of nasty criticizing with lots of curiosity. As soon as I recognized that my mind just thought, "Geez, Mare, you're being so stupid. Everyone thinks you're lame!" I'd then say to myself, "Isn't that interesting!" I'd notice how this habitual judgment felt in my body: I'd feel the painful knot in my belly and how closed my heart felt. I'd practice noticing all of this with acceptance and kindness, letting it be there, not fighting with myself. Then I'd see that in doing this, the nasty judgment and painful feelings would simply dissipate on their own. Amazing. And along with this relief, there was room for my wisdom to shine through, and I'd often spontaneously think, "Actually, I'm

Mindfulness develops a kind of inner stability and security, so you can gradually cultivate the confidence and freedom to be your true self.

enough, just the way I am in this moment. I'm learning to believe that I am okay." Gradually, with practice, the habit of automatically condemning myself has greatly lessened, and I've become more and more accepting of myself. Along the way I've also seen through the tyranny of perfection, and continue to practice letting it go.

As for my pattern of shyness, mindfulness has been alchemical medicine. I've completely changed my relationship to it, and when it arises now it's not a big deal. I used to hate the feeling and myself for being shy, and I'd do everything I could to try to stop being that way. All this resistance, though, only kept me stuck and frozen in it. Now when shyness arises, which is way less often, I first note it, "Ah, here's shyness." Then I bring curiosity to it: "What's it like right now? What exactly am I thinking? Imagining?" "What's the sensation like in my body?" I open to it. I stand steady with my experience, letting it be just as it is. I cradle the uncomfortable sensation in my awareness, relaxing around it, and I offer compassion to myself because it is truly painful. Then, at some point, the feeling simply dissolves on its own, because shyness, too—like every experience—is impermanent.

This is how mindfulness works for all of our experiences, whether they are deeply conditioned or not. When we can turn toward and open to exactly what we're experiencing in the moment, see into it very directly, clearly, honestly with our open and kind heart, without resisting or being swept away but staying steady and present, the experience just naturally shifts and changes on its own. This is the power of radical acceptance through mindfulness.

Acceptance Requires Courage

Clearly, this requires courage, because we're practicing accepting ourselves, no matter what. It's a kind of spiritual warriorship, a deep commitment to not turn against ourselves. But what's great is that you actually cultivate fearlessness little by little as you practice, so as you grow more courageous you're naturally more willing to risk being your full and wonderful self. Mindfulness develops a kind of inner stability and security, so you can gradually cultivate the confidence and freedom to be your true self.

I've been practicing mindfulness for about 23 years now, and teaching classes for 15 years. This past winter I offered a class for LGBTQ folks. Over and over I've been witness to people experiencing amazing benefits from the practice. It's become the main modality I use in psy-

chotherapy because it's so effective and empowering for transforming our conditioned painful patterns. Although it's best learned and cultivated through a daily meditation practice, mindfulness is meant to be lived moment-to-moment. When we can bring it to being fully present when we're hugging our friend, or really seeing the incredible beauty of the sunset, or enjoying that piece of fabulous chocolate, or the pleasure of kissing our sweetie goodnight, beyond freeing us from our limiting patterns, mindfulness truly deepens and enriches our lives.

Trust that Each of Us Is Enough

I hope I'm brave enough to grow into complete internal freedom long before I die so I can relax and enjoy being myself just as I am, wherever I am. And isn't this what we all want, what we all yearn for: to be fully and authentically ourselves, just as we are, including all our sparkles, quirks, and dark places? And within that, to be able to rest in the trust and knowing that we are enough, just as we are in this moment? This is the ultimate freedom, the freedom that only we can create within ourselves.

I invite us all to be big and brave and go for this: to stretch for radical self-acceptance and to explore mindfulness as a path. As we transform these old habits, our inherent wisdom, kindness, and compassion naturally shine through. The more we can each take personal responsibility for freeing ourselves from our conditioned limitations, the more we naturally benefit those around us and can offer real help to this dear, poor, suffering world in which we live.

- May you be safe and protected.
- May you be peaceful and joyful.
- May you trust and accept yourself.
- May you live with ease and kindness.

rigorously study positive human experiences. Here are some findings from this trend that moves away from failing to flourishing:

- Gratitude and optimism may lead to better health
- People generally overestimate how long distress will last after a breakup
- Wealth has little to do with happiness

To learn more, find Dr. Seligman's "Authentic Happiness" home page linked at drlacoque.com.

Meditation as Stress Reduction



CENTER FOR MINDFULNESS & JUSTICE
CHERI MAPLES, CO-FOUNDER

I am delighted to see the extent to which meditation is entering the mainstream of health care as a method of stress and pain reduction, and I am particularly excited by the pioneering research being done —by folks like UW-Madison's Richard Davidson—that illustrates how meditation can rewire our brains for the better. We've learned that the brain responds to training (neuroplasticity)—we can intentionally change our own brains through mental activity alone. Countless studies suggest how meditation can activate portions of our brain that correspond to compassion and positive emotions. Scientific studies are showing that meditation works, particularly for stress-related conditions (it interrupts the fight or flight response and its devastating effects). Mindfulness practice is effectively being used for conditions ranging from anxiety and depression to substance-use problems. We're creating neuropaths in our brains with how we respond to experiences every day...the more positivity we generate, the more we strengthen

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member profile



NAME:
Sandy Andersen
TITLE:
Financial Advisor
EMPLOYER:
Northwestern Mutual

Sandy is excited to be the newest member on the OPEN board, serving as Treasurer. She is also on the Internal committee. By day, she runs her financial practice at Northwestern Mutual, but by night she is a professional opera singer, always ready to bring a little Wagner to an unjust world.

Having recently moved to Madison with her partner Vivienne, OPEN served as a wonderful way for them to connect both socially and professionally. They've both experienced the importance of having this community of out professionals in their lives. Sandy is excited to help OPEN help others to thrive!

upcoming events

JULY 15 5:00

Billy Elliot Reception & Production at Overture

AUGUST 19 10:45 - 12:45

OPEN Brunch prior to Wisconsin Capitol Pride

OCTOBER 6

OPEN Career Fair

OPEN VISION AND MISSION

Our vision is a vibrant community where LGBTQ leaders are a significant catalyst for strengthening the economy of the capital region.

Our mission is to connect and create LGBTQ leaders in the capital region.

We do this through:

- Professional development
- Corporate & community outreach
- Networking
- Mentoring programs

openmadison.org

feature



THE *embodiment* OF FITNESS

What do Greek gods, break dancing, tear gas, and the circus have share in common? They are all mile-markers along **Septimiu Teodorescu's** path to the American Dream.

my passion for fitness and nutrition comes from my childhood in Bucharest, Romania, where I was born and raised. Life was harsh under the communist regime, and I realized that I had to be a survivor; that came in the form of athleticism, which was instrumental in shaping my identity and personality. My mother raised me on her own after my father died—in the line of duty as a police officer—in a car accident when I was two years old.

Sports-oriented Family

I came from a sports-oriented family. My mother grew up performing gymnastics and was an avid equestrian, my father was an accomplished soccer player, my brother a boxer and hockey player, and my sister a volleyball player and canoeist. I took up gymnastics, soccer, judo, and horseback riding, but the sport that I fell in love with was bodybuilding, which was fueled by my love and curiosity for Greek mythology; the illustrations I saw were of strong and beautiful athletes in ancient Greece. I dreamed of transforming my body to that of an ancient Greek god and so started learning about bodybuilding by reading Romanian and English magazines. Finding bodybuilding reading materials and a support network in Romania at the time was difficult because the communist party was a staunch non-supporter of bodybuilding.

