

**Save the date:  
Right Reverend  
Gene V. Robinson  
to speak at Oberlin  
Oct. 27, 2009**



# NEWS

## Oberlin Lambda Alumni —

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

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Fall 2009

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### The OLA Steering Committee needs YOU!

Alums of all class years are encouraged to apply. Simply send an email to [ola@world.oberlin.edu](mailto:ola@world.oberlin.edu).

## Openly Gay UU Minister brings multifaith perspective to campus by Mary Meadows '83

Rev. Greg McGonigle is the director of Oberlin's newly-defined Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. He was officially installed on September 11, 2009, after serving in the position for a year.

Spiritual life is nothing new to Greg. At age four, he said mass using as his altar the ironing board in the play area of his public preschool. By early high school family and friends expected that he would become a priest. He suspected that his being gay might have fed into his priestly image, although he did not become conscious of his sexual orientation until undergraduate school.

Greg did convince his parents to let him attend a Jesuit high school and the historical critical method used in religious studies quickly made him aware that the church as he experienced it had little to do with Jesus Christ. When in an American Literature class he stumbled upon the works of Emerson and Thoreau, he found his core beliefs echoed in their writings. He began attending a local Unitarian Universalist (UU) church – a culture shock to his Catholic practices.

Greg journeyed to Brown University where his religious universe was expanded by his studies of

Asian religions. He studied abroad in India for a semester where practices of Hinduism resonated with the rituals of his Catholic upbringing. He went on to Harvard for a Masters in Theological Studies, but after a year felt his call was to ministry. It was then he came out to his parents – as a Unitarian – something that was much harder for them to take than the fact that he was gay.

Greg's field education led him into pastoral care for persons living with AIDS. After graduating, he did his internship at a Unitarian church where half of his time was devoted to campus ministry. Following the internship, he spent three years as an ecumenical campus minister at UC at Davis.

Greg first heard of Oberlin from one of his professors at Brown, Donna Wulff, '65. Hence,

(Continued on page 2)



Greg McGonigle, left, chats with Jack Skelton, former LGBT Community Coordinator, at the Multicultural Resource Center.

## Donald Downs '62 and Richard Korb Fund Enriches Campus Life

The Donald Downs and Richard Korb Fund is the newest endowed fund created to support the needs and activities of the Lambda community at Oberlin. The first recipients of the funds are: Queer Disability Studies Scholar and Activist Eli Clare; Baccalaureate Speaker Reverend Peter J. Gomes; My Name is My Own: Queering the Intersection of Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality Series; Transgender Advocacy Group; Zami; and Drag Ball.

Grants from the fund are available to students, faculty, and staff to support projects such as scholarship assistance, faculty development, research projects, conferences, film screenings, guest speakers, publications, outreach and education, relevant art and library acquisitions, and emergency needs.

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## Your Donations are Important

by Chanel Chambers, '97



I can't believe the summer is over! Way up here in Seattle, the days are getting shorter, school buses are back on the roads, and the leaves are turning fancy colors again.

It also means that the OLA steering committee has just completed its fall meeting during Oberlin's Alumni Council Weekend. The weekend is a wonderful opportunity to connect with current students and get a

feel for what is going on campus-wise. Being able to return to Oberlin reminds me what a gift an Oberlin education really is.

Oberlin students bring a perspective to the world that is often missing in our institutions and businesses: one of intellectual curiosity and integrity, optimistic vision and the courage to stand apart from the crowd. Our three Cemelli Grant winners are a wonderful example of the academic spirit still nurtured at Oberlin.

For this reason and many others, I hope you'll join me in making a

contribution to Oberlin Lambda Alumni this fall.

Your contribution goes to supporting OLA's efforts to ensure the Lambda community's concerns are heard not only by Oberlin administration and staff, but also by the broader alumni body itself.

I have made the decision to continue to support OLA because I see the difference between Oberlin and other schools. Please take some time to consider what Oberlin means to you and pass on the gift to future generations.

