our lives

Madison's LGBTQA Magazine

November/December 2007

Holiday Gift Ideas

free

Red Ribbon Advocacy

AIDS philanthropy at *The Old Fashioned*

Growing Together

A candid look at a loving gay relationship

Day Trip: Sauk Prairie

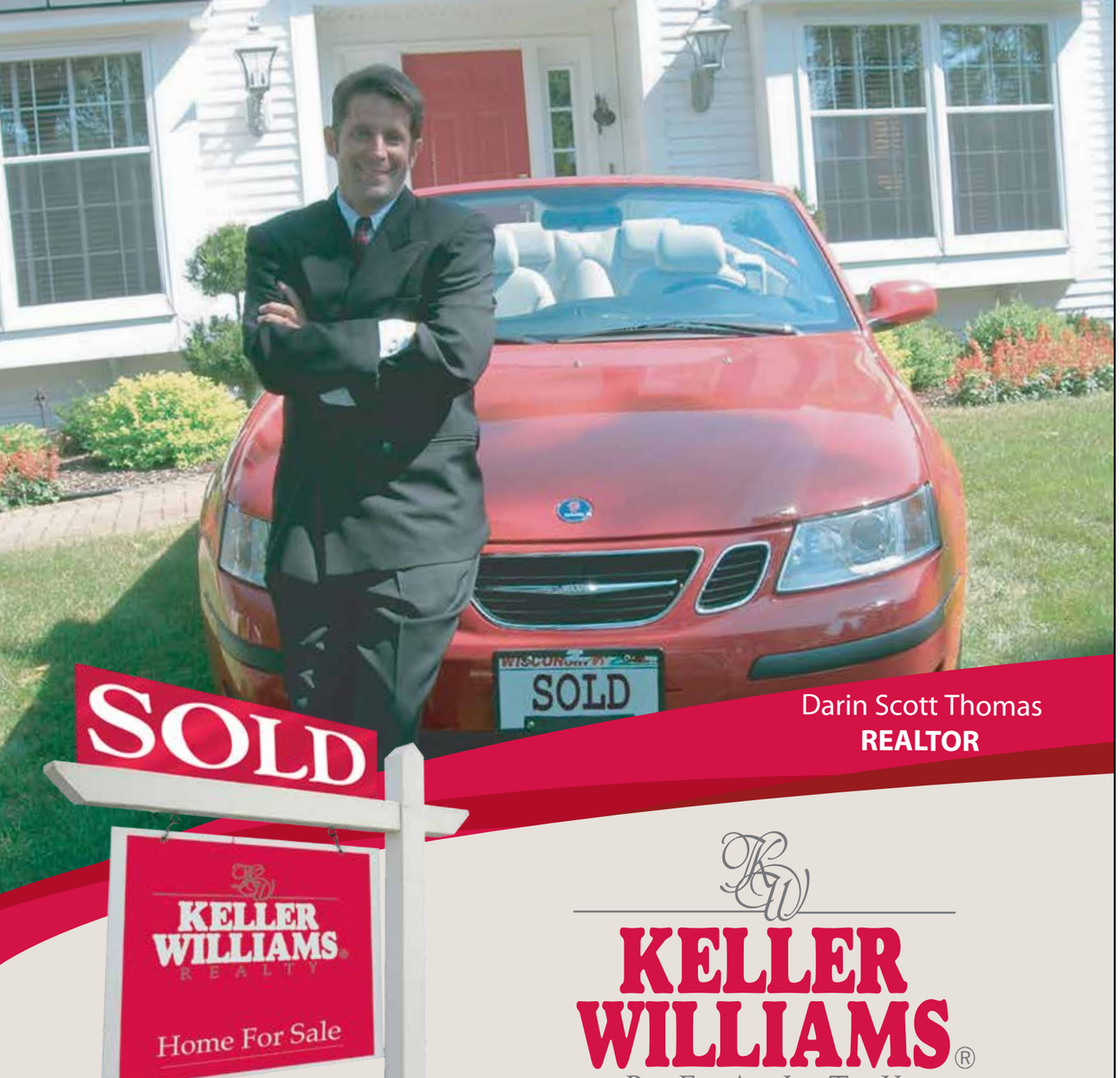
Jody Kapp discovers a few local treasures

One Year Later

The Marriage Amendment

Fair Wisconsin's **Eva Shiffrin** reveals our next steps

Madison Alder **Eli Judge** recounts what we've accomplished



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Cover Photo by Jessica Horn
shooterforhire@gmail.com

our lives

Queer Studies Forum
...SEXUAL ORIENTATION AS A CHOICE
Submitted by **KevinLpz**

Most scientific hypothesis regarding sexual orientation is relative to the supported position. Let's assume sexual orientation is a choice? Why bother advocating for extended civil rights for a population that chooses to be. There is no legal grounding for freedom-of-choice protections. If we are to be included into the civil rights club along side racial minorities, the disabled, & women then it's crucial that we be found as equally distinct as they.

our lives

Madison's LGBTQA Magazine

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My Two Moms

Alta with her parents, Susan & Mary Jane

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Ashlyn & Bailie with their parents, Brendan & Vance

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editor

Rest in Peace, My Friend.

"Over the past few months I have been happier than I have been in a long time. The reason for this is that I have someone in my life. Dana makes me feel like I have a meaning in life again, and I the same for him. We both at long last found the person we want to be with forever.

We have decided that it is stupid to keep two houses going as we are at each others anyway. So I will be moving in to Dana's over the month of August.

I know this is new to you… and to me. But both of us feel that this is right for us. We have talked to Grandma and she is fine with it. (As long as I continue to cook.) I am at a time in my life that I need someone and want that someone to feel the same way about me."

I was asked to read this at the funeral of someone who might never have known the hope, courage and beauty he helped me find by simply entering my life. This is for you, John, and for showing us all that love transcends everything.

With love,
Patrick Farabaugh
PUBLISHER / EDITOR

our lives — Dana Crumpton ourlivesmadison.com user dnj6366

How we will remember John W. Meyer:

"When I met John on May 6, 2000, I knew he was the person I was going to spend the rest of my life with. He realized that also when he gave up an expense paid trip to Hawaii to get back to see me in St. Louis. These past 7 years have been the best of our life, bringing two families together as one. I will miss my partner, my best friend, my soul mate. Holidays will be a time of celebration in his memory. It is not goodbye but so long for now until we are together again. I love you!!" **—Dana Crumpton**

"John = family. John had a great sense of family. His love of the holidays will be with us always. We will celebrate him at each holiday forever." **— Barb Meyer (John's Mom)**

"I will remember everything I ever knew about John. Death does that to a parent. I'm 69 years old and I go to sleep now at night with one of John's teddy bears. When I touch teddy's head it feels just like John's head when his hair started growing back, I remember. I loved John more than anyone can imagine." **— Wayne Meyer (John's Dad)**

"I will miss his love of the holidays, his fabulous cooking and the twinkle in his eyes. What I will remember most about John is what an amazing uncle he was to Leah and Ryan. They already miss him so much. We will keep John very close to our hearts."
—Kimberly (John's sister)

Share your thoughts at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM

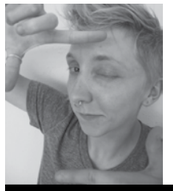
contributors

Gretchen Treu is an English major with a Women's Studies certificate working on her undergraduate thesis on queer sex-gender systems in science fiction. She is lucky to work in her favorite place, A Room Of One's Own Bookstore, and is happy to chat about books with anybody who stops in. She has also spent the past two summers working hard at Garden To Be, a local organic farm, and as a result of their wonderful produce loves to cook with her friends and roommates.

our lives — OUR PAGES ourlivesmadison.com user Gretchen

"My goal as a photographer is to be an eyewitness to life as it happens and convey that in honest and professional photographs. The challenge is capture life uniquely, in a way that touches others." As a freelance photographer, **Melody Hanson's** focus is lifestyle, fine arts and international photojournalism. Born in Papua New Guinea, she has traveled extensively through out Europe and the former USSR. She currently lives with her husband and four children in Madison.

our lives — PROFILE ourlivesmadison.com user melhhanson



Jessica Horn is enthusiastic! As a freelance photographer, she solves creative imaging needs for artists, musicians, families, businesses, professionals and publications. She spends free time with her partner, fattening their loud-mouthed pooch, and on Sundays, can be heard reporting news on WORT's feminist program, Her Turn. For portfolio samples and other inquiry, Jessica can be contacted at shooterforhire@gmail.com

our lives — COVER ourlivesmadison.com user JJ

Amy VanKauwenbergh is a new contributor to the *Our Lives* dining section and a longtime ally of the gay community. A lifelong Madison resident, Amy spent several years promoting Madison as a Tourism destination to the LGBT audience. In addition to frequenting Madison's many wonderful locally-owned restaurants, Amy can often be seen performing (unabashedly) at local karaoke nights'.

our lives — EATING WELL ourlivesmadison.com user AmyVanK

Callen Harty grew up in Shullsburg, Wisconsin and has lived in the Madison area since 1982. He was a co-founder of Proud Theater and UW's 10% Society. In 2003 he was named OutReach's Man of the Year. He is currently the Artistic Director of Broom Street Theater and has written around 20 plays that have been produced, acted hundreds of times in dozens of roles, and directed a couple dozen. He lives with his lifetime partner, Brian, in Monona.

our lives — OUR STAGES ourlivesmadison.com user callenh

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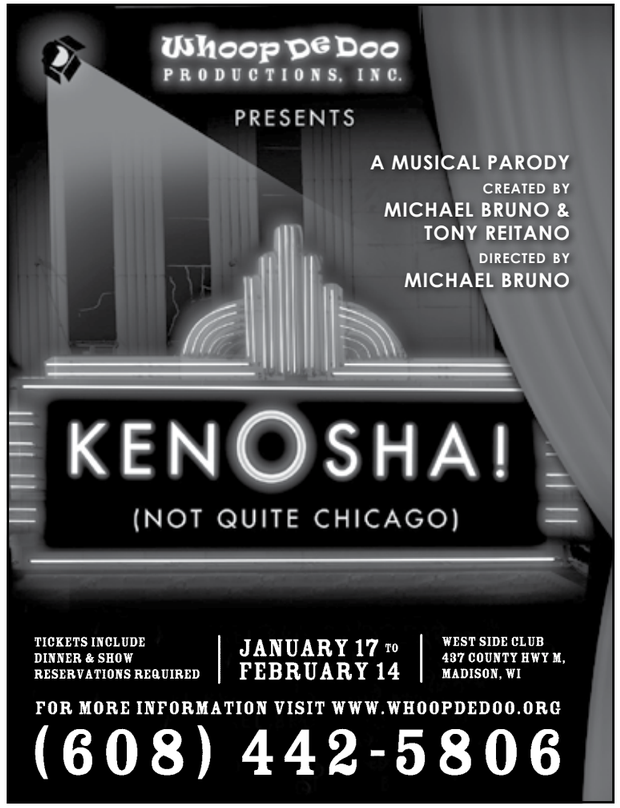

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INTRODUCING OURSELVES

The Dancing Queen

Meet **Liz Tymus**, the mind behind Madison's iQ

our lives
Liz Tymus
ourlivesmadison.com
user liztymus

Photos by Jessica Horn
shooterforhire@gmail.com

Tell us about yourself. I'm from Racine County, and came to Madison for undergrad. Have since received my degree, moved to the Czech Republic, moved back to Madison and am now managing a coffee shop on State St. After 7 years here, I started iQ (indiequeer.com).

What is iQ? iQ is indie Queer. It's how I identify, it's how my closest friends identify. It's the music I choose to rock out to, the way I dress and carry myself. It's the party I throw for my community. It's my social scene and my personal self.

