



(l-r) Rachael Jones, Annie Corrigan and Sarah Gordon, Steve Sanders, Sue Wanzer and Melanie Payne, Byron Craig, Emily Morrone, Brian Powell and Robert Fulk.

AT

age 95, Frank Banta liked to remark that he never came out of the closet as gay because he never knew there was a closet and really didn't know what it meant to be homosexual or gay when he attended Indiana University in the late-1930s.

No one dared to talk about it, he said in an interview with *Bloom* last fall. "I didn't know what it was, but I knew how I felt," he said. "If I knew anyone else who was gay, I didn't know it."

Bob Brookshire, a retired schoolteacher, enrolled as an undergraduate at IU in 1960 and graduated in '65. "I literally had never heard the term gay. I barely knew the term homosexuality. It just wasn't talked about," the 72-year-old Bloomington resident said.

Cindy Stone, 58, also was relatively clueless about same-sex relationships when she came to IU as a student in 1973 and recognized a mutual attraction between herself and Donna Payne, a staff member at Wright Quadrangle. She says the two essentially dated for two years before she realized that they were dating and were, in fact, in a relationship. "Donna made it very clear, you've got to be quiet. You've got to be cautious," Stone says. Now a lecturer in the Kelley School of Business, Stone wasn't as concerned about herself as a student as she was about Payne, who feared that she could be fired if she were "outed" as a lesbian.

Sarah Gordon, 31, looked to IU in her pursuit of a doctoral degree because the university has the only Ph.D.-granting folklore and ethnomusicology program in the U.S. A native of Montreal, Canada, she'd previously lived in gay-friendly, metropolitan places such as London and Tokyo and was anxious about moving to Bloomington. "I was really nervous about coming to small-town Indiana. I thought about maybe living in Indianapolis," she says. "I wondered, are there going to be coffee shops? Theater? I really didn't know what I'd do until I started doing research online and found Bloomington compared favorably to places like Austin and Madison.

"Nowhere is perfect and this place isn't either," says Gordon, who identifies as queer. "But I love it here ... I've very rarely felt threatened or meant to feel unsafe. The worst has been maybe getting yelled at three or four times. I've never felt physically unsafe."

Emily Morrone is a 17-year-old junior at Bloomington High School South. She's an outstanding track and field athlete, a member of the Sounds of South vocal ensemble, and a committed volunteer for South's Dance Marathon group that raises money for Riley Hospital for Children at Indiana University Health in Indianapolis. She also openly identifies as a lesbian and has been in a relationship with her current girlfriend, also a South student, for more than a year. "I've never had any problems with anyone. Ever," she says. "I've never encountered bullying. Everyone I've ever told has my back on it. I definitely think my generation and high school kids just don't care what other people are doing. It's not an issue."

No matter how one feels about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) issues, it's clear that public attitudes and policies are not just "a-changin'," to quote the Bob Dylan song. Times have changed.

By Mike Leonard 📷 Shannon Zahnle





(left) The joint is jumping — nightlife at The Back Door. *Courtesy photos*  
(above) Sarah Gordon, a Ph.D. candidate at IU, with her dog, a girl named Clyde.

#### Bloomington a mecca?

There's a tab on the opening screen of the Visit Bloomington website that lists "Gay & Lesbian Travel." Click on the link and the first thing you read is: "Welcome to Bloomington, Indiana — home to the nation's fifth largest per capita population of same-sex couples and one of the most progressive cities in the Midwest, both socially and politically."

This comes from the Bloomington/Monroe County Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB), a tax-funded organization that promotes tourism and is about as mainstream and connected to the community as can be.

The site touts a citation from the LGBT+ interest magazine, *The Advocate*, which in 2010 named Bloomington the #4 gayest city in America with the explanation: "This forward-thinking college town is a magnet city for gays in the Grain Belt. It's also home to Indiana University, where Miss Gay IU — said to be the first student-sponsored drag competition held on any campus — is in its 20th year. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction is also here, inspiring the entire town to be heteroflexible."

The CVB site also notes that the City of Bloomington and IU offer health benefits to domestic partners and gender identity protection within their human rights ordinances; that

community radio station WFHB hosts *BloomingOUT*, the state's only "out, loud, and proud" radio show, self-described as serving the interests of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community; that IU has received the highest-possible five-star rating from the LGBT-Friendly Campus Pride Index for two years in a row; and that Bloomington's annual PRIDE Film Festival attracts more than 3,000 attendees in the dead of winter on a weekend that also serves as the annual Homecoming for the IU Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Alumni Association.

IU law professor Steve Sanders chuckles about the latter. "The (university) Board of Trustees had a fairly chilly attitude toward gay people in the early-1990s. It's gone from that to being a group that is enthusiastically embracing its gay students and alumni," says Sanders, who is gay. "Our banquet is a fairly hot ticket with an all-star lineup. The deans of various schools will be there, as will members of the Board of Trustees and a couple of vice presidents."

The rainbow over Bloomington is justified. But how much the city lives up to its reputation is like most things: What you see depends on where you stand.

