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OLA NEWS
THE NEWSLETTER OF OBERLIN LAMBDA ALUMNI
Serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and LGBT-affirmative alumni of Oberlin College
FALL/WINTER 1999 VOL. 9, No. 1

**OLA Steering Committee Meeting
October 1-3, 1999
by Bekah Levin, '79**

OLA Steering Committee members met last month for our Fall meeting to do an assessment of our current activities and plan our work for the coming year. We began on Friday afternoon with an excellent presentation by Staci Haines '89 about her work in the field of child sexual abuse survivors learning to enjoy sex [see related article], followed by dinner with five current LGBT students. During our evening meeting, Joey Plaster, '00 met with us to tell us about his current research project, documenting the queer history of Oberlin [see related article]. On Saturday, we covered a lot of ground, with reports about activities subsequent to last Winter's meeting, and plans for activities throughout this year. Topics discussed included the following:

- ♣ OLA's HIV-AIDS Poster Project is coming along, and will be printed and ready by this coming commencement/reunion in May, 2000. The poster will feature the pictures of a number of Oberlin alumni who are HIV positive and living with AIDS, with a clear message for students to take care of their health.
- ♣ OLA's first Lavender Commencement was discussed [see related article] and plans for this coming year's lavender commencement/symposium were begun.
- ♣ Efforts to reach out to LGBT alumni who are people of color are underway and there are some new alumni who indicate interest in learning about OLA's activities.
- ♣ Regional events are becoming a greater part of the OLA activity docket, with a highly successful event having taken place this past September in NYC. Over 100 people attended an evening party at the Soho loft of Walter Brown, partner of Larry Wexler, '72. Other regional activities are planned for Minneapolis, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston.
- ♣ Tori MacReynolds '99, the new LGBT Community Coordinator, gave us an update on queer

campus activities. The week of October 4 -11 was Oberlin's Coming Out Week for the queer community and included discussions about coming out to parents, queerness within religion, and privilege in the white community and how that effects coming out; a "Safer Sex, Saner Sex and Sexual Health" workshop; movies; a coffee house by Zami (the queer people of color organ-ization); a social hosted by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Union (LGBTU); a picnic hosted by Queers and Allies of Faith; and a drop-in center for students who want to discuss issues related to coming out and being queer.

♣ Five students met with us to talk about their concerns re: LGBT life at Oberlin. In particular, they were looking for support in getting some sort of queer academic designation (a queer department, major, minor, concentration) and a queer program dorm. One student presented a letter that he had written, documenting his and a number of his friends' frustration at what he described as LGBTU's lack of openness to diversity of membership from students who are not white, wealthy folks. A long discussion ensued, with OLA members voicing their concern about the situation and a willingness to continue to meet with whichever students want to have contact with us. We also made it clear that this problem is not confined to OC, but indeed is reflective of the larger LGBT community.

Sunday's meeting was busy as well, with a number of important current activities presented and planned including:

- ♣ Safer Sex kits are being put together, in conjunction with the President's office, to be given to all entering first year students this coming September.
- ♣ An endowment campaign to support the Robertson Prize and Cemelli Grant will be undertaken this Winter.

Gay Marriage OLA Style

Becky Liddle '79 and Kathy Hines '89, who met through their work on the OLA steering committee, were married in Oberlin on June 5. Talcott Hall was "wedding central" during the weekend-long celebration, as friends & family moved in to relive their dorm days. A joyful and eclectic ceremony, performed by Rev. Anne Cohen '77, was held in Fairchild Chapel. Guests then returned to Talcott where they signed the rainbow flag "guestbook" and enjoyed an evening of dinner, dancing, card games, and front porch conversation. Although Kathy threw a bouquet, Becky passed up the traditional garter belt throw in favor of something more appropriate -- a tool belt. It was caught by the best man, John Smith '88.

