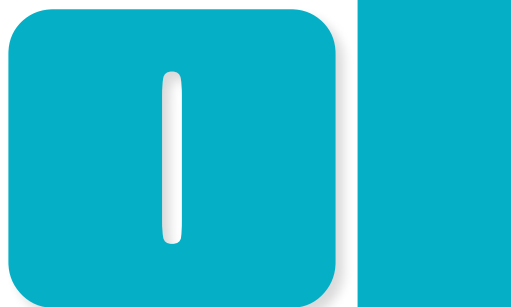


September
& October
2014

our lives



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Coming Out in Division I Sports

Wisconsin Badger Hockey player Ilana Friedman

A National Rockstar Comes Home

God-Des & She's Tina Gassen on her Madison homecoming

Keeping up with the Courts

Breaking developments in Wisconsin's marriage equality case

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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ARTS & CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT



Artist Michael Owen's mural
on the side of Plan B nightclub



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our lives **OL**

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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EDITOR'S NOTE **EMILY MILLS**



FOR THE LOVE OF ART

PICKING A FAVORITE ISSUE of this magazine would be like picking a favorite child—just uncouth, not to mention incredibly difficult. But I have to admit there's a special place in my heart for our arts and entertainment-themed editions, especially since I continue to be so involved in those communities.

I've been a musician, actor, writer, and tech person—in a wide variety of capacities—since I first moved to Madison in 2000. As such, I've had the incredible pleasure and honor of working with countless hardworking and ridiculously talented humans who call this city home. Many of them are represented in the pages of this issue, telling their stories: how they fell in love with the theater, both on stage and off, how visual art changed their lives and their relationships, how throwing inclusive and fiercely queer dance parties can be fun and revolutionary, how music can show you the world and the wide variety of people in it, and so much more.

Each of these stories represents hours, weeks, years of hard work and sacrifice, personal struggle and growth, and bountiful love. That's something I think we, as a community at large, could always do a better job of recognizing and rewarding—which means being willing to go to shows and pony up some dollars for cover charges and merch—all of which more directly support this work.

I'm not just saying this for myself either, though certainly I would never turn down the kindness. Truth be told, though, there are so many artistic people and projects in this city that deserve both our emotional and monetary support. What they contribute to our own personal and community well-being is immeasurable: art enlivens our ears, eyes, brains, and hearts.

So go out to a local theater production, check out some local bands you've never heard of before, attend a gallery opening and buy something for your blank walls. And be thankful for the bounty of beautiful and diverse arts thriving right here in our fair city.

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What is your connection to the LGBT community?

CSW has been funding LGBT groups since 1981, long before those groups—and the issues they work for—had greater support from the general public. We continue to support the area's LGBT nonprofits (OutReach, GSAFE, Fair Wisconsin, New Harvest Foundation) through workplace and online giving.

Do you do anything charitable or that gives back to the local community?

This year we will distribute over \$625,000 to local nonprofits working for change. And we'll continue offering training, technical assistance, and visibility for the important work our member groups do. Giving back—by raising and distributing funds and helping our groups in other ways—is the sole reason for our existence. We feel lucky to be doing this work for so many great nonprofits!

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TAMARA PACKARD is a partner in the Madison law firm Cullen Weston Pines & Bach LLP, where she practices civil litigation, focusing on employee rights. Packard graduated from Oberlin College in 1990 and from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1994 and is a Fellow in the Litigation Counsel of America. She has had the

good fortune to be involved in recent key civil rights litigation, including defending Wisconsin's Domestic Partnership Registry, challenging the 2006 "Marriage Amendment" to the Wisconsin Constitution, and challenging the Voter ID law. She co-teaches the Sexual Orientation and the Constitution seminar at the UW Law School and was President of the Board of Directors of the Fair Wisconsin Education Fund while Wisconsin's "Marriage Amendment" was debated and adopted. In June, Tamara and her same-sex fiancé legally wed.



DICK WAGNER moved to Madison in 1965 to study American history at the University of Wisconsin. Deciding to stay in Madison, he worked for the state and got involved in local politics. In the 1980s, he was one of the first dozen out gay elected officials in the country. Governor

Tony Earl appointed him in 1983 to co-chair the first-ever state level Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues. In retirement, he gardens, serves on boards, and researches and writes about Wisconsin gay history. **PAINTING BY GARY WANKERL**



I READ YOUR MAGAZINE on a regular basis even though I'm not part of the Madison LGBT&XYZ community. I'm straight with several dear gay and lesbian friends. I felt compelled to write about the May/June cover story on the "Custard Kinda Guy." What a fabulous and inspiring read!! Michael Dix shared from the heart and bared his soul, which I think is not only brave, but gives hope to others, straight or not, enduring the hardships in life. Thank you

for allowing him to share his story at length. I guess because he's the same age as me, I can relate to some of the hardships and challenges he's overcome. Great pictures, too, which seemed to reflect his personality! Michael's quote near the end of the feature is fantastic!!

"We humans are like seeds, scattered on this planet. Some take root, sprout, grow, and flourish. Some remain dormant their entire lives, so stuck in fear that they can't even sprout. And still others sprout, only to realize that too much time was wasted in worry and indecision, and so they wither and die."

It summarizes how we choose to live our life. I have clipped it out and it shares a space in my work area so I can read it when I need a boost. Keep up the great work with your publication and kudos for a very lovely and true-to-life feature! He's a flourishing seed!

Laurie, Madison

HOW COULD I GO ABOUT writing a response to the article by Kristen Petroschius that appears in the May/June 2014 edition? In particular I take issue with the section where she wrote in the paragraph beginning "Thus many white LGBTQ people continue to talk about gay marriage as the 'new civil rights' and then she goes on to state.... "is not the same as marriage discrimination".

While not intending to diminish the African-American holocaust in the least I feel that the writer diminishes what our community has historically had to endure. As a people we were until very recently denied our rights if we represented ourselves as we are. We were killed in public in the Middle Ages through the 1800's, we were imprisoned for having sex until far too recently, we were forced to undergo conversion therapy, we were marched off into concentration camps. Even now the cities where we can be open are very few and by open I don't mean living together I mean holding hands and kissing your husband or wife on your own front lawn or walking through your sub-division holding hands.

We do not do one any favors by diminishing the violence that is our own history. No, our experience is not the same as that of the African-Americans but it is one of 1900 years and more of aggression directed towards us for simply being who we are. Marriage equality represents not that end but the prospect of the beginning of the end. Mildred Loving gets that with her strong support for marriage equality and all that it symbolizes. It is too bad that your writer chooses to diminish her own history, or worse does not fully understand it.

DAVID CAVALIERE-ROOSA, Oakland Park, FL

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE THANKS FOR TAKING the time to express your thoughts and feelings about my article. I appreciate you naming the African-American holocaust as a holocaust and naming the discrimination and violence inflicted on LGBTQ people throughout history. LGBTQ people continue to experience incredible violence both within the U.S. and abroad, with transgender women of color and LGBTQ people of color being most targeted by hate violence in particular (Source: Hate Violence Report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs).

The intent of my article was not to diminish the reality of oppression against LGBTQ people or the right of LGBTQ people to marry the people they love. Rather, my purpose was to detail some of the ways white LGBTQ communities and communities of color have been strategically pitted against each other and the ways many of us have internalized this and make choices that reinforce this divide-and-conquer strategy. I hope you and our readers can take this to heart and hold the complexity of these issues not as something that belittles the struggles of LGBTQ people, but rather as something that deepens our ability to advance full equity and inclusion for all LGBTQ people.

KRISTEN PETROSHIUS, Madison

DID YOU HEAR

New PFLAG chapter started in Sun Prairie

SUN PRAIRIE NOW HAS ITS OWN chapter of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Meetings are being held the third Monday of each month starting on September 15, from 6:30-8:00 p.m. at the Colonial Club, 301 Blankenheim Lane in Sun Prairie. Those interested in more information may contact andrea.gage@gmail.com.



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SUMMER OF LOVE

A long sought-after mural project comes to Madison and the wall of Plan B just in time for marriage equality to make headway in the state

Does love matter? Does public art matter? These are the questions at the heart of Michael Owen's "Baltimore Love Project," which Owen is bringing to a national audience this summer.

After five years and the creation of dozens of murals in his native Baltimore, Owen is taking the project national, including returning to his Midwest roots to create a mural in Madison. Sponsored by the Marquette Neighborhood Association, the Madison Arts Commission, Plan B, and other donors, in July of 2014, Owen "spread the love" to the exterior wall of Plan B adjacent the parking lot at 924 Williamson Street.

The significance of this project (discussed for the last couple of years) coming to fruition a mere weeks after a federal judge declared Wisconsin's marriage amendment unconstitutional was not lost on anyone involved. At the dedication ceremony, Owen talked about the importance of love and the ability of this single word to transform lives.

"I wanted to make a statement, and try to bring people together from different areas under one word," Owen told the *Capital Times*.

"I wanted to make a statement, and try to bring people together from different areas under one word," Owen told the *Capital Times*. The use of hands came about because they imply motion and action.

Owen initially set out to create 20 murals in one summer, but ran into logistical hurdles in several locations. Getting permission from property owners, neighborhood groups, and city government turned out to be a complicated process. With the help of sponsors and a business collabo-

rator, however, the project has grown steadily, including the new installation at Plan B.

The Madison mural is only the second permanent one to be created outside of Baltimore—the first was Detroit—and it's unique in how colorful it is. Other Love murals all had solid black letters, which, Owen explained, was an effort to maintain a connection throughout the city of Baltimore.

Karin Wolf, the city of Madison's art coordinator, first saw Owen's work on a studio tour three years ago. She started work then to bring the mural to Madison. Local coordinators of the project included Sharon Kilfoy of the Willy St. Art Center and Madison Mural Project, who created the "Willy Street in the '70s: Changing the World Through Art" mural on the side of the Social Justice Center.

Plan B owner Corey Gresen couldn't be more happy with the results of the effort: "Love will win," he said. "This mural...will stand beautifully, for years to come, as a testament to this ideology. We will look back at this mural and remember this time in Wisconsin's LGBT history to remember that LOVE is for all." ■

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RACHMANINOFF, *Concerto No. 1 for Piano*

SHOSTAKOVICH, *Symphony No. 6*

NOV. 7, 8, 9

Scandinavian Wonders

Sarah Chang, VIOLIN

GRIEG, *Lyric Suite*

SIBELIUS, *Concerto for Violin*

NIELSEN, *Symphony No. 4*

DEC. 5, 6, 7

Madison Symphony Christmas

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FEB. 13, 14, 15

Fliter Plays Chopin

Ingrid Fliter, PIANO

BRITTEN, *Variations on a*

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MARCH 6, 7, 8

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BRUCKNER, *Symphony No. 7*

MAY 8, 9, 10

Ode to Joy

Naha Greenholtz, VIOLIN

Madison Symphony Chorus

BERNSTEIN, *Serenade*

(after Plato's Symposium)

BEETHOVEN, *Symphony No. 9 (Choral)*



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TO BE THE FIRST

Division I Badger hockey player **ILANA FRIEDMAN** started a You Can Play chapter to help LGBT athletes at the UW and around Madison come out and participate in sport.



It was love at first skate. I remember hearing the crunch of the ice beneath my feet, the smell of a cold rink early on Saturday mornings. The beginning of my hockey career started long before the day my mother (finally) first allowed me, at age seven, to participate in one of the youth hockey programs. Pictures of me in our family albums at ages two, three, and four encapsulate the love and obsession with hockey I had from a young age: me standing, staring up at the game on TV, with a wide-eyed unbroken stare, and even my birthday cakes always depicted ice rinks and hockey games. I was hooked from an early age.

fact that I was a girl who wanted to participate was quickly overshadowed by my competitive nature and athletic ability—you couldn't really argue with me when I continually scored, right?

Hockey became a constant in my life. Although the season is during winter, I played year round to avoid getting "rusty." Summers were spent devoted to training. I also always had a second family, one that I saw nearly every day at the rink, and with whom I have become extremely close. Although the members may have changed slightly from year to year, the commitment, discipline, and hard work on the ice and during workouts have bound us together in an inextricable way that has led to lifelong friendships.

In high school, I played on an all-girls traveling AAA club team, and, most poignantly, those were the girls I came out to first. We were always together, as we played over 80 games a season. As a young, gay athlete, I was not alone in the locker room in regard to sexuality variance. This realization overwhelmingly helped me to focus on hockey while I was at the rink instead of worrying about hiding who I truly was to the group of girls I cared about most. I could breathe free.

