

## Winter 2014 Volume 3, Issue 3

### Upcoming Events:

Student SafeZone Training  
February 1, 2-5pm  
Exhibition Lounge

Sandwich Seminar for Black  
History Month  
February 13, noon  
Jacobus Lounge

Staff SafeZone Training  
February 26, 3-6pm  
Fireplace Lounge

SafeZone Train the Trainer  
March 1, 2-5pm  
Corey Union 209

Ally Development Workshop:  
Let's Talk About Race  
March 5, 3-5pm  
Exhibition Lounge

Ally Development Workshop:  
Let's Talk About Faith  
March 26, 3-5pm  
Exhibition Lounge

Pride Ceremony  
March 28  
Exhibition Lounge

Kente Celebration  
April 5, 2014  
Corey Union Function Room

Student Diversity Conference  
April 12  
Corey Union

For more information on  
these and other events visit  
our [events and initiatives  
page](#).

For more information  
contact MLDO at  
**607-753-2336** or  
[multicultural.life@cortland.edu](mailto:multicultural.life@cortland.edu)

### Multicultural Life & Diversity welcomes our new Assistant Director!

Tamara Taylor has been named the Assistant Director for Multicultural Life & Diversity!

Tamara is a graduate of Central Michigan University where she received a B.S. in Psychology and a M.A. in Interpersonal and Public Communication. She has taught communication courses at Saginaw Correctional Facility, Central Michigan University, Mid Michigan Community College, and Delta College. She comes to us most recently from Saint Mary's College in Indiana where she served as the Assistant Director for Student Involvement and Multicultural Services. Tamara is originally from Detroit, speaks French, enjoys crocheting, practicing photography, cooking, has a deep love for ice cream, and has a 14-year-old daughter. She is excited to join the MLDO team and meet members of the SUNY Cortland community. Please be sure to welcome Tamara to our campus!

### Our Graduate Intern Says Goodbye

I would like to thank Noelle for allowing me to come and intern in the MLDO this semester. I have had a great experience and have learned some valuable lessons that I will carry with me into any future positions in student affairs. I would also like to thank the Cortland community, especially those members who work on the fourth floor of Corey Union and in Residence Life & Housing, for making my return to Cortland so warm and welcoming. As some of you may know, I worked here for three and a half years as Residence Hall Director. Coming back has reminded me of some of the things that I really loved about Cortland, particularly the students. I was very happy to see some of the changes that have occurred since I left, like an increase in the number of students of color and the inclusion of a SafeZone program. I hope that Cortland continues along this positive path in the years to come and only grows more inclusive and welcoming of all students. - Heidi Morton

### Gender Inclusive Housing, Coming Fall 2014!

In the fall of 2014, Residence Life and Housing will be implementing new special interest housing that will allow for gender inclusivity on campus! Gender Inclusive Housing is a pilot program designed for all students to have the opportunity to live with whomever they choose regardless of gender, gender identity, or gender expression. Students will be able to sign up for the Gender Inclusive Housing option during the spring 2014 Room Selection Process (RSP) and live in a suite style setting without any additional fees. The ultimate goal for Gender Inclusive Housing is to provide students with a safe and supportive living environment where they have the option to live with any student of their choosing. For any additional information please feel free to contact the Residence Life and Housing office.

### Multicultural Alumni Reunion

Please note that due to limited registrations Alumni Affairs decided it was best to postpone the Multicultural Reunion event that was scheduled for October 18-19 2013. We are interested in hearing what alumni are interested in and ask that you continue to share your videos and help the committee develop the program. Kindly contact the Alumni Affairs Office at [alumni@cortland.edu](mailto:alumni@cortland.edu) or 607-753-2516 with any questions and suggestions.

**a•ware•ness**

[uh-wair-nis]

noun

the state or condition of being aware; having knowledge; consciousness

Throughout the year there are many ways to be involved and committed to making sure Cortland is an inclusive place. A great place to start is with awareness.

It begins with you!



importance of father's and positive male role models.

International Men's Day focuses on improving gender relations and highlighting the importance of bringing up good male role models from all backgrounds and ages. It looks at addressing problems like parenting, families and good health choices.

