

our lives



## Inside:

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Arts & entertainment leaders offer industry insights

22 Local Moments in LGBT History

Significant milemarkers on Wisconsin's road to equality

The Cupcake Pioneers of Madison

Daryl Sisson & Kathy Brooks of the Daisy Café & Cupcakery

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine



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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2012



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**PHOTO:**  
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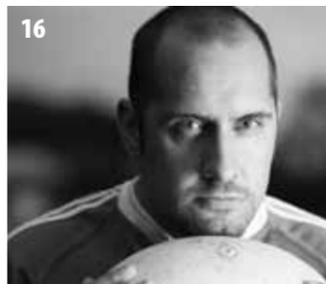
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**I Love Funky's, Lake Geneva**

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**Our History**

**40 Remember ...**  
**Richard Wagner** on the 30th anniversary of gay rights in Wisconsin and what we must never forget.



**Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine**

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September/October 2012 Volume 6, Issue 2  
Life in the Middle Publishing, LLC  
Patrick Farabaugh & Joseph Patane,  
Publishers. 215 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.,  
Box 1202, Madison, WI 53701

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## letters

### A Mile in Her Shoes



I would like to think I'm a social person, getting out and about to all sorts of events merely on the strength of my "cool" factor. The truth is, I have really stretched myself to learn more in—and experience more of—our community since becoming editor back in March of 2009. These efforts reward me with friendships, an ever-broadening understanding of all that makes up LGBTQ life in and around Madison, and great ideas for people and organizations to include in the magazine.

One group that has welcomed me and made great connections with *Our Lives* and our readership is the LGBTQ Narratives Group and their many endeavors, such as QueerSpeak. When I snuck in late to QueerSpeak at Dutch's Auto earlier this year, there was one thing I was sure of: that I would witness the sharing of some really creative and risk-taking pieces. That came true, but what I was not prepared for was Ashlin Ware. The piece she read that night took me places I hadn't gone in some time. It was equal parts eloquence and raunchiness. Equal parts wrenching and intriguing. I didn't want it to end—neither her reading nor the scene she read of two women who were her creations, and yet more real than fiction can be.

So when Patrick and I began planning this Arts & Entertainment issue, Ashlin's name came to mind as an artist whom I wanted to introduce to an expanded readership and potential fans—as I became that night at QueerSpeak. What you'll find in her narrative is even more revelation and eloquence than what she shared that night. Here, Ashlin talks about not only the hard knocks in her life, but also the tapestry into which she has woven all her experiences to become the artist she is today. I invite you to step into her world—and prepare to be moved.

Virginia Harrison  
EDITOR

### Why I Went Public

Last month I had the honor of being featured on the cover of the *Isthmus*. I am deeply appreciative of the care the *Isthmus* staff and contributors took in helping me tell my story and creating an opportunity for my message to reach far beyond my own network and the networks of this magazine.

When I was approached by the writer, Phil Busse, I made a decision to speak openly about some deeply personal things that eventually lead to the creation of this magazine. The *Isthmus* story marked the first time I've spoken publicly about almost killing myself a few years ago, and about the solution and vision I found that helped me climb out of a very deep and almost fatal depression. At that time in my life all I wanted was someone who could understand what I was going through and help guide me to a better place. I needed someone who could show me that it was not only possible to survive, but that I could still come back to thrive and celebrate life. So when this chance presented itself, I didn't want to miss the opportunity to be visible to anyone needing that person today and to realize who they need to know is out there for them, too.

To anyone reading this right now who may be scared, struggling, or feeling lost or broken, please let my story be an example of how you can still find love and purpose in a world that desperately needs you, too.

Patrick Farabaugh  
PUBLISHER

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## contributors



Lois Bielefeld (Cover) shoots commercial and fashion work. Recently, Lois completed a series of 103 portraits of people in their bedrooms. She lives in Shorewood with her 12-year-old daughter, partner, guinea pig, and cat. Besides photography, Lois loves to bike, cook, eat, and dabble in Midwestern things like trap shooting. [loisbiefeld.com](http://loisbiefeld.com)

Dick Wagner (Our History) moved to Madison in 1965 to study American history at the University of Wisconsin. Deciding to stay in Madison, he worked for the state and got involved in local politics. In the 1980s, Governor Tony Earl appointed him in 1983 to co-chair the Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues. In retirement, he gardens, serves on boards, and researches and writes about Wisconsin gay history.



Nina Bednarski (Cover) is an artist, environmental designer, and stylist working on an as-needed basis for creative projects throughout Southeast Wisconsin and beyond. She is currently developing a new business with her partner Craig Grabhorn called Chalet Press ([chaletpress.com](http://chaletpress.com)). Chalet Press strives to push intelligent art and design into the market with handmade products that carry sustainable integrity. [ninabednarski.com](http://ninabednarski.com)



Amber Sowards (Our Future Leaders) is an artist/photographer who photographs people in their natural environments. She received her MFA in 2009 from Maryland Institute College of Art. Amber is originally from Baltimore but moved to Madison three years ago with her partner. When not working on her own art, she works as a freelancer around town and is in the process of starting a silkscreen business. [ambersowards.com](http://ambersowards.com)



Tamar Zick, LPC, RYT (Our Issues) is a licensed psychotherapist and a registered yoga teacher. She has had the privilege of working within the LGBTQ community of Madison for over 20 years. Tamar is deeply inspired by the teachings of Buddhism and yogic philosophy. She offers individual and relationship therapy at her Atwood Avenue office and teaches yoga at the Perfect Knot Yoga Studio. [tamarzick.com](http://tamarzick.com)



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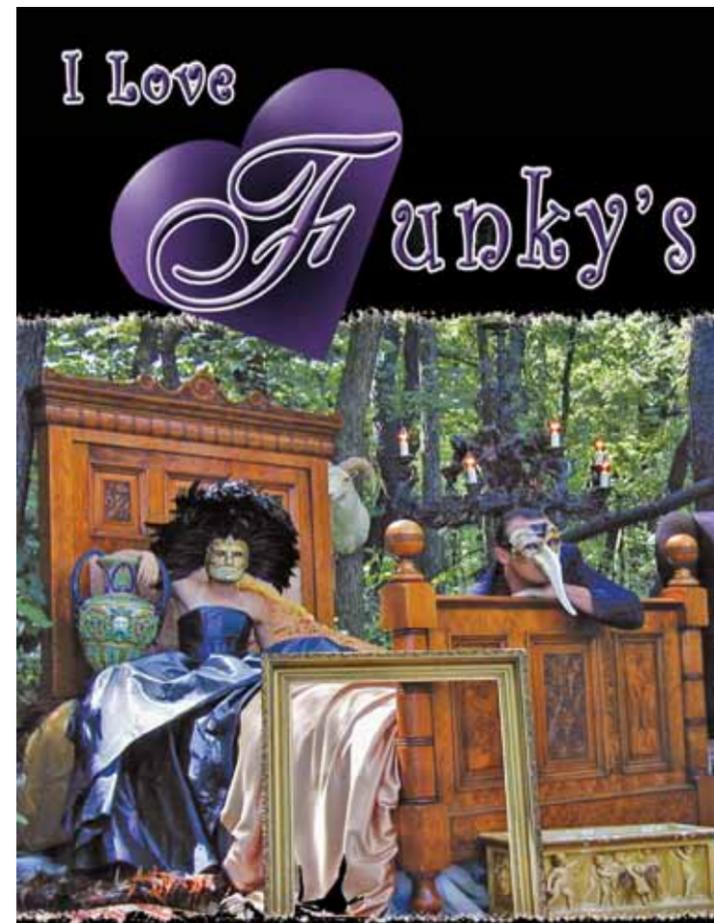
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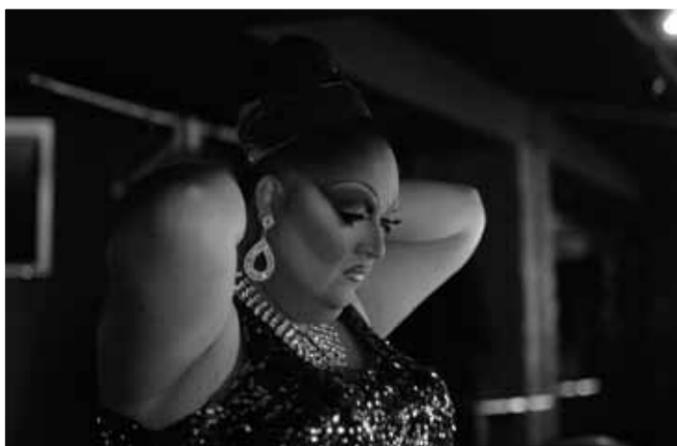
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## Becoming Trina

**Christopher Wilford** kicks off a new entertainment column by mapping out his own path to an entertainer's persona.

**W**elcome to the new "Our Entertainers" column. I was asked to begin the column by answering the question, "Who is Trina?" I was excited and nervous as I began to explore how to answer that. I had never really given it much thought. I think to understand where and who someone is currently in life, you have to know the events that shaped or changed them and led them to who they are today.

### I Love You No Matter What

I was born Chris Wilford in 1981 in Waukegan, Illinois. My mother, Becky, was a young single mother; my biological father left us. My mother is a strong woman who did anything and everything in her power to make sure I wanted for nothing. She has always been very open-minded and free-spirited. My favorite story she tells is that while pregnant with me, she would caress her stomach and talk to me, assuring me she would love me no matter what happened or who I became. She even went so far as to say to me while I was still in the womb that she would support me no matter if I turned out gay or straight. This always intrigues me as she had no reason to make that statement at the time. She did not have any gay friends (that she could recall) or anyone gay in her life, yet she felt the need to address that aspect. To have that kind of outlook in 1981 really shows me how progressive she was.

My mother married my stepfather, Steve, and they had my younger brother, Mike, when I was still very young. I was so young, in fact, that I always thought Steve was my father. It wasn't until my third grade teacher asked me if I knew my real father, telling me Steve couldn't be my father because he had a different last name. I remember coming home feeling like my world was shattered. Of course, in hindsight, nothing changed. Steve was my father: he raised me and would always consider me his son.

### Bullying and Depression

That year was very rough for me, however. For the first time, I no longer did well in school, and I failed third grade. This was around the time I was starting to feel "different" from my classmates. I no longer had interest in playing with the boys on the playground; I would much rather spend my time playing with the girls. This ultimately led to teasing and name-calling, as well as depression.

By middle school I had become so good at hiding my feelings through comedy and being a class clown, that nobody—including my family—knew the real me. I realized early on that if I acted out and made my classmates laugh, I somehow escaped the radar of the bullies, even if the laughter was at my own expense. This behavior eventually led to acting out at home as well. My parents had a hard time understanding and disciplining me. I often would do as I pleased.

I surrounded myself with fake friends, and people who only liked me for what I could do for them. I often found myself funding friendships; if I was out of cash, my friends were nowhere to be found. They also used my brazen attitude and lack of respect for authority figures to their advantage—using me as an accomplice to many wrongdoings.

My high school years weren't much different. I wasn't ever popular, but I wasn't a "nerd." I was in limbo, and the popular crowd would come calling when they needed something from me. Eventually, I dropped out.

I came out to my parents and "friends" around the time I left school. The reaction I received was a bit different than some of your typical coming-out stories. My parents fully accepted and supported me from the minute I told them. They never questioned the love they had for me. They just wanted me to be happy. Although you would think this acceptance would be all I needed and that it would fix everything, it didn't. I found myself not wanting to be happy.

### I Did Not Want to be Gay

Even though my family accepted me, I could not accept this as my destiny. I did not want to be gay, and I did not have a good support system. I didn't know anyone who admitted to being gay. I felt embarrassed and thought I could change myself. I even continued to have relationships with girls.

Later that year, I left home searching for who I was. I moved around the country working odd jobs and selling goods door-to-door from a duffel bag. I was traveling so often, I sometimes ended the night sleeping in a car. But no matter where I went, I couldn't find what it was I was looking for. I did, however, meet lots of new people, and realized the true meaning of the word "diversity." I felt like even though I wasn't exactly confident in who I was, or comfortable with my sexuality, I was willing to at least explore myself more and try to find the answer.

**I can only compare it to being seduced by power. I felt like I was a somebody. I was popular—and shallow. It took a lot for me to walk away from that scene.**

### Alcohol, Drugs, and Sex

Years later, after many failed relationships with people who sensed my weakness and vulnerability, I had all but given up on love and happiness. I had come to terms with what I thought was the gay lifestyle. I truly believed that being gay meant seedy bars, alcohol, drugs, and sex. I did not think love and happiness were part of that equation. I had moved back in with my parents and had all but given up hope for a fulfilled life. Then I met Joey. Joey and I went on our first blind date over six years ago, and it was love at first sight. I was apprehensive and had walls built up from so many bad experiences in life, but he broke those walls down faster than I could rebuild them.

### Rebirth

About a year into our relationship, Joey and I had tickets to attend a murder-mystery role-playing dinner at a local gay establishment. I received a call from one of the organizers asking me if I would attend in drag. They had a shortage of female participants and thought it would be fun. This was something that was very far out of my comfort zone, but Joey convinced me to just have fun with it. I did.

I think I had so much fun because all of those experiences of being the class clown, the comedian, and the rebel came flooding back—and suddenly I was the center of attention. This was both scary and exciting. It was exactly what I spent my life trying to get away from, but also I was now much more in control of my emotions and in a good place in life.

I was asked immediately afterward if I would host a weekly bingo event in campy drag. After careful consideration, I took the position and



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## community

had a lot of fun with it. But I promised myself one thing: If it ever started to change me for the worse, or interfered with my life in a negative way, I would walk away. After doing a weekly spot for a couple years, I realized it was time for me to move on.

I was in a bad place again. But this time it was different. I wasn't the one desperately seeking attention anymore and dying to fit in. I was vain, self-absorbed, and was surrounded by people of that nature. I was in the "cool" crowd. I was drinking every night and at the bar four to five days a week. I can only compare it to being seduced by power. I felt like I was a somebody. I was popular—and shallow. It took a lot for me to walk away from that scene. In doing so, I faced a battle as well. The clique I hung with turned on Joey and me. They ousted us and tried to make our lives miserable. I was devastated. I loved the entertaining aspect of being a performer, but felt like there had to be more than just trying to be popular.

### The Move to Madison

It was about that time that Joey and I decided we were all we needed. We applied for a domestic partnership, and had a beautiful reception at my parents' house. We also felt it was time to relocate, and leave "Trina," my drag persona, behind. I sold all of my drag items and we relocated to Janesville, Wisconsin, where we had a couple of friends. We were only in Janesville a short time before the bug hit me to start performing again. I knew we risked the same outcome and risked surrounding ourselves with the same type of crowd, but I felt I could try one more time. I am very glad I did.

It was in Madison that I found a different type of performer. I found a sisterhood; a family-type unit. Performing was fun again. There was so much opportunity thrust at me when I entered the scene that it felt like a whirlwind. I was being booked for this, that, and the other. But something

## OUR ENTERTAINERS



Pride is what had been missing in my life. I had, of course, gone to Gay Pride parades in the past—but felt nothing. It was just a party as far as I was concerned. But now there was a sense of giving back to the community.

was different. I wasn't just operating in this small crowd of people who were all about themselves and nothing of substance. There were so many great causes and benefits to help with, and I had a sense of true pride.

