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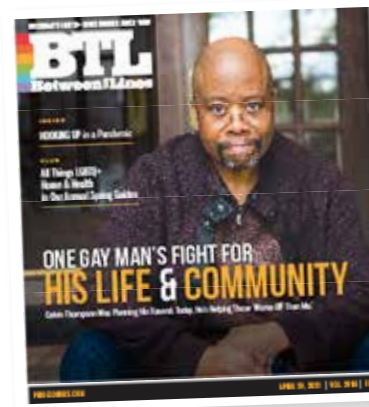
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5 **Queer** Things to Do Right Now

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

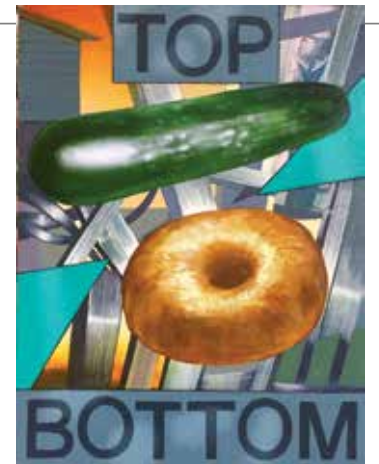
The pandemic has either delayed or entirely canceled most events across the state, but right now you can still take in an art exhibit or two. You could go on an interactive mystery with classical great Franz Schubert as your musical guide. You could virtually attend a missing-person production where that missing person is none other than ... Britney Spears? Yes, even a year into the pandemic, there are things you can do and places — remember those? — you can go. Some, however, require that you put on pants.

1

See Over a Dozen Local Artists Interpret Gender Through Art

An exploration of gender in all senses of the word, the “¿GENDER?” exhibit features over a dozen Michigan artists who use original art to depict their interpretation of gender based on their own experiences. Some explore gender roles or outdated stereotypes through self-portraits, like Darryl DeAngelo Terrell; others depict commentaries on sexuality and the financial implications it may have, like Callie Hoskins. The show is curated by lifelong Detroit resident and local artist Gary Eleinko. “I was traveling two years ago in March and I was at a collection of shows at a university in Mexico City,” Eleinko says. “One of the shows I saw was ‘50x50’; it was artists doing 50 interpretations of women on canvases that were 50-by-50 cm. That’s where the gender idea came from, and I wanted to expand it.”

“¿GENDER?” opens on May 7 and runs through Saturday, June 5, at the Detroit Artists Market located at 4719 Woodward Ave. in Detroit. Preregister to this free, RSVP-only event at [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com).

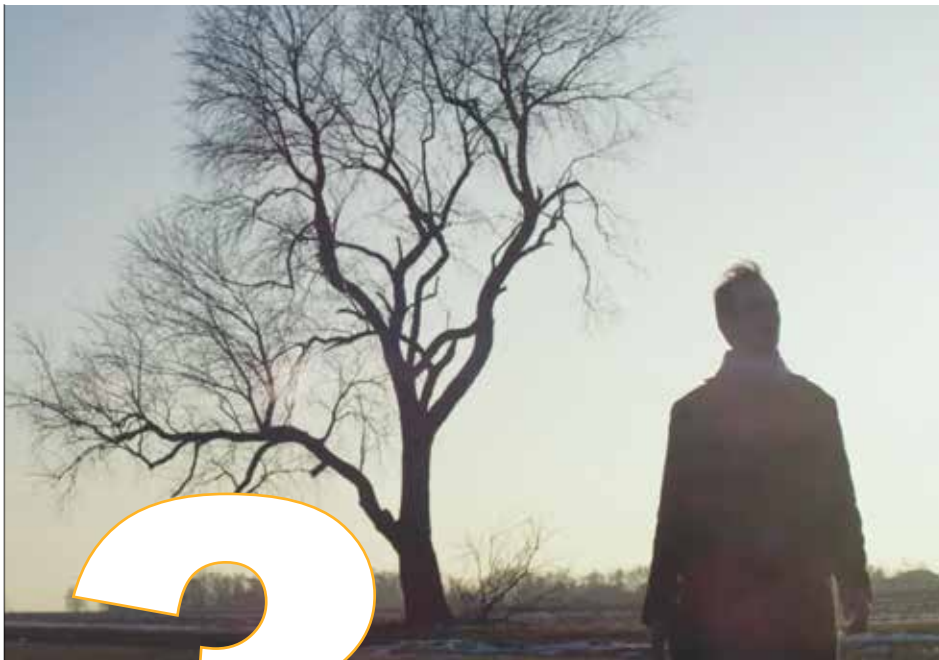


It’s Britney (and the Ringwald), Bitch!

Now streaming through May 10, “Murder, She Wrote” and The Holy Spearit unite in a matchup we didn’t know we needed in “Murder, She Podcast: Baby One More Crime.” Watch as famed author and amateur sleuth Jessica Fletcher records her first-ever podcast alongside sidekick Amos Tupper, the sheriff of Cabot Cove, the fictitious “Murder, She Wrote” town. The topic? The disappearance of Ms. Spears, of course! The duo will get to the bottom of the question on everyone’s mind: “Where’s Britney, bitch?”

Tickets for “Murder, She Podcast: Baby One More Crime” are available now and start at \$20. Tickets can be purchased until Sunday, May 2, at this link: bit.ly/MurderShePodcast-Tickets. For more info, contact theRingwald@gmail.com.





3

Solve a Mystery with Music by Franz Schubert

Classical music fans and those hankering for a good mystery, we've got just the thing for you: "The Wandering." An interactive show inspired by the music of Franz Schubert, "The Wandering" is a visual album, too. It has queerness! It has puzzles in spades! And it's designed so that those who don't know a thing about classical music can immerse themselves in figuring out the show's meaning, too. You can opt in to get clues to solve the mystery mailed right to your door. To begin your journey with "The Wandering," simply buy a ticket, receive your package and log in online.

Experience "The Wandering" now through May 15. Tickets start at \$24.99. Learn more online at experiencethewandering.com/home.

See 5 Queer Things, page 10

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Motor City Pride Sets Dates for In-Person, Virtual Events

BY JASON MICHAEL

Motor City Pride has announced it has for the moment decided to postpone its June Pride festival until September. The new dates for Motor City Pride will be Sept. 18 and 19 in Hart Plaza “as long as the rate of new infections reduces over the summer as more people are vaccinated,” said MCP President Dave Wait.

MCP will also host a second Pride Live this year.

“Pride is important for our community, so our Pride committee and a talented team of volunteers will

host Pride Live, a two-hour virtual celebration loaded with performances by festival favorites and special appearances by community leaders,” Wait said. “This is not a replacement for our Pride festival, but rather an opportunity to engage with our community in a creative, meaningful way as plans for our physical festival continue to evolve.”

The virtual Pride Live will take place on Saturday, June 5, from 3 to 5 p.m. on motorcitypride.com. In addition to live entertainment, the multi-channel experience will include a Pride History section, a virtual marketplace, an art exploration area, user-generated content via social media platforms, online community resources and messages from partner LGBTQ+ organizations.

Though this will be the second year in a row there is no Pride festival in Detroit in June, Wait said he’s optimistic about the September date.

“It’s too early to cancel,” he said. “People want to get together to show support, to celebrate and to really advocate for further protections for the LGBTQ community and all citizens. Talking to the city, they’re planning to have events back up starting in July. We thought that might be a little early so we went with the September date they had available and we’re optimistic we can gather as a community.”

Wait did say, however, that keeping the Motor City Pride brand alive has been challenging during a pandemic.

“It’s hard to remain active when we’re not able to meet,” he said. “We do a few things to kind of keep our name out there because we haven’t been able to meet and we rely on that so much. Our funding through our sponsors has been very encouraging. Sponsors funded us nicely last year. They helped us present Pride Live. We thought we would just do that out of our reserves and their contributions helped us do that in a nice way. It also helped us provide almost \$18,000 in support to other Pride organizations once that event was over.”

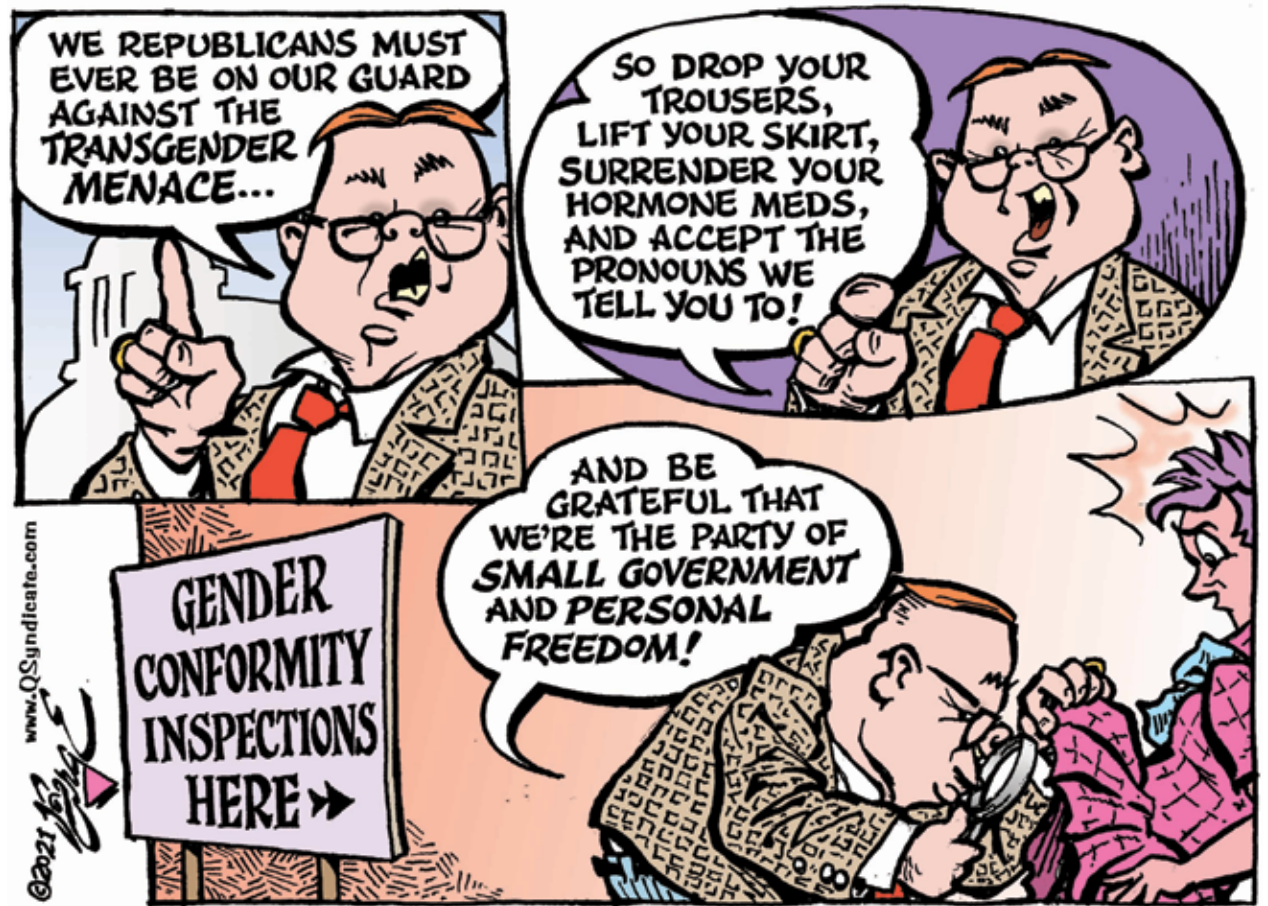
Already, MCP is looking for sponsors for this year’s two events.

