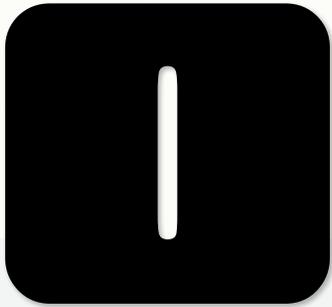


our lives



Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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March/April  
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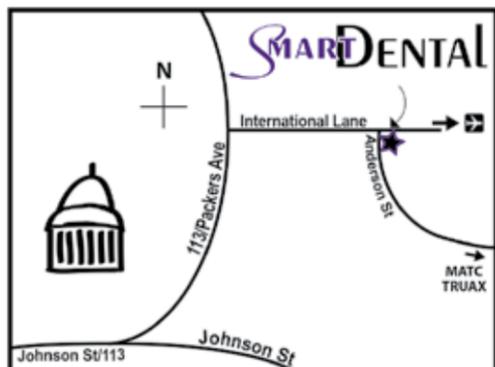
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**PUBLISHER'S NOTE** PATRICK FARABAUGH

**OLD & NEW CONNECTIONS**

**I HAVE TO ADMIT**, I'm a lucky guy. I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to help share our community's stories for a living.

In each issue I get to learn from—and connect you to—the local leaders who are willing to share parts of their lives in our pages.

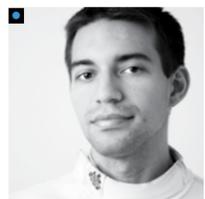
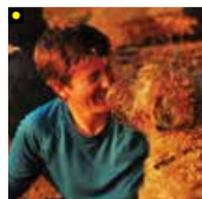
In this issue, our home and garden annual, we get to lift up a few familiar faces, and introduce you to a couple new ones as well. Celebrating her 30th year in business, **Pat Blair** of Blair Lawn and Landscape, looks back on both the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated profession, and the doors she's been able to help open. **Rico Sabatini**, perhaps best known as a co-owner of Plan B nightclub, shares his own personal plan b with us as he moves on to the next chapter in his life.

We are also honored to introduce you to **Sheri Swokowski**, who recently moved back to the Madison area. Now retired, she is the highest ranking out, transgender former service member in the country. The story of her transition, both the personal and professional discrimination that came from it, and her national advocacy illustrate the progress we've made and where there is still work that needs to be done. I hope her story inspires you to continue the fight. ■



**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:**  
I'd like to send a special congratulations to Christa Lowe on completing her chemotherapy. So glad to see you on the path to recovery!

**CONTRIBUTORS**



■ **IAN DEGRAFF** specializes in editorial, portrait, and farm photography and can often be found crawling through mud, jumping fences, and driving long distances just to find the best location for a shot. He uses his goofy sense of humor to make subjects feel more at ease during the photography process. When not doing photography Ian enjoys gaming and being the crazy gay uncle to his nephew and niece. Follow his work at [ianstevenphoto.com](http://ianstevenphoto.com)

■ **SUE GILL** is a psychologist in private practice specializing in trauma, anxiety, and mind/body approaches to wellness. She and her partner have lived in Madison for 15 years and share their house with Maslow and Pip, two dogs who go out and about with Sue as often as possible. In the summer Sue and Pip can often be found drifting in their kayak or paddle board on area lakes. Sheri and Maslow are not such fans of water sports but do enjoy a nice hike in the woods.

■ **RYAN PETTY** has worked with *Our Lives* to feature youth leaders from around Wisconsin and has been a longtime volunteer and board member for OutReach LGBT Community Center. He recently completed his PhD in biochemistry at UW-Madison with plans to attend law school, focusing on intellectual property. In what little spare time he has, he is an avid gamer (video games, tabletop RPGs, boardgames), national fencing referee, and Netflix-er.

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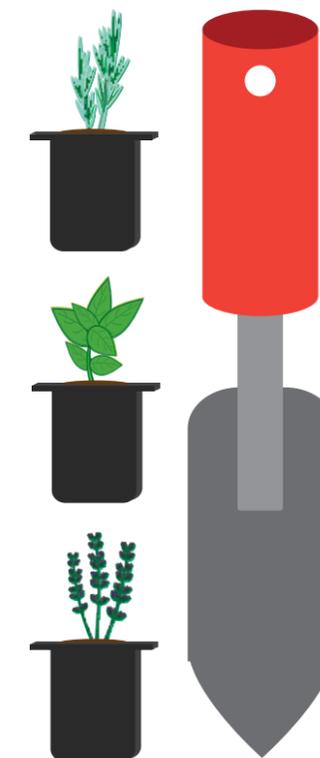
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## ALWAYS RESILIENT

**PAUL MANDRACCHIA, AGE 57**, artist and community organizer, died on December 24, 2014. Paul danced with Milwaukee Ballet from 1983 until 1987, moving from Phoenix as a scholarship student. After he ended his dance career, Paul started his business, Painted Finishes, through which he marketed his work of creating faux finishes for many Milwaukee area commercial and private spaces. Paul was a very active volunteer.



With his husband, Paul decided to embrace the AIDS epidemic starting in 1985. He was a tireless volunteer for AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin AIDS Fund, for which he helped organize Art for AIDS, Absolut Benefit, and Gallery TBA. These ventures raised awareness and hundreds of thousands of dollars to care for people living with HIV. He also assisted his AIDS buddy for the last 10 years of Marty's life. Paul's artwork, particularly his highly stylized drawings of women, were shown in New York and Chicago. Paul was also a sculptor, muralist, and painter. Even in recent years as multiple sclerosis impaired his abilities to walk, speak, and hold objects, Paul continued to be a contributor, participating in Open Canvas in support of MIAD.

An avid gardener, Paul wrote gardening columns for two Milwaukee publications.

Several years ago he was the final speaker at a national symposium of growers and hybridizers. He introduced himself as "just a Joe-blow gardener" and then hushed the room with photos of his garden specimens and his deep knowledge of hardy roses.

Paul also contributed powerfully to the work of Diverse & Resilient in addressing public health. Over the course of his 31-year marriage with Gary Hollander, President and CEO of D&R, Paul was tireless in his encouragement of the organization and its staff. He hosted numerous events for staff and volunteers and urged Gary to continue to work, even as his own health limitations shortened their time together.

Paul spent nearly half of his time in hospitals and rehabilitation facilities in the last year of his life. Throughout those many admissions, Paul was always proud to be an openly gay man, having forged that ability to be himself in the early days of his marriage as he and his husband worked on the liberation of themselves and their community. Because Paul was not interested in a memorial service, his husband published an extended elegy upon his death and plans to mount an exhibit of Paul's work. ■

## REST IN POWER

**DAÑA ALDER, AGE 66**, of Madison, Wis., passed away unexpectedly on Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. She is survived by her sister, Laura Maynor, of Colorado; brother, W.F. "Skipp" (Patsy) Maynor, of Ohio; her niece, Beth, and her family, of Arizona; nephew, Justin, of Ohio; her chosen children, Louis and Ben (Stephanie) Cashin; chosen grandson, Finn Cashin; beloved companion dog, Chloë; and an intentional lesbian family formed in love and spirit.

She was born Barbra Griffith Maynor on Jan. 5, 1948, in Mullens, W.V., the daughter of Wirt F. and Ruth Griffith Maynor. She was always proud of her West Virginia roots and of having received her mother's maiden name as her middle name. Daña had a love of singing that began early, entertaining family and friends; singing in the church choir as a child and teenager; appearing in high school musicals, including the role of Aunt Eller in "Oklahoma"; and continuing into her adult years with participation in women's singing groups and Community Theater.

In the mid-seventies, Daña moved to Louisville, Ky., and was radicalized by feminism and lesbianism. It was in Louisville that she legally changed her name to Daña Alder. She was very active in the lesbian community and was a member of the Louisville Lesbian Feminist Union, the Lesbian Nation Planning Committee, and multi-term President of "Mother's Brew," a woman-only club that functioned as much as a lesbian cultural center as a bar. For the rest of her life, Daña would refer to herself as a "Radical Lesbian Feminist."

Daña moved to Madison in the mid-eighties, drawn by friends who had recently arrived from Louisville and by its progressive political environment. Shortly after arriving, she joined the newly formed Reformed Congregation of the Goddess, which remained her spiritual home. Daña's vocational history in Madison supported her interests in social justice and equity. She held various positions within the State of Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations (DILHR), including Policy Analyst, Program Manager, and Public Education Coordinator. These were followed by a position as an Administrator for the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Board, State of Wisconsin. With a passion from early on for social justice, LGBTQ rights, and fighting race and gender discrimination, Daña's last employment position as Team Manager at the University of Wisconsin Health Services (UHS) was a perfect fit for her. She put together a team to address "big picture issues." She called them the



smartest and coolest people on campus. Daña used her significant writing and editing skills to create a booklet on lesbian health issues. She led the UHS committee on equity and diversity topics, including issues of transgendered people. In addition, she was mentor to the student group "Sex Out Loud" that worked to promote safe sex on campus.

Daña retired from her Health Services position in January 2013. Daña's life had many facets. She was an artist who whittled beautiful works of wood. She was an actor and singer and a pretty good stand-up comedian.

Daña was an avid reader, social commentator, and activist. She was volunteer coordinator for Tammy Baldwin's successful 1992 campaign for the Wisconsin State Assembly. For at least the past six years she served as a moderator of the "leztalk" e-list, an online communication and community-building tool for Madison-area lesbians.

Daña was Women in the Arts' (National Women's Music Festival) coordinator for press releases and contact with the local media in Madison. She was a goddess woman, active with her congregation, RCG-I, and will be missed at gatherings where she could often be found welcoming those new to the gathering at a newcomers' breakfast table with her southern charm, staffing the candy and soda concession at lunch, or emceeding a talent night.

Retirement in January 2013 brought many gifts. She began to travel internationally. Despite arthritis pain and the use of a cane, in the summer of 2013, Daña climbed to the ancient and sacred Glastonbury Tor, in Glastonbury, UK, a considerable feat of which she was very proud.

This obituary was written by Lynn Levy and taken from the Gunderson Funeral Home website. It has been edited for length. ■

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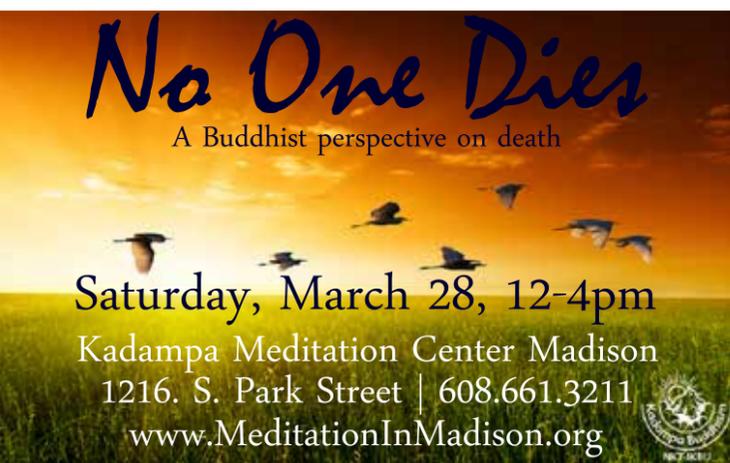
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**Hit So Hard**

In the full-contact world of rugby's rucks and scrums, **Greta Slack** found an inclusive and supportive family to call her own.

**CURLED UP ON THE FIELD** with a girl much larger than myself on top of me, I lay winded, sore, and covered in bruises. Having just successfully tackled this girl, I could hardly believe I was playing in a Division I college rugby game and actually enjoying all 80 minutes of it.

It was only days earlier that I timidly arrived at my first rugby practice, being introduced to this crazy sport and surrounded by tough girls who spoke a bizarre and foreign language about rucks, scrums, mauls, and hookers. As I struggled to catch my breath, I caught a glimpse of my parents' befuddled faces on the sideline, and I knew they were just as shocked to be witnessing this situation as I was to be living it.

Although I spent most of my life playing soccer, it was never a realistic option for me to continue to play competitively at a Division I school—but I also wanted to play at more than a strictly intramural level. My love of competition, desire to stay active in college, and passion for the camaraderie of team sports led me on a search for a new game.

While doing some research the summer before college, I stumbled onto the UW Women's Rugby webpage. To my surprise, I knew one of the girls listed on the roster. Upon talking to her she assured me it was completely acceptable and even normal to attend an initial rugby practice without knowing anything about the sport. And, after attending my first practice, I was certain I knew even less than before. Even still, the girls were an enthusiastic, welcoming, and fun group, and the structure of biweekly practices was the motivation to remain active I was looking for. They all seemed to have a sense of responsibility to each other. Although I had just recently met them, I was already beginning to share in this sense of teamwork and perseverance.

While watching the team play their season opening game that same weekend, I saw the captain suffer a broken nose. As she came to the sideline bruised and bleeding, a parent who was a doctor looked at her injuries. It is a lucky coincidence that there always seem to be quite a few rugby spectators who are medical professionals. The girl asked if any more damage could be done if she went back in the game. After all, the team was short players, and she could easily shove a tissue or tampon in her nose to stop the bleeding. Against the obvious advice of

the doctor, she was back in the game before I could even dissect what had transpired. Any sensible person would have advised me to run away and never look back. The respect I was gaining for these crazy and passionate players influenced me otherwise. From that moment on, I knew these were my people and I had found my family.

By the time I joined the rugby team, I was already out as a lesbian. It seemed to work out nicely that this was seemingly a very stereotypical lesbian sport. I figured I would conveniently find a community of other gay friends on my team, though during my first semester, I was shocked to discover that there were equally as many straight girls playing this intense contact sport. I was actually just one of two lesbians on the team at the time. Fortunately, I quickly discovered that rugby girls in general are a very open-minded and accepting bunch. Though it was not necessarily the big, gay college activity I was anticipating, many more LGBTQ people joined the team or came out as LGBTQ over the years. Sometimes I like to think that my being one of the first ones on my own team helped start that shift.

Luckily for those who stick around in Madison after graduation, we have a senior level sister team, the Wisconsin Women's Rugby Football Club (WWRFC), which is the team I've played with for two years.

I recognize my bias but can confidently say that the rugby community is one of the most welcoming and fun communities around. The sense of belonging that I feel when I am in an airport wearing a rugby shirt and a stranger asks who I play for and in which position extends

If someone moved to a city where they didn't know a single person, they could join the rugby team and instantly have 30 new friends. I think that this sense of belonging is very important for LGBTQ athletes in the sport who may be looking for community in new places.

the rugby family beyond my own club or city. It's like a built-in support system in even the least-expected places. If someone moved to a city where they didn't know a single person, they could join the rugby team and instantly have 30 new friends. I think that this sense of belonging is very important for LGBTQ athletes in the sport who may be looking for community in new places.

In my time playing rugby, I have learned a lot about myself and found both structure and direction in my endeavors. Everyone that has been involved in my rugby career has played a big part in that. In college I was able to be free-spirited without judgment. Within my current club I have found balance between commitment to my team and commitment to my partner. Fortunately, she played rugby in high school so she both understands and is very supportive of my dedication to the game.

Folks within the rugby community often say that there is a place for everyone in the game. There are women who weigh 115 pounds and ones who weigh 250 pounds, and we all have different roles but the same goal. We have players who can run for days and others who can tackle the wind out of anyone in a quick swoop. We all have the same love for the game, and that's what bonds us. We all have friends and family members who once thought we were insane for playing such an aggressive sport. To be honest, we probably are all a tad crazy. We hit and tackle people without protective gear for fun. That awesome feeling of stopping someone in their tracks by tackling them is one that never goes away, even when they've just knocked the wind out of you. ■

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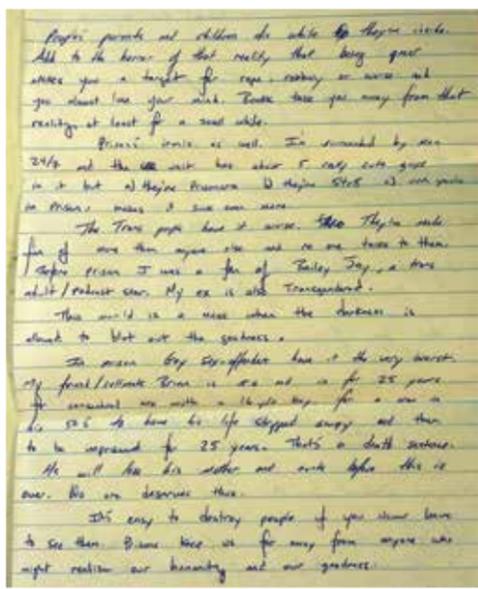
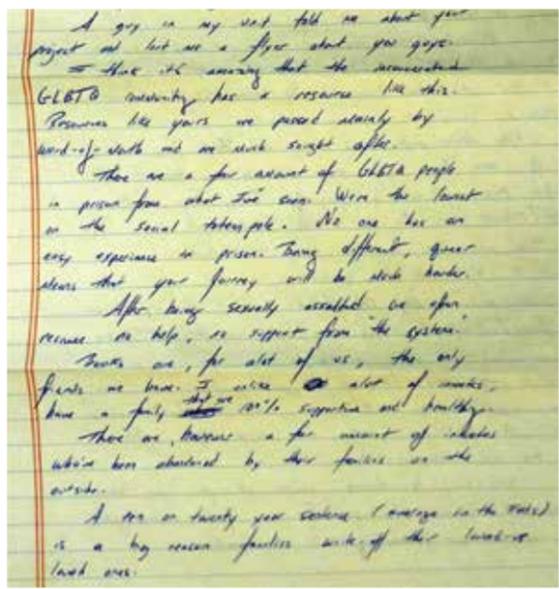
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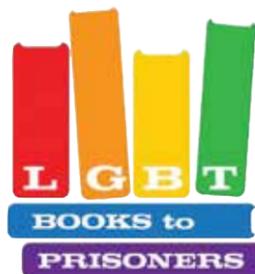
## The Good Word

How the **LGBT Books to Prisoners** project is bringing a bit more hope and community to those serving time.

