

[420 Events](#)

RI doesn't really have much in the way of significant 420 events (hint-hint, pre-legalization party planners...)

Here's some stuff we know about (or that sound promising).

420 Party with Horizon Wireless & Rezin Headz: Presented by *13 Folds Magazine*. Music, and most likely the largest collection of advocacy-minded legalization supporters. 8pm, Alchemy, 71 Richmond St, PVD. alchemyri.com

PUFF Release With Sixpoint Brewing: Enjoy the release of a new IPA and sample their complimentary rolling papers. 7pm, Rogue Island Kitchen & Bar, 65 Weybosset St, PVD. rogueislandgroup.com

Wine, Women & Jewelry: Get stoned, then go get some stones. Not exactly a 420 event, but hey, they picked the date. 6:30pm Stadium Theatre, 28 Monument Sq, Woonsocket. stadiumtheatre.com

Sterile Garden/ Rare Storms/ Taskmaster/ Clean/ Purism: Three acts from the northern lands bringing some truly negative vibes. 9pm. Machine with Magnets, 400 Main St, Pawtucket. machineswithmagnets.com

Rob Duguay's Birthday Benefit Bash Pre-Party at Malachi's Café: The Top 5 Fiend promoter (and *Motif* contributor) celebrates joining the over-30 set with three days of musical sets to benefit local non-profits. Pregame gently with acoustic, folk and dream pop by O.B. Howard, Jillian Kay and John Faraone, to benefit the J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center. Malachi's Café, 134 Ives St, PVD. fb.com/malachisri

Nicholas Kristoff: *New York Times* columnist lectures on balancing the refugee crisis with American national interest. Probably easiest to appreciate if you're high? 7pm, Roger Williams University, 1 Ferry Road, Bristol. rwu.edu

There are, of course, non-publicizable events - millennials, (the above events asked us not to post them either. We're pretty sure they were kidding).

[401 Counterculture: Sandi Andersen and the Dharma Healing Center](#)

Americans have an interesting fascination with their health and well-being from the perspectives of both groundbreaking advances in western medicine, and a continued exploration of alternative medicines and healthy lifestyles hailed by many, scorned by some, manipulated by con men and brought

to fruition by the true believers willing to show the way.

One such groundbreaking institute of alternative health and medicine is right at Providence's doorstep, and for those willing to commit their energies and open their minds, they will meet the lovely and enigmatic Sandi Andersen, founder and practitioner of Dharma Healing Center. I sat down with Sandi recently for a talk about just what Dharma does, and why Providence needs to talk about their health from a new perspective.

Adam J Schirling: For the uninformed, what is Dharma Healing Center and what is your role?

Sandi Andersen: At Dharma Healing Center, you will experience healing naturally and naturally healing experiences. We explore food as medicine, the expansion of human consciousness through programs, clinics and classes, bodywork, skin therapy, life & wellness coaching, yoga and meditation, for the integration of mind, body, spirit and environment in preventive healthcare, education, business and personal development. We believe there is an intimate connection between mind, body and spirit as well as between the individual and the environment. We share a vision of higher states of consciousness and embrace the path of enlightenment. The Dharma team will guide you on your path in achieving your goals. Success in health and wellbeing is yours to be had.

My role at Dharma is visionary, CEO, founder and traditional chinese medicine practitioner.

AJS: How did Dharma Healing Center come to be?

SA: Two and half years I ago I was working by myself with more clients than I could possibly serve. I was involved in a number of networking groups within the healing community and noticed that many amazing and talented practitioners could not make a living at their chosen craft or struggled to make ends meet. This inspired the umbrella the Dharma Healing center has structured to support practitioners by empowering them to focus on their healing practice instead of all the other stuff (marketing, scheduling, software management, administrative support, etc). The result is the practitioners are doing fabulous, the clients experience radical attention and support, and our business is growing!

The Dharma umbrella frees the practitioners up to focus their energy and attention on their healing practice instead of the admin work and the stuff that many practitioners just do not like to do.

AJS: Why do Rhode Islanders need Dharma Healing and similar services?

SA: Our society has had a loss of common knowledge. Until recently much of health was from our own kitchens, our own gardens, our mothers and grandmothers. Our society has lost touch with basic healing practices and as such, we have lost or given our power away to the almighty doctor or western medicine.

Rhode Islanders, as well as the entire human race, need the work that the Dharma practitioners and other (w)holistic healers do. Two out of three Americans seek alternative (w)holistic healing services because traditional medicine is not providing the results we seek.

AJS: In your opinion, what is the state of health in our country right now?

Putting it in perspective ... I visited a huge box store yesterday and watched the food that people were

purchasing. I have such a sadness to see the state of health and dis-ease that many are accustomed to living with. Lifestyle and food options are really bad in our country. If people do not have options, what are they to do but purchase bulk dis-ease-causing food-like products?

In addition, there's an epidemic of stress combined with a misconception that life is supposed to be easy. In reality, we have always had stress — huge amounts of stress — however, how we deal with it is the difference.

In Ayurveda, we believe that the body will heal itself when the body is allowed to balance itself by reducing stress, reducing foods that are difficult to digest, and using bodywork (massage) to stimulate the physical body in processing and eliminating amma (imbalances). Modern science is beginning to go back these ancient practices. The best proof, however, is in the pudding. Our clients show us every day that the work we do and provide is changing their lives for the better.

AJS: What's the biggest threat to the physical and spiritual health of Americans?

SA: The idea that change is scary. However, the only constant is the scary truth defined as change. If you are not feeling great, physically, mentally and emotionally, then you are suffering and dying.

As the human race catapults through time, we slowly, and in some ways quickly, are realizing the only option for humans is to change everything — how we eat, what we eat, where we get our food, how we think, what we listen to, who we listen to. With all that said, the great change is ironically going to be us going back to our roots. Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine have had the answers for thousands of years. The great change will be the human race entering a state of humility and receptiveness to the grandmothers and grandfathers of health and well-being. The forefathers of every culture and race have always looked to food as medicine. Now we are beginning to go back to these ancient truths.

AJS: You are the third small business owner I have interviewed for this column, and others have mentioned the overwhelmingly positive and interesting dynamics of running a successful small business in Rhode Island. Do you have any comments on that?