“We’ve had a number of companies who reached out to us wanting to start the plans for this year,” Wait said. “Their interest is there and they’re very supportive so we’re working on different arrangements to lock in their support for the coming year.”

Email info@motorcitypride.com.



Photo: Andrew Cohen



Our Path to Parenthood

BY DANA RUDOLPH

My son is graduating from high school this year, which is making me reflect back to how our family started. If my social media feed is anything to go by, a lot of folks are also wanting to start their families in a similar way, so I thought I’d share our story in hopes of offering some insight or at least inspiration (though I’m not a doctor or lawyer, so please consult your own).

My now-spouse Helen and I had been together for eight years, but we focused on our careers before we decided to start a family. Once we began discussing it, we knew almost immediately that we wanted to do reciprocal in vitro fertilization, with Helen carrying my eggs, so that we could both be a part of the process in a physical way. I’m a few years younger, so we used my “fresher” eggs.

We then juggled the three areas of health care, insurance and law. First, we talked with our regular doctor and got physicals. She referred us to a fertility practice. I also approached my employer’s health insurance provider to be sure that IVF was covered — at \$20,000 per attempt, we couldn’t have done it otherwise. We had to pay for the sperm ourselves, though, at about \$300 per try.

Next stop was the lawyer to make sure none of the paperwork we had to sign at the clinic would waive either of our rights, since it was set up for egg donors who would not be parenting the child.

We also updated our wills and powers of attorney just in case.

At the same time, we started looking at online catalogs from sperm banks. We wanted an anonymous donor who would have no possible legal claim to the child. Looking back, we might have considered a donor who was “willing to be known” when the child turned 18, but we unfortunately didn’t know this was a possibility. Mostly, we wanted someone healthy — but that still left a lot of choices. We were almost driven to putting printouts of the finalists’ profiles on the floor and choosing the one the cat sat on. Ultimately, we made the call ourselves.

Then began the real attempts. We met with the fertility doctor and brought home a large paper grocery bag full of medicines and needles. Helen needed to take hormones to prepare the lining of her uterus to receive the egg. I needed hormones to produce many eggs at once instead of the usual one per month.

Helen started with a “test cycle” of hormone pills to make sure her uterus responded appropriately, then I went on birth



Dana Rudolph (left) with her wife, Helen, and their son.

control pills to synch my cycle with hers. I still laugh about the fact that the first time I ever went on birth control was in order to have a child.

I then gave myself daily injections in my belly for several weeks. The needles were tiny and nearly painless, though I felt a little bloated as my ovaries grew.

Helen started with a daily injection via small needles and then another for a week or so via a 2-inch needle in her backside, which I had to give her. (It was a bonding experience.)

We also both went to the clinic every other morning at 6 a.m. for blood tests and ultrasounds. We'd cut out caffeine for the duration, so that was rough, but we figured it was good preparation for parenthood.

My final injection, to release the eggs, had to be exactly 36 hours before my clinic appointment, when I went briefly under general anesthetic and woke up with the eggs painlessly removed.

The clinic then fertilized the eggs with the sperm we'd had shipped to them. Five days later, they inserted the embryos via a tube into Helen's uterus. They usually inserted more than one — this boosted the chances of any one succeeding, but at the risk of multiple births. The doctors recommended how many, based on how the embryos were developing, but the final choice was up to us. This was the most difficult question we faced after selecting the sperm donor.

We then waited for the results — a *looong* 10 days, especially since most over-the-counter pregnancy tests didn't work with IVF and we had to go to the clinic. The first time didn't succeed.

None of our remaining embryos had been good enough to freeze, so we started again from scratch. We chose a different donor, in case the sperm was the problem. I also took an additional medication to improve egg quality.

Success! Helen was pregnant!

This was all before marriage equality or civil unions, however. In New Jersey, where we lived, I would not have been able to be on the birth certificate or have any parental rights even though the child was genetically mine. But with the help of our lawyer, we successfully petitioned the state for a pre-birth parentage order, making me a legal parent from the moment of our son's birth. We thought we were going to be the first RIVF couple in the state to get such a parentage order, but we ended up being the second — happy to be part of a trend.

RIVF was definitely the extra complicated (and needle-filled) route. It's not for everyone, but we both value the different connections it has given each of us to our son. To those also considering RIVF, or any path to parenthood, I'd say be patient, try to find the humor in it and realize it's just the start of the long but worthwhile adventure of parenthood. Good luck!

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian, which can be found at mombian.com. It is a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 600-plus LGBTQ+ family books, media and more.

Creep Of The Week

Caitlyn Jenner Throws Her MAGA Hat Into the Ring for California Governor

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Congratulations, everyone! We did it! Anti-LGBTQ+ bias is over and done now that Caitlyn Jenner is running to be California's next governor! If we've learned anything from these past four years, it's that putting a completely unqualified ego-maniac in charge of things is a great idea. Great, great. Nicely done everyone.

HA. I'm kidding. Not about Caitlyn Jenner running for governor. I wish that was a joke. Or, I mean, it *is* a joke. But not a "ha ha" joke. A "that's pathetic" joke.

There is currently a Republican effort to recall California Gov. Gavin Newsom because he was too mean to COVID-19, daring to enact restrictions to stop its spread. HASN'T HE EVER HEARD OF FREEDOM? Doesn't a deadly virus deserve freedom, too? So, perhaps Jenner is hoping to capitalize on that.

Look, I'm all for women getting elected to the highest levels of government. And I'm all for trans women holding these positions! We need more transgender people making policy because the current wave of anti-trans bills flooding the nations is heinous.

But Caitlyn Jenner is not the one, thank you.

And I'm reminded of the many people who said things like, "I'm all for a woman being President, but not *this* woman" when talking about Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, etc. The difference, of course, is that all of those women were — and still are — imminently qualified to hold the position, which laid bare the sexism behind the "not *this* woman" argument that rejects women candidates.

But Jenner is not qualified. At all.

You don't have to take my word for it. On April 23, transgender activist Charlotte Clymer tweeted in response to the announcement, "Caitlyn Jenner is a deeply unqualified hack who doesn't care about anyone but herself. Her views are terrible. She is a horrible candidate."

Clymer also points out the wrong response to Jenner's announcement: "Misgendering Caitlyn Jenner because you think transphobia is OK."

And that's part of what's tricky about Jenner. On the one hand, she's transgender and on the receiving end of a lot of anti-trans hate.

On the other hand, as a Republican she's historically supported a political and social structure that has inequity at its core and has benefited from it.

Jenner supported Donald Trump in 2016, for example. She said that he'd be "very good for women's issues," even.

After Trump's push for anti-trans policies, she claimed to no longer support him, but then was photographed out and about wearing a red MAGA hat, claiming that she'd just grabbed the first hat that was handy while she ran out to run errands.

Uh, sure. I have no doubt that a celebrity who knows that every single public second of her life will be photographed "accidentally" wore a hat celebrating fascism.

Then there's the "Big Tent party" argument: the Republican Party needs LGBTQ+ people on the inside in order to change the party for the better.

Keep in mind that the Republicans have only gotten more anti-LGBTQ+ over time. They are not shifting away from hate — they are embracing it more openly than ever.

As Abigail Covington pointed out in *Esquire*, Jenner is also a useful symbol for Republicans' window dressing that helps to obscure their hostility toward transgender people.

"Republicans will cite her campaign as evidence of their lack of transphobia," Covington writes, "while they draft legislation that bans gender affirming health care for transgender minors. 'How can we be transphobic,' they will claim, 'when Caitlyn Jenner is running for governor as a Republican?' It's the LGBTQ+ version of the 'America can't be racist because we elected Obama' argument."

And we see how that's working out! A single president isn't enough to undo hundreds of years of racism. And a single transgender woman running for governor won't be a panacea, either.

It's also worth noting there isn't much the



Republican party has to offer transgender people. It's the party of making the rich richer, while most transgender people face significant barriers — including the kind of bigotry the GOP reinforces — to employment and job advancement. It's the party against everyone having health insurance even during a pandemic. It's the party that excuses at best, or endorses at worst, misogyny and sexism that makes life even harder for transgender people. It's the party that is actively working to hurt transgender people every single day through legislation to do things like ban trans athletes and prohibit gender-affirming care for minors.

