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Photo courtesy of Cassandra Peterson

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5 **Queer** Things You Can Do Right Now

BY JACKIE JONES

Call us your genie in the bottle because all your fall wishes are about to come true. Whether you're into the gore of Halloween or a relaxing experience sans the costumes, we've got an event for you. Here are a few of our favorite things to get you into the fall spirit.

Stay Curious at Babe House's Secret Halloween Party

"We must make the 2020s a decade where Black, Indigenous, Latinx, queer, gender deviant, disabled, sexually explicit and sex working people thrive in a world set against them," AJ Raymore, the creator of the art collective and national solidarity network Babe House, explains to BTL about their Halloween party, to be held at a secret location. Intrigued? So are we, which is why we needed to get the word out. At this elusive event, expect dancing and an explosion of sets from talent such as Kleaner, DJ Coolkidsue, Ariel Sports, and more. Doors open at 8 p.m. Oct. 31 with the show starting at 9.

Ticket information can be found on their Instagram @babexhouse.



AJ Raymore. Photo courtesy of AJ Raymore

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Haunted Like Human. Photo courtesy of Voisine Vision Photography

Cozy Up with Haunted Like Human in Holland

Nashville's Dale Chapman and Cody Clark, also known as Haunted Like Human, are in town fresh off their new album "Tall Tales and Fables." They'll be performing their single "Whistling Tree," which was inspired by Chapman's friend who attempted suicide after her parents "were making her life a nightmare trying to keep her away from her girlfriend." Along with their often achingly beautiful melodies, the Nashville acoustic duo will bring the Detroit-based group Whiskey Charmers on stage.

See the show at 7 p.m. on Nov. 5 at the Park Theatre. Tickets can be purchased at Park Theatre's website.

3



Be Amused at 'Twilight Rocky Horror Tribute Show'

Detroit drag icon Sabin, the host of the "Twilight Rocky Horror Tribute Show," asks a very valid question: "What can possibly go wrong when you put drag queens and meatloaf on stage together and feed the audience alcohol?" For this show, a tribute to "Rocky Horror Picture Show," Sabin, along with local drag troupe 12 Drag Players, will bring the cult classic to life at 7 p.m. Oct. 29 and Oct. 30 at Five15 in Royal Oak. We know you're already shivering with anticipation. I mean, who wouldn't be?

Ticket information can be found on Five15's website.



Get Down at Boogie Fever's Halloween Costume Party

It's going to be a "boogie oogie" night with Boogie Fever's Halloween costume party in Ferndale. This is a "great spot to party and almost everyone will be dressed up," says owner Mark McConnell. Be ready to groove to the best of the '80s and '90s. In addition, attendees can enter a Halloween costume contest at midnight with a cash prize of \$300. So, round the

crew, finish the last bits of your costume and head to the party of the season. Doors open at 9 p.m. on Oct. 29. You must be 21 to attend.

Ticket information can be found on Eventbrite.



Photo courtesy of Amazon Studios

Binge Watch 'Tampa Baes' on Amazon Prime

For all our homebody lesbians, there's "Tampa Baes," a new eight-episode Amazon Original docuseries that follows a group of young lesbian friends in the ever-growing gay hotspot of Tampa Bay. As they navigate through their social and professional lives, these friends — and sometimes more — are always ready for an adventure. So if you're looking to spice up your night, tune into their drama.

All episodes will be available Nov. 5 on Amazon Prime.

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Queer History in Comic Form

'Come Out! in Detroit' Documents Early Local LGBTQ+ Activists

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

When Merrilee Melvin, then 24, came out as lesbian to some coworkers in 1972, she didn't expect to lose her job.

"I was working at a little print shop in Detroit, and I had come out to my coworkers," she tells BTL via phone from her home in Clarkston, Michigan. Somebody told the boss; soon after, she was fired.

Melvin wasn't unemployed for long. The Michigan Gay Confederation was putting together an event scheduled for June of 1972. Named after the location of the 1969 Stonewall Riots, "Christopher Street Detroit '72" was Michigan's first Pride march.

"I got \$24 a week to be the official organizer," Melvin recalls. As a result, she took to calling herself "the first professional lesbian in Michigan."

It was a monumental event. And, sadly, one that far too many people have no idea ever happened.

Historian and Michigan State University adjunct assistant professor Tim Retzlloff, who is gay, seeks to change that. "I wanted to make sure as a historian that it gets remembered and that history gets known," Retzlloff, who was 8 years old in 1972, tells BTL. And the 50th anniversary of the 1972 march coming up was the perfect time to document it.

The question, however, was how. What form should such documentation take?

"As a historian, I've done articles. I've done features for *Between The Lines*, I've been involved in exhibits, I've done panel discussions," Retzlloff says. "I'm even a talking head in the Jeff Montgomery documentary that Daniel Land is doing."

But newspapers "come and go, so an issue is out for two weeks, but not everybody sees

it. Exhibits are up for a limited time," he says, noting that not everyone can go. "What you have to marshal to make a documentary is kind of tremendous: the cost of it and just the logistics of it. So, none of those made as much sense as trying to do a comic."

At first, Retzlloff envisioned something small, perhaps four or five pages. But the scope grew quickly. "There was lots of brainstorming about first coming up with the script and the narrative, and it grew over time," he says. "It's in four-page increments for comic books, so the interior quickly went from 24 to 28; 32 if you count the covers."

The result is "Come Out! In Detroit," a full-color non-fiction comic book that tells the history of the Christopher Street Detroit march, which had an estimated attendance of 200 to 400, according to Retzlloff. The goal is to distribute 20,000 copies of the books for free, and there is a donation fund set up for the project to help pay for "printing, storage, promotion, and delivery of the comic book," the GoFundMe page, which has exceeded its fundraising goal of \$6,000, reads. It will be distributed at Pride events, community

centers, libraries, bookstores and bars, with a special early release at selected comic book stores for Free Comic Book Day.

Taking this project from conception to reality was aided by Retzlloff's close connection to an artist who identifies as a non-binary lesbian. Retzlloff recruited Isabel Clare Paul, an Ypsilanti artist and graduate of the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit, to create the illustrations for the comic. "I've known Isabel since she was born because I'm good friends with her parents," he says. Paul's parents were friends of Retzlloff in high school and college, and "growing up, he was my uncle Timmy," Paul says.

Paul remembers Retzlloff's pitch for the project:



Isabel Clare Paul, an Ypsilanti artist and graduate of the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit, and Tim Retzlloff, an historian and assistant professor at MSU, worked on their comic book "Come Out! In Detroit" during the pandemic. Photo: Wendy L. Gouine





The style progression of Ken Dudley, a Black activist with the Detroit Gay Liberation Front, for "Come Out! In Detroit."

"I have this idea for this comic. It's only going to be a couple of pages. Would you be interested?"

She was. And her interest continued as the project grew in scope. "Every email update, it just kept turning into a bigger and bigger project that became more important," she says.

While there are many figures featured in the comic, it was very important to Retzliff that Ken Dudley was well represented. He was a Black activist with the Detroit Gay Liberation Front and spoke at the 1972 march. "He later helped found what is believed to be the first formal Black gay organization in Detroit, in 1973," Retzliff says. "The group was called the Black Association for Gays and lasted from late 1973 until at least into 1975." Dudley died of AIDS in 1991 when he was only 44.

"I feel very deeply that he needs to be remembered and celebrated. He's not here to tell his own story any more, and there's very little from anything in his own voice aside from the speech," Retzliff says. "When I saw that [Paul] was going to depict him well and bring him to life, I just was excited."

"Come Out! in Detroit" has been a labor of love for both Retzliff and Paul.

"This project was really important to me just from the standpoint of making history accessible to another generation of LGBT kids and being part of that," Paul says. "I think sharing that history and having that connection to your kind of ancestral community and learning that history is really important." Paul says she is excited to be a part of the project and that details about this period in local history will be "more accessible for kids my age."

"I am kind of amazed, and I am in awe of her," Retzliff gushes. "I'm in a different place in my life and my career, and she's kind of launching herself, and I'm excited that this is kind of her beginning. The idea of a young lesbian and an older gay guy trying to tell this story is kind of fun for me."

Retzliff and Paul agree that they make a good team.

"It's been really a learning process for us both, but in a really good way because he comes from a very academic point of view and I come from a more visual artistic point of view," Paul says. "There were a couple of times when we weren't speaking the same language, but we had the same idea." She adds, "It's been so much fun, and I've

learned so much about him."

For Retzliff, the project also came at the right time. "This has really helped me get through the pandemic in ways that I'm really grateful for," he says. "And I can't possibly sing enough praises to Isabel for just the stunning, amazing, awesome, incredible, fantastic work that she has done."

Retzliff and Paul have drawn from archival material and have worked closely with Special Collections at Michigan State University, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, the Detroit Historical Museum, the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University and the Joseph A. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan.

Julie Herrada, the curator of the Labadie, describes it as "one of the world's foremost collections of social protest moments including primary source materials going back to the 19th century and into the present"

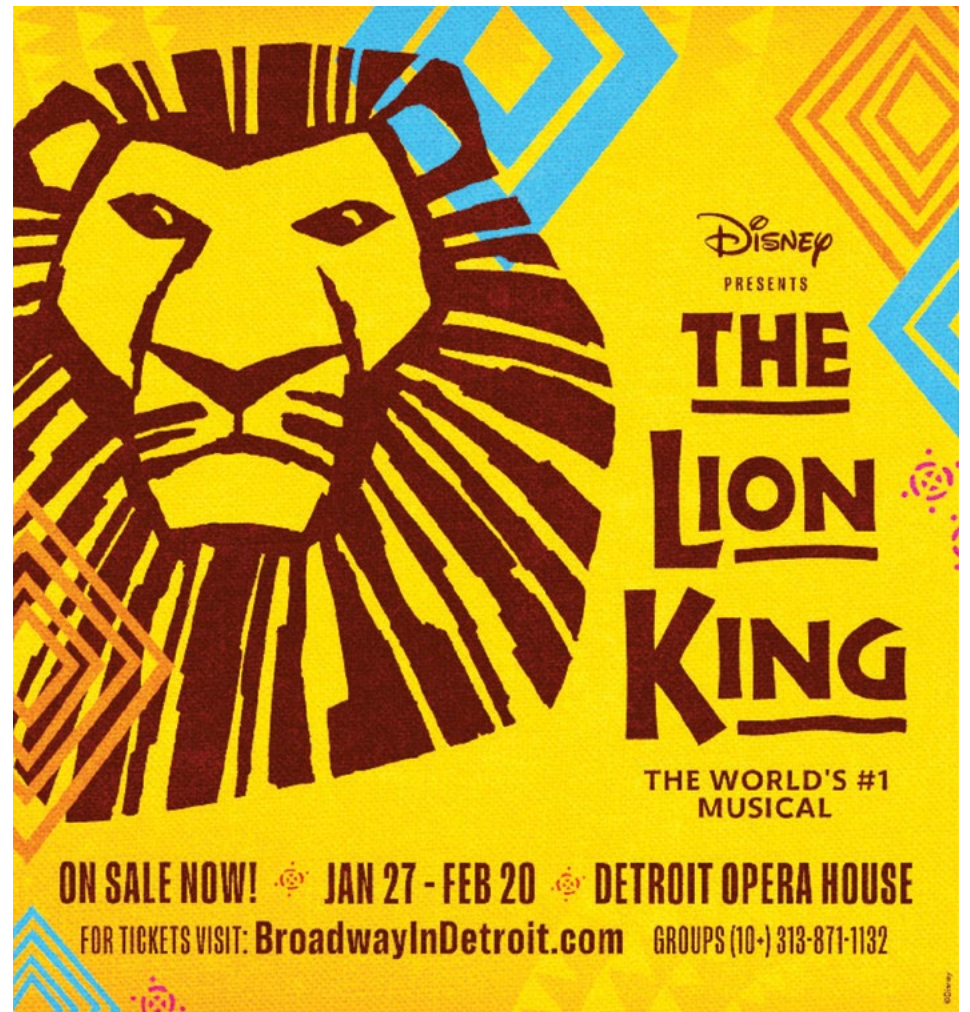
"Tim and I go back a long ways to the late '90s," Herrada tells BTL. "I think [this project] is really exciting. Really, really contemporary, very timely, and the format that he chose to tell the story is going to be very popular. It appeals to people of every generation."

