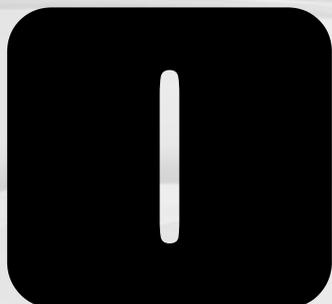


January/February  
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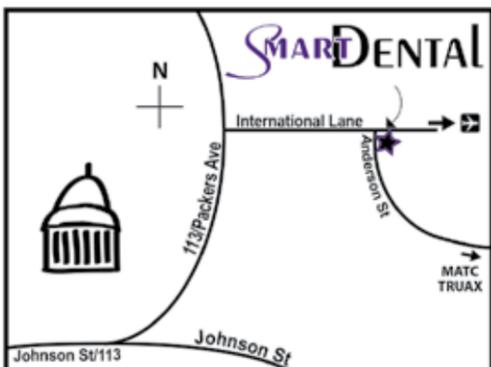
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**40 WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE**  
 Brian Firkus on creating his alter-ego, Trixie Mattel. Trixie, a host at Madison's Plan B nightclub, will compete on the new season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

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**CORRECTION** In our November issue we miscredited "The Revolving Closet Door" to an anonymous reader. The article was written by Dennis Yadon.

COVER PHOTO BY MAUREEN CASSIDY

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our lives



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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EDITOR'S NOTE **EMILY MILLS**

COMMUNITY LOVE

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!** And what interesting times we live in. This issue in particular reflects the beautiful and ever-changing landscapes of our world—the diverse personalities and experiences of the LGBTQ community, the complex issues we face every day, and the families we choose to build.

Included in these pages is our annual Committed Couples List. As the landscape of same-sex marriage and LGBTQ Civil Rights changes too, we've been listening to your feedback and continue to work to make the list more inclusive of the variety of forms that our relationships take.

I'm incredibly proud of all the stories featured in the pages of this jam-packed and colorful issue: From the story of Trixie Mattel representing Wisconsin on *RuPaul's Drag Race* (and the incredible photos by Lisa Predko that accompany it), to the story of new community-supported café and grocery Cow & Quince out in New Glarus, and the poignant words of advice that always come from our column writers.

I'd like to draw special attention, as well, to M. Adams' especially timely and urgent piece about why the events in Ferguson and elsewhere are absolutely queer issues and why the LGBTQ community must always approach its fight for equality and justice with an intersectional mindset. ■



CONTRIBUTORS



**VIRGINIA HARRISON** is a Special Education Assistant at West High School. She believes all students have the right to an educational environment that allows them to thrive. Virginia also served as editor of *Our Lives* from 2009–2012.

**LISA PREDKO** is a Chicago-based photographer who grew up with a fondness for purple shag, muscle cars, and all things Bettie Page. And while these retro influences don't define her photography, they have given her a keen eye for the vibrancy, individuality, and style so essential in creating images that evoke emotion. Whether shooting editorial or commercial, Lisa has an unassuming charm that immediately puts her subjects at ease. And if that doesn't work, she plies them with her famous chocolate chip cookies.

**M. ADAMS** is a Black-gay-working class-gender non-conforming wimmin, a community organizer, a scientist, and an activist scholar. As a grassroots organizer in Wisconsin, M has years of experience in addressing the root causes of our oppressions on the ground with organizations such as Freedom, Inc., Take Back the Land-Madison and National, and the Center for Pan-African Development. M's work is based on centering the leadership of those most affected, specifically working with Black and Hmong queer folks to build liberation movements, and building a new society as the means to end our oppressions.

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LETTER TO THE EDITORS

RESPONDING TO "MEETING THE NEED"

ISSUE: NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014 **LAST MONTH'S DIP** in temperatures and early snow are a stark reminder of why we need to be concerned about homelessness and homeless services in Dane County. Homelessness is a destructive force in the lives of individuals and families with children. When it gets really cold outside, it is life threatening.

Out of over 14 years of working with area churches on social justice and human services issues in our community, I can recall no more than four occasions when I received complaints about the Salvation Army with respect to LGBTQ clients. In each instance the SADC indicated a desire to resolve the situation. Their current partnership with Outreach is a sign of their intention to be responsive to the concerns of members of the LGBTQ community who find themselves homeless.

No matter what we think of the positions of the Salvation Army as a religious organization, in our community this organization provides critical services to women, children, and families. Boycotting the kettle will not change the Salvation Army, but it will endanger the local services the SADC offers to people in our community who have very few options.

Continuing to support the Salvation Army of Dane County does not mean that we shouldn't be concerned about the unique challenges of LGBTQ homeless individuals and families in our community. The article in the November/December issue is a reminder that we, as a community, need to be asking very important questions about how services are offered to our brothers and sisters—and not just of the Salvation Army.

When we offer financial support to a human service system (whether as individuals, businesses, or religious organizations), we should be taking the time to ask questions. What outreach efforts are being made to the LGBTQ community? What policies and procedures are in place to insure that LBGT clients feel safe in the shelter? What education and outreach is in place to other shelter residents to reduce tension or conflict?

The Salvation Army of Dane County is only one of a number of organizations that provide important services. We should be thinking about the support we offer to The Road Home, Porchlight, the YWCA, for example, and getting feedback about their efforts to provide outreach, services, and support in their shelter systems (since both The Road Home and Porchlight have relationships with religious organizations for shelter and financial support).

If we have questions about the homeless service system in Dane County, what is going through the minds of LGBTQ individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness? Are they seeking help or worrying about discrimination?

The article calls us not to boycott but to engage. I hope that we can respond to this call to action in a positive way that does not hurt the most vulnerable amongst us. We have money, talent and power to bring to these important questions in our community. Let's use it for the common good.

WENDY COOPER, M.Div, MSSW, Madison

BEING AN ALLY TO PEOPLE OF COLOR IS  
A RESPONSIBILITY & PRIORITY

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**AS A GAY MAN**, I understand what it is to be marginalized and discriminated against. Thankfully, I have been fortunate in the struggle to recognize my sexuality. Last winter I was in Capetown, South Africa, evaluating the government's ability to adequately grant asylum to LGBTQ refugees. The process brought me face-to-face with men and women from all over Africa who truly knew fear, prejudice, and hate against them because of their sexual orientation and gender identification. In those interviews, I came to more fully understand my privilege.

At the heart of the situation in Ferguson, and all over this country, is the lack of a conversation about privilege. Fortunately, this conversation is beginning to surface. Privilege is not only about the color of our skin, but our sex, wealth, educational opportunities, nationality, geography, sexual orientation, and many other factors that are often not chosen. Many Americans who have traveled to developing countries have experienced American Privilege. When I was interviewing and writing affidavits for those individuals in South Africa, I constantly confronted my privileges and asked myself, "How can I empower those who do not have these benefits?" I am a white, educated, cisgender male from America who happens to be gay. I'm loaded with opportunities to advocate for people who are women, non-white, seeking to be educated, transgender, and queer. I found my opportunity to be an ally is not only a responsibility—it is a priority.

How do we make being an ally a priority? First, we must acknowledge our privilege, acknowledge it and itemize what we take for granted. Second, we must identify who this privilege affects and disadvantages. Consider what we would all be able to accomplish if these obstacles were not in the way for so many. Third, we must begin recognizing when inequalities arise. Ask how we can diminish these inequalities. Empathy is extremely important because without empathy, we will not internalize how these inequalities really feel. Finally, we must use our voices to create space for the voices of the marginalized. It isn't about speaking for the people we are advocating for. There are brilliant, loud voices in those communities. Other people just need to listen and know who to listen for.

Being an advocate looks different in different situations. Sometimes it is voting for women's reproductive rights. Often, advocating can just be asking a community organizer, "How can I be best used?" Other times, it is clearly a moment where we must scream, "Shut up and listen to what is being said!" Know that being an advocate is not always easy. We are not there to lead, only to assist in the journey to equality. The communities we are advocating for can sometimes be cautious and protective of their cause. Be patient with them and keep showing up to be a part of the cause. We must have true integrity in our advocacy because when it is hard, and we get pushback as an advocate, we must stay true to our word and keep fighting.

The most important tool for a good advocate is being open. This is not only about helping; that's a tiny piece of it. Being an ally is learning, sharing information, and hearing a story. This intersection is where true social change happens. We can overcome these inequalities in privilege once we all find the same space, truly empathize with one another, and become companions on this journey to equality. This journey is long and may never have a final destination because humanity can be cruel. But I also believe humanity can be extremely loving. If we stay true to our goal, and welcome all who want to join, positive social change will get us closer to equality, and privilege will be so transparent that it will not be a concern.

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## Emotional Landscapes

Photographer **Rolando Cruz** tackles life's mysteries, personal identities, and small, intimate moments through his ever-curious lens.

**AMONG THE MANY IMAGES** Rolando Cruz exhibited at the Yellow Rose Gallery on State Street this past November was a portrait of a bright yellow bird. Rolando tells the story about how the bird caught his attention by flying right in front of him while he was walking to work. Shortly after it landed in Rolando's path it died. Rolando carried it to a pond covered with a green blanket of duckweed and gently set the bird on top of the plant-saturated water. He then placed a branch next to the bird, offering up this familiar object in much the same way one might place a keepsake into their loved one's casket.

Like a Victorian memento mori, Rolando captured a post-mortem portrait of the little being. He memorialized the passing of a life that he had the honor of witnessing. Rolando has used the process of photography to try to understand life's confounding mysteries since he was a young child—yellow birds, beautiful landscapes, people, even his own identity. Making art helps him make sense of it all.

Rolando's work, not unlike the artist himself, expresses pain and beauty, vulnerability and strength, the power of memory, and an abiding hope for the future. He is an observer of nature and culture and believes in the strong interplay between both. He considers his identity a feeling, not an objective and unchanging fact. He is fascinated by how people project their assumptions about his identity upon him. Muslim? Straight? Rich? Poor? People, with their relentless drive to analyze and categorize, try to guess, but Rolando is not likely to fit neatly into anyone's pre-conceived notions.

Rolando comes from a remote mountain town in the state of Michoacán on the Pacific southwest coast of Mexico. He shared sweet memories of walking to church with his mother, creating a comforting and long-lasting imprint of family and his encounters with nature along the way. He moved to Wisconsin at age 16 to live with his sister-in-law and brother, but after coming out, he ended up on his own in Madison, with a job but no place to live. Through his own tenacity and the kindness of others, he has traversed an obstacle course of a life path. Talk with him now, and it is clear that he wouldn't remove anything from his journey:



it has made him who he is and brought him to where he is now.

He is 38 years old, happily married, co-parenting five children, running long distance, working, and beginning to gain recognition as a photographer. In September, at Madison's inaugural Latino Arts Fair at the Central Library, Rolando's work was recognized with a "Best in Show" award. He has had gallery shows in Mineral Point and throughout Madison and contributes to group shows as well. He is about to travel home to Mexico and will of course bring his trusted camera, the combination of which will certainly yield dozens of compelling images for a new series or exhibition.

In his artist statement Rolando says, "Often for me, the simple gesture of an ordinary everyday event is all I need to spark inspiration. For example, looking in the mirror in the morning and seeing the reflection of myself looking back can be inspirational. Not because I'm looking at myself, but instead because I know the sequences of events that have led to this moment and the infinite possibility which stem from that point forward."

It is perhaps the juxtaposition of those everyday events and that limitless future that have brought Rolando to such an exciting and balanced place. It is also because of that, moving forward this emerging artist will be one to watch.

For more information about the artist visit his website [rolandocruz.com](http://rolandocruz.com).



**KARIN WOLF** is the arts program administrator for the City of Madison Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development and the Madison Arts Commission.



I am what I am  
I am a feeling,  
I am an emotion  
I am a single feather in the wind guided by the breezes that have inspired dreams and have created prophets  
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I am the mural of perfection and imperfection alike  
I am you  
I am me  
I am an image of life...  
And a future memory of life



### DID YOU KNOW

#### STAGEQ ANNOUNCES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Madison's LGBTQ community theater company, StageQ, announced the results of their board elections: Presiden - Michael Bruno, Vice President - Donnovan Moen, Treasurer - Danielle Sesko, Board Members - Mark Albright, Mike Finnegan, Laurie Frost, Sid Richards, Louise Stout, and Laura Vaerla.



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## Ferguson to Madison: A Black Queer Synopsis

Freedom Inc.'s **M. Adams** makes the case for intersectionality and why Black rights and queer rights are inextricably bound together.

advocacy approach on the spot. In some ways, I was young, green, and energetic, and in others, a complete emotional wreck.

Days went by, filled with advocacy, organizing, strategizing, and operating at high capacity with hardly any sleep. We were in day three of the convention and somehow I had managed to get through it, and, according to others, do well. On this particular day, the U.N. committee members would interrogate the U.S. government based on all the evidence and testimony that we, civil society, had brought forth.

I remember not being able to sit still.

I remember the room being hot. I had already had three bottles of water and loosened the collar of my shirt and tie. I remember that not being enough. I remember the sound of papers shuffling. I remember we were all swiveling in our chairs. I remember whispering and frantically writing strategy notes. Then I remember being caught in silence.

I don't know how long I sat in silence.

The silence was broken by an African woman, a UN committee member. She sharply confronted the U.S. government while we were all there to bear witness. "What happened to the man who murdered Trayvon Martin? Is he free?" she asked. I don't remember anything but the chill and the heaviness that smothered the room. I don't remember the expressions on anyone's face. I don't even remember breathing, but soon enough I came back to awareness of my person.

While I was there suspended in grief, I searched the room for Sybrina Fulton's face. I looked for Jordan Davis's father, Ron. I looked to see if there was any sign of relief that someone, somewhere, cared for our children—that we, as people of African descent around the world, loved each other. While I searched the room for those eyes, I got distracted by the same committee member's next question: "And what is going on in Ferguson?"

Wait, what's Ferguson? I thought. My comrades around me seemed thrilled that she was addressing it, and I had no idea what they were talking about. That was the first I had heard of it. Later that evening, as we all went back to the hotel to strategize, I was updated on what had happened just a couple of days earlier back in the States. I learned that the young people had taken to the streets, taken up an urban rebellion, and were refusing to go home. I thought again of Sybrina Fulton and Ron Davis, and all the mothers and families who lost their children due to violence against Black folks.

There, in Geneva on August 13, fueled by Malcolm, the international human rights framework, emotions, and the power of my ancestors, family, and other activists, I understood I had to go to Ferguson.

Shortly after I returned to Madison, I began connecting what was happening in Ferguson to what was happening here at home. It is clear that to win any of the fights to improve the lives of Black folks in Madison (ending the school-to-prison pipeline, tackling homelessness, etc.), we need to see the connections between Madison and Ferguson.

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and protect each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains."  
—Assata Shakur

ON AUGUST 9, I WAS PREPARING for my trip to Geneva, Switzerland. I remember listening to Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet," reading about his life, and understanding how the struggle for Black freedom is a human rights struggle.

I was particularly involved in studying Malcolm because I was going to Geneva to continue the work he pushed so hard for—to hold the United States accountable, in a world court, for the crimes and human rights violations it has committed against us people of African descent—Black folks.

My plane left late that morning. I remember being nervous, wondering if what I said would be powerful enough, if it mattered enough, to add to the barometer of social change. I was going to Geneva to bring evidence of racism in the U.S. to the United Nations at the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, specifically looking at housing injustices. I was armed with personal

How do we as a community understand that police violence, poverty, and mass incarceration are all linked and are all forms of state violence?

stories about how racism has impacted me, ranging from such issues as food access to education and incarceration. I was guarded by the souls and energies of my ancestors to continue the struggle. I knew I owed at least that to them.

When I arrived in Geneva, I was tired, already jet-lagged, hungry, and a bit put off by the loss of my luggage. But despite my personal irritability, I was thrilled. I had been thinking of all the stories I could tell, and how to fit them into just three minutes. I thought of meeting Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother, and how urgent the work is—whether I would be able to remain cool as she told her story, or if I had learned enough to prepare me with sufficient wit to respond or adjust my

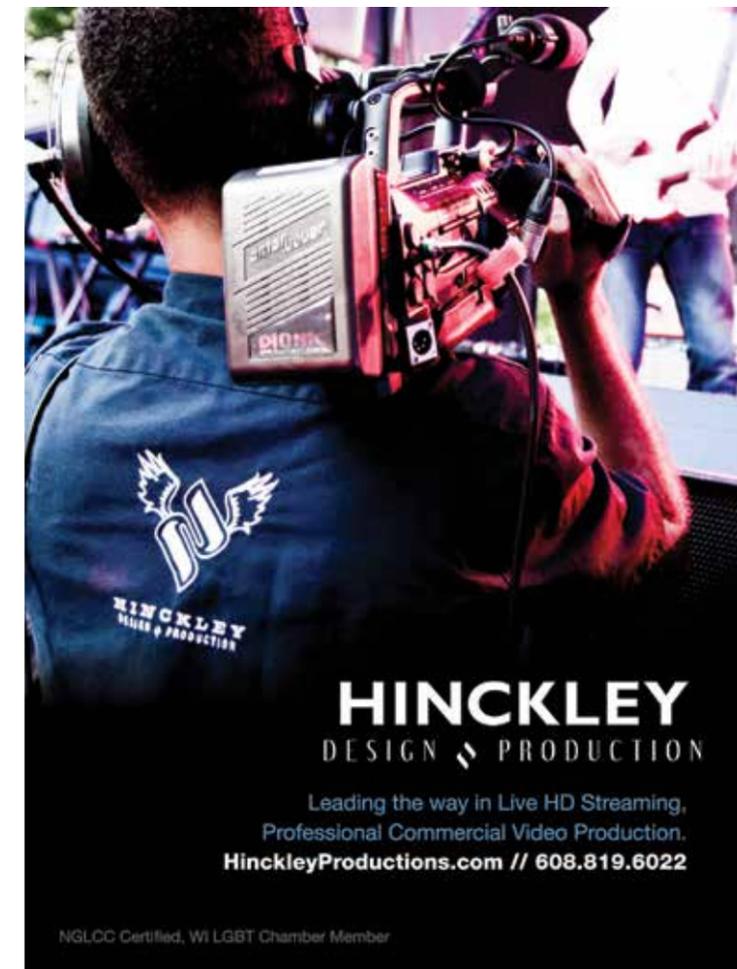
For example, how do we as a community understand that police violence, poverty, and mass incarceration are all linked and are all forms of state violence? The more I learned, the more obvious it became that I and other members and leaders of Freedom Inc. needed to go Ferguson.