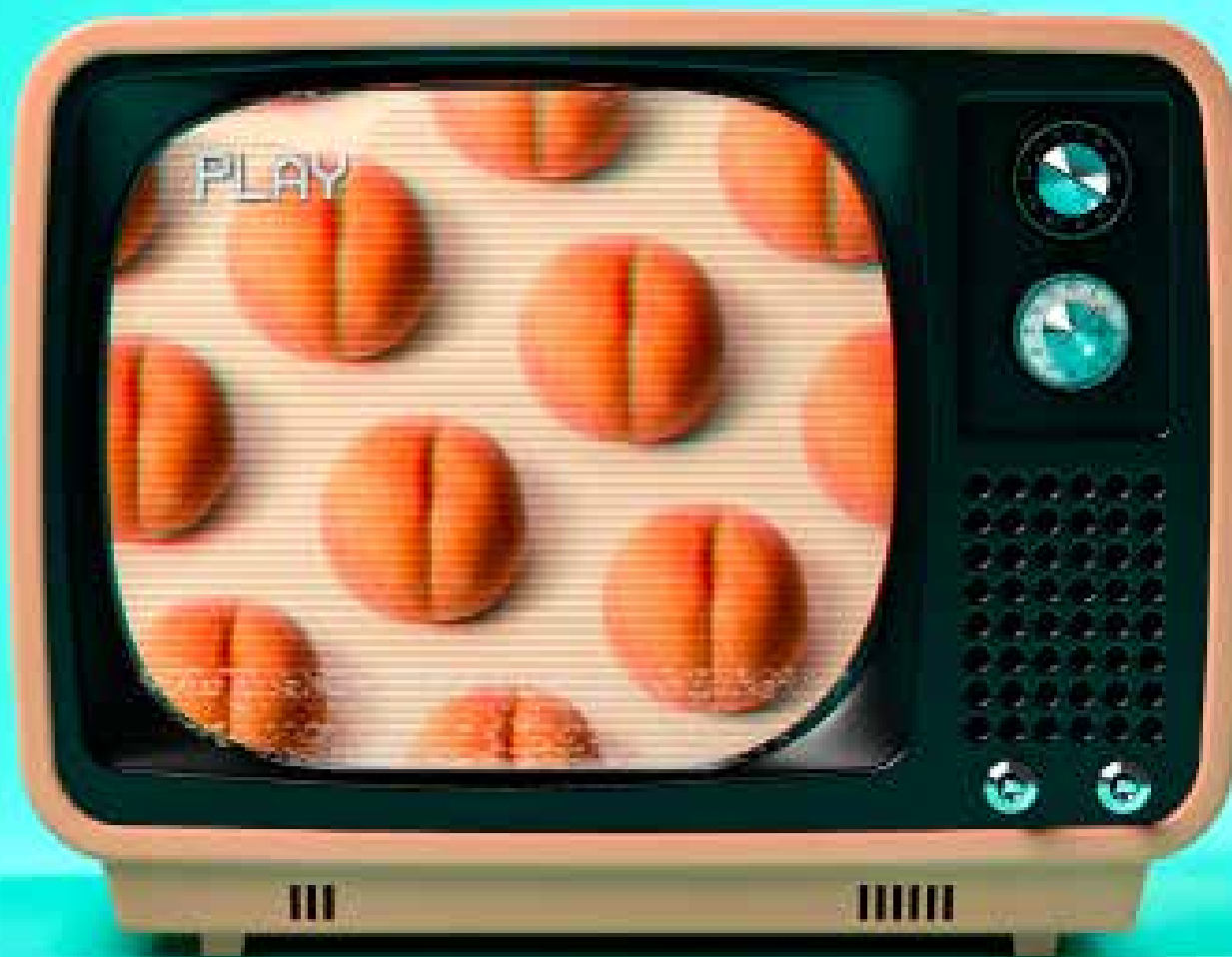
Not only would Jenner assuming the governorship not help transgender people, it's more likely to hurt them, something a lot of people understand.

"Make no mistake: we can't wait to elect a #trans governor of California," Equality California tweeted. "But @Caitlyn_Jenner spent years telling the #LGBTQ+ community to trust Donald Trump. We saw how that turned out. Now she wants us to trust her? Hard pass."

There are plenty of transgender women who would be great public servants. But we've seen how this reality show goes. We canceled it. We don't need a reboot.

WATCH YOUR ASS

The Deadly STI You May Already Have and Can Do Something About



A virus called HPV, which causes genital and anal warts, is the most widespread STI and can lead to fatal rectal and throat cancers. But with a vaccine and other precautionary steps you can protect yourself from top to — especially! — bottom.

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

A 35-year-old working in film production, Geoff Moore had a pretty good sex life with his boyfriend. In fact, you could call it vigorous. Sometimes even exhausting. So when they both noticed fleshy bumps around and inside Moore's anus, they assumed it was just a sign of too much good lovin'.

Until they didn't go away. And grew bigger.

A visit to an LGBTQ-friendly doctor taught them a new word: *Condyloma*, the term for genital and anal warts, which is caused by

certain strains of a virus called HPV. It's the most common STI, and so widespread that if you've had more than four sexual partners (or if any of those had more than four sexual partners), you've almost certainly been exposed at least once.

HPV, a.k.a. *human papillomavirus*, causes all types of warts, including the unflattering, nubby bastards we develop on hands and feet. About 150 numbered strains exist, around 40 of which specifically affect the genital region, the anus, and inside the anal canal, while a dozen of those strains are classified as "high risk" HPV

and can cause cancers of the genitals, anus and even throat. The latter afflicted actor Michael Douglas, who contracted HPV through oral sex.

Not-so-fun-fact: gay men acquire twice as many HPV strains as their heterosexual counterparts and have the highest incidence of anal/rectal cancers — *four* times that of cervical cancer. Condoms do offer some protection, but because HPV can infect skin not covered by the latex — including the entire pubic area, scrotum, inner thighs, ass, throat, and what we lovingly call "the taint" — it can still spread if present, even through kissing.

"I've seen full-blown anal cancers caused by HPV while working in a hospital," says Dr. Latonya Riddle-Jones, medical director of Detroit, Michigan's LGBTQ-focused Corktown Health Center. "You don't want cancer, and that area of the body has lots of functions and cancer there can completely devastate someone's life. There have been cases where we thought it was a colon cancer, but was an anal cancer from an HPV outbreak and got out of control."

The iconic model and actress Farrah Fawcett was a casualty of anal cancer in 2009, bringing mainstream attention to anal cancer and its

connection to HPV. And, unfortunately, Moore learned after a biopsy that his breakout was also from a cancer-causing strain and present both within his anal canal and outside. Happily, none of these warts had progressed to cancer, and Moore underwent a surgical procedure to have them removed.

Now for some good news: 2006 saw the arrival of Gardasil, a two or three-dose vaccine that targets both cancer and wart-causing HPV strains and has continued to include even more strains over the years — six when first introduced, now nine.

Initially recommended exclusively for young girls to mitigate cervical cancers, which was a leading cause of death for women, 2011 saw Gardasil also

advised for boys age 26 and under. Ideally, it's administered at age 11 or 12, prior to first sexual activity, although most of today's generation routinely receive it during middle school. In 2018 the FDA recommended that anyone under 45 receive the vaccine (insurance covers the cost), since even those who have already been exposed to Gardasil-covered strains receive an immunity boost.

"Especially if you're HIV-positive, it mitigates your cancer risk significantly," affirms Dr. Evan Goldstein, an openly gay surgeon whose NYC practice Bespoke Surgical is dedicated to LGBTQ+ anal-rectal health. "I see a lot of people with anal warts and some are difficult to get rid of, but getting the vaccine can create an immune response that helps resolve the issue. All gay men should get the HPV vaccine."

While HPV is most contagious when physically manifested as visible warts or lesions, which can appear raised, flat, cauliflower-shaped, or like a skin tag or mole, the virus can be passed along even when no visual signs are present. In fact, many of those who contract HPV will never experience a noticeable outbreak, because if one's immune system is functioning properly, the body often cycles HPV out of the body on its own.

Yet once warts have developed, they often will grow and spread since the body doesn't recognize them as an immediate threat. "Think of a whale with barnacles on its tail and it doesn't know they're there and feeding off the whale," Dr. Goldstein explains.

Dr. Rachelle Wilcox, chief of speciality services at University of Michigan's University Health Service, has seen cases where warts were allowed to run wild, including "someone who had their entire labia replaced by condyloma."

Dr. Riddle-Jones, meanwhile, recalls an HIV-positive patient in his 20s who, unvaccinated due to his parents' refusing it during his adolescence, allowed an anal lesion to go unchecked when first noticed. About 18 months later, he started to experience intolerable symptoms, including pain and bleeding.

"When we talked about the possibility of it being a precancerous lesion caused by HPV, they were terrified," she recalls. "It was a precancerous lesion, but it could be treated and at that point the patient got the vaccine and has been doing great."

While treatments for HPV breakouts haven't evolved much over the past couple of decades ("still


barbaric," Dr. Goldstein opines), external and internal HPV is, nonetheless, highly treatable by simply removing or destroying the tissue containing the virus, fortunately located on the surface. Depending on their preference, physicians will often remove external condylomas through freezing (cryotherapy), with Trichloroacetic acid, or the use of self-applied prescription creams that provoke one's own immune system to attack the affected area and remove wart-y cells (which, according to some, can also help prevent recurrences).

For internal warts, laser surgery is often the optimal route since Trichloroacetic acid, although usable on very small anal condyloma, can highly irritate and scar those delicate tissues.

As far as prevention measures besides the HPV vaccine and routine screening for unusual bumps or growths, Dr. Riddle-Jones recommends rectal pap smears every two to three years for sexually active HIV-negative individuals and annual if HIV-positive.

Dr. Goldstein prefers to conduct annual pap smears for active bottoms who he feels are at higher risk and utilizes two distinct types of swabs. "One tells me which strains of HPV someone has been exposed to, high risk or low risk, and the second looks at the cells and whether they are transforming," he says. He also emphasizes the importance of regular STI tests that include chlamydia and gonorrhea screenings, and if one does experience external condyloma breakouts, they are checked for internal ones as well. "The goal," he says, "is to make sure there isn't an internal issue with a good examination by someone who knows what they're doing, looking inside and out."

"The HPV develops into a wart and it's on the last cell of your asshole and your body doesn't even know it exists. And when many people deal with other immune issues, whether herpes or HIV, the likelihood your body has to fight all these things and then says, 'Oh yes, I have something anally I have to get rid of,' is very low."



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→ **5 Queer Things**

Continued from p. 5

Experience Photos of 20th-Century Gay Identity

With 856 works on paper by 404 artists from around the globe, this exhibition at the Flint Institute of Arts features selections from the Jack B. Pierson Print Collection that draws on his experiences as a gay man. Pierson was a Massachusetts-born photographer and visual artist famous for work like his “self-portrait” series. “Through highlighting public identity and activism, dissecting historic complexities of the gay male gaze, and considering the pensive and private moments of gay love and attraction, this exhibition captures the multi-dimensional nature of gay identity in the 20th century,” reads the FIA description.

See the art in-person now through July 11, 2021. Tickets for non-member, non-residents of Genesee County adults are \$10. Learn more and purchase tickets online at flintarts.org.



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Virtual attendance means it's way easier to travel to the Tate Modern museum in the U.K. to check out Andy Warhol's work during this professionally curated exhibition. Alongside the iconic pop-art images that are associated with the artist, curators Gregor Muir and Fiontán Moran will virtually guide viewers between rooms at the Tate and showcase Warhol's work through the lens “of the immigrant story, his LGBTQI identity and concerns with death and religion.”

View the free exhibit online now at tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/andy-warhol/exhibition-guide.



