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QUEER POLITICAL HOPEFULS PREPARE
LGBTQ+ Victory Institute Inspires,
Trains Local Candidates

REMEMBERING DETROIT'S CHINATOWN
Curtis Chin's Memoir on Life as a
Gay, Asian '80s Kid

EASTPOINTE'S NONBINARY CITY CANDIDATE
Nicola Strong Offers Counter to Local
Queerphobic Energy

The Book Issue

Amy Schneider

In Her Own Words

The 'Jeopardy!' champ on fame, activism and book bans

By Chris Azzopardi

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

If you've been meticulously planning your Ken-who-strictly-does-beach costume, planning to join up with the Weird Barbie cult or plotting something horrifying that makes your friends uncomfortable, your moment has arrived. They call it Queer Christmas for a reason, so get out there and soak up everything Halloween has to offer, including drag performances, costume parties, themed brunches and events like queer-affirming craft-making.



Support a Frightfully Good Cause

Halloween can deliver a fright, but there's nothing quite as scary as anti-LGBTQ+ candidates being elected to office these days. That's why the Unity Fund works to support Southeast Michigan-based LGBTQ+ candidates running for office at the local, county and state levels. The political action committee (PAC) has the support of impactful politicians like Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss and Rep. John Hoadley, so who knows which familiar faces might pop up at the Fund's annual Halloween Bash on Oct. 28. Unity Fund board member Ben Rubinstein tells BTL, "Our third annual Halloween dance party is a costumed bash supporting a great cause — local LGBTQ+ political candidates running for office. Let's give bigotry something to be scared of!"

Oct. 28, 9 p.m., 215 West (215 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Purchase tickets at bit.ly/46GkSCM.



Enjoy Womanly, Witchy Delights

Get your lady coven together for a seasonal event exclusively for women.

Head to Copper House, Detroit's first woman and queer-owned "bud & breakfast," for the Spooky Boobies Brunch. Expect incredible eats prepared by local up-and-coming Chef Aus, a poetry reading and a conversation centered on self-care and breast cancer awareness. Oct. 28, 1 p.m., Copper House (17418 Monica St., Detroit). Purchase tickets in advance at bit.ly/3tLFFWA.

Keep the party going at the Boos & Baddies Halloween party at Bosco, when the Litty Committee holds its second official lesbian Halloween event. Enjoy strolling entertainers, a costume contest and drink specials. Oct. 29, 8 p.m., Bosco Lounge (22930 Woodward Ave., Ferndale). Tickets at bit.ly/3tDVRD6.



Catch Some Spooky Drag

Halloween and drag are a match made in heaven, and you'll find many opportunities to watch local performers light up stages all over Michigan in the coming days, including:

Planet Ant and Affirmations, the LGBTQ+ community center in Ferndale, presents Cheers for Fears — A Halloween Extravaganza. Local drag performers will hit the stage and amateurs are welcome to take a turn, too! Oct. 28, 10 p.m., Ghost Light Bar at Planet Ant Theatre (2314 Caniff St., Hamtramck). Tickets at bit.ly/3RZgDxu.

Enjoy brunch and bingo with a side of drag on Oct. 29 at the Halloween Drag Bingo & Brunch event at Detroit Fleet. Tickets support Affirmations. Oct. 29, 12 p.m., Detroit Fleet (1820 E. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Tickets at bit.ly/491Eu5U.

Ann Arbor's North Star Lounge will present Halloweird, a humorous, double-feature drag show featuring lip-sync performances. Oct. 31, 6:30 p.m., North Star Lounge (301 N. 5th Ave., Ann Arbor). Info at bit.ly/3FkDYCn.



Get Creative at a Halloween Crafting Event

Feeling crafty? Queer Crafternoon at SCRAP Creative Reuse in Ann Arbor has just what you need to channel all that spicy pumpkin energy into a fun, creative project. The drop-in event, set for Oct. 29, promises an affordable, queer-affirming safe space to put together something artsy from the center's vast collection of donated art supplies and some unusual materials that would otherwise be taking up space in a landfill.

Oct. 29, 3 p.m., SCRAP Creative Reuse (4567 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor). Learn more at bit.ly/402H2fL.



Photo: Wayne State University Theatre and Dance Dept.

Do the Time Warp (Again)

Keep it classic this Halloween with a live stage version of everyone's favorite sexy mad scientist musical, "The Rocky Horror Show," running through Nov. 12 at Wayne State University. The show is directed by Joe Bailey, the queer founding artistic director of the Ringwald Theatre, which frequently features LGBTQ-angled productions. At the 11:59 p.m. Oct. 29 performance, audiences are invited to bring along their own props. Basically, it's up to you if you want to remind Brad that he's an asshole or slut-shame poor Janet — it's all in good fun.

Through Nov. 12, Wayne State University Hilberry Gateway Theater (4715 Cass Ave., Detroit). Tickets at bit.ly/45BQ9oP.

A poster for the musical 'Wicked' featuring a witch and the text 'WICKED IS FLYING BACK TO DETROIT'. The poster has a black background with green and white elements. At the top, it says 'WICKED IS FLYING BACK TO DETROIT' in white and green. Below that is a large illustration of a witch with a green face, red lips, and a white hat, with her hands clasped in front of her face. The text 'The untold true story of the Witches of Oz' is written in green. The title 'WICKED' is in large, white, stylized letters. Below the title, it says 'Jan 24 - Feb 18' and 'DETROIT OPERA HOUSE' in white. At the bottom, it says 'BroadwayInDetroit.com' in white.

Nurturing the Next Crop of Queer Political Candidates

The LGBTQ+ Victory Institute's intense training is a winning strategy



BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When BTL sat down with Chase Cantrell following the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute candidate training held in Detroit earlier this month, he explained right out of the gate why the immersive training was “extremely valuable” to him.

“I am strongly considering running for mayor in 2025,” said Cantrell, a proud Detroit native and founder of Building Community Value, a program that teaches small-scale real estate development to residents of Detroit, Hamtramck

and Highland Park.

Cantrell, who ran for Detroit Charter Commission in 2018, said the training refreshed the basics of campaigning for him while highlighting the realities of being an openly LGBTQ+ candidate. He said he was struck by the “really strong, beautiful experience” of interacting with the other LGBTQ+ candidates and learning from openly queer elected officials.

“It was sobering but also encouraging and uplifting,” Cantrell said. “Sobering in the sense that all

of [the elected officials] experienced very real challenges that they had not only on the campaign trail but with colleagues once they were elected.” Homophobia still exists, he acknowledged, citing the statistic from the Victory Institute report *When We Run* that 71 percent of openly LGBTQ+ candidates face homophobic attacks on the campaign trail.

Local out elected officials selected as panelists for the training included Michigan Sen. Jeremy Moss, state Reps Laurie Pohutsky and Jason Hoskins, and Detroit

City Councilmember Gabriela Santiago-Romero. A school board trustee from Ohio, Dion Manley, shared the experience of being the first openly trans person elected to public office in his state.

Elliot Imse, executive director of the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, spoke with BTL prior to the training. He said one of the reasons Detroit was chosen was that “there are a lot of great LGBTQ elected officials in the state. In the past few years, there’s been a lot of history-makers in Michigan: LGBTQ people who achieved the story first and moved into public office for the first time.”

Holding the training in Detroit this fall was part of a larger effort by the Victory Institute to focus on the Midwest. “We think it’s incredibly important to have more LGBTQ+ representation in the Midwest,” Imse said. “And as part of that, we wanted to make sure that our candidate campaign training was accessible to as many cities in the region as possible.” To that end, Chicago will host the Institute’s signature four-day “boot camp” style training in July 2024. Other 2024 trainings include Phoenix in February and Charlotte, North Carolina in April.

The LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, a global organization that works to build LGBTQ+ leadership in public office, has been conducting candidate trainings for the past 30 years.

“Our theory of change is that when LGBTQ+ people are in the halls of power, it changes hearts and minds,” Imse said. “It changes the policy debates and leads to more inclusive legislation. So that’s really how we position ourselves within the movement and our work.”

Certainly, running for office today is far different from what it was in the ‘90s. But for LGBTQ+

candidates, more has changed than just the advent of the internet and smartphones.

“One part of our training that has remained consistent over the years is the importance of being authentic and open about who you are,” Imse said. “But the degree to which you talk about it has changed dramatically over the 30 years that we’ve been conducting this training.”

Now LGBTQ+ candidates are encouraged to share their experience as a way to relate to voters; diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are considered assets on the campaign trail. At the same time, candidates must learn how to balance authenticity with focusing on the critical issues in their district, because the reality is that most voters are not LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ equality is often not their top concern.

Cantrell said he didn’t arrive with particular expectations, but he was impressed with the diversity of the participants. “I had never been in a room of LGBTQ political hopefuls,” Cantrell said. “On the first day, the table that I sat at, the individual next to me was a trans woman, and the person beside her was an out drag queen who’s running for office in Florida.”

Even with his experience as Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist’s fundraiser for Gilchrist’s 2017 city council campaign, the challenge and expense of financing a large-scale campaign was an eye-opener for Cantrell. He’s well aware running for mayor of a major city would involve a great deal of call time, among other things.

“You have to be so diligent,” Cantrell said, “setting aside time every single day to call your network and fundraise and not being shy or shameful about asking for money.” He also noted costs like mailers and paid canvassers.

Krystina Edwards is another local participant who noted how expensive campaigns can be, TV ads in particular, whose cost she called “staggering.” She also learned how raising money for a political campaign differs from her own experience fundraising for a nonprofit.

Recruited to attend the training by Equality Michigan, Edwards is the community engagement manager for the Ruth Ellis Center. When she enrolled in the program, Edwards’ primary focus was to learn how the training could boost her advocacy work for REC.

Then she had another idea. “I was like, you know what? Maybe I can go into this thing and learn more about politicians: how they function, how they work, how we can join further with them and do more work,” Edwards said. “And I left purely with that.”

But that’s not all. The training planted a seed: Could Edwards become the first trans woman of color elected in Michigan? She doesn’t think she’s cut out to be a candidate, but Edwards can see herself working behind the scenes. The training is also suitable for people interested in working on campaigns.

“I’ve learned that I might have an interest in potentially fundraising or being a campaign manager for a queer politician who’s running for office,” Edwards said. “I don’t have a need or interest to be a politician myself. But I would love to see others get there for sure.” Edwards lives in Taylor and said she would like to get involved in local politics when the opportunity arises.

Equality Michigan was just one of the organizations that partnered with the Victory Institute to promote the training locally. LGBT Detroit, Great Lakes Political Academy (GLPA-LEAD) and the Unity Fund were involved as well.

Oscar Renault is president of Unity Fund’s steering committee. As leader of a political action committee exclusive to LGBTQ+ candidates in Southeast Michigan, Renault called the training “extremely important,” not just for LGBTQ+ candidates but those who support them.

“We don’t just want to support any LGBTQ candidates,” Renault said. “We want to support the ones that are prepared and qualified. We want to back the ones that prepare their campaigns, their image, their focus and their message really well.” He added that the Victory Institute does just that: It provides LGBTQ+ candidates with the tools to be effective.

Renault made another important observation. He said the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute can help queer candidates who haven’t had access or exposure to politics before: for example, an individual in a small town who wants to make a difference but otherwise wouldn’t have access to resources. “A person like that would benefit tremendously from this,”

Renault said. “All the changes start in small towns locally.”

It should be noted that the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute training is intense. It’s called a boot camp, after all. Participants are expected to stay at the designated hotel and attend all sessions. The days are long and include nightly homework. But for attendees in Detroit, there was also a Friday night reception at a cocktail bar where participants could network with elected officials and representatives from the various organizations in a fun, relaxed environment.



Chase Cantrell (top) and Elliot Imse. Courtesy photos

For Imse, a native Wisconsinite, traveling from Washington, D.C. to the Midwest is all in a day’s work. He told BTL he and his team were looking forward to the Detroit training, and they expected a full house of 40 participants from across the country. The demand is great.

