



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

August 2023- Volume 29 Issue 8

STORIES OF OUR LIVES

Lee Robbins

As a young grad student at University of Pennsylvania, Lee Robbins had hoped that a men's therapy group would alleviate his gay angst. Unexpectedly, it did – by bringing him deeper into the Tribe.

"My therapist reproached me for abandoning the quest (for a cure)," remembers Lee.



Lee's response? "Well, doctor, it's been almost ten years of therapy. I can just imagine that someday, when I'm 85 and in a nursing home in my wheelchair, I'll spot this little old lady in her wheelchair at the other end of the corridor and realize, 'Wow, that's just what I've wanted all my life.' Even if it's true, I don't think it's worth waiting any longer."

The miracle-straight-conversion ship definitely sank – imploded! – for Lee, who is now 84 and married to a wonderful man. He drily remarks that none of

the other men in his therapy group were “cured,” either, though they helped each other get the latest info on the best gay cruising spots.

What the straight world lost was a real gain for the queer community in Philadelphia, and later, San Francisco.

“Building communities, mostly as a volunteer, has been the most important thing in my life,” Lee notes – he loves getting organizations going and helping them thrive.

Some of his first gay forays included working with the gay switchboard, as well as helping to found Philly’s gay community center, one of the first in the country, started in 1974. He was active in the Homophile Action League, the civil rights organization that predated the Gay Liberation Front, and later helped found Philadelphia’s first queer synagogue in 1975, Beth Ahavah (Home of Love).

“My fascination with cooking started (in youth) when I was desperate to learn how to cook after my mom announced she wouldn’t bake pies anymore,” Lee recalls. “When I was looking for ways to help local organizations do well, I started doing restaurant reviews for the Philadelphia Gay News, hoping that would generate an income for the paper, then owned by Mark Segal, and help keep it going”

He continues to keep up with the foodie scene in the Bay Area online.

Lee was born the only child of two agnostic Jewish parents in April 1939. He was a non-athletic child who learned to read early and, endlessly talkative, preferred chatting at recess over being involved in sports, so ended up socializing more with girls. Libraries were his second home:

“It really annoyed me when they wouldn’t let me check something out they thought was too ‘old’ for me,” Lee says.

Though he wasn’t harassed much in early years at school, he didn’t feel like he fit in until high school, where he learned to play tennis and made friends among the intellectual set, most importantly participating in the Life Science Club – a group of lifelong friends he still meets with via Zoom.



Lee at an AIDS Rally in Golden Gate Park

“My parents met when my father accidentally knocked down my mother while skating at an ice rink – and that was the last time he was the top in the relationship,” Lee jokes.

His mother wanted Lee to find happiness and success, so she encouraged him to focus on getting good grades with an eye toward college scholarships. Lee brought up his grades from all C’s to all A’s in one semester. After graduating in Los Angeles, he won a National Merit scholarship to Harvard, where he tried different majors from Physics to Cultural Anthropology, finally completing a Bachelors in

Economics with honors. Then he chose University of Pennsylvania in Philly, which offered him a graduate fellowship.

After completing his Masters in Economics, Lee began teaching at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA, later becoming director of the Harrisburg Open Semester Urban Studies program – students enrolled in any participating college could do coursework and an internship there.

Still driven to found community organizations, he left to start Lee Robbins Associates, Apartment and House Sharing Inc., to help people find shared housing. He recalls meeting the incredible [Gray Panthers founder Maggie Kuhn](#), such a dynamo in her late 60s as she advocated for equitable, inter-generational housing solutions. Maggie's 22-year-old assistant snapped, "Lee, you're not living up to your potential, are you?"

Shocked out of his complacency, Lee shortly returned to the Wharton School of Business, where he was thrilled to work on his PhD under "the only genius I've ever met, Russell Ackoff," also known as the Einstein of problem solving. "Finally, in my 40s, I've found what I want to do when I grow up!" Lee loved Ackoff's new program, Social Systems Sciences, figuring out how he could help organizations improve.

Eventually, he moved to California and took a teaching position at Golden Gate University, where he has taught and consulted for 28 years.

