

Ann Loeb

Hello :)

I am truly honored to have this opportunity to shower my sister with love and words of tremendous pride in all she has done to bring greater understanding and compassion to the Atlanta community, the South and truthfully the entire world. I am 14 years older than Rebecca, Becky to me :) and was out of the house during her formative years. But as my husband and I were raising our family to include children and grandchildren my sister shared in it all...giving and caring and giving some more. She has always been fiercely loved by her nieces and nephews and now their children as well!

BECKY IS OUR FAMILY TREASURE

I speak for myself, my husband, children, grandchildren and siblings...but most importantly I speak for the two people we all expected would be here at such a moment. Our mother and father, Dolly and Bernie Wax. They were without a doubt Becky's greatest cheerleaders! They attended many POP yearly events in full costume with laughter and love. Love for their beautiful, wonderful daughter and her achievement in creating this very special hallmark event each year.

The home Becky and Jen are building with their amazing boys, the important work she does with her whole heart and soul and the important place she holds in all our hearts are all proof of my sister's greatness of spirit. She is a gift to us all.

I love you Becky

Eowyn Garfinkle Plymesser

On October 20th, an incredible, vivacious, charismatic, dare I say magical soul was brought on to this planet... me. Just kidding, I am of course talking about the magical Rebecca Stapel-Wax. Although we do share a birthday, which means I have been lucky enough to know her since I arrived into this world. Rebecca is my godmother, and she has been a source of light and love ever since we met on our birthday. She's been there for me through birth and death. Through the good and the bad, the small and the big.

When I say Beck is magical, I don't just mean pulling a bunny out of a hat magical. I mean life changing, indescribable, magic. Some people just have this palpable magic inside of them, and Beck is one of them. Her love knows no bounds, and even when we go years without seeing each other in person, I can constantly feel her love. And her love extends to people she doesn't even know. A fierce advocate, she stands up for vulnerable communities and inspires change. She inspires me to be a better person, a better friend, a better daughter, a better sister, a better human being. She gives me hope, something that I've been lacking the past few years. Hope that we will prevail, that we will survive. Hope that we will overcome.

Rebecca has spent over 18 years as a committed force dedicated to serving and advocating for gender and sexually diverse communities. Along with many Sojourn volunteers, Rebecca has trained thousands of youth, educators, parents, clergy, and advocates to build inclusive communities. She has built curricula for rural southern communities to address the increased risk of suicide rates that gender and sexually diverse people experience. The value of her contributions to our world is immeasurable.

As one of Sojourn's 20 under 21 Michael Jay Kinsler Rainmaker Award honorees, I am honored and incredibly privileged to award the 2023 Michael Jay Kinsler Rainmaker Award to the Ravishing, Enchanting, Beautiful, Extraordinary, Caring, Colorful, Amazing, Stunning, Tenacious, Astonishing, Persistent, Exceptional, Lovely, Wonderful, Awesome, Xanadu... Rebecca Stapel-Wax!

Rebecca Stapel-Wax

Life is good. Even after the week we have had legislatively. Right here, right now, in this very moment, life is so good.

I've been reminded over the last year of the traditional Jewish saying – Gam Zeh Ya'avov... This too shall pass. It reflects that time is fleeting, both up and very down. Simultaneously we experience, the past, the present and the future to remind us that the state we are in is not going to last forever. However, I like to think that when we remember this night together, this precious feeling of elation will linger and we can call it back any time we need it.

We are here celebrating 18 years. It's a whole lifetime for some. The world has drastically changed in almost 2 decades. While I have been involved in gender and sexual diversity work; the first states legalized same-sex marriage. The Jewish Conservative Movement started ordaining openly gay and lesbian clergy and officiating same-sex weddings. Don't Ask Don't Tell came and went. Federal hate crimes bills were passed and so was the supreme court's decision federally legalizing same-sex marriage. Under the Equal Access Act, students were able to form Gay-Straight Alliances. Bans against reparative therapy are the norm and the Bostock decision eliminated work-place discrimination against LGBTQ people. Representation and conversations about gender diversity in media, in politics, and religious communities commonplace.

However, we, especially in the South, have been inundated by legislation to legally discriminate based on religion. In my sacred book, Gd doesn't discriminate. Georgia is on the same path as some of our neighboring states to withhold medical and mental health care from transgender and non-binary young people. Education, freedom of expression, threats to livelihood, and access to basic needs are being threatened. As part of the Thrive Coalition, SOJOURN has been at the forefront of Jewish communities across the country who are visible and taking action to protect transgender youth. In Georgia we need to contact our House representative especially if that person sits on the Public Health Committee. We have people here from FL, AL, MS, TX, TN, and KY. We are everywhere, we are mighty and we will not back down from protecting ourselves and each other.

