ADVOCATE HALL OF FAME

These heroes made the LGBT rights movement—and The Advocate itself—what it is today.

The Advocate Contributors
JERRY JOACHIM was among the founders of *The Advocate*. The now internationally known magazine is celebrating its 50th anniversary of covering LGBT lives. It began as a newsletter for a group called PRIDE, an acronym for Personal Rights in Defense and Education, and Joachim was its president. The newsletter evolved in September 1967 into a local LGBT newspaper called *The Los Angeles Advocate*. Joachim hosted a meeting between LGBT groups and local police in his own home and the forum was announced in the first issue, promising that "a complete account of what went on" would come in the next issue. And so began *The Advocate's* reporting on the LGBT movement. —LUCAS GRINDLEY

While many of us associate the 1960s and 1970s with sexual liberation, mainstream films were still fairly buttoned up. But PAT ROCCO (left) made gay films when no one else dared take the risk. His homoerotic, erotic love stories were the first films of their kind to be shown in public movie theaters. While the prolific gay beefcake photographer was defining modern male erotic film, Rocco in his spare time was also documenting the fledgling gay rights movement. Rocco was behind the scenes, often working with his friends at *The Los Angeles Advocate* as a photographer capturing early pride festivals, rallies, and other historically important events from which images are rare. Rocco wasn't always behind the camera, though. He became the first official president of Christopher Street West Association, the organization behind Los Angeles’s pride festival, and he helped launch the first festival in 1974. —MICHELLE GARCIA

African-American politician WILLIE BROWN may not have been gay, but he was determined to decriminalize gay sex in California. As a state Assemblyman he introduced the legislation every year from 1969–1975. "Passing the bill required one of the most daring—and fun—political capers I ever was involved in," the one-time San Francisco mayor wrote in his memoir. "It wasn’t all political opportunism. The legislation also emerged from a sense of outrage. My outrage. The penalties didn’t affect just gays; they affected everyone."

Even after the Castro was moved out of Brown’s district in 1971 he kept fighting. The bill eventually passed in 1975 and helped inspire other laws across the country. —LG
When Frank Kameny was fired from the Army Map Service in 1957 because he was gay, he sued the American government for discrimination. In 1961, the suit arrived at the U.S. Supreme Court, decades before the court declared sodomy laws unconstitutional in Lawrence v. Texas. The case was unanimously dismissed, so Kameny cofounded the Mattachine Society of Washington and began lobbying Congress for gay rights. Kameny was the first LGBT rights activist to picket the White House (in 1955). In 1969 he testified before the Department of Defense, against “the de facto denial of security clearances to homosexuals.”

“Never forget that we are American citizens,” he said. “With all that is implied by those two words, as well as homosexuals, whatever you may think is implied by that word.”

In 1971 Kameny launched an unsuccessful run for Congress himself. He helped inspire the American Psychological Association to drop homosexuality as a mental disorder (in 1974), which had been an excuse the military used to deny gays and lesbians the right to serve.

The civil service that once kicked him out issued a formal apology to Kameny in 2002. A year later, when President Obama signed a repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, Kameny was among the honored guests. He died soon after, secure that gays and lesbians could now serve out and proud. —LG

In 1970, Jack Baker (left) and his partner, Michael McConnell, became the first same-sex couple to apply for a marriage license and sue when turned away. In the landmark case Baker v. Nelson, Baker sued the state of Minnesota. Although his case was eventually thrown out by the Supreme Court—and he lost his job at the University of Minnesota—Baker persevered in his quest to legally recognize his relationship. He eventually adopted his partner, earning McConnell access to the types of benefits afforded dependents.

In 1971, Baker co-founded Gay House, an LGBT youth center with a library of periodicals, books, and other resources. —MG
MADELINE DAVIS founded the Western New York Mattachine Society in 1970. Two years later, she taught the country's first course on lesbianism and became the first out lesbian delegate at a major political convention. At the Democratic National Convention in Miami, Davis gave the first noted speech encouraging the Democrats to add gay rights to the party's platform, arguing that an estimated 20 million gay people would be voting that November. Davis went on to coauthor Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community with Elizabeth Kennedy.—MG

Before the term “reality television” had been invented, LANCE LOUD made history when he came out as gay on the groundbreaking PBS documentary series An American Family in 1973. An instant gay icon, Loud went on to front the new wave band the Mumps, and became a contemporary of Warhol superstars Jackie Curtis and Holly Woodlawn. He became a celebrated columnist for the The Advocate as well as Details, Interview, and Creem. Loud died in 2001, but his legacy lives on. In 2011, HBO's Emmy-nominated film Cinéma Vérité provided a behind-the-scenes look at An American Family with Thomas Dekker as Lance.—TRACY E. GILCHRIST

ELAINE NOBLE was the first out gay person to be elected to a state legislature. The target of harassment from colleagues when she first entered the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974, Noble’s won her re-election with nearly 90 percent of the vote in her heavily Irish-Catholic, Boston-area district.

Noble was part of the first delegation of LGBT people to be invited to the White House when President Jimmy Carter was in office. In addition to gay rights, Noble saw desegregating Boston's schools as a critical fight. She recruited volunteers to ride buses with Boston's black children to white schools to ensure their safety.

