



# OBERLIN LAMBDA

## *Alumni News*

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND LGBT AFFIRMING ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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### SHARING OUR STORIES

By Ryan Brazell '05, Co-Chair, OLA Steering Committee

**ON BEHALF OF THE OBERLIN LAMBDA** Alumni Steering Committee, I'd like to congratulate the Class of 2011 on their recent commencement and to formally welcome the newest OLA members. Whether you graduated recently or many years ago, we're excited to have you!

Congratulations are also in order for Eric Estes, former director of the Oberlin Multicultural Resource Center, who began his new position as the dean of student life and services upon the retirement of Linda Gates this summer. Working with him over the past several years has been a pleasure, and we wish him the best in his new role.

For more than 20 years, OLA has remained an active part of the Oberlin community through a number of outreach activities, including our annual Lavender Celebration, the Norm Robertson Student Prize, the Andy Cemelli '85 Student Research Grant, this newsletter, and the Oberlin LGBT Community History Project. Started several years ago by Joey Plaster '00, the project contains historical documents, personal essays, interviews, and oral histories from LGBT alumni that cover almost a century (from Leslie "Pratt" Spelman '28 to Harmony Pringle '11). If you haven't checked out the project recently, I encourage you to do so.

This year the United States has made exciting progress on many queer issues, including the legalization of gay marriage in New York, an official repeal of the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, and here in California, the popular election of Victoria Kolakowski, the nation's first openly transgender judge. While we are making progress on many fronts, there is still much work to be done. Too many children are denied the opportunity to have two loving parents; too many teenagers are bullied or harassed every day because they "don't fit in"; too many adults fear the repercussions of being out at work.

Although at times these problems seem enormous, there are small actions we can take to help make the world a better place. Not all queer-identified individuals can be out and proud, but those of us who can have an obligation to make ourselves visible. This can mean donning your best feather headdress and leather chaps at a Pride Parade, volunteering with your local queer community center, or even simply sharing your story. (See the end of this column for links to the LGBT Community History Project and the Oberlin Stories project.) However you choose to do it, spending a few minutes of your time volunteering in the queer community can make a huge difference in someone else's world, perhaps in ways you may never realize.

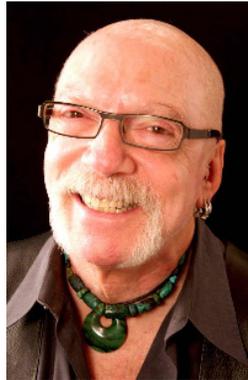
If you're interested in being more involved with OLA specifically, we would love to hear from you! Currently, we are looking for volunteers in three main areas: membership on the Steering Committee, developing content for the next edition of our newsletter, and planning the next Lambda Alumni Reunion (October 11-13, 2013).

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to extend my appreciation to Jason Bribitzer-Stull '95, Chanel Chambers '97, and Mary Meadows '83, who have recently completed terms

# FROM THE ASHES RISEN

By Roger Goodman, M.Div. '68

**I JUST PASSED THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY** of my death and “resurrection.” I have been HIV-positive since the early 1980s and was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS in 1995. On Christmas Eve 1995, as a result of severe opportunistic infection, I slipped into a coma for 10 days and died while in the coma. It was not my time to go, however, and I returned to life again without resuscitation, just as the doctors were about to remove me from the ventilator and turn it off. This was miraculous. Clearly I had more work to do in my life, and resurrection was in order.



For the past 10 years, I have wanted to make a documentary film about what happened in Chicago during the 1980s and 1990s, when our nation lost close to an entire generation of 100,000 exquisite Queermen in what I refer to as our holocaust, lost to institutionalized homophobia on the part of the Reagan-Bush White House administration. According to the media, which denied us a place in AIDS history, nothing of any import happened in Chicago regarding AIDS and HIV when, in fact, we lost thousands of beautiful young gay men in their prime. If we believe the media and the post-holocaust documentaries surrounding what happened back then, only New York, San Francisco, and perhaps Los Angeles were affected by the epidemic.

It is my mission to tell our powerfully heartbreaking and simultaneously uplifting Chicago story of that era, not just of death and destruction, but also of an extraordinary, self-empowered community of love, compassion, altruism, volunteerism, caring, selflessness, and optimistic vision of blindingly beautiful, awe-filled light in what was a terrible, awful darkness. The film will tell the Chicago epic through the stories of 10 Queermen who were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. It is about the making, breaking, and then re-envisioning of a compassionate community of love, loyalty, brotherhood, and sisterhood that has been the manifestation and embodiment of queer spirit since the beginning of humanity. We were a community of life in the midst of a community of death.