SA: I have found that people want to see us succeed. Everyone from our landlord, Robert D'Amico, to our realtor to our laundry company and every single client is cheering us on. We have so much support from our community and we are beyond grateful.

AJS: What are some things the average Rhode Islander can tweak in their daily schedule to begin making improvements in their well-being?

SA: The first step in the well-being awareness practice or process is just that — to create a daily practice. It can be as simple as drinking a glass of warm water with freshly squeezed lemon first thing in the morning as a Sadhana, literally "a means of accomplishing something," that can include meditation and mantras.

"A daily routine is absolutely necessary to bring radical change in body, mind and consciousness. Routine helps to establish balance in one's constitution. It also regulates a person's biological clock; aids digestion, absorption and assimilation; and generates self-esteem, discipline, peace, happiness, and longevity." — Vasant Lad, B.A.M.S., M.A.Sc., Ayurvedic Physician

AJS: What is your response to the naysayers who arise when any non-western medicine is espoused as

beneficial or life-saving?

SA: To each his/her own. However, if and when you need us and realize that the alternative does not serve you, we will be here. Judgment-free with open arms and open minds.

AJS: Would you consider what you do alternative health? Why or why not?

SA: (W)holistic (whole healing), alternative health and medicine is one way of describing the work we do. In reality, we are simply the liaisons of balance. Balance heals the mind, body and spirit. We are the only true traditional medicine, but we will give society time to catch up.

AJS: What can the one expect when visiting Dharma Healing Center for the first time? Are there many timid newcomers or regular veterans?

SA: With over 3,000 new clients in 2014 our practice is growing. When one comes to Dharma, the experience speaks for itself. You will need to visit to truly understand. I can say it better this way: You will not experience a conveyor belt massage, you will not experience hard selling, you will not experience a cold receptionist and you will not experience inexperienced practitioners. And the proof is in the number of new clients who decide to become members.

Our team is one of the most exceptional (w)holistic healing teams I have ever worked with and the value provided to our clients is unparalleled.

If you are a member at the Dharma Healing Center, you will experience 70 minutes of hands-on time during your sessions with extra time to chat with your practitioner before and after your session, free nutritional support and coaching, extra discounts on all services, and members always get free mini sessions any time, as needed, to support them through whatever life has them going through. Ultimately, they experience the personal time, commitment and dedication of the Dharma practitioners.

AJS: What is the biggest misconception about you and Dharma Healing that you want to clarify?

SA: I do not know of the specific misconceptions about Dharma outside of the societal misconceptions of (w)holistic or alternative health and medicine. I only know that when our clients come to us they want to stay, they want to learn more, they want to understand why they have not heard of these options before and they want their health insurance to cover their services and feel that it is a crime that health insurance does not cover preventive care such as Ayurveda and Chinese medicine.

Dharma Healing Center, **536 Atwells Ave, Providence. 401.237.0180, dharmanutritionhealing.com, Mon - Sat, 9am - 8pm**

[401 Counterculture: Pawtucket's Mode Merr](#)

Rhode Island has fast become synonymous with creative small business. You can hardly find a street corner or loft office in the Providence or Warwick area not adorned with the humble and vibrant signs of local-owned businesses selling everything from artisan food to eclectic art and handmade furniture. One such office in Pawtucket holds the headquarters of Mode Merr, an independent handmade clothing label owned by designer Angela Zampell, who relocated her business to the Ocean State from New Hampshire in 2013. I sat down with Angela to discuss what it means to be both an alternative clothing designer and small business owner in Rhode Island.



Adam J Schirling: How would you describe the mission of Mode Merr Clothing?

Angela Zampell: Mode Merr is a handcrafted women's clothing line that caters to curvy ladies. We provide our customers with well-made, retro-with-a-twist designs that flatter real women's bodies.

AJS: What was your early inspiration for creating your own clothing line and how did fashion influence your early life?

AZ: My inspiration for creating Mode Merr was my love for vintage clothing and my frustration of not fitting into most of it. I was allowed to be very expressive with my clothing at a very early age and shopped almost exclusively at thrift shops and vintage stores in Boston. I would then deconstruct my

finds to make flattering creations for my friends and me.

AJS: Was it always your idea to provide the signature retro edge and wide range of size availability Mode Merr is known for?

AZ: Mode Merr has always offered all of our designs in sizes xxs - xxxl. This started early because my friends were my first customers. I still love it when a person transforms while wearing Mode Merr, which would not be possible if I made a limited size selection. My designs have always had a vintage flair and a sense of humor about them, which has been my trademark since 1989.

AJS: What is it like to be a small business owner in the creative mecca of Providence? It seems like one may be easily lost in the noise. Is there a strong network of female-owned small businesses in RI?

AZ: I love being in RI. The networking and support from other women-owned businesses is so wonderful. I belong to The Lady Project Providence, which has helped to promote my business and find more employees and other resources to grow Mode Merr. We are carried in several local shops, including Studio Hop on Hope St and Suite Tart Salon on Broadway. I love working with independent boutiques and making custom pieces for their shops.

AJS: Do you see a large uptick in business around the holidays? What is your most popular item this time of year?

AZ: We do! Everyone loves our Perfect Skirts in Red and Ruby Brocade for the holidays. Our Proper Circle Skirts have been a big hit as well.

AJS: You are an inspiration for any young alternative girl with an interest in fashion design or manufacture. What advice would you give them?

AZ: I have two great interns from The Met School right now. My advice to them is to take the business side of things as seriously as the design process. If you don't have a good plan, it's harder to sustain a business and this drains your creativity. I also tell them to stick to their guns when it comes to what's important to them. For me, it was to offer curvier measurements than a standard size chart. For years I had pattern makers and manufacturers tell me that I had to conform. I knew in my heart that my choice was best for Mode Merr and I have a loyal following that is grateful for that.

AJS: What would you consider the highlight of your career thus far?

AZ: I have had so many amazing adventures and opportunities while building Mode Merr, but I think that the highlight is the company's longevity. I started Mode Merr in 1989 while I was in high school and made it my full-time career in 2000. Being able to make a living at what you truly love doing is the best feeling in the world.

AJS: What does the future hold for Mode Merr Clothing?

AZ: We are launching a new website (modemerr.com) in January that will offer an extended plus-size collection, limited-edition items, a custom-design section and bridal designs in addition to the existing collection.