**SEVENTY-THREE.** That's the percentage of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and people living with HIV who have had run-ins with the police in the last five years. Many of them end up behind bars—in jails, youth detention facilities, and prisons, where they are likely to experience discrimination and abuse. For prisoners' "protection," officials may place them in solitary confinement, and they are given few to no resources to help pass the time. Even those who have access to programs and prison libraries quickly realize that these services don't have the design or capacity to meet their needs. As William at Green Bay Correctional Institution writes, "sometimes—well most of the time—we—the gay community—feels abandoned and forgotten in here."

This isolation and despair are what LGBT Books to Prisoners (BtP)—a local project that sends books, free of charge, to LGBT and queer-identified prisoners across the United States—hopes to counter. Every week in the basement of Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, LGBT BtP volunteers read dozens of letters from LGBTQ prisoners who ask for books, lists of LGBT resources, and, most important, connection with the outside world. The volunteers match books to the letters, write notes to accompany them, and wrap them up for mailing. Each week BtP sends between 30 and 50 packages, each containing up to five books.

The process between receiving and filling a request usually takes between two and three weeks. Its impact is tremendous. Richard recently wrote from the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola that reading provided "a joy and peace I've found nowhere else in my 32+ years in this prison." Most of the recipients eventually pass their books along to other prisoners or donate them to their prison's library, extending the lifespan and utility of the materials. Since many of the books deal with topics on which it is nearly impossible to find other resources, like the



lived experiences of trans\* women or stories about gay relationships, this is especially meaningful. Each book has the potential to reach hundreds of people who otherwise have little access to knowledge of their choosing. In an oppressive and violent prison system, books give prisoners more control over their circumstances. As Edward in Rhode Island puts it, they "help create a place to disappear to, to live a life through other characters and dream about places and things to do once out."

In the nine years since it was founded by then Madison-resident, Dennis Bergren, LGBT BtP has sent packages of books to almost 4,000 incarcerated LGBTQ people. Now run by an organizing collective of five members, the project continues to grow rapidly with more prisoner requests and more people supporting the project on the outside. All of the books that the project sends are donated by individuals and organizations, and all of the money that it spends on postage comes from donations and small grants. Most important, all of the people who keep the project running do so on a volunteer basis. LGBT BtP's biggest needs currently are financial donations and volunteers. At this time LGBT BtP can accept only the following kinds of books: transgender or bisexual interest, drawing, dictionaries, thesauri, and almanacs. If anyone has books in these genres to donate, please contact the project.

*For more information or to make a financial contribution to the project, visit LGBT Books to Prisoners' website: [lgbtbookstoprisoners.org](http://lgbtbookstoprisoners.org) or Facebook page: [facebook.com/lgbtbookstoprisoners](https://www.facebook.com/lgbtbookstoprisoners). If you'd like to volunteer or arrange a book donation, send an e-mail to [lgbtbookstoprisoners@gmail.com](mailto:lgbtbookstoprisoners@gmail.com).*

*Volunteers meet on Monday and Tuesday nights from 5:30–7 pm and every other Saturday at 10am.*



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## The Fighter

A fierce advocate for her rights and those of the people who come after, **Ret. Col. Sheri A. Swokowski** tells the story of how she came from conservative Wisconsin roots to become one of the highest ranking out transgender officers in the world.

LGB military and LGBT civilian workers. However, he stumbled badly as he tried to articulate the policy differences between civilian and military employees. You see, transgender personnel are not allowed to serve in the military. But I am and I had, along with at least two other transgender veterans in the room. Allyson Robinson, a West Point graduate, ordained Baptist Minister, and current Director of Policy for Service Members, Partners, Allies for Respect and Tolerance for All (SPART\*A) and Kristin Beck, the former Navy SEAL whose story was told in the CNN documentary “Lady Valor” were seated in the same row. The event emcee was another friend, Amanda Simpson. She is the highest ranking, out transgender civilian appointed by President Obama. Amanda is an awesome individual with degrees in engineering, physics, and aviation. She was a test pilot for Raytheon Corp before she transitioned.

My, we seem to be all over the place! Yet we heard no mention of the value of transgender personnel in the US military. In fact, a year prior I had received a written document from the DoD Director of EEO and Diversity that denied our very existence in the military. The bottom line is that our military, four years after repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell, still discriminates.

I would purchase and dress in female clothing for a day or two. That was followed by feelings of extreme guilt as I purged everything I had just purchased—at least until the next time. And I knew there would be a next time, and a next...

### EARLY YEARS

I was born and raised in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, an industrial town filled with blue collar workers. My dad spent his career as a telephone repairman while my mother worked part-time as a nurse's aide and later earned her license as a Practical Nurse. Although my dad was deferred from military duty because he installed communication systems in the submarines built at the Manitowoc Shipyards, he enlisted in the Army in 1944. He participated in the Battle of the Bulge, was taken prisoner, and spent four months in a POW camp in Bad Orb, Germany. Thankfully, he was liberated on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945. The German soldiers, who had lined up all the prisoners in his barracks to be executed that morning, abandoned their machine guns as tanks from Patton's 3rd Division broke through the gates.

I was one of four children, three boys and a girl. My parents died without knowing they really had two sons and two daughters.

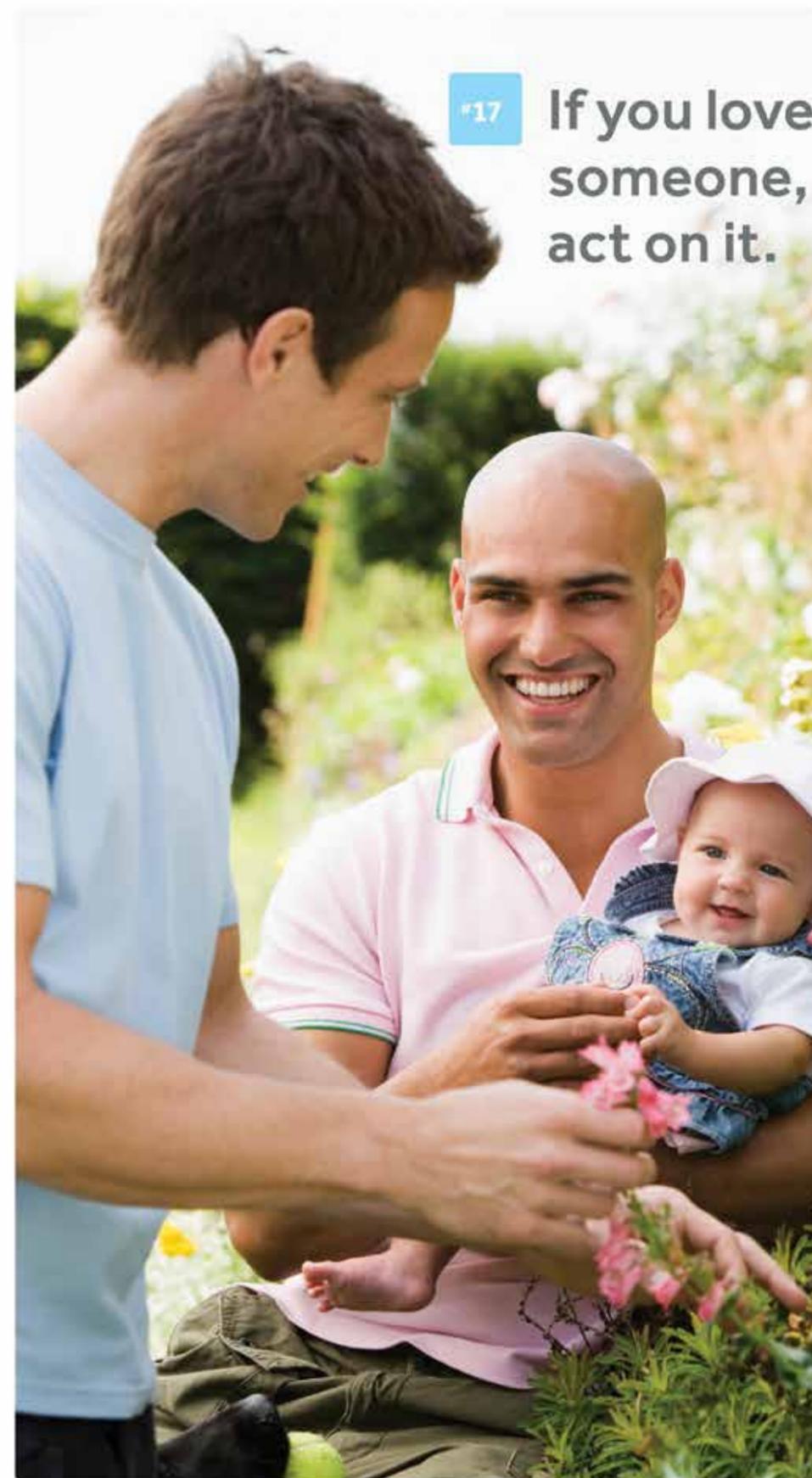
Although assigned male at birth, I knew I was different from the age of five—I just didn't know what it was called. I admired my

**SITTING IN THE THIRD ROW** of the Pentagon auditorium last summer felt different.

I had been there a dozen times before while a Senior Analyst for the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management (ACSIM) from 2008 to 2010. It was June 5, 2014. Earlier that day I was the keynote speaker at the Army Research Lab in Adelphi, Maryland, and shared my Transgender journey as part of their Pride event. Now I was back in the building attending the third iteration of the Department of Defense's (DoD) Pride event since the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell.

While a couple hundred individuals were in attendance, there was a distinct lack of senior leaders, the three and four star and Flag Officers that lead each service. Perhaps the leadership had already made their statement. After all, it was standing room only with the Secretary and all the Service Chiefs present at the inaugural event in 2012. We waited patiently for the keynote speaker, newly appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work. He arrived after a 20 minute delay, apologized (something about a call with his boss in Afghanistan), and delivered his remarks. As I listened, I keyed on what he didn't acknowledge—the contributions of the 15,500 transgender members currently serving and the 134,000 transgender veterans who have honorably, and with distinction, served as part of our military services.

During his remarks he addressed the important contributions of



17 If you love someone, act on it.



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sister and always thought I should be wearing her dresses and skirts, and sometimes when I found myself alone at home, I did. Like many trans\* children, I prayed at night for God to fix His mistake, and the next morning I realized He hadn't. The following night I prayed even harder. In the end, as a child of the fifties and sixties, it was easier to conform to the conservative values of my Roman Catholic family, a conservative area, and a conservative era. So I suppressed my feelings and lived up to others' expectations instead of my own.

I was so adept at masquerading as male that I never experienced much of the bullying, taunting, and physical violence that many of my LGBT brothers and sisters have endured. In order to prove myself, shortly after high school I became a Reserve Deputy Sheriff and joined the military. It made suppression of my authentic self a bit easier.

In my twenties, I finally figured things out thanks to articles about Renee Richards, a New York Ophthalmologist and avid tennis player who underwent a sex change operation and played professionally for five years. I now had a name for what I identified with—transsexual, and later transgender. But that complicated things even more. By that time I was well established in the military, had risen to the rank of Staff Sergeant, attended the Wisconsin Military Academy, earned a commission, and had a position as an Operations & Training Specialist at 2d Bn (Mech) 127th Inf in Appleton. Now I had the expectations of some 800+ military folks, not to mention military policy, to deal with. The stress of the new job and my dysphoria compelled me to experience brief interludes as my authentic self. I would purchase and dress in female clothing for a day or two. That was followed by feelings of extreme guilt as I purged everything I had just purchased—at least until the next time. And I knew there would be a next time, and a next...

LEFT: On the steps of Supreme Court in July 2014, for the National Center for Transgender Equality's Transgender Lobby Day. RIGHT: On a Pentagon office call in 2013.



PROFESSIONAL LIFE

While many believe the military is not for them, I found it much like any other job; it is what you make it. The life skills I learned were invaluable, particularly during my road up to and through transition. As a career Infantry officer I served at Battalion and Brigade levels and had the honor to lead a light infantry company based in Oconomowoc. I deployed twice, although it was to Europe rather than to SW Asia or the Middle East. I also had the pleasure of teaching Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at UW – Stevens Point (UWSP) from 1993 to 1997. I don't know if there was a better job anywhere. While I didn't relish the 0500 mornings three times a week to supervise and monitor the cadets' physical training sessions, I realized early during Officer Candidate School the resolve it takes to be a leader.

During one of our first OCS runs (in combat boots), I had fallen out of formation and trailed behind. While I wasn't the only one, I was extremely embarrassed and vowed to never be in that position again. The Army's Physical Fitness Test was comprised of push-ups, sit-ups, and a two-mile run, but that wasn't enough for me. With a lot of dedication and effort, I became an endurance runner. I ran 10k races, Army Ten Milers, half marathons, and completed the 1989 Lincoln (NE) Marathon in 3 hours 45 minutes. The conditioning has served me well throughout my adult life. It was especially helpful at UWSP, where I could outrun 90 percent of students half my age.

It was gratifying to see the professional development and personal maturity of students grow exponentially as they progressed through our program to become excellent young leaders. I particularly admired two young women who both graduated in four years, a feat few students accomplished. They earned their commissions, and one went on to fly helicopters while the other conducted research at the Army Lab at Fort Detrick, Maryland. I was so proud of all our graduates and am humbled to have had a small, influential role in their lives. When I left that assignment, I knew our future Army would be in good hands.

I returned to the Joint Force Headquarters in Madison for a variety of assignments. There I benefited from of mentors who guided me through the later years of my military career. For a second time I became the

The question was how to proceed without hurting those I loved the most—my wife and family—and how it would affect my employment.

agency Change Manager for the Wisconsin Army National Guard. Those change skills would play a vital role in my personal life just a few years down the road. That job was followed by assignments as the Mobilization Planner, the Strategic Planner, and, lastly, the Director of Joint (Army and Air) Personnel for the Wisconsin National Guard.

And of course, all the while I continued to suppress my authentic self, interrupted by brief periods of authenticity. As I approached the military retirement window, I felt safer about expressing myself as the person I knew I had always been. It took me 50 years, but I arrived at a point where I desperately needed to share things with someone. I had been married several times before and had two children but never discussed my "secret" with anyone. To do so would put my job, my family, and me in jeopardy. Now a glimmer of hope was approaching—the safety net of retiring with 20 years of active service.

While my spouse was a bit taken aback by my revelation, she made a sincere effort to understand. To her credit, she accompanied me to several regional Transgender conferences, and we made friends with other couples in similar situations. She suggested the name Sheri as a good fit. I chose the spelling because it combined female pronouns and a first person pronoun (she, her, and I). We now share the same middle name. I first appeared in public with her while out of state in Nevada. I remember I could hear every beat of my heart as if it were going to drive a hole through my chest as we walked about the hotel and casino. It was both terrifying and exhilarating. My wife and I lived in a tenuous relationship, never sure where my need to be authentic would lead. I did know that my leadership experiences and the skills honed in the military would serve me well in all future endeavors.

A TIPPING POINT

Retirement did little to ease the call I heard to serve. My former supervisor, one of my mentors, was on tour in Afghanistan in 2006. He mentioned there was a vacant Strategic Planner position available at his

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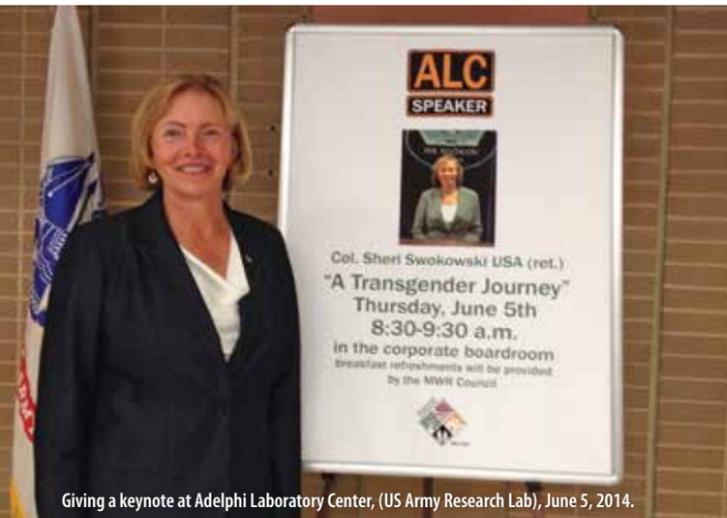
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Giving a keynote at Adelphi Laboratory Center, (US Army Research Lab), June 5, 2014.

location. I jumped at the chance to serve side by side again. I applied for the position as a government contractor. While I didn't get that job, Military Personnel Resources, Inc. (MPRI) offered me a position as a lead course instructor at the US Army Force Management School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I accepted and moved to the National Capitol Region while my wife remained at her job in Madison. This proved to be a tipping point in my life. My hair was a bit long as I reported to work and some of the other faculty—older, white, male retired officers—joked about the new instructor being a “hippie”—if they only knew the whole story, which would follow just a year down the road.

The freedom of living alone provided an opportunity for me to further explore my true self. I quickly developed a support group of transwomen in the Washington, DC area, and we saw each other often. The connecting place seemed to be our electrologist's office. As I moved closer toward transition, I must have spent 200 hours there having every hair follicle on my face (and elsewhere) burned away. Soon the only time I was male was while I was on the podium at the schoolhouse. The tight petals surrounding me were slowly peeled back, and Sheri was about to blossom. The path I needed to pursue became apparent. The question was how to proceed without hurting those I loved the most—my wife and family—and how it would affect my employment.

