



THE OFFICIAL

RAINBOW
A L L I A N C E
ZINE



The Rainbow Alliance was established in 2004 with the mission to provide education, support, and advocacy to LGBTQ+ individuals and families in the Wyoming Valley. We work to promote a sense of community, establish and publicize resources, facilitate communication and collaboration, create safe and inclusive spaces, and support equality whenever possible.

We envision a future where all people can live openly and free from fear; where individuals, organizations, and businesses work collaboratively to build an equal, inclusive community, and where we celebrate and nurture our diversity. To work towards this future, we proudly organize the annual NEPA PrideFest celebration in solidarity with the many nationwide Pride festivals, marches, and parades honoring the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Just this past year, we partnered with Jacob Kelley Queer Education to create resource pages on Coming Out and Allyship as featured on our website. We also relaunched our Trans Social Discussion Group, to provide a safe and nurturing place for transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people to meet, learn, socialize, support each other, and take pride in their lives. You can learn more by visiting us at neparainbowalliance.org.

Hey there! about the editors.



Hello! I am **Trish Dickert-Nieves**. I am a Rainbow Alliance Board Member and Chair of the Community Relations Committee. My pronouns are she/her. I am passionate about capturing stories from our local LGBTQ+ community. I want to know what past generations lived experiences were like and see how we've grown as a community and where we still have work to do. I grew up in the 90's in NY and my exposure to queer culture was the NYC club kids. I knew I was Queer since I was 15 years old. I believe that telling queer stories leads to visibility and visibility leads to acceptance and ultimately leads to community.

Hello, I'm **Devin Bloom-Borys**, I'm 16 and I use they/them pronouns. My passions and hobbies in life include poetry, music, and philosophy. Being nonbinary and a member of the LGBTQ+ community myself, this project holds special meaning and esteem. My partner and the vast majority of my friends are also queer. It has given me an entirely unique perspective on life and our culture as a whole. For me, this project is about staying true to myself, and honoring the founding members of our community who have helped make that truth a possibility.

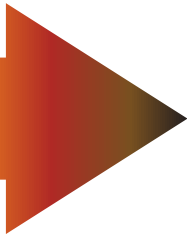


My name is **Samuel Jacob O'Connell** and I am a proud Rainbow Alliance Board Member, and the co-chair of our Marketing Committee. When Trish first told me about the zine and I was immediately "in". By day I work at Coal Creative as the Creative Director where I get to cultivate my passion for storytelling. This is the first of what I hope to be many Zines so I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this as much as we enjoyed creating it.

The three of us collaborated to make this Zine!

FORWARD

by *Jess Meoni*



The LGBTQ+ community has always been an integral part of zine creation and culture. At their height of dominance during an era of movements for civil rights, feminism, and sexual revolution, underground newspapers took on a life of communication, documentation, and **elevated voices for LGBTQ+ youth.** These publications, whether made with or without expertise in writing, design, and distribution created an important means of networking for marginalized groups, both in accepting identity and empowering others around them. **As marginalized folks continue to break ground and fight for equal rights, creating a zine further cultivates the power of voice and imbues a sense of the same DIY ethics that inspired so many in the past.**

An excerpt from **The Graphic Design techniques and Cultural History of Radical Publications** by **Jess Meoni**

"While some historians trace the radical press back to the colonial days of Thomas Paine's Enlightenment leaflet, *Common Sense*, others look to earlier prints such as Martin Luther's disputation piece, *The Ninety-Five Theses*. Both of these documents served as prominent, controversial beneficiaries of Gutenberg's printing press. Later, during the Dada and Surrealism movements of the early 1900s, avant-garde mail-art such as weeklies, monthlies, letters, and pamphlets added an additional layer of letterpress exploration through collage and *découpage*. These ephemera championed the motives of students in the 1930s, who sought to craft self-published opinion pieces on the newly integrated Platen printing press model and typewriters.

