



NEWS

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

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Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Steve Silberman '79, Contributing editor, Wired magazine

We achieve, we aspire; we laugh we cry; we create and we share. The following is an interview with Steve Silberman '79.

Describe your current career/ life situation.

For the last ten years or so, I've been a writer for *Wired*, a glossy magazine that I usually describe as a magazine about the intersection of science, technology, and culture, owned by the same folks who publish *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*. My first article for the magazine, back before the Web existed, was about gay and lesbian teenagers building community online. My own personal favorite was a profile of the neurologist/author Oliver Sacks – if you Google my name and Oliver Sacks' name, you'll find it.

Two summers ago, I married my sweetheart of ten years, Keith Karraker, a bright, sweet, and adorable science teacher from the Midwest. We got married six months before the mayor of San Francisco started handing out marriage licenses to gay couples, and it was a wonderful event, with several Obies in attendance, as well as our families and many friends. We had a very joyous ceremony – with an exchange of rings, dinner for 110 people, dancing, and everything but a legal license—that gained added significance when my father passed away suddenly several months after our ceremony. My dad was in his glory at our

wedding; he gave the only political speech.

Keith and I live in a very friendly and peaceful little neighborhood in San Francisco, near the Haight-Ashbury, called Cole Valley. I've lived here for 25 years.

How did your Oberlin experience affect your path/ choice?

For me, Oberlin was as much a social education as an academic one. Many of my most important lessons there were learned in the kitchen and dining room of Harkness, and in the rooms and lounges of Tank and Fairchild. My psych professor, John Thompson, had an enormous impact on me by giving me permission to always tell the truth; and my English professor, David St. John, had an equally decisive effect on my life by suggesting that I go to Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado during the summer between my sophomore and junior years to study with the poet Allen Ginsberg. The dogged pursuit of wisdom and honesty, and the passion for social justice, that I learned among my peers at Oberlin is the foundation of both my writing and my stance in the world.

What obstacles did you face on your path?

One of the main obstacles I faced after I got out of school turned out to be mostly an illusion. The leading-edge Baby Boomers – the generation about ten years older than my peers -- had been so



Steve and his partner, Keith

successful at making themselves visible in the world, and generating their own innovative forms of cultural expression, I went through my 20s believing that there was nothing left for my generation to do. Music? Dylan and the Beatles already did it all, sorry. Politics? How Sixties! Literature? What was there left to say after Ginsberg's "Howl" other than, "Me too, dude?"

Then the Internet came along, which changed everything so fast we're still figuring out what it all means, and gave a huge shot in the arm to innovation, improvisation, and community.

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Introducing Joe Blitman '71, OLA's Newest Steering Committee Member

JOE BLITMAN was born in New Jersey, and raised in that state as well as in New York, Nevada and North Carolina. While at Oberlin, Joe majored in English, was co-director of the Oberlin Resistance (a group that sponsored anti-war activities and promoted draft resistance) and Vice President of the Student Senate. A

perennial packrat, Joe accumulated a huge collection of papers and other memorabilia documenting the anti-Vietnam War years on campus and later donated them to the Oberlin Archives, where they still remain, presumably gathering dust. After an 11-year break from classes, Joe went back to school at the University of Southern California Law Center, but dropped out before graduating to write screenplays.

Joe is known internationally as a Barbie doll expert, author and dealer. His articles have appeared in *Doll*

Reader, Barbie Bazaar, Haute Doll and Miller's Fashion Doll Collector magazines. He has authored three standard reference books on the Barbie doll family: *Barbie and Her Mod, Mod, Mod, Mod World of Fashion, Francie and Her Mod, Mod, Mod, Mod World*



of Fashion and Vive La Francie. He produced, wrote and starred in a best-selling hour-long video, *Joe Blitman's Oh You Beautiful Doll: featuring Barbie.*