Freedom Inc. is a grassroots collective and nonprofit with a mission to end violence within and against low-income communities of color. We do this work by building the leadership and community organizing capacities of women, queer folks, and young folks from those communities. Freedom Inc. gathered a group of women and young queer Black and Hmong leaders and set out for Ferguson.

I set out to Ferguson with these goals in mind: (1) support the local rebellion and movement, (2) strengthen the connections between Ferguson and Madison, and (3) learn about and participate in creating political strategy that will ultimately end police violence against Black communities and lead to deep sociopolitical change for the Black community.

Over the course of the last months, Freedom Inc.'s young Black and Hmong queer organizers have gone to Ferguson four times to participate in the rebellion and movement. We answered the call of the young leaders in Ferguson to go home and do it in our own city. Returning to Madison, we began building a solidarity campaign—forming alliances and building the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition. Our work begins to connect the dots: What are the experiences of the Black communities here? How are Black communities being impacted by police violence? State violence?

Currently, we are engaged in a direct action campaign to increase awareness of state violence against Black communities and to (1) stop the building of a new jail, (2) secure the immediate release of 350 Black folks, incarcerated due to crimes of poverty, and (3) see funds invested in Black communities led by young Black folks, so that we have a resource for creating our own human rights solutions to the oppression



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we face. In the process of building our own movement here in Madison, in a majority white city, we have been tasked with challenging white folks to address these issues as their own. In other words, how do we inspire people to take up the fight and see too that their humanity is bound with ours? And to focus on a more specific issue relevant to this piece: How do we engage our non-Black, queer counterparts, so that they understand how the freedom and lives of Michael Brown and Eric Garner—Black lives—matter to them?

If you can, imagine how I have been filled with emotion—rage, hurt, confusion—when non-Black queer folks disregard the murder of Michael Brown, with rhetoric such as “It is not a queer issue.” Was the way that I had been personally impacted not proof enough of it being a queer issue? Were the hundreds and thousands of Black queer folks who took to the streets not proof enough that it was a queer issue? Were the countless murders of Black queer folks by police violence, the same violence that murdered Michael Brown, not proof enough that this too is a queer issue?

I offer the following:

**1. Anytime there is an issue of body safety and the right to live free of violence, it is a queer issue.** The murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Tarika Wilson, and Aiyana Jones are all the result of historical, cultural, and systemic violence against Black bodies, in these cases by the police, that devalue and dehumanize Black folks. We as queer people are also devalued and dehumanized, and violence is targeted

In the process of building our own movement here in Madison, in a majority white city, we have been tasked with challenging white folks to address these issues as their own.

at us interpersonally, culturally, and systemically. I am not equating race oppression to queer oppression but rather offering a human rights framework that says that anyone—Black, queer, undocumented, etc., anyone—has the right to walk down the street, stand outside, carry Skittles, sit at home with our children, and not be murdered. If we believe that these are our rights as queer folks, because we are human, then they must too be the rights of Black folks, because we are human. Therefore it is our obligation as queer folks, those who are fighting for freedom and whose lives are also threatened by oppression, to be outraged by these murders.

**2. Anytime there is an issue of gender performance or presentation, we queer folks must undertake it as our own.** Though it may not be explicitly stated, many of the Black men killed have been thought of as being overly masculine or hypermasculine, and therefore aggressive. The dress and demeanor of Black men is also made criminal, and that is seen as warranting their murders or policing. As queer folks who fight adamantly for the rights and diversity of gender presentation and performance, this analysis and fight must extend to Black folks. We will not win our fight if we validate only the gender presentations in drag, for example, but not of those who sag or wear hoodies as a way of presenting our gender. We must principally stand against all the criminalization and violence toward people whose gender and/or gender presentation or performances are seen as deviant or unacceptable by dominant power structures. We must also broaden our analysis and undertake a human rights approach.

NOVEMBER 25 Ferguson to Madison Rally



PHOTOGRAPHED BY IAN DEGRAFF

**3. Queer people are Black, too. Perhaps this is the most obvious of the points, but it is worth stating.** All queer folks have race, class—identities. None of us stop being any of these other identities and exist only as queer. Therefore, if we are going to fight for the justice and liberation of all queer people, this must include liberation for Black folks as well. Many of the folks leading the fight, and acting as a vanguard, are young, Black, and queer—both locally and nationally, including the leaders of #BlackLivesMatter and the uprising in Ferguson. Folks are fighting for the fullness of their lives to be valued—both the queer and the Black parts—inseparably. In fact, if we do not take seriously the work of ending racism, then the lives of the countless queer Black folks killed will continue to go unnoticed and undervalued.

There are several other reasons we as queer folks must see the struggles in Ferguson and elsewhere—Black liberation—as integral to queer justice and liberation. To learn more, please contact us at Freedom Inc. We are in a critical hour, when we must choose a side, because history proves that there is no neutrality. We as queer folks must be on the side of human rights and freedom for all, and therefore be unwavering and unapologetic in our commitment to Black liberation.

“If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.” —James Baldwin to Angela Davis

*M's other work on this subject, "Foward From Ferguson," will be available for sale at Rainbow Bookstore or directly from the author.*

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## A Song in His Heart

Despite early setbacks, **Bobby Goderich** knew his love for singing was worth the hard work and patience that have since brought him to the stage with Madison Opera and beyond.

**AFTER WEEKS OF PREPARATION**, you arrive at the theater. You meticulously go through your standard routine of putting on your costume and makeup. As you eagerly await your curtain call, your heartbeat starts to accelerate and you feel sweat forming on your palms. You go over your lines, blocking, and scenes one last time while you wait offstage—when, suddenly, you receive your cue. It's showtime!

I've been involved in local music, theater, and opera since moving to Madison in 2003. Growing up, my family (my mother and older sister)

moved around a bit. However, I consider myself from Montana, more specifically, the small town of Deer Lodge, Montana.

I have been singing for as long as I can remember. As a kid, I dreamed of being a famous singer, even though I had a music teacher tell me I should stop singing, I wasn't talented, and I would never make it. I was so crushed. I stopped and turned to musical instruments. I knew that the love I had for music wouldn't stop, and I needed an outlet.

My family moved to Deer Lodge in 1992, and there I found chances that I hadn't been afforded before. One such opportunity was a traveling company called The Missoula Children's Theatre. MCT would hire actors/directors to travel the nation, going to various schools and putting together an entire musical in a week. This is where I encountered my first musical theater acting experience. After one show, I knew I was hooked.

For the next few years, musicals would be the only place you could hear me sing, as the fear of failure was too great. It wasn't until my sophomore year in high school that I would sing in an organized chorus. I loved it. I took to the challenge and wanted to prove to myself and everyone else that I would succeed.

Whether it was coming in early or staying hours after school, I worked hard to try to become the best singer I could be. I earned accolades through Solo Ensemble, All-State Chorus, and All-Northwest Choruses, most of which had never before been accomplished at my high school.

After graduating, I took a year off to work before going to college. During this time I was able to reconnect with my father, stepmother, and little sister who lived in Waukesha. I knew that Montana wasn't a place for me to find success or be myself. Wisconsin seemed like it could be the fresh start I needed. So when my father offered to have me move in with him and go to school in the UW system, I couldn't say no.

In an effort to meet new people and to better come to terms with my own sexuality, I started to volunteer at Project Q, a Milwaukee LGBTQ youth drop-in space. It was a space where youth between the ages of 12

and 24 could go to feel safe and be around other young adults within their community. It was an opportunity that I wish I'd had growing up. I felt the need to make myself available to them. It was through Project Q that I was able to find my voice as a gay youth.

Unfortunately, I would need to take an absence from my schooling. The relationship between my father and stepmother had become strained, and I was unexpectedly homeless. This was not what I had planned for within six months of relocating. For about six weeks, my entire life took place inside of a two-door hatchback Ford Escort, and my sleeping arrangements involved jumping from couch to couch. It would have been very easy to turn around and drive right back to Montana. However, I knew Montana wasn't right for me. I needed to buckle down and pull myself together.

I moved to Milwaukee. I was working as a server/bartender by day and performing as a musical theater actor by night. At times it seemed like thankless work, but I needed to work hard to live. Most importantly, the work helped me really define who I am as a person.

Upon moving to Madison in 2003, I started performing with Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus, singing with the group for about four years. I started performing with local theater companies: Children's Theater of Madison, Verona Area Community Theater, Middleton Players Theatre, StageQ, and Four Seasons Theatre, to name a few. I was given the opportunity to sing with Madison Opera for the 2008 season. Never having had a vocal coach, I wasn't sure if I had the chops for it, but I was up for the challenge.

I am tremendously honored to have been cast in my first principal role in Madison Opera's upcoming production of *Sweeney Todd*. It's a piece that asks the question, "Is it truly an opera, or is it musical theater?" My character, Pirelli, provides a challenging balance of operatic vocal passages, acting, and singing—all during the scenes of dialogue. I'm very thankful to John DeMain, Kathryn Smith, and Madison Opera for this auspicious opportunity.

I hope you are able to experience the amazing music that *Sweeney Todd* presents, as well as the astounding talent from all who are involved. I bid you buongiorno and good day, and see you at the opera!

*You can also catch Bobby this spring in the chorus for the Madison Opera production of The Barber of Seville, as well as in Opera in the Park. Later in the summer, he will be featured as Nicely Nicely Johnson with Four Seasons Theatre in Guys and Dolls.*



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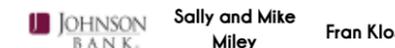
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## Justice Warrior, pt. 2

In the second of a two-part series, **Caroline Werner** delves into the history and ethic of a queer activist family.

**SOCIETY MAY NOT ALWAYS RECOGNIZE** that there are LGBT grandparents—and even great-grandparents—living among us. Carrie (Chaus), an active union member and grandmother, has two daughters, Cayne and Corrie. Cayne has a daughter, and Corrie has two sons. Carrie’s mother, Vivienne (Nana), is a great-grandmother. They don’t generally like labels, but Carrie agreed to the term “dyke on a bike” and Vivienne agreed to “dyke on the back of a bike” to describe themselves.

Born in the 1940s, Vivienne was repressed and abused by her father. She wanted to leave home but didn’t. Her father told her that lesbians would pick her up on the street and beat her. At age 17 and six months pregnant, she and her boyfriend tried to run away. Their parents hunted them down with shotguns and forced the marriage. After her son was born and she was pregnant again (with Carrie), Vivienne says, “Their father came home from working the night shift and told me that he had been seeing another woman for a year and that he was leaving me.”

“I didn’t want to get married because I saw my mom and my aunt and my mom’s roommate being beat up for being gay. We had to hide. I was affected as a child by what I was seeing around me.”

Living in a trailer on her dad’s property, she worked as a go-go dancer at night and went to beauty school during the day to support herself and her children. After she lived with another guy and was beaten by him for several years, her family “moved me out one day to get rid of him.”

Carrie never knew her dad’s side of the family. “I was close to my mom’s family,” she says. “My grandma on my mom’s side did a genealogy. I learned my great-grandparents came from Prussia to escape the Nazis and to avoid being drafted into war. My grandfather was a peace-loving person. I am really close to my immediate family. My mother and her parents accepted me for who I am, and her parents accepted Vivienne as a lesbian.”

Born in the mid-1960s, Carrie had two moms well before it was at all accepted. She learned about McCarthy and Communism in school and about the movie stars losing their jobs. She lived through bomb drills in grade school, having her mother throw her to the ground and cover her with her body on State Street when the students were being tear-gassed by the police during the Vietnam War era and the bombing of Sterling Hall on the UW – Madison campus. “I vividly remember how scared I was,” she notes.

Attending Malcolm Shabazz High School, she learned “how to practice passive resistance. I learned organizing skills at Shabazz from the progressive teachers and organized a protest.”

“I was bullied and learned not to be bullied by little kids. I was always against injustice. I was tear-gassed in Detroit in the ‘80s and marched against racism. I knew we were losing rights every day, but what could I do about it as one person?” As a union member, when the controversial budget bill of 2011 called Act 10 happened, she got involved. “I don’t like bullies!”

When I asked Carrie about her two daughters, she explained, “I never married. From childhood I always knew I was gay, but I had to hide who I was. I was trying to be straight when I was with my boyfriend for three years. I didn’t want to get married because I saw my mom and my aunt and my mom’s roommate being beat up for being gay. We had to hide. I was affected as a child by what I was seeing around me.”

Carrie loves her children and grandchildren. “I can’t imagine life



**CAROLINE WERNER** has a Master’s Degree in Social Work. She did case management with Dane County seniors before retiring. Now she is a part-time LGBT Senior Advocate for the OutReach LGBT Community Center, funded by the City of Madison.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CALLEN HARTY

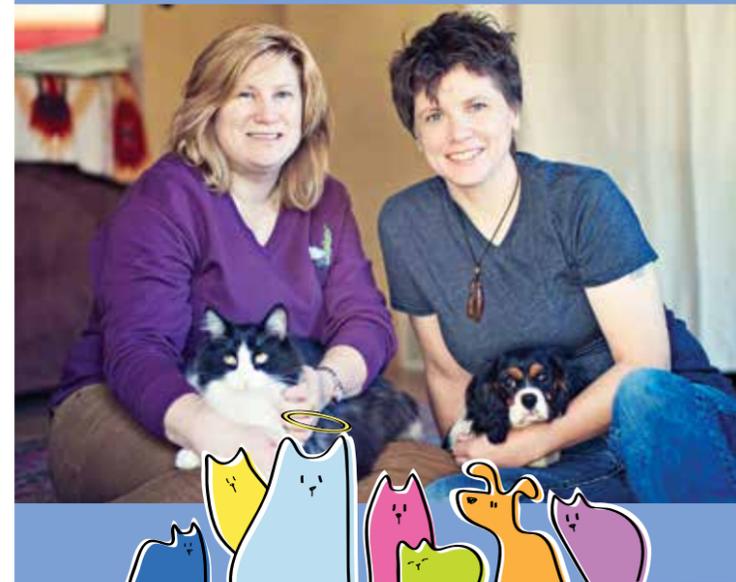
without them. Everything I do, every cause I stand up for, is in large part for them. One of the grandsons, Osiris, is five; Levi is seven. Lilly is the youngest. I listen to everything they say. I’d say their actions speak the loudest. They know everything I do, and sometimes they come with me. One time I was talking about some conflict with Stone Soup, a project I began a few years ago to feed homeless people on the streets. Osiris began to cry when he thought Stone Soup was not going to be continuing. Last year when he went out with me after Halloween, he gathered all his personal candy from trick and treating and gave it out to the homeless. No one asked him to do this.”

Vivienne says that, while she “might not agree with” all of her daughter’s choices, “I support and love her. Carrie, her daughters, and my son, John, are all really, really smart, and that just blows me away! I’m proud of them. They make their choices in life.” ■

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# Figuring It Out

US and Olympic Figure Skating Judge **Robert G. Rosenbluth**.

**THIS PAST FEBRUARY** I traveled to Sochi, Russia, to judge the Women's Figure Skating competition at the XXII Olympic Winter Games. This was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream—something I have worked for as long as I can remember.

I first put on a pair of skates at the age of three. The rink was near my family's office, and my mother dropped off my older sisters and me two afternoons a week as a convenient babysitting service. I liked to go fast, and I didn't learn how to stop properly until I was about six or seven years old. When I needed to stop, I just crashed into the boards. For me, the thrill of racing in circles around the ice was exhilarating, which may explain why I am such a big NASCAR fan as well.

When I was seven, I graduated from basic group classes into private coaching and discovered that there was more to skating than simply speed and crashes. I began learning how to jump, and this is when my passion for the sport really took off. I can still remember how it first felt to lift off the ice and propel through the air—that feeling of being in flight. I was fearless and small, a killer combination, and I didn't mind falling. I just got back up and started going fast again.

When I was 13 years old, my coach became pregnant and temporarily stopped coaching. She sent her best skaters to one of the top coaches in the country. That coach happened to be teaching in Philadelphia, where I lived at the time. Unfortunately, he coached at a rink that would not accept us as members because my family is Jewish. At the time, Philadelphia still had many sporting and social clubs that were very restricted. I was able to skate in the mornings and take lessons from my coach there, but we could not join the club. Being barred from membership in a club that I had earned my way into by being an excellent athlete was a hard lesson for an adolescent to learn.

Ultimately, it only made me work harder to be the best. I had the opportunity to train alongside world-class athletes such as Scott Hamilton. He was someone I looked up to, who inspired me, and with whom I maintain a friendship to this day.

After two years I joined the Wissahickon Skating Club, which would become my home rink for most of my career as a skater and a judge.

I went on to attend Emory University, in part because of the school's outstanding reputation and for the excellent coaches and training available to me in Atlanta. In 1985 I graduated from Emory and moved to Tacoma, Washington, for a year to skate full time.



Rosenbluth in his Madison home.

In 1983 I competed at the US Nationals, placing 11th in the senior men's event. In '85 I won the US Collegiate Championships and placed second at the World University Games. In '86 I stopped competing to join the family business, but I did not leave figure skating behind. I had started judging as part of a pilot program designed to keep people involved in the sport by giving athletes who were not interested in becoming coaches the opportunity to become judges. At that point I was mostly judging tests that would qualify skaters to compete. Once I retired from competition, I began trial judging—essentially practicing as a judge at actual events—and receiving appointments to judge more competitions.