Noble left the office after two terms, but a decade later, Massachusetts was an early adopter to a statewide gay rights bill, and in 2003, it became the first state to legalize marriage equality.—MG
1975
OLIVER "BILL" SIPPLE

On September 22, 1975, 33-year-old Vietnam veteran, OLIVER WILLIAM SIPPLE stopped Sara Jane Moore from shooting President Gerald Ford in San Francisco. For saving the leader of the free world, Sipple was branded a hero—until the media discovered he was gay. The news caused major friction between Sipple and his family and he (unsuccessfully) sued several newspapers for invasion of privacy. In a 2001 interview, Ford denied caring about Sipple's sexual orientation, but after the assassination attempt the president simply sent a thank-you letter to Sipple—no ceremony, no award, no phone call.—NEAL BROVERMAN

1976
DAVE KOPAY

High school football star DAVE KOPAY was recruited to play at the University of Washington. As co-captain of the Huskies, Kopay led his team to the Pac-10 conference title, and was named an All-American running back. Drafted by the San Francisco 49ers in 1964, he led the team in rushing yards in his rookie year. He dated girls and even married a woman, but Kopay always knew he was gay.

Later recruited by the Washington Redskins under legendary NFL coach Vince Lombardi (whose brother was gay) Kopay learned the team's assistant general manager and the sport's information director were also gay. Kopay dated tight end Jerry Smith, a 13-year veteran of the Redskins who later died due to AIDS complications.

Kopay retired in 1973, two years later, he became the first NFL player to come out. He spoke to The Advocate in 1976 and wrote the bestselling memoir, The David Kopay Story. Though he applied for numerous coaching jobs in the NFL and college football, he was turned away—which Kopay believed was due his sexual orientation.—MG

1977
HARVEY MILK

After losing several previous bids, HARVEY MILK won election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in November 1977, becoming the first out gay man elected to public office in California. In office, he successfully sponsored an ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. A skilled orator, Milk delivered his famous "Hope Speech" at the 1978 San Francisco Gay Pride, urging gays to come out of the closet. He would later declare, "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet also destroy every closet door in the country." Those words proved hauntingly prescient when Milk was 48 and assassinated in City Hall by former supervisor Dan White.—LG
1978
DIANNE FEINSTEIN

San Francisco Supervisor DIANNE FEINSTEIN found Milk’s body and was the one to publicly announce that he and San Francisco mayor George Moscone had been killed. "There was a bullet hole through Harvey," Feinstein told The Advocate in 1998, "I put my finger on his wrist to try to get a pulse. I knew he was dead. It was a terrible, terrible moment."

Feinstein took over for Moscone as San Francisco, memorably eulogized the fallen leaders and sat about calming and uniting the city after Dan White was given a light sentence and riots broke out. She went on to become a vocal ally of the LGBT community and one of the country’s leading Democratic senators.—LG

1979
ROBIN TYLER, LUCIA VALESKA, TROY PERRY AND PHYLLIS FRYE

ROBIN TYLER, LUCIA VALESKA, TROY PERRY, and PHYLLIS FRYE (from top left) organized the first gay rights march on Washington, held in October 1979. The watermark event was put together by Frye, an attorney, advocate, and Texas’s first out transgender judge; along with Valeska of the National Gay Task Force. The women were joined by Tyler, an out lesbian comedian and longtime LGBT activist, and Perry, the founder of the gay-affirming Metropolitan Community Church and co-founder of Christopher Street West, the nation’s first Pride celebration (held June 28, 1970, it drew approximately 1,000 people). The 1979 march on Washington drew more than 79,000 demonstrators—organizers say it was more like 100,000—and coverage by mainstream press. Speaking at the Mall, Tyler roused the crowd: “If freedom shall ring in this country it must ring for all Americans or in time it will not ring at all for anyone.”—NB
California governor JERRY BROWN, in his second run for president, appealed explicitly to LGBT voters, calling himself a "comrade in arms." He used his political career to extend LGBT rights in California, signing the bill repealing the criminalization of homosexuality and appointing the first out gay judge in the country (in 1979). Brown spoke out against the 1978 Briggs Initiative, which would have made it legal to fire any school official or teacher who supported gay rights. He signed a law in 2011 requiring the history of the LGBT rights movement to be included in school curricula. "History should be honest," he said at the time.—LG

BILLIE JEAN KING exploded onto the tennis scene in the 1960s, winning her first Wimbledon title during her first doubles tournament. She would go on to win a mind-boggling 21 Wimbledon titles by the end of the 1970s. She was the first female athlete to collect more than $100,000 for winning a match (although that was far less than male players).

Challenged to a "Battle of the Sexes" by Bobby Riggs, King trounced the once top-ranked male player in a 1973 tennis match watched by 50 million people around the world. King cofounded and served as the first president of the Women's Tennis Association, where she leveraged her star power to demand (and achieve) equal pay for women at the U.S. Open.