### Having a Purpose

Pride is what had been missing in my life. I had, of course, gone to Gay Pride parades in the past—but felt nothing. It was just a party as far as I was concerned. But now there was a sense of giving back to the community. Having a purpose. I was blessed to meet such great volunteers and people who organized events for various causes—from the Drag Down Cancer benefits to the Trevor Project, the Wilma Fund, the AIDS Network, and many more. I felt a sense of pride in what I do.

Not every show I do is for charity or a benefit, but just seeing that there was another level of performer opened my eyes to a whole new world. After two years in Janesville, I realized we were spending a huge amount of time in Madison. It felt like the perfect time to relocate. My partner Joey and I became Madison residents in May, and I realized for the first time that nightlife did not just mean drinking and debauchery. It can be fun and fulfilling, all while being responsible. Nightlife no longer has a negative feeling to it. I am very happy I found such a diverse city and nightlife in Madison.

### Sharing Pride Through Others' Stories

I feel as if my story has truly just begun. The events of my childhood may have led me down a certain path, but I still have so much of the journey left. My goal is to take you on this journey with me and share my pride. I want to show you the nightlife through my eyes, and maybe even give you a different perspective on something you had given up on—like I had. Each issue, I will be highlighting a different aspect of nightlife and the amazing people of Madison who make it what it is.

So, to answer the question at hand, "Who is Trina?" I guess we will have to find that out together! ■

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# community

OUR PROSE



## It's Complicated

Excerpts from the **LGBTQ Narratives** Activist-Writers Group's "Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed" production

**C**onceal & Carry: Queers Exposed is a full-length theatrical production featuring original monologues written, directed, and performed by members and allies of Madison's LGBTQ Narratives Activist-Writers' group. The project is designed to interact with our community by continuously integrating new work into the show. After a sold-out July debut at Broom Street Theater, we will be returning to the stage on **October 11 at UW-Madison** and **October 25 at Edgewood College**. Future performances will feature monologues from the debut as well as new voices. To get involved with the project or to learn more about the writers whose excerpts are featured here, visit our Facebook page at [facebook.com/conceal.and.carry2012](http://facebook.com/conceal.and.carry2012).

The scenes of everyday life are often mundane. We measured time in memories shared, celebrated anniversaries, counted the years like the rings of a tree trunk, cycles of the moon, dog years, or the number of finch nests in a season. In loving her, I realized that love grows like bones, filaments weave, grow strong over time, while struggles and growing pains measure progress, not distance.

Silence. Utter silence. What could I say? My über-Christian family, the one I was sure would send me packing if they every caught whisper of my heart's true intentions, embraced me, celebrated me, lifted me up the most beautiful ways.

We, as queers, are not okay. No, we are more than not okay. We are vile. We are unworthy. We are better off dead. Day after day with these messages, this is what we hear, small or large; the really fucked up part is that we don't question them. So we can be pretty sure that no one else is questioning them either. Including me. Including you. And if we don't, then who will?

I'm bisexual and it's a lot more complicated than you think... If you're straight, you don't have to explain that at all. It's the default assumption. It's what you are unless you say otherwise. You don't have to come out heterosexual.

Jesus didn't breathe a word about homosexuality. That language comes from a book that's over 2,000 years old and has no problem with saying slavery is acceptable, stoning women to death if they aren't virgins upon marriage is the proper punishment, and eating meat on Friday is a Hell-worthy sin. That language comes from fanboys and fangirls who forget Jesus was a messenger of love and forgiveness because they're scared of the world around them.

When he asks me / on the dark street / after dinner / if I feel intersexed / and I say / "Dad, I think you mean transgendered" / he says "You know what I mean" / and then "Do you feel like a transman? / I always thought you celebrated your femininity."

We don't talk about it. We want to forget. But shit like this happens. My ribs healed, but I still get a knot in my stomach every time I leave my house. I don't mind that I'll never get my wallet back. What I really miss is feeling safe. Not all hate crimes leave a bruise, but they do mark us. Even words can feel like punches.

I wear my pink triangle everywhere. And I mean, not only everywhere, but everywhere. Yeah, you get it. I like wearing my pink triangle. I like never lowering my voice when I talk about lesbian love, or better—lesbian sex. I like making my voice just a little sexier when I talk about it. I don't do it for anyone else. I don't do it for an audience. I do it for myself. I do it because I like to feel sexy for me.

I mourn my friend's death every day. And when I lock eyes with someone else who loved her, our grief is entangled with horror and with shame. A force grips our throats and pierces our lungs. It is difficult to talk about our friend because her death is a gruesome trauma—and because we know how she lived. We know the risks she took and what she risked every day simply moving through the world—a target for violence—even when she wasn't looking for affection.

It's one week since my grandma died and I had to mourn the loss of the time we could've had together at the end of her life, the time I lost because I was so fucking scared to have to see one more person that I respect look at me like that; couldn't face another face that stared at me like I was a stranger when I loved that face all my life.

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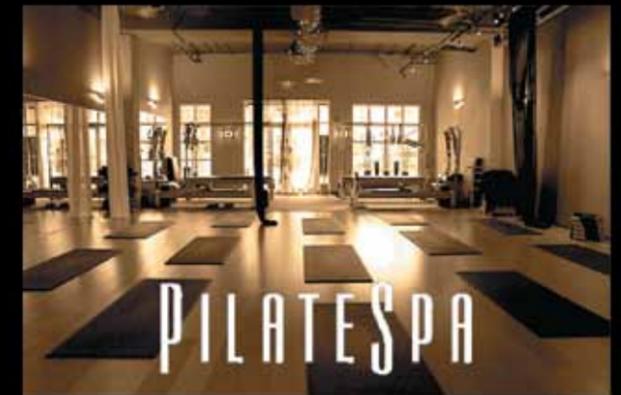


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## OUR STAGES

### Nobody Is Helping the Fags

StageQ's **Scott Bennett** on the emotionally charged and historically based **Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart***. This play about the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic is directed by Steve Noll.

**Who are you, and how did you come to be involved with StageQ?** I live in Madison with my partner and two 6-year-old tuxedo cats. I received my MFA in acting from UW-Madison; it was a challenging, humbling, and life-changing experience. I have acted, directed, and worked on productions with many local theater companies over the years. In 2007, I auditioned for StageQ's *Gays of Our Lives* and was cast. After getting to know artistic director Tara Ayres, she recruited me to join StageQ, and it felt like I had really found a home. Currently, I am on the board of directors and the artistic committee for StageQ at the Bartell Theatre.

**What is noteworthy about Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*?**

*The Normal Heart* is an emotionally raw script. The whole production team, not just the actors, will have to take care of themselves as we work on creating this show. Taking place between 1981 and 1984, the story is driven by the character of Ned Weeks, who publicly confronts the apathy surrounding this new "gay virus," which is killing off a large number of men in New York City. Pulling in friends and acquaintances to join him in the fight, Ned prefers confrontation and exposure, while most of the other characters are closeted and prefer other approaches. This causes a great deal of the tension in the play. Another source of anger and frustration comes from the inaction of the press and the US government, seemingly because it's "only happening to gay men." The most striking part of the story to me, other than the fact that it is based on actual events, is the amount of fear in the play. Nobody knows what is happening, how to protect themselves, or what to do. And nobody is

helping "the fags." It is a poignant reminder of the beginnings of HIV and AIDS. The way it began, what it did to our community, and how badly the situation was handled are things that should never be forgotten.

**What are your hopes for the StageQ production of *The Normal Heart*?** Speaking technically, I find it thrilling to take a well written, emotionally charged script and present it to an audience in all its guts and glory, without pulling any punches. I also think theater should be



It is a poignant reminder of the beginnings of HIV and AIDS. The way it began, what it did to our community, and how badly the situation was "handled"

transformative, so I hope the audiences either learn about or are reminded of the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic. I think it is very important not to forget the statistics and events from this time period. We have entered into a new era of HIV and AIDS treatments and research. It may no longer be a death sentence, but there is certainly no cure. Larry Kramer writes about his continued frustration in an afterword, which we may be handing out to patrons as they leave. It won't be an easy piece of theater for some audiences, but it is certainly important and worth producing.

**When does *The Normal Heart* run?** Performances are October 19 through November 3 at the Bartell Theatre, 113 East Mifflin Street, Madison, WI. Please visit [www.stageq.com](http://www.stageq.com) for details and reservations.

**Your next production is *The Holiday Stops*. Please explain this show.** On the other end of the spectrum, some characters that are near and dear to my heart will be making a return stop in Madison after their 2009 appearance in StageQ's comedy/musical *The Stops*. Taking their name from organ stops—you know,



those knobs you pull out to make the pretty organ sounds—Rose, Ginny, and Euglena will be joined this time around by a fourth member, Linda. As ladies of NALOG (the North American Lady Organists Guild), they are touring the country, uniting their differing faiths with their love of song. A lot has happened to these ladies since we last saw them, and they can't wait to catch up with you and share some new songs featuring wallabies and haggis, with some traditional holiday music thrown in. I play Euglena, and this show is particularly dear to me since *The Stops* was the last show my mother saw before she passed. Written by Eric Lane Barnes, *The Holiday Stops* will run November 29 through December 15 at the Bartell. I hope y'all will come join us for some holiday fun, laughs, and cheer.

**What else would you like readers to know about StageQ?** We are an all-volunteer organization, and we have room for everybody. From actors to directors to scene painting, producing, and everything in between: If you can do it, we're happy to have you—if you can't, we're happy to teach. You can also support the arts by being a contributor, season ticket holder, or by just coming and enjoying our productions!

**How can readers learn more about *The Normal Heart* and StageQ?** There are many online and published sources to learn about Larry Kramer and *The Normal Heart*. A good place to start would be his 1970s writings such as *Faggots: A Novel*. Of particular interest is his involvement in the origins of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, detailed in the play. He later helped create ACT UP, and continues his work as a playwright, guest speaker, and fierce advocate for a cure.



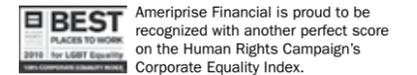
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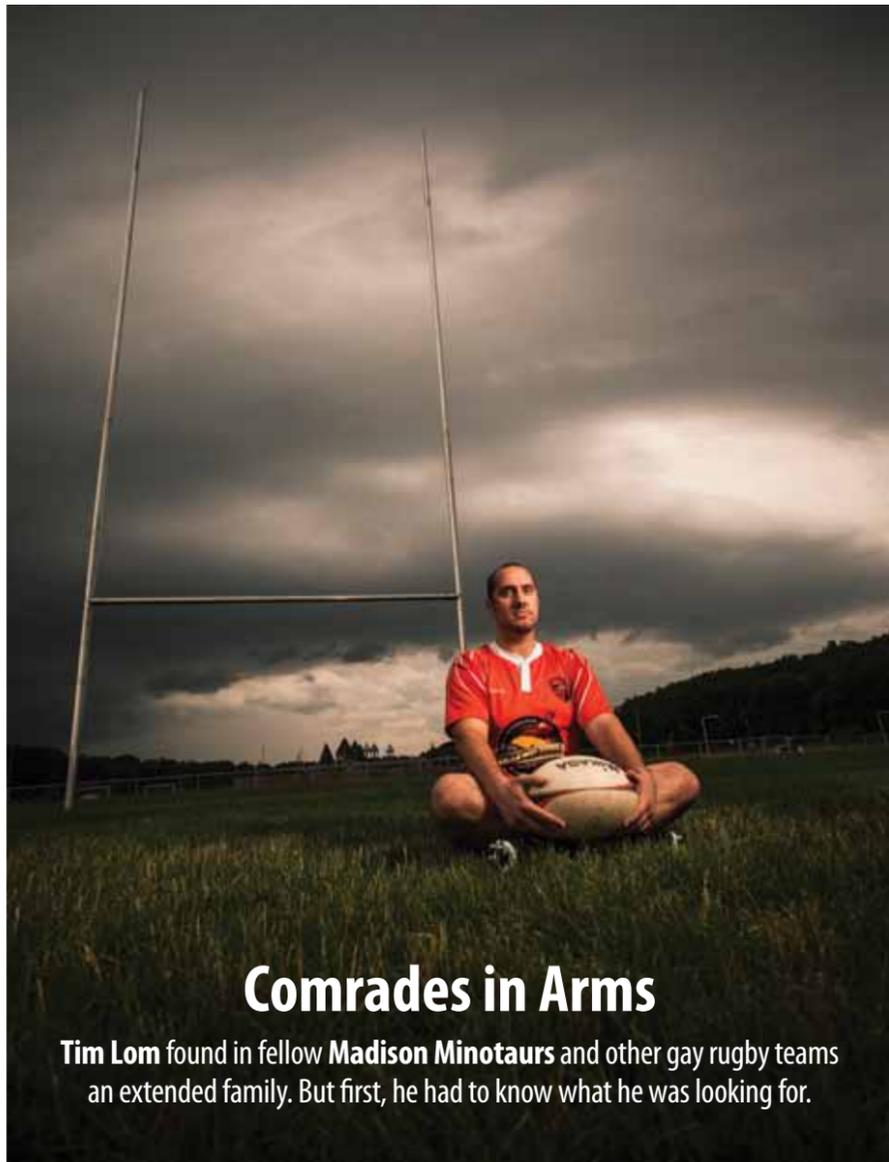


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# community

## OUR ATHLETES



### Comrades in Arms

Tim Lom found in fellow **Madison Minotaurs** and other gay rugby teams an extended family. But first, he had to know what he was looking for.

Like so many other LGBTQ people, my formative years did not conveniently and abruptly end when I turned 18. Throughout my twenties, I was actively searching for some sense of community that would specifically address my goals and wants. At the age of 27, while some of my former classmates and peers were settling down and getting married, I found myself persistently, and somewhat pleasantly, lost and drifting further afield of the institutions that raised me. I wasn't unhappy, but I was definitely missing a sense of structure and purpose to my life.

#### Devil-may-care

I didn't really know anything about rugby back then, other than that I once owned a rugby shirt I really liked and that a really good-looking guy named Ben Cohen used to play it. At the time, this was enough to get me involved with the Madison Minotaurs; the fact that a trusted friend sold it to me so convincingly certainly helped. My first experience with rugby was a bit jarring. First of all, rugby is an incredibly taxing game physically and emotionally. It's a full-contact game of tackling, rucking, and scrumming—with very little padding—and bloody noses, bruised legs, and black eyes soon became a fact of life. Secondly, we were playing in early March, or as most Wisconsinites refer to it, "the dead of winter." These are not the conditions in which rugby is normally played, let alone learned,

but the determination and devil-may-care attitude of the guys around me was infectious. The socials we had after practice were incredibly fun and memorable, and we felt like we were all in it together. Our audacity and sense of adventure carried us through the whole process. We became a registered nonprofit, reached out to other local rugby clubs for instruction and coaching assistance, and played our first-ever scrimmage against our good friends the Minneapolis Mayhem.

#### Sense of Fellowship In and Among Rugby Teams

It was during these first couple of years that I began to understand that the sense of fellowship I was feeling had extended to other gay rugby teams in the area, especially the Chicago Dragons and Minneapolis Mayhem. The unique culture of rugby was allowing me to relate to people on a level that was previously foreign to me. Singing ribald rugby songs at the post-match parties, playing drinking games, providing lodging to the opposing teams' players, and starting our own Minotaur team traditions showed that the extended community of gay rugby was bigger than I had realized. The sense of camaraderie I had once only associated with being a Minotaur was something I now felt for other people in the gay rugby community as well.

