

our lives



46 Dina Martinez



54 Ben Brummerhop



30 Brandon Rounds

ENTERTAINMENT

QUEER ARTISTS: Our Economic & Cultural Drivers

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

September
October
2018

FORWARD, TAMMY

Sen. Tammy Baldwin

Midterms present the toughest reelection yet for the nation's only out senator: Why voter turnout will be crucial.

A COMMUNITY DIVIDED

Madison's LGBTQ+ community responds to police and Pride.

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TRANSGENDER HEALTH COVERAGE

State board removes exclusion on insurance coverage for state employees.

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QUEER MINERAL POINT

A hidden haven for LGBTQ+ businesses and people in the Driftless Region.

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- 25 E. Faye Butler - Songbook of Jazz

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JUNE

- 14 Colin Mochrie & Brad Sherwood: Scared Scriptless JUST ADDED!

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“There will not be a magic day when we wake up and it’s now okay to express ourselves publicly. We make that day by doing things publicly until it’s simply the way things are.”

- Senator Tammy Baldwin

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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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James Ehnes, Violin HARBISON | BRAHMS | MUSSORGSKY



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EDITOR'S NOTE EMILY MILLS

HEALING FRACTURES

HEARTBREAKING. EMOTIONAL.

Complicated. Frustrating. Necessary.

This summer has been a tumultuous one for Madison's LGBTQ community. The controversy around Pride and police boiled over into a contentious debate that revealed stark divisions.

It's been a wild, complex, and often bumpy ride for our two-person full-time staff as we worked to put this issue to bed, support the now-annual QPoC Pride Brunch, and try to keep up with the fast-evolving developments around first the protest of cops in the Pride parade, and then the blowback from those who disagreed with OutReach's decision to pull them out (For some reason, there continues to be some confusion around our relation to OutReach. To be clear: *Our Lives* is an independent media operation, entirely unconnected from OutReach).

We do our best to stay on top of what's relevant to the community, because we think it's crucial to have as accurate and comprehensive an accounting as possible of the events and people that influence all of our lives—even and especially when things get tense or controversial. We can't begin to address problems or hurts without that.

The last month has been eye-opening. While I was aware of differing experiences and opinions around the issues, it's still been difficult to find the most constructive path forward. I don't pretend to have an answer, but I'm committed to the work. That is my hope for us all, as we navigate an ever-tenuous position in society at large and seek ways to build a better world for everyone.

This will require some painful self-reflection, some admitting of mistakes, some reaching across gaps in background. For those of us with degrees of privilege, it will also involve a whole lot of listening. Ultimately, we all have to find a way to work together—to hold space for each other, and to make room for our flaws with forgiveness and grace. ■



OBITUARIES



JESSICA SUE FISCHER, age 43, passed away unexpectedly on Friday, August 10. She was born on July 24, 1975 in Green Bay. Jess was the wife of her beloved Laurie Weaver and mother of their daughter Lillian. Jess served the Town of Madison as a patrol officer, detective, and sergeant for the past 13 years.

Sgt. Fischer received numerous awards during her tenure. She received many letters from thankful citizens and appreciation for her work from other law enforcement agencies. She also received recognition for her work from the United States Marshal Service. She cared about kids and ran the Shop With A Cop program for many years.

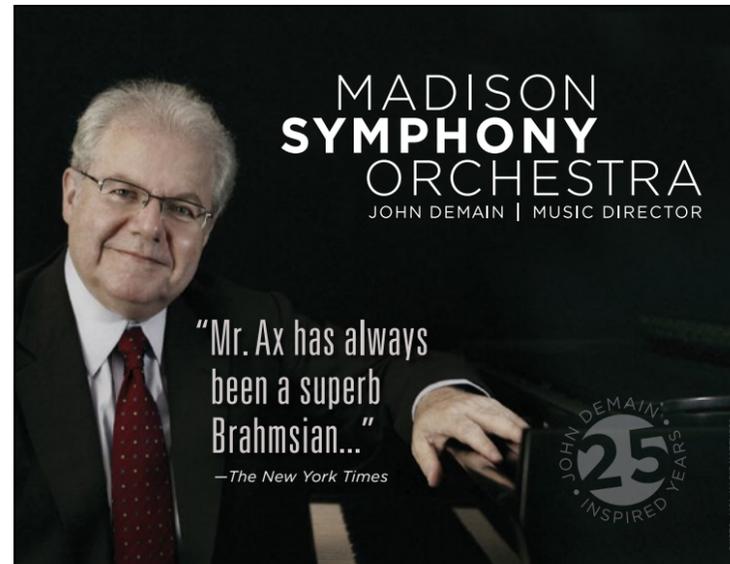
Jess loved dressing up for Halloween and lighting fireworks on Independence Day. She loved her friends at FIVE Nightclub, a place she called home. Memorial contributions may be made at: gofundme.com/sergant-fischer-family-fund



WILLIAM JOHN WARTMANN died Sunday, June 17, at the Agrace Hospice center in Janesville. Bill was born in Chicago, on Feb. 8, 1936. Bill was preceded in death by his wife, Joyce, and his mother and father. Bill and Joyce were married on June 2, 1973, at the First Unitarian Society of Madison. Long before, Joyce and her daughter Mimi began weekend outings to visit Bill, at the house he was restoring near Edgerton. Together with Michael Saternus, Bill's first partner, Joyce would pitch in toward renovating the house built in 1852, by a settler from Maine.

Bill and Joyce would go on to support many local efforts. The two established major endowments at U.W.-Madison School of Music and Fine Arts, including the Madison Early Music Festival.

Bill's big-hearted nature led to many deep and lasting friendships and working relationships. His professional career culminated with service as president of the American Society of Appraisers, Wisconsin Chapter.



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OWEN KARCHER is a bilingual art therapist, author, and social justice educator. He co-founded the Center for Community Healing in Madison, Wisconsin to provide high-quality therapy to people with marginalized identities.



VIRGINIA HARRISON is happiest when she is in the woods or catching frogs. She makes the best of the rest of her life working as a “bridge builder” with LOV-Dane, copyediting *Our Lives*, and raising her teen daughter and fur babies with her partner, Melissa, on Madison’s fabulous east side.



SAMANTHA DUTCHER, one half of Dutcher Photography, loves great coffee, solid high-fives, and building blanket forts in the winter. She and co-owner Rob have been photographing weddings, portraits of all kinds, and roller derby for over 15 years. To see their work, visit robandsamphoto.com.



The fact that we could pick up a piece of local journalism made by and for a community that included our family gave me a sense of belonging that I wasn't even aware of at the time.

MADISON, WI

Thomas Greenler

Growing up in rural Wisconsin, my moms never tried to keep it a secret from my brother and I that we weren't a typical family. They talked to us about how they described our “two mom family” to certain audiences, and asked us what we would say if any of our classmates ever questioned us about why we didn't have a dad, or confronted us about the validity of our family identity. It wasn't about instilling fear or shame, just loving preparation for the world we were entering.

Living outside Edgerton, we did get into Madison pretty frequently. I remember whenever we walked by the free journal boxes on State Street, my parents would always pick up an *Isthmus*, along with the latest copy of *Our Lives*. My moms were busy with parenting in those days, and were not particularly involved in Madison's LGBTQ community, but they did like to

keep in the loop. I didn't think much of this ritual at the time, but looking back, I've grown to appreciate the effect it had on my life.

The fact that we could pick up a piece of local journalism made by and for a community that included our family gave me a sense of belonging that I wasn't even aware of at the time. Coming out in my tweens, I knew that I would have a community to celebrate my own identity with. In high school, I knew I would find fellow students with whom I could fight for queer and trans justice in public schools. And just this year, when I decided to drop out of college and pursue drag, I knew I would have a place to start in Madison.

I've had a blast this summer performing at FIVE Nightclub for fundraisers and competitions leading up to Madison Pride. I am so thankful for the welcoming environment that Madison has provided for the beginning of my career as Pam. I am also thankful to my moms, who both stayed up past their bedtime to see my first drag show. I wonder if they knew that the copies of *Our Lives* would lead us here?! ■



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DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING WORKPLACE ADVOCACY

Out for Business

Our Lives Publisher **Patrick Farabaugh** speaks with **Wisconsin LGBT Chamber of Commerce President & CEO Jason Rae** about the organization's founding and future.

HOW DID YOU IDENTIFY A NEED FOR THE CHAMBER?

It started kind of selfishly. I graduated from Marquette University, and after a few years a number of my fellow LGBT alumni started moving away. I remember thinking, "Well, I can't be an out professional in Milwaukee. I've got to go to Chicago or New York." Although I didn't think that was the case, there also wasn't anything really working to bring the local community together on a professional level. So I met some folks for happy hours and invited them to spread the word. We did a focus group with those that had been attending. A business owner who came said, "You know, I've got a business plan that in about five years I can double the size of my business. I know exactly what to do. But I can't do it in my current space. I want to find an LGBT-owned or allied bank to do some lending, an LGBT or allied realtor to find a new space, a contractor to do the build out. I want to do business with those that share my values."

As we looked, we found that there wasn't anybody really doing the business and economic development organizing in Milwaukee. That really got us started.

WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS TO BRINGING AN ORGANIZATION LIKE THE CHAMBER TO LIFE?

When we launched, we had a steering committee with LGBT business owners. The other key was being willing to try new things and fail. There were lots of events that we tried that didn't really stick. Often people will give up when they do that. We kept saying, "Well let's try it this way, let's do this instead." I think that's what's been the key for almost six years now: Being willing to try things.

WHAT MADE YOU GO THE DIRECTION OF A FORMAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE?

We wanted to reclaim the idea of a chamber. A lot of folks have a perception that chambers of commerce are conservative. I



Jason Rae

We saw an opportunity this past spring when Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, the state's chamber, was pushing legislation that would have severely impacted the ability of these local municipalities could do about employment laws. We mounted an aggressive campaign against that. And went after them directly, for pushing such an anti-LGBT piece of legislation.

really wanted to reclaim the idea that you could be pro-fairness and pro-business at the same time.

It also really opened doors at a number of places; we get to be included in lists from the largest chambers of commerce across the state. It has put us at different tables at different organizations. It helped get us national partnerships.

WAS IT A STRUGGLE TO DO SOMETHING STATEWIDE?

When we first launched, we were very strategic. Milwaukee was home base for me; I was here, and I had the lay of the land, so we started here. We waited about six months before we chose our next city. We were a working organization, but we were only

doing events in Milwaukee.

We wanted to go somewhere nontraditional next. It's important that the chamber isn't just a Madison and Milwaukee organization. So we chose Appleton in February of 2013 and spent several months building there. Then we went to Madison.

What I learned is it's important to know how each community is different, and what each community will attend. I've learned in Madison, if I do an event too far on the west side, east sides won't come. I've learned if you do something in Appleton, people from Green Bay will not go down. Sometimes they might, but very rarely. I've learned in some markets they prefer a happy hour rather than a breakfast.

DOES THE CHAMBER HAVE MILESTONES MEASURING GROWTH THAT YOU CAN SHARE?

A big growth milestone that many organizations look at is the number of members they have. While that's important for us, it's not everything. We were very fortunate that on our one-year anniversary we actually hit 100 members, and on our two-year anniversary we hit 200 active members. We're currently somewhere around 570 member businesses. That's a great benchmark, but we also look at engagement and how we are helping businesses grow.

Also, what connections are we making? I view the chamber's role as a convener—to bring people together. We have great events that provide opportunities for members to network, to learn, and to find business contacts. Our business equality summit in January provides educational programming and network connection opportunities. We also have our business showcase, which is just a social event. I really view our success as how we are helping businesses grow and get business.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT I FOUND FASCINATING IS THAT THE CHAMBER HAS A ROLE IN POLITICS.

I will admit that I was hesitant to be political when we first launched the chamber. I come from a very political background, and have a very political patch that I wear outside of the chamber in my down time, and

PHOTO BY ANDREW FELLNER

I didn't want people to see me as using the chamber as a vehicle for my own personal political agenda.

We spent a lot of time discussing it with our members, with our corporate partners, and with others, saying, "When there is legislation that has a business impact, we want to speak out on that, and they want us to speak out on it." What we did the first two years was educate members on business-related issues. No direct advocacy. We did not ask members to call an elected official.

But we wanted to participate in that dialogue, and we heard from our membership, saying, "Tell us more about how this impacts us." So during the Obama years we participated in what was called Chamber Chatter. It was a monthly call that was organized by one of our national partners that focused on one issue and included invited senior white house administration officials. We talked about the Affordable Care Act and why it mattered for small businesses; why immigration reform mattered to small businesses; and what does the federal budget mean for small businesses.

I'M ASSUMING THAT POST-OBAMA, NOTHING LIKE THAT HAS HAPPENED.

Nothing like that has happened, no. And that's when we started saying, "You know what? Perhaps we need to be a little more active, and need to help amplify the LGBT business voice." The biggest opportunity was with Wisconsin's nondiscrimination laws. We know how outdated they are for not protecting on gender identity and expression, so we started building a business case around why that matters, and what it means. Especially when we're living in a global market where people can choose where they want to live and can go anywhere.

As we got businesses on board, we started pushing something positive and saying, "When we get the legislature back and have enough supporters, this is something we can advance." We saw an opportunity this past spring when the state's chamber, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, was pushing legislation that would have severely impacted the ability of local municipalities to do anything about employment laws. We mounted an aggressive campaign against that, and went after them directly, for pushing such an anti-LGBT piece of legislation.

At first, I was fearful of what members and corporate partners might say, but we didn't get push-back from any of them. In fact, we had corporate partners who were joining us in that effort and were speaking up publicly around how this was a good

thing, and we had businesses making calls to their elected officials. It really showed me that in addition to the work that we do to promote business development and inclusion and to create a pro-business community, part of that work has to be around advocacy.

WHAT IS THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHAMBER?

We are a 501C6 organization, which is the designation for chambers and trade associations. We've got a board. I'm the full-time president, and Annie Spritz is the managing director. She and I are out there, traveling the state. We have started kind of testing ourselves organizationally. One of our chamber members in Green Bay really wanted the chamber to have a bigger, more frequent presence there, so he said, "I'm happy to help organize events. If you can offer support for it, I'll staff it."

We also have a corporate leadership advisory council, which is made up of all of our corporate partners at a certain level and above, which meets quarterly to hear updates on the chamber.

ONE LAST QUESTION: WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE CHAMBER?

We are an affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce. They rebranded in November and have been a really great partner. I serve as the national chair for the affiliate chamber council. We are also members of the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, or the mid-America chamber executive folks, so we can learn from different peer organizations on topics such as: How to structure membership dues and what meeting types are working? Within the state, we have a couple of programs that have partnership components. One of those is the LGBT Workplace Alliance. That is a program that brings together 22 different corporate employee resource groups or business resource groups, mainly in southeastern Wisconsin. The ERGs are from GE, Rockwell Automation, Associated Bank, and BMO Harris Bank, to name a few. We meet every/other month to share best practices, talk about programming that we're doing, and learn from each other. Our community partners include Diverse & Resilient Wisconsin, ARCW, and Milwaukee Pride. ■



PATRICK FARABAUGH founded *Our Lives* in 2007 and has published it since. He also founded the Madison Gay Hockey Association in 2006. Before moving to Wisconsin, he was a Senior Creative at *Condé Nast Traveler*, and an Art Director for *OUT*.

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Pride, Police, and Protest

Controversy around **Madison Police's involvement** in the annual **Pride Parade** highlights divisions within the LGBTQ community.

Exactly what happened, and is there a positive way forward?

PRIDE COMMUNITY POLICE PROTEST

THE FOURTH ANNUAL OutReach LGBTQ Pride Parade went off with no logistical problems on August 19, with hundreds of people marching and hundreds more lining State Street and the Capitol Square for the festivities.

The lead-up to the event was anything but smooth, however. A group eventually calling itself the Community Pride Coalition protested the inclusion of official, on-duty law enforcement groups in the parade and began demanding that sponsors pull out of the event due to what was perceived as non-responsiveness and silencing on the part of OutReach LGBT Community Center, the parade hosts.

Just two weeks before the event, OutReach's board voted unanimously to reverse course and withdraw the applications of MPD Pride (Madison Police Department's LGBTQ employee group), as well as Sheriff Dave Mahoney, and the U.W. Police Department.

"Our community is facing complex, unprecedented times, where power is a fleeting commodity for our most vulnerable members, especially queer and transgender persons of color. In times like these it is crucial that we listen to those whose voices are not often heard in the mainstream," their official statement read. "Those whose voices are silenced due to gender and sexual orienta-



COMMUNITY RACISM POLICE PRIDE PARADE READER POLL

A Community Responds to Pride, Police, and Protest

Whether on social media, via email statements, or in-person interviews, **Madison's LGBTQ community** has made its various thoughts and feelings known in response to the controversy around police at Pride. We've worked to compile some of those responses below, as a way to paint a more comprehensive picture of the ways in which we grapple with an intensely complex and emotional issue—and to show how diverse those positions are.



OUTREACH'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT

To Queer/Trans People of Color (QTPOC), as well as the LGBTQ+ community at large, we hear you, loud and clear, and hold ourselves accountable for the hurt that we have incurred related to the issue of police in Pride.

Our community is facing complex, unprecedented times, where power is a fleeting commodity for our most vulnerable members, especially queer and transgender persons of color. In times like these it is crucial that we listen to those whose voices are not often heard in the mainstream. Those whose voices are silenced due to gender and sexual orientation, as well as the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, immigration status, age, and lack of institutional power, need us to amplify their voices.

