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THE AUTO ISSUE

Classic Cars and
the Trans Women
Who Love Them

HORTON HEARS A THEY/THEM

New MSU Research
Reveals Unique Nonbinary
Speech Patterns

BARBIE THROUGH A QUEER LENS

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

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Photo: Stephen Herzog

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

It's already been a long year, and you totally deserve a nice night out. It's a good thing, then, that there are so many excellent LGBTQ-affirming options available. You can head out to a fancy dress "MasQueerade" ball or start planning ahead for the annual Big Bash in support of Affirmations. If a live music event is more your speed, don't miss your shot at grabbing Greta Van Fleet tickets or a chance to check out the delightfully weird Alex G in Royal Oak. On the other hand, if your idea of a good time is checking out of reality and into nature, Campit Resort's annual gay camping friends weekend could be just right for wrapping up your 2023 summer fun.



Josh Kiszka. Photo: Facebook

Buy Tickets for Greta Van Fleet

Grab your tickets now for Frankenmuth natives Greta Van Fleet's Sept. 8 show at Little Caesars Arena. The 2022 arena tour completely sold out and ticket sales are hot for this year's Starcatcher World Tour. Not only does the band offer up queer energy that feels directly piped in from the '70s, but lead singer Josh Kiszka recently came out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The singer penned an emotional Instagram post earlier this summer in response to the wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that has swept across the country, including in his current home state of Tennessee. "These issues are especially close to my heart as I've been in a loving, same-sex relationship with my partner for the past 8 years," Kiszka wrote. "Those close to me are well aware, but it's important to me to share publicly."

Sept. 8, 7:30 p.m., Little Caesars Arena (2645 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Tickets at bit.ly/47uEb2b.



Get Dressed Up for a MasQueerade Ball

L.S.D²: The Urban MasQueerade Ball & Drag Show promises a little bit of weird for everyone. Set for Aug. 18 at Planet Ant Theatre and the attached bar, The Ghost Light, promo materials promise a night for LGBTQ+ community and allies where the abnormal will become normal. The party celebrates Planet Ant's ongoing lesbian speed dating events with three DJs, multiple drag performances and a masquerade ball theme. Prizes will be awarded for best masquerade mask and party attire is recommended.

Aug. 18, doors open at 7 p.m., drag performance at 11 p.m., Planet Ant/The Ghost Bar (2320 Caniff St., Hamtramck). More details at bit.ly/45otcpu.



Reserve Tickets for Affirmations Big Bash

Tickets are available now for one of the biggest annual local social events on the LGBTQ+ calendar — Affirmations Big Bash. The event is scheduled for Sept. 23 at General Motors Auditorium. This year, the theme is "Glow Up" and will feature a special menu prepared by Quina "Que" Broden, owner and creator of Detroit's Cooking with Que, the renowned DJ Nouveau, a drag performance and more.

Sept. 23, General Motors Auditorium (460 West Baltimore St., Detroit). Tickets and more info at goaffirmations.org/big-bash.



Go on a Gay Camping Trip

Close out your summer fun with a whole weekend of debauchery dedicated to time in the great outdoors. Saugatuck's Campit Outdoor Resort is celebrating its 40th anniversary Aug. 25-27 with the Midwest Regional Meetup and Gay Camping Friends Weekend. Campers can take place in a host of activities sure to please your inner, outdoor-loving spirit, including a pool party (with blender bar), a drag show game show featuring Muffy Fishbasket, multiple dance parties, body positive yoga, a street party with karaoke and Sunday brunch. Visit campitresort.com to reserve your spot.

Aug. 25-27, Campit Outdoor Resort (6635 118th Ave., Fennville near Saugatuck).



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Alex G. Photo: Facebook

See Alex G in Concert

Expressing theories about Alex G's sexuality is something of a pastime in some internet circles. In fact, you can even find an entire Spotify playlist called "possibly homoerotic Alex G songs." Thus far, the singer-songwriter, who is frequently compared to Elliott Smith and Built to Spill, has kept those cards close to his chest, but he's amassed an eclectic, frequently queer internet following, nonetheless. Catch his latest tour and see what his unique lo-fi indie rock is all about Aug. 30 when he plays an intimate set at the Royal Oak Music Theatre.

Aug. 30, doors 6 p.m. Royal Oak Music Theatre (318 West 4th St., Royal Oak). Tickets at bit.ly/3OwEn8N.

Please check lgbtdetroit.org for the most up-to-date scheduling information.





Horton Hears a They/Them

New Research Out of MSU Suggests Nonbinary People May Have Their Own Language

BY DANI LAMORTE

An old book says that “Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus.” I’ve never read the book, but it must be true. After all, men and women are total and polar opposites. Men wear pants so they don’t tangle their ankles and fall down. Women wear skirts so they are free to engage in interpretive dance. Men have AC chromosomes. Women have DC chromosomes.

Not convinced? Good. Humans are much more complicated than tradwife podcasters might have you believe. Take language, for example. New research by Jack Rechsteiner and Dr. Betsy Sneller from Michigan State University suggests that

nonbinary people — people who don’t understand themselves as men or women — might use language in a way that’s all their own.

Rechsteiner and Sneller interviewed nonbinary individuals and kept track of how they pronounced words that end in -ing: Were they *speaking* or *speakin’*? This might seem like an absurdly small thing to track, but linguists have shown that sayin’ or saying it one way or the other can be associated with your gender. Stereotypically, many white “women” go for the version that confirms the dictionary spelling, while many white “men” are found to be sayin’ things the other way.

Why this association exists is a very complicated question,

but the association itself isn’t too surprising. Society involves a great deal of comparison. For all sorts of reasons (sometimes historical, often troubling), we look around and understand ourselves in contrast to others. How we speak has many influences, and a key influence is how we understand ourselves as similar or different from others. It’s sort of a feedback loop, too. If I think I’m different from you and speak in a way that’s different from you, you’ll begin to hear that difference — even if you’re not consciously aware. The difference becomes meaningful for both of us.

Even when we think something about our behavior is “just biology,” things are often more complicated.

Dr. Sneller explains, “There are also studies that find that little kids tend to reproduce gendered pitch patterns. In other words, little girls tend to have higher voices than little boys, even though there is no physical reason for this [before puberty]. Humans are pro-social beings: we care about what other humans think of us, and we imitate, consciously and unconsciously, other humans whose group we want to belong to.”

Gender is a system of belonging and caveats. When we say “men” do something a certain way, or “women” do something another, we invariably mean that a certain subset of people linked to those categories behave in those certain ways. Some people feel they match those categories well

enough to call themselves men or women. For other people, neither category sounds right. Terminology has shifted over recent decades, but these people who don’t hear themselves in the words “man” or “woman” are often described today as being nonbinary.

As a linguistics student, researcher Jack Rechsteiner heard professors discussing how men and women spoke, but there was little discussion of how people outside those categories spoke. Rechsteiner, along with his graduate advisor, Dr. Sneller, wanted to change that. The team gathered eight nonbinary speakers (seven white, one Black) in the MSU area and interviewed each for roughly one to two hours.

Then, the researchers counted each time an interviewee pronounced a word ending in -ing the “standard” way (imagine it said by Julie Andrews) or the “nonstandard” way (Roseanne Barr?). Remember, among many American English speakers, it’s more common for white women to use the standard version while men use the nonstandard.

What Rechsteiner and Sneller found was that nonbinary speakers tended to use the “standard” pronunciation, no matter what gender was assigned to the speaker at birth. In other words, these nonbinary speakers weren’t using language in a way that split them into talking “like men” or “like women.” Instead, they used -ing in a way that doesn’t neatly map onto stereotypically gendered speech.

Rechsteiner and Sneller based their work on earlier research by Chantal Gratton. In 2016, Gratton published a paper which argued that nonbinary speakers may change their pronunciation of -ing in order to avoid being misgendered. When in comfortable, familiar settings, Gratton’s research participants used the standard and nonstandard pronunciations in roughly equal amounts. When they were interviewed in a less-controlled, more public setting, however, each speaker used more of the pronunciation which was not associated with their gender assigned at birth. For example, if a nonbinary person was concerned about being erroneously perceived as a man, they might use the standard -ing pronunciation (associated with women’s speech) in order to disrupt that perception. Gratton explains the difference in behavior as a reaction to the perceived threat of being misgendered. Simply put, people might use speech to disrupt a possible identity as much as they use it to construct an identity.

