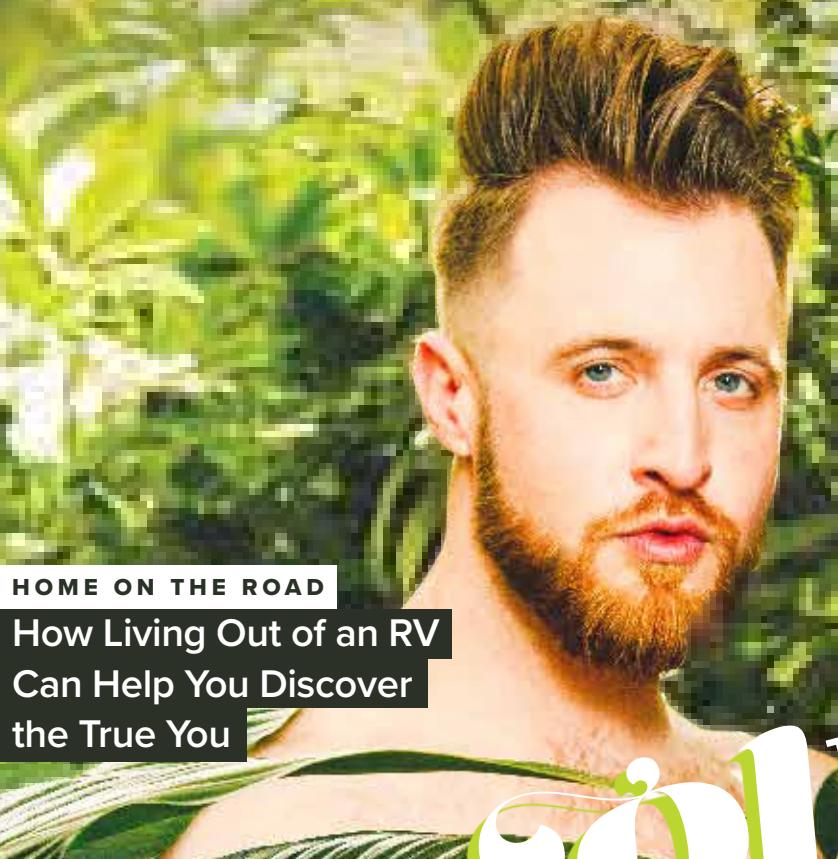


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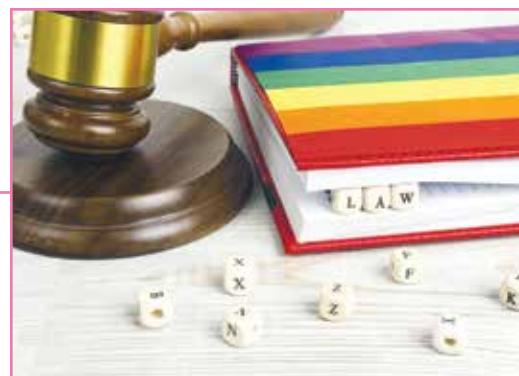


Models Josh Oikarinen and Travis Adler photographed at Planterra Conservatory in West Bloomfield. Photo: Andrew Potter

## STAY TUNED TO PRIDESOURCE.COM FOR CRUCIAL UPDATES ON ELCRA

By the time you read this issue, it's VERY likely Gov. Whitmer will have put her signature on the bill to amend Michigan's civil rights law (the 1977 Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, aka ELCRA) to include LGBTQ+ protections against discrimination. Recently, on March 8, the bill cleared a critical hurdle when the Michigan House of Representatives voted in favor of sending the bill on to Whitmer.

Gov. Whitmer has signaled and explicitly stated on several occasions that she will sign the bill once it clears the two state house chambers (the Michigan Senate approved the bill and sent it on to the House on Feb. 9), making it all but a done deal that Michigan's law of the land will favor the civil rights of queer people across the state.



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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Ready to break free from the normal routine and spice things up? Need a change of pace from scrolling through the endless stream of negative news? This list has you covered, from a space-themed Pride event to an all-female queer rock band concert to a sexy burlesque event. Get out and mix it up with some new, positive experiences. Celebrate the unique, enduring queer spirit that ties the LGBTQ+ community together.



## Have an Out-of-This-World Good Time at Planet Pride

Sometimes, you just have to embrace the weird and see where it takes you. Ferndale Pride's Planet Pride event is one of those times. Set for March 25 at 215 West, the event will showcase drag performances by Miss Michigan Trans Gay World Mia Cole, Mr. Trans Michigan Michael Christian, Jewel Jubilee and Bentley James. The intergalactic-inspired event will also feature DJs Skyrah and Hemlock spinning tracks, local go-go dancers and special mixed drink and mocktail selections from Starcut Ciders and Short's Brewing. Don't miss the chance to put together an outer space ensemble — prizes will be awarded for the best looks. Ticket sales benefit Ferndale Pride.

Friday, March 25, 7 p.m.-2 a.m., 215 West (215 West Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Tickets at [bit.ly/41GkqSG](http://bit.ly/41GkqSG).



## Delight in a Star-Studded Drag Performance

Lately, the art of drag has been under attack by people who are under the mistaken impression that there's something inherently wrong about beautiful, spirited people dressing up in character and putting on shows for delighted audiences. Well, those people are dumb, RuPaul is the Queen and the March 26th Fantastic Five of 14 show at SoundBoard, featuring Season 14 "RuPaul's Drag Race" finalists Angeria, Bosco, Daya Betty, Lady Camden and Willow Pill, will have you forgetting the haters and loving on the ladies who work it the best.

March 26, 8 p.m., SoundBoard at MotorCity Casino Hotel (2901 Grand River Ave., Detroit). Ticket link at [soundboarddetroit.com](http://soundboarddetroit.com).



