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DineTogether program brings needed connection to local LGBTQ+ seniors

BY EVE KUCHARSKI
SGN CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Photo by Askar Abayev / Pexels

Around the world, COVID-19 has contributed to a measurable rise in loneliness. That makes sense, considering that social distancing has been the norm over the past two years.

But long before the majority of the population began to grapple with quarantine's effects, loneliness was a way of life for about one-third of Americans. The most at-risk group for developing loneliness is adults 65 and older; LGBTQ+ elders, who are twice as likely to live alone than their heterosexual counterparts, are especially vulnerable to social isolation.

That's why the DineTogether program with AgePRIDE was created. It been connecting LGBTQ+ seniors for free monthly lunch meetups at the Tin Table restaurant and bar since late summer of last year.

AgePRIDE is an arm of the Goldsen Institute at the University of Washing-

ton School of Social Work, developed to improve the lives and well-being of older LGBTQ+ adults. Program Manager Laura Culberg said she got the idea for DineTogether's format because she felt it was important for seniors to have "regularity" in their lives and a consistent social outlet.

"I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to partner with a restaurant?'" Culberg said. "I contacted [the owner of the Tin Table] Hallie Kuperman, who is a friend of mine, and said, 'Would you consider partnering with me to try this out? This is a pilot.'"

Kuperman came on board, and it wasn't long before LGBTQ+ seniors had an established monthly space to grab a free lunch and connect face-to-face. And while the invitation prioritizes LGBTQ+ attendees, so long as participants are at least 55 years old and a resident of King County, allies are welcome.

"Socializing is a lot harder as a single person," Culberg said. "I think it's harder at any age, but especially when you're older... it's super challenging and vulnerable to make plans."

Health benefits

Culberg emphasized that despite DineTogether origins in curbing social isolation, the intent of the monthly luncheons is never to "pathologize anyone."

"We invited participants to join us, and we very explicitly wanted to be just about engagement and not about, 'There's something wrong with you,' 'You're sad and lonely,' 'You're having trouble with your memory and your health,'" Culberg said. "It was just about getting out and being engaged."

While something as small as taking time for a meal with peers might seem inconse-

quential, there is evidence to show that the health benefits of consistently socializing can be significant. The Goldsen Institute's founder and director, Dr. Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen, said that "about two-thirds of LGBTQ+ older adults are pretty severely socially isolated," and the related health effects can be dire.

"We know that social isolation can lead to very significant health disparities and that people who are isolated are at risk of premature mortality, premature cognitive decline, and many adverse health conditions," said Fredriksen-Goldsen. "This idea was to find ways to create connections and engage LGBTQ+ seniors in an opportunity to meet with others and build community. That is why we started the DineTogether program."



Chef Frank Wielgosiek
— Photos courtesy of The Tin Table

Community input

She added that DineTogether wasn't created in a vacuum without community input either. Rather, it the result of observations from a community-driven study. In addition to being an expert in well-being and longevity in underserved populations, Fredriksen-Goldsen is the principal investigator of the National Health, Aging, and Sexuality/Gender Study, funded through the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Aging. It is the first-ever longitudinal study of LGBTQ+ older adults — meaning that researchers consistently examine the same individuals to detect any changes that might occur over a period of time. Notably, the 11-year effort just gained an extension to 15 years.

"What we noticed is that a lot of LGBTQ+ seniors or older adults were isolated, and while they may have been well connected in earlier parts of their lives... as their peers also became older or maybe developed their own health conditions or became more limited in their mobility, many of them ended up socially isolated," Fredriksen-Goldsen said.

"And then with COVID, that situation was exacerbated, because so many couldn't connect, and people are still fearful to come out and connect."

Connecting comfortably

That fear of connection may be the reason behind some of the low attendance rates at DineTogether. However, in the case of Thomas Merritt, a regular at the program, whose need for greater social engagement came after his husband died, he makes sure to attend whenever he can.

"It's a reason to get out, a reason to connect with people. There's not many people at the luncheon to connect with, but I'm going to keep going and hope that it gets bigger and bigger," Merritt said. "I like having an excuse to get up and go out, and that gives me a good one. And it's also geared for my age group."

When asked if he attends other events marketed to LGBTQ+ people, Merritt said

that he doesn't feel as comfortable as he used to.

"A friend of mine and I, not too long ago, went over to The Cuff. What I realized is that I'm a 70-year-old in a 35-year-old world, and most of us that are in my age group, there's not much out there for us for socializing and getting together," Merritt said. "I felt very uncomfortable among all these 30-year-olds, and I imagine they prefer to have an age group of their own."

Frank Wielgosiek, the Chef at The Tin Table, who serves these monthly luncheons, is also a part of the community. At 64 years old, he said that his experience has been similar to Merritt's.

"Being a little bit older, I still enjoy being around people," Wielgosiek said. "Going to bars is not really a part of my life right now, and I don't feel quite as comfortable going to the Gay bars, because I feel self-conscious a little bit, being an older person, unless I'm hanging out with other people in my age bracket."

For that reason, Wielgosiek provides just "a little bit more care and love" when preparing the food for this event.

"I'm very protective of my food that I'm giving out, and I give them more than what the group has paid for," he said. "It's a pleasure to do that for them."

Fredriksen-Goldsen added that she too is eager for more people to join the DineTogether program, but said that starting small has been intentional, too, in order to get more feedback about improving the event.

"That's the process we're in now: growing the program," she said. "And that way, the people that participate can help shape it. And people have shared a lot of excitement and have helped more people know about it."

DineTogether events are held every first Friday of the month from noon to 1 p.m. RSVP at AgePrideCenter@uw.edu. This event is currently in its second session, and plans are being made to partner with other restaurants in other neighborhoods to increase accessibility.



Your story is my story:

A look at Seattle's yesteryear Gay activism

BY MARTIN LEE
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

Tim and Martin, 1983,
Plymouth Pillars Park,
at Boren Ave & Pike St, Seattle
—Photo courtesy of Martin Lee

When I told Gay activist Tim Mayhew that I someday wanted to write about the part we had in those early days of the movement, especially him, he told me, "Your story is my story."

These are some of his accomplishments working for the cause. But the first few pages are about my coming out, and how it led to meeting Tim, one of the two loves of my life. I long for him to still be around.

Coming out

One day near the beginning of fall 1971, I moved to Seattle from Yakima. I left the city in which I had been excommunicated from the Mormon Church, at my instigation and insistence, to be free to be Gay. I had gone to my bishop in the fall of 1969, when I was 16, to tell him that I was Gay and therefore I should be cut off from the church, so he could inform the Stake President as well. I demanded that my free agency, as they called it, to no longer be a member be respected.

Somehow, in spite of their fiery denunciations of homosexuality, which to them was second only to murder in its seriousness, I felt deep down that I wasn't bad for having those feelings. Nor did I deserve to be cast

into hell. And I had faith that somehow it would all work out for the best some day. But I had to take that step of liberation first.

I always felt that if you are a member of something, you either obey the rules or you get out. To remain in an organization that castigated your very existence, and doomed you to an eternal abyss after you died, was hypocritical, wishy-washy fence-sitting, and didn't face the fundamental truth: even if they're wrong, it's still their rules. To keep being a member — going on a mission, marrying and having children, enjoying the benefits of praise and acceptance for doing what they saw as the only right way — while in the closet, while posing as someone you're not, was morally wrong.

