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(Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

Faces of LGBT Pride



The Obama White House · Follow

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Today marks one year since the Supreme Court ruled that marriage equality would be the law of the land. On Friday, President Obama designated a new national monument at the historic site of the Stonewall Uprising in New York City to honor the diversity of the LGBT equality movement. And today, in New York City, San

Francisco and around the country, people will march in the streets with friends and family to celebrate LGBT pride.

In celebration of our journey towards greater equality and justice for all, read these stories from members of the LGBT community to see what pride means to them.

“One of the most special moments of my presidency was that warm summer night last June when we lit up the White House out there. It was a powerful symbol here at home, where more Americans finally felt accepted and whole, and that their country recognized the love that they felt. It was a beacon for people around the world who are still fighting for those rights. It was a reminder that when the change we seek comes, and when we move a little bit further on our journey toward equality and justice, we still have a responsibility to reach back and help pull up others who are striving to do the same.” — President Obama at the 2016 LGBT Pride Reception



Gilbert Baker, designer of the Rainbow Flag (Photo: Kelly Jo Smart)

Gilbert Baker

Flags are about power. [Harvey Milk's] whole message was that our power came from the individuals coming out. That we were all, as he said, a little molecule of water in a big wave that's going to change the world. And what that little molecule is, or as I like to say, the thread that connects us is that in our lives we come to that place where we come out. We're true to ourselves. We don't live the lie and we don't hide. We move from the place of shame to a place of pride.

I decided to make a rainbow flag. I didn't sit around making 20 designs. I said, okay, rainbow. Because the rainbow flag is a magic part of us. It's a magic part of nature. It's beautiful. It's spiritual. And it fits: It's the diversity of our race, our gender, our ages, everything. It really fit us as a people. And it didn't depend on the word, whether it was going to be gay or lesbian. It doesn't say "USA" on the American flag or "France" on the French flag.

The rainbow is understood in every language.



(Photo: Kelly Jo Smart)

So June 25, 1978, after all that work, we're raising it up these beautiful flag poles in SF. And finally, it sails out of my hands and into the wind and I can't ever describe how profound that was. I mean, it was so beautiful. I knew, this is the most beautiful thing I'll ever do. This is it. This is the most important thing I'll ever make.

The wind catches the fabric and it's wild, it's like a flame. The kinetic energy of it is beautiful. I was really astonished. As I stood there, I looked around and saw in the eyes of all my friends and everyone there, that they owned it. It was immediate. They all knew,

“That’s our flag. That’s our symbol.”





Rob Calhoun (left) with his husband Clay, and their two children (Photo: Kelly Jo Smart)

Rob Calhoun

For most all of my life, I knew I was different. I grew up in Georgia where I spent my childhood and adolescence feeling like an outsider because I was attracted to boys and not girls. When I reached college I began to come out, doing so scared and timidly. But my shyness started to dwindle as I became deeply involved in LGBT activism and when I eventually met and fell in love with my soulmate, Clay. And in 1993, as a part of the mass wedding performed during the March on Washington, I married my best friend and the love of my life. I took his last name and we started our life together.

I have always known that I wanted to be a father and my husband felt the same way. The time had come and we wanted to start a family together. In 2002, our daughter was born and we were among the first same-sex couples in our state to jointly adopt a child. A few years later, in 2005, our family became complete when my son was born and we were again issued a joint adoption.

Instantly, our world changed. We were filled with an incredible amount of joy. However, coupled with that joy was the reality that people were not used to two-dad families. Back in the early 2000s, it was a completely different time when it came to acceptance of couples and families that were not made up of one man and one woman. We were stared at in the grocery store. We were constantly reminded that there were people who viewed our love differently because of our genders and because we didn't have the legal right to marry.

Massachusetts became the first state to offer same-sex marriage in 2004.

Straightaway, we headed to Provincetown to get married legally. As meaningful as that moment was, to me it was a formality.

I married my husband in 1993 and that is when our shared lives began. We just had to wait for the world around us to catch up. And in the coming years, our

country would shift in a way that I could never have imagined.

