



In Conversation: Alex Abramovich

with Melissa Benner

Alex Abramovich is an academic, activist, and artist, combining all three passions into a compelling argument for social change. Currently working on a Ph.D. at University of Toronto, Alex is an advocate for homeless LGBTQ youth and a world based on respect and love.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this past year?

My research focuses on LGBTQ youth homelessness and the lack of support available in Toronto. Specifically, I look at the changes that need to be implemented in Toronto's shelter system in order for it to become safer, more accessible, and more supportive for LGBTQ youth.

I also work very hard at trying to shift the ways knowledge has traditionally been produced. LGBTQ youth with lived experiences of homelessness are the experts of their own experiences. It's time we begin listening to their important and insightful stories.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

The Toronto District School Board issued new guidelines regarding acceptance around gender identity, and the recent anti-bullying legislation in Ontario come to mind. These are good examples of our society moving in the right direction. I truly hope to see more of this, especially for young people.

What still needs work in our local community?

We still need to do a lot of work around raising awareness about the issues of LGBTQ youth homelessness. A lot of people do not know that 25-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, and that there are no specialized shelters or housing for LGBTQ youth in Canada. It's also a very serious problem in Toronto: there is minimal support available and this needs to change immediately.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

People need to start raising awareness by engaging in dialogue around LGBTQ youth homelessness and educating one another

about these issues. We can also raise awareness by writing letters to the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division, and to our local City Councillors.

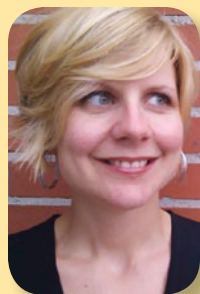
What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

The transformation I would most like to see is for the world to stop being so homophobic and transphobic. The underlying message of homophobia and transphobia is hatred. Life would be more livable for so many people if we lived in an accepting world that truly nurtured love and taught people about love.

I would like to see the world become a place where youth do not end up on the streets because of their LGBTQ identities, a world where people can walk down the street and not have to worry about holding hands with the person they love, a world where there is acceptance for trans people, starting with the extremely simple act of adding gender neutral washrooms wherever there are gendered washrooms.

Homophobia and transphobia destroy people's lives and the world desperately needs to shift towards becoming a more loving place where people are accepted regardless of their sexual and gender identities.

Melissa Benner is a writer, educator and community organizer, living in Toronto.





In Conversation: Philip Hare

with Kelly Wilk

Philip Hare (www.philiphare.com) is a charismatic and passionate visual artist who works primarily with textiles. He explores issues of gender and sexuality from a queer perspective. Hare is a member of Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts and is currently showing in *Hard Twist 7, Touch Me, Feel Me* (November 1st to January 27, 2013) at the Gladstone Hotel. His latest work "TERROR!ST" will be part of *The Penis Project* at Buddies in Bad Times (November 30, 2012).

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

In the summer I had a show called *TERROR!ST*. It was one large piece that was about 6x10 feet, a textile piece... that took a *long* time. I think it was 172 of these individual pieces that are all hand sewn and stitched together. I've got this rep as the penis artist that I wear proudly. I really think sexuality is something to celebrate and empower people and one of the reasons I put that large missile phallus in the middle of that piece was to draw attention to the way sexuality is used to oppress, torture and do harm. All those multicoloured faces I don't see as terrorists, I see those faces as the people out there... getting arrested for dancing in a church in Moscow. Those aren't terrorists. They are outlaws.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

In Uganda this year there was a Pride Parade—that for me is huge. That gives me great hope. I think there is a lot of work to be done in Canada for Queer rights. I see so much looking abroad, we are so lucky to be living in this country, and I see places like Uganda or Nebraska, where people are fighting for rights that we, well that a lot of people, are taking for granted already. When I see something happening in a countrys where lesbian and gay rights are still in their infancy I am really encouraged.

What still needs work in our local community?

Personally I think we really need to work on our government around the criminalization of HIV. It's an extremely important wrong that is being committed against the community. The criminalization of HIV is just something that I am incredibly angry about and moved to create around. Actually that was part of what the inspiration behind *TERROR!ST*. My art is a form of protest.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

By being honest with ourselves and the rest of the people in the world. I really believe that we as individuals have to take responsibility for our bodies and our well being. I'm in a relationship, it's not like I'm out there playing the field, but if I was I would certainly be coming from the place where I would be acting like I was HIV positive and all the people I am encountering are HIV positive. That removes the politics from it completely.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

It makes me crazy that we are so disconnected. I would like to see people loving themselves on every level, including who they are as erotic beings.

Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer, Reiki Master and Reflexologist working and living in Toronto (www.feetmatter.ca). She has contributed to LoveInToronto.com reviewing Queer Community events, businesses and Pride-flagged restaurants (www.loveintoronto.com/tag/Kelly-Wilk).



In Conversation: Tara-Michelle Ziniuk

with cee sando



Tara-Michelle Ziniuk is a Toronto-based writer, editor and activist. She is the author of *Emergency Contact* (McGilligan Books, 2006) and *Somewhere To Run From* (Tightrope Books, 2009). She is currently parenting a toddler, writing her first novel and cooking up a storm. She can be found exclaiming about reality TV on twitter @therealrealTMz.



What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I saw through year five of my Birds of Paradise plan for Halloween this year. I've been drag queen-esque versions of fabulous birds: swan, peacock, flamingo, chicken and now ostrich. I'm also working on a book project that reflects on the history and impact of the Toronto Women's Bookstore, and serves as a bit of a love letter to the community that space created.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I think there's been some solid attention paid to early AIDS activism in a way that I didn't see coming and find inspiring. I think films like *How To Survive A Plague* and Studio 180's production of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* have done a good job at looking not only at HIV/AIDS, but at lessons in activist organizing, rifts in the LGBTQ community and in opening up conversations that need to happen. I'm thinking specifically about conversations between generations, really looking at how we can stand for the same things but express and deal with them very differently, whether or not we want to work with government and pharmacy. I think we've known that our community is not homogeneous (no pun intended), but even the more radical side of it has divisions. I think once we can talk about that, we can move forward from it. I'm glad that these discussions are surfacing, even if it's taken 30 years.

What still needs work in our local community?

I'm going to say two different things that come to mind:

1. We need to protect queer and trans community-made media. That means independent bookstores, campus-community radio stations and programs, publications and so on. This is our voice and our history and has to be part of our future.
2. We need to stop telling young queer and trans people who are bullied to wait it out, and start working on the systemic

problems that bullying is born from.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

In the first instance, I think it means that corporate media can only have so much of the pie. There has to be pressure on the CRTC, the city and industry to preserve community space and community needs.