They didn't want to excommunicate me, and I went through a long process of trying to persuade them, resulting in a delay between my request and when it was finally granted, on May 18, 1971, not long before I graduated high school. They had tried to get me to change my mind, saying they would find a girl for me. They sent a psychologist who was in the church over from Wenatchee one time to talk to me, and they asked me to reconsider in light of what they called the glorious promises given to me in

my patriarchal blessing — contingent of course, on my faith and obedience.

How could I turn my back on those? Why, as various members had said, my name would be in lights some day, I'd rise to become one of the Twelve Apostles! And my bishop said I'd probably run the whole thing some day. A stake president said that my blessing was a piece of dynamite.

Patriarchal blessing

There's a certain number of boilerplate statements that everyone gets in their patriarchal blessing, such as that they are from the tribe of Ephraim (unless they are black- or brown-skinned), general encouragements to follow the path of righteousness in order to have the approval of God, and an assurance that you will come forth in the first resurrection. But several people who read mine, as well as some church leaders, said that mine was different. Although I don't have proof of what was said, since I shredded that paper long ago, among those things said, were the following:

It gives me great joy to lay my hands on your head and give you this blessing. Now know ye this, dear brother, that it was through your faithfulness in the spirit world

that entitled you to the favorable conditions you now enjoy. You have been born with a strong, healthy, white, and delightful body, for which you should be very grateful. And inasmuch as you keep it clean and free and wholesome from the sins and vices of this world, with it you will be able to work out your salvation and exaltation in the Kingdom of God.

You will be blessed with the good things of the earth, to sustain you in all your doings in righteousness, and have all that is necessary to have a rich and rewarding life, and the blessings of the Lord will follow you throughout your life and throughout the endless ages of eternity.

The Lord loves you, and you will be honored and respected by all who know you, and you shall have friends beyond number. In times of trouble or strife, use the priesthood which you bear, for the Lord will hear you and will graciously answer your prayers.

Through your faith and obedience, the Lord will bless you with great wisdom, understanding, and spiritual power, and you shall have great power to do good.

see YESTERYEAR page 8

A TIP FROM A
**FORMER
SMOKER**

TM

**HIV alone
didn't cause the
clogged artery
in my neck.
Smoking with
HIV did.**

Brian, age 45, California

Brian had his HIV under control with medication. But smoking with HIV caused him to have serious health problems, including a stroke, a blood clot in his lungs and surgery on an artery in his neck. Smoking makes living with HIV much worse. You can quit.

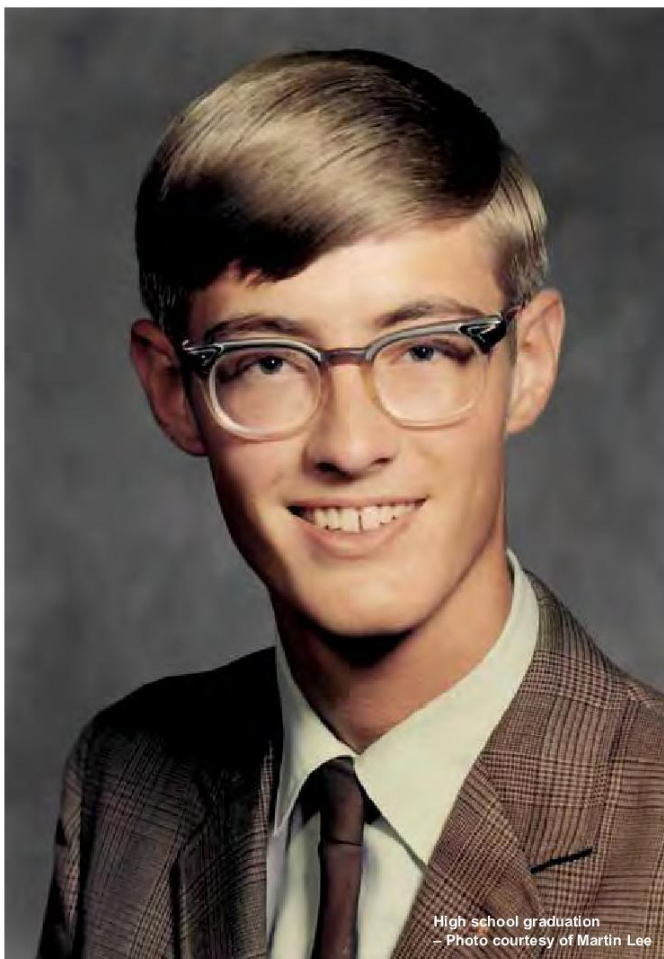
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High school graduation
— Photo courtesy of Martin Lee

YESTERYEAR

continued from page 6

"Great wisdom and understanding"

Their blatant racism smacks you in the face, and is what they still believe today, despite their efforts to deceive the public even now about what they really think. Having finally granted the priesthood to Blacks in 1978 does not change their views on why they deserved to be born that way, nor other aspects of that disgusting doctrine's origins and ramifications.

I felt especially struck by the phrase "great wisdom and understanding," because ever since I was a young Lutheran boy who started reading the Bible at 5 or 6, I was fascinated by the story of Solomon in 1 Kings, when God appeared to him in a dream, and said, "Ask for what I should give you." Then Solomon said, "Give your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I might discern between good and bad."

The Lord was pleased with his answer, and said, "Because you haven't asked for long life, or for riches, or the lives of your enemies but have asked for understanding to discern judgment, I will give you a wise and an understanding heart. Like there was none like you before you, neither shall any arise like you. And I have also given you that which you did not ask for, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all the days of your life..."

There was also the words of Proverbs: "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding."

I thought, if only God would ask me the same thing, so I could answer the same way, so I could help others know the right path, and help with their burdens in life. And here were those strikingly similar words, encouraging me to follow the path of righteousness, in order to receive that reward that was precious above many others.

I had never mentioned my yearning to anyone, in or out of the church, and certainly not to the total-stranger patriarch in another town that I met that night only a few minutes before he gave me the bless-

ing. Was I to give up that future, all because I wasn't attracted to women sexually, and instead wanted to be with other guys? How could I turn my back on having great wisdom, understanding, and spiritual power, as well as regular power to do good? How could anyone know what I wanted except God himself, letting me know what was in my future through his anointed patriarch, if only I had faith and was obedient?

Excommunication

But later, as mentioned, I kept asking them to excommunicate me. Only then would I feel free from the shackles of their strictures that tried to make me and others feel guilty under their oppressive thumb, squashing our so-called perverted thoughts and longings into oblivion.

The bishop was so anguished by my persistent requests that he once said, "What are you trying to do, put an old man six feet under?" On that night at the convened bishop's court, they still didn't want to do it, and tried to change my mind even at the last minute. The bishop and his two counselors were crying, and said what a fine example of the youth I was, in spite of my perceived character flaw. If only I would repent, God would still accept me, and my blessing wouldn't be nullified.

Oddly though, one of the two counselors used some shocking language for a church leader, when he said, "Now let me get this straight: when a girl leans over and you can see into the top of her dress, you don't want to reach in and feel her boobies?"

"No," I answered, no.

"But when a guy is sitting and stretches out his legs, you want to reach into his pants?"

"Yes."

I suspected there was something not right about him to be talking like that, like he was on the road to apostasy or something.

A few weeks later, he called out to me from across the street downtown, taking a cigar out of his mouth and waving to me with that forbidden stogie in hand and a big smile on his face, yelling, "Hey, Martin, buddy, how are you doing?"

I found out after that he had been dropped from the bishopric.

My official paper, brought to my house

later that summer, said that it was upon my insistence that my name was removed from the records and rolls of the church — no mention of the reason why — confirming that the reason they ultimately did it was because I wouldn't have it any other way.

