

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines™

NATIONAL SUICIDE LIFELINE
How Well Does 988 Serve
the LGBTQ+ Community?

MONKEYPOX IN MICHIGAN
Vax and Facts: What
You Need to Know

CONVERSION THERAPY
What Exactly Does Kevin
Bacon Have to Do With It?



Kill 'Em With Kindness

'Michigan-Lite' Queen Nina West on Her Midwestern
Queen Identity, Detroit Roots and Royal Oak Pride

By Eve Kucharski



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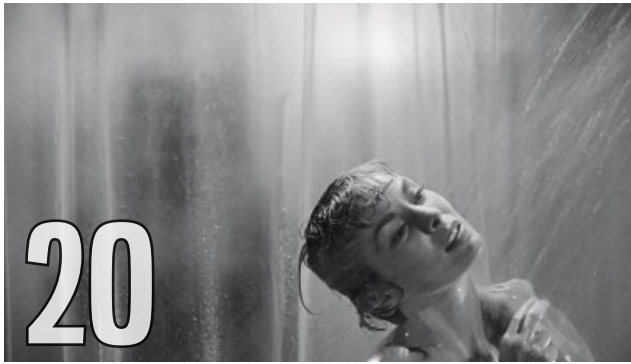
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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

There are two types of summer babies: those who live to soak up the sun and those who do all they can to escape the heat. Whichever camp you're in, you'll find something here that's queer to do right now-ish: set up camp at Fern Fest, break out your best black tie attire for a prom redo, catch a bonafide queer trailblazer in concert and more.

See Melissa Etheridge in Detroit

Somehow, it's been 34 years since 15-time Grammy-nominated artist Melissa Etheridge released her self-titled debut, but we checked the math, and yep, it's true! Soon after, just before her folk-rock breakthrough album "Yes I Am" hit the charts in 1993, the powerhouse truth-teller officially came out at the Triangle Ball, a queer event celebrating President Bill Clinton's first inauguration. Three decades later, the lesbian icon is still going strong, despite numerous personal setbacks along the way. Now in her 60s, Etheridge shows now signs of slowing down as she tours the world and releases new music. Her latest album, "One Way Out," was released in late 2021.

Melissa Etheridge brings her "One Way Out Tour" to Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts on Aug. 6. Visit musichall.org for tickets.



Melissa Etheridge. Photo: Elizabeth Miranda



Connect and Commune with Other Women in an Inclusive Space

Fern Fest is a trans-inclusive, woman-centered music festival held deep in the woods in western Hart, Michigan, southeast of Pentwater. The event, set for Aug. 9-14, is held on what is called "The Land": 650 acres of woods, meadows and fern fields where the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was held for nearly 40 years. The festival celebrates and honors that heritage while working to connect attendees with new performers across multiple genres. The lineup includes Southern roots musician and community music teacher Saja Butler, social justice folk lyricist and singer Crys Matthews, Ypsilanti-based folk-rocker Kate Peterson and many others.

Tickets can be purchased until Monday, Aug. 8 at michiganfernfest.com. Tickets cannot be purchased at the gate. Visit their website for tickets and event information.



Attend Pride and a Picnic

Downtown Royal Oak will provide the backdrop to a Pride event organizers hope will draw more than 20,000 attendees on Aug. 12-13. "RuPaul's Drag Race" contestant Nina West (Aug. 12) and R&B icon Deborah Cox (Aug. 13) are headlining the festival, which will feature a sound stage with local DJs, a drag show hosted by West and a live music stage with acts like Class of '98 and One Up Duo.

And while you're in Pride mode, grab some food and lay out a blanket at one of two trans-centered picnics happening this weekend: Transgender Michigan's Pride in the Park picnic starts at 12 p.m. on Aug. 13 at Martin Road Park in Ferndale, and The Stand with Trans Family Pride Picnic at Royal Oak's Memorial Park takes place at noon on Aug. 14.

Visit royaloakpride.com, transgendermichigan.org and standwithtrans.org for more details.



Get Immersed in Van Gogh

You've seen the ads, and though this international phenomenon may seem gimmicky, it's hard to ignore all the rave reviews. Detroit's Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit fills Lighthouse ArtSpace downtown with a dazzling take on the infamous painter's iconic works with over 500,000 cubic feet of projections, 60,600 frames of videos and 90 million pixels, according to organizers. Attendees literally walk inside the artwork.

The exhibit runs through October. Head to detroitvangogh.com for more information and to buy tickets.



Have a Prom Do-Over

Did you skip your prom? Attend, but hate it? Or maybe you're part of the other camp — you loved prom and feel sad you only got to do it once. In any case, here's your chance to "get dressed up, drink punch and sway back-and-forth to top 40 hits with your crush," according to Cheers to Queers Prom Takeover organizers. This 21-plus event welcomes local prom goers to a queer-focused dance party where, this time, you can enjoy those prom beverages legally.

Learn more at annarbor.org/event/prom-takeover/10901. Tickets are \$25 and include drinks.

Please check event pages for the most up-to-date scheduling information.

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The National Suicide Lifeline Is Now 988. How Well Does It Serve the LGBTQ+ Community?

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

Until recently, individuals in crisis who wanted to seek help by phone or text had two main options: They could call 911, which might involve the police or result in a trip by ambulance to the emergency room. Or they could call the 10-digit National Suicide Lifeline, which requires having the presence of mind to find it. Now, a new mental health hotline, known as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, replaces the 10-digit number and broadens its scope. But it remains to be seen how well it will serve the LGBTQ+ community.

Dr. Antonia Caretto is one therapist who has full confidence in the new system. She explained that calls from a particular area code are routed to the crisis center nearest to them. For area code 248, which covers Oakland County and

portions of Livonia and Northville in Wayne County, that's Common Ground.

"That means they know the local resources, which is nice," said Caretto, a psychologist whose areas of specialty include LGBTQ+ issues. "And especially with Common Ground, we know that they are very LGBTQ-sensitive. It was mandated that part of the switch to 988 include strategies to provide specialized services, especially to LGBTQ youth, because of the higher rates of mental health issues and suicidality."

"So I think it's probably fine for an LGBTQ person to utilize the service," she continued. "Trevor Project has been very involved in helping with this rollout. And they endorse it. So I trust them immensely."

Callers to 988 are connected through the existing Michigan Crisis and Access Line

(MiCAL) to call-takers throughout most of the state. Calls from Macomb County are routed to Macomb County Community Mental Health and in Kent County, Network 180. A possible glitch in the system presents itself when someone calls using the area code from their former residence, because they are then routed to services in that area. However, it's possible to connect a caller to local services from that point.

Dr. Debra Pinals is medical director for Behavioral Health and Forensic Programs at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The new hotline isn't just for people who feel suicidal, she said.

"It's not just a suicide prevention lifeline," Pinals said. "It's also a general crisis line, which means that a caller defines the crisis. And so the idea is that we can help connect people

to care and help support their needs prior to when they might be in more of a suicide crisis, so we can do more preventive work upfront."

The lifeline provides access to a network of supports and referrals. That includes peer "warm lines" for connecting with another individual who's experienced mental health or substance abuse issues. Calls to 988 can be taken in either English or Spanish. Over 250 languages are available through a translation service. Text is English only.

Pinals said 911 remains a critical part of the infrastructure, but 988 presents a specialized service for behavioral health, emotional crises, substance use crisis and suicide prevention.

While 988 is not a federal program, it was

See 988, page 32

Victory!

Michigan Supreme Court Rules That State Civil Rights Act Includes LGBTQ+ Protections



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

The Michigan LGBTQ+ community is celebrating after the state's Supreme Court ruled Thursday, July 28 that the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act does, indeed, encompass LGBTQ+ rights.

The 5-2 decision means that Michigan businesses, landlords and others may not discriminate based on any person's sexual or gender identity. (We're looking at you, The Broadway Avenue.)

While Elliott-Larsen has been in place since 1976, LGBTQ+ discrimination has been practiced openly due to a technicality. The language in the act, which established the framework for Michigan's civil rights policy-making, bans discrimination on the basis of sex. The decision makes clear that "sex" in this instance includes gender identity and sexual orientation.

As Republican Justice Elizabeth Clement wrote in the majority opinion, "Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation necessarily constitutes discrimination because of sex." Chief Justice Bridget McCormack and justices Richard Bernstein, Megan Cavanagh and

Elizabeth Welch, all Democrats, all voted alongside Clement. Brian Zahra and David Viviano, Republicans, dissented.

As BTL reported earlier this year, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel argued before the court in March. "I have long fought for equal treatment under the law," Nessel said at the time. "I was proud to represent our client agency [the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (MDCR)] this morning, as well as the people of our vibrant state. No one should experience barriers to employment, housing, education, or public accommodations and services because of who they are or who they love."

Nessel's arguments centered on her assertion that it would be impossible to discriminate against a person based on sexual orientation without also discriminating against them based on gender.

"Our residents deserve to live in a state that recognizes the value of diversity and rejects the notion that our own civil rights law could be used as a tool of discrimination. This ruling is not only a victory for the LGBTQ+ community, but for all Michigan residents, and one that's long overdue," Nessel said in a statement.

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HOW TO BAN Conversion Therapy



Doug Booth. Photo courtesy of Doug Booth

It's Not as Hard
as You Might
Think. Take It
From This Grand
Rapids Man.

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

The 2021 Netflix documentary about conversion therapy, “Pray Away,” was a turning point for Doug Booth, a political activist and openly gay man living in Grand Rapids. After watching the film, he said he had to pick himself up off the ground.

Growing up in the Catholic Church, Booth struggled with his sexual orientation. “Throughout high school, knowing that I was different, I wanted

to change,” Booth said. “I never was officially sent to conversion therapy, but I did everything I [could] for four years throughout high school, and that first year of college, to really figure out how to not be gay. It’s something that, almost 20 years later, I’m still suffering from the consequences of.”

In Michigan, conversion therapy is still completely legal in many jurisdictions, though some municipalities have taken steps to ban the practice. Booth felt compelled to

work toward eliminating it altogether, across the state. But as he explored existing local and municipal bans, he recognized that banning conversion therapy in Ferndale or Hazel Park requires a different conversation than banning it on the west side of the state, which tends to be more religious and conservative. Still, he was, and remains, determined.

Eight Michigan cities have banned conversion therapy, including Ann Arbor, Berkley, East Lansing, Ferndale, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Madison Heights and Royal Oak. That works out to around three percent of the state’s population being protected, according to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP). Nationwide, the practice has been banned in 20 states and Washington, D.C. MAP estimates that 48 percent of minors in the U.S. live in states that ban conversion therapy.

As a board member of the Grand Rapids LGBTQ+ Healthcare Consortium, Booth started planning with the help of their leadership. On the advice of The Trevor Project, he launched a website (banconversiontherapymi.com) and, armed with data compiled with the help of a data analyst, built a coalition of like-minded individuals and organizations, starting with the religious community. To date, the site boasts support of more than 60 organizations, including University of Michigan Health-West, Grand Rapids Pride Center, Bethany Christian Services, the Michigan Psychological Association and numerous churches and businesses in the area. In addition, more than 1,000 individuals have expressed their support on Booth’s website.

“Throughout this,” Booth said, “we did discover that there is still a practice [of conversion therapy] here in Grand Rapids — at least one that we know of. Hopefully, there’s not more, but even one is too many.”

The existing bans in Michigan are aimed at conversion therapy practiced on minors by licensed healthcare professionals. For example, in Ferndale, a “counselor” who practices this widely and wildly discredited “therapy,” which attempts to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, is subject to a \$500 fine and 93 days in jail. That’s the stiffest penalty allowable for the crime, a misdemeanor. In other municipalities, conversion therapy is classified as a civil infraction, which is not subject to jail time.

While it’s a start, the fact remains that most conversion therapy occurs in religious settings. According to 2019

Williams Institute data, an estimated 57,000 LGBT youth (ages 13-17) in the U.S. will undergo conversion therapy from religious or spiritual advisors before they reach the age of 18. And 16,000 LGBTQ+ youth will receive conversion therapy from a licensed health care professional before they reach the age of 18. These statistics apply to the states where conversion therapy is not already banned.

Aware of the repeated conversion therapy bills that have stalled in the state legislature, Booth wants to start city by city and create a patchwork across the state. While some may call municipal bans symbolic, he insists they have value.