COMING OUT

During the summer of 2007, I returned to Wisconsin to share my secret with my two brothers. Their reactions were vastly different. My younger brother, a Minneapolis attorney, had been exposed to the

LGBTQ community during his years in New Orleans as well as at his practice and readily accepted me. As my older brother and his wife sat across the table from me and my spouse in Green Bay, it didn't take long for me to figure out he was clearly more concerned about how my transition would affect his life and friends. I was in complete disbelief when he uttered, “I'll have to protect my grandchildren from you” and “We won't tell the kids about you.”

He later informed me they didn't tell all their friends about me because “we don't want to have to defend you.” Shortly after the Green Bay meeting, my spouse received a phone call from him letting her know they fully supported whatever decision she made about our marriage. Almost a decade later, I'm still waiting for a call of support from him. My experience was pretty hurtful, but not unlike many other transgender individuals' experience when they come out to their family members. Though my sister had died 14 years earlier, I also shared my news with her husband. His response was, “Jill would have been shocked, and then she would have been your biggest advocate.”

I believe how we are received by society and by family is both educational and generational. While my older brother had been an educator, he hadn't lived outside the county we grew up in, with the exception of a two-year stint in the Army. I have not had any contact with him for almost three years. While that is unfortunate, and certainly not the way I would prefer it, I have found it helpful and necessary to surround myself with positive individuals. For me and many in the transgender community, that excludes some family members. While

While my spouse was a bit taken aback by my revelation, she made a sincere effort to understand. She suggested the name Sheri as a good fit. I chose the spelling because it combined female pronouns and a first person pronoun (she, her, and I).

I'm always hopeful that they will come around, I've made it clear we can talk when they acknowledge and take responsibility for the way they have treated me since transition. Perhaps my reaction is a bit shortsighted, but the wounds they inflicted are deep and still present. I am reminded of a line from *The Godfather*: “Blood makes you related; loyalty makes you family.”

On the other side of the coin, my two children have been fantastic and very supportive. They like me better now. That's not at all surprising since I like myself better now too! I am convinced we must be the best person possible for ourselves before we can be the best possible person for others. I truly believe my marriages were doomed to fail from the beginning because I was not my authentic self.

In the fall of 2007, I also came out to a couple of my mentors. I am sure they were a bit apprehensive when I invited them to lunch at my home, but our friendship over the years transcended the rough spots, and it did not take them long to realize that the only thing that had changed was my exterior appearance; it now aligned with my internal sense of being. They communicated my change to agency leadership, who communicated it throughout the 10,000 person organization. Now everybody knew! In those early days it was comforting to get calls from out of town and out of state from former colleagues who wanted me to know, personally, I had their support. For others, it takes time. And sadly, for others there is not enough time.

I recently had lunch with a dear friend I have been close with for decades. We made it through the tough times of Officer Candidate

School and worked together for 25 years afterward. Yet over the past eight years my emails to him weren't acknowledged. One of my mentors suggested I call him, and a few days later I did. We chatted briefly about having lunch, and I sent him my contact information. After six weeks of not hearing from him, I figured the time still wasn't right. But thanks to the persistence of our mutual mentor, we finally arranged a lunch date. I tried to put myself in his shoes as he approached the table where I was seated. I knew it was difficult for him, and I certainly understood the lack of eye contact during the first ten minutes of our conversation. After all, I didn't look much like I used to thanks to the hands of a skilled facial surgeon. However, the conversation turned to families and friends, and suddenly he realized he was chatting with the same person he had known all those years. We chatted for two hours, just two retired infantry Colonels who had both turned pages in our lives. His comment as we left, “This was fun, we'll have to do it again soon,” leads me to believe the next lunch will be even better.

TRANSITION AND (OF COURSE) DISCRIMINATION

While there has been tremendous progress within the LGB community, the transgender community remains the most marginalized group in societies around the globe. We suffer discrimination in employment, health care, and housing, among other areas.

Like many of my trans\* brothers and sisters, I have experienced discrimination firsthand. In 2007, I was fired from my lead instructor position at the US Army Force Management School immediately after transitioning. Prior to departing for a surgery, I informed the HR Director I would be returning to work as Sheri. When she indicated she had no experience with a transgender employee, I suspected it would

be challenging. I offered to meet with the staff and faculty along with my counselor to educate and inform the employees. The response was “We're all retired military officers, and we don't need any training.” In fact, since the military prohibits transgender service, they probably needed it more than anyone else.

I felt wonderful as I walked into the schoolhouse my first morning back at work. I met with the Director, a retired three-star General who had served at the White House, and his Deputy. His first statement wel-



LEFT: With her friend at his retirement in 2010. CENTER: Sheri with Congressman Mark Pocan on the National Center for Transgender Equality's 2014 Lobby Day. RIGHT: With Senator Tammy Baldwin on the day ENDA passed the Senate in 2013.

comed me back to help out with the course. His second statement was “We've already hired your replacement.” He admitted I wasn't “doing anything criminal,” and what started out as “my issue” progressed to “my problem” during the conversation. It still amazes me; although absolutely nothing changed about job qualifications, I was soon to join the ranks of the unemployed because my exterior appearance did not align with my employer's sense of propriety.

I have a framed copy of President Obama's Executive Order #13672 from July 21, 2014, on my bedroom wall. It protects federal and government contract employees from discrimination based on sexual ori-

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entation and gender identity. Had it been in effect when I transitioned, I would have had legal recourse. I was happy to see the President issue the Executive Order protecting federal employees and contractors. But although the Employment Non-Discrimination Act passed the Senate with bipartisan support in November 2013, it died in the House of Representatives.

“We’ve already hired your replacement.” He admitted I wasn’t “doing anything criminal,” and what started out as “my issue” progressed to “my problem” during the conversation.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, post-transition and shortly after being fired, I went to work at the Pentagon as an analyst. I was hired by an individual interested in what skills I brought to the table, rather than who I may have been previously. And while the Security Manager expressed his concerns to the Deputy Division Chief about getting me cleared, she told him to return to his office and do his job. There never was an issue with my clearance. One of the duties I excelled at was representing the ACSIM weekly at a secure, worldwide, Strategic Planning video teleconference. While the tiered communications suite typically had all 70 seats filled, I never needed to be concerned; I had one of the eight seats at the table. In what many would consider an extremely conservative environment, my civilian experience at the Department of Defense was entirely positive. It was professional, cordial, social, and based on my performance, not my exterior appearance. I must admit I didn’t mind having doors opened

or held for me either. I went on to spend three years as the regional HR Director for the US Forest Service in Golden, Colorado, before leaving federal service.

ADVOCACY

My original plan was to blend into society after I transitioned. Being fired as a government contractor for being who I am changed that. Since then it’s been about making things easier for those who follow. I began working with then Rep. Tammy Baldwin in 2008, to secure basic civil rights for members of our community, with a focus on transgender rights. I travel to Washington, DC, several times a year to advocate on Capitol Hill and elsewhere. We have made some progress over the years, but there is still much work to be done. In July 2014, I met with now Sen. Baldwin in her Washington office. She reminisced that when we started working together only a handful of Representatives had ever met a transgender individual. Now, she assured me, all 435 Representatives have been visited by transgender constituents.

Education is the key to ending the discrimination, bullying, and violence transgender individuals face. It is vitally important that we share our stories. While over 80 percent of the population knows someone who is gay, only 9 percent knows someone who is transgender. But sharing our stories is difficult for most. After all, why would we risk the exposure to ridicule and scorn and open old wounds? Yet it’s the lack of societal exposure and education that is, literally, killing us.

We can’t do it alone; we are too few. We need the support of allies. Mara Keisling, the Executive Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) has said, “When people get to know us, more often than not they find they like us.” Society almost always

takes the word of medical professionals when it comes to their own health concerns. But some in society don’t realize, or don’t want to understand, that the American Medical, Psychiatric, and Psychological Associations recognize gender dysphoria as a medical issue deserving of treatment.

A 2011 survey conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and NCTE found 41 percent of transgender respondents indicated they had attempted suicide. That rate is 25 times the suicide rate of the general population and 10 times higher than that found in the LGB community. This is a real crisis. While I have never entertained thoughts of suicide, I am particularly close to the subject. In a one week period in November 2014, I talked with two individuals who had recently taken active steps to end their lives. These are intelligent, honorable, distinguished military personnel who have served our country under the worst of circumstances. Both are involved in healing others—one as a physician, the other a combat medic. They both have so much to offer, and I am very pleased they are still with us.

For all those transgender individuals, young and old, who are struggling with why God hasn’t fixed them, please take comfort and inspiration from the words of my dear friend Allyson Robinson’s MSNBC interview last fall. She believes, as do I, God’s message to her is “My child, I have not fixed you because you are not broken. You are just like I want you to be.”

In addition to internal threats, transgender individuals face extreme violence at the hands of others. From November 2013 to October 2014, 286 transgender individuals were murdered worldwide, simply because they didn’t fit society’s strict roles. It is estimated between 1 and 1.5 percent of the population identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. Unfortunately, we are 400 times more likely to be assaulted or murdered than the general population. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reported 72 percent of LGBT murder victims in 2013 were transgender and 67 percent of those were transgender women of color. This year alone, already six transgender women of color have been murdered in this country, along with a 22-year-old white transwoman stabbed to death by her father in Ohio. Each November we come together at locations around the world to remember and celebrate the lives of transgender individuals who lost their lives to hatred and violence. Although some may not like to think about it, a direct analogy can be drawn between the murders of transgender individuals and the recent deaths of two New York City police officers who were assassinated while sitting in their patrol car. All were killed for simply being who they were.

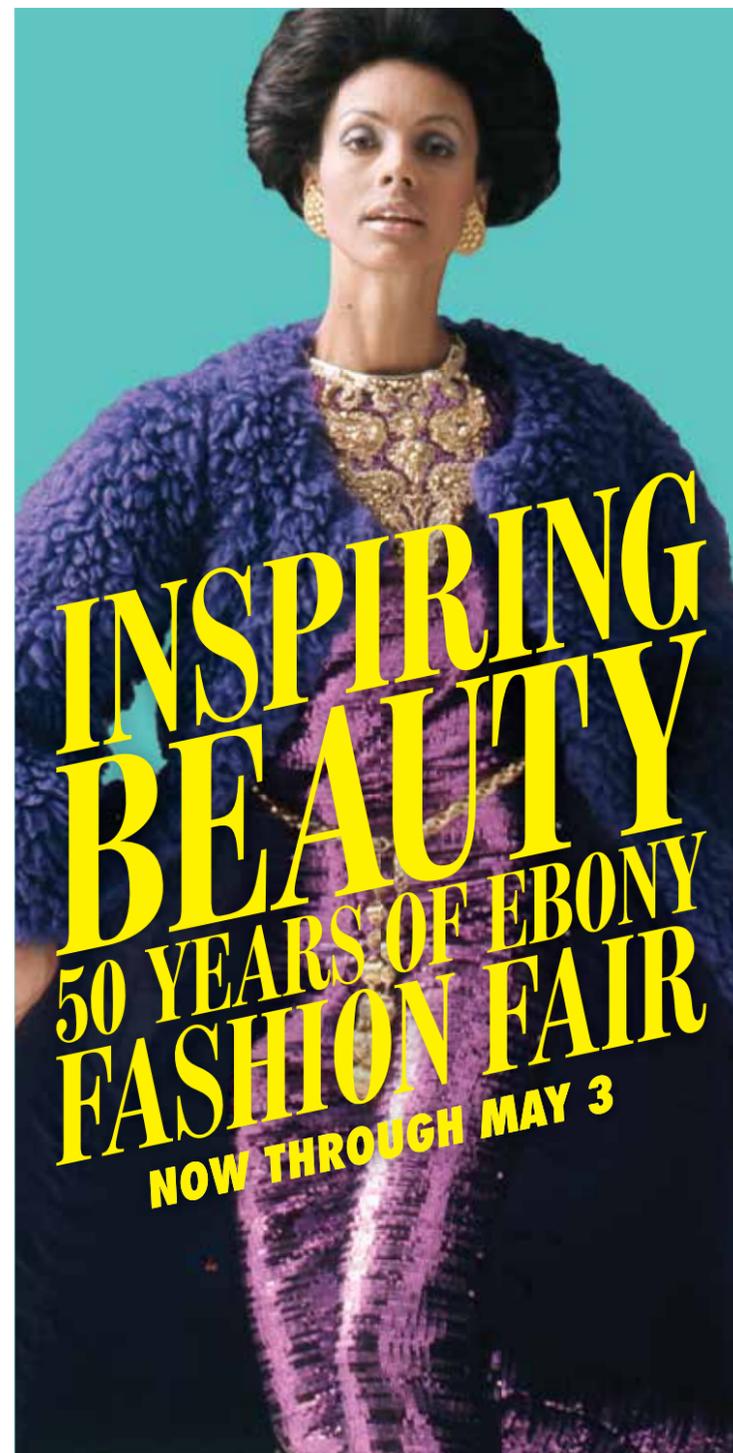
SUCCESS, BUT NOT WITHOUT COSTS

Although the diagnosis is the same, each transgender journey is different. The experiences garnered, although delaying my authenticity to later in life, provided a solid platform of skills that enabled me to transition relatively smoothly and to be highly successful. I consider myself extremely fortunate, but surviving and flourishing does not come without costs.

My 11 year marriage and the extended family relationships that were part of it ended very abruptly and without any communication since. My former spouse was a devout Catholic, and I suspect that played a role. In addition to the loss of my own siblings and my job, the financial costs associated with transitioning approached \$100,000,



At home in DeForest with her grandson Carter in 2014.



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not to mention the discomfort of multiple surgeries. While I had the health and financial means to pay for out-of-pocket surgery expenses, such is not the case for the majority of transgender individuals. I should point out here that most transgender people do not have surgery. That is due to a variety of circumstances, whether age, health, relationships, or simply having no desire for surgical intervention.

We are making strides in accessibility to trans\* health care. Thanks largely to the efforts of a dynamic young attorney from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, transgender healthcare was included as part of the Affordable Care Act. Andy Cray's success at the Center for American Progress lives on even after his untimely death from cancer last August. His efforts will affect hundreds of thousands of transgender individuals over the years. In addition to Andy's efforts, trans\* health care is now provided as part of Medicare, and nine states and the District of Columbia have taken steps to ensure health care is available in their jurisdictions.

After almost ten years, I still encounter health care discrimination. Tricare, the military retiree health coverage, denied payment for a mammogram claiming it was excluded as part of "transgender surgery." It took eight months, multiple phone calls, an appeal, a grievance, and a Congressional Inquiry to provide coverage and payment for a basic preventative test.

It is pleasing to know more and more children are identifying earlier in life and getting the medical treatment they deserve. While the vast majority of parents become educated, it is distressing to hear of those who put their children's health and lives at stake by not understanding and supporting them. The suicide of 17-year-old Leelah Alcorn of Ohio is yet another tragic example of a bright young light being extinguished, not because she was transgender, but due to how she was

We are making strides in accessibility to trans\* health care. Thanks largely to the efforts of a dynamic young attorney from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, transgender healthcare was included as part of the Affordable Care Act.

treated by those who, supposedly, loved her most.

In our community it's essential to support each other. We must all reach out and educate friends, family, colleagues, and especially the haters and bigots. We must also educate ourselves. How can we expect society to understand the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity when many members of our own community either don't understand or choose not to respect the "T"? While we are different from our LGB brethren, we share many commonalities: harassment, discrimination, bullying, and violence. A two-gender binary construct based on sex assigned at birth is neat and tidy. It enables society to impose roles and expectations for each gender, and for many there is no middle ground. Science has proven otherwise, and we must educate all in an effort to gain support and understanding.

**OUR WAY AHEAD**

I probably did a few things well to attain the rank of Colonel. However, I often wonder how much better I could have been had I been able to transition while serving. I am convinced our military leaders will soon realize the discrimination that exists and act to unleash the full potential of currently serving soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. As I look back at the Pentagon Pride event, I am convinced that



With friends at Camp Randall, Nov 15, 2014. L to R: Amanda Simpson, Jennifer Watkins, Sheri, and Jessica.

Deputy Secretary Works stumbled not because there was a difference in the categories he covered, but rather he realized there should be no difference in how all service members are treated.

Discrimination followed me well after transition. In 2010, a US Forest Service Supervisor felt it necessary to call attention to the name on my Military Record of Service (MRS) to the hiring manager because it was different than the one on my application. Until very recently, the DoD has steadfastly refused to update transgender veterans' records of service. As a former Human Resources Director for two federal agencies I can attest to the criticality of an accurate MRS as part of any veteran's application packet. There are some indications things may be changing. For the very first time, in November 2014 and again in January 2015, the DoD agreed to provide three transgender veterans with updated MRS forms reflecting their post-transition names. My request was submitted in May 2014.

I visit Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) frequently when in Washington. I am always awestruck by the beautiful, serene landscape, punctuated by the graceful air traffic departing Reagan National Airport. I am eligible to be buried there and have let my children know of my desires for my final resting place. On January 21, 2015, just two years after being informed in writing that we don't exist in the military, the Army Board for Correction of Military Records notified me they will be issuing a new MRS that reflects my birth/legal name. It will be an official document to support my ANC inscription:

Sheri A. Swokowski  
COL, Infantry

Until then, as the highest ranking out, transgender former service member in the country (and perhaps the world), I have and will continue to advance the fight for equality. The military teaches us to fight; the DoD and others shouldn't be surprised when we do. ■

**DID YOU KNOW**



Every transgender or gender non-conforming individual who is suffering needs to know a new suicide prevention hotline, **Trans Lifeline**, was recently established. What makes it unique is the organization is run and staffed by transgender volunteers. The hotline can be accessed throughout the US at 877.565.8860. An additional source of support for those in need is the Trevor Project's Lifeline at 888.488.7386 or [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org).




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# Sharing Life

Linda Lenzke explains the growth and future of Madison East Side Co-Housing (MESCoH) and Intentionally-Welcoming Cohousing at the Union Corners site.