Building on Gratton’s work, Rechsteiner and Sneller tried to keep their interview setting consistent to avoid triggering the participants’ fear of being misgendered. What they found is participants tended to use the standard -ing pronunciation most of the time — regardless of their gender assigned at birth. Additionally, even talking about gender didn’t seem to change the speakers’ behavior in this regard.

While Gratton’s nonbinary participants tended to use both the standard and nonstandard -ing when comfortable, Rechsteiner and Sneller’s participants tended toward the standard version alone. There are a few reasons this might be, regional dialect differences among them, but overall both studies emphasize that nonbinary speakers may be developing novel approaches to using small parts of language.

So, does this mean that there’s a nonbinary way to talk? Not quite. In Rechsteiner and Sneller’s study, they define “nonbinary” based on how their participants define the term: “identities which are not captured by the dichotomy of cis or trans female-male binaries as well as identities which resist the label of any gender at all.” Just as “man” and “woman” are full of caveats, “nonbinary” can mean many different things. Rechsteiner and Sneller’s work doesn’t describe how nonbinary people

everywhere talk, but instead describes how a small group of connected individuals talk.

Sociolinguists use the term “communities of practice” to describe these groups of people who share time and space and who work together to make meaning in the world. Let’s say you’re part of a queer South Asian Muslim organization in a big American city. You get together regularly for religious study and holidays. You share life news with each other, spend time in each other’s homes. Sure, you have big “demographic” things in common — being urbanites, part of a religious minority, queer. What might connect you more strongly, though, is the amount of time you spend together and the kinds of meanings you try to sort out together: What does it mean to be Muslim and queer? What makes someone a Muslim who belongs in your community? What’s the right way to live as a queer person of color in the world? Compare this to other people you see regularly but casually (bus drivers, cashiers), or people you see “intensely” but infrequently (teachers, therapists). People in your communities of practice are a unique overlap of quantity/quality. As a result, the way your community of practice speaks may begin to reflect how you see yourselves as similar to/different from groups and identities elsewhere in society.

For the participants in Rechsteiner and Sneller’s research, they’re spending time together and negotiating how to exist in America when you don’t quite fit the dominant gender categories. How do you help people understand you, and should you even try? How do you stay safe while being open about who you are? Why do you feel like you’re not a man or a woman, when so many people seem comfortable with those categories? Along the way, you’ll be sorting out how your nonbinary experience makes you similar to or different from people who call themselves men, women or neither. Your use of language may begin to follow the answers and attitudes you develop.

That link-up between self-understanding and language is what research by Gratton, Rechsteiner and Sneller tracks. Sociolinguists learned a long time ago that men don’t talk like this, and women don’t talk like that. White upper-class men from New Jersey who grew up in Italian-American homes and who are in a fraternity talk like this. And Filipino-American middle class nonbinary people from central Texas who grew up in evangelical homes and who are part of lesbian book clubs talk like that. We have many understandings of ourselves that we’re constantly trying to highlight or hide, celebrate or subdue. Language is a key part of those negotiations with ourselves.

More than tracking a curiosity, Rechsteiner hopes this kind of research will help others understand nonbinary experiences. “Any research that can validate non-conforming identities is great research to ensure understanding of marginalized and targeted groups.”

So, remember: However you speak, there are people out there who want to hear you.



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Susan Crocker (left) with Rachel Crandall Crocker at the 2023 Ferndale Pride festival. Photo: Jason A. Michael

Michigan Is Better Than Ever For Trans People Thanks, in Part, to These Two Women

Rachel Crandall Crocker and Susan Crocker on Three Decades of LGBTQ+ Activism

BY DAWN WOLFE

When Rachel Crandall Crocker and Susan Crocker met in the '90s, there were so few organizations for transgender people that they had to start one on their own. Trans people's fight to change the gender markers on their Michigan drivers' licenses or birth certificates hadn't yet begun. It was perfectly legal to deny housing to trans people or to fire them, as Rachel learned when she was promptly fired after coming out to her employer.

The times, as they say, have definitely done some changing.

Today – at least, in Michigan – not only is it much easier for trans people to align their birth

certificates and drivers' licenses with their true gender, two years ago Michigan's Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson ruled that nonbinary people can use the letter "X" on their licenses. (Making changes to birth certificates is still overly complicated, but at least the state doesn't require people to undergo surgery anymore.) Trans people are also now protected under the expanded Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, which Gov. Whitmer signed in March.

Both nationwide and in Michigan, there are more organizations for transgender Americans than ever. Transgender Michigan itself has chapters all over the state, and its budget has grown well beyond the "shoe-string operation" Susan says it was in the beginning. This month,

Transgender Michigan is celebrating the 24th anniversary of Transgender Michigan Pride in the Park. The Aug. 26 event, which features a vendor area and a bring-your-own picnic, is a chance to socialize and learn about local organizations and businesses serving the Michigan transgender community.

While it would be impossible to name just one person or organization as being responsible for the relative explosion of awareness of transgender people and issues over the past few decades, Rachel and Susan are two undisputed rock stars of the movement here in Michigan. Theirs is also a seriously effective partnership. Rachel, a social worker and gregarious extrovert, is a people person who handles most of the human side

of Transgender Michigan, including the lion's share of conversations with journalists. Susan, an accountant, ensures the technical issues involved in running a statewide organization go smoothly.

When it comes to the progress trans folks have made in Michigan in particular, Rachel and Susan must be recognized, at the very least, as two of the people who have made that progress possible. They have also had an international impact courtesy of Rachel's creation of Transgender Day of Visibility in 2009. Locally, Rachel was honored in June as a Game Changer by the Detroit Tigers, the Detroit Red Wings and Comerica Bank.

See **Rachel Crandall Crocker**, page 23

How the Disc Golf Pro Tour Tried to Bar a Trans Woman From Competing And Why They (Sort of) Reversed Course

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

The sport of disc golf is far more than fancy Frisbee. In two separate divisions of the Disc Golf Pro Tour — female and mixed — players compete for purses that can reach over \$100,000. DGPT, the official pro tour of the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA), found itself in hot water last month when the organization tried to “solve the problem” of a transgender woman who had twice sued for being barred from competing in Female Professional Open (FPO) events.

On July 14, the DGPT released a statement concerning the remainder of the 2023 season. Five FPO competitions, including one held annually at Kensington Metropark in Milford, Michigan, would be canceled. The DGPT sought venues in other states where the likelihood of being sued by trans woman Natalie Ryan was less likely.

Previously, Ryan fought for and won the right to compete with cis women at tournaments in California and Minnesota. Ryan’s battle for equal rights stems from the PDGA Policy on Eligibility for Gender-Based Divisions, updated earlier this year. It’s a detailed document focused on a menu of variables including, among other things, hormone replacement therapy, testosterone levels and gender-affirming surgery and is meant to establish that trans women are not eligible for FPO competition unless they transitioned before puberty. It’s no coincidence the update that would exclude Ryan was announced the season after she started winning tournaments. Ryan was devastated by the news.

“I’ll be honest,” Ryan said. “I cried myself to sleep a few nights. I thought I was kind of going to walk away from the game entirely. And I was very lost at that moment.”

Ultimately, Ryan rallied. She filed a lawsuit contending that the new PDGA policy violates her civil rights under California’s Unruh Civil Rights Act.

The DGPT is transparent about its motives. “These adjustments have been made in order to protect competitive fairness in the FPO division and to limit financial burden

in locations where the PDGA Policy on Eligibility for Gender-Based Divisions may become the subject of last-minute litigation harmful to the tour,” a statement reads. Further, it expresses concern for maintaining the “operational viability” of the FPO division.

