

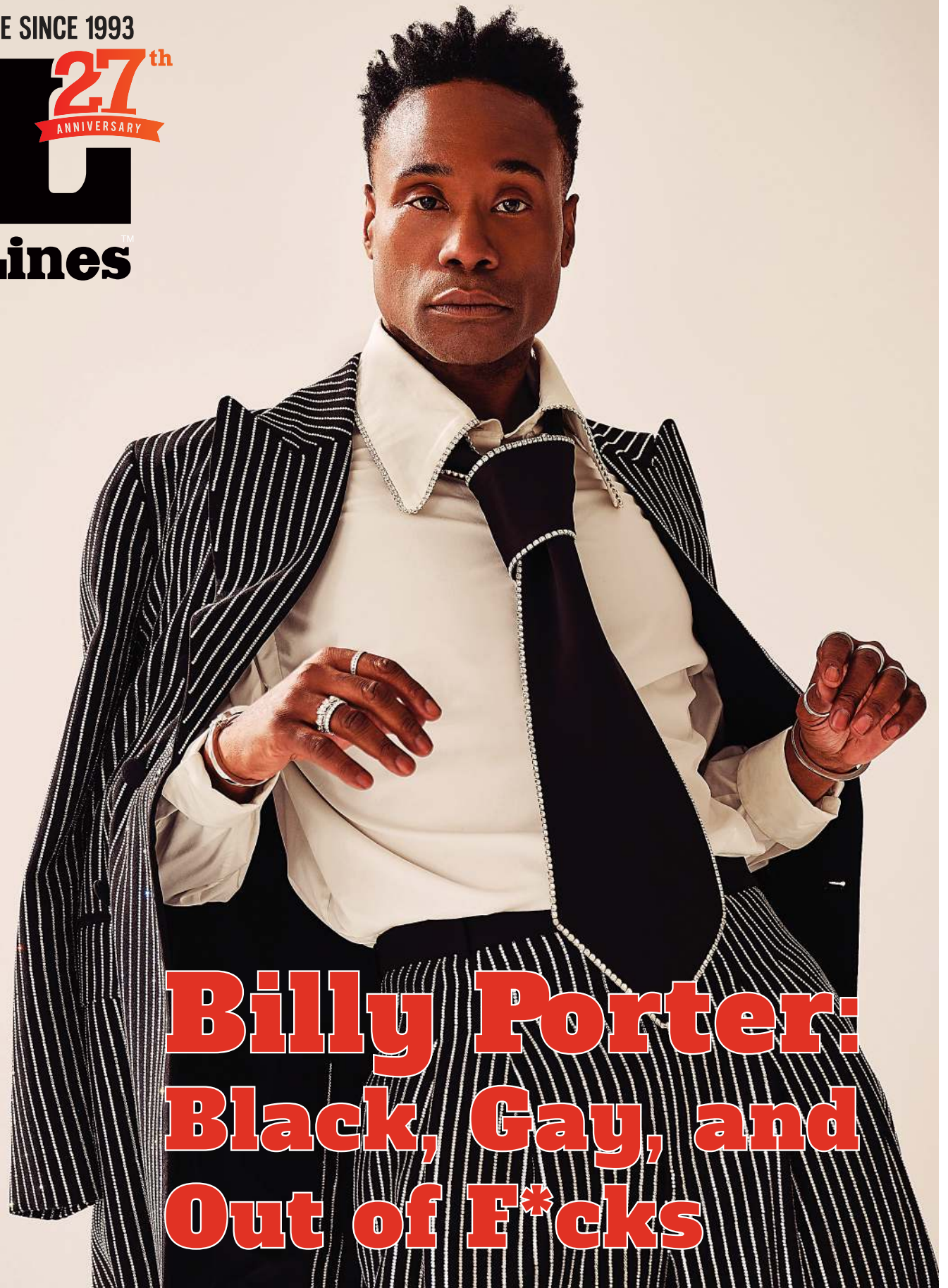
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**'It's Not Who We Are':
Livonia Mayor Condemns
Anti-LGBTQ Signs**

**Royal Oak City Commission
Makes Conversion Therapy
Criminal Misdemeanor**

**2020 Democratic and
Republican National
Convention LGBTQ Wrap-up**

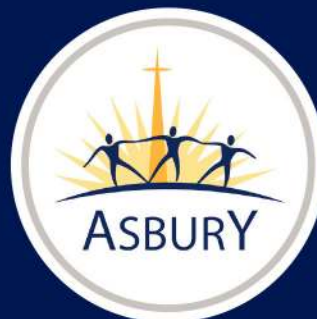


**Billy Porter:
Black, Gay, and
Out of F*cks**

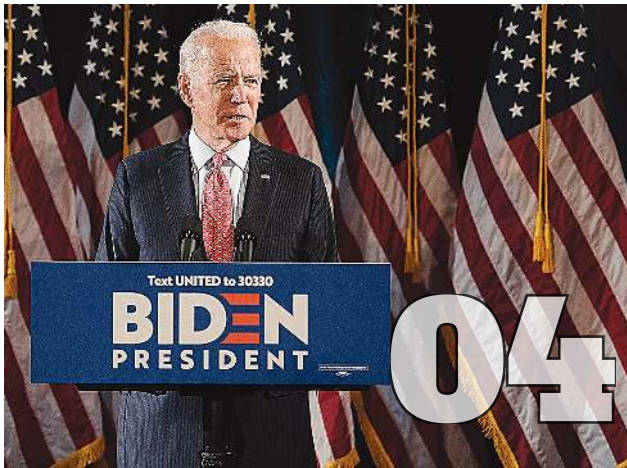
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The Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder, founder and senior pastor of City of Refuge United Church of Christ in Oakland, California. She will be hosting a webinar with MCCD on radical inclusion.

Here are some of our latest online-only pieces:

MCC-D to Host Webinar on Radical Inclusion

By Jason A. Michael

HHS Sued for Ending Data Collection on Tribal, LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

By Chris Johnson

LGBTQ Activists Participate in March on Washington Commemoration

By Steph Purifoy

'Platonic' Web Series Explores Queer Dating World and the Friendships that

Last Through it All

By Eve Kucharski

Also, make sure to check back for continuing COVID-19 coverage.

2020 Democratic and Republican National Convention LGBTQ Wrap-up



BY BTL STAFF

Despite social distancing requirements created by the novel coronavirus pandemic, over the last two weeks, both the Democratic and Republican Parties adapted and held their presidential nominating conventions for the upcoming 2020 election in November. While LGBTQ-specific issues were not the main focus of either event, each of the conventions had speakers from the community and touched upon LGBTQ-specific policies — directly or indirectly. Here's a summary of the month's events:

Democratic National Convention

Monday

- Multiple LGBTQ speakers took the stage including Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, soccer champion Megan Rapinoe, State Delegate Danica Roem and Kristin Urquiza, who drew national media attention in June when she wrote an obituary for her 65-year-old father who died of COVID-19.

- The Democratic Party's official 80-page platform denounced the Trump administration's actions that allows discrimination to target LGBTQ people. Additionally, the platform commits to helping LGBTQ youth with mental health needs and suicide prevention goals and pledges to "fight to enact the Equality Act and at last outlaw discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in housing, public accommodations, access to credit, education, jury service and federal programs."

Tuesday

- Openly gay convention Secretary Jason Rae directed roll call votes.

- A video in lieu of a keynote speaker featured 17 people who pledge to vote for the party's presidential nominee of Joe Biden. Three of the featured people were gay men: Long Beach, California, Mayor Robert Garcia, Pennsylvania State Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta, and Georgia State Rep. Sam Park.

- Former South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, whose campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination made history as he emerged as one of the top contenders as an openly gay candidate, announced Indiana's delegation vote.

- State Rep. Craig Hickman, the first openly gay African American to serve in the Maine House of Representatives, announced that state's votes.

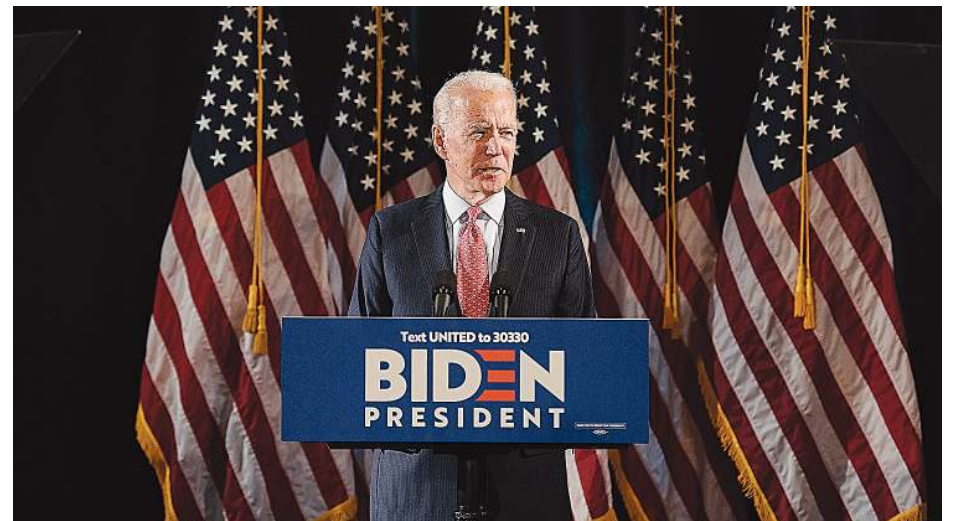
- Wyoming's vote was announced by the parents of Matthew Shepard, the victim of a 1998 assault that inspired legislation to prevent crimes motivated by hatred of LGBTQ people and other minorities. Dennis and Judy Shepard credited Biden with helping to pass that legislation and for his "commitment to equality and compassion for others."

- Before the convention's evening schedule, the Democratic Party's official LGBTQ+ Caucus held its first meeting on Tuesday afternoon. It hosted various LGBTQ leaders like Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, U.S. Reps. Mark Takano of California, David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Mark Pocan of Wisconsin and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Wednesday

- Emma González, a bisexual student who became one of the leaders of a youth egnovement against gun violence after a 2018 shooting at her high school in Parkland, Florida, was one of the first voices heard by people tuning in to Wednesday night's broadcast of the Democratic National Convention. Viewers then heard from the mother of Jerald Wright, a 31-year-old man killed during a gun massacre at the Pulse gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in 2016. The broadcast's host, actress Kerry Washington, noted the increasing violence against transgender people.

- Speaker Nancy Pelosi noted at the start of her address that the Democrats in the U.S. House include 60 percent women, people of color and LGBTQ people, standing on the shoulders of those who fought for them at



Seneca Falls, Selma and Stonewall.

- A video celebrating the accomplishments of women included a wide range of women, including several lesbians – Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, soccer champion Megan Rapinoe, Texas Congressional candidate Gina Ortiz Jones, U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids of Kansas and Virginia's transgender Delegate Danica Roem.

- Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David called Harris an "exceptional choice" for vice president saying, "Throughout her groundbreaking career, Senator Harris has been an outspoken advocate for the LGBTQ community," David said, "standing with us when many, even sometimes those within her own party, did not."

- Baldwin, who was said to be have been on Biden's list of potential vice presidential running mates, noted Wednesday that Harris came to Wisconsin to help with her last reelection campaign. Baldwin was speaking to a Zoom audience organized Wednesday evening by the Lesbian Political Action Committee to pay tribute to the fact that she was the first lesbian elected to the U.S. Senate.

Thursday

- Buttigieg used his time on Thursday night to share the story of his time in the military, too, in Afghanistan. This followed a video recounting the life of Biden's late son Beau, who served as a member of the National Guard in Iraq. Buttigieg said he grew up at a time when "firing me because of who I am wasn't just possible — it was policy."

- Two other openly LGBTQ people were briefly highlighted during the last night of the convention. One was Virginia Delegate Danica Roem, the first transgender person to win office in that state. Roem spoke as part of a video of various people sharing what they hope the nation will be like "this time next year." Roem said she hopes there will be a president who can look a transgender woman in the eyes and "tell her her rights are important." The other was openly gay Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia, who said he hopes there will be "comprehensive

See **Convention Wrap-up**, continued on p. 6

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Want to help? Here's how you can get involved:

Become an election worker

Sign up here at Michigan.gov/DemocracyMVP
(Participants paid at least minimum wage)

Volunteer for a campaign

Here are six openly LGBTQ candidates endorsed by BTL. We encourage you to support them by volunteering and donating to their campaigns:

Jon Hoadley (D) is running for the 6th Congressional District in southwest Michigan. Hoadley seeks to unseat incumbent Republican Fred Upton who is seeking his 17th term in the U.S. Congress.



David Coulter (D), Oakland County Executive seeks election to the post he was appointed to last summer after the death of longtime County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.



And these State Reps.:

Tim Sneller (D) seeks reelection to his seat in Michigan's 50th House District.

Laurie Pohutsky (D) seeks reelection to her seat in Michigan's 19th House District.

Jody LaMacchia (D) seeks election in Michigan's 46th House District.

Renee Richter (D) seeks election in Michigan's 108th House District.

► Convention Wrap-up

Continued from p. 4

immigration reform.”

- The event's invocation was delivered by Sister Simone Campbell of “Nuns on the Bus,” a Catholic social justice group that has supported respect for same-sex marriage.

Republican National Convention Monday

- In June of this year, the COVID-19 prompted the Republican party to forego a meeting of its platform committee this year and adhere, instead, to the platform it adopted in 2016. It was a platform that had prompted Log Cabin Republicans to place a full-page ad in USA Today, calling the platform the “most anti-LGBT platform in the Republican Party's 162-year history.” On July 29, the Log Cabin Republicans issued a press release announcing a public education program, Outspoken — featured at getoutspoken.com — to “articulate our conservative voices and amplify them across the nation.” The most recent posting criticizes LGBTQ comedian Randy Rainbow for his “anti-Trump” videos.

- The 2016 Republican National Convention included one openly gay primetime speaker, Paypal founder and Facebook board member Peter Thiel.