This feeling of fellowship was most prevalent during the first Bingham Cup tournament I participated in. The Bingham Cup is also known as the gay rugby world cup and is hosted by IGRAB (International Gay Rugby Association and Board) every two years in places as diverse as Dublin, New York, and Manchester.

#### The Bingham Cup

The Bingham Cup is named after Mark Bingham, a young man whose passion for rugby and his fellow man led to an incredibly heroic act. On September 11, 2001, Mark Bingham and a handful of other Americans turned the tables on the terrorists who had hijacked their commercial flight—and potentially saved hundreds of innocent lives in the process. Mark Bingham's mother, Alice Hoagland, was present at our first Bingham Cup in 2010, which was held in nearby Minneapolis. Meeting Alice and hearing her story was a real turning point in my life. She is an inspiration to anyone who meets her, and she clearly has a real understanding of her son's love of rugby and how it was integral to his heroic life. Everyone at the tournament called her "Mom," and she returned the affection she received graciously.

#### Increased Feelings of Self-worth and Gratitude

It was at this point that I felt like I was coming out of my shell. The Madison Minotaurs went on to experience a real period of growth, recruiting a whole batch of new players and winning tournaments in Chicago and Toronto. The shared experience of competing with my Minotaur brothers filled me with confidence and a real sense of pride. By putting my faith in my teammates, I saw us compete at a whole new level. Rather than battling our own sense of self-doubt and fear, we were now going toe-to-toe with our peers. This feeling was beginning to affect my personal life as well, increasing my feelings of self-worth and assertiveness.

This past June saw us compete in our second Bingham Cup in Manchester, and the experience was incredible. On that snowy day in March years ago, I never would have believed that our team would be able to send a full competitive side to the UK. Between the extended family I've made and the experiences I've had, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude to the people who have supported the Minotaurs and to the wonderful teammates who I am glad to call my family. ■

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**OutReach Awards Banquet**  
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- May | GSAFE Celebration of Leadership
- June | Milwaukee PrideFest
- June | OPEN Betty Lou Cruise
- June | FruitFest
- August | ACT 11: Wisconsin AIDS Ride
- August | Wisconsin Capitol Pride

**GLBT Partnership 15-year Anniversary Event and Beach Party, September 18, Waverly Beach, Menasha** The GLBT Partnership is an ongoing leadership development and weekly support group for Appleton-area youth ages 14-18 who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and allied. GLBT Partnership is a program of Harmony Café in Appleton.

**OPEN Networking Event, September 20, HotelRED, Madison** Have a blast at HotelRED! There will be appetizers, a cash bar, a raffle with some really fun prizes, tours of the guest rooms, and a great chance to mingle with OPEN members and guests. [openmadison.org](http://openmadison.org)

**Java Jive to Benefit the Rape Crisis Center, September 30, The Brink Lounge** Java Jive is the Rape Crisis Center's signature fundraising event of the year, featuring a coffee tasting, breakfast, silent auction, and raffle donated by local businesses. The event also features live jazz from Madison's very own Jan Wheaton Duo. [danecountyrc.org](http://danecountyrc.org)

**OPEN Career Fair & Expo, October 6, Sheraton Hotel, Madison** This is not your typical career fair. In addition to the booths and scores of talented professionals looking for new opportunities, we will also be hosting a variety of workshops that will help teach you strategies for improving the climate for LGBTQ people in the workplace. [openmadison.org](http://openmadison.org)

**The Sixth Annual GSAFE Walk/Run/Eat, October 14, Goodman Community Center, Madison** Do your part to benefit the Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools. The fundraiser includes a 5K walk, a 5K run, and a 10K run—and good food afterward. [gsafewi.org](http://gsafewi.org)

**"The Secret History of Love", October 30, Young Auditorium, Whitewater** Secret love affairs, the history of outlawing love, and the underground ways that LGBT people managed to find—and and love—each other in decades past are revealed in Sean Dorsey Dance's highly anticipated new concert. The show is based on a two-year LGBT Elders Oral History Project and features the remarkable real-life stories. [www.edu/youngauditorium](http://www.edu/youngauditorium)

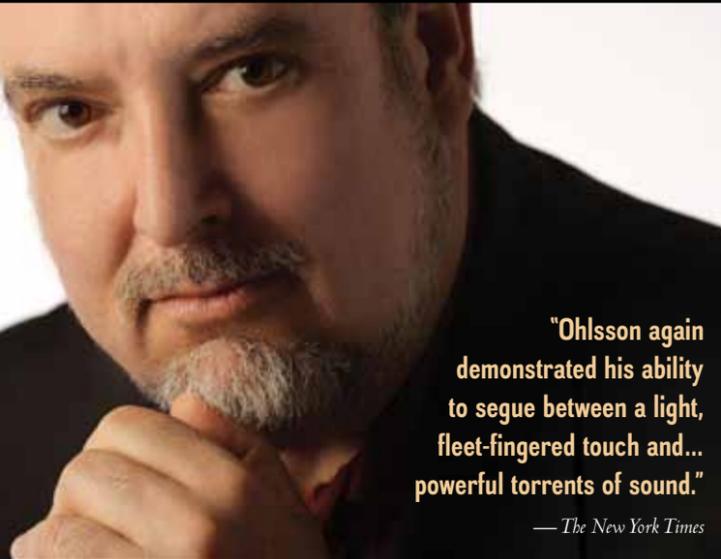
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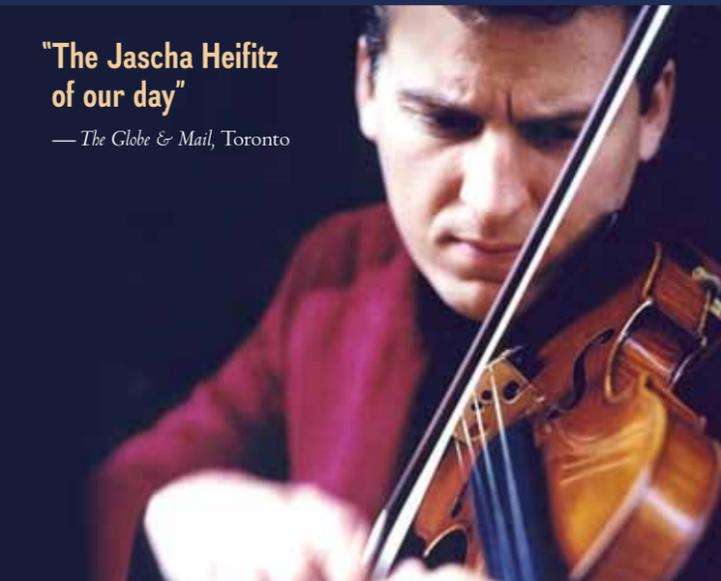
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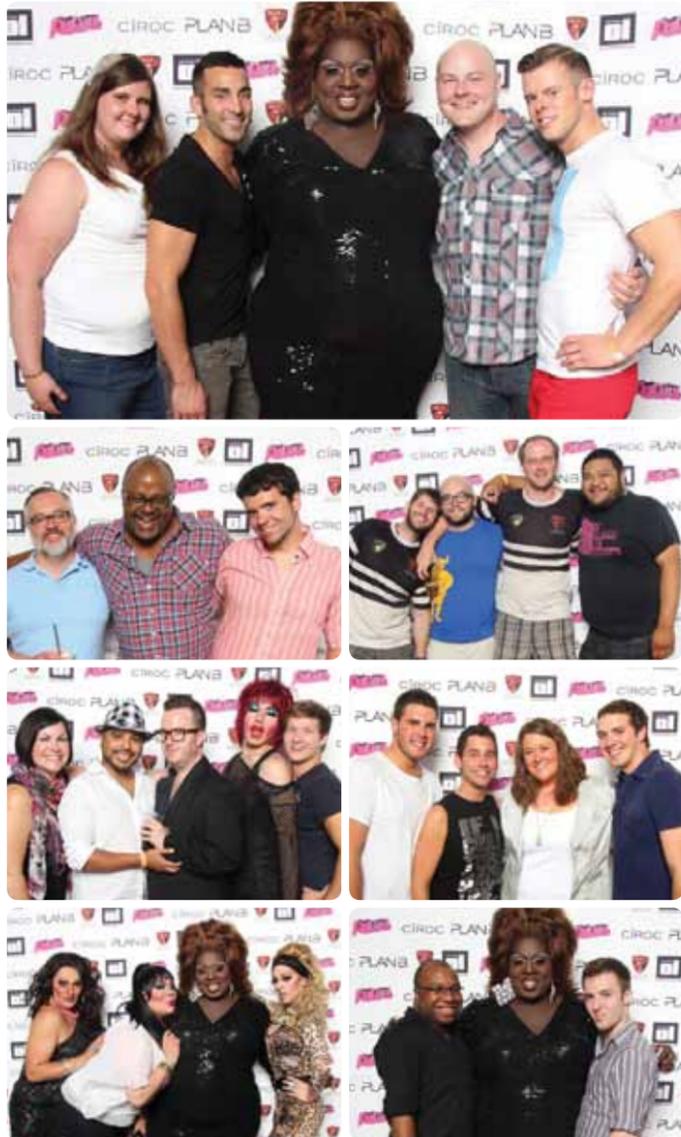
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# community

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## July 31 | Business Professionals Happy Hour at the Madison Club



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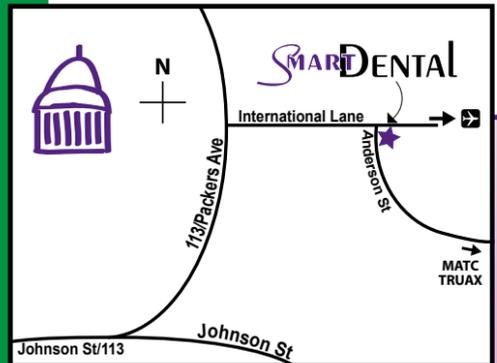


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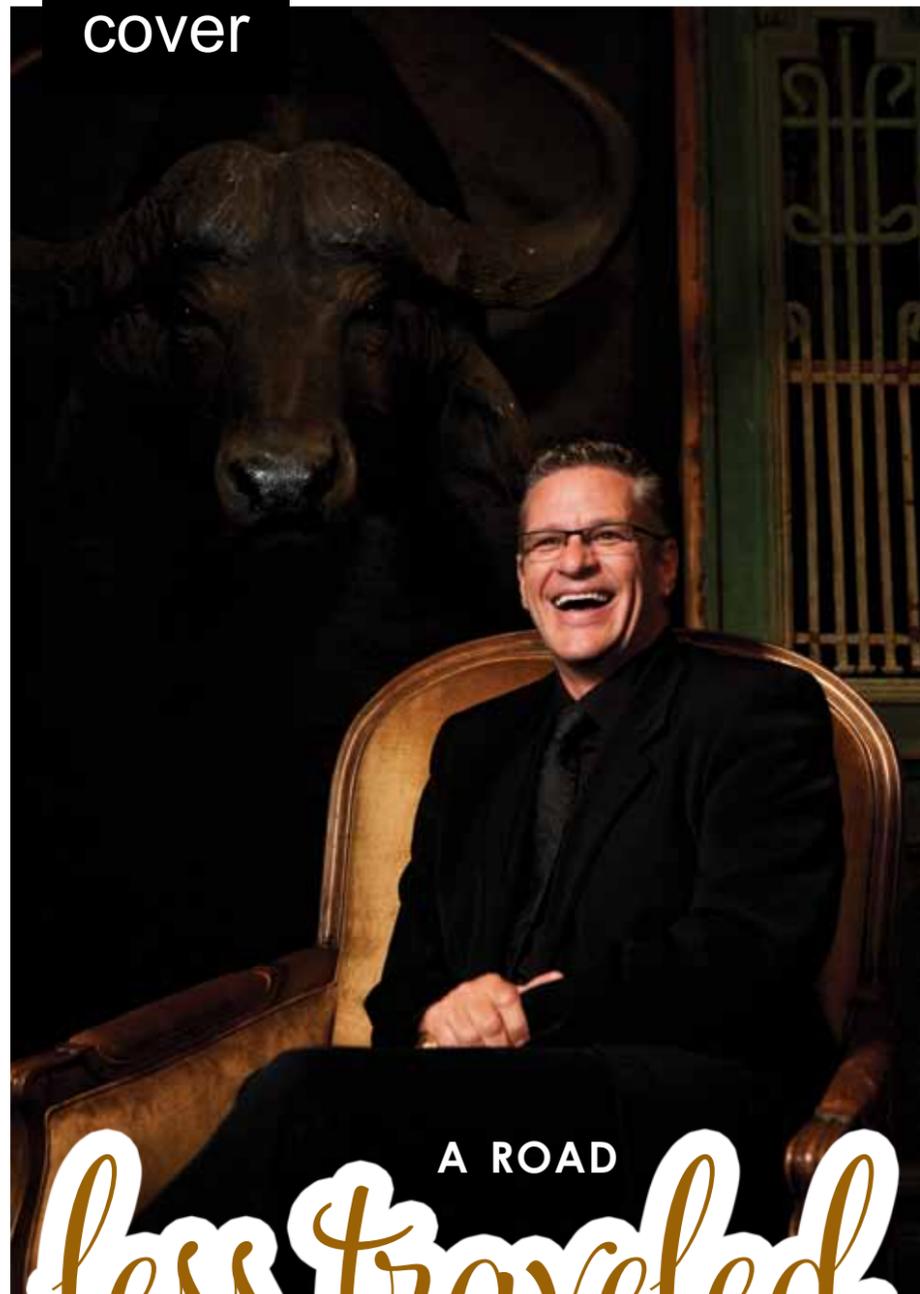


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# A ROAD less traveled

**W. Earle Smith** has spent a lifetime on a path toward the most rewarding part of his career: as artistic director of the Madison Ballet.

As a kid growing up in Kailua, Hawaii, there was one constant in our family — and that was dinner. My mom was adamant about the family sitting down together at the table for supper every night. For me and my two sisters, this was clearly a nuisance since we spent every waking moment on the beach — sailing, body surfing, snorkeling, or just catching rays. But of course, like every family, mom’s rules were law.

To make matters worse for us, my mom would read a piece of literature before every dinner. I remember her saying, “It’s just like eating your peas. You may not like it today, but eventually you will grow to love it.” So, as we suffered through our veggies, we endured the dinner readings. With broccoli, it was “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge;

mushrooms usually brought on William Blake’s “The Tiger”; and asparagus was accompanied with the three witches from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. My sisters and I can, to this day, still recite parts of it, ending with the famous line “Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble.”

One of the poems that stuck with me all through my childhood and even into my adulthood was Robert Frost’s “A Road Not Taken”. Little did I know, my life’s journey would be, as Robert Frost said, “the one less traveled by.” And my road has been filled with many turns and bends, ultimately leading me to where I am today.

My childhood was a reflection of my parents. My dad was a career military officer who excelled in sports. He played baseball, golf, and football while at the United States Naval Academy. My path was littered with stints playing football, boxing, and swimming. On the other side, my mom was an English teacher with a passion for art, music, and opera. So I dabbled in theater, opera lessons, and choir, and played an array of musical instruments. In the end, it seemed I was a “jack of all trades and the master of none.”

## Ballet Lessons

At some point, I was encouraged to take ballet by my best friend because I was having knee problems from growing too fast. I had never taken a dance class and was weary of it because my concept of dance was the typical male rocking back and forth, step-touch step-touch version. I thought ballet was for sissies — so I opted for modern and jazz dance.

