Protest in a Pandemic

COVID-19 hasn't stopped protests against problems created out of changes caused by the virus, as well as issues that predate it

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- LGBTQ+ Programming: A Shift in Venue... and Values?
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PLUS: Viewpoints, Photo Spreads, Local Info, Poetry and MORE!
Hello again - it's been awhile. When I last sat down to write this column it was January, and what has now been a world-changing pandemic was still new, seemingly impacting a different part of the world.

By the time we looked to assemble what would've been our March issue, we realized that many of the venues where a magazine like Centerline would be distributed were closing down. We made the tough decision to pause the magazine.

The New Haven Pride Center, under whose purview the magazine is published, shifted directions nearly instantly to provide virtual services in a socially distant world, while surveying our community and finding food insecurity to be a critical concern.

That led to the launch of our Food Pantry program, which has fed hundreds of families. That program, which is slated to continue to the end of August, has been the cornerstone of our response in this newly uncertain world.

The return of Centerline is not a return to normal, per se, but for us a way to continue to document what's happening in our community.

Mel Cordner returns this issue, looking at changes in our community when it comes to entertainment, resources and more, and how virtual conversations and events have impacted the accessibility of resources. There are some who benefit, and some who don't, by the changes from in-person gatherings to virtual ones.

You'll notice that we have more Viewpoint pieces in the magazine this issue. We're not a news publication, but news inevitably impacts what we do, and we're launching a broader viewpoint program that extends not only here in print, but to a set of blogs that will be maintained on the New Haven Pride Center's website.

The Pride Center's program officers will be collecting content from themselves and other community members to cover a variety of viewpoints from various corners of our LGBTQ+ community.

We've always had a mission of telling our community's stories, many times through their own words, and so we're excited to expand our mission in this way.

This issue, I've compiled resources that are designed to assist the Bi+ community. Over the last year I've led the Pride center's Bi+ Social and Discussion Group, one of three groups in Connecticut available to the Bi+ community, and have gotten to know a number of amazing individuals in recent years who are dedicated to expanding resources, many online but some in person as well.

As we've done for women and the trans community in previous issues, we hope this list of resources will help those who are looking for some support, information, or recommended reading. And if you know of a resource that we left out of our list, don't hesitate to email me at centerline@newhavenpridecenter.org - the resources are being shared among the various group leaders.

Within these pages you'll find queer poetry written as part of a recent program, a look at protesting during the pandemic, how intersectionality impacts safety, a look into the Drag King community and the unique perspective they bring, and pictures from events that took place before the pandemic: The Yale Cabaret Theatre Dragaret, and the Dorothy Awards.

We're excited to be back, and hope you're staying safe. We'll see you in September with our annual Pride issue, but in the meantime we hope this issue helps provide you with some of the best of what's happening in our community.
The Bisexual+ community is, based on many surveys of the population, the largest portion of the LGBTQ+ community. That doesn't mean the resources have kept pace.

While resources certainly exist that are agnostic to any one part of our community, a lot of resources have developed over time for the gay and lesbian communities, and more recently for the Bi+ and Trans communities, many of which started as grassroots initiatives.

Many of the resources have shifted online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; as such, it's worth checking in as things may change over time.

This is, like any, an incomplete list, but hopefully gives some helpful starting points for those seeking resources, whether groups or online.

If you're aware of another resource not covered here, we'd love to hear about it! Email centerline@newhavenpridecenter.org and we'll incorporate it in a future list of resources published online or in the print version of the magazine.

**GROUPS**

**Bisexuals and Allies (1st Thurs, 7:30p)**

Bisexuals & Allies of Fairfield County (BAFC) is a nonjudgmental support and social group for all bisexual/non-monosexual folks in the Fairfield County area and their allies, hosted via the Triangle Community Center.

Members include people who identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid, no label, asexual, or otherwise, as well as straight, gay, and lesbian allies (friends and family). The group welcomes people of all genders, including cisgender, transgender, gender non-conforming, androgynous, genderqueer, and other gender identities.

BAFC seeks to build a stronger bi+ community and to increase the visibility and support of all who fall under the bisexual umbrella term. Closeted or out, monogamous or polyamorous, all are welcome to join as long as other members of the group are treated with respect and compassion.

**Bisexual+ Discussion Group (4th Wed, 7p)**

Based in Middletown, the Bisexual+, Biromantic+ Queer, & Questioning, Discussion and Support Group is held every Fourth Wednesday of the month. For the foreseeable future we are meeting via zoom. Bring your topic of discussion or just listen.

People of all ages, religious backgrounds, ethnicities/races, genders & gender presentations (including cis, genderfluid, intersex, nonbinary, trans, etc.) are all most sincerely welcomed to attend.

**Bisexual+ Social Group (4th Sat, 1:30p)**

Hosted at the New Haven Pride Center, the Bisexual+ Social Group offers a social atmosphere to facilitate conversation, getting to know you, and more. The group straddles the line between a social group and a discussion group.

The group is meeting via Zoom, but will return to the New Haven Pride Center when it is safe to do so.

**RESOURCES**

Events and Information for the Bi+ Community

by Joshua O’Connell
8th Annual Bisexual Book Awards Winners

Each year the Bi Writers Association announces the winners and finalists of the Bisexual Books Awards. Launched in 2013, the goal was to recognize books with bisexual/pansexual/fluid characters and content. The association has been working since 2006 to ensure a place for bisexual books.

Winners are bolded.

NON-FICTION
- From Psychoanalytic Bisexuality to Bisexual Psychoanalysis: Desiring in the Real by Esther Rapoport, Routledge
- Under the Bisexual Umbrella: Diversity of Identity and Experience edited by Corey E. Flanders, Routledge

MEMOIR/BIOGRAPHY
- In the Dream House by Carmen Maria Machado, Graywolf Press
- Sorted by Jackson Bird, Tiller Press / Simon & Schuster

FICTION
- Attraction by Ruby Porter, Text Publishing
- Naamah by Sarah Blake, Riverhead Books / Penguin Random House
- Northern Lights by Raymond Strom, Simon & Schuster
- Red at the Bone by Jacqueline Woodson, Riverhead Books / Penguin Random House
- Small Silent Things by Robin Page, Harper Perennial/HarperCollins

EROTIC FICTION
- Lot’s Wife: An Erotic Retelling by Rosalind Chase, Under Hill Press
- Three For All by Elia Winters, Cecaelia Press
- We Three; One and One and One Makes Three by Lara Zielinsky, Supposed Crimes

SPECULATIVE FICTION [BI-FI/SCI-FI/FANTASY/ PARANORMAL/HORROR/ ETC.]
- Monster of the Week by FT Lukens, Duet Books / Interlude Press
- Shatter the Sky by Rebecca Kim Wells, Books for Young Readers/Simon & Schuster