- On Monday night, no speaker mentioned LGBTQ people outright, but several referred to “values” and “morality” in ways that seemed to conflate efforts to achieve equality with “vengeful mobs” and the closing of churches due COVID-19.

Tuesday

- There was a thinly veiled criticism of equal rights for LGBTQ people by Cissie Graham Lynch, the granddaughter of the Rev. Billy Graham and daughter of evangelical minister Franklin Graham. Lynch told viewers that the Obama-Biden administration had “tried to force adoption agencies to violate their deeply held beliefs.” That was an apparent reference to the ongoing controversy over whether local and state governments with laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity can withhold funding for religious adoption agencies that violate those laws.

Wednesday

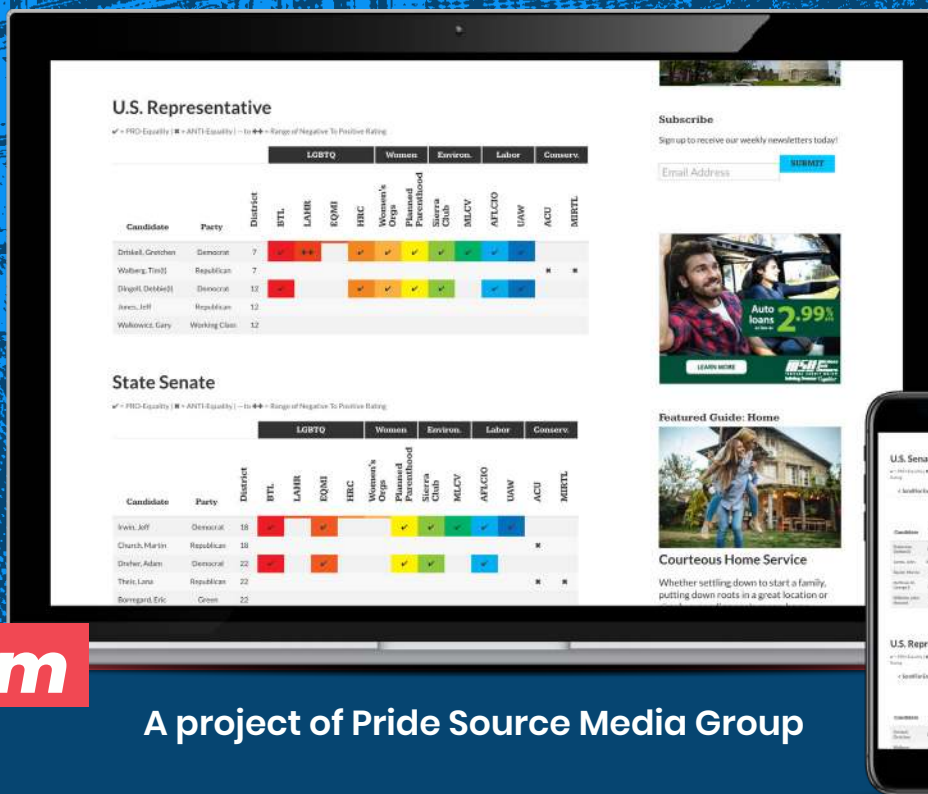
- There was no mention of LGBTQ people during night three of the 2020 Republican National Convention Wednesday night. However, Richard Grenell, openly gay former acting director of National Intelligence and ambassador to Germany, was given time in the spotlight. He did not discuss equal rights for LGBTQ people or even mention his role as the newly appointed leader in the Trump campaign's outreach to LGBTQ voters.

Thursday

- The final night of the 2020 Republican National Convention ended with President Trump highlighting the distinct differences between his intended leadership going forward and the leadership of Democratic nominee Joe Biden. This mirrored both presidential nominees' inclusion, or lack thereof, of LGBTQ people.

Visit us online at pridesource.com for complete coverage of both conventions.

Let's Make Michigan Progressive Again.



MiVoterGuide.com

A project of Pride Source Media Group

The 2020 Michigan Progressive Voters Guide aggregates endorsements from 10+ state and national organizations dedicated to supporting equality and justice for all Americans regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, economic status, age, concern for the environment or other divisive lines drawn between us and our fellow citizens.

All in one place, you can see which candidates have the support of the progressive organizations on your own personalized statewide and local ballot. The Guide also provides right wing, conservative endorsements so voters can see which candidates, if elected, would actively work against progressive values in Michigan.

Go to www.mivoterguide.com to learn more.

Royal Oak City Commission Makes Conversion Therapy Criminal Misdemeanor

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

The Royal Oak City Commission voted at its monthly meeting Monday, Aug. 10, to make conversion therapy on minors criminal misdemeanor. This follows its decision in June to pass an ordinance prohibiting the practice in the city.

Royal Oak is the sixth city in the state to enact such a ban. Huntington Woods became the first last June. Since then, Ferndale, Berkley, Madison Heights and East Lansing have also come on board. Across the country, 20 states and have banned the practice. Michigan is one of the remaining 30 that has not taken such action, although there are two bills, Senate Bill 284 and House Bill 4515, currently pending in the legislature.

The American Medical Association and the National Association of Social Workers have both discredited the practice labeling it as harmful to those who undergo it.

"I have met many individuals later in life who have gone through conversion therapy who spent years trying to undo the negative effects of what happened to them during the attempted conversion," said Joe Kort, founder and director of The Center for Relationship and Sexual Health, which is located in Royal Oak. "There is no science behind conversion therapy that's satisfactory because it doesn't work."

Kort said the lingering effects of such alleged treatments include nightmares, anxiety and depression. In addition, many participants spend a significantly greater time in the closet before coming out. Additionally, many who have undergone this treatment marry a spouse of the opposite sex in an attempt to convince themselves that the treatments have worked only to later divorce.

The Royal Oak ordinance, if violated, will come with a penalty including up to 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine, which is the toughest penalty the city could enforce according to City Attorney David Gillam who drafted the ordinance.

"Even though there's a ban and it's illegal in many states to provide conversion therapy to minors, sadly it's been done by the unlicensed professionals in religious institutions and coerced by the parents forcing them into these programs," Kort said. "This type of 'therapy' is very harmful and abusive and causes trauma to the teenagers that are involved."

PLAN TO VOTE
NOV. 3 or By Absentee
Ballot Starting Sept. 24

Lesbian Grand Rapids Judge Won't Return to Church After Being Denied Communion

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Denied Communion, Part 2

When *Between The Lines* last spoke with Chief Judge Sara Smolenski in December, the 62-year-old resident of Grand Rapids had recently been informed she could no longer receive Communion at St. Stephen Catholic Church, where she was a lifelong parishioner. The reason provided by Father Scott Nolan, a new priest at the parish, was that she was married to her same-sex partner. To everyone at the church and in the community, the marriage and the long-term relationship were never a secret.

Since that time, Smolenski has had time to reflect — and grieve. This was particularly acute when, out of respect, she felt it necessary to skip a fellow parishioner's funeral.

"There was a longtime parishioner that died," Smolenski explained. "And I thought, 'My gosh, I want to go to his funeral. But I don't want to go to St. Stephen's and have everybody know I'm sitting in the pew when it's Communion time.' So I did not go to his funeral. And I thought, 'Really? That's sad.' But I thought, 'Really, I don't want to make an issue of it.' I didn't want to take away from what their family was going through. But I didn't want to

be the one left in the pew and say you're not good enough to come up."

Smolenski offered an analogy to put a finer point on her predicament.

"It reminds you of being invited somewhere for dinner but you cannot eat," she said. "Where have you ever been invited to someone's home for a meal and you cannot partake?"

In no uncertain terms, Smolenski reported she won't return where she's not welcome to fully participate in the service. She then compared her reaction to that of Terry Gonda, who was fired from her part-time job as music director at a parish in Auburn Hills because the Archdiocese of Detroit became aware of her same-sex marriage. Similarly, the marriage was well-known to the pastors and parishioners.

"I don't want to go back when I can't go up for Communion," Smolenski stated. "I feel like I'm being told I'm not good enough to be a real member — but you can visit. And that's no way to have a faith-based group to be with."

"I jokingly think [Gonda]'s a better Christian than I am, because she is a spiritual director," she continued. "So she has a lot of expertise in helping people from a spiritual perspective. And I appreciate that she doesn't want people to be angry at the hierarchy or angry at the church or angry at all priests. I'm not exactly there, because I think it's the opposite of what

Jesus would really want us to do: get along with everybody, treat everybody equally, be kind and considerate and be the kind of person God wanted us all to be."

Discrimination

Smolenski expressed frustration at how arbitrarily she believes she is being treated. Before and since the original story broke, she has received Communion at other parishes where her marital status is known. Not only that, she's heard from concerned pastors near and far, who report never having denied anyone Communion.

"Here's my biggest issue," Smolenski said. "It's discrimination. How I see it is discrimination. Whether it's the rule or not. How does one priest do it so totally different from another?"

Just as Gonda's fellow parishioners were left with feelings of anger, sadness and confusion about her firing, so too were many who attend St. Stephen, about Smolenski's plight. *Between The Lines* spoke with one of them.

Micki Benz has known Smolenski for 30 years. She is also a St. Stephen parishioner. According to Benz, there was "quite an uprising" when news spread that Smolenski

continued on next page

LGBT Detroit Partners with 2020 Highland Park Census Committee, to Host Sep. 5 Event

BY BTL STAFF

In the last push of effort to ensure that everyone is counted in the 2020 Census, LGBT Detroit's Be Queer Be Counted Census Campaign has partnered with the 2020 Highland Park Census Community Count Committee. The two organizations will host a commemorative event, the Highland Park Census Car Parade and Movie Rally, on Saturday, Sept. 5, from noon to 3 p.m. at the Highland Park Fire Station.

"LGBT Detroit recognizes that this time continues to be unique due to the impact of COVID-19," said Chunnika Hodges, community advocate for the Be Queer Be Counted Project. "Partnerships with like-minded organizations strengthens the and challenges unforeseen obstacles in the new normal of civic and social engagement."

"An undercount in Highland Park will continue to place our city into further decline, which would create a misleading picture of our population growth, affect our Medicare, Medicaid and unemployment assistance we receive to serve our residents and cut funding programs for our two schools including Barber Academy and George Washington Carver Academy," said 2020 Highland Park Census Community Count Committee Chair Anista Thomas.



Thomas went on to say that each person per household accounts for over \$50,000 in federal expenditures for the city over the next decade.

"And we currently have acquired over \$205,000,000 in future federal funding with those who have completed their Census in Highland Park," Thomas said. "If we reach each and every Parker — your participation will help us reach our goal to over \$600,000,000 in federal funding for Highland Park."

Thomas said that over the next few weeks, those in Highland Park will receive details regarding the first Highland Park Census Car Parade and Movie Rally.

"Census enumerators will be knocking on your doors in August. And if you have not filled out your Census by then, please practice social distancing, welcome them and do so — they will have an Identified ID with a Census enumerator code," Thomas said. "Lastly, the Highland Park Census Community Count Committee is proud to partner with

LGBT Detroit in our efforts in getting our communities counted. I welcome LGBTQ+ residents and communal support organizations to work with us as we work toward not only being counted but being inclusive and fair."

Be Queer Be Counted, a project of LGBT Detroit, aims to ensure the successful count of LGBTQ people in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties. As a virtual campaign, Be Queer Be Counted highlights the even more meaningful Census count during the novel coronavirus pandemic while decreasing the spread of viral infection. LGBT Detroit uses social media strategies, social organizing and direct mail to reach and engage the LGBTQ community in Southeast Michigan.

This parade and rally is the first in-person event of "Be Queer Be Counted Census" and the 2020 Highland Park Census Community Count Committee. Organizers emphasize that all gender presentations and expressions are welcomed.

The Sept. 5 event will last from noon to 3 p.m. and will be held at the Highland Park Fire Station located at 25 Gerald St. For more information about Be Queer Be Counted Census 2020 or to get involved, visit lgbtdetroit.org or contact Chunnika L. Hodges at 313-397-2127;106 or Chunnikahodges@lgbtdetroit.org.



Chief Judge Sara Smolenski

would be denied Communion. Benz and others held “very civil” conversations with the pastor and parish council, but no one’s minds were changed, Benz said. Now, she says, she and her husband “don’t feel comfortable” going back to St. Stephen.

Benz explained how she understands the circumstances.

“In the context of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, there are priests who understand that there are people in our church who are gay who still want to be Catholic and they are welcomed — just not at St. Stephen’s,” Benz said.

Benz’s friend in the diocesan office explained to her that marriage is a very public statement. And the diocese cannot be seen to support something like that that’s clearly against the principles of the Catholic Church. However, Benz and many others don’t think same-sex marriage or being gay is against the principles of the Catholic Church in the first place.

“I know there are people who are supportive of this rigid direction,” Benz said. “To me, the saddest thing is that it’s divided up our parish. It was a very tight-knit, close, active parish. And it’s very divided now.”

Tradition

When asked what she thought of the Catholic Church’s exclusionary approach in her own and Gonda’s experience, Smolenski questioned why church leadership insisted on “shooting themselves in the foot.”

“There’s a lot of people have been saying to me, ‘Well, Sara, what took you so long? What took you so long to realize. ... Why’ve you stayed this whole time?’” Smolenski said.

“The younger people don’t like to put up with any of that [discrimination],” she continued. “It’s a deal-breaker. And if that change means they won’t be going to the Catholic Church, so be it. I don’t know if that means the Catholic Church would become extinct or nonexistent.”

There are plenty of people who attend the Catholic Church because they have always gone and it fits for them, said Smolenski.

“They’re not worried about you or your problem. It doesn’t happen to them. Until their kid is gay. Or their sister. Or their family member. It’s like Black Lives Matter is an example of — this is a problem for everyone. You don’t have to be Black to realize this a huge

issue. But sometimes people just find what fits comfortably for them, until they’re forced to face the reality of what’s happening.

Smolenski said she’d reconsider returning in the event a new pastor came to St. Stephen.

“Now maybe say they get somebody else,” Smolenski suggested. “And I hear he’s very progressive and inclusive. I wouldn’t hesitate. Because the majority of the people that are there, that I’ve known for the 62 years I’ve been part of the church, are wonderful, loving, great people.

