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From the Publisher

Publisher



Soon we will be welcoming the world this June to our wonderful city for WorldPride 2014.

The world! What a magnificent big expansion of land, continents, countries, and people, people living in different cultures, with different ways of thinking, and different values.

I have personally experienced some of these differences. I was born in Kuwait, to a Lebanese father and an Italian mother. Born Catholic in a Muslim country. Born gay.

With Toronto hosting an array of different cultures, all coming here to celebrate together being LGBTQ+, it has made me reflect on my own journey as a gay man coming to Canada at the age of 19, and discovering one of the most amazing communities that I could have ever dreamt of being part of.

I spent my childhood, and teen years in Kuwait. There I discovered my sexual orientation. Let me tell you, I call BS on anyone who says it is a learned behaviour, it is a "western phenomenon", and it is a "phase." I was born in a country where no one talked about being gay. We were your regular church going, conservative family, that spent most of our time hanging out with uncles and aunts, cousins and neighbors, none of whom were gay. I had never heard of the word. Nothing swayed my being gay, nothing.

I felt different for as long as I can remember, as early as childhood. At the age of 11 I recall talking about it to my best friend, who was very understanding, and mentioned that he heard about this "condition" called being homosexual. We went together to the library to find books on the topic, and let me tell you, I was thrilled to read about being gay, to figure out who I was.

A big influence on my upbringing was church. My siblings and I were sent to church school every Friday. When I first learned of my being gay I had some struggles with God and sin, good and evil. However, my own faith led me to understand that I am a wonderful person and that God would never be some mighty being who hates me, after all, he made me. I read the Bible, I even read the Quran and the Torah, and the more I read, and the more I understood, nowhere did I find anything that made me feel "wrong."

Sure I could have done what many in religious conservative countries do, one day I would get married, have children,

keep it all in the closet, and just shut up about it. My theory though was: being gay is not a learned behaviour, being in the closet is. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are normal, lying about it, is not.

With that understanding I would say I had relatively happy teen years. I never had an issue with my homosexuality. I was out to all my friends and in my school. Something I am always proud of. Just because I lived in a country that criminalized being gay, I wasn't going to be ashamed or hate who I was. So there I was, growing up in Kuwait, and because I was strong, a happy type of person, and I trusted the universe, everyone accepted my sexuality without judgement, which I must say surprised me. Now this is my own personal experience, relating to my own character and my approach to things, and I know that not everyone in countries such as Kuwait have it as easy or go about it the way I did.

However, I never came out to the family, not until we moved to Canada.

Growing up, some of our vacation time was spent in Lebanon. I loved Lebanon, it is one of the most beautiful countries I've ever been to. While not as conservative as Kuwait, it was still like everywhere else in the world back in the '70s—not really accepting of homosexuality. However, I did feel the difference in Lebanon, it being more liberal where sex and sexuality are concerned—both are more celebrated. Something that makes me very proud of my homeland is this news item from the *Huffington Post* in the last few weeks:

"Lebanon: Being Gay Is Not a Crime Nor Against Nature. A court in Lebanon has made a historic ruling stating same-sex relations are not 'contradicting the laws of nature' and cannot therefore be considered a crime. The assumption that homosexuality is a result of disturbances in the family dynamic or unbalanced psychological development is based on wrong information."

To be continued...

(Part two will follow in the summer issue, with more on my upbringing, and then moving to Canada.)

Antoine Elhashem
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springplay!

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On the cover is a selection of the team who is bringing you WorldPride 2014.

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From the Editor

Editor



It's been a long, cold, snowy winter and spring has been hard fought for, but with more days of warm sunshine here, I'll bet everyone is eager to lose the layers and hit a patio for that first celebratory cocktail, welcoming back the sunny season.

With the balmy weather comes the anticipation that Toronto will be hosting WorldPride, welcoming our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters from around the globe. When the time comes we'll be partying it up like no other time we've celebrated. A vital part of the festival though, will be the Human Rights Conference, where the world will gather to share ideas, put our heads together and look for ways to continue to work on bettering our rights and freedoms no matter where we call home.

We have it pretty good here in Canada, with equal rights, protection against discrimination and legalized marriage, but not everyone is as lucky as we are. One only needs to pay attention to the news to know that so many of our fellow queers are still fighting fiercely for their rights and freedoms—even their very lives. The Winter Olympics underscored the newly passed draconian laws in Russia and I was greatly saddened to hear that Uganda has also passed severe anti-homosexual laws. We spoke to activist Richard Lusimbo about this very thing and send him our hope and prayers that he stays safe from harm as he continues to lead the battle for equality.

Speaking of champions, we're absolutely thrilled to welcome to PinkPlayMags two of my heroes. Journalist extraordinaire Andrea Houston sits down with community ally and advocate, Kristyn Wong-Tam in an intimate chat about how the City of Toronto is her first love.

It's also a pleasure to welcome author, Michael Rowe, back to our Fiction pages with an excerpt from his latest novel, *Wild Fell*—a ghost story that will send a chill down your spine and make you grateful for the longer daylight hours.

Last but not least, we bid a fond farewell to Jaime Woo, who leaves the pages of Hyper-Culture behind, as he continues to pursue his writing career. It was such a pleasure working with him and we wish him all the best in the future.

So are you ready for it? Are you ready for spring? Are you ready for WorldPride? Are you ready to welcome the world? You only have a couple of months before it's here, so grab a spot to relax in the sun while you can, because before you know it summer and North America's biggest Pride festival will be in full swing!

Much love,

Jeff Harrison
editor@pinkplaymags.com

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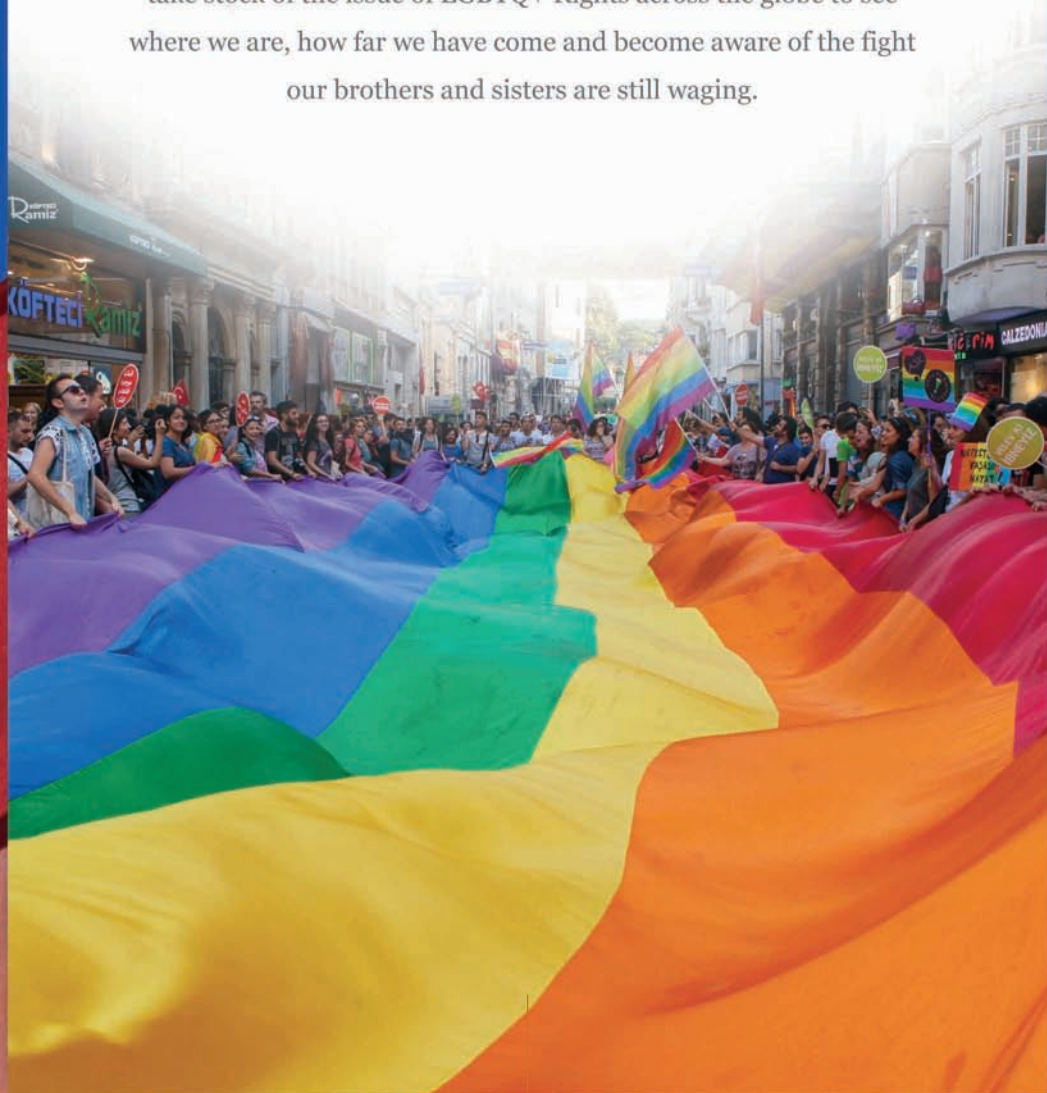


# LGBTQ+

## *Rights Around the World*

*by Jeffrey Luscombe*

As WorldPride in Toronto approaches, this is an opportune time to take stock of the issue of LGBTQ+ Rights across the globe to see where we are, how far we have come and become aware of the fight our brothers and sisters are still waging.





## CANADA

In Canada, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1969 with an amendment to the Criminal Law Act. While defending the bill, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau made his famous remarks to reporters that “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation,” adding that, “what’s done in private between adults doesn’t concern the Criminal Code.”

However, equality for LGBTQ+ Canadians was still a long hard fight. It was thanks to a number of successful court decisions concerning Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms—and LGBTQ+ activists working tirelessly for years—that gays and lesbians slowly moved toward full equality in Canada. LGBTQ+ Canadians have been able to serve in the Canadian military since 1992 and marriage equality came to Ontario in 2003 and nation-wide in 2005. Anti-discrimination laws were introduced for employment in 1993 and in all other areas, including hate speech, in 1998. Still the work is not done. Organizations such as Egale Canada are working hard on trans rights in Canada.

Today Canada is considered one of the most gay-friendly countries in the world.



## THE UNITED STATES

Since LGBTQ+ rights in the United States have evolved over time on a state-by-state basis, said rights south of our border often depend on what part of the country you are looking at. New York is quite different from Alabama.

Same-sex activity has been legal since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2003 that invalidated Texas’ sodomy law and, by extension, the thirteen other states with similar laws. Yet even though the Supreme Court decision made their laws unenforceable, today eleven states (Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah) have refused to repeal their state’s archaic sodomy laws. I personally like to have sodomy in those states just for spite.

As of this writing, same-sex couples can be legally married in seventeen states (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington) plus the District of Columbia. Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex marriage in May 2004, after the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled the previous November that gays and lesbians could not be denied the right to marry due to the Equal Protection Clause of the state constitution.

In June 2013, Section 3 of DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act, which forbade the federal government from recognizing same-sex unions and relieved states of the requirement that they recognize same-sex unions performed in other jurisdictions) was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, which led to a number of district courts striking down same-sex marriage bans in states such as Utah, Oklahoma and Virginia as unconstitutional. A stay has stopped gay marriage in Utah, where some 1,300 same-sex marriages had been performed in the last days of 2013, until the appeal works its way through the courts.

Today a single individual gay person can legally adopt a child in all fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia, although there are fewer states where they may adopt children jointly with their partners.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is outlawed in twenty-one states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Additionally, seventeen states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico outlaw discrimination based on gender identity or expression. The Matthew Sheppard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 makes hate crimes based on sexual orientation, or gender identity, punishable under federal law. And the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled in 2012 that job discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is classified as a form of sex discrimination and thus violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964.





## SOUTH AMERICA

Every country in South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Falkland Islands, French Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, South Georgia and the Sandwich Islands, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela), except Guyana, has legalized same-sex sexual activity. But even Guyana has begun the process of looking at changing its buggery laws, which have penalties of up to life imprisonment for a conviction. Though, ironically, gays and lesbians may join the military in Guyana.

Only four countries in South America have same-sex marriage, but two are really BIG countries: Argentina, Brazil, French Guiana and Uruguay, while a number of others (including Paraguay, Venezuela and Ecuador) have a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

Argentina boasts some of the most advanced LGBTQ+ rights laws in South America. Gays and lesbians have been serving openly in the Argentinian armed forces since 2009. And in July 2010, Argentina legalized same-sex marriage, which also included full adoption rights. Still, Argentina has no national law to expressly deal with discrimination, or harassment, on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.