TEEN/YOUNG ADULT FICTION
- Deposing Nathan by Zack Smedley, Page Street Kids
- Monster of the Week by FT Lukens, Duet Books / Interlude Press
- The Mover by JC Garton, Riversong Books / Sulis International

POETRY
- A Sand Book by Ariana Reines, Tin House Books
- turn around BRXGH TXYS by Rosebud Ben-Oni, Get Fresh Books
- Why I Never Finished My Dissertation by Laura Foley, Headmistress Press

MYSTERY
- Blood & Bitcoin by L.A. Witt, Independently Published
- Burying the Dead by Georgette Gouveia, JMS Books

PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR
- Routledge
- Simon & Schuster

BI WRITER OF THE YEAR
- {authors alphabetically by last name}
- Rosalind Chase, Lot’s Wife: An Erotic Retelling, Under Hill Press

To see previous honorees, as well as other events by the Bi Writers Association, visit http://www.biwriters.org
Centerline editor-in-chief and Pride Center Bi+ Social Group facilitator Joshua O’Connell interviewed Bi+ author and activist Zachary Zane during a pride month live chat. To watch the replay, search "A Conversation with Zachary Zane" on YouTube.

ONLINE RESOURCES

**Bisexual+ Connecticut**
A free and open group on Facebook for local Bisexual+ community members to chat, get to know each other and make friends.

*Search “Bisexual+ Connecticut” on Facebook*

**New York Area Bisexual Network**
Since 1987 #NYABN (New York Area Bisexual+ Network) has been providing places where ALL people on the Multiple gender-attraction Spectrum (#MSpec) as well just plain old Bi-friendly #Gay, #Lesbian & "Straight-But-Not-Narrow" Allied folx can keep themselves informed about Bi-inclusive stuff, as well as where to gather and interact in the New York City Tri-State Area, (including Manhattan the Bronx, Brooklyn Queens, Staten Island, Long Island, New Jersey, Connecticut, Westchester County and the Lower Hudson Valley).

*Info: www.facebook.com/NYAreaBiNet*

**Bisexual Resource Center**
This nonprofit was founded in the 1980s and is one of the longest running organizations focused specifically on the Bi+ community. Among other resources on their website are a listing of national and local Bi+ groups, handouts that can be used as resources in community centers and for Bi+ groups, and reports/research that they’ve compiled from various sources.

*Info: biresource.org*

**The American Institute of Bisexuality**
This organization features a variety of Bi+ focused content, information about various influential and various Bi+ people, aiming to help with visibility, a resource library with plenty of information, and options on how you can get involved.

*Info: bi.org/en*

**Bi Writers Association**
The Bi Writers Association, founded in 2006, aims to ensure a place for bisexual books, and offers the annual Bisexual Books Awards, to ensure representation and recognition of Bi+ books and themes. This year's award winners and finalists can be found inside this article.

*Info: www.biwriters.org*

**Bisexual Bloggers**
This Facebook group encourages sharing of Bi+ authorship and information, regardless of resource, from books to blogs to podcasts to video content.

*Info: www.facebook.com/BiBloggingCentral*

**Bisexuality-Aware Professionals Directory**
This list of resources is designed to connect those seeking Bisexual+ aware professionals in a variety of categories with those seeking their services. The listings are organized geographically for easier discovery.

*Info: https://www.bizone.org/bap/locate.php*
CHAT4CHANGE


For more information, go to www.PrEPNav.org
The Government’s War on the Trans Community

by Maia Leonardo

Since the beginning of the Trump administration, the government’s war on LGBTQ+ and specifically trans people has only accelerated. From fighting the rights of trans students and athletes to “religious liberty” protections in health care and housing, this administration has shown itself to be the most trans-antagonistic in recent memory. It certainly gives the Reagan administration watching gleefully as many thousands of gay and trans Americans suffered and died from AIDS a run for its money.

Just over a month after Inauguration Day, on February 23, 2017, the Trump administration rescinded guidance dating to the Obama administration that stated that students should have access to bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identity, making trans students’ safety at school dependent on school districts and states. The Department of Education later clarified the guidance, saying that while discrimination and harassment of trans students was prohibited, separating bathrooms by sex assigned at birth was not. One could argue, of course, that forcing hundreds of thousands of trans students into the wrong facilities constitutes discrimination and harassment, but that probably wouldn’t stop an administration built on discrimination and harassment.

The Trump attacks on trans students have extended to those students’ participation in sports. In January of this year, the administration filed a brief in support of an Idaho law that singled out trans women, preventing them from participating in women’s sports, with the brief stating, essentially, that trans women are a threat to women’s sports. This notion, though unscientific, is at the root of this and following actions to hurt trans athletes.

In March, the administration filed a brief in support of a lawsuit filed here in Connecticut by three cisgender girls, where trans athletes can participate in teams that match their gender identity, challenging the state’s inclusive policy. The filing calls the trans girls at the heart of the lawsuit “biological males” and repeatedly mentions “real physiological differences,” neglecting to note that one of the plaintiffs of the lawsuit won a race against one of the trans athletes days after the lawsuit was filed. In May, the Department of Education issued a letter specifically in regards to the Connecticut case but applicable generally saying that Title IX explicitly does not allow for trans inclusion in sports. The letter continued to refer to trans women as “males” and described athletics with trans participants as “coeducational.” This lawsuit is still winding its way through the courts, but the Supreme Court’s recent ruling on Title VII as it related to LGBTQ+ people was narrow and kept the door open for an unfavorable ruling on a case about trans athletes.

Another way the Trump administration is making trans peoples’ lives worse is through its sanction of discrimination on the basis of “religious liberty.” In June, the administration rolled back another Obama-era rule, this one prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity in health care, citing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and
celebrating this as a victory for civil liberties. Another “victory for civil liberties” occurred in early July, when the Department of Housing and Urban Development issued guidance that allows for religiously-affiliated single-sex shelters to turn people away based on trans status. A leaked memo from HUD contains “tips” for identifying a transgender woman, including being tall, having facial hair, and having an Adam’s apple. This guidance is designed to allow shelters to discriminate against trans women, putting lives in danger. What civil liberty is more important: the right to be a bigot or the right to be safe in healthcare and housing?

The Trump administration is far from the first violently anti-LGBTQ+ administration the United States has been under. How was this state-sanctioned bigotry combated before? In the 80s, while the Reagan administration was at best ignoring the AIDS crisis, activists did advocacy work at the local, state, and federal levels, and organizers with groups like ACT UP conducted dramatic direct actions to bring attention to the scope of the problem. The example of those who came before us and our experiences now tell us two things: one, that when it comes to forcing change and holding those in power accountable, people power and sustained action gets results, and two, that any reform won under the current system can easily be overturned.