"Come Out! in Detroit" reminds Herrada of other historical comics that she describes as "really compelling works," including the March trilogy by John Lewis about the civil rights movement and George Takei's "They Called Us Enemy" about his family's time in Japanese internment camps during World War II.

"Comics have been really popular in the recent years," she says. "I think that [Come Out! In Detroit] has the potential to have the same enduring impact as those other ones."

Merrilee Melvin, who can be seen in photos from the time wearing a hat and carrying a bullhorn, agrees. "I think it's absolutely wonderful," she says. "Isabel is just a wonderful artist."

Melvin is impressed with what she's seen so far. She recently met with Retzliff and Paul and got to see the project as it nears completion. "I noticed that in the cartoons in the little boxes, people are saying things that they actually told Tim," Melvin says. "This is the real deal. This is not made-up stuff. He's telling the real details about what happened years ago."



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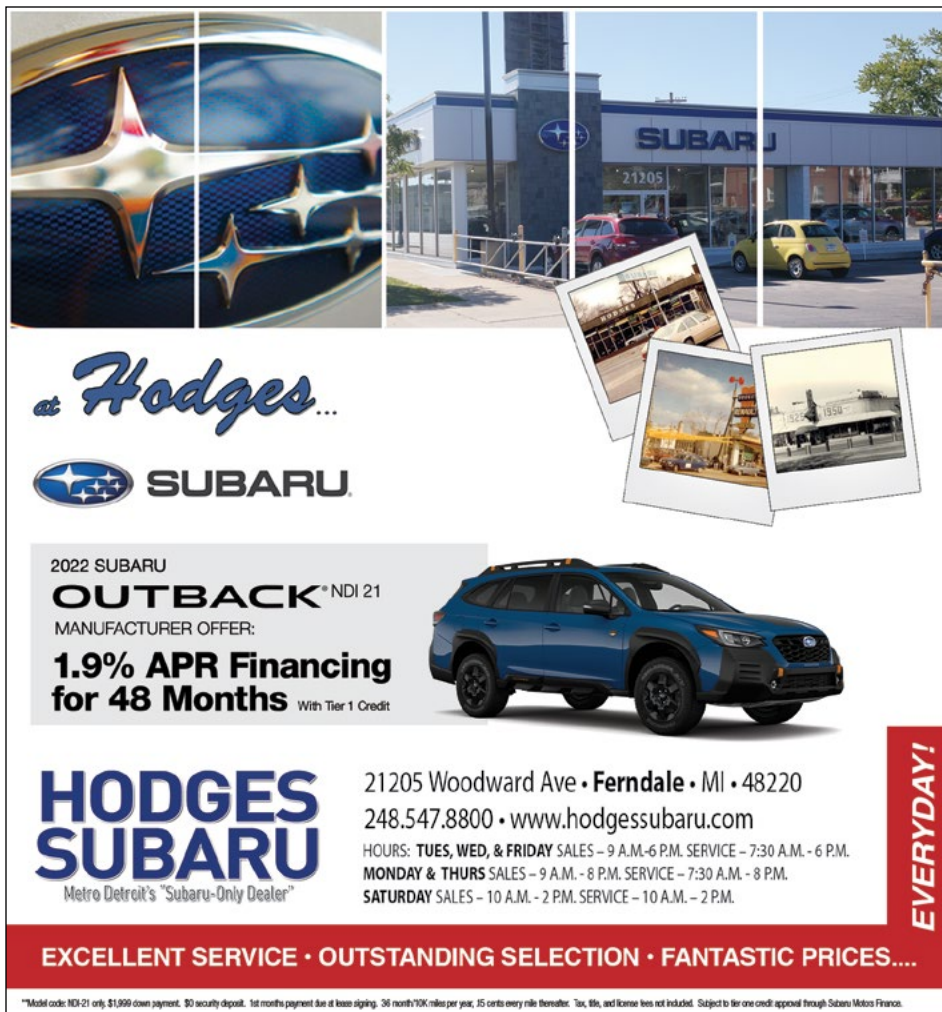
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Keeping Palmer Park Together Discussed During Redistricting Effort Hearing

LGBT Detroit Says Redistricting Map Leaves No Room for 'Majority Black District in Detroit'

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

LGBT Detroit is continuing its efforts in support of the Palmer Park neighborhood of Detroit being kept together as one voting block.

On Oct. 20, several LGBT Detroit staff members and volunteers spoke at the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) hearing. The Commission, charged with finalizing maps for the new proposed U.S. congressional districts, the Michigan Senate districts and the Michigan House districts, has ignored pleas to keep Palmer Park together. This is despite the fact that LGBT Detroit's proposed map has received more comments and feedback – over 100 – than any other proposed map so far.

The issue at hand is LGBTQ+ representation. Of the maps MICRC has drawn, none of them include Palmer Park as a cohesive geographical area. The U.S. congressional maps cover it at 78 percent. The Michigan senate map covers it at 75 percent. And the Michigan house map covers it at only 28 percent.

Keeping the Palmer Park area, known as something of an LGBTQ+ enclave, together as one voting block means that LGBTQ+ people living in the area would make a more significant impact at the polls. It will also give LGBTQ+ people a better chance to be elected to local office.

"Gerrymandering doesn't just happen to divide racial communities," Jerron Totten, LGBT Detroit's legislative advocacy specialist, told BTL. "There are people who would not want to see gay people vote together or gay people hold public office. Just like there's racist gerrymandering to see that Black people don't vote together and their votes don't hold the political power as much as other votes."

Sadly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the

MICRC appears to need convincing to keep the neighborhood together.

"Their first draft of maps cuts Palmer Park right down the middle," said Totten.

LGBT Detroit put out the call looking for people to speak at yesterday's hearing and offer supportive public comment and encourage the Commission to do the following:

- Keep Palmer Park together in the congressional districts by using either mapID#P900 or mapID#P467, which are both fair to each party.
- Keep Palmer Park together in the Michigan State Senate districts by using mapID#P1502, which is fair to each party.

Totten was just one of more than 160 people who provided public comment. A separate but similar issue frequently raised was the fact the proposed maps break

apart majority Black communities and will, opponents say, weaken the Black vote.

"As it stands now, and this is very important, the maps that the Commission proposed leave no majority Black district in Detroit," Totten said. "This means that Black districts have been diluted so much by the proposed redistricting that Black people have no voting majority in any district the Commission is proposing. And that's very concerning."

Despite the outcry, Totten said he is unconvinced that the Commission will take any action to rectify the situation.

"We're not confident that they're going to do that," he said. "We believe they have no interest at all in changing any of the maps. So, come Nov. 5, [when the final maps are due] we believe we'll be faced with the same maps and that what people are going to have to do is sue the Commission. We believe that will happen."

“There are people who would not want to see gay people vote together or gay people hold public office.”

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No Trick, Just a Treat

Elvira Actor Cassandra Peterson Talks 'Caring, Loving' Support From LGBTQ+ Fans — and Straight Men — After Coming Out



Cassandra Peterson recently came out in her new memoir. Photo: Alan Mercer

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Cassandra Peterson, famously known as pop culture Halloween icon Elvira, isn't scared anymore — at least not when it comes to saying that, yes, she's a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Peterson came out in September in her new tell-all book, "Yours Cruelly, Elvira: Memoirs of the Mistress of the Dark," where she writes about the relationship she's been in with a woman, Teresa "T" Wierson, since 2002.

Now, Peterson says the reaction from queer and straight men alike has been immense and warm — a response she didn't think would be quite *this* positive. "I am just so glad that so many people are interested, you know?" says Peterson, humbled, when we connected recently.

During our interview, Peterson spoke frankly about sharing the hardest, most intimate details of her tumultuous young life and extravagant career in the book, and by the end of the chat, said she was a fan of interviews like this, "where I don't [go], 'Yeah, so I began Elvira in 1981.'"

Less thrilling for her? Having to recite the most basic elements of her Wiki page: "I want to say, 'Read the freaking book!'"

And, well, now she can.

RuPaul was right — this memoir is juicy. You've spared no detail, it seems. Were you ever reluctant to include anything?

I mean, I thought about doing this book for like the last 15, 17 years, and as I went forward and kept getting closer to actually doing it, I really thought, "I'm gonna talk about everything." I was most worried about the relationship between me and my mom. But my mom passed away and I felt [laughs] a lot better about exposing that because — that's strange, you know, here I am protecting my mom who was abusive to me, but I thought if I came out with that book and she read all of that stuff, that would probably kill her, so I didn't want to do that.

Until now, so much about your life and Elvira has been a mystery. Were you ever concerned that sharing your personal story might affect the overall mystique you've built around Elvira?

Oh, yeah. It was on my mind all the time. I mean, that is the main reason for hiding my relationships and my personal life and keeping it very private — that I own and run a business that is entirely dependent upon this one brand. [Laughs.] And if I tarnish that brand in any way, I may lose my livelihood. And I'm not going to start back at square one in show business. Mm, no, I've been doing that forever, you know? So I didn't want to blow it. Finally, I just got to the point in my life when — I just turned 70 years old and I have enough money. I'm comfortable enough that I felt like, "OK, I can risk it now. If my brand does go to hell, I'm OK. I live in a nice place, and I have enough money to last me the rest of my life and be comfortable."

Has the response to the book been what you expected?

It's better than I expected. It's better. I got so much wonderful support and love and comments from my fans and from people who weren't even really fans. I had a straight guy run up to T at the farmers market a couple of days ago; a straight guy comes up and goes,

"I just want you to tell Cassandra that her book completely changed my mind about what straight is, what gay is. It just completely changed the way I think. And please tell her thank you for that."

I think you've addressed how you've had some regret for not coming out about your relationship sooner. Do stories like that make you think, "If I had done this 15 or 20 years ago, perhaps I could have changed more minds at a time when maybe it was more crucial"?

I don't know. I'm afraid if I would've done it 15 or 20 years ago, I don't think people would have been ready. I do think it would have very possibly damaged the character. I have a couple of friends — I will not name their names — and they are celebrities and 15, 20 years [ago] they both came out and they pretty much didn't get any more acting work. Just spiraled down.

So people think that doesn't happen anymore. But it does, and especially in Hollywood. I mean, one of them was a handsome leading man, and he kind of never got any of those roles again. I had gay male friends telling me, "If anybody asks about if you are in a relationship with T, you just deny, deny, deny." I mean, it's a horrible thing to say, and it makes me feel like a big hypocrite because I am so involved with the gay community, and I was very worried. I knew I was gonna have some straight guys go, you know, "Oh, she's a big lesbo!"

One of my social media platforms, 11,000 people quit following me; most of the comments were like, "Hey, you were lying the whole time. I don't like Elvira anymore. I used to be a fan but I'm done." And I know those are straight guys thinking, "My chances of being with Elvira are all ruined now." Anyway, I lost 11,000 people,



See *Elvira*, page 22

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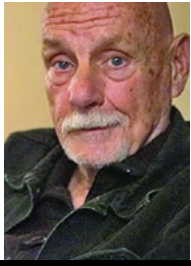
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Parting Glances

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

A Magic Moment Recalled!

About a dozen days ago tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow — at my age how can I be sure? — I was gifted with a pair of John Lennon enchantment glasses.