Erin Knott, executive director of Equality Michigan, said that while she doesn’t know the details of Ryan’s predicament, Ryan would



Natalie Ryan. Photo: Instagram

likely have had a legal path forward if she were to sue to compete in the state, under Michigan’s newly amended Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

“The Disc Golf Professional Tour [is] basically making the argument right now that excluding trans women is to protect the women’s sport,” Knott said. “But in this case, it’s my opinion that they’re completely removing all women. So you’re not protecting the women’s sport. You’re basically saying that this sport is not inclusive to anyone but cis men.”

Knott and Ryan both noted the lack of evidence that trans women have any biomedical advantage over cis women when it comes to sports competition.

Ten days after the original announcement, the DGPT abruptly switched course.

A new designation, the United Series, was created specifically for both trans and cis women who wish to compete in FPO



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MSU FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

Barbie Through a *Queer* Lens

Photographer Stephen Herzog Has Captured Barbie in a Lake and, Yes, in a Toaster

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Photographer Stephen Herzog, who performs as drag queen Barbie Q where he lives in Minneapolis, had an epiphany about Barbie when he was a 20-year-old undergrad student at the University of Michigan. At the time, drinks at a friend's Ann Arbor apartment led to childhood thoughts about Barbie, when she was "sort of forbidden" while Herzog was growing up in Flint.

Herzog, who graduated in 1987 from U-M with a bachelor of fine

arts degree, remembers finding Barbie irresistible throughout his coming-of-age years, but didn't own a Barbie until college. He finally got his hands on one when that same Ann Arbor friend came to Herzog's dorm room with a Barbie and said, "I think you really need this," as Herzog recalls.

His collection grew from there, with almost two dozen more Barbie dolls that were either gifts, the legs fully intact, or Barbies with missing parts from thrift stores.

"Even though I had four older sisters, there were no Barbie dolls

in my house because Barbie's body was 'too developed,'" Herzog says. "My dad thought she was too sexy, and we were pretty conservative Catholics."

With a new movie about Barbie that has been wildly successful, surpassing the \$1 billion mark in global box-office ticket sales and becoming the highest grossing live-action film directed by one woman, Herzog certainly isn't alone in his decades-long infatuation. Now 58 years old, he's been taking photos of Barbie as if she exists in a David Lynch-meets-Todd Haynes film as

recently as last year. His stylized photos of Barbie shot in black-and-white and deeply saturated color, he notes, are intended to evoke mood and humanity.

"I think my imagination could run pretty easily with a figurative object like that," he says. "So the idea of her in different scenarios came pretty easily to me. But I don't know why I started photographing her. I developed a pretty strong fascination with Barbie dolls. And I think some of the forbiddenness of Barbie dolls too made me cherish her a little bit. And then after I

came out, I think I just found her to be sort of powerful."

His experiences with Barbie is what he wished was captured in the new "Barbie" film — gay boys who develop a secret relationship with Barbie.

"That's what I had," he says.

Herzog's bond with Barbie since boyhood is demonstrated in his extensive collection of photography taken over 30-plus years. Here, in his own words, he reflects on a smattering of them.



I don't think I have a real great academic explanation for what each of these images means. I think I have more subliminal thoughts about them. Here, there's a Barbie that I had with no legs, and it looks as though she's wiped a little spot of steam off the window to see through the window, and it just looks like a still from a film.



That's the same original Barbie doll. She's in a lot of them. This was experimental. That's on a mirror. There's just a mirror in the bathtub. I think a lot of these, I just don't have a solid conclusion about what they mean, but hope that the viewer is affected by it and finds their own specific meaning. It was shot in a bathtub and with the mirror slightly underwater. She was also on this lime green piece of vinyl that's behind her. And yeah, I gave her that haircut.



That's more recent. That's only a year or so ago. And I have a lot of photos with other types of dolls too that I've taken in nature. This is about race too, a little bit. That's a Black Barbie submerged under water. I like the idea of the white Barbie sort of reflecting. They're connecting, but there's a barrier too.

That's in a lake, actually, that image. It's up in northern Minnesota, about 15 miles from Canada, up near the boundary waters. [My husband and I] have a cabin. I want to do stuff that I think will invoke a reaction, and if someone finds real queer energy into it, that's great.



This was at some friend's house, and that is a Barbie head, a hairstyling head. I titled this "Tell Me a Story." I was taking a lot of photographs that were long exposure at the time. So with the camera on a tripod in a dark space, I would light the image selectively with a penlight flashlight. With cellophane over the camera lens, I lit that Barbie, the lower left part that's pink. And then I lit her face without any cellophane, and Susan, the person, a little without the cellophane.

I was painting with light. I prided myself on making some really eerie or surreal things that the film really saw. I think I wanted some sort of intimate connection. And Susan had more of a boy's haircut back in the day. So yeah, there's a queerness to it. There's more of a lesbian story here. They are in a bed, and I was probably encouraging [Susan] to engage with Barbie as if they are connecting.

See **Barbie Project**, page 22

Beauty and Grace Can Be a Death Sentence in a Culture Steeped in Toxic Masculinity



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

When I was in high school my twin sister and our friends and I liked to “parking lot dance party” — and,

yes, I am using that entire phrase as a verb because we didn’t GO to parking lot dance parties. We created them. The rules were silly and simple. My sister or I would drive our big red mini van (nicknamed the “Big Red Bitch”) to a parking lot. Everyone would pile out and we’d open all of the doors and the back hatch and blast whatever song was playing. Everybody danced for at least one full song and then we’d pile back in and drive to a different parking lot and repeat. I remember that the local Big Lots parking lot was a favorite because it was big and not very crowded.

This was pre-internet so we did not take videos of these events and put them online. It was just harmless fun.

I think of my time parking lot dance partying when I read about the murder of O’Shae Sibley, a man who was stabbed to

voguing to a Beyoncé song. A group of men approached them and, according to The Advocate, shouted “antigay slurs at Sibley and his friends.”

A fight broke out and Sibley was stabbed in the abdomen.

The person who stabbed him? A 17-year-old. A kid the same age I was during my

people, there is also a dramatic uptick in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric from Republican leaders and religious conservatives across the country. We’ve got conservative lawmakers trying to ban drag shows under the guise that drag performers are sexual predators against children. We’ve got a Supreme Court that just ruled that it’s OK for a business to refuse to serve LGBTQ+ people. The state of Florida is hellbent on making sure that schools don’t teach anything about gender or sexuality (or about Black history, for that matter). Sibley’s murder cannot be divorced from this context.

“There are reports that Sibley was voguing to a track from Beyoncé’s ‘Renaissance’ album, music from the biggest pop star in the world celebrating Black queer people,” Darian Aaron, GLAAD director of local news, U.S. South, said in a statement. “O’Shae Sibley had the audacity to live without the restraints of patriarchy and toxic masculinity, embracing freedom and joy. He should still be alive to celebrate all that made him great and inspired others to live their truth.”

Instead, he’s dead. Because his dancing made a group of young men feel threatened. They could not stand to see a man who was not trapped in the same toxic prisons they themselves lived in. He was beautiful. So they killed him. Because they had been taught that beauty is weakness. They had

been lied to. And those lies were deadly.

And yet these lies get repeated over and over in the media under the guise of balanced coverage.

“GLAAD urges media to challenge harmful rhetoric, report on LGBTQ lives accurately and inclusively, and elevate our humanity and right to live in peace and safety,” Aaron continued. “Politicians spewing lies and proposing policies filled with disinformation, and media repeating their false and dangerous rhetoric unchallenged, are creating an incredibly hostile environment that endangers all LGBTQ people and all queer people of color.”

In fact, it endangers everyone. You don’t have to be LGBTQ+ to be in danger. All you have to do is to not conform to the rigid gender roles conservatives consider sacrosanct.

“We must never believe that anti-LGBTQ — rhetoric is ‘just politics’ — it’s hate and it has devastating consequences,” Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson tweeted. “O’Shae should still be here today. He should still be dancing and laughing and having fun with his friends. I’m sending so much love to his friends and family.”

I want to believe that love will win over hate. I have to believe it. The alternative is too much to bear. But some days it’s really fucking hard.