The rest of the LGBTQ+ community needs to stand with trans people and get loud and militant to hold the Trump administration’s feet to the fire and work toward building a more equitable and just society.
YALE CAB DRAGARET
Local Show

Yale Dragaret is a fabulous and fierce opportunity for the Yale School of Drama community to come together and explore gender through performance art. The local show features community performers rallying together to help fundraise for the Yale Cabaret Theatre.

Photos by Linda-Cristal Young
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Historians may look to 2020 and conclude that it was a year where truth melded with dystopian fiction.

The main player took the stage in force with the coming spring. COVID-19 consumed the globe and the news cycle. The mounting death toll was a constant ticker amid our society coming to a dead stop as the nation’s leadership seemed tone-deaf. The office chatter became Zoom and skype calls as commute traffic thinned, and malls and restaurants grew empty.

But the already-bizarre script twisted sharply on a Minneapolis, Minnesota street on May 25.

“I wanted to go out into streets and scream and just cry,” Marcus Blackburn, a young, black, queer activist with Hartford-based Black Americans Undivided said of the death of George Floyd at the hands of police. “I was angry as a black person to see black people lynched by police to see black people killed by police.”

What followed since has been a groundswell of open protests mixed with a bloom of collective action online even as the COVID crisis intensifies. To longtime Hartford activist Kamora Herrington, the pandemic in a sense prepared many for the moment to spark a movement.

**RIGHTS FIGHT**

**Protest and the Pandemic**

Despite COVID, the summer of 2020 has seen some of the most sustained street heat in over 50 years, but will it stay hot?

by Karleigh Webb

Actions like this one on June 29 have led to action among state and municipal lawmakers. Efforts continue to push for more protections, even during the pandemic.
“COVID created a place where we had to sit, contemplate and think. When that day happened, everyone knows about George Floyd in real time as it happened,” Herrington noted. “Instead of being out on Memorial Day we were at home contemplating what we saw.”

What has followed is marches, rallies, sit-ins and jammed highways across the nation and the world that reminded some of the national turmoil throughout 1968. Locally, thoughts of what happened to the Floyds, Breonna Taylors, Ahmaud Arberys, and Tony McDades have melded with this state’s response to the pandemic that leaves vulnerable communities at risk.

“What coronavirus is showing us is the contradictions in our society. If you throw people out of their homes – evictions carried by police – that’s police violence,” Party for Socialism and Liberation organizer IV Staklo said. “That is going to negatively impact Black and Latinx communities.”

SPEAKING UP WHILE LOCKED DOWN

Staklo refers to one of the main issues regarding this crisis in Connecticut. Since a state of emergency was declared March 11, the state of Connecticut has twice pushed back the moratorium on rent. Yet, an effort has emerged to push for rent cancellation through a smart mix of internet advocacy and street heat that has included a group of “car caravans” that have taken to the streets in way that lessons the risk of COVID. The “marches on wheels” have picketed property companies, landlords and legislators in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport.

“These were major issues prior to the pandemic but are being exacerbated now,” Staklo noted. “A lot of the things that keep from engaging, such as economic stability, are the things that motivate people to take to the streets. These are not issues that you can put on hold.”

Such tactics have been an example of the flexibility and adaptation that has always been a part of the survival of vulnerable communities. Now those tactics are a growing facet of the “new normal” of the pandemic. Contrary to the belief of those who may oppose the growing movement, organizers are taking steps to protect people. The only time you might see a mask removed is when someone is addressing crowds and even that has become quite rare. Hand sanitizers and water bottles amid this recent heat wave have equal importance.

To Herrington, the founder of Kamora’s Cultural Corner, the mask itself has prompted what she feels is an important discussion or how we value each other. “One of the challenges we have is how we help people come up with ways to make their voices heard when they can’t physically be there.”

The internet throughout the crisis is a tool many have pointed to during the
lockdown. For organizers, it has been a means to strategize and give space to those who may be at too great risk to be out at a demonstration.

“We've had some people who may be able to be out, be creative and build on social media,” Staklo said. “We've people build videos and infographics to help frame the issues.”

Blackburn noted the tool has been key for a budding organization that is mainly young, queer BIPOC activists. They efficiently built a unit that quickly built an action on Juneteenth that drew more than 6,000 to the steps of the Connecticut state capital and raised eyebrows. “We had been connecting through organizations and demonstrations where we didn't feel represented,” Blackburn recalls. “We took this opportunity to create a moment where many of these voices could be heard.”

The protests have made some progress in Connecticut. Two months of street heat got a landmark police accountability law to Governor Ned Lamont’s desk. The cancel the rent effort has extended the rent moratorium twice. Police defunding and restructuring has gone from theory to pending law in a number of city and towns, and lawmakers already scrambling to adjust to the changes COVID have brought are also adjusting to constituents demanding a greater voice.

“COVID 19 forced us to drop our common practices, and the surge in protests and demonstrations came at a time when our board was still feeling its way through this new set of circumstances,” Stamford Board of Representatives member Raven Matherne noted. “I worry that without action our legislative bodies simply aren’t going to be able to be as responsive to the requests, needs, and demands of their citizens, just as we reach a time when residents most need to be able to communicate with their elected representatives. The digital age has brought the protests to legislators’ digital front doors.”

Matherne went on to add that technology can be a bridge between organizers and legislators. Recently, they used that bridge gain support from local and national transgender rights advocates for a resolution to stand up to recent threats on Connecticut’s public schools
by the Trump Administration for stand firm for the rights of transgender students. But the tactics and tools of organizing also involve what happens away from the fray.

**KEEPING IT (AND US) TOGETHER**

Within days of getting the resolution passed, Matherne continued an impressive streak of going on a daily run during the pandemic. “I’ve run every day for the last 92 days,” the representative declared. “I decided that I’d rather wear out the soles of my shoes on dirt trails and give my soul a chance to refill. It beats wearing my soul thin watching a world attack its own people.”

Even with the successes, the grind has been rough, especially on LGBTQ communities. Each of these voices, and thousands of other have felt that weariness. COVID has forced adaptation in the work, and adaptation in healing from it.

“Sometimes I turn my phone completely off,” Blackburn declared, saying it was something he had done since high school. “I let people know if I’m working on a project that I would be available, and I disconnect so I can reconnect with myself. Right now, with organizing and COVID you can get burnt out so easy. It’s important for me to connect back with what I’m doing.”

Self-care is important to Staklo as an organizer, but also as a program director of Trans Lifeline. North America’s fully trans-run support line that has seen a sizeable upsurge in peer support calls mainly due to COVID and the surge in anti-trans violence in the last two months. Calls are up to 81% due to isolation and lack of community, since March.

In addition to taking down time to take nature walk or reflect alone, they feel connection beyond organizing work is an equally important component of self-care. “It’s easy to forget what we’re here for when don’t see each other,” they said. “Our thoughts automatically go to believing if we go to our friends, we are being a burden, and often our friends are believing the same thing.”

“Somebody will tell me they are feeling depleted and I can reach out and say hi, I’m feeling the same thing. Reaching out to someone else is not just beneficial to me it will be beneficial to someone else.”

