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Photo: The Experiment Publishing



Photo: Ford

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Ford Brilliantly Clapped Back at Homophobic Remarks By Creating an Even Gayler Truck

By Jason A. Michael

Why I Can't Join the Elks Club and Campaigning in Rural West Michigan

By Ellen Shanna Knoppow

Get Out! LGBTQ Travelers Show How to Travel Safely This Fall

By Ed Salvato

VOL. 2936 • SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

ISSUE 1182

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

Dinner, dancing and drinks, anyone? That's right — this one's ready-made for a first date. Let us know how your relationship-hunting goes after stopping by these five events across Southeast Michigan — oh, and Canada, too.

Show Your Pride — Canadian Style!

With COVID-19 restrictions relaxing enough to allow cross-border travel, take the bridge and show your Pride internationally at Windsor-Essex Pride Fest from Sept. 10 to 12. There'll be a fashion show, flag raising and even youth-focused events in the city of Windsor. Sometimes it takes leaving for a bit to feel right at home.

Check out wepridefest.com/festival/schedule to see a full schedule of events and buy tickets when necessary.



WE Pride 2019.

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Solve (or Commit) Murder in St. Olaf

Not all is well in Minnesota's best-known Scandinavian safe haven St. Olaf. Because there's been a murder! In this interactive event held at Five15 in Royal Oak and hosted by local drag star Sabin, you'll join Dorothy, Rose, Blanche and Sophia as they work together to figure out which kaflügenachen is playing Ugel and Flugel and get back to that sweet, sweet Genügenflürgen cake (for those not up on St. Olaf speak, you'll still solve the murder and enjoy some cheesecake on the lanai).

To register for "Death in St Olaf: A Golden Girls Dinner Murder Mystery" on Sept. 15, visit five15.net.



Joey Jay. Photo courtesy ViacomCBS

Have Brunch with 'Drag Race' Star Joey Jay

She's the dumbest bitch you'll ever meet. And if you haven't met her, now you can. Over breakfast! On Sunday, Sept. 12 at Como's Restaurant, stop by for Detroit's original Sunday Service and meet "RuPaul's Drag Race" Season 13 contestant Joey Jay, alongside Deja Dellataro, Eva Sapphire, Asio Aviance and more, all hosted by Bentley James. And don't forget to grab an LGBT — you know, Como's Detroit-style pizza with spinach, garlic, bacon and tomato.

Como's Restaurant is located at 22812 Woodward Ave. in Ferndale. Tickets start at \$42. Visit Eventbrite.com for more details.



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Dine to Donate

Grab dinner for a good cause! And that's "just the beginning," says John Joannette, Affirmations' director of development. On Tuesday, Sept. 7, when you get dinner after 4 p.m. at One-Eyed Betty's or Pop's for Italian, 10 percent of the day's sales will directly benefit Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, which provides vital services to the community across the Metro Detroit area. "It's truly a win-win for everyone involved," says Joannette, who teased a larger-scale "Dine Out Ferndale" event for spring 2022.

Visit the Affirmations Facebook page for more information.

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Jadein Black. Courtesy photo

Put a Little Pride in Your Friday Night at Necto

Join the "largest weekly LGBTQ+ party in Michigan" and go to one of Necto's Friday Gay Nights. Fans of the latest Top 40, EDM and pop won't be disappointed as DJ Edward Alan and DJ DigiMark keep the party going, and host queens Chanel Hunter and Jadein Black make sure that no two Friday nights are the same. The fish bowls don't hurt, either.

Visit necto.com for more information.

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\$1 Million CHAG Grant Will Provide COVID Vaccine Outreach to Overlooked Detroit Populations

Program to Focus on Trans and MSM Communities

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and widely available at no cost. For many people, going to get the shot is easy. For these individuals, returning for a second shot might be a minor inconvenience, but it's not an obstacle to care.

That isn't the case for many of the people Community Health Awareness Group (CHAG) serves. The organization has received a \$1 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to do outreach, education and vaccinations for often-overlooked populations in Detroit, including African-American men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and transgender individuals. The grant money will fund a mobile clinic and the hiring of community members and healthcare professionals.

Detroit has been described as an "island of vaccine hesitancy." According to CHAG, "African Americans represented nearly 14 percent of the state's population, yet they represented 40 percent of the deaths from COVID-19." The city's vaccination rate is lower than other areas in Michigan despite the fact that COVID-19 hit Detroit especially hard.

This does not necessarily surprise Barbara Locke, director of Preventions Programs at CHAG.

"We have a history of distrust in our community," she tells Between The Lines. She offers the Tuskegee experiment as an example, where the U.S. government studied what syphilis does to the body by recruiting Black men who were never told they were infected and were intentionally left untreated.

"There's a lot of issues, but particularly with this community, they're often judged, overlooked, not engaged in health systems as a whole, and when they are, they're stigmatized," Locke says, pointing out that issues African Americans face getting treatment are "layered on top of what's happening to these special populations we are targeting to serve."

Then, of course, is the rampant amount of misinformation circulating about the vaccine and COVID-19.

"We are aware of how much fear is being spread and inaccurate information," Project Coordinator LaShawn Reece says. This is why CHAG wants to combat vaccine hesitancy and mistrust by hiring "vaccine ambassadors," trusted people from within the community who will be trained to educate their peers.

CHAG has close partnerships with community organizations, including LGBT Detroit.

"We've worked with Curtis Lipscomb for more than 20 years," Locke says. But their official partnership with LGBT Detroit

See **CHAG**, page 13

Church, Outside the Box: MCC-D Will Celebrate 49 Years at First Affirmations Service

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

September brings with it a new season and a new day for Metropolitan Community Church – Detroit (MCC-D). The congregation, which has been sharing space with the Clawson United Methodist Church for the last several years, will be moving to Affirmations. Their first service in the Ferndale community center is set for Sunday, Sept. 26.

"When it came to 'church in a box' or church at a non-traditional space, I had a hard time looking outside the box, myself," said Rev. Dr. Roland Stringfellow, senior pastor and teacher at MCC-D. "But the pandemic has really taught me, as well as our congregation, that the church is more than just a building. It's about the people and the ministry you have with your community."

There are, of course, drawbacks to sharing space at the center, but none, said Stringfellow, that can't be overcome. The church will meet in Affirmation's Pittman-Puckett Gallery, while the Ringwald Theatre, which is also moving to Affirmations this fall, will hold their productions in the community room.

"We have a storage space there, so, in a sense, that's kind of what I meant when I said 'church in a box,'" Stringfellow explained. "Everything is stored, and then each Sunday we pull it out, and then we put it back when it's time to leave, which is a challenge for some of my people because they're not accustomed to doing that. But many other MCCs have that style of church, so it's not new. It's just new for us."

On days when there isn't a Ringwald matinee, including most Sundays, the church will have use of the center for the entire day.

"Sunday is ours," said Pastor Hattie Alexander-Key, who will be delivering the message on the 26th. "So, we get to spend the day on Sunday until we lock up ... feeding the people. Not necessarily physical food, but spiritual food. It's a place for us to greet families. Affirmations sends a message to the entire community that 'Here's a place where you can feel welcome, and you can come in and be.'"

For Dave Garcia, Affirmations' executive director, having the church meet in the center was a no-brainer.

"This is the community center, and we should be behaving like a community center and allowing the building to be used by the community," he said. "Also, especially in light of all the religious exemption battles we're seeing across the country, it's important to lift up progressive ministries to combat all the hate."

But Garcia said you shouldn't expect to see him in the building on Sunday mornings.

"I am a proud atheist, yet I think the center should be a place for everyone, whether that's someone religious or someone like me. So, this is a part of our mission."

Garcia said he has no doubt that MCC-D

and the Ringwald will peacefully coexist with Affirmations and each other. He also said he's talking to additional groups about sharing space in the center.

"The more groups we have coming in and out of Affirmations, the more cross-pollination we're going to have within those groups. What if someone in an AA group wants to become more involved spiritually in a place that is nonjudgmental? I think it benefits the church, who wants to expand their ministry," he said. "And the more groups that want to utilize the building, that's exactly what we should be doing. The more vibrancy you see when you come into Affirmations, the better."

At times, MCC-D will need a more traditional setting to host more formal services.

"We have written agreements with both Affirmations and Zion Lutheran Church on Woodward and Albany," said Stringfellow. "Our church offices will be at Zion Lutheran."

The church will also use Zion Lutheran, Stringfellow said, on high holy days such as Good Friday, Ash Wednesday and Christmas Eve.

"Also, whenever we have weddings and our funerals, it's good to have a sanctuary as well. I was joking with my folks, halfheartedly joking, that if something happened to me and I died, I did not want my service at Affirmations. I want a traditional setting."

Still, Affirmations and Zion Lutheran will both offer the church more freedom than they've had at Clawson United Methodist, where church policy would not allow MCC-D to perform same-sex weddings.

"I'm so excited about moving to Affirmations," said Alexander-Key. "It's going to be a wonderful opportunity for us as a ministry to do spiritual healing. There's been so much church hurt, so much wounding in our community because of church jargon and church dogma. It's going to be a great time to be together and be seen as a part of the community."

The first service in the center will take place on the church's 49th anniversary.

"One of the things I've been very careful about letting my people know is that we are not an extension of Affirmations," said Stringfellow. "We have to be more than just a community center. If we allow people to come, and we're not encouraging them spiritually and helping them heal from spiritual violence and have a reconciliation with God, we are losing our mission. So, we have to be very clear on who we are and why we do what we do."

"We've been this congregation close to 50 years and reached out to the LGBTQ community, and we've done that through the transforming power of God," he continued. "We want to make sure that is front and center."



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Southern Spirit: A Very Queer Vacay In Historic Savannah

BY LAWRENCE FERBER

The ghost of Kevin Spacey haunts this room. Actually, it's the ghost of a rich, gay antiques dealer and preservationist, Jim Williams, whom Spacey portrayed in the 1997 film "Midnight In the Garden of Good And Evil," although the latter seems somehow more likely to impart chills and cringe these days. I'm touring the Mercer-Williams House, one of Savannah, Georgia's most famous 19th-century homes, including the actual study where Williams shot and killed his hustler boy toy, Danny Hansford (played by Jude Law in the movie, and I'm sure many queens would welcome his spectre), reportedly in self-defense.

Adapted from gay author John Berendt's bestselling 1994 nonfiction novel, director Clint Eastwood's movie shined a Hollywood spotlight on Savannah and its quirky denizens, including iconic transgender entertainer The Lady Chablis, who famously played herself, regularly performed at LGBTQ bar Club One and, sadly, passed away in 2016, which helped attract even more millions of tourists annually. In 2019, 14.8 million visitors came for Savannah's mix of historic architecture, gorgeous willow-draped parks, movie locations (including the spot where Forrest Gump sat on a bench babbling inane philosophies about chocolates), a buzzing riverside entertainment zone and live-and-let-live genteel Southern attitude. Bless their hearts!

Today the lush, compact and walkable port city, hometown of "RuPaul's Drag Race" season 8 queen Dax ExclamationPoint and Georgia Democrat Senator Raphael Warnock, boasts an even more progressive open queerness. There's Halloween weekend's vibrant Savannah Pride, the hipster Starland District, an influx of creative young energy thanks to Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD for short — fashion icon André Leon Talley sits on its Board of Trustees) and, this being one of America's most haunted cities, an expanding population of spirits (including the drinkable type at Ghost Coast Distillery).

Ultimately, Mercer House — once owned by the family of another iconic homegrown talent, prolific songwriter Johnny Mercer of Oscar-winning "Breakfast at Tiffany's" ditty "Moon River" and Elvis' "Fools Rush In" fame — proved an illuminating experience replete with photos of Williams and his parties, original antiques, paintings and furniture, especially for fans of the film and book. But the upper floor, where Williams' sister still lives, and its working pipe organ remain off limits.

Savannah stays

Many tourists stay around the tourist-heavy, shop-lined River Street, newly developed Plant



The Savannah skyline. Photo courtesy of Visit Savannah

Riverside district, and adjacent downtown, which all form Savannah's equivalent of NOLA's French Quarter and an active port where cargo ships routinely zip past along the city's namesake river and hotels include an Andaz and new 416-room JW Marriott. However, my husband Matt and I opted for the neighboring, slightly inland Historic District. Its Perry Lane Hotel, which splits 167 rooms between two buildings and boasts a cheeky, upscale camp aesthetic in design, decor and property-wide collection of contemporary art, proved perfect and more chill. Just two blocks from Chippewa Square (site of the Gump bench, a temporary prop), there's also a rooftop bar and pool where local queers regularly congregate for the gorgeous views and a kiki... but not so much for the pedestrian cocktails, one noted. "Nobody goes there for the drinks!" However, if you prefer gay B&Bs that capture the city's historic flavor, and are allegedly haunted to boot, there's the Foley House Inn,

Digging your scene: Savannah's to do's

To get one's bearings in Savannah, a tour is well-advised, and there are dozens listed on official tourism website VisitSavannah.com,

from trolley to bicycle to themed walking tours. The latter include Black heritage, food, local indie boutique shopping, ghost/haunted (I'll get to that later!), and openly gay guide Jonathan Stalcup's engaging Architectural Tours of Savannah, which we joined and enjoyed. Stalcup juxtaposes structures and stories with photos of Savannah's evolving cityscape since its founding in the 1730s by General James Oglethorpe and, as it turns out, some sassy queer facts if you take him aside post-tour.

Many essential attractions are historic, educational and kid-friendly in nature, including the Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters, Bonaventure Cemetery, and 100-plus-year-old Leopold's Ice Cream, which draws snaking, hours-long lines of tourists daily for old-timey frozen treats. It honestly isn't worth hours-long waits unless you're the 8-year-old with extremely limited travel and life experience who loudly declared "This is the best ice cream I ever ate!" as I

consumed a sundae and rolled my eyes so far back the time traveled to 2015 (pro tip: there are two satellite Leopold's locations at the airport with little to no wait). Yet some of Savannah's most intriguing musts are surprisingly modern



Architectural Tours guide Jonathan Stalcup dishes queer facts about Savannah to tourists. Photo courtesy of Visit Savannah

and edgy.

