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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
Transgender Archives of Western New York

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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Monthly Meeting - Oct. 27, 2016

Dramatis Personae: Adrienne, Camille, Carolyn, Katz, Bridge, Marek, Ana, Liz, Felix, Sara
(via Skype)

Swimming with Lesbians

On Oct. 18, the History Project held a screening of the 2009 documentary *Swimming with Lesbians* at Hallwalls. The screening itself was followed by a roundtable discussion about the movie about LGBTQ archives, moderated by Adrienne, in which Madeline Davis, Camille Hopkins, and Dan DiLandro participated. In addition to getting lots of good feedback, we also made \$216.30 at the screening. We have money!

In general, the group agreed that the event was good, that we succeeded in getting our name out, and that the space was conducive to the event. We did, however, talk about a few things we need to do differently at future events:

- Leave out a list asking for people's contact info. We should be working on building a mailing list.
- Make cards with our contact info. The pamphlets were great, but we should also make something smaller for people who don't want something that bulky/are intimidated by the pamphlets.
- Be more deliberate in asking people who come in where they heard about the event, so we know how to improve our marketing tactics. (Liz mentioned that, although she didn't ask in any systematic way, she did try to ask this question to people entering Hallwalls every now and then. Based on her informal research, it sounds like most of the people who came saw the event on Facebook. Very few people mentioned seeing our flyers around town.)

We also need to make a point of recording events like these in the future, so those events can also become part of the archives. As it so happens, Carolyn recorded the event--in two files--on her phone. She hasn't figured out how to upload it yet, though. Her goal for this upcoming week is to upload the video files to Google Drive or Dropbox. From there, we can post the video(s) to our website and to social media. We also hope to give a copy to Dan DiLandro for the Madeline Davis Archives.

Finally, although we didn't come to any clear conclusions on this account, we agreed that we need to think a bit more carefully about how we use events like these to rope people into our projects and meetings.

Next Projects: Helping LGBTQ Seniors Digitize Their Archives

Of the \$216.30 raised at the *Swimming with Lesbians* screening, \$35 has already been spent by the Trans Committee, on renting filming equipment for a recent oral history interview. We obviously don't have a lot to spend on the equipment we want--hopefully we'll hear back soon about our Embrace WNY grant application for that-- but we have a little bit to invest.

Adrienne suggested that the group spend some of the money on a high quality yet portable scanner, to help us get started on the project of helping LGBTQ seniors digitize their archives. While applying for the Embrace WNY grant, Liz and Adrienne found some high quality scanners that only cost about \$100. There was some discussion/debate about this: Carolyn and Marek pointed out that there are free apps, such as CamScanner, that turn your phone into a scanner and don't cost anything. Bridge, however, pointed out that the quality of an app like CamScanner is entirely dependent on the pixel quality of one's phone.

In the end, the group agreed that the scanner was a good investment. For the sheer volume of scanning we want to do, one scanner will not be enough, so for people whose phones have a high pixel quality, CamScanner might work for documents until we can invest in multiple scanners. But we also agreed that an actual scanner would be best for pictures, objects, etc.

This led to a brief discussion about how to backup archival materials. Some group members expressed a desire to invest in an external hard drive. Fortunately, Adrienne had an extensive discussion with Vanessa and Clinton some months ago about the best external hard drives to invest in, so if we decide to go this route, the research has already been done. In general, though, we agreed that getting a Dropbox account would suffice for now.

Digitizing Senior Archives - Logistics

Ana spoke to the group about the work she has been doing to connect with LGBTQ seniors who want their archives digitized.

Carol Speser. Some of you may recall that we were in talks with Carol to digitize her archival material several months ago, in order to facilitate her getting it out the door and into the Madeline Davis Archives. Carol was a bit hesitant at the time, and once we thought we had succeeded in negotiating the process of digitizing her archives, she pulled back because of personal concerns that she had to take care of.

Shortly after the *Swimming with Lesbians* screening, Carol got back in touch with Ana, telling her that she was ready to digitize her archives, no more hesitation. She also had a lot to say about what it *means* to go through and give away your archives: that although an archive holds a portion of public/community history, it is also deeply *personal*, and to go through your archive is to reckon with grief and other complex, personal feelings that arise in the process of making history. (That is also, obviously, a big theme of *Swimming with Lesbians*: how do you archive feelings, which are so deep and yet so ephemeral?) Ana would really love to hold a deeper dialogue with Carol about grief, mourning, and archive-making, and to maybe write something about this-- either for our website, or for a local publication. In the meantime,

Ana plans to talk with Carol sometime during the first week of November about how and when to get started on her archives.

Ari Moore. Ana has also talked with Ari about digitizing her archives. Ari said she was ready, without even a moment's hesitation. Ana will be meeting with Ari in early November as well, to work out the logistics for this.