AJS: Is there anything else you want readers to know about?

AZ: The Mode Merr studio will have a Pre-Viva Open Studio March 6 thru 8 from 12 - 7pm at 560 Mineral Spring Ave Unit HA-100, Pawtucket. This event is on Facebook at facebook.com/modemerrclothing.

Angela can be reached at inquiries@modemerr.com. Follow on Twitter (www.twitter.com/modemerr) and Instagram (www.instagram.com/modemerr).

Unconditional Love – 401 Counterculture Talks to Gay Parents To Be

Interview With Tyffaney and Andrea Fonseca

One of the most popular attacks on the legitimacy of gay marriage is the attack on a gay couple's right to raise a family no different from the traditional (and clergy-approved) nuclear family unit that has long been a hallmark of red blooded Americana, despite its ever dwindling members. It's a hazy memory of nostalgia-poisoned, rose-colored lenses about who and what should constitute the American family. Zealots clamor on with archaic statistics, shouted by their fathers and grandfathers before, a litany of fear mongering and misinformation. "We must not allow it!" they shout from the hills. "It will be the destruction of us all."

In 2014, America is a vast and diverse landscape, where every morning parents of every size, shape, color, gender identity and sexual orientation imaginable awake and love their children unconditionally. They care for them, nurture them and educate them on their passage through the human experience. At no point does who they are change the way they love and protect these children. Despite massive advancement in gay rights and legal recognition of marriages and family building within a few short years in America — a triumphant hope for greatness to come — obstacles still abound for gay couples who wish to raise children.

I sat down with Tyffaney and Andrea Fonseca, a married couple in southern New England, who recently found out that Andrea is expecting their first child. We sat in the living room of their pretty suburban house on a quiet street over wine and pizza and talked about the hopes, dreams and fears they have about being a gay couple raising a child.

Adam J Schirling: How long have you been married?

Tyffaney Fonseca: Seven years this July. We've been together 12 years.

AJS: I suppose the first question is the most obvious. When two married women want to have a baby, how do you decide who will carry?

TF: We went through a donor program in California, which wasn't our first idea of getting pregnant. I have a very good friend who propositioned me, who didn't want any strings attached. He had two kids of his own already, but he just wanted to give us the gift of life. He knew we might need it. So we wanted to make sure legally that everything was on paper. He signed over his parental rights and we went through a lawyer who was also lesbian and married to her wife. They each had children, so she was knowledgeable. But it just didn't go. I had two miscarriages and some medical issues came up and I couldn't carry. So we took a step back and thought about it and then the decision was to go through the donor program in California.

Andrea Fonseca: We tried to get her pregnant for about 8 months. We went to a gynecologist who told us what was going wrong.

TF: It just wasn't going to be medically possible.

AF: So that's when we decided I would carry. Originally the plan was that she would have a child and then somewhere down the road I would. But when she wasn't getting pregnant, I said I think you should have the sperm analyzed and it turned out that he was the issue.

TF: And I was, too. There were two issues.

AJS: That must have been heartbreaking after all that.

TF: I went through all the emotions — happy, sad, jealous. I don't think you can plan for getting so close to being a mother and having that go away.

AF: We aren't religious people, we are very spiritual people, and when we looked at the bigger picture, it must not have been the right time. Then we decided to go with the bank. It was overwhelming and scary.

AJS: It was like looking through a catalog?

TF: It was a menu. Everything you wanted to choose from — eye color, skin color, hair color, educational background.

AJS: Before you decided to go with a donor program, were you attempting to conceive at home rather than a doctor's office?

AF: I'm a nurse and I would bring home a specimen cup from work, he would put it in the cup, and at home we would put it in ourselves with a syringe. We wanted to conceive at home, that was important to us.

AJS: There are many heterosexual couples going through the exact same thing, facing obstacles they may not have expected. Do you think because of your status as a gay couple that you had extra challenges or do you think you had similar experiences as those couples on a personal level?

AF: Our friends and family have been so giving of themselves, helping us clear our minds of any stresses. I guess I haven't experienced anything that would be different than any other married couple.

TF: I always thought that our advantage is that we are both women. The fact that if one of us can't carry the other one can. You know? Even though that wasn't our original plan.

AF: Exactly. One woman-one man doesn't have as good of odds as we do!

TF: It was definitely stressful making sure we chose the right sperm, though.

AJS: At the beginning, did one of you want to carry more than the other?

AF: The original plan was that she would carry first because she was older, and a few years later I would have the second with the same donor. We would each carry one with the same donor and then be done.

TF: The new plan is that we will harvest my egg and she will carry surrogate. We bought four files of donor sperm and we have two on bank, so the baby will have the same genetics and hopefully both of our genes.

AJS: You said you have very supportive friends and family. Was there every any negative feedback?

TF: No. We have been very fortunate. Everyone has been in our corner, and we have been very thankful that they are interested in our story. It's not the norm and it's something they're learning. They are used to the typical heterosexual couples — mom, dad, three kids and a dog — and here we are, two hard-working, educated moms to be, who are halfway there, who have achieved so much in society as a gay couple and are still reaching. Everything we wanted has happened. That's our story. Everything we've wanted to achieve, we've went for it and they've rooted for us.

AJS: Do you think you face, as two women, different challenges than a gay male couple with the same goal?

TF: Absolutely

AF: Unfortunately, yes.

TF: Even now, lesbians seem as if it's the 'in thing,' you know? It's the cool thing. It's like, queue Katy Perry "I Kissed a Girl," but when you have two men, there's still a reaction like, "Ugh. How dare they?" Switch it to the lesbians and people react like, "Okay, I could watch this all day."

AJS: So would say you receive much more positive feedback as two women having a child than two men may?

TF: Absolutely. When we recently told a couple of our gay friends, they were startled. They couldn't even wrap their minds around that. It was if they thought "your lives are ruined." Really any of the negative feedback we've had has been from gay men, some of them our friends.

AJS: How come? Do you think it's because they've experienced a backlash?

TF: Yes.

AJS: Tell me more about picking out the donor and your apprehensions. You mentioned it was like a catalog?

AF: Yes, it was overwhelming. There were hundreds, and you could pay to see a picture.

AJS: So it's like you get the stats, but you have to pay extra for the pictures?

