

LAVENDER Godzilla

Voices of the GLBTQ+ Asian Pacific Alliance

Fall 2022

Boy to Queen

by Michael Trung Nguyen

Towel, wrapped around my head,
Just ten, singing to Pop Music.

*"There's a hero if You
look inside your heart."*

*"Don't go for second best, Baby,
put your love to the Test."*

Diva life meant
Wanting to be taken care of.
Luxury, dahlin'
Mom taught me the diva life.
"No, wear the pink suit!"
Mom always needed
My expert opinion on
Dresses, blouses, tops and skirts.

Dad, on the other hand,
a macho man, is ex air force.
He timed my showers to just two Minutes.
Trained me to read maps on road trips,
be his co-pilot in the front seat.
Bursting into my room,
Dad barked, "You live like a garbage can!"
"Ta lum, ta la" "Trois duc oi!"

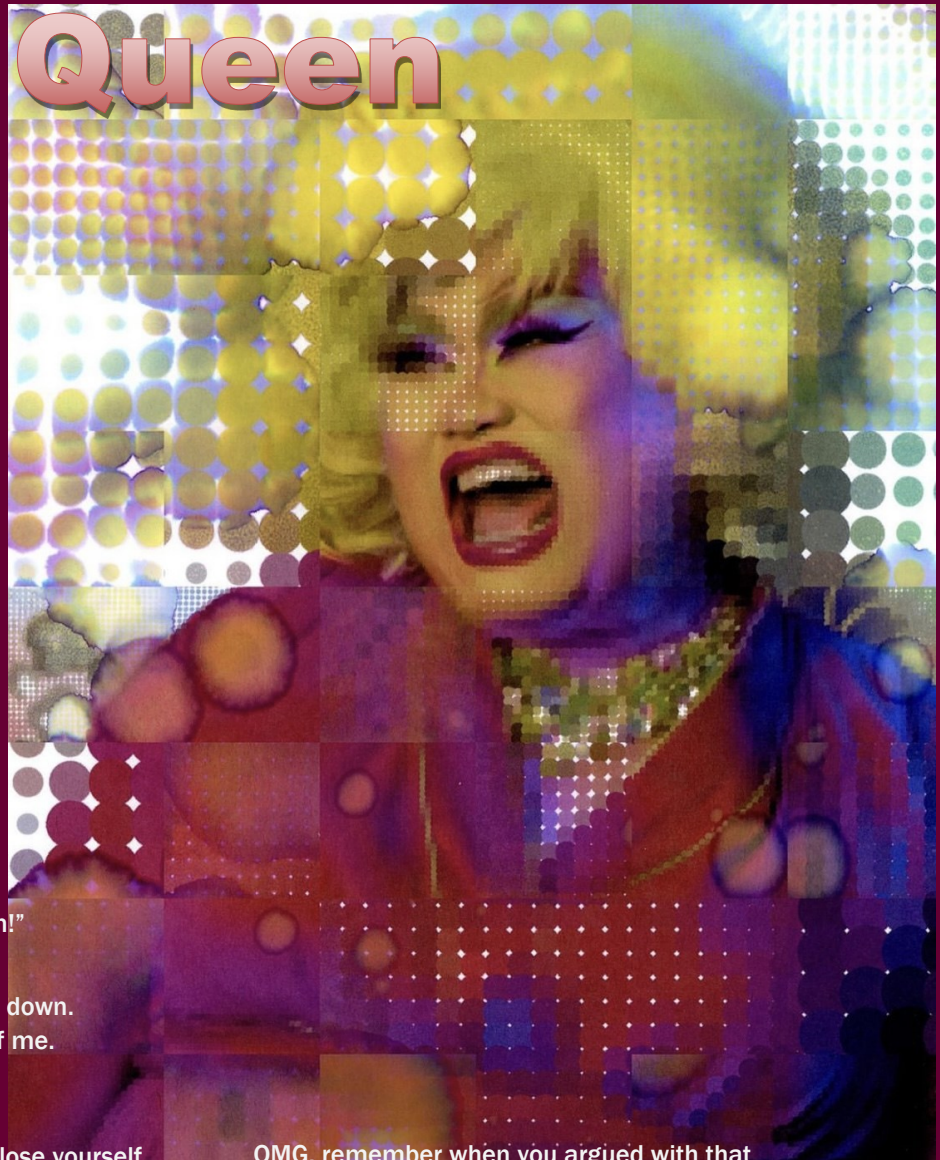
My father beat me so hard, I couldn't sit down.
It's like he wanted to beat the gay out of me.
And Mom? Mom couldn't save me.
"He loves you In his own way."

When you're beaten by your father, you lose yourself.
You confuse feeling full with feeling love,
Fast food equals fast love.

"Super Size me" means "Show Me Love."

"I wanna know what love is..."

From Shopping in the men's section at age 10,
Now your heels are bigger than Mom's, Size 10!



Cover illustration by Phillip Hua

OMG, remember when you argued with that
Church Lady all the way to DFW?

And how something changed inside of you?

It was the day after your non-coming out to your parents.
You were about to say the words, then Mom interrupted,
"I know already, it's about your alternative lifestyle, right?"
He doesn't need to know. I'll tell him later, how's work?"

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Ken Hamai: In Remembrance & Celebration



We are heartbroken at the sudden passing of long time GAPA member and supporter, Ken Hamai. A fixture in our Queer and Transgender Asian and Pacific Islander community, Ken always led with love and support, building connection and community with so many.