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Living Through Dual Pandemics

Black AIDS Institute Founder Phill Wilson on AIDS, COVID and the Black Community's Distrust of the Medical System



BY ASHLEY INNES

We're coming off a historic year in 2020. A year that devastated us and empowered us. A year that tested us and made us stronger. A year that put systemic racism and health disparities front and center for the world to see. It reminded us that there is still much work to be done in the fight for equality and equity yet inspired us to act toward progress.

We are still in the middle of a pandemic that has claimed the lives of over 500,000 Americans, but amid the struggle we are beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel. As the COVID vaccine allows us to feel hope, I reflect on what this feeling must be like for long-term survivors of HIV. Many remember when a new unknown virus emerged that was claiming the lives of their loved ones. A virus that they still live with today.

As we work to manage the current pandemic, many who have been living with HIV for decades once again find themselves losing loved ones. Reliving the past, grateful for what science has brought so quickly, and cautious to not let history repeat itself.

I recently had a conversation with Phill Wilson, founder and former CEO of the Black AIDS Institute. As many know, Phil is a gay Black man who has been living with HIV since 1981. He has been a champion and leader in this work for decades and understands better than anyone the concerns facing people living with HIV and the parallels to COVID, especially in Black communities. He says:

"This experience presents both an emotional as well as a physical health risk. We're living dual experiences because we're not yet finished with the HIV pandemic, and we're now

See **Phill Wilson**, page 28



Horny in a Pandemic

Why Some Still Got It On (and Some Didn't)

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

[Editor's note: Some of the subjects interviewed for this story preferred to use only their first names to maintain anonymity.]

While living in pre-pandemic New York City in early 2020, Brandon didn't even think twice about hooking up with other men. In an average week, he says he was sleeping with five guys.

"There's a ton of great options, and it's just part of the culture," he says. "Everyone's young and cute and horny."

But when COVID hit, sex in the LGBTQ+ community, as he remembers it, came to a "screeching halt." At first, he heeded health and safety guidelines. In fact, he stopped meeting men

for sex entirely. But by the time he moved back to Michigan several months later, he couldn't help himself — he started to feel the urge to fool around again. He noticed a trend: other men on dating and hookup apps like Grindr were giving in to their sexual desires too.


"The real promiscuous guys would still do it on the low," he says, "but there wasn't a huge thing around it. It stopped for me. I just fully stopped."

Then, by the end of last year, Brandon decided to start hooking up again.


For some, the guilt of resuming sexual activity during a

See **Horny in a Pandemic**, page 28

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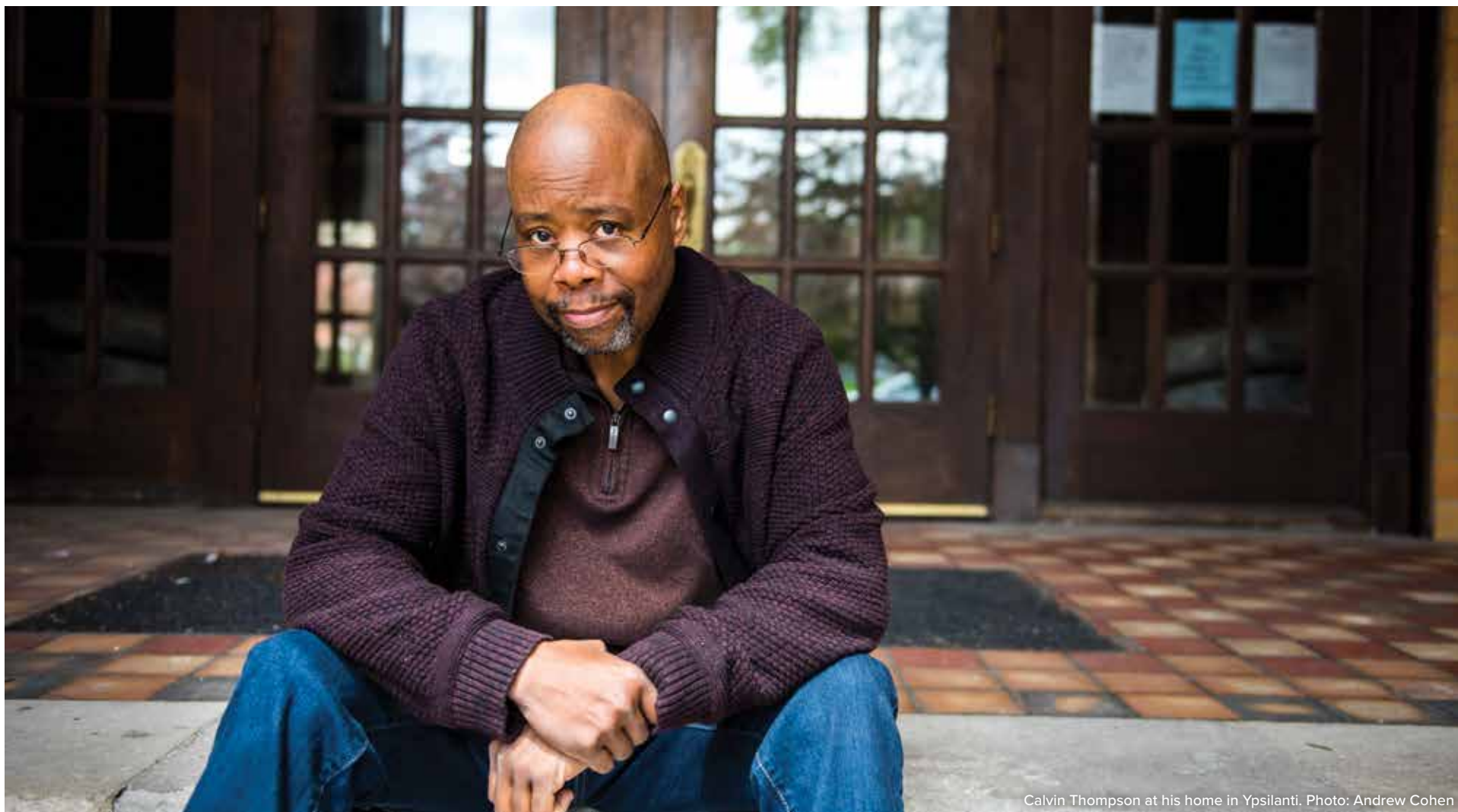
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Calvin Thompson at his home in Ypsilanti. Photo: Andrew Cohen

One Gay Man's Fight for His Life and Community

Calvin Thompson Was Planning His Funeral. Today, He's Helping Those 'Worse Off Than Me.'

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

After living in Atlanta for 30 years, Calvin Thompson decided to make a change at age 55. He took a new job in New Orleans and began settling into his new routine.

"I had moved in with a roommate and I remember one night we were out doing laundry and I told him, 'Can you take me to the ER? I'm not feeling well,'" Thompson says. "I can't describe it, but something's not right."

When Thompson got to the hospital, he learned that both his systolic blood pressure and blood sugar levels were nearing 300 — so high that he was in imminent danger of a stroke. When Thompson's roommate asked if he would be able to go home that evening, he was met with a firm "no."

"As a matter of fact, they didn't think I would be able to go home, period," he says. "I remember the doctor saying that. I woke up

the next day and there were tubes coming out of my stomach, there was a catheter placed in my chest, and I was told then that I had stage 4 kidney disease [of five stages] and that I was now going to be on dialysis."

Newly diagnosed, Thompson decided that he'd move again. This time he went to Michigan to be close to family and plan his funeral. But when Thompson's nightly dialysis treatments began working, he soon realized that he was "not going anywhere." It wasn't long before Thompson felt impassioned to do what he could to help others "worse off than me."

When his social worker directed him to resources at the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan, he also learned of an internship being offered there. He applied, was accepted and spent his time advocating for access to health care by calling legislators.

"I was able to help out. One of the things that the kidney community is in need of is people to provide transportation for people to

go to their visits to their treatments, and I was having issues with that as well, so I contacted people," he says. "Senator Debbie Stabenow was one of them."

After regularly talking with her office, he got excited about the prospect of doing work to help the community and "it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't worked with the Kidney Foundation," he says. "I haven't been with them since, but the desire to reach out to the community in that way is still strong."

It was that experience that inspired Thompson to pursue a master's degree in social work, which he intends to pursue at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

"That's one of the reasons I wanted to be a social worker, so that I could help people find ways to and from [treatments]. And I haven't completed that task yet, but it's part of what I really need to do. It's not a want anymore — it's a need," Thompson says.

Today, because of NKFM's help, Thompson is

on U of M's kidney transplant waiting list and will head down to Toledo, Ohio, to get on another. Thompson, who is a gay man, said that NKFM's welcoming and inviting atmosphere made him feel more comfortable during the process of receiving treatment and learning about services that he was eligible for via NKFM.

"Now, four-and-a-half years later being on dialysis, I don't feel all by myself like I used to; I don't feel all alone," he says. "And that in itself was affirming to me: that there are people who are willing to listen to you and help if you need help. I appreciate that more than anything."

That's also why Thompson is hugely supportive of an initiative started by Edward Bohach, a program coordinator and diabetes prevention lifestyle coach and master trainer. Bohach is also a gay member of the diversity,

See **Kidney**, page 30

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Kayla Gore visits the site of the first two tiny houses, which will become permanent homes to homeless transgender women of color. Photo: Entertainment One/Ariel J. Cobbert

Tiny Houses. Big Futures.

Meet the Woman Building Other Trans Women of Color Homes Who Gal Gadot Calls a ‘Woman of Wonder’

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

Home is where the heart is, but sadly too many people are heartless when it comes to those who are homeless. Especially when those people are trans women of color.

Ten years ago when Kayla Gore experienced homelessness and needed emergency shelter, “there was nothing out there for me” she tells *Between The Lines*.

She slept in parks. She did not feel safe or secure.

Today, Gore works to combat homelessness for transgender women of color in her hometown of Memphis. Gore is a co-founder of *My Sistah’s House*, an organization that provides emergency housing, support, meals and other resources to people experiencing homelessness. Her story is one of six featured in

the anthology doc series “IMPACT with Gal Gadot,” now on National Geographic’s YouTube channel.

The series highlights the stories of women around the world who are working to better their communities, like Kameryn Everett, a figure skater who coaches and empowers young Black girls in Detroit, and Arianna Font Martin, who set out to get clean drinking water to people in Puerto Rico after 2017’s devastating hurricane.

Gadot, who is famously this generation’s onscreen Wonder Woman, refers to Gore and the other women she highlights in the series as her “Women of Wonder,” as she called them during the virtual winter Television Critics Association press tour recently.

Gadot tells *Between The Lines* exclusively: “Home is a place

where you can find safety and shelter. Kayla knows too well what it’s like to feel unsafe. As a Black trans woman she has grown up in a world that cast her out for simply being who she is. But she’s determined to live her truth with dignity and impact others like her by creating the safety and shelter of the home that everyone of us deserves.”