Herrington noted that keeping it together and staying together are on the same axis for her. She notes that one of the best keys working with many of newer, and mostly white, faces who are newly engaged. “What we are moving into right now is that many people are being hit with what it means to stand up for a cause,” she said. “and now they’ve stepped in and they are getting the pushback now.”

But she also notes one of the biggest changes is what recharges her. The protest actions haven’t just taken place in the cities. They’ve extended to people on the march in smaller communities as well. “What sustains me now is that more people are stepping into a moment that we need to step into,” she said.
How Does Being Intersectional Affect Safety?

by Ala Ochumare

Safety... What does that even mean anymore? Who defines it? Most importantly, who does that definition pertain to?

I proudly proclaim that I am a Black Queer Woman but my intersections don’t stop there... I am a Mother, an Organizer, a Healer, a Black Feminist, a Sex Goddess, and I am my ancestors’ wildest dreams. My acceptance of my identities has allowed me to honor myself and my community in a magnificent way. Yes, I proclaim this proudly, loudly, and as often as I can.

My truth is also what can get me killed. Killed because someone else can glimpse upon me and deem me immoral or not quite human, or in the words uttered from my own family, just... “wrong.”

Yet I still hold privileges, and I’ve turned them into power.

Very often in my anti-racism work I say, safety does NOT equal comfort. In the case of my queerness I work to make my comfort into my safety. In the world we live in now, each one of my intersections can result in my demise.

How do I create safety in a world designed to hate me? A world that wants to use or abuse black queer womxn? Where the best chance at success stems from the fetishization or tokenism of our bodies?

In order for queer folx to began to heal around the messages that we don’t belong, we make our own families and co-create our own worlds of love and acceptance.

Sometimes even within these worlds MY lived identities still aren’t welcome. I’m too Black for some, or too loud, and I do not match up with folx’ definition of what a femme woman is supposed to be.

It is well known that our safety has never existed. But add in the intersections of blackness, trans identity, or womxnness, and you have the basis for erasure of us.

As a black queer woman I find that I have to work so much to be seen and not just seen, but also heard. I have to constantly remind folx, sometimes even other queer folx, that I am viable, powerful and NOT disposable.

In my latest work I have seen queer black people be erased and cancelled resulting in them entering into homelessness and mental health institutions. Some have even disappeared. Again this isn’t uncommon knowledge to us queer folx.

As the youth program coordinator for the Pride Center, I think about lack of safety for the youth I create programs for. The spaces we create for young queer folx are the spaces we all needed to feel whole and safe.

We are fortunate that the next generation is multicultural and is not voiceless. They are loud, proud, and reimagining this world.

Though many of these same young queer folx are living in constant fear because in the space they live in their queerness is not accepted or, more scarily, they are abused due to it.

So again I ask the question: what is safety, who defines it and who does it really pertain to?

Witnessing young people thrive in their found communities has been a beautiful thing since Covid-19 came and tore our world apart. I also can’t help to wonder and worry about the queer folx in our spaces who haven’t had the ability to find a healing community before Covid-19 hit.

What does their safety look like now?
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We know there’s a problem. We know that more than half of all bisexual women experience some form of intimate partner violence within their lifetime. We know that transgender women are murdered at horrifying frequency. We know that the LGBTQ+ community at large is burdened by generations of trauma.

Many attempts to help LGBTQ+ survivors of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence focus on reform to the existing system. Time and time again, we are forced to rely on a criminal justice system that was designed to work against us, not for us. Survivors of all genders and sexual orientations report frequently feeling less safe after interactions with the police. There are numerous books and articles like Chanel Miller’s “Know My Name” to illuminate us on how the courts protect rapists and abusers all while retraumatizing their victims.

We are stuck in a cycle where survivors are repeatedly retraumatized, where communities are fractured, where abusers can go on to do more harm, and where harm is sometimes treated but never prevented. LGBTQ+ people, especially those that are Black, Indigenous, and women/femmes, are especially harmed by this cycle. As a community of communities, we must work to find better solutions.

I know firsthand what it’s like to interact with the police after experiencing rape, domestic abuse, and stalking. Even with a trauma counselor by my side, the encounter left me on edge, constantly looking over my shoulder, always vigilant.

It did not make me feel safe. Rather, I felt like a pawn to make another arrest, to put someone behind bars. As angry, hurt, and even vengeful as I felt, that was not what I needed or even wanted. I wanted to heal. I needed to heal. At the end of the day, I chose not to file a formal report.

I also know firsthand that there’s reason to have hope. Healing is an ongoing process. Even as I entered my new role at the New Haven Pride Center and started a new, healthy and fulfilling relationship with my girlfriend, I was still working through the trauma. I was lucky to find community here in New Haven.

From events with Tea & Tarot to socials at Three Sheets, I got to surround myself with beautiful, brilliant women and femmes there for the purpose of supporting one another. I felt safe.

The more I engaged with this work, the further my days of looking over my shoulder slipped far behind me. I was listened to. I was supported. I was allowed to relax and have fun and be myself again. Community support helps survivors heal.

Communities can also prevent harm and navigate fair consequences for those that cause harm. This means we must identity and interrogate patterns of harmful behavior before they escalate. More than that, we must invest resources into communities to equip them with the tools to protect one another and to thrive. Leaders within LGBTQ+ communities, in particular, need to be honest with ourselves about how we create safe spaces. Our communities and people are more likely to live in poverty, experience discrimination seeking resources, and rely on “chosen family” and partners to get by. This makes us all more vulnerable to abuse if we don’t create community spaces that are truly safe. We have to
ask ourselves: Who do we listen to? Who is empowered? What actions do we tolerate and why?

Communities are at the heart of creating a lasting cultural change. At the New Haven Pride Center, we partnered with local and statewide organizations tackling the issue of partner violence to launch the #ArtAgainstViolence campaign. The goal of this campaign is to empower all survivors and allies to use art as a tool of healing and to give people a platform to speak up. We’re centering LGBTQ+ artists in this campaign because all too often our communities go unheard on issues of violence. We’ve been an afterthought for too long. My hope is that art will help us envision an approach to violence that focuses on healing, prevention, and community.

I write this with tremendous love for our LGBTQ+ community. There would be no point in making these statements if I did not think that our community and communities could rise to the challenge. We have to have enough hope to imagine a world where things are better. And we will.
YALE CAB DRAGARET

Student Show

The annual event typically takes place in February and acts as the Gala fundraiser for the Yale Cabaret Theatre. The student show portion features Yale students donning drag to not only put on a great show, but also raise much needed funds.