Incorporating an antebellum railroad depot in its design, the contemporary SCAD Museum of Art hosts multidisciplinary, provocative exhibitions by international talents like queer French artist Mehryl Levisse, whose immersive "White Wig," featuring five sculpted wigs by

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→ Savannah

Continued from p. 8

Parisian drag queens, will be on display through December 12, 2021. Artwork and home goods by SCAD's own faculty, students and alumni, plus books, accessories and more, fill out sister retail space shopSCAD.

Only open Thursday through Sundays, Graveface Museum is destination-worthy for those obsessed with serial killers, cults, sideshows and pinball machines, with a permanent collection of artifacts related to the above, including a pair of underwear worn by lesbian serial killer Aileen Wuornos and artwork by John Wayne Gacy (shockingly, John Waters hasn't been by yet!), plus a horror-movie-themed arcade and shop.

And Chocolat by Adam Turoni is one of Savannah's retail musts. A queer chocolatier who channels Southern culture and flavors through his sophisticated, high-quality, artful creations, Turoni's Historic District Bull Street

boutique is designed like a home library, its shelves displaying trays of Red Velvet, Mint Julep and Georgia Peach truffles plus gold-dusted honeycomb bars and much more. To the rear, a glass-enclosed kitchen provides views of chocolate-making in action, while Turoni himself often works the register and can be chatted up. Another Chocolat location, on Broughton Street, is dubbed the "Dining Room," while a third can be found in nearby Charleston, South Carolina (there's a lot of brand crossover between the two sibling-esque destinations, including Savannah Bee Company, Byrd's Famous Cookies and the trailblazing Husk restaurant). Private chocolate-making classes with Turoni can also be arranged via the Perry Lane Hotel.

Coffee and cuisine

Being a coffee snob and caffeine junkie, a priority was finding Savannah's best cold brew. Conveniently, a branch of popular local cafe Franklin's was a few blocks from my hotel

offering a solid cold brew and yummy pastries. Downtown's queer-owned Blends roasts its own beans, as does Perc, whose owner Philip Brown, a hipster-bear literal daddy, staffs his flagship warehouse-cafe with LGBTQs and is himself the proud father of a trans child. Perc also sells a killer dehydrated instant version, plus excellent bagged beans (Perc expanded to Atlanta in 2020 and opened its second location there in 2021, so this could well become the Southeast's Stumptown!).

Hungry, we had our first breakfast at local and tourist fave B. Matthews, where reservations are highly recommended during peak hours. Passing numerous rainbow flags, I noticed its listing as both "LGBTQ friendly" and a "transgender safe space" on Google Maps, while the lowcountry Southern-tinged food was excellent. I savored a cheesy, decadent

If you're a natural at networking, befriending queer locals is well-advised, since even before COVID hit private house parties became Savannah's dominant form of local socializing and nightlife for LGBTQs (Grindr and Scruff, we're giving you stink eye).

shrimp and grits bowl I would happily return for, plus fried green tomatoes. Another brekkie-must with outdoor seating to boot, The Collins Quarter serves brunch daily and its "Swine Time Beni" — bacon and hollandaise-topped poached eggs over pulled pork and French toast — is bar none the most decadent, heart-clogging eggs Benedict iteration I've encountered. And if you're hungry and hunty, once a month the Moon River Brewing Company and Club One collaborate for a family-friendly Sunday drag brunch.

Savannah has upped its culinary game substantially in recent years with enterprising young chefs bringing color, presentation and locavore ethos to plates. As a foodie I was psyched to try Husk, and while the interior design proved stunning, drinks lovely, and a bonus to be greeted by a seemingly nonbinary host, the food was hit-and-miss (my boneless heirloom pork entree was shockingly tough, but its side dishes sublime and brightly flavored).

Happily, 2021 arrival Common Thread and Savannah native Zach Shultz's Cotton & Rye proved high points, with outstanding, fresh, memorable cuisine; request a table with view of the kitchen at the former, and do not sit outdoors during summertime at the latter lest you risk being tormented by hangry flies while eating. As for supporting LGBTQ-owned restaurants, the traditional French Circa 1875 and Italian La Scala Ristorante are the work of gay couple Jeffrey Downey and Donald Lubowicki.

Nightlife in the garden of good and evil

If you're a natural at networking, befriending queer locals is well-advised, since even before COVID hit private house parties became Savannah's dominant form of local socializing and nightlife for LGBTQs (Grindr and Scruff, we're giving you stink eye). Only one LGBTQ+ bar, the multi-level dancing and drag queen destination Club One, still stands — there are 18+ nights, a plus for SCAD students — since



Club One in Savannah. Photo courtesy of Visit Savannah

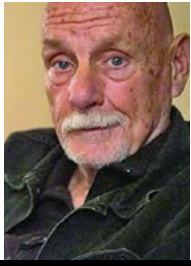
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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

Fading Days: Wine & Roses

“Life is what it isn’t, when it was what it wasn’t, once upon a time.” This bit of retrospective, pandemic isolationist wisdom crossed my aging mind recently when giving thought to my own many LGBTQ+ years gone by — days of now-corked wine and withered roses.

Truth is, I don’t remember much about turning 25, 30, 40 or 50. (If only I had kept a daily journal instead of my “Saint For A Day” address book).

But getting older hasn’t bothered me as much as I thought it would. At least, I don’t think it has (“Nobody wants you when you’re old and gay,” my mother cautioned me when I entered kindergarten, “Little Lulu” lunch pail in hand).

I’ve never experienced a panic at finding myself over the hill (or, taking my turn in the barrel, for that matter).

And though I’ve been around the block so many times it doesn’t have any corners to stand on, I’ve been stoic about losing my hairline in life’s turbulent wind tunnel. Resigned to experiencing full-body Mach 3 gravitational, gluteus maximus sag.

If aging is something that happened only to me (or Queen Elizabeth), I’d have a legitimate gripe, so I counsel myself over morning coffee, “Go not quietly into that good night!” I say at bedtime, snoring soundly in spite of myself.

The truth is, aging — like taxation — will chat up anybody who stands in line long enough — with or without lube — to chitchat. (Just don’t stand naked in front of a full-length, two-way mirror or before a sharp-eyed IRS auditor). I do, however remember two birthdays fondly: my 21st (gay bar) and my 50th (a surprise party). In between, I haven’t a clue where I blew out my allotted wax candles or, if in the act of such celebratory ID-checking, I got my wish (or, my man).

We all remember our coming of age.

“Thank God I’m 21. No more 3.2 Zing Beer for me! It’s all disco lights and bubbling champagne from here on in” (Please have three pieces of picture ID handy, pay the cover charge and what are you doing at closing time, Big Guy?).

And 50! Wow! 600 months. 18,250 days. 43,800 hours. How time unzips flies (“You took too long to powder your nose, Mary. You were too busy finding out what the backroom boys were having, Charley.”) Ah, yes...

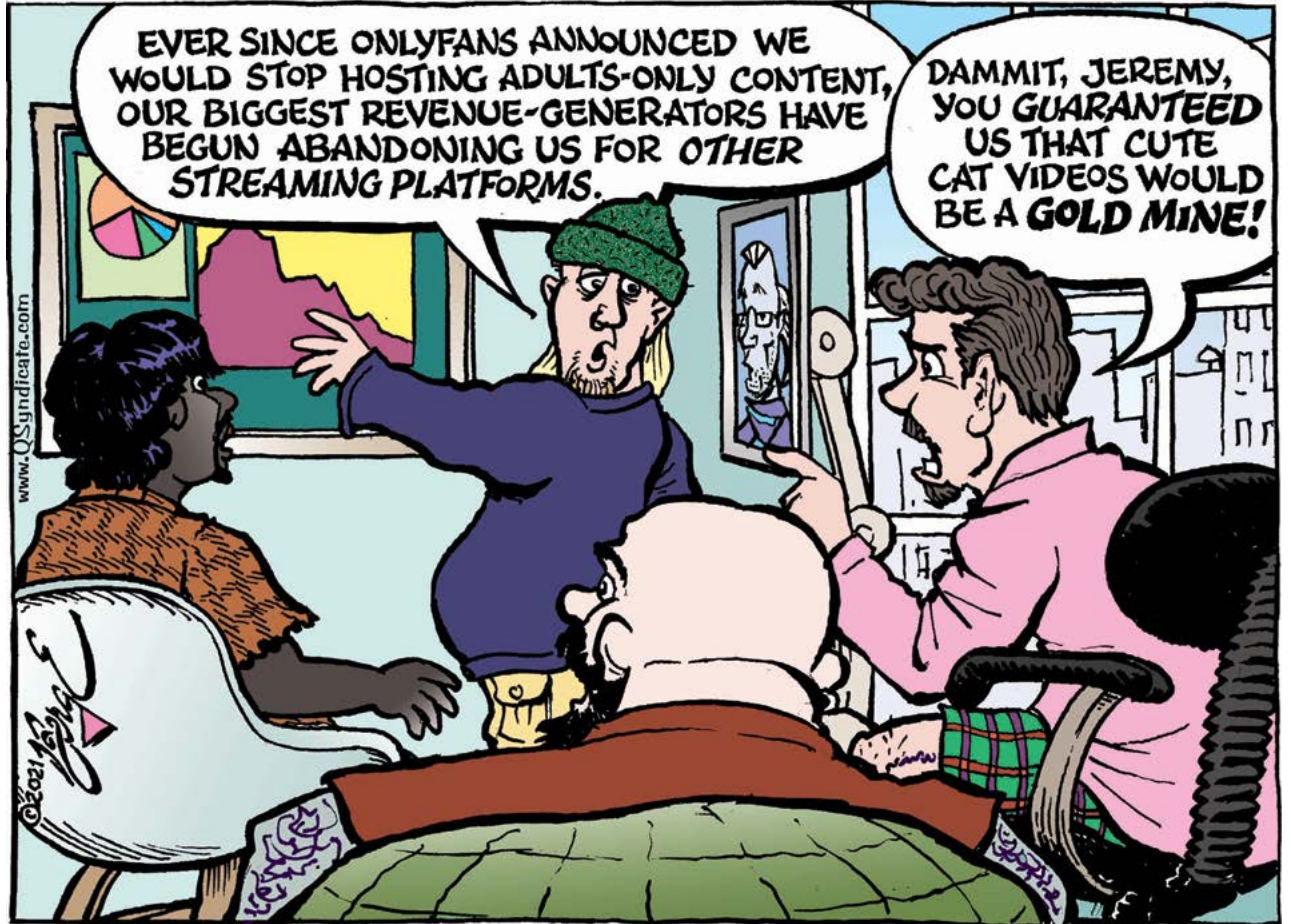
At some undesignated point past ages 60 or 70 — you’ll know when you get there, Butch Bruce — one stops counting. And, to quote a famous poem:

“They are not long, the days of wine and roses / Out of a misty dream; Our path emerges for a while, then closes / Within a dream.”

The poet, Englishman Ernest Dowson, died at 32. Short changed. An alcoholic.

As for me, I turned a brisk 85 this year, with 65 of these in Detroit’s LGBTQ+ rainbow community. And! sober 38 extra years this December.

Unasked-for advice: Enjoy life. It’s never later than you think. Or, is it?



BY JAY KAPLAN

ACLU: Crucial Court Cases Are Promising Sign for LGBTQ+ Civil Rights

A recent Michigan Court of Appeals decision in *People v. Rogers* points the way to civil rights protections for Michigan’s LGBTQ+ community.

In July 2018, Kimora Steuball, a transgender woman, had a terrifying encounter with Deonton Autez Rogers at a Detroit gas station. Rogers started harassing Steuball when he saw that she was transgender, then shot her in the shoulder after refusing to show him her genitalia.

Along with two assault with deadly firearm charges, Wayne County prosecutors also brought charges against Rogers under the Ethnic Intimidation Act, Michigan’s hate crimes law. However, Rogers argued that the Ethnic Intimidation Act, unlike federal hate crime laws, didn’t include transgender people.

When the trial court agreed to dismiss Rogers’ charges, Wayne County prosecutors appealed to the Michigan Court of Appeals, which upheld the

dismissal, stating that transgender people weren’t covered under the Ethnic Intimidation Act under the designated category of gender.

The Court of Appeals reached this conclusion even though numerous federal courts, including the Sixth Circuit of Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over Michigan, had already ruled that discrimination against transgender people violates civil rights laws and the term “gender” is synonymous with sex.

The Court of Appeals decision was concerning because the most recent

FBI Hate Crimes Report documented that hate crimes against transgender people have increased over the past two years. In 2019 alone, at least 27 transgender

or gender non-conforming people were fatally shot or killed.

With that in mind, the case was appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

“We believe that the Court of Appeals’ interpretation regarding the hate crimes law would’ve had harmful implications for LGBTQ+ people seeking civil rights protection.”

The ACLU of Michigan, with the National ACLU, filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the Michigan Supreme Court, urging the Court to reverse the Court of Appeals’

started six years ago, and CHAG is a named sponsor of Hotter Than July. “Our missions directly align,” she says.

“Reflective staff” is one of the ways CHAG has built the kind of trust with community members that larger health systems have not.

“We have staff that are reflective of the population that we serve,” Locke says, adding that CHAG hires people who are comfortable in and knowledgeable about the communities where they work. This approach also helps them identify obstacles to care that might get overlooked.

For example, Reece says, operating hours are a barrier for many of the transgender people they serve. “Because what we’ve found is a lot of our ladies, however they make their money, it’s usually at night, and it’s not at a time that is conducive to be somewhere at 8:00 in the morning.” Helping these clients secure appointments later in the day can ensure they do not fall out of care.

CHAG has also earned trust by not being judgmental of its clients.