According to “IMPACT,” homelessness in the trans population is three times higher than the general population. In a 2015 survey, the National Center for Transgender Equality reported that 34 percent of transgender people in Michigan had experienced homelessness and 35 percent “avoided staying in a shelter because they feared being mistreated as a transgender

See *Tiny Houses*, page 19



Keith Bynum and Evan Thomas flip Detroit homes on their HGTV series "Bargain Block." Photo: HGTV

As Seen on HGTV: A Gay Couple Who Flips Detroit Homes

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It's the newest show on the HGTV network and it's filmed right here in Detroit. "Bargain Block" stars personal and professional partners Keith Bynum and Evan Thomas, transplants from Colorado, and follows the couple as they put a unique spin on the concept of house flipping. They buy boarded up and abandoned houses in neglected Detroit neighborhoods for as little as \$1,000 and live in them while they invest their own money fixing them up and bringing them back to life.

"We love taking on the absolute worst of the worst," Bynum tells *Between The Lines*. "The house that no one wants or believes in, that's our jam."

Bynum, who shared he was disowned by his family when he came out, feels especially at home in Detroit's land of misfit houses. He sees himself in the properties they rehab, he says: "I kind of personify the houses. I was down and beat up and even my family didn't want me after I came out, but someone believed in me and I'm in such a better place now. The houses are the same. They just need someone to believe in them again."

Bynum and Thomas had to believe in themselves, though, to move across country to an unfamiliar and misunderstood city.

"Neither of us had ever been to Michigan before we moved here," says Bynum. "Detroit kind of has, you know, a little bit of a reputation, and so when we moved here we were a little scared. But almost immediately we realized how amazing Detroit is, and how kind and loving."

It didn't take long before Bynum and Thomas's neighbors surrounding their first property befriended them — the same neighbors that, inevitably, became fans of their HGTV-worthy renovation work. Bynum, an artist, designs each house with a theme, furnishes them with funky second-hand furniture and adds touches of his personal art. The houses, usually around 1,000-square feet, sell for on average \$100,000 or less once finished and make perfect starter homes.

"I hate the idea of duplicating designs because each house has so much personality and charm and each has a very unique energy," he says. "So I try to custom tailor each one. It's the most fun putting them back together and seeing renewed life in the house and the neighborhood."

"Bargain Block" airs at 9 p.m. Wednesdays on HGTV.

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Angelica and Kayla Gore check out one of the finished tiny homes. Photo: Entertainment One/Ariel J. Cobbert

→ Tiny Houses

Continued from p. 16

person.”

While some cities have shelter beds set aside for transgender people, Memphis is not one of them. In fact, admittance to a shelter is often based on biological sex, which leaves transgender people with few options. “So most trans people choose not to use the services of shelters here in Memphis,” Gore says in “IMPACT.”

My Sistah’s House grew out of a need for options for the trans women of color who would come seeking emergency shelter at the LGBTQ community center OUTMemphis where Gore was working.

According to Gore, there were only a couple of organizations that allowed trans women, but those places were always full with a waiting list.

Gore ended up opening her own house to those in need, even though it was against the community center’s policy. It was “very grass roots,” Gore tells Between The Lines. “Very word of mouth.”

Eventually Gore and others got the opportunity to buy a house that could shelter multiple people. But there was still a great need for permanence. “What we realized in our journey with My Sistah’s House was that when we became homeowners we had a lot more autonomy over how we governed our space,” Gore says on “IMPACT.” “So we wanted to pass that blessing on to the individuals in our membership, which is home ownership in the form of a tiny house.”

So in June of 2020, Gore started a GoFundMe with the goal of building 20 tiny houses to

give trans women of color a safe place to call their own.

Why tiny houses? Cost, says Gore. Tiny houses are more economical to build, which means My Sistah’s House can afford to build more homes in order to help more people.

“We want to be able to help people plan ahead,” says Gore. “These homes will allow people to plan for five years or plan for 10 years. People can go back to school, people can actually live a full life thriving versus only being able to plan for a week or a month in advance.”


In other words, giving someone a home is giving them a future.

The biggest challenge My Sistah’s House faces is, not surprisingly, resources. Demand for MSH’s services have only gone up during the pandemic. “For the need to be so great, and for the resources to not be as great, that’s always an issue for us,” Gore says.

“My life experiences make me want to make sure that trans women don’t have to endure what I endured,” Gore says, tearing up as the cameras roll on “IMPACT.” “If there’s one thing I’d like people to know about trans folks is that we’re human, that we have feelings, and that we’re worthy. Everything that we’re asking for or everything that we’re entitled to, we are worthy of it.”

The bulk of My Sistah’s House’s funding comes from individual donors. To learn more about My Sistah’s House and to make a donation, visit <https://mshmemphis.org>.


“IMPACT with Gal Gadot” is now airing on National Geographic’s YouTube channel with new episodes weekly.





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Photos: Hsiang-Hsi Lu

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

A couple of blocks east from Manhattan's Empire State Building in the neighborhood known as Murray Hill, 25-year-old Taiwan-born photographer Hsiang-Hsi Lu fires off a Grindr message.

"He's Taiwanese!" Lu remarks with a tinge of pleasant surprise about the 20-something recipient, perhaps hopeful that their shared heritage may garner a positive response and invitation to connect. But Lu doesn't want a date, hookup, LTR or "plug" — he wants to shoot photos of the guy's apartment.

"Grindr Profiles" is the working title of Lu's latest art project: photographing the living spaces of people — mostly cisgender male, but all gender identities are game — he meets through Grindr and accompanying the image with the occupant's blurred face photo and respective profile text. (Lu's own reads: "I'm doing a photo project about ppl's lifestyles. No nudity, no identifiable face pic will be involved. Your real ID is confidential! Lmk if interested.") A sampling of his 80-plus entries to date are viewable on his Instagram account, although he ultimately plans to create an online interactive map of NYC and its boroughs including Queens, Brooklyn, The Bronx and Staten Island, with subjects and interiors from each neighborhood.

"I still haven't been to most of the neighborhoods, so it will take at least a half year to finish this project," he says. "I'm generally a curious person, so I'm trying to understand humans through the digital world, and that's why I document people and collect data from Grindr and turn it into an index. So we can see the slight differences."

Although the openly gay Lu admits to more traditional sorts of experience with Grindr during his college years, it was during the COVID-19 lockdown last year that he got bored and redownloaded the app. Also during this time, Lu tumbled down the rabbit hole of live webcam shows on Chaturbate, which inspired an antecedent to "Grindr Profiles" titled "Cam Rooms." "I found their living environments very fascinating," he confesses, "so I started screenshotting when they went out of the room. It helped me develop my current project. But "Grindr Profiles" has

more weight, is more independent and fully controlled"

Raised in Taoyuan, Taiwan (just outside Taipei), Lu moved to New York in 2018 and earned an MPS degree in fashion photography at the School of Visual Arts. Inspired by the work of artist Hans Haacke and early Dan Graham, and disenchanted with fashion photography, Lu launched "Grindr Profiles" in August 2020.

Based in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, he started fishing for subjects locally, messaging people in adjacent neighborhoods and scoring sessions in Bedstuy, Crown Heights and Bushwick. Spending around 30 minutes on each photo shoot (longer if the subject is chatty), he later traveled to different parts of NY, planting himself in a public park, store or subway station to message



"Grindr Profiles" photographer Hsiang-Hsi Lu

and respond, targeting a wide variety of demographics.

He admits it's been challenging finding willing subjects in certain neighborhoods, notably the posh West Village, trendy Bedford Street section of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and Chinatowns of lower Manhattan, Brooklyn and Flushing Queens (yes, NY boasts three distinct Chinatowns). "They're a little more conservative," he muses. "I didn't meet any in person for now, so I don't know their situations, but I assume probably because of their family situations."

Although some Grindr users are incredulous at first — "people say, 'Why are you asking me this question?' and some ask for

See **Where It Happens**, page 29

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Photo: Parri Thomas

Dodie Is Building an Understanding of Herself

The YouTuber's Debut LP Had the Bisexual Artist Reexamining Her Sexuality

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

To know dodie is to *really* know her. Since 2011, the British singer-songwriter's diary-wide-open authenticity has drawn millions of fans to her YouTube channel doddleodde and its sister channel, doddlevloggle.

Those faithful fans — she once considered calling them “doddlers” — were with her in 2016, when, after establishing an online presence, she released her first EP. The result was the intimate “Intertwined,” a collection of songs tackling mental health, sexuality and friendship. Another EP, “You,” followed in 2017. Her third, “Human,” was released in 2019.

“Build a Problem,” though, is dodie's full-length debut, written over a two-year span during a period of self-discovery after she came out in 2017 as bisexual with a song and video called “I'm bisexual — a coming out song!” (the video has amassed six million views on YouTube). After being pushed back three times, she's eager for the album to come out on May 7, she tells me over Zoom from her studio flat in London. But first things first: all the stuff strewn across her floor that she thought she hid.

“Excuse my room,” she says, after rushing

home from a walk to get on the call. “I didn't realize how messy it was, and that it was gonna show.”

When the album finally comes out, how do you anticipate that you will feel?

(Laughs.) Relieved, released. Free. And yeah, I mean, I have no idea. It's why I gritted my teeth when I heard that you listened to it, because I just have no idea how people will respond. I've already spoken to a lot of people who have listened to it, like my friends and also some fans, and that's been nice. From what I hear, they all really like it. And that, honestly, is enough for me. If I could just share the Dropbox link around to everyone and get their feedback, that's enough to keep me going.

It must feel weird to create a piece of work that is so close to you and so intimate and not know how anyone will respond to it.

Yeah. I'm just so ready to move on. I feel like I'm holding onto this album and to all of these feelings associated with it. And like, obviously, my life has moved on. I've grown up and grown since writing (it), but I feel like I can't properly move on until I've released it, which I don't know if it's healthy or not. But it definitely feels

like a part of my life.

How would you compare the songwriter you were when you first started writing songs to the songwriter you are on this album?

I think I've always been very dramatic in my songwriting. Not, like, in an overt way. I think what I mean is: I love building tension and release in my songs. I love over-soaring melodies. I love creating dynamics, like such a range in my songs. So I think that's similar.

The difference is that I'm better. (Laughs.) I honestly just think the way in which I look at life has changed. I look at life in a more nuanced way now, whereas when I was younger I wrote more black and white, obviously, because that's how I saw the world. So, if anything, the meanings of my art have gotten more mature. Probably the sound of my music as well. In terms of writing style, I really don't know, to be honest. That's a good question. I have to think about it.