King, who was married, also had a long-term relationship with a woman, who later sued for palimony when they broke up in 1981. King admitted to the affair. She beat the lawsuit, but coming out bisexual cost her millions in endorsements and led to her divorce.

Granted a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009, King remains a board member of the Women’s Sports Foundation, which she founded; and has served as acting director for the Elton John AIDS Foundation and the National AIDS Fund. She remains a vocal proponent of LGBT people and women in sports.

—MICHELLE GARCIA AND JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL

California congressman HENRY WAXMAN called a first-of-its-kind hearing in April 1982 to investigate a disease that was killing primarily gay men. The hearing of the House of Representatives subcommittee on Health and the Environment, over which he was chairman, focused on Kaposi’s sarcoma, a skin disease that was a common AIDS-related condition.

"There is no doubt in my mind," Waxman has said, "that if the same disease had appeared among Americans of Norwegian descent, or among tennis players, rather than among gay males, the responses of the government and the medical community would have been different."

Waxman remained in the House of Representatives until 2015. During his career he was instrumental in passing numerous bills helping those with HIV, including the Ryan White CARE Act of 1990.—LG
Just as AIDS began to ravage New York City in 1981, SHERYL LEE RALPH starred in the original Broadway production of Dreamgirls. As she watched many of her gay friends succumb to AIDS complications, Ralph transformed into one of the earliest celebrity HIV-activists and her work was chronicled in a 1983 edition of The Advocate. The actress—who would move on to roles in Moesha and Barbershop—has raised millions for HIV charities through her Diva Foundation and her Divas Simply Singing events. Ralph continues her HIV-related work.

"A young man called me up yesterday to say, 'Miss Ralph, you told me to take the test... and I'm positive,'" Ralph told us in 2012. "That call has never changed over 30 years—the same fear, the same apprehension."—NB

Biomedical researcher ROBERT GALLO led a team that discovered HIV, the infectious agent responsible for AIDS, back in 1984 when the disease was killing thousands of gay men. A medical researcher with the National Institute of Health, Gallo would go on to develop the first HIV blood test, and his breakthroughs continued through the '90s—he discovered a natural compound known as chemokines that can block HIV and halt the progression of AIDS. In 2016, Gallo (who recently turned 80) called on the new administration to continue funding HIV-related work. Through the Institute of Human Virology, which Gallo founded and directs, he has helped countries like Botswana and Rwanda reach 80 percent viral suppression—rates that the U.S. is still struggling to meet.—NB & JAM

DAVID GOODSTEIN (left), the influential former publisher of The Advocate, died in 1985 after transforming the local Los Angeles newspaper he had bought into a national newsmagazine covering the LGBT rights movement. Goodstein founded a computerized investment company and then joined Wells Fargo Bank, but said he was fired when executives learned he was gay. Outraged, Goodstein used his financial success on Wall Street to help fund a long list of causes for the expansion of LGBT rights. He bought The Advocate, founded the Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation, a gay rights organization devoted to educating the public; and cofounded the group Concerned Voters of California, which helped defeat a proposed law banning supporters of gay rights from teaching or working in schools. He also created the Advocate Experience, a weekend empowerment conference for gays and lesbians.—LG
Director **DONNA DEITCH**'s *Desert Hearts* wowed Sundance in 1986, and remains one of the most beloved lesbian films of all time. The independent film portrayed intimacy between two women with such reality that it changed films that followed. When *The L. Word* was taped, *Desert Hearts* was reportedly required viewing for the Showtime series actresses. The screenplay, written by Natalie Cooper—and adapted from the 1964 lesbian-themed novel *Desert of the Heart* by Jane Rule—tells the story of an uptight university professor who is romanced by a younger casino worker in late-1950s Nevada. Deitch won an Outfest Achievement Award in 2008 for her continued excellence in portraying LGBT themes, including with her Emmy-nominated miniseries *The Women of Brewster Place*.—LG & JAM

Few figures loom as large in LGBT history as **LARRY KRAMER**, a screenwriter—he wrote the 1970 film adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*—turned novelist (his *Faggots* criticized fellow gay men for sexual promiscuity and lack of emotional commitment), and playwright.

Then the AIDS crisis transformed Kramer into an activist. When his New York friends began dying of an unknown disease, he cofounded the Gay Men's Health Crisis (now GMHC) to provide services; and started the influential protest organization ACT UP, which took leaders like New York mayor Ed Koch and President Ronald Reagan to task for their lack of action. His semiautobiographical chronicle of that period, *The Normal Heart*, premiered off-Broadway in 1985, while a Broadway revival swept the 2011 Tonys and a 2014 movie version was critically acclaimed.

Kramer's prolific writing includes books from *Just Say No* and *The Tragedy of Today's Gays* to his magnum opus *The American People: Volume 1, Search for My Heart: A Novel*. Kramer, who turned 80 in 2015, wed his longterm partner, architectural designer David Webster, in 2013.—NB
Famous actor SIR IAN MCKELLEN came out as gay at age 49, in 1988, while fighting to stop antigay legislation from becoming law in the United Kingdom. Known as Section 28, it prohibited the “promotion of homosexuality” through gay-themed books, films, and artwork in libraries and schools. It passed and wasn’t repealed until 2003. McKellen went on to help found the British LGBT rights group Stonewall UK. He continues to support LGBT causes worldwide and became actively involved with ending school-based antigay bullying. The multi-award-winning actor portrayed Gandalf in The Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies, James Whale in Gods and Monsters, and Magneto in the X-Men films, before playing Cogsworth in the live action version of Beauty and the Beast.

