



1530 Blake St., Suite 200  
Denver, CO 80202

# Newsletter

Summer 2014

## A LETTER FROM JUDY SHEPARD



Judy Shepard

It was hotter than the dickens when I was Grand Marshal of Atlanta Pride a few years ago. The crowds were just massive – it seemed like the largest Pride in the South and there were folks from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama lining the parade route. They all came out to celebrate who they are, despite the heat. Rain started to pour right after the parade ended, and the winds

got so bad that part of the main stage was blown over.

At the Pride parades and festivals, some people don't want to think about my sad story and others who face hate every day. So I like to focus on the pride I see in everyday things. In the last few months, I have seen pride take many forms.

I spent time with Jason Collins recently, and he is a great example of pride. He is a role model who shows young people that regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, they can be who they are and chase their dreams. Jason's story has had such a big impact on so many young people and his pride is there for the world to see.

I saw Pride in the young LGBT people of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, during my recent tour with the U.S. Department of State. The hate they face in Kingston, Jamaica, is horrific. It is just so frightening – brutal assaults and exploitation. The homeless situation for LGBT youth is unspeakable. But, still there is pride in

who they are. Straight allies there are standing up for what is right and supporting kids who have been shunned.

Our young bloggers on MatthewsPlace.com share their stories of being young and discovering who they really are - a great kind of pride. The website is a constant support to the thousands who visit and read the stories of people just like them.

Calls and emails come in to the office daily from people needing help. I am reminded that the work my family and the MSF staff does is still needed. Our country has made so much progress in the last year but there are still schools who are stopped from producing "The Laramie Project". Too many young people don't feel safe in their classrooms and communities. Job, housing and marriage equality are still not available everywhere.

That is why we do this important work and are so thankful for your support. Thanks to you, we can continue in the memory of all those who have seen hate and especially my Matt.

With love,

Judy

## Matthew Shepard Foundation Calendar of Events

For more information or ticketing, go to [www.MatthewShepard.org/event](http://www.MatthewShepard.org/event)

July <b>25</b> 2014	<b>Celebrating the life of Dennis Dougherty,</b> Denver, CO	September <b>12-27</b> 2014	<b>Central New York Playhouse production of "The Laramie Project,"</b> Syracuse, NY
August <b>1</b> 2014	<b>Matt Shepard is a Friend of Mine with post-screening discussion with Judy and Dennis Shepard,</b> Provincetown, MA	September <b>6</b> 2014	<b>Matt Shepard is a Friend of Mine with post-screening discussion with Judy and Dennis Shepard,</b> Shreveport, LA
August <b>15-23</b> 2014	<b>Detroit Actor's Theater Company production of "The Laramie Project" and "The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later" in cycle,</b> Ferndale, MI	September <b>27</b> 2014	<b>Annual Rehoboth Beach Benefit,</b> Rehoboth Beach, MD
August <b>28</b> 2014	<b>Four Seasons Pool Party Happy Hour MSF benefit,</b> Denver, CO	October <b>11</b> 2014	<b>Matthew Shepard Foundation Honors,</b> Denver, CO

## CREATING SPACE FOR THE "Q"

We use the tagline "By LGBTQ Youth, For LGBTQ Youth" on MatthewsPlace.com, the Foundation's resources site for young adults ages 13-24.

Many view the letter Q as the representation of the word "queer." However, we've always maintained that it also stands for "questioning." It's important to give the space for those who are questioning and exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. Young people are growing, changing, and discovering themselves. As time passes, it's easy to forget that feeling of fear and the heavy internal conflict that can arise from questioning sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Questioning is valid and authentic. It's part of the larger story and journey of each person.

The continued importance of creating space for those who are questioning arose recently when a young person submitted a video to MatthewsPlace.com and talked about questioning gender identity. This young person said in the video that he had not told anybody in real life that he felt he may be transgender – even though he'd wondered this deep down for awhile. He has asked that we continue to use the pronoun "he."