And how did it all get started? I wanted to open a downtown niteclub but didn't have the money or credit to do it. So my friend Bob (who was managing Mickey's Tavern at the time) and I decided to start a queer night for east side queers. It all evolved out of that one December night and my friendship with Bob. It's really all about 'who you know' and we realized that collectively we knew enough people to get iQ going.

Watching the theatre fill up with queers from all over the Midwest was the most fulfilling iQ moment yet

And has it become now? iQ nights have become the best dance parties on the Isthmus. Originally I wanted to move the party around town, but the need for a place for queers to dance downtown and the abundance of radical indie dance music has evolved into monthly dance nights at the King Club. We've had some live music with bands from Baltimore, Austin and Madison. But overwhelmingly what I've seen is that Queers just want to dance. So we'll stick with that.

You just threw Madison's biggest LGBT Halloween party—*HalloQueen*. How'd you pull that off?
It evolved out of a Craigslist posting in September before the Majestic theatre had reopened. They were looking for people to help promote events, I decided I wanted to throw an event there. I was tired of throwing mid-week parties and was ready for a Saturday party, and it just so happened they had the Saturday of Halloween weekend open. Perfect. I threw an indie Queer costume ball. Nick Nice was more than thrilled to DJ and the Real Jaguar has been involved with iQ on a few events. WORT and the Isthmus co-sponsored the event which brought even more threads of our community together. I am still exhausted but I cannot wait to do this all over again. Watching the theatre fill up with queers from all over the Midwest was the most fulfilling iQ moment yet, all of the late nights and early morning planning was worth it to see the spectacle that was *HalloQueen*.

What other moments have felt that good? iQ's *Alterna Prom* in April, raising money for GSA for Safe Schools and watching queers get down in their prom gowns. The iQ ACT 5 Aids Ride benefit for Team Caffeine in June was pretty awesome. And just seeing folks from the community show up at iQ night as a 'thing' to do in Madison. Most importantly, eavesdropping on people asking one another if they're going to the next iQ.

…And are they? As long as they are, I'm gonna keep organizing bigger and hotter events for the queers! ■

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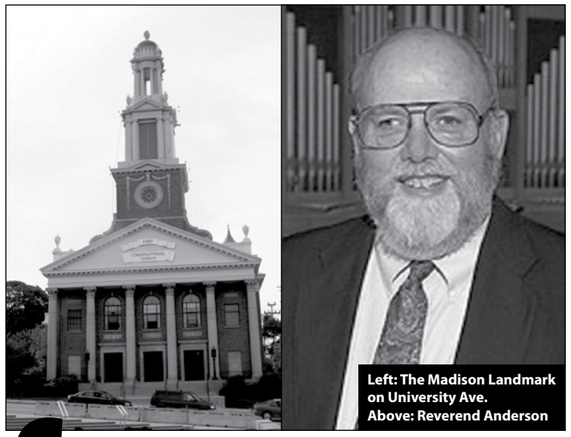
Connecting Through Faith

One of our most consistent and visible allies, the Reverend Curt Anderson openly affirms all people at First Congregational United Church of Christ



Left: The Madison Landmark on University Ave.
Above: Reverend Anderson

For Curt Anderson, it's been a long road from Fresno, his hometown, to Madison. Curt is the Senior Minister at First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ. This church, with its iconic bell tower, has served as Rev. Anderson's home since he and his wife arrived here in 2000. He was called to service here after a career spanning several decades and service to churches in Iowa, Michigan, California, as well as a church in Janesville.

People are responsible for working out their own faith

Although matters of faith and religion can be unfamiliar and intimidating to some, First Congregational has a long history of being an ally of the LGBT community. In 1992, the church adopted a formal statement openly affirming and welcoming the LGBT community as vital members of the congregation. LGBT members of the church have formed "Rainbow People", a network that acts as a social network as well as a resource for the congregation at large on issues that affect us. And the associate minister, Rev. Eldonna Hazen, was called to service at First Congregational after a long search for a place where she and her partner would be embraced and accepted.

As spiritual leader, Curt Anderson is the steward and guide for the congregation. It was an easy choice for Curt when he answered the call to service. "UCC has always had a passion for social justice, and has always allowed people great freedom in terms of setting their own beliefs. People are responsible for working out their own faith." He notes that within the framework of empowerment and trust, "openness comes to people in the midst of those searches."

Despite the progressive nature of his starting point, Curt admits that in terms of LGBT issues, he was "not at the same place 30 years ago that I am today. We've all come along way in recognizing our need to rethink our attitudes about LGBT people and issues." Still, the church was a trailblazer in this regard; in 1972, one of Rev. Anderson's fellow seminarians, William Johnson, was the first openly gay person ordained in the United Church of Christ.

When Curt came to know the LGBT members of his various congregations, their experiences and his observations fueled his sense of social justice. "I really believe that discrimination against LGBT people is analogous to discrimination against African-American people." This has led Curt to be one of our community's most consistent and visible allies. This was perhaps most evident during the recent debate over the constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Curt was one of a number of spiritual figures who were "first responders" to the issue. He recalls hearing about discriminatory bans in other states. The antigay language reminded him of the debate against interracial marriage, and served as Curt's call to action. "When we started, the only religious words used in the debate were discriminatory." Curt and the United Church of Christ were part of the Christians for Equality in Wisconsin group, which was discussing the repercussions of such a ban and its effect on LGBT people as early as 2004, prior to its passage in the legislature.

Curt was also a comforting and highly visible ally to LGBT people and to Fair Wisconsin during the campaign for the "No" vote. He debated Julaine Appling, executive director of the Family Research Institute (now Wisconsin Family Council) in several debates across the state, as well as on WISC-TV's "For The Record". But despite his efforts and guidance, the amendment passed. Curt had to shift his focus and offer support to his congregation, many of whom were devastated by the vote and mourned the loss of such a hard-fought battle. The following Sunday, Curt delivered a sermon that included a declaration reaffirming that no matter what happened outside of the church, the walls of First Congregational were always a welcome and nurturing place for LGBT people.

Despite the amendment, Curt sees a silver lining in some aspects of the debate. "For the first time, statewide all across Wisconsin, we were having a conversation with LGBT people and about LGBT people and their issues. That hadn't happened before. If the people involved

We don't call them 'commitment services', we refer to them as 'weddings'

weren't in the closet, the conversations about them were." He's convinced that while we may have lost the battle, the struggle will go on. "The day will come in Wisconsin where there will be full marriage rights for LGBT people. It may be difficult to overturn, but it will happen."

In the meantime, Curt continues to offer spiritual guidance to all the members of First Congregational. The church has stayed a cohesive unit, and no one has left as a result of the amendment. As for same-sex marriage, he mentions an upcoming ceremony for two women in the church. "We don't call them 'commitment services', we refer to them as 'weddings', and we talk about them the same way and think about them the same way." Referring to the commitment as a 'union', Curt says, may be "good as a political strategy, but the long term goal is full marriage rights."

—Patrick Erwin

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Full Name: **Tom Farley**
Organization: Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau
Web Site URL: http://www.visitmadison.com/
About Me: I am the Director of Marketing for the Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau. I recently moved back to my hometown of Madison, after 20 years in the NY City area. I am convinced that Madison has a great untapped wealth of creativity that needs to be unleashed!

To do this, our community needs to embrace all of its vast, diverse, and unique populations. I think Madison would suffer without the LGBT population and the many positive qualities it brings to the community. To me, the results would produce a Madison that is a hell of a lot more humourous, more understanding, emotional. And we'd sure as hell dress a lot better! This magazine is revolutionary! Bravo; another reminder of how smart and creative this place is.

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MARRIAGE & RELATIONSHIPS

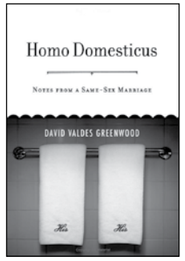
Happily Ever After

David Valdes Greenwood goes inside a same-sex marrige to candidly show the ups and downs of domestic bliss.

In recent years, most books about same-sex relationships have been sociological or legal treatise on the need for legalization. While these are useful for the fight for justice and equality, they are not necessarily fun to read. In the memoir *Homo Domesticus: Notes from a Same-Sex Marriage* David Valdes Greenwood has created a wonderfully readable demonstration that relationships are created out of love, not a particular mix of genders. The story follows

Seeing how one couple overcame such trials is a reminder that relationships, LGBTQ or A, require work

two very different personalities from their initial meeting as grad students through a commitment ceremony, a legal Massachusetts wedding and finally an adoption. While the book is often romantic, it is also incredibly honest about the difficulties the couple faced along the way.



The story begins at the commitment ceremony of a groom who forgot his pants. It proceeds, with frequent digressions to give past history, in roughly chronological order. Unlike so many gay memoirs that seem to feel they have to be incredibly witty or sarcastic, this telling is sweet, funny, and very real. The reader will be reminded of friends sharing stories of their relationships around the dinner table. Valdes Greenwood seems to have cultivated this feeling, drawing his readers ever closer to his subjects.

Part of the humor in the book arises from the differences between the two men. The author is a self-described gushy romantic while his partner is far more stoic and pragmatic. Trying to work through these differences not only creates the humor but also the tension. As in any relationship, all does not go smoothly. Though, seeing how one couple overcame such trials is a reminder that relationships, LGBTQ or A, require work.

As same-sex relationships remain a political football for heterosexuals, *Domesticus* is a reminder that a loving relationship is a loving relationship, regardless of gender. For homosexuals, it's a joyful story of lives shared.

— Ward Holz

MARRIAGE & RELATIONSHIPS

Landing on Solid Ground

Emma Donoghue delivers a story exploring how distance and difficulty don't have to overwhelm a relationship

Emma Donoghue's *Landing*, unravels the story of the transatlantic relationship between 25-year-old Canadian Jude Turner and 39-year-old Dubliner Sile O'Shaughnessy. Dialogue sparkles between the characters; Sile's Indian heritage and Irish accent are more noteworthy for the inhabitants of Jude's backwater hometown than her place as the latter's lover. It is unclear whether Donoghue prefers the grounded, history-buff nature of Jude or the classy, metropolitan sensibility of Sile—both personalities are engagingly detailed.

Donoghue returns to the thread of her earlier novels, *Stir-Fry* and *Hood*, which she admits were partially inspired by events in her own life. However, those often dwelt on pain and insecurity in lesbian relationships. *Landing* maintains a calm optimism through the details of distance. The love story itself is understated. This isn't a harlequin romance. Neither Jude nor Sile is prone to overblown effusions of love; even Sile's breakup with her partner of five years is due to dissatisfaction with their relationship, not as casualty of her correspondence with Jude. Furthermore, while homophobia does rear, none of the characters are closeted. *Landing* strikes a lovely balance between acknowledging the occasionally difficult aspects of being out without allowing them to overwhelm the strengths of our relationships and community. **—Gretchen Treu**

our lives
Books Forum
...RECOMMENDED WORKS OF FICTION
Submitted by **chartfan**

Try *The Weekend* by Peter Cameron as well as his short stories *The Half You Don't Know*. Also, Adam Haslett's book of short stories *You Are Not A Stranger* Here has a number of stories with LGBT slant. They are amazing.

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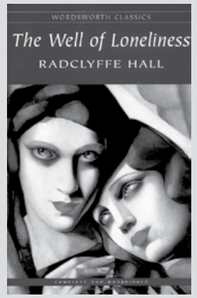
Classic Fiction



SUN DIAL PRESS

The Well of Loneliness
by Radclyffe Hall

A timeless story of a couple's struggle to be acknowledged and accepted in "polite" society. When it was first published in 1928, *Well* offered the most candid and honest portrait ever released of two women in love. If there was a way to measure distance traveled, revisit the fate of Stephen and Mary to soberly see where we've been.