Gold rimmed. Sunset orange. Autumn tinted. Pre-Donald Trump, to be sure. No Mike Pence trifocal fog-up.

Reflected in my hand-held vanity, two-way mirror, these magic spectacles make me look and feel younger (to be honest, not an easy thing to do at my gravity-compromised, sag-along-with-me age).

The two-circle Lennon spectacles came rainbow wrapped. Gay tasteful, in a box filled with “magic sequins and let’s pretend glitter.”

Oh, yes! With a note.

And, surprise of surprises! A note written in cursive writing — thanks to the Republicans, of late rapidly becoming a lost art form — one word: “Imagine!”

Underneath the sequins and glitter is a folded patchouli-scented parchment. A map. Headline: “Things Once Happened at Downtown Detroit’s gay intersection. Midnight’s the bewitching moment. Follow! In or out of high heels or leather.”

And, in small lavender hand lettering, “Count the years backward. Say the magic word. Put on these glasses. For a minute or two, be glad you were gay way back then ... 1960 Detroit!”

Let me be honest. I’m a born skeptic. I arrive 15 minutes early — promptness is the courtesy of kings (or queens, in my case), as the old saying goes — and I discover, to my chagrin, two empty, dimly lighted downtown city blocks. Farmer & Bates.

Come on, MoTowners, you’ve got to be kidding! Where are the 1011, the Silver Dollar, La Rosa’s, the Hub Grill greasy spoon?

I stop counting backwards at number 60, which it turns out, is just a few seconds before midnight. Looking about for safety’s sake, seeing I’m not in harm’s way, I — with just a touch of coming out nervousness — put on my Lennon specs, and ... Oh, my stars. Mary, I can’t believe it!

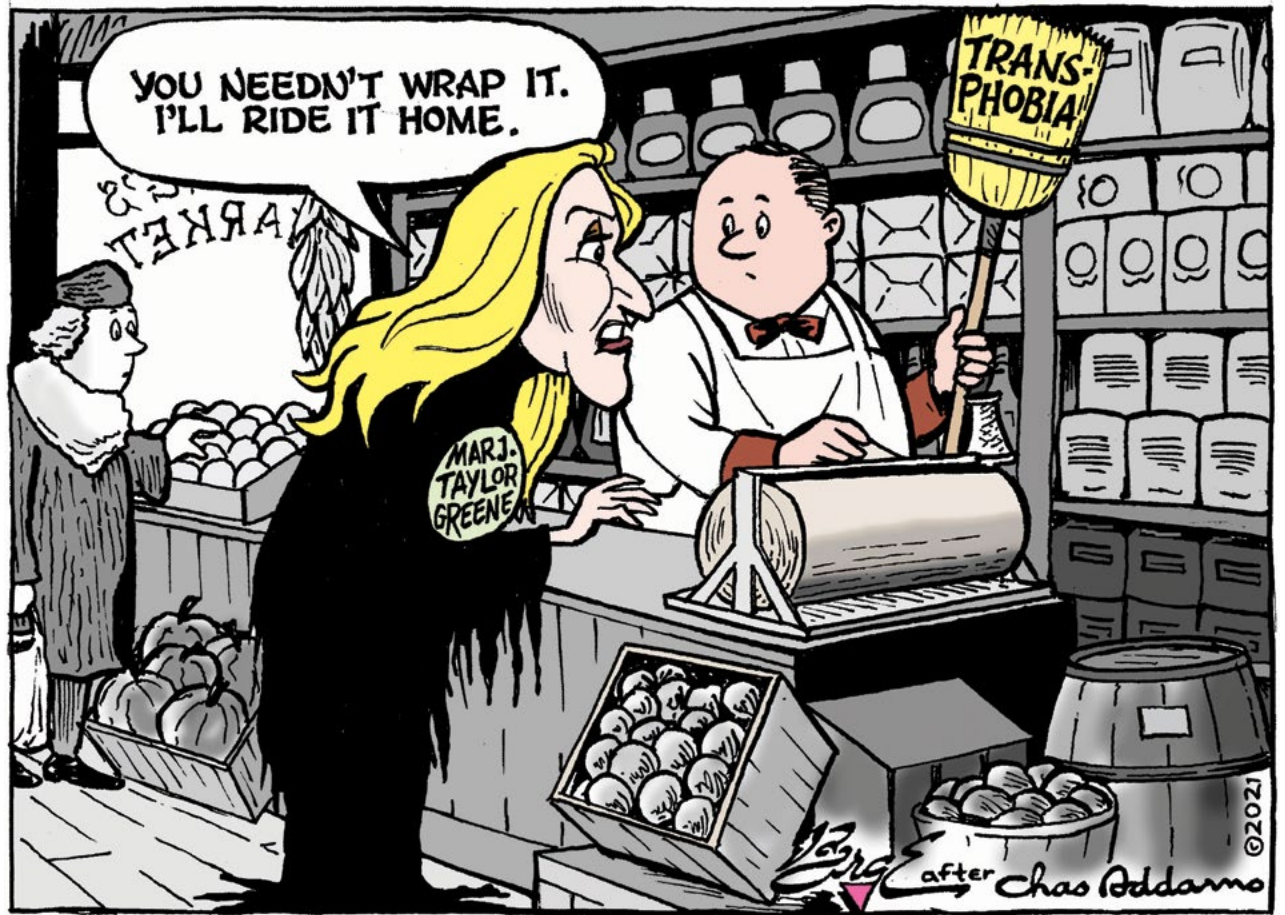
Farmer & Bates is suddenly alive with hundreds of tourists eagerly watching from behind street-lined wooden barricades. There are shouts of approval. Loud applause, as one by one, gaudy costume by glorious costume, drag queens by drama queens arrive, turn, bow, pause regally for yet another take of in-your-face grandeur.

“You like what you see folks? You bet your sweet straight bippies you do!” chants Lola Lola, pausing grandly before the entrance of one of the intersecting streets of several gay clubs. “This year’s trade, next year’s competition!”

She blows a kiss to the crowd as imaginary light bulbs flash. And out of nowhere, blue side of the moon perhaps, a recorded band lip-syncs “Hello, Dolly.”

Even in this imaginary, make-believe world of once-a-year royalty on parade, there’s got to be a star. Just to be

See **Parting Glances**, next page



BY DANA RUDOLPH

Viewpoint

Facing Our Fears as Queer Parents

Halloween is almost here. A celebration of all things scary. That means, of course, that we should be celebrating queer parenting, too, which brings with it no end of scary moments. Here are some I have had, along with a few thoughts on facing our fears.

Waiting for our pregnancy results. My spouse Helen and I wanted to start our family through reciprocal in vitro fertilization (RIVF), using my eggs and her womb, with anonymous donor sperm. This began with lots of (scary) injections we each had to give ourselves, Helen to prepare her womb and me to release multiple eggs. Even though we used my (younger) eggs, we were scared that we would not have any success before our insurance coverage ran out. The first cycle of RIVF didn’t work, making the second even scarier—but our fears were assuaged when Helen got pregnant.

Then came the process of confirming my legal parentage. Even though I was our son’s genetic parent, I would not be a

legal parent under the laws of New Jersey, where we lived at the time. We could have waited until after our son’s birth and done a confirmatory (second-parent) adoption, but I didn’t like the idea of having to adopt my own genetic child. We instead found a lawyer with expertise in LGBTQ+ family law who helped us petition the state for a pre-birth parentage order, recognizing me as a legal parent from the moment of our son’s birth. No other same-sex couple in the state had gotten such a pre-birth order when we started this process, which definitely scared us. Just before our one court visit, however, a couple in another county received one. That didn’t set an official precedent for ours, but was a good sign, and indeed we got our parentage order, too.

Next came our son’s birth. Helen had the world’s most boring pregnancy — no morning sickness, no odd cravings — until the last three minutes, when she started feeling weird and our son’s heart rate dropped. I suddenly worried that I’d

lose both of them. The doctor decided to do an emergency C-section, and our quiet birthing suite at the hospital became a scene out of “ER.” Medical staff rushed in to transfer Helen to a gurney and take her to the operating room. Someone tossed me a pair of scrubs that I threw on as she was being wheeled down the hall. I ran after her and made it just in time for our son’s birth. Both were well, but it had been the scariest few minutes of my life.

Then came the scary time we had to drop him off for his first day of preschool, and every year after that. Our son was excited about going to school, so there weren’t tears at the door, but I knew that in addition to friendships and learning, he would also be exposed to some of the not-so-good things that can happen in a classroom, including social snubs, outright bullying and the common cold. He would encounter a range of experiences and opinions that would helpfully broaden

See **Viewpoint**, next page

Creep Of The Week

Magnolia School District

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Hair is political.

The rules about hair in the United States are, well, hairy. A lot of it goes back to the Bible, which has lots of wild opinions about hair. In Leviticus, it states that men shouldn't trim their beards or the hair at their temples. Yes, this is the same Leviticus that people use as "proof" that the Bible forbids and opposes homosexuality. I wonder why you never see people protesting at funerals with signs that read "God Hates Bowl Cuts" or bakers refusing to make cakes for men with clean shaven faces. Weird.

I have my own complicated history with hair. I am a very hairy person. For decades I shaved my legs despite the constant razor burn. I tried waxing my legs more than once. Then, when I got breast cancer and at age 37, I lost all of my hair, every single strand including my eyelashes, thanks to chemo. Before cancer, I had very long hair. Now I was bald as a cue ball. After treatment when my hair started to regrow, I kept my hair short because I couldn't bear the idea of going through that awkward "growing out" phase to grow it long again. Then the pandemic happened, and I have long hair again. One thing I did stop, however, was shaving my legs. Once I lost every hair I had, not to mention surviving cancer, the idea of spending time and energy removing hair was ridiculous. I wanted every god damn second of my life spent shaving and waxing back.

Popular culture has shaped how we think about hair. Think of all the Renaissance paintings of white women who have no hair on their bodies save the hair on their heads, which is usually flowing and long. Unshaven armpits and legs became ubiquitous with feminists in the 1970s. "Hair metal" ruled the airwaves in the '80s with bands like Poison, Mötley Crüe, and Ratt blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity with their long hair, makeup, tight pants and high heels, all while managing to still be sexist and misogynistic.

Racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia inform many American attitudes about hair. The long and the short of it is that men have short hair, and women have long hair. Men with long hair are, if not gay, at the very least not masculine. Women with short hair must be lesbians. But, of course, there are plenty of men and women and gender fluid/queer people with hair of all different lengths and styles. And then there's the discrimination and disparagement of Black hair and Black hairstyles that goes back long before the United States was even a thing. The U.S. Military banned many Black hairstyles until 2014.

But thank goodness we have evolved as a country and no longer police who has hair and on what parts of their bodies and what lengths.

Just kidding. The ACLU is suing the Magnolia, Texas school for their gender specific rules regarding hair.

"Plaintiffs in the lawsuit include six boys and a non-binary student ages 7-17," reports the Texas Tribune. "The lawsuit says the students have been threatened with or sent to in-school suspension for weeks at a time; some were placed in a 'disciplinary alternative education program,' leading three of them to unenroll from the school district."

Remember when Tracy Turnblad from John Waters's "Hairspray" got put into special ed because of her hair? That was intended to not only be funny, but cautionary. Certainly not instructional.

"To be kicked out, pushed out, of school entirely simply because of their gender and their hair, is really unconscionable," Brian Klosterboer, an ACLU of Texas staff attorney, told the Tribune.

Then again, "unconscionable" and "Texas" seem to go hand in hand these days.

The ACLU argues that "the dress code policy's gender-specific requirements violate equal protection under the 14th Amendment and Title IX, which prohibits discrimination in education institutions on the basis of sex," according to the Tribune.

That's a no-no.

