

# The State of Us



2003 BRYAN FELLOW

## Marcie Fisher-Borne

**HOMETOWN:** Hattiesburg, MS

**MAJOR/DEGREE:**

Masters of Social Work,  
Class of 2005

**PROJECT TITLE:** The State of Us:  
Modern Day Snapshots of LGBT  
Families in North Carolina

**FACULTY MENTOR:**

Dorothy Gamble,  
School of Social Work

**COMMUNITY PARTNERS:**

Lesbian Resource Center

**PROJECT LOCATION:**

Statewide

“Before I started the State of Us documentary, I thought, if people could just see what I see, would there be so much fear or judgement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people? If people could travel to our homes, meet our children, hear our stories, would anything change? Through the State of Us documentary, I want to give people the chance to sit in those intimate spaces and see for themselves the everyday lives of gay and lesbian couples and families in North Carolina. I want to give people faces, stories and names that are woven intractably into the geography of this state.”

The *State of Us* Documentary identifies the everyday lives of a group of people who often are unseen and face daily challenges and triumphs that are not always understood within the larger society. The documentary aims to show same-sex couples and families who have made North Carolina their home and have navigated adoption, foster parenting, step-families and a multiplicity of other issues without a great deal of public support or understanding.

### Project Goals

- To increase awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and families in North Carolina.
- To utilize youth voice to create the questions that will direct the content.
- To facilitate community ownership and a participatory process in the development and implementation of the documentary project.
- To provide a concrete training, educational and advocacy tool for professionals around issues of sexual orientation.

I began the project by meeting with LGBT youth to help define the scope of the documentary. Questions concerning their perception of the climate of the state as well as their hopes for the future were discussed. I also organized a community meeting in Durham, which was attended by eighty people, to discuss the state of LGBT family and marriage issues in North Carolina.

I wanted to do a documentary because I knew the real inspiration and hope would come in everyday moments, the thousands of moments we face as LGBT people that push us everyday to be out, to love our partners, to share our families in the world. These were the moments I went searching for this summer.



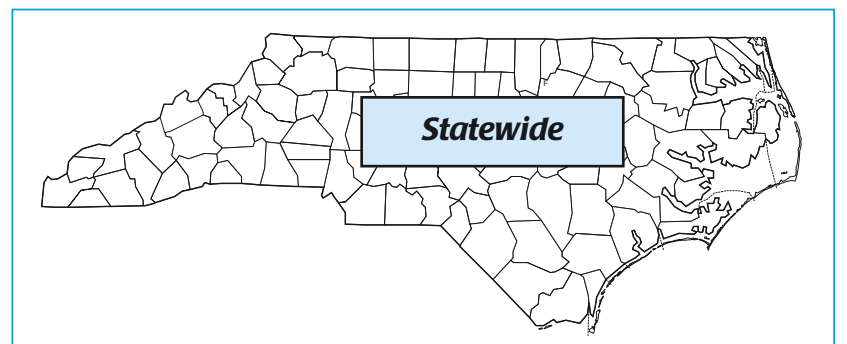
In the last seven months, I have sat in people's living rooms and kitchens. I have watched lightning storms from porches, eaten pecan pie and attended church services. I have met people's children and family as they have shared their hopes, fears and wishes for the future.

For example, I met with Frank, 64, and Gary, 63, a retired couple in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Together and out for over forty years, they are a powerhouse of hope, energy, and activism within the LGBT community.

In many ways Frank and Gary are like any other senior couple. They are active in their church, spend holidays with family and live on their Social Security. Unlike heterosexual

couples in this phase of their life, Frank and Gary do not have the same legal protections and security. When Gary underwent surgery recently, Frank worried that the hospital would not allow him to visit his partner – something many gay couples must face with no legal recourse. Though they worked hard and paid taxes like everybody else, they also are not eligible for Social Security survivors' benefits. Even finding a retirement home where they won't be forced to separate will be a huge burden.

For Frank and Gary, the awareness of inequality has made them active spokespeople for older LGBT couples and marriage rights on a national level. One story that is especially poignant is Gary's "grocery store activism." Gary does most of his shopping during the day and has found himself in a position to help older women with items that are out of their reach. Gary will ask if they need assistance and then as he places the item in the cart, he says, "Have a wonderful day ma'am, and I would like you to know that a gay man helped you today." On the surface, it seems like a small and rather silly gesture; however, as LGBT people we are often invisible. Beyond this, many feel they have to prove themselves as people first before disclosing their sexual orientation. Gary's gesture owns his completeness. He is a kind man, yes. For Gary, and for many, it is important also to be known as a kind, gay man.



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