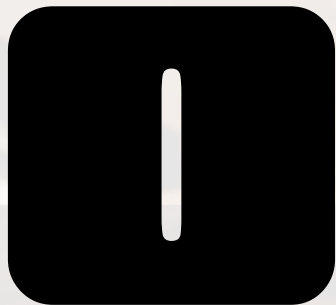
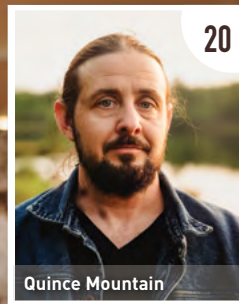


our lives



Kathy Flores



Quince Mountain



Vica-Etta Steel

# ENTERTAINMENT

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

INSIDE: Our Annual LGBTQ+ Arts Directory

September / October 2023

## PRESERVING A LEGACY

Ashley Pfannenstiel & Shannon Porter

Wilson Creek Pottery is celebrating a half-century of operation.

### TRANS HEALTH CARE

SSM Health's decision to discontinue gender-affirming surgeries for trans people.

### FIRST LGBTQ HISTORIAN

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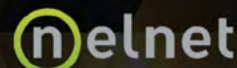
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october

20 FRI 7:30 PM  
21 SAT 8:00 PM  
22 SUN 2:30 PM



“[Naha Greenholtz] was exquisite — her beauty of tone nearly brought me to tears.”  
— MSO PATRON

KYLE KNOX, Conductor  
NAHA GREENHOLTZ, Violin

**music**  
**Leonard Bernstein,**  
*Three Dance Variations from “Fancy Free”*  
**Dmitri Shostakovich,**  
*Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77(99)*  
**Johannes Brahms,**  
*(orchestrated by Arnold Schoenberg), Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25*

We begin with Leonard Bernstein, who was a major influence on Music Director John DeMain’s early life and career. Bernstein had a knack for bringing lighthearted populism into the concert hall. Though written in the late 1940s, Shostakovich’s first concerto makes use of traditional musical forms, including a famous Passacaglia, favored by composers like Bach 200 years earlier. Feared by violinists and loved by audiences, it was a hit from the day it was written and is one of the true masterpieces of the solo violin repertoire. The final work is Brahms’ *G minor Piano Quartet*, orchestrated by Schoenberg. These will be the MSO’s first ever performances of this remarkable work. Schoenberg took Brahms’ chamber work and transformed it into a kaleidoscope of 20th-century orchestral color, giving virtually every instrument the spotlight.  
— Kyle Knox, Associate Conductor

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october  
6 FRI 7:30 PM



GREG ZELEK, Organ

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— Greg Zelek, Principal Organist and Elaine and Nicholals Michler Curator of the Overture Concert Organ

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YARELIS GANDUL



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Programs, dates, prices, and artists subject to change.





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"I feel myself becoming the fearless person I have dreamt of being. Have I arrived? No. But I'm constantly evolving and challenging myself to be unafraid to make mistakes."

- Janelle Monáe

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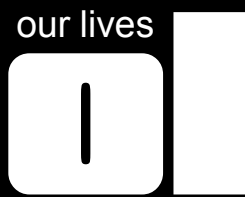
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Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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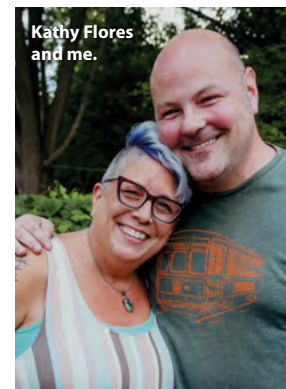
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## QUEER LIFE ACROSS WISCONSIN

**WHENEVER I MEET** with a new potential *Our Lives* contributor, I will almost always try to make clear who the readers of *Our Lives* are. I pride myself on earning the trust of a wide spectrum of our community; diverse in every imaginable way. I always try to make clear that no matter how someone identifies, as a contributor they are an ally to the majority of our readers. No singular alphabet letter under the LGBTQ rainbow is a majority, so there's an opportunity to educate and build bridges with every piece we publish.

I think that is as true in this issue as it is in every one before it. Perhaps in some ways, more so than others. The stories here are a real geographic quilt across queer Wisconsin. Our cover has us visiting **Wilson Creek Pottery** in Spring Green and learning from owners **Ashley Pfannenstiel & Shannon Porter** about their business and the deep roots potters have had in the region. **Melanie Jones** travels up to the very small northwoods of Mountain, about an hour northwest



Kathy Flores and me.

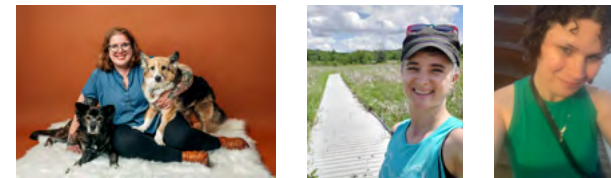
of Green Bay, to introduce us to the Iditarod's first transgender dog musher, author, and adventurer, **Quince Mountain**. Hearing him share stories about being embraced by his tiny rural town instills hope that even in today's climate there's more we share in common than what divides us.

Later in the issue, former *Our Lives* editor (and current *Our Lives* Media board member) **Emily Mills** travels to Appleton to interview longtime anti-violence activist and survivor advocate, **Kathy Flores**. After decades on the frontlines of many justice movements, she's moving into a new season in her life: embracing rest. Kathy has been a fixture in Wisconsin's LGBTQ rights movement for as long as I've been publishing this magazine, and she's someone I've always admired and looked up to. Emily's piece on her is a true tribute to a critical figure not just in the Fox Valley, but statewide. It's as close as I think *Our Lives* has come to the editorial equivalent of a lifetime achievement award.

**Michail Takach** and **BJ Daniels** take us to Milwaukee to help to keep the memory and legacy of **Louis Stimac** alive. Stimac, perhaps Wisconsin's first LGBTQ historian, was a founding member of Gay People's Union—he was personally responsible for filing their articles of nonprofit incorporation. He also researched, published, and taught gay history coursework at the Milwaukee Free University. The course, which launched in the fall of 1975 with a single lecture, became the first formal education in LGBTQ history ever offered in the state of Wisconsin.

For years we've used the closing page of each issue as a profile of future movement leaders. This issue takes us to La Crosse, where GSAFE youth **Carter Mandel** speaks about representation and an advocacy practice based in a desire for each of us to understand that we are enough. I often feel the sooner we can pass the torch to the next generation, the better the movement will be for it.

Something I love about doing this work is the exposure I have to all the walks of life in our state's queer community. Getting a chance to vicariously share their lived experiences is a gift I never want to take for granted. ■



**MELANIE JONES** is a photographer and writer living on the northside of Madison with her spouse, three dogs, and three cats and working out of her Atwood Avenue studio. While she enjoys photographing people, her passion project for the past two years has been her photography work with dogs under her Dulcy Dog Photography brand.

**EMILY MILLS** is the former editor of and a current board member for *Our Lives* magazine. She is a writer, musician, photographer, and nature lover currently working for a non-profit environmental organization where she sometimes gets to help set (planned) fires. Emily lives in Madison with her partners and two small dogs.

**TESSA JADE PRICE** is a transgender woman who enjoys writing, web design, and community organizing. Tessa grew up in Joliet, Illinois, and as a politically minded punk youth, moved to Madison in 2011 to study politics. After graduating, she worked in tech support and web design for seven years. Tessa came out publicly as trans in 2020 and, in 2021, started working with Trans Advocacy Madison to advocate for the needs of transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive people in the Madison area. Tessa writes about queer, trans, and diversity issues and lives with her big, fluffy cat, Rigo. She is passionate about helping others and using media and politics to help platform queer and trans perspectives.



**Martha Dixon Popp**, age 77, passed peacefully in her sleep at home on August 10, 2023, after two years of struggle with ALS.

Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Martha grew up in a loving family of Hoosiers. She held a B.A. from Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where she was on the first women's intercollegiate swim team, and later received a second BA in Communication Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Martha was a Speech Pathologist, and she was on the faculty of Middleton High School for 20 years.

With two other educators Martha helped to found the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network of South Central Wisconsin, and organized the Safe Zone program; established the Week of Respect; promoted the Day of Silence; and worked to end homophobia and transphobia at her high school. She educated many audiences about the importance of being a visible and out lesbian teacher, role model, and ally for LGBTQ+ youth.

In the mid 80s, Martha and Alix sued the YMCA for denial of a family membership, which paved the way for Madison's Domestic Partner Ordinance. In 1997, Martha received the Woman of the Year award from The United (the LGBTQ+ community and resource center in Madison). In 2001, she received the Distinguished Alumna award from the University of Wisconsin for her work "vigorously ensuring that every child in every K-12 school learns to respect and accept all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."

Martha met Alix in 1974, and they fell in love in 1976. They lived in Madison for 32 years where they co-parented her son Tim and daughter Emily with Martha's former husband. After 47 years of love and laughter, joy and pain, Martha and Alix finally were legally married in May 2010.

Martha leaves behind her beloved family and furry friends Max and Koko.

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MADISON, WI

Nicholas Garton

I'm Nicholas. My pronouns are he/him. I've been out for a really long time, but I'm an introvert. For most of my life, I didn't have much connection to the LGBTQ community, but lately I've been writing a lot about other people's experiences during this very tense time. All of the anti-LGBTQ backlash and legislation has really made me feel like I have to share people's stories. I never thought anyone like *Our Lives* magazine would ask me to share mine! Especially since I don't have one that's as interesting as what we read in this publication all the time.

I remember being at the Magic Festival years ago and seeing a big poster with the faces of all kinds of LGBTQ people of color on it. It was people who *Our Lives* had featured. I was on it, and I remember thinking it was so surreal to see myself with all of these other people who sort of stood for something. Being a person of color in this community (LGBTQ) is not easy. It made me think about coming out of my shell a little bit. But then I didn't. The pandemic took everything from me except my life. I saw someone I love walk out the door, and all of the things I love doing were gone. So right now, I'm sort of developing a second act, and we'll see how it goes! ■

MEETING SCHEDULE

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## Trans Health Services Canceled

Patients navigate **SSM Health's** decision to discontinue gender-affirming surgeries for trans people.

NEWS HEALTH CARE YOUTH RELIGION TRANS

**MICHELANGELO ARLES** was taken aback when he received a message from MyChart saying that his appointment had been canceled. Curious about the sudden change in his care, Michelangelo called Missouri-based SSM Health to hear that they “are no longer providing that service”—a mastectomy for a transgender person. SSM confirmed that they are still providing mastectomies for cisgender people. After speaking up about this apparent health care discrimination, they were told that SSM believes it is their right as a “Catholic organization” to deny health service to transgender people. He describes the situation as “sick and discriminatory,” in concern for trans people with low incomes who lack health options that are becoming increasingly import-

ant. This decision has impacted the local transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive communities severely. SSM Health has not responded to our requests for comment on their decision.

Michelangelo has concerns about his health care going forward because they have Dean Healthcare, and are worried about their ability to work with UW Hospitals since they have not previously. He also is concerned about his ability to get gender-affirming care through Dean going forward. Dean claims that SSM's decision will not affect their coverage of gender-affirming surgeries, and that they will now be referring patients to UW Hospitals as an alternative for care.

Other patients like August and their family also





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face dilemmas about keeping Dean Health Care given their ties to SSM Health. “I can’t imagine how long the waiting list will be,” one of August’s parents, Cody, tells us, worried about an out-of-network referral for treatment. Regarding August’s doctor at the SSM Clinic, “We aren’t sure she’ll be allowed to prescribe the (puberty) blockers.” Their doctor says for now they can, but Cody is afraid for their child. They have the ability to switch insurers if necessary, but know that is a privilege many do not have. Dean was previously owned by SSM Health, but sold to Minnesota-based Medica in 2021. Despite this, Dean Medical Group maintains some ties with SSM Health. Medica refers to Dean Medical Group as a “joint venture” with SSM Health.

### INTERSECTION OF RELIGION & HEALTH PROVIDERS

Legally, certain businesses have been able to skirt health discrimination laws through religious exemptions. The Supreme Court decided in the 2014 case *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* that the contraceptive mandate under the Affordable Care Act violated the corporation’s religious freedom rights. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court ruled in *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, that it was within the web company’s first amendment rights to refuse service to same-sex couples. The Court’s recent turn to the right under President Trump has opened the floodgates to various lawsuits from firms like Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, aka WILL, to sue schools on dubious grounds and try to repeal discrimination laws through the courts.

“It’s a corporate decision,” an SSM Health receptionist relays to me. Sisters of St. Mary’s operates under private Catholic ownership. Some folks have pointed out that there is a conflict of interest in having a corporation supposed to be focused on health care, but ultimately more concerned with internal Catholic doctrine. This doctrine appears to oppose all life-saving gender-affirming care including puberty blockers, hormones, and surgeries. So far, SSM is just limiting surgeries, but patients worry that’s just the beginning.

By contrast, SSM Health is owned privately after Mary Odilia Berger and her sisters fled religious persecution in Germany to St. Louis, Missouri in 1872. They now own 23 hospitals across Missouri, Oklahoma, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Folks in LGBTQ+ communities say they are now religiously persecuting them. SSM claims a history of social justice and empathy for the poor, but has yet to respond for any official comment regarding this situation. According to SSM: “...the Sisters of St.

Agnes have embraced peace and justice issues, women’s rights...” with the notable exception LGBTQ+ patients. Casa Maria Catholic Worker out of Milwaukee reached out to SSM Health encouraging them to support trans people. In a recent report by *The Cap Times*, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced that Dane County is investigating SSM Health and Dean because their health contract is up for renewal next year.

### CHALLENGES AND MISINFORMATION

This comes as a media firestorm emerges from the American Right calling queer and trans people “groomers,” and spreading misinformation on the efficacy of gender-affirming care. The Madison diocese shared a document with me regarding “Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body.” Folks in the community think this sounds dehumanizing.

The Court’s recent turn to the right under President Trump has opened the floodgates to various lawsuits from firms like Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, aka WILL, to sue schools on dubious grounds and try to repeal discrimination laws through the courts.

Within that doctrinal note from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the conference claims that gender-affirming care is not effective in treating gender dysphoria despite overwhelming consensus otherwise. They claim that trans people do not suffer sufficient “burden” for health care to be appropriate. These statements reinforce misunderstandings about gender dysphoria and trans health care.

Trans people are overwhelmingly more satisfied with their lives after transitioning. The *JAMA Surgery* journal recently published a study demonstrating that gender-affirming mastectomies had results “overwhelmingly positive compared to other medical and non-medical decisions.” Transition, however, looks different for everybody and does not always involve medical intervention. This myth of transition having a beginning and an end is just that, a myth. Trans+ people thrive in an environment with social, legal, and medical options, and that’s something that Wisconsin is just lacking. Wisconsin has legal limits against discriminating against LGB people but, decades later, has not passed one protecting the T of LGBT.

Wisconsin law requires a “sex-change

surgery” to change a birth certificate. A name change must be published in a newspaper unless a judge is able to declare it confidential. The law forces trans people to advocate for our own basic privacy in court, and to obtain surgeries they may or may not desire or have access to. Last year, there was a right-wing firestorm regarding a tent to obtain a letter of readiness for gender-affirming surgery at last year’s MAGIC Pride Fest. Known hate-mongers like “Libs of Tiktok” spread lies about gender-affirming surgery being easy to obtain, despite the extreme gatekeeping trans people still face in finding access to health care.

According to the LGBTQ+ rights non-profit, Human Rights Campaign, as of 7/25/23, 32.2% of transgender youth live in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care, and another 13.2 are at risk of losing gender-affirming care. Due to the Wisconsin GOP’s relentless, and so far failed, attempts at banning gender-affirming care in Wisconsin, this state is firmly in the “at risk” category for vulnerable trans youth.

The WI GOP also attempted to protect conversion therapy through the legislature after deciding in committee that licenses cannot be revoked for practicing the dangerous, discredited practice that survivors amount to torture. There is no evidence that youth under 18 are incapable of pursuing appropriate gender-affirming therapy. The American Medical Association passed a resolution on June 12 in support of “evidence-based care” saying “medical decisions should be made by patients, their relatives, and health care providers, not politicians.” Based on the recent Wisconsin legislature, it appears our representatives have not gotten the memo.

### MEDICALLY NECESSARY GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

Ollie Heide was in the car on the way to his pre-op appointment for gender-affirming surgery when he got a call that it was rescheduled— indefinitely. Four different medical professionals told him that this surgery was necessary. Ollie, a teenager with blue hair, now has to deal with months more of physical and emotional turmoil as a result of this decision. His family reached out to SSM and the Madison diocese for a medical reason for this decision and got back little. It’s “an absolute political move” he said, noting that he gets called slurs on a regular basis at high school.

Binding is difficult for him, especially with hypermobility that makes it even more uncomfortable for his joints. This gender-affirming surgery would have relieved his pain and discomfort. Ollie notes that this move was clouded in secrecy. “It’s obvious you know you’re doing something wrong when it’s a

secret like that.” He also made it very clear that his doctors were supportive and helpful. They are trying to provide care, but the hospital is preventing them. “Just listen to doctors about medical care.” In the end, SSM told him it was an “equipment issue,” which Ollie chalks up to a desperate lie.

According to the LGBTQ+ rights non-profit, Human Rights Campaign, as of 7/25/23, 32.2% of transgender youth live in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care, and another 13.2 are at risk of losing gender-affirming care.

Ollie has been through three years of therapy leading up to this decision. He says his insurance companies misgendered (knowingly used the wrong pronouns) him regarding his care. He was required by his insurance to be on testosterone for one year before even scheduling a consultation for surgery. This requirement has since been removed from WPATH policy, but not before Ollie’s coverage was denied and he had to jump through numerous hoops, including a review from multiple additional doctors. His family planned their summer around this surgery, making sure to give Ollie the care and time he needs to recover. Now, his top surgery is rescheduled for October at a different hospital in the middle of the school year. Now he will be forced to take a month out of school for this medically necessary surgery.

### THE FUTURE OF TRANS HEALTH CARE

It appears that trans patients are being referred to UW-Health surgeons after being denied treatment. In the last couple of years, Indiana, Missouri, and Iowa have banned life-saving gender-affirming care for those under 18 despite the medical evidence to the contrary. Sarah Benzel, UW-Health’s Media Relations Manager communicated: “UW-Health will continue to serve our transgender, gender-expansive, and nonbinary patient communities.” Based on my own previous experience with them, the UW Gender Clinic confirmed that this new influx of patients from out of state has driven up wait times for transgender services.

Two workers at the UW System spoke to us on the condition of anonymity out of fear for their jobs. They say that UW directed them to not discuss SSM Health’s decision publicly. One told us that, while they were collecting feedback on the situation, they were told to not respond or encourage feedback. Another said that they can reply but cannot seek feedback actively. UW System and UW-Madison have not yet returned our request for comment. It is not clear if the Wisconsin Department of



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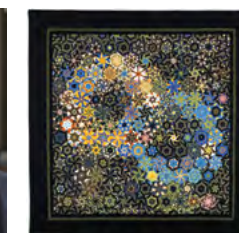
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Employee Trust Funds (aka ETF) that manages employee health care will continue their contract with Dean. Given the lack of response from the state, this contract seems likely.

Going forward, the community is scrambling for answers regarding health care, rights, and religion. We face challenges related to misinformation, legal barriers, and limitations to health care access. We are talking about the word "genocide" and wondering if that's

what our opponents want. We talk about allies needing to do more to listen and help us. The LGBTQ+ community is built on solidarity. We rely on each other for our rights, our events, and our social lives. The future of gender-affirming care in Wisconsin is unclear, but the future of the transgender community in supporting each other in navigating these changes and finding solutions is looking as strong as ever. ■

**NEWS BRIEFS** **WRITTEN BY MELANIE JONES**

**ARMED NAZIS PROTEST WATERTOWN'S PRIDE**

**AFTER MONTHS OF** resistance against Watertown's Pride in the Park from anti-LGBTQ locals, armed Nazis show up to protest and intimidate those attending.

On July 29, an armed self-described Nazi group protested at the entrance of Watertown Pride, the town's second annual pride event that featured, among other events, drag performances by local queens. The group—who call themselves Blood Tribe and who showed up wearing black shirts, khaki pants, black balaclavas, and many of whom were armed—shouted slurs and threats to those entering the event, at some points even threatening to lynch the LGBTQ community, whom they regard as "pedos."

They also waved black flags with the swastika, and some wore go-pros, a tactic many on the right use when they are purposefully pushing the limits of offense. They want someone to get upset enough to fight back, for them to film as proof of "liberal aggression." The Anti-Defamation League describes Blood Tribe as a "neo-Nazi group with semi-autonomous chapters in the United States and Canada. Blood Tribe promotes hardline white supremacist views and openly directs its vitriol at Jews, 'non-whites' and the LGBTQ+ community."



**TRANS STUDENT ATHLETE BAN REVIVED IN WISCONSIN'S STATE LEGISLATURE**

**ON AUGUST 15**, conservative members of Wisconsin's state legislature re-introduced two sets of bills that would ban trans student athletes from participating in sports teams that match their gender identity, and would instead require that they either participate based on their sex assigned at birth by a physician, or compete in a new coed category. This requirement would extend both to public and private K-12 schools and to the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Technical College systems.



The bills would also allow schools to sue the NCAA and/or the federal government if they face sanctions for excluding trans athletes and would "create new avenues for lawsuits to be brought against schools by female student athletes if they feel they are 'deprived of the opportunity to participate' if a student transitioning from male to female is allowed to join," according to Wisconsin Public Radio.

The new bills, introduced by state Rep. Barb Dittrich, a Republican representative representing Oconomowoc, are unlikely to become law, as Governor Tony Evers has already promised to veto them. Nearly identical bills were introduced and were ultimately unsuccessful in 2021, but Dittrich reintroduced them because, she told Wisconsin Public Radio, a lot has changed since then. Seventy-one percent of respondents to a Marquette University Law School poll favored "requirements that transgender athletes compete on teams matching their assigned sex at birth and not their current gender identity." She continues, "The goal of the legislation is not to be unfair to anyone, it's to create a spot for everyone that's safe and fair for each." More than 20 states have passed leg-

islation that in some way ban or restrict trans athletes from participating in student sports in recent years, with conservatives increasingly using safety and fairness to justify their laws.