“We know this training has a lot of impact,” Imse said. “We wish we could hold more trainings and include even more people in them if we had the resources because the need is there. We know that when LGBTQ people get trained and know how to use their identity as an asset on the campaign trail, they often can pull off a win on election night.”

A Queer City Council Candidate Seeks to Change the Narrative in Eastpointe

Nicola Strong hopes to be a voice for those who feel left out

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

When the Eastpointe city council rejected a Pride Month resolution this past June, Nicola Strong took it as a call to action.

“The mayor and other city councilmembers just let their own personal beliefs get in the way,” Strong said. “That’s a shame.”

Strong and her wife Kat spoke at the protest that followed. “After that I started paying attention,” she said. “I just thought I wasn’t represented on the council and neither were my friends or family.” Strong is nonbinary and uses all pronouns. She decided to take the initiative to run for council and create change herself.

Since then, Strong has enjoyed canvassing the neighborhoods of Eastpointe and sharing with residents her priorities. During a recent canvassing stop, she made the acquaintance of someone in the LGBTQ+ community.

“I met a trans person down the road — actually on my street — and he was so excited that I’m running, just because [I’m] LGBT; he’s going to feel represented now,” Strong said. “I just love that.”

Strong, an officer in the police reserves who once worked as a police aide for the department, also said she met someone who was pleased to know Eastpointe has a Black officer. Having these conversations and making connections has been meaningful for her. “I just like when people say ‘thank you,’” she said.

When Strong sat down with BTL, she had just come from a shift working on her current passion, the Eastpointe Community Garden, Urban Seed’s flagship garden project. Established seven years ago, it’s a space where Strong can help build community and literally deepen her roots in Eastpointe. Recently, they harvested 1,000 pounds of produce and donated it back to residents.

“I got involved right after the



Nicola Strong. Courtesy photos

Pride resolution got denied in Eastpointe,” Strong said. “Some people mentioned the garden, and so I went, and I really liked it. And I’ve been there every Saturday since.”

That day, they picked some of the summer’s last crops: eggplant, squash, various peppers and a few tomatoes. “We’re in a weird transition right now where we’re going from a summer crop to fall crops,” she said.

The city administration is undergoing a transition too. Eastpointe’s scandal-plagued mayor, Monique Owens, is on her way out. She’s well known for her hostility toward the queer community. Strong has spoken with both candidates for mayor: Mike Kleinfelt, who is openly gay, and Mary Hall-Rayford. “I think they have other people’s interests at heart, not their own,” Strong said, confident that either can move Eastpointe forward.

First elected in 2014, Cardi DeMonaco currently serves on city council. He and Strong met through her involvement with the Eastpointe Police Reserves. DeMonaco says

he’ll be voting for Strong.

“I’m a big fan of her,” DeMonaco said. He said in the past he took for granted the ability to simply discuss a policy with a candidate, but because of recent events on city council, that has become more of a priority. He may have been referring to Owens’ behavior on city council; she was known to silence her critics.

“I truly believe [Strong] will be interested in talking about any issues that come in front of the city council, and she’ll bring her own ideas forward. I think it’s important for legislative bodies to have a whole bunch of people that have different interests because then you’ll get different things coming forward.” He said Strong has a lot to offer the community.

If elected, Strong would be one of the few openly queer elected officials in Macomb County. She considers that distinction significant.

“I think it’s important because I want other people to know, ‘Hey, I’m out here. I’m here for you,’” Strong said. ““You can get out in your community as well and do great things.” She doesn’t think being LGBTQ+ should be a hindrance to



anyone, even as she overcame her own early self-doubts.

Strong brings more than increased representation to the city council. As a resident involved in the community, she’s concerned that city finances are not being looked at closely enough.

“For instance, the lead pipe situation,” Strong said, referring to efforts currently underway to replace them. “The amount that they originally quoted us ended up being so much more in the end,” she said. The explanation was they didn’t know how much work it would entail. Strong is committed to being prepared and always casting an educated vote.

Strong would like to see more community events to foster engagement among residents of Eastpointe where folks can gather and enjoy one another. Past events haven’t been adequately promoted, and Strong has plans for that to change.

When Strong isn’t knocking doors or harvesting crops, she’s a production leader for Lipari Foods, where she supervises teams of 12 to 20 people. She and her wife

have three adult children and one 18-month-old grandchild. (“I’m too young to be a grandma, so I just go with ‘Coco,’” Strong said.) In addition, she serves on the board of Macomb County Pride.

With a degree in early childhood development, it’s no surprise Strong enjoys her volunteer work with the Boy Scouts. She finds other opportunities to spend time with kids too.

“My favorite experience as a police reserve officer was actually going to a fair that we had here in Eastpointe and riding some rides with the kids, actually letting the kids get in the car and push the siren button,” Strong said. “I like hanging out with children and senior citizens — that’s my thing. I like to make them feel good because they’re always kind of left out.”

As a council member, Strong can be a voice for those who feel left out. It’s a sentiment rooted in what spurred her to run: not feeling represented on city council. “I want everyone that lives here to be welcomed and feel like they belong because that’s what community is about.”

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When Sufjan Stevens Finally Came Out, He Broke Our Hearts

Where did all that speculation get us?

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

For two decades, curious queer fans of the enigmatic indie singer-songwriter (and Detroit-born and Michigan-raised) Sufjan Stevens have pored over his equally enigmatic lyrics for the reverse red herring that would finally put the question to rest. Is he? He must be... right?

Many of his songs reference emotionally intimate relationships and moments with men (and women, too). And then there are the probing articles that ponder what's up with all the curiosity, like the bluntly titled *Vice* piece "We Can't Stop Wondering if Sufjan Stevens Sings About God or Being Gay," which explores the internet fascination with his sexual orientation.

At a high level, the speculation is fraught with inappropriateness — it would absolutely not be OK to engage in this kind of intense investigation about the LGBTQ+ status of someone in your real life. And yet, there's a unique earnestness here. The queer community who loves Sufjan simply wants to invite him into the fold, to make sure he knows how loved he is, whoever he is. Frankly, he's so often singing from the aching, bludgeoned hollow of his broken heart that we just want him to be happy and whole.

Given Sufjan's intimate relationship with sorrow, it's maybe not surprising that when he did lay the speculation to rest this month, it was in a post honoring his "beloved partner," who died in April. Next to a photo of said beautiful partner, Evans, he wrote, "This album is dedicated to the light of my life, my beloved partner and best friend Evans Richardson, who passed away in April. He was an absolute gem of a person, full of life, love, laughter, curiosity, integrity, and joy. He was one of those rare and beautiful ones



Sufjan Stevens. Photo: Sufjan Stevens

you find only once in a lifetime — precious, impeccable, and absolutely exceptional in every way."

Such a Sufjan way to gently shock our senses while publicly coming out as part of the LGBTQ+ community, oh so casually. It's doubtful we'll see a dramatic shift in the way he writes his music or lives his life. The theories will continue filling the pages of the Sufjan subreddit, and he'll keep giving those theories little mind — hopefully, he'll simply continue pouring himself into music and sharing it with the world.

In the meantime, we can now take a fresh look at some of Sufjan's potentially queer-coded songs without it feeling quite as much like wishful thinking. Some of the tracks below have frequently been cited as part of the "evidence." Still, like any good songwriting, there's much left to listener interpretation in his always honest, sometimes autobiographical writing. Sometimes, it really is about God, and maybe sometimes, it's about a man or woman he has loved romantically or platonically. Sometimes, the protagonist isn't even him.

Perhaps that's what's always made Sufjan's music so widely resonant and why, ultimately, it doesn't

actually matter if he's been explicitly or implicitly singing about his sexuality for the past two decades. At its center, Sufjan's body of work, some of which is examined here, is a testimonial to the human experience in all the joyful, sorrowful, redemptive, regretful ways every one of us holds at different moments.

"The Predatory Wasp of the Palisades Is Out to Get Us"

From "Illinois," 2005

The speculation here focuses on these lyrics: "Touching his back with my hand I kiss him/I see the wasp on the length of my arm." Is the wasp a metaphor for the "sting of love," as one listener wrote on lyric-analysis site *genius.com*? "The wasp," the listener continues, "is a metaphor for the church's anti-homosexuality stance. Seeing it refers to his sudden realization that his feelings are, supposedly, morally wrong. The wasp resting on his arm (rather than hovering around them) shows that his fear of his attraction betraying his faith is very much internalized and could sting at any moment. Like swatting a wasp, attempting to push that fear away threatens to make it

worse."

"Futile Devices"

From "The Age of Adz," 2010

Among the more bitterly debated songs when it comes to clues about Sufjan's sexual orientation, "Futile Devices" could be about a lot of things. Platonic male friendship. Love between man and dog, according to some internet theories. A queer love story between two men. A heterosexual love song where he calls his female partner his brother because... reasons. All we definitely know is that he sings gorgeous lines like these, and they make us feel stuff: "But you are the life I needed all along/I think of you as my brother/Although that sounds dumb/And words are futile devices."

"Drawn to the Blood"

From "Carrie and Lowell," 2015

A devastating track off a devastating album centered on Sufjan's journey through the grief of losing his frequently estranged mother to cancer, "Drawn to the Blood" is primarily seen as

a biblical allegory. One stanza stands out as something more personally reflective: "The strength of his arm/My lover caught me off guard." In a 2015 interview with *Uncut*, he confirmed that the abusive relationships described here was his own.

"Mystery of Love"

From the "Call Me By Your Name" soundtrack, 2017

Sung from the perspective of main character Elio, "Mystery of Love" details the breakdown of Elio's relationship with Oliver. The track isn't autobiographical, but the fact that Sufjan was so involved with this seminal queer film, alongside his powerful performance of the song at the 2018 Academy Awards (with partner Evans in the audience), demonstrates some personal importance. It's trademark Sufjan all the way through, with lyrics like, "Oh, to see without my eyes/The first time that you kissed me/Boundless by the time I cried/I built your walls around me." The soundtrack also includes a reprisal of "Futile Devices."

Songs from "Javelin," 2023

Finally, we have "Javelin," the newly released album Sufjan has publicly dedicated to his partner Evans. We don't have an official timeline for this relationship, but the two had known one another for years, dating back to as early as 2018. There are many moments that stand out in the track list that could be referencing this love story, including: "So you are tired of us/So rest your head/Turning back fourteen years/Of what I did and said" on "So You Are Tired." And on "Running Start," we have the bittersweet memory of a boundless loving moment: "If I align myself with Pisces in a funny way/Can you, my lover, kiss my bracelet, and my shoulder blades?/We've always had a running start/I jump between the trampolines/You throw your arms around my heart/As if to say you're all I need."



Amy Schneider. Courtesy photo

A Trans Champion, In Her Own Words

Amy Schneider talks post-‘Jeopardy!’ fame, activism and book bans

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Amy Schneider has made at least one thing clear: she is the person you want on your trivia team. The Ohio native ruled the “Jeopardy!” stage in 2021 and 2022 like a queen in her castle — the only question she couldn’t seem to answer was whether her winning streak would ever end.

Viewers, who she won over with every win (an incredible 40 by the end), sure hoped it wouldn’t. What we, or she for that matter, couldn’t guess is just how big her win would be. It was history-making big, as she became the most successful woman ever to compete on the ultimate quiz competition show. Schneider left “Jeopardy!” \$1.3 million richer, and she left the world at large with something even more valuable — an invitation, for all of the families watching, to understand her life as a trans person.

“So when did I know I was trans? Always. Never. In 1986, or 1993, or 1996, or 2011, or 2016, or 2017, or any and all years in between,” she writes in her debut memoir, “In the Form of a Question: The Joys and Rewards of a Curious Life.” “I’ve come to realize that I don’t much care when I knew I was trans, or even if I know it now. All I care about is that you know. And now you do.”