Determined, I used my own basic weights. I soon realized that my rudimentary equipment was not going to be enough; I needed to find a well-equipped gym, and so became a member of the club where my father trained as a police officer and where family members of police officers trained in a variety of sports with more advanced equipment. Later, I found the best fitness facility available in Bucharest at the high school Spiru Haret, where the owner and coach, Szekely Ladislau, the author of two popular bodybuilding books, ran the gym with his wife Lenke. Their gym focused on recruiting competitive bodybuilders and Szekely and Lenke became my first mentors. At the school I passed the audition and started competing at the teen level, placing fourth at my first competition, third at my second competition, and first at my third. Those victories deepened my passion and commitment to bodybuilding and increased my thirst for more knowledge on the subject, a thirst that has never left me. My mentors taught me about the relation-

[HEALTH] WHAT'S TRENDING

those pathways in the brain; ditto with negativity. Science is proving what the sages have always known...we truly ARE what we think. mindfulnessandjustice.org

Free Screenings



WISCONSIN WELL WOMAN PROGRAM
KARI SIEVERT, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Our program provides free breast and cervical cancer screenings for individuals who have limited income and little or no health insurance.

LGBTQ individuals often face daunting barriers to obtaining quality health care. A growing body of research identifies institutional, cultural, financial, and personal barriers that may cause LGBTQ individuals to avoid or delay medical care, making them more vulnerable to disease and poor health outcomes. The WI Well Woman Program in Dane County is informed and sensitive to the societal circumstances of these individuals and understands how cultural distinctions might impact access to preventive health screenings. wellwomandaneconomy.org

Tide Turning to Healthy Living



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
JORDAN BINGHAM, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COORDINATOR,
NUTRITION, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND OBESITY PROGRAM

We are surrounded by high-calorie food choices and giant sugary drinks. Physical activity has been engineered out of our daily lives. Healthy living is harder than it should be. On the flip side, the tide may be turning. It is increasingly common to see bike paths, farm-to-school programs, sup-



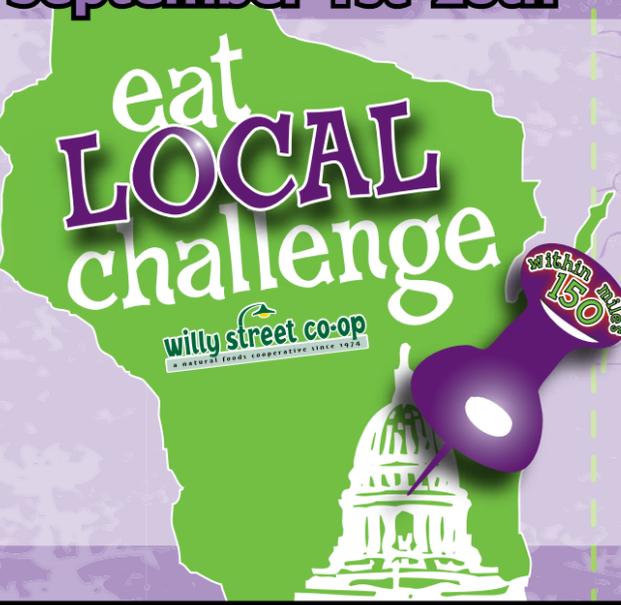
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port for breastfeeding moms, employee wellness programs...the list goes on. The First Lady's "Let's Move" initiative and HBO's recent *Weight of the Nation* documentary highlight great examples, but you don't have to leave Wisconsin to see innovative and effective solutions. Nothing less than the health and economic well being of future generations depends on it. dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/index.htm

Educated, Affirming Providers



PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF WISCONSIN
TANYA ATKINSON, MSSW, V.P. PUBLIC AFFAIRS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Over the years, I have personally experienced medical providers becoming more aware of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Progress has been made, but we still have a long way to go. Many health inequalities still exist, and transgender, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming people still struggle to find competent, affirming providers. I believe that creating truly healthy LGBTQ+ communities requires us to remain vigilant to ensure that progress is made. I am committed to becoming educated about the issues facing trans and other gender-queer communities to be a better health care advocate. I will never forget the first time a provider quickly and appropriately determined that my partner was a woman. I felt a sense of relief and trust that my medical needs would be thoughtfully met. All LGBTQ+ people deserve that. ppwi.org

Technology for Improved Health



DEAN CLINIC
CRAIG E. SAMITT, M.D., M.B.A., PRESIDENT & CEO

I've been inspired by what is clearly an increasing recognition of the critical role that technology will play in the future of health care. I would predict the best healthcare systems in the future will implement such things as kiosks (like in airports) and interactive websites for appointment bookings and access to test results. They'll use more video technology for online patient visits and video conferencing to connect people regardless of location. They'll use robots in surgery and computers to make faster diagnoses. There will be even better methods to help patients home-monitor their blood sugar, body weight, and physical activity. New avatar technologies and other real-time technical solutions will help doctors and patients engage as partners in improving the health of our communities. deancare.com

HPV Vaccine Recommended for Men & Women



SMART DENTAL, LLC
TAMIM SIFRI, DDS

The CDC recommendations for vaccination against the human papillomavirus (HPV) have expanded to include both men and women beginning at age 9 and up to age 26. HPV can cause oral, genital, and anal warts and cancers. Since HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection and gay and bisexual men are 17 times more likely to develop anal cancer, this recommendation is good news. Fifty percent of sexually active adults will at some point have an HPV infection but most will never have symptoms. Early vaccination along with annual exams and Pap tests for women go a long way in reducing the disease burden caused by HPV. Limiting sexual partners and using a condom with every sexual act also provide some protection. Talk to your doctor and check out the CDC Fact Sheets on HPV online. smartdentalmadison.com

ship between bodybuilding and nutrition, and I learned that without a solid, technical background in nutrition I would never achieve victories in training and bodybuilding.

The Necessity of Nourishment

I embraced bodybuilding wholeheartedly, as it helped me to discover myself and take care of my body, but the challenge of becoming a properly fed bodybuilder in a malnourished, communist nation stood in my way. Meat and produce in markets were a rarity, but necessary to provide protein for muscle building. Having been raised without a father figure, I moved forward undaunted, finding inspiration in Bruce Lee and several professional bodybuilders. I had other interests: the arts, music, and break dancing, which would later help me to win five "best posing routine" awards.

Dreaming of America

To follow my professional passions, I had to find a way to get out of communist Romania where my dreams would be left unrealized. I knew that to become successful as a bodybuilder and professional fitness trainer, I had to go to the best country in the world for the training and education of bodybuilders, the United States. I had a passion for things American not only because of bodybuilding but also due to my love for American movies, music, and the freedom of the culture. From the age of five, I watched American movies and imitated the sounds of spoken English, although what came out of my mouth wasn't the English language. While watching the movies I rolled on the floor imitating the action and dialogue in nonsensical English while my mother laughed at me.



Winning the Midwest Natural Championship last October.



Septi with his circus troupe in Bucharest, 1996.

It's a testament to fate, perhaps, that I'm here today ... The smell of tear gas and sound of the bullets whooshing past my head are sensory experiences that will stay with me for life.

Subversive Work Behind the Iron Curtain

Before leaving Romania, I had one more challenge—to fulfill my mandatory duty to serve under the communist regime in 16 months of military duty. I then found a way to make money until I could leave Romania for America. My love for animals helped me to choose vet medicine as a temporary profession, a way out; a choice that surprised my military- and sports-oriented family. My mother was supportive and helped me find a veterinary school outside of Bucharest. I graduated with a veterinary technician diploma and landed a job at a farm, all the while training intensely to win bodybuilding titles. It's a testament to fate, perhaps, that I'm here today—because I was very active at the time in working subversively to bring down the Iron Curtain by participating in street fighting and the building of barricades against the military's tanks. The smell of tear gas and sound of the bullets whooshing past my head are sensory experiences that will stay with me for life. It was worth it. I fought the communists; I risked my life, but today am very proud of how I participated in the downfall of communism in eastern Europe, which brought the end of the dark era and new hope to my native Romania.