“It’s a great parish,” she continued. “It really helped mold who I am today. When this whole thing happened ... it felt like grieving my parents again. It felt like a death to me. When he said I can’t come up for Communion, to a church I’ve belonged to virtually my entire life. A church that I can barely separate from my family.”

Reflection

For now, having “time off” due to novel coronavirus precautions has been, in Smolenski’s words, “refreshing.” She echoed a sentiment the Rev. Roland Stringfellow shared with BTL shortly after COVID-19 spread to Michigan and MCC-Detroit started holding services via videoconference: “God is not confined to a building,” he said.

“I don’t think you need a physical structure to have a church base,” Smolenski said. “I think that you can have your strong faith in how you live, what you learned, how you’ve been raised. Your faith is a big part of you. But it isn’t just blossoming just because you go to a church. Each one of us has to work on our own faith life, whether you go to church every day or not.

“So let’s say you take your bike and you go ride to a beautiful nature trail,” she continued. “That can be a faith-filled experience. I say that now because I’m riding my bike 10 miles a day. And I do this nature trail that’s absolutely gorgeous and breathtaking and sometimes I find myself praying or thinking about somebody that might need my prayer of health. Just because I’m not going to church doesn’t mean I can’t pray and have a faith-filled experience.”

Going forward, Smolenski says she doesn’t think her churchgoing days are over. That’s always been an important part of her life. However, it sounds like she’s not “married” do the idea of returning to the Catholic Church, whether that means short or long term.

“I don’t think I’ll stop going to church,” Smolenski said. “But sometimes when I go to the Methodist church or another church of different religion, they are so — It can be a very powerful experience. The Catholics are no different than anybody else — we’re no better, we’re no worse. [We’re] people trying to live our lives. But when the church goes in what appears to be a complete opposite direction of what you really believe Jesus would want to do, it’s hard to stay with it.”

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‘Discrimination is Wrong, No Matter Where It Exists’: Conflict Between LGBTQ Catholics and Church Leadership

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

It's not news that the Catholic Church has a long history of discrimination against LGBTQ adherents of the faith. What Between The Lines took notice of in particular, however, was a trio of recent events in Michigan. Back in March, the Archdiocese of Detroit announced that Dignity/Detroit and Fortunate Families faced expulsion. Several months later, a music director was fired from her job at a parish in Auburn Hills because she is married to her same-sex partner. And, refused Communion last fall — also for her same-sex marriage — a lesbian judge in Grand Rapids has decided to leave her church. With the above in mind, BTL spoke with two individuals who have knowledge in the field.

‘What a Failure of the Church’s

Core Mission”

Dignity USA is an LGBTQ-inclusive Roman Catholic organization, which, in some regions, offers Mass by ordained Catholic priests. Because Dignity/Detroit — the Detroit affiliate — has “reject[ed] Church teaching on human sexuality,” the Archdiocese of Detroit recently cut ties. Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of Dignity USA, had a few things to say about that, and she commented on the firing of church music director Terry Gonda and the denial of Communion to Judge Sara Smolenski as well.

“Every one of these firings just rips my heart out, honestly,” Duddy-Burke said, in reference to Gonda. “This is an issue that has been going on for decades. At least since the 1970s, [there have been] documented cases, and probably long before that. Then it was about being gay

or lesbian; now they’re sort of saying that the folks who enter into civil marriage publicly flaunt Church policy, and that’s the reason. It’s homophobia, and it’s transphobia, and it’s discrimination, pure and simple. There’s no excuse for this.”

Duddy-Burke contrasted the firings with being denied Communion.

“Cases of LGBTQ people being denied sacraments are, I think, a less publicized but also deeply scarring kind of exclusion that is becoming a lit bit more public,” Duddy-Burke said.

Then, echoing Smolenski’s own words about her heartbreak regarding the prospect of being denied Communion at a funeral, she said, “What a failure of the Church’s core mission to have somebody told, ‘You cannot come to the table and be fed while you are mourning your mother.’”

Duddy-Burke suggested there’s a campaign by the AOD to push LGBTQ people back in the closet or to “live the kinds of lives that have proven over and over to be absolutely damaging to our mental, physical and spiritual health.”

“There is just this clear message that is coming from the chancery, from Archbishop Vigneron, that we are evil and damaged people incapable of God’s love unless we comply with rules and thoughts about who we are that are absolutely cruel and inhumane,” she said.

Why Target LGBTQ Catholics?

We questioned why LGBTQ Catholics are being targeted. And why now.

One reason, Duddy-Burke said, is that many bishops are taking their cues directly from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops who gather

continued on next page

‘It’s Not Who We Are’: Livonia Mayor Condemns Anti-LGBTQ Signs in Resident’s Yard

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

As the November election gets closer, it's not uncommon to see lawn signs announcing support for preferred political candidates across the state, but when a longtime Livonia resident was taking a drive through his neighborhood earlier this month, he was shocked at what he saw on a neighbor's lawn. In addition to a sign supporting President Trump's reelection, a house on Levan Road displayed hand-made signs with messages like: “Fags R Sicko” and “Fags R Evil See Gen. 18.20 Sodom & Gomorrah! If I catch you, I will kill you!”

It wasn't long after that that Jeff, the concerned resident who chose not to disclose his last name, shared pictures of the signs on social media and called the police to complain. He said that the response from Livonia Police bothered him almost as much as the signs themselves.

“Obviously, I have the most issue with the signs — but the other issue that I had was when I called the police to report the signs there was no empathy at all from the officer. He didn't say, ‘Oh, I'm sorry that there's nothing that can be done.’ He just said, ‘No, it's on his lawn, it's freedom of speech.’ Even to say that if he catches someone, he'll kill them? He's like, ‘Yeah, if it said a specific person then they could stop it, but because it's a general statement there's nothing we can do,’” Jeff said. “... My parents have lived in Livonia for 30-some years, and I've lived on-and-off, and it's kind of hurtful.”

Livonia Mayor Maureen Miller Brosnan learned of Jeff's complaints and the signs just last week. She called their messaging “ugly” and “hurtful.”

“Just in general, deconstructing prejudice is



Anti-LGBTQ signs on a Livonia resident's lawn.

incredibly difficult work, and signs like those that were displayed at this home in our city don't help us with that work at all,” Brosnan said. “The derogatory language, the outright slurs presented on those yard signs, they are an affront to our values, to our public decency. I know that the ugly, hurtful sentiments that were displayed, they don't represent the Livonia that I serve.”

Brosnan confirmed that the resident who posted the signs is former Livonia mayoral candidate Leo Weber who earned 2 percent of the vote in 2015. Brosnan said that while the First Amendment protects Weber's right to display the language on the signs, city officials have both called and sent letters notifying him that he is in violation of a city ordinance.

“We're trying really hard to abide and to uphold the First Amendment, so we can't enforce any kind of ordinance relevant to what

the signs say, but the fact that we do have an ordinance that prohibits you from having an excess number of signs,” Brosnan said. “So, he was found to be in violation of the number of signs and I believe there are some that are hanging in a tree, and they violate our height ordinance.”

Brosnan even tried visiting Weber's home herself to “engage in a dialogue,” but Weber did not answer his door. When asked about steps that Livonia is taking to create a more equitable environment in the city, Brosnan used the recently reinstated Livonia Human Relations Commission as an example, which aims to recommend policy regarding matters of diversity, inclusion and equity. Brosnan urged engaged community members to participate.

“The Human Relations Commission is definitely an opportunity for people to contribute, and the Commission reports

directly to me,” she said. “City Council meetings are another opportunity. The online survey [created by the Commission to assess equality in the community] is a third opportunity for people to participate as well. And there's always just office phone calls, emails and that type of thing. They're always accepted and appreciated, really.”

She also recognized that while the city has taken positive steps, incidents like these are a reminder that there is a lot of work yet to be done.

“It's going to require a lot of courage, a lot of patience, a lot of humility. And Livonia, while we remain really committed to the First Amendment, we do remain steadfast in our beliefs that there is no place in our city,” Brosnan said. “Again, it is not what we represent in Livonia. It's not who we are.”

Jay Kaplan is the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan LGBT Project Staff Attorney. He said that the ACLU has plans to send a letter to city government next week, urging the Livonia Police Department to make a statement denouncing the language, too.

“Though they can't make this gentleman necessarily remove the signs based on their message, they could also make it clear that any violence toward an LGBT person would be dealt with by law enforcement,” Kaplan said. “And just to make it clear that violence motivated by hate is not to be tolerated in the City of Livonia as well.”

The next step, Kaplan said, would be for the city to pass a specific nondiscrimination ordinance that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

“That way they would be demonstrating their commitment to being a welcoming community that supports diversity,” he said.

annually to decide on policy agendas.

“Abortion and anti-gay are their top two,” Duddy-Burke said. “Not immigration, not poverty, not climate change, not racial justice — it’s anti-abortion and not allowing the spread of ‘deviant lifestyles.’ It’s a campaign against our community. It’s written into their priorities.”

In addition, there is a group of bishops who oppose Pope Francis’s papacy and who see him as too “permissive” on LGBTQ issues. Duddy-Burke said Pope Francis’ oft-cited, “Who am I to judge?” quote was like a panic button for them.

A third reason is that many bishops “are totally incapable of comprehending much less leading with the social changes,” Duddy-Burke said. “The idea of gay marriage as being on the same par as heterosexual marriage is literally incomprehensible to them.”

While Duddy-Burke allows that sometimes change is gradual and it may take time for top church leaders to age out, she’s not taking it sitting down.

“The damage is being done now,” she said, adding that it’s neither fair nor ethical to be expected to wait for change to come.

“It speaks to a huge gap between the people of the church and the church leaders in terms of their attitudes on LGBTQ people and our place in the church and our place in society,” Duddy-Burke said. “Since just the 1980s, we’ve seen that — it used to be a little crack, but now it’s huge.”

The Small Church with the Big Heart

Like Duddy-Burke, Father Harry Posner is similarly dismayed by what happened to Smolenski and Gonda at the hands of church leadership. Posner is an Old Catholic priest at Christ the Good Shepherd in Berkley, where one of the other pastors is his husband.

“I think it’s a travesty,” Posner said. “And I think it’s a sad day when people are fired for living authentic lives. [Terry Gonda] is being true to herself as God created her and to be fired for that from a religious institution is outrageous.”

He likewise called Smolenski’s treatment by the priest at St. Stephen “a travesty” in that religion was being used as a weapon.

“Jesus never denied anybody his love,” Posner said. “No matter what the cause was. He encouraged people, he invited people with kindness and with love. He never said, ‘You’re not worthy; you can’t come.’ And so I just think it’s so far from a pastoral way or Christ-like way of behaving. It breaks my heart to see churches use faith as a weapon to gain compliance. The Eucharist should strengthen us.”

How They Differ

Christ the Good Shepherd, located in the former Doll Hospital on 12 Mile Road, is not a Roman Catholic Church and is therefore not recognized by the Archdiocese of Detroit. On theological issues, the Old Catholic Church is very similar to the Roman Catholic Church. However, there are key differences.

“The main difference between the Roman

Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Church is much more progressive and open on social issues,” Posner explained. “And so we have women priests, married clergy, full inclusion of people in the LGBTQ community.”

“Basically, everybody is welcomed to full membership to participation to all sacraments and so we don’t determine who can receive Communion and who can’t receive Communion,” he continued. “We don’t fire people because of their sexual orientation or ban anybody from participation in the church ... all are welcome.”

Posner explained further that the Old Catholic Church can be thought of as the “old faith” or the early church, and it harks back to a time when individual churches had a certain level of autonomy and the pope was first among equals with the bishops, not in charge.

In terms of whether Old Catholic priests could perform a Mass for the Dignity/Detroit, which can no longer worship on AOD property, Posner said at first they held back, but now it’s different that the expulsion is in effect. He said they would be open to working with them and even offered a separate Mass for their members.

Posner then pointed to an interesting distinction between how their Church is viewed in the U.S. as opposed to Rome.

“Rome looks on us very differently from the Archdiocese of Detroit,” Posner said. “The Archdiocese of Detroit looks on us kind of like with suspicion, and we have no relationship whatsoever with them. But in Rome, there’s Papal documents that, in the absence of a Roman Catholic priest, Roman Catholics can receive sacraments from Old Catholic priests in good conscience. So there’s a provision in Rome; the Archdiocese of Detroit has just chosen to ignore us for the most part.”

A Growing Church

Christ the Good Shepherd opened its doors in 2013 with 13 individuals and now has 85 member families, Posner reported. And he extended a warm welcome to Catholics who may be looking for an alternative — but no less legitimate — form of Catholicism.

“Our church is growing because we are open and loving,” Posner said. “We call ourselves the small church with the big heart, because it really is about the heart. It’s about love. And the faith is about love. And compassion and understanding and caring for one another, not building up artificial walls that separate us for whatever reasons. Discrimination is wrong no matter where it exists. Whether in a church or in society, discrimination is wrong.”

We are all equal in God’s eyes, Posner said.

“I would invite any Catholic — Roman Catholic — that’s feeling ostracized or alienated because they’re a woman that wants to become a priest or someone that’s been married or a former priest that has left because he felt called to marriage they can check out an Old Catholic Church,” Posner said. “It’s a new way of living the faith. You can be yourself.”



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Ubuntu! Remembering and Honoring Those we Have Lost

HOTTER THAN JULY 25TH ANNIVERSARY
RETROSPECTIVE HOTTER July

BY RHIANNON CHESTER-BEY

Each year, Hotter Than July's annual Pride celebration begins with a calling of the names of friends, family and community giants who've come before us and on whose shoulders we stand. The Hotter Than July Candlelight Vigil is an event for Detroit's LGBTQ community of all ages, religions and backgrounds to come together to be seen, held and heard. In its beginnings, the Blue Spruce Memorial Tree was planted in Palmer Park as a declaration to always remember, not erase and to never forget those we lost to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in our community.

Ubuntu, a philosophy used in communities of African descent, means "I am, because you are." This principle, used as a previous Hotter Than July theme, calls for us to remember those who have come before us — whether they have paved many roads or simply left an impression on our lives.

