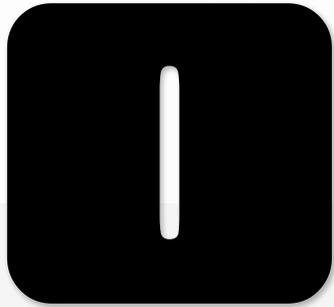


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LOVE & MARRIAGE

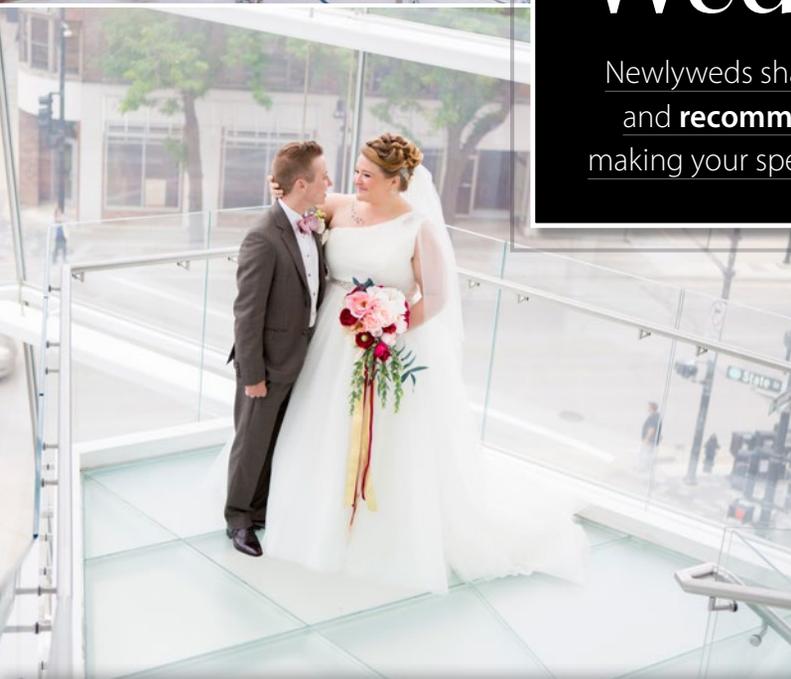
Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

The Love List: Celebrating Wisconsin's LGBTQ Relationships



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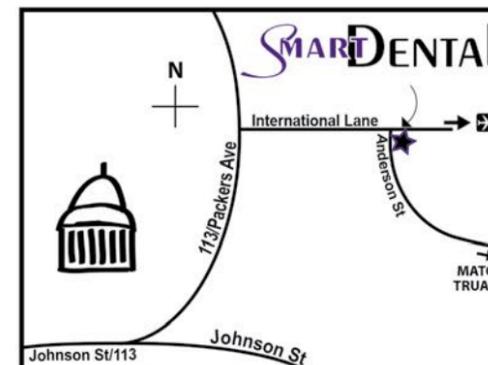


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—E. Lynn Harris, *Invisible Life*

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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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EDITOR'S NOTE EMILY MILLS



SO MUCH TO LOVE

SOME EXCITING THINGS are afoot this year at *Our Lives*. Our annual Couples List is now our Love List, as marriage equality is now the law of the land and as we work to make it more inclusive of all romantic relationships within the LGBTQ community. It's more crucial than ever that we do what we can to ensure visibility for the rainbow spectrum of queer love, including our bisexual, pansexual and polyamorous friends, as well as for trans* people and people of color.



Thank you to everyone who reached out to submit to the list, as well as to our wedding and love vignettes, for helping us paint a more complete picture of our beautiful, diverse community. We pledge to continue this process into the future, because the collage still isn't anywhere close to being complete. We believe this kind of representation and role modeling is a crucial part of creating a fuller, healthier experience for LGBTQ people.

I'm also grateful to the people who contributed their stories of love and loss, since the death of a loved one is likely something all of us will have to face at some point in our lives. It's never a remotely easy thing to talk or think about, but both the usual and unique challenges of LGBTQ relationships make it all the more important that we share these stories.

Related to that, I am honored to include the voice of Joanne Lee, mother of Skylar Lee, as the final story in this issue. It's a heartbreaking bit of coming full circle, since Skylar contributed the Future Leaders essay in last January's issue. Now his mother must talk about his suicide and the work she feels compelled to do in his absence and honor.

The theme of the issue is "Love," and what is love if not something that encompasses the complete journey of life, from the highest highs to the lowest lows. I hope these difficult stories bring some small amount of comfort to those who need it.

I've been heartened by a number of news items out of Wisconsin lately, too, most notably with the outpouring of support for transgender youth that we saw around the *I Am Jazz* book reading in Mount Horeb, as well as the chorus of voices that went up in opposition to the anti-trans bathroom bill introduced by members of our Legislature. You can read more about both things in our Connect section, but they were a positive sign of the massive sea change happening around trans* issues in the country—the incredible progress made, and the amount of fight yet to be fought.

The important thing is that we approach each other and all of these issues from a place of Love. Indeed, it is the only way forward. ■



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CONTRIBUTORS



SPENCER MICKA is a portrait, event and editorial photographer based in Madison. He has been photographing individuals, drag pageants, sporting events and theatrical performances for the past seven years and recently opened his own business. Spencer's love for moments of stillness and serenity help to authentically represent his subjects' personalities, experiences and passions. He has lived in Madison for nearly three years with long-term boyfriend, Ed Rector, and their rescue cat, Louis. Though originally from Iowa, Spencer now proudly calls Wisconsin home.

MOLLY HERRMANN is a trainer, researcher and health educator with expertise in HIV, sexual orientation and gender identity, and intimate partner violence. She is especially passionate about using the community readiness model to help figure out ways to improve the health of communities and helping service providers deliver inclusive and welcoming services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. Her contributions to *Our Lives* focus on sharing information about health disparities experienced by LGBTQ people and (hopefully) motivating her community to better understand their health and how they and their providers could work together to improve it. Molly has also worked for the State of Wisconsin for over 16 years, first in the Department of Health Services and currently at the Department of Public Instruction.

In her free time, Molly likes to spend time with her wife Missy and their three small children.

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Goodman's Jewelers has always believed in supporting the community. The current owner of Goodman's has carried on that belief and continues to support many local charities and events, including New Harvest Foundation, Goodman Community Center, ARCW, Wisconsin Council for the Blind and Visually impaired, Wisconsin Public Television, DAIS, Gio's Garden, and many more.

CORRECTIONS

In the article about Rollers in the November/December 2015 issue, Susan Agee was given credit for starting the group. Sylvia Brown (who now lives in Florida) was actually the first person to start up the lunches at Monona Garden Family Restaurant on Bridge Road and Broadway in Monona. We regret the error.

In the same issue, Haruka Yukioka was incorrectly referred to with she/her pronouns in the introduction to the Our Future Leaders column. Haruka uses fae/faer pronouns. We apologize for the error.

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Trans Rights Wisconsin

The fight for—and against—the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming youth in Wisconsin has been ramping up in the last year.

THE LAST FEW MONTHS in Wisconsin have seen a number of high-profile actions related specifically to the transgender and gender non-conforming communities, both on the legislative and community levels.

Introduced in October by Republican Rep. Jesse Kremer, AB469 would restrict access to school bathroom and locker facilities for trans* and genderqueer youth, basing it on their gender assigned at birth and not their actual gender identity. An emotional public hearing on the bill was held in November and saw dozens turn out to testify, mostly against it, including several area students, teachers, advocates and parents.

Representatives from the Wisconsin Association of School Boards and the School Administrators Alliance both voiced their groups' opposition to the bill as well. Kremer was assisted in drafting the bill by Julaine Appling of the conservative Wisconsin Family Action, which was the only group registered in favor of it.

A revised version of the bill was re-introduced in mid-December, with a provision that would allow schools to offer students gender-neutral bathrooms. It stipulates, however, that those facilities would have to include stalls with floor-to-ceiling partitions. Transgender students would still be disallowed from using single-sex bathroom and locker facilities that correspond with their gender identities.

According to the Wisconsin State Journal's coverage of the bill, if it passes, "the new state law could put Wisconsin in conflict with a federal policy. In 2014, the Office for Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education said federal student non-discrimination law covered sexual identity, and federal officials have said school districts that do not allow transgender students to use bathrooms assigned to the gender with which they identify are violating those students' civil rights."

Meanwhile in Mount Horeb, a planned reading of *I Am Jazz*, a book about a transgender child, met with opposition from the out-of-state Liberty



Counsel, an ultra-conservative group that has been classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The Liberty Counsel threatened to file a lawsuit against the school if the reading went ahead and school administrators stopped it so that a thorough discussion could be had with the community about the issue.

The book reading had initially been planned as a way to help students at the elementary school understand and support a classmate who had recently transitioned. The school board eventually voted unanimously to pass a trans and gender-nonconforming anti-discrimination policy, extending full protections and rights to all students in the district.

During all of that, Mount Horeb parent Amy

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The crowd stretched down the hall for the public hearing on the anti-transgender "bathroom bill" AB469; After reaching capacity in the first room, the committee hosting the public hearing had to open a second overflow room; Kathy Oriol, MD, MS speaks at the hearing about the health impacts AB469 would have on transgender and gender non-conforming students; The crowd attending the reading of *I Am Jazz* at the Mount Horeb Public Library; *I Am Jazz*.



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Lyle decided to organize a public reading of the book for her own children and for any other interested parents and kids. Lyle only expected the event, held at the Mount Horeb Public Library, to attract a few dozen attendees. Once word got out to the public, however, things quickly snowballed: the book's co-author, Jessica Herthel, was flown in from California for the event with funding support from the Human Rights Campaign. In the village of just 7,000 people, some 600 turned out for the reading, with no one visibly protesting.

"I believe that including transgender, gender-variant, and gender non-conforming students in schools is a human rights issue," says Lyle. "This is a matter of life and death for too many children and we can't ignore it any longer. It is our responsibility as parents, as educators, as school administrators and as community members to create safe learning environments for all children."

Alex Bledsoe, the father of a Mount Horeb student, also emphasized the importance of showing support for the most vulnerable children in our communities, as well as how crucial it is to stand up against the idea of book banning in general.

"This was important to me both as an author, and a parent," he says. "Any time a book is banned it affects all authors, since it creates a climate in which our work, no matter its genre or intended age group, might be next. And as a parent, no outside group should be able to come in and make decisions about my child's education. I think the school board made the right decision, and I look forward to seeing what the teachers and administrators come up with to make the school a safe place for all students." ■



LGBTQ Organizations Update

Events | Accolades | News | Staff & Board Changes Recognition | Calls to Action

Reported by Johanna Lepro-Green

NEWS

Important notes about area LGBTQ groups

U.W. LGBT CAMPUS CENTER The Campus Center will be offering a Queer Emerging Leaders Program for undergraduate students during the spring semester. Topics covered include "Power, Privilege and Oppression," "Identity Development," "Telling Your Story for Social Change & Narratives in Action," and more. The class will take place on Mondays from 6 to 8 p.m. and academic credit is available. To sign up, visit lgbt.wisc.edu.

AIDS RESOURCE CENTER OF WISCONSIN The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) has expanded their medical home at 600 Williamson Street in Madison. The facility reopened on December 1, in recognition of World AIDS Day, and offers integrated medical, dental and mental health care to patients without regard for the ability to pay. The remodeled space includes a new pharmacy that will include access to PrEP, a medication that provides HIV-negative individuals who are at high risk of contracting HIV with an effective preventative method. To learn more visit arcw.org.

OUTREACH As ARCW grew in size, OutReach remodeled their location next door. After remaining closed for the majority of the fall, OutReach celebrated their reopening on December 15 by inviting donors, volunteers, clients, and community members to attend a "Grand Re-Opening Celebration." The new space includes an overhauled front office, as well as the addition of individual bathrooms and a separate front entrance. For more information visit lgbtoutreach.org.

PROUD THEATER The company received third place in UW Credit Union's "Share the Inspiration" giveaway. The giveaway, designed to provide support to organizations that have provided life-changing service, awarded Proud Theater a \$750 donation. Artistic director Brian Wild commented, "We were humbled to be included with some terrific organizations that assist young people in finding themselves, or comfort bereaved parents who have suffered the loss of a child, or who make equality for all a priority. Each of the organizations we were in the running with deserved to be there. We are all, together, fighting the good fight for a fair and just world, where compassion and love rule the day."

GSAFE In partnership with Diverse and Resilient and the U.W.-Madison LGBT Campus Center, GSAFE has announced "Justice for LGBTQ Youth" as the theme for the 2016 State Conference for LGBTQ Youth. The conference, on April 15, 2016, will explore what health, educational and racial justice looks like for LGBTQ youth in both schools and communities. This year's conference will be held on the U.W.-Madison campus, and welcomes school and community-based adults who work with LGBTQ youth, as well as middle and high school youth leaders, to attend. For more information and updates, visit gsafewi.org.

ALIANZA LATINA Alianza Latina and OutReach have announced that they will be offering a safe meeting space for Latina youth and their allies. "Alianza Latina Youth" is a group for young Latino people from seventh to twelfth grade who are questioning or need help or information about their sexuality, or who are just looking for a place to be themselves without experiencing discrimination. The group will meet on the second Thursday of the month, 7:00-9:00 p.m. at OutReach Community Center, located at 600 Williamson Street in Madison. For more information, contact Baltazar De Anda-Santana at general@alianzalatinaamadison.org.

FAMILY EQUALITY COUNCIL Registration has opened for "Maybe Baby Wisconsin," an LGBTQ workshop designed for those thinking about starting or growing a family. This event includes an Expert Panel, which focuses on the varied ways in which families can be created, and a Parent Panel, where LGBTQ families will provide personal stories about their experiences forming a family. This event takes place on April 30 in Madison. To register, visit familyequality.org.

FORGE FORGE sponsors a support group of parents of trans children and youth. If interested in attending, please contact FORGE by email at parents@forge-forward.org.

FORGE also continues to expand their photography collection, the Espavo Project. This photographic collection is a narrative project designed to promote personal healing and empowerment for trans* and gender non-conforming individuals and loved ones who have experienced sexual violence. To see the collection, visit forge.zenfolio.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in

PRIDE FILM AND PLAYS The festival will present the Chicago premiere of "Ten Dol-

lar House" by Rick Kennebrew and Martha Meyer at the Piccolo Theatre in Evanston, Illinois from January 7 to 31, 2016. "Ten Dollar House" first premiered at the Broom Street Theatre in Madison, and was a finalist for 2015 New Works Festival at St. Paul's History Theatre. Based on a true story, the play takes place in Depression-era Wisconsin, in which a London-based decorator and a local drifter fall in love as they restore a dilapidated rock cottage. With a "gay marriage" that hides in plain sight, Bob Neal and Edgar Hellum create Pendarvis house, an improbable business venture that transforms an entire town.

STAGEQ The local queer theater company presents "Psycho Beach Party," a comedy described by director Michael Bruno as a raucous mix between Frankie Avalon, Imagine Gidget, Sybil and Mommy Dearest. The play will premiere on Friday, February 12 and run through Saturday, February 27. Taking place at the Bartell Theatre in Madison, tickets can be purchased at the box office or at bartell-theatre.org.

LGBT SENIOR ALLIANCE Join the LGBT Senior Alliance for a New Year's Day potluck, from 1 to 5 p.m. at OutReach. Please bring a dish to pass if you're able.



Simpson Street Free Press Deidre Green works with a student (left).



This publication celebrates diversity in the Madison area. It is in this issue of Madison Magazine and will also be available online and at select pick-up locations listed below.



Debuts January 2016. THE MAGAZINE WILL BE AVAILABLE JANUARY 22ND AT THE FOLLOWING PICK UP LOCATIONS:

- East Madison Community Center • Goodman Community Center • Bayview Neighborhood Center • Boys & Girls Club of Dane County • Bridge Lake Point Waunona Neighborhood Center • Kennedy Heights Neighborhood Center • Lussier Community Education Center • Lussier Teen Center Neighborhood House • Northport Apartments Community Center • Vera Court, Neighborhood Center • Warner Park Community Recreation Center • Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center • Wisconsin Youth & Family Center



The organization will also be hosting a Winter Social on January 14. Dinner will be provided, followed by a presentation by Ricardo Gonzalez, owner of the Cardinal Bar. Ricardo will discuss his journey from living in Cuba to running a successful business in Madison as a member of the LGBT community. This event will be held from 5 to 9 p.m. at the Madison Senior Center at 330 West Mifflin St. A \$10 donation is suggested.

OPEN The Out and Professional Executive Network will be hosting their annual dinner in support of OPEN's mission on February 5 at the Sheraton Hotel in Madison. There will be a cocktail hour, a plated dinner and live entertainment, including a speaker to be announced. For more information about, or to become a sponsor of, the dinner, visit open-madison.org.

MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY Madison's gay men's rugby club will be hosting a Rugby 101 class from 3 to 5 p.m. on January 30 at the Goodman Neighborhood Community Center. Come learn the basics of rugby with the team as they gear up for the 2016 season! No experience necessary and all fitness levels are welcome, but please wear sensible gym clothes and tennis shoes.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT Diverse & Resilient, in partnership with the Fair Wisconsin Education Fund, will be hosting the Wisconsin LGBT Leadership Conference from February 19 to 21 at the Hyatt Regency in Milwaukee, and the Trans Leadership Institute on February 21 at the same location. The theme for the 2016 conference is "Building Community, Advancing the Movement," and will allow participants to deepen their understanding of

Higher-Minded Education

Lucia Nuñez becomes new Vice President for Equity, Inclusion and Community Engagement at Madison College.

MADISON COLLEGE PRESIDENT Jack E. Daniels announced in December that Lucia Nuñez had been named as the school's new Vice President for Equity, Inclusion and Community Engagement.

According to the announcement, Lucia is currently Director of the City of Madison Department of Civil Rights and will begin her service in the newly created position at the college January 4. Her responsibilities will include providing leadership, innovation and vision for diversity and inclusion efforts. Lucia will also lead efforts to enhance engagements with the communities throughout Madison College's 12-county district.

A search committee chaired by Dr. Keith Cornille, Vice President of Student Development and Success, reviewed applications and conducted initial interviews with candidates. The finalists met with members of the college community at forums in late October.

"Lucia's 30 years of experience in working with diverse and underserved populations and her demonstrated ability to bring diverse people together to seek creative solutions to a wide array of community challenges uniquely equips her to assume this role," wrote Daniels.

"We know there is a lot of important work that needs to be done related to inclusion and diversity on our campus and in identifying ways that Madison College can more effectively engage with our communities to influence positive and substantive change," he went on to say.

Lucia will be formally welcomed to the College community on January 12 at the Spring Semester Convocation.

Prior to her service with the City of Madison, Lucia served as division administrator of the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division, deputy secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, and executive director of Centro Hispano of Dane County. She was also a teacher at the Community Adolescent Resource and Education Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras.

Lucia received her bachelor's degree in Political Science and Hispanic Studies from Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, and earned a master's degree in International Education from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

She was featured in the July/August 2010 issue of *Our Lives* magazine. ■



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issues facing the LGBTQ community, network with other LGBTQ and allied leaders from across the state, and learn more about what organizations and activists are doing in order to advance health, safety, fairness and intersectionality in the LGBTQ community. Registration is \$50-\$200, with a limited number of scholarships available. For more information, visit wilgbtleadership.org.

PFLAG PFLAG hosts meetings on the third Sunday of each month in Madison. The meetings take place at the Friends meeting House, at 1702 Roberts Court, from 2 to 4 p.m. For more information, call 608-271-5440 or visit pflagmadison.org.

PROUD THEATER The LGBTQ youth theater company will be hosting "Connections: Building LGBT Relationships," on March 12. "Connections" is a conference that is designed to promote intergenerational relationships within the LGBTQ community. This event will be held at the First United Methodist Church at 203 Wisconsin Avenue in Madison. For more information on attending, becoming a sponsoring partner, or submitting a workshop proposal, call 608-222-9086 or email info@proudtheater.org.

GSAFE "Captured," a photography exhibition hosted by GSAFE, will run at the Arts + Literature Laboratory in Madison until January 15. "Captured" puts a face to local racial disparities, exposing the local community to the experiences of incarcerated youth in Dane County, including LGBTQ+ youth of color. There will also be a poetry reading about these issues at the same location on January 8 from 7 to 9 p.m., and a panel discussion about the exhibition during the closing reception on January 15, from 6:30 to 8:30. "Captured" and related programming are free and open to the public. The Arts + Literature Laboratory is located at 2021 Winnebago Street in Madison. For more information, visit gsafe.org.

PERFECT HARMONY MEN'S CHORUS On Saturday, February 6, Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus will be performing at the Stoughton Opera House. The performance will take place from 3 to 5 p.m. at 381 East Main Street in Stoughton. To purchase tickets, visit stoughtonoperahouse.com.

ARCW "Camp Bingo," a fundraiser for ARCW, is celebrating its sixth season with three dates, packed full of seven games of bingo. There will be cash prizes, a costume contest, trivia game, 50-50 raffle and food and beverages for purchase. The event, host-



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Tickets and sponsorships are available now.



CONNECT → OUR ORGANIZATIONS

ed by Cass Marie and emceed by Mariah Haberman, will occur on January 31, February 28 and March 20. Themes include "Bad Hair Bingo," "Plaid Bingo," and "Classy and Trashy Bingo." Tickets are \$20-50. For more information, or to purchase tickets, please visit madcampbingo.org.

FORGE On Saturday, January 3, FORGE will be hosting "Financial Wholeness" with Sandy Eichel. Sandy is a Financial Representative at Northwestern Mutual, and has spoken at numerous offices and events all over the

country in order to make financial services more inclusive for women, people of color and the LGBT community. The event will begin at 7 p.m. and take place at the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. For more information visit mkelgbt.org.

MADISON GAY HOCKEY ASSOCIATION MGHA will continue their 2015-2016 winter season with weekly games through March. Games are from 4:40 to 10:20 p.m. each Sunday at the Hartmeyer Ice Arena, 1834 Commercial Ave. Learn more at madisongayhockey.org.

Justice Sought for LGBTQ Inmates

Community rallies for lesbian woman wrongfully convicted of murder, trans woman held in solitary confinement.

PETITIONS AND ACTIONS to demand justice for two separate cases heated up in December, with the **Wisconsin Innocence Project** working to secure the overturning of a murder conviction against **Penny Brummer**, and the **Young Gifted and Black Coalition** organizing to free **Lisa Mitchell**, a trans woman of color, from solitary confinement.

Brummer was convicted in the 1994 murder of Sarah Gonstead and has been serving time in jail ever since. The Innocence Project says that the conviction came despite there being "no weapon, no forensic evidence, no motive, and literally no evidence of any kind tying Brummer to the undetermined crime scene." The group working to secure Brummer's freedom says it has long been speculated that anti-gay bias played a big part in Penny's conviction.

"The Madison Police and Dane County Sheriff's office wanted somebody to clear an unsolved murder, so they concocted a theory about jealousy among lesbians and used Penny," says Nancy Brummer, mother of Penny. "In their ignorance, they just wanted another lesbian off the streets, and everyone went along. This would not happen today and we are hopeful that, 21 years later, people will emerge as heroes and correct this wrongful conviction."

Said Rikki Glen, a private investigator who has been looking into the case, "Penny Brummer is a sweet woman who went out bar-hopping with her friend, was judged guilty by the police and is now serving a life sentence for a crime committed by a murderer still at large."

Brummer has been represented by the Wisconsin Innocence Project since 2007 in attempts to find new evidence. Brummer's case is also the subject of a book, *Who Killed Sarah, A True Story of Injustice* by Sheila and Doug Berry.

A \$10,000 reward is being offered for information that could help lead to the arrest and conviction of Gonstead's real murderer.

Meanwhile, the local Young Gifted & Black coalition has been advocating on behalf of Lisa Mitchell, a transgender woman who has been held in solitary confinement at an all-male facility in Dane County for the past eight months. She was initially arrested for charges of prostitution, which came at a time when Lisa was homeless.

According to YGB, "While fighting her case, Lisa Mitchell has experienced transphobia at all levels of the criminal punishment system. She has been denied hormone therapy, has been called the wrong name and pronouns, her gender identity has been called deceptive and a disguise, and again, her long sit in solitary is only due to her gender identity. The harassment and criminalization of Lisa Mitchell due to being a Black trans woman must stop."