“We approach things from a very non-judgmental perspective,” Locke says. “Harm reduction is what we do. If our consumers are engaged in syringe services because they’re injecting drugs, we want to keep you alive by giving you Narcan until you’re ready to get drug treatment.”

Harm reduction is often at odds

“We are all members of the community and a community cannot be whole and healthy when it lets people fall through the cracks. You have to put community first, and that can not just include the people that are well off.”

with the political rhetoric of “personal responsibility,” which some feel breeds resistance to helping those most in need.

Reece has heard the personal responsibility argument before. Her approach is to stress that it’s a community issue. “We are all members of the community,” she says, “and a community cannot be whole and healthy when it lets people fall through the cracks. You have to put community first, and that can not just include the people that are well off.”

decision that transgender people aren’t covered under Michigan’s hate crimes law.

In our brief, we asked the Court to consider the recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Bostock v Clayton County*. In this case, the ACLU’s friend and client, Aimee Stephens, a successful and empathetic funeral director, was fired for coming out as transgender. As a result, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a landmark victory that discrimination against gay and transgender employees is sex discrimination and violates federal civil rights law.

While the ACLU doesn’t support criminal penalties in a legal system that disproportionately targets people of color, we believe that the Court of Appeals’ interpretation regarding the hate crimes law would’ve had harmful implications for LGBTQ+ people seeking civil rights protection.

In light of the *Bostock* ruling, the Michigan Supreme Court ordered the Court of Appeals to reconsider Steuball’s case decision. On August 5, 2021, the Court of Appeals reversed its initial decision. It determined that crimes against transgender people are covered under Michigan’s hate

crime law under the category of gender, representing a significant victory for LGBTQ+ people. This decision is essential for redressing violent incidents against transgender people and providing guidance in a current critical civil rights case — *Rouch World v. Michigan Department of Civil Rights*.

In *Rouch World*, the Michigan Supreme Court will decide whether Michigan’s civil rights laws, which prohibit sex discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations, cover LGBTQ+ people.

No doubt, the Court will consider both the *Bostock* legal analysis and the *Rogers* decision. Bearing that in mind, we believe there is a legal path to finding full civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ people in Michigan, and the *Rogers* decision is a helpful step along the way.

Creep Of The Week

People Who Hate Gays More Likely to Hate Vaccines in Totally Weird Coincidence

BY D’ANNE WITKOWSKI

It’s the moment we’ve all been waiting for! The Pfizer vaccine has been officially FDA approved.

Finally, those completely reasonable and rational people who’ve been refusing to get the shot until it was upgraded from “emergency use authorization” to “full blown approval” will be lining up to get their shot. After all, the word “emergency” is very easy for a lot of people to ignore because it’s so vague. Apparently. I mean, sometimes you have to wait until 650,000 or so people have died in order to make an informed decision.

And with the Delta variant raging across the country, not a moment too soon! Definitely a lot of moments too late, but there’s nothing we can do about that now.

But could it be that the “but it’s not officially approved, yet!” crowd were not arguing in good faith? Could it be that they would now move the goal posts in order to continue to refuse vaccines?

Leave it to the Liberty Council, a self-professed “Christian ministry” that is both anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-vaccine. Not only do they want you to believe that preferred pronouns are a sign of the apocalypse, but they’re still pushing hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19.

On Aug. 23, Liberty Council issued a “report” that warned against the Pfizer vaccine despite the FDA approval because there have been FDA approved drugs that ended up being pulled from the market decades later!

And they’re right. Drugs have been pulled because they were hurting or killing people. It’s almost like amassing data over time about a particular drug so that we learn more about it enables us to make informed decisions when what we learn is bad.

That’s not to say the pharmaceutical industry is always on the up and up. There are plenty of horror stories. But it’s worth mentioning that the same conservatives who are trying to scare you with these stories are the same conservatives who are against governmental oversight, so forgive me if I can’t take their concerns seriously.

The truth is, we don’t have a decade to wait to see how the COVID-19 vaccine pans out. People are dying NOW. The virus is raging NOW.

And, no, the vaccine wasn’t recklessly rushed to market. Operation Warp Speed, which you’ll remember started under the Trump Administration, was intended to allow vaccine makers to prioritize the

vaccine — one that was already in the works since COVID itself isn’t a brand new thing — by pouring resources into it, including money and staff.

The Liberty Council is a cesspool of misinformation that will get people sick and cause death. They are liars hiding behind a shield of “religious liberty” that allows them to denigrate LGBTQ+ people, spread the Big Lie about the 2020 election and scare people into trusting their “reports” about vaccines and COVID-19 over actual medical professionals and organizations.

I have some relatives on Facebook who share conspiracy laden vaccine misinformation (don’t we all?) who are definitely NOT getting vaccinated. Because Freedom. And because they know better than the medical establishment. And because they’re not going to listen to that commie Socialist Joe Biden because Trump is their REAL leader.

And so, President Biden’s support of vaccine mandates is evidence that there’s a huge conspiracy raging across the country rather than a highly contagious and very dangerous virus.

Unfortunately, when Biden said “require it” at a recent news conference, it was heard as “FINISH HIM” by those who want you to believe that the danger of vaccines is worse than the danger of getting COVID-19 (it isn’t).

It is true that deaths have been reported following the vaccine. According to the CDC, as of Aug. 16, 2021 there were reports of 6,789 U.S. deaths out of the 357 million doses of vaccine (note: 5 billion doses have been administered worldwide). Did all of those people die because of the vaccine? It’s impossible to know, but it is also unlikely. According to the CDC website:

“FDA requires healthcare providers to report any death after COVID-19 vaccination to [the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System], even if it’s unclear whether the vaccine was the cause. Reports of adverse events to VAERS following vaccination, including deaths, do not necessarily mean that a vaccine caused a health problem. A review of available clinical information, including death certificates, autopsy, and medical records, has not established a causal link to COVID-19 vaccines.”

In other words, there’s no evidence that all of these deaths were caused by the vaccines. There is, however, evidence that 6,789 is a much smaller number than 650,000. Too bad the Liberty Council thinks numbers are gay.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®

This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

(bik-TAR-vee)

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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
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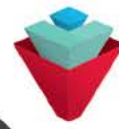
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 **GILEAD**



This Isn't Just the Story of the

'Pregnant Man'

Photo courtesy of The Experiment Publishing

Trystan Reese on His New Memoir, a Reminder That Love Truly Does Make a Family

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Once upon a time, two men fell in love. By the next day, they were parenting two toddlers.

OK, it wasn't the next day. But Trystan Reese, now 38, and his husband Biff Chaplow, now 35, who call themselves "the accidental gay parents," became dads early in their relationship. The two were still in their 20s when they adopted Chaplow's niece and nephew, who needed a stable home.

But after five years, when Lucas, now 13, and Hailey, now 10, had settled into their home and Reese and Chaplow had gotten the hang of being parents, they decided to have another child. Biologically.

Reese, who was born female, carried the child. And in 2017, he gave birth to the couple's baby boy, Leo.

And this, well, blew some people's minds, for better and for worse. When Reese and Chaplow decided to go public with their story, media outlets clamored to tell the story of the pregnant man.

And now Reese is telling his own story in his memoir "How We Do Family: From Adoption to Trans Pregnancy, What We Learned about Love and LGBTQ Parenthood." Spoiler alert: this is a love story upon a love story. Seriously. There is so much love in this book.

There is also so much normalcy. While "gay trans man has a baby" is what will draw many people to this book, inside, there is much to learn about how to be a parent, a partner and a member of a supportive community. Reese utterly dismantles the argument that children cannot thrive without a mother and a father at home.

That's not to say parenting didn't come

with challenges. When Reese and Chaplow were going through the process of adopting Lucas and Hailey, they literally had to prove themselves as worthy, capable caregivers.

"We had lawyers and judges, social workers and investigators. And they're looking at our credit card statements, they're interviewing our doctors and bosses and touring our home, looking under our sink and double-checking the fire extinguisher in the kitchen," he says. "We quite literally had to prove ourselves in very meaningful and obvious ways."

With Leo, however, they were able to do things on their own terms.

"Going from zero to two kids overnight is very different from going from two to three with lots of lead time," Reese says. "And also starting with a newborn as opposed to toddlers, because [Hailey and Lucas] were 1 and 3 when they first came to stay with us. It was just a huge,

huge, huge difference. I won't say that we knew what we were doing, but at least we knew kids could survive our parenting." It also didn't hurt that Leo was, as Reese says, "a super chill baby."

"We grew so much [as parents] in those five years," Reese says about the time between the adoption and Leo's birth. Instead of stressing about every minute of screen time or worrying if one of the kids skipped eating a vegetable, they realized that "what really matters is making awesome memories. Having fun and going on adventures together."

As parents, Reese and Chaplow knew what their kids needed. "Kids being surrounded by love and support, and really clear boundaries, and really good role models for what it means to be a healthy, loving person who is living a life of meaning: that's what we know really

See **Trystan Reese**, page 32

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HOST HOMES PROGRAM

New Hope for Homeless LGBTQ+ Youth



Michigan Couple, Others, Ready to Open Their Homes and Hearts to Teens in Need

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Longtime LGBTQ+ allies and parents Gary and Sheila Bigelow are ready to open their home to a local teen in need of stable housing.

It's been a long journey for the pair. In the '90s, when a pastor the family knew was being removed from his congregation because he was outed as gay, they traveled to Benton Harbor where their 15-year-old daughter Lisa spoke

out on his behalf "with her knees knocking in her shorts," Sheila said. It was around that time that Lisa began attending a support group sponsored by the Kalamazoo Gay/Lesbian Resource Center—now known as OutFront Kalamazoo—something the couple was aware of, even if they didn't discuss it.

Gary and Sheila's support was never in question, but when she came out to her parents a few years later, Lisa was hesitant. "It was

between her junior and senior year in high school," Gary recalled. "One night, my wife and I were already in bed, close to asleep, I guess... she came in and said, 'I think I'm gay.'"

Lisa then said good night and left the room. After a while, her father chuckled a little at the memory of her abruptness. He admitted to feeling somewhat uneasy at the time, if only because he imagined life could be more difficult for his child because of her sexual orientation.

Sheila, who was less surprised by the admission than her husband, called their associate pastor the following day and cried. Like her husband, she was scared for their daughter.

"I didn't want this child that we love so much to be rejected," Sheila said. "I didn't want her to be in danger. And after I got through that day, it was easier. You don't love a child all their life and find out one day that they're gay and say, 'I don't love you anymore.'"

The Bigelows said their relationship with their daughter remains supportive to this day. Lisa Jenn Bigelow is a librarian and author in Illinois who has written three young adult novels featuring main characters who are LGBTQ+.

Now Lisa Bigelow is fostering a young teen, while Gary and Sheila Bigelow recently hosted an unaccompanied minor from Honduras. When the couple heard about a new program to temporarily house LGBTQ+ homeless youth in southwest Michigan, the Bigelows were eager to sign up. The two were encouraged to get involved by their pastor at Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church.

Michigan's first Host Homes program was launched last November and is a collaboration of OutFront Kalamazoo and OutCenter of Southwest Michigan. The program will provide case management and help connect youth with supportive adults willing to provide housing. The Bigelows are the first couple to volunteer; however, due in part to delay as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have yet to host a youth participant.

Hunter Willard is a social worker and director of homeless youth programs at OutFront Kalamazoo. Willard, who uses they/them pronouns, said they will be the main case worker for the program.

"It is a youth-driven selection process," Willard said, outlining how youth are matched with host families. "There will be files on each individual host family and the youth is able to select which family they would think is the best fit for them. The host family will host them for up to six months while we work on either family reunification or seeking out means of shelter."

To be eligible, LGBTQ+ youth must be aged 13 to 17 and experiencing housing instability. The program is designed to keep them out of the foster care system whenever possible. Willard said LGBTQ+ youth can find themselves homeless when family

members kick them out because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or when they leave home as the result of an unaffirming environment.

According to a 2018 study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented among the nearly 4.2 million youth and young adults in America who experienced some form of homelessness during the 12-month period the study examined.

The study uncovered several concerning findings about homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth:

- LGBTQ+ youth are at more than double the risk of homelessness compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers
- Among youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ young people reported higher rates of trauma and adversity
- Youth who identified as both LGBTQ+ and Black or multiracial had some of the highest rates of homelessness

Most troubling, the study found, LGBTQ+ youth had over twice the rate of early death among youth experiencing homelessness.

Gary and Sheila Bigelow are aware that sometimes, family rejection is related to the misperception that the LGBTQ+ teen is living in conflict with the family's religious faith. Both emphasized their aptitude in refuting anti-LGBTQ+ interpretations of scripture if that will aid in family reconciliation. They've also helped promote the Host Homes program.

"We've been trying to make ourselves known the best way possible," Willard said. "I've done multiple live information sessions that have been on our Facebook. We've done a Living OutFront episode, which is our web series where we interviewed the first host family to actually go through the application process. But mainly, we used our social media... as our broadcasting system to let people know that this is a thing and that we're here to help."

Once a potential host individual or family steps up to help, the onboarding process involves a screening and basic training that includes topics like LGBTQ+ cultural competency.

Originally known as the GLBT Host Home program, Host Homes is a housing model with a 15-year history. Ryan Berg is program manager of the ConneQT Host Home Program of Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit that addresses youth homelessness in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area and where the model originated. Berg authored "No House to Call My Home: Love, Family and Other Transgressions," a 2015 memoir of his experience with LGBTQ+ homeless teens in New York. Between The Lines asked Berg to share the history of the program in the Twin Cities along with his experience.



(Top) Longtime LGBTQ+ allies and parents Gary and Sheila Bigelow. (Right) Hunter Willard.

“The LGBTQ community came together and recognized in 1997 that queer and trans youth were going into the shelter system and experiencing discrimination, violence and exploitation based on who they were and how they identified,” Berg said. “[They] did some research — a feasibility study — and host homes as a model was determined to be a good fit. So the program was born out of community activism.”

