

A Glimpse of Our Future

Models for LGBT Aging in Community

Derek Gordon and his partner Arturo Fernandez moved to a straight San Francisco neighborhood hoping they would be tolerated by neighbors who would leave them alone.

They got quite a surprise.

For six years, Derek and Arturo have lived on a cul-de-sac near the University of San Francisco. Their straight neighbors don't just tolerate the middle-aged gay couple. They rely on the two men as a cherished part of a tightly knit neighborhood where everybody helps and protects everyone else.

"I always wanted to live someplace where I knew my neighbors and where people would look out for each other," Derek says. "Somehow as a gay man I never believed that would happen unless I moved to a gay district."

Derek's Lone Mountain neighborhood is so diverse, it couldn't be called "gay" or anything else. It's Asian, Russian, White, Black, Native American, student, professional, young, old, high-income, low-income – all mixed together on a street where everybody treats each other as part of one extended family.

Like Derek and Arturo, many gay men and lesbians in San Francisco find themselves on the edge of a major new trend in urban living. Often without realizing it, they are developing diverse communities of neighbors who are taking care of each other in an accepting way. Their interactions model how many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) seniors might live in the near future.

"As it was unfolding it didn't occur to me that this was happening," Derek recalls.

Gradually, everyone on the cul-de-sac started pitching in to help two older widows on the street – tending their gardens, carrying groceries from the corner store, toting ladders to change burned out light bulbs, even taking them to the DeYoung Museum or MOMA once a month.

Local residents weren't connecting just with 80 and 90-year-old women. All the children on the street started playing basketball together. Families began offering each other a hand whenever needed.

They created annual block parties with barbecues, beer and music. Residents with money chipped in to cover expenses. Others supplied muscle or help with organizing.

"It's very informal and spontaneous," Derek explains. "We didn't set out to do this. We all just seem to have made a commitment to each other to listen and be aware.

"And now, remarkably, as a gay couple we don't stand out. We fit in. I'm thrilled to be a part of it."

openhouse believes Derek's experience is part of the growing phenomenon toward diverse, multi-generational, "livable communities" being promoted by such groups as the AARP and the Sierra Club. It may well be our future.

On a deeper level, it means we're changing attitudes – especially about our relationships with neighbors who may be very different from us.

As lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people who benefit every day from the courage of our "out" forbearers, this is the first widespread chance our history has given us to become fully accepted and integral members of local mainstream communities.

It's just in time, since it's a model that could serve our exploding population of seniors very well.

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Derek Gordon, Arturo Fernandez and Buddy at home

Three years ago, there were 17,000 LGBT San Franciscans over 60.

Now there are an estimated 25,000. Based on state projections, in three years there will be 35,000.

Many LGBT elders are isolated. In time, most will need assistance.

All will need community.

Executive Director's Update

By Moli Steinert

More than any previous issue, this newsletter is packed with information about major changes in the way lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) seniors will soon be living in San Francisco.

In profound ways that weren't possible before, we are connecting to each other and to our non-LGBT neighbors.

openhouse is working to strengthen those connections, to include us in a full range of supportive community experiences and aging-related services that historically had been closed to us.

Most of us want to stay in our own homes as we age independently and comfortably. We chose San Francisco to live out our lives and be who we are. We don't want to have to leave just because we're getting older. To succeed as we age, we must have affordable options, community connections and support.

Our job at **openhouse** is to make that happen.

This newsletter's front page article describes changes one gay couple is experiencing on a San Francisco street that is naturally turning into a caring and mutually supportive community. It could be a model for other neighborhoods.

Our article on page 3 explains how and why so many of us became dangerously isolated. We cannot afford to stay that way.

Our tribute to **openhouse** benefactor Joie Hubbert on page 5 shows an example of someone who spent her life countering isolation, bringing people together, and engaging as many others as possible in her vibrant style of life.

We have not yet labeled this trend, but it's all about connections.

In my own Bernal Heights neighborhood, I've noticed similar changes appearing for the first time. Several years ago, without really thinking about the deeper aspects of what we were doing, my partner Donna and I helped organize our

block to make sure we'd all look after each other in case of a major earthquake.