This immense relief resulted in an opportunity to play hockey in college at the Division I level. But the dynamics of my hockey career changed during my freshman year of college. That year I both formally came out as a member of the LGBT community and really embraced this community that I hold so dear. As a member of the UW Division I Ice Hockey Team, I spend almost all of my free time with my teammates, including team study hall, meals, team workouts, traveling on the weekends, and practices during the week. When I came out, I was worried this would negatively impact the acceptance my teammates felt toward me in the locker room, but thankfully I grew closer to them. This journey of self-realization and self-acceptance took many years, but ultimately it has strengthened these bonds of friendship and family I feel with my teammates.

Lately, we have all heard the incredible and courageous stories of pro athletes like Michael Sam, Jason Collins, and Megan Rapinoe. I realized many within the LGBT community at University of Wisconsin might also be struggling with self-acceptance or acceptance on their respective teams. Therefore, in the spring of 2013, I started a chapter of the You Can Play social activism campaign dedicated to eliminating homophobia within all sports. You Can Play brought me back to the days where kids simply played sports for fun. It was not about championships, scholarships, or sexuality. It was pure. As the group's tagline says, if you can play, *you can play*. Regardless of level—professional, amateur, rec-league, or otherwise—I believe sports should be a place where work ethic, talent, and sportsmanship come together and are honored, and none of these attributes are dictated by one's sexuality. Thankfully, this

Ilana helped organize a "You Can Play" video for UW Athletics (above).



You Can Play brought me back to the days where kids simply played sports for fun. It was not about championships, scholarships, or sexuality. It was pure. As the group's tagline says, if you can play, *you can play*.

I grew up in Middleton, Wisconsin, on a cul-de-sac surrounded by kids my age. We all enjoyed playing outside together on our quiet street, but when it came to sports I was the only girl who consistently participated. Whether it was running football routes in our backyards, shooting hoops, or endless hours of roller hockey on the street, sports and physical activity defined my youth. Grass-stained clothing and scabbed knees were as natural as my ABCs. One was accepted and able to play with the Willow Trail group simply if their athletic ability was up to par. The



sentiment is heavily echoed within Wisconsin Athletics.

Sports, specifically hockey, have benefited me in so many far-reaching ways. Most important, though, the embarrassment or shame I could have felt by being different from my teammates because of my sexuality was overpowered by my confidence associated with my athletic prowess on the ice. I realized the reason teams are successful is not because every member fits a cookie-cutter mold. Each teammate brings priceless and different attributes to the table, all of which form championship-caliber teams. As any elite athlete knows, personality variance on a team is extremely important, and whether one teammate is black, white, gay, straight, short, or tall, it doesn't matter so long as they buy into that team's system to win games.

I believe we are at a major turning point for LGBT inclusion in sports. We have so many phenomenal and award-winning athletes coming out both as allies and as members of the LGBT community. This is so important for kids, much like a young Ilana, because it proves to them that athletic ability is what matters, not one's sexuality. Sports locker rooms once were extremely hostile and homophobic environments. But it is important for all of us, regardless of competition level, to foster more inclusive, accepting environments today to make sure all kids, irrespective of sexuality and/or gender identity, are able to realize their full athletic potential. ■

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A DANCE FLOOR OF OUR OWN

DJ BOYFRRRIEND and the "Loose Cannon" queer dance party have been creating a community built on respect and busting a move

Who are you and what do you do?

I am DJ Boyfrrriend, and each month I host and DJ the fantastic dance party called Loose Cannon. Loose Cannon is an intentional safe(r) and separate space dance party for queers and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We have held it at a couple of locations but most often at the Dragonfly Lounge (under Bellini Italian Restaurant).

I enjoy DJing events throughout the Midwest, especially fundraisers for radical grassroots organizations committed to social change. But Loose Cannon has a special place in my heart as it really embodies something I had wanted to create for a long time. It also gives me a chance to mix and scratch with music I feel really passionately about.

I taught myself some DJing basics with lots of help and encouragement from DJ Saeng, Amy Barber, and the staff at MC Audio.

How long has Loose Cannon been running? What prompted you to start it?

Two years ago, I started looking into venues for a regular queer dance party that specifically highlighted queer, female, and local artists in Hip Hop, R&B, Pop, Riot Grrrl, Punk, and Electronic music. A club manager told me he wouldn't allow any Hip Hop or R&B to be played because that music draws an "unsavory ghetto crowd," and that he didn't want "that type" of person in his club. I told him this type of policy had racist implications, contributed to a culture of discrimination, and that I wasn't interested in working with him. He called me foolish and said he had half a mind to warn other bars about what a "loose cannon" I was.

Around this same time I was put in touch with Caro, who had similar ideas about organizing a new queer dance party in Madison. Together with other friends, we determined that in addition to conscious music choices, we wanted to make a space with full gender inclusivity and body positivity reflected in promotional materials, the handling of photo IDs, and bathroom designations. We wanted it to be affordable, wheel-

We didn't want a queer "friendly" space; we wanted a queer space—and one that understood "queer" could be more than a sexual identity, but also a radical political identity.

chair accessible, have themes that didn't encourage cultural appropriation, and to have an explicit policy against predatory behavior. Most importantly, we wanted a dance party that truly prioritized a space for just queers and ALL members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We didn't want a queer "friendly" space; we wanted a queer space—and one that understood "queer" could be more than a sexual identity, but also a radical political identity that encourages critical thinking and active resistance to all of society's fucked up systems of oppression.

What kind of reactions/input have you gotten from attendees? Why is it important to have a queer-specific dance party like this in Madison?

I am constantly overwhelmed, in the best way imaginable, by the amount of positive feedback that I've gotten about Loose Cannon. I think people appreciate having a place to dance where their identity is more thoroughly respected and the music is different from what you might hear at an established club. Many queer people appreciate a space that is not just free of homophobic people, but also free of people who are both straight and cisgender who may come as "allies" but (whether intentionally or not) end up acting as "tourists."

What are some of your favorite memories from the theme parties?

Lisa Frank, the Better Off Alone Valentine's Day party, and the All Denim Everything: Chambray Soirée were all really good themes. There have been some really extravagant, bizarre, and creative costumes, drag, and dance performances that have blown me away. I once started crying during a large and unexpected "Let's Have a Kiki" flashmob because it was so beautiful.

What are your hopes for other queer-specific nightlife events in the future?

The more merrier. But I also hope queer people use their energy and resources to create nightlife options that challenge norms and tackle current problems in our community. Nightlife should be for all of us, not just for profit. Communities should challenge each other to resist oppression in all its forms. Smashing homophobia won't get us anywhere if we are tolerant of transphobia, patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, classism, a culture of violence showcased by militarism and the prison industrial complex, etc. It is possible to both love to party and to understand that we have a lot of difficult work to do. ■

DID YOU HEAR

Another Wisconsin school district passes inclusive non-discrimination policy

MIDDLETON-CROSS PLAINS AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT is now the 10th Wisconsin school district to add specific discrimination protections for transgender and gender nonconforming youth. Their board approved the change in policy on Monday, July 14. MCPASD students, staff, and board members took on the bulk of this effort. Congrats to them!





body. It shows in a real, tangible way that you care.” Maggie values making something personal for someone else by hand. “It is more flawed, but more human.”

Recently she has been training as an apprentice tattooist at Colt’s Timeless Tattoos, and she hopes to begin tattooing by the end of 2014 or early 2015. “This is the only ‘professional artist’ career that has really made sense to me. Public perception of tattooing as a socially acceptable art form has been changing over the last decade, and I am so excited to help fuel that change. How much more meaningful can my art be to someone if they are letting me mark their bodies with it forever? Tattooing completely fulfills the ‘handmade, personalized’ manifesto by which I try to live. It is a gift and experience that I can share with a close friend or complete stranger, and that will leave us changed. It has always been my aim to improve the lives of the humans I meet, and it cannot be overstated how humbling and inspiring it is that people are excited to let me literally, physically change them in a way that makes my art a part of their daily life.”

“Being Authentic” is part of her philosophy, and one she feels is generational. “Our generation believes authenticity and sincerity make the world a better place.” Between her art and her activism, Maggie Gosselar is definitely living up to that goal. ■

DRAWN TO ART

Up and coming visual artist **MAGGIE GOSELLAR** finds inspiration in the personal connections forged by the act of creation



maggie Gosselar is an activist, a roller derby player, a visual artist, and an aspiring tattooist.

When she’s not skating, she is drawing. Gosselar draws “all the time” and shares her art as widely as possible. In a world in which creating art is increasingly explained by terms like “economic impact,” “job creation,” and “quality of life,” Maggie’s motivation stands out as a bit of an anomaly. In fact, one might say she cares more about making friends than money, about building community than building a career.

She creates her illustrative renderings for friends, community, and the joy of it. Gosselar studied Studio Art and Museum Studies at Beloit College but does not seek the label of fine artist, instead making art because of how it makes her feel.

Public perception of tattooing as a socially acceptable art form has been changing over the last decade, and I am so excited to help fuel that change.

“There is pressure to have a big goal,” she answered in response to a question about her long-term objectives and dreams. She went on to explain that selling, exhibiting—all the trappings necessary for the business of art—are not her thing. She makes art because it “deeply interests” her. She is more compelled by the “ripple effect,” the way her work makes people happy and the way it impacts their lives.

She likens her art to that of a good home-cooked meal. It is an honest way to express love for someone and, honestly, for life itself. “It’s like taking the time to buy the ingredients, prepare them, and then share a meal in an intimate setting. I take a lot of time and share the affection with some-



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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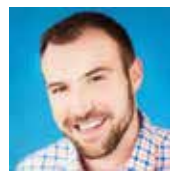
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member profile



NAME:
Blake Griffin
TITLE:
Founder
EMPLOYER:
Integrated Tax Systems

Blake is the founder of Integrated Tax Systems, a cloud based- 100% paperless accounting firm that's focus is to serve the needs of LGBT-owned small businesses & individuals with services ranging from Accounting and taxation to payroll, financial analytics, process automation and just about everything in between. Prior to earning his MBA and finding his new niche, Blake was a founding partner with a consulting firm that provided struggling businesses with the tools and training necessary to drive sales, increase profits, and grow their market share. During the Tax filing season, Blake provides pro bono services to Low income and disadvantaged members of the LGBT community to help them get their financial lives back on track.

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5:00pm

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OPENMADISON.ORG



MAD PROPS

MEL MARCUM found acceptance and a crafty calling in the world of queer theater (and beyond)

I never considered myself a theater geek, but, now in my thirties, I've found a calling. I always wanted to be creative and knew that I just had to find the right medium to showcase what I could do. Then I found a place in theater. It all started on a whim and a bit of an "Oh-my-gawd-I'm-turning-30" crisis. My interest in theater had been sparked a couple of years before after seeing a friend in a play called "Vamp." Afterward I thought that acting could be fun, but then fear started picking at my brain. I kept talking myself out of auditioning: Who was going to cast a transman? I was too short and feminine looking (in the face and chest) to be cast in any of the male roles, and my voice was too deep to play any of the female roles. Heck, if people found out I was trans*, they probably wouldn't want to touch me on stage, so what was the point? I eventually put the idea aside and left it alone for a while.

Flash forward, back to the OMG30 crisis; thankfully, by this point I'd met a wonderful woman who liked me for who I was, and I had developed more confidence as my transition progressed and I was seen as male by the rest of society. I really had no excuses not to audition. The next step was to actually go for it, but it was close to the end of the season for many production companies, and I didn't know where to look until my friend Kristin told me about Queer Shorts, StageQ's annual production of short plays.

Going into the audition I was nervous as hell. First of all, I went to the wrong place. Secondly, by the time I got there I was late. And lastly, there were people there with headshots and actual resumes; that freaked me out! It was a great relief when the producer, Katy Conley, warmly welcomed me to join and fill out some very simple paperwork. I knew from that point on Katy was going to be a great person to work with, and I was right!

I auditioned, went home, and then waited with anxiety to see whether I would be cast or not. I didn't have to wait too long because the next day I got a phone call from Katy, who said she just knew she had to have me and asked if I would like to be in the play. Of course I said yes! At that moment I felt accepted, validated, and had a sense of pride for just putting myself out there. Now it was time for rehearsals to start and to take on the challenge of remembering lines.