Ken was a constant in GAPA, lighting up a room with his warm and generous smile. For 34 years, Ken and his husband Jack Henyon have attended every single GAPA Runway since 1988, being our biggest cheerleader and always taking pictures, sharing information, and assisting us in building our shared history. Ken also organized several VIP receptions for Runway, making sure to invite members of the Imperial Council of San Francisco and building bridges in our Queer community.

We learned so much from him: his deep love and care for the community, his approach to creating new connections, and his exuberance for all things fabulous! Ken's zest for life, warmth in welcoming you in every social gathering with a smile and a hug, and deep caring for everyone in our QTAPI community will be deeply missed, but his Queer Asian Joy lives on in us all.

We send our love, support, and deepest condolences to Jack and the rest of the community mourning this great loss. We wish to acknowledge the ongoing outpouring of love for him and the deep impact he's had, helping to shape GAPA through all of his efforts and joy into the organization it is today.

Contributors

César Cadabes (he/him) is an award-winning Gay Filipino American solo performance artist/activist. His most recent show, *Not My First Pandemic*, ran during September 2022 at San Francisco's Brava Theater. In addition to his solo performance work, César is the Artistic Director of [GAPA Theatre](#), an intergenerational collective of Queer Asian and Pacific Islander writers and performers. César also serves on the Advisory Board of the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District.

Howard Chan (he/him), GAPA Chair, is an investment management professional and an independent strategy consultant. He believes that community volunteering is an important part of everyone's civic responsibility and is passionate about creating and preserving community mission and values by building sustainable organizations.

Phillip Hua (he/him), is a Vietnamese-American gay artist living in San Francisco. He has been awarded numerous public art commissions and his art has been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Examiner, SF Weekly, Huffington Post, 7x7 Magazine, California Home & Design, and Interior Design Magazine, among others. Find him on Instagram [@philliphua](#) or on the web at [philliphua.com](#)

Michael Trung Nguyen (he/him), is a community organizer and drag activist. He co-founded Queer and

Transgender Asian and Pacific Islander (QTAPI) Week in 2021 in response to the wave of violence against Asian Americans and the lack of response in the LGBTQ+ community to address it. He represents GAPA on the LGBTQI+ Advisory Committee of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

Danny Tai Pham (he/him) is a queer San Francisco Bay Area native, born first generation in the San Jose suburbs to Vietnam War refugee parents. Danny has served on the boards and organizations of GAPA, Prism Foundation, APIENC, and more. More recently, Danny became Founder and CEO of [QT Nightlife](#), an event production company which produces RIZE SF and aspires to empower the next generation of queer and trans event organizers creating spaces for all QTPOC communities. Paid GAPA Membership now includes free entry to RIZE SF! Connect with Danny at: events@qtnightlife.com

Danny Wan (he/him), Banquet 2022 Co-Chair, is thankful to GAPA for providing him with his activist base. As the first openly gay Oakland City Council member, he got inspiration from GAPA to author one of the first local ordinances to offer domestic partnership registration, a precursor to the fight for gay marriage. In addition to being Secretary on the GAPA Board, Danny currently serves as CEO for the Port of Oakland.



Real Power moves you—
Flips a switch inside your soul.
Transform trauma 'til
Your pain fuels your fight and grit.
Find what makes your heart sing Joy!

Boy to Queen by Michael Trung Nguyen
continued from front page —

Later, she made you promise to use lots of lube
“cause I don’t want you to get hurt!”
She Doesn’t Know You!
To her credit, no bottom shaming here. Thanks Mom!

Next day, she sees you, driving to the Airport in her fast car;
Her church lady friend in the back
Ranting about the gays out of nowhere,
“What is Rosie O’Donnell doing to her children?”
and that “two men could never love each other”

You clench your teeth tight
Mapping out your rebuttals
All while weaving through Texas traffic, trading lines
Like, how do their marriages affect you? Why care?
Why put discrimination Into law? That’s dumb.
Equality for some? No.
Equality for us all!

Your voice grew, slowly,
Louder, more confidently
With each word, unleashing
A pow’r inside you,
Leaving The Church Lady at the curb.

At the airport, you
Reflected, Wow, that was fun!
Never felt like that.
Such power! Such passion! Wow!

Should you go to law school, now?
What? Like law school’s hard?
Like Woods comma Elle, You went into law,
Not for some boy, but to hone your reading skills,
like you read that Church Lady.
Also Inspired by Hillary, then Senator Clinton
When she spoke up for your gay rights.

Law school taught you grit.
With grit, you can go places.
Rules can be broken
In the name of Liberty and Justice For Us All! Werk!

Call on Juicy Liu.
Juicy is bold pow’r.
You don’t have to wear wigs and Heels to access pow’r
But it sure helps! Find your Juice.
Blame it on the Juice, Baby!
Your juice lifts You up where You Belong.
All you need is the Juice!

Oh! Juicy is taking over! Woo!
When you’re Juicy, you’ll never be beaten.
Don’t forget the lube,
Get Wet for Juicy Liu!

As Your Queen, You Shall
Find your pow’r and Make a Choice!
You’re in a Culture War with White Pow’r, Asian Hate,
Transphobia, and Fake News.

“I need a hero...”
For truth, love, peace and justice,
Fight lovelessness, now!
Without justice, there’s no love!
No truth, No peace!
Just sadness, mis’ry and lies.