In the book, Schneider, 44, reflects on becoming a nationally recognized and beloved trans celebrity, but these turning points

are just part of her overall story. She shares other aspects of her life with unflinching candor and inviting repartee in her multifaceted memoir, which is deliberately less wholesome than her “Jeopardy!” image. By gaining a richer understanding of her life, you can’t help but become a fan of the person she is, not just the awe-inspiring quiz-show contestant she was.

Now that Schneider has the world’s attention, she’s using her platform to open up about what a trans life can look like and be boldly intimate about her own. The book may be eye-opening for some outside the queer community and, even for those within it, surprising and affirming as she writes about various personal topics: her newfound fame (and zealotry for the free touchscreen toaster fame afforded her), having ADD, being pro-polyamory (not so popular in the Midwest, she admits), her unexpectedly moving experience with a prostitute and how doing theater was critical in helping her understand who she is. I spoke with Schneider at the end of September, the same week her book hit shelves.

Congratulations on the book. What is going through your mind right now as you promote it?

See **Amy Schneider**, page 14

Florida Man Joe Harding Says ‘Don’t Be Gay, Do Crimes’



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

File under “Bad Things Happening To Bad People.” The author of Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill, Joe Harding, has been changed with “de-

frauding the government of \$150,000 in pandemic aid,” according to the Orlando Weekly.

He was facing up to 35 years in prison, but thanks to a plea deal, he will only serve four months followed by two years of supervised release.

Look, I’m no supporter of this country’s prison industrial complex, but the fact that he was facing 35 YEARS but will only serve four MONTHS is pretty much what you’d expect from a criminal justice system set up to favor well-connected white guys.

I doubt I need to remind anyone what Florida’s Don’t Say Gay bill is all about. Then again, Florida and Gov. Ron DeSantis have been in the news a lot for all kinds of bad reasons. So it’s understandable that some of the ways

orientation and gender identity in public schools from kindergarten through third grade. The law was later expanded to cover fourth through 12th grades.”

Gov. DeSantis was very excited to sign this bill because he’s never met an LGBTQ+ person he didn’t want to hurt.



I mean, who among us hasn’t used taxpayer dollars to buy ourselves an island? And anyway, perhaps this is an island free of LGBTQ+ propaganda where no one says gay and anyone who uses pronouns is banished and sent out to sea in a leaky rowboat.

Republicans have made Florida a bad place to live can get lost in the shuffle.

According to the Orlando Weekly, the Parental Rights in Education Act is “a bill derided by critics as the ‘Don’t Say Gay Bill,’ which banned discussions of sexual

In a wild turn of events, it should be noted that Harding resigned from office in December after being criminally charged rather than screaming that this whole thing was a “WITCH HUNT by the Democrat Party!”

“According to court records, Harding defrauded the federal government through loan applications with the federal government’s Economic Injury Disaster Loan program for two companies he owned that were inactive,” reports the Orlando Weekly.

Isn’t it something that Republicans who denied that Covid was a threat or even real at all were more than happy to pretend to believe in it if it could be financially profitable for them? All those dead people, though? No big deal.

“Prosecutors said Harding used part of the money to pay his credit card balance. Some funds were shifted to the bank account of an oil company owned by his brother-in-law, Patrick Walsh,” the article continues.

Cool, cool. So the guy who declared that even hearing about the existence of LGBTQ+ people is so scandalous for grade schoolers that the government must step in to prevent it thought it’d be cool to steal from the government to pay his AmEx bill.

But, hey, at least he shared some of the money with his brother-in-law. I’m sure he’s an upstanding guy.

Or not.

“In January, Walsh was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for defrauding the federal government of

\$7.8 million in COVID-19 loans, some of which was used to purchase an island in the Gulf of Mexico,” says the Orlando Weekly.

I mean, who among us hasn’t used taxpayer dollars to buy ourselves an island? And anyway, perhaps this is an island free of LGBTQ+ propaganda where no one says gay and anyone who uses pronouns is banished and sent out to sea in a leaky rowboat.

I wonder if Harding is mad that he only bilked the government out of \$150,000 while his brother-in-law was out there getting island money. Then again, Walsh got a lot more prison time. They can all look back and laugh about it at Thanksgiving 2028.

At Harding’s sentencing hearing, his brother Daniel, a pastor, “told the judge that his brother was a committed family man and pious Christian who taught kids softball instead of advancing his business interests,” according to the Gainesville Sun.

I imagine it went something like this: “Please, your honor, my brother Joe was so busy playing softball with his kids and teaching them that gay people are an abomination that he did not become a rich businessman, so he asked ‘what would Jesus do’ and thus knew he must rob the country. Amen.”

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Bad Bunny Will Make You Thirsty in Detroit

Puerto Rican rapper-singer Bad Bunny recently announced an April 6 stop at Detroit's Little Caesars Arena on his Most Wanted Tour, and queer fans aren't about to lose interest in the frequently shirtless performer who sometimes does queer-adjacent things just because he made his relationship with Kendall Jenner Instagram official.

We're not here to speculate, but make what you will of him dressing in drag in his "Yo Perreo Sola" video and kissing a male backup singer on stage. Whatever his intention, at least he's encouraging men to define masculinity on their own terms.

Still, that kind of queer energy will land a person in the hot seat, answering some pointed questions by the likes of

Vanity Fair, which asked Bad Bunny to address concerns about "queerbaiting" in a September interview.

"I get an endless number of negative comments and sexist and homophobic ones, without being homosexual, for dressing like that," he told the outlet. Ultimately, he added, "You do it because you want to, and it makes you feel good, and it makes you feel happy."

The singer has amassed a vocally supportive queer following thanks to his thirst-trap-happy Instagram feed and his outspoken LGBTQ+ allyship. And recently, Bad Bunny locked lips on screen with Gael García Bernal in the Prime Video movie "Cassandro," which tells the story of Saúl Armendáriz, a gay wrestler known as "The Liberace of Lucha Libre."

Special guests on the upcoming tour include trailblazing Latinx artists Cardi B and the "Queen of Reggaetón" Ivy Queen.



Bad Bunny. Photo: Facebook

BTL Publisher Emeritus Susan Horowitz Enters Remission from Cancer

Married former BTL publishers Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz are celebrating after learning that Horowitz has entered remission from cancer. Stevenson posted on Facebook, "We met with the oncologist Friday afternoon and received excellent news! Susan is officially in remission — no detectable cancer anywhere!!"

Stevenson wrote that after two surgeries and 18 weeks of chemotherapy, Horowitz can now move into regular monitoring and will have a reprieve from "nasty chemo" and "debilitating surgeries."

"Thank you to everyone for your loving support. It made a very difficult and scary time tolerable for both of us," Stevenson added. "We appreciate the support more than you can know. So here's to good health, getting stronger and good times ahead."



Troye Sivan in "One of Your Girls." YouTube/Vevo

Troye Sivan Ignites Crossdressing vs. Drag Debate

Troye Sivan's new music video for his single "One Of Your Girls" has stirred a debate over the distinction between cross-dressing and drag. Chicago drag artist Eva Styles brought up the question on X, tweeting, "Y'all do know that he isn't doing drag right, he's cross-dressing. There's a difference." Technically, cross-

dressing refers to wearing clothing designed for the opposite sex while drag is entertainment challenging gender stereotypes.

The queer pop singer told People, "I've never done drag before, [but I've] always wanted to, and it was a really beautiful, fun experience. We were trying to think of a name, but honestly, I feel like her name is Troye."

"RuPaul's Drag Race" contestant Luxx Noir London downplayed the debate, tweeting, "Crossdressing... drag...who cares she looked cunt." Sivan's album "Something to Give Each Other" is out now.

This 'House' Is So Queer

Netflix's horror series "The Fall of the House of Usher" steers clear of the "bury your gays" trope. The series delves into the lives of the Usher siblings and a detective aiming to dismantle their criminal empire. Key LGBTQ+ characters include Leo Usher (who juggles a secret affair), Perry Usher (who loves a queer rave), detective Auguste Dupin and lesbian scientist Victorine Lafourcade. Camille L'Esplanaye adds bisexual representation. The series, streaming now, is the ideal queer Halloween binge.

TikTok Does 'Gay Math'

The internet's abuzz with "gay math" — not about numbers, but relationship dynamics. Following the trends of "boy math" and "girl math," "gay math" has taken over TikTok and Instagram. In a hilarious breakdown, Uly from UlyandErnesto's TikTok humorously suggests, "A one-month relationship for gay men equals five years, while for lesbians, it's just one month. But after three weeks, they've already adopted a cat!"

Slayyyter in Town

Grab your tickets now for trending bisexual club pop darling Slayyyter's upcoming Detroit show, set for Nov. 3 at St. Andrews Hall. The singer released her second studio album, "Starfucker," in late September after launching three singles off the LP over the summer, including the bouncing synth-rich bop "Erotic Electronic" along with the song's music video, which features a night in the life of Slayyyter's album character on Hollywood Boulevard. Ticket link at slayyyter.com/tour.



Slayyyter. Courtesy photo

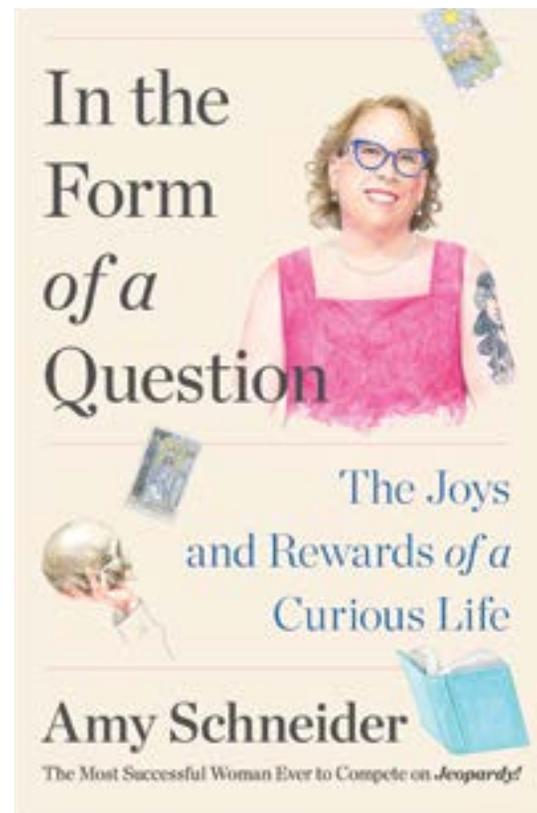
Oh, I mean, it's just been a blur. I've been in New York for four days, and I did "CBS Mornings" and "The View" today and I just barely have time to stop and think about it. But yesterday I did go to a Barnes & Noble a couple blocks away, and indeed there it was. It's really real, so it's pretty exciting.

What was it like seeing your book at Barnes & Noble for the first time?

Pretty great. The real moment was when I got my author's copies; that really hit me. I just remember looking at it being like, "It's got an ISBN number. It's official. It's part of the record now."

You've got an ISBN number and a toaster. I mean, what more could you really ask for?

Indeed. I mean, this was quite a toaster, I have to say.



If ever there was a time for a trans activist, especially one such as yourself with a universal, beloved platform, it's now. But what's so unique about your platform is the audience you attracted just

by being a "Jeopardy!" contestant. How do you think being on "Jeopardy!" helped you reach an audience who may not understand trans people or are just blatantly anti-trans?