But the district claims it's doing nothing wrong.

"The rules are included in the student handbook each year and are similar to the codes of approximately half of the public school districts in Texas," the district said, according to the Tribune.

In other words: We put our discriminatory rules in writing, and anyway, everybody else is doing it.

The non-binary student included in the suit was threatened with in-school suspension if they did not cut their hair. The child's parent told the Tribune that their hair had been long for several years, meaning the school wasn't enforcing their policy for quite some time.

But something has changed. Could it be that Republican lawmakers are focusing and harshly targeting gender fluid and transgender youth in Texas and across the country? Perhaps. That certainly can't help.

I wish the ACLU of Texas and these kids luck and thank them for standing up during these hair-raising times.

→ Parting Glances

Continued from previous page

sure it's all for real, I push my Lennon glasses back on my nose. Oh, my. Yes! Of course, it's Hazel Hobbs arriving by top-down, 1960-something red convertible.

Her gown, a year in sewing. Sequin by sequin. She radiates class! And chic. Her muscular Prince Charming companion holds up a sign. QUEEN OF FARMER & BATES! The crowd — straight and gay — roars its once-a-year awe-struck, Halloween Night approval.

I look at my self-winding watch. How quickly time runs down when you're having last-minute fun. Or so it seems

tonight. Just as I reluctantly turn to go, an old-familiar parade passes by.

Somehow gathered for my imagined benefit; I'm gently touched. Perhaps one final farewell with feeling for me. They wave in gaily passing ... I nod nostalgically ...

... Big Red, Jean, Eve, Rusty, The Empress, Miss Bruce, Tall Dick, Virgil, Tabu, Rita Hayworth, Fran, Flo, Uncle Jimmy, Little Mama, Mack, Drano, Sky, Eve Taylor, Che Che, Fran & Wally, Bookie, Fat Jack, Bessie, Billie Hill. Rosie Bonham, Andy, Sam, Chunga, Bobby Johns, Billy & Maurice, Ruthie Ellis ... Hugs! Godspeed!

Gay today. Gone tomorrow...

→ Viewpoint

Continued from previous page

his world, but sometimes challenge what we had taught him. As new parents, we usually control most aspects of our children's environment; as parents with children in school or daycare, we do not. We simply have to trust that we have prepared them well enough to make their own assessments and stick with their own values. We must also encourage them to communicate with us so that we can talk through any difficulties. Fears can sometimes best be overcome together.

The first time he drove on the road was another hair-raising moment. Aaaaaah! Enough said. He's a fine driver now, but that first venture outside of the parking lot raised my heart rate.

And then, suddenly, there we were, dropping him off at college. Had we done enough to prepare him? Was there some vital piece of advice we had forgotten to convey? Would he find his way without us there? Would we be able to step back and not call or text every day? Would he do his laundry? Answer: So far, yes.

These are hardly the only fears that parents face. I have pangs of fear every time I hear about another school shooting, a child diagnosed with a serious illness or a fatal random traffic accident. My heart jolts when I hear news of queer parents fighting for legal

parentage. I worry when another anti-LGBTQ+ bill moves through a state legislature. Then there is the litany of lesser but more everyday fears we may experience: Will our children do well in school (by whatever measures — social, emotional, and academic — matter to us)? Will our children's new relationships be healthy? Will they find the resilience to face failure and keep trying? Will they find their place in the world?

The fears can be overwhelming. If we cower from them, however, we remain at their mercy, even of the ones that never become reality. If we ignore them completely, on the other hand, we risk being unprepared for the ones that do happen. Finding that balance can be tricky, and there will always be some fears that come to pass that we can never anticipate. Yet worrying too much diverts energy that would be better spent preparing our children and families for the things we can control and for simply enjoying time with our loved ones.

Scary moments will always exist—but so will our strength to face them. Happy Halloween!

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 800+ LGBTQ family books, media, and more.

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Spencer p. 35

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Photo courtesy of Pose Las Vegas

Marsha Warfield Talks Career, Comedy and Coming Out

'9-1-1' Star Brings Comedy Show to Detroit

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

In the late '70s, Chicago-born Marsha Warfield started her career by writing for comedy legend Richard Pryor. Then, in the '80s, she rose to fame in her own right starring as Roz on the popular sitcom "Night Court." After the show ended in 1992, she made film and TV appearances throughout the rest of the decade. But then Warfield, who came out publicly in 2017, retired and walked away from Hollywood.

Recently, though, Warfield returned to TV yet again, appearing in Season 4 of Fox's "9-1-1" — and, again, during the current season — as Antonia "Toni" Wilson. The show, which airs Mondays at 8 p.m., follows the lives of Los Angeles first responders such as paramedics, police officers and dispatchers. In the series, Warfield is the mom to firefighter and paramedic Henrietta "Hen" Wilson, played by Aisha Hinds. As a result of the pandemic, Warfield's character lands on hard times and has to move in with Hen.

Beyond "9-1-1," Warfield will perform her comedy show, "The Book of Marsha," at Bert's Marketplace at 7:30 p.m. and 9:45 p.m. on both Nov. 5 and 6. During the show, she'll tell stories about playing straight, coming out to her mom and her observations on the state of America.


You were off the scene for almost two decades. What were you doing during that time?

In my act I say I was sitting at home fucking with people on Facebook — not that it existed when I first left. I was retired. I was not working. I moved to Vegas in 2001. I'm still there. I didn't work until about 2015, and so I started all over again and went back to the clubs doing standup — and not just to the clubs but some bars. Whatever shows I could get. And I'm just now building it up to where it's ready to showcase.


When you came out of retirement, you also came out of the closet.

I was tired of being in it. People don't understand how much the world has changed for LGBTQ+ people and they don't realize that LGBTQ+ is a fairly new acronym. Everybody was in the closet until pretty much the AIDS crisis and the bungling of that brought issues to the forefront that had long been purposely buried. Deliberately buried. So Ellen came out and then Rosie came out, and it wasn't until the Obama administration when we got gay marriage and it kind of blew the roof of everything. It's a new environment that people are coming into, so coming out is not quite as traumatic for most people. It's a different world.

See **Marsha**, page 18




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Photo courtesy of Colin Thanh

A Community Finds Joyful Connection in Raving

LGBTQ+ Asians Look to Michigan Rave Scene for Acceptance and Found Family

BY DIAMOND YAO

Colin Thanh is used to raving under extreme conditions. Pouring rain or searing hot, it doesn't matter: Thanh is there among the drugs and sweat.

After many hours of soaked dancing in the mud at this year's Lollapalooza Festival, Thanh and his friends went back to their hotel room where, he says, "we put the music on, and we had our own little mini rave within our friend group."

Thanh is part of a group driving the rave renaissance, according to Plan A Magazine. But this new wave is different — it's no longer about the middle-class white ravers of the '90s. Modern rave events in recent years have been steadily full of Asian faces. In fact, Subtle Asian

Ravers (SAR), a Facebook group for Asian ravers, had 97,000 members at press time. Though Asians have always partaken in the rave scene, the increase in Asian participation in contemporary electronic dance music (EDM) festivals and events is something of a phenomenon. One factor that seems to be influencing this trend is the fact that the roots of the EDM scene have their origins in queer subcultures shaped by marginalization and resistance — something queer Asians understand fundamentally.

Sitting at the confluence of raving queer resistance and the modern Asian rave scene, these partygoers find community, joy and acceptance in the scene, which, for the queer Asian demographic, is a communal experience that harks back to collectivist cultures that highly value

group gatherings. At events, Asian ravers can be spotted in groups of "rave families," with the term "rave mom" or "rave dad" designating the raver who introduced the others to the scene and to the family. There is also often one raver there to support the rest of the group, offering small fans to keep them cool and water for hydration.

For Thanh, a gay Vietnamese-American raver from Ann Arbor, the sense of community within the rave scene helped him be comfortable with his sexuality and come out. He went to his first rave at 18, "shocked by the way people dressed," he recalls.

"I didn't come out when I was 18," he says. "I was still exploring all the options, and raves were definitely a big change. I

See **Asian Rave Scene**, page 20

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→ Marsha

Continued from p. 14

In this new and different world, your first TV credit since 1999 is your recurring role on the Fox show "9-1-1." You, an out lesbian, play the mother of an out lesbian character. Did you get a "you've come a long way, baby" sort of feeling when you landed the role?

I've come a long way in a lot of ways. I think about that. I thought about that just the other day: where I'm playing a straight woman mother of a lesbian. It's interesting how that turned out. And then when you think about you want to make rules and you say gay people should play gay people. Well, that would leave me out and her out. It's kind of interesting to flip the script and just let people act.

Going back a bit, I read that when you came out to your mother she made you promise to stay in the closet until she died.

I came out to my mother. I think I must have been close to 30 — well. I was over 30. I was in a relationship and I didn't want to hide it anymore, so I told her. And she said she knew. And to this day it bothers me when people say that because if you knew and it's OK, why did you leave me in that closet? It just bothers me; telling me you knew doesn't give me anything to work with. It feels dismissive of the reality that I live. So that was kind of hard to take.

But, truthfully, her telling me she didn't want me to come out while she was alive in the environment that we were living in didn't hurt at the time. It hurt later. You get older and you realize just how suppressed you've been and how much you've missed. You can't imagine what the world looks like outside your window until you go outside. I had been inside so long that it was a load off to tell her. And that small condition, knowing the reality of being the parent of a gay person as far as society was concerned, didn't make it easy on them either. So, in the moment, I wasn't overly upset about it.

I grew to be resentful but more so saddened and disappointed. It could have been so easy. It could have been so different.

Tell me about your standup. Your act is a bit different these days than when you first started out. How is the lesbian thing going over with your audiences?

They don't have a problem with it. They have more problems with my race-based material than the lesbian material. I'm talking about that from my own point of view. I haven't had any negative feedback on that.

What haven't you done in your career that you'd like to tackle?

There's so much. I would like to see what the next iteration of show business is. I think we're in a transition period where people aren't going to be going to movies on Friday night anymore. And depending on how this Covid thing goes, gathering in groups might not be a good idea for a while. So what's the new thing? I think there are so many possibilities. I wish I was a 22-year-old starting again. There seems to be so many possibilities now. And I'd be getting a lot more sex with women.

Are you getting any now? Do you have someone special in your life?

Yes, I have a boo, baby. Her name's Angie. Hopefully we'll be Mrs. and Mrs. soon. That was never something you could look forward to for most of my life. But it's something I think about and we talk about it and we plan to do it.

What does the future hold for Marsha Warfield?

I have no idea. That would be so stifling. I think I'd quit if I knew. There's so many possibilities. Who knows? Somebody could call me tomorrow and say we want you to do this or that. As for my standup, I call my show "The Book of Marsha" because, at this age, it's my story, looking back over my life and the world as I know it over these past 60-plus years. It all comes out in my standup.