Faith is central to the Detroit LGBTQ community. The annual vigil is recognized as the opening ceremony for all to come in remembrance.

Rev. Dr. Selma Massey, pastor of Whosoever Will United Church of Christ, said regardless of your faith or belief, everyone who came together at the vigil stood united on HIV awareness and creating open spaces.

The Rev. Darlene Franklin, former pastor of Full Truth Fellowship of Christ Church, reflected on her experience and how the candlelight vigil started.

"It was really us identifying ourselves, making a claim to not only our divine selves but that we are here," Franklin said. "We also claimed the ground, claimed Palmer Park, claimed our place in the church and we brought about awareness to the dilemma of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the enormous amount of souls we lost."

The event became the connective link between the issues, our history and our faith that brighter days are to come.

"It was about making that connection that we are real, we are here, we are united and we are making a statement that will continue on forever," Franklin said.

This Pride opening ceremony is about something deeper than remembrance. It is about honoring our ancestors. Whether participants honor them as a regular practice or only once a year at the Blue Spruce Memorial Tree, this is an important tradition to be upheld.

"Each time that we went there [Palmer Park] and bordered the tree it became apparent that we were pouring libations into the earth and



The Blue Spruce Memorial Tree in Palmer Park.
Photo by INPAQ.

that we were calling out the names of not just those who passed from HIV/AIDS but we began to call out the names of our heroes and heroes that we know can hear us," Franklin said. "Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, we began to call out those names that gave us strength and you could feel the power from within."

When we call names in remembrance, we are honoring the life and story of those we call to. The connection to the life, tribulations and dignity of our ancestors gives us strength. The act itself is an act of faith.

"In my faith it says, 'Honor your mother and your father.' To me, it means the people who have birthed something, the Rev. Jeffrey Seals, pastor of One Church Detroit, said.

"A scripture in the Bible talks about 'a great crowd of witnesses.' To me, that's who it's talking about." He continued, "When you honor them, it gives you the strength to move on, it gives you the courage. If we don't honor them we won't learn the lessons."

There are many lessons embedded in the experiences of Detroit's LGBTQ community that provide markers for living an authentic and full life.

"Today, in a nutshell, as an African person, if we do not honor our ancestors we will not come to know what it means to really walk free," Franklin said. "We must embrace it and embrace it beyond a kente cloth. It has to go deeper than skin deep. It has to go to the cells

... that is where they live."

In order to continue making strides toward full dignity for LGBTQ people of African descent we must rely on the lessons in our DNA that remind us of our humanity and the right to stand up to injustice.

Massey shared her thoughts on what she feels every year at the candlelight vigil.

"It gives us the energy and drive to go back to where we came from, for me it's my church community," Massey said. "We're here standing on their shoulders and we can go forward to carry the same message of love, inclusiveness and respecting one another like our mother, Ruth Ellis, did. They say, 'What would Jesus do?' What would Ruth do?"

The answer: create space for pride to grow — pride in ourselves, pride in our history and pride for the future.

Pride gives us "a sense of belonging and a sense of community," Seals said.

"Just as she [Ruth Ellis] was a mentor for us, we can be a mentor for other people," Massey said. "Whether that is in the church pews, our business or in the community. Love begets love."

It is not coincidental that each year Hotter Than July's weeklong celebration begins with this reminder of faith and pride.

"Now it's very important because we're losing our history. We're so busy trying to get somewhere, fighting to do something, but if you don't follow where you come from it's hard to

move forward," Seals said.

This tradition sets the tone of the week by providing a solid foundation for the road walked and the journey ahead. We have the opportunity to reenroll ourselves in our history each year.

"It wakes up everybody's spirit," Franklin said.

She said the candlelight vigil helps us to remember and to reignite ourselves. Being in the park is "taking the church outside -- outside the four walls. Everyone who showed up was a living expression of what we were overcoming," Franklin said. "We claim that ground because so much has happened at Palmer Park to gay people. We have loved, we have died, we have celebrated and we have claimed. People have come out there, people have died there, people have found themselves there and once again people connected."

The Blue Spruce Memorial Tree in Palmer Park is where we return each year. Palmer Park holds so much history in its soil.

"We are people of the earth," Franklin said. "We will always connect with earth! That's how we live, that's how we grow."

The tree is a physical representation of Detroit's LGBTQ community, a landmark that continues to withstand Detroit winters, economic recessions and even a global pandemic.

"It almost measures what we've all been doing," Massey said.

Solidly rooted, the tree is a home for the community and a place to go when weary, feeling lost or disconnected to speak our troubles.

"The tree is there to remind us. Trees know everything," Franklin said. "They've heard everything. They've seen everything. We can always go back to that tree and tell the story. We can always go back to that tree and claim and speak the names and connect."

Franklin urged us to "never stop telling the story."

"Tell the original story," Franklin said. "Tell the story of why Detroit Black Pride is connected to faith."

Rhiannon Chester-Bey is a cultural visual artist, write and healing arts practitioner born, raised, and educated in and by Detroit. She is a longtime activist, advocate and contributor in the Detroit LGBTQ community.



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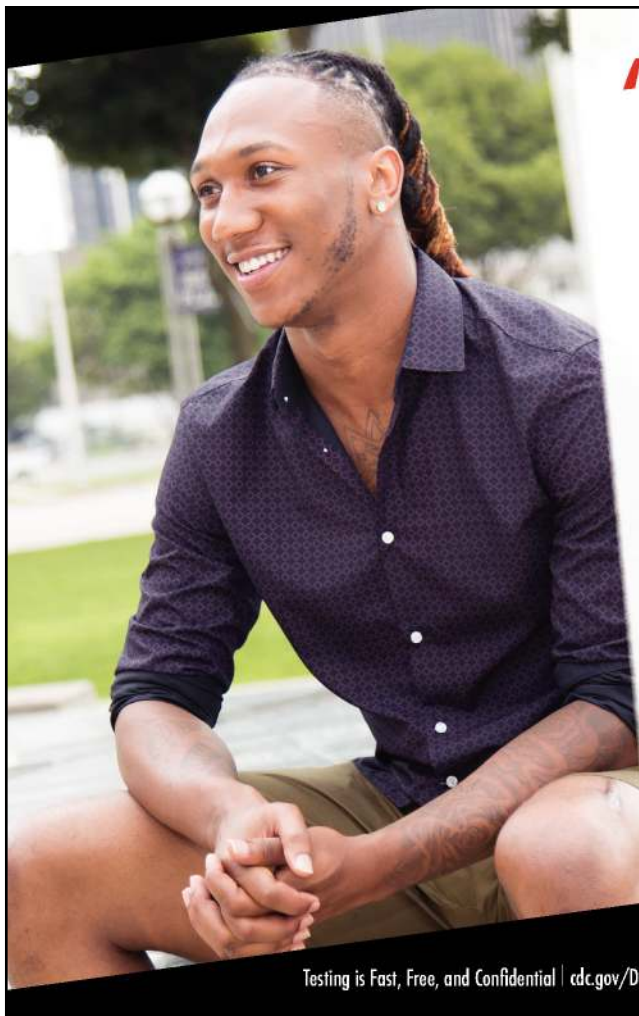
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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

From a Book in Progress

As a gay teenager I hung out at the Hub Grill in downtown Detroit, a greasy spoon of a place, located at Farmer & Bates in convenient walking distance of four quite popular gay bars, city hall and the 1st Precinct Police Station!

Just out of high school I was eager to find work, and a gay friend named George Trapmann — nicknamed “Trapezoid Mary” — told me that Harper Hospital, where he worked, was hiring high school grads to be trained as OR Techs, operating room technicians.

That sounded like a great lead for many reasons, one of which was that I was born at Harper Hospital. (At the time I hadn't the slightest idea that my OR training would lead to what might well be the first coincidence of its kind.)

My training as an OR Tech lasted about two months. I learned how to wash my hands with antiseptic, gown without breaking sterile scrub, how to identify and pass surgical instruments and chromic sutures, how to keep detailed records, use the autoclave, do sponge counts and, once, deal with a dying patient.

OR Techs all wore green scrub uniforms like physician interns, surgeons and medical students on learning assignments. (If a patient called me doc or doctor, I did little to dissuade them from the vicarious honor so accorded me. Suffice it that OR Techs wore no telltale stethoscopes.)

In time, I passed instruments for several caesarian section births, witnessed a four-holed drilled craniotomy, circulated during dozens of tonsillectomies and attended while a patient died on the operating table.

(I and another OR tech ID tagged his right-hand thumb and toe, and took his body three flights down for temporary freezer storage. Our first experience with death, we sought to dispel the unexpected shock by touches of tension-easing humor.)

The shortage of operating nurses during World War II — an understandable critical need — let at the time to the training of lay persons to fill the need.

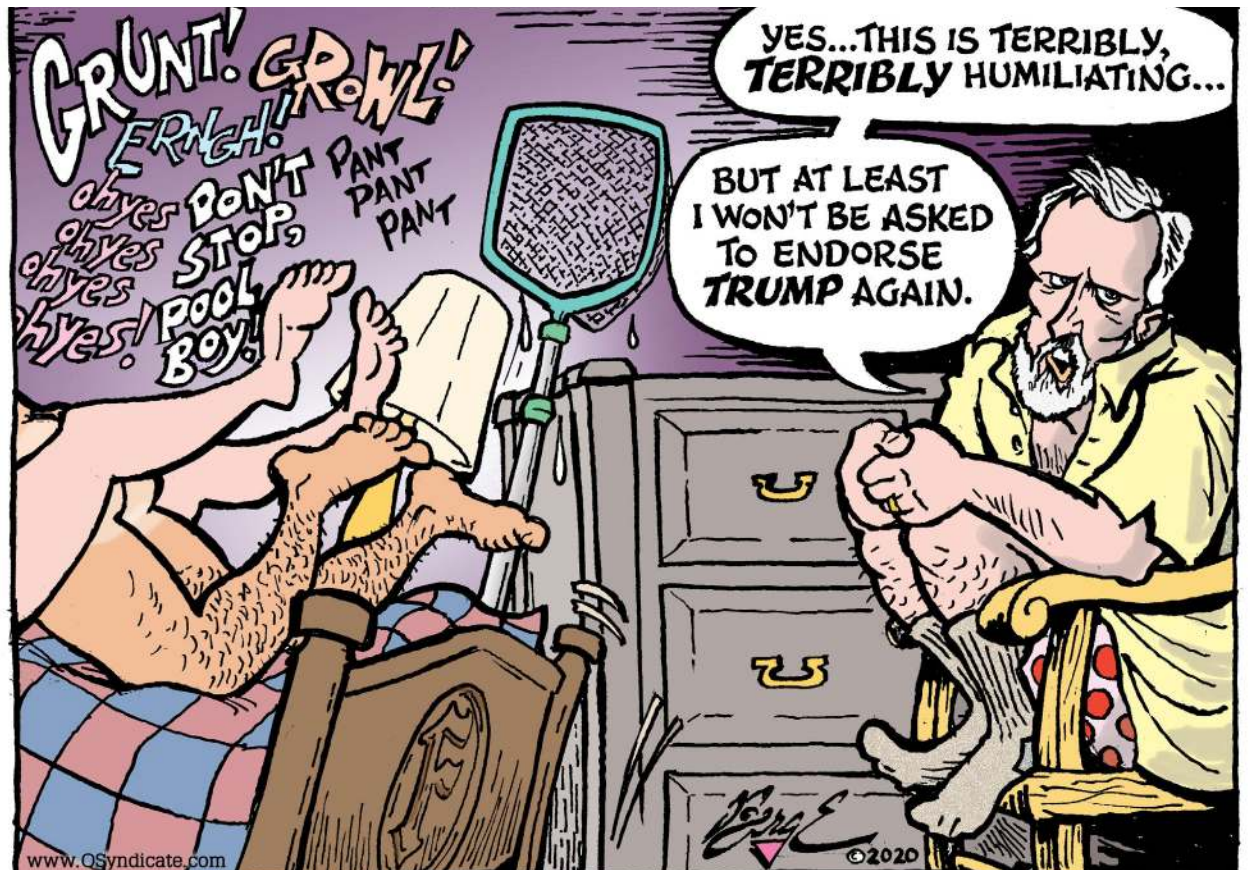
In the late '50s there was also an extensive surgical nurse need in metropolitan hospitals, and laypersons — high school grads, conscientious objectors to avoiding war serve — where trained.

As a Harper Hospital OR Tech I made mental notes about who might be gay or lesbian. I suspected the rather butch nurse responsible for keeping surgical tools sharp, honed and sterile was a lesbian.

We OR Techs were also warned about the head of the anesthesia wing and not to accept rides on his summer yacht. There were at the time 13 operating rooms at Harper, numbered 1 through 14. There was no number 13.

Once I attended my third surgical go-around the sight of blood no longer bothered me. I also found out that surgery often was subject to participant talk about sports, touches of humor and banter among the interns, residents and surgical

See next page



Transmission



Cracking Eggs

BY GWENDOLYN ANN SMITH

Every so often, I like to step back a bit and discuss some of the bare basics of being trans. It is very easy to go deep into the issues of the day, especially as we face political threats, anti-trans forces pushing back on trans identities — and so many other horrible things — and forget to spend some time discussing the basics. With that in mind, I want to get about as basic as one I can, and discuss how a person might come to the realization they are transgender in the first place.

First, my own story. I had a good sense of things from a very early age. At around three years old, I found myself wanting girls' shoes over boys' shoes. By the time I was eight, I had heard that people could transition, and I feared it was something I was a little too curious about. By age 12, I was pretty sure I was transgender.

It would still be a few years before I'd take any action on this. Resources were slim, and it took me nearly another decade before I had both resources and support. I had, over that time, tried my best to fit into society as a man, and it felt like an utter falsehood. It wasn't me. If anything, it was a costume I had to wear and a game that I was forced to play.

So, I slowly dipped my toe in. I joined a local social group

and met others. I started to explore online, which, at the time, meant pioneering online support groups and forums. I read everything I could get my hands on.