## Get in Some Scream Therapy at a Razor Braids Show

If it's catharsis you're after, the March 26 Razor Braids concert at The Parliament Room in Ferndale needs to find its way to your calendar. This queer, Brooklyn-based, all-female/non-binary rock band will have you channeling all your angry, angsty energy about <insert any number of global and national issues> into a head-banging, frenetic experience you won't soon forget. Check out the band's new album on bandcamp, "I Could Cry Right Now If You Wanted Me To," and grab a ticket.

March 26, 7 p.m., The Parliament Room at Otus Supply (345 East Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Ticket link at [razorbraids.com](http://razorbraids.com).



## Attend a Thrift Store Gala and Burlesque Show

Yes, you read that right. The REO Town Thrift Store Gala and Burlesque Extravaganza, set for March 18, offers plenty of reasons to make the reasonable trek over to Lansing. Not only do event organizers encourage you to dress in your thriftiest finds, including gently used suits and ball gowns, but you'll be in for an evening of magic, food, drink and burlesque entertainment from national performers like Sarah Jean Anderson, Eartha Kitten, Lilith Von Tal and Marina Casanova. Proceeds benefit the REO Town Commercial Association, an organization that has turned this once-downtrodden corner of Michigan's capital city into a bustling hive of creative (and often queer) energy.

*March 18, 8 p.m., 1033 S. Washington Ave., Lansing. Tickets at [bit.ly/41Ud3ah](http://bit.ly/41Ud3ah).*



Artwork by Kel Neveu (from [kelneveu.com](http://kelneveu.com))

## Meet Queer Comic Artists

Oakland University's Women and Gender Studies Film Festival, set for March 18, will focus on the recent PBS documentary, "No Straight Lines: The Rise of Queer Comics." You'll also have a chance to meet local historian Tim Retzloff and artist Isabel Clare Paul, who together created the comic "Come Out! In Detroit," a retelling of the real events surrounding Michigan's first Pride celebration. Oakland University alumnus Kel Neveu will discuss their queer-focused comic, "The Sacrifice's Purpose," as well.

*March 18, 1 p.m., Oakland University, Human Health Building 1050 (433 Meadow Brook Road, Rochester). Learn more at [bit.ly/3SUxrnr](http://bit.ly/3SUxrnr).*

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

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# Why Mr. Trans Michigan Is Using His Platform to Advocate for Drag



Michael Christian. Courtesy photo

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Michael Christian, Mr. Trans Michigan USA 2023, is a drag king. And like his sisters in the artform, he is feeling targeted and attacked.

"It's really unsettling," Christian told BTL. "It's nerve-racking. I don't understand it. As someone who is 43, I never thought that we would be going back in time."

While Michigan, at least currently, is in good hands with the Democrats controlling the legislature and the governor's office, other states across the country are acting rapidly to ban the innocuous art of drag. Tennessee, for example, recently became the first state to ban drag performances in public, a law that will take effect in July. "It's a direct attack on the transgender community," said Christian of the

effectively as a regular ol' six-foot-tall white guy. "I'm super blessed," he said. "I pass very easily in the world."

For 20 years, Christian has been performing drag. He had an "average childhood" while growing up in Saint Clair Shores, but feelings of gender dysphoria set in by the time he reached puberty.

"I definitely remember that I did not

Tennessee debacle. "I think it's really sad."

Christian went on to say that there are people — lots of them, possibly a majority — who love drag. "It's popular on TV. They come to our drag brunches. They come to the drag king and queen story hours and now we're banning it. It's just art. We're just dressing up and dancing. It's just another form of art."

All of this is not to say that Christian is unaware that even within the trans community he has privilege. He presents

want my body to develop in any female way," he said. "But you don't necessarily have the language for it. This was the '80s. Even when I first came out, I came out as a lesbian. There wasn't a language for being trans. It was, 'You're gonna be butch, and you're gonna be over here.'"

It wasn't until Christian found his way into Gigi's Gay Bar that he discovered trans women. "I was like, 'Oh my god. This all makes sense. I am you but the opposite.'

The first time he performed was at an amateur night at the long-gone Rainbow Room in Detroit. When he dressed as a male for the first time, things all came together for him.

"It's kind of like you can breathe," he recalled. "It all makes sense. You can look in the mirror and you can start to decide what path you're going to go on and what path your journey is going to take."

From then on, Christian said that he began to love himself and no longer look down on who he is. "I never thought I had a place in the world, that society would always look down on me as 'other.' Finally, I figured out I didn't have to live that way."

And now he's built a reputation in

binary and gender-nonconforming leaders as visible advocates and role models for the community at large.

Christian said that other pageant systems are all entertainment-based. "And I think that's fantastic and great. They're all wonderful. I go to all of them. But the fact that it's community- and platform-based... you're really going out there and talking to people, going to town hall meetings and speaking at universities. You can help bring the trans community to light. Show that we're just average human beings trying to make our way like everybody else."

As part of his Mr. Trans Michigan USA platform, Christian has partnered with Ferndale Pride to raise funds for the organization. He'll perform in a number of fundraisers leading up to the pageant. His next appearance will be at the organization's Planet Pride event on March 25 at 215 West in Ferndale. The event is billed as "an evening of interplanetary awesomeness featuring DJs, drag queens and dancing" and will benefit Ferndale Pride. Christian will donate half his tips to the organization.

Julia Music, executive director of Ferndale Pride, said that Christian is "willing to help anyone in the trans community. He is just really a person who cares about and wants to help other people. I will be trying to go to the competition to see him because I'm just so proud of the work he's done. The board and I are very honored to have him choose us."

In addition to Planet Pride, you can catch Christian at the Motor City Drag Kings brunch at Gigi's the first Sunday of every month. He also just booked a gig at the University of Michigan. "We'll do a little spiel on transgender health," he said. "Then we'll do a show as well."