The group delivered a petition with some 400 signatures on behalf of Mitchell's case to Administrative Law Judge Cynthia Stoppel's office on December 16. ■



Penny Brummer

Lisa Mitchell

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership

FAIR WISCONSIN

On December 10, the Board of Directors of Fair Wisconsin, Inc. and Fair Wisconsin Education Fund announced that Megin McDonell will serve as the organization's Executive Director. McDonell has served as the interim Executive Director of Fair Wisconsin since March. She previously served as the organization's External Relations Director. Before joining Fair Wisconsin in 2011, she was the Program Director at the Tenant Resource Center in Madison for 14 years, and served for 11 years on the Madison Equal Opportunities Commission.

CALLS TO ACTION

Where and how you can help

PROUD THEATER

Proud Theater in Milwaukee is looking for volunteers. Proud Theater is described as an "award-winning, exciting and innovative youth theater program, designed to foster self-expression and self-empowerment for youth who identify as LGBTQ, children of LGBTQ parents or allies of the LGBTQ community at large." To apply for a volunteer position in Milwaukee, or at one of

the multiple locations in the Wisconsin area, visit proutheater.org.

MKE LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER

The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center is looking for people of color, women and members of the LGBT+ community to show their work at the Center Gallery for upcoming shows. Paintings, fiber, quilt, photography and mixed media accepted. The center takes a 30% commission towards supporting the Center. If interested, please contact mkelgbtgallery@gmail.com and include links to your work.

GSAFE

GSAFE's 2016 Youth Scholarship application is now available. This scholarship awards four high school seniors \$1000 each. The recipients of these awards will have demonstrated a commitment to promoting just and respectful schools for all, with an emphasis on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning students and issues (LGBTQ+). This scholarship is open to all Wisconsin high school seniors, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. They especially encourage youth of color and trans youth to apply. All applications must be received or postmarked by February 15, and scholarships will be awarded in March. For more information, visit gsafe.wi.org, or email brianj@gsafe.wi.org. ■



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Calling the Shots

Madison boasts a world-class curling scene, and **Lori Karst** is proud to be part of the community that fulfills and challenges her every day.

Not once, in everything I've ever done, have I ever felt the same wonder and humanity as when I'm playing the game of curling. — from Men with Brooms

CURLING IS A TEAM SPORT, played on a sheet of ice with four players that slide and sweep rocks to a target area; the team closer to the center of the target scores the points. If you know the first five words in that sentence, then you already know more than I did when I started curling. Growing up in Minnesota I loved winters, but curling meant nothing to me. I am surprised at how curling has enriched my life, molding me into a fuller person and a stronger firefighter.

I got involved with curling as a kind of joke, to appease my college friend's repeated requests to try it. Her dad ran the college curling program in Mankato and she was my supervisor at Hardees, so it was hard to dodge the requests. I played half-heartedly for two years as a front-end player (throw two stones then sweep all the rest) and my interest was waning when I saw a national magazine on curling that piqued my curiosity. On the cover were four junior girls from Madison, Wisconsin, and they had just won Junior Curling Nationals and were headed to Junior World Curling Championships. I had no idea that there were different tiers in curling. Until that point, I was living in a small world, curling once a week in a tiny club and didn't know that there were oth-

ers doing this in bigger places for bigger prizes. Since I was headed to Madison to further my career goals in firefighting, I thought I'd go meet these girls and continue to give the sport a chance.

Once in Madison, I joined a team that needed a vice player, or the person that throws third in the line-up just before the skip throws (last rock thrower). What that also means is that you get a chance to participate in the decision making part of the game, have more difficult shots to execute, and are the team communicator, uniting the front-end (first two players) with the back-end (last two players). Having this extra involvement started changing my view on curling, and I was getting more excited about it. On top of that, I was curling with the most decorated woman in the sport of curling at that point, and the environment was much more competitive. National- and World Champion-caliber players were walking around the club on an everyday basis, and I was thinking this was getting pretty cool.

My "aha" moment came in my fourth year of curling when I was encouraged to skip my very own team (be the main strategist and last rock thrower). This changed everything. I was empowered by the responsibility of that position, and took it as a sacred oath to

make sure that each one of my team's gracefully delivered rocks made it to the perfect position by the decisions I made (the sweep and line calls).

Once I started skipping I never looked back and curling took over as my main sport, far surpassing my other interests in softball, volleyball and biking. I now have curled more years than I haven't (25 years), and have found the curling scene to be the place where I've found the best quality relationships, have the best focus, relaxation, exhilaration, and some disappointment. It's everything and nothing. I've heard it said that you can curl 100 years and still learn something new about the sport.

A great quote I've heard came from the Canadian romantic comedy, *Men with Brooms*. "No, it's not just a rock. It's 42 pounds of polished granite, with a beveled underbelly and a handle a human being can hold. Not once, in everything I've ever done, have I ever felt the same wonder and humanity as when I'm playing the game of curling." – Paul Gross

I have become a stronger firefighter since I've been curling. Curling and firefighting are pretty much the same to me. Curling is a safe place where practicing real life skills come in handy before needing it in a life-death emergency situation. Both use the risk versus reward thinking to make critical decisions. Both need to be situationally aware and form strategies that can bend given the changing variables in the environment. Both have a high dependence on clear communication; orders must be given in a very clear and concise way. Both teams use four people; each team member contributes their special skill set to help solve any problem. Both train to "win."

In competitive curling my team's best finish was eighth place at the 2005 Olympic Curling Trials. In firefighting, my best finish is still to come, but I will continue to work hard at decision making, communicating, and occasionally yelling and sweeping hard.

Madison Curling Club boasts over 500 members, has six sheets of ice, and offers leagues three times a day Sunday through Friday. Our youngest league member is 10, and our oldest member is 86. Curling is multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and welcomes all walks of faith and

sexually identified persons. We are home for people on many National teams, including the National Wheelchair Team, High Performance team, Junior and Senior National teams, and Men and Women National and Club teams. We boast members from the 2002 World Curling Champion team and have sent members to the last five Olympics (1998–2014).

Find us at madisoncurlingclub.com to try a pick-up game, schedule a company work party, or try your hand in a league. ■

READERS' POLL

Madison Date Night

We polled some of our single readers to find out what their itineraries would be for a great Madison date night.

Submitted by **Kristin F**, Madison



IDEAL DATE: "The date I've been wanting to do for a while is go out for breakfast at Short Stack in the middle of the night, then take a walk down State Street to the Capitol. Maybe the night would end with a kiss under the holiday lights!"

A BIT ABOUT KRISTIN: "I'm a student at U.W.-Madison who enjoys trying new things, which means new food, new date ideas. I'm curious and adventurous, but also into staying home, cooking a nice dinner and watching a movie."

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEENA CIRVES.



Climbing the Mountain

Anna Vogelzang muses on the challenges and triumphs of life as a professional musician, where the journey is the destination.



I'M WRITING THIS on the tail end of a successful Kickstarter campaign—15 hours before my campaign closes, to be exact. Despite my crippling anxiety and intermittent imposter syndrome, my friends, family and fans showed up with open arms to ensure that I will be able to finish my new full-length album, *Hiker*. It is a tremendous feeling.

I have an amazing community, and I am lucky to make music for a living. I think that phrase is something that every professional musician feels the need to say, because it is true and sometimes it feels like we're getting away with something amazing—like pretty soon we're going to get caught.

Being a full-time musician indeed can feel as though you're keeping a weird secret. The job description includes many hats these days: I write songs, make albums, tour the country, play shows, sing and play on other peoples' albums and shows, organize community events, run educational workshops, maintain my website, produce an annual charity show called "Wintersong," teach each summer at Girls Rock Camp, and on and on and on. But my favorite thing to do is make records.

I've been making records since 2003. I moved to Madison in 2008 after a stint in Chicago, and from Pittsburgh before that, where I had earned a degree in vocal performance at Carnegie Mellon. All along the way, I've been writing songs, and when I arrived at college I was able to start laying them down in a real studio and making them into albums. The process of breathing life into a song to see it flourish into its fullest form is one of the most rewarding experiences in this entire musical

"The process of breathing life into a song to see it flourish into its fullest form is one of the most rewarding experiences in this entire musical cluster I call a career."

cluster I call a career.

As Joni Mitchell says, "songs are like tattoos;" and for me, literally. Around every album release I find myself getting a new tattoo denoting a large lesson or philosophical realization, wanting to mark that point in time. My albums try to make sense of the world at a certain juncture, encapsulating those few years of living and loving while I was writing them. Just like tattoos, they are talismans that represent a swath of time in one's life, or a circle on the calendar. And with each one—*Hiker* will be my seventh studio album—it has felt like crossing over a new threshold.

Each threshold passed is part of a larger climb. It's like there's a large mountain with numerous plateaus up the side. With each album, you land at a plateau and take stock, looking down on what you traversed to get there,

stopping and looking around to celebrate yourself for making the trek, and then, eventually, you get up and go onward and upward again. You hope that the overall trajectory is a positive one, and that you don't remain on the same landing doing the same thing over again. Thus far for me, each threshold has been one step higher than the last, more difficult of a climb than the one before it, and because of that, more rewarding when I pass onto that solid landing.

Right now, I feel like with this record, this is the one. It's why I asked my community to help—it is the best thing I have ever made. *Hiker* feels like even more of an accomplishment than its predecessors because there was even more life and work and difficult climb going into it. In making the album I had more material than ever to choose from—more than 70 new songs—thanks to a yearlong, song-a-week writing project. I spent more than a year planning for the recording session and collecting ideas and sounds. I knew the people I wanted to involve and kept it a small family of musicians. We tracked it as a live band. And most importantly, I asked my friend Todd to produce it.

Until this point, I had co-produced or solely produced all of my own albums. I met Todd Sickafoose through a mutual friend in 2010 when he agreed to play upright bass on my album *Canary in a Coal Mine*. Until then I'd known him mostly as Ani DiFranco's bass player. Like most queer girls, discovering Ani during my teenage years made me feel as though the world had suddenly cracked open into possibility; I also felt like there was a songwriting beacon I could follow as I tried to forge

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SPENCER MICKA AT A LA CRATE VINTAGE RENTALS.

my own path—like many musicians feel upon discovering Ani's vast catalogue. By the time I worked with Todd on *Canary*, much of the song-writing education I'd garnered from exploring Ani's albums had become a subtle piece in the fabric of my craft, but nevertheless, connecting with people who'd had such a hand in molding my process felt like a coming home, like a full circle.

After more than a year of trying to find a date, in April of 2015 I toured to Todd's home in Oregon, my friend Shane Leonard flew out from Milwaukee, and the three of us made an album together in about 10 days. Todd's thumbprint is unmistakable. I am consistently grateful that he lent his ears and immense musicianship to this project. I feel like my world has cracked open all over again.

And now the album is recorded and ready to go out into the universe sometime in 2016; and I'm sitting here thinking of every tattoo, and every record that felt like it was passing over a threshold with its release. And each one was. Each album took a substantial step that got me to this place. And for the moment, I am so happy to be in this place. Eventually, I will have to take another step. But for now, I'm going to look around on this landing and be grateful, and proclaim that it is good. I'm sure in a little while I'll be ready to climb up the mountain again.

Find out more about Anna and her new record at: theanna.com. ■



READERS' POLL

Madison Date Night

We polled some of our single readers to find out what their itineraries would be for a great Madison date night.

Submitted by **Kelli Martino**, Madison



IDEAL DATE: "We'd start by meeting at Manna Café for the most important meal of the day. After fueling up, we would head out to the Blue Mounds for some snowshoeing to take in the serene winter scenery. Some of my original recipe chili could warm us up for lunch. With our blend of creativity we would then construct a brilliant work of art made of snow. Afterwards, we could warm up with some coffee at Fair Trade on State Street, or try a new place. To bring the date to a close, we'd cook a delicious dinner and snuggle as the stars come out."

A-BIT ABOUT KELLI: "I like to be active and can be most frequently found doing CrossFit, hot yoga, GoRuck events, and playing hockey with MGHA and the Rage. Instead of watching TV I'd rather be outside, in large bodies of water, or taking out the motorcycle. Whenever possible, I like to go to concerts at preferably smaller venues. And my love of cooking sustains my love of food and of course, eating."

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Jan/Feb 2016

Winter can feel a little isolating in Wisconsin, so it's more important than ever to get out and connect with your community! There's always plenty to do—from LGBTQ-specific gatherings and activities, to sporting events, concerts, social groups, and so much more. We've selected a few to highlight for you, the LGBTQ community, from a wide variety of great local organizations. Get out there!



JANUARY **FEBRUARY**

31 28

ARCW'S CAMP BINGO
Concourse & Sheraton Hotels

"Bad Hair Bingo" and "Plaid Bingo" are your themes for each respective event, as the annual Camp Bingo fundraiser returns for another season of games, off-color jokes, and fabulous outfits—all for a great cause. The January edition will be held at the Concourse Hotel and in February the festivities will move back to the Sheraton. Proceeds benefit AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin.
madcampbingo.com

JANUARY

9

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Overture Center for the Arts
Enjoy more than 30 FREE performances in one incredible day. The fest brings performances, crafts and foods from across the globe to Madison.
overturecenter.org

18

FOX CITIES' MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY CELEBRATION

Lawrence Memorial Chapel, Appleton
This annual celebration of the civil rights leader will feature a keynote address from out social justice icon, scholar and author Dr. Angela Davis. The event is free and open to the public.



23

MAD ROLLIN' DOLLS ROLLER DERBY

Alliant Energy Center
Madison's hard hitting, fast skating roller derby league takes the track for the second game of their twelfth home season with a triple header, featuring an early bout between their rec league, the Mad Wreckin' Dolls, versus the Barbed Wire Betties from DeKalb, Illinois. Next, all four home teams will face off in two bouts. Doors open at 3:45 p.m., action starts at 4:15 p.m.
madrollindolls.com

29-30

FIRE BALL VIII: EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

Majestic Theater
The biggest, freakiest and most entertaining night of the winter in Madison returns to the Majestic for two nights of tasteful and talented debauchery, featuring top-notch performances by artists from across the country. Enjoy burlesque, fire dancers, aerial acrobats, drag and the spectacle of an audience dressed to the nines.
fireballproductions.com

30

FROSTIBALL

Overture Center for the Arts
Dance to live music, nosh on gourmet hors d'oeuvres, sip signature craft cocktails and rub elbows with Madison's best-dressed social butterflies—all while supporting the state's largest nonprofit arts organization, Overture Center for the Arts.
overturecenter.org

FEBRUARY

5

OPEN ANNUAL DINNER

Monona Terrace
OPEN hosts their annual dinner at the Monona Terrace. There will be a cocktail hour, a plated dinner and live entertainment, including a keynote from Phillippe Cunningham, the Senior Policy Advisor for Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges.
openmadison.org



6

PERFECT HARMONY MEN'S CHORUS

Stoughton Opera House
PHMC will perform a concert at the beautiful Stoughton Opera House from 3 to 5 p.m.
stoughtonoperahouse.com

12-14

MADISON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Overture Center
The MSO presents "Music, the Food of Love," with special guest violinist Alina Ibragimova and guest conductor Daniel Hege.
madisonsymphony.org



12-27

PSYCHO BEACH PARTY

Bartell Theatre
Charles Busch's hilarious comedy FINALLY comes to Madison. Imagine Gidget, Frankie Avalon & Annette Funicello combined with SYBIL & Mommie Dearest...and you've got the perfect show to chase away the winter blues! Directed by Michael Bruno. Costumes and make up by Joel Duffrin. Set design by Dino Maniaci.
stageq.com/psycho-beach-party

13-14

MADISON WINTER FESTIVAL

Capitol Square
Over 90 truckloads of snow will transform the Capitol Square into a race and recreational venue this weekend. The inside lanes of the Square will be closed off for the family-oriented activities such as snow and ice sculpting, sled hill rides, snowshoeing, winter-themed museum tours, adaptive sit ski programming and many other events to participate in. Other fan favorites scheduled throughout the weekend include the Frosty 5K Run & Walk, Cyclo Frost Cyclocross Race, Frosty 1-Mile Dog Jog and other fun and festive outdoor activities.
winter-fest.com

14

CABARET: AN EVENING WITH CHARLES BUSCH

Brink Lounge
Charles Louis Busch, actor, screenwriter, playwright and female impersonator, known for his appearances on stage in his own camp style plays makes a one-night appearance at the Brink Lounge.
stageq.com



19-21

WISCONSIN LGBT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

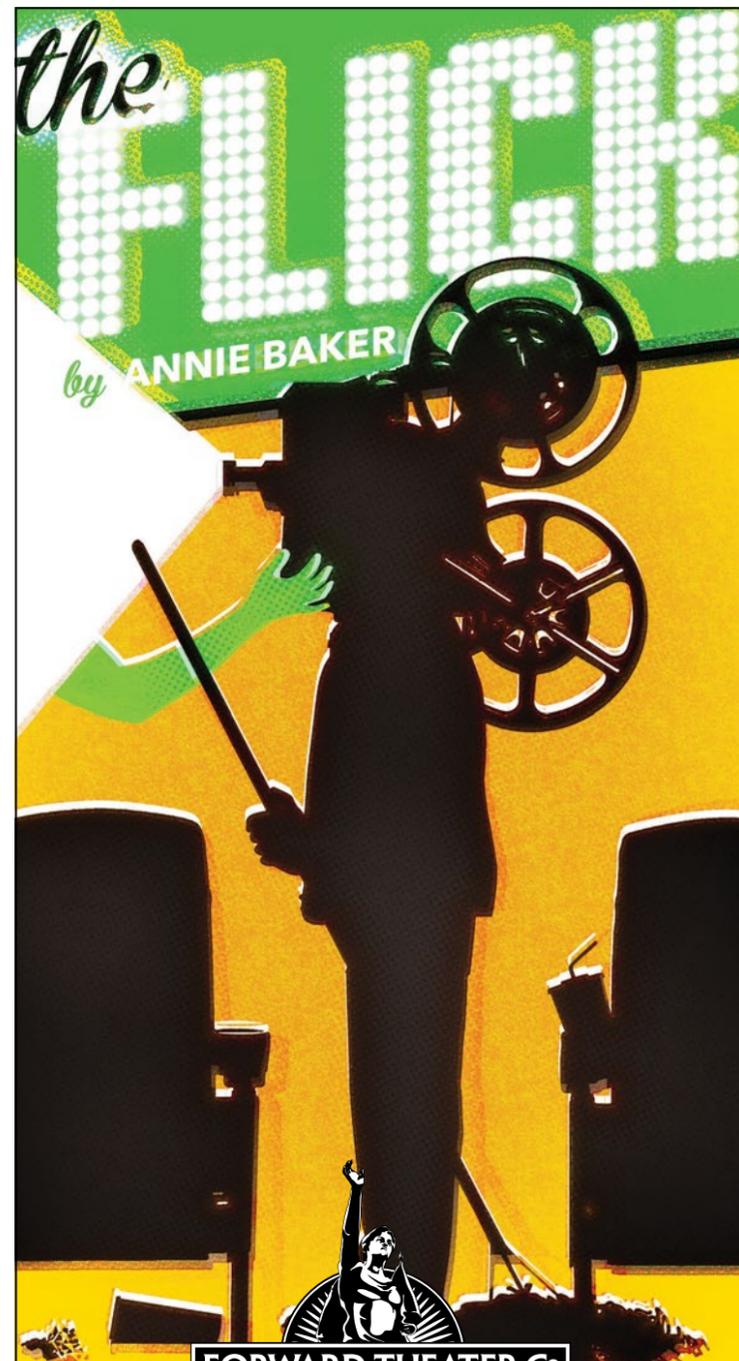
Hyatt Regency Milwaukee
This year's conference theme is "Building Community, Advancing the Movement." The annual event brings an innovative approach to building a more skilled and connected network of LGBTQ and allied leaders who are empowered to achieve and protect LGBTQ equality in their local communities across the state of Wisconsin.
wlgbltleadership.org

MARCH

12

BLADES AGAINST AIDS

Hartmeyer Ice Arena
Madison Gay Hockey Association (MGHA) hosts its eighth annual ice skating event to raise money in support of ARCW, with an exhibition game, open skate, raffle, entertainment, and more.
facebook.com/MadisonGayHockey



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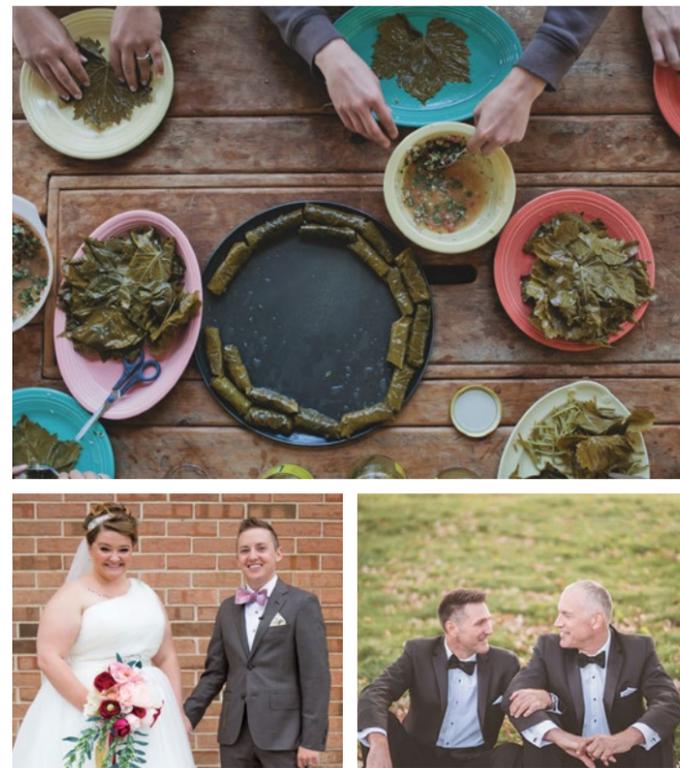
www.FORWARDTHEATER.com



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Planning Your Wedding

Wisconsin's LGBTQ newlyweds share their wedding experience and advice.



Outdoor (un)Convention

DEAN NETT & ALAN STROZAK

MARRIED JUNE 20, 2015 in Spring Green, WI: Before we left our house that morning, I walked outside and two cranes flew overhead. I felt that was the first of several signs of blessings/good luck. Though it started out raining, it cleared up enough to provide us not only a beautiful day but dry grass. The setting on our friend's farm outside Spring Green was nothing short of pastoral. We were wed by two friends of ours that spent weeks on end working to get the wording to be perfect. Both brought beautiful moments to the ceremony and blended perfectly. Our unconventional ceremony opened with the "Calling of the four directions and for the center," a traditional polytheistic invocation of the four cardinal points and elements of the Earth.

We've been together for 11+ years, so our wedding was more a celebration of what we've already built and blessings for its continuation. Guest after guest said it was one of the most beautiful weddings they'd ever attended. From the start of the day and the frenzy that always happens at the start of anything involving dozens of people to the almost magically beautiful reception that evening at the Tip Top Tavern, it couldn't have been any better or made either of us any happier!

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **La Fortuna Pizza:** Mobile wood-fired pizza oven. Their food was delicious, healthy and beautiful.

Madison Sweets: They make all their products from scratch and that was very important to us. We had a Grooms cake and a variety of cupcakes.

Jenny Sligh/Lavender Hill Events: Cannot stress enough how easy and smooth she made our day. A pleasure to work with and the perfect personality for what she does.

The Tip Top Tavern: Where we held our reception that evening from 8 to Midnight. From planning to the final product, Ben and the staff at

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the Tip Top gave us a most magical, fun evening. One of our guests was moved to tears on how beautiful it looked. They're a warm and welcoming venue anytime they're open.

Studio Jewelers on Regent Street in Madison: We went to look at rings there because we knew we didn't want diamonds and they specialize in colored stones. We found a pair of rubies we really liked and worked with one of their designers. From the drawings to the wax castings to the final moment of seeing the finished rings, it was a great experience! We wept at how beautifully he captured what we wanted.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Give yourself a year and make a serious budget. Visit the Wedding Expo for ideas of what you want and don't want. Think outside the box and have fun. We intentionally dressed in casual clothing that didn't match but was obviously meant to compliment each other as well as express our own individuality. There's a lot to be said for some traditions but now is the time to claim your own. We saved a lot of money by creating our own music list on our laptop and got amplification equipment from a local rental company.

