



# Lavender Notes

***Lavender Seniors of the East Bay  
a Program of the  
Oakland LGBTQ Community Center***

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*Celebrating 28+ years of service and positive change*

*July 2023- Volume 29 Issue 7*

## STORIES OF OUR LIVES

### Ben C. Anderson III

A former Friendly Visitor and aspiring future Lavender Senior, Ben Anderson understands that service to others brings value to our lives.



Born in Lafayette, Indiana, in December of 1977, Ben is the first-born child to young parents. His mom was 17 when he was born, and Ben describes his childhood as a wild ride. He shares his parents with a sister. When Ben was 5, his parents divorced, so he also has 2 half-brothers, born when he was 12 and 14, from his father's second marriage. Ben and his first half-brother even share a birthday.

Both parents remarried and have been with their partners for nearly 40 years, but his mother has divorced and remarried the same person multiple times, which adds to the wild ride. After his parents' divorce, his mother pulled back on parenting and spent more time with friends. She liked to have a good time, but Ben describes her as an "angry alcoholic". There was a lot of police activity at home in his youth, so when he was 12, his dad gained full custody.

Other than a Pentecostal grandmother, religion didn't influence Ben's upbringing. While that grandmother made comments to Ben about his "lifestyle" and where he would end up in the afterlife if he didn't

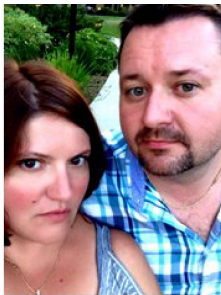
change, Ben was always nice to her. While he was nervous about coming out to family, it hasn't been an issue for anyone besides his maternal grandmother. He has relationships with his parents and siblings who are all back in Indiana.



Ben with his dad and Great Grandma

Ben attended Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, on a Secondary Math Education scholarship. Though he was quite good at math, he found it boring and didn't see himself pursuing teaching as a career. He did not want to put himself into any career where his sexuality could be an issue. Ben changed his major to Psychology a few years into his undergraduate education, because he found it more interesting. He also felt it gave him more freedom and versatility for future careers.

As early as 11 years old, Ben knew he was gay. However, he spent his high school years dating girls. He had many girlfriends throughout that time, but he never dated them longer than 3 months. During his freshman year of college he booked a free appointment with an on-campus therapist. After spending the majority of the session talking himself up, he chose the last few minutes to announce that he was gay. The therapist said that knowing that earlier in the conversation would have been helpful for the session, but Ben just wanted to say it out loud to someone else for the first time.



Ben and Carrie

After that, he came out to his best friend, Carrie, whose reaction was far less dramatic than what he was expecting after the build-up he created.

"I thought you were going to tell me something serious!" she said.

Carrie agreed to attend a meeting of the Gay Student Association with him. Together they attended a picnic put on by the group and Ben found himself interested in a popular guy with whom he would have his first experience with a male partner. Unfortunately, it wasn't great and Ben wasn't interested in casual hook-ups, so he stayed single for awhile. After being out for about 6 months Ben met Andy and they spent the next 5 years together.

During college, Ben spent four years working at Olive Garden, which helped cover expenses. His dad helped cover rent, but working allowed him financial freedom and good experience. While there, he was identified as Employee of the Month many times, a fact of which he is still very proud. He really enjoyed the social aspect of food service as he has always been good at connecting with people.

In fall of his senior year, Ben took Asian Studies 101. The class composition was 50% South Asian, 50% Chinese, and him. He earned the highest grade in the class and found it very interesting. The instructor promoted a six-week trip to Asia the following June and Ben decided to go. After his return, he was very interested in spending more time there, which worked out well. Because Andy was working for a company making shelves for Home Depot, he was offered the chance to move to China for work. Ben interviewed for a position in

Certification and Compliance Services with the same company and was offered a job in China, too, so they made the move together. Ben spent the first month of 2003 in Hong Kong and then settled in Shenzhen for work.



As shown in this photo, Ben taught American Fountains at Shanghai University of Finance & Economics in 2012. Following the earlier move to China, however, Ben agreed to open their relationship, which led to what he describes as a “year of awkward situations” where Andy would hook up with Ben’s friends and tell him afterwards. By the time Ben no longer found the relationship satisfying, he agreed to move out and let Andy keep all the things they had

collected during the relationship. Ben describes Andy as a heavy drinker, which is not so different from his mother, so he was just ready to walk away. He describes the time following the break-up as having some “dark days”, but after about 6 months, he was offered a higher-paying job with a competitor with double the benefits. He took the job and moved to Shanghai.