In my late 20s, I started my transition. It felt right — and it still does.

I'm not going to tell you that this trek has always been easy. On the contrary, it has often been a difficult path. I lost friends and family, suffered joblessness and faced ridicule and scorn from all over.

I'd rather have not faced all the trials I have, but I also would never give up the person I am, or “go back” to where I once was. As if “going back” would be an option in a world that travels, unceasingly, into the future.

While I can share my story, it is only one such tale. Everyone's path is different. I can tell you a few things to consider for yourself, but understand: none of these — not even all of these together — can definitively tell anyone that they are transgender. Only you can know that for yourself.

See **Viewpoint**, next page

► Transmissions

Continued from p. 12

While I started to figure things out from a young age, not everyone does. Some do not have the resources to do so, or they push their feelings deep, deep down. I spent some time bottling up my own feelings, but I have known others who were able to repress that much harder.

I would suggest, first and foremost, to examine why one may even question this about oneself: Where does your curiosity come from, and what is making you ponder this question in the first place?

Most, but not all, transgender people experience gender dysphoria. I certainly did. Do you feel that you fit in within your expected gender roles, and does doing so cause you discomfort or pain? Does it feel like a lie or cause you dread? How would you react if someone accidentally referred to you in a different gender?

For myself, as a child, I often found myself praying that I might wake up the next day in a different gender. I would sometimes dress in clothing I had filched, while at home alone. I would also attempt to fit in with other girls at school when I could. Maybe you had similar experiences — but again, you don't necessarily have had to.

Furthermore, while puberty is a confusing and awkward time for nearly everyone, it was soul-crushing for me. After years of hoping, even expecting, my body to finally feminize, it went in entirely the wrong direction. It was a time full of sadness and anger, as I felt betrayed like never before by my own physical form.

So, what to do about all this?

If you do have an inkling that you may be transgender, find resources. The internet is littered with them, some good, some otherwise. Read enough of them and you will likely be able to separate the two. Same with books. There's more than you could likely ever read. While I would highly recommend "Trans Bodies, Trans Selves" and "My Gender Workbook" as two great resources, there are so, so many more than that.

What's more, find support. There are plenty of groups online, there are support groups both there and otherwise and there are even plenty of therapists who can help you talk through things. It can be invaluable to discuss your feelings, and decide what, if anything, you wish to do.

Also, one key point. No one can tell you if you are transgender or not. That is a question only you can answer.

If I could give one big piece of advice, it's this: do not be afraid to explore, in as safe a manner as you can. Do not feel you need to be locked into one way of being trans, or that you have to do anything specific to be "really trans." You have a virtual panoply of options to explore: countless gender possibilities and even more ways one might wish to express them. You can change directions at any time and try something else if you wish.

No matter what, understand this: your feelings are valid. The world is yours.

Gwen Smith feels it's the journey, not the destination, that matters. You'll find her at gwenasmith.com.

► Parting Glances

Continued from p. 12

chiefs.

Each surgery ended with what was called a "sponge count." No surgical opening could be sewn shut until the blood-absorbing sponges were accounted for, to confirm that none were left in the patient.

Alas, in one surgery, a sponge was missing. We recounted and recounted. Finally, a resident admitted to standing on the truant sponge. Was it an accident or a OR prank?

And, that may well be an item for the Guinness Book of Records, I had the privilege of scrubbing with the doctor who brought me into the world, Dr. Leonard Heath.

Whether or not I was his first gay baby birth is not known. It was, however, I'm sure a memorable experience for me and, presumably, Dr. Heath.

When I was also 19 I was required to take my physical examination for military service. I passed the exam, but because I did not want to be separated from my first gay partner at

the time, I checked the homosexual tendencies box. Yes! I had more than the requisite tendencies,

The psychiatrist asked me if I could offer proof to back up my honesty.

"I can talk about my experiences," I replied.

And, so I was classified 4F — excused from military service. However, during the Cuban Missile Crisis of the 1960s under President JFK, I was reclassified 1A — eligible to serve if an international conflict took place. Fortunately, it did not,

So, while I would probably have served as a medically trained gay military combattant, I was spared service. Who knows? Perhaps in Vietnam. (A gay friend who served there died not long ago from exposure to Agent Orange exposure.)

Charles Alexander is prolific both as a BTL columnist (700-plus columns) and as a well-known LGBT community artist (1000 Facebook images). He is a Spirit of Detroit Award recipient and an Affirmations LGBT CENTER Jan Stevenson awardee. Connect with him at Charles@pridesource.com.

Creep Of The Week

Donald Trump

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Greetings and F.U. to Trump and his enabling Republicans who pretended COVID-19 was a Democratic hoax and STILL have no national plan to mitigate the virus, because my kid started his first day of middle school alone online in his room today. And it sucked, he reports.

If it baffles you that anyone would still support Trump after he killed off 180,000-plus people in the U.S. through his indifference, inaction and lies about coronavirus, you aren't alone. If it's hurting your head, you need to do yourself a favor and shut off your logical brain that uses things like facts and science to order the world around you. Trump supporters don't use that part of their brain.

Whether that part of your brain is active depends, largely, on where you get your news. If you read about Trump's scandals and insanity in places like The New York Times, CNN, NPR, the Washington Post or Fangoria, then you might have the notion that breaking the law and being a misogynistic racist con man is, like, bad. If you get your "news" from Fox News, then you laugh at the idea of drinking liberal snowflake tears. You'll also be treated to the exact same security briefing Trump himself gets when you watch Sean Hannity's show, which I believe is called "Hannity Insanity," and if I'm wrong all I can say is what a missed opportunity.

For so many white people in the U.S. racial justice and equality is far more terrifying than fascism. Under fascism they'll be fine, but if faced with racial justice they might have to, you know, address this country's horribly violent racist past and present. Fascism may be what your great grandpa fought a war about, but it's what your uncle fantasizes about to lower his blood pressure after he sees protesters demanding that Black people not be killed indiscriminately by police on Fox News.

Trump is talking to that uncle when he rage Tweets, "LAW AND ORDER!" Funny how law and order doesn't apply to Trump and his administration. Law and Order, you see, is what white people use to keep Black people in line. And by "in line" I mean not making pesky demands like, "Don't kill us."

There is nothing Trump can point to that hasn't been a disaster during his presidency. Sure, the stock market rebounded after a huge drop, but millions are still out of work and 1,000 people a day are dying from a virus just about every other country managed to get under control in some way.

So Trump has to scare folks into voting

If you read about Trump's scandals and insanity in places like The New York Times, CNN, NPR, the Washington Post or Fangoria, then you might have the notion that breaking the law and being a misogynistic racist con man is, like, bad.

for him. And he doesn't care that he's escalating clashes between anti-racist protesters and white supremacist militia groups and people are being killed.

But Joe Biden sees Trump.

"Trump and Pence are running on ... quote, 'You won't be safe in Joe Biden's America.' And what's their proof? The violence we're seeing in Donald Trump's America," Biden said recently. "These are not images of some imagined 'Joe Biden America' in the future. These are images of Donald Trump's America today."

But, of course, Trump is the president who said, "I take no responsibility at all." For anything.

"He keeps telling you if only he was president, it wouldn't happen if he was president," Biden continued. "He keeps telling us that if he was president, you'd feel safe. Well, he is president whether he knows it or not. And it is happening. It's getting worse and you know why? Because Donald Trump adds fuel to every fire. Because he refuses to even acknowledge that there's a racial justice problem in America, because he won't stand up to any form of violence."

Trump's largely white supporters love a "strong man" and are so desperate and afraid right now they're willing to pretend that Donald Trump is one. He's not. He is pathetic, he is cruel, he is ignorant. But strong? No.

Remember in 2016 when everybody was like, "There's no way in hell Trump can win. What a joke." But he did. And now here we are in 2020 and Trump has exceeded all of our most nightmarish expectations and he absolutely has the chance to win again. And if he does, goodbye Democracy. Goodbye civil rights. Goodbye marriage equality. Goodbye transgender people being treated like anything other than pariahs.

You need to vote. And, yes, voting isn't the end-all be-all. There is deep healing work to do in this country. But we can kiss any hope of healing if faced with another four years of Trump.



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Major Transgender Bathroom Decisions in Federal Appeals Courts

BY LISA KEEN

Two federal appeals court panels have ruled that a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ people at work also applies to discrimination in schools.

In *Bostock v. Clayton*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination “on the basis of sex” in employment, includes discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.

In August, two federal appeals panels cited *Bostock* in holding that Title IX of the federal Education Amendments Act, which prohibits discrimination “on the basis of sex” in federally funded schools, also prohibits discrimination based on gender identity.

The two new rulings came from the 4th Circuit and 11th Circuit U.S. Courts of Appeal, involving cases in Virginia and Florida where public high schools refused to allow transgender boys to use the boys’ restroom.

Both cases were decided by three-judge panels and could now be appealed to the full bench in each circuit and, eventually, to the U.S. Supreme Court. Issues surrounding accommodating transgender students have been in litigation for some time and were a focus of one speaker at the Republican National Convention last week. The speaker, Cissie Graham Lynch, told viewers that Democrats have “pressured schools to allow boys to participate in girls’ sports and use girls’ locker rooms.”

Both appeals panel decisions found that the refusal of schools to allow transgender boys to use the boys’ restroom violated the students’ U.S. Constitutional right to equal protection and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act.

The stories of both transgender students — Gavin Grimm in Virginia and Drew Adams in Florida — are relatively similar. Both had been identified as female at birth but experienced a lifelong sense that they were males. Both sought and received help from their parents and medical experts; both transitioned to live as males; both had their driver’s licenses and birth certificates amended to indicate they are male.

In both cases, the students began using the boys’ restrooms with no problems at first. However, eventually, school officials began to hear complaints. In Grimm’s case, it was from parents. In Adams’ case, the complaints came from “two unidentified girl students” who simply saw Adams entering the boys’ restroom.

“There were no complaints from boy students who shared bathroom facilities



with Adams,” noted the majority. “Regardless, school officials gave Mr. Adams two choices: use a single-stall, gender-neutral bathroom in the school office, or use the girls’ facilities.”

Both Grimm and Adams said they felt stigmatized by being barred from using the boys’ restrooms and required to use an alternative facility. Interestingly, in the case of Adams, the school district of St. John’s County had adopted a policy requiring teachers to address LGBTQ students by their preferred names and pronouns and promoted other LGBTQ-sensitive rules around attire, bullying and privacy.

The 4th Circuit issued its decision in *Grimm v. Gloucester* on Aug. 26;

the 11th Circuit issued its opinion in *Adams v. St. John’s* on Aug. 7. The votes in both cases was 2-1, with the majority votes coming from judges who had been appointed by Democratic presidents and the dissenting votes coming from judges appointed by Republican presidents.

And both majority decisions relied on *Bostock*.

“With *Bostock’s* guidance, we conclude that Title IX, like Title VII, prohibits discrimination against a person because he is transgender, because this constitutes discrimination based on sex,” said the 11th Circuit in the Adams case.

“After the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, we have little difficulty holding that a bathroom policy precluding Grimm from using the boys’ restrooms discriminated against him ‘on the basis of sex,’” said the 4th Circuit majority.

“At the heart of this appeal is whether equal protection and Title IX can protect transgender students from school bathroom policies that prohibit them from affirming their gender,” wrote Judge Henry Floyd, in the Grimm case. “We join a growing consensus of courts in holding that the answer is resoundingly yes.”

In the Adams decision, the Eleventh Circuit majority applauded the Florida school district’s goal of protecting “the bodily privacy of young students.” But, said the majority, while it makes sense to designate some restrooms as being for boys and others for girls, it does not protect the bodily privacy of students to force a student who was designated at birth as a girl to use a girls’ restroom after

they have transitioned to living as a male.

The 11th Circuit panel noted that the St. John’s school board could not point to any complaints from boys when Adams was using the boys’ restroom or “any incidents across the country in which allowing transgender students to use the restroom according to their gender identity compromised other students’ privacy.”

“In fact, the [St. John’s] School Board conceded at oral argument it was ‘fair’ that some transgender students in the School District may already be using the bathroom consistent with their gender identity, without anyone’s knowledge,” said the majority. And the court refused to accept, without any evidence, the school district’s claim that the “mere presence” of a transgender boy in the boys’ restroom violates the privacy of other boys using the restroom.

The 11th Circuit case was brought by Drew Adams when he was a student at Nease High School, with the help of Lambda Legal.

The 4th Circuit lawsuit was brought by Gavin Grimm with the help of the ACLU when Grimm was a junior at Gloucester High School. School officials initially allowed Grimm to use the boys’ restroom, but some parents objected, and the school board adopted a policy that required transgender students to use an “alternative” private restroom. Grimm, now 21, is a student at Berkeley City College in San Francisco. The outcome of the case is still important to him, though, because Gloucester High School has refused to change his records — records that could be relevant to applications to other schools and jobs.

In the decision, Judge Floyd took considerable time to discuss “what it means to be transgender” in a way that would be helpful to a person who is unfamiliar with the term to understand its implications. He noted, for instance, “there have always been” people who “express” a gender “we would think of as opposite to their assigned sex.”

“Such people are transgender, and they represent approximately 0.6% of the United States adult population, or 1.4 million adults,” wrote Floyd. “Just like being cisgender, being transgender is natural and is not a choice.”

While transgender people face “major mental health disparities,” wrote Floyd, being transgender is “not a psychiatric condition, and ‘implies no impairment.’” The diagnosis of gender dysphoria describes the “significant distress experienced by some transgender people resulting from the incongruence between the gender with which they identify and their sex as identified at birth.”



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Holland Approves Citywide LGBTQ Protections

BY JIM LARKIN

The nine-year wait to pass anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ residents of the city of Holland is over.

It took a seven-hour City Council meeting that stretched from Wednesday night on Aug. 19 through Thursday morning, Aug. 20. It took almost evenly divided testimony from more than 60 people, and surviving attempts from some council members to remove the words “sexual orientation,” “gender expression” and “gender identity” from the purpose of the ordinance. But in the end, the council approved by an 8-1 vote the non-discrimination ordinance that broadened the list of people protected by it.