Joe is the co-owner of Joe's, a thriving internet and mail order business that sells new and vintage Barbie dolls, clothing and accessories, as well as other fashion and celebrity dolls (www.joeslist.com). Joe's has been in business since 1989. He also co-produces a series of fashion doll shows/sales throughout the United States. He co-starred with Leeza

Gibbons in Mattel's "Barbie as Scarlett O'Hara" infomercial, and has been featured as a Barbie expert on CBS Morning News, CNN Headline News, 20/20, Leeza, Personal F/X, Biography, Treasures in Your Home, the Roseanne talk show "E", MTV and countless U.S., European, Australian and Japanese documentaries and newscasts about Barbie. Joe has presented multi-media programs on Barbie at many national and regional Barbie Doll Conventions and at international fashion doll conventions in France, Canada and Germany.

Joe lives with his partner of 27+ years, Kevin Mulligan (Wesleyan '72) in Hollywood, California in a pale pink Mediterranean-style home friends have named "Barbie's Dream Villa."

Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Steve Silberman '79 (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Over time, I realized that the world always seems "fallen" and sucky to alert young people who don't fit into the mainstream. The pain that causes you, the community you build any way you can to keep yourself sane, and the crafts you learn to help heal the societal illnesses of your era, become the foundations of your Real Work. When you find your real work, you'll discover that there is no one else alive who can do what you were born to do, and that it's never been done before. In an age when George Bush is reelected because millions of Americans believe he's "sincere, straightforward, and resolute," there is plenty of healing work left to be done.

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

Annie Dillard, the author of one of my favorite books, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, once said that to become a painter, you have to be in love with the smell of paint. To be a writer, you have to be in love with words—with the sensuous music of phonemes, and the weighting of phrases and

sentences. You have to read books with the thirst of a man or woman in the desert who thinks there might be a source of water over the next dune. If the main thing you love about being a writer is the notion of getting published quickly to a wide audience, you have a promising career ahead of you as a hack. If you truly love words, and you employ that love to examine the world and your own mind more closely, you may become a real writer.



What makes you happy?

The secret pleasures of craft and the public pleasures of speaking the truth and moving the world forward a millionth of an inch; the music of Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Bach, Joni Mitchell, Radiohead, Nick Drake, David Crosby, and dozens of others who create beauty for the most subjective, intelligent souls of those who are drawn to listen; the hugs and respect of my friends; and the love and patience of my dear husband, Keith. Being alive on the Earth for a few years is miracle enough to keep me happy most days.

**Steve
Silberman '79**

**Feel free to
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with your
thoughts and
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My June Wedding

By Leslie Lawrence '72

Like most girls born in the Fifties, my earliest images of marrying a handsome prince in a golden silk tunic and dancing until dawn in a torch-lit ballroom eventually gave way to more contemporary images. First, to marrying a handsome doctor-in-training in a tux and dancing until dawn in a country club. Then, to marrying a handsome draft resister, doctoral student, or furniture maker in a Nehru, tweed or lumber jacket and dancing until dawn in a rambling old farm house or under a big tent on the beach. Approaching thirty, I had matured enough to accept that my man might be handsome only to me; I allowed that mid-vow I might notice an irritating stain on his shirt and that there would be a thunderstorm and the tent would leak. Yet, even then, I could never have imagined that the only man at my wedding would be my fourteen-year-old son Sam, in sneakers and a shirt in need of some serious ironing. That no other blood relatives would be there; that my father would not walk me down the aisle; that there would be no aisle, no rabbi or reverend, no *chuppah* or veil or glass to smash. No music. No dancing. That the whole thing would take place in a municipal building on a weekday afternoon, postponed from the previous day because the person I was marrying had to go into the hospital—and this part is not amusing—for complications from the cancer she's had for six years. Yes, Reader, I married her.



