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REMEMBERING

OUR HERO JIM TOY

'KEEP MISBEHAVING': AN LGBTQ+ ICON'S LEGACY LIVES ON

By Tim Retzloff

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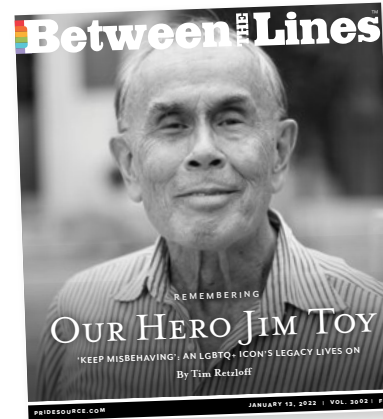


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- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 'Gentlest But Most Unshakeable Campaigner' Jim Toy, Michigan LGBTQ+ Trailblazer and Icon, Dies at 91
- 8 Marquette Diocese to LGBTQ+ Catholics: No Sacraments for You
- 9 Detroit Native Michelle Brown Has Found Her 'Forever Home' at Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice
- 12 Phoenix Rising in Pontiac as City Gets All New Council with LGBTQ+ Community Members
- 14 Viewpoint: I'm Not Mad ... I'm Disappointed in Jussie Smollett
- 15 Creep of the Week: Internet Preacher's Hate Speech Drowned Out With Metal
- 16 Here's What Affirmations Is Doing to Protect Staff and Guests Against Omicron Surge
- 18 Gay Sex After 50: MSU Researcher on a Mission to Normalize, Promote Sex at All Ages
- 22 Bridget Everett Takes on Small-Town Queer Family



6 COVER STORY

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Photo: Paramount

'Retro Sex Kitten' Grand Rapids-Based Drag Queen Earns A Spot on 'RuPaul's Drag Race' Season 14

By Jason A. Michael

Former Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield Accused of Sexual Assault

By Ellen Shanna Knoppow

A Community in Mourning: Michigan Politicians, LGBTQ+ Orgs Honor Jim Toy's Activist Legacy

By Jason A. Michael

5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY JACKIE JONES

2022 is bound to offer new beginnings, fresh awakenings and, hopefully, less Trump talk. In short, expect a lot of change. However, one thing will remain the same: people are still here and queer. To celebrate this new year queerly, check out these five things you can do right now.

Engage in Queer Conversations at Affirmations

Looking to regroup after the holidays? Queer Conversations at Affirmations is an in-person and virtual support group that "creates possibilities" for people "who are stronger together," according to Jeffrey Olivier, the group's facilitator. As an intersectional group, "This group is open to everyone," says Olivier, "regardless of who you are." Participants collectively decide on a topic and discuss it casually at every session. The group meets at noon every Saturday.

For more information, email info@goaffirmations.org.



Photo: Detroit in Broadway

Laugh Your Way Through Hairspray at the Fisher

The world has got a million shows for you to choose from, but you'll walk a little taller after experiencing Broadway's "Hairspray." Or whatever the original quote was. Anyway, find out for yourself when the Broadway and Tony Award-winning musical comedy "Hairspray" returns Jan. 18-30 to the Fisher Theatre. Join 16-year-old Tracy Turnblad in 1960s Baltimore as she dances her way onto the most popular TV show. This all-new touring production will reunite Broadway's original creative team, led by Jack O'Brien and choreographer Jerry Mitchell. "It's a brand-new world we find ourselves in today, and 'Hairspray' is even more relevant than 20 years ago when it first burst onto the scene," said O'Brien in a statement "...We cannot wait to raise the various roofs once more with dance, joy, music and that glorious, famous, energy-packed score."

Purchase tickets at BroadwayInDetroit.com.



Photo: HBO

Catch the New Season of 'Euphoria'

Be careful. This could be a spoiler! Season 2 of HBO's trippy, Emmy-winning TV show "Euphoria" returned Jan. 9. Get caught up and watch as its 17-year-old lead, Rue, played by Zendaya, balances high school, sobriety, sexuality and family expectations. Rue's best friend, Jules, played by Hunter Schafer, who is transgender, has Rue questioning her sexuality and testing her sobriety. Surrounding Rue are other high school students also navigating love, sex and trauma in our modern era.

Episodes air at 9 p.m. every Sunday on HBO and HBO Max.

Remember the Life of Betty White with One Last Film



Betty White was a legend. An icon. And a long-time advocate for the LGBTQ+ community. As such, it's only fitting that we all celebrate her life one last time on film. This Jan. 17, on what would've been her 100th birthday, come out to watch "Betty White: A Celebration." This film draws from her final interview, examines her career, and provides insights into the most important aspects of her life. In addition, hear testimonials from celeb friends such as Ryan Reynolds, Carol Burnett, Valerie Bertinelli, Jennifer Love Hewitt and more. Select theaters are participating in the exclusive showing.

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Share Queer Stories at Queer Family Storytime

There's nothing more wholesome than queer families coming together for a queer storytime. CADL South Lansing Library knows this to be true. For that reason, after a hiatus due to Covid, they've brought back their popular Queer Family Storytime event. "We really want to create a safe space for [queer families] to connect and share reading materials," said facilitator Seoung Kim. The free event, for ages 6 and up, is from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Jan. 14.

For more information, reach out to CADL South Lansing Library.

Due to Omicron and the recent surge of Covid cases, events are more likely to be postponed and canceled last-minute. Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.

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Activist and icon Jim Toy watching on as Michiganders celebrated the historic victory for marriage equality in Ann Arbor's Braun Court on June 26, 2015. Photo: AJ Trager

'Gentlest But Most Unshakeable Campaigner'

Jim Toy, Michigan LGBTQ+ Trailblazer and Icon, Dies at 91

BY TIM RETZLOFF

On April 15, 1970, at a large demonstration held in Kennedy Square in downtown Detroit to protest the war in Vietnam, Jim Toy became perhaps the first person in Michigan to publicly come out as gay. A year-and-a-half later, Toy co-founded what was then called the Human Sexuality Office at the University of Michigan, the first campus office in the United States that aimed to serve those we've come to call lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

At a time when LGBTQ+ people faced harsh attacks to their very being from legal, psychiatric, religious and educational authorities, Toy set an example for others to resist social animus, live honestly, and pursue justice. His life's work continued in the decades that followed.

Jim Toy, tireless activist, advocate and gay force to be reckoned with for more than half a century, died on New Year's Day at the Hillside Terrace Retirement Community in Ann Arbor. He was 91 and had been living with dementia and declining health for many months. His close friend and caretaker Scott Dennis was at his side shortly before he passed.

Former Jim Toy Community Center board member Kerene Moore announced the news on one of Toy's two Facebook pages.

James Willis Toy was born April 29, 1930 in New York City to James Toy and the former Imogen Hamblen. His mother, a missionary teacher of Scotch-Irish descent born in Japan, died soon after childbirth. His father, a World War I veteran of Chinese descent, worked as

a chemist and had once been on a research team for famed inventor Thomas Edison, only to be fired when he and other assistants attempted to concoct some home brew in Edison's laboratory.

In the early 1930s, young Toy moved in with his maternal grandparents in the small town of Granville in rural Ohio, 30 miles northeast of Columbus. During a TED Talk at the University of Michigan in 2012, Toy recounted growing up on a farm, joking that they had only candles and kerosine lamps. His father soon remarried and moved to Granville as well.

According to a biography Toy provided to the LGBTQ Religious Archives Network, the entry of the U.S. into World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor brought him face-to-face with racist harassment from high school classmates who responded negatively to his Chinese-American heritage. To protect himself from assault, he was compelled to don a cardboard placard around his neck to proclaim he was not Japanese.

Toy excelled in his studies, graduating with the class of 1947 from Granville High School and being named valedictorian after a year at Licking County Joint Vocational School. He went on to earn his B.A. in Music and French in 1951 from Denison University, where one of his classmates was actor Hal Holbrook.

After a stint teaching high school English in France for the French National Government, Toy worked as a clerk for a hospital blood bank in New York City. The job fulfilled his alternate service requirement as a conscientious objector in lieu of serving in the U.S. military.

It was in New York that Toy faced inklings

that he might be homosexual. "Growing up in a time when sexual orientation was not discussed, I felt confusion, isolation, shame, despair," he told *Between The Lines*, Pride Source's print publication, in 1998. "I didn't know that I was anything but a suicidally unhappy heterosexual person. A gay man in Manhattan took me under his wing and began helping me understand that I was in a closet."

In 1957, Toy moved to Detroit to take a job as organist and choir leader for St. Joseph's Episcopal Church. A year later he became heterosexually married to a woman named Janet. They divorced after seven years, though remained friends.

Toy enrolled in the School of Music at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1960 to pursue a Ph.D. in musicology. He formally achieved candidacy in 1970 but did not complete the degree. "It was clear I had no vocation to continue a musicology program," he said in a WRAP newsletter profile in 2005.

He earned his Master's in Clinical Social Work in 1981.

Retired librarian James Kangas met Toy not long after Kangas started at the Music School in 1966. At first somewhat casual friends, their friendship grew over time even when Kangas moved to Chicago and later to Flint. The two bonded over music and culture, attending University Musical Society concerts, playing together in a chamber music quartet with Toy on violin, and traveling to Stratford, Ontario to see plays.

"He was very possibly the most brilliant man I've ever known and a great eccentric," Kangas shared with BTL. Kangas got to know a more intimate, playful side of Toy, albeit still guarded. "He would crack witticisms, as it were," Kangas said.

Most people, however, knew only Toy's public side and that public side emerged from his longtime activism.

As Toy often observed, the 1960s were "radical times" and he was deeply influenced by the multiple movements that emerged from the social tumult.

Six months after the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York, while typing the church bulletin, Toy learned about a "gay meeting" to be held at St. Joseph in January 1970. Toy attended the initial meeting of the Detroit Gay Liberation Front and volunteered to serve as its secretary. That March, he became a founder of the Ann Arbor Gay Liberation Front.

A month later he spoke on behalf of GLF in solidarity with the burgeoning anti-war movement at a large rally in Detroit. According to FBI surveillance documents and Detroit Red Squad files released through the Freedom of Information Act, some of the organizers resisted allowing a gay speaker, but GLF persisted and so prevailed in being included in the program.

"I can remember that being a very scary experience for me. I can remember being hot, literally hot and cold at the same time," Toy remembered in a 1994 oral history interview. "But I got up there and said what I had to say."

As recorded in a surviving draft of the speech, Toy called on gay people to "join in the struggle

to end this war." He urged the others gathered to "put an end to sexual chauvinism and to support our movement for gay liberation."