And if he were to win the competition in November and become the next Mr. Trans USA?

"I think it would mean a lot," said Christian. "I think it would be the accumulation of my entire drag career and my journey to be who I am. And obviously give me the opportunity to share my platform and what's important to me nationally."

*I never thought  
we would be going  
back in time.*

— Michael Christian

Metro Detroit, taking home titles such as Mr. Power Diva, Mr. Grand Diva, Mr. Birdcage, Mr. Bretz and Royal King of Kings of Michigan. But the Mr. Trans Michigan USA pageant is different. There's no talent portion required to take home the title. Instead, Mr. and Mrs. Trans USA pageantry system's mission is to celebrate and promote the development of transgender, non-



Counter-protesters stand outside Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak. Photo: Jason A. Michael

# 'Sashay Your Bigotry Away'

## Love Louder Than Hate as Anti-Drag Protest Backfires in Royal Oak

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

A small protest against Sidetrack Bookshop's "Drag Queen Story Hour" was met with an enormous counterprotest supporting the event Saturday, March 11 in downtown Royal Oak. Police estimate there was a crowd of about 1,000 people outside the store, which opened last

year. Only a small contingency of a dozen, maybe two, seemed to be against the story hour. The rest were loudly and colorfully in favor of it, carrying clever signs and repeatedly chanting "Bigots go home."

Said bigots came to protest the innocuous event after the Oakland County Republican Party issued a news release encouraging them to

do so. "Drag queen story time is an exercise in normalizing what is not normal," read the release in part. "And it can be upsetting, scary and confusing to young children.

... Adult sexuality introduced to a child — especially outside of the family unit — is not 'playful' or safely entertaining. It is at best inappropriate, and at worst, criminal."

Of course, Sidetrack Bookshop owners Jenny Carney and Jen Brown didn't see the event their store hosted as either. At the event, Carney said drag queen story time is "this amazing celebration of being weird, and it's for kids and so, to be able to offer that to other kids ... and not just for the people with queer kids. You know, it's for everybody to see."

Carney said "Drag Queen Story Hour" is an "option, so that everybody can see a celebration of people being their authentic selves. It's really important to us."

Sidetrack Bookshop, located on the northeast corner of South

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(Left) A small group of anti-drag extremists and a much larger group of pro-queer drag enthusiasts outside Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak. (Right) Ed Londin and his daughter Madison. Photos: Jason A. Michael

## Royal Oak Protest

Continued from page 7

Washington Avenue and East Fourth Street, packed sidewalks with mostly event supporters. During the protest, Royal Oak Police prevented pro-

queer and anti-queer demonstrators alike from stepping onto the street, all along Washington and Fourth in front of the store and down to the end of the block. Large groups of demonstrators also gathered on the other three corners of the intersection. The small number of

homophobic Republicans carried misinformed and outdated slogans against grooming and one, calling himself a street preacher, read from the Bible. Perhaps the biggest impression the protesters made on the massive crowd was when two large billboard trucks kept circling



the block playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and antisemitic rapper Kanye West on loop.

Ed Londin and his daughter Madison came from Lathrup Village spurred on by "the injustice of what's going on in the country," he said. "We wanted to support the community, the drag community and the gay community." Ed carried a sign with images of Robin Williams as Mrs. Doubtfire, as well as Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble in drag, Dustin Hoffman as Tootsie, and an image from the film "Some Like It Hot" where actors

Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon are also dressed in women's clothing. His sign read "What's changed?" Madison's sign, meanwhile, read "Sashay your bigotry away."

Zack Fredericks from Detroit came out "for the community. I love it. I love seeing a good outpouring of love and a good message against bigotry." Fredericks said he was impressed by how the queer community quickly mobilized to counter protest.

"This was done in like two or three days through a Facebook page, so I think the turnout was amazing."

Though love and support rang out loud and clear during the protest, Kara Kengy from Dearborn Heights could still feel the intensity from those angry about the story hour event. "These people disgust me," she said about the few anti-drag extremists who did show up. "They're trying to turn back the clock 100 years."

"It's not about drag," she went on. "It's never been about drag. It's about being homophobic and transphobic."

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# From Michigan to Hollywood

DSO Performer Geoffrey Johnson Has Performed on ‘Creed III’ and ‘Lion King’ Scores



Geoffrey Johnson. Courtesy photo

When Geoffrey Johnson first picked up an oboe as an elementary school student, he never imagined that he'd one day be playing the iconic double-reed symphony instrument on a soundstage in Hollywood. A few decades later, though, he has three such experiences under his belt. Most recently, his musical talent can be heard in "Creed III," which is in theaters now.

Ironically, Johnson isn't a "huge movie watcher," though he has seen most of one of the films he was a part of: 2019's live-action "The

Lion King." He even once caught a glimpse of a fellow airplane passenger watching it in flight. "It was kind of wild that other families were enjoying the work we did," he says.

Johnson, who lives in Royal Oak, also played oboe at the 2022 CNN concert "Juneteenth: A Global Celebration for Freedom" at the Hollywood Bowl and on other movie scores, like Spike Lee's latest film, "Da 5 Bloods."

He says the experience of creating scores with groups of musicians he usually hasn't met before in unusual

settings takes a different skill set versus his work with ensembles like the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) or as an instructor for local oboe students and in adjunct roles at schools like Western Michigan University. No matter the role at hand, Johnson applies years of painstaking training and study at Baylor University and the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he earned his master's in music performance.

On top of his impressive accomplishments in a notoriously competitive field, Johnson is a standout among standouts as a

Black, gay classical musician. A 2014 League of American Orchestras study revealed that only 1.4% of orchestra musicians were Black — a figure that may have changed in the years since, but is surely still quite low. It's impossible to guess how many of those musicians are LGBTQ+, but it's safe to assume that Johnson is part of a very small minority.