My part was fairly small, and that gave me a lot of time to come up with ideas as the director thought of props she would like to have or use. I started offering up suggestions or volunteering to make a certain item, and next thing I knew I was making or finding a number of props

for the show I was in as well as for some of the other Queer Shorts. This was it! This was the passion, the fire, my thing I was good at, and I loved every minute of it. Clearly my excitement was quite obvious because one night backstage Katy came up to me and asked if I would like to be the Props Master for Queer Shorts next

I have also been approached by other companies and theater groups like Proud Theater and The Madison Opera to be Props Master for their shows.

year. Heck yeah I would! That moment was the launchpad to my props career.

Since then I've been Props Master for a number of StageQ shows, and this season is the first time I have been PM for every show put on by the company; they have even asked me to be the resident Props Master. I am truly honored. I have also been approached by other companies and theater groups like Proud Theater and The Madison Opera to be Props Master for their shows.

I can't express how grateful I am for the opportunities and experiences I've had and for the family I have gained through the theater who couldn't care less that I'm trans* and really only care about the quality of work I produce.

Finally, I have to thank Kristin Forde and Katy Conley for spreading the theater bug and everyone that I have worked with in theater for being there every step of the way; there are too many to list, you know who you are! Thank you for letting me shine outside of the spotlight and allowing me to be who I am.

To see some of props I have made, as well as some of the leather work I've done, visit facebook.com/odditiesandalterations. ■

DID YOU HEAR



OutReach names of 2014 awards recipients

OutReach recently announced the names of award recipients for its upcoming 22nd annual awards banquet, to be held Friday, September 12 at the Monona Terrace.

LGBTQ ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD: **Kristen Petroschius (GSAFE)**

HARRY STRAETZ MEMORIAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: **Jean Wennlund**

OUTREACH ALLY OF THE YEAR: **Scott McDonell (Dane County Clerk)**

OUTREACH ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR: **ACLU of Wisconsin**

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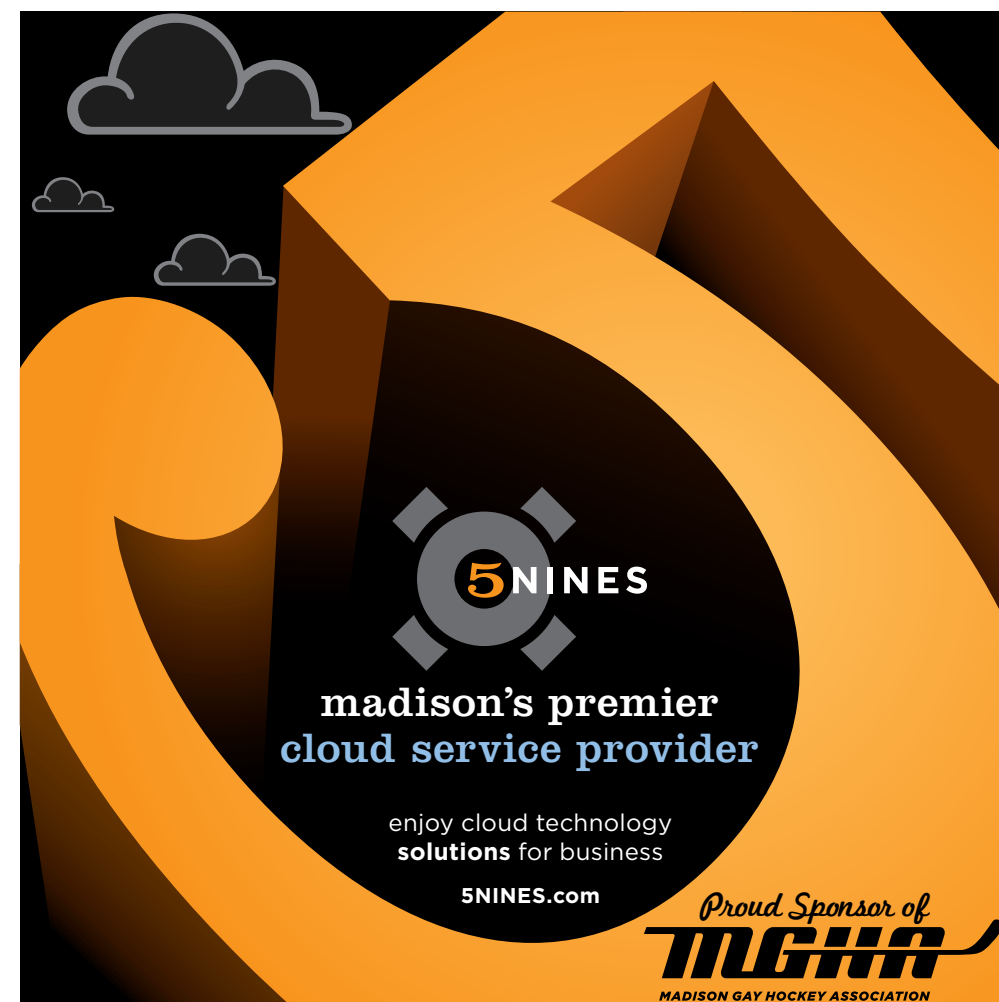
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Cultural, Social, Service, and Nightlife listings



StageQ's Standards of Care
September 5-20,
Bartell Theater, 113 E. Mifflin St.
Standards of Care is a harsh, humorous, and honest exploration of some of the realities that face the trans community. Written by Tobias Davis and directed by Callen Harty. stageq.com



OutReach Annual Awards Banquet
September 12, Monona Terrace
Madison's LGBT community center hosts its 22nd Annual Awards Banquet, featuring guest speaker U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, with former Sen. David Clarenbach as emcee. Enjoy a reception, cash bar, and full dinner, and celebrate our community and the individuals and organizations being recognized with awards. lgbtoutreach.org



GSAFE's Walk/Run/Eat for Safe Schools
October 12
Goodman Community Center
This event is fun for the whole family! The event features a 5k walk, 5k run, 10k run, and kids run. New this year is a kids run, 5k stroller run, costumed superheroes, face painting, and balloons for the kids! All registered kids will receive their own capes. gsafe.org

ORGANIZATIONS

A representative sampling

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

Alianza Latina
facebook.com/alianzaLatinamadison

Dairyland Cowboys & Cowgirls
dcandc.org

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

Gay/Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE)
122 E. Olin Ave., Madison (608) 661-4141
gsafe.org

Gay Softball League
badgerlandsoftball.com

Gay Volleyball League
madisongayvolleyball.com

Hermanos Latinos
sneal@aidsnetwork.org

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

Proud Theater (LGBTQ Youth)
proudtheater.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

August 10 | OutReach Pride Parade & Rally



DID YOU HEAR



Community Shares to award Outreach's Steve Starkey with leadership award

ON OCTOBER 6, COMMUNITY SHARES OF WISCONSIN will host its 25th Annual Awards Event, a gathering to recognize "this year's nonprofit heroes and the critical change they create every day." One of the major award winners is **Steve Starkey**, who is receiving the Liesel Blockstein Community Leadership Award. In his more than 30 years working with community nonprofits, Steve co-founded the first state-wide gay and lesbian newspaper, OUTI, in 1982; he co-founded the Social Justice Center in 2000; and today he heads the OutReach LGBT Community Center.

The awards will be held from 5-7:00 p.m. at Union South at UW - Madison. Other award recipients will be Larry Dupuis, Legal Director of the ACLU of Wisconsin, and Janice Griffin of the Rape Crisis Center.

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Out In The Park, September 13, Six Flags Great America Out In The Park is an annual private LGBT night, featuring unlimited rides on all of the popular amusement park's rides, plus live music and features the performer Lady Bunny. The event will benefit AIDS Resource Center Wisconsin (ARCW). gaysixflagschicago.com



PFLAG Sun Prairie meeting, September 15, Colonial Club, Sun Prairie Sun Prairie now has its own chapter of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Meetings are being held the third Monday of each month starting on September 15 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. The group is hoping to include an "LGBTQ 101" presentation from OutReach at the kick-off meeting, to be held at the Colonial Club, 301 Blankenheim Lane in Sun Prairie. Those interested in more information may contact news director Andrea Gage at andrea.gage@gmail.com.

Madison Symphony Orchestra's "Orchestral Splendor" Showcases, September 19-21, Overture Center for the Arts In celebration of 10 years in Overture Hall, Conductor John DeMain and the Madison Symphony Orchestra (MSO) will open the 2014-2015 season with a program highlighting the talented members of the orchestra as well as the colossal Overture Concert Organ. The concerts are Sept. 19 at 7:30 p.m., Sept. 20 at 8 p.m., and Sept. 21 at 2:30 p.m., all in Overture Hall. madisonsymphony.org

Q-Ball, October 2, The Inferno A brand new queer night at Madison's stalwartly alternative club, hosted by Lili Luxe and featuring the eclectic turntable mastery of DJ Boyfrriiend. Everyone is encouraged and welcome to attend, but "absolutely no bullying or predatory behavior of any kind will be tolerated. Have fun and be respectful of others!" clubinferno.com

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August 10 | OutReach Pride Parade & Rally



DID YOU HEAR



Wisconsin's own Trixie Mattel rumored to star in next season of RuPaul's Drag Race

THE EXTREMELY STRICT MEDIA BLACKOUT that Drag Race contestants are made to adhere to until each new season's cast is officially announced is notoriously well-enforced, but keen observers tend to notice when previously social media-mad queens drop off the face of the Earth without explanation. Such is the case with Trixie Mattel, a cast member at Plan B in Madison. As reported by the blog Dragaholic, Trixie disappeared from both her performer and personal Facebook pages back in July, right around when the show likely began filming. The official announcement of the cast won't be made until late this year.



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She COMES HOME

Singer **Tina Gassen**, of hip hop duo **God-Des & She**, talks about the highs and lows of the music business, family, heartbreak, and the journey that eventually led her home to Madison

Idyllic upbringing

I was born on an Air Force base in Washington State and returned to Madison when I was a baby. I think I was around five when I started telling everyone I was going to be a singer. You would only have to know me for seven minutes before that would fly out of my mouth. Growing up on the East side of Madison in the seventies was magical. Our family was the true definition of middle class before “The Gipper” fucked my life up with Reaganomics. My dad worked at Sub Zero and

my mom managed a grocery store. My mom worked nights so I spent a lot of time with my pops. He was the cool dad on the block. All the kids would always play outside in front of my house because, invariably, my dad would be listening to really loud rock and roll. I got my love for music from my dad, for sure.

In high school I joined a youth group called Young Life. Although it was a Christian organization, there wasn’t much negative pressure to commit to the religious philosophy. We had a “club” every Monday night where we would sing songs (contemporary and Christian), play games, and at the end one of the “leaders” would get up and tell a story about their life and relate it directly to the Bible. It amazed me to see adults be vulnerable and honest. In any event, it kept me out of trouble all during high school. I went on to become a “leader” myself. That’s where I met Brian.

Brian was lead guitar player in the Madison band Marques Bovre and the Evil Twins. They had a huge following in Madison in the nineties. Basically, Marques Bovre was my Bob Dylan. He was such an amazing storyteller and writer that it made me almost angry. Brian always encouraged me in my singing and invited me to sing on some MBET records. This was my first taste of being a “real” musician, and it was like coming home. Marques passed last year due to cancer. I was lucky enough to put some vocals down on the last record he put out, which meant a lot to me.



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Art is Love



MADISON MURAL PROGRAM / WILLIAMSON ST ART CENTER
SHARON KILFOY

Have you seen the Baltimore LOVE mural on the side of Plan B on Willy St? Michael Owen came through town this summer and stayed at the Willy Street Art Center while he painted a fabulous rendition of the mural he has painted in 20 different locations evenly dispersed throughout his hometown of Baltimore. The mural, which could not be more timely, was sponsored by the Marquette Neighborhood Association Art Initiatives, a model for others of how a neighborhood can band together to bring public art to its streets. The paint on the Baltimore LOVE mural was not even dry before a wedding party stopped by for a photo shoot!

Celebrating the Community Arts Center



MADISON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
JOHN DEMAIN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

The Madison Symphony Orchestra’s 89th season opens Sept. 19 and is a very special celebration: the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Overture Center for the Arts, and for us, the opening of our glorious Overture Hall. This incredible gift to our community deserves celebration by raising Overture Hall’s roof to its rafters. I’ve chosen a program designed to explore the sonic power, as well as subtlety, of Overture Hall. Our program includes the magnificent tone poem of Richard Strauss’ Also Sprach Zarathustra, Frank Martin’s delightful Concerto for Seven Wind instruments, and the colossal Saint-Saëns’ Symphony No. 3, his “organ symphony.”