Toy called attention to linkages between sexual and gender freedom and other fights for social justice. He also challenged the hiddenness and silence that defined so much of queer life up to that time. When most of society still considered homosexuality criminal, sinful and sick, the speech was an act of courage, and it marked a major turning point for gay visibility in Michigan.

In the ensuing months, Toy and other Gay Lib activists challenged some of the highest echelons of society. The Ann Arbor GLF demonstrated against UM president Robben Fleming in June 1970 for refusing to permit use of campus buildings for a gay student conference.

Then, after Bishop Richard Emrich evicted the Detroit GLF from St. Joseph's, activists disrupted the annual Episcopal Diocesan convention in November 1970. Toy was denied an opportunity to speak to the assembly as Emrich gavelled the meeting to an early close. However controversial, GLF's actions may nonetheless have impacted Emrich because the bishop subsequently appointed Toy a founding member of the Diocesan Commission on Homosexuality, a group that went on to issue a landmark 1973 report, one of the earliest U.S. church documents in support of queer people.

In November 1971, members of the Ann Arbor GLF pressed the UM Office of Student Services to hire paid advocates to serve gay and lesbian students similar to paid staff the university had for Black, Chicano and women constituencies. In turn, Toy co-founded, with Cyndi Gair, what is now the Spectrum Center, the first campus office for LGBTQ+ affairs in the country. The hiring of Toy and Gair as UM's human sexuality advocates attracted national attention. Conservative writer Russell Kirk decried the new office as catering to the "farthest shores of lust."

Far less about lust, the office pioneered educational outreach, counseling and programming for queer students that persists through to today.

Toy was a constant gadfly within the wider institution, helping to foster a 20-year effort to amend Regent Bylaw 14.06 to include sexual orientation as a category within the university's non-discrimination protections.

At first quarter-time, the gay male and lesbian advocate positions were made half-time in 1977 and, with the hiring of Billie Edwards, full-time in 1987.



In a 1990 Ann Arbor Observer profile of Toy, his cherished friend Billi Gordon marveled that he survived so long on a part-time salary, living in an efficiency apartment and wearing second-hand clothes. "With the talents he has, if he were more selfish, he could be off in a large mansion someplace with boats and cars,"

Gordon said. "Instead, he chose to serve others."

While Toy helped make inroads over time, UM Law School alum Bill Dobbs suggests the creation of the office may have also muted oppositional energy that might have spurred sooner change. Dobbs met Toy in the mid-1970s when both were active in GLF and involved in Ann Arbor's first gay community center. "He was a central figure in LGBT matters for decades," Dobbs said of Toy. "At the same time Jim was very conscious that he was on the payroll of the University of Michigan and he played cards close to his chest."

Toy held his job with the office until 1994, when UM administration reorganized what was then known as the Lesbian and Gay Programs under a single director with Dr. Ronni Sanlo hired for the position. Toy moved into a staff position with the university's Affirmative Action Office.

He retired from UM in 2008.

His mantra was "Keep misbehaving." From the 1970s onward Toy remained a dedicated instigator beyond UM as well. When Ann Arbor became the first city in the country to formally recognize Gay Pride Week in June 1972, Toy co-authored the proclamation.

A month later, with Human Rights Party council members Jerry DeGriek and Nancy Wechsler, Toy helped draft Ann Arbor's landmark ordinance that prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Though pioneering, the ordinance might have gone further in its protections. As the Ann Arbor Sun reported at the time, Democrats joined with Republicans to "deny transvestites and transsexuals equal protections."

Undeterred, Toy and others would continue the push to safeguard the rights of transgender citizens for the next 27 years. In 1999, he and Sandra Cole succeeded in securing a revised ordinance that included gender identity as a protected category.

His history of actions included a "zap" of the Rubaiyat nightclub to protest the bar's ban on same-sex dancing and a picket of the American Psychiatric Association convention to demand it remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

Strategic in his activism, Toy's career as a gay organizer aligned with milestones of the Michigan LGBTQ+ past in the last half century, with Toy always involved, if not front and center then taking part in the rear guard.

Issues of faith held a special place for Toy. Along with serving on the commission for the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, he worked with Bishop H. Coleman McGehee to achieve greater inclusion within the church. Decades later, Toy helped begin Oasis TBLG Outreach Ministries, a project of the Diocese initially housed at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor.

The Reverend Joe Summers, currently vicar of the Episcopal Church of Incarnation, served as staff person for Oasis from 2007 to 2018. He witnessed a shift in attitude toward Toy within the church, given that he'd "stirred up so much controversy early on." By the 2010s, Toy was heralded for his commitment to inclusion and to racial justice.

"Jim was always looking at the intersections of different kinds of oppression," Summers said, noting that it was Toy who insisted that transgender people be foregrounded in the TBLG in the ministry's name.

As more mainstream churches have become more accepting, Toy's work with Oasis has been carried on by Inclusive Justice, a statewide interdenominational coalition of faith communities. Toy served on its board until his death.

Toy participated in the founding convention in 1977 of the Michigan Organization for Human Rights, established in response to fears that Anita Bryant would bring her anti-gay "Save Our Children" crusade to Michigan. MOHR was precursor to the Triangle Foundation, which later merged with Michigan Equality to form Equality Michigan.

He served on the ACLU Committee on Lesbian Women and Gay Men, which in 1979 successfully prodded the administration of Republican Governor William Milliken to rescind Michigan's liquor regulation that prohibited bars that were "rendevvous for homosexuals."

When the AIDS pandemic emerged as a mortal threat to gay and bisexual men, Toy

See **Jim Toy**, page 20



Marquette Diocese to LGBTQ+ Catholics: No Sacraments for You

Once Again, the Leadership of the Roman Catholic Church Is at Odds with the Queer Community

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

“Frankly, I was sickened.”

That was Marianne Duddy-Burke’s response to “Created in the Image and Likeness of God: An Instruction on Some Aspects of the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Dysphoria,” a 15-page document that outlines new guidance issued by the Marquette Diocese, the Roman Catholic body that oversees Michigan’s entire Upper Peninsula. Duddy-Burke is executive director of Dignity USA, a national organization that advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Not only does the ruling ban all transgender and nonbinary Catholics from receiving sacraments unless they “repent,” it also affects any individual living in a sexual relationship outside of a heterosexual marriage. The sacraments in question may include baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion, as well as anointing of the sick.

It’s believed to be the most severe ruling regarding LGBTQ+ Catholics of any diocese in the U.S.

While the policy was issued in July, it didn’t come to light until LGBTQ+ Catholic advocate Fr. James Martin wrote about it on Twitter in December. Signed by Bishop John Doerfler and Diocesan Vice Chancellor MaryAnn Bernier, the guidance refers to LGBTQ+ people as “persons with same-sex attraction” and “persons with gender dysphoria.” “It is best to avoid identifying persons merely using labels such as ‘gay’ or ‘transgender,’” it reads. Duddy-Burke points out this is not the kind of language anyone in the queer community would use.

“It’s a demonizing kind of label,” Duddy-Burke said. “It makes our identities into some kind of an illness. It’s very pejorative.”

Duddy-Burke agreed that fear of a rapidly changing culture may be part of what’s driving the ruling. The bishops in the U.S. preside over a Church that’s lost anywhere from 30 to 50

percent of its adherents in recent decades, “and rather than reflecting on what’s causing the people to turn away from the church,” she said, “there seems to be this knee-jerk reaction to say, ‘If only people understood our teaching better. If only we live our teachings more purely...’” When it comes to women’s equality, LGBTQ+ issues or anything having to do with sexuality, Duddy-Burke called many parts of the Catholic Church “ill-equipped” to address the realities of people’s lives.

While we can’t know Doerfler’s mind, we do know his history. In a 2010 deposition, Doerfler admitted to destroying documents related to priests accused of sexual abuse. His actions, reportedly done in compliance with federal privacy laws, occurred before his appointment to Bishop of the Marquette Diocese by Pope Francis in 2013.

Additionally, in his conclusion to the new guidance, Doerfler recounts his previous experience as a chaplain for Courage International, an organization that advocates for celibacy among LGBTQ+ Catholics. It is based on a 12-step recovery model. Some chapters promote conversion therapy. Doerfler states, “I am inspired by their faith and desire to live chastely. It was one of the most joyful and meaningful ministries that I had as a priest, and a true exercise of spiritual fatherhood.”

There is widespread criticism against the practice of withholding sacraments as punishment for apostasy. In response to that issue, Pope Francis in September said he had never denied the Eucharist to anyone.

“This thought that if someone is not proclaiming adherence to church teaching, you can exclude them from sacraments has some traction in the highest level of church leadership in the U.S.,” Duddy-Burke said. “And I find that very disturbing.”

‘Do we stay or do we go’

Renee Richer is similarly disturbed by the latest communication from the Marquette Diocese. Richer, an assistant biology professor who lives on a family farm in Gladstone, is also a married lesbian with a 10-year-old daughter in Catholic school. Generously supporting the local Catholic school and parish is a family tradition.

“Being LGBTQ and Catholic in the Upper Peninsula is really difficult,” Richer said. “There are other Catholic communities that are certainly more welcoming. I feel that the Marquette Diocese — and our Bishop in particular — has embraced a vision of Catholicism that loses the vision of Christ.”

Richer said she feels “pigeonholed” into certain others’ ideas of what it means to be LGBTQ+. Instead of being viewed simply as the active church members and good neighbors that they are, “We’re being set up as not being Catholic and not being Christian, and it’s disappointing,” she said.

The situation has led to some troubling questions for Richer and her family. She said now she wonders whether she’s welcome at her church and whether she should continue bringing her daughter to Mass.

While Richer said her church experience had been challenging all along, the dynamic really changed when she married.

“Shortly after I got married, [Bishop Doerfler] came to the church and while I sat in the pew, he gave a sermon on gay marriage,” Richer said. “And I looked around and wondered if that was specifically targeted at me. I could only guess it was.”

According to the ruling, “Parents and those taking the place of parents are to be informed that the children will be instructed according to the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexuality...” In her own experience of Catholic

education, Richer said it was “really a school of amazing love and amazing community.” Now she calls it divisive. Her daughter has nightmares and fears she will burn in hell.

“We try to present a vision of Christ that’s more accurate,” Richer explained. “The person that stood up for the poor and the marginalized and the sick, and who was welcoming to everybody and loved everyone, regardless of their faults — that is what we try to present in the household.”

Presently, it is unknown whether Richer would receive sacraments because her family is avoiding all gatherings due to the risk of Covid. They haven’t yet made a decision about the future with their church. “We sit around the table all the time and ask: ‘Do we stay or do we go?’” she said.