#### Black and gay

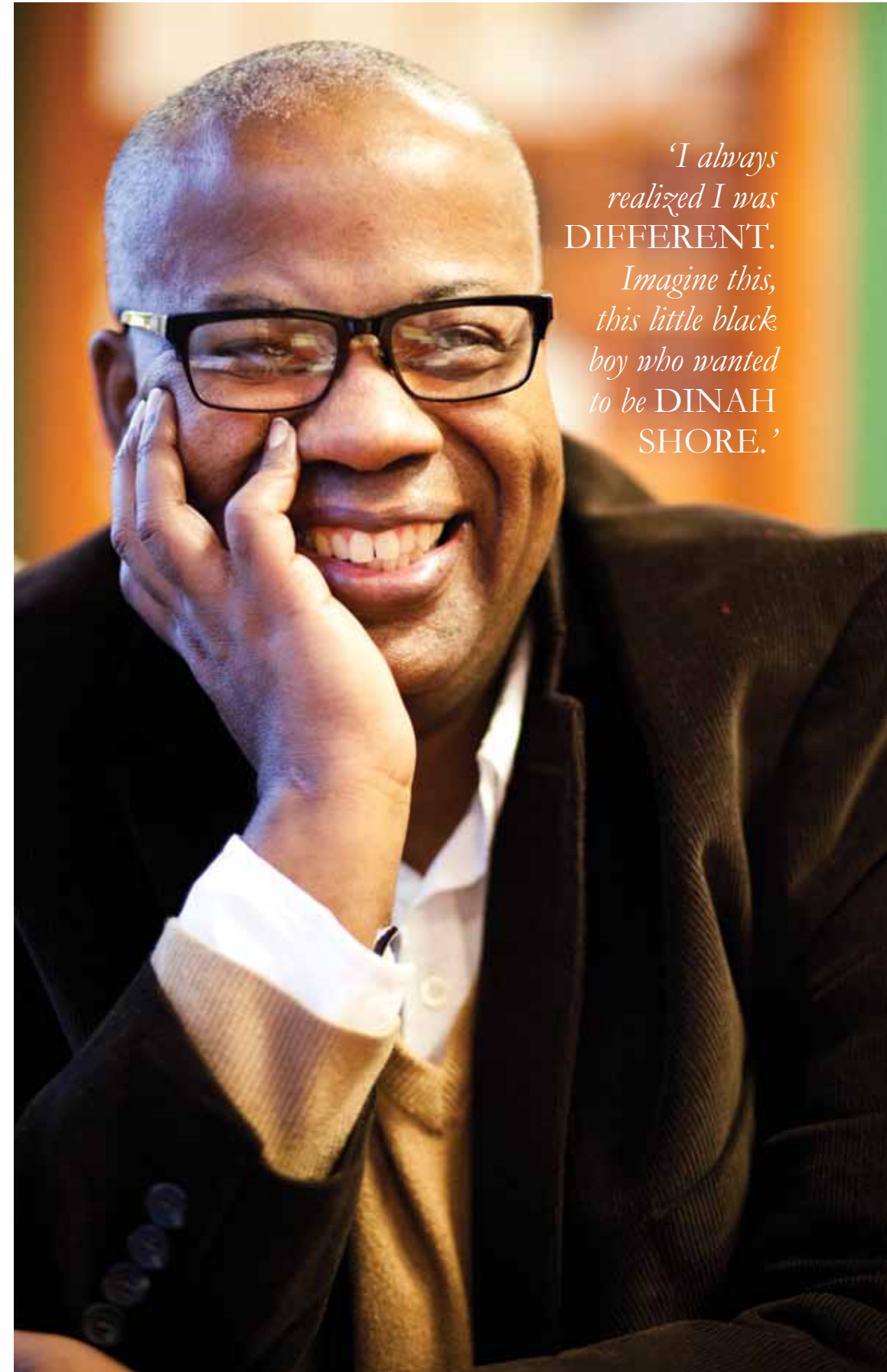
"It differs for different demographics," says Byron Craig, a lecturer in business communication in IU's Kelley School of Business who is black and gay. "In the more professional segment of African American GLBT folk, you're not going to see a lot of us living in Bloomington (although Craig does). I think it's working toward getting better. But I still think you'll see a lot of black GLBTs commuting from Indianapolis. And you're still going to see a lot of black GLBT folks closeted."

Why? "The black church. Fear of jobs. But mainly, the black church," he says, explaining that black churches are, on the whole, conservative and less accepting of gays. The lack of diversity in Bloomington, at least in numbers, also makes being black and gay in the city a little more difficult, he believes.

"In my time here since 2001, I never felt like there was an infrastructure for me. I could go to Bullwinkle's (a popular gay nightclub, now defunct) and be the only African American person in there. I'd be dancing by myself."

While things have gotten better over the years, Craig says, the comfort level for people of color took a significant step backwards after the brutal 2009 murder of black and gay IU English professor Don Belton, 53, by a white former Marine, 25, who stabbed Belton more than 20 times, cut his throat, and then wiped the blood from his knife on the dead man's pants before leaving the scene of the crime.

The murderer, Michael Griffin, claimed "heat of the moment" rage at his trial and said he was sexually assaulted multiple times by Belton, who was twice his age and much smaller in stature. Griffin was convicted of murder in April 2011, and his 50-year prison sentence was reduced to 45 years on appeal in March 2012. "With Don's murder, it made a lot of people who are living 'out' nervous, whether you were black or gay or lesbian or whatever. It did me. My mom lived here as a child, and when I first told my mother I'm moving to Indiana she said, my God, be careful. Mom knows I'm gay. And black."



*'I always realized I was DIFFERENT. Imagine this, this little black boy who wanted to be DINAH SHORE.'*

Byron Craig is a lecturer in business communication at the IU Kelley School of Business.



#### The constitutional amendment issue

IU sociology professor Brian Powell is gay, has lived in Bloomington for 29 years, and finds the city safe and welcoming but small-townish. “We spend our summers in New York and it’s very different. It could be something as simple as a pat on the shoulder or a touch of some kind — you think about what you’re doing here. It’s different,” he says. “The issue of public displays is different. The idea of a quick touch when you’re walking down Kirkwood, you’re conscious of that.”

Not as conscious or concerned as he once was, the sociologist acknowledges. In addition to his own experiences in Bloomington, Powell studies American perceptions of gay citizens and whether gay couples should be considered families, and has been heartened by the steady progression of increasing acceptance nationwide over the last decade.

What family hasn’t come to learn that one or more members of their own gene pool is gay, he asks.

But Powell, 59, is blunt when he says the biggest drawback for gay life in Bloomington is its location in the state of Indiana. “Indiana may be on the verge of being the last state in the nation to be more restrictive (on gay rights) when everyone else is moving in the other direction. A constitutional amendment against same-sex marriage? That’s the biggest problem to me. Maybe we should move Bloomington to Illinois,” he suggests wryly. And yes, he knows Illinois already has a Bloomington.