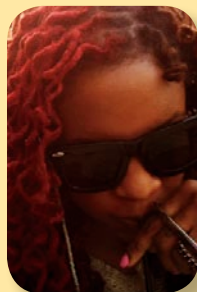
The second is a huge topic, but I think that as much as we want to empower youth, which we do, we also need to think about how to be active in the difficult work that is dealing with perpetrators [of bullying] and doing it in a way that values community-based rehabilitation and popular education.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

The world might be too big a topic for me to take on, but locally—Ford Nation is reminding me a lot of the Harris days. I don't want to revisit those. I think we need to start looking at how we as LGBTQ people fit into the broader socio-economic and regional communities we exist in, and be responsible to the most vulnerable members of our communities. I want Canadian courts to decriminalize sex work and HIV. And I'd like people stop telling me I look like Katy Perry.

Currently calling Toronto home, cee sando (@xox_cee) rarely sits still.

Jet-setting throughout the Caribbean, France, Dubai, India, Mexico, the USA and Canada, cee documents her experiences through words, photos and her fashion choices. Obsessed with style and pop culture, cee has a bohemian heart and readily admits her love for the classic rock-and-roll lifestyle





In Conversation: Jonny Bunning

with Jaime Woo

Jonny Bunning recently came to Toronto from the UK and works for a public relations agency specializing in film. His love of film has him going around the city to check out film shoots and help promote local productions.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I guess really finding a career, a job that I enjoy. Working with filmmakers is really satisfying in Canada—getting to work with amazing stories, amazing films. For example, at Hot Docs, I was helping out *Herman's House*, a feature film about America's longest serving solitary confinement prisoner for 40 years—it's a pretty intense story—spreading the message on social media. Getting the story out there, especially for Canadian film, it's a struggle to compete against Hollywood films, so contributing to get those films noticed.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Seeing *Pride* flourish this year, in the sense that it may have had problems with funding, seeing that community event come together. I like the idea of finding a place there, no matter where you think you belong. I don't know where I fit into the community but I want to go down to show support and be part of that cultural mix. Also, some of the other cultural events: I really like the 519 Community Centre. I went to some of the movies held outdoors and enjoyed being with the community and watching movies with other people. I had a lonely day and there was a screening of *Hedwig And The Angry Inch*. To then find a space to be part of, it felt good.

What still needs work in our local community?

Going somewhere and meeting people, I find that tough. I end up online trying to find a community group or an event I can be part of. I used to be part of a hiking group in the UK but I find it harder here. It's a bit daunting not coming from Canada. I still get caught off-guard by not knowing

the local knowledge. I'm not sure how other immigrants deal with that.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

I've made some really great friends through Twitter, and trying to have a common interest. I kind of have a love-hate relationship with social media, because I think you still need that personal contact. I've made some friends just being in line waiting for a movie at *Inside Out*, just chatting with the people around me.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

That is such a huge, daunting question to answer! I think the general spreading sense of awareness of their surroundings—people are just in their own bubbles and not aware of what's around them. Being able to see from another's perspective, I know it sounds lame, but walking in someone else's shoes.

Creator of *Gamercamp*—Toronto's indie game jamboree—Jaime Woo wonders: when things are so disposable or prone to become obsolete, how do we balance experiencing what's new while being respectful of the planet? Maybe the solution is ensuring we discover the full value of the things we love.





In Conversation: Deb Singh

with cee sando

Deb Singh is an activist warrior, fighting and resisting the world we live in. She is a queer Indo-Caribbean settler on Turtle Island who spends her days supporting survivors of sexual violence at the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape and spends nights writing, reading and choosing her outfits.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

This year I am most proud of accomplishing a trans inclusive policy for the event I am the coordinator of: Take Back the Night (TBTN) at the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape (TRCC/MWAR). Although we are still working on the overall policy for the organization, I am truly proud that we finally made time and space for the issue.

Personally, I am proud of getting through a hard year of thinking about having a baby as a queer, single parent person. It's hard to not project how this should be done when the hetero model of baby making is much more apparent (pun intended!) than queer struggles around parenting. I am just proud that I haven't lost my head yet with all the information and journeying around becoming a parent!

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Well with Toby's Act, Bill 33, we can finally add gender identity to the Ontario Human Rights Code. This is a real victory in some sense because this is now a fundamental human right. And the hope is that if this is reflected at the federal level and in the most important document to Ontarians (in terms of our rights), then we can hope to expect that other institutions will follow suit. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is finally talking about gender non-conforming kids in school, so that is something.

What still needs work in our local community?

So much! There is still a lot of internalized sexism, transphobia and queerphobia in our communities and we perpetuate it on ourselves and each other. I would like to see our straight allies do more work around the supremacy of heteronormativity.

Straight people as allies have all sorts of power and it's high time we have a conversation about the powers that be in our communities and how we can deconstruct the system, versus worry about whether or not we are "queer enough."

How do you think we can accomplish that?

I think our straight allies have to start gathering and talking about their straightness. I think they can figure out ways to show up and share their power and resources with us. In essence, they have to be the ones who are invested in breaking down the idea of "straightness" and confront how it plays out in their lives and the world that allows for the supremacy of heterosexuality.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

For queer communities, a transformation I would like to see is the rejection of marriage. I understand to each their own, but ultimately, the institution of marriage was never meant for us—we see love as a thing that brings community together, as queers we are fighting for our right to love every day. But marriage was meant to be an institution, for the purposes of bringing families together for increasing economic status and family status. Queers don't see marriage this way. In some ways, we are transforming the previous notion of marriage and highlighting its love component. But I believe we might be freer if we didn't buy into the idea that marriage will make us freer. I am in complete support of marriage for LGBTQ communities, however, I don't believe this institution makes queers freer to be us. I think marriage makes being queer more palatable to the straights.



In Conversation: Ryan Kelly

with Scott Dagostino

Dora-award-winning actor Ryan Kelly was nominated again this year for his stellar work in a revamp of Larry Kramer's AIDS drama *The Normal Heart*. He and actor Dale Miller also performed Christopher Wilson's 2011 Fringe hit *Living with Henry* at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in July. All this was presumably worth the time away from his beloved pitbull Penny.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Celebrating the end of a year gone by is always a strange event for me, as well as celebrating the New Year coming. It's like when you have your seventh birthday and you're sure you'll feel different than you did when you were six but then the day comes and it's just another day in a string of days. But 2012 was a little different. For me professionally, it was the year of the remount or the do-over: *Living with Henry* went to NYC and *The Normal Heart* had another run at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. For me personally, it was a year of closure: saying a firm goodbye to relationships that didn't serve my heart and soul in a healthy way, letting go of the personal hold and effect Facebook used to have on me, and releasing myself from old voices and old insecurities.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

My time in New York taught me that I do have a value that I didn't know was there, while my return to Toronto taught me that it's not all just handed to you.

What still needs work in our local community?

I think our community needs more relationship building. The gay world used to have a wonderful sense of mentorship and appreciation for those that stood up to tell our stories and fight for our recognition. I feel we are losing our sense of art, humanity and connection.

How do you think we can accomplish that change?