“I’ve been doing this and trying to make myself more public with it because of the fact that I know what it’s like to grow up here and not feel like you’re surrounded by anyone else that’s like you,” Booth said. “So even if it’s symbolic, if you help that one individual maybe not take their lives or maybe think that they’re OK and there is something better, then it’s worth it.”

Booth’s point about suicide is a reality. Non-transgender LGB people who have experienced conversion therapy are more than twice as likely as their peers in the general population to attempt to kill themselves. What’s more, LGBTQ+ youth are already four times more likely to attempt suicide than youth who are not LGBTQ+.

Though it may be an uphill battle, Booth and others, like Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBT Project, are encouraged by the possibility of administrative actions. Consider that Gov. Whitmer issued an executive directive last year prohibiting the use of MDHHS-administered funds for the practice of conversion therapy on minors. And just last month, President Biden issued an executive order that asks federal agencies to ensure federally funded programs do not offer conversion therapy.

“We think the most effective way is through licensing of mental health professionals,” Kaplan said. “And I recognize that that doesn’t always cover conversion therapy that might be done through religious organizations. But the problem is when you have the government regulating religious organizations; you’re gonna run into First Amendment issues.”

At the same time, Kaplan said, if an individual is promoting themselves as a counselor yet are unlicensed, they should be subject to penalty. “To me, it’s a many-pronged approach,” he said.

Kaplan would like to see stakeholders

See **Conversion Therapy**, page 15



Advice to Be Well

From Dr. Mark Bornstein and Dr. Paul Benson



I thought I had hemorrhoids for the last few years. A friend saw these and said they are warts and can turn into cancer. Is that true? Is there anything to do to treat these? Is there anything available to prevent them?

This is a great question and a topic that all folks who are having any type of sex should understand. Anal warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). This a virus that is sexually transmitted and essentially, all folks who are sexually active have come into contact with this virus at one point or another. There are many strains of HPV, some of which can cause anal, cervical, or oral cancer. Other strains of HPV only cause warts. It is important to know that the strain of HPV that causes warts does not cause cancer.

When an individual comes into contact with the virus, some people's immune systems will be able to fight off this virus itself and others need treatment. Specifically for warts, one may even see that they go away on their own without treatment, however, typically we treat these with by freezing them off (cryotherapy) or a topical cream. Sometimes an individual may need multiple cryotherapy treatments for the warts to go away. This is normal!

For prevention, we recommend getting vaccinated! There is a 3 dose vaccination series

that is now available for folks up to 45 years old, regardless of gender. It is also important to vaccinate children when they become eligible at 9 years old.

Remember, if you see anal warts, please do not fear. Warts are extremely common and are something medical providers treat on a daily basis. We encourage you to continue to have open conversations with your partner/s regarding sex and sexual health!

I've been hearing more and more in the media about Monkeypox and that the World Health Organization has declared it a global health emergency. Can you comment on this? I'm a gay man and have been told that this is a gay disease. When can I get vaccinated? Thanks.
- John C

Dear John,

Monkey pox, first recognized in the 1970's, has been confined until just recently to Central Africa. It escaped Africa and has been identified in over 66 countries totaling about 6,000 cases. Until now, there has been no real data to suggest it's a gay disease. With that said it seems that the majority of cases outside of Africa has been in men having sex with men. One possibility to explain

this is a gay man, or group of men, contracted Monkeypox while in Africa. They might have brought it back to their home countries and then spread it to others. Monkeypox is transmitted through close contact with an infected individual, including sex. That could explain why we are seeing this phenomenon in gay men. I expect it will crossover non-gay individuals too in a matter of time.

Monkeypox is not fatal. It has been classified as a global emergency by the WHO. Symptoms include flu like illness and a characteristic rash. The vaccine to combat it is in short supply. We are stretching that supply by using one dose instead of two for the time being. One dose, instead of two has been shown to be effective in protecting against Monkeypox, at least for the short term. Because of this vaccine shortage, the only people able to get the vaccine at this time, are those who have had contact to a person confirmed as having Monkeypox. With the limited supply of vaccine, we have to be very smart in vaccinating the people most at risk. This includes those who are immunosuppressed and/or having multiple sexual contacts. The good thing is that we will be able to vaccinate ourselves out of this epidemic with vaccinations once we have a sufficient supply. Hopefully that will be by the end of this year. The best thing you can do right now is use your common sense. If you are not feeling well, or

have a rash, you should avoid intimacy until the symptoms reside. There is also a therapeutic medication Tecovirimat, in short supply, that is currently being reserved for treating severe cases. Tecovirimat is only available from select medical providers.

We have learned a lesson from history. With HIV, first recognized in the 1980's, no one was talking about it, including the media. Today, with Monkeypox, we are getting ahead of it early and ramping up production of effective vaccines and therapeutics. David Coulter, Executive Director of Oakland County, has created a Monkeypox task force to keep the public educated as well as develop the best guidelines possible for treatment and prevention of Monkeypox. His announcement of the task force, as well as other important information, can be found at <https://fb.watch/eqVMFDAC38/>.

Since 1980 Dr. Paul Benson's Be Well Medical Center has been an inclusive medical center celebrating diversity. Do you have a health related question for Dr. Paul Benson and Dr. Mark Bornstein? Submit your questions to bewelladvice@pridesource.com. This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines's journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. Learn more about Be Well from their ad below.



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Monkeypox: History Must Not Repeat Itself

Mistakes Made During the COVID-19 Pandemic and AIDS Epidemic Occurring Again



BY DR. N. ADAM BROWN, WASHINGTON
BLADE

What's that saying? Those who don't understand history are doomed to repeat it?

Once again, the United States is repeating mistakes made during the COVID-19 pandemic and the AIDS epidemic.

It's been two months since the first U.S. patient with monkeypox was identified. There are more than 5,800 cases that we know of. The nation's capital, Washington, D.C., leads the country in cases per capita. The opportunity to contain the virus is slipping away.

The country needs a swift, but comprehensive response. We need more vaccines. We need uniform standards and clearer rules about testing and treatment. Trusted officials need to combat myths. And people must get vaccinated, particularly those at the greatest risk.

Testing standards are not uniform, for example, a problem that echoes what happened in the early days of COVID-19. There are not enough vaccines and we are not allocating them to areas hardest hit. Even our tech isn't right. People looking for vaccines have dealt with crashed websites just like they did at the beginning of the Covid vaccine rollout. And, as AXIOS noted, while there is an effective, FDA-approved antiviral treatment, patients only can get it if they fit within "an onerous 120-page protocol for expanded access to investigational new drugs."

We know what will happen if we don't get this right. We've lived that reality for two-and-a-half years.

Let me be clear, though. Monkeypox is not COVID-19. It does not spread as easily as Covid since, generally, transmission requires personal or intimate contact. That fact is on our side. (Scientists have not ruled out airborne transmission, however, so this guidance could be updated as we learn more.) As the New York City Department of Health admitted "a lot of cases ... are not being diagnosed." These unknowns are halting signs. If airborne spread is confirmed, or if it's found asymptomatic carriers can spread monkeypox, the monkeypox spread will be much worse than we currently anticipate. We are still learning about this new viral strain. We must remember that.

Like we did at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, we also have a media problem. In the early 1980s, the public was led to believe AIDS affected only men who had sex with men. That messaging created stigma and fear associated with AIDS. The results were catastrophic.

As pediatric emergency medicine physician Vinay Kampalath wrote in STAT News, "Pathogens don't

See **Monkeypox**, next page



The State of HIV and Aging



By Jeff Berry

By now we've all heard the statistics: 50% of people living with HIV (PLWH) are over

the age of 50, and by 2030 it will be 70%.

When we talk about HIV and aging it always tends to sound like a laundry list of everything that can possibly go wrong as we get older.

But please indulge this old-timer as I ponder a few things for us to consider.

Today, thanks to advances in treatment, older adults with HIV are faring better, but we tend to have an average of three or more comorbidities than our peers without HIV, and these occur more frequently and at an earlier age.

Things like frailty, bone and neurocognitive issues, cardiovascular disease, cancers, kidney and liver disease — and inflammaging, the idea that chronic inflammation is the driver of many of these co-occurring conditions.

But what about invisibility as a co-morbidity? Stigma is still a huge issue for PLWH, and for those of us who are aging, we face the dual stigma of aging and HIV. Our society does not value our elders or the wisdom that can come with aging. How do we tap into that wisdom and begin to turn the tide of this impending silver tsunami?

We hear about trauma, too. Many long-term survivors (LTS) have experienced multiple traumas — trauma from

our childhood, the trauma of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and the trauma of losing entire support networks of lovers, friends and family members to AIDS early on in the epidemic. People who acquired HIV around birth or at an early age and have been living with HIV 10, 20, 30 years now are also long-term survivors. We need to include them in the conversation and pull up a chair for them at the table.

Along with these co-occurring conditions we see increased rates of isolation, depression, substance misuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychosocial issues.

We know that HIV disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC). And then issues such as unstable housing, justice system involvement, poverty, food insecurity and other social determinants of health all affect the quality of life of people aging with HIV, and often can change the trajectory of the lives of PLWH, for better or for worse.

As advocate Jules Levin likes to point out, our healthcare system is broken and ill-equipped to deal with an aging society, let alone people who are aging with HIV.

We've heard stories of older LGBTQ+ people and PLWH having to go back into the closet when entering into long-term care facilities, for fear of being outed, ostracized and stigmatized — and still being stigmatized and receiving suboptimal care.

Not only is our healthcare system broken, the entire system is broken. But, I promise, there is some good news.

The updated national HIV/AIDS strategy includes people aging with HIV and long-term survivors for the very first time. Clear goals for improving the quality of LTS are articulated in the

See **State of HIV**, next page

→ Monkeypox

Continued from previous page

discriminate like humans do — they have no innate capability of discerning race, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality.” Whether gay, straight, or bisexual, if you have close contact with someone with monkeypox, you’re at risk. Even so, it took the Center for Disease Control and Prevention until this month to update its guidance to state, “Anyone who has been in close contact with someone who has monkeypox can get the illness.”

At present, however, not everyone has the same statistical chance of getting the virus because the virus is more prevalent in some communities over others. So while we need to be careful about reinforcing stigma, we do need to target relevant messaging to the people and places most at risk. And right now, that appears to be men and trans women who have sex with men.

We can tailor monkeypox awareness campaigns and focus resources to certain groups of individuals who are most effected while educating the public at large. As the virus spreads and as vaccines become more available, public and private vaccine campaigns must target people of all orientations and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Ultimately, if a person does not see themselves in a public health campaign, they will not protect themselves.

While government officials get their act together, Americans must take charge of their own health. Like COVID-19, we can reduce spread with a dose of common sense and personal responsibility. Here’s what you can do:

- Register to get vaccinated
- Contact your healthcare provider if you develop rashes or abnormal lesions
- Avoid sexual contact if you’re having flu-like symptoms (COVID is still a risk)
- Avoid sexual activity or physical skin-to-skin contact if rashes or lesions are found
- Because linens can be contaminated, sleep in a different room if your partner is infected
- Cover lesions
- Stay informed

Dr. N. Adam Brown is a practicing emergency medicine physician, founder of healthcare strategy advisory group ABIG Health and a professor of practice at the University of North Carolina’s Kenan-Flagler Business School. Previously he served as President of Emergency Medicine and Chief Impact Officer for a leading national medical group. Follow him on Twitter @ERDocBrown. This article originally appeared in the Washington Blade and is made available in partnership with the National Gay Media Association.

“

We need to advocate for policies and reforms that will improve the quality of life and deliver culturally appropriate services and care for people aging with HIV.

→ State of HIV

Continued from previous page

strategy — let’s hold our leaders accountable, and work together so that we may achieve them. Organizations and programs around the country and globally are already starting to address some of these issues.

We know that many LTS have developed resilience in the face of all these odds, so how do we help support and build models of resilience? Just as PLWH created a system of care and support where none existed early in the epidemic, we are the ones who will need to create new systems and models of care, from the ground up, because no one else is going to do it for us.

We need to advocate for policies and reforms that will improve the quality of life and deliver culturally appropriate services and care for people aging with HIV.

We need increased research on HIV and aging, but we also need implementation science that will help translate that research into improved outcomes and quality of life.

And lastly, it’s imperative that we strengthen and harness the collective voice and power of networks of individuals living and aging with HIV to achieve all of these goals, and provide people living and aging with HIV the support and dignity we all so richly deserve.