While same-sex marriage already is banned under state law, opponents of same-sex marriage are pushing for a state constitutional amendment, which must be approved twice by the Legislature and then by a referendum by the voters. Already approved once, the measure passed on to the 2014 Legislature defined marriage as between one man and one woman but included the following, controversial, second sentence: “A legal status identical or substantially similar to that of marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized.”

Legal scholars and various opponents of the measure said that sentence could ban same sex partner benefits and other rights or perquisites currently provided by employers such as IU and Eli Lilly & Co. Eliminating these benefits would severely impede the ability of Hoosier employers to hire or retain the best and brightest employees, opponents (including IU and Lilly) contend. At presstime, the controversial second sentence had been stripped from the measure by the Indiana House, which would require the

entire amendment proposal to be scrapped, passed in a new form, and then passed again before it could go to Hoosier voters, no sooner than 2016.

The full proposed amendment also could be revived and passed as originally written before the current legislative session ends March 14. Opponents say even consideration of a constitutional amendment banning same sex marriage damages the reputation of the Hoosier State and its ability to attract quality employees, or even, high-achieving students, to Indiana colleges and universities.

#### Gay – then

It was 1935 or ’36 when Frank Banta met a young man who confided his attraction to other men when both were students at Hanover College. Both transferred to IU after their sophomore years at the small southern-Indiana school. Both wondered why they were “different” and sought answers. “The man who was head of psychology at that time, I asked him whether he could help us, or in other words, cure us. He said he was sorry, he didn’t have time for that now,” Banta recalled. “We both had the feeling he’d probably gone to wash his hands. That’s the attitude we felt.”

Banta got a much different reaction from Professor Alfred Kinsey, who taught a popular

*‘I’d say with STUDENTS, 85 to 90 percent of them are fine with it now. The anti-gay folks, they’re on the DEFENSIVE.’*



(above) IU sociology professor Brian Powell’s research interests have focused on family sociology, sociology of education, gender, and social psychology.

(left) Frank Banta was interviewed for this story by Bloom’s Mike Leonard in the fall. He died in January at age 95. Photo by Duane Busick

class on marriage. “Kinsey asked everyone in the class to come in for an interview,” Banta recounted. “He was a marvelous interviewer. Absolutely without judgment.” Banta was happy to share his thoughts and perceptions and provided Kinsey with another case study for his famous work in sex research. And the exchange worked both ways. “I learned things about gay life from him,” Banta said.

Initially rejected for military service in World War II because of a congenital spinal condition, Banta eventually was called back (“when they were scraping the bottom of the barrel”), interviewed, and conscripted. He chuckled about it last autumn, just a few months before taking a fall that led to a rapid physical deterioration and his death in January of this year. The U.S. Army dismissed its previous concerns about his physical condition but still

administered a psychological test. “The test consisted of the question ‘Do you like women?’ and I could quite honestly answer yes,” he said. “If the question had been ‘Do you like to go to bed with women?’ I would have had a problem.”

Banta earned a degree in German language and was sent to Germany for the postwar reconstruction from 1946-50. There, by coincidence and good fortune, he found himself working with, and on a couple of occasions translating for, former IU President Herman B Wells, who was asked by the U.S. government to go to Germany and establish the new Free

University of Berlin. “Like everybody else who knew the man, I loved him,” Banta said.

Banta, who grew up near Franklin, Ind., returned to the states and worked at the University of Illinois for 14 years before angling back to Indiana and IU. Over the years, he taught classes, counseled students, and quietly confirmed to colleagues, when appropriate, that he was gay. He said he never sought out other gays or places where he might meet other gay men. “I didn’t know. I’m sure there were such places,” he said. “But I neither knew where they were nor looked for them.”



Meeting others

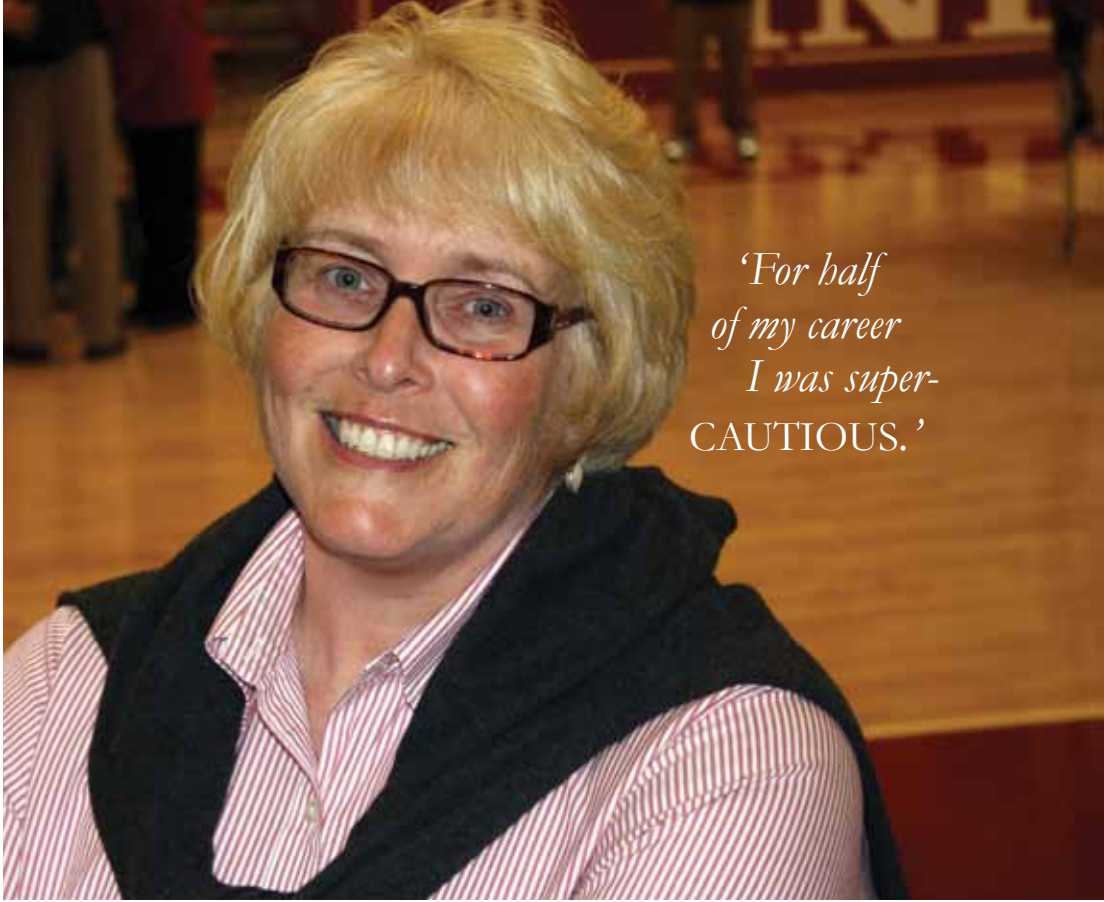
Bob Brookshire, the 72-year-old retired schoolteacher, also died after he was interviewed last fall, succumbing to brain cancer in late January. He said that in his years at IU and afterwards, teaching in another southern-Indiana city, he never cruised for casual sex partners but definitely was eager to meet other gay men. “Everything was pretty much word of mouth. People had small parties in private homes and apartments. Sully’s Oaken Bucket was a place where the bar section was quasi-gay. Nick’s [English Hut] — there’d be people who would hang out at the bar,” he said. “Another bar downtown was the Royal Oaks. It had a big horseshoe bar. It was convenient for meeting people there.”