It's gratifying to know that young people feel so comfortable at Matthew's Place that they know they can be honest there and feel supported – even if they don't feel that way in their day-to-day life. We worked through getting the young person real-life support and making sure he's feeling healthy and in a safe place before publishing the video. His state of questioning is important because it speaks to a shared experience that many have felt. We also recognize that in-person support is incredibly helpful. Other MatthewsPlace.com youth reached out to offer him support. This speaks to the community at MatthewsPlace.com. It's truly beautiful to watch and see other young people step up and offer

to be a support person when others are in dire need. It speaks to the community at MatthewsPlace.com and demonstrates the continued need for a moderated place online where young people can identify as questioning.

We don't always hear people say aloud - "I am questioning. I need help. I just need somebody to tell me these feelings aren't crazy, wrong, or weird." Along with talking about these feelings of questioning, it's also important to give space where they can try on different things and see what fits for them without the fear of having to declare a fixed identity.

A tangible way to help those who are questioning is by sharing your story. MatthewsPlace.com publishes personal stories from readers. These stories are one of the most popular features on the site. They include many common themes, such as feelings of isolation, fear, and conflict. Yet they also include themes about the joy of self-discovery. These stories resonate with people questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity because they are truly in the thick of those feelings.

We accept stories by all people - including those who wish to remain anonymous. Please consider sharing your story to help a person who is questioning: <http://www.matthewsplace.com/stories/share/>



**Christine Romero** is the editor of Matthew's Place. She has a background in professional writing, editing, public relations, and marketing. A graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder, she was a newspaper reporter in Arizona and Colorado and later worked in public relations. She has long been involved in various LGBT organizations, including those that worked to create safe spaces for youth.

MatthewsPlace.com is an online village for LGBTQ youth and allies. It features interview with celebrities and newsmakers, youth blogs, personal stories from our fans, and much more. It is a safe place for youth regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

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## LARAMIE PROJECTS ACROSS THE POND

As the inspiring pro-diversity plays “The Laramie Project and The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later” continue to be produced more and more across the world, the Foundation has stepped up its efforts to help far-away casts, crews and audiences strongly feel connected to the real-life events and people portrayed in, and the powerful anti-hate messages at the heart of, the works.

Producing the full Laramie Cycle (the phrase used to describe both the plays together) was the challenge Max Lindsay of the Nuffield Youth Theatre in Southampton, England took on, and he reached out to Laramie Project Specialist Susan Burk for support. Cast members were able to enrich their production through overseas video chat sessions and a variety of resources. “Seemingly endless amounts of written information, videos and personal accounts that were added to my own collection made our research period so much deeper and more connected to Matthew’s story’s meaning,” Lindsay said. “It was a truly beautiful thing to see so many young people so informed and brimming with enthusiasm to tell this story and tell it right.”

Lindsay said the production “has left deep imprints in all those involved. Most of the cast still wear their wristbands to sessions, and have spoken of how they are the first to shoot down even the most minor moment of homophobia in school or friendship settings. This was more than just a production; I really feel this changed all our lives.”

In the meantime, Burk had been assisting with a combined drama, text and curricular package under development in Scotland as far back as early 2012. John Naples-Campbell of Edinburgh College Performing Arts Studio said he was first introduced to The Laramie Project while working on a piece of verbatim theater based on the Lockerbie plane crash. “As a gay man I was moved by the honesty of the piece,” he said. “Global themes of acceptance and tolerance are vital resources to educators.”

“I am lucky to be in a field where I can use the text not only as a theatre resource but as an educational tool to teach about equality



Photography By: Richard Budd



Photography By: Richard Budd

and diversity,” Naples-Campbell said. “Matthew Shepard’s legacy is the hope his story brings to thousands of young people to change the world in which they are living.”

He described the Foundation, Burk and especially Judy Shepard as invaluable. “We are communicating across an ocean and no request is too small or too big,” he said. “Their dedication in supporting communities is admirable and I know my students have felt, by their communication to the organization, they are part of a global movement to erase hate.”



**Susan Burk** joined the Foundation as its first-ever Laramie Project Specialist in June 2011. A former radio and television news anchor and theatre professional, Susan attended the Graduate Acting Program at the Goodman School of Drama in Chicago (now The Theatre School at DePaul), and has strong backgrounds in theater, journalism, and Matthew’s story. At the time of Matthew Shepard’s murder, his funeral, and the trials of his killers, she was the Executive Producer/Senior Anchor for the evening news at KTWO Television.