We’ve earned it.

Jeff Berry is the editor-in-chief of Positively Aware magazine, and he is Director of Publications at Test Positive Aware Network in Chicago. This column is a project of TheBody, Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service.

CREEP OF THE WEEK

Michigan Voters To Choose Between Democrats, Radically Unhinged Transphobes In November



By D’Anne Witkowski

I am writing this on Primary Election Eve. By the time you’re reading this, races across the country

will be decided, for better or worse.

In Michigan, we have a clown car of right-wing Republican candidates for governor. And this is AFTER half of those running were disqualified for submitting fraudulent signatures on their nominating petitions. None of the remaining candidates are fit to run a Hobby Lobby, never mind the entire state of Michigan. Whitmer leads all of them in head to head polling, but we live in a nation that elected Donald Trump, so we can’t take anything for granted.

While in office, Whitmer has been an outspoken supporter of LGBTQ+ people. The Republican candidates? Not so much.

All of them attacked transgender people during their final debate on July 27, according to the Michigan Advance.

Tudor Dixon, who leads in the polls, has been endorsed by Trump. She thinks transgender people are gross and are taking away the a woman’s right to be proud of motherhood, or something. She also tweeted in June that she “will sign a bill that creates severe criminal penalties for adults who involve children in drag shows” calling it “child sex abuse.”

Jan. 6 insurrectionist and gubernatorial candidate Ryan Kelly said that the “left is really good at manipulating words” and gleefully fantasized about asking Gov. Whitmer to define the word “woman” on a debate stage.

Candidate Ralph Rebandt said that transgender people and those who support them are “throwing out the laws of nature” and that our founding fathers “understood what a boy was, what a girl was” (never mind the fact that these same founders didn’t understand what a human was, i.e. they saw Black people as property, not people. Also note that none of the Republican candidates would want you to learn that in school).

To candidate Garrett Soldano, using inclusive language is “hot garbage.”

And candidate Kevin Rinke said, “in my world there’s boys. There’s girls. There’s men. There’s women. And I will not negotiate. I will not give an inch on these woke issues.”

In the real world that exists outside of a Republican’s head, transgender and gender fluid and gender queer people DO EXIST. And they are really sick and tired of being used as punching bags to hide the fact that Republicans have no plans to do anything that actually helps

people and are unfit to govern. They’re not even unfit — they’re uninterested. Republicans are far more interested in trashing

democracy for their own benefit than they are in whatever issues you and your family are dealing with. They DGAF about people. Period.

No matter who wins tomorrow, they’ll be in terrible company with Secretary of State candidate Kristen Karamo, a person who thinks abortion is satanic and that demonic possession is sexually transmitted.

Attorney General candidate Matthew DePerno vows that if elected he will prosecute women who have abortions and the doctors who provide them.

He also lost his mind on Twitter in response to a comment Attorney General Dana Nessel, an out lesbian who was deeply involved in the Supreme Court case that led to marriage equality who is known for her sharp wit, called for a “drag queen in every school.” DePerno issued a public statement rebuking Nessel for the comment and trying to create a link to the measures Gov. Whitmer took to save lives and slow the spread of COVID-19.

“Our students suffered through some of the most extreme measures, put in place and backed by Dana Nessel, that kept them away from the classroom and her answer is to over-sexualize elementary schools,” DePerno wrote. “Students in the third grade are behind on their reading, our test scores are some of the worst in the country thanks to these disastrous Covid lockdowns and she calls for drag shows for kindergartners.”

A couple of things. Third graders with trouble reading and low test scores isn’t something that suddenly happened during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Michigan’s legislature has been controlled by Republicans for DECADES, many of those years with Republican governors, and they have vampired funding from public schools at every turn. They have DONE NOTHING to help kids in Michigan. Again, they DGAF.

This is the most humorless take imaginable on a comment made in jest. I expect more from the star of Buddy BeBop vs the Living Dead.

Secondly, Nessel was not calling for drag queens in schools as a solution to the problems DePerno is so concerned about. That said, her plan (which is a joke, mind you) is more than Republicans have offered Michigan’s students in years.

Michigan is a state to watch in 2022. Not only do we have important races at the top of the ticket, but Democrats have the chance to flip the state senate for the first time in nearly four decades. That’s huge. Help them do it.

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

What You Need To Know

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

As the monkeypox virus spreads across Michigan, it's important to sort fact from fiction. This guide includes helpful information about how the virus takes hold and spreads and links to evolving federal and state information and data related to the outbreak.

As of Aug. 2, more than 5,800 cases have been reported in the U.S., according to the CDC. Thirty-seven cases have been reported across Michigan, including the first case in the state in Southeast Michigan's Oakland County, as BTL reported last month. Wayne County has so far seen the most cases of the virus — as of Aug. 2, the county had recorded 13 cases. Globally, nearly 24,000 cases have been reported.

What is monkeypox?

Monkeypox is part of the same family of viruses as variola, which causes smallpox. Unlike smallpox, monkeypox is rarely fatal — in fact, it's typically much milder. Monkeypox is not related to chickenpox.

The source of the disease is unknown (while monkeys could harbor the virus, we don't actually have data to support monkeys as the original source). The name refers to the virus's first discovery in 1958, when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease appeared in groups of monkeys used for medical research. The first human case of the virus was recorded in 1970.

What are the symptoms?

The CDC notes the following symptoms of monkeypox:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches and backache
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Chills
- Exhaustion
- A rash that can look like pimples or blisters that appears on the face, inside the mouth, and on other parts of the body, like the hands, feet, chest, genitals, or anus.

The rash goes through different stages before healing completely. The illness typically lasts two to four

weeks. Sometimes, people get a rash first, followed by other symptoms. Others only experience a rash.

How is the virus spread?

According to the CDC, monkeypox spreads from person-to-person in several ways: direct contact with the infectious rash, scabs, or body fluids; respiratory secretions during prolonged, face-to-face contact; or during intimate physical contact, such as kissing, cuddling, or sex; touching items (such as clothing or linens) that previously touched the infectious rash or body fluids; pregnant people can spread the virus to their fetus through the placenta.

People can also contract monkeypox from infected animals, by being scratched or bitten or by preparing or eating meat or other products from infected animals.

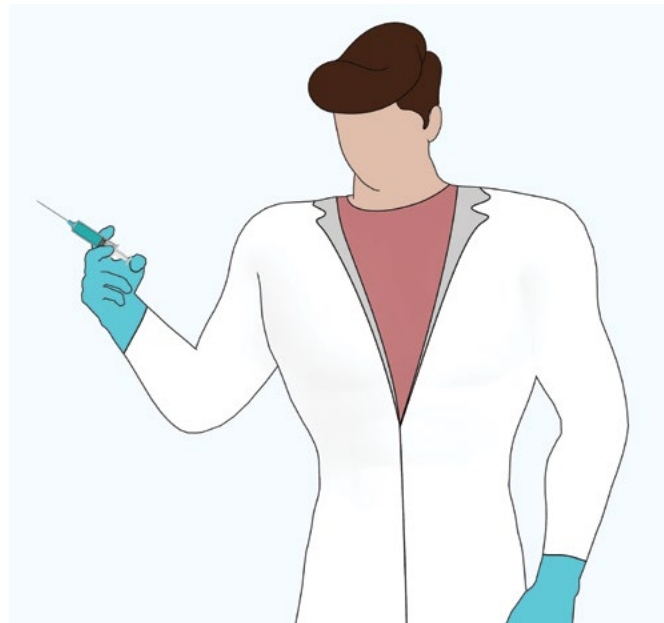
The CDC reports that monkeypox can be spread to other people from the time symptoms begin until the rash is fully healed (and a fresh layer of skin has formed). Symptom-free people cannot spread the virus to other people.

Scientists are not sure if monkeypox can spread through semen or vaginal fluids.

Is monkeypox impacting sexually active gay men more than other groups?

As BTL reported July 13, nearly everyone contracting monkeypox right now is gay, bisexual, or a man who has sex with men (MSM). "A recent report out of England showed that 151 out of 152 of the men interviewed with the disease were MSM. That doesn't mean that the disease is "gay" or even that it is sexually transmitted — it means that the disease is spreading rapidly through our sexual networks," wrote BTL columnist Trevor Hoppe.

This is a key distinction. It's vitally



important to push back against the narrative that monkeypox is a "gay" disease. Writing for the Washington Blade, Dr. N. Adam Brown notes, "Like we did at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, we also have a media problem. In the early 1980s, the public was led to believe AIDS affected only men who had sex with men. That messaging created stigma and fear associated with AIDS. The results were catastrophic."

The article goes on to cite pediatric emergency medicine physician Vinay Kamaplah, who wrote in STAT News, "Pathogens don't discriminate like humans do — they have no innate capability of discerning race, sexual orientation, religion, or nationality." "Whether gay, straight, or bisexual, if you have close contact with someone with monkeypox, you're at risk," Brown continued. "Even so, it took the Center for Disease Control and Prevention until this month to update its guidance to state, "Anyone who has been in close contact with someone who has monkeypox can get the illness."

Right now, the virus is more prevalent in some communities over others — notably, men and trans women who have sex with men. So, it's critical to stay vigilant, but equally important to not add to the unfounded hype that this virus somehow targets this community.

How serious is the virus?

Typical monkeypox cases last

around two to four weeks and are relatively mild. Still, it's not unusual to experience disruptive, uncomfortable flu-like symptoms on top of a significant full-body rash. Any time "pustules" are involved is a good time to practice caution — not only are these unsightly sores itchy and unpleasant, scarring can be permanent.

Rarely, monkeypox causes severe symptoms requiring hospitalization. It's a good idea to check in with your healthcare provider if you suspect you've contracted the virus.

How is monkeypox treated?

While the CDC notes that there are no current treatments available specifically for monkeypox, because monkeypox and smallpox are genetically similar viruses, some medications and vaccines developed against smallpox can be used to prevent and treat monkeypox.

Antivirals like tecovirimat (TPOXX) are sometimes recommended for people more likely to become seriously ill, such as those with weakened immune systems.

In most cases, the virus will resolve on its own within two to four weeks.

Where can I get a vaccine?

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services updated guidance on monkeypox vaccination July 28.

"Although the vaccine supply is limited, we are striving to utilize all doses of vaccine as soon as they become available to help mitigate spread," said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, MDHHS chief medical executive in a statement. "We have issued guidance to our local health department partners to help ensure those most at risk from MPV are prioritized. Michiganders who know they have been exposed to MPV or suspect they have been exposed should contact

their local health department about getting vaccinated."

Currently, MDHHS is recommending vaccination in the following situations:

- Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP): vaccinating individuals following intermediate or high-risk exposure to MPV to prevent illness.
- Expanded Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP++): vaccinating individuals with risk behaviors in geographies, settings, events or venues with known MPV transmission in the last 14 days.

The CDC recommends the vaccine be given for PEP within four days from the date of exposure for the best chance to prevent onset of the disease. If given between four and 14 days after the date of exposure, vaccination may reduce the symptoms of disease but may not prevent MPV.

So far, the state has received around 3,800 doses of the JYNNEOS vaccine, including doses allocated to the Southeast Michigan area in and around Detroit (including Be Well Medical Center in Berkley) and within Oakland and Washtenaw counties. Southeast Michigan clinics offering the vaccine include:

- Be Well Medical Center (Berkley)
- Wayne HIV/STI Clinic (50 East Canfield, Detroit)
- Detroit Health Department (100 Mack Avenue, Detroit)
- Washtenaw County Health Department (555 Towner St, Ypsilanti)
- Oakland County (call 248-858-1280 for info)

MDHHS notes that local health departments may initiate contact with eligible individuals who have been identified as close contacts to a MPV case about receiving the vaccine. The agency is directing people who have suspected cases, or who have been in contact with someone with a suspected case to their local health department for more information.

Visit pridesource.com for up-to-date information on monkeypox as we find out more about the virus and vaccination availability.



Doug Booth. Photo courtesy of Doug Booth

→ Conversion Therapy

Continued from page 8

sit down and take a look at what exists already, then explore the possibilities. Perhaps the Federal Trade Commission should be made aware of individuals or businesses that practice conversion therapy. The Consumer Protection Act could come into play, too. “Maybe those regulatory agencies also could have a say, making it clear to people that these are deceptive practices and you’re not allowed to advertise or to promote as such.” In a way, conversion therapy can be viewed as a “product” that doesn’t work.

