



Happy Pride 2019

The Chair's Corner – Why I Volunteer

~ by Tonya Ruckenbrod

The work of volunteers change society, people, the environment, animals and a host of other social needs in a positive way.

Volunteering comes with many benefits. Benefits that you can't put a monetary value. We notice a subtle shift in ourselves when we volunteer.

- Increased sense of purpose knowing you are making a difference in the lives of others;
- Work with an amazing group of people dedicated to improving the lives of older LGBT adults in Pierce County.
- Opportunity to create, plan, implement and/or support programs and activities to serve our constituents.
- Meet new people; make new friends while volunteering

I volunteer because I believe that honoring and supporting our older LGBT+ adults is important. Several years ago, I came to Tacoma Pride and stopped by the Tacoma Older LGBT booth. I was excited as I talked with board members staffing the booth. This was exactly the organization I was looking for to serve my community with my time and energy.

Are you looking for something to do and meet new people?

Tacoma Older LGBT is looking for Awesome Volunteers

Our Mission: Tacoma Older LGBT works to achieve a vibrant high quality of life for older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults in Tacoma, Pierce County and surrounding areas.

What You Bring:

- Are committed and passionate about the lives of older adults.
- Have experience as a caretaker or in the field of aging and disability, event planning and support, newsletters, finance and legal services.
- Identify as an LGBTQ individual or are an LGBTQ ally.

What are you waiting for?

Contact Tacoma Older LGBT. Send us an email at: info@tacomaolderlgbt.org for an application or set up a time to discuss volunteer opportunities with Tacoma Older LGBT.

Board of Directors

Tonya Ruckenbrod - Chair

Patricia McIntyre –Co-Chair

Cheryl Cristello – Secretary

Chris Stover – Treasurer

Nellis Kim – Board Member

Annette Dawson-Miller – Board Member

Contact Us:

Email: info@tacomaolderlgbt.org

Message Phone: 253.271.8185

Website: www.tacomaolderlgbt.org

Facebook: facebook.com/TacomaOlderLGBT/



Coming Out Late in Life

~ By Cheryl Cristello

“Maturity includes the recognition that no one is going to see anything in us that we don't see in ourselves. Stop waiting for a producer. Produce yourself.” Marianne Williamson

Being an engineer, I was rather analytical about coming out as a transgender woman at age 60. I had been married for thirty-five years, employed as a design engineer and Sr. Projects Manager for almost forty years. My children were long ago grown up and out of college, successful. What were the pros and cons of coming out?

Coming Out

Actually, the analysis was rather straightforward. Since I was about four years old, I had lived my life knowing that I was “different”, hiding my true self. I had worked hard to hide in plain sight. My wife and I had adopted a “don't ask, don't tell” relationship. As I aged, I grew increasingly unhappy, tormented, even considering suicide. Thankfully, I realized that suicide was not the answer.

What Could Go Wrong?

When I made the decision to transition and to live my truth openly, honestly, I felt a profound sense of relief, yet I was also very apprehensive. What could and would go wrong? I had read so many stories of the disasters others had

experienced. Once my decision to transition was made, I was “all in.” Confident and determined to live the rest of my life on my terms. While I did my best to “rush slowly”, my 35-year marriage ended and ultimately, I was fired from my job, three years before my planned retirement.

Post Transition

Was transition and coming out worth all that I lost? Absolutely, unequivocally YES. For the first time in my life, I found peace and happiness. The stress from hiding my true self, from working 60 hours per week... gone. I never found another job even though I applied for over 400 positions all over the world, in about a year. I found numerous other opportunities. I began to volunteer. I took a five-week car trip, camping, hiking, exploring, seeing and experiencing new things. I trained for a 500-mile bike ride from San Francisco to LA- the ride was so very much fun!

Regrets?

Amazingly, a man who knew me long before I transitioned asked me to become his wife. He loves me for who and as I am. Life is good, really good. I have no regrets, none.



Older Gay Men and Loneliness ~ By Chris S.

Population estimates suggest that one-third to one-half of older gay and bisexual men live alone, without adequate services or supports (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, et al., 2013; Wallace, Cochran, Durazo, & Ford, 2011). In the Caring and Aging with Pride project, 61% of gay and 53% bisexual male participants reported experiencing loneliness (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, et al., 2011).