Ben was not out at the new company. He had a boss from Toronto who he describes as “a functional alcoholic who liked to drink all night, spend time with sex workers, and then hit the gym at 6am.” After going out with the boss one Friday night, Ben decided to look for a gay bar, much harder to find in 2006 than it is now. He found a place that was described as a “Bear Bar”, but says it was all Chinese guys when he got there, so he joked that it was a “Panda Bar”. Little did Ben know he was about to meet the person he would spend the next 17+ years of his life with.



Justin and Ben as a new couple, on vacation in Alaska and out on the town

Justin had spent 3 years in Louisiana earning his MBA before moving back to Shanghai. He was at the bar with his boyfriend, a recognizable actor who often had small TV roles. The bartender suggested he go talk to Ben since he spoke English. Justin got to the table where Ben was already talking to people and introduced himself. Ben let him know that he spoke Mandarin and didn’t need his help. Admittedly, Ben was drinking heavily that night, so there was surely some sass in his rejection of Justin’s approach.





Hunan Fish Head, Ben's Favorite Dish; Ben with Midas & Spiro, who moved to California, too; Bay to Breakers, 2022.

The next night, Ben returned to the bar and found Justin playing Ping Pong. Justin took Ben on a date the following Friday and they have been inseparable ever since. The date happened to be at Ben's favorite restaurant, unknowingly part of a chain that Ben used to frequent in Shenzhen. When asked what happened to the boyfriend, Ben said that he and Justin became just friends. Ben says that he and Justin complement each other and there is something easy about their relationship. Compared to Ben's experiences growing up, Justin comes from a much more innocent and stable background. Sometimes they experience a language barrier or cultural differences, but they work through it. Ben says he finds it exciting and feels he learns more from being in a multi-cultural relationship.



Ben and Justin Wedding, 2015; with Theo and Freddy in 2023 visit to Indiana and Chicago

In 2014, Ben took a job with a company in California, moving to Fremont. Justin followed about 9 months later. Within a year, they were married in a small ceremony. In 2016, they welcomed their first son, Theo, followed by a younger brother, Freddy, in 2020. Theo was born in time to be welcomed by Justin's father and mother who came from China to meet their first grandson. Unfortunately, Justin's father developed lung cancer so would never be able to meet Freddy or see Theo again. Justin's mom spends time in the states with the family and they go to China to visit her, as well.



Ben and Elephant in Thailand; Two-Hour Thai Cruise; Ben and Jinx Monsoon

Travel has played an influential role in Ben's life. Some highlights include trips to Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, France, Spain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Alaska and Hawaii. Ben says that Italy has been one of his favorite places. When asked his other interests, Ben said science fiction, horror movies and parenting.

Reflecting on his career in Supply Chain Management over the last 21 years, Ben says he likes the work because it is dynamic. He meets geniuses who are making new things all the time. He gets to learn about new technologies and advancements in biodegradable products, medical devices, and the internet of things, to name just a few types of products he works with. He sees the work as recession-proof, since there is always a demand for engineering, program management, sales & marketing, and operations.

Volunteering his time has always been important to Ben. In China he taught English to elementary school kids with disabilities for 2-3 hours every Saturday through a program called Hands on Shanghai. Ben has always felt that giving his time is more important than giving money.

After moving to Fremont, Ben connected with Lavender Seniors and became a Friendly Visitor. He was matched with a gay man in Alameda, who was 40+ years older than Ben. Ben visited him almost every week for 2 years. He found it educational because his client shared real-life experiences and talked about the Bay Area and how things have changed. Ben says he would have found it interesting to walk in his shoes. His client shared stories from his 60-year relationship before his partner passed. At that point in the man's life, most of his communication was only with people he paid for services and support, so Ben felt he was contributing to a really important friendship for him.

As parenting became more demanding, Ben tried – mostly unsuccessfully – to transition his client to another visitor. They had some contact between 2020 and 2022, but it was hard because Ben couldn't always come when his client wanted him to, especially due to the pandemic and having a new baby at home. The client passed away in February of 2022. In Ben's time as a Friendly Visitor, they created a friendship that felt like Ben had a "gay grandpa", so he values the time they spent together.