Councilmember Quincy Byrd, who expressed concerns about whether religious freedoms were adequately protected, was the lone no vote.

“The question has never been if we should protect the rights of all people of Holland,” insisted Mayor Nathan Bocks. “It’s been how... It’s time to welcome everyone into the circle.”

That brought a welcomed sigh of relief from the Holland LGBTQ leaders who asked the council last December to approve a broader non-discrimination ordinance that included protections for LGBTQ residents – nine years after the council rejected a similar request by a split 5-4 vote.

“After a long process and a roller coaster

of emotions, we’re thrilled that the City Council chose to vote in favor of the proposed non-discrimination ordinance,” said Jeffrey Sorensen, director of Out On The Lakeshore. “This ordinance will protect not only LGBTQ+ people from discrimination, but has also expanded to include several other protected groups as well, including by height, weight, and disability.”

That roller coaster included listening to comments Wednesday from more than 30 residents who insisted that such an ordinance was not needed. Those opposing the ordinance said it would give legal preference to a select group of people, elevate them above others, and wasn’t needed because they said state and national protections were already provided. Other arguments included:

- A mother who said the ordinance would jeopardize her child’s safety.
- Several people who said the ordinance would “open the door” for pedophiles to use it as a tool to prey on children in bathrooms and shower rooms.
- A man who said he couldn’t see people in the “homosexual lifestyle” being in leadership roles and urged the council to use “common sense.”
- A man who warned against the “danger of gender inclusion,” saying it would pave the way to “voyeurism.”

- A man who said by passing the ordinance the council would be responsible for a 250-pound male injuring a 125-pound “gender choice female” in football.

One woman in opposition to the ordinance wore a “Make America Great Again” cap while another argued against having to wear a mask at the meeting.

“I think you’re all stupid with your masks,” she said.

Yet more than 30 people also urged the council to pass the ordinance and rebuked comments made in opposition to the broader ordinance, which was modeled after one recommended by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

“Trans people are not predators,” said Josh Webb of Holland Township. “They simply want to live their lives like anyone else.”

Psychologist Krista Anderson, who facilitates a Holland area support group for transgender people, said there was “no evidence whatsoever” of transgender people using restrooms to prey on children and added that most avoid public restrooms. Instead, she said, they are the residents who need legal protections.

“Please,” she said, “do what’s right for our city.”

And while several ministers opposed to the ordinance spoke at the meeting, several quoting

Bible verses, the Rev. Jen Adams, chair of the Out On The Lakeshore Board of Directors, pointed out that 71 faith leaders representing eight different denominations had sent a letter in support of the ordinance to the council.

“It has been horrifying to hear this stoking of unfounded fears,” Adams said, who noted that transgender people are disproportionately affected by crime and called it “unconscionable to stoke fears” of them.

Councilman Scott Corbin recommended the ordinance be stripped of the words sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. He said the word “sex” included those classifications and to specifically list them would elevate them above other protected classes. But his motion failed by a 5-4 vote, with council members Mike Trethewey, Quincy Byrd and Raul Garcia supporting Corbin’s attempt.

Several council members noted that some of the comments made at the meeting, particularly the fears expressed by many, made them uncomfortable, with Councilman David Hoekstra pointing out that some felt that “justice is good but make sure someone doesn’t get more justice than I do.”

“We need to move from being a good community to being a great community,” Hoekstra said. “We have the capacity to be great. We just have to muster the will.”

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Photo Shavonne Wong

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

“Now that I have a massive platform, and now that the people want to listen to the Black sissy, I’m gonna talk,” Billy Porter says, fired up, leaning into the camera. On Zoom, Porter commands a computer screen like he does a red carpet.

In this particular moment, his fiery passion stems from a call he received from screenwriter-actress Lena Waithe, who raised an eyebrow after Porter made history as *Essence*’s first openly gay man to grace the magazine’s cover. Porter says Waithe got him on the phone to talk about the anonymous letter written by current and former *Essence* staffers calling themselves “Black Female Anonymous.” The letter was published on Medium on June 28 and called out the magazine for its toxic work environment, just before Porter’s cover story hit newsstands. “I had to stop her,” he says. “I said, ‘I hear you, I see you, I feel you.’”

But Porter simply didn’t know about the letter, he says. Until she called, he hadn’t even seen it. “I don’t give a fuck about social media,” he scoffs, talking about his refusal to be engaged on social platforms. “I don’t adjudicate my life or humanity in sound bites on social media. I don’t fight with nobody, I don’t have Twitter fights.”

The reason, he says, is “I’m 50 years old. Everybody has to remember that I built a career *before* social media.”

Porter’s mainstream breakthrough, playing

ball emcee Pray Tell on FX’s trans-centric series “Pose,” is an accumulation of dedication to his craft as a singer and actor that began in his 20s in his hometown of Pittsburgh. He released solo albums that weren’t widely known. He met music industry standards for Black artists (you had to be R&B). And then, later, he dismantled those standards (he could sing show tunes, and did). In 2013, he originated the role of Lola in “Kinky Boots,” which led to both a Tony and Grammy award.

In September 2019, Porter made history as the first openly Black gay man to win in any lead acting category at the Emmys for his role on “Pose.” Though winners won’t be announced until Sept. 20, Porter recently received another nomination for his portrayal of Pray Tell.

Despite the pandemic, Porter is remaining prolific. He recorded an updated version of the 1966 protest song “For What It’s Worth,” which he performed on the first night of the Democratic National Convention, to address our current political landscape; he’s also featured on The Shapeshifters’ disco number “Finally Ready,” which reflects, in part, his decades-long journey living through the AIDS crisis. He’s writing two books, his memoir and a children’s picture book. He also has starring roles in two upcoming films: a live-action “Cinderella” remake, as the Fairy Godmother, and in out “Love, Simon” director Greg Berlanti’s big-screen take on “Little Shop of Horrors.”

My recent interview with Porter was

scheduled as an audio-only Zoom call, but because not even Porter’s handlers can stop Porter from setting his own rules, he appears on video in a caftan, casually eating in a rented beach house. A bag with “Vote Betches” written on it is propped up in back of him. Expecting to see none of this, I’m in the clothes I went to bed in: a tank top and sweat shorts, with a hat I threw on. I tell Porter that I thought this was an audio-only interview. Porter responds incredulously; he can’t understand why anyone in their right mind would *not* use the video feature. “We have Zoom! Why are we not doing Zoom?”

I leap out of my computer chair and run to the closet in back of me, throwing on the first shirt I see. I realize in that moment that Emmy winner Billy Porter is watching me get dressed. “There is no need for you to put a shirt on for me,” he says with a playful smirk.

It’s early July when we speak, and our interview knows no bounds: from Buddhism, which Porter practices now, to how, even with notoriety, Porter still experiences racism in his everyday life, especially from those within the LGBTQ community. He laid bare his beliefs and opinions, and went off on a variety of other topics too because talking about them, he says, with a rip-roaring laugh, “helps me stay sane.”

I read that you’ve gotten into Buddhism.

Lightly. I’m still learning.

What have you learned, and what drew you to

the practice?

What has drawn me to the practice is that it’s a revolt against religion. Religion is man-made. Spirituality is divine. All of the wars that have existed in this world, all of the bullshit that we go through, is in the name of somebody’s man-made God. And I’m over it. I’m just over it.

I grew up in the Pentecostal Church. They systematically taught parishioners how to hate, disguising it through Bible verses. We’re living in a country right now that is being run by people who say they’re Christians and believe in Jesus and God, and they’re letting people die in the streets. That is not God. That is not Jesus. Y’all can take your Bibles and your religion and shove it. I am so done.

I had people actually say to me back in the day that they were voting for Trump because of his religious values. That motherfucker has been in the church three times, for his three marriages. That’s it. And yet we still sit here every single day and talk about morals. I can’t do it anymore.

Buddhism says life is suffering. That’s useful to me. You’re not going to get out of life without suffering. That takes me to radical acceptance, that takes me to radical compassion, which allows for me to have a foundation where I can feel what I feel “and” simultaneously be empowered to be a part of a movement for something different. Otherwise, I am useless.

You're a success story. And despite your success and the fact that you are an openly gay leading man and you've won major awards and shattered the glass ceiling for queer Black people, you're still a gay Black man in America right now.

I'm Black first. Which I have to remind my own people of, by the by. But keep going. Ask me the question.

What experiences of yours as a Black gay man might surprise people who look at you and think, "He's famous, he's good, he doesn't have anything to worry about"?

We were out on Long Island and we were meeting some friends of ours for a social-distance walk at this place called the Hog Farm. I pulled in with my husband (Adam Smith). It looked like private property to me. No signs, no real parking lot. There was a farm stand. It looked like a farmer's market, and there was no one there. And my friends weren't there and they texted and said they were late. So we sat there for a minute. Then out of nowhere a little white girl comes flouncing out, and she looks around and sees the car, and then she goes back to wherever she came from. I don't know where it was. I didn't see any doors. I didn't know what was going on, but I was immediately filled with anxiety because: Where is she going? Where is this little white girl going? And who is she telling that there's a Black man sitting out front on our property in a BMW? Never mind my white husband beside me. There's a Black man. That's where I live. Every day, all day. That's *before* the gay. So I deal with that, and then I turn around and my own people are just as violent toward me.

So, I've never had anywhere to go. I've never really had a place where I have felt comfortable and embraced fully by any community. The racism that exists in the LGBTQ community is at the top of the list. They're fucking racists just like everybody else. Inside that community, there's racism. And inside the Black community, there's homophobia.

Where are you going now as far as music? What do you listen to get you through the moment and help you recharge?

I'm in the middle of trying to figure out what that is. Music was and still is very healing to me. As I reenter the mainstream music market, I'm going back to disco, back to house, back to '70s funk.

Sylvester?

Sylvester. I'm trying to pick up the torch from where he left off when he passed way too soon. Because there's something healing inside of that energy, inside of that space as a 50-year-old Black man who came out in the '80s. We went to the clubs to find fellowship, we went to the clubs to heal collectively, we went to the clubs to party on the weekends so that we could shake the terror and the anxiety and the pain of just having gone to five memorials

that week for friends who passed away in their 20s, in a world where nobody cared about you. The government didn't care about us. (They thought) we deserved to die simply because of who we are. Something about this coronavirus is mirroring it, mirroring that, giving me a lot of anxiety, a lot of PTSD.

The last time we spoke, you told me you were working on a contemporary gospel-musical about your experience of surviving the AIDS epidemic.

I am still.

As you work on that while living through another pandemic, what is that experience like for you?

I am just trying to get a handle on the full landscape. This time it's different. And first of all, the reason why we're in the position that we're in in terms of this pandemic is due to whiteness. It's due to white supremacy. It's due to the fact that everybody knew going in that Orangina 45 was not the choice. But whiteness overrode any consequences – that's not quite the word. It overrode anything, because, "It's still Republican, it's still white, and whatever he's doing, he's doing what we want to get done so it's not so bad. We'll just deal with him for four years, get all of this shit we want to get done, done: appointing the courts, taking away healthcare from citizens, rolling back all of the work that we've fought for the last 400 years. Let's just roll all of that back. Because we know we can't stop it, but we can roll it back enough that it will take another 40 years to get back to where we've already gotten, or more. So let's just roll everything back." He represented that to white people.

It was at the expense of anyone who's not a white straight man in this country.

Right. So he can look at this administration and have the anemic response that he had and allow this country to continue to sink because in the sinking, whatever it was, whatever this bitch does, was never gonna affect him.

Now we're 50 million unemployed, motherfuckers are in the street every day, 60,000 cases of the virus that could have been contained, and in an economy that's tanking but we're still, in our whiteness, talking about books on the news that are written about him by his niece.

In 2014, I asked you if you were the kind of artist you want to be. You said, "I'm not sure that there is ever a scenario where I will feel like I have arrived or like I've made it." Can you answer that more definitively now?

Yeah. I have made it. I'm leaning into that, with as much grace and humility as I can. And I'm trying to use the space that I've created for myself to re-enter the music industry in the mainstream on my terms. That's what I'm working on. And the two singles that I have out right now, which may seem diametrically

See **Billy Porter**, continued on p. 24



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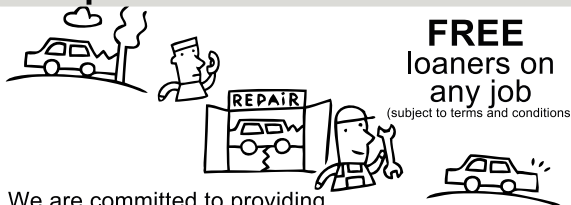
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► **Billy Porter**

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opposed, are exactly who I am.

“For What It’s Worth” was written in 1966, but is obviously still relevant today. What memory do you have of hearing Buffalo Springfield’s version for the first time?

It’s so ubiquitous, I don’t have a memory of the first time. It’s everywhere, it’s always been everywhere. Any war movie you watch, that’s what they play. It’s just been that for the whole time. So I don’t have a first time, but I do know when my manager suggested it I had to look at it and look at the lyrics and figure out, because I hadn’t really listened to the lyrics: What does this mean to me today? How do we take this song and make sure we’re speaking in the present? And not just as an observer, because it’s a very observational lyric, but how do we ignite the spirit of engagement and change with this song? And so that was the goal for that one. I recorded that the day after the Emmys, before all of this mess was happening. So my goal was to always have this ready for this political season.

The time seems ripe for an entire Billy Porter protest album. Have you considered recording one?

There is no music from Billy Porter without hope and without protest. It all is that. And I’m working on that new album right now. I’m signing a new deal right now. And I have some shit to say. It’ll be protest, it’ll be dance, it’ll be love, it’ll be all of it. Because those are all the things that I am. I no longer have to compartmentalize the wholeness and the fullness of myself anymore. I don’t have to do that anymore.

What advice do you have for Black LGBTQ people who are still pushing against an oppressive society that doesn’t allow them to be exactly who they want to be?

