



The Out
Mag

**PRIDE EDITION
HISTORY
IS MADE!**

#LOVE WINS

LOVE

IS

**HISTORIC
PULLOUT
MAGAZINE
CELEBRATING
LOCAL LGBT ***

**PUTTING
RURAL
IRELAND ON
THE MAP**

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In association with

**CELEBRATING
PRIDE**

The Nationalist



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We ARE HERE

Got a local LGBT+ story? Want to write a story? Get in touch! We would love to hear from you.



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Courtesy of VeeJay Photography

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Special thanks!

We want to say a huge thanks to everyone who made this magazine possible. Especially our advertisers, Carlow Nationalist, Carlow Credit Union, Carlow County Development Partnership, Jennifer Murnane O'Connor, Fintan Phelan, Adrienne Wallace, John Cassin, Tom O'Neill, Will Paton, Fergal Browne and Andrea Dalton.



Letter from the Editor

This issue is all about pride, and what pride means to so many people. Because Carlow Pride Festival 2020 isn't happening, we are celebrating pride right here! Over the past few months we have all got used to a ceratin way of life. But that doesnt stop us celebrating life, and thats what this magazine does. I want to thank the team at the Carlow Nationalist for making this possible. This magazine has allowed people to challenge themselves in new ways.

Creating this magazine has also highlighted to us ways in which LGBT+ people still face shame and fear, right here in Carlow. What I have learned in the last few years is that there is nothing to fear. You are worthy, you are capable and you are important to so many people. Never forget it.

Because of your incredible support, we wanted to do you proud. We have worked hard on this printed edition, and I hope you enjoy reading it.

John Paul & team



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Image courtesy of Thomas Sunderland



Why create an LGBT+ magazine for Carlow?

There are approximately 1,500 people in Carlow alone who identify as LGBT+. If you include their friends, their families and also the people who no longer live in Carlow but are interested in all things Carlovian, the number grows!

We also wanted to produce something that can showcase local LGBT+ people in a positive light. This magazine will also showcase the talents, stories and creative community that thrives in Carlow. Now we have somewhere to document it.

Imagine this magazine like a rolling history book. Our town and county has some of the most unique people.

Why wait for someone else to showcase who we are, when we have the technology, the ability and the know how to create something magical - right now!

Feature Story

Mr. Pride

By John Paul Payne
& Ciaran Rea

If you say the name Eddie McGuinness, there are very few people who don't know who that is. Last year, Eddie can be credited for providing Carlow Pride Festival with bunting and flags throughout the parade. Always camera ready, wearing his loud and proud coat tails, Eddie has paved the way in Ireland for many LGBT+ people. From being known around Ireland as Mr Pride for his work at Dublin LGBTQ Pride, Eddie is a trailblazer in more ways than one. But like many LGBT+ people in Ireland, Eddie's life wasn't always easy. But he is a survivor.

Growing up in Dundalk, a strong catholic background played a part in moulding Eddie. "I was very much a people person, and I wanted to be a priest. I had gone and done retreats to see was this for me. I did a retreat in a monastery and the abbot said I had a flair for community work in a different way. Looking back I think that was his way of saying, "you're gay".

"Religion had no correlation to my sexuality had an amazing faith, but the faith and the church didn't like who I was. I am a gay/bisexual man. 80% of me likes men, but I still have the 20% that likes women."

Homosexuality was illegal at the time, but bisexuality was even more misunderstood and undocumented. This created huge challenges for bisexual people. "I always say I am a survivor of suicide. Not understanding who I was or what my sexuality was. Why do I fancy boys when I fancy girls as well. That was the battle going on then. At the time gay people were criminals."

"As soon as I was 17, I had an opportunity to travel to London. I had to get out of the small town. Then I slowly started to discover who I was. When people found out who I was, they were shocked. "I fell in love with two women. The first was my friend Dee, she was the first person that knew I was bisexual. She is still my best friend to this day and was at my wedding to my husband."

"The second woman I fell in love with, was a girl from New York. I was 21 going on 22. It was the first time I felt someone had loved me. She was the first person who truly loved me, I didn't have that in my childhood. We were supposed to get married, but three months before the wedding I couldn't lie any longer and after I told her I was Gay/Bi, I tried to commit suicide."

"When I say I am the survivor of suicide, I sat on a window ledge, five floors up with a fence underneath me. I knew exactly what I was going to do. Luckily, the doorbell rang and I fell back into the apartment. That was that moment in time, that someone rang the bell and saved my life."



Image courtesy of Martin Doyle Photos

"I always say I
am a survivor
of suicide...
That was the
battle going
on then."

Pride & Survive

It was 1991/92. "The inner me still fought with who I was, and didn't want me to be who I was. Also my family did not want me to be who I was."

An inward healing process began within Eddie, and it shaped the person he is today. "Within a few years, I ended up managing a hotel back in Ireland and I entered a dance competition. I actually ended up winning it. From there my dance career began. That year I won an All-Ireland title, and within a year I represented Ireland at the World Championships in London and won the world title."

"Within a year and a half, I went from not wanting to be in the world to the world starting to blossom in front of me. A boy from a council estate background was on stage with dancers with backgrounds in ballet and classical dance. I have performed at The Gate Theatre and for many famous shows. Within the next few years my career as a dancer developed, and so did who I was a person."

"My first every pride was in 1993, the year homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland. This was a huge turning point for LGBT+ people in Ireland. I walked in that parade dressed in drag for - it was my way of still hiding who I was. It was still a struggle in my 20s figuring out where to fit in."

