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“The pressures on gay teens can be overwhelming—to keep secrets, tell lies, deny who you are, and try to be who you’re not. Remember: you are special and worth being cared about, loved, and accepted just as you are. Never, ever let anyone convince you otherwise.”

—Alex Sánchez, Mexican-American author of award-winning novels for teens and adults

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Cover photos by Max Wendt.
Hair by Daisy Quintal-Lepinski, Union Hair Parlor

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The spirit of Madison, the choice of Capitol Lakes. Melissa and Ingrid are looking forward to their life and lifestyle right here, at the only continuing care retirement community in downtown Madison. Real peace of mind, all levels of healthcare, housekeeping, and an expanding host of services and amenities make their future new address a brilliant decision. After all, Ingrid attended graduate school (economics) at UW, so she’s pretty sure the move has penciled out nicely. Want to know more? We’d thought you’d never ask. Just email madison@retirement.org or call 608-283-2046.

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FAMILY TIES

AS WE HEAD INTO THE HOLIDAY season, our culture turns a lot of its attention to the concept of “family.” This can be an especially difficult time for those of us who have, for one reason or another, found ourselves away from or without our blood relatives.

The concept of a “chosen” family, however, is particularly strong within the LGBTQ community, and we’re happy to feature several examples of the diverse ways in which we build relationships that nurture and sustain us even when the people who society says are supposed to support us fall short.

Everything from queer youth organizations formed in smaller communities to the Retired Older Lesbians (aka Rollers) lunch group right here in Madison are important ways that we build community and provide spaces for supportive human interaction for LGBTQ people of all ages and backgrounds.

For those most vulnerable members of our community, too, I’m heartened to see and read about the important work being done by organizations like Briarpatch, which just opened a brand new facility on the city’s south side and works with various other civil and state organizations to provide much-needed support for homeless and at-risk LGBTQ youth. I’m especially proud to include a story from a young transgender woman, who has been working with Briarpatch to beat difficult odds and build a better future for herself.

Our families extend to the most marginalized within our LGBTQ community, too. The open letter from members of the Wisconsin Trans Health Coalition calling for more humane treatment of transgender prison inmates provides an important call-to-action for and window into the world of those left behind by more mainstream civil rights victories like marriage equality. It’s an important reminder that we have much work to do in order to ensure a just and equitable playing field for all our LGBTQ family members.

Education plays a large role in all of this. We all do better when we all have access to quality information and training. Turina Bakken, Vice Provost at the ever-innovating Madison College, writes about her personal journey and how good leadership comes from a belief in the power of hard work, dedication and collaboration.

All of our work must come from understanding that our families are not limited to people with whom we share DNA or even households, but that we share commonalities simply by being human. Our communities thrive when they are made whole—which means not overlooking those who are struggling, or about whom we don’t have as great an understanding. It’s long-lasting and often difficult work, but it’s incredibly gratifying to see so many people—represented in these pages and beyond—putting their time, effort and money where their hearts are. That’s what family does for each other, after all.
I am beyond grateful, because to feel this vulnerable means I’m kinder and gentler to the people around me, and I have become gentler and kinder to myself through this process.

The process of putting my story on paper was a painful one; bringing to life memories that only surfaced in night terrors or flashbacks triggered by a memory, smell or sound. What my story didn’t share were the times I contemplated suicide, or getting in my car and just driving away, wondering if I would return. I found ways to connect to life by listening to the Indigo Girls, finding messages of comfort in their lyrics, finding safe (hidden) gathering places for the gay and lesbian communities I sought out.

My wish in sharing my story was to let others who may be having similar experiences to know, things get better. I knew there are way more people living in a pitch-black closet all alone, who feel so very alone, who are peering out through the keyholes in fear. Through the Sep/Oct issue cover to cover (including, unusually, the ads), I am so impressed with the magazine’s steady growth in scope, production values, writing quality and outreach. It’s a very moving experience that in a relatively short time Our Lives has grown into something really fine. Bravo tutti!

JESS ANDERSON, Madison

HAPPILY ALONG FOR THE RIDE WITH US

The best kind of cause & effect

ISSUE: JULY 2015

Thank you, Patrick and Emily, for allowing me to speak my truth for the first time ever through Our Lives magazine (July/August 2015). This allowed me to be seen, deeply seen, vulnerably seen. I’m beyond grateful, because to feel this vulnerable means I’m alive. The truth I shared for the first time has put a stop to the screaming memories of discrimination and rejection and has allowed me to be kinder and gentler to the people around me, and I have become gentler and kinder to myself through this process.

After the magazine had been in the stands and delivered to subscribers’ homes, I began to receive feedback that was way beyond touching. I received phone calls from people close in my life who wanted to apologize for not being a voice for me when I had no voice. I received letters via email and snail mail sharing stories and thanking me for sharing my story. I had strangers contact me with kind words and great gratitude. The outpouring of support I received gave me hope that society is making strides. Madison and the surrounding area gave back to me a sense of pride, confidence and love I had lost hope in. This opportunity has been therapeutic and life changing. Thank you Our Lives and the Madison community for the outpouring of love and kindness.

Margaret Kucera, Madison

ISSUE: SEPTEMBER 2015

Having just finished reading the Sept/Oct issue, Happily Along for the Ride With Us. Our Lives has grown into something really fine. Bravo tutti!

MAX WENDT, Madison

How can I help?

Thank you for allowing me to make strides. Madison and the surrounding area gave back to me a sense of pride, confidence and love. I had lost hope in. This opportunity has been therapeutic and life changing. Thank you Our Lives and the Madison community for the outpouring of love and kindness.

MARGARET KUCERA, Madison

Kathy Flores leads the Fox Valley LGBTQ Anti-Violence Project and is the City of Appleton’s full-time Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator. Kathy also serves on the Governance Committee of National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs working to prevent, respond to and end all forms of violence against and within LGBTQ Communities. Kathy advocates on a variety of issues both in her role with the City and the Fox Valley AVP helping address the intersections of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism, sexism and all forms of oppression.

MAX WEINDT is a Madison-based photographer, with an emphasis on artists and headshots. Max has photographed jazz festivals, opera performances and chamber music ensembles. He is also proud to provide photography for charitable organizations, including Flashes of Hope, Help Portrait and the ACT Ride. When he’s not shooting, Max plays the bass, designs science projects for his two daughters, and builds Lego creations. Max is honored to be collaborating with Our Lives.

Emily Faeth is an ally, advocate, and freelance writer living along the shores of the Yahara River with her cats, Pablo and Tallulah. She earned her BA in English Rhetoric and Writing from U.W.-La Crosse in 2011. She originally hails from la Crescent, Minnesota. When not writing, Emily focuses her energy on social justice and artistic pursuits.

JESS ANDERSON, Madison

For Forward Fertility

Why is buying local important to you and your business?

Christie Olsen
Nurse Practitioner/Founder

FORWARD FERTILITY

Why is buying local important to you and your business? Nationwide, in the last few years, parents-to-be via surrogacy have increasingly been coming from other countries. Some surrogacy agencies have focused on these clients, particularly from France and increasingly from China. Forward Fertility focuses on domestic parents-to-be and surrogates from the upper Midwest. Forward Fertility is a local expert in guiding people through egg donation and surrogacy. For such an intimate, personal, and profound experience, it’s not something most surrogates and parents want to do at a great distance from each other.

What is your connection to the LGBT community?

About 50% of the Forward Fertility clients are men wanting to become dads via egg donation and surrogacy or women in search of information and support as they conceive through donor sperm. Forward Fertility specializes in guiding people through the medical, legal, and emotional aspects of forming their family. It’s an honor to be a part of the process.

Do you or your business do anything charitable in the local community?

Education and awareness about fertility treatments and options are a central tenet to the mission of Forward Fertility. We have provided over 20 free, open-to-the-public sessions about various fertility topics in Dane County over the last two years.
The New ARCW Pharmacy is co-located with their health clinics and social services in the renovated facility at 600 Williamson Street. The opening of the pharmacy, along with the addition of the medical clinic, will complete the ARCW Health Home in Madison. Madison will be the first city of its size in the United States to have a comprehensive health home specifically for people with HIV. Hours will be Monday–Friday, 9:00–5:30.

According to ARCW Vice President Bill Keeton, “In addition to having prescriptions filled, pharmacists and other health professionals will be on hand to answer questions patients may have about their medications, how to mitigate any side effects they may be experiencing and how to make sure they are following their treatment plan. For HIV patients, closely following their drug regimen is one of the most critical aspects of their treatment and is key to achieving viral suppression—the best possible clinical outcome for people with HIV disease.”

Keeton goes on to explain that the ARCW Pharmacy is open to all HIV patients, regardless of where they
get their health care services. In addition to filling prescriptions and treatment adherence counseling, ARCW staff are “always available to help patients enroll in pharmaceutical assistance programs and health insurance programs to minimize their costs. At the ARCW Pharmacy, all patients can get their HIV medications, even if they are uninsured and unable to pay.”

Among plans for the future, ARCW is working to offer pre-exposure prophylaxis—also known as PrEP—to HIV-negative individuals as a way for individuals to stay HIV-negative.

“There are a lot of great pharmacies in Madison,” Keeton says. “However, currently there isn’t a pharmacy that is designed for and specially tailored to the needs of people living with HIV. The addition of the ARCW Pharmacy in Madison means that patients who receive their health care and social services from ARCW will have the additional convenience of being able to pick up their medications the same day they come for a doctor’s appointment to speak with their case manager or see their dentist.”

Further, ARCW says that revenue generated by its Pharmacy will be re-invested in the HIV prevention, care and treatment services the organization provides to the community, thereby “further strengthening our community’s response to the HIV epidemic.”

Organizations Update

Stay up-to-date with everything that’s happening with your local LGBTQ organizations and groups.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

MILWAUKEE LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER

On November 6 the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center will be hosting a reception and opening celebration for Shall Not Be Recognized, an exhibit of photo and text portraits of 30 same-sex couples by Jeff Pearcy and Will Schendel. The exhibit, which first opened in 2006, will revisit the intimate portraits of the same-sex couples by Jeff Pearcy and Will Schendel. The event will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. Come join the entire Madison community for a night of honest expression about the joys and trials of being trans, genderqueer, MTF, FTM, butch, nelly, queer, drag and anywhere on or off the gender-varient spectrum.

PERSEPHONE HARVEST MEN’S COGNITIVE CENTER

On December 18 and 20, the Perfect Harmony Chorus will be hosting their annual winter concert. “Transcending Tradition” will be at 3:00 on the 18th and 7:30 on the 20th at the First United Methodist Church at 203 Wisconsin Ave in Madison. For updates, please visit perfectharmonychorus.org.

PROUD THEATER

On March 12, 2016, Proud Theater will be hosting “Connections: Building LGBTQ Relationships.” Connections is a conversation that is designed to promote inter-generational relationships within the LGBTQ Community. The event will be held at the First United Methodist Church at 203 Wisconsin Ave in Madison. For more information, call 608-222-9086 or email info@proudttheater.org.

FAIR WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

The Madison Branch will be held at the Concourse Hotel on April 10, 2016.

LGBT CAMPUS CENTER

On Wednesday, November 18th, The UW-Madison LGBT Campus Center will be hosting Trans Monologues at the Madison Central Library, located at 201 West Mifflin Street. The event will take place from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Come join the entire Madison community for a night of honest expression about the joys and trials of being trans, genderqueer, MTF, FTM, butch, nelly, queer, drag and anywhere on or off the gender-varient spectrum.

FAIR WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

The Milwaukee LGBT Leadership Awards Gala Dinner will be held at the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee on February 20, 2016.

Fair Wisconsin Education Fund

The fifth annual Wisconsin LGBT Leadership Conference, entitled “Connecting Community, Building the Movement,” will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Downtown Milwaukee February 20–22, 2016. The conference is an exciting and innovative program that provides LGBTQ and allied people with the skills to be leaders in their own communities through workshops and networking opportunities, and by highlighting the strengths that emerge within various intersections in the LGBTQ community. For more information and updates on the event, visit wglbeleader ship.org.

FORGE

Each month, Forge holds monthly webinars for victim service providers. Every fourth Saturday of each month, Forge holds trans-focused, themed meetings. These meetings are held on the second floor of 1110 N. Market Street in Milwaukee. For more information, visit forge-forward.org.

MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY

The Minotaurs will begin to hold indoor practice in January or early February. These training sessions are open to all new and returning players. During these practices, Minotaurs Rugby coaches will be addressing fitness and basic rugby techniques. All skill and fitness levels are welcome. Check out madisonminotaurs.com for more information and practice locations.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT AND THE FAIR WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

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We stand for fairness, inclusivity and personalized financial solutions for everyone in your family.

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ACCOLADES

Lifting up our dedicated community members.

OUTREACH

Rich Fluechtling, the former President and current Board Member of the Perfect Harmony Men’s Chorus, received the Courage Award at the 23rd Annual Award Banquet hosted by the OutReach LGBT Community Center. Rich received the award
For his advocacy within the church community, and the Madison LGBT community as a whole.

Everett Mitchell was named the LGBT Ally of the Year at the 23rd Annual Award Banquet hosted by the OutReach LGBT Community Center. He was the first black Baptist pastor to marry a same-gender partner. Everett currently serves as the Director of Community Relations at U.W.-Madison and as the Senior Pastor of Christ in the Solid Rock Baptist Church. He has served as an associate director with the Madison Area Urban Ministry where he worked extensively with restorative justice programs for ex-offenders. He has been involved with a number of community service groups, including the 100 Black Men of Madison, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, United Way of Dane County Community Impact Chair, Agrace Hospice, Goodman Community Center, Thanksgiving Basket Family Giveaway Chair, U.W.-Madison Chancellor’s Scholar Mentor, and member of the African American Council of Churches.

Outreach Julie Woods received the Harry Straty Memorial Award for Volunteer of the Year at the 23rd Annual Award Banquet hosted by the OutReach LGBT Community Center. Julie began as a front desk volunteer in 2012 at OutReach. She now serves on the Speakers Bureau at OutReach, speaking to schools, businesses and community groups about LGBTQ issues. She also serves as the co-facilitator for OutReach volunteer training and recently became certified as a peer supporter. Currently she works as spiritually based, and rooted in love as a volunteer with a “strong capacity for understanding, patience and compassion,” with an “amazing energy and positive outlook that makes all who meet her confident that they are not alone.”

Outreach Dave Eck received the Board of Directors Special Recognition Award at the 23rd Annual Award Banquet hosted by the OutReach LGBT Community Center. Dave is the owner of FIVE, a bar and club serving the LGBTIQ community in Madison since 1998. Dave served on the OutReach Pride Parade planning committee, and recently competed in the Gay Softball world series. Dave has been a supporter of OutReach for many years, and has hosted countless fund-raisers for organizations in the Madison area at FIVE.

Outreach Z! Haukeness received the LGBTQ Advocate of the Year award at the 23rd Annual Award Banquet hosted by the OutReach LGBT Community Center. Z! has been in Madison for the past 15 years, and is a well known gender non-conformist and trans activist. They have been committed to social justice work that is centered in racial justice, as well as other systems of oppression and liberation. They have worked with a number of local and national organizations working for housing, food, land, gender, trans, queer and economic justice. They have been closely involved with Young Gifted and Black and deeply inspired by the work of the Black Lives Matter Movement nationally. They currently work with and are in close support of multiple social justice organizations, including Groundwork, Operation Welcome Home, the Safe Space of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and the Dane County Trans Health Group, the Wisconsin Network for Mental Health, GSAFE, the Dane County Trans Health Group, the Wisconsin Network for Veterans and Non-Traditional Students at U.W.–Platteville, and the Wisconsin Resource Center of Wisconsin.

Four years of service, Todd Streicher is leaving the Board. Christina Libs joins the board as vice president. Kate Walton and Dave Esparza join the board, and are co-chairing the member relations committee.

Fair Wisconsin Sheri Swokowski and Jody Rendall recently joined the board.

Fair Wisconsin Education Fund Kay Hartinger and Rebecca Ramsey recently joined the board of directors.

Michael Fumelle 4402 East Towne Blvd. 608-259-4263 Michael.Fumelle@ AssociatedBank.com

No direction awarded 11 grants totaling $41,000. Organizations receiving grants include OutReach (Pride Parade), Young Auditorium at Wisconsin Union Theater, GSAFE, the Dane County Trans Health Group, the Wisconsin Network for Veterans and Non-Traditional Students at U.W.–Platteville, and the Wisconsin Resource Center of Wisconsin.

The move was prompted by a petition from students, who argued that the change would “create a safe and more inclusive environment for all students” instead of basing spots for 10 girls and 10 boys, the court will simply include the top 20 vote getters of any (or no) gender identity. The top two vote getters may choose to call themselves “King” or “Queen” but are not required to do so.

West High is the largest of the school district’s four main high schools, with 2,065 students.

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Cards for many occasions • Also onesies, t-shirts, pint glasses & other fine paper goods
LGBT Door County builds a more inclusive community on the peninsula.

LGBT Door County started from a desire to seek out equality-friendly experiences and find community in a great area of Wisconsin. The plan was that businesses would receive inclusion training and go online to map a LGBT-friendly businesses in the Door County area. People who believe in equality would know where to spend their money and be treated well. What happened next was far more awesome.

Four months later LGBT Door County has become an active Facebook and online community, with 225,000 people checking in during our first quarter alone. LGBT Door County was the brainchild of Denise Cawley of Milwaukee and Barb Luhring of Sister Bay. Luhring knew Door County and Cawley had been a tourist there for over 20 years. Cawley’s wife, Anne Hefter, had practically grown up on Clark Lake and they sought to create a community that believed in equality for everyone.

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“Everybody loves to get together and share what they have. We welcome people who have never been here before. “People want to know what places welcome LGBT people and their money, and what to do while in the Door. We offer insider tips. Our training events let us get to know our client’s values, thus we can make recommendations about experiences that others cannot,” says Luhring.

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At the Crossroads
Sheltreese McCoy
Crossroads Coordinator at the LGBT Campus Center & Multicultural Student Center at UW-Madison, muses on life at the intersections of multiple identities, and her work to build bridges. Between them for herself and others.

I KNOW WHAT INTERSECTIONAL LIFE IS:
As a Black woman who is Queer-identified and disabled there is no shortage of vantage points from which I live my life. It is my insider/outsider status that enables me to move through so many different spaces and to work for justice authentically. 

Coming from Brooklyn to Madison was a huge transition, and changing the scope of the work I used to do to from national anti-racism work for youth and justice to colleges and universities that are predominantly white was tough. I learned a lot about how racism and white privilege operated in higher education. That re-sparked and fueled my love and dedication for higher education. I knew I wanted to study and work towards equity and justice in those spaces.

As I pursue my advanced degree I have been given a tremendous opportunity to do LGBTQ student of color work locally and nationally at the University of Wisconsin-Madison through the Crossroads Initiative. We have many types of events and programs including discussion groups, workshops, speakers, and social events. This work changes from day to day but is always centered in LGBTQ student of color needs and issues. It allows for queer and Trans Students of Color (QTSOC) to voice how their needs are unique from the majority LGBTQ student population and create opportunities to address those differences. The other side to that creativity and innovation is the demand for accountability to specific growth from majority LGBTQ students. Having a Crossroads Initiative at our university casts a light on the simple fact that we need an initiative that allows us to work for justice and equity so something like this would no longer be necessary.

A major national incident that put in high relief the need for QTPOC-directed initiatives was the Rachel Dolezal/Caitlyn Jenner conversation that took place on national television. While some people felt that if Caitlyn was to be “accepted” as a woman, then Rachel should be able to claim being black. What this entire argument boiled down to was that being trans-identified is not equivalent to being Black-identified, and it erased that trans people of color exist. I saw my students in person and on social media feel erased, silenced, and aggrieved in their own intersectional identities throughout this scandal. I had to remind them that transphobia and anti-blackness is something we will always have to fight against.

I have had a passion for justice and education since I was a child in Cleveland, Ohio. I remember vividly loving school and always being excited about learning new things. At the age of 14 I committed my first overtly political act by writing a letter to the mayor. I was extremely upset that the city was going to spend lots of money on a sports stadium instead of schools. The junior high school I attended was so severely out of date that we didn’t have a functioning computer lab, up-to-date books, or air conditioning in the building. I still did not know how to type, so I enlisted the help of my English teacher, who took dictation from me, corrected my grammar and structure, and mailed the letter. I got a response back from the mayor’s office. It was a form letter that made reference to a rainy day fund. I reminded the mayor in a second letter that Cleveland Public Schools had been in a hurricane since, at that time, we had not passed a school levy to get extra tax revenue in over 25 years.

It was the first time I recognized I could speak out against injustice even if and when the powers that be try to pacify or ignore you. I learned that fighting for equity and justice was a lifelong commitment. I took that passion with me to college at Bowling Green State University and moved into a larger issues around people of color and queer visibility, workers’ rights, and anti war campaigns. Justice and equity is at the core of who I am, and as I grow older and come to understand my own identities, I take advantage of and create opportunities to expand my reach to change the world all around me.

QTSOC work is not only my professional work but also built into my scholarship. I am currently pursuing my PhD in Higher Education with a focus on LGBTQ People of Color in colleges and universities. It is this dedication and drive that pushed me to start my own national consulting company called Change the Field, LLC. I specialize in trainings, workshops, keynote speaking, and long term strategic planning to improve services for QTSOC.

Through my work as a higher education scholar, student affairs professional and consulting firm owner, I hope to transform our collective understandings of the complex lives of queer and trans students of color. My hope is, through the development of understanding, campuses and organizations will recognize that (1) our campuses are growing by leaps and bounds with queer and trans students of color who deserve outstanding educational experiences, and (2) marginalizing, regulating, and making invisible QTSOC will render my colleagues’ work less creative, inequitable, and stuck in reactionary mode, going from crisis to crisis instead of being proactive and forward-looking.

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If you see a problem...
Visibility in Disability

A new anthology aims to lift up and shine a spotlight on the voices and experiences of queer, disabled authors, storytellers, and poets.

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT ENOUGH for queer voices to be heard in a hetero-normative society. Couple that silence with the societal stigma of living with a disability, though, and the silence can be deafening. But a small Minneapolis press, along with those who have lived the experience, are creating an opportunity for those voices to not only be heard, but to shine.

Raymond Luczak, editor of the forthcoming QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology, is a Minneapolis writer, editor, and queer activist who became deaf at eight months old. Luczak had the singular experience of growing up among a large hearing family and attending a mainstream school while deaf.

“I’ve always felt like an outsider looking into the lives of other people,” says Luczak. “When I got involved with the Deaf LGBT community during my college years, I felt ‘When I got involved with the Deaf LGBT community during my college years, I felt...”

“That many of the essays, stories, and poems featured in QDA expand upon this theme of desexualization of individuals with disabilities is no accident. As Luczak says, ‘It’s my hope that [the anthology] will break down, at least for the able-bodied community, that initial fear and stigma of associating with those who aren’t “normal.” Personally, I think the concept of “normal” is a very dangerous one because it is at the root of homophobia, ableism, racism, and so on. If we try to rid ourselves of the expectation of “normal,” we will find a better acceptance of anyone who doesn’t adhere to our currently unhealthy standards of physical beauty. Being different is a beautiful thing.’”

QDA isn’t only intended for readers who fall under the admittedly broad umbrella of either disabled or queer, though. It’s a testament to the contributors’ abilities that the works contained within the tome deal with such wide-ranging issues as religion, as in James Schwartz’s poem, Fellowship, and romantic love, self-acceptance, violence, and existential questioning. The work contained in the anthology transcend any social labels and instead remind us of our shared experiences as emotional and physical beings.

“Many disabled folks, gay or straight or in-between, are often made to feel asexual,” he says. “They are simply not seen as sexual beings; they are often ignored as part of the scenery.”

Says Luczak, “Of all the many communities within the LGBT spectrum, the disabled are probably the most marginalized. We are not seen as sexy or desirable; we often have to speak up for our accessibility needs. The ironic thing is that anyone can become a member of the disability community in a mere second from an accident, a stroke, a disease, and so on. The able-bodied should really pay more attention to those who are disabled because they themselves could one day unexpectedly join that community, and if they do, they’d want to be in a society that will be more aware and accommodating of their needs instead of having to fight and educate as much. Not only that, approximately 20% of Americans have one kind of disability or another, so it becomes imperative that we include disability in our national dialogue on what it means to be queer in America (and elsewhere, for that matter).”

QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology will be released for publication by Squares and Rebels Press on November 12. The book can be ordered online at squaresandrebels.com and will also be available as an e-book. Squares and Rebels Press offers many publications emphasizing the experience of LGBT individuals and those with disabilities, particularly those in the Midwest.

Emily Faith is an ally, advocate and freelance writer living along the shores of the Yahara with her cats, Pablo and Tallulah. She earned her BA in English Rhetoric and Writing from UW-La Crosse in 2011. When not writing, Emily focuses her energy on social justice and artistic pursuits.

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I WAS BORN IN 1961, number 10 of 11 children. My father died when I was four, when at least eight of us were still at home. To this day I feel the most alone and unwanted when around the family. I had, however, been having an otherwise pretty normal childhood until we moved to Jackson, Minnesota when I was about 12. It was when my life became a living hell.

I was constantly bullied and eventually started smoking pot, drinking, and skipping class at least four times a day as a means of escape. By the time I was 15 I had become an alcoholic: I would have to drink a pint of Sloe Gin before facing school every day and lots of beer and whiskey at night before I could sleep. No one asked me what was going on or why I was doing these things, they just labeled me a bad kid and mostly ignored me—until I screwed up big. Then I had their attention.

I have come very close to dying three times, twice due to dehydration caused by too much methamphetamine use and once due to my liver failing from HEPB. The second time was in January of 2004, and by March of 2004, only 10% of my liver was functioning.

THE ARMY
At 18 I joined the Army to get away from all the pain and to hopefully avoid jail. The Army then proceeded to kick me out for being gay. It was bad enough that I wasn’t good enough for what felt like everyone else in my life, including my family. Then to have my country say the same thing was heartbreaking. I should mention here that going into the barracks in full drag (it was the very first time I did it) probably was not a good idea, though.

ADDICTION
From 1981 to 2002 my life was spent being addicted to—well, let’s just say I have quit more drugs than most people have tried. I started doing drag at 19 and found it to be a great way to escape some of the pain in my life. I have had to prostitute myself for food, money and shelter on several occasions. I have lived in my truck. But now I have found a way to turn all that pain and anger into something good.

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FOUNDRING WILLMA’S FUND
When I turned 50, I founded Willma’s Fund (through OurReach) to hopefully help other LGBT people that have gone through similar problems avoid having to do what I did to survive.

I now work for The Salvation Army of Dane County. The case workers often comment on how difficult it is to find help for LGBT people, especially transgender people. The shelters here are divided by gender, so transgender people may not be safe in the current shelter system. Shelter staff may be supportive, but often the other clients discriminate against them. Most homeless LGBT people tell me they feel safer on the streets than in the shelters because they do not feel safe around other clients.

I rekindled my passion for performing in drag in December of 2010, and I wanted to use my talents to help the LGBT community and raise awareness about the important issue of LGBT homelessness. I talked to my husband Steve Starkey, who is the Executive Director of OurReach, and he said the organization would serve as the fiscal sponsor for Willma’s Fund. Our first drag show was for my 50th birthday in April 2011, and we raised $1,500 from sponsors, cover charges and donated performers’ tips.

WILLMA’S MISSION
Since then, we’ve raised over $50,000 dollars and helped more than 60 LGBT clients in south central Wisconsin with hotel stays, rent and security deposits, utility and phone bills, gift cards for gas and food, and more.

SUCCESS STORIES
One early success story was Austin Jones, a young African-American transwoman. She was fleeing from verbal and racial abuse from her landlord when I met her, but always had a positive outlook on life.

Willma’s Fund and The Salvation Army of Dane County were able to provide her with two months of hotel stays while she found her dream job. She was able to find housing and now supports herself. She wrote a poem for me, entitled Along Came Willma.
In October 2014, a gay client contacted OutReach. He was filing for Social Asylum from Pakistan and needed support. He was habitually persecuted and abused for being gay in his country before he came to the U.S. for school. After his student visa expired, he told the immigration board if they tried to send him back he would kill himself, so at least he would die free.

I connected him to former State Rep. David Clarenbach, who knew people who could help. U.S. Representative Mark Pocan also wrote a letter of support. In January 2015, I took the client to Chicago for three days of immigration meetings, all costs paid by Willma’s Fund. He has since acquired a work visa and works a part-time job in Madison.

LGBT youth are at heightened risk of homelessness when they come out to their families, and this can happen at a very young age. National research estimates 35% to 50% of homeless youth under 24 identify as LGBT. They are preyed upon and sexually abused while trying to just survive.

When people say homelessness is solved with a house, that’s true, but what they fail to see is homeless teens may not know how to shop for groceries, clean a house, maintain a budget, schedule their time, make healthy life choices or work a full-time job.

Life skills are important components of success. It is very intimidating for someone to come off the streets or couch surfing and be able to maintain an apartment. I have experienced that overwhelming feeling myself, often feeling more at home on the streets than in a shelter.

However, we don’t just help LGBT youth. We have helped people of all ages, including seniors. It is Willma’s Fund’s hope to offer some stability in peoples’ lives, creating an environment where people thrive.

Along Came Willma

By Austin Jones

I remember fleeing from a damaged place.
And I arrived at OutReach with worry and tears on my face.
Telling my story in exchange for resources and guidance.

Along came Willma to break the silence.
She was sassy, a cheeky Madame indeed.
But her heart was never out of line to help those in need.
When I was left out of money, shelter, or even food to eat.
Along came Willma to divert me away from defeat.
As long as I did my part to endure my grind, Willma’s Fund was always in mind.

The vision of Willma is so vast beyond her reality.
It’s beauty of providing many in need regardless of identity and or sexuality.

I’ve learned that once misfortune hits in one’s life, never be too proudful to ask for help during times of strife.
Darkness and light coexist for a reason.
To change and shape ourselves like weather in each season.

Thanks to Steve Starkey and Angie Rehling for editing help.
I have played chamber music for Steven Spielberg at his house. I have played string quartets for George Harrison, Gary Wright and Elton John, and I have been in the band for Liberace, Tony Bennett, Debbie Reynolds and Donald O’Connor, to name just a few.

In Madison, I have the honor of performing at the beautiful Overture Center and sharing the stage with some of the greatest artists in the world. I also have the opportunity to pass on my training to young musicians, to coach chamber music for the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestras and teach for UW-Madison Summer Music Clinic. I am so grateful for the invaluable education I have been given, and I am happy to be able to mentor the next generation. In fact, I am now working with musicians whom I coached when they were students.

In the end, my family was very proud of me and my accomplishments, and I am grateful to them for ultimately giving me the support I needed to achieve my goals. My only regret is that I didn’t start sooner. While I never encourage my students to pursue a career in music, my advice to anyone is this: know yourself, know who you are and who and/or what you want to be. Then devote yourself completely to realizing your dreams, regardless what anyone else says. Have the courage to be who you are, and live your dreams!

I am so grateful today that I managed to follow my heart and pursue a career in music. I earned a master’s degree at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and my doctorate at U.W.-Madison. Along the way I trained with world-class musicians and teachers and have had many unforgettable experiences. I have made many sacrifices, too: being a musician means working evenings and weekends, when everyone else is relaxing. I have lost count of how many birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions, etc. that I have missed. Still, the few times in my life that I have tried to find another kind of work besides music only taught me that I was right when I was 17: I am not a happy person if I am not playing music.

My life in music has taken me across the U.S. to Alaska, Asia, and Europe. I have played chamber music for Steven Spielberg at his house. I have played string quartets for George Harrison, Gary Wright and Elton John, and I have been in the band for Liberace, Tony Bennett, Debbie Reynolds and Donald O’Connor, to name just a few.

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What Is the ArtWrite Collective, and What Is Its Mission?

The ArtWrite Collective uses art as a bold new organization and its mission to lift up traditionally marginalized people through art.

What was the motivation/inspiration to start the collective?

ArtWrite began as a series of conversations with my peers and with leaders all over Madison, and those conversations were laced with an obvious urgency to take creative action for positive change in our community. Outside of academia, artists and other creatives weren’t sure where or how to find a community of artists, how to find creative labor, and how to organize creative activism. Including the term “collective” in our organization’s title was an important move to describe how our work is born out of the minds of many and that it must be collaborative in order to create change.

What Is Its Mission?

In our pursuit to diversify public aesthetics, we coordinate public art such as a recent Madison Arts Commission (MAC) installation that involved artists drawing their self portraits on public mirrors as an unapologetic effort to raise stories that might otherwise remain overlooked; this project was possible thanks to thoughtful collaboration with local social service agencies, local public libraries, and MAC.

Looking ahead, keep an eye out for a poster campaign sponsored by WCA-SA (Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault) and End Abuse Wisconsin, where our artists aim to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault within the queer community and promote access to services among survivors. A traveling mural on youth homelessness, produced in partnership with a program of Briarpatch Youth Services, is another major youth-led public campaign to listen up for in the coming months.

Talk About Some of the Projects AW Has Already Undertaken and Why, and Then What’s Coming Up?

We embraced that there are many potential approaches for cultivating a resilient community and that there are endless pathways for disrupting oppressive systems. For us, supporting youth, developing artists, and re-visioning public spaces have been the anchors to our work. For youth-centered projects we’ve partnered with Briarpatch Youth Services, local GSFAs, Transition Education Program, GSAFE, Lussier Community Center, and other groups to develop authentic relationships, build life skills, and foster creative expression as a vital component to overall well being. To support artists, we hold retreats aimed at strategically plotting our creative activism, offer workshops for artists and writers by artists and writers, publish zines, and connect community-based creative folks to paid and socially conscious projects.

We care about centering those most impacted by systemic oppression, together nurturing our voices, and changing the landscape of our community to better represent everyone who lives here.

How Can People Get Involved?

Reach out! Between monthly published zines, regular youth groups, and special campaigns, we’re always on the lookout for talented artists to participate in or facilitate our programs and projects. For peer organizations looking to partner on a project, know that we operate from a foundation of collaboration and would love to hear from you. Find more from us at facebook.com/theartwritecollective and theartwritecollective.org; reach us directly at theartwritecollective@gmail.com to plug in.

How is a group like this important to the community? What challenges does it seek to address and how?

We know from statistics and from experience that LGBTQIA+ folks, people of color, and womyn are at disproportionate risk for food and housing insecurity, sexual violence, and other trauma. We aren’t okay with this, and we aren’t okay with these facts dictating our life stories. We care about centering those most impacted by systemic oppression, together nurturing our voices, and changing the landscape of our community to better represent everyone who lives here. Between publications, art shows, education, and campaigns, we work to flip our stories to narratives of power.
Lesbians Who Lunch

Rollers co-organizer Liz Dannenbaum shares the group’s history and why having a gathering place for older lesbians is so crucial—and fun.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT ROLLERS—WHAT’S THE GROUP ALL ABOUT, HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN AROUND, AND HOW/BY WHOM WAS IT STARTED?

Rollers is an acronym for Retired Older Lesbian Lunch. It was started at least 10 years ago by Susan Agee and a few others. About seven years ago my partner, Donna Winter, took over organizing and promoting the group. Currently there are over 60 women on the group email list. Generally, about 25 women attend the monthly lunch—and every lunch seems to bring one or two new faces. I think it’s always hard to walk into a room hardly knowing a soul or even no one at all, but I think our group helps eliminate this natural anxiety. We are very welcoming and always pleased to have new women join us. Every lunch includes an introduction session where we go around the table and share a very brief bio.

WHAT SORTS OF FOLKS COME TO THE LUNCHES, AND WHY?

When people retire it allows them the time and opportunity to meet new friends and try new activities. I suspect lots of women come to expand their circle of friends and just get more connected to the wider lesbian community. Some women are newly out as lesbians and some have just relocated in Dane County. This is also an opportunity to reconnect with friends on a monthly basis that you might not see otherwise.

HAVE ANY UNEXPECTED (OR EXPECTED) THINGS COME OF THE GROUP AND THE FRIENDSHIPS/RELATIONSHIPS FORMED THERE?