Forbidden Love

BANTAM CLASSICS

Romeo and Juliet
by William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's classic articulates a theme driven by the heart. The same lines drawn between the feuding Capulet and Montague families as an attempt to deny the star-crossed lovers, hauntingly echos the gauntlet of discrimination we are facing in our own efforts to embrace love. Reaffirming, because it makes clear that above all, love is the one unpreventable thing worth risking everything. All in the streets of fair Verona.

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our lives
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Community Law for the Community

Jen Hitomi Bond tells it like it is. She says, "I want to break the myth that law or lawyers are scary." Bond is definitely not scary. Not much over five-feet tall, she is slight of build and soft-spoken, but you get the sense she knows her stuff and that if pushed, she stands her ground.

Bond set up JH Bond Community Law on the eastside of Madison just over a year ago.

She delights in her Madison practice where she gets "to actually see my clients, and get to know them, and their families. It's a great feeling to see, first-hand, that I'm making a difference in their lives."

Originally from Yokohama, Japan, Bond moved to Boston and then Minneapolis for college. As Bond's mother and step-father began the complex process of immigrating the family to the States, Bond experienced first-hand the need for community-minded attorneys. Since Bond was the only U.S. citizen in her family (her biological father is a U.S. citizen, her mother a Japanese citizen), she was very much involved in the process. Luckily, says Bond, the immigration attorney was "knowledgeable and compassionate and made the otherwise excruciating process bearable for us."

When in law school at the University of Minnesota, that same attorney was her professor, and she inspired Bond to pursue the field of immigration law. Along the way, Bond also became interested in family law and estate planning. She says, "I saw that these areas of law impacted everyone in some capacity, and the humanness of these areas of law really fascinated me."

Bond's awareness of LGBT-specific issues grew as her best friend evolved as a transgender person. As she met others in the LGBT community, Bond saw how the traditional family law structure not only doesn't protect LGBT couples, but has dire effects on their partnerships. As she watched gay and lesbian couples lose out in immigration and other rights, she decided to provide services specifically for the LGBT community. At her practice, Bond offers ways for LGBT families to protect their legal rights and get some recognition of their relationship using contract law tools and proper estate planning.

Many of us don't think of ourselves as owning an "estate," and so we might think these documents have little relevance. But according to Bond, "Even if the couple does not have any assets to speak of, a will enables them to name an executor -- the person who will gather and take care of everything. If you want to make sure your partner is the one sorting through your personal things, you want to make sure to have a will."

Bond offers a flat fee structure for these legal services. She says emphatically, "I want people to know ahead of time what they are getting." She urges gay and lesbians couples to have these documents before they need them. She warns that after the fact, it gets difficult and expensive.

Bond feels lucky to be doing this kind of work. Admittedly, it can be stressful, like the time she had a client who had one month until his deportation hearing. The case had been in limbo for nearly ten years, bungled by incompetence or greed. Unsure if she could prepare everything given the time constraint, she says, "I knew I had no choice, because this man's life was at stake." Happily, the case was successful. Afterwards, she recounts, "the client looked at me, started crying, and hugged me. That was the best moment of my career so far."

—Jill Nebeker

Jill Nebeker, whose hair keeps getting shorter and shorter, has worked in online publishing since 2000 and is the web editor at a Madison magazine publisher. When not working or getting her hair cut, she designs web sites, plays hockey, and practices yoga.

where to **FIND**

2158 Atwood Ave. **(608) 204-9572**

Where does a LGBT couple start?

Bond recommends getting a will that incorporates the partnership.

She explains, "When a person dies without a will, inheritance laws follow the traditional definition of 'family,' which means that even if a couple has been together for 50 years, they are not recognized as the next of kin."

And the next step?

After drawing up a will, Bond suggests getting 1) a revocable living trust to ensure that a partner receives your property if you die or are incapacitated, and 2) a Health Care Directive, comprised of a Living Will and a Durable Power of Attorney for Health.

These documents help to prevent those often-heard cases of a partner dying and his partner receiving none of their shared assets or a partner hospitalized because of accident or illness and the other partner is kept not only from her side but also from making decisions she knows her partner would have wanted.

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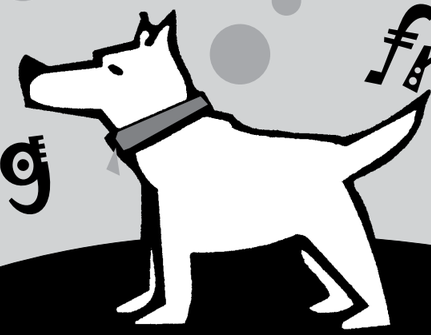

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PLAYBILL

Open Call for Scripts

Stage Q is asking for script submissions to be included in *Queer Shorts 3*.

Future Playwright: Who, me?
StageQ: Yes, you. Whether you are a closeted playwright or a famous published writer, we want you.
Future Playwright: Why me?
StageQ: Why you? Because no one else can tell your stories like you do.
Future Playwright: But…what do I do?
StageQ: Simple. You write a play, 5-15 minutes in length, and you send it to StageQ. By December 1, 2007.
Future Playwright: I don't know what to write about. I have so many stories. Which one do you want?
StageQ: Well, heck, you're the writer. You decide. Would it fit into something called "Queer Shorts?"
Future Playwright: Ok, so I write this play. Then what happens?
StageQ: You send it to us, along with a one-page précis, including:

- One-paragraph description of the plot
- Casting requirements (number of actors, gender, ages, special requirements, if any)
- Set requirements (remember, this a is a playfest with 10 – 12 plays in one evening; simple is better!)
- Running time (no more than 15 minutes!)
- Special technical requirements, if any
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is there lesbian, gay or other queer content?
- Is there nudity? Adult language?
- If a musical, is there a written score?
- If a musical, what are the instrumental requirements? Vocal requirements?

Future Playwright: Then what happens?
StageQ: We read it, and let you know by February 15 if your play has been accepted. If all goes well, you get to see your play performed June 12-21, 2008 at the Bartell Theater in Madison, Wisconsin.
Future Playwright: When are scripts due?
StageQ: December 1, 2007 (that means in our inbox or mailbox by December 1.)
Future Playwright: Where do I send my play when I'm done writing it?
StageQ: You can e mail your script and précis to QueerShorts@stageq.com

Or send via snail mail to:
Queer Shorts, c/o StageQ
PO Box 8876
Madison, WI. 53708-8876

If anything else comes up, e-mail us. We'll answer all your questions. OK? GET WRITING! We can't put on a show without your script! ■

PLAYBILL

Season's Greetings

Tidings takes a look into the lives of people working through disabilities to enjoy the holidays

Encore Studio for the Performing Arts bills itself as Wisconsin's only professional theater company for people with disabilities. Their mission states, "Encore actors develop their creative skills and talents to communicate, through the performing arts, a challenging and authentic message about disability and culture."

An example is the unusual holiday season play, *Tidings… from the Seasonally Affected*. This is not *It's a Wonderful Life*. It's a look at the lives of several characters who experience more than one kind of seasonal affective disorder. According to founder and Artistic Director, Kelsy Schoenhaar, for disabled people it is " …not necessarily a vacation, the holidays."

The play takes place in Sycamore, Illinois in 1977, a time known in the human services field as deinstitutionalization, when individuals were released from mental health and other institutions in staggering numbers. Many became homeless, some became integrated into the larger society, and many moved into group homes. *Tidings* follows the story of a character who moved to a group home during that period. It shows how several characters are affected by the holidays.

Schoenhaar says that their audiences typically discover that "they find similarities and not so many differences," when they watch the troupe's disabled actors perform. She says that the actors "have different disabilities" and that "the work we do is written to our actors . . . to the absolute height of their abilities."

Tidings opens on November 30 and runs through December 15 at the Bartell Theater, 113 East Mifflin Street. Call (608) 661-9696 x 6 for reservations or more information about performances. For more information about Encore Studio for the Performing Arts go to www.encorestudio.org. **—Callen Harty**

THEATRE CALENDAR

A representative sampling complied by **Callen Harty**

Doubt
by John Patrick Shanley
Milwaukee Repertory Theater
Milwaukee, 10/17-11/18
milwaukeerep.com

The Complete History of America (abridged)
by Adam Long, Reed Martin & Austin Tichenor
Madison Theater Guild
Madison, 10/26-11/17
madisontheatreguild.org

Uncle Vanya
by Anton Chekov (translated by David Mamet)
Strollers Theater
Madison, 11/1-11/24
madstage.com/Companies/Strollers.html

The Secret Garden
by Marsha Norman & Lucy Simon
Portage Area Community Theatre
Portage, 11/8-11/18
madstage.com/Companies/portage.html

Tartuffe
by Moliere
Edgewood College
Madison, 11/9-11/17
theatre.edgewood.edu

Dork Side of the Moon
by Brian Wild
Broom Street Theater
Madison, 11/9-12/16
broomstreet.org

Break a Leg!
by Five Ensemble Theater Groups
TAPIT/newworks
Madison, 11/15-11/17
tapitnewworks.org

Rent
by Jonathan Larson
Overture Center
Madison, 11/30-12/1
overturecenter.com

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever
by Barbara Robinson
Sun Prairie Civic Theatre
Sun Prairie, 11/30-12/2
sunprairiecivictheater.com

The Christmas Schooner
by John Reeger & Julie Shannon
The Renaissance
Lake Mills, 12/7-12/15
sunprairiecivictheater.com

Nuncrackers
by Dan Goggin
Curtain Up! Productions
Appleton, 12/7-12/21
waveballroom.com

Review local performances, discuss area stages and talk shop in the forums at: **OURLIVESMADISON.COM**

Cultural, Social, Service and Nightlife listings edited by **Patrick Farabaugh**

iQ night with God-dess & She
November 16
Since coming from Madison and meeting each other here, God-dess and She have gone on to caputre the number one spot on *Logo*'s click list and an appear on *The L Word*. Now, they are coming home to partner with indie Queer at the Majestic for an iQ CD release party of their latest album "Stand Up." Also performing will be the Fall Guys and DJ Pain 1.
indiequeer.com

Saltimbanco
November 17 & 18
The Cirque du Soleil production inspired by the urban fabric of the metropolis and its colorful inhabitants is coming to the Alliant Energy Center. Decidedly baroque in its visual vocabulary, the show's eclectic cast of characters draws spectators into a fanciful, dreamlike world, an imaginary city where diversity is a cause for hope.
cirquedusoleil.com

Big Queer New Years Eve
December 31
The Madison Gay Hockey Association is planning to again host an all-inclusive New Year's Eve party for the MGHA players and our community. Details are being finalized, and will be posted to the MGHA website as they are announced. The party last year was a runaway success, overflowing the Hookah Lounge with revelers the entire night.
madisongayhockey.org

Word Warriors Reading with Author Alix Olson
November 15, A Room of One's Own, 307 W Johnson Street, Madison International folk poet and progressive artist-activist, Alix Olson comes to A Room of One's Own to read from *Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution*.
roomofonesown.com

Holiday Art Fair 2007
November 16-18, 100 Block of State St., Madison The Art League of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art will celebrate the season with an expanded Holiday Art Fair. This year's fair will include the Henry Street Gallery and the Crossroads area of Overture Center for the Arts, as well as the museum's lobby and State Street Gallery. Participating artists will display jewelry, ceramics, woodwork, fiber, wearables, glass, and holiday decorations. The fair will also include a Gourmet Gallery and a new Rediscovered Art & Treasures booth organized by the Art League.
mmoca.org

2007 ACLU of Wisconsin Activist Conference
November 17, Pyle Center, 702 Langdon Street, Madison
Keynote from Kate Stewart, partner at Belden, Russonello & Stewart, ACLU's pollster on public opinion in the post 9/11 era. Also life after the Marriage amendment: Larry Dupuis, ACLU/WI Legal Director and co-counsel in our legal challenge to a ban on domestic partnership benefits. Plus Eva Shiffrin and Hannah Johnson from Fair Wisconsin on advocacy efforts around the state.
aclu-wi.org