Celebrate Your Way

JASON RAE & PHILLIP BAILEY

MARRIED ON MAY 30, 2015 at the University Club of Milwaukee: Our wedding was a truly spectacular day—despite cold temperatures and a bit of rain. We started the day at our place with a cookout for out-of-town friends and family. We grilled brats and hotdogs and got to socialize for a bit before the wedding that evening.

Our wedding was an evening affair at the University Club of Milwaukee, where we are members. We knew we didn't want a full sit-down dinner and dancing, so we tailored an event that would be true to who we were.

We started with dinner with our parents at University Club at about 5:30 p.m. We knew we needed to eat at some point and if we didn't do it then, we never would! Afterwards, at 6:30 p.m., we went to our "dressing rooms" to do final preparations and meet with the wedding party. Jason had three "Groomsmen" and Phillip had three "Groomsmen." We gathered in the room, practiced some vows quietly in the corner, and then just before 7:00 p.m. took the elevators down to the second floor grand ballroom.

We walked in to an instrumental version of "Love Me Like You Do" right through the crowd. We knew it would be a short ceremony, so we only had seating for a small group and everyone else was standing. The ceremony was presided over by Judge Lindsey Grady, a Milwaukee County Circuit Court judge. Jason ran her campaign a few years before and considered her a dear friend; Judge Grady was able to personalize the program.

It was a short, 10-minute ceremony, where we both exchanged original vows that were filled with humor and tears. We then exchanged rings—only to realize we had our own rings in our hands. So that added for some humor. After we exchanged vows, we went and did a few minutes of family and wedding party photos in an adjoining room while guests got cocktails.

The rest of the evening was simply a cocktail party featuring Old Fashioneds and other unique cocktails. We only served dessert, so had a ton of cookies and small treats around. We did a quick cake cutting, but spent most of the time walking around and getting to socialize with the guests. Once they finally kicked us out of the Club at about 10:30 p.m., we had most of the attendees head to La Cage and went dancing there for the evening.

It was a really unique day that captured who we were. We had about 175 people there and did it in a way that we could authentically express our love in our way. It couldn't have been better.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **University Club of Milwaukee:** We absolutely loved having our event at the University Club of Milwaukee. The staff was so thoughtful and truly made the wedding and celebration something we'd never forget! They missed no detail and thought everything through.

Reminisce Studio by Miranda & Adam: The photographers we hired were simply amazing to work with. They captured our wedding so perfectly. We couldn't be happier with the photos we got from them. They were able to do the mix of candid, portrait and more that helped capture every angle and aspect of the event.

Eat Cake: What wedding would be complete without cake? Eat Cake made a stunning cake that was so delicious! We hope to use them for anniversary cakes as we go forward.

We only used members of the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce. We wanted to support businesses that supported us.

PLANNING PRO-TIP One of the biggest concerns we had was trying to figure out how to juggle out-of-town family. We didn't want to ignore them or only get to see them at the wedding after traveling the long distances. To overcome this, we created a schedule that would allow us to spend time with out-of-town family. This included a special group dinner and drinks the night before, a brunch on the day of the wedding, and more.

Our other advice—which we had wished we had done—is to write Thank You notes as the gifts arrived, instead of waiting until the end after the wedding. With online registries and things getting shipped, it feels less overwhelming to do it on a regular basis than all at the end.

Finally, we were so glad that we took our honeymoon about a week after the wedding. It was great not to feel rushed and could do some clean up after wedding that week and then get away.

Making Your Own History

MOLLY CENSKY & MAGGIE O'LEARY

MARRIED ON OCTOBER 10, 2015 at Gates of Heaven and Goodman Community Center, Madison: Planning this wedding was a family affair—though we never wanted it to be. Feedback was appreciated, but we had a vision and we stuck to it. We consistently reminded each other, "This is OUR day. As long as we stick together, as hard as this is sometimes, this is OUR day."

But we also realized—this actually IS a family affair. Though the

marriage was ours, the planning, the support and the legality of the event was so much more. This was a celebration that we are so incredibly grateful for, and so humbled to have been supported by not only family members, but by everyone in the community and the many couples who helped pave the way for us to be able to celebrate our love.

When Molly proposed to Maggie, same-sex marriage was not yet legal, and we refused to tie the knot until it was. The fact that same-sex marriage was legalized nationally during → **Continued on Page 29**



CENSKY & O'LEARY PHOTOS BY KEDAR JOYNER PHOTOGRAPHY.

NETT & ALAN STROZAK PHOTOS BY TIM FITCH PHOTOGRAPHY. RAE & BAILEY PHOTOS BY REMINISCE STUDIO BY MIRANDA & ADAM.

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Sail Away

STEVEN HELLER & RYAN CROSE

MARRIED ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 at Bishops Bay Country Club, Middleton: After 2.5 years of planning during our engagement, and switching between Chicago (for legality) and Madison (to be at home) a couple of times, we didn't know what our day would become. What it became was a day where we welcomed 120 of our closest family and friends on a perfect fall day as we exchanged vows under the oak trees lining the shore of Lake Mendota. Following the ceremony, officiated by a dear friend, the wedding party sailed the lake and then greeted guests on the pier before they had a sail. Happy hour with his & his signature cocktails and passed hors d'oeuvres lasted until a formal dinner with champagne toasts. We drank them out of white wine—it was a good party.

Throughout the day it was important for us to emphasize the significance of our families, make sure our guests were comfortable and enjoyed their time, and that the day was uniquely us. Thanks to the help of many friends and family, it was—to us—the perfect day.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Angelic Angles Photography:** Jennifer's end product speaks for itself, but working with her and her creativity was unforgettable. She's amazing at what she does and worked so well with us.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Sign up on theknot.com and use their budget tool, website creator, and timeline/task list. That kept us very organized and on schedule, plus gave us good targets for keeping to a budget.



HELLER & CROSE PHOTOS BY ANGELIC ANGLES PHOTOGRAPHY.

the middle of our engagement was the sign that things were meant to be. Molly and Maggie were amazed at the kindness and open-mindedness of the community and the vendors. Every single vendor met us with gender-neutral pronouns when asking about plans and didn't bat an eye at the fact that we're both women.

The most exciting part for us was the application for the marriage license. We were asked, "Would you like 'spouse and spouse' or 'wife and wife' on your certificate?" Shockingly, Molly agreed on "wife and wife" because it symbolized us as women in marriage.

We both hold relatively traditional values when it comes to marriage—aside, of course, from the fact that we're both women. The wedding day began in separate places—Maggie was at HotelRed and Molly was at home. We'd decided early on to do the "traditional" thing and not see or talk to each other before the actual event, but when Molly lost the bowties for the wedding party, chaos ensued and she broke down and called Maggie who suggested she look in the trash. Sure enough, there they were. Oops!

Gates of Heaven was a beautiful venue, rich with history. Both Sun Prairie natives, Molly and Maggie grew up driving past Gates of Heaven thinking, "I'm going to get married there someday." Little did we know we'd be marrying each other!

Our families are extremely religiously diverse, so the ceremony incorporated readings and traditions from multiple faiths. It was not important to us to have a religious ceremony, but we wanted to consider the belief systems of family and the importance of a faith-based ceremony to them. A gay wedding was a difficult pill to swallow for some of the attendees, and some relatives declined invitations because of it, but we are forever humbled for the amount of friends and family who showed unconditional support through the whole process.



We are especially grateful for the love given to us by our parents. In a world where many LGBT couples still have to hide their love, we are privileged to have grown up in households with parents and friends who have grown to support ours.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Kedar Joyner Photography:** Kedar, Griffin and Joel spent the entire day with us making sure to capture each moment. Their unique point of view helps us to relive the day each time we look at our photos.

Hair Excellence: The team at Hair Excellence in Sun Prairie did a beautiful job with our hair, making us picture-perfect on our special day.

Fine Line Custom Attire: Mitch Bram primarily makes suits for men but was excited to expand to include women. → Continued on Page 31

Remember that tie you gave dad for Christmas last year?

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A Little Help from Our Friends

JENNIFER AND ALEXIS CLOUTE

MARRIED ON AUGUST 22, 2015 in Whitewater: The location was at a local park where we had our first date, and where Alexis had proposed. During the ceremony we walked into a Labyrinth separately (representing our journey through life alone), meeting our officiant in the center of it. After the ceremony we walked out together (representing our new journey together as a couple). We released butterflies and walked out to the sounds of both Native American and Irish music. For the reception we ate food prepared by our friends, sang karaoke, shoved ice cream cake into each other's faces, and played with sparklers outside next to a bonfire. Quirky and fun ... just like the two of us!

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Erica Andrus Photography:** She did an AMAZING job with our photographs. She did a fantastic mixture of traditional, formal, informal and unique angle shots that beautifully portrayed our special day!

PLANNING PRO-TIP Never underestimate the benefits of allowing your friends and family to help on the big day. We had so many people pitch in and help make the event a stress-free one. They were glad they could pitch in, and we were thankful to just have to focus on enjoying the day. Just make sure to give them as much advanced notice as possible, and don't dump it all on one person!



CLOUTE PHOTOS BY ERICA ANDRUS PHOTOGRAPHY.

Molly was among the first to have a custom suit from Fine Line.

Bunky's Cafe: Bunky's hosted our rehearsal dinner. It is such a beautiful spot for an event. Theresa made us feel like family. Also, the food is phenomenal.

Working Class Catering: We were so excited to be able to support youth in the Madison community.

Sol Yoga, Prairie Athletic Club: This hot yoga studio helped us get in shape for our big day.

Grampa's Pizza: Though they're known for their yummy pizza, Gil at Grampa's made the most delicious ginger cake cupcakes for our guests, and the most beautiful wedding cake for us. We frequent Grampa's Pizza and were elated when Gil agreed to do this for us!

Premiere Couture: Premiere Couture in Cambridge has such a gorgeous selection of unique wedding gowns.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Include everyone and let them give you suggestions, but don't follow any of them. In the end, what matters most is what you and your partner want. It's your day, not theirs!

Going to the Chapel

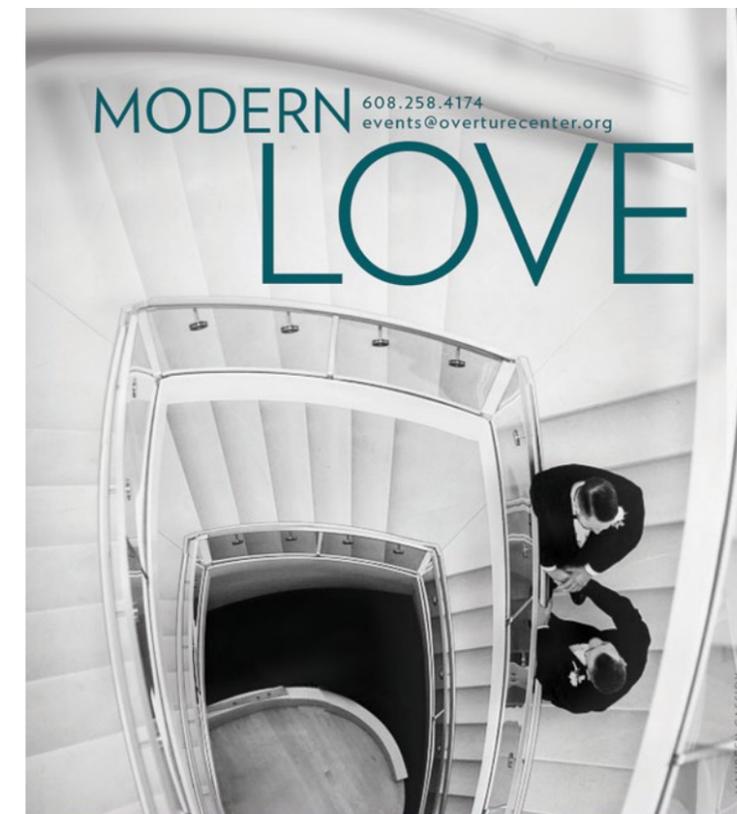
RAND SCHMIDT & STEVEN SANDERS

MARRIED ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2015 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Milwaukee: We waited a long time for our wedding. Steve and I were engaged for more than 17 years prior to the big day. We are active in our home parish and felt that we wanted to be married there. Until recently it was not possible to be married in an Episcopal church in Milwaukee. St. Paul's is the first Episcopal congregation and second oldest Christian congregation in Milwaukee, founded in 1838. It is now a very diverse congregation, worshipping in a beautiful historic building.

The move from "engaged" to "married" was rather amusing. Steve mentioned casually that our Facebook profiles didn't reflect our "engaged" status and he couldn't figure out how to change his. I got my phone out and changed my status, showed him how to do it and then began to receive many "likes" and comments from people wondering when we would be married. That started the process—no bended-knee proposals, just a social media posting. We then talked to Father Steve Teague and scheduled a series of counseling sessions with him. Part of the pre-marital process was for both of us to complete temperament sorters to see how our personalities might affect our relationship. Father Steve said this wasn't required since we had already been together for 35 years, but we did the exercise anyway and it was very interesting. Our personalities are quite similar—at → Continued on Page 33



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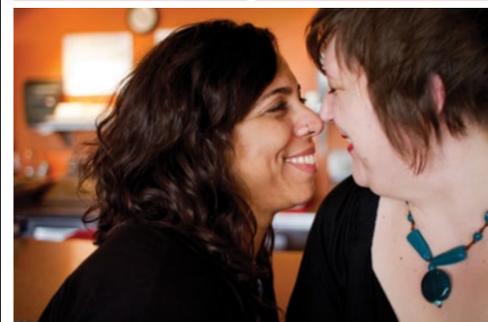


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Around the Pond

JACOB & COLLIN BOURDREAU

MARRIED ON SEPTEMBER 19, 2015 at Willow Wildlife Retreat: There are no words to describe the love and support we felt from our families, friends and military comrades. They are the ones who truly made the day memorable! Without them, it would have just been another day in the life of Collin and Jake.

The amount of work that was put into our big day was incredible, and it really showed. I remember showing up and seeing it all come together for the first time—it nearly brought me to tears. The reception tent was set up perfectly. Our “ceremony peninsula” had turned out gorgeous and picturesque.

Getting ready was nerve-racking. I remember looking at Collin several times, seeing him beaming and just taking it all in. Times where we would just look into each other’s eyes were the most memorable. The ceremony was perfect. We walked out from the opposite side of the pond. Exchanging our vows, we both came really close to crying. After, we lit our torch and let the celebrating begin! Overall, we are really thankful for our family and friends who made our day all the better and celebrated our life and love with us. Without them, we would have nothing.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Don’t worry! Make a list before you begin purchasing anything, and don’t forget that you will end up adding to that list as you go. Don’t procrastinate on any of it, either, and try to make sure you have everything big in order at least three months prior to the big day.



BOURDREAU PHOTOS BY CRAZY DAISY PHOTOGRAPHY.

least on paper! We also discussed the worship service, selected hymns and Bible passages for the readings, and discussed other aspects of the service. Although we didn’t have attendants in the ceremony, our sisters walked us down the aisle. Because of our long-standing involvement in the choir, Steve and I wanted to include choral music in the service and we actually sang two of the three anthems with them. I thought I’d tear up or cry while singing, but didn’t. Steve, however, lost it during the vows (as had I in the rehearsal). I gave his hands a big squeeze, and he was able to continue. Father Steve then noticed his wife crying in the congregation during the vows and he, too, got a lump in his throat. Such a long journey from the start of our relationship to our wedding day! We were fortunate that so many friends, family and parish members were able to be there to support us.

Steve and I decided that we wanted a stand-up reception, wanting people to mingle rather than be seated at tables. The church’s Great Hall was the setting for our reception. The room was freshly painted and decorated. As our friends who were recently married explained, the reception would be over before we knew it, and it was. We are so fortunate that Lee Matz, a professional photographer and a member of our congregation, took many photos during the reception. It was a very special gift to us and a wonderful remembrance of our special day.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Flowers by Jan:** The owners were extremely accommodating, and the arrangements were beautiful.

Jack Norman Catering: It was a pleasure to work with the staff, and our guests were very impressed with the prepared food items.

Chez Jacques Brasserie: We held a wedding brunch there for friends and out-of-town relatives, and the staff was very accommodating.

PLANNING PRO-TIP I think it was helpful to have examples of the type of floral arrangements and the color scheme we wanted when discussing with the florist. I provided photos of the stained glass windows in the church and asked that the flowers be in similar hues.

We decided to add a personal touch by baking a variety of family recipe cookies for the reception in lieu of a wedding cake. We also brought in dahlias from our garden to use in small bistro vases on the tables in the reception. They were a nice complement to the floral arrangement on the food table. Several family members came to the church on the day before to arrange the cookies on trays and the flowers in the vases. It was a nice bonding experience for them, and we appreciated the assistance.

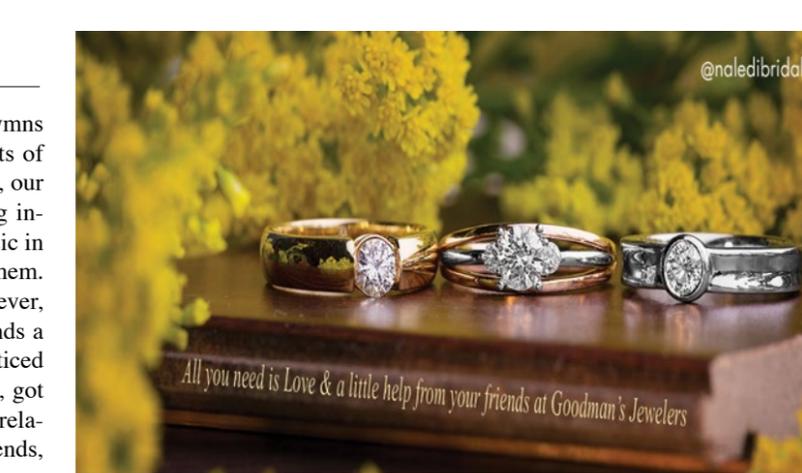
So Ordered

JEN & KELSEY VAN TASSEL

MARRIED ON JULY 11, 2015 at Minneapolis City Hall and Bryant Lake Bowl: From the start we knew we wanted to be married. We met in Madison just as I moved there—and two weeks before she was leaving for Minneapolis. There was an instant connection, a bond neither of us had experienced before. Together we felt like home and love and happiness.

We were inseparable those two weeks, and then she moved. Just a little over a year later, I moved to Minneapolis to be with her. We got engaged on New Year’s Eve, exchanging rings we had picked out together and promises for the rest of our lives—to the great delight of the very tipsy people in the bar around us.

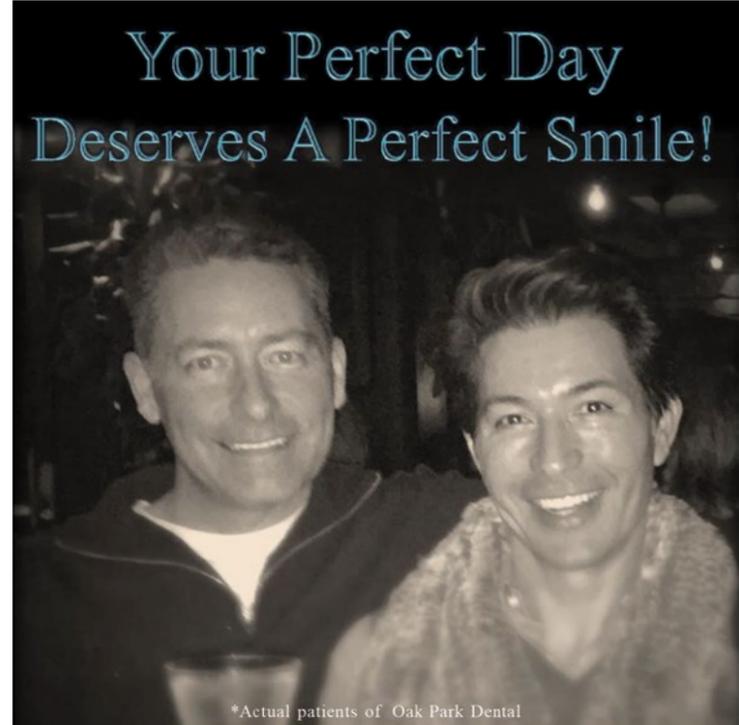
The only thing we wanted in a wedding was that it be authentic, intimate, full of love and meaningful to us and to our families, both blood and chosen. In the council chambers of → **Continued on Page 35**



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When in Doubt, Improvise

GARY & JEREMY COOPER-SPERBER

MARRIED ON JUNE 6, 2014 at the Milwaukee County Courthouse: We obtained a legal domestic partnership in November 2013 at the Milwaukee County Courthouse in order to obtain some legal protections for one another. Like many couples before us in Wisconsin at this point, we were planning on traveling to Iowa (specifically, Dubuque) to get married at a later date (to be determined) and were slowly taking our time with the wedding planning. We both planned on having "Best Women" as our wedding party (Jeremy's sister, Jeanna, and Gary's adult niece, Martica). On Friday, June 6, 2014, the news broke about Judge Crabb's marriage equality ruling in Wisconsin. Jeremy proposed to Gary (via text) to get married that same day, and he said yes. Our wedding plans just went out the window! Everything after that point was organic. We both quickly hurried to end our workdays at our respective jobs: Gary was fortunate to have a boss who allowed him to leave early to get hitched! A few hours later, we were married at Milwaukee County Courthouse. After our wedding, we went out to eat a nicer-than-normal dinner at a local restaurant and proceeded to end our day by celebrating: attending the opening day of Pridefest. Throughout this experience, we decided it was easier to just simply announce it to everyone at once on Facebook (except for our close loved ones, we did via phone call/text). The reasons why we did it this way: it was faster, cheaper (Gary got to wear his tuxedo t-shirt), we were unsure if a stay would be applied to the ruling at some point in the near future, and Gary loves a great party.

By being legally married, it shows that our government understands, believes and agrees that our committed relationship is no lesser than different-sex marriages. To us, our wedding was the official way to declare to everyone this was the beginning of new life together as one (some of our loved ones literally call us 'Garemy'). We hyphenated our last names, a combining of our namesakes to honor both of our deceased fathers and to establish us as family. We didn't have quality wedding day photographs, since it was a very impromptu decision. However, for our one-year anniversary, we worked with Nicole Acosta Photography & Artist for these great one-year anniversary photographs. Our initial wedding plans and wedding day was vastly different in all regards except in one way: we tied the knot and became the Cooper-Sperber Family!

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Nicole Acosta Photographer & Artist:** I would recommend Nicole because she is extremely flexible, patient, creative, fun and talented! She has a social justice core and she truly cares about your experience and final product!

PLANNING PRO-TIP When in doubt, just stop it all and go for it. Elope! Sometimes, the unexpected and unpredictable turns out to be the best route and works out in the end.



COOPER-SPERBER PHOTOS BY NICOLE ACOSTA PHOTOGRAPHER & ARTIST.



Jen & Kelsey van Tassel

Minneapolis City Hall, lights low and candles flickering, all our closest people gathered together. We walked down the aisle holding hands.

Just two weeks before the wedding, same-sex marriage became legal in all 50 states and every moment felt incredibly powerful and meaningful. When we entered the room full of friends and family, we felt like we were a part of something larger and so beautiful.

Kelsey's Aunt Daisy, a pastor, lovingly officiated. Jen cried all the way through both her own vows and Kelsey's, which we had written separately, as a surprise to one another (and Kelsey's vows were so perfect more than one person asked for a copy). Jen's two-year-old nephew was the ring bearer. He took his job very seriously. With

great concentration, he took each ring box, carefully opened it, extracted the ring, closed the box, and placed it in each of our hands. We were so proud of him. It was a difficult job for a two-year-old in front of all those people, and he was perfect.

We exchanged rings, and clung to each other's hands as Aunt Daisy said, "I now pronounce you married. It is so ordered!"

Jen forgot to lift her veil in her rush to kiss her beautiful wife. When we turned, the whole audience was waving "Yay!" banners, and that's when Kelsey started getting teary. A big yellow school bus shuttled guests over to the reception venue, Bryant Lake Bowl. The thing people remember the most about the reception, besides the fact that they didn't think they'd ever heard of a wedding reception with bowling, was that our wedding cake was chocolate mousse, with chocolate frosting, and there was much rejoicing.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Planning a wedding is hard. We decided to keep our wedding small to keep the cost down and to minimize

the stress and the amount of planning we'd have to do, and yet we were still completely dazed by the number of details we had to keep track of, from invites to RSVPs. We also decided to get married somewhat last minute, before we moved out of state—which gave us just about three months to prepare. So our advice is to give yourselves as much time as possible, keep very detailed lists (we did ours in Google Docs so we both had access to it) and try not stress out. It's really true that on the day of the wedding you will be so nervous, excited and overwhelmed with love that everything will feel perfect no matter what.