AF: Exactly! You had the free access that gives you all the info you need and you look through it and it's like, how do you begin to narrow this down? So we started thinking like what ethnicity, we wanted to be represented. We finally found someone. One day I came across this one catalog, he was half Irish-Italian, half African-American. It was close to representing our backgrounds, and we started reading his stats and some of them even gave you celebrity look-a-likes! His medical background was good and they even write essays, so we read his essay and his words were perfect. He sounded like the perfect person, and we had probably read through like 20 or 30 essays for the hundreds that were on there, and this one just really stood out. Now, she didn't like not being able to see...

TF: I'm a visual person, I wanted to know.

AF: That was big for her, so I said we would narrow it down to a couple and then we would buy the photos to look at.

TF: One night I read over his profile and his description of himself. He just seemed well mannered, well spoken, not afraid of himself, and he started talking about his mother. The way he talked about his mother, he said that when she visits, they hang out and have a couple of beers and spend time talking. Now my grandmother was very important to me, I was raised by my grandmother. She was a drinker, she liked to kick back, sit around the table, and drink beer. Right then and there I knew I needed to see this man's pictures.

AF: As soon as we saw them, we didn't even look at anyone else's. He was the one.

AJS: Just to backtrack a bit, did you ever consider adopting?

AF: We had. We knew we wanted to try for natural, but we always said that if it didn't work out we would adopt.

TF: We were just talking about this the other night. When we first met, I told her that if I ever adopted, I would adopt a child with HIV, because they are the ones that most people don't want. I would like to experience having our own children but we are totally open to adoption.

AJS: When your child is growing up, if they expressed an interest in organized religion, how might you approach that? Seeing as most religions aren't accepting of your family dynamic?

AF: She wants to baptize the child, but if we do, we want to find a church that we can be a part of, not just baptize and never go to church again. So we are still deciding what to do with that.

AJS: With bullying usually referred to as an epidemic in our country, are you apprehensive about having young children as gay women?

TF: We know bullying is a big big issue. I try not to let it worry me, but I know there is always going to be that one kid. I hope that if they do come in contact with that, that since we are open and honest with them, we will give them the tools to deal with it ... but that's kids. I know kids who are bullied just for being a little overweight.

AF: And we've learned how to respond. It probably doesn't bother me as much as it would her, but that's just our difference in personalities. I'm more of the "I don't care what anyone thinks and I'll tell

them where to go and how to get there." Even at work when people see I'm pregnant, they'll ask about the dad. And I'll say, "Well, Dad is a mom and she works in insurance." Nine times out of 10 I get positive feedback.

AJS: With this being your first child but not being the mother who's carrying, Tyffaney, do you feel like you will have less of a motherly instinct? Are you naturally gravitating toward a fatherly role? Or is that just my misjudgment of the situation as a heterosexual male?

TF: No, that's a great question. Honestly I think that I play both sides of that fence. I'm maternal because I'm a woman, I gravitate toward the baby. I want to nurture and take care. But not being the carrying mother, I also feel like I am paternal. I tell Andrea, "Don't do that, let me get that for you."

AJS: So you've adopted more of that role since she's become pregnant?

TF: Yes, it's come naturally.

AF: So it's actually forced me into the more feminine role and now since I can't do the heavy lifting or whatever, she has taken over and it has been interesting.

AJS: Do you feel like that more paternal instinct will carry on after the baby is born?

TF: I don't know, that's tricky. I really can't speak for the future.

AF: I think she will be more maternal after. I will probably be the hard ass. In some respects, she'll be more maternal but other times she will be much more paternal. It will be an interesting blend. We don't really know what to expect. We are the first of our lesbian friends to do it this way.

AJS: Everything feels like it's been fluid for you two. What do you have to say to the naysayers, or the people out there who have all these disapproving ideas and presumptions? "Your child will absolutely grow up gay." "Your child will grow up with perversions."

TF: I say you sound like an uneducated idiot. I mean you've seen kids grow up in battered homes and alcoholic homes and kids can't grow up in gay homes? If a child grows up to be gay, they were born that way. We all were.

AF: I always say I grew up with straight parents and I'm gay. I didn't grow up being exposed to any gay people, my parents aren't homophobic, I just didn't know anyone.

TF: As far as I know, I'm the only gay person in my family. I grew up raised by my traditional grandmother in the Catholic church. I go against all those odds.

AJS: What are the biggest apprehensions you have about parenthood?

TF: I'm definitely apprehensive about not carrying the baby. I'm just getting older and I know there is a plan in place for us but, where does that leave me as a woman who wants to be a biological mom? I get apprehensive that my genes haven't been passed down. At times I don't verbalize that because I don't want to be negative and selfish and interfere with this positive environment we have now. I've been reading books about other non-biological moms and what they went through, and they make it easier. It's ok to talk about it and get it off your chest. You have to communicate it.

AJS: Do you feel like if you do get to go with your plan b and she carries your biological child for you, that will help appease those feelings?

TF: Yes. Genetically seeing a baby carrying on my genes, but as a wife, a woman, a mother, it doesn't matter. I was the one who inseminated her, that is my baby, our baby. I think about that and that is what pulls me out of those feelings.

AJS: How do you feel about that Andrea?

AF: After I was pregnant, I was trying to get myself into a place where I knew my role, preparing myself, we didn't know what to expect. I wanted to know my role and how was I going to feel about that. Because the roles were reversed so quickly and now she was the one preparing for what I thought I was going to be doing. When we talk about it, I tell her, as a women naturally we want to carry, it's what we were born to do, but it's not like we are out there in the wilderness. What we really want, when it comes down to it, is to be parents. So maybe you aren't carrying for 9 months, but we will be parents. Whether I have it, you have it, we adopt, at the end of the day we are still parents and that's what we wanted. So that's where I come from when she expresses her feelings about that. We don't just want to walk around and be pregnant forever, we want to be parents.

AJS: Do you have any ideas of the kind of role model you want to set to your children not only as gay women but as mothers? Growing up, you look to your mother for certain lessons. What do you expect to instill?

TF: I just want to be the mom I never had. I was raised by my grandmother; my mother was murdered when she was 24 and left behind three babies. I never had that one-on-one motherly relationship. I just want to be that woman in my child's life that I didn't have. I want to be the mom that my grandmother wished her daughter could have been to us. Be a straight shooter, say what's on your mind, know that you're not alone. From a paternal standpoint, I want to be the father I never had. Whatever my child needs me to be, I want to be that person and that driving force.