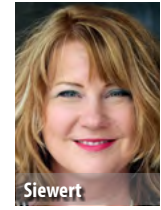


"incredibly harmful."

The National College Athletics Association and the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, neither of whom participated in the drafting of the bills recently introduced, have moved to allow transgender athletes to compete on teams in line with their gender identity recently. In response to the 2021 bills, the WIAA accused the legislature of overreaching into the decision making process of a private organization, and stated that the K-12 bill "targets a vulnerable segment of young people that may lead to isolation and exacerbate their vulnerability," according to WPR. The ACLU of Wisconsin has also said, "Excluding trans students from participating in sports teams consistent with their authentic gender identity is unfair and discriminatory. School sports should be inclusive for all students."

**WAUSAU NEWSPAPER TARGETED BY GOP STATE SENATOR WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SLAPP DEFACTION LAWSUIT AFTER HIS ALLEGED USE OF A GAY SLUR.**

**IN A CASE THAT HIGHLIGHTS** the new and disturbing trend of powerful people with deep pockets using the civil court system to silence detractors, the *Wausau Pilot & Review* was



sued by a local businessman and Republican state senator for reporting that he used a slur for gay people at a Marathon County board meeting two years ago. Despite the lawsuit's dismissal in April, 2023 for not meeting the legal standard for defamation, the legal troubles, and accompanying bills, have not subsided for the media outlet and its founder Shereen Siewert. Cory Tomczyk, who has brought the lawsuit and filed an appeal, has denied that he said the slur, despite three people giving sworn statements to the contrary.

The August 12, 2021 Marathon County board meeting reportedly got heated, according to the *New York Times*, when the community

was debating a resolution meant to promote diversity and inclusion. Sometime during the meeting, the *Wausau Pilot & Review* reported, Tomczyk called a then 13-year-old boy a "fag." Tomczyk demanded a retraction, and when the paper refused, he sued them for defamation, resulting in the nonprofit racking up close to \$150,000 in legal bills. This amount is staggering for a tiny news outlet trying to cover small town events, and trying to expand to cover more of their north central area.

In the GoFundMe page she set up to seek help with mounting legal fees, Siewert described the paper as "Wausau's primary source for hard-hitting local news coverage that has earned more than a dozen state and national awards." She described launching the publication in 2017, "when larger outlets were scaling back their coverage in a big way."

The *New York Times* reported that Republicans have used this tactic to try and silence their critics. "Devin Nunes, the former Republican congressman Mr. Trump hired to run Truth Social, has sued several outlets, including *The Washington Post* and CNN, for publishing stories that were unfavorable to him. In Mississippi," the *NYT* continues, "former Governor Phil Bryant is suing a news organization over its Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage that exposed how he misspent state welfare money to build a volleyball stadium."

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To conclude her plea for help on her GoFundMe page (which had reached 2/3 of the \$150,000 goal at the time of this writing) Shereen Siewert closed with: "Why is local news so important? The American Journalism Project puts it this way: 'Local news is our most trusted source for information about the world around us. It provides a shared understanding of what's happening in our city halls, schools, and businesses. Local news connects us to our community and to our neighbors. It uplifts voices that would otherwise go unheard. It demands accountability of community, business, and governmental bodies. It forces decision-making structures to operate within the public's view.'"

On August 22, Democratic lawmakers, led by Senate Minority Leader Melissa Agard, introduced legislation to ban sham lawsuits aimed at silencing news outlets and critics, commonly known as SLAPP lawsuits (strategic lawsuits against public participation). According to the Associated Press, the bill would "allow people to ask a judge to dismiss a lawsuit against them if they believe the suit is a baseless challenge over their exercise of free speech. If the judge finds that the case doesn't have a probability of succeeding, they can dis-

miss the lawsuit and order the person that filed it to pay the opposing party's attorney's fees." If passed, which is unfortunately unlikely in the GOP controlled legislature, Wisconsin would join at least 31 other states and the District of Columbia who have anti-SLAPP laws already in place. Bill Lueders, president

of the non-partisan Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, told the Associated Press, "The defense of transparency is not a partisan issue. Local news outlets are absolutely vital to the important business of having an informed electorate, and yet the challenges that news outlets face have never been greater." ■

## LGBTQ Organizations Update

General News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes | Events

Curated by **Doug Rowe**

*Stay up-to-date with area LGBTQ+ and allied organizations and non-profits, be informed, and get involved.*

### GENERAL NEWS

*Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.*

**ACLU WISCONSIN** is working to organize their supporters to take action against bills that target transgender individuals. Join in: Take the pledge to let trans kids everywhere know you're with them. [action.aclu.org/petition/wi-trans-rights-pledge](http://action.aclu.org/petition/wi-trans-rights-pledge)

**COURAGE MKE** made improvements to the backyard of their new C2 apartments with the help of volunteers including a group from Kohl's department stores.

**DIVERSE & RESILIENT** received one of 11 harm reduction vending machines that were placed at locations throughout Milwaukee County. The funds were provided through a settlement previously reached with opioid manufacturers. The machines hold cost-free harm reduction and prevention supplies, such as fentanyl test strips, nasal naloxone, medication deactivation pouches, medication lock bags, and gun locks.

**ENCORE STUDIO** is excited to announce their first live-in-person season since the pandemic! A mix of comedy, music and some seriously good original theater.

**FREEDOM INC.** fundraised to provide 150 air purifiers and 2,000 masks to the Madison community, free of charge, in response to need driven by reduced air quality.

**GSAFE** is now accepting contributions to their 2023 Quilt and Fiber Art Auction, "In Rainbow-

land." The auction runs Nov 28 through Dec 4. Proceeds raised help GSAFE support LGBTQ+ youth leaders and respond to requests for support in school districts and communities across Wisconsin. [bit.ly/gsafequiltsQA](http://bit.ly/gsafequiltsQA)

**MADISON GAY HOCKEY ASSOCIATION** (MGHA) is kicking off its season by expanding again for a total of 18 teams and 270 players! The first games will be Sunday, November 5th from 4:30-10pm at Capitol Ice Arena in Middleton.

**MADISON MINOTAURS** have announced their fall season dates with home games in September and October on the calendar. [madisonminotaurs.com/schedule](http://madisonminotaurs.com/schedule)

**MILWAUKEE PRIDE** has announced that the 2024 dates for PrideFest will be June 6, 7, 8.

**OUR VOICE MILWAUKEE** is beginning rehearsals this September with the largest chorus they have had in their 12 seasons.

**OUTREACH** has expanded harm reduction programming to include distribution of safer drug use supplies, including fentanyl test strips and naloxone, and offers naran training to community members and organizations as well. Safer use supplies can be found alongside safer sex supplies in their community pantry.

### AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

*Special thanks for those who do good.*

**CREAM CITY FOUNDATION** is excited to announce their Scholarship recipients for 2023.

Twenty Milwaukee-area LGBTQ+ students were selected for 2023 to each receive a \$2,500 scholarship (\$50,000 total—nearly twice the number of previous recipients). Since 2015 the program has awarded over \$220,000 to student leaders in Southeastern Wisconsin and the scholarships can be used for any post-secondary education at the undergraduate, graduate, or postgraduate level. Thank you to the donors who made this investment to future LGBTQ+ leaders in our area.

**DIVERSE & RESILIENT** is a part of the Fourth Cohort of the Racial Equity Fund, which is overseen by United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County. The goal of the Fund is to invest in Black- and brown-led organizations to increase organizational capacity. Funding will aid D&R in expanding their reach and serving more transgender individuals.

**FORGE** has been funded by the Office of Victims of Crime to create a new toolkit for service providers on responding to the needs of transgender/nonbinary victims of crime. It will encompass a spectrum of crime/violence that trans people experience. FORGE is hosting listening sessions to gather input from trans/nonbinary community members and service providers.

**OUTREACH** has been awarded a grant through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to collaborate on supportive services for LGBTQ+ elders with dementia and their caregivers.

**THE HOUSE URBAN ARTS INITIATIVE** volunteer of the year is **Liz Sexe**, Ballet Emperor at The House Inc & Artistic director of Liz Sexe Dance Company (established in 2014). Thank you Liz for all that you do for The House!

### STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

*Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.*

**COURAGE MKE** welcomes their new Operations Manager, **Marissa Bray**. Marissa has a unique background that includes mental health administrative management, paralegal work, and program management at the LGBT Center. She is excited to be working for a non-profit and with her community once again.

**MADISON GAY HOCKEY ASSOCIATION** (MGHA) recently sat their 2023-24 board; **Avery Cordingley**, **Kriona Hagen**, **Brett Rojec**, **Greta Landis**, **Gabby Grandin**, **Gene Zadzilka**, and **Matthew Greene**.

**OUTREACH** would like to welcome their newest Board members **Val Walowit** and **Patrick Alexander**, who were voted onto the board in July.

**LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN** has new staff members: **Jasmine Alvarez** (Operations Manager), **Venus Randall Saunders** (Equity Coordinator), and **Patricia Castillo Venegas** (Youth coordinator).

### UPCOMING EVENTS

*Plan ahead to join in.*

**PROUD THEATER MADISON** **September 13** Open enrollment begins September 13 and ends October 13. Youth ages 13–18 are welcome to attend during this open enrollment period.

**LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN** **September 22** The Pleasure Ball will be held at the Branch in Racine. It will have 24 categories for contestants to walk in order to win trophies and prizes. Performers from "Houses" have been invited, and it will be open to beginners as well.

**ENCORE STUDIO** **September 22–October 1** Showing for these dates is Navigating Well, several short plays focusing on mental health.

**MADISON MINOTAURS** **September 30** Home match vs. St. Louis Crusaders.

**CREAM CITY FOUNDATION** **October 12** The Business Equality Luncheon will be held at The Pfister Hotel with keynote, **Dr. Jesse Ehrenfeld**.

**LGBT CENTER OF SE WISCONSIN** **October 13** Murder Mystery Dinner 6:00–10:00 p.m. at Circa on Seventh, in Kenosha. This Masquerade Fundraiser will be a night to remember.

**TRANS LAW HELP** **October 14** A Zoom clinic will be held with legal information for trans and non-binary individuals seeking to change their name or gender markers on identifying documents.

**MILWAUKEE LGBT CENTER** **October 14** The Center will hold its Big Night Out: Halloween Masquerade. This night will include food, drinks, a burlesque show, a silent auction, and lots of fun.

**GSAFE** **October 15** The annual Trick or Trot Walk/Run will have a Mermaids vs. Pirates theme this year. There will also be a kid's dash and candy stations along the route.

**OPEN** **October 18** OPEN's Annual Dinner will be held at the Monona Terrace. Gather for a joyous celebration of our community and help fuel the growth of the OPEN Foundation, empowering them to enhance queer careers through job search assistance, training, and mentorship.

**MADISON MINOTAURS** **October 28** Home match vs. VOMITs. ■

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FAITH RELIGION

# What is Faith?

After several months curating a column on faith, **Vica-Etta Steel** reflects on her journey into understanding it.

**I'VE BEEN WRITING** about queer faith for just over one year now. I fell in love, and I've barely begun. I've spoken with queer Jewish, Pagan, Christian, and Muslim leaders. I heard clearly, queerly, from a leader in Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism the call to wake up and just do the damn work. In upcoming articles I will speak with people who understand faith as separate from religion, and I name in my own life the many atheist and agnostic people who are central to my own journey, all people who believe deeply in community and believe deeply in love.

I am in seminary (graduating in May of 2024). I preach at a church. I speak openly of inclusive love at my queer Farmers' Market Chaplaincy most Saturdays on the Capitol Square. Each week I give away hundreds of trans-celebratory stickers (Trans is Beautiful). People write affirmations and drop worries into tiles (at the new moon I perform a ritual at the water to release those worries—I always ask permission from the water first). I sing. I move my hips and dance to the music of the crowd.

I am just a woman, queerly speaking love, saying on repeat that each person passing is wonderful or amazing or beautiful or all of the above, giving out affirmation unasked-for but so needed. And I am met by so much love. People cry each week in joy, not because they have found the same faith as me, but because someone in my faith can be openly queer—a Rainbow on the Corner—affirming them in the faith that is their own, whatever and wherever that faith is rooted (but always, regardless if secular or religious, the faith I meet grows from love).

And I am met by so much hate. Much of that hate in the form of that polite Midwestern dismissal of tightened lips, stiffened bodies, quickened gaits. The hate that stares when it thinks we don't see (we see). The hate that sneers or steers their children quickly past the queer Giantess speaking love while the children stare back—I never mind the stares of children. Some of them are queer and haven't yet seen evidence in their lives of queer joy and love defiant. Let them stare. Some of them will find their own way to faith in being who they know they are against what their society says they can't be.

**BUT WHAT IS FAITH?**

For many Christians, it seems, faith is rules of who is in and who is out. Faith is what they believe gets them to heaven. I had a conversation



with a classmate in seminary who was in an existential crisis, "But what if what I believe about God wasn't real?" I don't have that worry. It doesn't matter to me if God is real or if God is metaphor. Heaven isn't my point in life nor is it the point of the Bible.

Jesus doesn't talk about heaven, not much anyway. And hell isn't even a thing. Jesus teaches us about radical welcome. Jesus' teachings are always to lift the most marginalized. Jesus' teachings, in a deeply misogynistic world, lift women, center women, call women to leadership again and again. The core of the Christian Bible is God come incarnate, co-created in the womb of an unwed teenage mother in a land under occupation. Marginalization on marginalization.

And we don't understand Black Lives Matter? We don't understand the need to center Black transgender women? Jesus' teachings, reflecting Jesus' Jewish world, are teachings of justice.

**FAITH IS JUSTICE**

Where do you root your faith? Mine is rooted queerly. I root my faith in the hope Mary sang predicting a world of justice to come, "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:46-55) and from the commands Jesus gave to the disciples, the men and women who followed Jesus, to love God with all their heart and love their neighbor as themselves. Let me break these calls down.

Love God. Do we understand that? Too often I hear colleagues say banalities like, "It means accepting God or Jesus in our hearts." But really?

How does that even truly work? How do you love when you love? When I fall in love with my wife, with friends, with new moments in life, I listen. I want to know about them. I pay attention. How do we pay attention to God or the Divine? By reading the Bible? Sure. The Bible is one way we can engage in conversation. But let's not imagine it's an only.

The idea that there would be an "only" in something so vast as God is absurd. If we love God, why aren't we also sitting with our Pagan family in Circle? Why are we not reading the Koran or sitting with Buddhist neighbors in contemplation or conversation? Why are we not listening to atheists who work to uplift others in justice? Why are we not listening with every person who thinks of a world bigger than themselves in this conversation with the Divine.

And what about all the other ways we can listen and be present with God? We hear in Genesis that the language of God is not Greek or Hebrew or Latin or English or any human language. God says light and there is light. God's language is the language of creation. God's word for the tree outside my window is the entire life cycle of that tree, from seed to decay. When we understand that we live in the language of God, how does it change how we love God? Do we understand the desecration of the conversation when we pave over the words of God with unnecessary parking lots for extra lanes of traffic? Do we call it love when we rape the land digging pipelines into soil sacred to Indigenous people who have lived on this land for generations uncounted?

**FAITH IS LOVE**

Love your neighbor. This. Just this. And how do we love, again? In my heart, we talk. We truly listen. In my work as a public face of queer joy at my card table sanctuary at the Farmers' Market, I also attract people who come to me claiming they "just want to understand," but who are rooted in anger and dismissal of queer and especially trans. These people rarely come to truly talk. They replace conversation with talking-points and, at best, wait to launch their next practiced bon mot after I've worked to give them understandings that they didn't have before. I was a teacher. For decades. So I'm fairly practiced at reading people. I will listen to these people that come to talk at me, then I share that I am here to talk with them. I ask that they let go of the next zinger and instead tell me something meaningful about what they love. Truly. If we fall in love, then we fall into true stories shared. It doesn't always work. But I won't stop trying.

Queerly loving ourselves, faithfully. This is the last part of "love your neighbor as yourself." Each day I fall in love again. Do you think that means I'm always happy? Love isn't always easy or happy. Love is also angst and frustration and real care. Love is breaking down in tears because I've opened myself up to feelings. Life was easier, in some ways, when I wore the mask of the man society insisted I must labor under. I didn't allow myself to feel. I tried so hard to not let myself feel anything. But I open myself. I laugh now. I smile. I sing. And I cry. I break down in big, messy sobs, and I struggle to breathe in the absolute beauty of everything. If I let myself see it, if I let go of my own talking points, my own practiced words, and instead stand speechless before whatever it is that we stand within. God? The Divine? The Source? Simple human companionship? It truly does not matter to me how any of us call it, just that we all join in conversation, together.

For me, faith, as I begin to understand, is a friend holding out a hand, or offering a hug. Faith is standing, shoulders bumping, looking at the grandeur of the ocean or the mountains or the leaves fallen at the base of an aging oak tree or the touch of hands in soil feeling the decay becoming growth.

Faith is a year's worth of stories from queer voices and allies, and more years of stories to come. What conversations do you have? How do you love your neighbor and yourself and all that we stand in within this vast world? How do you live faith? ■

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ADVOCATES ATHLETES TRANSGENDER

## Wild and Free

Melanie Jones profiles the Iditarod's first transgender dog musher, author, and adventurer Quince Mountain.



**IF YOU FOLLOW** reality television, particularly the extreme survivalist style that has flourished since *Survivor* came out in the 90s, there's a chance that you've heard of Quince Mountain. When he starred in an episode of *Naked and Afraid* (a show where he and a stranger were driven into the wilderness of the Honduran mountains and asked to take off their clothes and walk barefoot through the jungle to meet each other for the first time) he was the first openly trans person to do so. As the episode opens, a montage of Quince's history, featuring him in the military and on farms, where he describes being the victim of extreme bullying while growing up, continues for a few minutes until finally, he comes out as a trans man.

As he is taking off his clothes, the viewers see the scars from his top surgery, and get what is likely (for most) their first glimpse at the body of a trans man from the waist up (groins are blurred for television, after all). He later told the *New York Times*, "When I told friends I was going on *Naked and Afraid*, they worried I'd be rendered a caricature. Isn't reality television all about confining formulas? I told them it's here, stripped down for this naked TV show, that I can be real. That my experience growing up as a trans person was the fictional performance."

### LIFE AS MUSHERS

After surviving his jungle ordeal and coming out to the world in 2019, Quince went on to be the first openly trans competitor in the famous Iditarod race, a grueling thousand mile dog sled race through the rugged interior of Alaska that ends at the coastal town of Nome. Happily for him, he was able to be fully clothed for this competition, and while he was not able to finish, he helped pave the way for other trans competitors to come after him, most famously Apayauq Reitan, an Inupiaq trans woman who completed (and finished) in 2022.

When asked why he competes in such extreme, grueling contests, the answer is always the same: he was attracted to competing in these competitions because they are not segregated by gender, and because the wilderness does not care about gender at all. What matters is toughness, resolve, and, as Quince would later find out, community.

Now he lives in the bucolic northwoods town of Mountain, Wisconsin with his wife, writer and fellow dog musher Blair Braverman. They both split their time between Wisconsin and Alaska, spending most of their time training for dog races and writing books. Quince and Blair met while they were both in graduate school in Iowa, both working on an MFA in creative writing and in 2021, they co-wrote *Dogs on the Trail: A Year in the Life*, a charming book that mixes prose and candid photographs to tell the story of their life as mushers. Blair has also written and published two other books, one a memoir chronicling her decision to leave home and move to Norway to learn how to work with sled dogs, and, more recently, *Small Game*, a fictional look at what it's like to compete in an extreme outdoors reality show.

### CHOOSING OPENNESS

In between his long stays in Alaska, I was finally able to make my own way up to Mountain to meet Quince Mountain. The town, a tiny spec on the map about an hour northwest of Green Bay, has been a place where Quince could finally find peace and community. He went as a teenager from where he grew up in Illinois, and has never fully left since. When Quince and I met up at The Schoolhouse Bar, a bar in town that has Taco Thursdays and a pretty comprehensive beer selection, I wasn't sure what to expect. The rhetoric around trans people and trans identity being so



People worry all the time about acceptance, but what matters most is being an active member of the community and letting people get to know you as an individual. "While it is easy to hate someone from afar, it's very hard to hate someone who is integral to the functioning of the community," he explained.

toxic and raucous, a small town in rural northern Wisconsin felt to me like a perilous place to interview a trans person. I was relieved to be wrong.

When we found a hightop table and settled in with our beers, numerous people came over to chat with him. Since he splits his time between Wisconsin and Alaska, his neighbors don't get to see him often and seemed to relish a chance to catch up. One octogenarian came up and started to tell us about her new love interest, and another about retiring and selling their fish business. What was refreshing to me was just another day to him, and he explained how he's never really had an issue around here. People worry all the time about acceptance, but what matters most is being an active member of the community and letting people get to know you as an individual. "While it is easy to hate someone from afar, it's very hard to hate someone who is integral to the functioning of the community," he explained. Quince has been rewarded, he says, "by being open with friendships in places I might not have expected, which have changed me." But being open and trusting was something Quince had to learn and work at. His childhood and early adulthood being what it was, it would have been very easy to remain closed and bitter.

Quince grew up in a toxic, evangelical environment, in suburban Illinois. Because he was assigned female at birth, he spent a fair amount of time trying to conform to the gender roles dictated by religion. But he always knew he was different. As he became a teenager, he started coming to the realization that he was queer, but, he says laughing, "things got a little easier at church because it didn't matter what sex you wanted to have, it was all sin. Bible camp was a safe space for me." His home and school life, however, were described by him as torture. He chronicled his experiences with extreme bullying in his work with *Outside* magazine

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and the *New York Times*, and without going into too much detail, he was targeted in a malicious, dangerous way.