‘God is everywhere’

In 2014, Bobby Glenn Brown was faced with a dilemma similar to the one Richer’s family faces today. A Marquette-area vocalist and actor, Brown is also known for launching the LGBTQ+ student union at Northern Michigan University when he attended in the 1980s. Brown converted to Catholicism as an adult, soon thereafter joining the parish council and choir at St. Michael’s. But when church “busybodies” caught wind of the commitment ceremony he celebrated with his partner of 30 years, word got around.

“The next Sunday I went to church just like I always did,” Brown recalled. “[The pastor] stopped me and asked me about my fake wedding. And told me that I was no longer able to minister in any way: no more singing, no more cantoring. I should resign from the parish council and that if I wanted to participate, I could sit in the crying room with the children

See **Catholic Diocese**, page 13

Detroit Native Michelle Brown Has Found Her 'Forever Home' at Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice

Internet Radio Host Plans to Highlight Queer BIPOC 'Change Agents'

BY JACKIE JONES

Detroit native Michelle Brown was recently welcomed onto the board of directors at Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice, an LGBTQ+ community activist center and educational bridge. The New Jersey-based center, whose mission, in part, is to “inspire community” and “communicate acceptance,” is named after openly gay Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin.

Brown, host of the internet radio show “Collections by Michelle Brown — Blog Radio,” follows that mission while highlighting mostly BIPOC voices. On her weekly show, which airs every Thursday at 7 p.m., Brown recognizes and celebrates the lives of those standing “boldly in the crosshairs of their intersectionality and creating change as they move through life.” While spending some time with her cat Pancake and listening to Earth, Wind and Fire, Brown sat down with BTL to have a virtual chat about her new role.

How does it feel to be a part of the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice?

It feels like I found my forever home. The folks at Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice and I have developed a relationship over the past couple of years. Particularly [Robt Seda Schreiber], who is their chief activist, but also a lot of the board members have become friends. [Robt] calls me and says, ‘Hey, how you doing?’ If we’re working on a project, we talk about it. As they faced Covid and were talking about pivoting, I was there. I was like, ‘You guys don’t know it, but I think I’ve been on the board for a while.’ Actually, there are a lot of things [Robt] doesn’t think about doing unless he talks to me. But, also, the people who are on the board are phenomenal, and to be in that company is great. It’s sort of like being that one kid that was always coming over, like the adopted sister, and now Michelle’s a part of the family. Well, I was always part of the family.

What do you hope to bring as part of their board of directors?

I hope to bring more of what I’ve been bringing. I help them do a couple of programs that really focus on queer BIPOC voices, and



to really lift that up more. I work with a lot of people who are from all over the country, so it has been really exciting to sort of like bring those people to Bayard. I do what I do once a week, and they do “Social Justice Power Hour!” every night. [Sometimes] I’m able to bring some people who maybe they haven’t heard of. I had a fellow who was originally from Nigeria, who was a poet and entrepreneur, and I brought him [on the show]. I think that I bring different voices because of what I do. We’re able to share things. If I hear of an author who’s incredibly amazing, then I’ll tell them and they’ll put them on their [Power Hour].

I [also hope to]... highlight people who are change agents. I think [board members] give people an idea of what Rustin Center is about while also talking about people who are living that work. As a young Black queer girl, I never heard about us. We can be community activists or social justice activists, but that queer part was always in the closet. And Bayard Rustin faced that. I mean, he was part of the March on Washington, but he had to take a back seat because of who he was. You really have to bring your full self to it. By bringing your full self to it, we are those angelic troublemakers that Bayard talked about. He talked about how that’s our role. To come in there and fight for social justice.

What does this new role entail?

In part, it involves talking about the center, promoting the center, supporting some of the work they did. We have done things remotely last year, the year before, to help build BIPOC programs. We’ve done virtual Pride when

See **Michelle Brown**, page 16

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BIKTARVY is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in adults and children who weigh at least 55 pounds. It can either be used in people who have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements.

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- ▶ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- ▶ **The most common side effects of BIKTARVY** in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

These are not all the possible side effects of BIKTARVY. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking BIKTARVY.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

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- ▶ This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
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Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit BIKTARVY.com.

 **GILEAD**

Pontiac Gets All New Council with LGBTQ+ Community Members

BY CRYSTAL A. PROXMIRE

“Started from the bottom; now we here.”

Incoming councilperson Melanie Rutherford chose the popular Drake song lyrics as part of her swearing in speech Sunday, Jan. 2. Rutherford is one of seven new Pontiac councilpersons after voters made a clean sweep of City Hall this election, selecting Tim Greimel to serve as mayor and seven city council first-timers.

Though they’ve not served on council before, each of the incoming officials comes with a strong background of community involvement and leadership — working their way from community volunteers and advocates to the positions they now hold.

Among them is the city’s youngest councilperson ever, as well as two out and proud members of the LGBTQ+ community. Several of the new officials have experiences in other offices or positions in community organizations that will help as they work together to bring Pontiac out of economic struggle.

The community often uses the symbol of the Phoenix for inspiration, a brave, bold bird rising from ashes. And as Pontiac rebuilds an economy decimated by the closing of factories, emergency management by the state, and the challenges of differing personalities working together, Sunday’s swearing in at the historic Strand Theatre served as a symbol of hope.

In District 1, Melanie Rutherford is ready to hit the ground running. Rutherford has served as the Secretary on the Pontiac Library Board, and has worked as a Training Ambassador at Next Education and Homeless Assistant Specialist at AmeriCorps. Currently she works for United Way, helping connect people with resources and support. In her speech, she thanked her team and shared the songs that inspired her, including Drake’s “Started From the Bottom.” On her campaign website she wrote, “I’m proud of my Pontiac roots and I want to make our community a place every child can be proud of growing up in.”

Brett Nicholson now represents District 2. “We were sworn in as a council on January 2nd. As one of Pontiac’s first LGBT council members, I felt it important to celebrate this moment for our community by inviting the first LGBT circuit court judge in Oakland County, Jake Cunningham, to deliver my oath of office,” he said.

Nicholson is the owner of Liberty Bar, a longstanding gay bar in Pontiac’s downtown. He’s also been active in Main Street Pontiac, a group dedicated to the downtown’s success. “I’m proud to report that Pontiac could not be in better hands,” he said. “We have a unified interest in progress, a unified commitment of collaboration, and diversified backgrounds that will serve the city in a way we have never seen before.”

When asked about his priorities, Nicholson said, “The previous administration has left us with not even 50 employees for a city of 60,000



Photo courtesy of Crystal Proxmire

residents. I’d like to focus on ensuring our city is offering excellent benefits, competitive salaries and an atmosphere where they can thrive. When our city employees are well taken care of, they will be able to provide more and better services to our residents.

“It is important to me that when a person wants to make Pontiac their home or locate their business here, that we are known as a thoughtful and welcoming community. The bureaucracies and hurdles that exist will be something I know we will be taking a sharp look at.”

The youngest councilperson in Pontiac’s history is Mikail Goodman, representing District 3. Though still in college, Goodman had already been volunteering for community efforts and campaigns. “I know this is a leap of faith for many of you who voted for me. I appreciate all of the time you took to listen to me and the opportunity to earn your vote,” he said. “There is a lot of work to be done.” He added that he will continue to listen to the residents.

In District 4, the newest councilperson is Kathalee James, who has been involved in Pontiac since moving there in the 1960s. She graduated from Oakland University in 1969 and was a member of one of Pontiac’s first civil rights youth groups, the Pontiac Organization of Black Youth. Prior to coming to Pontiac, she was also a member of the Savannah Chapter of the NAACP and she attended the 1964 March on Washington with this group and was active in the sit-ins that led to the desegregation of downtown Savannah.

Among her many more recent activities, James is the founder and president of Friends of the Pontiac Parks Association, where she continues to advocate for cleaner, better equipped, safer parks for all Pontiac residents to enjoy. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Pontiac Community Foundation and The Village of

Oakland Woods, and is a member of the Pontiac Sun Time Bank. James told the crowd that she ran on a platform of unity and a desire to “bring our city together.”

“I believe that we are in a very unique time,” James said. “I believe this is our time.”

William Parker, Jr. now represents District 5. He took time to thank friends, family and supporters and to acknowledge that at times the political process has caused splits in relationships. His hope is for people to come together. “I believe in the power of ‘We,’” he said.

Parker is the Senior Pastor of New Springfield Missionary Baptist Church as well as a businessperson with 35 years of experience working for Fortune 500 companies, where he handled multi-million dollar budgets and diverse workforces. Since moving to Pontiac in 2005, Williams has been involved in many groups and activities including Pontiac Parks and Recreation Committee, the city’s Sheriff’s Relations Team, as well as faith-based organizations and civil rights efforts such as the NAACP. Those collaborative efforts put him in a position to work well with fellow officials. “We are not in competition, but in concert,” he said.

District 6 is now represented by William Carrington, who brought with him to the podium a message “of peace and love.” Carrington previously served as President of the Pontiac School Board and of the WeCare Neighborhood Association. He is a mentor to youth and to individuals who have been released from prison and need support. Plus, he’s the Treasurer of Pontiac Panthers, an organization that supports youth football and cheer. “Today is about our youth, who are the future of this great city,” he said. “Today is about every citizen of Pontiac that feels in their spirit the hope on the horizon.”

Mike McGuinness of District 7 basked in

kind sentiments from Congressperson Brenda Lawrence who was among the speakers at the swearing in event. “He loves the opportunity that being in politics gives him to listen and to care. He’s a go-to get it done person and I’m so glad to see him here today. This is one of his dreams,” Congressperson Lawrence said. “I am so proud of you, Mike.”

McGuinness won a write-in campaign, no doubt bolstered by his connections from serving on the Pontiac School Board, including as president and secretary, being chair of the Pontiac Arts Commission, and serving as executive director of the Oakland County Historical Society, based in Pontiac. He has a history of working in politics and government that includes working with Congressperson Lawrence. When he was elected to the School Board in 2016, he became the first openly gay elected official in Pontiac.

Among his priorities are “making Pontiac government more user-friendly for residents and businesses,” “strong collaboration with our new Mayor,” and “strategically leveraging federal, state, and county resources to invest in long-term infrastructure upgrades.”

The mayor and what comes next

Also sworn in on Sunday was Mayor Tim Greimel.

Greimel was a state representative who was the Democratic leader in the house for four years. He previously served on the Oakland County Board of Commissioners where he was Caucus Chair. His involvement and activism has been as robust and broad as the new councilmembers who will be joining him in leading the city.

But as he said, “It’s not about me. It’s not about incoming city council people. It’s really about our collective vision for the great city of Pontiac.”

