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Exhibit opening: January 15, 2009. 5:30: Talk by Susan Stryker, 7:00. Opening reception.

POLK STREET: LIVES IN TRANSITION **The GLBT Historical Society Examines Change in San Francisco's Polk Gulch**

San Francisco, CA – October 29, 2008 – When a teenaged Coy Ellison ran away from an abusive home to San Francisco in the late 1970s, he found in Polk Street “a sense of community and a sense of family I never grew up with.” His family is now finding itself without a home. “There’s a big sense of loss. The more gentrification that’s going on it seems like it’s gotten a little more aggressive, its not as gay friendly...[and] the opportunities are going away, for people who are coming to the city trying to find themselves... It seems like people are forgetting the history of what was there, the whole concept of the first gay pride parade went down that street.”

Joey Plaster recorded Ellison’s story as part of an oral history project designed to document the histories of longtime residents of San Francisco’s traditionally gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT)-friendly Polk Gulch neighborhood. According to Plaster, that particular neighborhood has seen more changes as a result of San Francisco’s escalating gentrification than most.

“When I began this project, I wanted to find out what it means to the identity of San Francisco, and specifically the identity of GLBT movement, that the Polk is changing so dramatically,” says Plaster. “When such a formative GLBT environment changes so quickly, and so drastically, what does that mean for our sense of community?”

A citywide building boom, escalating land values, and skyrocketing rents in the central city have pushed and pulled middle-income small businesses, clubs, and residents to the area. At the same time, the scores of gay bars that formed the backbone of the Polk community have all but closed.

In January 2009, Plaster and his team will explore this question as part of a new exhibit at San Francisco’s GLBT Historical Society entitled “Polk Street: Lives in Transition.” The exhibit will focus on the history of the Polk, from the 1980s to the present, with nods to its celebrated gay rights victories of the 1960s and 70s, by presenting stories from people living in the middle of current changes in the area.

“I think people will be surprised at the richness of what has been lost,” says Plaster. “GLBT communities first articulated their sense of politics and family in neighborhoods like the Polk Gulch. By preserving these personal histories, it’s my hope that we’ll be better equipped to continue to shape our city and community.”

About the GLBT Historical Society – The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS) collects, preserves, and interprets the history of GLBT people and the communities that support them. For more information, visit www.glbthistory.org.

About the “Polk Street: Lives in Transition” Project – The first significant historical study of San Francisco's Polk Gulch neighborhood, this project will produce a collection of oral histories, a series of historical radio documentaries, an exhibit incorporating original photography and audio portraits, a multimedia website and a series of community events. The project is sponsored by the GLBT Historical Society and funded in part from a grant from the California Council for the Humanities. For more information contact Project Director, Joey Plaster at polkstories@gmail.com or visit <http://www.glbthistory.org/PolkProject/>.

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