We met when I was thirty-two and have been together now for or twenty-one years. During the last few, I'd grown accustomed to hearing about commitment ceremonies for gays and lesbians, about "weddings" performed in progressive churches and synagogues, and even to photos of the newlyweds in mainstream papers. Still, I could never have imagined that legal, state-sanctioned marriage between same sex couples would be an option in my lifetime, as indeed it did become on May 17th, 2004 in the State of Massachusetts. More unfathomable still would have been the notion that I, a romantic at heart, someone passionately attached to family and religious traditions; an exasperating, hair-splitting perfectionist who can always find something amiss in every occasion—would find my humble June wedding entirely satisfying. In fact, it made me very happy.

How to account for this? I've finally grown up.

I was already filled-to-the-brim by three preceding events. In April I'd stood in the golden-domed State House with hundreds of other gay and lesbian parents and their children as one by one those children (some amongst them teens I'd known as toddlers) made poised, impassioned arguments for why their parents should be allowed to marry. In early May the university

where I teach offered free pre-marital blood tests, but not only that—cake and champagne, boas and top hats; they sent us off in a shower of confetti and with containers of wedding bubbles as party favors. Then, on the Sunday night of May 16th, my own City of Cambridge opened its main office building at around 10 p.m. so that at the stroke of midnight it would be the first in the nation to hand out applications for marriage licenses to same sex couples. Picture this:

Massachusetts Avenue is blocked off to traffic. Approaching by foot, we see media trucks and T.V. cameras; across from City Hall, a dozen or so sign-carrying protestors, but on our side a huge crowd of—yes—supporters, gay and straight. I'm thrilled and disappointed. We're too late, I think. We'll never get even close. But then we reach the corner, someone asks if we're there for a license, and suddenly the Red Sea parts. That's how it feels to me—in a biblical frame of mind, I guess. A stranger hands us flowers. Swept up the many steps by a wave of cheering, we reach the lobby where we receive our number, 211. We fly up another flight to where we are greeted by friends. My emotion surprises me. Living in a progressive city, coming from a loving family, I've rarely if ever experienced overt oppression or even negativity, but now I understand how for two decades I've been longing, not just for tolerance, but for approval and—yes—celebration! Getting both now, I find myself sobbing in my friend's arms.

Since it takes a very long time for 210 couples to fill out applications, at around 12:30 AM, Sandy and I walk back out the front door without one. Nonetheless, flashing cameras from Britain, Germany and CNN blind us. The crowd cheers. More flowers. Wedding cookies. Even a bag of freebies from a local bank courting new business! It's almost too much. I feel like Princess Diana (in a royal frame of mind, after all, I guess). Could any wedding match this! I think, none of the ticklish ironies escaping me. But really, it's more than the glamour and fifteen minutes of fame that move me so. It's that our supporters include such a rich mix of people, all feeling triumphant over this historic human rights victory.

Most women have their hair done before they get married, I'm having mine done afterwards. How I enjoyed sharing this realization with friends, so emblematic it was of how zany this wedding was going to be. Even after the 17th, we could hardly believe somebody wouldn't call a halt to it all, and by then we were so damn busy finishing our teaching, subletting our house for the summer, packing Sam's trunk for camp, adding a codicil to our will, buying film and sunscreen for a long-anticipated trip to Italy, unwittingly allowing our blood test to lapse so that we had to get another—all this with Sandy feeling rotten from her chemo treatments. I must admit there were days when getting married felt like one more chore to cross off the list; still, much as we would have liked the leisure to do it right, given the uncertainty in our lives, and in all of our lives these post 9/11 days, we felt we should do it before Italy. In the end, because of our one-day postponement, I *did* get my hair done beforehand; even so, I'm sure the last minute, makeshift nature of the event played a role

My June Wedding (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

in my pleasure in it. With no time to fashion new fantasies, I had none against which the reality could fall short.

Of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't say just a little about what my actual wedding ceremony *did* have:

- An attractive, dignified setting in the City Council Chambers
- Four stupendous friends who cancelled plans the same day to be there and weep
- Four fabulous bouquets

Truth and Beauty both—in a lovely statement about the real challenges of long-term relationships. It was written by a city clerk for the many veteran couples who wanted to honor our shared past as well as their future. Her words were delivered with such warmth and sincerity by another city clerk who told us how moved she'd been by the depth of love she'd witnessed in the dozens of ceremonies she'd performed in past weeks. All of this only added to the perfect—well—wedding I felt between my own small self and the community in which I lived.



