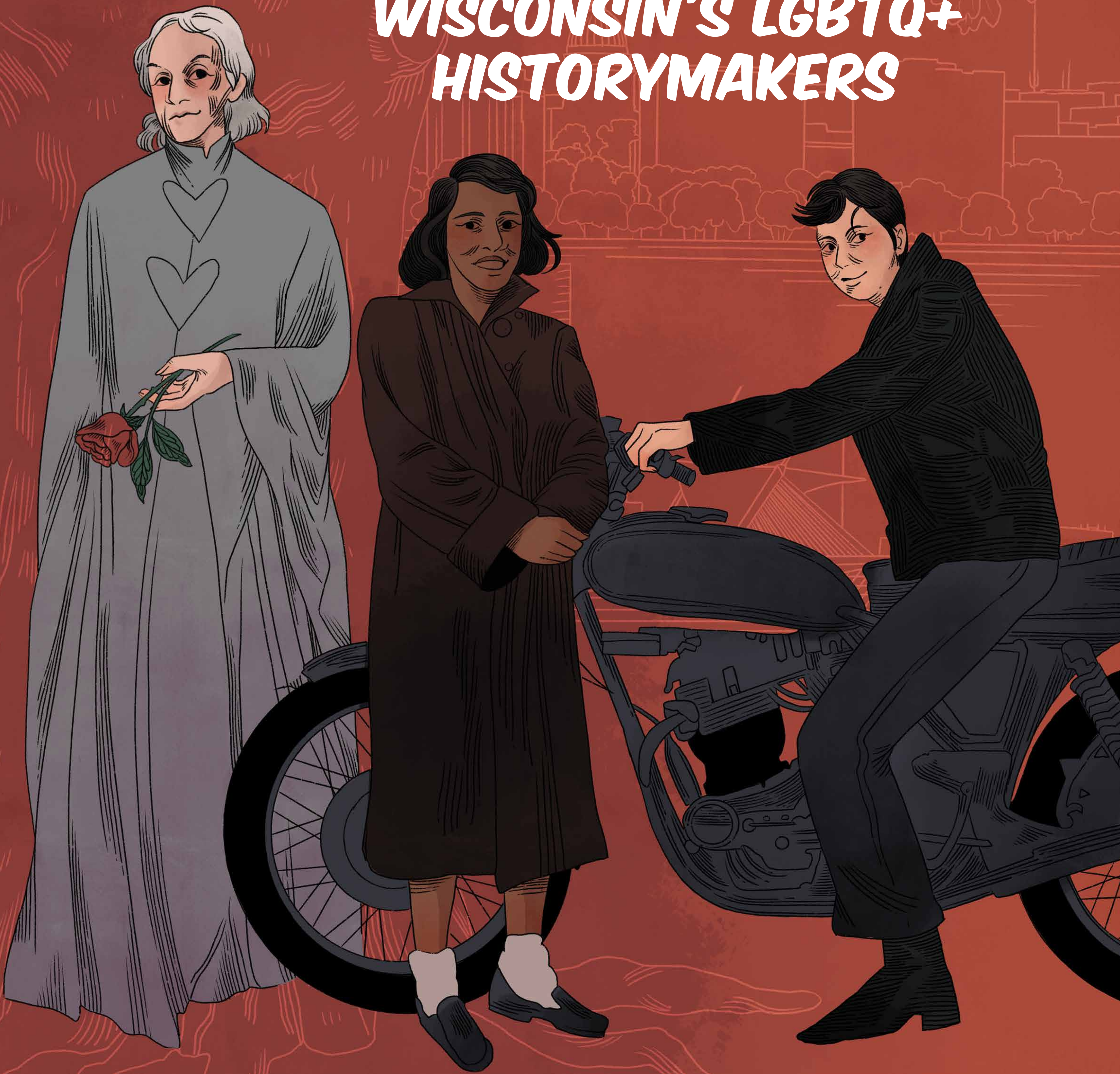




WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

WE WILL ALWAYS BE HERE

WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ+ HISTORYMAKERS



WE WILL ALWAYS BE HERE: **WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ+ HISTORYMAKERS**



THE PAST IS FULL OF STORIES WAITING—SOMETIMES DEMANDING—TO BE TOLD.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other members of the LGBTQ+ community have always been here. So why are their stories so rarely featured in our histories?