Circus Performer

Later, I would train to become an acrobatic performer in the circus. It provided a steady income and allowed me to travel all over Europe and realize my passion for being an artist and athlete. Getting out of Romania was one step closer to America. The circus brought a palpable pleasure to my life; I felt at home onstage under the spotlight in front of a large audience, performing acrobatic feats. There was glamour in the costumes, music, and diversity of performances: aerial acts, illusions, juggling. And the presence of the animals allowed me to use my vet tech background to care for them.

Reflecting back, the circus taught me much and I was exposed for the first time to life in other countries. In the back of my mind, though, I still held tightly to my dream of being a fitness trainer and opening my own gym. We were busy performing three to four shows a day, so it was tough to find a gym to develop my bodybuilding physique

Mindfulness for Improved Mood



TAMAR ZICK, LPC, RYT, LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR & REGISTERED YOGA TEACHER

Science is bringing to light new understandings of the brain's ability to change and become healthier. Neuroplasticity is a term used to describe the ways the brain changes and responds to our relationships and experiences. Research is demonstrating that engaging in mindfulness practices such as yoga and meditation can actually change the structure of the brain, our moods, and our attitudes. Here is an example of a mindfulness practice from the field of positive psychology: At the end of each day, stop and notice three things that went well for you. If done consistently, this simple focusing of the mind creates a pathway in the brain that can lower stress and improve mood. It is possible to feel better! tamarzick.com

Fitness

Local fitness practitioners and experts share what recent innovations excite them.

Those who like to work out or spend time being physically active are looking for easier, more enjoyable ways to make it happen. Even shoes and kayak gear are getting lighter, making them that much more pleasurable.

Fitness for the Long Haul



ALI DWYER, YOGA INSTRUCTOR, PERSONAL TRAINER, BICYCLE EDUCATOR

I see a movement toward sustainable healthy lifestyles and away from short-term weight-loss and overexercising. Since it's for the long haul, the need to be reasonable is high. This means starting somewhere with room for improvement instead of not starting at all because of unrealistic goals. Keeping exercise fun is key. Think Foodie Hiking Retreat or Yoga and Writing Workshop. Setting goals and having accountability are huge! Social media is useful for posting goals and completed workouts. Hiring a personal trainer or life coach is a way to boost enthusiasm for longterm health goals. alidwyer.com

Minimalistic Shoes



BERKELEY RUNNING COMPANY
ROLANDO CRUZ, MANAGER AND AVID LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

We have definitely noticed three trends: strength training, boot camp, and minimalistic running. All have changed the shoe industry as participants are looking for footwear that will not only compliment their workout, but enhance their performance as well. Brands such as Inov-8, Merrell, New Balance, Brooks, and of course, the Vibram FiveFingers, have captured participants' attention with their new line of low-provide shoes. berkeleyrunningcompany.com

Fitness as Play



BOULDERS CLIMBING GYM
VERA NAPUTI, CLIMBER & WIFE OF BOULDERS CO-FOUNDER

People want to simplify, so more people consolidate their fitness, recreation, and social time into one. We're seeing more people with their partners, friends, and family having fun and getting fit at the same time. When we see adults who might be there for birthday parties watching their kids, we say, "You can climb too!" Many middle-

aged and older adults enjoy climbing. Remember, you don't stop playing because you get old and out of shape, you get old and out of shape because you stop playing. bouldersgym.com

Lightening Up



RUTABAGA
DARREN BUSH, PROPRIETOR

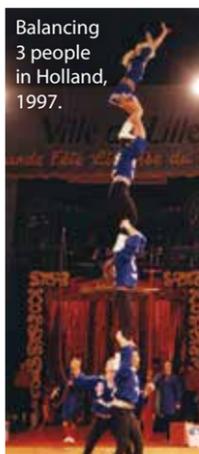
We're seeing a focus on lightweight gear, especially kayaks and kayak paddles. Getting the kayak to your destination is key, otherwise it's a dust collector. For similar reasons, paddlers are looking for rack accessories that assist loading boats on a vehicle. People are paddling locally more, so it has to be easy to load and unload if you want to spend an hour on Lake Wingra. Finally, there's huge growth in stand-up paddling. Folks like its lightweight gear, simplicity, and low-impact core workout... like floating yoga. rutabaga.com

Activity-based Fitness



VILLARI'S MARTIAL ARTS
ALI TREVIÑO-MURPHY, OUTREACH DIRECTOR/INSTRUCTOR & THIRD DEGREE BLACK BELT INSTRUCTOR OF SHAOLIN KEMPO KARATE

People are moving more toward activity-based fitness. Classes in martial arts, dance, or yoga keep students engaged because they have fun learning something new and meeting new people. In martial arts, for example, we strike and kick not just forward but also backward, to the side, and rotating into circular strikes. All of these movements build solid core strength and increase range of motion. Staying active shouldn't be a chore! villarismartialartscenters.com



Balancing 3 people in Holland, 1997.

and skills. Working out in so many gyms in as many cities allowed me to see an incredible variety of gym facilities, and it was during that time that I began to plan how I would one day build a first-rate fitness center of my own. We got an offer from our first American circus at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, and after a wonderful season performing there we said goodbye to each other as a troupe. I knew I had to start a new life in America, and leaving the circus was hard and I miss it today.

My next move to San Francisco helped me to understand myself at a deeper personal level and revealed to me my fear of being judged by my religion, culture, and the communist regime where it was hard to express personal feelings. I thought I was different from everyone else I knew. San Francisco was a difficult city to live in as it was so expensive and I felt insignificant, but I learned about myself and acquired a new personal freedom.

Landing in Madison

I began a search for education and training and found Madison Area Technical College, where I studied kinesiology and nutrition and became certified by the American Council on Exercise (ACE) and National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM). I worked for two years at Heroes Health Fitness & Beyond, where I became friends with and was mentored by the owner, Rob West. By that time, I had been competing in natural bodybuilding championships for 11 years and had won several Midwest championship trophies, including overall winner in 2004. I still compete and plan to do so into my 60s.

In 2008, I opened Septi Fitness on Madison's Capitol Square. My parents named me after a great man, the Roman emperor Septimius Severus, and I wanted to live up to his name.

My second job as a trainer was with Capitol Fitness, during which time I worked to realize my dream of opening a private fitness studio. Many challenges came up during my initial planning process, but I never stopped believing in the value of my project. Working as a fitness trainer was satisfying to me as I shared my knowledge and became a motivator for people who were trying to become healthier. My dreams moved closer.

In 2008, I opened Septi Fitness on Madison's Capitol Square. My parents named me after a great man, the Roman emperor Septimius Severus, and I wanted to live up to his name. I have built my own little 1,200 square-foot empire in Madison and am now living my dreams of becoming an American and having my own successful business. I have a new life, have realized my professional passions, and am quite Americanized after 14 years of living here in my adopted land. I'm surrounded by friends and feel like my clients are family members.

I landed with two suitcases and 20 dollars just 14 years ago and now can say I'm a living example of the American Dream. Since my first trip to Madison, this town has grown on me and I find it a special place to live and work and be a part of the community.

This will always be my home. ■

Editor's Note: Septi's narrative was written in collaboration with Greg Converse.

Tall Tale

A surprising charlatan's story was written in Wisconsin.



On May 18, 1933, *The Madison Mirror*, newspaper of Madison's Central High School (now Downtown MATC campus), carried a first-page story entitled "African Bush Man Speaks to Students," about a speech made the previous Monday to a student assembly. The paper carried a picture of the man wearing a coat and tie and a fez, and identified him as Ibn LoBagola. Among fantastical tales of snakes and thick vegetative

growth of the African Bush, the article noted that he said, "His people are intensely distrustful of any white people or even tribes living near them." Another quote, "Kindness among my people is a weakness and affection is unknown," also raises some questions. While purportedly relating to tribal life in the African Bush in what was then the French Sudan, it was probably more relevant to the speaker's secret life as a black gay man sorting through society's issues in the period from before World War I to the 1930s.