The theme for International Men's Day 2013 was 'Keeping Men and Boys Safe'. The day will focus on men's and boy's life expectancy and health as well as highlighting the

**Transgender Day of Remembrance, November 20<sup>th</sup>**

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is an annual observance on November 20 that honors the memory of those whose lives were lost in acts of anti-transgender violence. Additionally, during the week of November 12-20, individuals and organizations around the country participated in Transgender Awareness Week to help raise the visibility of transgender and gender non-conforming people and address the issues these communities face.



**Inaugural Louis Larson Lecture and Performance Series: The Journey to Equality**



On Wednesday, October 16, 2013 a presentation featuring panelists addressing the historical and legal ramifications of marriage took place in Corey Union's Exhibition Lounge.

In their fight for marriage equality, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community seeks access to the same legal rights as others. This includes a right most people take for granted, which is to marry. The program, titled *The Journey to Equality*, represents the inaugural event in the College's Louis Larson Lecture and Performance Series.

The series is sponsored by the campus Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies and a grant from Auxiliary Services Corporation (ASC). Future lectures will include guest speakers, panel talks and performances from professionals in the LGBT community.

**Spectrum CGSA's 3rd Annual Drag Show**

The title for this year's drag show was "The Real Housewives of the Cortland Hill" and was held on Saturday, November 9, in the Corey Union Function Room. The large audience was nice to see. All proceeds went to "Broadway Cares: Equity Fights AIDS".



## SafeZone certified!

More faculty and staff have demonstrated their commitment to making our campus an inclusive community by participating in SafeZone training. We were excited to have President Bitterbaum and Officer Rolfe attend the most recent training! The people listed below are now SafeZone certified.



Will Ahern	Cheryl Hines	Calvin Ruthvan	Jessica Borio
Shedia Christopher	Emily Quinlin	Marie Blanden	Laura Campbell
Jenna Siddon	Heather Daugherty	Lori Schlicht	Lauren Stern
Adrienne Victor	Chauncey Bennett	Nancy Kane	Cathy Smilth
Will Hernandez	Sandra Wohlleber	Chris Kuretich	Leah Calzolaio
Amber Ingalls	Jeanette Dippo	Susan Wilson	Nick Koziol
Rachael Forester	Claus Schubert	Kim Rombach	Sarah Zipp
Melissa Da Costa	Greg Sharer	Karen Gallagher	Judy Ouellette
Julie Jo-Stanton	Glodibal Natera	Darlene Miller	Tom Spanbauer
Laura Luettger	Miguel Espailat	Robert Earle	Devin Coppola
Ashley Ware	Cassandra Klinko	Lori Burns	John Shirley
Courtney Andros	Jaclyn DeBouter	Paula Giroux	Abby Thomas
Amber Wade	Amy Becker-George	Gary Sutton	Tyler Merriam
Ashley Morrell	Ashlee Boughton	Charlotte Pass	Brianna Sullivan
Jean Brown	Jeremy Zhe-Heimerman	Marc Dearstyne	Victoria Rasso
Cindy Lake	Shannon Reardon	Janet Hegedus	Nikki Anthis
Sarah Unruh	Noelle Chaddock Paley	Amy Dalhman	Very Moraza
Michelle Gonzalez	Lewis Rosengarten	Judy Bentley	Lynn Anderson
Ann Cutler	Erik Bitterbaum	Natalie Dopson	Natalie Yulfo
Amanda Carpenter	Lizbeth Antonio	Janet Duncan	Carolyn Bershad
Vicki Johnson	Gina Campese	Janice Eaton	Darleen Lieber
Michelle Kelly	Sally Dear-Healy	Dana Utz	Kara St. John
Chris Xenakis	Adiam Zerisenai	Vicki Wilkins	Priscilla Harvey
Susan Stiner	Stephanie Melendez	David Smukler	Brent Wilson
Adam Harvey	Brianna Fobbs	Tamara Taylor	Louis Bush
Mary Kate Boland	Juan Galan Sabugo	Lisa Allen	Lori Porter
Cheryl Jewell	Anderson B. Young	Ji-Ryun Kim	Wes Weaver
Kate Coffey	Mickey Gibbons	Donna Young	Steve Rolfe
Mary Guido	Cynthia Moriarity	Shavar Evans	
Marinda Souva	Maria Timberlake	Mecke Nagel	