I moved up the ranks, and in 1990 I received my national judging appointment and judged my first National US Figure Skating competition. This was a significant milestone for me as it put me in an elite group of judges and because as the youngest national judge in the country at that time I was judging skaters whom I had competed with and with whom I had trained not that long ago. It really marked the transition for me into the next chapter of my life in the sport.



**TIM LOM** is an editorial facilitator for Our Athletes and a member of the Madison Minotours rugby club, Wisconsin's only International Gay Rugby Association and Board team. He's excited to help various members of the sports community have their voices heard and their stories told.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROBERTO AMEZCUA

In '97 I received my international appointment from US Figure Skating. Since that time I have been fortunate to travel all over the world to cities like Tokyo, Paris, Budapest, and Moscow to judge, as well as some wonderful, out-of-the-way places I might never have otherwise visited such as Red Deer, Alberta; Gdansk, Poland; Ostrava, Czech Republic; and Jeonju, South Korea. In 1998, as a judge, I accompanied the first US team to travel to China for a competition.

In 2001 I passed my world exam, making me an Olympic-level judge. The next few years involved judging at the elite level of world figure skating competition both at home and abroad. I honed my own skills and worked with our athletes, helping prepare them to compete on the world stage. The two things I love best about the sport are the opportunities to travel and to mentor world-class athletes. There is no greater joy than seeing a skater I have watched grow from childhood enter the rink at a major competition and win the gold.

In 2011 I officially found out that I would be part of the US delegation to the Olympics in 2014. For the next three years I had to commit myself to the sport to make sure I would be ready to meet the pressures of judging on the Olympic stage. In 2013 the Grand Prix finals were held in Sochi as a test event to help get the city ready for what was

“Unfortunately, he coached at a rink that would not accept us as members because my family is Jewish. ... Being barred from membership in a club that I had earned my way into by being an excellent athlete was a hard lesson for an adolescent to learn.”

coming. The roads were rivers of mud and there were no hotels—we stayed in a sanitarium that had been cleared out to house the officials for the competition. I hardly recognized the town when I returned a year later and saw the gleaming park that had been built, through sheer force of Russian will, to house the games.

Everything about the Olympics was a thrilling rush. Top athletes, heads of state—I was surrounded by the elite from all over the world, and I was a part of it. I loved the competition and the thrill of judging under such high scrutiny. I also loved the camaraderie everyone shared in the park. I hung out with Apollo Anton Ono, who also knows a thing or two about going fast around the ice rink. I was a part of something bigger than myself, and I was representing my country in a show of international good will through sports.

What began as a way for my mother to keep me occupied in the afternoons had become a moment shared by the world. I spent my life going fast and jumping, and it took me all the way to the top of my sport. ■

## Did You Know

### PAUL ESSER TO RUN FOR MAYOR OF SUN PRAIRIE

Paul Esser announced in November his intention to run for a seat he previously held for two terms in the 1980s. Esser currently holds leadership positions in Sun Prairie United Methodist Church, Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum, Sun Prairie Historical Society, and PFLAG of Sun Prairie. He and his wife are involved in efforts to organize a Proud Theater chapter in Sun Prairie. Esser and his wife Carol are the parents of four children all born, raised, and educated in the Sun Prairie schools and the grandparents of six. Paul has a degree in accounting from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and is a CPA. He encourages people to contact him at PaulEsserforSunPrairie@gmail.com to discuss issues that concern them.

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600 Williamson St., Madison (608) 255-8582 [lgbtoutreach.org](http://lgbtoutreach.org)
  - PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**  
(608) 848-2333 [pflag-madison.org](http://pflag-madison.org)
  - Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus**  
[perfectharmonychorus.org](http://perfectharmonychorus.org)
  - Proud Theater (LGBTQ Youth)**  
[proudtheater.org](http://proudtheater.org)
  - StageQ - Madison's Queer Theater**  
[stageq.com](http://stageq.com)
  - UW - Madison LGBT Campus Center**  
800 Langdon St., Madison (608) 265-3344 [wisc.edu/lgbt](http://wisc.edu/lgbt)
  - Wisconsin Rainbow Families**  
[wirainbowfamilies.com](http://wirainbowfamilies.com)

**Madison Opera's Sweeney Todd, February 6-8, Overture Center** After 15 years of unjust imprisonment in a penal colony, the barber Sweeney Todd returns to the gas-lit streets of Victorian London to claim vengeance on those who wronged him. Sondheim's stunningly inventive score contains intense drama, macabre humor, lyrical purity, and an unforgettable final scene. [madisonopera.org](http://madisonopera.org)

**Fliter Play Chopin, February 13-15, Overture Center for the Arts** A great pianist's odyssey among the great orchestras of the world brings her, at last, to Madison: Ingrid Fliter and the Madison Symphony Orchestra present Concerto No. 2 for Piano by Chopin, plus other selections, conducted by John DeMain. [madisonsymphony.org](http://madisonsymphony.org)

**RuPaul's Drag Race Battle of the Seasons (Hosted by Michelle Visage), February 17, Majestic Theater** The tour returns to Madison and this time is bringing Courtney Act, BenDeLaCreme, Jinkx Monsoon (Season 5 winner), Alaska 5000, Sharon Needles (Season 4 winner), Ivy Winters, Raja (Season 3 winner), and Cary NoKey. Doors at 8:00pm. Show at 9:00pm. [majesticmadison.com](http://majesticmadison.com)



**Mad Rollin' Dolls Roller Derby, February 21, Exposition Hall at the Alliant Energy Center** Madison's premiere flat-track roller derby league races into the new year with a hard-hitting bout pitting the four home teams against one another on the road to the championship game in May. A portion of the proceeds from the event will go to benefit Reach a Child. [madrollindolls.com](http://madrollindolls.com)

**AIDS Network Camp Bingo, February 22, Sheraton Madison** Join host Cass Marie and celebrity ball callers Z104's Aaron Rogers and NBC15's Christine Bellport for the next installment of Camp Bingo: "Blingo," at the Sheraton Hotel in Madison. Proceeds benefit AIDS Network. [madcampbingo.com](http://madcampbingo.com)

**Over the Rainbow: A Musical Tribute to Judy Garland featuring Hilary Kole, February 26, Overture Center** The remarkable Hilary Kole conjures the spirit and beauty of Judy Garland in stunning jazz quartet arrangements. Featuring "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "The Trolley Song," "As Long As He Needs Me," and other timeless classics. Price level A includes post-show meet and greet with Ms. Kole. [overturecenter.org](http://overturecenter.org)

GET LISTED To see your event on this page, post it on our community calendar at [ourlivesmadison.com](http://ourlivesmadison.com)



**LGBTQ Youth of Color Leadership Conference, January 30, Dream Bank Madison** GSAFE is hosting a day-long LGBTQ Youth of Color Leadership Conference to create a space for LGBTQ youth of color and their allies to discuss what LGBTQ identities look like in their communities, identify the issues, and discuss ways to build. Youth attending will use theater, games, and dialogue to critically engage topics such as gender and sexuality, expectations and cultural norms, intersections of race, class, and sexuality, the impact of poverty, violence, prisons, immigration, and more in the LGBTQ youth experience. [gsafe.org](http://gsafe.org)

**Fire Ball VII: Deadly Sins, January 31, The Majestic Theater** The biggest, freakiest, and sexiest night of the winter in Madison returns to the Majestic for a night of tasteful and talented debauchery, featuring top-notch performances by artists and performers from across the country. Enjoy burlesque, fire performers, aerial acrobats, drag, and the spectacle of an audience dressed to the nines. [fireballproductions.com](http://fireballproductions.com)

**Frostiball, January 31, Overture Center** Spend an unforgettable night out and support the arts in Madison with a thousand new friends! Downtown Madison's signature event is now the gala fundraiser for Overture's community programs. Don't miss reimagined entertainment, including a dance band, DJ, and cirque performers, plus flowing champagne, beer, and wine (all included), delicious hors d'oeuvres (also included), craft cocktails, and, for the night owls, an all-new after party. [overturecenter.org](http://overturecenter.org)

**Madison Ballet's "Repertory I", February 6 & 7, Bartell Theatre** Madison Ballet's repertory performances bring the breathtaking beauty of ballet to the intimate space of the Bartell Theatre. Repertory I juxtaposes the energetic choreography of Artistic Director W. Earle Smith with works by guest choreographers. [madisonballet.org](http://madisonballet.org)

**MGHA's 7th Annual Blades Against AIDS, February 7, Alliant Energy Coliseum** The MGHA will host an Exhibition Game and Open Skate Fundraiser to raise awareness regarding HIV and its effects on the LGBTQ community. A portion of ticket proceeds and all donations will benefit AIDS Network. Raffle prizes, entertainment, and more! [facebook.com/MadisonGayHockey](http://facebook.com/MadisonGayHockey)



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JANUARY 23<sup>RD</sup> | 8<sup>PM</sup> | CAPITOL THEATER

**MASTERWORKS III**  
with pianist **SHAI WOSNER**  
GIANNINI | HAYDN | SCHUBERT  
FEBRUARY 20<sup>TH</sup> | 8<sup>PM</sup> | CAPITOL THEATER

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- ASHLAND**  
10 David & Teege Mettille
- BAILEYS HARBOR**  
15 Michael Meulemans & Doug Smith
- BARABOO**  
14 David & Ryan Berahn  
1 Stephanie Hebert & Jeopardy Henk ✓♥
- BARNEVELD**  
13 Glen Rosen & Rider Sporn
- BARRON**  
9 Daniel Djubenski & Brandon Litwiller ✓
- BLACK EARTH**  
12 Philip Frank & Mark Pocan

- BLOOMINGTON**  
4 Danielle & Rachael Merry-Love
- BOSCOBEL**  
39 T.J. Meehan & Larry Ortt Married
- 9 Rev. Jen Johnson & Brenda Larson**
- BROOKFIELD**  
14 Lisa Rouskey & Lynn Carlson
- BROOKLYN**  
20 Cheryl Hack & Myrna Peterson
- BURLINGTON**  
9 Dr. Steven Mayo & Jarod Pobst
- CAMBRIDGE**  
42 Mim Jacobson & Marian Korth

- CHIPPEWA FALLS**  
12 Daniel & Jason Bennett-Hardy
- COLFAX**  
4 Eva & Gretch Spiering
- COLUMBUS**  
3 Bonnie Gutsch & Heidi Hershberger
- COTTAGE GROVE**  
25 Karen & Preston Baker ★  
25 Marilyn Krump & Gloria Krysiak  
15 Jennifer Frisch & Tina Rogers ♥
- 9 Suzanne Fichtel & Cheryl Ravenscroft**
- DE PERE**  
2.5 Jeremiah Cottrell & Ken Stauss

**Bold**  
Couples who are married.

♥  
Couples who are engaged.

✓  
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.

★  
Straight couples identified as allies.

# So. Much. Love.

## THE WISCONSIN CARING & COMMITTED COUPLES LIST



Every year we ask our readers to help us connect and celebrate love by joining our Caring & Committed Couples list. This year we also began asking for photos, and you didn't disappoint. Even the coldest Wisconsin winter is sure to be warmed up a little by all the faces and smiles on these pages. A few of the relationships that we're featuring range from newly engaged young love, to a relationship that spans almost three decades and children. Thank you for showing us, especially in the year that marriage equality came to our state, that **#LoveWinsWI**.

- ALLENTON**  
7 Jen Carviou & Melissa Nettesheim
- APPLETON**  
11 Samantha & Sara Rabideau  
11 Heather & Natalie Starr  
10 Jeff Amstutz & Chad Hershner  
8 Charles Erickson & E-Ben Grisby  
8 Kathy Flores & Ann Kendzierski  
6 Patrick & Ryan Platta  
2 Gail Cardo & Juke Welnetz ♥  
2 Richard Lotto Jr. & Gary Schierl

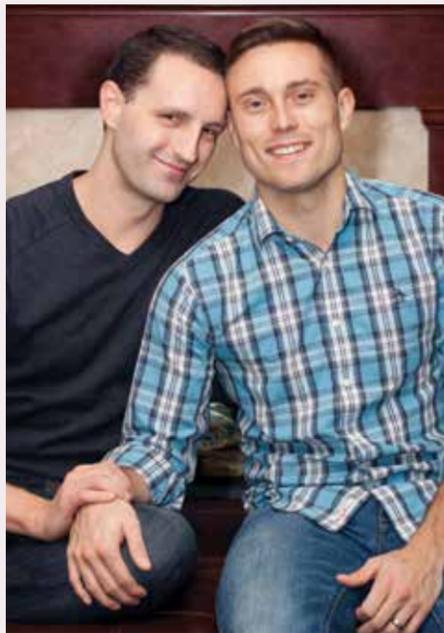
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## Building Bridges



**Dave Ryan and Justin Sukup** are forging ahead with life together after making it work in a long distance relationship.

**DAVE:** It was a Wednesday night in April 2012 in Iowa City. I was at the local club, which held open-stage drag shows hosted by the local drag queen, Sasha Belle (a contestant on the upcoming season of *RuPaul's Drag Race!*).  
**JUSTIN:** I was out with one of my sisters. I was ordering drinks when I made eye contact with

“Mr. Blue Shirt” across the bar. I smiled, and he immediately turned red and nervously looked away. I laughed hysterically. He was adorable.  
**DAVE:** It happened a few times. I told my friend, “I think that guy in the green shirt keeps smiling at me.” I wanted to meet him, so she refused to let me leave until we spoke. It took the whole night, but we finally ended up next to each other on the dance floor. Justin reached over, took my hand, and asked if I wanted to dance. Before we left, we exchanged phone numbers and went on our first date that Friday.  
**JUSTIN:** After seeing each other for a few weeks, I broke the news that I was moving to Madison for a job. It was a rough conversation—I was afraid it meant the end, and I didn’t want to lose him.  
**DAVE:** We decided to take it one day at a time. A few months later, while packing his stuff for the move, we decided to go for a walk. We stopped at a bench on a bridge and had a long talk about our future. We decided there that we would continue our relationship, and eventually I would follow him to Madison.  
**JUSTIN:** It was a really special night, but I think we were both still worried about the struggles of a long-distance relationship—it was hard, but I think it made our feelings for each other clear.  
**DAVE:** After a few months, it was easy to make the decision to relocate. I found a job, and in March of 2013, I made the move.  
**JUSTIN:** Sure, we went through the challenges any couple faces when living together for the first time, but after so much long distance, it was

amazing to get to see him every day.  
**DAVE:** Earlier this year, I reached out to a friend for help designing an engagement ring. It took months, but I designed the ring, spoke with Justin’s parents, and made sure the two most important people in his life (his sisters) could be in town. I just needed to get Justin back to Iowa City.  
**JUSTIN:** Dave told me we had box seats to Iowa’s homecoming game. Friday night, he drove us downtown to pick up a friend for dinner. We were walking when I realized where we were—the same bridge where we decided to date long distance. I froze and looked at Dave.  
**DAVE:** We sat down and took a minute together on our bench. I told him why I brought him there, that I wanted to talk about our future again. I took a small box out of my pocket and popped the question.  
**JUSTIN:** I, of course, said “Yes!” Then he had to tell me that he didn’t actually have football tickets. I think I was more surprised by that! But, I understood why it was important to be in Iowa City, especially when we got to dinner.  
**DAVE:** The table was already set with food and champagne, and when Justin saw our families there, he was speechless.  
**JUSTIN:** The fact that our families drove and flew in just for us really meant more than I can say. Having a caring fiancé and a family that is as supportive as ours is critical to our relationship.  
**DAVE:** We haven’t set a date yet, but we know we’re in it for the long-haul. We look forward to starting our lives together.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SPENCER MICKA

### DEFOREST

- 13 Holly Anderson & Colleen Marsden
- 3 Ronald & William Strelow-Dunn

### EAU CLAIRE

- 40 John Peterson & Arturo Santos DP
- 39 Carol Schumacher & Virginia Wolf
- 15 Chris Schlicher & Erik Thibado
- 13 Lisa Herrmann & Jane Schley

### EDGERTON

- 7 Mandy Ingram & Sarah Korpi

### ELEVA

- 16 Lori & Renee Filla

### ELKHORN

- 14 Brandon & Jeff Balke
- 13 Luanne & Marie Lo Monte

### EVANSVILLE

- 8 Linda Arrowood & Gwen Goos
- 5 David Elliott & Patrick Reese ✓
- 5 Margaret Kucera & Holly Scheuren

### FITCHBURG

- 34 John McCluney & David Ogren
- 26 Diane Olsen & Anne Hecht ✓
- 26 Susan & Vicki May ✓✓
- 22 Sam Gauger & Karen Stampfli
- 20 Michele Perreault & Stephanie Spoehr
- 20 Rachel Potter & Melanie Sax ✓
- 17 Thomas Gillen & Brian Widder
- 15 Cindy Byczek & Kristin Fiore ✓✓
- 13 Lindsay Raftis & Alicia Stevenson
- 12 Katie Belanger & Jason Sidener ★
- 6 Jill Muenich & Laura Webster

- 4 Ryan Crose & Steven Heller ♥
- 4 Vilayvan Angkham & Peter McGann
- 3 Eric Ignarski & Michael Ruiz
- 2 Dave Ryan & Justin Sukup ♥
- 2 Jose Vega & Mike Webber
- 1 Alicia Fitzgerald & Deborah Hamill ♥

### FOND DU LAC

- 3 Tricia Carr & Lissa Lembcke ♥

### FORT ATKINSON

- 14 Amy Rappold & Stephanie Thibault ♥

### FOUNTAIN CITY

- 18 Beth Cherne & Cindy Killion

### FRANKLIN

- 3 Gracie & Riva Limbach

### Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

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## Take Two



**Lisa Schoenwetter and KelsyAnne Schoenhaar** found family with each other later in life.

In October 2011, Lisa Schoenwetter was a resident chaplain at Meriter Hospital. Kelsy Schoenhaar was the Executive Director at Encore Studio for the Performing Arts (Wisconsin's only professional theater company for people with disabilities). Lisa and Kelsy had both been in very long-term relationships (45 years between the two) and were then divorced. They were also busy with their respective careers and family lives and were both very tired of dating. VERY tired.