He left home, joined and left the military, transitioned, and returned to the evangelical community to write about the Exodus ministry, one that tried to force queer people to conform to their assigned gender and into heterosexual, cis presenting members of the church. Here he found something unexpected: acceptance as a fully male person. He was not out about being trans, but conformed to all of the ideals that the program put onto men. He was called by them a “true man of god,” and felt like the church owed him that honor after all he’d been through growing up. Now he’s up in Mountain and has left much of that behind.

NOT SO BOGGED DOWN

I climb into his truck, which he has loaded with three of his retired sled dogs (his racing team is still in Alaska), and we head into the woods. He’s excited to show me a bog, and to let the dogs run around. Despite going to this particular bog pretty frequently, he misses the turn off, and we have a somewhat long truck ride, where he tells me about some of his other exploits before settling down in the woods.

We chat about dumb and risqué things we did when we were younger, and Quince, who was understandably a little tense during his recounting of his childhood, seems to relax and soften. We finally find the turnoff, and start down a bumpy, overgrown trail barely large enough to fit his truck. When we finally stop and get out, he lets the dogs free, and leads me into a lovely cranberry bog. This is clearly his happy place.

When asked why he competes in such extreme, grueling contests, the answer is always the same: he was attracted to competing in these competitions because they are not segregated by gender, and because the wilderness does not care about gender at all.

I’m admittedly a little star struck when I meet the dogs he’s brought along. Blair, his wife and fellow musher, went viral in 2018 with an adorable twitter (now X) thread about her dumb but charming dog Grinch, who is super strong and easily confused. This was actually how I first learned of her, and Quince. As Grinch came barreling towards me, I was able to confirm that everything in the thread checked out. Quince, the three dogs he’s brought along (Grinch included), and I walk along the spongy, mat-like sphagnum moss perimeter, and I get to watch him interact with his retired pups as the sun starts to set.

The pups are sure footed, even as the moss waves and bounces with each step, but I am not, and I end up wet up to my knees as I fall into a hidden hole in the moss. Quince, who is here often and is more familiar with this landscape, is unphased by the unsteadiness, and pulls out a whipped cream canister to give the dogs some treats. They crowd around, and he rolls around on the bog mat with a big smile on his face. This man, who has been through a hellacious childhood, a confusing time as a youth and young adult, the prejudice that is unfortunately a common trans experience, and the extreme trials of two very public battles with nature, is now finally home—and not afraid. ■



MELANIE JONES is a photographer and writer living on the northside of Madison with her spouse, three dogs, and three cats and working out of her Atwood Avenue studio. While she enjoys photographing people, her passion project for the past two years has been her photography work with dogs under her Dulcy Dog Photography brand.



Mountain letting his retired sled dogs run free.

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# Shared Across Generations, for Generations

**Wilson Creek Pottery** is celebrating a half-century of operation. Current owners **Ashley Pfannenstiel** and **Shannon Porter** tell how they came to own and operate the Driftless area business.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CRAFT POTTERY RURAL

**IN SPRING GREEN'S** Wilson Creek valley, nestled amid rolling hills, bluffs, wildflowers, and prairies, a unique story of love and art has been firing for the past half-century. This is the story of Wilson Creek Pottery, a woman-owned arts business, whose sustained existence is a testament to the power of love and a supportive community.

In 1973, Peggy Ahlgren bought an old cheese factory in Spring Green and refashioned it into a pottery studio so she could create and sell gas-reduction functional stoneware. She lived and worked there for 39 years, building a successful and beloved local business.

In 2012, Ashley Pfannenstiel and Shannon Porter heard from a

friend that Ahlgren was interested in selling. They agreed to check it out. Because they arrived at night, they had no idea what their surroundings looked like. They woke up the following early fall morning and found themselves nestled in one of the Driftless area's magical valleys. They were surrounded by hills covered in trees beginning to turn yet still dotted with yellow and purple wildflowers. For Ashley and Shannon, it was love at first sight. The only problem: they were not potters.

They weighed the pros and cons. One, they were ready for new jobs and a change of careers. Two, they were both big nature lovers, who liked the idea that they would no longer have to take vacation time to

take a long walk through the woods or canoe on a river. Three, they originally met at Farm Aid, but then a few years later, they "met" met at a startup in Chicago. The startup was an outdoor clothing company focused on sustainability that, unfortunately, did not make it through the 2008 recession. Thus, Ashley and Shannon were already familiar with the risks and rewards of maintaining a business. One big nagging issue remained; neither one of them were potters. Well, not yet, anyway.

### POTTER AND CHIEF OF EVERYTHING

Deciding that the positives outweighed the negatives, they took the leap. They traded in their city slicker lives in Chicago and purchased a little functional pottery operation in a bucolic setting in rural Wisconsin. They informed their family and friends, who were supportive (though they thought the pair were a little nuts).

Importantly, the two women made a deal with the original owner that she would stick around long enough for them to "learn the quirks." She agreed to teach them all the idiosyncrasies of the place, specifically the temperamental kiln's likes and dislikes. By the time the business transfer, aka apprenticeship with Ahlgren was over, Ashley was a professional potter, Shannon was a COE (Chief of Everything), and their family and friends were starting to come around.

As an out lesbian couple, they also speak fondly of the area's openness. They credit the history of the area, which has attracted a diversity of brilliant artists and thinkers to Spring Green since Frank Lloyd Wright built Taliesin there more than a hundred years ago.

These days Wilson Creek Pottery has a brick-and-mortar store they keep open. They have one employee, their production assistant, Katie, and call themselves a tight-knit trio. They continue to create Wilson Creek Pottery's traditional products while adding some new pieces and glazes. Their color palate and forms are the visual equivalent of comfort food: warm and satisfying. You can come into the store any day to buy retail, or wait for their ordering windows to place orders online for handmade dishes in farmhouse white, pot kettle black, patina, Van Gogh, harvest gold, jack straw, wildflower, or a tricolor option.

If you've ever had a cup of coffee in one of their mugs at Spring Green's General Store, you know there is a timeless sturdiness to their work. It's almost as if their pottery has the same honest, earthy, practical, kind-hearted, Deadhead vibes that they and their community value. Each plate, mug, or vase promises to be the right vessel to hold the everyday things that ground you: your morning coffee, bacon and eggs, the flowers you grew in your garden, your grandparent's rolling pin, a cherry pie.

### SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

The couple's influence extends beyond the walls of their studio. Over the years, they have played a pivotal role in their community. Shannon initiated and organized the painting of Center Stage, a large-scale trompe l'oeil mural in downtown Spring Green, created by her artist friend Eric Lee (E. Lee). When asked what the mural is about she explained that it celebrates, "the artistic vibrancy and natural beauty of the area." She continued, "The intention was to celebrate the community, and the community has an open heart to art. It was really beautiful how he took the arts and nature and highlighted and intertwined them."

Their civic involvement is not all arts related. As an out lesbian couple, engaged to be married, and coming up on 15 years of partnership, they also speak fondly of the area's openness and inclusiveness.



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They credit the history of the area, which has attracted a diversity of brilliant artists and thinkers to Spring Green since Frank Lloyd Wright built Taliesin there more than a hundred years ago. They mentioned the longstanding influence of American Players Theater. They also love attending concerts at the Shitty Barn. They are one of many creative sector entrepreneurs in the area who are committed to the tradition of rich and diverse cultural cross-pollination.

Selena Warsaw-Lane, orchardist, culinary creator, and owner of The Frozen Local, a store whose mission is to sell “locally sourced treats while supporting our community of small farms and artisan producers,” describing the women’s work as “unique, hand-crafted, exemplary pieces of art.” Warsaw-Lane added, “We all feel very blessed to have such amazing creatives who can support each other.”

“Supporting each other” seems to be a core value of the region. The way Ashley and Shannon describe it, it sounds like the simple practice of being neighborly. They rely upon the generosity of their neighbors routinely, and were especially reliant on the kind-heartedness of

strangers when they were new to the area and were less self-sufficient when it came to tasks like unearthing trees and fixing things around their property. Their neighbors were generous with their time and knowledge. According to Ashley and Shannon, the sharing of resources and ethic of care and responsibility for one another is holding out in spite of the country’s political and religious divisiveness.

Several years ago, for example, a gay neighbor whose lawn mower died rode down to their place on his four-wheeler to ask to borrow their mower. Shannon followed him back up the road on their tractor mower to lend it to him. Another neighbor, seeing them following each other up the road, asked what was going on. Shannon quipped that it was “the world’s littlest gay pride parade.” The idea stuck, and for the next four years, prior to COVID, the folks in their valley celebrated the area’s LGBTQ diversity and inclusion annually by holding the The Biggest Little LGBTQ Pride Parade in the World.

The parade route started at Wilson Creek Pottery and extended up the county highway about a quarter mile to their gay neighbor’s home. The

event appears to have included sharing candy and beaded necklaces with a host of cisgender and heterosexual neighbors. But the neighbors weren’t just spectators in lawn chairs perched along the parade route cheering on the valley’s four queer marchers and Ashley and Shannon’s dog, Mildred. “Spectating was available, but 95% of the attendees joined the parade,” they said. They also boasted that the Biggest Little LGBTQ Pride Parade in the World included drag performances in addition to the tractors.

#### CONTINUING A LEGACY

Wilson Creek Pottery is the couple’s home, studio, and retail space. Their business is not just about creating beautiful stoneware, it is about preserving a legacy that resonates with their values of environmental sustainability and hard work. People have found ceramic shards from woodland Indians dating to 1000 AD in the valley, establishing that potters have been there for a very long time. Ashley and Shannon feel a connection to that ancient heritage. They take pride in knowing that though they have been there a relatively short time in the long span of the area’s history they are part of continuing the legacy.

People have found ceramic shards from woodland Indians dating to 1000 AD in the valley, establishing that potters have been there for a very long time.

Their products, born of earth, water, and fire, are not just beautiful objects; they are symbols of nature’s dynamic beauty. Ashley uses her hands to shape the clay, but then she lets go and the kiln’s powerful fire takes over. She likens it to a conversation. Fire is its own capricious character in this story, and each unique piece mirrors the fire’s moods and energy.

This year, as they celebrate Wilson Creek’s 50th anniversary, the couple’s commitment to craft and community stands stronger than ever. For a little over the last decade, Ashley and Shannon have been at the helm of the company. Like the farmers around them, their work follows the same seasons. Pre-pandemic, they spent much of the summer producing inventory and taking it on the road to sell at arts and craft fairs. Like many others, they were hit hard by the economic uncertainty of the pandemic, and like many others, they adapted through online sales. They also used that time to write and receive a grant from River Valley Arts that helped them be able to afford to drive across the country to purchase another kiln so that Wilson Creek Pottery can continue to grow slowly and steadily for the next 50 years.

As we look back at its 50-year history, Wilson Creek Pottery is more than a story of a small stoneware business. It is a testament to the power of a shared dream and a symbol of the power and importance of kindness and inclusion. Ashley and Shannon use the tagline, “Shared across generations, for generations” to describe their wares. The narrative they have woven around their lives and their pottery is one of love, inclusivity, neighborliness, and perseverance.

And in that spirit, this September, Wilson Creek Pottery will celebrate 50 years of being in business—and we are all invited to their golden anniversary celebration. On Saturday, September 30, they will have an open house complete with tours, demos, and a toast. Then there will be a venue change to Homecoming, a local restaurant, for food followed by a silent disco, of course. (For more information, see their social media.) ■



**KARIN WOLF** is an arts administrator, freelance arts writer, and consultant. She likes to get deep and try to understand complex art, people, and ideas. Writing about them is her favorite way to do so. She has a M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and undergraduate degrees in History, History of Cultures, and Afro-American History.



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Kathy at home, focusing on rest now.

# The Warrior Advocate

Longtime anti-violence activist and survivor advocate **Kathy Flores** reflects on a life of service, mentoring the next generation of leaders, and embracing softness and rest.

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**IF YOU'D TOLD** Kathy Flores five years ago that she'd be spending most of her days at home, resting, tending to her small garden, spending time with her daughters and grandkids, and wrangling a naughty but adorable rescue pup, she probably wouldn't have believed it.

"Slowing down" was not part of Kathy's vocabulary or work ethic for most of her life. The Appleton resident and longtime advocate and activist has become a familiar and trusted face in both LGBTQ and intimate partner/domestic violence (IPV) circles in Wisconsin over the

past two decades. During that time, she's worn many hats, helped create vital policies and training to better serve survivors and LGBTQ people generally, put her neck out to fight for equal rights, and driven more miles across the state than most.

These days, however, Kathy's mental and physical health have told her in no uncertain terms that the time has come to embrace a more relaxed pace. The transition hasn't always been easy, but she admits that it's been a good one.

"My first instinct is to act," Kathy says during an interview over her kitchen table on a sunny summer day. "But I needed to lay down my sword. I'm still involved when and how I can be, but it's more through providing emotional support and advice to those still in the field."

Allowing for rest and small moments of joy have become her guiding principles in this new chapter of life. Kathy stepped down as the anti-violence program director for Diverse & Resilient this spring, after serving in that role for seven years. It was, she says, a decision her body made for her. Worsening symptoms from MS diagnosed in 2007, plus other health issues, pushed her to exhaustion.

Instead of working 70- or 80-hour weeks, driving across the state to work with organizers and survivors, the mom of three adult daughters is spending the time with them that she says she largely missed as a young,

single, working mother. And there's Katie the dog to keep up with, too, an affectionate and squirmy rescue Yorkie taken in by Kathy and her spouse, Zephyr.

There's plenty to reflect on and be proud of, in addition to looking forward to what comes next. And Kathy emphasizes the importance of supporting the next generation of leadership.

"It's time for a younger, browner, blacker, more queer and trans generation to lead," she says. "We all better be thinking about succession."

## THE BIGGEST ALLIES

Born in Montana to a white dad and Mexican mother, Kathy found her early life marked by change. The family moved first to Texas, then to southern California where her father "followed the call" and began his ministry as an independent fundamentalist Baptist, and finally to Michigan after her father "followed the call" to lead his own church and eventually Christian School.

"It was because he said the other Baptists were too liberal, including the Southern Baptists," she notes wryly.

Kathy dutifully met her father's expectations, embracing his evangelical faith and, she admits ruefully now, parroting the same hellfire and brimstone lines and participating in book and record-burning events led by his churches. The same fervor and dedication she'd later bring to her far more progressive advocacy work was apparent in those early days, she says. But cracks in her adherence to her father's ideology appeared early.

"I tried out for and got onto the cheerleading squad in high school," Kathy remembers, "and was promptly kicked off for refusing to sign the purity pledge. For me, it had nothing to do with sex, but was because I didn't want to go along with the ban on listening to rock and roll."

She also had inklings of her own queerness early on. There was a first kiss with a best friend when she was 10 years old, something she later tearfully repented for at one of countless tent revivals. It was, her father said, the "only sin called an abomination in the Bible" and, therefore, the very worst. Unforgivable, even. Kathy internalized a deep homophobia and fear that would see her through three marriages to men, two of whom ended up being abusive. The first was a boy she began dating at 12, only to end up pregnant at 17.

"My first instinct is to act," Kathy says during an interview over her kitchen table on a sunny summer day. "But I needed to lay down my sword. I'm still involved when and how I can be, but it's more through providing emotional support and advice to those still in the field."

"First of all I wasn't allowed to have sex," Kathy says, "but then my mom had the nerve to say, 'Well didn't you use birth control?'" Of course, it had never been discussed.

She worked as a waitress and struggled to make ends meet, and by the time she got out of her first marriage at 21, Kathy decided it was time to go back to school and start work on building a career that could support her and her children. She went to Fox Valley Technical College and came out with a job at the Kimberly Clark Corporation doing administrative work. It was there that she first joined what were then called employee networks (now employee resource groups), including the Gay, Latin American, and African American Networks. It was, she says, an eye-opening experience.

"I was most heavily involved in the African American Network. I initially showed up because they needed a secretary," she remembers. "So I walked into the first meeting and it's me, sitting at a table with Black

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folks, and they're wondering what the heck I'm doing there. And I'm like, 'I wanna help!' But I didn't have a clue about race relations."

Kathy credits the Black women in the group for kickstarting her anti-racist and DEI journey. She acknowledges that they took a chance on a young, naive, white-presenting person with a lot of her own internalized racism. The women became dear friends over the years that followed.

"My entire view on race and racism is shaped by Black women. Dr. Sabrina Robbins and Dr. Bola Delano-Oriaran in particular taught me how to be an ally to Black people. And they consider themselves church ladies, they weren't always knowledgeable on LGBTQ issues, but I stayed with them because they stayed with me, and now they are my allies. They were able to help me learn about Blackness, and later on I was able to help them learn about queerness. If I hadn't had them take me under their wing I don't know that I would have gotten it. They took the time to be like, 'You're fucking up.' That's a gift."

The mentorship and the community helped open her eyes to what Kathy saw was serious racial discrimination in the Fox Valley. While they worked to improve recruitment processes at Kimberly Clark, she noted how little was being done on retention.

"We're not doing anything to make people's lives better once they get here," she reflects. "And even if we do that within the corporation, we have this whole community to deal with."

It prompted her to get involved in community activism, volunteering to do work around anti-racism and DEI, including on LGBTQ issues.

"I was probably the biggest 'straight ally,' Kathy says with a laugh. "In fact, I had a lesbian friend who, when I finally came out years later, said, 'Oh no, we lost our biggest straight ally!'"

It was just the beginning of what would become her life's work.

#### LEARNING ALONG THE WAY

It was also during her stint at technical college that Kathy first got interested in studying and then speaking up about domestic violence. She had experienced it herself. After volunteering for a sexual abuse support group, in 2000 Kathy became the first director of Harmony Cafe in Appleton, a peaceful place for celebrating diversity. Even before the organization had its own physical space, she helped cultivate a safe and supportive environment for queer and transgender young people to hang out and have art and music-related events.

Shortly thereafter, in 2002, she joined a local program providing shelter and support for survivors of domestic abuse. It was at this shelter she met Beth Schnorr, her boss and someone who became a beloved mentor.

"Beth taught me how to put survivors at the center of all of our work within the DV movement," says Kathy. "Many long-term DV/SA directors and advocates can get smug in their knowledge of violence, but Beth instilled in me that survivors, not advocates or academics, are the experts on their lives. Beth was very supportive of the LGBTQ IPV work I did in Appleton and throughout the state. She sat in on community meetings and showed up at LGBTQ rallies and presentations to show support from the top of the organization. I doubt there would be a Diverse & Resilient IVP program without the influence of Beth."

In the domestic and sexual violence movement, Kathy was able to bring her DEI lens to the work: She noted that there were no services for transgender women or gay men dealing with intimate partner violence. There was little awareness generally at the time about IPV among queer and trans people, and Kathy knew something needed to be done. She wrote one of the first model policies for shelters to help them offer competent care for the LGBTQ+ community, followed by helping to form a committee that developed outreach and training for shelters across the state interested in the work.

There was plenty of learning from mistakes and an evolution of her



Kathy and Zephyr at home.

"Along comes this little volunteer wearing overalls and smelling of patchouli and sawdust," Kathy remembers with a knowing smile. "My attraction went through the roof. This person came in and started calling me 'boss lady.' That's how I came out. It was because of Zephyr."

own understanding of gender and sexuality along the way, Kathy says. "The original model policy is, in retrospect, pretty cringy," she notes. "It was a start, but at the time we wrote things like, 'If someone identifies as their gender 24 hours a day then they belong in the shelter that corresponds.' And I quickly learned that, especially for many of the trans women who came to us, it wasn't safe for them to be out at work or at home. It was impossible for them to meet that expectation."

She quickly realized that true progress could only be made by listening to and centering the people most impacted.

Furthering that work, Kathy founded the Fox Valley LGBTQ Anti-Violence Project in collaboration with Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs, Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services, Reach Counseling, and the Sexual Assault Crisis Center.

Long days of driving across the state to lead training for various shelters and IPV groups followed. Kathy shakes her head when she thinks about the time and energy she used to put into the work, but she wouldn't have had it any other way.

#### A CONSTITUTIONAL COLLISION

It was during this era that what Kathy refers to as The Collision happened. It was 2004 and Harbor House needed their website updated.

"Along comes this little volunteer wearing overalls and smelling of

patchouli and sawdust," Kathy remembers with a knowing smile. "My attraction went through the roof. This person came in and started calling me 'boss lady.' That's how I came out. It was because of Zephyr."

Kathy was just getting out of a straight marriage and Zephyr had just gotten sober. The timing wasn't perfect but the sparks were very real. Six weeks after getting together, they decided to step back and become 'just friends' instead. That lasted two years before they coupled back up.

Nearly 20 years later, Kathy and Zephyr have weathered a wide variety of stormy and calm seas together. There was the onset of Kathy's MS symptoms just three months into their relationship, and five months into it, Kathy was diagnosed with an aneurysm, followed by numerous doctor and hospital visits to deal with that and a pulmonary embolism developed after a routine hysterectomy. Before all of this medical drama was the first date that should have derailed the whole relationship.

"We went to see the movie 'Troy.' I didn't know at the time that Zephyr couldn't handle much violence. And then afterwards we were at dinner, and I didn't know how to be with anyone other than cis men, didn't know how to give compliments, and Zephyr at the time would have used 'genderqueer' or 'genderfuck' to describe themselves. But I said, 'You have such nice dainty hands.' And Zephyr appeared offended, but I didn't get it. I was clueless."

She is, in retrospect, amazed that she got a second date, let alone the long-term relationship that has been an anchor for her ever since. Even getting to that point had been a hard-won victory after years spent working through religious conditioning, bad marriages, and even worse professional advice.

"When I met my third husband—a sweetheart, he was a great guy—when he proposed to me I said, 'I don't know if I should get married because I think I'm a lesbian.' We were only married for five years. During that time we went to see a therapist—who's still practicing to-

day—and they wrote it off by saying, 'Well, Kathy just loves things that are 'taboo' and being a lesbian is taboo.'"

The therapist recommended incorporating lesbian pornography into their relationship. Needless to say, that didn't save the marriage.