An end, a beginning

I remember one day in high school Brian asked me to go get lunch with him. I sat across from him eating pizza when he told me he was gay. I was like, “Phew, I thought I was in trouble or something.” He got so serious. I was like, “Yeah? OK.” What I didn’t know is that he was about to come out to everyone and everything would change. After Brian came out, he was fired from the church. He had to stop working for Young Life because the church donated the time to YL, but they paid his salary. It broke my heart to see someone who clearly loved God and loved us be cast out. He was also the guitar player for our Monday night

I learned that I am always going to be afraid. If you wait for fear to leave, you will be waiting forever. It wasn’t until I shook fear’s hand that his smile began to fade.

clubs, so the music would be gone too. This was the nineties, remember, and it wasn’t at all weird for that kind of thing to happen. Young Life was really important to me, so I decided I would learn how to play guitar so the music wouldn’t be gone. I learned from the back of a Young Life song book. Song by song, chord by chord—and boy did I suck. Then as soon as I learned three chords I started writing my own songs—and boy did they suck.

So that’s how I became a songwriter. Marques Bovre’s amazing lyrics that pissed me off and my friend Brian coming out as gay. After I wrote a bunch of songs, I decided I needed to put a band together, which is how I started Doll. We went on to play many shows in Madison. It was at one of those shows that I met God-Des.



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WHAT'S TRENDING [A & E]

Pushing the opera envelope



MADISON OPERA
KATHRYN SMITH, GENERAL DIRECTOR

Madison Opera's April 2014 production of *Dead Man Walking* was an incredible turning point in our history. From the two months of panels, films, previews, and discussions leading it up to it, to the performances themselves, our community embraced this modern masterpiece completely. The audience was full of both first-time opera-goers and opera omnivores, all engrossed by the emotional depth of this wonderful piece. Such success tells us that there is an appetite here for opera performances that push the envelope a bit, particularly those with a strong emotional connection to the audience. While works by Puccini and Mozart are always the core of the opera repertoire, their modern counterparts have a place in the ecosystem, and I look forward to continuing to explore these works with our audiences.

Hidden gems of gay lit



UW PRESS
RAPHAEL KADUSHIN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR & JOURNALIST

It hasn't been a great year for gay lit, but one of my favorite recent books was Edmund White's *Inside a Pearl: My Years in Paris*. This is vintage White: a very personal, detailed, sensual memoir of his time in Paris that, through some kind of alchemy, turns into something elegiac and universal. Among the LGBT titles we published at the UW Press recently I especially liked Trebor Healey's *A Horse Named Sorrow*, a true romance that's almost incidentally gay.

Both our bands were playing a benefit for the National Organization of Women (NOW). Her male singer Wanda was leaving to go to grad school for opera in Boston. She approached me about doing a few songs with her. I never thought I would ever, EVER be in a rap group. But if you've met God-Des, you would know that she is the pushiest lesbian around. So as a lark and a "side project" I started writing hooks for her—and boy did they suck. So much so that the boys who were making beats for us told me that I shouldn't do hip hop. That's all I needed to want to get real good at writing hooks. Said boys have since apologized. Haters fuel me; what can I say? They certainly will never break me, so why not use them to my advantage?

Pretty much right away, God-Des & She started to get press and gigs. I remember the first time I got flown out to do a show.

I called my Dad and was all, "Dad, someone bought me a plane ticket to San Francisco to play a show!"

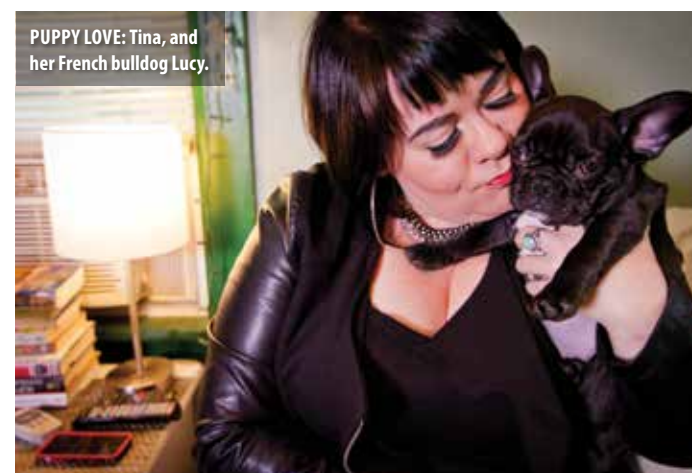
And he literally said, "No they didn't."

But they did. We got picked up at the airport city bus-style and slept on an air mattress, but I could not have been more excited. We played a music festival called "Peace Out West." It was the first time we had been around so many other queer rappers. We all thought we were the only ones! How amazing it was to find out we weren't. I'm still friends with a lot of those people to this day.

Loss and the big city

I lost my mom in 2001. It was sudden and shocking. I didn't really know how to deal with it. I couldn't even write music anymore. I wasn't too sad to write; it was that I was just totally numb. I knew I needed to take a big risk and make a huge change.

I moved to New York City. Really, I never would have, but again with God-Des being the pushiest lezzie ever, I went to NYC with only \$1,500



PUPPY LOVE: Tina, and her French bulldog Lucy.

bucks like an idiot. That quickly ran out, and I was having a hard time finding a job because I was super depressed about my mom's death and super freaked out and overwhelmed by New York. I was living with my best friend and quickly overstaying my welcome. So I decided to go back to Madison for the summer, earn some money, and then go back knowing what I had gotten myself into.

New York City was the best and worst thing that ever happened to me. It taught me to hustle. I quickly lost the enormous amount of entitlement I didn't even know I had. I got stronger. The saying "if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere" is real—SO real. I learned many lessons. So many stereotypes were broken. I found out what I was made of. I'm so grateful to God-Des for being pushy. Sometimes that's all you need. I learned that I am always going to be afraid. If you wait for fear to leave, you will be waiting forever. It wasn't until I shook fear's hand that his smile began to fade.

I worked a variety of jobs in NYC, mostly waiting tables. My last job before we got on *The L Word* was slicing meat at an Italian deli in Queens called Rosario's. I bullshitted my way into that job because it was two blocks from my house, and I was tired of taking the train to work. It was one of the best days of my life when I went in to tell him I was quitting to become a rockstar. I bought his fresh mozzarella that day and drank a bottle of champagne.

Living the dream

The *L Word* was super surreal. They flew us first class. It was most definitely the fanciest thing I had ever done. We stayed at the Whistler resort in Vancouver, Canada. It was all so dreamy. The day after the episode aired we had over 200 requests for shows in our inbox. It was like a dream come true. We were flying all over the country, finally getting paid, and loving every minute of it. We rode that wave for two years.

An appearance on a hit TV show can do a lot for you, but that kind of "fame" doesn't last. So we started to build God-Des & She like a business, growing our fan base by touring almost nonstop for eight years. We stayed after every show, every time, to take pictures and sign merch. We have given thousands of hugs, signed hundreds of boobs, and touched a million hearts. We love our fans, and they know it. They are WHY we get to live our dream and no record company can take that away because WE did that. It's the connection we made and continue to make at every show. It was always my goal to inspire. I get emails from fans all the time that have me in tears and let me know that I'm on the right track.

I lived in NYC for about six years. I was making money as a musician for the first time but just really getting by because New York was so expensive. It wasn't just the expense that was hard though; it was also quite lonely. You create community at your job. I was on the road most of

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WHAT'S TRENDING [A & E]

Toward A More Inclusive Community



FORWARD THEATER COMPANY
JENNIFER UPHOFF GRAY, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

I have been really thrilled by the increasing interest among Wisconsin theaters in diversity, both onstage and behind the scenes. It was exciting to participate in the first-ever Diversity General Auditions in Milwaukee this summer, where representatives from 15 companies attended to see auditions from 60+ local actors of color. Here at FTC, we are looking forward to the start this fall of a ground-breaking partnership between our company and the First Wave program (spoken word, urban arts, and hip-hop) at the UW – Madison. Our artists will be working with their students throughout the academic year, as well as providing technical internships on FTC's shows. It's wonderful to see the artistic work in our state better reflecting our changing community.

Going off the beaten path



STAGEQ
AUDREY WAX, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

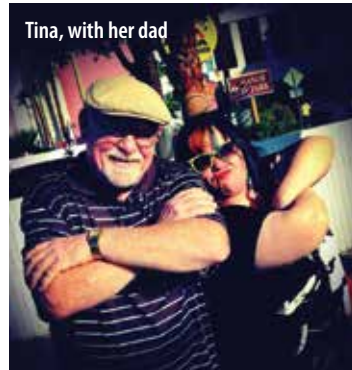
There is a new landscape in which unique, experimental, or "niche" shows are taking center stage and selling out! Audiences today are far less conservative compared to those 10 to 30 years ago. All of a sudden "niche" shows are sweeping the nation and a cult following has been born. We've seen this phenomenon before, decades earlier to be exact, with Hair and RENT—but never have we had such a high demand. Writers can't seem to create fast enough for our Next to Normal "generation." So shine up your kinky boots and head to a niche theatre near you!

Adapting to movie adaptations



BRUNO'S BEST BETS, STAGEQ
MICHAEL BRUNO

How extreme is the craze for adapting movies into musicals? *Far From Heaven*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Aladdin*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, and *Rocky* all have had recent appearances on Broadway. And the fad is international: *American Psycho*, *The Bodyguard*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *From Here to Eternity* are all running in London. *Coal Miner's Daughter* is in the works, as is *Dirty Dancing* (now on U.S. tour and playing in London), *Ever After*, *Honeymoon in Vegas*, and even *King Kong*, a rock spectacular that has already conquered Australia and stars a 20-foot-tall gorilla puppet. The trending has hit Madison, too, and in December StageQ will produce *Christmas with the Crawfords*, based on the live holiday radio broadcast from Joan Crawford's home and made popular by the film "Mommie Dearest."



Tina, with her dad



the time. When I was home I was so tired, I didn't want to go out to bars or clubs. That's where I worked when I was touring and the last place I wanted to be when I wasn't. I wanted to slow down a bit. Maybe even be able to save some money. So we decided to move to Austin, Texas.

Austin is like New York and Madison had a baby and named her Austin. I lived there for four years, and the first year it was over 100 degrees for something like 45 days straight. I could not believe it. How do people live like that? I'm sure they think the same of our winters. It was hard for this Nordic girl. Austin, however, is a great town with an amazing music scene. Live music capital of the world. We were officially accepted to SXSW every year. We had the opportunity to play with some greats like Rakim, Public Enemy, Questlove, and more. Plus, it was just a really chill place to live. It was nice to have a little security.

Coming home

Last June God-Des and I were coming to Madison to write our sixth record. I was excited to hang out with my dad. He was doing so great. He had lost a bunch of weight with his friends at work. He was happy for the first time in a while. I was so excited to hang out with "happy dad." It took him a long, long time to get over my mom's death, but I felt like he finally was okay again.

I put my stuff in storage and was loading up my car in Texas when my dad called to tell me he had cancer. I cried the whole drive home, which took three days because we had to go play a show in Knoxville, Tennessee, before heading to Wisconsin. I got to Madison and just spent every day I wasn't on tour with him. We went on three trips: Vegas (on his birthday), New Orleans, and Chicago. We cooked together and laughed a lot. He told me stories about my family I had never heard before, and a lot of things became clear. It was such a special time, and I'm so very grateful I have the kind of job that allowed me to be with him. He passed away on November 19, 2013. I miss him so much every single day.

This leads me to where I'm at now. It was a long, hard, COLD winter, right? I did a lot of grieving. I'm finally starting to write and process it all. I'm working on a solo record now. The first song I wrote after my dad's passing is a narrative in his voice called "Working the Line," and I'm very proud of it. I think he would be too. I hope to have my record done by the fall, and I will do some solo touring to support its release. I'm excited to show you all my heart. The other thing I'm doing in Madison in partnership with Sarah Hagedon is creating a queer women's night called "She Said Party" at Plan B ([facebook.com/shesaidparty](https://www.facebook.com/shesaidparty)). We have hot lady bartenders, amateur go-go dancing contests, lube wrestling, and more. No better way to spend a Friday night.

Madison is my home town, and I love it. I'm happy to be here healing up my broken heart. I've changed so much in the ten years I was gone. I really like who I turned into. I really like being here as I am now, remembering how far I've come. I like being reminded of the five-year-old who knew she was going to be a singer. There truly is no place like home. ■



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feature



A Beautiful CANVAS

Artist **Nicole Bresnik** found herself and her purpose in pushing paintbrushes and boundaries

Always painting

I was born in 1965, so the tagline on my business card, “Nicole Bresnick: Fine Art since 1965,” is designed to amuse, but it also tells my story.