Same Sex Parents Meeting
November 22, Happy Bambino, 2045 Atwood Avenue, Madison
Are you a parent or thinking of becoming one? Have you wanted to meet other families like yours? Come spend time with our same sex family group. We can talk, laugh and learn from one another. Children are welcome to join (there is a place to play and there are toys to play with) but not necessary for attendance.
happybambino.com

Rodgers & Hammerstein's A Grand Night For Singing
November 30-December 1, Majestic Theatre, 115 King Street, Madison Imagine "Wash That Man" sung by the Andrews Sisters or "Kansas City" performed by Manhattan Transfer and you'll get a taste of what's in store. A small orchestra joins a cast of singers that features arrangements of classic tunes from "Some Enchanted Evening" to "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning."
fourseasonstheatre.com

Men's Coming Out Support Group Starting
November 29, OutReach, 600 Williamson Street, Madison
A 10-week men's coming-out support group offering support to men who are dealing with the realization that they are not heterosexual and how that affects their everyday lives and to support those previously or currently in same sex relationships.
outreachinc.com

Women's Night Out
December 22, Mediterranean Hookah Lounge & Cafe, 77 Sirloin Strip, Madison Meeting for dinner at 5:30 pm, socializing 6 pm, bellydancing shows at 8 and 10 pm. No cover. RSVP for dinner.
womenacrosswisconsin.org

ORGANIZATIONS

A Representative Sampling

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

Bowling Out Loud
dand1957@earthlink.net

Dairyland Cowboys and Cowgirls
dcandc.org

Dykes on Bikes
dykesonbikesmadison.com

Fair Wisconsin
122 State St., Madison, (608) 441-0143
fairwisconsin.org

First Congregational Church
1609 University Ave., Madison, (608) 233-9751
firstcongmadison.org

Frontrunners/Frontwalkers
personalpages.tds.net/~tmcclurg

Gay/Straight Alliance for Safe Schools (GSAFE)
301 S. Bedford St., Madison, (608) 661-4141
gsaforsafeschools.org

Gay Outdoors Group
myspace.com/madisonsgayoutdoorgroup

Gay Softball League
ssblmadison.com

Gay Volleyball League
madisonglbtvolleyball.com

Hermanos Latinos
sneal@aidsnetwork.org

Madison Gay Hockey Association
madisongayhockey.org

Madison Minotaurs Gay Rugby
madisonminotaursrfc.org

OutReach Community Center
600 Williamson St., Madison, (608) 255-8582
outreachinc.com

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

Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus
perfectharmonychorus.org

Proud Theatre
proudtheater.org

Rural Dykes Association
pswfarm@juno.com

Stage Q
stageq.com

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

Women Across Wisconsin
womenacrosswisconsin.org

Find more community groups online, view our event calendar, and submit your own listings at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM

Supporting Our Youth

Scenes from the GSA for Safe Schools Walk/Run/Eat at Franklin Elementary School on October13th

PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY MICHAEL

1. Emma Zeldin and her mom, Shari **2.** Brian Juchems smiling
3. MB Blanding removes Jane Schneider's bib tag **4.** Team Safety Patrol
5. Smiling walkers **6.** Volunteer Brad Krueger gets ready for registration
7. Queen Anne's Jim Bresette and GSAFE Executive Director Cindy Crane
8. And they're off!

our lives
Coming Out Support Forum
CRAWLING BACK INTO THE CLOSET
Submitted by **Erica**

How common is it among gay and lesbian folks to go back in the closet? And if you have experience with this, how have you coped?

By the way, the equivalent among trans people is referred to "de-transitioning," (reversing your appearance to match that of your birth gender), or "purging," (actually throwing out the material artifacts that make up your new life).

This isn't really an issue for people that completely transition through surgery, etc., but for those of us in the middle the closet door always stands there... looking like an escape hatch to safety. I wonder to what extent do other GLBT-ETC folks fight with this, even after years of being out in the world?

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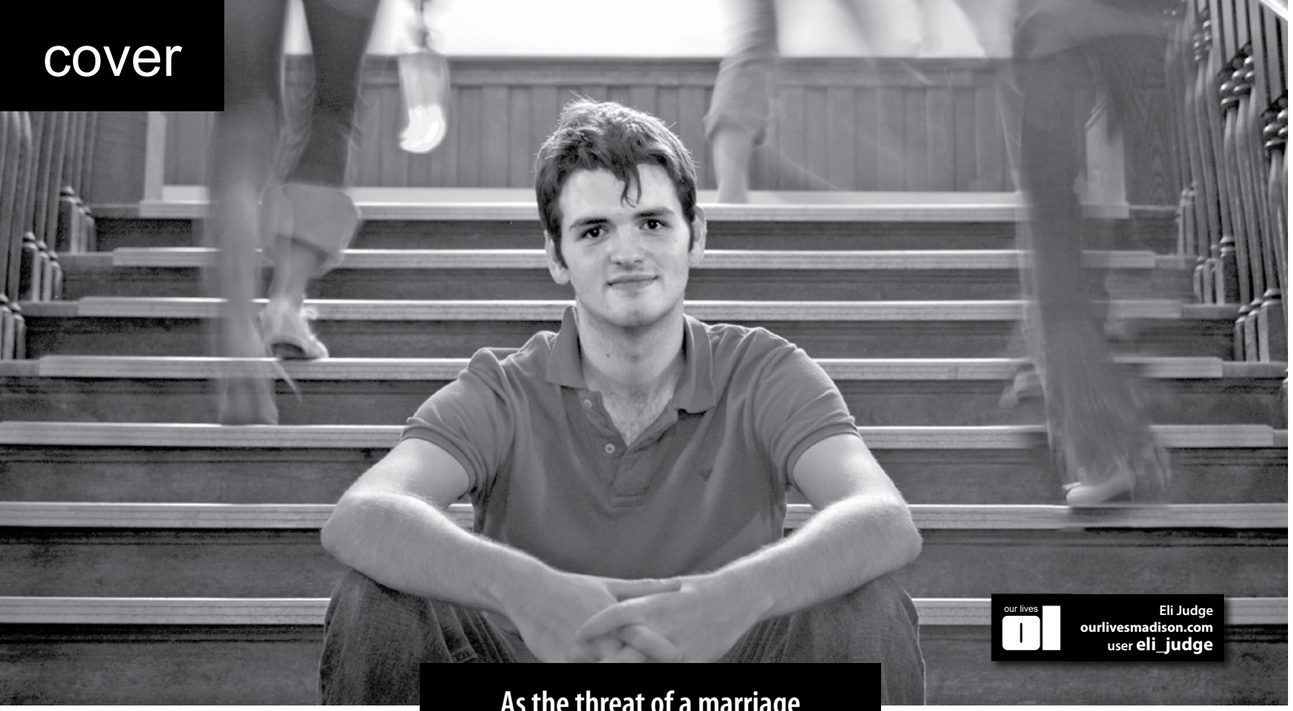

our lives ol Eli Judge
ourlivesmadison.com
user eli_judge

As the threat of a marriage amendment grew across our state, so did the voices and hearts of those it targeted.

This is the story of one college student, Madison Alder Eli Judge, who heard that voice— and answered:

For Barb.

Writing this story has been one of the hardest things I have ever done. When I was approached to tell the story of *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* I never anticipated the amount of emotion it would resurrect, nor did I predict the explosion of pride that I would have felt for the people who will be described in the next couple of pages. I hope that, by giving you a glimpse of what happened a year ago at this time, you might be able to get an idea of how a group of students became warrior poets and how, at least in one area of our state, a line was drawn in the sand and through the fabric of our society. To do this, though, I must start at the beginning.

I arrived at the UW-Madison campus in September of 2005. Having come out of the closet just three weeks before I showed up at the Lakeshore dorms, I hadn't put a whole lot of thought into what I would do with my newfound freedom. I knew only that I had an urge to get involved.

True to form, the students had begun to organize against the ban. But with the vote a long way off, they found it difficult to attract a lot of interest. This small group of five to ten students, known at the time as the LGBT Student Action Network, was what I joined about three weeks after moving in. I hadn't put much thought or passion into the cause at that point; my logic was comprised of the typical, "I'm gay, I should fight for gay marriage" paradigm. The Student Action Network typically sent various speakers and volunteers to student housing floors to hold "listening sessions" or talk about the adverse effects of the ban. The statewide group, *Action Wisconsin*, had sent their regional Speakers Network director, Lindsey Saunders, to help us occasionally and after I had a few floors under my belt, she asked me to help her with one of their sessions in an off-campus neighborhood training being held in our Union South.

The structure of these events consisted of providing some information about the ban, a short speaker's training, a practice, and a feedback session. Having been through the training a couple of times before, I sat off to the side and twiddled my thumbs for the first hour. People sat attentively and asked a question here or there, but for the most part things seemed to be going as they had in the past. We moved on to the speech practice and I decided to help keep the numbers even by pairing up with the odd woman out.

We did our introductions. She seemed like she didn't want to be there, constantly distracted but determined to get the job done. She offered to have me go first, but I revealed that I had done it a few times before. I insisted that she should practice so I might be able to offer some advice. We went through the motions of her practice and my pointers but, due to my lack of a need to try the script, we had extra time to spare. She began to ask several questions about the student efforts against the ban on campus and how I was involved. I was happy to answer until the end of the exercise cut us off. The usual feedback about what seemed to be effective in the speech, and what didn't, followed and it seemed that we were about to be done for the night.

All of a sudden, the woman I had been working with stood up to speak. Her hands were shaking and it seemed as if she wasn't breathing. She stood in a silent room for a couple seconds, obviously wrestling with the words in her mouth, and eventually began to tell her story.

She told us that she was from a neighborhood in Madison. She was there with her partner, whom she pointed out, and told us that this was the fourth event that they had tried to go to. It turned out that this was the first time they made it without turning the car around in fear. They lived together in the closet, both afraid that they would lose their jobs should their colleagues ever find out that they loved each other. She told us that they didn't expect to ever give the speech they had both just practiced, but had wanted to see what was being done to combat the ban.

She then turned to me and said that I was the reason she decided to stand and talk. It was the students, the "young people", with their passion toward the ban's defeat that gave her hope. With tears rolling down her face, she told the group and told me, that she thought that, if the ban were to be defeated, that it would be the students, the next generation, which drove the deathblow through its heart.

The woman's statement, and the emotion and hope behind her words, was what I have based my passion for LGBT rights on since that day. Seeing her and her partner come out to see just one event, against the weight of society and the threat of losing their livelihood, gave me a new perspective on the fight against the ban. It no longer became a fight between right and wrong, or a struggle for civil rights. For me, it became a fight for the ability to love.

I left that place and returned to my dorm. That night I called home and told my parents about what the woman had said. I told them about the standing ovation the people gave her after she had finished speaking, and about the many couples who came to me and admitted that they had gone through the same thing as the speaker. They told me that the students fought against more than just a simple constitutional ban. We fought for the silent masses, the ones who dared to love.

Signs blanketing Bascom Hill. Below: Students coming together on election day

The students fought against more than just a simple constitutional ban. We fought for the ones who dared to love.

The next morning I woke up and continued my work with the student organization but with the new motivation of the woman's story. Unfortunately, as finals and winter break got closer, the group began to shrink and, in late December, the LGBT Student Action Network ceased to exist.

In January, I got a phone call from Lindsey Saunders asking if I could sit down to talk about where UW was going. I agreed and on January 21st we met up at Espresso Royal on State St. There, Liz Sanger, the former Chair of the College Democrats and a 4th year student, met with us and we started to talk about what the next step could be. We decided to start over and with a new structure. Positions were assigned, roles were drawn out, and *Students for Equality* was created.