It is with this recognition that the OutReach Board of Directors have unanimously decided to withdraw the Pride Parade applications from the Madison Police Department (MPD) Employee Resource Group (ERG)/University of Wisconsin Police Department (UWPD) ERG, and Dane County Sheriff Dave Mahoney. These contingents will not march in the 2018 OutReach Pride Parade and we will be refunding all monies collected from the contingents. We hope that our actions help to create meaningful dialogue between the police, the ERG's, the Dane County Sheriff, and the QTPOC and greater LGBTQ+ community they are serving.

This decision supersedes our previous position detailed in our statement released on August 3, 2018.

Armed, uniformed MPD officers will continue to work security for the OutReach Pride Parade as our City of Madison Parade Permit requires. We invite off-duty, unarmed, plain clothes MPD and UWPD officers, Sheriff Mahoney, and their families to attend the parade and rally as members of the LGBTQ+ community and allies. We also invite off-duty, unarmed, plain clothes LGBTQ+ members of the MPD and UWPD to march as LGBTQ+ civilians in the parade.

We recognize that not everyone will be happy with this decision. It is our hope that those who are hurt by this decision use that hurt for growth and to approach that hurt with humility, rather than retaliate or create further divisions between those with institutional power and those struggling to exist.

These issues are complicated, and we know that this will not be solved in one day, one week, or perhaps even within a year. However, it is our hope that our actions draw attention to the gravity of the situation, and that our calls to action do not fall on deaf ears.

We encourage those interested in creating a dialogue attend the Madison Police Department's MPD Pride Listening Session Monday August 13 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Madison Central Library in Room 301.

We know that there is more work OutReach must do within the LGBTQ+ community. We hope through our actions we can repair fractured relationships and reaffirm the mission and values of the organization.

Instead of apologies or excuses, we offer a promise. We promise to do better by the LGBTQ+ community through action.

Thank you for your support,
Michael Ruiz

OutReach Board President, on behalf of the OutReach Board of Directors

tion, as well as the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, gender, ability, immigration status, age, and lack of institutional power, need us to amplify their voices."

OutReach went on to invite any and all queer and allied law enforcement members to participate in the parade so long as they were "off-duty, unarmed, [and in] plain clothes," which some of them ultimately did. The Madison Fire Department issued a statement saying they would boycott the parade in protest of the decision, though they had not yet submitted an application to march.

The decision immediately drew a firestorm of criticism from both within and outside Madison's LGBTQ community, with intense arguments dominating social media for the weeks that followed. The issue seemed to highlight a stark but previously somewhat hidden divide within the community, though opinions have varied as wildly as there are individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Some conversations devolved into racist and transphobic attacks, while others represented the mixed emotions and deep personal conflicts around the problem.

At a rally following the parade, activist T. Banks took the stage and delivered a blistering rebuke of both OutReach and the white population of Madison's LGBTQ community, alleging a lack of real allyship in the struggle for justice for queer and trans people of color.

"A white racist police, white supremacist, and white homophobic police presence still exists today in Madison," Banks said. "It's telling



T. Banks

when the biggest white queer organization—that's OutReach—took over three years to kick the cops out of Pride. OutReach had to battle whether or not to take the cops out of the Pride parade, in aid of its queer and POC community members. The police department is a bully. OutReach in its inaction...demonstrated their own racism within the board of directors and staff."

OutReach has a paid staff of just 3.5, relying heavily on volunteers to run its operations. The organization took over putting on the parade in 2014, after several other groups started and sputtered in their efforts to create a long-lasting Pride event. The controversy resulting from this year's decision to remove law enforcement from the parade itself has already resulted in the loss of several large donors to the center, threatening its ability to continue running the event, as well as its overall viability as an organization.

"The purpose of Pride is to remember the struggle that happened in Greenwich Village and at the Stonewall Inn," Banks went on to say. "And that cops have never been Officer Friendly, even if they do identify as queer. Pride is no place for cops."

OutReach has a paid staff of just 3.5, relying heavily on volunteers to run its operations. The organization took over putting on the parade in 2014, after several other groups started and sputtered in their efforts to create a long-lasting Pride event.

Reactions from the crowd were mixed, with some hearty cheers and others booing, cursing, or just leaving the rally altogether.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Discussions and disputes about police participation in LGBTQ Pride events are not new. The issue has come up time and again in cities large and small across the United States and Canada, with Toronto Pride making headlines this year for barring its local police from participating in the parade while in uniform or on duty, and controversies around the issue cropping up in New York and San Francisco as well.

In Madison, questions first came to the forefront after 2017 Pride saw a mandate by the city to increase the number of police on security detail. This came in reaction to events in Charlottesville, where white nationalists rallied and shot into a crowd of counter-demonstrators (killing one by driving a car into a crowd of peaceful protesters). OutReach also announced an active shooter training for volunteers.

The move galvanized many within the community already opposed to police at Pride, especially for queer and transgender people of color (QTPOC), who face disproportionately high rates of targeting and arrest at the hands of law enforcement, according to a study by the Movement Advancement Project.

The Wisconsin Transgender Health Coalition, a group of independent, grassroots activists based in Madison, brought their concerns to OutReach (which was at the time acting as the coalition's fiscal sponsor). Jay Botsford, the group's program director, had noted that they and others argued that the increased police presence would make people feel less safe, and that cops should be removed from the parade entirely.



Botsford

"[OutReach] said it was too close, but that they would reevaluate for next year," Botsford said. "Because they made that positive action at that point we said great, you're going to do this intentional process for next year, you're going to make sure that you're speaking to people and getting the cops out of Pride, that's fabulous. And then they never connected with us again. They never spoke to us. There were no public listening sessions, or if there were they were not well publicized."

One such session was held shortly after the parade last year. Organized by Shawna Lutzow, who was volunteering at the center, and her fiancée Johanna Heineman-Pieper, the event was part of a series called "Conversation about Racism within Queer Communities." Facilitated by Kiah Price, who identifies as a multiracial Black genderqueer lesbian and is a member of the International Socialist Organization, the presentation focused specifically on the history of LGBTQ Pride and relations between police and queer people, especially QTPOC.

Lutzow noted that the session was attended by OutReach Executive Director Steve Starkey and a few members of the board. She expressed frustration at what she felt was a lack of change in approach after the event.

"Johanna and I told OutReach that we are going to hold our conversations elsewhere since the conversations and content didn't

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COMMUNITY PRIDE COALITION'S OFFICIAL RESPONSE

Fellow community members and organizations, The Community Pride coalition, formerly known as Alternate Pride, would like to share its appreciation and thanks with OutReach LGBT Community Center for their decision to not allow police contingents at this year's Pride.

Through their newly released statement, OutReach has chosen to take this important, first step to give a meaningful apology, a promise to repair harm done to the most marginalized in our community, and an effort to engage in concrete actions that foster full inclusion and liberation for all LGBTQ+ individuals.

To our friends, supporters, collaborators, and comrades, we want to make it crystal clear that we have earned an important victory. We took a stand and demanded that OutReach rescind their invitation to the Madison Police Department, the University of Wisconsin Police Department, and Dane County Sheriff Mahoney, and we won.

In light of OutReach's decision, Community Pride will march as a contingent in this year's parade. We will continue our call to oppose police at Pride in future years and across the nation. We also will schedule an organizing meeting for all who want to join us next week. We know there will be backlash to this decision, and that is part of why it is important to march in the parade and defend this victory.

Queer and transgender people of color still experience silencing and erasure from our movement and fight for queer and trans liberation. QTPOC still face systemic racism and police brutality. Our movement, leaders, and advocacy and support organizations need to do better across the board.

Meetings will be organized and resumed in September to encourage deep reflections and conversations about race, privilege, and racism within the queer community. We invite all in our community to join in on these important discussions, which will hopefully guide our collective future actions towards justice and liberation. We would love to see everyone organizing together in the days ahead.

It is important that OutReach joins these crucial conversations. We also hope that OutReach will invite QTPOC to take the lead in organizing future Pride events. QTPOC lit the spark of our movement at the Stonewall Inn, and we need QTPOC to be at the center of our movement's future. Without liberation for QTPOC, there cannot be liberation for all.

seem to help them move any further in the right direction," Lutzow said. "We really wanted to help them get to where they want to be with being more supportive to QTPOC. So it was very disappointing when we learned that they were still going to allow police to march."

A COMPLEX AND FRAUGHT INTERSECTION

Prior to the final decision to remove police from the parade itself, OutReach had asked for and gotten a compromise from MPD Pride, the contingent of LGBTQ officers and allies that has marched in every parade since 2014. They agreed not appear in uniform or to bring along any squad cars or other official police vehicles.



Chaney Austin

Lt. Brian Chaney Austin, a member of MPD Pride who is himself an out gay, Black man, told a community listening session held the week before the parade that although he and his fellow LGBTQ-identified cops were personally upset by the decision, they understood and respected OutReach's position.

"Although we wanted to take part," he said, "we felt that we perhaps dropped the ball in

relaying to the community, and particularly that aspect of community that had real valid concerns and fears as to who we are, number one, and as to what our purpose and mission is. I've tried to be upfront about our support of OutReach, I've tried to assuage some of the heartbreak about this...but I do not want any correlation between the police department and wanting some sort of boycott of the Pride parade. That is not where our position is. That is certainly not what any of us want to see happen."

Held at the Madison Central Library, the forum drew in close to 90 participants for a sometimes heated but largely respectful conversation about the issue.

Those who supported removing official, on-duty law enforcement from the parade cited ongoing concerns especially from queer and transgender LGBTQ+ people over feeling unsafe with armed police marching side-by-side with them.

"We need to shut up and listen to people of color and listen to and believe them about their experiences," said Linda Ketcham, Executive Director of Madison Urban Ministry.



Ketcham

Racial disparities continue to negatively impact communities of color and LGBTQ+ people nationwide. Wisconsin has some of the country's highest rates of incarceration for African American men, and in Madison, Blacks are arrested at more than 10 times the rate of whites. Milwaukee and Madison are some of the most segregated cities in the country. Half of the state's "Black neighborhoods" are actually prisons. In Madison and Dane County, we continue to rank among the worst when it comes to racial disparities and inequality for everything from employment to graduate rates. Police have shot and killed unarmed Black men like Tony Robinson and Dontre Hamilton with little to no consequence.

Several of those present at the meeting expressed their own hurt and abuse at the hands of law enforcement, whether it was being profiled for their race, sexuality, or gender presentation, or actually being harassed or attacked. A woman who identified herself only as Christine, a member of the Madison Degenderettes and the TransLiberation Art Coalition, noted that she had been the "victim of police brutality myself, and I'm white. My experience was horrible, but I've heard much worse experiences from my friends who are not white."

Others pushed back, arguing that the MPD has come a long way in its policies and procedures, and that asking even its LGBTQ-identified members not to march constituted

discrimination and a step back from hard-won progress to serve openly.

Freda Harris, a Black woman and parent of a gay son, said she was sad to hear about the decision to remove cops from the Pride parade, and hoped that more communication would help lead to better solutions for the community.



Schalk

"I hate to see the community being torn apart because of concerns on one side and different concerns on the other. Talking to each other is hopefully going to bring us more together, or back together."

The discussion remained mostly respectful, but did grow heated when certain pointed questions were posed. U.W. Madison Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies Sami Schalk asked, "I genuinely want to understand, particularly for white folks in the room, how this decision harms you? For me there's a difference between 'I feel unsafe when I see queer cops vs. I feel safe when I see cops.' Being in this room speaking in front of all these people—many of whom are people who seem to be people who don't support my community—fills my body with adrenaline. I want to understand the harm that's being done to others. I want to hear from officers who are LGBTQ identified about how they feel about this."



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The police drove a divisive wedge into our vulnerable community. Now is the time for celebration of our victory, pride, and moving towards collective community healing.

In solidarity,
Community Pride



OPEN'S STATEMENT

We at the Out Professional Engagement Network (OPEN) believe it is important to respond to OutReach's decision to withdraw applications by local law enforcement to march in the Pride Parade. This decision has sparked a tremendous emotional reaction. Rather than fracture and divide our community, we hope to issue the challenge to rise to the occasion and begin the process

of healing and reconciliation between the LGBTQ community and officers. As an organization, we have a responsibility to bring together representatives from throughout our communities with diverse perspectives to have a challenging yet meaningful dialogue to move us from a state of reaction to being proactive in making change.

We know that the LGBTQ community, especially our members who are queer and/or transgender people of color (QTPOC), are suffering harm and pain, and that their concerns have not been well-heard and addressed in the mainstream. Our goal as an advocacy organization is to break the cycle of marginalizing voices in our community. More importantly, when police misconduct occurs, it disproportionately targets the most marginalized people in our community. Given that reality, it is understandable that QTPOC and other members of our community are often fearful of law enforcement. When officers wear their official uniforms, that reaction is particularly powerful—even if the officers happen to be members of the LGBTQ and/or QTPOC communities. This problem is not just about the Pride Parade. It is about the relationship between law enforcement and our community.

We want to thank local law enforcement for their statements of acceptance regarding the parade decision and about their desire to further discussions in our community about the deeper issues involved. We are grateful for the support that our community receives from our law enforcement agencies, and we know that we can build more connections with them through these efforts.

As we mentioned at the Madison Police Department listening session on August 13, OPEN feels it is imperative to bring all interested parties together to address this larger issue going forward, not just to reach a properly-informed consensus on how to handle law enforcement's participation in the Pride Parade, but to find ongoing and substantive ways of building trust and better relationships between our communities and the police. With that goal in mind, OPEN will be facilitating community-based strategy sessions and similar forums to engage in deeper discussions to build these much-needed connections. We are asking EVERYONE to participate in this. We need you. ALL of you. This work cannot happen in the few days we have left before the Parade. It has been said, "Change moves at the speed of trust." We are committed to the long-term work ahead of us.

Over the past several years, our Pride Parade has become a source of joy, love, and kinship. As such, we feel withdrawing support from OutReach or the Pride Parade is unproductive in furthering the goal of improving the relationship between our community and police officers. Our community deserves the joy of Pride, and the work that needs to be done will last long beyond this upcoming Pride Parade.

We need longer tables, not higher fences. We're ready to get to work.



ORGULLO LATINX LGBT OF DANE COUNTY'S RESPONSE

Orgullo Latinx LGBT+ of Dane County has been participating at the Pride Parade since 2014 when OutReach LGBT Community Center took the leadership of this great community event. Over the years, OutReach has done an amazing job organizing this event and has created the space where the community feels welcomed, loved and accepted.

Every year Orgullo Latinx looks forward to its participation at this parade for the following reasons:

- As an opportunity to make a public statement that the LGBTQ+ Latinx community is a strong and thriving community in Dane County.
 - As an opportunity to expose the Latinx community to a large LGBTQ+ event.
 - As an opportunity where the Latinx LGBTQ+ community feel welcomed, safe, loved and accepted.
 - As an opportunity to witness the love, respect, unity and compassion among every group.
- We are aware of the disagreements that have risen since OutReach LGBT Community Center

Madison native and bartender Jason Harwood interjected to note that he had once been helped by a gay cop and a straight cop after having withstood a physical attack. "They helped me get through all of that, including the trial afterwards, and not feel scared. Now they're being asked not to participate."

Another voice in the room countered with, "You were helped when your head was split open. Michael Brown was left in the street for hours."

Schalk reiterated her question about how the decision caused harm. Chaney Austin spoke up on behalf of the officers, noting, "I live on both sides of the fence, y'all. It is quite challenging to be in the position I am...I grew up in Chicago. I had some bad experiences with members of law enforcement. From my perspective, I am trying to do something good with something that has been identified as broken. It is incredibly small and fragile baby steps that we're taking in this mission. My hope is that we can continue to talk, my hope is that the very people who have really valid concerns and fears—I get it—I wanna talk. I wanna be able to sit down together in a small, potentially group environment where it's potentially easier to have that dialogue. And then I can try to bring it back to my department to bring change.

"I understand the decision, I respect the heck out of it, I know we have more work to do," he went on to say. "I don't want the police to be what is fracturing our community. That will drive us absolutely to a point where we will not recover. But we accept that there are these fears—and ready to have these conversations and bring them back to decision makers."



Nelson

Another MPD Pride member, Officer Jodi Nelson, added her own thoughts. "We don't want to take away from Pride, we want to support this event," she said. "I am proud, I am a lesbian, and I have a partner.

It took me a long time to get to this place. We are proud of who we are, we are proud of our group and the department. There are definitely things we can do to improve. We can't always make the decisions of what is put out [to the public]. But we can be working behind the scenes. Whether we are agreeing at this table or not, I only think this kind of discussion will make our community better."

The MPD's new transgender and nonbinary Standard Operating Procedure (SPO) was touted as one way in which LGBTQ officers on the



More than 90 attended MPD Pride's listening session after OutReach released their statement withdrawing law enforcement's application to march.

Another voice in the room countered with, "You were helped when your head was split open. Michael Brown was left in the street for hours."

force had worked with the community to create more inclusive policy. Police worked with now former OutReach volunteer and transgender advocate Ginger Baier to create the SOP, which seeks to enshrine in official documentation how police should interact with and treat transgender and gender non-conforming people

while on the job.

Chaney Austin told *Our Lives* that all officers had recently received a one-hour training regarding interactions with and education about the transgender community.

Several board members from OutReach attended the meeting as well, including Board President Michael Ruiz and Secretary Jill Nagler. "I know I hear a lot of vitriol from people who are against our decision," Nagler said. "It makes me really sad, and it makes me scared to even say I'm with OutReach, so I can only imagine what QTPOC feel like in these situations. I've been on both sides. I grew up in a



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withdrew the parade application from the Madison Police Department, University of Wisconsin Police Department and the Dane County Sheriff. We have also been following some of the circumstances and issues that caused this to happen.