Lon Michels, who painted since childhood and was Louise Nevelson’s studio assistant in the eighties, literally put a paintbrush in my hand, a canvas and a mirror in front of my face, and guided me through painting a self-portrait. It was only the second painting I had done in my life. “More orange!” he said. “That’s it, Nicole. It’s popping now!”

Though I hadn’t had much studio art training, art-making and creativity had been a through line in my life. That I had been an artist from birth came to me through Louise Nevelson herself, when I visited her work at the Chazen Museum of Art and waited for her to arrive. Though she had died over two decades before, Lon told me she would be there. Soon I felt a presence, and then I heard a voice. She said to me, “You’re always painting.”

I was raised male, and I began an awkward, homeless, drug-addled transition to female in 2000, when I was 35. And pretending I wasn’t an artist was almost as harmful as pretending I wasn’t female.

Even in moments of frustration at the canvas, when I take a break to let new inspiration in, even when I’m not holding a brush to canvas at all, I’m inside the painting process. In fact, I have always been creating; that is who I am. But my arrival at painting, signing, showing, and selling art as a central expression of that creativity has a story behind it.

An altered reality

I was in my early teens, it was the late seventies and early eighties, and Madison was home to a lot of cutting-edge art. The Elvehjem Museum of Art, the Madison Art Center and their film and performance art series, MFA and faculty shows on campus—even my mom had the Judy Chicago book on her shelf. Film societies showed Warhol’s “Heat,” the Majestic Theater showed “3 Women,” and the Little Professor Book Center sold underground comix to minors. I told comix publisher Denis Kitchen about the last bit when I met him here in Madison as an adult,

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WHAT'S TRENDING [A & E]

Collaborate and Listen



BARTELL THEATER
STEVE NOLL, BOARD PRESIDENT

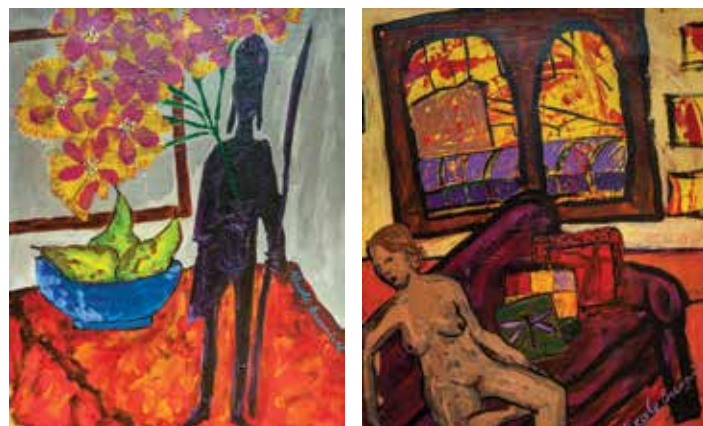
Collaboration. The Bartell is actually a theater co-op, five participating theater companies (PTCs) share the space with occasional outside renters. To our knowledge, this is the only theater like this in the United States. In past years, each PTC was very separate with their own props, costumes, and often actors only with one company. With the recession and less money for people to spend on seeing shows, the companies were, at first, forced to share and work together. We found that this is actually a better way for everyone, resulting in more creativity, less cost, and better productions for the audience. We've seen a greater crossover from the audiences too, where people who typically only go to see Strollers Theatre are now trying out a show from StageQ.

Looking for authenticity



MAJESTIC THEATER
SCOTT LESLIE, MANAGER

I've seen multiple shows this year where it seemed like the entire crowd was talking about how amazing the band was. Two of these were our events, and I was watching in total disbelief along with the audience. I think what we are seeing in music is the same as the trends in food and drink. People want something authentic. They care about where the music is coming from. They don't want manufactured, processed music; they want music that feels one-of-a-kind. I think it is apparent regardless of genre, whether an artist is breaking new ground and proud of it, versus who is putting out safe, manufactured songs.



and he said, "We always wondered about the kids who got their hands on this stuff, what effect that would have on them." Indeed. My mind was opened up, I dropped acid, and I generally got the idea that turning on, tuning in, and dropping out was a respectable choice.

I did pursue an independent major in postmodern art criticism from Oberlin College, and by the time I had my BA, I was entirely sick of institutional learning and jargon and returned to the "turn on, tune in, and drop out" theory. By age 28, I had a distrust of reality, a skeptical, deconstructive postmodernist perspective, and a bipolar diagnosis. In my detachment, I saw life as one big performance art project. Not something to build and enjoy, but part canvas to paint, and part ice cream sundae to devour. I often hit the road, bound for nowhere; I once took a road trip through Missouri, the South, and up to the East Coast, and when people asked me what I was doing, I told them I was "making a shape."

I did a lot of visual art but only for my own enjoyment, rarely showing it. I lived wildly and freely and selfishly and was told by dear friends and partners that I was really difficult to hang out with for any length of time. I was in denial and ignorance of my own trans* identity as well. I was raised male, and I began an awkward, homeless, drug-addled transition to female in 2000, when I was 35. And pretending I wasn't an artist was almost as harmful as pretending I wasn't female, or pretending I was straight or bi, when I knew had always loved women.

Sadly, most of my creative output of the next eight years is no longer in my possession because as dark as it is, what I do have I really love. My mode of production was to line up a pad of drawing paper, a set of markers, and some mood-altering substances, fill up the pad with imaginative, uninhibited, colorful, and iconoclastic images and text, and then try to find a meal and a place to sleep. I thought I had to be in an altered state of consciousness, on the margins of society, to produce art and to be my true self. I did art for its own sake, which is a beautiful thing, but I also hadn't yet learned to share it.

Dropping back in

I eventually found my way to recovery, got clean, and got support to begin taking responsibility for my life and well-being, and things finally started to turn around for me. Another year later, more grounded and happy than I had ever been, I met Lon Michels and Todd Olson, a vivacious and artistic couple. Lon became my mentor, and I became his studio assistant. Todd and I became painting partners, and every day Lon would give us an art lesson. I was part of an art tribe.

Within a couple of years, I had the honor of showing my work with Todd Olson and Professors Emeritae Gene and Evelyn Kain, who ran the Ripon College Studio Art and Art History departments, respectively, for 30 years. That Common Wealth Gallery show in September of 2012 was a hit, both critically and in sales.



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Todd's and my side-by-side paintings of the same subjects became our "Déjà Vu for Two" show, December 2012 to April 2013 at Overture Center for the Arts, another success which led to more exposure and more sales and commissions.

Out of that show, Todd and I created an event called Teen Pride Arts. Our purpose was to encourage queer teens to tap into their artistic selves and create. Support came from Overture Center via Beth Racette, Gallery Coordinator and a great artist herself, with funding from The Culver Foundation. Queer teens filled up the Rotunda Stage seating. Todd and I gave talks about our work, Lon told some of his story and led an art-making workshop, teen theater troupe Proud Theater and community theater group Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed performed. To encourage attendees to make art a part of their everyday lives, we sent them off with colorful gift bags containing a pad of drawing paper and a set of markers.

At Teen Pride Arts, I gave a talk I called "Choosing Beauty" and shared openly about my trans* identity. Transitioning to female was a big part of my journey as an artist. Now, clean of drugs, living as female, and mentally stable, I have a loving relationship with myself and the world around me. All of my wild experiences at the fringes of life and reality enter into my work but are now grounded in an artistic practice. I choose beauty over the ugliness and insanity that I had seen and been a part of but incorporate that darkness as well. I paint por-

I am not running from the past but integrating it into positive creativity. And that was the message I wanted to share with my community via Teen Pride Arts.

traits of people I love, still lifes of beautiful objects that have personal significance to me, and landscapes that make me feel that I am both witnessing and a part of the divine—all through my own imaginative lens. I am grateful that I have learned to bring all of this richness to my painting practice today. I am not running from the past but integrating it into positive creativity. And that was the message I wanted to share with my community via Teen Pride Arts.

The second Teen Pride Arts event was in the Spring of 2014, and I found even wider support from the community: Overture Center; trans* friends at the Madison Area Transgender Association; Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE) youth and staff; University of Wisconsin – Madison LGBT Campus Center students and staff; artist Michael Velliquette, who talked about his inspiration and process and then led an art workshop; Proud Theater; *Our Lives* magazine; and generous donations from individuals. We had an after-party at the new Cargo Coffee East coffee shop via co-owner Lynn Lee—another great artist I'm honored to know. Next spring, Teen Pride Arts will return.

Like any artist engaged in their work, I am evolving and experimenting, deepening my intuition through practice, trying new things, finding the old approaches I've always had and bringing them back, studying the work of other artists, and a most fruitful exercise for my mercurial personality: daring myself to stay the same.

When I'm not in my studio, I spend quality time with my family, take care of my cat Diego (Rivera), volunteer with women in jail, and work with Deaf and hard of hearing students at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. I am always trying to bring creativity and beauty to the daily choices in my life.

And as Ms. Nevelson told me, "You're always painting." Yes, I'd agree that I am.

To see Nicole's work visit nicolebresnick.com or see her work in person by appointment at the Mansion Hill Microgallery. ■



[A & E] **WHAT'S TRENDING**

Youth leads the way



PROUD THEATER
BRIAN WILD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I write this, Proud Theater is getting ready to celebrate its 15th anniversary this December. Reflecting back, I am constantly amazed at how humbly it started with three passionate young people and has since grown into a thriving organization serving upwards of 30 to 50 youth each season.

With three chapters across Wisconsin, a fourth on the way, and a vibrant, new young adult version (Proud Theater Beyond, launched this past May in Madison), we are incredibly excited about helping our LGBTQI and allied youth continue to express their true selves.

Ballet in the moonlight



MADISON BALLET
W. EARLE SMITH, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Watching Madison Ballet grow as a performing arts organization over the last year has been truly exhilarating. Through hard work and planning, Madison Ballet will leap forward with two tours to Menomonie and Oshkosh for the 2014–15 season, on top of a four production season in Madison. The ability to provide artists with performing opportunities and audiences with quality arts programming continues to unfold for us. A new trend in the ballet world is moonlighting—especially with the A-list ballet dancers. Dancers are expanding their performing opportunities and income by moonlighting from their "home-based" companies. In some cases the dancers are selecting and/or presenting their own works or programs.

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Catching up

It was Christmas Eve 2009, and I had been putzing around on Facebook, aimlessly catching up with statuses while waiting to meet a friend for lunch. I had the day off and was procrastinating; I was supposed to clean the house in anticipation of my parents' visit. I don't know how it always sucks me in—the photos of people I hardly know and their chatter—but it does. I happened to be struck by a post from a gentleman I went to church with as a teen. Matt and I both worked on the television ministry, which meant we ran the cameras for our non-denominational megachurch. What caught my eye was his relationship preference: it said men.

Saying my parents are Christian is a bit of an understatement. I forget how much so until my mom asks me to quiz her on her memory of verses or reminds me she has been on a peanut butter fast (her favorite) for fifteen years, in solidarity with God about specific prayer requests. Basically, no PB until one of her most important prayers is answered. We not only attended church every Sunday morning but also youth groups and church camps in both the summer and winter.

As a teen, I fell in and out of Christianity, either fervently embracing it in prayer around the flagpole at my public high school or completely turning my back and stirring up trouble with my Nine Inch Nails and curfew-breaking bad self. But I still had to go to church every Sunday or be grounded for the day, so I took up TV ministry because I really liked running cameras. Before the church expanded, it let youth parishioners like Matt and I lead and get creative (perhaps too creative) with the TV ministry. I remember with glee the time we made a double image of the minister's head preaching in the middle of a Christmas wreath.

I met Matt when I was in high school; he was a year or two older



and a geek like me. But he was always a good Christian, and I assumed he would become a minister or computer guru or theology professor. Although I liked him a lot, we were different and grew apart after I stopped doing TV ministry. Facebook, as it does, reunited us but only as “click friends” and nothing beyond me categorizing him as one of those church friends from my youth. So when I saw his post about him and his partner, I couldn't quite wrap my head around it and immediately started digging for more information. He was the ideal Christian golden child and was supposed to be a proper Christian adult. And he was...gay? It

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WHAT'S TRENDING [A & E]

Tinkering, tactile art



MICHAEL VELLIQUETTE STUDIO
MICHAEL VELLIQUETTE, VISUAL ARTIST

There is a "tactile" attitude happening right now in the projects and exhibitions I am excited about this fall. Jason S. Yi's magnificent installation titled "A Fragile Permanence" at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art is an immersive landscape of reclaimed wood and duct tape. Lynda Barry's enchanting workshops at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery's Image Lab reconnects participants' heads, hearts, and hands through a combination of drawing and personal storytelling. The Bubbler at the Madison Public Library offers opportunities galore to tinker and create at all levels of sophistication. And lastly, the fall exhibition at my miniature project space Lovey Town will show a collection of unauthenticated works by masters of the Russian Avant-Garde. Titled Orphans in the Storm, the show opens October 3 and more information is available at www.lovetytown.org.