Those months with *Students for Equality* were some of my favorite times at the UW. We were a group of people working together against the ban, but we all had different tales about how we got there. I wasn't alone in having a story like the woman at the training. Most of the central SFE-ers had more specific reasoning about sacrificing their days and late nights. The unique thing I noticed during those times, though, was that at the quieter moments of our meetings or conversation, there seemed to be a different element in the air among us. Perhaps it was an unspoken understanding or a simple acknowledgement of the fact that we fought for more than ourselves.

The spring semester trucked along without any real opposition or trouble. The State Assembly, despite the efforts of many of its liberal members, passed the ban the second required time on February 28th, 2006. *Students for Equality*, and the newly named *Fair Wisconsin*, then had a date to focus on, as the final step the ban had was the November 7th ballot. Regardless of its progression, the semester's activities eventually culminated in a collaborated Day of Silence march and rally in mid-April. The UW-Allies were hosting the event with the theme of fighting against the ban and invited *Students for Equality* to provide speakers and volunteers.

The event went off without a hitch and also provided another moment to give us hope. High school students from all across Dane County started showing up in droves to join our march. Most weren't 18 and could not vote. Even though that was the case, many, on the spur of the moment, took to the steps of the capital to give speeches about why they were still fighting against the ban. The reasons given weren't simply about people having gay friends or relatives. Most, ironically, echoed the sentiments of our opposition in that they claimed it was a simple matter of morality. Fighting the ban was the right thing to do.

As we moved into finals and summer vacation we left the group in good spirits. I returned in mid-August to some changes and adjustments. Liz Sanger, along with another leader of *Students for Equality*, Matt Berg, had both met with the new *Fair Wisconsin* Campus coordinator, Andy Gordon, to discuss the direction the student group needed to take in the final stage of the campaign. I had been out of town for the summer but, through email, was apprised of most of the changes before I arrived. The structure was to change to a more streamlined, efficient form, complete with new responsibilities, support from the statewide organization, and the name *Students for a Fair Wisconsin*. The race was on to set up the rest of our structure before the September 7th kickoff date, and we got to work planning our visibility campaign for the fall.

As I was appointed to the newly created position of "Chair", my responsibility included outreaching to other groups and consolidating our volunteer support through person-to-person and student organisation contacts. We did what we could with the campus and city papers, but the only real way to make things a success was to show people how committed we were. We stood outside of freshman convocations for hours, walked through pouring rain,

On the Day of Silence

and even went toe to toe with a band of very offensive fundamentalists on Library Mall. We were worried that the summer hiatus, coupled with a very busy level of competition from other student organizations, would lead to a less than spectacular maiden meeting.

"Alright, lets get started."

I'll never forget saying those words, nor will I loose the memory of the roar that came from the almost 400 students who arrived to pack one of the largest lecture halls on campus for our kickoff. There was an air of excitement and dedication that I had never experienced before. Overnight, *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* became one of the largest, most active student organizations in our state.

We hit the ground at a dead sprint. All of the visitors were signed up for activities varying from chalking to writing letters to editors of all forms of relevant media. With the help of financial support from *Fair Wisconsin*, thousands of window signs and pieces of literature were created and were quickly dispersed throughout the student population. Voting No was no longer a simple decision or ballot cast. It quickly became an absolute; it was a cultural norm that was not only assumed but also something almost everyone was more than ready to fight for.

On Bascom Hill

Overnight, *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* became one of the largest, most active student organizations in our state.

In the days leading up to the November election, I frequently said that it felt like the campus was rumbling with the energy that the campaign was generating. Our "get out the vote" efforts had, going into E-Day, close to 500 people signed up to fill a twelve hour election day with a huge variety of activities. We were constantly running out of window signs, and our ability to focus on anything but the most important of days soon disappeared.

The night before the election left most of the officers of *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* with an average of an hour of sleep. This wasn't due to restlessness, but rather because most of the volunteer force was awake all night hanging door hangers on almost every student dorm, apartment, and house door on the isthmus. There was no worry in their eyes, only the audacity of hope in the pursuit of the historical victory we were trying to achieve.

The November 7th morning greeted campus with beautiful weather and the clanking of the construction of the *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* tent on library mall. Hundreds of students rallied in that primary staging point to be deployed to every ward within our charge. From there they went out in all directions to go door to door, hold signs, and, in some cases, simply shout in the streets so that their peers would remember why that Tuesday was more important than the rest. Representatives from the College Democrats, the LGBT Campus Center, the Multicultural Student Center, the Campus Women's Center, Delta Lambda Phi, and the Associated Students of Madison comprised just a fraction of the hundreds of groups that provided full support on that most important of days. And so, with the stage laid down in front of us, *Students for a Fair Wisconsin* was there for all to see.

As Matt Berg and I took down the couple dozen "Vote No" signs placed all around Bascom Hill's base, we took a moment to stare at the Capitol in silence as the church bells all across Madison chimed eight times. The ringing echo of the various towers disappeared into the distance just as we heard cheers from the College Democrat and Fair Wisconsin tents down on Library Mall. The polls had finally closed and the fight on which we had spent a year and a half had finally ended. Matt and I looked at each other, nodded in absolute exhaustion, and continued down the hill back to our companions. The College Democrats were excitingly following and shouting out voting returns in other states, eager to know where congress had landed on the political spectrum. I looked around at the Fair leadership crew, all of whom had managed to find their way back to the tent. Although there was no excited chatter or real urge to see how the rest of the state had done, the looks on their faces were content. Hygiene and energy deprived, we broke apart to collect ourselves before heading to the Fair Wisconsin gathering at Monona Terrace.

Most of the group never made it there.

A couple days later, after we felt ready to be around others, we met together to simply talk for the first time since the 7th. When we were all finally together it was more like gathering with family than sitting down with friends.

We had no regrets. We had done everything we could have done on campus. Together, with the thousands of friends our campaign had produced, we generated one of the most visible issue-based student groups the UW has ever seen. With the help of our coalition, we broke every off-year student voting record by thousands and, at the same time, produced a Vote No average rate of over 87% in all student wards.

The statewide returns were a disappointing reality, but the students of UW-Madison knew what it was like to be in the service of those who could not protect themselves. Over the days and weeks following the vote, I received several anonymous emails, all expressing gratitude toward what we had done. Most were self identified students and faculty, all regretting that they could not have done more to help us in the fight. If you are one of those people, please know that we could not have done it without you.

My hope is that, when we stand together on the steps of the Capitol on the day of the ban's inevitable destruction, you will feel confident knowing that we did it for you; and also that I did it for Barbra. ■

Share your thoughts at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM

Still Fighting for a Fair Wisconsin

With the amendment passed, Fair Wisconsin's **Eva Shiffrin** outlines what steps come next in achieving equality

PHOTO BY JESSICA HONN

The rights we seek though our domestic partner registry are basic, fundamental, human rights.

One year ago, Wisconsin wrote discrimination into its constitution. What does this mean for the future of LGBT activism, advocacy, and progress? It can only mean one thing: We must keep fighting. The loss was heartbreaking to many. Thousands of Wisconsin citizens volunteered countless number of hours. People stretched into their pocketbooks and made personal sacrifices. The energy and momentum was palpable. On November 8, the disappointment was also palpable. Now, one year later, it is time to put the loss behind us. We must convert our sadness into firm resolve and resolute determination.

And there is plenty of work to do. Forward progress is possible. It is imperative to show Wisconsin that equality still matters. It is also important to build on the efforts of the last two years and show people that relationship recognition and family recognition for same sex couples benefits our families, our children, and our communities.

We are uniquely poised to create positive change. We are one of the strongest LGBT advocacy organizations in this country. We have thousands of active supporters who aren't afraid to make their voices heard in the state legislature. We have the support of key legislative allies. We have shown that we are a force to be reckoned with. Over 99 communities all over Wisconsin voted NO. As a result, we are in a position to see change within the next year.

The first indication of our strength came when Governor Doyle put domestic partner benefits for state employees in the budget. Instead of retreating from our issues, the Governor stood with our community and spoke for fairness. By the time this article is printed, we shall know the results of these efforts.

The next indicator of fairness is the overwhelming support we have received for our fall legislative efforts to establish a statewide domestic partner registry for same sex couples in Wisconsin. This bill is our declaration that we will not stop fighting for relationship recognition. This bill shows our commitment to stand firm and demand that families be afforded protections.

The rights we seek though our domestic partner registry are basic, fundamental, human rights. We are asking for hospital visitation rights. We are asking that a person be able to choose who is at their side when they are scared, sick, and in need of love and comfort. We are asking for the right to decide to whom you wish to convey your wordly possessions after death. And we are asking for the right to allow your last wishes regarding your burial arrangements to be honored after death. All of these rights are extremely personal, heartbreaking, and important. These rights are routinely extended to spouses in recognition that these are the moments when you need your loved ones at your side the most and when your life partner is in the best place to assist you in carrying out your wishes.

One member of our community told us a story. That story involved a medical emergency. She is a lesbian, and came home to find her partner unconscious. Terrified, she called 911. As many will describe who have been in that situation, the fear of loss shot like adrenaline through her body and the sense of helplessness followed soon after. The paramedics arrived and placed her partner in the ambulance. She followed the ambulance to the hospital in the car. When she arrived, she was told that she couldn't be with her partner during this emergency because she wasn't a family member and had no legal entitlement to be there or even receive information about the status of her unconscious partner.

Within moments, she was relegated from partner to nobody. She went from being the most important person in her partner's life to a stranger in the waiting room. The helplessness she felt at her partner's medical condition was turned into despair as she was thrust into an information void. She was alone and felt that she had abandoned her partner when her partner needed her most.

Luckily, her partner's mother arrived and gave the necessary permission for her to be with the person she loved most in the world. Also luckily, her partner recovered. However, this story should remind us of the human face behind the rights we seek.

The extension of these rights should not be caught up in partisan politics. They should not become entrenched in the so-called fight over values. The rights we seek are based on universal values of love, caring, commitment, and compassion. These are universal values and these rights should be extended universally. By asking our legislators to support these rights, we expose those who don't for what they are.

It is also important to continue our progress toward a pro-fairness majority in our state capital. We would not be where we are now if we had secured a pro-fairness majority in our capital two years ago. Our prospects on this front are extremely promising. Last year, several key legislative seats converted from anti-fairness seats to pro-fairness seats. We stand ready to convert even more. We must begin now to ensure that a year from now, we have a pro-fairness legislature.

They say change is inevitable. It is inevitable, but only when we ensure that it is inevitable. We hasten the day when progress is made by making that day today. How many days must be spent as a stranger in the waiting room of the hospital instead of by the side of a loved one before we work to turn the tide again?

Let's join together and make that day today. Let's start with this bill and then move on to the next. When election time comes, let's show that we won't support candidates who don't support fairness.

We can't let the amendment defeat or define us. The best way to do that is to continue to fight for a Fair Wisconsin. ■

Growing Together

Richard Kilmer and Tim Spires show how respect, care, and commitment can create a relationship rich with love and quality time spent together

Tim Spires unknowingly walked into a Monday night Dairyland Cowboys & Cowgirls dance on Richard Kilmer's birthday in 2003. Richard came up to him and said, "Hi, I'm Richard Kilmer and you can't dance in sandals."

A graphic designer and marketing professional, Tim offered to help with marketing and advertising for Dairyland. "We have a website now, we never had one before," says Richard, who was impressed with the flyers, website, and other promotional materials that Tim created.

Tim asked Richard to teach him Chill Factor, a challenging Dairyland dance. Richard still feels guilty, "I taught it to him wrong, and when we got out on the dance floor, we turned one way, he turned the other. He still has trouble with that dance." Needless to say, Tim enjoyed Richard's company and eventually asked him out.

Tim says, "Richard brought chaperones."