The most important function of municipal bans is that they send a message, Kaplan said. “I feel the same way about local human rights ordinances,” he said. “Many times, they don’t have the resources or the mechanism in order to really redress the harm that’s happened, but I think they serve a very important function in sending a message that we are such a community and these are our values, and this is not something that is acceptable. So I think they can go a long way.”

Casey Peck is the Senior Fellow for Advocacy and Government Affairs at The Trevor Project. An attorney by training, she has been working for several years on supporting the passage of state and local bans on conversion therapy. Peck explained how her organization supports ending conversion therapy. It starts with awareness.

“It’s a combination of storytelling, of raising up that kind of evidence and data, so that people are aware that conversion therapy is not a relic of the past, it is still happening, and it is still harmful,” Peck said. “So, that’s a large part of what we do. We also work hard to build coalitions so that young people telling their own stories, [as well as] their families and parents who have been exploited by people who promote these practices, don’t have to stand alone.

“They have the backing of medical and mental health professionals who know that these practices are unethical and harmful and not part of what they want their profession to be known for,” she continued, “that they have the backing of faith communities who are willing to stand up and say, ‘Not in our name. We believe that LGBTQ youth should be loved and accepted as they were created, as they are.’”

Peck pointed to Virginia as a recent success story for a statewide conversion therapy ban. The efforts started out small but grew with each municipality. She compared how they started conversations and built momentum toward an eventual statewide ban to the way LGBTQ+ people have secured rights over the decades: in the workplace, housing and public accommodation. It took time. Bills were introduced repeatedly. Then, eventually, the Virginia State Legislature gained enough bipartisan support that when the opportunity came, they were able to pass the bill.

Enacting an ordinance to ban conversion therapy is easier in some municipalities than it is in others, certainly, but it’s a straightforward process. And The Trevor Project and Doug Booth are here to help. For example, Booth’s website includes language that is broad enough to use as a template for any interested parties. It’s also common to “borrow” language, just as Royal Oak used language from Ferndale’s ban. Peck had advice for presenting the ban to the decision-makers in one’s jurisdiction.

“You want to be able to walk in there prepared to tell the story of how conversion therapy affects a particular community,” she said. “If there are survivors who are willing and able to tell their story, that’s fantastic; they should never have to stand alone. And everybody could tell a story about how being and living in a community that just rejects these dangerous and discredited practices is important to fostering an environment where all young people can survive and thrive and know that they are accepted and welcome.”

Back in Grand Rapids, Booth is waiting. To ensure he was in the best position to present the ban to the city commission, “That’s when I reached out to say, ‘Stop,’ and asked if I could present it to the Community Relations Commission, which I did in May,” Booth said. “And thankfully, they did release that memo to the city commission, city manager and mayor, just stating, ‘It’s time. You need to pass an ordinance to ban this.’”

“And so that’s kind of where we are at the moment,” he added, “but I have over 60 organizations [and] I have over a thousand individuals, including elected officials, on this list. There is a clear desire for the community to just stand up and actually start protecting LGBTQ youth in more ways than just words.”

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Kevin Bacon as Owen Whistler in "They/Them." Photo: Peacock

Kevin at (Conversion) Camp Again

Why the 'Footloose' Actor Is Especially Proud of His New LGBTQ+ Movie

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Kevin Bacon is back at camp. Not Camp Crystal Lake, where the 64-year-old actor met his gruesome demise in the original 1980 horror classic "Friday the 13th." But at the kind of camp that is a horrific reality for queer youth — conversion therapy camp. In "They/Them," Bacon, partly famous for being stalked by Jack on "Will & Grace," runs the Whistler Camp, a place sold to LGBTQ+ teens as welcoming and inclusive when just the opposite is true.

In openly gay writer-director John Logan's film, vulnerable queer recruits, led by non-binary actor Theo Germaine's Jordan, arrive both optimistic and skeptical to Whistler, under the impression they're seeking ultimate happiness. But when the pressure to conform is dialed up, that future prospect comes at the expense of their personhood.

Known for his roles in "Footloose," "A Few Good Men" and "Tremors" (some might say his best work was in "Wild Things"), Bacon took a few minutes to chat about the role and

how the film challenges LGBTQ+ horror tropes.

When you look back at your career, who is scarier: Owen, Jason or the underground creepy-crawlies of "Tremors"?

[Laughs.] This is how I would compare those: The Graboids [in "Tremors"] are actual monsters. Jason is technically a human being, but he seems to have evolved into having almost kind of supernatural power. But the scariest part about Owen is that he's a real man. He

could be in your family.

As the camp leader, you really tap into this sort of warmth that's very unsettling.

That's something that John Logan and I talked about a lot. We didn't want to come right out of the gate and have the guy be a drill sergeant or kind of Bible-thumping or terrorizing people right away. We wanted to bring everybody in in a gentle and warm sort of embrace, you know? And that left us a place to go so that when the anger and the

fear and the manipulation and the darkness of Owen's character come through, it comes as a little bit more of a surprise and becomes more chilling in that way.

You really embody that. For someone who's long been an LGBTQ+ ally, what was the appeal of doing a movie set at a conversion therapy camp, given the actual horror of that process?

You know, it's one thing to make a movie about very important

See Kevin Bacon, page 18

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- Kate Pierce at kpierce@alz.org or 248-996-1036
- Alzheimer's Association 24/7 helpline at helplinegmc@alz.org or 800-272-3900



→ Kevin Bacon

Continued from page 16

issues. But sometimes you can make small dramas about these things and you're gonna be preaching to the converted because they're not gonna have any kind of widespread appeal. Whereas if you can take, as John so brilliantly did, this horrible notion and package it in a film that has the possibility of widespread viewing, then there's something beautifully Trojan horse subversive in the messaging.

I think what John really wanted was for young people on the fringes who are feeling bullied or are closeted or living in some part of the country where who they are is completely unaccepted, to be able to see themselves up on that screen and feel a sense of identity. But the best outcome would be someone who thinks in the same way that Owen thinks or that Carrie Preston's character thinks and sees this and questions this very notion of conversion. They'll think, "Oh, well, wait a second. This is just not right."

Have you known people like Carrie Preston's character or an Owen and had to have a conversation about why conversion therapy is not the right route for a queer child?

I can't say that I have. I also have a feeling that if they did feel that way that they probably wouldn't bring it up with me. But also, maybe that just speaks to kind of [this] rarefied bubble of an existence that I live in.

How do you think the film represents the trans community in a different light, as opposed to the typical way they're portrayed in horror films — as victims or villains?

Horror can be different genres, as you know. There's psychological horror and there's slasher movies. There's monster movies, zombie movies, ones with vampires. You know, there's different kinds of worlds. In the slasher world, the tradition was to take

things that society had deemed morally wrong such as drug use, premarital sexuality, homosexuality, goofiness, race, obesity, anything, and kill those people. People seemed to agree that that was a good idea. And so this movie is definitely flipping that notion.

I think that horror in general — "Get Out" being one of the great examples of this — is having a little bit more of a pointed view. As far as I'm concerned, it can just be... somebody in a closet with a knife, if it's done well. But I do think that ["They/Them"] has more of a pointed view. And I can tell you that [during] the first scene that we shot in the movie, me walking out on that porch and looking at those people, I was really trying to stay in the headspace of the character. I have to say that I felt a tremendous amount of pride with the fact that these young people were standing there in front of me, and brought together in this film by John Logan and Blumhouse in order to be genuine representations of all different kinds of people that make up this society.

When in your career do you first remember being aware that you had an LGBTQ+ fanbase?

I honestly... I'm so happy to hear that. That never even crosses my mind. Great. That's cool. Maybe I became aware just now, in this moment. [Laughs.]

No way. Not the guy who did "Wild Things." There's no way that there weren't gay men coming up to you on the streets and acknowledging that role.

[Laughs.] Well, you know, "Wild Things" was crazy because I didn't even really think about the fact that male nudity would get so much attention. It was something that I... I don't know. I mean, it's just naïve of me, but it didn't even cross my mind that it was gonna become what it became. But it was great, and I like to be acknowledged in any kind of way, so thank you for that.

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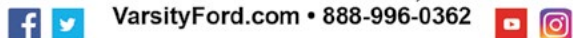


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Janet Leigh in "Psycho." Photo: YouTube

GENDER ROLES AT THE MOVIES

Which of These Classic Horror Films Got It Right?

A New Film Revises Classic Portrayals of Gender in Horror

BY GEORGE ELKIND

Part issue movie and part throwback slasher, Blumhouse's new horror film "They/Them," out now on Peacock, aims to flip the script for how queer characters are treated in horror films onscreen. Since the gender-bending twist in "Psycho" (and partly due to that 1960 landmark film's influence), horror has provided some of mainstream

cinema's most overt explorations of transgender themes, dealing with trans or trans-adjacent figures in fraught but often rich ways.

Directed by veteran screenwriter and playwright John Logan (who is openly gay) and set at a conversion camp for LGBTQ+ youth, "They/Them" spotlights a diverse ensemble of characters led by nonbinary actor Theo Germaine as Jordan, squaring off alongside an ensemble of their peers against Kevin Bacon's Owen Whistler, the camp's warmly unsettling proprietor.

Here, the film's central concern isn't the existence of LGBTQ+ people as an affront to the "normality" of a conservative society: a dynamic the late queer critic Robin Wood has often described as driving much of the last century's horror films. Instead, the film's threats stem

from the power and prevalence of conservative actors who would treat queerness as an aberrant threat and a problem to be reckoned with, even solved. By making queer people its subjects (even as they're targets), captives surviving through a combination of resourcefulness and solidarity, "They/Them" feels like an exception in a genre with a pattern of treating trans and nonconforming characters as ones to be feared rather than understood, much less granted agency.

Film history has played host to trans and gender-nonconforming characters, though it's often had to do so in quiet, covert manners. In horror, that's been less the case, and not for ideal reasons; the genre, ever rife with queer killers, has always made a space for whatever mainstream society fears. In this context, queerness has

rarely been depicted as a lived reality, pitched instead as a frightening late-stage revelation. Across the genre, it's long been common for a character to be revealed as both queer and murderous at precisely the same time.

"It was the late act reveal that a character wasn't who they were supposed to be, and it was the demonic femininity of men in dresses and lace that became the lasting image," explains trans critic Willow Maclay, who points to "Psycho" as a starting point. "The killer behind the blade was a man who thought he was a woman, and genre filmmaking [has] been milking this for all its worth ever since."

In light of this trend, what follows is a brief examination of some of these horror works — all directed by cisgender men — that deal with varying effect in trans themes.

'Psycho' (1960)

Director Alfred Hitchcock

"We're all in our private traps, clamped in them. And none of us can ever get out," muses Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates, an innkeeper and serial murderer who does his killing in his late mother's old clothes. Though he's ostensibly talking about geography rather than gender, his words easily resonate beyond that. So, too, does his burnt air toward the cruelties of his era's psychiatric approach, lending his eventual fate a tragic air that a chillier, more distanced depiction wouldn't grant.

Even so, "Psycho" draws a hazy boundary around Norman's compulsions, conflating dysphoric experience with dissociative identity

See **Horror Tropes**, page 26

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Getting One Up on Life

The Broadway Avenue, Roasted

Grand Rapids Wedding Venue Under investigation as Queer Folks Tear Into Owners on Social Media

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

We're queer. We're here. And, if you're homophobic, we're going to come for you on social media. That appears to be the new mantra of Michigan queers after a newly opened wedding venue in Grand Rapids announced via Instagram that they won't allow same-sex ceremonies in their space.

As BTL previously reported, Nick and Hannah Natale, owners of The Broadway Avenue, say serving the LGBTQ+ community would go against their faith in Jesus Christ. (The same man who, incidentally, served up such little nuggets of knowledge such as "that shalt not judge," and "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.")

However they decide to mask their homophobia, luckily Grand Rapids does have a human rights ordinance that includes sexual orientation as a protected class. According to Grand Rapids' FOX 17, the City of Grand Rapids has received multiple complaints against the venue and its discriminatory policy. A spokesperson for the city told the news agency that the city has begun processing the complaints and an investigation will follow.

Meanwhile, reactions on social media have been fast and furious. And relentless! "Idk about YOUR Jesus but MY Jesus loves everyone," said Instagram user samanthaayaqo. "This is SAD."