They could not stand to see a man who was not trapped in the same toxic prisons they themselves lived in. He was beautiful. So they killed him.

death when he and his friends were dancing in the parking lot of a Mobil gas station on the night of July 29.

Various reports state that Sibley, a professional dancer, and his friends were

parking lot dance party days.

Granted, Sibley’s death would be horrific no matter the age of his killer. But the fact that it was a kid adds another layer of horror.

At a time when younger generations are increasingly more accepting of LGBTQ+

How Gay Is Cedar Point?



BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Cedar Point. “America’s Roller Coast.” I’ve been making the two-hour trek down to Sandusky, Ohio to go to the beloved

amusement park since I was a wee lad. I feel practically ancient, dear readers, when I confess that when I first started going, the biggest rollercoasters in the park were the Gemini and the Corkscrew. In fact, I remember very clearly when Demon Drop was the newest ride in the park. That was 1983. I also recall when, in 2009, the ride was dismantled and transferred to Cedar Point’s smaller sister park, Dorney Park, located in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Do I feel old? You bet your season pass I do.

But I digress. The point of this column is not how decrepit I am; it’s how the park has evolved. Ten years ago this month, in 2013, Cedar Point canceled a planned wedding contest when a gay couple, Scott Kenimond and Eric Morrison from Akron, was denied entrance and a protest was organized in response.

Cedar Point justified the cancellation saying the contest had become political and “Cedar Point does not take any official stance on political issues,” according to a statement the park released at the time. But Morrison didn’t buy it. “I’m disappointed they would choose to go that way rather than stand behind their LGBT community,” he told the Cleveland News. “Ultimately, they’re playing it safe. But it’s a cowardly choice.”

Marriage equality, of course, became the law of the land just two

short years later, the result of a much more balanced Supreme Court at the time. Of course, these days the infirm and spiteful Clarence Thomas is suggesting that decision should be revisited. But this is all just a bit of factual background and I digress yet again.

Cedar Point has been known for years for its Gay Day, which interestingly enough takes place every year on Father’s Day. The first one actually took place on June 14, 1969. The day is completely unofficial and is neither recognized nor condemned by the park. Several online posts have found dads disgruntled by the fact they had to share the park with daddies —

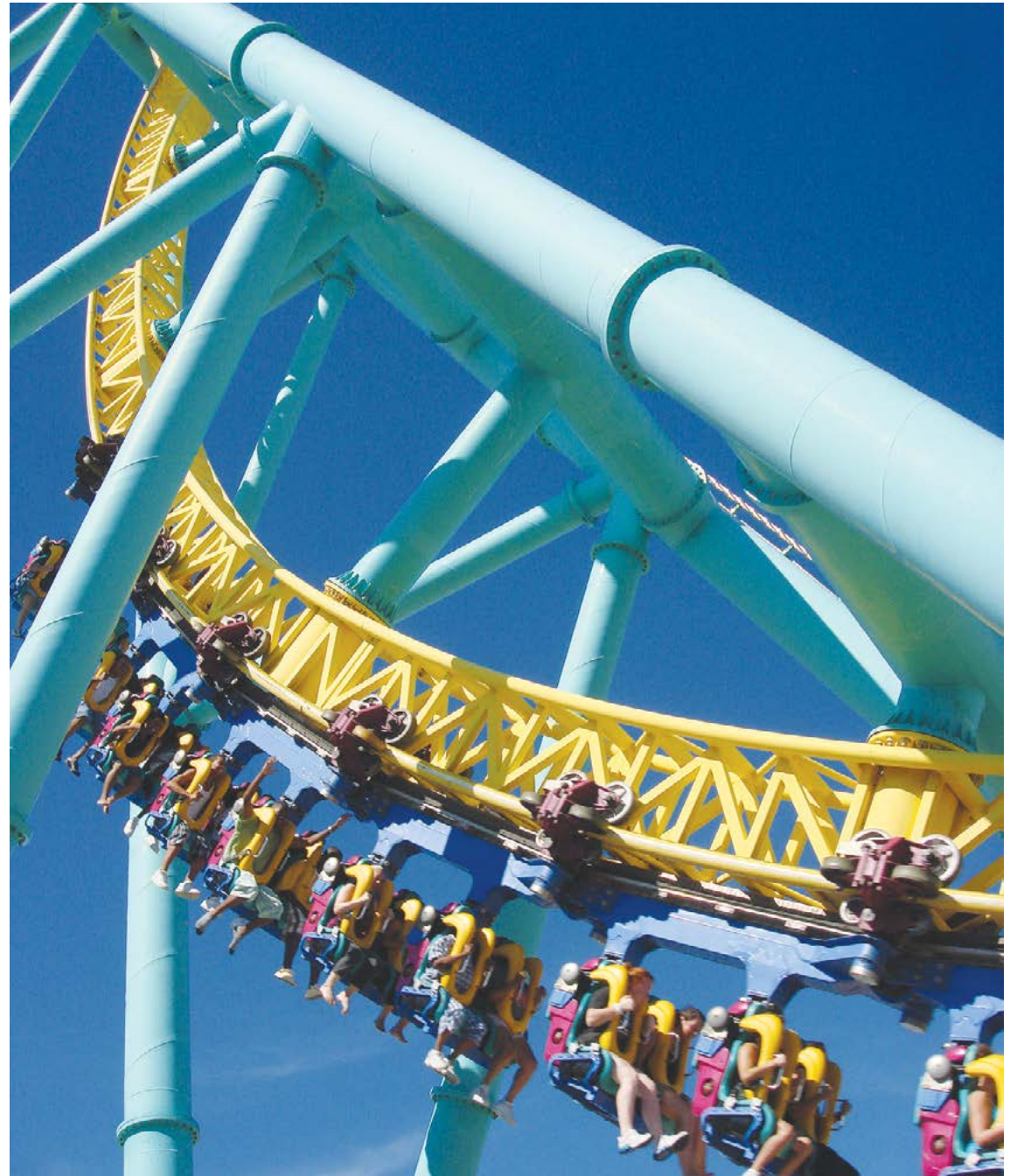
“Ten years ago this month, in 2013, Cedar Point canceled a planned wedding contest when a gay couple, Scott Kenimond and Eric Morrison from Akron, was denied entrance and a protest was organized in response.”

and cubs — on their special day.

So, 10 years after the marriage contest bruhaha, and just months after Walt Disney World lost its right to self-govern after taking on Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and his “Don’t Say Gay” policy, where does Cedar Point stand on queer rights? While no one on my very youthful Facebook friends list has worked at Cedar Point in the last 10 years, Judith Flowers, a queer ally, worked at the park for a few months just after the wedding mess.

“I believe Cedar Point to be LGBTQ+ friendly as it relates to their employees,” she said. “I saw a lot of gay men and women working for the company. The dorms appeared to be a safe haven for a lot of folks who left home early and needed a start or experience at something new.”

Unlike another of its sister parks, Kings Island, north of Cincinnati, there



is still no officially authorized Gay Day at Cedar Point. (Kings Island hosts a Pride Night at the Park in September.) Cedar Point also does not advertise in any queer media.

“I personally think that it’s a huge mistake that Cedar Point [and its parent company] Cedar Fair doesn’t have a strong presence in the LGBTQ+ market,” said Cindy Gunderson of

Crowbar, one of Sandusky’s most popular queer bars. “They absolutely should have Gay Days. ... They are a regular sponsor of Sandusky Pride, which is at least something.”

Yes, that’s something. And probably all we’re gonna get for now. So I guess it’s safe for you (rollercoaster) size queens to continue to enjoy the park. But if you do happen to go on Gay/

Daddy Day, please remember to dress appropriately. Collars and leashes optional.

Jason A. Michael is a senior staff writer for *Between The Lines* and *Pride Source Media Group*. He has been writing *BTL* since 1999. Jason is also an *Essence* bestselling author. He may be reached at jason@pridesource.com.

These Michigan Auto Enthusiasts Love Their Cars

They Just Happen to Be Trans Women



BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

The prevalence of transgender women among car enthusiasts is hard to gauge. But if the two who sat down with BTL are any indication, it's time to gear up and remove any real or imagined barriers.