Victory celebrations in song



PERFECT HARMONY MEN'S CHORUS
KEN FORNEY, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

LGBT choruses are looking at our roles as activists in a post-marriage culture. It's an exciting time as we acknowledge the progress we've made by acknowledging that our youth are challenged to understand the experiences of our middle-aged members. In the course of a generation, we've created a new reality for them. Developing our next generation of leaders will lead us in new directions, some that we cannot yet imagine.



didn't make sense. I looked at all of his pictures; he and his partner looked amazingly happy together. But I still couldn't fathom it. How did the uber Christian kid become a happy Christian gay?

On the subway ride home from lunch, I continued to process. I compartmentalize people and make assumptions, and I didn't know how to align it and reality in my head. I wondered about him concealing and assumed he concealed his gayness until he left home. It was quieting and humbling. I had completely walked away from Christianity, but Matt hadn't and had found his place and peace. Meanwhile, I was in a strange place, reflecting on my past while readying myself mentally for the present day and my folks' arrival. I have constantly tried to remove my upbringing other than the occasional joke about me growing up under a Christmas tree when I miss pop culture references. In spite of this, I decided I was going to take my parents to a Christmas Eve service, as it would mean a lot to them. I had not set foot in a church since I left my parents' house after high school. I had found a Christian, gay-friendly church in Park Slope that wouldn't perform marriages until everyone could get married (my folks didn't need to know that part). I started to feel excited about attending the service because I'd missed the Christ-

My mom made the analogy that if I had robbed a bank she would still love me, the sinner, but admonish the sin. I had become the equivalent of a bank robber.

mas carols and communal singing, even if it was about wise men and silent nights. As I expected, my parents were thrilled to go to church on Christmas Eve with my daughter and me. They got dressed up, and my mom chatted with me while brushing her hair that never seems to do what she wants. We trekked to the church, and as my mom is legally blind, we sat in the second row. I even found her a large print program. I tried to pay attention to the sermon but instead thought about my assumptions and wondered how often I'm completely wrong. It was all going quite well—church, introspection, my parents' visit. My parents were happy, I was happy; I was at church, for Christ's sake!

Working it out

Coming out to my parents was hard. Although I got married young and had a baby while I was still in college, I somehow figured it all out. Well, I figured out how to finish college with a baby, how to be a young



parent, and how to make it as a photographer in NYC. But I couldn't figure out how to be hetero. I knew and didn't know I was gay. It took meeting Meike and her putting the pieces in front of me to really know.

Meike and I met on a photo shoot for British Esquire that turned out to be somewhat pornographic, as the model was wearing only stilettos. We bonded over the bizarreness of that shoot and became fast friends (seriously, only friends!). I learned, retrospectively, that she suspected I was gay, and so she started taking me to watch the L Word on Sunday nights at a then-popular lesbian bar in Brooklyn called Caddy Shack. As I watched Alice and Shane and Carmen, I got a bit short-breathed, which eventually led to that quieting and definitive moment of knowing I was gay.

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WHAT'S TRENDING [A & E]

Entertainment and education



OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS
TIM SAUERS, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What I love about programming for Madison audiences is their diverse interest in all types of performances and a growing interest in humanities. We're an educated community that wants to engage and connect with personalities you might not expect to find at a performing arts center. For example, this season at Overture Center you'll find astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson of TV's Cosmos fame, chef Robert Irvine, and even TV star William Shatner. Based on response from last season, National Geographic Live is back with four individuals out there exploring the globe. You'll find a couple of photographers, a filmmaker, and a paleoanthropologist who discovered Lucy, the fossil of a female hominid australopithecine. As I start to program for the 15-16 season, you can be assured that our mix will continue to diversify as more celebrated non-performance-based individuals hit the road to share their experiences.

Rise of interactive media



Z104
AARON RODGERS, ON-AIR AFTERNOON HOST

Over the course of the last decade or so, the radio industry has moved in a direction fueled by you—the consumer. I think it's incredible how integrated stations like ours (Z104) and others have been able to utilize Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even (believe it or not) Snapchat into building brand loyalty. When brands are able to adapt to their clients' and consumers' needs, they pace at or above the rest of their competition. It's interesting and fun to witness fans interact with us! In an "on demand" culture, I'm excited to witness our industry captivate our core and casual audience in a consistent and meaningful way.

After months of working it out with a therapist and my husband whom I loved dearly and who was incredibly supportive, I was ready to break the news to my parents. Unfortunately, I had to do so by phone as they were in Wisconsin and I was in New York. I sat on the floor of my tiny office before I dialed and worried they would disown me as my mom had done to her sister when she moved in with a man out of wedlock (although they did reconcile once she was properly married). Eventually, I picked up the phone and dialed. My mom and dad listened as I explained I was getting a divorce—and then I had to tell them why.

My coming out was met with, "Are you sure? Maybe you're not. How do you know?" The thing is, I didn't exactly know. I had no real physical proof. I had only kissed a girl once back in college and didn't feel anything. But I couldn't ignore that the L Word made me bothered for the first time ever, nor could I ignore my numerous crushes on girls and women over the years. When I explained my anxiety about being disowned, my mom said that unlike her sister, I wasn't proclaiming to be a Christian. Her sister was a believer choosing to live in sin. My mom made the analogy that if I had robbed a bank she would still love me, the sinner, but admonish the sin. I had become the equivalent of a bank robber.

Pentecost at Christmas

The last hymn that Christmas in church was Silent Night. Before the song, we each received a little candle with a paper skirt, and we all lit each other's by kissing them to our neighbor's candle. It was sweet and touching, and the church was ablaze with candlelight. My mom was juggling her hymnal, her giant magnifying glass, her program, and

I know she felt completely humiliated by the events at the church, and I'm sure she wanted to put the evening behind her. Yet she still let me photograph her with her burns and charred hair because she knew it meant something to me.

the lit candle. The minister asked us to all rise to sing, and although I didn't see it, I know exactly how it happened. I can mentally see her movements that I know so well. As my mom stood, she tipped forward and her hair touched the candle and was instantly engulfed in flames.

I have no idea what I did with my own candle. My mom's entire head was on fire and as she cried out I smacked out the flames with my hands. It was over quickly and the whole church was silent and paralyzed in shock, the smell of burning hair wafting throughout the room. After a moment, everyone reacted and tried to help. In a very small voice, my mom said she was fine and pleaded that we please continue and sing Silent Night. Shaking, I tried to get her to go to the bathroom to assess her injuries, but she shrugged me off.

When I was younger, I was always so embarrassed by my mother's voice. She sang with such vibrato, and it always rose over all the other voices. That night, she sang with such strength, whereas I could barely stand; I was shaking, my teeth were chattering, my hands still feeling her fragile head. I was silent. After the song, everyone tried to help. Her face and head had minor burns and there was charred hair that somehow wasn't all gone. Someone had a brush and began to brush out the burnt clumps. The minister kindly arranged a car for us after it was determined she didn't need to go to the emergency room. My mother kept praising God that she was okay.

That night, I asked my mother if I could photograph her, as that



is what I've learned to do when I'm figuring things out, conceptually or just plain emotionally. She has always been so kind to oblige all my photography requests over the years. Once I was doing a series of photos in bathtubs, and she wore her bathrobe in a water-filled tub as I photographed her. The shoot took me an hour, and she just sat in the tub in her robe, patiently asking if she was doing it right. I know she felt completely humiliated by the events at the church, and I'm sure she wanted to put the evening behind her. Yet she still let me photograph her with her burns and charred hair because she knew it meant something to me. And maybe it was a way for us to be closer. There is an incredible intimacy that transpires between subject and photographer.

Reconciling and reconnection

My parents still struggle with me being gay, but they are trying. They joined their church's equivalent of PFLAG and recently came to the premiere of my documentary film, Ladies Out, with several of their other P-Flaggers. They always ask about my girlfriend and invite her to family events. They have come so far, as have I.

Matt, my church friend, and his partner made Wisconsin history a few weeks ago as the first gay couple to wed in Milwaukee County. As I write this story, I have been flipping back and forth between writing and gleaning on Facebook. These days have been easier than ever for us gays, and my focus has been on figuring out how to raise a teenager who just yelled at me to leave her alone after not being able to help her get out the dental floss jammed in her braces, developing my work as an artist, and being so completely in love with my girlfriend.

My mother once again kindly agreed to be photographed for this article. Writing this has opened up a dialogue between us about the unsaid, which has led to clarifications and ultimately closeness. Now I understand my mother didn't disown her sister, but, as she explained, she broke fellowship with her temporarily, and it was one of the hardest things she has ever done. We all have our work cut out for us, and right now mine is to try to stop making so many assumptions. ■

LOIS BIELEFELD is a conceptual photographer who splits her time between fine art and commercial/fashion photography. She was born and currently resides in Milwaukee, WI, with her girlfriend and daughter. Lois has her BFA in photography from Rochester Institute of Technology, and from 2003–2010 she lived in New York City. Besides photography, she feels passionate about Scrabble, bicycling, urban gardening, and bicycling adventures. She has two solo shows opening this fall: Room & Board will open Sept. 12 at ArtStart in Rhinelander. Androgyny will open at UW – Parkside Nov. 1. She can be contacted through Portrait Society Gallery. See more of her work here: loisbielefeld.com

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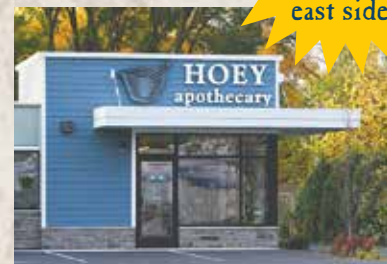
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LGBT SAFE SCHOOLS

PART 1 | Educational Employees Lead the Way toward Harassment-Free Schools

EARLY BATTLES

A teacher wakes up as a rock is thrown through her window. A note 'Lezzie Bitch' is left in her mailbox. The principal claims it is not a school matter, even though similar notes have been intercepted in her classroom."

"A teacher pulls into the parking lot at school to see his name painted on the side of the building, calling him a 'faggot.'"

"A teacher is denied bereavement leave to be at the side of his hospitalized partner."

These tragic LGBT stories appeared in the Feb. 23, 1989, edition of *Wisconsin Light*. They were the impetus behind the formation of Madison-based Gay and Lesbian Educational Employees (GLEE). Sadly, the initial press account noted these were occurring in "a city with a stringent non-discrimination policy," indeed one that had been in effect for fourteen years already.

By the time of the *Wisconsin Light* story's publication, the group had been going since the spring of 1988, almost a year. The bylaws note it was established "to provide support to gay and lesbian educators." Among their objectives were to ensure their own rights, lessen homophobia in school systems, and work for changes in curriculum and materials. They wanted "to enable all students to gain a realistic and positive concept of the lifestyles and the historic contribution of lesbian and gay people."

Early on, the group sought allies, and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) was one of the first. While the particular principal noted above was not supportive, the assistant principal at the same school was a strong backer. She was Libby Burmaster, who would later become the Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The *MTI Reporter* published by Madison Teachers Inc. was also involved in the early days, announcing to its members how to contact the group. In an oral history, it was recalled that John Matthews, the director of MTI, was "very supportive" of the teachers' effort. MTI also served as an early mail drop box for the group.

One of GLEE's initial efforts sparked a minor controversy. On April 7, 1989, a memo with an attached article on homophobia went to all

Madison Metropolitan School District Employees. Signed by Ruth Guidinas of the MMSD Human Relations Department, it was cosigned by Jack Siebert on behalf of GLEE and Jane LaFlash for PFLAG. Then-Schools Superintendent James Travis had to respond when parents voiced concern over the memo and the story got into the hands of reporters in early June.

The Wisconsin State Journal published a front-page story headlined, "Does school's memo push homosexuality?" Some self-identified Christian parents appeared at a school board meeting. The Rev. Richard Pritchard sent a mailing to 400 people of the group Citizens Concerned for Our Community. Pritchard himself told the school board the memo "openly supported and promoted the homosexual lifestyle as normal and acceptable." Pritchard then asked the board to distribute his own fact sheet that called homosexual practices sinful, and that it was a myth that a gay lifestyle could be happy. Terry Cremin, a teacher and GLEE member, defended sending out the memo, pointing out neither racist nor homophobic comments were appropriate in schools.