Johnson says when he's on stage, it's all about the music, which requires extreme concentration, but he does reflect on what being on stage at all means for

representation. "You never know how it's going to affect people, and that's a great thing," he says. "You never know who is at the symphony for the first time or what it will mean for them."

As a young musician in the Houston Youth Symphony, it meant a lot to Johnson himself to see queer representation on stage as a high schooler on a class trip to New York City. "I was dying to see Bob Fosse's show on Broadway as a musical kid,

## Creep Of The Week

# Log Cabin Republicans: We Hate Ourselves to Own the Libs



In the grand tradition of the Log Cabin Republicans siding with people who hate them, they have asked far-right commentator and self-proclaimed internet troll Isabella Riley Moody to be one of their 2023 Outspoken Ambassadors.

LCR describes their ambassadors as “fearlessly and unapologetically outspoken” people who have “charismatic and thoughtful perspectives at a time when so many people feel bullied into silence.” And who, exactly, feels bullied into silence? Maybe the trans kids who have become the target of Republican legislatures all over the country and who often have little to no community support and are lucky if they have support from their own families?

Of course not. The people being “bullied into silence” are the ones who want to do and say whatever they want, no matter how hurtful, no matter how much it inspires bigotry that leads to violence, no matter how untrue, without any consequences.

[These] anti-left free-thinkers are ready to inform, inspire, and amuse as they join the only media outlet dedicated to pushing back against radical gender and alphabet nonsense,” reads the Outspoken editorial announcing the 2023 Ambassadors.

Yes, you read that right. The group that represents LGBTQ+ Republicans refers to the struggles of LGBTQ+ people, specifically trans and nonbinary folks, as “radical gender and alphabet nonsense.” Not only that, they claim that Outspoken, a publication of LCR, is the “only media outlet dedicated to pushing back” against this. It’s a wild claim considering that right-wing media outlets are everywhere, from the mainstream (Fox News) to the fringe (World Net Daily) to the white guy with a microphone on YouTube variety (too

many to mention). I think Outspoken might be giving themselves a little too much credit here. But, I mean, maybe they mean they’re the only LGBTQ+ media outlet dedicated to denigrating LGBTQ+ people and their rights.

On Feb. 15, the same day the ambassadors were announced, Moody posted a graphic featuring a photo of herself with “Outspoken Ambassador” and the Outspoken logo to Twitter. “This is literally SO GAY!” she wrote. “Happy to be a token straight homophobic bitch ambassador for @GetOutspokenUSA!”

But, spoiler alert, she likes gays as much as LCR does, which is to say, she doesn’t.

On March 7 Moody tweeted, “Being a homosexual and proclaiming it PROUDLY has ZERO PLACE inside the Republican Party or within the conservative movement. Just as Christians should be ashamed of and repent for their sins, so too should homosexuals be ashamed, and repent. Further, being ‘gay and proud’ is itself GROOMING. If you’re gay and flaunting it proudly, you’re recruiting. And you should STOP it. NOW.”

Wow, what a fearless and unapologetic anti-left free-thinker! What a charismatic and thoughtful perspective! Somebody call every Pride parade and get this woman on a float, stat!

Keep in mind, it’s not like March 7 is the first time Moody has expressed abhorrently anti-LGBTQ+ views. It’s not like the Log Cabin Republicans didn’t know who she was

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*Wow, what a fearless and unapologetic anti-left free-thinker! What a charismatic and thoughtful perspective! Somebody call every Pride parade and get this woman on a float, stat!*

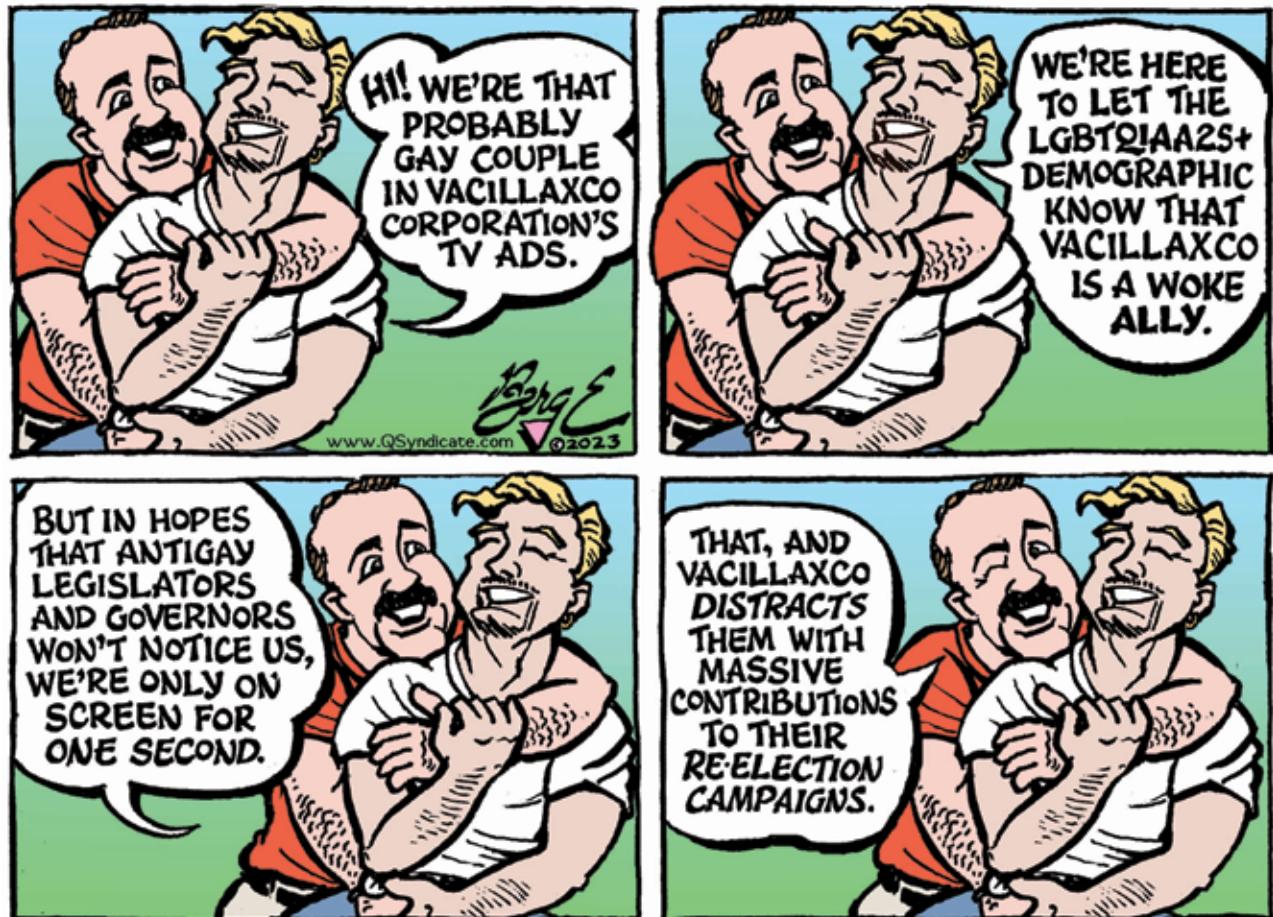
and what she thought. It’s that the Log Cabin Republicans, like all Republicans, exist to “troll the left.” They have no serious policy ideas that will actually help anyone but the rich. They think government is the enemy. They have no respect for Democracy. And they have been swinging ever more wildly toward the right for decades.