I don't have any answers on how to find that again. Do we need a remount or a do-over? Do we ever really get a chance at one? Do we wipe out our ideas of what we had in order to start fresh, or do we grab onto the tail of the last chance and add on from there?

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

If December 21st is indeed the end of the world, then we should celebrate how far we've all come. If it's not the end, then I think we ought to grab the tail of our history and *add on* and *grow*, but not without a regular checking of the blind spot. I feel that for as much as we can't foresee the future, having respect and reverence to hindsight makes going into the New Year that much clearer.

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto writer and editor.





In Conversation: Ryan G. Hinds

with Kelly Wilk

Ryan G. Hinds (www.ryanghinds.ca), singer and performance artist, just completed a six city Brazilian tour, is the creator of *Disco Down*, a 70's revue for Pride Toronto, and was the assistant-director of *Dutchman* for Summerworks Festival. Hinds has performed at Pride festivals in Ottawa, Montreal, and Peel, worked with Douglas Coupland on the critically acclaimed *Nuit Blanche* installation "Museum of the Rapture" and lastly was name-dropped by none other than Barbra Streisand onstage during her Toronto concert, in regards to her comment about her "...huuuuge thing for a gay boy."

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

At the beginning of the year I did my first tour of Brazil. It was really incredible! It was in very many ways a dream come true. When you are performing for an audience that isn't necessarily the language that you speak, you are really forced to find a way to make your work accessible. It taught me clarity, it taught me to read my audience better and it was just really fun. Brazilians make for a wonderful audience and they were really appreciative of my work!

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Lately I've been really, *really* aware of the new wave of queer artists and activists. It seems like every time I turn around there is somebody doing something new, or somebody really dedicating themselves to work that needs to get done, and consistently they are younger people. It's really nice to see that generation cares in the first place. I think in Canada we often take our rights for granted. There is always going to be resistance to our community so I think it is always nice to see younger queers fighting back on a local and international level.

What still needs work in our local community?

The atmosphere around our municipal government is really so toxic. It's tricky to make arguments against homophobia when our Mayor is openly homophobic. It's

hard to build a career as an artist, and convince others that you are serious about a career as an artist when your Mayor openly loathes and insults the arts in Canada.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

When we speak about arts in culture it's not necessarily the lesbian doing the spoken word at the coffee house and it's not necessarily the gay boy singing cabaret for an audience of ten. It is the television culture in Canada, and Toronto. It is media culture and literary culture and music culture. It is vital and integral to who we are as queer people I think. If I had one wish it would be to have a municipal government that backed this up more.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

This has been a bug-a-boo of mine, but it seems to me that everyone wants to be famous and whether that is on a local level or an actual level, everybody is determined to make a name for themselves and stand out, but not everyone is willing to do the work to make that happen. I see it a lot of times with performers when they are coming up. I think if we all let ourselves be a bit more real and a bit more humble, the things that we seek would come faster. If we let ourselves work hard, then we will get the recognition we want.

Photo by Tanja Tiziana (www.tanja-tiziana.com)



In Conversation: Richard Aslan

with Karen Fulcher

Richard Aslan is an old friend I wanted to catch up with who now lives in England—a most creative, gentle and gorgeous soul!

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

It's been a very special year. I finally got up the courage to leave my full time job and go it alone. I had been working as a commercial copywriter for radio for almost four years and the environment wasn't great—lots of pressure, very money oriented, constant fear of lay-offs. It was the kind of job I need a half-hour rant about every evening before I could relax (my partner is a good listener and very patient). I needed out. I started a course as a Thai massage therapist as a sideline to the writing and saved money. I told myself I needed £5,000 to resign—that or the massage certificate. As it happened, they both came at once so I had no choice. I've been freelance for most of this year and all the bills are paid, just about, and my writing is being published in four different magazines. But most importantly, I'm happier and healthier. No more daily rants.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I'm really lucky to live in a lovely city (Bristol, in the west of England). It's a special kind of place, arty, lefty and gentle. The kind of place you come to and think "I can *live* here." Our Lord Mayor is openly gay, we're renowned for tolerance and sexuality isn't a massive issue. The thing that gives me most hope is seeing more and more of us living lives that don't have to be defined by sexuality. More and more of us getting "married" or not getting "married," if that suits us. More and more of us having kids—or not—and more and more of us leading full lives.

I'm old enough to worry that the kids don't know how hard-won this freedom is, and I seethe when I see LGBTQ people (let's be honest here, it's usually the Ls and Gs) throw their lot in with the rightists and define themselves as white and rich before anything else, but all in all, it's good. We shouldn't have to wear badges (unless we want to).

What still needs work in our local community?

Man, *everything*. I'm a human creature before I'm anything

else and I have a firm belief that until we are *all* free, none of us are. The day that no one is hungry, cold, lonely or afraid, *then* the work is done. Well, no, actually—it's only then that the work of really being alive begins.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

I think we can do it. If we can remember a few things we can do it: 1) Every moment is brand new—none of this has happened before. We have a lot more options than we think we do. 2) Everyone has equal value, regardless of what they do. If someone does something you don't understand, don't assume they are bad, mad or crazy, just assume they are working with things you have no idea of. Then go from there. 3) Forgive everything, always. 4) Behind every fortune is a crime. No motherfucker *needs* to be rich. Yeah, we'll get there. OH, and 5) laurels get squished if you rest on them. All need to be actioned moment by moment. The world doesn't just get better all on its own.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

Beyond what is happening already? It's a hard one. I kinda wish people wouldn't be so *dumb* in the ballot boxes but hey, what do I know? I guess I will say, nothing. No transformation beyond what we have. It's all okay.

Karen Fulcher is a freelance writer living in Toronto.





In Conversation: Bruce La Bruce

with Bryen Dunn

Bruce La Bruce, filmmaker and activist, speaks out on controversy, community, and connecting. His most recent artistic endeavors in Europe brought forth a wide spectrum of comments, both appreciative and hate induced. La Bruce is currently working on a new feature film that delves into the world of inter-generational relationships. (www.brucelabruce.com)

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

My *Obscenity* show of photographs in February at La Fresh Gallery in Madrid was a big challenge in so many ways, so I'm happy it came off so well. Even with an incendiary device tossed through the gallery window, Camille Paglia loved the photographs and spoke about them at a lecture she gave at Barnard University about sexual and religious imagery in art.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I think in general this alphabet soup of a community is trying its best to be more inclusive, particularly when it comes to transgendered or differently-gendered people. There's still a long way to go of course, but at least there seems to be a growing awareness of some of those issues.

What still needs work in our local community?