Ruth Guidinas sent Travis a response memo on June 28, as she was retiring from 17 years in the District's Human Relations Department. She noted the basic reason for the original memo was in response to "the harassment of gay and lesbian staff by other staff and by students, as well as the frequent use of homophobic put-downs and name calling by students." Guidinas made clear the distinction between what she observed as the purported "alleged endorsement of homosexuality by the district" and homophobia as "unacceptable behavior." In the press comments on distributing Pritchard's supposed fact sheet, Guidinas said, "We don't ask the Nazis to tell us about Jews."

On August 2, 1989, Superintendent Travis correctly noted that signatures of non-MMSD persons should not be on district memos. He went on to forthrightly state the original "memo conforms with the District's Affirmative Action Plan which states that: 'Employees shall function in a harassment-free atmosphere.'" The Superintendent even noted that, while the Board of Education has a policy on controversial issues, "Teaching students not to engage in name calling in order to promote a harassment free environment is not a controversial issue." Score a big plus for GLEE efforts.

COMING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM CLOSET

"It's not even ten o'clock yet and we have to get more chairs." Thus modest expectations were swept aside in the fall of 1989 as GLEE launched their next major effort. In Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC, the largest of the statewide teachers unions) held an annual conference in Madison for educators from around the state. GLEE had arranged a subgroup for Gay and Lesbian Educational Employees. It was not held on the County grounds with the other gatherings but at the not-too-distant Madison Franklin School. Organizers explicitly recognized some teachers would not be comfortable walking into a room with a big gay label.

The Milwaukee Sentinel covered the event under an article headlined "Homosexual Educators at WEAC Convention Cite Isolation, Fear" but agreed "not to use names or school districts of the participants unless specific permission was given." Some noted that teaching "is not a safe place to be gay." A lesbian educator noted, "It seems like every morning I cross that line from who I am to who I pretend to be." The *Sentinel* story noted concerns beyond the employees. Comments like, "The students don't have any role models," and "As far as they're concerned, homosexuality doesn't exist or if it does, it's something really awful." Finally, "God, if someone had been there when I was 15, it would have made such a difference."



A lesbian educator noted, "It seems like every morning I cross that line from who I am to who I pretend to be."

The Capital Times of Madison also had a story, "Gay Teachers Hold Own Sessions." Note how the editorially more friendly paper uses gay rather than homosexual. Despite this being 1989, seven years after the passage of the state's non-discrimination law for employment on the basis of sexual orientation, "One teacher said he would fear for his job if he acted as a liaison between gay and lesbian students and places where they can get information." After a presentation about a Madison-based LGBT teen group by the professional youth services organization PICADA, a teacher asked, "How do you get more of this in the school district just to prevent suicide of gay teens and offer support?"

The *Wisconsin Light* reported planners were "elated" with the subgroup. It also noted the isolation of lesbian and gay teachers from small towns. Dennis Bergren, from Cottage Grove, reported on attending "this affirming group." He wrote, "These are committed teachers who care, who have been the objects of derision and prejudice in their own education and are concerned that their students do not suffer that same pain."

IT'S LATE ALREADY

GLEE members proved very effective as a support group in ending the isolation and bringing the homophobia in the schools to the fore. The group had a banner for GLEE with their name and carried it in Madison gay pride parades. Remembrance was "it took a lot of courage for me to march" where students and parents might see them. South Central Wisconsin's LGBT philanthropy organization the New Harvest Foundation provided critical early financial support with small grants. A woman librarian helped to create a Lesbian and Gay bibliography for school use. The group held monthly meetings and had an annual picnic.

By 1994 the group had morphed into Gays, Lesbians and Allies for Diversity in Education, or GLADE. Tom Popp sat on a Madison Superintendent's Advisory Committee as a representative of The United. Popp, advocating for gays and lesbians and citing the five point agenda of GLADE, urged that Madison schools needed to create a climate "in which all members of the school community are free from fear, violence and harassment." Steve Morrison, the advisory council chairman, stated in response, "It's late already."

This is part one of a two-part series. Look for this piece to continue in the next issue. ■



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.

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MARRIAGE EQUALITY ON TRIAL

TAMARA PACKARD looks at the oral arguments in Wisconsin's marriage equality case and offers an analysis on all of the appeals pending in the federal courts

It seems we don't go a week without another court victory in the fight for marriage equality. We have won marriage cases around the country an unprecedented 38 times since June 2013 (we lost one—in Tennessee state court). And yet despite those victories, marriage equality is still a reality in only 19 states and the District of Columbia. This is because every win has been appealed, and while those appeals are pending, the courts' rulings have been put on hold, or "stayed." So we turn our attention to the appellate courts, particularly the federal courts of appeal, for the next word on our freedom to marry. Here is a round-up:

COURTS WITH ACTIVE CASES

THE 10TH CIRCUIT, covering Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, has ruled twice for marriage equality in cases challenging marriage bans in Utah and Oklahoma. The losing parties have asked the United States Supreme Court to hear appeals. **THE 4TH CIRCUIT**, covering Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Maryland, has also ruled for marriage equality in a challenge to Virginia's ban. The State of Virginia is not appealing, but the state's registrar of vital records has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review the decision. Appeals in **THE 5TH CIRCUIT**, covering Texas, Louisiana and Missouri, and **THE 6TH CIRCUIT**, covering Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, have been fully briefed and argued and are awaiting decisions.

Two other Circuits have appeals pending: **THE 9TH AND THE 7TH**. In the 9th Circuit, covering the nine westernmost states, is a slow-moving challenge to Nevada's marriage ban that has been pending since 2012. Arguments will be heard there on September 8. In contrast, two appeals in the 7th Circuit have been expedited, and a decision is expected this fall.

STAUTS OF THE WISCONSIN APPEAL

Thus, all eyes are on the 7th Circuit, where the states of Indiana and Wisconsin have appealed pro-equality rulings from the lower courts (including Judge Crabb's for the



The federal judges in Wisconsin and Indiana's marriage equality appeal: Judges Hamilton, Posner, and Williams.

Western District of Wisconsin). Arguments were held August 26, and the day began on a hopeful note when the panel of judges was announced: Judges Posner, Williams, and Hamilton. These three judges previously lifted the stay in the Indiana case for two of the plaintiffs, one of whom is terminally ill, compelling Indiana to recognize their marriage.

Judge Posner is thought to be the "conservative" of the three deciding the Indiana and Wis-

He mocked them, scoffed at them, and berated them for having no evidence or even speculation of a single harm that could come from marriage equality.

consin cases. Judge Posner also proved to be the hardest on the lawyers defending the bans. He referred to their arguments as circular and feeble. He described the bans as based on hate, prodding the State's attorneys to acknowledge a "rather savage history" of governmental discrimination against "homosexuals." He mocked them, scoffed at them, and berated them for having no evidence or even speculation of a single harm that could come from marriage equality. Judge Hamilton also got some digs in, describing one of Wisconsin's legal arguments as a "thought experiment" and another as "reverse engineered" in an effort to get around Supreme Court precedent, ignore a great deal of history around marriage, and provide a narrow, artificial rationale for the bans.

Attorneys arguing for marriage equality were also questioned, but rather than signaling skepticism about their ability to win at all, the judges suggested a preference for the equal protection theory over the fundamental right to marry (due process) theory. Judges Posner and Hamilton expressed concern over the



A map of the Federal circuit court districts.

fundamental right argument and how to describe that right in a way that does not lead to a right to marry more than one person at a time. Judge Posner frankly stated that in his view, marriage is good for the children of same sex couples, and both he and Judge Hamilton found it problematic that Wisconsin and Indiana wish to protect the children of heterosexual couples by nudging the parents to marry, while leaving the children of same sex couples without the protections that come from marriage. Judge Hamilton seemed keen on viewing the marriage bans as discrimination on the basis of gender, which would draw a heightened level of scrutiny (i.e., make it more likely that they would be struck down). In contrast, Judge Posner expressed distaste for differing levels of scrutiny, while noting there was no rational basis for the bans. And Judge Williams signaled her thinking by remarking to the attorney defending the Wisconsin ban that he seemed unable to point to any rational basis for the ban. She noted that under rational basis review of a law, a State must have a legitimate governmental interest, and "you don't have any."

In sum, judging by the arguments, there is little question that the 7th Circuit will affirm the lower court decisions finding the marriage bans unconstitutional. The only questions are on what basis? Will the bans fail under a fundamental right to marry (due process) analysis, equal protection analysis, or both? If stricken based on equal protection, will the court find that there is no rational basis for the bans or will they fail as a form of gender discrimination? Answers to these questions, in the form of a decision, are likely to be announced this fall.

Finally, if, as expected, the 7th Circuit rules for marriage equality, Wisconsin's next Attorney General and Governor will decide whether to pursue an appeal in the Wisconsin case to the U.S. Supreme Court. So VOTE in the November elections for those who support marriage equality, and be sure everyone you know does too! ■



TAMARA PACKARD is a Madison civil rights lawyer, activist, and partner in the law firm of Cullen Weston Pines & Bach LLP, cwpb.com.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COMING OUT

Psychotherapist **ALEX EINSMAN** explains why exploring the hidden layers of ourselves is essential to the process of being out in the world

It's no secret that Americans' support for gay marriage—and acceptance of LGBTQ people in general—has improved dramatically in a very short time. So it's logical to infer that the process of coming out of the closet is getting easier too. But that's not always the case. While greater acceptance has helped many people to transition from the closet to living life openly, too many others still find the process scary and daunting. As a psychotherapist, I have the privilege of exploring feelings of identity dissonance with men and women of all ages. And as a gay man, I can identify their journeys with my own process of shedding the layers of a negative self-image so I could find pride in being myself. Many people, me included, are surprised to find that the resistance to starting the process of coming out and living authentically shifts to strength and becomes more sustainable over time.

Still, regardless of how, when, or if it happens, coming out is often presaged by a significant sense of internal psychological struggle and contemplation. While the LGBTQ community gains increased acceptance in many parts of society, the interpersonal and emotional challenges remain.

A LIFETIME PROCESS

While there can be a starting point in the coming-out process, there does not seem to be a clearly defined endpoint. Coming out continues throughout life in a variety of situations and relationships. However, the goal of coming out is not disclosure; it's about authentically owning our identities and truly accepting ourselves as we are. Even so, we often seek acceptance from those we care about most before we are ready to accept ourselves fully and completely.

The choice to honor our own identities can be delayed by the unfortunate and unfair cost of potential rejection by family, friends, co-workers, and other people who are important to us. And when we consider the potential cost of being who we are, claiming our true identity may not seem like a choice at all.

Having grown up in a small town in the



Midwest, I remember my own difficulties with coming out. On one hand, I wanted to truly own my identity, but like many I was very fearful of doing so. In this psychological state of confused dissonance, symptoms of anxiety or depression are common results—and understandably so. Not being able to be

For those who are in a situation where coming out now would put health, safety, or shelter at risk, the process can be started inside, until it's safe enough to represent it outwardly.

who we are significantly affects our emotional health and how we feel about ourselves. But there's an added layer to the process, one that we aren't always aware of.

THE ROLE OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

In order to best understand how to cope with identity dissonance, it's useful to understand the difference between our conscious and subconscious minds. Right now your conscious mind is reading this article while your subconscious mind processes and compares past experiences and feelings related to the content of what you are consciously reading. It's like a 24-hour news network in your brain; you watch the anchor (your conscious mind) discuss the featured story, but underneath there is a continuous ticker of

text describing other stories, experiences, and perspectives (your subconscious mind).

While not all of our thoughts reach conscious awareness, they still continue to play a role in our mental health and behavior from backstage. We typically have tens of thousands of thoughts streaming through our subconscious minds in a single day.

The thoughts and beliefs coming from our subconscious represent a mixture of what we think about ourselves and what others have told us about ourselves. As our brain grows and develops, we receive a variety of messages about who we are, and we use those messages to ascertain our general sense of worth. These messages come from all sorts of systems around us: family, peers, friendships, relationships, the media, and religion. Our subconscious minds are the accumulation of these messages throughout our lives.

Over time negative messages about LGBTQ identities that we receive from people and institutions can lead to a subconscious belief system that we are damaged, wrong, or just inherently not as "good" as others. The word gay is still commonly used by some to represent something that is wrong, different, or bad. Rigid gender expectations are still used to shame others. We tend to integrate these negative messages into our view of ourselves because it's less painful than believing that the people who are supposed to care about us would want to make us feel bad about an important aspect of our identities.