Berg said the basic concept is mutual aid, in which those who are able to share resources that others need provide them in the form of things like food and shelter.

“Relationship is at the core of healing for so many young folks,” Berg said. “Ensuring that they can bring their whole selves to the experience without having to censor aspects of who they are in order to get their needs met is essential.”

Because youth experiencing homelessness have been failed by adults “time and time again,” Berg said, self-determination is at the core of the model. He and Willard both emphasized youth are not “placed” in a home, as in traditional foster care; they have the agency find the fit that works for them. Youth review the applications of hosts, not the other way around.

Berg had advice for prospective host families: “Consider why you want to become a host,” Berg said. “The successes that we’ve seen in our program have been really coming from hosts that are able to recognize that this isn’t



about saving anyone. This is about showing up and walking alongside someone in a season of their journey.”

Gary and Sheila Bigelow know that at minimum they will be providing room and board to a homeless LGBTQ+ youth. Both indicated they will leave it to the young person to determine whether that evolves into a closer relationship, be that mentorship or family-like bonds. For now, they’re ready to clear out Sheila’s sewing room to welcome a young person who chooses them.

“I’d almost say family is everything to us,” Shelia said. “We weren’t helicopter parents. We only have two kids; they’re spread out. I also would say that having lived far away from our families that family is what you make [it].”

To learn more about the Host Homes program, contact Hunter Willard at hunter@outfrontkzoo.org.



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I'm a White Cisgendered Straight Woman. 'Pose' Gave Me My History.

BY MELISSA HART

There's a scene during the first season of FX's "Pose" in which Blanca, one of the show's trans female protagonists, gets kicked out of a bar with her friend Lulu, who says, "This shit runs downhill past the women, the Blacks, Latins, gays, until it reaches the bottom and lands on our kind."

I'm the daughter of a mom who came out and lost custody of me in 1979, the sister of a man who died of AIDS in 1990, but I watched this scene feeling deeply ashamed of my privilege, and intensely envious of Blanca's community.

"Pose" follows the lives of queer POC characters in New York City during the late 1980s. Teens who come out to their parents find themselves penniless on the streets. They're adopted by mothers — trans women who provide food and housing while struggling to navigate the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Dramatic scenes of hollow-cheeked men dying in hospital beds give way to glamour shots of ball culture in which fabulously dressed performers strut their finery in lavish ballrooms with the hope of snagging a trophy.

I was a teen myself in the late '80s, but I knew nothing of ball culture, nothing of the terrifying disease that ravaged queer urban communities across the country.

All I knew is that a homophobic judge had separated me from my beloved mother when I was 9 years old, and the resulting sorrow and stigma shoved us both so deep into the closet that we couldn't see the lifelines organizations such as PFLAG or COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) might provide. Nor did we involve ourselves in ACT UP, working to help the very demographic that "Pose" illuminates.

How is it possible to live through your own history and only comprehend it 35 years later when you recognize it in a TV show? The answer to that, I think, has something to do with the community of women my bereft mother surrounded herself with — a group of lesbians who wanted nothing to do with men, who enjoyed exuberant, woman-only house parties and stayed as far away from political action as they could. My mother lived in fear that my dad would take away her legal right to see me and my siblings every other weekend. She didn't seek other newly-out mothers and fathers. I knew no other children of gay or lesbian parents; we didn't march in Pride parades or gather at city hall for political demonstrations.

Still, my mother was something of an anomaly in her new circle. She befriended her boss and his boyfriend and brought me with her to help water their plants and feed their cats when they went out of town on weekends. I marveled at their collection of stuffed bears in tiny leather hats and biker jackets, at their elegant suburban home



(Top) Writer Melissa Hart and her mother with the doorman in costume in front of the Sir Francis Drake in San Francisco. (Bottom) Hart with her mother.

a million miles away from apartments packed with queer folk in the Castro, West Hollywood, the Bronx.

In her own duplex, to counteract my father's bigotry, Mom fired up VHS copies of "Victor/Victoria" and "La Cage aux Folles" every other weekend when my siblings and I visited. From those films, I learned about resilience courtesy of camp and irony. I internalized my mother's outrage over homo- and transphobia on the screen. Still, like so many white, middle-class consumers of mainstream media at that time, we existed in our suburban bubble untouched by the AIDS crisis. That was, until my older brother in New York tested positive for HIV.

John was a decade older than me, the product of my father's first marriage in upstate New York. Across the country from one another, we met maybe four times in our life; still, we bonded over a shared love of novels and art.

Now, watching "Pose," I see what he must have lived through — the horror of watching his friends and lovers succumb to this wasting disease; the sickening fear as he sat in a doctor's office and listened to his own diagnosis; his heartbreak in the face of our father's outrage over his "lifestyle."

I was in college when John was diagnosed, busy navigating my own relationships and coming to terms with the repercussions of my family's dysfunctions throughout my childhood. I'm ashamed to admit that I can't remember even calling my older brother as he lay dying in New York; his life, his disease, seemed to have so little to do with mine as I studied and partied in my dorm room surrounded by other straight, white cisgendered freshmen like myself.

My college lay 70 miles south of San Francisco, but we didn't caravan up to demand health care for marginalized communities, or volunteer in hospice houses, or applaud on the sidelines of Gay Pride parades. Even when my father called to tell me that my brother had died of AIDS-related complications, I didn't understand that this was my battle to fight on John's behalf, and on my mother's behalf, as well. She wasn't political, and so I didn't learn about the power and solidarity of activism until much later in life.

What she was, however, was empathic. As my siblings and I grew up and she became less fearful of legal repercussions from our father, she welcomed all kinds of people into her life. And they welcomed her in return.

I felt this keenly when we drank JB sodas at a gay bar in Portland before heading to the drag show at Darcelle XV. She and the performers shared an easy camaraderie that eluded me then, and again when we went to the San Francisco Writers' Conference years later and found the hotel half-filled with authors and half-filled with queer performers in town for a "Pose"-inspired competition.

Mom and I took a wrong turn in the hotel one night and walked into a deafening ballroom scene instead of the staid public reading we'd planned to attend. "Let's stay," she said, and I agreed, though I felt like an imposter — even more so when the women around us embraced her, admiring her highlights and her all-black authorial ensemble while ignoring me completely.

"It's like they have gaydar," I grumbled. But what they really had was a shared history of oppression and lives touched by insidious disease. As my mother grew more comfortable in her identity, eventually marrying her longtime girlfriend, she began to realize just how privileged her life had been in comparison to those lived by gay and trans friends. Maybe this is why — when she discovered "Pose" while in hospice care two years ago — she insisted I watch it as well.

I waited two years to take her advice, overcome with grief at her passing and wondering what the hell a drama about Latinx and Black transsexuals in the 1980s had to do with me. But I get it now.

I got it from the first episode. "Pose" has showed me where I belonged in that era, and where I belong now as the daughter of a lesbian, the sister of a gay man, the mother of a queer Black biracial teen. It's shown me, too, how profoundly ignorant I was of the world around me as a young person and how that ignorance stemmed from fear and sorrow and trauma and isolation.

The show recently aired its final episode, and so I have no one to talk with about the first season. But maybe that's just as well. The experience of watching these characters' struggles has been intimate and heartbreaking and humiliating. I understand better now the horrific final year of my brother's life, my father's outrage goaded by terror, my mother's fear of political activism, my high school boyfriend's suicidal shame in revealing a desire for gender confirmation surgery.

Most importantly, I understand now how better to be an ally. "Black trans lives matter" is not someone else's battle to fight; it's mine. It matters not at all that I'm straight, that I identify with the gender assigned at my birth, that my ancestors are white, that I can't in this lifetime pull off haute couture. I have an obligation to help stop the flow of shit running downhill.

My mother learned this over seven complicated decades before she died. Maybe her insistence that I watch "Pose" was her way of continuing, post-mortem, my education — and my daughter's education — in compassion and activism. White silence kills.

"Pose" demonstrates this, inspires us to do better. The character Lulu may despair at the lowly position of trans women in the social hierarchy of the 1980s, but she ends her monologue to Blanca with these words: "How lucky are we? We create ourselves."

Melissa Hart is the author, most recently, of "Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens." Follow her on Twitter @WildMelissaHart.



Photo courtesy of Visit Savannah

→ Savannah

Continued from p. 10

the delightfully divey Chuck's Bar closed in 2019.

As with many cities, drag shows have become a magnet for godforsaken decidedly un-gay bachelorette parties and rowdy (albeit ally-

ish) heterosexuals. This certainly proved true with Savannah's Yes Queen! Pub Crawl. My hubby and I were the sole queers participating besides the delightful Venezuela-born queen and aspiring fashion designer leading the tour, Marie Con, and her lowkey boyfriend. It basically entailed Marie creating a loud public spectacle while we searched for her fictitious sugar daddy, Richard, aka "Dick"; stopped at non-gay bars for drink specials; and, at her insistence, grabbed each other's butts to

form human centipedes while crossing the street. It was a bit #MeToo and I really wished #TimesUp, but I did cull valuable intel from Marie about the scene and local drag collective, House of Gunt, before fleeing early.

We didn't flee early from another popular and quintessential Savannah after-dark activity: a ghost tour. Although hoping for the guide known as "Prince," who styles himself like the iconic late musician, our adults-only Sixth Sense haunted tour was led by the black-clad "Lady Ravenwood," whose ensemble included an LGBTQ+ rainbow and a shiny pair of steampunk glasses (not sure how steampunk figures in here, but OK).

Being a skeptical Scully to my hubby's I-want-to-believe Mulder, I rolled my eyes as Ravenwood told us of murder victim ghosts and flashed images of blue orbs hovering on her phone, and I begged for a spirit or demon to attach itself to us to spice things up ("Burn sage!" my hubby's fellow true believer friend texted in a panic). Alas, no blue orbs or demons followed us home, but darned if glowing happy memories of Savannah don't frequently haunt and beckon us back.

NY-raised entertainment and travel journalist Lawrence Ferber has contributed to publications including Entertainment Weekly, New York Magazine, National Geographic Traveler, The Advocate, NewNowNext, The NY Post and TripSavvy. He also co-wrote/co-created the 2010 gay romcom "BearCity" and authored its 2013 novelization.

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Daddies! (The Kind *with* Kids)

Bart Heynen's Book 'Dads' Sheds Light on Gay Dads and Their Families



Photos from "Dads" by Bart Heynen, published by powerHouse Books

BY JACKIE JONES

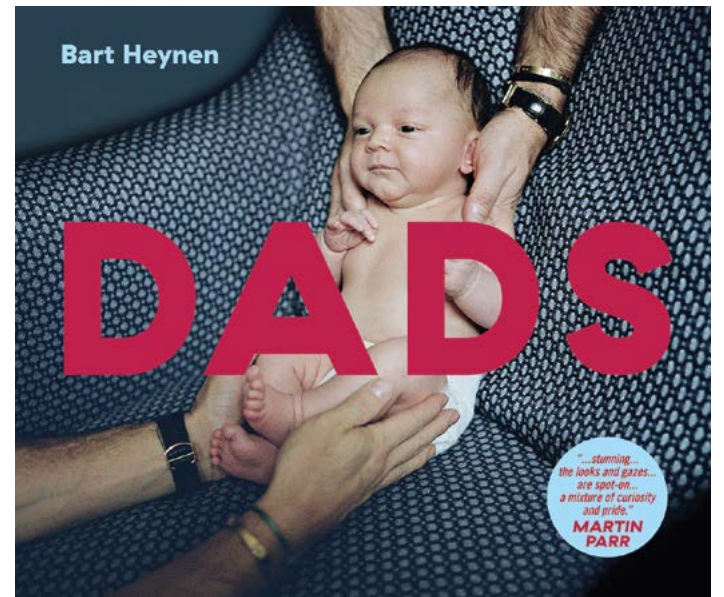
In an ode to gay fatherhood, photographer Bart Heynen gifts intimate, cute and loving portraits of more than 40 families in his photography book "Dads."

"So, I'm a gay father myself," says Heynen. "I found myself raising my boys without knowing any other gay dads in the very beginning, and I felt like I wanted to meet more families like my own. I also felt like, for my children, that they should see other families like [our] own, so I started to reach out to other families that I found through organizations and later on Instagram."

For four years, Heynen captured gay families while growing with the dads and children along the way. He says it began as a pet project that developed into something impactful.

"In some shoots, I brought my children along, [and] they were a great icebreaker for other families," he explains. "My kids played with their kids and they got along. I even still see some of the people we photographed. We've become friends. Not all of them, of course. But I think it was great because it all came together naturally. I was in the same position as them. We are all pioneers. We all feel the same way about certain things, and we go through the same things."

You can't help but smile flipping through the pages of this book, which features queer dads from all walks of life, perfectly happy with their precious families. It's the kind the LGBTQ+ community loves to see. And it doesn't hurt that, yeah, some of these dads are totally shirtless.



For the book, Heynen developed natural relationships with these dads and their families. The photos are evidence of that. It's almost as if some of these families forgot Heynen was even there documenting them.

"I think we all felt a strong bond," says Heynen. "Everybody was happy to participate in the project because we feel like we need to give more visibility and make people aware it's possible to create your own family... In America, the family is the cornerstone, and [gay dads] are a part of it."

"I found myself raising my boys without knowing any other gay dads in the very beginning, and I felt like I wanted to meet more families like my own."

Even if our heteronormative world thinks otherwise. "Dads," with its intimate portrayal of fathers who just happen to be gay, upends societal norms of what parenthood looks like, depicting dads and their children enjoying the simple pleasures of life: chatting in the garden, prepping snacks, braiding and combing hair, shaving in the bathroom and cuddling in bed.

"There are some special moments in there," Heynen says, "but most of the time, I kept it to very intimate day-to-day things that happen in the house and around the neighborhood. I wanted people to relate, whether straight or gay."