Raising Hell

Kelli Lin Kraft has been to hell and back — in more ways than one. Her black '69 Nova, Hellraiser, was purchased in Hell, Michigan in 2001. It was likely headed for the junk

heap, but Kraft rescued the rusted out Chevy and rebuilt it from the ground up.

"It was in really bad shape," said Kraft, a transgender woman living in Dearborn. "So I stripped it down, cut all the bad metal away and put [in] brand new metal. Basically, everything's been replaced on that car, except for the roof skin." Kraft continued with the specs. "The Hellraiser has a 383 stroker motor in it. It has 500 horses. It has a racing trans in it. It has a 12-bolt posi rear end in it with 4.10 gears."

A skeleton, Private Malone, sits permanently in the backseat.

"The kids just rave over it," Kraft said of

Hellraiser. With "2 Hell & Back" splashed across the windshield and an abundance of skull artistry, "It gets a lot of attention."

It wouldn't be until 2015 that Hellraiser was in the award-winning condition it is today. Not only did Kraft have a car to restore, she had her own personal and physical struggles to endure. First was the breakup of her marriage. Then, following a spinal injection mishap, Kraft spent years recovering from paralysis. And she would be debilitated once again following an accident with a drunk driver.

"The government really kind of screwed me out of everything," Kraft said, about her battle

for disability benefits. "I'm a survivor. I've had so much happen in my life. Everybody says I should write a book."

Kraft credits Hellraiser with motivating her to regain her health. "I love cruising," she said. "It's enjoyment for me, especially going from where I couldn't walk and all that. It brought me back. It gave me that hope."

The Wanderers are a Downriver car club where Kraft found community. But after almost a lifetime, when she finally made the decision to come out publicly as Kelli last fall, Kraft was ready to give up the auto life for good.

Shortly after coming out on her Facebook

page, one of the women in Kraft's car club hit her up with an offer.

"She's like, 'So are we going to see you this year?'" Kraft said. "And I'm like, 'No, I wasn't planning on it. I kind of was going to give the car thing up because I don't think I'll fit in.' And she's like, 'Girl, you need to bring that car. Anybody that don't like it here and can't accept you don't have to be here. We are a club that we accept all people, all right?'"

Kraft couldn't have imagined how transitioning would transform her outlook on life. She said she's sure taking hormones saved her from suicide. Today, "I love myself and I love my life. I couldn't have it any other way other than I wish I would have done this long ago." Over time, she slimmed down from 325 pounds. Formerly camera shy, Kraft now calls herself a selfie queen.

Kraft said she feels accepted and comfortable. She enjoys the attention she gets when she's cruising in Hellraiser.

"I get the looks and some people come up to me and they're like, 'Oh, did you buy that car from that guy?'" Kraft said. "And I'm like, 'That guy is me.'"

The Real Rosie the Riveter

Cassandra Valentine loves her job. She's a tool and die maker for Ford Motor Company, which means she helps manufacture metal car parts for Ford vehicles. It's not just physical work — it requires extreme precision.

"I don't consider my job a job," Valentine said. "I consider my job more of a hobby because I get to create things from scratch." In her department at Woodhaven Stamping, she's able to create her own continuous improvement projects. "It's satisfying," she added. "It's

one of those things that you step back and you say, 'I did that.'"

Valentine, who lives in Trenton, has been with Ford for almost five years. But she got her start in tool and die long ago. In 1989, at a time when she had been laid off and was unsure of what career path to take, Valentine's father brought her into his tool and die shop



Kelli Kraft (left) and Cassandra Valentine, Courtesy photos

in Belleville where she completed the training program and has stuck with the profession ever since.

Valentine is a huge proponent of women in the skilled trades.

"People in general just need to think that they could do anything as long as they put their minds to it," Valentine said. "In fact, when I started my transition, I had a lady come up to me. She says, 'Can a woman get into tool and die?' And my answer was, 'Absolutely. [It's like] most things in the world — you don't use your genitals as a work tool. You use your hands and your mind.'"

When Valentine interviewed for her position, it was just two weeks before the "bomb" went off in her head that told her, "I'm not who I think I am." She told Human Resources she would

be transitioning. Following a delay due to construction at the plant, "I was able to transition and walk into Ford Motor Company," Valentine said. Later she would learn from a coworker a meeting had been convened to announce the arrival of the new transgender team member and warn folks they could be terminated for saying something wrong.



Rightly, Valentine made her displeasure known to her higher ups to ensure trans employees wouldn't be outed like that in the future.

Rosie the Riveter is an icon to Valentine, who considers herself a modern-day Rosie. "If it wasn't for the Rosies in World War II supplying munitions for our troops, taking care of our country here in the homeland, we would have lost the war," she said.

With that inspiration, in March, Valentine created an elaborate Rosie display at work to celebrate Women's Month and Rosie the Riveter Day.

Women in the skilled trades should remember their Rosie roots, Valentine asserts. "Those are the people that paved the way for all of us women in

See **Classic Cars**, page 17

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Remembering Pee-wee
Puzzle on page 25

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Stephanie Beatriz in "Twisted Metal." Photo: Skip Bolen/Peacock

STEPHANIE BEATRIZ IN THE FAST LANE

'Twisted Metal' Actress on Bringing Her Authentic Self to Video Game-Inspired Role

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

What could be gay about a vehicular combat video game that's now a TV show, you ask? Well, here's what: In "Twisted Metal," the new Peacock series based on the PlayStation game involving machine guns, ballistic projectiles and a killer clown, we get openly bisexual "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" and "Encanto" actress Stephanie Beatriz, who tells me she's always bringing her authentic self to her roles.

Beatriz's part in "Twisted Metal" as Quiet, an instinctually driven car thief, is no exception. That clown, meanwhile, isn't just any clown — this one, clad in a harness, calls other men "puppy." He'd be very at home in a gay leather bar.

If you're not already hooked by the prospect of a potentially kinky clown and Beatriz as an "absolute badass" bisexual, there is a plot too: "Twisted Metal" takes place in an apocalyptic wasteland where a milkman with amnesia, John Doe (Anthony Mackie), will die if he doesn't deliver a mysterious package. With Quiet, the duo embarks on a sinister mission through Las Vegas.

In our recent interview, Beatriz reflected on Quiet's sexuality, how she felt about this

year's Pride season and why she got over being pigeonholed into bisexual acting roles.

How has your Pride season been?

This one, it's been a hard one. It's been weird. There's a fear that's kind of raging across the United States of America, and it really is — all of this is just based in fear of the unknown of change, of things that are different, of other people that you don't know. But the fear is attached to legislation that's moving quickly through the systems that are in place, and that's really terrifying as a queer person. It's really heart-wrenching to read about the violence that our community is suffering through. And at the same time, I'm still hopeful. I have to hold onto the hope.

The flag for Pride does keep shifting and changing. I think that's great. And yet at its core, it's just a symbolic rainbow of all these different parts of us together. And that rainbow is such a symbol of hope to me. And I really hope that as we keep moving forward, as humanity kind of keeps moving forward, that we can keep pushing.

Those of us that are in the queer community have to keep pushing because we are not seen

as equal in so many places. And this is a hard one, but I also went out and bought a dress that was the bisexual flag and wore it proudly everywhere that I could, just so that people would say, "Oh, I love your dress." And I'd say, "Thanks. It's the bi flag." And that would start a conversation. So yeah, I'm proud. But this has been a particularly hard one. But it just means we have to double down. We've just got to double down.

I love that you wore that dress. What I do as a queer person is process the current moment through my work as a writer and editor for LGBTQ+ press. But as an actor, how do you do that? Where do you go with the work when things are very hard as a queer person?

I mean, that's such a good question because of my form of work. I mean, for example, "Twisted Metal," we shot that last year. We shot it last summer, and it hasn't been seen yet. No spoilers, but I think I brought my authentic self to that character. You can take that however you want to take it. I think right now, because I'm not currently working on a project this second, I've got to do some sort

of other creative expression. I don't know what that is right now in this moment, but I will say that one of the things I'm doing in my own life is that I am trying to instill in my kid that this world is full of lots of kinds of people and that it's your job as a human to foster and grow empathy for others, particularly those in the queer community, particularly the people that are more vulnerable than you in the world. And I don't know if my kid's going to grow up to be queer or not, but this Pride, this particular Pride, I bought a lot of books for my kid.