JOSH HINKLE & JAM

EDWARD ALBEE, one of the most revered playwrights of the 20th Century, spoke to The Advocate about being gay, and writing gay characters in 1989. “Some of the characters in my plays are gay... and that’s fine because that’s the way life is, but gay is not a subject. Societal pressure on gay people is a subject.”


MG & JAM

BILL T. JONES's choreography has been performed all over the world, often by the dance company he founded in 1982 with his late partner Arnie Zane. Zane died of AIDS-related complications in 1988; Jones has been HIV-positive since 1985. In 1990, Jones was on the Advocate cover, urging gay men to stay strong in the face of the disease. Jones’s provocative 1994 piece Still/Here drew attention to the casualties of the global pandemic; and featured images of people Jones met leading “Survival Workshops” across the country.

He wrote and directed Broadway’s Fela! and has received many major awards, including two Tonys, a MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant, and Kennedy Center Honors.—LG
When **PATRICIA IRELAND** became president of the National Organization for Women in 1991, The Advocate praised her as "America's Most Powerful Woman," and Ireland revealed that in addition to her 25-year marriage to a man, "I have a companion and she's very important in my life." Escrowing labels, Ireland didn't identify as bisexual or lesbian, saying only, "The words I use are the words I use."

Still, coming out earned Ireland many detractors, especially as she pushed NOW to make lesbian rights a central cause, was arrested protesting the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and helped organize the 1993 March on Washington for Gay, Lesbian, and Bi Equal Rights. "I am not the exception to the rule," Ireland wrote in her 1996 memoir *What Women Want.* "I fall into an oppressed category, and I damn well don't like it." Ireland left NOW in 2001 after 10 years at the helm.—LG & JAM

**k.d. lang** is a Canadian singer who made it big in Nashville, a rising star who went mainstream but was embraced by indie circles, and an out gay celebrity before it was cool. At the height of her fame in the early '90s, lang came out on the cover of The Advocate. Fans embraced her after the announcement and turned her album *Ingénue* into a mega-hit.

No longer perceived as simply a "gay artist," lang is just a critically acclaimed one. In 2002, she recorded the Grammy Award-winning *Wonderfal World* duets album with crooner Tony Bennett, who calls her "the best singer of her generation." Her velvet voice is also heard on numerous soundtracks, albums, and TV shows, and her breathtaking rendition of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" helped open the 2010 Olympics.

Earlier this year, lang announced an *Ingénue Redux* tour to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the platinum record. She's done so much since that 1992 interview it's easy to forget how brave she was for speaking the truth decades ago.—NB

In 1993, President Bill Clinton nominated **ROBERTA ACHTENBERG** as the assistant secretary for fair housing and equal opportunity in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Republican senator JesseHelms of North Carolina, disparaged her as a "damn lesbian" intent on destroying the Boy Scouts (she was part of a group protesting the organization's anti-LGBT discrimination). Still, Achtenberg was approved 58-31 as the highest-ranking out gay person to serve in any presidential administration up to that time.

In 1977, long before entering politics, Achtenberg cofounded the National Center for Lesbian Rights, where she served as executive director from 1983-1990. She practiced law with Equal Rights Advocates and later became a senior policy adviser for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, and served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

In 2011, Achtenberg was appointed by President Obama to serve on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.—MG & JAM
1994

PEDRO ZAMORA made his debut as an HIV-positive cast member in the third season of MTV’s reality show, The Real World: San Francisco. During his time on the show, which was hugely popular, Zamora used the platform to educate his fellow castmates about HIV and, through them, the audience. When Zamora passed away from AIDS complications just after the final episode aired, his death touched millions.

In 2009, MTV and Bunim Murray, creators of The Real World, produced Pedro, a biopic written by Dustin Lance Black about Zamora’s life from when he immigrated alone to the U.S. from Cuba. —JH

1995

ROSEANNE BARR’s real-life gay brother and lesbian sister inspired her to fight with producers and network executives to include realistic portrayals of her hit sitcom, Roseanne. So Leon marries his partner, Scott; Sandra Bernhard plays Roseanne’s bisexual best friend. Roseanne threatened to switch networks when some affiliates didn’t want to air the episode “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” because it included her kissing another woman. For all of those reasons, Roseanne was named The Advocate’s Person of the Year in 1994. In years since, her leadership on LGBT issues has never waned, though she’s had battles with trans critics over the inclusion of trans women in women’s spaces. Barr has been mistaken for a trans exclusionary radical feminist (TERF), a charge Barr denies. —LG & DAM

1996

JUDITH LIGHT throughout her lengthy career on stage and screen, Judith Light’s choices for roles have reflected the actress’s passions in real life, making her a true ally for LGBT people, and the right cover subject for a 1996 Advocate feature on straight female allies.

