

LYNX: Get up, Get Out & Do Something

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In this piece, Lynx AKA member LeathermanLynx shares his insight and experiences on discovering the leather scene and getting more than your feet wet.

Getting Involved in "the scene"

Before the summer of 2015, the only experience I had with Leather, Kink, BDSM or radical sexuality came from clips I'd come across browsing porn or the scandalous stories I'd heard from one of my buddies. I have to admit, I was probably, no, I was certainly a prude back then. I had made up in my mind what leather was, based on what others had told me or what was featured in some type of media. I was WAY off!

Around October or November of 2015, I was chatting with someone online who had told me early-on in our pen-palship that he was into Leather & BDSM. I said that was "cool and everything," but that wasn't my thing. He let it go and the conversation carried on organically, blossoming into a really wonderful kinship. He's actually one of a few people to nudge me in the direction of the Leather Scene. There must have been a curiosity on my part though, right? We don't typically spend time considering anything that is a "hard no" in our minds, we just say "No" to it (...typically). Well, over some time, and after many, many questions, a lot of reading.... and some doubt, I found myself on the subsequent pledge line for a Leather Fraternity called The Men of ONYX. How the hell did I get here?!

In my opinion, "Leather" is rooted in radical sexuality - the gear, the play, the men/women/NGC, the sweat, the pain, the pleasure - woo! The list goes on... but there's much more within this culture, that continues to bring millions of like-minded people together from around the world. Whether it be education, charity, the Title Circuit, health & wellness, volunteering, play parties, outreach or just the camaraderie, there are many ways to be involved or participate. It's up to you to explore the path best designed to work for you.

I don't intend to touch on all the ways one can get involved in Leather Culture - there are just too many - but let's look at a few, just in case you're wondering.

Mentorship

For many, the idea of joining an Organization or "Club" might be a lot. Immersing yourself into an environment like Leather, full of people you aren't familiar with, might be a bit overwhelming. Perhaps one-on-one coffee chats, meals and outings with someone you're comfortable with might suite you better.

Note: The word "Mentor" means different things to different people.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that a mentor deserves to be vetted. Do they know what they're talking about? Do they have any sort of reputation within the community? Do they have honest, genuine references they're willing to share with you? Probably most importantly, do you trust them to be honest with you as you learn your way?

A good mentor can expose you to literature, history, people, and a host of many other things. Now, there is some debate as to whether or not one should play with (or have sex with) their mentor. I have my personal opinion about it, but it's irrelevant to your journey. Just be VERY sure of your choice, that's my advice on that bit.

Clubs/Organizations

One of the really good things about Leather Clubs and Organizations is that, generally speaking, they are operated by people who have experience and history in the community/culture. Most also have some sort of membership opportunity for people who are looking for ways to get involved and participate.

A quick search online will probably turn up some leather clubs/organizations in your area or nearby. Check them out. Do they appear to be a group of folks you'd want to get to know, etc? If they host a social night at a local bar, go! Get a feel. If it's too intimidating to go it alone, bring a mate - why not? Spend a bit of time getting familiar with the surroundings and people. Inquire about involvement opportunities. In many Clubs/Organizations, the membership process involves a "pledge" period - or "trial" period before joining officially. It allows the opportunity for those who're new to become familiar

with how the organization is run, the people responsible for the success of the organization, its history, opportunities to activate within the larger community and possibly the education of BDSM skill-sets or fetish play. It also allows the current membership to become familiar with you. This process is designed to allow for a smooth introduction with people at your side for support.

A side-note about Clubs/Organizations: Many people say, and I do agree, that membership in an Organization or Club isn't necessary in order to participate or be a "member" of the culture/community. They're right! It's definitely possible to explore on your own. If that works for you, great - but if you're someone who's curious about the broader culture and would appreciate support as you figure it all out, there are Organizations and Clubs full of people ready to help.

Now I realise that currently the situation with COVID-19 has practically interrupted our ability to socialise and gather. Around the globe, bars and clubs, pubs and play spaces, glory holes and coffee shops are all dealing with closures and the like. However, many Organizations have shifted their activity and interaction towards a virtual experience.