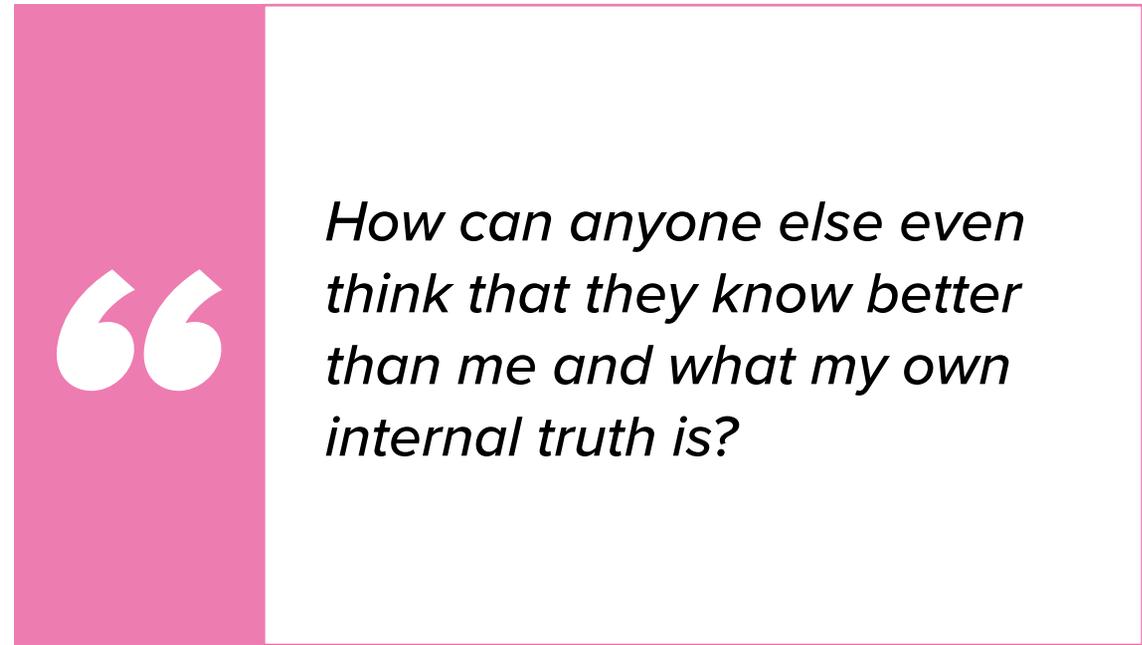
I certainly knew going in that it's an older demographic that watches "Jeopardy!" And so those are people that are less likely to know trans people or to be supportive of trans rights, so I was definitely bracing myself for a lot of negative feedback from the "Jeopardy!" audience. The fact is that that was really minimal. Instead, what I heard from so many different people was usually talking about their parents or people in their family who had seen me and were like, "You're the first trans person that I ever heard them gender correctly and use the right pronouns [for]. It really changed the way I think about trans people's place in our society."

I think that there is a loud minority of people that are motivated by hatred and othering and hierarchies. But I think most of the people that they get their votes from that end up supporting these policies aren't doing it out of that motivation. They're doing it because they were raised in an America that taught that trans people were frightening and scary and weird and laughable, as I was.

I was raised with all those same messages, and if you have never encountered an actual trans person, you're just not going to question what you've always been told. And so for all those people, it was just once they saw me — and I just obviously am not any of those ridiculous things — then that was all that needed to happen for them to change their mind, which

I was not expecting.

With this book, instead of writing just about your "Jeopardy!" experiences,



you've decided to present an in-depth look at your full life as a trans person.

At the time I was pitching the book, I just spent a few months doing nothing but talking about "Jeopardy!" I just was tired of it, so that was part of why I didn't want to just make it about that. But then there were two things I was thinking of. One was those people who had gotten to know me. They had seen my most presentable, likable, normal self. While that wasn't inauthentic, it's a big simplification of who I am and what my life has been. So if those same people were to encounter trans people in real life and not just on TV and see the complexities and not necessarily as relatable things that have happened to them, then maybe they're just like, "Oh, why can't they just be like that Amy from TV?" It was something I felt a responsibility to do — to show my full self in that sense, so that you could see that those things about me aren't incompatible with being successful and being nice and smart. And so that I shouldn't be written off for them, and neither should other people.

Then the other audience I was thinking of was just other trans people specifically like me, the younger version of me. What

are the things that I wish I had known a lot sooner about what it really means to be trans and what that internal experience is like? And the simplified version that I understood and that some trans

middle grade before. Because it's a different skill set and obviously it is going to not include every part of this book, but the parts that are appropriate, we'll be pulling those out. That said, like

people have lived up to?

I've known trans people in childhood who were fighting with their parents over what clothes to wear from age 4. That was my understanding of what counted as a real trans person, and [I thought] since that didn't apply to me, I couldn't be a real trans person. I can only tell my own story, but it is a story that I sure would've liked to have heard when I was younger.

In the beginning of the book, though, you do say that this is not a book for kids. Was it difficult for you to decide between writing a book that could reach a younger LGBTQ+ demographic given how a book by you could influence them, but ultimately opting to write a book that is more adult-oriented?

Well, actually, the good news is that I didn't really have to choose because in the deal that I signed, the agent that originally reached out to me mostly does children's literature. She was just going to make sure that any deal I signed had an option for a children's version of it as a middle-grade version. And so that is something that we're in the early stages of.

I'm going to be working with somebody who's written for

I say, that wasn't exactly my idea in the beginning. That was just something my agent wanted. I'd been all ages on "Jeopardy!" and there were parts of my life that aren't appropriate for kids, but still felt very important to share.

The thing about trans people and queer people is, because we did not fit into the moral systems that we grew up in, we are going to be more experimental around things like drugs and sex and violate rules that way because the rules that we were raised with were so wrong. That is part of what frightens people about queer people. So, that was also part of why I wanted to show, at least as best I could, why I wound up doing those societally less-acceptable things.

I love that there's a chapter about polyamory. Again, I feel like it will be one in which people may read your book because they loved you on "Jeopardy!" and they'll get to that chapter and their mind might be blown. Why did you decide to express that side of yourself in the book?

It's something that I feel strongly about, and here's this platform. I get the chance to write a book, and it's something that I think is

so misunderstood. I feel like in retrospect, I could have gotten this point across slightly more clearly. But to me, it's more about sexual monogamy being the one and only definition of a relationship. I find [it] baffling, to be honest. I think that it partly comes from patriarchal types of ownership. I think that certainly I know that when I was living as a man in a polyamorous relationship, it was other men who were extremely hostile to me for it. Really, it made them angry that "I would allow my wife to have sex with other people." So it is just something that I feel strongly about, and I also know that I'm in the extreme minority with that viewpoint. Trans rights have a decent following, but polyamory is still pretty niche. It is going to surprise people, and just let people know that there are rational people out there who believe in that.

You flew home to your home state of Ohio on the day you were attending the Out100 Gala to testify against a bill that would restrict gender-affirming medical care for minors. That bill is still in committee. What do we do if and when it potentially passes?

Keep fighting is all that you can do. I think that the thing that I would say is, first of all, when

it comes to medical care, there is some reason for hope in the course that these things won't be enforceable. That's no guarantee either, of course. The other thing is to comfort ourselves with the fact that time is on our side on this. Every day somebody sees a trans person on TV or something happens where they get it, and they realize that trans people are just people who deserve the same dignity as everyone else. When somebody does that, that's a one-way street. They don't end up going back on that.

So the people that are targeting us right now, it's this backlash because they see themselves losing, and they will. It doesn't mean that there's not a lot of hardship and suffering being caused by them now, and that's awful, and we should resist as much as we can, but there is a legitimate reason not to despair.

What would you tell a kid that makes them not feel like the "deviant subhuman" that some consider trans people to be?

This is what's so crazy to me about people who say negative and hateful things to me, saying, "Oh, you're really a man." I am legitimately the world's expert on my own mind and my brain and what's going on inside of it. How can anyone else even think that they know better than me and

what my own internal truth is? That's something that anyone can remind themselves of. You may not be a "Jeopardy!" champion, you may not be these other things, but the one thing you are truly an expert in is yourself. You can rely on that and know that other people, if they disagree, they're just definitively wrong because how could they know?

It's an interesting time to release a book as a trans person, given that books with queer content are under attack. It is possible your book could be banned from libraries. What do you say to the people who want to get rid of our literature and our books and potentially your book?

I would say that people that believe in banning books are unlikely to become "Jeopardy!" champions.

I love that shady comment.

Yeah, and it's true. I think that the mindset that people need to be shielded from information and protected from it, it harms yourself. When you shield yourself from information, you make yourself less knowledgeable, and ultimately you're going to be less powerful if you know less.

Young people will find that knowledge no matter what you take away from them. They have other ways to be connected. There is TikTok. There is YouTube.

Yeah. I mean, even before the internet that was always the case. Certainly, I was raised in a family and community that did their darndest to keep me from learning anything about sex, but I figured it out.

Since your fame happened and wasn't something you were expecting, was there ever a moment where you had to wrestle with being the major trans activist that you have become?

Yeah, it certainly is. I mean, it is an ongoing thing that I continue to wrestle with. Since I testified in Ohio, I haven't really done anything like that again since. There's a part of me that feels somewhat guilty about that. Not overwhelmingly, but I wish I had continued more of that specific type of activism. It's also, I've got this book to write and I've got to balance my own mental wellbeing, and how much I'm willing to take on and all of those things.

This platform is extremely lucky but lucky doesn't mean undeserved. I'm fortunate to have this opportunity, but that doesn't

mean I don't have the right to take advantage of it and to use the platform that I have. That's something that took me a while to start to accept.

Do you have a barometer for understanding how you have changed social attitudes about trans people? Even activists need that kind of validation to keep going.

Well, it used to be Twitter DMs and now that site is sinking into the ground. I would get a lot of stories from people about how it meant something in their family. Then also, I'm recognized out in public pretty regularly, and most of the time it's, "Oh, loved you on 'Jeopardy!'" I watched every episode." Things like that, which are a delight to hear and I love that.

But just today, one of the crew on one of the shows I did during this press run pulled me aside to say that they had a trans daughter that had just come out, and that was very meaningful to her to have seen me. I do hear those stories, and it's the best thing ever to hear a story like that. Because I feel so passionately about the trans kids out there and what they're up against, and it makes me so sad at times. To hear that I'm helping some of them is just the very best feeling.



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Curtis Chin on Growing Up Gay in Detroit's Now-Vanished Chinatown

New memoir explores Detroit during a pivotal, often violent era



Curtis Chin. Courtesy photo

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In “Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant,” author Curtis Chin describes coming of age in Detroit’s Cass Corridor Chinatown neighborhood. In the ’70s and ’80s, his parents ran a popular Chinese restaurant (Chung’s, which was open from 1940-2000), where Chin spent many hours working while also absorbing the community around him, an experience that included coming to terms with his sexuality and navigating unique challenges related to his status as a Chinese-American child born to first-generation immigrant parents.

The Washington Post and Time magazine have declared the book a “must-read,” citing Chin’s candor and frequently humorous reflections on what was clearly a sometimes tumultuous upbringing. For all the light moments he recounts, the memoir is set against the backdrop of Detroit during his formative years, when the city saw far more everyday violence in working-class neighborhoods like Chin’s than we see now — by 18, he’d known five people who had been murdered. Still, “Everything I Learned” is a “love letter to my hometown,” Chin says.

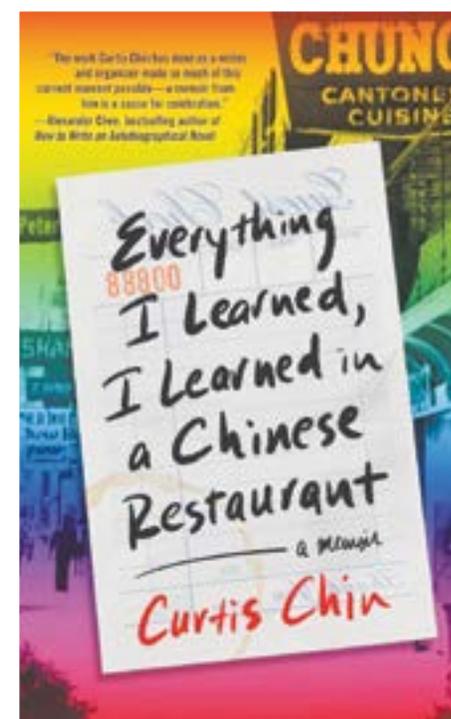
“They’re going to learn about an Asian American family, but in actuality, they’re going to learn about Detroit — and also America — at that time period,” he tells BTL. “A lot of the issues we deal with now, we see the origins from that era.”