We at Orgullo Latinx have gone back and forth regarding our participation in this year's parade. At the end, we have decided to participate in the parade, but we have decided we are not going to support either side of the debate. We have decided to participate for the sake of UNITY. It has been heartwrenching to witness our community divided in such a destructive manner. Orgullo Latinx is not going to be part of that. Period. Instead, we are eager to participate in any future dialogue to find a solution to the current situation and to create healing.

Currently, our Latinx community has been going through so much due to massive deportations, family separations, and a growing anti-immigration sentiment in this country. Our community is already exhausted. The color of our skin, our countries of origin, and our sometimes thick accents have been the cause of discrimination and exclusion. We have always found refuge within our LGBTQ+ community. During the times when our own Latinx community is discriminated against, our LGBTQ+ community was always there ready to welcome us and support us.

Orgullo Latinx of Dane County hopes that the annual Pride Parade can once again be a place where the whole LGBTQ+ community feels welcomed, loved, included and respected. We hope that this is an opportunity for all of us to value everything we have achieved as an LGBTQ+ community in Dane County. We trust that we will be able to move forward and come out stronger from this.

COMMUNITY VOICES



CEDRIC JOHNSON Member of the QPOC Pride planning committee

"I'm sensitive to the issue of police brutality against black and brown bodies. It's been three years since my cousin was shot and killed by a police officer in Rockford, Illinois, and the family still seeks justice for his murder," he told *Our Lives*. "As a queer Black man, the anxiety of when and how someone might inflict pain on my body is at the back of my mind whenever I walk down the street. It can be exhausting, and knowing who is an ally helps assuage those fears. Which is why I was discouraged to hear about the protest of the OutReach Pride Parade over MPD participation. Do I support the right to protest? Yes. Do I carry anger towards law enforcement for their systemic attack on people of color? Absolutely. Is there work to do? Absolutely. But how do we, as a community, advance the conversation about justice without trust first and foremost? I don't necessarily trust every police officer I see, but if one of them stands with me to honor the struggle of queer people—or people of color, or people who struggle with mental health issues—then at least I know who is willing to build that trust. I know who is ready to help with the heavy lifting and who'll stumble along with me towards a solution. We will disagree. We will argue. But we can also celebrate the minor victories along the way, together."



DANA GORDON ROWE Community activist

LGBT organizations in the area are being called to uphold an intersectional social justice mission and growing pains are being felt in various spaces. There are plenty of people wondering why POC and their allies have been so vehement in calling out organizations that are already doing good work, work that is already hard and frequently thankless.

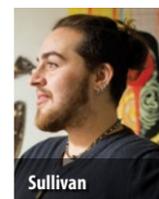
Many of us have wondered if this is the way and if potential allies are being alienated from our cause. Supporting marginalized groups can feel socially risky and that can lead us to question how much to commit. True allyship comes from believing a marginalized group of people when they tell you they're being treated unfairly, and agreeing that it is unacceptable.

The reality is that the police are an incredibly powerful institution. Strong and clear allyship from gatekeepers is needed for folks to feel safe accessing resources and community spaces. There are obviously LGBT individuals and POC who are employed as police and related functions. I refuse to see those folks as allies when they are appearing as agents of an institution that is inherently problematic for people of multiple identities. People who have their bodies, rather than their actions or intent, criminalized.

My friends who are championing this issue right now are not really calling to new allies. They are calling to us who already juggle many issues to spend some time throwing this issue above other work.

rural town where I was harassed, where I had a police officer call me a dyke. Those are strong, scary, powerful words. I moved to Madison and I hear stories, I see it, I'm not blind.

"I want to see individual officers marching off-duty, without the guns, without the badges. We want to get to know the humans behind the badge, behind the gun."

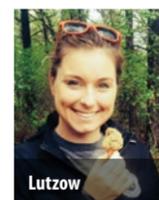


Sullivan

In an interview with *Our Lives*, Chaney Austin laid out what he thought the challenges and goals were likely to be in the future.

"I don't envy [OutReach's] position, it's really a challenging one to be in year in and year out. In the end we feel bad. We don't want this to be a burden on this organization, we don't want people to feel fearful of us. Our goal is really to humanize the badge and make sure people know who is actually marching in the parade. It is really the same people who you break bread with at the end of the day, the same people that go out to the same restaurants and bars as you do, the same people who have similar shared experiences as you do. Every part of the LGBTQ acronym is represented in our police department. We're happy about that. We're proud that we've been able to achieve that.

That's what we're marching for. We're not marching to say 'Mission Accomplished.' That ain't happening. We're saying we're here, please know that we're here in support, we are you, we're part of the community, and we realize we have more work to do."



Lutzow



Heineman-Pieper

That's what we're marching for. We're not marching to say 'Mission Accomplished.' That ain't happening. We're saying we're here, please know that we're here in support, we are you, we're part of the community, and we realize we have more work to do."

MISSTEPS & ESCALATION

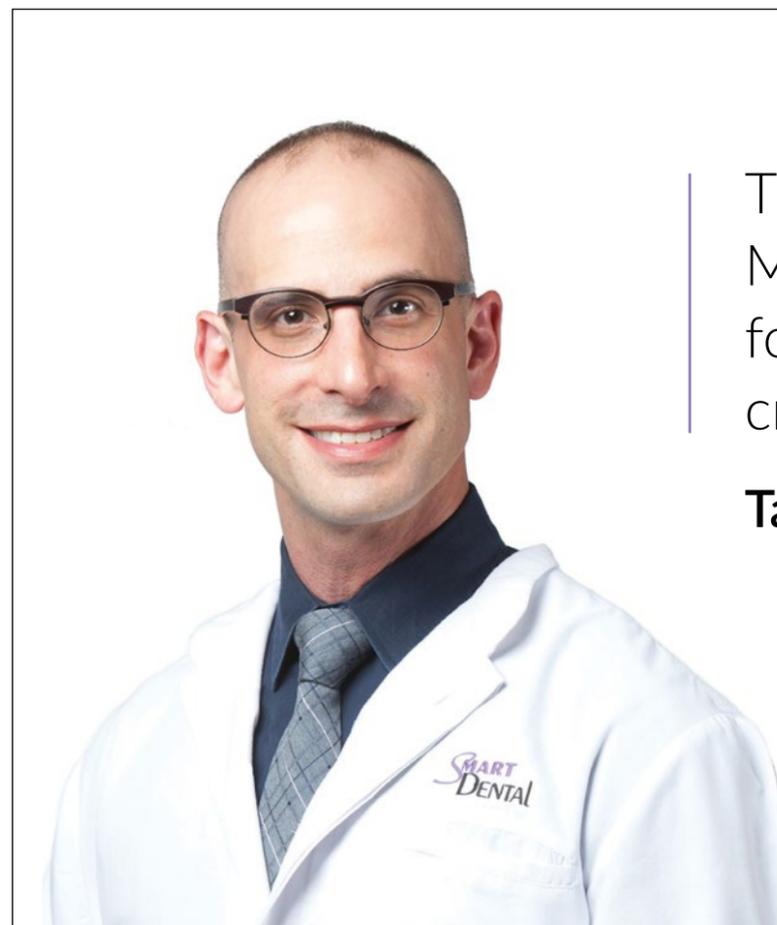
Over the course of July 31 and August 1, at least three queer people of color left comments on the official OutReach Pride Parade Facebook event page questioning the continued inclusion of police, and, in one case, calling OutReach's decision racist. The comments were deleted at some point in the early morning hours of August 1, and commenting turned off entirely for the event.

That day, Kaci Sullivan, the organizer behind the TransLiberation Art Coalition, took to Facebook to call out what they perceived to be the silencing of QTPOC voices in the discussion. One of the people whose comments were

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To those of us who are moderate in expressing their opinions but already having these conversations with those close to them—it is time to take these conversations public.



MONTELL ININITI ROSS Mr. Gay Madison 2018

You know, as I've been kind of staying quiet in regards to the whole fiasco going on in Madison, I felt as a queer person of color that it was time that I speak up and share my thoughts and views.

One thing I have always loved about Madison, and a huge reason why I'm Mr. Gay Madison, is because of the love and inclusion I have always felt since day one! I find it very strange that we have "LGBT" organizations standing so strong against the very individuals that are called first when we, as the LGBT community, face harassment, violence, or situations based on being who we are. Now, as a Black person, I will say I've never once felt that my equal rights were second guessed by the Police Dept./Sheriff Dept. in Madison.

I actually feel safer while in Madison (being someone who resides in Milwaukee) just because every single time I've come in contact with a police officer the first thing I get from them is "Hey, how's it going?" Not a funny look, not a "suspect possible" look, not an "unsafe while being black" look...so I'm baffled on how individuals are standing and protesting against them. What really blows my mind is the fact that these are non-POC standing strong against them being included in something that they support, protect, and serve! Madison, you can do better!

How is it that we as a LGBT community decide who's included and who's allowed to participate in something that is meant to be all about inclusion? How is it that we decide, "No, you're not good enough to march with us, but you're good enough to stand as security and protect us?" Sorry, but that's ass**** backwards! This new day and age has really transformed our community to not be who we've claimed to be, which is a community of LOVE, a community of SUPPORT, and a community of INCLUSION. We've now moved into picking apart the very space that we've always felt secure, safe, and allowed to be us.



ALI MULDROW Co-Executive Director, GSAFE

At GSAFE I am the only person of color in the office. And I am the first black person to have an executive role within the organization. I think that it's easier for LGBTQ+ organizations to point the fingers at the police than to address their own history of racism. There's something strange to me about having a bunch of majority white organizations say they won't march with the police as an act of Racial Justice and Solidarity.

I personally am not against the police; I am against racism, I am against racial disparities, and I don't think any singular role, position, or work assignment is responsible for the racism of America.

I believe firmly that divide and conquer has no benefit. I believe that we must work together and refuse to treat one another as disposable. Does removing the police from the Pride parade make me feel safer? No. Will it lead to job opportunities for communities of color within LGBTQ organizations? I don't think so. To me this about white folks who are passionate about being seen as champions for racial justice but are not particularly concerned with or interested in supporting people of color in real, substantial ways.



COREY GRESSEN Co-owner, Plan B nightclub

I have a ton of gay/queer officer friends that have every right to be proud of being gay and proud to be a police officer for Madison. By asking them not be proud of both identities in my opinion is harmful to the community as a whole. Would you deny another class of people that have multiple facets to be proud of, to celebrate, not to participate because you have an issue with their line of work? Though they did nothing wrong at all?

This is absurd and more divisive and harmful than helpful. When you are ready to accept everyone and all they can be proud of then please join us to celebrate Madison's proudfest diversity and community. Until then please stop sending these hateful messages. I don't appreciate them.

Feedback was gathered directly, or from published statements in the press and on social media.

deleted was TK Morton, a trans person of color involved in the TLAC who recently moved from Madison to Kansas. The two shared their frustrations and called out Starkey and others at OutReach about what had happened.

Those comments snowballed into a series of community discussions and arguments in various corners of social media. Lutzow and Heineman-Pieper started what was eventually called the Community Pride event in protest and began urging others to boycott the parade.

Letters were sent by protesters to every organization and business listed as an official sponsor of the OutReach Pride Parade, asking that they drop their support. Prior to OutReach's final decision, according to Botsford, groups that had withdrawn from Pride are the WTHC, Orgullo Latinx LGBTQ+ of Dane County, Diverse & Resilient (which had already opted not to participate due to scheduling constraints), and Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin.

OutReach responded in the days following by releasing an official statement that attempted to explain the relationship between Pride and the police, as well as the decision to delete comments: "...in poor judgement, we removed posts and made the decision to prevent further discussion on the page. Our intent was to route those discussions to the upcoming MPD listening session, which OutReach requested. We sincerely apologize and acknowledge that we should have found a more transparent and thoughtful way to redirect this conversation."

WHAT COST PRIDE?

One of the accusations leveled at OutReach involved their mention of the MPD as a sponsor of the parade. Protesters have argued that OutReach was "prioritizing" fiscal support from police over the needs of queer and trans people of color.

Starkey shared the financial information from the event with *Our Lives* in an effort to offer clarity on the issue: "The MPD was a \$100 sponsor this year. The fee they would have paid was \$75 to have a contingent, so \$25 was a sponsorship gift. The cost of hiring police in 2017 was \$1,753. Our total fees paid to the City of Madison were \$3,900. The total cost for the parade was \$13,700."

MPD Pride is a group made up predominantly of LGBTQ police officers and some straight allies. They participate while technically on duty, which is why, even in plainclothes, they will still carry badges and sidearms. MPD officers may earn MPPOA (straight time pay) by participation in community events like the

Pride parade, according to their official union contract.

SO...WHAT NOW?

There are as many differing opinions around this issue as there are people in the community. On one end, the argument goes that police should have no role whatsoever—even for security—at a Pride event. Perhaps even holding a parade is too mainstream, and the community ought to revert back to its radical protest roots.

"The MPD was a \$100 sponsor this year. The fee they would have paid was \$75 to have a contingent, so \$25 was a sponsorship gift. The cost of hiring police in 2017 was \$1,753. Our total fees paid to the City of Madison were \$3,900. The total cost for the parade was \$13,700."

Like Banks, many point to the origins of Pride in the U.S. as a series of anti-police riots, including Stonewall. There are ongoing issues with police at Pride events in various parts of the country, too, as well as institutionalized homophobia and racism within law enforcement as a whole.

On the other side, LGBTQ people who are themselves police (and their allies) wish to be

included in an event celebrating all aspects of their identities. The argument in favor also includes the idea that it's a sign of progress to have any police attend Pride in a friendly way (and to have openly LGBTQ officers), given the history of animosity between the groups and the hard work that has gone into making it possible to be out as a police officer. Others still can understand the need for police security but would rather they didn't march in the parade, or if they do, out of uniform and without weapons.

Of course, it's important to recognize that the modern LGBTQ Pride movement didn't begin only in the U.S., but rather in a variety of ways in all parts of the world. The current movement is as diverse as its people and locales, with different issues impacting various communities in different ways.

The question for now seems to be, what real work can and should be done to make sure all members of the LGBTQ community are heard, valued, and supported? And how do you ensure that process without tearing down what few resources the community has in place for that support, especially in an era of increased hostility to LGBTQ people and people of color?

The answers will likely play out in the weeks, months, and years ahead. At very least, it's clear that this year's Pride controversy has caused a major and potentially irrevocable change in the conversation. —Emily Mills

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Wisconsin's Group Insurance Board votes to remove exclusion for transgender health care coverage.

IN A NARROW 5-4 VOTE in August, the Group Insurance Board opted to remove the exclusion for transgender health care coverage for state employees.

The issue has proved to be a contentious one for the politically appointed board. In July 2017, the GIB voted to add coverage for transition-related care after its attorneys advised that it was required under the Affordable Care Act. Obama Administration officials had issued a memo saying that transgender people and their care were covered by Title IX anti-sex discrimination rules.

After the election of Trump and the reversal of that guidance, and as a ruling was pending (and ultimately given) by a federal judge in Texas to block implementation of transgender health coverage, the Wisconsin Department of Justice, at Gov. Scott Walker's request, asked the board to reconsider. They argued that the board's decision was based on "unlawful" rules that "improperly" interpreted Title IX.

The GIB met again in late January 2018, ultimately voting 7-2 to re-add an explicit exclusion for any transition-related care.

According to a state consultant with the Employee Trust Fund (ETF), a civil service body charged with researching many of the issues brought before the board, covering gender reassignment surgery and related benefits would have cost \$100,000 to \$250,000 a year in a \$1.5 billion program that provides health benefits to about 250,000 state and local government workers and their dependents. The estimate also assumed just two-to-five people would have used the services per year.

The decision in August came in light of a recent ruling by a federal judge in Madison, who ordered the state to cover the surgeries of two transgender Medicaid recipients, as well as other developments in case law and medical research showing the overwhelmingly positive impact of gender dysphoria treatments.

"I'd like to note specifically the material we received showing a significant change in practices regarding this coverage, and the positive results of the care," board member Chuck Grapentine stated before his vote to remove the exclusion. "I can in very good conscience ap-



"This provides improved health and well being to members at no cost," Day said. "I would like us to get out of the doctor-patient relationship and let those doctors and their patients determine what's best."

prove this change...and I encourage my fellow board members to do the same."

The ETF provided material laying out various options for the board to consider, from the status quo (keeping the exclusion) to removing it entirely. They could have punted the issue to a future meeting, too. Board member Herschel Day motioned to approve the first option outlined, which completely removes the exclusion and allows for care so long as it's deemed "medically necessary."

"This provides improved health and well being to members at no cost," Day said. "I would like us to get out of the doctor-patient relationship and let those doctors and their patients determine what's best."

A packed room applauded loudly, when the motion passed to remove the exclusion.

DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS DISCUSSED

The board also took up a motion to instruct the ETF to do further research on ways the state might still provide some form of domestic partner benefits. The state's Domestic Partner Registry was eliminated in the 2017-19 budget at the behest of Gov. Walker. He argued that the registry was no longer necessary given the legalization of same-sex marriage in the state in 2014 and nationally in 2015.

Board member and Walker Administration appointee Waylon Hurlburt argued that it would be a waste of ETF staff time to research something he said was against state law (Hurlburt is Walker's former budget director and introduced the original motion to add the transgender insurance exclusion).

Bob Conlin, the ETF Secretary, clarified that the state had only removed the registry and coverage for those on it, but had not technically made DPBs illegal. Hurlburt pushed back, saying that there was no reason to address it at the ETF or GIB level. "If we want that to change, talk to the government," he added.