By telling LGBTQ+ stories, we reveal a more inclusive and accurate history. This exhibit brings you the stories of some of the ordinary, extraordinary LGBTQ+ people who lived their lives and worked for change in Wisconsin and beyond. They have been visionaries, changemakers, and storytellers, living their truth, courageously taking risks, and trying to change our world for the better.

Meet some of our LGBTQ+ visionaries, changemakers, and storytellers, get inspired, and share your story.

WHAT WILL FUTURE HISTORIANS LEARN ABOUT YOU?



W I S C O N S I N
H I S T O R I C A L
S O C I E T Y

LIVING HIS TRUTH

RALPH
KERWINEO



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

VISIONARY



LIVING HIS TRUTH: RALPH KERWINEO

SAY HELLO TO RALPH KERWINEO, an Afro-Native American transgender man living at the turn of the 20th century. Assigned female at birth, but that's not what he saw when he looked in the mirror. Ralph saw what was *really* there.

He started dressing as a man. Cross-dressing was a crime, but Ralph was willing to take the risk.

Ralph got to be his true self for eight years. Even met a woman and got married. Then—all of it shattered by betrayal. His angry ex-girlfriend started telling everyone Ralph was a woman.

Milwaukee, 1914. Ralph was arrested for disorderly conduct—but really it was for the crime of dressing like a man.

“Guilty!” came the verdict. The judge forced him to give up his life as a man. To return to his birth name. To dress in what a reporter called “girl’s attire.”

Ralph lived out the rest of his life as a woman. But he never forgot who he truly was.

STATS

Born: 1876

Died: 1932



Milwaukee, WI

**"MY HEART AND SOUL ARE MORE
THOSE OF A MAN THAN A WOMAN"**

—RALPH KERWINEO, 1914

CREATING COMMUNITY



**TED
PIERCE**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

VISIONARY



CREATING COMMUNITY: TED PIERCE

SOMEPLACE TO BE YOURSELF. It was hard to find for a gay Black man in the 1940s and '50s. Simple things straight people took for granted, like holding hands or kissing the one you loved, could get you arrested. There were precious few places where gay men could be themselves.

In his small corner of the world, Ted Pierce conjured up one of those places.

Ted always had a unique sense of style. You might call him a “fashionista” today. Back then he was a “fashion plate.” But Ted didn’t just dress differently. He lived his life differently, too. Ted refused to let the world leave him lonely. He worked his magic and forged his own community.

On Jenifer Street in Madison, the members of Ted’s “Magic Group” talked art and politics. Ate amazing food. Dressed in the fashion-forward styles they loved. They came together to be themselves, without judgment or fear.

Magic, indeed.