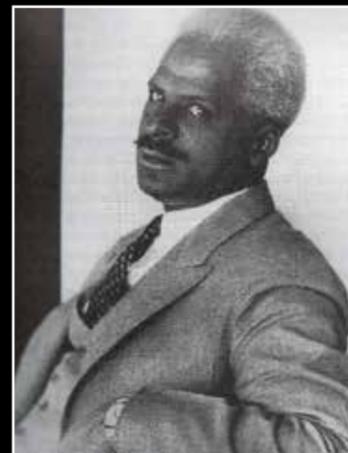
For LoBagola, born in 1887, finding role models for a gay life had to be a matter of creativity, doubly so in the racist culture of the day in the Western world. After lecturing throughout the East Coast on tribal customs, he came to the Midwest, speaking in Chicago, Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin. He addressed students at the Oshkosh Teacher's College (now UW-Oshkosh) and was to speak in Kenosha the day after his Madison Central High engagement. It was in Kenosha where his luck would eventually run out.

On May 19, the *Kenosha Evening Times* carried the front-page story "Dramatic Tale is Related by Ibn LoBagola." The subheading noted, "Many Turned Away for Lack of Room at Lecture by Bushman." The talk, sponsored by the First Methodist Ladies Aid Group, was widely anticipated. Every available seat in the auditorium was filled, so extra rows of chairs were added. The paper reported that LoBagola was in a flowing robe and donned what the paper called a "tarbush" (more commonly called a "fez"), which "he candidly told the audience he wore for 'color.'"

LoBagola's talk included tales of witch doctors, chiefs with councils of 300 women, fetishism, Amazon women warriors, and animal life. He claimed his people included a sect of black Jews headed by seven rabbis. Jewish tradition was said to have come from Morocco across the oasis of the Sahara desert to French Sudan.

The paper quoted him, "I'm living out of place—a maladjustment. I have no friends, no companionship." Further reported was that LoBagola declared that his Western education had unfitted him for savage life, yet he could find no real place for himself in the civilized world. The paper opened the article with the line, "A story so dramatic and fantastic as to be almost unbelievable..." If they had only known.

Next, on June 3, 1933, the paper ran a review of his book, *LOBAGOLA: An African Savage's Own Story*, published first as articles in *Scribner's Magazine* and then in book form by Alfred A. Knopf in 1930. The review referred to it as a bestseller and literary sensation. A later story would claim his book "has been extremely popular in Kenosha." The paper also noted he was back in Kenosha for a return engagement on June 8 and would speak at a children's afternoon matinee at the First Methodist church banquet hall, and then speak again in the evening at the YMCA gymnasium. The price was 10¢ for



For LoBagola, born in 1887, finding role models for a gay life had to be a matter of creativity, doubly so in the racist culture of the day in the Western world.

the matinee and 25¢ for the evening lecture.

On June 8 the paper carried a front-page picture under the caption "Speaks Tonight." The same edition ran a story with the headline "Children Flock to LoBagola" with an added subtitle, "Love of Little Folks Solaces Loneliness, Says Bushman."

The author, who claimed a Scottish upbringing, said adjustment to America was hard. He noted, "If I were to try to live with some nice Negro family, I would not be able to get along with them." The report on the evening lecture spoke of "an enthralled audience" and "LoBagola Wins New Friends." In what was taken as reference to his lost African community, he was quoted as saying, "It is no easy task to undergo complete ostracism. But I continue on the jump, always on the go, seeking that happiness that I hope exists for men somewhere in this Western civilization."

There was more truth than the paper suspected in that statement.

On June 10, the *Kenosha Evening Times* had quite a different front-page headline, "Jail LoBagola on Boy's Story of Misconduct, African Bushman Lecturer arrested After Disclosures Fri." On June 12 another story ran, "LoBagola Still in County Jail, Second Warrant Added to First Against African Bushman Lecturer." On June 13, the story was headed, "LoBagola Has a Long Record, Served 18 Months in Sing Sing on Immorality Charges."

So LoBagola's foray to America's heartland was an attempt to get away from his record on the East Coast. The paper noted that Scotland Yard had also investigated the lecturer during a period in London. Two 15-year-old Kenosha boys had reported the incidents to YMCA counselors, who referred the matter to police. Since he continued in jail unable to raise bail, lectures and appointments in Sheboygan and Wauwatosa were canceled, the paper noted.

The paper next reported on the preliminary hearing, which ordered him held for a trial by jury. The article cited the crowded courtroom, with no standing room available, and that it had been packed long before the hour of the hearing. Under a subheading "Women Listen Too," the report was, "The majority of spectators were young people, and three women were noted among those who listened to the proceedings." One of the boys was the sole witness who gave testimony.

Bail was set at \$2,500, which LoBagola's attorneys protested was too high with one pointing to a similar case pending in the county court in which bond was \$500. Evidently another case of gay immorality was going on in the town. The defense in the trial also presented the claim that LoBagola was an American citizen, by naturalization, though all the while he was attired in fez and robe, reportedly of his French Sudan homeland.

On June 16 the paper carried an editorial complaining about the "sensational" character of the hearing. Commending the court for excluding minors,

the editorial called for a closed hearing, not one where the "merely curious" could come and gawk. To reinforce the argument, the claim was made, "Even in crime-ridden Chicago, according to reports, sensational cases of this kind are invariably held behind closed doors. Why should that not be the case here?" This couldn't have been an argument for sweeping such matters under the rug, since the paper had trumpeted the matter on front pages for the better part of a week.

Bail was finally made and LoBagola released for a period; however, on April 9, 1934, the paper headlined another front-page story: "LoBagola Gets Year in Prison, Goes at Once, Pleads Guilty to Charges of Immorality Before Stewart Today." The sentence was a term of one to five years on each charge for the 44-year-old lecturer. It was also reported that a representative of the federal

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government was questioning LoBagola on his status as an American citizen.

All of the above is quite interesting as a tale, but it is not yet the surprising part. The prices for a lecture indicated a strong appetite in the Western world for information on Africa. The Dark Continent, carved up by the European empires, inspired awe throughout the United States. A great book, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, edited by Bernth Lindfors, helps explain the phenomenon. Interest about Africa in America was especially sparked by the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893, which featured a Dahomey village complete with natives. The budding field of anthropology added a veneer of academic respectability to displays of natives and their stories. The Barnum types decided there was money to be made, so promoters began

The paper noted that Scotland Yard had also investigated the lecturer during a period in London.

booking Africans on the stage in vaudeville and other more upright venues.

It turns out that LoBagola, who was earning his living portraying a native story as a noble savage, was not from Sudan or Africa after all. After U.S. immigration officials threatened to deport him to his native shores after his conviction, the con artist and convict confessed to being born in 1887 as Joseph Howard Lee, the 11th child of a family in Baltimore, Maryland. The immigration investigation only comes to light in this century.

Because his Wisconsin conviction violated his New York parole, after serving his term here, he was returned to the New York prison system where he died and was buried in 1947. The cement headstone bears his assumed African name.

If that was not enough intrigue in this tale, there is still more. While in Waupun, LoBagola (or actually Lee) became a subject of an academic study by UW Professor John Gillin on sex offenders. Gillin's interest as a sociologist was in the origins of crime, and his research probed the origins of homosexuality of a group of prisoners sent to Waupun for sodomy.

He mainly tried comparing effeminate traits among the sodomites versus

their straight siblings, so he interviewed prisoners for their life stories. Educated, literate prisoners were invited to write their own life stories, and LoBagola was one of those.

As the author of a previous (but not yet unmasked fictional tale) of an African savage who had become civilized, he now poured out his heart on what he claimed was a true sexual history. This 68-page account, written in the 1930s from Waupun, is the most amazing tale. I do not have space here to provide the full analysis, but it is a fascinating document.