Once when Sam was about ten and we were talking about the difference between biographies and autobiographies, he declared that *he* could never write the auto kind. Why not? "Because," he said, "there's nothing unusual about me."

I know he feels this way still. As for his two moms marrying... More than once in the preceding week he said, "I don't understand what the big deal is." I'm sure he was confounded by all the weeping. Nevertheless, he got into the spirit of the thing. Reaching into his pocket just seconds

after our *I Do*'s, he pulled out that plastic party favor I'd kept as a souvenir. He unscrewed the cap; then waving the white plastic wand, filled the staid council chambers with dozens of tiny, iridescent bubbles.

Leslie can be contacted at:
leslie.lawrence@tufts.edu

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? It may not be quite the same as when we were Oberlin students talking in the dorm, the Student Union, a co-op kitchen, the Con lounge, a cafeteria, (or wherever it was that you used to have discussions at Oberlin), but the new 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@yahoo.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>

Transgender Issues on Campus

By Diana Roose, Assistant to the President of Oberlin College

Being transgender at Oberlin College has become a bit easier in the past few years. At the request of the President's Task Force on Diversity, College offices have examined their policies and practices related to transgender students. The MRC (Multicultural Resource Center) has been exceptionally active in promoting education and sensitivity about trans issues for students, faculty, and staff alike.

Residential Life has created more transgender friendly housing, including single rooms and multi-gendered housing in Noah. Campus residence halls with 3 or more bathrooms must have at least one bathroom (with showers) designated as "gender neutral." OSCA, which has four housing units, has a similar policy for gender-neutral bathrooms. Wilder Student Union and the Conservatory each have a gender-neutral bathroom too.

The Counseling Center has an ongoing commitment to staff education that helps our counselors respond to concerns of transgender students. The Counseling Center offers services from therapists who understand that transgender identity is not a form of psychopathology and who do not stigmatize individuals for not conforming to standard gender roles. Counselors recognize the emergence of a growing transgender consciousness that challenges a binary concept of gender. Student Health Services, as standard practice, tries not to assume the gender or sexual identity of a student, and refers to all relationships as "partner" unless otherwise stated. A list of health providers of services specifically for the transgender community is maintained, and sexual health history forms have been revised to be more gender neutral.

The Registrar's office has instituted new procedures for recording gender and name changes on all student records, while protecting confidentiality and integrity of student records. Access to student records is limited by federal law only to campus authorities who have a legitimate educational interest in the information.

The MRC has created a workshop called Trans Training 101, which has been enthusiastically received. Workshops have been conducted for Baldwin, Career Services, Center for Service & Learning, Dean of Students office, Residential Life, Peer Liaisons, Student Union, and Third World House. Plans call for these workshops to continue on campus, and Student Health, Athletics, and Safety & Security have expressed interest in participating. To meet the increasing demand, the MRC trained additional student and staff facilitators (bringing the total number to eight) as well as first and second year students as "facilitators in training." Kate Eubank, LGBT Community Coordinator, senior Myrl Beam, and Eric Estes, MRC Director, deserve credit for this initiative.

The Edmonia Lewis Center for Women and Transgender People was established four years ago in a campus house on Woodland Street. The collective sponsors support groups, speakers, advocacy, and activities in support of the transgender community. With an independent governing board of students and staff, the Center has become a gathering place and resource base for our trans students and allies.

The Transgender Advocacy Group (TAG) is the largest student-organized transgender

group on campus. TAG is responsible for many key events designed to support transgender students and raise community awareness of transgender issues. TAG sponsors events such as Transgender Day of Remembrance, Trans Awareness Week, and speakers such as Leslie Feinberg. Members of TAG meet once a week to plan events and holds a weekly support meeting.