“Our residents have high expectations, as they should,” Greimel said. “Our residents recognize they deserve the same high quality parks, the same amazing senior centers, the same facilities as those in our neighboring communities.

“They recognize they deserve to have their snow plowed on time and their roads fixed. They deserve an accessible and accountable city hall. They recognize they deserve to have blight cleaned up and addressed in their neighborhoods. And they recognize they deserve safe communities where nobody has to face down daily bouts of gun violence.

“And they also recognize that as we bring investment to Pontiac, that we need to make sure all Pontiac’s residents benefit from that rising economic tide. So our residents understand that they deserve more, and we are going to work tirelessly to make sure they get services and the quality of life they deserve.”

The changes won’t be easy, or happen overnight, but Greimel said that he and his transition team are ready to begin taking on those tasks.



→ Catholic Diocese

Continued from page 8

and observe — not sit in a pew, not able to have Communion.”

What followed was a silent protest by hundreds of parishioners in support of Brown, media coverage, and a letter to petition the Pope.

Still, Brown didn't wish to leave his church. However, “I attempted to try to stay and then had a meeting with the ‘beloved’ Bishop Doerfler and found out that just was not an option,” Brown said. “And my whole point was, ‘You can't take something away from me that I've already done.’”

“When I went through the [conversion] process, everybody in that church knew who I was,” he added. “There is not one person in that church who did not know I was gay.”

Brown pointed out he's accepted at other Catholic churches. “When I go to Las Vegas periodically or other places, there's absolutely no problem. I am welcomed with open arms,” he said.

Perhaps what's saddest for Brown relates to his husband's father, who told Brown he wished his other children's spouses had converted, too. Upon his death, in a letter signed by Doerfler and others, Catholic leaders in the diocese were instructed that they were forbidden to hold a funeral for Brown's father-in-law at a Catholic church if Brown participated. The service was held at the funeral home and gravesite. “One of the things that still hurts me is that man didn't get the funeral he deserved,” Brown said.

In a meeting with the church deacon and Doerfler, Brown was informed that the only way to remedy the situation would be to leave his home, disassociate from his husband and publicly proclaim his chastity.

“I know several people in the same situation I am,” Brown said. “I'm sorry, my ‘most reverend’ Bishop, you cannot take away the sacraments that I have already participated in. God is everywhere, and you don't need a church or a building to believe. It's not a priest or bishop who's going to be with you when you come to your judgment. It's you and God, so hold strong and have faith.”

Duddy-Burke can't say whether the Marquette Diocese is an outlier or if the kind of ruling issued last month will become more commonplace. The Pillar, a Catholic media project focused on investigative journalism, refers to existing drafts of guidance relating to transgender Catholics. According to their report, the Vatican has asked the bishops to hold off on publication because Rome has guidance in the works.

Since the Marquette ruling, the leadership of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan responded in an email to local media stating they were “saddened by the news” from the Marquette Diocese and “We assert and affirm that no one needs to explain themselves: their bodies, their pronouns, and who they love — or meet any other requirement — to be God's beloved.” In a more recent development, Doerfler has agreed to meet with a group of the faithful who petitioned the Diocese over the new ruling.

“It just shows how much your experience of church depends on your geography and who happens to be in charge,” Duddy-Burke said. “And you know, if we believe in a God who is universal and that all of us are following Jesus, these kinds of inconsistencies are incredibly hard to reconcile.”

Sign Dignity USA's petition to tell Bishop Doerfler to withdraw this harmful and exclusionary policy.

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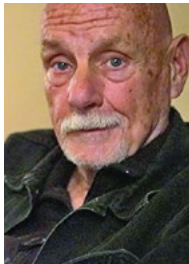
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Gospel 2022 for Mary and Heather

BY CHARLES ALEXANDER



1. In the Year of the Grand Delusion, during the Reign of Rumors of Lost Wars, a decree went out from the Tetrarch of Theocracy, abiding in the Capitol of Divine Cacophony, that all same-sex couples must register, under penalty of biblical banishment.

2. Now Mary, being espoused to her soulmate Heather — in sickness and health, for richer and poorer (but surely richer, as her father was wealthy and cunningly GOP powerful) — deemed it wise that they, once closeted but now of open accord, should journey without fanfare to register.

3. Mary, who was with child — presumably engendered by a handsome, PC, conservative DNA donor — also decided it circumspect to travel without family, servants, or thick-skinned, pachydermal bodyguards.

4. And while the two lovers pondered upon the sojourn, Mary had a dream. An angel in a bright sequined gown with feather boa visited her as she slept a deep untroubled sleep. For Mary knew in her heart of three-decades-plus-five that her life and that of her espoused Heather, of four-decades-plus-seven, was truly about to be blessed.

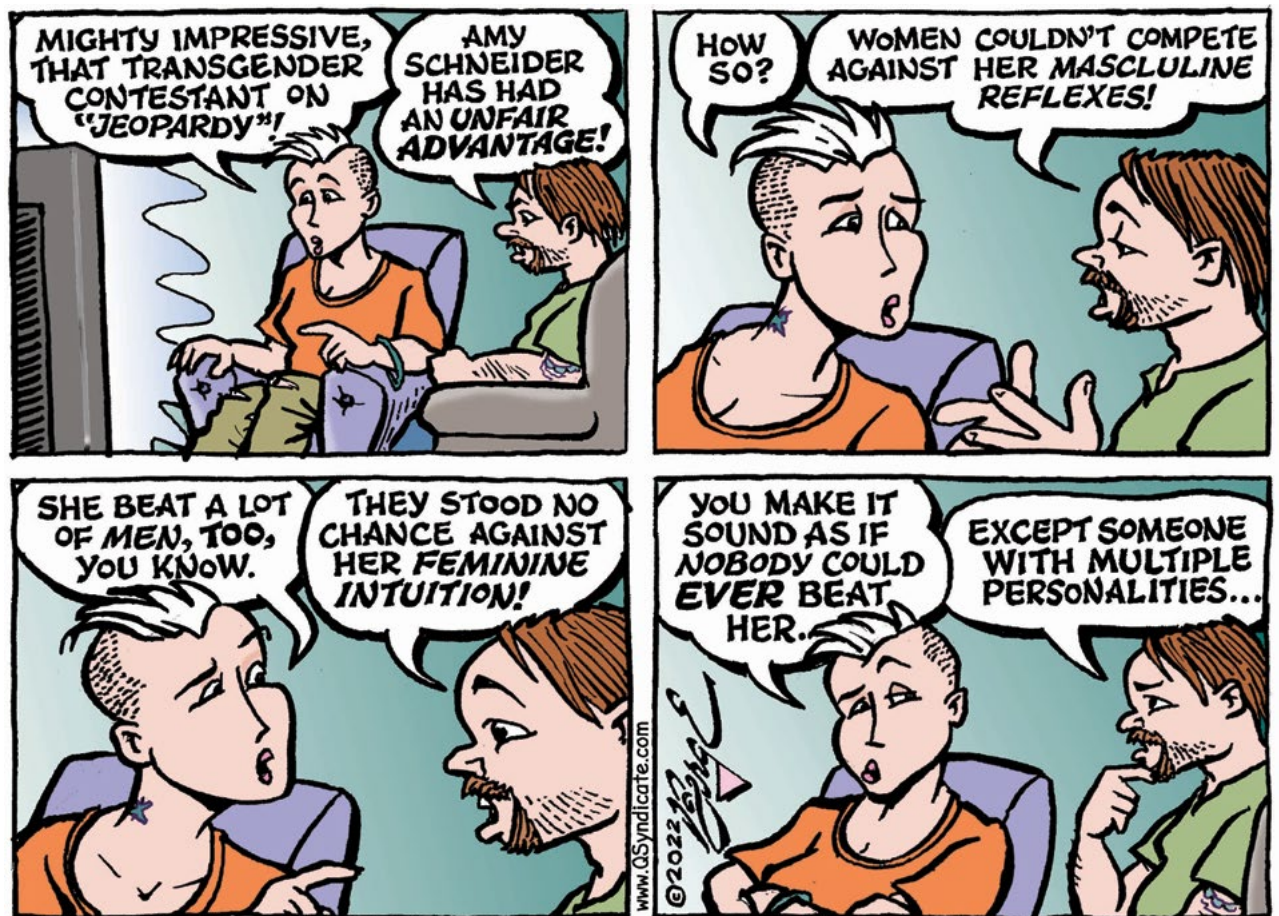
5. This in spite of what benighted neighbors thought, said, and vowed to do unto them if only given half a snowball's chance in Hell (MI).

6. And the Angel of Heavenly Drag said, “Mary, Mary, take things not quite so contrary, but go forth to the Capital of Divine Cacophony, register as required under the Head Count of Those Presumed to Be Faithlessly Heathen. But boldly proclaim your love as worthy, meritorious and tax deductible (even if your father shall be accursed as a backslider by the GOP Tetrarch of Theocracy).”

7. Having had this dream, Mary arose, kissed Heather gently on her forehead as she slept, and fixed herself a glass of warm, homogenized milk. And, lo, it seemed to Mary as she pondered her dream, that in the stately halls of her parent's Domicile of the Prophet Halliburton, not a creature was stirring, nay, not even a mouse. Of all womyn, Mary felt surely most singular.

8. So, full of patience and quietude, the two womyn — technically virgin by standards of Alpha/Omega male, heterodox exactitude — boarded a second-class passenger coach for the overnight trek to the Capital of Divine Cacophony. The Bipolar Express was full of travelers. And

See **Gospel 2022**, next page



I'm Not Mad ... I'm Disappointed in Jussie Smollett

BY CURTIS LIPSCOMB



I rarely watch television. My demanding job is equivalent to a reality television show, so most evening broadcasts hardly entertain me. But there was a time on Bible Study Wednesdays that I did run

home to watch a popular show that caught the nation's imagination. It starred a new, unfamiliar actor whose character I found deeply engaging.

And now I have been asked to write an op-ed on Jussie Smollett, the famed, openly gay, Black childhood-to-adult actor who became a lead character on the hit television show “Empire,” the five-year TV program developed by Black, gay director Lee Daniels.

Smollett and Lee are well-known and get a lot of public attention and

recognition from other people — celebrities I recognize often, who are in the film and television business. Although I am mostly unfamiliar with Smollett's career, his public attraction alongside Fox network programming caught my attention. High five for the out, LGBTQ+ person ... particularly the fact that they are Black!

In my lifetime, the mid and late 20th century has given rise and encouragement to out members of the creative class. I have witnessed heroes showcase freedom like Tony Washington, the lead singer of the Motown Records singing group Dynamic Superiors.

The Dynamic Superiors, an all-Black male band, helped break a barrier for openly gay performers, giving the group a multi-year deal in the 1970s. Washington made music he loved and performed as himself, challenging the status quo when he performed in traditionally feminine clothing.