Time to move, but where?

That summer, I explored a warehouse of books and magazines in a distribution facility open to the public. Included were sex magazines and books, and the title on a lavender-colored spine caught my eye: *The Gay Insider: New York*, written by John Francis Hunter. My heart was beating with excitement, and I could hardly wait to get home to start reading it.

Hunter wrote about all the places to cruise in New York: bars, baths, the docks, parks, you name it. And he had information about Gay liberation organizations and other places of interest to Gay people, like the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore. This was a completely new world to me, and I was fascinated and heady with the deluge of info.

I had the idea that I needed to move to either New York or San Francisco to come out. I wrote to Hunter and the owner of the Oscar Wilde bookstore, to say, "I'm stuck here in this small town. Should I move to one of those Gay meccas?"

They wrote me back, saying that New York was very expensive, and as far as the West Coast, why not make a more practical move to Seattle? They gave me the address of the Seattle Gay Alliance, so I wrote to it, saying that I wanted to move to the big city to be my real self.

I got a letter back from the president of the SGA, who used what I later found out was a pseudonym, to keep closeted. He also enclosed a one-page, orange-colored flyer about the SGA, with the title *You're Not Alone*, which gave the address of the newly opened Gay Community Center, near Pioneer Square, at 102 Cherry St.

(An aside: When Hunter wrote another, more comprehensive book called *The Gay Insider USA*, in the dedication, he said something like: "To my fellow writers and generous brothers..." and included my name, which I was very surprised to see years later.)

Off to Seattle

So, I got a map of Seattle and a one-way Greyhound ticket. I packed my suitcase, and headed out on my adventure into the unknown near the end of September. I got off the bus in the biggest city I'd ever been in, and made my way to Pioneer Square, to the GCC, the goal of my journey.

There it was, downstairs from the street level, where a lot of old Seattle had once been, now tucked underground. The door was open, and the sunlight was coming in brightly at the bottom of the stairs; sounds of construction emanated from inside. There was a guy who happened to be standing at that entrance below, looking up at me wonderingly as I was going down the stairs. He was the first Gay man I ever met, as well as the first person I talked to in my new city.

I showed him my letter from the SGA president; he confirmed that he knew him, since he was also on the SGA board, and then he called him from inside to let him know I had arrived. He then turned the phone over to me. The president assured me that the stranger I had just met was a decent person that I could trust to stay with. So, I crashed with him for a few days.

We went to the 107 Club one night (at 107 Occidental Ave S.), which was open to those under 21 since they didn't serve alcohol. While waiting in line to pay the dollar cover charge, Rod Stewart singing *Maggie May* was blasting away. Inside was a large dance floor, and some go-go boys were on a small perch, scantily clad and gyrating to the thunderous beats. A guy came up and asked me if I wanted to dance, and after that and talking awhile, he invited me to his place. I told my host that I was going to this person's home, where I crashed for another couple of days.

A fateful meeting

The board of the SGA met on Thursday nights at the GCC, so I went with him that September 30, and sat on a stools in the very rustic hall, with its wooden floor and brick

walls. I waited there while they were meeting amongst the signs of the ongoing remodeling.

After they were done, I met someone that changed my life forever. Tim Mayhew, one of the board members, and education officer of the Seattle Gay Alliance, came up to me, introduced himself, and offered to give me a tour of the city.

So the guy I'd been staying with drove me over to Tim's place the next morning. I moved in with him that October 1, and we lived together for the next 13 years, remaining very close after I moved, for the more than 32 years after that.

He showed me many of the sights that weekend, including the University of Washington, Seattle Center, Pike Place Market, downtown, etc. We held hands at the Woodland Park Zoo, precipitating disapproving stares, and I was wearing the same kind of T-shirt that Paul Barwick had worn when he and John Singer applied for a marriage license 11 or 12 days earlier: It was yellow, with red letters saying "GAY" on it, along with intertwining male and female symbols. There I was, 18 years old, proclaiming to the world that I was out and proud of who I was, not afraid of its opinions.

Challenging the marriage law

To digress: John Singer spent most of his time in the Gay Liberation Front, which was more radical than the Dorian Society. At one of Dorian's meetings shortly before, state Sen. Pete Francis discussed the revised marriage law that, interestingly, hadn't specified gender. So the idea of challenging the law gathered steam.

Tim was the first person to give John the news about it prior to that meeting, and added his encouragement to John's immediate eagerness to take up that torch and test the waters.

So John, never a wallflower and always eager to take on a challenge, and Paul Barwick went down to the auditor's office in the King County Administration Building and demanded a marriage license. They were refused.

Michael Boucai, author of *Glorious Precedents: When Gay Marriage Was Radical*, contacted Tim when he was doing research for it, and came to Seattle in 2014 to interview him.¹

Later, Tim emailed the following to Boucai:

Lloyd Hara, who had been County Auditor and State Treasurer, was the elected official responsible for issuing licenses, and he was notified by John that John was bringing at test case and the TV news crews to the courthouse, so Hara came out into the marble hallway and formally denied the license for the cameras, so that the courts could test the law. Personally, as a Seattle Democrat, he would not object, but this was a public ritual to settle all doubts.

To general astonishment, half the justices of the Supreme Court in Olympia defied state law to preserve old custom. Years later, after dozens of cases across the US had used *Singer* as precedent, the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled that the Washington court was just wrong under Washington law.

Finally, under our last governor, a vote of the people again confirmed gay marriage. I say "again" because gay marriage was implied in the Equal Rights Amendment, which was voted in by the Legislature and the people in 1973, and warning of gay marriage was argued explicitly in the official voter's pamphlet. The majority adopted it then. Details were spelled out in statutes that conformed the whole code to the new ERA in the Constitution. That's why the Supreme Court was wrong."²

Working from the inside and outside

Mayhew also wrote the following to Boucai:

In those years the Gay movement had two wings, representing two social classes and two kinds of personality. This sociological and ideological divide was wide and sometimes severe, a split about policy, strategy, tactics, and style that became almost a feud in some cities at some times. The AIDS crisis finally deflated it, but echoes of it are sometimes visible today, though

the younger generation has other concerns. Sometimes a third or fourth faction arose for a while. Particularly in California and New York, they even campaigned to embarrass each other in public occasionally. I toured those centers politically in 1968-74 and later to see for myself how they operated and to learn from the early leaders, and then I brought my lessons home to Seattle.

In Seattle, we were more polite and high-minded than most other cities, as part of the general cultural tradition, so here the different factions did not quarrel but just went off in different directions to pursue their own plans. Sometimes they even coordinated, but maybe in different aspects of a project. Usually they did not inform or consult each other.

I thought that this disunity was sad and wasteful, if inevitable, so I made it my business to work in both camps for years as a kind of double ambassador. Hotter heads with deeper prejudices got suspicious, but we sometimes exploited the special talents of both groups to hit the same problem from two sides at once. In this way I helped to found about ten of the first dozen gay organizations in the state, some of which have since become venerable and influential among civic leaders beyond the gay community. A few inspired copies in other cities. A couple were "first in the world" ideas.

To help my coming out during my fifth and sixth year[s] at the University of Washington, I led a lively discussion group that drew many new members to the Dorian Society. Professors and doctors in Dorian appointed me, as a newly minted liberal-arts graduate, to be the first gay lobbyist to the legislature in 1973, where I had some success. Sen. Pete Francis chaired the Judiciary Committee, and I brought him some outside support and additions to his ambitious legislation.