Also, if you don't have attendants for the ceremony, beg a friend or family member to be a support person on the wedding day—to give

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by our Sparkle Squad (the #Stephelly alternative to wedding parties), and all the flowers harvested from nearby fields and roadsides. Our friend Brock brought a lamb from his family farm and gifted it to us—it turned on a spit throughout the day. Kids, adults and one puppy ran around the yard and skateboarded down the country road behind the house. All in all, it was relaxed and full of love and joy.

Due to the rain, we moved the ceremony inside the reception tent, which worked better than either of us could have imagined. The sun popped out for this one portion of the day. Our officiant was a dear friend and worked with us to create our ceremony, which included poems, words of wisdom from family, and more. The ceremony was the hardest piece of the wedding to plan, and ended up being our favorite part.

The food was amazing. The desserts were epic. The toasts were touching. The beer ran out early, and friends went on a (successful) keg run in town. DJ Naughty Professor (another friend) brought everyone to the dance floor throughout the party, and we had a fantastic night. Fireworks provided by uncles went off with only a slight hitch. At last call, all the remaining dancers pitched in to completely tear down the reception tent.

We went back to the Hummingbird Retreat and collapsed into happy oblivion. Honestly, there's no way we could have pulled off our wedding without nearly superhuman support from our

directions to guests, help with last-minute fixes and correct unexpected flubs. They will save your life and deserve an entire cake of their own.

nearest and dearest. It was our best possible wedding day. To all of them reading this now...THANK YOU!

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Anda Marie Photography:** She was AMAZING. Our photos perfectly captured the quality of our day, and Amanda seamlessly integrated into even our most intimate moments. Both of us can get pretty awkward during portrait sessions, but Amanda made us laugh and feel totally comfortable in front of the camera. Her documentary style was exactly what we wanted—an honest and candid reflection of our wedding day and all the people who were a part of it.

Willy Street Co-op West: Pam Puckett, the wine/beer buyer at Willy West helped us find delicious and affordable wine options for our reception. She took our budget as presented and gave us an array of tasty possibilities to choose from. In the end we selected a red from Italy and a white from France, both of which were crowd pleasers. It was a relief to also be able to keep this expense in budget!

Tents, Inc.: If you're getting married on the east side of Madison check out Tents, Inc. for your tent and table rentals. They are much more affordable than many other options and were super easy to work with.

Heimie's Haberdashery: Kelly's suit was custom made by the fine tailors at Heimie's Haberdashery in the Twin Cities. Completely LGBT friendly and a great experience from start to finish. Be sure to ask for Gus—he is the best!

Hummingbird Retreat: If you're ever in Two Rivers, rent this place! It was a dream.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Plan for Rain! Do it! Now! (Seriously, though. Do it.) We did not plan for rain even though we sort of thought we had.

RICKETTS & SCHULTZ PHOTOS BY ANDA MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY.

And, of course, it rained the entire weekend. We got very lucky, and the wedding tent didn't flood until the day after everyone left (sorry for not listening, Dad).

Check out *The Practical Wedding*, a book by Meg Keene. It was a grounding and enjoyable read that helped us articulate our wants/needs for our wedding, and gave solid advice on how to navigate discussing the wedding with family and each other. Particularly for Stephanie, this was a very helpful planning resource.

Don't overdo the DIYing. We ended up making a TON of stuff (including the entire reception dinner) from scratch with the help of very generous friends and family. These same friends were the ones who pulled us away from final set-up an hour before the ceremony began to get dressed. A little more moderation and a few more dollars spent would have resulted in a much more relaxing wedding day.

Decide for yourself whether to invite family who are not supportive of LGBT marriage equality. Whatever will give you the greatest peace of mind and calm on your wedding is the best thing to do. For us, it differed by family, but the end result was the same—a wedding full of people who chose to be there wholeheartedly.

Don't leave for your honeymoon at 9 a.m. the next morning. It will always be too early. Leaving after noon will probably be much more fun. Do go on your honeymoon right away if you can—it's a prime opportunity to soak in the post-wedding glow and relax after the fun and (let's be real) the stress.

Autumnal Affair

SCOTT SHORT & ROBERT STIPICEVICH

MARRIED ON OCTOBER 17, 2015 at the Madison Club: We had an incredible day. It was a beautiful fall Saturday—Homecoming for the Badgers vs. Purdue, in fact. This was special, as Scott is from Indiana and several of his relatives attended Purdue. And while they hoped for a double celebration they would have to settle for just ours.

Scott and I arrived at the Madison Club at 1:00 and were met by our photographers and friends Johnny and Michelle. This in and of itself was a great start, we were relaxed and placed ourselves in their trusting hands. They whisked us off to Olin Park where we took a copious amount of photographs, including on the piers by the boat ramp. While on the pier a gentleman taking his boat in from the lake offered to take us out to the center of the lake so we could use Monona Terrace and the Capitol as a back drop; it was an incredibly kind act (which we had to decline due to time constraints) that made us think about how lucky we were to live in such a supportive community.

Once back at the Madison Club we were greeted by our wedding party. Scott had his best friend Tim, his sister Susan, and his cousin Jackie stand up with him while I had my twin brother Paul as best man and my older brother John, and sister from another mother Stacey support me. We were both blessed to have the support of our families across generations; it meant a lot to us. As we waited for the ceremony to begin and the guests to arrive we were able to walk around the venue and see how everything came together. Pictures were spread out over one whole room filling it with familiar faces, smiles and memories. The flowers were in place and looked stunning and the chargers on the tables literally sparked as they were hit with late afternoon sun.

The ceremony began at 5 with a small procession and Judge Ebert welcoming our guests to the land of the giants (I'm 6'5, Scott is 6'4, and the Judge is 6'2). It was the perfect icebreaker and put all at ease as this was the first "gay" wedding for the majority of our guests. Scott and I stated our intent and then moved into a reverse unity candle that

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Short & Stipicevich

had been lit earlier by our mothers. We then exchanged vows and were pronounced married and shared our first kiss as husbands in front of family and friends.

The writer and food critic MFK Fisher wrote in her book *Serve it Forth*, “Dining partners, regardless of gender, social standing, or the years they lived, should be chosen for their ability to eat and drink—with the right mixture of abandon and restraint.” That was the kind of folks we invited to our party so after the ceremony we started the open bar with our two signature cocktails, the Stipi Sippa and the Scooter Cooler—both big hits. While guests partook in sprits and appetizers Scott and I finished pictures and changed into white dinner jackets. Both our fathers were married in white jackets and we wanted to carry on that tradition.

Dinner consisted of chopped salad, roasted pumpkin soup, intermezzo, short ribs, cake, and an assortment of desserts. The toasts were awesome with my brother basically doing a stand up routine on how Scott and I met—it brought the house down! We could not have been happier with our day or with each other.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS Scott and I wanted our wedding to be as local as possible so the vast majority of our vendors were from Dane County. Here are some of the best:

Cherry Blossom Events: Sarah and Emily really invested in our big day; we can’t speak highly enough of them personally or professionally. Emily worked so hard in the weeks leading up to the wedding and then spent 11–12 hours shepherding and coordinating people and things on the big day. Truly a professional team and we can’t thank them enough.

Flora by Jamae: Jamae knocked it out of the park with her floral work—we asked for Fall and masculine and she delivered. She paired succulents with billy balls, peonies, and kale and it was beautiful. The table arrangements were layered and had texture—she even decorated the

light above the cake creating an incredible visual display.

Paper Antler: Great personalities and overflowing with talent, Johnny and Michelle manage to photograph and capture “you” and not just your day. Their work with negative space is incredible. Full disclosure, they are friends. They lived two doors down the hall when we met them several years ago and we knew right away we wanted to work with them on our big day.

The Madison Club: Everything old is new again. The staff here was awesome to work with both leading up to the event and on the big day. The food here is the real deal, and it was all excellent—we are still hearing compliments.

A La Crate: Sara and her husband have an eclectic gathering of goods to choose from to enhance and stage any venue. We chose some coke bottles, a sofa, frames, blackboards and a mantle. They are easy to work with and are straightforward.

Paper Piper: What a great find Missy and Beth were. Fun, energetic and clever, they helped us with an invitation and printed our menus and programs. Super-fun to work with—so much so we went back for thank-you and Christmas cards.

Diny’s Jewlers: We purchased our engagement and wedding rings from our neighbors across the street. They were very helpful and really, really patient.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Don’t be afraid to break tradition or protocols. We switched to white dinner coats after the ceremony even though we were well passed Labor Day. We did not offer a choice for the meal; we trusted our selection and put our faith in the quality of the food at our venue, and it paid off big time. We also did not have dancing after the ceremony. We opted instead for merriment—piano tunes, games, a little gambling, and s’mores out on the patio. Be true to yourself and your vision, and it will work out.

SHORT & STIPICEVICH PHOTOS BY PAPER ANTLER.

Casual and Personal

AMY & LAURA QUAINANCE-STRONG

MARRIED ON MAY 29, 2015 at Charles Allis Art Museum, Milwaukee: We were actually married on December 12, 2014 in our home with just our parents present. We wrote our own vows and it was very intimate and exactly what we wanted. In May was our reception—the big celebration with all family and friends that we wanted to have to celebrate not only our love and our commitment, but also all of the people that had been supportive of us throughout our near-decade-long relationship.

The setting was perfect—just the right amount of vintage glamour and elegance with the opportunity to still have a casual affair. We both wore tea-length vintage inspired dresses and felt beautiful and special, without being too “fussy.”

When the day finally arrived, it was certainly hectic! From appointments at the salon to trying to load in and arrange all of décor and centerpieces—we were feeling frazzled! Once our wonderful photographer pulled us aside and started taking pictures though, we were able to relax and enjoy our day (a glass of champagne helped, too).

We were able to have one of our closest friends play a few of our favorite Elvis and Johnny Cash songs on acoustic guitar, Laura’s sister gave a heartfelt speech about our relationship and our guests all enjoyed a delicious meal and dancing (to a playlist that we created ourselves) for the perfect evening.

And now we are celebrating our first wedding anniversary and soon we will welcome our son into our family (Amy is due February 20)!

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Aggie’s Bakery:** They did our cutting cake and cupcakes (in red velvet and vanilla flavors). We wanted something very simple that matched the décor. Not only did the bakery



Amy & Laura Quainance-Strong

QUAINANCE-STRONG PHOTOS BY MCKENNA MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY.

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look amazing, it all tasted phenomenal! We got compliments from our guests for weeks after.

McKenna Marie Photography: Our photographer was fantastic. Not only was she easy to work with and talk to (and helped calm us both down during the first hectic hour of our celebration), she really understood us and the images we wanted to capture. We cared a lot about capturing the mood of the reception and candid moments of our friends and family and were very pleased with the special moments she was able to capture.

Zilli Hospitality: They managed our bar service and not once did we have to worry about their set up or questions from their staff (very important since we did not have a wedding coordinator, we appreciated not being troubled with anything day of).

PLANNING PRO-TIP Don't get caught up in the details! Inevitably, something will go wrong day-of, or you will forget or overlook something. In our case, the location did not have WiFi which we needed to play the Pandora station that we set up. On that same note, even if you aren't working with a wedding coordinator and planning on doing everything yourself, make sure you have a back-up crew of your family and closest friends. We had people running out last minute to pick up items that were forgotten and a crew to help us set up the centerpieces and dessert table when our timeline just got too tight.



Fitzgerald & Hamill

Full Circle

DEBORAH HAMILL & ALICIA FITZGERALD

MARRIED ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 at Olin Park, Madison: Alicia and I met at MichFest on a trail in the woods. I offered to help her put up her tent and she turned me down flat. I always liked a challenge so after a few more interactions we became fast friends. After the Fest, I returned to Madison and Alicia went home to Old Town, Alexandria. Our long distance relationship and incessant texting didn't last long: Alicia moved to Madison on June 6, 2014—the same day U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb overturned Wisconsin's discriminatory state ban on marriage for same-sex couples. We celebrated during our car ride and when we entered the state that evening we knew our lives

together were just beginning. But, more importantly, for the first time there were neither distances nor laws in our way.

I proposed in Olin Park on December 9, 2014. While we were in Michigan they filled the skies with Wish Lanterns. I had wished on one for love, so it seemed only fitting to recreate the moment for the proposal. I had friends fill the skies with lanterns, which added warmth to the chilly December skies.

Our wedding day was September 12, 2015 in Olin Park. This location celebrated all of the important pieces of our story. We were outdoors just as we were when we met. Friends, family and music surrounded us and our vows were filled with laughter. I was so nervous my shaking hands couldn't tie my bowtie. Alicia, in true Latin style, showed up late. After our ceremony I bemoaned that I'd be late to everything for the rest of my life. Alicia lovingly replied, "You're going to be on time for everything for the rest of your life, which is late for you." Time is relative after all and no matter how hard you try time will fly on your special day. One of the best pieces of advice I received was to steal away for moments and watch it all from afar. Breathe in special moments.

The ceremony and reception were all about personal touches for us. When we looked at ceremony scripts they all felt too stuffy or traditional. Instead we opted to write the ceremony ourselves, pulling bits and pieces from the Internet and our story. Friends and cousins did the readings and a special song, and dear friend Koren Schemmel was the minister. The piece we struggled with the most was what to do as a unity symbol. Unity candles felt too religious, colored sand felt too beachy, wine mixing felt meaningless, and so we pondered. Finally, I stumbled upon a hand fasting ceremony. We decided to use rainbow colored ribbons to honor our community. Each ribbon had a different wish, which was read by our bridal party who wrapped them around our trembling hands. When we pulled our hands apart it was supposed to "tie the knot" and of course it didn't work! So we laughed, because it didn't need to be perfect; we tied it imperfectly together. Our personal touches continued in the food. We didn't have a traditional, tiered wedding cake. Instead our cakes were made with love. Dear friends Amanda Purington, Jennifer Luedtke and Teresa Curtis baked and my mom made her special pumpkin cake as the one we cut. Our sides were made by a close friend Leigh Vierstra and our flowers lovingly prepared by Alicia's boss and friend Erica Gittings. Of course we ended our day with Wish Lantern—a symbol that began it all.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS **Simple Elegance Wedding Planning:** We hired Dominique at the last minute to do all our wedding day set-up and decorations. She brought our dreams to reality and became a close family friend. She is dynamite!

Claire O Design: She will always be our photographer. She doesn't just snap a photo, she captures candid moments of rising joy in our lives.

Saturns 8 DJ: Andy saved the day! Our dance party never stopped, and he recommended our wedding band Trap Saturn who set the tone for our whole day. Perfect.

PLANNING PRO-TIP **START EARLY!** After booking the major vendors we left the rest until the end. The lighting, napkins, menu board, flowers, candles, the ceremony planning and program, etc. It all adds up and it is all much more time consuming than you realize. Make a long list early or use one of the many online calendars and stick to it. Don't forget to divvy up the tasks as well so you aren't overlapping. Discuss expectations as to who will handle what and by when to avoid unnecessary stress at the end.

HAMILL & ALICIA FITZGERALD PHOTOS BY CLAIRE O DESIGN.



O'Neil & Karcher

Blazing Your Own Trail

CHELSEA O'NEIL & OWEN KARCHER

MARRIED ON AUGUST 8, 2015 at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art: "Let us not forget the people who worked hard to make this public union possible. We want to thank and publicly acknowledge all of the queer people of color, trans, bisexual, lesbian, gay and allied activists and advocates who fight in the public eye and in the shadows. We want to honor their queerness and honor that we're taking a day to celebrate beauty, love and life in a ceremony that would not be possible without their dedication. Chelsea and Owen's love, and this day we will share together, is about bringing more light into this sometimes dark world." So began our wedding ceremony.

Our journey to the altar was a complicated one with many questions and conversations about what it would mean to craft a truly authentic celebration. As a queer fat femme and a queer trans man in relationship, we didn't see ourselves or our diverse wedding party reflected in wedding blogs and magazines. In fact, we began to notice that we repeatedly found more and more of the same cookie cutter options saturated with obscene amounts of money and thin, white, able bodies. Even the gay and lesbian features left us disheartened, since there were rarely transgender and gender non-conforming people or plus-size bodies represented.

Some days the pressures of traditions, heteronormative assumptions, and strict gender roles were enticing and we wanted to give in and just be "normal." To hold onto authenticity while so many voices and institutions were telling us to let it go was both liberating and heartbreaking. We had to come to terms with our insecurities and fears and to boldly take up space that didn't feel meant for us.

Amidst the celebrations for marriage equality, we found ourselves feeling more marginalized and full of questions. The more we tried to make our queer love fit within the rules and plans laid before us the more we realized that we didn't fit the mold (and we didn't want to).

O'NEIL & OWEN KARCHER PHOTOS BY VIVIANNE MCMASTER.

We were hungry for reflections of our values and our community—people of color, trans* people, individuals outside the gender binary, fat bodies, people with disabilities, bi, poly and beyond. We were motivated to craft the most personal, inclusive and joyfully queer celebration possible.

Owen's suit came from St. Harridan, a clothing brand designed for masculine women and trans men. Our wedding party got to choose their own outfits within a color palette. Each person was encouraged to shop for their body type, personal style, and within the budget of their choosing. In lieu of favors we let our guests know in the program that we donated money to GSAFE to help queer and trans youth in our community to live more vibrant and authentic lives. Our venue had gender-neutral bathrooms. Owen danced down the aisle with some cousins and friends' children wearing superhero capes and waving glittery ribbons! Our wedding became a Beyoncé-fueled love fest and a healing and purposeful act of revolution.

We who do not see ourselves in the media often feel a need to compare our bodies, our relationships, our haves and have-nots to what we see before us. We start to feel shame and fill our heads with "not good enoughs." We pay more attention to what we should be instead of loving what we are, and our souls start to suffer.

VENDOR RECOMMENDATIONS Our videographer **Vaughter Weddings** did an incredible job of capturing so many beautiful moments and details from our day that we would have missed without the video, and we felt so comfortable with their team.

PLANNING PRO-TIP Focus on how you want to feel and create your mantra. Ours was "joy and ease." We were constantly coming back to this when making decisions about everything from the ceremony to the guest list to the decorations. It helped us to stay on track with what was right for us and not get swept up in the excitement and pressure of wedding planning. It wasn't always easy, but we were able to make our decisions with purpose and clarity. ■



- 3 Sarah J. Ferry & Shanna Denning ♥
- 2 Katie Johnson & Bethany Ramsey ♥
- 1.5 Elaina Brown & Megan Tomasik
- 1 Brad Esquivel & Jesse Lockstein

ASHLAND

- 12 David & Teege Mettill

BARABOO

- 17 David Binder & Bill Stevens
- 15 David & Ryan Berahn

BAYSIDE

- 20 Leon Laufer & Nathaniel Walker

BEAVER DAM

- 1 Julie Tesch & Nikki Wayd ♥

BELLEVILLE

- 26 Ken Cameron & Brian Thompson ✓ ♥

BELOIT

- 12 Joanne & Tina Lenz-Mandt
- 4 Boston Smith & Preston Taylor
- 3 Ami & Jamie Christophersen

BLACK EARTH

- 13 Philip Frank & Mark Pocan

BLOOMINGTON

- 6 Danielle & Rachael Merry-Love

BLUE RIVER

- 10 Jen Johnson & Brenda Larson

BOSCOBEL

- 40 T.J. Meehan & Larry Ortt

BRODHEAD

- 8 Cindy Desch & Lynn Olson

BROOKFIELD

- 16 Lynn Carlson & Lisa Rouskey
- 6.5 Laurie & Michelle Thalacker

BROOKLYN

- 20 Cheryl Hack & Myrna Peterson

CHETEK

- 6 Kristine Gotch & Jennifer Holm

CHIPPEWA FALLS

- 13 Dan & Jason Bennett-Hardy

Bold
Couples who are married.

♥
Couples who are engaged.

✓
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.

★
Straight couples identified as allies.

Share the Love.

2016 LOVE LIST: CELEBRATING WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

2016 LIST PARTNERS



By being a part of the Love List, almost 500 LGBTQ couples from across Wisconsin are helping us recognize and celebrate our relationships while also creating connections and visibility for our entire community. This is one of our annual ways to lift up *Our Lives* readers from across the state while creating a portrait of love that reflects our diverse community.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: To protect against trans* and bi invisibility, **only LGBTQ-identified relationships** are represented in photos. Allies appear in the list text.

APPLETON

- 21 Jerry Koleske & Michael Nitz ✓ ♥
- 13 Julie Konik & Christine Smith
- 12 Samantha & Sara Rabideau
- 12 Heather & Natalie Starr
- 11 Sally Masters & Chris Zingler
- 9.5 Charles Erickson & E-Ben Grisby
- 9.5 Kathy Flores & Ann Kendziersi
- 7 Patrick & Ryan Platta
- 3.5 Gail Cardo & Juke Welnetz ♥
- 3 Abby & Christina Frederick



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Wisdom and Light



Thanks to their solid 16 years together, **Corey and Dereck Barr-Pulliam** have been able to adjust to life away from family and friends—and the start of a family of their own.

We met in 1999, but began dating in 2000 while we were undergraduates at the University of Mississippi. We have literally “grown up” together, and we have been virtually inseparable since! Though we have been together for nearly 16 years, we celebrate our second wedding anniversary on May 16, 2016. We were married

in Niagara Falls, Ontario (Canada) and shared the time with close friends. Though not yet legal in Tennessee in 2014, we both felt strongly that we should be married at some point.

After living in Memphis for 11 years, we moved to Madison in the summer of 2014 after Dereck got a job at the University of Wisconsin. We are both Southern boys at our core. Cory was born in Mississippi and Dereck was born in Tennessee and lived a significant amount of time in Mississippi as well. As family-oriented individuals, the move was very hard for both of us. It was especially tough because we were moving far away from our friends and family. That meant a lull in the frequency of weekend brunch with our closest friends. That was major! Despite the big adjustment, we are excited about the life we are creating in our new home—which now includes a baby girl named Blake Paisley. Her adoption process has been one of the notable challenges to the malleability of our relationship. While she has been the best baby we could have hoped for, we’ve ridden an emotional rollercoaster for about four months leading up to the critical termination of parental rights date. Only a tested and true relationship filled with love and lots of experience could have endured that.

There is never a dull



moment in our house and we truly enjoy spending time together. We have some common interests such as traveling, spending time with family and friends, music and sports (especially the WNBA). Like any relationship that’s lasted, ours has been tested. We’ve not experienced any overt homophobia or ever feared for our lives, but there were times early in our professional lives when our careers required we spend weeks at a time apart due to travel. We also arrived at the coming out stage at slightly different times. However, the one thing that’s been the bedrock of our relationship is our support for one another in the good, the bad and the ugly.

As black gay dads in a significant long-term relationship, we like to think of us as unicorns (even more so than LGBT persons in general) because of our multiple layers of identities. However, we often find ourselves serving as role models to others seeking or in the early throes of relationships (both gay and straight). It’s not because ours is perfect, but because we are transparent and available. We’ve found a great job in sharing our story and we are motivated by others (many of whom are represented in this issue of *Our Lives*) who’ve been together much longer and provide us with the wisdom and light we like to share with others.