He became a practicing Buddhist in the mid-1990s, something he values deeply.

"It has become central to my life," he says, "I really enjoy being part of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship of San Francisco."

He credits it with helping him to learn equanimity and happiness.

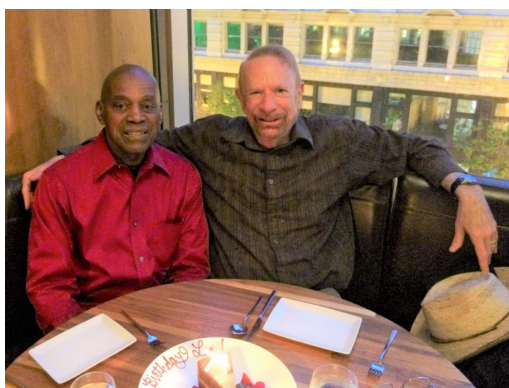
Lee was slow to come out.

"I always knew it was very important in my family to be married or in a relationship."

At 22, he began having sex with guys and was closeted.

"By the end of the flower-child 60s," he says, "I had turned with a vengeance to the pursuit of salvation through bodily friction."

Eleven years later, when his first long-term relationship had passed two months and counting, he came out to his parents.



"While they'd never discussed it, both my parents had been thinking for a few years that I was gay," Lee recalls. "They were okay with it – Mom was concerned about me being lonely in old age, and also about AIDS. HIV was in the news then. My friends didn't have negative reactions, except for one grad school roommate who pulled away. Most folks were indifferent."

Keeping in touch with long-time friends is also something that means a lot to Lee. In above photo, he shares a birthday meal with Ed.

Another longtime friend, Simon Marcus, first met Lee in 1979. He was looking for a place to live near his new job outside Philadelphia and was referred to Lee's roommate service. He recalls Lee being "efficient, practiced and motivated to help. He took me through a long battery of questions about myself and about what – and whom – I was seeking. By the end of this interrogation, the picture was clear in his mind, if not in mine. Then and there, he came up with a referral."

The place proved close to ideal!

Simon moved to Berkeley in the early 1980s. After Lee moved to San Francisco, they got to know each other a lot better. Over the decades, he's seen that Lee is "heroically loyal" in his relationships with friends and exes, continuing through challenging times. Simon was The Guest at Lee and Solomon's Dec. 2013 wedding in Oakland.

Lee's love of the outdoors and travel has been a lifelong joy. He's loved camping, hiking, backpacking and other nature exploration ever since high school. He travelled a lot prior to 2020 but is waiting to see how things go post-pandemic before going international again. In the photo to the right, he's at Mount Lassen in 2011.



Over the years, Lee had always hoped to develop a strong, lasting relationship.

"When I moved to San Francisco, I was cruising," Lee recalls. "I finally realized that this was an escape from intimacy."

He lost a partner to AIDS at one point. Later he focused on being monogamous; he's still friends with Steve, an ex he was with for 10 years, and Rich, from whom he separated over 40 years ago. His 17 years with Solomon have been a great joy, especially since they got married at Oakland City Hall in 2013.

"It has really increased the feeling of permanence in our relationship, for both of us."

Thank you, Lee, for your years of service to our community!

Photos below: Lee and his spouse, Solomon, at the Embarcadero near their home, and at Union Square



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.

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 Jessie at 510-781-2926 or Jessie@OaklandLGBTCenter.org.

Friendly Visitor Program Information session

Thursday **July 20th @ 6pm** via zoom
Wednesday **August 9th @ 6pm** via zoom
Saturday **August 19th TBA**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82371473490>
Meeting ID: 823 7147 3490

If you have any questions, please reach out to Jessie, 510-781-2926 or jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org



A note from Karen A. Anderson, former Lavender Seniors Friendly Visitor Program Coordinator:

Friendly Visitor Program returning soon...

Our community of elders continues to grow even as the LGBTQ community continues to grow due to aging.

