



"Chosen Familias" opening. Top center: curator Tina Valentin Aguirre.

"We are Complex, Dynamic and Supportive": Exploring LGBTQ Latinx Kinship in All Its Forms

by Rigoberto Marquez

On June 7, the GLBT Historical Society Museum unveiled a new exhibition, "[Chosen Familias: LGBTQ Latinx Stories](#)," curated by Tina Valentin Aguirre (genderqueer, they/them). A longtime activist, poet, producer and member of the Bay Area LGBTQ Latinx community, Tina currently serves as chair of the GLBT Historical Society Board of Directors. "Chosen Familias" explores LGBTQ Latinx kinship through 20 photo albums individually curated by members of the Bay Area's LGBTQ Latinx community documenting the specific ways they define their *familias* — their families. Each tells a unique story of strength, resilience, culture and community. This month it was my pleasure to interview Tina to learn more about the genesis of the exhibition.

What inspired the exhibition and the title “Chosen *Familias*”?

I lost my parents a few years ago, and at that time I examined what family meant to me, biological and chosen. Over the last few years, I have also met a number of younger LGBTQ Latinx people who would ask me how I keep pushing forward. A lot of these young people look to us, our histories, cultures, localities and even our losses to help them process. Looking to the past has helped me understand how I can build community and make stronger connections among people. We are living in difficult times. But at the same time, we are mobilizing. Many LGBTQ Latinx people do that through our chosen *familias*.

How did you decide on the idea of photo albums? What do you want people to take away after viewing them?

A collaborator and friend, Kimberlynn, suggested it. Today, when we add a new “contact” on social media we don’t usually go back and look at their photos or their history. LGBTQ relationships are hinted at on social media but they are not always featured. The exhibition is intended to do exactly the opposite. Whom do we love and who supports us? Here’s my past, here are my connections, here is how I have lived my life. Photos are the best way to represent that. Diving into someone’s memories electronically can feel weird; there is something great about being able to flip through a photo album of someone’s curated past experiences.

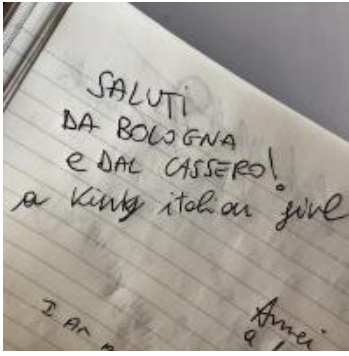
I hope people learn about LGBTQ Latinx people and see our experiences as universal. You don’t need to be Latinx to relate to them. I want people to learn about our relationships, our love, the challenges we experience. It’s our *familias* that help us to get back on track, find a different direction and get through difficult times.

Why was it important that this exhibition take place at the GLBT Historical Society Museum?

People from all over the world come to the GLBT Historical Society Museum and other LGBTQ-focused sites — especially in the summer — to learn about our history, culture and communities. But even within the LGBTQ community, the stories of people of color, genderqueer/trans people and elders are often marginalized. One of the strategic initiatives of the society is to feature underrepresented members of our community. I’m glad we are showing “Chosen *Familias*” during the museum’s busiest season. Visitors are going to be able to experience our *familias*. We are complex, we are dynamic and we are supportive; and the GLBT Historical Society is a great location to encourage this type of exchange.

Rigoberto Marquez is a member of the GLBT Historical Society Board of Directors.

A Link Between the Past and the Future



by Nalini Elias

In my position at the GLBT Historical Society, I spend quite a bit of time at our museum. We welcome over 16,000 guests every year, and visitor numbers have increased annually since we opened in 2011. Whenever I get a spare minute, I enjoy paging through the comments that visitors leave in our guestbook. They're a constantly evolving testament to the museum's

power and a daily reminder of why preserving and showcasing queer history is such a necessary endeavor.

Visitors' comments vary widely in tone, from exuberant and excited, to contemplative and thoughtful, to the deeply personal and emotional. Many guests are amazed by the objects on display and the breadth of topics explored. "Thank you for teaching us what they didn't teach us in school," wrote Maria and Victoria this month.

Others reflect on the contrast between the resilience and diversity of the queer community and their own experience of growing up in non-affirming environments. "When I was a kid, I never dreamed that there was a whole world outside my small town, a world where I could look, love and live as I needed and wanted to," shared a woman who visited with her girlfriend.

A Space of Catharsis

I'm struck by how often visitors experience the museum not merely as an educational venue, but as a space of catharsis where they can safely inhabit their own identities. "I want to be brave. I love girls. I want to be myself one day," confided Ar Ju. The shortest comments are often the most moving. "I'm a trans boy," read a one-line sentence written in the recognizable printing of a middle-school-aged child.

The comments left by international visitors underscore the museum's global reach. They hail from Helsinki to Bologna to Seoul, to name just three cities mentioned in last month's entries. While the museum is grounded in the queer history of the San Francisco Bay Area, their reactions demonstrate that its themes transcend time and place. "I've looked forward to visiting for a long time," Louis contributed in French. "It's a link between the past and the future, the way to better understanding and being able to respond to old questions."

If there's an overall takeaway, it's that the museum's small size belies its outsized impact. "The most important museum in SF for me," declared Katri, a sentiment shared by Leah, who judged it to be "the highlight of my trip." As the museum approaches its ninth anniversary, we'll continue to ensure that it educates, inspires, empowers and uplifts all who pass through its doors.

