

50+ Years of Pride *continued from front page*

by German immigrant Henry Gerber. They published several editions of their newsletters, "Friendship and Freedom" but police raids forced them to disband in 1925. The first lesbian rights organization, The Daughters of Bilitis was formed in San Francisco in 1955.

In the 1960s one of the only safe places were gay bars and clubs where people could openly be themselves and socialize. But in New York the State Liquor Authority often shut down or penalized gay establishments under the premise that any gathering of homosexuals was "disorderly." In 1966 members of another gay rights organization, The Mattachine Society, staged a series of "sip-ins," publicly declaring their sexuality while drinking in bars, forcing staff to choose to refuse them service, and then suing any of the establishments who did. That led to a declaration by the Commission on Human Rights who ruled that gays had the right to be served in bars. But engaging in "gay behavior" (holding hands, kissing, or dancing with someone of the same sex) in public was still illegal, so police harassment continued.

In June 1969 that police harassment led to the Stonewall Riots and initiated more visible gay rights activism. On June 28, 1970, on the one-year anniversary of Stonewall, thousands of people marched in Manhattan from the Stonewall Inn to Central Park, in what is now considered the first Gay Pride Parade, to "demonstrate against centuries of abuse... from government hostility to employment and housing discrimination... and anti-Homosexual laws."

When I graduated from high school in 1981, there was not one single openly LGBTQ+ person in my class of about 500 students because it just wasn't safe or OK to be gay. According to today's statistics, as a baby boomer there were probably 10-15 people in that class who were in the closet. But times have changed and today there is less stigma, less bigotry about an individual's sexual orientation, and people feel safer and are more comfortable being themselves – so more are being counted.

A recent Gallup poll, released in February 2022 found that the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as something other than heterosexual has doubled over the last 10 years, from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 7.1 percent. That increase is due to the large number of Generation Z adults, 21 percent, who are aged 18 to 25, self-identifying as LGBTQ+. The poll found that younger adults are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+, with Millennials (age 26 to 41) at 10.5 percent, and Generation X (42 to 57) at 4.2 percent. Less than 3 percent of Baby Boomers (58 to 76) identify as LGBTQ+, and just 0.8 percent of Traditionalists, who are 77 and older.

LGBTQ+ pride is often represented by the rainbow flag. It was first used by artist Gilbert Baker, an openly gay man and

drag queen, who said he was urged by Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the U.S., to create a symbol of gay pride. Baker explained his choice of the rainbow flag in an interview. "Our job as gay people was to come out, to be visible, to live in the truth, as I say, to get out of the lie. A flag really fit that mission, because that's a way of proclaiming your visibility or saying, 'This is who I am!'" Baker saw the rainbow as a natural flag from the sky, so he originally adopted eight colors for the stripes, which was later reduced to six: Red=Life, Orange=Healing, Yellow=Sunlight, Green=Nature, Indigo=Serenity, Violet=Spirit.

The flag was first flown on June 25, 1978 in the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. Today that flag has been expanded to incorporate more of the LGBTQ+ community who have been marginalized, including people of color, transpeople, those living with HIV/AIDS, and intersex people.

While Pride celebrations are now often seen as just that, celebrations, it's important to remember they are intended to be political events, that recognize the protests, activism, and advocacy that has led to the changes in unjust systems, unfair treatment, and legal reforms. Pride events have been used to register voters, demand action on HIV, and pressure politicians to publicly express support for gay causes.

Pride Month is all about opportunities. It helps raise awareness that, not only do LGBTQ+ people exist, but they are part of our families, they are our friends, they are our co-workers, and they are in our communities. Pride events and activities help reduce the stigma so many LGBTQ+ people have experienced in their lives. It helps promote self-awareness for closeted individuals, and normalizes the idea that LGBTQ+ people are everywhere in our society. It motivates each of us to acknowledge our biases and behaviors, allows us another opportunity to educate ourselves, and to be supportive in encouraging everyone to be themselves without recriminations. It provides freedom for gay families and individuals to be visible and openly participate in activities as part of a community who embraces who they are. It's a chance to consider, discuss, and welcome diversity in our communities, and learn about all our differences and commonalities.

And yet, even in 2022, with all the progress that has been made with gay rights – progressive laws, representations in media, elected leaders – LGBTQ+ people continue to come under attack, especially the transgender community, while LGBTQ+ youth continue to face higher health and suicide risks.

A 2020 Student Health Survey (SHS) of 6th, 8th, and 11th graders, conducted by the Oregon Health Authority and the Or-

egon Department of Education, found youth identifying as LGBTQ+ are much more likely to report mental health concerns compared with their peers.

- Among 8th graders, 38% of lesbian, gay and bisexual youths contemplated suicide in the past year, compared with 7% of heterosexual youth.
- Among 11th graders, 44% of transgender or gender diverse youth contemplated suicide compared with 18% of females and 10% of males.
- Among 8th graders, 40% of lesbian/gay youth experienced anxiety almost every day, compared with 8% of straight peers.

And so, recognizing and celebrating Pride Month remains an important reminder that the fight to overcome prejudice, discrimination, and hate is not over. It continues to be a chance to honor the progress that already been made by the brave people who came before. It recognizes the contributions that LGBTQ+ individuals bring to our communities. And it's an opportunity to commit to creating a society that promotes equality and justice for every one of our citizens.



The Vernonia Library is hosting a display featuring LGBTQ+ authors and stories during Pride Month.

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