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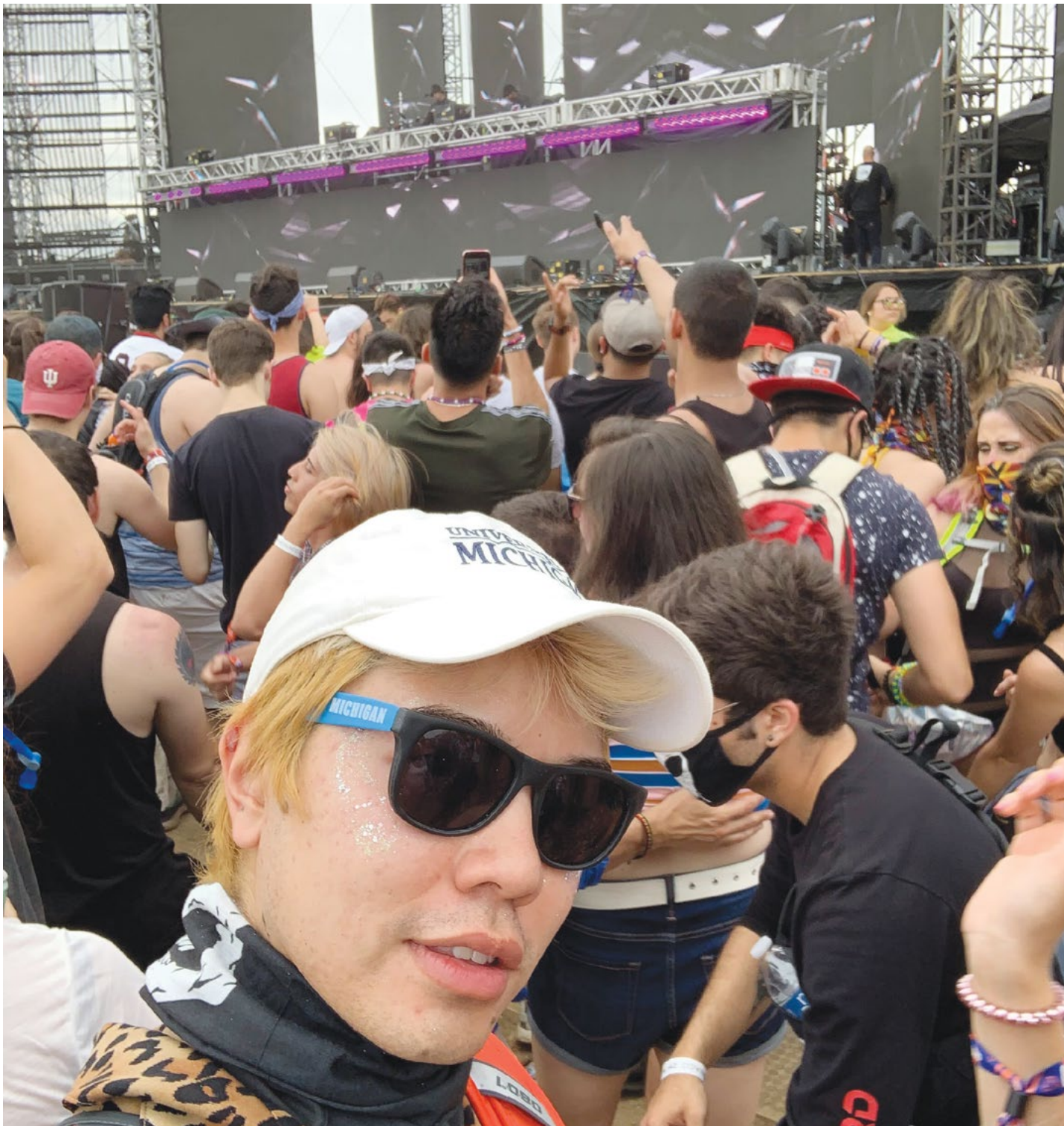
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Colin Thanh raving with friends at a recent Illenium show. Photo courtesy of Colin Thanh

→ Asian Rave Scene

Continued from p. 16

worried about how people would perceive me. Now I'm totally open, and I don't care what people think about me when I'm at a rave."

Thanh's main obstacle to being fully out was body image. As a teenager, he struggled with how he looked. But he found the rave community to be a safe and supportive space to be Asian and queer. "I saw how everybody was so comfortable with their bodies and with their outfits at all these raves and concerts. It made me realize that no one's here to judge on how you look," he says. "That had a big impact

on how I perceived myself, how I learned to love who I am and not to take any crap from anybody else."

Even Thanh's style changed. It was bolder, and the makeup he wore and the glitter on his skin reflected his true self. Then he started sharing beauty tips with fellow ravers. "Now I'm totally OK with going up to someone and saying, 'I really love your makeup; how'd you do that?' It was definitely challenging at first; it's not easy to go up to some random person and just start talking to them," he says. "But now, after having many years of going out and raving, it's second nature to me."

A bisexual Chinese-Singaporean raver from Rochester, Kate Moo could only accept herself

once she immersed herself in the rave scene. "I've known I was attracted to girls for a really, really long time. But I was always a bit in denial about it. I thought this was just a phase," she explains.

Moo's mother is a devout Christian who refused to acknowledge the existence of queer attraction. She felt invalidated by her mother and suppressed her attraction to women for many years. "I thought I was not supposed to feel like that. My mother and father told me that it wasn't real, that you're not supposed to have these feelings and thoughts," she explains.

But then Moo started going to raves as a teenager. She says she was around 15 years old when she found herself surrounded by queer

students and students of color at International Academy, a public high school in Bloomfield Hills. "When I met all these new people, I started going to concert raves and hanging out with them," she says. "I was exposed to way more diverse perspectives. It was a very racially diverse school." Under the bright strobe lights and away from the watchful gaze of her parents, Moo felt free. It made her realize she wasn't alone with her experiences.

Similarly to Thanh, Moo felt accepted and embraced just by watching queer ravers in rainbow gear with Pride flags. It was then that she gradually came out. She started telling her friends about her queerness and attending Pride events around a year after she started raving. Now at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, she feels comfortable casually mentioning her sexual orientation in conversation.

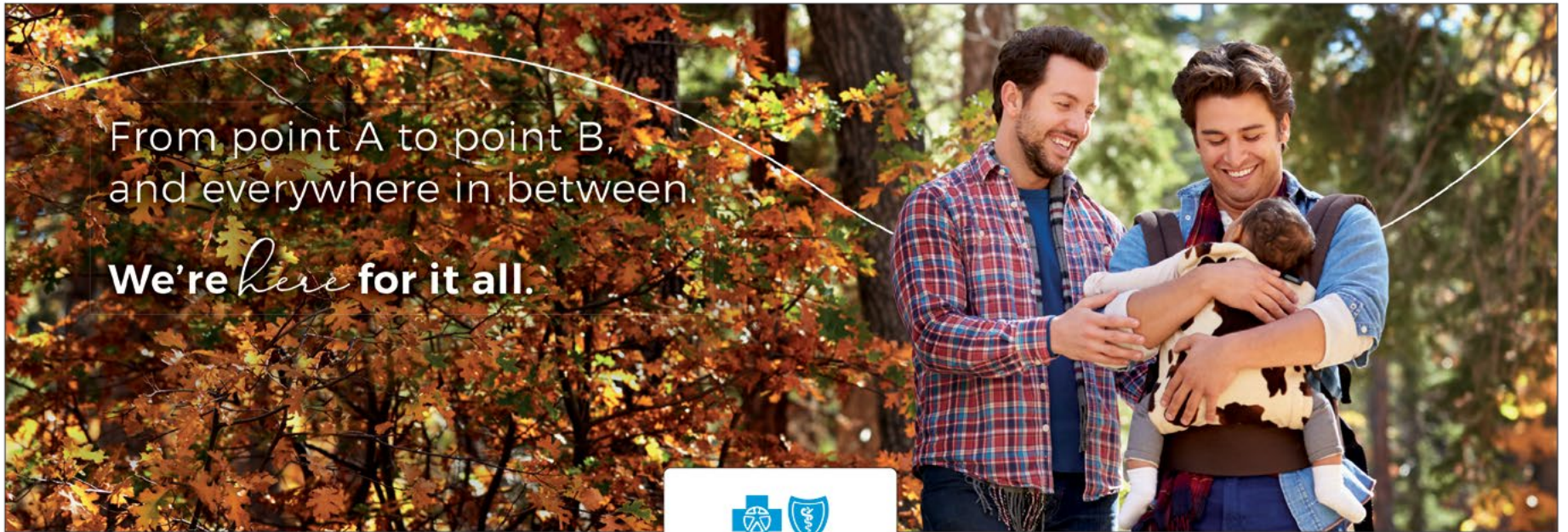
Kareem Khubchandani, an author and researcher who specializes in queer Asian nightlife, isn't surprised that so many queer Asians have been able to find a home within the rave community. "For a lot of people, nightlife is their initiation into queer community. It's a space for people who are exploring their identity and looking for an alternative to the kind of heteronormative life they live," he says. "But for a lot of queer Asians, showing up in a gay neighborhood or a gay bar means often finding themselves in a white space. So there's been a lot of organizing to create alternative spaces for queer Asian folks."

According to Khubchandani, the queer Asian organizers who put on these events tend to plan with more intent around the specific crowd they're hosting. This intentionality is reflected in who is on the guest list, the identities of the night's performers, and the kinds of music being played. Organizers might decide to make an event exclusive to queer Asians and put Bollywood or K-pop on the set list. It allows queer Asians to have a space that is just for them in a world that is dominated by whiteness and heteronormativity.

For Moo, her rave family in high school had a distinct routine every time they went to a rave. Since they were underage and could not go to clubs in Detroit, they would all gather at a friend's place and pregame before driving out to the event. On their way back, they would all go to an IHOP before heading back to Rochester.

Though COVID-19 meant Moo and other queer Asian ravers had to gather together virtually during the pandemic, she's already looking forward to clubbing at Electricity in Pontiac and attending Electric Forest at Sherwood Forest in Rothbury, Michigan. "It sounds like the coolest venue because they hang lights, decorations and artwork from trees," she says. "They're lit up 24/7 during all the weekends of the festival."

Thanh remembers when he went to Movement in Detroit before the pandemic with his rave family and they hung out and bonded on the riverfront. Together with his friends, they watched other queer Asian ravers dance. That alone, he says, was a powerful thing.



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→ Elvira

Continued from p. 10

but the good news was I gained 60,000 people.

And those are people you'd rather have as fans, I'm sure.

Absolutely.

What has the support from the LGBTQ+ community been like?

I did a big book signing last night. I signed between 500 and 600 books and I think many, if not most of the people, were in the gay community. They were like, "Oh my god, we love you more than ever. I didn't think it was possible to love you more. I love you so much now." Everybody there — every single person — was so sweet, caring and loving. They gave me notes that I've been reading today that are just like, ah! Almost heart-wrenching, they're so sweet and kind. The love last night was like I've never had before at any appearance that I've made with my fans. So I'm thrilled.

How did you manage to keep this relationship and your sexuality a secret for so long?

[Laughs.] I don't know! I have this very inner circle of friends who I told, and they were shocked, but they quickly got over that and [are] very, very loving and accepting, of course. And then I have a little farther out circle of friends who I didn't tell, and they are really good friends, but I never told [them]; I'm sure they all just suspected but didn't say anything. Because T is always around me. You know, she's fairly androgynous — some people might call her butch. I don't really call her butch. I think she's more androgynous. But we're together all the time. It was funny; somebody was saying, "We were at dinner this time and I remember T reaching over and brushing some crumbs [off you]" — I always drop all my food on my chest, let me tell you — "and I thought, oh, that's very friendly of her assistant." But they said, "You know what? Yeah, we had our suspicions about it." But I don't know. She works with me as my assistant and has for all these years, and traveled with me on the road. It's funny,

before me, she used to travel as an assistant for Mickey Rourke a few years ago. That's something nobody knows. She was even his sparring partner when he was boxing! [Laughs.] And now she's my sparring partner. We don't even box; we just spar.

But I don't know how we managed to do it. Honest to God, when I go to signings or conventions and all of that stuff, she's right next to me, working away. I don't think anybody ever suspected 'cause they know, uh, what a gigantic horndog I am and Elvira is and they just thought, "No, that's not possible."

Now that you're publicly out, does this mean that there are more lesbians lusting for Elvira than there were before?

Who knows? It's so funny, I haven't even thought about that. Maybe I'm gonna start getting tons of fan mail from lesbians. But you know, I always have. And I always have quite a large crowd of lesbians come to see me when I make appearances and stuff. Yeah, I don't know if they're going to think I'm available now, 'cause I'm not.

