

## Queer St. Olaf

By Michael Peterson

If statistics are right, somewhere between 100 and 250 of us were queer when we were at St. Olaf. Yet, almost none of us were out. Had we been out, we would have likely called ourselves *homosexual*. Later this became *gay* or *lesbian*, then simplified to *LGBTQ+*. More recently, the term *queer* has been used as an encompassing description.

It is hard to explain to young people today how hard it was to come out of the closet during our time on the Hill. Our faith, our family, and our self-expectations kept us from being fully ourselves. There simply were no good role models to show the way, and there were few public spaces where we could feel accepted. Some of us were partially out, but mostly in private conversations with roommates or special friends. Many of us did not even fully understand what it was that made us different.

After graduation, we mostly followed hetero-normative paths. Most of us entered careers where it was assumed we were straight. Many of us married and had children. Slowly though, we came to accept what we had known when we were in college but couldn't reveal. At different ages we have stepped gingerly into the gay, lesbian, and trans world. For our generation, it is said that the most difficult coming-out was to one's self. Once that was done, we journeyed through a process of sharing with parents, colleagues, spouses, friends and children. It wasn't particularly easy no matter what age. Yet it got easier each step we took.

All of us who now define ourselves as LGBTQ+ honor our classmates who came out when young, since they paved the way. We also respect those who did not come out until much later. We know how difficult it has been. I believe, though that all of us who have come out, at whatever age, are glad we did.

We celebrate each of our queer classmates and the extraordinary lives they have led.