The film is entitled *From The Ashes Risen*, not only because of my personal “resurrection,” but also because of that of our community. The image and mythology of the Phoenix is an appropriate symbol and logo of my not-for-profit organization, Tribal Elder Productions. Like the Phoenix, I came back as a far more beautiful bird than I was before my death. And like the Phoenix, the queer community is desperately trying to be reborn out of its own ashes.

I view myself as a “tribal elder,” hence the name Tribal Elder Productions; not just as an oral historian, telling our story as I have experienced it personally and speaking our mythology as we

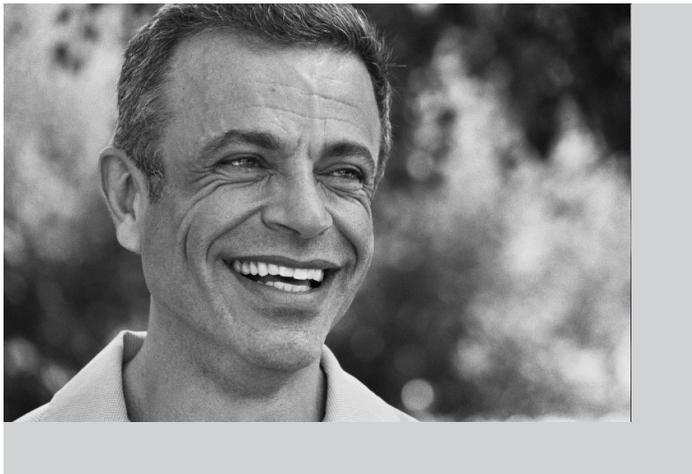
appear in all the mythologies of the world, but also as a custodian of the symbols, rituals, and arts of our culture, which must be kept alive for the next generation of queer youth. I also speak our spirituality and theology as I have unearthed it in my work. My role as a tribal elder is to teach queer youth the myriad of archetypes they carry in their collective unconscious—archetypes not easily accessible to the larger community. My role is also to teach queer youth their heritage so that they become fully adult queers, contributing to the growth of an empathic community of love and compassion, which I had experienced during that terrible time of mourning.

The film is intended to do all of these things, gathering queer youth and tribal elders together, especially the elders who tell the story of our holocaust in Chicago, why that story is unique within the epic of HIV/AIDS in this country, and why Midwest conservatism separated our experience from the more cosmopolitan, liberal experiences of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Struggling through the rampant racism, ageism, classism, sexism, internalized homophobia, and heterosexism that keep our community separated and fragmented, *From The Ashes Risen* will personify the breaking and making of a community of queer spirit that will rise from its own ashes and be even more beautiful, more magnificent, more compassionate, more loving, more altruistic, more empathic than it was even during the death years of the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s.

The paradox that strikes me more than anything else regarding community life and community death is that during those horrible years of darkness, gay spirit flourished and grew into a comforting, extraordinarily powerful, life-affirming force. We took wonderful care of each other when no one else would touch us or care for us. Then in the 1990s when protease inhibitors and the other anti-retrovirals came on the market and the gay body began to thrive again, gay spirit began to die. As body died so spirit lived, and as body lived so spirit died. It is still dead, although slowly it is struggling to re-birth itself. As queer people we are charged with the great task of teaching a world covered by the dark masculine blanket of war, poverty, famine, bigotry, deadly fundamentalism, intolerance, killing of natural resources, materialism, competition, and stifling reclusiveness caused by the continual use of our technological devices, the lessons we have learned from our journey into that same darkness and despair that HIV/AIDS has caused, transforming us back then into a community of Love and everything that the dark masculine is not. This is our charge today from the universe, from the Creator—to remake that connected community of Love that existed during the death years. It is my intention that *From The Ashes Risen* will be transformational and will help bring about a world of peace, hope, nonviolence, good stewardship of creation, and not just tolerance, but the joyous celebration of differences. It is my hope that audiences will leave the theater bigger in heart and spirit than they were upon entering it.

# REMEMBERING ROBERT FRASCINO '74

By Carol Levine '84, former Co-Chair of OLA



**BOB FRASCINO** died suddenly on Saturday, September 17, 2011, after a brief infection overtook him. He was used to battling illnesses, especially with his long-term HIV positive status resulting from a wound incurred while practicing medicine. However, he always won the battles with strength and vigor. Bob was not a loser, but a fervent fighter. That's why this came as such a shock to his friends, family, the Oberlin community, and his loving husband, Steve Natterstad.

Bob Frascino was so many things; above all, he was a man of effervescent personality with a drive to get things done and live life thoroughly and lovingly. He was also a man of many talents: doctor, writer, medical expert, AIDS activist, educator, concert pianist, board member, and philanthropist.