When I “came out” at age 19, it was in the midst of the AIDS crisis. I was overweight, living at home in a small rural town, attending college, depressed, and desperately lonely. I was excited to attend my first Pride festival, I marveled at all of the well-defined gay male bodies but at the same time, I experienced, body shaming, rejection and judgement because “I didn’t fit in.” Like many others, I began engaging in harmful and risky behaviors to dampen my feelings of loneliness and rejection with drugs, alcohol, binging, starving, and cruising.

Now as an older gay man, I have a wonderful husband of 24 years and life is good. For the younger generation, I am beginning to see broadening changes. The younger LGBTQ+ community appears to be more accepting and celebratory of the diversity of body types, ethnicity, gender identity and expression.

It is my hope that with the services of our partners, the Rainbow Center and OASIS that there are fewer and fewer gay men or for that matter any member of the LGBTQ+ community experiencing the loneliness of not fitting in, especially in our own community.

As a middle aged gay man, I celebrate the youth and young adults in our community and happy to see the wide variety of resources, support and programs available. However, what we as a country, as a LGBTQ+ community have traditionally



lacked is programming and resources for the fifty plus older adults and elders of our community. The LGBTQ community, and gay and bisexual men in particular are more likely to live alone which often leads to loneliness... essentially older LGBTQ+ are invisible, with few resources, programs and opportunities to connect with each other.

We know from research, loneliness and isolation contributes to health disparities, depression and earlier mortality. That’s where Tacoma Older LGBT (www.tacomaolderlgbt.org) plays an important role as the resource for older LGBTQ+ adults in Tacoma, Pierce County and surrounding areas. We recognize these issues and focus on connections, programming and resources for older LGBTQ+ and we would love you to join our team of volunteers.

As a Board of Directors member, I invite you, especially those older LGBTQ+ adults; to check out our website. You will find events to attend and if you have a great idea for an event, send us an email (info@tacomaolderlgbt.org). We will work with you and your idea to help you make it a successful event.

We need your energy, passion and connections to speak the word to those you know in our community who may be struggling with loneliness and need help to meet other older LGBTQ adults. We hope you will consider being part of a fun, but passionate team of Tacoma Older LGBT Board Members and volunteers supporting older LGBTQ adults.



“The spirit that emerged outside a Mafia-run bar in 1969 became the pulse of the gay community and inspired not just an annual parade but ways to express gay pride in individual lives.

Stonewall happens every day.”

— Ann Bausum, [Stonewall: Breaking Out in the Fight for Gay Rights](#)

Stonewall Uprising ~ by Pat McIntyre

This newsletter would not be complete this year without mentioning the 50th year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. If you are reading this and wondering what is the Stonewall Uprising/Riots I suggest you “Google it.” If you want to get a sense of the attitudes of the day, The Washington Post had an interesting article titled: [How the homophobic media covered the 1969 Stonewall uprising](#)

To understand even further, you must understand the atmosphere of the late 1960's. The years of 1968 - 1969 were years of unrest and discontentment. As a teen and a 20+ person, you had already experienced the assassination of a young President, (John F. Kennedy) and then witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in March of '68 followed three months later by the assassination of Robert Kennedy. The military draft and Vietnam War was at its height. We literally watch the assassinations and the Vietnam War on television with a death report every night ... something unseen in the past. Young people were marching, protesting the draft, and fighting for Civil Rights and Women's Rights. Later in May of 1970, we watch the Ohio National Guard shoot and kill unarmed college student protestors at Kent State University.

In June of 1969, I had just turned 19; I was home for the summer from my first year of college. As far as I am aware, the local paper did not cover or report Stonewall despite the numerous injuries. Homosexual and Gay were not words that you heard in my small town except in hushed conversations. It was many years later, when I had the courage to come out... first to myself and then to others that I learned of the Stonewall Inn Uprising, and the history that was an integral part of my LGBT+ community.

Fifty years later, we recognize those brave souls of the LGBT community who patronized the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York City and fought back. I suspect many of those individuals didn't even realize at the time what they had just started; they were fighting because they were tired of police raids and the violence toward them.

We now know that this was to be the start of Gay Pride and the Gay Revolution. For that, we honor these pioneers and unknowing heroes... for if it were not for them we might not have the freedoms that we have to enjoy Tacoma Pride out and openly.



Note: At Tacoma Older LGBT, we honor and celebrate diversity. We celebrate the updated Pride flag that many are using to be inclusive of those who have not always felt included.