I will share just one tidbit, though: LoBagola had volunteered for the U.S. Army in World War I to go to war for America, but after initially accepting him, the records of his arrest for perversion got him discharged from the U.S. Army. As he says in the published autobiography (with no mention of the specific perversion matter) I "was not a fit person to be in the United States Army, as I was a very bad man." So he turned around and volunteered to fight with the British army, which was recruiting in America and did accept him. He served in Palestine with regiments recruited from Jews who wished to fight, especially after the Balfour Declaration in which the British government supported efforts for a Jewish homeland. In the private autobiography written in Waupun, where he was frank about his active homosexual lifestyle, he notes, "Strange as it may seem, the British Army was not demoralized by my having served in it. (Underlining in his handwritten version.) Early shades of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

In the chapter on LoBagola in *Africans on Stage*, while acknowledging his creativity in creating a stage persona through his art of the savage tale, the statement is made, "His instability and sexual preferences destroyed him in the end." After reading his sexual life story written in Waupun, it is clear that American society's antipathy toward homosexuality, especially to a black gay man in the first part of the twentieth century, doomed this amazing storyteller.

Dick Wagner (rrdickwagner@gmail.com), openly gay former Dane County Board Chair and co-chair of Governor Earl's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Issues, is now working on gay Wisconsin history and welcomes topics and sources.

quality of life

OUR PETS



Tasha and Knicky with Their Mom

Breed/s: "Tasha" is a Tokenese, which is a cross between a Siamese and a Burmese. "Knicky," or "Brave, Brave Sir Robin," is an orange striped tom with a white belly and white paws.

Age/s: Tasha is 10 and Knicky is 12.

Owner: Jenni Wolfe, first-grade teacher, unicyclist, country line dancer, and Threshold Singer.

Where/how did you meet Jenni? Knicky: I met Jenni when I was a kitten. She picked me out of the litter because I was the runt and looked pathetic. **Tasha:** Jenni drove two hours to my foster home. I crawled onto Jenni's shoulder and started licking her ear. We went home together that day.

What kind of family member is Jenni? Jenni: Jenni brushes our fur, cleans the cat box, and keeps us well fed and watered. She makes a very good lap to sit on when she's working at the computer. Jenni is a good door opener so that we can lounge in the sun on the balcony. We routinely lick her neck, ears, and cheeks to keep her well groomed.

Jenni, what kind of family members are your cats? My cats are my most valued possession and a constant source of unconditional love.

One of my most comforting and rewarding experiences is the privilege of cuddling up with them at night.

Knicky and Tasha are also superb judges of human character. My cats fawned all over my girlfriend when she first visited my apartment. They never do that with strangers! That's how I knew she was a keeper.

If cats could talk, what would you say? Tasha: I would remind everyone that the world truly revolves around me. **Knicky:** I'm just content to think cat thoughts and nap in my bed under the dining room chair.



Photographed by Beth McConnell

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—Hippocrates

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“It Wouldn’t Be Manly”

For gay men, masculinity trumps sexual orientation when it comes to intimate partner violence. **Molly Herrmann** reports.

as a community, LGBTQ people are busy: trying to get legally married, parenting and raising children, coming out repeatedly, getting and keeping jobs, and staying safe from homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia. For many of us, healthy relationships have been hard to come by, and we feel lucky to have them amid these other challenges. However, in a quarter to a third of our relationships, there is a power and control imbalance between the partners. LGBTQ



For these guys, their identity as male usurped their identity as gay—at least when they talked about barriers to recognizing abuse in their relationships. What I heard is that masculinity really did a number on them.

people report experiencing intimate partner violence at rates equal to non-LGBTQ people. I specifically use the term “intimate partner violence,” or IPV, for a couple of reasons. First, “domestic violence” is thought of as something straight men do to women, and we don’t use it to describe our relationships. Also, the term captures the spectrum—from a first date to a long-term relationship—since abuse can occur early and often. It’s time to shed some light on an issue we don’t want to discuss.

According to research done through a Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program (HWPP) grant, LGBTQ people are not ready to recognize violence and abuse in our

relationships. We might think it is something that only happens in heterosexual relationships; we might think something is not right but would never label it as abusive. We might not recognize it in the lives of our friends. In 2007 and 2008, we interviewed more than 80 LGBTQ individuals to determine how ready we are as a community to deal with this issue. We are not very ready. And the reasons we are not ready differ among LGBTQ people. It is time to talk about these differences.

I would like to focus on a population that is different from my own, but which I consider a close neighbor: gay men. And yes, while “some of my closest friends are gay men,” I understand that I am an outsider to this community. Yet, I can’t stop thinking about what I learned from the guys I interviewed about their lack of readiness to address IPV. My conversations with gay men nearly broke my heart. I heard them talk about how the messages they received being raised as boys meant they could not identify as victims. It wouldn’t be manly to do so. For these guys, their identity as male usurped their identity as gay—at least when they talked about barriers to recognizing abuse in their relationships. In fact, though each identity group within the LGBTQ community was not very ready to deal with IPV, gay men were the least ready.

What I heard is that masculinity really did a number on these guys. If they were raised as boys (and most likely were, with the exception of some transgender gay men), they heard that “boys will be boys.” In other words, fighting is just part of being a male. It is normal, expected, and encouraged, but also ignored. One guy talked about how if a person had a black eye, someone might say something to his friend about the friend’s situation. Insert “woman you work with” there, and see how that sounds. And, if they have been teased for being effeminate, either by family members, strangers, in their relationships, or all of these, they might guess that identifying as a victim would further emasculate them and invite homophobia and stigma about gender identity.

If they could think about telling someone about IPV they were experiencing—and this was a big if—the guys did not think there

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were services for them. And why would they? Many IPV service providers are not ready to serve men—or worse, they may be averse to it. And since most people associate IPV services with shelter, which is infrequently available for male-identified people, why would men think any differently about whether they could seek other services there?

All of the availability of services in the world does not matter, however, if gay men are not able to name their abusive relationships as such. If you build it, they will not necessarily come. And if men aren’t talking to their gay male peers about the issue—and most guys indicated they were not—they won’t be turning to each other for support.

So where does all of this leave my neighboring community? The good news is there is something to be done even when awareness of an issue is low. And, this community has shown strength and resilience in the face of devastating health disparities before. The

short answer is that it is time to talk about IPV with gay men; time to talk about it as a local issue that happens in our closest circles of friends. It is neither possible nor desirable to dismantle masculinity; rather, we must expand masculinity to include the realities of some males being hurt by other males in intimate relationships and to admit that it paralyzes gay male victims and their allies from calling out intimate partner violence. We must develop language that recognizes male-to-male IPV and use it to start talking—now.

Some organizations in our state are already working to address this issue. You can find more information from them at www.rm2bsafe.org. ■

Molly Herrmann is an activist, researcher, trainer, and consultant on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) intimate partner violence (IPV) with Humble Pie Consulting. She also currently works as a health educator in the state AIDS/HIV Program.

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No Ingenue

Dr. Sue Gill shares what she has learned from k.d. lang about authenticity.

K.d. lang is hot! I was reminded of this while attending her concert in Madison earlier this year. However, what really struck me about k.d. was her incomparable authenticity—in her music, in her wonderfully gender-bending presentation, and in the way she has chosen to live her life. It takes gumption to be known as a vegan, lesbian, Buddhist country artist!

I've been trying to figure out how she pulls this off. I have some straight elderly Canadian in-laws from cattle-ranch country who adore



Wood proposed that the authentic person is one who has a strong awareness of their deepest internal states, emotions, and thoughts; lives an authentic life; and finds a balance between external expectations and the internal self.

k.d., and can't wait to see her in concert this summer. I want to ask them, "Did you happen to notice that she's a vegan, lesbian Buddhist who often wears men's suits? Why aren't you running away from her screaming?"