Oberlinians participating in the ceremony included Ginny Liddle '47; Gordon Liddle '47; Roger and Susie Liddle '77 & '79; and Roz Galtz, Lisa Murray, and Kristin Andersen Rubin, all '89. Also in attendance were Midge Brittingham (OLA steering committee member & Alumni Association Director) and Jan Cooper (professor of expository writing and longtime OLA ally).

The couple honeymooned at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC before returning to their home in Auburn, AL where Becky is an Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology and Kathy is working on a sociology master's thesis dealing with homophobia. Kathy's new last name is Liddle.

New Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Coordinator on Campus

Tori Irene McReynolds '99, has been appointed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Coordinator in the Multicultural Resource Center for the 1999-00 academic year. Tori will have the responsibility for assessing and addressing the specific cultural/social/political needs and concerns of LGBT students while also working with other students who belong to historically disenfranchised or marginalized communities, which include or are not limited to Asian American, African American, Latino/a, Native American, and multiracial communities as well as first-generation and low-income college students.

Tori is half African American and half Puerto Rican. She was born in Newark, Ohio, and spent most of her youth in Prince George's County, Maryland, where she graduated from Queen Anne School. While at Oberlin, Tori was a Spanish major, a Third World House resident, and she was active in the LGBT, Latino/a, and African American communities. She also had the opportunities to study in Puerto Rico and in Mexico.

This past October, Tori helped arrange the events for National Coming Out Week. Roger Goodman '68, was featured in a presentation about his experiences as Oberlin's first out gay man and as a person living with AIDS. She also engaged Lani Ka'ahumanu as keynote speaker for National Coming Out Day (Oct.11). She organized with students a week of activities in addition to the two events which included a discussion on how to come out to one's parents co-facilitated by a student and the president of PFLAG, Columbus, safer sex workshops, a picnic and bonfire, a coffeehouse for LGBT people of color, and more. Pride Week this year (April 9 - 15) will begin after Drag Ball on April 8 (another of Tori's projects for the year).

Lavender Commencement & Symposium for 1999 by Bekah Levin '79

On a spectacular Saturday afternoon during this past year's commencement, the Oberlin Lambda Association, in conjunction with the Multicultural Resource Center and the LGBT Community Coordinator for 1998-99, Angela Nichols, held its first Lavender graduation ceremony. Approximately 75 students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff attended the fete, at which 15 self-identified LGBT graduating students were honored with certificates, OLA t-shirts and rainbow tassels along with the invitation to remain involved in Oberlin as alumni through the Oberlin Lambda Association.

Another highlight of the afternoon was a presentation by Corey Dargel who received the Norm Robertson Prize for a completed project. Corey's project was a public performance of his piece, **at least remain silent** [see accompanying article]. The presentation was both informative and moving, and gave students, parents and alumni a sense of the

exciting queer activities that happen on the campus. Jessica Powers was the winner of the Andrew Cemelli grant that provides up to \$750 for one or more juniors, seniors, or fourth or fifth-year double degree students to support research or artistic production or performance in some area related to the history, experience or accomplishments of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people. Jessica's grant was to support her continuing research documenting the experiences of people who have gay parents, was unable to attend the Lavender Commencement. Jessica was studying in Prague during the second semester and returned to the campus this fall, and thus was unable to attend the Commencement / Symposium.

Following the Lavender Commencement and Corey's presentation, OLA hosted a reception outside in the Warner Center Plaza, which was a great opportunity for LGBT alumni to catch up with old friends and make new connections. If you happen to be in the neighborhood next commencement weekend, stop by for the 2nd Annual Lavender Graduation and OLA Symposium, Saturday, May 27th, 2000.

Author Staci Haines Speaks at Oberlin by Elyssa Faison '88

On October 1, OLA member Staci Haines ('89) spoke to a Wilder Hall audience of over forty Oberlin students, staff and faculty about her recently published book, *The Survivor's Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Child Sexual Abuse* (Cleis Press). While a student at Oberlin, Haines organized the campus's first incest survivor's group, and formed a student activist group to deal with inadequacies in the college's response to rape on campus. Now a trained sex educator, former manager of San Francisco's Good Vibrations, and the founder of the Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Action Project, she sees herself acting as a bridge between the world of survivors and the world of sex-positive educators. She visited Oberlin as part of a national tour to promote her new book.