With Zephyr, everything felt right but the world threw different challenges at them. For the first time, Kathy was facing down discrimination in the form of homophobia—both on the personal and political level. Medical discrimination led her to realize that, despite having a living will, there was no legal guarantee that Zephyr would be allowed access to Kathy during a medical emergency, nor would Kathy be able to prevent blood family from making decisions about arrangements if she were to die. It was well before gay marriage was nationally legalized.

In 2009, then Governor Jim Doyle added the domestic partnership registry in his budget. Seeing the chance to make her voice heard and emphasize the importance of such rights, Kathy wrote a letter of support to Doyle and copied the LGBTQ advocacy organization Fair Wisconsin on the missive. It was how she found herself testifying before the Joint Finance Committee, which was broadcast on local television and radio stations. Around this time, Kathy drove home from work to find that anti-LGBTQ pamphlets had been left blanketing her neighborhood.

In response, Kathy wrote to friends and asked them to donate to Fair Wisconsin in the name of the hate group responsible for the pamphlets. The actions won the couple a Leadership Award from Fair Wisconsin. When the registry was later challenged in court by perpetual anti-LGBTQ gadfly Juliane Appling and her Wisconsin Family Action hate group, Kathy and Zephyr stepped up as one of five couples who served as intervening defenders in the case. The registry was ruled constitutional in 2011, thanks in part to their efforts.

Not everything has been a political whirlwind in their relationship, though. Kathy and Zephyr have settled into the role of grandparents

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Kathy with her sisters and parents.



Kathy, while young and anchored in religion.



Kathy at 17 with her first child.

more than ever. Zephyr, who in the beginning of their relationship was pretty clear they never wanted children, has become an “absolutely adorable, loving grandparent” to their four grandchildren, Kathy says.

The two can also frequently be found tooling around their neighborhood in Appleton—Kathy on her mobility scooter, Zephyr on their bike. They stop at local parks and restaurants, determined to enjoy every moment of nice weather they’re afforded.

Since 2014, Kathy says, they’ve been practicing daily gratitude with each other and have yet to miss a day to tell the other something that they are grateful for in the other.

**PUSHING THE PARADIGM**

The year 2009 proved to be big for Kathy all around. Feeling like it was time for professional change, Kathy was looking for a sign. It came when a work vision board she’d created suddenly fell off the wall and crashed to the ground. And then a member of the mayor’s African American Advisory Committee called and told her about a new job with the City of Appleton that seemed like a perfect fit.

Then-mayor Tim Hanna was looking to hire someone to become the city’s next Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator. During the hiring hearing, he noted that he wanted “someone to challenge the status quo.” Kathy knew she was right for the job.

“Everybody told me, ‘He’s a Republican!’” she remembers. “I have yet to see evidence of that. Everything I brought to him he said yes, go do it.” That ended up including things like refugee resettlement, protections for transgender people in housing and employment, and domestic partner benefits for city employees. But while all of those initiatives eventually passed into law and/or action, they didn’t come without a fight.

“I was dealing with all of my health issues and a very hostile environment for being a queer diversity and inclusion coordinator,” Kathy says. Her job was threatened three separate times, as the city council debated whether or not to keep it during budget hearings. Every time she did anything the conservatives on the council didn’t like, they let her know it.

“I was under fire all the time. I helped lead some of the work around passing domestic partner protections within the workplace, and that battle got my job on the chopping block. One alderperson, Mike Smith, was

overheard saying, ‘Well this position’s gotten a little too gay.’”

The next battle resulted from something Kathy had intended as an easy win for the council. Local businesses had been requesting some kind of official campaign around inclusion. Kathy worked to create one. It would have made available stickers for businesses to put in windows simply to indicate that they were safe spaces for and inclusive of all people.

“You would have thought I was asking them to put a Satanic symbol up,” Kathy says of the reaction she got from the council. “They tore me to shreds. I was so naive. This was in 2011, it was my first time really going before the council and having to answer questions. I wasn’t prepared.”

The campaign never made it out of committee.

Conversely, her work with Fair Wisconsin to make Appleton the third city in the state to add protections for transgender people flew largely under the radar. The city council passed housing and employment protections for gender identity with little fuss, especially when compared to the outrage that cropped up around the domestic partner benefits.

“It was so absurd,” Kathy adds. “In those years, three times, we had the whole community show up at the budget debates, and I always fought to save the position. We always won. But it was so political, and it was because we were queer and we were doing queer work. I think it was probably the most visible position I’ve ever been in and there’s a point where I probably had 30 open records requests trying to prove my big gay agenda. And I’m like, I’m not lying about it! I have a gay agenda. I also have a pro-immigrant agenda. I’m the Diversity Coordinator! I’m pro-marginalized people.”

“Other people at 56 do not identify as an elder, but I do,” she says. “I strongly identify as a mother and a grandmother, that’s part of my identity. In the movement I feel like I’m mother/grandmother, too. There’s a lot of responsibility that comes with that, including knowing when it’s time to step back so others can step forward.”

After supporting local Black Lives Matter protests on her own time as a private citizen, Kathy says, the city’s Human Resources and Police Departments essentially black-listed her. They went behind her back to hire an outside consultant to do DEI training so that Kathy wasn’t the one leading it. She couldn’t get a raise. Then, the Pulse shooting happened.

“I just said, ‘fuck everything.’” After years spent bending over backwards to keep her LGBTQ activism and her job separate, Kathy organized a vigil while on work time.

“A lot of the work we were doing [at the city], it felt like it was to check a box and to make white people feel good. That’s not what I’m about,” she says.

**UNANTICIPATED NEED**

Intersectionality, anti-racism, and community care are at the core of all Kathy’s work. It’s what ultimately drew her to take a job as the anti-violence coordinator at Diverse & Resilient in 2016. Initially, her role was focused solely on starting a statewide LGBTQ “warm line” for survivors. It had her traveling the state to find pockets of LGBTQ people organizing, “unicorns in the woods,” as she calls them.

It became very clear very quickly that there was much more need than anticipated. In 2018, she applied for and got a grant to help open a second D&R office in Appleton and Milwaukee. Between the Appleton and Milwaukee offices, there are six staff members serving survivors of violence, although Kathy says more still are needed.

“They’re serving over 200 survivors alone in northeast Wisconsin.”

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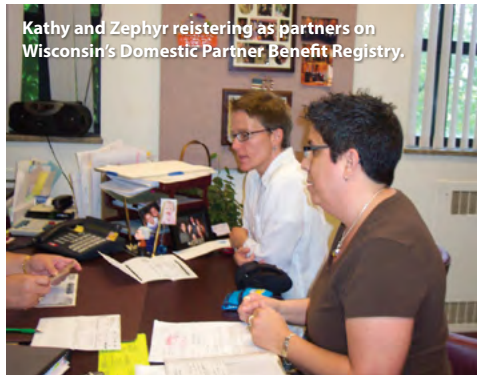
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That's the numbers we'd been looking at for the statewide warm line. We thought we'd get a couple hundred calls a year for the entire state."

Nick Ross and Kathy opened the office in December of 2019. It was a hectic time. Kathy recalls working from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. every day, frequently traveling the state.

"I didn't have rest, I didn't have any kind of life. I was all about the advocacy. I trained Nick to be the same way. We'd just be go-go-go. And then the pandemic hit."

The way they worked had to change. But calls to the warm line, she says, quadrupled. They were hearing from young people sheltering in place with abusive, often homophobic and transphobic parents. It wasn't just high schoolers, either, but also included droves of college students who'd been forced to return home and often go back into the closet.

At the same time, another influx of LGBTQ youth needing support came when Goodwill shut down its 25-year-old LGBTQ Partnership and fired the staff. The combination meant that the Appleton D&R staff were already underwater to meet all the needs of the community. Kathy scrambled to do some budget amendments and drummed up support from groups like the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. Those efforts paid off. The money meant they were able to hire the staff who'd been fired from the Goodwill program. Reiko Ramos began as a part-time advocate but quickly moved to full-time, and has since stepped into the role that Kathy left, as the Anti-Violence Program Director.

The enormous need for youth services also inspired Kathy and her fellow advocates Reiko and Nick to launch Room to Be Youth, programming aimed specifically at supporting the influx of LGBTQ young people in need. Since then, the program has grown to include support groups for both high school- and middle school-aged young people, plus a new QTBIPOC group coming this fall, as well as the overall Room to Be Safe Thursday night group aimed at adults.

Meanwhile, as the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding, a different debilitating illness struck Kathy down. She was diagnosed with Influenza B and, because her other autoimmune diseases kicked into overdrive, she spent five months in bed. Working.

"I worked in my bed," she says. "The flu kicked my MS into something far more serious. I kind of hobbled along for the rest of that year."

The effects of that illness stayed with her for a long time. In 2021, just when the Appleton office was preparing to re-open, Kathy began to have breathing issues that landed her in the emergency room. She tried to switch to part-time work, but says that she was back up to 40-plus hour weeks after just a month.

Other MS symptoms began to get more serious during that time, and the treatments weren't sustainable. Her doctor told her the MS had progressed from what's called a relapsing/remitting form of the disease and moved into secondary progressive. It means, she says, "you don't get better." While she's still able to walk, sometimes with a cane and sometimes without, she's had to do a major reassessment of how much

work and stress she could afford to put on her body.

Her doctor recommended she take six weeks off, something she'd never done in her life. But that time off proved crucial. Kathy learned to meditate and be in-the-moment. She felt better, but knew when she went back to work that she still wasn't well.

"My disability was overtaking my body," Kathy says. "Cognitively I wasn't as sharp. I was missing math stuff that I would have never missed on a grant before." She knew almost immediately that she needed to quit.

#### CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATION AND SUCCESSION

Having time to rest has meant time to reflect as well. Initially, Kathy worried that she wouldn't know how to define herself if she was no longer an advocate, no longer working long hours to support survivors and push better policy and protest.

"But it was really time," she says now. "And my body reacted almost immediately." She says her physical health actually got worse when she stepped down. Her body is "just finally letting go," she thinks. Things have leveled out a little since, but it's still early days. In typical Kathy fashion, she's determined to be as good at resting as she was at working.

Gardening, meditating, resting, and being a parent and grandparent have largely become the focus of her days. Still, she can't help but stay tuned into the movement, lending what support she can in a new, more behind-the-scenes capacity.

**When the registry was later challenged in court by perpetual anti-LGBTQ gadfly Juliane Appling and her Wisconsin Family Action hate group, Kathy and Zephyr stepped up as one of five couples who served as intervening defenders in the case. The registry was ruled constitutional in 2011, thanks in part to their efforts.**

"Where I'm at now, my entire life has been with a sword in my hand. I couldn't lay the sword down if I was in the workplace. I tried. Part of me leaving was acknowledging that I need to lay the sword down and rest."

Local queer, trans, and BIPOC leaders still find their way to Kathy's house for conversation, advice, and support. "That I have some energy for, but I don't have energy for much more. That feels much calmer to me, to be able to be that person, let me get you a cup of tea, sit down, let's talk about, how can I support you?"

Kathy turns to the notion of succession, noting that she believes it's time for a new generation to take the lead. A presentation by the poet and activist adrienne marie brown especially caught her attention.

"She talked about how she had to step down from activism for a while and how it allowed other people to step up," Kathy relates. "What I know, in BIPOC and queer and trans orgs, is we better be thinking

about succession because this work will burn you the fuck out. It will lay you flat. So if you aren't mentoring, if you're too self-absorbed in this work...in the last few years I've really put intentional focus on training up the next generation to lead the anti-violence movement."

That becomes especially pertinent when she reflects on the more difficult things she's learned and encountered on her journey. Specifically, racism and white supremacy within the DVSA community, which is still all-too prevalent. It is another part of the equation that Kathy says led to her own burnout.

"The other thing I was dealing with, and this is the heartbreaking thing—because of my whiteness, my role has always been to challenge white people," Kathy says. "My privilege means that I should do that. But at the same time it's the most exhausting shit to be challenging white people. When I got deep in the director's circle of the DVSA movement, the racism of white women in this movement surprised even me. I feel naive even today saying I did not know, I did not really witness it as harshly as I did until the last couple of years."

She cites several examples of how this has played out in front of her eyes. Her perceived whiteness has often meant that other white people will say and do things in front of her that they might not do in front of others. But some of it has also happened right out in the open and been aimed particularly at BIPOC people who take over as directors and/or found and lead their own, culturally specific organizations.

"People would say, 'Why are we talking about race, what does this have to do with domestic violence? Why don't we just get back to DV?'" Kathy says. "It was so frustrating. Most of my job in the past two years was addressing racism with these white directors and checking them and challenging them, trying to be that aspiring ally to Black and brown folks. And to remind them of how all violence is linked to racism and oppression."

Kathy acknowledges several times during the conversation that her own anti-racism journey has been long and filled with mistakes and missteps. She has enormous patience and grace for people who make a good-faith effort to acknowledge where they mess up and try to do better. "We're all swimming in this pool of white supremacy," she adds.

But there was a flip side to the role she took on, and it also took a toll.

"I deal with and acknowledge my privilege, and yet racism has also impacted me directly," she says. "I was aligned with the BIPOC directors, they asked me to be in those meetings, and sometimes it was to be that voice to go deal with the white people who were out of hand. That has been my role for a long time. I take it seriously, but it also worn me down because there's this other part of my identity that exists. My Mexican identity. I'm still hearing anti-immigrant, racist shit, you know?"

Kathy notes that it's the most disappointing to hear and see racism coming from white people who consider themselves to be feminists. Part of the issue is also wrapped up in a scarcity mindset, she says, that meant when funding started going to a more diverse array of organizations, especially those that are by and for Black and brown folks. "Some white women started losing their shit and viewing BIPOC orgs as competitors rather than collaborators."

There are, she notes, many great allies within the community. Many of them came from causing harm and getting called in, getting "checked and checked again" until they learned and grew and started doing the work. There are also many more Black and brown leaders coming up in the movement, something that's needed and overdue but still met with backlash, Kathy says.

I know my whiteness gets me in the door and they can hear it from me better," Kathy says. "That pissed me off, that a Black woman can't say things in the same way I say them without pushback. It opened my eyes. And with my health, the stress of it just tanked me."

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The stress wasn't limited to racism within the movement, either. There have been far too many times that people Kathy worked with and saw as friends and allies were revealed to have caused enormous harm and then refused to take accountability for it. Those have been some of the most difficult and heartbreaking episodes in her life, she says.

"One of my biggest pains in the movement is that I have been visibly friends with men and non-binary folks who have caused sexual harm to others," Kathy says. "As their friend, I've tried to help—you did this shitty thing, and I'm a sexual assault advocate, I wanna help you. But there has never been a man who has accepted my help. I've had six friends that I've lost who've caused deep harm to mostly women, yet don't want to own any of it. That's where I have to cut them out of my life."

She calls it one of her biggest regrets in life to have been "so publicly aligned with somebody who has caused harm, and I didn't see the red flags early on." Kathy acknowledges that such thinking puts the onus of someone else's behavior on her, but it still feels heavy and complicated.

"It breaks my heart to know that survivors saw me close to anybody that was causing harm that I didn't know about," she adds. "Once I knew about it, I still wanted to help those individuals not cause harm anymore but they never wanted that help."

And there is a real need for support for people who have caused harm who do want to make amends and change, Kathy notes. In progressive movements, there's often too much willingness to tear people apart and



Kathy with Dr. Bola Delano-Orarain and Dr. Sabrina Robins

**"My entire view on race and racism is shaped by Black women. They were able to help me learn about Blackness, and later on I was able to help them learn about queerness. If I hadn't had them take me under their wing I don't know that I would have gotten it. They took the time to be like, 'You're fucking up.' That's a gift."**

casting them out for even much smaller missteps and harms. Kathy admits to having gone through many phases herself where she was too rooted in hardness and judgment instead of grace. These days, she finds there's a healthier middle ground that provides a way forward.

"For me, I'm gonna give you grace if you come to me and say, 'Man, I fucked up.' Because you can recover from that, but you have to have accountability. And accountability has to be survivor-driven. It might mean you can't recover with that person that you hurt. It's not their job. Like if you did something racist, it's not that Black person's job to forgive you. But it's your job to learn and change and move on and grow from it. I have grace for that. I don't have grace for people who go, 'That's not racist, no I'm not being racist.' I get to the point of, 'I am done, I'm cutting you out.' It really comes down to, are you willing to own your shit?" Kathy adds. "And I will sit with you in the shit if you're willing to do the work."

#### EMBRACING A LEGACY MINDSET

Change is inevitable. Kathy is doing her best to lean into this new, less hectic stage of her life, which she happily refers to as her "crone phase." She acknowledges that, now more than ever, she doesn't know how many years she has left and wants to make the most of them in a way that's more inwardly focused on her own healing and time with family.

That doesn't come without challenges, of course. She wouldn't be who she is if it was easy for Kathy to sit still for very long.

"I still feel guilty every time I spend half a day in bed," she says. But the MS doesn't give her much choice, and so Kathy is learning to be as okay with that as she can be. It's meant finding ways to fend off feeling

isolated, to maintain friendships with people who are still actively in the movement despite having less in common and less time together. Her friend circle, she says, has gotten smaller but tighter. She's gone from being a social butterfly, someone who loved working 60–70 hour weeks, to someone who is learning how to embrace rest and stillness.

Kathy enjoys becoming a queer elder, which she laughs and says several young people have now called her just that.

"Other people at 56 do not identify as an elder, but I do," she says. "I strongly identify as a mother and a grandmother, that's part of my identity. In the movement I feel like I'm mother/grandmother, too. There's a lot of responsibility that comes with that, including knowing when it's time to step back so others can step forward."

She refers to herself as "legacy minded," noting that she's had just about every experience there is in DVSA work and wants to pass on any wisdom or lessons learned to the next bunch of advocates for the future. It's a way to stay involved while still honoring this newer, slower pace and phase of her life.

"It's this interesting place to be such a dominant, hard-nosed figure... but also have this fragility. So I'm trying to lean into the fragility of life a little bit more. That means holding my relationships more fragile, holding my life a little more fragile."

In a life filled with lessons about privilege, Kathy recognizes that, while she still has it in certain areas, she's lost it in others where she once had it. Her physical abilities, for one. But she sees it as an important lesson, one that we all eventually have to learn.

And there are so many things to look forward to—new ways of doing and thinking about things. Kathy is particularly interested in how she can help others embrace the softness she's been learning to

welcome into her life. It's something she's worked on a lot in therapy over the past several years, to the point that she says even her bedding and her sweaters are all extra soft.

"The next direction for me might be to help warrior advocates learn how to soften," she says. She wants to do for others what her own mentors did for her in helping her find her confidence and her footing in the work. Once again, she highlights her past boss and mentor Beth Schnorr.

"I remember being terrified the first time I had to present when I was leading community education with Harbor House," Kathy says. "But Beth came to my first presentation, and she was my biggest cheerleader. Now I want to be that person in the audience saying 'yes, you're doing great.' I want to make room and make sure Reiko, Nick, Keira, Passion, and Andrew—everybody at D&R—are able to have that. Whatever I can do to support them and be their biggest cheerleader."

Right this minute, sitting in her kitchen with a cuddly, soft Yorkie curled up on the floor next to her, all Kathy knows for sure is that she's content to "heal a little bit and rest."

And while there are things that are constantly happening in the community that call to her to get involved, she reminds herself that she's done so much and that it's time, at last, to watch and cheer on new people as they take the baton and run. ■

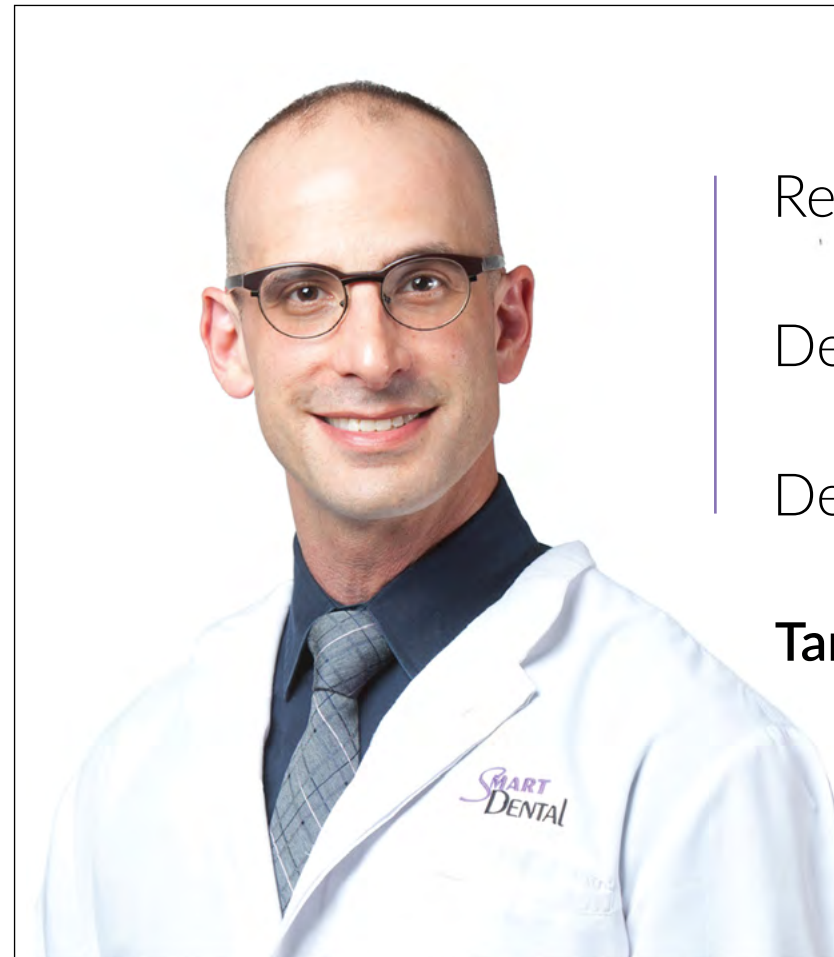


**EMILY MILLS** is the former editor of and a current board member for *Our Lives* magazine. She is a writer, musician, photographer, and nature lover currently working for a non-profit environmental organization where she sometimes gets to help set (planned) fires. Emily lives in Madison with her partners and two small dogs.