**IN THE FALL OF 2013**, I attended my first informational meeting about intentionally-welcoming, LGBT-and senior-friendly cohousing at Union Corners hosted by John Steines, community activist, artist, and member of the Schenk-Atwood-Starkweather-Yahara (SASY) Neighborhood Association, and Caroline Werner, a retired social worker and case manager for Dane County seniors, and an LGBT Senior Advocate for OutReach, Madison's LGBT Community Center. Both were volunteering their time, energy, and passion for cohousing, not in their official capacities, but as heartfelt commitments on behalf of our LGBT and senior communities.

As I visualized my future as an LGBT senior living in Madison and aging, I imagined residing in a community of like-minded individuals committed to mutual support and fellowship, while we shared spaces to congregate, celebrate, recreate, and collaborate. I would also need a private, personal space—a room or home of my own. I'd live in a vibrant neighborhood that celebrated diversity and progressive values. This dream may soon become a reality.

Union Corners is a mixed-use project in development by Gorman & Company on East Washington Avenue at the former Rayovac (French Battery) site. I joined others who shared this dream, many of whom were Madison eastsiders and possessed a history and connection to the site; we expanded our vision for the project and formed Madison East Side Co-Housing (MESCoH), a not-for-profit corporation.

### WHAT IS COHOUSING?

Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and management of their own neighborhoods. At the core of cohousing—more precisely, at the heart of the community—members dream, shape, and determine how and where they want to live, both individually and together. They decide what their common spaces will be, delineate their shared values, and lastly decide how their community will be managed and maintained. A cohousing community is a family of sorts—a chosen family—one with equal rights and responsibilities.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF COHOUSING

The modern theory of cohousing originated in Denmark in the 1960s by families dissatisfied with existing housing and communities that they felt did not meet their needs. The Danish term *bofællesskab* (living community) was introduced to North America as cohousing by two American architects, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, who co-wrote the book, *Creating Cohousing*. Durrett's second book is *The Senior Cohousing Handbook*. The first community in the United States to be designed, constructed, and occupied specifically for cohousing was Muir Commons in Davis, California.

### COHOUSING IN MADISON

- Madison is home to thriving cohousing communities:
- VILLAGE COHOUSING COMMUNITY** is Madison's first cohousing project. It is located on Mound, S. Mills Street, and St. James Court in the Greenbush neighborhood and includes 18 units in all, 15 in three newly-constructed buildings and three in two existing houses.
- ARBORETUM COHOUSING** located on Erin Street near St. Mary's Hospital includes new homes in two multi-family buildings, rehabbed townhouse homes, a duplex built by Habitat for Humanity, and existing single-family homes.
- TROY GARDENS** is an award-winning 31-acre project on the North side of Madison which combines community gardens, a working CSA farm, a restored prairie, and a 30 home mixed-income cohousing community.

### COHOUSING AT UNION CORNERS

Cohousing is planned for the lower triangle of the Union Corners project, adjacent to existing residential neighbors to the south and bordering Winnebago Street to the north. Madison East Side Co-Housing (MESCoH) is planning the Sister West building, a three-story, multi-family cohousing community featuring studio, one, two, and three bedroom condo-style units totaling 35 to 40 units, shared indoor and outdoor common spaces, and underground parking. A second cohousing group, Sister East, sponsored by Design Coalition, Inc., and Design Coalition Institute is envisioning a community mix of townhouse and apartment-type units. Both projects will include a variety of privately-owned units and commonly-owned amenities.



Preliminary Union Corners plan by Gorman & Company

Gorman & Company reached an agreement with the City of Madison to develop the 11.4-acre site at East Washington Avenue and Milwaukee Street. The project includes Phase 1, a UW Health Clinic which will break ground in spring 2015, followed next by Phases 2–3, four to six story buildings that include a grocery store, Fresh Thyme Farmers Market, affordable and market rate housing projected to break ground in 2015–2016, followed by Phase 4, two cohousing communities in the lower triangle, retail and work/live spaces, community gardens, pedestrian path, and outdoor public spaces. Phase 5 will be the redevelopment of the former sales office for the failed Union Corners Condominium project by McGrath & Associates on East Washington Avenue.

### MESCOH'S VISION

MESCoH has been meeting for almost 18 months, collaborating with cohousing partners including Design Coalition, Inc., Design Coalition Institute, Arboretum Cohousing (ARBCO), SASY Neighborhood Association, alders, Gorman & Company, project development consultants, city planning and design commissions, architects, and mortgage lenders.

We've hosted informational coffees, co-hosted workshops, a "blue sky" vision retreat, tours of ARBCO, and created a number

of work groups. We've expanded our vision for the community, which is a continuing, creative process as new members join. Following is our preliminary vision, expanding the initial LGBT- and senior-friendly intention to include our intention of creating a diverse, intergenerational, and affordable community:

*Madison East Side Co-Housing (MESCoH) is a group of individuals seeking to establish, design and create an intentional community of homes and common spaces on the East Side of Madison at Union Corners, based on the co-housing model. Members of MESCoH have expressed interest in such features as green building, walkable neighborhoods, community gardens, outdoor common areas, and street design featuring traffic calming.*

*MESCoH invites like-minded individuals with shared values and a commitment to participatory decision-making to join us as we develop our vision and mission statement and move forward to create a welcoming and diverse community that is affordable, intergenerational, LGBTQ and senior-friendly, and dedicated to preserving the quality of life and vibrancy of our east side neighborhood. MESCoH is a not-for-profit corporation.*

### HOW YOU CAN JOIN MESCOH

If you are interested in learning about more MESCoH, cohousing at Union Corners, and how to become a member, sign up by emailing MESCoH at [mescoghgroup@gmail.com](mailto:mescoghgroup@gmail.com). We'll add you to our contact list. You'll receive meeting notifications, project updates, and invitations to upcoming informational events and workshops. Visit and LIKE our Facebook page: [facebook.com/mescohl](https://facebook.com/mescohl).

As a member of MESCoH, you'll help develop the cohousing community, choose and design your unit, create community bylaws, and participate in decision-making. Join one or more of our work groups:

1. Marketing Outreach & Member Recruitment
2. Finance, Fundraising, & Affordability
3. Archives, Communications, & Documentation
4. Decision-Making Process & Bylaws
5. Facilitation and Meeting Planning

*"The beauty of cohousing is that you have a private life and a community life, but only as much of each as you want."* —Member of a Danish cohousing community ■



LINDA LENZKE is an LGBTQ community activist and writer. She is a founding member of MESCoH and serves on its Board of Directors. You can read more of Linda's work on her blog, [mixedmetaphorshomy.com](http://mixedmetaphorshomy.com).



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MESCOH-ARBCO MEETING PHOTO BY JANET MURPHY, ARBCO

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## Art Is My Sword

Performer **Alena Joling**, a.k.a. **Colin Acumen**, found a way to fight the hard fights within the supportive and radical community of drag artists in Milwaukee.

### I DIDN'T MEAN TO DRAG KING.

She starts taking her 14-year-old daughter to bars, buying her drinks, giving her Valium and Vicodin, and sending her home with older men to do what older men will do. Her only defense is a shrug and a nonchalant, "It's what my mother did to me." Her 24-year-old intellectually disabled son looks on. According to police documents, he has sexually assaulted his sister since she was only three years old. He studies his mother and the unfolding confrontation with the eyes of a child. Soon he will be throwing anything within reach. He is a simple man and a clear product of his isolation with Teacher Television Set.

Structural maintenance of sexism, queerphobia, and rape culture require an individual belief in divisions made along gendered lines. Drag forces the viewer to dismantle these beliefs and often renders them more receptive to the message with a laugh.

A man in his fifties anxiously waits for his daughter to get home from her bi-weekly visits with her mother. He is ignorant to what goes on when she is there, but he worries anyway. He's raised her since she was three and, for all his fighting, was never able to convince the Court how dangerous the mother is. One thing he was convinced of: his daughter would grow up not to take any shit.

Even with such a small example of my experience with rape-culture growing up, as an educated adult it sounds like an absurd fantasy that such behavior would be normalized and even defended. After graduating from UWM, I stumbled into unlikely solstice in a group of drag kings and queer performers: the lost-sock-club of Milwaukee, The Miltown Kings. What was meant to be a guest performance turned into five years of drag. The troupe is committed to creating a safe, consent-oriented space for performers and audience members with acceptance and respect of all bodies, sexualities, gender orientations, and abilities.

My name is Alena, though most people in the community know me as Colin Acumen. The story of how I came to do drag is less important than why I continue to do it and queer performance in general. It started as a fluke but continues with the realization that, for me, drag is the most accessible tool for destabilizing traditional ideas about gender. Structural maintenance of sexism, queerphobia, and rape culture require an individual belief in divisions made along gendered lines. Drag forces the viewer to dismantle these beliefs and often renders them more receptive to the message with a laugh.

Though the popularity of Ru Paul's Drag Race has never been higher (congrats, Trixie!), drag is still a serious act of rebellion. I dress up like a dude because I want to mock a certain brand of masculinity. The version of masculinity that promotes violence for the sake of violence and legitimizes the degradation of anything "feminine" is the same brand that fears, more than anything, being laughed at. I want to help you laugh at those dudes' justification for their behaviors because it's possibly the best way to get people to see how ridiculous and penis non-inherent this stuff is. I used to feel like I was shouting into a void. I am no longer alone in my corner.

By its very nature, drag is a way for lost socks to feel not so alone. It's a community founded by outcasts who, while helping each other heal, have moved together to broaden the horizons of many sleeping normative allies. Of course there are those that still respond in anger when their beliefs about gender are so irrevocably challenged on stage; that's when we really know we are doing something right.

Many people share my experiences growing up with rape culture and sexism totally normalized, and it can be so isolating, but I am no longer alone in the fight. **This past December I faced a new rapist armed with a gun and was severely beaten for my refusal to comply (See below).** Thousands of people appeared to support me and each other when I posted my story and a warning. The queer performance community was the foundation of my support, and I have never been more humbled or honored to be part of that community. An issue that is normally hushed made them raise their voices and inspired those around them to do the same. ■



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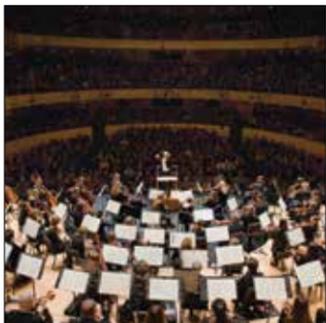
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APRIL 10

Out at the Symphony

OVERTURE CENTER Madison Symphony Orchestra presents another edition of its LGBTQ-focused evening of entertainment, including a performance of "Piano Genius" with Madison's own Christopher Taylor and the MSO, followed by an exclusive after party. Ticket discounts available for attendees. madisonsymphony.org



APRIL 17

Red Ribbon Affair

THE EDGEWATER The newly-merged AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin's annual gala dinner and silent auction fundraiser for the first time brings together community and support for both the venerable Madison organization as well as the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin since the two merged earlier this year. arcw.org

ORGANIZATIONS

A representative sampling

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

Alianza Latina facebook.com/alianzalatinamadison

Dairyland Cowboys & Cowgirls dcandc.org

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

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

Gay Softball League badgerlandsoftball.com

Gay Volleyball League madisongayvolleyball.com

Hermanos Latinos sneal@aidsnetwork.org

Lez Talk Yahoo Group leztalkmadison@yahoo.com

LGBT Books to Prisoners lgbtbookstoprisoners.org

Madison Gay Hockey Association madisongayhockey.org

Madison Minotaurs Gay Rugby minotaursrugby.org

New Harvest Foundation newharvestfoundation.org

Out Professional and Executive Network (O.P.E.N.) openmadison.org

OutReach Community Center 600 Williamson St., Madison (608) 255-8582 lgbtoutreach.org

PFLAG - Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (608) 848-2333 pflag-madison.org

Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus perfectharmonychorus.org

Proud Theater (LGBTQ Youth) proudtheater.org

StageQ - Madison's Queer Theater stageq.com

UW - Madison LGBT Campus Center 800 Langdon St., Madison (608) 265-3344 wis.edu/lgbt

Wisconsin Rainbow Families wirainbowfamilies.com

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A Queer History of Fashion lecture at MAM's Ebony Fashion Fair, March 12, Milwaukee Art Museum Explore the influence of the LGBTQ community on the world of fashion. Jonathan D. Katz, founder of the Harvey Milk institute, will discuss the business of fashion in the context of the exhibition. mam.org

Canoeopia, March 13-15, Alliant Energy Center The annual bonanza of all things paddlesports returns to the Alliant Energy Center for three days of vendors, exhibits, speakers, clinics, and more. canoeopia.com

Deliciously Queer: Coming Out/Commitment, March 27, April 3, April 9, Bartell Theatre StageQ, Inc. partners with the creators of Are We Delicious? to present Deliciously Queer, a show written and staged in a mere seven days. Deliciously Queer will feature pieces inspired by two compelling subjects in the queer experience: Coming Out and Commitment. stageq.com

"No One Dies" Meditation Retreat, March 28, Kadampa Meditation Center, Madison Take part in this meditation retreat and discussion of a Buddhist perspective on death. meditationinmadison.org

Hair Affair: The Art of Hair, April 23, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art MMoCA will host its fourth celebration of this artful and outrageous all-things-hair event with hair sculptures designed by premier local salons, plus free exhibitions and educational programs. mmoca.org

The Barber of Seville, April 24 & 26, Overture Hall Madison Opera presents two performances of this, the greatest operatic comedy, returning to Madison for the first time in 12 years. madisonopera.org

Mama Mia!, April 28-May 3, Overture Center The smash Broadway musical hit returns to Overture Center to fill the air with the sounds of Abba, wedding-related humor, and plenty of sparkle. Artist Q&A to follow the April 30 performance. overturecenter.com

Family Weekend in the Midwest, May 1-3, Sheraton Madison Family Equality Council puts on its annual destination event for LGBTQ parents, their children, extended families, prospective families, and friends. Family activities, fun, and programming for all ages. familyequality.org

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## FEBRUARY 22 ARCW's Camp Bingo at the Sheraton



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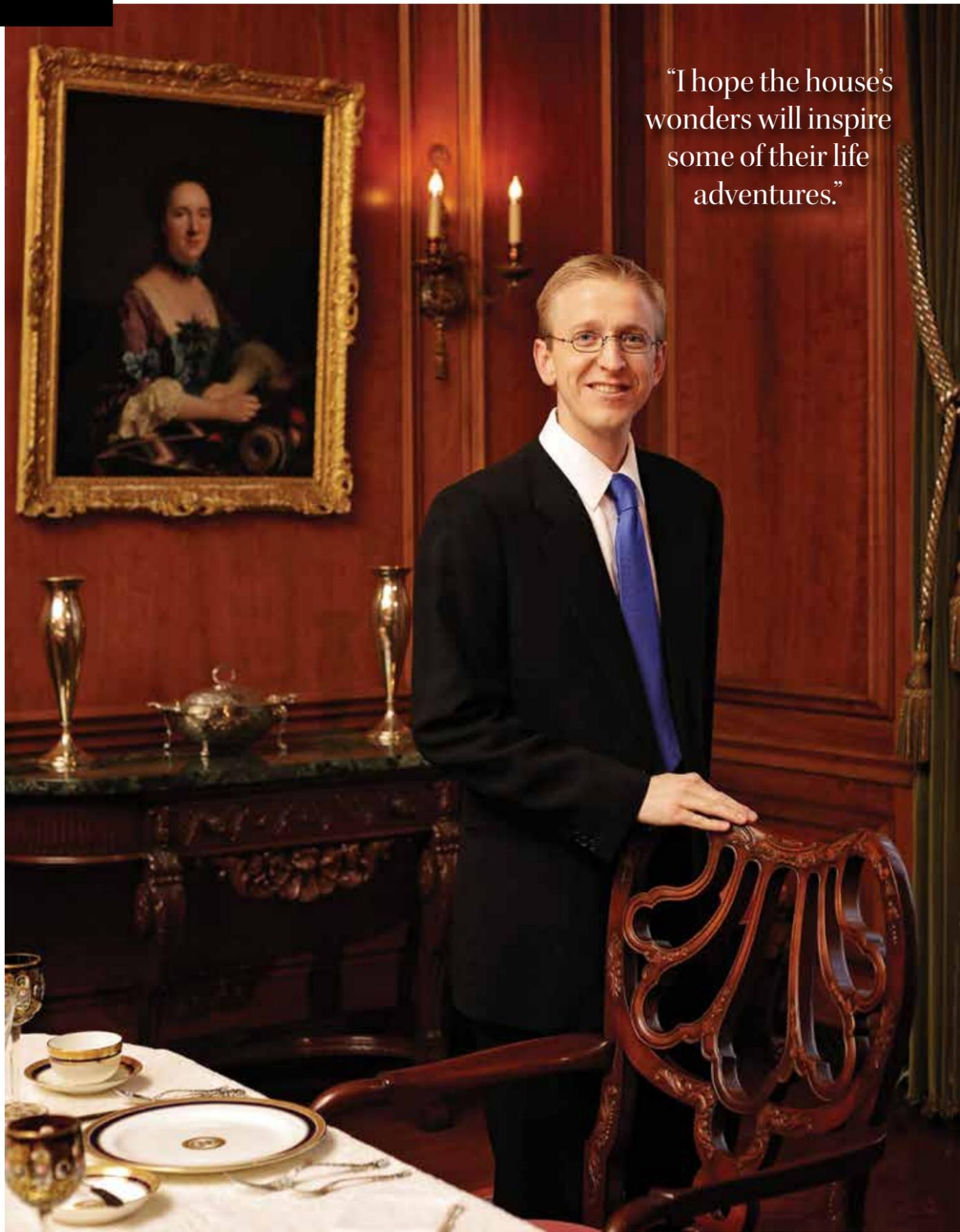


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“I hope the house’s wonders will inspire some of their life adventures.”