- COLUMBUS**
4.5 **Bonnie Gutsch & Heidi Hershberger**
- COTTAGE GROVE**
27 **Marilyn Krump & Gloria Krysiak**
16 **Deb Fruit-Gaines & Sheila Jacobson-Gaines**
10 **Suzanne Fichtel & Cheryl Ravenscroft**
9 **Michelle Melsby & Lori Van Himbergen**
5 **Carlos & Perry Edge-Gross**
- DE PERE**
4 **Jonathon & Robert Tagatz**
3 **Tom Brittnacher & Chad Sandoval**
- DEFOREST**
15 **Lynn Johnson & Charlene Strouf**
14 **Holly Anderson & Colleen Marsden**

- 5 **Bill & Ron Strelow-Dunn**
3 **Annie Getsinger & Andi Weinstock** ♥
0.5 **Gabe Loredo & Cooper Thomas**
- EAU CLAIRE**
40 **Carol Schumacher & Virginia Wolf**
15 **Lisa Herrmann & Jane Schley**
- EDGERTON**
11 **Amy Kongslie & Michelle Paulman**
8 **Mandy Ingram & Sarah Korpi**
- ELKHORN**
15 **Brandon & Jeff Balke**
- FALL RIVER**
2 **Angella & Anna Hall**
- FITCHBURG**
23 **Sam Gauger & Karen Stampfli**

- 22 **Michael Johnson & Robert Rosa** ✓ ♥
22 **Michele Perreault & Stephanie Spoehr**
18 **Andrea & Nancy Murleau**
14 **Lindsay Raftis & Alicia Stevenson**
10 **Nate Mathis-Vargas & Steve Vargas-Mathis**
6 **Jill Muenich & Laura Webster**
5 **Jesse Hoffmeister & Michael Van Hout** ✓
5 **Ryan Crose & Steven Heller**
4 **Beth & Naomi Zaccard**
3 **Eric Ignarski & Michael Ruiz**
3 **Dave Ryan & Justin Sukup** ♥
2 **Alicia Fitzgerald & Deborah Hamill**
2 **Savanna Strennen & Samantha Thompson** ✓ ♥
1 **Aaron Carreno & Ryan Piaszkowy**

Bold
Couples who are married.

♥
Couples who are engaged.

✓
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.

★
Straight couples identified as allies.

MOTOR IN THE MOMENT

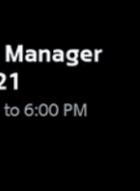
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Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

1 Andre Glass & Ron Gratz

FOND DU LAC

8 Amanda & Trish Miller

1.5 Teresa Ninneman & Jamie Shiner

FORT ATKINSON

15 Amy & Stephanie Rappold

FREDONIA

31 Chris Hewitt & Dean Wiegert

GLENDALE

17 Cindy Mangan & Jennifer Mangan-Moore

6 Carrie & Jennifer Doss

GRANTSBURG

3.5 Dawn Sarah Goodman

GREEN BAY

14 Angie & Deanne Kowalzek-Adrians

9 Kevin Garrity & Michael Larkey

5 Jennifer & Nicole Welch

1.5 Allison & Natasha Wolf

1.5 Stephanie Osgood & Darlene Wiese

1.3 Jade Gialdini & Sara Walker

1 Lizzy Frauchiger & Tiffany Williams

GREENFIELD

9.5 JR Rasch & Rod Rasch-Claussen

7 Toni Henry & Nicolette Tarantino

1 Haleigh De Smet & Tiffany Weber

HALES CORNERS

3.5 Charity Aviles & Angela Laack

HAZELHURST

16 Stephen Hulls & Edward Olson-Hulls

IOLA

18 Ann Casamassa & Michelle Hazuka

JANESVILLE

27 Richard Laurich & Neil Lawrence

15 Keith Steinbeck & Brad Yarmark

13 Jay Schleker & Josh Siedschlag

10 Kimberly Blanchette & Colleen Frentzel

10 Whitney Adams & Cori Reith

5 Jenna Lazzaroni & Casandra Robbins

3 Estee Mullen & Amy Peterson

3 DJ Davis & DJ Malchow

JEFFERSON

30 Mary Otterson & Gail Pearson

JUNEAU

2 James Clary & Daniel Hanks

KAUKAUNA

6.5 Robert Gulig & Scott Webber

KENOSHA

3 Megan & Rachel Quiroz

KEWASKUM

4 Natalie & Stefanie Brettingen-Nash

LA CROSSE

32 Francie Ball & Mary O'Sullivan

24 Tara DeLong & Willem Van Roosenbeek

19 Beth Cherne & Cindy Killion

9 Nicholas & Reegan Jensen-Shafer

8 Victor Macias & Scott Swedeen

LA FARGE

24 David & Joseph Rogan-Nordstrom

Choosing Each Other



Vivienne Anderson and Kye Richards have much in common and a flexible relationship that allows them to say yes to one another again and again.

VIVIENNE: I met Kye when I was in a post-divorce-slutty phase, where I would date anyone—and was at the same time shocked that anyone would ever touch me again. I approached our relationship as a fling that wasn't supposed to last. We met online and had vastly different expectations going into that first date. I told my colleagues I would be back in two hours (coffee turned into drinks, then dinner—I never made it back to work). Kye, on the other hand, was so anxious she forgot her own name. During that first date we learned that we have a startling amount in common, we both got married too young to people who didn't turn out to be at all who they presented themselves to be, we both endured years at seminary, we both struggled with body dysphoria and identify as transgender.

I am often still surprised that I am in a relationship that wasn't supposed to last more than a few weeks, and I think that is exactly what makes our relationship work. We aren't together because of some state sponsored ecclesial ceremony where one of us is clothed in shimmering samite, we aren't together because we can't get other dates (we retain the right to date outside of our relationship, though we rarely exercise it), we don't stay together because we have commingled retirement accounts. Our relationship has almost no rules. We stay together because we enjoy being together. Perhaps paradoxically, I feel more secure in this relationship than I have in any other.

Kye has shown me that a healthy relationship isn't just about mutual admiration, but it is about mutual support. While our relationship lacks traditional statements of commitment, I know if I ever need a partner in crime that she has my back. I know when we are out with friends we can both participate without upstaging one another. I know when I don't want to go to the gym she will encourage me. When I don't want to cold call new clients, she will prod me. I know if I want to make a dish, she will want to eat it. It just works. Kye is my best friend; she is chosen family in the best sense of the term.

KYE: Vivienne is a joy and a delight who makes my life more fun, adventurous and tasty. We share bizarrely specific experiences in common, from a rocky history with the Lutheran church to a nostalgia for Saturn station wagons, from body dysphoria to the joys of being Scandinavian. We had a lot to talk about on our first date. Our compatibility makes day-to-day life together a smooth and pleasant ride. I feel very fortunate to have found in Vivienne a partner who nurtures and encourages me while also pushing me to achieve my potential. I feel like I am able to be more fully and confidently true to myself with my best friend by my side. Vivienne brings out the best in me. I hope I bring out the best in her, too. I certainly try to.



"Thanks for the great work on our bathroom. It looks fabulous and we're very pleased!" **MARK POCAN**



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A Couple of Forevers



Aisha Bennett and LaSondra McGee overcame distance and difficulties to become everything to one another.

Sondra and I met on tagged.com four years ago. I was looking through profiles and came across hers, where my first thought was **she is so beautiful**. I hate rejection, though, so I was nervous to message her. Instead, I decided I would “wink” at her and hope she’d return it. She did! After a few more winks, she messaged me.

I was so attracted to her beauty and personality that I never even realized she lived in Mississippi. We exchanged more messages and then she asked for my number. When she called I felt like a little girl falling in love for the first time. Her voice and energy were everything. I remember laying down, smiling, just listening to her talk. We talked about the typical things you talk about when you’re trying to get to know someone. I asked her what her last name was and she said “McGee.” I did not say it to her at the time but I told my friends she was going to be my wife because McGee was my now deceased father’s last name.

Sondra was rough but so feminine and that is the sexiest thing in the world to me. We talked everyday on the phone for a few months. Then

one day Sondra called and told me she wasn’t ready for a relationship. She broke my heart but I loved and respected her even more because she was honest. We remained friends on Facebook, with a few rough patches here and there, but eventually we started back talking like we had never stopped. We would talk on ooVoo (a video messaging service) a lot, often falling asleep while still on the phone with each other. Whoever woke up first would hang up the phone and call back.

I told her one day, “I need to come see you, I need to be in your presence.” She thought I was kidding. I purchased bus tickets. I had to take a bus to Chicago from Wisconsin and then wait until midnight to get the bus from Chicago to Memphis. I was so nervous. We talked on the phone a lot while I was on the bus. Once I got to Memphis, I was so happy to see her but still so very nervous. I remember telling her I prayed for her, but I could tell she did not believe me. I spoke life into the type of woman I wanted and God sent her to me. When it was time for me to return home we were so sad. Forty-five days later

Sondra moved to Wisconsin.

The biggest test of all was for my mom and my two boys to like her. Thankfully, they all fell in love with her right away. In January 2013, she came to my job and brought me pink roses and a beautiful card. Inside the card she wrote, “This is your first surprise.” I told my coworkers I thought she was going to propose. She picked me up from work and I was being nosey as usual, asking all types of questions. She gave me a jewelry box and it had these beautiful purple and white earrings with a pendant to match and said, “This is your second surprise.” Then she told me to get ready to go hang out with friends. When we arrived she became sick. I told her we could leave but she insisted that I stay and she would go home and lay down. My mom called and asked me to fix her a plate and bring it to her. When we got to my mom’s house, there’s Sondra. She looked so nervous and excited at the same time, got down on one knee and asked me to be her wife. I said YES! She had already talked to my mom and the boys and got their blessing before she asked me.

The wedding planning began. Every day we tell each other something special about one another so we never forget why we fell in love. We got married September 18, 2014 at Inn on the Park in Madison. Our wedding song was “A Couple of Forevers” by Chrisette Michele. We had a beautiful wedding and reception but it still was not legal. Gay marriage was legalized shortly after that but we wanted to keep our original wedding date so we went to Vegas and got married legally for our one-year anniversary. I thought that I had been in love before but Sondra is my first true love. She loves me passed any imperfections I have. She loves our children as if she gave birth to them herself. She is my best friend, my safe place, my person, my sun in the rain, the missing piece of my heart—she makes me feel like I can do anything and I pray that I do all of this and more for her.

LA POINTE

24 Glenn Carlson & Michael Childers

LAKE GENEVA

41 Beth & Jody Rendall

MADISON

54 Clarence Cameron & Robert Lockhart

46 Chuck Bauer & Chuck Beckwith

40 Raphael Kadushin & Thomas McGhee

39 Sunshine Jones & Joann Kelley

37 James Corkey Custer & Betty Harris Custer ★

36 Janice Czynson & Crystal Hyslop

36 Lee Melahn & Rick Shaver

36 Pamela Hill & Sheryl Jones

35 Louie Phillips & Brian Schultz

35 Nancy Buckwalter & Sue Hughes

34 Larry Seeman & Keith Stephens ✓

34 Sue Currier & Janis Senungetuk

34 Danielle Dresden & Donna Peckett

33 John Cannon & John Fritsch

33 Melissa Keyes & Ingrid Rothe

32 Tom DeChant & Paul Gibling

31 Robert Bergeman & John Sacia

31 Val Hodgson & MC Reisdorf

31 Michael Bemis & Duane Hansen

30 Karen Milner & Elizabeth Petty

30 Anne & Lee Urbanski ★

29 Laurie Frost & Jeff Henriques ★

29 Rob Latousek & Brian McCormick

28 Lois Bradley & Pat Framke ♥

27 Mare Chapman & Pam Porter

27 Dale Decker & Chad LaFlash

27 Jim Chiolino & David Heuer

27 John Ferguson & Kurt Schuhart ✓

26 Sondra Dalton & Brenda Swenson ✓♥

25 Andrew & Giso Broman

25 Maggie Dugan & Melanie Witte

25 Patricia Blair & Pamela Stangl ✓

24 Judy Childers & Christina Zoschke

23 Dan Ross & Charles Squires

23 Kenneth Kaiser & Richard Schober

23 Donna Miller & Mary Kaye Radtke ✓♥

22 Richard Butler & Charles Klauer

22 Alan Irgang & Grant Priehs ✓

22 Callie Bell & Beth Thigpen

22 Judy Seymour & Mary Sykes

22 Susan Oshman & Tamara Seeker

Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.



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Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

- 22 Franck Meunier & John Strasser
- 22 Michael McFadden & Steven Scholze
- 21 Rigoberto Gallegos & David Wahlberg
- 21 Michael Austin & Robert Stindt
- 21 Eldonna Hazen & Cathy Noth
- 21 Liz Lauer & Nina Lebowl
- 20 AnnMarie Rutledge & Robin Barreau-Rutledge
- 20 Deborah Daniel & Linda Novinger ✓
- 20 Judith Howard & Amy Scarr
- 20 Rene Christesen & Karen Larson
- 19 Kimberly Fisher & Linda Ketcham
- 19 Carrie Beitlich & Amy Clements
- 19 Jon Amber Lefers & Rachel Veltman
- 18 Catherine Briggs & Marty Fox
- 18 Liz Dannenbaum & Donna Winter ✓
- 18 Martin Christopher & David Landre
- 18 Mary Hitchcock & Michelle Sawyer
- 17 Roberto Amezcua & Dennis Sokolik
- 16 Bret Dougherty & Timothy Lapp ✓
- 16 Bob Klebba & David Waugh
- 16 Diane & Monique Brockley-Drinkman
- 16 Eric Appleton & Rick Bristol

- 16 Joanna Fenner & Choua Her
- 16 Cory & Dereck Barr-Pulliam
- 16 Jordan Bingham & Heather Stouder
- 16 Devery Cash & Darren Kittleson
- 16 Carol Nelson & Nancy Speir
- 16 Scott Bennett & Landon Petersen
- 15 Dan Lippitt & Glenn Mitroff ✓✓
- 15 Aaron Schultz & Randy Wagner
- 15 Patrick Hoeth & Keith Lupien
- 15 Barb Arnett & Ellen Sullivan
- 15 Brett Butzman & Bernie Parish ✓
- 15 Jen Ferstl & Jamesetta Fousek
- 15 Terry Heiliger & James Moe ✓
- 14 Erin Johansen & Jeffrey Zoerner
- 14 John & Julie Meister ★
- 14 Lynn Lee & Steve Skaggs
- 14 Renee Herber & Tamara Packard
- 13 Jonathan Garber & Derek Tyus
- 13 Carol & Carrie McCann
- 13 Chris Meyer & Heather Wentler ★
- 13 Jocelyn Lepinski & Daisy Quintal
- 13 Kevin Campion & Wes Marner
- 13 Olwen & Shelly Hansen-Blake

- 12 Amanda Berg & Becca Schmitz
- 12 Joey Broyles & Danny Atwater
- 12 Jacinda Tessmann & Theresa Weiland
- 12 Kris & Lesley Wolf
- 12 Megin & Scott McDonell ★
- 12 Randy Cornell & Jess Salek
- 11 Lela Ann Cunningham & Jennifer Cox ✓
- 11 Nick Drake & Emily Mills
- 11 Dean Nett & Alan Strozak
- 11 Michael Cole & Paul Fleischauer
- 11 Karen Darcy & Beth McConnell ✓
- 11 Lisa Buchanan & Shawna Kollath ♥
- 11 Michael Velliquette & Tehshik Yoon
- 11 Renee & Shari Roll-Currie
- 11 Scott Burfield & Trevin Gay
- 11 Virginia Harrison & Melissa Peyton ✓
- 11 Nick Baillies & Craig Kramer
- 10 Robin Bechhofer & Pat Lambert
- 10 Helene & Jeanne Benink
- 10 Alisha & Keelyn Henning ✓
- 10 Eric Borchert & Timmo Dugdale
- 10 Heidi Beatty & Kathy Kreutzer
- 10 Julie & Monika Nischik



Stumbling Into Love



Gavin Logan and Eric Larrabee discovered that perhaps fate does play a role in being at the right place at the right time.

I first saw Eric shortly after I returned home from a 10-month deployment with FEMA. The readjustment to civilian life was incredibly challenging for me, and after weeks struggling to find community again I decided that the only way I could begin to reconnect would be to start going out. So, naturally, I went to FIVE Nightclub. As luck would have it, Eric just happened to be there, too. It was his birthday and he was out to celebrate. We definitely noticed one another, but circumstances being what they were, we just kept it at that. He was the cute guy from across the bar.

Not too long after that, I returned to work as a Security Officer for a private security agency. One night I was stationed at a hotel on the east side of town. Between the commute and the fact that I was in the middle of a stressful move into my apartment, I was very reluctant to go. I went. I was present. And I was bored. After a couple of hours passed I overheard some conversation at the front desk and decided to wander over and engage. It was at that moment that I realized Eric was the one working at the front desk. I was shocked—and at the same time, I was captivated by him. He looked a lot cuter outside of the bar scene. It was then and there that I decided I needed to come up with an excuse to talk to him. I guess you could say it was at that moment that it became love at first (or in this case, second) sight. I walked over and tried to introduce myself, but quickly became too flustered to speak properly and ultimately ended up just awkwardly doing something to convey that I was the guard on duty. Something I was later kicking myself for after realizing the obviousness of my statements, given that at that point I'd already been there for a few hours. Feeling rather embarrassed I shuffled back to my post thinking that I'd completely blown my chance with this beautiful man.

At the end of my shift I returned to the front desk to see what still needed to be done before I went home. This time Eric was the one who struck up conversation with me. It wasn't some magical topic, but it certainly left me feeling much better about my earlier display. I left the hotel still feeling like I had missed an opportunity when I realized that I had accidentally (and yes it was accidentally) walked off with the radio belonging to the front desk. I quickly turned around to return it and decided halfway to the door that I might just try my luck with a last ditch effort and leave a note with my number for Eric to find. I arrived back to the hotel when my phone suddenly vibrated with a Facebook message. I opened it up and saw that it was a message from Eric. All it read was, "Soooo you want to hang out sometime?"

We've been together ever since and have become engaged. I don't know if it was fate, luck or an odd combination of the two, but whatever the case may be, I feel so grateful to be able to say that this is the man I get to share the rest of my life with. I can't wait to see where it takes us.

TIPS & TRENDS

Customized Cookies and Cupcakes



APRIL RIPP, BAKERY MANAGER
THE MAKERY

A lot of people are expressing an interest in having customized cookies as a dessert and/or wedding favor for receptions, rehearsal dinners, showers, even bachelorette/bachelor parties. I think it's appealing because we customize the cookie to match the theme of the celebration, whether it be casual, unique or more traditional. Continuing in popularity is the use of cupcakes in place of the traditional wedding cake. Hosts often have a variety of flavors available for guests to choose from; which is appealing on many levels.

Innovations in Jewelry Design



CHALMERS JEWELERS
JON BUMANN, VICE PRESIDENT

Getting married? You'll need rings! While white gold appears to be riding off into the sunset, we are seeing an uptick in custom rose, yellow and two-tone vintage styles. Our custom demand has grown so rapidly, we've added an additional 3-D printer to our tech lineup. You HAVE to see this beast in action! If diamonds are your thing, fancy shapes are hot. Especially ovals and pears. Many men are currently drawn to black finishes. Tantalum, Zirconium and Ceramic are all new exciting options in this arena. The loudest buzz is coming from our Elysium black diamond rings. They are a pure black diamond in the shape of a ring. Seeing is believing.

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- 1 Sara Moe & Ashley Smith
- 1 Amber Halverson & Vanette Piepenbrink ♥
- 1 Ciara Havlik & Kelsey Shaw
- 1 Eric Graham & James Steinike
- 1 Eric Larrabee & Gavin Logan ♥
- 1 Jenna Joanis & Hannah McDowell
- 1 Maggie Augustin & Ames Barker
- 1 Rachel Lehmann & Peg Zizzo ♥
- 0.5 Caissa Casarez & Addie Chernow
- 0.5 Christina Davis & Paige Schenck
- 0.5 Eve Bertrand & Jenny Hanson
- MANITOWOC**
- 4 Alyssa & Stephanie Schragen

- MARATHON**
- 35 Mark Blume & Thomas Voss
- MAZOMANIE**
- 4 Fred-Allen & Matthew Self
- MCFARLAND**
- 27 Linda Besser & Sandy Theune
- 24 Chuck Mocco & Thomas Scheid ♥
- MENASHA**
- 4 Levi & Yolanda Young
- MENOMONIE**
- 8 Maggie Maguire & Lisa Marien
- MEQUON**
- 16 Brian Le Starge & Dale Mueller

- MERRIMAC**
- 14 Sondra Benson & Sabrina Osowski
- MIDDLETON**
- 45 Bill Diederich & Jim Green
- 20 Ron Meerhoff & Michael Rhoads
- 18 Joyce & Leilani Robertson-Hoyt
- 10 Erica & Mike Sweitzer-Beckman ★
- 4 Cassie Immel & Taryn Lindemann
- 4 James Belmont, Alexander Garcia & Nicholas Juris
- 3 Patrick Bass & Ray Hestres ♥
- 3 Spencer Micka & Ed Rector
- 1 Coryden Grau & Kyle Juve
- MILWAUKEE**
- 40 Ronald Coleman & Thomas Thresher

Bold
Couples who are married.

♥
Couples who are engaged.

✓
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.

★
Straight couples identified as allies.

- Bold**
Couples who are married.
- ♥
Couples who are engaged.
- ✓
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.
- ★
Straight couples identified as allies.
- 10 Donald Haar & Steven Starkey ✓
- 9 Tony Jamieson & Rob Van Nevel
- 9 Andrew & Noah Carrillo
- 9 Amanda & Dawn Siebert-Evenstone
- 9 Derek Aimonetto & Glenn Rowe
- 9 Amanda & Kathy Ferwerda
- 9 Bradley Tabor & Tim Walters
- 9 Carolyn & Ruth Barker-Bowman
- 9 Hannah & Megan Dew
- 9 Jeanine Hutcherson & Tricia Johnson
- 9 Jeff Clark & Tim Hagen
- 9 Jennifer & Kelly Yates
- 9 Jennifer Lawrence & Melanie Rider
- 9 Bex & Summer Laird
- 9 John Sims & Garret Trinrud
- 9 Judith Davidoff & Rhonda Lanford ✓
- 9 Kim Erickson & Katie Kuehl ♥
- 9 Philip Renner & Marco Torrez-Miranda
- 9 Tina Dorschel & Andrea Wipperfurth
- 9 Andrea Bill & Chops Seggerman
- 8 Bonnie & Sarah Schulte
- 8 Katy Conley & Leonie Dolch
- 8 Melissa Dittmer-Herrmann & Molly Herrmann
- 8 Paul Waller & Jason Kivela
- 8 Philip Keller & Steven Sievert ✓♥
- 8 Ann & Cindi Gonzagowski
- 8 Donna Schmitt & Jennifer Vance
- 8 Jay Edgar & Joshua Feyen
- 8 Lana Lawrence & Louise Stout ✓
- 8 Lauren Leibold & Kathryn Wilkin ♥
- 8 Lee Kampa & Eric Sedelmaier

- 8 Mel Freitag & Amber Sowards
- 7 James & Shawnee Parens
- 7 Ali Treviño-Murphy & Amy Winkelman
- 7 Elisa Derickson & Dan Krueger
- 7 Gabriel & Matt Starika-Jolivet
- 7 Nancy Hutson & Michal Osier
- 7 Shawn Farris & Douglas Hipenbecker
- 7 Ande Johnson & Emily Pepper
- 7 Dana Crumpton & Ronald Lee ♥
- 7 Jami Degrazio & Holly Hieronim ✓♥
- 7 Jason Kemp & Ryan Schroth ♥
- 7 Trent Gabler & Justin Miller ♥
- 6 Ellen Hebron & Melvyn Marcum
- 6 Hillary & Sarah Barnes
- 6 Hollie & Laura Thompson
- 6 Juliet & Marlo Darken
- 6 Vicki Goldman & Jen Mrotek
- 5 Ilsa May & Megan Watt
- 6 Rene Simon & Stephanie Thurow ♥
- 6 Sara Kolata & Sarah Sersch ♥
- 6 Joshua Reilly & Michael Westbury ♥
- 5 Jason Rush & Troy Theis ✓
- 5 Silvana & Staci Mercedes-Isbell
- 5 Jennifer Justice & Stormy-Kito Justice
- 5 Jon Dean & Larry Palm
- 5 Thomas Beckwith-Thompson & Casey Thompson
- 5 Victoria Echeverria & Natalie Hinckley
- 5 Toni Baker & Stephanie Graham
- 5 Kris Kalb & Robert Von Rutenberg ♥
- 4 Lukas Dietz & Jordan Siegler
- 4 Owen Karcher & Chelsea O'Neil