We need a hero!
Slay us all with huge truth-bombs
Because only then will we move forward together.
Now, repeat after me, k?

Vote, Organize, Slay!
Speak Up To Protect Trans Lives!
In the streets, online,
Become a fighter for truth.

Vote, Organize, Slay!
Speak Up To Protect Trans Lives!
In the streets, online,
Become a fighter for truth.

Hear my words, subjects!
Be a hero, serve your Queen!
Speak out and slay us
With your Truth, Beauty and Grit!
You Got the Power! Use it!



Why I want my 10-course Chinese dinner at the GAPA Banquet

by Danny Wan

When I think about what brings my community together in large numbers to celebrate, hands down, it's the 10-course Chinese banquets. These community dinners always happen in cavernous restaurants with a symphony of hundreds of people chattering and laughing, the din of clinking dishes, music, and speeches of welcome and inspiration in the background. Sitting in tables of ten, guests eagerly wait on each successive course of food to be served. You'll often hear refrains of, "Wow, *there's so much food and so good!*" And, "*what exactly is this?*" Having experienced every type of Chinese banquet myself, from weddings and funerals to political events, it is always my pleasure to explain in detail the exotic ingredients in every dish. "*Fish maws, anyone?*"

A recent San Francisco Chronicle article bemoaned that many Chinese banquet restaurants permanently closed in San Francisco's Chinatown under the weight of the pandemic. Malcolm Yeung of the Chinatown Community Development Center observed that Chinatown has been a center of connection and community cultural fabric for new immigrants, "and community banquets are the primary mechanism for celebrating and maintaining those connections." The article noted that Chinatown banquets also showcased political empowerment. The daughter of a co-founder of San Francisco's Chinese Historical Society said that the Chinatown banquets she attended are where "sometimes it was the first time anyone would have seen the Caucasian mayor of San Francisco or seen in person one of the members of the Board of Supervisors."

Community banquets in Oakland's Chinatown were an anchor of support for my run to become the first openly gay Councilmember of Oakland (and one of the first gay Asian Americans in northern California). Back in 2000 when being gay wasn't necessarily welcomed by voters even in one of the most liberal bastions of the Bay Area, I found support in the Chinatown community. We held fundraising dinners and introductions to voters at banquets held in the earlier days at the Silver Dragon and later at the Peony Restaurant. At these events, the focus was that I was one of the commu-

nity's own, who just happened to be gay. These banquets have seen United States senators, California legislators, numerous mayors, and countless local officials. Indeed, they are where hundreds of Chinatown seniors, school children and parents met and took pictures (and later, selfies) with their elected officials.

So, when GAPA was deciding where to hold its 34th Anniversary Banquet, it was natural to look to Oakland's Chinatown. A 10-course banquet served by the Peony Restaurant in the cavernous auditorium of the Oakland Asian Cultural Center is just the thing to bring our community together in celebration. This year's theme – **Building Communities of Action** – called upon our communities to not only celebrate, but to organize for action in a year that saw the Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade* and threaten the privacy rights not only of women but of LGBTQ+ folks. Also, at a time when anti-API hate and violence seems rampant, our activism to bring communities together is more urgent than ever. In the best tradition of Chinatown banquets, our community of GAPA members, supporters, allies, and leaders met and heard one of our preeminent Asian Pacific Islander American political leaders in California, **Attorney General Rob Bonta**, as the keynote speaker.

At GAPA Banquet 2022, we honored the achievements of the LGBTQ+ API community, including Godzy Award winner **Michael Nguyen**, **Anjali Rimi** (Donald Masuda Vanguard Award), **Danny Pham** (George Choy Award of Recognition), and **The Connection** (Doug Yaranon Community Ally Award). We showcased our recently crowned Runway Mx. GAPA royalty, **Obsidienne Obsurd** and **Siam Pussie**, who shined in the spotlight. We celebrated with fabulous performances from **Brian Palac**, **Jean Danao**, **GAPA Dance**, **GAPA Men's Chorus** and **Rice Rockettes**. For me, there were also the simple pleasures of eating a scrumptious 10-course Chinese banquet dinner, drinking in the chatter and laughter, and ingesting into my system inspiration for action to protect our rights and ourselves against hate.

This year's Banquet is for the history books, but there are future Banquets to look forward to. I hope you join me then.

Building Communities of Action

by Howard Chan

During Pride this year, GAPA participated in the People's March. The march was significant because the route traces the very first Gay Liberation march 52 years ago. We looked to be in solidarity with our black, brown, indigenous, trans, and queer family. Before the march started, GAPA was unexpectedly cast as a friend and a guest at the march. It left me wondering: are we truly seen as part of this movement or are we just outside a window looking in? Are we seen? If so, what are we seen as?

Perhaps unlike others, the challenge of visibility has always doggedly persisted for Asian Americans. Never mind that in 1882 the Chinese people were the first and only group of people to be explicitly subjected to a federal law that suspended immigration for a specific nationality. Let me repeat, 1882. Never mind that in the 1960s, Asian Americans like Kiyoshi Kuromiya, a gay personal assistant to Martin Luther King, Jr., marched at Selma and fought for civil rights. Or never mind that, Filipino farm workers like Larry Itliong stood equally side by side with Cesar Chavez to organize and fight for worker's rights. And never mind that in the 1970s and 1980s many Taiwanese and Indian Americans helped build what we know now as Silicon Valley. Never mind, or just never *in mind*.