Samanthaayaqo was just one of many self-identified Christians who took offense to the Natales' comments. Instagram user jennagreenawalt said, "As a Christian and an ally of the LGBTQ+ community, I'm deeply saddened by this." Jennagreenawalt went on to suggest a book the couple

should read and a podcast they should check out for a little enlightenment on the subject.

Instagram user Lindsay.cronebetts put it directly: "Quite frankly, you're not 'good people' if you openly discriminate against any couple that isn't your view of a 'traditional man and woman.'"

Some apparently didn't really want to believe it was true. The Instagram account of Fleurology Designs and Events asked for clarity and inquired whether non-Christians or even Atheists could have their weddings at The Broadway Avenue. The venue quickly responded that they could. Devil worshippers are apparently fine. Just no homos!

"All other religions, non religious, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, esthetics, vibes are all welcome," The Broadway Avenue responded to the post. "The marriage, itself, just needs to be between a man and a woman."

Instagram user therevelrose suggested that the couple's alleged embrace of their Christian faith might actually end up turning LGBTQ+ away from God. "I wonder if turning queer couples away from your venue will turn them away from Jesus?" therevelrose wrote to the Natales.

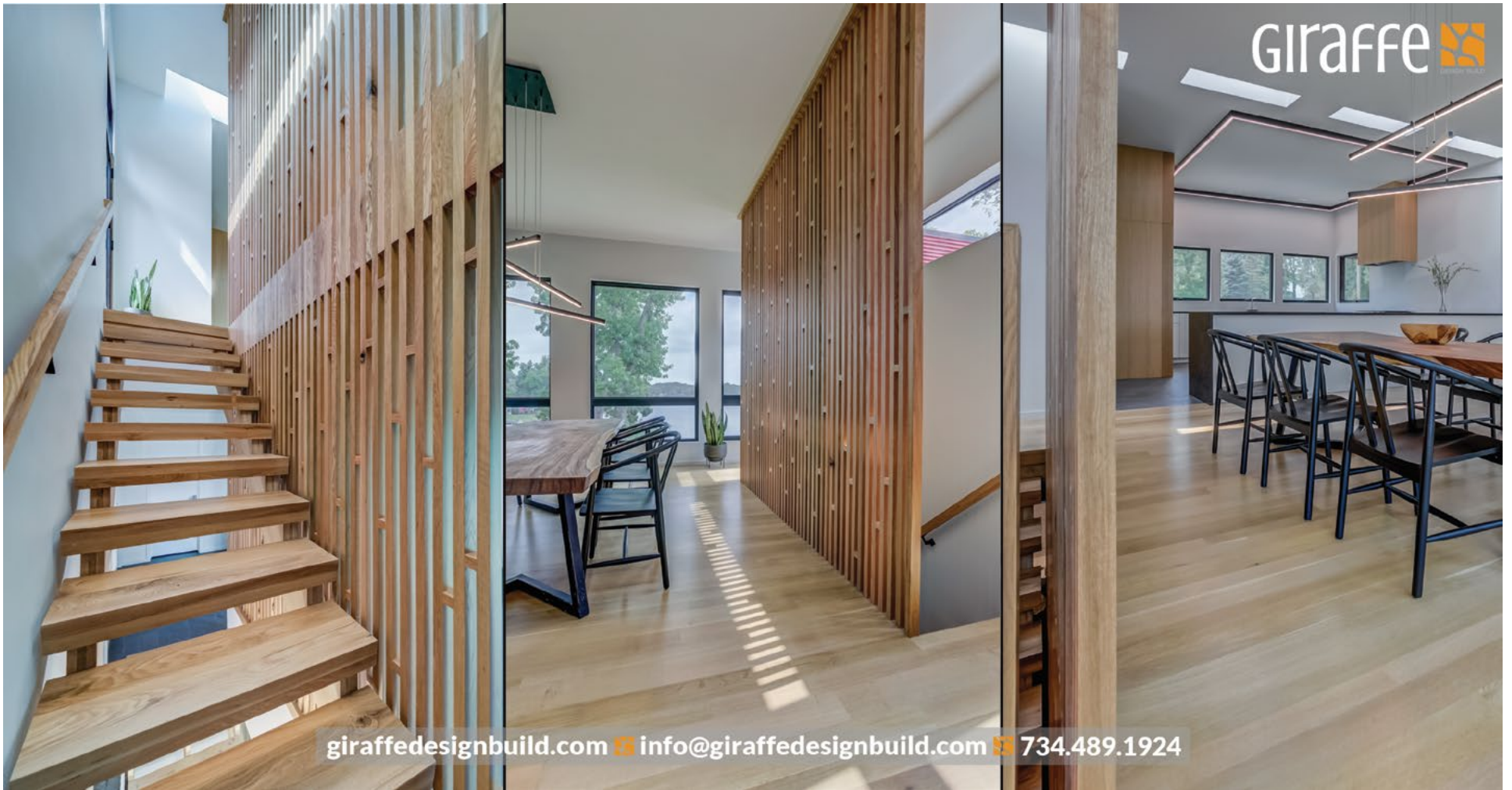
"I'm very curious which words of Jesus you're using to justify this exclusionary decision," another Instagram user, jilldevriesphotography, said. "He notably

never said queerness was a sin, and consistently befriends and wholeheartedly embraces the most marginalized people in society. As a lifelong Christ follower, your stance strikes me as completely antithetical to his teachings."

Several expressed that they had watched the venue's renovations with great anticipation which, now, has only turned to severe disappointment. "I was so excited watching this venue being built for the last couple of years," said Instagram user lisadrz_. "Just for it to end so ugly and disappointing. I hope you someday soon can understand without judgment that love has no boundaries and does not discriminate."

Instagram user _laceface_ said much of the same. "I've also been following along the whole time and am very disappointed to read this post," the user said. "I am not gay and am in a Hetero relationship. And when we get to the point where we will need a venue, I do not think I can any longer keep @thebroadwayavenue as a contender."

Others were even more blunt. "Oh gross," said Instagram user la_liaison. "Haha good luck out there in the wild being bigots. Just ain't a good look these days. The deal [is] God loved everyone. He said it himself in the Bible. I know because I read it."



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Kill 'Em With Kindness

'Michigan-Lite' Queen Nina West on Her Midwestern Queen Identity, Detroit Roots and Royal Oak Pride

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

"Go big. Be kind. Go West."

Those are the words Nina West left the world with on season 11 of "RuPaul's Drag Race" in 2019. And since then, the later-crowned "Miss Congeniality" of that season has more than met her own charge — no small feat during a global pandemic.

With the "kind" in her message a given for this famously kind queen, Nina certainly met the "go big" portion head-on, earning both national criticism and acclaim when she partnered with Nickelodeon's "Blues Clues and You" Pride campaign in 2021. Through it all, West has stuck to her message, choosing to give grace to herself and others.

"We're so hard on ourselves, we are so difficult to ourselves," she says. "We don't give ourselves enough credit to love the body that we're in and love the decisions that we made that day or be easy on ourselves when we are going [through] a difficult time."

And the "go West" part? Touring has taken care of that directive, geographically — and being authentically Nina West, of course, has filled in the rest. Currently, fans can look forward to seeing West as Edna Turnblad in the touring company of "Hairspray," read her newly debuted book "The You Kind of Kind," and catch her headline Royal Oak Pride on Friday, Aug. 12. Amidst a packed schedule, West (the alter ego of Andrew Levitt) spared a few moments to talk through what makes her tick and why she's actually a "Michigander-lite."

I know we're not your home state of Ohio, but does doing a show in Michigan feel like a homecoming to the Midwest?

Yeah, I was actually born in Detroit, so it kind of is like a homecoming in a way. I have a lot of friends there that have made it very comfortable for me over the years. I was born in Royal Oak and grew up in Farmington Hills for the first five years of my life, which makes it super special and super fun. But there is something, of course, to Midwestern identity and Midwestern queer identity and how that relates to drag or performance art and really to our communities as a whole and what that looks like. And I'm really excited and honored to be coming back to Detroit again. The last time I was there was for "Hairspray" in the winter, so I'm really excited to make a return before I go back.

Welcome back! I guess I can consider you a Michigander, then.

I'm a Michigander, kind of. Michigander-lite.

Speaking of the Midwest, the stereotype is that we're incredibly nice, and you're a queen who has definitely earned that reputation. However, I think you go a step further and could be described as kind as well, particularly since you partner your way of being with activism.

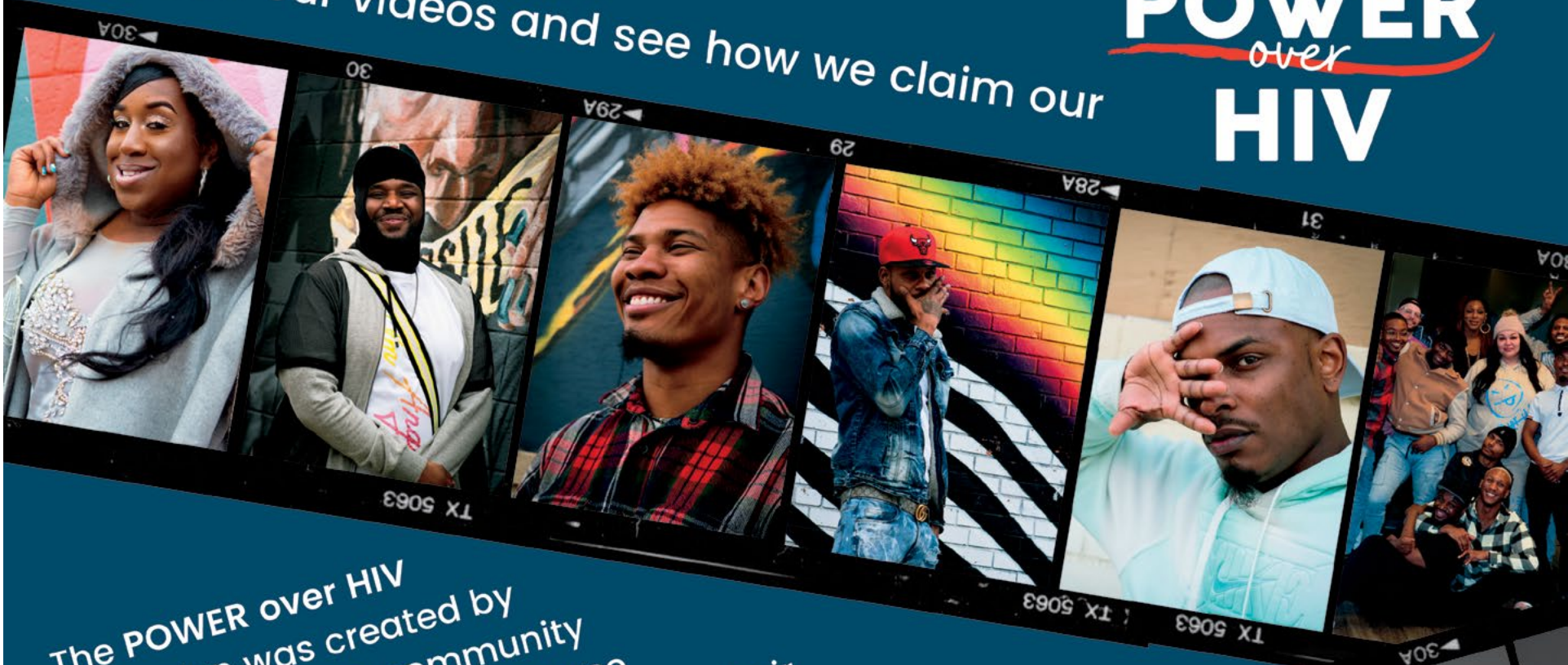
I think kindness and niceness are two very different things. It's not that I'm nice; it's just that I

Nina West. Photo: Staley Munroe

See **Nina West**, page 38

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A still from 1980's "Dressed to Kill." Photo: Criterion Collection

➔ **Horror Tropes**

Continued from page 20

disorder, positing Freudian roots for what it treats as an eventual psychotic break. In elaborating a succession of repressive mental gymnastics which allow Norman to assume the identity of his matricidal victim (and deny his role in her murder), the film's coda with a psychiatrist strives to establish Bates as singular, not representative of anyone else. This conflation of trans-coded acts with murderous impulses at least singles out repression as a problem, too, allowing for the possibility that Bates' actions stem from social realities bigger than himself.

