

Kelly, Nancy Denim Day Clippings and Ephemera, 1979-1980

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Descriptive Summary

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Ms.2018.035

Unit Date

1979-1980

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English .

Abstract

Ephemera and clippings related to Gay Awareness Week Denim Day held in January 1979 at Virginia Tech.

Creator

Gay Student Alliance

Extent

3.16 Gigabytes 27 TIF files

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 Folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

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Source of Acquisition

The collection was donated to Special Collections and University Archives in November 2018.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the Nancy Kelly Denim Day Clippings and Ephemera commenced in January 2019 and completed in October 2023.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Nancy Kelly Denim Day Clippings and Ephemera, 1979-1980, Ms2018-035, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Nancy Kelly was born in 1958 in Denver, Colorado. She was the youngest of five children with two older brothers and two older sisters. The family moved from Denver to Potomac, Maryland, where Kelly grew up. In the late 1970s, Kelly matriculated at Virginia Tech. During her time at Virginia Tech, Kelly was a member of the Women's Collective lesbian group and became the first lesbian co-president of the Gay Student Alliance. She graduated in 1981 with a degree in communications. After graduation, Kelly lived in Roanoke, Virginia where she was an active participant in the First Fridays group. She later moved to Durham, North Carolina and became a meeting and event planner for the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University. Kelly returned to Virginia Tech as an alumna in 2018, spearheading the effort to preserve the history of the first Denim Day event held as part of the 1979 Gay Awareness Week. Her efforts led to the first ever LGBTQ+ alumni reunion on campus and the 2019 Denim Day Do Over event held in honor of the 40th anniversary of the first Denim Day. She was honored as the keynote speaker for the Virginia Tech 2019 Lavender Graduation Ceremony.

Administrative History - Denim Day

During the week of January 15-19, 1979, the Virginia Tech Gay Student Alliance held the first Gay Awareness Week, a multi-event effort to promote awareness of gay and lesbian people throughout campus. The high point was Denim Day, which called on all students, faculty and staff to show their support of gay rights by wearing denim on that day.

Out of 20,000 students and thousands more faculty and staff, only a few dozen people wore denim, and the Gay Student Alliance members who started it all, and other members of the gay community, endured ridicule, taunting, verbal and physical assaults.

The idea for a 40th Anniversary Commemoration of Denim Day at Virginia Tech came from one of the organizers of the first Denim Day in 1979. Alumna Nancy Kelly returned to Virginia Tech after learning about the opening of the LGBTQ+ Resource Center in the Squires Student Center and after being inspired and encouraged by LGBTQ+ students at the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University where she worked. She returned with a desire to see the university officially recognize the struggle that LGBTQ+ students faced here even after the first LGBTQ+ student organizations were recognized by the university and she wanted to raise awareness of the struggles still faced by LGBTQ+ students today.

Beginning in 2019, the Ex Lapide Alumni Society and the entire university community commemorate Denim Day once a year during Virginia Tech's Pride Week. Hokies wear their favorite denim and share their photos on social media with the hashtag #VTDenimDay.

Content Description

Ephemera and clippings related to Gay Awareness Week Denim Day held in January 1979 at Virginia Tech. Most of the collection is only available as digital scans of the original documents.

Keywords

University Archives

University History

LGBTQ history

Gay Student Alliance

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (1970-)

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Description of Subordinate Components

Gay Awareness Week fliers

Unit Date 1979-01

folder 1

Clippings from the Blacksburg Sun

Unit Date 1979-01-21

folder 1

Digitized clippings and ephemera

Unit Date 1979-1981