# From House to Home

**Paine Art Center and Gardens** executive director **Aaron Sherer** remarks on how his own childhood memories of home helped shape his approach to building a family and career.

**WHEN I WAS NINE YEARS OLD** my parents rolled a huge Victorian house across town to a new foundation and then spent the next year restoring it. It made an impression on me that has lasted for 30 years. Beyond the move and restoration, as a kid I was mesmerized by the meandering house with five staircases, tall doors and windows, and a variety of nooks and crannies. It offered me endless make-believe adventures. Now, as an adult, I realize the house was also an inspiration for my real life adventure.

For the past 12 years I have been the director of a historic estate in Oshkosh—the Paine Art Center and Gardens. Built in the late 1920s in a Tudor style, the golden limestone house is more reminiscent of Downton Abbey than the gingerbread Victorian home of my childhood. While it has never been moved on wheels, the Paine house has its own saga to share and immense character to behold, and I am enchanted by it.

Visitors are often puzzled to learn that no one ever lived in the Paine house. Its creators Nathan and Jessie didn’t have children, and from the outset in 1927 they intended it to become a museum. They did plan to live in it beforehand, but the Great Depression and World War II halted its completion. By the time the world settled down in 1946, Nathan and Jessie decided they were ready to establish it as a museum.

I sometimes regret that the Paine house was never truly a home with a growing family’s story to tell. Fortunately, as a museum its life has been rich and rewarding for generations of visitors, and I believe that every guest is giving it a life story. When school kids visit, I see their fascination with its many facets and majesty, much as I was as a child with my home. I hope the house’s wonders will inspire some of their life adventures.



**BUILDING HOME**

When my spouse Paul and I moved to Oshkosh, we bought a small, 1920s Dutch Colonial house. Coming from Boston, we were delighted by the bargain price for all of the charm and space. We weren’t as pleased with all of the work the house needed and the related cost, but we loved our little historic home and the experience of living in it. We were proud of the preservation projects we undertook, which we felt the house somehow deserved.

**WHAT'S TRENDING**

**The Value of Handcrafted**



CHAD'S DESIGN BUILD  
CHAD SPEIGHT, PRESIDENT

We are seeing the return of many older ideas: the value of using local and trusted suppliers and tradespeople who stand behind their products and services, the importance of doing business with companies who pay a living wage and who treat staff well, and the importance of creating healthy and comfortable living environments. After the economic downturn many people were just looking for bargains, but now they are starting to rediscover that renovation on the cheap has lots of other unexpected costs if you stay in your home and in your community.

**A Path Back to Nature**



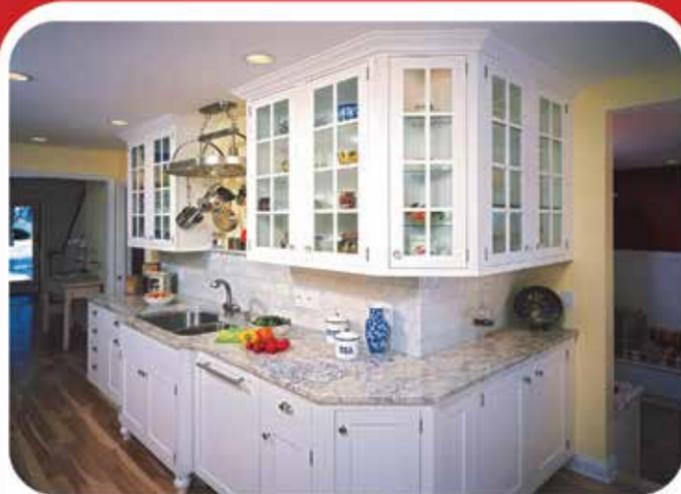
SHAVER MELAHN / PLEASANT LIVING LLC  
LEE MELAHN, INTERIOR & FURNITURE DESIGNER

Every year the color czars pick a new color to represent the year. This year their choice was Marsala, an earthy red nearer to terra cotta than burgundy. It foreshadows a path back to nature where neutrals and the colors of meadows and forests are the calming factors being brought back inside. Rich walnuts and cherries are juxtaposed with natural stones. Fabrics made from non-synthetic materials are being used to upholster furniture and hang from wrought iron curtain rods. There’s a stronger sense of nesting and a greater willingness to feather those nests thanks to a better economy than we’ve seen in a long time.



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Our first two sons were delivered to our doorstep as infants in foster care while we lived in the house. My memories of my sons' early years are intertwined with memories of the house—first steps on the hardwood maple floors, washing bottles in the porcelain kitchen sink, hearing their cries echoing down the short hallway in the middle of the night. I am grateful for the character of these memories that wouldn't be as rich without the character of the house.

Two additional sons later, our family now lives in a bigger 1980s house pretending to be an Early American Colonial. Its greatest feature is a three-stall garage, which I do not take for granted. While it doesn't have the historic features of our first home, over five years our lives have saturated the house, and it is fully our home. I can appreciate that any house where lives are full and happy is a good home with character.

### MILESTONES

If our homes told a story of my family's years in them, the tale would include steps toward gay equality. The latest milestone in our family's trek just happened in January. Both Paul and I became the legal parents of each of our four sons. Previously, only one of us was able to legally adopt them. Legal gay marriage recognition in Wisconsin cleared the path for the other spouse to adopt, and now our family is legally whole.

Paul refers to our current home as our "thirty-year house." He says this because of the length of the mortgage, but I know it's also that he can see the house meeting our family's needs for a generation. Our sons span ages 3 to 8. While I can't imagine them as teens, I can imagine the house functioning as well as possible for two adults and four teens. Whether or not we stay put in our home for another 25 years, I am sure our lives will be anything but idle.

## About the Paine Art Center & Gardens

### THE PAINE ART CENTER AND GARDENS

is a historic estate in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, featuring a 1920s Tudor-Revival house surrounded by three acres of gardens. This coming summer the Paine will present three-dozen period costumes from the acclaimed public television series *Downton Abbey*. The exhibition, **Dressing Downton: Changing Fashion for Changing Times**, premiered in February at the renowned Biltmore estate in North Carolina, and then in June it will travel to the Paine where the costumes will be presented throughout the rooms of the historic mansion until mid-September. To learn more about the Paine and the exhibition, go to [thepaine.org](http://thepaine.org).



At home in Oshkosh with his family. Inset: Aaron's husband Paul with their first son.

A few years ago my oldest son and I watched a house next to the Paine being torn down. I didn't anticipate that he would be upset by it. He was sad and cried. As I began to think about what he was experiencing, I realized he saw more than a house. He saw a home—a safe and sound place for people to live. He must have wondered if this home could be torn down so easily, was his home also so weak and vulnerable?

As a child, seeing my family's Victorian house roll down the street and onto a new solid foundation, I was riveted with a dynamic sense of what home could be—courageous and compelling. This uncommon understanding has helped to forge the path for my life, family, and home. As houses become a part of lives they become homes, and the transformation from house to home can be an astonishing journey. ■

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Fresh Looks From the Past



ODANA ANTIQUES & FINE ARTS CENTER  
**SUE DUNCAN, OWNER**

The mid-century modern genre is extremely popular. Younger consumers seek the clean lines of mainstream manufacturers such as Drexel or Lane. Renowned designers such as Herman Miller and Knoll generally appeal to savvy, older buyers with more disposable income.

Up-cycled pieces are reflecting the creativity of the designer. Imagination and a good eye are key. Environmentally safe and easy to use chalk paints have exploded in popularity as well.

### Outdoor Life at Home



QUIGLEY DECKS & FENCE  
**TIM QUIGLEY, OWNER**

The deck is still the most popular feature for outdoor living, and designs today are far more elaborate than years past. The backyard is a popular place to entertain, and people look for decks with better function and design, featuring larger areas to accommodate everything from a stand-alone grill to fully functioning outdoor kitchens. Stainless steel cable railing and deck lighting are both practical and add a pleasing, sophisticated look. Fences are being designed for aesthetics in addition to function with wood choices like Brazilian mahogany that are both durable and beautiful. Front porches are on the comeback, particularly in smaller homes. Catching up with neighbors while relaxing on the front porch seems to follow the increased sense of shared space families have nowadays with community gardens and shopping at farmers markets.



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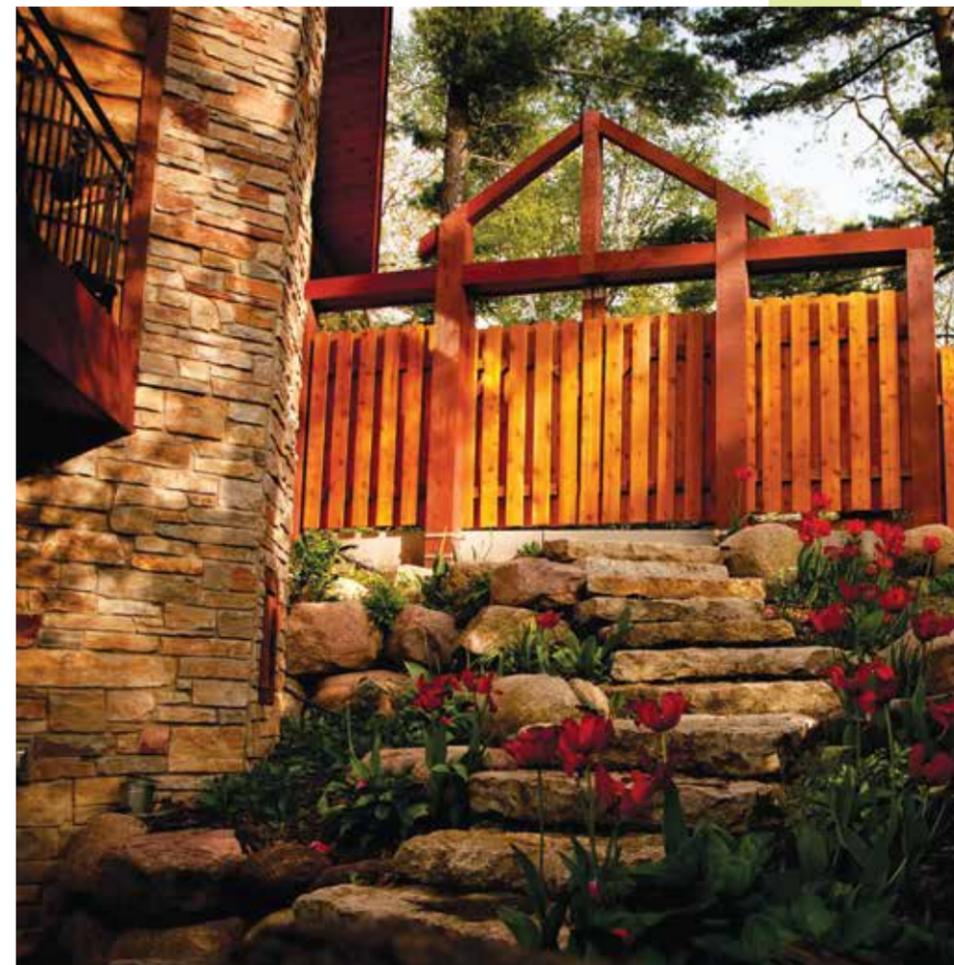
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feature

# Lay of the Land

Pat Blair found her life's work and a sense of community in the traditionally male-dominated field of lawn care and landscaping.

**I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GRADUATE** from the UW with a degree in art and a background in horticulture when Blair Lawn and Landscape was first born. That was 30 years ago, in May of 1984.

I knew that returning to the suburbs of Illinois—where I had grown up—was not in any way what I wanted to do with my life. I decided instead to use my experience from the park district in Illinois, the small lawn care business my sister and I had back in high school, and my work experience at the local Jung's Garden Center to stay in Madison.

More than any of that, though, I knew my passion was to be outside and to be artistically creative, so I decided at that moment to put an ad in the local paper, calling myself Blair Lawn Care. It was a scary and incredibly powerful feeling all at once. I had a little '79 Datsun pickup



Photographed by Beth McConnell

truck and some pruning tools and a mower, and I was starting a business.

### GRASSROOTS

Thinking back on my life growing up, I always strived to do what I was passionate about. The landscaping industry, being outside, and creating with Mother Nature were in line with what brought me joy.

Yes, there were critics who thought only a male could run a bobcat, or plant a big tree, or dig in the dirt. Thankfully I had the desire and people along the way to encourage me to do what I was passionate about and to do it well.

These challenges with gender-norms were not unfamiliar to me. Growing up, my sister and I started playing hockey on the ponds and were the only two girls on the lagoon in Lombard, Illinois. When I came to Madison, I got to be part of the Women's Ice Hockey Club team, where we were pioneers in the arena of women playing the sport. I remember the challenges with getting people to accept and take us seriously.

Once an older guy asked me, "Why do you want to play hockey?"

"Because I love the game," I answered simply.

I believe when you are able to do things you are passionate about, it makes the journey that much easier and hopefully shines a light on what doors can be opened. Mother Nature doesn't ask an acorn not to become an oak tree, now does she?

I believe a lot of my initial interest in landscaping came at the age of 12 when my dad passed and my twin sister and I had to take care of our home for my mom. Living on a corner



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## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Moving from Brutalist to Bright

VAULT INTERIORS & DESIGN  
CARRIE SIMPSON, OWNER

Industrial design with a Brutalist influence has been quite a trend for the last few years. And while that is still largely influencing design, I think that we are going to start to see the polar opposite—Fresh Traditional. Bright, bold, sunny colors, white casework, and fine craftsman details. Light-infused rooms that feel uplifting and energizing.

### Green Design for Greener Living



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PATRICIA BLAIR, OWNER

Trends in the landscape industry for 2015 include a wider selection of Permeable Paver brick. Used for patios, walkways, and driveways, these pavers allow water to infiltrate into the ground, replenishing ground water and reducing runoff into storm sewers. Also Live Roofs which are a selection of drought-tolerant plant material grown in trays, increase cooling effects especially at commercial sites. Live Walls are vertical "walls" of plantings that can be anchored to the walls of a building or on a movable stand by a patio to create privacy and make gardening easily accessible for anyone, including those with disabilities. Combine herbs, annuals, hardy perennials, and lettuce or table greens, and you can have a garden without having to bend over to tend to your garden, and you add privacy to your patio area.



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lot, we had lots of grass to mow and plenty of shrubs to prune, plus side-walks and a double driveway to shovel in the winter. I remember taking to it naturally, enjoying it and wanting everything to always look nice.

That led my sister Pam and me to start a business doing lawn care and small landscape projects. We worked together for a summer and found we both loved the work, but we had different ideas about how to run it, so we parted ways and I headed off the college.

When I was deciding what to study, I remember horticulture and art were my two passions, even though I had no idea where they might lead me. My mom kept telling me to take typing and office skills because women were always needed to do office work (this was in the early eighties). I would laugh, knowing there was truth in what she said, but that it was not me at all.

**It took time, but it happened, and I met some extremely talented people and great mentors, such as David Watts and Paul Ganshert, who inspired me to continue on and helped me make good business decisions.**

My first client was an elderly woman named Frances Borchardt who had a large property on Fish Hatchery Road. I would come once a week and hand push a mower on her quarter acre lawn, weed and prune the shrubs, and rake leaves when needed. Frances recognized my passion for work and would often invite me in for a sandwich and to share some stories of how she and her husband had built their house and raised two kids. I still remember her to this day and how her kindness and encouragement kept me going. She would pass my name on to other friends, and I was suddenly building a nice client base. I wasn't making a lot of money, but every day was mine to schedule, work, and play as I wanted.

### GROWING PAINS

My desire to grow and take on more challenges was huge. In part it comes from being an athlete all my life and wanting to challenge myself to see how much better I could be. Plus getting to do physical work in the sun and was a great way to stay in shape. It all fit right into my lifestyle.

As my company grew, so did the challenges. Once I had a business phone number set up, I began receiving calls asking for "Mr. Blair," who they assumed was the owner. Most were shocked and would wonder how a female could do such "heavy" work.

That continued for years: mail, phone calls, etc., all directed to Mr. Pat Blair or Mr. Blair.

Once I was able to establish a solid reputation and get signage on trucks, all of that began to subside. Then I had to work through proving to bankers and suppliers that I deserved a business account and was looking long-term. Many asked why I wanted to do landscaping because it was "man's work," and others wondered what "my husband" thought.

### PAVING THE WAY

I persisted and established business with a local bank and Madison Block and Stone, which is still one of our main suppliers for materials.

I was encouraged to join the Madison Chapter of the Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association by Liza from Avante Gardening. The first meeting I attended was in a smoke-filled room with 15 male landscape contractors, half of whom fell asleep during the meeting. I didn't see the value of joining, but Liza kept encouraging me to come back. She said it would be changing, and new members were coming in that would support the companies we were trying to build.

It took time, but it happened, and I met some extremely talented peo-

ple and great mentors, such as David Watts and Paul Ganshert, who inspired me to continue on and helped me make good business decisions.

That group has been a key to my success along the way. Being able to network with other business owners and rub elbows with some of the top contractors in the state has been of huge value to me.

In 2001, I was elected president of our chapter and served through 2003. Together we installed community projects such as the engraved walk at Agrace Hospice, the Shorewood Elementary School kids' area, Ronald McDonald House landscaping, and we continue to do the Garden Expo central display every year. Though our name has changed (now WNLA, Wisconsin Nursery Landscape Association), this group continues to be a main source of knowledge and inspiration for me, and now I get to share my knowledge with other, younger members.

### WEATHERING THE STORMS

There have been a variety of challenges over the years: the weather and its unpredictability, surviving a recession or two, as well as labor shortages in the industry. These are all challenges that force me to be creative and seek out wisdom where I can. Of course, Mother Nature will always have the last say, and after 30 years in business I realize that there may not be a "normal" summer or winter anymore, and still we must continue on.

While I feel accepted as a woman business owner, I was recently reminded that some things in the world take longer to change. I was volunteering with my neighborhood group to do leaf raking for those who are elderly or unable. Our group consisted of three guys, two other women, and me.