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Pride Stage

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Saturday, September 18, 2021

<u>Time</u>	<u>Act</u>
12:30 p.m.	Alise King
1:30 p.m.	Laura Rain and the Caesars
2:30 p.m.	Jharid Collins
3:30 p.m.	Sabin Detroit
6:00 p.m.	Bright Lights
7:00 p.m.	Logan Henderson Garrison Briggs
8:00 p.m.	Stage Closes

Sunday, September 19, 2021

1:00 p.m.	DJ LiXxer
2:00 p.m.	PRISM Men's Chorus
3:00 p.m.	AccousticAsh
4:00 p.m.	J.Santino
5:00 p.m.	Killer Flamingos DJ LiXxer
7:00 p.m.	Stage Closes

Riverfront Dance Stage

Sponsored by MadDog Technology

Saturday, September 18, 2021

<u>Time</u>	<u>Act</u>
1:30 p.m.	DJ DigMark
3:00 p.m.	Garrison Briggs
4:30 p.m.	Ryan Skyy
6:30 p.m.	Jace M
7:30 p.m.	Stage Closes

Sunday, September 19, 2021

12:30 p.m.	DJ Marquis
2:00 p.m.	DJ Myint
3:30 p.m.	TYLR_
5:00 p.m.	DJ Disc Detroit
6:30 p.m.	Stage Closes

Schedules are subject to change. Check the website

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Pyramid Stage

Saturday, September 18, 2021

Time	Act
1:00 p.m.	Sean Robinson
2:00 p.m.	Emmanuelle Jacobs
3:00 p.m.	Lucylujah
4:00 p.m.	Karley Davidson
5:00 p.m.	Hannah Francis
6:00 p.m.	Zeyy
6:45 p.m.	Jon Paul Wallace
7:25 p.m.	Rocky Wallace
8:00 p.m.	Stage Closes

Sunday, September 19, 2021

1:00 p.m.	Lin-Say
2:00 p.m.	Robert Bannon
3:00 p.m.	BayBro
4:00 p.m.	Nay Luma
4:30 p.m.	Crystal Harding
7:00 p.m.	Stage Closes

Festival Stage

Saturday, September 18, 2021

Time	Act
1:30 p.m.	Ella X
2:30 p.m.	Paytra
3:30 p.m.	The Band Mint
4:30 p.m.	Paisley Fields
5:30 p.m.	The BoyS
6:30 p.m.	Sing Out Detroit
7:30 p.m.	Stage Closes

Sunday, September 19, 2021

1:30 p.m.	Flash Clash
2:30 p.m.	Lipstick Jodi
3:30 p.m.	King Buzzard
4:30 p.m.	Jon Worthy
5:30 p.m.	Valerie the Vulture
6:30 p.m.	Stage Closes

MOTOR CITY PRIDE DETROIT **SATURDAY**

Welcome Gates Open at 1 p.m.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 1 - 8 p.m.

Four Stages of Entertainment
Featuring over 50 Artists!

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1 - 5 p.m. Family Area with youth activities and games (See page 19)

7 p.m. Festival Entrance Closes (No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)

8 p.m. Festival Closes

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MOTOR CITY PRIDE DETROIT **SUNDAY**

Welcome Gates Open at 12:30 p.m.

FESTIVAL EVENTS 12:30 - 7 p.m.

Four Stages of Entertainment
Featuring over 50 Artists!

Over 120 Sponsors, Vendors, Non-Profits & Food Booths, plus thousands of LGBTQ+ people coming together for Equality!

Noon 2021 Motor City Pride Parade Sponsored by Jeep (See page 27)

1 - 5 p.m. Family Area with youth activities and games (See page 19)

6 p.m. Festival Entrance Closes (No Admittance or Re-Entry after 8pm)

7 p.m. Festival Closes

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www.motorcitypride.org for any last minute updates.



FESTIVAL MAP

FOR MORE FESTIVAL INFORMATION, VISIT MOTORCITYPRIDE.ORG



Motor City Pride COVID-19 Mitigation Strategy

The following procedures have been developed to assist with ensuring a safe festival for all attendees.

We would like everyone attending the festival to be fully vaccinated. You must show your vaccination card or another record proving that you have been vaccinated when you arrive at the festival.

If you are not fully vaccinated, you will be required to wear a facemask while attending the festival. Facemasks protect the wearer and members of our community, participating family and friends.

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated will also be invited to visit the Vaccination Station set up inside Spirit Plaza. We believe that by offering a Vaccination Station we can enable accessibility for those who are not currently vaccinated and contribute to a greater societal good.

Other mitigation activities include:

- Additional hand wash and hand sanitizer stations will be at the festival.
- Additional facemasks will be available at the festival.
- Physical reminders to socially distance.
- Physical reminders to wear a facemask in crowded areas (even if you are vaccinated).

Attending the festival is a personal decision that each person interested in attending must make using the information available. Motor City Pride nor the City of Detroit are legally responsible for an attendee contracting COVID-19 while attending the festival.

The most important recommendation that we can make is to be vaccinated. If you are uncertain about whether vaccination is for you, we suggest researching vaccines at: <https://ivaccinate.org/>

Individuals that have not yet received their COVID-19 Vaccination are encouraged to schedule it prior to the festival using one of the links below. Vaccinations given on the day of the festival will not protect you at the festival but will start you on your way towards becoming fully vaccinated to protect yourself, your family and your friends.

Detroit Residents can schedule their vaccination at: vaccinatedetroit.com/

Michigan Residents can schedule their vaccination at: www.michigan.gov/coronavirus

The information above is as of August 28, 2021. It may be revised as we receive additional guidance from the Detroit, Wayne County or State of Michigan Health Departments.

Family Activities

Saturday
Sept. 18th
1:00-5:00 p.m.

Sunday
Sept. 19th
1:00-5:00 p.m.

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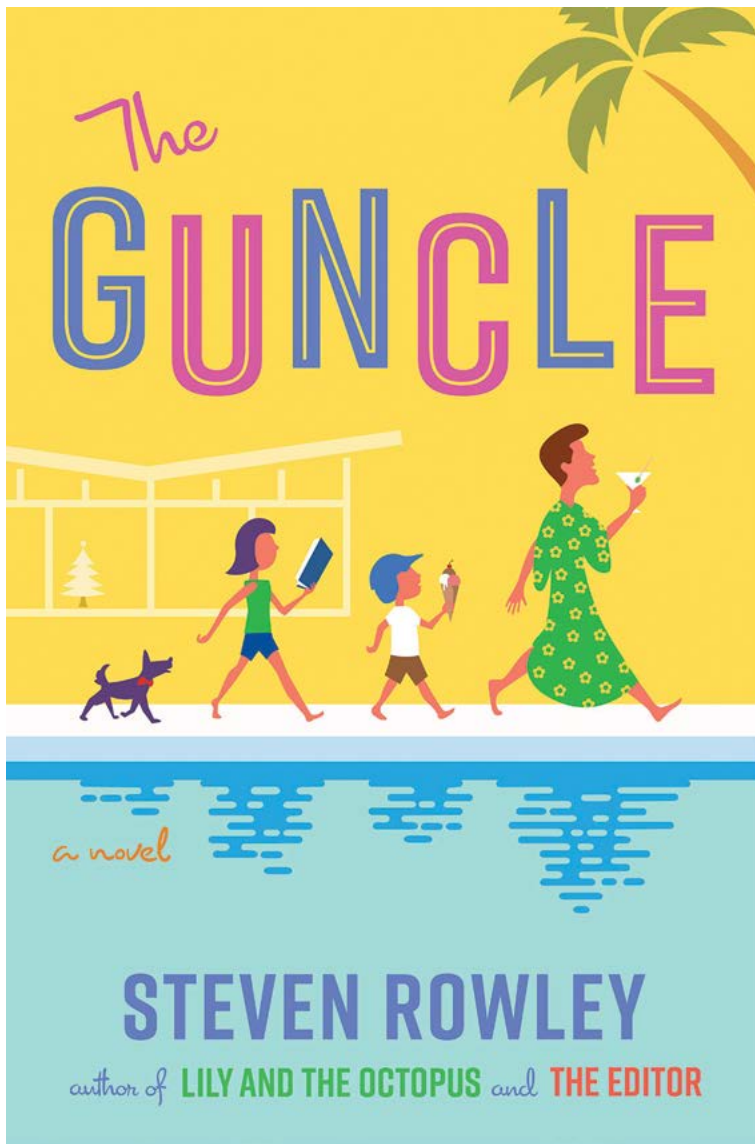
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Rowley's third book explores this very bond between Guncles and their nieces (and nephews) with astute, heartwarming observations, while also illustrating how the term "parent" expands beyond traditional mom and dad roles. In the book, Rowley's character Patrick is a gay man who spends his days in Mr. Turk caftans, soaking up the Palm Springs sun. He's no longer the sitcom star he once was, so he's got some time on his hands. That is, until his life is turned upside down when Maisie and Grant, his niece and nephew, lose their mother, also one of Patrick's dearest friends and sister-in-law. Suddenly, Patrick, still working through the grief of losing his own partner, becomes the children's temporary guardian. Just one who happens to love a draping caftan.

Rowley spoke to me from Palm Springs, where he lives, about the places he found inspiration for the book and why nieces and nephews share special bonds with their gay uncles.

Because of my relationship with my niece, I really identified with this idea of how Guncles can be an escape for the nieces and nephews in their life and can offer some stability when they need it most. Can you talk about that in terms of this story?

That's incredible that you have such a parallel in your own life, and I do have five nieces and nephews. I don't have children of my own, but there's so many more LGBTQ+ parents doing remarkable jobs raising children, and I'm at awe of what they do, you know? It's unarguably one of life's great emotional experiences, and so I'm always conscious of not having that in my arsenal as a writer, and I felt I had things I wanted to say about kids.

My nieces and nephews, they don't quite have a grasp on my life. They're all on the East Coast; I live in Palm Springs. I have a house with a swimming pool. I don't go to an office the way they see other adults go, and so they don't quite have my life pegged. It was truly fun to celebrate the specialness of these relationships. You know, there was "Auntie Mame" first, the 1955 Patrick Dennis novel, but he was closeted and came out later in his life as at least bisexual. But it got me thinking, too, about a lot of these queer writers from the mid-century, like Tennessee Williams, or writers

who created these larger-than-life female characters perhaps because they weren't able to openly write about gay men, and that was a really interesting to reclaim: that sort of Auntie Mame character as Guncle.

Like Maisie and Grant when they visit Patrick, do you recognize a special level of excitement when your nieces and nephews come see you in Palm Springs?

For sure. Writing a story about grief against the backdrop of unrelenting, cheerful sunshine was interesting. And then there's the sort of fish-out-of-water element. The idea of having kids here and seeing this lifestyle that's very different from what they're seeing, that's where I had some fun, particularly, in creating JED, the gay throuple that lives just over Patrick's wall on the neighboring property. Putting them in a situation where they might see different relationship models and types of families than they might see in suburban Connecticut was fun to play with.

I love that you come at family structure from different angles.

It's a slight echo of who an uncle is, the "it takes a village" kind of attitude about raising kids. It does take more than just parents sometimes to successfully raise a child. And that more than two people would be in a relationship is really scary thinking to a lot of people. So it was fun to play with people's expectations about who this throuple might be and divert those expectations a bit by making them very family-minded with legitimate things to contribute to the conversation.

What did you want this book to say about the meaning of family?

I never really understood people who wanted kids just to be mini versions of themselves all over again. (Laughs.) There isn't anyone that is so great that what the world needs is another version of them, you know? And so the great joy to

me in having kids would be to see who these people become on their own terms, and so I wanted to touch on all of that.

In the acknowledgements, you also say that your editor, Sally Kim, recognized this story before you did. Could you talk about that and about how it developed?

It stemmed from a week where my brother brought his two boys to visit. He's an attorney in Boston, and he was here with the boys for a week and after about 12 hours here got called into court, basically, to represent one of his clients. He had to leave, and I suddenly was left with the two boys. I felt like an understudy being thrust into the lead role. I documented the whole thing on Instagram. My editor was watching me flounder a bit that week, and she said, "You know, I think there might be something to write about here."

So some of this is based on your own experiences.

I imagined the book as a much lighter comedic novel at first, and a month into the writing process I lost one of my very best friends from college to breast cancer. She left behind a 6-year-old son, which was devastating for me and for her family. But the idea of grief in children was something I was suddenly thinking about much more seriously.

How else do you explain this relationship between Guncles and their nieces and nephews?

I do make a joke in the book. Patrick says to the kids, "You know, I have a swimming pool with no natural heirs. You should be nice to me." (Laughs.) I think there's an absolute acceptance of them for who they are, and I think a lot of Guncles... and justice for lesbian aunts! We need a better word than "Launt." But we are delighted in them for who they are. We're not the people in their lives that put any pressure on them to be anything other than who they are. I think they respond to that energy.



Author Steven Rowley. Photo: Byron Lane

Guncle to Guncle

Author Steven Rowley and Pride Source's Editorial Director, Both Uncles, Explore the Glories of Gunclehood

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

I read Steven Rowley's third novel "The Guncle" with my 8-year-old niece in mind. After all, his book makes a case for how parenting extends beyond a child's actual parents. Uncles, aunts, friends, grandma, grandpa, babysitters: "It takes a village," Rowley reminds me during our recent conversation.

It was "The Guncle" that reminded me of what my own niece, who has

experienced abrupt life changes due to the pandemic and sudden family shifts, told me recently after I made an aside about how it's unlikely I'll become a parent at this point in my life. Ever the inquisitive one, she said, "What do you mean, Uncle?" I briefly explained that if I were going to parent a child, it would've happened years ago. She corrected me, reminding me that, in her eyes, I am a parent. "But you've got me," she said, as my heart burst at the seams.

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Ridley Jones to Ashlyn Madden as Ismat, Andrew Rannells as Aten and Chris Colfer as Kosy of "Ridley Jones." Photo: Netflix

A Non-Binary Bison and a Strong Female Lead Walk into a Treehouse...