'Dressed to Kill' (1980)

Director Brian De Palma

Laying out a complex relationship between looking, aspiration, desire and gender identity, "Dressed to Kill" consciously reiterates the blend of dissociative and repressive psychodynamics seen in "Psycho." Engaging openly with transgenderism as a subject while still retaining hints of multiple-identity frameworks from decades earlier, the film distinguishes itself by linking its flashes of violence to a kind of cognitive dissonance in such a way that its outward drama becomes an expression — though hardly an accurate or representative one — of a deeper conflict within its key figure. With a twist revealing Michael Caine as Bobbi, the film's femme-presenting killer (living publicly as Dr. Robert Elliott, a prominent psychiatrist in everyday life), the film finds a bit of truth when it suggests that heterosexual desire and a deeply felt, essential womanhood need not be perceived as at odds — a reality Bobbi struggles to accept.

Despite this stroke, De Palma's regard of the medical processes of transitioning — discussed within talk shows, office settings,

and dinner-table discussions — can feel at times prurient and leering. Like many films before and after, "Dressed" tightly links breaches of traditional gender identity with violent impulses, enmeshing them with the more concrete, still-evolving difficulties of pursuing gender-confirmation procedures. (In this, it treats trans experience as both alien and sympathetic). Across all this, a razor becomes a visual symbol and a kind of fulcrum for Bobbi's conflict, nodding to the socially embedded aspects of gender performance and the means by which such constrictive roles are both enacted and enforced.

'Silence of the Lambs' (1991)

Director Jonathan Demme

Engaged with gender as a constant pressure from its opening moments, "Silence of the Lambs" finds Buffalo Bill (played by Ted Levine) in a desolate, isolated place. Having been rejected by numerous hospitals in attempting to transition, his choice to take matters into his own hands through a brutal series of flayings and killings — all in pursuit of "transformation" into a more outwardly feminine form — becomes, troublingly to viewers then and now, a driving force toward violence.

But Bill's relationship to transness proves contentious, both within the film and in its reception since. "Billy is not a real transsexual," insists Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter in one scene. Shortly prior, Jodie Foster's Clarice Starling says "there's no correlation in the literature between transsexualism and violence," using what she now acknowledges as dated terminology. At the same time, the character's coding feels adjacent to transness, and Bill's psychiatric diagnosis by Lecter and other unrelated cis characters registers in retrospect as eerily paternalistic.

While a perpetrator of monstrous acts,

See **Horror Tropes**, page 28

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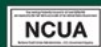


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Theo Germaine in "They/Them." Photo: Peacock

➔ **Horror Tropes**

Continued from page 26

not only brutalizing women but displaying swastikas around his home, Bill's framing by cinematographer Tak Fujimoto seems psychologically attentive in a similar way to the rest of the film's head-on portraiture of Lecter, Starling and everyone else. At the same time, his treatment of Bill's body differs in key ways, particularly in the film's infamous tucking scene, which renders Bill's form as something evoking an obscure, nearly alien interest. Such tensions run basically unresolved throughout, with characters insisting that anything now monstrous about Bill was "made" rather than "born," seemingly by what Robin Wood deems "the worst excesses of patriarchal culture" in his writing on the film. Rife with contradiction and ambiguity in its depiction, Demme, Levine and Fujimoto's portrayal of Bill signals an effort, at least, to understand him, never wholly discounting the life of the character's mind.



Buffalo Bill in "Silence of the Lambs."

'They/Them' (2022)

Director John Logan

Logan's new film happily sheds most of this cultural baggage, responding to it all the same. Even as its LGBTQ+ characters prove

victimized by both physical and emotional forms of violence as captives at the camp, they retaliate in ways that are more wily than rough themselves, with Logan's screenplay avoiding even retaliatory forms of queer people inflicting harm. [Readers, note: spoilers follow] This tendency comes to a head — and maybe a breaking point — in the film's climax which features a sympathetic character (whether they're queer is never quite laid out) — harshly exacting vengeance against those responsible

for the camp's history of queer suppression. What Logan gives his queer cast is not so much revenge or firm agency but rather a way out of a longstanding representational trap, seeking to put daylight between the possibilities of the present and a troubled history of queerness in the genre.

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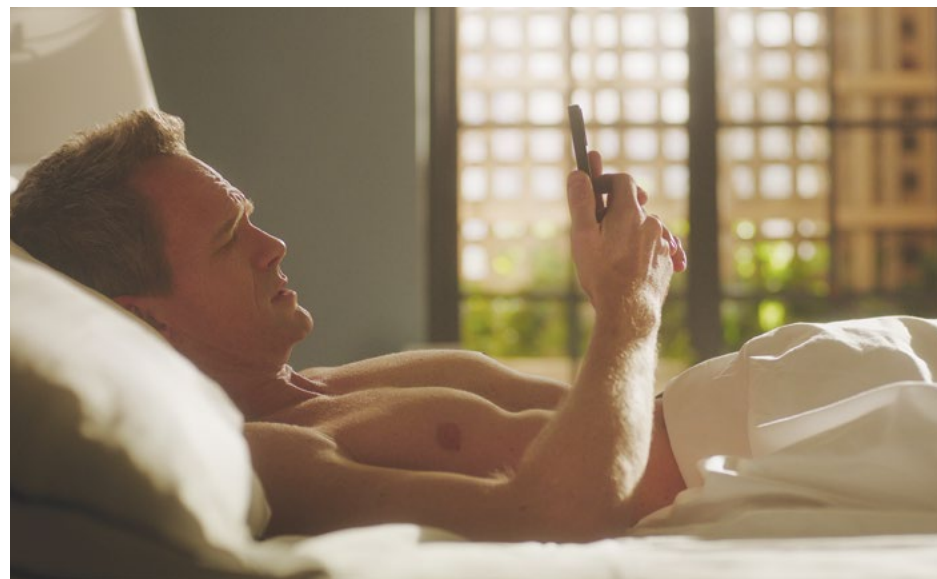
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Neil Patrick Harris's

Penis Problem

Actor on 'Uncoupled' and His 'Digital Dong' in 'Gone Girl'

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

It wasn't that it was hard, but when Neil Patrick Harris shot a scene for the new Netflix series "Uncoupled," in which his character tries to snap just the right Grindr shots, it was a little... hairy.

It was "taking angles" and "making sure that you didn't show your stuff in certain positions" that Harris says was "interesting."

"We had to find what my 'd actually looks like," said the actor, throwing up air quotes while on Zoom to promote the series.

In "Uncoupled," Harris's Michael, a married Manhattanite, has the rug pulled out from under him when his husband of 17 years, portrayed by Tuc Watkins ("Desperate Housewives," "Boys in the Band"), suddenly decides to end things. Michael quickly learns that, for a single gay man in his mid-40s living in New York City, he's a little behind the ball when it comes to contemporary queer culture. Openly gay TV rom-com mogul Darren Star, who created "Sex and the City" and "Younger,"

helmed "Uncoupled" with Jeffrey Richman, so naturally there's a fair amount of gay sex.

But, as Michael learns, in order to get some taps, you've gotta show the goods on social media. Harris's bare bottom is prominently featured during the episode, though it was the front of his body that resulted in heated discussions and debates.

"My modesty's fine; I wasn't that nervous about that," he admitted to BTL. "You have this weird contraption around your actual genitals so no one can see it, but I didn't want Netflix execs or the editors to see this, like, weird pouch thing, and the camera couldn't see that either."

In other words, situating a penis just right is a complicated affair on set. So complicated that, when he went to his trailer the day of the shoot and found "two flaccid rubber phalluses on my desk," it was time to get the producers involved.

"They were like small and weird, and I think

See Neil Patrick Harris, page 32



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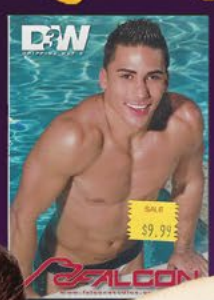
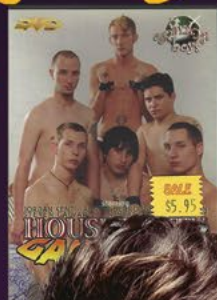
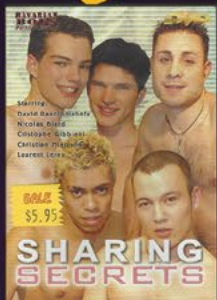
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→ 988

Continued from page 6

made possible by the Biden Administration with more than \$400 million earmarked to strengthen mental health services and other supports offered via states' own crisis centers. In Michigan, at least \$3 million is budgeted for more staffing and infrastructure, placing the state in a solid position to build out the network.

As the system becomes more established, Pinals said they would be looking into the best ways to support the LGBTQ+ community, one population at greater risk for suicide. She assured BTL that call-takers are equipped to respond to crises related to one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

"The idea is that the line and the call takers will be able to have the training and skills to support those types of crises, as well as refer people to other resources, if that's what's needed," Pinals said. "But we want to do that with the voice of people in the LGBTQ+ community. And so one of those strategies will be to reach out to certain vulnerable populations and to have focus group-type conversations to help inform how we work with the crisis responders."

Jeff Kapuscinski, chief external relations officer for Common Ground, explained that part of their 96-hour crisis intervention training involves an LGBTQ+ component. "Topics within that section focus on understanding the possible complexities this population is faced with," said Kapuscinski by email, on behalf of Common Ground staff.

Kapuscinski said it's been the experience of

Common Ground that most calls from self-identified LGBTQ+ people aren't generally calling about LGBTQ+ issues, but "crisis workers treat every caller with dignity and respect, meeting them where they are in that moment, focusing on utilizing trauma-informed care. If a caller is in need of specific LGBTQ+ support and resources, our training covers multiple referrals we are able to offer to the caller." He added that LGBTQ+ callers can expect to receive support in a confidential and non-judgmental space.

That could go a long way toward responding to the 45 percent of LGBTQ+ youth ages 13 to 24 who seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. That's according to the Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. The survey also revealed that 73 percent reported experiencing anxiety, while 58 percent said they experienced depression. Sixty percent of LGBTQ+ youth who wanted mental health care were not able to access it.

Caretto said she can relate to the kind of extensive training involved in working on a hotline because she answered a crisis line when she was in high school and college. And she said she hasn't heard about negative experiences from clients who, in the past, have called hotlines like Common Ground.

BTL asked Caretto what she advises clients to do in a mental health emergency if she is not available.

"Well, on my voicemail, it says, 'If this is a life-threatening clinical emergency, hang up and dial 911, or go to the nearest hospital emergency room,'" Caretto said. "I will now change that so that it says 'Dial 988' instead of 911."

→ Neil Patrick Harris

Continued from page 30

something people used to pack themselves, like drag kings, but it didn't look very flattering and I sort of said, 'I don't want this! I don't want you to take a picture of this!'"

Specifically — because who wouldn't want every single last detail? — Harris described the phalluses to BTL as "latex, pale, single-colored thing[s]."

And if you ever wondered what it's like to work on a set of a show in which the penis of your character is up for debate, wonder no more: "We had a nice text thread with the producers," he recalled. "What about this photo if we crop it? And what about this? It was the filthiest thing of all. 'Too big, too thick, too long.' I was like, 'Come on!' But we kind of met in the middle."

As for the new-and-improved, NPH-

approved penis pics? Still on his phone, he says. Though not for long because his two kids with Michigan-born husband David Burka, Harper and Gideon, could possibly see them when they go through his phone.

"I really do need to erase those pictures off my phone," he said.

In other Neil Patrick Harris penis news: He had you fooled in "Gone Girl," and contrary to popular belief, what you saw down there wasn't the real thing.

"We're at the New York Film Fest, and we're about to do the red carpet, and [director] David Fincher, when we're all saying hello, turns to me and goes 'Oh, by the way: We added a digital dick to

your thing so just so you know, it's not yours. It's digital.' I was like, 'Is it nice?'"

Harris knows that, perhaps, you were misled, telling BTL: "I think people think they might have actually seen my dong on 'Gone Girl,' but that was a digital dong."

On behalf of NPH, sorry for the confusion.

As for the new-and-improved, NPH-approved penis pics? Still on his phone, he says.

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A Beyoncé Dedication That Doesn't Surprise Us One Bit

Bey Herself Once Told BTL Just How Much She Loves Her Queer Fans

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Between The Lines readers won't be surprised to learn that, after some savvy Beyhive sleuthing, it's true: Beyoncé has lovingly dedicated her new "Renaissance" release to her gay uncle who died of AIDS-related illness.