If we are seen, then what are we seen as? Crazy, rich, complicit, self-hating, and demure are all reductive words others use to generalize us. But is this really how we see ourselves? Answering that question will reveal to you the magic that is GAPA.



Many queer folks arrived in San Francisco and the Bay area to escape persecution from their families and their communities in the 60s and 70s. What was paradise to many, was a gilded cage for many Asian Americans. Why? Because their families only lived several miles down the road. As the masses of young gay men fled the stifling social mores of middle America for the relative freedom they found here, they often brought with them their own prejudices and tried to exclude anyone who did not look like them. What does it mean to be marginalized within a marginalized group? How does it feel to be marginalized in your own home, a place you grew up in?

As the AIDS crisis reached its height, where were these gay Asian men to seek solace? To find others who understood their plight? This was why GAPA was formed: A space for these men not only to talk about the trauma of the day, but also to find the joy and the pride of who they were. That at the end of the day, being queer and being Asian can co-exist.



That joy and pride is still strong today. It shows when GAPA Men's Chorus sings. It shows when GAPA Theatre performs. It shows when the audience cheers for our talented contestants during Runway. I see it at the potlucks and get-togethers. I see it with hands rising when GAPA asks for help to run an event. And I see it at the dinners after rehearsals marked by laughter. No question of "where did you come from?" just "how are you?" No reductive descriptors. Only a sense of camaraderie, friends, and community. And that, ladies, gentlemen, and non-binary folks, is the magic of GAPA.

People like our GAPA Banquet guest of honor, Attorney General Rob Bonta, show our children what it looks like for us to be at the helm. We stand on the shoulders of giants. These folks have already and continue to answer the calls for action. Along with Parivar, who focuses on South Asian transgendered issues, APIQWTC, who creates a space for queer API women, The Connection which ensures queer APIs are healthy, and many other groups present at the Banquet, these are the many different strands that create our community. I am so glad that at events like Banquet, we can see the criss-cross of these strands more clearly and appreciate the beauty of the weave as a whole.

Community is more important than ever. In June, we learned that the rights we won through privacy and due process are in jeopardy. So I asked the straight allies and those who value reproductive rights to stand alongside us, 74% of Asian Americans already do.

Community is also a matter of life and death, especially during the darkest days of the pandemic, when our grandfathers, our

grandmothers, our aunties and uncles were beaten and some literally pushed to death. When we organized a march against anti-AAPI hate, it was the community that came out in the hundreds, all sharing our common frustration, to simply and collectively say, “No more!” Yet more work needs to be done.

The Gay Asian Pacific Alliance was founded in 1988 as a space where gay and bisexual API men could share their struggles, their joy, and their pride; but over the years it has grown into much more than that. We realized that the organization can better serve the community by extending our platform to create new spaces for other queer and trans API folks. We wanted to extend this sense of community beyond queer API men to the broader queer and trans API community, to extend this space for others to breathe. That is why we changed our name to the GLBTQ+ Asian Pacific Alliance. It’s an enormous task to earn the name. Luckily, GAPA has an amazing Board and membership to help us reach this goal.

So I close this with one last story and an ask. During the 2008 financial crisis, Icelandic banks were the first to fail because of the toxic mortgages that they held on their balance sheets. But there was one bank that did not fail. The reason? It was a bank



run by women. The bank, and its board, had a different perspective than the rest. This is what we are trying to do on the GAPA Board. To capture different API perspectives in order to better serve the organization and the community. On a board, they say one is a token, two is a minority and three is when the magic happens. If you don’t look like me, I want to invite those of you interested to join our board. Join us and help us so we can truly be the GLBTQ+ Asian Pacific Alliance. Thank you.



Anjali Rimi

Building Communities of Action is about elevating the greatest need for equity for the most marginalized identities in the world. It begins with ensuring that the most vulnerable yet resilient voices of these marginalized identities are leading these movements of action and thereby helping build the most sustainable, equitable, and inclusive communities.

As GAPA has displayed for over three decades that action begins with interacting with socio-economic intersectionalities that overlap our existence, we must build communities that can take action to fight Homophobia,

Transphobia, Xenophobia, Anti-Asian Hate, and systematic racism in effective ways.

While building these Communities of Action, I believe that we must strive and ensure that the voices of the transgender, queer, immigrant and BIPOC lead us on the path to taking swift action that has indeed helped save thousands of lives especially during global crises like the COVID pandemic. When building Communities of Action, we must center the Black Transgender, Queer Trans Elders, API Youth and all those folks who will powerfully lead and be inclusive of all voices that need to be represented.

Building Communities of Action requires social ideologies that balance to be unified in fighting for our collective liberation, and must be inclusive of building leadership development and mentoring. As a South Asian Transgender Brown immigrant woman, I perhaps remain dedicated to building such communities because they energize, empower and enable us to showcase the courage and resilience of our often erased communities of Transgender identities especially from the Global South.

Anjali Rimi (She/They) is San Francisco Bay Area based immigrant brown woman of transgender, kinnar southasian indian, and hinduism experiences. Anjali is President and Co-Founder of America's only Transgender-led, Transgender-centering South Asian Queer organization: [Parivar Bay Area](#), and has been recognized by California Legislative Assembly as a state LGBT leader in the Senate, as well as the Assembly.