Another artist from the '80s, Michelle Ndegeocello, a funk, soul and jazz artist, rocked the nation during the Neo-soul period within Black music. As

“Smollett, a hero to some, did a terrible thing. By conjuring up American terrorism, he forces us to think about the cultural ramifications of his actions. He is convicted and certainly will be remembered for this atrocious act; he will pay a price and should expect forgiveness.”

See **Viewpoint**, next page

→ Gospel 2022

Continued from previous page

although Mary & Heather were alone, they saw that many traveling wore about their person telltale ribbons from Life's Coat of Many Technicolors.

9. Hailing a Checkered Cab, the two espoused womyn upon arrival sought refuge in nearby motels. And although Mary's father's platinum VISA was often "Open Sesame," she and Heather found neither room, nor food, nor service, nor kind words wherever they sought lodging.

10. "Two women — shamefully one so big with child — are not welcome here without the wedding band of a father,"

said seven-times-70 pinch-nosed desk clerks. (They belonged to the Union of Sad-u-sees, Scare-a-sees & Naysayers.) "Go walk the straight and narrow," they advised. "But do get lost."

11. After hours wandering lonely streets together, an Angel of Most High Camp and Compassion appeared unto them, pointed to a spangled disco star, and said, "Follow me, guys. I know a place where you can safely party." Holding hands against winter's forbidding cold, Mary & Heather did as they were bidden to do.

12. And so, in a city ghetto of unexpected seasonal warmth and afterglow, they were welcomed by an unwed mom, a stand-in dad, four butch shepherds, three kings (actually queens), six pink sheep, and a smiling, radiant child. Amen and yo!

→ Jussie Smollett

Continued from previous page

an out bi person, she became a hero of expression. Here, we applaud champions who challenge and make us think. Unfortunately, we cannot applaud poor decision-making.

Last month, Smollett was convicted of five felony counts of disorderly conduct for making false police reports after he staged a fake hate crime against himself in Chicago. After much public press and scrutiny, it was found that Smollett reported to the Chicago Police Department a fake hate crime that he had staged earlier that morning to make himself appear the victim of an anti-gay, racist assault because he was unhappy with his salary on "Empire." In January 2019, Smollett had planned the event with two Nigerian-American brothers who had worked with Smollett as extras on the set of the television drama.

I have a job that assists victims of crime, so I take harm against victims seriously. But Smollett's incident was fabricated — a staged hoax meant for fame.

Healing and Support Services is a domestic violence and sexual assault prevention program. Since 2017, LGBT Detroit has operated this program to provide free counseling and crisis intervention for survivors of intimate partnership abuse, sexual violence, stalking, harassment, trafficking and hate

crimes. This is a confidential service open to LGBT+ adults or their loved ones who have experienced violent crime.

What makes Smollett's case even worse is its negative cultural and racial impact. Bias against African-American persons are the highest reported incidents of hate crimes, according to the FBI. And reported violence of homosexuals (male) are listed as the fourth highest category. Hate crime violence is a serious accusation, to say the least.

I celebrate celebrities. I certainly am a fan of most things pop culture: film, TV and song. I also uplift and affirm members of the LGBTQ+ entertainment industry for daring to be open and vulnerable. Even other types of celebrities — infamous and otherwise — receive my attention. I ask those whose profession it is to entertain just be mindful. It is a job ... a job. Primarily that. A career that generates income. Something that most Americans do. I cannot begin to fathom why the need to use historically harmful reminders of the far and near past to become the next "TMZ" headline was the winner's choice.

Simply put: I'm not mad ... I'm disappointed in Jussie Smollett.

Smollett, a hero to some, did a terrible thing. By conjuring up American terrorism, he forces us to think about the cultural ramifications of his actions. He is convicted and certainly will be remembered for this atrocious act; he will pay a price and should expect forgiveness. Let others who seek the limelight recall from him where bad acting can lead.

Creep Of The Week

Internet Preacher's Hate Speech Drowned Out With Metal

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Not sure if you know this, but I am a big fan of heavy metal music. It's not the only music I like, but it's the music I like the best.

In fact, soon after Trump's election, I turned to metal and haven't turned away. I mean, do I get a little choked up if I hear Wilson Phillips' "Hold On" in the grocery store? Sure. But metal is my go-to. It's honestly the only music that makes any sense these past six or so years. Does it help that I'm a goddess lesbian? Of course. Metal is music made to speak to me — no doubt the hours I spend listening to metal are awash in Satanic messages filtered through my subconscious that manifest in me being even more gay.

So when I saw that Internet Preacherman Mike Spaulding had written a piece titled "Democrat [sic] Party is a Wholly Owned Satanic Subsidiary of the Luciferian Globalists," I perked up because I thought I was getting some new metal recommendations. I'm always interested in hearing new things! Except for hate speech. Alas, that's basically what this turned out to be.

Spaulding is upset about all of the usual things like marriage equality, abortion, helping poor people and treating immigrants and asylum seekers like humans. The country is going to hell and it's all the fault of the party that DIDN'T back an insurrection against the government.

Sure, dude.

Honestly? I don't have any patience for it. I'd rather be listening to metal. So instead of reading all of his dumb words, I decided to comb through his essay title for hidden metal messages.

I didn't find a metal band named after the Democratic party, but I did find a punk/thrash band from Singapore called Opposition Party. Of course, when it comes to metal and partying in the U.S., nobody holds a candle to Andrew W.K. His latest album, "God Is Partying," is on my best records of 2021 list, thank you for asking. Andrew W.K. has put out a lot of party songs during the course of his career: "It's Time To Party," "Party Hard," "Party Til You Puke," "Long Live the Party," "The Power of Partying," "Party Mindset," "The Party Never Dies," "We Party (You Shout)," "Big Party" and "The Party God."

I couldn't find a band called Wholly, but there is a band called "Swallowed Whole" from Seattle that plays the kind of black death metal you might crank up loud on Halloween if you want kids to be too scared to come to your house. There's also the song "Wholly Night" by Virginia death metal band Arsis, which Encyclopaedia Metallum warns is "not to be confused with the Christian rock band of the same name from Alaska." Noted!

"Owned By the Ocean" is a song by Boston's The Blackest Deep, a progressive metal band with a nautical fixation and a mix of harsh and clean vocals. Not bad! Will definitely listen to the whole album.

I found LOTS of metal bands with "Satanic" in their names (shocking, I know), but was drawn to a band called "Clouds Taste Satanic," because that's a weird name. They're an instrumental doom band from New York. And on their latest release they do a cover of Elton John's "Funeral for a Friend!" And it's amazing. Am now following on Bandcamp! Thanks, Mike!

There is, indeed, a band named Luciferian. They're a black metal band from Colombia. Black metal isn't my favorite, but they seem to be pretty good at what they do! From what I can tell, they have no affiliation with the Democrats. They do, however, have a self-titled album that came out in 2021 with a song called "Luciferian." So that's "Luciferian" by Luciferian from "Luciferian." Like the Iron Maiden song "Iron Maiden" from their album "Iron Maiden." Fun!

From what I could find there isn't a metal band called "Globalists," but there is a band from Washington State called "Global Warning" and their latest song, released in 2018, is called "Apocalyptic." Feels prescient. If only we'd gotten their warning sooner...

Even if you don't like metal, I hope that this column helped take your mind off of the incredibly fucked up times we're living in and the continued assault on U.S. Democracy by gaslighters like Spaulding. For the love of god and metal, please vote for Democrats. They're not perfect, but they don't hate you. And that's a message worth cranking up to 11.

→ Michelle Brown

Continued from page 9

there weren't things. We've done virtual New Year's Eve. We have brought in voices from all over. We let people know that these programs are available.

You are well known for your internet radio show "Collections," do you see this new role aiding in that? How so?

Often, I'll talk to people and let the Rustin Center know "This is someone you should [put on Power Hour]." I [introduced them to] Nina Kennedy, who is a concert pianist [and] has written a couple of books. To have Nina come on the show and start off playing Rachmaninoff and then go into a hip-hop melody was like, "Wow." I see us [Black queer people] and put them out there. I think that that's important.

I think with Rustin being on the East Coast, they can get in that little box of being on the East Coast. The East Coast is awesome. But there are amazing LGBTQ people who are doing phenomenal things across, with who we can build collaborations with.

What do you have planned for 2022 in regard to "Collections?"

There are some people I'm going to go back and revisit because I know they've been doing something. I'm going to be cross-pollinating with Rustin's Power Hour. I'm going to reach out to people who have been past guests on [Power Hour], who I wasn't ready to do, who I hope to do now. I'm thinking of doing a [woman] panel, where we would talk about something. We could talk about hair, holistic living or how this pandemic has been a time to reset. I find that a lot of people who have been going full speed ahead had to come home to change their mindset... [Also,] I hope to talk about people who're saying, 'I'm here, I'm queer, and I'm doing it.'

How Affirmations Is Protecting Staff, Guests Against Omicron Surge

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Due to the rapidly increasing infection rate of the COVID-19 Omicron variant, Affirmations community center has implemented temporary, additional policies to protect staff and center guests. The changes were prompted when a volunteer tested positive for the virus recently.

"Three staff were in close contact with them," said Affirmations Executive Director David Garcia. "Those staff [members] have all now tested, and two are negative. We are waiting to hear back regarding the third."

Garcia says the outbreak and the rising infection rates sparked a conversation with staff and the executive board committee. "It was decided to take further precautions to help mitigate risks of exposure or infection," he said. "We did not feel it is necessary to return to appointments only or to completely close the doors again at this time."

New protocols include half of the staff working remotely to mitigate any potential spread throughout the Affirmations team. Those working at the center will be staggered throughout the building to limit the risk of exposure. N95 masks have been made available to the staff with a strict mask

mandate continuing for all who enter the building.

"All staff are currently vaccinated," said Garcia. "We decided to stagger the entire team — having half work from home and half from Affirmations and then they will swap next week and continue this pattern so long as necessary. We feel this will help protect against any possibility of a larger exposure affecting the entire team at once."

In addition, facilitators of support and discussion groups have been strongly encouraged to suspend in-person meetings and pivot to virtual technology supplied by the center.

"As for [the] suspension of face-to-face groups being 'strongly encouraged,' we are asking that all of our more than two dozen support, recovery and discussion groups move back to the Zoom platform for at least two weeks," Garcia said. "Most already have since the announcement. There are a few smaller groups that would still like to meet face to face. In these remote cases, we have moved them into our largest meeting areas in the building, spread them out, and have eliminated food and drinks throughout Affirmations so that individuals can keep their masks on at all times."

