

NEWS

Oberlin Lambda Alumni –

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and LGBT-affirming Alumni & Friends of Oberlin College

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**Oberlin is the only
College that made the
Advocate's Queer Guide!**

Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Joani Blank '59, Entrepreneur, Publisher, Author and Health Advocate

OLA Steering Committee member Paul Forrest Hickman recently spoke with fabulous alumna Joani Blank ('59) in her home in Oakland, California. She has a beautiful home with skylights and wood and beautiful art. She has a wonderful presence that is full and fun. They sat, talked, laughed some and played with her dog, Bapu. Here are some excerpts from their conversation.

Describe your current career / life situation.

Joani laughed and talked about how she was pleased not to have a specific career anymore. Her life situation revolves around volunteering for her co-housing community and the co-housing movement. She is active in The Cohousing Association of the United States, a non-profit organization that promotes the development of cohousing communities in this country. She is a co-coordinator for the Association's last national conference that took place in the summer of 2006 in Chapel Hill North Carolina.

Joani is working on making music a stronger presence in her life. She sings in her

Unitarian Church choir and plays in their hand bell choir as well. She has played recorder all of her life. Joani's former career involves such accomplishments as starting Good Vibrations—a business touting accurate sex information and providing quality sex toys—and Down There Press—the only U.S. independent publisher devoted exclusively to the publication of sexual health books for children and adults. She was



also in one of the first groups of volunteers at San Francisco Sex Information (SFSI) organization, an all-volunteer non-profit organization that provides free, accurate, non-judgmental sex information via the web and through a referral switchboard.

How did your Oberlin experience affect your path / choice?

Going to college away from home was really important for Joani. She is still grateful for receiving a liberal arts education. She also spent the first semester of her third year at Oberlin

Save the Date!

OLA Reunion
for the Oberlin Lambda Alumni
Community and its Allies
On Campus

October 5-7, 2007

Highlights

- Symposium: How a Lambda community enhances the greater community
- Drag Show & Ball
- Alumni Recital
- Picnic
- Discussion Groups
- Time with friends, students, faculty, staff

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Oberlin MRC Hosts an LGBT Film Series

By Eric Estes

In the 2005-2006 school year the Oberlin Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) sponsored an LGBT film series. Titles included: *Toilet Training*, *Austin Unbound*, *Touch of Pink*, *Homoteens*, and *My Brother...Nikhil*, which made waves in India as one of the few gay male characters to grace the screen.

Andrea Stokes, LGBT Coordinator of the MRC, said the idea for the film series came from a meeting with Meredith Raimondo, Assistant Professor of Comparative American Studies, about finding some direction for the LGBT student

population at Oberlin College. Suggestions for films came from discussions with students, faculty and others with valuable ideas. Films reflect a diverse look at LGBT existence with regard to race, nationality, religion, class and gender. There was an eye on choosing indie films. The LGBT film series gives students a chance to see films often neglected in major film festivals.

Most of the films are quite contemporary, several having made film festival circuit tours as recently as summer 2005. The film series has appealed

to many students on campus including those outside the LGBT and ally community. The South Asian Students Association came out in force to watch the December screening of *My Brother...Nikhil*. In the future, we plan post-film audience discussions given the tremendous buzz following each film.

Please forward your suggestions or resources for future LGBT film series to the MRC:
Andrea.Stokes@oberlin.edu
Eric.Estes@oberlin.edu



An interactive archive created to record, preserve, and make available Oberlin College's LGBT history.
Created by Joey Plaster '00



Joani Blank '59

Feel free to contact her with your thoughts and questions at:

www.JoaniBlank.com
Joani@swansway.com

Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Joani Blank '59 (continued)

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participating in the Negro College Exchange Program at Fisk University. This was in 1958 and before the first civil rights sit-ins in Nashville where Fisk is located.

Joani also participated in the Gilbert and Sullivan Players all four of her years at Oberlin, and she is still a big G and S fan who regularly attends performances of San Francisco's Lamplighters, one of the best G and S groups in the country.

What obstacles did you face on your path?