Graventine suggested that DPBs were no longer necessary because the "population served" by them was "finally able to marry" like everyone else. His comment was met with some derisive laughter by the gallery.

Domestic partnerships are utilized by LGBTQ and heterosexual people alike, especially for those people on disability for whom marriage would eliminate coverage and care options. Many private and even state businesses find ways to offer some form of domestic partner benefits in recognition of that need.

It was a letter from the U.W. Chancellors requesting the reinstatement of DPBs that prompted the discussion about research at the GIB meeting. They argued that the lack of such coverage seriously hurts efforts at recruiting and retaining important faculty and staff at the university. Several competing Big 10 colleges offer such coverage.

A motion to not advise the ETF to research the issue carried 7-3.

"I'm really excited that the trans exclusion has been removed so that people are going to be able to get access to necessary medical care," said Jay Botsford, program director with the Wisconsin Transgender Health Coalition. However, Botsford relayed complicated feelings about the outcome of the meeting overall. "The fact that they are completely ignoring domestic partner benefits is an issue of both LGBT justice and disability justice."

Davey Shlasko, also a member of the WTHC, added, "The people on the board who spoke about DPBs appear to be unfamiliar with the laws related to it, and also unfamiliar with the purposes of providing benefits to domestic partners. That concerns me because some members of the LGBT community are also unfamiliar with the purposes of providing domestic partnership benefits even though marriage is possible now. I really think we need to learn how this is important for members of our community who have various disabilities and various family formations and other reasons that marriage is not a good option—and that they need domestic partnership benefits." ■



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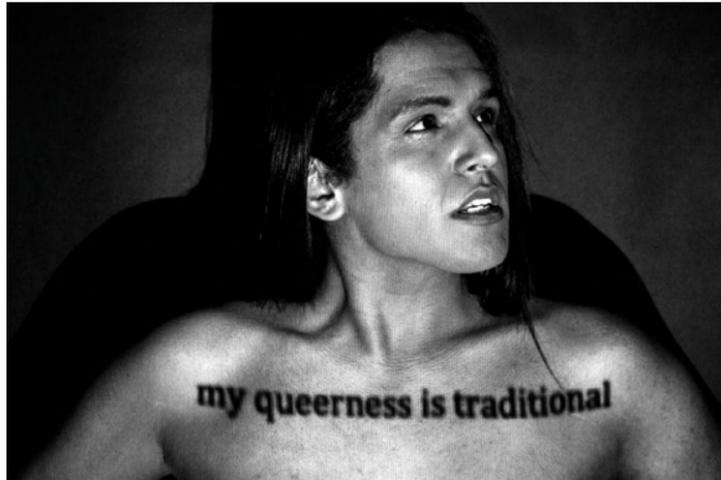


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ART PHOTOGRAPHY TWO SPIRIT INDIGENOUS

My Gender Is Indigenous

Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe photographer **Ryan Young** reflects on the interconnectedness of their Two Spirit and Indigenous identities, and using art to build bridges and pride.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF!

My name is Ryan Young (They/Them/Their). I am Ojibwe from the Lac du Flambeau reservation in northern Wisconsin. Right now I am in my final semester as an undergrad at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with a major in Photography and a minor in Performing Arts. In my spare time, I am a contributing photographer to *Native Max Magazine*, an Indigenous fashion magazine based out of Colorado. Recently, I wrapped up a summer internship at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I worked with the Native American House, LGBT Resource Center, and Housing as the Coordinator for Two Spirit and Indigenous Programming.

WHAT FIRST ATTRACTED YOU TO MAKING ART, AND IN PARTICULAR, THE KIND OF ART THAT YOU DO? WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN YOUR LIFE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I used to love making art as a kid. When I was in grade school, I had a negative experience with my art instructor in regards to something I created, and decided to no longer take art classes.

Throughout high school I continued to draw and teach myself new mediums. When I first started college, I had planned to major in Psy-

chology, but wasn't really interested in many of the classes I was taking. After taking a break from school, I bought my first camera and started taking photos of my friends and family to gain experience. When I pursued my BFA at the Institute of American Indian Arts, I also fell in love with printmaking, digital art, and performing arts. In preparation for my senior show, I am working primarily in photography, but experimenting with text on the body, either through projection, printing ink on the model, and even adding beadwork to photographs.

Art making is important to me because a lot of it has to do with empowering my identity as a Two Spirit person, and wanting to create work that teaches and empowers other queer, Indigenous people. Social media has made this work more accessible, especially through the use of hashtags. I want my work to be accessible to the folks this work is created for.

TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR INDIGENOUS HERITAGE AND WHY YOU ARE FOCUSED ON WEAVING IT INTO YOUR ARTWORK?

I focus on incorporating my queer and Indigenous identity into my artwork, because it's who I am. My experiences in this world are as a queer, Indigenous, Two Spirit person. I grew up experiencing a lot of homophobia from inside and outside of my tribal community.

In high school, I was always told I didn't look "Native" enough by non-Native peers, despite growing up and being involved with my community. When I first came out, I had a conversation with someone who was also queer in my community. They discussed their own struggles and essentially left me with the idea that I would have to either choose to be queer or Indigenous, as it was too hard to try to navigate this world as both.

In college, I researched queerness in Indigenous culture and learned about the multiple gender identities in various tribes. Even the term "Two Spirit" is a translated Ojibwe term. As I've continued to do this research, it has inspired a lot of my artwork to focus on both queerness and Indigenous identity, as they are not separate entities. Precontact, being Two Spirit plays a role in how I would have contributed to my community, and different gender and sexual identities were more accepted before the influence of colonization and religion.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE TWO SPIRIT WOOL BLANKET CONTEST (FOR EIGHTH GENERATION IN SEATTLE), AND HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE CHOSEN TO CREATE THE PIECE?

I follow Eighth Generation on Instagram. Initially they put out a survey to see what kind of concepts and design aspects should go into the Two Spirit blanket they were creating. About a month later, they put the call out for Two Spirit artists to contribute a design to be considered for the blanket. Many of my friends sent or tagged me in the post and motivated me to contribute a piece of work. I submitted a photo of a painting I created, and after a phone call with Louie Gong to discuss the meaning of the artwork, my work within the Two Spirit community, and the importance of this project, I was selected as their artist. I feel honored and humbled to have this opportunity to represent my community and work with an Indigenous-owned business like Eighth Generation.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO IDENTIFY AS TWO SPIRIT? WHAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS DO YOU FEEL THE GENERAL POPULATION—OR EVEN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY—HAVE ABOUT THAT IDENTITY?

I identify as Two Spirit because it connects me to my culture. Two Spirit is a term translated from my tribal language ("Niizh Manidoowag") and recognizes the existence of Two Spirit people in the Ojibwe community. While it is a pan-Indigenous "umbrella" term for gender and sexuality, we must acknowledge



that not every queer Indigenous person identifies as Two Spirit. There are multiple communities with their own words for various gender identities that align more with how individuals identify themselves. There are even additional terms for gender in Ojibwe culture beyond it.

While homophobia and transphobia exist everywhere, seeing this knowledge and recognition of gender fluidity in Indigenous languages show that it hasn't always been there. By learning and owning my identities and finding their place within our traditional culture, I rebuilt my relationship to my cultural identity that had been impacted heavily by being bullied for being queer. My artwork reflects this desire for agency and self-advocacy by reminding other Two Spirit folks that

our queerness is traditional, and that we need to see the power that these identities once held, instead of the shame that Western beliefs try to push on us.

I feel the biggest misunderstanding is through the appropriation of Two Spirit identity by non-Indigenous folks. Recently, Jason Mraz had an article about him finding his "Two Spirit" identity to recognize his love for both men and women. The article showed me how little work he did to research this identity before attaching himself to it. Two Spirit isn't just about sexuality. It's about gen-

der identity and its origins are rooted within not just Indigenous culture, but specifically Ojibwe culture and it connected these identities and your role in helping your community.

Additionally, there are so many Western terms that exist to identify various sexual and gender identities that don't have a cultural context that can be used. I know that for some folks, it's a journey in itself to find which words fit best for your identity and how you want to be acknowledged. Identifying as Two Spirit when you are not Indigenous strips it of its cultural significance and its purpose. We have to take it upon ourselves to truly understand what those words mean and their history before we take something that does not belong to us. ■

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Taking the Stage

Incoming StageQ President **Zak Stowe** was bullied and shunned by his conservative, evangelical community for attempting to stage a play they felt was heretical. Now he's finding his voice, and living life on his own terms, through the LGBTQ theater scene.

GROWING UP IN A CONSERVATIVE, religious environment was hard; growing up and realizing you were different than what your zealous schooling said you should be was harder.

While in college, I became a board member and the technical director of the local community theatre, State Street Theatre Company. During my tenure I attempted to direct "Inherit the Wind," the play about the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" challenging the teaching of evolution in school.

My conservative school was alerted to this by various professors and community members. In response, they confronted me on their disappointment with how I was involved with such a sacrilegious production. They attempted to shut down my auditions, community members sent me article printouts from "Answers in Genesis" (the Ken Ham blog), and local pastors and priests scared my cast to the point that all dropped out save for one.

With the shadow of this controversy weighing on me, I was forced to drop out as director for fear of retaliation from my school's administration. With the production on hold, several news outlets picked up the scoop and the story was published in various local and national media outlets including *Playbill* and *Broadway World*.

THE HERETIC

The saddest thing about this episode is that, while my school thought the play was only about creationism versus evolution, they missed the greater message. The play, written during the height of McCarthyism, was a spotlight on the repression of thought and free speech; an irony not lost on me today.

I was labeled a heretic by my college, for this and other episodes in which I called out

While I was forced to graduate early with a "washout" degree, I had gained something that took me 22 years to realize: I had my own thoughts and opinions that mattered. I publicly came out as gay on my graduation day and my school disowned me.

hypocrisies. While I was forced to graduate early with a "washout" degree, I had gained something that took me 22 years to realize: I had my own thoughts and opinions that mattered. I found my voice through all those trials and tribulations. Moreover, I found that I could accept who I was without fear of some sort of divine retribution. I publicly came out as gay on my graduation day and

my school disowned me.

Looking back now at the interviews I gave, I have to laugh. I was still so naïve, but I was also playing the long game. I had to couch every opinion I had about the episode in a political manner so that I wouldn't anger my school's administration any further. I had to reiterate that I believed in creationism, even though, internally, I was starting to have some seismic changes in options and beliefs. I remember getting phone calls from local TV stations asking to do live on-air interviews and turning them down feeling that, while that might make me feel better internally, it would only perpetuate and draw it out longer. I put an end to it and tried to finish my senior year with my head down. That ultimately didn't work.

For the first time in my life, I had stood up for myself and had an opinion different than what was fed to me by my church or school. It was really hard to stop talking after that. It started because I came out to family and close friends the summer before and, once that bird had been freed from its cage, the whole damn zoo wanted out as well. Years of pent up questions and frustrations, anxiety and internalized self-hatred about who I was, welled up and finally detonated. It was a controlled burn to be sure, but it was enough to end up under the magnifying class of my school.

LIFE ON MY OWN TERMS

I now live in Madison as an openly gay man. While the internal scarring of an upbringing in the religious right will always be there, I have to marvel at how far I've come and how much I've grown. I've become more of a fully realized person and discovered who I am more in the past five years than I did in at any time prior. I've gone from being the wallflower in high school to being an outgoing, engaging human, producing shows and having more friends and acquaintances than I ever thought possible.

Directing the upcoming StageQ production of "Southern Baptist Sissies" will be a victory lap for me. Not only do I get to finally direct a show, but I get to do so on my own terms about a topic that very much flies in the face of everything I was made to believe growing up. It's very cathartic indeed.

The ability to tell stories on stage, giving voice to the voiceless, sharing in the human experience is a tradition that I am so lucky to have in my life. StageQ not only allows me to continue the love of theatre that sustained me during so many trying times, providing an outlet for creativity, and fostering a sense of community; they constantly show me the beauty that is being yourself: Unflinching. Unwavering. Unapologetic. ■

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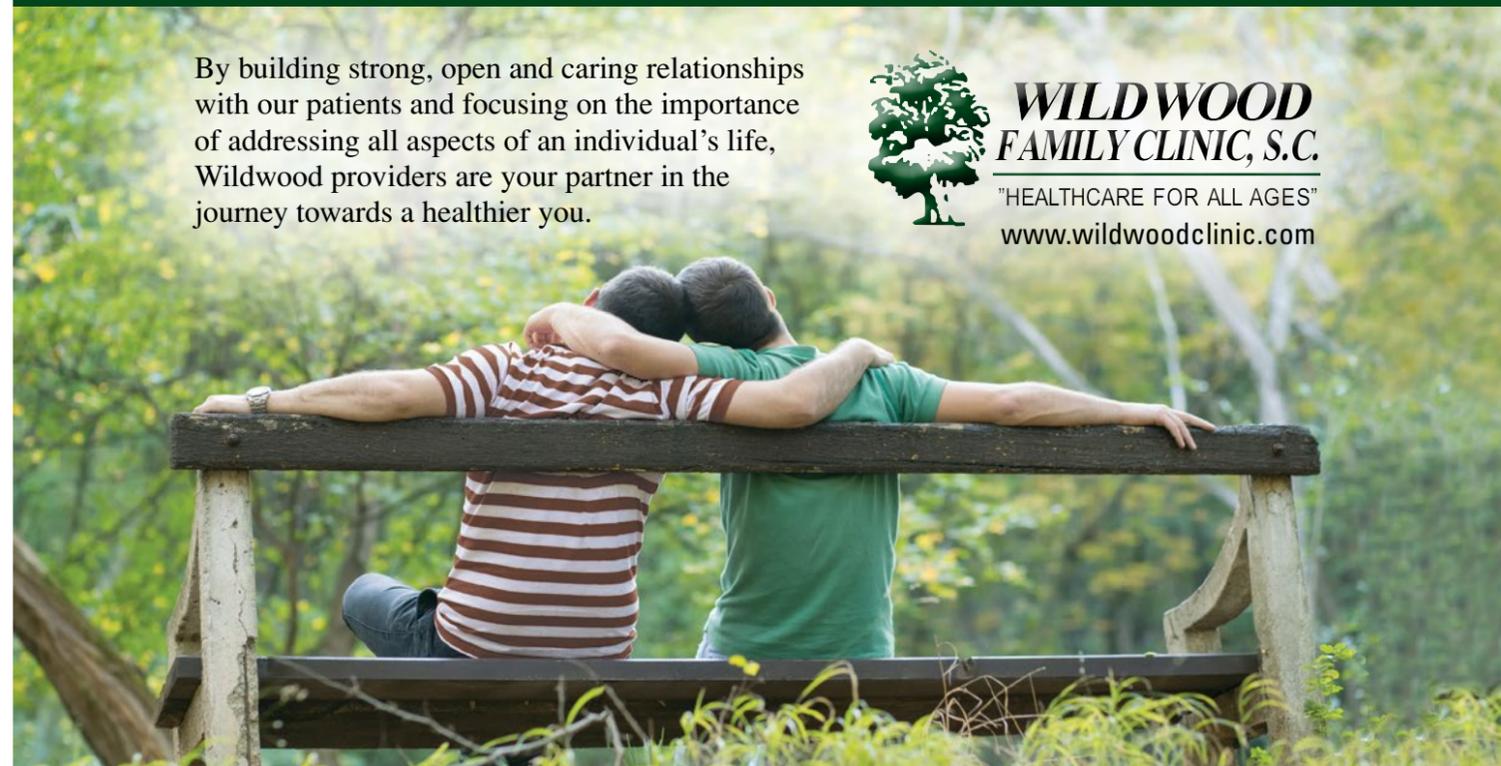
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DRAG PERFORMERS

Dare to Drag

Brandon Rounds reveals the origins of **Bianca Lynn Breeze**, why he loves the Madison drag scene, and best practices for finding your own drag groove.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR DRAG PERSONA.

My drag persona is Bianca Lynn Breeze, but she wasn't always that. When I first started doing drag, she was just Bianca Lynn. Bianca was a name that was given to me by a fellow performer and Lynn was my mom's middle name.

Bianca was a peppy ball of energy when she first started and no one could stand in her way. She quickly learned that drag took time, energy, growing, and learning to become the queen she is today. More experienced entertainers would often find me staring at them in the mirror while attempting to "copy" what they were doing. I was not very successful with the "copying" in the beginning but eventually listened to what other entertainers had to say, learned the basics, and eventually started to really understand what drag is. Bianca is a fun, sweet queen who also like to do comedy, musical theater, and top 40 pop songs.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST GET INTO DRAG & WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DO IT?

Drag for me started out as a dare. I was the president of The Alliance (an LGBTQ organization) at U.W.-Platteville where I went to college. We held a large conference and drag show every year with more than 400 student from all over the area. I had two good girl friends help me "get in drag" for the end of the show as a surprise while we performed "You Can't Stop the Beat" from *Hairspray*.

I then moved to Madison in 2012. I would go to Plan B to watch *RuPaul's Drag Race*. A local drag queen hosted, and one night after indulging in a few beverages she said I had great assets for doing drag (aka, I had a big butt). So I said I'd give it a try, and the rest is history!

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT DRAG THAT KEEPS YOU COMING BACK? WHAT ROLE DOES IT PLAY IN YOUR LIFE, IN BUILDING COMMUNITY?

When I was in high school and college, I always wanted to be on the stage. I wanted to be in plays and musicals but never could work



up the courage to do so. When I learned what drag was I felt like it would be the perfect outlet for me to play a character and lip sync to my favorite songs. Sure, I have a "great shower voice," but it's not good enough for live vocals.