In addition to digitizing her archives, Ana brought up another Ari Moore-related project that she is interested in, as well. Back in September, when the Trans Committee was at Ari's house filming an interview, Ari showed the group a queer, trans, Afrofuturist graphic novel she had been working on. This graphic novel is AMAZING, and everyone in the Trans Committee has been obsessing over it ever since. We don't fully know her plans for it, but in time, when we have more money, we've talked about helping Ari publish her graphic novel, if she wants. In the meantime, Ana and Adrienne held a conversation with an old professor of theirs, Dr. Ellen Berry, who maintains the online journal *Rhizomes* (<http://www.rhizomes.net>). Ellen is interested in possibly publishing something about Ari and her graphic novel in her journal: maybe some excerpts from the graphic novel, some excerpts from the interview the Trans Committee conducted with her, an essay or two to introduce Ari's art, and a couple of comments on Ari's work by artists/scholars/activists. If Ari consents to this, Ellen has proposed publishing it in February 2017. Ana will discuss this with Ari when they talk about the larger project of digitizing Ari's archives. The group was enthusiastic about this, and Liz and Bridge mentioned WNYBAC and Mikey Rizzo/*The Loop*, respectively, as possible publishing resources in the future.

Induction Ceremonies. Katz had a beautiful idea: what if we turned the digitization of senior archives into a ceremonial event? For each LGBTQ senior whose archives we digitize, we could hold a party/induction ceremony, where we share food, put parts of the person's archival materials on display, and honor their contributions to local LGBTQ history. This could simultaneously be a form of outreach for our organization, a sort of meta-archiving opportunity where we reflect publicly on the making of history and archives, a way of honoring individuals, and a community-building exercise.

TO DO FOR THE NEXT MONTH:

- Get people on board. In addition to Ana's discussions with Carol and Ari, we want to make a point of working on this archiving and induction process with Camille, since she's moving this summer. As someone who is both a member of the history project and a history-maker who we hope to highlight, she's also uniquely positioned to give us feedback on what it's like to go through this process.
- Make a schedule. Whose archives are we working on, and when? What is our target date for the first induction ceremony?

Reaching Out to LGBTQ Refugees and Immigrants

SPECIAL GUEST: Sara Ali of the New America Project

Sara Ali is a writer and activist with roots in Buffalo's many refugee/immigrant communities. Until recently an editor at *Karibu News*, she currently works as a freelance writer-- in fact, she wrote the article on *Swimming with Lesbians* that recently appeared in *The Public*,

featuring Camille and Adrienne! Additionally, she's currently working on establishing the New America Project: a nonprofit organization that will use articles, documentaries, and Podcasts in multiple languages to tell the story of Buffalo's refugee and immigrant communities.

For a long time now, Sara has been interested in exploring and covering the intersection between LGBTQ issues and immigrant/refugee communities. While working at *Karibu News*, she made a point of ensuring that the newspaper included coverage of LGBTQ issues. Now that she's starting her own organization, she wants to make space for LGBTQ refugees and immigrants to tell their stories. Since we, too, are interested in collecting and preserving the stories of LGBTQ people across WNY in all their diversity, Sara was invited to this month's meeting to brainstorm ways that our two organizations could collaborate.

Sara opened the conversation by pointing out that LGBTQ issues are a taboo in many local refugee/immigrant communities, so opening up a space for discussion is the first and most crucial step. She thinks we should start small, and proposed planning a diversity and awareness training for refugees and immigrants. This could be headed by Camille, who has done plenty of such trainings before, including for local organizations that work with immigrants and refugees. Sara's primary concern with this idea is finding a safe space-- she had been in talks with a local mosque to host it, but doesn't think the mosque in question would be open to hosting such an event.

There was some pushback on this proposed plan. Marek, for instance, expressed concern about the power dynamic involved in teaching refugees how to be tolerant. He felt that any workshop we established should center on refugees and their stories, and give non-refugees a chance to listen to those stories, rather than instructing refugees in American LGBTQ identity politics. With that in mind, the group brainstormed a number of possible activities that could either augment or be alternatives to a diversity workshop. These included:

- A resource fair that connects members of the immigrant/refugee communities to much-needed resources--including LGBTQ community resources. In that setting, Camille's diversity workshop could be presented as one of many available resources.
- Something even more casual, like a brunch. A place that opens up dialogue between local immigrant/refugee communities and other Buffalo communities, including the LGBTQ community.
- Instead of bringing members of assorted immigrant/refugee communities to a space for a diversity training, we could contact resources and centers that refugees are already using, and do trainings there.
- A storytelling workshop, open to members of the LGBTQ and refugee/immigrant communities (and, of course, people who are members of both). We could either contact an extant storytelling organization in the city (like Karima Amin's) to lead it, or our very own Katz might be able to lead it. Additionally or alternatively, we could put together an event with both communities where people shared their stories with one another.
- Exploring the role that agencies catering to refugee/immigrant communities have already played in documenting people's stories. Is there an archive we don't already know about?

