

Love in multiples: A Britannia couple's polyamorous relationship

BY CHARLIE SENACK

Britannia resident Ocean O'Fhloinn realized they might not be monogamous after catching feelings for someone else while in a committed relationship.

"I brought up these feelings with my girlfriend at the time, and it did not go well," O'Fhloinn recalled to KT during an afternoon interview at Beachconers Microcreamery. "We tried to make it work, but it didn't. We were young and she was very monogamous."

"I started to realize that I could have feelings for more than one person and that it does not mean my feelings for either one of them are any less."

O'Fhloinn is part of the polyamory community, where people have romantic relationships with more than one partner at the same time. The name "polus" stands for "many" in Ancient Greek and "amor" is Latin for "love".

Polyamory is different from polygamy, which involves a person, typically a male, with more than one spouse, often with strong ties to religion.

The Montreal native who moved to Ottawa when they were six has two partners: Dae Gordon and Niall MacConiail. Gordon is currently seeing two others while MacConiail is in the early



Above: From left to right: Niall MacConiail, Ocean O'Fhloinn and Dae Gordon are members of Ottawa's polyamory community. PHOTO BY CHARLIE SENACK. OPPOSITE PAGE: MacConiail has been a furry since the movement grew in the 80s. PROVIDED PHOTO.

stages of dating someone new.

Gordon first met O'Fhloinn in 2010 after one of his former partners introduced the pair.

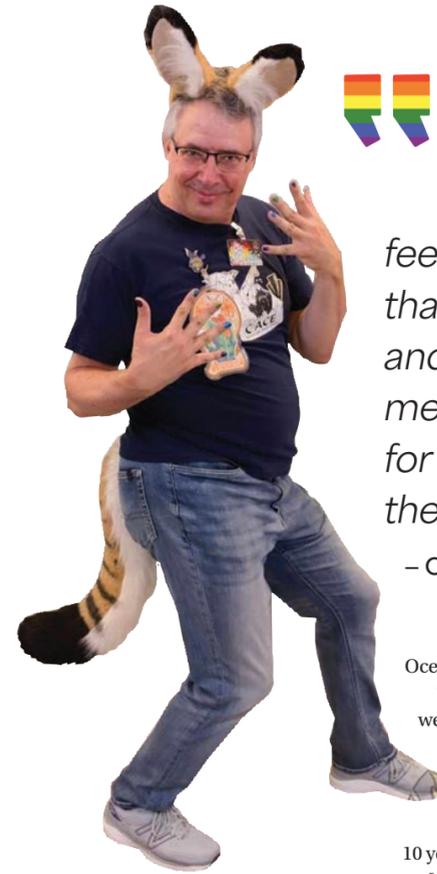
"Ocean and I hit it off pretty fast," said Gordon. "At the time, I was doing a lot of set-up work with different furry conventions, and I brought Ocean with me. That is where they met Niall in 2012."

WHAT IS A FURRY?

A "furry" is someone who has an interest in anthropomorphic animals, or animals with human qualities. It's formed into a community where people socialize, purchase art, dance, and explore their identities. Members create a "fursona" - their own animal character - which typically are hybrids. In Ottawa, hundreds attend

CanFURrence, an annual furry conference held at the Delta Hotel in August.

MacConiail grew up as a shy francophone in Quebec but was able to slowly shed his anxiety after finding acceptance in the animal-loving community. He grew up reading French comics that were full of animal characters, and immediately fell in love with the tone



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– OCEAN O'FHLOINN

Ocean was there dancing with me.

"When it came time to say goodbye, we hugged, and there was this spark that I had never had before. I mumbled something, and on the way back I got an email from Ocean saying they wanted to meet. Now it's been 10 years."

and airbrushed artistic techniques. He was also a dancer, and enjoyed sharing worldly chocolate at the conventions he attended. Soon, he attracted many friends.

"That specific convention I had a special, unique chocolate from Brazil that I'd never had before. Most people went 'eww' when they tried it, but Ocean immediately had the same reaction I did," remembered MacConiail. "On Sunday night, I started dancing and I realized

Statistics Canada does not track how many people are engaged in a poly relationship, but some global stats suggest that it is about one in six people. In the United States, a 2021 survey found that four to five per cent of its population has engaged in consensual relations with more than one partner.