When I put on my face, the hair, the flashy costumes, the heels, and the lights come on, it's a whole other world. The feeling you get from all eyes on you and watching the audience smile, dance, and sing along with you is just amazing. The energy I get from performing keeps me coming back for more. It makes me push boundaries and challenge myself to do better each

and every time. Drag isn't just about performing, though. It goes beyond that. I have often donated time and money for local organizations, including OutReach, Willma's Fund, Courage MKE, ARCW, St Jude's Children's Hospital, and many more. It's about the community coming together to raise money for causes and organizations we believe in.

WHO ARE SOME OTHER PERFORMERS THAT YOU LOOK UP TO/ADMIRE AND WHY?

I look up to a lot of the Wisconsin drag community. I've learned techniques from queens who have been performing for 30 years and from people who have been performing for under a year. Cass Marie Domino has always taught me to remain humble and to avoid the drama. Bryanna Banx\$ has taught me to not let people get in your way of your dreams and goals. Karizma Mirage and Windy Breeze have taught me to try something new with my makeup and never be afraid of color. Josie Lynn has taught me to step out of my comfort zone for performing and perform songs I love. Harmony Breeze has taught me to always invest in the right costumes, hair, and jewelry. Betty Boop has always taught me to be myself and to never be afraid to try something new.

One thing that none of them have done is taught me my painting (makeup) technique. They have influenced certain things, but I'm a self-taught drag queen by trial and error!

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON MADISON'S DRAG SCENE?

Madison's Drag scene is like no other. I've traveled and performed throughout the Midwest. There is definitely unique drag out there but Madison's community has so many different styles. Drag isn't just a male transforming into a female. There are bearded queens, Femme queens, bio queens, comedy queens, pageant queens, male entertainers, kings, and the list goes on. Madison has such a variety of drag and that's what I love about being here.

IF YOU WERE LITERALLY LIP SYNCING FOR YOUR LIFE, WHAT SONG WOULD YOU CHOOSE AND HOW WOULD YOU DRESS FOR IT?

Something by Meghan Trainor. That's my girl! Whenever she comes on at the club, everyone always says, "Where's Bianca?" Oftentimes I get Snapchats from friends all over lip syncing to Meghan Trainor! ■

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BOOK REVIEW MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

The Only Way Out is Through

Mare Chapman offers readers a path to self-love and acceptance through mindfulness meditation practice and insights.

IN ONE OF MY FAVORITE Alanis Morissette songs she sings,

The only way out is through

The only way we'll feel better

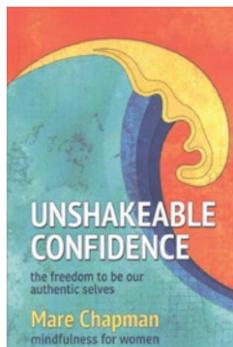
The only way out is through, ultimately.

That song was released in 2004, and by then I had already been blessed with the knowledge of the zen concept that “the obstacle is the path,” both in my relationship with my partner and through Mare Chapman’s mindfulness meditation for women class that my then-partner and I took together.

We looked at how we had been conditioned to “other” (more about this later) and to take everything personally, carrying the weight of all that society and our upbringing had told us as females we should carry and be and do. The class was life changing, and I have retaken it once every five years or so to refresh and remind myself to breathe and give everything inside more spaciousness and kindness. When I do, everything feels easier.

Mare’s 2017 book *Unshakeable Confidence* is almost as good as the classes themselves, with one major difference: her in-person classes got me to meditate regularly in a way that I wasn’t able/willing to do when receiving her teachings through the book.

What I love about Mare’s book is that it has all the great content of her mindfulness for women classes in a voice and pace that mirrors her in-person teachings. The chapters, like her classes, are enriched with anecdotes from Mare’s life and meditation practice as well as those of her students.



Review: *Unshakeable Confidence: The Freedom to Be Our Authentic Selves; Mindfulness for Women* by Mare Chapman (Mare Chapman LLC, 2017).

PHOTO BY TIMOTHY HUGHES.

Something I find helpful about Mare’s approach is her humility and willingness to share her own fallibility and humanity. She isn’t making the suggestions from an empirical or authoritative perspective, but as someone who has learned through the practice herself.

Like in her classes, Mare offers meditation practice, “ownwork” (practice to do on your own), and check-ins to reflect on how things are going and possibly changing as a result of practicing mindfulness meditation.

OTHERING

The concept that has most profoundly impacted my understanding of myself and my relationships is that of “othering,” which Mare describes as “a conditioned imbalance of our attention in which we focus almost exclusively on another persona while ignoring our own experience. We are so intent on trying to meet the needs and ensure the happiness of others, we don’t notice ourselves. Because we overlook information about what is authentically true for us, we lose our sense of self.”

Women are conditioned to “other” as nurturers and caregivers, putting others first. Mindfulness helps us rewire our brains to bring our awareness back to ourselves in a way that is both freeing and empowering, allowing us to live in the moment with authenticity and clarity.

This may all sound amazing and positive, but many of you reading this may also know that it can be exquisitely painful and exposing to clear away the clutter and look deeply into ourselves. When we are no longer looking to others for our sense of self and value, it can leave us feeling vulnerable and even lost. Mare reminds readers at every turn to be incredibly gentle and forgiving with whatever comes up for us during practice or as a result of a more mindful way of being.

METTA

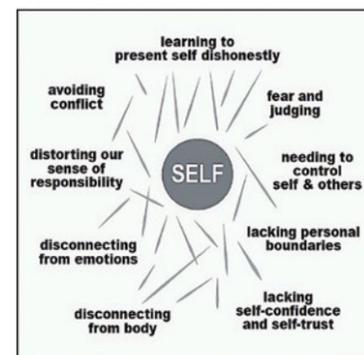
The other really powerful takeaway from Mare’s classes and this book is the practice of Metta, or Loving Kindness. When we practice Loving Kindness, we bring “unconditional and unrestrained friendliness toward ourselves and others.” We start with ourselves, offering this “spiritual balm to heal the wounded self” internally, then out to others into ever-widening circles of intention. I once encouraged a gathering of like-minded women to offer Loving Kindness to ourselves, others, and even Scott Walker during the Act 10 protests at the Capitol. My suggestion was met with some amount of shock and resistance, but proved powerful and somewhat healing.

First and foremost, in-person classes are always best for the way I need to practice (this goes for writing, yoga, meditation—basically any healthy habit). But in the absence of the class, Mare’s book is a close second to reminding me to breathe and offer myself and the world gentle curiosity and spaciousness. ■



VIRGINIA HARRISON is happiest when she is in the woods or catching frogs. She makes the best of the rest of her life working as a “bridge builder” with LOV-Dane, copyediting *Our Lives*, and raising her teen daughter and fur babies with her partner, Melissa, on Madison’s fabulous east side.

Characteristics of Being Disconnected From Authentic Self



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ART GENDER COMMUNITY

In the Season of Shadows

Artist and organizer **Alaura Borealis** reflects on their ambitious and far-reaching artistic project that spanned venues, communities, bodies, and the infinite spaces of the mind.

I HAD TO WRITE THIS at a day's dawn. I had to make myself write about Season of Shadows on a morning with no shadows at all, beating the rooster and the long shadows of daytime for the heavy task of explaining my daily rhythm. Or maybe this dawn is all shadows, tall grasses blending into trunks into street. One thing leading to another. A kind of morning where anything is possible, and even though I race the sky through its blues and pinks, I know the other side of this no-shadow, all-shadow dawn will cradle me, too.

My body feels alone at a time like this one, neighbors making their own coffee and their children sleeping late weekend sleeps; I feel it in the space between us, measured by the speed wind can rally before splashing into my skin. Sometimes, the space between me and the world feels too great to grit my teeth and bear; I take a breath and I know this lonely feeling is a lie. If I listen past the wind, foot-candles measuring higher on the horizon, I can hear birds sending out their morning songs. They know I'm listening. They're singing about those little daily eclipses of our world, just like me.

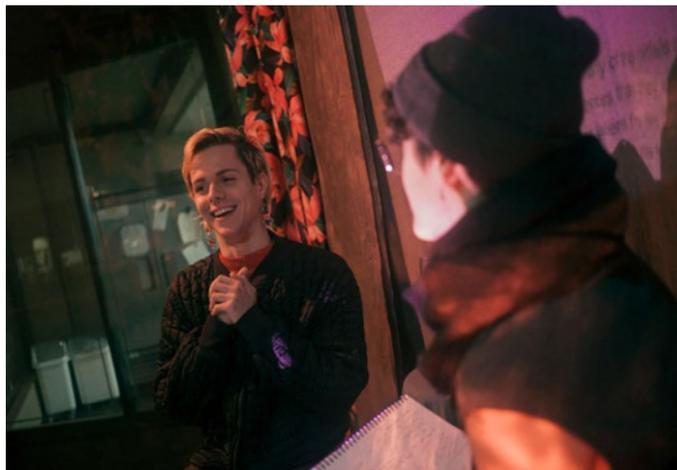
BEGINNINGS AND IN-BETWEENS

I began research for the social art project Season of Shadows in early 2017. I had been feeling lost in the throes of chronic pain and finally gave in to scheduling a minor back surgery. For the decade prior to that procedure, I felt like I didn't have the language to explain the magnitude of my hurting. Even for people who wanted to understand my bodily experience, there seemed to be no markers to legitimize my disability. After the surgery, with the production of a scar, I suddenly had something to point to.

I spent the months that followed reflecting on the tools we use to try to explain our otherwise hidden experiences. How can we articulate the nuance of our spirituality, class experience, sexuality, race experiences? How do I explain my gender to another person and feel like they truly understand?

I'd been out as nonbinary for a few years but still very young to the task of articulating my gender, so I leaned on my peers in interviews as a part of my research. We talked about all the intricate pieces that flow together to inform our gender, how these experiences are so universal and not universal at all, and eventually worked to find metaphors for our complicated lives. We would then transform these ideas into art pieces, giving shape to unshapely things, but it became clear that we would never be able to physically articulate all of the metaphors we were building with our minds.

At the end of the day, it was that intimate act of collective imagining that made Season of Shadows a critically social process. Without conditions, we practiced our queerest arts of mutual care and of witnessing. Even my own metaphor (that my gender is like a shapeshifting shadow, taking up space and taking up no space at all) only found its place in small details within larger performances.



COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION

After over a dozen interviews with peer queers, we fabricated art and events throughout late 2017 and early 2018. I held costume making parties and an installation at Everyday Gay Holiday, Halloween parties for playing dress up with Queer Pressure. Then, "Unpredictable Forms," a sort of reverse Yoko Ono Cut Piece performance with ArtFly in Eau Claire (it turns out that replacing scissors with a sewing needle makes a performance no less harmful and a lot less "reverse" than adding clothes to a body may seem). Children's workshops with StageQ and Whoopsocket. Window display conversational pieces at the east-side Chocolaterian Cafe, before their fire. A more traditional exhibition of mixed media works at Black Locust Cafe.

First came research, then interviews, then performances, and then an exhibition at Overture Center for the Arts throughout Spring 2018. Project interview excerpts and photographic documentation of our events hung on the walls; successfully presenting the performative work, where dialogue is a necessary ingredient to its livelihood, posed a unique challenge that we confronted with regular artist talks, community conversations about gender, and light-based workshops within Overture.

Now, I'm here. I'm dwelling on the light as it brightens the sky around me, white dots of sunshine bouncing off leaftops, dampness lifting. I'm tired from a marathon of art-making, art-talking, art-living, but more than an aching spine or a heavy plate, I feel the anticipation of more to come.

The next stage of Season of Shadows is a major writing project, and I brace myself for the process of reflecting on my gender journey, my community's journey, and the futures towards which we're propelling ourselves. I feel the sunshine on my face and a shadow behind the place I rest. I feel gratitude for my neighbors, just out of sight but not out of touch, and I step into the full day ahead.

To read Season of Shadows interview excerpts or find more from Borealis, visit alauraborealisart.com. ■

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Photo: GSAFE



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- Wisconsin Women's Network
- Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice
- Working Capital for Community Needs
- Worker Justice Wisconsin

communityshares.com



Sept. & Oct.

The air turns just a bit cooler, and the sights and sounds of harvest in the fields and students in the streets fill the air—it must be autumn in Madison! There are plenty of options for great things to see and do all around town and beyond, and we've got a few highlights for you here. Go forth and pumpkin spice it up!



OCTOBER

3

TRIXIE MATTEL'S "NOW WITH MOVING PARTS" TOUR *Overture Center*

An evening of live music, outrageous comedy, and flawless drag with Madison and Milwaukee's own Trixie Mattel, who first appeared on the 2015 season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In 2017, Mattel released the LP "Two Birds," a country-pop album that made a splash both at home and abroad. In 2018, she was crowned winner of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars 3*.
overturecenter.org

SEPTEMBER

14-22

STAGE Q'S "SOUTHERN BAPTIST SISSIES" *The Bartell Theatre*

Centered around the experiences of four boys growing up in a constrictive, evangelical southern church, the show explores how each deals with the realization that he's gay. One hides it, one sashays out of the closet and into drag, one tries to change the church from within, and one just tries to hold on to hope.
stageq.org

26

AN EVENING WITH MIKAH MEYER— WORLD RECORD SINGER, ADVENTURER, & LGBT ADVOCATE *Trinity Lutheran Church*

Mikah Meyer is traveling the country with two main goals: to visit every U.S. National Park, and to spread a message of inclusion and love for LGBTQ people within the Christian faith. Meyer will stop in Wisconsin this fall to talk and perform at local churches. There is no admission charge.
[facebook.com/
events/205326460196525](https://facebook.com/events/205326460196525)

28-30

MADISON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA SEASON PREMIERE *Overture Center*

Enjoy a cross section of classical and contemporary selections as performed by the stellar MSO, under the direction of John DeMain, including works by Higdon, Prokofiev, and Brahms. The program also includes a collaboration between DeMain and world-renowned pianist Emanuel Ax.
madisonsymphony.org

29

INDIGO GIRLS *Orpheum Theater*

The longtime, openly gay, folk powerhouse duo return to town for a performance in support of their new triple album recorded live with the University of Colorado Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gary Lewis.
madisonorpheum.com

OCTOBER

6

AIDS WALK WISCONSIN *Milwaukee Lakefront*

Actor/director Matt Bomer acts as grand marshal for the walk/run that raises money for crucial support and services for those living with HIV/AIDS.
aidswalkwis.org

11

NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY BREAKFAST *The Madison Club*

The Wisconsin LGBT Chamber hosts its annual breakfast meeting and celebration for LGBTQ people and allies, with keynote speaker Amber Hikes. Hikes is the executive director of the Office of LGBT Affairs for the City of Philadelphia, where she develops policy and serves as the principal advisor to Mayor Kenney on issues that affect the LGBTQ community.
wislgbtchamber.com

14

GSAFE'S TRICK OR TROT 5K WALK/RUN *Franklin Elementary School*

The annual fun run/walk event raises money for GSAFE's work to support LGBTQ+ students in Wisconsin's schools and beyond, with costumes, trick or treating stations, kids face painting, and options for dogs on leashes and kids in strollers.
gsafe.org

19

OUTREACH AWARDS BANQUET *Monona Terrace*

Annual benefit dinner and celebration of LGBTQ community members.
outreachmadisonlgbt.org/events

BUSINESS EQUALITY LUNCHEON *The Pfister Hotel, Milwaukee*

Cream City Foundation's 10th gathering is Southeastern Wisconsin's premier corporate event focusing on the state of LGBTQ+ communities in the business sector. The event celebrates and promotes equality, inclusivity, and fairness for all workers in the greater Milwaukee area.
creamcityfoundation.org

27

FREAK FEST 2018 *State Street*

New Orleans queen of bounce, Big Freedia, headlines the annual Halloween bash. Local Madison queer punk rockers Gender Confetti also play, with Queer Pressure Collective's DJ Boyfrriend hosting the Capitol Stage.
madfreakfest.com



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AUGUST 18 QPoC Pride Brunch



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Join us on October 11 for our Third Annual National Coming Out Day Breakfast featuring Amber Hikes, the executive director of the Office of LGBT Affairs for the City of Philadelphia.

Amber Hikes has been recognized nationally by *Business Equality Pride* as one of the 40 LGBTQ Leaders Under 40, by *Philadelphia Magazine* as one of the 100 Most Influential People in Philadelphia, and by *Philadelphia Gay News* as their 2017 Person of the Year.

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Senator Baldwin holding a listening session at the new Progress Center for Black Women in Fitchburg.

Our Senator

As Republicans pour record amounts of money into the state for the November senate election, incumbent **Sen. Tammy Baldwin** faces perhaps her toughest reelection bid ever. The longtime Wisconsin public servant talked with *Our Lives* Editor **Emily Mills** about the race and the issues that are shaping it and why she believes it's more important than ever to stand up and be counted.

POLITICS ELECTIONS LGBTQ

I want to start with the overall climate of the race because there's so much outside money coming in, and Republicans are very focused on Wisconsin. Why do you think that is?

Well, I'd say it's a couple of things. First of all, Wisconsin has been a battleground state for a number of years. Usually even though the state has gone blue in presidential years to the presidential candidate, it's often been really narrow. I remember Gore winning by about 5,000 votes, and Kerry by 11,000. And then in 2016 we saw Trump win by 22,000. These are very narrow margins. But I think elsewhere in Wisconsin, folks have seen Republicans make headway in statewide races. So number one, Wisconsin is truly a swing state.