"The 90s still were not safe, or good for LGBT+ people. Even though we were decriminalised, there was still everything wrong. We didn't have equality, other than the fact that the police couldn't prosecute you because you went out with your partner."

Pride was always in Eddie's blood. Working for MTV, Channel 4 to RTE as a choreographer and dancer, Eddie started to give back at a local level across Ireland. "I started up dance schools across Ireland, I wanted to give dance classes to children from deprived areas. In a way I tried to make sure anyone who was younger got an opportunity that I never had as a young person. Some of the children from my dance school went on to perform on television and stage shows. This gave me great satisfaction."

"Even though we were decriminalised, there was still everything wrong. We didn't have equality"



Feature Story



Image courtesy of Martin Doyle Photos

"I was so impressed with Carlow Pride, and how the community got behind the committee"

This was the moment where Eddie realised his life experiences, and business acumen could really help make a difference. "I performed at Dublin Pride, I was asked to choreograph the opening part of the show. At the time Dublin Pride was small. Because I volunteered and was connected within the LGBT+ community, I ended up being part of the Dublin Pride committee. I was their chairperson of events and then communications officer. There wasn't sponsorship like there is nowadays. Councils were still not realising the benefit of what we were doing at the time. Councils do have to invest where prides exist."

His message to councils, "Pride is not just about tourism - it's about localism."

"Pride is a local passion, and it is a multicultural event. In a way pride isn't just about sexuality or your gender, or non conforming of such - it's about our cultural element of society."

Eddie met his husband John in 2003, and they have been together ever since. "It was new for me being with him as he was finding himself. I think within the gay scene we become guardian's of each other, we help nurture and help those around us. For many LGBT+ people because we couldn't fit in where society wanted us, when you get older - you help those coming up."

Many changes happened in Eddie's life, and he hosted Ireland's first ever gay focused television programme, 'Free To Express' on City Channel from 2005. "This was a big learning curve. At this stage I was very comfortable with who I was."

This led Eddie on to helping other LGBT+ people to connect via The Outing Festival, the world's first LGBT+ matchmaking festival in the west of Ireland. "The Pride festival is more about bringing people together rather than romance."

"Dublin Pride has helped me develop and hone in my entire skills range and my ever evolving title." Eddie is currently the head of fundraising, corporate and events at Dublin LGBTQ Pride. "As a gay person, the community is sometimes your only family and I do think that pride helps create those moments. I believe in the rainbow. Pride is the pot of gold at the end of that rainbow."

Eddie spends his summers attending every pride in Ireland, adding colour, flags and vital event expertise. He helps make the smaller pride events around Ireland world class. "I was so impressed with Carlow Pride, and how the community got behind the committee and showed Carlow what pride is all about, community and culture."

He can be spotted with his rainbow coat at every pride event. "When I step into my colourful suits, that's when my inner diva comes out!"

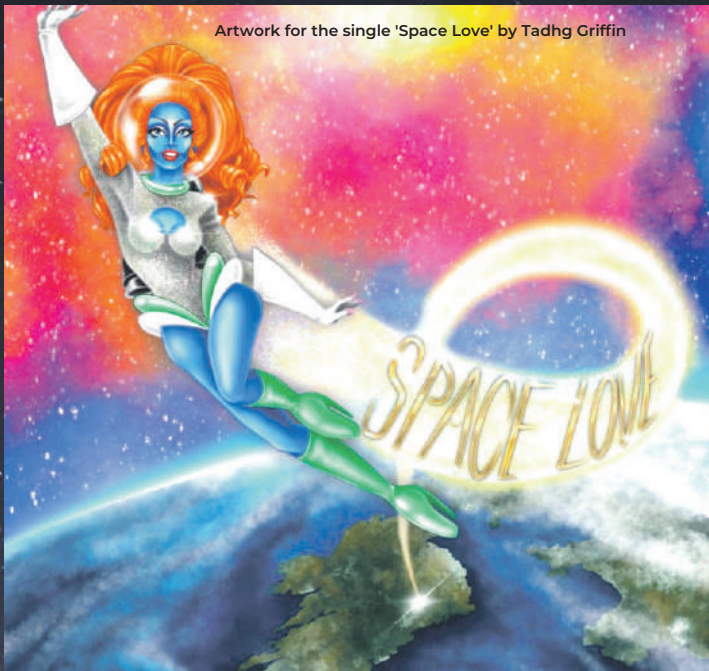
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Global Pride 2020

Tadhg showcases Carlow to 300 Million

By Ryan Shannon



Global Pride was celebrated on June 27th was an online event created by EPOA and InterPride in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Most pride events globally have been cancelled, so pride organisers around the world teamed up together to create a world class 24 hour event.

Carlow Pride Festivals headline act this year was Tadhg. Tadhg's new single 'Space Love' was the centre of his headline act. He got to work and created an eye-catching and colourful video to submit to Global Pride 2020 along with Carlow Pride Festival.

Their submission was selected out of thousands of entries and on June 27th was the centre of the world for 2 minutes as their submission was beamed around the globe to over 300 million viewers. This may be the biggest audience Carlow town has ever had globally.

You can follow Tadhg's story and hear his new single online @tadhgofficial.



Our building block

by Robbie O'Brien

Starting a new community initiative is daunting, but with the support of Carlow County Development Partnership, Carlow Pride Festival became a reality. From training, resources, support, community connection and involvement, forums and helping us navigate paperwork - Jo Donohue changed the path of our lives, and helped us create Carlow's best moment.