In the 1999 TV movie, The Ryan White Story—which chronicled the real life of the boy who became a face of AIDS at a time when stigma and discrimination against people with HIV was rampant—Light played Ryan’s mom, Jeanne White. In Ugly Betty, Light played media matriarch Claire Meade, mother of Rebecca Romijn’s transgender character, Alex. Light is credited with helping former Who’s the Boss? co-star Danny Pintauro come out (gay and poz). She now plays Shelly Pfiefferman, the family matriarch whose ex-husband comes out transgender on the hit show Transparent.

Off screen, Light has tirelessly raised funds and awareness for LGBT rights, and HIV causes, through her work with organizations like Broadway Cares, Equity Fights AIDS, the Matthew Shepard Foundation, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, GLAAD, the Hetrick Martin School, and dozens of others. —MG
With the iconic headline, "Yep, I'm Gay," and her smiling face on the cover of Time magazine in 1997, comedian and actress ELLEN DEGENERES came out and changed television. The star once told The Advocate it seemed she had "lost everything" after her ABC show was canceled — her relationship failed, and her follow-up sitcom never picked up steam.

But DeGeneres rose from the ashes to become one of the most successful women of all time with her role in Finding Nemo (and the hit 2016 sequel Finding Dory), her hugely successful daytime talk show (which reportedly earns her an annual salary of $70 million), her 2008 marriage to actress Portia de Rossi, her spokeswoman gigs for major brands like CoverGirl, and hosting of the 2014 Academy Awards. No one seems to care anymore what a headline on Time magazine said in 1997 — LG & JAM.

1998 is the year that the name MATTHEW SHEPARD became synonymous with the consequences of unchecked hatred. The cover of The Advocate declared, "He murder leaves blood on the hands of the Far Right."

The night of October 6 Shepard was beaten and left for dead, tied to a fence outside Laramie, Wyoming. He died October 12. Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were convicted of the crime. During the trial, McKinney used a "gay panic" defense, claiming Shepard came on to him and triggered the ensuing violence. The case put anti-gay hatred — and its deadly impact — on public display. Although his death would eventually lead to stricter laws, it would take nearly 11 years before Congress passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, making similar murders a federal crime.

After signing the bill, President Obama said, "I promised Judy Shepard ... that this day would come." She and her husband, Dennis, made that day happen in honor of their son. —LG

When TAMMY BALDWIN won the election to the U.S. House of Representatives and joined Congress in 1999, the odds were against her. Baldwin was the first woman to ever be sent to Congress from Wisconsin. And she was the first non-incumbent to run a winning campaign for federal office after coming out gay or lesbian.

"I've always believed that having a seat at the table matters," Baldwin told The Advocate after announcing her candidacy for U.S. Senate. "It matters that our legislative bodies are representative of the whole diversity of our country. Nobody checks their life experience at the door."

In 2012, the seven-term congresswoman became the first out LGBT senator in U.S. history. Baldwin initially came out while on the Dane County Board of Supervisors, before winning a seat in the Wisconsin State Assembly. At every level that Baldwin has served, she argues for LGBT rights. She cofounded the LGBT Equality Caucus, fought "don't ask, don't tell," advocated for marriage equality, and cosponsored a bill to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act. She continues to serve in the Senate, where — earlier this year — her objections to Supreme Court nominee Judge Neil Gorsuch sparked a social media backlash from Wisconsin Governor (and 2016 presidential candidate) Scott Walker, that The Nation described as a "Twitterstorm tirade of 16 Trump-style attacks on residents of the state capital city of Madison, liberals, and Baldwin herself." —LG & JAM
When figure skater RUDY GALINDO revealed that he was gay—just before winning a national title in 1998—he followed in the footsteps of previous out sportsmen like Gay Games founder Tom Waddell and Olympic Gold medal diver Greg Louganis. Like Louganis, the champion later revealed (in 2000) that he’s also HIV-positive, and ever since he’s used his story to raise awareness about prevention and life after diagnosis. He’s received numerous honors off the ice, including the 2001 Ryan White Award. “If my story can help people—anybody at all—it is positive,” he told The Advocate in 2000. “I’ve always tried to help people, whether it be as a gay man or a Mexican-American, or now, as someone who is HIV-positive.”

In 2015, Galindo returned to the ice as choreographer to Olympic skater Polina Edmunds.—LG & JAM

The tragedy on September 11 brought Americans shocking sadness, but the victims gave us long-lasting inspiration.

New York City Fire Department chaplain MYchal Judge (bottom), whose coworkers learned was gay after his death, symbolizes those who risked their lives to help others. The Franciscan friar died while helping victims at the World Trade Center. He’d previously worked with the homeless, AIDS patients, and victims of the 1996 crash of TWA Flight 800.