Senator Baldwin with Emily and Brandi Harris at Wylymar Farms in Monroe.

We are seeing outside money just pouring in—primarily from the Koch Brothers network and from a fellow by the name of Richard Uihlein. And I think this is because they've figured out that I am fighting for Wisconsinites and not for their interests. I stand up to these people from out of state, and they would rather that Wisconsin have a senator that they influence, a sort of bought-and-paid-for person.

Do you think the election of Trump here made a difference in terms of them sort of going, "Oh, maybe there's a shot?"

It's hard to say. I don't think I could hazard a guess because even without Trump's narrow victory, the other things I said about previous years are still true. Democrats had usually won the presidential elections in Wisconsin, but often narrowly. So they could be emboldened by how close they'd gotten. And in the rest of the statewide races they've just kept on picking up seats, whether it's governor, attorney general, state treasurer. So I think this could have happened without Trump, but we can't measure that because Trump was elected.

You're a co-sponsor of The Equality Act. I'm curious what the status of the bill is, and what you can say about how it would help not just the LGBTQ community, but all of us in general, and what the obstacles to passage are?

We reintroduced the bill in 2017. The lead office in the Senate, Jeff Merkley, myself, and Cory Booker, we tried to grow our support between the House and Senate sponsors. We hoped to grow it every year. I think we have a record number of cosponsors between the two houses. And in the House it is bipartisan. So there's progress in terms of support of members of Congress, and members of the Senate. In terms of obstacles to its passage, both houses and the administration are controlled by Republicans who appear to have no appetite for allowing the bill to be debated or voted on. It hasn't even gotten any sort of committee review or hearing. All of those things have to happen before a bill can become law. There is a lot of power in the leadership in each house. Mitch McConnell decides what comes to the floor, and Paul Ryan decides what comes to the floor. So, sadly, I think the obstacles are the Republicans in leadership who don't want to see this advance at this time.

Since it is a fairly new measure in historical terms, meaning that we've introduced it two sessions in a row, I think people are still educating themselves about it. It's a really important new approach to equality in that it basically looks back at our civil rights laws of the 1960s and says, "These also apply on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity." And what it really means is that they'll provide the full array of protection. Employment, housing, public accommodations, education,

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A Timeline of the Life and Work of Tammy Baldwin

1962	Born on February 11 to Pamela Bin-Rella (raised by maternal grandparents while mother struggled with mental health and opioid addiction issues).
1971	At age nine, Tammy is diagnosed with a serious childhood illness similar to spinal meningitis. She spends three months in the hospital. Afterwards, her grandparents struggle to find an insurance plan that will cover her with the "pre-existing condition."
1980	Graduates from Madison West High School as class valedictorian.
1984	Earns B.A. from Smith College, studying political science and mathematics.
1986	One year into law school, she serves briefly on the Madison Common Council to fill a vacancy. Elected to the Dane County Board of Supervisors, a position she holds until 1994. Baldwin was one of the first openly gay elected officials in the country at the time.
1989	Earns J.D. degree from U.W.-Madison Law School. Begins working as a lawyer in private practice.
1992	Elected to Wisconsin State Legislature to represent the 78th Assembly District, becoming just one of six openly gay politicians nationwide to win in a general election that year, and the first openly lesbian member of the Assembly.
1994	Tammy comes under fire from anti-LGBT activists after saying she would introduce legislation to legalize same-sex marriage in Wisconsin. Later that year, she wins reelection with 76% of the vote.
1995	As some private companies begin offering domestic partnership benefits, Tammy works to introduce two bills that would extend those benefits to people statewide, acknowledging that they're unlikely to pass.
1996	Another reelection victory comes with 71% of the vote.
1998	U.S. Congressman Scott Klug of the 2nd District announces he will retire. After defeating Democratic candidate Rick Phelps in the primary, Tammy goes on to beat Republican candidate Josephine Musser with 53% of the vote. She becomes the first woman elected to Congress from Wisconsin, as well as the first openly gay person elected to the House and Congress.
2000	Tammy is elected to a second term, defeating Republican John Sharpless 51%–49%, a difference of just 8,902 votes. She also introduces the Health Security for All Americans Act, which would require states to provide a single-payer health care system. She goes on to introduce the act three more times.
2002	Tammy is one of 133 members of the House to vote against authorizing the invasion of Iraq. She later joined the Out of Iraq Caucus. Later that year, she wins reelection for her third term, against Republican Ron Greer.
1996	Another reelection victory comes with 71% of the vote.

and credit. I can give you all sorts of other examples, but it's so important for those who live in states, or localities, where there are no protections, or only patchwork quilt protections. It's a really important new approach.

The census is such an important tool for legislation and rights. Is there a connection between the push-back on The Equality Act and the lack of LGBTQ-related questions on the upcoming census?

They were proposing to add some questions to the census that would help us get a better understanding of the LGBTQ community across America and ended up not doing so. The additional questions could have helped the census do a better job getting information about where we are, what our challenges are, etc., which could be used to inform public policy. It's a tragedy that we haven't made more progress in gathering data.

I have a couple of things to say about this. During my time in the House of Representatives, it became very clear to me that there were

many, many government-funded surveys and studies, and none of them asked about sexual orientation and gender identity. In fact, the only way we were getting data, if you look several decades back, was by privately funded surveys or studies. It was so important to me, especially on health related studies, that we gather data so that we know what challenges our community has, what disparities exist, and what we need to do to advocate for our wellness and health.

I, at first, got complete resistance, and then during the Obama years we made real progress. Some of that progress is being walked back under this administration, so we've got to be diligent about collecting data.

The other thing I want to say about this is more of just a broad statement of why it matters. Because people are like, "Data, numbers, data, numbers. Who cares?" I came of age during the AIDS epidemic, and there was an expression, "Silence equals death." I would argue that invisibility equals death—that not being counted equals death. It's a very powerful statement, but when you don't need to acknowledge that someone exists there doesn't have to be a debate or a policy. That's happened to our community for too long in America's history. I really think it's important to be counted as a threshold to having informed public policy.

The last time we talked to you, you were still in the House, and it was when Obama was first running for president. One of the things you mentioned in that interview that really stood out to me was the idea that you'd finally been able to pivot to proactive work and passing positive legislation. And now we're back on the defensive again.

I'm thinking in particular now that we face the real possibility of a Supreme Court appointee, Brett Kavanaugh, who will probably be unfriendly to LGBTQ rights, women's rights, Roe v. Wade, etc. One of the bigger things that you've worked on is healthcare, which applies to a lot of that. Is there a proactive way to approach that at this point, or is it all defense? And what is the defense? What is the proactive stuff that we can do either to stop the appointment, or if that does inevitably happen, what do we do then? What do you do then?

Well, first, one never gives up, and you remind yourself that of the bigger picture, like the expression from an abolitionist preacher that Martin Luther King, Jr. always quoted, which is, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." We've got to keep it up because ultimately it's going to bend towards justice, even if there are disappointments, or short-term steps backward. I will say that I'm very concerned about the ramifications of the Supreme Court opening. Thus far, we've never seen a major civil right be repealed. It's always been a matter of advancing, and we don't want that to stop now.

Having said all that, partly how I confront others and try to inspire others to keep on fighting, to keep on making progress wherever we can,

is to sometimes work around the obstacles. We're at a moment right now where the Congress can't pass something because Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan won't let it happen, so obviously we're focusing on elections and trying to change that majority. But let's look at states and localities where there are equality minded people, who will do the right thing.

Let's have some of those battles at the local level. You can't do everything you can do at the federal level at the local level. They can't pass The Equality Act, but they certainly can make progress. How about in corporate policies with regard to their workforce? Are they perfect yet? If not, let's try to change it at our own workplace. What about schools? It's so important that children have protections and not get bullied. We'd love to see that passed at the federal level, but let's do it school board by school board, in our backyards. It's another way.

I'd tell you the same thing about climate change. To see this president pull out of the Paris Climate Accord, and to see this president say we're going to renege on the Clean Power Plan? It's like, okay, so California's

going to comply with all of those goals. And we have a couple cities in Wisconsin that are going to do that. How about a few elementary schools, or middle schools saying, "Our school's going to do this too."

It's just a great opportunity to promote activism and to be hopeful in a time when things are so disappointing.

That leads me to one of the things I wanted to ask you. There is a record number of out LGBTQ people running for offices across the country. I'm curious to hear your thoughts, and why you think that's still important, and maybe more important than ever for out people of various stripes to run for office, serve in government, and maybe what changes you've seen over your time as well?

I have seen huge changes. When I was first elected to local office, there were fewer than 2,000 openly gay and lesbian elected officials worldwide. This was 1986, and it was hard to know who was there, who

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A Timeline of the Life and Work of Tammy Baldwin

2004

Tammy beats out Republican Dave Magnuson 63%–31% for reelection to a fourth term. She defeats Magnuson again in 2006.

2009

Tammy introduces the Ending LGBT Health Disparities Act, which sought to advance LGBT health priorities by promoting research, cultural competency, and non-discrimination policies. The bill fails to pass.

2008

Republican Peter Theron loses to Tammy, 31%–69%.

2010

Tammy wins her final race for the House, defeating Republican Chad Lee with 62% of the vote.

2012

In a big move, Tammy takes on former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson in the race to replace the long-serving Herb Kohl in the U.S. Senate. She won and became the first openly gay member of the U.S. Senate, and because of her 14 years in the House, entered with the highest seniority of her class of senators.

2017

Koch-backed political action committees begin to amp up attack ads against Tammy in the run-up to the general election. Combined with attacks funded by out-of-state mega-donor Richard Uihlein and others, over \$10 million has already been spent in an effort to unseat her.

2018

In May, Leah Vukmir, the Republican challenger to Tammy's seat, sends a newsletter to supporters depicting the senator as part of "Team Terrorists" alongside a photo of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, principal architect of the 9/11 attack.

was out, so we scoured papers and tried to figure out who was there. That's when we started meeting in conferences. In fact, the first conference was the year before I was elected to the Dane County Board. It was L and G, no B, T or Q, and there were very few of us, and a lot of folks really thought it couldn't be done at higher levels. Most of us were local, and some state elected officials. It's changed dramatically with so many.

One of the things that I've learned in my time, from 1986 to now, is having a seat at the table matters. There are so many different ways to put this that make sense. One is, if you're not in the room people are talking about you. If you're in the room people are talking with you. And that makes an enormous difference.

Then, as we've gone from a handful of people in the world to hundreds now who've run for office in different places around the country, and around the world—there are role models. I think that symbolism matters. I remember seeing Geraldine Ferraro nominated for the vice presidency when I graduated from college, and I thought to myself as a

young woman interested in public service, "Hell, I could do this. I could really do this, and I don't have to have modest ambitions. I can do anything." People have told me that I've had that impact on them, and it is really humbling and moving when I hear that.

It's true that all of us are leaders in different ways, and people are watching, and looking up. And that's a really neat thing. We know how hard we have to work, and we're good as voices for underrepresented people, and we also represent our communities at large.

I remember when I first ran for state assembly a lot of people saying, "What's your gay agenda?" I said, "My agenda is to fight for healthcare for everybody in my district. My agenda is to help support a really great education system for everybody." People have to recognize that's what we're seeking to do, too.

There are people who don't necessarily identify as Democrats but do identify as progressive. How do you get those folks to turn out, and how does the Democratic party win them over? How do you win them over, and what are your strengths in comparison to your likely challengers come November?

I think in this environment where Wisconsinites of whatever ideological stripe have watched out-of-state billionaires try to hijack our elections, that there are a lot of reasons for people to be skeptical about that, saying, "Why would they be doing this?" And I think that the very clear answer is that I stand up to those folks. I can't be bought. [Those moneyed interests] are looking for somebody who's going to do the bidding of the powerful, and not the bidding of the grassroots of Wisconsin.

I think listening is really important, and I will always prioritize listening to my constituents and not the high-paid lobbyists, who are corporate representatives. It is important to recognize what Wisconsinites are challenged by and struggling with. Healthcare: there are all the attempts to weaken and even repeal the Affordable Care Act. I'm fighting for coverage for all, and particularly protections for people who have been sick before and have preexisting conditions.

I'm fighting for a great economy. Wisconsin is known as a major manufacturing economy, as well as an agricultural economy. Folks are struggling. They need a level playing field so they can get ahead.

That's how I think you win over both progressives as well as people of all political stripes, because you get credit for listening, you get credit for fighting for them, and people recognize that not everyone takes the same approach. If you're listening to the problems and trying to tackle them, you get some credit for that. ■

2018 Midterm Elections are on November 6.

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turn OUT

2018 | #turnOUT

The continued attacks by Donald Trump and Mike Pence towards LGBTQ people, women, people of color, and immigrants has gone uncontested by some members of Congress for far too long. **Enough is enough.**

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feature



Funny Lady

Stand-up comic **Dina Martinez** found acceptance and inclusion among the women of Madison's comedy scene.

Now she's giving back with the **Lady Laughs Comedy Festival**, returning for its third run this fall.

IT WAS 2012, and I arrived in Madison during one of the hottest weeks of summer. At 102 degrees, I was like, "What fresh hell have I landed in?" I only knew four people, and one of them was a dog. I had left Los Angeles and was in the middle of the country, kind of perplexed at what I'd just done.

I'd been doing stand-up comedy for five years and was forging my way through that world. I'd had the honor of performing with some incredibly talented people. I never had to wait in line at the WeHo bars. Who pays cover anymore, anyway? It was a rude awakening to have to

wait in line and not get VIP treatment, but I paid that cover and began forging my way through THIS world.

Imagine my surprise when I started working at a diner and I wasn't the only trans person. HUZAZH! I loved working there, meeting people and really knowing them for the first time in a good decade. I made people laugh with my "restaurant humor," and I kept them entertained.

A MIDWEST WELCOME

My first show was an all-women's lineup produced by La Bomba (aka Tulin) Waters. I was excited to be welcomed into all-female spaces. I submitted for Chicago Women's Funny Festival, and got in...and headlined the show. This was amazing. For the first time I felt welcomed. I felt like I was part of something. I got to just be a woman in the middle of the country. Not a transgender woman, but a woman. Now don't get me wrong, I love being a trans woman and am so proud of who I am and this journey, but Imposter Syndrome is REAL, and it's a bitch.

Until women, especially women of color, and LGBTQ+ comics and actors have the same opportunities, until every comedy club in the country books just as many women as they do men, there will be work to do.

These women's spaces and these women comics I'd met were so incredibly supportive and absolutely empowering to be around. It was this that propelled me forward. I've done the Chicago Women's Funny Festival every year since I moved here and, had it not been for the women I met through it, I would not be where I am today. These funny women asked me to be on shows and referred me to other producers. It was because of that festival, these woman and my deep yearning to work with and to empower women in the comedic arts that Lady Laughs Comedy was born.

ALL THE STAND-UP LADIES

I started Lady Laughs Comedy Festival in 2016 as a way to foster women in comedy and to impact the Wisconsin comedy landscape. It's turning out to be so much more than that. In our first year we had more than 70 performers for a three-day festival. Women came from all over. It was inspiring. We packed Plan B, Glass Nickel, and The Frequency. It was two days after the presidential election gone wrong, and it definitely felt like everyone was looking desperately for humor and commiseration.

This November throngs of women will be returning for the International Lady Laughs Comedy Festival. The invasion will be from November 7 to 11 and will showcase stand-up comics, storytellers, improv and sketch groups, and digital content. There will be four days for live performances and one day of films created by and featuring women.

Even though I'm running around like a madwoman during the vast majority of the festival, it's an honor to facilitate these women as they connect, network, and do what they love.

This year's festival will be bigger and will include some favorites from years past as well as plenty of new faces. We'll start off with the "He's Not A Lady" showcase, which is an all-male stand-up show. It's their chance to make you laugh...and then we kick them off the stage for the remainder of the festival! We'll also add the "They're Not Necessarily A Lady" showcase to feature our non-binary comics in a show

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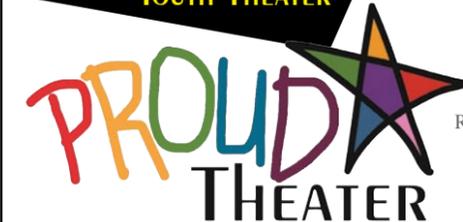
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If you're not all that pumped for the fest by now, along with Plan B,

Just this year I watched cisgender men in our comedy community—right here in “woke” Madison—victim blame, post transphobic material on social media, tell rape jokes, misgender people, and dismiss women, trans, and nonbinary people.



Art In, and various venues that will host panel discussion and workshops, Saturday night will be at—wait for it—the Barrymore Theatre!

Now, you may ask, why is Lady Laughs Comedy so important? I mean, women are finally getting accolades from the media and winning Emmys, and just look at Hannah Gadsby, Michelle Wolf, and all of the other women taking over Netflix and the like.” Oh yes, we’ve made some lovely strides forward and we are being loud, unapologetic, and visible, but there is still so much work to be done. Until women, especially women of color, and LGBTQ+ comics and actors have the same opportunities, until every comedy club in the country books just as many women as they do men, there will be work to do.

NOT SO WOKE

Imagine my surprise when, just this year, I watched cisgender men in our comedy community—right here in “woke” Madison—victim blame, post transphobic material on social media, tell rape jokes, misgender people, and dismiss women, trans, and nonbinary people. Constructive conversations were shut down in the name of “civility.”

I watched as the men I thought were enlightened allies opened their mouths and total B.S. fell out. I’m not here to shame all of the men who are in the comedy community, as this reaches far beyond Madison and throughout this entire country. They’re not bad men. They’re just men who have been taught to be a man from and by an age that is no longer relevant. They’re men who don’t understand their privilege and the responsibility that comes with it. They’re cisgender, straight men who have never been confronted by women who are finally able to stand in their own power. They’re cisgender, gay men who are finally learning that it’s not OK to just “say anything” and to touch our bodies without consent.