**KELSY:** Our first date was on October 30, 2011, but I met Lisa online. Unbeknownst to her, the United

Church of Christ congregation where she had been the interim pastor had recorded a few of her sermons and uploaded them to YouTube. I was impressed by Lisa's eloquence, intelligence, and sense of humor. It was a fantastic preview.

**LISA:** I had given up on meeting anyone online or elsewhere. I was discouraged. When Kelsy first contacted me through the dating site, I sent her a terse no.

**KELSY:** I remember that no. It didn't seem so terse, though. As an out and forthcoming former transgendered person, the "no" response was common. Lisa's no was different. Her reluctance

seemed to stem from dating burnout and other life complications.

**LISA:** I had a few frustrations with my life that I wanted to address. I wanted to change careers and work in the arts. My ex had refused to have children and now, in my early 50s, that door seemed closed.

Then I reread Kelsy's "profile" and decided that I was crazy not to follow up with her. Kelsy is a musician and playwright (among many other things). She has two amazing young adult daughters, Sarah and Kristi. She's also brilliant, tall, and gorgeous. All of my life's desires were wrapped up in one person.

**KELSY:** Love came quickly. Sometimes you just know it. We were married June 15, 2013, at Memorial United Church of Christ in Fitchburg—the congregation Lisa was born into and was ordained in over 25 years ago. DOMA was found unconstitutional just a few days later, which allowed us to make it federally legal on November 21 in that same year. (YAY!)

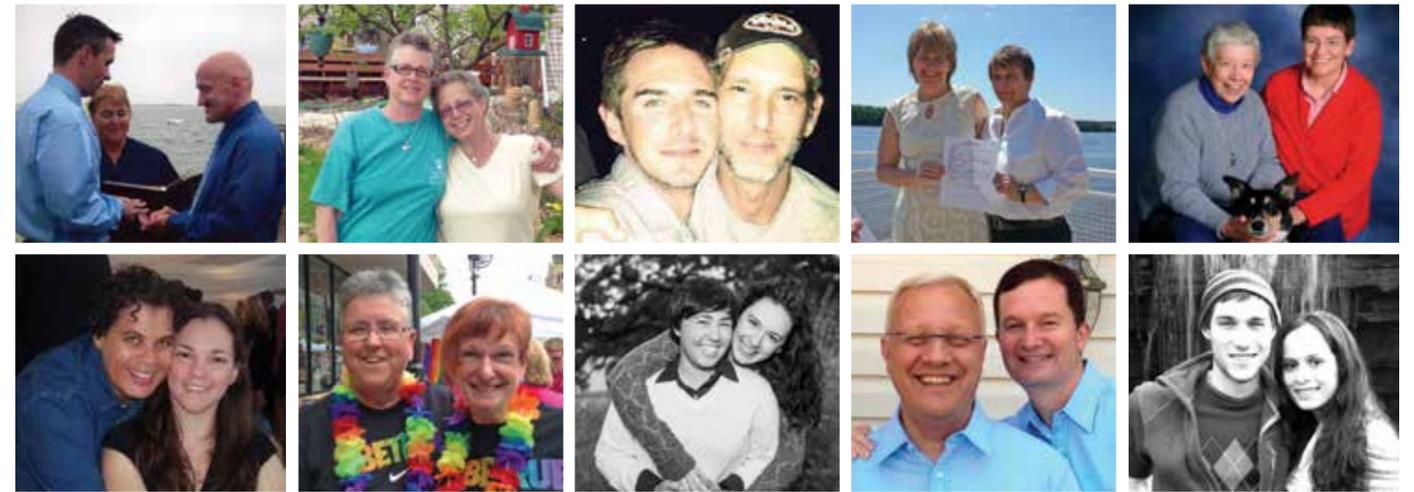
**LISA:** I was worried that Sarah and Kristi would resent me. Instead, not only they, but also Kim (Kelsy's ex-spouse, best friend, and frequent visitor), warmly embraced me. They dubbed me the third mom right away. Coming to parenthood for the first time in my 50s has been a challenge for me. I'm not as patient or flexible as I was 30 years ago.

**KELSY:** Adding to that challenge, Sarah, Kristi, and I fall on the autism spectrum. To say our household is eccentric would be kind. Poor Lisa.

**LISA:** Poor Lisa nothing! I moved in and together we've all worked hard to make it our home.

**KELSY:** Very true.

**LISA:** My parents and my ex didn't get along very well and, to their credit, Mom and Dad kept their feelings to themselves until she left me after 25 years. This made it all the more moving how quickly they embraced Kelsy. My dad was dying by the time Kelsy came into my life. Even so, the two of them had a funny conversation about her "intentions." My dad fell for Kelsy as hard as I did. He told me that he was glad and relieved that I had found her. Mom loves and trusts her, and that means the world to me.



### FREDONIA

30 Chris Hewitt & Dean Wiegert

### GRANTSBURG

2 Dawn & Sarah Goodman

### GREEN BAY

21 Stacie Christian & Julie Tetzlaff

20 Roxann Krause & Shannon Lanquist

12 Angie & Deanne Kowalzek-Adrians

10 Julie & Theresa Weise

7 Kevin Garrity & Michael Larkey

6 Justin Pearson & Cory Nicklaus ♥

6 Todd Kane & Michael Vinson ✓

5 Tina Marie Baeten & Peggy Kubiak

4 Andrew Helmann & Christopher Nikolai

2 Daniela Kollmansberger & Sarah Stone

1 Allison Pamperin & natasha wolf ♥

1 Armando Lopez & Dominick Szymanski ♥

1 Samantha McIntyre & Stephanie Scheider ♥

### GREENFIELD

10 Chantal & Jessie Norris-Smith

5 Dana Gill & Jessica Langoehr ✓ ♥

### JACKSON

13 Susan Kerr & Cherylynn Noll

### JANESVILLE

24 Amie De Voll & Liz Keenen ✓

15 Alexis & Jennifer Cloute

9 Cori & Whitney Adare

3 Kimberly Blanchette & Colleen Frentzel ✓

3 Amy Peterson & Estee Mullen ♥

2 David Davis & Daniel Malchow ✓ ♥

2 Michalea Moore & Casandra Robbins

### JEFFERSON

12 Dorothea Guensch & Patti Kramer

8 Sheryl & Tarrah Spooner

3 Debbie Bagley & Apri Watson ♥

### JOHNSON CREEK

1 Dee Biznatch & Christina Neace ♥

### KAUKAUNA

5 Robert Gulig & Scott Webber ✓

### KENOSHA

2 Megan Schnorr & Rachel Quiroz ♥

2 Rachel Quiroz & Megan Schnorr ♥

### KIEL

21 Kevin Heling & Steven Mantia

### Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.



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### Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

#### LA CROSSE

- 31 **Francie Ball & Mary O'Sullivan**
- 23 **Tara DeLong & Willem Van Roosenbeek**
- 20 Dee Carpenter & Rosanne St. Sauver

#### LA POINTE

- 23 **Glenn Carlson & Michael Childers**

#### LAKE GENEVA

- 41 **Beth & Jody Rendall**

#### LANNON

- 8 **Juan Anzaldua & Edward Anzaldua-Buth**

#### LITTLE CHUTE

- 3 **Christina & Lyndsy Hebert**

#### LODI

- 3 Patrick Bass & Ray Hestres

#### MADISON

- 53 **Clarence Cameron & Robert Lockhart**
- 45 **Chuck Bauer & Chuck Beckwith**
- 39 Raphael Kadushin & Thomas McGhee
- 37 **Sunshine Jones & Joann Kelley**
- 35 **Janice Czynscon & Crystal Hyslop**
- 35 Lee Melahn & Rick Shaver
- 34 Louie Phillips & Brian Schultz

- 33 Danielle Dresden & Donna Peckett

- 33 **Nancy Buckwalter & Sue Hughes**

- 33 **Pamela Hill & Sheryl Jones**

- 20 John Cannon & John Fritsch

- 32 **Sue Currier & Janis Senungetuk**

- 32 **Melissa Keyes & Ingrid Rothe**

- 32 **Sam Hokin & Carla Shedivy** ★

- 31 Michael F. Bemis & Duane M. Hansen

- 31 Tom DeChant & Paul Gibley

- 30 **Darren & Stephanie Bush** ★

- 30 **Rob Bergeman & John Sacia**

- 30 **Todd Hill & Thomas Jacobson**

- 30 **Val Hodgson & MC Reisdorf**

- 29 Deborah & Ocean Meir

- 29 **Karen Milner & Elizabeth Petty**

- 28 **Laurie Frost & Jeff Henriques** ★

- 28 **Rob Latousek & Brian McCormick**

- 26 **Jim Chiolino & David Heuer**

- 26 **Mare Chapman & Pam Porter**

- 25 Sondra Dalton & Brenda Swenson

- 23 Donna Miller & Mary Kaye Radtke

- 23 **Maggie Dugan & Melanie Witte**

- 22 **Dan Ross & Charles Squires**

- 22 Kenneth Kaiser & Richard Schober

- 21 Alan Irgang & Grant Priehs

- 21 **Franck Meunier & John Strasser**

- 21 Richard Butler & Charles Klauer

- 21 **Susan Oshman & Tamara Seeker**

- 21 Judy Seymour & Mary Sykes

- 20 **James Bond & Todd Crouch**

- 20 **Rene Christesen & Karen Larson**

- 20 **Sean Flyr & Bruce Slaughenhaupt**

- 20 **Eldonna Hazen & Cathy Noth**

- 20 **Liz Lauer & Nina Lebwohl**

- 20 **Troy Dassler & Robert winters**

- 19 Deborah Daniel & Linda Novinger

- 19 **Judy Howard & Amy Scarr**

- 18 **Carrie Beitlich & Amy Clements**

- 18 **Kimberly Fisher & Linda Ketcham**

- 17 **Catherine Briggs & Marty Fox**

- 17 Peter Barden & Kirk Williams

- 17 **DeeJay Redders & Jonathan Viau**

- 17 **Denise King & Nancy Smider**

- 17 **Erin Johansen & Jeff Zoerner**

- 17 **James Amato & Jason Goyer**

- 17 **Liz Dannenbaum & Donna Winter**

## Finding Family



Family is the tie that binds a lasting relationship for **Christine and Robyn Ward**.

**ROBYN:** I am a registered nurse and work at the UW Hospital. I had been there for four years when I met Chrissy, who is an optometrist and lived and worked in Southern Wisconsin. Both of us were stable in our careers, homeowners, and ready to settle down when we met.

Chrissy and I met on Match.com. After several views of her profile pictures and a few typed conversations, we met over cocktails at The Tornado Steak House. It was an awful first date. She was more interested in her soup than our conversation. Thank goodness for the strong drinks and the dim lighting. Without it I would never have had enough courage to ask for the second date. I think it is safe to say I fell for her first. Falling in love with her was easy, meant to be. She was everything I was looking for: stable in her career, driven, and one of the most genuine people I'd ever met. To top it off, she is so beautiful.

Getting to know Chrissy, we realized that we grew up 20 minutes apart and our families actually knew one another. My dad picked up milk from her grandparents' farm and our younger sisters played on the same soccer team. I think that is the common thread that kept Chrissy and me together: we both came from two amazing families. Everyone, from our young nieces and nephews to the grandparents in their 80s, has been so supportive of our relationship.

We really haven't had any challenges during our relationship because of our amazing friends and families. We realize how lucky we are. We dated for two years before I asked her parents for her hand. Family and friends were so wonderful throughout the wedding planning process, and they were the reason we had the beautiful wedding we did. It was the most perfect day. We had our wedding planned for over a year, and the week we were to marry, the law was ruled unconstitutional. Just five days before our wedding, we were able to get a real marriage license. My brother officiated our wedding, and our siblings and close friends stood by our sides. Both of our fathers gave us away.

Like most newlyweds, our hope for the future is to eventually raise some amazing, happy children. We hope to grow old together changing grandbabies' diapers, pulling weeds from our vegetable garden, and knowing that we nailed life.

**CHRISSEY:** I was cranky on our first date because I hadn't eaten all day. Falling in love with Robyn was definitely more gradual for me. She had just gotten out of a long-term relationship, so I didn't want to rush anything. The more comfortable Robyn became, the more intrigued I became with her. I remember thinking that she had the most stunning eyes I'd ever seen and an infectious laugh. Three months into our relationship I asked Robyn to be my girlfriend. Her response was, "Oh good, I can let myself go." She is the most hilarious person I've ever met. She makes me laugh every single day. I've never been so happy or so content.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JENNIFER BRINDLEY



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### Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

- 16 Roberto Amezcua & Dennis Sokolik
- 16 Patrick Hoeth & Keith Lupien
- 16 **Bob Klebba & David Waugh**
- 16 **Cessely Block & Lu Wichlacz**
- 16 **Gail Farrington-Sprague & Kathryn Sprague**
- 16 Joanna Fenner & Choua Her
- 16 **Martin Christopher & David Landre**
- 16 **Mary Hitchcock & Michelle Sawyer**
- 15 Bret Dougherty & Timothy Lapp ✓
- 15 Carol Nelson & Nancy Speir
- 15 **Eric Appleton & Rick Bristol**
- 15 **Jordan Bingham & Heather Stouder**
- 15 Scott Bennett & Landon Petersen
- 15 Devery Cash & Darren Kittleson
- 14 **Cory & Dereck Barr-Pulliam**
- 14 **Aaron Schultz & Randy Wagner**
- 14 Brett Butzman & Bernie Parish ✓
- 14 Jamesetta Fousek & Jennifer Ferstl
- 14 Terry Heiliger & James Moe ✓
- 13 Allison & Ashley Foxborn
- 13 **Christopher Meyer & Heather Wentler** ★

- 13 **Cynthia & Jessica Bachhuber**
- 13 **Ellen Sullivan & Barb Arnett**
- 13 **Hollis Rudiger & Kathryn Swartz**
- 13 **Renee Herber & Tamara Packard**
- 12 **Laura & Patricia Carrera**
- 12 **Kevin Campion & Wes Marner**
- 12 **Olwen & Shelley Hansen-Blake**
- 12 Kevin Hubbard & David Casey
- 12 **Daisy & Jocelyn Quintal-Lepinski**
- 12 Jonathan Garber & Derek Tyus
- 12 **Renee & Shari Roll-Currie**
- 11 Randy Cornell & Jess Salek
- 11 Jerry De Young & John Fruitschy ✓
- 11 Tammy Downing & Pete Nowicki ★
- 11 **Amanda Berg & Becca Schmitz**
- 11 **Megin & Scott McDonell** ★
- 11 Jacinda Tessmann & Theresa Weiland
- 11 Joey Broyles & Danny Atwater
- 10 Nick Baillies & Craig Kramer
- 10 Jennifer Cox & Ann Cunningham ✓
- 10 Daniel Ramos Haaz & Steven Lange ♥
- 10 **Christopher & Joey Wilford**
- 10 Dean Nett & Alan Strozak

- 10 Jason Hiller & Justin Price
- 10 Karen Darcy & Beth McConnell ✓
- 10 **Nick Drake & Emily Mills**
- 10 Scott Burfield & Trevin Gay ♥
- 10 Virginia Harrison & Melissa Peyton ✓
- 9 Robin Bechhofer & Pat Lambert ✓♥
- 9 **Eric Borchert & Timmo Dugdale**
- 9 **Helene & Jeanne Benink**
- 9 Donald Haar & Steven Starkey ✓
- 9 **Michael Velliquette & Tehshik Yoon**
- 8 Judith Davidoff & Rhonda Lanford ✓
- 8 **Amanda Evenstone & Dawn Siebert**
- 8 **Andrew & Noah Carrillo**
- 8 **Carolyn & Ruth Barker-Bowman**
- 8 **Derek Aimonetto & Glenn Rowe**
- 8 Jeff Clark & Tim Hagen
- 8 **Tony Jamieson & Rob Van Nevel**
- 8 **Jennifer Lawrence & Melanie Rider**
- 8 Kim Erickson & Katie Kuehl
- 8 Lauren Lebwohl & Kathryn Wilkin
- 8 Lee Kampa & Eric Sedelmaier
- 8 Philip Renner & Marco Torrez ♥
- 8 **Rebecca & Summer Laird**



## We Do.

ON THE COVER



After 20 years together, **Sean Flyr and Bruce Slaughenhaupt** found themselves unexpectedly able to legally marry—and made the celebration something uniquely their own.

We met in 1994, and although we have been fortunate, with friends and family supporting us, the idea of gathering them for a big wedding celebration was pretty much unthinkable until recently. We weren't initially even planning a wedding; it was intended to be a party to mark 20 years as a couple. However, as we planned the party, the legal landscape changed, and our perspective on the importance of marriage equality did as well. So one day, in a rather unromantic and perfectly practical manner, we proposed to each other and then celebrated with burgers at Harmony Bar.

Since neither of us grew up with any idealized notions of our wedding day, we didn't feel bound to tradition. I think that allowed us to create an evening that reflected us as a couple. We were able to dispense with things like cutting the cake and feeding each other. And we threw in our own touches, including a "ceremonial lowering of the disco ball" as we danced to Grace Jones. We also played around with the order of events, starting with cocktails in the lobby of the Capitol Theater and then moving into the theater for the rest of the evening.

I think both of us remained a bit uncertain about how the evening would go and what it would mean to get married, until the ceremony. It turned out to be profoundly meaningful for us as a couple. A friend served as our officiant and started by declaring that we had gathered to "commit our own act in defense of marriage." We wrote our own vows independently, and as it turned out, they were fairly similar. We pledged to respect and support each other, to listen and to share our thoughts, and to love one another for each day of the rest of our lives. I remember taking a moment to look at our guests as we shared our vows. I had wondered if this part of the night might feel odd, with us taking part in a ritual so affiliated with straight weddings. Instead, it felt so perfectly natural and right that Bruce and I should have this moment in our lives together. We were surrounded by so much love and support, and it was a great reminder of the gravity of the commitment we've made to each other. We ended the ceremony by asking our guests to pledge to support us as a married couple before sharing our own "We do!" The rest of the evening is pretty much what I have heard described by other married people—a blur of laughter, love, and dancing. It will always be one of the best, most important nights of our lives together as a couple.