Did the pandemic open up this creative well for you? And did you write the album, or any of it, in the pandemic?

I wrote half of the album in the pandemic. The deluxe side, and all of those songs, I was

uploading them in the first wave, as it were. And I felt, yeah, definitely creatively inspired. It gave me all of the time I needed and the space I needed to start writing and finishing all of these little snippets of songs and tweak them and form them into demos. Then the next wave of the pandemic was the complete opposite and I just sort of fell into a slump.

A lot of this music, from what I read, brought you closer to the person that you are right now. Did any of it help inform your sexuality or the discovery of new parts of your sexuality?

Yes! Great question. I think it took me a while to really understand what it meant to come out as bi. I think when I was younger I was so excited to (come out) because, firstly, it felt like a very exciting thing and I wanted to rush out and say it, like get in with the crowd because I felt very kind of lonely and weird in it. I wanted to immediately be a part of this community. And it felt good. And then I grew up. (Laughs.)

I realized that all of those sort of inner biphobic workings of growing up where I did, and the family that I had, caught up with me, and I realized it was a bit more difficult than I thought and that I had a lot more to work through and a lot more to understand about it. And I'm still working through it; I'm still trying to understand. And, yes, everyone always says that sexuality is complex — as is gender, as is everything in life — but I think I'm only just beginning to understand what that means and still understand myself more.

So when it comes to identity, are you still using the bisexual label?

I think it's easier to say bisexual because that's what I am. It's hard to even talk about what love is for me and what attraction is for me because it just keeps shifting. I still don't really know myself very well when it comes to relationships. So, I just don't think I can land solidly on talking about any of that. All I know is that I'm bisexual and that means something to me.

It's pretty incredible to think that six million people watched you come out on YouTube in 2017 with “I'm bisexual — a coming out song!” That's a lot of people. How do you reflect on that moment and coming out in such a big way?

I think it's very sweet. I think I have a lot of queer fans. A lot of young queer fans, right? At least I definitely did at that time, probably following a song that I put out when I was even younger than that called “She,” which was about liking a friend of mine who was not bi or gay in any way. Also, before I even knew that I was, it was just this vague, flirty song about really finding someone attractive and kind of knowing what it was, but not really sticking a pin (on) it. It just makes the whole feeling so much softer when I understand that so many have gone through that feeling and are now going through that feeling.

See **Dodie**, page 24

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Michigan's Stand With Trans Is Recruiting Young Trans Writers for Digital Pub Thanks to Tegan and Sara

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

With funds from a grant provided by the Tegan and Sara Foundation, Stand with Trans is launching a three-edition digital newspaper by and for transgender and non-binary youth. Stand with Trans is a Michigan-based organization that supports transgender and non-binary youth along with their families. Currently, there are six openings available for this paid position that is open to teens ages 13 to 19. Participants will be expected to contribute to all three issues with compensation of either \$300 or \$100 per issue.

Published on Stand with Trans' site and its social media channels, the project will provide leadership opportunities and the ability to hone one's skills in writing, art, digital publishing and organization.

"We had a pilot of this newspaper last fall where we did just one edition with the youth just to see how it would go and how they responded to it," said Cameron Parkins, communications manager for Stand with Trans. "The kids loved it."

Using last year's example, Parkins said, it will up to the teens to create future editions as they see fit. They will have creative control.

"We're just here to make sure they have the resources they need," Parkins said.

The only real requirement is that the applicants are teens with an interest in writing, design or art, Parkins said.

"It gives them a chance to be published and get their feet wet to the process of writing and editing and producing a product."

Another stated goal is for published issues to give allies insight into the lives of transgender and non-binary youth and topical issues that affect the community.

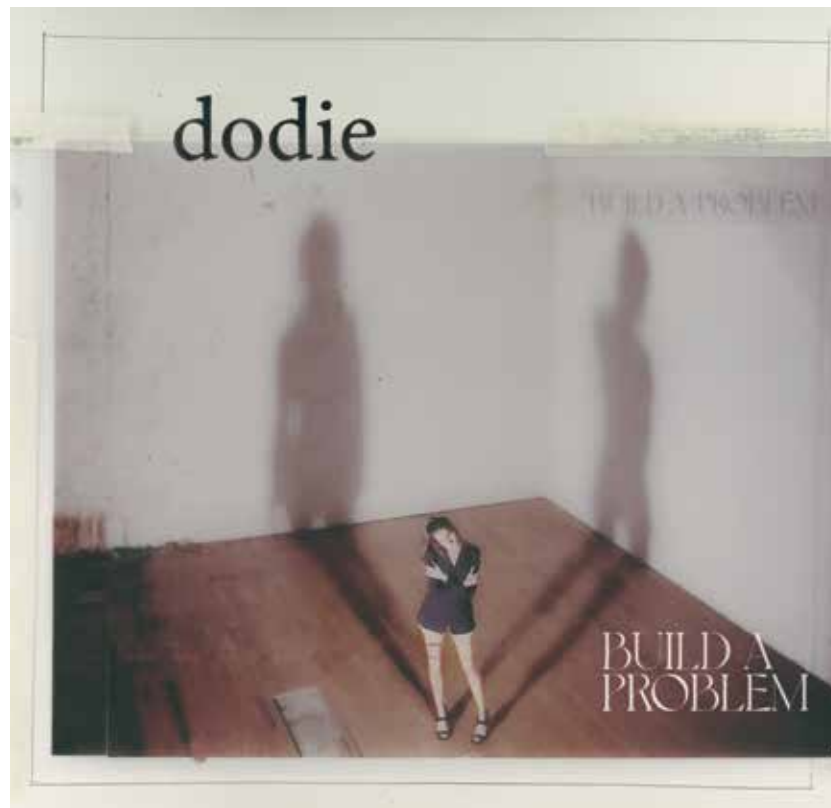
Applicants need not be residents of Michigan; any transgender or non-binary teen nationwide may apply.

Currently, Stand with Trans President and Executive Director Roz Keith is scheduling interviews as applications are submitted. Stand with Trans staff hopes to begin the project at the end of April.

Parkins agreed it was significant that the youth will be compensated for this opportunity to build their skills because it will serve as a way to help them stay engaged in the project.

"It's exciting that we're able to offer that to them as a little extra pocket money," Parkins said.

Founded by musician and activist twins Tegan and Sara Quin, the Tegan and Sara Foundation's mission is to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ women and girls. This mission is founded on a commitment to feminism and racial, social and gender justice. To learn more, visit standwithtrans.org.



→ Dodie

Continued from p. 22

Bisexuality still seems to be taboo. Do you think we're past that? What is your personal experience with that?

I think we're past it in a way, but I still think there's so much stigma inside that label even. To be fair, I see it talked about on TikTok a lot in a very nice way, in a comforting way, where people explore how you can be bisexual but still be in a "straight" relationship. Just all of the complexities. Basically, your history doesn't have to align with your orientation. It's just a very confusing mess that I think people still don't understand because the world looks at things in a very strict putting-in-boxes way when really, of course, everything is more nuanced than that.

When I think of boxes now, the boxes are even less so than the boxes that I had to put myself in.

I would have lost my mind. I don't know what I would have done. I mean, I still am because the inner bi-phobia (is) still there. Sometimes I lie in the bath and I'm like, "Oh, fuck! I think I'm gay." Like, "Oh fuck, I've been lying to everyone, I've been lying to myself." And I'll be like, "Shit, I must be completely straight, I just love girls, like everyone else, oh god." I still flip back and forth because we've all been brought up in this "either-or" world and then as soon as I find the word bi again and I really understand what that

means, I'm like, "OK, everything's better now."

I'm interested in knowing a little more about your queer fans, because you have such a following. What kind of fans are they?

Yeah, they're very sweet. I mean, I haven't really come into contact with them for a while. You know, for at least a year or so. (Laughs.) But I've seen so many grow up, kind of, with me. I get really emotional when I think about how weird I felt as a teenager, or a kid even, just like a complete outsider, and very dramatic and deep-feeling.

And yeah, OK, I'll say it: I have a friend called Elle Mills. She's a YouTuber and she's really cool. You can tell her fans apart from mine because hers are all the cool kids in school, and mine are all of the arty-farty fairies who are a bit weird. And like, I felt ... I don't know ... slow in the hierarchy of school. And now I understand there wasn't a hierarchy at all; it's just kind of people. And I feel like I've collected a community of them and that makes me feel really good.

That's really sweet. Do you have a name for these fans? You know, like Mariah has her "lamb" and Gaga has her "little monsters."

(Laughs.) I toyed around with "doddlers," but I didn't want to imply that we're an army or anything like that. I didn't want to be like, you know, the leader of this army or whatever. I think that's strange.

And yet you kind of are that leader. It's you who brings these people together, right?

Kind of. I don't know. I like it when I

become a very separate thing. There's a sort of fandom that I'm not even really a part of. I really love that. I think that's so sweet.

What do you hope your queer fans take away from your example in living so openly in regards to your sexuality?

I would love for them to feel better about the complexity and the guilt of it all, I think. I don't really know how many (songs) exactly are about being queer; I'm sure it floats in and out of all of my writing. But in "She" and a song called "Rainbow," there's a lot of struggle. As much as it is a celebration, there's a lot of pain and shame in there. I would hope in sharing that it lightens their load a bit, because I know that it's a really heavy thing to carry around. And I would love for us to share that and feel better together.

Celebrities were once people who seemed so unattainable. But you've built an entire career on being your most authentic self. Do you think it's important for people in the LGBTQ+ community to be able to relate to the artists that they listen to and that they love?

I don't think it's necessary. I wouldn't want to enforce a breaking of boundaries on anyone. I grew up seeing, yeah, you're right, celebrities as these like unreachable aliens that I didn't really understand existed. And so when I kind of became someone that people knew about, that I probably would have deemed to be famous when I was younger, I wanted to break that and almost reach into my younger self and shake her and be like, "Look! These people are human and everyone is human. You walk this earth with these people." Yeah, I'm not sure if it's necessary or incredibly important, but I do find it interesting and I like that I am someone who can do that.

What will you be doing to celebrate Pride this summer?

I haven't even thought about it. Isn't that so weird? I think probably just connecting with people online. I don't know. Maybe I should work on that. Maybe Pride is something I should partake a little bit more in.

It sounds like you've had some new thoughts about sexuality in the last several years, so maybe it's time for a follow-up to "I'm bisexual."

Yeah. Though I don't know if I'm ready to share them yet, because I don't even know what they are. I still don't understand myself, really. Maybe I'll just say that.




This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.



