



NEWS

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

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Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Peter Nicholson '91, Entrepreneur, Environmentalist, Essayist

The following is an interview with Peter Nicholson '91.

Describe your current career/life situation.

I've been trying to escape Oberlin's pull for more than twelve years now and have been failing miserably. No matter what I do or where I travel, it seems impossible to ever completely sever my connection to the place. People think I try to stay attached, but this is not true! I've come to the conclusion that Oberlin is like the Matrix—all pervasive. You can't run, you can't hide, in some form it will find you. So I'm starting to stop and just accept the fact. As I was telling a friend the other night (an Obie, of course), I just like hanging out with smart, creative, engaged people, and these qualities tend to manifest themselves more often than not in Obies.

My current career situation involves three somewhat distinct strands. I have my own

consulting and design company called Blue Prophet. I work with non-profit and relatively small businesses on identity and communication issues, helping them better coordinate who they are with how they express that identity through text, graphics, and actions. One of my first clients was an organization run by an Obie, Rebekah Levin ('79), a former OLA steering committee member; almost all of the people who work with me are somehow connected to the place as well. I've been fortunate to cultivate clients in whose work I strongly believe. These include, among others, a national gay Christian group, a local (to Chicago) organization that does policy research around issues related to poverty and the working poor, and a leading green architecture firm.

The second strand of my professional life is the Foresight Design Initiative, a non-profit for designers, students, and related professionals interested in

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Southern Comfort

By Jeremiah Gold-Hopton '85

The Southern Comfort Conference (SCC) is the largest gathering of transgendered people in the world. Each September, hundreds of transgendered people meet at a hotel in Atlanta with family and friends to hold workshops, socialize, and enjoy being in a community where, if only for

five days, we are the majority, the "normal" people. Attendees represent a wide spectrum of gender expression and identity. Unlike at most transcommunity events,

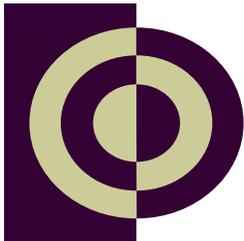
all the different subgroups mingle together at SCC.

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Gareth Fenley '83, Jeremiah Gold-Hopton '85, and Holly Boswell '72 taken at the Southern Comfort Conference.

Oberlin is like the Matrix—all pervasive. You can't run, you can't hide, in some form it will find you.



Peter Nicholson '91

Contact Peter with your thoughts at:

psn68@ix.netcom.com

Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Peter Nicholson '91

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sustainability and environmental issues. I co-founded this group with Rick Sanford ('03). Last January, we hosted four Oberlin students for Winter Term, who ended up doing some amazing work on one of our projects. We will be hosting another group in 2004. We have, and are developing, several programs, all of which can be read about at: www.foresightdesign.org. Suffice it to say, I've come into contact with more than one Obie through this work.

The third strand comprises my creative pursuits—the kind for which I don't necessarily expect to earn an income (although it's always nice when it happens). For the past several years this has primarily focused on writing. Thanks to an Oberlin connection, I'll be publishing some essays about being a sperm donor (to a lesbian couple, classmates of mine at Oberlin) sometime this winter in the *James White Review*, a gay lit journal. In the spring, I'm scheduled to be a guest speaker at Wilkes University, where one of my friends from Oberlin, Phyllis Weliver ('91), has presented my essays to her first year English classes to some effect (and where Jim Harrington '73, former OLA board member, works as well). In the future, I plan to continue writing and publishing and delving more into some digital video/theatre ideas I've been harboring.

How did your Oberlin experience affect your path choice?

Right out of school, I pursued a career in arts administration. I knew how to write and I knew about classical music, which

turned out to be a valued and somewhat uncommon combination. I lived in New York and became one of the "Oberlin mafia," as it was once described to me (by a non-Obie), meaning one of the many arts administrators in the



city who shares a common alma mater. At one point, I could name an Obie in every major (and not-so-major) arts institution in New York. I was introduced to the NYC new music scene by one of my former Oberlin music professors, Conrad Cummings, who has since become one of my closest friends.

Attending graduate school in design, I thought, would finally help me break this curse. I would study a field that had little-to-no connection to that small town in northeastern Ohio (despite the fact that I first did page layout as an intern in the Office of College Relations the year after I graduated). For a while it worked and I was free. And I felt completely displaced. Then I started getting more involved in sustainable design and, well, back into the fold I came.

What obstacles have you faced on your path?

This is a difficult question for me. I tend to look at the world as a wealth of possibilities, instead of barriers. Obstacles are merely opportunities

for even more creative solutions. Then again, perhaps I've just worked in the non-profit world too long?