Creator Chris Nee on 'Ridley Jones' and the Importance of Representation in Kids' Entertainment

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Is there really anywhere cooler to live than in a treehouse situated inside the natural history museum your mom helps to run? Especially if the exhibits in the museum came to life at night providing you with endless adventure and one-of-a-kind friends?

No, there is not. And after watching *Ridley Jones*, the new children's program from Chris Nee, every kid — heck, every grown up — is going to aspire to live in such a home.

Nee, the creator of the hugely popular *Doc McStuffins*, is behind another strong female character with *Ridley Jones* who shares qualities with *Indiana Jones* such as her outfit (though her outfit is accented with purple camo) and her never-ending quest for adventure.

A natural history museum is the perfect setting for *Ridley Jones*. "For me, the museum was just a great place to bring disparate characters together and explore what it is for characters with different backgrounds and needs to try to get along," Nee tells *Between The Lines* via email.

Jones's friends include a dodo bird named

Dudley, Dante the dinosaur, a monkey in a space outfit named Peaches and a mummy queen named Ismat.

And then there's a non-binary bison named Fred. When they meet for the first time, Jones asks Peaches if Fred is a boy or a girl. Peaches responds that they're "just a Fred." Jones quickly and easily accepts this and they go on adventuring.

While Fred is a welcome addition to children's characters by those who support LGBTQ+ equality, Fred will no doubt upset the anti-LGBTQ+ right, a group that loudly complains about any positive LGBTQ+ representation, whether it be Mr. Ratburn getting married to another man on "Arthur" or a girl with two dads on "Sesame Street". But representation matters.

"I grew up as a gay kid in the '80s and didn't see anyone on TV like me," Nee says. "I wanted to create a character that made kids like me feel more comfortable in their own skin. I also wanted to incorporate a non-binary character in an effort to make topics like this a non-issue

See *Ridley Jones*, page 34

A Family Guide to Queer-Inclusive Kids Entertainment

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

If you're looking for children's shows that include LGBTQ+ characters, just go to any anti-LGBTQ+ organization's website and you'll likely find a whole list full of stuff you weren't even aware of. It's a treasure trove, truly.

The reason for this is because the anti-LGBTQ+ outrage machine wants everyone to think that a non-binary bison or a kid with two moms is a sign of the End Times, while most everyone else is all, "Yeah, so?" Which is why allied parties aren't frantically compiling those same lists.

But to everyone who is LGBTQ+ and was once a kid, the shift toward inclusivity really is a big deal. Representation saves lives, and seeing queer characters or storylines in kids' programs is a beautiful thing.

Here are some shows and movies to be on the lookout for:

Sesame Street (PBS Kids)

June 2021 saw the debut of married couple Frank (Alex Weisman) and Dave (Chris Costa) with their daughter Mia (Olivia Perez) on an episode titled "Family Day." This isn't the first time "Sesame Street" has acknowledged same-sex couples, but Frank and Dave are the first ones expected to make more than one appearance on the show. "There's all kinds of different families," Franks says during the episode, "but what makes us a family is that we love each other."

Arthur (PBS Kids)

Arthur the aardvark third-grader has been a kids' TV staple for decades. In fact, it's the longest running animated series for kids, ever. In 2019's "Mr. Ratburn and the Someone Special," teacher Mr. Ratburn is getting married. The kids are very confused about teachers' private lives (Buster suggests they go home at night and "sharpen pencils and eat kale") so they cannot

wrap their heads around a wedding.

They mistakenly think that Mr. Ratburn is marrying Patty Ratburn (Jane Lynch) and create a deepfake of Mr. Ratburn dressed like a hippie reciting penguin poetry to try to break them up,

which is way wilder than the fact that Mr. Ratburn is actually marrying a man.

Though *Arthur* is set to wrap up its 25-year run after the current season, the show is sure to keep delighting kids for generations to come thanks to endless streaming options.

Loud House (Nickelodeon)

What do you get when you put a family with 11 kids who have the last name Loud under one roof? The Loud Family, obviously. Lincoln Loud's best friend Clyde has two dads, Harold and Howard, who are a little neurotic and overprotective (when dropping Clyde off for a sleepover at the Loud house they leave "just a couple things" Clyde will need: sleeping bag, footie pajamas, white noise machine, humidifier, dehumidifier, ear plugs, inhaler, and allergy medication). Plus, Lincoln's rock-'n'-roll sister Luna Loud has a girlfriend named Sam Sharpe and they're pretty adorable.

The Mitchells vs the Machines (Netflix)

While the true star of this movie is Doug the Pug, the main character, Katie (voiced by Abbi Jacobson), is a queer teenager taking a road trip with her family (and saving the world from a robot apocalypse) as they drive her to college. We know she's queer because she wears a rainbow button on her hoodie and when she's introduced, she talks about figuring out who she was. And that's it until the end of the movie. It isn't a main plot point, it just IS, which is a nice change. Plus, the movie is hilarious and features an amazing cast of comedians including Maya Rudolph, Fred Armisen, and Danny McBride.

Rugrats (Paramount+)

The classic '90s series is back. The adventures of Chuckie, Tommy, Phil, Lil, Susie and Angelica will be rendered in CG-animation, only this go around, Phil and Lil's mom Betty DeVille is an out and proud single mom rather than married to the dweebish Howard as she was in the original. For many people, Betty's sexual orientation is not a surprise as, well, there have always been rumors, especially since it was the '90s and Betty was (gasp!) a feminist. Natalie Morales voices Betty. Morales told Yahoo Entertainment, "Getting the part was incredibly joyous and I pinch myself every time I get to do it."



"Loud House" characters Harold (left) and Howard (right) with Clyde. Photo: Nickelodeon



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On the Subject of ‘Fag’ in Art: Is It (and All Queer Art) Still Worth Celebrating?



BY SEAN KRAMER

I’ve been wrestling with one painting ever since selecting works for a new exhibition at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) back in September 2019. The show, called “Oh, honey...,” isn’t about “queer art” necessarily, whether interpreted as works by queer makers or with queer subject matter. Rather, the show features paintings, prints, photographs, sculptures, video and other artforms, which call into question categories of gender and sexuality, especially as they relate to forms of power. It also engages in a project that’s likely preoccupied many of us throughout our lives: finding queer spaces in a straight world.

The particular work I’ve been grappling with is Bjarne Melgaard’s “Untitled” (2007), a massive, striking, oil-on-canvas painting that depicts three men, a dog and three marshmallow, ghost-like monsters, two sporting razor-sharp teeth and one a somewhat jarringly prominent erection.

Everything about the painting is confrontational. The paint itself globs on the surface of the canvas, pushing its way into your space. The highly keyed greens, oranges, yellows and blues positively scream at you while the grand-scale tableau threatens to surround and engulf you if you come too close. You have to strain your neck upward to read the semi-scribbled text in the upper right, which says things like “the gay mafia monster” and “three fags pretending they are Ben Gazzara.”

Now you see the problem. The painting deals irreverently with a homophobic slur, which has been reclaimed by some and fetishized by others, but which still carries a lot of pain and has the power to cause harm for many. By including the work in the exhibition, I realized I would be playing fast and loose with the word and this fraught history. And the image is *huge*; it demands pride of place in the gallery by virtue of its sheer size.

In my own reading of the work, the “voice” that utters these written phrases is a disdainful, gay, male one, likely because that partially aligns with my own identity position. The text mocks a kind of falsified masculinity embodied by the three figures as merely imitation, costume, make-believe. The judgments pronounced by the painting through this dislocated voice suggest that the speaker assumes a higher position — possibly a more authentic form of manhood? By reading the text, the work compels us to share in the same attitude, if even for a split second. In other words, we are encouraged to look at these three cartoonishly rendered men and think of them as “fags.”

I know I’m not alone in having complicated feelings about the term. Over a year ago, walking down Huron Street in Ann Arbor, someone speeding along in a

truck felt it necessary to yell that word at me. For some reason, that instance bothered me less than when my friends say it, gay or not, whether merely using it in a sentence or even directing it jokingly at me. Writing this in early August 2021, I’m also fresh off the news that Matt Damon just months ago learned that “fag” could be harmful, about a century late. My feelings about the word undoubtedly relate to my perceptions of personal and/or mental security. I didn’t think for an instant that those guys in the truck were going to stop to follow up on their insult. But with friends, somehow the old playground fears of shame and ostracization come back to haunt me.

This all raised the question for me about whether I was celebrating Melgaard’s painting or Melgaard himself by featuring his work in the exhibition. As I see it, the answer is no. Ultimately, it’s up to each viewer to decide how to approach the painting and what they’ll bring to it. For me, it remains profoundly ambivalent.

But the painting is still something to be reckoned with. The artist’s work is often, mildly put, controversial. The issues the painting confronts us with about masculinity, identity, hierarchies — within, among, and outside LGBTQ+ communities — are uncomfortable, even painful. As a white, gay man reared in a deeply homophobic environment, my relationship with the painting differs from the ones other viewers will establish with it, to be sure. But there are several other works in “Oh, honey...” that offer a vastly different viewpoint and elicit a different response. For example, a glorious set of lithographs by Chitra Ganesh, Tracey Emin’s vibrant and sardonic neon faux-sign, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s quiet and mournful twin lightbulbs are some works I thought powerful enough to contest the specific idea about queer experience conjured up by Melgaard’s painting.

This, of course, isn’t unique to “queer art.” You can find examples of celebrities, films, TV shows and songs claiming to represent an aspect of queer experience that are fundamentally problematic and sometimes harmful. There is also art that wants to be celebrated but shouldn’t be — take 19th-century imagery of soldiers and battles, for instance. Most of them are steeped in the patriarchal, nationalist, imperialist, and often racist ideologies that brought them into being. These paintings are rarely celebrated anymore, although they were very popular in their time. Studying these images and including Melgaard’s painting in the UMMA exhibition is not to venerate difficult works of art but, instead, to examine critically how they have conveyed ideals of manhood, sexuality and authority in their own historical contexts.

Sean Kramer is completing a PhD in art history at the University of Michigan and is the curator of the exhibition “Oh, honey... A queer reading of UMMA’s collection.” The show runs through Feb. 20, 2022. Learn more at umma.umich.edu.

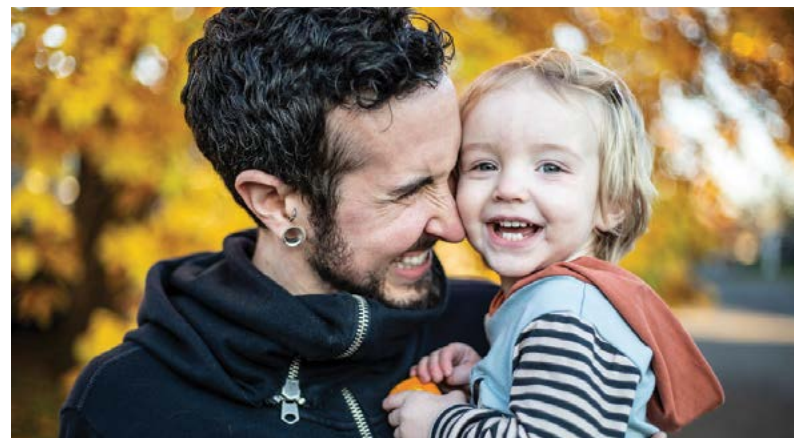


Photo courtesy of The Experiment Publishing

→ Trystan Reese

Continued from p. 16

contributes to kids feeling strong, safe, secure in their lives,” Reese says.

Reese and Chaplow were determined from the beginning to surround themselves with that love and support.

“Biff and I, both being from really conservative small towns, we know in our bodies what it means to not have support because we lived in those worlds, we lived in those communities,” Reese says.

“So the fact that we have a lot of support around us, that’s not accidental — it’s intentional,” he says. “We built that from scratch. We had to. We had to surround ourselves with people who are loving and supportive because we know what it’s like to not have that, and we knew that we were going to need it no matter what, whether we had kids or not.”

“Intentional” is a word Reese uses frequently. From the beginning, he and Chaplow have had to make conscious choices, often surrounding the question of how to keep themselves and their family safe.

Taking their pregnancy story public, for example, was not a decision made lightly.

“We had to shore up our physical safety in a lot of ways. And then we really talked to the kids too about their emotional safety,” Reese says. “We came to a determination that it was safe for us to tell our story, both physically and emotionally for us and for the kids. And I would say I don’t think that either of them experienced any negative consequences of us telling our story. We shielded them from the worst of it.”

Because, of course, there were negative reactions. Reese was called a “cancer on this planet” and a “disgusting circus freak.” Social media, Reese wrote in his book, became “a disgusting stew of judgment and shame.”

“While we had reached our intended goals of increasing the visibility of

transgender men and sparking a larger cultural conversation about transgender people and families,” Reese wrote, “it had also resulted in my life being turned upside down as a toxic slurry of transphobia rolled over me, again and again.”

Thankfully, that supportive community Reese and Chaplow so carefully built helped them get through it. Reese also learned to avoid online comments sections.

Reese has only grown more resilient since that time. For one thing, he’s older and wiser. “I’m old as hell in trans years,” he says. “You know, I’m 38. Sadly, in many ways, I am considered a trans elder, and I’ve been in the trans movement now for 20 years. So, my sense of who I am and my worth in the world is not dependent upon what anti-trans ballot measures, or piece of legislation, or who’s trying to ride the coattails of transphobia.”

Instead, Reese focuses on being a good man, a good father, a good husband and a good transgender activist and advocate. In other words, he lives his life with intention.

Like so much else in his life, even his tattoos are intentional. “On my chest, I have this giant floral piece with my favorite flowers,” he says. “Pansies. Because ‘pansy’ is often used as an insult, but if you know anything about gardening, then you know that pansies are actually the most resilient of all the flowers. Rain, sleet, snow, flooding, drought, a pansy will show up anywhere. They’re virtually indestructible.” Reese’s tattoo art also features lilies, he says, just because he loves them. “They’re so pretty.”