Bob specialized in pediatrics; allergy, asthma, and immunology; and HIV medicine. He founded two medical clinics devoted to people living with HIV and established the Robert James Frascino AIDS Foundation, together with Steve, to provide services

to people living with HIV/AIDS and to raise awareness of the epidemic through education and advocacy. The two men also created the Concerted Effort benefit concert series as their fundraising vehicle, where they used their piano skills to raise funds for the foundation.

For Oberlin, Bob has been a proponent of OLA, bringing the AIDS quilt to Oberlin and sponsoring an AIDS awareness poster project. Most recently, he served as vice chair on the college's board of trustees. He was originally brought to the board as an alumni-elected trustee. He was a tremendous asset to the board and to the stewardship of Oberlin College; he will be sorely missed in that capacity.

Nevertheless, those are things Bob did; he was more than that.

Bob had the deepest, loudest, most guttural laugh. It was infectious. You could hear it from miles away, and it would bring you a smile, inciting you to laugh with him. He lit up any room with his enormous smile and warm eyes. He was a hugger.

Bob's humor was engaging; it was not just for delight, but he used it as an effective communications tool. He could make light of the most contentious situations and help disparate parties find common ground.

His emails were notorious for their detail and humor. I couldn't possibly memorialize it all here, but suffice it to say, Bob and Steve were married in California on Halloween, during that brief period when it was possible in that state. You can just imagine Bob's colorful description of how the impromptu marriage came together, between running back and forth to put quarters in the meter to Bob insisting on dressing like the electoral map. Enough said.

I adored Bob—his friendship, humor, intellect, and inclusive warmth. I'm convinced his presence will remain in unsuspecting ways.

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## FROM THE ASHES RISEN, *cont. from pg. 3*

I have assembled an extraordinary organization with an equally extraordinary board of directors who are completely committed to the film project and to me. I have also engaged a remarkably gifted filmmaker from England who will be the director of photography. An exquisite queer composer has been commissioned to write an original score for the film. My role in the film is to serve not only as president/CEO of Tribal Elder Productions, but also as writer, producer, and director. I invite you to visit [www.fromtheashesrisen.org](http://www.fromtheashesrisen.org) to view the 8½ minute film trailer of archival rushes. The musical score for the trailer has also been written by the composer of the music for the feature-length documentary. My hope is that this will be some of the most moving 8½ minutes you will have ever watched.

My dream of 10 years is becoming a reality. The work that I have been called to do and for which I have come back to life

is being done with a love and passion shared by the board of directors, the film crew, and the support staff. We are all in the midst of raising funds to complete the film. We have applied for grants, and we have approached the private sector. As an Oberlin alumnus, I am asking for your help and support, too. We cannot make the film without your financial and spiritual support. Please donate through PayPal on the film website or send your contribution, payable to Tribal Elder Productions, NFP, to Tribal Elder Productions, c/o Roger Goodman, 6725 N. Sheridan Rd., Suite 304, Chicago, IL 60626-4512. All donations, contributions, and gifts are tax-deductible. Please join our community and help us make this transformational film a reality. You will become a vital part of a great work of Queer history, making the world a better place, not just for the Queer community, but also for the larger community of the world.

# LAVENDER CELEBRATION 2011

By Mary Meadows '83

**THE 2011 LAVENDER GRADUATION**, held on the Saturday of Commencement/Reunion Weekend, welcomed more than 15 seniors, along with dozens of family members and friends, in celebration. The program began with the presentation of the Norm Robertson Student Prize. This year's recipient, Sarah Schrag, completed an independent study project on the violence at the 2008 Queer Sarajevo Festival. Sarah discussed her project, which included conducting interviews with LGBTIQ people, activists, politicians, professors, and students in Sarajevo, using the events surrounding the Queer Sarajevo Festival as an opportunity to analyze issues of human rights, cultural values, tolerance, discrimination, queer visibility, and the politics of difference in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Later in the afternoon, Eric Estes, then director of the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) and then Associate Dean of Academic Diversity, recognized the 2011 Andy Cemelli '85 Student Research Grant awardees: Taylor Johnson '13, Mandy Hogan '14, Chinwe Okona '13, and Julie Christensen '13.

Johnson will study "Studs, Doms, and A.G.s: (Mis)representation of Black Female Masculinity in the Queer Community." Hogan, Okona, and Christensen will use the grant to form an Oberlin Queer Wellness Coalition.

Representing the OLA Steering Committee in congratulating the newest members of OLA was Mary Meadows '83, who shared her own "coming out" as a 40-something, and offered the graduating seniors a gift: a mirror. "The mirror is to remind you that as you move through this world, what will anchor you is knowing who you are as you change and grow," she noted. "And knowing who you are will allow you to stay true to yourself as you encounter the joys and challenges of your life."

Meadows also recognized the alumni present as those who have led the way on issues related to Lambda. Later in the program, during an open sharing, Tucker Farley '61 expressed her gratitude that the culture of Oberlin has shifted over the past 50 years to include the voices of the LGBTIQ people. "It just wasn't like this in 1961," she said with deep emotion.