There were various places where gay men would cruise or meet in the ’60s including the block around the Monroe County Public Library (now the Monroe County History Center), Dunn’s Woods, and the bathrooms in the Indiana Memorial Union and Ballantine and Lindley halls. There also was a place across from Nick’s called Wyatt’s — a diner that was frequented by gay-curious men in the evenings. “One of the most amusing things was the scene at this place on Woodlawn called The Hide-away. It was in that block where the parking garage is now, between Atwater and 3rd Street. In the evenings it had a gay clientele,” Brookshire recalled. “It was always an interesting little game. Guys would go in there and make eye contact. But there also was code going on. A lot of that. If someone went to the jukebox and played an aria from Madame Butterfly, for example, and the next guy played the same song, that was a cue. It was a real gay identifier thing.

“We had our own terminology. We called it dropping hairpins,” Brookshire said. Banta had a similar but slightly different term for gay code: “We called it dropping a bead.”

Gary Pool met Banta shortly after both came to town in 1964. Pool was a student and Banta a faculty member. After many years of friendship, Pool and his partner, Daniel Soto, were legally adopted as sons by Banta and all three lived together in a comfortable home on Bloomington’s southeast side. Interviewed together, Pool expounded on Banta’s recollection of people discreetly dropping a bead. “Somebody, of course, would say, ‘I was out with him last night and he didn’t drop a bead — he broke a string of pearls,’” he guffawed. “There was a subculture of humor.”

Pool said he absolutely was into meeting other gays and having fun but was not promiscu-



Cindy Stone became IU’s first openly gay trustee when elected by IU graduates in 1993. Courtesy photo

ous. Still, he said, gay code was critical at a time when being openly gay was avoided by most. “Oh, the code. There was the famous handkerchief in the back pockets, indicating whether you were passive or aggressive (a “bottom” or a “top” in contemporary parlance). If you had the handkerchief in the left back pocket that indicated you were passive. If you had it in the right back pocket that meant you were aggressive.

“And then there was the earring,” he goes on. “If you wore it in the right ear, that was supposed to be the queer ear. If you wore it in the left, that was supposed to be the straight ear. And if you wore two, then you were supposed to be bi.”

Cindy Stone and Helen Harrell, one of the hosts of WFHB’s *BloomingOUT* program, both say that lesbians had fewer options for meeting one another. They didn’t cruise or have lesbian bars. “You found feminist bookstores or feminist choirs,” Stone says. Activities such as softball also served as a way for women to meet and socialize with other women.

“I remember Aquarius women’s bookstore,” Harrell recalls. “Everybody knew what a women’s bookstore meant. It didn’t mean everyone was a lesbian, but it did mean that in those places, there naturally were lesbians and it was a safe place to go.”

Bullwinkle’s opened in downtown Bloomington in the late-1970s as a bona fide gay (in the broadest definition) bar and disco. Located in a prominent location at the intersection of West 4th Street and South College, it humorously took its name from the moose head carved into the limestone façade when the building housed a Moose lodge. And while it took its hits in the early days — people yelling at patrons coming and going, and occasional assaults on people walking to their cars — over time it attracted gay males, lesbians, bisexuals, and others. The fact that it was known as a gay bar made going to Bullwinkle’s a bit of a statement for liberal-minded straights.

Bullwinkle’s also became well known for drag performances and at times hosted shows three nights a week. The drag shows proved to be very popular and influential in nudging straight society toward recognizing gender identification in the context of human sexuality.

Neither gay nor straight

Nancy Kalina, 49, a longtime educator, says that if you go back to the famous Kinsey Scale developed by IU researchers Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin in 1948, “bisexual was actually considered quite normal for most people, including people who self-identified as straight.”