Building Communities for Connection



by Danny Tai Pham

When I think about *building communities of action*, I naturally think of the social justice and political activism rooted in GAPA's long history. However, I think a necessary precursor before building communities of action is *building communities for connection*. We know there is power in numbers, but our collective impact is limited if we do not have spaces and means to connect with one another first. Only in recent years have I begun to see how the importance of connection has been central to my life and my own connection to the community at large.

For the past two decades, I have been progressively developing and supporting communities for connection. The motivation behind this work was arguably self-serving at first. It stems from being socially awkward as a child. I always felt out of place. I never felt like my peers accepted me. I constantly struggled in wondering if I have any genuine friends. Though I consider myself introverted, I still craved social interaction. So instead of withdrawing and retreating, I opted to create spaces around me. For example, I created a bunch of high school club organizations around my interests of chess, environmentalism, and Dance Dance Revolution – just to name a few. It was a coping strategy. I artificially created “forced” relationships around myself. If I doubted if we were friends, I would tell myself – we're clubmates! A similar mindset would carry over into my early professional career and volunteer work. Obviously, this is unhealthy framing of how I saw my self worth.

In my late 20s, I started seeing therapists to unpack my internalized shame that was compounded by multiple minority identities. I also addressed my recent discovery that I had lifelong depression and anxiety through mental health medication. And to boot, I now self-identify as neurodivergent and being on the spectrum; my early years make so much more sense to me now.

As I became increasingly self-aware of my struggles, I began to see the universality that everyone has their struggles too. I am fortunate to have supportive parents, access to mental wellbeing resources, and early financial independence. It afforded me to process the heightened challenges that came with intersectional identities. Conversely, I have reflected on how different my life would have been if I had the privilege of being a mediocre

straight man, let alone being a mediocre straight white man. How much easier would my life have been? Would I have felt the need to push myself so hard in society? Could I have had familial support in navigating my ex-fiance's alcoholism had I been straight?

There is something to be said about being your authentic self. My emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing turned for the better after finally coming out to my parents at age 28 – a surprise to those around me seeing how visible I am in the community after producing gay Asian club events (namely GAMEBOI) and serving on various queer nonprofit boards including GAPA. No more double life-living, code switching, or showing only siloed lenses of my identities. Though my father still struggles at times to fully embrace my queerness, I have felt seen by him when I share my painful moments, he responds with incredibly zen-like advice. The sort of exact thing that I needed to

hear. Yet all this is contrasted with some bitterness. It feels so unfair how society held me back from feeling my authentic self.

On the surface, some may be dismissive of nightclub events as just some place to party and get messy. However, I grew to see the value of such dedicated spaces centered around minority identities. It is a place to feel safe, a place to belong, to be your authentic self, to find others just like you, to celebrate and feel joy. I have seen many friendships form and romantic relationships turned into marriages from meeting each other within my club events. I think about the various queer API performers we've highlighted go on to bigger stages and greater fame. I think about the operations team and crew we employ behind the scenes, affording them both life and professional experience. There is community here.

Before the pandemic hit, I was seriously considering retiring from the event production industry. I felt 20 years was a nice bookend to this chapter of my life. However, during the pandemic, I took a dark turn in self medicating myself. So much so, I went to rehab. I learned how addiction is the ‘disease of isolation’ and the best remedy is to fight that isolation, reach out and connect with others. Guess I learned I'm not as introverted as I thought. I still had the wherewithal to recognize and imagine how many others were struggling just as much. I felt we would need these spaces to connect more than ever. That is how *QT Nightlife* was born. I doubled down with renewed interest for queer API space through the RIZE SF division, but my company has the intentionality and aspiration to build out for other minority communities who may have not had such spaces pre-pandemic to begin with.

In closing, building communities of action can only exist and can only be as good as the quality of connections within the community – from person to person and from within one's true authentic self. To foster these connections, it does not have to be within a nightclub setting. Just put yourself out there, don't isolate yourself. Lastly, you do not need to be an overt activist with a mission to better the community. Give yourself the permission to do whatever it takes for you to get connected to your true self first. Your mere presence is a contribution to the community itself. Who knows – maybe it's just a matter of the right time and right place that you will call upon yourself to take action.



Though reminiscent of all positive things, I still sought more in my experience and existence. And I found the missing piece at an LEX training this summer, when I saw, “[Queer Possibilities: A Conversation on Intergenerational Solidarity](#)” with Sammie Ablaza Wills and Vince Crisostomo. Sammie is the previous director and a strong leader of Lavender Phoenix and Vince is an elder and a pillar in our community. This video shows Sammie and Vince reflecting on their own relationship and on connecting their different generations through a lens of organizing, healing, and love. Throughout this video, my spirit cried both tears of sadness

We Weave Stories Across Generations

by Chali Lee

Lavender Phoenix (formerly known as APIENC) is powered by queer and trans Asian and Pacific Islander people. The organization is primarily led by young, trans and non-binary folks, for the entire QTAPI community.

More than any other organization, LavNix arguably embodies new generations of QTAPI activism, and their perspectives can shed light on where our diverse community is going.

LavNix works to inspire and train grassroots leaders.

Chali and Iris, recent graduates from the 13th annual Summer Organizer Program (SOP), share some thoughts about their affirming experiences.