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**QUEER PEOPLE** have long contributed enormously to the fabric of our community through work that adds texture, vibrancy, and contemplation to our lives. To honor those creative efforts locally, below is our third annual survey of LGBTQ artists in the greater Madison and Milwaukee area.

As always, this is by no means a completely comprehensive list. We reached out to our various networks for names and resources and did our best to contact each artist for updates. Entries are made through a form where participants are free to choose a category, self identify, and provide a description in their own words.

Thank you to everyone who participated and shared the form with their networks. We hope to continue building on this in future years, so feel free to reach out with recommendations at [contact@ourliveswisconsin.com](mailto:contact@ourliveswisconsin.com).

#### PERFORMING ARTISTS: BURLESQUE / DRAG

**Amethyst Von Trollenburg** | [instagram.com/amethystvt](https://www.instagram.com/amethystvt) | A drag and burlesque entertainer known as the Seven Foot Siren. She is a former Miss Madison Pride and is known for her sultry demeanor and vocal talent.

**Anita Spanx** | [instagram.com/spanx\\_me](https://www.instagram.com/spanx_me) | A creative queen who wants to make you laugh. She loves to bring you characters, concepts, and absolute buffoonery!

**Anya K. Thunderkat** | [instagram.com/theonlyanyaknees](https://www.instagram.com/theonlyanyaknees) | Madison-based artist performing for more than five years, show director at FIVE Nightclub and This Is It! in Milwaukee, and former Miss Hamburger Mary's MKE.

**Bianca Lynn Breeze** | [linktr.ee/blbreeze](https://www.linktr.ee/blbreeze) | Bianca has loved entertaining and educating others through drag since 2012. She owns her own event management company, BLB Productions, hosting Bingo, Brunch, Evening Shows, and Private Events.

**Bryanna Banx\$** | [facebook.com/bryannabanxs](https://www.facebook.com/bryannabanxs) | Former Miss Club Wisconsin Bryanna Banx\$ has been in the industry for nearly two decades and is still blessed to be able to continue emceeing, performing, and organizing events all over the state.

**Cass Marie Domino** | [@theecassmarie](https://www.instagram.com/theecassmarie) | Fabulous at 50 and performing for more than 30 years, Cass is a former Miss Gay Madison Elite and the first trans woman to win the National Entertainer Of The Year Femme pageant. She is an advocate for the trans community as well as for people like her who live with HIV.

**Cynthia Mooseknuckle** | [cynthiamooseknuckle.com](https://www.cynthiamooseknuckle.com) | Known as the Queen of the Pups and the Mother of Moose, Cynthia Mooseknuckle is a Wisconsin-based Drag entertainer with stylings that vary from Broadway to country, diva ballads, and concept costuming.

**DaddyDon't Give a Damn / MamaNo Shits** | [facebook.com/mamano.shits](https://www.facebook.com/mamano.shits) | Former Madison Pride King Daddy Don't Give A Damn is a fierce trans non-binary drag king that comes from the world of burlesque and theater. MamaNo Shits regularly hosts a burlesque brunch.

**Dee Dee Purr** | [linktr.ee/deedeeppurr](https://www.linktr.ee/deedeeppurr) | Dee Dee Purr is a drag clown. The Wisconsin Entertainer of the Year 2023, she's a comedic and theatrical entertainer that aims to push the boundaries of drag.

**Gio** | [instagram.com/gio\\_guzman\\_180685](https://www.instagram.com/gio_guzman_180685) | Gio has been a drag entertainer since 2008. They infuse their performances with hope and their Mexican culture. They have represented as Mr. FIVE Nightclub, Mr. Gay Latino Madison, Mr. Club Wisconsin, and Miss Wisconsin Capital Pride.

**Invertia** | [instagram.com/invertia\\_drag](https://www.instagram.com/invertia_drag) | Their stage name is a play on how queer people have been pathologized and demeaned. Invertia is a drag performer who embodies all corners of the gender spectrum. An Invertia show is a helping of cosplay, pop punk, and sad emo girl vibes.

**Jacques Infini-Hall** | The dancing divo of Milwaukee. He is a former Mr. Five Nightclub and you can catch him hosting his monthly show

HAUTE at This Is It.

**Josie Lynn** | [facebook.com/josielynn94](https://www.facebook.com/josielynn94) | An artist, ally, activist, and friend, 30 years ago, Josie Lynn came out on stage for the first time at a small club in Wausau for a turnabout show and started this fantastic journey. Josie wears many hats and, on occasion, a couple of wigs.

**Karma Zavich** | [facebook.com/karma.mirage.1](https://www.facebook.com/karma.mirage.1) | A former Miss Gay Madison and the co-director of the Madcity Drag Review at FIVE Nightclub.

**Kayos Mirage** | [instagram.com/worldofkayos](https://www.instagram.com/worldofkayos) | Co-director of the Madcity Drag Review at Five Night Club, Kayos has also produced and hosted shows at Pyramid Event Venue in Lake Mills, and This Is It! in Milwaukee.

**Lola Monroe** | [facebook.com/lola.monet.9275](https://www.facebook.com/lola.monet.9275) | A comedy queen from the final frontier of Alaska. From ballads to cartwheels, she brings a smile to all who watch her perform. She strives to support all manner of drag.

**Loretta Love Lee** | [instagram.com/sheezlovelee](https://www.instagram.com/sheezlovelee) | Crowned Miss Gay Madison 2023, she will run again November 4 at FIVE Nightclub. She also represented Wisconsin at the Nationals in Dallas this year, placing 11th.

**Lucy Von Cucci** | [linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci](https://www.linktr.ee/lucyvoncucci) | She's been performing for 10+ years and held many regional and state titles. Lucy's first love has always been the stage, and she adds her theater background to all she does.

**Madam Lacy** | [instagram.com/madamlacy](https://www.instagram.com/madamlacy) | A burlesque, drag, and vocal artist. Her performance style is a campy mix of Disney Princess and storytelling that's sure to have you laughing and blushing.

**Malaiya Marvel** | [@malaiyamarvel](https://www.instagram.com/malaiyamarvel) | Wisconsin's Queen of Cosplay since 2014! They cohost Wisconsin's only cosplay drag show: MANIA! at This Is It! in Milwaukee, and also host at D.I.X. Milwaukee. Malaiya has been featured in Entertainment weekly, was a Milwaukee Bucks halftime performer, and appeared on Judge Jerry.

**Mercedes Benzova** | [instagram.com/themercedesbenzova](https://www.instagram.com/themercedesbenzova) | A bodacious diva that's a whole lotta fun with an extra side of sass. She is Miss Gay Madison Plus and Miss Gay City of Festivals Wisconsin USofA 2023.

**Michael Lynn** | [instagram.com/thatchichaellynn](https://www.instagram.com/thatchichaellynn) | Pageant competitor, entertainer, MC, producer, and promoter. Former Mr. Gay Minnesota America and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.

**Mimi Sanchez** | [instagram.com/mimi\\_\\_sanchez](https://www.instagram.com/mimi__sanchez) | The life of the party, giving you face, grace, and no lace.

**Monica Ciccone** | [facebook.com/valentin.elizalde.397](https://www.facebook.com/valentin.elizalde.397) | Monica is a former Ms. Diva Latina, has been an entertainer since 1998, and hosts Noches Latinas at FIVE Nightclub.

**Mystie Von Cucci** | [facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.92](https://www.facebook.com/mystie.voncucci.92) | Mystie's drag can be described as fun and comedic. You can catch her at FIVE Nightclub.

**Nemo** | [nemodrag.com](https://www.nemodrag.com) | 17-year-old Nemo is known for blending theater, dance, and contortion in the shows she produces at FIVE Nightclub and This Is It! in Milwaukee. As a member of the trans community, Nemo is passionate about activism. She has been featured in shows with Trixie Mattel, Trinity the Tuck, Joey Jay, was one of the stars of the documentary series Generation Drag on HBO Max.

**Ponyboy** | [facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9](https://www.facebook.com/ponyboy.trevor.9) | A mix between funny and sexy, he tries to get the people hyped up for a good time. He wants to inspire people to be who they are and not care what others think.

**RyRy Minaj** | [facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39](https://www.facebook.com/ryan.moffat.39) | A male entertainer based out of Madison and performing since 2015. In this time he has captured the titles of Mr. Gay Madison and Mr. Gay Wisconsin USofA.

**Sasha Christine** | [facebook.com/sasha.christine.1](https://www.facebook.com/sasha.christine.1) | Her drag can be described as a tiny little dancer, who's polished and pristine, but doesn't mind getting a little dirty. You can catch this kitty cat performing at her favorite place, FIVE Nightclub.

**Susan Sox** | [facebook.com/auntsusansox](https://www.facebook.com/auntsusansox) | Madison's Premier Auntie of Drag. Her charming, comedic stylings make you feel right at home. Why don't you ever visit your Auntie Sue anymore!?

Ja' Malik, Artistic Director  
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**CYNTHIA MOOSEKNUCKLE**

**Drag** | [cynthiamooseknuckle.com](http://cynthiamooseknuckle.com)

**MY FIRST EXPERIENCE** with the art of drag was in 2015. I decided to participate as a cast member of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at what was then Plan B. I performed as Frank-N-Furter for the first time, and I was hooked. My second performance was at Five Night Club for the Miss Gay Softball fundraiser for our local LGBTQ+ softball league. There, I represented my team the Chartreuse Moose and performed for a packed audience.

But really, from the moment I started talking, I've been entertaining. I am always excited to light up the stage for a cheering crowd and some of my favorite memories have come from performing in drag.

One moment really stands out, and that was when I was the grand Queen of the Spring Green Pride in Spring Green. This was the first time a rural town in the driftless region was hosting a Pride event, and I had the honor to host and officiate their parade. I have performed on a large stage in front of sold-out crowds; however, I prefer these small, local Pride shows as they give me a chance to connect the public with my drag. I will never forget performing a solo show in front of an 1800s schoolhouse out in the middle of the driftless area to a crowd of 100 locals. To this day, it is one of my favorite moments in drag!

I also love engaging with my audience and having them participate as part of the performance. I once had a lovely grandmother in the audience who didn't know the meaning behind my last name. This adorable person was so sweet, yet not getting my explanation at all. This being a family friendly event, I proceeded to go into an impromptu charades game with this lady until it clicked. It was so funny seeing the light bulb go off in her head, the facial expression of "I got it," to "Oh, that's what that means," was priceless. I remember my final words on the subject were, "Okay, you got it? Don't Google that here." ■

**Victoria Lynn** | Former Miss LaCage Plus and Miss Gay WI USofA. Also known as Bicky the Bucking Queen, she is a quick witted, kind, and statuesque drag queen who has been performing for years.

**PERFORMING ARTISTS: COMEDY**

**Becky Wennlund** | Becky (she/her/hers) has dabbled in the realms of drag (known as drag king Colonel Honey Mustard), improv, and most recently stand-up comedy, thanks to classes with Lady Laughs Comedy. Born and raised in Wisconsin, Becky's jokes are cheesy.

**Dina Nina** | [dinanina.com](http://dinanina.com) | Trans comedian, speaker, actor, and Madison alder. Her sass and charm has been featured in comedy festivals and world-class comedy venues. She is the founder of Lady Laughs Comedy & Artemis Bow Productions. She was named one of the "58 Trans Women Actors You Should Know & Also Love" by AutoStraddle.

**Forest Reed** | Queer. Trans. Non-Binary. Feminist. Artist.

**Linda Lenzke** | [mixedmetaphorohmy.com](http://mixedmetaphorohmy.com) | I'm an amateur stand-up comedian, spoken word storyteller, blogger, and LGBTQ+ community events emcee. I have a new routine, Funny, Not Funny! that I will workshop and perform later in the year. I riff on the culture wars, politics, surviving the pandemic, and draw from my lived experience as an aging lesbian and woman in recovery from substances.

**Michael Bruno** | [madstheatre.com](http://madstheatre.com) | Host of "Showbiz Buzz With Bruno" presented by Mad's Theatre. Michael Bruno has served several local organizations as a board member.

**Vanessa Tortolano** | [facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano](https://facebook.com/vanessa.tortolano) | Vanessa jumps from improv comedy to a bit of burlesque and can be found on various Madison stages in support of women- and LGBTQ-centric events.

**PERFORMING ARTISTS: DANCE / THEATER / MEDIA**

**Alex Trofka** | [kanopydance.org](http://kanopydance.org) | Alex has performed in the Madison area for more than three years and is a dancer, teacher, and choreographer.

**Ankita Bharadwaj** | Produces the show *Subtle Desi Traits* (writing and sound production including audio editing, mixing, fading etc.).

**Brian Wild** | Active in the Madison theater community since 1992, he is the Executive Director of Art and Soul Innovations, Inc. and the Artistic Director of the Madison Chapter of Proud Theater. Brian has written and directed 15+ plays and has been involved in more than 100. He lives in Monona with his partner, Callen, and several pets.

**Chris Walker** | [education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris](http://education.wisc.edu/staff/walker-chris) | A professor of dance and founding artistic director of the First Wave program in the Office of Multicultural Arts Initiatives at UW-Madison. He is also a senior choreographer with the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and program director for the New Waves Dance & Performance Institute in Trinidad & Tobago.

**Dana Pellebon** | Dana has acted, directed, written, and produced for a variety of theatrical troupes since 2001. She is a co-founder/producer of the Loud 'N Unchained (LNU) Black Theater Festival and the Caburlesque troupe, Foxy Veronica's Peach Pies.

**Jay Gile** | [facebook.com/jeremiah.a.gile](https://facebook.com/jeremiah.a.gile) | Jay has worked multiple shows as a director for StageQ. Their goal is to always create meaningful, fun, uplifting, emotional, and thoughtful theater while also working on developing their voice in social justice works.

**Jim Chiolino** | [madisontheatreguild.org](http://madisontheatreguild.org) | A producer, director, and actor as well as a former president of the Madison Theatre Guild (Madison's oldest community theater organization).

**KelsyAnne Schoenhaar** | [encorestudio.org](http://encorestudio.org) | KelsyAnne has a mixed career of music (from rock to symphonic to jazz), theater (in the Chicago area as a musician; in addition to writing "to" actors, as she wrote, directed,

and produced original children's theater), and human services.

**Laura McMillan** | [ctmtheater.org](http://ctmtheater.org) | A proud Black/Lebanese queer womxn who is not only a 20-year theater vet, but a US Navy vet as well. Laura works as Children's Theater of Madison's Education Manager. On-stage credits include: *The Revolutionists* as Marianne (Bartell), *Little Shop of Horrors* as Ronnette (Edgewood College).

**Malissa Petterson** | [linktr.ee/harpermitchell](http://linktr.ee/harpermitchell) | Malissa Petterson has written and directed 10+ major theatrical projects. Armed with an MFA in creative writing, she spends her days spinning stories about her two favorite topics: feminism and sex.

**Neil Mills** | [neilmillsdesign.com](http://neilmillsdesign.com) | A scenic designer and an assistant professor in the Department of Theater and Drama at UW-Madison, he's also a proudly trans man and member of United Scenic Artists-USA 829.

**Orion Risk** | A director and theater artist whose work includes creating *TransTheatreFest-Madison*, crafting the virtual play *GenderTalks* from real conversations about gender between trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people, and producing and directing as founding artistic director of *Scene D Theatre Project* (Iowa).

**Proud Theater** | [proudtheater.org](http://proudtheater.org) | Proud Theater is a powerful community of queer\* youth who create brave spaces for support and self expression. Proud teaches theater, activism, and the power of authentic storytelling to youth 13-19. No auditions or fees to join.

**Richard Ganoung** | The Madison-based actor is best known for his roles in the movies *Parting Glances* (1986), *True Identity* (1991) and *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* (1998), but has appeared on stage with groups like TNW Ensemble Theater, the Madison Rep, and Forward Theater.

**Robert (Bobby) Goderich** | Goderich's love for singing brought him to the stage with Madison Opera. He's worked with local theater companies including Children's Theater of Madison, Verona Area Community Theater, Middleton Players Theatre, StageQ, and Four Seasons Theatre.

**Roseann Sheridan** | [ctmtheater.org](http://ctmtheater.org) | Roseann is retiring this year after 15 years as Artistic Director with Children's Theater of Madison. She was previously Producer and Associate Artistic Director at American Players Theatre for 17 years. She has directed for regional and university theaters, including UW-Madison, Texas Shakespeare Festival, Next Act Theatre (Milwaukee), Penobscot Theatre (Maine), UW-Whitewater, Edgewood College, and UW-Oshkosh.

**Sara Beth (SB) Hahner** | The founder and former Program Director for The Penguin Project of Sun Prairie Civic Theatre, board member of WI Association of Community Theatre, SPCT, and StageQ. SB is an abilities advocate, designing theater initiatives for artists with disabilities.

**The House Inc** | [Thehouseinc.org](http://Thehouseinc.org) | Clyde Mayberry, CEO and founder of The House Inc., has been in Madison for most of his life and spent his developing years noticing a gap in what the city had to offer. The House Inc. makes up that gap, providing a space and programming for Black and brown youth in theater, dance, leadership, and community service.

**The Space Cats** | [facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE](https://facebook.com/SpaceCatsMKE) | The Space Cats are a loud colorful dance team created, produced, and led by Jinx & Micah Ogé with the mission to spread positivity. Since 2015, the group has appeared in music videos, club performances, local shows, and Pridefest Milwaukee.

**Tim Sauers** | [facebook.com/tim.sauers](https://facebook.com/tim.sauers) | As Overture Center's Chief Artistic Experiences Officer, Tim is responsible for providing program and marketing vision, strategy, leadership, and management, and for developing and directing Overture Center portfolio of artistic experiences.

**TNW Ensemble Theater** | [tnwensembletheater.org](http://tnwensembletheater.org) | Danielle Dresden and Donna Peckett are co-Founders/co-Producing Artistic Directors of TNW Ensemble Theater. Established in 1985, TNW creates, produces, performs, and presents original works of art and cultural practice. The Company collaborates with artists and scholars working in the disciplines of theater, social justice, visual arts, tap dance, and music to



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## RAT BATH

**Band** | @rat.bath.mke

**RAT BATH** is an all trans band that reclaim queer-coded villains from their childhood as heroes and strive for visibility in the music industry. They describe their sound as “Y’alternative” but have also been called Cow Punk, Alternative Emo, Dirt Americana and Murder Country.

Whichever way you slice it; they are fast, loud, and have a unique backwoods edge. Originally formed by long-time friends, Fred Kenyon and Cora Bequeaith in December of 2019, RAT BATH only played a few shows before going into hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When re-emerging into the Milwaukee music scene in July of 2021, the band had a new line-up and a first album written.

Members now include Fred Kenyon (they/them, vocals), Cora Bequeaith (she/her, guitar), Ivy Escobedo (she/her, bass), Róisín Shields (she/they, guitar) and Nikki Nelson (she/they, drums). The band is named RAT BATH because of each member’s shared dream of one day opening a rat grooming salon with intention of reserving the name.

Their freshman album *Rat From Hell* is considered to be vocalist Fred Kenyon’s autobiography and was named one of *The Milwaukee Record’s* best albums of 2022. “Rat From Hell” is made up of many different genre influences that don’t seem to work together but, in this case, do. It follows the story of a witch whose powers are rendered useless and is forced to physically fight a demon who was sent to capture them.

The album explores different ways in which trauma manifests in one’s life: fear, anger, romanticization, vengeance, and finally, release. The cathartic ending to the story is told in the track “Sweet Puppet” featuring Johanna Rose. However this is not the final track on the album. The group chose to tack “Slowdown Malacha, Malacha Slowdown” on at the very end to go out in a blaze of thrashy power violence with the first song ever written for RAT BATH.

“Scale of the Fish,” the most recent single, is an account of modern romance via a fish trapped in a bathtub, struggling to breathe as the tub fills with alcohol instead of water. The following sophomore album is also highly conceptual, telling a star-crossed lovers’ tale of a vampire and a time-traveler. Although this album still challenges the definition of genre, there is a more cohesive sound and climactic build.

Having completed three regional and two national tours, RAT BATH continues to take their music on the road and have been included in music festivals such as Stoopfest in Lansing, MI and Compost Heap in Denver, CO. They’ve shared the stage with Vial, Lung, Pony, Apes of The State, Ceschi Ramos, Nightmare, and Pansy Division; as well as other rising Wisconsin acts such as Gold Steps, and Kat and the Hurricane. ■

promote the understanding of diverse cultures while enriching the lives of all individuals.

**Trevin Gay** | [ctmtheater.org](http://ctmtheater.org) | An actor, director, teaching artist, arts administrator and is thrilled to serve as Associate Artistic Director and Actors Academy Director for CTM. He holds an MFA in Actor Created Physical Theatre from the London International School of Performing Arts and recently performed in Peter Pan, Finder & The North Star, A Christmas Carol, Freaky Friday, Stellaluna, and Matilda.

**Zak Stowe** | [zakstowedesign.com](http://zakstowedesign.com) | A self-taught, award-winning lighting designer, director, and producer for theater and opera having worked for various theater companies all over Madison. He is currently the Lighting Supervisor for the Overture Center for the Arts, President of the Bartell Community Theatre Foundation, Marketing Director and Webmaster for Stage Q, as well as being a founding member of the National Queer Theatre Alliance, and a pyrotechnician and photographer for the touring airshow act Tora!Tora!Tora!

### PERFORMING ARTISTS: DJs

**DJ Avalon** | [linktr.ee/theonlyDJAvalon](http://linktr.ee/theonlyDJAvalon) | A DJ since 2011, Avalon made her mark in Philly celebrating women in punk, riot grrl, and rock n’ roll. Since then she has charmed audiences across clubs and bars with her emphasis on pushing women and LGBTQ artists toward the spotlight.