Both my jazz and modern teachers recognized a talent for movement and a physical aptness for technique, so they continued to encourage me to supplement my dance training with a ballet class to help build a strong foundation of technique. After months of protest and procrastination, I finally relented and took my first ballet class. I remember dis-

CLOTHING AND PROPS STYLING BY NINA BEDNARSKI. HAIR BY ANGELA KOVIESKI. PHOTOGRAPHED AT LOVE FUNKY'S.

[A&E] WHAT'S TRENDING

## Arts & Entertainment

Local professionals share what's catching their eye.

Local! Local talent, local venues, local collaborations are hot and on the rise in the Madison arts scene. More universal trends are toward technology as either an enhancement or a decimation of the production or delivery of content. Musical theater is more popular among adult and youth productions and audiences alike.

### Surface-skimming as Reading



**WISCONSIN BOOK FESTIVAL**  
ALISON JONES CHAIM, DIRECTOR

Some say it's now easier to read than ever before. Theoretically, with the latest electronic devices, one can sample widely diverse genres and sources

and points of view, all from the comfort of the bus stop (irony intended). Much has been written (and can be Googled) about what the Internet is doing to our brains: ways in which changing media may produce a surface-skimming approach to reading, lacking the depth and discipline of the scholar.

Far more important is the question of access. How much more difficult has reading become for those without a smartphone or a home computer? Library branches and even big commercial bookstores are shutting their doors. Many periodicals have online-only content—and hundreds have no physical form at all. People living in rural areas without high-speed Internet are as disconnected from the dialogue of participatory democracy as those in underserved urban areas. Is the PC the newest poll tax?



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Creating Original Work



**PROUD THEATER**  
**COLLEN HARTY**

True originals look to their interior and find ways of expressing it outwardly, and do so in ways that have not been done before. My partner, Brian, and I have both been involved in Madison theater for decades. We work primarily with Proud Theater and Broom Street Theater, where all of the work is original and has never been produced elsewhere. The last thing we want to do is to copy work done by others or simply follow trendsetters. We would rather create something new that speaks from our personal experiences to the universal human experience.

Two New Art Galleries



**DAVID WELLS CREATIVE SERVICES**  
**DAVID WELLS**

Fall's biggest visual-arts event is the opening of two new galleries—in brand-new buildings, with ambitious gallery directors and exhibit programs. Paul Baker Prindle heads the gallery in Edgewood College's Visual & Theater Arts Center, while Liese Pfeiffer is the director of UW-Madison's Design Gallery, opening in the new wing of the School of Human Ecology. I had advance tours of both buildings; these new spaces are a fantastic addition for Madison. Plus, an exhibit of presidential portraits by more than 50 local artists accompanies Forward Theater's *44 Plays for 44 Presidents* at Overture Center, then moves to Sundance Cinemas just in time for the November election! And September and October bring multiple exhibits as part of Photo Midwest 2012.

Ensemble Theater Movement



**TAPIT/NEW WORKS**  
**DONNA PECKETT AND DANIELLE DRESDEN**

We're excited by the "ensemble theater movement," a term referring to an idiosyncratic group of organizations. Ensemble theaters can be large institutions and own big buildings, or tour in a Winnebago performing something called "Family Reunion," or they can be like TAPIT/new works—somewhere in between. But we have some things in common—our works bear the imprint of those who created them; community connection is key; and an independent spirit rules. We plan to continue our pursuit of artistic innovation and community connection, seeking new ways to tell stories and to share those stories in meaningful ways.

tinctly the love I immediately felt for this form of dance. The discipline of the technique and the beauty of the lines drew me in like nothing I had tried in sports or the performing arts. To the dismay and disappointment of my jazz and modern teachers, I quit everything to focus on ballet. Sissy or not, I was determined to be a ballet dancer.

Dancing Across the Globe

My life as a professional ballet dancer spanned 17 years and took me all over the United States and to some amazing countries around the world. I am fortunate to have danced on some of the most prestigious stages in the world, including the City Center in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and The National Theater in Taipei, Taiwan. As a neo-classically trained ballet dancer, I performed a vast number of works by George Balanchine, one the greatest choreographers of the 20th century. It was an honor to be a part of these important works of art.

A typical ballet season runs from September to June, so in the summer during the off-season, I supplemented my income and need to perform by doing summer-stock theater, modeling and when times were especially tough, odds-and-end jobs like waiting tables, bartending, and even birthday sing-o-grams. But there was always the nagging awareness in the back of head that the average retirement age of a ballet dancer is 27 years old. Like any typical young performing artist, I thought I would be the exception to the rule and that my career would never end. However, my parents convinced me to prepare myself for the inevitable, so I pursued my degree in accounting. Why accounting? I had no idea what I would want to pursue after my career as a dancer, and accounting was the first degree listed in the course catalog.

Choreography

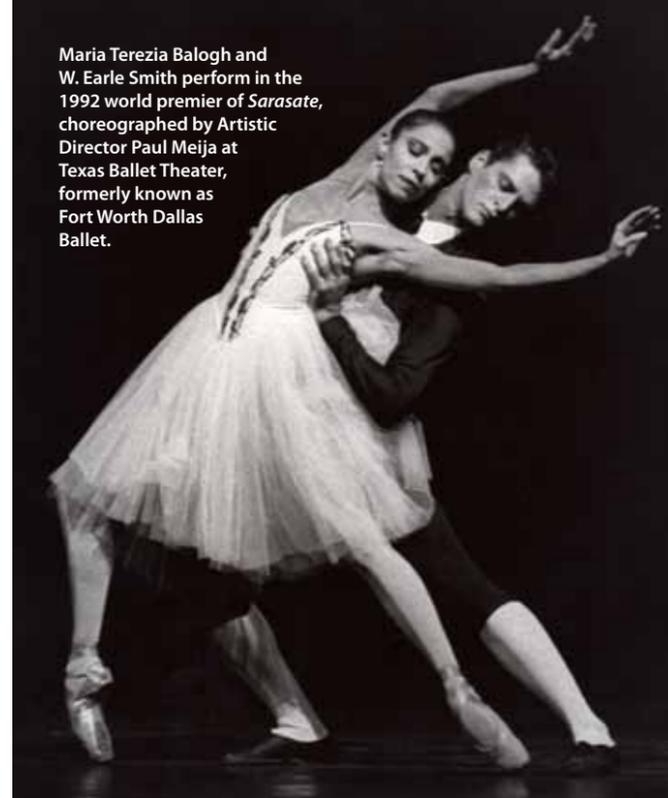
I began choreographing and found it was a new and exciting way for me to express and challenge myself artistically as I got older. I started in my mid-twenties and, in short, was really a neo-classical Balanchine copy cat. Looking back on the work I created, my artistic voice was shallow and limited, but I feel it was a necessary evolution for me. Choreographing allowed me to bring all my skills together in a unique and provocative way. I had long lost the notion that ballet was for sissies, as my body was feeling the rigors of ballet more often than not. I would later undergo a hip replacement, suffer with three compressed disks in my neck and three in my lower back and, to cap it off, a surgery to reattach my Achilles tendon. The sum of these severely limited my abilities in rehearsals and teaching class.

Retirement from Ballet

The inevitable was creeping closer and closer. My decision to retire occurred in New York City, where I had been living. I decided to end my career doing guest performances around the country. As I committed less and less to those guest roles, I dipped my toes into the corporate world. I began as an accounts payable manager and quickly worked my way up to director of special projects for a \$23 million organization.

The day I officially retired was as vivid as my first ballet class. I was making a guest appearance in Slidell, Louisiana for a production of *The Nutcracker*. After the approximately six-minute pas de deux, lifting and partnering the Sugar Plum Fairy, I began my variation. My ego was at its height and I had loaded my section with various male bravura ticks — turns and jumps. When I walked off stage after the variation, I could barely catch my breath. In the wing, hunched over, gasping for air, and waiting for my next entrance after my partner danced, I noticed that the sweat had completely soaked through my tunic and was visibly noticeable on the outside. My desire to perform had evolved into "How

Maria Terezia Balogh and W. Earle Smith perform in the 1992 world premier of *Sarasate*, choreographed by Artistic Director Paul Meija at Texas Ballet Theater, formerly known as Fort Worth Dallas Ballet.



will I survive this!?" It was at that moment at 35 years old I decided to hang up my tights and ballet shoes. It had seemed that the scale had tipped and the physical realities of ballet hit me square between the eyes. I'd had a wonderful career as a dancer and had danced incredible works of art. I never looked back and never regretted the decision. And neither has my body.

Shared Space



**FRESCO OPERA**  
**FRANK CAIN**

Trending in the musical arts and theater communities is the idea of sharing space and consolidating administrative operations to use budget dollars more efficiently. Smaller companies have faced the issues of limited funding and higher demand for services. Sharing services like office and rehearsal space, administrative supplies, and technology helps reduce overhead and increase creative spending. Fresco recently had the opportunity to meet with the executive director of Opera America and the general director of A.R.T. New York to discuss starting a shared space project in the Madison area, which included a tour of the Opera Center, currently under construction. Members will have access to this state-of-the-art facility, complete with shared studios and a recital hall.

Thrift and Technology



**MADISON OPERA**  
**GARNETT BRUCE**

Opera will always be labor-intensive: a myriad of disciplines in a single performance. Thrifty and ingenious producers are turning to chamber operas either to save costs of a full-scale production or to diversify the types of music for their audience, which may be weary of standard fare. Composers have often focused on creating dramatic musical stories for smaller spaces. Audiences seem to enjoy being closer to the raw power of an opera singer in full tilt.

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## WHAT'S TRENDING [A&E]

Another trend is projected scenery. While not necessarily less expensive, new technology creates a visual trajectory evolving in sync with the music. Look for adroit solutions to thorny problems from Madison Opera this winter with Handel's *Acis & Galatea*.

### Audience Engagement and Participation



**BACH DANCING AND DYNAMITE SOCIETY**  
JEFFREY SYKES, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The performance model that most classical chamber musicians follow is rooted in the late nineteenth century: audience and performers very much separate and unequal. We are beginning to see artists and organizations breaking down these traditional barriers between performers and audience with strategies of audience engagement and participation. Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society has been a leader in audience engagement since 1992. They are combining chamber music with visual art, dance, and drama, creating a "stage set" for performances and helping audiences have an authentic emotional experience listening to music rather than scolding them for clapping in the wrong place.

### Fringe Voices and Social Change



**UW-MADISON ARTS INSTITUTE**  
KATE HEWSON, ARTS RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Last year, I was excited to see a show by transgender performer Justin Vivian Bond publicized on the home page of the UW-Madison website! (Full disclosure: this was part of a university-sponsored arts residency program that I manage). The arts have always been instrumental

## Big Business

My teaching and choreographing took a back seat as I dove headfirst into the business world. The biggest attraction was the money. I was making more money than I had ever known and the days of scraping by and juggling which bills to pay were gone. My new life was challenging me in ways I had not known as a dancer, teacher, or choreographer.

## Youth Volunteer

To feed my passion for working with young people, I started volunteering as a youth counselor for The Neutral Zone, an LGBTQ drop-in center for young people ages 13 to 21. As a trained counselor, I had three young males with whom I met with weekly as their mentor to discuss anything they wished. With the 15-year-old Amish kid from Kansas who ran away to New York because he was gay, the goal was to get him off the street as a beggar and send him home on his own volition. With Paul, a 17-year-old Jamaican from Queens, a psychologist and I tried to get him to find a relative or friend he could move in with because his father was physically and verbally abusing him because he was gay. And with Andrew, a young man who had turned to prostitution, I was trying to get him to find another means of supporting himself. With the kids at The Neutral Zone, there were some successes and, unfortunately, a lot of sad endings. The work was emotionally difficult for me and I still wonder what happened to some of them. It was hard to watch these vibrant young people dealing with such tragedy and loss as a result of their sexual orientation.

**With the 15-year-old Amish kid from Kansas who ran away to New York because he was gay, the goal was to get him off the street as a beggar and send him home on his own volition.**

My typical day in New York City started at the gym at five in the morning. I was at work by six-thirty and leaving around seven in the evening. After work, I would make my way uptown from the Tribeca area, volunteering at The Neutral Zone or stopping in Chelsea for drinks with friends. Then it was dinner with another set of friends in midtown's Hell's Kitchen and then a stop at a gay bar called Waterworks for a game of pool and late-night cocktails with yet another set of friends. I would end up in bed around one or two in the morning and start the day over three or four hours later. On Sunday, I would sleep fourteen to sixteen hours, only getting up to answer the door for the Chinese food or the pizza delivery man.

## Welcome to Madison

I soon realized I could not keep going at this speed, and it occurred to me that I did not need to be in New York to work in finance. I contemplated a move back to Texas, where I spent most of my dancing career. Instead, I opted to move closer to some of my family — to Madison. I had not lived in the same state as my family for 22 years and it was time slow it down. I began to carve out a new life in the business world with my mom and sisters close by. It was clear that Madison was the place for me. Not as big and bustling as the other cities I had lived in, but still an interesting mix of people with beautiful views. Madison offered a big-city feel with a small-town personality.

I had started working at Group Health Cooperative as a financial and business analyst when I was asked to consult on finding a new artistic director for the ballet company in Madison. I was occasionally teach-

ing ballet around Madison but had no intention of getting back into the performing arts in any capacity. Long story short: a one-year interim position as artistic director led to a full-time job in the performing arts. My detour into the business world was short-lived but proved an important step for my work ahead.

## Madison Ballet

It did not take me very long to see that the most rewarding part of my career has been as artistic director of Madison Ballet. I am about to start my 14th season with the organization and realize my career as a dancer, teacher, choreographer, volunteer counselor, and business executive has lead me to this very spot. My prior journeys have prepared me for the role that I love and cherish; the ability to inspire audiences with my choreography and ignite passion in young students through my teaching has become a part of who I am today. Money is no longer an important factor for me. My rewards are many: working with students and passing on my knowledge as an artist to eager young dancers; rehearsing professional dancers in their quest for artistic excellence; and developing programs that make the beauty of dance affordable and accessible. I walk into work every day knowing that I am a part of a vibrant community that I love and that my work is food for the soul.

In the end, there are no riches and little fame. And I do not wish for people to shower me with accolades as a famous choreographer or a great teacher. I only hope that people will say, "He was a good man." The older I get, I realize, the less I know. I believe my journey further down the road will be filled with wonderment and excitement. The past has taught me to keep my eyes open to new possibilities and my heart filled with passion and love. The roads I have traveled have prepared me to be open to what lies ahead. As poet Robert Frost said best, "And that has made all the difference." ■

## [A&E] WHAT'S TRENDING

in introducing less-accepted ideas and people to the mainstream. At its best, the academic environment is a haven for young voices and ideas that challenge the status quo. Yet much of academic culture is still very conservative. I have heard people dismiss events with LGBTQ content as only appealing to "niche" audiences, which is discouraging. Art practice and academia together have the potential to be a potent force for social change.

## Community Outreach



**PERFECT HARMONY MEN'S CHORUS**  
KEN FORNEY, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

An exciting developments in the LGBTQ arts is a focus on outreach and taking our art into smaller communities of our state. We get the opportunity to create a friendly environment for a sometimes invisible LGBTQ community where neighbors can then come out and celebrate diversity. Additionally, we are able to reach our LGBTQ youth and seniors who have transportation issues that keep them from participating in the opportunities that exist in our major cities. Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus has found that as we reach out, we improve the perception of the LGBTQ community, and our art becomes a catalyst for changing people's lives.