I grew up in a traditional Hmong household that practiced under a patriarchal system with gendered roles and a religious belief of Shamanism, the belief that spirits are intertwined with our physical reality. These traditions taught me that queer Hmong individuals do not have a place in our community because we do not fit the binaries, and that my ancestors spirits would never accept and love my own for being queer. So I struggled finding space for myself in the only communities I know, physically and spiritually. The shame and taboo of queerness closed me off to any queer Hmong people and to any queer and trans API spaces at such a young age of seven.

I navigated my queer Hmong life by myself for ten years. It started out as a secret I would not tell my family, and as the years progressed, it turned into internalized hate for myself. I felt hopeless and lost with no strong support system. My world looked and felt gray.

At 17, I remember sitting around a conference table with ten other queer Hmong people who shared their own queer journeys. My spirit resonated with them, it felt as if it was trying to escape my flesh prison, it felt drawn to live, breathe, and play with their stories. They gave me stories that validated my experience as a queer Hmong individual—they too were on a journey to reconcile their sexuality and their spiritual religion. For the first time in my life, I felt heard and understood. They introduced color back into my life.

I went off to college at Stanford, away from home, to further explore my queerness. Here I taught others about my queer Hmong identity, I wore crop tops, and I acted more feminine. But something was still missing. I couldn't quite pinpoint it. And after my first year at Stanford, I found myself here at Lavender Phoenix as one of their Summer Organizers. It felt reminiscent of the queer Hmong space I was in before. I began relearning a lot of love, care, and longevity for myself.

and tears of joy. How beautiful it was to highlight the perspectives of an elder and a younger person in our community. What resonated with me was how I deeply understood both perspectives.

Here, I recognize how much I internalize what society has been telling me since youth. Sammie says it perfectly: “We’re told we don’t have legacy and don’t have future.” I also recognize how much I work in crafting my story to build a future, legacy, and community for my own queer and trans Hmong community. Vince says, “I hope the elders will start to tell those stories because if we don’t, someone else will.” During the video, I was able to see clearer who I am in the communities I am part of: a young person, seeking guidance and mentors, as well as an older person, being able to share my wisdom and knowledge with those younger than me. I saw myself as an elder to other queer Hmong youth, while recognizing my young age of 20.

The clarity of this video highlights the necessity for stories in my life. At Stanford, I felt a missing hole in my queer Hmongness during my first year because I lost access to queer and trans API stories. At Lavender Phoenix, I found stories woven in all of my conversations with other SOPs and supervisors, all of our River of Life presentations, and in my work with zines. Stories are integral in my healing journey as they affirm me and teach me things I didn’t even know about my own life. Stories from our elders, our youth, and everyone in-between are valuable as they will continue to breathe life into one another. Stories are meant to be interacted with, actively, as they allow such vibrant communication, warmth, and solidarity for our whole community.

In the video, Vince says, “maybe the message is that when we meet with younger people, we heal because we know that those efforts weren’t for nothing.” Here, I listen and understand as an elder. And I reflect and respond as a young person, “when us younger people meet with our elders, we are inspired and we heal because we now know what we are fighting for and living for.”

I want to recognize that Lavender Phoenix's existence has impacted me even before I came in contact with them, truly transformed me within my time here, and will continue to inspire me after. It will continue to do so for the queer and trans API youth who seek their existence, guidance, and love. And I am honored to be part of the first cohort of summer organizers under the new name Lavender Phoenix.

Chali Lee (he/him/any) identifies as a queer Hmong individual from Fresno, CA. He currently attends Stanford University where he studies Political Science, Asian American Studies, and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Chali believes the new values and skills learned from Lavender Phoenix will aid him on his lifelong journey to create intentional, loving spaces for trans and queer Hmong communities.



I don't even remember who I appreciated or who appreciated me. But I do remember that I was overwhelmed with the love that everyone in that space had for one another. It was the first time I had ever experienced such a kind and warm community of queer and trans API people.

As the program progressed, it got easier to affirm others. I began to focus my attention on the actions of each of my teammates and recognize everyone for the work that they did. I gave specific appreciations that helped me get across how much I cared for each of them and how much they meant to me. It got easier to receive affirmations and affirm myself as well. Each week, our full team came together to hear 1-2 team members share a snapshot of their life with the rest

I Learned the Power of Being Honest

by Iris

Growing up, I could not imagine anyone accepting me for my queer and trans identities. I viewed these parts of myself as a burden that I had to carry, something ugly and unlovable. Believing that I could never show my queerness to anyone, I hid and silenced myself. In order to keep myself safe, I sacrificed my authenticity. In college, I began unraveling these internalized beliefs. I came out as a trans woman and nonbinary, and in the process of my social and medical transition I found a supportive group of people who understood me and loved me.

Yet, coming into Lavender Phoenix, the remnants of my past still stuck with me. I found myself retreating inwards in times of struggle, avoiding other's company rather than asking for their help. I feared being vulnerable with others and worried that by showing weakness, I would be rejected. But as the weeks went by in the Summer Organizer Program, I found myself opening up, unlearning my fears surrounding intimacy, and learning how to share with honesty and vulnerability.