## EUROPE

Western Europe is, perhaps, the most advanced place in the world for LGBTQ+ rights. Today, ten out of the sixteen countries in the world that have marriage equality are in Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). The United Kingdom's same-sex marriage law, which covers England and Wales only, took effect on March 13th, 2014. Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Scotland and Switzerland are considering adopting legislation to introduce same-sex marriage. Fourteen more European countries have legalized civil unions or unregistered cohabitation for same-sex couples.

However, things are not as progressive in terms of acceptance to same-sex marriage as we move east across Europe. The constitutions of Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

As for sex, consenting, adult males can now legally have sex in every country from one end of Europe to the other. As of 2014, all jurisdictions in Europe had legalized same-sex sexual activity. The last holdout to decriminalize sexual relations between men was the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. But in January 2014 Turkish Cypriot deputies passed an amendment repealing a colonial-era law that punished homosexual acts with up to five years in prison.

Take care though, when traveling to Putin's Russia. Although homosexuality has been legal since 1993, in 2013 Russian Parliament unanimously (436-0) passed a federal law banning the distribution of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" among minors. This law effectively makes it illegal to suggest that gay relationships are equal to heterosexual relationships or to distribute material on gay rights. It also imposes fines on individuals or groups convicted of breaking the law. Hate crimes including kidnapping, torture and murder have also spiked against LGBTQ+ people in the country over the last year.



## ASIA

Homosexuality has been legal in Japan since 1880. Yet Japan, like many Asian countries' attitudes have been slower to change. There is no same-sex marriage or civil partnerships. A recent lesbian wedding at Tokyo Disney Resort was symbolic only. LGBTQ+ rights are rarely discussed in the political or personal realms. Still, a poll released by the Pew Research Center showed acceptance of homosexuality in Japan and other Asian countries is growing. According to the poll, the proportion of Japanese who said gays and lesbians should be accepted by society

grew from 49 percent in 2007 to 54 percent in 2013. And, as an example of the changing climate in LGBTQ+ rights in Japan, last year 12,000 people marched in the gay pride parade during Tokyo Rainbow Week.

In China, the national penal code was changed in 1997 that decriminalized adult, consensual and non-commercial homosexuality and in 2001 the Ministry of Health removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Officially, police enforcement against gay people is restricted to gay people engaging in gay sex acts in public or gay prostitution. Still, last year 19-year old Xiang Xiaohan was thrown in jail for twelve days after he organized Changsha's first Pride Parade. Officially, his arrest was not because he was gay, but because he organized a public event without permission. Today there is no same-sex marriage or civil unions in China and only heterosexual couples may adopt. To increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, in June 2008 PFLAG China was formed. They currently work in eight regions (Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Hebei, Fujian, Guangxi, Xi'an and Dongguan) with a mission "to involve more and more LGBTQ+ parents, families and friends, to improve the living environment of LGBTQ+s and their families, to eliminate harm and discriminations related to sexual orientation, and to gain dignity and equality."

Homosexuality has been illegal in India since 1860. In 2009 the Delhi High Court decriminalized consensual adult homosexual activity within its jurisdiction; however, in 2013 India's Supreme Court set aside the Delhi High Court's decision. Same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption is not legal in that country. LGBTQ+ people cannot serve openly in the military. In 1994 though, a group of transgender people, called *Hijras*, were granted voting rights as a third-sex.



## AUSTRALIA

The land that gave us *Pricilla Queen of the Desert* decriminalized homosexuality in all of its states and territories over a number of years, stating with South Australia in 1975 and ending with Tasmania

in 1993. Federal laws do not yet permit same-sex couples to legally marry in Australia, and although same-sex marriage bills have been proposed a number of times, the government has always rejected them. The High Court ruled in December 2013 that the Australian Capital Territory's same-sex marriage law, which had begun allowing same-sex couples to marry legally on its own, was invalid. Most states and territories have domestic partnership status and all have anti-discrimination legislation for LGBTQ+ people.



## MIDDLE EAST

We have a lot of work to do in the Middle East. According to Pew Research overwhelming majorities in the predominantly Muslim countries surveyed say homosexuality should be rejected, including 97% in Jordan, 95% in Egypt, 94% in Tunisia, 93% in the Palestinian territories, 93% in Pakistan, 86% in Lebanon and 78% in Turkey. And these negative perceptions of homosexuality have found its way into the law of the land.

Let's start with the good news. Israel has the most progressive LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East. Although same-sex marriages cannot be performed in the country, Israel does recognize same-sex marriages from other countries. It also recognizes "unregistered cohabitation," a form of common-law marriage, for same-sex couples since 1994. Yet, Israel also has a ways to go. In a disappointing turn last December, the Ministerial Committee on Legislation in Israel rejected a bill that would have allowed same-sex couples to have recognized civil unions.

Although same-sex sexual activity has been decriminalized in Iraq, there has been a constant wave of violence committed on LGBTQ+ Iraqis. These attacks, according to the U.S. Department of State's human rights report, "ranged from intimidation and verbal harassment to reports of kidnappings, beatings, some of which resulted in deaths, sexual assault, and killings."

Bahrain legalized same-sex activity in 1976 for people over the age of 21. However, recently there



has been a crackdown on cross-dressing and in 2009 a man was sentenced to a month in jail for dressing in a women's clothes. A bill stopping LGBTQ+ foreigners from entering the country is also pending.

I would suggest LGBTQ+ people stay away from Saudi Arabia. The fact is, they don't want us in their country either. Like Bahrain, they think they can pick out LGBTQ+ travelers and stop them at the border. Do they have some kind of gay test? The penalty for same-sex sexual activity in Saudi Arabia ranges from prison sentences of several months to several years, to fines, flogging, torture and execution. Needless to say, there is no same-sex marriage in Saudi Arabia, nor will there be any time soon. In fact, a same-sex marriage performed in another country can be used as evidence against you in court.



## AFRICA

And while we are discussing places LGBTQ+ folks should avoid, let's look at Africa. Today homosexuality is punishable by death in Nigeria, Sudan and Mauritania, while in Uganda, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone homosexual acts can put offenders behind bars for life. The Islamic states of Africa are the worst on the continent for LGBTQ+ peoples. Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunsania have penalties against same-sex activity ranging from fines, torture and jail time from 2-17 years, with or without hard labor. Vigilante executions also occur.

However, same-sex sexual activity is legal in some African countries including Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Chad, Gabon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Central African Republic and Madagascar. Unfortunately, none of these nations recognize same-sex relationships, allow gay adoption or allow gays in the military. Still other counties have laws outlawing male same-sex activity (sodomy) but have no laws against female same-sex activity. These include Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Mauritius and Swaziland.

One of the bright spots on the continent for

LGBTQ+ rights is South Africa where same-sex sexual activity has been legal since 1998, gay and lesbian rights are enshrined in the constitution and where there's been marriage equality since 2006. South Africa bans all discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gays have also been serving openly in the South African military since 1998.

Finally, the United Nations' LGBT Rights Declaration calling for the worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality, has been signed by the African countries of Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritius, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone and South Africa. It's an encouraging sign on which to end.

So we have much to celebrate as Toronto prepares to open its doors for WorldPride in June. We have come far in the last decades, but there is more work to do. And though it is unlikely that we will live to see full LGBTQ+ equality across the globe, we must continue to work towards it not only for ourselves, but for LGBTQ+ people in over 70 countries around the world where homosexuality is still a criminal offence. As R. Tarfon said, "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it."

*Jeffrey Luscombe is a freelance writer and author of the novel Shirts and Skins. He is also the creator and author of The Gay Groom blog*



# Working for LGBTI Rights in Uganda

**R**ichard Lusimbo is a gay Ugandan living in the capital city of Kampala who works with SMUG (Sexual Minorities Uganda), an LGBTI non-government organization founded in March 2004 to address Human Rights Issues based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Uganda. Currently, the network comprises 18-member organizations and eight LGBTI human rights defenders in Uganda, all working to advocate for the rights of LGBTI Ugandans. Their vision is “a liberated lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people of Uganda.”

I spoke to Lusimbo via Skype from Toronto to discuss Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni's new anti-gay law. Under the proposed legislation, those convicted of homosexual acts could face life imprisonment. The proposed law would also make it a crime not to report gay people to authorities. Although Museveni first refused to sign the bill (which even Reverend Desmond Tutu has called 'fascist') last month, he recently indicated that he would approve it shortly, after receiving scientific advice.

“It's a bit scary and confusing but calm,” Lusimbo says. “And while the bill passed there was confusion. We were not sure if the president received bill and people give threats. The ground is not balanced and we're not sure it will happen.”

Being out in Uganda is dangerous. Still Lusimbo carries on. “People I know, some have received threats. Toward end of Christmas we met with organizations and had long discussion around security. And what we did was send out memo from SMUG about the situation. We advised that for a period of time we would close our offices. So we continued working but not in the office. We also advised that there be no public gatherings for fear of attack by anti-gay groups.”

And the debate, which has hit a fever pitch, has so far been mostly one-sided. “Every Sunday churches are preaching against homosexuality,” Lusimbo said.



“Members of parliament put pressure on president make it look like public issue and insisting that the president needs to act. So it's a very chaotic time. Every talk show on the radio has been discussing the law. Very few people speak out against it.” Still, Lusimbo tries to use the current debate to educate his countrymen on LGBTI issues. “The whole debate has created an opportunity to reach out to masses. And the debate allows us to say things people need to think about.”

But at the moment, it is difficult to educate through the hysteria. “It's hard to teach because there is no equal ground,” Lusimbo says. “If you speak they say you are promoting homosexuality. The other side has more power and can speak openly with the media. Our meetings are shut down. And we are turned down when we request to speak on talk shows. So the only medium where we can express ourselves is social media and Internet. It is a difficult time to reach out to the masses.”

*By Jeffrey Luscombe*



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## COMMUNITY CHAMPION: KRISTYN WONG-TAM

by Andrea Houston

**I**t only took an hour for Kristyn Wong-Tam to have the paperwork approved to get the rainbow flag flying proudly on the roof of City Hall. The ward 27 councillor worked fast, as she often does, and arrived at Nathan Phillips Square just in time to politely greet a small group of shivering journalists and ensure Toronto joined other Canadian cities in a show of solidarity with queers in Russia.

But what happened over the next few hours descended from embarrassment to despair.

Mayor Rob Ford, demanding the flag be removed from the ceremonial pole, responded indignantly by duct-taping a Canadian flag up to his office window overlooking the square.

"I do not agree with putting up the rainbow flag," Ford told reporters as he marched outside to inspect his flag. "We should put our Canadian flag up. I put my Canadian flag up in the window. This is the Olympics. This is about being patriotic to your country. This is not about your sexual preference."

Wong-Tam, the only openly gay member of council, once again took her place as the official champion and advocate for the queer community—a leadership role she'd much rather see the mayor step into, for once.

Over her three years at city hall, the rookie councillor has been extraordinarily patient with Ford—far more than he likely deserves, taking pains to try to include him in Pride events every year. But he's never accepted her olive branch.

At a campaign debate in Scarborough on February 5th, Ford was finally truthful about his long-held refusal to attend Pride.

"He was honest," Wong-Tam shrugs, sounding almost relieved to finally wash her hands of him. "He wants nothing to do with Pride, and that's fine. He finally owned up to it. He has no interest in this community. He doesn't like us, nor has interest in investing his time and energy into us. But he should have owned up to this sooner, and we would have left him alone. Instead he made up lies and excuses about spending time up at the family cottage. He is creating a dialogue of family values versus gay values."





Kristyn Wong-Tam with her dog Francis.

"That created a frictitious war, with battle lines being drawn by the Fords, who are true masters of division. Finally he's honest. Ford doesn't want to come. Fine. We'll save the postage."

## Hope for Change

Meanwhile, inside City Hall, Wong-Tam runs one of the busiest ward offices in Toronto. She gets about 300 to 400 emails each day, and double that amount is sent to her staff, plus hundreds of phone calls. But trying to get work done while the

distraction of an increasingly surreal political circus unfolds down the hall has been no small feat.

With the 2014 campaign already underway, Wong-Tam is holding out hope for change. She wants the next mayor of Toronto to do less constituent calling and more leadership. The city doesn't need a superintendent (as Jon Stewart from *The Daily Show* called the current mayor). It needs a visionary.

"We need someone who will inspire us to be more than we are," she says. "We need someone to unite us as a city."

The unflinchingly positive councillor, who has earned a reputation for carrying herself with dignified poise in the face of often-boorish behaviour from the city's chief magistrate, is not endorsing any mayoral candidate quite yet. *Toronto Life* called her "the anti-Ford," an apt descriptor that's stuck.

"The past three years have been a real learning experience for me," she says. "I feel like I've grown in so many different directions. I feel like it's a real honour to serve."