## Locavore Art



**OAKWOOD STUDIOS**  
LEE HILL, PAINTER

More recently, as the "locavore" concept has caught on with food consumers, I've seen a parallel movement at art fairs. Just like at our farmers'



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**Recent Grant Recipient**

**Alianza Latina** is a project serving Madison's Latino LGBTQ youth community and their allies through supportive, responsive programming that addresses issues of safety, discrimination, and mental health. Alianza Latina is a culturally sensitive safe-haven that provides support to, creates opportunities for, and shares information about resources and services available to the LGBTQ community in Madison.

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every diamond

IS MOLDED UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE

Writer **Ashlin Ware** is rich beyond any monetary valuation. Find out why.

Living with HIV in a poverty-stricken community made me who I am. Who would I be if life had been easy for me? What would my eyes hear and my ears see if I had not had those experiences? My life has humbled me, molded me, in ways many cannot understand. Through my poetry I try to create the canvas of my childhood encounters.

At home I shed tears.  
I'm scared.  
Long days in buildings with smells like spillings of death.  
Her eyes glazed over.  
AIDS lay her to rest in ashes all scattered 'round bays as she insists.  
She always told me she'd be missed...

CLOTHING AND PROPS STYLING BY NINA BEDNARSKI. HAIR BY ANGELA KOWIENSKI. PHOTOGRAPHED AT LOVE FUNNY'S.

At 24 years old, I have led many lives. Growing up I always had an un-quenching thirst; I knew the world had much to offer. I was overpowered with curiosity: inundated with questions about how, why, when, and where; and obsessed with understanding why my family had been plagued with HIV. I spent much of my time as a child pondering—and being aged by—questions such as these. My adult-like behavior often made people refer to me as an “old soul.”

With disease comes an unspoken wisdom—a greater responsibility. I was the child who spoke to every adult with great inquisition and never moved quickly. Once my stepfather told me I walked as if I were floating. He didn't understand that my grandfather taught me never to hold my head low; “You might miss the daisies,” he'd say. I couldn't verbally interpret his wisdom but internally I knew it was important.

We each have our own special gifts to help us emerge from this madness as beautiful butterflies—if only we take the time to discover our talents.

However, I was always bothered by the mystery of money. I knew it played a powerful role in society, yet didn't understand why. I became convinced that it was the answer to many of my questions. “Are we rich?” I'd ask my mother at the oddest times. She'd always tell me, “We are vastly rich with curiosity; our payment is knowledge.” My mother answered many questions in metaphorical statements, usually beginning and ending with “Look it up!” I thank her tactics for my own way of thinking and responding. The only thing she made explicitly clear was that education is the answer to all of our inquiries. My mother believed knowledge was the key to escaping poverty; a state of being I did not know affected me until I entered college.

I was 15 years old when my mother passed away from AIDS complications. A few months later I lost my pet rabbit, stepfather, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I continued to go to school every day. I kept up my good grades. Of course, I strayed into drugs and alcohol to ease my pain, but my mother had hardwired the importance of education so firmly into my makeup I couldn't let her down—not even in her death. It was no surprise (to me) that I ended up at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2006. As one of the top students in my high school, I felt equipped academically for a four-year university.

However, I hadn't fathomed the social shock awaiting me. I noticed two things after living in Madison for a short period of time. First, I was poor. I grew up poor but hadn't fully understood this because everyone around me was also poor. I, also, felt rich because I benefited from many programs due to my HIV status that continuously gave me experiences unlike my peers. Second, I was black and that meant more than the color of my skin. It was much more than hip-hop and baggy jeans. There was a world full of social issues I had not anticipated. I believed that every person was judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin, but after the fourth or fifth conversation about affirmative action with my new peers, I felt as though white students thought of my presence as a form of charity, not an earned success.

Once my view of humanity had shifted, I was not enthused or ready to continue the journey ahead. I tried to live with rose-colored lenses for as long as possible. One day I suddenly remembered my mother's words, “Running from life is never an option.” I couldn't continue to hide from the world I saw. But what could I do to make a difference? I had been an AIDS activist for years. What could I do differently? I was desperate and fuming. I remembered as a child I found it useful to write out my frustrations and created a file on my computer—“My List of Frustrations.” I

markets, art buyers really like the opportunity to meet and talk with the artists whose work they collect. They learn how and why it was created and what the artist's vision is. I find it satisfying myself to get to know those who are “adopting” my paintings and why my work speaks to them. It makes for a richer and more meaningful experience.

**The Real Deal**



**LON MICHELS, PAINTER**

There has begun a monumental change in how we think about and view what is being created today. We live in a fast, throwaway society where trends and fashions come and go, but within the past couple of years that has been changing for the better. Citizens and art lovers are now searching for art that embraces integrity and beauty. The “flop-house” and “shock art” values are in the past. Artists and art lovers are looking for the real deal, which is passion, love, dedication, and beauty in producing art. It seems to me that when the economy suffers, artists flourish and so does their genuine, honest creativity. When we are surrounded by what seems fake, artists try harder to create the truth.

**Eco-friendly Art**



**ABSOLUTELY ART**  
**MEGHAN BLAKE-HORST, OWNER**

The arts are an essential part of our lives. They build community, foster uniqueness, spread beauty, drive tourism, and spur our economy. In recent years, artists have been hit hard by the downturn in our economy. Yet, this has never stopped them from producing; in fact, they have become more resourceful. At Absolutely Art, we have been delighted to see an increase of work created from recycled and up-cycled materials. Artists consider it necessary to use eco-friendly materials and practices while creating new and unique ways to produce and display their works. From vintage racket mirrors and recycled sweater skirts and mittens to metal sculptures and mixed-media works, you can only imagine what an artist will think of next! (Photo credit: Rachel Dolnick.)

**Musical Theater**



**MICHAEL BRUNO, BOARD MEMBER,**  
**CULTURAL ARTS COMMISSION AT DANE ARTS**

Trending now in theater is the musical. From *The Book of Mormon* on Broadway to Madison's own *Love Death Brains: A Pete Rydberg Musical Meme*, the musical is the hottest ticket in the theater world today. A



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**B & Z**  
**LANDSCAPE**

few years ago all we saw being staged were revivals of the old warhorses—*Annie Get Your Gun*, *Oklahoma*, *West Side Story* and *Dames at Sea* were all having Broadway revivals. Not that these musicals didn't deserve a fresh audience and a chance for actors and actresses to put their stamp on roles created by some of Broadway's brightest stars, but audiences wanted something original to enjoy and experience for the first time.

Locally, we have some of the best theatrical companies that specialize in musical theater. Four Seasons Theatre recently staged Steven Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, and Music Theatre of Madison brought us *Parade* and is in the process of staging *Elegies for Angels*, *Punks and Raging Queens* next year. (Photo credit: Dan Myers of Lumi Photography.)

**Collaboration**



**EDGEWOOD COLLEGE ART GALLERY**  
PAUL BAKER PRINDLE, DIRECTOR

Visual-arts groups are thinking creatively about local arts investment. With MMOCA and Chazen Museum as flagship institutions, smaller museums and galleries are stepping in to offer an agile and responsive infrastructure for local artists. As Edgewood College opens a new arts center, the UW Design Gallery and Union South expand their programming, and cooperative galleries open in underused spaces, Madison is becoming more attractive and affordable for local artists. With decreased public financial support, arts organizations are collaborating intensely with business and private donors. Edgewood College Art Gallery is partnering with BMO Harris Bank to underwrite an exhibition series for 2012-2013, in

wrote whatever came to mind. It was evident that I was angry. I was angry because I felt like I had been deprived of life; the people I loved were and are being deprived of a life. I remember watching television as a child and telling my cousins I could not wait until I lived like "those" people. Cynically they'd assure me "those" people do not come from where we did. "They only on TV, Fool," I vividly remember my older cousin telling me. Lack of resources (e.g., jobs, good schools, healthy food) has left my community dry of material and mental prosperity.

After I successfully released my anger, I needed to be proactive with my approach. I knew, without reference, that healing must begin on the inside. I used my many facets to guide me through my mental rebirth by writing poetry from the depths of my soul.

**I am Black**

I am Black, therefore  
I think in Black,  
I speak in Black,  
I write in Black ...

**I was born with HIV**

...The Devil laughing. Girl,  
stop while you're ahead.  
You too will soon end up dead...

**I am queer**

I am queer.  
Not quite man or woman.  
I just am.  
Peaceful.  
Why are you uncomfortable?

Poetry is my voice. Often I am asked, "Would you change anything about your past?" Needless to say, I had spent much time reflecting on this question before anyone ever inquired about it. Every time I ponder it, I emerge with the same answer, "No. I would not change anything I have been through. For it is that which has given me voice."

**Voice**

Doesn't matter a roaring boom or gentle whisper.  
The voice is like a shooting pistol.  
Aim it high and shine its light.  
It quivers not when dangers near.  
If challenged watch it stick its spear.  
This voice is justice it holds no fear.  
Yet never forgets its listening ear.  
From experience it bellows lost demands.  
Hear respect and pride in its stance, the eyes and ears as its guide. Oh voice be filled from what you feel, let no one tell you it isn't real. A voice for those lost child.

Speak loud for forgotten worlds; continents, countries, streets, our people.  
Lift up your voice and sing.  
In English or Spanish, Ebonics or canvas use your gift your soul demands it.  
As the descendants of slaves forgotten, let us pray.  
Remember our ancestors and speak as they'd say.  
Look deep in your heart find words to part seas.  
Believe your voice has many degrees.  
Believe.  
Your voice shall set you free.

As I learned to heal my wounds I yearned to teach others how to heal theirs as well. I decided to take the world along with my journey of self-discovery by blogging. I started blogging under the name "Average Joe" with a pretense that I am only one human searching for answers just like everyone else. After a few entries of confessions and venting, I felt arrogant for writing as if I had lived a complete life, so I began to post my poetry while outwardly searching for more answers. While looking for answers, I stumbled upon a group of queers who seemed to rejuvenate my soul as well as push me to develop my writing skills.

Through this group, I found the power of meditation and a greater understanding of self-awareness. Meditation has taught me to turn off the thinking brain and enjoy the moments around me. This is a practice life taught me without proper vocabulary. I also learned that having a childlike demeanor is healthy for recovery and survival. I feel enlightened after finding a balance between tragedy and beauty in life. Our world is very chaotic and easy to be swallowed by, but there are so many ways to counteract such negativity. We each have our own special gifts to help us emerge from this madness as beautiful butterflies—if only we take the time to discover our talents. It is not about ignoring the world we live in but accepting that the only control we have over it lies within our being. In order to access the power we possess, we must be able to function on a clear field. This does not include denying our emotions toward the world and/or events but consciously being able to respond effectively to those things. The patience I am gaining has offered me emotional intelligence. With this new intelligence I have been able to constructively release my passion while finding sustainable joy. I feel more youthful than I ever did as a child. In fact I often refer to myself as Benjamin Button—wiser yet younger.

I am more confident in my ability to paint a vivid picture for my readers. I have dared to be true to myself and write the world as I see it. The destitution I see does not frighten me anymore. Instead, it inspires me to live and write along my journey. I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to rebuild my structure with the frames of my past. I am privileged to say I have cleared old weeds to make room for springing flowers. My once-beaten soul is now a glowing-fiery spirit. I have also been able to break new boundaries within my own imagination and write in other genres such as erotica, submitting short stories to many queer publications.

My words, my writings, are the greatest gift I can offer. As long as I stay truthful to my core and speak fearlessly, I am sure my words will positively impact those who need them most. I can only dream that my poetry will spark a movement of interdependence, breaking the need to "otherize" one another. More importantly, I hope my work answers the childhood query, "Are we rich?" The answer is "Yes," as my mother used to tell me. As long as we strive to be happy from within, as long as we are kind to our fellow brethren, as long as we are brave enough to search for our own answers, we are vastly rich in this life. I finally realize that money is not what is important. Our passions are what should drive us. If we follow the sparks in our souls, we will be lucrative in ways we can never imagine.

A year after graduating from UW-Madison, I wonder what I would tell myself as an incoming student. I think I would tell myself, "Happiness is closer than you think. It is not the destination but the journey. When you feel overwhelmed, find a pad and pencil and write. Write everything you feel. Do not deny yourself your valuable emotions. When you feel angry, it is okay as long as you use that rage to positively impact the world around you. When life seems too tough, remember why you should be grateful; write about the good in your life. Find a balance. When you feel confused and lonely, take a walk, listen to the birds, feel the grass, and become connected with the earth. Live each moment as if it is your last."

As I speak these words to myself, I would like to pass them on to you, reader. We have to be the change we want to see if we are to make a difference. Writing and public speaking are my assets—what are yours? ■

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**The Devaluation of Content**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS**  
RAPHAEL KADUSHIN, SENIOR ACQUISITIONS EDITOR

The only thing that excites me about LGBTQ writing is the same thing that excites me about any strong writing. It has to be eloquent and beautifully written—which means there has to be a real sense of language, rhythm, evocative detail, and imagery. And it has to ultimately be universal, at a time when too much writing has become insular, self-involved, and a form of exhibitionism. We have one of the most sustained LGBTQ lists in the country now, and the only list devoted to LGBTQ autobiography, because the conventional wisdom among the larger trade houses is that LGBTQ fiction and creative nonfiction don't sell well beyond a niche market. But we can aim at that niche market, and the niche isn't really LGBTQ readers; it just consists of readers who still take reading seriously.

So this fall, as an example, we have Michael Lowenthal's *The Paternity Test*, a novel about how a gay couple in midlife negotiate a long-standing relationship and a desire for a child, and Trebor Healey's *A Horse Named Sorrow*, a true romance that should appeal to anyone who still believes in love, as corny as that sounds. Amazon, of course, will appropriate most of the profits from these books, because the worst trend I see now is the devaluation of content and worship of technology; people will pay anything for a laptop but feel increasingly that content should

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**MARK POCAN**

*Looks like it's...*

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member profile



**NAME:**  
Linda Balisle  
**TITLE:**  
Shareholder  
**EMPLOYER:**  
Balisle & Roberson,  
S.C.

Linda Balisle is proud to be the current President of the OPEN board. She is also a shareholder in the Madison law firm of Balisle & Roberson, S.C. where she practices Family Law. For 31 years she has represented children and adults whose families are either being put together or falling apart. For the LGBT community she has worked in the courts and legislature to establish rights of children of LGBT parents.



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THE WORLD  
according  
TO MICHAEL

From private chef to cruise ship videographer, paper sculptor **Michael Velliquette** came a long way to find his creative niche in the "absurdly awesome."

"You should apply to Madison," she said. "The trees here are reallllly pretty."

People close to me know how prone I am to suggestion. I've made numerous, slapdash choices over the years, and my friend Heather's offhand remark was all I needed to consider another major life change. In hindsight, this impulsive streak is what's propelled me into my most memorable escapades and noteworthy breakthroughs. My steady side though...that part of me identifies with being an artist. The studio is

CLOTHING AND PROPS STYLING BY NINA BEDNARSKI. HAIR BY ANGELA KOWIESKI. PHOTOGRAPHED AT LOVE FUNKY'S.

my shelter—that familiar place I've returned to again and again over the years to process the swirl of the world around me.