At one point in the evening, we thanked our guests for joining us, and I spoke about the early years of our relationship when we could not share our love with the world. There were pockets of safety in our lives, but we often had to use euphemisms and vague pronouns to conceal the real nature of our relationship. That we were able to, some 20 years later, openly declare our love and commit to the institution of marriage is almost incredible, and not something we take for granted. It feels like a serious responsibility, especially because so many people fought so hard for us to have this right. And it also feels wonderful to have our love seen as valid and equal and to so proudly and publicly call each other "husband."

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- Bold**  
Couples who are married.
- ♥  
Couples who are engaged.
- ✓  
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.
- ★  
Straight couples identified as allies.
- 8 Sara Colopy & Robin Sereno
  - 8 Tim Walters & Bradley Tabor ♥
  - 8 Tina Dorschel & Andrea Wipperfurth
  - 7 Andrea Bill & Chops Seggerman
  - 7 Jason Kivela & Paul Waller
  - 7 Philip Keller & Steven Sievert ♥ ✓
  - 7 Beth Hanson & Kandis Severin
  - 7 Jay Edgar & Joshua Feyen
  - 7 Jeanine Hutcherson & Tricia Johnson
  - 7 Mel Freitag & Amber Sowards
  - 6 James & Shawnee Parens
  - 6 Lana Lawrence & Louise Stout ♥
  - 6 Chrystal & Heather Seeley-Schreck
  - 6 Dana Crumpton & Ronald Lee ♥
  - 6 David Goodwin & John Mysliwicz
  - 6 Elisa Derickson-Krueger & Dan Krueger
  - 6 Jami Degrazio & Holly Hieronim ♥
  - 6 Jason Kemp & Ryan Schroth
  - 6 Brent Duckwitz & Brian Elmore ♥
  - 5 Daun Johnstone & Hazel Mare
  - 5 Hillary & Sarah Barnes
  - 5 Jennifer & Stormy-Kito Justice
  - 5 Ray Pearson & Oscar Perez
  - 5 Sara Kolata & Sarah Sersch ♥
  - 5 Vicki Goldman & Jen Mrotek
  - 4 Jon Dean & Larry Palm
  - 4 Kendra McIntosh & Patti Thompson ♥
  - 4 Toni Baker & Stephanie Graham
  - 4 Dawn & Jacqui Scott-Papke
  - 4 Jennifer & Quetta Fisher
  - 4 Mary & Wendy Liedtke
  - 4 Raini Justice & Erika Rusch
  - 4 Silvana & Staci Mercedes-Isbell
  - 4 Thomas Beckwith-Thompson & Casey Thompson
  - 4 Victoria Echeverria & Natalie Hinckley
  - 3 Kaitlin Hammis & Capri Thongnuam ♥
  - 3 Owen Karcher & Chelsea O'Neil ♥
  - 3 Brian & Meredith Turany ★
  - 3 Justin Brown & Dan Meyers
  - 3 Kael Fry & Anne Toterio
  - 3 KelsyAnne Schoenhaar & Lisa Schoenwetter
  - 3 Lukas Dietz & Jordan Siegler
  - 3 Michael Bruno & Yannick Henrion ♥
  - 3 Michele & Robin Briggs
  - 3 Shannon Ballhorn & Nick Wagner ★
  - 3 Staci Jayce & Katie Mier
  - 2 Abby Churchill & Chris Swomley
  - 2 Angie Alcott & Ann De Tienne
  - 2 Sebastian Greenholtz & Erik Medina ♥
  - 2 Sophia Ott & Tanya Robish ♥
  - 2 Ali Dwyer & Lorrie Hurckes ♥
  - 2 Annie Getsinger & Andrea Weinstock
  - 2 Carol Foglestad & Kim Westergaard DP ♥
  - 2 Corey Florence & Davey Neff ♥
  - 2 Emily Groth & Robyn Rauman
  - 2 Milo Dickerson & Emma Zeldin
  - 2 Patrick Farabaugh & Sedrick Huppert
  - 1 Libby Armstrong & Andrew Peterson
  - 1 Minta Dwyer & Camden Hargrove
  - 1 Jenny Fish & Melissa Niemczyk ♥
  - 1 Sam Rettke & Brittany Simler
  - 1 Sandy Eichel & Nancy Noet
  - 1 Sheena Hirschfield & Andrea Stolts ♥



- MARATHON**
- 34 Mark Blume & Tom Voss
- MARINETTE**
- 13 Rhonda Mellinger & Amy Reddinger
- MAZOMANIE**
- 2 Fred-Allen Self & Matthew Self
- MC FARLAND**
- 13 Lisa Abler & Amy Johnson
  - 23 Chuck Mocco & Thomas Scheid DP
- MELROSE**
- 1 Arica & Emily Gagnea
- MENASHA**
- 12 Pam Massey & Tracy Plamann ♥
  - 3 Levi & Yolanda Young ♥
- MERCER**
- 36 John Flynn & Michael Novak
- MIDDLETON**
- 17 Joyce & Leilani Robertson-Hoyt
  - 9 Erica & Mike Sweitzer-Beckman ★
  - 6 Casey & Sarah Groeneveld Kenney
  - 4 Edwin & Jeffrey Roman-Carney
  - 3 Cassie Immel & Taryn Lindemann
  - 3 Martin Batchelor & Jeremiah Kasdorf
- MILWAUKEE**
- 57 Erv Uecker & Ross B. Walker
  - 38 Garth & Roy Badger
  - 34 Steven Sanders & Rand Schmidt ♥ ♥
  - 31 Gregory & Raymond Konz-Krzyminski
  - 28 Brenda Coley & Sandra Jones ♥
  - 28 Cathy Arney & Sabley Sabin
- 28 Gerry Coon & Stewart Dempsey
  - 25 Becky Burton & Sue Robinson
  - 20 Don Martinson & Steve Scragg
  - 20 Kari George & Tracey Joan Fecteau
  - 19 Gregory Ruffer & Peter Stark
  - 18 James Horst & Michael Lasser
  - 13 Mark Janetski & Ed Mullins
  - 12 Laura Maker & Susie Seidelman
  - 11 Brigid & Erin Brady
  - 11 Ed Seaberg & Patrick Smith
  - 10 Jacquie Lindo & Dawn Schmidt
  - 10 Nicole Arndt & Jennifer Larson
  - 10 Scott Jones & Thomas Zigan
  - 8 Katie Francis & Sarah Kordsmeier
  - 7 Fernando Gutierrez & Matthew Schreck

**Bold**  
Couples who are married.

♥  
Couples who are engaged.

✓  
Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.

★  
Straight couples identified as allies.



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MADISON : GREATER MILWAUKEE : MINNEAPOLIS



**Bold**

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

- 7 Akiba Dallas-Stegall & Tangia Stegall
- 7 Brenda & Robin Cwiklinski-Kertscher
- 6 Elizabeth Brown & Rebecca Larson ✓
- 6 Jackie Degenhardt & Donna Schweda
- 5 Nashata Norwood & Tanika Reyes ♥
- 4 Jeremy Falk & Christina Oettel-Flaherty ♥
- 4 Dezy & Meghan St. Nolde
- 4 Joe Imperiale & Ryan Moss ♥
- 4 Artise & claudia Thompson
- 3 Ethan & Faith Parnell
- 3 Gary & Jeremy Cooper-Sperber
- 3 Jim Lautenbach & Chris Wisniewski
- 3 Marc Anderson & Tim Gagliano-Anderson
- 3 Tamika Conley & Mary Heide ♥
- 2 Tandra Hill & Amanda Meyers
- 2 Anya Chesebro & Juliana Nailen ♥
- 2 Kellymarie Perez-Cruz & Leslie Schwartz ♥
- 2 Lisa Hochschild & Nicky Vaaler ♥
- 2 Phillip Bailey & Jason Rae ♥
- 1 Eamon Forslund & Grace McKirdy
- 1 Luis Correa & Vinnie Maniaci

- 1 Katlyn Pfeiffer & Melissa Prochnow
- MINERAL POINT**
- 13 John G Greenwood & Fred Vaughn ✓
- MONONA**
- 9 Dorothy Rietzler & Kari Sievert
- 6 Emily Peffer & Ande Johnson
- 6 Erica & Leslie Gittings
- MONROE**
- 4 Brandi & Emily Harris
- MONTELLO**
- 25 Jo McLaughlin & Carol Vandenberg
- MONTFORT**
- 4 Aaron & Christopher Schnulle-Simons
- 3 Gary McHone & Harry Zelhofer-McHone
- MOUNT HOREB**
- 28 Sue Huntentburg & Jill Jonas
- 2 Julie Opat & Sara Woitte
- MUKWONAGO**
- 14 Adam Beyerl & Patric Trusty

- MUSKEGO**
- 6 Andrea & Cecilia Danlin
- NEENAH**
- 23 Liz Miller & Maureen O'Gara
- 9 Laura & Tracy Kading-Nohr
- 1 Daniel Moorcroft & Josh Schmirler
- NEW AUBURN**
- 18 Scott McCracken & Abe Zeman
- NEW BERLIN**
- 10 Nancy Biker & McGee Steffes
- NEW LONDON**
- 11 Ashley Struck & Stephanie Weissahn
- OAK CREEK**
- 4 Amanda & Heather Morrissey
- OREGON**
- 14 Walt Jackson & Dennis Outhouse
- 7 Susan Mosel & Brenda Onken ✓
- OSHKOSH**
- 11 Jillian & Tialynn Church-Grayson ♥
- 9 Lisa Buehler & Laura Jones ✓♥
- 7 Jessica & Joline Moore

# Flying High



**Jeff Robertson and Jeremiah Pyant** took their wedding vows to new heights.

Jeremiah and I met on a plane during one of my trips home to Wisconsin. After much courtship, Jeremiah finally moved to the state to be with me. Jeremiah and I obtained a domestic partnership registration while living in Wisconsin before moving to Texas for my new job.

This past April, Jeremiah and I were one of five winning couples in the ACLU's "My Big Gay (II) Legal Wedding" contest. The contest asked couples to submit creative ideas for how they would cross from their home states (where gay marriage was not allowed) into a state where their marriage was legal. We crossed the state line from Texas into the state of New Mexico via helicopter to legally wed at sunrise.

The idea to marry in the air was parallel with our current lifestyle. Jeremiah is a flight attendant, and I am particularly concerned since Jeremiah's job requires him to travel across the country and spend significant amounts of time in unfamiliar cities and states. The patchwork of marriage laws in this country means that Jeremiah could be understood and respected as a married man in the morning and, after flying to a state where same-sex couples are denied the freedom to marry, be seen and treated as a single man by the afternoon.

We still are planning for a large wedding in August 2015 to include family and friends in Wisconsin.



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## Getting It Right



With 29 years under their belts, **Elizabeth Petty** and **Karen Milner** have been growing and changing together through all of life's ups and downs.

Ours is not a story of love at first sight. It is a story of a deep, loving, long-term relationship that took us both by surprise. Our journey began in August 1985, when Liz was a medical student at the UW-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health rotating through a clinical elective in psychiatry. Karen was the senior psychiatry resident assigned to oversee and teach Liz in the hospital.

Liz was an outspoken, out, vegetarian, lesbian activist, with short "butch" hair, who often wore a tie to work. Karen, a displaced Texan, had big curly black hair, wore red lipstick, and had a polite Southern-hospitality style. We had little common ground, other than that Karen was a dedicated teacher and a compassionate clinician, and Liz was an intellectually curious student who was eager to learn and loved caring for patients. During downtimes on the rotation, Liz talked about wild weekend camping trips she took with women she was dating. Karen told

Liz about the attraction she felt for one of the male residents, who looked a bit like a young Brett Favre. We built a strong working student-mentor professional relationship that month, but nothing more.

At the end of the monthlong rotation, Liz invited Karen for dinner to thank her for her teaching. It was a short professional dinner. That was the last we saw of each for three months. In December of 1985, Karen invited Liz for dinner—"a belated thank-you dinner for a thank-you dinner." That one snowy evening changed everything. An innocent hug good-bye at the door of Karen's apartment became the start of a now 29-year-long relationship—a relationship that has withstood moves to three different states and seven different homes, the serious illnesses and deaths of close family members and friends, the acquisition and loss of pets, multiple different jobs, and growth of our family through two sons, now ages 13 and 16. We moved back to Madison in August of 2011 and were married at the city hall on June 7, 2014.

It wasn't always easy, and it wasn't always fun. At the start, our lifestyles and interests were so very different. Karen loved watching sports, drove a sports car, and did beautiful needlework. Liz loved being outside, preferably in the woods or on the water, snow, or ice. She rode her bike everywhere. When Liz had to make a decision about where to do residency training only two months after that fateful all-night long December dinner date, she elected to stay in Madison to continue to explore this new relationship.

Over time, our interests blended: We developed several new hobbies together, visiting art museums, collecting antiques, and exploring new places, from California to Croatia. Our favorite place in the world has become the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, along the shore of Lake Superior.



Some of our most difficult times have revolved around work, with schedules and commutes that left little for one another except for sheer exhaustion, minimal communication, and problematic misunderstandings; moves that forced us to decide whose career to put first; and having children—deciding whether to, when, and how. We were often on very different pages, if not in completely different stories within different books. Once a decision was made, however, we never looked back. We are happy with every decision we have made, no matter how turbulent the journey was to get there.

Now we look forward together with hope, a sense of adventure, and anticipation of the good things to come. We have been there for each other when we needed each other the most and will continue to be there. We respect, admire, and learn from the differences we bring to our relationship. Lasting love has been a treasured surprise and a truly wonderful gift we will continue to nurture and celebrate. Our love may not have been love at first sight, but for us, it is a love that is undeniably right.

- 3 Ann & Sam Sheahan**
- 2 Tori Dolley & Christine Lammers ♥
- PEWAUKEE**
- 16 Timothy Baack & John Sheaffer**
- PLATTEVILLE**
- 1 Zosia Bartosik & Summer Padley ♥
- PORT WASHINGTON**
- 11 Scott Lone & Joseph Maddalena**
- POYNETTE**
- 5 Gina Leerek & Lyn Monroe ✓ ♥
- PRAIRIE DU SAC**
- 6 Dee Dee & Jill Sorg**
- RACINE**
- 18 Cheryl & Julie Totsch**
- 7 Ann Kelso & Sarah Mueller ✓

- REEDSBURG**
- 9 Diana Held & JoAnn Keenan**
- RHINELANDER**
- 6 Jessica Jones & Jamie Powers
- RICHLAND CENTER**
- 17 Lisa & Tina McAdams**
- SOUTH MILWAUKEE**
- 37 Bruce Davies & Arthur Van Lydegraf
- SAUK CITY**
- 18 Agnes Baldwin-Pierce & Ginger Pierce ✓
- SCHOFIELD**
- 4 Heather Blair & Ivey Zywicki ♥
- SHEBOYGAN**
- 1 Christopher Kautza & Austin Weber

- SHEBOYGAN FALLS**
- 25 Teresa Dziak & Mary Willard**
- SHOREWOOD**
- 13 Christopher Martell & Mark Williams**
- SPRING GREEN**
- 48 Tom Alfini & Bob Charley**
- SPRING VALLEY**
- 25 Eric & Michele Huppert ★**
- STEVENS POINT**
- 14 Lorie Dobrzynski & Melanie Kuolt**
- 10 Sandi & Sarah Lakewood**
- STOUGHTON**
- 41 Judy Captain & Kate Stormer**
- 15 Jill Hauk & Jean Ligocki**
- 13 Angie & Tammy Whitiken**

### Bold

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

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**Bold**

Couples who are married.



Couples who are engaged.



Couples on WI's Domestic Partnership Registry.



Straight couples identified as allies.

- 13 Carmen Alcalde & Sue Hunter ✓
- 12 Todd Cieslak & Brent Eastabrooks
- 10 **Terry Cowles & Timothy Zimmer**
- 7 Tyna Brewer & Kelley Udulutch

**SUN PRAIRIE**

- 38 Ann Jakel & Peggy Stormoen ✓✓
- 26 Britta Johnson & Sharon Kolb ✓
- 6 Patti Abrams & Aleta Klicko ✓✓
- 5 Timothy Lom & Steve Noll

**4 Jane Kahl & Sue Nelson**

- 3 Aisha Bennett & LaSondra McGee ♥

**3 Ian & Racquel Anderson**

- 3 Molly Censky & Maggie O'Leary ✓✓

- 1 Ed Lalor & Brett Wilson

**SUSSEX**

- 1 Jessica Rakel & Jenniffer Schaefer

**TOMAH**

- 1 Collin Boudreau & Jacob Rusch ♥

**UNION GROVE**

- 6 Kirsten Dent & Lisa Szalanski

**VERONA**

- 3 **Christine & Robyn Ward**

**VIROQUA**

- 9 **Kaitlyn Karasek & Cassandra Torgerson**

**WAUKESHA**

- 8 **Kristin Hansen & Darrel Johnson** ★

- 1 Tom McGargill & Dan Rosa

**WAUNAKEE**

- 15 **Leah Buysse & Randii Waddell**

- 12 **Linda Aumann & Deb Nies**

- 7 **Holly Ellickson & Corissa Miller**

- 5 **Michelle & Stacy Anderson**

- 4 Dana Gordon & Chelsea Rowe ✓✓

**WAUPUN**

- 6 **Jen Glowinski & Sara Steppke**

**WAUSAU**

- 8 **Kelly & Tracy Ackley**

- 3 **Gina & Misty Buchmiller**

**WAUWATOSA**

- 6 **Michael & Shawn Storey**

- 3 **Brad & Nick Schlaikowski**

- 1 Colleen Cronkleton & Mashair Henry ♥

**WEST BEND**

- 10 James Combs & Kyle Watry Married

- 3 Jennifer droppers & tessa hirtreiter ♥

**WEST MILWAUKEE**

- 14 **Karina Willes & Kami Young**

**WHITEFISH BAY**

- 6 **Anne Marie Arroyo & Tamela Greene**

- 4 Kyle Schmidt & Bryan VanMeter ♥

**WHITEWATER**

- 18 Robin Fox & Kim Simes ♥

**WINDSOR**

- 9 **Tony Brungaber & Emmalee Pearson**

- 2 **Jim & Paul Fritsch**

**WISCONSIN DELLS**

- 10 **Michael Dodd & Tom Scharbach**

**WISCONSIN RAPIDS**

- 7 **Amy & Angel Mancil**

**WOODVILLE**

- 6 **Renee Cowdery & Amber Jakes**

**WRIGHTSTOWN**

- 3 **Angie & Jen Ott**

*Join the List*

Responses were collected through a collaborative form that was shared on social media and e-mailed out to the mailing lists of our partner organizations. To inquire how to be on the list for next year, e-mail us at: [contact@ourlivesmadison.com](mailto:contact@ourlivesmadison.com)

17 If you love someone, act on it.



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Trixie Mattel and the man behind her. Literally and figuratively.

