

Close Up on Baltimore // A documentary photo series

By Crystal Micriotti 2016- 2018

An authentic narrative of the city, one that often goes untold in the national media, captured through a series of photos with diverse, compelling, quirky and introspective storytelling as shared and told by residents in Baltimore City.

Part One

Focus on different portrayals of gender and gender roles

Veronica Lush



Crystal Micriotti 2017

"I'm a freak, I do what I want. I am a character.

I moved to Baltimore three and a half years ago with the sole goal of performing as a drag performer. My mother got me my first drag show back in 2013. Ever since then I've been performing. At my first real performance, I came in third place out of seven people. I was very proud of myself, I thought I was sickening. I look back now on those early performances and I hate them. I think I was an awful performer-- I had no stage presence and no choreography. Now in my shows I mostly wing it, it works out really well. Now I have stage presence. I smile, I look at people and make eye contact. People live for my performances, I'm on point! People are the only reason I perform, they're the only reason I really do drag anymore. I did it at first because I wanted to make money, I wanted to be famous--and I still do-- but seeing the happiness I bring to people during a performance, even if they're drunk, and seeing people smile keeps me going. It makes me want to one up myself every time. I don't repeat myself. I always try to keep it new and exciting for the people. I like to entertain.

When I was in high school, I was one of the first few people to come out as gay, but it was a new age when I came out, and it was mostly accepted. Although my teachers didn't defend me when I was getting bullied. My sister outed me to my parents. My dad got really upset and punched a hole in the wall. But now he's one of the most supportive people in the community. He comes to the drag shows and he participates! It all has come such a long way, people are more accepting. My family has become my biggest support group, which makes it more rewarding than anything else is. That's what keeps me going. I'm gay and wear drag as a creative outlet. I'm planning my first national prelim. I'm running for an Entertainer of the Year prelim at the start of next year! And also working on some fresh content for an upcoming YouTube show.

Veronica IS crazy. Veronica is drunk. Veronica never gives a damn.
Veronica just has fun."



Crystal Micriotti 2017

Amanda

"I joined my first tall ship by chance in 2003. I made friends with the sailors on board during the summer in Boston, they talked to their captain and had me hired by September to take the transit south to Key West. I was the only girl on board. 12 years later, there is an ever growing number of female captains among them. I think the only thing different about being the only girl was the pressure I put on myself. Maybe the guys were skeptical about me, but no one ever made me feel that way, they taught me so much and they helped me feel like part of the crew, and that builds your confidence in yourself like nothing else. I still keep in touch with most of them and I even get to see some of them when their boats come through here. I love living and working on a boat in Baltimore because there are so many other sailors around, and I really missed that kind of community on other boats in other towns. We all hang in Fells Point, not just because it's historically been the sailor-friendly part of town, but it really still is. That friendly neighborhood feel, that instant comradery like you've known everyone there for years, that's so rare and so special when you live this kind of gypsy vagabond life. This will be my second summer in Baltimore aboard the schooner *Summerwind* and my first driving as captain!!!

Anastasia Mae

"I was Miss Mixers 2010.

Sometimes I feel like I'm creatively stuck. I do not consider myself a boy. I am a lady. I have been part of the Baltimore scene for years, I bowed down to the old school girls and always respected the queens who came before me. When I became fierce, lots of the older queens had started to move to Philly or D.C. and the newer queens came to me for guidance. EVERYBODY knows me as Anastasia.

The scene is not done...but it's changed. Equality isn't as much of an issue these days and there is an acceptance now most places we go. I can walk into a non gay bar in drag with my friends, and feel completely fine and comfortable. No one will say anything to us because that's how it is now. I AM a Baltimore queen... before the media made drag more mainstream friendly...we were here. Baltimore is NOT a homophobic state and I have always felt like I can be myself here. There is support. The scene is changing, but not gone...mostly just relocating from the mainstream bars people knew about and finding homes in new venues. I'm Trans. I'm part of the community. I can be who I am here. I came out in middle school, all my friends were straight, but they supported me from day one. They don't judge other gay/trans people because they know I'm gay and they love me because I'm a good person. Back in the day being a trans woman wasn't a thing people discussed or understood. The media portrays a different concept of what's happening in the gay/trans community than what I'm actually living and experiencing.

We have all had to come to terms with ourselves and who we are in our own way.

I am trans and I love living my life as a woman."



Crystal Micriotti 2017

Alana



Crystal Micriotti 2017

"After being on this earth for 6 decades plus, it still difficult for me to believe how my life has been totally transformed in the 3 years since I moved to Baltimore. Hopes and dreams that I internalized and held within my soul my entire life that I thought I would never realize have become true in my home in this great city. In my career I've travelled close to 2 million miles all over the world and I've never experienced the sense of community, love and acceptance as I have in Baltimore. I'm usually out and about in town on the weekends and there isn't a week that I don't meet at least one or more new friends! Many of the places I go have mixed age groups...people from 21 to 81...everyone is cool, gets along, respects each other and has fun! Just a few doors away from my row house in Fells Point there are several great neighborhood bars where I frequently stop in to meet with friends. I enjoy all type of music, I also love to dance and experience the energy of the live music scene here whether it's in one of the many taverns or clubs in town or a venue like the Meyerhoff.

Now about the future...I'm still trying to fully absorb all the recent changes...I'm taking one day at a time, as I'm still learning about myself and what my vision is for the remaining part of my life. I have a strong faith in God which has been strengthened by finding an open and accepting church in town. Although I'm extremely happy here in Baltimore, my family lives in the Southwestern USA including my wife who I love very much. How to reconcile my being transgendered and what she wants and needs in a partner remains unresolved but I remain optimistic that something will be worked out between us in the near future. Having achieved many of my lifelong dreams in a such a short time in this amazing city...I know now **ANYTHING** is possible!"



Crystal Micriotti 2017

Mama Grace

"My Priest says I'm the last of the Highlandtown hons. I grew up in Baltimore and have spent all my life in this city. I have always been a bigger than life character. Big hair and big earrings...the works. Times have changed around here, lots of yuppies are buying homes in the neighborhood then leaving instead of raising their families here. It takes away from the sense of community and knowing your neighbors. Now everyone is a stranger. It's a shame. I was a bar maiden for years and I have seen ALL kinds of people...but as you get older you just can't hang anymore. I can drink with the best, but I only go out once in awhile. I do go to church, I LOVE playing bingo and I also go bowling twice a week at Patterson Lanes. I do hair once a week at my client's homes. I did the hair for Hairspray the last time it played in Baltimore.

I've been called the big blonde with the big hair. "