Photography By: Richard Budd

The MSF works with professional companies, colleges and universities, high schools, community theatres, and religious groups to provide a variety of services including media resources, historical background and context, creative consultation, helping to create school curriculums and more and has worked with productions all across the country and around the world.



## MEET THE STAFF | ROBERT OZOLINS-HOUSE • Programs and Outreach Manager



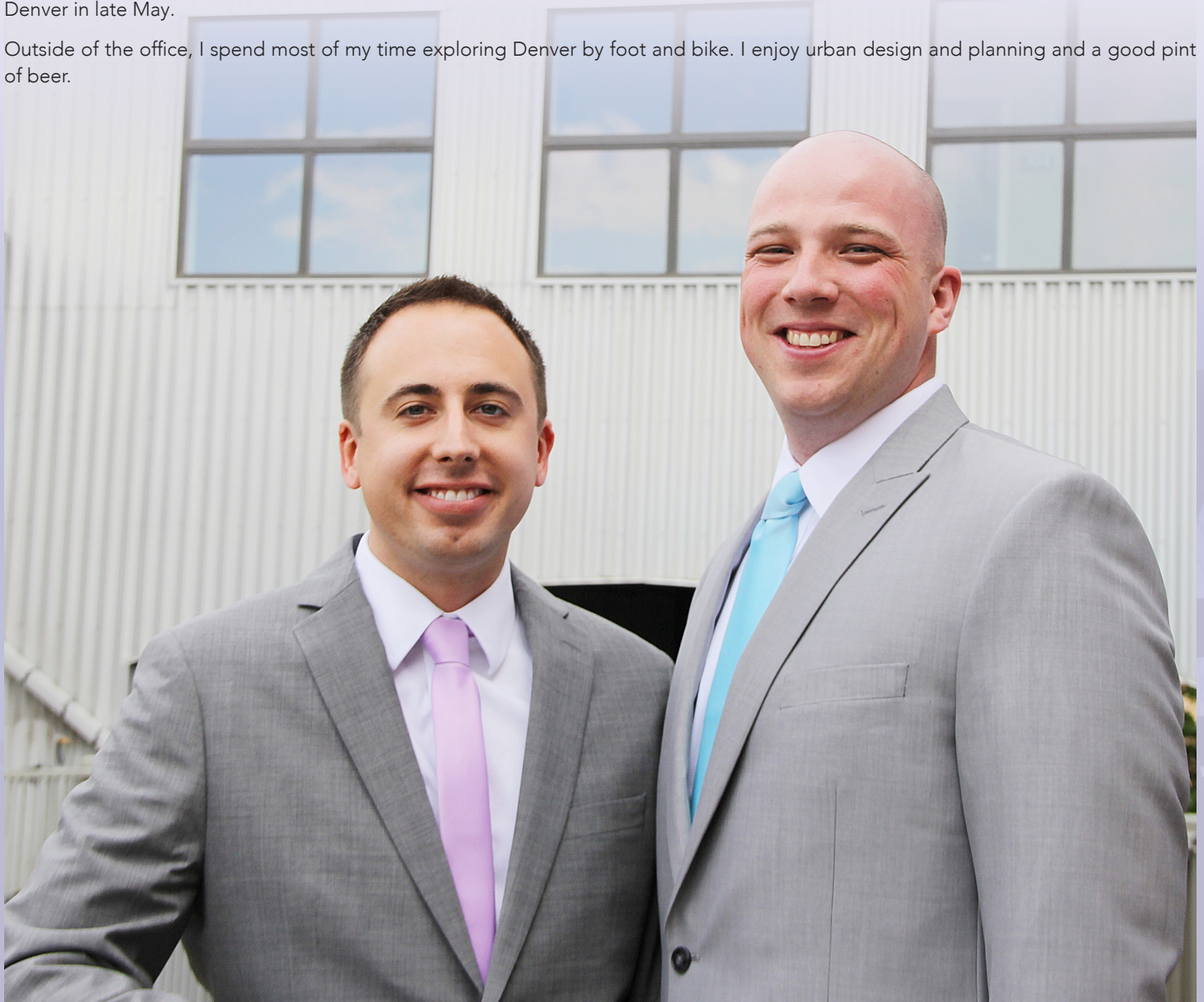
Hello,

I'm Robert Ozolins-House, and I have had the honor of working at the Foundation for more than three years. I have held a number of roles here since I started as Intern in the Spring of 2009, but my current role is Programs and Outreach Manager. I oversee the Foundation's online and in-person programs, working with schools, community groups and companies to make speakers available across the nation and overseas to spread the message of Erasing Hate. I also get to share all the amazing work we are doing with supporters and interact with people who contact the us through our website, Facebook and Twitter.