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## Interview with Greg McGonigle (continued)

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(Continued from page 1)

when he saw the advertisement for the job at Oberlin, his interest was piqued. He knew of Oberlin's reputation and religious heritage and felt that the environment was rich in resources for spiritual life.

After a year on the job, Greg reports that Oberlin has exceeded his best expectations in terms of resources and potential for developing vibrant and vital religious and spiritual life programming on campus, especially in terms of local church involvement in social justice issues and other College staff. He has also found considerable religious diversity in the greater Cleveland area, including the Shiva Vishnu Hindu Temple and the Islamic Center of Cleveland. With the newly formed Multifaith Student Group, Greg was able to visit both of these communities this fall. Greg's passion is in opportunities for multifaith and interfaith initiatives and interaction and this drives his work as the director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

Greg's role as director of the office is multi-faceted. He provides the administrative leadership of the office and is the spokesperson for raising visibility of spiritual life on campus. On a campus where 50% of the students profess to be atheist or agnostic, he relishes the role of reaching out to help students think critically about issues of faith and to learn to appreciate the role that spiritual practices and beliefs play in other's lives. For himself, Greg has found new paths of learning in the ExCo atheism course he took last spring.

Greg is also aware as an openly gay man that issues related to LGBTQ people will arise. He knows that he must strike a balance between his commitment to his own values and creating a safe place where all can speak of beliefs. Greg is hopeful that through his office, he can help lift up critical issues and provide opportunities for conversation and learning.

Just such an opportunity arose last spring. Fueled by certain racial interpretations of California's passage of Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage, some students began a conversation on the relationship between African Americans, particularly the Black church, and LGBTQ people and issues. Greg believes that this conversation revealed a desire for ongoing conversations about the complex relationships between race, religion, and sexuality.

The conversation sparked Greg's invitation to the Reverend Peter J. Gomes, a gay African American theologian, author, and preacher to speak at the 2009 Baccalaureate service. The visit was funded in part by the Donald Downs and Richard Korb Fund.

Greg is working with the Multicultural Resource Center on more collaborative programming, including possible reorganization of QUAF (Queers and Allies of Faith). With the MRC, Greg is also bringing the first openly gay Episcopal Bishop, the Right Reverend Gene Robinson, to speak on campus on October 27, 2009.

## Making History

By Jude-Laure Denis '88

There is no doubt that January 20, 2009 was an historic day. Millions of people gathered on the National Mall in front of the Capitol Building to witness the swearing in of Barack Obama as our 44<sup>th</sup> president.

But for me, history was made long before that day. It began when I first read Barack Obama's book, "Dreams from My Father." The language was beautiful; the pictures painted evocative; the idealism regenerative. And then I read, "The Audacity of Hope," and, within me, something began to stir—a hint of the person I had been at Oberlin, a hint of the person I could be more than twenty years after leaving this place that marks my very foundation.

History, for me, began with the first Obama speech I heard as he made his way across the country, the pundits by turns decrying his candidacy, then denigrating it. I listened and his words did more than tell me what he would do as a politician. It moved me, as it moved many others, to do something; that something was leaving my six-figure position as a vp at Merrill Lynch.

It was no longer enough to read the news. It was no longer enough to stay glued to my television set, screaming at the Joe Scarboroughs and Pat Buchanans of the world. And so, before the campaign landed in Pennsylvania, I did something I had never ever done before—I got involved. I worked to get his name on the ballot by leading a petition drive. I made phone calls. I knocked on doors. I spent a summer pounding the pavement registering new voters until my heels grew calluses. Most importantly, I talked and talked to complete strangers and invested in their lives and built

relationships that continue even today. In short, my transition from corporate America to community organizer, was a life-altering experience.

But weeks before the inauguration, the Rick Warren fiasco overwhelmed all the good feelings the campaign had generated for me and many others. As a queer woman, the all-out media frenzy that selection generated, pitting our community against itself, was a wonder for me to behold. I had spent the past two years listening to this man say the same thing again and again and again about the need to dialogue, to listen to one another, to agree without being disagreeable. And yet, the intolerance on exhibit caught me way off guard.

