

Carmen M. Machado
“LGBT Leaders in Washington, DC: A Photo Essay”
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Carmen Machado

Organization: National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Centers

Leader: Terry Stone

Title: Executive Director

When Terry Stone came out of the closet in 1976, at the age of twenty-six and in Amarillo, Texas, there weren't many options for him. He had a wife, children, and many hard choices to make, in a place with virtually no resources. "But now," Terry says, beaming. "There's a center there. There's a center in Amarillo, Texas."

Terry Stone is well over six feet tall, a towering man with piercing blue eyes and a pronounced Texas accent. He laughs easily and shakes my injured, braced hand with the utmost gentleness. He describes himself as a "professional gay man."

"I've been executive director here for eighteen months, but I've been working in GLBT non-profits for eighteen years," he says. He's lived in Seattle, Washington, and Orange County, California. He has a degree in accounting, but was "drawn" to the non-profits. His degree, he says, helps from the administrative end of non-profits.

He returns to the center in Amarillo, Texas.

"I think about how much easier it would have been for me if that'd been there when I needed it," he says. "There were so few resources... these centers mean a lot to everyone everywhere, but they make the biggest difference in small cities and towns where the resources are scarcer."

The National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Centers had their first conference the week before I spoke to Terry, and he was tremendously excited about it. "It's great for networking," he says. "Many of us had heard each other's names before but had never met. This conference was able to tie folks together."

There exist over 150 NALGBT Community Centers in the United States. The National Association of LGBT Community Centers, "exists to support and enhance lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community centers, which are engines of community organizing and liberation, and crucial to the health and strength of LGBT communities." The group is one of advocacy, not political lobbying, and exists as a provider of support and resources for the LGBT community – in every community. Even in Amarillo, Texas.



Carmen Machado

Organization: Woodhull Freedom Foundation

Leader: Ricci J. Levy

Title: Executive Director

Ricci Levy is both executive director and founder of the Woodhull Freedom Foundation, and she wants to bring things out into the light.

“The problem,” she says, “is that we share everything. As a society, we share *everything*. We talk about book or cars and movies, and no one thinks anything of it. But we don't share sexuality. I think that's wrong. I want to remove the stigma and bring things out into the light. That's what I want to do.” She looks me straight in the eye. “That's what we do. We bring things into the light.”

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation is the result of a long dream of Ricci's.

“I was very interested in advocacy work, and I wanted a way to move the sexual agenda forward.” She smiles. She's so proud. “ And here we are, in our fifth year.”

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation exists for one purpose – to advance sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. It seems like a broad goal, and it is. Anything surrounding reproductive choice, sexual expression, and comprehensive sexuality education is covered, including GLBT issues.

“We are an advocacy and educational group,” Ricci tells me. “We do lobby. We seek to change sex-negative legislation and craft sex-positive legislation. We advocate adult sexual expression. We fight against censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech. Yeah, we kind of do everything.”

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation also currently supports The Sexual Freedom Network. The SFN is a public service project, a joining of organizations and individuals for whom the idea of “sexual freedom is a fundamental human right” is paramount.

“The purpose of the Sexual Freedom Network is so that all of these disparate issues and organizations can speak with one voice,” Ricci says. “We are millions of voices strong. The minority controls the majority when the majority is silent.”

Another one of her goals is to “challenge the narrative of sexual fear.”

“People say 'alternative lifestyle.' Alternative as compared to what? Lifestyle? As opposed to what? Why is there a stigma?”

And so we return to the beginning. “We need to bring things out into the light.”



Carmen Machado

Organization: National Coalition for LGBT Health

Leader: Rebecca Fox

Title: National Director

Rebecca Fox has been doing this sort of thing since high school.

“I always did that thing – you know, there was one like this in every school – that thing where I'd have sex ed at the lunch table. This,” she laughs, “this is an evolution of that.”

Rebecca has been working in this field for a long while. She served as assistant director to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) for four years, she's taught sexuality education at George Washington University, and worked for the Whitman-Walker Clinic. She is now the director of the National Coalition for LGBT Health. That evolution has landed her here, at this desk, where she sits with her bare feet tucked onto the chair. She doesn't have much time to talk. The calendar behind her betrays the frenetic nature of her schedule. Every time the conversation lapses, she turns to check her computer. But she tells me everything I need to know.

The National Coalition for LGBT Health seeks to address the severe health disparities that are experienced by LGBT people. Rebecca describes GLBT health as an extremely “under-recognized field.”

The Coalition has five stated goals: To increase knowledge regarding LGBT populations' health status, access to and utilization of health care, and other health-related information; to increase LGBT participation in the formation of public and private sector policy regarding health and related issues; to increase availability of, access to, and quality of physical, mental, and behavioral health and related services for the LGBT population; to increase professional and cultural competencies of providers and others engaged in health and social service delivery to the LGBT population; and to eliminate disparities in health outcomes of LGBT populations and the community including differences that occur by gender, race/ethnicity, education or income, disability, nationality, geographic location, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or presentation.