The first big moment came during the very first day of the program. As we trickled into this new online space, nervous and excited, Yuan, the current director of Lavender Phoenix, shared the structure of the day. We would be discussing LavNix's history, values, and build relationships with each other, culminating in appreciations that we would give to one another. Surprisingly, it was the last part, giving and receiving affirmations, that terrified me. Immediately, I found myself struggling with the worries that no one would have anything to say for me and that I wouldn't know what to say to others. I was not used to uplifting others and having others do the same to me. At the end of the day, when it was time to give affirmations,

of the group. During the third week of the program, it was my turn to share my river of life. When it came time for me to present, I felt really scared. I wasn't sure what I wanted to say and I was afraid of the reaction I would get from sharing my story. But I knew that if I wanted to grow, I would have to face my fear of vulnerability.

And so, as prepared and shared my river of life, I did it as honestly as possible. I shared the things that I loved and things that I hated. I shared my story of exploration and discovery. And I shared my experiences of hiding, of isolation, and of fear. At times, I was overcome with my emotions. But at every point before, during, and after, the other SOP team members held me with loving and gentle energy. They gave me endless loving affirmations that filled my heart and made me feel valued. In this moment, I was able to share my authentic story vulnerability and on my own terms. The parts of me that I felt had to remain hidden were received with open arms.

At Lavender Phoenix, I learned the power of being honest and vulnerable to those around you. I learned to express my needs to those that would both hear them and meet them. I found healing at Lavender Phoenix, healing that I want everyone in my community to find. At Lavender Phoenix I see a vision of the future that I want for myself and for the generations after me. A future where my identities are something that I can be proud of rather than ashamed. Where our communities embrace us in all of our complexities and multitudes. One where we are powerful and one where we are free.

Iris (she/they) is a nonbinary second-generation Chinese American trans woman. She joined Lavender Phoenix to find QTAPI community and has loved every second of it.



by César Cadabes

In 2018, I wrote a performance piece titled #Resist, a personal narrative/response to the first two years of the Trump administration. The fact that two hours into his new administration they had wiped out all the mention of LGBTQ+ issues from the official White House webpage was an immediate signal to queer and transgender folks in this country. Subsequently, they slashed AIDS funding by \$1Billion, reinstated the ban on transgender people in the military, rolled back protections for LGBTQ folks in housing, education, and healthcare.

In this story I wrote about being in San Francisco for over three decades and having gone through all that we did and being tired of always having to fight. We had a lot of battles through the 1990's and 2000's that we had fought hard and won. Over the years we were being allowed to adopt children and start families. Our relationships were being legally recognized, first through local domestic partnership and civil union laws, then a final ruling from the United States Supreme Court for marriage equality.

Sodomy laws were being repealed, meaning that our intimate physical expression of love and community was no longer a crime! The repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) — all our brothers and sisters who wished to serve our country, were finally given the respect for the true patriots that they are. Through the years our pride parades transformed from vigils and funeral marches to defiant celebrations!

But they keep trying to take it all away. Gay conversion therapy is still legal in over 20 states. They continue to deny us access to housing, employment, and health care under the guise of religious liberty laws. Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito say the Gay marriage decision was a mistake. This year alone, over 230 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced in state legislatures across the country.

They don't just want to take it all away, they want us to DIE. After over four decades of fighting and screaming and strategizing and losing and then fighting more and

finally winning, I thought that we wouldn't have to fight so hard anymore.

After each report of a murdered of a trans sister of color, after another attack resulting in a queer brother hooked up to machines and fighting for his life, after another tweet equating queer folk as less than human, after 41 years of no cure or vaccine for AIDS. I'm living through the second global pandemic in my lifetime. And with COVID, just like with AIDS, they always find someone, some group of people to blame. Our Asian elderly and women are afraid to live their everyday lives because they get harassed, attacked and sometimes they get killed.

But what has inspired me, has always inspired me, and continues to inspire is the expressions of humanity, in spite of and in response to all of this. During the beginning of AIDS, like COVID and like MPX, we didn't have a lot of information we just knew that people, our people, were sick and dying. And as afraid as we were, we still found something inside ourselves and responded. For some of us it was very simple, we responded by running errands, making meals, or cleaning people's apartments.

During COVID, we helped our neighbors who are elderly and immunocompromised and got them groceries and other daily essentials. And with MPX — artists, social media influencers, community-based organizations on the one hand, held the government accountable for their slow response, while on the other hand, shared information, even their own personal and detailed experiences with MPX, on what we needed to prevent the spread in our community.

We queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander folks have a deep and long, joyful and powerful history in all of the social justice movements in this country. We have so much that we have learned from our history, and we carry it with us.

The call to action will always be there; the question is how will you respond?

The most powerful and revolutionary way one can respond is by expressing one's decency and humanity.

The queer and trans API community is making gains in getting its voice heard, including needed representation in the political arena. A candidate for California State Assembly, Dublin City Councilmember Shawn Kumagai is a promising presence in local politics effecting positive change for many. He generously shares his thoughts and views in an exclusive Lavender Godzilla interview.

1) Can you share a little bit about your background?

I'm a third-generation military veteran, son of a first-generation Japanese immigrant and only Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) candidate in the race for Assembly. I'm also a lifelong Democrat and Dublin's first openly gay City Councilmember who has been keeping promises and delivering results



10 QUESTIONS: Shawn Kumagai

for Alameda County families. I grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. After losing my mother, I stepped up to become legal guardian to my younger brother. We planted roots in Dublin, but with out-of-control housing costs keeping families from homeownership, I made affordable housing my mission.