By the way, Isabella Riley Moody’s name has since quietly disappeared from the Outspoken Ambassador list.

That’s not to say that they scrub all of their mistakes off of their website. Take the 2020 Outspoken editorial “Why same-sex marriage will never be overturned, despite media fear-mongering.” Their reasons why marriage equality is safe include: “Overturning Obergefell would create utter chaos and personal hardship” and “Closely fought landmark cases do not get overturned

even when the losing faction becomes a majority.” Oh, and they also say that Trump would never support such a thing.

Keep in mind, this was published two years before Roe v. Wade, a “closely fought landmark case” establishing abortion as a constitutional right, was overturned by the most right-wing Supreme Court in ages, thanks to Trump. And all of their other “reasons” are moot. The Supreme Court doesn’t give a fuck about public opinion or personal hardship — Roe was supported by the majority of Americans and overturning it has definitely caused personal hardship. And Trump is fucking gleeful about it. To think that he wouldn’t support overturning marriage equality using the court he handpicked shows just how out of touch and full of shit the Log Cabin Republicans are.



# On Trans Issues, The New York Times Is Not the Real Enemy

BY MARK SEGAL

This month found me in London for what turned out to be three major speaking events.

It also came in the wake of what I believe is one of the most horrible of trans hate actions ever publicly reported in the United Kingdom — the murder of 16-year-old Brianna Ghey, who was stabbed multiple times in a park by two 15 year olds. Police immediately stated it was not related to her being trans. If that were not enough, the mainstream media didn't report it as an anti-trans attack and the government, because of their anti-trans laws, misgendered her in all the investigative papers — including her death certificate — since she was not allowed by law to change her birth certificate.

Back here in the U.S., we are not talking about the 400 anti-trans laws that have been introduced in the U.S. In the U.K. the issue is so divisive that it literally has the possibility of breaking up the U.K. with Scotland having a vote on whether to leave the union. So in each of the speeches I felt compelled to bring up her name, Brianna Ghey, and give her the identity she deserved, an identity her parents supported, but the British government and mainstream media did not.

Meanwhile, we in our community that do support trans health and legal issues seem to want to do nothing but debate on almost any issue of trans health and legal issues. The reality is, much of the anger is being targeted at those who agree with trans health policies rather than those who fight against trans people.

We all agree that trans people and children have a right to their health and proper respect by governments. We all agree that politicians, mostly Republicans, are grandstanding on



anti-trans issues.

In the middle of all this, GLAAD decided to create a debate about The New York Times (NYT) reporting on the issue. They called out the NYT for "irresponsible, biased coverage of transgender people" and created a petition against the publication. These actions are why we are losing on this issue, and it's sad that the national organization focused on understanding the media simply proves it does not. While GLAAD's action will help their fundraising, it adds discourse that distracts from the real fight.

You can't begin to fight the injustices until you understand how those supporting injustice

are fighting. In this case, they're allowing us to fight against ourselves and divide ourselves, and GLAAD contributed to that. Here is the ONE simple point that those Republicans use: They state that the medical treatment for trans children "harms children." They're using the same debate that Anita Bryant used in Florida in the 1970s. Back then, it was "Save our Children." It's a simple message, and it requires a simple counter attack. But instead, we go into the weeds and debate all health and legal issues and attack The New York Times as the major culprit. Does this sound like Trump and calls of fake news? The New York Times is not the enemy. Republicans are.

GLAAD's major talking point is that the NYT didn't print only one side of the trans issue, but spoke to people that GLAAD would not approve of. That's called censorship. In the end, the NYT will either consider you irrelevant or put out a blanket statement that they have learned from this experience. GLAAD will have raised more funds, and we all will have wasted time we could have spent fighting the real enemy.

My friend and fellow journalist Chris Johnson, formerly of the Washington Blade, wrote an important piece about this issue, titled "Why a crusade against The New York Times shows LGBTQ

groups outlived their purpose." It's a good piece, and it reflects on how far groups like GLAAD have come and how far they have strayed from their original purpose.

Ron DeSantis is the enemy. Greg Abbott is the enemy. Moms For Liberty is the enemy. Republican state legislators are the enemy. Don't forget it.