WELCOME TO THE

# Dollhouse

This month Plan B cast member **Trixie Mattel** becomes the first drag queen from Wisconsin to compete on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Out of drag, **Brian Firkus** shares the inspiration for his alter ego.



**STEPPING INTO THE WORLD** of Trixie Mattel feels a lot like walking into a life-size plastic Barbie dollhouse. Everything is in different shades of pinks and pastel blues, and proportions are all exaggerated to the extreme. Trixie's creator, Brian Firkus, means it to be that way. As he puts it, "Trixie is kinda like the Barbie doll I never had but always wanted."

This month he gets to share Trixie with America, as she becomes the first contestant from Wisconsin to appear on hit reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. We sat down with Brian to learn a bit about what brought him to this moment and where he hopes to take it.

## LIFE BEFORE DRAG

**So let's start with where you are from.** I am from Silver Cliff, way up north in Wisconsin. I literally came from a trailer on a dead-end dirt road. I didn't come out until college, but I always knew. I just kept it to myself until I got out on my own.

**How did your family handle your coming out?** I have a gay aunt, so I was never scared that it was going to be a problem. But I knew I wasn't going to be dating in high school, so I didn't see the need to address it right away.

**When did it finally come up?** Freshman year of college. I lost my virginity in the most stereotypical way possible: on a bunk in a dorm. Right after that, I called my mom and told her I had a boyfriend. She kinda made me feel silly for even thinking she'd have a problem with it. The drag queen thing I think took her a little longer to come around to though. At first I think she thought it was more my gender identity and sexuality.

## AND ALONG CAME TRIXIE

**At what point did you discover drag?** When I was 18, I was in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at the Oriental Theatre in Milwaukee. Someone who played a drag role was sick, so I had to step in unexpectedly. If that person hadn't been sick, I don't know if I ever would have tried it. It just so happened that the character's name was Trixie, which felt like fate. I had a rough relationship with my stepdad, and whenever I was acting effeminate he would call me a Trixie, like it was a slur. I really hated that word. So it was eerie that when I did drag that night, the character was Trixie. She helped me take back the night! Now I love that name.

**At what point did it go from a one-time thing to something regular?** I did it a couple times after that, then regularly with *Rocky*. When I turned 21, I went in drag to see BeBe Zahara Benet at the LA Café in Milwaukee. I got scouted for a gig that night. When I first started, I wanted to be fierce, but the more I embraced comedy, the more the aesthetic developed into a living doll.

**So that's how you landed on Trixie's character?** I've always been obsessed with Barbie but wasn't allowed to have one as a child. Dolls always seem like they have everything, so Trixie's kinda like the Barbie doll

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### The details are in the dress



**BRANDI'S BRIDAL GALLERIA**  
BRANDI NEHMER, OWNER

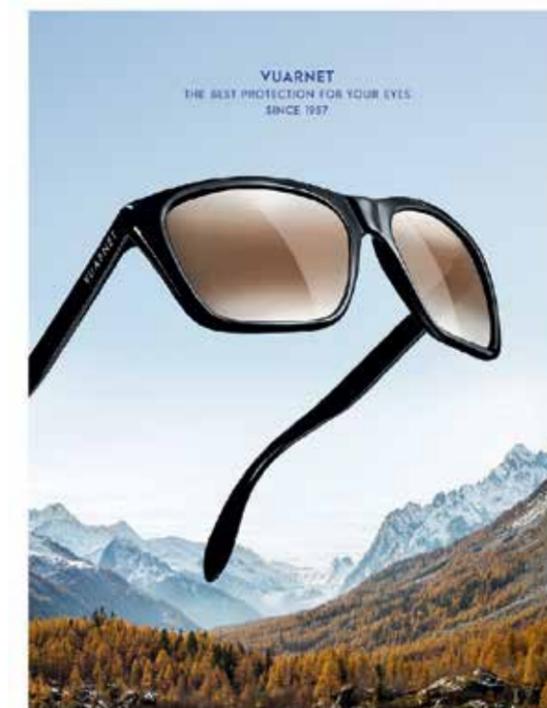
We've seen so many new trends in the bridal gown and bridesmaid world! Bridal gowns are full of detail now, from long bell sleeves to classic strapless and sheer illusion with lace appliques and beading, to short, fun, trendy gowns. Pantsuits and ivory jumpsuits have come into the fashion world again, as well. The bride really wants her bridesmaids to be comfortable too, and we have seen so many brides let their bridesmaids pick out their own dresses, with each bridesmaid sticking to the same color, or all tea length, or something fun too!

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BRANDON ROUNDS, SALES AND EVENT MANAGER

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## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Wedding ring boom



**JEWELERS WORKSHOP**  
JASON BRADEN, OWNER

Obviously we had a huge spike in engagement and wedding rings for same-sex couples in the weeks following the original announcement. There was a sense of urgency and excitement that energized both our customers and our designers. The whole year has been full of couples who have often been together for decades being able to achieve what they thought was an impossible dream. The stories have been beautiful, and we have been honored to share in them through our craft.

### Give the gift of comfort



**ORANGE TREE IMPORTS**  
CAROL "ORANGE" SCHMIDT, OWNER

I am very excited that the concept of "love" is now so much more inclusive than it used to be. Orange Tree Imports has always offered a gift registry for commitment ceremonies as well as weddings, but it's wonderful not to have to make that distinction anymore. We appreciate that gift giving is a way of expressing love, and so we see customers looking for nontraditional gifts that show that they know the person or couple well. Thymes bubble bath as a wedding gift? It may not last forever, but why not give something that you know will delight the recipient? We've also been featuring more products that represent Wisconsin, such as our White Lily Glass and Peggy Karr Glass items. These are not souvenirs, but rather a way to say "someone in Wisconsin loves you."

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Going local and seasonal for wedding treats



**BLOOM BAKE SHOP**  
ANNEMARIE MAITRE, OWNER

Wedding dessert is more fresh, creative, and open-minded than ever! Traditional tiered cakes still happen, but what I love are couples incorporating the local growing season into their decision-making. This past summer we had the pleasure of making many seasonal pies with the summer harvest, as well as gorgeous dessert tables. Dessert tables could include ice cream bars, bake sale-style tables, or modern mini desserts!

### Theme weddings and Skype-in guests



**HOLY WISDOM MONASTERY**  
JILL CARLSON, DIRECTOR OF GUEST SERVICES

Weddings held at Holy Wisdom have always been as unique as the people holding them. The first legal same-sex wedding held at Holy Wisdom was on December 5, 2014. The two women invited 25 friends and family members to witness the ceremony. Classical music, candlelight, and lots of love and laughter made the ceremony perfect. Theme weddings are also popular. One couple held an outdoor Doctor Who-themed wedding, complete with a TARDIS from which the groom emerged. The bride, groom, and the wedding party were dressed as characters from the show too. Because planning a wedding is a time-consuming job, we've seen several couples hire a wedding planner to help coordinate all the details for the rehearsal, wedding, and reception. Having someone Skype the ceremony is a great way to allow those who are unable to attend the wedding in person to still see it, too.

I never had but always wanted. She's the antithesis to what I was like growing up. She's also like a Stepford wife because of how blown-out and hyperfeminine she is.

**Trixie has very distinct makeup. Where does it come from?** I was looking at vintage dolls from the '70s and began painting my face the way they were drawn. The more Trixie embraced comedy, the more I wanted her to be a 50/50 split between a clown and a living doll. If you're supposed to paint for the back row in drag, I like to think that I paint for the Denny's down the street. The cheeks are strong because I want you to know that I am a man. I want you to be like, "This idiot has paint on his face."

**How has the Wisconsin drag scene received Trixie?** In Wisconsin I've always been treated weird for being different. I've had lots of queens tell me I could be so much more if I was XYZ, and honestly, that's not what I believe works. I've never left my house and paid money to see your run-of-the-mill showgirl queen.

**So what do you want your audience to feel when you are performing?** I want them to feel like they are 10 years old on Christmas and just opened their favorite toy. I want the fantasy to be so over-the-top that they have to go along with it. I'm not taking it too seriously, so they see they don't have to either. I don't know what's going on in people's lives, but when they are at my show, they get to escape from it for a while.

### LIFE OUT OF DRAG

**What has dating been like since creating Trixie?** In drag, there are two schools of thought around this. When you tell a guy you like that you do drag, they are either like, "OMG that is so cool"—your art is amazing, and they respect that you work hard and do something that you care about. Or you tell somebody and to him it compromises your masculinity, and he can't see you romantically anymore. He can't see you fully as a man.

Since I started, I've been lucky enough to only be single a small amount of time. In that window I've sometimes put what I do for a living in the closet to keep people interested in me. That was always really weird. It felt like having to inform someone on the first date that I had a terminal illness just to see if he'd still want a second date. It's funny. If I phrased it like I run my own business and I create and sell a product, then they're usually like, "Oh, cool."

**Have your own thoughts on drag changed since creating Trixie?** There's a lot of vulnerability to being a man who dresses in drag, but there's a lot of power in being a drag queen. When I first started doing drag, I was a little ashamed of how much I loved it. Now I feel like it's my superpower.

It's amazing how comfortable I've become with my perception of masculinity. When I first started, I was daring myself to do something feminine. Now, putting on this other persona makes me feel happy to be myself. No expression of yourself should make you feel less like a man.

### C'MON, SEASON 7

**It's official. Your season has the first queens from Wisconsin on it. While we wait for it to start, can you tell us about some of your favorite queens from the past seasons?** BenDeLaCreme. Raven. Alaska. I love anybody who has really developed his or her character. I especially love queens like Ben that do a kind of drag similar to mine. I just connect with the way he realistically lives in his character. He makes strong choices for the character and just commits to it. Also, it's inspiring that he uses drag to kind of mend and grow a lot.

Though I also love Carmen [Carrera] because she does something completely different.

**What draws you to Carmen?** She's great because I love her confidence and her body. I think sometimes the things that amaze us the most are the things we can't do at all. Really fishy body queens amaze me because it's something I can't touch.

**Is that a direction you would take Trixie?** Never, never, never. The whole concept of Trixie is that everything is fabricated right down to my eye color. I've always prided myself in the transformation—turning a normal-to below-average-looking dude into this ridiculously plastic-looking girl. I love using makeup to do all the same things that surgeons do.

My whole mission statement is to create this over-the-top thing of supreme beauty. I feel like cosmetic surgery would be cheating my mission and changing Brian. I don't want Brian to be different.

**What other queens from last season do you really like?** Besides Ben, a close second would be Bianca Del Rio. She's so funny and has a sense of humor about herself. She's a man in a wig who can say these really cutting things because she has a sense of humor about herself.

She's a great example of how much power you're given in drag. In our society, to be a man is to have privilege and power, but for a man to willfully step outside of that and dress like a girl is super inspiring.

**Well, we are certainly looking forward to seeing what you bring to the race. Any final thoughts to leave us with before the show starts?** I have a saying that carried me through college:

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

In life all you can ever do is take what you have and do something with it. That's what you do with drag and what I hope I'm able to inspire others to do too. ■

Rediscovering color



ROSE COTTAGE  
ROSE FULLER, CO-OWNER

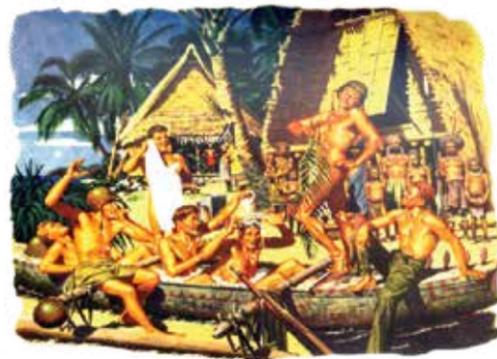
It is very exciting that things are finally turning around and people are legally able to commit themselves to one another. It is about time! In the floral world, this means big business. Commitment and marriage ceremonies are a big part of our business, and we work closely with all couples to create the service of their dreams, no matter what the budget. Handheld bouquets of single flowers are still very popular, and people are choosing colorful and WOW! over the all-white classic look. We have been very fortunate to assist in many ceremonies, and we look forward to creating beautiful designs for even more! 2015 is looking up, and we are very excited about it.

(Legal) marriage is for everyone



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
REV. ELDONNA HAZEN

I am so excited that I can now perform LGBT weddings that are legal in the state of Wisconsin! For years, I have tried to provide the same experience for same-sex couples as I do for heterosexual couples. It has always been challenging to provide a certificate that did not hold the legal protection for a couple. I am pleased that I no longer have to "make" a certificate of marriage. How wonderful to be able to honor the love of two individuals without qualification!



A Camp Fantasy

Dick Wagner examines how same-sex love found its way into mainstream press during the upheaval of the World Wars, though it still dared not speak its name.

PERHAPS, LIKE ME, you love old movies. I especially like the World War II flicks that show how the pressing circumstances of possible combat quickened love between soldiers and their girlfriends. I wonder, now that we have gays in the military and marriage equality, how Hollywood might rework this for the war husband. Perhaps I hope for too much.

Looking back, one can find in the historical record romances between gay men even in the period of World War II. The war experience would change America. Gay men experienced part of that change—by being taken out of local, tight social structures and put into a predominantly single-sex environment with lots of other men from diverse populations and by being faced with an immediate mortality that might make them more open to things otherwise hidden. One gay Wisconsinite would say, "You're facing Eternity at every step." That some used this period to learn about broader sexual experiences seemed bound to occur.

In both World War I and II, a worry was that young, arguably innocent American men were taken from their families and home communi-

"And we'll talk—you and me, and be near; and learn about each other, and discover what new things can be found."

ties and thus exposed to the wider world and all the presumed vices that existed therein. During the first war, the Army cooperated with police and other authorities to shut down the flourishing red-light districts where urban prostitution, presumably heterosexual, occurred near military bases. This was a culmination of the social purity, anti-vice crusades begun before war. The same concern would occur in the second war, but now could also have to include concern over homosexual vice.

After some success as a radio actor for WHA as part of "The Dramatic Hour of the Air," Madison poet-writer Keith McCutcheon had moved to California before the war in 1939, to try his hand at breaking into Hollywood. He described the city as "Hollywood the Amazing," which possessed "but one industry—and that is the most intriguing of any industry in the world—except war." He noted the presence of "glamour boys and glamour girls." Surely part of the amazement was "young men

jerking sodas at every drug store—many would easily eclipse the most striking man on the screen." To support himself, Keith undertook to write a travel column. In September 1939, the Wisconsin Rio Journal was pleased to tell its readers his column would reappear in the paper.

One of the realities of the 1939 outbreak of war in Europe was that America seriously had to think about issues of war and peace. McCutcheon, though he wrote "I despise Hitler," was also no fan of Roosevelt's New Deal or the rush to war. In the column for Christmas 1940, he urges readers to have "faith in this country." The columns included a poem that gave thanks for a land "unpacked with ugly scars of war; unfilled with dead." He hoped that the power of the pen could "swerve toward Peace desires of mankind." It was not to be.

A peacetime draft instituted during 1940, to help America's preparedness, resulted in millions of young men moving around the country, bound for military camps. McCutcheon, his imagination grasping this new social phenomenon, wrote a series of columns for the Rio paper describing two young men, new draftees Joe and John, caught in this upheaval. The soldiers were presumably fictional, for no mention of actual first-person reference is made as if McCutcheon was at camp. As such, he creates a romantic atmosphere for a male-bonded relationship. Joe is described as "young, handsome" and John as "so good looking."

Of John, he writes, "His life has been suddenly changed by this new order of things—this army business. In camp he met Joe—a friend that it seemed his whole life had been destined to meet."

McCutcheon has John say, "But I'm awful lonesome now. If I hadn't found you well I don't know what I'd have done." When Joe gets ready to meet John, "He knotted his tie as meticulously as though it were his first formal." John is inspired by the friendship to write poetry and reads it to Joe in a voice "low and soft." A stanza so read was:

Like a lovely lilting tune  
With a subtle melody  
Through the lovely afternoon  
I press you close to me.

Joe compliments John on his poetry and urges him, "Write some more." That this could be characterized as anything but a same-sex courtship in the Army would be hard for even the casual reader to miss. One line reported, "Arm in arm they walked down the camp street."

The couple walks "a little ways from the camp, out into the quiet evening, where the sounds of day are being hushed, and dusk is gathering slowly like dark smoke along the ground." The column continues, "And we'll talk—you and me, and be near; and learn about each other, and discover what new things can be found. Ready?" The happy one of the pair, Joe describes a vision, "where friends are—there is a good place, a lovely place." John, who had been lonely, and now is not, asks "But—where Joe? Where's this place that sounds like a dream? You talk as if you'd been there before." The hints are that Joe has been over the rainbow and perhaps is experienced in same-sex love. After commenting on the wonderful evening, John "tossed his head in a quaint little way. 'You know, I believe I could almost love you.'" ■



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

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Evan Wolfson is founder and president of Freedom to Marry, the campaign to win marriage nationwide, and author of *Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry*. In 2004, *Time* magazine named him one of the "100 most influential people in the world." Prior to founding Freedom to Marry in 2003, Wolfson launched the ongoing global movement for the freedom to marry as co-counsel in the landmark Hawaii marriage case, *Baehr v. Miike*.