Together with our neighbors, many of whom are LGBT seniors, we made lists of contact information, agreed on a neighborhood meeting spot in the event of a crisis, and even took stock of who has what emergency supplies.

Then last year, after our home was burglarized, we piggybacked a neighborhood watch system on top of the connections we had already made.

As we became closer, we started watching out for elderly neighbors -- a gay man in his 80s, and a straight man in his 90s who gets dinner delivered by a group of neighbors most nights.

In a way, today's LGBT seniors and baby boomers have long had to "create" their own families, especially if we were rejected by our families of origin. So it makes sense that we have the skills and experience to help lead the way to ever more helpful friendship and neighborhood linkages.

If we are to live longer and better, we will have to have people around us who recognize and support us. At **openhouse** we are building a model of community and neighborhood engagement.

The reality is that we are creating our future, and it looks different from what most of us expected.



Photo by Jane Cleland

Moli Steinert



Lorraine, Dion, Ida, Felicia, Marilyn and Joyce are among seniors who have courageously told their life stories at openhouse LGBT cultural competency trainings for senior service providers.

senior community | living with pride
openhouse

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The Rise and Fall of Isolation

A hundred years ago, most Americans resided with their extended families in rather homogeneous communities, relying on each other and religious congregations for mutual support.

Then industrialization, urbanization, advanced secular education and increasing mobility split up multi-generational families.

Children moved away, and the American descent into loneliness began.

For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Americans in the middle of the 20th century, alienation and self-sufficiency became a lifestyle. To be open or even unguarded about orientation or gender usually meant rejection from relatives, shunning by religious communities, loathing from neighbors, loss of employment, and sometimes imprisonment or involuntary and brutal psychiatric "treatment."

Many LGBT teens and adults learned to keep a low profile -- i.e., isolate -- in order to survive. If we acted on our desires at all, we lived furtively, like outlaws.

Starting in the 1950s, the courage of groundbreaking LGBT advocates helped create some public spaces in San Francisco where we could find each other.

In the 1960s and 70s, thousands of LGBT singles moved to the city to be surrounded by other open-minded people in safer areas such as the Haight and the Castro.

And some of us moved away from people, relocating to semi-rural parts of the Bay Area that offered access to San Francisco yet maximum privacy from neighbors. As we aged, late-night commutes to San Francisco bars became less appealing. More and more, we stayed home.

Sometimes we developed LGBT friendship circles that could care for us in emergencies (lesbians did this more often than gay men). But most of us remained too wary to build many connections – even with other LGBT people.

Until HIV/AIDS, many of us felt we could get by without having to rely on others.

The HIV epidemic forced us to develop new models for building communities of care. In the beginning, most HIV related support was provided for LGBT people by LGBT people. In time we relied more on partnerships with mainstream providers.

Meanwhile the deaths of so many gay men accelerated gentrification of the Castro and Noe Valley, bringing in straight couples and families.

At the same time, changes in mainstream culture and advances in LGBT rights enabled more of us to venture beyond protected neighborhoods – and to start to connect to the mainstream community. The result was greater LGBT integration.

Today, being LGBT is seen by straight folks of all ages in the greater Bay Area as less threatening. More people

For decades, being closeted helped us survive. Now it's hard to change a long-term way of life.

But as we become seniors, isolation can be fatal. Researchers agree it may be the single greatest threat to a long and happy life. Without emotional and practical support from people who know us and care, we more quickly fall into serious illness, poverty, early institutionalization and death.

seem willing to accept us as we are – and as good neighbors to boot – and, in fact, appreciate the diversity we bring to urban living.

As many of us move further into the second half of our lives, all of these forces are coming together. Today, finally, we have our chance to connect with others to ensure a safe and vital life as we live longer than ever before. But we need leadership, an infrastructure, support services, and a plan to make it happen.

Providing that is what **openhouse** is all about.

openhouse helps the LGBT community make connections on multiple levels.