Later, in the 1981 session, when the Reagan landslide had put the Republicans in power, I actually got two of them to sponsor the gay-rights bill despite the Moral Majority (remember them?), and got their hardnosed caucus leader to block antigay bills that were filed. I served without pay, of course. In those days, we all did.

Lobbying and the Dorian Society were [the domain] of the professional-class, gray-haired, house-owning, stock-holding, suit-and-tie people who began meeting in secret in 1966 in Seattle, in 1952 in Los Angeles, and in 1947 in DC, to discuss Gay rights, to dream for the far future, after they were safely dead. The alternative class were colorful youth, some hippies, some runaways or castaways, some artists, some hustlers, some druggies, some students: impoverished, impatient, angry at injustice, energetic to push, schooled by the movements for labor, socialism, people of color, [and] women, and their own glorious coming out as rainbow *mariposas* (gay butterflies). The first group had Rules of Order and resolutions, while the second had manifestos and marches. You can see the gap.

John Singer was of the second kind, a radical secular New York Jew, brash and smart. He came to the Gay Liberation Front, not the Dorian Society. I was in GLF from the beginning and kept it from being burdened with all the structure of Dorian. GLF had only a speaker (the cutest boy) and a secretary, and they elected me secretary, so I could keep records. The first thing we did was call on the Mayor of Seattle, who soon proclaimed Gay Pride Week, another Seattle first. It made big news.

Soon after coming from New York, influenced by the widespread women's movement in Seattle, John Singer changed his name and costume. He became Paygele ben Miriam and stopped wearing pants. He did not wear drag, because it also stereotypes women. You may know that in Yiddish, *faygele* is the diminutive of [the word meaning] "bird" (*Vogel* in German) and has become the slang word for *faggot*. Miriam is actually his mother's name, so he honored her among women. He loved to be in your face.

Some younger people recently have written him up as a patriarch, but many of us had been busy for years before he arrived. He does deserve credit for several big splashes that made waves across the country. I wish we were seeing more of such dedicated energy today.³

Dancing queens

The Dorian Society had only recently changed its name to the Seattle Gay Alliance, in a bold move to be more open, only to change it back to the Dorian Group years later, in the days when Charlie Brydon emerged on the scene and took command.

Tim was sometimes described as being too conservative for the GLF yet too radical for Dorian and the SGA. I saw the beginnings of infighting between various Gay lib groups in the '70s, which were always debating what the correct political approach should be to gain our rights.

Within a week of arriving in town, I was part of a small protest organized by the GLF, in front of the District Tavern, a straight bar in the U District, objecting to its exclusion of same-sex couples wanting to dance there. It was supposed to be largely a surprise, though the GLF had tipped off the press just before that Gay men would get on the floor and start dancing together just like everyone else. But one GLF member had tipped off the owner, a short Black man named Sonny, well before, because he thought it was unfair and too radical to just spring it on him and the patrons.

The TV van was in the parking lot out front, and the bright lights and cameras were ready. I wasn't old enough to get in, but I peeked inside briefly, to see the colored lights from the glass-like blocks of the dance floor, like in *Saturday Night Fever*. I marched around with the dozen or so others near the corner of the parking lot, holding signs and chanting slogans I'd never heard before, like "2-4-6-8, Gay is just as good as straight!" "Hey hey ho ho, the ruling class has got to go!" "Ho-Ho-Homosexual, the ruling class is ineffectual!" and "What do we want? Gay rights! When do we want them? Now!"

After they threw out the offenders almost immediately, Sonny grandstanded to the press about his supposedly liberal heart, but said this was going too far.

A visit to California

In the winter of 1971, Tim and I went down to San Francisco to visit the Gay organizations there, and stayed with a friend of his in Berkeley. Included in those orgs was the Daughters of Bilitis house, where, to my head-scratching surprise, there was a guy who had had the operation to become a woman, and was now a Lesbian. She said that the only way she could relate to women was to be one herself.

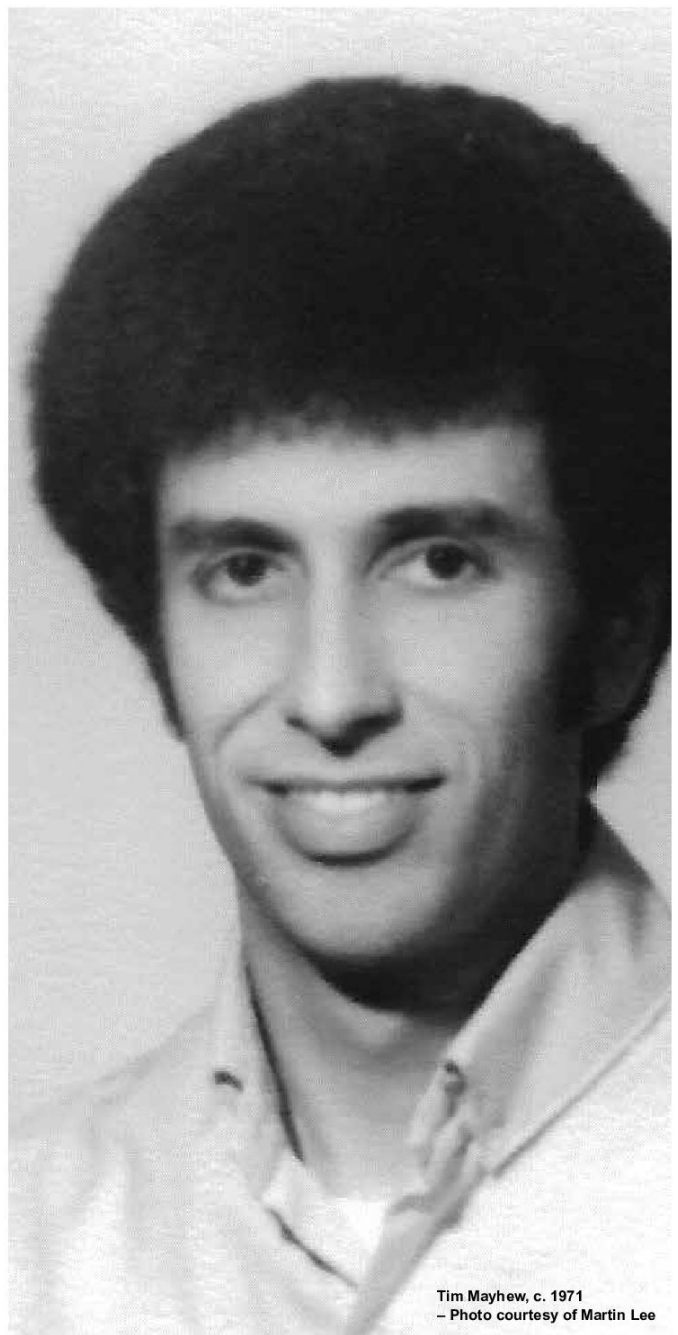
We looked in on the bars on Polk St. and Folsom St. In a leather bar on Folsom, I briefly met Paul Lynde. He was wearing sunglasses, sat on a barreltop, and sheepishly hung his head down a lot. I came up to him and said, "Aren't you Paul Lynde?" He looked startled, and said, "Do you think anyone else will recognize me?" He seemed afraid at the prospect. I left him a minute later.

When we left the bar, we heard a loud crack and turned to see a tall guy decked out in black leather from head to toe. He wore a hat with a shiny bill, a leather jacket, a harness across his otherwise bare chest, chaps, shiny black pants, and what looked like steel-toed boots. Turns out that he had just cracked a long whip in the air, and while letting it droop, said smiling and laughing in a high-pitched voice and swishing his hips, "Oh, don't worry, boys, I'm just trying out my Christmas present!" I found the contrast between his apparel and the image he wanted to project odd.