I know close friendships have formed or rekindled because of the lunch. Peggy, who commutes between Chicago and Cambridge, is one of Donna’s and my new, close friends, and someone we never would have met if she hadn’t braved coming into the lunch knowing no one. At least one romantic partnership began when two women met at the lunch. A Rollers monthly book group has also arisen because of a shared love of reading among some of the women who attend.

WHY IS A GROUP LIKE THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU, TO THE COMMUNITY?

I think there aren’t many venues for older lesbians to meet and mingle. Lesbians can find each other in other places: church, working for candidates and causes, online with groups like Meet Up. But some older lesbians aren’t comfortable with computers, aren’t at all religious, and don’t have the famous “gaydar” we always hear about. When you come to the Rollers lunch you know that everyone there is a lesbian near your age. That’s special.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE GROUP’S FUTURE?

We hope the group continues so that older lesbians can continue to connect and share and laugh together.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SHARE?

Donna and I want to be sure to give a shout out to Elie’s in the Lake Edge Shopping Center. The food is great, the prices are extremely reasonable, and we are given a private room. But much more importantly, we want to thank Elie and her terrific staff for being entirely welcoming. Waitress Dawn treats us all like the princesses we are (ha!). How she and the cooks get lunch to so many people so quickly is a mystery.

If you’re like more info about joining the Rollers email list or stopping in for lunch, call Liz and Donna at 608-221-3997.
**EXHIBIT OPENING**

**Milwaukee LGBT Community Center**

Observe in late November in recognition of the 1998 murder of Rita Hester. In 1999 advocate GwenIfyl Ann Smith coordinated a gala in Rita’s home. The vigil commemorates all who have been tragically lost to anti-transgender violence.

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**THEATRE**

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**FORWARD THEATER’S EXHIBIT OPENING**

**Stageworks Theater**

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**CONCERT**

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In his novel, *One*, author Richard Bach explores the mythical met-aphor of a pattern representing the paths we have taken and the choic-es we have made throughout our entire life. He intersects that pattern with every other possible path we could have taken to show how our infinite choices, even those which seem most mundane, are woven together to take us to the very point we are at in the current moment.

In short, our choices are infinite and lead to the experiences that shape the person we are today. As I look back on the pattern of my choices, choices that have gained me wisdom, friends, experiences and character, I am proud and blessed to be at this very point in my life. So, at the gracious invitation of *Our Lives*, I humbly share that journey with you.

**COMMUNITY BEGINNINGS**

I was born in Fargo-Moorhead and lived my pre-college life in Minnesota. Much to the dismay of my Viking fan relatives, I now say I am from Madison, and yes, I am a diehard Packer and Bad-ger fan. My parents are from a small town called Lake Bronson, up by the Canadian border. It’s the doppelganger of Keillor’s Lake Woebegone—“the little town that time forgot and the decades can-not improve,” the kind of town where the word “community” really means something. It was there, as a kid, that I learned how to look out for neighbors, how to greet people on the street even if I didn’t know their names, and the value of a hard day’s work. While those days are long since past, I never lost the northern Minnesota brogue (especially after a few pints) nor the love of community. It was also that Minnesota youth that led me to participate in just about every team sport imaginable—fastpitch softball, hockey, basketball, tennis, soccer, flag football and even broomball.

Growing up an athlete introduced me early on to the ideas that indi-viduals can be stars, but victories come as a team; the ability to bounce back and learn from losses was the only way to win in the future; cen-tral to leadership was the ability to rally the team to better their perfor-mance; and that good teammates had your back no matter what. These were lessons that would serve me well as a future leader, teacher and coach. Sports led me early to these lessons and led me to first loves.

**GLOBAL JOURNEYS**

Author Margaret Wheatley writes that “we see the world as we are, not as it is.” But my perspectives on life, love, country and inclusion have been deepened by seeing the world, experiencing other cultures and eating foods I can’t pronounce. My global adventures began as a U.W.-Madison student when I lived in a small town in Southern France for nearly two years. I attended a Political Science institute and a Letters college, and ultimately earned a certificate from Univer-site de Provence in International Studies and French. While studying in France, I also joined a women’s soccer team in the small town of Éguilles. It was the first time in my life as an athlete that I was the outsider, the last one in.

It was daunting, and scary, but it built character and courage. By the end of two seasons, we had won the Coupe de Provence champi- onship, and I had made friends for life. I also traveled to Italy, Hun-gary, Austria, Yugoslavia, Germany and other European countries. That experience, in addition to earning a French degree, introduced me to the value and fun of global travel—“experiences that continue to shape how I see the world and deepen my appreciation of the con-cept of “other.” Since that time, I have been to amazing places such as Nepal, Costa Rica, Bonaire, Corsica, Malta, Spain, Singapore, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, among others. I have participated in teaching exchanges to Northern Ireland and Belgium and led study abroad journeys.

My commitment is to enhancing an academic culture that invites all students to find their voices and their stride about their studies, ideas, values, identities and future.
When I was about six years old, my dad signed me up for figure skating lessons at a park near our house. On the very first night of practice, I was coming up the slippery wooden ramp to the warming house when a hockey player came through the door and knocked me down. In braking my fall, I slammed three fingers in the door and ended the night in a cast. Goodbye figure skating career!

My cousins lived on a lake and we would skate all winter long. Without pause, I screamed, “Hockey!” From there, my brother and I played on the same team for the next several years—all the way until high school. I was small but fast. Whenever the boys discovered I was a girl and decided to come after me, I would simply out-skate them and step out of the way for my much bigger brother to take care of things! I remember so many games on outdoor ice in Minnesota, frigid temperatures that drove us into the warming house between periods to warm up. Dad would hold my feet until the feeling returned. It was either that or 6 o’clock games in indoor ice on Sunday mornings. Despite the weather and schedule, both of which were equally brutal, I fell in love with the game. I played with the boys through age 16, and gave it up to focus on high school basketball, soccer and softball. But I never stopped skating.

Shortly after I began classes at U of Madison, a poster caught my eye at the Natatorium—an invitation to skate with the University Club A team. After a few calls, I found myself at practice with boys who seemed like the most logical, but not preferred, decision. I decided the risk of injury was too great. I took to coaching instead—a natural extension of my love for the game. For a few seasons, I coached a USA Hockey B-level team from around Madison who were literally the pioneers of women’s hockey. I was a kid in Minnesota. My teammates became my Madison family, were a positive force both on and off the ice (well, closing down Jingles at bar time on a weekend was not all that positive for a college student, but still), and are a part of some incredible life memories. Legendary skaters like Musher, Jones, Voich, Kate the Great, the Blair Twins, Jill, Marley, Susie and so many more were hockey warriors who played at the Shell at 11 p.m., road-tripped to Minnesota to play three games in a weekend, then traveled to Brampton, Ontario for Canadian tournaments, one time with only seven skaters.

There were victories and losses, injuries and celebrations, practical jokes and deep conversation—but in the end, it was the most inclusive group of women I had ever been around. Gay, straight, married, single, parents, students, teachers, all sharing a common bond: hockey. My 30-year hockey career ended with my second major knee injury. When the surgeon told me, “If you want to golf when you are 40, you need to quit playing hockey,” I decided the risk of injury was too great. I took to coaching instead—a natural extension of my love for teaching. For a few seasons, I coached a USA Hockey B-level team in town with the same energetic spirit and love of the game that I had experienced over so many years. Coaching ended when I started my doctoral studies. Something had to give, so picking my studies seemed like the most logical, but not preferred, decision.

Since 1998, I’ve also been involved in broadcasting for the national champion University of Wisconsin Badger women’s hockey team. I was asked to provide color commentary for the first-ever varsity game at the Kohl Center, a game that pitted the Badgers against University of Minnesota-Duluth and included interviews with Olympian Cami Graney. As a former hockey player myself, I had no prior broadcast experience, but it was a lot of fun and I realized that after so many years in hockey, it was pretty easy to just talk about the game. I have continued to be a part of hockey broadcasting over the years in both radio and television whenever public television calls and invites me back. And when I’m not calling a game, I’m usually in the LaFahn arena standing watching. I still love the game as much as I did when I was a kid in Minnesota. My only regret is that I was born too soon and missed the incredible opportunities that young female hockey players now have to earn college scholarships and compete in the Olympics.

I entered the education arena in a sort of cosmic way. After years in the private and public sectors working in product development and marketing, I worked for five years at a local nonprofit that focused on community building, organizational learning strategies and quality improvement. For the love of hockey, I moved to Madison. Well, maybe not such a hotshot, but I held my own with women from around Madison who were literally the pioneers of women’s hockey. I played with the Club A team throughout my undergraduate years and for several years thereafter as it transitioned to a private team and the expansion of women’s and girl’s hockey skyrocketed. My teammates became my Madison family, were a positive force both on and off the ice (well, closing down Jingles at bar time on a weekend was not all that positive for a college student, but still), and are a part of some incredible life memories. Legendary skaters like Musher, Jones, Voich, Kate the Great, the Blair Twins, Jill, Marley, Susie and so many more were hockey warriors who played at the Shell at 11 p.m., road-tripped to Minnesota to play three games in a weekend, then traveled to Brampton, Ontario for Canadian tournaments, one time with only seven skaters.

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improvement. As I saw the evolution of that nonprofit, I began to think about what might be next for me. With an undergraduate degree in Marketing and International Business/French and an MBA, I was looking back toward the private sector and a possible move from Madison. It was then that I met Warren, a former leader from Madison Area Technical College who asked if I had considered teaching. Despite experience in executive education and consulting, the answer was “not really.” He mentioned that he had a marketing faculty position open and that I should consider it. I threw my hat in the ring and passed through to the final interview round. Within a week, the offer was made and I was working for laid off 90% of its staff. And on the same day I learned that news, I was offered a faculty position at Madison College. I was unemployed for exactly four hours.

Since that serendipitous day, I can proudly say that I am the only person in the history of Madison College to have served as a faculty member, program director, associate dean, dean, associate vice president and now, vice provost. I was awarded Distinguished Teacher and Outstanding Employee by my students and my peers. I have worked and continue to work alongside the smartest and most dedicated faculty anywhere, the most creative and supportive staff, and academic leaders who truly believe in the mission of the college and the power of individual transformation—and a community that demonstrates this commitment through their actions every day.

My continued interest in higher education has been nurtured and expanded over nearly three decades, first as an undergraduate, master’s and Ph.D. student; as a college instructor and now, as a senior leader. My journey wasn’t part of a specific plan or goal. But, as I focused on excellence at the current step, the doors kept opening and I confidently walked through each one.

Having the courage to walk through those doors into new and often unnerving challenges is when I learned the most about myself. When the doors are open and new opportunities present themselves, it is then that I was most open to advice from others, the most humble, and the most intentional about what I needed to learn to make it the next day. I think it was that “edge” mixed with a bit of fear and self-doubt that forced me to work harder, do more, and as a result of applying the wisdom gained in difficult times, gain confidence and the courage to move forward. It has been said that you can’t be brave unless you try. And I believe you can never be a leader until you try.

From Mrs. Bates in grade three who told me, “Yes, girls can become construction crane operators” in response to my stated career choice, to Mrs. Stanch in high school who through her true love of France inspired me to live abroad, play international soccer and pick up a French major to complement my marketing undergraduate degree, to my many mentors at Madison College. I have been abundantly blessed with influential encouragers who, in their own way have shaped the person I’ve become: Coaches who taught me how to lead, to understand the value of collaboration and teamwork, and how to win. My college mentor, with whom I still maintain a strong work ethic, humility and who modeled respect for others at every turn; Grandma, who became a mayor in her 70s and taught me perspective, gratitude and how to smile at the world around you since “it is better than the alternative;” and Marcia, who reminds me daily how easy it is to be kind and generous, and who has been a constant source of encouragement, support and good humor, and without whom my path and choices would have been dramatically altered.

SPECIALIST PT, OCS

Tiffany E. Daniels III, the College is hiring a Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. It’s a shared commitment that is taken seriously at every level of the college, at each of the nine campuses in our 12-county district. We’re a team. And that, quite simply, is why I stay.