In my mind, the pick of Rick Warren did exactly what it was supposed to do—it generated dialogue; it made people consider what it means to be queer; it even opened Warren's mind, who after meeting Melissa Etheridge and her partner, went out and bought queer studies books to read because they were not who he expected them to be.

So January 20, 2009 was history in the making. And I'm thrilled that I played a role in making it happen. And it's my hope that moments that challenge our conventional thinking—be it right or left—continue to be a part of this drama unfolding before us. And, that history has lead me to this moment, this activism, this new journey in the meandering world of politics, which in retrospect began more than twenty years ago, on this campus that helped make me who I am.

## Lavender Celebration Review

Carol Levine, '84

Lavender Celebration 2009, held during Commencement and Reunion Weekend, was a smashing success! I was quite blown away by it. More than 80 people packed Klutznick Commons in Peters Hall to hear the winners of the Robertson Prize and Cemelli Grant awards report on their projects and to see the class of 2009 as they were inducted into Oberlin Lambda Alumni.

Anna Straser '09, the winner of the Norm Robertson Prize, directed "Speech & Debate," Stephen Karam's dark comedy, through the Oberlin Student Theater Association. The play is a picture of the borderland between late adolescence and adulthood, where grown-up ideas and ambition coexist with childish will and bravado as a frumpy girl, a nerdy guy and an openly gay young man

who band together to disclose the truth about a teacher who preys on his male students.

The two winners of the Cemelli Student Research Grant for the academic year 2009/10 also presented their works-in-progress. Jonathan Doucette '11, presented "Negotiating Tolerance," a project he will be doing this summer in Sweden and Amsterdam. His research looks at Muslim immigration to the European Union and how such immigration shapes LGBTQ communities. He would like to see what spaces there exist for dialogue across LGBTQ and Muslim immigrant communities and what successes (and failure) there have been in the past.

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## My Life as a Junkie

### Roger Goodman, '68

As I look back, I see that I did not become a drug addict at Oberlin. I started using drugs in High School as early as my Junior Year. It was my brother who gave me my first LSD25. Oh.... it was good stuff, you know. Pure. Clean. It came in a glass vial, the top of which had to be cut off with a blade, and then I drank it. It was 1962 and I was a frightened, shame-filled, overweight, Jewish, musical genius, who was so frightened by a life of The Lie regarding my sexuality, and drugs helped me to forget the fear and the shame. After much psychotherapy in my adult life, I know now that I was also a child of sexual abuse and I suppose the drugs helped me to forget that as it was happening.

But then I got to Oberlin, and in my Freshman year, my new friend Bob, a former student at the High School of Music and Art in New York City, an institution of very gifted music, art, and dance students many of whom were already using drugs to enhance their consciousness or for recreation, gave me my first marijuana. I remember listening to the Brahms F Minor Piano Quintet, which I had never heard before, and I was screaming at the Third Movement, quite literally sitting on the floor of his Barrows Hall dorm room, screaming from the sheer power of this music as the piano and strings pounded out their heavy, angular rhythms over and over again until I thought my head would explode. On marijuana, I also discovered the music of Gustav Mahler, who is still today a composer who speaks volumes to me emotionally and psychologically, perhaps because he, too, was sexually abused.

Then, perhaps because it was the 1960's drug culture, and perhaps because Oberlin was a place of easy drug access, I used every conceivable hallucinogen known. I had just come out publicly as a Gayman on campus, the first man ever in the history of Oberlin to do so, publicly in the class rooms even, demanding of the professors why we were not talking about the sexuality of great Lesbian and Gay authors like Stein or Melville, or great artists like Michelangelo or David Hockney or Andy Warhol, or brilliant composers like Tchaikovsky or Copeland. The professors didn't know what to do of course. They just stood there with dumbfounded looks

on their faces. Prior to me, no one in the classrooms had the audacity to talk about homosexuality.