MARK BINGHAM (top) made it clear that the hijackers picked the wrong flight with United 93, and the bravery of he and fellow passengers changed history. Bingham, a 31-year-old San Francisco public relations entrepreneur and 6-foot-4 gay rugby player, was one of the those who stormed the cabin, preventing the al-Qaeda terrorists from slamming United 93 into the U.S. Capitol or the White House. Bingham and the other rebels on that flight saved hundreds of lives—and our nation itself.—NB & LG

In a 2002 interview with Diane Sawyer on Primetime Thursday, ROSIE O’DONNELL came out and used her fame as the “Queen of Nice” to draw attention to laws banning adoption for same-sex couples after a gay couple was prohibited from adopting a child in Florida. “I don’t think America knows what a gay parent looks like,” O’Donnell told Sawyer, revealing she had adopted three children with Kelli Carpenter, her partner at the time.

O’Donnell earned six consecutive Daytime Emmys as the likable host of The Rosie O’Donnell Show. She used her star power again when San Francisco began defiantly marrying same-sex couples in 2004, attracting throngs of cameras as O’Donnell and her partner joined in and drew attention to marriage equality. Those marriages were later overturned, but eventually marriage equality prevailed. O’Donnell has since had a long-running radio show, appeared on The View, and had a short-run show on the Oprah Winfrey Network.—LG
2003
BISHOP V. GENE ROBINSON

When V. GENE ROBINSON became the first out gay bishop in the Episcopal Church in 2003, he hoped to bring people on the margins back into the church. He could not have known that his example of what it means to be both Christian and gay would inspire LGBT people of faith—and cause a schism in his church, which threatened to split apart over the election. Robinson held forums at Episcopal churches all over the country so people who were uncomfortable or angry could ask questions. His ascension to bishop set off a conversation about the role of LGBT people in all churches, not just his own. Through heated debates and repeated death threats, Robinson insisted he was doing God’s work. “As long as I’ve got the attention of the world’s media,” Robinson told The Advocate in 2003, “I’m going to use it for the church and I’m going to use it for God.”—LG

2004
CYNTHIA NIXON

Actress CYNTHIA NIXON came out in 2004 after playing Miranda on HBO’s hugely popular Sex and the City. Since, Nixon has often spoken out on LGBT issues. She was a vocal opponent of Proposition 8 in California and made a video for Fight Back New York after the state’s marriage equality bill was shot down. In it, Nixon shared her personal involvement in the fight against anti-gay state lawmakers.

In 2011, furor broke out when she told the New York Times that it shouldn’t matter whether being gay is a choice. Nixon told The Advocate, “I believe we all have different ways we came to the gay community and we can’t and shouldn’t be pigeon-holed into one cultural narrative which can be un-inclusive and disempowering,” she said. “While I don’t often use the word, the technically precise term for my orientation is bisexual. I believe bisexuality is not a choice, it is a fact. What I have ‘chosen’ is to be in a gay relationship.” Nixon married her long-term partner Christine Marinoni in 2012. The couple have a son together.—JH

2005
MELISSA ETHERIDGE

When MELISSA ETHERIDGE was named The Advocate’s Person of the Year in 1995, she admitted knowing why: “I’m sort of a gay success story.” Etheridge came out during President Clinton’s inaugural ball and went on to sell hit records. “What happened to me is exactly the opposite of what closeted people fear: They think they’ll lose everything if they come out. This did not happen to me at all. In fact, everything came back tenfold.” Then when Etheridge publicly fought breast cancer in 2005 and won, her story once again became a tale of hope. “Let my life have been an inspiration to anyone—gay, straight, breast cancer [survivor], woman, mother—any human being,” she said after her star was added to the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2011. “Believe in your dreams, my friends, believe because they do come true.”—LG
2006
BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

The gay romance told in BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN was so intimate it almost never got made. Agents pushed their actors away from the script. Common wisdom in Hollywood assumed roles like these could derail promising careers. It took two up-and-coming young actors willing to play the roles of cowboys Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist, locked in a secret affair in the Wyoming mountains. The late Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal were both nominated for Academy Awards for their performances and both went on to have other acclaimed performances. The movie was a Best Picture nominee. Ang Lee won for Best Director and both the screenplay and music took home Oscars.—LG

2007
DUSTIN LANCE BLACK

DUSTIN LANCE BLACK writes about people who have changed the world and manages to change it all over again. Black won an Academy Award in 2008 for Best Original Screenplay for his biopic Milk, which reminded the world of Harvey Milk’s perseverance on behalf of LGBT people and his assassination for trying. His screenplay for the movie about Pedro Zamora, increased awareness about HIV, his play, B, covered the response of LGBT activists to California’s Proposition B, a fight he joined as a founding board member for the American Foundation for Equal Rights, which challenged Prop B in court. This year Black’s latest tour de force—the remarkable ABC miniseries When We Rise—showed the world how intersectional the LGBT rights movement has always been.—LG & JAM

2008
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

BARACK OBAMA became the first sitting president to support marriage equality and jumpstart pro-LGBT legislation. He appointed more LGBT people than any previous administration. He spoke out in support of our causes.

“This is personal to me,” he wrote in 2010 for The It Gets Better Project. He signed the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act. He instructed the Justice Department to stop defending the Defense of Marriage Act in court, believing it was unconstitutional. “I think same-sex couples should be able to get married,” he told ABC’s Robin Roberts in 2013. When the Supreme Court ruled for marriage equality, the White House lit up with the colors of the rainbow flag. In the following years, he would sign executive orders protecting LGBT employees, unveil pro-trans policies and become the first president to use the word “transgender” in a State of the Union address. Obama really was our president, and it all started in 2008.