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An OLA Angel Lands on the Steering Committee

by Bekah Levin '79

At the recent OLA Steering Committee Meeting, one of our newest steering committee members announced a fabulous and most generous challenge gift. Herb Zeman '65, a professor of biomedical engineering at University of Tennessee, is going to match at 50% any gift made to OLA at the \$100 or greater level, up to a total of \$3000 through 3/31/00. Though the suggested dues for OLA membership is only \$40, Herb is hoping that this challenge grant will encourage alumni and friends who have the financial ability to support OLA at a higher level to do so. Herb stated, "OLA is able to accomplish a tremendous amount, with a minuscule budget. This should help the association reach out to a wider group of alumni across the U.S. as well as strengthen our ability to support LGBT students, staff and faculty on campus." So for all of you who have been waiting for a way to make your contribution to Oberlin go further, here is your opportunity. If you already make an annual contribution to the college and want to target it for OLA, you may. Or, we're sure that the College wouldn't mind if you were to make a contribution to OLA on top of your current College gift.

OLA Regional Events

by Jim Harrington '73

A highly successful OLA gathering was held in September in the New York City in the Soho loft of Walter Brown, partner of Larry Wexler, '72. The party was organized by Doug Cooper, '50, Larry, Jay J. O'Neill, '90, Jordan Balter, '89, and Jim Harrington, '73. Doug did the lion's share of the work, making certain that all details were covered. More than 100 members of OLA and some friends were in attendance at the cocktail party. The response by those in attendance was extremely positive, and future events (cultural and social) will be planned. Jay J. O'Neill will be coordinating these events with Doug. Congratulations to all who attended and to those who planned the NYC party!

The Twin Cities alumni held a gathering that featured alumnus Allan Spear. More details will follow in the next OLA newsletter. Other



regional events are being planned for the spring in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago. OLA members from these cities who would like to help organize, please contact Jim Harrington at: harringt@wilkes.edu or (800) 945-5378, extension 4428, or at (570) 820-9631.

Attention OLA Members of Color

by John Young '83

The OLA Steering Committee is actively seeking OLA members of color to serve on the Steering Committee. One of the goals of the Steering Committee is to have diverse views and

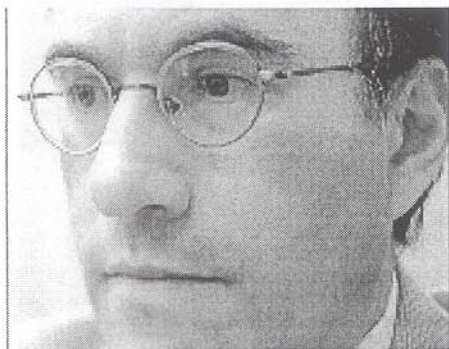
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Members of Color

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opinions represented on the committee which reflect the diversity of OLA. So if you are interested in contributing to OLA and being a force within the larger Oberlin community, LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD! Steering Committee membership does not require an inordinate amount of time and you get the opportunity to visit your beloved alma mater twice a year. So send your statement of interest to either Jim Harrington at: harringt@wilkes.edu address: 68 Jefferson Lane, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701 or Zoe Sherinian at 114 Ruby Street, Lancaster, PA 17603. We look forward to hearing from you.



New OLA Steering Committee Member

HERB ZEMAN '65 graduated from Oberlin with a major in Physics. He graduated magna cum laude with high honors in physics. He became a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi his senior year. Herb spent only three years at Oberlin to get his AB because he received advanced placement credit in Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, and English for his work at Teaneck High School, in Teaneck, New Jersey. After Oberlin, Herb received his MS (1966) and PhD (1972) degrees in physics from Stanford University.