Sorry, ladies.

In a relationship!

What is it about your sexuality that led you to conclude that you're pansexual or sexually fluid, as you've said?

Yeah. I don't know. I mean, is it possible to just turn that way when you're like 50 years old? I don't know what happened. I certainly didn't consider myself that my whole life. I was always with men. But I did have a penchant for gay men, I'll tell you that. Most of my boyfriends throughout my life and most of my relationships were with gay men, and they were basically straight relationships.

I actually thought of myself as a gay man — I really did, my whole life. I swear. I feel like a gay man, and that's why when I dress up as Elvira, I feel like I'm doing drag, which I absolutely am. There's no difference between me and a drag queen, except for tucking. And I don't do that. Saves me a lot of time and pain. But yeah, I hung out with so many gay men, that I finally just felt like I was one. So now, I'm a gay man in a relationship with a woman, so what does that make me?

I guess whatever you want it to make you.

Yeah. I know. I'm confused! [Laughs.]

The book beautifully explores these relationships that you had with gay men throughout your life. I mean, so much of it is devoted to those relationships, in fact. What was it like revisiting these special bonds you had with your gay friends?

Probably the closest and, you know, heaviest relationships I had in my life were with gay men. And probably still are. My closest friends in the world are gay men, and I love talking about it in the book because they were so, so dear to me. We were so close. I mean, my friend, John Paragon, who without him I would not be the Elvira I am. And my friend Robert [Redding]. John Paragon wrote everything with me for 27 years, and Robert Redding designed my look and my outfit, and he was my closest friend.

I mean, I just had gay men guiding me through my whole life, and writing about it was really, really fascinating. But the sad culmination of it was that almost all of them are dead, and mostly because of AIDS. That was one of the hardest things to write about in my book. It just crushed me. I couldn't even get through a paragraph without sobbing and going outside and breathing, and then coming back in and sitting down and writing about it again. I mean, everybody I knew just died. Young, handsome, healthy guys. They were in the prime of their life. I just think young gay men — nobody understands what that time was like. I mean, imagine getting Covid and you are gonna die from it, period, end of story. There is no way to get better. You get it, it's a death sentence, and you die within just a few weeks. People just can't imagine what that was like. I was scared to death. I was so scared for every friend I had.

As I was reading the book, I was thinking to myself how hard it must've been to go back through the grief and trauma of that.

Oh, just gut wrenching. Barely could get through it, really. People have asked questions about the book and go ... "then the AIDS



Young Cassandra Peterson. Photos courtesy of Cassandra Peterson

epidemic came along." I can't even talk about it, I start sobbing. When I read for the audio tape for my book, when I got to the part about AIDS, I couldn't get through it. I started sobbing my eyes out. I had all these people [in the studio] waiting on me, I couldn't get through it. I had to leave. I had to go in the bathroom and cry for about 30 minutes non-stop, sobbing my brains

out, and then pull myself back together and go in and try to read it again. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. Talking about it, I couldn't handle it.

What's next for you? Any interest in another sitcom?

Oh, I wish. I would love to. My next steps that I really wanna concentrate on are three things: I want to do a documentary, kind of based on the book, and I would love to do a biopic with another actress playing me. Maybe a six-episode thing, or a film.

See *Elvira*, page 34

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Aut Bar Has Closed. But Its Spirit Lives On.

Owners Reflect on 25-Year Run: 'I Feel Like We Really Did Do Something That Was Special'



Braun Court reflecting through an Aut Bar window months after the bar closed. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Twenty two years ago, Ann Arbor resident Debra Miller came out at age 44 after a long marriage. The first LGBTQ+ space she went to was the Aut Bar.

“When I came out, I didn’t realize how difficult it would be to feel safe or feel comfortable,” Miller tells BTL. “The first experience [at the Aut Bar,] I was scared. Who’s going to see me there? I was a teacher. I was afraid I was going to get in trouble.”

She did not know what to expect.

“I had this kind of question: What are these people like? They must be odd. And so when I went to the Aut Bar and was having a meal, I was a little sheepish at first, and then after a while I felt like, ‘Oh it’s okay. Oh, these people

are a new normal,” she says. “They’re not odd. They are very giving and loving and caring, and they just love somebody of the same sex.”

She adds, “By going there, that alleviated a lot of my fears.”

And, like so many since the Aut Bar’s opening in 1995, Miller became a regular at what became a staple of LGBTQ+ community in Ann Arbor.

“People were starved for a good LGBT place,” Keith Orr recalls. Orr and his husband Martin Contreras owned and operated Aut Bar in 1995. The only places geared toward LGBTQ+ people in Ann Arbor at the time were The Flame, which is where Orr and Contreras met, and the Nectarine, which was a dance club with a twice weekly LGBTQ+ night.

“There had never been a gay-owned LGBT place in Ann Arbor, so when people heard we

were doing this, there was a lot of excitement,” Orr says, recalling that they would get frequent phone calls asking when they would open while they were still waiting on permits and other city business. While they wanted to eventually have a grand opening, their plan was to have a soft launch so that they could get a feel for things.

“On the day we did that soft opening, it was a little crazy,” Orr says. There were last minute touch ups on paint and other housekeeping issues.

“We’d gotten one call that morning asking when we were going to open,” he says. Orr told the caller that they would be open that night.

“We made no other announcement; there was just this one phone call, and we were mobbed,” Orr remembers. “The equivalent of going viral back then.”

Part of the excitement was around the Aut Bar’s ethos.

“We weren’t looking to recreate a bar of the time,” Orr says. “In 1995 a gay bar tended to be kind of circumspect. If there were windows, there were shades on them because God forbid someone would see who was in there. So we kind of threw that out the window.”

Even the name of the bar was an attempt to reflect that open spirit.

“We went through about 200 different names trying to come up with a name for it, and none of them seemed appropriate,” Orr says. “A friend of ours said, ‘It sounds like you’re trying to celebrate being out — just call it the Out Bar.’” They used a phonetic spelling to make the name more unique.

“Shortly after opening, it was great to see the

joy in people's faces when they walked in and kind of sharing in our vision of "We deserve something better, this is something better for everyone to enjoy," Contreras recalls.

Unsurprisingly, when the Aut Bar staff announced the bar would be closing for good in 2020 after being shut down temporarily for the pandemic, many people found the news hard to take. That includes Orr and Contreras, who retired from the business in 2019, selling it to the Bar Star Group. They certainly didn't expect the Aut Bar to close up shop so soon.

"We created a little gay hub in the middle of Ann Arbor that had not existed," Orr says. "It's sad for us that it closed because it was not only a legacy of the LGBT community but a legacy of what we created in that community."

Contreras is also disappointed.

"There is a void now that Aut Bar's closed and the bookstore Common Language is gone, and Jim Toy [Community Center] has moved out of its space [in Braun Court]," he says. "And it's sad to see that. I'm hoping someone will step forward because there is a need for our community to have a gay-owned gathering place."

But don't look to Orr and Contreras.

"We used to sit there on a really busy night and sit in the corner and watch the buzz and the laughter and the music and people," Contreras says. "I would sit there and look out and say 'Keith, I really love the space and love the bar. If only we didn't own it. Because I know how much work went into keeping that vibe going.'"

The job was very demanding and the couple couldn't take time off together. Not even for their wedding.

"We got married in that little 24-hour window in March of 2014 before the [marriage equality] case went up to the Supreme Court," Contreras says. They were one of more than 300 same-sex couples to get married that day in Michigan.

"There's no guarantee of what's going to happen at the Supreme Court," Orr remembers thinking. "Take advantage of it while you can."

But they had to hurry. Not only was the window during which they could get legally married in Michigan short, but Orr and Contreras had to go to work.

"It was a crazy morning that wedding day because we still had to do morning brunch at the bar," Orr remembers.

They were the fifth couple married in Washtenaw County.

"We had to then run over to the bar, and fortunately the staff had covered for us setting up for brunch," Orr says. He was on the floor waiting tables, telling customers about an item on the menu "that was homemade in our kitchen," he says. "I said, 'By my husband of about an hour

ago,' and the whole dining room clapped and cheered."

In fact, Aut Bar played a very important role in celebrating not only that one day in March, but also in June 2015, when news came down that the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of marriage equality.

Debra Miller remembers that day. She was in the process of breaking up with her partner.

"I got a text from a friend that said, 'Oh my God, the decision came down,' and it was so surreal because [my partner] and I had talked about getting married at one point," Miller says. "I was sad, and I was confused, but I felt like [Aut Bar] was a place I needed to be during the celebration."

Terry McClymonds, who started as a bartender at Aut Bar in 1997 and worked there until it closed, was working that day.

"The most memorable day was the day of the marriage equality decision in the Supreme Court," he says. He'd been inside making drinks "and had just the vaguest sense of what was going on."

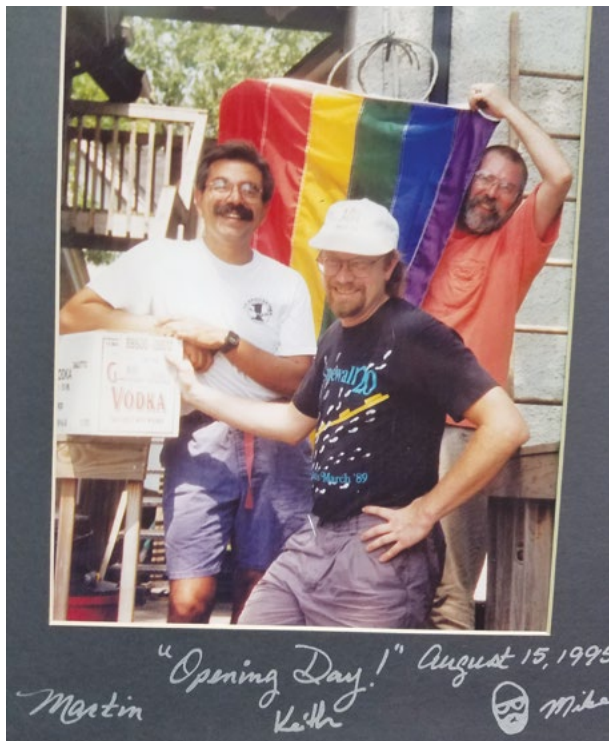
It was "a momentous day," he says. "Only when it was over did I remember what I'd lived through, and I was so proud and so happy."

Aut Bar was a place that witnessed a lot of change in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. "We live certainly in a better world than the one '95 when we opened, but it's still not a world that has completely accepted the LGBTQ community," Orr says.

Contreras says he still hears from people in passing or from close friends that Aut Bar was their first gay bar experience or that they met their life partner there.

"Those are the times when I feel like we really

See **Aut Bar**, page 26



Aut Bar owners Martin Contreras and Keith Orr an hour before their "soft" opening, which Orr says was "anything but soft." They're joined by Mike Tice, one of the founders of the organizations that became HARC. Photo courtesy of Keith Orr



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(Top) A candlelight vigil held in Aut Bar's famous courtyard after the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016. (Right) Aut Bar's courtyard after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality. Photos courtesy of Keith Orr

→ **Aut Bar**

Continued from p. 25

succeeded in doing what we set out to do," he says. "It was always a very safe and welcoming place for people to meet for the first time or meet with friends or go on a first date, so when I hear those stories I really feel like we really did do something that was special."

Orr says he will always remember the many people who brought their parents to the Aut Bar. "We saw a lot of that because, of course, one of the times people come out is after they move out of [their] home," and with Ann Arbor being a college town, there were always young people



on their own for the first time. "This was a way of showing [their parents] they could be part of a positive community. And that happened on so many occasions, and people would talk to us afterward and tell us how much they appreciated that they were able to do that."