"Carlow Pride Festival just shows what you can achieve with some support and the right information and mentoring. We are so delighted to make sure everyone has a voice in Carlow."

Jo's little boy Sam (pictured below), was officially the youngest person at Carlow Pride Festival in 2019 - at just 3 weeks old!



Image courtesy of Martin Doyle



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THEOUTMAG 7

Making the world a better place

By Thomas Brown Lawlor

"The Guardian of the Peace" or An Garda Síochána as they are commonly known, are Ireland's police force. Elaine Byrne hails from Carlow and is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Elaine has served in the Gardai for the last three years. Elaine always wanted to help others.

"From a young enough age, it was something I wanted to do and I knew I wanted to help people, as I hate when there is injustice". "While in college I found my voice and I found out I was a good leader and people came to me with their problems and no matter what it was, I would sit down with them and try to help them find a solution." Elaine has won awards for her LGBTQ+ work while in college. It was from all of this that Elaine realised that

"Maybe I can do this and I got that boost of confidence". She applied and got accepted into An Garda Síochána. Elaine is a now a proud member of G-force which is an LGBTQ+ Network setup by serving members of the An Garda Síochána. Their roots start back from 2005.

"G-Force was created before it was ok to say comfortably, I'm gay. The Gardai have come along way since then and its 100% accepted, from my experience but when it was first set up there were lots of hurdles" G-Force are currently thinking of new ways to make life better as an LGBTQ+ person in the Gardai. "We will be making a new committee soon and getting new plans and goals set for G-force."

Asked if she had faced any issues in the Gardai, Elaine said "I haven't had any issues in the Gardai and I'd be very open about my sexuality and some members who wouldn't be very educated with the LGBTQ+ community are afraid to ask questions as they are afraid of offending". Elaine recalls fondly, of a story with another member asking her questions about being gay "so one day if their children come out to them, that they would know the right things to say and that was lovely."

Image courtesy of Elaine Byrne



"One day if their children come out to them, that they would know the right things to say"

Elaine spoke about what the police are doing to make life better for the LGBTQ+ community. "As individuals in their roles, the Gardaí can be educated, have an awareness and be approachable".

Work of course is challenging, but Elaine has the capability to succeed. Efforts are made to help LGBTQ+ youth societies so young people will approach Guards if they need their assistance and "not feel like they would be judged or wouldn't be taken seriously".

Elaine explains "we take all cases seriously and if you come and ask us for help, that's what we're here to do". Being an LGBTQ+ member in the Gardaí has benefited when Elaine is helping someone in the gay community that has been a victim of a hate crime. "I have been able to say it's OK I'm gay too, I understand what you've been through. I don't do it to befriend them but to reach them on a level, as finding similarities does break down barriers and you can get a small level of trust. They need to know that you're not just someone in a blue uniform".

This way of working has been a support to people who reach out as "they can always ring and say I don't feel OK, I don't feel safe".

Image courtesy of Elaine Byrne



"This is something that is personal to me and I haven't seen much of this on the job, but I know it exists"

There is currently no hate crime legislation as of yet Elaine says "It is something that is needed". The Gardaí marched last year in Dublin Pride. "Last year we got the go ahead to March in a uniform in the Dublin Pride."

This was a proud moment for Elaine as she recalls, "It was great to march as a member of An Garda Síochana and marching with my family and the LGBTQ+ members of Ireland." But even though this was an amazing experience for Elaine, she emotionally recalls one moment during the march.

While marching, some people shouted negative comments towards the Gardaí for being involved with Pride. "It didn't feel fair that people were hating on the Gaurds for marching. I wholeheartedly understand there are other parts of the world where the LGBTQ+ community are targeted by police but this isn't Ireland now. Not the Ireland of my generation. It hurt me alot, being an LGBTQ+ officer. We have changed and evolved, and it was important for me to march in that parade with Pride to show how far we have come."

Elaine positively says, "After that I had kids, parents and just random people come over and give me hugs and saying that they were so delighted to see us marching and not just as workers but real humans as well and having LGBTQ+ Gardaí march with us for support, made it lovely and an amazing experience"

Elaine continues her work as a member of An Garda Síochana and wants to become a community Guard in the future to be able to help more people in the community.

Local Interest

A warm welcome for LGBT+

We Ask Rev. David White of St. Mary's Church, Carlow some questions about his life, faith and LGBT+ inclusion in his church.

By Sally McDonald

So tell me a little about yourself.

Well, I'm the Church of Ireland Rector of Carlow Union of Parishes which takes in St. Mary's in the town, Urglin and Staplestown. I've been here nearly four years. I came after I spent three years in Bandon in lovely West Cork and one year in Edenderry in Offaly. So, I've been ordained nearly eight years. I live with Holly and Joey who are both demented Jack Russells.

And where are you from originally?

I'm from near The Naul in North County Dublin. We're a farming family. I'm the eldest of five. We're all in Ireland except my brother who lives in Melbourne. My parents are still farming up there. I feel very fortunate to have been brought up in the countryside particularly in a time before 'screens' took over. It's given me a great love of the outdoors and the natural world.

Did you always want to be ordained?