AJS: That was a wonderful way of putting it.

AF: I hope to instill what I learned from both of my parents. I realize that we learn male and female things from parents, but know that's just society's roles and you don't need to be a male to teach certain lessons. I want to teach hard work and education. I want to teach what's gotten us so far. I think if we can teach that to our kids, they will turn out just fine.

AJS: What do you feel are the biggest misconceptions from people who may not know any gay couples?

AF: I would love to know, what is it that we do different? Other than the way we do it, there is nothing about our lives that is any different. We are two women, but everything else we do in our day-to-day lives is the same. We get up, go to work, walk the dog, pay taxes, spend time with our families. I just honestly don't know what they see. They just don't understand that we are two women in love.

AJS: Does it ever bother you to turn on the TV to see the debate over gay marriages and gay families? Other people debating your fate and your future?

TF: Yes! It angers me. Who are you to condemn me? You point the finger and you should have four more pointing back at you. The same people coming at us, down the road you find out they do or have done

horrible things.

AF: It goes to show you that your sexuality has nothing to do with the mistakes you make.

AJS: Is there one childhood moment that you are personally looking forward to as a mother?

AF: I think, for me, we have decided that I will be “mommy” and she will be “momma,” but I know when the baby is old enough they will decide what to call us. I can’t wait to hear what names they choose to give us.

TF: I’m looking forward to teaching my child how to ride a bike. I taught myself, I gave myself bumps and bruises. I want to be that mom to take the training wheels of the bike. But hearing who I am to them, “Ma, Mama,” however they perceive me.

AF (To TF): I like hearing that. I never knew that’s one of the things you were looking forward to, teaching them to ride bikes. It’s nice.

AJS: I always end my interviews with the same question. Even in the supportive environment you have, you still face adversities. What would you want the average person to know about you as first time mothers who just happen to be gay?

TF: I just want other gay couples to know that it’s achievable. If you really want it that bad you can make it happen. And don’t be afraid of change. If you have questions, ask them. You aren’t a mental case, we all have the same fears. I want people to know that it’s freeing to look outside yourself and ask for help. To know that I got this far and you can, too. Don’t fall under the norm of a lesbian or a gay man if that’s not what you want. Don’t fall under the norm of a typical straight person. As long as you have faith and work hard, you can be in this happy place.

AF: I want people to know that I have all the same fears as any new mom. I look forward to the same milestones. I’m just as hard working. And regardless of what people think is different between our lives, I’m really going to give it my all to be the best parent and provider for this baby and any other babies we are blessed with.

401 Counterculture Hangs Out with Mister Sister



An Interview with Devin Mayim-Daviau

I have been in my fair share of sex toy shops and porn stores in my 30 years on this planet. Some were amazing, some were terrifying and some I'd rather not discuss. Experiences will always vary when you choose to patronize the wonderful world of sleaze for sale.

On a recent beautiful morning, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Devioune Mayim-Daviau, the owner of Mister Sister Erotica, the popular local favorite erotic boutique in Fox Point. We sat on two chairs outside her storefront, her bulldog curled at her feet, enjoying the long awaited warmth of the New England spring sun. Devioune, Devin to her friends, invited me to sit with her and discuss just what it means to be a "Queer owned boutique that understands the need to not only celebrate the diversity of all sexualities and sexual expressions, but also to actively honor and cultivate them."

Adam J Schirling: Tell me a bit about yourself. How did you end up running a high-end sex toy boutique on Wickenden Street?

Devin Mayim-Daviau: Well, prior to this store, I had two stores in Provincetown. I guess what originally got me into this was that there wasn't really anything out there for women. There were probably, like, a dozen women-owned erotica stores across the United States and I think we have a different hit on sexuality. I really wanted a comfortable place for women to come and it surprised me how uncomfortable men are going to one of the big chains. So I wanted a place where gay people could go and it not be "gay friendly" and just be gay. I carry a lot of stuff geared toward our community, but also for heterosexuals, trans... That was the main reason though, because I personally couldn't go somewhere and be comfortable.

AJS: What made you make the move from Provincetown to Providence?

DM: The economy, really. In Provincetown, you've got five months to make your money. The trickle down effect took a while to hit there, and the rent just kept going up. You see the writing on the wall eventually.

AJS: How was your reception on Wickenden Street when you first arrived?

DM: Ah, I loved it. I mean, immediately, folks up from all up, down, and across the street came over and introduced themselves. The shopkeepers here are really tight with each other and with the

neighborhood.

AJS: Did you have any negative experiences?

DM: Just from one person and she's no longer on the street.

AJS: How do you feel about the modern day reception of erotica, considering how much more mainstream it is compared to the past?

DM: Everybody has sex, you know? I don't think I'm seeing more customers, but people are much more willing to explore their sexuality now. There are gynecologists and sex therapists who send people to my stores and it's really surprising. Sometimes there is a woman or a gentleman in their '70s and they come here to get educated. It makes me feel like I'm giving back to my community. I think what really differentiates us is that none of us consider ourselves sales people. We want to help figure out what works for you, rather than sell you the next best thing. It's a blessing to be able to help someone who's never had an orgasm.

AJS: And how is business doing?

DM: It's good. We have a great reputation. Five years in a row we've received the highest customer satisfaction rating online and two years ago, the best erotic boutique in the United States (independent) at the AVN Awards. I'm always asking how people hear about us and it's either from word of mouth or they find us online.

AJS: People will always have misconceptions about different groups of people and different sexualities. One of the points of my column is to help dispel these. What would you want people to know about either you personally or as a business owner?

DM: I would think that the biggest misconception that people have is that you are a sex whore or something.

AJS: Just by being in the erotic industry?

DM: Yes, I'm actually fairly conservative in my private life. I get hit on a lot by women and sometimes men, though that's rare. I think it's worse for the gay men who work here. Everyone who works here is gay, which is nice for our community. It provides a sense of comfort to our customers.

AJS: In what ways are you active in the gay community in Providence?

DM: We are yearly sponsors of gay bingo, they raise funds monthly for AIDS and supporting families living with HIV. We do tons of donations for gay pride and auction baskets for fundraisers in the community. And if the students from Brown or RISD or wherever have fundraisers, we always help out.