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*Mark Segal is an award-winning journalist, author, and Stonewall pioneer. He is also founder and publisher of Philadelphia Gay News. More information on his 50-plus years of continuous activism can be found at marksegalstonewall.com.*



Photo: Andrew Potter

# The Plants of Grindr

## A Look Inside the Men Who Father Their Foliage

BY DANI LAMORTE

I can't help but notice that Grindr is full of hungry creatures, reaching out to take whatever you can give. They're insatiable.

I'm talking about plants, to be clear. My Grindr grid is covered in plants: Monstera in the back of a butt pic; pothos hanging out in a mirror selfie — the classic kind with a peace sign and a tongue stuck out. A few users come direct with screen names like "Plant Daddy." Plants, and especially house plants, are near or at the peak of fashion. Instagram accounts like @boyswithplants collect images of people posing charmingly, seductively, plants proudly on display. So it's no surprise that they're showing up in the spots where we find friendship, romance or *ahem*.

But what does it mean when someone calls themselves a "plant daddy"? Do plants in a pic mean the user behind the screen is the image of zen and mindfulness? Or is it just an aesthetic thing? I spoke with a number of Grindr users, as well as some local friends who are on the apps and in the plant shops, to get some insight. As the social media cliché goes: It's complicated.

I messaged a number of Grindr users across Michigan with the decidedly unsexy line, "I'm writing a story about plants on Grindr and I see some plants in your profile photos. Can I ask you a few questions?" Most respondents admitted that they hadn't really noticed or thought about the

plants I was seeing. Maybe the spider plant at the front of their photo was just there because it's a spot that gets good light — good for plants and selfies alike. Maybe they took the photo at a friend's house, never even noticed the plant in the first place.

In 1998, botanists James Wandersee and Elisabeth Schussler coined the term "plant blindness" to describe this phenomenon. It's a kind of inattention — like when you drive to the grocery store but upon arrival can't remember the trip. Some part of your mind was aware of the trip, but those memories are no longer conscious. Likewise, you might physically see a plant in a room but you may not actually notice it. In Western culture, plants are often backdrops and rarely the main event. We're acculturated to treat plants like wallpaper.

Consider anonymous Grindr profiles with profile pictures like these:



Photos: Wiki Commons

A user might choose these photos because they don't show anybody in particular. Maybe they indicate where the user went on vacation, or what kinds of weather they like, but they don't show the face of the human operating the account. For many people, some plants are nobody. You can contrast this to photos showing a dog or a cat, which might signal that the human in the shot is a "dog person" or a "cat person." A profile picture of a tree doesn't make you a "tree person," though.

For Grindr users who did notice the plants in their photos, the presence of plants could still be accidental. One user told me they just had too many plants to possibly take a picture in their apartment without a few green encroachments. For another user in Ann Arbor, the presence of plants coincides with their love of hiking. Plants are part of their outdoorsy nature, which a photo of them standing surrounded by sunflowers or drying wheat conveys. Plants don't always mean "nature," though. One profile picture showed racks of cut plants drying upside-down. Naively, I thought they were garden herbs. I asked the user about his photo. He runs a commercial marijuana business and is, essentially, advertising his wares.

Others find botanical connection on Grindr. One couple in Detroit, with more than 100 plants in their apartment, told me that they've networked with other plant collectors via the app. They've even met up and exchanged plant cuttings. If you didn't know, many plants can be grown by taking a living stem from the plant and placing it in moist soil. It doesn't work with every plant, but it can be an easy way to gift someone a plant without giving up your own.

Philosopher Michael Marder, who I spoke to for this essay, reminded me that plants often blur the boundaries between "the many and the one, life and death, the inside and the outside[...]" What seems like one plant can be turned into two. In response, two (or more) people who seem wholly separate might come together. Is that what's going on with the plant swappers in Detroit? I don't know. They didn't confide; I didn't pry. Leave something to the imagination.

For some, plants might signal

safety or good behavior. One friend I spoke to opined that potential hookups might see plants in his Grindr pics and infer that he's a safe person to be around. Plants in this case are a stand-in for being caring or generally safe company. Maybe the plants don't signal "hot sex," but they also do not signal

reminders he had to keep alive — just like he kept that promise to himself alive. It was a replacement activity of sorts and he'd made those strong, proud columns much more daunting, more forbidding. Plants, after all, aren't always safe. Consider the Venus fly trap (*Dionaea muscipula*) which attracts insects

with one another. The black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) are just two species who practice allelopathy (literally "mutual suffering") — the secretion of soil chemicals to inhibit

can change sexes from season to season... they can engage in sexual foreplay with pollinating insects, seducing with their shapes, colors and aromas." What's surrounding us in our profile pics isn't a cadre



Models Josh Oikarinen and Travis Adler photographed at Planterra Conservatory in West Bloomfield. Photo: Andrew Potter

"axe murderer."

Another friend confided that after he gave up certain oral pleasures, he found himself collecting cactuses. Here were literal reminders of what he wasn't allowing himself. They were also

into its "mouth" (actually leaves) scent and color. Some Euphorbias, a favorite houseplant of many, contain a milky sap which can cause blistering, vomiting or even temporary blindness. Then, there's the matter of how plants interact

the growth of other plants around them, literally trying to starve out the competition.

All those plants in our profile photos can be taken as a sign that other things are going on. As Marder reminded me, "Plants

Plants themselves don't use Grindr, but I like to imagine what that could be like. Maybe, like "Plant Daddy," they'd send rapid-fire demands. "U got water? Water? You got water? Looking for water."

of green, chaste tchotchkies. It's a bacchanal, and it has scandalized the world before.