Herb has been involved in lesbian/gay political activities since 1980, when he helped found the Palo Alto Coalition for Equal Rights (PACER) which worked towards passing a gay rights ordinance in the city of Palo Alto, CA. He was also involved in organizing a Guest Event Team for the Advocate Experience on the

San Francisco Peninsula. Herb presently is an Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Radiology at the University of Tennessee, Memphis (UTMe). He is the only out LGBT professor in the Joint Program in Biomedical Engineering of UTMe and the University of Memphis. Herb was involved in the Memphis Gay Community Center, and the Memphis Lambda Chorus, while they were in existence. Herb is now a member of the Memphis Pride Committee and gets his musical enjoyment by singing in the Memphis Symphony Chorus as a Second Tenor.

OLA Needs You to Volunteer by Zoe Sherinian '84

OLA coordinates a continually growing list of volunteers to do many essential tasks. Presently we need to expand this list in order to invigorate regional activities and create a feeding system for potential steering committee members. We need your help to do the following: organize regional events in major cities in order to expand OLA membership and raise funds for OLA projects (this is also a great way to meet like-minded queer obies); help develop OLA membership; write articles for the newsletter; and do smaller but essential tasks like writing thank you notes. Let us know today any way small or large that you can contribute and bring us creative ideas. Contact the volunteer coordinator Zoe Sherinian '84' at Z_Sherinian@acad.fandm.edu or (717) 291-4012 and thank you for seriously considering giving a little of your time and effort towards supporting queer students, professors, alumni and queer studies at Oberlin.

ZOE SHERINIAN '84 is Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at Franklin and Marshall College (F & M) in Lancaster, PA. Her dissertation is entitled *The Indigenization of Tamil Christian Music: Folk Music as a Liberative Transmission System* (Wesleyan University 1998). She worked closely with Christian untouchables in South India (where she had been a Shansi representative) researching liberation theology and the politics of musical style. Before taking her position at Franklin and Marshall this fall she taught at Harvard, Tufts, Northeastern, Oberlin, and Wesleyan. Last year she had a unique opportunity to teach a 27 year old Princess in Saudi Arabia and observe women's culture

there. She continues to play jazz drumset and South Indian classical percussion, and she plans to start a steel band at F & M.

LGBT Program Hall Proposed by Alex Kwanten '00

The LGBT program hall has been in the works for some months now. Student Alex Kwanten first raised the idea last February and then wrote the formal proposal along with former-LGBTU co-chairs Alexis Eastman and Marissa _____ and another student, Rich Naples. Alexis and Alex then took the proposal to Residential Life and Services and submitted it to the Housing and Dining Committee, where it was unanimously approved. In the current process of creating a Program hall, proposals are supposed to pass from Housing and Dining Committee to the Dean of Student Life, to the Student Life Committee (SLC), and then to the General Faculty. After the Housing and Dining Committee, Alex came down with mono and was consequently constrained to the sidelines of the proposal process. Somewhere between Housing and Dining and SLC, the proposal was tabled. Last semester, the explanation was that a review of all program halls would be conducted before a new one was created, but this semester, the explanation has changed. Alex recently met with the new Dean of Student Life, Peter Goldsmith, who told him that the proposal had merely been temporarily tabled to give him time to look at it, as Deb McNish (last year's Acting Dean) had resigned to take a position at Earlham and he did not take over the position until June. Regardless, after the explanation that the program halls would be reviewed, Alexis and Alex both assumed that the proposal had come to a semi-permanent halt. A month ago, another Student named Ireta Kraal wrote an article in the Oberlin Review asking for input on why the proposal had disappeared. Since the appearance of that article (and two that followed it) Alex has been working to force the issue and get it into SLC. Goldsmith is very eager to help and would like to see the hall happen.

Alex has asked to have OLA's help in creating this hall and the programming it would sponsor. He will soon be sending letters to the Review and the LGBTU mailing list regarding information about the hall and on the open forum about continuing the process of approval that will likely happen in November.