Photos by Linda-Cristal Young
THE AGE OF THE KINGS
The Connecticut Drag King community is evolving
by Lucy Gellman
Sometimes it’s as simple as the first notes of “Purple Rain,” and the essence of Prince himself is whooshing out onto the stage. Sometimes Robbie Rotten steps out from behind the curtain, taking the audience back to LazyTown circa 2000. Sometimes Steve Urkel is in the house, until Genuine blasts through the speakers, and the suspenders start coming off.

The routines all come from drag kings, mostly female-identifying and non-binary drag artists who are turning male stereotypes on their head. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, drag kings make up a small but growing number of performers, changing how the medium and artistry is understood. In addition to performing, many are using their presence and their routines to address internalized misogyny that they see within drag, sometimes directed at AFAB (assigned female at birth) performers.

Their origin stories, often riddled with misunderstanding from judges and sometimes audience members, show the kaleidoscopic nature of the medium itself. For the last four months, many of them have been navigating virtual performance, social distancing, and a drag landscape that changed overnight due to COVID-19. Here are just a few of their stories.

FRANKIE CYANIDE

Frankie Cyanide, 27, was raised in Long Island and Putnam County, New York. His parents were 1970s New York punks who became professional clowns, the inheritance of which now seems baked into his work as a performer. He was “always that weird kid” as a teenager, including a stint as headmaster of three Harry Potter role playing forums when he was in middle school.

It was during those years—years that also brought his first and only detention for doing the Day Of Silence in eighth grade—that he began playing with makeup. Initially, the image that he held onto was Frank-N-Furter, the self-proclaimed “Sweet Transvestite” from the 1975 cult classic Rocky Horror Picture Show. After showing up at school dressed as a male-bodied person for Halloween, he kept going.

At 17, Cyanide cut his hair short, then later trimmed the sides with clippers. He started watching RuPaul’s Drag Race when it came out in 2009, after catching an early episode. A few years later, he attended the first DragCon in New York City in a prom dress. Then he discovered Norwalk’s Troupe429, while going out with a friend.

After watching drag, he asked Hazel Berry and Robin Fiercè if he could perform. By his own description, “it kind of snowballed from there.” His role models were often the villains straight from young adult films with big life lessons: Peter Pan’s Captain Hook, Spy Kids’ Floop, and Robbie Rotten among others.

“I really like being able to play with gender and get hit on by gay guys at the bar,” he said. “I’m going to play with makeup, I’m going to create this person in the mirror. I feel like I myself live in this amorphous blob of gender, which leans towards 70s glam.”

When he isn’t doing drag, he works in tech support at a private school in Stamford and represents Stamford’s 12th district on the Board of Representatives.

He is @frankiemcyanide on Instagram.

RAM SHACKLE

For Ram Shackle, 25, a drag career grew out of a childhood surrounded by dance and theater. Raised in East Hartford, Ram Shackle was raised by a mom who

Contributed photos

Previous page, clockwise from top left: Frankie Cyanide, Loo D’Flyest Priestly, Ray Decorazon and Ram Shackle
Ray Decorazón, 22, grew up in Connecticut and started drag as a junior at Ithaca College, where the drag scene is vast and vibrant. A self-described “real socially anxious” person, he initially saw it as a way to find community. In addition to that—which came in droves—he found magic.

“I’d been living like these other people and this was something that was purely mine,” he said. “I was so quiet and reserved before I started. Getting up and doing this wild thing was not something that people would think I would do. I liked that I was pushing myself. It felt easier to be confident that I could do this on stage.”

Ithaca’s scene, he soon found out, was booming: he was able to book gigs with venues interested in new talent. There were a number of kings already performing, which meant that he didn’t have to explain himself. The name, a nod to the Spanish for “King of Hearts,” is a nod to his own demi-sexuality.

Back in Connecticut he found a very different drag landscape. There were virtually no kings: neither Ram Shackle nor Hal 6000 had appeared on the scene. He came to love the Chez Est, for its open stages. “I could try new things and I wasn’t paid to be any certain character,” he said. “I’ve done a lot of sexy numbers. It gave me a space to try something real goofy. It felt like a space where people weren’t going to judge.”

It led to bookings—and to a surprise expectation that landed squarely on his
shoulders. Suddenly, “I felt like there was this pressure to represent drag kings, which is impossible to do, because we’re so many different things,” he said.

Now, he brings that kaleidoscopic approach to his own routine, and to his support of other drag kings in the state and the region. By putting himself out there, he hopes that he has inspired other kings to do the same.

COVID-19, meanwhile, has marked a surprisingly transformational period for him. Before the pandemic, Decorazón was getting bookings, but producing numbers he wasn’t completely satisfied with. When the state effectively shut down overnight, it gave him time to recalibrate. He isn’t a fan of digital performances, and has been pouring most of his energy into Chez Queen All-Stars. Ram Shackle has been helping him.

“I don’t want drag to be a career,” he said. “I don’t want to do it full time, I want it to be something that I’m excited about.”

Follow him on Instagram as @raydecorazon. Decorazón also performs as the drag queen Rayna Shyne. She is @raynashyne on Instagram.

LOO D’FLYEST PRIESTLY

Loo D’Flyest Priestly, 34, started drag in 2012. At the time, he was working at Divas, a gay nightclub in Northampton, Mass. After watching other drag artists perform, he asked his boss if he could take the stage. She gave him a night off to do it.

In some ways, he was made for the medium. Priestly grew up around artists and theater kids in Amherst, Mass. His mom was a Patsy Cline impersonator and his dad was a clown. He was painting other kids’ faces at birthday parties by the time he was 7. As a young adult, he was a member of Project 2050, a social justice theater initiative (the name comes from the projection that in 2050, people of color will outnumber white people in the U.S.).

By the time he was working in Northampton, “I guess I’d always kind of known about drag,” he said. Once he started performing, something clicked.

“I liked the idea of playing with gender,” he said. “As I kind of developed my character more, I started to play with gender a lot. I always say that Loo is just a glittery sparkly human who likes to entertain, make people laugh, corrupt your memories of childhood icons.”

The character is a composite of some of Priestly’s favorite influences, from sketch comedy on Saturday Night Live to comedian Will Ferrell to musicians Freddy Mercury and Prince. As bars closed, Priestly could feel a loss that went beyond the performance. There was no gathering, no impromptu tipping (Venmo for digital performances is not close to the same, he pointed out), no new friendships that came out of the night.

While Priestly likes the breadth of virtual performances—one show might now include kings and queens from multiple states and time zones—he’s less onboard with the medium.

“Loo gives me the spark,” he said. “So losing that social aspect was tough. But also, losing the outlet of art. There’s such a difference between recording and performing online than doing an audience.”

Follow Loo at @loodflyestpriestly on Instagram.

LEO CRAYZ

Leo Crayz, 30, began their drag career in 2012 after watching Loo perform (the two are married to each other in real life). From early on, they were focused more on burlesque, and the moments in which drag and burlesque could fuse and create magical, embodied storytelling onstage. Most of their work has unfolded in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

A former musician and
The New Haven Pride Center’s Centerline Magazine is a bi-monthly print and online publication that is distributed throughout Connecticut (more than 20,000 copies annually) and digitally hosted on the Center’s website, http://www.newhavenpridecenter.org.

