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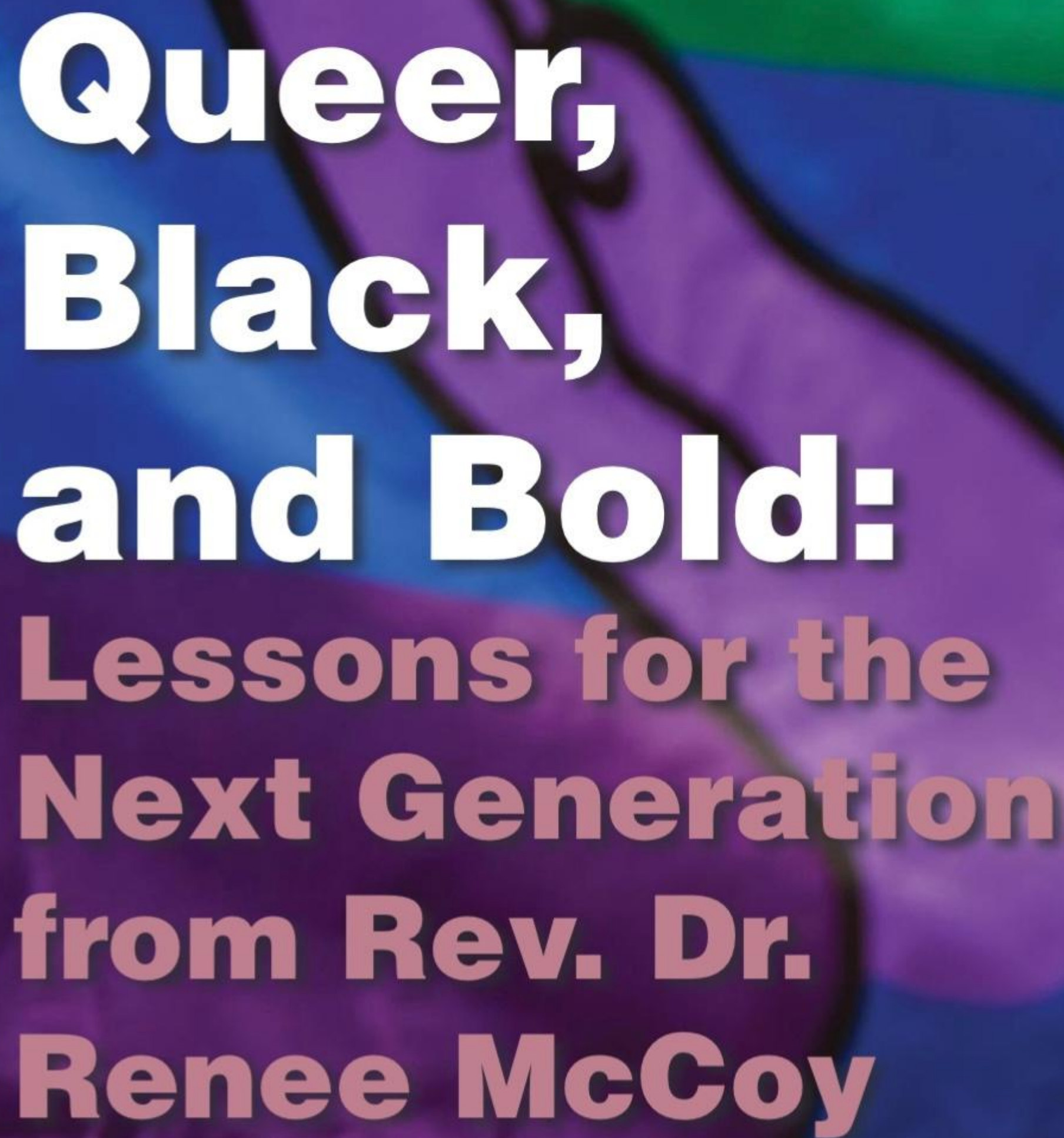


THE
CHARITY
ISSUE

The Rev Dr.
RENEE
MCCOY

Honoring a life of service, love,
and faith. From the HIV Crisis
to creating a home for faith.


With Articles Covering
LGBTQ+ Fundraising, Still Queer & Still Here,
The Missing Generation, Raising the Next Generation,
Weathering the Storm, plus more...



**Queer,
Black,
and Bold:
Lessons for the
Next Generation
from Rev. Dr.
Renee McCoy**

by MK Scott

photos by Bruce Carithers





Rev. Dr. Renee McCoy's presence is immediately commanding yet welcoming. Her laughter has a warmth that belies the battles she's fought over decades, and her voice carries the kind of authority that comes from living through both joy and trauma, loss and triumph. For nearly half a century, she has been at the forefront of some of the most challenging moments in modern queer history — from civil rights to LGBTQ activism, from the early days of the AIDS crisis to the ongoing work of supporting senior queer communities.

"I kind of like to say 'human rights,'" she clarified as we began to talk about her early work. "I started out with civil rights, as every Black person does, but it quickly became about gay rights. Back then, we didn't even have the words we have now. It was just... something different."

Her story begins in Detroit, a city at the heart of American industrial might and civil rights activism. It was here that she first began advocating for human and civil rights, laying the groundwork for what would become a lifetime of advocacy. "We just talked about gay rights," she recalled. "We didn't have any other word for it, other than 'gay rights.' But we were there, showing up, trying to make sure people had visibility and dignity."