I often say that design is really about overcoming barriers of one sort or another. That good design seems to actually require a certain amount of resistance. A famous poet once told me that it is important to always be writing against something, that this is what can help one go deep, get at a certain significant essence.

The most significant obstacles I've faced have probably been more internal than not. Issues of confidence and self-esteem and vulnerability have played a role in my development, as well as learning to believe in my own talent and abilities enough to act upon them instead of relying on always nurturing the skills of others. As much as I'd like to marginalize it, being gay influences everything I do, because it is so rooted at the core of my being. Some times it's just more obvious than at others. It's been said before: coming out is a lifelong process. At thirty-five I believe that now more than ever.

My friends and colleagues would also probably add learning to manage control issues to this list, but they are wrong.

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

Forget about a career path. Forget about a career. Stay in touch with that about which you're passionate. Let that guide you. It will make, I promise, all the difference, even if simultaneously making it

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Introducing Larry Wexler '72, the Newest OLA Steering Committee Member

Larry Wexler is the newest member of the Oberlin Lambda Steering Committee. He is a graduate of Oberlin, Honors in Psychology in 1972, and also has a Ph.D. in Epidemiology, a Master's of Public Health in Mental Health Services Administration, and a Master's of Philosophy in Biostatistics, all from Yale University, where he was treasurer of the Yale gay alumni group.

Larry has served as an Alumni representative in various capacities, including President of the Oberlin chapter of New York City, host of a party for gay alumni, and member of the John Frederick Oberlin Society for many years. He has also been active outside of Oberlin, serving as chairperson of the Community Research Initiative on the AIDS Institutional Review Board, an organization that writes and develops new therapies for AIDS clinical research.

Larry currently teaches and does research at a New York medical school and lives in New York City with his partner of seventeen years, Walter Brown. Walter is a self-practicing architect who, among other things, designed his and Larry's home in Eastern Long Island, a four-story octagonal solar-heated house.

Larry can be contacted at
LarryMWexler@hotmail.com



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@yahoogroups.com

[www.oberlin.edu/
alumni/OLA/default.html](http://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>

Southern Comfort (continued)

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Obies are disproportionately represented at SCC, as I discovered when I wore my Oberlin t-shirt to SCC this year. I had known that Holly Boswell ('72) was on the SCC Board of Directors and was active in the transcommunity in many other ways, but I hadn't realized that she had graduated from Oberlin in 1972. One of the SCC workshops that I attended this year was led by Holly, who facilitated a lively discussion on androgyny and other paths of gender variance that offer an alternative to conventional expression as a man or a woman.

Then, Holly told me that the 2003 SCC keynote speaker, Noelle Howey ('94), was also an Oberlin graduate. Noelle wrote *Dress Codes: Of Three Girlhoods—My Mother's, My Father's, and Mine*, a book that gives her perspective as the daughter of a transwoman who transitioned from male-to-female during Noelle's adolescence. Unfortunately, Noelle had to cancel her trip to Atlanta at the last minute due to illness, so I did not get to meet her.

Last but not least, Gareth Fenley ('82), took some time off from her busy schedule as a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Georgia to attend the SCC banquet with her partner, Monica Helms, who is the Executive Director of Trans=Action, Georgia's transgender lobbying and advocacy organization. Monica co-facilitated several political activism workshops that I attended, including one which focused on the barriers that homeless transpeople face because of overnight shelters' rules. Monica has been working on opening Atlanta women's shelters to transwomen ever since an unemployed transwoman facing homelessness committed suicide after finding out that she would not be admitted to a women's shelter and that she would only be admitted to a men's shelter if she presented herself as a man, including wearing male clothing.

As usual at SCC, I attended many workshops, saw old friends, made new friends, and enjoyed myself thoroughly. I've already got September 29th through October 3rd, 2004, reserved on my calendar for the next SCC. If you are interested in attending, go to www.sccat.org and register before July 4th to get the lowest price.

"True Colors": Gay Pride in Los Angeles

By Stan Kim '90

On June 22, 2003, I hosted another gathering for OLA members at my home in West Hollywood. Members stopped by before heading out to watch the Los Angeles LGBT Pride parade with this year's theme, "True Colors."

In planning this event, I came across the usual "I am prided out," "Why should I go to a parade that doesn't represent me?" and "Those parades are about the cult and worship of youth and physical perfection" excuses for not wanting to attend. I found these excuses indicative of an eroded Oberlin spirit. While there is an understandable weariness of living life outside the Oberlin arcadian setting, I think it is worth mentioning some of the benefits of attending such events in whatever community you are a part of.