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## New Harvest Foundation

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

### HIV/AIDS Grant Proposals

New Harvest Foundation is pleased to announce and solicit grant proposals for our new MilMaids-funded grant.

This grant money targets HIV/AIDS issues in our community. Grant proposals that address HIV/AIDS issues may be submitted using our regular, electronic Grant application process.

Prospective grants must address HIV and AIDS issues in some way, we encourage creative approaches and are open to any intriguing grant proposal.

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## Centering Desire in Our Work

The following is an excerpt of the speech given by **Kristen Petroschius** when accepting the LGBTQ Advocate of the Year Award at the Outreach Banquet this past fall.

### WHEN I THINK ABOUT GSAFE'S

work over the last three years, I start from a place of deep desire and longing. Close your eyes for a moment and think back to that first crush, that first kiss, that first moment you realized how important it was for you to come out, to take a risk, to live your dreams, to make the impossible possible. Feel that energy.

Suzanne Pharr, a middle-aged white lesbian “handywoman” and multi-issue community organizer, talks about the politics of desire and the ways we build our movements as follows:

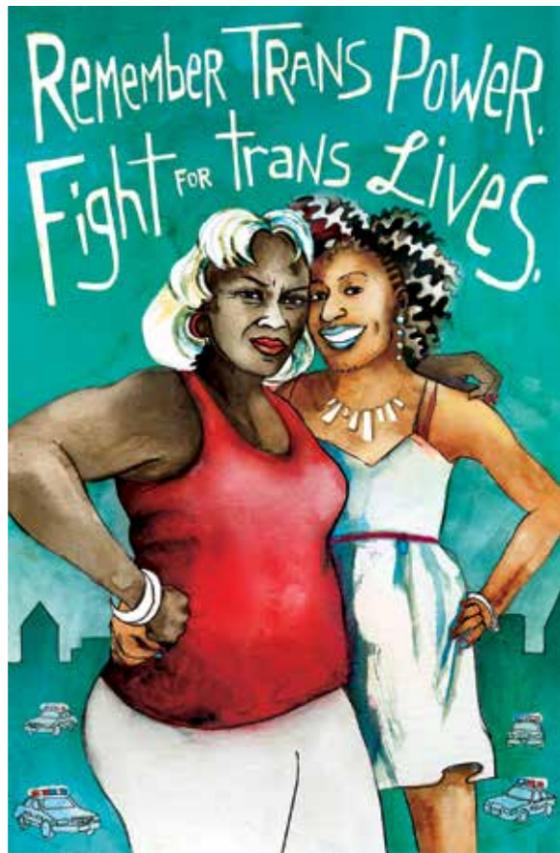
“What would it mean if we began our base-building and organizing from a place of people’s longing and desire? It is a place where many of us share common dreams: to have self-determination for our lives and bodies; to have integration of mind, body, and spirit; to be recognized for our whole selves and identities; to be respected and considered persons of worth.”

My work at GSAFE has been about building off desire to create a place where everyone can feel at home as our full selves—where we can be LGBTQ and Black, immigrant and trans\*. It has been about building a place where we are not asked to leave a part of ourselves at the door in order to belong.

Would all my efforts as an ally be pointless if, in the end, white people or groups really couldn't change?

Given that we as a people are incredibly diverse, this asks all of us to be constantly open, reflective, learning, and growing. And while we must do the work, it has not been easy.

Fear is in some ways the counterpart to desire. In the beginning of my time at GSAFE, I shared a vision of a multiracial, trans-inclusive LGBTQ and racial justice-centered GSAFE.



ART BY MICAH BAZANT, MICHAELBAZANT.COM

That’s a lot, right? I had a lot of anxiety about trying to lead us through a process to get there, especially with few models of success. What if I gave everything I had to offer and failed? Would it be a reflection that transformation was impossible? Would all my efforts as an ally be pointless if, in the end, white people or groups really couldn't change?

In moments like this, I think about my own family, who very rarely has places that actually feel like they’re for us. I wonder what a GSAFE would look like where we can be ourselves; a GSA where my child can be at home; a fundraising event where my wife can express her big, full self. We are not “there”



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

yet, and we have made incredible progress in the work.

That brings me back to desire. Unfortunately, it’s very rare to find LGBTQ spaces where we can all be at home as our full selves. We live very segregated lives and organizations and movements. We are used to cutting off or ignoring parts of ourselves, whether out of safety, to make things easier, or simply out of habit. This is deeply painful.

All of this means we need to remember our desire—our desire for love, our longing to be whole, our vision for a home where we can all bring our full selves. And we have to do the

We are a living reality that change is possible, even if you were an all-white organization.

work. We can say it’s hard, we don’t know how, we’ve tried it before, we just don’t do that. And yet you still have to try. GSAFE has much work to still dig into, and we are a living reality that change is possible, even if you were an all-white organization. Remember that desire you feel within yourself. Recognize your fear. And move forward through it.

I have to end with my favorite poet and writer, Audre Lorde, discussing the power of the erotic. Audre Lorde reminds us:

“The erotic is a measure between our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves.

“It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies.”

Do you want to guide your destiny? ■

## Did You Know

### AIDS NETWORK TO MERGE WITH ARCW

In order to strengthen Wisconsin’s response to AIDS, AIDS Network and AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) are announcing they will merge effective February 1, 2015. Leaders of both organizations state the merger will preserve continuity of care for patients and clients.

ARCW will continue to build upon existing community partnerships to provide access to HIV Medical Home care, including medical, mental health and pharmacy services. ARCW will also close its small Madison office and move into the current AIDS Network office in Madison and continue to provide services from the AIDS Network Beloit office.

ARCW projects it will serve 4,000 people with HIV throughout the state annually. Given the anticipated increases in the need of people living with HIV for integrated and comprehensive care and services, and the need for aggressive HIV prevention programs, all staff of both organizations will have the opportunity to continue employment. Gifford added that it is likely the number of employees will increase in the future.



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# Qualitative Research Surfaces on Wisconsin Trans\* Youth

Virginia Harrison reports on a groundbreaking study of trans\* and gender-nonconforming youth in Wisconsin schools and the unique challenges they face.

**THE SAFE SCHOOLS FOR** Wisconsin's Transgender Youth research project bolsters what we already know: The experiences of trans\* and gender-nonconforming youth in Wisconsin's public schools are stressful and generally non-supportive. On the eve of the release of findings from the urban school setting component of this study, the researchers share their thoughts on why the data is necessary and what is needed moving forward.

## STRESSED OUT AND PUSHED OUT

According to the Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools, 1.5 percent of Dane County's high school students self-identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, and 17 percent of them have attempted suicide, compared with 3 percent of non-transgender students. Also, fewer transgender youth than non-transgender youth reported having no long-term

mental health problems.

"While the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey—the national survey that most schools administer every two years, to understand what's going on for youth at risk for school push-out (as opposed to 'dropout') and other disparities—does provide students the chance to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning, it does not provide students an opportunity to identify as transgender," says Brian Juchems, Director of Programs for GSAFE.

"Also, national data is often seen as not relevant or not pertaining to 'our' students in local school districts. Having Wisconsin data—especially data from students outside of Madison and Dane County—makes it harder for local and statewide leaders to ignore or dismiss the challenges faced by transgender or gender nonconforming students," he adds.

GSAFE approached the University of Wisconsin School of Social Work's Dr. Maurice Gattis, who together with UW faculty Drs. Sara McKinnon and Karma Chávez (both professors of Rhetoric, Politics, and Culture in the Department of Communications Arts) created the Safe Schools for Wisconsin's Transgender Youth research project to study the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth in Wisconsin public schools.

## GOAL: UPDATE EXISTING STUDENT NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

"The Safe Schools for Wisconsin's Transgender Youth research project grew out of a desire to see Wisconsin finally modernize its existing pupil nondiscrimination policy to

include explicit protections based on gender identity, gender expression, and gender nonconformity," Juchems explains. "Many states around the country have already done so—including several of our Upper Midwest neighbors. We knew we wanted to see this changed, and we knew that we would need local data to help educate and influence decision makers, as well as to build allies in our efforts to make this change."

Dr. Chávez says that going into the study, "Our hope was that conditions weren't as bad as GSAFE staff thought they were for trans\* youth in Wisconsin public schools." Unfortunately, they are.

## FOCUS GROUPS

University of Wisconsin faculty and GSAFE staff developed and conducted focus groups with 21 trans\* and gender nonconforming youth enrolled in public schools in Green Bay, Milwaukee, Racine, and Madison. They also interviewed the Madison parents of a trans\* youth group. The purpose was to create a systematic approach to learning outcomes and data about this population to impact public school policy statewide. (The results were not yet available at the time of publication.)

## THE TRANSGENDER OPTION

The 2012 Dane County Youth Survey allowed students to self-identify as transgender for the first time in the history of the survey. The results helped the researchers develop questions for the focus groups and one-on-one interviews with students and parents participating in the Safe Schools for Wisconsin's Transgender Youth survey.

Dr. Gattis said the students in the focus groups were asked questions regarding the individual, their family, climate, safety, opportunities for full participation, school staff, social life and culture, discipline, and academic achievement and success.

"At this point we can share that several major themes emerged from the focus groups related to learning environment, policies, physical facilities, activities and involvement, safety, and health and wellness," Gattis says.

## SOURCES OF STRESS

The researchers found that one of the greatest sources of stress for trans\* and gender nonconforming youth in public schools are the physical facilities—the bathrooms, locker rooms, and cafeterias. Another source is the refusal of teachers or staff to employ preferred gender pronouns and/or names, claiming, "It's

not your legal name" or intentionally misusing pronouns as a form of punishment.

Ultimately, the researchers would like to see the creation and implementation of school non-discrimination policies at the statewide level for trans\* and gender-nonconforming youth, to work with the schools to implement the policies, and then to assess the implementation.

## INFORM AND REFORM

"My hope is that the results of the study will inform conversations regarding policies and practices that will create meaningful change for full inclusion of transgender and gender-nonconforming students in schools throughout the state, as well as inform the development of best practices for policy formulation and implementation," Gattis says.

Specifically, GSAFE wants Wisconsin to modernize its pupil nondiscrimination policy, State Statute 118.13, so that the policy includes explicit protections for students on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and gender nonconformity. This would mean the Wisconsin legislature would have to vote to change the existing state statute—and our governor would have to sign the change into law—just as was the case when Wisconsin added specific sexual orientation protections in the early 1980s.

"In addition to using the results of the survey to help educate and inform, we also want to be able to show that a significant number of Wisconsin students are already protected by local school policy and make the case that all Wisconsin students should be covered by these protections," Juchems adds. "As such, we're working with individual school districts to make these changes on the local level. Currently, there are 62 out of more than 400 school districts in Wisconsin that have these clear protections for [transgender] students."

Juchems says the goal is adoption by 25 percent of Wisconsin school districts of comprehensive protections for students by the end of the 2014–15 school year.

## WISCONSIN STUDY IS UNIQUE

This study is unique in its focus and scope. Chávez said there are small pockets of similar studies around the country, but this study speaks to GSAFE's leadership in this area.

"There is very little data about the experience of trans\* and gender-nonconforming youth in public schools nationwide, and none



**VIRGINIA HARRISON** is a Special Education Assistant at West High School. She also served as editor of *Our Lives* from 2009–2012.

in Wisconsin," Dr. McKinnon says. "We are trying to make this a statewide project; so far our subjects have been from urban areas. Other variables, of course, are class and race. As we analyze the data we have collected, we are asking ourselves: How do race and class matter? How do they play into the youths' experiences? What are the intersections of these variables?"

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The study participants were from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black, White, Asian, Hispanic and American Indian, a mix of students who were and were not eligible for free or reduced lunch, and those holding a variety of religious beliefs.

"Although I had heard anecdotes regarding experiences of transgender youth in schools," Gattis muses, "I am still surprised to hear the specific lengths that the students go through to obtain an education, given the numerous obstacles and persistent—and sometimes seemingly insurmountable—institutional and societal challenges they face. The amount of resilience in these youth is extraordinary."

## STORIES ARE MORE PERSUASIVE

"We decided to take a qualitative route to our study analysis," Chávez explains, "be-

cause the number of trans\* and gender-nonconforming youth is small and we can't create a generalized sample from such a small number. Also, stories are more persuasive than numbers when it comes to affecting policy.

"This study felt like a great way to use our research skills and resources and work with a great community organization (GSAFE)," she says. "And, it was a really collaborative process between community stakeholders and researchers."

McKinnon said the next phase of the study, currently under way, includes one-on-one interviews with rural youth and support and health professionals. "We will ask those who are doing a good job working with trans\* youth what makes what they do work, in order to affect policy and for training purposes."

## FUNDING

Funding for the study is provided through a \$50,000 grant from the Wisconsin Partnership Program. The three-year development grant supports research projects, education efforts, school district policy changes, and the development of an intervention model to reduce discrimination and improve social cohesion, educational outcomes, and health outcomes for transgender and gender nonconforming youth in Wisconsin public schools. ■

## Article Sources



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## Congrats! We Can Marry. Now Should We?

Attorney **Christopher Krimmer** lays out the legal ups and downs of legalized same-sex marriage and makes a case for why it is—and sometimes is not—right for a couple.

**IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE** that gay and lesbian couples want to marry and marry now. We've been denied a fundamental right that is finally available to us. Yet in the jubilation of recent events, some couples may be marrying without a full appreciation of the rights and, more important, the obligations that stem from marriage. This is not unique to gay and lesbian couples. Opposite-sex couples marry every day without understanding what they are signing up for. Before you tie the knot, consider a few of the obligations that come along with being a spouse.

Wisconsin is a community property law state. Technically, we are a "marital property law" state, which is a form of community property law. What this means is that having a title in your name alone doesn't determine ownership of property when you are married. So, even if you owned a home prior to the marriage and you alone continue to pay the mortgage throughout the marriage, your spouse still owns a presumptive one-half interest in the home. The same is true for your retirement accounts, investments, and essentially almost every asset you acquire during the marriage, other than inherited and gifted assets.

Just as your spouse gets to share in your assets, you get to share in your spouse's debts. If two spouses have different perspectives on finances, this can be problematic. One spouse could be quite frugal, while the other may appreciate fine food, luxurious vacations, and designer clothing. It doesn't matter whose name is on the credit card—both spouses are jointly and severally liable for the balances.

Approximately one-half of all marriages end in divorce. There is no reason to believe that we are immune from this statistic. There will be same-sex marriages that end in

divorce. And with divorce, there is a potential for one spouse owing the other spouse maintenance, our state's term for alimony.

One of the most significant factors in awarding maintenance is the length of the marriage. What we don't know is how a court will determine the start date of a same-sex marriage. Is it October 6, 2014, when the state was required to recognize same-sex marriages? Is it the date the couple married previously in another state or country? Or is it the date the couple began to live together and would have married but for being denied the right to do so?



For example, let's assume John and Bill lived together for 30 years when they decided to marry in 2012 in Iowa. In 2015, Bill files for divorce. When the judge needs to decide the issue of maintenance and how long the couple has been married, does she find that John and Bill have been married for only one year (i.e., 2014 to 2015, the year between Wisconsin recognizing same-sex marriage and the date of the divorce) or three years (i.e., the date of the marriage in Iowa)? Or maybe 33 years (i.e., the duration of the parties' cohabitation)?

In addition to the potential obligation of support for your spouse, the law presumes you will share equally in all of the assets acquired during the marriage and even property brought to the marriage. If there is a great disparity in assets or debts at the time of the marriage, this may not be the arrangement



**CHRISTOPHER KRIMMER** teaches Sexual Orientation and the Law at Marquette Law School. His law practice focuses on nontraditional-family protections.

both partners believe is fair.

A couple would be well served by each spouse consulting with an attorney about a marital property agreement before they marry, to be sure that both spouses are entering the marriage with the same expectations both during and at the possible end of their marriage. If you have already married, a marital property agreement can still be executed, but, like any agreement, it requires the agreement of both spouses.

There are tax advantages to being married, but there are also disadvantages to consider. For example, a couple in which both spouses are high-income earners may be pushed into a higher tax bracket than if they were single individual filers. This is sometimes referred to as the "marriage penalty tax."

**If you have already married, a marital property agreement can still be executed, but, like any agreement, it requires the agreement of both spouses.**

If you marry a partner who has a child from a previous relationship, your income as a stepparent may be considered when the stepchild applies for college financial aid. If the stepparent has a healthy income, it could have a devastating impact on the stepchild's

eligibility for loans, grants, and scholarships. This is true whether or not the stepparent has any intention to contribute to the stepchild's college expenses.

Same-sex couples who are approaching retirement age should consider the impact the marriage would have on both Social Security benefits and Medicaid planning. In the context of retirement benefits, if a partner was previously in a marriage with an opposite-sex spouse, he or she would be entitled to receive Social Security retirement benefits based on the former spouse's earnings if the marriage lasted at least 10 years. If the person marries again, he or she cannot collect on a benefit based on the former spouse's earnings.

If either spouse may need to rely on Medicaid to pay for nursing home care, there are strict income and asset limitations that must be met to qualify. A spouse's assets may not only disqualify the other spouse from receiving nursing home benefits—the state also has the ability to levy marital assets to recoup the cost of the nursing home care.