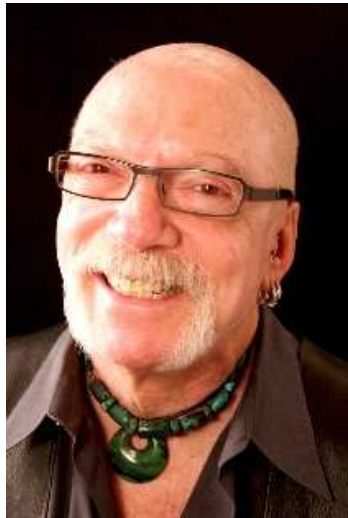
It was John Thompson, Ph.D., in the Psychological Services office, who taught me that I am beautiful and strong in my Queerness. His job was to make me love myself and throw off the dark closet of shame and guilt. He did. And then, after some of the happiest years of my life, I graduated after having lived in London for my junior year and part of my senior year.

The 1970's and early 1980's were the cocaine years, and I stopped the other drugs because cocaine was the Cadillac back then. I suppose it still is among many. And then, in 1983, when I came back to Chicago after having lived in New York City for three years, I stopped using drugs completely for the next 21 years.

Then, because of some unspeakable emotional and psychic pain, I found the dreamland and sexual playground of crystal methamphetamine. Crystal Meth, also called Tina in the Crystal world, was like coming home to a loving family. It was everything I wanted in a drug. It made me forget my pain. It enabled me to have unbridled sex for days on end without stopping, beginning on a Friday

afternoon in sleazy motel rooms with strangers, and ending the following Tuesday morning, when I would stop injecting this poison which I thought was emotional and sexual Heaven. Then I would start again with another needle in my "golden arm" on a Friday, and spend Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday in the bathhouse.

Crystal brought me to my knees, because without exception, that's what it does. I lost everything dear to me, including a loving relationship of thirteen years and my home and family of cats, not to mention my extended family of in-laws. I entered a psychiatric facility because I finally became psychotic and suicidal from the Crystal, and that place enrolled me in a thirty-day lock-down rehab center for substance abuse for LGBT people. I came out of that only to live in a halfway house for drug addicts, but in rehab I entered the world of 12-step recovery work. I lived at Chicago House for



Roger Goodman writes candidly about his struggle with drugs in the years since high school. He is now in his second year of recovery.

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## How Quickly We Become Strangers Again

Justin Brogden, '09

A long bus ride on my way home,  
He sits next to me and I smile,  
We talk just to pass the time a while,  
but for a moment his words make time stop.  
He tells me of his exploits in the Amazon and his fondness for the guitar, I  
dream of him strumming some cords as we sit under the stars.  
But I know that when this bus ride ends how quickly we'll become strangers  
again.

We talked of college,  
We're both in school.  
I told him how Oberlin was a place for the notoriously uncool.  
I imagine us holding hands in Tappan square, Walking through the grass with  
no shoes, our feet bare.  
We talk politics and I tell him my dreams, and for a moment it's like our hearts  
be in sync, our souls flow in the same gentle stream.

The bus ride ends as I arrive home,  
and once again I am alone,  
His words fade away,  
His warmth evaporates in the cold air.  
All that's left is his empty chair.  
I sigh for I know the fantasy is dead,  
the one that had for a brief moment danced in my head.  
As I leave I see him once more,  
I smile slightly but he doesn't notice and heads for the door.  
Maybe in some other life we could have been friends, but how quickly we be-  
came strangers again.



Justin Brogden '09 is a family support specialist for the YWCA of Cincinnati. While at Oberlin, the politics major served on the Student Senate and was a Bonner Scholar. In his sophomore year he received the James Baldwin Humanitarian Award, sponsored by ZAMI and PFLAG Atlanta.

## Lavender Celebration Review (continued)

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The second Cemelli Grant winner is Francesca Krihely '10, who presented "Gentrification & LGBTQ Communities," which examines the effects of gentrification on LGBTQ communities, particularly the displacement of queer people of color in urban spaces. The intention of the project is to educate Oberlin College students on the effects of privilege and oppression and developing strategies for solidarity across communities.