I recently donated some of my art to the LGBT Youth Line Auction in Toronto which I think is a very worthy organization. Youth outreach is always important. I know when I was a kid and didn't have any support it was really tough to negotiate all the complicated issues around being gay. It's always good to have somebody to talk to.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

Social media is a great way to stay connected and vent and express yourself about a variety of issues. It's always important to monitor the media and politicians and take them to task for their handling of LGBTQ issues. A good example is how a lot of people online have taken that ridiculous Tory MP Rob Anders to task for his stupid comments on the "bathroom bill," in which he ignorantly implies there could be something "predatory" about trans people using public washrooms.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

AIDS-phobia and the criminalization of HIV are still huge problems. People really have to keep informed and not succumb to the ignorance and fear that surround a lot of issues that concern the LGBTQ community and other minority groups.

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

Photo by Maria Fonfara



In Conversation: Nina Arsenault

with Scott Dagostino



As an award-winning multidisciplinary artist, Nina Arsenault has fearlessly used her words, her voice and her very body to challenge our culture's rigid views of class and gender. Following her acclaimed theatre piece *The Silicone Diaries*, she toured with *The Whore of Babylon*, collaborated with photographer Alejandro Santiago on *SERVE: The Work* and was the subject of professor Judith Rudakoff's essay collection *TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work*.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Personally, I am most proud of my artistic work—proud to have worked with institutions who have helped me create it, especially Buddies in Bad Times, The Theatre Centre, The Art Gallery of Ontario, and The Centre for Lesbian and Gays Studies in New York City.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

The opening of Video Fag in Kensington as a new space for radical queer art and performance is a very good thing. With small fiscal responsibilities, the venue can give artists great creative freedom to experiment and risk. This will also add to—not take away from—a larger artistic conversation happening at Buddies in Bad Times which is still the home of queer theatre in Canada.

What still needs work in our local community?

In our community, transwomen have never been treated as equals by gay men. We are included and tolerated by gays usually if we operate within social norms established by them. However, if we step outside these boundaries, our identities and lived experiences are ridiculed—casually and callously—or judged by those who do not understand us, but claim to.

How do you think we can accomplish that change?

I think there was a time when gay behaviours weren't understood by heterosexuals, so the straight world told gay men they were sick, fake, too flamboyant, narcissistic, shallow, perverted or even evil. Now, I think more straight people are more likely to admit merely that they just do not understand some gay behaviours. I think certain gay men need to hear that they will never understand what it is like to be transgendered. In the same way, I don't think I can ever truly know what it is like to be black. It's okay for us to not have all the answers about each other.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

I want very little, and I want a lot. I want to be able to work for my own money and artistic expression to survive and thrive in society—a hierarchical, capitalist culture. I don't want some bougie-gay-Liberal-hypocrites blabbing on to me about their outdated "moral code" (and, gasp, Marxism!) while trampling on my ability to succeed. I want to be a freak AND I want to be treated with dignity. Unrealistic?

Photo by Wilford Barrington for Nina's Whore of Babylon pin-up calendar 2013



In Conversation: Patricia Wilson

with Bryen Dunn

As guitarist for Crackpuppy (www.crackpuppy.net) and bartender at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Patricia Wilson, tells it like it is, straight up with a slant. Recent changes in the band, and hopefully new material and gigs in the New Year, may bring a puppy of unknown sorts to a sound system near you. Rumour has it there may be one show the last week of the year. Wilson also gigs on the staff at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, and can often be found behind the bar on weekends. Rock n Roll is a way of life.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Personally, I moved toward being more fit out of fear of not being able to maintain my lifestyle. I need to be able to play guitar and perform in my rock band Crackpuppy and continue to love the trappings of what I do. I love Jack Daniels and late nights and my friends at all hours of the 24 hours we are given each day. I started Boot Camp around eight months ago twice a week, along with two weight training sessions every week. First my whole feeling about myself changed physically, mentally, and emotionally all so drastically. That change also helped me move back to the spiritual quests I once had, which got lost in the blur of the human struggle to survive.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Seriously, nothing particularly outstanding in the queer community recently has made me feel hope for the future. I only see outstanding individuals within the community. I think the community has fucked itself by trying to be all-inclusive and therefore not being able to help anyone. You either feel included and know it, because little bits of

the alphabet in front of the word community isn't going to do it.

What still needs work in our local community?

We need to be honest with ourselves and recognize that not all people are on our side whether they're queer or not. The poor queers, the financially challenged ones are still looked at by mainstream society as disgusting because they have no leverage, no money, or even political clout.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

Take the fucking blinders off and admit we are not them and they are not us (straight society), and educate our queer youth accordingly. Teach them that we were lucky and fortunate to be born queer, because the realization of being different leads to self-awareness of the individual.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

The act of true kindness to yourself and the world around you. Imagine if every individual made that one change of practicing true kindness, imagine what the world and universe would be.



In Conversation: Shelley Marshall

with Bryen Dunn

Comedienne Shelley Marshall dishes out the straight side of gay, recalling moments in her life when her two children really shine through. As the mother of two young adults, Marshall has often recalled moments of motherhood in her shows, including her infamous production of *Hold Mommy's Cigarette*, which she is remounting again in early 2013. (www.shelleymarshall.com)

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I was headlining the Frederickton Gay Pride Stand up Gala and after the show I went to the local gay bar to celebrate the success of the show with my fellow comedians and many patrons of the show. As I stood at the bar, a delicious man came up to me and wanted to hug me, he expressed his love of my comedy and kept saying "I fucking love you, I fucking love you!" He then opened his shirt and showed me his scars from his recent top surgery. There in front of me stood honesty, celebration and love.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

My daughter graduated this year as a Social Worker, after doing stints as President of the Positive Space Committee, where she would speak at high schools and other colleges where she would help create safe spaces. It's come full circle for her to give back and move forward in a career that will benefit the LGBTQ community. I should also mention, my son called me yesterday asking if he could bring a few "Bear" orphans to our family holiday dinner. We hope to encourage them to know that families can be extended, exchanged, and intertwined. I may have lost many of my "real" family because of their ignorance, intolerance, or

whatever you want to call it, but I now live in truth and freedom. Such a gift this has been for me.

What still needs work in our local community?

We need more information and safe spaces available in all our educational facilities.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

If we all take a little time out of our lives to present our ideas, then more spaces will be created. I love when my daughter calls me to say she's received a letter from someone who attended her Positive Space Information Seminar. The connection is very important to the future of our gay youth.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

It is necessary for us to evolve from tolerating to accepting. It's a poor choice of words, and our words become our actions. People's identities should not be tolerated, but accepted with ease and understanding that we are all on our own journey. Mine just happens to be one where I am the very proud mother of a gay son and lesbian daughter!

Photo by Kevin Thorn



In Conversation: Denise Benson

with Scott Dagostino

A longtime favourite of Toronto's club scene, DJ Denise Benson has also been a radio host on CKLN, a co-creator of the successful queer women's party CHERRY BOMB and a writer for weekly paper *THE GRID* with not one but two regular columns: "One to Watch," featuring new artists, and "Then & Now," a series of history pieces on this city's most legendary nightclubs that she's working to publish as a book in 2014.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Since starting the "Then & Now" series last September, I've become increasingly focused on my writing. This year, I felt I've really stepped into it, expanding on my skills and discovering that I really enjoy researching. I've been a music journalist for a long time but more than ever, I'm finding so many great stories and queer history in examining our club culture.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

We feel very lucky to get a diverse crowd at CHERRY BOMB and we have nights where girls come out on their 19th birthday while others are celebrating their 50th, but more and more, we see young girls partying with groups of friends that include all genders, all orientations, all out having a good time together. It's great to see.