Well I think that I always felt close to God. But the decision to be ordained in the Church of Ireland came about through a slightly unusual route. I always say that God sometimes speaks in loud clear signs, but God speaks mostly in 'a still small voice'. My first love is gardening and that continues to be my main hobby. So I trained as a horticulturist in the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. After that I was lucky to get a job there and I got to travel to South Africa and Northern Spain with my work. It really was a privilege to work in one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland. But something really strange happened. After I had been there a couple of years I was promoted and now had my own section. I was in charge of the Victorian Alpine garden and having a section of your own is for what everyone was aiming. But I felt really unhappy and was confused. Why would I be getting on so well in work and yet be so dissatisfied?



Image courtesy of Rev. David White

I went to talk to a wise friend and with his help I listened to the still small voice of God. It took some time to listen to that voice but I soon realised that I felt called to religious life. Since I was born into a Roman Catholic family, I started visiting monasteries and the next part of my journey took me to the opposite side of the country - to county Limerick, to the Benedictines at Glenstal Abbey. You may have heard of these monks, they make wonderful CD's of Gregorian chant and also run a boys' boarding school.

What drew you there?

Monastery life for most people might seem mysterious and strange and even just plain weird. Yet it was the humanity and humour of the monks that drew me. The atmosphere of prayer, the beauty of the liturgy with plain chant made me want to try out life there. There was just so much goodness there. And yet after a couple of years, the still small voice began again to guide me away. And I came home. While I decided to leave Glenstal, I was certain I didn't want to go back to the Botanic Gardens. They had given me a generous career break so I could have returned. So what next? I suppose I can say that this was a very difficult time of deep and lonely searching. The 'still small voice' was difficult to make out. But gently I was guided to All Hallows College in Drumcondra in Dublin where I completed a degree in Theology and English and later to Trinity for a master's degree. And the voice became louder and louder as I found my feet again as I began to think about what were the most important things about my faith and what I really believed in as an adult.

Where does the Church of Ireland come into your story?

As I thought more about my faith I felt drawn to the Church of Ireland where the spaciousness gave me a chance to really feel close to God. It's a Church which is far from perfect but has allowed me to thrive. And I suppose that brings me to what I think Christianity is all about. Flourishing. It's as simple as that. Shortly after I came to Carlow I put my favourite bible verse up at the gate of St. Mary's. It's when Jesus said that he came so that we might have life and life to the full. Fullness is about living out of our deepest self and celebrating that in every way possible. And that flourishing is for everyone and everything on the earth.

Our three churches are very involved with Eco congregation Ireland and have biodiversity areas at all the churches. But this flourishing is about people too. So in June 2018 the Select Vestry (which is like the parish council) responded to a parishioner who asked would we register the Parish as a place where we welcome everyone without distinction. Since we were doing this already it was enthusiastically agreed. So we registered as a 'Welcoming and Open Congregation' with Changing Attitude Ireland which is a Church of Ireland organisation with ecumenical friends, heterosexual and gay, lay and ordained, working for the full affirmation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) persons within the Churches in Ireland. The six principles which we try to live out are:

- We promote trust and understanding amongst heterosexual and LGBT+ parishioners.
- We seek to include LGBT+ people and their families at every level of parish life, welcoming not only their presence but all they have to offer.
- We do not make the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, whether in conversation, preaching, or in the prayers of the church.
- We are upfront in our welcome for LGBT+ people and same-sex couples.
- We recognise committed same-sex unions at social events, in church services and other aspects of Church life.
- We welcome clergy regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

So overall, what's the best thing about your ministry?

Every day is different and you get to meet the most extraordinary people - like the Carlow Pride Festival Committee. I was so glad to get the call to enquire if they could use the Community House for meetings because that's exactly what it's for. It's for the whole community. And Pride is all about human flourishing. So it was a very natural thing for us to become involved. Walking in the parade last year, I was so encouraged to see so many families and people of every age. Someone had to explain the flags to me. I was familiar with the Pride flag of course but there is so many others reflecting the diversity of God's people.



Image courtesy of Rev. David White

Like many others, I'm sad that Pride can't go ahead this year, but it will happen again. In the meantime, we need to mind ourselves and one another. This might also be a good time to wonder what it means to flourish and to listen out for the still small voice. I once was asked, 'What do you think is God's dream for you?' It stopped me in my tracks. But at last year's Pride I felt God's presence there and knew that this was God's dream for each and every one of us and our wonderful country. God's love has no limits or conditions. Because God simply is love and I have no doubt that God smiles every time people flourish.

**"We are upfront
in our welcome
for LGBT+
people and
same-sex
couples"**

Rebecca's freedom to be.

By John Paul Payne

For many trans people in Ireland, life isn't straight forward. Growing up in a country that may not understand you or having to defend or explain yourself at sensitive times in your life, is a common thread of trans life throughout the world. Rebecca Harold's life is no different. Overcoming difficult life moments and coming out as trans has empowered her to help other people. Rebecca attended Carlow Pride Festival last year as part of the Carlow LGBT+ Network.

Growing up, Rebecca felt at odds with herself. "I remember at age 4 having feelings of being different. Feelings at the time I could not sum up in words or explain to myself never mind my parents. The girl next door was my best friend as a child, we would play house and other games. My favourite memory with her was finding and wearing my mother's wedding dress and bridesmaid dresses. We wore them to local shops, we were gorgeous and rocked. When my mother found out she told me never to do it again. Looking back, it was a different world then and my mother was doing what she thought right."

"I always wanted to hang out with my sister and her friends, we'd play kerbs, tennis, hob scotch and skipping etc. I must have driven them crazy at times."