**DJ Ellafine** | [linktr.ee/ellafine](http://linktr.ee/ellafine) | A versatile DJ specializing in darkwave, synthpop, post-punk and related alternative genres, dj ellafine enjoys spinning everything from disco and funk to ambient and classical. Twitch stream Tuesdays 10 pm CST.

**DJ Femme Noir** | [facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir](http://facebook.com/DJFemmeNoir) | Femme Noir spins an eclectic blend of highly danceable tunes. Catch a show at FIVE Night Club, Hot Summer Gays, Majestic Madison, This is It! in Milwaukee, or many other venues around Southern Wisconsin.

**DJ Millbot (Emily Mills)** | [facebook.com/djmillbot](http://facebook.com/djmillbot) | A longtime Madison DJ who specializes in all things house music, with detours into industrial/EBM, alt R&B, neo-soul, vintage rock n’ roll, ‘70s-’90s dance music, and a potpourri of other good tunes. You can catch them at small local clubs and queer dance nights.

**DJ Pearl Marshall** | [facebook.com/DJPearlMarshall](http://facebook.com/DJPearlMarshall) | Madison native Pearl Marshall celebrates a wide range of genres through diverse rhythms and unexpected mashups since 2019. You can find her regularly at The Rigby and Nattspil.

**DJ Sarah Akawa** | [facebook.com/djsarahakawa](http://facebook.com/djsarahakawa) | Voted silver for Madison’s best DJ 2022, DJ Sarah Akawa has been curating nightlife and community events for the queer community of Madison since 2014. Find her at Hot Summer Gays, Subtext, or Dyke Dive!

### PERFORMING ARTISTS: MUSICIANS

**Akiya Alexander** | [facebook.com/kiloaskitlz](http://facebook.com/kiloaskitlz) | The hip-hop artist and emcee’s accolades include Female Artist of the Year (Madison Hip-Hop Awards 2016), Madison’s #1 Lesbian Rapper (Queer Pressure Awards 2017), and Hip-Hop Performer of the Year (MAMAs 2019 and 2020).

**Amanda Jane Hoffman** | [facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot](http://facebook.com/AmandaJaneSingsALot) | Heartful singer and guitarist, singing songs from the radio, stage, and campfire

**Arthur Durkee Arts** | [arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com](http://arthurdurkee.bandcamp.com) | Award-winning composer, musician, artist, poet. Chapman Stick Touchboard player: Stick and NS/Stick. Experimental, avant-garde improvising free jazz musician. Published author. Letterpress and linocut printmaker. Graphic design, typography, and illustration for musicians.

**Basal Jones** | @basaljones | Madison rapper with a sound fairly unique to his own but evocative of the historical body of queer music in a way that

will appeal to various ages of listeners.

**Benjamin Rose** | [mxbenjaminrose.com](http://mxbenjaminrose.com) | Self-described as a “hopeful skeptic,” Rose uses music to tell stories and connect with people. They are a core member of the Madison synth-rock outfit Kat and the Hurricane and also the creator and host of the podcast Queerful, highlighting stories of queer creators and trailblazers.

**Brannen Clark** | [zykfa.mailchimpsites.com](http://zykfa.mailchimpsites.com) | Clark is a member of the Zhong Yi Kung Fu Association lion dance team and performs on the drum, gong, and cymbals while other performers dance under the lion.

**Certified Scruffian** | [soundcloud.com/colorlunes](http://soundcloud.com/colorlunes) | Certified Scruffian’s a focus genre is drum and bass, and they experiment with different sounds and filters. Finding a voice in music has helped them find confidence throughout their transition.

**Damsel Trash** | [damseltrash.com](http://damseltrash.com) | Damsel Trash sprang fully formed from the skull of Madison-based alt-country outfit Little Red Wolf; the raucous, outrageous, filthy-minded offspring that has nothing in common with its progenitor other than sharing two of its members (Meghan Rose and Emily Mills). With high-energy, interactive, super-fun live shows, DT is all true punk energy. The duo are deeply queer, feminist, and sex-positive.

**Dana and the Joanis** | [facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis](http://facebook.com/Danaandthejoanis) | Dana Perry is a powerhouse producer, vocalist and rhythm guitar player, with poignant original songs of an evolutionary folk rock variety. Jenna “The Joanis” provides smooth grooves on multiple live and recording projects playing drums, percussion, guitar and bass. Collectively, they’ve been involved in multiple multi-award winning bands, recordings, and performances over the last five years.

**Falling Flat** | [linktr.ee/fallingflat](http://linktr.ee/fallingflat) | Falling Flat is a trans-fronted pop punk/emo band that has performed at High Noon Saloon, The Majestic Theater, Live on Queen Street and multiple smaller cities around Wisconsin.

**J-Star Domino** | @JStarDomino | Violin virtuoso, multi-genre MAMA winner, and general bringer of all things PARTY, pairs with members of the aerial, burlesque, and drag community to power-infuse the after-dark experience with inspired melodic ballads and shreddy solo throwdowns.

**Jessie Waggoner** | [queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com](http://queermadisonmixtape.bandcamp.com) | One of the founders of the Queer Madison Mixtape project, they are drawn to songwriting themes such as rural queers, trans trucks, big hair, and femme utopias. Past projects include a drag gospel quartet, a femme-fronted Meatloaf cover band, Corn Palace and Mary Okie.

**jilip** | An anarchist folk punk lo-fi solo project. jilip is where angst meets the ethereal, with catchy hooks and rad, socially conscious lyrics. Inspired by reimagining our social reality, ze makes music that speaks to hir soul and hopefully yours, too.

**Jinx Ogé** | [linktr.ee/jinxoge](http://linktr.ee/jinxoge) | A Non-binary, Jamaican-American artist, songwriter, and fashion designer from Wisconsin. They gained recognition with a mix of pop, dance, and R&B songs and visuals. They were also part of a music number on the hit television show, Empire and have an upcoming single and music video, Lavender Skies.

**Kat and the Hurricane** | [campsite.bio/katandthehurricane](http://campsite.bio/katandthehurricane) | A genre- and gender-bending indie-pop/synth-rock trio and winner of several MAMAs 2023. Lead singer/guitarist Kat Rhapsody (they/them), keyboardist/vocalist Benjamin Rose (they/them), and drummer Alex Nelson (they/them) deliver a unique blend of pop and haunting indie rock they affectionately refer to as sad lesbian music, queer emo, or sapphic bops.

**Killcrop** | [facebook.com/Killcrop](http://facebook.com/Killcrop) | The solo project of Josh Killcrop, one half of the founding members of psychedelic-industrial band Gentleman Loser, the experimental electronic music draws influences from indie rock and darker industrial. After years of production his new album is close to finished with a teaser track released.

**Ladyscissors** | [facebook.com/ladyscissorswi](http://facebook.com/ladyscissorswi) | Prolific and longtime Madison musician Stephanie Rearick joins forces with Brent George and Anne

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**BASAL JONES**

**Rapper** | @basaljones

**BASAL JONES** is a 25-year-old Madison native. His early childhood wasn't easy, but it was culturally rewarding and enriching. He was exposed to and integrated into families with different religious beliefs, socioeconomic backgrounds, and identities.

He drew inspiration and purpose from all of them, and around 13 he found love in learning to rap, squarely on a Nicki Minaj instrumental. Artists such as Eminem, Kanye, Azealia, Heatbox & Minaj shaped the budding musician's way he formed metaphors or flows. Other artists such as Madonna, Mike Patton, Justin Timberlake & TLC shaped the way he approached songwriting or vocal stylings.

When he first began, Basal entertained in a short-lived R&B & Rap supergroup in middle school before moving on to solo work. Despite a lack of studio access, he continued to find connections and establish his artistry and presence in many ways (most often through protests, demonstrations, and community work). He cultivated a sound fairly unique to his own but evocative of the historical body of queer music in a way that will appeal to various ages of listeners.

Finally in 2020, he released a string of singles, playing with a kaleidoscope of sounds behind his bass vocal. He would touch on topics like police brutality in his collaboration with local artist Janae Mosley in "Law & Order." "Pass The Test" goes into a tongue-and-cheek pop-rap song about fetishization, and Basal even has a fiery bilingual moment with his song called "Zoo." In 2021 and 2022, he released songs "Run The Haus" (which has captured fans internationally), and "Partner" which was his first paid promotional song for a product. This year Basal has been focusing on booking shows and is now signed to a marketing and promotion team as well as securing a publishing deal.

Basal is preparing to drop his first full-length project some time this year and is mapping out a couple of features from friends and other artists. You can look forward to him further experimenting in genre-bending sounds ranging from trap to house music. In addition, he is in the process of developing a short film in which he will act, direct, and provide a soundtrack. The project is currently untitled, but we can look forward to a thought-provoking experience featuring an emphasis on human performance. ■

Bull for a boppy rock project with an irreverent core.

**LINE** | [linesoundslike.com](https://linesoundslike.com) | Indiepop band LINE weaves singer-songwriter sensibilities with multigenre arrangements. Vocalist Maddie Batzli works with bandmates Austin Lynch, Esther Chun, and collaborators to create harmonies, slap basslines, folk instrumentation, synth tracks, and playful stage aesthetics with lyrics both campy and sincere.

**Little Red Wolf** | [facebook.com/littleredwolfmusic](https://facebook.com/littleredwolfmusic) | Bringing together the creativity and collective talents of Meghan Rose, Kelly Maxwell, Emily Mills, and Laura Detert. Formed in 2008 in Madison, LRW combines elements of indie rock, bluegrass, alt-country, and the harmony-heavy vocals of swing-era ensembles, over the course of three albums and numerous singles that are silly, earnest, dark, and joyful.

**Maceo** | [linktr.ee/macy\\_cray](https://linktr.ee/macy_cray) | An independent artist and singer/songwriter from Baltimore. He has auditioned for American Idol, The Voice, ANTM, Xfactor, and Sunday Best. In 2020 his fourth project titled D.E.E.P was released followed up by his Debut album 1330 which honors his grandmother and the home he grew up in.

**Meskales** | [flowcode.com/page/meskales](https://flowcode.com/page/meskales) | The Latin ska band from Madison takes the genre that had a brief commercial dalliance with punk in the 1990s, and marries it with Latin and surfer rock elements. The end result is a chirpy, high-energy, and brass-heavy sound.

**Michael Darling** | [linktr.ee/MichaelDarling](https://linktr.ee/MichaelDarling) | An artist, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer based in Madison. Compared to a wide range of artists such as Harry Styles, James Taylor, Perfume Genius, and Father John Misty, he blends elements of indie pop, folk rock, and jazz to create lyrically reflective and emotionally charged music that feels both familiar yet pleasantly subversive.

**Nate Meng and the Stolen Sea** | [hannahedlen.bandcamp.com](https://hannahedlen.bandcamp.com) | Hannah Edlén is a clarinetist, composer, and music improvisation collaborator. You can see her perform with the magical symphonic-metal five-piece group known as Nate Meng and the Stolen Sea, her duo with bandmate Nate known as Medlén, performing her solo Clarinet-Loopalist project, or shredding on the clarinet with her all her musician friends. Album release planned this year.

**Neurospicy** | Alt rock/punk band made up of Madison based queers.

**Precarious Towers** | [shiftingparadigmrecords.bandcamp.com/album/ten-stories](https://shiftingparadigmrecords.bandcamp.com/album/ten-stories) | A high-octane jazz quintet founded by pianist and UW-Madison jazz studies professor Johannes Wallmann that includes an all-star cast of alto saxophonist/flutist Sharel Cassity (Chicago), vibraphonist Mitchell Shiner, drummer Devin Drobka (Milwaukee), and bassist John Christensen (Madison). Precarious Towers' second album, Ten Stories, dropped September 1 and features compositions by each of the quintet's members.

**RAT BATH** | [linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke](https://linktr.ee/rat.bath.mke) | A band of all transgender individuals that reclaim queer-coded villains from their childhood as heroes in their storytelling and strive for visibility in the music industry. They describe their sound as "Y'allternative."

**Rin's Violin** | [facebook.com/RinQRibble](https://facebook.com/RinQRibble) | Genre bending violinist, currently operating with the groups Five Points Jazz Collective, Ribble & Rightley, and Frank Martin Busch and the Names.

**Salamander Sunday** | [salamandersunday.com](https://salamandersunday.com) | Singer/songwriter Steph Stringer joins with Diana Wheeler, Maggie Schenk, Dave Foss, and John Minnich. The group originally came together in collaboration for a couple of uniquely arranged cover songs and has continued.

**Sister Agnes** | [cnelsonlifson.bandcamp.com](https://cnelsonlifson.bandcamp.com) | The ALTAR ego of C Nelson-Lifson (member of band Proud Parents). Using a drum machine and throbby basslines, Sister Agnes attempts to set to music the sacred oath of devotion and sexual repression.

**T. Price** | [linktr.ee/tessajadeprice](https://linktr.ee/tessajadeprice) | A singer/songwriter whose music sounds like a smooth cup of coffee or some sweet, cheap rosé. It's delicious. Her style ranges from sincere guitar rock to hectic electronic mess. She

likes writing and singing and dry sarcasm. It's pretty bad.

**threadfall** | [threadfall.bandcamp.com](https://threadfall.bandcamp.com) | An indie pop band fronted by Angie Remington (former bassist of Sassy Come Home, Token Minority, and Turbo Loogie). She writes numbers about love and awkward situations.

**Venus in Furs** | [venusinfursband.com](https://venusinfursband.com) | The long-running surf-punk outfit features the couple Victoria Echeverría (guitar/vocals) and Natalie Hinckley (bass/vocals), alongside energetic drummer Marlo Darken. This group is heavy on the instrumentals with catchy, darkly humorous, and sometimes pointedly political lyrics. They host the annual Punks Picnic at Lake Farm County Park.

**Woke Up Crying** | [wokeupcrying.bandcamp.com](https://wokeupcrying.bandcamp.com) | A 90s alternative/grunge queercore project fronted by Doug Rowe (they/them). Since last year, Doug has released an additional track via the Queer Madison Mixtape and has begun playing live shows again.

#### LITERARY ARTISTS

**Annie Menzel** | [gws.wisc.edu/staff/menzel-annie](https://gws.wisc.edu/staff/menzel-annie) | A political theorist, former midwife, and abortion access advocate, her first book, *Fatal Denial: Racism and The Political Life of Black Infant Mortality*, is forthcoming from the University of California Press. She is also at work on a second book project, *Birthing Paradox: Race, Colonization, and Radicalism in US Midwifery*, which seeks to understand the contradictory politics and practices of the homebirth midwifery movement since 1970.

**Ashling Meehan-Fanning** | A writer and poet based in Madison, her collection *COLOSSAL GIRL* was self-published during the weird reality that was 2020. Her recent work has been featured in *Troublemaker Firestarter* Vol. 4 'Sad Poems 4 Horny People', *Thó Wiy* Magazine, and *Written Tales*. She will be featured in the upcoming winter issue of *The Cackling Kettle*. On weekends you'll find her hiking with her wife or

playing D&D.

**Bridget Birdsall, MFA** | [bridgetbirdsall.com](https://bridgetbirdsall.com) | An award-winning author who overcame dyslexic challenges to balance a life in business and the arts. Her 2015 YA novel, *Double Exposure*, won numerous awards and outstanding reviews for its portrayal of an intersex character. In August 2022, she was ordained as a Minister of Walking Prayer (Cross-Cultural Studies) through the Center for Sacred Studies.

**Callen Harty** | [callenharty.com](https://callenharty.com) | Author of 24 produced plays, 50 monologues, and numerous articles, essays, and poems in various print/online sites. He has published 10 books with his 11th coming up. His monologues for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum's annual cemetery tour, *Talking Spirits*, won awards from the Wisconsin Historical Society and the American Association of State and Local History. He is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and a lifetime member of Broom Street Theater.

**Em Rowene** | [emrowene.com](https://emrowene.com) | Em is an author of queer fantasy that trends toward the gothic and the mysterious. Their works include *Fractured Magic*, a gothic high fantasy, and *The Case Files of Sheridan Bell*, a detective fantasy series à la Sherlock Holmes.

**H Warren** | [heatherwarrenpoetry.com](https://heatherwarrenpoetry.com) | H (they/them) is a poet and musician from Fairbanks, Alaska. Their debut poetry collection *Binded* was published with Boreal Books / Red Hen Press in 2023 and discloses their reality of living nonbinary in the rural context of Alaska. H received their MFA from University of Alaska Fairbanks and they are a MSW candidate with the University of New England and a 2019 Rasmuson Individual Artist recipient.

**Harper Hazelmare** | [brownhorseherbal.com](https://brownhorseherbal.com) | Harper Hazelmare (she/they/we) is an author and visual artist living in Madison. When not loving the color yellow in nature, they can be found in her home studio working with found objects and writing speculative fiction.

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T.L. LUKE

Illustrator | tl-luke.com

**T.L. LUKE** (she/they) is a professional illustrator based in Madison. Prior to starting her business in 2018, Luke used to work as both an Exhibitions Manager for the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art and as a Revenue Agent Credit Tax Specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. These are two very different positions, yet they provide a panoramic perspective for how her work is informed today.

Concerned with the political schism happening across the country, but especially in Wisconsin, Luke shifted her illustration practice (which previously focused on dark-yet-whimsical designs depicting empowered girls traveling precarious unknown locations with their animal companions, and tongue-in-cheek products about self-care of which queer Millennial femmes can relate) to focus on well-researched comics and infographics on current events in local politics, drug harm reduction, art equity, and more. It has become her goal to make complicated subjects more digestible and accessible, and to encourage communities to start thinking critically about local policies as we approach the 2024 presidential election.

As such, in 2023, Luke started the comic journalism campaign "Auntie Luke's Guides," which demystifies complex topics and local interests. Amid the abundance of information sources saturating our lives, Luke has found that Wisconsin is craving a different approach. Gone are the days of solely relying on articles, the ever-revolving news cycle, and questionable tweets from politicians as our sole guides. Recognizing that 65% of the world's population are visual learners, "Auntie Luke's Guides" come to the rescue as the ultimate solution.

Embracing the philosophy that "You can't know what you don't know," "Auntie Luke's Guides" offer an immersive experience that goes beyond the traditional mediums of information consumption. These guides unlock a world of knowledge in a way that resonates, empowers, and propels the reader forward, and to make more informed decisions for themselves and their communities.

T.L. Luke is also a book illustrator, consultant, teaching artist, activist, and public speaker. She has illustrated two books (*How to Be a Difficult Bitch* with Lerner Publishing and *Rebel Girls Celebrate Pride* with Rebel Girls/DK Publishing) and provides art equity consulting for local organizations, business professionals, and emerging artists. She has also run workshops for tech companies and law firms on best practices for hiring local artists, as well as participated in "Commissions 101" and "How to Make the Sale" panels at professional art conferences across the state for organizations like Wisconsin Visual Artists and Dane Arts. ■

**J. Sargent Rady** | *From the Gravel Roads of Mudbrook*, an autobiography, is a journey of growing up as a gay kid in rural America. It's a story of struggles with self-doubt, painful losses, and heavy grief.

**J.B. Corgard** | [buckygamgee95.wixsite.com/jbcorgard](http://buckygamgee95.wixsite.com/jbcorgard) | A transgender female author in the sci fi-fantasy genre including titles *Eldrida's Call to Arms* and *Subzero Quest*.

**Jaimie Sherling** | Author Jaimie Maura Sherling (born October 5, 1976) passed away on April 20, 2023 after a long fight with cancer. Her memoir *From Queens to QUEENS: How the Madison Drag Community Saved My Life* was published in September, 2021. Her second book *I'm Tough... And I Cry A Lot* was published early this year. She was an active member of Out Professional Engagement Network (OPEN) and is survived by—and will be remembered by—many.

**Kelly Goodman** | [facebook.com/kellydgoodman](https://www.facebook.com/kellydgoodman) | A figurative painter and writer living in Madison. Contact for commissions.

**R. B. Simon** | [rb-simon.com](http://rb-simon.com) | R.B. Simon (she/her) is a queer, Black, disabled poet whose work has found homes in pacific *REVIEW*, *The Coop*, *Strange Horizons*, *Literary Mama*, *CALYX*, *Obsidian*, and *West Trestle Review*. She is the winner of the 2023 Zoyer Zyndel Poetry Prize. Her chapbook, *The Good Truth*, was released in July 2021 from Finishing Line Press, and her full-length collection, *Not Just the Fire*, was released March 2023 from Cornerstone Press.

**Raphael Kadushin** | An award-winning travel and food writer, with work appearing in a wide range of anthologies, including three editions of *Best Food Writing*. He is the editor of two travel anthologies: *Wonderlands* and *Big Trips*.

**Rita Mae Reese** | [ritamaereese.com](http://ritamaereese.com) | Rita Mae Reese (she/her) is the author of *The Book of Hulga*. She designs Lesbian Poet Trading Cards for Headmistress Press, is in the bluegrass band Coulee Creek, and serves as the Co-Director at Arts + Literature Laboratory in Madison.

**Sami Schalk** | [samischalk.com](http://samischalk.com) | An Associate Professor of Gender & Women's Studies at the UW-Madison. She's the author of *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race & Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Duke UP 2018) and *Black Disability Politics* (Duke UP 2022). She identifies as a fat Black queer disabled femme and a pleasure activist.

#### VISUAL ARTISTS

**Angela Richardson** | [angela-richardson.com](http://angela-richardson.com) | Richardson's work often explores the idea of "community"—how communities form, operate, and how art plays a role in their vitality. As a teaching artist, she's led classes at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, Center for Healthy Minds, Madison Children's Museum, and Madison Public Library.

**Anna Campbell** | [annacampbell.net](http://annacampbell.net) | An artist and professor, their sculptures, installations, and ephemera mine history and queer desire.