When I first came out, we were known simply as 'gay'. After a quiet struggle we became gay, lesbian and bisexual. Before we were accepting of the rainbow flag, we were identified as LGBT then LGBTQ then LGBTQQIA+ and otherwise 'alphabet'

But no one knows us better than we know ourselves; we appreciate support from each other.

Let's get together on Wednesday, August 9th at 6pm via Zoom to exchange ideas about what's ahead for LGBTQ+ elder community members and our friends. Let's talk about social opportunities, community resources, activities, and how we can volunteer to support community members by providing a few hours each month to spend time together.

Let's listen to the perspectives of one of the East Bay Elder Community's new faces, Jessie Spivey, as he introduces plans to support seniors while

identifying our needs, reducing isolation and keeping us informed of our choices before the system identifies them for us.

(Karen Anderson, Former Friendly Visitor Program Coordinator)



Third Friday Lunch Bunch for August

Thank you to everyone who came out for July's Third Friday Lunch Bunch! We hope everyone enjoyed Ashley Jemison's saxophone performances, dancing and the presentation from Home Match on how sharing homes can be facilitated through their services.



Above: Lunch Bunch Participants Dancing to Ashley Jemison's Saxophone – Home Match Presentation on home-sharing

Please join us for our August Edition of Third Friday Lunch Bunch! Food is provided for all registered guests. Please RSVP using the following link: <https://forms.gle/E696zGiXV68YbCn48>

Once you've completed the form, click on "submit" at the bottom to finalize your RSVP. The RSVP link for Friday, 18th August Lunch Bunch will close at midnight, Tuesday, 15th August.

At press time, the program for August has not been finalized. Suffice it to say that we will all have time to socialize with our peers and eat some nutritious food!

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 to **RSVP**





Socialize! Fun! Food!

Come out and join the fun at Oakland's newest LGBTQ Senior hangout! Food is provided for all registered guests. Please **RSVP** using the following link: <https://forms.gle/qcV1wJ1z6tjJrejA>

Once you've completed the form, click on "submit" at the bottom to finalize your RSVP for the Friday, 25th August, gathering. The RSVP link will close at midnight, Tuesday, 22nd August.

For questions or technical assistance, please contact Jessie Spivey, Director of Elder Services at the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center: (510) 781-2926 or jessie@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org

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, 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

Caring for Family and Friends as We Age: Taking Care of Ourselves while Caring for Others

Tuesday, 8/1

What are the key causes of stress and distress that arise as we care for older family and friends? Learn strategies to help maintain and even enhance the quality of life for you and your loved ones. Presented by David W. Coon, PhD, Associate Dean for R.I.S.E., Director and Professor, Center for Innovation in Healthy and Resilient Aging, Arizona State University

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.



Out Standing Seniors - Hayward - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Aug 1 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. (1st Tuesday)

Meets via Zoom email 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

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

Meets via Zoom email 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 Therapy Group - Virtual - Sponsored by Pacific Center Meets via Zoom Tuesdays 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Please email olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org for more information. No drop-ins. Intake is required for attendance.

Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+

Life after 40 - Gay & Bisexual Men's Group

Meets in person at Oakland LGBTQ Community Center every 1st Tuesday at 7:00pm & virtually every 3rd Tuesday at 7pm.

A support group for men over 40

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

Wednesdays 1:15pm - 2:45pm

Please email 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.

Please email olderandoutgroups@pacificcenter.org for more information.

Intake is required for attendance.

Free therapy group for LGBTQIA+ community members age 55+

Rainbow Seniors

Aug 8 & 22 12:30 p.m. (2nd & 4th Tuesdays)

San Leandro Senior Community Center

email 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

Aug 17 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (3rd Thursday)

Meets via Zoom email 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

Apr 18 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. (Third Friday)

North Oakland Senior Center

This month's program: (not yet finalized)

Social Seniors

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

Aug 25 12:30 p.m. (Last Friday)

The Watermark

1440 40th St, Emeryville

See flyer above for registration info.

a Program of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center Advisory Council

Dr. John David Dupree
Beckie Underwood

Jessie Spivey
Barbara Jue

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

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