For the majority of LGBT San Franciscans who plan to remain in their homes as they age, we are educating and building partnerships with mainstream groups. Our goal is to tap all available resources to enable LGBT seniors to live long, healthy, open and fulfilling lives.

We are also planning 90 units of senior housing with aging support services at 55 Laguna Street that will be fully welcoming to LGBT seniors. We are working toward construction of a second facility with similar services in the Octavia Corridor, where all units would be affordable to low and mid-income LGBT seniors.

As our extensive surveys have shown, most prospective residents at **openhouse** do not want to live in an entirely "gay" building. So we are planning a mix of LGBT people and other seniors aligned with our values and lifestyles.

In time, as prejudice dissipates, we hope we won't need senior housing as a safe haven for LGBT people. Until then, our apartments will provide the safety, support and vital connections LGBT seniors deserve.

Right now, an important part of the job of **openhouse** is to help create naturally occurring retirement-friendly communities like Derek Gordon's (see page 1). These neighborhood supports will take care of LGBT elders along with everybody else – in groups that are structured not by apartment buildings, but by the neighborhoods where LGBT people already live.

Circle of Friends

\$50,000+

Joie Hubbert Estate

Matile Rothschild & Joan Zimmerman

Lee Leighton & Ray Saari

\$25,000+

Howard Grothe & Robert James

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Ruthy & Maureen Bennett

Saralie Pennington & Tom Hertz

\$10,000+

Alvin H. Baum & Robert Holgate

David Black

Wai Poc

Eileen Blumenthal & Patricia Dunn

Edgar Pye

\$7,500 - \$9,999

Jan Faulkner

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Robert Sass

Arthur Hurwith & Warren van Eck

Lu Chaikin

Roy Sauer

Sonni Zambino

Kevin Cheng & Todd Mavis

Arthur Slepian

Jay Cohen

Moli Steinert & Donna Canali

\$5,000 - \$7,499

Marcy Adelman

Laurence Colton & John McCoy

openhouse Brings Neighborhood Programs to LGBT Seniors

openhouse's Cultural Competency work to educate service providers – making them aware of issues unique to LGBT elders – is opening its second stage.

This year we will show neighborhood senior centers how to identify, bring in, and serve isolated LGBT elders in ways that assure safety and trust.

Nancy Flaxman, our Aging Resource Specialist, will provide on-site technical assistance to two San Francisco senior centers that are most ready to incorporate LGBT elders: Bernal Heights and Castro (which, despite their locations, are surprisingly *not* LGBT.)

We designed this work to create a shift in the cultures and direct services of those two agencies – and then to demonstrate this to more organizations providing health, aging and housing related support to thousands of LGBT seniors throughout the city.

We will also identify isolated LGBT elders and help them build community and increase access to services designed to support healthy aging.

Under new California law AB 2920, every county aging agency in the state is required to pro-

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Nancy Flaxman and Valerie Hayden

vide culturally competent services to LGBT Californians. **openhouse** and other LGBT groups in the Bay Area are uniquely positioned to work together to show how that can be done.

In a collaboration with New Leaf funded by The California Endowment, **openhouse** Education and Outreach Coordinator Valerie Hayden will create a "Best Practices" manual that can be used as a health assessment tool to implement the goals of AB 2920.

By using **openhouse** know-how to help develop LGBT outreach expertise within mainstream agencies, those agency providers will reach many more isolated elders than LGBT organizations ever could by themselves. They will also assume long-term funding responsibility to sustain this impact for the foreseeable future.

Circle of Friends

Donors contributing \$1,000 or more become members of the new **openhouse** Circle of Friends.

This visionary group is dedicated to ensuring that **openhouse** can meet the long-term care needs of our current aging LGBT community — and future generations too.

With the support of this Circle, no one will have to age alone or without support.

Joie Had Impact in Life and Beyond

Joie Hubbert didn't collect things. Knick-knacks, she scoffed, are just "claptrapia."

She collected people instead.

There always seemed to be dozens around: Partying at the weekend house she shared with her partner Mary Greer in Guerneville. Accompanying her to the ballet or the newest San Francisco restaurant. Flying to New Hampshire to eat corn, lobster and blueberry pie at the old family cottage that she kept there.