Although we may not be able to go to the nearest dungeon space and meet folks from "XYZ Men of Leather," a quick search on social media will show you who's doing what and how. Make contact, ask the questions and get involved. Connection is the thing. Some areas of the world have more restrictions than others, so if you find that it's not possible to "go out and meet people", there are other ways to get involved. Use what you have to work with. With any luck and a bit of time, we'll all be behind this pandemic and can return to some semblance of communal fetish life.

Volunteering

Maybe you've heard from people you talk to about IML, MAL, Antwerp or some other "Mr." Contest - perhaps the retelling of an awesome story from a friend who'd just returned from a Leather Contest Weekend piqued your curiosity. Granted, those on-stage competing in various contests have had some experience in "the scene", but that doesn't mean you can't get involved.

Leather Contests require tons and tons of support through the volunteering of work hours. And what better way to get a birds-eye view of real time Leather Culture? Helping to run a registration table, set-up breakout rooms, stuff programs and envelopes, prepare space for a retail pop-up shop plus a plethora of other bits that help put on a Contest Weekend is a great way to get involved and meet people. Most times, a few hours of labor will get you a few drinks, entrance to the contest, a swag bag or two, or any number of things thanking you for volunteering your time. Some contests even provide stipends!

On the whole though, volunteering is needed in many more areas than just the Contest Title Circuit. The community cannot do what it does or help the people it helps without the generosity of people willing to donate their time. It truly is one of the easiest ways to get involved.

Does your local LGBTQ+ resource/health center have a bulletin board with socially-related notices posted? Are there events or charity fundraisers coming up - do they need volunteers? Find out and get involved. You never know who you'll meet along the way and how they might advance your path. Again, this might be a challenge under the current climate, but keep it in the back of your mind, we'll be together again soon.

Play Parties/Fetish Events

What if you're just a kinky bastard and you know it? Perhaps you're comfortable with your sexuality but want to grow and develop more? You're not really interested in the fringe benefits of the culture... you really just want to pig out, but don't know how to go about it. Well, lucky for you, there's the good old Play Party/Fetish Event! There are certain provisions one should take if going this route.

Getting involved with radically sexual people at a Play Party takes a great deal of trust, and knowledge. Not every person we meet is a good choice for a play partner, but Play Parties and Fetish Events bring people together and we never know who we might meet. For now, check social media to see if there are any events happening online that may showcase demos of kink and fetish play. It's a great way to "preview" the buffet of opportunities that exist in Fetish. It'll help you make a list of things you may want to inquire about when we're all able to be together again.

I could discuss the innards of "The Play Party" in great detail, but for the purposes of this piece, I'll just say a few things: If you're a novice to BDSM/KINK/Leather Culture, a public or open Play Party might not be the 1st attempt you make at getting involved. If the word "protocol" doesn't mean anything to you regarding Play Spaces, research it. Learn it. Things can go badly if you're not familiar with how Play Parties operate.

During some weekend events, there are parties hosted at a bar/club and you have the opportunity to observe fetish play in action. Some even have stations set up and run by trusted Fetish Players for the sole purpose of letting people "try it out." In the US, "Kinky Karnivals" happen all over the country throughout the year. If you find yourself in an environment where there's a specific fetish being executed and you're curious enough to want to give it a go, follow protocol, when appropriate approach the person in question and simply say, "I'm a novice. I'm interested in what you're doing. Would it be possible to talk to you more about it?" - See what happens. Trust your instincts though. Always.

*As a novice, you're never obligated to play with someone you've only just met. Ever.

Like I said, there are infinitely many ways one can get involved and explore "Leather." These are just a few that came to mind. Whether you feel more comfortable with the structure of a process executed by an Organization, or prefer to do your own thing and wiggle your way in bit-by-bit, there are many ways to explore and develop your curiosities. The culture/community is made up of wonderfully amazing people, many of whom are happy to help you along the way.

I never imagined that I'd be where I am right now when I first walked into "Jackhammer" 5 years ago. Choosing to act on that impulse has changed the trajectory of my life and I'll be forever grateful.

So, if you're new to this, welcome! Get up, Get Out & Do Something! If you're a veteran, thank you for lending us your shoulders to stand on.