Upon arrival at the last residence on our list, the elderly gentleman poked his head out and said, "Oh, you even have gals doing the work!"

I could smile and think how far I've really come. ■

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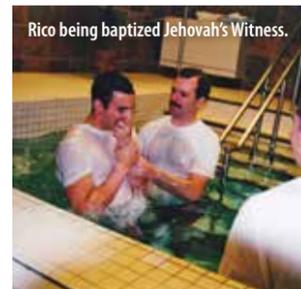


# Home-maker

Former **Plan B nightclub** co-owner **Rico Sabitini** talks about growing up Jehovah's Witness, being disfellowshipped after coming out, and helping others find the home they need.

**I GREW UP IN MCFARLAND**, a small community right outside of Madison. McFarland is made up of primarily white, middle class folks who value family and like the small town feel. Being raised a Jehovah's Witness meant my mother and father thought McFarland was a perfect location to raise children. My father was a middle school teacher in the Madison school district, and my mother ran a home daycare.

Practicing the religion at a young age was more than a mere challenge. My mother prepped



Rico being baptized Jehovah's Witness.

me for what lay ahead when I would attend public school and living up to biblical standards. I was set apart from the rest of the kids in school, and so ridicule and persecution became a part of daily living. The key to survival without going insane was finding a good group of young people to associate with that accepted me for who I was. I guess that rule not only applied then but clearly still applies today.

In high school I broke away from religion for a while to explore the world and what existed outside the Old and New Testaments. This was an exciting time. The restraints were lifted, and I ran amuck. I was met with an onslaught of feelings as adolescence took hold. I turned to drinking, drugs, and acting like a badass to cover the underlying feelings that were trying to surface. After finally graduating from high school I went to MATC for Real Estate Development. Along with college came the "college experience" of girls, partying, and paying your own bills. This is where I really learned that moving out the day after graduating high school wasn't going to be as easy as I thought.

Despite the sudden upheaval from everything I knew to be my life, it felt like the burden of secrecy had been lifted from my body.

## GETTING ENGAGED

After being on my own for a while, I did some soul searching and thought going back to God would help me fight the inner struggle of not being comfortable with who I was. In truth, looking back I think it was more of a refuge where I could not have to deal with the fact that I was gay. I worked my way toward baptism, which required a year and a half of intense Bible study and living a life based on Biblical principles. I went door-to-door preaching the good news of God's Kingdom and had plenty of interesting experiences with property owners who didn't care for us being on their property. About a year after baptism, I met a girl and, as was custom, we became engaged. But at age 24 the feelings boiling underneath it all were coming to a head.

## FIRST LOVE

During my engagement I stumbled across a farm boy from up north. He, like I, was from a very traditional family, was scared to death to come out, and looked at the "gay inside him as a disease." We were a comfort to each other and both realized we weren't alone in dealing with this thing we saw as blight. Needless to say, our relationship developed very quickly. We talked daily on the phone for almost four months before we ever met in person. I will never forget the feeling the first time I met him in person. It was a roller coaster of emotion that one can only hope to experience at least once in their life.

Extreme confusion from the feelings that had developed for the farmer along with the guilt I had for my unfaithfulness to my fiancé led me to my elders to finally explain the weight I was carrying. I begged and pleaded for help and guidance with what I was dealing with, and for mercy for the "act" I had committed. Despite my utter remorse and sobbing cry for help, they disfellowshipped me, and my whole life changed in a matter of two hours. My fiancé and my relationship with my mother and my friends were all no longer allowed. I was shunned

### Environmental Testing for Safer Homes



AMERISPEC  
REBECCA LAIRD, INSPECTOR

I'm seeing clients installing radon mitigation systems even when their house tests low for the gas. This is due to the fact that radon levels are impossible to predict because of weather and geological factors. Egress windows are also something that homeowners are considering for older houses. If you spend any time in your lower level, an egress window is a safe and aesthetically-pleasing addition. Finally, a lot of homeowners are choosing to build a rain garden to contain runoff and to make sure water doesn't build up against the foundation and go into the basement. They are a cheaper way to control water while adding beauty and value to your property.

### Creating a Home for Your Future Selves



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## WHAT'S TRENDING

### Downsizing and Sharing



CRB INTERIORS  
BILL BEAUDREAU, INTERIOR DESIGNER

A continuing result of the 2009 economic downturn is smaller and shared spaces. It is in housing, offices, transportation, and more. Since we continue to move toward smaller homes, we'll seek out new spaces to socialize and eat.

Offices will incorporate café tables, lounges, and other quiet alternatives in ancillary spaces for necessary productivity. This allows for connectivity, sharing ideas, and even focusing. Bike rental and vehicle sharing schemes have been a boon to navigating streets and parking headaches. A community car service, community bike rentals, or apps such as Lyft or Hailo utilize technology to reduce our ecological footprint through the shared experience.

### Windows to the Soul of Your House



EXQUISITE WINDOWS & DECOR  
ANDREA HEDQUIST, OWNER/DESIGNER

Pantone color of the year for 2015 is Marsala, a robust, earthy, wine red that will instantly add warmth. It lives comfortably with other neutrals and accents and brings out the beauty of wood and leather. Long, lean drapery panels mounted near the ceiling and off the glass are making windows seem even larger and frame views beautifully. Layered treatments of blinds and shades with soft drapery fashions and top treatments are still very popular, and we'll be seeing embellished fabrics and statement hardware. Motorized options using smart phones, or your home automation system are more affordable than ever!



Corey Gresen and Rico on New Years Eve at Plan B.

BOTTOM TWO:  
Rico behind the bar at Plan B.



There were some moments when I found myself waking up at the club after a long night of crying into a bottle. In the end, though, it did work out, and, more important, Corey and I will be life-long friends.



Helping his client purchase a home.

split. Getting bought out by your business partner can be similar to a divorce. Terms need to be set, and things aren't always mutually agreeable. Let's just say there were some moments when I found myself waking up at the club after a long night of crying into a bottle. In the end, though, it did work out. Plan B is still thriving, and, more important, Corey and I will be life-long friends.

It's weird to think how life comes full circle. When I went to college I studied Real Estate, for which I was always passionate. I remember reading the income property advertisements and seeing all the homes for sale in the Sunday newspaper when I was still living with my parents. I decided this was a great opportunity to get a start in a field I've always felt drawn to work in.

I studied for (and passed) my licensing exam shortly before leaving Plan B. After the buyout was complete, I joined with RE/MAX Preferred. I had met so many wonderful people and wanted to continue building relationships with the same community where I'd been able to make my home. I wasn't going to do that in a cubicle. With the skills I had learned over the years in sales and running my own business, I couldn't think of a better fit than Real Estate. I was recently named "Rookie of the Year" for RE/MAX Wisconsin and continue to develop a thriving new business in the field I love. I look forward to spending many more years helping the community that supported me with open arms when I needed it the most. ■

## WHAT'S TRENDING

### All That Glitters Is Gold



FONTAINE DESIGNS  
BARRY AVERY, OWNER

We have seen jewel tones and peacock colors playing an important role in interiors, and these tones continue to be strong: hues of royal, indigo, aquamarine and navy. One of the brand new trends is "all that glitters is gold." Glittery, metallic, shiny gold accessories are playing an important role going into spring—lamps, stools, vases, mirrors. Copper is the new finish for faucets, cabinet hardware, pendants, and door handles to name a few. Gray is the new beige. Two or three years ago it was mixed with shades of yellow, citrine, and marigold, but whole rooms are now being done in shades of gray for a tone on tone and very peaceful and soothing interior.

### Personalized Style to Match Your Taste



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PHILLIP LEVY, DESIGNER

Pantone's color of the year is Marsala, a rich earthy red, and while it—and approximations of it—have been well-represented at the major markets, blue was omnipresent, mentioned as a "hot" color by almost every manufacturer. Indigo seems to have caught on as a favorite hue, but grey-blue, teal, and navy tones were everywhere at the most recent home furnishings market in High Point, North Carolina. Furniture has become very eclectic, and the mix is most important. Mid-century modern has become very vogue. Both traditional styles and hard edge contemporary are classic.

"Rookie of the Year" RE/MAX Wisconsin 2014

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from the congregation and anyone else who was a baptized Jehovah's Witness. Despite the sudden upheaval from everything I knew to be my life, it felt like the burden of secrecy had been lifted from my body.

### A PLAN B FOR LIFE

After coming out I started to explore the local gay scene a bit and realized there was something missing. I became determined to change that. I met this edgy, blond boy from LA that thought he was the coolest thing to hit Wisconsin since the invention of cheese curds. We had the same dream and goal: to open the best gay dance club Wisconsin queers could be proud to call home.

Many challenges lay ahead: location, funding, concept, timing, a name—and all of the things that go into starting any business. We quickly got to work and after two years of meetings with Corey Gresen, Plan B opened its doors on Pride weekend, August of 2009.

Plan B became more than I expected. It blew up immediately into a mecca for not only the gay community, but also as the place to dance in Madison. I enjoyed success early on, loving every minute of it. I was able to give back to the community that I could now call home and also support many organizations that I was a part of. I'd not only finally integrated myself into the community but also helped create a place that many others could call home.

### GOODBYE, AND HELLO AGAIN

After five years and achieving all I had set out to do I decided it was time to "B OUT." I told Corey that I had thoughts of leaving, and once you don't have a passion for your work it's time to get out. He was less than excited. I had held the reins at B during my tenure, and it was time for him to step up whether he liked it or not. It wasn't the easiest

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## Not-so-Innocents Abroad

Historian **Dick Wagner** explores the life and thoughts of Cooksville's Ralph Warner, seen as an important figure in historic preservation.

**IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY**, Mark Twain took a trip to Europe and wrote travel columns back to America. These were later published as the book *Innocents Abroad*. "Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things can not be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime," he noted. In the early twentieth century, a number of Wisconsin gay men seemed to accept this advice and traveled abroad. They, however, would discover views of men that many would not have thought so wholesome.

Following the Great War (1914–1918) many Americans flocked to Europe, and the expatriate community flourished by communicating back to America its views on literature and the arts. Some of these gay Wisconsin travelers would record what they found about homosexuality and must have communicated this information discreetly back in the states.

Ralph Warner of Cooksville, Wisconsin, traveled to Europe in 1928–29 and kept diaries of his observations. Will Fellows, in *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture*, has shown how Warner's efforts to save the historic pioneer "House Next Door" helped to revive the village of Cooksville.

### THE HAPPY TRAVELER

Warner's travel diaries reveal many things about the men he met, though almost nothing of women he met. For example, the ship's doctor on the way over was "a very young man with a delightful voice and youthful laugh." Others on board ship were a "sad looking young Russian" and "the other young person a Major Wise who has a farm near Newfoundland and has one of the most pleasant personalities I've met in many a day." On another occasion "a very interesting waiter" served him who he found out was also a footman at Buckingham Palace.

Warner does a number of things any gay tourist today would have on his must-do list, like seeing Michelangelo's nude sculpture of David in Florence ("beyond any idea I could have had of it") and visiting Hadrian's villa outside Rome. Hadrian was the Roman emperor who erected statues all over the empire to his male favorite, Antoninus. Oscar Wilde used references to the favorite as expressions of same sex love.

Of his visit to Capri, a place also famous for homosexual travelers, Warner notes the natives from a family gave songs and dances where "two of the younger children were very good to look at and the boy especially interesting in the dance." Of the Italians, "I like the people,

these guides are such gentle fellows and when they are possessed of blue eyes with long dark lashes they certainly move me. We had such a nice charmer yesterday..."

The trip to Algeria resulted in the following entry: "I found these Arabs quite good natured chaps almost like boys playing and joking, laughing." About the French staff in Algiers, they "interest me very much. They are anxious to learn English and I should like nothing better than to teach them. The waiter in the dining room is a splendid type and would make a wonderful servant." Warner romanticizes the idea of bringing a male European servant to America.

### GAY LONDON

During a 1928–29 trip in London, Warner engages with two young men. One is Hamilton Beatty of Madison who Warner knew was in the English city but not where and then one night discovers him at the theater several rows in front of him. "Ham," as he is called, "certainly looked good to me and I had the warmest little feeling about my heart all evening. He did make me feel he was glad to see me." The Madisonian subsequently is asked to dinner for "a real visit." On another occasion he records lunch with "Ham."

At the Tower of London, he strikes up a conversation with "a young southerner from Atlanta." They talked "quite awhile," visited churches and came back to the hotel and rested. The southerner was leaving for Paris the next day but in the diary he notes, "I should like to have seen

"Ham," as he is called, "certainly looked good to me and I had the warmest little feeling about my heart all evening. He did make me feel he was glad to see me."

even more of him and hope he looks in" on his way back. Several days later he meets the chap again after finding himself in Piccadilly in the evening. Matt Houlbrook, in *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, shows this area was the stalking ground for West End "poofs," an English term for homosexuals. The term Dilly Boys was used for the working class young men who sought companionship and sometimes robbed the better off.

Whether Warner and his Southern friend were just playing tourist viewing the scenery or participating in the sexual underground remains unclear. The Atlanta chap had a tale of woe whereby he was approached by a fellow supposedly hoping to go to America and wanted to know things about the United States. The would-be traveler and a pal of his then relieved the Atlanta gentleman of all his cash. Warner thought the Atlanta native had been "foolish."

Clearly Ralph Warner used foreign travel to find interesting sights for a gay man. Many of these were noteworthy enough to put down. Others may have escaped the pen.

One writer described in a national magazine Warner's preservation work and noted his performing non-normative gender roles like cooking, cleaning, and dish washing. This writer placed him among the "members of a secret fraternity." Apparently Ralph Warner was, as gay historian Allan Berube has observed, in the "long tradition in which people have used other cultures to discover and explore their own homosexuality." ■



**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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**MARK POCAN**

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## Protecting Our Youth

**Congressman Mark Pocan** issues a rallying cry for the movement to turn its sights more thoroughly on creating safe and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth.

AS WE BEGIN 2015, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community has many reasons to celebrate and look forward to the future. LGBTQ Americans can marry the person they love in 36 states and counting, an incredible expansion of this right in just a few short years. Workplace protections for LGBTQ employees are more prevalent than ever before, with local governments across the country—including in Madison, Milwaukee, and Appleton—prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In addition, we saw President Obama expand these protections for federal contractors through executive action, and LGBTQ Americans have greater access than ever to affordable health insurance through the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. As our community marches forward and makes more progress, I want to take a moment to highlight an issue we must continue to tackle head-on: school safety and anti-bullying efforts.

The legislation is named after Tyler Clementi, a freshman at Rutgers University who ended his life after his roommate filmed and streamed footage of Tyler with another male.

We know bullying and harassment of LGBTQ students and students perceived to be LGBTQ is both widespread and incredibly damaging. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) 2013 National School Climate Survey, 74 percent of LGBT students have experienced verbal harassment due to sexual orientation and 55 percent due to their gender identity. Many of these students also face physical harassment and even physical assault because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Even LGBTQ students who do not directly encounter bullying report frequently hearing homophobic and transphobic remarks from peers. The detrimental effects of an unsafe school environment are severe; bullied students experience lower grade point averages, are less likely to go to college, and suffer low-



er self-esteem and psychological well-being.

As our community makes progress on a number of issues, it is time to utilize the strength of the movement to protect LGBTQ youth. We must take bold, collaborative action to fight unsafe school environments; this is a national problem that demands a response.

In Congress, I am proud to support an array of proposals to create a safe learning environment for all students. In the upcoming weeks, I will introduce the **Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act**, a bill requiring colleges and universities receiving federal funds to implement an anti-harassment policy prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, among other criteria. The legislation is named after Tyler Clementi, a freshman at Rutgers University who ended his life after his roommate filmed and streamed footage of Tyler in his dormitory with another male.

I will also continue to advocate for legislation like the **Safe Schools Improvement Act**, which requires school districts receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to implement codes of conduct targeting bullying and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. They offer legal protections for students at all levels of education, providing a vital resource for these students and sending a clear message that targeting LGBTQ youth is unacceptable.

While we need student protections at the federal level, we also need action at the local level to change destructive behaviors and



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

ensure the safety of LGBTQ youth. It is critical that we foster a culture of support for LGBTQ students both in classrooms and throughout communities. Supportive, LGBTQ-conscious faculty and student-run organizations like Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) are vital to providing a comfortable environment for all students. Organizations like GSAFE, which is based in Madison and works to promote and support GSAs, provide additional resources to help educators and students break down bullying culture.

Schools also must be equipped with the resources to educate both faculty and students about issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, including offering positive examples of LGBTQ people and history in the classroom. All of these efforts made at the local level in classrooms and hallways across America are how we will see concrete change and improvement for all students.