Increased vaccination clinics in

partnership with Oakland County Health are currently being planned, in addition to the center providing drive-up testing for community members.

"We have already conducted a few vaccination clinics here at Affirmations in partnership with Oakland County Health Dept," said Garcia. "We will soon be adding additional dates and hopefully providing a drive-through testing option here at Affirmations. But we are still waiting on confirmation to move forward on that last piece."

These changes will continue at the center for the foreseeable future.

"This is all very fluid and we will continue to reassess all of our options on a daily basis," Garcia said. "Our goal is to do our best to protect staff and the community's health. The truth is, this pandemic is new for us all. We are all doing the best we can and we ask the community to be flexible and to show grace toward one another during this unprecedented time."

For a complete list of all upcoming vaccine clinics and testing dates, please visit Affirmations' website.

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Photo courtesy of Lucus R. Prieto

Gay Sex After 50

MSU Researcher on a Mission to Normalize, Promote Sex at All Ages

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A Michigan State University Ph.D. candidate is conducting a study focused on the sex lives of gay men over 50. “SASSY: Study on Aging and Sexual Satisfaction Among Gay Men” is the brainchild of Lucas R. Prieto. Here, Prieto talks to *Between The Lines* about SASSY and his research.

Your website says that you are “passionate” to advance discussions on sexual satisfaction among gay men 50-plus. How old are you? And where did this passion come from?

I am 30 years old. My interest regarding sexual health and well-being started when I was younger and would watch reruns of Dr. Ruth Westheimer’s sex talk TV show. I was impressed with Dr. Ruth’s ability to be so open about sex and wanted to help people. In my opinion, we need to be more open and honest about our sex lives and educate others that sex at any age, particularly for individuals over 50, can be wonderful and beneficial to one’s health.

Can you talk about your specific goals for the survey?

One of the goals of my study is to understand if and how gay men 50 and older are engaging in sex. My survey also focuses on ageism, particularly related to gay men, and whether or not ageism influences sexual satisfaction. Emerging evidence from previous studies [suggests] that older adults, in general, who internalize ageist messages about sex tend to have worse sexual health and well-being. I am interested [in] how this internalization translates to the gay community, as gay culture tends to normalize ageism.

Gay men 50 and over grew up in the age of AIDS, likely knew friends who died of the disease and often recall the fear and stigma. They may be living with HIV themselves. How do these lived experiences affect sexual health and habits among older gay men?

We are missing a big portion of the gay male population, which would be the current generation of gay men over 50, due to the AIDS epidemic. This massive loss in the gay community created a negative

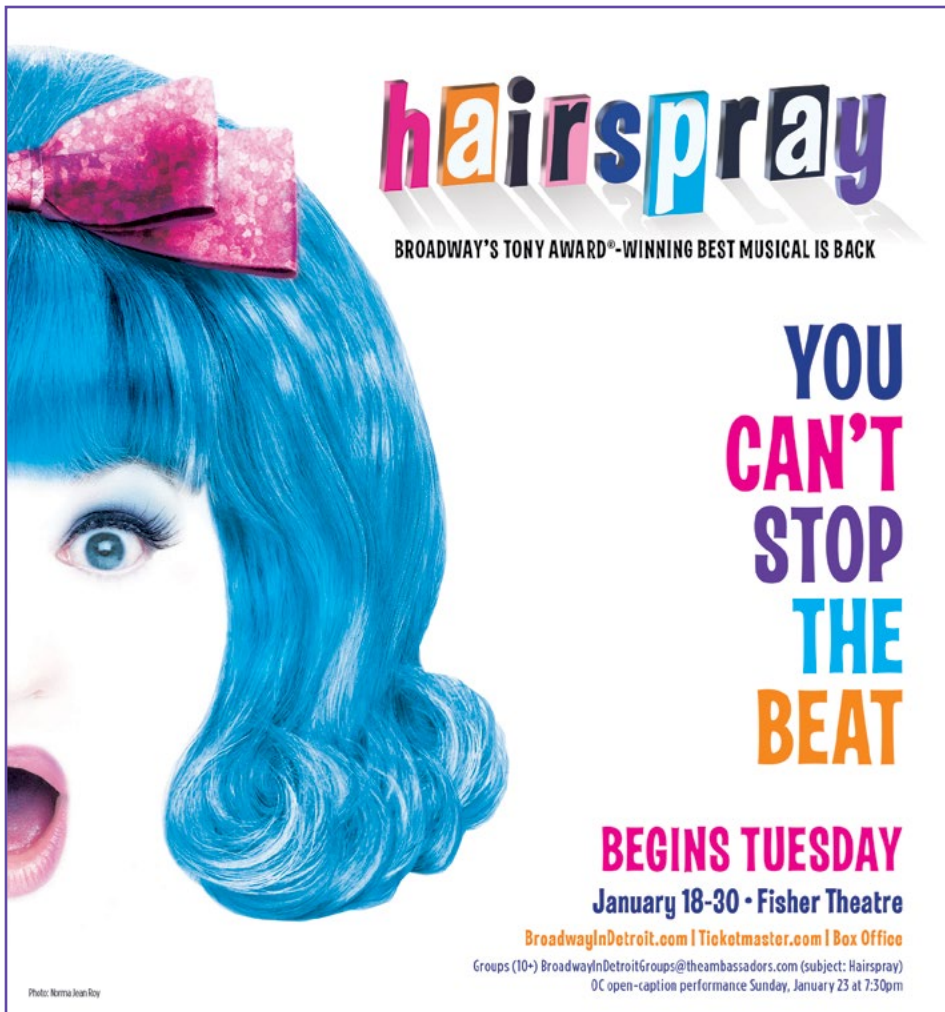
connotation regarding sex and gay men, which may have made it more difficult for the current generation of gay men 50 and older to navigate sexual behavior and unlearn sexual stigmas. Currently, advancements in sexual medicine, such as PrEP, which has a high percentage rate of decreasing the risk of being infected with HIV, has changed how gay men today engage in sex.

Is there any advice you can give gay men over 50 about the advantages of a healthy sex life?

There are several benefits of leading a healthy sex life. For example, those who lead a [satisfying] sex life are associated with higher life satisfaction and better physical and mental health. My best advice for gay men who are 50 and older regarding sex is to pursue a healthy sex life, and do not get discouraged if you have a few mishaps along the way. There are so many negative signals emanating from society postulating that older adults must stop engaging in sex after a certain age, especially in the gay community, which is false.

If you are unsure of where to start your path toward a better and healthier sex life, ask yourself what are your individual barriers to sex? If partner selection is lacking, attend some local community events that include LGBTQIA+ individuals to connect with others. If there are physical or psychological barriers, reach out to your primary provider or a clinician that specializes in sex to discuss your options. Additionally, if you are content with not having sex, that is your absolute prerogative, and you are valid. Sex is not the same for all individuals and you have to find out what is right for you and what are your own wants and needs.

For more information about the SASSY survey, visit Prieto’s website. The survey is open to all gay men 50 plus who live in the state of Michigan. The survey takes approximately 15 minutes and, as a gift for taking it, you will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card.



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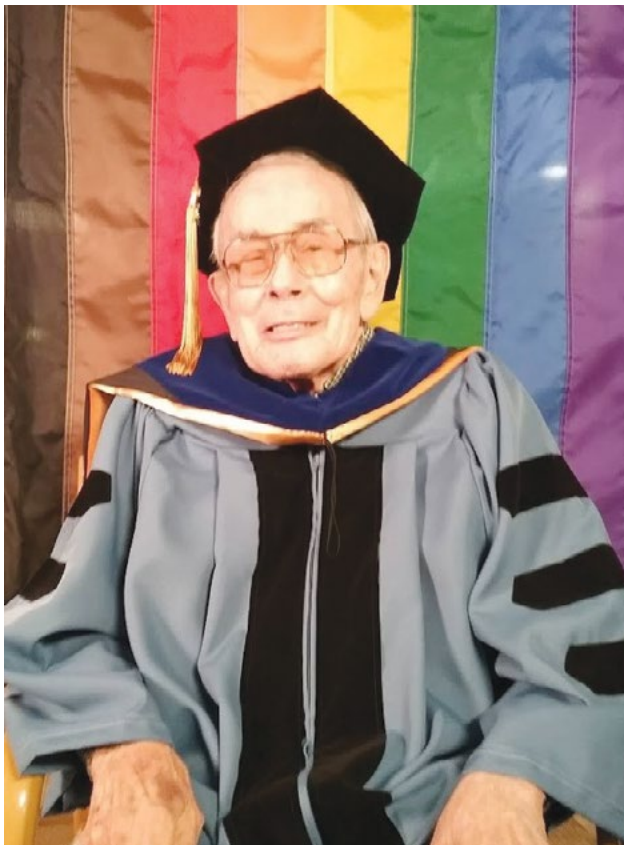
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Jim Toy received his honorary doctorate from U-M in 2021.

→ Jim Toy

Continued from page 7

in 1986 helped launch the Huron Valley Chapter of Wellness Networks, later the HIV/AIDS Resource Center.

He was also a key co-founder in 1995 of the Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project. WRAP changed its name to the Jim Toy Community Center in his honor in 2010.

Wearing a yellow hardhat, a rainbow boa and tinted glasses, he was on hand in Braun Court holding court outside the center for the celebration following the 2015 Supreme Court

ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

Ann Arbor realtor and former Toy Center board president Sandi Smith was on hand for the occasion. “There was so much emotion that day,” Smith recalled to BTL. “I always felt we were standing on his shoulders. None of this would have happened if he hadn’t taken those first brave steps.”

Smith’s wife Linda Lombardini, also a former Toy Center board president, concurred. “He always was a hero,” Lombardini said.

The memory that sticks in Smith’s mind of first meeting Toy as a first-year student at UM in 1981 when she made her way to the Lesbian-Gay Male Programs Office: seeing an “impossible number of books and papers.”

Indeed, Toy was a packrat. Lombardini recalled the indelible image of Toy with his plastic bag with him wherever he went. The materials he collected were a legacy in themselves. In 1997, Toy placed his amassment of files with the Bentley Historical Library. Additional materials were transferred in 2020 when health necessitated him leaving his apartment to live at Hillside Terrace.

Contacted via email, Bentley Director Terrence McDonald shared these thoughts:

“Jim Toy was a model for us all both in how he lived and what he left. In life he was the gentlest but most unshakeable campaigner for what was right in so many areas; in death his legacy has been preserved in his magnificent collection at the Bentley Historical Library which is not only frequently used but has served as a magnet for other collections involving LGBTQ individuals. In this way, just as he was a pioneer in the LGBTQ cause in life, he has helped open a whole new understanding of that cause in the archives after his death.”