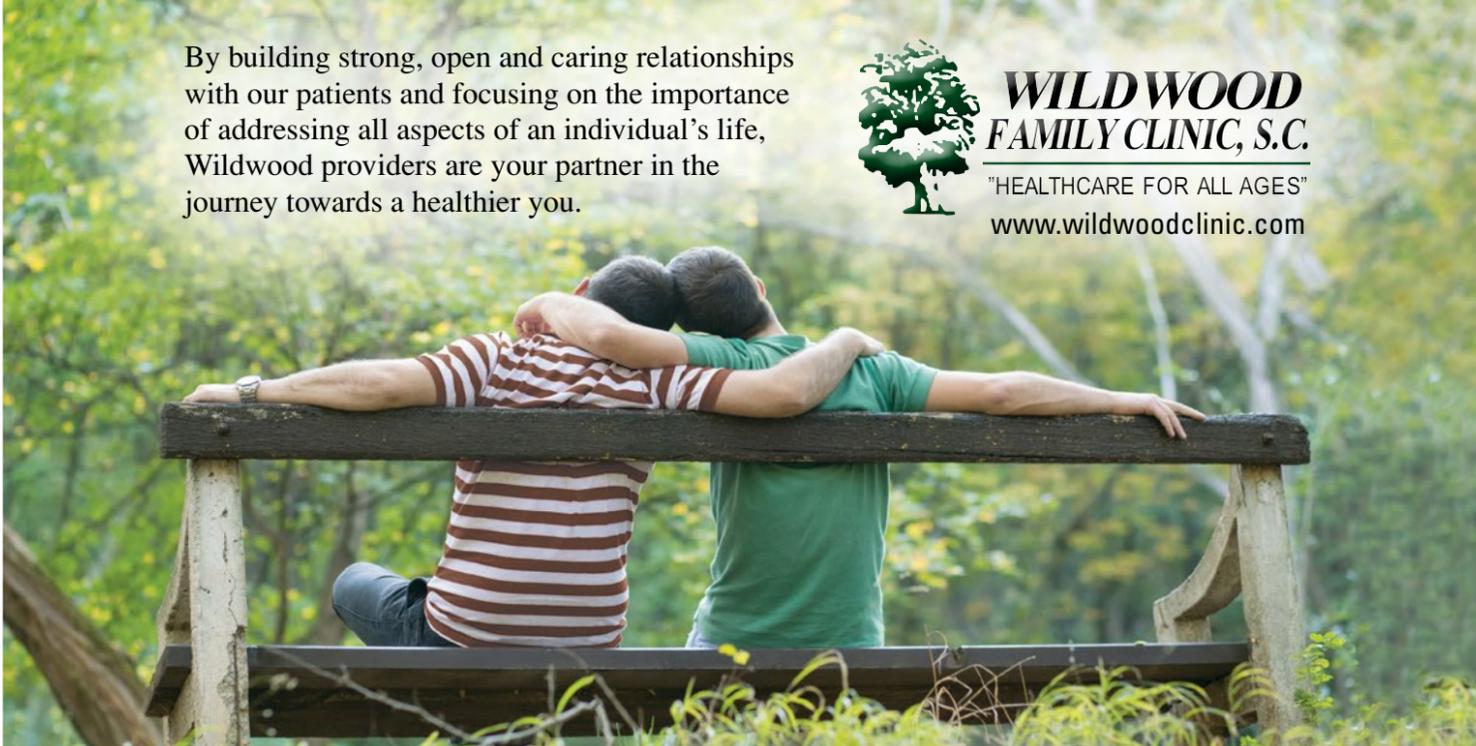
- 4 Amber & Brenda Ward
- 4 KelsyAnne & Lisa Schoenhaar
- 4 Lisa McDougal-Pederson & Guy Pederson ★
- 4 Shannon Ballhorn & Nick Wagner ★
- 4 Justin Brown & Dan Meyers
- 4 Kael Fry & Anne Totero
- 4 Shawn Ramsey & Kelly Staerzl
- 4 Sommer Olli & Lizzy Tymus ✓♥
- 3 Minta Dwyer & Camden Hargrove
- 3 Paul Gibson & Brian Hargro
- 3 Harmony Fitzsimons & Amber Riedesel
- 3 Julia Eyers & Cassie Getz
- 3 Angie Alcorta & Ann De Tienne ♥
- 3 Emily Groth & Robyn Rauman
- 3 Robert Kobuch & Mark Sannito ♥
- 3 Roz Klaas & Käri Rongstad
- 3 Abby Churchill & Christian Swomley ♥
- 3 Ali Dwyer & Lorrie Hurckes ♥
- 3 Brittany Cudaback & Lydia Scofield
- 2 Patrick Farabaugh & Sedrick Huppert
- 2 Casper & Cristie Soluna
- 2 Caitlyn & Tina Lee
- 2 Ellie Maier & Crystal Rossman-Maier
- 2 Jen & Kelsey van Tassel
- 2 Libby Armstrong & Andrew Peterson
- 2 Leah Clark & Terry McLaren
- 2 April Degner & Gina Oliphant
- 2 Jaclyn Nyhus & Kiara Pearson ♥
- 2 Jen H., Angel S., and Gretchen T.
- 2 Sam Rettke & Brittany Simler
- 2 Sheena Hirschfield & Andrea Stolts ✓♥

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Taking Care of Each Other



Alicia Stevenson and Lindsay Raftis have created a life for themselves in Madison that they could never have imagined back in Iowa where their relationship began.

ALICIA: Our adventure started 14 years ago. We lived in a community that wouldn't accept us, so we kept our relationship a secret until Lindsay moved to Madison for a job. I followed about a year later. Madison was all we wanted it to be—for the first time we met people who were successful, professional and out. Once we were able to be fully out and in a supportive community our love began to grow. About seven years ago life became a bit more adventurous as the rheumatoid arthritis I have lived with brought me extreme pain every day. Lindsay became my partner and my caretaker. After a few years we were given a new opportunity at life when I had two total knee replacements.

Our latest adventure has been to take control of our health, lose weight and challenge ourselves. My amazing wife, after a life of never running, decided that she loved to run. This past year she completed three half marathons and I am her very proud cheerleader. One of the most amazing days of our life together was June 6, 2014—the day we were able to be legally married. I never thought much would really change when our legal status changed from domestic partners to legally married, but it did. Having the piece of paper that says we are legally married gives our relationship the same legitimacy as everyone else. I am grateful for our grand adventure; and cannot wait to see where we go from here. Lindsay makes me a better person, and for that I am so grateful.

LINDSAY: It's been 14 years, and I can still remember what Alicia was wearing the first time I met her: green shorts, a blue v-neck t-shirt, and Birkenstocks. Her hair was almost down to her shoulders. Alicia worked at the church that my family went to. That's how we met. Because Alicia worked for a Catholic church, life was well left in the closet. No one knew we were together, we avoided each other in public, and when we wanted to go out we would drive somewhere out of town so no one would see us.

One of the best things that happened was our move to Madison. I was offered a promotion but it meant relocating. We didn't know anything about Madison. Our life did a 180 when we got here. I cannot express all the love and support we have felt being part of the Madison community.

Life isn't always easy or fair; I have an amazingly brave and strong wife who I have watched suffer pretty much every day of her life. Some days are good, some are not. It can be a challenge to balance being a supportive partner, lover and caretaker all in one. What makes it worth it all is a lot of love, a lot of commitment and a lot of passion and compassion.

The day marriage became legal for us was the day we got married. We were at work when we got the news, so we worked until 6:00, ran home to quickly change, and headed downtown. Alicia's boss and his wife brought a camera and a friend of ours came down, too, all to the fanfare of random strangers, a band, police officers, and homeless people hanging around. We were married, couple number 47 for Dane County that day. It was quick, crazy and unexpected, but I wouldn't have it any other way!

TIPS & TRENDS

Marriage as Usual



JASON BRADEN, JEWELER/OWNER
JEWELERS WORKSHOP

Last year there was a predictable surge in same sex weddings and in ring purchases. Things have slowed down a little simply because the backlog of couples that have been together for decades who wanted to get married quickly is no longer there. But we see people who are planning things out more. We see younger couples, slightly more traditional styles and people asking parents' permission. Basically, it is turning into "marriage as usual" for all kinds of couples.

Telling Your Unique Story



SHANNON BALLHORN, FOUNDER
SOPHISTICATES OF STRING QUARTET

We've seen couples creatively telling their story by including meaningful props like chalkboard signs, giving folding fans as favors, and creating a lasting memento during the ceremony like a vase of sand or a glass sculpture. From how they met to who they are, a couple's story can be told during their ceremony or written in their programs. One wedding we played had an infographic program detailing how many days since the couple met, their first date, and since their engagement. It showed how many miles guests have traveled and the age of the oldest and youngest in attendance. And of course, couples tell their story through having us play "their song" during the ceremony, from "Claire de Lune" as an emotional interlude, to the music from Star Wars as a twist to the recessional.

Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

- 39 Garth & Roy Badger**
37 Jan Hill & Paul Toonen ✓
35 Steven Sanders & Rand Schmidt
35 Wendy Pologe & Mary Thoreson
32 Gregory & Raymond Konz-Krzyminski
29 Brenda Coley & Dr. Sandra Jones ✓ ✓
29 Gerry Coon & Stewart Dempsey
22 Will Fellows & Bronze Quinton
19 John Harmon & Karter Wilkening ✓
18 Candice Hackbarth & Debbie Knepe ✓
16 Loree Cook-Daniels & Michael Munson
14 Mark Janetski & Ed Mullins
14 Anoma Phakeovilay & Robin Stoiber ✓
14 Kevin Kotke & Frank Sadler ✓
12 Joanne Klieve & Janine Mercer
10 Scott Jones & Thomas Zigan
9 Charlie Nash & JR Witt
8 Brenda Hernandez & Angie Huntington
7 Elizabeth Brown & Rebecca Larson ✓
7 Haley Heaviland & Catie Sampedro
6 Billy & Ryan King-Dee
6 Dana & Jessica Langill
6 Jake Mace & Mark Neufang
5 Joe & Ryan Imperiale
5 Leonica & Melissa Hernandez
5 Nashata Norwood & Tanika Reyes ✓
5 Pam Cesarec & Dana Spandet ✓
4 Ethan & Faith Parnell ★
4 Jim Lautenbach & Chris Wisniewski
4 Marc Anderson & Tim Gagliano-Anderson
4 Phillip Bailey & Jason Rae

- 4 Valen Meeks & Elizabeth Ramirez-Soto**
3 Christopher Freund & Tori Hayward ✓
3 Jonathan Hughlett & Paul Petrowsky ✓
3 Kellymarie Perez-Cruz & Leslie Schwartz ✓
3 Steven Schultz & Curtis Vandebusch
3 Edward Lupella & Joe Pehoski
3 Lainie Davidson & Kerry Foshey ✓
3 Lisa Hochschild & Nicky Vaaler ✓
3 Nicole & Sierra Escamea
2 Sara Lind & Shelly Perkins
2 Donny Dozal & Keith Gray ✓
1 Amanda Duranso & Kathya Tapia Preciado ✓
1 Antonio D'Acquisto & Cody Krznarich
1 Jennie Guerrido & Joanne Rosa
1 Jennifer Allen & Amanda Cramer ✓
1 Victoria Gale & Sandy Solomon ✓
7 Melinda Castro & Erica Retzlaff

MINERAL POINT

- 14 John Greenwood & Frederick Vaughn**

MONONA

- 13 Chris Haas & Nicole Lendborg ✓ ✓
11 Dorothy Rietzler & Kari Sievert
7 Beth & Jamie Kernan
5 René Lips & Luke Sironi
5 Brittyn & Rowan Calyx

MONTELLA

- 26 JoAnne McLaughlin & Carol Vandenberg**

MONTFORT

- 5 Christopher Schnulle & Aaron Simons**
5 Gary & Harry Zelhofer-McHone

MT. HOREB

- 5 Dana & Sarah Martin**

NECEDAH

- 3 Collin & Jake Boudreau**

NEENAH

- 10 Laura & Tracy Kading-Nohr**
2 Daniel Moorcroft & Josh Schmirler

NEW AUBURN

- 19 Scott McCracken & Abe Zeman**

NEW GLARUS

- 19 Scott Rippe & Scott Shaver**
10 Nathaniel Basting & Shaun Dow
9 Brian Rennard & Patrick Zimmerman

OAK CREEK

- 2 Shay Bowman & Ashley Trawitzki
1.2 Brittany Buccitti & Ivanna Waupoose

OREGON

- 17 Mark Koch & Robert Manion**
15 Walt Jackson & Dennis Outhouse
9 Susan Mosel & Brenda Onken ✓ ✓

OSHKOSH

- 11 Angela & Kiersten Bloechl-Karlsen**
8 Brittany Blankenheim & Kate Klein ✓
3 Kaysie & Shemone Perry

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2 Gabe Wand & Marcus Wisniewski ♥

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8.5 Shane Burkart & Kristopher Gasch ✓♥

PORT WASHINGTON

11 Scott Lone & Joseph Maddalena

POYNETTE

12 Joanne Weber & Susan Worthington ♥

8 Adam & Josh Giehtbrock

PRAIRIE DU SAC

9 Dee Dee & Jill Sorg

RACINE

20 Elaine Morberg & Pat Stepanski

8 Ann Kelso & Sarah Mueller

6 Paul Carbonneau & Julio Villarreal ✓

1 Alyssa Chaloupka & Trisha Rowland

REEDSBURG

10 Diana Held & Jo Keenan

5 AJ & Lynn Morrison

RICE LAKE

3 Kimmy Gotch & Jessica Paulson

ROTHSCHILD

6 Rick Palmerton & Jeremy Schmidt

SAINT FRANCIS

9 Amy & Laura Quaintance-Strong

4 Gracie & Riva Murbach

SAUK CITY

18 Agnes & Ginger Baldwin-Pierce ✓♥

2 Erika Cady & Stevie Venner

SHAWANO

5 Michael McNelly & Nick Uttecht

SHEBOYGAN

3 Sue Czekala & Krystal Matamoros

SHEBOYGAN FALLS

26 Teresa Dziak & Mary Willard

SOUTH MILWAUKEE

21 Pat Brady & Bill Heinzelman

8 Christa Galarza & Mary Ruiz ♥

SPOONER

30 Daniel Clements & Joseph Melton

ST FRANCIS

8 Jen Glowinski & Sara Steppke

5 Suzanne & Tammy Lickelhoff

STEVENS POINT

14 Lorie Dobrzynski & Melanie Kuolt

11 Sandi & Sarah Lakewood

STOUGHTON

42 Judy Captain & Kate Stormer

14 Carmen Alcalde & Sue Hunter ✓♥

13 Angie & Tammy Whitiken

13 Todd & Brent Cieslak

12 Kitty Gilbert & Lila Tesch

10 Gay & Heather Simmons

2 Laura Aylesworth & Josh Brown ★

STURGEON BAY

22 Bruce Joffe & Russ Warren

SUN PRAIRIE

39 Ann Jakel & Peggy Stormoen ✓♥

23 Cindy Ulsrud & Julia White

14 Jennifer & Tammy Knutson

11 Brittany & Kristen Brazzel

9 Kevin Crowe & Will Featherston

6 Andy Jarvis & Brent Roeder ♥

6 Aleta & Patti Klicko

6 Nat Fores & Jenn Kiss

6 Tim Lom & Steve Noll

5 Molly Censky & Maggie O'Leary

4 Jane Kahl & Sue Nelson

4 Aisha & LaSondra McGee

4 Gregory Bankz & Brandon Chacon

3 Amanda F & Mary N ♥

3 Ed Lalor & Brett Wilson ✓

SUSSEX

2 Elizabeth Eichsteadt & Kayla Willis

TREMPEALEAU

9 Marlene & Tracey Frank-Corey

VIROQUA

38 Kevin & Robert Gross

10 Kaitlyn & Cassandra Guinn-Karasek

WATERLOO

21 Lani Urbas & Shirley Wickersham

12 Brendan Barrett & Vance Skinner

9 Maureen & Stephanie Barnow

7 Brandy & Kari Konkol

6 Christie & Jessica Clayborne

WAUNAKEE

13 Linda Aumann & Deb Nies

7 Michelle & Stacy Anderson

WAUWATOSA

7 Michael & Shawn Storey

4 Brad & Nick Schlaikowski

1 Maria McQuestion & Jordan StClair

WEST ALLIS

16 Gino & Josh Hoffmann

3 Angela Graczyk & Ashley O'Neill

WEST BEND

10 James Combs & Kyle Watry

WESTBY

1 Ellen Forde & Anney Tripp

WHITEWATER

19 Robin Fox & Kim Simes

WILLARD

6 Rebecca & Samantha Pierce

WINDSOR

3 Paul Fritsch & Jim Hartman

WISCONSIN DELLS

11 Michael Dodd & Tom Scharbach

WISCONSIN RAPIDS

3 MaryKelly Elsen & Lacy Stirk

Let it Go, and It Will Come to You



Elizabeth Armstrong and Andrew Peterson will make you rethink what it means to be a cis-gender woman and man in an intimate relationship.

Andrew and I met at a time I had completely closed myself off from falling for men, and of course, as they all say, when you're not looking for it, there love is.

As a feminine pansexual woman, at times I have felt invisible or detached from the queer community. During the period preceding my relationship with Andrew, I was feeling further from the community than ever. Young and insecure, I felt like a fraud around other LGBTQ+ people, as the majority of my relationship history consisted of cis-gender men. I was determined to establish a long-term relationship with someone who identified differently. During this period of tunnel vision, I was introduced to Andrew. We quickly hit it off, developing a close friendship instantaneously. I denied my feelings for him, unable to explain why he was frequently in my thoughts as I continued on my stubborn mission for an LGBTQ+ identified partner. Then one night, after one-too-many and while attempting to make macaroni and cheese from scratch, our true feelings were spoken. Cheese is the most romantic food, after all.

I have never felt so accepted and comfortable with another person. Where previously I have felt I've lost my identity and felt disconnected from the community, with Andrew it is the opposite. Andrew and I have attended many OutReach events together, and volunteered for the Madison Pride Parade two years and counting. I have never known a greater ally. I am continuously learning from and in awe of Andrew's compassion for other human beings. His core values of respect and equality for all are what I love the most about him. He makes me better.

Today, Andrew and I are happily settled in the Atwood neighborhood with our dog, Clark. Together, we have journeyed through new jobs, moves, graduate school, births of nephews, and of course, the pain-staking perfection of our mac and cheese recipe. I have never felt closer to the community as exemplified by the existence of this article, and I am looking forward to continuing my LGBTQ+ support and advocacy work alongside Andrew, one of our greatest allies that I am honored to call my love.

PHOTOS BY NICK JOHNSON.



TIPS & TRENDS

Making Tasty Memories



ANNEMARIE MAITRI, OWNER
BLOOM BAKE SHOP

Wedding dessert trends are more meaningful than ever! Couples are choosing flavors that reflect their heritage, perhaps a childhood dessert or one they might have enjoyed during their courtship. Cakes are still timeless, but doughnut towers, dessert tables, and candy and cupcake bars are just as popular these days.

A More Colorful Bride



BRANDI'S BRIDAL GALLERIA, ETC.
BRANDI NEHMER

So much color has come into the bridal world, such as soft blushes, soft blues, golds and pinks. Bridal gowns with a print on them are taking the world by storm. Social media is flooded with gowns with sleeves and straps, heavy beading, and tattoo lace. Illusion tops with lace and beading are so popular!

Winter Weddings



BECKY SNYDER, MARKETING COORDINATOR
THE MADISON CLUB, INC.

We've seen an increase in winter weddings, with couples opting to celebrate November-March, and we've found that this gives a lot of vendors the opportunity to create really special and unique spaces, food, decor, and ambiance that is completely different than that of a summer wedding.

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BARTON PERREIRA

On Loss and Living On

In the midst of tremendous loss and pain, LGBTQ people deal with both expected and unique challenges when facing the death of a romantic partner.

Below, a handful of our community relate their own stories of being widowed in the hopes of helping others better navigate one of the most difficult parts of our lives.

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GARY HOLLANDER

This morning the sun stood right at the end of the road and waited for me.

—Ted Kooser

MOST PEOPLE WHO KNOW ME understand that I am not much of a romantic; my sentiments tend to get examined and put aside. Neither am I religious or a spiritual believer. Still, I harbor many, many beliefs that may be baseless in fact, but are as real to me as breath. These are a couple of them: My late husband, Paul, had always waited for me. He would not always do so.

Paul died on December 24, 2014. In the last month of his life, he said almost daily, “I apologize. For everything.” We would laugh and laugh and laugh about that, because he had nothing for which to apologize. The week before he died, he added, “I apologize for everything. For the stuff I’ve done, the stuff I am doing, and for the stuff I am about to do.”

There he stood. Right at the end of the road. But he could not wait for me.

When we met 32 years ago, he was a danseur with Milwaukee Ballet. He was young, handsome, and funny beyond words. When he died, almost half of my life had been with him, and more than half of his had been with me. For the last 13 years of our time together, we lived with his diagnosis of a progressive form of multiple sclerosis. During those last years, we celebrated with others the victories of marriage equality, but we also mourned that we would not marry because to do so would bankrupt us with his medical expenses.

Paul’s death required many accounts from many people. Fire fighters, EMTs and police had all filed them. Medical examiner and mortuary personnel made theirs. The clerk who received the shopping bags of prescription bottles I delivered to the police station certainly made a log, even attached a copy of my driver’s license to that one. No doubt the home health agency did one; the primary care, urology, neurology, ophthalmology, nephrology, audiology, radiology and infec-



Paul Mandracchia & Gary Hollander



At first, I was almost looking for my late spouse in his closet and dresser drawers. I slept with some of his clothes and, though they were too small, I wore others.

tious disease physician offices, made theirs. Researchers from Medicare, Medicaid and the Medical College called and wrote to complete their files on the sweetest man who was so recently in the world. There is a lot of busyness with death.

I cleaned for much of the past year, too. At first, I was almost looking for my late spouse in his closet and dresser drawers. I slept with some of his clothes and, though they were too small, I wore others. While I scrubbed and scoured some areas of the house, I didn’t touch the room where he died for some time. For months, I would get to the floor and lie there on the spot where he died. Along the way, I started to do deferred household projects, things that I could not get to while I was caring for him. I did projects in parts of the house that were inaccessible to him in his wheelchair; those came last on my list.

In addition to dancing, Paul was also a talented painter, muralist and sculptor. With dear close friends of Paul, I mounted a month-long retrospective of his work at a local gallery. Because Paul’s parents became estranged in the conflict between his sexual identity and their rigid religiosity, they had years earlier sent him all of his childhood belongings. This included all of his childhood artwork. I was able to exhibit his earliest crayon drawing of his name and his final self-portraits, scratched out weeks before he died on the floor of his studio.

Because of Paul’s long illness, my social life changed dramatically over a decade. Where we once entertained in our home on a weekly basis, at the end we were lucky to do so annually. My own family relationships have been re-examined in the past year. Many of my friendships have been considered as well. Neither Paul nor I wanted funerals. The art exhibit served as a memorial of his life. But more has been needed to address the distance that grew among social connections over 13 years of chronic illness, distance punctuated by grief at his death. It became necessary for me to express sorrow to others over their loss of their friend, my husband in all but marriage.

I have apologized to a dozen people or more about my ignorance of

The Trend is Equality



ELDONNA HAZEN, SENIOR MINISTER
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

No reason to wait! For far too long, same sex couples have waited to have ceremonies to celebrate their relationships. They have lived together, but have not always believed there was need for the ritual of marriage. What I am seeing more in my profession as a minister is that same sex couples are now seeing the value in being married. Before, there were no legal benefits afforded to the couple. Ceremonies were held because couples wanted a ritual in the church, or wanted to state vows in front of family, friends and God. Now, same sex couples can have both the ritual and legal federal/state/city recognition of their marriage. What a gift to be able to celebrate sacred days with these couples—sacred AND legal! The new trend—EQUALITY! Yes!

A Wedding Toast—To your Health



BRANDON ROUNDS, SALES & EVENTS MANAGER
HOTELRED

People are becoming increasingly health conscious. I often hear, “What if my guests have health concerns?” “Where do you source your food?” Choosing a venue that sources their food locally helps in your food being less processed and healthier. They are probably also open to going past their printed catering menu to accommodate you. The Wise at HotelRED offers just that! With a relaxed atmosphere and locally sourced food for your guests, your night will truly be a night to remember.



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the depth of their loss when their own spouses had died. These people, mostly straight, assured me that they knew exactly what I meant. Even though I have experienced numerous deaths in this age of AIDS, I had not known loss like this. My recognition of my ignorance has been a real help in letting go of the ineptitude of others in the time of my grief. Until you live it, you cannot imagine how completely dopey the death industry is.