Maybe it's time to write a children's book, then.

Maybe. That's a great idea, actually. I mean, I have been reading a million children's books, and some of them are not great.

What can you say about Quiet and what you bring to that role when it comes to authenticity?

I can say that she is an absolute badass. She works mainly from impulse and instinct. She doesn't always think things through. That's sometimes a good thing and a bad thing. And

See **Stephanie Beatriz**, page 24



Cassandra Valentine's Mustang, named Ruby. Courtesy photo

◀ **Classic Cars**

Continued from page 15

the working industries in general,” she said. Outside of work, Valentine is an artist and a musician who enjoys cruising in her dark blue '67 Mustang, Eleanor. Her day-to-day car is a red 2019 Mustang fittingly named Ruby. Reflecting on whether she experiences transphobia in the workplace, Valentine said

she hadn't noticed it outright, but expressed a frustration familiar to many women. “There are some times where I feel as though I'm not taken serious enough and that I have to prove myself,” Valentine said. “It's kind of like the story of time, where women have had to fight for their independence, the right to vote, the right to work. And there's always that individual, that one male individual that has that attitude of, ‘You don't know anything. You're a girl.’”



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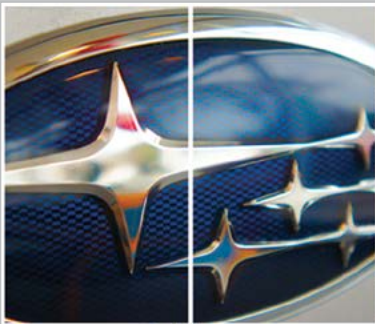
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Vroom, Vroom, Barbie

Which Barbie Vehicle Would You Pick in Real Life?

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

I don't know about you, but this Barbie drives a no-nonsense Subaru Outback while casually pondering the evolution of her sexual orientation in between running the kids all over town. As one does in their 40s.

A few decades ago, though, when it was time to choose a vehicle for my first Barbie, I had to have that Pepto pink Corvette from the mid-'80s. My childhood Barbie time focused on escaping the norm, and sending Barbie, Skipper and sometimes Ken off to the beach in a sexy convertible was the exact opposite of summers in landlocked Southern Ohio.

So far, there isn't a Barbie Outback on the market (I'd still pay too much money for that, if you're paying attention Subaru and Mattel), but over the years, the list of Barbie vehicles has greatly expanded from the first model, a classic 1962 Austin-Healey 3000 Mk II. Today, in addition to sleek sports cars and trusty Jeeps, Barbie can hit the town on a bike, hop aboard a boat, set up for the weekend in a camper (or glamp), hit the warehouse store in her minivan or fly her own plane. It's all up to your big, beautiful imagination.

Thanks to the new movie,



imagining what Barbie and Ken might be like in real life (or what you might be like as a Barbie or Ken) has never been more enticing. When Ken came down that spiral slide, it was 1987 all over again for all kinds of grownup kids.

What if you could walk into the Barbie dealership and pick out a real-life version of your favorite vehicle today? Tap into your Barbiecore aesthetic and go shopping with me.

The Barbie Bike: Mackinac Island, Anyone?

Maybe you're the kind of Barbie who prefers a quiet, car-free vacation that is Pure Michigan all the way. The Barbie bicycles, especially the ones complete with flower basket and safety helmet, have your number. You're into the simple pleasures of good company and fresh air, and your calf muscles are reaping the benefits.



The Barbie Scooter: Oo, La La

Picture it. Sicily. 1981. Your Barbie locks streaming behind you as you cruise through the public square, a hint of salt air and warm basil in the wind. Maybe you'll get Ken a sidecar, but ultimately, you're a self-possessed Barbie in Charge who knows about fashion and being effortlessly cool.



encompassing everything from a kayak to an enormous cruise ship, but it's the party boat options that truly encapsulate what daily Barbieland

life feels like. There's plenty of room for a select, exclusive clique and their tiny, tiny swimwear. Add some tunes and good lighting, and what else do you really need? Does this boat even leave the dock? Does it matter? As long as the photos look hot on Instagram,

you're in.

The Barbie Boat: Sexy Babies Only

The Barbie floating vehicle lineup is surprisingly representative,

The Barbie Camper: Go On, Get Dirty

Barbie camping options are some of the more hilariously unrealistic

versions of the "Barbie does stuff you might do in real life" concept, but they are among the cutest. So what if it's hard to imagine Barbie actually fishing up her own trout, gutting it on the checkerboard tablecloth and roasting dinner over an open flame? Barbie camping is for those of us who like the idea of camping — maybe we'd love to tell everyone we "went camping" last weekend even though "camping" really meant sleeping under an air conditioning vent in an RV versus sleeping under the stars. And hey, that's OK. It takes all kinds of Barbies.

The Barbie Van: A Place for Everything

Among the more sensible offerings in the Barbie vehicle catalog are the Barbie vans. Maybe you're old school cool with a touch of pragmatism — if so, the 2002 VW Microbus would fit the bill nicely. Strap in the kid, pump up some ironically cool alt-indie pop and do the monthly grocery trip. This vehicle surely comes equipped with a natural homing device aimed directly at the nearest Costco, right?

The Barbie Sports Car: Kid-Free Classic

Whether you've emptied the nest or never filled the nest to begin with, it's hard to go wrong with a classic Barbie sports car. If it's fast and sporty, there's a good chance Mattel has created a Barbie version of your favorite, from Maseratis to Thunderbirds to Corvettes to Ferraris. It's the quintessential Barbie mover: stylish, impractical, fun and always ready to follow the road wherever it leads.



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Good News From the Michigan Supreme Court for LGBTQ+ Parents

Local Legal Experts Thrilled with Ruling

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

LGBTQ+ attorneys, their clients and allies across the state are cheering after the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that

unmarried parents will soon be able to seek parenting rights for their nonbiological children. Previously, in Michigan, the parent-child relationship was recognized solely within the context of legal marriage, something unavailable to same-sex couples before the 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

“That was a really good decision and man, it’s been a long time coming, this issue of equal parenthood for LGBTQ parents,” said

Jay Kaplan, the attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBT Project, about the case in question, *Pueblo v. Haas*. “Ever since I started working at the ACLU back in 2001, we’ve tried to make headway, and now was the right time.”

Kaplan cited the composition of the court and other recent decisions as factors. What’s more, he and others are excited about what else the landmark decision could mean for the LGBTQ+ community, even while some

are calling it a narrow ruling.

Michigan had long been discriminatory in its application of the equitable parent doctrine. The 1999 decision *Van v. Zahorik*, which involved a cisgender heterosexual couple, left nonbiological parents without a legal leg to stand on. And it entirely shut out same-sex couples who were unable to marry.

“The long and short of this all means is if you were in a same-sex relationship that ended before the marriage equality

decision, and you can provide, through the preponderance of evidence, that you would have gotten married — that this was a relationship that appears to be a marriage — then you will be able to have standing to request custody as an equitable parent,” Kaplan said.

Kaplan pointed out this decision benefits a relatively small group of people because it’s been eight years since same-sex couples were permitted to marry. For families where children and parents have lost contact for that many years, the damage may be irreparable.

Lake v. Putnam in 2016 was the first time the court entertained the equitable parent doctrine as it applies to same-sex individuals who could not marry in Michigan. And if they did marry elsewhere, Michigan would not recognize the marriage. “Seven years ago, when Lake was decided, many people who had been in a relationship with the other person... the person was denied standing because they were not the biological parent,” noted attorney Angie Martell. The biological parent is considered the one who gave birth, whether or not genetically related.

That kind of legal situation occurred in what Martell called one of their worst cases. Martell, of Iglesia Martell Law Firm PLLC, is the State Bar of Michigan LGBTQ section chair and a family law practitioner in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts. In this case, Martell represented a lesbian who was the

nonbiological parent of a child the couple raised together until the child was 7. The parent-child bond with Martell’s client was strong, but the parents’ relationship unraveled due in part to emotional abuse.