Even in 2011, when Beyoncé gave a rare LGBTQ+ press interview to BTL while promoting her album "4," the Beyhive was delighted to hear the megastar make it crystal clear that she has a lot of love for her LGBTQ+ audience. And it wasn't just when she was asked about girls and gays running the world together. (To which Queen Bey responded, laughing, "That's what I meant when I said girls.")

"If anyone is brave and true to themselves, it's my gay fans," Beyoncé said to BTL editorial director Chris Azzopardi on the phone at the time. "The amount of confidence and fearlessness it takes to do what maybe is not what your parents expect you to do or what society may think is different — to be brave and be different and to

be yourself — is just so beautiful."

"It's what we all want to be at the end of the day," she continued. "And not worrying about satisfying or becoming what other people think you're supposed to be, that's like the ultimate dream — to just be brave."

On Thursday, July 28 Beyoncé posted the album's liner notes on her website, which reveal that "Renaissance," Beyoncé's seventh album, is part of a "three-act" project that had been in the works for three years. While she noted that Jay-Z played a big role in helping bring the album to fruition, she added that "Renaissance" wouldn't have been possible without her Uncle Jonny's influence.

"A big thank you to my Uncle Jonny. He was my godmother and the first person to expose me to a lot of the music and culture that serve as inspiration for this album," she wrote. "Thank you to all of the pioneers who originate culture, to all of the fallen angels whose contributions have gone unrecognized for far too long. This is a celebration for you."

In a 2019 acceptance speech for the Vanguard Award at the 30th Annual GLAAD Media Awards (an award she shared with husband Jay-Z), she referred to Uncle Jonny as "the most fabulous gay man" she had ever known.

"I want to dedicate this award to my uncle Jonny, the most fabulous gay man I ever knew,

who helped raise me and my sister," she said in the speech.

"He lived his truth. He was brave and unapologetic during a time when this country wasn't as accepting," she continued. "And witnessing his battle with HIV was one of the most painful experiences I've ever lived. I'm hopeful that his struggle helped to open pathways for other young people to live more freely. LGBTQIA rights are human rights."

As for Beyoncé's post-"4" artistic evolution, she has made bolder political and social statements through her work. Creating art that means something to her first and foremost is clearly important to her. "Break My Soul," the first single off "Renaissance," is a prime example. It's so much more than a bass-driven, gay-forward house number — one that samples Robin S's 1993 club "Show Me Love" — with lyrics like "queens in the front." It's therapy. Because as you're working up a sweat on the dance floor, Bey's actually pushing you to chart a course to a better you.

Already it's clear that "Renaissance" has



inspired the kind of self-love the artist told BTL she hoped to achieve with 2011's "4."

"I hope that I've given them confidence, and I hope that I've given them inspiration," she told Azzopardi in the 2011 BTL interview. "I just want everyone to become a better person, and I hope that when they see me perform they can live out their fantasies and see my work ethic and apply it to their lives and be confident and proud."


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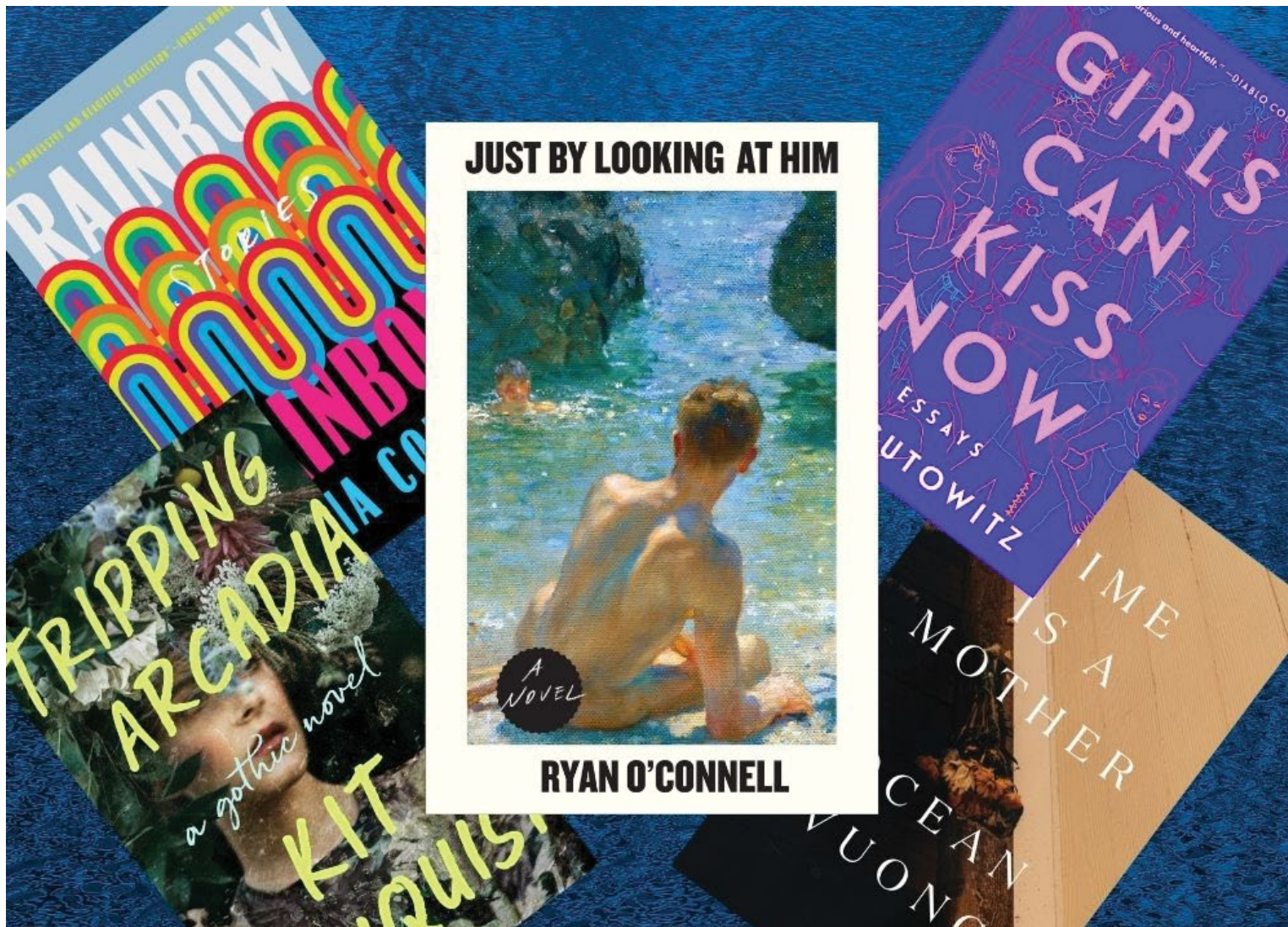
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seasons on Netflix. Now you can add author to his ever-expanding resume with his first foray into fiction. “Just By Looking at Him” tells the story of Elliott, who masks his alcohol addiction with a smoke-and-mirrors career as a TV writer. He’s cheating on his boyfriend, though, and things aren’t great overall. All the while, he has cerebral palsy, which makes him feel like a “gay Shrek.” O’Connell’s story is about the fight to overcome addiction while also searching for acceptance in an ableist world.

‘You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty’

Akwaeke Emezi

Nigerian fiction writer and video artist Akwaeke Emezi, who identifies as non-binary transgender, has been a celebrated queer voice — a “once-in-a-generation” one, according to *Vulture* — since “Freshwater,” their 2018 debut novel that is currently being adapted into a TV series for FX. Since then, Emezi has gone on to achieve major prestige, including being named a “5 Under 35” honoree by the National Book Foundation that same year. Their 2019 book, “Pet,” which explored identity and justice, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature. And their latest book, “You Made a Fool of Death With Your Beauty,” the story of Feyi Adekola grappling with the aftermath of her lover’s death, was described by *The New York Times Book Review* as “an unabashed ode to living with, and despite, pain and mortality.”

‘A Previous Life’

Edmund White

National Book Award-winning author Edmund White explores polyamory, bisexuality, aging and love in “A Previous Life,” a book about Sicilian aristocrat and musician Ruggero and his younger American wife Constance’s decision to break their promise to each other to refrain from sharing intimate details about past relationships. Their transparency leads to some revealing revelations about each other: Constance was married to multiple older men, and Ruggero has loved not just women, but men too. And White, whose book experiments with writing himself into the story as a secondary character, just happens to be one of them.

‘Rainbow Rainbow’

Lydia Conklin

A visiting professor in fiction at

www.PrideSource.com

Fight the Queer Book Ban By Lovin’ Up on These 11 New LGBTQ+ Reads

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

No matter what Republicans tell you, there’s never a bad time to get lost in a queer book. But now just happens to be a really good time to do so as parents pressure administrators to ban books with LGBTQ+ content from school classrooms and libraries. You can take action against these conservative groups relentlessly pushing their troubling censorship efforts. One way? To simply exercise your reading rights by supporting these LGBTQ+ stories and authors.

‘I Was Better Last Night’

Harvey Fierstein

Harvey Fierstein is a bona fide gay legend across the board, from his illustrious stage and screen career (among his most memorable work: “Torch Song Trilogy,” “Hairspray” and “Mrs. Doubtfire”) on through “Kinky Boots,” the Tony Award-winning musical he wrote the book for. Of course, there’s everything in between and

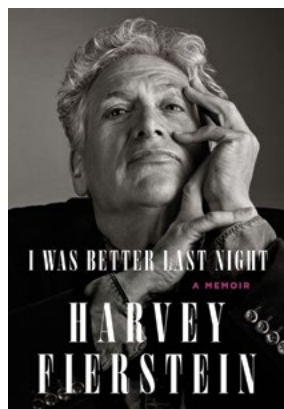
everything that came before, and in his first memoir “I Was Better Last Night,” Fierstein reflects on all of the above. The book covers aspects of his life as a prominent figure in the LGBTQ+ community, including his community theater roots in Brooklyn, his nonconformist childhood and two seminal moments in queer history — the early gay rights movement in the 1970s and the AIDS crisis the following decade. In a 2015 interview with BTL, Fierstein said, “I don’t

believe in life after death, so whoever’s gonna remember me is none of my business, certainly. I ain’t gonna know about it.” With this memoir, surely, though perhaps unintentionally so, he’s given us yet another reason to not let him slip away into oblivion.

‘Just By Looking at Him’

Ryan O’Connell

Ryan O’Connell is currently playing a gay pop culture nerd on Peacock’s “Queer as Folk” reimagining, while also serving as a writer and executive producer. And before that, he created “Special,” the Emmy-nominated comedy-drama loosely based on O’Connell’s life as a gay man living with cerebral palsy that ran for two



the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Lydia Conklin's "Rainbow Rainbow" pulls from various aspects of queer, gender-nonconforming and trans life for this collection of stories: a young lesbian and her lover try to have a baby with an unprofessional sperm donor, a fifth grader dresses as an ox for a class "Oregon Trail" reenactment, and a nonbinary person experiences an open relationship alongside their top surgery during the height of the pandemic.

'Ma and Me'

Putsata Reang

Described as "a layered story of queerness, assimilation and displacement" to the press,

author Putsata Reang's memoir sheds light on the gay refugee experience in America as she — born in Cambodia, raised in rural Oregon — tells her own story of intergenerational trauma and her complicated relationship with her mother, which she describes as "painful." In "Ma and Me," which is based on her Modern Love essay in The New York Times, Reang recalls how, in her 20s, after doing everything she could to be the kind of Cambodian daughter who would make her

mother proud, she came out to her. Her mother tells her it's only a phase, but then, in her 40s, Reang marries a woman, forever changing her relationship with Ma. A journalist for The New York Times, Politico and The Guardian, this is Reang's first memoir.

'Miss Memory Lane'

Colton Haynes

Described as the story of "a man stepping into the light as no one but himself," Colton Haynes lays bare his thoughts on stardom, addiction and living as an openly gay man in Hollywood in his debut memoir. The star of TV shows like "Arrow," "Teen Wolf" and "American Horror Story," Haynes writes about a death scare in his 20s that led to his sobriety. He chronicles that galvanizing episode in the book, when he woke up in a hospital after having two seizures, lost sight in one eye, ruptured a kidney and was put on involuntary psychiatric hold. His frank storytelling and emotional transparency moved Elton John and his husband David Furnish; they called the book a "brutally honest memoir that socks you in the gut with its candor," adding that "Miss Memory Lane" is an example of "how conquering our demons in life is a never-ending journey."