One of the questions I always dreaded in job interviews is, “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?” I always thought, “Who really cares?” and would respond with a rather generic-yes/no an- swer. The reality is that I have positioned myself for advancement at every stage of my professional and academic life. Why? Because I am very goal-oriented, a deliberate planner and a driven, forward-thinking person, my belief has always been to focus on doing the very best in the present moment, no matter the job. The credibility earned by doing the right things right, having a good work ethic and maintaining authenticity leads to the next point of decision and advancement, just as Richard Bach emphasized in his book: “From the Inside Out.”

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Path of Thorns

How are organizations like Briarpatch Youth Services helping the needs of homeless and at-risk LGBTQ youth in Dane County?

LGBTQ youth are: disproportionately at higher risk of becoming homeless after leaving foster care; 7.4 times more likely to experience sexual violence than other homeless youth; and are twice as likely to commit suicide. To make matters worse, LGBTQ homeless youth often experience difficulties finding shelters and services that accept and respect them.

Although this paints a dismal picture nationally, one might assume that LGBTQ homeless youth in Dane County do not face such adversity — sadly this is not the case. Local LGBTQ homeless youth are often unaware of the resources available in Dane County. Briarpatch Youth Services has served runaway and homeless youth since 1979 and during the last 10 years has been providing street outreach services in an effort to educate homeless and runaway youth about the resources available to them. In addition, Briarpatch recently opened the first shelter in Dane County dedicated to serving runaway and homeless youth ages 13–17.

Other organizations and individuals in Dane County are also trying to help. The following are various perspectives on the issues at hand, including adults doing the work and a youth currently getting services from Briarpatch.

IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Judge Shelley Gaylord was elected to the Dane County Circuit Court in 2003, 2009 and 2015. Currently she serves in the juvenile, family and civil rotation. Shelley also maintains a private practice with concentrations in family, juvenile, LGBTQ, real estate, personal injury, and wills and previously served on Gov. Evers’ Task Force on LGBTQ issues.

PROFESSIONALLY, I see a wide range of situations: Homeless youth accompanied by competent adults face a different set of problems than those without that resource. But survival often trumps other issues, like paying attention in school. Some LGBTQ youth have the added stress of less than sympathetic or abusive parents. Transgender youth face this somewhat more commonly than LGBQ. Some youth are causing physical harm to themselves or others in the family, repetitively. There is no simple reason for this. Some parents have reached out for services, with or without success. The critical element to success is finding a person who “connects” with that family and can find resources.

Other LGBTQ youth are the victims of bullying, physical, sexual or verbal abuse, from inside or outside the home. Some families ask the court for help. While youth at least age 12 could petition the court for help, it would take tremendous savvy and courage. Alcohol and drug abuse in the family, family isolation, poverty and lack of parenting skills loom large for cases filed in court.

Truancy is often the “canary in the coalmine.” Youth may stay with family, friends or on the streets to survive. Sex trafficking or being in the sex “trade” is particularly difficult to unearth, especially when compounded with LGBTQ, alcohol/drug issues or other mental or cognitive issues.

Meanwhile, the mental health, runaway, abuse and neglect systems in Dane County are over-taxed. Often, waiting lists are too long and length of treatment too short. In-patient or long-term treatment is limited. Access to readily available and longer-term respite from home is not easy to find. I recognize there are many who work hard to provide services within their existing limits and many have succeeded.

There are some terrific stories of success with the help of talented foster parents and relatives. Briarpatch, multi-dimensional family therapy, Rainbow Project, NIP, and Journey Mental Health are a few of the services providing informal and court success stories. Not all service providers have contracts that connect with the courts. The courts and related stakeholders are working as a system to bridge that with non-court system providers. Strengthening access and connections among them could lead to swifter, more comprehensive and initial resolutions.

However, many families will take advantage of less than perfect services, once motivated and engaged. Swift access to respite while other services are provided may (re)habilitate the home environment. At times, services can strengthen youth self-care capacities to launch into a healthier life.

School may provide food, shelter and a temporary safer alternative to the streets or exploitative adults. That’s important, even if the student isn’t passing. School personnel can be alert to youth in need and reach out early and often. Extracurricular activities can prolong the safe school day and make a positive connection. Maybe one relationship will “stick.” Courts, social workers and service providers in the system can (and do) encourage young people to take small steps.

However, some youth are reluctant to disclose as LGBTQ, homeless or what their sources of money are. Building trust with one competent person can make all the difference in the world. Try to be or find that person.

IN THE SCHOOLS

Sheie Hohs is a community activist, believer in inclusion and an advocate for LGBTQ+ youth. She’s been a School Social Worker in the Madison Metropolitan School District for the last 12 years. In her second year as the LGBTQ+ Social Worker for MMSD, she has the vital role of training educators on inclusive practices, building meaningful community partnerships, advancing youth leadership, and protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ students and their families.

As the LGBTQ+ Social Worker for the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), I support LGBTQ+ students, their families and their school staff, hoping to create healthy, inclusive learning envi-
Identifying unaccompanied youth is a challenge, and I presume many building as to the rights, signs and needs of homeless youth. Still, school, our TEP program trains Student Services staff in every school homeless. In addition to ensuring that homeless students can access community referrals and emotional support to youth who are often do not have their basic needs met, are not able to be fully present that many of these young people are at a high risk for victimization,ber of LGBTQ+ youth are homeless; LGBTQ+ youth of color and stressors and traumatic events. We know that a disproportionate num-

Inclusive Curriculum: From preschool through high school, all students and families should be represented in curriculum. It is important for students to see their families and identities reflected in the world around them. Youth who see positive models of their

Family & Community Education: In conjunction with inclusive curriculum, we must work to make schools safe and inclusive environments where all students can feel affirmed and represented. In collaboration with MMMSD’s Transitional Education Program (TEP), we work to provide personal resources, safety planning, community referrals and emotional support to youth who are homeless. In addition to ensuring that homeless students can access school, our TEP program trains Student Services staff in every school building as to the rights, signs and needs of homeless youth. Still, identifying unaccompanied youth is a challenge, and I presume many

Homeless LGBTQ+ youth go uncounted. Older students tend to find informal supports to keep them safe in a crisis. Many want to avoid the stigma of being homeless. Some get by, couch surfing from friend to friend until they wear out their welcome. Others worry that if someone finds out, they will be taken away by police or put in the foster care system.

There are things that we can do as a community and as a school dis-

The Assembly and Senate both unanimously supported this resolution. Thanks to the symposium’s momentum, I was able to pass a Joint Resolution honoring November 2013 as Runaway Prevention Month. The Assembly and Senate both unanimously supported this resolution. Now that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are more familiar with the issue of homeless and runaway youth, along with some of my legislative colleagues, we put on a symposium at the capitol that hundreds of people attended. Senators and Representatives from all over Wisconsin left with their hearts and minds open to helping these youth who live in every community in our state.

Contact the staff of Rep. Melissa Sargent at 608-260-0204 or Melissa.Sargent@legis.wisconsin.gov. For more information about the work we do, visit www.makeroomforyouth.com.

Dane County Board. I was fortunate to meet several community leaders who are passionate about this cause. Together we formed the grassroots organization Make Room for Youth, a coalition of service providers, local leaders and volunteers who continue to advocate for the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth.

When I was first made aware of the issue of homeless and runaways, I was shocked. I had come across two young adults who were living on the streets, a reality that far too many young people experience. It was not a far-off reality for me; it was our daily reality. When I was first made aware of the issue of homeless and unaccompanied youth during my time on the Dane County Board. I was fortunate to

With research showing that 75% of homeless youth have already or will drop out of school, we can and must do better. We need to reconnect them with school to prevent them from developing a long-term pattern of homelessness.

When you think of homelessness, do you think of a 14-year-old sleeping on a friend’s couch, living in an abandoned car during a Wisconsin winter, or staying with strangers? This is a reality that far too many young people must endure on a daily basis. I was first made aware of the issue of homeless and unaccompanied youth during my time on the Dane County Board. I was fortunate to meet several community leaders who are passionate about this cause. Together we formed the grassroots organization Make Room for Youth, a coalition of service providers, local leaders and volunteers who continue to advocate for the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth. When I was elected to the State Assembly in 2012, I knew I wanted to work on this issue at the state level. Knowing this would be an uphill battle, during my first term my goal was simply to raise awareness about homeless and runaway youth. Along with some of my legislative colleagues, we put on a symposium at the capitol that hundreds of people attended. Senators and Representatives from all over Wisconsin left with their hearts and minds open to helping these youth who live in every community in our state.

Thanks to the symposium’s momentum, I was able to pass a Joint Resolution honoring November 2013 as Runaway Prevention Month. The Assembly and Senate both unanimously supported this resolution.

Now that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are more familiar with the issue of youth homelessness, I hope to bring together a bipartisan coalition to take action to address some of the pressing needs. Based on my conversations with advocates, school staff and other interested parties, I know that the legislature can truly help with some basic, common-sense measures. Among those:

- Access to their birth certificate
- Ability to receive a state identification card and/or driver’s license
- Access to health care

While the political climate in Wisconsin is challenging, I am confi-

ent that we can get these common-sense measures passed.

No longer can we as a society accept vulnerable youth sleeping in cars or stealing food just to survive. We have a duty to provide these people with a future, and a place to call home. With research showing that 75% of homeless youth have already or will drop out of school, we can and must do better. We need to reconnect them with school to prevent them from developing a long-term pattern of homelessness.

Too often these unaccompanied youths are invisible. I know we can bring them out of the shadows and into a compassionate society.
Paige, photographed for Our Lives in October, 2015.

IN THE WORLD

My name is Tyler Schueffner. I am the Coordinator of the Street Outreach Program at Briarpatch Youth Services. As one might imagine, many of the youth we serve are vulnerable, at-risk for exploitation, substance abuse, mental illness and various forms of abuse. Three years ago, while conducting outreach, I made my way to an encampment of homeless teens. After conducting my regular check-in, consisting of assessing needs, providing hygiene items, food, condoms and resources, I turned to a new face in the group and asked if they needed any help. Following a nervous pause, they began to tell me about their situation below:

NAME IS PAGE. I had been in the Foster Care system, aging out on my 18th birthday. When I aged out, I knew housing was going to be a challenge. I had part-time jobs but never got paid enough to cover all my expenses. I was 18 and didn’t have a co-signer for an apartment.

Eventually, I exhausted my options. I was literally homeless. With nowhere to go, I found myself at the Men’s Homeless move encampments. Tyler and a volunteer with Friends of the State Service worked with encampments, trying to help those in need. Eventually I made my way into transitional housing, and with help from organizations such as Felician, the Salvation Army, and Briarpatch, I eventually secured an apartment and a full-time job.

My family, while at times supportive, was not prepared or eager to have me with them. My family and I don’t exactly see eye-to-eye and they struggled with some of my “characteristics.” In my late teens, I began to acknowledge and express my true gender identity. Challenging gender was not something easily understood. The stigma of being “different” had an impact on my options for support. Without a supportive outlet, my anxiety and depression kind of took over.

Being on my own brought many challenges: I spent a lot of time trying to identify where I might stay for a night. Eventually, I exhausted my options. Family and friends could not accommodate me anymore. I was literally homeless. With nowhere to go, I found myself at the Men’s Homeless Shelter. As a transitioning 18-year-old, the shelter did not feel safe, and I lasted one night.

From there on, I turned to a new face in the group. I met Tyler from Briarpatch around the time we were forced to move encampments. Tyler and a volunteer with Friends of the State Street Outreach Program helped us identify and move to a new location. I began working with Tyler and Briarpatch, identifying resources to help me get on my feet. Even with help, I continued to struggle with mental health, housing, and stable employment. I was moving from place to place, couch surfing, and obtaining hotel vouchers through the Salvation Army. Eventually I made my way into transitional housing, and with help from organizations such as Felician, the Salvation Army, and Briarpatch, I eventually secured an apartment and a full-time job.

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It has been nearly three years since I became homeless. There were many lows; times when dying seemed like the only option. With help, I made it to the other side. I am no longer homeless, and I can focus on being well, mentally and emotionally. It was not easy, but I found that in my struggle I learned who I was and what I am capable of.

CALL TO ACTION

Despite adversity and discrimination, local LGBTQ homeless youth are extremely resilient. But these youth need our help now. As adult members of the LGBTQ community, we have a unique opportunity (and responsibility) to offer a voice on behalf of these youth, and when necessary, to push our community to listen. To do this, we must increase our awareness of the needs of local LGBTQ homeless youth and increase our community’s capacity to provide them with safe, supportive, and culturally competent services. Supporting Briarpatch and their new Youth Shelter is one such opportunity to do this. The younger members of our community can scarcely afford to wait.

GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANS, STRAIGHT.

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wvsinfertility.com
3146 Deming Way, Middleton
IN MADISON, there were two organizations dedicated to supporting the LGBT community—the United and the Gay Center. When Jane LaFlash’s 14-year-old son came out to her that spring, she went right to the phone book and looked under “gay.”

“I was completely ignorant,” she says frankly. “Knowing me, though, within days I went to as much research as I could.” That work, and flipping open the phone book, are what brought the Gay Center to her attention. She called them up.

“I was apparently the first parent to call asking for help,” Jane notes. It was through the GC that Jane was put in touch with Adele Starr, who, in 1976, had founded the Los Angeles chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a gay rights and acceptance organization known then as ParentFLAG, now as PFLAG. Over the next year and a half, as Jane tried to get a Madison PFLAG chapter running, Adele “would call me every month just to see how things were going,” offering help and advice.

Every month, too, Jane would set up shop for meetings… and wait. Sometimes, she was the only person there. Other weeks, one or two gay men would show up. Once in a while, a mother would shyly arrive as well. She stuck it out because, as she explains, it was too important not to do. “I was a young mother. I was 19 when Chad was born, and I was worried about him. But I knew—I have a gay son, that’s a fact over which I have no control. So what can I control? Me.”

Jane’s younger brother, Tom, came out as gay some time after her son did. She grew up in Middleton as the oldest of six kids. It was a pretty standard Midwestern upbringing, nothing that might have indicated the eventual path her life would take. She ended up working as a microbiologist at the State Lab of Hygiene and retired 10 years ago, and has long since been an avid gardener as well. But Jane’s professional experience only tells some of her story.

In 1985, the nascent PFLAG group got a major boost when she applied for and received a startup grant from the New Harvest Foundation. Working with the Gay Center, then, PFLAG Madison began holding workshops and attracting more interest from fellow parents looking for help understanding and supporting their gay and lesbian children. Around that time, too, Jane met Joann Elder and her husband Joe through their gay son. Joann quickly took on a leadership role within the organization, “which made all the difference in the world,” Jane explains.

There was, understandably, a lot of enthusiasm in the gay community—between 1987, when the group moved into the Friends Meeting House, and 1988, when they participated in Madison’s first Pride Parade, the local PFLAG had about 50 people on its mailing list and a rotating group that attended meetings at any given time.

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September 28: PFLAG Celebration of Leadership

The Madison PFLAG chapter is now one of the longest running in the nation. Kay Heggestad, another longtime member and leader, set up their table at the Dane County Farmers’ Market and has helped keep it there for 20 years.

Between 1987, when the group moved into the Friends Meeting House, and 1989, when they participated in Madison’s first Pride Parade, the local PFLAG had about 50 people on its mailing list and a rotating group that attended meetings at any given time. There were a wide variety of needs and attitudes with the parents who came—those much like Jane and the Elders, wanted to get educated to help their kids as much as they could, others came looking for support as they struggled with acceptance. In one case, Jane relates wryly, a parent ended up leaving the group, complaining that “you guys are too happy about having gay kids.”

For a long time, the group’s entire yearly budget came from shared profits they earned by volunteering at the annual Magic Picnics sponsored by the Hotel Washington and held at Brittingham Park.

Her work with PFLAG and gay rights in general earned Jane attention from other corners, too. In 1988 she was asked to be on the Wisconsin Conference of Church’s Taskforce on Sexual Orientation, which she drafted a letter to churches across the state about support for gay rights. In the 1990s she participated in the U.W. campus, with facilitation help from a gay man and a lesbian woman. “Volunteers can do things that professionals can’t,” Jane says. They had the flexibility to just start meeting without having to go through committees or bureaucracies first, and Jane frequently took phone calls from distraught youth and simply dropped everything to go meet with them and make sure they were cared for.

Eventually, though, Briarpatch Youth Services stepped in to create the more formal Teens Like Us (which still exists) as the first group pittered out. Jane stayed with PFLAG, however, as that organization continued to expand and adapt to the changing times.

The Madison PFLAG chapter is now one of the longest running in the nation. Kay Heggestad, another longtime member and leader, set up their table at the Dane County Farmers’ Market and has helped keep it there for 20 years.

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Preserving the Queer Past
A new historical preservation group aims to protect and share Madison’s LGBTQ past through oral histories and other collected materials. Dick Wagner relays one woman’s story of early lesbian life in the city.

GROWING UP IN DANE, WISCONSIN—a small community of 250 people northwest of Madison—a young girl of 11 was “struggling with my sexuality.” The oldest of 11 children, she recalled, “I knew I liked girls and the way boys liked girls, and I didn’t understand why.” Drawing on natural imagery, she would say, “I didn’t know what a lesbian was from a pumpkin.”

On New Year’s Day of 1963, just before her 18th birthday, the young woman moved to Madison. Her grandfather, who she described as “my mentor and my trusted adviser,” had told her she “didn’t need to worry, that if I got to a larger city, there was other people who were like me, and that I wasn’t the only one.” Her grandfather was in a band and knew musicians who were gay.

Thus opens the remarkable oral history of DJ Wipperfurth, one of those rare breeds of Madison area native. Her story is part of 80 LGBT oral histories amassed by the UW Madison Archives as part of their overall oral history project called DIANE (Dane County Historical Archives National Environment) and the campus and the environment of its city. The Wipperfurth story is rich with early vignettes of the area’s LGBT past.

To find community she went to the gay bars, except they weren’t bars in the usual sense, as that was known to happen in town in the old days. It’s a great example of how DJ could be fearless.

Wipperfurth remembered leaving the Three Bells on University Avenue across the street from where the George Moses Humanities Building now stands. There gay men, especially the “fly boy” servicemen from the Army and the environment of its city. The Wipperfurth story is rich with early vignettes of the area’s LGBT past.

To find community she went to the gay bars, except they weren’t bars in the usual sense, as that was known to happen in town in the old days. It’s a great example of how DJ could be fearless.

She recalls the “wonderfully lovely Catherine Rouse” who was the main woman behind DJ. “A tremendous experiment in a woman-owned and woman-operated space, it was a bar and restaurant. Kay Clarenbach was also one of the board members. Termed “the nicest place we’ve ever had in town, as far as I’m concerned,” its eventual destruction due to real estate, possibly by the building owner for real estate purposes, caused great sadness in the community.

Wipperfurth’s work experience included a stint as a manger for a group of lawyers at a Madison law firm. Her main career was 31 years driving a cab, 21 of them with Union Cab. While there she was also able to urge others to help the Women’s Transit Authority on calls to provide rides and advice.

For a time, she also tended bar at the Back Door, Rodney Scheel’s first foray into a locally owned gay bar. Across the street was a bar where, when the students got liquored up, they would come over to beat up the queers. She remembers them yelling obscenities and throwing ashtrays. A small, 100-pound woman would grab a pool cue and watch her back in these confrontations. One time she remembers a tall, slender drag queen being slammed into one of the students and saying, “There’s nothing worse than an angry queen. Have you ever been hit with a high heel!” She recalled her own reaction—“Not afraid like scared, but afraid like one of these days, one of these jackasses is going to hit me, stupidly.”

Wipperfurth participated in many of the community’s institutions. When asked about being on a softball team she said she was the pitcher. “Fast pitch, yeah, I don’t play slow pitch,” but this was in her Dane days. Then in Madison, she recalled one softball game where the “shirts off” movement struck, “so all the fans in the stands and the ballplayers paid off their shirts.” Another time she was ambushed between a Madison lesbian team and a team of women from Taycheedah—“the women’s prison.”

Wipperfurth is recorded saying, “Yeah. I’m very proud to be a lesbian.” The onlooker wishing to talk to young people to understand that they do have people they can look to for guidance… Because I went through a lot of torture, mental torture that I inflict on myself, because I couldn’t figure out what the hell was going on with me.”

Wipperfurth’s story (and there’s more) is preserved because of the oral history interview by Pat Calzha, who has done a lot of work to preserve and present lesbian history. Now, an ad-hoc group interested in the Preservation of Madison Queer History has taken up the challenge to preserve even more of it. Cooperation has been secured from the UW-Madison Archives to supplement their extensive oral history archive with written documents and other archival material. The New Harvest Foundation and the university’s George L. Mosse Program in History have both agreed to help fund a part-time archivist to collect and organize material. Outreach is administering part of the effort.

Because of the trailblazing and productive history of Madison’s LGBTQ community its history is both locally and nationally important. Since the early development of gay and lesbian history was subject to historical erasure due to the closet, we want to save the parts of our history that do exist. Look for future information coming in Our Lives about materials collected and how to help this effort. So, especially when cleaning out the closets, DO NOT THROW OUR HISTORY AWAY!
NAME: Stewie
OWNERS: Dino Maniaci & Jason Hoke
HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR PET? Breast friend/life fan
AGE: 6
SEX: Male
BREED: Whippet
BIRTHPLACE: Coralville, Iowa
OCCUPATION: Pillow Monitor
FAVOURITE TOYS: Orange cat stuffed animal
FAVOURITE LEISURE ACTIVITIES: Sunning around the house, staying in bed late with dad
FAVOURITE FOODS: Bacon drippings, ice cream, yogurt
PET PEEVES: Made beds, aligned throw pillows
LEAST FAVOURITE PHRASE: STEWART! Turn the fire on dad, please!

NAME: Augustus (Gus)
OWNERS: Samantha Thompson & Savanna Strennen
HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR PET? Adopted through the Wisconsin chapter of Greyhound Pets of America
AGE: 2
SEX: Male
BREED: Greyhound
BIRTHPLACE: Arkansas
RESIDENCE: Apartment
OCCUPATION: Retired racer
FAVOURITE TOYS: A large bone-shaped squeaky plushie
FAVOURITE LEISURE ACTIVITIES: Napping, cuddling
FAVOURITE FOODS: Chicken, peanut butter, pears
PET PEEVES: People who think he’s too skinny
LEAST FAVOURITE PHRASE: GET OUT OF THE KITCHEN!
IF PETS COULD TALK, WHAT WOULD YOURS SAY? I hated being a racer. All of that running was way too much work. Retirement is the best thing ever!

NAME: Louis
OWNERS: Spencer Micka & Ed Rector
HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR PET? Found abandoned by feral mother at one week old
AGE: 3
SEX: Male
BREED: Orange Tabby
BIRTHPLACE: Coralville, Iowa
OCCUPATION: Hall Monitor
FAVOURITE TOYS: Orange cat stuffed animal
FAVOURITE LEISURE ACTIVITIES: Cuddling
FAVOURITE FOODS: Chicken
PET PEEVES: Closed doors
LEAST FAVOURITE PHRASE: Get out of the kitchen!
IF PETS COULD TALK, WHAT WOULD YOURS SAY? It’s hard being this cute!
Black Trans Lives Matter: Health Care for All
An open letter from the Wisconsin Trans Health Coalition on the necessity of community efforts to eradicate state violence against transgender people.

Bryan Godar’s recent article in the Capital Times, “They Wanted to Keep this Quiet,” about Lisa Mitchell, a Black trans woman suing Dane County Jail for mistreatment, thoroughly depicts Lisa’s activism and life struggles. Lisa’s story touches on issues that unfortunately are too common for Black transgender women across the United States.

One in two Black trans women are incarcerated or have been incarcerated in their lifetime. Most have experienced sexual violence, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and sometimes survival sex work.

Lisa is no exception. With the overwhelming violence of police brutality toward Black cisgender men being brought to the foreground, the state violence toward Black cisgender women and trans people is often overlooked. This violence contributes to early death, suicide, and health problems for trans women of color and Black trans women in particular.

The violence that Lisa has experienced should be seen as both a racial justice issue and an LGBTQ issue. This includes being criminalized for surviving poverty, being forced into gender segregated jails and homeless shelters, experiencing sexual assault, and being denied medically necessary care while incarcerated at various jails and prisons in Wisconsin, including currently at the Dane County jail.