**Ari Gochberg** | [@ari.g.ink](https://www.instagram.com/ari.g.ink) | Ari is a white, trans, and autistic tattoo artist at Red Clover Tattoo Collective who focuses on fineline illustrative works in black and gray or soft colors. He draws inspiration from manga and anime, botanical illustrations, mythology, art history, queer sexuality, and the human form. They believe in tattooing as a form of body reclamation and healing from the trauma carried in our bodies and strive to create a consent-driven environment.

**Babette Wainwright** | [babettewainwright.com](http://babettewainwright.com) | As a youth, Babette exhibited at the Centre d'Art of Port au Prince, Haiti. In the US, her work has been shown in Baton Rouge, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Chicago, Iowa, North Carolina, and Madison. In 1998, she discovered the pleasure and power of expressing herself with clay, making sculptures which are informed both by her African roots, and by the work of the pre-Columbian people of Haiti, the Arawaks.

**Bear Cunningham** | [redclovertattoocollective.com](http://redclovertattoocollective.com) | A queer tattoo artist at Red

Clover Tattoo Collective specializing in fine-line minimalist and illustrative design. They love working with a range of subject matter from florals, pop culture references, celestial bodies, and occult imagery, to pin-ups, portraits, and anything involving queer forms and identity.

**Benjamin D. Rinehart** | [benrinehart.com](http://benrinehart.com) | Benjamin's images depict an autobiographical narrative critiquing relationships between people and identity. As a member of the LGBTQ community, Benjamin uses personal experience to raise awareness about issues affecting under-represented and marginalized people. Each piece is intended to have numerous readings beyond the initial view, contributing to a wider dialog.

**Bernie & Zuzu** | [bernieandzuzu.com](http://bernieandzuzu.com) | Bernie Witzack is the current Artist-in-Residence at Pinney Public Library. They believe everyone deserves to have more beauty and joy in their lives, adding it through hand painted, printed and dyed home goods, accessories, and prints.

**Beth Racette** | [bethracette.com](http://bethracette.com) | A cultural worker and visual artist. Underlying themes in her work are flow and interconnection. Since 2012, she's worked on a series of paintings called Gaia, which tries to portray the Earth as a living being. Beth is an administrator at the Overture Center, and in the spring 2023 curated the show Democracy.

**bumblechub** | [bumblechub.com](http://bumblechub.com) | Jess Draws is a digital artist who loves bugs and exploring themes of fatness, disability, and queerness.

**Claire Warhus** | [snaggletootharts.com](http://snaggletootharts.com) | Claire Warhus has been a freelance artist for 12+ years and translated that skill set to tattooing (currently at Wayward Tattoos). Illustrative organic subject matter is what calls to her the most, especially portraits and animals mixed with plant life.

**David Wells** | [finearts.edgewood.edu/art-department/faculty/david-wells](http://finearts.edgewood.edu/art-department/faculty/david-wells) | Gallery Director at Edgewood College and former Executive Director of Edenred, the creative residency program of the Terry Family Foundation. Wells also serves as Director of Ernest Hüpeden's Painted Forest and Study Center, Edgewood College's restored folk art site in Valton, WI.

**Elaine Pasinski Thomas** | Visual artist, painter of portraits and landscapes in oil and acrylic. Elaine's paintings are of elderly, disabled, poor, and oppressed persons in a manner that is compelling to the viewer to see their humanity. Elaine's landscapes are intended to illustrate the beauty of Creation.

**Gay Art Club** | [@gay.artclub](https://www.instagram.com/gay.artclub) | Gay Art Club is a collective of local LGBTQ+ artists who gather at various locations. The group is led by Elizabeth David McIntyre, a drawing-based interdisciplinary artist and educator.

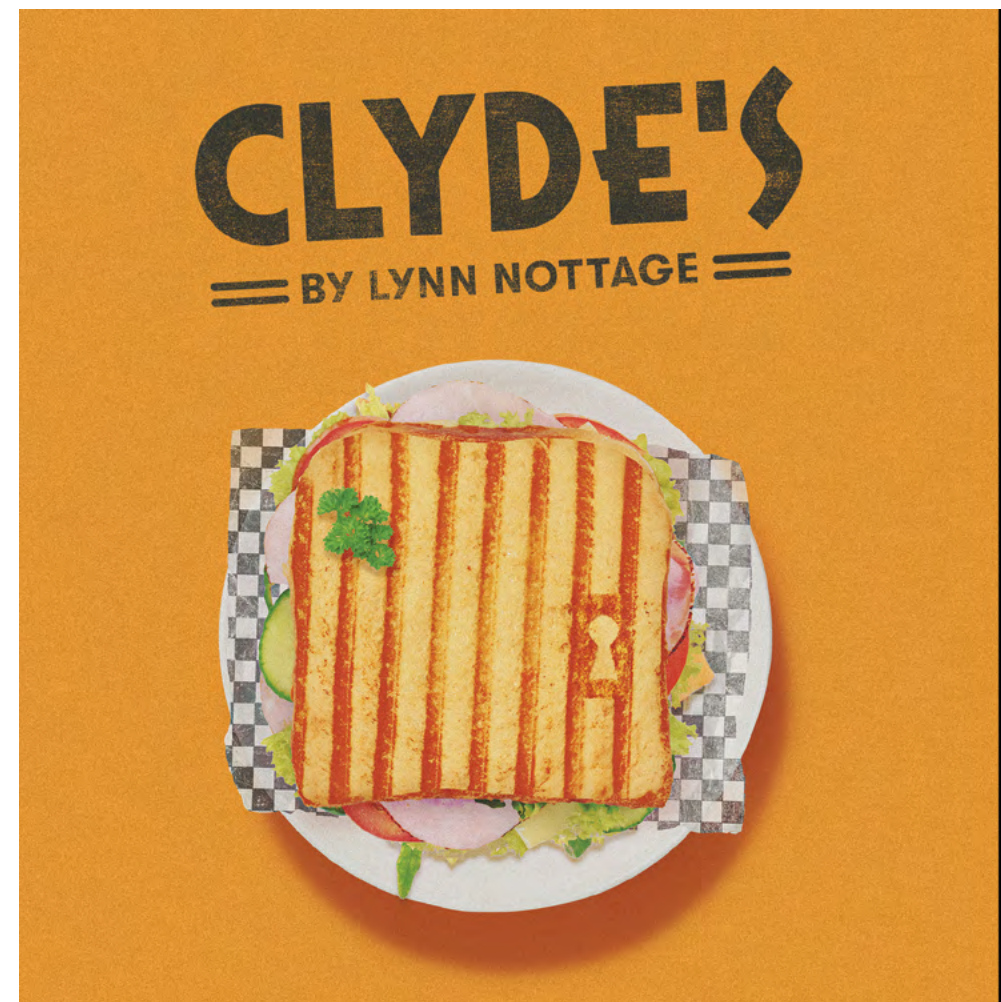
**Goldie Raye** | [goldieraye.com](http://goldieraye.com) | A freelance illustrator, designer, fine art photographer, and printmaker, her art work focuses on gender identity and defining the female queer gaze.

**Heather C. Williams** | [drawingtogether.com](http://drawingtogether.com) | Heather is an ontological artist and the author of *Drawing as a Sacred Activity*. An ontological artist listens to their heart and soul and draws out a song, a dance, a drawing, a painting, a poem, and more. Since Heather was a child, drawing has been a way to learn about the world around and within.

**InternetPublicWorks** | [InternetPublicWorks.com](http://InternetPublicWorks.com) | InternetPublicWorks is a multimedia art conglomerate and collection of independent artists and their work. Based in Madison and led by artist, photographer, graphics/merchandise designer and filmmaker, Jordyn Alft.

**Janis Nussbaum Senungetuk** | [janis-senungetuk.pixels.com](http://janis-senungetuk.pixels.com) | After 40+ years of fine art education/working in a variety of mediums and exhibiting, Janis' focus now is the healing power of art. Janis' images of farmers markets, gardens, flowers, and the wildlife living/visiting the naturalized park nearby, capture the vibrant colors, textures and light. Janis' work is included in the collection of various hospitals locally and in Europe.

**Jaundy Brunswick** | [jaundybrunswickart.com](http://jaundybrunswickart.com) | Jaundy's work explores and critiques personal identity and highlights the space between self-perception, others' perceptions, and how easy it is to alter those perceptions. As a woman of color, raised by white parents in a predominantly white




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**BRUCE SEEDS**

**Quiltmaker** | [bruceseeds.com](http://bruceseeds.com)

**BRUCE SEEDS** used to be an architect. It seemed like the thing to do. Equally proficient as a kid in art, math, and science, the young lad declaring, “I’m going to be an architect,” elicited approving grunts from the elders. “I’m going to be an architect.” Heh, heh. Sure, kid. Get ready for a ride.

And so it was: Two years at UW-Madison, then four more at University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, then leaving the Midwest to start a career in Dallas. A career almost immediately derailed by the new Computer-Aided Design (CAD) system that his firm had just bought. Turns out, the CAD course listed on his resume (the first ever offered by Minnesota’s architecture program) landed him the job. But he followed that digital bliss. Drawing, training, IT support, and even some designing served him and his employers well—until it didn’t.

He tried his hand at stained glass, culminating in a commission for a church in Texas. But feeling the need to be closer to family, he moved back to Milwaukee and designed websites until the economy of 2008 said “no.”

Shopping one day with his mom at Ben Franklin, a book called *One Block Wonders* caught his eye. Quilts, but in a style he had never seen before. They were gorgeous. Could he understand the instructions? Check. Did he have a sewing machine? Duh. So he bought some fabric and made a quilt. Then another. (He’s now working on quilt 50.)

He shared his work on social media where it got some attention. Then more attention. Which led to coverage in print and on television, including an interview on “Sewing with Nancy,” a one-day, pop-up at the Milwaukee Art Museum; a solo show with The Museum of Wisconsin Art; exhibits at the Wisconsin Museum of Quilts & Fiber Arts and a number of galleries; a profile in the documentary “Treasured Quilts of Wisconsin,” and inclusion in a sequel to the book from which he first learned the technique.

And get this: One of his fans, filmmaker Doug Langway, asked if he could use some of Bruce’s quilts on location for his “BearCity” trilogy. Answer: Yes! Four of them appeared in BearCity 2, and Bruce himself appeared in BearCity 3 in a small role in addition to being one of the film’s executive producers.

Bruce lives in Milwaukee with his husband Jason and their two cats. ■

farm community and education system, Jaundy has spent life balancing the urge to blend in while simultaneously needing to feel heard.

**Kaci Sullivan** | [ksullivan.designsit.wixsite.com/timecapsule](http://ksullivan.designsit.wixsite.com/timecapsule) | A visual artist who works in both traditional and digital mediums. Currently he runs KS Strategy & Design, a business that focuses on virtual spaces and events. He’s known for his paintings and oceanic porcelain sculptures, as well as his organization: Trans Liberation Art Coalition.

**Karin Wolf** | Karin serves as the Arts Administrator for the City of Madison, curating events, running grant programs, and advocating for all things arts and artist. She goes to neighborhoods for local art projects and learns of the community’s concerns and addresses them through art.

**Kimberly A. Blanchette** | [kimberlyblanchette.com](http://kimberlyblanchette.com) | An author (poetry, plays, inspirations), artist (painter, photographer), activist, officiant, and comedienne. Kimberly currently resides in Janesville with her wife Colleen and is a member of a local comedy improv troupe called Steadily Improv’ing.

**Kristin Ellis** | [farwellgallery.com](http://farwellgallery.com) | Co-owner of the Farwell Gallery, she is a self-taught glass-on-glass mosaic artist. She is inspired by the beauty in nature, and enjoys spending time outdoors. Ellis has a BA in Studio Art/Art Therapy and a MBA in Finance.

**Lisa Lauren** | [instagram.com/kettleblacksilver](http://instagram.com/kettleblacksilver) | Specializing in creating jewelry through silversmithing, she uses stones, crystals, bones, fur, leather, silver, copper, and a variety of other natural/found materials.

**M.Rose Sweetnam** | [facebook.com/M.RoseSweetnamArt](http://facebook.com/M.RoseSweetnamArt) | A mixed media artist, educator, and organizer, they work with collage and print, as well as embroidery, illustration, dance, video, photography, and found objects.

**Mar Gosselar** | [@theseboneshavefeelings](http://@theseboneshavefeelings) | Mar (they/them) is a white, queer, and mad artist. They strive to engage with tattooing at Red Clover Tattoo Collective as a consensual, trauma-informed practice that centers collaboration and the client experience. They make art inspired by vintage illustrations, woodcuts, naturalist paintings, pattern-making, and their clients’ input.

**Melanie Renee Photography / Dulcy Dog Photography** | [melaniereneephoto.com](http://melaniereneephoto.com) & [dulcydogphoto.com](http://dulcydogphoto.com) | Weddings, people, branding, and lots of dogs. Melanie is also a regular *Our Lives* contributor of both photos and writing.

**Michael Velliquette** | [velliquette.com](http://velliquette.com) | A mixed media artist and paper sculptor, he has participated in exhibitions in museums and galleries in the US, Europe, and Asia. Velliquette is an Assistant Professor of Foundations in the Art Department at the UW-Madison where he teaches courses in visual literacy and creative practice.

**Natalie Hinckley** | [hinckleyproductions.com](http://hinckleyproductions.com) | A Director and DP with passion in supporting entertainment, LGBTQ and recovery communities. She is founder of the creative studio Hinckley Productions, specializing in brand storytelling, commercial cinematography as well as live streaming and event production.

**Nicole Bresnik** | [nicolebresnick.com](http://nicolebresnick.com) | Nicole paints from life, trying to bring the most beautiful elements out of people and places. “Painting is a meditation and an act of putting positive energy into the universe,” according to Nicole’s teacher. But once in a while, Nicole needs to get in the world’s face by appearing as the alter-persona-artist-self called “peyton place.”

**nipinet** | [nedpines.com](http://nedpines.com) | A Michif, Anishinaabe, Nêhiyaw and mixed-European descent Two-Spirit tattoo artist working in Teejop at Red Clover Tattoo Collective. Their art focuses on the intersections of identity, culture, queerness, and deep, nasty, complicated emotions. They tattoo with bright color gradients and bold lines and love beadwork, ledger art, anime, decomposition, the natural world, and the human form.

**Nykoli Koslow** | [instagram.com/nykoli.koslow](http://instagram.com/nykoli.koslow) | An artist working in the realm of painting and drawing, fusing figuration with abstraction to explore

notions of gender, sexuality, and agency. Part autobiographical and part research-based, his work pulls from ancient history, mythology, religion, mysticism, and a kind of theoretical physics infused with sci-fi.

**Owen Tuohy** | [concretebedsheets.net](http://concretebedsheets.net) | Local non-binary trans artist specializing in woodburning, neon lighting, wood sculpture, and painting.

**Rae Sowards** | [instagram.com/raesowards](http://instagram.com/raesowards) | An author, poet, and fine art photographer with a special focus on shooting with film and in black and white. The photos are often beautiful and gritty at the same time, showcasing deeply personal reflections on identity, location, class, and more.

**Rolando Cruz** | [rolandocruz.com](http://rolandocruz.com) | An award-winning artist and photographer, as well as an ardent runner, who frequently explores issues of identity and race through his work.

**Simone Doing** | [simoneandmax.com](http://simoneandmax.com) | A visual artist, youth worker, and museum educator. Simone and her collaborator, Max Puchalsky are artists, organizers, and educators who work collaboratively on projects that reflect their interest in empathy, technorealism, and engagement with local community issues.

**SNollPhotography** | [snollphotography.com](http://snollphotography.com) | Photography focused on performance photography, either theater (of which Steve has been a producer/director for 20 years), drag, burlesque, and especially our local gay athletes (Steve’s husband plays rugby for the Madison Minotaurs).

**T.L. Luke Park** | [tl-luke.com](http://tl-luke.com) | A professional illustrator providing printed goods, custom commission services, and art business consultations. In 2018, she started illustrating empowered g\*rls, exploring whimsically dark and often spooky worlds.

**Transpainter** | [transpainter.com](http://transpainter.com) | Rae Senarighi / Transpainter (he/him) is a non-binary cancer survivor inspiring self-compassion, activism, and gender resilience via unapologetic portraiture of vibrant transgender and non-binary power. On a mission to spread self-acceptance, as creator of the “You Are Loved” campaign, Rae’s message has found a home on billboards in thousands of locations across the U.S. and Canada and flags and merch across the world. He’s partnered with the likes of Schwinn, Nike and the Portland Trailblazers, GLAAD, and Netflix.

**Will Kiley Santino** | [patreon.com/willsantino](http://patreon.com/willsantino) | Best known for his New Yorker cartoons, but he has been drawing, writing, and making up new worlds and stories for his entire life. Will’s creative practice is multifaceted. In addition to the cartoons, he also writes whimsical rhyming poetry and has begun doing comedic impressions.

**Woody Olsen** | [woodyolsen.com](http://woodyolsen.com) | An abstract painter, his acrylic and watercolor paintings are rendered primarily in bright, floating, overlapping colors. A graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, his work has been featured in juried shows throughout the Midwest.

## CRAFTERS/MAKERS

**After While, Craftodile** | Geometric mobiles and sculptures inspired by folk-crafts and the full moon. Think Himmeli, Pajaki, Puzurs, etc., things for your mantle, altar, home, and life. Most pieces are made of a combination of things: brass tubes, nylon string, beads, crystals, love, and attention. They are sparkly and pleasing to the eye in the light.

**Bruce Seeds** | [bruceseeds.com](http://bruceseeds.com) | Shopping one day with his mom at Ben Franklin, a book called *One Block Wonders* caught his eye. Quilts, but in a style he had never seen before. They were gorgeous. Could he understand the instructions? Check. Did he have a sewing machine? Duh. So he bought some fabric and made a quilt. Then another. He’s now working on quilt #50.

**C3 Designs** | [facebook.com/AwardWinningFineJewelry](http://facebook.com/AwardWinningFineJewelry) | Nationally award-winning jewelry designer located in South Milwaukee. Besides creating custom jewelry, C3 also offers such services as repairs, appraisals, and pearl stringing. C3 carries an extensive array of colored gemstone and

diamond jewelry as well as wedding rings and commitment bands. Family-owned-and-operated, C3 gladly services any and all clientele.

**Darn Queers/Universal Friend** | [facebook.com/groups/930631423985133](http://facebook.com/groups/930631423985133) | Kandra Shefchik is a multi-disciplined artist, sewist, painter, creator of wearable sculpture. They love to teach sewing at the monthly Darn Queers meet-up.

**Haus of Ogé** | [instagram.com/hausofoge](http://instagram.com/hausofoge) | A Wisconsin fashion brand created by Jinx and Micah Ogé. The brand features signature designs with a strong emphasis on LGBTQ+, drag, non-binary, femmes, and more. From high fashion echoing pop culture, 80s and 90s trends, barbiecore and futuristic-themed looks and beyond.

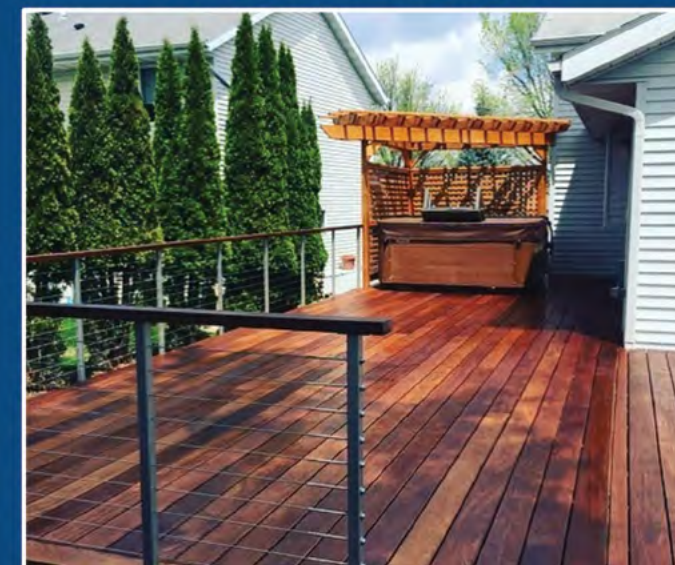
**Mindfully Inspired** | [dot.cards/mindfullyinspired](http://dot.cards/mindfullyinspired) | Featuring an eclectic collection of art made using repurposed vintage jewelry, upcycled toys, and found items, Mindfully Inspired creates art without judgment.

**P&S Glassworks** | [@psglassworks](http://@psglassworks) | Established in 2023 by a gay couple who make stained glass pieces, P&S Glassworks would love to bring some more color into your home! DM on instagram for commissions.

**Queer Suave By Niko** | [queersuavebyniko.wixsite.com/queer-suave-by-niko](http://queersuavebyniko.wixsite.com/queer-suave-by-niko) | Niko makes garments from scratch for the queer community to their exact measurements, free of charge. Niko wants to stop dysphoria with fashion and garments and make it so as many queer folks as possible will have euphoria wearing garments made for them. Clothing shouldn’t have gender roles, so every piece is genderless, and anyone can wear it.

**Scott by Design** | [linktr.ee/ScottbyDesign](http://linktr.ee/ScottbyDesign) | Abbey and Haley Scott are a married couple from Madison that love all things body/fat positive, neurodivergent, queer, thrifted, glittery, and unique! Abbey specializes in wreaths and wall hangings, while Haley dabbles in a bit of everything: painting, collaging, and digital drawing. They offer a wide range of creations that appeal to many different styles. Commissions welcome!

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HISTORY EDUCATORS

# Wisconsin's first true LGBTQ historian

Celebrating **Louis Stimac**, a long-lost champion of our hidden history.

**SINCE 1994**, LGBT History Month has been celebrated every October to commemorate the contributions of our community. October was specifically chosen to coincide with National Coming Out Day (October 11) and the first and second marches on Washington for LGBT rights (1979, 1987).

The 25th anniversary of Stonewall sparked a national consciousness of the unique and separate heritage of LGBTQ people. Stonewall25 inspired a national movement that created the ONE National LGBT Archives, local LGBTQ history projects across the country, and ultimately, the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project.

But Wisconsin was already decades ahead of this movement, thanks to Louis Stimac.