During the summer of 1996 I was a cook at a vegetarian restaurant in the chill, gulf coast community of Siesta Key, Florida. I grew up not far from there in a sleepy little town of suburbs and surfboards called Bradenton, and had moved back to the area after completing my BFA in sculpture at FSU in Tallahassee a few years before. Surprisingly (!) fine arts degrees don't always segue into conventional career tracks, so I supported myself during and after college working in kitchens. I wasn't making much in the way of art then—a few drawings here and there—my real priority was food. I was into Macrobiotics, a holistic diet believed by its practitioners to have reparative benefits by balancing one's inner "energies". Outside of my shifts at the restaurant I was also cooking for a select clientele. I soon became known in the small Macrobiotic community for my flair with brown rice and kale.

At 25, I had a private cooking business that was starting to take shape. It had its perks. I was making good money and there was ample space for creativity, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd just rather be making art. This was the first time I faced this particular dilemma: continue doing something relatively stable and that I'm good at or roll the dice on an artist's life.

An Artist Inside

This wasn't always a choice I had to make. I started out in college vaguely as an English major (though at the time my real areas of interest were bong hits and Dead shows.) It wasn't until I took a few credits in the Art department that I found this calling. On a field trip to my drawing instructor's studio the strongest feeling of déjà vu came over me. Like many studios, his space functioned as both a workshop and laboratory, playroom and curiosity cabinet. Staring at his creative

[A&E] WHAT'S TRENDING

be free, which means the artists who actually fill your screen with something worth reading lose out to the techno-monopolies. But that battle is already lost, so all we can do is hope that real writers will keep coming, and that there will be a sustained core of readers waiting.

More Teens in Musical Theater



CHILDREN'S THEATER OF MADISON  
ROSEANN SHERIDAN, PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Whether it's the influence of *American Idol*, programs like the Tommy Awards, or more parents helping their kids pursue their creative interests, I am seeing an amazing amount of musical-theater talent among teenagers in our area. It's truly impressive. I also see a decline in the number of young people who audition for non-musicals. While there seems to be more acceptance of LGBTQ performers and programs in area high schools, there's still a lot of judgment and harassment of queer-identified youth offstage. Theater can be a catalyst for social change, and I hope schools and local companies will continue to take risks in programming, and that audiences and funders will support the variety of offerings in our vibrant performing-arts community.

Arts Districts



CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART  
RUSSELL PANCZENKO, DIRECTOR

In China, contemporary art is thriving. I recently spent ten days in Beijing as a guest of China Central Academy of Fine Art and its current vice president,



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Xu Bing, whose first U.S. museum exhibition was at the Chazen in 1990. CAFA is the foremost art school in China, with a curriculum that emphasizes mastery of one's chosen medium. While CAFA's role in contemporary Chinese art is important, the growth of the Chinese economy is also a major factor. In Beijing, developers are encouraged to include an arts district in their urban projects. In addition to the famous District 798 where many western galleries have a presence, I was surprised by the prevalence of arts districts, which have local galleries, project centers, and affordable studio space for both established and young artists. In this flourishing environment, both Asian and Western collectors are buying contemporary Chinese art, and more artists are showing their work outside of China than ever before. It's truly a vibrant art scene with an exciting future. I am delighted to have experienced it.

A Culture of Excitement



**BARTELL THEATER FOUNDATION**  
SARAH HOOVER, MANAGING DIRECTOR

While traditional venues are providing great places to build expertise and audience, performance in "found" spaces is a nationwide trend that's coming to Madison. Twenty dollars or less gets you an aerial dance around a tree, a play in a bar, a concert in a warehouse—and a uniquely Madison sense of play. We (Madison) must develop a culture of excitement, showing off the voices found right next door, and we (artists) must keep improving our quality and accessibility and especially our communication about great performances. Madison Arts Commission's Cultural Plan will help, but the bottom line is us. Bring a friend! (Photo credit: Dan Myers.)



**RIGHT:** Based on his "Power Structure" concept, Michael Velliquette was selected to represent Dane County at EUARCA, an elite group of artists who will create work during the renown DOCUMENTA sculpture festival in Kassel, Germany

clutter and pin boards, his sketches, works in progress and supplies, I felt something kick in my core. Even though I had never really been in a formal artist's studio before, I knew this space. It was the feeling you get when you're having a really great flying dream or you're running super fast. It felt boundless. I just wanted to stay there and above all, get to work. And when I finally got my first studio that's just what I did.

MFA at UW

I graduated with a ton of creative momentum, but I had zero knowledge in funneling that into a profession. My career plan at the time

included hitchhiking around the Pacific Northwest. I did so until I ran out of money and had to move back home to Florida. That's where I found myself a few years later on the phone with my friend Heather. I had decided that I needed to go back for another degree. I looked into Macrobiotic cooking schools, but my boyfriend at the time, a real pragmatist, encouraged me to think twice about venturing into a profession vulnerable to the subtle fluctuations of yin and yang. He thought I should go back for my MFA. I had already applied to clown college the year before on a quirk and had gotten rejected; I figured an advanced degree in studio art couldn't really be that much different. So following his advice, I applied to a handful of programs, got accepted to UW, and loaded up my '93 Toyowagon for a journey to Madison.

I hadn't had a serious studio practice in about five years, so getting back into that space—figuratively and literally—was uncomfortable at first. I chose Madison in part because I only knew one person here. I expected that the social isolation coupled with the long winters would force me to stay in the studio. And that's what I needed, just to be in there. As blissfully cozy as a studio can be it can also sometimes feel like you've walked into a bad hangover. There's a lot of fumbling around and inability to focus, perhaps a little regret over what you may or may not have done. And like a hangover, there are no quick fixes; you just have to ride it out. It took me almost the first full year to really get back in stride.

I had already applied to clown college the year before on a quirk and had gotten rejected; I figured an advanced degree in studio art couldn't really be that much different.

I worked mostly on performance-based videos during grad school. I built a set to resemble a cabaret, and the camera was the lone member of the audience. I danced around in dog collars and sailor suits, lip-synced to Donna Summer and Maria Callas, and delivered long, stream-of-consciousness monologues about the coming out experiences of my early 20s and my bad luck with men. This was not good work per se, but it was necessary. An artist's vocation is sometimes (ahem) distinguished by the way we literally work through our experiences.

Out at Sea

By 2000 I'd finished my MFA and was adrift again, this time literally. The video work I'd been doing gave me some editing skills and I was targeting jobs in the Miami area. I wanted to be closer to my family and in touch with a more active contemporary art scene. I got a call back from Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines (RCCL) that they were hiring a video technician for one of their ships and within a few days I was on a plane to Antigua to join the crew of the Monarch of the Seas.

I was a videographer, which meant I taped passengers in all their glory at limbo contests and belly flop competitions and then compiled the footage into a "cruise memories" video they could buy at the end for 20 bucks. After a few months I was promoted to run operations on a ship doing four-day booze cruises from Southern California to the Baja peninsula. A year into it, I still held an inner distinction between this cruise gig, and my "real" job, which was being an artist. I often used the ship's camera and editing equipment to make my own goofy, self-conscious videos, and I would draw every night in my cabin before I went to sleep.

I could have stayed with RCCL and made a very comfortable life. I had a good salary and was paying off my student loans. My daily

New Works by Local Authors



**FOUR SEASONS THEATER**  
SARAH MARTY, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Opportunities for playwrights and musical-theater composers and librettists have continued to grow. Last season, Playwrights Ink met on a regular basis to read scenes and support fellow writers. Broom Street Theater and Encore Studio produced several new works by local authors. CTM offered the Young Playwrights Festival. *Z-Town: The Zombie Musical*, produced by Madison Performance Collective and OUT!Cast Theater, played to full houses at The Bartell and headed to the Fringe Festival in New York. Forward Theater premiered *A Thousand Words* and offered two readings: *Uncivil Disobedience* with Wisconsin Story Project and *Oatesland*, a 2011 Wisconsin Wrights finalist. Stage Q's *Queer Shorts 7* featured 11 new short plays. It's great that the theater community has continued to embrace and support the development of new works. (Photo credit: David Corso.)

A Return to Arts in Education



**WILLIAMSON STREET ART CENTER**  
SHARON KILFOY, DIRECTOR

It is my responsibility to bring art to people in all walks of life. I especially use art to make a difference in the lives of at-risk children and youth. Recently, schools had been reducing or eliminating arts programming. An exciting trend is the return of an emphasis on the arts as a necessary part of education. I spend a lot of time in schools, mainly



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## WHAT'S TRENDING [A&E]

working with kids who do not succeed within the traditional model. I am excited that project-based learning is part of the solution for engaging kids who are disenfranchised because of race, country of origin, sexual orientation, disability, learning style, and/or poverty. The arts deserve to be placed front and center in our community, not because they bring economic improvement to neighborhoods—like they did to Willy Street—but because they teach us what it means to be human—to be happy, healthy people who are engaged with others, who are engaged with ideas, and who are engaged with the planet.

### Interactivity and Community Collaboration



**STAGEQ**  
TARA AYRES, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

I'm delighted by the increase in creative involvement in theater and performance art. Younger theatergoers won't sit passively and "receive" theater. More audience members are going to want to be actively involved, which could mean acting, writing, or doing tech—or responding vocally during a show. Or it could mean taking performance to the streets: more flash mobs, ongoing solidarity sing-alongs; protest as art. We're going to see more interactive productions and more community collaborations like *Queer Shorts*, and the LGBTQ Narratives group's *Conceal and Carry*, and more do-it-yourself events like *Queerspeak*. I'm excited about more people making creating culture a part of their daily lives, and including art in our political struggles. StageQ looks forward to sharing our skills with people who will take those tools and use them in ways we haven't even considered yet.

commute included ports of call from Barbados to Alaska. I was even dating one of the ship's cute dancers. But the thing as a whole just wasn't right. The vision of my life as an artist would rise in mind every night like the tide. When I got offered another promotion on one of the new mega-ships, I saw the choice as another test of my will. So, a week shy of my 30th birthday, I disembarked in Miami and resigned.



### Coming Out as an Artist

Really coming to terms with being an artist is not that unlike coming out. You deal with a lot of messy pre-conceptions about what this identity means, not only from others, but yourself too. Does this mean I'm destined to be a financial failure? Do I have to be tortured? Am I good enough? Will I need a beret? Despite some cultural stereotyping, most artists I know are actually competent and emotionally stable, organized and hard working. True, a certain amount of eccentricity and solipsism are hazards of the job, but what do you expect when an artist's value to society is so dependent on their ability to express individuality? Still, most artists I know have a healthy sense of self-deprecation, and spend just as much time contemplating the outer world as they do their inner.

**A certain amount of eccentricity and solipsism are hazards of the job, but what do you expect when an artist's value to society is so dependent on their ability to express individuality?**

Once ashore, I reconnected with friends from graduate school who had settled down in San Antonio. We talked about opening our own artist-run project space and really getting serious about our work. So when I moved my base of operations to the Alamo city in 2002, I began a sequence of events that oriented the direction in my life towards my one true goal.

Texas is where I really first got established. I set up a good studio, started exhibiting my work, made my first real art sales, and got picked up by my New York gallery. I still had a full-time job aside from making art, as the assistant director of a commercial gallery. When the director resigned I was given the opportunity to step into her place and that was the last time I had to make a choice between two careers. I left my position at the gallery shortly thereafter and took up teaching part time. Teaching has been the best thing that I do "on the side" ever since. It has been the only job I've had in tandem with my studio work that doesn't make me feel like my soul is being crushed. Quite the opposite—teaching directly feeds into and back from my own studio interests. I love the dialogue around art making at all levels of experience. I genuinely love being in the classroom, sometimes as much as I love being in the studio.

### Back to Madtown

In the spring of 2005 my former graduate adviser emailed to see if I was interested in coming back to Madison to teach a summer class. Some things in my life are cyclical. I've often returned to live in the same place at different phases separated by big chunks of time. So it shouldn't have been surprising to me that coming back to Madison would also bring with it the prospects of a much longer stay. Boy-



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Trapped in the Present as We Move Towards the Future, 2012. **ABOVE LEFT:** Space Flower, 2012. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Happy Minotaur, 2009.

friends have also come in pairs. I've dated two different guys named Jason, two Patricks, two Matts, and two Bryans. But there only has been and will only ever be one Tehshik. He and I met that summer over brunch at the El Dorado Grill. He just moved from Boston to take a position at UW in the Chemistry Department. He ordered coffee and I ordered a Bloody Mary. We've been together ever since.

Since my second move to Madison in 2007, I work more or less full time on my art. I'm no longer burdened by the feeling that I'm supposed to be doing something different with my life. I'm an artist. I'm known primarily for my elaborate sculptures with cut paper. But if I'm feeling philosophical I'll tell you that it isn't so much what I'm making as how I make it that seems to bring the most purpose to this path. It's a desire to manifest an interior sense of self, an unshakable vision that wants to take shape in the world, pretty trees and all. ■



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Photo: OutReach



## 2012-2013 season



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book by Brian Hill  
directed by Tara Ayres  
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## WHAT'S TRENDING [A&E]

### Adapting Films for the Stage



**OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS**  
TIM SAUERS, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

One of the biggest Broadway trends that is here to stay is adapting a Hollywood film for the stage. You may not think this to be original, but if the right creative team is involved, it could prove to be very successful. Six of the top 15 biggest Broadway hits have earned over \$2 billion since their original productions, including Disney's *The Lion King*, *The Producers*, and *Hairspray*. What's not to like about those shows? This season there are three adaptations that excite me: *Diner*, directed by Kathleen Marshall with music and lyrics by Sheryl Crow; *Big Fish*, directed by Susan Stroman; and the obscure *Hands on a Hard Body*. The latter is based on a documentary about contestants trying to win a car. Here's hoping we have three more hits that will find their way to our community, whether as a national tour at Overture or produced locally by one of the many companies or high schools.

### Central Library as Artist Showcase



**MADISON ARTS COMMISSION**  
KARIN WOLF, ARTS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

New galleries and studio spaces are sprouting up all over town. The new Edgewood College Gallery will have fabulous exhibitions lined up all year. Brazilian aerosol artist and women's rights activist Panmela Castro painted "The Siamese Twins," a large-scale mural about the unity of women, on the side of the Willy Street Co-op. Metal assem-



## creative PLAYGROUND

**I Love Funky's** offers an atmosphere and one-of-a-kind product selection that stimulates the senses and inspires creativity in all who enter. It was the perfect place for photographing our cover and features.

In order to match the caliber of the artists we feature in this issue, we need a location that unleashes peoples' creativity and imagination. I Love Funky's in Lake Geneva surpassed our needs!

I Love Funky's sprung to life in Fort Atkinson in 1999 from a passion of collecting "Funky" antiques from around the world and a love of fashion, art, and humor. A desire to share these unique items in a richly interesting atmosphere was the goal. A move to Lake Geneva in 2010 brought an expansion with Funky's Underground, showcasing premium American-made leather furniture and home accessories.

I Love Funky's is a playground for the senses. Each season brings a new collection of fashion-forward feminine clothing, jewelry, hats, and accessories along with the nationally recognized collection of vintage jewelry. An ever-changing array of antiques including furniture, stained glass, lighting, taxidermy, and architectural salvage make for hours of treasure hunting. When you walk through the doors, make sure to bring your sense of humor along because Funky's may be best known for its "out of the box" gifts, books, and unusual oddities that will revive the most jaded consumer. ■

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**Owner:** Tisha Erdman  
**Hours:** Summer: Mon-Sat  
10am-6pm,  
Sun 11am-5pm  
Winter: Everyday 11am-5pm  
(subject to change)

## WHAT'S TRENDING [A&E]

blage sculptor Erika Koivunen is starting a new gateway piece for the Marquette neighborhood.