Building Community in the Early Days

Her work with the Metropolitan Community Churches and

the formation of the National Coalition for Third World Lesbians and Gays marked the beginning of an organized effort to make Black lesbian voices visible in spaces where they had often been erased. "We started out as the National Coalition for Third World Gays," she explains. "Lesbians didn't have a lot of visibility. We had to fight to make our presence known."

Through these early efforts, Rev. Renee learned a lesson that would shape her life: visibility is survival. "It wasn't just about getting rights," she said. "It was about being seen, being acknowledged, and being cared for — because nobody else was going to do it for us." **HIV/AIDS: A Crisis that Demanded Action**

Then came 1981, and with it, HIV/AIDS. For many in the LGBTQ community, the crisis was a shocking, deadly reality. "Nobody really cared if LGBTQ people died or not," she remembered. "The efforts to stop this 'gay disease' largely bypassed us. That gave way to a ton of activism. The question wasn't if we'd do it, but what do we do now?"

At the time, Black people made up roughly 12% of the US population but accounted for 25% of those diagnosed with AIDS. The scale of the disparity was staggering, and the response from institutions was largely absent. "People were dying," she said simply. "Women were dying within six months of diagnosis, men within nine. The energy we'd put into celebrating ourselves and our identity, into

building pride, suddenly had to pivot toward survival."

Despite the immense challenges, Rev. Dr. Renee emphasizes the essential role of community care. "Lesbians stepped up," she said. "We took care of one another. It wasn't about trans, male, or female — it was all of us together. If we didn't care for each other, nobody else would."

This care extended beyond immediate survival. It was about creating family where the biological kind was absent or insufficient. "Even if your family embraced you, you were always the other one," she said. "We created our own networks, our own love, our own support systems — and that's what got us through."

The Lost Generation

The losses from the AIDS crisis were profound and generational. "We've lost the wisdom, energy, stories, and dreams of those who died," she said in reflection. "The community lost the motivation that comes from oppression. Pain is a great motivator. But with so many gone, the lessons were lost along with them."

This absence is felt most acutely in today's LGBTQ community. "We talk about pride, but we don't know our history enough to be really proud of what it took to get here," she explained. "People have walked through doors that were hard-won and closed them behind them. We need to remember the fight, the struggle, and the victories that



came before us.”

Senior Advocacy and Passing the Torch

Now, as a leader and advocate for senior LGBTQ communities, Rev. Dr. Renee continues to emphasize intergenerational care. “Survivors can tell their stories,” she said. “How they got HIV, how they survived, what empowered them. That’s a powerful legacy to pass down.”

She is also adamant about combating the ways society diminishes older adults. “Stop ‘feeble-izing’ seniors,” she said emphatically. “We got old because we know things. Let us tell you what we know. Don’t always assume we need special treatment or patronizing care. Let us define our needs.”

For her, intergenerational engagement is about mutual support and respect. “Cut my grass, cook me dinner, walk my dogs — simple acts of care. In return, I’ll share everything I know about survival, life, and joy. That’s the exchange that keeps us whole.”

Mentorship for the Next Generation

Rev. Dr. Renee is also deeply concerned about younger generations, whom she sees as facing different struggles in a world that often offers comfort over challenge. “Hope is a great act of resistance,” she said. “But too many young people are distracted — by social media, substances, or a culture that numbs them to possibility. They have the potential, but they

sometimes give up before they even try.”

Her advice is simple but radical: trust yourself. “Trust the you you see — even if nobody else sees it. Trust that vision. Stay the course. My generation has got you.”

Queer Truth and Identity

To Rev. Dr. Renee, queer identity is fundamentally about truth. “I still come out,” she said. “Always. There’s always a smidgen of fear. But truth is bigger than fear. Being a lesbian is about embracing that truth, celebrating it, and claiming your space — whatever that looks like.”

This perspective extends

to her understanding of the word “queer.” “It’s about who I truly am,” she explained. “It’s about stepping into the fear, being seen, and refusing to compromise the truth of myself.”

Moments of Personal Joy

Amid decades of advocacy, activism, and caregiving, personal milestones hold profound significance. One such moment is her marriage to Patricia, with whom she has shared more than 16 years of life. “The proudest moment was having both our families there, celebrating the space we were claiming together,” she recalled.

Yet joy is found not only in milestones but in everyday learning and discovery. “I took a swimming class this year,” she said with a laugh.

“I realized there’s still time to learn, to refine, to experience things I never thought I could. Retirement isn’t about stopping; it’s about refinement.”

She has also discovered new passions, like fly fishing, which offer a form of meditation and connection with nature. “It’s about standing in the water, being present, learning, and still finding joy. That’s survival too.”

Legacy of Love and Resistance

Looking back over her life, Rev. Dr. Renee sees both triumph and loss, resilience and community. “The first decade of HIV/AIDS activism was eye-opening,” she said. “We realized we were responsible for our own survival. That awareness gave

us power. It was horrible, but it was amazing.”

Her message for today’s generations is clear: radical care, authenticity, and hope are revolutionary acts. “Love fiercely, tell your story, embrace your truth, and never stop fighting,” she declared.

From Detroit to Seattle, from civil rights to queer senior advocacy, Rev. Dr. Renee embodies a life lived at the intersection of courage, compassion, and truth. Her work is not only a record of survival but a blueprint for generations to come — one that emphasizes the importance of community, storytelling, and refusing to accept anything less than full humanity.