—DAVID ARTAVIA
The reality singing contest American Idol dominated television in 2009 when glam-rocker ADAM LAMBERT broke preconceived notions by finishing the show's eighth season as first runner-up. He was the subject of an Entertainment Weekly cover story questioning his sexuality before the show ended. In his first post-Idol TV performance at the American Music Awards, Lambert stole headlines by kissing his male keyboard player.

Lambert's career continues to soar. His team-up with the classic rock band Queen—Queen + Adam Lambert—was named 2014's Band of the Year at the 10th annual British Classic Rock Roll of Honour Awards. His solo album, The Original High debuted at number three on the Billboard 200. In 2016, he starred in a remake of The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

A consummate philanthropist, he has supported LGBT organizations like The Trevor Project and HIV-related causes. He recently partnered with Giro to launch a global ad campaign with a diversity message about embracing those who are different.

"I think visibility is a great tool," he told The Advocate in a 2011 cover story. -LG & JAM

From the earliest days of her career, LADY GAGA positioned herself as an LGBT advocate. After winning International Video of the Year at the 2009 MuchMusic Awards, she made headlines for thanking "God and the gays." That same year, she landed the cover of Out, opened up to Barbara Walters about being bisexual, and spoke at the 2009 National Equality March in Washington, D.C., which she called "the single most important event" of her career.

While at the march, she screamed a message to President Obama about his promises on LGBT inclusion: "Are you listening? We will continue to push your administration to bring your promise to reality." Later, she would take a fierce stand against the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy and make history for having the first number one song to have the world "transgender" in its lyrics ("Born This Way"). But let's not forget Gaga is more than just an ally, she—like millions of other often invisible bisexuals—is part of our community. In 2017, Gaga became the first out bisexual to perform at the Super Bowl, where her haunting rendition of "This Land Is Your Land" was a poignant response to Donald Trump's Muslim ban. -DA

HILLARY CLINTON's first campaign for president was a sign of the character she later showed as Secretary of State, when she expanded her outspoken advocacy for LGBT rights worldwide. "Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights," she said in a landmark United Nations speech in 2011.

During her time in the U.S. Senate, Clinton cosponsored the hate crimes bill that passed during President Obama's first year, and sponsored the Employment Non-Discrimination Act that still lingers before Congress.

"The gay rights movement has been unbelievably successful over a relatively short period of time," Clinton said in 2007. "I know that if you're in the midst of it, you see the failures to move forward, not how much forward motion has occurred. The lesson is to keep going, don't give up. Know that you're laying the groundwork for people being more understanding and accepting. But just keep going."

Her words mean even more after Clinton's shocking presidential loss to Donald Trump in 2016 opened the door to bigots intent on rolling back all the gains we'd made since the days when Clinton served in the White House as first lady. -LG & JAM
When "don't ask, don't tell" was finally repealed in 2011 and LGBT troops began serving openly, Army National Guard LT. DAN CHOI caused a ruckus trying to reenlist. Choi knew how to make an impression; whether speaking at rallies or being arrested for handcuffing himself to the gates of the White House to protest DADT, it began when he went on The Rachel Maddow Show in 2008 and publicly came out. Despite his desire to continue serving, the military discharged him (nominally) 17 months later.

"Only an unflinching commitment to improve the lives of others can determine the nature of one's service," Choi said when he came out. After his discharge, Choi helped form Knights Out, an organization of West Point alumni supporting the rights of LGBT soldiers to serve openly. His efforts helped push the repeal over the tipping point, but it came at a cost: he's never been able to regain his enlisted life.

— LG & JAM

The public has followed CHAZ BONO since he was born 1969 to very famous parents, Sonny and Cher, and raised on camera on their variety show. After decades as an out lesbian-identified LGBT advocate, Bono came out as transgender. In 2010, he legally changed his name and gender, documenting his transition with the film Becoming Chaz and memoir, Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man.

"All I can do is share my experience, and you're either going to relate to it or not," Bono told The Advocate in a 2011 cover story. "It wasn't my job to make other people feel OK about this. It was time to take care of myself. When that clicked it was full steam ahead."

Once a writer-at-large for The Advocate, Bono became the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming Out Day spokesperson, and served as GLAAD's Entertainment Media Director. He became the first transgender contestant on the family-friendly, prime-time reality show, Dancing With The Stars and has since had guest appearances on several TV shows including American Horror Story (with out lesbian co-star Sarah Paulson).

In 2016, Bono, who has lost 75 pounds since transitioning, spoke with Oprah Winfrey about the body dysphoria many trans people face. He continues to share his experiences and raise awareness for LGBT issues.

— LG & JAM

Rep. BARNEY FRANK of Massachusetts was the first gay member of Congress to come out voluntarily after the late Garry Studds of Massachusetts was forced out.