How am I doing? While I have grown accustomed to giving my answer to this question, it remains tricky. “How am I doing? I am doing really well. Thanks for checking. You see, I expect to be sad, angry, afraid and lonely. I have lost a great love.” From that vantage point, I am doing extremely well. I am also happy, content and very much alive. My close friends, a few family members, a couple of former caregivers, some neighbors, our little dog—we are in this life together.



Nikki Baublatt & Cris Derrick Soluna

CRIS DERRICK SOLUNA

IN 1990 I MADE A LIFE commitment to the woman I loved to spend the rest of our lives together, to raise my children together, and to grow old together. In 2004 that woman began to have disturbing illnesses on a regular basis. They became more frequent as the years went by, and neither our doctor nor any of the many specialists could explain why she was getting so sick so often.

In February of 2008, we finally said ENOUGH and pretty much told the medical professionals we were done playing around and needed answers. In three months’ time, she was added to the transplant list for a double organ transplant. She almost didn’t survive the wait when, miraculously on August 8, 2008, she got her transplant. Three years later she was scheduled for a “routine” surgery to fix a hernia. She didn’t make it out of the hospital until I brought her home in hospice. In less than a week, my life was changed forever.

I had never considered the possibility of Nikki’s death. I was the cheerleader, keeping her spirits up as her health ebbed and flowed. In better times we had talked through all the possibilities and what we wanted. We had the papers drawn up for power of attorney, both for health and financial. We had wills drafted (but never finalized) and we knew what the other wanted done. But trust me when I say that I had no idea how it would feel to have that power of attorney enacted. I was devastated, terrified, overwhelmed—and yet calm because I had to make serious decisions. And you make them, because that is a part of the commitment you made. Because you love, you do what you need to do.

May 1, 2011, I became a non-legally recognized widow—one week before what would have been our 21st anniversary. I was in shock; devastated. Dear friends, my Threshold singing sisters, family and others gathered. There was a whirlwind funeral, religious customs that Nik didn’t follow but her family did. I was not able to see many of the people who came to honor Nikki, but I knew that many did come.

I was in a daze. After the formalities, I came home to be with my kids for a bit and then went to sing at my Threshold rehearsal. I needed something familiar in a world that had suddenly become a nightmare.

The days went on and so did I. There was no longer form to my life other than the calls and visits from friends and the singing for others who were at the end of their lives or seriously ill. My sisters in song had come once a week for three months to sing for Nikki and me, and it felt good to be able to do that for others.

Hospice offered bereavement classes, but it was all straight women mourning either a parent or a spouse. It was the only support group offered at the time, but it was lacking understanding and tact. They continually referred to the love of my life as “your friend” no matter how often I corrected them. It filled time.

In the two months that followed a very dear friend (and Nikki’s co-worker in her last job) died, as did Nikki’s father. It felt like the world was closing in on me. Death was all around.

I was very lucky to have a few people close to me keeping an eye out and checking in on me, but I was at loose ends. There were details I never thought I would be working on: Returning durable medical equipment, rearranging my house, cleaning things out, legal details would mostly wait, many thank-you notes to the people who had donated to the causes chosen.

I had a horrible experience with an attorney who point blank told me that Nikki’s mom would be getting our house because our wills were never executed. In shock at this joint family meeting with the attorney (Nik’s mother and sister were also there to address her father’s estate), I asked if the fact that we were legal domestic partners would affect anything and was told, in no uncertain terms, that it didn’t matter. It left me in a state of total shock for over a week until the legal intern contacted me to tell me they were wrong, that the house was mine.

After much searching I found a Lesbian Widows online support group, and it helped me to see that others had much of the same kinds of experiences. From the moment their beloved partner dies, their lives are never the same. The loss is unimaginable, you lose your heart, you lose your way of life, you lose your dreams and plans for the future. The sense of being lost is huge.

I spent almost two years finding my way, with support from friends, some who had no clue about the things I was dealing with, some who understood, and some who had been or were going through their own loss. Eventually I began to build a new normal.

It is possible to find love again after that deep a loss. The process can be fraught with potholes, and it takes a very special love to help you pick up the pieces and begin again. I think the depth of my love for Nikki was what allowed me to find a deep and true love again. I will always have Nikki in my heart, but now there is someone new to share the growing and loving. Nikki and I always agreed that if one of us died, the other should not be alone. In the beginning, I didn’t believe that would be possible. But when your heart is open, things happen that you never expected. I fell in love again. My wife and I were married this August.

With endless thanks to Nikki Baublatt (1961–2011), the woman who opened my heart to love, and Casper Soluna, the woman who fills my heart each day.

The support group mentioned in this piece is L.I.G.H.T. (Lesbians in Grief - Healthy Transitions) and the website is lesbianwidow.org.

PHOTO BY JESS HORN.

RORY WARD

I LOST MY PARTNER, DJ Douglas, in 2010. We had been together 40 years and had studied, worked, problem solved and had amazing air, land and water adventures together. I have been an elementary school teacher, researcher at the U.W., a firefighter-paramedic, pilot and psychologist. She had an amazing life: passing as a boy to fly airplanes, then teaching flying in WWII and later here in Madison; earning the seventh U.S. black belt in Judo in the late 50s, earning five degrees with no formal schooling, becoming a professor here and at other universities.

Her death was a sudden, unexpected embolus that involved emergency response and 36 hours of brain stem death with all the drama and trauma that involves. During the process I had to make decisions literally of life and death with little information and within a matter of hours, sometimes minutes. I was forced to rely on the medical staff who were very kind and sympathetic but could do little.

Initially, I lived day-to-day with what I would describe as piercing sadness and the raw emptiness of her absence. Her caretaker Linda (now my wife) helped me pull together a memorial service that was a spectacular tribute to her; larger than most but matched to her life. She gave me comfort and work to do—a focus for those first weeks.

Hospice offered bereavement classes, but it was all straight women mourning either a parent or a spouse. They continually referred to the love of my life as “your friend” no matter how often I corrected them. It filled time.

A few months after her death I was determined to find the reasons for a missed diagnosis of vascular dementia not a result of Alzheimer’s. That search also helped me find the answer, cope with guilt for missing her problem, and the irony of ending her life in the system of emergency care both she and I had studied and worked in.

Grieving for me has a different emotional impact after five years than it did initially; it is still as painful but not overwhelmingly at the forefront of consciousness. I do things; I am physically active, solve problems and intellectually attack questions as I always have. I know that maintaining my lifestyle, activity and interests—and even expanding them, with Linda’s love and support, helps me manage the ever-present grief. As the old Irish tune says: “Let grief be a falling leaf at the dawning of the day.”

CINDY HANSON

IT WAS A VERY QUICK but extremely painful thing that happened with Terri and me, and it took me a long time to get a handle on it. I did a lot of journaling back then, so I have a lot of words in my head about all of it. I wouldn’t know how to put it into a short piece, so instead, for now, I just want to point out some of the most important things I learned while going through the huge loss of a loved one:

Make sure your paperwork is in order—wills, titles on property, directives, etc. Never take that for granted. Your life as you know it can be literally destroyed over a minor word difference on a title.

If you have a specific wish for your remains and you have parents (or siblings, if your parents are gone, as they can also have rights over these decisions) that don’t agree with your lifestyle, these preparations are crucial. Prepay for a funeral. Otherwise, they can do whatever they want, no matter what your wishes are.

And, most importantly, love the ones you love the best you can at all times. You just never know when that might be taken from you. ■

TIPS & TRENDS

All Means All



REV. TINA LANG
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love is the foundation of ministry for FUMC. We understand all people to be our neighbors and that we are called to love all of our neighbors; that’s why the banner above the church door declares “All Means All.” Holy marriage is one of the ways a church celebrates love. Throughout its 178-year history in Madison, First Church has been offering the ministry of marriage for heterosexual couples. But the discriminatory practice of limiting marriage to only heterosexual couples contradicted our commitment to “All Means All,” so in a 2014 resolution the congregation declared that it “will support and honor the marriages of all couples who are duly prepared and licensed to be married ... and affirm clergy who choose to offer pastoral care by celebrating such marriages...” Love is at the core of all of FUMC’s ministries with all people.

Wedding Unity with Creative Authenticity



JEN OBRANOVICH, GENERAL MANAGER
EAST SIDE CLUB

It’s been trendy to come up with a “unity” process that reflects the couple more than the usual candle or sand. One exciting change to this was a painting where each of the colors stood for an element in their relationship and they each painted a little on the canvas and now it hangs in their home.

There’s No Time Like Now to Plan Your Future



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Band of Brothers and Sisters

Dick Wagner recounts Madison's three out elected officials trip to attend the first National Conference of Openly Lesbian and Gay Elected Officials.

IN NOVEMBER 1985 I was flying to West Hollywood, California. There Kathleen Nichols and I joined 10 individuals for the first National Conference of Openly Lesbian and Gay Elected Officials. The identity model had been followed earlier by Black elected officials. It was amazing to be in the company of this handful of others who were doing the same pioneering work. Harry Britt from San Francisco, who had replaced Harvey Milk, would not join us for the whole conference but spoke at an evening banquet. One of the reported 19 out American officials unable to join us was Gerald Ulrich, the mayor of the

legislator in Massachusetts. Spear would recount in his memoir, *Crossing the Barriers* how the early small numbers meant the he could welcome Harvey Milk in 1977 to "the still-exclusive club of openly gay elected officials." He attended along with lesbian Minnesota State Representative Karen Clark.

The featured keynote speaker at the conference was Chris Smith, an out Labour member of the British parliament. While he was the first English official to publicly acknowledge his homosexuality, he quipped, "I'm gay, just like a hundred other members of parliament. The only difference is they won't tell you."

The conference, titled "Speaking for Ourselves," had been sponsored through the efforts of Tom Chorlton of the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs and the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles, one of the first and the largest electorally focused local gay groups in the country. Interest also came from the relatively new Human Rights Campaign Fund and, to make it bipartisan, the president of the Log Cab-

in Republican Club of Los Angeles was a plenary speaker.

Held in West Hollywood, a newly incorporated city in Los Angeles County, the city had been proclaimed the first gay government in the nation because two gay men and one lesbian made up the majority of its five-member City Council. One of them, Steve Schulte, had some fame as he had been a star of glossy gay beefcake magazines. John Heilman was the nation's newest gay mayor.

Prime topics for discussion among the workshops at this first ever "historic event" were to identify and articulate a vision of human rights, developing a plan of action to boost efforts for dealing with the AIDS crisis, endorsing a follow-up march on Washington to the one held in 1979, and outrage over Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis' recent ban on gay foster parents. Britt talked of how we had to overcome the sense of

failure for the movement now that we were in the age of Reagan. Hoping to nurture and support lesbians and gay men who were potential candidates, there were workshops on political mechanics. Developing a bench for future and higher out officials was an assumed agenda.

The conference concluded with a joint statement drafted during the event. It opened, "As elected officials, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to serve as teachers within the institutions of government...and to demonstrate to our own community that we will always obtain more by reaching for what we need rather than settling for what we can get." It continued, "We ask not only to be seen and heard, but also to be acknowledged for the work we are doing to provide fair and effective government, and to be supported in our demand that gay and lesbian people be given the respect and justice we deserve. We support and seek to place at the head of our national agenda a vision of human rights which embraces those material and non-material resources which are necessary for each individual to grow into a self-fulfilled, confident and secure person."

The list of issues from 1985 showed support for non-discrimination legislation, repeal of laws on consensual sexual activity between adults, legal recognition of family relationships, equitable treatment in foster care and adoption, support for reproductive freedom, passage of the ERA and positive sex education about sexual identity.

There was good coverage in the major California dailies. The *LA Times* quoted Kathleen Nichols saying, "She went from being a 'rock-throwing liberal' to an elected official." And she followed this up with, "There's nothing like...being on the inside." The *San Francisco Chronicle* noted the support for AIDS funding, non-discrimination laws and gay marriages. The *LA Herald Examiner* referred to it as a "first ever 'gay summit'" aimed at more coordination in the electoral arena. The gay paper the *New York Native* reported on Barney Frank's address; Frank also keynoted the banquet. Frank, not out at the time, urged going ahead on lesbian and gay issues despite the social backlash. "If you present a bleak



DICK WAGNER, openly gay former Dane County Board Chair and co-chair of Governor Earl's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Issues, is working on gay Wisconsin history and welcomes topics and sources.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY DICK WAGNER.

landscape, there'll be no initiative."

One pledge made in the statement was to go and "lobby for increased funding for AIDS research and education and to ensure compassionate and informed care for people with AIDS." In March 1986 David Scondras from the Boston City Council and Brian Coyle of the Minneapolis City Council led a delegation of officials who coordinated with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on talking with Congress members. They met with House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Kentucky Representative William Natcher who headed a key health appropriations subcommittee and strongly opposed the Reagan Administration's plans to cut \$41 million of AIDS funding in the 1986 budget.

Following West Hollywood, the next

annual conferences were in the District of Columbia in 1986, Minneapolis in 1987, San Diego in 1988, and Madison in 1989. The conferences let us officials air our issues as out elected persons and functioned as a support group for our unique positions. They also provided us with up-to-date information as we shared initiatives and national groups and leaders provided us with resources. They further let us see the state of the development of gay and lesbian political and social institutions in other cities. For example, while Kathleen worked away Saturday evening with a subcommittee of drafters on the statement, I took advantage of the free passes to Studio One, one of West Hollywood's big dance discos. Flying back, I felt less alone in the work I was doing. ■

Madison LGBTQ Archives Project: Preserving Our Past

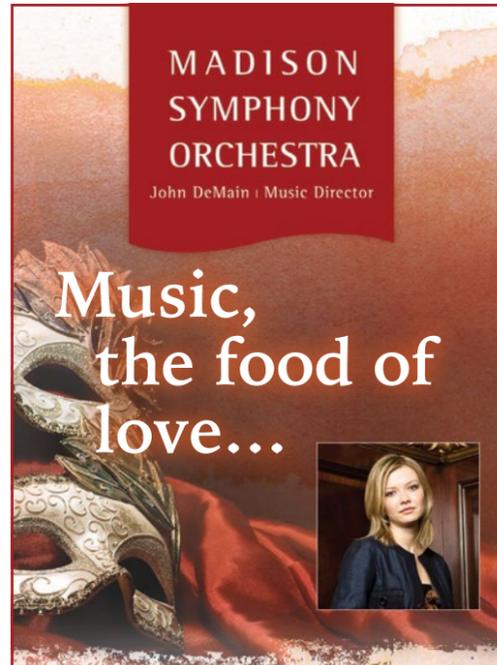
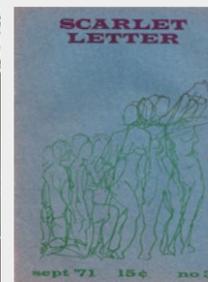
The U.W.-Madison Archives is collecting and providing access to items that help tell the story of LGBTQ people in Dane County. We are seeking donations of organizational papers, photographs, diaries, posters, flyers and buttons that reflect LGBTQ life in Madison. And, we are looking for film, audio and video recordings about local LGBTQ events, people and issues. Supported with funding from the New Harvest Foundation, Inc. and the George L. Mosse Program in History, this collection will form a permanent reflection of our community.

You can make a donation by contacting us at uwarchiv@library.wisc.edu or 608-262-5629. We are interested sharing glimpses of items donated with the community. Here we offer items from a recent donation from the collection of Judy Greenspan, founder of Gay Sisters.

Gay Sisters was the first public lesbian organization in Wisconsin, formed in Madison in March of 1971. Early Gay Sisters meetings were largely social events—parties, dances and consciousness-raising sessions which provided personal support and growth for group members. Efforts soon turned to publishing a monthly lesbian journal called the *Scarlet Letter*. Gay Sisters changed its name to Madison Lesbians in 1972. Women from Madison Lesbians went on to participate in the creation of some of the most important supports of the local lesbian and feminist communities of the 1970s including the Lesbian Switchboard, the Madison feminist paper *Whole Woman*, A Room of One's Own Feminist Bookstore, Fallen Woman Productions independent women's music production company, Lysistrata Women's Restaurant and Bar, Woman's Transit Authority, and more. The following images—most never-before published—document an important early Madison queer liberation group.



Madison Lesbians enjoy a summer picnic in 1972. Madison Lesbians at the International Women's Day March, 1973. Gay Sisters founders pose for *The Daily Cardinal*, 1971. The *Scarlet Letter* begins publishing 1971 and is one of the earliest queer-themed publications in the state.



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Love and Estate Planning

Proper estate planning may not be the most fun part of relationships, but attorney Michele Perreault points out how crucial it is for LGBTQ people in particular.

AH, LOVE. Love is a many-splendored thing. It is heart palpitations when your loved one draws near. It is reading the same book over and over and over because your four-year-old can't go to sleep without it. It is...an estate plan? Discussion about end of life care? Absolutely yes.

The importance of estate planning and discussions is heightened for LGBTQ folks. One of the saddest calls I receive as an attorney is from LGBTQ individuals who have lost their partner or spouse, only to learn that the estate, or their partner's financial assets, are going to the very family members who rejected the decedent for being LGBTQ. In one case, the

Please note that no short article like this can address all of the complexities of individual situations or estate tax advice, so this is not meant to provide legal advice. Rather, I will provide general information and strongly encourage you to take action to provide real support and security for those you love.

The first step every single one of us should do is to gather information from every retirement plan, pension plan, bank account, life insurance policy, investment account or any other financial vehicle. You need to look to see who you named as the beneficiary of the plan, account, etc. Oftentimes, we name someone when we first establish the account, and then completely forget about it. That means your mom or your first boyfriend or your BFF you haven't seen for 20 years will get that money even if you have a will naming your spouse! That's because these kinds of assets do not pass through the probate estate, and instead go directly to whoever is named on those designation lines. Seriously. Go check it now. I'll wait for you here with further instructions.

Welcome back. Hopefully as an interim step, you have checked all of those accounts and changed them as necessary. You're not out of the woods yet. Do you own real estate? Have you checked to see how you own it? This information is on the title and is not controlled by who is on the mortgage. Each ownership option (e.g., joint tenants with right of survivorship, or tenants-in-common) comes with a different impact when you die.

Assets that do not have a direct beneficiary designation are controlled by someone's will or estate plan. If you don't have a will, your assets will go where the State wants it to go, and not necessarily where you want it to go.

The best way you can protect your loved ones is to establish an estate plan. You say you don't need one because you don't have any money? First, maybe you'll exit the earth via an accident caused by one of the Koch brothers. Suddenly, your estate is huge. Second, good planning with small or large estates includes things such as powers of attorney for health care and signed HIPAA releases so you and your loved ones can make medical decisions for each other, durable powers of



Be wary of the "free" estate planning seminars that are designed to sell you a big fat trust document you do not understand and most people do not need.

estranged family members literally showed up at the door of the house within a week of a woman's death, demanding to come in to remove furniture from the house shared by a couple who had been together for more than 20 years, and who had been rejected by that same family. Ultimately, they also took the retirement accounts and individual bank accounts because the deceased had failed to name a beneficiary. Under the law, they had that right. A simple will would have changed everything.

attorney for finances so that you can manage financial matters while you are alive, and advanced directives to medical professionals, advising them how you want to handle end of life issues. These documents are very simple, but they are crucial to ease the burden of your loved ones in a time of crisis.

Now for good news: estate planning is not nearly as expensive as you think. If you have addressed your direct beneficiary designations, you have already started the process and it didn't cost you a dime! A good estate planner

The estranged family members literally showed up at the door of the house within a week of a woman's death, demanding to come in to remove furniture from the house shared by a couple who had been together for more than 20 years, and who had been rejected by that same family.

will take a look at those beneficiary designations and let you know if there is a better way to designate beneficiaries (e.g., name a trust for your children as the beneficiary) and will create a detailed plan for you. The cost for a simple will can be as little as a couple hundred dollars and the cost for all but the most complex estate plans designed to address complex tax issues rarely exceeds \$3,500. Be wary of the "free" estate planning seminars that are designed to sell you a big fat trust document you do not understand and most people do not need.

When you are looking for estate planning professionals, be sure to ask them whether they have special training or experience working with LGBTQ individuals and families. While marriage equality has reduced some of the distinctions between LGBTQ folks and our hetero counterparts, many people choose not to marry for various reasons, but still want to provide for their loved ones. Also, there are issues that are unique to our families, especially involving children.

These topics aren't easy, but if you love someone (and I bet you do), or someone loves you (yes, they do) you will make this a priority to either establish or update your estate plan to ease the burden of your loved ones. Now go pack a lunch for your honey and include a love note. You'll thank me for it later. ■



MICHELE PERREULT is an attorney for DeWitt Ross & Stevens. Recently, she's presented "Protecting Children of Gay and Lesbian Families: Challenges, Opportunities, and Where We go From Here."



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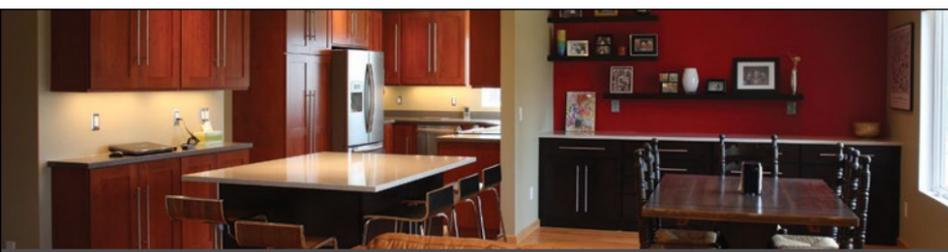
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Because I Love You

Molly Hermann shares intimate details of seeking healthcare as an LGBTQ-identified person and the ways in which our health providers hit and miss the mark in providing compassionate and considerate care.

I'M SHARING THIS because I love you, or us. It doesn't take long to figure out I'm an introvert. Ask any of my closest friends when the last time I answered their calls instead of letting them go to voicemail. You know, then, that me writing intimate details about my healthcare and my body is a stretch outside my comfort zone. But because I care about the healthcare we receive and because I have some level of privilege within LGBTQ circles, I am going to share a few stories of how providers missed an easy chance to get it right and of how some took an easy step to do the right thing.

NO-SWEAT MAMMOGRAM

This first story is actually one about a positive interaction: Sharing this is an attempt at reducing anxiety about a procedure many women fear. I finally got myself in for that mammogram after years of hearing how terrible it is for women. And I can only own my experience with my body and say: it was not as bad as I thought it would be. No one freaked out that my gender expression is androgynous. No whispers in the changing area—which has stalls—did you know that?

The technician was very kind, with no judgment and yet with acknowledgement of how uncomfortable it can be. I actually survived an appointment about my chest. And in my experience, it was not nearly as painful or uncomfortable as women had always told me it was. At least for me.



GOOD JOB / BAD JOB

Last May, I visited the ER for the first time. Excruciating pelvic pain had me on the floor. In this incident, the nurses, who happened to be male, scored big points on two fronts—one for finally asking about safety/abuse in our home without my partner in the room and the other for

totally casual and appropriate conversations about us having kids. Those of you who know I train on LGBTQ intimate partner violence can imagine how infuriating it is for me to hear over and over my partner being asked in front of me if she is experiencing abuse in her home. Good job, this nurse! On the other hand, and this one blows my mind—one of their diagnostic tests was an STD panel collected via pelvic exam. With no sexual history taken. I consented to it, assuming the pelvic exam might help diagnose the problem leading to searing pain. Had I known it was for an STD test, um no. And yes, I understand that my being there with my female partner did not indicate that I have no male partners or that we are monogamous. But seriously, take a sexual history, especially if your alternative idea is an invasive exam while the patient is in pain.

LANGUAGE FAIL

And then there's that doctor at urgent care that repeatedly referred to me as my partner's "buddy" when she went in for a health concern. I had provided the word "partner" in

my introduction. For future reference, please do not introduce new words into the conversation when your patient or their family has already provided you a word. This goes for pronouns too; don't make things up.

INCLUSIVITY FOR THE WIN!