In turn-of-the-century Germany, schools banned botany instruction for fear that children would be made aware of "so-called bisexual plants." According to Dr. Joela Jacobs, associate professor of German Studies at the University of Arizona, this coincided with the new discipline of sexology and the coining of the term "homosexuality." Plants, which unashamedly toss their genetic material up into the air over anyone who passes by (think tree pollen and dandelion seeds!), were part of the devious bits of nature from which children should be protected. Plants, especially flowers, meant something in particular. Victorians even had "flower language." If a gentleman expressed interest in you, but your affections lay elsewhere, you might send him a yellow carnation as a gentle brush-off. The code was a nice idea, but as Dr. Jacobs explains, "It never actually worked because there were so many disparate codebooks." The meaning of plants is bold, if ambiguous.

After several days of Grindr chats about plants, I thought I knew what to expect. Then, I messaged a self-declared "Plant Daddy." He told me he grows plants commercially for landscaping. Then he told me about his other grower. Then he sent me a bunch of photos I didn't

See **The Plants of Grindr**, page 30

# Home on the Road

## Traveling Alone in my RV Helped Me Learn How to Be Truly at Home With Myself



Jupiter Contreras. Courtesy photo

BY JUPITER CONTRERAS

When I decided to move my entire life into a 1979 Coachmen RV, most people thought I'd lost my mind. Moving 27 years' worth of my life, including my two giant dogs Zeus and Apollo, into a 24-foot-long vehicle that offered less floor space than the master bathroom in my soon-to-be ex apartment was, ironically, a very large undertaking.

As I packed up my 900-square-foot space, I sorted my belongings into three piles: Things to Take, Things to Sell and Problems for Future Me. As the "take" pile was loaded into my new home where every inch was sacred, items were made to prove they were worthy of the space they required. Things that didn't make the cut but I didn't want to sell were added to the growing pile of gifts left to Future Me. A busted old guitar that I might learn to play on the road? In. Record player? Out.

Though I couldn't admit it, in the weeks leading up to hitting the road I began to worry I was making a mistake. Still, it was a perfect storm of factors that had made the move to a home on wheels the most attractive option available for me to stay housed and move into the next chapter of my life.

I had long decided I wanted to go to law school, but, while working two jobs, I wasn't able to dedicate the time and energy the application process required. After enduring significant racism and homophobia at my job, a wave of layoffs had rippled through my corporate work environment. The reality was very clear: my ability to stay housed (and move forward with my career) would always be in someone else's hands unless I made a drastic change. I figured it would be pretty hard to lose the roof over my head as long as I owned it, so I bought the RV.

A final trip to my storage unit in June 2020 signaled the end of my year of renovations, and with that, I hit the road seeking sanctuary in solitude. Whether I was sure or not, with every

turn of the key I was reminded of the reality of my situation: It was too late to turn around.

For the first few weeks of my travels, I had neighbors. Their presence meant I wasn't exactly comfortable leaving my rig, for fear of how my Blackness or my queerness (or the combination of both) might be perceived, and for what I'd do if some act of violence were to befall me in the "nowhere" I'd driven myself to the heart of.

On my first night of true solitude, I began to understand just how easy it is to take up space when no one's asking you to do so only in ways that make sense to them. As I continued to travel, this theme reappeared.

Everywhere I went, I found myself experiencing life to the fullest when no one else was around. Being alone outdoors was the first time I experienced life with no one to police me or project their concepts of gender and sexuality onto the canvas of my existence.

Solitude became an escape, just as I'd hoped. I drove my house as deep into remote public lands as possible, leading my little wolf pack on long walks through forests and desert landscapes. I conquered my fear of standing on the roof of my RV and spent more nights than I can count laid out up there, subjecting the wildlife and the heavens to my haphazard guitar plucking. Each time it felt like the sky held more stars than I'd ever seen before, and on too many occasions I fell asleep trying to count to be sure.

I swam topless in the waters of Mexico, feeling the sun kiss parts of my body that other eyes selfishly demanded either pleasure or shame of. I stood atop mountain peaks in California and peered into sun-soaked valleys, out of breath and full of joy. I raged uncontrollably in the woods of Southern Illinois, asking the trees to hold just a drop of the pain I felt after losing my mom, free of shame for the first time in decades. I spent all of my time outside, alone, and I discovered, in that roundabout

way that adults have of “discovering” what they once knew as kids — that crying, screaming, playing and laughing do not define or devalue you as a man or a woman or a person; it all only confirms that you are alive.

One of the few times I emerged from my solitude was to host The Midwest Vanlife Gathering in Illinois. It was one of my first times since making my RV my home that I was around large groups of new people for an extended period of time. I wasn’t sure how I would be received, but I hoped for the best. I was pleasantly surprised. I met with nomads of all ages, gender identities, races and faiths around our nightly campfires. It didn’t matter who I was — we all shared a burning desire to see more of the world around us. I came away from the gathering with about 50 new friends and a growing list of places to see, including Sleeping Bear and Nordhouse Dunes, added at the behest of some of the sweetest nomads to ever come out of the Mitten.

Somewhere along the road I began to realize I had unconsciously created a mental version of my Problems for Future Me pile. In that pile were things about myself I’d noticed in the past, but never had the time to unpack as I tried to keep up with the pace of the city. Primarily, that was never really feeling like a “girl” or a “guy.” If gender was a line drawn from masculine to feminine, mine was the surface



Jupiter Contreras and their dogs Zeus and Apollo. Courtesy photo

on which the line was drawn. If gender was the difference between the sky and the ocean, I came to understand myself to be both and the Earth in between.

After six months of living with two dogs in a 200-ish square-foot space, no one was more

astonished than me to find that I felt not only OK with my choice but relieved by it. Life in the city had left me with a perpetual sense of dread, always wondering if my rent would increase to exceed my budget or when the pendulum of quarterly layoffs would swing my way.