In my mind, grassroots activism is the most significant factor that has advanced the LGBT equality movement. The movement reached our families and our friends and has been impactful through us living our own truth. But it also has been forever changed by the leadership of President Obama, who has been a trailblazer in bringing change to our country, particularly surrounding the issue of LGBT equality.

Pride is being happy and proud of who you are. For much of my early life, that concept felt out of the realm of possibility.

I was petrified to be who I always knew I was. As a teenager, growing up in the South in the 1980s, I wished that I could be just like everyone else. But today, I wouldn't trade who I am for anything. Being gay brought me to the love of my life and together we started the incredible family, with our two wonderful children, that I am proud to have today.



Robyn Ochs, activist and writer (Photo: Kelly Jo Smart)

Robyn Ochs

Born in 1958, I was raised in an era of deafening, suffocating silence around LGBT issues. Then, in 1976, I discovered I was bisexual. I had just begun university, and — to my great surprise and bewilderment — I found myself head-over-heels in love with another woman. I had never imagined such a possibility, and this new information was deeply unsettling. Like most Americans, I had taken as given that I would grow up and seek my Mr. Right. But what if Mr. Right turned out to be a woman? If I shared my truth, what would my life be like? Would anyone still love me? Terrified and unsure, I remained silent for five long, difficult years, gathering courage to speak and live my truth.

We LGBT folks grow up knowing that our lives and our loves are considered by many to be less valid, even repugnant or evil. Whenever I mention my wife to a new acquaintance, I'm not sure whether I will be asked, "What is her name?" or if the person will flinch, take a step backward, and look away. Every time I tell someone I identify as bisexual, I brace myself, unsure whether they will respond with a smile or with a look of puzzlement or disgust.

Peg and I married in Massachusetts on May 17th, 2004, the first day it was possible to do so.

Neighbors and strangers greeted us on the street with enthusiasm and joy. Strangers waved to us from passing buses. A stranger thrust a bouquet of flowers into my hands. A stern-looking court clerk smiled, stating "It's about time!" A street artist handed us a painting, saying "Congratulations! Here, let this be your first wedding gift!" To be embraced and celebrated by our community was an amazing — and unfamiliar — feeling.

To me, pride means living life in the light, with my head held high, my wife's hand in mine. It means knowing that the light of our love is stronger than the storm clouds of disapproval. I know now that my love

is beautiful. I am fortunate to have love in my life, and to live in a country where I can live my life openly.

We have made great progress, yet much remains to be done. We must ensure that no one can be fired because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. We must work in coalition with others to center and empower those still denied equity, whether because of their gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, race, citizenship status, or any other reason.

I am grateful to President Obama, the first U.S. President to make clear — through his words, his unprecedented support of LGBT people, and by hosting these annual LGBT Pride Receptions — that the White House is indeed the people's house, and we LGBT people are welcome.

Finally, forty years later, I feel welcome.



Layha Spoonhunter (left), activist (Photo: Kelly Jo Smart)

Layha Spoonhunter

As an LGBT and two-spirit advocate, I believe that pride is a chance to celebrate our identity and to reflect on the progress that we've made so far, while also recognizing the work that remains.

In 2014, I came out as two-spirit, which at first, was difficult. But once I embraced my identity, I started on the journey that brought me to a community that is truly an honor to be a part of.

From being guided by two-spirit elders to being embraced by LGBT advocates, this community has been life-changing. Pride is a time to celebrate our community and the identities that have brought us together.

In my community, two-spirit people previously brought great respect to our tribal nations. They held the honor of having both masculine and feminine spirits. As a two-spirit advocate, I am determined to revitalize the respected role in my community. I am striving to demonstrate that we can still hold that honored role today.

I have worked in advocacy across many different spaces, from working at college campuses, to working with the Human Rights Campaign, to visiting tribal nations across the country. I am passionate about promoting inclusiveness in tribal nations because I believe that it is what makes our community great. I will continue to educate young people on the role that they will play in making sure that our nation's future is both inclusive and proud.

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