Downtown, conceptual artist Aaron Stephan is working with a local design team to create a piece for the stage area next to the Madison Children's Museum. The new Central Library will be an artist showcase extraordinaire with artist-made-parts and murals and community gallery spaces, including a new media screen for video installations, incorporated throughout the architecture. Local art stars as well as internationally renowned artists will also be commissioned to create site-specific sculptures for the new building. Look for work from the sculptor Niki Johnson (previously featured in *Our Lives*) when the Central Library re-opens.

### Multiple Platforms



**Z104 THE HIT MUSIC CHANNEL**  
AARON ROGERS, ON-AIR HOST

Radio has definitely moved beyond the boundaries of turning on your favorite station in your vehicle. Technology has forced our industry to adapt to multiple platforms, including social media, online streaming, digital content, and smartphones. One of the biggest successes I've seen recently is the evolution of the iHeartRadio app for your smartphone. The free app creates an experience with users and their favorite artists. The iHeartRadio Music Festival on September 21 and 22 in Las Vegas is a prime example of integrating our listeners with the music on a level that radio has never seen before. As technology evolves, we must continue to adapt to the ever-changing needs of our clients/listeners in the industry.

### A Decline in Queer Gathering Spaces



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Indie Queer (iQ) has had many faces in the past six years. A monthly "pop-up" queer dance party saw attendance rise in 2007, its first year, from 80 to 230 to 650 attendants. iQ parties were an institution of the Madison nightlife for a solid two years.

With the opening of Plan B in 2009 and the recent addition of Sotto, the Madison queer socialites are struggling to find their fit within this very mainstream gay and Top 40 club scene. I see fewer and fewer folks who identify as queer in the clubs, and I'm feeling less of a collective queer energy in the Madison gay nightlife. Opinions around this are pretty unified—there is demand for a queer-girl bar, more non-Top 40 dance parties, and a new queer establishment to serve as an anchor to Madison queers, offering a place to meet, a place to hang, and a stage that is committed to producing live queer shows and dance parties. I wish I could make that establishment my new iQ endeavor...and maybe I will.

I'm seeing so many independent queer events happening around the city lately, from art openings, theater, social nights out, and live shows to coop parties—the Madison queer community is about enrichment and political action now more than ever. These actions are what is keeping queer Madison fierce.

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Our History by Richard Wagner

# Remember...

The 30th anniversary of gay rights in Wisconsin is a time for celebration—and a time to remember.



I was there in 1982 for the passage of the Wisconsin gay rights bill—the first of its kind in the nation—and I know it is indeed time to celebrate. Yet the note I want to strike on this anniversary is one of caution: We should not take our gay rights for granted.

### Notes of Caution

As a historian, I might point out that the greatest flowering of gay culture prior to our present time was in Weimar Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s. That flourishing counterculture was utterly wiped out by the late 1930s, and homosexuals were being sent to the concentration camps.

Or I might note how the jubilee promise of American emancipation from slavery in the mid-19th century—with hopes of education and economic security in “40 acres and a mule”—turned instead into the Jim Crow of segregation through the corrupt bargain over Reconstruction.

Or again, the bright promise of women’s suffrage in response to Susan B. Anthony’s centennial question of 1876, “Are not women citizens too?” shines less brightly with women still earning less than their male counterparts and the U.S. Senate still male-dominated by 83 percent.

### The American Promise

I came to Wisconsin in 1965 because, like so many gay men in that era, I knew I had to get

out of my hometown to figure out who I was. For more on the mobility of gay men and the nostalgia and disassociation with native cities, see *Hometowns: Gay Men Write About Where They Belong*, editor John Preston, 1991. I came to Madison to study history and to find that American promise of life and liberty.

But I carried something of that hometown—in my case, Dayton, Ohio—with me. In 1913, Dayton was beset with a great flood, and my grandmother, with my mother in her arms, was passed out of a second story window to rescue boats. It was a shaping event and tales were retold of how people were stranded in their upper floors.

But the lesson the Dayton community learned was that they had to change things. Based on a campaign that used the slogan, “Remember the promises made in the attics,” the area established a conservancy district. They built five dams to control the Miami Valley rivers, and the 1913 flood has not been repeated.

### You, Too, Must Remember

I want you not to take our rights for granted because you, too, must remember. You must remember how it was before the American people began to accept that gays, and all LGBTQ people, had any rights. When we were “the other.” When our community had not organized.

### Remember...

- The Wisconsin territorial legislature that inherited a law upon its separation with Michigan that had a sodomy penalty of up to three years... Wisconsin raised it to five.



The 5th anniversary of Wisconsin’s pioneering gay rights law was celebrated with public LGBT officials in 1987. State Representative David Clarenbach, Dane County Board Supervisor Dick Wagner, Madison Alderperson Hank Lufner, State Representative Tim Carpenter, Dane County Board Supervisor Tammy Baldwin, and Dane County Board Supervisor Kathleen Nichols



Donna Brukett and Manonia Evans, who, in 1971, applied for a marriage license at the Milwaukee County Clerk’s Office, and had their request denied. Image: Milwaukee LGBT History Project

# feature

- Anna Morris, alias Frank Blunt, who dressed in men’s clothing and was claimed to have married Gertrude Field, and who was sent to the state penitentiary in 1894 for one year.
- The activist sentiments of the Wisconsin Supreme Court of 1905 in dealing with gay sex, stating, “There is sufficient authority to sustain a conviction in such a case, and, if there were none, we should feel no hesitancy in placing an authority on the books.”
- The Madison police’s annual reports for the first part of the 20th century that recorded gay sex among the major crimes—along with murder.
- In the 1930s, the hundreds of gay men incarcerated in Waupun for sodomy with terms up to five years.
- The 20 gay males in the military at Truax Field in 1945 at the end of World War II who were examined for mental illness in a study conducted jointly by the military and our very own University of Wisconsin.
- The Wisconsin legislature of 1947 that enacted a law permitting the institutionalization of any sexual “psychopath,” whether or not the person had committed a crime.
- The 1948 arrest by campus police of two men being intimate on campus, which led to a raid on a private home in the city of Madison described as a den for lewd activities, with court charges and penalties for possession of gay material, and student expulsions.
- Patrons of gay bars in Madison being fearful that their license plate numbers were being recorded by police if they parked in the lot associated with the gay bar.
- Noted history professor George Mosse, a refugee from Germany, who came to teach at UW in the 1950s and in his memoir noted, “The closet door had to be tightly closed...”
- The Wisconsin legislature of 1959 that prohibited the granting of a driver’s license to anyone convicted of “sexual perversion.”
- The 1962 gay purge at the UW when lists of hundreds of known gays were gathered and people were told not to pursue their studies or count on financial aid.
- The handful of pioneers who, after Stonewall, founded the Madison Alliance for Homosexual Equality (MAHE) in the basement of St. Francis House on campus, the first gay rights organization in the state, in 1969.

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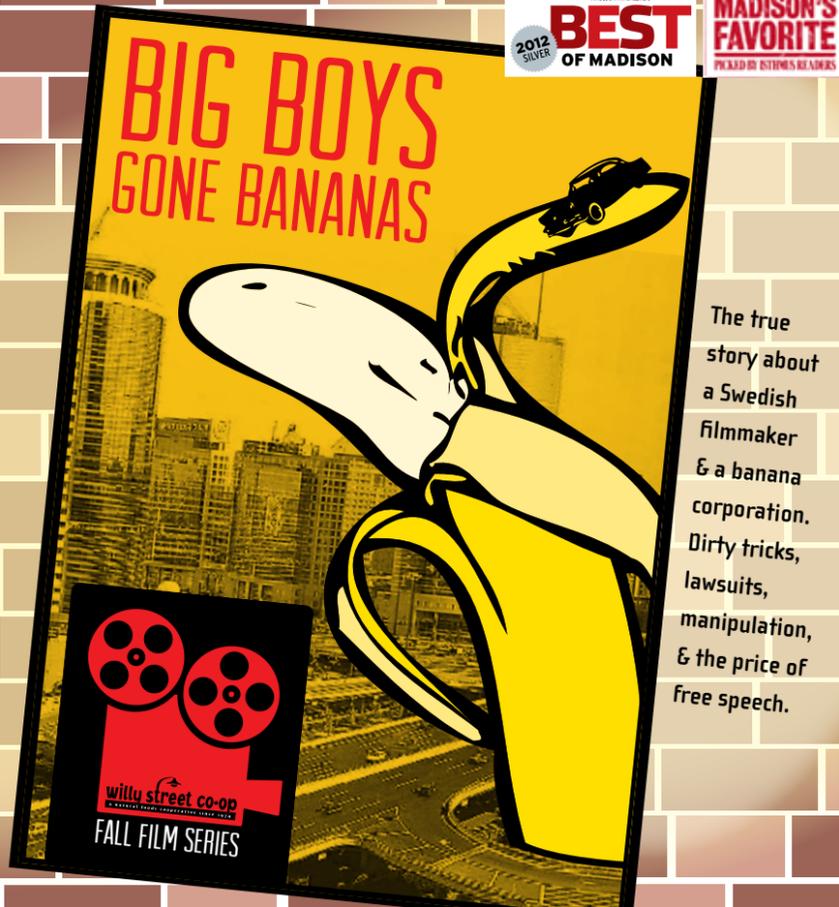
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- Donna Brukett and Manonia Evans, who, in 1971, applied for a marriage license at the Milwaukee County Clerk's Office, and had their request denied.
- The 1972 case of Paul Safransky, who was fired in Racine County from Southern Colony because the superintendent said he would fire any known gay person...and the State Personnel Board upheld the firing.
- The Madison Gay Center, a forerunner of Outreach, which opened the first of our own friendly spots in the state in 1973.
- 1975, when Mayor Paul Soglin and Reverend James Wright led the Madison City Council to adopt the first municipal ordinance for non-discrimination based on sexual orientation in the state.
- 1976, when Miriam Ben Shalom was discharged from the Army Reserves for declaring she was a lesbian, beginning a decades-long court fight for her right to serve.
- 1976, when James Yeadon was appointed to serve on the Madison City Council, the first out gay official in Wisconsin. He was re-elected in the spring of 1977, before Harvey Milk was elected in San Francisco.
- The Anita Bryant movement that hit Madison in 1978 in an effort to repeal the city's non-discrimination ordinance. It failed because the Madison Community United, another forerunner of Outreach, fought back.
- 1980, when the Dane County Board, myself among them, adopted a non-discrimination ordinance based on sexual orientation.
- The gay men, including Madison activist Grid Hall, a chair of the city's Equal Opportunities Commission, and others, who needlessly died from AIDS because LGBTQ health was not on the radar of service providers.

Why do I want you to remember? Not to pass a history quiz. I want you to remember that the struggle for gay rights was a hard path. Many suffered and struggled along the way. That is why we here in Wisconsin—as proud as we are, and as thankful we are to David Clarenbach's leadership to pass the landmark legislation—should not take our rights for granted. If we do not take them for granted, we will realize how valuable they are, we will cherish them for ourselves, and we will ensure that they remain for those who follow.

Dick Wagner, openly gay former Dane County Board Chair, is now working on gay Wisconsin history and welcomes topics and sources.

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## OUR PETS

## quality of life



### Axel and Aspen and Their Family

**Breeds:** Axel is a six-year-old black lab. Aspen is a five-year-old lab mix.  
**Family:** Jennifer Carlson is a payroll/HR program support assistant with ESI. Tina Rogers is an administrative assistant/marketing specialist for Liz Lauer & Associates. Jennifer and Tina's son, Ethan Carlson, is the pups' buddy.

**Where/how did you meet your family?** **Axel:** They all came to my home where I was born to meet my family and my buddy Ethan picked me out of all my brothers and sisters! **Aspen:** I was born in a semi truck and abandoned at a truck stop. Some lady picked me up; however, I jumped out of her car and ran to Momma J in her work parking lot!

**What kind of family members are each of your moms?** **Axel:** My moms love me to death. I am always getting belly rubs, treats, and best of all—they take care of my OCD with anything I can fetch! **Aspen:** My moms saved my life and I will never forget it. They take the best care of me, with snuggles, treats, walks, and "the parkie"!

**Jennifer and Tina, what kind of family member is each of your dogs?**

**Jennifer:** They are both like children to me. Aspen is really my "first" dog and I just cannot believe how much I love them. I cannot wait to come home to their unconditional love after a bad day! **Tina:** They are definitely my kids! If I could, I would just stay home and love them up and snuggle them. They just always put a smile on my face.

**What are your must-have treats? Where do your moms get them for you?**

**Aspen:** Beggin' Strips. You can put anything else in front of me, but I will not eat it until AFTER I get those. **Axel:** Milk Bones and anything that falls on the floor.

**How do your moms meet your needs?** **Axel:** Well, I really only listen to my Momma T—she is my alpha! However, Momma J always makes sure I get my piece of ham when sissy gets her meds everyday. They both love me all of the time and they both feed me. Ethan helps too; he and my buddy Clayton like to play fetch and take me to the parkie.

**Aspen:** Momma J always makes sure I have my meds to make me feel good and stay alive. I follow them both around like a shadow; just want to be near someone all of the time. Momma T and I have nuggle bumpkins time every morning and she always gives me my treat after her shower. I lie outside the bathroom door and wait patiently!

**Moms, how does each dog meet your needs?** They give us unconditional love, are part our family, and nothing would be the same without them. We will never find other dogs with their personalities.

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# quality of life

## OUR ISSUES

### You Gotta Have Friends

**Tamar Zick** encourages us to keep our friendships healthy and strong, offering **three qualities** to strive for to help maintain these relationships.

The year was 1980. I had the good fortune to own a copy of Bette Midler's album *The Divine Miss M*. The song "Friends" repeats the lyrics, "You gotta have friends." If you don't know the song, please look it up on YouTube or iTunes. Maybe some of you are too young to know that in the early days of her career, Bette Midler was a diva in the gay club scenes of the 1970s. The song "Friends" expresses the deep importance of friendship for all people, but particularly for LGBTQ people. There are



Although the art of friendship may be common sense and somewhat obvious, it is interesting to look at what makes for a true connection that benefits both people.

certain moments in our lives when having close friends—friends with whom we can reveal our emotions, confusions, losses, and joys—is paramount to our wellbeing. In between those critical moments (coming out to parents, a first love relationship, a life partner getting ill, etc.) are all the other moments when we need friends.

Over the last 30 years, life has become easier for us in many ways. For some of us (unfortunately not all), families of origin are more accepting, workplaces more friendly, and society in general is more welcoming of who we are and the gifts we bring to the world. My hope is that as LGBTQ people become more assimilated into straight culture, we do not lose the particular depth of friendships with our queer sisters and brothers. I love moving freely through the world, going anyplace and interacting with all types

of people. This is so, so very important. Yet, let's cherish our culture of queer friendships.

Although the art of friendship may be common sense and somewhat obvious, it is interesting to look at what makes for a true connection that benefits both people. The relatively new field of interpersonal neurobiology researches and explains the impact that relationships have on us. Positive relationships foster a calm, compassionate, and empathetic mind and stimulate neuronal activity and growth in the brain. We all have had the experience of being upset or feeling down and noticing we feel better after spending time with friends. But we probably did not know there were actual changes happening in our brains. These changes influence the mind, causing an improvement in mood and outlook.