In brainstorming these ideas, we also brainstormed people and institutions in both the LGBTQ and refugee/immigrant communities that we could partner with:

- Ali, Marek's coworker at Lakeshore. He coordinates local soccer matches, and has been open-minded when Marek talked with him about LGBTQ community issues. He may be an in to these communities.
- Pride Center.
- Katz suggested that focusing on refugee youth might be fruitful, and that Lafayette High School might be a good place to find collaborators.
- GLYS
- Local universities-- Marek has a friend at Buff State who may be a resource.
- Ze Yar Swe (known in the community as Banyar) is a Burmese refugee who has been working on creating the Myanmar Student Association, an association of local college/university clubs for Burmese students. Adrienne knows him, and he has been at least open to hearing her talk about LGBTQ issues in the past. Maybe he would connect us to local college students?

We also talked about institutions/spaces that might be open to hosting one of the brainstormed events:

- Jericho Road-- Carolyn will ask her neighbor who works there.
- Jewish Family Services.
- International Institute.
- Journey's End.
- West Side Bazaar-- particularly for one of the more casual events on our brainstorming list, like a brunch.

For the next month, we decided that the best first step would be to reach out to refugee communities and institutions. Before we plan anything, we want to find out if people in refugee/immigrant communities would be interested in participating. Here is our reachout plan:

- Sara will reach out to her friends in the Nepali and Somali Communities.
- Marek will reach out to Ali and his friend and Buff State.
- Katz will reach out to GLYS and Lafayette High School.
- Adrienne will talk to Ze Yar Swe.

Committee Updates

Party in the Archives:

October's Party in the Archives was supposed to be at the Grosvenor Room of the Central Library, but due to a miscommunication, it didn't happen. Fortunately, the hours at the Grosvenor Room are relatively open and consistent, so this is the most flexible party site available. The tentative plan for November's Party in the Archives is Nov. 11 at Camille's apartment, to go through Camille's private archive. Stay tuned to social media for more details.

Trans Committee:

The Trans Committee has now conducted and filmed two interviews. No major details tonight, as the head of the committee wasn't present, but the next meeting is slated for Sunday, Nov. 13, at 4 p.m., at Grindhaus Cafe.

POC Committee:

This committee has been on hiatus because its leader, Marielle, just had a baby. (Congrats, Marielle, and welcome to baby Kelila!) The next meeting, however, will be on Thursday, Nov. 10, at 6 p.m., at Ashker's Juice Bar.

The ongoing saga of the burlesque fundraiser:

Nola is currently in talks with the folks in charge of Brent House in University Heights to host a burlesque fundraiser. No date as of yet. In the meantime, though, Nola's burlesque troupe is having their usual monthly performance at Underground this Friday, Nov. 4, and they are donating a portion of their earnings to the History Project! Be sure to come and support them--and bring all your friends!

Other Stuff

Liz's friend Sylvia is interested in participating in the History Project, and in particular on starting a project/committee that documents and combats bi erasure. If you are interested in joining, please let Liz know.

Carolyn is still struggling with finding places for us to table. If you have any resources for her, please reach out to her! Here's some stuff we discussed re: tabling:

- Adrienne reached out to this year's Trans Health Conference, but alas, they don't have tabling this year. BUT-- people who are attending should bring pamphlets with them to pass out. Contact Adrienne to get some pamphlets!
- Adrienne has also reached out to The Foundry about tabling at Second Saturdays. No response yet.

Katz left the meeting a bit early, but on their way out, said that they were interested in creating a archival induction ceremony, and also in storytelling workshops.

Bridge asked if we had anything to add to the website. Here is what we brainstormed:

- Ana would like to see pictures and info from the *Swimming with Lesbians* screening added to both the website and social media.
- We also expressed a general desire to have more written stuff on the website. Liz brought up the question of whether we needed to establish a schedule of who submits what when. We didn't establish a schedule at this meeting, but that is something to consider in the near future.

Several months ago, Marek brought up the possibility of documenting the history of the local DL community. He reached out to his contact in that community, but the contact hasn't responded yet.

Marek books spoken word events at the Screening Room in Amherst, and has offered to help us book/plan an event there if we're interested--maybe in June (Pride Month) or October (LGBT History Month). Although we may book something at the Screening Room earlier, the group agreed to work toward some kind of event for October 2017--possibly in conjunction with local schools.

Carolyn invites all of us to come to Buff State on Wednesday, Nov. 2, when SJ Miller, a scholar on anti-LGBTQ bullying, will be giving a presentation.