One of the most exciting parts of the celebration was the report that not only is the Donald Downs and Richard Alan Korb Fund fully endowed, but this was the first year that money was distributed. The fund was directly inspired by the OLA Reunion in 2007 and established by life partners Donald Downs, '62 and Richard Alan Korb.

I spoke to the group about my own journey and welcomed the new alums into a community that will last their lifetimes. One of my most poignant moments came a day afterward, when I bumped into one of the moms in Wilder who thanked me for my personal words and for the support that we have provided to her daughter, both directly and indirectly. Lavender Celebration in particular was very helpful to her and her family, who were there for her daughter's graduation, in feeling part of a greater community.

I was truly honored and excited to be there. It was a beautiful event and I was thrilled to be a part of it!!!!

## My Life as a Junkie (continued)

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the next ten months, then getting my own apartment right on Lake Michigan overlooking the Lake where I now live, clean from all drugs, with a new cat family. Murfee and Gizmo are my constant furry companions.

For the past twenty years, I have been teaching Baroque Music at DePaul University, working there even during my short-lived but intense career as a crystal meth addict. I love my teaching. Today, I am clean from drugs. Today, I have a new life. Today, I can feel real joy and love, especially for my students at DePaul, and my friends both in and out of recovery.

Recovery from Crystal Meth is not an easy road. It is painful and fraught with potholes in which to fall, always facing the specter of relapse, but this time, there are recovery friends who "have my back". They watch out for my welfare and my sobriety. They walk with me on my spiritual road in the 12-Step Program.

Recovery has taught me a new way of life, a way filled with honesty and integrity, love and friendship beyond anything that can be fully expressed in words. It is a world of joy and possibility. Recovery is my new Oberlin. Oberlin was

always my place of possibility. Recovery, in my 60's, is that place for me now. In it, I know I can finally find humility in the face of my God who takes care of me and keeps me clean from drugs.

I know that I cannot remain clean alone. It requires a community of like-minded people, and it requires a powerful faith in Something Greater Than Myself to whom I can look for support and strength when I am feeling small and weak. I know that when I cannot do something, faith in my Higher Power can help me achieve that task.

Today, I am a Conductor with whom to be reckoned in the world of Baroque Music and a harpsichordist of great repute. Today, I can love and allow myself to be loved in return in non-abusive ways. Today, I have all possibility in my life as a Queerman living in a hostile straight world. Today, I have strength to live life to the full, teaching and playing, laughing and crying, in the fullness of my humanity and divinity.

*Roger Goodman has been on the OLA steering committee since its inception in 1989. He has performed recitals in major concert halls throughout the United States and Great Britain, including Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, and Wigmore Hall in London. In addition to his work as a musician and teacher, he is a Spiritual Director in private practice.*

Roger invites everyone to  
read his blog  
"Thoughts of a Tribal Elder"  
[queerwitness.blogspot.com](http://queerwitness.blogspot.com)

## Meet Mary Meadows '83, Jude-Laure Denis '88 and Ryan Brazell '05

New OLA Steering Committee Members



Mary Meadows is an attorney in the practice of Social Security disability law in Oberlin, Ohio. In addition to her work as an attorney, Mary is

an ordained minister and has volunteered as a child advocate for abused and neglected children. After graduating from Oberlin with a degree in psychobiology, she received her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and a Master's in Divinity at Duke Divinity School in Durham, NC. She is also mother to nine year old Rose.



Jude Denis is an event marketing specialist who has provided event production services focused on brand building and the bottom line to Fortune 100 companies and institutions. In 2007, Jude left her position as VP of Events and Sponsorship at Merrill Lynch to join the Obama campaign and was a community organizer in PA's Lehigh Valley. She is currently the campaign manager for the mayor of Allentown, PA. While at Oberlin, Jude majored in Government and French.

Ryan Brazell works in the Center for Instructional Technology at University of California-San Francisco. After graduating with a double

major in English and History, he worked in Oberlin's Cooper International Learning Center and volunteered for the MAD Factory. Ryan now lives in Oakland, CA and maintains a professional blog, Language Lab Unleashed ([languageunleashed.org](http://languageunleashed.org)), with his colleagues.