Richard responds, "Well, I already had plans with friends. We had our real first date the next night." They watched *A Girl with a Pearl Earring*, and Richard still had to ask if they were officially on a date.

The couple now lives together in Madison, not far from Lake Monona, with their young English Bulldog, Winnie. They also divide their time between there and a second home—a hobby farm they escape to in Wonewoc, Wisconsin.

Both men grew up on Midwestern farms—Tim, a pig farm in Illinois and Richard, a Wisconsin dairy farm—with several siblings. Richard attended college at the University of Wisconsin, then explored New York, Mexico, and San Francisco before returning to his home state. He came out in 1978. Eventually settling in Madison, Richard has been working as Chief Pharmacist at Community Pharmacy for 23 years. His story about growing up on a Wisconsin farm can be found in the book *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* by William D. Fellows.

Tim grew up in Shabona, Illinois, near Rockford. He moved to Madison in 1993. "It took me 10 years in Madison to meet Richard. It's funny, you resign yourself to being single, and then, boom, you meet the right guy." Tim worked for a variety of companies as a marketing professional but is now self-employed. Spires MarCom, his company, provides marketing support to Madison area organizations and businesses. He has enjoyed participating in musical theater since high school and is currently involved with StageQ, Madison's community theater focusing on gay, lesbian, and queer productions. Tim credits one of his latest roles with StageQ with helping him better understand being gay and family dynamics. "We invited our therapist," he says.

Both Richard and Tim come from large families and their parents have both accepted their sexual orientation and partners. But, that wasn't always. Tim's father enjoys Richard, but Tim's first boyfriend was barred from the family home. Richard's mother adores Tim. Their siblings have not been accepting across the board, but some are welcoming or merely tolerant. Tim let his family come around on their own, and allowed people to move at their own pace. "Some people will never come around, they're stuck." Both men caution others struggling for familial acceptance to remain open, but that if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. Tim's role in *Dutch Love*, the Stage-Q production, reminded him "we're all different, straight and gay, but we're all a family."

Richard calls himself an overachiever who is always on the go. "I joke that even though he's older, I've never had as much energy," says Tim, who enjoys taking time for himself and identifies as more of the "unassuming, wallflower type." Both reference their experiences in high school when explaining their personalities. Richard says that he felt a sense of lower self-worth growing up, which made him into an overachiever. The other students knew that Tim was different, and as a result, he was picked on. He holds back and doesn't over commit.

"Therapy helped us build a new template for a relationship," says Richard. Tim adds, "Yeah, we're a gay couple, but it was a normal thing [going into therapy]." Richard envisions Tim as an extension of himself—his right arm, and automatically assumes that he will participate in all of Richard's interests. They speak easily about the struggles encountered in their relationship, pinpointing communication as a point of difficulty. "Therapy is effective when people are willing to work," says Tim.

It's funny, you resign yourself to being single, and then, boom, you meet the right guy.

Richard and Tim explained that they find that gay couples lack the same supportive network that straight couples have. "In straight marriage, the legal hassles make people try to work things out. Without commitment to marriage, it's easier for gay and lesbian couples to walk out the door." "I learned to step back and say, 'you don't want to go dancing, fine,'" says Richard. "You have pulled me out [from being a wallflower]. He's so well loved in the community," replies Tim. ■

Tim and Richard at home on their hobby farm in Wonewoc, Wisconsin. Right: The view from the farm.

Dairyland Cowboys and Cowgirls
dcandc.org

Since 1993, Dairyland Cowboys and Cowgirls has hosted scores of country dances with instruction, canoe trips, potlucks, and rural barn dances.

Dance lessons are given every Monday night at Club 5 at 5 Applegate Court, Madison, WI. We also dance every third Saturday of the month at Club 5. Previous experience, partners, and western wear are not required.

Story by Jennifer Jennings. Photos by Melody H. Hanson

Wollersheim Winery

Scenes from the Cameo Antique Mall along with owner Deborah Skowronski and associate Sue Grass.

I gravitate towards places that have a sense of exploration and adventure … a feeling of past hopes and future potential

Rolling on the River

Twenty minutes northwest of Madison, nature, art and history combine to motivate **Jody Kapp** to be a pioneer—not a settler.

our lives
Jody Kapp
ourlivesmadison.com
user **Jody**

I remember it as if it were yesterday: my six-foot tall self being exuberantly pulled through the streets of Europe by a five-foot-five-inch Jack Russell Terrier-like friend. With his *Gay Guide to Europe* in hand, he continued to urge me on through jet lag and the unknown, "Girl! Be a pioneer—not a settler."

It's ten years down the road and although my traveling companion is no longer at my side, I have adopted this simple string of words as my daily mantra for life and travel. I gravitate towards places that have a sense of exploration and adventure; places that aren't fully developed, perhaps a little rough, but with a feeling of past hopes and future potential.

So here I am in Sauk Prairie, the combined villages of Sauk City and Prairie du Sac, twenty minutes northwest of Madison. From my lookout at the Blue Spoon Café I glimpse eagles as they spiral down into the cold Wisconsin River and ricochet up with large fish in their talons. I spend a few hours this way, cup of coffee in hand, meditating back and forth between the river and the local artwork gracing the walls. And this is where I find my favorite place—in between the ancient forms of the beauty of nature and the stories told through art.

On my path through the Prairie I stop by the local River Arts Gallery and happen to catch a thought-provoking show by UW-Madison fine arts graduate Arthur O. Mohagen III. His humorous critique of young society's identity through fashion and sexuality is the butter on top of the pancake of my day—a show that allows me the opportunity to explore a new side of myself; a chance to rethink my own identity.

As I cross the bridge to Wollersheim Winery for a taste of wine mingled with history, I find myself growing attached to the spirit of the area. Perhaps it's the fresh zest of locally grown grapes or the rush of wind over the bluffs going to my head, but I feel a sudden rising of inspiration to join a board, to get active, to become a pioneer, to live life soaking in the full local flavor, to find ways to move my fellow settlers stuck in their tracks onward with a new perspective. It's amazing what a little time out for retrospection and relaxing along the river can do. With a striking combination of nature, art and history as the backdrop for the coming year I have a feeling 2008 is going to be a very satisfying vintage. ■

Jody Kapp tells client stories through word art at Galena, LLC, a woman-run communications and marketing firm specializing in moving socially aware businesses forward with a new perspective.

PHOTOS BY JENN ROTMAN

Area Businesses

Cameo Antique Mall
827 Water Street, Sauk City
(608) 643-8000

Blue Spoon Café
550 Water Street, Prairie du Sac
(608) 643-0837

Wollersheim Winery
7876 State Road 188, Prairie du Sac
(800) 847-9463

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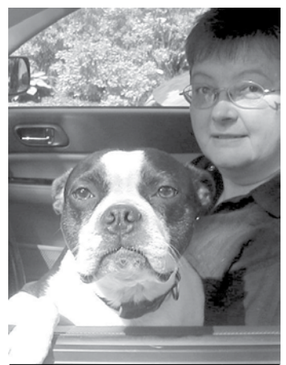

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- The median combined household income of gay couples is nearly **60% higher** than non-gay double income couples, **(OpusComm Group)**
- "The historical role and place of the homosexual in society is not in its regenerative sustenance but in its contributions to cultural revitalization and entrepreneurial or intellectual rejuvenation." **(Virtually Normal by Andrew Sullivan)**

Learn more at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM/ADVERTISE

Dealing with the Deuces

In the wake of the marriage amendment, **Dale Decker** examines how shame can prevent that "personal connection" necessary for creating change.

I admit it—I really didn't want to write this article. I can't shake my anger about the passage of the anti-gay marriage amendment nearly a year ago now. I obsess about what went wrong and how I could have responded differently. Did I do enough? Would anything have made a difference? Heavy stuff. If I'm going to search for answers, I'm going to need some backup. Preferably something fabulous and fun. Let's start by asking ourselves: WWGD (What Would Gloria Do?). Behold, the Gospel according to Ms. Gaynor.

Simply being open about our lives is a powerful political action that not only changes our society—it changes us

I am what I am
And what I am needs no excuses
I deal my own deck
Sometimes the ace sometimes the deuces

Obviously, we lost. If that ain't a deuce, I don't know what is. However, my hat is off to anyone who bothered to play a card—even if it didn't win. I've licked my wounds now for a year trying to figure out why there is so much despair in my mind. It always seems to come back to rooting out those lingering pockets of shame. Our society has done an excellent job of weakening our self-confidence and discouraging us. I'll be the first to admit it: there were times when I was reluctant to speak up because I feared rejection and embarrassment. Let's deal some aces by getting out of our comfort zone. Research done before the election found that people with a "personal connection" to someone gay were much more likely to support same sex marriage.

It's one life and there's no return and no deposit
One life so it's time to open up your closet

Opening up is how we provide that personal connection. Simply being open about our lives is a powerful political action that not only changes our society—it changes us. There's no better way to find your own pockets of shame than talking about how you spent your weekend. I remember explaining what a leather bar is to straight co-workers. Awkward! But if I expect people to embrace my culture and its wonderful diversity, I must be comfortable with it too. You don't need a therapist to work on your "shame issues." It's simply about being as open as possible about your life.

Of course, there are some very personal subjects that make it easy to hide in the closet and pretend that we are just private people. I'm always amazed by how open straight folks are about their marital lives—including sex. By staying silent about this very important part of our lives, we allow people who fear us to distort attitudes. Vivid images of sex can induce raw emotions—desire, guilt, disgust—that are very easily twisted into hatred and fear. Society has to examine those emotions, just as we did when we came out. Queer folks have learned to hide a huge part of themselves to avoid rejection. Talking openly about the issues involved with marriage, love, and sex teaches our society to accept us as full-fledged humans.

Now, am I advocating that you describe your sexual preferences in great detail to your grandmother? Of course not! Everyone must use common sense and be true to their own personality, but make sure that you aren't hiding your homophobia behind a sense of privacy. We'll know our nation has opened up the closet when a gay joke doesn't garner a laugh on *The Daily Show* or the latest teen sex movie. Why exactly is gay sex funny? Because it makes straight people uncomfortable. Because it makes us uncomfortable. It's that discomfort and internalized shame that causes us to hesitate when we have a chance to make a personal connection—a connection that just might change someone's vote on the next constitutional amendment. The personal really is political and the simple power of sharing your life—all of your life—can and will make a difference. Ask yourself... WWGD?

Research done before the election found that people with a "personal connection" to someone gay were much more likely to support same sex marriage.

Life's not worth a damn till you can shout out
I am what I am . ■

Dale Decker has been a psychotherapist and substance abuse counselor in our community since 1994. He can be found online at **www.daledecker.net**

our lives
Dale Decker
ourlivesmadison.com
user **daledecker**

our lives
Civil Rights & Discrimination Forum
STRAIGHT ALLIES
Submitted by **kahegges**

Unless a person has been schooled in hating by their parents, I think most straights are more or less indifferent to GLBT people until a child or other significant person comes out to them. Then they begin the process which starts from "silent ally" and proceeds to a correctly voting, parade marching, leaflet passing, signature collecting, in your face, "don't make homophobic remarks in front of me" type of person. I welcome anyone along this continuum. The homophobic "hate the sin, love the sinner" types are not allies and give very mixed messages. We have lots of potential and actual silent allies out there and with the right provocation, I am confident they will speak up.

Kay Heggestad, President, PFLAG-Madison, www.pflag-madison.org

Do you have a personal story from the campaign against the ban? Please share it at: OURLIVESMADISON.COM

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Get ready to capture those holiday memories. The **Casio EX-Z1050** ($269.99) is a great way to do just that. It's small enough to fit in the palm of your hand and with 10 mega pixels, it's powerful enough to get just the right shot. A sign of the times, the camera also features a mode which automatically creates pictures that are sized perfectly for both eBay and YouTube. It doesn't get easier than that.