Don’t wait for anybody to give you permission to be who you are. Just be it. Just be it and let those motherfuckers catch up. I said, “When you catch up, you’ll figure it out.” But that’s not my journey. Y’all need to catch up. I’m not the problem. We have to stop thinking that we’re the problem. We’re made to feel like we’re the problem and we need to be fixed. No. Y’all are the problem. If you have a problem with my authenticity, that’s your stuff that I will no longer take on or receive, and I’m going to make sure that I sit in the fullness of myself and give that 100 percent, no matter where the chips may fall.

And I’m living proof that that actually works out. It’s not fast. It’s not always fast. And I think that’s a lot of the problem: that we have gotten more and more microwavable in the way we live, in our expectations. We live this microwaved life; everything is instantaneous. It’s like, I’m 50 fucking years old, y’all. I’ve been doing this since 1985.

Do people realize that you had to put that time in before you became Emmy winner Billy Porter?

No, they don’t. Because I’m Black and Black don’t crack. It’s all good. But like, no, I’m 50. And as a result of that I have no more time to give any fucks about what other people think about what I’m doing. I don’t have time. I am middle-aged! Ha! I have to say exactly what I want to say and do exactly what I want to do. Period.

Reflecting on “Kinky Boots” and “Pose,” how do you think those projects changed the conversation when it comes to LGBTQ communities of color?

Well, there are Black people in these spaces. When the LGBTQ stories started being told in the mainstream, it was all about white people. Always. I’m still waiting for my guest spot on “Will & Grace.” Still.

Have you auditioned?

Never a call, never a thought. Never anything. I’m not saying this because I’m angry about it or I’m trying to call them out or anything. We write what we know, and what those white people knew was white people and that’s what they wrote about. So now, I’m in a position of power and I’m gonna write about my people. I’m going to do it about *myself*.

You wrote a TV pilot.

I’ve written several things, but yes, most recently I’ve written a pilot. I’m writing my memoir. It’s in my hands. I can’t wait for other people to give me permission, I can’t wait for other people in positions of power to validate me. I can’t wait to be invited to the table. I’m at the table. I crashed the party. I’m at the table. Here I am.

That’s how you got to where you are – you kept crashing the table.

I crashed the party. I crashed the dinner party. And I’m keep doing that.

I think the deadline for the memoir is in October, right?

You really do your research.

What can you share about it with me at this point?

It’s in transition. What’s really interesting is that, because of COVID, because of the lockdown, because of the work that I’ve been doing in lockdown on myself, it’s not a memoir just about recounting my disappointments and my successes. It’s deeper than that. And I’m trying to figure out what that is. And I’m just trying to allow myself to let it come and not be so Virgo about it, so planned about it. It’s like, yeah, I wrote

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the proposal; but what I'm feeling in my spirit is connected to that but also much deeper and much different than what it originally started out to be. So I'm literally in the space of trying to just let it come.

Is it tough to keep up with what's happening internally at this moment while working to meet your October deadline, as we move through the Black Lives Matter movement?

(Sarcastically.) Oh, it was easier to deal with it until you have brought it up three times today.

That's fair.

I was actually doin' all right until the three times you brought it up today.

I've triggered you is what you're saying.

Yes, you have! No, it's all good. I'm just trying to be compassionate with myself and give myself the space to be wherever I am emotionally – to be wherever I am spiritually, to be wherever I am creatively and move through it, not compartmentalize it, not put the pain away, not ignore it. None of that. Move right directly through all of it. That's what I'm trying to do.

You recently got some backlash for telling Black people to stop killing Black trans people. How do you respond to those who have an issue with what you said?

The African American community's relationship to the LGBTQ community is horrible. It always has been. The Black community is the most homophobic, in my experience, and so the backlash was not a surprise to me. And I was called out by some friends – some really lovely friends – who said in this moment of heightened sensitivity the specificity of


language is very important. I said "Black people." I didn't say "homophobic" Black people. I didn't say homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic Black people. So I actually recorded an addendum to my message so that I could deal with the semantics of that. Even though y'all know what I'm talking about, I will deal with the semantics of it in this moment.

Please understand: I hear you, I will be more specific on who I'm calling out. I'm calling out homophobic, transphobic and xenophobic Black people who are in the streets killing their own. That's who I'm calling out. And I meant it. I am comparing it to white supremacy. I am because it is. Everybody has to look in the mirror at themselves. We all have to do it. We all have blind spots. The blind spot in the African American community, one of them, is that. It is. I created a simple do-onto-others metaphor that people had problems with. If you have a problem with it, you need to look at yourself and ask yourself why you have a problem with that.

One of the things my friend told me – because I don't read comments – was that with all of the pushback, there was pushback to the pushback, (people) saying, "But did he lie?" That was a phrase that I heard that kept coming up in these comments when people were trying to drag me. I'm not lying. Deal with it however you want to. But this is the truth. And I'm a truth-teller.

As editor of Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ wire service, Chris Azzopardi has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in The New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ and Billboard. Reach him via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

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Miz Korona. Photo by Lamar Landers.

Lesbian Detroit Rapper Miz Korona Riffs on COVID-19 with Her 'The Virus' EP

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Developing, writing and recording an album is no easy feat, but sometimes, when the environment is just right, one new idea can set off a creative chain reaction — one strong enough to pull a musician out of retirement. That's the case with Detroit emcee and rapper Miz Korona who released her latest EP "The Virus" in April. A clear riff off of the similarities between her own name and that of the novel coronavirus pandemic, when it became apparent that the U.S. might end up seeing COVID-19 at home, many of Korona's friends and followers urged her to create music about it. She wasn't sure at first, but, once she put pen to paper, Korona said "it seemed like it was meant to happen." In just under two weeks, "The Virus" EP was written, produced and released.

"The Virus" is Korona's first musical creative work in over four years, and she said that she had to push personal boundaries to make that happen. Now, months into a global pandemic and removed from the initial release, Korona caught up with *Between The Lines* to share how she used the record to fight personal demons of self-doubt, why she chose this EP to talk about politics on one of her songs for the first time in her career and how she was able to

turn a production flub into marketing magic for "The Virus."

What inspired you to write this album?

I had been seeing news coverage about the virus taking over overseas but not knowing where it was. So, once it hit the United States, a lot of people started contacting me — just making little jokes, being funny — like, "Hey, you need to come out of retirement because a whole virus is named after you." But I was already thinking about it. I was already reaching out to people like, "Hey, it's this thing, it's this virus that's called the coronavirus," and not really thinking about the severity because I never saw that until later. And a lot of the people that surround me and have been supportive of me, they really were pushing me to do it and, I don't know, I'm a very spiritual person and it was just like, I felt like it was time.

Did you have any doubts when you released it?

I think maybe a week before I posted it online digitally I was rethinking it, because that's when they started talking about it on the news and the media the amount of deaths that were happening. And then on social media, my whole social media circle, a few entertainer friends, a few friends, family members, both my parents were diagnosed with COVID-19 — but not the severe stage where they needed to be hospitalized, which I was grateful for. So, I started thinking, "Well, should I release this? Because now people are dying and people are being intubated and on ventilators and I don't want it to be triggering to people." I even thought about changing my name, and I made this post about it online — not that I didn't feel proud about the project. But because I honestly felt

like God was telling me that this was what I needed to do, and I felt like every step of the way it was like another being that was inside of me. I wrote that project in four days. That's the fastest that I've ever created a project. It was something that clicked in my brain, and I was on autopilot and then I knew I wanted to do six songs, I knew that I wanted to work with specific people, and that was that.

Now that it's been a couple of months since you first put out the tracks, have any of the songs on the EP changed meaning for you?

I don't necessarily think that they changed meaning to me, but I believe that they changed meaning to people who were a little skeptical about the project just based off of the name in general. I did have some folks who were offended — some who were familiar with who I am as an artist and some who had never heard of me and thought that I was just trolling. But then people actually went back and listened to the project and they were just like, "Wow." Especially around the time the protests started happening and some of the subliminal messages that the president was sending over the media airwaves. People went back to listen to that "45" song and [they'd say], "This song is amazing, and it's really touching on everything that's happening right now." And it was already things that happened in the past, but I never thought it would reoccur again. That song has been on rotation with "Shade 45" with DJ Premier, who is a legendary DJ for a couple of weeks, so it's resonated with more and more folks. So, when I pressed up the vinyl, it seemed as though a lot more people who were unaware of the project started taking notice, and now it's got a whole new set of legs.

How did you get the name Miz Korona?

Many, many, moons ago, there was a guy who was one of the most popular rappers in my aunt's neighborhood, and he worked at a liquor store, so I went in there looking for the guy. He worked in the back cooler and we were freestyling and he was like, "You're not for real, I don't believe you're freestyling," so we started naming off things in the cooler. And I said a line, and this is one of the only freestyles that I remember because it's how I got my name, but I said, "My rhymes intoxicate minds like Coronas" as I was pointing to the bottle. But then I started looking up the definition because my mentor at the time, Big Proof, who was a part of D12, he kept trying to push me to change my old rap name, because he felt like it was going to hinder me and hold back. And he was right, but I didn't want to believe him (laugh). It was Pimpette. I'm so glad that I changed it, and I believe everyone is also.

And now, years later, that name change led to this EP.

I don't know, honestly, Eve, everything about this EP seems like it was meant to be, from

the album cover and how it was shot to create it. I sent the graphics designer a few photos, and I didn't really care for the direction he was going in — it didn't really come across the way that I wanted it to. I wanted it to represent the album title and also as a return, "This is her coming out of retirement. She means business and needs to look serious." So, when we shot the photos with our photographer Lamar Landers, we went downtown, and it was the same day that the governor did the shelter-in-place announcement, so when we went downtown it was this dead man's zone. It was the perfect backdrop. We were in the heart of downtown and there was no traffic; we literally saw three people in the timeframe of the hour shooting and five cars, which is unheard of. Even the situation with the vinyl pressing, it was a little mishap with that, but I ended up being able to flip it and make it make sense.

Really? What happened?

When the press plant pressed my record, they pressed it at the wrong speed. So the speed of a 12-inch record is supposed to be 33 RPM, a seven-inch record is supposed to be pressed at 45 speed. And so, I get the records back and people were calling me, "Hey, something's wrong with my record, it's not playing right. You sound like you're dragging." There's a style of music in the South called chopped and screwed, and people said, "You sound chopped and screwed." So I come up with this idea. I have this song called "45," I can create a postcard and drop it inside the vinyl that says, "Warning: This record has a virus and must be played at 45 speed." So I had my friend, his name is Evan, he's a graphic designer. I called him up and had him do me a sketch of like the president or something that I can put on this postcard. We created it and dropped it in there and everybody's looking like, "Oh my God, this is genius." So, people didn't even know that it was done by mistake (laughs).

What's something you want people to think about as they listen to this EP?

I just really want people to know that as an independent artist, it's always a struggle to have or maintain a successful career, so stepping back into the arena of hip-hop after a 4 ½-year time span of not writing, not recording and doing a project of this magnitude — like I said, there was a lot of resistance from folks, but to still push through [is hard]. The title of the album wasn't to make fun of or downplay the seriousness of the virus or what's happening and the pandemic, but it's hard as a woman in the hip-hop industry, and it's twice as hard as a lesbian woman in the hip-hop industry. So I really just used that as a metaphor of me not defeating myself, me not allowing the virus of insecurity and self-doubt and people not being supportive of me saying, "I can be this. I can defeat myself."

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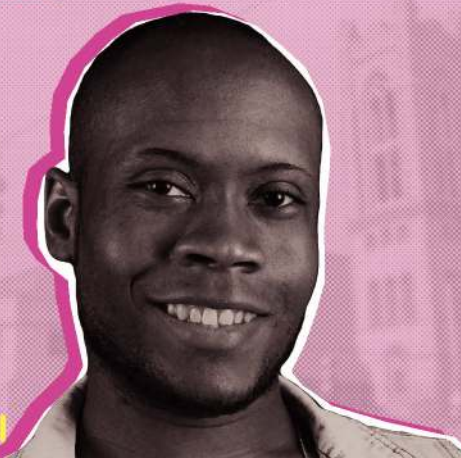
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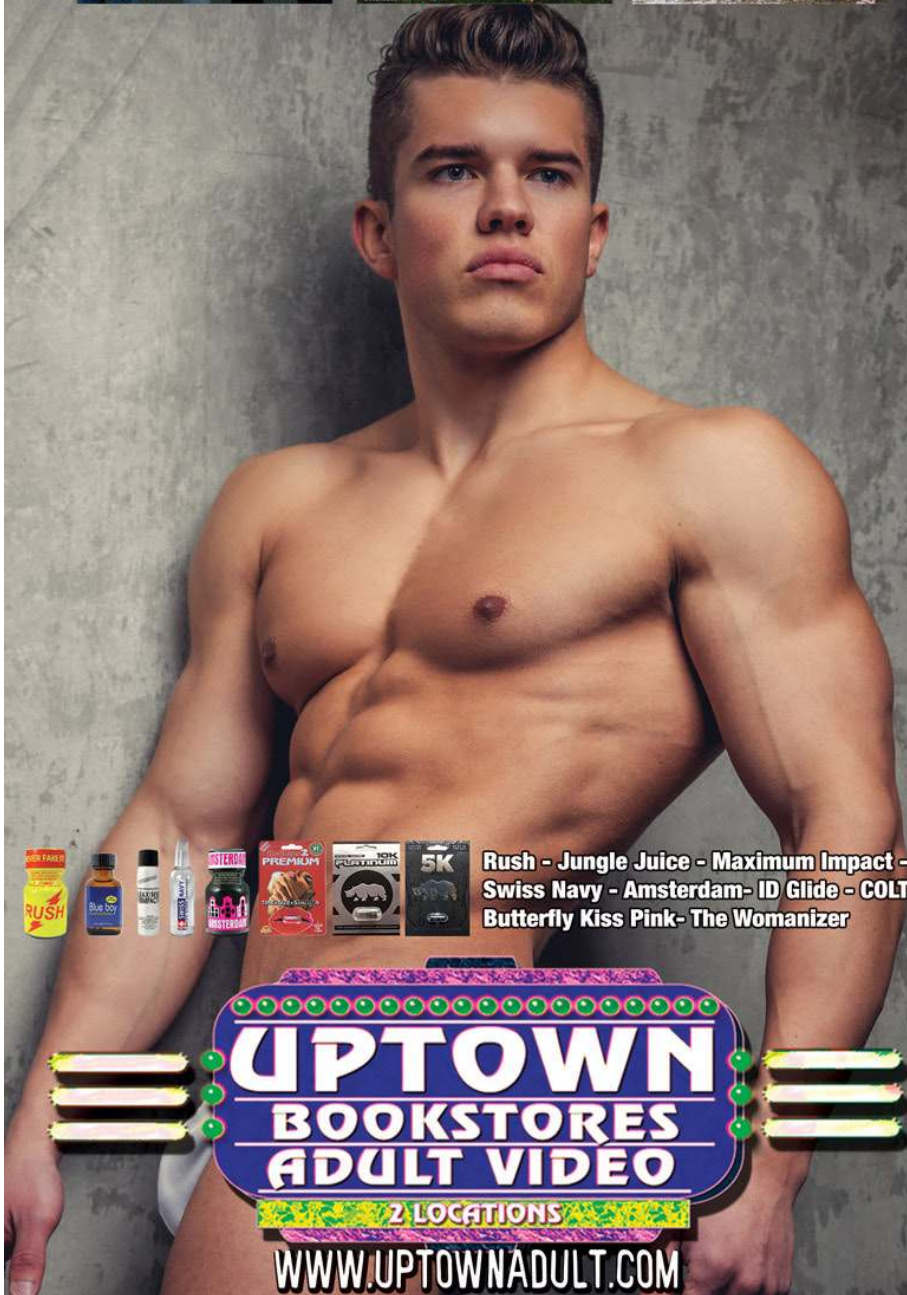