STATS

Born: 1907

Died: 1999

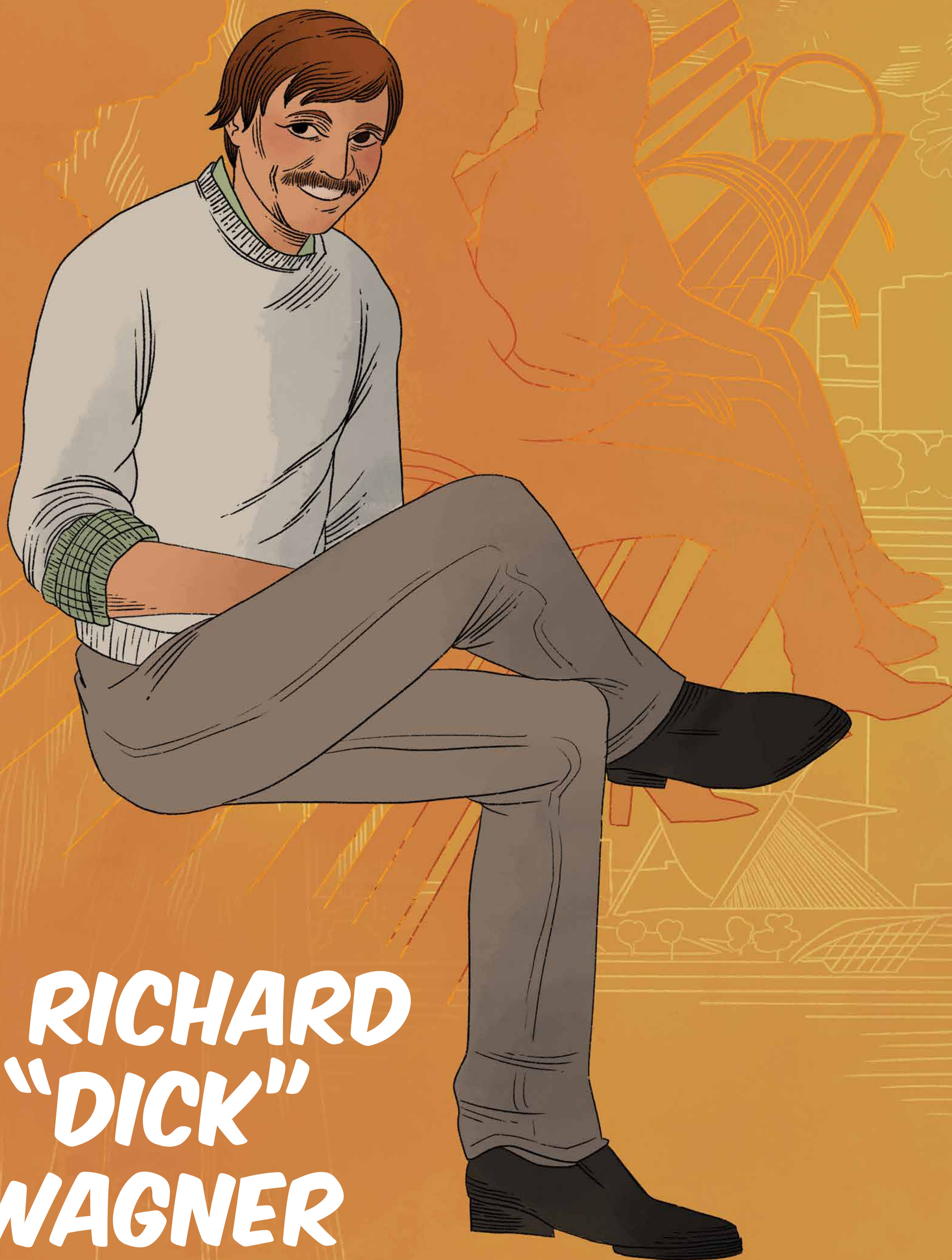


Madison, WI

***"AND ALL OF A SUDDEN THE DOOR
OPENED UP AND HE WAS AT HOME."***

***—FROM THE POEM "A GAY MAN—MIDDLE-AGED,"
TED PIERCE COLLECTION***

DOCUMENTING HISTORY



**R. RICHARD
"DICK"
WAGNER**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

STORYTELLER



DOCUMENTING HISTORY: R. RICHARD “DICK” WAGNER

A WRITER? NAH. That’s not how Dick Wagner saw himself.

Dick loved thinking deeply about the past. Even earned a PhD in history from UW–Madison. He also liked getting things done, so in 1980, Dick became a politician—one of the first openly gay elected officials in the country, in fact.

Being on the county board gave him a chance to make and record history. He traveled around Wisconsin learning what life was like for LGBTQ+ people. And he collected things. Posters, party invites, news articles, everyday objects... boxes of LGBTQ+ history.

Believe it or not, those boxes turned Dick into a writer. All that stuff he’d saved couldn’t just lay around gathering dust. It had to be shared!

So Dick went to work. He wrote two books about Wisconsin’s LGBTQ+ history. Brought to light stories people had never heard before.