And always laughing at Joie's biting sense of humor.

Struck suddenly by pancreatic cancer, Joie died last year at age 74. She left dozens of people feeling they had lost their best friend and lifetime social director.

She also left openhouse \$55,225. Her bequest showed great foresight and enthusiasm for creating new ways for LGBT people to age with dignity. It also showed her belief in openhouse's work to build an infrastructure to support our LGBT senior community.

"Joie embraced life with the energy and heart of a dozen people," said friend Diane Benjamin. "I think she wanted to help connect people even after her own life was over."



Mary Greer, left, and Joie Hubbert in her 70s

Joie provided an example of living and aging that the rest of us could learn from. Her ability to link with others, friends say, made her more than just hard to forget. It made her a builder of the kind of informal community that takes care of its own.

For many years, Joie lived in a small rented cottage on 27th Street in San Francisco, with a garden and a view. The property she bought was a flood-prone Russian River weekend getaway.

Joie became nationally known in two career fields. As a survey and polling research expert, she was Vice President and Research Director at the Field Research Corporation.

When she retired after 24 years, Joie pioneered the use of jury research in court trials. She became a top witness for the National Jury Project.

Joie devoured the New York Times, sharpened her mind with crossword puzzles, and read books for at least an

In Memoriam 1931-2006

hour every day of her life. She made sure she saw every movie nominated for an Academy Award. She loved good food and drink.

"Whatever was there she just wanted to enjoy it all and get it all," said longtime friend Eleanor Murray.

As much as she liked to talk and tell stories, Joie listened even more. People opened up to her because she was genuinely interested in them.

"Joie had a knack for bringing people together, caring about them, and encouraging them to care for each other," said friend Sally Anderson.

How Friendships Worked

Joie Hubbert used her energy to gather friends and inspire them to get as involved in life as she was.

She and Mary Greer hosted countless parties and shared holidays with friends, a group of women in Marin and San Francisco whom Joie called her "Sisters."

The Sisters met monthly as an investment club. When the market cooled, they became a bridge club.

The Sisters co-celebrated birthdays and special events. As they started getting older, they took care of anyone in the group who was ill or needed help.

When Mary Greer developed early dementia, Joie became her caregiver. The Sisters divided up other responsibilities for keeping her comfortable.

When Joie was diagnosed with cancer, the women worked with Mary's cousin to find a house with excellent care for Mary in England with relatives nearby. Joie and Mary knew that **openhouse** expects to open in 2010. They wanted to live there, but they needed it sooner. They especially liked the idea that **openhouse** will facilitate friendships and connections with vital people who will care about and for each other.

"Friendships are important at any age but especially when you get older," said Diane Benjamin. "They're the key to staying active and involved all your life."

For more about Joie, see www.openhouse-sf.org

Your legacy can improve the lives of LGBT seniors for generations to come. To learn the tax advantages of naming **openhouse in your estate planning, call Moli Steinert at 415-296-8995.**



Joie Hubbert in her 20s

Photo Courtesy of Sally Anderson

spring openhouse fling

Sunday Brunch May 20

This year **openhouse's** 3rd annual **Spring Fling** brunch will be moving to Alexandra's Room at the Westin St. Francis adjacent to San Francisco's Union Square on Sunday, May 20, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Celebrated pianist Michael Parsons will entertain.

We expect more than 200 major supporters at the event, which will include special guest Supervisor Tom Ammiano.

Co-chairs Sonni Zambino and Robert Holgate will present the **openhouse** Trailblazer Award to Charlotte Coleman and José Sarria for their bold activism in the 1950-60s in the bars and nightclubs that forged early LGBT civil rights in San Francisco.

Tickets to the brunch are \$100. For more information, call Trilce Santana at **openhouse**, 415-296-8995.



This 1961 poster from José Sarria's courageous LGBT-supportive campaign for Supervisor marked an historic first. It would be another 16 years before Harvey Milk became San Francisco's first openly gay elected official. Join us in honoring José, and Charlotte Coleman, on May 20.