Joani thought about this for a while, and said that she could not really think of any significant obstacles. Joani talked about how supportive her parents were of her education and businesses. They were

proud of what she did, and gave her loving support. She concluded that she has "a good knack for getting my own way, and any obstacles were my own."

What advice might you give to others on their career path?

Joani's advice for others on their career path is to find something that you love to do, then see if you can figure out how to make a living doing it. If you don't have to worry too much about making money, so much the better.

What makes you happy?

Joani smiled and said that the connections that she has with other people make her happy. Bapu put his head in her lap and she said that he made her happy, too.

Seeking Home: A Sustainable Living Experiment

By Neal Appelbaum '90 & Garth Hawkins

I grew up in some suburbs the second of three children to parents raised in Brooklyn. My grandparents were small business owners and professional people. My husband's sister is 9 years older than he. They were raised on a farm and in the farmhouse his parents purchased from his grandparents. We moved every few years due to my father's corporate transfers. Garth's parents finally left the family farm after he went to college.

Garth and I arrived in Chicago around 1990: he out of graduate school, I was just out of Oberlin. I believe we were intentionally introduced a few years later by mutual friends who were trying to make a couple out of a pair of cutish nerdy guys. The occasion was summer solstice and the celebration was a Swedish feast of lutvisk (salted fish), boiled potatoes, and fresh dill. I was intrigued by Garth's lack of fashion sense, his thick glasses, and his thicker mustache. He liked that I was short and sounded like a guy from Jersey.

We started dating with the understanding that it lasts as long as we both shall love. It is probably the only Hallmark moment in our 12 years together, we are not a Hallmark couple. Beyond that original "official" policy, I think the word love was not mentioned again for the next three years.

The first few years of the relationship we lived separately, but spent several nights together each week. In retrospect, it gave us the time to find out that we were compatible on a day to day basis, not just in bed. Due to my inherited spreadsheet/budgeter personality, we found a plain but sturdy 1970s condo for Garth to purchase. It was a fully south facing 2nd floor space with treetop views. We removed the carpet and refinished the concrete floors staining them blue. It was a comfortable open space that we periodically treated like a wood shop making efforts to meet the buildings anti-noise covenants. Our many houseplants and vegetable seed starts craved outdoor air and earth. We began collecting floor plan books for small vintage houses and how-to books for building an earth-friendly home.



Neal Appelbaum '90

As we neared completion of various renovation projects on Garth's "passive solar" heated condo, a friend suggested we look at a single-family house in the city, which she hoped someone close to her would someday own. I walked in the back door, out through the front door, signed the contract and wrote a check. My grandmother was in my head when I walked through the house, telling me it was a good house; she was also in my head when I met Garth. My father

was in my head telling me it was a good investment. I told myself Garth could have a workshop and a garden. I did not know if I could afford the house and I did not ask Garth's opinion about buying the house. Negotiation on the purchase was finalized one week later.

I learn lessons constantly. Two big ones came to me with that house purchase: never make living arrangements without complete agreement from the other partner; mortgage companies lend people much more money than they can really afford to borrow.

It was a gay guy's dream vintage house: a 1927 brick Chicago bungalow with quarter sawn oak trim, oak floors, a south facing side yard, original wood fully-operating windows, hot-water heat, and located a few blocks from public transportation, the highway, and mom & pop grocery stores.

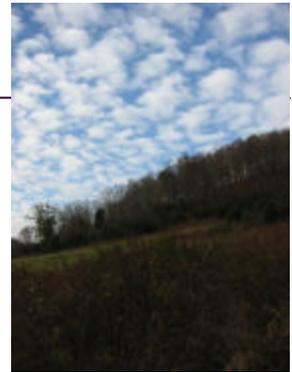
Despite the positives, it took Garth almost 4 years to forgive me for moving him from the condo to the house. He kept the condo for a year after we moved to the house. It was there as an escape route, should he need it. While Garth never escaped to it, we both longed for the condo. There we had become accustomed to newer construction, thermopane glass, and heated public spaces. The original wood windows at the vintage house were not energy efficient, and the exterior walls were not insulated.