MISCONCEPTIONS AND JEALOUSY

So how does a poly relationship work? O'Fhloinn said it all comes down to constant communication.

"Feelings of jealousy usually point to an underlying issue of needs not getting met somewhere," they explained. "I remember when (Gordon) and I started going out, that was my introduction to polyamory. It was a little bit rough for me."

"There were times where he was dating someone and they would call and interrupt our date, and that would get me a little rattled. But I have since gotten over that," O'Fhloinn explained. "You need to be willing to be wrong. We are not fighting with each other; we are trying to find a solution to a problem."

In this case, it helps that both MacConiail and Gordon have known each other since the 90s. While the two are

not in a romantic relationship together, they are good friends and feel part of a community.

While polyamorous relationships are on the rise, they are not always accepted or understood. For starters, polyamory is not cheating, contrary to some assumptions, explained Gordon. That said, it's still possible to be disloyal.

"If you go off and sleep around and don't talk to people, you aren't giving your partner the opportunity to provide consent," he said. "It's also not swinging, because it's not about going out and hooking up. It's about creating a relationship with a circle of people and so that you have an intimate community."

O'Fhloinn added they don't need to see each partner on a daily basis and noted date nights could include working together or going grocery shopping; they don't always need to be lavish romantic events such as a fancy dinner or trip to the movies. It's also not about the sex.

"I am demi-sexual, so I need a lot of emotional connection and trust built up before I even explore the possibility of an intimate relationship with somebody," they said. "For me, it's quality time and spending life with somebody."

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A complicated legacy of fighting for LGBTQ+ rights in Ottawa

BY CHARLIE SENACK

Why do we celebrate Pride? It's a question many ask themselves decades after the Stonewall riots, the decriminalization of gay acts, and the legalization of same-sex marriage.

While there has been progress, the movement continues for many Queer folk who are still fighting for equal rights. According to 2020 stats, it was still illegal to be gay in 70 countries – roughly one third of the world. Twelve of those countries still have the death penalty if you are caught or suspected of being part of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

Even in Canada, progress is relatively new. Most living generations were born in a time during which equal rights for Queer folk were not the 'norm'. Same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults was decriminalized in 1969, with same-sex marriage becoming legalized in 2005 — the fourth country in the world to do so. On June 11, 2003, Renée Sauve and Tracey Braun were Ottawa's first gay couple to get married. Bill C-16, which supports the rights of transgender or gender diverse individuals was passed in 2017, and conversion therapy was banned in 2022.

In 2024, acceptance is encouraged, but not always present. Last year, demonstrations were held in Westboro to try and silence members of the LGBTQ2S+ community and reverse course on decades of progress surrounding basic human rights.

Combing through old newspaper clippings and historical accounts of what life was like for Queer individuals in Ottawa, KT compiled a timeline of Queer-related events which have touched Canada's Capital

city – some of which have happened in Kitchissippi's own backyard.

1916: A public servant by the name of Charles P. was charged with gross indecency after an encounter “with a young fellow” named James at Elgin and Nepean Streets downtown. According to historical accounts from Charles, the relationship began when James asked if he liked to sing and invited him back to play the piano. Police found out about the pair's connections when they picked up James on a house-breaking charge a few weeks later.

In court James testified: “He asked me to go into bed with him... I was about 45 minutes with him. He felt me all over with his hands.”

The case was later dismissed after Charles' friends spoke to his “reputation of morality.”



AUGUST 30, 1971: About 80 men and women who supported homosexuals demonstrated on the front lawn of Parliament Hill – the first time a demonstration of this kind was held in Canada. Billed Gay Day, it was calling for an end to the discrimination against homosexual individuals.

OCTOBER 16, 1974: A dozen Gays of Ottawa members paraded in front of the Immigration department offices and handed out brochures stating that Section five of the immigration act was homophobic. It prohibited the entry of Queer people into Canada and labeled them as “undesirable types.” Earlier in the day, organizers from the group met with senior officials of the immigration department to protest the move.

“As it stands, it's illegal to let homosexuals into Canada, but once you are here, it is legal,” Ron Dayman, chairman of the Gays of Ottawa committee, told the Ottawa Citizen. “The people we talked to within the department agreed the law was medieval, archaic and that it should be changed.”