I'd like to recognize those both in this room and all over this region clergy, legislators, council and committee members for your unbelievably important service to our community. Close to home, thank you to 2016 POP Honoree, Jeff Graham and Georgia Equality for continuing to provide intelligence and information in order to protect our community. We rely on you to spread our work in the Jewish community and beyond.

Each of us is precious so it is important to me that you know, I appreciate you. I see you. I thank you.

Any time I think of the "Whenever You're Away From Me" sponsors I'll come back to this moment. Thank you to my esteemed colleagues at Positive Impact Health Centers, where I have moonlighted as a therapist for the last 10 years. Last year we did the extraordinary work of impacting the lives of 15,000 people affected by HIV.

I have enormous gratitude to the Osiason Educational Foundation, led by Margie Osheroff and her brother Lee, who have supported SOJOURN and this event since its inception.

And to my treasured rabbi, sibling, friend, founder of SOJOURN, the one, & only Rabbi Joshua Lesser. We are all here because of your vision, determination, wisdom, and encouragement. I am eternally grateful.

To all of the honorees that have come before - how I admire you! Thank you for placing yourself here-so we could celebrate all of the various ways you support gender and sexual diversity. One of my greatest joys has been getting to know you more deeply and because of our collaboration with Purim on and off Ponce, we will forever be related.

There are two honorees that are no longer with us in this world. Owen Halpern and our illustrious and so beloved, Sylvia "Double" Gross. Both will always have an enormous influence, impact and presence at SOJOURN. Sylvia made every person she touched feel that they were valuable and vital. She adored this party. It didn't matter that she was the oldest person in the room. Her zest for living life to the fullest with joy, humor, dancing, and connection is infectious. To continue her legacy, I strongly urge us to imitate her. Double Double.

These have been years of enormous loss for so many. We pay homage to those who have passed and to those that are still here that were most significant to them.

As my sister mentioned, our brother and both of our parents all passed in the last 15 months. My parents came to 5 out of 15 POP's. They would be kvelling right now. They'd be first in line, getting costumes at Costume's Etc, and cheering all of us to take on our critical equity work. For them and their unconditional support and love, henieni - I am here!

To my family-of origin, choice, and creation-you are the very reason I do this work. I had to find my place in the Jewish world after I came out. Although I questioned my very existence, it made me a stronger advocate for myself and other LGBTQ+ people.

To have my sister here, sharing in this simcha, saying these words validates and soothes everything we've been through together.

To my friends, some who I even get to work with, and those who have come here from far places, I adore you.

I want to thank my kids-who endure and challenge me. Who you are and who you are becoming is what the world needs.

And to my wife of 31 years, you see how the sausage is cooked. For better and worse-you are my life partner and I am able to be here because of you.

It takes an immense amount of time and talent to pull off such an event. However, it's the imagination and heart of Shane Garner and a posse of dedicated volunteers that has brought Xanadu to life. Shane, you are my muse. I also want to recognize your muse, Olivia Newton-John, for her glorious work with the environment, animals, and cancer treatment.

Shane, you make me believe we are magic. This theme is recurrent in SOJOURN's work - that anything is possible, if we have faith, to ensure gender and sexually diverse people and their support systems have what they need.

We are SOJOURN GSD - which stands for gender & sexual diversity. I also like to think of GSD as getting shit done. You can engage in our shit, I mean work, and win prizes by visiting our programs table right outside the ballroom.

The heart of our work occurs with the SOJOURN staff. Give it up for McKenzie Wren/programs; Rose Kantorczyk/Communications; and our newest edition, our Director of Development who brought you Purim Off Ponce 2023, Lisa Stoch.

Massive gratitude to SOJOURN's Board of Directors, led by the unstoppable, Simone Bonnejonne. Y'all keep us on course to do better and to be better.

Tremendous thanks goes to the POP committee and volunteers who traveled, schlepped, shaped, and asked all of you to contribute to the success of this event.

All y'all are doing a mitzvah tonight. Your righteous deed is being here. Just like Purim, in a world that is seemingly backwards and upside down, we are foiling the enemy by showing up, celebrating our wins, and being inspired so we can face upcoming challenges. Commemorating Purim is also the act of giving to charity. Purim Off Ponce is SOJOURN's "Annual Giving Celebration" so thank you to our sponsors, community partners, donors, and game players. If you haven't had a chance to make a donation and/or buy tickets for the 10p costume contest, I encourage you to see someone with a _____ glow bracelet, scan our QR code, text POP23 to 44321 or visit the ticket booth right outside this room so you can fulfill a mitzvah AND guarantee that SOJOURN continues to do gender and sexually diverse education, advocacy, outreach and support work.

Again and again, I am grateful for the privilege and honor to do this work. To be recognized and present for an 18 year chai celebration is a tremendous gift. In the words of the late, great Olivia Newton- John, I am and continue to be hopelessly devoted to you.