The radical press described these groups, encompassing those who printed countercultural literature and art that challenged social norms. Chronicling underground school newspapers, science fiction fan clubs, Amateur Press Associations, labor unions, punk rockers, and more, the capability to self-publish played a major role in the promotion and historical conservation of many diverse groups, subcultures, and social movements. The key element linking all these free-thinking individuals together was the ability to print. Letterpress printing, and the renditions of printing techniques that followed, allowed for voices to be heard and ideas to be seen."

Maria Montoro Edwards

It was in 1985 Maria was a student at Marywood college, her cousin was working in a hair salon in downtown Scranton. Maria got a job working there at the front desk. She's the oldest of eight kids, grew up in a home that was Catholic and going to work in the salon for her was an "eye-opener." She said she's never been exposed to same-sex relationships up until that point.



It was also the beginning of the HIV epidemic. She knew about HIV, how could she not, it was a national conversation at the time. But she began to see how this was affecting people's lives. People she knew. The owner of the salon was a gay man who had clients who were openly gay as well. She began to see that there were "hushings of 'so and so is sick, this one is sick, he's not doing well.'" As she understood it at the time, a lot of people that are from our area who were now living in New York City and other big cities after their diagnosis came home to be closer to family. There was a quiet epidemic going on here in NEPA but there were no services available.

So the owner of the salon decided to host a fundraiser for HIV/AIDS support. He called it the North East AIDS Council and he partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Health. He hosted a "Senior Prom" at the salon and raised around \$3,000. It was a really grassroots effort by one person who genuinely cared for the people he wanted to help.

Maria was asked to make a few phone calls to find out who would be willing to help and care for someone with HIV/AIDS. She had a lot of people hang up on her but she was also amazed at how many people said "yes, I'll help." From dentists to doctors to funeral homes, little did she know at the time, but Maria was creating a vital community resource list. They began referring those affected by the disease to these resources that Maria had collected.

Maria explains the salon owner would tell her, "There's a guy coming in who needs help with his rent, take money from the fundraiser lockbox, put it in an envelope, and give him what he needs." She says, "it was that simple." After some time, she began to notice that there were folks who she hadn't seen in a while, they just stopped showing up. People she worked with began getting sick. A lot of loss and a lot of funerals.

The community began to have a sense of hysteria and paranoia around HIV. People were afraid to use public restrooms and would even bring their own salon tools for their manicures. The United Way was hosting a training about HIV/AIDS and the salon owner told Maria that she could attend and he would pay her for the day's work. At this training it was very basic, what is HIV kind of information. She stated they were even clarifying that you could not contract it from the public toilet or that it is not transferred from mosquito bites. The fear was real. It was at this conference that Maria began to network with other area agencies regarding resources that were available in the community.

Maria left the salon around 1989-1990.