"I am prided out" and "Why should I go to a parade that doesn't represent me?" Since when is a public event exclusively

for one person? Part of inclusion and representation requires participation. Just showing your face can be a major influence on a teen just coming out. They might think "Aha, this community



OLA Regional event guests Paul Brockmann ('85) and Bryan Van Gorder (Harvard '95)"

is truly diverse...I do fit in." Part of the responsibility in maintaining and growing a vibrant queer community is to be a participant, rather than a parasite.

"Those parades are about the cult and worship of youth and physical perfection." As I live in the perceived epicenter of gay male narcissism I often hear this complaint. I wonder why this issue seems to bother so many people who profess not to buy into such values. Pride celebrations are not just about visibility but also about building community. These are events where people can meet, strike up friendships, renew a community spirit, all in a neutral-yet-positive setting. It seems such a shame that an opportunity like this is often discarded. As for me, I hope to see you out and about, and if you are in LA June 20th, 2004 drop by before the parade and meet some other Obies of a like mind.

Stan can be contacted at: stanonmars@aol.com.

Alumni Council Weekend, September 2003

By Matthew Bribitzer-Stull '94

In contrast to our spring meetings, the Alumni Council weekend each fall is a time of great activity. Schedules are full, meeting rooms are packed, and familiar faces are everywhere. As usual, OLA Steering Committee members did not lack for things to do; other committee and board meetings, roundtable discussions with students, and farewell celebrations for Midge Wood Brittingham augmented our usual OLA meeting schedule.

Much of Saturday morning was occupied by meetings with Oberlin staff and faculty. Our first visitor was Kate Eubanks, the new LGBT Community Coordinator at the Multicultural Resource Center. Kate shared with us her enthusiasm for her new position and her commitment to introduce new initiatives benefitting transgendered and intersexed students. After Kate, we were fortunate enough to share an hour-and-a-half with Clayton Koppes, Vice President and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and college President, Nancy Dye. Clayton was eager to tell us the details of the now up-and-running Comparative American Studies major. Of particular interest to Lambda alumni was the appointment of Assistant Professor, Meredith

Raimando, a specialist in Queer and Gender Studies. President Dye then addressed the concerns of the Steering Committee with regard to transgendered and intersexed issues on campus.

Saturday lunch was spent with members of the other Oberlin Alumni Affiliate Groups. These groups highlight the diversity of Oberlin Alumni and this lunch, which brought together everyone from bisexuals to Ultimate Frisbee players, was no different. Together, the affiliate groups hope to learn fundraising strategies, host more regional events, involve more of our recent alumni, and continue to network with one another.

Saturday afternoon allowed members of OLA to meet with students. While our roundtable discussion was ostensibly designed to give students an opportunity to ask career-related questions, most of us found it simply a nice time to interact with our younger counterparts. The students, in particular, seemed interested in hearing about "Lambda" life at Oberlin in years past. This prompted us to contemplate hosting a panel on "Being Out at Oberlin from the 60s through the 90s" when we are on campus next March.

Perhaps most moving of all our events, though, were the celebrations surrounding our longtime ally, Midge Brittingham. Friday night featured a tribute to Midge in which alumni from class years in the 40s to the 00s paid tribute to her with remembrances, anecdotes, speeches, humor, photographs, and even cheerleading. On Saturday evening, alumni met in Kulas Recital Hall for a concert devoted to Midge. While "Mother Midge," as she is affectionately known, will cease her duties as Executive Director of Alumni Development and Alumni Affairs, she will continue to live at Oberlin for at least part of the year and her home will remain open to alumni for a long time to come. We on the OLA Steering Committee gave her a GPS unit so that throughout her travels she will always be able to see exactly where she is in relation to Oberlin.

As is usually the case, we were reinvigorated by our return to Oberlin. Sunday morning's leave taking found us all brimming over with energy, looking forward to the events of our spring visit to campus. Warm or cold, wet or dry, we are confident that our March meeting will bring us the renewed sense of purpose common to all our Oberlin



Stan Kim '90 and Carol Levine '84 at Midge's celebration.

**OLA
Mini-Reunion
March 5-7,
2004**

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During Alumni Council weekend, OLA Steering Committee members viewed Mars from the Observatory in Peters!