Beyond the floral work, Reese says he has a tattoo of the word “rebel.” “I am a nerd, and I love the word rebel because it’s both a noun and a verb — you can rebel, or you can be a rebel,” he says, “and so I find that very inspirational.”

Reese is an unapologetic rebel in both senses, though he’s definitely not without a cause.

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Chris Nee, the creator of "Ridley Jones." Photo: Netflix

→ Ridley Jones

Continued from p. 30

to children. And, Fred was born."

Fred is voiced by non-binary actor Ezra Menas. Hiring a non-binary actor to voice Fred was a conscious choice and Fred's creation was a very thoughtful process. "It was important that we found the right fit for casting a non-binary character," Nee says. "Ezra Menas is non-binary and we wanted the role to be authentic. We made sure that Ezra felt comfortable with what we were working on. We had non-binary people in our writing staff so that we were always making sure that Fred was coming from an authentic point of view."

Fred isn't the only character who doesn't conform to gender norms. Ridley Jones herself is not traditionally girly, from her name to her outfit to her interests.

"I designed Ridley to be that strong, adventurous and relatable character we all know and love, but female to empower young girls," Nee says. "We don't see strong female leads frequently, so Ridley was designed to showcase what girls are capable of."

While Ridley Jones is a girl, the show is designed to appeal to all genders.

"Ridley is for all kids, and I'm excited for boys to be invested in a girl's hero story," Nee says.

Nee is an ideal creator for the first non-binary children's character, as this isn't the first time she's dealt with topics that a lot of people don't know how to talk to children about. An episode of Doc McStuffins, for example, deals with a girl with cancer who has lost all of her hair.

"The cancer episode was an extremely important

episode that we were best equipped to handle," Nee says. "Kids get cancer. We deal with it because those kids and friends and families should be able to see themselves."

People connecting despite differences is a common theme in Nee's shows.

For example, in "Vampirina", another one of Nee's hit shows, the lead character is a vampire living with her vampire family among mortal humans. She sings, "I may be blue with pointy teeth, but I'm just like you." Vampirina's dad, Boris, tries to warn her that some people might not accept them saying, "Sometimes humans get just a little teeny bit terrified of things they haven't seen before."

"I am always writing about community and how we need to take care of each other, even when we're different," Nee says. "I love this show and I'm so excited to share it with the world!"

"Ridley Jones" is streaming now on Netflix.



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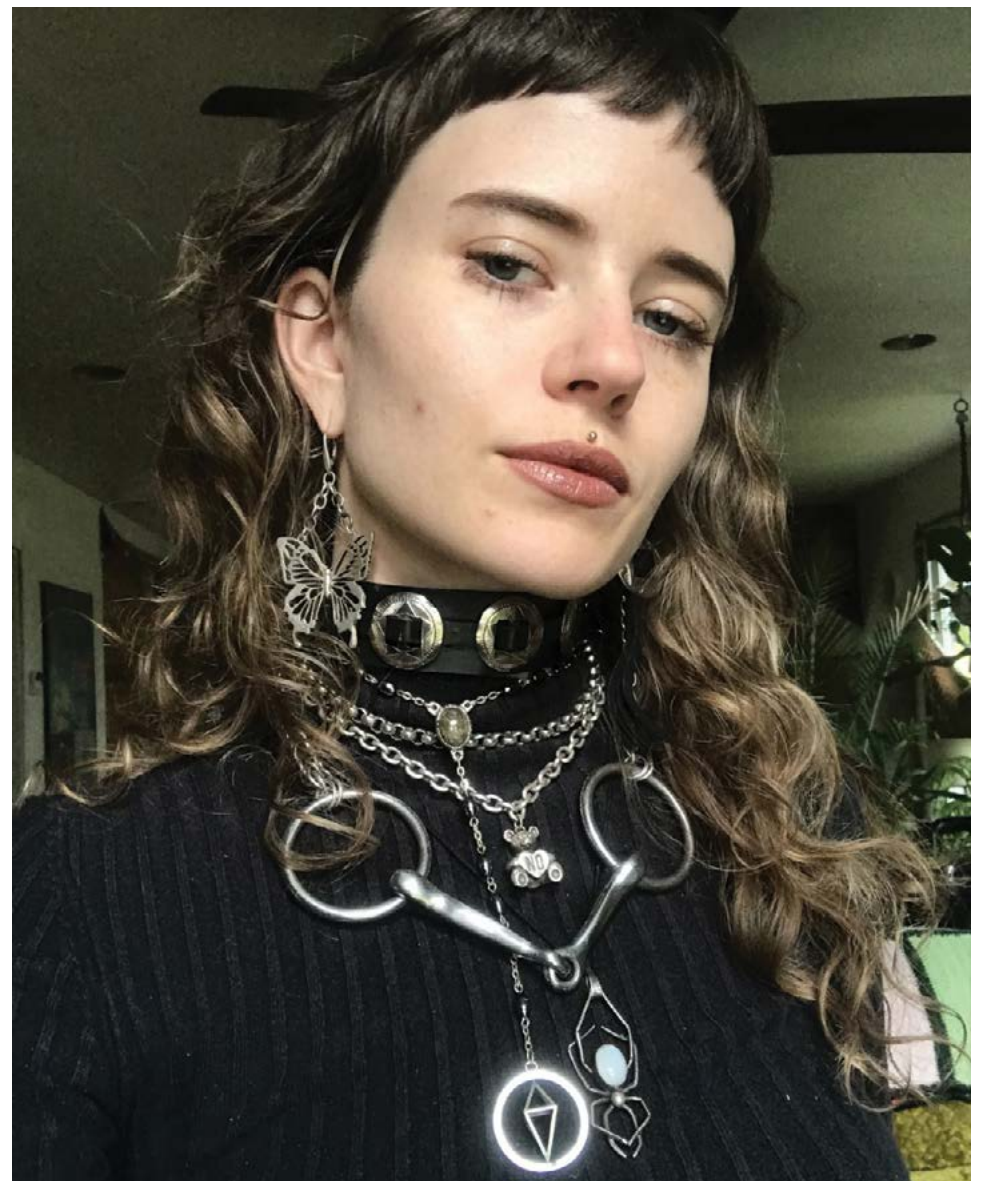
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Highland Park portrait artist Allison Scout Waite was recently named one of six "Artists Next Door" by WDET. Photo: Erik Paul Howard

Queer Highland Park Painter Allison Scout Waite Named a WDET 'Artist Next Door'

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Highland Park-based queer artist Allison Scout Waite tells *Between The Lines* it's "amazing" to be named one of six "Artists Next Door" by WDET, Detroit's National Public Radio station.

The program, according to WDET, "illuminates and celebrates Detroit area artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds and disciplines to enhance awareness and understanding of our communities and cultures."

"All of life is art, in my opinion," Waite tells BTL. Indeed, her oil paintings are self-portraits, in a way.

"They're portraits more of an emotion that I'm trying to convey than just a portrait of a picture I took of myself," she says, adding that each painting looks different from the next, whether it's the hairstyle or the pose or the skin color, which can range from blue to gold to pink.

"Nothing is very realistic looking," she says. "They're very stylized."

Waite, who names 17th-century artist

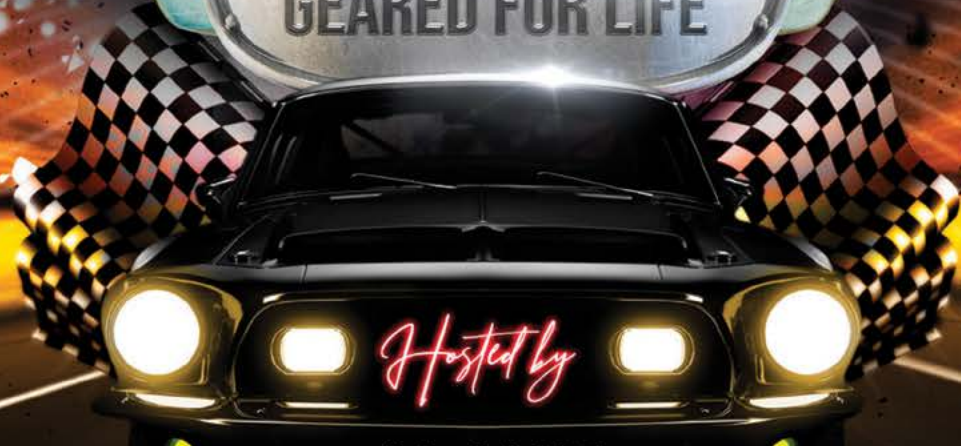
See Allison Scout Waite, page 38

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→ Allison Scout Waite

Continued from p. 36

Artemisia Gentileschi and modern Mexican comic book artist Inechi as influences, is essentially painting various versions of herself. “I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how we’re all different people all the time, depending on the situation, and that we’re always having experiences that inform us and change us,” Waite says, “even if they’re very minor.” Sometimes we realize these events are life-changing, other times we don’t.

Family has certainly been a life-changing event for Waite. She grew up in the Rochester/Auburn Hills area, but has always felt drawn to

Detroit, coming down on weekends in her teens.

“It was always a place where I could go and be myself,” she says. “I have such a big community here and I have for so long.”

That was not the case at home. Growing up, she didn’t feel like she fit in, not in her hometown and not in her family. While she has a good relationship with her brothers and dad, “I’m pretty much disowned by my mom, off and on,” she says.

“We have a relationship, but it’s been severely severed. It’s impossible to go back to a non-severed relationship, even if we are having a good month or something,” she says. “It is an intricate dance, learning how to be authentically myself and having a

relationship with someone who thinks my authentic self is wrong and sinful and shameful.”

And so, she found refuge in Detroit. “It’s just truly one of my favorite places to be. I feel so whole here,” she says. “I can’t speak for everybody, we all have our own unique experiences, but there definitely is a family aspect to the queer community of Detroit.”

For Waite, this “family

aspect” informs the “understanding of our communities and cultures” that Artists Next Door seeks. Queer people “find our own families a lot of the time,” she says, adding that she wouldn’t know “almost any queer history if it wasn’t for other queer people.”

Instead of the judgment and scrutiny she felt in her family home, she feels accepted here.

“It’s just a bunch of really creative, beautiful people,” she says. “I think the community as a whole is very accepting and understanding within the queer community, and I think a lot of people at least are very excited and willing to interact and make friends... share love with each other, whatever that means to them.”

Waite’s art is a way for her to “share love” with her community.

“They’re very large, and they’re very colorful, and they’re unwavering,” she says of her pieces.

She describes her work as “very raw and honest” and hopes it will inspire others.

“Being so honest and open and kind of attention grabbing helps other people also be that,” she says. “When you see someone being brave, it kind of helps you to be brave as well.”



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Where Church and Social Justice Meet

In His New Book, Queer Asian Pastor Tyler Sit Uses the Gospel for Good

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Jesus was “woke” before it was cool, and Pastor Tyler Sit, who identifies as queer and Asian, knows this: “Jesus wants Christians to stay awake,” he tells *Between The Lines*. And to what, exactly? “To both the crucifixions and resurrections in our world.”

Rev. Sit, the pastor at New City Church in Minneapolis, is the author of “*Staying Awake: The Gospel for Changemakers*,” out now by Chalice Press. In the book, he argues that being woke is an imperative part of being a Christian.

“If ‘woke’ simply means being aware of injustice in the world, then a ‘woke Christian’ as a concept should be redundant,” he tells us. “If ‘woke’ means creating a world where there is peace and love, then it is absolutely a Christian’s responsibility to stay woke in that way.”

In addition to wokeness, the book also delves into the contrasts between “Christianity” and “Christiandom.” As Sit explains, “Christianity is following the way of Jesus. It’s the gospel of liberating love. Christiandom is the appropriation of Christian symbols and language for the purposes of The Empire, which is the system of domination, oppression and hatred in the world.”

So when rightwing Christians use their religion to oppress the LGBTQ+ community and protect the comfortable, that’s Christiandom at work. Rev. Sit uses scripture to call for social justice and rejects the use of scripture to oppress marginalized

communities. His identity as Asian American informs all of this work, he says, and all of his leadership at New City Church.

Rev. Sit grew up in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, in a mixed-race household. His dad is an immigrant from Hong Kong, his mom a white woman from Minnesota. They faced discrimination for being a mixed-race family, even receiving death threats.

“My parents taught me that sometimes society gets it wrong and God gives us love to fix it,” he says, “and that has permanently orientated me toward looking for who’s being left out, who’s being othered in the spaces that I’m in because I come from people who have been othered.”

Rev. Sit rejects the narrative where God judges whether people are good or bad and sends them to either heaven or hell, which is often used to make LGBTQ+ people feel broken or inferior.

Rev. Sit’s interest in the Bible started from an early age. “I started reading the Bible on my own volition in fifth grade,” he says. “Later in life I got a Master’s of Divinity, which is a seminary degree, so I’ve also received formal training on how to interpret the Bible.”

In other words, he’s here, he’s queer and he knows his way around the Old and New Testament.

“Queer people are very spiritual people,” he says. “I think that at very early developmental stages queer people had to ask very big questions: Do I belong in the universe? Is there a place for me? Can I trust my instincts or not? Am I safe?”

He says that these kinds of questions are so big that they cultivate “a kind of spiritual

sensibility. Those very early formative experiences primed queer people to be particularly attuned to or sensitive to a higher power or a bigger picture.”

“Throughout the New Testament, we have evidence that Jesus cares less about retribution and more about repair and reconciliation,” he writes in his book. “If we assume that God cares about reconciliation, then God’s actions and decisions must, in some way or another, nudge humanity toward a restored relationship with each other and with God.”

How this works in practice is in centering marginalized voices.

“That has been such a huge game changer for New City Church,” Rev. Sit says. “We’ve committed to centering the people who are most impacted by injustice. So when we’re talking about immigration, for example, the immigrants in our community get to talk first.”