We went down to LA also, arriving after our red-eye flight to an atypical, very heavy rain. We made our way to the steps of the City Hall, where Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, was having a sit-in protest. There were a number in sleeping bags, in a line around the building, huddled in against the relentless, monsoon-like weather.

Even though Tim was an atheist, Troy asked him to put him in touch with anyone in Seattle that wanted to start an MCC congregation there, so Tim ironically became an emissary of sorts, doing just that a few months later in 1972.

Included in our visit to LA was the headquarters of the Mattachine Society, where we talked to the librarian, picked up sample Gay newspapers and flyers, and exchanged contact info, since Tim was an archivist too.



Tim Mayhew, c. 1971
— Photo courtesy of Martin Lee

We also met with some of the activists, like Jim Kepner and Morris Kight. Jim was a collector of Gay materials, which were stacked everywhere in his apartment. He also moonlighted as a porn writer for a popular series at the time, under the pen name Sean. They were also strewn across the table among various books and papers from his archive. He took us to Bob Mizer's male-model studio one afternoon, though it had no models at the time.

Beginnings of Seattle MCC

As for the beginnings of an MCC branch here, Bob Sirico, a charismatic Pentecostal who was in the closet to his followers, contacted the Seattle Gay Alliance and spoke with Tim. Bob said that he was going to have his last public appearance in his healing ministry, at a meeting soon to be held near the Opera House — although he didn't announce it as such to the public beforehand — and that, unbeknownst to them, he was going to come out to the Board of Elders later.

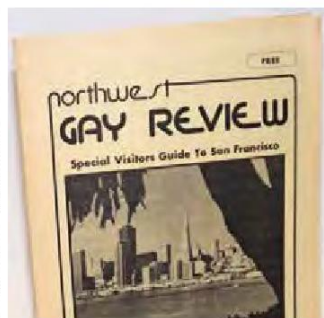
We went to that meeting of fervent believers, and watched him in action as he preached and healed. Then he suddenly, dramatically announced that he was leaving that ministry, as the Lord had other things in mind for him. He then took his suit jacket off and placed it around the shoulders of a boy in his young teens, who was with his parents who had come up to the stage with him, along with others wanting spiritual direction or healing. He made a verbal allusion to how Elijah had passed his mantle on to Elisha,

and declared to the very surprised boy and his parents that God had chosen him to be his successor some day.

After it was over, we went backstage to meet Bob, as he had arranged with Tim. We saw the boy with his parents come up to him and ask how and when he knew that their son would follow in his footsteps. He answered that the designation from God had just come to him suddenly in the moment, and didn't elaborate. The parents continued to look puzzled and taken aback, with a stare that seemed like they really didn't believe it, and dissatisfaction with not knowing more about that special moment.

Tim told Bob about Troy Perry's search, and put them in contact with each other. A few weeks later, we went with Bob for the final meeting with the leaders of the Pentecostal church he belonged to, on Queen Anne Hill. He told them he was Gay and didn't see it as incompatible with scripture, having also been bolstered by his talk with Troy. They were horrified, telling him to repent, then started speaking in tongues, heads bowed in a prayer circle. Bob said that if this was how they felt, he would leave for good, then wiped the dust off his feet, as mentioned in the Bible, shuffling his shoes back and forth a few times on the carpet. Their chanting voices grew only louder, speaking gibberish as far as I could tell, as the three of us left.

see YESTERYEAR page 10



(top from l) United Methodist Church, Sons of Norway Hall, a copy of Northwest Gay Review, (below) Broadway Theater
— Images provided by Martin Lee

YESTERYEAR

continued from page 9

In his search for a place for his fledgling MCC church to meet, Bob contacted the manager of the Broadway Theater, at the corner of Broadway and John St. (now a drugstore), to ask him if they could hold Sunday services there. The manager said yes. But before they could have the first meeting there, he suddenly changed his mind.

The manager was Gay himself and generally sympathetic, but his mixed feelings and fear of community reprisal gave him cold feet. So Bob organized a picket line, and I watched from the sidelines as the small group marched on the sidewalk, chanting about how unfair it was. Bob handed out flyers, and as one attractive young man walked by, Bob turned around and said loudly, "You're cute, honey!" The guy turned his head back, with a look of shock and disgust, as he kept walking.

The manager didn't relent. So the search continued, resulting in regular meetings at the United Methodist Church, at 16th and E. John St., near what was Group Health Hospital (now Kaiser Permanente). The MCC shared the chapel and other meeting rooms in that old stone building, staggering its schedule with the other church. Bob would open his sermons with the same phrase Troy Perry used: "The Lord is my shepherd, and he *knows* I'm Gay!"

When Bob tried to organize a chapter of the church up in Vancouver, BC, I went with him and his boyfriend one time, to the Gay bar that was offering to hold meetings there. I think it fizzled out fairly quickly and never really took hold. While we were in a restaurant afterwards, though when the waitress asked him what he wanted, he joked, "As a homosexual, I demand a bowl of fruit!"

Electoral politics

In the early '70s, Tim developed a questionnaire for candidates running for public office, asking what their stance on Gay rights was. When the Seattle Municipal Elections Committee (SEAMEC) was organized in 1977, it used his questionnaire word for word, as well as its rating system and layout.

I went with Tim to the City Council chambers, while he interviewed members in person in their offices. Some were very liberal and sympathetic ones, like John Miller, Jeannette Williams, and Phyllis Lamphere.

Others, like Tim Hill, were bristly and quite the opposite. Some others, like Sam Smith, were friendly but noncommittal, substituting glad-handing and smiles for substantive discussion and really grappling with the issue.

Some candidates responded by mail, but Bruce Chapman was one who didn't. We went to his home on Capitol Hill one night, and I waited on the sidewalk while Tim interviewed him on his porch. He was elected to the City Council, and a few years later became secretary of state.

We also went to candidate fairs, like one that was held at North Seattle Community College, going from table to table where they had their meet-and-greets, brochures, buttons, etc., with a questionnaire in hand for each of them. One of those was John Hempelmann, a young attorney running for Congress, standing at his booth with his Vogue model-looking wife. He kept looking at the questionnaire, seemingly hesitant to answer, hemming and hawing, saying a few blandishments that were vaguely liberal enough but not wholeheartedly supportive. His wife kept herself turned away a bit, not looking at us directly in the eye, and said to him, "Just tell them Romans 1, honey!" referring to a New Testament condemnation of homosexuality, which she wanted him to throw in our face and end the discussion. He didn't heed her and stumbled on, ending on a vaguely friendly note, in contrast to his scowling wife.

Tim was the first designated Gay lobbyist to Olympia, beginning in January 1973 through part of May. He had very humble funds that the SGA raised, barely enough to cover the commuting costs of taking the bus to and from the capital, unlike the exorbitant salaries of later Gay lobbyists years after, which ranged from \$60,000 to \$80,000 and even higher. One person who gave the rare amount of \$100 was angry that his donation didn't result in full Gay rights being won nearly right away!

Sen. Pete Francis was especially sympathetic to our cause and sought Tim's testimony a number of times for committee hearings in Olympia and public meetings in Seattle.

While Tim was lobbying, I lived with two Gay doctors near Lake Washington, cleaning house, doing yardwork, and some of the cooking for them and their parties, in exchange for my room and board and a small salary; Tim's base was with a friend in Seattle, who was kind enough to not charge him rent to share his apartment.

