

Carolyn Sherer

Artist Profile

Part of West Hollywood's One City One Pride Queer Arts Festival

Name: Carolyn Sherer

City of Residence: Birmingham, Alabama

Age: 56



Rebecca and Mary, photo by Carolyn Sherer

1) Who are you, where do you live, and what kind of art do you make?

I am a southern fine art photographer living in Birmingham, Alabama with my lesbian partner of 33 years.

2) How old were you when you come out, and what is your coming out story?

Last year I was 55 years old when I came out completely and publicly. This may shock those living in other parts of the country where LGBT people may be part of the social fabric of their community at large with rights provided by state or local government— but in Alabama there are no legal protections and discrimination is actually legislated. For example, current law requires that sex education for school children include instruction that

homosexuality is illegal. Parents can and regularly do lose custody of children simply because they are accused of being gay or lesbian. Recently some large companies have implemented anti-discrimination policies to protect the LGBT community in an effort to recruit employees from the national pool, but most do not even speak of it.

Why come out now? A friend was keeping vigil by her partner's hospital deathbed when the family of her beloved locked her out of her home. The police had to let my friend into her home to get a change of clothes and her computer. My response was to create the photography exhibition, *Living in Limbo: Lesbian Families in the Deep South* to challenge the status quo in our community. It is a southern perspective. It is my coming out story.

3) How does being queer affect your artwork?

I have to preface my response with a disclaimer. In much of the Deep South being queer means trying to live an authentic life that departs from the norm, sometimes at significant risk. Queer as an intellectual concept is a privilege few can afford to consider here and something I am not entirely comfortable with.

My work is very personal. I always explore identities, seeking common ground with others—particularly members of marginalized communities. Although I do believe being queer in Alabama sharpened my sense of empathy for the outsider, the stronger influence may have been the fact that my nomadic army childhood was clearly defined by a pursuit of intimacy amongst great diversity.

4) In your mind, what is gay pride and how do you celebrate it?

Gay Pride is my newly discovered sense of satisfaction with my identity. I celebrate it every day, knowing that many in my community still cannot enjoy that freedom.

5) Where can we see your artwork during the One City One Pride LGBT Arts Festival this year?

West Hollywood Public Library, 625 N. San Vicente Blvd., free admission, open M-Th 11-7, Fri-Sa 10-6, closed Sundays. For more info visit www.weho.org/pride or www.LivingInLimbo.org



Carolyn Sherer, no photo credit



Carolyn Sherer as photographed by Jerry Siegel