Male privilege has permeated society so much that we don’t even see where it affects us until, well, it does. I’m grateful for good men, but they’re not immune to the traps that privilege has afforded them.

HOLDING SPACE

This is why Lady Laughs Comedy exists. It is a space for us to be ourselves and to not be at the whims of toxic masculinity. To have a safe space where we don’t have to listen to your rape and trans jokes and wonder what might happen to us when we’re leaving after the show. It’s a space where we get stage time and aren’t subjected to open mics and shows with no or maybe one other woman on it. It’s a space where we get to be in control and aren’t subjected to fragile masculinity that is just fighting against positive change.

Over the past several years of working with mostly women, I have found a comfort. I’ve found a space free from rabid competition. I’ve found encouragement and acceptance. I’ve found respect. If I could work with women and queer/non-binary people for the rest of my career, I would be so stoked.

However, we welcome men into our space and we welcome those who identify somewhere between because, despite problematic behavior, we need everyone to make a movement stick. To encourage equality while leaving anyone out is to not be equal, but we need space to make corrections so that we can find our voices and our power and so that men can take a step back and learn to see the value of (and develop real respect for) women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and the disabled community.

I don’t hate men. I date men. I love men. It’s just time that women have the stage. It’s our time to shine. Visit LadyLaughsComedy.com to find updated information and to sign up for our mailing list. ■

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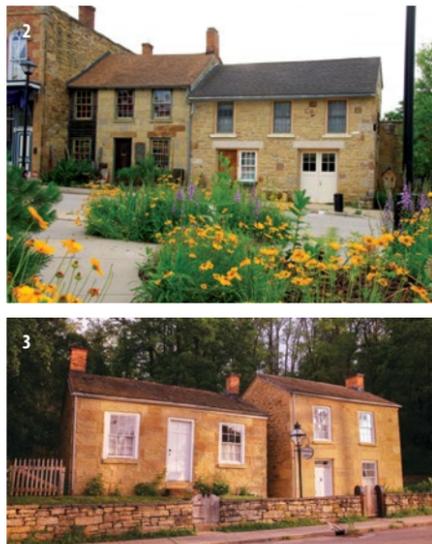
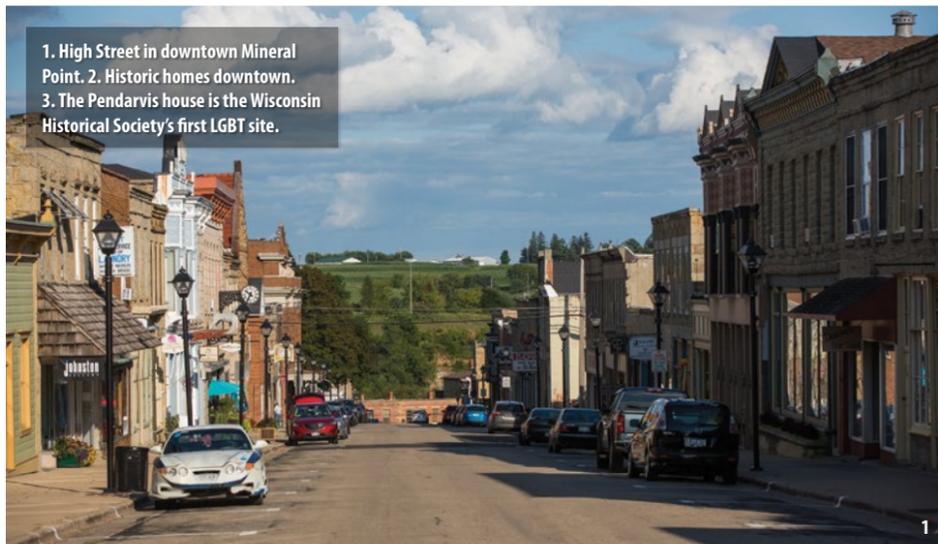
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Small Town Charm

Mineral Point is one of Wisconsin's hidden gems, boasting art galleries, historic buildings, and as of 2017, its own LGBTQ Pride celebration. Get to know some of the people and places that have turned this former lead mining town into a must-visit destination in the Driftless Area.

LGBTQ TRAVEL | DRIFTLESS | ARTISTS | HISTORIC PRESERVATION



1. High Street in downtown Mineral Point. 2. Historic homes downtown. 3. The Pendarvis house is the Wisconsin Historical Society's first LGBT site.

NESTLED IN THE ROCKY HILLS and dells of Wisconsin's famed Driftless Area, Mineral Point may not be on most people's list of queer-friendly places to go. The town of just under 2,500 people is full of surprises, though, with at least a dozen LGBTQ-owned businesses populating its charming and historic downtown.

How this former Cornish settlement and lead mining town became what it is today is a long and winding tale, some of which you can learn from two separate plays. "Ten Dollar House" and "The Pattern at Pendarvis," center around Edgar Hellum and Robert Neal, a gay couple who moved to town in the 1930s and bought the then-crumbling Cornish settlement now called Pendarvis. The two men helped put Mineral Point on the map, running a nationally renowned restaurant while revitalizing the town's commitment to historic preservation.

Since then, the town seems to have fully embraced its historic draw,

and (more recently) its LGBTQ history. Now, art galleries, a letterpress print shop, potters, antique stores, and small cafes provide a home base for locals and visitors alike. At the Red Rooster Cafe, you can still order traditionally Cornish pasties. Across the street at the Gray Dog Deli, good food mixes with weekly live music offerings. The Mineral Point Opera House brings it top-notch national and regional touring acts to play in its gorgeously restored 1915 theater.

Several of the area's bed and breakfast offerings are also LGBTQ-owned and operated, including the Chestnut Cottage (run by Dan and Alan), and the Maplewood Lodge (run by Coleman and John).

The increase in LGBTQ residents and shop owners finally lead to the town getting its own Pride celebration. Several community members came together with Richard Baumeister and Tim Apuzzo, the couple that owns local restaurant Tequila Point, to organize the event last year that featured live music and a drag show.

One of those involved, Ashley Klingensmith, went on to create Pride53565, which now serves as the central organizing behind the town's Pride celebration. The event returned for a second run in June of 2018, which also saw nearly the entire length of High Street (the main drag) festooned with rainbow flags.

"My friend (and head volunteer) Angie Hendrick and I, as well as a few other people, all walked downtown asking businesses to fly the flags (this year Doolin, my seven-year-old, did 95% of the flag distribution)," Klingensmith explained. "There were more businesses and individuals that wanted to participate this year. We bought more flags and still ran out."

"Mineral Point is (and has been for decades) a very welcoming and tolerant community," Joy Gieseke of the Mineral Point Chamber of



Judy Sutcliffe and Sandy Scott at the Longbranch Gallery.



Mineral Point's Pride53565.

Commerce told *Our Lives*. "We are fortunate that we have so many people who are passionate about the arts and care so deeply about preserving the architecture and culture of our community. The LGBTQ+ community can feel at home here—not just tolerated, but welcomed and encouraged to be a part of all the really cool things that make this a unique and creative community."

As part of the town's legacy of being a center for artists, actors, musicians, and other creatives, the Shake Rag Alley School for Arts and Crafts offers everything from a children's program to concerts and other cultural events, as well as adult art workshops. The facility occupies nine buildings on a 2.5 acre plot in the valley around Federal Spring where the first Cornish settlers originally clustered their own cabins.

It's a beautiful part of the state to visit regardless of the season, though special note should be made of the annual Arts on Point gallery weekends, held several times a year. The doors of the various businesses downtown stay open late, demonstrations of traditional skills are held on the sidewalks, and friends and neighbors say hello as they walk the small circuit. This year, locally made Hook's Cheese added samples of their wares to the trek as well, making for a delicious scavenger hunt.

FAMILY BUSINESSES

The following is an (incomplete) list of LGBTQ-owned businesses in Mineral Point:

- **Longbranch Gallery** - longbranchgallery.com - Judy Sutcliffe and Sandy Scott
- **Mayday Press** - mayday-press.com - May Sorum & Maggie Tucker
- **Tequila Point & Cafe 43** - tequilapoint.com - Richard Baumeister & Tim Apuzzo
- **Brewery Creek Brew Pub & Inn** - brewerycreek.com - Mike Zupke
- **Chestnut Cottage** - Dan & Alan
- **Maplewood Lodge** - maplewoodlodge.com - John Fetters & Coleman
- **Boyoyoboy Gallery** - boyoyoboy.com - Henk J Klijn & Michel Metford Platt
- **Bruno & Bruce** - art gallery - Bruce Tunis
- **Stonewall Art Studio/Gallery** - stonewallartstudio.com - Kirk Williams & Peter Bardon

THE STORY OF KIRK AND PETER

We wanted to get a sense of what might bring a gay couple to such a small Wisconsin town, and Kirk Williams and Peter Bardon of Stonewall Art Studio/Gallery were kind enough to share their unique story with us.

PHOTO BY EMILY MILLS.

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KIRK

I grew up on the south side of Chicago in a little part called Hegewisch. I learned at the age of 14 when my only sibling/sister was taken from me in a car accident that your life could be over tomorrow, so you should live each day to its fullest and never put things off.

I learned to try to be the best I can be every day. Don't put off doing something for later if it's something you really want to do or experience. Spend time with the people that make you feel good, that love you, and that you love. Pick up the phone and call (well, these days, text) that friend you haven't talked to in a while, call your mom, etc.

At age 20, I decided that I needed to figure out who I was and to understand all these feelings that I thought were not normal. I decided to pick up my life and move across the country to Boston. I'd met a guy through this new strange thing called a chat room. We had so much in common and through our chatting we basically came out to each other. One thing led to another and a vacation turned into a move.

After a while and some details that I will leave to your imagination, I met other guys and found a great job that then brought me to Madison, where I decided to stay because I met the man who is now my husband. After a year, we moved in together and then sold his condo and purchased our first house that would turn into our first house flip. Peter was in school, about to finish his degree in interior design. He landed a job with a small residential remodeling company as an estimator and designer. Peter went on to learn a lot and win many awards for his innovative designs.

Meanwhile, I decided to buy a video store in Cross Plains. When I knew streaming was peaking, I decided it was time to sell and move on. I eventually started working for the same company as Peter, running the day-to-day operations of the office. When not at work we both spent the next 15 years remodeling a house that was design by a Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice, and started a Dachshund rescue. We, of course, also



Kirk Williams at the Stonewall Art Studio/Gallery.

started a family of six Dachshund (Eddie, Perron, Frankie, Rascal, Dolly & Doolittle), one Chow Chow (Mia Xiang), and 30+ koi.

Done with the remodel and looking for the next thing, we couldn't find a house that called to us to remodel it, so we built a new house and made it everything we wanted. Well, almost, as it turned out to just be a stepping stone while our next adventure awaited us.

KIRK & PETER: NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED

We had both gotten to a point in our lives that we needed something more, something different. We decided to put our newly built house up for sale, pack everything up that was of value to us, place it in storage, and hit the road to find our next big adventure. We traveled the Southwest looking for that calling of "this is home." We looked at places like Flagstaff, Santa Fe, and Taos. Nothing really fell into place. After four weeks on the road and 6,000 miles, it was time to head home and rethink.

Back in Madison, with no jobs and a sense of "What the hell are we going to do now?" we thought we would come back from trip with a solid plan—but there was nothing. Reinventing yourself in your 40s is not something either of us ever wanted to do. We have always loved buying, fixing, and selling houses, so we started looking at that avenue but nothing seemed to feel right.

One night around two a.m. Kirk was on the internet looking at houses and properties in southern Wisconsin when Mineral Point popped up. There were a few cute buildings on High Street for sale. We have always loved the little artist town and its charm and had been going there on and off for more than 10 years. The next morning, he showed Peter and we started brainstorming what we might do.

A little background: Peter has set up a pottery studio in every house we have owned, but every time something changed and we moved on. Now, though, Kirk asked if he wanted to make pottery! Kirk has run businesses and is an amateur photographer, and we know someone who does metal sculptures that we love.

Could we do this? Did we want to do this? Kirk called an agent and set up the showings. A few days later we set off to Mineral Point to explore, eventually stumbling onto a very cute, charming building on High Street. There was something about this place. We both left feeling that could really be home. We spent the next few days deciding if we could really start a gallery and pursue things that we had great passion for but had always looked at as hobbies.

Our house sold and we had seven weeks until closing. We ended up living in the basement of a good friend, which was especially interesting with our dogs. It gave us time to come up with our business plan, though, even as we struggled with naming it! One night Kirk was scrolling through the pictures of our new building and house. There was photo of the beautifully uncovered and restored stone wall that dominated one entire side of the gallery and one entire side of the apartment upstairs—

PHOTO BY EMILY MILLS.

and so Stonewall Art Studio/Gallery was born.

We knew as 40-something gay men that the Stonewall Riots in New York have great meaning for us, too, so it felt especially good.

A DELICATE BALANCE

Kirk runs the business side of things and makes an all-natural soap line called Kleanz. He also sells his photography. Peter is the potter and the inspiring artist. One of the things he has focused on is making pottery that everyone can afford and have in their home for daily use. He wants people to enjoy, love, and mainly use handmade things from people that put their hearts, souls, and passion into the work.

Mineral Point is a creative experience for your mind, body, and soul. We found a saying that we have made as a tagline for our gallery: "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."

It's certainly not easy starting and running a retail-type business these days. Our current political climate has people being conservative with their money. People are not spending so freely anymore. We think twice about making those extra purchases. That does make it harder to keep a small artist-run business going.

We keep an eye on how to price our products so we can make profit but still allow for anyone to take something home. We are always keeping an open mind to new ideas and things to try or pursue. We are currently thinking a lot about how we do what we enjoy while still being able to make a living especially during the winter months, when Mineral Point can become a bit of a ghost town.

SETTLING IN

We have made lots of new friends in Mineral Point, though. The people are so awesome and friendly. For a small rural town it's one of the most open. When we tell people we are married no one has even skipped a beat or blinked an eye. They care more about getting to know you and welcoming you to their town.

We both can be found working a few days a week at Gray Dog Deli. On one hand it's necessary to make a living as a business owner to either have other income or a part time job, and on the other hand there are businesses in town that need help that is reliable. Kirk works the counter and Peter helps in the kitchen. We love meeting all the people that come to town there (feeding people seems to open them up to chatting more than when folks visit the gallery).

We knew MP was open and friendly to LGBTQ people but we never realized how many businesses were owned by LGBTQ folks, or how many lived here! As it seems to often go, however, it can be hard to open up right away. We all have a sort of GayGuard up, as I say, so though we are friendly and chat about the common stuff, it's taking time to really get to know our LGBTQ neighbors. It's also difficult just given the time it takes to run a business!

Mineral Point is a creative experience for your mind, body, and soul. We found a saying that we have made as a tagline for our gallery: "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." It is something that we feel when we see a piece of art, a plate of food, a warm inviting bed in a B&B, a woven item, a bar of soap, a photo, a painting—they all just make us stop in our tracks and admire the work, and the heart and soul the creator has put into it. It lifts our mood and warms our hearts to know someone made this for someone like us to use and admire every day. We hope to see Mineral Point turn back into the thriving town it was when we discovered it 17 years ago. ■

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The Point of Return

Artist **Ben Brummerhop** never expected to find the key to sobriety and a creative kick-start when he followed a boyfriend to the small community of Mineral Point, Wisconsin.

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FOLLOWING THE DEATH of my sister in 2003, I flew deep into the throes of my addiction to methamphetamines. I quickly progressed from a weekend user to a daily user and switched from snorting to shooting. I do not recall ever making the choice to become an IV user; it was as if I woke up and syringes were a daily part of my life. The addiction had fully grabbed ahold of me and become my dearest, most trusted friend.

I lived in Florida at the time of my sister's passing and the idea of being sober and living in Mineral Point, Wisconsin would have been laughable if I had really planned the move for much longer than a couple weeks. I was chasing love and, in hindsight, running from my current life. I was hoping to find something or someone who would love me and help me start the healing process. My now former partner Jason became that person, the one who cared enough to see past my lies, my addiction, and fully love me. That love set forth the path that has taken me to the beautiful life I live today.

CULTURE SHOCK

I moved to Mineral Point, a town of 2,600 people, kicking and screaming. I never understood the allure of a small town, and I was sure that living there was going to be torture at its finest. Jason grew up in a small town in the Midwest and, after living in Florida and then moving to Madison, he found Mineral Point and decided that he/we had to live there. He would come home from day trips, touting how magical of a town it was and how great living in a small artist community would be for my art and me.

If I had only known then just how big of a role this small town and the people in it would play in my sobriety and creative journey, I would

have moved years ago. I found in Mineral Point some of the best and most genuine friends I have ever had in my life. I grew up in Tallahassee, Florida, but Mineral Point is the place I feel most at home.

I worried about confessing my addiction to people that in my eyes might not be able to understand my struggle. I worried that I would become the subject of town gossip and be labeled as “city trash” bringing city problems to their small town. I soon learned that everyone became the subject of town gossip and it was very much an equal opportunity gossip mill. The gossip mill did not care whether I was a drug addict, the town tramp, or just the person that did not keep a tidy yard; you would be gossiped about and subject to an occasional glance of disapproval.