Answering the phone

When Tim's assignment was over, we moved to an apartment a couple blocks from Broadway. Since the SGA couldn't afford an office, our personal phone was also its contact phone number. Tim had the number 323-6969 for years before that, and it became the listed number for the Seattle Gay Alliance, with a cross-reference under Gay.

We answered the phone all hours of the day and night when we were home after work on different shifts. Visitors and natives wanted to know where and when the organization meetings were, or where the bars and other Gay spots were. High school teachers wanted panels to come talk to their students. Lonely and dejected men and women who were struggling with accepting their gayness wanted a shoulder to cry on.

One time a kid called from a phone booth in West Seattle, saying he felt like committing suicide, because his parents were hostile about him being Gay and threatened to kick him out of the house before he could quite finish high school. We encouraged him to stay calm and hopeful, and talked him down on that cold and dark, rainy night. The phrase "it'll get better" hadn't gained currency yet, but that's what we helped him to realize. He sounded cheered up, and hopefully he held on till he was out on his own, away from the self-righteous grasp of his disapproving parents.

Sometimes hecklers called to yell "faggot!" and hang up. What sounded like schoolkids asked if this was where all the Queers were, then laughed their heads off, sounding like they had the phone hooked up to a loudspeaker for the rest of the group, as it echoed in the room.

Speaking engagements

Tim arranged speaking engagements for those high school classrooms, including Franklin High off Rainier Ave, Lincoln High in the Wallingford area, and West Seattle High. Sometimes there were three or four people to talk to the students; other times it was just Tim and me.

Tim also organized some speaking engagements in Nathaniel Wagner's sexuality class at the University of Washington, where the panel was as many as half a dozen. Other engagements included medical students at the UW who wanted to understand their future Gay patients better, and a Jewish group on Greek Row, headed up by a liberal rabbi. His name came into play at one of the Franklin High School engagements, when a couple of Jewish students testily challenged

our right to be there. When Tim told them that not all Jewish people felt the same, that there was a diversity of theological opinions in their community, and cited this rabbi's name, they knew who he was and said that they didn't accept his authority.

We also talked to a sensitivity training session of the police, in downtown Seattle. The uniformed cops mostly just stared back at us, while we recounted the history of some of the outrageous ways Gay people had suffered at the hands of some of the police, and how relations would be vastly improved if they were truly accepting of us. One or two ventured a remark that sounded like he (there weren't any women officers in the room) was trying to be open minded. Others glared at us, looking like they ached to bust out with a homophobic remark but were duly polite enough, or duty bound, not to.

One of the officers asked us why so many people called them pigs, and how much they resented it. We tried our best to assure them that not all Gay people, or any other part of the population, called them that. But that given the bad treatment Gay people, let alone others, often got from police, it was no wonder that some hurled that insult back at them.

Another time, Tim and I and a third person went to a Renton PTA meeting, requested by one of the mothers. They first spit-fired some unenlightened questions at us, but after all, that's what we were there for: to reason with them. They became more mollified when they could see, as they said, that we weren't wearing dresses or wanted to be women, and weren't child molesters, wanting to prey on their kids. I remember the audience being just women; I don't think any fathers were there. Some of them clustered around me when it was over, smiling and laughing as we talked about cooking and recipes, their suspicious stares and snarky questions having dissolved by then.

On one occasion, Tim organized and headed up a speaking engagement at the meeting hall of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Seattle. He started with a general introduction about Gay people and their rights, for the audience at several tables, and then said there was a Gay person to answer their questions at each one of those tables. The Gays who were sprinkled throughout, one per table, then stood up to identify themselves and say that they could discuss everything with the attendees further.

Northwest Gay Review

Tim was the Seattle editor of the monthly Northwest Gay Review, started by Lanny Swerdlow in Portland, OR, in 1974 and covering the Gay news of Oregon and Washington, etc., until Lanny turned the paper over to some others in 1977. The three of us would take piles of them around to the bars and organizations.

One time, Lanny wanted to test whether the Canadian border police would allow us in, answering their question "Do you have anything that you're bringing in?" by openly declaring the newspapers. They had us pull off to the side, and then took us and the papers into their office. After questioning us, a bit brusquely and clearly taken aback, they said we could not come in with them. So we turned around and went back to Seattle.

In addition to Tim's editor duties, he raised ad revenue from bar owners and other advertisers to a small extent, but Lanny and others were primarily involved with that task. Around 1974 or so, one such bar owner was Jack, of the new Boren Street Disco, which had been the old Sons of Norway Hall. We met him inside the vast space featuring a wooden floor and impressive architecture. It was completely empty, with just a little table or two on one side, a strong contrast to later days, when it would be packed with dancing revelers as this disco, then later as the Timberline.

Jack told us that when the king of Norway came to officiate at a ceremony handing over ownership, all the king was told about what it would become was that it would be a place for young people to gather and socialize, and he thought that was a fine idea.

Tim sold him ad space for the fledgling bar, while he served us a nonalcoholic tropical drink of fruit juices, complete with a tiny paper umbrella.

see YESTERYEAR page 15

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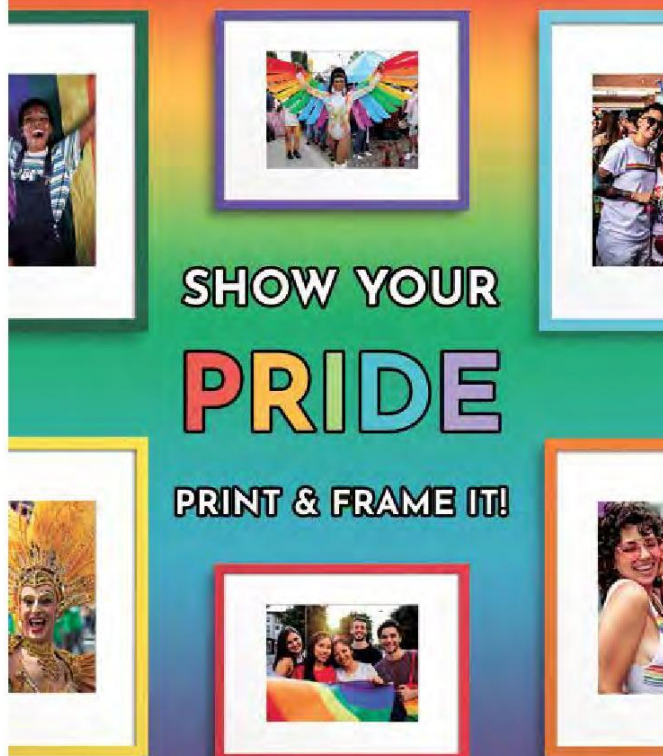


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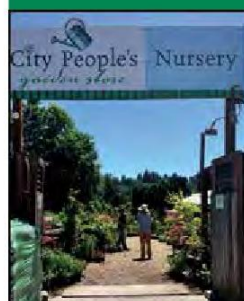
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Conflict and progress

When Anita Bryant rose to prominence opposing Gay rights, and Initiative 13, filed by a couple of police officers, raised its ugly head in Seattle in 1978, Tim and I talked to some of the women who had a table with anti-Gay signs in front of Frederick & Nelson (now Nordstrom) and the Bon (now Macy's) on several occasions.

They were largely Mormons, aligned with conservatives of other churches. Other pro-Gay people came along while we were trying to reason with them, to add their support. But the women were stubbornly clinging to their beliefs, as expected. Many other Gay folks went downtown numerous times to talk to these hardcore true believers. No surprise to any of us, they didn't yield. If any seeds were planted to eventually change some of their minds, we'll never know.