MARCH 21, 1975: Fifteen representatives from the group Gays of Ottawa protest outside of the Ottawa Journal newspaper building and the city police station. Organizers said they were against discriminatory laws and persecution from members of the media and police officers against homosexual individuals.



Their outcry came after 34-year-old Warren Zufelt jumped to his death from the rooftop of his condo building at 20 Chesterton Dr. in Nepean. The public service worker was accused and charged with gross indecency in connection to a male prostitution ring involving juveniles. The ring uncovered March 4, 1975 also led to the arrest of 17 other men. Their names and addresses were posted in local media.

Speaking with the Ottawa Journal, Zufelt's lawyer Leonard Shore, who met with his client a day before his suicide mission, said the gay man “was very upset and nervous and didn't know what to do.”



A news release from protest organizers said “continued police persecution amounts to a homosexual witch hunt. Sensationalistic headlines and reportage have totally distorted the nature of these cases and created an atmosphere of hysteria. These persons are suffering the penalties of convicted persons even before trial.”

During the trial branded “Ottawa's sex scandal”, it was revealed the 16-year-old prosecution chief witness was coached on what to say by police. The youth committed suicide during the trial.

MAY 25, 1976: The Wellington Street West gay bathhouse was raided. Police charged two men with gross indecency and 22 others with being “found-ins”. Marcel Rollin, 27, Jean Danfousse, 25, and Andrew Mackey, 28, were also charged with keeping a common bawdy house.

After the raids, Gays of Ottawa group organizers blamed the raids on an effort to clean up Canada in time for the upcoming Montreal Summer Olympics.



FEBRUARY 15, 1980: Ottawa gays distributed leaflets outside the Elgin Street theatre to protest against Cruising, a controversial film with Al Pacvno. American gays said the movie provided a “how-to” course on how to kill homosexuals. “We dont blame movie audiences, because



OPPOSITE PAGE left to right inserts: In August 1971 a group of brave LGBTQ2S+ folk were the first to advocate for equal rights. CREDIT: CA-025598. Chesterton Towers in Parkwood hills is where Warren Zufelt jumped to his death. PHOTO BY CHARLIE SENACK. Gay rights demonstrators outside the Ottawa Journal Towers on Kent Street following the death of Zufelt. CREDIT: CA-025566. Top: Marchers link arms on Parliament Hill in 1975. CREDIT: CA-025592

THIS PAGE clockwise from top: The discreet entrance to Club Ottawa in Wellington West. PHOTO BY CHARLIE SENACK. LGBTQ2S members and allies carry a trans flag down Broadview Ave on June 9, 2023. PHOTO BY CHARLIE SENACK. By 1975 the fight to change human rights to support gays was growing. CREDIT: CA-025592. A large audience at the National Gay Rights Conference at the University of Ottawa. CREDIT: CA-025580

they have no choice” Gays of Ottawa spokesperson John Duggan told the Ottawa Citizen. “We blame the movie industry for not portraying a true image of homosexuals.”

FEBRUARY, 25, 1981: Ontario gays waged a campaign to turf New Democratic Leader Michael Cassidy from his Ottawa-Centre seat. The gays said Cassidy did not show enough support during the controversial Toronto steam bath raids. Organizers urged gays to spoil ballots and embarrass candidates at riding meetings - particularly in Ottawa Centre. The pushback came a month after more than 200 Toronto police raided four Toronto steam baths. Hundreds of men were charged.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1981: About 25 queer individuals protested outside of the United States Embassy in Ottawa, to demonstrate against an immigration law in that country which they claimed labeled homosexuals as “Psychopathic.” Gays of Ottawa organizers also said homosexuals were harassed at the border and forced to state their sexual orientation before gaining entry.

AUGUST 1983: Two known cases of Aids are reported in Ottawa and seven others are suspected. The first case was Peter Evans, a bisexual man in his 30s. The actor who recently returned from living in England

participated in the city's first AIDS walk-a-thon. He died the following January. The second case was a 28-year-old battling the disease.