Of course, these are all practical, tangible, and financial considerations of marriage. This ignores the real reason couples marry, which is to express and solidify their love and commitment. Still, this doesn't mean couples should do so blindly. Sometimes the right to marry includes the choice to not marry. ■



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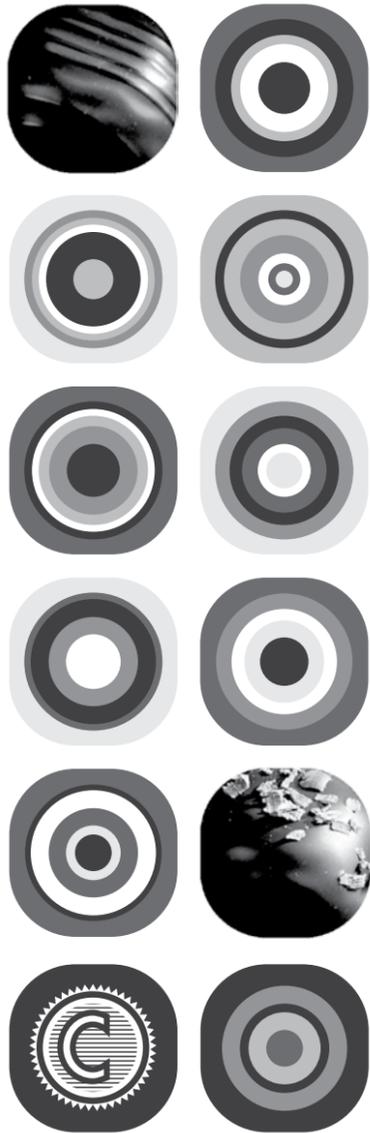
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## The Long Fight

Outgoing president **Katie Belanger** recaps the challenges and successes of her time at Fair Wisconsin on the eve of the organization's transition to new priorities.

**COURT AFTER COURT** struck down discriminatory bans on marriage equality in the past year, including right here in Wisconsin. With the freedom to marry accomplished, we at Fair Wisconsin are incredibly excited about the next phase of our work to advance equality for the entire LGBTQ community.

As we prepared for a "post-marriage" world, the board, staff, and membership of Fair Wisconsin explored opportunities to deepen our work to realize our vision of a fair, safe, and inclusive Wisconsin. We assessed the myriad challenges LGBTQ people still face in Wisconsin that marriage does not solve. We looked at how other state-based LGBTQ advocacy organizations had moved forward after they achieved the freedom to marry, to learn from the experiences of our sister organizations.

Homophobia and transphobia are still real and still impact LGBTQ people and their families every day. Trans\* people can still be denied employment and housing, fired or evicted, and denied access to public places simply because of who they are. Until all LGBTQ people are able to live safely and free from discrimination, our work continues.

To that end, Fair Wisconsin is committed to ensuring that legal equality becomes a lived reality for LGBTQ people. Our top three priorities in 2015 and beyond include:

- Ensuring equal access to the protections of marriage for same-sex couples
- Ensuring equal treatment for our trans\* brothers and sisters
- Ensuring a robust movement remains to advance LGBTQ equality

### MARRIAGE IMPLEMENTATION

Since the Supreme Court of the United States' decision to not take up the Wisconsin and Indiana marriage cases, Governor Scott Walker and Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen have not given any specific direction to state government agencies to do anything more than treat same-sex marriages as the same as opposite-sex marriages. This has led to confusion for state agency officials,

county clerks, and couples, as there are still many instances in existing statutes in which same-sex couples are treated differently from their heterosexual counterparts or are not recognized at all.

To ensure that all legally married same-sex couples are truly treated equally, Wisconsin statutes must be comprehensively updated to recognize all the legal issues affecting all married couples, from birth certificates to income taxes to the death of a spouse, and more.

### STATEWIDE TRANS\* NONDISCRIMINATION

In 1982, Wisconsin made history by becoming the first state to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This historic legislation has been protecting lesbian, gay, and bisexual Wisconsinites from discrimination at their workplaces, in housing, and in public accommodations for more than 30 years. Fair Wisconsin believes it is equally important that these protections be extended to the trans\* community, as well.

Current nondiscrimination best practices include protections for trans\* and gender-nonconforming individuals with the addition of "gender identity and expression" as a protected class.

By modernizing our nondiscrimination policies, Wisconsin will have a new tool to protect our citizens from incidents of discrimination. Current laws protecting public safety and nondiscrimination will stay in place; the updates we seek will ensure that all people, including trans\* individuals, will be protected from discrimination.

We've had tremendous success in advancing updates to local nondiscrimination ordinances to ensure that trans\* people are protected from discrimination. But modernizing state laws is our ultimate goal.

It's time for Wisconsin law to change so that every worker, including those who are gay or transgender, is judged on performance and qualifications—nothing more, nothing less. It's about striking a balance. We can give everyone an equal opportunity to earn a living and hold everyone to the same professional standards.

### MOVEMENT BUILDING

A strong grassroots infrastructure is the foundation upon which our work is built. That's why in 2012 we launched the Wisconsin LGBT Leadership Conference, titled "Connecting Leaders, Advancing the Movement," which seeks to build a skilled and connected network of LGBTQ and allied leaders advancing equality in their communities. We host this conference in partnership with Diverse and Resilient, our statewide LGBTQ public health organization.

The Wisconsin LGBT Leadership Conference is an exciting and innovative program that provides LGBTQ people and allies with the skills to be leaders in their own communities, through workshops and

networking opportunities, and by highlighting the strengths that emerge within various intersections in the LGBTQ community.

Current laws protecting public safety and nondiscrimination will stay in place; the updates we seek will ensure that all people, including trans\* individuals, will be protected from discrimination.

Each year, we have been proud to draw from national movement leaders to inspire and engage our participants. In 2015, we will be joined by Evan Wolfson, founder of the national Freedom to Marry campaign, and Kris Hermanns, Executive Director of the Pride Foundation, an LGBTQ community foundation in the Pacific Northwest, as well as other local, state, and national speakers. To find out more or to register, visit [wilgbtleadership.org](http://wilgbtleadership.org).

It's a time of transition here at Fair Wisconsin. In 2015, we are going to see new campaigns launch to address the priorities I've outlined, and we will have new leadership to move Fair Wisconsin forward.

As I wind down my six-year tenure with Fair Wisconsin, I'm incredibly proud of the work we've done together. We've achieved significant and groundbreaking victories. From the passage of the domestic partnership registry in 2009 to myriad local victories that demonstrated Wisconsin is ready for full equality to winning the freedom to marry for same-sex couples, the Badger State is once again a leader in the quest for fairness. ■



**KATIE BELANGER** has been the President and CEO of Fair Wisconsin since 2009 and was their legislative director before then. She's also served as the Board Co-Chair for the Equality Federation.

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## Embracing Vulnerability

Taught to be self-sufficient and strong at all costs, **Connie North** makes the case for why being able to see and accept one another, warts and all, is a crucial part of healthy human relationships.

WHEN A NEW FACILITATOR entered the room on the third day of a social justice workshop I was participating in, the tension was palpable. We had been discussing the relationship between various forms of oppression, particularly racism and heterosexism, and several people in the room seemed shut off and angry.

After assessing the landscape, the facilitator declared that we needed an intervention. She told us to pair up, face our partner, and place our palms against those of our partner. She then ordered us to look each other in the eye for five minutes. If we could not hold our gaze, we could walk over to a mirror in the room and look at our own reflection instead.

The protective mechanisms they had developed at an earlier time to protect them from more wounds were getting in the way of seeing that they both yearned for the same thing: to feel seen, heard, and valued.

When she signaled the end of the five minutes—which felt like an eternity—I noticed that most of us had tears streaming down our faces. This activity shattered the shields we'd been using to protect ourselves from feeling alone and alienated, within the workshop and beyond it, in our everyday lives. It also revealed the fuller humanity of our partner and ourselves as the eyes generally cannot hide the joys and struggles common to all of us.

On the heels of this exercise I felt the truth of Washington Irving's words: "There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition and of unspeakable love."

Given the love theme of this *Our Lives* issue, I could think of no better topic to focus on than vulnerability, which was at the heart of the exercise described above. As a relational therapist, I celebrate when clients allow their partners to see cracks in their armor. Those fissures truly are where the light enters us and intimacy can grow. For example, I worked with a couple who were fighting about a common relationship issue: one partner feeling like the other was not making the relationship a priority. The two partners turned their bodies away from each other as they both complained that the other did not hear her perspective. I encouraged them to focus their attention inward, instead of on what the other partner was and was not doing or saying and, with curiosity, notice what was going on there.

Sure enough, the partner who felt she did not matter touched into a sense of invisibility, something she had felt since she was a small child. She attributed her partner's workaholicism to a lack of desire to spend time with her and reexperienced the old shame and sadness associated with feeling unimportant. Meanwhile, the other partner devoted significant time and energy to her

career in large part because she had spent most of her life caring for others' needs, including her alcoholic mother's. Thus she had decided to put her own vocational dreams on the front burner and unapologetically declared she would not sacrifice herself to yet another relationship.

The protective mechanisms they had developed at an earlier time to protect them from more wounds were getting in the way of seeing that they both yearned for the same thing: to feel seen, heard, and valued. After we created a space in which they felt safe enough to let their guard down, they could turn toward each other and use their vulnerability as a strength. From this softer, more open place they said things the other could actually hear, like, "I miss you," "I'm scared of losing myself again," and "I feel lonely." Having heard these more tender words, each found it easier to respond with reassuring, empathic, and appreciative statements, and connection was restored. It turns out these two individuals did want to be with each other and mostly needed to remember how to attune to themselves and each other with acceptance, compassion, and care.

As I write this piece, I can hear skeptics' voices in my head. Perhaps we associate vulnerability with weakness or something only an overly sensitive type would care about. Ironically, the best counter-evidence for doubt about the significance of vulnerability lies in our own lived experience. If we honestly investigate the encounters of our lives—which is no small feat given human beings' capacity for self-deception—we find the deepest felt sense of love and belonging in vulnerable moments. These moments generally occur when people really see and accept us as we are. For them to be able to do so, however, we have to let ourselves be seen. As Ash Beckham said, "If you want someone to be real with you, they need to know that you bleed, too."

Ultimately, our lives are made up of ten thousand joys and ten thousand sorrows. When we attempt to avoid or reject the sorrows, we dampen our capacity to feel the joys. In contrast, when we deepen our capacity to feel the vulnerability of our living and dying bodies and world, we can live and love with our whole hearts. In Brené Brown's words, "Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." ■



CONNIE NORTH has an MS in marriage and family therapy and a PhD in education. She uses a mindfulness-based, justice-oriented approach and has taught and written about LGBTQI, equity, and diversity issues.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLA ECHEVERRIA

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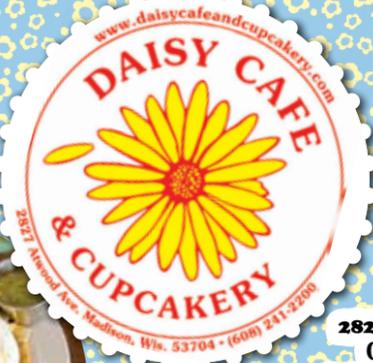
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## Farm to (Cafe) Table

Jeanne Benink visits the new community supported cafe and grocery Cow & Quince in New Glarus and finds hospitality, farmer direct sourcing, and delicious food.

**ON A BLUSTERY WISCONSIN** winter morning, with the wind howling and the snow swirling, what could possibly be more inviting than a freshly brewed, steaming mug of coffee and a savory waffle smothered in sausage gravy with cheese curds on top? Nothing!

So off we went to New Glarus to check out Cow & Quince, a restaurant opened just this past fall.

The owners, Lori Stern and LeAnn Powers, were both on hand that morning to greet us, as was their chef, Jared Austin, and their amazing go-to girl wonder Hallie Weintraub. This cozy restaurant was already buzzing when we arrived, so we exchanged brief introductions and then got right down to ordering lunch—which was quite good! My wife had a gorgeous beet salad, and I had the poutine waffle, both of which were extremely pleasing to both the eye and palate.

Stern came and joined us at our table while we ate, and she started off by telling us the daunting story of how they'd brought the restaurant from idea to fruition. She and Powers had truly undertaken a project of a grand scale, but now they were finally seeing the fruits of their labors. There were several other tables occupied with diners, and groups of people filtered in and out to check out their retail market items as well.

The idea behind Cow & Quince was really to bring the relatively new concept of community-supported restaurants to Green County. "We live in an area completely surrounded by farms, yet we see almost none of that food at our grocers or on our tables," Stern explained. And so Cow & Quince has come along to change all that. Stern and Powers are working directly with local organic producers such as Grassroots Farm (Monroe), Jordandal Farms (Argyle), Scotch Hill Farms (Broadhead), and others to source nearly all of their raw materials for chef's creations. Not to mention the couple owns their own place, Lucky Dog Farm, where some of the restaurant's food comes from as well. And if that were not enough to keep them busy, they also own/run the Lucky Dog Farm Stay ([www.luckydogfarmstay.com](http://www.luckydogfarmstay.com)) where you can sleep, eat, and experience life on their farm in beautiful New Glarus.

So community-supported restaurants—what does this mean? Good question! It means you can pre-buy a share of Cow & Quince's goods

## Cow & Quince Restaurant & Market

407 Second St., New Glarus  
cowandquince.com

Owners: LeAnn Powers & Lori Stern



PHOTOGRAPHED BY IAN DEGRAFF

(food) and services (classes). Just as when you buy a share in a CSA (community-supported agriculture) farm, and essentially prepay for x amount of produce, meat, cheese or other farm-produced goods, when you buy a CSR share, you're prepaying for a certain amount of food or services from that restaurant.

The couple has an even broader vision for Cow & Quince, in that they hope to soon be able to offer space in their kitchen to farmers and community members who wish to produce season-extending items (think canning, cheese making, and so on) that can be also sold in the Cow & Quince market space.

Pretty amazing concept, isn't it? And best of all (in this humble chef's opinion), the food is locally sourced from organic producers who are committed to sustainable farm practices. To check out the restaurant's hours, the different shares and products they have, and current menu offerings, just visit the website: [www.cowandquince.com](http://www.cowandquince.com).

So, when you're thinking, "What can we do this weekend that's fun and different?" just head out to New Glarus and check out Cow & Quince. Have the waffles—seriously. You need to try the waffles. ■



**JEANNE BENINK** is a Madison chef and the sole owner of Simply Served Personal Chef Service. Her friends often call her the soup guru, and she truly does have passion for exploring soups and stews from all over the world. You can find her online at [simplyservedpersonalchef.com](http://simplyservedpersonalchef.com)

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## Motivated & Empowered

Trans\*, Asian-American, young, and queer: **Skylar Lee** is blazing a trail for intersectional equality in the Madison school system and beyond.

**MY NAME IS SKYLAR**, and I am a queer, transgender youth of color—specifically, a Korean-American transman. I find strength in my identities; however, the journey to discover who I am has not always been easy.

Growing up in Madison, I've had the privilege to be surrounded by supportive communities and resources. The Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools and my middle school and high school Gay/Straight Alliance groups are amazing examples of such, but before I found those safe spaces, it was more difficult to be accepting of myself. My culture is split

between traditional Korean values and my American heritage in a whitewashed society. The stigma around the LGBTQ community in the East Asian culture my family comes from is prominent and destructive to young, queer Asians. My experience was no different. My Christian upbringing caused me to internalize homophobia, and being transgender was literally unheard of.

Starting in sixth grade, when I identified as a cisgender girl, I started to notice my romantic attraction to people of my own gender. It was a shocking and horrifying realization after all the years of being told it was wrong to be gay. In eighth grade, I became involved in my school's GSA. This was the turning point in my life as a closeted queer Asian.

After finding that safe space and coming out to my close friends and family, I finally started on the journey to self-acceptance and love. Ninth grade was a year of hardship, turmoil, and experimentation with my gender and sexuality, and simultaneously one of the worst and best years of my life. Because of my dysphoria and uncertainty about my identity, I had experienced anxiety and severe depression throughout my life, but this was when I hit rock bottom. In the spring I was hospitalized because of the toxic environment and relationships I was experiencing, at home and at school, with my family and my peers. During this time, the inner turmoil of confusion over my identity only escalated. I went through several identities, sometimes changing every two weeks, from pansexual to lesbian, genderqueer, bigender, and genderfluid. Finally, in the summer before 10th grade, I discovered I was transgender.

After I attended the summer national conference hosted by the GSA Network in Minnesota, my love for social and racial justice grew in leaps and bounds. Working with queer youth from across the nation to empower ourselves gave me the inspiration and motivation to step up in my role as a youth leader. I became an active member in GSAFE's Youth Leader-

ship Board, volunteering whenever I could. This past August, I attended a summer camp held by GSAFE called the Leadership Training Institute, where I was able to connect with other queer youth across Wisconsin.

That was the first time in my life I had found a space for queer Asian youth. I cannot stress enough how important it is to create safe environments for young queer Asians in spaces for people of color. Our experiences as queer Asians are very different from those of other QPOC youth, and this is rarely recognized. As much as my East Asian culture rejects

my queer identity, I also understand that as an Asian youth, I am not accepted into typical American culture. I am now able to find empowerment in my identity, and I am proud to be a queer Korean-American to challenge the stigma that surrounds who I am.

I am a strong advocate for queer and trans\* youth of color as I work to incorporate intersectionality into my GSA at Madison West High School and into my community as a whole. I love going to middle schools and education panels in general to share my experience and teach youth about the LGBTQ community. I believe the first step to embracing and celebrating each other's different identities is through education and the willingness to learn. My work with GSAFE continues to educate and shape me into a youth leader, as the Youth Leadership Board navigates complex subjects such as (but not limited to) racism, sexism, and ableism, which are intersectional in our identities in the LGBTQ community.

I am also part of the National Youth Council, a program started by youth leaders across the country and sponsored by the GSA Network. Along with these programs, I am involved with restorative justice work in my school's community to challenge the punitive justice system, which so often pushes youth of color out of schools.

Today I am still learning to accept and love the different aspects of my identity, and I believe that this will be a lifelong

process. However, when I look back, I can't believe how far I have come. The journey to become the confident, outspoken advocate I am now was harsh and unforgiving, but absolutely worth the struggle. I am happier than I have ever been in my life now that I have more of an understanding of who I am. Activism is my passion, the only work I love to wake up and do every single day. I hope with my work I can inspire other queer youth. In the future, I believe I will continue to work with queer youth and help them empower themselves, as others have helped me. ■



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