Tim and I were delegates to the state Democratic convention that same year, in Spokane. And we came face to face with more of Anita Bryant's supporters, demonstrating in front of the building the convention was held in. They hurled Bible verses condemning Gay sex at us, and warned us that we'd go to hell if we didn't repent. Staying calm in such a situation tested our patience, but overall it was peaceful, though noisy, and didn't escalate into anything bad.

Tim was one of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention of 1980, held in New York. He worked on the platform committee, and was part of the Gay caucus that nominated Mel Boozar for vice president, a historic first for a Gay Black man in a major political party. When Mel gave his speech accepting that honor, his most stirring comments were these:

"Would you ask me how I'd dare to compare the civil rights struggle with the struggle for Lesbian and Gay rights? I can compare, and I do compare them. I know what it means to be called a nigger. I know what it means to be called a faggot. And I can sum up the difference in one word: none."⁴

We continued to see many changes in the movement over the years, and the activists and leadership shaping it. This recounting of mine is just some of the highlights of those earlier days, to add to these sources:

Photos inside the Gay Community Center, 1971: <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv23464>

Transcript of Tim's testimony (written and audio) to the Seattle City Council on housing discrimination, 10/16/72: <https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/seattle-voices/sexual-orientation-and-housing-discrimination>

Tim's collection of Gay materials, 1964-93: <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv79011>

Tim's position statement on homosexual liberties, prepared for the ACLU, 12/14/71: <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/25984>

Gary Atkins, author of *Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging* (2003), has now covered more info of Tim's activism that wasn't included originally. See paragraphs 11-21: <https://gayseattlehistory.com/chapter-updates/>

My archived history at the UW, including more biography and photos of Tim, and of Tim and me during our years together: <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/pioneerlife/id/29686/rec/1>

Maxwell Timothy Mayhew, born January 1, 1941, died on April 30, 2017, of heart problems. I am devastated losing him, and will always love him.

Endnotes:

¹ Some of their follow-up email correspondence follows:

5/30/14

Dear Tim,

I thought I had a postal address for you in my files in New York; alas, I was wrong! So now I must thank you by email, and

much too long after the fact, for the time we spent together during my first visit to Seattle. Your memory, vocabulary, intelligence, and intellect are just astonishing. So too are the thousands of papers that constitute the Tim Mayhew Collection at UW — with so many of them dated (!) in your own unmistakable handwriting. Those papers are treasures. Thank you for saving them and thank you for giving them away.

Sincerely,
Michael

6/6/14

Michael—

It was a pleasure to meet you. I will be happy to try to answer from memory any questions that may come up after you have read some documents.

You said you were focused on the origins of the marriage movement. That was a very remote concern 40-47 years ago, but the legislative reforms in which I had a hand and that became Washington constitutional and statute law in 1973, even provided fully for gender-neutral marriage, among other things.

The State of Washington threw out the colonial sodomy laws over a generation before the US Supreme Court did, but it was never mentioned on television. I think most of the public never realized how benighted the old laws were, because those laws were never mentioned, either. Married women could not own property until 1967.

—Tim

Tim Mayhew to Michael Boucai 8/26/14

As for *Singer v. Hara*, I am the direct cause of that. As I came back from lobbying the legislative session that passed it, I told friend John Singer that nobody had yet tried to use the new marriage law, and what it provided. He wanted to be the first, to make sure that it was pushed to the limit, so he grabbed his friend Paul Barwick and went ahead. They were comrades of the campaigns, and no romance was involved, which is appropriate for a civil property contract.

² Below is further correspondence:

Michael Boucai to Tim Mayhew, 8/26/14

I do have some questions about these lines in your email: "As for *Singer v. Hara*, I am the direct cause of that. As I came back from lobbying the legislative session that passed it, I told friend John Singer that nobody had yet tried to use the new marriage law, and what it provided." Several sources suggest that it was Pete Francis who informed Singer (among others) of the legislative revisions and who at least implied that a case should be brought. Gary Atkins in *Gay Seattle* reports that Francis conveyed this information at a meeting of the Dorian Society.

Francis, incidentally, was the Dorian's lawyer, as you no doubt are aware. I don't think the two stories are necessarily contradictory — the reforms were no secret, and gay marriage was certainly in the air after the Minnesota and Kentucky cases were filed.

But it would be interesting and helpful to hear from you whether you think there's any truth to the Atkins version and, if so, whether yours and his can and should be reconciled.

Tim Mayhew to Michael Boucai, 8/27/14

News in most hands comes out wrong. I do not have before me the article you mention, but I believe that I have been telling you the truth. I have always been very careful for accuracy, not least because of my linguistic education and working with translations. Twice I have been a newspaper editor and tossed back a lot of sloppy reporting and writing for rework. Sometimes I have been at a news scene and watched how TV reporters misdescribe what is happening before the camera.

Ancient Greek literature shows how different classical historians seriously tell very different versions of the same events and people. You can see the same in modern histories and newspapers, even in science books and movie reviews. As I am literate in many European languages, I can see how professional translators accidentally twist meanings or leave things out. Students hearing the same lecture write different notes. Witnesses disagree in court. Hearsay is inadmissible. You can see these phenomena for yourself in your two professions, as lawyer and teacher.



Outside our apartment building, c. June, 1973.
Looking west from Federal Ave E and E Republican St,
to Broadway, two blocks away. — Photo courtesy of Martin Lee

I was indeed the first person to tell John Singer about the new law, because he was surprised and excited. Naturally, discussions would have been going on elsewhere, but I doubt that he heard them or talked to those people, at least until he began organizing his own effort. I did not help on his case, so I do not know who prepared it.

³ Below is further correspondence:

Martin Lee to Michael Boucai, 8/27/14

I'm Martin Lee, Tim's best friend of nearly 43 years. Tim forwarded your question below, and his response, to me this morning. If I'm not being too presumptuous to add a few observations of my own, I'd like to add a bit of info.

As for Fayette, and trying to pinpoint the genesis of the whole struggle for equality in marriage: I met him and Paul Barwick quite early on after coming to town. I sometimes visited the collective they had on Capitol Hill, on Malden Avenue E., down the street a few blocks from the Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities. [I] was with them or Tim and others in political meetings, in marches for gay rights, as well as some for women's rights in downtown Seattle in the '70s, (the chants of "*Not the church, not the state, women must decide their fate*" still resound in my memory), and a wide spectrum of other activities.

And although I wasn't witness to Tim telling John Singer for the first time about the new marriage law, having come on the scene a little after that, I heard John and Paul talking with him one day at the collective, following up on the developments after Tim had given him the news, pondering strategy after the marriage license rejection, ramifications, etc. Which quickly became woven together with Pete Francis, whom I met and saw in action as he eagerly sought Tim's testimony to a committee he chaired as a senator, and in various and sundry public meetings. He hoped Tim would be the spark to an otherwise dull proceeding, as he put it, despite the controversial nature of gay rights in other respects than marriage.

So, a flat-out statement that it was Pete Francis who conveyed the information to John, as if he were the one and only source and the first source, isn't accurate. I think this shows how less than careful and precise people can be to attributing, or failing to correctly attribute altogether, things to many people and events, their exact sequence, etc., so that the resulting story has a ring of truth but is misleading or wrong.

Because Pete's important work was certainly in the mix early on, one might come to the conclusion Atkins reported, that Singer acted on the idea that Pete Francis had given him at the Dorian meeting, if they were not aware of all the factors.