Hearing Chin describe his growing-up era (primarily the ’80s) can feel a bit unsettling. For him, it was “just normal that people would die around you and that buildings would burn down around you, so I don’t have another frame of reference. I mean, you’re a kid. I didn’t necessarily stress out about it.”

Throughout the book, Chin touches on stories that will resonate with Michiganders who experienced life in Detroit in the ’80s, which he describes as a pivotal time period for the city. Chin reflects on Detroit’s first Black mayor, Coleman Young, who served the city for two decades in that role, for better or worse, depending on who you ask. He also dives into what it was like to be part of an Asian American family when news broke about Vincent Chin, a Chinese

American Detroiter who was killed in 1982 in a racially motivated attack by two white autoworkers who received no jail time for the crime. “If you grew up in Detroit in the ’80s, you’ll be able to relate to the book so much — even if you’re not gay, even if you’re not Asian,” he says. “The book is really for Detroiters from the ’80s, just through the prism of an Asian boy.”

As Chin’s story unfolds, he writes about



the growing realization that he was not straight. While it was more taboo three decades ago, and especially among the Asian American community, Chin recalls there being a gay community in Detroit’s Chinatown; he names the gay bar the Gold Dollar (where the White Stripes got their start after it became a rock bar) and says there were several prominently owned LGBTQ+ businesses. Chin didn’t set out to focus on his sexuality in the book, but he recognizes it’s been important to LGBTQ+ readers to see themselves reflected.

“I really didn’t think about it because I was just trying to tell my own story. I’m not trying to represent anybody — just my own truth, but now that the book’s done, I do recognize that it does have that impact,” he says before describing an encounter with

an Asian American lesbian on a recent visit home to Detroit for a book reading.

“She came up to me, excited about the reading, and she’s invited her parents to come, as well as the parents of her girlfriend, who’s also Asian, and she was saying how none of the parents were accepting or happy about the relationship, but were excited to come to the book reading,” he recalls. “She thinks of it as an opportunity to maybe start a conversation or to also show her parents that being gay can be something that could be celebrated, something positive in our community. And when I think about that, I think, ‘Wow, that’s really great.’”

Chin feels many young LGBTQ+ people today don’t realize what it was like to come out in an era like the ’80s, when, he says, it could feel like a death sentence. “For older people like me, we still remember those time periods when gays were not accepted, when you could lose your job because of your sexual orientation or go to jail,” he says. “I think the way that we’re processing some of the stuff happening today might be different from the way [younger people] are. It could be good for them to read this and see that perspective.”

At certain points, Chin remembers, he assumed he’d never make it to the age of 30 because dying from AIDS seemed inevitable. “I did not see myself having a very long life — it’s a driving point in the book because I didn’t want to go to college

that four years wasn’t actually a lot, given that his parents had sacrificed their “whole lives” for their children. Since then, he’s established a career based in New York City, where he co-founded the Asian American Writers’ Workshop; in Hollywood, he’s

Collided,” was selected for the Best Food Writing in America 2023 award.

Looking ahead, Chin isn’t sure what will — or should — happen to Detroit, especially now that the heart of what was once a thriving Chinatown community is effectively gone. Recently, the city opted to tear down a community center that had stood in the neighborhood for decades, discarding a unanimous city council vote in favor of halting the demolition for 30 days so a study could be conducted to determine if the building had historical value. “You’d think they would want to respect that history a little bit more, so that part makes me a little sad, but I don’t know,” he says. “I mean, I do want this city to move forward, but I don’t want them to completely forget the past.”

In the meantime, Chin will keep memories alive of a childhood in Detroit that he says he wouldn’t trade for “anything in the world.”

“For older people like me, we still remember those time periods when gays were not accepted, when you could lose your job because of your sexual orientation or go to jail.”

because I didn’t understand the point of sitting in a classroom for four years when I would probably be dead by the next decade.”

Ultimately, Chin did attend the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor after deciding

spent years writing for network and cable television and writing and directing social justice documentaries. An essay he wrote that appeared in Bon Appetit magazine, “Detroit’s Chinatown and Gayborhood Felt Like Two Separate Worlds. Then They

Visit curtisfromdetroit.com for details about Chin’s book tour, which will visit Southeast Michigan in early November.

Fall Into a Book

National Book Month is for queer readers, too

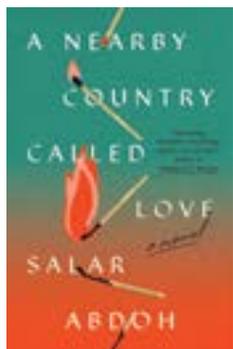
BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT & CHRIS AZZOPARDI

We are celebrating queer stories, queer icons and queer authors during National Book Month, a time to honor the importance of reading, writing and literature. Those still pushing for bans on queer-inclusive books may say otherwise, so consider supporting a local bookstore or your local library this fall — they need your love and support more than ever.

Fiction

A Nearby Country Called Love, Salar Abdoh

Publishers Weekly describes Iranian author Salar Abdoh's latest novel, a study of gender and sexuality in modern-day Iran, as "an artful rendering of hope amid despair." In the book, we meet Issa, who witnesses a woman who has just lit herself on fire — a desperate act of defiance. Violence and protest ensues. Now, Issa must confront an uncomfortable family history that involves his late brother, Hashem,



a prominent queer artist, who defied their father for his oppressive cultural views on traditional masculinity. This sets Issa on a journey, discovering more people like his brother who are living on the margins. Destruction

abounds, but in these hope-filled pages, so do small but powerful acts of love and kindness. *Out Nov. 7.* — Chris Azzopardi

Blackouts, Justin Torres

A book within a book, author Justin Torres' follow-up to "We the Animals" — a beautiful story in its own right, with themes of Latino queerness, masculinity and self-discovery — explores the erasure of queer history. "Blackouts," a fact-meets-fiction intergenerational epic, uses real text from the 1941 book "Sex

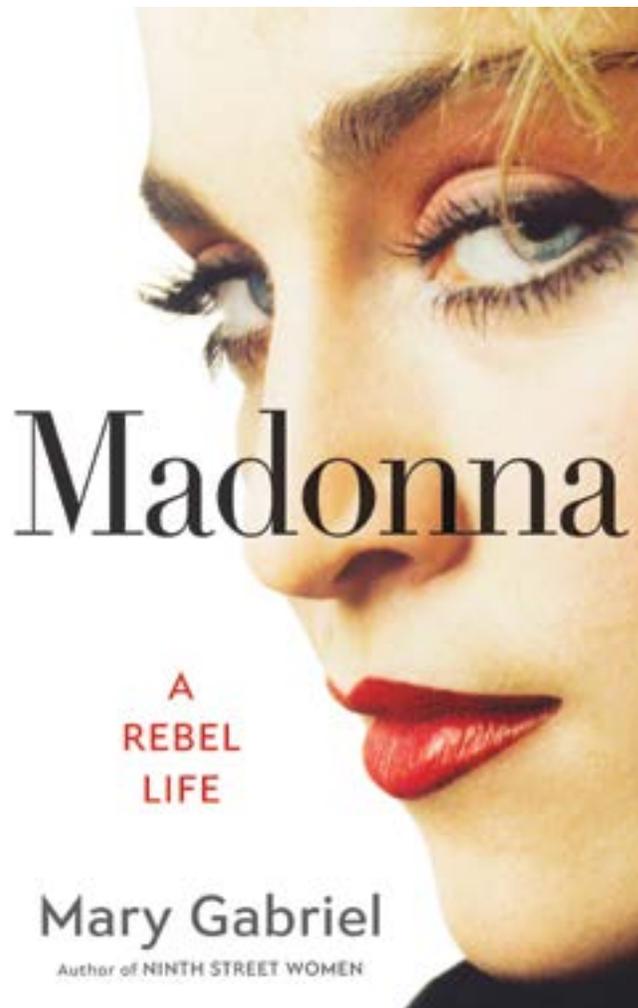
Variants: A Study of Homosexual Patterns," a doctor's collection of the psychological, physiological and social aspects of sexuality, particularly homosexuality. Torres was drawn to the historical book for being "ahead of its time" when it came to how "frank and straightforward" it was in sex-related subject matter published during the 1940s," he told The New York Times. The resulting novel, through its use of testimony, illustration and photographs, is ambitious in scope and riveting in content, asking an important question — are missing historical details about queer life lost forever? Already among this year's finalists for the National Book Award, "Blackouts" was described to the Times by gay author Alexander Chee as "the literary equivalent of a PJ Harvey album." *Out now.* — CA

Something About Her, Clementine Taylor

A rich, intimate queer coming-of-age story, "Something About Her" zeroes in on the transformative power of first love set in Ireland, Scotland and London. Taylor's sensitive storytelling focuses on Aisling and Maya, who have an unexpected connection as university students. As the two fall in love and experience an undeniable sexual awakening at the impressionable, often challenging period of young adulthood, Taylor weaves in an emotionally intelligent storyline familiar to anyone who has experienced the often painful road toward self-discovery and young love. *Out Nov. 7.* — Sarah Bricker Hunt

Day, Michael Cunningham

Ohio native Michael Cunningham is best known for giving contemporary life to Virginia Woolf through "The Hours," his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel-turned-film about three intergenerational women whose lives intersect on themes of love, hope and despair.



Cunningham's new book, "Day," is his first in almost a decade. Written during the pandemic, the novel takes place as the threat of coronavirus upends life as we know it, but it is intimate, focusing on a New York family who was already facing challenges. The book is presented in three acts over several years, during the worst of the pandemic, with the familiar themes of abrupt change, grief and loss permeating its pages. "I do have to give credit to Virginia Woolf for helping me understand that a novel can have real scope without being physically large and without spanning a great deal of time," Cunningham recently told The New York Times. "That there's meaning at the cosmos, but there's also meaning at the subatomic level." *Out Nov. 14.* — CA

We Belong, edited by William O. Tyler and Viktor Kerney

"We Belong" is a crowdfunded anthology created to fill a significant gap in the sci-fi/fantasy genre: the Black queer perspective. Every story is written by a Black, queer author and features queer characters and plots. As co-editors Viktor

Kerney and William O. Tyler write in press materials, the stories "showcase the fact that, despite what the landscape of popular fiction says, Black queer people have existed and do exist everywhere, in every time and space. Whether we're fighting monsters or becoming superheroes, we belong. From intergalactic adventures to interdimensional exploration, we belong. As wizards, as mermaids, as witches, fully as ourselves, we belong." *Out soon.* — SH

Gay Icons

Madonna: A Rebel Life, Mary Gabriel

When I first thumbed through what must be the most comprehensive book on Michigan's own Madonna — it is over 800 pages, about two-thirds the size of an average Bible — I couldn't believe some of these chapter names: Chapter 1: Pontiac (1958-1963), Chapter 2: Pontiac (1964-1966), Chapter 3: Pontiac (1967-1969), and then three chapters on Rochester Hills and one on Ann Arbor. That's just the first 51 pages of biographer and former Reuters journalist Mary Gabriel's very heavy book on Madonna, who almost died recently but, like the seemingly indestructible pop warrior she is, recovered and slapped on some knee pads and wrist splints to finally kick off her Celebration Tour. Whether Madonna was bravely parlaying religion and sex into pop music when it was not popular to do so, defending the queer community when few other famous allies did or setting the pop-music stage for the Beyoncé and Taylors of the world, Gabriel's book is a meticulous history of an extraordinary trailblazer, a reappraisal that reminds current and future generations who didn't experience Madonna in real time why we should always celebrate her. In the book, her life and influential career is examined within the context of historical markers that shaped her own personal and professional narrative, from Stonewall to the pill, the Equal Rights Amendment, Roe vs. Wade and the AIDS crisis. "A Rebel Life" is Madonna's history as much as it is our own. *Out now.* — CA