Happy Holidays

Taking some tips from Santa himself, **Tim Foster** goes shopping for stocking stuffers that can make even the Grinch feel merry.

The iShop

6035 Odana Road, Madison
(608) 270-4444 thepodshop.com

When it comes to music players, smaller is always better. The **iPod Nano** ($149.00 for 4 gigs or $199.00 for 8 gigs) takes small to a new level. And… its no longer just for music. You can now have your favorite movies, TV shows, and photos in the palm of your hand. No more missing work to catch your soaps.

Yakety Yak

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(608) 310-4390 yakitup.com

Nothing's sweeter than **Chocolate** ($356.00 or $129.95 with a two year contract) and this phone is as sweet as it gets. LG has retooled the Chocolate to include two new colors which they've dubbed ice blue mint and dark chocolate cherry. This phone has all the features you need, like Bluetooth and an integrated music player that can be upgraded to a four gig memory card.

Digital Outpost

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Believe in the power of pink! Smokin' Buds ($19.99) by Skull Candy will let you rock tunes while supporting a cause. A portion of the proceeds from the pink headphones will be donated to helping stop breast cancer. There is an assortment of other colors though, just in case pink isn't your thing.

TIM'S SHOPPING LIST

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exclusivecompanyonline.com

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608-251-6121
paragonvideoandstereo.com

Preplayed
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608-310-8112

7610 Mineral Point Rd., Madison
608-833-4107
preplayed.com

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608-257-3535
starphotoinc.com

Brothers Main
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608-221-7860

7968 Tree Ln., Madison
608-221-7865
brothersmain.com

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608-271-1000

5215 High Crossing Blvd., Madison
608-271-1002
americantv.com

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compusa.com

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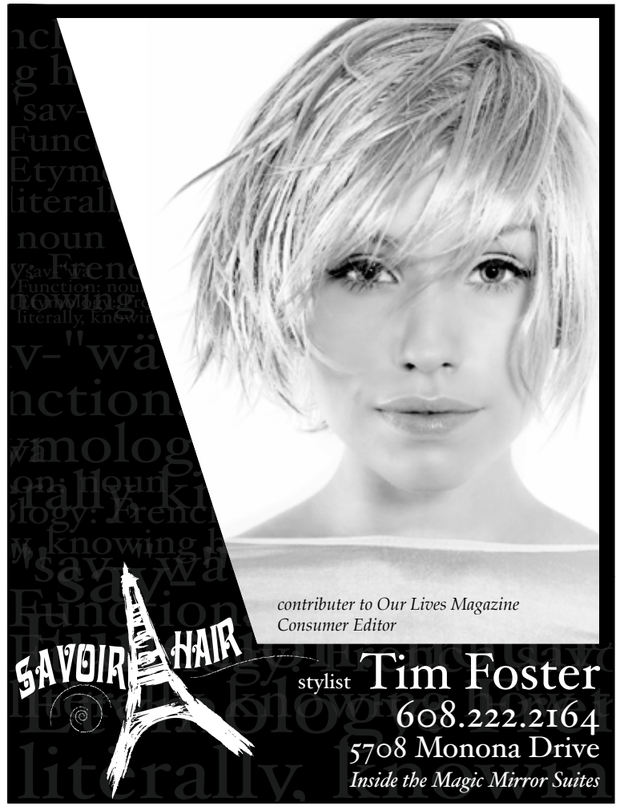

The Old Fashioned
23 N. Pickney St., 310-4545
theoldfashioned.com

"Old Fashioned" Wisconsin Pride

As it turns out, Wisconsin Cuisine is not actually an oxymoron.

THOUGH WISCONSIN MAY BE KNOWN BEST FOR SOME oft-derided, nutritionally-questionable culinary creations—most notably, deep-fried cheese curds and the ever-present bratwurst—there's a reason that these foods have been so successful: they're darn tasty. And some of our state's food traditions truly deserve preservation. The Door County Fish Boil, for example, or its more famous cousin, the Friday Night Fish Fry. And let's not forget the Supper Club.

Thanks to The Old Fashioned (23 N. Pinckney St., Madison), we can get a taste of that longstanding tradition, served up with a healthy helping of both reverence and humor, right on the Capitol Square.

Besides a staggering selection of homegrown artisan cheeses, available in pre-determined platter options or atop the warm apple pie, you'll find a great selection of classic Wisconsin fare prepared in a way your mother never imagined.

Share one of the Lazy Susans with some friends – yes, that classic revolving tableside buffet is available for a taste of nostalgic fare. Follow that up with a Door County cherry salad, made with crisp field greens, and sprinkled liberally with quality bleu cheese and toasted almonds. Or, sink your teeth into the amazingly decadent House Burger, topped with hickory smoked bacon, aged cheddar and a soft-cooked egg. For something a little healthier, the grilled rainbow trout is a great option, grilled whole and served alongside a beet salad.

But the food and cozy atmosphere will not be the only thing that make you feel warm and welcomed at The Old Fashioned: this restaurant is actively reaching out to the LGBTQA community. Weekly Pride Night events are in the works, held every Wednesday night after the dinner rush, and a monthly drag queen karaoke event will start in mid-October. A portion of proceeds from these special nights goes directly to benefit the AIDS Network.

Starting in November, you'll also be able to enjoy a special "Red Ribbon Cocktail" at The Old Fashioned any night of the week, year-round, with 100% of the drink's proceeds benefiting the AIDS Network. More details on these events, as well as a complete menu, will be available at www.theoldfashioned.com. **—Amy VanKauwenbergh**

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www.amyscafe.com

Angelic
322 W. Johnson St., 257-2707
American, Pizza $
angelicbrewing.com

Bab's French Quarter Kitchen
1353 Williamson St., 251-1222
French, Creole $

Bandung Restaurant
600 Williamson St., 255-6910
Indonesian $$
bandungrestaurant.com

Bellini Restaurant
401 E. Washington Ave., 250-0097
Italian, Pasta $$$
bellinirestaurant.com

Blue Marlin
101 N. Hamilton St., 255-2255
Seafood, Steak $$$
thebluemarlin.net

Blue Velvet Lounge
430 W. Gilman, 250-9900
American, Tapas $
thebluevelvetlounge.com

The Brass Ring
701 E. Washington Ave., 256-9359
American, Burgers $
thebrassringmadison.com

Brocach Irish Pub
7 W. Main St., 255-2015
Irish $$
brocach.com

Buraka
543 State St., 255-3646
East African $
buraka.com

Burrito Drive
310 S. Brearly St, 260-8586
Mexican $
burritodrive.com

Cafe Continental
108 King St., 251-4880
Continental $$

Cafe Costa Rica
141 S. Butler St., 356-9830
Costa Rican $

Cafe Montmartre
127 E. Mifflin St., 255-5900
French, Tapas $
themomo.com

Cafe Porta Alba
15 N. Butler St., 441-0202
Pizza $$
cafeportaalba.com

Cafe Soleil
25 N. Pinckney St., 251-2700
Bread, Sandwiches/Deli $
letoile-restaurant.com

Cocoliquot
225 King St., 255-2626
French, Croissants $$$
cocoliquot.com

Come Back In
508 E. Wilson St., 258-8619
American, Sandwiches $
essen-haus.com

Crave Restaurant & Lounge
201 W. Gorham, 268-2728
Seafood, Burgers $$$
cravemadison.com

Dotty Dumpling's Dowry
317 N. Frances St., 259-0000
American, Burgers $
dottydumplingsdowry.com

Eldorado Grill
744 Williamson St., 280-9378
Tex-Mex $$$
eldoradogrillmadison.com

Essen Haus
514 E. Wilson St., 255-4674
German $$
essen-haus.com

Fresco
227 State St., 663-7374
American $$$
frescomadison.com

Frida Mexican Grill
117 State St., 256-4000
Mexican, Southwestern $$
fridamexicangrill.com

Great Dane
123 E. Doty St., 284-0000
Brewery, Burgers $$
greatdanepub.com

Harvest
21 N. Pinckney St., 255-6075
American, French $$$
harvest-restaurant.com

Himal Chuli
318 State St., 251-9225
Nepalese, Vegetarian $

Husnu's
547 State St., 256-0900
Turkish, Italian $

Ian's Pizza by the Slice
100 State St., 442-3535
Pizza $
iansdelivery.com

Johnny Delmonico's
130 S. Pinckney St., 257-8325
Steak, American $$$$
johnnydelmonicos.com

Johnny O's
620 University Ave., 251-0943
American, Steak $
www.madavenue.com

Jolly Bob's
1210 Williamson St., 251-3902
Caribbean, Jamaican $$

Kabul Restaurant
541 State St., 256-6322
Afghanistani $

Lazy Jane's Cafe
1358 Williamson St., 257-5263
Sandwiches, Deli $

Le Chardonnay
320 W. Johnson St., 268-0372
Mediterranean, French $$$
lechardonnaymadison.com

L'Etoile
25 N. Pinckney St., 251-0500
French, American $$$$
letoile-restaurant.com

Madison's
119 King St., 229-0900
American, Burgers $$
madisonsdowntown.com

Maharani
380 W. Washington Ave., 251-9999
Indian $$

Marigold Kitchen
118 S. Pinckney St., 661-5559
Sandwiches, Soup $
marigoldkitchen.com

Maza
558 State St, 256-9330
Afghanistani $

Michael's Frozen Custard
2531 Monroe St., 231-3500
Frozen custard, Burgers $

New Orleans Takeout
1517 Monroe St., 280-8000
New Orleans Cuisine $
eatmobettah.com

Ocean Grill
117 MLK Jr. Blvd. 285-2582
Seafood $$
oceangrillmadison.com

The Old Fashioned
23 N. Pickney St., 310-4545
Steak, American $$
theoldfashioned.com

Opus Lounge
116 King St., 441-6787
Tapas $$
opuslounge.com

Parthenon Gyros
316 State St., 251-6311
Greek $

Restaurant Muramoto
106 King St., 260-2680
Asian Fusion, Vegetarian $

Roman Candle
1054 Williamson St., 258-2000
Pizza $
theromancandle.com

Sardine
517 Williamson St., 441-1600
French $$$

Shamrock Bar
117 W. Main St., 255-5029
Sunday Brunch $
shamrockbar.com

Sunprint Cafe
1 S. Pinckney St., 268-0114
Sandwiches, Vegetarian $

Takara
315 State St., 268-0188
Japanese, Sushi $

Tornado Club
116 S. Hamilton St., 256-3570
Steak $$$
apartmentrenting.com/tornado

Weary Traveler
1201 Williamson St., 442-6207
International $

Wisconsin Union
800 Langdon St., 265-3000
American, Sandwiches $
www.union.wisc.edu

East

Bunky's Cafe
2827 Atwood Ave., 204-7004
Italian, Mediterranean $$
bunkyscafe.net

Ella's Deli
2902 E. Washington Ave., 241-5291
Kosher/Deli, Ice cream $
ellasdeliandicecreamparlor.com

Fork and Spoon Cafe
1133 E. Wilson St., 257-7216
Italian, Pasta $
forkandspooncafe.com

Glass Nickel
2916 Atwood Ave., 245-0880
Pizza $
glassnickelpizza.com

Harmony Bar & Grill
2201 Atwood Ave., 249-4333
Pizza, Burgers $

Lao Laan-Xang
2098 Atwood Ave., 819-0140
Laotian, Vegetarian $$

Michael's Frozen Custard
3826 Atwood Ave., 222-4110
Frozen custard, Burgers $
ilovemichaels.com

Monty's Blue Plate
2089 Atwood Ave., 244-8505
American, Pies $
montysblueplatediner.com