What still needs work in our local community?

We have lots of adults talking about bullying, but it's also become a term applied enough in the mass media to become trendy. How can we turn it from a buzzword into real outreach?

How do you think we can accomplish that change?

As always, we need more dialogue, more awareness. We can't tell kids "it gets better," we have to make it better NOW.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

When you look at where queer people are right now, there's a huge push/pull happening. We've made amazing gains with seeing queers in pop culture, Obama winning, the end of Don't Ask Don't Tell, big signature things that are exciting. But at the same time, the people who want to marginalize us are growing louder. It's more important than ever to not be complacent.

In Conversation: Michelle Poirier

with Shelley A. Harrison



Michelle Poirier recently moved to Hamilton, Ontario, where she works in the Office of Human Rights & Equity Services at McMaster University, and is a member of the LGBTQ Advisory Committee at City Hall. She lives with her partner, Lisa, and her 4 month old child, Pet.

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What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I am personally most proud of becoming a mom—that may sound cliché, but after years of trying to conceive, a difficult pregnancy, and a horrific labour, it is one of my greatest accomplishments. Heterosexism is very apparent when navigating fertility clinics, prenatal classes and pregnancy help books... it required a fair amount of patience because we didn't fit in the family mould.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

It is not a recent happening, but it still resonates with me, the Toronto parents who refused to share the sex of their baby, Storm. This mainstream media story brought awareness to the general public about trans-rights and the rights of gender creative children. Although it created a bit of controversy, it enabled some critical thinking and trailblazing for queer acceptance.

What still needs work in our local community?

In Hamilton, we are desperate for a LGBTQ community centre, much like the 519 on Church Street in Toronto; ideally a centre that offers queer parenting programs. Community organizers are working on making this dream into a reality, and I am confident it will happen.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

As anything for the social good, it will be accomplished

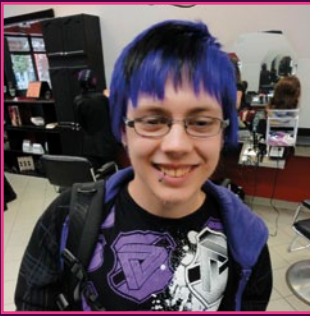
through the hard work and dedication of visionaries and community builders, who do not get any financial reward for their volunteerism.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

As a new mother I'm now painfully aware as to how small children are labeled as a boy or a girl before they have a chance to choose their gender identity. A necessary transformation I would like to see happen are families and institutions that respect and nurture kids who are gender fluid. Children ought to play with toys and dress the way they want, without stereotype. The same goes for children with gender variant parents, same sex parents and transgendered parents—to live in a world that is accepting and supportive of their family unit. I can only hope that more daycares and elementary schools seek out sensitivity training when working with LGBTQ families.

Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa. She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for over 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com or visit her at www.doveheart.ca





In Conversation: Nathan Rhodes-Truppe

with Jeff Harrison

Nathan Rhodes-Truppe is the co-founder of Eastdale C.V.I.'s Gay Straight Alliance. He is a drag queen who considers himself lucky to be a part of a group of youth drag performers within Durham Region.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

There are two accomplishments I'm most proud of. The first is winning the Club 717 Durham Youth Talent/Drag Competition. The competition featured eight phenomenal youth performers and it was an honour to compete against all of them. The other accomplishment I am most proud of is that I have been successfully dealing with my anxiety and depression for one year. That's a huge milestone for me and I look forward to many more years of success.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Everyone has differences of opinions and personal issues. It's a fact of life. But I was completely inspired at the Durham Region Evening of Hope, which is a night to remember those who have taken their own lives due to bullying. To see everyone set aside their own opinions and issues to come together strong as a community to show that we are there for support.

What still needs work in our local community?

I think that we still need to show the rest of the community that there is nothing wrong with being a member of the LGBTQ community, that we are no different than those who do not identify in such a way. A lot of people still seem not to understand that the LGBTQ community is nothing to fear.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

I think the only way to accomplish this is by educating, which is what we are doing already. We must continue to try and educate those who may not understand the LGBTQ community and how they feel. I know this may sound like a clichéd answer, but I think it is the best answer.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

The most necessary transformation I want to see happen in the world would have to be equality for all. By this I do not just mean that I am concerned with the LGBTQ community gaining equal treatment. I also want to see women be treated as equal to men. Racial and ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, the homeless, those with mental and/or physical disabilities, all of these people deserve to be treated as equals.



In Conversation: Eric Hébert-Daly

with Shelley A. Harrison

Eric Hébert-Daly currently works as the National Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), a charity that works to promote wilderness conservation across Canada. He is also a Certified Lay Worship Leader for the United Church of Canada. After a five month interim in Rupert and Wakefield, two small communities in Gatineau, Quebec, Hébert-Daly felt compelled to deepen his connection to God and is currently in a discernment process to determine if he should become a fully ordained minister.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Working closely with D'thea Webster, an openly lesbian woman, who was ordained while serving our little rural church in Wakefield. She has since taken up service in Etobicoke at a full-time appointment. Serving churches in West Quebec almost every Sunday this year and last, it has been a great gift to be asked to spend a few hours every week intentionally reflecting on the world, our community and our families in light of scripture.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Seeing the US President openly supporting same-sex marriage is a day I never thought would come; working through my discernment process to become an ordained clergy with an openly gay minister from my nearby rural pastoral charge has been great and will continue into the New Year. I am also incredibly buoyed by projects like "You Can Play" that are using well-known athletes in the NHL and other sports to promote LGBTQ equality. The sports world always felt like one of the last mainstream worlds that hadn't spoken out on equality. I feel like that wall is coming down for the first time ever. Politics, religion and sports—when you're able to see progress in each of these areas, it's hard not to be hopeful.

What still needs work in our local community?

Two Things: Bullying and LGBTQ Faith. Obviously bullying continues to be an area that we need to prioritize. There are too many people—young and adult—that are victims of bullies, too many suicides, too much tolerance for abuse. At minimum, we need respect for each other as human beings.