“And then in a matter of hours,” Martell said, “unbeknownst to the person, the bio mom packed everything up in a U-Haul while this person was visiting one of her relatives, fled in the middle of the night to another state and filed a PPO in the other state restricting the person from ever entering or seeing this person or finding out about where this person lived.”

The biological mother was involved in law enforcement and was able to use connections to keep her former partner out of the picture. Five years have passed. Potentially, Martell’s client could come forward and say they want to be recognized as the child’s parent. But that’s not likely due to the passage of time and the fact that the biological mom originally fled to a state hostile to LGBTQ+ issues.

The Pueblo ruling aims to prevent that kind of tragic scenario from playing out in Michigan again.

Kaplan and Martell both pointed to the footnotes or dicta to discern the potentially far-reaching implications of the decision. Most importantly, footnote six says that family law statutes use gendered language (i.e. husband and wife as opposed to spouse and spouse).

“Basically, what the court was saying in this footnote is, ‘We think that these family law statutes that talk about male or husband and wife or male and female also should equally apply to same-sex couples,’” said Kaplan, who emphasized that dicta are not part of the opinion. On the legislative side, a package of bills is currently in the pipeline that would remove gendered marital language from Michigan’s statutes entirely.

Martell mentioned another important takeaway.

“An equitable parent doctrine is a doctrine that many states embrace as being broader than just the biology of parentage, in terms of equitable parentage and in terms of de facto parentage. I think we’re going to see

“

Michigan had long been discriminatory in its application of the equitable parent doctrine.

more and more willingness of the courts to entertain that. Fewer than half the children across this nation live in traditional family structures.”

The case was decided 5-2, with Chief Justice Elizabeth Clement siding with the Democratic-nominated justices.

As for the two justices who dissented, Zahra and Viviano, Martell expressed concern. Not only is Martell a family law practitioner, their personal history is key to their passion for putting the interests of the child first: As a 7-year-old, Martell appeared in the New York City courts because of their parents’ custody battle.

“I’m glad that this case was decided because I think that it’s going to be very helpful to children to have this equitable parent doctrine in place,” Martell said. “But I also think Zahra and Viviano are not considering the far-reaching ramifications of ripping children from traditional family structures that are nontraditional because of this alleged cisgender heteronormative structure of mother/father that most of America doesn’t have anymore.”



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This was in the same apartment [in Ann Arbor]. There's a white sheet and then the toaster, and then this is all lit only with a penlight flashlight and still just some cheap, pink, magenta cellophane in front of the camera part of the time. When I printed this in art school, somebody who was a grad student studying photography left a note on one of these and said something about it being a really cool, surreal image. That was even a new term to me — surreal — sad to say. But anyway, so that was a sense of validation. And her hair — I made her hair stand up with a comb and hairspray.



My boyfriend at the time was a pre-med student, but he also was a film student too, and so we were deeply into provocative, avant-garde images. Joel-Peter Witkin was a hero of his. He was a photographer back then. He did extremely disturbing stuff. So mine is very colorful and light compared to that.



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◀
 Rachel Crandall Crocker

Continued from page 8

Of course, there are people who can't stand the fact that trans folks are finding greater acceptance in society. Such people have ensured that these are scary days for trans and nonbinary people, particularly those who live in red states. Nor has life as a trans American become a cakewalk no matter where they may be living. Trans folks face huge disparities in health care. Violence against gender-nonconforming people is at an epidemic level, and trans people are still more than twice as likely to live in extreme poverty, according to the philanthropic organization Funders for LGBTQ Issues. Republicans are busy passing anti-trans hate laws in every state where they hold a majority.

Even in the face of these depressing facts, though, what's also true is that respect and acceptance for transgender people is now so ingrained in mainstream culture that Transgender Michigan recently received a \$10,000 grant from United Way. Transgender Day of Visibility, created by Rachel in 2009 to celebrate trans people and communities, is celebrated worldwide and has been publicly honored by the White House since 2021.

So, yes: These are the worst of times for way too many transgender people, particularly transgender children in backward red states and the parents who want to protect them. On the other hand, Rachel said, when she first came out, "No one knew what the heck transgender

was; one reason Sue and I started Transgender Michigan was to educate people."

Rachel also takes heart in the fact that so many young people are out now — and that there's an organization, Stand With Trans, that she can refer them to. In the early days of Transgender Michigan, she said, she seldom ran into trans youth. That's not to say that there weren't any transgender teens or children out there. Rachel knew she was actually a girl when she was just 8 years old. "When I tried to come out to my parents, they said that that was the worst thing I could ever say," she said. By the time she was an adult and came out for the second time, though, her parents were supportive.

A natural optimist, Rachel admits that the climate in Texas, Florida and other conservative states concerns her ("I would no way live in Florida") but, on the other hand, all of the news coverage about Republican hatefulness "is causing a lot more support for us," including a marked increase in calls to Transgender Michigan's helpline from people looking to come out and others interested in volunteering. And while Michigan's current progress on trans issues — like the state's progress on abortion rights, and so many other things — could be seen as tenuous given that Michigan's GOP is no better than the national party, Rachel said that she's very optimistic about our state being a good place for transgender folk. "A lot of people have worked very, very hard to make Michigan a safe place," she said. "And if we can, I would even like to see Michigan as a sanctuary state."



Rachel Crandall Crocker throws out first pitch at a Detroit Tigers game. Courtesy photo

For her part, Susan shares her spouse's optimism. While she feels cautious because of the anti-trans backlash, she said, she also believes the trend is moving in the right direction. "There's some [people] that are trying to fight back, but that always happens," she said.

When it comes to the future, Rachel said that things are "full steam ahead" for Transgender Michigan, including plans for a job fair for transgender people in November at Affirmations. But the future ahead isn't all work. The couple also likes to go out to dinner and travel — Susan says the couple has been all over Michigan, and have another trip up north planned soon.

There is one question, though, that Susan wasn't ready to answer. Given all the coverage of Rachel in particular, is there something no one knows about Rachel that Susan would be willing to share with BTL readers?

"I'll take the fifth on that," she said, laughing.

For more information on Transgender Michigan Pride in the Park, which runs from 12-6 p.m. on Aug. 26, in Martin Road Park (1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale), visit transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride.



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Stephanie Beatriz

Continued from page 16

she's really driven by revenge. When the series begins, that is her ultimate goal — to get and have revenge.

I think the main stuff that I think you'll see in terms of who I am authentically is that, as you watch the series, I certainly played this character in a way that feels like she's open to all possibilities, whether that's in the world, whether that's learning about the world, whether that's fighting for what she needs and whether that's about her possible romantic entanglements within the world. But I think we'll have to sort of see how that all develops over the course of not only the season, but maybe if we get a second season.

There's also some queerness going on with Sweet Tooth, the killer clown, and I don't know what you can say about this, but I am picking up on some real S&M kink vibes.

Is Sweet Tooth a leather daddy? Let everyone be the judge. I'm not sure. There might be a group of people that [he] might be doing it for. He does wear that gorgeous leather harness, also clown pants, so everyone, don't yuck someone else's yum, as my sister always says.

In the beginning of the second episode, he calls another guy a "puppy." In mainstream culture, I don't know what puppy means, but in queer culture, I do.

I mean, I think as people we're always kind of watching things looking for little signs because for so long we weren't given very much at all. I was always looking for little signs. I was always, always, always looking for little signs. And so as an actor, you better be sure I'm dropping those little signs so people can pick up those little crumbs.

What did you appreciate about the women and the way they're portrayed in this series?

I like that they were fully fleshed out characters. I mean, there's nothing wrong with this sort of girl-next-door character, but there's other characters too. There's other people too. There's other failures of human beings. And I think in a lot of ways, these women in the series are failing at a lot of stuff. They're not good at a lot of stuff. They don't know how to do a lot of stuff, but they're fucking going to try. They're going to try. And they learn as they go.