From the halls of Congress to classrooms across Wisconsin, we must work together to ensure the safety and security of our students. We must demolish the culture of bullying and harassment affecting too many young people and instead foster an environment in schools that allows each student to reach his or her full potential. I look forward to continuing the fight to improve the lives of LGBT youth and I hope you will join me as we strive to make progress on this issue. ■

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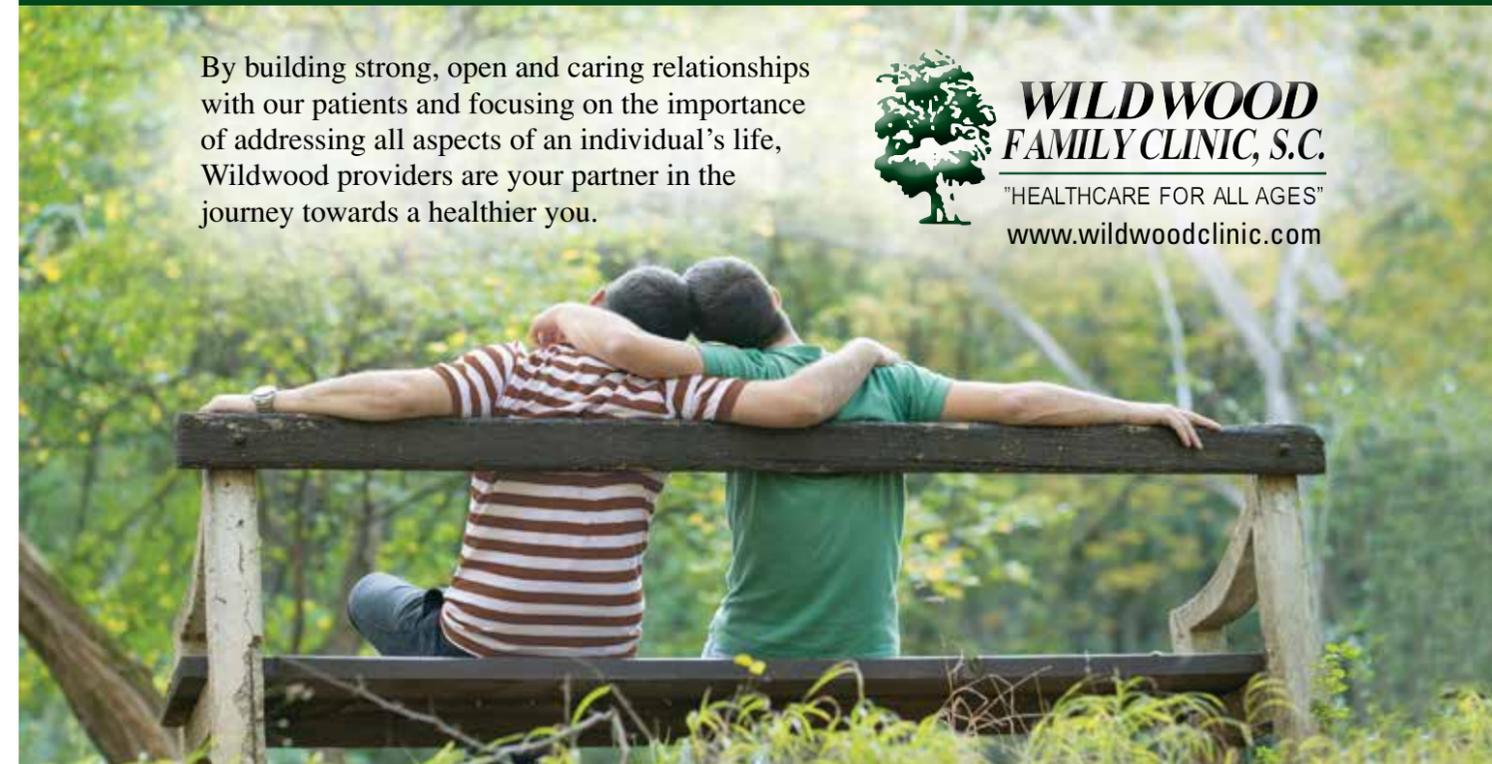
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## Pushing Forward

**Kristen Petroschius, Cindy Breunig, and Laura McNeil** of Groundwork urge continued constructive dialogue and action around issues of racial disparity in Dane County.

**AN OPEN LETTER** penned by the Young Gifted and Black Coalition (YGB) and the response from Chief Koval have deepened the conversation about racial disparities in Madison.

As Dane County leads the nation in racial disparities, particularly in the criminal justice system, there is no doubt that the world we experience is drastically different based on our race. We are very grateful to YGB for pushing this conversation forward, speaking honestly about experiences with police, and articulating a vision for alternatives. In reading Chief Koval's response, we appreciate his honesty and good intentions to work for racial justice and many of the solutions he outlined in his statement for shifting institutional racism within the criminal justice system. At the same time, some of his responses highlight the gap in understanding the impact police presence

has in communities of color. Though there is a need for protection and accountability in our communities, there is also a lived reality in communities of color that policing acts as an "occupying force." This is what YGB is speaking to when they ask for alternatives and more community control.

People of color often have contact with the police and have done nothing wrong. As white folks, we do not have similar experiences. From people in our lives who are Black, we have heard of the following experiences happening here in Madison:

- A Black woman is meeting up with a friend of hers, a Black man, to go for a run through a park one fall night after dusk. Despite the fact that she leaves her car with ankle weights and sweatpants on, two cop cars pull up and detain them both, charging the woman as a prostitute.

- A Black man tries to attend his son's elementary school graduation. He is unaware that he needed a ticket to enter and, while trying to explain the situation to the police officer at the door, hears his son's name called. He leans into the door to glimpse him walking across the stage when the officer physically pushes him out of the doorway and onto the ground, then proceeds to arrest him.

- A Black person pulls onto a main road on their drive to work. Several times a week, they find a cop car trailing them and running their license plates, trying to find some reason to pull them over.

- A homeless Black person is on the lake fishing early one morning with all his possessions on him, including a sleeping bag. A cop makes an accusation that he must have slept in the park overnight, which is illegal, and arrests him.

These experiences are incredibly traumatizing, and we can completely understand how they can lead to a desire to have no contact with the police. Seemingly "neutral" police activities such as patrolling through the neighborhood, playing with kids in a park, and chit-chatting in the neighborhood are always overshadowed by the fact that the police have both the role and the power to drastically change the course of a person of color's life in a moment.

For Chief Koval to call into question the desires of the YGB and then state he will actually increase police presence in neighborhoods can feel like a targeted threat, even when it is with the good intention of building relationships. It is understandable that the Chief perceives police as the "guardians of the community." However, we cannot erase the lived experiences we wrote about above or the long history of distrust between communities of color and the police. It will take a long future of strengthening relationships for that to change. We encourage conversation and joint problem solving to make our community safer.

We strongly support the YGB and their desires to have more ownership and decision-making power about what occurs in their communities. We strongly encourage public entities, especially our local government and law enforcement agencies, to remain open to feedback and communication, even when it is difficult to hear or feels like an attack. The neighborhoods of color subjected to higher rates of policing certainly feel as though they are under attack. We believe we can all work through these challenges and come to a conclusion that works for everyone.

At the YWCA Racial Justice Summit in 2013, Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr. asked how Dane County could both lead the nation in racial disparities and be filled with such nice, liberal white people at the same time. Nice white liberalism may be exactly the force that allows those of us who are white to call out racial disparities while refusing to think critically about changing the institutions, systems, and structures that produce such results. As the YGB demonstrates, institutions, systems, and structures involved in producing these results involve the Madison Police Department and other local law enforcement agencies, although law enforcement is certainly not the only source of these disparities.

That being said, it is undeniable that the MPD and other local law enforcement agencies are the institutions responsible for arresting people: the entry point into the criminal justice system. If there were no arrests, entry into the criminal justice system would not happen. What would it look like to analyze the policies and practices in place that are disproportionately impacting communities of color and make change? Perhaps we can simply cease to arrest people for offenses that do not actually cause harm to others or impact public safety, such as unpaid fines or sleeping in a park? And instead we can expand on our restorative and community-based approaches that are working to resolve problems in a deeper way.

Just as we are pointing the finger at the police department, we believe it is important to

point the finger at ourselves. Because of white privilege, those of us who are white usually experience the police to be benevolent and helpful. We are conditioned to call on them for assistance whenever we have a problem, even for problems that could be better solved through direct communication between individuals, like calling the police on a neighbor's barking dog or for moments when we confuse discomfort with being unsafe, like calling the police to report people yelling at each other on the street.

Neighborhood associations in Madison can also play into this problem when encountering challenges by calling for an increased police presence or successfully advocating for an increase in funding to the police department. Such a response comes both from a conditioned lack of creativity and absence of community-building to address issues in ways that get at the root cause as well as an entire worldview shaped by the experiences of white privilege.

We need to transform the systems that lead to extremely high arrest and incarceration rates of African Americans in Dane County or we will continue to get the same results. Those of us who are white especially need to reflect deeply on the ways we have come to value and trust the police, just as it requires the police to honestly acknowledge the ways they are complicit in a system that at the very least makes people of color feel unsafe and at the very most upholds racism. It should, of course, be emphasized that it is not law enforcement's actions alone that uphold racism, but all types of institutions and cultural forces working together. Since this is the case, all of us need to engage in efforts to build alternative models for conflict resolution and accountability in our communities that are rooted in trusting relationships and effective solutions.

We thank YGB for speaking truth publicly about their experiences and desires about policing in our community. We thank Chief Koval for his open and honest response. Such deep, direct engagement is the only way we can continue to work hard toward building a world rooted in racial justice. Thank you YGB for helping to pull those of us who are white outside of our worlds of comfort and "niceness" and for asking us to critically reflect on the ways we are all complicit in a system that demonstrates Black lives don't matter. #blacklivesmatter. ■



**KRISTEN PETROSHIUS** is the Executive Director of GSAFE. She's also a member of Groundwork, a white, Madison-based racial justice organization that supports people of color working for racial justice.



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PHOTO BY EMILY MILLS



# Coping with Serious Illness

A Lyme disease diagnosis forced **Dr. Sue Gill** to rearrange everything about how she approaches and thinks about her own life and what it means to deal with chronic illness.

**THREE YEARS AGO** I was standing in line in a bank in Costa Rica to exchange money while on a much needed vacation. My vision suddenly got blurry, sounds became distant, and everything started spinning.

Next thing I knew I woke up lying on the marble floor of the bank with my partner shouting my name at me, and two Costa Rican ladies had my legs tossed over their shoulders as if they were helping me give birth. They were shouting at me in Spanish, which I don't understand, but their faces looked very concerned.



Please do not ever say to someone who is ill, "You look great," or, "But you don't look sick," or, "Don't worry, you are going to be fine." Those are probably some of the most dismissive things you can say, and they feel isolating to the person hearing them.

But it wasn't until after I returned to the States that things got weird. I fainted twice that day in Costa Rica and had a fever the rest of the trip. In the following weeks and months, new and confusing symptoms arose, each one piling on top of the previous list of misery. I kept nearly fainting, the fever persisted, and muscles all over my body started twitching, sometimes strong enough to wake me from sleep.

I became so weak that I literally had to crawl upstairs, I felt sudden stabs of pain so sharp that I thought I was being stung by a hornet or stepping on a nail, my joints hurt like arthritis, but the pain kept moving. My

skin hurt. Every time I ate, I'd start to faint and only come to as my head was about to hit the plate. Scary and violent images flashed through my mind. My heart rate would often beat as high as 140 while I was just standing stationary.

I was so confused that some days I could not figure out how to cross the road, and something was so wrong with my muscles that I couldn't make them work unless I concentrated. One day I suddenly lost vision in my eye. My heart beat so abnormally that I went to bed many nights certain that I'd die from a cardiac problem before morning. When I did wake up, I was immediately aware of this deep heaviness that invaded all of my muscles, obvious before I even moved in the morning. For nine months I woke up each morning hoping that the heaviness was gone, disappointed when it was still there—often also disappointed that my heart had not given out in the night.

Of course I went to many doctors during this time. Test results were frustratingly normal, except for a possible current, recent, or past mono infection. My doctor therefore concluded that it was mono and told me to wait it out. However, after six months of waiting for the "mono" to resolve, while symptoms continued to worsen, my doctor concluded, "You now have post-viral fatigue. I can do nothing for you, except help you fill out disability papers."

### TURNING POINT

I felt lost, abandoned, helpless, unwilling to continue living as I was but unable to fix it. Out of desperation I made an appointment with a doctor in private practice that specialized in Integrative Medicine. He listened to me for two hours as I cataloged the scope of the illness. It was a relief to me to at least have a medical professional listen to my story and take it seriously.

At the end of the appointment, he stated that he wanted to run a Lyme Disease test. I explained that I had been tested for Lyme early in the illness and that it had come back negative. He explained that the current state of Lyme testing is terrible and that the tests

often produce false negatives. The test relies on measuring antibody response to the Lyme infection, but Lyme inhibits the body's ability to produce those antibodies. In addition, the current testing and treatment guidelines for Lyme appear to be more informed by opinion and politics than by good science, so the best path to diagnosis is through good clinical interviewing. Finally, he explained that a high percentage of ticks in Wisconsin carry infections other than Lyme, and these infections can also make a person very sick. I had never been tested for any of these other infections.

Weeks later I was surprised to learn that I was positive for an active Lyme infection. Subsequent testing also showed that I was positive for active Bartonella, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Babesia infections.

### LIVING WITH LYME

In contrast to what many have heard, Lyme Disease is not an easy infection to treat, especially if it is advanced, or if there are co-infections. Treatment has been long, brutal, expensive, heart wrenching, confusing, and very isolating. After more than two years of treatment, my health remains quite fragile, although it is significantly improved from where it was prior to treatment. I was only recently able to return to work full-time, and I still have plenty of bad days. Relapses seem to be a part of this constellation of infections, so I live with the knowledge that I could return to that hell at any moment.

Although I am still too close to these events to fully process them, I have learned a few key things in the past three years.

To everybody, whatever your current level of health, find a way to get the little life out of what you've got. I promise you, things can get much, much worse and with lightning speed. I will probably never get to go on those backpacking trips I had planned, or rehab a house, or sail the Pacific. I grieve the loss of those possibilities. I also do not know if the health I've got will hold, so I need to carve that paddle, explore local wetlands, and cook some new dishes while I can.

If you struggle with ill health, my heart goes out to you. Work hard to find the bal-

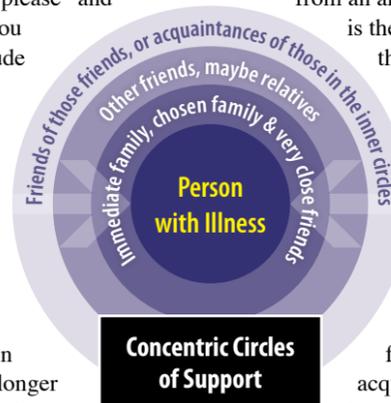


**SUE GILL** and her partner, Sheri, have lived in Madison since 2000. They keep busy with their two dogs, Frankie and Maslow. Sue is a psychologist in private practice and can be found at [madisontherapy.com](http://madisontherapy.com).

ance between acceptance of what you've got and refusal to give up. That's a really hard balance to find. If you've been through some sort of serious illness, you already know that some people will really step up in amazing ways, while others will deeply disappoint you. That is a part of this journey. Be open to allowing those who step up to do what they are good at, and try not to spend energy on resenting those who have let you down.

### TAKE CARE OF YOU

Serious illness is inherently selfish. That's OK, but be nice and say "please" and "thank you" even when you don't feel like it. An attitude of gratitude toward those who are helping you will go a long way in helping them to endure in the long run. Be flexible. If you are no longer able to do the things you love, find new things to love. I used to love backpacking and mountain biking. Because I can no longer do that, I have taken up pad-



### SEEK TO SUPPORT

Finally, I want to share a model I call the Concentric Circles of Support that I learned from an area therapist. In the middle is the person with the illness. In the next circle are those who are closest to that person. It may be immediate family, or maybe more often with LGBTQ folks, chosen family and very close friends. The next circle contains other friends, maybe relatives. The next circle contains friends of those friends, or acquaintances of those in the inner circles. The key to this

model is that all support goes in an inward direction and never outward. The acquaintances support the friends who support the close friends who support the person with the illness. Never the other way around! Some of the most stressful situations I've seen are when this rule is broken. For example, a mother who is supporting a child with cancer and who is being asked for information, advice, and support from a relative will be extra stressed because the rules of this model are being broken. The relative must only provide support to the mother who is supporting the ill child.

I rarely look at photos from that trip to Costa Rica. They are too painful. I see over-the-top joy on my face in pictures of me white water rafting, knowing that 48 hours later I came to on the marble floor of that bank. Core aspects of Me were permanently taken away through no fault of my own. In addition to continuing to fight for whatever level of health I'm able to attain, my task for the future has to include getting to know this new Me and coming up with a new bucket list because I'm not capable of most of the things on my old list.

If you or someone you love is in a similar situation, persevere. Don't give up. Cry when you need to, and keep moving forward in the way that best works for you. ■

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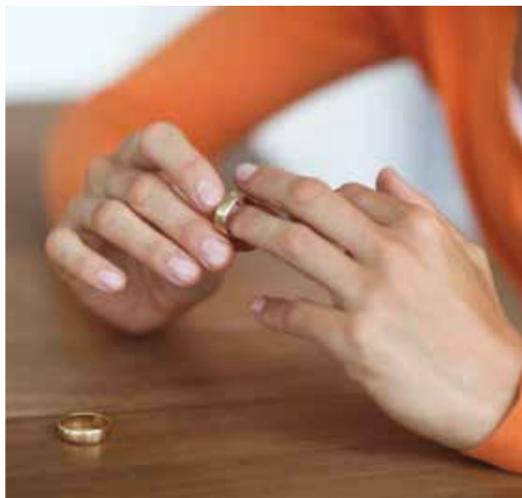
Attorney Christopher Krimmer explores the tricky technicalities of gay marriage and divorce and the patchwork of laws that impact couples even long after they've split.

**THE FACT THAT MARRIAGE** equality is now available to same-sex couples in Wisconsin is wonderful news and a significant step toward the civil rights of gay men and lesbians. Yet for some, the recognition of same-sex marriage has been a rude awakening.

Same-sex couples had been getting married for years before those marriages were recognized in Wisconsin on October 6, 2014. They'd been traveling to other states or countries where same-sex marriages were allowed. Massachusetts has been issuing marriage licenses for same-sex couples since 2004 and Canada even before then. The out-of-state marriages offered an opportunity for the couple to express their love, commitment, and affection for one another with the historical distinction of civil marriage. Granted, the marriages had no legal effect in Wisconsin, but they were nonetheless important ceremonial events for gay and lesbian couples.

And now, through the *Wolf v. Walker* decision, those marriages are finally recognized in Wisconsin. Same-sex spouses now enjoy all the rights, privileges, and obligations of marriage. This is welcome news for many of the couples who are happily married and living together, but it may come as a shock for those couples who have since separated. They find themselves now suddenly married to an ex-partner that they may not have seen in years. What are they supposed to do now?