**Vela para los muerto/Candlelight Vigil for the Dead**

On Oct 18, 2013, La Familia Latina went to Syracuse for its annual Velas para los muertos. This event has been a tradition that LFL has had for at least 10 years. This event serves two purposes; the first is to honor ancestors that died when the Europeans invaded this land or what is known as “the Americas”. The other purpose is to cause awareness about the truth of Christopher Columbus. The reason the date was Oct 18 is because that Monday was Christopher Columbus day and we as a group feel that the nation celebrating that day is very culturally insensitive. This event was broken up into two segments, the actual ceremony and the dinner afterwards. The ceremony took place in Syracuse, where there is a Christopher Columbus statue. Arriving on the site we saw a lot of weird things. LFL asked our members and Hillel, our invited guest, to analyze the statue and notice certain things. After 5 minutes the people had told us that the feet of the statue are on top of four indigenous heads facing towards a Catholic Church on E. Onondaga Street. All of these things were very “coincidental;” but, nonetheless, we commenced the ceremony. First, we formed a circle with everybody holding a flag of Latin America and a candle at their feet with tobacco burning in the middle. The burning of tobacco is an ancient tradition of our people that was used to communicate with the divine and our ancestors. I opened the ceremony with a Taino prayer that offered the smoke to the spirits that are all around us. After that we had members come to the circle and offer a piece of their minds towards remembering our ancestors and why there is a celebration of Christopher Columbus. After the celebration we got on the bus and headed towards the restaurant where we ate. There we talked about the event and mingled with each other and formed relationships. One of the best parts of the trip was the bus trip going back because we sang and sang random songs that we virtually did not know the words to, but what stood out most was the feeling of doing so and the spirit that was being emitted out of that bus. The event was to honor our ancestors and it feels that we did by the passion that was placed on this event, the feeling that we gave to those who came and the feeling we received back from them. Also, I would love to thank our advisors Sebastian Purcell for his words and Noelle Paley for the Alegria (sincerity, joy, and happiness: there is no direct translation, so Alegria is a combination of these three) that she gave to us during the trip and the support of Sebastian’s wife, Elyse.



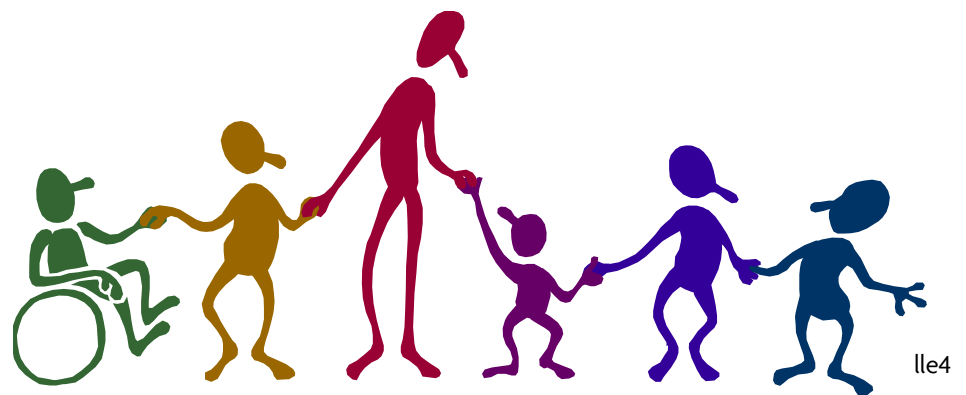
**Hillel: Bar Mitzvah and Hanukkah Party**

On November 5 at 8 pm in the Function room Hillel hosted a Bar Mitzvah for one of the members. Matt was very excited to finally become a Bar Mitzvah and share the experience with his friends. Dancing, eating and schmoozing followed.

On November 19 Hillel held their annual Hanukkah Party in the Caleion Room at 8 pm. Traditional holiday food and treats were served.

**Programming in the Residence Halls—“The Illusion of Inclusion”**

On October 1, the Residence Life & Housing staff in the apartments hosted a program called “The Illusion of Inclusion.” This program focused on different disabilities. There were various tasks and obstacles set up through the Rec Center for students to participate in. Some of the things the residents needed to do include maneuvering a wheelchair, not using certain limbs while preparing and eating food, and not using their sight or words while trying to communicate a message. The discussions at the end of the program were insightful and educational.