## Cemelli Grant Winner updates *Compiled by Jack Skelton*

Even though Oberlin does not have a Queer Studies department, the academic exploration of Queer issues continues through interdisciplinary programs and self-directed study.

The Andy Cemelli (OC'85) Student Research Grant supports students who do research related to the experience or accomplishments of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and/or transgender people. This grant has been awarded for more than 15 years to Oberlin students and continues to help outstanding students to follow their academic interests beyond the classroom. The class of 2009 winners are no exception. This is how they describe their projects.

### Andrew Spencer '09

AIDS Activism, Education, and Art: The grant allowed me to attend a conference on art and AIDS in New York City and conduct research at the New York Public Library. Through these experiences, I was better able to understand how activism around HIV/AIDS has changed over the years and what art's role has been within the movement. I also learned about a lot of the work that different organizations are doing around HIV/AIDS today.

I began this project with a very specific function in mind: I wanted to create public art that could reach out to young generations who are engaging in unsafe sexual practices. A lot of my research has focused on what makes safe sex messages effective and what the limitations are of various approaches.

Since then, I have become more interested in reaching out to younger generations through education. While my art is still political, [it] no longer [tries] to achieve such specific political outcomes. This whole process has had a tremendous impact on the way I approach both art and activism, and I'm excited to apply the knowledge I have gained towards future projects.

### Emma Anderson '09

The project I have completed with help from the Cemelli grant is my honors thesis in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies, entitled "Beyond Survival: Violence, Performance and Narrative in Queer Young Lives."

In the course of this project I conducted eight interviews with college students who responded to a call for LGBTQ people who had spent most of their adolescence in the Midwest. In these interviews, I asked the participants about the high school or high schools they went to, positive and negative experiences that they had while in high school, about activities they participated in (and refused to participate in), mainstream culture at their schools, and whether or not their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance. After analyzing these interviews, I came to some interesting conclusions about violence and queer identity.

I argue that the degree to which spectacular violence is valued by the media (such as in the cases of Matthew Shepard and Brandon

Teena) necessarily makes this violence a part of the life that queer kids expect to experience.

Additionally, the idea of violence – psychological, social, and physical – asks queer students to participate in normative structures, determined and varied by race, gender, and locality.

### Rufus Nicoll '09

Project: "The Truth About Boarding Schools: Sexuality and Liberal Multiculturalism with the Lights On"

I completed transcribing 10 interviews with boarding school alumni in January and then began the daunting task of coding all 300 pages of transcription for major themes.

Whereas I originally planned to focus on how LGBTQ identified students experienced the regulation of their behavior and identity expression in settings like dormitories, the interviews revealed a far more complex set of questions about the inclusion of LGBTQ discourses within broader discourses on multiculturalism and diversity at boarding schools.

Specifically, I am now interested in how such schools' LGBTQ programming and related institutional policies contribute to marketing strategies that promote images of exceptional tolerance in opposition to boarding school's historical stereotypes as bastions of white elitism.

The interviews suggested that boarding school discourses about LGBTQ tolerance are a developing component of this rebranding.

### Give Generously

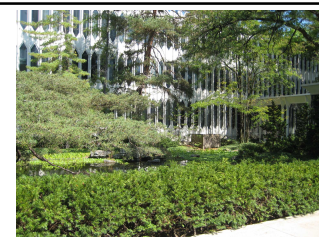
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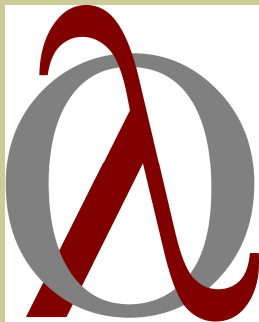
**Your support provides an ongoing Lambda Alumni presence at Oberlin and in the alumni community while also supporting various student, faculty, and alumni activities.**

**Thanks!**



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





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Oberlin Lambda Alumni **thanks you** for your generosity this year.