Although I am not sure my in-laws can articulate it, I think that they are drawn to the essence of how she is living her life. They may be sensing something about her that we all yearn for in our own lives. Wouldn't we all be happier if we lived with more authenticity and without apology, arrogance, or the brittleness that comes with fear?

Authenticity is difficult to define, although philosophers and humanistic psychologists have tried, and most of us are drawn to

people when we perceive that they are living with authenticity. Because I am a geek, I am going to use the definition developed by Alex Wood (and others, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2008). After doing a bunch of geeky statistical stuff, Wood proposed that the authentic person is one who has a strong awareness of their deepest internal states, emotions, and thoughts; lives an authentic life; and finds a balance between external expectations and the internal self.

Self-Awareness

We all have complex internal emotions, beliefs, and physiological states that do not entirely match our conscious awareness of those emotions, thoughts, or states. For example, I might really be afraid of doing something on a deep level, but I think that I just don't feel like doing it, with no real awareness that I'm afraid. Or when I get really busy, I often lack an awareness that I am actually hungry and tired. Or when I actually didn't know that I was gay (that one still blows my mind).

Alex Wood proposed that this self-alienating mismatch between our internal state and our conscious awareness causes psychopathology and that conscious awareness of our internal state is a key component to authenticity.

Authentic Living

Where self-awareness is congruence between internal states and conscious awareness, authentic living is congruence between conscious awareness and behavior. I am aware that I am afraid, and I run away! I am aware that I am hungry, so I eat. We are not living authentically when we feel afraid but act cool, or when we are hungry but say that we are not. Or when we know that we are gay, bi, trans, or queer but don't behave in a way that's consistent with that. Or when I wore that dress in 1996. At least I was aware enough to know that the dress was a terrible expression of my internal self!

External Influence

Social and environmental factors can create conflict with self-awareness and authentic living. Conforming to the expectations

Although all three components had an influence, self-awareness had by far the strongest influence. More self-awareness was associated with more happiness, and less stress and anxiety.

of others can increase self-alienation and decrease authentic living. There is tension to this because we have to live in society and we want to be in relationships with others, so we are always conforming to the expectations of others to some degree. I know a lot of gay people who seem to get a lot gayer when with other gays than when they are with straights. I get it. I sure was a lot gayer at the k.d. lang concert than when I'm at my mother's house!

This can get very serious when a person is considering coming out in their broader social circle and risks real safety issues and alienation from loved ones. However, I think that in general we give too much consideration to this factor at the extreme cost of self-awareness and authentic living, and ultimately at the cost of happiness. I get worried when I hear people say, "I can't come out to my family; they'd disown me," or "I can't transition now; I'd lose my job." Although that may be true for some people, they may be sacrificing significant happiness in the process and overestimating the perceived benefit of attending to external influences.

Putting It All Together

This is an area where k.d. lang has excelled. I believe she has sacrificed significant professional success by giving less weight to external influence and more weight to self-awareness and authentic living. If she weren't such a lesbian, Buddhist, vegan cross-dresser, she could be a mega-super pop star. But if she did that, she would be less of our beloved k.d., and I'll bet she would be a lot less happy.

Wood looked at the three components of authenticity—self-awareness, authentic living, and balancing external influences—to see how they affected happiness, stress, and

anxiety. Although all three components had an influence, self-awareness had by far the strongest influence. More self-awareness was associated with more happiness, and less stress and anxiety.

This surprised me, as I had assumed that living your life in a way that is true for yourself, and damning external influences, would have the strongest influence on happiness and stress. According to Wood's study, deeply knowing yourself is more important; maybe because it's a precursor to the other two elements of authenticity. So today, let us all make the space to know ourselves more deeply.

k.d. summed it up the best when she said, "If you have the courage to face yourself, the whole package, you will receive an extraordinary amount of power you may have never realized was there." ■

Sue and her partner Sheri have lived in Madison since 2000. They keep busy with their two dogs, Frankie and Maslow. Sue is a psychologist in private practice and can be found online at www.madisontherapy.com.

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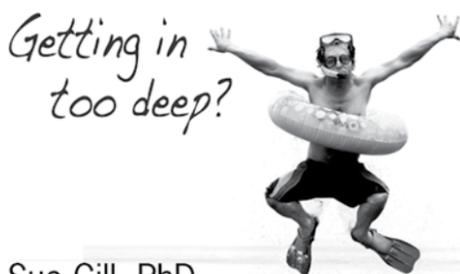
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Rolling Back Our Rights

Linda Balisle analyzes recent legislation that reduces the Violence Against Women Act and alienates queer, immigrant, and Native American survivors.

The headline caught my attention: "House Passes Violence Against Women Act that Leaves Out LGBT, Immigrant Protections." —Huffington Post, May 16, 2012

How could this be, I wondered? In the 18 years since the federal legislation known as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) first passed, it has been renewed three times without controversy and with strong bipartisan support. Each renewal has refined and



While many survivors of domestic violence believe a batterer's threats to take their children away, with LGBTQ couples the threat may have the support of the law.

extended protections as interested organizations and law enforcement gained experience in the application of the law. Despite its name, it covers women and men.

So why the rollback in protections for LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence? The easy answer is that in this polarized political world in an election year, everything is up for "reframing" and being used to justify broader political positions.

In this case, the Senate version of the bill had extended protections for LGBTQ survivors as well as immigrant and Native American survivors of domestic violence. The House of Representatives used a funding component as an opportunity to use this previously non-controversial bill as a platform for its social agenda.

Despite the opposition by at least 320 advocacy groups, faith-based or otherwise,

the House version of the bill excludes the protections for LGBTQ, immigrant, and Native American survivors that are in the Senate bill. We now know that enough Republican members of Congress do not consider LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence to be "real" survivors of violence.

The issues faced by immigrant survivors of domestic violence, deportation being only one, as well as Native American survivors living under tribal jurisdictions with no authority to issue injunctions against non-tribal residents, are substantial and demanded revisions to VAWA. The Senate bill accomplished that. The House bill is silent on those protections and actually reallocates some of the substantial resources away from survivor services to administrative costs.

Fortunately, Wisconsin's domestic abuse restraining order statute has been applied to LGBTQ couples whether or not they live together. It applies to violence by:

- An adult family member or adult household member against another family member or adult household member (a household member can be a current or former household member)
- An adult caregiver against an adult who is under the caregiver's care
- An adult against his or her adult former spouse
- An adult against an adult with whom the individual has or had a dating relationship
- An adult against an adult with whom the person has a child in common

So is there a problem in Wisconsin in providing protections for LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence? Unfortunately, there are unique issues that can stand in the way. The notion that violence between men and between women is sexual and not a law enforcement issue can prevent otherwise competent officers from making an arrest. VAWA has been instrumental in funding training for law enforcement nationwide. The Wisconsin legislature in the past has also funded such training. Not all statewide training and services are equal, however, and not all areas of the state include more than a few LGBTQ couples willing to call law enforcement for help.

This raises the other side of the problem

with implementing the protective legislation available in Wisconsin. LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence not only share the same hesitations most survivors have in calling the police—embarrassment, a belief that they caused the problem, fear of losing financial support—but they also have some additional barriers to asking for the help they need.

Domestic violence is about power and control. It is often part of a cycle of violence in both the batterer's and survivor's lives. Being LGBTQ provides unique opportunities to wield power. If a partner is not "out" to family or at work, the threat of being "outed" may be enough to keep a survivor from picking up the phone and calling the police after being assaulted. If the survivor is a parent who shares custody with a former spouse or partner, a domestic violence action may be handing the other parent the ammunition needed to reduce the survivor's time with his or her children.

If the LGBTQ couple has children and the survivor is not the biological or adoptive parent, cutting off access to their child is a serious and real threat. Wisconsin still limits rights of the non-biological or adoptive parent to only "visitation." This can result in a very different relationship with the child.