SMALL TOWN HEALING

My normal routine of waking up and doing an injection of meth was replaced by breakfast and hearty conversations at the Red Rooster Café with a group of people that had no idea that they were getting me through the most difficult two hours of my day. I found solitude in my interactions with the disarming morning breakfast gang and soon began to look forward to seeing them and being at the epicenter of the town gossip mill. I got all the dirt on the happenings in town and, most importantly, I got through the cravings—not by sitting in rehab, but by being surrounded by what I consider the greatest asset of Mineral Point: its residents.

I got all the dirt on the happenings in town and, most importantly, I got through the cravings—not by sitting in rehab, but by being surrounded by what I consider the greatest asset of Mineral Point: its residents.

In the small town that I once thought of as the ultimate end to my ability to be labeled a city guy, I found refuge from what ailed me the most: a fight with intravenous drug use that had already consumed more than half my life. Who would have thought in a town of 2,600 people that so many of them would not only take interest in my journey, but were more than happy to become a part of my life in the most loving and sincere manner possible.

ADDICTION INTO ART

I remember going to the doctor to have blood drawn, and it was the first time in two years that I had a tourniquet on my arm. I freaked out and left, not realizing until I was nearly home that I still had the tourniquet on my arm. I remember reaching out to my friend Keith about the experience and he suggested I use syringes to paint with as a way of associating syringes with something positive in my life. This was the birth of my 2010 national exhibition called “A New Use for Syringes.”

Most people hide things like this from the world. Not me. I created 79 paintings about it, wrote blogs, and went on a five-city mini-tour that changed my life in ways that I still cannot wrap my head around today.

PAINTING WITH MUSIC

My work would not be complete without music. I have always painted to music, and my work has a rhythm to it—every stroke can be matched with a beat. In most cases, that beat comes at the hands of DJ Alyson Calagna. Electronic music was a trigger for me during my first two years of sobriety, but then I reconnected with the music I love, and the reconnection has allowed me to get to where I am today as a painter.

“A New Use for Syringes” was the first collection in my career that is musically attributed to one artist—Alyson. I did not realize how import-

PHOTO BY EMILY MILLS



ant music was to my art until I allowed myself to feel the desire to get high and paint through it. Thanks to Alyson, I graduated from compulsive drug seeking (my favorite rehab term) to compulsive beat seeking.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

I have since moved away from Mineral Point and now live in San Diego, California with my wonderful husband Clay. I went back, though, just this past August for an exhibition called “New Horizons” to celebrate my 12th year of sobriety with my Mineral Point family and friends.

It only seemed right to do the show in the town that made me who and what I am today. I am a happy, I am free of IV drugs, and I am creating and loving not only my complete self, but also the wonderful life I get to live now.

Learn more about Ben and his art at benbrummerhopart.com. ■

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My Story, My Life

Creative writing helped **Rachel L.** reclaim the voice she'd lost after childhood sexual assault and trauma went unheard and disbelieved.

TRIGGER WARNING Child sexual assault and abuse, trauma

IT'S AROUND THE TIME OF YEAR where the memory is creeping up again. Waves of heat. Clouds of dust. Graduation caps and gowns and parents piling their child's goods into the backs of SUVs and U-Haul trucks.

I remember last year, this same time, sitting in the third row of risers on the stage of my high school auditorium. I squinted into the camera as I was handed my diploma. I accepted the rose that came with it. I was so nervous, so emotional. I couldn't imagine leaving again. I never thought I'd make it to high school graduation. I never thought that high school graduation would mean the things that it did.

Ends of the year have always been difficult for me because they mark all the times in my life I had to leave things behind. Sometimes, ends of the year have meant being forcibly separated from my family, forced into an institution, or sent to a place I knew would abuse me as a person with a disability. I have lived in five different places in the past five years, all of them a variety of medical, behavioral, and educational institutions.

THE CRUCIBLE

Throughout my late middle and high school years, my unexplained health issues—the GI issues, the weakness, the heart trouble, the weight loss—became a burden to my parents. I was repeatedly institutionalized in psychiatric facilities. The longest was for three months, the shortest for nine days. I learned quickly that my status as disabled designated me to many in those institutions as sub-human. It cost me my childhood.

I was 13 the first time I was institutionalized. On the first day, a staff member took me into the exam room to perform a strip search. I refused to take my clothes off. She threw a tissue box at me for crying. I weighed 70 pounds. My heart rate was 33 beats per a minute. I worried if I fought too hard, exerted too much energy, my heart would stop. And I would die.

The second time she took me into the exam room, seven days later, she told me to take off my clothes again. She made me lie naked on



Ends of the year are difficult for me because they mean the school doors close and the streets open and my body remembers what it's like to be completely alone.

the table. As she touched me, she laughed at my crying. When I was asked five years later during a police investigation why she touched me the ways she did, I didn't have the answer. After all, rape by a woman, in English, where sexual assault is defined in many states as penetration by the sex organ for the purpose of sexual gratification, does not have language.

YOU CAN'T GO HOME

I learned throughout my adolescence that my voice didn't matter. I learned in the days and months following that first hospitalization that my disability label was meant to continuously invalidate my voice. Some 86% percent of incarcerated women have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetimes. I cannot even find statistics on the rape and abuse of institutionalized children because no one has ever cared enough to talk about the abuse of youth, once locked

away, who become the liability of the state.

When I returned home, I stopped talking to my parents. I ran away on a regular basis. My dad would call me and tell me if I did not come back, I would be arrested. He'd chase after me. When it became clear I would not return, he would use my empathy to get me back to him. After an hour or so of running, he would collapse onto the street and moan, pretending to have a heart attack. I'd stop in my tracks and run back to comfort him. He knew I could run from violence, but I could not run from someone else's pain.

In April of that year, my dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and said because he was dying, and I had given him nothing in return with my silence, I had to show that I loved him. He'd lock me in the car or bathroom with him for several hours and not let me out until I told him I was sorry. When my words weren't enough he began popping the lock of my bedroom door and coming into my room right when I'd get out of the shower. The institution made me believe the ways he treated me were okay. I did not realize what happened those nights was sexual abuse until after I left home, six years year later.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF HOMELESSNESS

At 19, I am now an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the Federal Appli-

cation for Student Aid (FAFSA) definition of homelessness based on the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). Unaccompanied homeless youth is defined as a youth, without fixed or stable housing, who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. For me, it means last year, after high school graduation, I fled my family home to a shelter. For the first time in five years, I disclosed in detail what happened to me at a local rape crisis center.

Ends of the year are difficult for me because they mean the school doors close and the streets open and my body remembers what it's like to be completely alone. Many people don't understand the definition of unaccompanied homeless youth, much less the ways it puts an edge to words like endings. They don't understand that the "unaccompanied" is just as significant as the "homeless" is just as significant as the "youth." Even though I rarely reveal my identity as such, people at school have prodded me around breaks with, "Well if you don't go home to your parents, then where DO you go?"

Let me explain. The unaccompanied doesn't come from the complete absence of people in my life. I had many people by my side when I became homeless: my former teachers, a school social worker, a youth worker from a shelter necessary to my survival. I am grateful for these people. Unaccompanied comes

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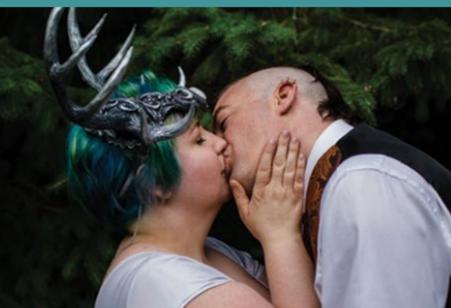


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from the absence of people who will love you unconditionally; the absence of a stable, human constant in your life.

The homelessness does not mean I have no roof over my head. Both the HUD definitions and the RHYA definitions have, for a long time, defined homelessness beyond rooflessness.

Definitions of homelessness include those who couch surf, double-up with relatives, and live in a shelter. Homelessness is defined as lack of stable, permanent residence. Unfortunately, stereotypes of homelessness as street homelessness are the only thing, in their visibility, that many pay attention to. I have not lived in a stable place without fear of rooflessness for the past 12 months, but I say I am formerly homeless because it takes too much energy to explain to others the precarity of endings.

The reality is that the homelessness lasts as long as I am afraid of being pushed out onto the streets again when the school doors close. The unaccompanied lasts until I find—if I find—a family.

THE LIFE WITHIN WORDS

If there was a constant, however non-human, that kept the ground stable, it's been creative writing. After that first hospitalization, I never stayed long enough in one place to form the trust needed for human connection. Paper was not human, but it was the bridge, the time capsule, that kept visible the trauma I felt society wanted silent. Writing was preservation. In the months, then years after my sexual assault, I felt comforted in knowing I would leave something behind in my own voice. I was tired of who had been allowed to write the story.

In eighth grade, when I returned from the hospital, I wrote 500 pages. I wrote all that had happened in the months before the assault. I wrote about the things that had been happening in my home to silence it. I told myself, once it became clear no one would believe me or listen, that I would kill myself once I reached the end of the story. As I wrote, though, I discovered something: By trying to write toward an ending, new stories kept coming. The more I wrote, the more I realized I couldn't stop. Writing was, and still is, my lifeline. As long as I keep living, there will be no end of the story to tell.

Creative writing saved my life. It taught me I could leave evidence of harm even when those who perpetrated set out to erase that harm. When I began sharing my personal experiences as fiction, it taught me I could make public my grief without risking my secret. Later, it taught me that my experiences could be thrown onto the table for judgment without the experiences

being attached to my body. And eventually, when the fiction was called too cliché to be "real," having my words on paper first gave me the courage to step out and say the fiction was nonfiction and had happened to me.

SHAPING AN IDENTITY

Last autumn, I finally began sharing my writing about my experiences with childhood sexual abuse publicly and won a scholarship for my creative work to go to a sociology conference in Georgia. There, my personal story became my public testimony. My public testimony became my first experience finding a community of others in search of family.

Trauma has come to ripple into every facet of my identity. I identify now as asexual. For me, it means I cringe at the idea of sex and romance. Intimacy is about emotional understanding, not physical touch.

The reality is that the homelessness lasts as long as I am afraid of being pushed out onto the streets again when the school doors close. The unaccompanied lasts until I find—if I find—a family.

I don't search for partners, but I find myself, still, in an unwanted search for family. I am afraid I bother too many people, and I push myself away when I become too close to those old enough to be my mother, honest enough for me to trust them, present enough to temporarily fill a hole that cannot be filled. My asexuality is about my relationship to trauma, and about a paralyzing, deeply rooted fear that if I love anyone and believe that I am loved, I will be hurt when I realize the love of a family is irreplaceable. Sometimes, it feels contradictory in a world that tells you your lack of sexual desire, too, means brokenness.

The people who have helped me the most in the past six years have been my teachers, both the formal and informal. I am grateful for the language, understanding, and sense of community these people have given me. My education has been lifesaving.

THE POWER OF STORIES

In the past five years, learning, and applying what I've learned to my trauma, despite the constantly changing landscape, is something that stays. In October of this year, I became involved with an organization called The Voices and Faces Project, whose mission is to change public discourse on sexual violence by sharing

stories. In April, I took that mission upon myself and shared my story at the Capitol on Take Back the Night, and then in writing about the abuses of institutionalized children for Rooted in Rights. I can't say it has healed me but writing and speaking have given me a purpose and a ground when I often feel, with so much pushing away and leaving, unneeded anywhere.

It's that time of the year again. The time of year where the doors close, and the people who have accompanied me for the year vanish behind institutional boundaries. My legs shake when I step outside of my last class for the semester because I know it's time to leave again. But for the first time in six years, my moving does not mean leaving the city. This time, I move less than a mile away into an apartment, the first place with a kitchen and a bedroom and a bathroom I can temporarily call my own.

Last summer, on that final day of wandering between friends' and strangers' houses before I found shelter, I sat on the train and put my head against the tinted window. The whole city whizzed back at me. I imagined I could see the staff member from the hospital who taught me how little she thought I was worth, the nights I'd spent running, the locked bedroom and institutional doors, the pushing away.

Home does not exist when the people around you, the family that did not choose to raise you, tells you your survival means nothing. They will tell you, once you turned out to be a contradiction to the image of a child they wanted, that they wished you were never born. I have been told, many times in my life, that because of my circumstances I am not important, and I have nothing worthy to say.

But they got it wrong. They did. Survival is always a story. ■

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse or violence in the home, please reach out to any of the following local, LGBTQ-inclusive resources:

- **Domestic Abuse Intervention Services**
abuseintervention.org - 608-251-4445 or 800-747-4045
- **Dane County Rape Crisis Center**
thercc.org - (Eng.) 608-251-7273, (Esp.) 608-258-2567
- **Briarpatch Youth Services**
youthsos.org - (608) 251-1126



RACHEL is a queer, disabled student, artist, and writer studying sociology and creative writing at U.W.-Madison. She is a member of The Voices and Faces Project, an activist organization dedicated to changing the public discourse on sexual violence through storytelling and personal testimony.



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IMMIGRATION LAW & COURTS TRANSGENDER LGBTQ

Why Immigration is an LGBTQ Issue

Recent news stories have highlighted the plight of LGBTQ asylum seekers, who often face persecution and even death in their home countries, only to experience discrimination and abuse in the U.S.

WE OFTEN THINK OF HUMAN issues as separate. More often than not, however, they are interconnected. This is especially the case when we talk about issues of oppression and marginalized communities. Here is where intersectionality plays a critical role.

Intersectionality is often described as the interconnectedness between different identities, such as gender, race, social class, colorism, and so on. These characteristics are all affected by systems of oppression and discrimination. Immigration and LGBTQ identities are no exception to this.

Recent stories about immigration have been making headlines. Our current administration is practicing violations of human rights for asylum seekers, and the Human Rights Watch, CNN, and the ACLU illuminated stories of abuse and neglect. LGBTQ immigrants are at heightened risk of these abuses.

LEAVING HOME

While the majority of us could not possibly state that it is “easy” being part of the LGBTQ community anywhere in the world, there are countries and regions where being LGBT is a death sentence. The level of humiliation, harassment, gendered views, religious views, and legality vary drastically, as well as the actions based on these views. Additionally, further characteristics may add to the existing ones. Racism and colorism are perfect examples. In countries where there is discrimination against people of darker complexion (yes, this



The average time a transgender person is detained is 99 days, whereas cisgender people have an average of 44 days.

is common outside the U.S.), LGBTQ people of darker complexion experience racism or colorism on top of discrimination for their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The spectrum of legality varies substantially across the globe as well. In countries like Sierra Leone and Turkmenistan homosexuality is legal for women but not for men. Also, in countries where homosexuality is illegal the punishment varies from temporary imprisonment, life in prison, or the death penalty. Even in countries like Brazil where LGBTQ legislation has improved and is considered progressive, the rates of violence against the LGBTQ community are substantial. As stated by Newsweek, a new research study indicated that “500 LGBT Brazilians suffered violent deaths at the hands of homophobia in 2017.”

In the case of transgender people that flee their home country, it is usually a matter of life or death. In Latin America, the increased gang violence, harsh economic realities, and often traditional gender views play a role as to why some LGBTQ people immigrate to the U.S. The economic realities of Latin American countries with a competitive workforce further disenfranchise LGBTQ people who face

discrimination. Transgender people that live in poverty and do not have the means to “pass” or have access to hormones or surgery often face harsher discrimination and harassment. Additionally, powerful gangs often coerce transgender women into prostitution. Many face extortion, are threatened, or even killed.

SEEKING SANCTUARY, FINDING WALLS

As a result of continuous overlapping hardships, some LGBTQ individuals have chosen to seek asylum in the U.S. It wasn't until 1990 that the U.S. even allowed LGBTQ people to apply for asylum. Prior to that, America deemed LGBTQ identities as ‘sexual deviation’ and not worthy of protection. Now, migrants are allowed to apply for asylum in the United States by law, but in order to receive approval must demonstrate that they have suffered persecution or have credible fear of it based on race, religion, sexual orientation.

As their cases are decided, and often denied, they remain in detention centers. The average time a transgender person is detained is 99 days, whereas cisgender people have an average of 44 days.

It has been reported that transgender immigrants have suffered abuse while in the detention facilities. Some have been sent to solitary confinement for “protection” from harassment from other detainees while others have been sent as a result of discrimination. This practice puts these immigrants at increased risk of abuse by guards. Transgender detainees are 97 times more likely to experience sexual abuse or assault as their cisgender peers.

Recently, *The Guardian* and other news media reported on the death of Roxana Hernández, a Honduran transgender woman, who died of health complications five days after being in custody of U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The heightened risk of abuse and the substandard medical care as demonstrated by Roxana's case demonstrate the atrocious conditions faced by LGBTQ immigrants who often come seeking safety and refuge from persecution.

The intricacy of the asylum seeking process goes further in the courts. Transgender people coming to the U.S often use the term “gay” as a general self-identification term. However, this can have unfavorable consequences based on the legal difference between the terms gay and transgender. Without proper representation, adequate terminology, and compelling evidence, transgender people can face deportation back to the adversity they were trying to flee.

Our immigration system is flawed, and many

people are starting to pay attention to the harmful ways our government treats immigrants and asylum seekers. Stories of families being separated at the border have awakened the American public to the atrocities committed in our names. As we organize for LGBTQ rights, we need to ensure the safe passage of immigrants and asylum seekers and understand the broader context of discrimination faced by LGBTQ people around the world. Contact legislators and pressure them to treat immigrants better. Vote people into office who are committed to ensuring the safety of all LGBTQ people.

Immigration IS an LGBTQ issue. Today more than ever. ■



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OWEN KARCHER is a bilingual art therapist, author, and social justice educator. He co-founded the Center for Community Healing in Madison, WI to provide high-quality therapy to people with marginalized identities.



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