Aut Bar was not just any other bar, Chino Connell, who worked at Aut Bar as a bartender

and general manager over the years, tells BTL. "There's a lot more to it when it comes to a gay bar. Yes, it needs to be profitable," he says, "but the community service side of it, you cannot value it. You really can't." In other words, the connection between the Aut Bar and the people it served is priceless.

While the bar may be closed, its spirit

remains a repository of community and personal experiences.

"Every single person that ever went to the Aut Bar has a story about it, and it was really a place where people met and fell in love," Connell says. "That was it. So, so many stories, relationships, just all around experiences."

And it was a place of welcoming.

"I can remember you could see how scared [people] were when they walked into the building [for the first time]," he says, "and I, of course, was the very first person that all of these people talked to and it really gave me great joy to welcome them with open arms: 'You have found a place of community. You will not be judged here.'"

And that is Aut Bar's legacy, made possible by Orr and Contreras: two men looking for a place to belong and thrive who ended up giving such a space to the entire community.

"Martin and Keith worked so long and so hard to create a beautiful place for people," says Ann Arbor Mayor Christopher Taylor. "I'm so grateful for what they've done."

Meanwhile, Orr and Contreras are enjoying, but still adjusting, to retirement.

"I have these Aut Bar dreams where we're slammed and we don't have enough supplies," Contreras says.

But mostly the couple are able to do things they never had time to do before, like making food just for themselves.

Contreras still makes bread pudding using his grandmother's recipe, the same recipe he used at the Mexican restaurant they ran for nine years before converting that business to the Aut Bar in 1995.

His grandmother didn't write the recipe down. "I had to make many batches until it tasted like I remember as a child," Contreras says. "Back in the day I had to figure out how to go from four servings to 30 servings."

Now he is working on scaling the servings back down to four.

Contreras is also enjoying working in the garden. Orr, who used to play string bass in a symphony, is practicing his music again.

"One of our jokes has been: 'You know they say that you can never really catch up on missed sleep, but we're gonna try,'" Orr

says.

Clearly, retirement suits the couple.

"Keith and Martin are local heroes to the community," McClymonds says. "They've worked very hard, and they deserve the rest that comes with retirement."



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Caregiving and Bereavement: Does the LGBTQ+ Community Need Stronger Support?

One Out of Every Three LGBTQ+ Adults Serve as Caregivers

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Acting as primary caregiver for a dying parent is a heavy burden for anyone. Martin, who preferred not to use his last name, assumed that role for his mother after outliving his own cancer prognosis by 20 years. Yet Martin remains remarkably upbeat while candidly discussing his experiences giving and receiving care.

From the start, Martin felt the responsibility of caring for his terminally ill mother fell to him because he was single. “There seems to be a lot of families that treat their LGBT children differently than their [heterosexual,] married children,” said Martin, a gay man “of a certain age.” It was assumed he had fewer responsibilities. “They’re from the heterosexual-normative lifestyle, and they’re used to the thought, that my family is different, my family doesn’t really exist.”

Being gay was “undiscussed,” Martin said. And because he didn’t have a partner at the

same time that his mother was sick, Martin was left to pick up the slack.

“That included making meals, visiting her every day, spending hours helping her to get dressed, undress, go to the bathroom — doing the things caregivers do,” Martin said. When she entered assisted living during her final months, Martin visited her every day, keeping her company and “making sure her life was easier,” he said.

Bile duct cancer is rare, and in Martin’s mother’s case, particularly aggressive. Martin said he felt fortunate to have those six months caring for his mother because “all the things that had gone unsaid were said.”

Perhaps Martin was such a dutiful caregiver to his mother because he recalled his own experience dealing with cancer alone when he was diagnosed in 1999. For one thing, he didn’t share much about it with his family. With LGBTQ+ people, “family members don’t necessarily know or want to know what’s going on,” Martin said.

“They did not realize how sick I was,” Martin continued. “And me being who I am, I did not tell people. I would just go to my chemo...drive myself for blood transfusions, do all sorts of things that most people actually have caregivers for, like cleaning the house — even though I am sick as a dog. Because I have to... Because there’s no one else to do it.”

Martin did have a network of friends he could rely on for some things. “Being a gay guy of a certain age, my lesbian friends were very supportive,” he said. “But there’s a difference between being supported in doing things and being a true caregiver.” He said they made his life easier, but it wasn’t until he cared for his mother that he realized how much work was involved in caregiving.

For the purposes of this article, “caregiving” is defined as providing unpaid emotional, physical and sometimes financial support to a sick individual: In general, ensuring that everyday needs are met. Some research suggests caregiving became common within

the LGBTQ+ community during the HIV/AIDS crisis due to stigma surrounding the illness.

Among the LGBTQ+ community, caregiving is far more common than many realize. Data from a 2014 study by the National LGBT Cancer Network reveals one out of every six U.S. adults serve as unpaid caregivers to a sick adult. The rate is nearly double for LGBTQ+ adults; one in three serve as caregivers. There are many factors at play. For example, among older LGBTQ+ adults, there is an increased likelihood of living alone and being single, and a decreased likelihood of having the support of children.

Whether it’s a single LGBTQ+ person caring for an aging parent or a chosen family caring for a friend, the scenarios Martin described are not unique. Like Martin, Lauren Corneliussen identifies as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and was a caregiver to a dying loved one. But unlike Martin, Corneliussen, who is nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns, lost their partner. Tragically, they were high school

See **Caregiving**, page 32

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Queer People Die Too, So Take Note of This Handy 6-Step Checklist for Planning Your Estate

Plan Ahead — Otherwise, the Wrong Person May Decide Your After-Death Wishes

BY JACKIE JONES

You don't want to think about it, but you and your loved ones are going to pass away. When it's your partner, you're going to have to handle both the grief and the after-life arrangements. So why not start estate planning now to relieve some of the burdens and stress that come with death?

While the conversation about estate planning

seems bleak, it's also a necessity. This is especially true during a global pandemic, where COVID-19 has taken almost 730,000 lives (and counting). For the LGBTQ+ community, having an estate plan is even more crucial. Reports conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have all confirmed that our community is at a greater risk of COVID-19 illnesses.

HRC reported that "17% of LGBTQ adults do not have any kind of health insurance coverage"

and that "23% of LGBTQ adults of color, 22% of transgender adults and 32% of transgender adults of color have no form of health coverage."

Beyond healthcare issues, it's crucial to get a handle on legal issues related to death.

"If someone is married to their spouse, a lot of things are going to be taken care of, but for those who aren't in that situation, it's so important to have those documents in place," says Jay Kaplan, ACLU of Michigan's LGBT rights project staff attorney.

Are your affairs in order? Because there's no time like the present. Here's a 6-step checklist for estate planning, tailored to the LGBTQ+ community.

1. Get life insurance

You may be surprised to find out that life insurance is relatively affordable. Depending on the term policy, your health status, residence and

income, you can get a quote as low as \$20 a month.

There are two main policies to choose from: term and whole life. Term insurance only pays out if the passing happened during the policy term, typically one to 30 years. And whole insurance, you may have guessed, is paid out whenever you die. Should you or your insured loved one pass away, some funeral expenses, business debts, taxes and more can be covered.

2. Designate a beneficiary

A beneficiary designation written into an insurance policy or financial account determines who will receive specific assets when the designee dies. Designating a beneficiary will save your loved ones a great deal of uncertainty — this official documentation can even override a will. So if you name an ex-partner on a financial account but neglect to update it to your current partner, then the ex will have legal control over that account once you pass away.

3. Create a power of attorney

A power of attorney (POA) is a notarized document that gives a designated person the authority to act on your behalf in legal matters — effectively, the designated person “becomes” you in order to access bank accounts, make medical decisions, handle real estate transactions and many other activities. For the LGBTQ+ community, it’s important to have a notarized POA especially if your support comes from a chosen family rather than a blood family.

“If you don’t have a healthcare power of attorney even though you’ve been with a partner for 40 years, that person will not be able to make decisions

for you,” explains Angie Martel, an Ann Arbor-based attorney. “That means, [the state] may go to an estranged person that you haven’t seen in forever, and that person will be making decisions... as opposed to the people you’ve chosen to spend your life with or the people who’ve supported you.”

Michigan’s state website offers several POA forms. You may need to research which type of POA is appropriate for your specific situation.

4. Write out an advance healthcare directive (a living will)

While this is similar to a POA, it does have important differences. A living will is a written

document that explicitly states your wishes if something happens to you. It focuses on your preferences concerning medical issues and/or treatments. Living wills and POAs go hand-in-hand so be sure these documents are consistent with one another. For example, if you designate a POA, be sure to mention in your living will that your preference is to have that person make decisions on your behalf. That way, the people around you will have a clear path forward based on your desires, even if the documents are reviewed separately.

5. Make a will

You definitely want to write out a will, no matter your age, because this document details how you want your property and assets distributed. When drafting a will, speak to an attorney well-versed in estate planning law. They will handle the process for you. But, while this makes the process easier, it also makes it more expensive. Using online forms is a less costly option. However, if you choose to draft your own will in Michigan, you may want to include a self-proving affidavit and get it notarized so that the probate process can move faster.

6. Assign temporary guardianship

For those who have children, assigning temporary guardianship is essential when planning your estate. If something were to happen to you, you want to make sure you have a trusted guardian taking care of your child or children, even for a short amount of time. It should be noted, though, that a temporary guardian doesn’t have any legal authority. Unless they go through the official process of becoming legal guardians, they won’t be able to oversee any of your child’s health, finances or legal decisions.





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→ Caregiving

Continued from p. 28

sweethearts and Corneliussen was left an unmarried widow/er in their 20s. Today they are 28.

But don't call Corneliussen brave. "Alex hated being called brave," Corneliussen said, referring to their partner, who was bisexual and used they/them pronouns. "Because of my age, everybody expected me to bail," they said. But Corneliussen stayed by Alex's side until the end.

As Corneliussen recalled, it was around 2015 that Alex said to them, "My tongue hurts a little bit." He delayed seeking treatment. And after the first doctor misdiagnosed him with a sexually transmitted infection, a proper diagnosis and treatment were delayed even further.

That's one thing that can be called "typical" in Alex's case: Research has shown that when someone has one experience of healthcare discrimination, they are three times more likely to postpone care in that year. By the time he did receive a proper diagnosis, he was facing stage 4 cancer. And Corneliussen was faced with being a caregiver. It helped that Alex had a supportive family, but they didn't live nearby.

Corneliussen feels fortunate they were able to participate in Alex's medical care within the health

system. "For the record, my partner presented as male and I presented as female," Corneliussen said. "And so we were able to pass as heterosexuals and cisgender people through the medical system in a way that constantly benefited us."

Corneliussen remarked that they were always shocked by how often they were able to enter rooms and get privacy notices waived by simply stating they were Alex's fiancée. And while that enabled Corneliussen to make life-saving decisions for him, it was painful to feel forced to lie about their identity to participate in their partner's medical care. "I would say that the way that queerness affected us had more to do with distrust of systems, distrust of the medical system," Corneliussen said.

Caregiving can be complex, and as Martin and Corneliussen's stories illustrate, it can be especially fraught for LGBTQ+ people. Whether family dynamics or discrimination by the healthcare system is at play, LGBTQ+ caregivers and those going through the grieving process often find appropriate support is lacking or hard to find.

Forrest Hosea is tackling a piece of the puzzle. Hosea, who uses they/them pronouns, works in the office of Cancer Health Equity and Community Engagement at the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute. Martin and Corneliussen are members of the LGBT Cancer Action Council (CAC)

that Hosea facilitates, which brings together cancer survivors, caregivers, advocates and representatives from community-based organizations. Throughout Michigan, the Karmanos Cancer Institute has eight different CACs based on geographic location or racial or ethnic identity.

"[The CACs'] knowledge and experiences are super vital in creating this targeted research and programming to improve cancer outcomes in our local communities," Hosea said.

