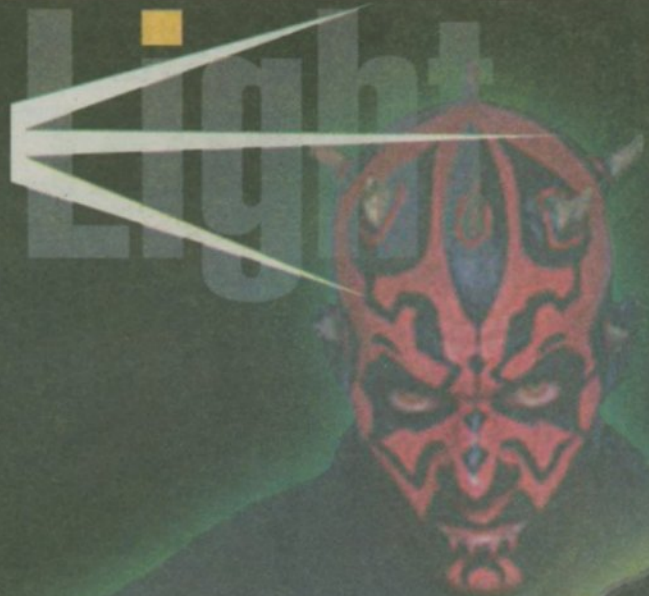




May 19-25, 1999



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Eldon Murray

LGBT Wisconsin can boast of many contributions to our national Gay community. They include the first ever statewide Gay civil rights law and the first ever openly Lesbian Congresswoman, Tammy Baldwin.

We have also made a number of contributions that aren't as well known. Eldon Murray is one of those. A true pioneer in the Gay civil rights movement, he is still going strong at the age of 69. Last year, the International Gay and Lesbian archives named him one of the "pioneers of the movement." He is 1 of only 32 people to receive that honor.

Born in Vincennes, Indiana, Eldon says, "I've been Gay for as long as I can remember. It was always the prince in the fairy tale that interested me. He was the one who went out and did wonderful things."

He began exploring his sexuality at an early age. Like most young Gays and Lesbians in the days before Stonewall, Eldon turned to the local library. "When I was in the fifth grade, I had read everything in the children's section of the library. So, I was allowed to go to the adult section, he said. "I headed for books on sexuality and abnormal psychiatry. I read Freud and James. I was looking for answers to my feelings for other men."

He adds, "James held out the idea that homosexual acts and eroticism were quite normal in adolescence and that one outgrew them," he said. "I never worried about these things. Then when I was 17, I decided that I didn't want to outgrow homosexuality."

A year later, Eldon moved to "the big city, Chicago." It was there that he found his professional calling, the world of finance. He landed a job in a bank as a messenger boy.

The bank was soon to learn what activists in Milwaukee, and around the country, would later take for granted — Eldon Murray is a man with drive. "I worked my way to the Trust Investment section," he says. The bank was reluctant to give him a position there. "I simply told them that if they didn't, I would go elsewhere," he states in a matter of fact manner.

Soon, however, he was called away to fight a battle far from the quiet world of high finance, the Korean War. "I was a forward artillery observer," he says. "They normally used officers for that, but they lost too many officers that way." It was a dangerous assignment that meant moving close to the enemy and calling in artillery fire.

After the war, Eldon went back to work at his bank, but not for long. "I came up to Milwaukee in 1955 to visit a girl," he says. "I met a man here and came up to find work, because I couldn't advance where I was. I found a job in the brokerage business."

His life moved along like most others. Then came the watershed event in Gay history, Stonewall. Eldon got involved in what was then called "Gay Liberation" in a big way. "I was 39-years-old and established in my business," he says. "My clients didn't care as long as I made money for them. I could stand up and be openly Gay when few people could."

That ability launched a remarkable string of projects that established a legacy still felt today. Along with his friend Alyn Hess and a handful of others, Eldon founded Wisconsin's oldest LGBT group, Gay People's Union. Most of Milwaukee's LGBT organizations are in one way or another descended from GPU.

His influence reached outside of Milwaukee too. Eldon became editor of one of America's first LGBT publications, *GPU News*. "I was nominated for it during a meeting," he says. "I agreed because I saw a need."

He answered that need for the next ten years. The monthly *GPU News* was a glossy covered magazine containing news, commentaries, fiction and poetry. It had a national circulation and a national reputation. A lack of volunteers led to its demise in 1981.

Eldon didn't confine his activities to *GPU News*. He began what could have been the first LGBT radio program in the country. The program *Gay Perspectives* was a weekly prime time show, with news, music and an occasional interview.

He was also instrumental in founding the first Gay STD clinic in the country. The GPU STD Clinic later became the BESTD clinic.

In between all that he helped to establish the GPU Hotline, counseling services, support groups, a legal defense fund, and many other projects. Throughout it all, Eldon kept in contact with leaders around the country, exchanging ideas, helping where he could. Many of the projects Eldon began became models for others around the country.

Then a new disease hit the Gay community, AIDS. Eldon rolled up his sleeves and pitched



Eldon E. Murray receives his diploma upon completion of the Senior Statesman Classes from County Executive Tom Ament.

in. He was instrumental in getting the initial grants for what would become the Milwaukee AIDS Project (MAP) which is now ARCW, the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin.

Having been a founder of a community and a recognized national leader would have been enough for most of us, but not for Eldon Murray. Six years ago, the Cream City Foundation gave him a grant to attend a SAGE conference in New York. It was money well spent. Eldon came back to Milwaukee and founded a chapter of SAGE here.

The group currently has around 100 active members. Of course, Eldon wants more. Speaking of the problems faced by Gay Seniors he says, "The major problem is that there are all kinds of programs out there. Gay people don't choose to participate in them. They either don't know about them or they are in the closet."

Our Village Elders

So, as he has so many times in the past, Eldon Murray acts as a referral service. He also acts as a spokesperson for LGBT Seniors. He is a member of the Milwaukee County Council on Aging's Advisory Board.

Despite his busy schedule, Eldon still finds time for fun. He collects antiques and travels abroad and around the country. Although he is single, Eldon has a romantic life, but he won't divulge the particulars.

Assessing the Gay movement, Murray says, "If we make as much progress in the next 30 years as we have in the last 30, I would be very pleased. He adds, "There's still things to be done. The rights you have must be constantly guarded, or they'll be taken away." He cited the *Wisconsin Light's* coverage of controversial Police actions at two Milwaukee Gay clubs as an example of doing that.

Eldon's latest crusade is to help overcome ageism in our community and in society at large. "In the Gay community we can lead the way," he says. "If we can work to educate younger people so they do not have society's negative ageism, we can do the same thing. Gay people have taught society much."

Eldon has taught Gay people much, too. He says, "My position has been to start things, get them going and then move away."

Eldon Murray has been starting things for the last 30 years. He's planning to start even more in the next 30.

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