## 2013 Unity Celebration Awardees

### Vicki Wilkins, Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department

Vicki Wilkins promotes equity and inclusion with her tireless efforts as co-chair of the LGBTQ Faculty Staff Committee. She includes service learning in her REC 150 Play Across Cultures class informing students about the importance of community building and solidarity. Her work with the learning community initiative is further evidence of her desire for students to experience civic engagement opportunities. Everything Vicki is involved with at SUNY Cortland is geared toward creating a safe welcoming environment for our students and colleagues in the classroom, in her workspace and with her kind and helpful communication style. Vicki Wilkins is indeed a Unity Champion.

### Virginia Levine, President's Office

Dr. Virginia B. Levine, Executive Assistant to the President, is active with her work concerning women's issues and her commitment to improving the campus climate for all people. She has been part of the leadership to better understand our campus climate and convened working groups to address concerns. This work has included chairing the President's Committee on the Status and Education of Women and the Gender Implementation Team. She has contributed to the campus Climate Action plan and Gender Climate Survey report. Dr. Levine is the Title IX Coordinator, overseeing all Title IX reporting for the campus and issues relating to discrimination in education. Her commitment and involvement go well beyond the scope of her role on campus. She serves on the board of the YWCA of Cortland that provides women, children and family services and is one of the strongest diversity organizations in the community. She is involved with state and national organizations that promote advocacy for women including the American Association of University Women and the American Council on Education Central New York Women's Network. Dr. Levine is an active member of these groups, often chairing subcommittees, coordinating events, and authoring reports. Additionally, she works to recognize the efforts of her colleagues and connect women on campus with these networks and leadership opportunities.

### Mary Schlarb, International Programs Office

Mary Schlarb, Director of International Programs, has been an agent for change and collaboration since she arrived. She has focused on diversifying study abroad in both destination and participation. Mary regularly collaborates with the Multicultural Life and Diversity office to afford an array of students the opportunity to experience internationalism on and off campus. Mary values her colleagues for the differences they bring and is ready to help negotiate barriers that difference brings to the international experience. Mary's very mission IS Unity...and she lives it every day.

### Davon Clarke, Student

Davon Clarke is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to creating a campus climate that promotes unity. He is a champion for inclusion and diversity on campus. For three years, he has been involved with Residence Life and Housing, during which time he created many informational displays and programs that explore and embrace culture. As a member of the Black Student Union, Davon has served as the historian and student government representative during his sophomore year and vice president during his junior year. He is a member of Phi kappa Phi and Kappa Delta Pi, two honor societies that honor his dedication to becoming a well prepared, effective urban educator. He has been a tour guide for Admissions and completed Peer Diversity Training. With all of these many activities, Davon maintains a single focus: promoting a vision of the Cortland campus and community as a place where all are welcomed and encouraged to take leadership roles.



### Caribbean Student Association Presents: Music 4 the Cause

On Saturday, Nov 2, at 6PM in the Corey Union Function Room, CSA held Music 4 The Cause. This is a talent show/fashion show with all types of multicultural fashion and performances including a Soca artist from Grenada by the name of MR. LEGS. They sold \$2 raffle tickets for a 39 inch flat screen TV, with all proceeds going to CAPCO.

## 2013 Unity Celebration Nominees



### SGA Works Toward Greater Inclusivity!

The Student Government Association of SUNY Cortland is committed to providing a fun and welcoming environment for all students. We feel a sense of solidarity in that we are all students. Though we may have different cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds; and though we may come from different cities, states, and even countries, we, by acknowledging and understanding our differences, unite to provide a student experience that is inclusive to all. It is no secret that mass inequity exists in the United States; the clubs of the Voice Office have always been an integral part of educating the campus of this. We realize and respect their efforts and that is why we, the e-Board of SGA, decided to collaborate with both the Caribbean Student Association and Women of Color for the school's second annual Halloween Party. SGA hopes that such collaborations will help in creating events that are more inclusive and representative of all SUNY Cortland students.