*‘For half  
of my career  
I was super-  
CAUTIOUS.’*

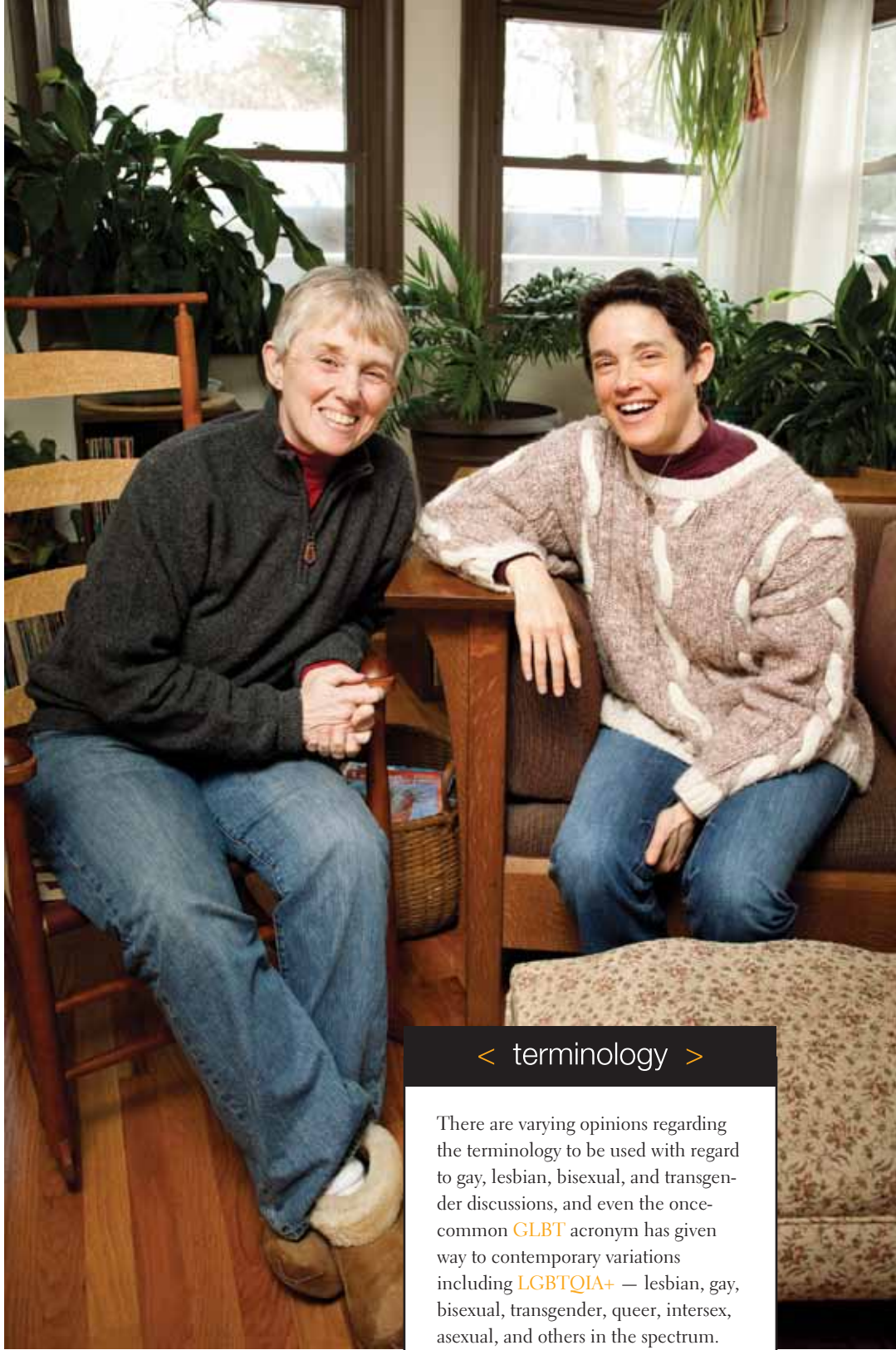
The Kinsey website maintained by the IU research center summarizes: “Interviewing people about their sexual histories, the Kinsey team found that, for many people, sexual behavior, thoughts, and feelings towards the same or opposite sex was not always consistent across time. Though the majority of men and women reported being exclusively heterosexual, and a percentage reported exclusively homosexual behavior and attractions, many individuals disclosed behaviors or thoughts somewhere in between.” The seven-point Kinsey Scale puts zero as exclusively heterosexual, six as exclusively homosexual, and everyone else — a majority of the population — as somewhere in between, with varying degrees of same-sex attraction.

For Kalina, who considers herself bisexual, attraction is not about “physical urges” or sex. “I’m not attracted to a person based on outward appearance. I’m really attracted to what’s inside a person, and so that can open up to anything. I can be attracted to a man. I can be attracted to a woman. I could be attracted to someone who is trans.” Kalina has been in relationships with men and women, but currently enjoys a committed, 18-year relationship with partner Kim Davis, also a female.

She acknowledges she can be temporarily irritated when someone disputes her self-identification as bisexual. “It’s like, ‘You’ve been with a woman for 18 years. Clearly you are a lesbian.’ And my response is, no, Kim has nothing to do with my orientation. My orientation is what it is. She just happens to be who I’m in love with and who I’ve built a life with. My orientation is personal to me.”

Kalina, who works as a life coach, says she’s sometimes amused by people who just see binary orientation: man or woman, gay or straight. Gender identification and sexual preference are broad categories that defy simple “either/or” categorization, she says. “I sometimes do GLB panels on the IU campus and younger kids will use the term pansexual. The first time I heard it, it was, ‘What the heck is that?’”

A glossary compiled at UCLA describes pansexual as a person who is sexually attracted to all or many gender expressions. “I don’t see any difference between that and bisexuality,” Kalina says. “I can see how someone might want to use the term pansexual if they don’t want to adhere to binary gender definition, but it’s just terminology to me at that point. I think there’s too much energy put into labeling. It’s all about the makeup of a person.”



Life coach Nancy Kalina (right) at home with Kim Davis, her partner. Davis, a retired research associate for the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, was recently named a co-honoree for the IU GLBT Alumni Association’s Distinguished Alumni Award.

< terminology >

There are varying opinions regarding the terminology to be used with regard to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender discussions, and even the once-common **GLBT** acronym has given way to contemporary variations including **LGBTQIA+** — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and others in the spectrum.