After our chat, Devin gave me a tour of her wonderful store and we discussed the ins and outs, no pun intended, of the vast assortment of toys and clothing for almost any and all sexual identification, fetish and appetite. She happily greets customers as they come in, quick to put them at ease and ensure them she is there for all their questions. I purchased a wonderful book of erotic photography from local artist Greg Easton, said goodbye to Devin and headed back into the midday bustle of the street. My last glimpse through the front windows saw Devin happily perched behind the counter, surrounded by

products made for the sole purpose of increasing someone's happiness, and customers looking to make their sex lives just that much happier. We are living in dark times; open and free sexuality is one of the last redeeming features of humanity. We should value this industry of happiness, and the merchants of happiness like Devin who strive to make Rhode Island a place where more people are getting their rocks off in more wonderful ways.

[401 Counterculture: The Thomas Slater Compassion Center](#)



The issues of medical and recreational access to cannabis is no longer the wistful dream of an outlawed minority. It is our reality, our present, and our ticket to a brighter future for a better nation. Despite late-in-the-game, desperate Hail Marys by the fanatics who stand fast on the sinking ship of prohibition, our national spirit is open and ready for reconnection with a sacred plant.

Misinformation, tales of triumph, and controversy abound in the coast-to-coast slug-out currently in progress over medical and recreational use. But often lost in this maelstrom are the stories of the medical patients who are living and dying by the success or failure of legislations over their safe access to effective medication. Every headline over another state voting to allow medical access to cannabis is an emotional victory and a feel good moment for all those in support of the cause. But until that average citizen seeking relief from a multitude of ailments is able to walk safely into a secure facility near their home and purchase inspected and reliable medicine prescribed by their doctor, we are still losing.

Rhode Islanders who follow this issue know of the milestones and setbacks of the Rhode Island medical cannabis program. And at the front of this battle is the Thomas Slater Compassion Center, the first medical cannabis dispensary in the Ocean State. On April 19, the facility celebrated its first year in business with a party for its patients. This first of hopefully many more anniversaries is probably the most important of these milestones. It represents a year that Rhode Islanders have enjoyed legal access for patients who depend on this medicine for their health, happiness and sometimes very lives.

To mark the importance of this anniversary, I sat down with Gerald McGraw, CEO of the Slater Center, co-founder Liz Joseph and press liaison Chris Reilly for a discussion on just what this meant for Rhode Islanders and the road they've taken to get here.

Adam J Schirling: The average person who is not involved in the medical marijuana community may not be familiar with what a business like TCS had to go through to gain legitimacy. So let's start with a synopsis of what got you to this point.

The Slater Center (Gerry): It was a long, grueling process. We went through a regulatory process that took about three years. Before we were awarded the license, the state government shut the program down. The legislation was modified to plant counts, which would be 150 total plants, 99 mature, 51 immature. That capping of the amount of cannabis we can have on hand is what finally got it to pass.

AJS: What was the amount of time that passed after medicinal cannabis was approved in the state of Rhode Island and your application for your business was actually approved?

TSC (Gerry): Well, the medicinal was passed in 2006, and the amendment to allow three compassion centers passed in 2009. From 2009 until last April is the span that the team had to put everything together. About four years.

AJS: Was it working with lawyers and lobby groups and working on your application? Or just trying to change the governor's mind on the legitimacy of the program?

TSC (Gerry): Well there was a whole process that we had to go through before we even got to the point to put the documentation in. That process took about three years. and then we spent about a year or two in review of the application.

AJS: What kind of work with lobbyists and patients went into getting the application approved?

TSC (Gerry): Well we got involved with RIPAC. I was a caregiver for a patient who was involved, and that's what got me motivated to move forward with this. We all knew we had a long road ahead of us, but we had the passion to do this.

TSC (Liz): It never seemed right that something so healing and benign was so taboo and so ... bastardized and it's a plant. In 1985, my mom was very sick with cancer and she passed away. She was given cannabis and it was something that she needed to hide. It was almost shameful and it never made sense to me. It was effective. To have something so natural and healing and effective be so looked down upon. Especially someone from her generation, she felt seedy...

AJS: So that was something that solidified your belief and desire to work in the cannabis industry?

TSC (Liz): It did; I was around people who cultivated it growing up and it was something I took interest in. So when this whole thing came out, it just started out as an idea. Three friends who had a great idea. And it started out very grassroots. Handwriting applications, brainstorming logos ... it was very mom and pop. But this one got tunnel vision and every roadblock we hit, and we did hit several, this one always pointed us in the right direction. When we started out, on the initial application, they were asking us to describe how we would cultivate enough medicine to accommodate the entire patient population. So we still face challenges because we went from learning how to cultivate all this medicine to accommodate all these people, to the 99 plant limit. Financially, we certainly still face obstacles. Something people don't understand is that we buy at a certain premium, and then we turn around and still have the regulatory process with taxes and insane overheads and loans that we had when this was put on hold for so long.

AJS: After the long process was done and you were finally able to open the doors, what was the initial reception to your business from the local community?

TSC (Gerry): Out of the gate, they were a little hesitant. They thought this might be a place where people used on site or came to hang out. But once we opened our doors, they see how discreet it is and we are a great neighbor. We give back to the community and we try to be a great neighbor.

AJS: Are there any opponents to the center?

TSC (Chris): From an opponent standpoint, it's been very limited. When we see people who demonstrate any level of concern, normally it's a misunderstanding of what we do versus legalization in general. For instance, there is a group in Barrington that is very involved in prevention of drug use in youths and they may have some misunderstandings of medicinal use versus recreational use, and we talk to them about it. We reach out and have discussions and I think once people understand that this is a facility where only licensed patients can come — we aren't opening up our doors to children or just anyone — once people hear what we do, that we are regulated, that doctors regulate people, they understand more. We are a place that is hiring people and creating jobs. That's not happening on this block of Providence that often.

AJS: How many people are employed at the center?

TSC (Gerry): About 56 with benefits.

AJS: How would you see the role of the Slater Center changing or evolving if legalization legislation passes in Rhode Island in the next few years?

TSC (Gerry): We are just an option, but we want to be the best option out there for patients. We want to give them safe, affordable access to medicine. As far as legalization, that's a different animal. We are more concerned with the medical aspect and the care of our patients.