Centerline Magazine is one of the few LGBTQ+ publications in New England, and as such is a tremendous opportunity for any business or nonprofit wishing to reach the widely diverse LGBTQ+ community.

Advertising ranges in size and cost, starting as low as $200. For more information, please contact us at info@newhavenpridecenter.org.

Help us build our content! Suggest a story to be included in Centerline Magazine - the Center accepts both story referrals and content trade on a variety of LGBTQ+ topics and activities around Connecticut.

Centerline Magazine is also occasionally looking for writers to help to contribute to the diversity of voices and perspectives being presented.

Email our Editor Josh O’Connell at: centerline@newhavenpridecenter.org

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Want to be on our distribution list? Email Editor Josh O’Connell at centerline@newhavenpridecenter.org.

self-described “band dork,” they perform as both a non-binary king and the non-binary burlesque performer Mz Chocolat Swirl. As Leo, they tap into the wacky, the wonderful, and the transportive, pulling from a range of influences that include Prince, Steve Urkel and Jack Nicholson as the Joker from Tim Burton’s 1989 Batman.

The name came to them one afternoon years ago, while listening to Leona Lewis’ “Bleeding Love” in the car. Crayz recalled thinking, jokingly, “that Leona, she cray cray!” as Lewis wailed her way through the song, hitting every high note. The name stuck.

Years later, Leo joked that they couldn’t change it even if they wanted to.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have worked on virtual performances, including videos edited and mastered by Loo D’Flyest Priestly (“we make a pretty gnarly team,” they said). Outside of drag and burlesque, they’ve only recently returned to their “muggle gig” as a massage therapist.

In eight years, they have also become a fierce champion of representation, in a medium where booking and performance can remain disproportionately white. In a recent interview, they recalled their time performing in band, when they were sometimes pushed away from the spotlight for reasons that had nothing to do with talent.

“I wasn’t the front line, but I know that I could be and should be,” they said. “It’s beautiful to see some of the folks in the community, to showcase that you can be a beautiful POC person to the front.”

Now, they fight for both themselves and other Black and Brown performers in the medium. They recalled several conversations with Hartford-based queen Xiomarie LaBeija, in which the two acknowledged how far both the regional drag scene and the medium had to go.

“Sometimes I think that I’m not being taken seriously,” they said, noting that they stand with drag artists who have refused to perform in shows where they are one of one or two performers of color. “People should not be snoozing over any of us.”

Follow Leo Crayz on Facebook. They also perform as @mz.chocolatswirl.
At Mx. Chez Est, The King Reigns

by Patrick J Dunn

Fireworks exploded over the glowing Chez Est sign. Confetti splashed out over the onlooking, socially distant audience. Flashing lights, snapping cameras, and cheering parents looked on. And a King was crowned the winner.

On Saturday, August 1st, the Chez Est in Hartford hosted year two of the Mx. Chez Est competition. Mx. Chez Est, which is the annual grand finale to the weekly Chez Legends (formerly Chez Queen) show hosted and created by Mia E Z’Lay, challenges the two finalists to create unique performances and compete in three categories before a winner is crowned by audience vote. The competition is designed to push performers to the edge of their creative ability and the two finalists, Ray Decorazón and Ambrosia Lay Black, did not disappoint!

Act One asked performers to do their best celebrity impersonation, to which Ray sported two different Elton John looks AND sang live for the first time on stage. Ambrosia tackled 5 different costumes in her portrayal of Lady Gaga, lip syncing her most well-known hits. Both performances were fun, with the audience singing along and tapping their feet.
In Act Two, performers took on 90s Cartoon Characters. Ambrosia’s performance as Jean Grey / the Dark Phoenix was powerful. During the performance there was this moment where I was overwhelmed thinking of the internal struggle every queer person: to be our true powerful selves or hold back and be what others want us to be. Ray surprised everyone, coming out as world traveler and criminal mastermind Carmen Sandiego. This was a different appearance than Ray’s usually more masculine presentation, but it was great to see Ray have so much fun on stage and blend and bend genders from their more traditional looks. It became one of those - this is what drag is and should be moments.

Finally, in Act Three both performers took the show to a whole new level. Category “Extravaganza” brought Ambrosia out in a latex dress with latex blood drippings covering their skin. Ray appeared moments later in a head to toe look that meshed together multiple genres of fashion that somehow forged a whole new trend. Both performances were each competitors best of the Photos by Patrick J Dunn
Above left, fireworks go off at the Chez after the crowning of Mx. Chez Est 2020 Ray Decorazón. Below, from left, Ambrosia Lay and Ray Decorazón were the finalists for this year.
evening. Emotional, raw, and incredibly inspiring. They both left the judges near speechless and the audience cheering.

As votes were tallied, it was time for one final performance by Mx. Chez Est 2019 Mz October May Lay. October has had some amazing moments on stage over the past year, but this was one of the best (if not THE best). The number, which was performance art meets political statement, included spoken word and music and spoke directly to the conversations we are having as a community around racial justice and QPOC folk. It was striking, powerful, and emotionally overwhelming. As she performed you saw the souls of all of those who have fought for civil rights come through her every movement and by the end of her performance the entire audience was standing and applauding.

After the standing ovation the audience didn’t have long to sit as Mia E Z'Lay came out with the winner’s name hidden in an envelope. You could see the strain of pressure and anticipation in both of their eyes. There was a moment where everything seemed to stand still and the entire audience stopped breathing. And then “The winner of Mx. Chez Est 2020 is ... Ray Decorazón!” The audience exploded, Ray was sashed and crowned and then ran from the stage to hug their partner and fellow performer Ram Shackle and their parents.
DOROTHY AWARDS
Honoring Our Best

Each year the Dorothy Awards honors our local unsung heroes - those making a difference on the ground, in our community, every day. The event took place in early March, just before COVID-19 began to shut down the state.

Photos by Megan McGory-Gleason
Yale New Haven Health believes the sum is greater than all of its parts. When individual organizations work well together with a common mission, great things happen. This collaboration is what makes our community strong.

Yale New Haven Health is proud to support New Haven Pride Center.
LGBTQ+ Programming: A Shift in Venue — and Values?

by Mel Cordner

As COVID-19 changed how we work, play, and generally exist, queer folks experienced an additional impact—“queerantine,” being isolated from other queer people and even re-closeted. Queer folks handled this the way we handle most of our feelings, and took it to the internet—and this time, we brought our programming with us. Online programming has been the ideal in terms of accessibility for years, and makes perfect sense in a world that has seen social movements born of viral hashtags and celebrities emerge from social media accounts. Shifting programs into cyberspace forced everyone to reconsider how we create and access content online. We’ve changed how material is presented, how we interact with it, and even WHO is doing the interacting.