Ben was asked to participate in "Stories of Our Lives" because of his rich experiences and because his family and the writer's family are friends. We both look forward to watching our children grow up together; to aging and eventually becoming Lavender Seniors ourselves.

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## CONNECTIONS



Have you moved out of the area, do you want to get in contact with other Lavender Seniors near you or someone you have lost contact with? [Email us](#) and we will try to help out. No information will be shared without your specific permission.

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## LAVENDER SENIORS FRIENDLY VISITOR PROGRAM HAS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.

Volunteers with the Lavender Seniors Friendly Visitor program are background checked, interviewed and trained, after which they are matched with a senior to visit regularly, usually for a couple hours each week. Visitors can share stories, chat about mutual interests and current events, and if both are willing and able, volunteers can take their seniors out for a walk in the park, a bite to eat, a cup of coffee, shopping or maybe a movie or a trip to the museum.

We ask volunteers to make a commitment of at least six months.

If you are in need of a Friendly Visitor, we can help with that too!

Please contact us at [info@lavenderseniors.org](mailto:info@lavenderseniors.org) and we will be in touch with you soon. Thank You!



## Mellow Saxophone Revisited

There was such positive feedback to our having Wendy Clymer come with her viola and amazing story-telling skills in February that we've been on the prowl to find other musicians and performing artists who might come with their talents, movement and/or story-telling again from time to time. Last month, we had Miss Iman performing several music and dance numbers for the group. This month's Third Friday Lunch Bunch is making up for what we missed in May, when logistical hiccups prevented our sax soloist from performing for us. Hopefully, all will go smoothly this time.



Miss Iman and Lavender Senior  
June 2023



Ashley Jemison – a community ally and accomplished saxophonist – will entertain us with her new school vibe of smooth jazz. Her repertoire includes current styles of R&B, pop music and a unique improvisational twist leaving her audiences wanting more. With a mother and father who were musicians, it was inevitable that she would follow at least a bit in their footsteps. A breast cancer survivor, she vowed to focus on her music once she got to the other side of that battle. Since making that career shift, she has been working up and down the West Coast. Provoking emotion with every note she plays, it is guaranteed that you will not leave an Ashley Jemison performance without feeling moved to dance, to smile or perhaps to tears. Her goal with every performance is to uplift the spirits of her audience.

In order to ensure that enough food is ordered from the caterer, anyone



intending to attend this program on Friday, 21st July, 12:30-2:30pm at North Oakland Seniors Center, 5714 MLK Jr Way (corner of 58th Street), should RSVP, using the following link, noting preferences for vegetarian or non-vegetarian menu choices: <https://forms.gle/U9UynHMjTf6k942B7>. Once you've completed the form, click on "submit" at the bottom to finalize your RSVP. The RSVP link will close at midnight, Tuesday, 18th July, to allow time to place the final order with our caterer.

Those who don't have internet access should RSVP via contacting Jessie Spivey, Director of Elder Services at the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center: +! (510) 781-2926. For any other questions or concerns, he can also be contacted at [jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org](mailto:jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org).

# *Third Friday* **Lunch Bunch**

Every **Third Friday @ 12:30pm**  
North Oakland Senior Center  
5714 MLK Way



Please call **510-781-2926** or email: [jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org](mailto:jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org) to RSVP

## **July Social Seniors**

Friday July 28th, 2023 @ 12:30pm

*The Watermark, 1440 40th St, Emeryville, CA 94608*

Sign up [here](#)



Please contact Jessie with any questions: [jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org](mailto:jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org) or 510-781-2926



**SOCIAL SENIORS**

**Oakland**  
LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTER

LAST FRIDAY  
OF EVERY  
MONTH

12:30PM

**A SOCIAL GATHERING FOR LGBTQ SENIORS**  
@ THE WATERMARK  
1440 40TH STREET, EMERYVILLE, CA 94608  
CALL 510-781-2926 OR EMAIL: [JESSIE@OAKLANDLGBTQCENTER.ORG](mailto:jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org) FOR RSVP LINK



**OAKLAND**  
GAY MEN'S  
CHORUS  
DR. BEN RIGGS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**ALL  
YOU  
NEED  
IS  
LOVE**  
THE MUSIC of the BEATLES

SATURDAY, JULY 8TH, 7:30PM  
LANEY COLLEGE, OAKLAND

SUNDAY, JULY 9TH, 4:00PM  
DEL VALLE THEATER,  
WALNUT CREEK

[OAKLANDGMC.ORG/TICKETS](http://OAKLANDGMC.ORG/TICKETS)



# Well Connected

## Enriching lives and supporting well-being.

(FORMERLY SENIOR CENTER WITHOUT WALLS)

### Community Phone Calls

This award-winning program offers activities, education, support groups, and friendly conversation over the phone or online.