*Bloom* uses gay as an umbrella term to include everyone involved in this story for the sake of brevity and in accordance with the terminology primer compiled by UCLA: “Term used to refer to the **LGBTQI** community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.”



### The HIV scourge

Gary Pool says HIV and AIDS, in a perverse way, actually served to blow gender politics wide open by forcing closeted gays to assert themselves. “It made it more important to come out because we had to take a stand because the reaction of the Reagan administration was so abysmal, especially at the beginning. It was almost like ethnic cleansing,” he says, wincing at the recollection of the term, “gay plague.” “I mean, people were dying like flies ... Gay guys are often extremely beautiful and in very good shape and all of a sudden they were getting sick and nobody could figure out why. They were getting all these weird diseases that human beings don’t get. I knew one guy who got this weird kind of brain cancer that only cats get. It was so bizarre.

“But in about 1982 or ’83, you couldn’t be a self-respecting gay person and not be out because you had to make a stand,” Pool says. “If there was an upside to the AIDS epidemic it has to be that so many people came out and so many straight people started to see gay people for the human beings we are. That removed a lot of the fear and the threats. A lot of people had felt threatened by gay people because it was weird and mysterious but when people began to realize that gay people are essentially

human beings just like everyone else, and we’re nonthreatening, that’s when things began to change and that’s how that all came about.”

### Institutional change

Brian de St. Croix was the youngest person ever elected to the Bloomington City Council at age 23 in 1971 and its first openly gay member. While his leadership garnered attention and moved the general acceptance of gays forward, it didn’t serve as a watershed event, either. It wasn’t until 1993 that the IU Board of Trustees saw their first openly gay member in Cindy Stone, who claimed one of the three seats on the nine-member board chosen by a vote of IU graduates (the other six are appointed by the Indiana governor). But even the example of her partner’s tragic death was not enough to move the trustees to consider and grant domestic partner benefits until eight years later.

Donna Payne, her partner of 20 years, developed brain cancer and died in 1995 while Stone was both an IU employee and trustee. “When Donna died, I was given two hours off for the death of a friend. That was it,” she recalls. Law professor Steve Sanders would later describe the legal status of the 20-year couple as “no better than that of freshman roommates.”

Attitudes were evolving at the trustees level, however, and in 1997, when advocates pushed to establish a GLBT Alumni Association as an official affiliate of the IU Alumni Association, IUAA President and university trustees’ President John Walda turned up at the committee meeting where it would be decided whether to push the matter forward. Sanders credits Walda for verbally strong-arming the group when he called for a vote: “All in favor, say IU,” Walda said. “All opposed, say Purdue.”

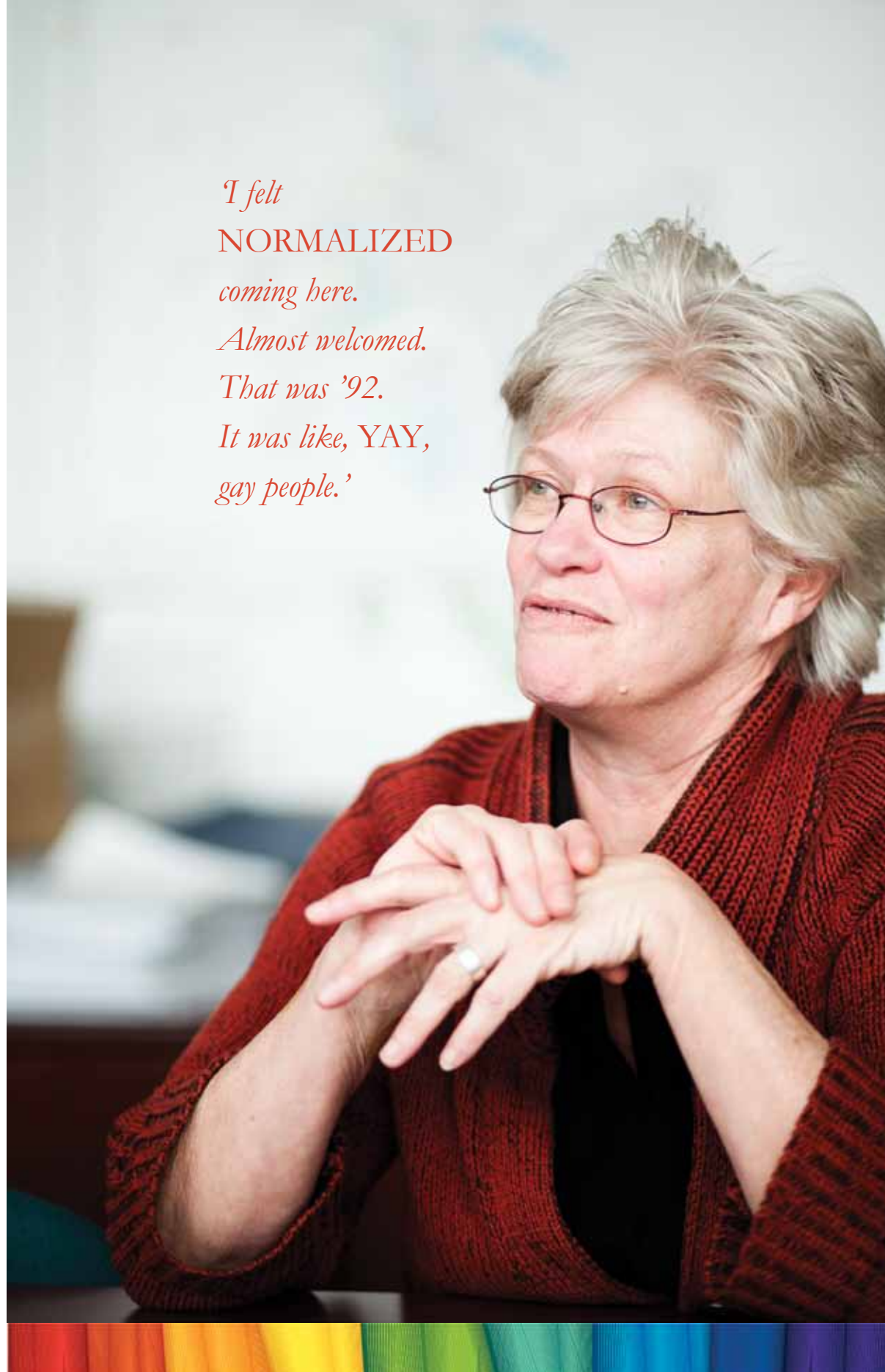
Sanders also credits Walda for moving the potentially thorny issue of domestic partner benefits through the trustees. Sanders earned his bachelor’s degree and did graduate work at IU and in the fall of 2000 was working for IU Chancellor Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis and Morton Lowengrub, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He photocopied an article about the trend for colleges and universities to grant domestic partner benefits, sent it to the nine-member board, and only Walda responded to express interest and affirmation.