Rebecca spent most of her childhood in and out of hospital, with various illnesses. "I put it down to me being accident prone. I would play nurses with one of my friends, the nurses would give us their white crowns upon their heads and place their aprons around our frail waists. We were no longer sick. We were nurses for a few hours and it felt wonderful."

"I remember when I was placed in an adult male ward for the first time when I outgrew children's ward. Two lady patients would often visit me, and they could not understand why I had to stay there, it was way things were back then."



"I attended the Christian Brothers primary school, and for the first few weeks I thought 'Where are all the girls?'. I dreaded changing for PE every week. When it came to confirmation, the students from the Presentation girls school joined us for rehearsals. I remember at one of the rehearsals turning around at the altar and seeing girls on one side and boys on the other, I felt sad, alone and confused."

Moving on from primary school and into a mixed secondary school was a positive experience for Rebecca. "I really loved Secondary school a lot! Why? I was in a co-ed school and I had both male and female friends now. My favourite memory of school is the day two girls and I got to spend the whole afternoon together in art class while the rest of school gathered in assembly all to watch a soccer game. I was one of the girls for those few hours."

For years, trans people around the world have been used as conversational talking points when it comes to who can use what bathroom. Years ago, before that debate raged, Rebecca had her own demons when it came to what bathroom to use. "At school I wouldn't use the toilet, instead holding onto it until I got home at lunchtime or after school. "I remember at little lunch all the girls heading into their toilet, I so wanted to join them. I would go to bed at night, wishing to wake up in the right body. Sometimes people expect us to use wheelchair accessible toilets. Being trans is not a disability and it isn't a personal choice. Wheelchair accessible toilets should be kept free for people who need them."

After I completed secondary school I did an art and design course. It was wonderful. It was around here at some point I really started to crossdress more with undergarments. That way no one knew what was under my clothes."

"My first job after college was with an embroidery company. I worked with two women, and it felt good. A few years later I went on to manage a charity shop. Every morning on my way to work pausing and admiring dresses in a wedding shop and dreaming of my ideal wedding.

Experimenting with women's clothes also brought feelings of guilt and shame to Rebecca. "I was brought up in a country where religion was so important to people. It would make me feel guilty and I would often burn or throw away my clothes. I thought at the time I was sick or it was wrong. I feared God would hate me and I'd go to hell. Within a month I would find myself again buying clothes online or shopping in a big city. That way no one would find out my secret."

"I spent many a lonely night planning my departure from this world. I wanted to tell my family and friends, but I was terrified of their reaction. I was also afraid of what society would think. I have seen so many trans people being the butt of many jokes in the media or misrepresented on television. Sadly, we still are." For many people in Ireland, May 2015 was a turning point in their lives. 5 years on, we are only starting to understand the impact it has had on LGBT+. Rebecca's journey is no different. "After marriage equality was voted through, I decided it might be safe for me to come out as trans. So a few years ago, I got the courage through going to Grow meetings to seek help. I was no longer able to keep my feelings to myself of who I was, feelings that became too overpowering for me to contain.

Rebecca found solace and acceptance in friends. "I came out to friends and family a few years ago and started my journey as a transwoman. They showered me with love, understanding and support. Having that support is amazing. At same time it also made me feel guilty and sad for all those in my community who haven't had the same support shown to them."

"Through Grow, I made contact with a Trans Support Group in Clonmel for adults. They saved me. I was no longer alone and there were more people like me. Dublin Lesbian Line really helped me through in-person workshops. The hardest part of my journey of being trans is self acceptance."

"I had to undo in my head all my 40 years of being told that it was wrong to be trans. I have also lost both my parents, who I loved with all my heart. That means never getting to introduce them to the daughter they never knew."



Rebecca is proudly a member of Carlow LGBT+ Network and has used her life experience to make sure people have support and her work is changing lives locally. "Unbeknown to myself I've become an activist for the trans community. I have spoken at events, taken part in projects, attended protests, done a podcast and even radio interviews. I am also a co-facilitator for a trans support group and founded a national group to help break the isolation we all feel, mainly in rural Ireland. The Kilkenny and Carlow area has very limited resources for LGBT+ people."

Rebecca realised this and wanted to help. "I wanted to set up a group for Kilkenny, Carlow, Waterford and neighbouring counties, because there was no support there. This was my moment to stand up and help. It has been a lot of work, but I have got there. I never give up. I am medically transitioning now, not all trans folk choose this path. I am presently on hormones. Sadly, we have to leave Ireland for surgery and on our return there is no after care. Waiting lists to start medical transition takes years and sadly for some this forces them to end their life."

A 'Speaking From The Margins' study in 2013 found that 78% of trans people in Ireland had thought about suicide, and 44% self harmed. "Still today many councillors know very little about trans people. They are fine in regards to the 'LGB', but not the 'T'. This needs to change. Acceptance of trans people across Ireland still has a long way to go, but we are getting there. I believe education is the key. I suffer from social anxiety, and anxiety in general. When I make new friends, I wonder if I should tell them I am trans. There is also the fear of how people will judge me still. I hope people will get to know us first before they judge us by a label. We face many challenges. Each of our stories are different, but yet they are similar and relatable. It is never too late to reach for your dreams. I thought my ship sailed, and that I left it all too late. I was so wrong. I hid in my dark and dusty closet for years until I jumped out when the clock struck midnight one New Years Eve. Now, I am free."

HAVE YOU BEEN EFFECTED BY THE TOPICS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE? REACH OUT, PEOPLE ARE WAITING TO HELP.