We began an odyssey of house renovation that many couples live through. Our focus was on long term annual savings by winterizing and summerizing the house. We did splurge on the water patterned real linoleum floor for our new bathroom. It's almost edible it's so organic! It's also costly. The renovation work was all paid for in cash. There would be no second mortgage or home equity loans.

I had gone back to school during this period to learn accounting. I thought telling people I was a CPA would be a quick easy answer to that often asked question, so what do you do? It also meant that I could communicate in a language that I knew was important to my extended family. It enabled Garth and me to consider and measure our lives with a business plan perspective.

Given our incomes, we were extraordinary savers and only became more so. However, utility costs and property taxes were forever increasing and beyond our control. Also during this time, my mothers' parents began to fail and I found myself responsible for the financial minutia that accumulates with 67 prosperous years of marriage. Both Garth and I experienced

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Give Generously

When making your annual contribution to Oberlin, please give generously and earmark some funds for "OLA".

Your support provides an ongoing Lambda Alumni presence at Oberlin and in the alumni community, and supports various student, faculty and alumni activities.

Thanks!

How YOU Can Get Involved

1. **Offer a Student Career Advice**—Correspond with a student to share your valuable experiences. Many students would love to hear about your real life experiences in the 'real world'.
2. **Sign up on Obie web** and on the "Out" list to allow students and alumni to contact you with specific questions about career paths and Winter Term projects.
3. **Provide Winter Term Housing**—Housing is often the biggest barrier to securing projects in unfamiliar cities. There are a variety of arrangements to support or assist students in locating and securing housing in a city near you.
4. **Sponsor a Winter Term Project**—If you have an interesting idea, pass it on! Let the office of Career Services at Oberlin know about your great idea so that some bright student can follow up!

Oberlin On-Line Community

The on-line community at the Oberlin website gives you the opportunity to update your profile and share as much or as little information about yourself as you like.

When you sign on, there will be four sections to complete:

- Personal
- Academic
- Professional
- Activities and Interests

Under the last section, there are two places where you can choose to identify with OLA. Please select Oberlin Lambda Alumni "Out" List under the OC Self Identified Groups (along with all other groups with which you identify) if you are comfortable allowing alumni to search for you under OLA.

If you want to remain anonymous, please select the box next to Oberlin Lambda Alumni instead; your affiliation with OLA will remain confidential and "hidden" from other alumni.



OC Self Identified Groups

I am interested in participating in the following Oberlin Alumni Association self-identified group(s). *Please be aware that this is public information and is searchable by others.*

(To select multiple items, hold down the control key on the PC or the command key for the Mac while selecting.)



Oberlin Lambda Alumni
I am interested in participating in Oberlin Lambda Alumni - the group for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender, Intersexed, Queer and Questioning (Lambda) Alumni. This information is confidential and will not appear in the Directory. Those alums who are also interested in being "out" should select this option in the Self-Identified Groups menu above.

OLA in Cyberspace!

OLA Discussion Group

Do you have reactions or responses to any of the articles in this newsletter? Do you have thoughts that you'd like to share with other Oberlin Lambda alums? The Oberlin Lambda Alumni electronic discussion group is an excellent opportunity for us to share our thoughts, so please come and join the discussion!

Here's how to join:

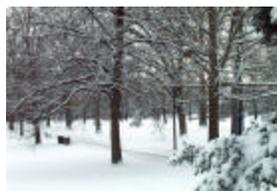
Go to: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OLAdiscussion> and click on "Join This Group"

OR Send a blank email to: OLAdiscussion-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

www.oberlin.edu/alumni/OLA/Default.html

OLA Listserv

This is a listserv hosted by the Oberlin College Center for Information Technology for OLA members to post announcements of upcoming events and items of interest. This listserv is moderated, and only Oberlin alumni are allowed to join. The volume of messages is fairly low. To subscribe to this listserv, send an email message (from the email account where you want to receive listserv messages) to majordomo@venus.cc.oberlin.edu that says: Subscribe ola_news.



NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY: The list moderator will only approve current OLA members as subscribers to ola_news, and the list of subscribers will not be shared or made public in any way by OLA. However, subscribers should be aware that anyone already subscribed to the list who is familiar with the command system for this listserv software might be able to access email addresses (not names) of subscribers. Because the software is commercially produced and administered by the Oberlin Center for Information Technology, we are unable to change this feature of the program. Since anyone attempting to do this would have to already be an OLA member subscribed to the list, we believe that the risk to members concerned about confidentiality is minimal.

OLA Email Address
ola_oberlin@yahoo.com

OLA Website
<http://www.oberlin.edu/alumni/OLA/Default.html>

Seeking Home (continued)
By Neal Appelbaum & Garth Hawkins

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grandparents who did not reinvent themselves as they aged. Lastly, I found that my new favorite hobby, gardening, was too limited by the short growing season of Chicago.

Before the finishing touches were completed on the bungalow, we had already made plans to change course drastically. The bungalow would not be our final home, but it was critical to the evolution of our life together.

We now find ourselves in Tennessee on a 152-acre farm that we pieced back together over the last three years. It has plenty of room to garden, plenty of room for the dog to play, and plenty of room for our friends to visit. Our effort to live modestly, accumulate savings and manage real estate investments have funded our new adventure – developing an anti-development.

We are interested in questioning the conventional wisdom that creates traditional housing neighborhoods, and so each of the 13 homes we are proposing for our property will be built with a different building material or construction method. There is a maximum square footage limit, not a minimum. The 152 acres will not be subdivided. Each home owner will be a shareholder of the property. In effect we are organizing a small village that in some respects resembles an Israeli kibbutz or a New York co-op.

The houses themselves will be designed with current sustainability principles in mind. Hopefully, architecture and design students will participate in the development of the structures. Going one step

further, we intend those structures to be at least partially built by people attending construction workshops. It has taken some time, but I believe I appreciate the process as much as the outcome. Hopefully, we can offer many people an experience here and for some, we can offer home.

There is a long history of homesteading in our area. More recently, straight and gay hippies have settled here building creative structures and lives. We are drawn to the wisdom of those people.

For the next 40 years or so, Garth and I will be able to apply our formal training and professional experience to our day to day lives. We know we will learn from each mistake and each person who stops here, be it for a day or for the long term. There are many questions that we will attempt to answer: some esoteric, some mundane.

We found out early on in our relationship that we could look after each other successfully in the density and competitiveness of Chicago. We also decided that there had to be more to life than bank account balances and object accumulation for their own sake. Last year I bought solar panels with the money saved from 15 years of not buying Starbucks and not paying for a cable TV subscription.

Project planning is underway. Initial infrastructure and reforestation efforts in bottomlands will begin late in 2006.

We welcome your visit, your conversation, and your participation. This is intended as a group project that hopes to draw on the talents of many

people. The main (and currently only) house is set up as a green, zero energy bed & breakfast. Guest rooms are waiting. Camping is cool too.

We are located a few miles from Short Mountain Sanctuary, a radical faerie retreat, and about an hour from Nashville. If you are driving through, stop in for coffee. You might want to stay the night.

Please see our website for more information about our project: www.modelassemblage.com.

Neal Appelbaum: 1990, BA in economics, Oberlin College; Oberlin Review, Pottery Coop, SFC CPA coursework, DePaul University

Garth Hawkins: 1989, Bachelors of Science in Civil Engineering, Purdue University; 1991, Masters of Science in Engineering, University of Texas at Austin

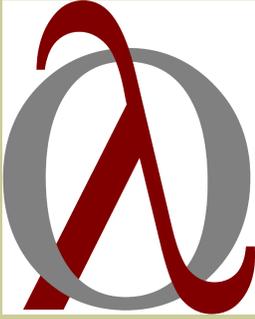


Garth Hawkins

Model Assemblage

A sustainable living experiment in the hills of middle Tennessee Working towards 14 garden cottages demonstrating green building techniques





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