In a recent episode of *The New Normal*, the gay couple, who are working with a surrogate, find themselves seeking options for godparents and re-exploring their own faith. During a powerful scene, one of them is in confession with a

priest who tells him that gays and lesbians have been doing a great job of fighting for their rights and winning, but they seem to have abandoned the fight for their souls and faith. I am grateful for places like Metropolitan Community Church (particularly in Toronto) who help us reclaim our faith, but we also need to be working with our religious allies across the board. Progressive Christians need to stand together.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

I wish I knew what the solutions were when it comes to bullying, but again, I am hopeful that an increasing level of discussion will generate some answers there. When it comes to faith, I hope that Catholics and Anglicans can continue the theological battle from within. In churches where the battle has been won, we can work together to speak to the LGBTQ community and let them know they have a home and a safe place to explore their faith. I dream of churches, temples and mosques where you are not required to leave your LGBTQ identity at the door and can participate fully in the life of the community.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

Here's where all the various parts of my work come together: my work as National Executive Director of CPAWS has been deeply rooted in my faith. Wilderness conservation is a key way I see to protect the sacred. I see nature as a manifestation of the divine and I'd love to see more people seeing it that way as we consider environmental protection and sustainability—even if they don't all come at it from a faith-based perspective. I'd also like to see less "us versus them" in the world. If we were less siloed into our own categories—traditional and contemporary, industrial and environmental, progressive and conservative, Christian and Muslim, gay and straight—we'd likely change the world.



In Conversation: Miss Conception

with Jeff Harrison

Miss Conception is the drag alter ego of Kevin Levesque. Known as the nicest drag queen in the gaybourhood, Miss Conception has performed on stages along Church Street dazzling audiences with her live singing, penchant for elaborate costumes and rousing Broadway reviews. Be sure to catch her in sunny Puerto Vallarta this winter for her second annual all star show at The Palm Cabaret and Bar, from January 7th to April 1st, 2013.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I'm most proud of stepping out of my element and finally writing my first live singing show, which I took to PV Mexico and then performed here in Toronto as well.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

There's lots of changes happening in our community with different styles of drag, new bars opening and people staying positive about change. We should never forget fundraisers and supporting all the local bars... pay it forward! World pride in 2014 is so exciting for our community—I'm really looking forward to this!

What still needs work in our local community?

Lots of things still need work. We shouldn't be talking behind each others' backs. We should be like the old days where bars worked together and had different fundraising events as one, not talking trash.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

We need to work as a community, not separate ourselves.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

Well, world peace! [Laughs] I would love to see the world accept everyone for who they are—what should we care about who or what a person does? Just enjoy life and have fun with no stress.



In Conversation: Doug Kerr

with Jeff Harrison

Doug is a trainer, facilitator and independent consultant to the nonprofit sector. He runs his own consulting practice and is a founding member of the Progressive Consultants Network of Toronto (www.pcnt.ca). Doug is also the Vice Chair of Sherbourne Health Centre, Co-Chair of the LGBT Giving Network (communityone.ca) and Chair of World Pride's Human Rights Program Committee.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Personally, I am most proud of becoming a dad. My husband Mike and I became foster dads to a wonderful two-year old boy this past summer.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I am part of a group of people who recently bought Glad Day Books, the oldest LGBTQ bookshop in the world. It's been inspiring to see a whole new generation of diverse young queer people become involved in Glad Day. We have book readings, cabaret nights, political and social events at our new gallery space and most of the people attending are young. Their creativity and passion for social justice makes me very optimistic about the future.

What still needs work in our local community?

There is still a lot of homophobia in our society and while we have legal rights, many LGBTQ people, especially outside the downtown core,

still find themselves rejected by their families and communities. I think we need to do a lot more to combat homophobia and transphobia in Canada.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

We need to continue to ensure that the education system supports LGBTQ students. Especially for students who might come from extremely religious families, we have to have supports for these youth who face particularly difficult challenges coming out and finding acceptance. I also think we need to continue to build bridges to faith communities that still do not accept homosexuality and continue to educate them on LGBTQ issues.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

The transformation I'd like to see is the empowerment of women and girls around the world. As LGBTQ people, our liberation has always been tied to the success of the women's movement. This is happening around the world and it gives me a great deal of hope.



In Conversation: Maggie Cassella

with Karen Fulcher

Maggie Cassella, is the funniest most direct person I've ever met and she's a woman making it in the restaurant business! She's been a phenomenal supporter of both the comedy and LGBTQ communities in Toronto for years with her amazing *We're Funny That Way* festival that happens at Buddies in Bad Times every spring.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

My proudest personal accomplishment this past year is too personal to talk about. Seriously. But on a career level I'm pretty proud of building a business with my biz partner Heather Mackenzie in a down market. A business that specifically focuses on providing quality entertainment in a proper cabaret room; a room where audience members can see a show in peace and quiet, but know that hooting and hollering and laughter and applause is not mutually exclusive of being respectfully quiet during a performance.

I'm proud that the space is diverse and that basically we've established ourselves not as a bar with a label but as an "asshole-free" bar: everybody's welcome, unless they're an asshole. It's just nice that something we set out to do on a creative level is working. Good food. Good entertainment. And a great vibe. It's a fuck of a lot of work, but the place runs and people come. I'd say that's a decent accomplishment.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I'm not sure. I see us as more fractioned lately than I'd like. Wait, I take that back, that's not a fair statement. We've ALWAYS had infighting. [laughs] The crusade to end teen suicide and bullying gives me hope. The fact that people are becoming more involved and understanding that you have to do more than say "it gets better" to a kid and literally be there ready to take action. And the feeling that people understand

that this is *everyone's* job not just the LGBTQ/etc. community's job. American football players who come out for queer rights: as dumb as that sounds, because they *should* do it—that to me is a ray of light.

What still needs work in our local community?

Ironically, I think it's building community without judgment.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

By listening more. Rushing to judgment less. And understanding that people can have their own dialogues and stories without compromising the dialogue and story of someone else. We have to stop calling people "phobic" because their experience as whatever they feel or call themselves, gay, lesbian, bi, trans, intersex, butch, femme, (insert whatever word you like to be called here) doesn't fit with what some people might insist is the way to accept someone else. Everyone experiences life differently, and it matters that there is space to hear what their experience is without judging it as "unacceptable" or a threat to someone else's right to their experience or existence.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

Peace on earth baby. I'd love to see the world start treating women and girls right. Then I say we give patriarchy a try and see how that goes. Don't worry boys, we'll be gentle.

Photo by Rannie Turingan



In Conversation: Matt Taylor

with Jeff Harrison

Matthew Taylor lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he is the program manager for HIM—Health Initiative for Men—a community-based organization dedicated to strengthening the health and well-being of gay men.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Achieving emotional intelligence and becoming increasingly more comfortable and accepting of my identity as a gay, HIV+ man. Also, for becoming the newest program manager at a progress Gay Men's Health organization HIM, Health Initiative for Men, which has provided incredible opportunities personally as well as professionally.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

The LGBTQ community taking a stand and becoming true leaders in advancing queer health and well being—physically, emotionally, sexually and mentally.

What still needs work in our local community?

We need to work on addressing and eliminating the lateral oppression and polarization that exists within our LGBTQ community that serves to divide us and dismantle the progress being made towards unification.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

By acknowledging our own internalized fears, shame and stigma, as well as deep seated societal pressures, and creating spaces for community engagement, consultation and dialogue towards closing those gaps, by sharing experiences and healing together as one community.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

An internalized shift in society from tolerance to acceptance—dignity and equality for all person-kind.