**24/7 ANONYMOUS TEXT SUPPORT : TEXT LGBTI+ TO 086 1800 280
PIETA HOUSE (24 HOURS A DAY): 1800 247 247**

Family full of Pride

By Robbie O'Brien

This is a woman who I could easily say might have figured out how to have it all. A business woman and working mother who defied all the odds to find her version of what it is to be happy.

Starting out, Kate Gaynor, she viewed the world with wide eyed anticipation. "After I left college I went to work for the summer in a gay bar in Wales thinking or I had an inkling that I might be gay and once I entered that world sure there was no going back, I left home and went abroad knowing it would have been much harder to come out if I stayed at home. Where as being abroad nobody knew me, it took the pressure off. Personally, I felt less brave about moving abroad but it seemed an easier to understand and see if I was gay and not have to worry being labelled, especially when you are unsure of yourself. You can get labelled very quickly and labels are very tough to shake off. Going abroad gave me the time to be comfortable within myself and not be given a long term label when you are not 100% sure what you are."

For some of us who didn't have the opportunity to go abroad to discover ourselves and navigate through our emotions we tend to build up walls around us as a way to protect ourselves and to hide who we truly are from others. Eventually when those walls become a prison we finally realise the need to come out and tear those walls down, sometimes it takes longer than others but once you do the whole world becomes your stage to live your best version of yourself for the world to see.

"After the first time I kissed a girl, I knew then I was gay and I ripped off that plaster very quick, ran home from Wales and told my family I kissed a girl and I loved it and as they say that was that. I come from a very liberal family and even though they were happy for me, there was more of a grieving process for a while, more for the life that they had envisaged for me, their straight daughter, marriage, kids etc". But times have changed so much since then what with the marriage referendum and the equality of children act.



Image courtesy of Kate Gaynor

Above: Kate Gaynor, her wife Susan and their two children.

Every gay person and even every generation have their story to tell, everyone has their reasons to live their truth and with every generation there are always battles to be fought and people to be helped and protected.

"I am very lucky to have such a wonderful family and to be made feel safe and free to live my life but we still need to fight the good fight as there is still a lot of work to be done, I definitely feel that the transgender issues are the "new gay " and it can be complicated and it unfortunately has the same level of shame that people had years ago being gay and it is much harder and tougher now and I have so much admiration for trans people. They are so brave and I hope that everyone will help them to live their lives the way they want to. The same goes for the likes of Mick Reilly (Dicey's) in Carlow, who as a heterosexual local man has run LGBTI+ nights and we need more allies like him."

"In some cases it is still not that easy to be gay and to think that even now we still have to deal with it in our community like for example up in the north of our country that the issue of religious freedom can be used to discriminate against gay people to deny them a service. To me that is outrageous and when, say our kids look back ten years from now I hope that we will not have to be still striving for equal rights for all. There are issues that we still need to keep fighting for. We have to be out in the forefront and you cannot be challenging the status quo until you are accepting of yourself and out there in the community as a LGBTI+ person present in society. In our community we are living in a world were young gay people are looking for role models in society someone who has been through the same experiences as them, someone who they can relate to."

"When you are submerged in your environment and come through growing up and coming to terms and accepting yourself and your community, when you settle down and are older you get caught up in living your life, working to pay bills, your mortgage etc and all that emotional stress of growing up gay and coming out is all behind you and all the Labels meant nothing as your issues now are getting on with life and living it in the best possible way. Susan and I are now living it out in the suburbs and the most we would stress about would be whose turn it is to bring out the bins!"

"Your gay identity is gone as you settle into the normal life as a couple with kids you tend to become oblivious to the old gay life and mine came back full force when it came to the marriage equality referendum and I had to define myself yet again and go out in society to defend who I am. When I was canvassing it was really an eye opener for me, I remember knocking on a door and a young mother answered the door to me surrounded by children and she said she would not be voting yes in the referendum and I told that what if one of your children was gay you would be denying them the right to marry the person they love."

"To be honest I was horrified and the next door I knocked on was elderly lady whom I assumed would be very religious and was expecting a no and she was only delighted in voting yes. I found going from door to door asking my friends and complete strangers for their permission to be allowed to get married very difficult. I do think that society still has a long way to go even down to the simplest of things like a same sex couple holding hands in public, still can be upsetting for some people. Society has changed so much but we still need to be on the frontline and working towards a better future for all of us."

As parents to two beautiful children Kate and Susan are truly living the idyllic life and I could not be happier for them both. "We are truly blessed and I think as gay women as parents it seems to be easier process but gay men trying to become parents find it harder and more difficult, it is like going down two different paths for the same journey. It is much easier for women as gay parents where as gay men get a tougher time of it. Susan and I went up to a Sims IVF clinic in Dublin and I must say we have not had negativity towards us as gay parents. Even in the world we live in some people are going to dislike you for whatever reason and people get use to the idea of two women as parents that they soon see it as normal which is the way it should be. We were the first gay couple having kids that some of the nurses had ever seen in the Coombe."



"We have not had negativity towards us as gay parents"

Kate and Susan have been so blessed and lucky in a way that things have developed in their lives like any other normal relationship. Even now with the Equality of Children Act that came into law, Kate and Susan can now legally have both their names on the birth certificate. But sadly that does not cover all forms of parents including male couples.