“We work with government agencies,” Rebecca says. “We work on a policy level, we work with congress to get funding, we fight for advocacy and education. Right now, one of our focuses is HIV/AIDS among gay and bisexual African American men.” She describes a fight to earn money to get a single question added to a national survey. The question is about sexual orientation, and the importance of adding the question is quite high. And so the fight continues.

Luckily for the LGBT community, the evolution – and the fight - has brought her here, in this

time of tremendous need in the area of LGBT health.



Carmen Machado

Organization: National Stonewall Democrats

Leader: Jon Hoadley

Title: Executive Director

Growing up in South Dakota, it was harder to Jon Hoadley to come out as a Democrat than to come out as gay. Now, as executive director of the National Stonewall Democrats, he can be both – and work actively on both GLBT issues and with the state of the Democratic party.

The mission of the National Stonewall Democrats is simple: to improve the Democratic party. They work to elect fair-minded Democrats, and improve the party and its platforms as a whole. “We can write our values into a platform,” Jon says. “We will not apologize for non-sympathetic Democrats. We refuse to accept that as the end.”

2008 is the ten year anniversary of the organization, and it's been an exhausting ten years. The National Stonewall Democrats work actively to shape and change policy. They've fought to keep gender identity in ENDA, worked on the “Stop Santorum” campaign in 2006, spearheaded get out the vote campaigns, and endless ballot issues during election time. “We've surprised everyone with the battles we've won,” Jon laughs.

“I've always believed in fundamental fairness,” he continues, suggesting that this is why he's currently active in this movement. “The Democratic Party thinks that it's better, but it's not. We need to make better Democrats. It's not good enough to just have the Democrats be the 'lesser evil.' GLBTs need a political home, and it should be the Democratic party.”

What's in the future for the National Stonewall Democrats? “We need to harness the power of grassroots more. We want to close the lobbying loop. We want to endorse local candidates, staff phone banks, and run candidates for office. We're also working on developing a younger membership. The sooner we get younger voices into the electoral mix, the sooner we'll see change.”

“National Stonewall Democrats is at an interesting crossroads,” Jon concludes. “It takes a place like National Stonewall Democrats to harness grassroots energy to win campaigns. Having a partisan organization paying attention to the party workings – that's what's important. I'm really excited to see where we go next.”



Carmen Machado

Organization: PFLAG

Leader: Jean-Marie Navetta

Title: Director of Equality Partnerships

Jean-Marie Navetta wants people to laugh and squirm.

The former director of communication for PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) has just started her new position as Director of Equality Partnerships. She is spearheading a new campaign called “Straight for Equality.” The idea of this new program is to bring in “straight allies from outside of the family.” And the campaign's very direct take on bravery against homophobia by the straight community is enough to make any person laugh *and* squirm.

Jean-Marie is getting married in the spring. She tells me that her future sister-in-law has only felt comfortable in the last year putting up a picture of Jean-Marie and her partner in her workspace. Not from a sense of shame; rather, she wasn't sure how it would be perceived by her co-workers.

Since she's done so, however, she says, everything has changed. Co-workers approach her and talk about GLBT issues. They discuss their GLBT family members. It's become a “whole new world.”

Straight For Equality has a three part mission – one of support, education, and advocacy. It is not a political organization, and does not work with legislation. Rather, it seeks to make the world more LGBT friendly through other means.

Jean-Marie first learned about PFLAG in 1992, when she saw them at a gay pride parade in Portland, and long before she was out of the closet. Before PFLAG, she worked for the American Association of University Women. Later, she was a chapter volunteer for the Metro DC PFLAG.

When Jean-Marie came out to her parents, she recalls how she wrote a long, complicated email, full of explanation and information about her sexuality. “My father,” she says, bemused, “wrote back a one line email. It said 'unconditional is unconditional. I love you.' My parents could not be more supportive.” She laughs. “Heck, my mom is an ex-nun. She feels strongly about this cause, and she doesn't take nonsense from *anyone*.”

“But people just love PFLAG,” she continues. “I don't mean to be cheesy, but it really is a dream come true. This job, it's... it's everything that I've always wanted. I'm so proud of my members.”

“I want young GLBTs to see PFLAG as not just a place for parents. Younger people should be involved. Younger people are the key. They're our strength.”



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FOR
equality

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influence Americans' willingness to
speak up on behalf of gay people?