I am a proud native of Spokane, WA but I made my way to Denver in 2005 to study Politics and Peace and Justice Studies at Regis University. After graduating, I worked as a policy advocate at Lifelong AIDS Alliance in Seattle during my year of volunteer service in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. The Jesuit Volunteer Corps, a year-long service experience focused on simplicity, social justice, community and spirituality, solidified in me the need to make a positive impact in the world through my work.

I live in Denver with my lovely husband, Erik. Because the Colorado Constitution bans loving, committed same-sex couples from marrying, Erik and I were legally married on the Washington coast on May 4, 2014. We also held a proper ceremony with our family and friends in Denver in late May.

Outside of the office, I spend most of my time exploring Denver by foot and bike. I enjoy urban design and planning and a good pint of beer.





## INTRODUCING THE MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION HONORS



As the Foundation nears our 16th anniversary, we owe it to the movement for LGBT equality to lift up and honor those who have committed themselves to securing justice for our community. We are excited to introduce the Matthew Shepard Foundation Honors, the new iteration of our Bear to Make a Difference Gala.

Judy and Dennis care deeply about this event and share our belief that this new vision for our annual celebration reflects the maturity of the Foundation and our commitment to an enduring, sustainable movement that embraces and recognizes all contributions. We are incredibly grateful to the community that created our Bear to Make a Difference 12 years ago and look forward to celebrating the future of the Matthew Shepard Foundation and honoring those who have brought us this far.

Our transition in 2014 was spurred by an amazing year of growth and progress for the Foundation. Judy and Dennis Shepard spoke to students, teachers, workers, and politicians in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and across the U.S. We worked with more than 65 productions of "The Laramie Project" in 2013, igniting community-wide discussions on how to create a more civil, compassionate, and just world. MatthewsPlace.com has more than doubled its web traffic, providing more youth visitors with a safe online environment and access to resources to make their community safer, happier and healthier. We are also very proud to be adding new programs that will be announced during Honors 2014!

This year, it is our immense pleasure to announce that **Stephen Fry will receive the Making a Difference Award**. Stephen Fry is an English actor, screenwriter, author, playwright, journalist, poet, comedian, television presenter, film director and all-round national treasure.

Whilst at university, Fry became involved with the Cambridge Footlights, where he met his long-time collaborator and friend Hugh Laurie. As half of the comic double act Fry and Laurie, he co-wrote and co-starred in *A Bit of Fry & Laurie*, and took the role of Jeeves (with Laurie playing Wooster) in *Jeeves and Wooster*.

Fry's acting roles include the lead in the film *Wilde*, Melchett in the BBC television series *Blackadder*, the titular character in the television series *Kingdom*, a recurring guest role as Dr. Gordon Wyatt on the crime series *Bones*, and as Gordon Deitrich in the dystopian thriller *V for Vendetta*, Mycroft Holmes in Warner's *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* and *The Master* of

Laketown in Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy. He has also written and presented several documentary series, including the Emmy Award-winning *Stephen Fry: The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive*, and is also the long-time host of the BBC television quiz show *QI*. He played Prime Minister Alistair Davies in the 9th season of Fox TV's *24: Live Another Day*.

As a proudly out gay man, the award-winning *Out There*, documenting the lives of lesbian, bisexual gay and transgender people around the world, is part of his 30-year advocacy of the rights of the LGBT community.

As well as his work in television, Fry has contributed columns and articles for newspapers and magazines, appears frequently on radio, reads for voice-overs and has written four novels and three volumes of autobiography: *Moab Is My Washpot*, *The Fry Chronicles* and his latest, as yet untitled.

Get your tickets to the Honors at [MatthewShepard.org/Honors](http://MatthewShepard.org/Honors)



Stephen Fry