“Basically we worked for about a year behind the scenes to do research, figure out costs, compile data, list everyone else who was going in that direction,” Sanders says. The City of Bloomington had already extended benefits to its employees. And the group brought in Tim Solso, chairman and CEO of Cummins, Inc. in Columbus, who explained the business logic behind such a policy and the need to attract the best and brightest employees. It also helped that Dan Dalton, then dean of the Kelley School of Business, also stepped out strongly in favor of granting benefits.

“Myles Brand, who was then president of IU, was very supportive and felt strongly that it was an issue of economic justice,” Sanders says. By the time the issue reached the trustees it had been vetted and discussed so much informally that advocates saw approval as a foregone conclusion. The measure passed unanimously and wasn’t even assailed by the anti-gay forces in the Indiana General Assembly who had objected to an LGBT+ support office on the Bloomington campus. “I’ll always remember that the vote was just a couple days after 9/11,” Sanders says. “What might have been a page one story in *The Indianapolis Star* got buried on page 13.”

The Monroe County Community School Corporation became one of the first public school corporations in the state to establish domestic partner benefits in 2008. Lesbian board member Sue Wanzer admits that she

*I felt  
NORMALIZED  
coming here.  
Almost welcomed.  
That was ’92.  
It was like, YAY,  
gay people.’*



Sue Wanzer worked in student affairs and residential life at the university level before becoming deputy city clerk of Bloomington. She’s been a member of the Monroe County Community School Corporation board since 2000.

pushed hard for the issue but also cautions that she’s never wanted to be known as “the gay board member.”

“Sue should get big credit for everything she’s done,” says Cindy Stone. “She’s also pushed the school board to make a statement on (the proposed amendment to the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage and partner benefits), something some of them clearly do not want to do.”

“I’ve always stood up for social justice. So I don’t want people to think I’m just a gay advocate. It’s about more than that,” Wanzer says.

Wanzer, who has worked in university student life and student affairs for most of her career, was married last summer in Maine to Melanie Payne, senior associate director of the Office of First Year Experience programs and director of New Student Orientation of IU. They began dating when both worked at Ball State University in the 1980s.

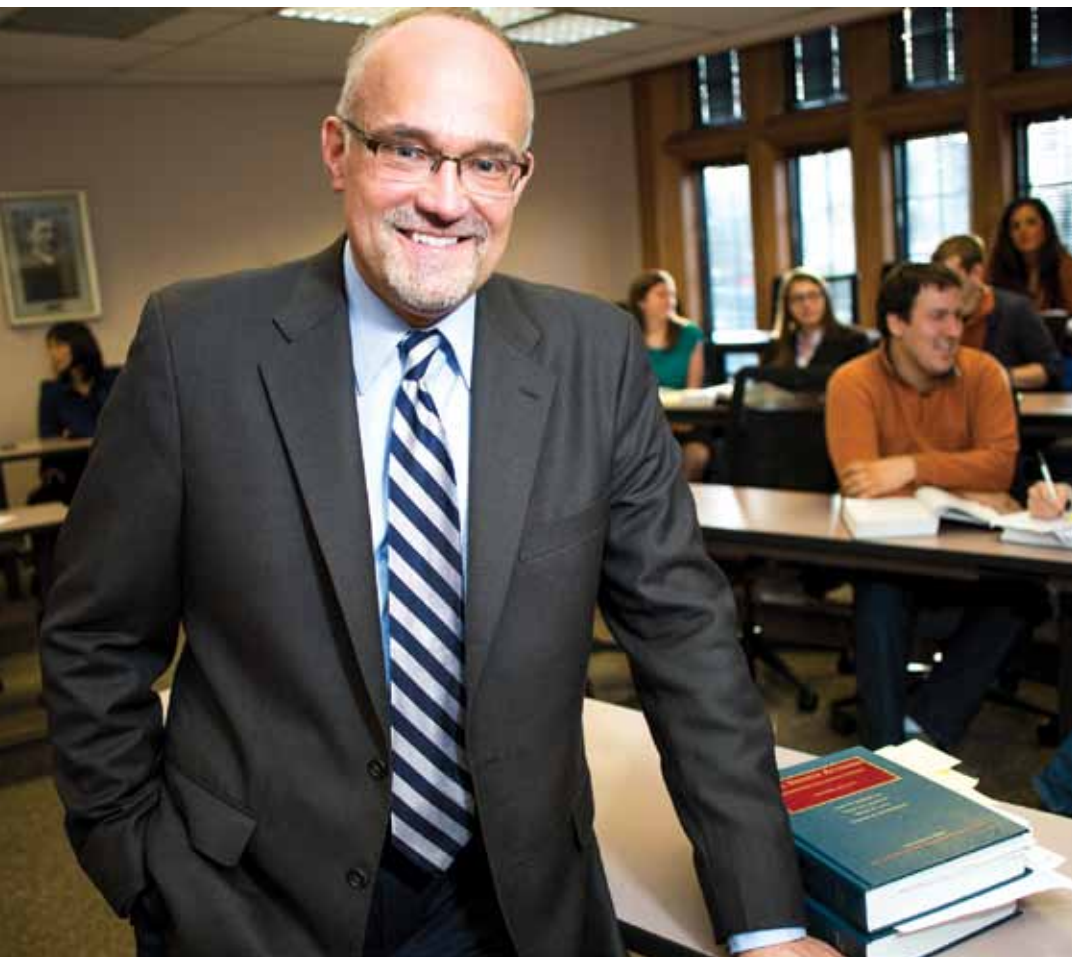
Stone and her current partner, Amy Benckart, affirmed their relationship in a commitment ceremony in 2001 but married last summer in Delaware after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down portions of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In August, the Internal Revenue Service changed its rules to recognize same-sex marriage tax benefits as being the same as opposite-sex marriages for anyone married in a state where they can legally marry, irrespective of the laws in the state in which the couples reside. “States may not recognize same-sex marriage but God and the IRS does,” she says. “I can’t tell you how many of my friends have gotten married since the IRS did that.”