Lisa has filed a federal case against Medicaid after being denied transition care from Badgercare (WI Medicaid). She won her appeal, but wants to make sure trans exclusions are removed from the Badgercare and Medicaid policies as are currently written.

When a person experiences multiple forms of oppression such as Lisa, it has a dramatic impact on their health. This is only further exacerbated when they go to find support or seek medical or mental health care, and are often met with further barriers. Systems of care often provide inadequate treatment or refuse to care for transgender people of color. In fact, over half of transgender people reported needing to educate their providers on how to treat them, as found in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey.

Contributing Wisconsin Trans Health Coalition Members

Alex Hanna, Z. Hauhees, Gabe Javier, Owen Karcher, Shobhajit, and Anders Jazichowski

Lisa Mitchell

WISCONSIN TRANS HEALTH COALITION

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Did you know?
• Approximately 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ.
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• Homeless teens are more likely to become homeless adults.

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Hope Springs Up
Madison Urban Ministry’s Linda Ketchum muses on what has changed—and what has not—since the death of Tony Robinson in Madison, and where hope for the future of the community comes from the ground up.

Much has been written about the Madison Police Department’s response to the protests that erupted after Tony was killed, self-congratulatory articles and blogs praising the police for behaving differently than Ferguson Police. The protesters, too, responded differently, but not much praise was directed toward them. Instead the focus was on their expressions of anger and rage, signifying white Madison’s underlying fear that the protesters would become violent. On the night of March 6, in the heat of anguish and rage, standing on Willy Street where Tony Robinson was killed, the protests were not violent. In fact, that night I witnessed leaders of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition keep the crowd peaceful even as they gave voice to the rage. I believe that it was the members of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition and Robinson’s family that maintained the peace in the aftermath of Tony Robinson’s killing, not the established power structure. YGB leaders are people of color, straight and LGBT, and are building a movement that connects the dots related to oppression and equity.

On May 12, when the District Attorney issued his opinion that the officer that killed Tony Robinson exerted a lawful use of force, I was in front of the apartment where Tony was killed, along with dozens of other area clergy. We organized to be a witness for justice, a witness to the rage. I believe that it was the members of the Young, Gifted and Black Coalition and Robinson’s family that maintained the peace in the aftermath of Tony Robinson’s killing, not the established power structure. YGB leaders are people of color, straight and LGBT, and are building a movement that connects the dots related to oppression and equity.

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On May 12, when the District Attorney issued his opinion that the officer that killed Tony Robinson exerted a lawful use of force, I was in front of the apartment where Tony was killed, along with dozens of other area clergy. We organized to be a witness for justice, a witness to the despair, anguish and rage that came with the killing of another unarmed youth of color. As the afternoon wore on, friends of Tony’s found their way to the demonstration. Individuals from other organizations found their way, too. The youth, grief stricken, demonstrated their leadership by peacefully taking over the street. They then led the procession of clergy and others down Williamson Street to the Courthouse, around the square and finally to the steps of Grace Episcopal Church.

Studs Terkel wrote, “Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up.” And that’s where I see hope today: not trickling down from the established power structures but rather spilling up from small, local, grassroots organizations that are working with our LGBT youth and youth of color, helping them see and embrace the power of their voices, learning the skills they need to lift their voice and demand change. Organizations like Freedom Inc., which hopes to offer a Queer Youth Freedom School, a 12-week program for Hmong and Black queer youth aged 18–25, many who are homeless, living in poverty, survivors of abuse, formerly incarcerated. These youth are socially isolated, and the Freedom School will build community leaders and the capacity of queer youth of color to become advocates for themselves and their communities.

If we want Madison to become the community we like to think it is, please support some of the perhaps not-so-mainstream grassroots organizations that have sprung up and are challenging white privilege and racism, that are working with our youth, listening to their voices, teaching them the skills to engage and lead, showing us what it means to work collaboratively in a movement for justice and equity. Check out some of these organizations, they are all on Facebook (and I know most of you reading this are, too, so no excuses):

- Freedom Inc.
- YGB Ferguson to Madison
- Groundwork
- Operation Welcome Home
- Alianza Latina

Please consider a donation to these groups; they are doing hard, challenging, grassroots organizing with few resources.

Finally, in a city where local media is dominated by white reporters, opinion writers, etc., check out news sources that include the voices of men, women and youth of color:

- Madison365
- Capital City Hues
- Madison Times
- WORT
And Baby Makes Three:
Marital Children of Same-Sex Spouses

Attorney Christopher Krimmer explains the present status and future fight to establish a marital presumption for same-sex parents.

**Children were the paramount concern of both sides of the debate on whether to allow same-sex couples to marry. Opponents of same-sex marriage argued that procreation is the sole purpose of marriage and that marriage provides a family structure for heterosexual people who may accidentally and irresponsibly procreate. The argument follows that since gay men and lesbians cannot accidentally conceive children, they do not need the protections of marriage for their children. If you are having a difficult time following this logic, you are not alone. In the 65 court cases involving same-sex marriage in the past two years, only four courts even remotely hinted at accepting this rationale behind the purpose of marriage. In the 61 other cases, most importantly, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision provides finality and certainty that gay men and lesbians can marry, some states, including Wisconsin, continue to argue that the decision did not encompass all of the benefits, rights, and obligations associated with marriage. This is most evident when it comes to children.**

**Birth Certificate Statute**

As one example, when a married opposite-sex couple has a child, the husband is automatically listed as the father on the birth certificate. Specifically, state law states, “[a] man who is married to a woman… was married at any time from the conception to the birth of the child, the name of the husband of the mother shall be entered on the birth certificate as the legal father of the child.” Now that lesbian couples can marry, why should a wife of a mother who gives birth be denied the right to be listed on their child’s birth certificate as the other parent? If we are to treat opposite-sex couples equally as to marriage, then presumably this statute should be read to now include lesbian spouses, yet there has been no revision from the state of Wisconsin and other states throughout the country. A birth certificate does not establish any custodial and parentage rights of the child, but it is the document most often relied upon when determining a child’s parents, provides the parents with a sense of equality between them, and gives the child a certain security and legitimacy that the child is part of an intact family.

**Marital Presumption Statute**

Unlike the birth certificate statute, the “marital presumption” does indeed grant a spouse the legal status of a parent in all respects. In opposite-sex marriage, the husband of a wife who gives birth is not only listed on the birth certificate but is presumed to be the child’s legal father. This “marital presumption” is defined by statute to read “[A] man is presumed to be a natural father of a child if he was married to the natural mother when the child was conceived or born, or if he subsequently married the natural mother after the birth of the child and he had a relationship with the mother during the conception period of time and no other man has been adjudicated or presumed to be the father.”

Here, again, the statute relies on gender-specific terminology. A wife of a mother who gives birth during the marriage should enjoy the same parental rights of a husband under this statute now that we have marriage equality.

The application of the “marital presumption” as applied to lesbian spouses has been litigated in recent years with differing outcomes. Some state courts, like New York, have held that the marital presumption is not based on the marriage itself but the biological reality that the husband and wife conceived the child together. Other state courts have determined that the marital presumption is not generally based, but provides legitimacy to the children.

We have no definitive answer yet on how Wisconsin will apply the marital presumption or the birth certificate statute with respect to children born during the marriage of a same-sex couple. There is pending litigation on these issues. In determining that gay and lesbian couples have the right to marry, the U.S. Supreme Court stated that marriage provides safeguards for children and families “and thus draws meaning from related rights of childrearing, education, and medical decision-making.” A fair reading of this language would indicate that the Court intended not only to allow gay men and lesbians the right to access marriage but to also enjoy all the rights of marriage, including parenthood.

Even if Wisconsin should start to apply these parentage statutes to same-sex spouses, the couple should not rely exclusively on these statutes to protect the relationship of the non-biological parent with the child. These are presumptions under the law which means that the presumption can be rebutted. Historically, the marital presumption has been rebutted by DNA that the husband could not be the father of the child. In most cases, but not all, the same-sex spouse will not be generally related to the child and could be vulnerable to having this marital presumption rebutted by the spouse at the time of a divorce, or even possibly by a third party like a state agency. In addition, the “marital presumption” may not “travel” to other states if the family relocates. In other words, just because Wisconsin may presume the same-sex spouse to be the child’s other parent, this does not mean Tennessee or Texas will give deference to Wisconsin’s marital presumption law.

**Adoption or Parentage Order**

The married couple still should strongly consider seeking an adoption or parentage order for the protection of the child’s relationship with the non-biological parent. Although gay men and lesbians now have the right to marry, it is not full marriage equality yet. People and state governments that oppose marriage equality will continue to parse out statutes and laws that are gender-specific and exclude those protections for same-sex spouses. This is no more evident than with the laws pertaining to children. The U.S. Supreme Court decision recognizing the right to marry for gays and lesbians understood that we were not fighting for the right for “same-sex marriage,” but the right to “marriage.”

Remember that tie you gave dad for Christmas last year? Why should a wife of a mother who gives birth be denied the right to be listed on their child’s birth certificate as the other parent? If we are to treat opposite-sex couples equally as to marriage, then presumably this statute should be read to now include lesbian spouses, yet there has been no revision from the state of Wisconsin and other states throughout the country. A birth certificate does not establish any custodial and parentage rights of the child, but it is the document most often relied upon when determining a child’s parents, provides the parents with a sense of equality between them, and gives the child a certain security and legitimacy that the child is part of an intact family.

**The Court’s decision this past summer recognizing the nationwide right to marry for same-sex couples, the Court acknowledged that hundreds of thousands of children are being raised by gay and lesbian parents who provide loving, supporting homes. The Court expressly rejected the opponents’ argument that children should be protected from same-sex marriage and determined, in part, that the welfare of the children is exactly why gay men and lesbians must have the right to marry. The Court concluded that to deny same-sex couples the stability and predictability of marriage would cause their children to suffer the stigma of believing their families are somehow lesser. Although the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision provides finality and certainty that gay men and lesbians can marry, some states, including Wisconsin, continue to argue that the decision did not encompass all of the benefits, rights, and obligations associated with marriage. This is most evident when it comes to children.**

**Stability & Predictability of Marriage**

In the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision this past summer recognizing the nationwide right to marry for same-sex couples, the Court acknowledged that hundreds of thousands of children are being raised by gay and lesbian parents who provide loving, supporting homes. The Court expressly rejected the opponents’ argument that children should be protected from same-sex marriage and determined, in part, that the welfare of the children is exactly why gay men and lesbians must have the right to marry. The Court concluded that to deny same-sex couples the stability and predictability of marriage would cause their children to suffer the stigma of believing their families are somehow lesser. Although the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision provides finality and certainty that gay men and lesbians can marry, some states, including Wisconsin, continue to argue that the decision did not encompass all of the benefits, rights, and obligations associated with marriage. This is most evident when it comes to children.
Many Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence programs are hoping to provide safe spaces for LGBTQ survivors seeking services.

In September, I interviewed Shannon Barry from Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS) in Madison to ask about the services and outreach they offer. Shannon has been with DAIS since 1999, serving as its executive director since 2007.

DAIS’ new emergency shelter, which opened in August 2014, accommodates more private spaces and includes single bedrooms as well as single user bathrooms. However, we experience violence in our relationships at similar rates to the heterosexual community, yet there are fewer services designed to support us when we have been hurt by IPV. As this article goes to press, we will be receiving the newest national report on LGBTQ Intimate Partner Violence from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP), which can be found at nacvp.org. Last year, NCAVP reported 76% of IPV LGBTQ homicide victims were gay men. Gay men, LGBTQ and HIV-affected communities of color, LGBTQ and HIV-affected youth and young adults, bisexual survivors, and transgender individuals were most impacted by IPV within the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of violence rarely go to the police, the courts, or domestic violence shelters for support.