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Community, Commemoration and Celebration: The Evolution of Hotter Than July

HOTTER THAN JULY RETROSPECTIVE

25TH ANNIVERSARY
1995-2020
HOTTER THAN July

BY VIBHA VENKATESHA



For the past 25 years, Hotter Than July has revolutionized and represented the vibrant Black LGBTQ+ community in Detroit and holds the

honor of being the world's second-oldest Black LGBTQ+ Pride. From its first iteration in 1995 to now — and in an unprecedented global pandemic — HTJ has created a space for healing, education and celebration. And, above all, it is a space for building a community and movement. Over the course of these years, the event and its founding organization, LGBT Detroit have evolved and grown, too, with over 9,000 in attendance at the 2019 Palmer Park Picnic.

LGBT Detroit began as KICK Publishing Company, then only the third Black American LGBTQ+ media company created in the country. Askari Ali, the first HTJ host and former columnist for KICK, sought to reconcile a seeming discordance between the faith community and the LGBTQ+ community in Detroit with a Spiritual Corner column. The Black LGBTQ+ movement in Detroit at that time was fledgling and malleable and mostly a conglomeration of various organizations working together, wanting to build their own table rather than beg for a seat at others.

HTJ is a space created by Black LGBTQ+ Detroiters, for Black LGBTQ+ Detroiters. Ali recalled visiting other cities and seeing their Prides and feeling that Detroit needed a Pride that truly represented the distinct, rich culture of the city and its Black LGBTQ+ community — and one that felt truly inclusive and special.

“The Black LGBT+ community in Michigan didn't have very many openly supported and celebrated events of Pride. I wanted our LGBT+ youth to know they had support, love and deserved to be celebrated out loud,” says former host DeAngela “Show” Shannon.

More than entertainment

A defining aspect of HTJ has been its political impact. Innocence Milliown, another former host, shared how a particularly surreal moment at HTJ came while standing side by side with the late Congressman John Conyers and other significant politicians and how that moment demonstrated the importance that including civic education and engagement in Pride events can have. Ramon Harris, a former host and



(From back to front, left to right) Ronn Reeder, Innocence Milliown, Ramon Harris, Cierra Malone and Erica Carter. Photos: Darryl Terrell

co-founder of the Detroit LGBT Chamber of Commerce, says that the biggest evolution HTJ has had is the expansion of programming.

“We need advocacy, leadership, mentorship, support, venturing, visibility and acceptance. We needed a space to build community and solidarity with one another and to collaborate and respect and understand each other and our differences,” Harris says, highlighting the diversity of experiences within the Black LGBTQ+ community.

Former host Erica Carter has enjoyed seeing HTJ grow from year to year also, not only in attendance but in its ability to serve the community and reach parts that have been overlooked, like Black trans women, as well as hone its messaging and help people find their purpose.

Unfortunately, HTJ had a long journey to get to the standing it has in Detroit today. When Ali asked for a formal welcome letter for the event from Mayor Dennis Archer, the ask was rejected on account of the “lewd behavior” HTJ would be promoting. But Ali pushed back and called attention to this incident in national media. As Harris said, HTJ became “an opportunity to take ownership of our own narrative.” Many former HTJ hosts found their start working with LGBT Detroit from doing grassroots advocacy in the community, demonstrating the inextricable nature of Pride and movement building and mutual aid. Host Ronn Reeder became introduced to LGBT Detroit through

partnerships as a health care worker and, along his journey, found empowerment and comfort in his identity and the spaces around it.

Ali also came to the then KICK Publishing Company after doing HIV/AIDS education and prevention work and at the height of the epidemic. It became clear how imperative and powerful the organization would be to the community. Decades later, with HTJ shifting to a virtual space in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has continued to provide a safe space for the community in challenging times. HTJ has also provided the Black LGBTQ+ community in Detroit with a much-needed sense of family and connectedness.

Familial bonds

As former host Cierra Malone puts it, the event has a “family reunion atmosphere,” and reminds folks of the power in finding solace in chosen family. From the somber candlelight vigil opening the event to the joy of the closing brunch, HTJ has allowed for the community to come together as one.

Carter, who has lived in Detroit all her life, was especially drawn to these familial moments of the event and took that concept far beyond that weekend. She has worked to help her community in whatever ways she could, from giving people in need a place to stay in her Palmer Park home to employing and training Black trans women in her salon to assisting

several to go on to be licensed themselves. Still, that's not to undervalue the entertainment — an important component of HTJ throughout its evolution, vital in all of its vibrance and glory.

“The entertainment aspect is so important because it is an opportunity to bring in talent to those in the community who don't or can't go to the clubs or drag shows,” Malone says.

Milliown found purpose in bringing in new talent as a host, from drag queens to vocalists, and recreating the freedom of the nightlife scene at the event. Reeder, a former host with the background of both a healthcare worker and “American Idol” contestant, especially emphasized the importance of this blend, noting that he was able to grow as a person, entertainer and community leader through being a performer and overcoming a fear of public speaking.

“I didn't go to prom in high school but LGBT Detroit gave me the chance to become prom king,” he said.

Hotter Than July was an opportunity to further develop his talents from hosting at the Woodward and to showcase the range of incredible talent in the Detroit LGBTQ+ community.

“Hotter Than July is at its core a celebration, a time to elevate everyone's spirit,” Carter says.

More than anything, HTJ has given Black LGBTQ+ folk in Detroit the freedom, power and platform to tell their own stories and create change from the ground up.

“It gives us a chance to unify and be ourselves and raise our voice and share our stories and experiences with people who identify just like us,” Reeder says.

This year, HTJ will be an opportunity to look back on the last quarter of a century in remembrance and retrospection of the history it has written. The festival will move forward in healing and persistence in light of work yet to be done.

“From fighting in the street to living our authentic lives to having parades and celebrating who we are, we are creating change every day,” Shannon says. “We have come so far but we still have such a long way to go towards freedom, and it is up to us to continue to educate ourselves and others, live out loud and celebrate our truth and our power.”

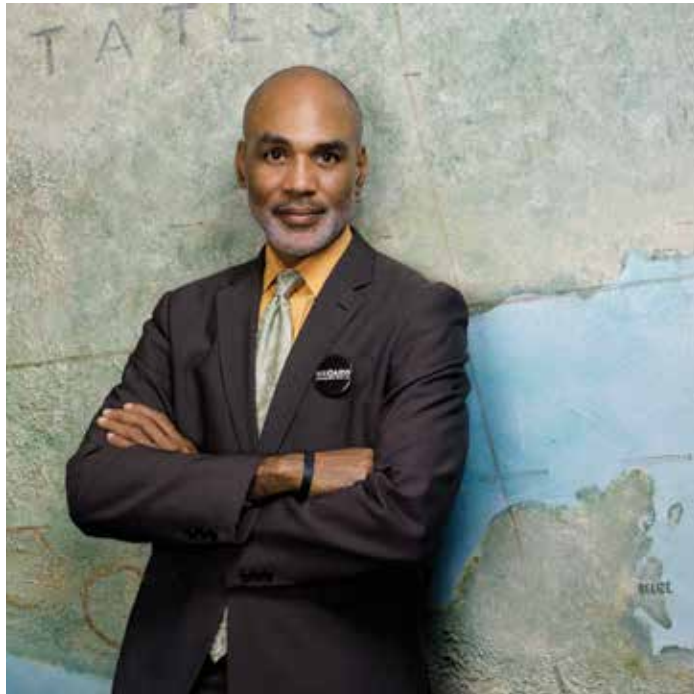
Vibha Venkatesha (she/her) is a Detroit-based writer and activist. She works in urban policy, has organized on a range of human rights issues from the grassroots to the United Nations and is passionate about amplifying QTBIPOC voices.

→ Phill Wilson

Continued from p. 12

living with COVID. There is kind of a painful déjà vu going on as COVID-19 is manifesting itself in our communities in the way HIV continues to manifest itself in our communities. Chief among them are the disparities. Black communities were slow to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic while we were disproportionately impacted, and policy makers were not sufficiently concerned about our needs. That is being replayed with COVID-19 as well.”

It should be very apparent at this point that ending HIV and COVID-19 is about more than just access to medicine and vaccines. It's



Phill Wilson.

about dismantling the systems of oppression that allow these viruses to thrive and recognizing that Black and other marginalized communities have a long history of distrust of the medical system. Many remain traumatized by the Tuskegee experiment, Henrietta Lacks, the experimental procedures performed on enslaved women, and the list goes on.

“Black people have very legitimate reasons to have medical mistrust because the medical community has not always been responsive to our needs,” Wilson says. “The most dominant way we have been mistreated by the medical community is by them withholding treatment from us.” Tuskegee is an example of that, as the Black men involved received no treatment for syphilis, and Wilson believes that is exactly why we should be fighting for information and access to the vaccine now.

I wholeheartedly agree with him and at the same time understand that as much as I urge Black communities to get into HIV care, utilize PrEP and take the COVID vaccine, I know it's not that simple. Medical racism is real, and the challenge is on America to overcome it. We can urge people to take this vaccine

“Black people have very legitimate reasons to have medical mistrust because the medical community has not always been responsive to our needs.”

– Phill Wilson, Black AIDS Institute Founder

without shaming them or judging them for being skeptical. It's not Black people's fault that they don't trust the medical system. America

has been medically unethical since the founding of this country. That legacy never goes away.

Therefore, my job and that of everyone who calls themselves an advocate or is a part of the medical system in any way is to improve trust by providing equitable care and accurate information that allows people to make informed decisions about their health. We need all of us collectively working together. So many people have already lost their lives.

Wilson cautions us to not repeat past

mistakes, saying:

“These are lessons that we've learned and, frankly, the consequences of screwing up. I'm hoping we can take the lessons of HIV/AIDS, apply them, and come up with more equitable solutions as we fight the pandemic. And one of them is making sure that medicine, vaccines, and prevention tactics and strategies are open and accessible to Black, brown and other marginalized people.”

Simply put, we honor the past by fighting for the now, fighting for the future. Let's ensure we all survive.

Ashley Innes is a writer and HIV advocate. Follow her on Twitter @Ash_Innes. This column is a project of *TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ* and *Q Syndicate*, the LGBTQ+ wire service. Visit their websites – <http://thebody.com>, <http://hivplusmag.com>, <http://positivelyaware.com> and <http://poz.com> – for the latest updates on HIV/AIDS.

→ Horny in a Pandemic

Continued from p. 12

pandemic made it impossible to do so. That's the experience of Robert, an Ann Arbor-based gay guy who regularly dated, used apps and participated in cam sites and men's masturbation clubs pre-COVID. When the pandemic hit, he abstained even from online encounters.