'Tripping Arcadia'

Kit Mayquist

If you've ever been desperate for a job, you might understand Lena's situation — to make money, in this case to support her financially challenged parents, no matter how unusual

the work. And working for one of Boston's most elite families is... weird. Weirder, too, the more Lena, a med school dropout, learns about the family; there's that mysterious live-in doctor and Jonathan, the sickly poetic and drunken heir to the family empire. The author is Kit Mayquist, a trans writer, and "Tripping Arcadia," her debut novel, is a Mexican Gothic soap opera, where the champagne flows as freely as revenge and greed.

'Young Mungo'

Douglas Stuart

The second novel from author Douglas Stuart, winner of the Booker Prize for "Shuggie Bain," is, at its tender core, a story of queer love and working-class families. Stuart, of course, is no stranger to steeping his literary work in queerness: In "Shuggie Bain," his coming-of-age debut novel, he wrote about Hugh, a young gay boy growing up in the 1980s with an alcoholic mother. Now, in "Young Mungo," we meet Mungo and James, who grow up together in a Glasgow housing estate. A world seeks to divide them, but their against-all-odds friendship that, in time, blossoms into a romance pushes against the violent, dangerous forces they must, like many queer people, face together.

'Time Is a Mother'

Ocean Vuong

"I was grieving, the world was grieving, and the only thing I really had was to go back to poems," Vuong, who wrote "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous," told TIME magazine earlier this year. At the time, he was expressing how his mother's death, paired with the pandemic, led to his latest work, "Time Is a Mother." The openly gay Vietnamese-American essayist and novelist, whose mother died in 2019 from breast cancer, writes about how he survived that loss in the collection, his second poetry book after 2016's "Night Sky with Exit Wounds."

'Girls Can Kiss Now'

Jill Gutowitz

Author and humorist Jill Gutowitz has been writing about her gay relationship with pop culture (thankfully lots about Taylor Swift) for 15 years, in magazines such as the New Yorker, Vanity Fair and Vulture. Now, in her first book of essays, "Girls Can Kiss Now," the journalist and essayist expands, with her signature wryness, on the pop-culture stuff that makes her tick. And then, of course, there is, as back of the book promises, "the time the FBI showed up at her door because of something she tweeted about 'Game of Thrones.'"



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→ Nina West

Continued from page 24

do rest in kindness, and I do live my life day-to-day on a plane of kindness where I really do treat people the way that I want to be treated. And also, part of my own queer upbringing and queer understanding was that I never wanted anyone else to feel the way that I felt when I was at my most isolated and most alone in coming to terms with who I was and my own identity.

But I want to be really clear: I think people really view kindness as some kind of weakness, but I do think it really does relate back to how I demand to be treated. And I demand to be treated with a code of ethics and with some kind of moral compass when engaging with me. I offer that to others, and once that's broken, I think that there's some kind of new negotiation that I must make with myself and with another person if I'm going to engage with them any longer.

So kindness is not to be confused with niceness. I don't want anyone to confuse me with, "Oh, I'm just a nice person and I'll tolerate or accept anything." No, actually I'm a kind person that will only go so far to allow myself to be treated in any specific way that's not healthy for me.

At the start of your career you wanted to go to New York City, but 9/11 derailed those plans and you ended up staying in the Midwest. Do you think you would have been the same queen if you had gone?

Wow, I've never thought about that. I don't know because my lived experience is what it is. I'm not sure if it would have changed me or made me a different kind of queen, but I think what I found was a career ahead of me that was not a direct route. And within my community of Columbus, Ohio, I found my own path of hardships and joy and challenges and successes that I think would have been different, but would have maybe been consistently the same.

I don't know if New York hardens a person or if a person hardens because of their own experiences throughout their life. I do know that in my 21-year drag career, I've had the privilege, really, of making mistakes in a community that corrected me. And I've had the privilege of learning how to be a leader. And I've had the challenges of being faced with complicated and difficult conversations and situations that made me a better person. I think those would have found me anywhere. I just know that, through my own experience, I'm really grateful that that happened in Ohio.

What are some of the changes in drag you've

noticed throughout your career?

When I started, there was no "RuPaul's Drag Race," so drag was never seen as a viable option to a 14-year-old kid or even just a potential hobby. It just wasn't seen that way because it was relegated to nightlife, and it was relegated to underground bars and clubs and adult venues 18 and over. Now, drag is everywhere, and it's so much because of "RuPaul's Drag Race."

The definition of the art form has changed so much in such a short period of time that I think the possibilities of it all are very different. Again, I'm not sure what younger me would have thought; I just know how my career has gone, and it has been fraught with challenges.

*The lesson is to **never** give up on yourself. The lesson is to keep going. **Keep doing it.** Keep putting it out there. Keep knocking on that door.*

We're still dealing with the AIDS crisis in our LGBTQI+ community, amongst many other things. And now, with the overturning of Roe v. Wade, things are very, very challenging for LGBTQI+ people and are only going to get harder over the next several years. So, I'm not sure. [Laughs.]

I only know the life I've lived rather than what could have been, but drag has dramatically changed over this last decade. Specifically, that has redefined and reshaped how people see the art form. When you have 12-year-old kids who want to do drag, that's very different from the world that I grew up in. I didn't come to drag until I was about 19 or 20.

What convinced you to do drag?

After I graduated college in May of 2001 I went and did a drag contest in June, and I won the contest. And once I understood that I could make money from it, I started to take it seriously. It was like, "Oh, right, I could actually do this. I'm not bad!" It was a couple of years later that I was going to take it seriously as a career, but I've always had, until I got on "Drag Race," a full-time job. I was always trying to justify that I needed to be a [laughs] serious adult, when the

work that I do in drag is far more complicated and more serious than anything I've ever done. It's more time-consuming, it's more challenging to me. But it's also more rewarding. It's exactly what I think I was put on this Earth to do, both to be a performer and to reach this audience of this LGBTQI+ community that I'm in love with and fight for on a day-to-day basis. I think drag has only allowed me the opportunity to do that. So, it's been incredible.

You famously auditioned nine times for the show, but you noted that the last one was authentically you and that's what sold it, right?

[Laughs.] The "Drag Race" auditioning, that

asking me to do.

You're also an accomplished author. What inspired you to write "The You Kind of Kind"?

Right after my season, I was approached by several different publishers to write a children's book, and I'm really glad that I'm partnering with Princeton Architectural Press. This has been a three-year process that has taken me quite some time, and, thankfully, this was one of the great things that came from my time during the pandemic. This is a children's book about finding kindness in the wild. It's beautifully illustrated by Hayden Evans, who is a brilliant artist, and I think the book came at the right time for me.

As we find ourselves in this great debate of drag being accessible to families and children, I think it's a really important conversation to have, and I'm really glad to be a part of that specific conversation, leading the way and the charge. I fully believe that when my LGBTQI+ friends started to have kids after marriage equality came down through the Supreme Court, I really leaned into wanting to support my friends who were wanting to have kids. And then the conversation has only evolved further as

"cis straight friends" who were on their own gender identity journey and journey of self-identification. I want to provide them support in this quest to find content and entertainment that matched the desires of their families. So this kids book is a huge passion project that has evolved into now a published book, and it's just so exciting to think that it's not just a dream.

And bringing a true sense of kindness to the world that so desperately needs it right now. And if it happens to be Midwestern, that's awesome, but I think it's something we can all strive to be better at and better to one another and

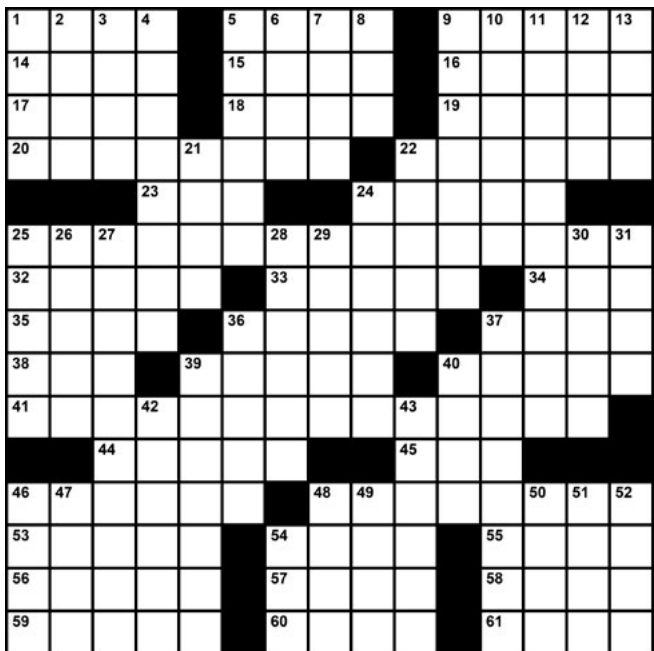
better to ourselves. My continued mission on this planet is to be good to myself and others. And not every day is perfect, but I'm definitely working on it.

Learn more about Royal Oak Pride at royaloakpride.com/entertainment. Visit ninawest.com for info about "The You Kind of Kind."



Photo: Staley Munroe

process was not easy. And it's even rumored that RuPaul said, watching that last tape, "She's either on this season, or we're never gonna put her on." And I know now I'm one of the more auditioned queens who has auditioned for the show, but now I would assume that there's probably more queens, given that they're going into season 15, who have auditioned more than I have. But really the lesson is to never give up on yourself. The lesson is to keep going. Keep doing it. Keep putting it out there. Keep knocking on that door, because they're going to answer, and they're going to tell you yes or they're going to tell you no. The lesson I learned was that I have to keep going and that I want to change and I want to evolve and become a better version of myself to be able to be ready for what they're



Getting One Up on Life

Q Puzzle

Across

- 1 Symbol on Bernstein's score
- 5 Shakespeare's shrew
- 9 Broadway gun getter
- 14 Taylor of "I Shot Andy Warhol"
- 15 Club for Sheehan
- 16 Rock Hudson roles, usually
- 17 Nat. counterpart in MLB
- 18 Mind the bar

- 19 Jobs for Burr's Mason
- 20 Start of a quote by 48-Across
- 22 Cadillac model, with "Ei"
- 23 Word after post or ad
- 24 "Bolero" composer
- 25 More of the quote
- 32 Tape over a video
- 33 Blue bottoms
- 34 Came out on top
- 35 Boy Scout outing

- 36 Composed on a keyboard
- 37 "Terriff!"
- 38 Lesbian opponent of Wade
- 39 Also-ran
- 40 Metallic in sound
- 41 End of the quote
- 44 Queen topper
- 45 "Bambi" doe
- 46 David Hyde ____
- 48 She plays a videogame aficionado in the upcoming series "IUP"
- 53 Strongly opposed (to)
- 54 Composer John
- 55 Phantom name
- 56 Come after
- 57 San Francisco's Nob ____
- 58 Conveyance weight
- 59 Howled at the moon
- 60 Maker of some fruity flavors
- 61 Aspen vehicle

Down

- 1 Family group, in the land of Barrie
- 2 Green fruit
- 3 Mt. sign
- 4 Laddermen use it to hook up
- 5 Elvis picture on velvet, e.g.
- 6 Part of San Francisco's BART
- 7 Curtis of "Some Like It Hot"
- 8 Split one in the locker room
- 9 Breakfast nooks
- 10 Less remote
- 11 Feature of Gomer's speech
- 12 Fingered
- 13 Big name in pumps
- 21 Horror writer Michael
- 22 Michelangelo piece with stones of stone
- 24 Echo effect
- 25 India's first prime minister
- 26 Hunter that comes out at night
- 27 Song by the Eagles
- 28 "My Name Is Earl" girl
- 29 Portable erection
- 30 Band members blow them
- 31 Covet thy neighbor's ass, e.g.
- 36 Joe of baseball
- 37 Mosque towers
- 39 Percolated like Cary Grant?
- 40 Like Elton John's dancer
- 42 Faith, hope, or sweet charity
- 43 Dean, and others without causes
- 46 Naval Academy freshman
- 47 Island of Barrie's land
- 48 Police incursion at Stonewall
- 49 Like America's Betty
- 50 Anal alternative
- 51 k.d. lang record label
- 52 Barely made, with "out"
- 54 Antonio's "Evita" role

See p. 22 for answers

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