DAIS strives to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to accessing services. Last April, DAIS held a mandatory, daylong staff in-service on the topic of inclusivity of services for LGBTQ survivors. Additionally, all DAIS directors and all staff who have client contact were required to participate in three LGBTQ-focused webinars sponsored by the State Department of Children and Families to be more mindful of how we can tailor our services to be more inclusive. In addition to the in-service and webinar based trainings, all DAIS staff and all volunteers being trained were also required to complete a training session tailored to supporting those impacted by domestic violence in the LGBTQ community during their New Advocate Training. As a result, DAIS has made the following adjustments:

- DAIS reminds ourselves that when collecting demographics, we should always ask an individual if they identify their gender identity and sexual orientation rather than assume their identity or limiting their answers. DAIS thinks this question should remain open-ended so that we are leaving the decision to share and define in the survivor’s hands.
- DAIS’ new emergency shelter, which opened in August 2014, accommodates more private spaces and includes single bedrooms as well as single user bathrooms.
- DAIS changed its assessment/screening language for support groups.
- Help Line Advocates are trained to talk with callers about the violence they may be experiencing by their partners rather than assuming the caller is in a heterosexual relationship.

WHAT LOCAL RESOURCES CAN LGBTQ SURVIVORS REACH OUT TO FOR SUPPORT?

DAIS offers a wide array of crisis intervention including a 24-hour Help Line, programming for children from violent homes, legal advocacy, support groups, emergency safety planning, and the only domestic violence shelter for all of Dane County. DAIS also partners with a wide variety of other organizations throughout the community. Additional resources can be found at:

- OutReach LGBT Community Center: lightoutreach.org
- Briarpatch Youth Services, Inc. has a weekly group called Teens Like Us, which provides support and education for LGBTQ youth (13-18 years old), youthout.org/ programs/teens-like-us.
- The Salvation Army also has some funding for transgender individuals seeking shelter who may not feel comfortable residing in the Salvation Army shelter as it currently stands.

WHAT INPUT/ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE FRIENDS OF LGBTQ SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE WHO WANT TO HELP?

Each of us has the power to reach out to someone we love or care about and tell them that abuse is not their fault. Be open, listen, don’t judge or give advice. Provide support to this person and let them know that you are there for them. Be mindful of how identifying as LGBTQ may increase their barriers and/or impact their safety.

The DAIS Help Line is available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Help Line can be reached at 608-251-4445 or 800-747-4045. We receive many calls each year from concerned friends and family members seeking information about strategies to be an effective support person to a survivor in their life.

- For additional information on how to help a friend or family member experiencing domestic abuse, visit abuseintervention.org/help/friend/family.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR PROGRAMS SEEKING TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE?

Be very open to having a conversation, but more importantly, be open to listening. Sometimes I think it can be scary because we want to do things correctly for any survivor of domestic violence, especially LGBTQ survivors. We won’t always do things perfectly, but being open to feedback, listening, and evolving are key to our work. As advocates, we are trained on these skills already. We already know that being present and following the lead of the survivor means that we really need to listen to their stories. It’s not different for LGBTQ survivors. Let’s challenge ourselves to be present and to listen. Each person has an individual story and should have an individual safety plan created for their needs.

KATHY FLORES leads the Fox Valley LGBTQ Anti-Violence Project and is the City of Appleton’s full-time Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator. Kathy also serves on the Governance Committee of National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.
New Harvest Foundation is the only foundation in South Central Wisconsin that channels charitable contributions exclusively to organizations working to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, services, culture and community development.

Fall Grant Cycle Has Begun!

Grant Applications Due November 31st

Are you working for social service, social change, public education, or arts and culture, and/or development of LGBTQQA communities? We currently are accepting innovative grant proposals for our Fall Grant Cycle.

Funding priorities include: LGBTQQA Youth & LGBT Seniors

The grant application, and information about past grantees, is available online. Allow us to help you be an instrument of empowerment and change in our LGBTQQA communities!

Charles, a Transgender Man, and his spouse have been trying to have a baby using his eggs. He’s been on testosterone for six years but has been off hormones at the suggestion of his insurance company. They won’t cover the procedure to harvest his eggs but suggested he even begin taking estrogen to have a better chance of doing so.

“I have to do what they want me to do,” Charles (not his real name) says, otherwise his chances of getting the procedure covered will become slimmer. Being off testosterone for so long has had adverse consequences for him. Charles also suffers from endometriosis, which causes him constant pain. His primary care doctor is friendly to transgender patients like himself, but couldn’t care for him in her facility. He was referred to a women’s clinic, where he felt very uncomfortable and had to explain his body to the providers.

This kind of experience is all too common for most transgender people. Getting proper health care as a transgender person is difficult in Wisconsin, as it is in most of the U.S. Most employer health insurance plans don’t cover transition care. In addition, when insurance does care cover, there is a paucity of providers who know how to provide adequately for transgender patients. Even something as simple as allowing for preferred names and pronouns is not a standard feature of health software.

Open Enrollment Time for Health Insurance

People can enroll in a health insurance plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace November 1, 2015 through January 31, 2016. People may qualify for Special Enrollment Periods allowing them to enroll outside of Open Enrollment if they have certain life events, like getting married, having a baby, or losing other coverage.

Under the ACA, no one can be denied preventive care because of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, which are among the preventive services covered under the ACA. But some insurance policies can be limited. For example, some policies exclude transgender care, or only cover gender-specific health services—such as pregnancy care for transgender women, or male circumcision for transgender men.

The proposed rules would apply to any insurer working with Medicare, Medicaid, or the ACA Health Insurance Marketplace.

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You Are Enough

Owen Karcher

As we engage in learning more about our identities as LGBTQ individuals, we have an opportunity to create our own stories and our own answers to these questions in a way that is liberatory, rather than oppressive. Work on an individual level as well as a collective level. We will need to be able to hold bravery, vulnerability, and forgiveness for ourselves for being who we are and will have to do some unpeeling of the stories we want to tell about ourselves from the messages we hear from outside.

One suggestion I have for working through this is to start by explicitly naming all of the beliefs, doubts, fears, and expectations held that came from the source of conflict. So, for example, if I were to have some long-held beliefs about how I can behave and express my gender or sexuality that came from my family values and messages growing up, I would start there. As an art therapist, I tend to favor physical expressions of things like this, so I would recommend writing down, drawing, sketching, painting, or creating 3D representations of the many ways I learned that I was not _____ enough. Share it with those close to you. Burn the list of negative messages that held you back. Transform it into another piece of artwork that doesn’t feel so limiting. I would revisit it when you start to doubt yourself again. This practice can be repeated as much as necessary for as many sources of doubt, judgment, or fear as you are experiencing. The more we can make explicit the things we are holding that are not serving us, the more we can actively challenge them and change our capacity to give ourselves permission to live the ways we want to.

I am hopeful we can practice things like this individually, but also in community. I believe our LGBTQ movements can work to stop oppressing members of our community by policing each other. We can challenge what it means to be whatever our identities are, and should honor and respect each other when we have the bravery to do so. Good luck with this process. Hold compassion for yourself because this can be a challenge. Hold compassion for each other as you struggle to figure out what it means to be _______ enough, and how to authentically and deeply express that truth.

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Midas Touch

At The Makery in Waunakee, Spencer Porter and his team turn everything they touch into gold—after about 15 minutes and at 350 degrees.

WHO DOESN’T HAVE fond memories of fresh sugar cookies, still warm, golden brown with a tender crust? Mmm. Makes my mouth water just thinking about it. Now think of those cookies and add the perfect amount of delicious icing. Getting even better, right?

That, in a nutshell, is what Spencer Porter brings to the world each and every day. Spencer is the owner of a relatively new cookie shop in Waunakee called The Makery. He and his dedicated staff work hard every day to make our world a slightly more delicious place. But they don’t make just any old frosted sugar cookie. These are very delicate cookies and they are hand decorated to order by Spencer and his baking team. So, for instance, if you own a business and are having an event, The Makery will add your logo to their cookies to create a memorable, one-of-a-kind sweet treat for patrons.

PORTER has plans to keep growing the business; he would like to see at least one more shop in another community. The Makery also has a stand at U-W-Madison home football games, so you can try one of their awesome sweet treats while cheering on Bucky.

If you own a business and are having an event, The Makery will add your logo to their cookies to create a memorable, one-of-a-kind sweet treat for patrons. It is a very cool idea, and is very artfully done.

A final note: if you think you may want to order holiday cookies from The Makery, call now. They fill up very quickly (since there are only four people on staff and they do have a limit on how many cookies they can make). I would also encourage anyone in the Waunakee area to go to the shop. It’s a fun place, and now they’ve also started making dreamy cupcakes. I had a chocolate cupcake with a whipped peanut butter frosting that was absolute decadence: very moist, very chocolaty and certainly of a higher quality than a couple of other cupcake joints I’ve tried in Madison (just sayin’).

HOLIDAY COOKIES

As bakery manager April Ripp points out, though, their bread and butter (sorry, but I do love a good pun) is most certainly their holiday cookies. In fact, the holiday cookie is what got Spencer into the cookie business to begin with. In the Fall of 2014, Spencer and his sister decided that a fun project would be to make up a bunch of Christmas cookies and give them to family and friends. These cookies were so stunning and so delicious that people began to ask him if they could buy these cookies for their own holiday gatherings. From there, the cookie business just continued to roll out.

From that humble beginning in his apartment, he now has a staff of four people (Ripp, baking assistant Nancy Maly, and pastry chef Katie Bateman) and a lovely shop to help keep our community’s cookie cravings in check. He’s left behind his former career at Meriter Hospital, but he certainly is putting his business degree to good use.

“I had no idea my life was going to be in cookies, but sometimes you just have to go where life takes you,” says Porter. Clearly, this leap of faith is working for not only him, but for his staff as well. His business model is certainly sound—he’s hired great people and they all work hard because they absolutely love their work. It definitely shows in their products.

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.

Breakfast and Lunch served daily
Dinner served Tuesdays through Saturdays

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Be the Change
Haruna Yukioka

I was born and live in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, a city with a population of less than 50,000, of which the majority are white and conservative. My brother and I were the only Asian students in our elementary school, a fact I realized only after my freshman year of high school. My childhood was happy, albeit tinged with ignorance. I remember praying for blonde hair and blue eyes every night so that I might look a little more like my classmates, and I remember seeing a disfigured reflection the next morning in the mirror. My parents would speak about being refused service at local grocery stores or being told that the “Japs would speak about being refused service at the next morning in the mirror. My parents would speak about being refused service at local grocery stores or being told that the “Japs

My goal during college is to achieve a double major in Music Education and Social Work, and firmly believe that they were instrumental in helping me heal from the hurt of oppression and loss, and I know that I will never forget them. My goal during college is to achieve a double major in Music Education and Social Work, and firmly believe that they were instrumental in helping me heal from the hurt of oppression and loss, and I know that I will never forget them.

During after spending so much time working with folks from Madison, I became frustrated at the lack of resources for youth in the Fond du Lac area. By the time that I had started high school, there were no active youth LGBTQ+ organizations within the Fox Valley, which only helped to perpetuate the illusion that we were alone. By my senior year, I had had enough. Along with a group of highly motivated and inspirational youth, I started a LGBTQ+ youth group called the Fox Valley Alliance. I had learned from LTI that youth had the power to make the change we wanted to see in the world, and I used that knowledge to make life better for people like me in the Fox Valley.

While our group is relatively new, we have plans to increase our community outreach efforts through monthly meetings and other LGBTQ+ centered events. The only requirement to join this group is holding the passion to change the lives of queer/trans youth in the Fox Valley for the better, and I am grateful and proud to say that we have gathered more people than I ever thought possible.

I cannot stress the importance of community. I firmly believe that one of the worst weapons in the battle against the LGBTQ+ community is the image of isolation. It is so very important for queer and trans youth to find each other and band together, and I cannot thank organizations like GSAFE enough for making that possible. Throughout GSAFE, I was able to meet and work with people that shared my identities and helped me on my journey to self-love and acceptance. The community I am lucky enough to be part of has been instrumental in helping me heal from the hurt of oppression and loss, and I know that I had continued to be alone that I would never be here today.

I was lucky enough to go back to LTI two more times, once as a peer mentor and once more as a senior mentor. I discovered that my true joy and passion lies in building community and sharing knowledge—the youth that I have met continue to amaze and inspire me, and I know that I will never forget them. My goal during college is to achieve a double major in Music Education and Social Work, with a minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies. To work with an organization like GSAFE that empowers and saves so many young queer youth is my dream—I was lucky enough to be one of those youth, and I can only hope that I will someday be able to repay the favor.

Today, I see my reflection in the mirror and I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing. I hold my queerness as a gift, a precious part of me that I wouldn’t change a thing.
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