

A need to know it all

Halifax publisher amasses more than 2,000 local LGBTQ+ related articles

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When you know, you know. For Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia founder Daniel MacKay, discovering his sexual orientation was expedited with just one look at his older brother's striking housemate during his early childhood.

"His across-the-hall neighbour was this big, beefy, handsome Italian guy who had just moved to Halifax from Italy to work as a carpenter," says MacKay, of his brother's housemate, who frequently visited his family in his hometown of Barrington Passage. "They got to be friends, and my brother brought him home to hang out with the family. I totally fell for him; I was crazy about him — he was beautiful. In hindsight, I had a crush on him."

Unconsciously finding fellow LGBTQ+ community members when he was around eight years old, the would-be publisher found friends in a group of writerly cottage owners for whom his father performed plumbing duties.

"It was a bunch of a bunch of women — I'm certain all of them were lesbians — and they got to like me," says MacKay, of the women he refers to as Aunt Maria, Aunt Marian, Aunt Tessa and Aunt Mimi. "I spent a huge amount of time with them, and they took over my literary education at an early age. They said, 'Here's the stuff you want to read.' They were quite amazingly remarkable people; they were publishers and writers of note at the time."

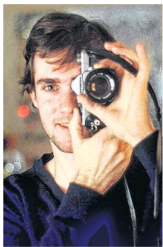
Later moving to Bridgewater, MacKay attended New Germany Rural High School, where he excelled in multimedia endeavours like photography, facilitated by the school's communications lab. In addition to developing new aptitudes, he also encountered teachers who inspired him to be himself during his formative years.

"There was very little that was gay there, except for some of the teachers," says MacKay. "In hindsight, the teachers did this really beautiful job of letting me know that they were gay but not coming out, of course, it was the 1970s and teachers were not allowed to be gay at the time. They were my heroes at the time, and I didn't know why."

Leaving for the city to study journalism at the University of King's College in 1981, MacKay became quickly involved with Halifax's queer community — which included



Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia founder and Wayves Magazine publisher Daniel MacKay has overseen the publication of tens of millions of quality queer words over 25 years. CONTRIBUTED



A photo of Daniel MacKay when he was about 20 years old. With a passion for photography and multimedia, he studied at the University of King's College in Halifax after moving from the South Shore region. DANIEL MACKAY

building the interior of then-club Rumours. However, one of his biggest undertakings would be taking over publishing duties for the GAE-ZET T E, run by Gay Alliance for Equality, which MacKay later rebranded as Wayves Magazine. Remaining in online publication to this day, Wayves printed 11 times a year and featured tens of millions of quality queer words over 25 years.

Fully entrenched in the queer community, MacKay had plenty of sources from hanging out at spots frequented by the who's who of the scene at the time.

"Because I was connected to lots of stuff, people started throwing info at me — facts, photographs and stories," says MacKay, noting the overwhelming influx of information. "I had no place to put them; I was losing my mind. This was important stuff. These were historic pictures

"Making my city a better place for other queer folk is making the city a better place for me as well."

Daniel MacKay

and stories, and I knew these people wouldn't be around forever."

Little did he know, he would soon find new inspiration and an appropriate place to showcase information pertaining to Halifax's LGBTQ+ community.

Circa 2000, MacKay attended a drag show at the behest of his then-boyfriend; unfortunately, MacKay wasn't a big fan of the art form.

"I was absolutely bored to tears," says MacKay. "I said, 'What am I going to do to amuse myself?'"

Finding consolation, the journalist was struck with a brilliant idea. Deciding to profile the performers, MacKay conducted interviews and took photos to create an online drag queen catalogue — resulting in the perfect first step towards what would become the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia.

"Doing the drag queens was a stroke of fortune because drag queens want to be seen, so they told everybody about the encyclopedia I was building," says MacKay, who also spread the word via business cards. The various promotional effort brought attention to the website's early entries received much attention in the days before social media.

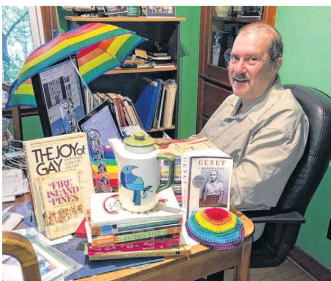
"Suddenly, I had a place for everything," says MacKay, whose wiki-based page (editable by all users) was used by drag queens and other prolific

community figures who interacted with users on the platform. "People generally love it," says MacKay.

With thousands of articles on the website — some fun, others scholarly — users can find everything from upcoming community events, a gay walking tour (very popular), profiles of vintage gay businesses, and even information about Oscar Wilde's 1892 visit to the city. Featuring vast and varied topics, the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia is niche, but not too niche — catering to the entire queer community, not one specific type of queer identity, unlike many hyper-specialized platforms nowadays.

"There's a page for every person, place, thing and event of significance to the Queer community in Halifax, ever," says MacKay. "On top of that, there's humour and completely random articles that have nothing to do with Halifax."

Having served as elders



A photo of Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia founder and Wayves Magazine publisher Daniel MacKay, who recently began an archival position alongside Dalhousie University. DANIEL MACKAY

coordinator for Halifax Pride's 2021 Pride Festival, which wrapped up last week, MacKay (supposedly retired) continues to work in new and exciting capacities. He recently took up a position as a research assistant for the Dalhousie University's Sexual Health and Gender Lab's Indigenous Boys & Men project, facilitating intergenerational dialogue to better sexual health and all health. Additionally, he performs archival duties for Dalhousie, which has promised a permanent home for many LGBTQ+ related materials.

And the work is never done. With the 20th anniversary of the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia approaching later this year, MacKay isn't finished with his magnum opus — which has amassed over 2,000 pages.

"It should probably have another thousand pages if it's going to be really complete," says MacKay, who continues to write and produce oral histories (long-form audio interviews) for the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia.

Meanwhile, with many years ahead of him to reach his goals, MacKay continues to promote and give voice to the local queer community — in turn, making his city better for others; and, of course, himself.

"This is all extremely selfish work. People say, 'Oh Dan, you're doing all this really great community work,' but it's all selfish work," says MacKay. "Making my city a better place for other queer folk is making the city a better place for me as well. It's not selfless work at all, it's making my home a better place, documenting my community, and it's fun."

To learn more about Daniel MacKay and the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia, visit: gay.hfxns.org/FrontPage.

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