Without Dick’s words and hard work, those stories would’ve been lost. So let’s all say thanks to Dick Wagner: historian, politician, writer—and hero.

STATS

Born: 1943

Died: 2021



Madison, WI

*"THE REASON I WRITE IS NOT BECAUSE I ENJOY WRITING BUT
BECAUSE I WISH TO SHARE STORIES THAT I THINK ARE IMPORTANT."*

—DICK WAGNER, 2020

DEMANDING EQUALITY

**DONNA
BURKETT &
MANONIA
EVANS**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

VISIONARIES



DEMANDING EQUALITY: DONNA BURKETT & MANONIA EVANS

MEET DONNA BURKETT AND MANONIA EVANS. They met at a bar on Milwaukee's North Side. Fell in love. Wanted to get married.

There was just one problem. Donna and Manonia were both women, and it was 1971. Same-sex marriage was against the law. Did Donna and Manonia let that stop them? No, they did not. They went to the county clerk. Applied for a marriage license. Got the door slammed in their faces.

Did Donna and Manonia let *that* stop them? Are you kidding? These bold, brave women demanded equal treatment under the law. Filed a lawsuit. Declared they'd been denied the rights straight couples had. Rights guaranteed by the US Constitution.

Their lawsuit was dismissed.

Did Donna and Manonia let that stop them? What do you think? These bold, brave women invited 250 friends and family members to celebrate their union. In a church ceremony, in front of all those people, they declared their love.

STATS

MANONIA

Born: 1950

DONNA

Born: 1946



Milwaukee, WI

***"I DID NOT BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT HAD ANY
BUSINESS TELLING ME WHO I COULD MARRY."***

—DONNA BURKETT, 2007

BEING HIMSELF

LOU
SULLIVAN



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

STORYTELLER



BEING HIMSELF: LOU SULLIVAN

YOUNG LOU SULLIVAN LONGED TO BE A COWBOY. He dressed the part. *Felt* the part. But he'd been assigned female at birth.

Lou ached for a way to express what he was feeling. So he told his pink vinyl diary. "The cowboy's in my soul, where he counts," he wrote. "I really should have been a boy."

That diary turned Lou into a writer. He wrote for people who felt the way he did: trapped in the wrong body. Lou was one of the first transgender men to write and speak publicly about his world. He told the stories others wouldn't (or couldn't). Even helped start FTM International, one of the first transgender male organizations. Lou was one of the first openly gay transgender men to medically transition from female to male.

Lou died from complications from AIDS in 1991, but his work lived on in those who took strength and inspiration from his words—and his life.