### Mona Ivey-Soto, Childhood/Early Childhood Education Department

Dr. Mona Ivey-Soto consistently and continuously raises questions about how those in the School of Education and beyond can assure their practices are authentically connected to all learners and to all members of diverse communities. Not only does Dr. Ivey-Soto raise questions, she models with actions, with her deeds, a commitment to mentoring young people, to assisting disenfranchised individuals and families, and to teaching and learning joyfully with those who are wealthy with stories, character, and faith, if not with social or material capital.

### Seth Asumah, Africana Studies & Political Science Departments

I hardly know anybody who is so passionately involved in creating a welcoming campus for all students, and especially underrepresented students. Seth is often the first person who attends to students who confide in him their experiences with racial profiling. He intervenes and stands by their side, making sure they receive the necessary counseling and other services. Seth's dedication to the Ghana project has been exemplary, both in terms of chaperoning but also in pre- departure preparations.

### Brian Barrett, Foundations & Social Advocacy Department

Dr. Barrett's approach to teaching and service at SUNY Cortland are grounded in social justice. His courses in the foundations of education help teacher education students to understand the structural and systemic inequities facing many students. His work as the faculty advisor for Habitat for Humanity and the Cortland Women's Club Hockey team are clear demonstrations of his commitment to students. Dr. Barrett also works to create a welcoming and open community through his advocacy and support of the LGBTQ community on campus

### Julie-Jo Stanton, Residence Life & Housing

Julie-Jo has the ability to make everyone in the room feel like they belong. As an RHD in a large group of other RHD's, Julie-Jo is friendly and accepting of all. She will go out to lunch and reach out to various people. She genuinely believes that everyone should receive respect. Julie-Jo is not afraid to speak-up for how she feels and ensures that everyone around her is being treated equally.

### Will Ahern, Residence Life & Housing

Will is the type of person that will go out of his way to say hello to someone. He is very friendly and outgoing to his co-workers, staff, and residents. Will is constantly making others feel welcome. Will does not judge people and is very cognizant of the way others feel. When Will is in a room with everyone, his positive attitude is very contagious. He consistently strives to be inclusive and unites all people in the Cortland community.

### Susan Rayl, Kinesiology & Africana Studies Departments

Dr. Rayl has always been an advocate for the rights of all students, especially minorities. She never hesitates to voice her concerns and aid students in seeking the appropriate help.



### Did you know?

The best time to deal with a problem is before it happens?

The Multicultural Life and Diversity office offers training and professional development including SafeZone for your department. Let us know what you need and we are happy to work with you to offer professional development.

### **Miguel Espaillat, Student**

As a student leader Miguel has helped the multicultural community understand intersectional identities and the different performances of race, orientation, and citizenship. Miguel works hard to unify the community of color with the LGBTQAI community of color especially at the student level. Miguel is intentional and thoughtful in his diversity, inclusion, equity, and social justice work and is the embodiment of a Unity Champion.

### **Timothy Davis, Physical Education Department**


Dr. Davis has the unique passion and ability to bring groups of varying abilities together to learn from one another. I had the privilege of witnessing this passion in his teaching during a recent Raquette Lake experience for his Inclusive Outdoor Education class. The students in the class met young adults with autism spectrum disorders, and complex learning and developmental disabilities from Wildwood Education Program. Throughout the course of weekend I observed Dr. Davis knit these two very diverse groups together using a variety of activities to bridge differences and become one unified group sharing common ground. I witnessed the students in the class transform their understanding of disabilities into a sensitivity and passion mirrored by Dr. Davis. I feel these values at their core truly exemplify the spirit of unity, celebrating inclusion and diversity on a very personal level creating a place where everyone feels valued, welcomed and empowered to be the best they can be.

### **CK Conway, Student**

CK is currently trying to implement a campus wide campaign using the "Ouch" system. The "Ouch" system can help build the Cortland campus since we might not all be aware of how different words can offend one another, especially those of us who come from different backgrounds and cultures. CK not only is trying to get an inclusive campus wide campaign for our campus community but is also a great spectrum President who is very welcoming. CK is an advocate for the LGBTQ community but also brings awareness to aspects of different diversities. This year CK is trying to reach out and bring more awareness to the Transgender Community. There will be a Transgender Day of Remembrance Speech where CK will speak. This semester already CK has had a program about stereotyping which had a main focus of the Transgender Community. It is important because whether everyone knows it or not there are transgender people here at SUNY Cortland. CK always puts passion into the work of helping all feel welcome, included, and accepted.