The Woman In Me, Britney Spears

Britney Spears' much-anticipated tell-all was even too revelation-heavy for the author herself, who couldn't read the audio version and enlisted actress Michelle Williams to do so in her place. "It is finally time for me to raise my voice and speak out, and my fans deserve to hear it directly from me," Spears told People magazine. "No more conspiracy, no more lies — just me

owning my past, present and future.” The book traces Spears’ life from her childhood-star roots on “The Mickey Mouse Club” at age 11 through stardom-catapulting moments in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when she released her first two iconic records, “...Baby One More Time” and “Oops!...I Did It Again.” Of course, behind the scenes, her life was tumultuous and tightly governed — she was a constant paparazzi target, she was placed under psychiatric holds and, infamously, in a court-ordered conservatorship. Her father and a lawyer were, until 2021, granted complete control over her financial and personal affairs for 13 years. The put-upon pop icon gets real about all that, including how her family “robbed me of my freedom,” as Spears writes. Her story is finally hers to tell. *Out Oct. 24.* – CA

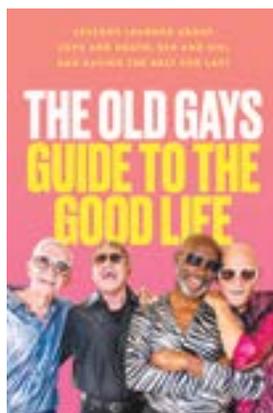
My Name Is Barbra, Barbra Streisand

If page count is any indication, few stones will go unturned in Barbra Streisand’s first memoir, which clocks in at a whopping 1,040 pages. At 81, Babs has done and seen more than most gay icons, with a spectacular six-decade career that spans film, music, TV and the stage. She even has her very own shopping mall right in her house, which, if you ask me, is an accomplishment right up there with her Kennedy Center Honors, EGOT status and 46 Grammy nominations. What I’m saying is, in addition to promising recounts of her early struggles to becoming an actress and her political advocacy, this book is big enough to give us at least a few chapters on what we also hope to find out: what she thought of Lea Michele in “Funny Girl,” being an LGBTQ+ ally mom to gay son Jason Gould and every last detail on eating “frozen yoghurt” with Lady Gaga and Ryan Murphy after casually showing them her “Funny Girl” gowns at her in-home mall. *Out Nov. 7.* – CA

Memoir

The Old Gays Guide to the Good Life: Lessons Learned About Love and Death, Sex and Sin, and Saving the Best for Last, the Old Gays of TikTok

When you’ve lived long enough to be called “old,” surviving AIDS and the plight of queer people during the 1960s gay liberation rights movement, maybe it’s time to wear that “old” title just as proudly as the gay one. Enter Mick Peterson, Jessay Martin, Robert Reeves and Bill Lyons, who call themselves the “Old Gays,” and their book “The Old Gays Guide to the Good Life.” The



foursome, who consider themselves the real-life Golden Girls of the social media era, or “grandfluencers,” did just that, amassing 11 million followers on TikTok (by comparison, Beyoncé has 5 million, while Taylor Swift has 21.9 million; the guys know how to work the short-form video format is all I’m saying). In the book’s good-humored preface, they draw on their long, enduring histories, “from Hula-Hoops to hot hookups, through protests and parties, witnessing the chaos of the ’60s to the current culture wars.” As current LGBTQ+ generations live through another wave of clamorous anti-queer hate, it’s never a bad idea to check in with the elders who know more than a thing or two about surviving and thriving during the worst of it. *Out Nov. 28.* – CA

How to Live Free in a Dangerous World: A Decolonial Memoir, Shayla Lawson

Nonbinary author Shayla Lawson’s upcoming memoir, “How to Live Free in a Dangerous World,” is a lyrical voyage through a world of self-discovery, empowerment and unapologetic queerness that bestselling author Imani Perry called “phenomenal” and “luminously intimate.” The memoir embraces the significance of queer community and self-love, emphasizing that “free spirits are never binary.” Lawson reminds us that individuals are more than their gender, offering the mantra: “Trans people do not owe you their gender performance. Nonbinary people don’t owe you their androgyny.” A powerful revelation unfolds when Lawson is diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and shares a strikingly honest perspective on Black queer intimacy in disability. *Out Feb. 6.* – SH

TransElectric: My Life as a Cosmic Rock Star, Cidny Bullens

Two-time Grammy nominee Cidny Bullens has spent 45 years performing alongside the biggest names in the music industry, from Elton John and Bob Dylan to singing on the “Grease” soundtrack. Now, the singer is charting new ground as a trans man, releasing his first solo album (“Little Pieces”) this month and a candid memoir, “TransElectric: My Life as a Cosmic Rock Star” about his storied music career and his long road to feeling whole. The book features a foreword by his long-time friend, Elton, and has the support of musical giants like Lucinda Williams and Beth Nielson Chapman. Elton writes in the forward, “I would never have known that

See **Fall Into a Book**, page 26

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‘Why Mariah Carey Matters’ Speaks to the Power of Pop Star Idolization

A new book on the icon explores a love that sometimes we only find through music



Mariah Carey arriving at a music store in Amsterdam to sign her album "Rainbow" and have a meet and greet with her fans, Sept. 18, 1999. Photo: Robert Hoetink

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Mariah Carey is in sharp focus as a pop music innovator and gay icon in some of the best-written commentary on her artistry and what she means to queer fans, thanks to writer Andrew Chan's remarkably studied new book "Why Mariah Carey Matters." The book plumbs the depths of Mariah's voice, songwriting and production savviness since making her debut in 1990.

Chan, who wrote about her previously for NPR, writes with a window into his own deeply personal devotion to Carey as a gay Chinese-American man. In the 1990s, when Chan was first drawn to her, his connection to her music was "intimate and private," he writes just a few pages into the book. Here, Chan is summarizing

his feelings on "Outside," a song revered by many of Mariah's queer lambs, the name for her most loyal fans, for understanding that once an outcast, always an outcast.

"The too-muchness of the vocal was an accurate description of everything I felt but couldn't say," he writes before adding, "Mariah's vocals seemed to be saying that the ultimate voice could also be the one that resonated on the queerest frequency. The most beloved voice could be the most freakish."

At 40, it's hard to imagine I don't already fully understand why Mariah matters to me — like Chan, my foundation for perseverance, enduring those tough gay teen years, was built on her own survival, her own outsiderhood. To that end, I wrote about how extensive my

connection to her music is in an essay for The New York Times in 2020, coincidentally around the same time Chan began writing "Why Mariah Carey Matters." Few people in my life fully understand how deep it goes, exactly. On some level, my mother does; after all, she saw me struggle the most as a queer kid, and she saw Mariah's music keep me afloat throughout that period of time.

And yet, after reading Chan's careful analysis — in one part, he recognizes how she entered Black gay club culture in the 1990s by flipping her hits into house mixes — alongside his own personal introspection, I found myself catching my breath several times. Though I didn't think it possible, I felt like I was graduating to the next level of understanding my own connection to Mariah. I even

called my mom to read her some of his best passages — could it be that my defense of her was really an extension of me defending myself as a queer person? I was seeing parts of my own story on these pages, told by someone else who, at one point, also needed, as he puts it, "a glamorous, hetero-feminine idol."

When I wrote my essay on Mariah for The New York Times, I was having this moment where I was craving the comfort of home during the first year of the pandemic. When that need kicks in, I find that feeling in so many of the Mariah songs that have been healing since I was an adolescent, so "Through the Rain," "Hero"

and "Can't Take That Away." For you, at what point during the pandemic did you realize that you needed to write this book for yourself?

It was after the NPR piece, and there was kind of just an itch. I think there's a deeper reason, but I think the more superficial reason was I was a little bored and I needed a project. The deeper reason was I knew that tapping into her as a subject was going to allow me to explore a lot of other themes. As much as this is a tribute specifically to her and giving her her flowers as an artist, it also opens out onto bigger subject matter that I think will resonate with people who don't even know her music: the subject of the voice and how we connect with singing voices. During the pandemic, I too had that craving for home, the familiar. I think maybe there's not enough writing about what it means to return again and again to the same music and how that can be profound.

A song like "Anytime you Need a Friend," I was just listening to it this morning. I've heard that hundreds, thousands of times in my life and it pierces my soul every time. That's such a magical, profound thing. I mean, even as I'm talking about it, I'm getting emotional because I think the pandemic also revealed something about our fundamental needs as human beings and also the cyclical nature of what makes us tick and what hurts us, and those wounds from early in our lives never really go away.

In the book, you examine Mariah songs about adversity and emotional pain as things that can be life-long struggles. "Outside," "Close My Eyes," "Petals" and "Portrait" are all examples

of this. For many who are queer, that feeling of being marginalized and oppressed doesn't ever completely wane.

That's something that really sets her apart. Sometimes I get sick of comparing her to the other major diva singers of the '90s who we love. I love Whitney; I love Celine. But I think the clarity of Mariah's worldview, when it comes to that kind of pain, which is often why we make music in the first place and listen to it in the first place, especially as queer people, we turn to it as a lifeline. She gets that on just a really instinctual level.

What is so moving about "Outside," "Petals" and "Close My Eyes" is that they're very specific songs. They're written from inside the particularities of her experience as a mixed-race woman, as someone who had the family dysfunction that she had. To me, what's kind of most moving and miraculous about our relationship to those songs as queer listeners is that she doesn't identify as queer and you can't really conflate the experience of being mixed race with being queer. They are two very different things, and yet she's speaking to us across this great divide, and we're finding a commonality there that we're connecting with, which was so important at a time when there were so few images of us in the media. The fact that I could connect with her songs at such a young age and not even really know what she was talking about in terms of the mixed-race themes of those songs — even if you set aside the words, I could feel in her voice that she knew something about what I was feeling.

I really moved through life like Mariah did in some ways. Her triumphs over adversity became my mantra for my own hardships.

It's interesting because we don't personally know her, but we don't have to. I mean, I am kind of wary of stardom in a way. I think there's something really toxic about fame, and so part of me, as a critic, is scared to touch that. My comfort zone is listening and really getting deep into the sound and the aesthetics of the music, but you can't deny that the reason we're able to connect with her in that way over the decades is because of the machinery of stardom. And I think there's something really deep and intimate being shared, even with the whole corporate structure of how stars are made. It is kind of magical how something really human can be transmitted even through the veils and the smoke and mirrors of the star machinery.

After reading your book, I'm listening to her music with fresh ears, newly appreciating, for example, the layered complexities and the harmonies on the "Butterfly" album.

I am kind of adamant that this is very much a work of criticism, and that's what's different about what I've written and other books that have been published on her before that are more celebrity profiles. And criticism, I want to emphasize with people who maybe don't read it a lot that this is the point of it — the writer writes it in order to hear something that they have maybe heard hundreds of times anew. Because through the writing, you're creating a new encounter, and then with the sharing with the reader, you're multiplying it, and you're able to hear these songs that are so ingrained in you, almost like for the first time. So, for me, the experience of writing is almost, at times, less about the writing and just about the listening that is required to do the writing. I want to be able to hear deeply again.

What I didn't fully consider until I read your book was how she was creating these dance remixes in the '90s because it was the music authentic to her as a person and artist, whereas her ex-husband and label head Tommy Motolla controlled the sound of her earliest albums. But those mixes, many of which were house music played in gay clubs, ended up reaching the queer community almost exclusively. I don't know how much she even knows that or how aware she is that what she was creating was being played in those clubs. Considering that connection, do you think that Mariah was as aware of herself being a gay icon then as she is now?