(From a later note)

...If it was even true at all that John went to a Dorian meeting, which he wasn't usually inclined to do. Or maybe he did on that rare occasion, after hearing the news from Tim and already deciding to go ahead with the test case, to hear more from the senator. Given how people can easily conflate events and make assumptions, or are just plain mistaken, and repeat a story enough to where it gains the upper hand over the truth, [it] doesn't change what actually happened. Pete Francis definitely disseminated the information at that meeting, but that is the only core statement we can safely assert is true. Maybe since it was news for those attending that meeting, and it wasn't long after that John and Paul went to apply, they assumed that was the way John got the news too. Which became that he went to that same meeting. In any case, Tim's recollection is true.

⁴ That was a coming together moment for Gay men and Lesbians, and even though Mel had no chance of actually becoming the nominee, since Walter Mondale was again running with Jimmy Carter. It was different from the tensions with feminists and Lesbian separatists that flared up sometimes in the '70s, when graffiti spray-painted on the walls off Campus Parkway in the U District, near some of the dorms, rang with hateful words like "All rapists should be killed, All men are rapists. Therefore..."

Those were also the days when some women's rights meetings were held in a small house, converted to an office space, in the U District on the upper Ave, near Cowen Park. They were trying out a new concept at the time: providing on-site daycare for those women-only meetings. Women were welcome to bring their daughters, but their sons were forbidden — babies and those of all other ages — since they had a penis and testicles, and therefore were the oppressor.

They also were so sensitive about the use of the word "girls": they would refer to girls as "baby women," but boys weren't called "baby men." They naturally didn't like how some men for so long had called women "girls" to disempower them, making them sound immature and not up to the same rigorous tasks as men. But their categorical denunciations of all males and the use of the term "girls" was ridiculous. In the name of combatting hatred, they were guilty of unjustified hate themselves. If only they had been reasonable and distinguished between sexist oppression — which they had every right to disdain and fight against — and those who were innocent.

This essay was submitted by
Martin Lee (mleecomw@outlook.com).
Version: 6/14/22



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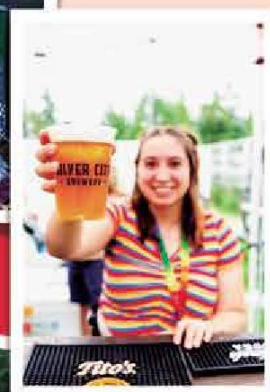
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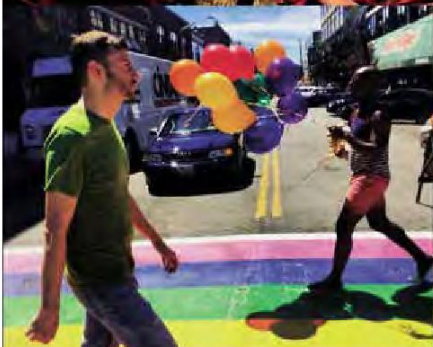
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“The kids these days are daring”

Seattle drag legend Boy Mike returns to a new scene

BY A.V. EICHENBAUM
SGN MANAGING EDITOR

“...and I was on Roseanne Barr’s talk show as a Roseanne look-alike. I did a music video with Boy George, and I used to be a cast member of *An Evening at La Cage* in Las Vegas. Are you familiar with that show?”

Mike Siler — better known as Boy Mike — had started talking before I’d finished setting up my recorder. His enthusiasm was infectious. The passion with which he discussed his craft was undeniable, and I was struggling to keep up.

In the ‘80s and early ‘90s, Boy Mike was close to infamous on the Seattle drag scene, from humble beginnings lip-synching at Seattle Center to hosting *Retrovenge* Tuesdays at Neighbours. “We’d have stand-up comedians or fire jugglers or a *Brady Bunch* look-alike contest... It was really a great time. I packed about 750 people into Neighbours. It was more popular than their Saturday nights.”

Then he vanished from the Pacific Northwest. For decades, he was a fixture in San Diego, before returning to Seattle in 2008 — when *The Stranger* described him as “omnipresent and impossible to miss,” among other things — disappearing again, and returning again just last year.

“I’ve toured everywhere, from Florida to Washington to Tijuana to Vancouver, and I just got done with a tour in California, Mexico, and Vegas,” he told me.

“And you could say — this is interesting — that I had my own drag queen radio show on the number one station in San Diego, for four years, and it was very successful and very funny.”

Mike explained to me that three nights a week, he was on a radio show with The New Guy, a DJ in San Diego, something we’d discussed in the past. He’s also written for the *SGN* off and on for years, including a chat with RuPaul and, most recently, a touching memorial to the late political cartoonist and *SGN* fixture Ken Campbell. He wrote a regular column in the ‘00s called “Boy Mike’s Fab Gab,” which he recently

reintroduced to the world via the sometimes-quarterly magazine *Unite Seattle*.

There’s no denying that Boy Mike has an impressive résumé. A regal cape of rumors trails in his wake, and his wild, tampon-tossing performances are legendary. When he called to tell me he was returning to the stage at Julia’s on Broadway, I wanted to know one thing:

In his absence, how has the Seattle scene changed?

In response, he recounted his old route through Seattle’s clubs: The Monastery, City Beat, then Club Broadway and The Underground.

“It was a carefree time! It was the ‘80s, the ‘90s, the music was great. I mean, how can you say that ‘80s music was *not* fabulous? It was so fun to go out on the dance floor and sing along to your favorite songs. You don’t really have that anymore.”

He also noted that the club scene’s grown more diverse. “It’s much more mixed. My club night, I promoted to straight, Bisexual, Gay, drag queens, Trans, whatever. I welcomed everybody... I think it’s a great mix.”

“We used to dress up in full makeup and [dress] like celebrities. The kids these days are daring,” he added. “Like, Nonbinary? That’s a new thing. They didn’t even really talk about Bisexuals back in the ‘80s.”

Considering the boldness with which Mike has approached drag, life, and comedy, “daring” might be one of the highest compliments he could pay to today’s youth.

Looking back, Boy Mike lamented the loss of all-night Seattle businesses besides clubs. “We’d stay up and drink coffee and eat donuts all night, and then we’d sleep all day at the Gay youth center called the Orion Center. It was just so much fun! It’s not fun for me to go out anymore.”

So what happened? Mike boils it down to too many straight people on Capitol Hill. “Over on 13th, the whole place is inundated with straight people. Drunk, obnoxious



straight people — they’ve kind of taken over that area. That [area] used to have the Wildrose, and that’s about it.”

Boy Mike has a lot of nostalgia for his glory days. When he looks back at his youth, however, it’s not all roses. “High school was a horrible time for me... I didn’t take any crap from anyone, and I had a sharp tongue on me — sort of like Boy George’s — and it got me into a lot of trouble, but I stayed true to myself. I didn’t have the option to come out... I never had the luxury of a closet to hide in.”

With that experience, though, came some wisdom. Mike had this to say to the next generation of kids in the LGBTQ+ community:

“Maybe they’re still in the closet, or maybe they’re getting a lot of drama thrown their way... You’ve got to remember: you will make it through this, and it’s a temporary event in your life. Soon, the pain and sorrow will be over, and you can come to Seattle any time you want and be fabulous. We love you.”

You can catch Boy Mike performing during PrideFest at Julia’s on Broadway (1:40 p.m. on Saturday, June 25) as part of the festivities. Where he’ll be next is anyone’s guess. Seattle’s very own drag queen cryptid still has stories to be told. We’ll all just have to wait and see what comes next.



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Expect an amazing lineup of entertainment as we work closely with our community partner Alma to bring our mainstage to life!

For more information and further details on ALL of the events happening in July for Pride Month in Tacoma, check out Tacomapride.org





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