#### Just a few of the things offered:

(The times are no longer listed in the generic catalog, once you have signed up you will get a link to a catalog with times in your time zone)

#### LGBTQ Chat Wednesdays, 6/28, 7/12, 7/26, 8/9, 8/23

This group is intended for participants who identify as LGBTQ, and is an opportunity to connect with others socially in a supportive environment, where participants can share individual and collective experiences. We will create an inclusive place to share our stories with each other and build a sense of community. Facilitated by Kay George

#### Music's Memory Lane Tuesdays, 6/27 – 8/29

We'll discuss a hit song, vintage television variety show, or a memorable musician in music history. From Big Band music to the Beatles, we'll dive into our recollections of concerts, lyricists, and pop culture. We will then hear musical requests and discuss. Facilitated by Steve Maraccini

View the Current catalog of community phone calls [here](#). Check the [website](#) for more information. To participate in these or other Well Connected telephone activities, or to learn more about their programs, call 877-797-7299 or email [coviaconnections@covia.org](mailto:coviaconnections@covia.org).



Out Standing Seniors - Hayward - Sponsored by Pacific Center

July 4 **Holiday...no meeting this month**(1st Tuesday)

Meets via Zoom email [outstandingseniors@pacificcenter.org](mailto:outstandingseniors@pacificcenter.org) for info.

*A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.*

Living OUT in Livermore - Sponsored by Pacific Center

July 4 2:00 - 3:30 p.m. (1st Tuesdays)

**Holiday - check with your facilitator to see if you are meeting this month**

Meets via Zoom email [livingoutlivermore@pacificcenter.org](mailto:livingoutlivermore@pacificcenter.org) for info.

*A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.*

**Older & Out On Line Therapy Group - Sponsored by Pacific Center Meets via Zoom Tuesdays 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.**

**No meeting July 4th**

Please email [olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org](mailto:olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org) for more information. No drop-ins. Intake is required for attendance.

*Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+*

**Older & Out Therapy Group - Oakland - Sponsored by Pacific Center In-person at Oakland LGBTQ Community Center**

**Wednesdays 1:15pm - 2:45pm**

**No meeting on July 5th**

Please email [olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org](mailto:olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org) for more information.

Intake is required for attendance.

*Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+*

**Older & Out Therapy Group - Berkeley - Sponsored by Pacific Center In-person at N. Berkeley Senior Center**

**Fridays 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.**

**No meeting on June 30th**

Please email [olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org](mailto:olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org) for more information.

Intake is required for attendance.

*Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+*

**Rainbow Seniors**

**July 11 & 25 12:30 p.m. (2nd & 4th Tuesdays)**

**San Leandro Senior Community Center**

email [rainbowseniors@pacificcenter.org](mailto:rainbowseniors@pacificcenter.org) for info.

*A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.*

**Tri-Valley Rainbows - Sponsored by Pacific Center**

**July 20 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (3rd Thursday)**

Meets via Zoom email [trivalleyrainbows@pacificcenter.org](mailto:trivalleyrainbows@pacificcenter.org) for info.

*A welcoming space for LGBTQI seniors 50+ to share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.*

**Oakland Third Friday Lunch Bunch**

**Sponsored by City of Oakland Aging/Adult Services, Lavender Seniors of the East Bay & Oakland LGBTQ Community Center**

**July 21 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. (Third Friday)**

**North Oakland Senior Center**

*This month's program: ('Mellow Sax - revisited' - see info above )*

**Social Seniors**

**Sponsored by Oakland LGBTQ Community Center and Lavender Seniors of the East Bay**

**July 28 12:30 p.m. (Last Friday)**

**The Watermark**

**1440 40th St, Emeryville**

*See info above for registration info.*

## Lavender Seniors of the East Bay a Program of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center Advisory Council

Dr. John David Dupree  
Beckie Underwood  
Jessie Spivey

Dr. Melinda Ginne  
Barbara Jue

## Lavender Seniors of the East Bay a Program of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center

Message: 510-736-LGBT (510-736-5428)  
or [info@lavenderseniors.org](mailto:info@lavenderseniors.org)

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