I am guessing it was a gradual awareness. I mean, she even says in the memoir that she didn't even know how many fans she had or how famous she was until "Music Box" [in 1993]. You can take that with a grain of salt, but I think she's probably being sincere in that she was so cocooned and famous, so I'm sure such a weird experience that you kind of dissociate. I'm not sure she really knew what to make of her relationship with her listeners, let alone a segment of her listeners, the LGBT audience. But I think she had to have known that house music was creating a connection, that releasing this kind of really attentively, carefully,

See **Andrew Chan**, page 24

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When the National Organization for Women Purged Lesbians

A look back at how only ‘feminine feminists’ were welcome into the movement

BY VICTORIA BROWNWORTH
LGBTQ+ HISTORY PROJECT

The website of the National Women’s History Museum (NWHM) describes Betty Friedan as “co-founder of the National Organization for Women” (NOW) and “one of the early leaders of the women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her 1963 best-selling book, “The Feminine Mystique,” gave voice to millions of American women’s frustrations with their limited gender roles and helped spark widespread public activism for gender equality.”

The 1964 Civil Rights Act had banned sex discrimination in employment, yet the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the government agency that had been established to enforce workplace equality, did not acknowledge the sex-discrimination clause, effectively nullifying the Civil Rights Act’s addition of gender.

As NWHM details, Friedan’s groundbreaking book “helped transform public awareness” of such discrimination and propelled Friedan into the leadership of the nascent women’s liberation movement, where she was often referred to as the “mother” of second-wave feminism.

In 1966, Friedan, Pauli Murray and Aileen Hernandez co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). Friedan was NOW’s first president and authored NOW’s mission statement: “...to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.”

Among the objectives of NOW were “securing the enforcement



From left, Linda Rhodes, Arlene Kisner (sometimes misidentified as Arlene Kushner) and Ellen Brody participate in the “Lavender Menace” action at the Second Congress to Unite Women in Chelsea on May 1, 1970. Photo: Diana Davies. Image source: Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

of anti-discrimination law; gaining subsidized child care, abortion rights, and public-accommodations protections; and passing the Equal Rights Amendment. NOW was able to bring about changes large and small — to hiring policies, to credit-granting rules, to laws — that improved the lives of American women.”

NOW was itself a groundbreaking organization, which made Friedan’s purging of lesbians from that organization in

1970 — after calling lesbians the “lavender menace” in an interview with New York Times magazine — significant on myriad levels. That action effectively separated lesbians from mainstream feminism, just as they had been separated by gender from the decidedly male gay liberation movement.

NOW’s Susan Brownmiller, whose book “Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape” would become another critically important feminist treatise, tried to make a joke of Friedan’s comment

by calling it a “lavender herring,” but that just further alienated lesbians in the organization.

Mainstream media had already dismissed the feminist movement as “a bunch of bra-burning lesbians,” so Friedan and other straight feminist leaders were acutely sensitive to this labeling — and dismissal — of all feminists as lesbians. Friedan wanted “feminine feminists” in the movement.

Friedan, like many straight feminists, did not want feminism associated with and tainted by

“man hating” and lesbianism. As lesbian activist Karla Jay later wrote in her memoir, “Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation,” “I’m tired of being in the closet because of the women’s movement.”

The blatant hostility toward lesbians and the move by Friedan and others to disassociate the feminist movement from lesbianism took on its own activism. NOW established policies that were exclusionary of lesbians in the early years of the

organization. NOW newsletter editor and lesbian theorist and author Rita Mae Brown stated that “lesbianism is the one word which gives the New York NOW Executive Committee a collective heart attack.”

The lesbian purge at NOW was momentous and had a ripple effect on lesbian activists. It was also surprising — and even ironic — as lesbians had been so pivotal in the founding of NOW and in the impact and influence of second-wave feminism. Many of the key figures of that wave of feminism and of NOW itself were lesbians. This included NOW co-founder Pauli Murray; Brown, member of The Furies collective and author of the first mainstream lesbian novel “Rubyfruit Jungle”; and graphic designer Ivy Bottini, who designed NOW’s logo (still used today) and was president of the largest chapter of the organization, New York NOW.

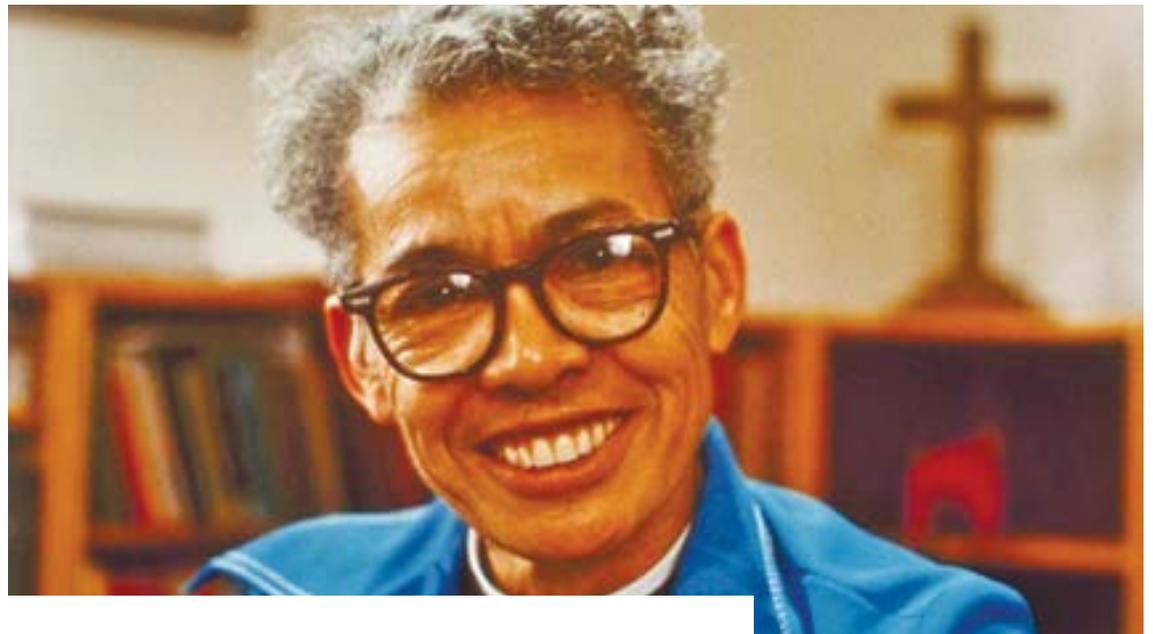
Yet the taint of the “lavender menace” was perceived by Friedan and other straight feminists, Shirley Chisholm and Gloria Steinem among them, to be problematic: Lesbians were perceived as “man hating” and mainstream feminism was intent on presenting the movement as pro-woman, not anti-male. Lesbians were still viewed as perverts and even as mentally ill. It would be several more years before the psychiatric community’s DSM would change its view that homosexuality was a mental disease.

As Hannah Quayle wrote in a blogpost about the purge, “Lesbians were placed within an unnatural category of the ‘third sex.’ This ‘third sex’ was associated as a gross abnormality which violated female anatomy, heterosexual desire and gender behaviour by associating masculine features upon the female body. In this sense, lesbians were not considered ‘real women,’ and stood outside the category of ‘woman’ in a physical, sexual, personal and political sense.”

Quayle asserted that within the mainstream feminist movement and NOW, “Lesbians had to find an effective way to address the accusation that their masculinity was somehow complicit with men and the patriarchy, and that lesbian influence would not in fact dismantle strict heterosexual categories as it was widely believed. Heterosexual feminists excluded lesbians from the feminist movement in the 1960s based on this discomfort towards their sexuality.”

In 1969, the same year as the Stonewall riots, Bottini broached the subject of lesbianism and the movement in a public forum titled “Is Lesbianism a Feminist Issue?” Bottini — like Brown, Murray and others — thought lesbians were leaders of the feminist movement, not background players. It was lesbians like Susan B. Anthony, who had also led the first wave of feminism in the U.S.

But Friedan was adamant that lesbians not derail the feminist movement and the work that she and others were doing to establish equity in employment and reproductive rights (Friedan was also co-founder of NARAL). Lesbian visibility, Friedan



Pauli Murray seated in her study. Photo: Schlesinger Library, Harvard Radcliffe Institute

“Yet the taint of the ‘lavender menace’ was perceived by Friedan and other straight feminists, Shirley Chisholm and Gloria Steinem among them, to be problematic: Lesbians were perceived as ‘man hating’ and mainstream feminism was intent on presenting the movement as pro-woman, not anti-male.”

believed, would allow men to dismiss the feminist movement as fringe and something most women didn’t want to be associated with. Trumpeting her assertions and coining the term “lavender menace” (which a group of New York lesbians would later adopt to form a group of radical activists), NOW president Friedan fired Brown.

Friedan then orchestrated the purge of lesbians, including Bottini, from NOW’s New York chapter. That action did not go unremarked. At the 1970 Congress to Unite Women, 400 feminists from NOW and elsewhere were in attendance. Brown, Bottini, Karla Jay and a dozen other lesbian feminists marched to the front of the auditorium wearing T-shirts that read “Lavender Menace.”

One of the women, Charlotte Bunch, who was also a member of The Furies collective with Brown, read the Lavender Menace’s manifesto, “The Woman-

Identified Woman.” That paper was considered the first major lesbian feminist statement. That action was among the first to challenge the heterosexism of heterosexual feminists and to present lesbians not as that “lavender menace” or mentally ill perverts, like the DSM defined them, but rather as more feminist than anyone, because they were women independent from and unconnected to men and to compulsory heterosexuality.

In the treatise, the “woman-identified woman” defined herself without reference to male-dominated societal structures. She “gained her sense of identity not from the men she related to, but from her internal sense of self and from ideals of nurturing, community, and cooperation that she defined as female.”

Later Bunch would write, “It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women’s liberation, and the

basis for the cultural revolution,” articulating the principle of the woman-identified woman that would become a cornerstone of lesbian activism in the 1970s in the post-purge feminist movement.

Friedan’s action did not end with that Lavender Menace demonstration at the Congress to Unite Women. Pushback from within NOW’s ranks resulted in a near-embrace of lesbians within NOW just two years post-purge. In 1971, NOW passed a resolution declaring “that a woman’s right to her own person includes the right to define and express her own sexuality and to choose her own lifestyle [sic].” There was also a conference resolution about lesbian mothers that declared it was “unjust” to force lesbians to remain in heterosexual marriages or remain closeted to keep custody of their children.

The NOW Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism was established in 1973, and NOW resolved to introduce and support

civil rights legislation designed to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. Del Martin was the first open lesbian elected to NOW, and Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were the first lesbian couple to join NOW. Martin and Lyon were co-founders of Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian civil rights organization in the U.S.

Over the next 20 years, NOW would go on to support lesbian fights for everything from those custody battles to same-sex marriage and lesbians in the military. NOW supported the right of a lesbian co-parent to seek visitation by filing an amicus brief in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court case T.B. v. L.R.M. That right was upheld “where the child has established strong psychological bonds, with a person who ... has ... provided care, nurture, and affection, assuming in the child’s eye a stature like that of a parent.”

NOW also supported hate crimes legislation that included lesbians and trans women as early as 2002 and came out in support of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expands the 1969 federal hate crimes law to include sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and disability.

It all started with a purge. The history of that purge made history — and redefined the feminist movement.

This article is courtesy of Philadelphia Gay News as part of a shared media partnership related to the LGBTQ+ History Project.

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◀ Andrew Chan

Continued from page 21

passionately made house music was going to foster a relationship with this particular community. And also you have David Cole as this really key collaborator, a gay man. So I think she couldn't have been completely unaware of it.

This is what's kind of interesting to me, and I don't really say this, maybe I should have said this in the book, but I do focus a lot on me experiencing her from the outside of her own experience. She's a Black woman, a mixed-race woman; I'm this Chinese-American gay man, and so I don't really belong to the specificity of her world. But, also, she is creating in our world too, as someone who's not queer, but making music, incredible music, in kind of a queer idiom. And so it's almost like this becomes this common ground for us to meet at.