BEING WHO WE ARE

While coming out can include an outward process of disclosure, the internal process of acceptance allows us to experience more joy and satisfaction about who we are. For those who are in a situation where coming out now would put health, safety, or shelter at risk, the process can be started inside, until it's safe enough to represent it outwardly.

As we add acceptance to our identities, we gain power to subtract negative symptoms of criticism and shame that do not fit our true sense of self.

Awareness of negative self-talk in our subconscious allows us to counteract it, to redirect our conscious and subconscious minds to let go of shame and take pride in accepting our true selves. ■



ALEX EINSMAN is a licensed marriage and family therapist at Atlas Counseling. He holds a Masters of Science degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Edgewood College.









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HELPING BY HEARING

GSAFE Co-Director **KRISTEN PETROSHIUS**: Let's Stop Silencing People of Color

Recently I have been witness to several complex situations that demonstrate an implicit desire to silence the authentic thoughts and feelings of people of color. Even "nice, good" white people like me contribute to the racism that people of color experience daily, demonstrating the cultural, interpersonal, and communication norms that hold such power in dominant white work cultures. Let me explain.

ONE EXAMPLE

A woman of color expresses some hard feelings that have to do with race with a white colleague. She feels she expressed herself, was heard, and the situation was resolved despite the white colleague's defensiveness at moments. In the following months, she notices the white colleague seems to have distanced herself and generally seems a bit nervous around her. In later conversation, the white colleague confirms that she has distanced herself because the woman of color "just seems angry." This perception and treatment has a direct impact on the woman of color's ability to successfully achieve her work goals and affects the reputation of her job performance with others.

THE CHOICES

For those of you who are white, imagine being a person of color in this or a comparable situation. A moment of racism or simply a complex moment that is racialized plays out, and you are faced with several choices about how to handle it:

- Say nothing and consciously try to ignore race/racism, which can take a personal toll on your sense of empowerment and your desire to be authentic.
- Say nothing, but your continued interactions with that white person make it clear neither of you care to interact with each other, which can result in ongoing tension and anxiety.
- Speak to the issue directly and risk being labeled as angry, violent, or unprofessional, which can then lead to you being treated differently. In the worst cases, you can have your job and reputation threat-



- ened, or you can lose them both.
- Speak to the issue directly and be supported by your supervisor and organization, knowing this may mean the organization risks its own funding and reputation.

In each of these scenarios, regardless of how a person of color chooses to handle them, there are great emotional costs, fears, and risks. At the same time, regardless of the person of color's choice in how to handle the situation, the outcome is largely dependent on the response of the white people involved—which speaks to the nature of power and institutionalized racism. Given how common it is for those of us who are white to completely lack skills to recognize racism or simply talk about race, the odds are stacked against the person of color. This is the nature of racism.

THE WORK OF WHITE PEOPLE

What then can a white person do who finds themselves in one of these situations?

- If an issue is brought up to you that demonstrates a conflict with a person of color or your own racism, don't take it personally, but do engage more deeply. All of us who are white are complicit in racism. It's part of a centuries-long legacy passed down in white families and institutions. While it's not your fault, it is your responsibility to try to interrupt this system. While many white people don't have experience directly addressing conflict in general let alone conflict about race, this is a critical skill to learn in order to be able to effectively address racism. So start leaning into the discomfort of conflict, share your emotions, be vulnerable, and make it your common practice.

- Build relationships with other people who understand and can talk about racism, both white people and people of color, who you can lean on for support and advice in these situations. While we all have our support people, if your support generally comes from people who don't really understand racism, the only messages you're going to get are ones that reinforce your default response—to convince yourself that you're right, the other person is wrong, or the situation is hopeless and there's nothing you can do to shift it. People who understand and can talk about racism will be more likely to understand the complexity of a situation, challenge you in shifting your own response to effectively repair any harm done, and relate to you in the experience that the work is not easy.
- Consciously work to build a relationship with the person of color, despite your mental and emotional desire to avoid them because of a challenging situation. At the White Privilege Conference this past spring, Dr. John Powell spoke to the ways that our brains' neuro pathways actually become hardwired to reinforce the racism we take in from everything in society, even in

All of us who are white are complicit in racism. While it's not your fault, it is your responsibility to try to interrupt this system.

children who are only several months old. I know that when I have a conflict with a person of color, regardless of whether or not it is about race, my mind and emotions' first response is to think the person hates me and then fear or avoid them. This is my hard-wired brain, steeped in the covert and overt racism I have soaked up from the world around me for 30+ years. I consciously have to recognize this tendency and tell myself, "No, that moment does not define the person of color as angry nor does it define me as bad. I will choose to overcome my emotional desire to avoid or fear by instead reconnecting with the person and working to strengthen our relationship."

- Move over the shards of glass rather than expect the person of color to do it. In many of the situations I have recently witnessed,



KRISTEN PETROSHIUS is a Co-Director of GSAFE. She's also a member of Groundwork, a Madison-based racial justice organization that focuses on supporting people of color working for racial justice.

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To view a situation as “we both have equal responsibility to resolve the issue” is like asking the person of color to walk barefoot over the shards of glass to meet the white person where they’re at.

the white person has said, “Well, we both have issues, so let’s both just own it and move on.” In a world without racism, that would be true. However, in a reality in which people of color continuously experience acts of racism by white people, it can never be that simple. I once heard someone use this analogy: Centuries of racism have produced shards of glass between white people and people of color. To view a situation as “we both have equal responsibility to resolve the issue” is like asking the person of color to walk barefoot over the shards of glass to meet the white person where they’re at. Instead, a white person can choose to use their privilege to walk over the shards of glass themselves.

Moving over the shards of glass includes consciously choosing to own your responsibility in a situation first, even if the reality is more complex, working through your anxiety or fear to build a closer relationship with the person of color, and creating a foundation for strengthened trust and mutual accountability.

To bring this last point home, I’ll share another scenario and an example of a white person using the principles above to address the situation:

A woman of color is at work alongside a white colleague. Another white staff person comes over to say hi, but only makes eye contact with and directly speaks with the white colleague. Feeling slighted, the woman of color begins to avoid interactions with that white staff member. The white staff member visibly demonstrates nervousness and avoidance around the woman of color, and the woman of color interprets this as “Now you’re scared of me.” Both staff members continue to have distance between each other.

In this situation, both people feel tension and avoid each other. The white person could choose to proactively address the situation by practicing the points above as follows:

The white staff member recognizes there is tension between her and her colleague of color, so she confides in a close friend who is savvy in understanding race issues. The friend suggests to her, “Perhaps you did something harmful to your colleague without even recognizing it. What could you do to address the situation?” The white staff member feels a little defensive at first. In reminding herself that all white people perpetuate racism and she doesn’t need to take it personally, she recognizes that her defensiveness is really a cover for her fear, insecurity, and guilt. She then spends some time processing these emotions with her friend so they don’t become blockages to her addressing the situation.

Several days later, the white staff person realizes she wants to say something but gets a little stuck in two places: 1) She recognizes her gut response is to fear and avoid her colleague of color. Changing that pattern feels scary. What if she is called a racist? 2) She wonders why she needs to initiate the conversation. After all, the tension feels mutual.

Then she remembers learning about the ways white people are conditioned to fear and avoid people of color after a conflict and reflects on the shards of glass analogy. Choosing to move through her fear, she goes to work the next day and asks her colleague

of color to talk. The white staff person opens up the conversation by saying, “I’ve noticed there’s tension between us and recognize I may have done something I’m unaware of to cause you harm. Is there anything you’d like to tell me?”

The colleague of color shares her experience of being avoided by the white staff member while she seems to recognize her white peers without a problem. The white staff member apologizes, feels guilty, yet tries to not unload her guilt on her colleague, then promises to be more conscious of the ways she may be enacting racism without even being aware of it.

In the following weeks, the white staff person does a lot of processing with her race-savvy friend to process her emotions and work on not labeling herself as a bad person. She proactively speaks to her colleague of color on an ongoing basis. Although they don’t have a close relationship, they consistently interact, respect each other, and have enjoyed daily conversation. The tension generally seems to have been resolved.

While it may be more common to experience conflicts around race that have not been effectively resolved, resolution is possible—though it requires work from everyone involved, especially from the white person.

Have you had an experience like the ones I describe here? How have you handled them? ■

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GSAFE scholarship winner **QUINTIN SMITH-BICKHAM** found a path away from despair and toward a living truth that's helping lead the way for LGBTQ youth in Milwaukee and beyond

My name is Quintin Smith-Bickham.
I'm 19 years old.
I am a Youth Activist.
I just also happen to be an African-American and homosexual.

I was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and attended many schools including Messmer and Pulaski High School.

I grew up in a single-parent household with my mother. My mom made sure I went to school and got my homework done, and she made sure I was always on my best behavior.

There have been a lot of situations that have shaped who I am as a person. My dad's passing was a huge factor in me questioning life itself and why things happen; he was gunned down in August 2004, when I was only nine years old. Soon after, I started to experience bullying and torment, which ultimately turned me into a bitter person.

I always knew I was gay. It was just a thing about guys that attracted me, even at a young age. I never really had a boyfriend or anything, but I was always gay. Before high school, I would deny and deny and deny everything. I even had a "girlfriend" (which I still feel bad for). I hated myself for being gay; I felt like a disappointment. It was as if I had let everyone down, and I was constantly trying to compensate. Dealing with all those emotions started to take a toll, and I ended up really acting out.

I never really came out. I just began to show out, hang with the wrong crowd, and stop denying the accusations.

By my sophomore year everything I had been suppressing and hiding caught up to me, and I was spinning out of control. My mom tried everything from a psychiatrist, physiology, behavior clinics, etc. I was on different behavior medication and at the point where I wanted to die.

It was a lot for one person to deal with, and living in a city where being gay was NOT cool, and every day there was something to worry about.

It all came to a head in February 2012, when I tried to harm myself and my mom called the police. They arrested me and took me to the County Mental Complex. I stayed there for three days and two nights. I had never cried so much and been so uncomfortable in my life. It was the

lowest moment of my life—and the point where I started to detox from the negativity and demons from my past.

I was in a depression after that. I dropped out of school and worked up until I started at Pulaski. That was also around the time I entered Urban Underground. Pulaski and Urban Underground changed everything.

I began to get involved in cheerleading, singing, choreographing, created a safe sex campaign, and eventually joined Diverse and Resilient's "Be YOU" team, as well as 414 ALLs condom campaign. I learned so many things about activism and promoting positivity in our community.

2014/Senior year has been a breakout year for me. In October we started Pulaski's first Gay-Straight Alliance, with the help of the Violence Free Zone. We had a lot of help from Kelly Lockwood (history teacher), Amanda Buss, and our wonderful principal Darrell Williams.

The group consisted of over 30 young people, varying in grades as well as ethnicity. We met on Tuesdays around 11:30 for about one hour and focused on team building, trusting each other, bringing peace and love to our school, and bridging the emotional gaps between our students.

Our GSA held spirit weeks, participated in school-wide events, bake sales, and more. We even got a visit from The Gay Men's Chorus for a special performance that really motivated our school to eliminate bullying and to participate in National Day of Silence, when more than 1,500 students wore rainbow tape over their mouths for an entire day. It was a moving demonstration of how far our school has come.

As only one of a small group of GSAs in Milwaukee, we have received numerous requests for us to work with other schools, resulting in my going to a Madison high school to speak with their GSA students.

I am proud of all the work I have been able to do in the last two years as well as all the accomplishments: being Pulaski's first openly gay Prom King and receiving the GSAFE Scholarship Award as well as a citation by the Wisconsin State Legislature. It's all because of the angels in my life, including Ms. Sharlen and Reggie Moore, Charmaine Harris, Jeremy Triblett, and my entire family who have been supportive of everything!

I am now a high school graduate and about to start my year of service with City Year Milwaukee. I will dedicate one year to mentoring youth in Milwaukee. I do not know the site I will be placed at, but I do know that I am ready to change someone's life!

Finally, I am very hopeful that I can start doing more dance choreography and modeling. I ultimately dream of being in show business and being rich and famous, giving the LGBT community a good name and eventually giving back to my community and being involved in many humanitarian projects. Basically, a gay Michael Jackson!

I am very blessed and thankful for all the opportunities and chances I've been given. I feel like God has chosen me to be someone who lifts others up in some way. I believe that this is only the beginning. ■



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