Daniel Siegel, MD, writes and teaches extensively on the subject of interpersonal neurobiology. He contends that through theoretical and experiential learning about the interplay of brain, mind, and relationships, we can foster greater resiliency and wholesome mental qualities. Enriching our connections with others is powerful medicine. With that in mind, let's look at three qualities that exist in the best of moments with our friends, partners, and family members.

#### Presence

The first quality is presence. Presence is being open and receptive to whatever arises within yourself and within the other person, allowing each unique experience to unfold without bias or preconceived notions. Too often we may be listening to a friend while thinking we already know what will be said. Or we spend time with someone, assuming that we know how things are going to go. This mental habit is often outside of our awareness. Simply noticing and bringing ourselves back to presence can allow for a fresh experience. This quality could be summarized as a state of openness.

#### Attunement

Attunement has two aspects. Internally, we place our attention on our own arisings. We tune in to what we are sensing, feeling, and thinking—not to make our case, but to be open and aware. Interpersonally, we place our

attention on the other person. We listen deeply and allow the other's story or experience to unfold without interference. Our internal state responds, allowing ourselves to be affected. This process of attunement mirrors the other, fostering the respect of differences and the cultivation of compassion. We pay attention to our own internal state as well as the experience of the other person.

**The next time you find yourself in such a situation, ask yourself this question: "Do I want to be right, or do I want to feel connected and at peace with this person?"**

#### Resonance

This leads to the third quality, which is resonance. With the receptivity of openness and the attunement of attention, a change occurs in both people. Take the simple experience of a smile. Someone smiles at us. With openness we attune to the quality of the smile. We are uplifted, smile back, and the person who smiled is uplifted in return. So simple and ordinary, yet so linked to our wellbeing.

A rupture occurs in our connections when one or both people are not present or attuned. Very importantly, we repair the rupture by coming into presence and attunement. This repair process builds trust, compassion, and resiliency between people.

There is a common error made when there is a rupture in our relationships. Say we are fighting with our partner or feel alienated from a friend. We erroneously believe that if we express our anger loudly, or show our unhappiness, the other person will see how miserable they are making us and change. The next time you find yourself in such a situation, ask yourself this question: "Do I want to be right, or do I want to feel connected and at peace with this person?" If the answer is the latter, then bring your awareness and intention to fostering a state of presence (openness) and attunement (attention). See what happens.

These concepts may be things that we take for granted or that go unnoticed. It can be very powerful to reflect on these aspects of interaction with the important people in our lives. With awareness, we can deepen our connections and enhance our wellbeing. As Bette sings, "You gotta have friends." Let's show up for each other. We all benefit. ■

Tamar Zick, LPC, RYT is a licensed psychotherapist and a registered yoga teacher working within the LGBTQ community for over 20 years.

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## quality of life

### OUR ELDERERS

# Resilience Rewarded

Caroline Werner takes a look at recent developments in healthcare protections for LGBTQ seniors.

**W**hen I think of myself, the seniors I know, the seniors before us, and the discrimination endured and survived by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population, I have no doubt that LGBTQ seniors are resilient. That resilience is reported in an article entitled, "Study of the Day: Gay Seniors Are Resilient Despite Tougher Old Age" in *The Atlantic* (Feb., 2012), which quotes research done by University of Washington social workers.



Last year the American Medical Association began asking healthcare providers to collect data regarding LGBT patients. For us, this is a double-edged sword. Will disclosing make us any safer?

It says, "Policymakers and researchers have largely ignored the health issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender seniors, whose numbers are expected to exceed four million by 2030." To better understand the risk and protective factors affecting these older adults, 2,560 LGBT adults aged 50 to 95 across the U.S. were surveyed. Respondents reported greater rates of health issues than heterosexuals of similar age. Almost two-thirds of them had been victimized at least three times, and 13 percent had been denied healthcare or received inferior care.

The report goes on to say, "Still, LGBT older adults remained resilient. Nine in 10 engaged in wellness activities like meditation, and 82 percent said they regularly exercised. Nearly all of them felt good about belonging to the LGBT community, and more than

one-third stated that they attended spiritual or religious services."

As a social worker, I learned about situations of neglect and abuse of heterosexuals of all ages and wondered how much more vulnerable LGBT seniors could be. Young workers in group homes had little or no medical training. The minimal standards facilities legally operate under scare me when I think of my aging. Others of us have heard or experienced horror stories firsthand. I'm concerned how the effects of stress on overburdened workers will affect increased numbers of elderly patients, especially LGBT elders.

A 2010 Lambda Legal study entitled, "When Health Care Isn't Caring" (quoted in the Healthcare Equality Index 2012: Promoting *Equitable and Inclusive Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Patients and Their Families*) found that more than half of all [LGBT] respondents reported that they had experienced at least one of the following types of discrimination in healthcare: being refused needed care, healthcare professionals refusing to touch them or using excessive precautions, healthcare professionals using harsh or abusive language, being blamed for their health status, or healthcare professionals being physically rough or abusive. Seventy percent of transgender and gender-nonconforming respondents had one or more of these experiences, and almost 56 percent of lesbian, gay, or bisexual respondents had at least one of these experiences.

Last year the American Medical Association began asking healthcare providers to collect data regarding LGBT patients. For us, this is a double-edged sword. Will disclosing make us any safer? In order to provide safety, care facilities are now offering LGBT sensitivity trainings and culturally competent care, buttressed by new regulatory requirements.

In May, UW-Madison medical professionals who belong to PRIDE in Healthcare proposed a resolution to the Wisconsin Medical Society recommending, (1) that health care providers working with geriatric populations (e.g., aging services, residential care facilities, and home care agencies) should receive training regarding the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) seniors, in-

cluding (a) their concerns of being ostracized and abused by care providers and community members; (b) health risks, health disparities, and prevalent diseases of LGBT seniors; and (c) how the lack of legal protections and access to social programs granted to heterosexuals causes hardship for LGBT seniors; and (2) that Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) consistently and explicitly inquire whether clients desire counseling about the services that are available or pertinent for LGBT seniors and, whenever applicable, counsel clients about accessing these resources.

On June 19, at an event at Howard University in Washington, D.C., with Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released the 2012 Health Equality Index (HEI). The Index focuses on four core policies: 1) Patient Non-Discrimination, 2) Visitation, 3) Employment Non-Discrimination, and 4) Training in LGBT Patient-Centered Care. The annual HRC Foundation survey helps hospitals assess themselves against established best practices and ensure that they are complying with requirements for non-discrimination. These include a requirement issued last year by The Joint Commission, the largest accrediting body for U.S. hospitals, calling on all accredited facilities to extend non-discrimination protection to LGBT patients.

That same day, HHS Secretary Sebelius announced the Departments' 2012 nine objectives aimed at improving the health and well-being of all LGBT Americans. HSS also recommitted to its 2011 objective of increasing the number of federally funded and demographic surveys that collect and report sexual orientation and gender identity data. Additionally, 1) the Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) will award up to eight grants to organizations to connect transgender women of color with HIV prevention and care services; 2) National Institutes of Health (NIH) will release a report that identifies the gaps and opportunities in its research portfolios in light of the recommendations from the 2011 Institute of Medicine report; and 3) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and HRSA will develop a plan to disseminate existing tools to behavioral health and primary care practitioners to help them assess, treat and refer LGBT clients in a culturally competent manner.

It is getting better.

Caroline Werner is the Volunteer Senior Program Coordinator at OutReach.

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## Daisy Chain

Connections are the icing on the cake at Daisy Café & Cupcakery

**y**ou could say that Daryl Sisson and Kathy Brooks chose the neighborhood, but the neighborhood also chose them. Daisy Café and Cupcakery celebrated its third anniversary in May, which also marked the day they sold their 250,000th cupcake. They boast Madison's "Favorite Waitstaff" two years in a row in *Isthmus's* Annual Manual, as well as a runner-up title last year for "Madison's Favorite Sweet."

"We had no idea it would take off like it did," Brooks says. The cupcakery was the first of its kind in Madison, but many others soon followed. "We were the first within a very short period of time."

The idea sprouted from Sisson's visits to his home turf in Seattle where cupkateries were popping up all over the place.

"We started by picking the neighborhood, and this neighborhood reflects that diversity," Sisson says of their focus on inclusivity, which is reflected in both their staff and clientele. "We have a disproportionate number of drag queens on staff," Brooks adds.

Brooks and Sisson met while working for Food Fight, where they coined the "GLBT" sandwich—guacamole, lettuce, bacon, and tomato. They both left Food Fight to open Daisy Café and Cupcakery, where to date they have released more than 500 flavors, ranging from Brooks' favorite (extreme vanilla) to a rotation of seasonal creations.

**"This neighborhood reflects that diversity," Sisson says of their focus on inclusivity, which is reflected in both their staff and clientele. "We have a disproportionate number of drag queens on staff," Brooks adds.**

"We can't even keep track," says Sisson, who is personally a fan of "the latest and the greatest" new flavors.

Although there's no shame in dessert for breakfast, the café's extensive menu provides an array of options for morning, noon, and night, including multiple variations on stratas and meatloaf. The menu also leans heavily toward vegetarian and gluten-free options.

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# OUR TASTE



**Daisy Café & Cupcakery**  
www.daisycafeandcupcakery.com  
2827 Atwood Ave., Madison (608) 241-2100  
**Owners/partners:** Kathy Brooks and Daryl Sisson  
**Hours:** Breakfast and Lunch daily – 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.; dinner Tues. – Sat. 5 p.m. – 9 p.m.; Cupcakery – 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. (or until sold out)

Local art hangs on the walls, which includes both Brooks and Sisson's own work. "Art and the restaurant are so intertwined," Brooks says.

"The latest we hung was my own," Sisson notes of Brooks' influence on his newly acquired mosaicing skills.

It's a busy life, full of long days, and sitting down as we are is a welcome but rare moment. When the going gets tough, Sisson says he just has to come back to work because clients "say such nice things." "That's as gratifying as it gets," he says.

They've seen one of their clients celebrate her 100th birthday at the cafe, and they've been proud to lend a hand during union and wedding ceremonies with their cupcakes.

"I have been in this community for 25 years, so I know so many people and I've known them for a really long time," Brooks says.

"We love being a part of this community," Sisson adds.

—Marcelle Richards

Photographed by Roberto Amezcua

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## I've Got the Power

Proud Theater Mentor **Gavin Logan** on art and its power to connect and transform.

Art has always been a central part of my life. Just the word "art" sparks memories of childhood: summer days spent swinging my legs beneath a wooden picnic table that sat outside my grandmother's in-home studio. I would sit for hours, surrounded by the aromas of oil paints I couldn't yet pronounce, stacks of charcoal-stained sketchbooks, and every shape and style of brush one could imagine. I'd watch as my grandmother would turn simple ideas into sketches and then bring them to life upon canvases.

This instilled in me a great respect not only for the craft, but also for the power of art itself to bring people together, to teach, and to ultimately shed brief glimpses of light onto one's personal experiences not otherwise shared.

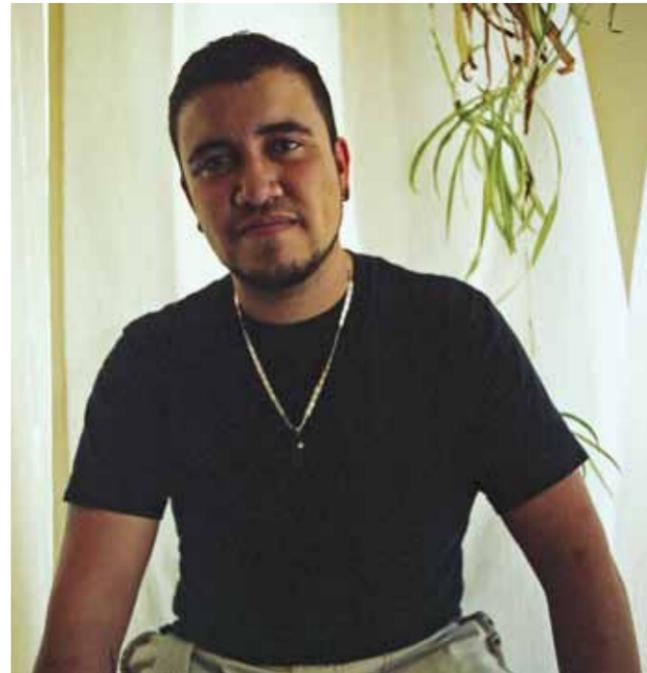
### A Reluctant Participant

Growing up rather shy and quiet, however, the last thing I could have foreseen was taking my art to the stage. That was before I became involved with Proud Theater. It was a cool September evening; I remember standing outside, across the street from the address where my friend had told me to meet him. He had asked me to come by after running into me at our high school's gay-straight alliance, explaining the group as a place where LGBTQ youth would go to practice and perform theater.

I suppose I had envisioned something along the lines of a queer take on a Shakespearean piece. I couldn't have been more wrong. Having clearly not paid enough attention when speaking with my friend, I had unknowingly become a participant. I was terrified. So much so that I made it a personal goal to sabotage any chance of return; I would arrive late, I would barely speak—much less participate—and on the off chance that someone could convince me to do otherwise, I would do so minimally.

### Just Write

It wasn't until a few weeks in, when I was personally approached by one of the mentors, that my thoughts began to change. It was pretty well determined at that point that I was going to put up a fight when it came to talking, so the best bet for me would be to write. I was told to do nothing else but that and report back the following week with



There, I could let go of some of that struggle for a bit by turning it into a monologue, a song, a poem, or even a play. That is exactly what I did when I wrote the somewhat-autobiographical "Do It Yourself."

whatever I produced.

I returned with almost a full notebook, divulging feelings about my gender identity and past that I had previously kept quiet. I was more than apprehensive at first to admit to much of what I had written, but it hit me after some time that this group was far more than just a bunch of queer kids on stage. It could be, if I wanted it to be, a family—unconventional, yes, but nevertheless one that met once a week over bagels and pizza to talk and to share in one another's lives and experiences for the sake of creating art. And that was something I could understand.

### Turn Around

I wouldn't have admitted it then, but I don't think I would be doing as well now without them. Even in moments when I feared I'd be the most alone, like shortly after coming out as transgender and realizing that my decision to pursue hormones would ultimately cost me the relationship I'd formed with

my biological family, I found some of the greatest comfort in knowing I could turn to Proud Theater. There, I could let go of some of that struggle for a bit by turning it into a monologue, a song, a poem, or even a play. That is exactly what I did during my second season with Proud Theater when I wrote the somewhat-autobiographical piece called "Do It Yourself."

It's been about four years since that time, and I am 21 and living fully and legally as a man. I am an actor, baker, photographer, writer, artist, and activist. What's more is that I am about to begin my second season as an adult mentor for Proud Theater. It is my turn to nurture the shy or reluctant artists inside the students I work with. ■

**Proud Theater is looking for interested youth, ages 13-18, for its 2012-13 season. The group meets every Wednesday evening starting September 12, and meets from 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Enrollment is open until November 28.**

Proud Theater meets at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation located at 2146 E. Johnson Street, Madison. Call 608-222-9086 or write to [info@proudtheater.org](mailto:info@proudtheater.org) for more information. [www.proudtheater.org](http://www.proudtheater.org)



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