STATS

Born: 1951

Died: 1991

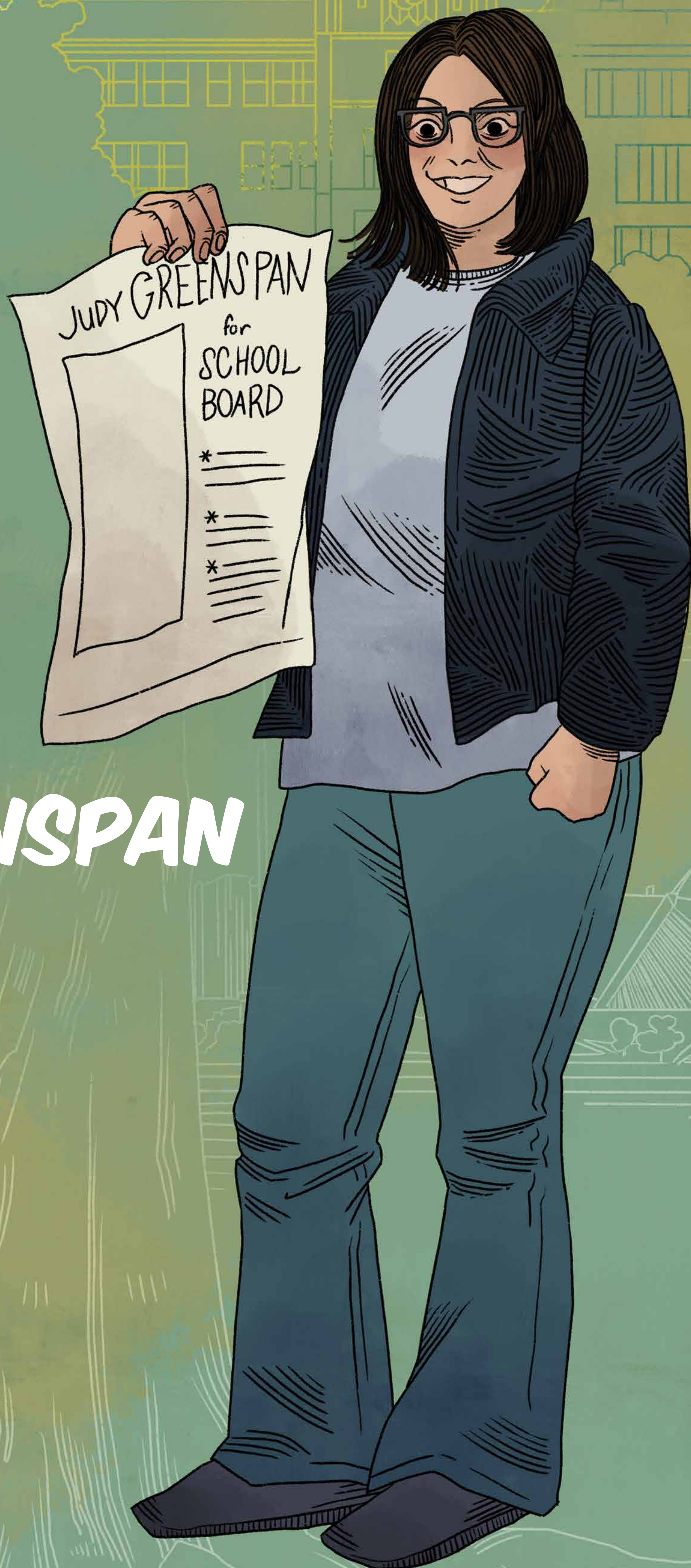


Wauwatosa, WI

**"WHEN PEOPLE LOOK AT ME, I WANT THEM TO
THINK—THERE'S ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE... THAT
HAS THEIR OWN INTERPRETATION OF HAPPINESS."**

—LOU SULLIVAN, 1966

SPEAKING OUT



**JUDY
GREENSPAN**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

CHANGEMAKER



SPEAKING OUT: **JUDY GREENSPAN**

MADISON, 1972. A high school teacher invited speakers from the Gay Liberation Front to talk with students about sexual identity and orientation.

Amazing, right? But the school's principal made sure it never happened. Even got gay and lesbian speakers banned from all Madison high schools.

Judy Greenspan was one of those speakers. They were 20 years old, openly gay, and not about to give up without a fight.

Judy ran for the Madison school board. Their message? A high school bill of rights, equal protection for women, and the right for "gay people to exist openly and speak in schools."

Judy became one of the first openly lesbian women in the country to run for office. Any office. Ever.

Judy lost the election, but they set the stage for future openly gay women and men to run for office, just like them. Someone had to be first. With their message of equality and openness, Judy made it happen.

STATS

Born: 1952



Madison, WI

***"RUNNING OPENLY AS A LESBIAN AND A FEMINIST
IS GOING TO BE A HARD JOB. I HOPE MY SISTERS
WILL ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE CAMPAIGN."***

—JUDY GREENSPAN, 1973

TAKING A STAND

**JAMIE
NABOZNY**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

CHANGEMAKER



TAKING A STAND: JAMIE NABOZNY

COMING OUT GAY IN WISCONSIN WASN'T EASY. Jamie Nabozny? He proved his courage when he came out at age 13. But that didn't stop the bullies. Jamie finally asked his high school principal for help. "Boys will be boys," was all the principal said.