Among the 45 members of council, Wong-Tam has defined herself as a progressive crusader. "Our responsibility is to really set a direction for the city, which sets the direction for a generation to come. I don't take that lightly."

Wong-Tam is not the same woman she was in 2010. "I was not a confident person coming into City Hall. Being a progressive councillor under an incredibly hostile, far-right-wing administration has made me much more nimble and efficient as a local ward councillor. I really hope we have a new mayor in 2014."

She is already getting into campaign mode and meeting with her team. "I feel very confident that I have worked hard. I have a huge list of accomplishments that I can rattle off. We have done some extremely innovative projects that have been quite ambitious for a rookie councillor. So that gives me great pride."

Among the projects she's tackled—Celebrate Yonge, Church

Street Parklets, a ban on shark fin soup and a bid to host World Expo 2025—it's the mural project in Allan Gardens she says is her proudest accomplishment.

The mural is one of the largest pieces of public art in the city, bringing together 23 aboriginal artists and non-artists, many with addiction and mental health issues. The mural spans the length of two football fields, and will remain in Allan Gardens until 2015. "Some of these artists who took part made sure they stayed clean the night before so they had a steady hand," she says affectionately. "It really brought the community together. To me it represented the best of Toronto, strangers helping, collaborating, and sharing with one another, something we could use more of in Toronto."

## Unapologetically Empathetic

Like many councillors, she frequently gets asked when she will run for mayor. But don't expect a firm answer on this question any time soon. "I don't know where I'll be in 10 years," she says. "In the absence of real mayoral leadership right now, I believe people are just looking for leaders."

The 42-year-old art lover lives within walking distance of City Hall. She starts her day at 6 a.m. and often doesn't get home until about 10 p.m. "It's a crazy schedule, but I work really hard to maintain close relationships in my life," she says. "That's important."

At home, she's surrounded by animals, including a cat named Artemis; two turtles, Ghenghis Atwood and Otis Red Ear; and her beloved dog Frances, a poodle-cocker spaniel mix, who at 13 is now getting older and starting to lose her eyesight.

"Next to Toronto, Frances is the big love of my life," she says. "She's such a happy dog. I'm so blessed that we found each other. I suspect I will be a big mess when it's time for me to say goodbye."



Kristyn Wong-Tam as a little girl.

Wong-Tam is unapologetically empathetic. As the child of working-class immigrant parents from Hong Kong who settled in Riverdale, the experiences and struggles of her life have informed every aspect of her politics.





Kristyn Wong-Tam and her family.

At age 16, she was a confused youth coming to terms with being queer. The night she came out to her parents, she packed a duffel bag and prepared for the worst.

"That night I was so scared," she says. "I had no idea what was going to happen. I had a plan. I packed my bag. My girlfriend at the time was living in a rooming house, so I knew where I was heading. But up until then, I'd only known family."

"When you come to Canada as an immigrant, and you don't speak the language and only know other immigrants, you become really tight-knit. So I lost the support of my father in particular, temporarily. If my mother had her way I would never have been out of the house, but for my father it was a tough one."

For the next few years she survived as a street youth. "I wasn't so much homeless; it's more accurate to say I was under-housed."

Nevertheless, financially she was a wreck. She worked part-time jobs to make rent, pay for food, transportation, and clothing. She couch-surfed and bounced around through different rooming houses. Things fell apart with her girlfriend. It was a dark and confusing time.

"That's why I say today that the best form of social services and social housing is a unified family. So if people can learn to love their children and work through their issues, no matter how big or small, that is the best form of social service."

## Family and Community

Wong-Tam's story is certainly not unique. It's the story of so many queer youth, who are kicked out of their homes, rejected by their churches, discriminated by their school systems, and often subjected to violent bullying.

It was during this precarious time that Wong-Tam found herself in a new "chosen family," as so many street youth often do who are rejected at home.

"I was hanging out with a lot of young gay men because I

happened to be one of the few women around at that time," she says, describing her days as a tomboy budding baby dyke.

She dove into activism, joining the Lesbian and Gay Youth of Toronto and finding her voice. Years later, she would take on then-councillor Rob Ford by leading a group of Asian Torontonians chained to appliances to demand an apology for a derogatory statement he made about "Orientals" and how "they work like dogs" and "sleep beside their machines."

The year that Wong-Tam came out to her family and left home was also the year she attended and marched in her first Pride parade with her new chosen family.

"I'm a very intense person," she says. "Once I decide to devote myself to something I really just wrap myself around it. If I love you, I love you up and down."

The Pride parade became an instant love. A word Wong-Tam says she doesn't take lightly is "liberation." That's what Pride embodies for her.

"I never imagined I would feel so free," she says. "I finally found people who accepted me for who I was."

Two decades later, she says, it pains her to see young LGBTQ+ people still going through the same problems



Kristyn Wong-Tam celebrates her first Pride.

she did. "For those of us who are out of the closet, and in positions of influence, and who have the privilege to make decisions that affect policy around housing and community support, if I don't take this opportunity at City Hall to make the lives of LGBTQ people better, I don't know when I'll have this opportunity again. That's why I do see this job as a call to action for me.

"It's not a coincidence that I am the only out lesbian on council, who is constantly raising this issue. I made sure I was on the Community and Recreation Committee because it dealt specifically with issues around shelter and housing, child care, long-term care and social services. Because given my life, I know how difficult it can be."

Wong-Tam's relationship with her family has improved considerably since those early days on the street.

"It's fantastic. We're closer than we've ever been before," she

says. "They are extremely proud that their daughter is sitting in council chambers, so there's a sense of pride in them about who I am. They stand to defend me at every opportunity. And I am so proud of my parents for how far they have come."

## Loving Toronto

Prior to her life as a city councillor, Wong-Tam ascended through the class structure. She spent 16 years in the private sector, earning her real estate license at age 22, before a turn as a small-business owner when she bought a Timothy's



franchise on Church Street in 2000. That's when she decided the neighbourhood needed a business association, becoming one of the founders of the Church-Wellesley BIA and helping officially define the neighbourhood as Toronto's gay Village.

Then, in 2010, with the blessing of her parents and the nudge from a small army of supporters, Wong-Tam decided to run to replace long-time councillor Kyle Rae.

But she has never forgotten her roots. Her years on the street are among the main reasons Wong-Tam is so committed to housing and social supports. She's frequently seen in council writing motions to insert a gendered lens on various issues and projects to ensure equity.

The stage is now set for WorldPride. It will be the largest event Toronto has ever hosted, and Wong-Tam wants to ensure it leaves a legacy for the city for years to come.

One way to do that is to install rainbow pedestrian crossings at intersections in the gaybourhood with matching rainbow bike lanes along Wellesley. "They would be the world's gayest bike lanes. I'm running into a bit of bureaucracy on this one. City staff are scratching their heads, saying it's not the city standard," she laughs. "The city will not fall apart if we try this out and rise above the city's minimum standards."

Then there's the gay wedding project. WorldPride estimates two million people will visit the city, many from countries around the world that violently persecute LGBTQ+ people. For those living in the 83 countries that criminalize homosexuality, living openly and proudly without fear remains the first step. Marriage is almost unthinkable for them. "If you choose to get married, you can do that in Toronto."

"For an LGBTQ youth living in Zimbabwe or a young lesbian from Russia, I want them to be able to look to Toronto to see that, here the international community comes together for WorldPride, and there is a different way of interacting and behaving in society. If we achieve that, that's a very powerful legacy. We will be sending home people who have had a profound experience in Toronto, who will hopefully continue that good work in their home countries to free the lesbian and gay people around the world."

For some queer Torontonians, marriage represents an antiquated, heteronormative institution with deep roots in misogyny and ties to oppressive religions that continue to make gays and lesbians feel unwelcome.

"I know there are activists among us who question the need for state-sanctioned marriage, like, 'Why do I need governments to recognize my relationships? Why can't there be recognized chosen families? Why should any service and rights not be granted to any one community?' Having said that, I believe strongly that equal marriage is something to be proud of and promoted."

Wong-Tam is planning a mass gay wedding on the roof of Toronto City Hall, which she says will be secular humanist in nature, yet respectful of all religions. She envisions it to be completely inclusive, emotionally powerful and send a message to the world that Toronto is a city that recognizes all types of love.

For her part, Wong-Tam says she will never marry. "I'm not the marrying type. That doesn't mean I won't be in a long-term committed relationship."

Recently she celebrated the one-year anniversary of being single. Besides, she says, she's already in a relationship with Toronto.

"I just realized that Toronto is my first love," she says. "I would marry my city. I have traveled to other cities, and worked in other cities, even outside Canada, but I always come back to Toronto, which is my first love."

*Andrea Houston is an award-winning journalist and advocate specializing in queer issues. Her work has been published in The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, Toronto Life and Xtra!, where she spent four years as a staff reporter. In 2012, she was named Honoured Dyke by Pride Toronto.*





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## PROUD FAMILIES SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

*by Kelly Wilk*

**M**y late wife and I had the common concerns when we got pregnant and all the typical decisions to make as parents: home or hospital birth, midwife or doctor, drugs or natural labour, how to decorate the nursery? As lesbian parents we also made other decisions, like, which fertility clinic and sperm bank to choose, whether to have a known or unknown donor, deciding what donor to pick, and which mom would be called what name? Given that we chose a midwife supported, drug free, home birth and ended up with a 42 hour, drug hazed, hospital-marathon-cesarean option, we conceded to the obvious conclusion that we were not actually the ones making the decisions.

However, there were some decisions that were ours, choices that had yet to be made but we still thought a lot about. The most important one being: how to parent a confident, strong, secure child in a queer family? These days with the horrific on- and off-line bullying it is enough to make any parent wary and protective. This is especially so when many of these attacks are homophobic in nature. As a queer individual I am used to being aware that I have a target on my back in many situations, but when it came to me thinking about my child being in the line of fire, I had a lot of panic to make peace with.

Coming into this world, my son was very lucky to be born into a strong, queer positive community of family and

“ Here my Toronto community is like a little rainbow shield around my family. ”

friends. With my side of the family who didn't even blink when I came out, and my wife's side of the family who is the proudest, most supportive Irish Catholic crew I have ever met, he was set for life. This was only to be added to by a wonderful gay Godmother and Godfather and a contingent of amazing lesbian and allied Aunties. It is a running joke about how many of them he has.

Knowing that I had so much support, plus the fact that we were starting a family in Toronto, really allayed my what-might-be-fears. We are with some exceptions, such as our tactless Mayor, Rob Ford, a queer rights supportive city. We are also not living in one of the 83 countries where being gay is illegal and therefore difficult or impossible to have our rights, unions and families validated in legal and ethical ways.



The boys with two mommies club.

Here, my Toronto community is like a little rainbow shield around my family. We celebrate the good and support each other in difficult times. However, I know that this is certainly not the case for everyone.

### Creating Family Diversity

This is the fundamental reason why the presence of a solid queer community is so important to the raising of strong children with lesbian and gay parents. We did our prenatal classes at the 519 Community Centre ([www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)), which was a fabulous beginning to seeking an inclusive space to prepare for our family. They have a resource center, day camps, and an early-years drop-in center (complete with splash pad in the summer) that runs Tuesdays 5:30 to 7:30 pm. They have a Family Resource Centre open Tuesday

through Friday from 10am to 1pm. In addition, they also have Queer Parenting Programs like Dykes Planning Tykes, which serve as a great way to foster social connections between queer families. As a mom I know how valuable it is to connect with other parents, but when you are with another queer parent or family it gives you and your child a lovely normalizing effect, as well as a place to discuss and plan for challenges that arise.

A study done in 2013 on raising adopted children, by the University of Massachusetts indicated, "The best predictor of child behavior problems was competition between the parents and dissatisfaction with child care labor divisions, which were not related to parents' sexual orientation." ([www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130713095246.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/07/130713095246.htm)).

And so it seems, whether you are a queer or straight couple, the emotional wellbeing of your child appears to be completely dependent on the emotional wellbeing and functionality of the parents, shocker I know! Kids are little sponges and were I a sponge sitting around in a dish filled with resentment, a tendency towards gender biases, and rejection of otherness in all its forms, I wouldn't do as well either.

Just like gay and lesbian individuals that grow up in households and communities where gender difference and sexual orientation are maintained as just another type diversity, they learn to respect and expect differences. They develop personal experiences that allow them to be aware of and sensitive to otherness, as well as experiencing, ideally, a much more forgiving and broad space to grow into their own identities. I have been excited to see the Canadian Studies done on lesbian families in particular whose children seem to excel on many levels.

"On average, kids with two moms seem to be more confident and less aggressive than those raised by a mom and a dad. They are open-minded, affectionate and less susceptible to anxiety and depression," said Denise Balkissoon of *The Globe and Mail*, in her article "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Lesbian Families."