Stimac, a passionate community champion, was Wisconsin's first true LGBTQ historian. Sadly, his name is no longer well-known or recognized, he is rarely mentioned among Wisconsin's LGBTQ leaders, and few know about the hard-won battles he fought for us all nearly 50 years ago.

Now, we're paying tribute to a man who sought to document, preserve, and celebrate our shared history—long before we even believed we had a history of our own.

### MEET LOUIS STIMAC

Louis Stimac was born on January 23, 1941 in Ironwood, Michigan. His childhood was not a happy one. His parents, forced to marry after his conception, were constantly fighting. His father was a chronic and abusive alcoholic, his mother a codependent enabler who "kept up appearances" as long as she could. Eventually, his parents separated, and he moved to Wisconsin with his mother.

Louis graduated from Eagle River High School in 1959 with intentions of becoming a priest. However, after attending two seminaries, he realized his true calling was elsewhere. Where others saw judgment, rejection, and condemnation in the Bible, Louis only saw lessons of love, acceptance, and salvation.

As a gay rights activist, he was emboldened to confront religious intolerance, bigotry, and homophobia whenever and wherever he saw it.

"Why does it matter whom we love? What does matter is that we do love. To be gay is to



Louis Stimac in 1980.



be a healthy, happy homosexual. To be gay is to enjoy the fact that one loves other people of the same sex. And a person who is gay can be a religious person. Love is always a religious act," he wrote in 1976. "Neither heterosexual nor homosexual is a better way of life. The best way of life is being oneself, being honest. Honesty is a virtue. Hatred is a vice."

After moving to Milwaukee, Louis worked for the County Welfare department until his controversial firing in 1971. He lived at St. Nicholas Parish (1155 N. 21st St.) before moving to the Upper East Side, and later, Merrill Park. He served UWM for decades as an administrative assistant, dispatcher, and project manager for the Facilities department.

Upon accepting himself, Stimac penned an emotional coming out letter to his mother, which reveals many of the inner conflicts he navigated in his youth.

*You were trapped by society's pressures, but I will not let that happen to me. You married a man in a different time and place you most likely did not want to be stuck with. Just imagine how much your*

*whole life changed that one single night. You wanted to give your baby a name. This is one baby who had rather been raised a legal bastard. For what you have done for me, I am grateful, but nobody has to give up their personal happiness to please others.*

*I will never be a saint, but I will spend my life seeking justice. I know the hell I went through faking who I was. And if possible, I want as few others to go through the same ordeal: wearing one face to the world, and another face to themselves. The strain is unreal. My only regret is that I did not make my choice a lot sooner. At this point in my life, I'm willing to tell people to fuck off. I would rather be lonely than suffer the hell of other people. Under the guise of tolerating hateful people, we end up hating ourselves.*

*You probably don't like much of what you read, but now you know how I feel and think. I am still me. I am just a better version of me now.*

### INVISIBLE PEOPLE

Louis was a founding member of Gay People's Union (GPU). He was personally responsible for filing their articles of nonprofit incorporation. This was no easy process in the early 1970s: Raising money for gay rights was next to impossible, several law firms rejected GPU as they didn't support gay causes, and worst of all, Stimac found it difficult to find five people to commit to being named members of the organization. They were afraid that outing themselves in writing would create something that could be used against them later.

When we think of the Stonewall generation, we think of a huge army of angry, activated, and committed revolutionaries fighting for change. But the truth is that the movement was much, much smaller. Imagine a dozen people who were not only willing to be seen—at a time when just being seen was dangerous—but willing to fight against all odds. That was how liberation began.

"We moved in a short span of time from a sense something was deeply wrong with us—to the realization that there was something radically wrong with society," said Stimac in 1978.

*In one quick and bright flash, we experienced a revelation: we had been mistreated, we were among the oppressed. We had been a silenced majority of invisible men and invisible women. We were unspeakable and unknown for so long, that generations had*

*found comfort in their own abuse. No more.*

*As we changed our minds, we changed our world. We moved from various forms of self-negation and self-destruction to newfound outrage and outward action. We moved from hiding our sexual and affectionate nature—to affirming publicly the best parts of our being. We experienced an epic shift in our sense of self. We experienced ourselves as instigators of a movement for social change. We experienced ourselves as history makers. We experienced ourselves as revolutionaries.*

*From homosexuality as a personal and devastating fate, a private secret shame, a prison sentence from which there was no parole, a curse of endless sorrow and despair; we moved with often dizzying speed towards sweeping, intoxicating feelings of self-acceptance, love, and liberation.*

*The heterosexual dictatorship tried to keep us out of sight and out of mind. But now, the people of the shadows were in the light, and there was no going back to what once was. That time was over. And we would never let it happen again.*

*This is our fight...and it is a fight. No one will hand you justice on a silver platter. You have to get in there and grab your share, or starve.*

### WE'RE EVERYWHERE

Still, it wasn't easy to be a gay rights activist in 1970s Wisconsin. Despite being the founder of the first LGBTQ community center in Milwaukee, Stimac was frequently frustrated by the lack of support from his own community. Complacency—anchored in fear and self-loathing—deeply concerned him.

"The gay scene in Milwaukee is well established and has been that way for over 50 years. Homosexuals are the second largest minority in Wisconsin. Yet, the homosexual who speaks out for gay rights is still an outcast," wrote Stimac in a *Milwaukee Journal* editorial in March 1975.

"Many people are uncomfortable around him, threatened by their own fear of the different. 'I know you exist, just don't remind me of it.' He even encounters opposition from other gays, closet queens who wail, 'I'm comfortable in my closet. I embrace my fear, my shame. Just leave me alone, let me hide in my bars and baths.'

"Nobody, it seems, wants to talk about homosexuality. But the fact remains that homosexuals exist, in far greater numbers than most people realize. We are everywhere."

Stimac was a firebrand. His frustration often



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was rendered in editorial indictments of a society that refused change. He jokingly called these the “the rantings of a frustrated liberationist.”

*Homosexuals are always in season, he told the Sentinel in 1977. Feel free to attack your local fag. It's fun to hassle pansies. So few dare to fight back. If we keep putting a lid on them, they will never find out how many of them exist or how many happy occasions we have denied them. Rumor has it over 40,000 homosexuals live in the Milwaukee area. Keep it a secret.*

*Homosexuals should have no rights. A right not to be discriminated against? Absurd! So we must gleefully deprive them the rights to first class citizenship. Queers are not human anyway. Remember, every time you say fruit, pansy, queer, or fag, you help keep them in their place.”*

(Note: it's not clear if the *Milwaukee Sentinel* understood Stimac's sarcasm, or simply agreed with these statements.)

Yet, he persisted. He launched a twice-weekly radio program on WUWM that focused on gay rights issues. By March 1975, over 50 episodes had been recorded and archived. He was deeply concerned about the self-harm and suicide that followed family rejection, and so, he created the first GPU support groups for parents of gay people. He was troubled by youth bullying, and sponsored GPU's first gay youth scholarship fund to give students hope for the future.

He fought the police payoff system. He fought sexual harassment of women in the workplace. He fought Anita Bryant and the Save the Children campaign. He fought police raids of bars, baths, and parks. He fought the Briggs Initiative. He fought for male survivors of sexual violence. He fought for legal recognition of trans identities. He fought for outed spouses facing devastating divorce and custody trials. He toured the country to teach others how to build what he had built in Milwaukee. He spoke at conferences all over North America. He fought, and he fought, and he fought.

And it's amazing what one unselfish person could accomplish, guided by passion and rage, in such a turbulent and troubled time.

By the mid-1970s, Gay People's Union was a national leader in the gay rights movement, blazing a trail with innovative first-time community programs unseen in most American cities. For over a decade, Gay People's Union lobbied for a healthier, safer, stronger, and more

inclusive LGBTQ community throughout Wisconsin. They effectively dismantled long-standing systems of oppression: media, health care, police, justice, and legislative policies that had long criminalized or excluded LGBTQ people. Through their efforts, Milwaukee passed a gay rights ordinance in 1980, Wisconsin became the Gay Rights State in 1982, and sodomy laws were decriminalized in 1983.

“Louie was very kind to me,” said Michael Karbon. “He had an infectious giggle for such a bear. He always had a lot of cute guys hanging around. I'll never forget him taking me to my first GPU meeting at the Farwell Center.”

For years, Stimac was the director of gay counseling services at Gay People's Union. He established a ground-breaking crisis hotline that became the first call for help for a generation. Whether struggling with self-acceptance or self-destruction, callers knew they would find a supportive, positive, affirming, and competent voice on the other end of that call. The number of lives changed and/or saved by the GPU Hotline can never be measured.

Still, his frustration raged.

*We cannot trust the bleeding heart straight liberals. They are gutless. They will use us, exploit us while they can, and when our back is to the wall, they will be the first ones to walk away. There is as much hostility from straight activists as ignorance from gays of their own oppression.*

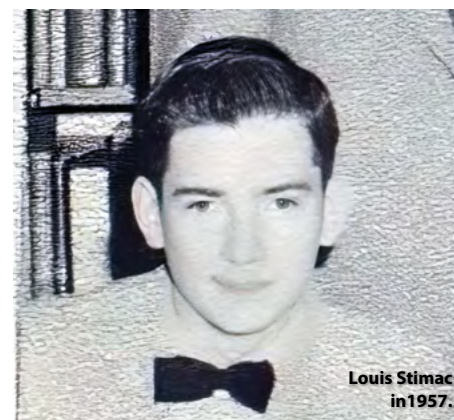
*It's difficult to serve others and get totally ignored as a reward. The batteries of the most active people in the movement have long ago run out with no way to recharge. No one asks for great rewards. That would be illogical, selfish, and stupid. What is sought is a response from the community, that there is a community.*

### A HISTORY OF OUR OWN

History was Stimac's long-time passion. He personally researched, published, and taught gay history coursework at the Milwaukee Free University (and later, the GPU Farwell Center). The course, which launched in fall 1975 with a single lecture, became the first formal education in LGBTQ history ever offered in the State of Wisconsin. The incredibly comprehensive curriculum—available for review in the UWM Special Collections—covers four centuries of homosexual history, with mentions of Magnus Hirschfeld, Phyllis Lyon & Del Martin, Frank Kameny, Morris Kight, Bessie Smith, Gertrude Stein, Gladys Bentley, Alfred

Kinsey, Reverend Troy Perry, and other pivotal national figures.

Most curious is Stimac's preamble promise to “go further back than the Stonewall Rebellion.” Stonewall was already becoming a blurry, romantic mythology, and Stimac seemed to work very hard to ensure his students knew we'd been here all along.



One lesson begins with a quote from Father Pere Marquette's first visit to Wisconsin:

*Some...assume the garb of women and retain it throughout their lives. There is some mystery in this. Some call them monstrous, but they are people of tremendous consequence. They are summoned to the councils, nothing can be decided without their advice. They are simply revered by all of their people. Their only profession seems to be leading an extraordinary life.*

Considering the limited resources of the era, his curriculum was shockingly all-encompassing, and surpasses most people's knowledge today. He included lessons on William Dorsey Swan, the ballroom scene, New York's Paresis Hall, the fairy movement, Dr. Frank Kiernan, Dr. Frank Lydston, Ma Rainey, the Pansy Craze, the Veterans Benevolent Association, the Boys of Boise case, the Jewel Box Revue, the post-WWII boom in urban gay bars, and more.

Stimac was somehow aware of local gender pioneers (including Frank Blunt and Ralph Kerwineo); early gay hotspots (including the St. Charles and Royal Hotels); the big-name drag stars of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s; and even a Grafton music studio that recorded gay-themed blues songs in the 1930s. His course also examined the language of gay people, including terms like “trick” and “lover” and how these deviated from heteronormative language due to the impossibility of marriage and impermanence of gay relationships.

Curiously, he does not include a history of

the gay bars, nor any mention of the Black Nite Brawl of 1961. Upon closer inspection of Stimac's papers, it's easy to see why: He did not see gay bars as symbols of liberation. Gay bars were seen as self-imposed prisons that kept people out of sight, out of mind, and effectively destroying themselves while destabilizing any sense of community. Gay bars were symbols of an earlier, more oppressive time when they were the only outlet gay people had. They were beneath his notice.

The *Milwaukee Journal* ran a story on Stimac's course in 1979. The media saw gay history as a curious oxymoron; after all, how could gay people have their own history?

*It is difficult to compile a history of people whose particular way of life was for years considered a crime so horrendous that none dare speak its name, wrote Joel McNally of the Milwaukee Journal. But that has been the project of Louis Stimac, a founder of the Gay People's Union.*

*It is history filled with gallows humor, tragedy, and a lot of wry opinion. But it is documented, and to Stimac, that is important. He refers to gays as the people of the shadows, who had their history denied and stolen from them. He feels it is important for gays to realize they were not alone and never have been.*

*Documented local history is scant and sometimes bizarre, but the gays have been here longer than anyone might suspect.*

The article mentions Milwaukee's 1890s reputation as one of the “capital cities of homosexuality.” Stimac shared—and the *Journal* actually published—the astonishing story of an 80-year-old gay history student. “After the class, he told us that he was in his early teens when he became aware of his homosexuality. He started going to Juneau Park to relieve his urge, because at that time, shortly after the start of the 20th century, Juneau Park was already known for its long reputation as a homosexual meeting place.”

Stimac asked the *Milwaukee Journal* to let him share his history lessons in a weekly column. Apparently, they weren't interested. Very little is known about his life after the Farwell Center closed in 1981, and Gay People's Union effectively dissolved a few years later.

Cancer claimed Louis Stimac on April 8, 1994. He was buried in Allouez Cemetery in Green Bay. Two months later, the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project was born at PrideFest.

We can only wonder what he thinks of today's Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project. We can only hope we've made him proud. ■

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FOOD RECIPES TRAVEL SELF-PUBLISHING

## Standing Fork Salute: A Celebration of 20th-Century Cuisine

After doing short-form food writing for *Madison* magazine, **Dan Curd** has now self-published a book of recipes pieced together with travel logs and a historical narrative.

**DAN CURD** has worn a lot of hats in his lifetime. He has worked in advertising, graphic design, political campaigns, at a travel agency, and, more recently, as a food writer. It's his work as the latter that has now culminated in a self-published book, *Standing Fork Salute: A Celebration of 20th-Century Cuisine*. With one part food history, which Dan feels is a very under-explored topic, one part travel log, and two parts recipes, *Standing Fork Salute* feels like the life's work of a man who has been eating and writing his way through good food for a couple of decades. What it really is, however, is a love letter to his friends, his past, and to a less frenzied life.

Dan was born in 1948 in Kentucky, and growing up as a queer kid in a fifth-generation Kentucky family at that time was not easy. Dan was not your typical little boy, and fondly remembers collecting menus like his peers collected sports memorabilia. For his 10th birthday, he asked his parents to take him and his friends to Simon House, which was the most upscale and expensive restaurant in town at the time.

The food writing he did for *Madison* magazine required a lot of research for small, 300-word pieces, and Dan felt that the stories he didn't have room for before needed to be told.

His memories of a particular aunt, however, are less fond. She hated that he loved cooking and food, feeling not only that it made him more feminine in the eyes of many, but also that cooks were (and still are) considered "blue collar" workers. She wanted him to be a doctor, or something more lucrative, and also wanted to try to impart her gender stereotypes on him, once gifting him a baseball that was promptly put on the shelf and never touched again. "She came from a different world," he told me. *Standing Fork Salute* is dedicated to the little boy that Dan was, and all of the other little boys who like to cook.

Madison has been Dan's home for most of his adult life. Despite a fruitless attempt at graduate school at the UW, he says he kept coming back, making it his permanent home in 1977. Starting out, he worked in advertising, but was not happy or fulfilled. A chance meeting with Dick



Wagner at a luncheon quickly propelled Dan into the political world, where he worked for the McGovern campaign, and helped behind the scenes with the first gay rights bill in the country, called the "Consenting Adults Bill." He worked in politics for many years before running out of steam, and left to work briefly at a travel agency.

Once the internet came along and the bottom fell out of the travel agency world, he started working with the Madison AIDS Network as a development director, and eventually, though he left that particular position, started working closely with Dick Wagner for different LGBT fundraisers. He and Dick worked well together, with Dick working the front of house and Dan putting together the menus and food. Later in life, Dan started writing about food for *Madison* magazine, and this work, and the research he did for it, is what eventually led to his new book.

Like many of us, Dan felt stranded during the pandemic. Not being able to travel meant that he had a lot more free time on his hands, and having completed a 1400-page volume on the genealogy of his family, he felt that he had more to share. The food writing he did for *Madison*



magazine required a lot of research for small, 300-word pieces, and Dan felt that the stories he didn't have room for before needed to be told. In a time when most cookbooks are large, glossy affairs featuring slick photos of the recipes, *Standing Fork Salute* does not have any images, and that makes it special—and affordable to do outside of a large publishing contract. You can, however, find photos of all of his recipes on his Instagram account @danscurd. ■

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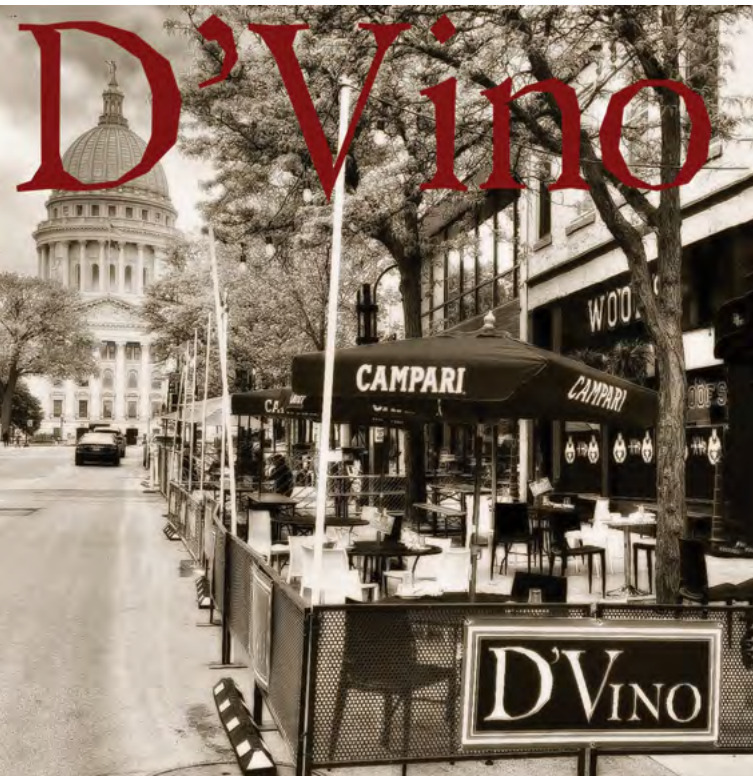
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I am a gay, white, transgender, fat human being. I grew up in a small town where life was simple. I never knew who I was there. My skin was never my own, the clothes I wore were there to hide my body, lock it away. I would convince myself to have crushes on the girls in my class because my best friend wanted to know who my crush was. I'll never forget the wheel I made, every girl in my class had their name on it in a different color of the rainbow. Every time I was asked who my crush was my finger glided over the rainbow and flicked a small piece of paper cut to resemble an arrow. Whatever it landed on being the new love of my life. I never felt safe, I never felt free to be myself.

Moving away changed my life, I went to a place where people could be themselves, where I had the chance to see a real, breathing, and thriving queer couple walking the streets. Queer adults don't realize the power they truly hold in existing. Their beautiful identities are a beacon for queer youth. As a depressed queer teenager, you never imagine yourself being 46 and working your nine-to-five. But being able to see queers existing past the age of 21 changed my life. It reminded me of the power and authenticity of the queer community.

The most challenging part of coming out and living my life as a queer human is my size. Fatphobia is an issue across all groups, constantly encouraged to show less and hide more. Put our bodies away for the satisfaction of others.

I love being queer. I love being myself. My advocacy comes from my heart. I work with people because I love people. I want others to feel safe. I want others to know they are okay, that no matter what they have a hand supporting them, even if it costs a few one-liners delivered with impeccable timing. I have had the privilege to work with so many influential adult queer people, that I feel like I can have a future. Not everyone can have that. When I didn't feel safe in the GSA at my school, I started my own group. Escape is always an option, it's never cowardly to want more for yourself.

I don't want this article to be only a narrative about my appreciation for queerness. No matter how much I do love the LGBTQIA+ community, we have issues. The most challenging part of coming out and living my life as a queer human is my size. I am a 270-pound, 5'11" AMAB human. I am intimidating, and being queer has been difficult with my size. Fatphobia is an issue across all groups, constantly encouraged to show less and hide more. Put our bodies away for the satisfaction of others.

I am someone who wants communities to be able to see their identity and themselves in the person advocating for them. I want to advocate for people I can be in community with. Presenting feminine is difficult when you can't be slender. Gender stereotypes are something I battle every day, and this has made my advocacy harder. Trying to fight yourself and oppression is an uphill battle. But there was a point where I gave up. I decided to love myself. To look in the mirror and say "You are enough." And that is what my advocacy is.

I want you, the reader, to take something away from this article. That no matter where your journey is, it is only beginning. The story of my life isn't a NYT bestseller—yet. My advocacy is about reverence, realizing that no matter what, we are just humans all trying to survive in a decaying world. Even if we fight, in the end, we love each other. Every human being has the most beautiful thing at their core. Humanity. That is what advocacy is, a fight to empower the core of every human being. That is my advocacy. That is my journey. ■

ADVOCACY IDENTITY FATPHOBIA SELF-LOVE

## I Decided to Love Myself

GSAFE youth **Carter Mandel** speaks about representation and an advocacy practice based in a desire for each of us to understand that we are enough.

**EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE**, I've had this feeling of not belonging, ostracizing myself from others. Sure, it might've been my social anxiety or main character syndrome, but I think it goes deeper than that. Being queer is a journey, a winding path that takes so many turns it sometimes feels like a chapter book that will never end. Even writing this, I'm not sure what path I want to go down, but I will give you an insight into my life.



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