I cried when I got the call suspending in-person programs at True Colors. As the Youth Activity Coordinator there, I see the immeasurable value of queer youth spaces every day. Teens whose identities aren’t respected anywhere else get through their week just for these activities. Many of our most vulnerable ‘regulars’ don’t have access to personal computers or even cell phones, and have been cut off from the lifesaving network of people who see them as they are since March.

True Colors moved activities online to provide what connection was possible while maintaining physical distance. The computer creates a sense of distance that both repelled in-person regulars, who felt Zoom activities to be a caricature of their usual Fridays, and enticed online visitors. Zoom’s mute and stop video features offer control over who sees and hears you, which alleviates social anxiety for many. This also provides a way to be part of an experience along with others.

Sienna Rose, left, and Anita Manager’s “Sip and Simmer” virtual drag cooking show combines cooking, comedy, and a few drinks. You can tune on Sundays at 8:00p.
without interacting, which means youth can (and do) “lurk,” listening on headphones and enjoying the concept of queer space without risking being “outed” to whoever might overhear them if they were to respond.

Lurking may sound disappointing, but it can be a lifeline to youth who can’t engage otherwise. Group members include lurkers whenever they can by doing things like reading typed chat messages aloud or describing images on the computer screen so lurkers can follow the conversation without seeing it. Many youth say goodbye to lurkers by name when they leave as a way to affirm their presence. All of these are examples of inclusion, but they’re also examples of making online content accessible to everyone. Image descriptions, screen readers, and other accessibility concepts and devices are becoming mainstream as mainstream culture moves online.

Large-scale programming has similarly become more accessible by moving online. Viewers can pause and replay video streams, control the brightness and volume of their experience (a DREAM for me!), and more without having to dress or move a certain way—or even at all! This opens programs to more, and different, people. The True Colors Conference, typically held in March in Storrs, was adapted into an online “MiniCon” of six livestreamed sessions, which were then posted to YouTube along with related material. People who didn’t have time or funds to spend a day or weekend at a conference now peruse this content at their leisure. Q Plus has moved queer youth open mics online (shameless plug—it’s the third Saturday of every month at 6 PM!), which allows visual artists, stage-shy performers, and physically far-away youth to participate for the first time. Summer camps are meeting on Zoom, while Connecticut’s queer youth proms joined forces on Twitch. In all cases, moving online made events accessible to youth who couldn’t access in-person versions.

Queer adult programming is similarly focused on access and inclusion. True Colors, the Triangle Community Center, the New Haven Pride Center, and Kamora’s Cultural Corner have moved their usual social and support programming online, even creating new resources like provider roundtables and food pantries to fill newly identified needs. The True Colors Youth Leadership Team recently cohosted a
webinar with the Governor’s Prevention Partnership, getting their stories to dozens of adults who wouldn’t have heard them otherwise. The New Haven Pride Center has hosted several live panels on topics ranging from supporting trans athletes to addressing racism in the queer community, all of which can be viewed for free on their YouTube channel.

Hosting programs online cuts out commute time, lessens social pressure, and supports diverse communication styles and needs. We no longer have to worry about getting to a venue early to find parking, bathrooms, or elevators. Body language and tone are vital to in-person communication, but are bewildering and exhausting to some of us, and Zoom lets us skip these things. With social rules about things like footwear, posture, and eye contact no longer enforced, our energy is freed to focus on discussion content. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed being everything from a listener to a panelist while my under-table fidgeting and pre-speaking note-writing goes undetected. Add to this the aforementioned normalization of access tools like image descriptions and screen readers, and it’s understandable that for some of us, quarantine has actually INCREASED social interaction. Access needs have become normal instead of “special” needs now that everyone has them. Quarantine has made some of us feel included for the first time.

Large-scale pride events that haven’t been canceled or postponed have also moved online, sometimes including in-person components. Bridgeport Pride, celebrating its ten-year anniversary, included an art gallery showing that will be available as both a prerecorded online tour and a socially distanced in-person tour at City Lights Gallery. West Hartford Pride, which debuted this year, included a flag raising, a mini filmfest with Out Film CT, and of course a drag show, called Virtual Dragfest. Casper, of Sky Casper Productions, directed that show, most of which was livestreamed from the Chez Est stage in front of a live, but small and distanced, audience. Sky has also moved events like Pink Eggs and Glam and Laugh with Pride online, where a main challenge has been “keeping everyone’s attention with so much at their fingertips” during a show. High-quality videos keep attention longer, but can be difficult and expensive to record and edit.

Ricky Mestre, a founder and organizer of Bridgeport Pride, identified video quality as a key component to moving Bridgeport Pride’s variety show online as well. The show typically occurs on a theater stage, which
generally supports more space, lighting, backdrops, scenery, and special effects than a bar stage can provide. Ricky sought to maintain that theatrical feeling in the virtual show by lending his video editing abilities to performers. A static camera doesn’t move and engage with the performer, so it loses some of the energy and emotion of a live performance.

The show included multiple takes and camera angles to “enhance the experience” and capture the dynamic “element of change” that drag especially is known for. This is far more work than the ‘send me your music’ of shows past, but Ricky says it’s worth it to ensure that the event “feels like a full-scale show” and creates “something physical and tangible that represents what our last ten years was about” in the recording.

Both Casper and Mestre noted that the biggest challenge virtual performers face is the lack of audience interaction to energize and guide them.

This is a sentiment Mia E Z’Lay, who hosts a weekly open stage show or competition at Chez Est, frequently expressed while hosting the virtual version of those shows, Doctor Online, during quarantine, even joking about setting up a stuffed animal audience instead. She explains that it’s “so easy to jump into a split if the crowd’s going wild and your adrenaline is running off that,” but in a virtual show, “you basically have to make your own adrenaline and it’s terrible.”

Drag is interactive by nature, but there’s no way to gauge how a joke or dance move is being received by an online audience while it happens. While performing this way week after week was “really difficult,” Mia feels it’s helped her become a stronger performer and host.

Drag creates financial and social support for the community; moving shows online protected both. Those who kept our jobs drastically increased our tip amounts to performers who lost theirs, and many online shows became charity fundraisers. The opportunity to celebrate our identities, satirize our struggles, and process our experiences onstage became even more important to us when we lost the ability to do so together. The consistency of weekly online shows provided some structure in chaos. While online shows changed the way we interacted, it maintained the fact that we could, and I’m not exaggerating when I say that kept many of us going.