“I quit using the apps altogether and I have not had had sex since January 31, 2020,” he says. “Part of all that is with the pandemic — being single, living alone and at the time, unfortunately, being unemployed — I was quite depressed.”

In the case of David, a gay Michigan native who identifies as a bear and is now living in Arizona, he says he's seen more people use apps and social media to solicit hookups — including himself — but not without implementing some precautions first.

“In my own experience, I have seen more people on the apps, as well as more recently I have used them to hook up, but usually making

“I quit using the apps altogether and I have not had had sex since January 31, 2020. Part of all that is with the pandemic — being single, living alone and at the time, unfortunately, being unemployed — I was quite depressed.”

sure they were safe and tested first,” he says.

On a larger scale around Metro Detroit, it seems that the trend for making sexual connections online has held up, too. Royal Oak-based psychotherapist and sexual health expert Dr. Joe Kort says that casual sex practices have remained largely the same as they were before the pandemic — and the vaccine rollout hasn't done much to change people's behaviors. In his practice, he's noticed a distinct 50/50 split: the people who have chosen to be cautious have been, while those who have decided to continue hooking up never stopped.

“It's all ages,” he says. “Forty and younger, they don't feel that they are at risk. Or if they are, they think they'll just live with it and get past it. So, while it definitely has impacted people, I still think people are operating as if it hasn't.”

Where COVID and AIDS meet in the middle

In some cases, blasé attitudes about transmission within the LGBTQ+ community

have led to large groups engaging in risky behavior. Brandon mentioned that while he lived in New York, he became aware of “antibody parties” — better known as orgies to establish herd immunity — that were happening among gay guys.

Dr. Tim Retzlaff, a professor of LGBTQ+ studies at Michigan State University and a gay man himself, drew a comparison between this style of party during this pandemic and the actions that were taken by some during the AIDS epidemic in the U.S. during the '80s and '90s.

“There were certainly people who became fatalistic about AIDS,” he says. “And they figured, ‘I'm going to get it, so I might as well just get it.’” This was happening, he adds, “just before the cocktail of treatments became available and actually started saving people's lives.”

Echoing Retzlaff is the Rev. Dr. Renee McCoy, a Detroit-born anthropologist who identifies as a lesbian. She is also the former director of the city's HIV and AIDS prevention programs and worked in HIV prevention right as the AIDS epidemic hit New York in the early '80s. She, too, drew parallels and said that, while both viruses differ, it all comes down to one's hierarchy of risk.

“We didn't all enter into [the AIDS epidemic] where risk had the same agency. That's been the same thing with COVID,” she says. “People see themselves at risk, but there's so much going on in their lives that they consider risky also.”

She recalled her time as a pastor in New York during the HIV epidemic: “Most of the people that I dealt with were Black LGBTQ persons. So, AIDS hit the white community and they said, ‘Well, I'm not dealing with white boys, so I'm not at risk.’”

Back on the hunt

Some health organizations and states, like New York, aren't stupid — they know total abstinence isn't a realistic option. Consequently, they've released safer-sex guides. Though information about what is and isn't COVID-safe continues to develop now that vaccines are available, Kort still recommends taking social distancing to the bedroom.

“Wear masks. Masturbation six feet apart. I know it sounds strange, but that is the safest way,” he says. “Watch each other masturbate and have masks on when you're engaging in sex.”

Kort says that for those who know they will not be able to avoid sexual encounters or be able to adhere to his socially distant advice (and are not yet vaccinated), committing to quarantine for two weeks before meeting up with a potential partner is best practice.

Only now that the vaccine is becoming widely accessible and he's gotten both doses, Robert has started to get his libido back — with plans for a possible Provincetown vacation this summer.

“I do find myself flirting quite a bit,” he says. “I had one gentleman recently text me who is vaccinated say, ‘You need to get your shots. Because I need some dick.’”

→ Where It Happens

Continued from p. 20



money, but I'll generally say I can offer you lunch or something" — Lu has also dealt with the typical Grindr trappings of receiving unsolicited dick pics (which he ignores), an encounter with a horny subject who didn't really care about the project ("he worked in the medical field and just wanted to have sex, but we ended up just chatting, so it's fine"), and realizing he entered a home that he wanted to flee almost immediately.

"Yes, in Staten Island," Lu recalls. "He was like a hoarder and his room was packed with

unnecessary stuff and his dog slept in a pile of trash. It was very smelly, and he used foil to block his windows to prevent people from seeing in. That was very intense. He was an OK person, but his lifestyle was kind of horrible!"

Conversely, Lu has also been welcomed into a few exemplary, literally fashion spread-worthy spaces by well-known designers and artists, including the Ft. Greene, Brooklyn house of an interior designer that is routinely rented out for photoshoots. "But I'm trying to keep it balanced,"

Lu emphasizes, "because that's not how most people live. I try to get people from the top to bottom, so you can see their actual worlds."

Winding things up in Murray Hill, Lu's Grindr lights up with a response from the 20-something, and they exchange another message.

Well? A Murray Hill success?

"He said no," Lu replies. "That's common. I don't take it personally."

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Photo: Andrew Cohen

→ Kidney

Continued from p. 14

equity and inclusion committee at NKFM.

Specifically, Bohach is working to provide programming to people who are at high risk for developing diabetes or kidney disease, like Medicaid recipients, underinsured people and those with underlying medical conditions like HIV and hepatitis C. Many of those people are LGBTQ+, who are disproportionately affected by these conditions due to discrimination and other factors like greater levels of stress and a higher likelihood of being lower-income.

"With kidney disease and diabetes, you can let that go for a long time before you end up in the ER with kidney failure," Bohach says. "I know firsthand what it's like to let stuff go because [of homophobia]."

Bohach has been working to connect with LGBTQ-affirming organizations across Michigan like the Ruth Ellis Center, MCC Detroit, Affirmations and Unified — HIV Health and Beyond to raise awareness about the offered services at NKFM. Often he said, people

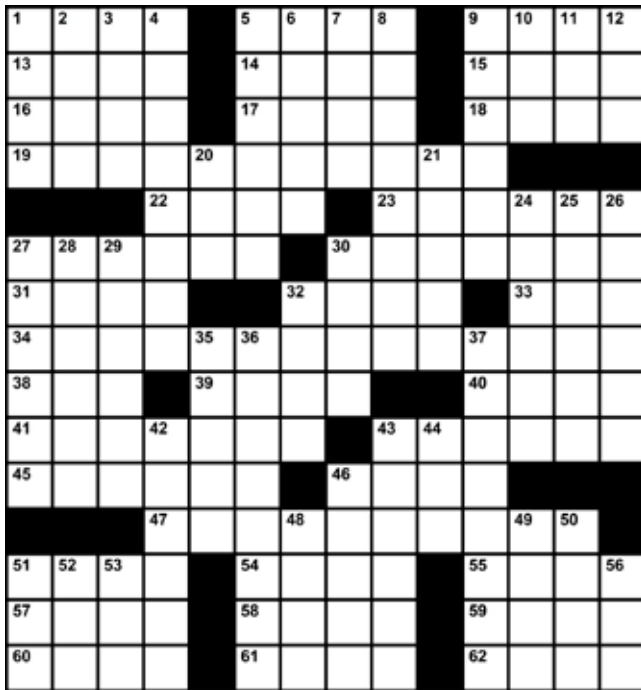
aren't even aware that there is grant funding that can aid with kidney disease treatment, transportation to dialysis and a slew of other services.

"Ever since I've worked at the Kidney Foundation, we've had stuff to give people but we can't connect with the people to get it. It gets frustrating because it's like, 'We have the money to cover this; we can help you,'" he says.

Long term, Bohach is excited that NKFM has partnered with University of Michigan Hospital, University of California San Francisco, and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center on a multi-year research grant assessing the high prevalence of chronic kidney disease among individuals living with HIV in the U.S. Specifically, it focuses on disparities in how people with HIV are treated differently in the health care system. Much like Thompson, Bohach is dedicated to providing community support.

"And my personal passion is [the] LGBTQ community because I'm part of it," Bohach says.

"Anything that happens in the straight community — guess what? It happens in this community, too," Thompson adds. "We're all the same."



- 30 Chicago Sky's conference
- 31 Peter I, for one
- 32 Sommer of film
- 33 Pick up
- 34 TV series of the '90s about teen angst
- 38 Gay history mo.
- 39 Etheridge's "Don't Look ___"
- 40 Persian Gulf land
- 41 Everest guides
- 43 "Who's on First?" straight man
- 45 Men's Gay Chorus section
- 46 Infant, to Marga Gomez
- 47 Rickie portrayer in 34-Across
- 51 Call from Dave Pallone
- 54 Personal lubricant ingredient
- 55 De novo
- 57 Gomer's "Encore!"
- 58 "___ creature was stirring..."
- 59 Quote as a reference
- 60 Pink Triangle Press publication
- 61 Madonna's "Dick Tracy" character
- 62 Coup target

- 8 Ballet parodied in "Funny Girl"
- 9 "Alec Baldwin ___ Love Me"
- 10 "Meet Me in St. Louis" writer Brecher
- 11 Toreador's trophy
- 12 Cunning
- 20 Theology subj.
- 21 Made less difficult to bear
- 24 "Cape Fear" star
- 25 Top PLO guy
- 26 Straight
- 27 Maximum extent
- 28 Love of Eros
- 29 Haul ass
- 30 Vanity Fair alternative
- 32 Shade trees
- 35 Italian resort isle
- 36 Not straight
- 37 His museum is in Las Vegas
- 42 Ravenclaw of Harry Potter fame
- 43 Trojan, but not a condom
- 44 "Ab Fab" network
- 46 "Kinky ___" (Ejofor flick)
- 48 Gin flavor
- 49 Body of soldiers
- 50 ___-Jones of "Chicago"
- 51 Clinton put it in his mouth
- 52 Guy under J. Edgar?
- 53 Christmas tree, often
- 56 Lube brand

Down

- 1 "Hairspray" composer Shaiman
- 2 Sea bordering Kazakhstan
- 3 "Tales of the City" character
- 4 Captain Jack Sparrow, e.g.
- 5 Come
- 6 Herring varieties
- 7 "Idol" judge DioGuardi

Teen Angst

Across

- 1 One of the Three Bears
- 5 Puts it to
- 9 Peters out
- 13 "East of Eden" brother
- 14 Warm to a come-on
- 15 Kind of stimulation

- 16 Go on and on
- 17 Georgia spread on the screen
- 18 "Climb ___ Mountain"
- 19 Angela portrayer in 34-Across
- 22 Prey for chicken hawks?
- 23 "Ed Wood" Best Supporting Actor Martin
- 27 Supported

See p. 24 for answers

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