Meredith Raimondo, associate professor of comparative American studies, toasted the graduates, reminding them that while much has changed, there was more to do. She noted the importance of the family and communities we create to help sustain us on our journey.

The program ended with recognition of the work that Eric Estes has done over the past seven years as director of the MRC, and more broadly, through the college as associate dean of academic diversity. Eric now serves as the new dean of student life and services upon the retirement of Linda Gates. Congratulations to Dean Estes, and to the graduates of 2011!



photos by Greg Pendolino



## Student Awards

**The Norm Roberston Student Prize of \$250** is intended to recognize and spotlight students who have completed outstanding projects of either scholarly research or artistic production/performance that advance communal awareness of issues related to the history, experience, or accomplishments of U.S. and non-U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT) persons. The Robertson prize is co-sponsored by Oberlin Lambda Alumni (OLA) and the Committee on Diversity and Equity. A subcommittee of the Committee on Diversity and Equity oversees the awarding of the prize.

**The Andy Cemelli '85 Student Research Grant**, awarded in memory of Cemelli, provides up to \$750 to support a proposed research project, performance, or acquire training in an area related to the experience or accomplishments of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and/or transgendered people. The award could be used for travel to research sites, acquisition of reference sources, conference travel, performance production, etc. The prize is funded by Oberlin Lambda Alumni and may be used during spring term, summer, or fall term. The successful candidate must agree to produce some product (paper, performance, conference presentation, etc.) that relates to what has been learned or accomplished.

## 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 while also supporting various student, faculty, and alumni activities. Thanks!

Gifts can be made online at <http://www.oberlin.edu/giving/> or by mailing a check to:

The Oberlin Alumni Fund  
Office of Development and Alumni Affairs  
Oberlin College  
50 West Lorain St.  
Oberlin, OH 44074

## SHARING OUR STORIES, *cont. from pg. 1*

on the Steering Committee. All three took very active roles in the organization, and we'll miss their creativity and leadership! Beginning terms on the committee this year are Gareth Fenley '83 and Steve McQuillin '75; I look forward to meeting and working with them both during Alumni Council weekend in September.

Thanks for reading. I sincerely hope you enjoy this edition of the OLA newsletter. Have a wonderful fall!

- Visit the Oberlin LGBT Community History Project at <http://oberlinlgbt.org/>.
- Visit (and contribute) to the Oberlin Stories project at <http://stories.oberlin.edu>.

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## THE END OF DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL

By Jude-Laure Denis '88

**IN JUNE 1987**, when Ronald Reagan declared, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” he couldn’t have imagined that more than 30 years later his words would ring so true. In September 2011, President Obama affixed his signature on the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. And the walls of discrimination began to crumble before our eyes.

That Clinton-era law had codified discrimination against LGBTQ members of the armed forces, and, since the day in 1993 that it was signed into law, forced them to lie about their sexuality or lose their jobs—despite whatever oaths to truth and honor they had taken. During the 17 years that DADT was the law of the land, it drained our military of good men and women who simply wanted to serve their country and destroyed careers that would have otherwise been stellar. Gay-rights organizations fought it with gusto. And I supported that fight unequivocally, believing discrimination in any form is unacceptable.

But in the years of the Obama administration, the gay rights movement changed the conversation about DADT from one of discrimination to one about the administration moving too slowly on the path to repeal. And the tone of that conversation was entitled and petulant, not taking into consideration the slow grind of government and how it works. That tone reminded me of the conversation I often have with other LGBTQ people of color—that a white LGBTQ man or woman is still white. And when I overheard conversations about 17

years being long enough to wait, I must admit my blood boiled a bit as I contemplated that black Americans were first considered 3/5<sup>ths</sup> of a person and that it took more than 200 years for us to be deemed “equal” under the law. That day, I watched President Obama, Speaker Nancy Pelosi at his side and surrounded by folks from our community, trace each letter of his name at the bottom of the repeal, I celebrated without compromise my anger at the presumption of “White privilege” forgiven but not forgotten.

Discrimination cannot be tolerated and must be fought at every juncture. And this past February, when the Obama administration announced that it would no longer defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), it signaled the end of an era, crumbling even more of the walls of LGBTQ discrimination. There is more work to do of course, because DOMA must be repealed. But on this front, that is almost a certainty as both the Justice Department, Senators like Kirsten Gillibrand and President Obama are moving almost in concert towards the same goal.

Still, as we continue to move forward and fight for the rights our Constitution assures us, I challenge all of you to consider this idea of “White privilege,” and how it impacts the LGBTQ community. We are a microcosm of our larger society and often we fail to see that though we are a minority community, we carry some of the same deficits that exist at large.