In later life, Toy took to his role as gay elder with a sense of gusto and renewal. As ever, he was a gifted public speaker, precise with his language. In explaining to “Stateside” host April Baer on Michigan Radio in 2020 why he continued his activism into his ’90s, he said, “I’m stubborn. I’m committed to making as much trouble as I can to create and maintain justice.”

Over the past several years, accolades poured in. In 2016, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National

Association of Social Workers-Michigan. In 2017, Toy served as Grand Marshal of the Ann Arbor 4th of July Parade. In 2019 at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Detroit, the Michigan Diocese named him a Canon Honorary, the highest position that the Episcopal Church bestows on a lay person. And in May 2021, the University of Michigan presented him with an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters.

As impressive as his public achievements were, Toy’s greatest impact may have been on the personal level, in the lessons he left with those he affected on an individual basis.

In a comment on Toy’s Facebook wall early last year, friend Jay Aiken recounted the “royal waves” tutorials that Toy would give: “There’s the windshield wiper. The come hither (or beckon). And the classic screwing in the lightbulb.” Just one example of his regal poise and his gentle camp humor.

Toy was also a major fan of classic Hollywood cinema and was especially obsessed with screen icon Marlene Dietrich. In his younger years, usually in more private settings, he would don drag and perform as Marloona. One of his last and most public performances was for a Gender Bender Revue in the early 2000s held in the University Club in the Michigan Union.

Jim Toy is survived by his half-siblings Nancy Young and David Toy, along with two nieces, three grandnephews, and grandniece. Other survivors include longtime dear friends James Kangas, Scott Dennis, Jim Etkorn, Jay Aiken and Tom Nickey, all who attended to his needs in his last year, as well as too many friends to count.

“When I was a kid, I was told, ‘We don’t talk about sex or politics or religion,’” Toy said addressing the Ann Arbor Pride celebration in 2018. “So, what are we going to talk about? We’re going to talk about love and justice and higher ideals.”

Forty-six years earlier, Toy spoke to participants of Christopher Street Detroit ’72, Michigan’s first-ever Pride event. “I know that gay stands for love, and that gay stands for life,” he told the rally from the same podium in Kennedy Square where he’d come out publicly in 1970. “Maybe that’s all I know, but that is all I need to know, and that is all you need to know. So, I ask you to come out — come out for love, come out for life.”

Plans for Jim Toy’s memorial celebration are in the works and will be announced at a later date.

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Photo: HBO

Bridget Everett Takes on Small-Town Queer Family

How Her Queer-Aligned Life Became an HBO Series About the Power of Chosen Family

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Bridget Everett is surrounded by queer people in her everyday life. She's got queer friends, queer family, queer fans — the latter of which she courted while performing her alt-cabaret (alt as in she's been known to sing about buttocks to a ukulele-accompanied tune) at New York City gay bars.

Everett, who Amy Schumer featured in her sketch show "Inside Amy Schumer," is straight but, at this point, you'd have a strong case for making her an honorary member of the LGBTQ+ community. And now, with her new

HBO series "Somebody Somewhere," in which she acts and produces, her queer-filled real life extends to the heart of this moving, semi-autobiographical show. That's because a major part of the show is about chosen family, and in the case of Sam (Everett), who doesn't fit her small-town Kansas mold, it's the town's queers who make her feel at, well, home. Among them are Joel (openly gay actor Jeff Hiller) and Fred Rococo (Murray Hill, comedian and NYC drag king performer).

In a recent Zoom interview with Everett, the actress talked about how the queerness of "Somebody Somewhere" mirrors her own life in some ways, her longtime relationship

with Murray, and why she feels queer people "rescued" her.

I thought I knew you, until I started writing all these questions last night as if you were queer. Am I the first one to assume you're a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

I think that, you know, the people I run around with [are], and people make some assumptions. But you know, we're all doing the best we can. [Laughs.]

It must have something to do with your immersion in queer culture. Is the show a reflection of your real-world queer chosen

family?

Oh yeah, most definitely. Murray Hill is one of my closest friends, and we've known each other for, like, 20 years. He was the first person to give me a job, to give me stage time, and was so supportive. And I started meeting people like Murray in New York, and I suddenly felt seen and encouraged to be more of myself. So I feel saved and rescued by the queer community [laughs]. So, I definitely wanted to be a part of this show because that's who I think I would be looking for, you know?

How did your queer chosen family translate into "Somebody Somewhere"?

Paul [Thureen] and Hannah [Boss], the showrunners, pitched this world and the idea and had the character of Joel and the character Fred Rococo. They know that I'm friends with Murray. So that was nice. That also helped solve the concept for me. I was like, "Oh, well my buddy can be in this show. This is it [laughs]."

But I think that's the thing: When you live in a small town, and you don't feel like you fit in, you have to find your chosen family anywhere. We all look for our chosen family, right? But for me, thinking about what that might look like in Kansas was really interesting. I just know that if I still lived in Kansas, I would've found people like Murray.

What was it like for you growing up in Maine?

I spent summers in Maine at this "Dirty Dancing" kind of resort, and I would sing at night and wait tables during the day. And I went to school in Arizona, so I'd be there during the year. And then I finally moved to New York and left both of those behind. But in high school and growing up, I had a lot of friends. But I didn't always feel seen by anybody. I had a foul mouth, I was dirty, I always got in trouble with my teachers for saying raunchy shit. I mean, even from the time I was a little kid. I was just always like that and always getting reprimanded for it. But also it made my friends laugh, you know?

When I got to New York, I remember doing this show with Murray, and we had this song called "Can Hole," which is about butt sex, and I sang that. The response that we got, I was like, "Oh my god, people think this stupid shit is funny. These are my people."

You got your start in gay bars, right?

I was doing a lot of Murray's shows [at] gay bars. It feels like queer culture is always on the cutting edge; queer culture usually identifies what's next and what's new, and encourages you to be yourself. And the only way you're ever going to succeed and have an original voice is if you're holding true to yourself. That's what I felt like I was getting.

As you were building a career, it must have felt like a real esteem booster for you to have your LGBTQ+ audience believe in you and your work.

Yeah, because I struggled with self-worth and all those things growing up, and low self-esteem. And even though I had a lot of friends, I just didn't feel special. And I felt special when I got to the gay bars and the gay

clubs, and also, encouraged to push it even further. [Laughs.] The reason I am the way I am is because of those days.

You get to sing in this show, you get to act, there's a bunch of queers, you get to do Zumba. This feels like what you were born to do, am I right?

I mean, I hope so. I feel like I wouldn't have been able to do it until this exact point in my life. I would've been too nervous or not comfortable in my skin. But because I got to be such a part of the whole process, I felt really at home in it and I didn't let myself get in my own way, and I felt not just a part of it, but I felt celebrated, you know? I felt like we tried to make everybody feel like that on set. But we felt like we were doing something a little bit different, and let's just be ourselves, and cut loose and see what happens.

You've come a long way since "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

Fully. Believe me, I remember... oh my god, that's so funny. We did [that] in Maine at that resort, Quisisana, where I worked for many



Bridget Everett and Jeff Hiller in HBO's "Somebody Somewhere." Photo: HBO

summers. I was singing "Those Canaan Days." I felt like such a star. I didn't know that I could go further. I didn't know that life would get better from there, but it did. [Laughs.]

Going back to Kansas, where you were born, what was your introduction to the queer community?

Two of my favorite cousins were both gay. And my oldest sister, Brinton, who has since passed away, I remember her and my cousin Bruce, we would be at a big family event, and they would sort of take me under their wing.

And I still love my cousin Bruce. He's great. Every Friday night, he goes and plays a piano at a nursing home. Super sweet, and he's fabulous and works for Ralph Lauren. But I didn't have a lot of queer friends in high school. College, yes. I mean, there were some. But now, I have found the queer people in my hometown, so when I go home, I see them.

See **Bridget Everett**, page 24



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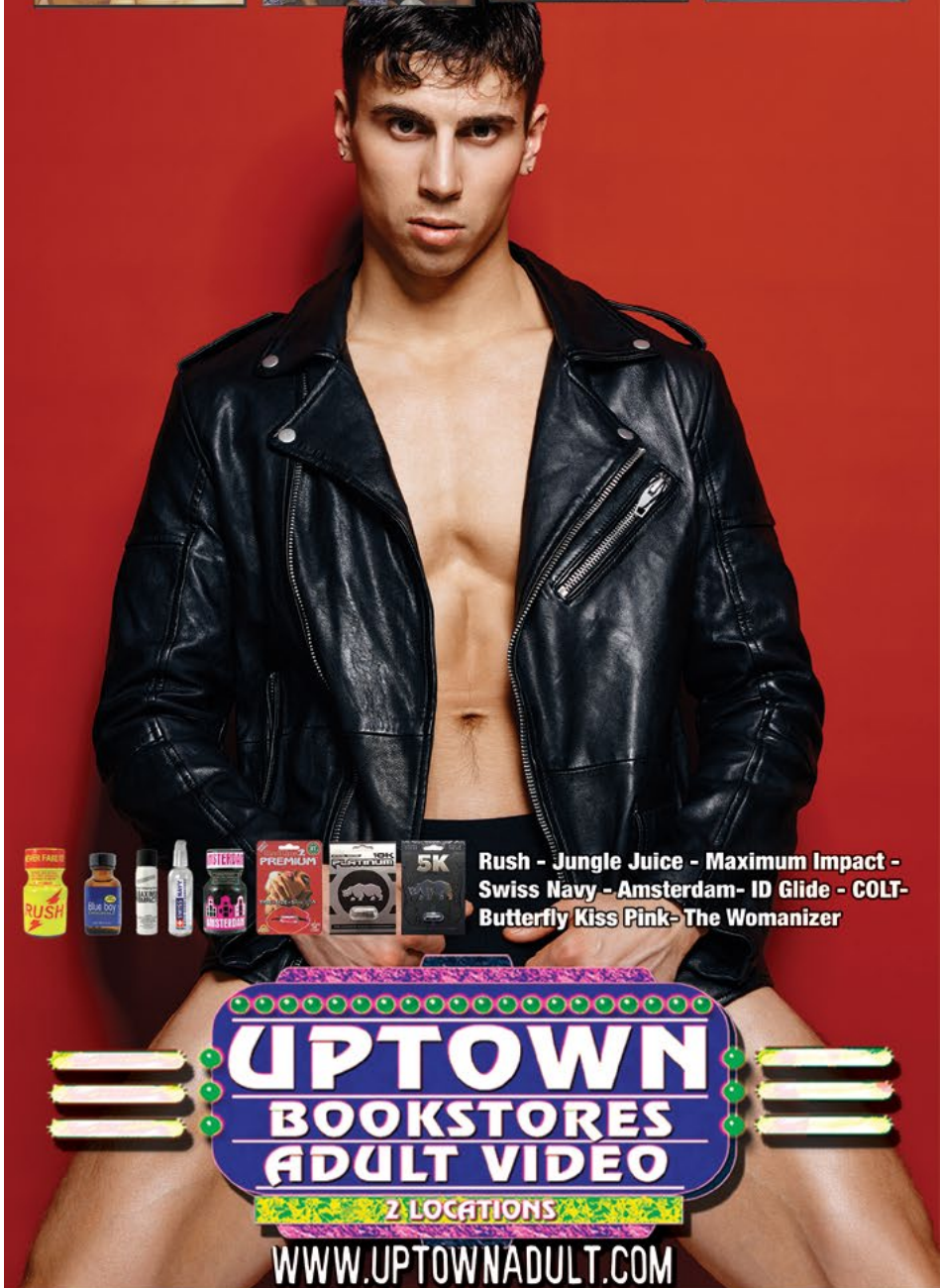
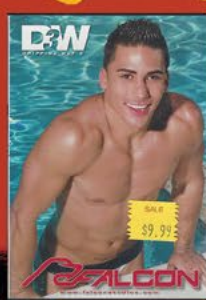
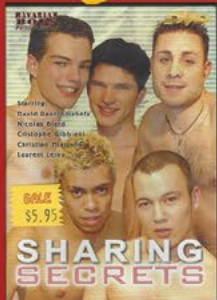