TSC (Chris): Legalization and medical use can work hand in hand. They are working hand in hand right now in Colorado, recreational structure along with a medical structure. The thing that would be great if it happened here ... take a service member returning home with PTSD. Right now our state doesn't recognize PTSD as a qualifying condition, and that's shameful. I don't know how we can send these people off to horrible parts of the world and when they come back broken, a doctor says that this can help you but your PTSD isn't recognized. Well to have that back-up where if you can't get in through medical but if you are over 21 you can get it. That can work and the two programs can complement each other.

AJS: Something you don't hear a lot about is the compassion program. Can you tell me more about that?

TSC (Liz): What we do is probably give away every month about \$25,000 worth of medicine through our compassion program. We never want to see any patient have to go without. Impoverished, end of life patients ... we try and help as much as we can.

AJS: What do you feel like the average patient experiences the first time they come in for medicine?

TSC (Liz): I've heard a lot of feedback about this. I think in the beginning when they first walk through

the doors, there is a natural trepidation just because you don't know what to expect. But I feel as though it is one of our primary goals to make people feel comfortable and welcome and to see that this is a good place. The staff really takes their time with the patients and their knowledge is amazing. A lot of people say they like just being in our atmosphere.

TSC (Chris): Think about what people were faced with before this. If they didn't grow or didn't have a caregiver, they might turn to an illicit source. Why should people have to go to the street if they are sick and their doctor says that they should use this? Now they can come to a place that is safe, regulated and the medicine is tested. Not too many drug dealers out there are testing, making sure there are no molds or contaminants, but these people do. It's great, it's elevated.

AJS: Chris mentioned that you are currently working with pediatric patients and working with a provider at Hasbro.

TSC (Liz): Yes, it's the CBD project. The doctors at Hasbro came in and met with us and told us about these patients who are severely epileptic, just a very very debilitating disease. Maria, our office administrator, works very closely with the parents. Every day they come and they are dialing the dosage, making these concentrates of this high CBD oil. Our youngest patient is 3 and it is just amazing. Some of them are going from having 500+ seizures a day to maybe 2 or 3 or even none. They could not get those results with any sort of pharmaceuticals.

TSC (Gerry): The parents are just blown away. They send us video updates all the time, like a child doing puzzles where they couldn't do anything before... Really just blown away...

AJS: What is the biggest thing you want people who may not be familiar with the Slater Center to know about this place?

TSC (Gerry): I wish they could come stand in the center for an hour. I mean if you aren't crying from seeing these patients' lives change just because the center is open. You know, they won't get it until they see it. They may not get it until someone in their family needs cannabis to help them.

TSC (Liz): I would want people to know we are truly about compassion, that is the absolute truth.

[401 Counterculture: The Straight Scoop on Life on the Pole in RI](#)



RI Dancers and Club's look the other way type of attitude

The adult industry in Rhode Island has seen a very challenging 12 months. In August 2013, a 15-year-old girl was discovered dancing with a fake ID at Cheaters, long known to be an establishment of supposed ill repute. In November, undercover journalists documented prostitution being solicited at several clubs. In December, undercover Providence police officers busted dancers offering more than the menu services at Satin Doll right in down city. The local media has cried epidemic, and to believe the news reports, every dancer in every club in RI is selling herself with underage girls at her side. Mayor Taveras and Governor Chafee both called for massive reforms on strip club laws governing private dance booths and the hiring procedures of dancers. It would seem we have descended into utter debauchery and filth that is rotting the soul of the capitol city.

But what is really going on? Certainly the underage busts are a tremendous problem that should be dealt with as harshly as possible if it is found management was aware (there is not evidence of this). Is anyone surprised that dancers in a strip club may occasionally offer services barred by law? And why do we care? Are the girls victims or masterminds? Are they systemic or isolated incidents? The oldest profession in the world is the oldest for a reason; certainly prostitution will always exist in the Ocean State regardless of the presence or regulation of adult establishments. Is it fair to these businesses that they are subjected to gotcha journalism and targeted by police and levied heavy fines and/or suspensions of licenses for the actions of two consenting adults behind a closed door? Don't the police have more pressing matters in a city being ravaged by drugs and violent crime?

These are the questions we must ask ourselves before joining a witch hunt. We must put aside any prejudices and moral dilemma, look at the facts of the matter, and form an educated opinion.

To gain a full understanding of the situation, I sat down with "Brandy," a veteran former feature dancer in RI, and talked about the life RI dancers are leading, and if the recent negative attention is hype or a mere glimpse into a bigger problem.

Adam Schirling: How many clubs did you dance at in Rhode Island and for how long?

Brandy: I worked in two clubs here in RI for about 14 months.

AS: How soon after starting dancing in Providence did you witness prostitution occurring in the club?

B: As soon as I was done getting ready in the dressing room and got to the floor, I witnessed prostitution. My first lap dance, in a \$25-a-song booth, consisted of an 85-year-old man with a remote controlled vibrator in his pocket who loved to talk about bestiality. This was within the first 20 minutes

that I ever worked as a dancer. The first club I worked at was more dive like. It was a more nasty strip club than a high-end escort type club, where I later worked. I have to say, the level of prostitution going on in both clubs I worked at was equal, but the money in the more high-end club was better for doing weird things.

It became clear to me, on my first day dancing alongside my sister, that prostitution is part of the gig. Some girls just didn't participate, and they walked out of work with \$100 to \$200 compared to the thousands some girls were making a night. I recall older, more experienced dancers saying, "Girl, we're gonna turn you into a whore! That's the way to get regulars. That's the way to get paid. "

AS: Did you personally know any underage dancers or were any ever discovered to be underage?

B: I'm sure that in my 14 months of dancing, I ran across a few underage girls. I don't personally know any. Management always checked IDs , made photocopies, and tried to make sure no underage girls were working the club. It would be bad news for them if anybody found out. Underage girls were bad for business, and no one wanted to get raided.

AS: Does management promote drug and alcohol use among dancers? Did you personally ever witness any overdoses among girls working?