She reported, "Children with same-sex parents are undoubtedly bullied. A recent survey by the legal rights group Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere found that 37% of these teens reported verbal



Ann Ryan.



harassment, and 27% reported physical harassment.” However, in her research of the dynamics in lesbian parent families, she seemed to find they taught about equal division of parental responsibility, way lower tolerance to violence, support for a straightforward approach to helping their children form their identity, and learning acceptance and understanding personal rights. They also found a huge benefit of group parenting as creating a wider base of support for their children and a large inclusive feeling of family, which are my thoughts exactly. What we affectionately refer to as the three strong “boys with two mommies club” is going to be a key supportive ingredient in the lives of our sons.

She also states that the same statistics are not available for gay men raising a child as almost a quarter of lesbian couples have families and only 9% of male couples do. Although, I have to wonder if that fact is a little biased as well, as gay couples are in the position of having to utilize a surrogate donor or adopting children, something that tends to be more of an issue for queer couples in general. Once they are able to start a family I think strong parenting and a supportive community plays the same role.

## Updating Family Tradition

In searching out this rarer contingent of queer parents I spoke with Jeremiah Edmonds, President of H.O.P.E. (Halton Organization for Pride and Education), proud father to an adopted child, Jake. His partner Ben and he have tried to step back from being overly regimented with their parenting in terms of behaviour with their seven-year-old son.

“Both Ben and I can be quite ‘diligent’ with our rules and structure, and we have found that relaxing about things can help out quite a bit with all our stress levels,” says Edmonds. “As much as structure is important (especially for adopted children), giving some breathing room is as well. Both Ben and I have alpha type personalities; we joke that being parented by two dads doesn’t let you get away with anything. So we have relaxed on things, and focus on the big items.”

As a gay dad, I asked what challenges he and his partner had come up against raising their son. Their answer addressed the perception of family in the school system, and how this needs to change. I think it is a great example of how two

gay dads are also creating the positive change needed in the world and leaning on key supportive community members.



Jeremiah Edmonds

“Jake started working on some family tree activities this year, and his social studies teacher got in touch with us, asking for help. All the activities showed having a ‘mother’ and ‘father’ as the primary caregivers. We helped her to revamp the templates, making them more generic, and open ended. This was great, as it didn’t just help our family, but also other families that didn’t fit this narrow definition. The traditional family is an outdated term, and with so many different permutations of family, it was good to change this.” It also helps they educate Jake at home to get him comfortable with having two fathers. “Now he thinks it’s the coolest thing ever, and we hear his friends saying that too.”

“I think our Family Pride comes from (and keeps growing) with the amount of time we spend with each other,” Edmonds told me. “We did bring Jake to Toronto Pride last year, and enjoyed the activities at the Church Street school together. We did leave before it got really busy, for the parade. We have also been to one of the picnics that the 519 did for LGBTQ families, and continue to do this, as we settle in more with Jake. We are also friends with a couple of other LGBTQ families. Diversity is key, in my opinion. We want Jake to see us as one of many ways families are.”

So how do we celebrate Family Pride and should that necessarily coincide with adult Pride? I have yet to experience Pride events with my child. I have also thought to myself at Pride, as I go up and down the street watching the Trojan men and rainbow painted bodies,

“On average, kids with two moms seem to be more confident and less aggressive than those raised by a mom and a dad.”

“I want him to know we are proud of our family and we deserve a place to celebrate and be together...”

how I might explain that phenomenon to an inquisitive child. Pride does focus on aspects of sexuality, as we are, after all, celebrating different sexual orientations, gender expressions and freedom of choice and really just the right to be silly and play.

### Celebrating Family Pride

There have been numerous discussions around the topic of children at the Pride Festival, which seem mostly to be condemning this decision on moral grounds, because of the instance of nudity and sexual content. Lets be honest, when a person comes out of the closet and escapes possibly years of repression, self-hatred and fear, and gives themselves permission be themselves, Pride is the time we go out on the streets to celebrate. Don't tell us to go back in the closet, it's our day. If you were locked in a closet for most of your life you would be ecstatic too.

That being said, I also understand that exposing a child to concepts like body positiveness, and sexuality have to be done with awareness. Perhaps adult pride is just not the right venue to take them to, but that is each parent's decision and really why Family Pride exists. I have not gone yet myself, as I said, but we have had Family Pride brunches early morning at The Hair of the Dog, and barbeques at our house on Sunday after the Pride Parade. All the kids run around with rainbow flags, eat way too much cake and learn how wonderful it feels to have a proud queer family around them, loving them no matter who they are.

Ann Ryan, a friend of mine, is a Family Pride frequenter with her wife and son. “Family Pride is the first place we go and where we spend the majority of our time at Pride,” she says. “There are all kinds of families there and our children get to see a bunch of families that look like ours.”

I also have very much appreciated that my son has a reflection of queer families like his, in our close queer community. I want him to know that we are proud of

our family and we deserve a place to celebrate and be together, especially this year as Toronto hosts WorldPride for the first time. As for the attractions there are a number of things for a family to enjoy together. The Church Street Public School at 83 Alexander Street seems to be the hub of family friendly fun at Pride. This year it is open to the public On June 27th, 28th and 29th.

“Our son loves the face painting, arts and crafts and live music,” says Ryan. “It's more laid back and less crowded than the rest of Pride, and I think that celebrates love and diversity in a beautiful way. It's also nice to get out of the heat for a while, you can go inside the gym of the school, or lay down on the grass under a tree. Last year we chatted with other lesbian friends while our kids played baseball at the park. It's nice to see so many community organizations involved—there are booths set up and people volunteering their time to interact with the kids. It also lets us know about organizations that are gay friendly. The free food and drinks are a huge bonus!” For newer moms and dads they also provide a diaper changing station.

The place I would like to try is the 519. My friends and I headed there last year at Pride after doing The Dyke March. The early-years drop-in clears out for beer tents, live music and an amazing hotdog stand.

“We also like the splash pad behind the 519,” says Ryan. “The kids can cool down in the water while the adults can enjoy a drink or two. This area is separated from the main beer garden, is less busy and more kid friendly, at least until late afternoon.”

These are the fun times our kids are going to remember. The celebration of Pride will be etched into their childhood memories like any other holiday. They will grow up knowing there is a space in the world for them and that their family deserves to plant their roots there together. That my friends, is something to be proud of.

*Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer, Reiki Master and Reflexologist ([www.feetmatter.ca](http://www.feetmatter.ca)). She is also a woman processing the death of her 35 year old wife. To heal she has invented a seriously disheveled super hero version of herself and started a blog. To read her soggy Thursday capers go to [www.captaingrief.com](http://www.captaingrief.com) and be ready to laugh and cry along with her!*



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# JOI *De Vivre* Partout

by Bryen Dunn

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Divers/Cité©

heating things up to packed audiences. Then, once spring hits and the snow melts away, the city begins its transition to summer, a time for round-the-clock festivals and frolicking. It's also the time of year for celebrating pride, diversity, and a bit of perversity, as the city presents three LGBTQ+ themed events, with the annual **Divers/Cité** ([diverscite.org/wp](http://diverscite.org/wp)) happening between July 28th and August 3rd, and



**Montréal Pride** ([www.fiertemontrealpride.com/en](http://www.fiertemontrealpride.com/en)) between August 11th and 17th. **Pervers/Cité** ([cultmontreal.com/tag/perverscite](http://cultmontreal.com/tag/perverscite)) also presents more fringe type events both during these two festivals and throughout the year as well.

Divers/Cité used to happen just outside The Village area, but has now been moved to the larger open-air space down by the St. Lawrence River. It's a bit of a hike, but it also makes for a nice stop in Old Montréal for dining or drinks on the way. This event is all about the partying with outdoor stages set up for DJ's and other performances going non-stop from midday until late night. Montréal Pride, on the other hand, has more of a political and educational aspect to it, but of course mixed in with tons of fantastic parties, as well as the parade that winds its way through the downtown city streets. Pervers/Cité most often takes place in unique spaces attended by the more alternative queer community, thereby offering a full spectrum of entertainment for most any taste. **Black and Blue** is another homo-happening in October that's popular with the circuit party, buff boys who like to sweat.

Other summer festivals are **Just For Laughs** ([www.hahaha.com/en](http://www.hahaha.com/en)), **International Jazz Festival** ([www.montrealjazzfest.com](http://www.montrealjazzfest.com)), the eclectic arts and music **Osheaga Festival** ([www.osheaga.com](http://www.osheaga.com)), and a never-ending collection of smaller extravaganza's popping up almost anywhere at any time, themed around fashion, music,

multi-culturalism, and of course *joie de vivre*.

## Aires Libres (Open Air Enjoyment)

Visiting a city for the first time can be daunting when trying to figure out how to get from one place to the next without the use of a tour guide or taxi cab. Montréal is

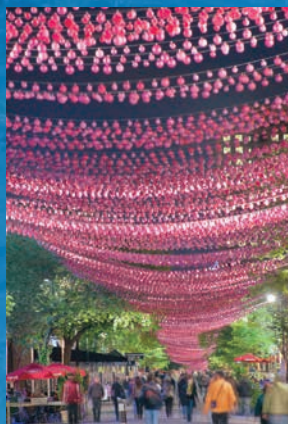
a sprawled out city, but it's also quite navigable. It's best to establish a couple points of references, so that if you do get disoriented there will be landmarks to help get you back on track. **Old Montréal** is down by the harbour where exploration ships first came in some 400 years ago to discover the city. Freighters and cruise ships still sail the mighty St. Lawrence River today, and the shoreline is a great place to spend an afternoon at the markets or lounging about at one of the outdoor terraces.

**Mont Royal** is another monumental landmark with its lighted cross towering above the city giving you an additional direction. The trip to the top is more endearing if you walk the trails rather than take a vehicle, and the reward is an awesome panoramic view of the downtown and surrounding areas. **McGill University** is a great place to chill as well, spread out over several downtown campuses with lots of open green space. It's not uncommon to see people having picnics, games being played, or the sound of musical instruments. These activities are even more common in the large city-centre **Parc La Fontaine**, where sun worshippers spend the day.

The best way to navigate Montréal is on foot, especially for first time visitors. The central area along **St. Catherine Street** can be strolled for hours with all the shops buzzing, especially **Simons**, everyone's favourite for Québec original clothing. Around Stanley and Crescent streets is the "Anglais" area, but it's easy to get by pretty much anywhere in the city without knowing French. Walking east, is the legendary rock and roll bar **Foufounes Électriques** ([foufounes.qc.ca](http://foufounes.qc.ca)), which further on, eventually leads to The Village area. This part of the street is also closed to traffic the entire summer, 24 hours a day, for a good 1km stretch. It's what can be called party central at night, but it's also a great place for brunch and dinner, or breakfast on the way home. Bars and clubs range from drag and strippers, to karaoke taverns and leather bars. As of print, it's also the



**The Village**  
Photo by: Tourisme Québec,  
Linda Turgeon



**Aires Libres.**  
Photo by: Marc Cramer



**Mont Royal's Angel**  
Photo by: Tourisme Montréal



**Just for Laughs Festival.**  
Photo by: Tourisme Montréal,  
Martin New



only remaining open location of **Priape**, for those looking for sexy summer wear. Sky ([www.complexesky.com](http://www.complexesky.com)) and **Unity** ([www.clubunitymontreal.com/?lang=en](http://www.clubunitymontreal.com/?lang=en)) are two long-standing multi-level dance clubs. **Mado** ([www.mado.qc.ca](http://www.mado.qc.ca)) has the fiercest queens in the city. **Stock Bar** ([www.stockbar.com](http://www.stockbar.com)) is all about the g-strings, and the **Black Eagle** ([www.aiglenoir.ca](http://www.aiglenoir.ca)) sells quarts of beer to bears. Most places have extended patios all summer with the street closure, so bar-hopping makes for a fun night.

## Bien Manger (Good Eats)

**St. Laurent** and **St. Denis** streets run parallel to each other cutting through the centre of the city, but that's where their similarity ends. Walking to this area from the downtown core would take about 30 minutes, and there is a bit of a hill to climb, that's unavoidable from anywhere in the city. **St. Laurent** is lined with unique one-of-a-kind shops, independent designers, hip hangouts, and art galleries; whereas **St. Denis** is more about the brand name designs and finer dining.

**St. Laurent** takes in three eclectic neighbourhoods that overlap and forge into one larger area, namely The Plateau, Latin Quarter, and Mile End. It's a section of the city to find live music shows and one-off parties, many queer themed. It has a grittier urban feel to it, but in a good way. Make sure to check out **Schwartz's** ([schwartzsdeli.com](http://schwartzsdeli.com)) for their smoked meat sandwiches, or if the line is too long you can go to **Dunn's** ([dunnsfamous.com](http://dunnsfamous.com)), also raved about for their meats. Another must while in the area are the bagels from either the 24-hour **St Viateur** ([www.stviateurbagel.com](http://www.stviateurbagel.com)) or **Fairmount**, both rivaling it out for the best in the city. This is also the area where two of Montréal's legendary artists called home. Author Mordecai Richler (*The Apprenticeship*

of *Duddy Kravitz*) grew up on **St. Urbain Street**, and musician Leonard Cohen still lives across from **Parc Portugale** at **St. Laurent** and **Rachel**.