Tex Tubbs Taco Palace
2009 Atwood Ave., 242-1800
Tex-Mex $
textubbstacos.com

Wonders Pub
1980 Atwood Ave., 244-8563
American, Burgers $

West

Bar Bistro 608
430 N. Midvale Blvd., 316-6900
Seafood, Steak $$$
sundancecinemas.com

Biaggi's
601 Junction Rd., 664-9288
Italian, Pasta $$
www.biaggis.com

Bluephies
2701 Monroe St., 231-3663
American, Vegetarian $$
bluephies.com

Flat Top Grill
538 N. Midvale Blvd., 236-4008
Asian Fusion $$
flattopgrill.com

Fleming's Steak & Wine Bar
750 N. Midvale Blvd., 233-9550
Steak, Seafood $$$$
flemingssteakhouse.com

Glass Nickel
5003 University Ave., 218-9000
Pizza $
glassnickelpizza.com

Great Dane
357 Price Place, 661-9400
Brewery, Burgers $$
www.greatdanepub.com

Inka Heritage
602 S. Park St., 310-4282
Peruvian $$$

J.T. Whitney's Brewpub
674 S. Whitney Way, 274-1776
Brewery, American $$
jtwhitneys.com

Jordan's Big Ten Pub
1330 Regent St., 251-6375
American, Burgers $
jordansbigten.com

La Hacienda
515 S. Park St., 255-8227
Mexican $

Madeleine's Patisserie
3742 Speedway Rd, 441-0909
Bread, Pastries $
madeleinesmadison.com

Mickey's Dairy Bar
1511 Monroe St., 256-9476
Breakfast, Burgers $

Original Pancake House
5518 University Ave., 231-3666
Pancakes $

Tex Tubbs Taco Palace
2701 University Ave., 231-3473
Tex-Mex $
textubbstacos.com

Zuzu Cafe
1336 Drake St., 260-9898
Sandwiches/Deli $

Coffeeshop Corner

Ancora Coffee Roasters
112 King St, 255-0285
1859 Monroe St, 258-9881
3314 University Ave, 233-5287

Barriques Coffee Trader
127 W Washington Ave, 259-9394
1831 Monroe St, 284-9463
1901 Cayuga St, Middleton, 824-9463
8410 Old Sauk Rd, 828-9502
5957 McKee Rd, Fitchburg, 277-9463

Cafe Zoma
2326 Atwood Ave., 246-2009

Electric Earth Cafe
546 W Washington Ave, 255-2310

Escape Cafe
916 Williamson St., 255-0997

Espresso Royale Caffe
208 State St., 259-0800
650 State St., 259-0300

EVP Coffee
1250 E Washington, 294-6868
3809 Mineral Point Road, 236-9690

Fair Trade
418 State St., 268-0477

Ground Zero
744 Williamson St., 294-8668

Indie Coffee
1225 Regent St., 259-9621

Java Cat
3918 Monona Dr., 223-5553

Meeting Grounds
494 Commerce Dr., 826-4200

Mermaid Cafe
1927 Winnebago St., 249-9719

Michelangelo's
114 State St., 251-5299

The Sow's Ear
125 S. Main St., Verona, 848-2755

Washington Hotel Coffee Room
402 W Lakeside St., 441-7599

Nature vs. Nurture

Relying on reason to rationalize his own journey, **Kevin Romero** discovers how life doesn't always follow a simple science.

As a kid, my life was dictated by logic and family. My family was often run by logic known as "because I said so," a command most typically uttered by older authority figures. In my case, that meant six authority figures in the form of three brothers, a sister, and two parents. We each have our role in my family—I have always tended to have the identity based firmly on the logical side of any argument or debate. Always refuting "because I said so," or "that's just the way it is," as simply unsubstantiated.

As I was going through puberty, homosexuality remained something wrong, something that wasn't concrete in a Catholic home. It defied my logic and understanding. It defied my parents' beliefs. Why it was bad was a matter of resorting to the sayings above—It just was.

I thought something was wrong with me when I first noticed attraction to other guys. I

Saying "this is just who I am," allowed me so much freedom that I had denied myself for so long

our lives | Kevin Romero
ourlivesmadison.com
user **kromero**

was curious about this seemingly irrational development and did what any logical person does. I tried to find some books and read and figure out why I was feeling what I was feeling. So one afternoon, heart racing, I bought a book about being gay. In the end, I suppose I was looking for a logical defense to my sexual development. One that I could point to, to justify why I was thinking and feeling the way I was, other than simply saying it was "because I said so."

So one day I came back home, horrified to learn that my mother and grandmother decided to clean the entire house, including my room without me knowing. My book was found. Sobbing, my parents sat me down to ask if I was gay… I said no. I didn't know what else to say. The only excuse I felt I could rationally defend was that I was curious about sexuality, but not gay. While my answer was not completely logical, it sustained me temporarily.

Following that, my parents decided to take me to the backyard, out in the desert, and burn the book with me. Looking back now, I should have been forthright and justified my sexuality as being, again, just the way it was. I instead yearned for a path that I knew, a journey that was logical to follow. A path that was acceptable and right.

Adaptation to my environment has always been one of my strengths, adapting my own self presentation to others was easy for me to do and I did it for several years thereafter. I shunned my emotions. I felt I could force myself into set ideals of sexuality and development—I didn't want to live a life that was not perceived as normal, that did not follow a predictable pattern of marriage and children and friends and approval. I guess my main goal was to not have my life, as the book had been, burnt to ashes because it wasn't right. I did not want to wear, what felt like, my scarlet letter, for fear I would become something socially demonic.

Self-discovery, I've since learned, does not follow a set equation. Emotional and spiritual growth do not follow patterns that can be copied simply because it's the logical path one might foresee for himself. My parents never went through the emotions of learning that their sexuality was considered wrong or weird or outside the norm. I don't anticipate that they will ever fully understand the range of emotions and changes that I underwent to be normal in my own eyes, but they have learned to accept that who I am cannot be changed and they love me all the same. I think they now understand that my sexuality, like my predilection for logic, is simply a part of who I am.

Coming out was not easy for me to do. While playing the role of a chameleon based on who I was around, I buried emotions and knowledge of my inner-desires and shunned those around me who were capable of being open about their sexuality. I tried to hate things that were "too gay," thinking it would make who I was less gay.

Accepting yourself is difficult enough, but learning to embrace a community which was labeled as wrong and understanding your place inside of it is hard for one who functions on order and logic. I am still the logical thinking little brother I was before I came out. But I have learned more about my emotions—how I talk and act, how I become jealous or proud, how I see others—and that those emotions can't always be justified by logical means to an outsider.

One day, I was going out with a friend of mine who was openly gay, and I just decided to tell him. He didn't judge me, he didn't care that I was gay or straight. I had an ear to listen and understand where I had been and what I was going through. When that admittance came out and I knew I wouldn't be burned because of it, I somehow became a much louder, free-spirited, honest, and more outgoing person. Coming out and saying "this is just who I am," allowed me so much freedom that I had denied myself for so long in adapting and revelling who I was.

So while science may help me justify being gay (there is a great article on the biology of homosexuality sited below), it is that acceptance of my personal emotions and desires that makes me who I am. My journey is definitely not over and I am not through with understanding everything about myself or those around me. If anything, I have learned to accept that not everything is going to be as you may want it to be, but will end up being just the way it is and ought to be. ■

http://nymag.com/news/features/33520

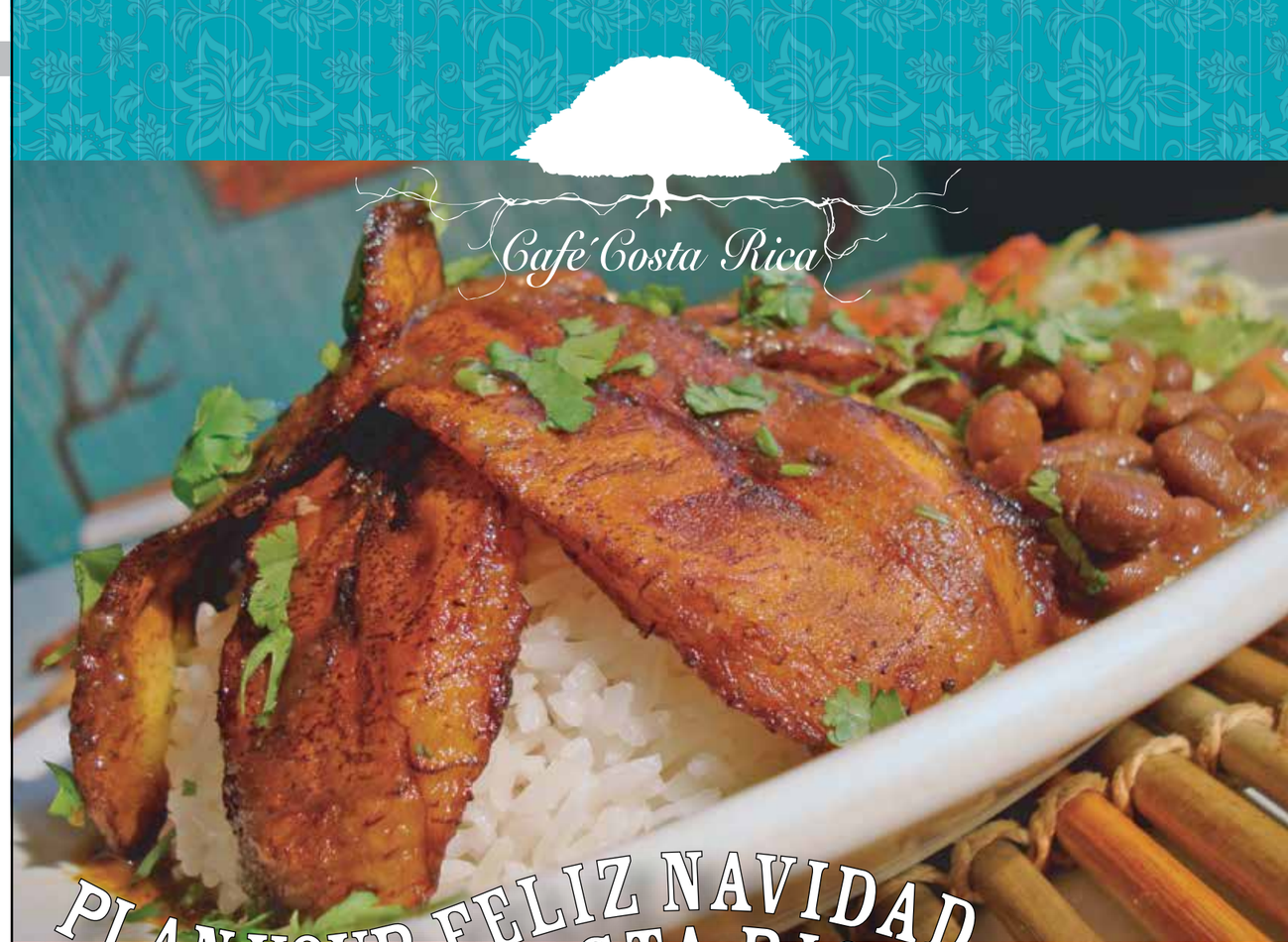
our lives | Coming Out Forum
I LOVE BEING GAY!
Submitted by **femaestro**

"To thine own self be true", "You must love yourself before you can love anyone else…"

We have all heard these mantras repeated in excess, but how many of us actually understand them, or apply them in our own lives? Being gay in a culture that teaches both directly and indirectly that homosexuality is a condition to be loathed and ridiculed is a challenge. I think we all can attest to our own personal struggles with coming out. However, how many of us understand that being gay is a gift? Rather than seeing one's sexual orientation as something that separates, how many of us have been able to see how it connects us? …

PRIDE is not just a parade, think about how beautiful you are people, and why you should be celebrated: simply, because you are.

Ask questions, find support and learn more about the coming out process in our forums online at: **OURLIVESMADISON.COM**



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