For Quiet in particular, the series starts out as a very precise desire for her own needs to be met, and the scope of what she needs and who she needs to help really shifts over the course of the season. And I like that. I like it so much. I like when characters are surprised by their own journeys because it allows you as an actor to try to figure out what's going on because that's so human. It's so human to be within your own sort of like, "Oh my god, I'm so confused about

how I handle this. What's my next step? How do I live?" And then also put on the mask of "everything's fine, I can handle it." I just love those two things happening at once.

How has your experience playing a bisexual character early on in your career, as Rosa on "Brooklyn Nine-Nine," opened your eyes to what representation can do and how has that influenced later career decisions?

In terms of creative decisions, I certainly am open to playing people who are queer. I want to



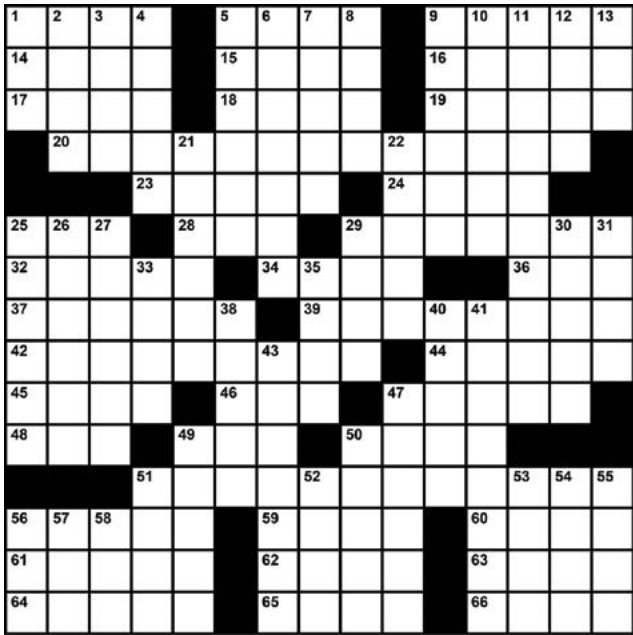
play queer characters. I had a conversation with a friend a long time ago and I said, "Is coming out as bi and playing a bi character going to pigeonhole me into only playing bi characters?" And they said, "Well, so what? So what would be the harm in that?" And I said, "Well, I don't want to just play one kind of character." And essentially what they said to me was, "If that's the case, then how amazing in the end when you look back at your career, because that will mean that everything that you did, you played a queer person."

No matter what, I'm bringing elements of my queerness to [my roles]; it's impossible not to. It's just impossible for me to, even if I am playing a straight character, even if I am playing a straight person or a lesbian or whoever I'm playing, right? I'm bringing elements of myself to it. That's what you do as an actor. I am, right now, in a weird waiting game while I wait for "Twisted Metal" to come out. So I haven't really been able to actively look at and take on other stuff right now.

But you were in "In the Heights" in 2021, in which you played a queer character. So after Rosa, it seemed clear to me that maybe you understood what was happening, what you could do, and then took roles that might have had a similar impact.

I would hope so. I mean, I wish I was smart enough to think about it that way and also some of the stuff, sometimes it's not my decision, right? I'm not in the place yet in my career where it is always my decision. I want to influence those decisions to be made, but I'm not in a power position quite yet. But when I am on a set and when I can try to float the idea, I do because I need to and want to.

This interview took place prior to the SAG-AFTRA union strikes.



Remembering Pee-wee

Across

- 1 The bottom line
- 5 Facetious "I see"
- 9 In a queer way
- 14 Nothing but
- 15 Breaks for Heather's mommies
- 16 Rap sheet item

Q Puzzle

- 17 Biweekly tide
- 18 Model Banks
- 19 Fouls, to the Pinball Wizard
- 20 Start of a Quote from Paul Reubens (1952-2023)
- 23 Sound from Mary's little lamb
- 24 Med. center
- 25 Interjection for Magnus Hirschfeld
- 28 LAX letters
- 29 Tennis great Navratilova

Down

- 1 Leopold or Loeb
- 2 R.E.M.'s "The ___ Love"
- 3 29-Across, for example
- 4 Laid-back sort
- 5 Buck feature
- 6 Susan of "Valley of the Dolls"
- 7 Jack, who licked it clean
- 8 Key opening
- 9 Decide on
- 10 Most in need of a lube

- 32 Get in shape
- 34 What you may call your life partner
- 36 Unmannerly man
- 37 Gay-friendly veep Kamala
- 39 More of the quote
- 42 More of the quote
- 44 Grain grinders
- 45 Zips
- 46 Tag antagonists
- 47 Eva Gabor's "Green ___"
- 48 Frequent Hudson costar
- 49 Where they rub you the right way
- 50 Killed, to King James
- 51 End of the quote
- 56 Opera singer Callas
- 59 Island of Barrie's land
- 60 Middle of Caesar's boast
- 61 One who often screws actors
- 62 His brother laid him in his grave
- 63 "She" to Bonheur
- 64 Symbols on Captain Hook's flag
- 65 "___ lay me ..."
- 66 Aspen vehicle
- 11 Edible dildo?
- 12 Senator Trent
- 13 '69 and others
- 21 Gay marriage advocate Morisette
- 22 "West Side Story" gang member
- 25 Where a j.o. buddy should be?
- 26 Bones that are the farthest up
- 27 "I don't think so!"
- 29 Chains around a knight
- 30 Conquers, sexually
- 31 Says further
- 33 The Unicorn author Murdoch
- 35 Pipe elbows
- 38 "Losing My Religion" singer
- 40 One who runs the show
- 41 Medium for Pride Vibes
- 43 Michelangelo, for one
- 47 Acid neutralizer
- 49 Takano and Baldwin hold them
- 50 Muscular strength
- 51 Langston Hughes' "Life Is ___"
- 52 WNBA star Rebecca
- 53 "To ___ a Mockingbird"
- 54 "Spamalot" writer Eric
- 55 Bombed, on Broadway
- 56 Queen in "Romeo and Juliet"
- 57 "Fourscore and seven years ___ ..."
- 58 Kevin Bacon in "Footloose"

See p. 15 for answers

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◀ Disc Golf

Continued from page 9

events this year, but only where the five FPO competitions had been canceled. Those five are now reinstated, and all FPO athletes may compete equally for the same payout.

BTL queried the DGPT's communications director regarding the cancellation and reinstatement of certain women's events and received this reply:

"I appreciate you reaching out. Unfortunately, I am not able to provide media availability at this time regarding this topic. However, I can say that the recent announcement of the United Series will allow more transgender female athletes to compete at multiple high-level events this year and the DGPT is committed to finding a sustainable path forward for our sport that celebrates and welcomes transgender athletes as gender eligibility policies evolve across the international sporting world."

Ryan believes the reason for the partial reversal by the DGPT was the outcry expressed in blue states where the five FPO competitions would have been canceled. Cis women would be hurt, too. And that was untenable.

Ryan and other transgender women still will not be permitted to compete in FPO events this year in Missouri, Kentucky and North Carolina, states known for being

hostile to trans folks and where a lawsuit would surely be unsuccessful. The mixed division events will go on as scheduled.

BTL asked Ryan whether she planned to compete in the United Series in the Discraft Great Lakes Open to be held Aug. 17 to 20 at the legendary Kensington Metropark Toboggan Course.

"I will be competing for sure," Ryan said.

In response to the United Series announcement, Ryan posted the following on social media:

"While I'm beyond happy that all women will have a chance to compete in the canceled events, I'm struggling to see how the DGPT's decision today is a good one. Now don't get me wrong, it's certainly not a bad decision but choosing to discriminate sometimes rather than all the time is still a losing strategy. This new policy is nothing more than the DGPT patting themselves on the back and thanking themselves for being so 'inclusive.' Nevertheless, progress is progress."

Ryan won the Great Lakes open last year. She's looking forward to competing again and said she hadn't looked into this year's prize.

"I'm not really playing for the money," Ryan said. From the very start, her intent was "to just be visible so that other trans folk could have someone to look up to, could see someone like them and root for someone that they actually kind of agree with."

"And that was the only reason I had ever tried to do this," she added.



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