In Conversation: Savoy Howe

with Karen Fulcher



Savoy Howe is an amazingly positive and supportive person. She is the head coach and owner of the Toronto Newsgirls Boxing Club, Canada's only all-female and trans positive boxing gym.

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What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I am so proud that our gym has a trans policy, the first trans policy for a Canadian boxing gym. The policy was written by Cathy Van Ingen, a boxer, Brock University professor and the creator of our Shape Your Life program, a free boxing program for female and trans survivors of violence. The draft was passed around to several organizations, including the 519 and OFA (Opportunity for the Advancement of Women) for feedback and then put into place four months ago. We offered it to Boxing Ontario and to the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association in case other gyms wanted to use our model.

I am so proud of our Shape Your Life program. After the six-week session we give all participants a free 3-month membership to the Newsgirls. It has really exploded in so many unexpected ways. Aside from putting over 700 participants through it in the past six years, we recently offered sessions to people who are "differently abled." This started as a partnership with the Anne Johnston Health Station. In our current session we have 10 people who happen to use wheelchairs, come in and box and it is awesome! I've never worked with a more excited group of people to be in a boxing gym. We are half way through our second session right now and it is pretty clear that this will somehow have to become a regular thang. We are currently running a session for women of colour between the ages of 16 and 30. We just had our first class last weekend and 16 women showed up. Again, awesome!

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I just did a workshop this week at the Unity Conference (www.unityconference.ca) hosted at OISE. Their theme was "Against All Odds." When I looked at the workshops being offered, I was blown away. When I showed up and saw the masses of cool looking teenagers all just doing their own

thang, eating pizza, attending these mind opening workshops and probably sharing their own experiences, I all of a sudden felt like a worn out soldier who could now retire: the younger generation had arrived to carry the torch. This gave me so much hope and promise for the future.

What still needs work in our local community?

I love the 519's Healthy TransAction program (www.the519.org/blog/2010/11/05/healthy-transactions). It deals with why trans people do not enter recreational facilities (swimming, boxing, yoga, etc.). It deals with why trans people are out of shape, isolated, possibly depressed, suicidal... I think we need to support the 519's idea of educating recreational facilities about trans' needs (additional change-rooms/bathrooms, clearly posted policies).

How do you think we can accomplish that?

Being a part of putting it "out there." The Newsgirls is happily accommodating the trans community. I would like to propose that all boxing clubs and sanctioning bodies are asked the question: how are you going to accommodate the trans community? To hold them accountable for however they answer this question. And then to hit every recreational facility in Toronto, but in a gentle way with free education/workshops against ignorance offered as part of the deal. It's like we show up with the problem and solution at the same time.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

For people to realize that trans people are the solution. They are the next big "Inventors" and the world will appreciate them as they deserve to be appreciated and honoured when the world realizes that what they have to offer will facilitate life for everyone.

Photo by Jacklyn Atlas



In Conversation: Drake Jensen

with Scott Dagostino

For a couple of decades there, k.d. lang had the title of queer Canadian country music star all to herself, but Ottawa-based, Cape-Breton-born singer, Drake Jensen staked his claim to the throne when he came out in February. Jensen featured his husband in a video from his new album *On My Way to Finding You* and dedicated it to 15-year-old Ottawa student Jamie Hubley, who committed suicide last October. Jensen made his next single a fundraiser for bullying.org and has spoken openly and movingly of his own history of being abused and bullied as a child.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I've changed so much! For the first time, I've a solid idea of where I'm going. I'm not the first one to do this but I'm doing what I call "record-label quality" and I'm starting to see myself and my career in a different light.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Discovering hundreds and hundreds of gay country fans has really elevated my confidence. The gay community has really supported what I'm doing and I've been allowing the fans to drive this.

What still needs work in our local community?

I did a video for "Stand by Your Man" with William Belli from *RuPaul's Drag Race* and was surprised by how nasty a few people online were about it. "How dare you ruin that song with a drag queen?" and things like that. Even some gay people were

attacking me! I didn't care—I'm a fighter. My friends and fans will always be there for me and Tammy Wynette's people loved it, but it did show me how easily we can bully each other too with snarky remarks and online nastiness. People like power and if they can't find it in themselves, they'll tear others down to get it.

How do you think we can accomplish that change?

We all have to work on ourselves and recognize that everybody has problems. I hated it when my mother used to say, "There's always someone worse off than you," but of course she was right! We all need to be kinder to each other.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

"Transparency" is a very big word for me. I live my life in the open, I am who I am, take me or leave me. The only way to move forward is to show people who you really are.



In Conversation: Leanne Iskander

with Melissa Benner

Leanne Iskander went from student to superstar advocate in a short span of time. In 2011, when her Catholic School nixed the request for a GSA (Gay/Straight Alliance), Iskander and her friends decided to fight back. It quickly went from a Mississauga issue to a provincial issue, pinpointing hot topics of homophobic curriculum, public school funding, and how bullying affects queer youth. Iskander was awarded LGBTQ Youth of the Year at the 2011 Inspire Awards in acknowledgment of her efforts.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

In this past year, I am most proud of having worked with so many dedicated individuals and organizations in ensuring that queer and trans student groups are able to be formed at all of Ontario's publicly-funded schools. My fellow students and I worked hard to bring together students from schools across the province and empower them to make their schools safer places for queer and trans students.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

The passing of the "Accepting Schools Act" with the revisions that my fellow students and I had been pushing for, made it a requirement that all of Ontario's publicly-funded schools allow queer and trans student groups to form. Because this was accomplished largely due to students themselves, it has given me hope that students will feel inspired and able to challenge oppressive systems and policies in their schools and in their communities at large.

What still needs work in our local community?

There is still much work to be done in our communities and in our schools in particular, to ensure that they are safe and supportive environments for queer and trans youth. Having gone through the Catholic school system and fought for

safe spaces in that system, I can speak from experience when I say that the separate school system is certainly not the most inclusive environment, and the existence of a separate Catholic school system as a whole is in itself discriminatory and exclusive.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

As a community, we have to fight to make sure that queer and trans students in all our schools are treated in a way that is fair and free from discrimination. We have to make sure that board and government policies are congruent with this goal, and furthermore that school staff are adequately trained to support all of their students and create an anti-oppressive environment.

Most importantly, as a community we must continue to support students who come up against resistance as they attempt to make their schools more inclusive, just as the community has come together to support many other students and myself as we fought for our right to form queer and trans student groups in our schools.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

It is necessary that we continue to respect and support youth who aim to challenge systems that are oppressive.