In 2018, I was elected to the Dublin City Council. I promised to build more transit-oriented affordable housing for seniors and low-income residents, and delivered over 1,000 new units. I promised I'd stand up for small businesses, and delivered by helping local small businesses stay afloat during the pandemic, expanding good-paying union jobs, and making his city safer. And I promised to respect our tax dollars, and delivered again by balancing the city's multi-million dollar budget every year and earning the highest possible credit rating.

Today, I am the only elected official in the race that has a real record of delivering results and would make history as the first openly gay member of the Assembly from this district. I have endorsements from local democratic clubs and civil rights organizations to the Chamber of Commerce - which demonstrate that I'm the only candidate with the right experience to deliver for you in Sacramento.

2) Have you always been politically active?

I am proud to be a lifelong Democrat, and a party activist. Throughout my adult life I have been active in various Democratic Clubs, and volunteered for my local Democratic Party. I currently serve as the State Treasurer, California Democratic Party API Caucus (Board Member with various leadership roles since 2017), Lead Co-Chair of the CDP Credentials Standing Committee, a Delegate to the California Democratic Party Democratic State Central Committee, and Associate Member on the Alameda County Democratic Central Committee (immediate past AD-16 Vice Chair). I am an active member of multiple Democratic Clubs and have worked for years to identify, recruit, train, and elect Democrats to local office.

3) When did you first get involved in politics? How did that come about?

I have always been an active and involved voter, but I decided to get more involved in 2016 after Trump was elected. I was an Organizing for Action fellow and got involved with issues-oriented organizing, including advocating for protections for our immigrant communities. I was elected by my neighbors as a California Democratic Party delegate and in 2018, I became the first LGBTQ person ever elected to the Dublin City Council. Since then, I've been delivering transit-oriented affordable housing for seniors and low-income residents, helping local small businesses stay afloat during the pandemic, expanding good-paying green jobs, and making my city safer. I'm also getting results from Sacramento for Alameda County families as District Director for Democratic Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan and fighting for us as a Navy Reservist assigned to an intelligence unit at Camp Parks.

4) There's a big difference between working in state government and local politics, particularly smaller communities. How does that translate for LGBTQ+ concerns? How do you deal with it on a local level?

At the state level I have been proud to work alongside Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan to promote a pro-equality agenda, including legislation that clarifies official documents for non-binary individuals. As a Councilmember, I have advocated for additional visibility and inclusion of our LGBTQ+ community. In 2019 I advocated for us to pass our first-ever LGBTQ+ Pride Proclamation and raise the Pride Flag at City Hall. I have also advocated for additional inclusion of LGBTQ+ community members in our city governance and have advocated for the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ in our decennial Tri-Valley human services needs assessment.

5) How about AAPI representation?

As the Asian American running in a plurality AAPI district, it is incredibly important to me that we have AAPI representation at all levels of our government. I also strongly believe in mentoring the next generation of AAPI leaders. That's why my campaign has worked to engage AAPI young people in the election by developing a comprehensive internship program that engages students with practical campaign experience, giving them the ability to connect with neighbors and learn about local policies in their community. My campaign has also engaged with non-English language speakers by participating in round tables and engagements that target under-served communities within our AAPI community.

6) How is your experience networking with other API and LGBTQ political figures?

I have spent a lot of my time volunteering on boards and caucuses that aim to advance AAPI representation and civic engagement, including on the boards of the Asian Pacific American Public Affairs (APAPA) Tri-Valley Chapter, the California Democratic Party Asian Pacific Islander Caucus, and the League of California Cities Asian Pacific Islander Caucus.

7) What do you think of the new generations of API LGBTQ political figures?

I think we are great! I would be honored to join the caucus of API LGBTQ legislators, as I think we bring a very unique and important perspective to policy making. Organizations like GAPA are key to creating that pipeline by fostering the next generation of AAPI LGBTQ+ political leaders.

8) What accomplishments are your most proud of?

As a Councilmember I have consistently advocated for pro-LGBTQ policies. I advocated for our city's (and region's) first LGBTQ Pride Month proclamation and to raise the Pride flag, advancing awareness and visibility

for our LGBTQ community. When the motion to raise the Pride flag was voted down in 2019 it created controversy in Dublin and throughout the Bay Area. Under my leadership we were able to bring the item back and pass it, and we have passed it every year since. I have worked to have the Pride flag and Pride proclamations passed throughout the east Bay Area and beyond. I also advocated for our city to self-evaluate using the HRC Municipal Equality Index. Our first year we achieved a score of 82, and working with staff we now have a score of 95.

9) Especially in light of your Assembly race, what are your future goals and objectives?

I will work to advance LGBTQ equity issues in our criminal justice system and in our government systems and reporting; expand resources to our local governments and CBOs so that we can get health and human services to our LGBTQ community, particularly our trans people of color, youth, and elderly communities; advance pro-LGBTQ education and professional training in our schools so that all schools are an inclusive environment for our youth; ban conversion therapy.

10) Any advice or last words for those who want to get more involved, especially for those who don't think they're political or might shy away from politics?

There's a role for everyone in our political process! You don't necessarily have to be an elected official to make a big impact in your community. Follow your passion and find ways to make things better for our community. That can be by helping political campaigns, volunteering in non-profit organizations, or working within a field that directly impacts our community. And if you would like to run for public office, do the training programs, build your network of supporters and cheerleaders, and go for it!

To learn more about Shawn and his campaign for California State Assembly, visit: www.shawnkumagai.com



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