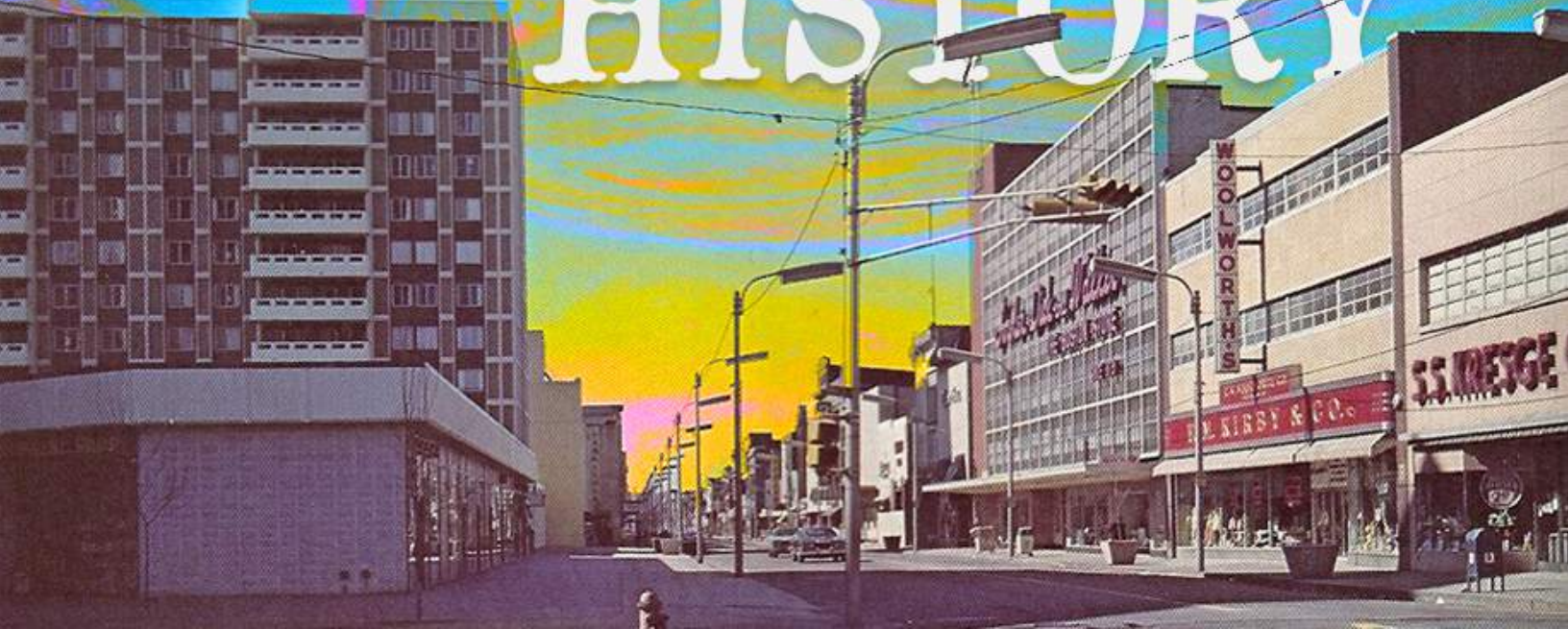
Nowadays Maria is the CEO of Maternal and Family Health Services Inc. and she states that there is a false sense of security around HIV. It's now seen as a chronic illness with the prevalence of preventative medication.

She says that we're also now seeing folks in their late 60's who have been on HIV meds since the late 90's and we're just learning about their healthcare needs. At MFHS she is spearheading more inclusive language for the WIC program and trying to bridge the gender-affirming gap in healthcare and family planning. On reflection, Maria states that her experience at the salon has given her the lifelong wanting to continue to support the LGBTQ+ community.



Original illustration by Lukas Tomasacci

NEPA QUEER HISTORY



History, our individual and collective stories, is important for so many reasons. Our stories create our identities and our communities. They help us understand our place in the world and create culture. It has been said that understanding the linkages between past and present is basic for a good understanding of the condition of being human. That, in a nutshell, is why History matters. It is not just 'useful', it is essential. That's why we are proud to announce a research initiative to uncover our local LGBT history.

We seek to gather individual stories and community stories to share and disseminate throughout the LGBT community and the larger community. Our purpose is twofold: to reflect on our struggles and success, and create community identity and pride.

Examples of research projects include identifying and understanding the changing nature of queer places such as local gay bars in the 1950s and how public places were used to meet others. Identify the contributions of closeted community leaders from the 1920s forward. Celebrate the work of early organizations such as REACH, Wyoming Valley AIDS Council, Caring Communities, Statewide Pennsylvania Rights Coalition (SPARC), PFLAG-NEPA and the Rainbow Alliance. Understand the struggle and success of political activism related to non-discrimination ordinances, marriage equality and diversity, equity, and inclusion within academic and corporate institutions. Recognizing community firsts such as elected officials, trans people in business, youth issues and religious outreach to the LGBT community. These are just a few of the many topics to cover and we welcome and invite board participation.

**If local Queer history interests you, please let us know. Thank you.
Anne Wolfe (570-881-1108) | Tony Brooks (570-793-3631)**

Paul Strunk

The Boy Scouts of America have a very long history. They were founded in 1910 and it wasn't until January of 2014 that openly gay boys were allowed to join and not until 2015 that they would allow openly gay adults to become leaders.