Fear amongst Ottawa's gay community starts to spread and questions mount over whether or no bathhouses should be closed. “Bathhouses are not filthy holes in the wall,” then Club Ottawa owner Jerry Levy told the Ottawa Citizen. “They are extremely clean and brightly lit and probably mitigate the spread of AIDS. The steam baths are far healthier (to have sex in) than parks and bars.”

JUNE 15, 1987: The National Capital Commission considers new landscaping and the RCMP promises to do more monitoring after nearby residents complain about gay cruising occurring at Remic Rapids Park. In letters sent to the NCC, parents stated their kids were picking up used condoms which were littered around the park.

1988: Bruce House is created to provide service to residents who are dying from AIDS. The disease was a death sentence that carried stigma and the organization wanted to provide the sick with dignity in their final days. The first home opened on Arlington Avenue and later moved to Everand Avenue. The service still runs today, providing stable housing, independence, and healthy living.

1989: At least 15 incidents of violence and hate crimes are reported targeting Ottawa's LGBTQ2S+ community. Seven gay men are pushed off a cliff at Major Hills Park, with two dying from their injuries.

On Aug. 21, Alain Brosseau was dangled over the Alexandra Bridge connecting Ottawa to Gatineau and fell to his death in the water below. While Brosseau is believed to be straight, his killing was done on the assumption of him being gay because of the shoes he wore. That same night, Alain Fortin and Wilfred Gauthier were stabbed in their Orleans home by the same gang members. Both managed to survive.

JANUARY 11, 1994: A new gay bathhouse is approved by Ottawa's planning committee on Lewis Street near Bank Street, but Club Ottawa owners are not pleased. Levy sends a six-page letter to the committee casting doubt on the credibility of the owners. According to the Ottawa Citizen, there were allegations of drunkenness, verbal abuse, and threats of intimidation.

FEBRUARY 7, 1996: About 15 demonstrators who were gay, bisexual, and lesbian, disrupted a Red Cross Blood clinic being held at Carleton University. They were protesting a health assessment questionnaire that they said discriminated



against gay men. The question, in place since the 1980s, asked men if they had sex with other males since 1977. If the answer was yes, they could not donate blood.

MARCH 28, 2001: Disease breaks out amongst users of the Capitals two bath houses. Ottawa Public Health said six cases of syphilis and one suspected case of the disease were reported in the city – some of whom had contact with the sex clubs.

AUGUST 26, 2003: On August 23, 2003, thousands rallied on Parliament Hill and on the Steps of the Supreme Court of Canada to show their opposition against same sex marriage which would become legalized two years later.

JUNE 9, 2023: A “gender ideology” demonstration is held outside Nepean High School and Broadview Public School in Westboro. Organizer “Billboard” Chris Elston rallies against puberty blockers — also known as hormone blockers — which are seen as a lifeline for transgender individuals. Children stomped on pride flags as parents, many who flew in from the United States, chanted homophobic remarks. Five people were arrested but no charges were laid. Counter protesters made up of LGBTQ2S+ members and allies of the community held colourful banners and sang chants of love and acceptance.

Preserving the Boat People's stories with future Chinatown museum



Above: A new Vietnamese museum has been in the works since 2007. Insert 1: Liem Duong has been organizing fundraising initiatives for the museum across North America. Insert 2: An Hoang used to be a member of the Vietnamese military. Insert 3: Can Le came to Canada in 1963 to study chemical engineering at l'ecole polytechnique. ALL PHOTOS BY HANNAH WANAMAKER.

BY HANNAH WANAMAKER

Commemorating the Boat People who fled Vietnam after the war was merely a dream for Vietnamese immigrant Can Le.

In 2007, Le's vision became his vocation when he developed plans to create the Vietnamese Boat People Museum at the corner of Preston and Somerset Streets. With over 15 years of delayed progress, the project lead and his supporters are adamant that construction will commence in the next few years.

"We have set for ourselves an objective and everyone agreed that it would be a good idea. The museum will be built one way or another because there is strong support from the community," a hopeful Le told KT.

When Canada announced it would accept 8,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979, former Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar pledged to welcome half of them to the city. This endeavor is known as Project 4000.

The initial concept for a Vietnamese

community space was inspired by the overwhelming success of the 25th anniversary of the non-profit's mission in 2004. Le wanted to organize a permanent installation where people could learn about the Vietnamese diaspora.