B: Management did not give two fucks if their girls were fucked up on drugs or alcohol. If you were a newer girl and management didn't know how you acted when you were fucked up, they may make you sit a shift out or send you home if they thought they could get in trouble for having said fucked up girl work. But once they saw what a girl could handle without endangering the club, anything went. Management in one of the clubs found a rolled up wad of cash with cocaine stuffed inside. When the girl came running, looking for her cash, all management did was throw the coke in the trash and hand her her money. She didn't get in trouble at all. Another girl, she was top bitch in this club, nobody could top her. She was open about her dick sucking abilities, she was open with the fact that she was a prostitute. Management adored her. She got booked for all the bachelor parties on stage and always was invited to the most private VIP parties, athletes and politicians. She got caught selling coke and was suspended for a shift or two. Management would urge you to get a drink and relax, but sloppy, messy, stumbling girls was a problem for them. So they didn't encourage girls to be messy sloppy, but they did not care if a girl was coked up, on pills, drunk, falling, puking ... as long as you pulled yourself together before you hit the floor.

It was totally a look-the-other-way situation. One of the girls made excellent pot brownies and would sell them for \$5 a pop and they were ... so very good. The house mom at one of these clubs received pot brownies in lieu of tips once a week.

As far as straight up ODs, I never saw a girl being rushed to the hospital because she was going to die. But girls would routinely be nodding out, sleeping in a swivel chair set aside for such drug stupors. Newer girls who couldn't keep it together were refused the shift, because girls who walked around in 8-inch heels who were nodding out were liable to fall and really get hurt. Those shoes are no joke. Neither is heroin, though.

I mean, crazy shit, dude. For example, I can't take opiates, I'm allergic. But one old bag of a dancer would sell me Percocet every single time I got drunk. I told her to stop, but every time I had one too many she would take \$30 and give me one tiny pill. I would be sick for days after. It sucked. But these girls, the job, drugs are part of the gig. I'd say 60% of girls dancing are addicts. It's clear. Girls take the

amount of money they need to buy 30 pills and divide that by how much dick they need to suck to make that money. For 30 pills, for one or two days worth of drugs. It's disturbing what some girls will do for drugs. Initially, I went into the business expecting more drugs and less prostitution. But it's pretty equal.

AS: Does management encourage prostitution among the dancers? Or is it more a look-the-other-way situation?

B: Does management encourage prostitution? They always supplied little paper cups and mouthwash in the bathroom of the dressing room. So ... It was routine for girls to come back from a champagne room and beeline for those little paper cups to get the fucking grossness out. You could almost bet money on who just participated in a sex for money exchange. When a girl walked out of a champagne room, you can see on their faces that look that says, "I just did something bad," mixed with the look of, "But I got \$500 for it." That shamed look mixed with a bit of pride.

If a girl got caught participating in prostitution in a club and arrests were made or the media caught on or if they got threatened by the police, they would have no other choice but to crack down. One club took more slats out of their doors to see more of the champagne room after one particular arrest or raid.

AS: How soon after you started working were you propositioned for prostitution? How often did it occur?

B: I was propositioned for prostitution the first day, and every single day after that until I stopped dancing. It happened 50% of the time. I would approach a man and he would make it known immediately that he was looking for more than a lap dance or an all nude champagne room. Immediately I knew if I was the girl for them or not based on what they wanted. I'm not saying I was a perfect angel, but straight-up prostitution wasn't my thing.

I've done hours-long champagne rooms or dinners where these men would talk to me for hours. Whole nights they paid for to talk to me. Those were the only regulars I ever had. Talkers. But prostitution runs rampant. Right now, as I'm typing this, I'm 100% positive there is a girl somewhere in a Providence club giving a blow job or having sex. Right now.

AS: Did cops, politicians or local celebrities ever try to curtail sexual favors due to their office while at the clubs? If you didn't personally witness it, was it talked about? Such as a police officer demanding sexual favors under threat of drug/prostitution arrest? What about sex between the owners and dancers?

B: I never was propositioned by police or politicians. I never saw the girls and owners mix. The house moms took care of the girls and the owners would come in once in a while to hand out free drink tickets. Clubs can't legally be brothels, so if it goes on it is rarely discussed. I don't know if there were ever girls who were forced to trade sex for freedom. But in one club, it seemed to always be protected by the owner's connections. He ran the most high-end strip club in RI, where girls were practically giving away blow jobs, and nothing really ever happens there. It's not in the know.

AS: Did you ever fear for your safety or the safety of other girls while working? Any incidents stand out in your memory?

B: Yes, of course you fear for your safety. You enter a dark club with hundreds of men with no windows and two bouncers. Hundreds of extremely horny and drunk men. But you put it in the back of your mind. You protect yourself. You never go home with anyone. You don't put yourself in a position to get hurt. There are bouncers, and I've never gotten really badly hurt on the job. The guys who like to strangle are scary. You can't be letting strange men in a strip club strangle you or pull your hair. I've heard some girls claim rape. But the doors are like an inch thick. Scream a little bit and the bouncers would break in and stop it. The girls, though ... When strippers attack, that shit gets real. Those heavy lucite heels can knock you out. Girls throw hot curling irons at each other, pull weaves out of other girls' heads. Bouncers trying to control 10 angry women in a dressing room the size of a closet can get really bad. I was never really bored though. You work, do your job, and go home, and you have rent money and savings and nice things. You bear the burden of seeing that dirty dark side of humanity. You try to live a normal life without letting the job consume you.

AS: Certainly dancers across the USA have similar tales for good and bad. What would you say was the worst part about dancing in a RI club? And what positives, if any, did you take from the experience?

B: Being treated like a straight up object takes its toll. I was turning into this empty, sexually confused, ugly person. The men can be just so vulgar, so crass. Like who in their right mind says to a girl, "I'll give you \$20 more for anal"? This is just what it is.

It's part of the gig. I'm happy I went into it with half a brain. There are things I did take away from it. I grew up. In the more high end club, I had to compare to the most put together, sober girls. I focused more on my health and what I put into my body when I was at home because I knew the amount of alcohol I was ingesting three nights a week was dangerous. I worked out and had the best clothes and makeup. I took away this — maybe imagined — power. I control my life. It's a really tough industry to endure. It gets painful to do after a while. That imagined power fades away, and you see it for what it really is: a brothel where they encourage you to make money by any means. The worst part is that it makes a person so jaded, it sucks the life out of you.

The best part is knowing the power of your actions, on men, on people in general. The worst part? Seeing some girls just fucking fade away.