**Rachel Street** west leads to one of the more interesting entrances to Mont

Royal with large gates and towering sculptures. The Park at the top of the mountain was designed by world-known architect Frederick Law Olmstead, and the cemetery has many high profile individuals resting there, including Richler. Heading the opposite direction will take you past the home of Cohen and many other funky shops, across **St. Denis**, and right into the green oasis of **Parc La Fontaine**.

A suggested stop anytime of the day or night is at the 24-hour **Poutine La Banquise** ([labanquise.com/en](http://labanquise.com/en)), known for their generous size and multiple versions of poutine, the original being made with French Fries, gravy, and fresh cheese curds. Another option to visit in the same direction is the car-free Duluth Avenue that has a variety of dining options, many offering bring your own wine option. Walking back down **St. Denis** toward the always entertaining **St. Catherine Street** will provide an interesting contrast between the two main through fares.

## À Pied, À Vélo (By Foot or By Bike)

Many people also choose to get around by Bixi, the public bike-share program that anyone with a credit card can use. Pay for a \$7.00 day membership and ride as many times as you like for up to 30 minutes at a time for no additional charge. That can get you pretty much anywhere in the city, with pick up and drop off at anyone of the over 400 stations. If you go over the 30 minutes there's additional charges, so making short trips of discovery is best. There are cyclists everywhere, with separated bike lanes on many of the streets. The annual **Tour de l'Île** ([www.veloquebec.info/en/govelo/The-Tour-de-l-Ile-de-Montreal](http://www.veloquebec.info/en/govelo/The-Tour-de-l-Ile-de-Montreal)) held the first weekend in June attracts upwards of 35,000 participants who spend the day riding about 60 kilometres through various neighbourhoods on vehicle-free city streets. There's also the **Tour de la Nuit** evening ride where everyone decorates and lights up their bikes.

A good day excursion is to make your way over to **Parc**



Tour de l'Île  
Photo by: Maxime Juneau



Fairmount Bagel Bakery  
Photo by: Tourisme Montréal,  
Pierre-Luc Dufour



Shopping on Laurier Street  
Photo by: Tourisme Montréal,  
Stéphan Poulin





Montreal Pride

**Jean Drapeau**, located on an island in the middle of the St. Lawrence River connected by one of the many long bridges that make up the city landscape. This is where Expo 1967 took place, and many of the buildings are still being used today for a variety of events, including the weekly DJ driven **Piknic Electronik** ([piknicelectronik.com/en](http://piknicelectronik.com/en)) dance party. There's also a swimming pool with a handmade sandy beach, and this is where the massive three-day outdoor Osheaga Festival takes place the first weekend in August, the same weekend as Divers/Cité. If you find yourself visiting on an unpleasant day outdoors, there are plenty of ways to fill your day indoors. A visit to the **Scandinave Spa** in Old Montréal is definitely a worthwhile visit to lounge and pamper oneself. Walking the expansive underground network of shops and services is another way, or you can visit one of the many art galleries and museums, including **The Museum of Contemporary Art**, **Canadian Centre for Architecture**, and **Montréal Museum of Fine Arts**. The newly renovated downtown public library also often has changing art and historical exhibitions.

Montréal has no shortage of dining options, so it's best to venture out and discover what you're craving, from traditional local bites to international cuisine. For those wanting to go with the celebrity chef experience, there's **Maison Boulud** ([www.maisonboulud.com](http://www.maisonboulud.com)), one of Daniel Boulud's France inspired restaurants, and Canadian Chuck Hughes operates **Le Bremner** ([crownsalts.com/lebremner/index\\_en.html](http://crownsalts.com/lebremner/index_en.html)). For traditional Québécois cuisine, there are many places to be found, and three highly recommended restaurants are all located around the Plateau/Latin Quarter area. **La Binerie** ([www.labineriemontroyal.com](http://www.labineriemontroyal.com)) has been serving it up

right since 1938 with specialties found nowhere else, **Restaurant Mâche** ([restaurantmache.com](http://restaurantmache.com)) has real home-style comfort food, and **Au Pied de Cochon** ([www.restaurantaupieddecochon.ca/index\\_e.html](http://www.restaurantaupieddecochon.ca/index_e.html)) specializes in foie gras. **The Peel Pub** has been feeding the university crowds cheap booze and food for years, and **The Village Grill 50's Diner** ([villagegrille50sdiner.com](http://villagegrille50sdiner.com)) is hangover central and an awesome people watching spot.

As for places to bed down there's no shortage of hotels in every price range, as well as home-stays, bed and breakfasts, and university dorms for those on a budget. The **W**, **Westin**, **Fairmount Queen Elizabeth**, and **Ritz Carlton** are well worth the extra dollars if within your budget. More quaint gay-welcoming accommodations are **Atmosphere**, **Village Bed and Breakfast**, and **Chateau Versailles**. Both McGill and Concordia universities offer economical alternatives to hotels in the summer months, and **Montréal Central** is a combo hotel/hostel depending on how much privacy you want. It's a great way to meet other travellers if winging it solo, and they do their own events and entertainment onsite as well. Grab a bottle of the local wine or beer to bring back to the room from one of the many SAQ alcohol outlets, or a different selection can sometimes be found at any of the licensed convenience stores.

Check out all you need to know about Gay Montréal on this tourism sponsored blog: [www.tourisme-Montréal.org/blog/category/gay-life](http://www.tourisme-Montréal.org/blog/category/gay-life). Then pack your bags and get ready to experience the *joie de vivre*.

*Most places  
have extended  
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with the street  
closure, so bar-  
hopping makes for  
a fun night.*

*Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities. He's willing to take on any assignments of interest, attend parties with free booze, listen to rants, and travel the world in search of the great unknown. He's eager to discover the new, remember the past, and look into the future.*





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## Hot Artist



# THE CHURCH STREET

**R**oughly bounded by Charles Street to the north, Jarvis Street to the east, Gerrard Street to the south, and Yonge Street to the west, with the core strip located along Church Street from Wellesley south to Alexander is the area we Torontonians affectionately call “The Village.” As historical home to Toronto’s LGBTQ+ community, the Church-Wellesley Village is the perfect location for the large-scale mural project that has recently taken over the area.

The Church Street Mural Project was realized in consultation with the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) as well as LGBTQ+ activists and historians from all over the country. The artists involved in the project were selected by a panel of local art community leaders.

As stated on the website, the purpose of The Church Street Mural Project is:

1. *The beautification of one of Toronto’s most iconic cultural neighbourhoods through the telling of its stories in art on the front of its buildings’ walls; and*
2. *The creation of an artistic experience that will position the historic hub of Toronto’s LGBTQ+ community as the must-see open-air art gallery for the millions who will visit the city between now and the end of WorldPride 2014.*

Syrus Marcus Ware and James Fowler co-curated the project. Aimed at invigorating the visual appeal of The Church-Wellesley Village, the murals are meant to connect public spaces with the community. Eleven artists were

chosen to interpret “the history, culture, and community of the neighbourhood through a series of publicly-accessible murals in the area.” ([churchstreetmurals.com](http://churchstreetmurals.com))

Anyone interested in Toronto’s LGBTQ+ art scene is familiar with Syrus Marcus Ware. Among his many awards and achievements are “Best Queer Activist,” *Now Magazine* 2005; in 2012 he was awarded the Steinert and Ferreiro Award for LGBT community leadership and activism, and last year he was invited to be part of the Canadian Jury for the Inside Out LGBT Film and Video Festival. For the last decade, Ware has also worked with Blackness Yes! to produce Blockorama at Toronto Pride. His own work explores the spaces between and around identities as a way of questioning traditional understandings of gender, sexuality and race and he has exhibited at the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU), Gladstone Hotel, A Space Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, and SPIN Gallery.



Lily Butterland  
Photo by: Kalmplex

James Fowler is an active member of the World Pride Marketing and Communications Committee and was the Social Media Director at Akimbo Art Promotions from 2011 to 2013. Identifying the need for more visual art at Toronto Pride, Fowler founded the



Above: Butterland Mural

# STREET MURAL PROJECT

by cee sando

10x10 Photography Project, an annual portrait exhibition taking place during Pride at the Gladstone Hotel featuring ten LGBTQ+ photographers while celebrating the contribution of one hundred LGBTQ+ Canadians who have contributed to the arts. (Ed. Note: you can read our profile of James Fowler and the 10x10 Photography Project in 2012's springplay! "Hot Artist.")

What an exciting way to welcome WorldPride! As visitors from all over Canada and the world flock to our city to celebrate WorldPride, they will be welcomed with beautiful artwork that simultaneously celebrates the queer community, recalls events of the past and demands respect and equality for all. Community is clearly the project's main theme. Though each artist is very proud of their own particular contribution to the overall project, each also made it clear that the project was very much a group effort. The community was involved throughout—from conception to the actual painting of the work.



Wil Craddock  
Photo by: Kalmplex

After being dared by friend DJ XXX to apply to the Church Street Mural Project, Lily Butterland sent in her application and impressed the selection committee with her 11 foot wide tableau of Amsterdam Window Girls, "BloedGracht." Butterland jumped at the chance to create an even larger scale piece on the building—adjacent to 66

Wellesley Street East, which used to house Police Stables. Her mural depicts a boisterous party with "the 50 most important party people of gay Toronto nightlife," Butterland says. "The portraits [are] set all together in a nightclub made of bits and



Wil Craddock's Pink Button Project

pieces of night clubs near the village from the past 64 years. The people I selected for portraits are also chosen from the past 64 years...



Meera Sethi's mural

I consider this Mural and the research project anthropology of my own contemporary scene. As a regular gallery artist, most of my works are portraits of the party girls, queens, dancers, and performers I see every week. I set out to trace the origins of this scene and traced it back through Goodhandies' championing the decriminalisation of sex work and bawdy house laws, back through egg and





Meera Sethi

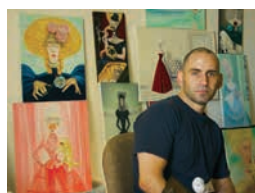
ink attacks and queens fighting in the street every weekend in the '70s, all the way back to the ultra-sleaziness of a \$3 room at the Warwick hotel with 200 pound muscle queen, Miss Brandy Lamar belting out tunes over a live band in 1949."

Based on a previous art piece, William Craddock's mural reimagines his Pink Button Project. The Pink Button Project is an online exhibition featuring photographs of several pin buttons from the LGBTQ+ community sourced



Troy Brooks and Christiano De Araujo's mural

Meera Sethi's mural is on the south wall of 552 Church Street. Sethi's bold work explores the intersection of material culture and migration. Just as Craddock's relied on others to complete his unique work, Sethi's work would not have been completed were it not for the help of the community... in this case in the form of a 'good Samaritan.'



Artist Troy Brooks

of the nicest moments of the process was on one cold Sunday afternoon," Sethi recalls. "I was about halfway into my mural, when I was contemplating a day of clambering up the scaffolding to begin marking diagonal lines across brick and windows... It was an impossible job for just one person to do, yet no one else was available to help. And the weather in Toronto had turned cooler. Was I going to be able to see this project through? And then the universe sent me a message in the form of a complete stranger, Christopher Rouleau,



Artist Christiano De Araujo

who had heard of this project through one of the curators. Chris was a blessing to me that day—and for many other days. I would not have been able to complete this project without his kind, generous and consistent help."

At 418 Church Street, on the south Facing wall of the building formerly known as the Barn, now Marquis, Troy Brooks and Christiano De Araujo's mural depicting the 1981 Bathhouse Raids and subsequent riots in Toronto can be found (view a video of the mural being completed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIK4g\\_Laah4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIK4g_Laah4)). "It tells a story" says De Araujo. "I hope [the piece] can help the public understand the challenges our community goes through." De Araujo is a Brazilian born self-taught artist. He claims that his love of art began the moment he discovered his sister's crayons.

Brooks came to art later in life, beginning to show work publicly in 2010. Brooks is particularly interested in female characters—the most significant character in their mural is a central female character whom the artists purposely have left open to interpretation. Some see the figure as a lesbian demanding visibility among the raucous, others as a drag queen in the midst of the fray. Brooks was primarily responsible for the design of the piece, with De Araujo responsible for the art direction and actual painting, though the artists assert that every step of the mural was a community effort. In fact, after the project's original sponsor dropped out, the pair thought they would never make it off the ground, until the local Bank of Montreal stepped in and agreed to sponsor the mural. After a month of planning and 18 days of actual painting, the mural was complete. "I am very proud of this work and I'm very happy to be a part of this project. It is one of the most exciting pieces I've done in my career thus far," says De Araujo.