In Conversation: Farzana Doctor

with Melissa Benner



Farzana Doctor is one of those people who manage to be well-known and warm; accomplished, but accessible. She has a busy schedule as a writer, psychotherapist, and curator of the popular Brockton Writers Series, yet remains engaged in Toronto's queer community. Farzana was recently awarded the 2012 Lambda Literary Award for her second novel, *Six Metres of Pavement*. Her fictional characters could be your neighbours, and she has a knack for blending the intimacies of daily life with a broader scope of healing and growth.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Winning the Lammy was a real high point for me. There's nothing quite like being acknowledged and celebrated by a community I care about. Plus, I got to meet Ally Sheedy, who presented the award!

The Lammys are presented Oscar-style, with the big reveal happening on the night of the event. This was really nerve-wracking for me, to wait all night to find out whether I'd won in the Lesbian Fiction category, the second to last category that was announced. I was stunned and thrilled when they called out my book as the winner (no one really ever expects they'll win) and I had to talk myself up to the stage: "Stand up, Farzana. Go to the aisle, climb those steps" ...and so on.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

I was thrilled when Bill C-279 [an amendment to the Canadian Human Rights Acts preventing discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression] passed this year. The trans community has been fighting hard for this for so long! I know the fight isn't over yet, though. There are still bigots like MP Rob Anders around spreading misinformation about this bill.

What still needs work in our local community?

Lots! It seems that each year Pride is under threat by apolitical folks who have forgotten its history. I'd like to see the queer community do more anti-oppression work in general and become more inclusive to those on the margins.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

We each need to start with ourselves, right? We have to reflect on our privilege and the ways we use and abuse it in both our individual and collective lives.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

What a huge question! To narrow it to just one necessary change... I'd love it if the world would be less caught up in gender and sexual orientation binaries. I'd love it if there was more room for spaces in between, for ambiguity, for people to occupy whatever body and sexuality they want and need.

I think writers, and all artists, have a role to play in creating social change. Yes, we need to craft beautiful, entertaining prose, but we also have the capacity to write characters and stories that might influence the way readers view the world.

Photo by Vivek Shraya



In Conversation: Scott Thompson

with Scott Dagostino

As one-fifth of legendary comedy troupe The Kids in the Hall, Scott Thompson created beloved characters Buddy Cole, Danny Husk, Francesca Fiore and, of course, the Queen of England. Since then, he's written a book and graphic novel, performed stand-up, appeared on *The Simpsons*, *The Larry Sanders Show*, *Star Trek: Voyager* and has now joined the cast of the upcoming series *Hannibal* as a CSI fingerprint expert we pray won't get eaten!

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

This year I am most proud of doing something big that had nothing to do with my career.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

There are two things, actually. Number one: Honey Boo Boo's declaration of solidarity with "the poodles." Number two: the return of pubic hair. I can finally stop feeling like a pedophile size queen.

What still needs work in our local community?

As usual, the patrons in the bars could be a little looser and the drinks could be a little stiffer.

How do you think we can accomplish that change?

We can achieve this in one go by initiating a "free pour" policy with all the bars immediately.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

I would like to see an international holiday called "Drag Day" declared. This would be a day when everyone—regardless of race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or creed—dresses as what they consider the opposite sex. We can hold it on December 21st to commemorate the day when we thought it was all going to end—forgetting that when something ends, something also begins.



In Conversation: Steven Larkin

with Bryen Dunn

Steven Larkin is President & CEO of Adventure Center (www.adventurecenter.com), which also oversees OUT Adventures, a queer owned and operated soft adventure tour company based in Toronto. Larkin shows his passion for travel both here at home and abroad, either working, vacationing, or volunteering.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

Continuing to work with my business partner Rob Sharp on OUT, who was formally a life partner as well.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

The LGBTQ community is breaking down its own barriers and it's awesome that mixed events are happening, and we're breaking out of the Church Street strip with cool events and spaces on both the east and west sides of Toronto.

What still needs work in our local community?

We're so fortunate that we have equality and rights that our collective focus should be in helping causes either across the border or overseas, where inequality still prevails.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

It's not easy, but a bit of research online and you'll quickly identify a cause that speaks to you, whether that be marriage equality, or even more basic human rights issues. Volunteer or donate!

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

If the entire world adopted a "go local" approach to solving their own issues—be it poverty, malnutrition, education, water and resource issues—then one-by-one local communities would make practical decisions and tackle their most serious issues. Small steps could lead to universal change.



In Conversation: Boyd Kodak

with Jeff Harrison

Boyd Kodak helped change the Ontario Human Rights Code against discrimination based on sexual orientation, is a crusader for trans rights, the recipient of the INSPIRE Award Lifetime Recognition (2011) and was inducted into the GLBT Hall of Fame in February this year.

What are you most proud of accomplishing this year?

I am very proud to have recorded and released an original tune this year. It's been my life goal to seek awareness, acceptance, inclusion and hopefully understanding of LGBTQ human rights. I have been writing a musical, and my dream is to reach out through song. This is the start, and I've shown myself that I can do it, which is an awesome feeling.

I am also really proud of being able to contribute to the development and diversity of the INSPIRE Awards team this year. I've never worked with a more invigorating, efficient and positive group of people.

What has happened recently in our LGBTQ community that gives you hope and promise for the future?

Toby's Act being passed in the summer of 2012 was monumental. It provides protection under the Ontario Human Rights Code for individuals to not be discriminated against because of gender identity and gender expression. A few years ago, I myself was discriminated against in a scenario with professionals. I was called he/she, talked about how confusing I was, even masturbation gestures were made, followed by giggles. Trans people get denied jobs and housing often. We suffer verbal and physical abuse in outrageous amounts. Even the name calling, bullying and verbal abuse that I was subject to, is not acceptable. It all contributes to a very negative environment. Hate, derogatory comments and actions are unacceptable in any capacity. Toby's Act gives me hope that we are moving forward and making it clear that this behaviour is unacceptable.

What still needs work in our local community?

It would be great if we could have more cohesion, within

the communities. I understand, and agree that we are all different; we are all entitled to our own beliefs and have our own priorities. That is fine, we don't have to all think alike and agree on everything, but we should all be able to find common ground and stand united.

While trans awareness has grown tremendously from when I first transitioned, we must continue to promote inclusion of all who choose to identify with our community, and work together.

How do you think we can accomplish that?

Awareness is often the way to the path that makes things better. Being able to recognise the growth and development needed within ourselves and our community enables us to nurture it. Understanding of how we've come to be where we are, is vital to being able to appreciate and remain positive about our successes and future. We have some strong, out and positive leaders, organizations and affiliates. I believe these strong role models and groups are not just talking, but taking action towards ensuring diversity and unification, which will lead the way. Whatever anyone can do to help, and educate is important.

What necessary transformation would you like to see happen in the world?

I would like to see this world become a place where there is no discrimination and everyone is treated fairly and equally. We need to take better care of each other and our earth. I wish people would stop worrying about who to hate, and instead focus on finding a way to love, or at least live and let live. I think all forward movement towards inclusion and acceptance, no matter how big or how small, will make this world a better place for all.