### **Brooke Burk, Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department**

Brooke Burk has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. This is evident in her teaching, service and scholarship. Brooke has been at SUNY Cortland since August of 2011. In that short time she has demonstrated a dedication promote social justice, fight inequity and oppression. In her service Brooke is a member of Bringing Theory to Practice team, which has been committed to community service and social justice. Brooke's research demonstrates a strong enthusiasm towards diversity. She has developed presentations for both the state and national level on preventing bullying in recreation. She has been published on such subjects as perceptions of Black girls on their health and body types, social health among rural residents, and determinants of physical activity among Latino visitors to outdoor areas. Additionally, Brooke has submitted a grant to develop a program for individuals with developmental disabilities to train for Tri-Athlon events. Serving a population often times ignored when it comes to issues related to fitness. Brooke Burk deserves the Unity Award for her total commitment marginalized groups within her teaching, service and research.



“We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.”

- Max de Pree

**SUNY Cortland “What is your diversity story?”**

MLDO welcomes articles and pictures that highlight your diversity, equity, inclusion work at SUNY Cortland and around the world!

Submissions for the February 2014 Newsletter are due December 1, 2013. Please email submissions to [multicultural.life@cortland.edu](mailto:multicultural.life@cortland.edu)

**Diversity Stories**

**David Paulino**

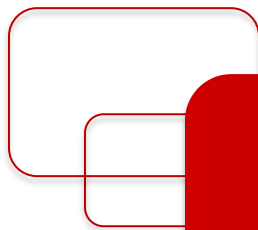
On Thursday, October 31 I went to the 4th annual Men of Color Summit conference in Binghamton with Seth Thompson, who is the director of the Office of Multicultural Services at Tompkins Cortland Community College, and four of his students. Going to the summit, I was not expecting that it would have much of an impact on me but when the conference was over and we were heading back to Cortland, an overwhelming feeling of appreciation and passion began to spark my heart. What I had appreciated was that I was glad that I did not let this opportunity just become one of those fleeting opportunities that I would have regretted, because the speakers that I had interacted with were phenomenal. I had such a connection with Ramon Maisonet, that we actually made plans to meet back at the Bronx for winter break, and what caused this relationship? He asked me the simplest question, “¿Tu eres Latino?” And I replied ¡Claro, yo soy Dominicano! And asked ¿Y usted? And he said “¡Yo soy Boriqua!” After that we quickly just gave each other a hug, which created this relationship just because of the Latino culture. However, imagine if I would have never taken the chance of going to the Men of Color summit, then I would have never met El señor Ramon Maisonet. It was not just only professional but the students’ from TC3 I made wonderful relationships with as well, one of which is an artist and does wood carving. I will pursue and develop this relationship and have him demonstrate his art here in SUNY Cortland so the community can witness this beautiful form of art. Nonetheless, I loved going to the Men of Color Summit and I am anxious to go again next year and hopefully other students from SUNY Cortland can accompany me as well, so that they too can enjoy this magnificent experience.



**Kimberly Huyhua**

Hurry, you're on in five minutes. I stand there nervously, I run my hands down the pollera feeling the colorful beads threaded on. Once the zampoñas and queñas began to play, I stepped onto the stage. Peruvian Folkloric Dancing has played an important role in my life ever since my first performance. I remember it as if it was yesterday when I first put my hair in braids and slipped on the pollera; hearing people cheer and singing along is a fascinating sensation that runs through my body. I can feel their excitement, the passion, and their enjoyment when they see me dance to this music. Hearing the instruments play gives me an incredible strength to dance my heart out and give a good performance. I have always enjoyed watching performances, noticing the dancers' passion for the music. Dancing to this type of music helps me stay connected and teaches me more of my Peruvian culture. After each performance, I take a quick look at myself, and know that I was born to do this.