Jamie ran away to Minneapolis during his junior year. After college, he showed his courage again when he sued his former school district for allowing the bullying to continue *for years*.

He argued that the US Constitution guarantees equal rights and protection under the law, and he was denied those rights. By the bullies, sure. But also by the adults who protected them.

Know what? Jamie was right. The court awarded him nearly one million dollars and ordered the school leadership to pay it.

Jamie's courage helped guarantee young people greater protection under the law. It's something Jamie needed then. Today, as a safe school advocate, he's fighting for the young people who need it now.

STATS

Born: 1975



Ashland, WI

"THE SCHOOL HAD A POLICY, AND AS A DISTRICT, THE BUILDING AND THE LAWS WERE THERE TO PROTECT ME, BUT THE PEOPLE WHO WERE IN CHARGE OF MAKING SURE THOSE LAWS AND POLICIES WERE FOLLOWED THROUGH ON DIDN'T DO THEIR JOBS."

—JAMIE NABOZNY, 2011



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

AMPLIFYING LGBTQ+ VOICES



AMPLIFYING LGBTQ+ VOICES

WHEN PEOPLE SHARE THEIR STORIES, they leave a valuable record of their experiences and their communities. Sometimes, the stories even affect future people or events in unforeseen ways.

Here are just a few voices of the LGBTQ+ people who have always been—and will always be—a part of Wisconsin's history.

"MOST OF THE TIME, I CALL MYSELF BISEXUAL, BUT I DISLIKE LABELS. THEY TEND TO BOX YOU IN. MY SEXUALITY SHIFTS FROM DAY TO DAY... SOME DAYS I'M JUST PLAIN CONFUSED!"

**—JENNIFER, 18, IN 1994
(MILWAUKEE)**

"I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT FOR EVERYONE TO KNOW THAT THEY AREN'T GOING TO KNOW EXACTLY WHO THEY ARE RIGHT AWAY."

—ROWAN, 16, IN 2021 (JEFFERSON)

"INSIDE, I'M PROUD OF WHAT I AM, BUT I'M NOT OUT TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC. I BELIEVE THAT COMING OUT IS AN ONGOING PROCESS."

—RACHEL, 16, IN 1994 (MADISON)

"I WAS STILL ON THE EDGE OF, 'DO I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE MY NAME?'... I'VE BEEN KIND OF FEMME THROUGHOUT MY ENTIRE LIFE BUT JUST HAVING A NEW NAME IS KIND OF WHAT CONFIRMS MY FEMININITY."

—SELENA, 22, IN 2017 (NEKOOSA)

**SHARING
STORIES**



**MAKING
HISTORY**



**SHAPING
THE
FUTURE**



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

SHARING STORIES, MAKING HISTORY, SHAPING THE FUTURE

SHARING A PERSONAL STORY IS AN ACT OF BRAVERY. It can make a person feel less alone. It can help others see the world in a different way. It can inspire the ones who listen.

A complete history includes everybody's story. LGBTQ+ stories make our collective history fuller. They help us better understand how we got to today—and what possibilities exist for the future.

The LGBTQ+ people you've met in this exhibit were visionaries, changemakers, and storytellers. They made contributions to create a better world. Over the decades, their efforts added up to significant changes in Wisconsin and beyond.

SHARE YOUR STORY. MAKE HISTORY. HOW MIGHT YOUR STORY SHAPE THE FUTURE?



Learn more about these stories and Wisconsin's wider LGBTQ+ history with these resources from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press:

We Will Always Be Here: A Guide to Exploring and Understanding the History of LGBTQ+ Activism in Wisconsin, by Jenny Kalvaitis and Kristen Whitson

We've Been Here All Along: Wisconsin's Early Gay History and Coming Out, Moving Forward: Wisconsin's Recent Gay History by R. Richard Wagner



W I S C O N S I N
H I S T O R I C A L
S O C I E T Y

Artwork for the exhibit is the creation of nipinet landsem, an Indigequeer Anishinaabe and Michif artist currently based in Teejop (Madison, WI). They are a descendant of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.