We suspect that the entire community is proud of all of these amazing murals and the inspiring story they tell of our vibrant and diverse LGBTQ+ community!

Find more information about the project and all of the murals visit [churchstreetmurals.com](http://churchstreetmurals.com) online or @churchstmurals on twitter.

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June 1st - 5th Annual Mr. Miss Pride Niagara Competition @ Envylounge.ca 10pm

June 2nd - Annual Rainbow Flag Raising @ St Catharines City Hall 2pm

June 2nd - Niagara Falls Rainbow Lighting Ceremony @ 9PM and 10PM

June 4th - First Annual Niagara Unity Awards @ Amici's, Thorold

June 7th - 3rd Annual Pride in the Park @ Montebello Park 12pm - 10pm

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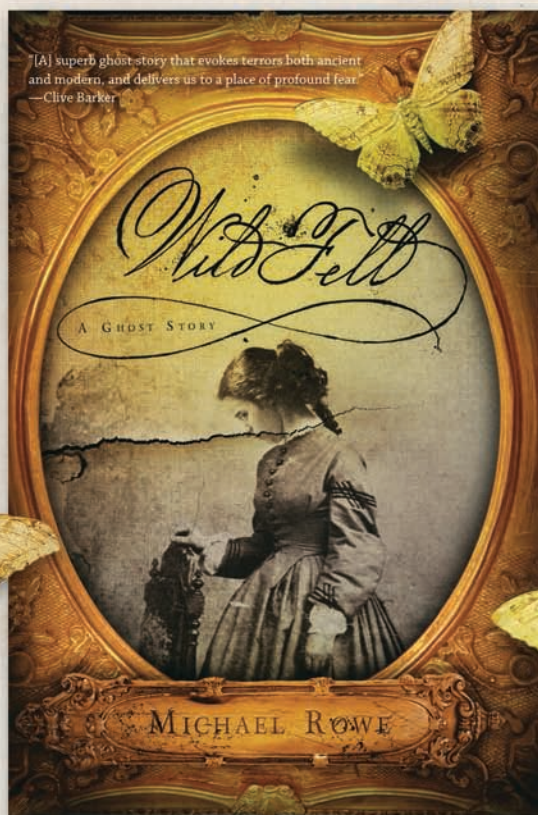
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EXCERPT FROM



*A crumbling mansion on a rocky island in a remote northern Ontario lake. A century's worth of corrupt family secrets and gruesome legends, passed from generation to generation. A malefic supernatural force, biding its time, hungering for revenge. Sixteen-year-old Brenda Egan has just woken up on the beach across the lake from the ruins of the house called Wild Fell. It's night. It's cold. Her boyfriend Sean has disappeared. And Brenda is about to find out that she's far from alone in the dark. springplay! is proud to welcome back to its pages acclaimed Canadian horror writer Michael Rowe with this exclusive excerpt from his terrifying second novel, Wild Fell.*

### Nightswimming 1960

Brenda woke shivering in the cold. Her closed eyes stung from the smoke of the dead fire trapped behind her eyelids. She sat up, then rubbed her eyes with her knuckles like a crying child in a cartoon. *Sean let the fire go out*, she thought stupidly. *How did the fire go out that quickly? It's only been a couple of minutes. We just dozed off.*

"Sean..."

For a moment, Brenda thought she had gone blind, because she couldn't see anything: not the fire, not the lake, not the trees, not the sky. The world as she had known it before she dozed off had simply... vanished. She might have woken up in the blackness of space. She knew, without being able to see, that he was not beside her.

She whipped her head around. *Someone is there. I can feel it. Someone is watching me.* This time, Brenda didn't call out Sean's name: she whispered it, suddenly, crazily afraid that if he wasn't close enough to hear her whisper, someone or something else might answer her from the darkness instead of him.

As her eyes grew accustomed to the dark, Brenda realized that the shoreline of Devil's Lake was enveloped in deep fog, the densest fog she had ever seen in all of her sixteen years growing up in Alvina. Sure, there had been fogs before, certainly the sort of mists anyone living near large bodies of water knows well. They came, they went. At worst they were an annoyance for boaters and drivers on roads, especially at night. But this? She had never seen anything like this.





*And how much time had passed? Half an hour? An hour? Two?*

And she felt the eyes again, just out of sight.

*The Devil is always a thief, Brenda.*

Unbidden, an image eddied in her mind. It was the image from Sean's stupid ghost story about the woman with no eyes who rushed across the road from behind the locked gate of the desolate country cemetery.

This time not caring who heard her, Brenda screamed out, "*Sean! Sean, where are you?*" but her voice was lost in the deadening weight of the heavy fog. The dullness of it mocked her, isolating her with its brutal, forced quieting. She felt her rising fear flip over into the terror zone before she was even able to understand why it had. Brenda started to cry. Had she been further away from the edge of hysteria, she might have wondered why the thought that perhaps Sean *was* playing a trick on her, or hiding, or going to the bathroom up against a tree hadn't even occurred to her as an outside possibility, a logical conclusion at which to arrive in these circumstances.

No, Brenda knew two things clearly, internally, on a primal level that did not require external verification. Firstly, she knew Sean was nowhere nearby. She sensed he wasn't hiding, playing a trick, or anything else. He was simply *not there*. His presence had been *cancelled*. Brenda's conscious mind may not have been able to ride that particular horse but her subconscious mind had already processed it. Secondly, she knew just as strongly that she wasn't alone, that whatever she felt peering at her through the fog wasn't Sean.

Brenda groped on the ground at her feet till she found her pedal pushers and her sandals. She dressed herself blindly, frantically, feeling for buttons and zippers. She knew her panties were somewhere nearby but she couldn't find them, and didn't care if she ever did, or if anyone else ever did either. All she wanted was to be dressed, to find the keys for Sean's truck, and to be away from Devil's Lake.


Weeping, Brenda stumbled, feeling for branches. The branches would mean the edge of the path leading *up*, away from the shoreline, back to the truck, back to safety. Blindly, she flailed her arms, meeting nothing but the empty fog.

And then she distinctly heard a muffled splash behind her. She pivoted on her heel.

"Sean, is that you? Sean?" *It must be him! Who else could it be?* The relief that washed over her nearly brought her to her knees. Another splash came, louder this time. "Sean? Sean! Answer me! I can't see!"

And then, as if the omnipresent fog had abruptly thinned or parted in the gloom, Brenda *could* see. Not clearly, but at least she could see outlines: the bulk of Blackmore Island, darker than the water surrounding it, the edges looking like smaller pine scrub islands of smooth, rounded granite layering in the lake, grey on grey on black.

A sudden subtle shift of shadows on the surface of the lake drew her eye to a place maybe fifteen yards offshore where a figure stood pale and unmoving in the murky starlight. Brenda drew a sharp intake of breath, covering her mouth with her hands to keep from screaming. As she watched, the figure moved deeper into the lake. This time there was no splash, just a susurrating displacement of water. Brenda saw that the figure was male, and nude. Of course it was Sean. Who else would it be? Before tonight, she might not have been able to recognize his body in the dark, but at that moment she still felt its ghost-imprint on her own and she knew it was him.



Again, the impression of *cancellation* came to her. While she could see Sean through the fog, in the water, she could not *feel* Sean. Whatever he was doing in the lake at night, he wasn't swimming. Or if he was swimming, he didn't know it. She could see the tips of his elbows rising whitely out of the surface.

The thought came to her, as clearly as if a voice had spoken in her brain: *Sean is drowning himself. He's committing suicide in the lake, right in front of your eyes.*

Another step deeper, the water now just at his shoulders. The fog began to thicken again, sweeping across the surface of Devil's Lake from the direction of Blackmore Island, the island itself now hidden from sight.

Then she saw the woman strolling across the water.

Brenda blinked, and looked again at what must surely be a trick of the fog, or the residual starlight, or her own exhausted imagination.

Her first instinct was to call out to the woman to save Sean, to pull him out, to wake him up if he was sleepwalking. She was *right there!* But she knew the woman could not be right there, because what she was seeing could not possibly be real, because nobody ever walked on water except maybe Jesus Christ a long time ago, and there was no way in hell this was Jesus Christ. Not out here, not at night, not in this godforsaken place in full sight of Blackmore Island and the house behind the small forest of windswept white pine.

*This is not happening*, she thought. *I'm not seeing this.*

"Sean! Sean! Stop!" Brenda screamed his name over and over, waving her arms to catch his attention. "*Sean, no! Come back!*" She picked up a piece of driftwood at her feet and threw it as hard as she could into the lake in his direction, hoping to hit him with it, to shock him, to wake him up. When she looked again, Sean was alone in the lake. The driftwood landed uselessly in the water not far from where she stood. The sound of the splash was weak, absorbed by the fog.


Then Sean's head disappeared beneath the water.

Brenda screamed again, taking five lurching steps into the water, kicking up waves as she ran. She would swim to him, to where he had disappeared. There was still time. She realized the folly of that as soon as the water reached her knees. It was cold. Terribly, terribly cold. Not August-cold, but cold like it became in late fall when you realized you'd taken one late-season swim too many and the ice of it shocked your heart and made you scream in a high, warbling voice that seemed to come from the top of your throat because everything below your throat was impaled by the chill coming up from the sediment of the lakebed.

She stumbled backward out of the water and fell, twisting her left knee painfully. White-hot bolts of pure agony shot up from her kneecap, pinning her to the ground as surely as if she'd been nailed to it.

The fog came alive around her in a whirling swarm. Something landed on her face. Then another something. Then another, until her entire face was covered with what felt like tiny scabrous feathers crawling across her nose and eyes. Frantically, Brenda scrubbed her face with her hands. They came away covered with moths, some crushed and broken by the movement of her fingers, others still fluttering, crawling with dreadful insectile determination across her wrists and up her arms. They came in relentless numbers till it was impossible for Brenda to tell the moths from the fog, or where one





grey miasma ended and the other began. They swarmed across her mouth, crawling inside. The dry, dusty body of one of the moths caught in her throat. She gagged, coughing and spitting, with her fingers in her mouth, scraping the moths from inside her cheeks and along her gums, the roof of her mouth. Her world was reduced to the chirruping sound of what seemed like the thunder of a million insect wings. She swatted them away with her hands. Her only thought was to get the moths off her body. Then it came to her— she would drown them in the lake. She would swim out to where she'd seen Sean, where the water was deep enough, and she would drown the disgusting things. They couldn't swim, but she could.

*A good plan*, she thought, crawling laboriously across the ground towards the water's edge, feeling lightheaded and weak and teetering on the edge of a different sort of blackness. The edge of her palm struck the water and sank into the sedimentary mud, grainy with ground rock and sand that oozed between her splayed fingers. Pulling her weight with her arms alone, dragging her injured knee behind her, she launched herself into the lake. She fell face-forward. Lake water and sand surged into her nostrils and her mouth, but she still felt the moths wriggling on her wet skin.

When Brenda reached deep enough water, she flopped forward into it weakly, scrubbing herself with her hands beneath the surface. Then she coughed. And coughed again.

*That thing is still in my throat*, she thought. *Oh sweet Jesus*.

She coughed again and again, trying to dislodge the carapace of the moth that had lodged in her windpipe, or at least swallow it down. Her throat filled with water on the intake. She rose to the surface, and then slipped below again, taking in water through her nose and mouth. Frantically, she clawed her way up, treading water to stay afloat, coughing and inhaling more water involuntarily as she rose, retching. Her larynx constricted, sealing the oxygen channels to her lungs as water entered her airways, driving out consciousness, and Brenda began to drown.

Suddenly, the scent of camphor and dried violets was everywhere. The fragrance reminded her of the sachets in the drawers of her grandmother's mahogany vanity dressing table, in her bedroom at the top of the old house in Stayner. It was the extract of dim hallways with shuttered windows and high ceilings; of dresses of silk and long woolen coats; of sun-warmed wood panelling, candlewax, unwound clocks, years spent indoors—in essence, the attar of time itself sleeping.

Brenda had a sudden, vivid impression of her grandmother's fine and white hands, smooth as bone, gently brushing Brenda's hair out of her eyes as she tucked her in under the duvet and reached over to turn out Brenda's bedside lamp.

The thought was a comforting one, and it even distracted Brenda from the realization that she was dying. It made her smile, even as she felt her grandmother's hands grasp her ankles and pull her beneath the surface of Devil's Lake, her body spiralling downward, her lungs taking in one final deep breath of lake water, driving the last bit of life out of her in a fine spray of bubbles that floated to the surface, then disappeared.