Rev. Sit points to the horrific murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin, which happened within walking distance from New City Church. In the nationwide conversations about racial justice, police violence and policing that followed, Rev. Sit makes clear that Black people should get to talk first, saying that it’s important to allow the “people most impacted by injustice to start, steer and stop the conversation.”

The reason for this, Rev. Sit writes, is that “God gives marginalized people, not their oppressor, the knowledge of what repair looks like for the harm done.”

“This past year we saw in real time

“This past year we saw in real time how centering marginalized voices isn’t just fluffy ideals. It’s a deeply held commitment that changes how we go about justice.”

how centering marginalized voices isn’t just fluffy ideals,” he says. “It’s a deeply held commitment

that changes how we go about justice.”

It’s important to note that marginalized voices aren’t required to be nice or quiet. Rev. Sit writes, “It is our moral obligation to suspend pleasantness when grace requires it.”

“A great time to suspend pleasantness is if a Black man in the community is murdered by a white police officer kneeling on his neck for nine minutes,” Rev. Sit says. “It is appropriate for Black people to raise their voices and yell.”

He points out that there’s always a lot of “tone policing” in response to such anger and expectations for a calm reaction to unspeakable oppression and violence. “All of those are strategies to contain fears of Black rage, when really that anger is an appropriate and healthy response in those situations and we need to suspend pleasantness to let the grace of that anger permeate our discourse.”

To ignore that anger and that hurt and look away from the people who are grappling with it is, in essence, to ignore God. After all, Jesus didn’t just hang out with privileged people in comfortable places.

“Jesus showed not only in word but in action that God shows up in a particular way in the margins of society,” Rev. Sit says, “and unless people of faith go to the margins of society, we will miss out on God.”

“Staying Awake: The Gospel for Changemakers” is available now from Chalice Press. For more information, visit TylerSit.com.



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Think Detroit Is ‘Shitty’? An Upcoming Circuit Party Is Determined to Prove You Wrong

The Motorball Production Manager Hopes the Event Changes People’s Minds About the City



Photo Courtesy of Geared for Life

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

It’s no secret that gay men love to dance. They’re literally the ones who started the disco inferno of the 1970s. The dancing slowed for a bit as AIDS ravaged the community in the 1980s. However, by the ‘90s, the gays were out again — this time for a cause.

“The big benefit dance events really took off in the early ‘90s,” said Geared for Life Board Member Alan Brown, a veteran of what has become known as the circuit party scene. “They were AIDS fundraisers and there were many, many events all around the world. And I’ve probably been to more of those parties than any human on earth.”

“We in the gay community have a long history of dancing and dance parties,” continued Brown. “We have a few cultural traditions in our community that are uniquely ours. Sort of large-scale dance events are a part of our culture and have been for many years.”

Circuit parties are one of those traditions.

Circuit parties, typically weekend-long events in most major cities across the country, include iconic-themed events such as the White Party, the Black Party and the Blue Ball. Started by a group of friends who called themselves Geared for Life, Detroit had its own circuit party.

The first Geared for Life circuit party, GEAR Party, which was later changed to Motorball, took place in 1994 at the Majestic Theatre. From the 1990s until the mid-2000s, GEAR Party and Motorball occurred at multiple venues including St. Andrew’s Hall, Clutch Cargo, The Shrine and Michigan State Fairgrounds. During their most active years from 1994-2005, Geared for Life’s parties dominated and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for Michigan-based HIV and AIDS groups.

After an eight-year hiatus, original board members Tracy Hoffman and John Joannette decided to give the disco ball another spin and planned a party to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their first party. Geared for Life produced Motorball 2014 and Motorball 2015 at St.

Andrew’s Hall, in which net proceeds benefited the Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC).

Now Geared is gearing up, pardon the pun, for Motorball 2021, which will feature a weekend full of events taking place from Thursday, Sept. 30 to Sunday, Oct. 3 around Metro Detroit.

“I’m really excited that Motorball is now a full weekend like other circuit events in other cities,” said Jason Misleh, the Motorball 2021 production manager, veteran promoter and DJ. Misleh said that he plans to make this year’s Motorball bigger and better than ever.

“The Geared board members came together and said, ‘We’re not screwing around. We want you to pull the best of the best DJs, the best of the best drag queens and the best of the best venues,’ which is what we did,” Misleh explained.

“I’m excited that we’re bringing a world-class circuit event to Detroit,” he said. “The community here deserves what every other major city has.”

Brown couldn’t agree more.

“I’m excited about creating an event that is

Motorball 2021 Complete Schedule

Thursday, Sept. 30

Motorball Warm-up Party at 251 W. 9 Mile Road, Ferndale 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. (with DJ Dani Brasil)

Friday, Oct. 1

Motorball/Thots and Prayers Party at Club Bleu in downtown Detroit, 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. (with DJs Deanne & Jace M)

Saturday, Oct. 2

Motorball/After Thots Party at Olympus, Detroit, 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. (with DJ Calagna)

Ferndale Pride, noon-9 p.m.

Motorball Main Event at Magic Stick, Detroit, 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. (with DJs Dan Slater and Isaac Escalante)

Sunday, Oct. 3

Motorball/After Thots at Olympus, Detroit, 3 a.m. to 8 a.m. (with DJs Cindel and Tom Stephan)

Motorball/ThotTea at Como’s, Ferndale, 2 p.m. to 11 p.m. (with DJs Jace M and Joe Gauthreaux)


uniquely Detroit, that you can’t go somewhere else for,” he said. “I want to see drag queens and classic cars. Having just lived through Dream Cruise, I’m so ready for that. Secretly, I would love for Geared for Life to do something during Dream Cruise that was a parade of classic cars with drag queens as part of the Cruise. That would shake up things a little bit, wouldn’t it?”

To purchase tickets for the weekend events, visit gearedforlife.us. This is a vaccinated-only event, so you must be fully vaccinated for entry.

“Everyone who doesn’t live in Detroit thinks Detroit is shitty and we’d like to change their minds. That’s part of our mission,” said Misleh.



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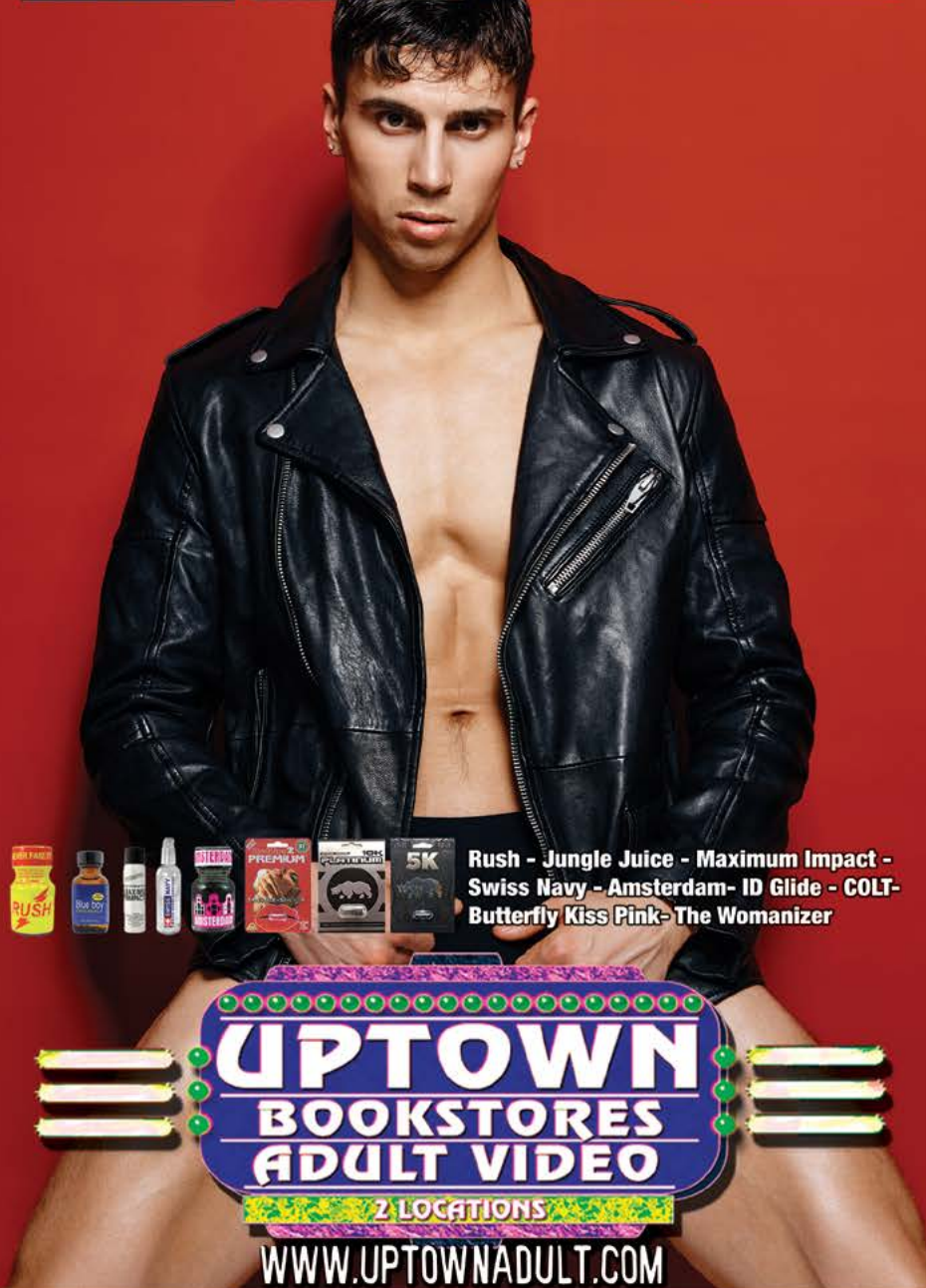
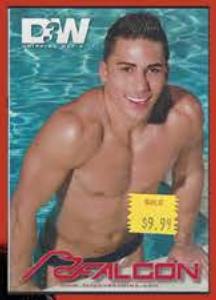
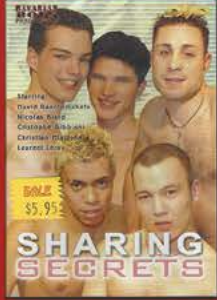


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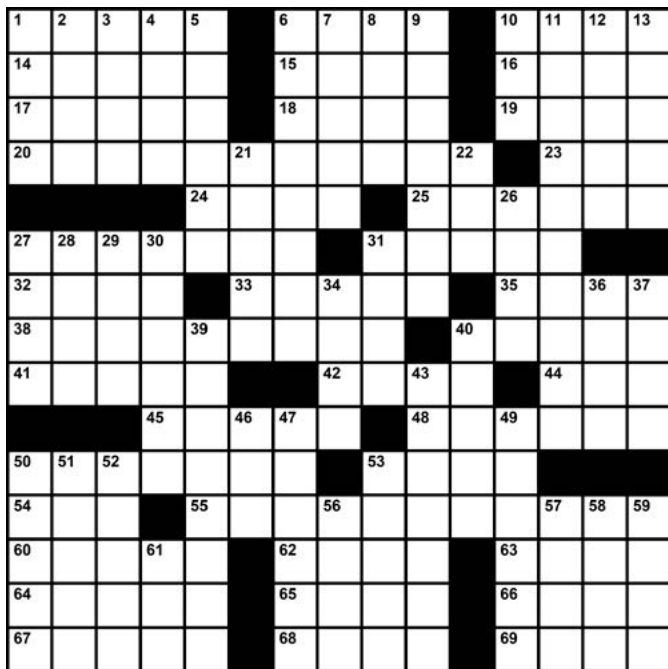


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- 31 Cola choice
 32 "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of ___ Other"
 33 Scores with Megan Rapinoe
 35 Fairy tale bad guy
 38 More of the description
 40 More of the description
 41 Pastoral poem
 42 Singer Norah's father
 44 Word after pro
 45 Women's rights advocate Equi
 48 State of polar bears
 50 Lessened, as anxieties
 53 "The African Queen" author
 54 End of the description
 55 Source of the description
 60 "Hollywood Squares" regular
 62 Kopay's team
 63 Collar kind
 64 Writer Wystan Hugh
 65 Coward of "The Scoundrel"
 66 Top
 67 Successful cross-dresser's cry?
 68 Kind of child
 69 Where a cobbler puts the tongue
- 8 Verdi work adapted by John
 9 Grable and Parton
 10 Word between partners' names
 11 Theatrical illumination
 12 Nouveau ___
 13 Brian of figure skating
 21 Hull section
 22 Cash for an actor between parts?
 26 Starting from
 27 Sweet opening?
 28 Not outstanding
 29 Revolting
 30 Louise's partner
 31 Guilty, to Perry Mason
 34 Plot unit
 36 Wear a lot of perfume, e.g.
 37 Humorist Bombeck
 39 Rug-rat corrals
 40 Lubricated
 43 Without detail
 46 "Ready to Wear" actor Stephen
 47 "Beats me"
 49 Trojan hero
 50 Ike's opponent
 51 Rim job?
 52 "Wonder Woman" star Carter
 53 Synthetic fiber brand
 56 Nala or Simba
 57 Problem for skin
 58 "More" singer Perry
 59 You may go down on one
 61 Chef Traci ___ Jardins

Will Grandmother Come to the Wedding?

Across

- 1 Cotton props in "Showboat"
 6 Prick
 10 Pomo ___ Homos
 14 Hamlet's words before "to be"
 15 Sex, crudely
 16 Casino call

- 17 Greek island
 18 Disengage a bra hook
 19 Callie Torres, et al.
 20 Homophobe whose granddaughter is marrying a woman
 23 Start of a description of 20-Across
 24 Baltic port
 25 Phone sex initiator
 27 Oral secretion

Down

- 1 Frida's mouth
 2 "East of Eden" son
 3 Icon letters
 4 Hit high, like Mauresmo's balls
 5 Family of James I
 6 Caviar source
 7 Patty Hearst's SLA name

See p. 36 for answers

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