The importance of caregivers can't be overstated. "There's a lot of studies that show that without a cancer caregiver, cancer patients tend to not do as well [in] treatment," they said. "They tend to have a less likely success rate of recovering."

The group is working to tailor a previously successful cancer caregiver and patient support program to support LGBTQ+ people, with an emphasis on LGBTQ+ cancer caregivers. Because there are fewer support programs specifically focused on such individuals, the LGBT CAC members have made this a top research priority.

Hosea described how the healthcare system sometimes falls short when it comes to LGBTQ+ cancer caregiving. They said CAC members expressed a desperate need for LGBTQ+ education and understanding in cancer care providers. Specifically, there is a need

for providers to be able to combat their own negative biases towards LGBTQ+ people. Hosea said this can be seen in body language or insensitive comments.

"If they're already experiencing discrimination from their providers, even just in these subtle, subconscious ways, it's very unlikely that the patient or the caregiver would be willing to actually talk about any other medical or mental health issues that they're having," Hosea said.

Hosea emphasized the LGBT CAC is not itself a support group, although positive feedback from group members shows it is having a positive impact on their journeys. They said members have described the group as "cathartic" and feel that their caregiving experiences are being put to a good use.

"We're doing a lot of really good work," Corneliussen said. "I like to make sure that people know about it so that once we get things running off the ground more and more and more, more people can be helped."

Martin added, "There's a lot more stuff you can do and be proactive in your care and in caring for someone else. That was the amazing thing [about] the Cancer Action Council for the people on it. It's very healing also, 'cause you [can] discuss things that go unsaid."

The CAC has been beneficial for Hosea, too.

"I love being able to work with other queer and trans folks at the top of all things because, as a trans and queer person myself, I can at least relate on the level of worrying about health care discrimination," they said.

Corneliussen noted that "dying is so much logistics" and that end-of-life care can be particularly complicated for LGBTQ+ community members. There are variables like wills and funeral arrangements in an environment — whether legal or familial — that doesn't always recognize LGBTQ+ relationships.

Since Alex passed, Corneliussen has found support in the form of Facebook groups. They said they belong to "about 50" and haven't felt a need to seek out LGBTQ+ specific ones.

"They've all been surprisingly very welcoming to LGBT people: young widowers, as well as unmarried widows," Corneliussen said. "Something that we had a lot of concern about was the people being able to establish the legitimacy of our relationship after his death, and I was happy to learn that there is a large unwedded widow community."

Other virtual options include chat

rooms and forums on websites like Grief in Common. Founder and grief coach Karyn Arnold pointed us to one of the group's many online forums, LGBTQ Loss. Arnold runs six-week programs for those who have lost a partner, but not an LGBTQ-specific program. She said she is open to ideas and feedback about offering additional support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Online communication isn't everyone's cup of tea. An in-person group, printed guide or a website with links to resources is a better approach for some. The Alzheimer's Association has a page dedicated to LGBTQ+ resources, for example. SAGE USA offers numerous downloadable guides and caregiving factsheets in PDF form, and the AARP offers a "Prepare to Care Guide."

Judy Lewis is the training and education manager for SAGE Metro Detroit, which serves the aging LGBTQ+ adult community through training, advocacy, programs and information. Lewis recommends numerous guides and directories that could benefit older LGBTQ+ caregivers; the main hurdle, she said, is getting them into people's hands.

The free SAGE Metro Detroit "2020-2021 Rainbow Resource Guide for LGBTQ Older Adults" provides listings for inclusive businesses and services, such as community centers, senior housing and advocacy organizations and indicates which organizations have nondiscrimination policies inclusive to LGBTQ+ people.

The organization also offers a Friendly Caller Program to combat loneliness and isolation.

For those who do seek out support, finding visible allies can be an obstacle. "My whole function over these last several years is to create an army of allies," Lewis said. "So that's what SAGE's total function is: to spread the word that there are a lot of allies out there, and there are a lot of resources out there."

When Lewis was asked whether Affirmations LGBTQ Community Center or SAGE might one day offer a group specifically for LGBTQ+ caregivers or for those grieving the loss of a loved one, she said she couldn't imagine why not.


"Because of the partnership that we have with Affirmations, and how open they have been to welcoming ideas for older adults, I can't see why there would be any issue in terms of a live discussion group or bereavement group."



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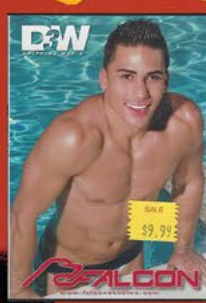
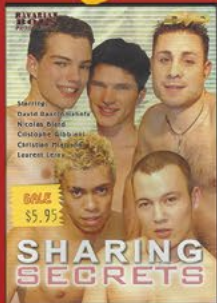
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Cassandra and her girlfriend, Teresa "T" Wierson. Photo courtesy of Cassandra Peterson

→ Elvira

Continued from p. 22

I'm thinking about who might play you. Can we get Dolly Parton?

Ah! You stole my joke, man! [Laughs.]

No way.

Oh my god, we're all on the same wavelength here. Everybody used to say to me, "If there was a biopic of your book, who would you want to play you?" And I go: "Dolly Parton."

I mean, there's really nobody else.

I know, right? And the third thing that I would really love to do, and I've thought about this for so many years, is a Broadway play of "Mistress of the Dark," the movie. I just think it would be so awesome. Kind of along the lines of "Hairspray" or "Legally Blonde," the Broadway plays of those. And have it be a musical, and obviously somebody else would play me, but I just think it would be a really uplifting, really fun musical for Broadway. So I'm gonna start working on all of those projects. I actually have a meeting today already for the documentary. I actually have so many production companies coming to me right now asking to do the documentary.

I have to ask you about Halloween, obviously.

Oh, god, yes. Halloween is coming up. I mean, I think this has been the busiest Halloween I've ever had. I've been booked up, and basically have done my Halloween projects for TV and stuff — those are all in the can and finished. So who knows, I might get to stay home on Halloween.

Please tell me you'll pass out candy as Elvira then. Or that you have before!

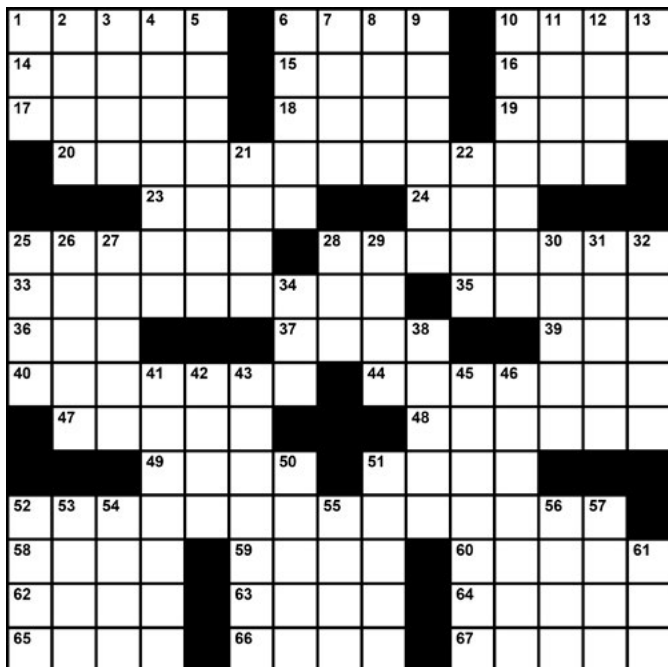
One time I did it. It was the weirdest thing. I have never, never, never been home at Halloween in 40 years, but one night in the

mid '80s I went home. I think I did "The Tonight Show" with Joan Rivers. I ran home and stopped there for a few minutes to do something before I headed out to Knott's Berry Farm where I do my live show for Halloween, and I forgot it was Halloween night and the doorbell rang. I just ran over to the door and threw it open and there are these stunned little trick-or-treaters. And more stunned than them were their dads who were standing behind them. You should've seen their faces. I had no idea it was Halloween night because, yeah, obviously in October, every night is like Halloween to me. So I was like, "What are they doing there?" But the kids were in costumes, so I'm like, "Is it Halloween? Oh my god." And I didn't have anything for them, so I ran to my purse and I gave them dollar bills. So stupid.

As the Queen of Halloween and now an out member of the LGBTQ+ community, what kind of light can you shed on why you think Halloween is so popular among queer people?

It is, and let me tell you, the gay community obviously had a huge, huge influence on taking Halloween from a pretty much strictly kids' holiday, which it was when I was a kid, to an adult holiday. I mean, I used to go to Santa Monica Boulevard on Halloween night in Boystown every single year and have this huge party with everybody in costume. But I think it's a little bit like getting in drag. It's so fun, and you can be somebody else for a night, and it's OK. It's so freeing, and you know, the gays, they love to dress up in costumes. And there's nothing like a gigantic gay party on Halloween night. No other straight parties come close to that.

And I just think that gay people are more open to dressing up and being somebody else and looking fabulous than your general straight crowd, you know? Everything there is — the masquerade balls, the carnivals — the gays are the ones who are the heads of it. They're the ones who are the leaders; they're the ones who do the best costumes and have the best time. It's just a born-in thing. [Laughs.]



- 28 Pirate's telescope
- 33 More of the quote
- 35 Egyptian president Nasser
- 36 Having one sharp, to Schubert
- 37 Facetious "I see"
- 39 Family school org.
- 40 International Mr. ____
- 44 More of the quote
- 47 Shuteye
- 48 Sap suckers
- 49 Dame of the piano
- 51 Debussy's deity
- 52 End of the quote
- 58 Food thickening agent
- 59 Rob of "Brothers & Sisters"
- 60 Otherwise
- 62 "Ed Wood" role
- 63 Kind of stimulating
- 64 French composer Erik
- 65 Gertrude Stein's "Wars I Have ____"
- 66 Monster's Loch
- 67 Fairy tale character
- 10 "Billy Budd," for one
- 11 Nonheterosexual conception
- 12 Faint, with "over"
- 13 Unusual power
- 21 Ogled a hottie in a bar, e.g.
- 22 Diana of "The Avengers"
- 25 Make water bubble
- 26 Dr. Weaver portrayer Laura
- 27 Old enough for sex without arrest
- 28 Gag order
- 29 Jack in Mexico
- 30 Theater prefix
- 31 Satisfied fully
- 32 Puts in stitches, like Wanda Sykes
- 34 It gets laid in some streets
- 38 Sign in Frasier's booth, perhaps
- 41 Capital of Iran
- 42 Dickens's Uriah
- 43 Delta follower
- 45 Swordsman that doesn't penetrate
- 46 To date
- 50 Barber manuscript, e.g.
- 51 Twosomes that fight
- 52 Hunter and namesakes
- 53 "The African Queen" author
- 54 Curly-leafed veggie
- 55 Christmas poem opening
- 56 Not taken in by
- 57 Comedic straight man
- 61 Address book no.

Spencer

Across

- 1 Cut
- 6 Sex toy for the butt
- 10 "Just do it" brand
- 14 Squirrel's snack
- 15 First name in lesbian fiction
- 16 Sapphic poems
- 17 Humdinger

- 18 Morales of "La Bamba"
- 19 Lincoln's Johnson
- 20 Start of the two people that Lady Di had to be, per Prince Charles, in "Spencer"
- 23 One-night-stand partners
- 24 Up to, for short
- 25 "God Bless the Child" singer
- Holiday

Down

- 1 Queen in "Romeo and Juliet"
- 2 "Johnny Mnemonic" actor
- 3 He cruised for 40 days straight
- 4 De Vil of "101 Dalmatians"
- 5 Go to el?
- 6 Part of the media
- 7 Santa's got a long one
- 8 Nevada neighbor
- 9 Homosexuality?

See p. 14 for answers

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