Peruvian Folkloric Dancing is an important type of dancing in Peru. This beautiful dance represents the Andean culture of Peru. It all started about four years ago when I went to a performing arts show, I was completely astonished by the way the musicians played their instruments with such passion, along with the performers who showed their passion for Peru through the dance. Ever since then, my love for Peruvian Folkloric music began to grow. I was completely fascinated by the dancers and musicians. My love for Peru grew every time I saw the different types of dances. That was when I decided to actually participate in a dance. My mother's friend is part of a Peruvian Folkloric Musical group; they sing to Andean music and perform all types of dances from Peru. I enjoy dancing to folkloric music because it helps me stay connected to my culture. I realized that I do not necessarily have to go to Peru to learn about their culture because I can simply learn about it throughout the dances. What I absolutely find fascinating about Peruvian Folkloric Dancing is that there isn't just one type of dance, but that there are many types of dances. For example, there are dances from the Northern, Coast, Amazon, and Southern part of Peru; such as, Valiche, Huaylas, La Marinera, Festejo, Bailes de las Tijeras and Negroide. My favorite of all is Huaylas because the clothing used is incredibly wonderful. There are many layers that have to be worn, but that is how it is used in Peru. The clothing captures the audiences' attention. Anyone can learn about the Peruvian culture just by watching the dances because the dances have so much to say. I never imagined myself dancing to these types of dances, because I thought I wasn't going to perform it properly, but after practicing a lot, I was able to get to learn the steps quick. By participating in these dances I was able to meet many people who are interested in folkloric music, not just Peruvian folkloric music, but folkloric music from different countries such as Bolivia and Ecuador. I encourage people to give Peruvian Folkloric Dancing a try because it is without a doubt a beautiful and fun dance to learn. I was very lucky to perform in front of small and big audiences, I am sure anyone will enjoy it as much as I do.



*...it begins with you...*

# Diversity Rocks!

## Magda Janczak

Gender conformity and heteronormativity are everywhere and you probably do not think twice about it. Everywhere you look you see people dressed and behaving according to their gender along with an assumption of heterosexuality.

I am a female that is gender non-conforming and I identify as a lesbian. I am very comfortable and confident with myself, but I am always aware of how I am perceived by others.

You can imagine my excitement when I found out there was a camp for queer women. Several days spent on a mountain in California with gender- bending, identity- contorting, free spirited women all of whom condone sexual, gender- expressional, and social diversity. It is not every day I get to be in such a welcoming, queer friendly environment and I was adrenalized with the thought!

A-Camp was amazing. The second I spotted the group at LAX I knew the camp was going to be a riot. These women definitely stood out from the rest with their bowties, asymmetrical haircuts, and assertive demeanor. There were so many interesting people from all around the world that I was able to meet that I would not have otherwise. The workshops, sessions, and panels that were held throughout the days were full of thought provoking discussions, as well as useful information. Some of the sessions I attended were DIYke Jewelry- basic do it yourself hardware jewelry, Yes Ve Gan- a discussion on veganism, and Rage Against The Machine- a tool on navigating professional and social sexist spaces.

The nighttime brought around performances such as comedian Deanne Smith, musician Somer Bingham, and personality Hannah Hart. The great part about this was that we all had the privilege of being directly entertained by these lesbian celebrities and then were able to converse with them over breakfast about totally normal topics. That is how cool everybody was.

Special programs that took place during this A-Camp were the carnival and Prom. Events that took place during the carnival were shirt stenciling, live performances from campers, a fashion show, a puppet show, various carnival games, and a Hannah Hart kissing booth. (If you do not know who Hannah Hart is, check out her show on YouTube- My Drunk Kitchen.) Prom was fantastic as well. It was so wonderful to see everybody so dressed up. Even though these were all queer women, their presentation and expression were all respectfully beautiful. There were women in skinny ties and blazers, and there were women in skirts and blouses. Then there were also those who chose to wear their jeans, combat boots, and leather jackets and look just as dapper. It was very hard saying goodbye to everybody and leaving that queer positive space, but it was time to face reality and go back to the 'real world'. That camp environment was so very unlike the real world. It was like something you can only dream of; an environment so open to everything and non- judgmental towards anything. It really stood true to the camp's motto which was "You Do You." You be whoever you are because you are unique and respected. Everyone should take part in such an extraordinary experience.