Not to say that divas hadn't been singing on house tracks forever. Black women are pioneers of house music. But I think the specificity of the address in those remixes is really powerful, and it's kind of exciting to know that she found this freedom in that format, in that genre.

In the book, you write, "By sticking up for our beloved diva, are we trying to protect something from our childhoods — something that feels even more precious for having been at times as uncool as we ourselves may have once been?" This passage hit me hard. I hadn't thought about my connection to her on that level, exactly.

Just as we need to remember being in the closet and the shame and the fear we experienced in it, memories of how uncool Mariah was at that time if we were part of that generation are tied up in that because she became such a signifier, especially if you were a cis, male, gay child and you were closeted and you didn't want to be found out. Admitting that you love Mariah's music was going to be the tip-off. Now a lot of people are jumping on the bandwagon and they're more than welcome because it's a big tent [laughs], but we remember a time when she was uncool and uncool had a lot to do with homophobia toward her fan base as well as misogyny and racism toward her.

I wrote this with lambs and people like me in mind, but I was also thinking about friends of mine who come from a completely different experience, and sometimes I think this is common in friendships between straight men and queer men: As much love as there can be in those friendships, it can feel like there's such a wide chasm culturally and emotionally in the way we express ourselves that is so hard to communicate across. I do think this is a way of offering

something of my interior life to friends of mine who don't share this experience, and even though this book is not my memoir and it's pretty minimal about the personal stuff, it's about how I listen. Implicitly, I'm saying I'm listening to this as a gay Chinese-American man, and I have been really moved by their response to the book.

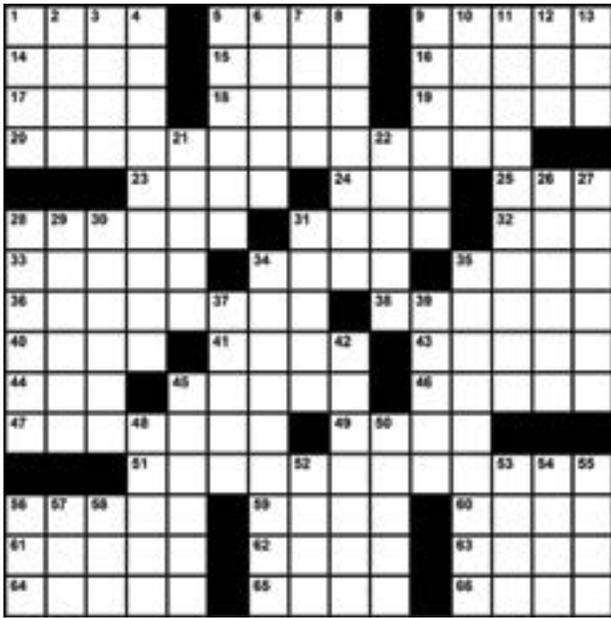
Representation was so different in the '90s for LGBTQ+ people who were growing up. We didn't have a lot of examples of what it looked like to feel and be different, and that we could be OK despite our differences. How do you think queer people of this current generation will feel the impact differently of what we got to experience in the moment with songs "Outside" or "Close My Eyes," or these remixes, and what Mariah represented to us then?

I think this is such a great question, and I am always constantly thinking about this intergenerational aspect of queer life, because even as I say in that chapter on house, I was a little too young to really be engaging with house music in the '90s like that. So I am almost experiencing those remixes as a portal to an earlier era of queer culture that I don't have access to. I am also wondering what this music will mean to young queer people now. But I think as far as we've come, we also know how much homophobia and transphobia exists today, particularly with the really violent backlash against trans people in recent years.

I think what I was trying to convey with the book, when I was saying that I see her almost as an antidote to the "it gets better" rhetoric of queer positivity, which has its place, and I'm not knocking it just to be a contrarian, but I think we've gotten to a point where Pride has been co-opted by corporations, and it's been mainstreamed in this way that I fear sometimes that we've forgotten what it meant to really be in the closet and the shame, and what that did to our spirits and the after-effects of that over years and years. Even as our lives go on, we flourish and thrive. Where's the space for that conversation?

Songs like "Outside" and "Close My Eyes" and the memories of experiencing them when we were kids, at least I can speak for myself, bring me back to that time. And I don't want to fetishize the trauma and the pain. I'm just saying that the after-effects exist, and listening to the music is a way to re-encounter and find a way to face a lot of things that, for myself, because I knew I was queer from a very young age, never really got processed or reconciled. So the music is a framework in which to do that.

"Why Mariah Carey Matters," published by University of Texas press, is out now.



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Remembering Dianne

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Down

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 2 Material for a drag queen
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 4 Uprights at Stonehenge, e.g.
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 8 Type of hosiery for men?
 9 Ruler with a vagina
 10 Fox's cry
 11 Unisex garment?

See p. 15 for answers

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◀ Fall Into a Book

Continued from page 19

Cidny was so troubled with who he wanted to be, his identity. That night he told me that he wanted to transition to a man, I just cried and cried. I finally kind of understood.” *Out now.* – SH

Breaking Free, Cory Allen

Cory Allen’s “Breaking Free” is a vulnerable and empowering memoir detailing an often-difficult childhood spent in Pennsylvania and rising through the ranks of a career in law enforcement as a gay man. Allen doesn’t hold back when it comes to detailing his sexual and romantic exploits, including a marriage that ended in divorce and a winding path toward true self-acceptance and the kind of love he’s deserved all along. Highlights include exclusive anecdotes about working as a secret service agent for the Obama family. *Out now.* – SH

Nonfiction

Prequel, Rachel Maddow

Our favorite bespectacled queer investigative journalist is back in the stacks with “Prequel,” a deep dive into a WWII-era narrative about a little-reported propaganda campaign waged by the far-right that was thwarted by everyday citizens and committed public servants. Maddow draws parallels between the movement and the modern-day right-wing strategy to undermine democratic institutions, promote antisemitism and destroy public confidence in duly elected leaders. Maddow details how both movements have aimed at overthrowing the government in favor of authoritarian rule. *Out now.* – SH

Gender Is Really Strange, Teddy G. Goetz

“Gender” might just be the buzzword of the decade, but precious little space is dedicated to exploring what it actually means to be trans, nonbinary, gender expansive, or any other label under the ever-expanding umbrella of identity. “Gender Is Really Strange” tackles these big-picture questions in the form of a non-fiction graphic novel geared toward anyone who wants to understand more about their own gender identity. Here, Goetz considers the nature vs. nurture debate and the inherent messiness of gender alongside intriguing, fact-based information from the fields of biology, neuroscience, behavioral and mental health,

balancing scientific fact with the impact of social norms shaped by religion, culture and other influences. *Out now.* – SH

Eyeliner: A Cultured History, Zahra Hankir

What can we learn from a little eye makeup? More than you think. Just ask ancient royals and RuPaul. In Zahra Hankir’s exploration of eyeliner, we learn about the intersections of beauty and power around the globe, a history seen through a beauty mainstay. Through reporting and conversations with a wide variety of people who have lined their eyes throughout history — from geishas in Japan, dancers in India and drag queens in New York — Hankir, a Lebanese-British journalist who reports on the Middle East and editor of “Our Women on the Ground,” investigates humanity with the unifying thread of eye contouring. She looks at eyeliner as a signal for religious devotion, a practical tool for shielding the eyes from the sun and a transformative way of turning a face into a fantasy. *Out Nov. 14.* – CA



Young Adult

The Borrow a Boyfriend Club, Page Powers

This young adult rom-com delivers the heaping dose of trans joy we could all use right about now. The story follows 16-year-old Noah as he enters a new school and works up a plan aimed at getting his classmates to see him as his true gender. Can Noah convince the “Borrow a Boyfriend Club” president that he can pose as the perfect sham boyfriend? Or is something else happening here? The perfect page-turner for a queer teen. *Out now.* – SH

Eli Over Easy, Phil Stamper

“Small Town Pride” author Phil Stamper’s latest middle-grade book focused on a queer lead, “Eli Over Easy,” is a sensitively penned story about Eli, who has recently moved to New York City from small-town Minnesota. Eli’s mom dies unexpectedly, and his dad can’t seem to communicate about her at all, leaving Eli feeling utterly alone. When he finds a collection of instructional cooking videos created by his mother, he decides to follow the recipes — by recreating the dishes, maybe he can keep her with him always. Still, there are only so many videos and he’s not sure what happens when they run out. Eli opens up about his feelings and his sexuality with next door neighbor and kindred spirit Mat. *Out now.* – SH



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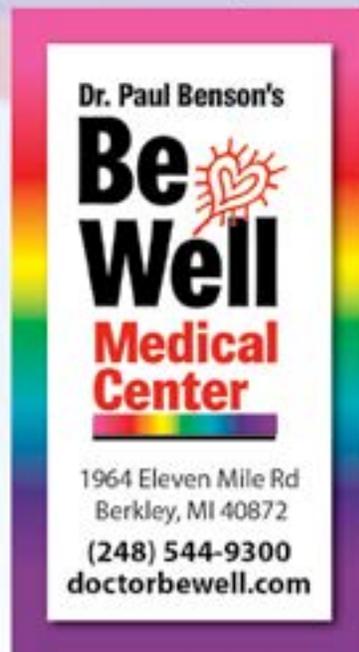
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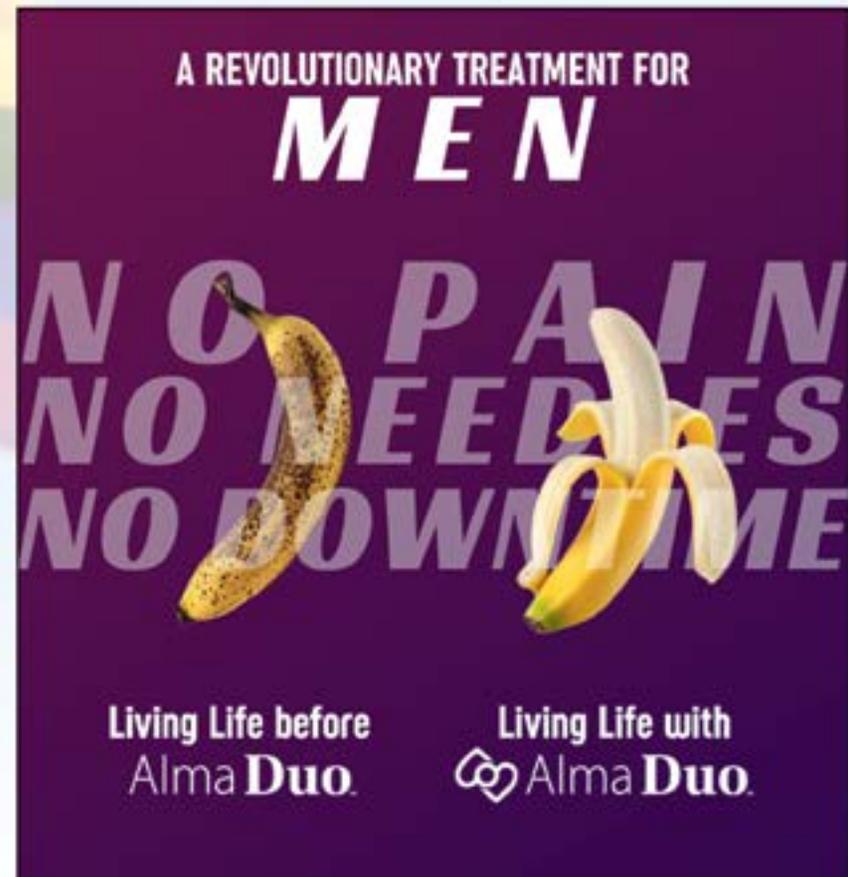
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