"Originally, we planned to have an exhibition for two weeks but so many people came, including the younger generations, the children of the refugees, sponsors, and the general public," said Le. "There was so much interest in the exhibition that we extended it to five weeks. We decided that we could organize an exhibition like this from time to time, but there should be a long-term solution and that was going to be a museum."

Le was one of many community members who helped create orientation programs, find jobs and housing for newcomers, and matched volunteers with sponsors to increase community support.

As more people arrived, Le's work in the community increased. He organized conversational English classes to help the Vietnamese community overcome language barriers and opened Ottawa's first Vietnamese Centre at 249 Rochester St.

Along with presenting the historical background of the Boat People diaspora in the museum, Le wanted to showcase the community's achievements and contributions in the time since.

DELAYED BY A DECADE

Le and his supporters began fundraising for the museum from coast to coast and across the United States in 2008, receiving "overwhelming" support.

By 2014, the project had such traction that competitors sought new leadership of the project, the expensive addition of underground parking, and

for the museum to be built in Edmonton instead. The heated disagreements soon became a pricey court matter.

To pay off a whopping \$30,000, Le used a combination of his personal assets and the funds he raised for the site. In 2019, the court sided with Le but this chapter did not fully come to a close until 2021 when the defendant lost their chance to appeal.

Along with the challenges of the pandemic, Le also revealed that he suffered a stroke, which further delayed progress.

Following the pandemic, Le revisited his dream and began taking concrete steps by hiring consultant Saide Sayah in 2023 and architect Jessie Smith about a year later. The group is currently finalizing a design plan which will determine cost estimates.

According to Smith, the Saigon Square building is set to be six storeys to accommodate the three-storey museum and 15-20 residential units above. Once inside, people will be greeted by the memorial hall and a commercial space, likely for a cafe.

"There will be a big celebratory stair that wraps up to the second floor which will have the gift shop, maybe a service centre, and a library," she said. "On the third floor, there will be three exhibition rooms."

Both Sayah and Smith agree that cost is the biggest hurdle with this project, but that it will add tremendous value to the community.

"Construction prices post-pandemic are still high and I think a lot of it will depend on their ability to fundraise," said Sayah. "We'll look at how much rent the dwelling units could bring in or if they're eligible for some kind of affordable housing grant."

On November 3, Le is holding an event to celebrate the 45th anniversary

of Project 4000 and raise funds for the Vietnamese Boat People Museum.

A HARROWING JOURNEY

While Le is not a Boat Person, some of his greatest supporters are. Building a museum to memorialize the almost 800,000 people who fled the war not only preserves their history but ensures newer generations are taught the reasons and difficulties of their ancestors' exodus.

Le's longtime friend Liem Duong left his fiancée behind to board a cramped boat of 48 people, some of whom did not survive the journey.

"It took 11 days because there was a typhoon. People died on the boat," Duong recalled. "We planned on the trip taking four days according to the navigator, but with the typhoon and the boat's engine problems, it took us 11 days."

His 11 months on an island refugee camp were no less grim.

"At that time, the United Nations Refugee Agency sponsored us but we were stateless, meaning we had no country," said Duong. "You're not from Vietnam anymore, you're not from Malaysia. You're nothing."

After five years of journeying alone, Duong was finally reunited with his fiancée in the late 80s, a few years after he settled in Canada.

An Hoang, another Boat Person, was so overjoyed when he finally immigrated to Canada. He had fought in the war for years and when he finally escaped, pirates raided his boat three times and killed about 30 people.

After three months in a refugee camp, Hoang finally got his fresh start in Canada.

"Me and two other Boat People rented a one-bedroom. My two friends went to school every day, but I went to work," Hoang said. "I worked in the kitchen to make money to send back to my family. Later on, I sponsored my parents, and then I later sponsored my younger brother, and finally, I sponsored my fiancée."



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Events

Tuesday September 17th
the Councillor is hosting an Older Adult Forum at Ron Kolbus Lakeside Centre from 1-3pm

Tuesday September 24th
is Councillor Kavanagh's Volunteer Appreciation and Welcome to Fall event at Ron Kolbus Lakeside Centre from 7-9pm

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