**Michael Rowe** is an award-winning Canadian writer. The author of several nonfiction books and a former contributing writer for *The Advocate*. His first novel, *Enter, Night* was a finalist for the Prix Aurora and the Sunburst Award, and will be published in German this fall by Random House. His second novel, *Wild Fell*, was published in early 2014. He lives in Toronto and is at work on his third novel.





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**During PRIDE, Toronto Newsgirls Boxing Club floats down the street with women holding the ring corners and Savoy Howe, “Coach Kapow!” refing women boxing demonstrations to the thrill of onlookers.**

I still remember the first time I met Howe ten years ago at a LGBTQ+ sports exhibition at The 519 Community Centre. Howe was holding leather hand pads for one of her students, a muscular but petite woman who *patta pat pat* smacked the hand pads with a rhythmic combination of punches pushing Howe backwards in a circle around the display tables. I was smitten by the display of female strength.

The Club has been around since 1996 after Howe spent four years as one of the only females in the Toronto Newsboys Boxing Club. At the time, with a theatre degree, she was also pounding the pavement as a performer and needed to find additional income. Howe put up posters on telephone poles that read “Boxing for Women!” and within four months over 40 women showed up to pay her to teach them boxing.



Back then, Howe could only find time to run classes during the men's times at Toronto Newsboys Boxing Club, but when she found women-only time, everything changed. "I noticed how women became bigger in their bodies and weren't nervous like they were [during men's hours]," said Howe. She realized that it was very important to have women's-only class times in order for her students to feel safe in the boxing gym. Take a class or two and Howe will assign you a boxing name based on your strengths. Ten years later, Howe still remembers mine: Falcon.

The theme of creating safe space grew. "Since moving into our own gym in 2006, life has gotten more predictable in a good way. Plus, we no longer have to clean up after the boys," Howe chuckled. With the establishment of the new gym located in Toronto's east end at 388 Carlaw Ave, Unit #108, Newsgirls became a partner in a program called Shape Your Life, a free boxing program for female and transgender survivors of violence ([shapeyourlifeboxing.com](http://shapeyourlifeboxing.com)).

Shape Your Life was created by Brock University Professor, Cathy Van Ingen after having taken part in one of Howe's summer boxing camps. Van Ingen brought in two other partner organizations along with Brock University (Opportunity for Advancement and Jessie's, now called the June Callwood Centre) to offer this empowering program to women who would benefit.

The Newsgirls has a sister club in Tokyo, a women-only boxing club called Wildheart Sports Gym and began to grow as community space here in Toronto. "We offer a recreational program for participants who have no desire to get punched in the nose, an amateur program for boxers who want to compete, and the Shape Your Life program—our free boxing program for female and transgender survivors of violence," said Howe.

Even after eleven Fight Factory events that give Newsgirls a chance to get in the ring and compete, and an estimated community of 4,500 (alumni and current participants), Howe doesn't stop. The gym has a choir, a clear Trans policy, a writing group, a goal-setting program called The Path, a food bank, and will soon have a monthly book club.

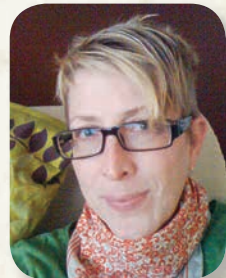
She also encourages art expression. "Interested Shape Your Life participants come and paint on canvas that used to be the ring canvas," added Howe. "When we got our new ring canvas a year or so ago, we cut up our old ring canvas into 80+ pieces, stretched them onto frames, and have used about 50 of them so far." They've had a number of art shows so far at the Grapefruit Moon Restaurant, Gladstone Art Bar and Tango Palace Coffee Shop. They also featured a photo exhibition of 40 photos of empowering female boxers at the Grapefruit Moon. For more information about all that Newsgirls offers, visit [torontonewsgirls.com](http://torontonewsgirls.com).

Although the gym has had a life-changing impact on the hundreds in the LGBTQ+ community and so many others, Howe still struggles to keep the gym viable. "I wish I could say financial freedom keeps me going, but most boxing gyms survive on passion, not on finances as most boxing gyms survive month to month." But Howe added, "What keeps me going is seeing the difference our programs make in the women's and trans peoples' lives. It's huge. I often say we will never be rich in money, but we are very wealthy in community."



Howe has a clear vision for the future. "On the horizon for Newsgirls is training as many women and trans people as possible to stand their ground and defend themselves. With all that is going on in the world right now with violence against women and the LGBTQ community, we must be proactive and be strong role models for those to come," says Howe with a grin. I have no doubt she'll achieve it.

Karen works as a corporate communications professional and a freelance writer. She prefers being free to explore and write about things beyond policy and procedure and nearer possibilities and play.





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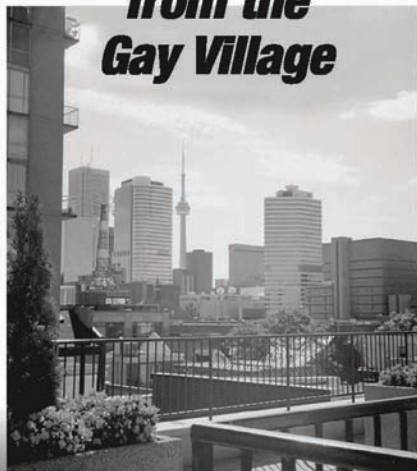
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# spring in the city

by Ori Dagan

Wow, does it ever feel good to be moving on to spring! An ideal time to try something new or venture to a place you've never been. This winter has been one of the longest and most brutal ones in recent memory, so it gives me great pleasure to point you all in the direction of these fine events and establishments. Please feel free to let them know where you read about them! Also, there are so many things going on in the city, I'm always open to suggestions of what to feature next. If there is anything you can recommend for our *summerplay!* issue, please feel free to write me—my contact is at the end of the piece. Thanks for reading and here's to a spring that's warm and refreshing as can be.



## FOOD

### Geraldine Seafood and Cocktail Bar

1564 Queen Street West

647.352.8815

[www.geraldinetoronto.com](http://www.geraldinetoronto.com)

Pretty posh for Parkdale, this getaway from the everyday is a gem well-worth discovering for foodies and lovers of old-fashioned attention to detail. The vintage concept charms you at first glance: bow-tied



bartenders, Victorian paintings and two 19th century chandeliers. Geraldine's Dinner menu features a daily selection of crab, oysters and lobster, as well as bar snacks such as the Ménage a Foie (sliced smoked duck breast, duck pâté and seared foie gras, \$20).

Those who enjoy the art of cocktails will not be disappointed; in addition to two varieties of absinthe, the Libations menu includes mixed masterpieces such as The Charlemagne (Boulard Calvados, fresh squeezed lemon juice, honey cinnamon syrup, egg white, nutmeg, angostura bitters, \$11); The Fountain (Tromba Blanco tequila, housemade vanilla allspice dram, pear shrub, lime juice and rosemary sprig, \$14); and Attention! (citadelle gin, carpano bianco dry vermouth, creme de violette, absinthe and orange bitters, \$14).

**TIPS:** Oyster happy hour daily from 6-7pm; Half-price wine by the bottle on Tuesdays!



**Frankie Goes to Buffalo**

quality shoulder beef with lamb casing, and decorating each dog with fancy toppings that quite frankly, are brilliant. Like Frank's Got Seoul (Korean beef ribs, kimchee, sesame seeds, scallions, \$7.50); Frankie Goes to Buffalo (panko fried weiner with chicken bacon, celery, carrots, blue cheese dressing and buffalo wing sauce, \$7.25); and the Frankaphone (smoked gruyere, horseradish cheddar, squeaky curds, honey dijon mayo, \$9.00).

**TIP:** Be sure to get your loyalty card stamped: your 9th dog is free!

## EVENTS

### Firesound on the Waterfront

As part of Doors Open Toronto  
May 24, May 25 at 4:30pm  
West Jet Stage, 235 Queens Quay West  
[www.toronto.ca/doorsopen](http://www.toronto.ca/doorsopen)  
Free

### Fancy Franks

326 College Street  
416.920.3647  
[www.fancyfranks.com](http://www.fancyfranks.com)  
Most dogs range from \$7 to \$9  
Believe it or not, Toronto has been praised for the quality of our "street meat"—especially in terms of the selection of toppings available at most vendors. Fancy Franks takes this idea one step further, by using only high



**Firesound on the Waterfront**

of celebrating the city, there are also some great live performances to check out—just one to point you towards takes place on Toronto's Waterfront. Award-winning band, Firesound, is comprised of talented Toronto firefighters, all donating their time for a worthy cause. Performing pop, rock and soul with three-piece horn section, the group has been around since 2005 when they put out the CD *Burning Love*, featuring more than 30 firefighters singing fire-themed songs such as "Disco Inferno," "Ring of Fire" and "Burn Baby Burn." Proceeds from CD sales go to Camp Bucko, a burn camp for children.

**TIP:** If you prefer pirates to firemen, all weekend long during Doors Open Toronto there will be pirates singing in 3-part harmony all along the waterfront, 10am-5pm!

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Inside Out Film Festival

May 22 - June 1  
TIFF Bell Lightbox, 350 King St. W. (primary venue)  
Screenings: \$13; \$11(members)  
Galas/Special Events: various pricing  
[www.insideout.ca](http://www.insideout.ca)

It's quite remarkable how much this festival has grown over the years. Since it started humbly in 1991, Inside Out is now considered one of the largest festivals of its kind in the world. Over 11 days, the festival is expected to draw crowds close to 35,000 for screenings, artist talks, panel discussions, installations and parties, highlighting over 200 films and videos, both national and international. Check the website to find out which films will be screened this year.

**TIP:** Get involved by volunteering! You help make the festival possible and you'll get to see movies for free! Contact them at 416-977-6847 ext. 30.

### An Evening with the Mirvishes

*Arrabal*  
Until May 11  
Panasonic Theatre, 651 Yonge St.  
416.872.1212  
[www.mirvish.com/theatres/panasonictheatre](http://www.mirvish.com/theatres/panasonictheatre)  
\$29 - \$84

Director Sergio Trujillo (*Jersey Boys*, *Memphis*) and choreographer Julio Zurita create a dramatic vision that is emotional, sexual and powerful. Follow Arrabal, our heroine, in this coming of age story as she enters the underground world of Buenos Aires' tango clubs and discovers the violent history that took her father and disrupted a nation. Based on the true story of the political violence that threatened to destroy Argentina in the 1970s the show features a live band, performers direct from Buenos Aires and cabaret style seating.

### **The Lion King**

April 30 to June 15

Princess of Wales Theatre, 300 King St. West

416.872.1212

[www.mirvish.com](http://www.mirvish.com)

\$30 - \$140

Experience the phenomenon of Disney's *The Lion King*. Marvel at the breathtaking spectacle of animals brought to life by award-winning director Julie Taymor, whose visual images for this show you'll remember forever. Thrill to the pulsating rhythms of the African Pridelands and an unforgettable score including Elton John and Tim Rice's Oscar®-winning song "Can You Feel The Love Tonight" and "Circle of Life."

**TIP:** A group outing is a fantastic gift for you and your family or friends.

### **A Night at the Four Seasons Centre**

145 Queen St. W

416-363-8231

[www.coc.ca/performancesandtickets.aspx](http://www.coc.ca/performancesandtickets.aspx)

### **Hercules**

April 5 to 30

\$45 - \$332

The ancient Greek tragedian Sophocles was also a war general who knew first-hand the devastating psychological traumas that imperilled returning veterans. With *Hercules*—Handel's take on Sophocles' play—Director Peter Sellars creates a healing work in which the untold horrors of war and the unspoken complications of reunion find their voice. Truly a story for our modern times.

### **Don Quichotte**

May 9 to 24

\$45 - \$332

Based on the same classic novel that inspired the Broadway hit *Man of La Mancha*, *Don Quichotte* is Massenet's affectionate

portrayal of literature's ultimate dreamer, Don Quixote. Ferruccio Furlanetto, opera's pre-eminent bass, stars in his intensely moving signature role. Lush melodies and Spanish dance rhythms conjure up medieval Spain at the end of the age of chivalry. In this enchanting production, characters spring out of giant leather-bound storybooks as windmills are fashioned from oversized quills.

**TIP:** Want to see the opera for less than the cost of a movie? Approximately 60 standing room tickets are available for each performance for just \$12 and go on sale at 11 a.m. on the day of a performance.

### **Rent**

April 3 to May 4

Lower Ossington Theatre

100A Ossington Ave.

416-915-6747

[www.lowerossingtontheatre.com](http://www.lowerossingtontheatre.com)

\$49.99 - \$59.99



Located in one of Toronto's hippest hoods—Dundas & Ossington—the Lower Ossington Theatre (aka LOT) can be likened to an "Off-Broadway" experience. It's also an exciting place to discover up-and-coming young talents who are eager to get their foot in the door. Since its inception in 2004, the theatre has



focused on providing opportunities for young theatre graduates of institutions such as Sheridan College and the Randolph Academy of the Performing Arts. Countless LOT actors, designers, stage managers and technicians have gone on to work with Mirvish, international touring productions and Broadway.