At the Museum

Reflecting on Love that Hurts and Heals



by Angela Ting

“Love Hurts,” says the slogan on a large red-and-black, heart-shaped leather patch on display in the GLBT Historical Society Museum’s exhibition [“The Mayor of Folsom Street: The Life and Legacy of Alan Selby.”](#) Marking the 40th anniversary of “Daddy” Alan Selby’s iconic leather and kink emporium Mr. S. Leather, the exhibition includes items that detail his relationship with his “boy,” Johnie Garcia, to whom the patch is dedicated. Through the course of helping with the curation of this exhibition, I’ve found that it is true — love can hurt — but only if you want it to.

A picture of Alan and Johnie in the exhibition shows the two smiling at a modest daddy/boy contest, which they entered randomly and eventually won. In the archives, I’ve rifled through and read stacks of love letters between the two men, exchanged through years of being together and apart. Some letters are cheeky, some sensual, some absolutely hilarious, with nude male models on postcards or kinky messages hidden behind innocuous Father’s Day greeting cards. However, what struck me the most was their love and intimacy pouring from every page. It was clear as day in the tenderness with which they addressed each other and longed for each other’s company, physically and emotionally.

It’s easy for outsiders looking into the gay kink community to willfully misunderstand it; after all, the pages of the Mr. S Leather catalog are not for the fainthearted. Alan Selby, who dedicated his life to leather and lust, is the same Alan Selby who adored Johnie Garcia and who spent years volunteering in the AIDS ward of San Francisco General Hospital. He held and massaged the aching hands of gay and bisexual men who were thrown out of their homes and communities during times when they needed love and understanding the most.

Alan Selby’s life and work prove that there is love — deep, abiding and compassionate — even in the places you would least expect.

Angela Ting is the society’s spring 2019 museum exhibitions and programs intern.

Upcoming Events

Living History Discussion

SF LGBTQ Journalism in the Early Days of HIV/AIDS



Saturday, July 13

1:00–2:00 p.m.

American Bookbinders Museum

355 Clementina St., San Francisco

\$10.00 | Free for members

A conversation with Randy Alfred, a gay journalist who covered the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and was cofounder of the *San Francisco Bay Times*. Randy will discuss his reportage of the terrifying and yet-to-be-named “gay plague” in 1981. Hear journalistic “war stories” from a San Francisco reporter/editor who was breaking national news on KSAN-FM and in *The Sentinel* when much of the local LGBTQ media was burying its head in the sand or doing tepid rewrites of mainstream coverage. He’ll reminisce about early heroes like Bobbi Campbell and discuss foot-draggers, obstructionists and denialists. More information can be found [here](#). Tickets are available online [here](#).

Film Screening

A Great Ride: Adventures in Lesbian Aging



Thursday, July 18

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

Filmmaker Deborah Craig will introduce a screening of her award-winning film “A Great Ride,” a 30-minute documentary about Bay Area lesbians confronting the challenge of aging with determination, dynamism, courage and humor. The film follows Sally, a retired women’s studies professor and activist living in a cabin in Northern California; Brenda, an African American political activist in Vallejo; and five residents of a Santa Rosa retirement community: two couples, Nancy and Marjorie and Sue and Patty, as well as Shirley. Craig teaches at San Francisco State University and Mills College and has created more than a half-dozen films. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Living History Discussion

Early Leather: SF’s Leather Scene, 1966–1992

Friday, July 26

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco



\$5.00 | Free for members

A panel featuring members of the early San Francisco leather scene and scholars of the local leather and kink community will reflect on leather life in the city from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s, the years that witnessed the emergence of this unique subculture. Among the topics that will be discussed are the origins of the leather community in early gay

motorcycle clubs, the emergence of a distinct and recognizable scene in the 1970s and the maturation of leather culture during the height of the AIDS epidemic from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. Panelists include Peter Fiske, a leatherman for the past 55 years and the chairman emeritus of The 15 Association. His book *My Leather Life: Early Years 1958–1983* will be available for purchase and signing. The program is being held in conjunction with “[The Mayor of Folsom Street: The Life and Legacy of Alan Selby](#),” an exhibition currently on view at the GLBT Historical Society Museum. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Current Exhibitions

Front Gallery

[Chosen Familias: Bay Area LGBTQ Latinx Stories](#)

Open through October 20, 2019

[More information](#)

Community Gallery

[The Mayor of Folsom Street: The Life and Legacy of Alan Selby](#)

Open through October 20, 2019

[More information](#)

Main Gallery

[Queer Past Becomes Present](#)

Permanent exhibition

[More information](#)



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CREDITS. Feature: Collage of photos taken at the opening reception of “ChosenFamilies”; all photos by Gerard Koskovich. FROM THE STAFF: Photo of the GLBT Historical Society Museum guestbook by Nalini Elias. AT THE MUSEUM: Daddy Alan Selby (right), aka Mr. S, and his boy, Johnie Garcia, at the National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights (1993); photographer unidentified; collection of the GLBT Historical Society. UPCOMING EVENTS. Living History Discussion: Bobbi Campbell (ca. 1983); photo by Marie Ueda, collection of the GLBT Historical Society. Film screening: Still from the film “A Great Ride” depicting documentary subject Brenda Crawford, courtesy of Deborah Craig. Living History Discussion: Koalas motorcycle club group photo, taken at a club run in the Santa Cruz mountains (1967); photo by Henri Leleu, collection of the GLBT Historical Society.

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