While many survivors of domestic violence believe a batterer's threats to take their children away, with LGBTQ couples the threat may have the support of the law. Although Wisconsin's domestic violence statute is inclusive, it still is insufficient to protect the survivor from the very real threat of losing access to his or her child. As long as children of LGBTQ parents are "non-marital children" whose parents are not allowed to be married, their relationship with the non-biological or non-adoptive parent is dependent on a court's willingness to stretch "visitation" to an arrangement that looks more like shared custody.

Good legislation is a baseline needed to provide protection against domestic violence. While Wisconsin's statute covers LGBTQ relationships, the federal legislation pending in Congress rolls back some past protections. This is the wrong message to send children of LGBTQ families and the wrong message to send to those who think that LGBTQ violence is simply part of "gay sex." No good can come from it, and much harm has already occurred.

For more information and a link to oppose the House version of the bill, go to wcadv.org.

Linda Balisle is a shareholder in the Madison law firm of Balisle & Roberson, S.C. where she practices Family Law. She has worked in the courts and legislature to establish rights of children of LGBTQ parents.

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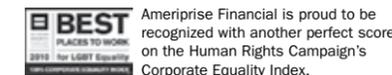


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Let's Talk About Sex

Ellen Barnard of A Woman's Touch offers advice and guidance for all genders to maintain healthy sexuality and intimacy as we age.

We all want an ongoing sense of vitality, a deep engagement with life's pleasures, and the ability to enjoy meaningful and rewarding intimacy—regardless of our age. However, there are stereotypes about aging that we all encounter: things like, “sex is over after menopause” and “all men will experience changes in their sexual function as they get older.” But are these immutable facts, or scenarios that we can alter based on the choices we make?

While there are definite physical changes that happen with age, many of these can be slowed down by our lifestyle choices. It is not absolute that we will experience changes that mean the end of intimate pleasures. Yes, menopause is inevitable, but its effect on our sexual wellness and pleasure is within our control to a great degree. Yes, men will experience changes



As our physical experience of sex and intimacy changes, we need to change our mental expectations at the same time, so that we define satisfaction based on what is possible.

in sexual function with age, but the speed and extent are controllable. When changes in function occur, the way we think about ourselves and our sexuality and our willingness to adapt and move with those changes will determine our ability to remain satisfied with intimacy all the way to the end of life.

What do we need to care for to ensure our sexual function and pleasure?

In order to enjoy healthy, pleasurable sex, we have to have some basic systems in our bodies able to function at their full capacity.

First, we need healthy nerves that can transmit the impulses of pleasure from our skin to our brain, and trigger the impulse of orgasm in response to stimulation. Next, we need healthy blood vessels that are able to fill with blood when the nerves signal to the brain to trigger the arousal response in our bodies. All people, regardless of gender, need to have these healthy blood vessels because everyone experiences erections and engorgement as a part of sexual arousal. Finally, we need bodies that are strong and flexible enough to support us in a variety of positions comfortably.

Strategies for Maintaining Sexual Health and Lifelong Pleasure

1. CHOOSE HEALTHY HABITS. The choices we make in the way we take care of our bodies have a direct effect on both the health and function of our nerve fibers and our blood vessels. It's a familiar refrain, and important when it comes to sexual wellness: eat healthy foods that are minimally processed, drink only moderately if at all, avoid smoking cigarettes, get enough sleep, and exercise daily. Focus on eating fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins and fats, and things like dark (70% or higher) chocolate, nuts, and tea; that way you are stacking the deck in favor of preserving nerve function and healthy blood flow. Exercise takes this benefit even further; 30–60 minutes daily of brisk walking or biking (or whatever you can comfortably enjoy) is most effective.

2. USE IT OR LOSE IT. This is important when it comes to maintaining sexual wellness throughout our lives. We need to remind the nerves what to do, and keep the skin that receives the sensations supple and healthy.

Whether or not you have a partner, it's important to keep your sexual systems running smoothly by engaging with them at least once a week. An orgasm a week has also been found to have many mental and physical health benefits, so you have no excuse not to indulge!

3. ADAPT AS NEEDED. Despite our best intentions, our bodies may suffer from disease, disability, or cancer, all of which will affect how we enjoy intimacy and pleasure. When changes happen, it's important to recognize them, grieve the loss or change so you can let go of the “I wish it were the way it used to be” feeling, then move forward to embrace what is now. As our physi-

cal experience of sex and intimacy changes, we need to change our mental expectations at the same time, so that we define satisfaction based on what is possible. Grieving and personal reflection are good paths to achieve this.

The next step is seeking out and using therapeutic “aids” such as lubricants, vibrators, erection rings, erection pumps (these exist for all different physiologies), and erotica to keep the mind nimble and interested. There are therapeutic regimens to help people of all genders maintain sexual function as we age, or after surgery or a change in our physical abilities. While your doctor may not know anything about this, all of the staff at A Woman's Touch are extensively trained in teaching these practices and are happy to be a resource to anyone, regardless of gender.

4. COMMUNICATE, NEGOTIATE, AND COMMUNICATE.

For those with partners, it's critical to learn how to communicate our desires, what works best for us, and how we are experiencing changes in our bodies. We also have to practice negotiating intimacy, especially as our desires and responses may be changing and the pace or frequency of sex may be changing along with them.

5. BE PLAYFUL AND HAVE FUN! The point of sex and intimacy is to increase pleasure. Laughter and playfulness increase pleasure, and keep you alive and young at heart, if not in body. ■

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you're no Craig Culver," I banter with the slight, athletically built man in front of me.

He grins boyishly, and it's that much easier to see how this whole thing started taking shape in his childhood in Milwaukee, chipping ice off the lake to make frozen custard with his mother and brother from his grandmother's five-ingredient recipe.

"We did that all the time, and those things didn't dawn on me then, but I guess it was all a training ground," he says.

It wasn't until about five years into the business that he remembered that he and his brother also used to play restaurant.

"A lot of times, you don't put two and two together," he says, but neither do his peers.

"Most people don't know I'm gay ... a lot of people don't even know I'm Michael," he says.

So this is Michael. The Michael Dix behind Michael's Frozen Custard. A series of guided events led him and his former partner to purchase the original location on Monroe Street. Then, the building wasn't just a fixer-upper; it was arguably a hot mess. But as they careened past it during a bike ride coming off the Arboretum, something in Dix lit up. He was driving forklifts then, and money was tight. He dreamed up the notion of opening a frozen-custard business, and visualized it happen-

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ing in this much-neglected Monroe Street property.

Just three days later, his real estate agent pointed him to the very location he had daydreamed about.

He didn't know a lick about the ins and outs of running such a business when he started out, but learned quickly.

"What I knew was how to make a great frozen custard," Dix says.

They opened August 22, 1986 at 4:00 p.m. "Then we closed at 5 o'clock because the fuse panel started on fire," he says.

Having missed the height of summer to carry them through the slower winter months, he says they practically begged customers to keep patronizing them or else they wouldn't see the light of spring. Their fans were loyal.

"The next year, we had a great summer and the rest is history," Dix says, and now heads four locations.

Having essentially been a one-man show since his partner's passing in 1993 from AIDS, he has handled every last stitch of the business, from payroll to oversight.

"After he died I came pretty close to almost folding," he said, noting that in his partner's absence he had to teach himself how to run the financial end of the business.

"I'm like the guy who does everything," Dix says, this year being the first year that he's had a break from his seven-days-a-week schedule, sunup to sundown.

And he's had several opportunities to take an out: for the last seven years he's turned down offers to sell out, despite the reality that he could live an easy life not working another day. But it isn't what he wants.

"I have this vision in the back of my head, I'm going to have this business until I'm 80. I'll always have this," he says.

He sources locally whenever possible (the burgers, for example, come from Ken's Meat and Deli) and as the owner enjoys the perks of calling the shots on the stereo.