### An inclusive community

The closing of Bullwinkle’s in 2006 was seen as a major setback by some in the LGBT+ community. Its location made it, in many ways, a convenient venue in the downtown bar scene. And its dance floor — plexiglass on top of various colored lights — recalled the best aspects of the disco era, a place where people could dance with abandon. Drag shows were a regular feature, and special shows, such as the Miss Gay Bloomington pageant, packed the upper level that for years functioned as Second Story, an alternative music nightclub.

Uncle Elizabeth’s helped fill the void, but it took on more of a reputation as a gay men’s venue, though not exclusively so. Ultimately its inconvenient location on West 3rd Street led to its surprise (to many) closing at the dawn of 2014.

Steve Sanders is a faculty member at IU’s Maurer School of Law, an appellate lawyer, and an author and commentator on issues pertaining to sexuality and the law, constitutional rights, and higher education. Photo by Tyagan Miller





*‘I figured it out  
really YOUNG,  
like the end of  
7th grade.’*



(above) PRIDE Film Festival attendees take a break between films at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in January 2014. Photo by Darryl Smith

(left) Emily Morrone, a junior at Bloomington High School South, hopes to continue competing in track and field after graduation.

The Back Door is the newest venue on the LGBT+ scene. Described on its website as “a fun place for queers, dancing, and people who like queers and dancing,” the nightclub in the alley behind the former Bullwinkle’s (now Serendipity Martini Bar and Restaurant) also offers karaoke and shows by drag queens and drag kings. FARMbloomington offers Drag Queen Bingo in its Root Cellar Lounge on Thursday nights and weekend dance parties that attract a variety of people.

While some bemoan the dearth of, for lack of a better term, gay bars, IU graduate student Sarah Gordon has a different take. “What’s so cool about this town,” she says, “is that there are lots of places you can go that are not defined as queer spaces or GLBT. There’s Rachael’s Café, Soma, The Rail, Atlas. Guys like Serendipity, while I’m not that fond of it myself. But there are lots of places that want to be considered queer-friendly but don’t put out the rainbow flag.”

Rachael Jones is the name that pre-operative transsexual Eric Wininger took when she transitioned from male to female, and she very purposefully launched Rachael’s Café as an inclusive venue where straights and everyone under the rainbow flag could feel welcome. At age 54, she’s been married, raised three children, and knows very well what life is like for a straight male — albeit, a male who always knew he was “different” — as well as a transsexual living comfortably as a woman.

“Opening this place was a desperate gamble, a way for me to try to be me,” she says. “I don’t

see the world as gay or straight. I just see people, so it was always my intention to be as welcoming and inclusive as I possibly could.”

Rachael signed the lease for her location at 300 E. 3rd St. and explained her gender transitioning to her new landlord — the late Jigme Norbu, nephew of the Dalai Lama (in Tibetan Buddhism, the reincarnation of the god of compassion). He never flinched, she says, but advised her to be Eric when construction

workers were around, remodeling the space.

“But, you know, once they got to know me, it didn’t matter if I was Eric or Rachael,” she says. “I became a person first, and not an object. And that makes all the difference in the world.”

IU business lecturer Cindy Stone echoes a similar sentiment. “When (partner) Donna died, I got the sweetest sympathy letter from the guys at the physical plant, where I worked at the time. I’d helped them with training, they got to

know me as a person, and they weren’t guys who’d done diversity training or anything. I was a person to them, not a lesbian. So when people ask me, how do you change public opinion about gays or lesbians or whatever, I always relate to my own experience. One person at a time. When people accept you as a good person, the other stuff becomes secondary.” ✨

Rachael Jones shed her male identity when she opened Rachael’s Café in downtown Bloomington. The café’s mission is “to bring understanding, education, and acceptance over a cup of coffee.” Photo by Jeffrey Hammond



## You Drank the Coffee, Now See the Play!

Rachael’s Café is not just a popular venue in Bloomington. It’s also a hit in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

*Rachael’s Café* — the play — that is.

British actress and writer Lucy Danser studied drama at Indiana University for a year and frequented the Bloomington café and coffeehouse. She returned to the UK to complete a degree at the University of Kent, but, inspired by the true story of Eric Wininger’s transition into Rachael Jones and the eclectic café she created, Danser wrote the one-woman play over a two-year period and guided it to its premiere at the acclaimed Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland in 2011.

It moved on to performances at the Brighton and Dublin Fringe Festivals and will make its London debut at the Old Red Lion Theatre Feb. 25-March 15.

The play has been described as “humorous and poignant,” “a tour de force,” and “a compelling portrayal of an ordinary person in an unusual situation, trying to do what is right.”

“I just learned they’re flying me to London for the premiere,” Jones said when interviewed in January. “I also went to Edinburgh, which was fun but kind of strange. Everywhere I went, people called me sir, even though I was wearing a dress, makeup, and a wig. And I had boobs.”