Staci Haines

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"I really did a lot of my own recovery work while at Oberlin," says Haines, herself a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. "Taking classes in sociology and women's studies while I was a student here gave me the social and historical context I needed to see that I wasn't the only one going through this. That gave me the courage to heal, and the desire to try and make a difference for other people."

Haines advocates a somatic approach to healing that "assumes that the body, mind, and emotions are one interconnected biological system." Sex, she argues, is a fundamental human drive that offers enjoyment and empowerment, but for so many survivors of childhood molestation, it is also the site of trauma. "Once you begin to reclaim and re-embody sexually, you can enter the place of trauma and relinquish its control over you." Embodiment (being present and feeling the sensations in your body) is the opposite of the kind of dissociation or "checking out" many survivors learned as a coping strategy during their abuse. Her book and her workshops offer practical steps for recognizing dissociation and moving towards embodiment and a fuller, more empowered sex life.

"People who are queer and have experienced sexual abuse can have an even more complicated relationship to the process of healing," she noted. "Our sexualities are already targeted and seen as perverse, so for survivors, the internalized shame can be even more intense." There are also social stereotypes to be confronted. For example, men who have been abused as boys by other males are often assumed to be gay. Similarly, lesbians sometimes face assumptions that their sexual orientation is a result of the trauma of sexual abuse. Says Haines, "Sexual abuse doesn't make you gay, although it does affect the way you relate to your sexuality. One in three girls, and one in six boys, are victims of childhood sexual abuse in this country. As one of the many women survivors quoted in my book so poignantly noted, if sexual abuse made you gay, 66% of American women would be dykes."

After an engaging question and answer period with the audience, Haines joined OLA steering committee members and LGBT students for an informal dinner in Stevenson dining hall. Afterwards she met with Oberlin student

activists involved in carrying on the incest survivors support and advocacy work that she began over ten years ago.

You can buy copies of *The Survivor's Guide to Sex* at your local bookstore, or directly from the publisher online at www.cleispress.com. The website also provides a schedule of upcoming lecture and workshop appearances by Staci Haines. Tour dates for the spring include Los Angeles, New Orleans and Austin, with others to be added.

composer corey dargel receives funds from the andy cemelli grant and the norm robertson prize

at least remain silent is best described as a "premeditated recital" which presents and combines the words of frank o'hara and the music of j.s. bach, corey dargel, the indigo girls, r.e.m., and morrissey. i wrote *at least remain silent* in collaboration with my best friend, conductor, miguel felipe, and soprano michael maniaci. all of us identify as queer, and we wanted to make music which could embody our experiences. what we created was a quiet, introverted portrait, a litany for the silenced voices of queer people who have felt the need to keep their queer identity hidden.

i thank the oberlin lambda alumni for the andy cemelli research grant, which was used to bring the performers to oberlin. it was a sublime experience for me to share this music with the oberlin community. i am also grateful for the norm robertson prize, which will help to fund a recording in the near future. the support of the o.l.a. is an encouragement which is greatly appreciated.

yours,
corey dargel

**Oberlin Queer History
by Joey Plaster '01**

Hello. I am a second-semester junior history major and have begun a private reading project on the history of (queer) sexuality on the Oberlin campus from its founding in 1833 until the aftermath of the Oberlin Gay Liberation Front in the mid seventies. I will be focusing on three major themes: everyday acts of resistance, formation of identities and communities, and administrative and faculty response. I became

interested in this project after interning at the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society (GLHS) in San Francisco over the summer. While there, I spent some time talking with Gerard Koskovich who has written a history of gay and lesbian people at Stanford. I was also housed by several alumni on the "Out List" (which I am very grateful for!). Hearing their stories as well as working with the GLHS inspired me to begin this project.