He loves dance music. A customer complained. He told him not to sit under the stereo.

He's Michael. And there will be dance music.

"I believe in being who you are and being your extraordinary self," Dix says. "I want to play. Life's too short." —**Marcelle Richards**

Photographed by **Roberto Amezcua**

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Maia Has Two Mommies

Accomplished GSA for Safe Schools scholarship recipient **Maia Noll** insists her family is extraordinary for all the right reasons.



If I told you a handful of facts about my life, you would think I was just a typical Midwestern girl: middle class, good student, well-liked. By all accounts, I'm very average. But if I casually throw in the fact that my parents are two lesbian women, the seemingly typical and average aspects of my life become a little more complicated.

My name is Maia Noll, and I am the adopted daughter of two openly lesbian women. With a list of personal accomplishments that include being my high school's prom queen, a fabulous performer, and, admittedly, a well-known teacher's pet, I've always liked to think that the least interesting factors in my life are my parents. Like most children, I love my parents and would do anything for them, but I don't see them as a flashing neon sign that says "Unique" or "Different." In my eyes, my parents are equals to the millions of other parents out there who are accepted so readily without a second of thought. Quite simply, I do not believe that my parents' sexual orientation is what measures the level of importance of my or my family's actions, accomplishments, and lifestyle, let alone sets me apart from the children of heterosexual parents. What is complicated to some is just life for me. This is why I am always a bit floored to realize that, to others,

I was exposed to both national and international adventures, fantastic music, art, and foods, and most importantly, a "tribe" of friends and family who loved me unconditionally.



Maia at the GSAFE Celebration of Leadership in May.

my loving and nourishing childhood and parents are the subjects of great resentment and ignorance.

Although I don't have much in my memory as far as my first years of life, I know that they were magical. My parents, who are what I've come to call "earthy-folky," raised my sister and me with a great appreciation for nature, the arts, and community. And so I was exposed to both national and international adventures, fantastic music, art, and foods, and most importantly, a "tribe" of friends and family who loved me unconditionally. In addition, my moms made a great effort to instill important values in my sister and me in order to teach us to be both listeners and leaders in this world. Looking back, I know that I have been infinitely blessed.

My point in all this is that I have really, really great parents. Parents who, regardless of their sexual orientation, did exactly what they were supposed to do according to the job description. Parents who, regardless of their sexual orientation, created a beautiful and loving home for their two daughters. Parents who, regardless of their sexual orientation, made an impact on this world in the form of a family. As complicated as they may seem, they did something right.

I am the daughter of two lesbian women, but I am not an anomaly. I am the daughter of parents who raised a strong woman with morals, goals, and a drive to succeed. And in the end, isn't that really what it's all about? ■

It Takes Courage.

Imagine making yourself the potential target of bullying, name-calling, and harassment as a result of your involvement in your Gay-Straight Alliance. Could you have done it? Would you?

TAKE A MOMENT to step back into the shoes of your 17 year old self. Once there, imagine your old school community with your teachers, your friends, and maybe your enemies or bullies. Now picture putting yourself in front of a video camera and when the light turns green saying, "I'm a member of the Gay-Straight Alliance, and I'm here to tell you about the LGBT community." Imagine doing that each Monday for all your school community - your teachers, friends, and maybe your enemies - to see and hear. Imagine making yourself the potential target of bullying, name-calling, and harassment as a result. Could you have done it? Would you?

While things have changed a lot since many of us have been in high school, we know it still takes courage to be that face. **It still takes love for not only oneself but also for others who can't or won't take that risk.** It still takes the belief that you can't sit around and wait for someone else to make it better. You have to be the one that you've been waiting for.

Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools' Safe School Sustainers are investing in our community and the lives of our youth by giving a gift that will make it better for today's LGBTQ youth. Thank you to the founding members of our Safe Schools Sustainers! With your support, GSAFE supports over 130 Gay-Straight Alliances, develops LGBTQ youth leadership, and trains educators on creating safe and supportive school environments.

Thank you to the founding members of our Safe Schools Sustainers!

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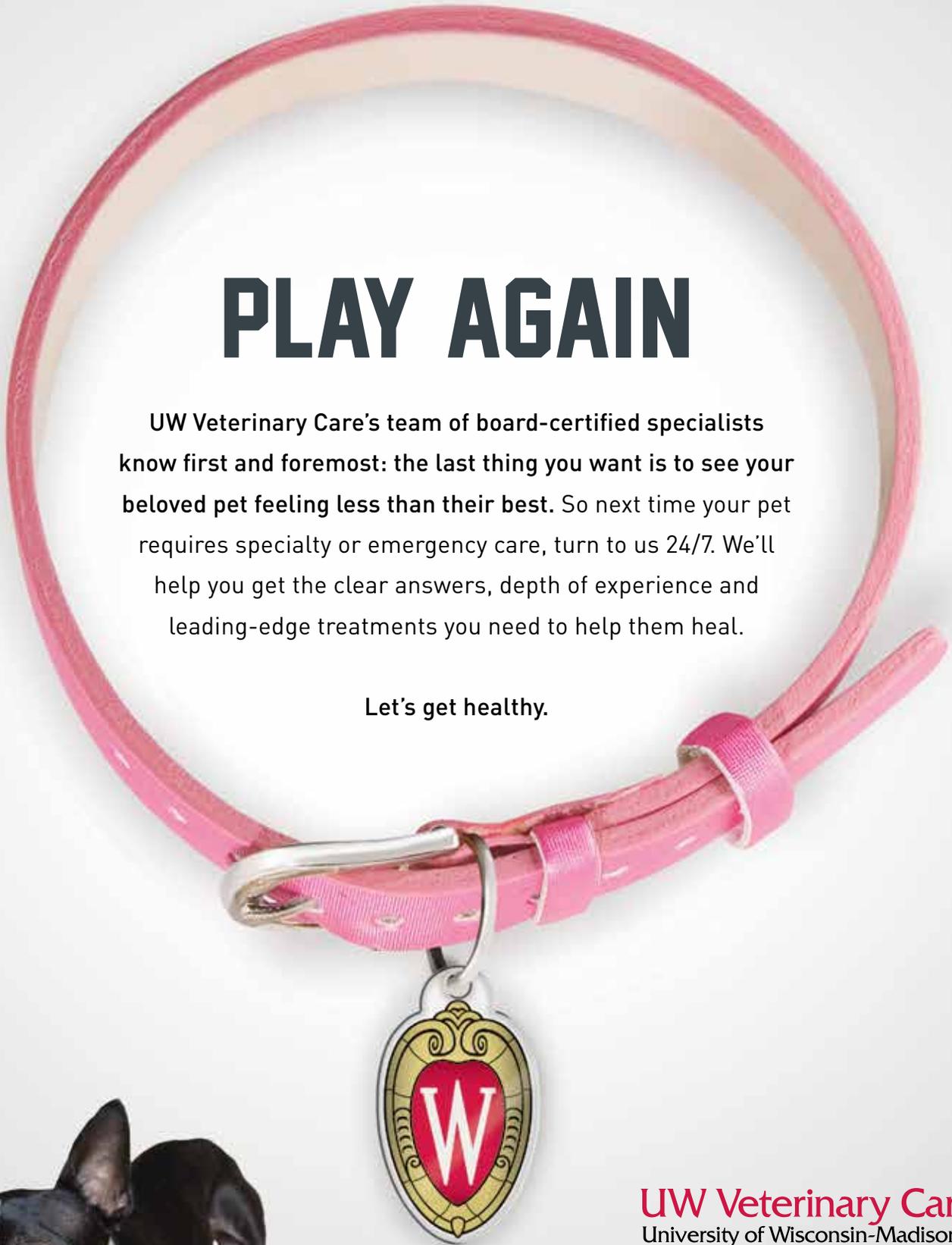
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