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Deep Inside Hollywood

BY ROMEO SAN VICENTE

'Monsoon' season for 'Crazy Rich Asians' star Henry Golding

Whether you know him as the very good-looking romantic lead in "Crazy Rich Asians" or the very good-looking Ghost of Christmas Heart Transplant Surgery Past in "Last Christmas," you now know Henry Golding and what a movie star he is. And now queer audiences will get to swoon over him in the gay romantic drama "Monsoon," from filmmaker Hong Khaou (director of the Ben Whishaw-starring indie drama "Lilting"). Golding plays a young British Vietnamese man who returns to his birth country after the death of his parents. There he meets his estranged family, as well as a man (Parker Sawyers, who played young Barack Obama in "Southside With You") with whom he might find love. This one's been moving its way through the film festival circuit and will now be getting a November U.S. theatrical/streaming date through indie veteran Strand Releasing. In other words, it'll be a dreamy escape from whatever happens after the election. Set your timers.



Henry Golding. Photo: Debby Wong.

Dueling Joe Exotics are coming soon in case you needed more of... that.

Earlier this year, in the early weeks of the pandemic shutdown, Netflix viewers lost themselves in the weird murder-world of Joe Exotic and Carole Baskin in "Tiger King." Then we all moved on to even worse real-life content courtesy of the news and the President and people who refuse to wear masks in Target. But Hollywood, almost always content to follow in the footsteps of the zeitgeist, has decided to keep the vibe going and battle it out, Carole-and-Joe-style, with a couple of dueling narrative series based on the same story. We already reported on Kate McKinnon taking on the Baskin role in the upcoming NBC/Peacock limited series in the queerest wild animal keeper rivalry in human history. But never sleep on Nicolas Cage's propensity for the odd, because he'll be playing Joe in another as-yet-untitled series from "American Vandal" showrunner Dan Lagana and Paul Young. This one is from CBS, and it's based on an early "Texas Monthly" article on the whole sordid matter. Now it's a race! Which one will get to series first? Which one will you ignore? Will there even be a United States when it happens? Who knows!

Docuseries 'Equal' to explore queer history from trans and POC perspective

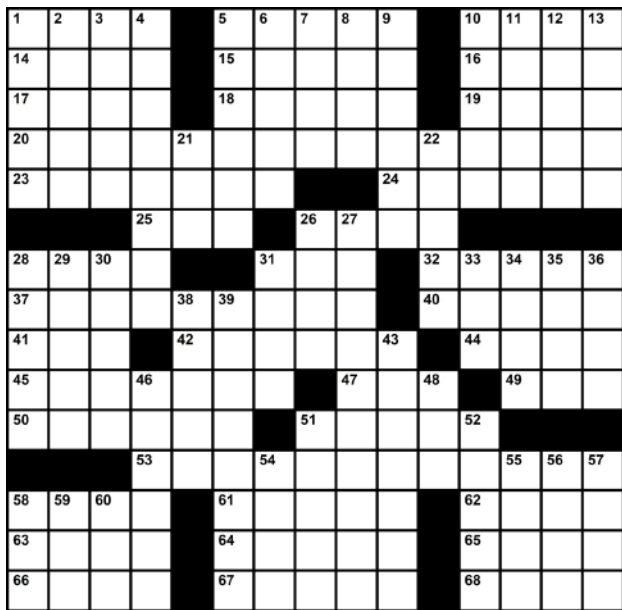
You have no excuses when it comes to knowing your queer history. First of all, there are these things called books. Then all the documentaries. Start somewhere. (Just don't bother with that bizarre Roland Emmerich "Stonewall" movie, because, well, OK, it's hilariously bad so go ahead and watch it, why not.) Or you could wait until "Equal" finds its way to HBO Max. Produced by Jim Parsons and Greg Berlanti, the four-part docuseries will be directed by Stephen Kijak ("Sid & Judy") and Kimberly Reed ("Dark Money") and focus heavily on the contributions of trans and POC activists whose work has often been ignored. It will feature both archival footage – some of which has never been seen before – and a very large cast who will reenact key moments

in queer activism. A partial list: Samira Wiley as Lorraine Hansberry and Anthony Rapp as Harry Hay, as well as Cheyenne Jackson, Heather Matarazzo, Sara Gilbert, Shannon Purser ("Stranger Things"), Alexandra Grey ("Empire"), Jamie Clayton ("Sense8"), Theo Germaine ("The Politician"), Hailie Sahar ("Pose") and Gale Harold ("Queer as Folk"). Air dates yet to be announced, so there's still time to figure out how to get an HBO Max code from a friend.

Cara Delevingne blasts off to 'Planet Sex'

Pansexual actor/model Cara Delevingne will host a three-part documentary series for BBC3 and Hulu called "Planet Sex," and from what we've heard we don't quite know what to make of it. The current information includes the educational elements of the project up front, with references to "issues related to sexual and gender identity." We approve. It sounds good for everyone. But then comes the kicker, the cinema verité of it all, if you will, in which we learn that Delevingne will participate in "experiments" that will be "conducted by world-leading sex labs." What sort of experiments? Where are these "sex labs?" Will there be electrodes? Blind tests? It suddenly sounds like exactly the sort of refreshingly horny television experience we've been waiting for and we salute Delevingne for whatever it is she's got going on with this thing. It can't come to Hulu fast enough.

Romeo San Vicente is also a sex lab scientist and welcomes peer review.



- Trojans
 37 She plays 13-Down
 40 Character in 20-Across
 41 Home of T. Bankhead
 42 Dated
 44 Showboat's "Nobody ___ But Me"
 45 What Madonna did to Evita
 47 Rinks org.
 49 Split one in the locker room
 50 Like a sauna
 51 Hibernate with the bears
 53 She plays 40-Across
 58 "Dancing Queen" band
 61 Bridge bid, briefly
 62 Breakfast spread
 63 Where Louganis worked out
 64 Shrek and others
 65 G.I. Jane portrayer
 66 "The Black Clark Gable" Diggs
 67 Monterrey mom
 68 James VI, e.g.
- Down**
 1 Full sweep
 2 You must remember this
 3 Cut and paste, e.g.
 4 Work out with Richard Simmons
 5 Takes part in a bee
 6 Cosmetician Norman
 7 First name in Pulitzer Prize poetry
 8 Part of BART
 9 A gangster shoots it off
 10 Your gardener's tool
 11 "Days of Our ___"
 12 Molecule constituents
 13 Character in 20-Across
 21 Enjoy orally
 22 ___ Ababa, Ethiopia
 26 Downs of "20/20"
 27 Titanic, for example
 28 Loads
 29 Dispense carefully
 30 Dazzling light
 31 Chablis title
 33 Fairy tale, so to speak
 34 Lesbos, e.g.
 35 Grp. or org.
 36 Like Easter eggs
 38 Desmond of "Sunset Boulevard"
 39 Rec area
 43 1979 Bette Midler film
 46 Some like it hot
 48 One side of a ship
 51 Edgar Bergen's Mortimer
 52 Walks like being fagged out
 54 "Young Frankenstein" woman
 55 Trump portrayer Baldwin
 56 He went down under the sea
 57 Cole Porter's "Let's ___"
 58 Quick on the uptake
 59 Drag queen's favorite snake?
 60 Type of toy

When Evil Rains

Q Puzzle

Across

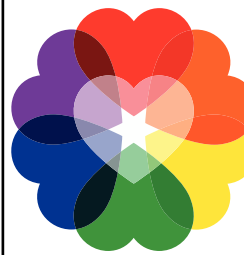
- 1 Put out
 5 Accuse of pedophilia, e.g.
 10 Navratilova, for one
 14 Glenn, in "Fatal Attraction"

- 15 Ricky Martin's Peter
 16 Greek meat container, perhaps
 17 Adult filly
 18 Beach birds
 19 Shakespearean stream
 20 With "The," Netflix series with the phrase "When evil rains"
 23 Like Julia Morgan's models
 24 Black Sea port
 25 "___ De-Lovely"
 26 Got some beds ready
 28 Word after "fag"
 31 Second name in sci-fi
 32 Story of Greeks and

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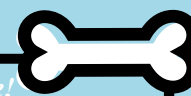


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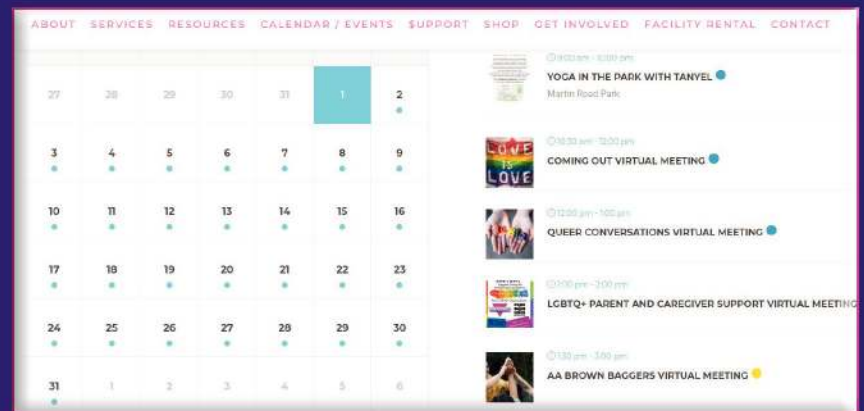


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Walk-in or by Appointment

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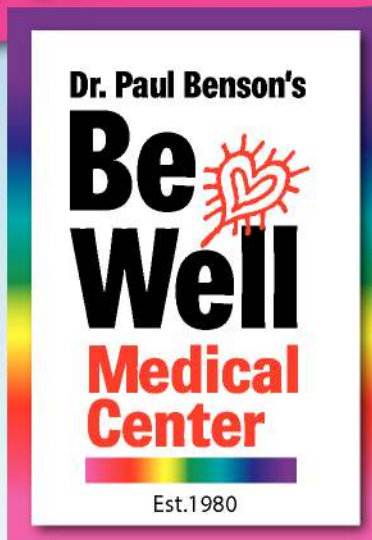
On the Edge of Primary Care PODCASTS with Dr. Paul Benson



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1 Why We Sleep? (Dr. Benson) Release: **1/2/2020**

Sleep is one of the most important, but least understood aspects of our lives and wellness.

2 Living with HIV in the 21st Century (Dr. Benson & Caleb Youngblood) Release: **1/16/2020**

HIV is a chronic manageable disorder, perhaps easier to live with than Heart Disease or Diabetes. Learn the latest about the HIV virus, new therapies, and the lessons learned from our history of dealing with HIV and its social stigma.

3 On the Edge: Transcending the Standard of Care

(Dr. Paul Benson, Dorea Shoemaker & Gretchen Haughton) Release: **1/30/2020**

Take matters into your own hands and become an active participant in your health. We'll discuss Cannabidiol (CBD) and its properties to improve and manage health with an expert, Dorea Shoemaker. CBD may be a new and safer alternative for pain instead of Tylenol or ibuprofen. We'll also discover benefits of whole food supplements to keep us healthy.

4 The Transgender Population – Understanding and Embracing this Population (Leon Bullough) Release: **2/13/2020**

A report from the World Professional Association on Transgender Health's (WPATH) Annual Conference. Hormone Replacement therapy is only a part of the transitioning process. Community and mental health support is essential for success. Individualized care plans based on evidence based

medicine and created to match each individual's desires and pace is essential to make the transition process a safe and healthy journey.

5 Sexual Health and HIV Prevention

(Dr. Paul Benson & Mark Rosen) Release: **2/27/2020**

We'll discuss sexually transmitted infections and their prevention. Many healthcare providers sweep this topic under the rug, but outcomes improve when we talk about how to stay healthy and infection free. Sexual health is not simply the absence of disease. It's living comfortably without fear or stigma; and embracing your sexuality while living day to day in your comfort zone.

6 Living Well Over the Age of 50

(Dr. Benson and Colin Colter) Release: **3/12/2020**

We'll discuss simple steps you, with the assistance of your doctor, can implement to live longer and healthier. Proper health maintenance makes a big difference at any age, but becomes even more important as the decades pass. We'll talk about prevention and aggressive strategies to manage co-morbidities sometimes encountered as we age. We can't turn back the clock, but you *can* improve your heart, liver, brain function, kidneys, and virtually every organ system.



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