Paul Strunk has been involved with the Boy Scouts of America for most of his life. He was a cub scout at the age of 8 years old, then at 14 became a camp staff member and eventually a camp director. He even worked for the organization for 3 years. He believes that the Boy Scouts of America are an incredible program that helps kids be more independent and offers more opportunities.

Paul is now 61 years old and has only been publicly out as a gay man for the last 14 years of his life. He says that he came out very late in life. Shortly after Paul's college graduation in the early 80s, our nation was faced with the AIDS epidemic. Staying in the closet for Paul was the "path of least resistance." There was a strong stigma around HIV and AIDS and this stigma was towards gay men in particular. Paul mentioned how much respect and thanks he has for people who have been out throughout their lives and led the way for others, like himself.

It wasn't until the mid-90s that Paul's mind began to change. It was because he saw society changing and the narrative began to shift. He remembers Ellen DeGeneres coming out on national television. "It was as if it was now ok to be gay." He also recalls a NY Times article which stated that the HIV and AIDS epidemic, while awful, had an eye-opening effect as it forced society to recognize that gay men and women exist everywhere, as many people unexpectedly had friends and loved ones that were affected. The article stated, "An unintended but not inconsequential side effect of the AIDS crisis has been a greater acceptance of gay people." Lastly, Paul recalls a 90's era Levi's jeans ad that was supportive of gay people and Levi's also pulled their funding for the Boy Scouts of America. Here you have a major national brand that focuses on hyper-masculinity showing their support for the gay community through their advertising and brand financing.

In the late 2000s, Paul wrote his Master's thesis on the Boy Scouts of America and the ability they had to discriminate against gay men and boys. In the year 2000, there was a landmark Supreme Court Case, the Boy Scouts of America v Dale that landed in a 5-4 decision that the Boy Scouts had the constitutional right to exclude homosexual people from membership. It was 14 years later that the Boy Scouts of America changed this policy. It was an additional 3 years after that decision in 2017-2018 that the Boy Scouts of America updated its policies to allow girls and transgender youth to join the Scouts.



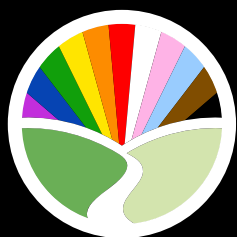
AFTERWORD

by Anthony Mell

As we wrap up our first zine and reflect on these local stories from the 80s and 90s, we challenge you to think about the work we still need to do. In 2021, there is no state law in PA or federal law specifically prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in public accommodations, such as at a salon. LGBTQ+ people can still be unfairly evicted, denied housing, or refused the ability to rent or buy housing. Such discrimination seals the closet door forcing queer individuals to take the path of least resistance to ensure their own survival and basic needs. Laws such as the PA Fairness Act would cover these gaps in protection for LGBTQ+ people in Pennsylvania and the Equality Act would do so across the nation.

This past year, we've also seen an unprecedented number of anti-transgender legislation across the country, specifically targeting and harming transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender non-binary youth. These dangerous tactics only fuel hate and ignorance towards trans folks, further marginalizing queer youth, creating unsafe spaces in our schools, and unnecessarily infringing on their healthcare needs which should be private decisions between the youth, their legal guardian, and healthcare provider.

Remember, you are living history. Each day we write a new chapter and decide what our role will be. Will you be Maria and make the phone calls to build our community resource list? Will you be Paul and step into your truth and be an advocate for change within an organization you love? What role will you play in the fight for equality? The AIDS Memorial Instagram account often uses the hashtag #whatisrememberedlives (What is Remembered Lives). Early pioneers like Barbara Gittings, Bayard Rustin, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Harvey Milk, and Larry Kramer cleared a path for us. Take the next steps. Walk with giants. Walk with those who need a hand. No one has to walk alone.



RAINBOW ALLIANCE

www.NEPARainbowAlliance.org