They do...but not
the way you might expect

18% Cite religious or moral beliefs
as the reason they do
speak up for gay people

20% Cite religious or moral beliefs
as the reason they
speak up for

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Carmen Machado

Organization: Out For Work

Leader: Riley B. Folds

Title: Executive Director

When Riley Folds was out of college, he read “Lavender Road To Success.” The book, written by Kirk Snyder, outlined ways in which gays could be successful in their careers. It talked about being open in the workplace. And Riley wished that he's had that resource when he'd graduated.

And then he did something about it.

Now, as executive direction of Out For Work, the only national program in the United States that aims to educate, prepare, and empower GLBTs in the workplace, Riley sees the organization as a “personal reconciliation.”

“I wasn't out in the workplace when I first read the book,” he said. After founding Out For Work, he says, “I grew more comfortable. And as I grew more comfortable with who I was, the organization grew.”

Being a young non-profit can be tricky. “It's always hard for the new kid on the block to get respect, but we've gained a lot of recognition,” says Riley. The group has had many celebrity speakers, and the program has gained respect “quite quickly.”

In regards to ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act that passed the House of Representatives on November 7th, Riley says that his organization's role changes “slightly” in light of the act (which is a proposed federal law that prohibits discrimination against employees on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity), but their overall goals remain the same.

“Discrimination still happens,” he says. “Even if it's not legal.”

Out For Work has had three successful conferences (the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally Student

Career Conference & PRIDE Career Fair), which have connected students from all walks of life. One Brazilian student attending the conference saw Donna Rose, a well-known transgender advocate, speak. She later said “As a questioning transgender person, it was wonderful to meet someone who could show me that being transgender in the workplace is okay.”

“Never did I think that I'd be working as an advocate in the LGBT community,” says Riley. “But as long as I can start new programs within Out For Work, I'll be happy. It takes a lot of time and effort to start an organization; and there can always be more money for the little guy.”



Carmen Machado

Organization: SMYAL

Leader: Tasha Hill

Title: Executive Director

When Tasha Hill was going for her master's degree in education, it didn't take long for her to figure out that this was where she wanted to be.

“Everything I did kept coming back to working with GLBT youth,” she says. “So that's why I'm here today.”

Since becoming executive director of SMYAL this past April, Tasha “hopes” that she's affected the organization in a very positive way.

“But I've done this before,” she says. “When you have experience in a certain area, there's less of a learning curve. But DC...” here she laughs, coughs slightly, and continues, “DC is a very complicated city sometimes.”

“It's challenging to keep up with the other organizations here.”

The function of SMYAL is to serve local GLBT youth in the Metro DC area. They provide support, education, and advocacy, and have already trained over one thousand youth workers. They've had youth speak out against hate crimes at town hall meetings.

“We are the only DC Metro organization dedicated to GLBT youth, and that makes us unique,” she says. The organization, however, does work with other less specific youth-based organizations, such as Covenant House.

The great need for SMYAL in the DC area is because, Tasha explains, the city unfortunately provides a somewhat dangerous mix of GLBT youth, poverty, racism, and homo-/transphobia. “There's a lot of violence at the intersection of those different oppressions,” Tasha says. “But we're working to fight that violence and give GLBT youth a place to go.”



Carmen Machado

Organization: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Ally Resource Center

Leader: Sara Bendoraitis

Title: Director

Sarah Bendoraitis knew fairly early on that Texas was not the place for her.

She worked at Texas A&M for four and a half years as a program coordinator for the ambiguously titled “Women and Gender Equality” program (unable to give it a more LGBT-centric name). Before that, she was doing “this kind of work” in undergrad. But Texas was not the place for her.

Now the director of American University's GLBTA Resource Center, she is able to provide education, resources, and support to the university's GLBT community, as well as their allies.

The resource center has an interesting history. It only came to this famously politically liberal university campus in 1994 as a strictly volunteer-run office. In 1996, the first staff member was hired, part-time. In 2000, the first full-time staff member was hired.

As for Sara, she's always felt strongly about social justice.

“I was always really involved with feminist organizations. When I found out that you could do this sort of work on campuses... it just made sense. I've always felt strongly about gender issues education. This isn't much different.”

The GLBTA Resource Center provides American University students with several services. They sponsor the GLBT Colloquium, giving programs and speakers to the school, the Rainbow Speakers, and the Safe Space sticker program. They provide peer education and support.

They also have a somewhat behind-the-scenes approach to working on and shaping campus policy. Currently, they are working on insurance for transgendered faculty and staff (and hopefully soon, she says, students), and the right for transgendered students to declare their names and gender as they want on all of their official transcripts, dorm applications, and other university paperwork. Gender neutral bathrooms are another issue where the GLBTA Resource Center is working hard for students.

“Transgender issues are kind of our big issue right now,” Sarah says. “We want to make sure that life on campus is good for everyone, including transgender students, faculty, and staff.”

