

Remarks by Robbie Samuels

Recipient of The History Project's Lavender Rhino Award, 2009

Thank you Gary for that lovely introduction and I'd also like to thank Lee Swislow, GLAD's executive director for nominating me for this award. It was quite a surprise as I had no idea she was keeping track of the numerous activities in which I take part and I appreciate the recognition from her and GLAD. Unfortunately she wasn't able to join us this evening.

I would also like to thank The History Project for selecting me for this honor - the inaugural Lavender Rhino award. It gave me the opportunity to reflect back on my life as an organizer.

My connection to the LGBT community began when I was in college in the mid 90s, when I first came out as a dyke - a decade before coming out as trans - by the time I was 25 I had directed a Northeast regional LGBT student conference, founded an LGBT young adult organization and was New York State Coordinator of a national LGBT campaign. And boy was I tired. I had not yet figured out how to balance life and work.

In my late 20s, while trying to get a better sense of balance and of who I was, I couldn't help but begin to deal with this gender thing that kept coming up. As I began to identify as a man I quickly realized I would be perceived - as a white man. And having spent the last 10 years being socialized and politicized as a dyke this was - let's say unsettling. I needed to begin to broaden my sense of the world and to educate myself on how I could work for justice in ways that stretched beyond my involvement in the queer community.

To begin this part of my journey I sought out new archetypes of what it means to be a man - men who were aware of their white and male privilege. That's why I got involved with the Boston chapter of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism. This all genders organization focuses on working with men on the issues of pro-feminism, LGBT equality and racial justice.

Through my work with NOMAS-Boston I began to understand how complex the world was - the intersectionality of oppressions - and I wanted to be part of a community of like-minded, not just like-identified, progressives that were working within and across issues. So in August 2006 I co-founded a group called Socializing for Justice with my good friend Hilary Allen. We're building a cross-issue progressive movement by 'putting the social back in

social justice'. Twice a month SoJust hosts events, which bring together like-minded progressives off-line and in-person – face time not facebook.

To make sure SoJust was a welcoming space for all kinds of left-leaning social justice minded folks, I became involved in other groups and communities. This allowed me to meet many people I wouldn't have ordinarily and helped me create a community in which you were likely to see someone like yourself and meet someone you wouldn't have otherwise. The focus was finding commonality with people and movements who were like-minded, but not like-identified. What could we learn from each other?

I feel that tonight I'm being recognized for the sheer volume of groups that I've been active in within the past 3 years. What I've noticed is that my birthday party invite list has become much more diverse - by race, gender, sexual orientation and age. I find this to be an interesting barometer to whether I'm making progress in my effort to create a more diverse community that supports and sustains me.

We need to find creative ways to collaborate with our allies. Find what we have to offer and share. We need to create more spaces where we're not defined as "allies" but are instead working together on a shared vision that connects our specific issues.

Now as I turn 35 this year, I find myself surrounded by a supportive community that helps me seek the work/life balance that eluded me when I was younger and has given me a feeling of abundance rather than burnout. My newest passion is cultivating this abundance – I've discovered that sharing knowledge has allowed for more in my life not less and has strengthened my communities.

Getting this award definitely gives me the "umph" that I need to sustain this work and to keep marching forward. I'll be keeping it next to my most prized LGBT artifact, a signed and numbered replica of an original 8-striped rainbow flag by Gilbert Baker, that I received back in 1999 – yes, I'm a queer history buff so it's quite an honor to be recognized by The History Project as an emerging historymaker and I will strive to live up to the expectations of this award.

Many thanks to the numerous groups and organizations that I've worked with over the years – for welcoming me into your community – this award is accepted in honor of the work you do. And many thanks to the volunteers who helped make this evening possible, as

well as the staff of the Athenaeum. I look forward to working with The History Project as they begin to document the history of the transgender community in Boston.

I encourage all of you to seek new connections within the next year that will help you build stronger relationships with those that aren't already part of your community – aren't like-identified. Perhaps you'll find your birthday list has also expanded and become more diverse.

Thank you.