"We see ourselves as just a normal loving family who happen to be two women, we don't see ourselves as gay parents just simply as parents as it should be. And even like seeing all the pride flags flying all over Carlow for its first Pride, my own heart was pumping with joy and pride. I can't imagine if you were there as a young boy or girl with your mum and dad questioning your sexuality the feeling of seeing those flags and the parade. It would give any young person a true sense of hope, that you are not alone and once people see that there will come a time when we no longer need to hide who we really are and we can simply just live our lives they way really want to".

Moving to Ireland as an LGBT+ Student

By Ryan Shannon



Image courtesy of Tawnya Lynn Foster

Pictured above: Darren Malone (he/him), Thomas Druy President (he/him), Tawnya Foster (She/Her), attending Carlow Pride Festival.

College is one of the first chances in a person's life that they get to go out and find out who they are. While many people choose to stay in their own country, there are those that take a leap and move either on an Erasmus for a year or for their entire college lives. Moving to a new country can be a terrifying but fulfilling challenge for anyone but being in the LGBT+ community there are also those extra steps to ensure that where you're going is safe and accepting. I reached out to Tawnya Lynn Foster who is a Canadian citizen who came to Ireland for her final year of studies in IT Carlow.

In 2018 Tawnya came to Ireland to finish studying her honours bachelor's degree in Business specialising in human resources management. After finishing her degree Tawnya then ran for the student's union in IT Carlow and was elected as the Vice President of Welfare and Equality.

Tawnya said that she knew Ireland was much more conservative when it came to the LGBT+ community due to the country having a strong Catholic background. "I knew that Ireland had a lot more conservative ties. I think the presumption that I had of Ireland was that it was very Catholic. Coming from Canada, being very liberal, I know growing up there was pride in Toronto and stuff like that. Coming to Ireland where like I from what I heard on the media, was more conservative. It was something that I was a little bit worried about. But at the same time, I also could see that there were changes like obviously Ireland was the first country in the world to have a referendum to allow same sex marriage. So I knew that there was starting to be this perception that it was starting to become more accepting."

Not originally recognizing herself as part of the LGBT+ community before coming to Ireland, she had not put much thought into the country's stance on the topic. One of the things she had heard when she first arrived was that Carlow wasn't very accepting of people from the LGBT+ community but over her time here, she has seen those walls breaking down and people's opinions changing. The experiences that people have being LGBT+ in Ireland compared to in Canada are very different.

"In Canada, pride has been a normal thing for a long time. We would have our big parades and like Toronto which is very well known for its big parade. But even small towns would have some sort of celebration. I know back in Canada, in public schools, you'd have the pride flag flown up."

In Ireland, Dublin would be much more open, originally Tawnya had the perception that Carlow wasn't very LGBT+ friendly, but over time she has seen that change. "It got a lot friendlier, like, even you see down the streets and in Carlow some bars are flying their pride flags and we've got cafes with pride flags. When I first arrived here, that wasn't the case. So I do think, even in the year and a half that I've been here, it's changed as a community and become more of something". While she says Ireland is still about 10 years behind Canada in terms of acceptance for the LGBT+ community, we are progressing quickly.

I asked Tawnya what her favourite memory of being part of the LGBT+ community in Ireland was and she said that it had to be of Carlow Pride last year. While Dublin pride had been the first ever pride festival she had actually attended, she enjoyed the whole family aspect of Carlow Pride much more.

"Carlow Pride was just amazing because it was a family focused event, we all kind of marched down with our flags and stuff but it was catered towards showing families that this is normal, and this is okay". She said it was just a really cool experience being part of the first ever Carlow Pride.

Another event Tawnya really enjoyed was Pink Training, which is an event that is held by the Union of Students in Ireland every year that is catered towards the LGBT+ societies in each college. "Being able to meet other students and hearing about the challenges that they're facing, as a Canadian I don't think I've faced as many challenges as some of the Irish people or some of the racism or homophobia. It was a very eye-opening moment."

Being part of the student movement in Ireland was another eye-opening experience for Tawnya. "I gained a lot more insight into the changes that Ireland has already made and the changes that still need to be done. Not just in the area of LGBT rights, but in all aspects of the challenges students are facing."

Prior to her involvement with the student's union, she had no idea about how restrictive the SUSI grant was and how hard it was especially for students who are LGBT+ to get the grant if their family relationships had broken down. Also, as a cis-gendered woman, learning about the struggles of those who are transgender or non-binary living in Ireland was an eye-opening experience for her working in the students' union. Things such as gender-neutral bathrooms are normal in Canada, while they are rarely seen in Ireland.

This gave her a greater appreciation for those who are transgender or non-binary because of the struggles they are going through. She also saw her predecessor in the student's union due a huge amount of work to fight for transgender and non-binary students' rights.

"So I did learn a lot this year and I think that I have a greater appreciation for trans or non-binary people because I kind of understand what they're going through. It is interesting. It really has opened my eyes in a lot of ways."

Supports for students coming from other countries are important. One of Tawnya's main supports when she came over was the international office in IT Carlow. They were her first point of contact and suggested that she signed up for any clubs and societies that she was interested in. While she wasn't very involved with the LGBT+ society while she was a student, she attended many of their events and fundraisers. For any student who is looking to study abroad, Tawnya advises that you allow yourself to be yourself, not everyone is going to like it but that's ok, as long as you're comfortable with yourself. Get involved with the different societies in the college or if what you're interested in isn't available, look for supports outside of college.