Surely there is more we can do. We all welcome advice and suggestions from our alumni community as we strive to make the campus more open and welcoming to all.

Counselors recognize the emergence of a growing transgender consciousness that challenges a binary concept of gender.



Comparative American Studies Program—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies at Oberlin



Students interested in pursuing LGBTQ Studies at Oberlin College may do so within the Comparative American Studies major or minor. As CAS majors/minors, students are invited to develop a LGBTQ focus and work closely with their faculty advisor to identify classes that comprise a rigorous and comparative course of study.

What is LGBTQ Studies?

LGBTQ Studies explores the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities, communities, and theories. Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework, the field examines sexual desires and practices in their historical and cultural contexts while considering the relationship between sexuality, normativity and power. Like African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Latino Studies, LGBTQ Studies emerged from community activism that called for the creation of curricular

programs to foreground the experiences of U.S. populations ignored in mainstream histories. It seeks to transform the production of knowledge about LGBTQ people specifically and sexuality more generally. At Oberlin College, student and faculty activism around Ethnic and Queer studies helped lead the creation of a distinctive curricular program dedicated to the comparative study of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class in the United States.

What is Comparative American Studies?

Comparative American Studies is an interdisciplinary program that examines issues of power and identity formation in the United States through the lenses of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Comparative American Studies takes a broad view of “America” that extends beyond U.S. geopolitical boundaries to consider the global reach of American political, economic,

and military power as well as U.S. cultural production and histories of social change.

Creating an LGBTQ Studies Focus in a CAS

Concentration Area

Students pursuing LGBTQ Studies through the CAS major will complete the program’s core courses to develop skills in comparative analysis and choose one of three concentration areas—Identity and Diversity; Globalization, Transnationalism, and Nation; or Histories and Practices of Social Change. Working with an advisor, students will develop an interdisciplinary and comparative focus within the concentration on some aspect of LGBTQ Studies, selecting courses that will enable them to address their particular interests. Because this field is so broad and diverse, students are encouraged to choose a specific theme or question in constructing a focus.

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DID YOU KNOW???

This newsletter is a forum to which YOU can send information or updates about yourself, your life, your work, or anything else you might want to share with queer alumni.

Send info to OLA by email (as indicated on the masthead) or by filling out and returning the pink sheet (included in this newsletter) and we will publish it.

DID YOU KNOW???

There is an annual Lavender Celebration at Commencement, recognizing graduating queer students, and honoring the recipients of the Cemelli Grant and the Robertson Prize.

ALL LGBT alumni are invited to this event, so spread the word, mark your calendar for Saturday, May 28th at 2PM, and we'll see you then!!

Comparative American Studies Program (continued)

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Regularly offered courses in LGBTQ Studies:

1. LGBTQ Identities (CAS)
2. Transnational Sexualities (CAS)
3. Queer Geographies (CAS)
4. Modern Fiction and Sexual Difference (English)
5. Queering the Reel (RHET)
6. Queer Acts (Theater).

Regularly offered related courses, which include significant exploration of LGBTQ issues:

1. Crossing Borders: The Mysteries of Identity (FYSP)
2. American Sexualities (History)
3. Race, Gender, Sexuality and Identity (Sociology)
4. Autobiography and Performance (Theater)

Core Faculty:

Gina Pérez—(gina.perez@oberlin.edu)
Meredith Raimondo—(meredith.raimondo@oberlin.edu)

For more information on the Comparative American Studies Program, including a complete list of faculty who serve on the program committee, please see the CAS website (<http://www.oberlin.edu/CAS/index.html>).



Oberlin On-Line Community

Changes to the on-line community at the Oberlin website were implemented this past winter of 2004. You now have 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
- Professional
- Academic
- Activities and Interests.

Under the last section, there will be 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.

Feel free to contact anyone on the masthead of this Newsletter if you have any questions.



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.



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