In most situations, they will now need to get a divorce. The *Wolf v. Walker* decision not only required Wisconsin to grant same-sex



So at the time of the divorce in 2015, is it fair for the divorce Court to retroactively impose all of the obligations of marriage on Jill and Becky when they did not enjoy any of the benefits, rights, or privileges of the marriage during those same years?

marriages but also to treat same-sex marriages the same way it treats opposite-sex marriages, meaning it must now also recognize same-sex marriages that took place in other states. This can have a devastating impact on a couple who are no longer together. Neither spouse can remarry, they must file either joint tax returns or "married filing separately," they may need the other spouse's consent to list anyone other than

the spouse as a beneficiary on a retirement or life insurance policy, and they have a good faith duty to the other spouse in the management of their financial assets and accounts. These are only but a few of the hundreds of obligations and responsibilities a spouse owes to the other spouse or the government as a married couple.

If the spouses both agree on the terms of the divorce, then the divorce should be relatively straightforward. The problems arise when the parties do not agree on everything, such as the division of debts, property, and whether one spouse owes the other spouse maintenance (i.e. alimony). Under our "divorce statutes," the Court is to presume the property and debts are to be divided equally and may award maintenance to the lesser earning spouse. These laws may be objectively fair in the context of an opposite-sex couple who married and enjoyed all the benefits of marriage during their marriage, but is it fair to apply these laws to a same-sex couple who just recently began to enjoy those same benefits and protections?

Same-sex marriage is different from opposite-sex marriage. I am not speaking of the commitment, love, and affection they share, but of the legal aspects of the marriages that took place prior to Wisconsin recognizing same-sex marriage. For example, assume Jill and Becky went to Massachusetts to marry on January 15, 2004. They entered into a marriage knowing that it would not be recognized in their home state, or, at that time, by the federal government. The marriage was an important ceremonial event, but not a legal event, until now.

In contrast, assume John and Becky went to Massachusetts to marry on January 15, 2004. When they entered into the marriage, they had full knowledge that Wisconsin and the federal government would consider them to be married under both state and federal law.

Now, fast-forward eight years later: both couples separate in 2012. John and Becky would presumably get a divorce, which would divide their property and debts and determine whether maintenance should be awarded to one spouse. Now, what about Jill and Becky? In 2012, they were not allowed to divorce since their marriage was not recognized by the state of Wisconsin. Nor could they return to Massachusetts to divorce since Massachusetts requires at least one party to reside in the state to obtain a divorce. They were "wed-locked," meaning that there was no legal avenue for them to divorce.

Then the *Wolf v. Walker* decision comes along, and Wisconsin suddenly recognizes Jill and Becky's 2004 Massachusetts marriage. They will now need to file for divorce, but when the Court considers how to divide their property or award maintenance, how long should the Court consider the couple to have been married?

Marriage is a contract between each spouse and the state. Did Jill and Becky really contract to be subject to all of the obligations and rights of a spouse under Wisconsin law when they married in Massachusetts in 2004, a point in time when Massachusetts was the only state to recognize the validity of their marriage? They knew that once they returned to their home, Wisconsin would not provide them with any of the legal protections or obligations of marriage, even though they very well would have wanted those rights and obligations.

Certainly, John and Becky understood that their marriage would be recognized in Wisconsin once they returned home. The exact opposite was true for Jill and Becky. So at the time of the divorce in 2015, is it fair for the divorce Court to retroactively impose all of the obligations of marriage on Jill and Becky when they did not enjoy any of the benefits, rights, or privileges of the marriage during those same years? For example, is it fair for Becky to be liable for Jill's credit cards and tax obligations when Becky had absolutely no legal right to say or do anything about Jill's tax filings or credit card obligations? Or should Jill be required to pay maintenance to Becky when no duty of support was imposed by law during the course of their entire relationship?

Family courts are courts of equity, which means that the court has discretion to achieve a fair outcome for the parties. It is important that the Court recognize this legal distinction between a marriage that enjoyed all of the rights, benefits, and obligations of marriage during the relationship versus a marriage in which the parties operated under the legal premise (mandate) that the marriage was a legal nullity.

The nature of this inquiry will become less relevant over time. It only applies to couples who have been separated or will be divorced in the near future. A couple who remains married with the full recognition of having all the rights and obligations of marriage in Wisconsin will have presumably affirmed their legal status of wife and wife or husband and husband. It may be time for married couples to consider renewing their vows or seeking advice on a Marital Property Agreement. ■



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



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## Yoga for All

Instructor **Kelly Fox** talks about why creating truly inclusive spaces for queer and transgender people—in yoga and in life—requires more than just talk; it takes mindful practice.

**A FEW YEARS AGO**, a genderqueer friend of mine invited me to go to a yoga class with them to celebrate their healing from top surgery and their new sense of feeling at home in their body. In the moments before class started, they told me how empowered they felt to move through the world and not be perceived as a “woman.” Then the teacher walked in and greeted us with, “Hey ladies!” My friend was crushed. The teacher’s “ladies” had invalidated their identity. Too often trans\* and genderqueer people are misgendered, stared at, and even harassed at yoga studios due to ignorance and, sometimes, bigotry.

The response of many teachers and yoga studios to yoga’s diversity and inclusion problem is to claim, “We are open to everyone!” This is a beautiful intention, but there is a huge difference between saying that your classes are open to everyone and actually making that true.

The last few months have seen a marked increase in articles about yoga and diversity in the national media. Participating in these conversations has made me reflect on my own position as a queer yoga teacher in Madison. Over the past few years, I’ve worked to create safe, affirming yoga spaces for Madison’s LGBTQ community and to educate other yoga teachers and students about how to create pro-queer and pro-trans\* yoga spaces.

I fell in love with yoga over a decade ago after taking my first class. Yoga taught me to love and nurture myself into wholeness after struggling with anxiety disorders and self-loathing. I learned to honor my needs and boundaries, hold space for my feelings, and care deeply about my own suffering and the suffering of others. For me, yoga is about getting really honest about how I feel and what I need. It’s about breaking out of the trance of unworthiness and old stories and lies about how I’m flawed, defective, and undeserving of love. It gave me the strength to realize that my need for people to accept me as I am is not “too much.”

Yoga helped me to deal with the chronic stress of being a queer woman in this world. That’s what motivated me to become a full-time yoga teacher who does outreach yoga and healing work specifically with queer and transgender people—because we are a community that desperately needs healing and messages about self-love and radical acceptance. Yoga can not only serve as a tool to cope with the anxiety inherent in moving through the world as an LGBTQ person, but it can also help us to manage our reactivity to the daily microaggressions we all face. When we are able to pause, take a breath, and gather ourselves strongly, the weight of the world is less likely to crush us. But while queer and trans\* folks are a population who benefit immensely from a yoga practice, most yoga studios do not feel like safe spaces for many in the

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLA ECHEVERRIA

LGBTQ community.

The response of many teachers and yoga studios to yoga’s diversity and inclusion problem is to claim, “We are open to everyone!” This is a beautiful intention, but there is a huge difference between saying that your classes are open to everyone and actually making that true. Participating in diversity initiatives is a powerful way to transform our noble intention of inclusion into mindful action. That’s why I am passionate about bringing awareness to issues of queer/trans\* inclusion in yoga.

I do workshops on teaching LGBTQ-inclusive classes that train teachers and studio workers about everything from how to use gender-neutral language to the importance of creating gender-neutral changing rooms. I also teach yoga classes specifically for queer and trans\* people so that folks who feel unwelcome at studios have a safe place to practice. I’ve taught queer/trans\* yoga everywhere from feminist co-ops and dorm basements to my own living room!

Some in the yoga community question the necessity of these initiatives. They think that identity has no place in yoga, i.e., “Identity is a fantasy of the ego! We are all of the same heart!” and that fostering space for marginalized folks within yoga is somehow divisive. I disagree. I believe that we should honor and celebrate each part of who we are. As teachers, we have an important platform from which to model compassionate and authentic living. I cannot ask my students to open themselves up, to bring their whole selves to the mat, and to love every part of themselves unless I am doing the same. That’s why I’m committed to being a visible and vocal queer yoga teacher.

I hear a lot of beautiful statements from folks established in the Madison yoga community about the unity they feel on their mats. My quest is to foster inclusive spaces where everyone can feel this sense of unity, especially those people who fear yoga does not include them.

When you attend my classes I ask only one thing: that you open and honor your own heart. And I promise that I will show up and do the work that I was put here to do: hold space, create community, and let you know that you are perfect just as you are. Namaste. ■



**KELLY FOX** is a yoga instructor at Kula Yoga & Wellness, Inner Fire Yoga, and Bliss Flow Yoga.

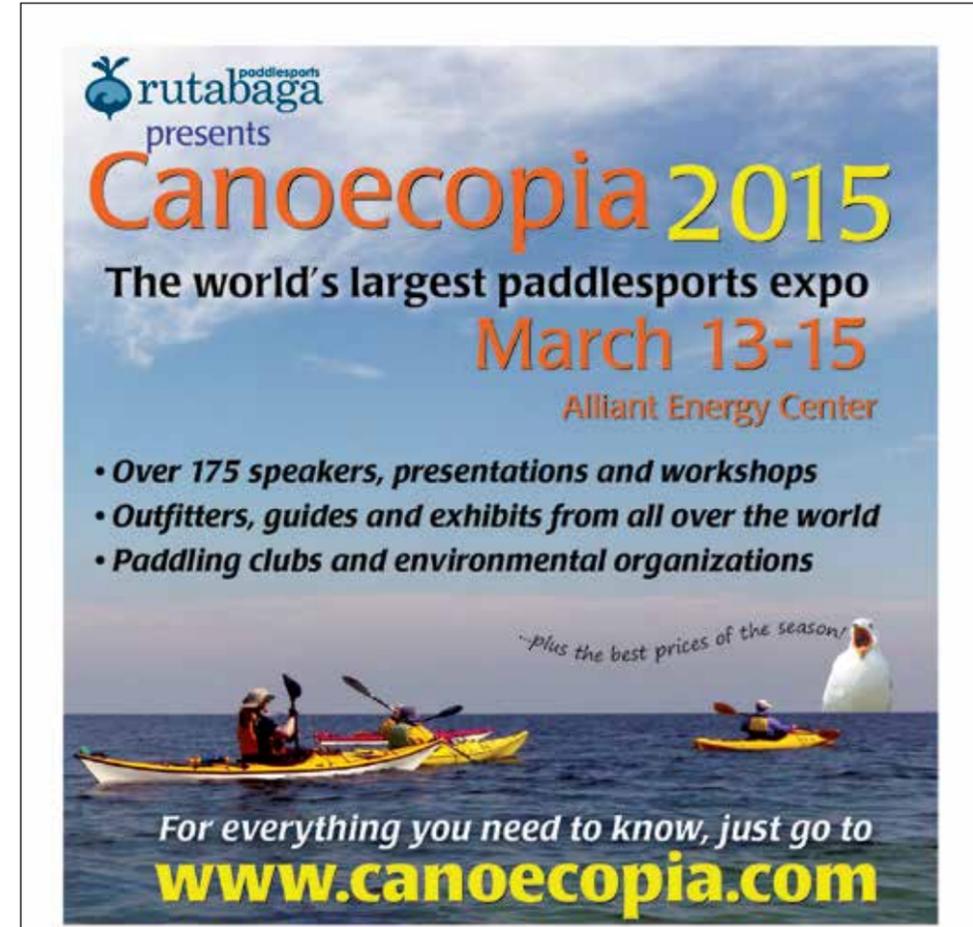


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## Feel Good Wine

Square Wine Company makes the case for the little guy at their Capitol Square shop.

FOR YEARS NOW, I've been touting the virtues of buying from small producers and local shops to support good values with our food dollars. In general, we should be more conscious of what we consume because it matters. But I had not really thought that much about wine consumption/production—that is, until I met Andrea Hillsey, one of the owners of Square Wine Company in Madison.

Andrea and her life partner, Ashley Parr, met at Purdue University. Like many of us, their undergraduate schooling and subsequent graduate studies took them hither and yond, but they eventually returned to Wisconsin to set down roots and for Andrea to open her wine shop.

It is a bit unique for a Midwestern girl to really find her groove in wine. It happened while Andrea was an undergrad. She found herself needing to fulfill some pesky credit requirements outside of her field of study. A "Wine Appreciation" class filled one requirement and ended up the class she felt she got the most out of that semester. So her graduate studies turned from physical therapy to the hospitality field. She landed at Florida International University in Miami and worked for a man named Jeffrey Wolfe in his wine shop in Coral Gables. It was under Wolfe's tutelage that Andrea learned about what went into making great wine and how to cultivate relationships with the producers and purveyors. After finishing her graduate program, she went to work for a small vineyard in Oregon (Chehalem Vineyards) for eight weeks during their grape harvest.

Fast-forward to 2012, and her dream became reality with the opening of Square Wine Company. Her goal in opening the store was to educate people about good wine and good practices in wine production. While we were chatting, numerous shoppers came in to consult with Andrea on a wine they needed for this or that event. As I listened in, it was obvious that these shoppers knew Andrea and trusted her knowledge base of the wines in her shop. And they should; she is a certified sommelier.

"I want to sell wines that are not only good tasting wines, but also wines that we can all feel good about drinking," Andrea explained. She went on to tell me about how many of the big wine producers were making their wines, and believe me, it was both shocking and then again not shocking at all. In short, they strip away most of the unique qualities of the wine (like naturally occurring yeasts and bacteria) and then add in things like "mega purple" and "oak powder" (Google these terms for further fascinating reading), so that a bottle of wine made in 2006 will



Andrea Hillsey, owner.

taste the same as a bottle that was made in 2013. Which is exactly how most Americans want it. It's pretty sad really. Why not enjoy a wine for what it was meant to taste like? Wine is not Coca Cola, after all.

This was a fascinating journey that Andrea took me on. I felt extremely lucky to have been privy to my very own private wine tasting/wine class. I learned that these small wine producers have a lot to offer. And again, by buying these wines, our money goes to support a way of life that is good for the grower, the planet, and the consumers. Luckily for our readers, Square Wine Company offers wine tastings and classes throughout the year—see their website (<http://www.squarewinco.com/>). And don't be afraid to visit the store and chat with Andrea if you're in Madison. She possesses a sea of knowledge regarding wines. Also, don't presume that this is a shop where only deep pockets need explore. Her wines range in price from \$9 to over \$100. I walked out with a very moderately priced wine that she recommended from Washington, and I can honestly say that it was one of the finest bottles of wine that I've had here in the states. ■

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAMANTHA DUTCHER, DUTCHER PHOTOGRAPHY



**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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## Radically Inclusive

Baraboo High School senior **Catherine Hartup** has been an active and driven member of her school's GSA and was the lone student to speak in support of the district's new trans-inclusive athletic policy.

**MY NAME'S CATHERINE HARTUP**, and I'm a senior at Baraboo High School where I serve as the president of our Gay-Straight Alliance (currently in the midst of a more inclusive name change to Gender-Sexuality Alliance). Ever since I realized I fell under the LGBTQ+ spectrum in middle school, fighting for our justice and inherent rights has been an integral and significant part of my life.

Over the past four years in GSA (two of those spent as the club's president), I've worked passionately to promote education and activism for LGBTQ+ people. The summer following my attendance at GSAFE's 2013 Leadership Training Institute conference, I challenged myself to do more with the group than had been achieved in years past. Since then, I've given presentations and hosted club discussions on topics ranging from asexuality and aromantic awareness, to bisexuality visibility, to the intersection of race with gender and sexual orientation.

Last year, I involved GSA with our school's Key Club during Project Respect Week, when we presented a video featuring staff members speaking their own messages of support for LGBTQ+ students. Key Club's mission has always been about anti-bullying efforts, but sometimes the slogan of "we support all students" isn't enough. We need validation of students who aren't always as readily recognized, such as those who identify under the LGBTQ+ spectrum. I continued this theme with our poster campaign for Day of Silence, highlighting the struggles of not only LGBTQ+ students, but also females, people of color, and disabled persons.

This year, the club's taken a strong stance on continuing the fight for transgender justice. In the fall our school board proposed a policy change that allows transgender student athletes equal access to sports teams that align with their gender identity. Predictably for a small town such as Baraboo, much of the community met the amendment with heated (and misinformed) opposition. At the first school board meeting I attended where the policy was discussed, there were several community members present who spoke out against it and only one (my GSA faculty advisor) who voiced support. By the next meeting, increased visibility from newspaper coverage and a general town buzz drew in a large audience urging the school board to adopt the policy, as well as many who again opposed it.

When it was my turn to speak during the public comments, I kept my remarks short and to the point: the school district promises to welcome



and protect all students, and if the board voted no on this proactive policy prohibiting discrimination against transgender students, they were not following through on their own promise. The media coverage of my short but certainly impassioned speech was honestly astounding—I had complete strangers coming up to me and saying thanks.

The publicity surrounding the public event, the successful passage of the policy, and my comments as the sole student speaker all correlated with GSA's actions: since junior year, I had wanted to host a clothing drive for organizations that provide free and accessible attire to trans\* or non-binary identifying teens. We were finally able to accomplish this last December after jumping through the hoops with administration to ensure the word "transgender" was publicly attached to the drive. Also in December, GSA's advisor and I gave a presentation for staff on how to be allies to trans\* and gender nonconforming students.

Next year, I'm headed to the East Coast to study at the small liberal arts women's institution, Smith College. Following this, my great ambition is to create and support more radically diverse media than what we see in our mainstream culture today. This means more diversity in race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and the myriad other underrepresented groups in the most widely consumed movies and TV shows. And I'll always be working toward LGBTQ+ justice, continuing on the road I've started down in high school. ■

PHOTO BY EMILY MILLS



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