## Jen Cutsogeorg

Teachers have the power to impact a child for a lifetime. Vice Principal Johnson was one of these teachers, and she changed my life forever. Vice Principal Johnson was charged with enforcing the rules and keeping the peace during my time in sixth through eighth grade at Largo Middle School in the early 1980s. I had never seen anyone quite like her in the suburbs of the west coast of Florida, but I found her amazing. She was the only person I had ever seen wearing such brightly colored long, flowing skirts with beaded jewelry and an afro. As a young teenager, I knew that she must have been aware of how different she appeared from everyone else, but I could not understand why that did not

# What's your diversity story?

bother her. Vice Principal Johnson kept her ear to the floor and noticed that I had traded my old group of friends for other kids that were known for not always making the best choices. My parents had divorced that year and I was angry at the world. I was frequently in the administration office as I was “stuck with” a peer mediation group I had volunteered to be a part of the previous year. Since then my attitude had changed, along with my friends, and I had become caustic and moody.

One morning when I arrived in the office, Vice Principal Johnson was sitting at the peer mediation table reading *Beautiful Blackbird*, written and illustrated by Ashley Bryan (2003). As anti-social as I was at the time, I couldn't help but be drawn in by the vividly colorful illustrations, and I moved behind Vice Principal Johnson to look over her shoulder. Keeping me interested by slowly turning the pages, Mrs. Johnson told me the story of the *Beautiful Blackbird* (Bryan, 2003), that was hounded by the other birds to give each of them beautiful black feathers such as he had. They felt that if they could only look like the blackbird, they would never be sad or angry again. As Mrs. Johnson talked about the book she asked me if I really believed that acquiring the qualities of another would really make the birds happy. She told me of a time when she was young that she felt as if she had to look and dress like the other students in her predominantly white, middle-class school. Elaborating, Mrs. Johnson said that she never felt “right” trying to be someone she was not; that she had “felt uncomfortable in her own skin.” When she was eight, her mother bought Mrs. Johnson her first dress in the traditional African style. It was bursting with reds, yellows, and oranges, and although she loved the dress, at first she did not think she could wear it to school. With her mother's encouragement, Mrs. Johnson wore her new dress on picture day, shedding her conformist apparel for that which was an expression of her. She concluded that she had realized that she was trying to be someone she was not and didn't realize how unhappy she was until she found the courage to be herself.

At the time, confronting my own fear of being my true self scared me to death. I made some lame excuse to Mrs. Johnson and ran to avoid any further emotional self-examination. I realized later that Mrs. Johnson was brave enough to stand true to herself and embrace her culture, one that appeared wildly different from her peers. By sharing *Beautiful Blackbird* and her own story, Mrs. Johnson had given me a tool with which to draw upon to find the courage within myself to admit that even though I was angry, I really was not the nasty, rebellious girl I thought I had to be. I began to read every book I could find, devouring them in an effort to address my own emotional state by invading the psyches of fictional characters through narrative. Through reading I came to the realization that I was not alone in the world and that I would never be happy if I was always trying to be something I was not. Mrs. Johnson's inner beauty was undeniable, for she radiated warmth and self-confidence. I developed a sincere appreciation of the beauty and value of other cultures, for I saw the beauty within Mrs. Johnson and realized that it was everywhere, if only I would look. With Mrs. Johnson's help, I was able to find the courage to be me. This meant cutting ties with my current group of friends, other teenagers who for various reasons had walls of anger surrounding them in an effort to protect them from further emotional injury. As an adult, I now know that these forms of self-imposed isolation do not provide a buffer against hurt, but instead prevent nourishment in the form of love, support, and guidance from reaching the heart. It was extremely difficult as an angry adolescent to admit that I needed anyone, for that meant I had to be open and vulnerable. As a future teacher, I plan on being there for all children, even the repugnant and sarcastic ones like I was at the age of twelve. I hope to pay it back and make a difference for another as Mrs. Johnson had for me. An undercurrent of all my future teaching will be the undeniable existence of the inherent beauty in each of us and that sometimes it can take effort and courage to witness that beauty. Children must be taught and consistently reminded that without this underlying knowledge it can be easy to turn away from those that are different from us and it could be these very people that are ready and waiting to be the teacher in our lives.