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Jeff Hiller, Mercedes White, Murray Hill and Bridget Everett in "Somebody Somewhere." Photo: HBO

→ **Bridget Everett**

Continued from page 23

When I moved to New York, that's when I found all my people, and my friends. All my queer friends. It was just the community I was looking for and waiting for. And I know that there were friends of mine that have since come out of the closet. But in Kansas, in the '80s, it just, sadly, wasn't as easy as it is now. And maybe it's not easy now. You know, I don't know. I don't know the right answer. Please just edit some of this out because I sound like a real ding-dong. [Laughs.] But my heart's in the right place.

How close is the series to your actual family dynamic?

We tried to make the character of my mom like my mom, who you can't even believe she's real because she's so larger than life. I don't even know how to describe her. We tried to make the character work, and it was just like, "No." Every time, it just seemed like a clown. "No." Every time, it just seemed like a clown. I'm like, we can't do this. And then the dad, I didn't have a close relationship with my dad at all, and I have a close relationship with my dad in the show.

But the dead sister was something that was really great for me, because like many Midwesterners, and many people from Kansas, I dealt with my grief in a very solitary, sort of bottled up way. And this show has been

a nice way for me to grieve her and honor her.

I wish you could've seen me here while I binged it. I mean, I was watching this alone the other night eating a turkey sandwich and just, like, blubbering into the turkey sandwich.

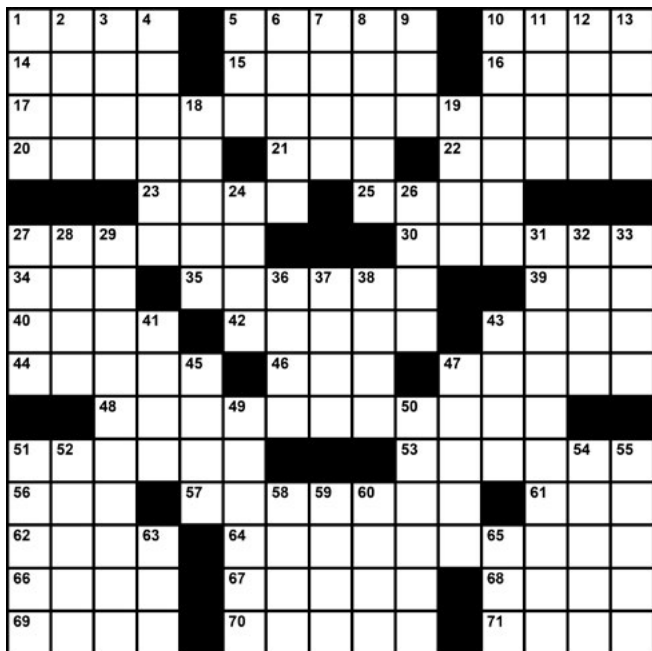
Oh, Chris. [Laughs.]

It's very, very moving, Bridget.

Thank you, thank you.

And this also feels like a big moment for you, career-wise. Do you feel like Hollywood has had a hard time figuring out what to do with you?

Yeah, most definitely. And, you know, it's not their job. [Laughs.] I'm lucky to be in this position. I'm lucky that HBO wanted to take a chance on me. And HBO's been super supportive and patient and helpful. But it's hard for me to not get emotional. Even when we're just watching edits and the HBO logo comes on and the sound — I grew up, like, thinking HBO was the shit. And now I'm on HBO. And not just on HBO, but I'm in my own show. And I can't really stop and think about it that way, because it's too much, and I'll be the one crying into my turkey sandwich. [Laughs.]



- 42 "The Lord of the Rings" and such
 43 Industrial-strength air?
 44 He wrote on Friday
 46 Butt
 47 Clinton's "___ in Joyland"
 48 More of the quote
 51 Streetcar guy
 53 "At Swim, Two Boys" writer
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 56 Ocean State sch.
 57 Broadway industry
 61 Prefix with political
 62 More of the quote
 64 End of the quote
 66 Baldwin's "The ___ Corner"
 67 "SNL" producer Michaels
 68 French 101 verb
 69 "Peter Pan" pooch
 70 Barrel bottom bits
 71 The A of ILGA
- 12 Discouraging words
 13 Showboat's "Nobody ___ But Me"
 18 Kids' song refrain
 19 Canal of Sal
 24 WNBA callers
 26 Hogwarts Mail deliverers
 27 Like porn
 28 ___ bit (slightly)
 29 Like many high achievers
 31 B-29 devices
 32 Personal lubricant ingredient
 33 Dipstick wipers
 36 "The Bridge" poet Crane
 37 Cry of mock horror
 38 Material for a drag queen
 41 Member
 43 Not nutty as a fruitcake
 45 Mireille of "Hanna"
 47 Chimp costar with Ron Reagan's dad
 49 Being cheated at phone sex?
 50 Des ___, Iowa.
 51 Disney film set in China
 52 It arouses two body openings
 54 Looks like a chicken hawk
 55 "Two Women" star
 58 Estimating words
 59 "The Way We ___"
 60 Have sex with
 63 Doe in Disney's "Bambi"
 65 Some like it hot

Remembering Anne

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Thompson of "Angels in America"
 5 The Village People's kind of man
 10 Painter Magritte
 14 Advice from Richard Simmons
 15 Bald tire's lack
 16 Russian river
 17 Start of a quote from Anne Rice
 20 "Of ___ Sing"

- 21 Canadian map abbr.
 22 "Legally Blonde" Witherspoon
 23 Peter by the piano
 25 Dijon dusk time
 27 Bitch role of '50s television
 30 Tavern that excites you?
 34 Frat hazing prop
 35 More of the quote
 39 Suffix with schnozz
 40 World of Ulrichs

Down

- 1 Cut
 2 Ho Chi ___ City
 3 Portion (out)
 4 Birthplace of Socrates
 5 Where you might see R.E.M.
 6 Playground retort
 7 One in a breath mint pack
 8 Sean of "Will & Grace"
 9 Ann Bannon's "___ Girl Out"
 10 Kit in "Shakespeare in Love"
 11 Art Deco design name

See p. 20 for answers

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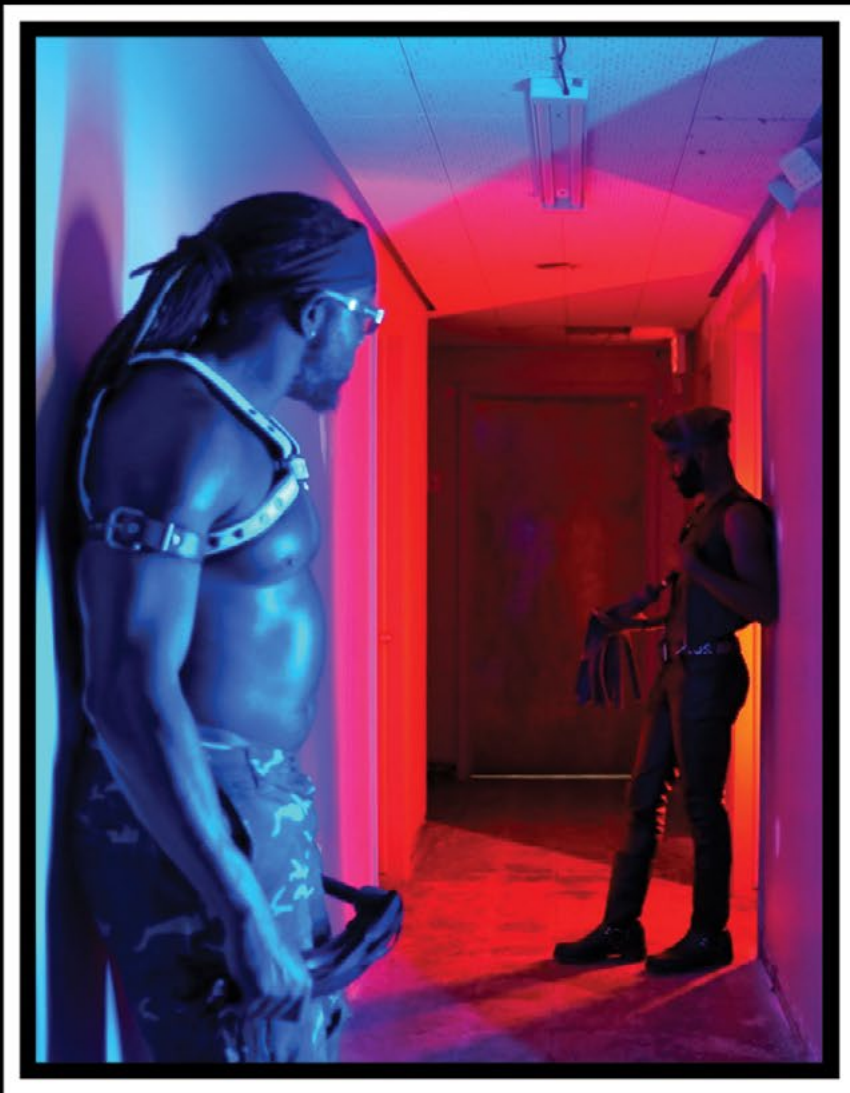
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