Make sure you get involved with the culture of the country you're studying in, learn to adapt but make sure not to lose yourself. "studying abroad has probably been the best experience in my life. Being able to, move away from my family, I gained a huge amount of independence and confidence. I gained a huge amount of ability to adapt, to change easily, to be able to innovate and to be able to reach out for support." Be sure to keep in contact with the international office of whichever college you go to because if you need support, they can refer you to where you need to go. Don't let being LGBT+ scare you from studying abroad, attitudes of other countries may be different but that doesn't mean that they won't change.



LAVENDER Queen

By Tadhg Griffin

Nothing has swept the globe quite like the art of drag. From the metropolis of Manhattan to our own locality of Carlow, stunning queens are rising up and unapologetically showing us their artistry. Lavender, however, is not your typical queen. Her glamour punk aesthetic creates a mysterious and edgy aura that is both captivating and unique.

And while she is a spear head for the new era of drag, once I asked her about the origin of her name I was met with a rich knowledge and respect for LGBT+ history.

"My name is Lavender, just Lavender. Do you want the real tea? So the word and the colour lavender was the symbol for the LGBT+ community before the rainbow flag that we have now. In the 40/50s they used to call gay/lesbian marriages "Lavender Marriages", and on Valentines Day members of the community used to give each-other lavender roses. In the 1950's, gay propaganda campaigns used to call us "The Lavender Scare". It's just such a lovely soft pink!"

Living in rural settings is never easy for anyone who stands out, and Lavender was never one to blend in. "In Clonegal I'm the only gay in the village and I'm not even a typical gay. I'm a cross dressing bearded drag queen. So that idea of counter culture and trying to rebel has definitely affected me as a queen. I think if you're a country gay you can assimilate or really stand out. I came out when I was around 12 or 13 and I remember thinking to myself, I'm not going to hide, I'm going to be really in your face about it. That was almost the defence mechanism". A moment that broke this defensive barrier down for Lavender was the first Carlow Pride Festival. It's emotional and social significance had a huge impact on her, and she still remembers the day vividly. "I think I'll be on my deathbed remembering that day.

I never thought in a million years there would be pride in Carlow, and I never thought in a million years I'd have the courage to walk down the street in drag". Around a month or two before it I remember thinking that it may be a once off so I may as well go all out. I spent ages making my outfit perfect for the day. I look back and cringe, but I had great fun. The best part of that day was that my entire family came to support me! There's pictures I have on my fridge of myself in full drag with my Mum and my Dad and it's surreal. If I had told my 13 year old self what was going to happen I wouldn't have believed it. It's just incredible how far we've come".

"A few days after that my dad said to me, I'm really proud of you, you rocked that. I got the impression from my dad that he didn't really care what I was doing as long as I gave it my all, so it was a really gratifying experience".

Looking into the future, Lavender has an optimistic view. "I'd like to expand my drag empire a bit more. I've been making drag performance videos on my instagram page (@lavenderthequeen) and I want to continue to combine my drag with digital media to create new experiences for people. As a queer artist I'm using drag as a channel to express myself. I want to keep doing that so I can keep living as freely as I am now".



Image courtesy of Lavender Queen

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Credit Union flies the flag once again

by Ciaran Rea

For many people, Carlow Credit Union is a vital resource for their day to day lives. From helping people live their dreams and to supporting local organisations and initiatives - the work they do is the lifes blood of our rural community.

Almost a year and a half ago, Carlow Pride Festival began the start of it's online journey - hoping to make Carlow more brighter and open for LGBT+ people, their friends, families and allies. In that time, a message came through on our email. It was from the Carlow Credit Union. They had seen our social media, and felt they could help us in our mission.

When we met with the staff at Carlow Credit Union, we instantly made new friends. That was the one thing that we didn't realise we would get from all this. Friendship and support. The Carlow Credit Union was the first business in town to support our mission and objective, and could instantly see the wider benefit to the thousands of people in County Carlow and beyond.

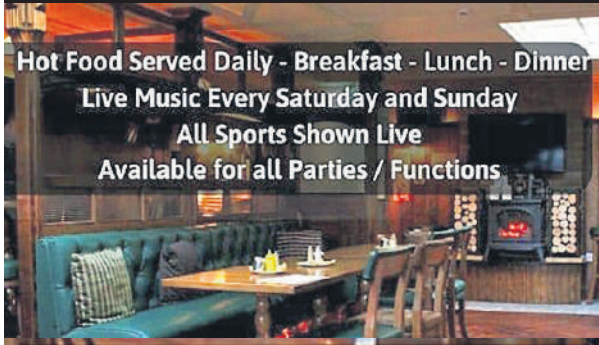
This cemented what our ideas and dreams were, now we could live them. From the moment we left the Carlow Credit Union after our first meeting, we realised that was the moment our group needed. Someone to say "We believe in you!". Over the last year and a half they have thrown us little parties, rubbed shoulders with them at awards shows and laughed at all the funny moments we have shared. We are so very fortunate to have been on this journey with them, and we thank them for their continued support up until now.



Carlow Credit Union was the first business to fly the rainbow flag in solidarity with Carlow Pride Festival. (Above: some of the Carlow Credit Union team fly the flag in 2020. Below: Carlow Credit Union present a cheque to Carlow Pride committee.)



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Carlow Pride Festival 2019



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Carlow Pride Festival 2019 was supported by





At MSD diversity and inclusion is key. We encourage people to come to work as they are and take **pride** in who they are.

Even though it wasn't possible to hold this years Carlow Pride Festival, all of the team at MSD Carlow would like to wish the Carlow Pride Festival Committee continued success.

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