OLA Mini-Reunion, March 5—7, 2004

OLA will be hosting a mini-reunion on campus March 5-7, 2004. On Saturday afternoon, we will facilitate a panel discussion focusing on being queer at Oberlin through the decades—from the 1960s through the millennium. Saturday evening we feature the screening of a movie, yet to be determined, followed by a discussion. In addition, there will be time to socialize and catch up with the members of the Steering Committee and other Lambda alumni. If you are tempted to come back to Oberlin for a visit, this is a great time to do it! Please stop by and join us in Oberlin this March.

If you would like to be a panelist and especially are from the earlier decades, please contact Carol Levine '84 at clevine@carmelus.com.

For more details as we get closer, please contact OLA at ola_oberlin@yahoo.com

The Robertson Prize, Year After Year

By Stan Kim '90

In its commitment to promoting student research in the areas of queer issues, OLA offers the Cemelli Grant and the Robertson Prize. These monetary awards come directly from OLA membership contributions—from people like you. They are awarded by a faculty committee and are recognized during Lavender Celebration. Lavender Celebration is a time of special recognition during Commencement for graduating Oberlin students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning. The recipients for the 2003 Robertson Prize were Abby Farragher '03 (Lesbian Identity from the 1900's to the Present) and Sarah Saunders '03 ("Transgender Rights in the American Prison System").

The Robertson Prize is named after Norm Robertson '81, who enrolled at Oberlin in the fall of 1975 intending to be a pre-med major. By the time he graduated in 1981 he had a completely different outlook and graduated a Religion major with significant interest in the Conservatory. Although he had studied the violin seriously in high school, he never intended to become a professional violinist. Oberlin introduced him to early music for the first time. While a student, he participated in Collegium Musicum and studied baroque violin and viola. When he moved to Chicago after graduation he was one of the first members of City Musik, a short-lived, but distinguished, baroque orchestra. His partner also participated and was a well-known keyboard instrumentalist and soloist. Along with City Musik, Mr. Robertson played with Jubal's Lyre, Basically Bach, and Harwood Early Music Ensemble. Oberlin professors who knew

Norm well remember him as a talented student and gentle, generous person. While at college, Norm worked hard and managed to reconcile his

Some past winners of the Robertson Prize include:

1997- Robert G Colby '96 – honorable mention. "The



Abby Farragher '03 Robertson Prize Winner at Lavender Celebration 2003.

sexuality with his deep-felt convictions as a Catholic. After graduation he put his convictions to practice and worked for several years in a parish in Baton Rouge, LA as director of Christian education. He was also quite proud of his position as director of consignments at Leslie Hindman Auctioneers, one of the Mid-West's finest art auctions. As a resident of Chicago, Norm was very active in the Chicago alumni group and received the volunteer of the year award.

Norm Robertson died of complications related to AIDS on January, 11 1992. He was remembered by his friends in Fairchild chapel in an historical performance concert entitled "Bach for Aids."

Angels of Sodom: Gustave Moreau, Homosexuality and the Culture of A Rebounds"

1997- Stephanie Cohen '97—honorable mention. "Bodies Gone Public: Passing Exposure Stories and the Visualization of Hertonormativity"

1997- David Berman '97— "For Better or Worse: The Gay Movement and the Problem of Gay Marriage"

Featuring Fabulous Alumni: Peter Nicholson '91

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difficult to describe one's career at cocktail parties. (One of my closest friends (an Obie) eventually gave up and began to introduce me to friends as a "workaholic dilettante," which was a great conversation starter.)

Oh, and don't be afraid to change directions. Continuity is in the eye of the beholder.

What makes you happy?

My boyfriend, Tim. It's not that he makes me happy, but I'm happy to be with him. (He's not an Obie, but I try to overlook that.) Same goes with my friends and family (biological and extended) as well.

There are many amazing people in my life, in several different parts of this country and the world.

They add to my life's meaning and value. I've never counted, but the majority of them probably share the Oberlin connection, although not all from my era. Finally, I enjoy my work, all the various different projects. I used to be very goal oriented, relying on achieving certain milestones for satisfaction. But over the past several years, I've found myself gaining more reward from the process. And what a process it all has been!

Peter attended Oberlin from '86-'91; worked there '91-'92 as an intern in the Office of Communications (as "College Relations" was called then); and again '96-'97 (as the Acting Director of Conservatory Communications.).



New Alumni Association Executive Director

Laura M. Gobbi '91 has been appointed to serve as the new Executive Director of the Oberlin Alumni Association; she will begin January 15, 2004. You can read the full story at <http://www.oberlin.edu/alumni>

Oberlin On-Line Community

Coming soon... changes to the on-line community at the Oberlin website. You will 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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