I'd like to close with two examples that seem so simple but show how much a little goes a long way. I ended up on hormones to regulate my cycle because of the whole pelvic pain debacle, following that unneces-

And then there's that doctor at urgent care that repeatedly referred to me as my partner's "buddy" when she went in for a health concern. I had provided the word "partner" in my introduction.

sary test and a subsequent misdiagnosis. My dear provider actually apologized to me in advance for any possible messages I might hear at the pharmacy about how "the Pill doesn't prevent STDs." She knows I have a long-term, female partner and am not trying to get pregnant, and she was trying to get ahead of a non-inclusive comment. A+! And, in the unlikeliest of places, in a recent scare in my partner's health, we found acceptance in a small town hospital. They cared for our

kids while I visited my partner in the ER. When they asked if we were married and I said yes, the kind ER staff person said, "Oh, good!" It's the little things; it really is.

I train providers, as do many colleagues of mine. We are not asking people to throw out all of their protocols and ways of providing care. We are asking you to form new habits, ask in different ways, allow for mistakes, and listen to what we are telling you. For those of you who are anticipating, listening, messing up and apologizing, creating new scripts and habits, thank you. And please share these tips with your peers. We are paying attention.

This is probably the most difficult health article I have written yet, because in ways you may or may not realize, it's pretty revealing for me. However, I am a career health educator, sexual health advocate, and strong believer in finding ways LGBTQ people can get respectful, quality healthcare...even for those parts of our body we don't embrace. Because I love you and want you around. ■



MOLLY HERMANN is a trainer, researcher and health educator with expertise in HIV, sexual orientation and gender identity, and intimate partner violence. She's worked for the State of Wisconsin for over 16 years.



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Relationship Recovery

Alex Einsman explains why past relationship traumas shouldn't define our sense of self or what's possible in the future, but that we can and should learn from them.

LET'S FACE IT, we all carry some baggage from past relationships. How we've been hurt in the past can become part of how we decide what we believe about ourselves, our worth, and what we can expect from a relationship. It's not uncommon for people to feel damaged or hurt after an abusive or failed relationship—and that trauma can live on past its effective expiration date. And that's true even if the only past relationships you're drawing from are those with friends and family.

It's no surprise that convincing ourselves we are damaged keeps us feeling damaged, which in turn causes us to question whether it's even possible to be happy or fulfilled. The truth is we are all perfectly imperfect, and we continue to have opportunities to learn, grow and change. Healing from a relationship trauma is a necessary step in moving forward.

Whatever type of historical relationship trauma you've experienced—and we've all experienced it, at one time or another—the healing process includes the following three important steps for recovery:

STEP 1: CONSIDER WHAT YOU'VE GAINED

All past relationships, no matter how fabulous or terrible, include experiences that we can learn from and use to move forward, stronger and better. This is a direct challenge to the feelings of loss, which are usually the first ones we feel, after the end or significant change in dynamic of a relationship. It may be necessary for you to grieve about what you've lost, but too much "soaking in it" can cause you to remain in place, rather than moving ahead. At a certain point, it's time to reframe things. Sometimes the gain comes from just gaining more experience in a relationship.

STEP 2: CONSIDER WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Perhaps you learned that there are certain characteristics in a partner that don't mesh



It's no surprise that convincing ourselves we are damaged keeps us feeling damaged, which in turn causes us to question whether it's even possible to be happy or fulfilled.

well with your personality. Or maybe you learned more about yourself: that you have parts of yourself you would like to change. This step requires some self-exploration and willingness to find ways to make positive changes in your life. It's an opportunity to learn whether the characteristics or behaviors—both yours and your partner's—are what you ultimately need and want in a relationship.

STEP 3: LEARN HOW TO DETACH

The last step is the most challenging, but it can be the greatest catalyst to positive change. By turning what you've learned and gained into tools you can use in future experiences, you can detach from the past and move forward stronger and more resilient. This is the time to switch things up. Instead of focusing so much on your past relationships, now it's time to focus on yourself and your needs. An important task is accepting that another new relationship is not necessarily going to solve the problems you experienced in your prior ones. Jumping too quickly into a new relationship, before you've fully healed from a previous one, can also put an incredible amount of pressure on a new relationship and can potentially

even snuff things out, before they've begun to brighten your life.

One of the best ways to detach from past negativity is to invest in yourself. Remember: a new person or relationship is not going to fix what you feel is broken inside of you—only you can do that. A new and healthy relationship can provide a corrective experience that encourages personal growth, but the investment starts with the relationship with yourself. And by reconnecting with who you are, you offer the opportunity for others to do the same. Resist the temptation to worry about what's next, and engage in activities that truly bring you joy.

As members of the LGBTQ community we have an additional task to consider when it comes to debunking our wrongheaded belief that healthy relationships are difficult—or might not even exist. Many of us have been hurt, targeted or discriminated against, because of who we are and who we love. It has only been recently that marriage has been recognized as legal for same-sex couples, which is a huge victory in acceptance and equal rights. But many of us have seen very few examples of positive LGBTQ relationships represented in the media or the community. Discrimination targeted at LGBTQ relationships has been an added challenge in our community.

Even so, the hardships LGBTQ people have historically endured have also forged an incredible inner resilience that we can tap. Resilience is one of the most powerful forms of strength, with the power to outweigh the feelings of damage that come from being hurt for just being who we are.

The good news is that things are changing—and quickly, too. This issue of *Our Lives* is dedicated to promoting and cultivating love in our community; it even includes a list of committed couples that prove that strong, loving relationships are indeed possible for those who are looking for them. There's never been a better time to examine the messages you received over your lifetime from the various relationships you've experienced and decide what you want to keep and what you want to let go of. By focusing on what brings you joy, and by knowing more about who you are, you can create the context needed to build confidence to attach to others, and to lovingly re-attach to yourself. ■



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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Global Equality

Rep. Mark Pocan argues for stronger LGBT protections across the globe by using trade and other agreements to enforce equal standards.

OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS there have been enormous strides in the fight for equality for members of the LGBT community. An overwhelming majority of Americans believe that LGBT people should not be discriminated against in the military, employment or in housing, and the Supreme Court's landmark decision in June legalizing gay marriage shows distinct progress forward.

While I am happy to see this shift in opinion in the United States, there is still a lot of work to be done. In places around the country backwards lawmakers are still on the wrong side of history. Rather than support fellow LGBT Americans by outlawing discrimination in housing and employment, they are actively working to protect these discriminatory laws under the guise of religious freedom.

As our attention shifts from marriage

We need only to look to our democratic trade partners in Asia to see the effects of indifference towards other countries' LGBT policies. Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar and Malaysia are all countries with whom we trade, and are all countries where it is illegal to be gay.

equality to ensuring that LGBT people are protected from discrimination in all aspects of their life, it is important to not back down from the fight. It is also critical that we widen our scope to understand the plight of LGBT people around the world and ensure that the U.S. demands equality in our dealings with the international community.

According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Association (ILGA), over 70 countries and territories criminalize same-sex activity, with varied punishments including arrest, imprisonment, forced psychiatric treatment, corporal punishment, banishment and the death penalty. Even in countries where same-sex activity is technically decriminalized like in Russia, LGBT people experience harassment, persecution and exclusion from society.

We need only to look to our democratic trade partners in Asia to see the effects of

indifference towards other countries' LGBT policies. Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar and Malaysia are all countries with whom we trade, and are all countries where it is illegal to be gay. In other countries in this area where being gay is not illegal, almost none of them have basic protections for the LGBT community, meaning that harassment and assault of gay, lesbian and transgender people are subject to violence and discrimination without any legal recourse.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), heralded as the largest free trade agreement in history, is an example of how America should be leading to ensure LGBT equality abroad. I've demanded—for more than a year now—that the TPP must include strong and enforceable standards to protect LGBT people from violence and discrimination in all TPP countries, specifically in Brunei and Malaysia. Unfortunately, after reassurances from the United States Trade Representative and President Obama's Administration, the TPP does not include explicit language that addresses the criminalization of homosexuality in these countries.

The U.S. needs to be a consistent leader in creating policies that are inclusive and ensure equality. While publicly condemning discriminatory legislation in Uganda and The Gambia and hosting the first-ever Global LGBT Human Rights Forum are good examples of U.S. leadership, our foreign policy and trade negotiations must be more purposeful to promote LGBT rights around the world.

For as far as we have come, there are still many battles ahead to ensure LGBT equality both in the United States and abroad. We need to demand change in our country and the countries with whom we do business. If we do not take a stand, we will only embolden leaders in those countries who will further harm the LGBT community. ■



CONGRESSMAN MARK POCAN is the U.S. Representative for Wisconsin's second district, which includes Dane, Green, Iowa, LaFayette, Sauk, and portions of Rock and Richland counties.



Food for Thought

Jeanne Benink explores the ways we develop a taste for different kinds of love.



MANY TIMES WHEN we have themed issues for the magazine we get tunnel vision on what stories need covering, or at least I do. I asked my editor if I could stretch the boundaries of my usual topics this month to touch on something that I think we could all hear a little more of—loving yourself.

We have just come thru the holidays, and for some lucky people it truly is the most wonderful time of the year. Especially if you have someone to love who loves you back. Not everyone does. Some stay single by choice and some not, but either way I suppose it doesn't matter. We live in a society that drowns us

My point is to not let society (or Instagram) mislead you as you develop your own markers for a well-lived life. Go out there and find what makes you happy and roll around in it. Let it seep into your pores. Whether it comes from volunteering or starting an ant farm, if that's what takes you to your happy place, then get out there and do it.

in the message that two are better than one. Perhaps for a lot of people that's true, but it doesn't hold water for everyone. I've had marvelous, profound experiences as a single person and also as a married person. My point is to not let society (or Instagram) mislead you as you develop your own markers for a well-lived life. Go out there and find what makes you happy and roll around in it. Let it seep into your pores. Whether it comes from volunteering or starting an ant farm, if that's what takes you to your happy place, then get out there and do it.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLA ECHEVERRIA

Along those same lines (brace yourselves, as the chef in me is creeping out now), self-love also manifests itself in how we care for ourselves from a physical perspective. I've noticed over the years that a largely overlooked piece of the self-love pie is health. When you're as healthy as you can be, it feels as though when crises arrive they can be more adeptly handled. I know in my own case, if I'm not feeling well, the smallest molehill of an issue (like being out of tea for example) feels catastrophic.

My point is this—give the machine what it needs to work at optimum levels. Here's my two cents: Eat really well, as well as your pocketbook will allow. Rest—try to get the eight hours of restorative sleep that our bodies need to rebuild on a cellular level. Play—find any reason to romp and frolic! Play should not end after childhood. Taking your sister ice skating is playing, so is playing a board game with friends. Exercise. Quit smoking. Stay in tune with your mental health—I can't stress this one enough. Most of us will at least battle depression over the course of our lives and may need to seek help to get through it. Tell a friend, your family or your spouse what you're feeling. Get help and stay on your meds if your physician feels you need them. Cut yourself mental slack when you should. What do I mean by this? I don't mean to give yourself permission to not get up and go to work every day. I do mean to end the negative self-talk of the mind and be as patient and supportive of yourself as you would of your spouse or best friend.

In short, work on learning to love whoever you are in this moment. Married or not, short or tall, thin or heavy, young or old, love yourself wherever you're at on this delicious journey of life. We may never check off everything on our honey-do lists of self-improvement (the Buddha might, but we're not the Buddha), but living serenely with outstanding list items sounds peaceful enough, right? Right. ■



JEANNE BENINK is a Madison chef and owner of Simply Served Personal Chef Service. Friends call her the soup guru because of her passion for the soups of the world. You can find at simplyservedpersonalchef.com.



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

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Mother Love

After the nightmare of losing her child to suicide, **Skylar Lee's** mother **Joanne Lee** is dedicating herself to continuing the work that her son began on behalf of the LGBTQ community that she struggled for so long to understand.

ONE YEAR AGO, in this very issue, *Our Lives* had the honor of publishing an insightful essay by Skylar Lee, a transgender, Korean-American young man who was very active with the GSA at West High School, GSAFE, and the National Youth Council, with a focus on intersectionality and racial justice.

Like so many people all across Wisconsin and beyond, we were heartbroken when, in September of last year, we received word that Skylar had succumbed to depression and taken his own life. It's hard to comprehend how such a bright light can go out so soon, and the outpouring of grief and support within the LGBTQ community (and its allies) was further testament to the impact Skylar had.

At the center of all of it there emerged the presence and voice of Skylar's mother, Joanne Lee. Since her son's death, Joanne has been doggedly speaking out for the rights of LGBTQ people—transgender youth in partic-

ular. She joined the local chapter of PFLAG. She gave moving testimony to oppose the anti-trans bathroom bill now circulating in the Legislature. And Joanne intends to do whatever she now can to be the supportive mother to transgender youth and anyone else in need of that love.

We sat down with Joanne to talk about her life, her family, her struggles, and her crash course in LGBTQ activism, and are honored once again to feature the Lee family within these pages.

EVERYTHING CHANGED

"Skylar's death changed everything," says Joanne, frequently speaking through tears. "I didn't accept him as my transgender son, I didn't participate in his life for enough years. I loved him so much, but I never showed that I loved him. That's my regret, but to honor his life I have to continue his work

and advocate for transgender youth and give them opportunity to live to their full capacity, help the parents and communities and society to make them understand they're not so different and they have the right to live to have equality and dignity. I'm going to outreach to the parents who don't accept their transgender children. I will show them how to love their children and not to lose them like I did. That's the start."

Both of Joanne's children are transgender. Her eldest, Avi, came out as trans in June of 2014 shortly before moving away to live on the east coast. Skylar, she says, came out to her about a month later.

"Two children, I raised them as beautiful girls until that moment when suddenly my girls became transgender sons; it was very hard for me to accept them," Joanne remembers. "My initial thought was, 'what did I do wrong?' Now I understand it is not what they chose, it is what they felt. They are born with it. I had no understanding about being transgender and the issues they have, and then they became depressed because society rejected them, repressed them, and wanted them to be invisible. I had no idea about that."

Skylar asked to go on hormone therapy at age 15 but, Joanne says, she refused at first,

worried that it was too soon for medical intervention and not understanding how crucial it was for her young son's sense of self and well being. She told Skylar to wait until he was 18 to do it.

Skylar couldn't wait, though. He began self-injecting with hormones he got through a friend. Finally, Joanne says, she acquiesced and signed off on treatments through a doctor. He only had three legal injections before his death. "I wish I could change it. I wish I could give him that opportunity," she says.

CULTURE CLASH

Joanne grew up in Korea where, she says, it was (and still is, for many) simply taboo to talk about having LGBTQ family members.

"Korean community, Asian community, is a very closed community," she explains. "We don't expose ourselves to other people well. There are (LGBTQ) people out there but they're not treated well. If they come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or especially transgender, the society doesn't accept them at all. The family keeps it a secret, or kicks them out. So if someone has a transgender, lesbian, gay family member, the family has a problem because people don't want to connect with those families. They have to choose between community, society, or their children. So they can become homeless; they're not well treated by society.

"I wouldn't tell even my close friend. I would keep it a secret. Because once you talk about those things you are done with the society, you are going to be alienated from them. They don't want to make contact with you. I was raised with a Christian background. Here in the USA there are lots of different kinds of Christians—extremist, more in the middle, or very flexible—they might welcome them. But in my country they are all extremist, and they condemn the family and parents. So we cannot even talk about it. We cannot even tell the closest of friends. They are going to tell everybody. (LGBT people) are treated in a bad way, like a disease. I cannot even imagine what kind of life they have. If I have a chance to work with them, or the Korean, Asian community, I want to reach out to them. I want to help them."

Asked what advice she wishes she could have given herself a year ago, Joanne doesn't hesitate to mention seeking resources like PFLAG. The guidance counselor at West High had recommended that she attend once Skylar came out, but Joanne says her demanding work schedule, along with little sense that it would be such a crucial resource for her, kept her from going. She says just hearing the testimonies from other parents,

about what they're going through and struggling with, and having access to education about LGBTQ people and issues, would have made a world of difference. She encourages any parent of an LGBTQ-identified youth to attend, especially if they're having a hard time with it. "One time at the meeting would change my life. I would understand my child more. You have to go to the meeting to understand your child. It was actually a life-and-death situation for me and my child."

"At the funeral, my pain was so big. But now, I will take the love I had for him and give it to other children so I can save their lives if I can."

Joanne says she only really became aware that Skylar was struggling with depression in the last year, when he first attempted suicide. There was more conflict within the family, and certainly enormous pressure from outside, too. Skylar wrote about the intersecting identities of being young, trans, Asian, and queer, and all the baggage for it placed on a person by society at large. He worked hard to fight on behalf of all of those identities and more.

"I had no experience with this and then my husband kept telling me this is going to pass, and then it will go back to the way it was," Jo-

anne explains. "I wish I could go back and get those experiences so at least I can start talking with my child about that experience, and expand my knowledge and share something, at least, with my child. That is my regret. He didn't get support from his family."

WORKING FOR LOVE

On the day of the public hearing at the Capitol about AB469, which would bar transgender youth from using school facilities that align with their gender identities, Joanne Lee was there to offer her testimony against it. It was, she says, too important to miss.

"The night before he died, Skylar came to me. He said he would go to a friend's house to sleep over and go to school together, then he hugged and kissed me. But the hugging and kissing I could feel was not from Earth, it was from outside of the world. The kiss was so gentle, like a rose petal kiss. And then I felt, 'Oh my goodness this child is forgiving me.' I felt he understood me; he forgave me. Then the next morning he was dead. At the funeral, my pain was so big. But now, I will take the love I had for him and give it to other children so I can save their lives if I can."

Brian Juchems of GSAFE reached out to Joanne to see if she would speak at the hearing, and she agreed immediately. "Whenever I have a chance, I will talk," she

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says. "They're my children now, too, and I am going to tell them that they are beautiful, very beautiful, and the future is going to be changing. I want to tell them to dream it and hope it so they can see it. I'll tell them, be patient with us because there are families who will fight for them. If we work with them, then they can change society, little by little. This is going to be a movement."

Her son is gone from the world, Joanne says, grief-stricken, "but he gave me the gift of his friends, and so many transgender children and youth; they are my children. Skylar gave that gift to me, to take care of them."

She'll be working with the GSA network to travel to the LGBTQ Korean national gathering in California, as well as the Leadership Training Institute for transgender youth here in Wisconsin.

"Wherever, from now on, if they want my help or to do something, if I can go I will go wherever and whenever I can," Joanne says. "That's what I'm going to do." —Emily Mills



A Mother for Many

Below is a transcript of the testimony [Joanne Lee](#) provided at the public hearing for AB469, the discriminatory anti-transgender bathroom bill that is moving through our state legislature.



MY NAME IS JOANNE LEE and I am a mother of two children. Two months ago I would have agreed with this Bathroom Bill. I didn't know anything about transgender issues, what it is like to be transgender until my son's death.

My child's death. My child, Skylar Marcus Lee,

passed away less than two months ago with severe depression that was due to so many things. He was transgender. My other son is transgender, too. I did not listen to them. I ignored them when they talked to me. I would not have walked my children to school to speak to their principal for bathroom accommodations. It did not make sense to me. It did not seem serious to me at the time, even though my son complained to me last year. He did not know which bathroom to use.

I am a medical professional as a nurse. I should have known the issues if they did not use the restroom. Urinary tract infections are common when a person does not use the restroom on time. Yes, on time. It is hard to concentrate at school when you can only think of using it.

Being transgender is something we cannot as parents control. They grow up. You want them to be what you think they are, but it is not always what it seems.

My heart is broken. I am grieving the loss of my child who will

always be 16. My other son just turned 20. I want to talk about how this country is representing freedom. They should be treated as equals. Not discriminated by their gender identity.

Humans have rights for choosing happiness and voicing who they are. We need to give them this equal opportunity regardless of their sex and/or gender. They deserve dignity.

What we need to do is to protect these youth to get the same opportunity as other students do. If we force them, transgender students, the attempted suicide rate is higher than 40%. Their mental status is very fragile. They feel rejected because major community and society don't acknowledge their existence and validity.

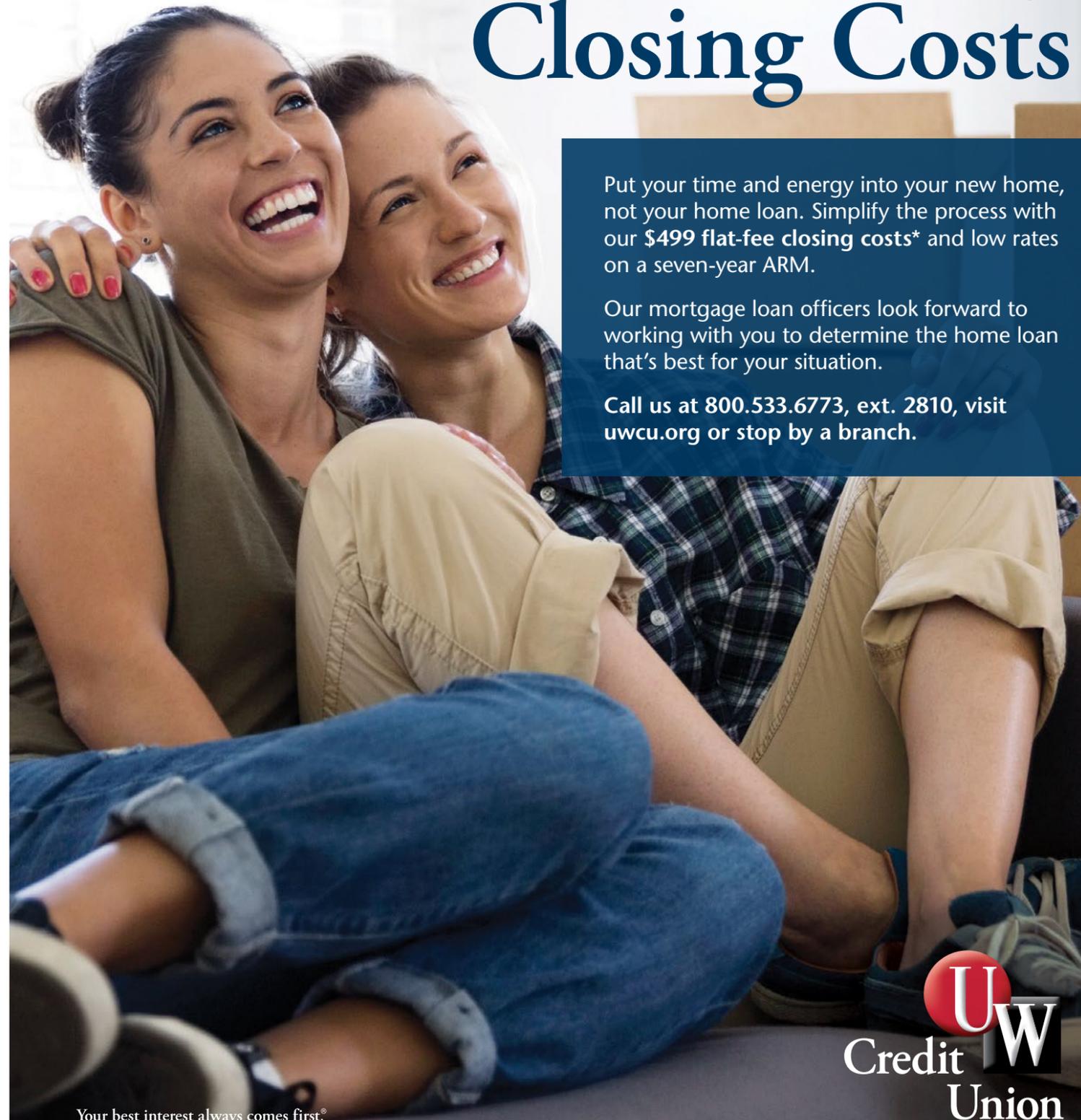
This Bathroom Bill sounds simple, but it is not. Bathroom Bill makes students to go to bathroom by birth genitalia. Transgender students are not who they are by birth pronouncement from medical professionals anymore. If we force them to be who they are not anymore, they will commit suicide. If we force them to kill themselves because of Bathroom Bill, the blood will be on whoever participates and forces them, administration or politicians. It is indirect killing. I am sorry, but it is the truth. We don't want this on our consciousness when this Bill is passed.

Every transgender students' life and death are in your hands. We don't want to see sudden outbreak of urinary tract infections in school districts or sudden rise of transgender students' suicide.

Please give them opportunity to live, fulfill their goals, and save people, and contribute to this country. Make them proud to be citizens of America like other people. Don't deprive them of their rights to use the bathroom or the locker rooms. Do not just make it two genders. There are intersex students, too. I am a mother of two children. One is no longer here. Please listen to their voices. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Joanne Lee

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