"I spent nights and weekends alone and terrified that someone would find out that I was gay," said Frank in an It Gets Better video, recalling when he started his career in the Massachusetts State House. "I didn't have the courage to be honest about my sexuality until I was 47 years old, and I'd been a member of Congress for six years."

Frank filed the first gay rights bill in Massachusetts history in 1972, cofounded the Stonewall Democrats, hired the first out transgender Hill staffer (in 2008), and became the highest-ranking out gay member of Congress.

"To those who said he pushed a "gay agenda," Frank replied that the agenda was "to be protected against violent crimes driven by bigotry, it's to be able to get married, it's to be able to get a job, and it's to be able to fight for our country." After 16 terms, he had helped secure three out of four of those rights before retiring from Congress in 2013.—LG
2013
BLACK LIVES MATTER

Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors (two of whom are queer) founded the #BLACKLIVESMATTER movement as a social media call to action after the tragic killing of 17-year old Trayvon Martin. What started as a social media hashtag following George Zimmerman’s acquittal in July 2013, transitioned into an outcry and political movement, as the public poured into the streets in protest and to hold authorities accountable for racial injustice and police brutality.

In the years since, BLM protesters have become persistent witnesses and intersectional activists, who demand that we all wake up to this country’s institutional racism that disadvantages people of color at every turn. In doing so, they are pushing white Americans to grapple with their roles in perpetuating these inequalities. Their simple statement has resonated deeply and inspired countless others to join the movement, marching the streets of Ferguson, New York City, Baltimore, Washington D.C. And now The Black Lives Matter network is taking an increasingly prominent role in the resistance. Saying that people of color’s lives matter seems even more radical since the 2016 election.—DA & JAM

2014
TRANS TIPPING POINT

In 2014, #GirlsLikeUs founder Janet Mock’s memoir, *Redefining Realness*, debuted on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. That same year, *Transparent* premiered on Amazon. The series may star a cisgender man but would go on to hire more trans people (behind the camera and in front of it) than any other in the history of television.

But it was actress Laverne Cox’s Emmy-nominated turn on the hit show *Orange Is the New Black* that captured America’s attention the most. Cox (right) later became the first trans person featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, which announced that America had reached a “TRANS TIPPING POINT.” (For many activists, it’s Mock and Cox who shifted the country’s consciousness most on trans issues.)—JAM
EDIE WINDSOR had been with Thea Spery for 40 years and married for two when Spery passed away. The recently widowed 68-year-old Windsor was hit with a $380,000 estate tax bill, because the federal government didn’t recognize their Canadian marriage. Windsor sued and her case Windsor v. United States led to the June 26, 2013 decision overturning The Defense of Marriage Act. Another longer term gay couple, Ohio’s JIM OBERGEBEL had been with John Arthur 20 years when the Supreme Court struck down DOMA. They married in Maryland and Arthur passed away soon afterwards. In filing the death certificate, Obergefell was denied the right to be listed as the surviving spouse because the state didn’t recognize their marriage. He sued in Obergefell et al. v. Hines, June 25, 2015, in another 5-to-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled in Obergefell’s favor, and effectively made marriage equality the law of the land. --JAM

The coming-of-age film MOONLIGHT received critical acclaim for tackling the subject of gay black youth living in Miami. Not only was it a trailblazing story, written by out playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney (who wrote the play In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue, which the film was based on) and directed by Barry Jenkins, who is straight.

Moonlight was revolutionary. Becoming the first LGBT movie to win best picture in the history of the Academy Awards, it also had an all-black cast, and challenged perceived notions of hyper-masculinity in the black male community—an issue that is seldom told in stories, much less Oscar-worthy films. "One of the things that Barry and I were very clear about is that this isn’t every gay black person’s story or queer black person’s story. This is one specifically," McCraney said to Deadline. "The community should look at what this life looks like in the tapestry of the village. To me, if we can line up our stories next to each other and see how they exist, and how they make us unique and beautiful, we can go a long way."

Jenkins was reluctant to tell the story at first, being a straight man. That is, until he and McCraney began the writing process. "I realized through that process that I could preserve Tarell’s voice and meld it with my passion as an empathetic ally for LGBTQ stories," he said to Vulture. "The combination of those two things could give me the room and breadth to actually be able to take authorship of this thing." -OA

GAVIN GRIMM choked back tears while addressing a crowd of protesters in D.C. this year: "No matter what happens, no one, not even the government, can defeat a community so full of life, color, diversity, and most importantly, love." Grimm has become a prominent figure in the fight for transgender equality since filing suit against the school board in Gloucester County, Virginia, in 2014, for not being allowed to use the boys’ restroom. The case almost made it to the Supreme Court, until the Trump administration decided to “vacate” the case, which cancelled the hearing and overturned a previous ruling that protected trans students from discrimination.

Grimm was named by Time magazine as one of the “100 Most Influential People” of 2017. His perseverance has turned him into a true hero in the fight for trans equality. And he’s only just begun. At the protest in D.C., Grimm stated, “This isn’t going to stop us in our tracks, we’re going to fight as hard as we always have. That will not slow down at any point, for any reason." --DESIRE GUERRERO