I’m certainly not sad about being able to attend live shows again, even with their reduced cast and floor plans, missing high-risk audience regulars, and obvious avoidance of physical touch. I do wonder, though, if we’ve learned anything. A universal quarantine created universal access needs, which forced us to prioritize inclusion and accessibility in everyday life like we never have before. Whether our values shifted enough to continue prioritizing that when they no longer apply to everyone remains to be seen... but here’s hoping.
Notes on the Binary
By Adrian Huq

I am more than a body,
My soul is non-binary
My very being is resilient and fiery
I am who I am in all my finery

My pronouns are required, not preferred
All I wish is to be truly seen and heard
And yes, I am always using they/them
Regardless of if my expression is femme

Sometimes I wonder how much of my conditioned femininity is truly me
Or if the presentation I rejected to spite others was meant to be
Looking past my appearance to appreciate the true me is what I wish others could see

My gender is more than you can comprehend
To be something I’m not would be a hard act to pretend
I’m learning to decolonize my mind and liberate my brain
Sticking to my assigned place in the binary is something I can’t feign

I am fluid and free flowing
I am infinite, complex, and on-going
My presentation knows no label
I am like a river, never still nor stable

POETRY
A Sampling of Qweird Words

In May, in partnership with The Word, the New Haven Pride Center hosted a series of writing workshops for LGBTQ+ youth inspired by the words of transgender poet Stephanie Burt whose book Advice from the Lights. Following the workshop the Center hosted an open mic titled Qweirds Showcase that was hosted by Hartford-based poet Versatile Poetiq. Here are some of the poems from that day’s showcase.

The Center is looking forward to hosting more of these workshops and open mics in the coming months. For more information about these and other Center youth programming reach out to Ala Ochumare at youth@newhavenpridecenter.org.

My expression knows no confines
Only around accepting people can I fully shine

So what if I talk about my identity a lot?
With internalized queerphobia I have long fought
My sexuality and gender are significant pieces of me
They both are things I had to battle for, but now I’m free

So what if “like a lady” I don’t behave?
So what if my body I don’t want to shave?
Why is body hair something that makes others stop and stare?
My hair is beautiful, it’s natural, it’s simply there
I like to categorize myself with the word “queer”
For some, the term rather than comfort causes fear
But for me, its ambiguity and infinite possibility is something I hold dear

We all have our own unlearning to do
To honor queer people for who they are through and through
We need to be able to see gender for what it is in reality:
A made up system that’s caused widespread assimilation and mortality.

We have work to do on deconstructing the binary, even within the queer community
It’s time for us to come together to affirm all identities and expressions in unity.
Two Roads
By Alan Veloz

The road ahead was clear
Find a Beautiful woman, Marry,
Have kids
Mom sang it to me through
Spanish lullabies
Dad praised the road ahead
And Grandparents waited in
anticipation to see me go
down this road with there
own eyes

The road ahead was clear
Clear and already paved for me
Clear and awaited my vehicle
so readily

The road ahead was clear,
My parents constantly told me
The happiness accompanied
by the road was a
promise

The road ahead was clear until
it wasn’t
Until I hit this roadblock
It came to me as a surprise
There was no knock
Where I could refuse to open
the door to this new road
There was no lock
Where I could focus on the
road ahead which was so
‘clear’

The road ahead was clear
But then again doubts
interfered
And a new road appeared
With twists and turns
And what my mom would call
concerns

The road ahead was no longer
clear
With the inability to steer
And the constant state of fear
How could I be queer

Yet after all the uncertainty my
mother insisted that road
ahead was clear for me
And sure I could embark on
the so-called clear road
But some things were made
clear

The road ahead could no
longer guarantee
A chance to be happy

The road ahead was no longer
free
It came at the cost of
forgetting the curvy road

My parents tell me I should
count myself lucky
Lucky that I could still go on
the road that fills them
with glee

That I had a choice and so by
that logic I should choose
the right one
That I should choose the road
ahead that was oh so clear.

The truth is the road ahead
isn’t clear
The road ahead has lots of
curves
Filled with twists and turns
And lots of swerves
And it’s not defined by an
ending
Find a beautiful woman, Marry,
Have kids
It’s defined by the journey

Find a guy, or a girl or a
partner
Who makes you happy
If it didn’t work out it’s ok
The road hasn’t ended
There is so much more to
explore

The road of love has no end
That much is clear of the road
ahead.
Welcome to the Gayborhood
A teensiest bit of P-Town in Short Beach

By John D. Allen

If New York has Greenwich Village, San Francisco The Castro, and LA West Hollywood, then where in New Haven is the gayborhood? Talk with different people and you'll likely get different answers – Westville, Wooster Square or East Rock.

But what about the burbs? Sure, NHPC's demographics include many suburbanites from Hamden, Woodbridge and West Haven, but then consider a little village along the Shoreline.

In the southwestern section of Branford sits a quaint village with its narrow streets, historic cottages and a beach at the end of every street. What contributes to this atmosphere is that Short Beach is the most liberal neighborhood in liberal Branford, and where many LGBTQ individuals, couples, and allies call home.

Short Beach became a summer community beginning in 1900 in part due to one of its famous residents. Ella Wheeler Wilcox was a world renown poet, who along with her wealthy industrialist husband, took up summer residence from 1891 to her death in 1919 in the waterfront home at the end of Bungalow Lane. According to local lore, it was there that she entertained notable Hollywood and Broadway glitterati including John Barrymore and Sarah Bernhardt.

Ella is credited with starting the perennial Short Beach Days, where at the end of summer on Labor Day weekend, there is festival of games, sand sculpture competition, entertainment, and culminates with a parade along Shore Drive.

Short Beach was also home to the infamous Nellie Green, a rum-runner,
In the southwestern section of Branford sits a quaint village with its narrow streets, historic cottages and a beach at the end of every street. What contributes to this atmosphere is that Short Beach is the most liberal neighborhood in liberal Branford, and where many LGBTQ individuals, couples, and allies call home.

hotelier, and matriarch of the village. Her building sits on the bank of the Farm River that separates Short Beach and East Haven and is now an apartment building. The restaurant that bears her name has moved and is now next to the Stony Creek Brewery near the center of town.

There are only a few businesses within the 2,500 resident district. The Shore Line Trolley Museum trolleys make a stop at the end of Court Street just a block from two popular eateries Genaro's Pizza and Rosso Vino Café, which are next to the US Post Office: Short Beach Station. And the Yale Corinthian Yacht Club is next to the village’s largest beach, Clark Avenue Beach.

Short Beach is surrounded by Branford Land Trust tracts to the east and north, the Farm River Estuary State Park to the west, and Kelsey Island and Long Island Sound on the south.

Home prices regularly sell between $150,000 for cottages, to over $1 million usually with water views and beach rights, or rentals similar to market rates of New Haven. And the tiny streets are more reminiscent of Provincetown before it became a vacation mecca.

But what mostly makes Short Beach a destination for LGBTQ people is its diversity, affordability, and seaside and marsh views. A stroll after work or weekends reveals individuals, couples and families, young and old, queer and cisgender, multinational, and many other ways that define diversity. And it seems to work – with people who like the water and who like others who like the water. It’s like being on vacation all year.
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