For the next two semesters, I'll be making use of the Oberlin archives, the Review and other publications, administrative records, Cleveland and Oberlin history texts and most importantly, oral histories. This is one way the Lambda Alumni can help me. I am very interested in conducting oral histories over the phone or via email with alumni graduating around and before the mid-seventies. I am especially interested in conducting oral histories with women, people of color, trans folk, and people from working class backgrounds, as those voices are so often underrepresented and marginalized in the writing of queer history.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to interview OLA steering committee members Jim Harrington ('73), Roger Goodman ('68), Herb Zeman ('65), Zoe Shirinian ('84), and Bekah Levin ('79). Considering the relatively short time I spent speaking with these alumni, a comparatively vast amount of queer history was uncovered, most of which was not even hinted at in "Into the Fink", the oral history compilation put together in 1991. The stories the steering committee told about drag names, (unofficial) gay houses and halls, outrageous camp, Cleveland bathhouses, rumor mills in the Conservatory, gay jokes ("Q: How do you separate the men from the boys in the Conservatory? A: With a crowbar!"), code words, and in-your-face queer politics (in 1965!) excites me to record other stories that have not been told. These stories are important to the future of the queer community, specifically the Oberlin queer community, as a movement can not be effective without an understanding of its history. It is essential that young queer people today and in the future hear these stories, both good and bad, in order to form identities and communities and to resist and transform our culture.

If you are interested in being interviewed or have questions about the project, contact Joey at sjb51060oberlin.edu, or at OCMR 2090, Oberlin College, 44074.



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A L U M N I N O T E S & N E W S

Gay Parents

by Jessica Powers,

a recipient of the Andy Cemelli Grant

My mom discovered more than twenty years of a hidden gay identity (love letters, erotica, photographs) zipped up in my father's tattered blue gym bag. Since that gym bag was unzipped five years ago, I have talked to other adult children of queer parents to explore common and uncommon passions, struggles, and comedies. The culturally and sexually queer children of lesbians and gays that I have interviewed have experienced harassment from peers; the death of a father and other role models from AIDS; bitter custody disputes; and being the son of lesbian separatists. In the past ten years, there has been a surge of deliberately created queer families. Today, there are hundreds of turkey baster toddlers teetering around. I have talked to some of the first turkey baster babies (they have grown out of the teetering), children who grew up in the gay liberation movement of the 70s, queer children of queer parents, and children raised by closeted parents. Through my interviews, I seek to explore how our parents' ideas, politics,

and identities have influenced our lives. Here are some quotes from my interviews:

"My mother really took me places so there were a lot of festivals and a lot of concerts or a lot of meetings and stuff like that. It just seemed natural. I mean, I was four and I grew up with the fact in mind that everybody had at least three moms. And then growing up, it began to piece together: 'Wait a minute. I'm the only one with three moms.' Nobody told me that."
Kate, 19

"When I was fifteen, I was already out marching in the Gay Pride Parades, which was in Texas in 1979... so there were only like eight people marching. Coming out to my mom, I thought that I was coming up with this whole new idea that she had never thought of...I'm coming out to you, I'm queer...thinking, assuming that that would be the first time that she ever thought about it on a personal level. It wasn't until a couple years later that she informed me that she dated women while I was growing up."
Mattie, 32

"There have been conflicts being male, raised by two lesbians in a mostly lesbian woman's community. As soon as I turned five or six, I stopped being allowed in to women's' only events. And that was, like, that was really really hurtful to me for a long time. I think that's a huge problem, because I totally see the need for womens' only space, and even lesbian only space. But there's this constant conflict between, you know: are we, are gays and lesbians one movement, or are they two movements along the same path, but really needing different things? I get so angry that people judge me because I have a penis."
Ray, 21

"My father was involved in Dade County Florida. There was that whole Anita Bryant orange juice thing. As a kid, for me it was the orange juice thing--or the milk thing. When I heard about Harvey Milk being killed, I thought of milk. I mean, I didn't really understand. I think that happens a lot for kids, that they don't ask questions, they just make up stories for themselves."
Zoe, 33