For those who have not seen it, Jonathan Larson's magnum opus is a modern adaptation of Puccini's *La Bohème* and one of the most popular rock musicals of the 1990s. Set under the shadow of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it follows the struggles of young artists and musicians of New York City's Lower East Side.

Resident LOT director Seanna Kennedy is excited to be reviving this piece yet again; it will be her third time directing the musical for the Lower Ossington Theatre and no, she is certainly not tired of it yet.



**Seanna Kennedy**

"I was really truly blown away," she reflects. "I first heard 'Seasons of Love' when I was 13 when a music instructor played it for me the year after the show had opened on Broadway. I fell so in love with the song, and soon after, the full cast album—the first CD I ever owned with the 'beware of explicit lyrics' sticker! I was head over heels in love with the music and the story and the power that it carried. I loved musicals, but I had no idea that

a musical could sound like that, could make you feel like that and could make you think like that. I laughed, I cried, I cheered. I come from a fairly small town, which I love, but is lacking in diversity, so seeing all these different types of people celebrating love and friendship in such an explosion of energy was amazing. I knew that someday I would have to be a part of this show. I would definitely have described my teenaged self as a 'Rent Head.'"

Also a performer, photographer and notable puppeteer, Kennedy has previously directed a variety of material including *The Mousetrap*, *Shrek: The Musical*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Avenue Q*.

"We have a very talented cast, a few people you will recognize from past LOT shows, but also fresh faces, which I'm really excited about," says Kennedy. "We have some new voices that will blow the audiences away. Our Musical director, Robert Wilkinson, is also taking a fresh look at some of the music, finding some new ways to bring it to life. I'm also very excited about having Erin Brookhouse on board as choreographer. I love the work she's done in LOT's *Cabaret* and am excited to have a chance to work with her. This is our first project together, and I'm so excited about the fresh and interesting ideas she's bringing to the choreographed numbers. The LOT is also a fantastic venue for a show like this, the audience is right up close and personal, there isn't a bad seat in the house. You are close enough to see every facial expression and feel the energy of the very talented cast and band. It's an experience you just can't get in a larger theatre."

**Ori Dagan is an award-winning jazz vocalist and freelance entertainment journalist ([www.oridagan.com](http://www.oridagan.com)).**





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# The Wake-up Call

In the quest for enlightenment, many of us find ourselves wondering whether being gay is a help or a hindrance, or if it makes any difference on our spiritual paths.

All spiritual paths distilled to their essence, endeavour to achieve one thing: the dissolution of ego. Ego can go by different names according to the tradition. It is simply the sense of separate self we have, which is an illusion. Ultimate truth is described as the One, and the many being expressions of the one. Sages also said, "One truth, many paths." That is, it doesn't matter which tradition we follow, they will lead to the dissolution of ego, and the realization of the Oneness and when the ego dissolves completely, as in the case of an awakened or enlightened person, the experience of separateness falls away. The individual lives in an experience of having no inner or outer boundary between self and other. I love the way Kathy Holmes, of Oneness University, describes this: "It's like being a coat rack. People try to hang their coats on you, and they just fall to the floor." Few of us will reach awakening in this

lifetime, but we have continual small awakenings. Coming out is one such emergence.

Here is what German born, Eckart Tolle, author of the bestselling books *The Power of Now*, and *A New Earth*, an awakened spiritual teacher, says about how coming out presents an opportunity to thin the ego:

"As you approach adulthood, uncertainty about your sexuality followed by the realization you are 'different' from others may force you to disidentify from socially conditioned patterns of thought and behavior. This will automatically raise your level of consciousness above that of the unconscious majority, whose members unquestioningly take on board all inherited patterns. In that respect, being gay can be a help [towards awakening]. Being an outsider to some extent, someone who does not 'fit in' with others or is rejected by them for whatever reason, makes life difficult, but it also places you at an advantage as far as enlightenment is concerned. It takes you out of unconsciousness almost by force."

We're all intimately familiar with the "coming of age" story: young man or woman of a certain age,

on the cusp. Sexuality awakens. There is a first lover. It can be sweet, or tragic, heartbreaking or heartwarming, but one way or another, the initiatory passage is negotiated and the young person moves on into adulthood to integrate the experience.

However, for an LGBTQ+ person, the coming of age initiation has the additional aspect of "coming out." This is an intense initiation all of its own. You don't just confront your sexual awakening, but also confront the fact that it is different than the "norm." This can be funny, awkward, painful, experienced as an exile, a danger, a trauma or liberation. You may come out with celebration and support, or stay stuffed in the closet well into adulthood. For some the "coming out" initiation happens later, after a marriage and kids. However, the element of confrontation with identity that Tolle speaks of is common. One has to examine themselves. Sometimes this is experienced as intense self-consciousness. You are feeling yourself with heightened awareness. Won't it be amazing if globally we can create more and more containers, communities, and environments where young LGBTQ+ folk can experience this dissolution of identification with "the norm" without feeling endangered or threatened by exposure? I believe that in some cities, some high schools, some communities of friends, the fire of this initiation is lessened as it becomes much more normal and accepted to be gay.

I was at a cousin's wedding in February this year. Rob is a jolly guy, very affable, warm, and easygoing. He has grown up in a small town, and works as an electrician, so could easily fall into the stereotype of "redneck." I was delighted to see at his wedding that one of his best men was his friend since grade 4, Jeffrey. Jeff happened to be gay, and his boyfriend was at the wedding, dancing with the whole gang of 20-somethings on the floor until the wee hours. I wondered how Rob had reacted in adolescence when his childhood friend would have revealed his orientation. Was

he awkward, threatened, embarrassed? Enough to reject one of his closest friends? Clearly not. I asked my brother about it, and he said Rob had told him about it, and that it was "no big deal." Hallelujah!

The world is coming. Pride events send a message to the world that diversity is beauty; that the human spirit, clothed in other than heterosexual flesh, belongs here. WorldPride

sends that message out on a global level, sending a huge wave of consciousness out in ripples. What in the world is happening? I believe the universe staged the Olympics at Sochi to shine a huge spotlight on the affronting and unacceptable injustices there. How are we doing as a global humanity with LGBTQ+ rights? In some places ego is dissolving and more unity is happening. Other places, ego is entrenching, thickening boundaries between "us" and "them," deepening fear of "other." How are we doing collectively in our evolution? In Canada we have made, and continue to make huge leaps. But no one can be left behind until all injustices end, and all are welcomed home. How are you doing personally in your own evolution and awakening? I'll offer some ways to look at that in my series of articles this year as WorldPride Toronto, approaches, explodes, and integrates.

“  
**Few of us will reach awakening in this lifetime, but we have continual small awakenings. Coming out is one such emergence.**  
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*Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa. She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for over 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at [fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com](mailto:fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com) or visit her at [www.doveheart.ca](http://www.doveheart.ca)*





# Spring Horoscopes

by Noanie

## Aries (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

It is all about communicating this spring for you lovely Aries. Your transformation is complete. It's time to teach the gifts that have been bestowed upon you. Remember that the subject is best delivered in a clear, concise, and logical manner.

## Taurus (Apr 20 – May 20)

You are holding back in one or all of these areas: finance, health, and/or relationships. Go with your gut feeling because that fear is there to make you aware that to succeed, you need to take things one step at a time. If you are not absolutely sure about something, hold off until you are.

## Gemini (May 21 – Jun 20)

Leadership and wisdom are your greatest assets, and it is time to bring those qualities to the forefront. Think and dream big, as you have the ability to build strong foundations for great change, and in doing so, creating what is needed for future generations to thrive. Look to the past fathers of our nations for guidance.

## Cancer (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

You have suffered disappointment and you are still holding it in the clutches of your heart. Wisdom knows that in giving pleasures to others, you can heal the effects of sadness and torment. In doing so, you will be renewed and regenerated and you will be rewarded with the release of such angst.

## Leo (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

Patterns are replaying over and over again in your life, and you are missing the message, which is why you feel "stuck." Regain your power by learning from these lessons and do not allow yourself to make the same mistakes over and over again.

## Virgo (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

Win, win, and win on all levels. Your winning streak continues mentally, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Life in its abundance is available to you at this time. You now understand that the positive energy that you sent out is returning with incredible dividends.

## Libra (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

You have just realized that self-reliance and true independence is the cross that you bear in this lifetime. This is a journey that you once took in your younger years, and that fear has kept you from that

path today. As the leaves sprout from the trees, you will have mastered the lesson of self-reliance. You will begin to enjoy the strength gained from being able to stand and prosper mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually.

## Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

You, dear Scorpio, do not like anything artificial and you have the uncanny ability to see things as they really are. Major internal change is happening within you at this time. Those ideas that no longer ring true, are slowly burning away, and through health, exercise, and diet, you will be transformed like the phoenix from its own ashes.

## Sagittarius (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

The gloves are off, as you have gained a sense of your own personal energy, power and vitality. Time to move out into the ring of life and demonstrate your talents of self-assurance to the world; no longer is there a sensation of self-doubt. You are working from a solid foundation of self-knowledge and others will be drawn to your confidence.

## Capricorn (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

You are motivated by stimulation and movement and work best when you have your hands in many projects with little regard for anything dull, boring, or routine. As they say, the only constant is change and you thrive on change. You are in your glory, as this spring, you are on a roll, a time of great motion, your career, your residence, and your interests are all on the chopping block. There is also an ease with moving into high states of consciousness and awareness.

## Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

You have stepped through the mirror to start anew, and the end of something in the past is only a reflection that is slowly fading behind you. This anew is a challenge that you had resisted, but now you hold it in the palm of your hand, be it a trip, a change in career, or a return to school; whatever it is, it is good.

## Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

Dearest Piscean, you have walked the tightrope long enough, and now inner balance is upon you; you now hold the feminine and the masculine energies with equal force. That force that you feel will allow you to expand in the areas of communication, insight, intuition, and vision.

Noanie is guided by our planetary mix. Her connection with her intuitive process allows her to guide you gently into your future. Noanie is also a Wellness Detective and is well versed in muscle testing for food and environmental sensitivities. She uses her knowledge at the Brooklin Family Health Centre assisting Dr. Robert Johnston's patients find the root cause of their pain and inflammation, and with lifestyle changes, shows them how they can secure the road to health and wellness.

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# Looking Back



## Toronto Bathhouse Raids of 1981

A quick time capsule of one of the most important, galvanizing moments in Canadian queer history is the series of bathhouse raids that happened in Toronto in 1981.

On February 5th, at 11pm more than 150 police officers enact Operation Soap, simultaneously raiding the Club Baths, The Romans II Health and Recreation Spa, the Richmond Health Emporium and the Barracks in downtown Toronto. In the ensuing chaos 286 men are arrested and charged as “found-ins” and 20 owners are charged with “keeping a common bawdyhouse.” Substantial, willful and unnecessary property damage is enacted on each on the premises by overzealous arresting officers—the damage to the Richmond is so severe, it never re-opens.

Public outrage at this act sees a mass protest by over 3,000 demonstrators the next day, blocking traffic at several major intersections. On February 11th, gay activist George Hislop announces that he will run as an independent protest candidate in the riding of St. George in the 1981 provincial election. Pastor Brent Hawkes of the Metropolitan Community Church begins a hunger strike on February 16th. It will last 25 days.

On February 20th, over 4,000 protestors march from Queen’s Park to 52 Division of the Toronto Police.

On March 6th a Gay Freedom Rally—effectively Toronto’s first Pride event—is held with speakers including Margaret Atwood

and member of parliament Svend Robinson, denouncing the bathhouse raids. Not yet out, Robinson later becomes Canada’s first openly gay Member of Parliament in 1989.

On March 12th, Hawkes finally ends his hunger strike when Toronto City council asks the mayor’s community and race relations advisor, Daniel Hill, to investigate the bathhouse raids and the larger issue of police relations with the gay community. Hill declines, but Arnold Bruner takes up the investigation on July 13th.

On June 2nd, a full-page ad supporting the repeal of the bawdyhouse laws, signed by over 1,400 people appears in *The Globe and Mail*.

On July 3rd, the New Democratic Party calls for the bawdyhouse section of the Criminal Code of Canada to be repealed.

On September 24th, Bruner’s report, *Out of the Closet: Study of Relations Between Homosexual Community and Police*, is released, recognizing the gay community as a legitimate community and calling for a permanent dialogue between it and the Toronto Police.

By April of the following year, 87% of the “found-ins” charged in the raids have been acquitted at trial; 36 individuals are found guilty, but receive absolute conditional discharges. The last remaining charge related to the 1981 raids is settled by plea bargain on February 7th, 1985.

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