Despite the square footage of my apartment, the circumstances around my existence in that chapter of my life felt smothering and temporary. Moving into a vehicle, on the other

See **Home on the Road**, page 22

# MEN ON THE MOVE

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# The First Drag Queen Created Spaces Where Queer People Could Feel at Home

Even Now, Well Over a Century Later, We Could Learn a Lot From William Dorsey Swann

BY ETAMAZE NKIRI

You don't hear the name William Dorsey Swann often enough these days, but Dorsey was a trailblazing 19th-century Black activist who carved out a space for not only himself but other individuals like him. He used his home as a safe space to host queer parties where men dressed in drag, until those staunchly against the artform tried to make something out of nothing.

On the night of Thursday April 12, 1888, that's exactly how his home on the corner of 12th and F street in Northwest Washington, D.C. was utilized, as a host of men gathered to celebrate Swann's 30th birthday. For the next hour, according to D.C.'s the Evening Star, the attendees, all Black, entertained themselves with song, dance and alcohol, much of which they had brought with them to the event. Though history has long since forgotten the names of many of the men in attendance that day, 11 of the participants were forever immortalized on the pages of several papers the next day.

Following a raid by Lieutenant Amiss and several other officers of the First Precinct, partygoers including Dorsey, the first known drag queen whose friends referred to him simply as the "Queen," were detained and sent to jail. The men in attendance dressed in gowns of what journalists described as being made of the "handsomest" silks and satins. Though most of them made a mad dash to escape as police barged in, Swann ran toward the officers, attempting to prevent their entrance into his home.

By this point, Swann had become synonymous with throwing drag parties for his friends in the D.C. area. Despite the threat of law enforcement, Swann demanded a space for himself, a home where queer identities could be celebrated and cultivated. Swann set a precedent we see and follow today, well over a century later. As a gay man in an era where I can, for the most part, freely be myself, and commune with others like me, I'm reminded and emboldened by the fearlessness of Swann, who despite the threat of law enforcement,



Two Black actors perform a cake-walk in Paris, circa 1903. By the turn of the 20th century the cake-walk had grown in popularity overseas, particularly in France. It is a photo used in many articles about William Dorsey Swann, given that it was taken in the same era as his drag parties and that no photos of him exist. Photo: James Gardiner Collection/Submitted by Channing Joseph

still created a safe space for queerness in his home.

Swann was born the fifth of 13 children in 1858 to a family of slaves in Hancock, Maryland, and had troubles with law enforcement that weren't always related to drag. In 1882, the 24-year-old was sentenced to six months in prison after being arrested for theft. He was eventually pardoned. Though it's not exactly clear when he began hosting his drag parties, by the late 1880s, he would become quite notorious for the activity in the local area.

By 1887, Swann owned a home on No. 1504 L Street in Northwest D.C., where he regularly threw "drags," as the local press would come to call them. Outside of his home, Dorsey also hosted at the homes of friends, the most prominent being Pierce Lafayette; like Swann, he was formerly enslaved. A drag at Lafayette's home was raided in January of 1887. Described as being two stories tall and "elegantly furnished," several men were arrested by police during a New Year's ball in the home. According to the papers, most of the men

were dressed in elegant gowns, while at least two were completely naked. When taken into custody, five of them gave "feminine" names to the officers. Two of the men arrested that day, Benjamin and Daniel Swann, were Swann's brothers. Daniel not only participated in the drags, but also sewed dresses for them.

On New Year's Eve 1895, Swann and three other Black men were arrested as they were preparing to host a benefit for some of his white friends, all of whom were sentenced to come in as witnesses during the trial. The trial, which was presided over by Judge Kimball Miller, received a great deal of local attention, as many young men, described as being of "respectable parentage," appeared to give accounts of how they had visited Swann's home and indulged in dance as well drinking alcohol. Judge Miller, who made no qualms about his dislike for Swann and men of his "character," eventually sentenced him to 10 months in prison for running a disorderly house, though per his admission he had wished to impose up to 10 years on Swann.

Much of what we know today about Swann is through Washington newspapers that published articles about the raids. Not even pictures exist of him. Swann's boldness in being himself in an era where homosexuality and crossdressing were criminalized emboldened a community of others like him to step out of the shadows and themselves. He simultaneously created spaces where queer expression was possible.

Facing the very real and current threat of administrations around the country hellbent on criminalizing the expression of drag, it's important that we look back, tribute and channel the boldness of the queer men and women before us, who, under dire circumstances, founded their own houses on behalf of their communities. They were able to create a home, a safe haven, a place of solace, and a place where their queerness could not only be accepted, but celebrated and flaunted.

Though born a slave, Swann lived to be a Queen, and in the process brought an entire community together.

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*Etamaze Nkiri is a freelance writer who has written for American History magazine as well as for the Gay & Lesbian Review. As the gay son of Cameroonian parents, Etamaze has just recently begun the journey of bridging the gap between his identity as an LGBTQ+ individual, with the more traditional aspects of his culture and upbringing.*



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# Hope Sweet Hope

## Moving to Spain Has Helped Me Imagine a Queer Future for the U.S.

BY EMMA L. SMITH

Once I graduated college, I packed my bags and didn't look back. My dreams to study abroad had been dashed by the pandemic, but with a diploma to my name, I was ready to see the world and start my education beyond the classroom.

I settled on Madrid, an urban center where I could teach English

but otherwise live in my second language, Spanish. Part of my search process included Googling queries like, "Are there lesbians in Madrid?" and "Is Madrid queer-friendly?" I can't quite remember what I ended up reading, but it must have been convincing enough since I moved to Madrid, where I have lived for over six months. With each passing week, the city feels more like home. Still, I

sometimes feel my heart pulled in two directions.

On the one hand, there is the United States, where I grew up, attended high school and college, and had my first queer kiss and my first love. I remember my first Pride parade, in Hartford, Connecticut. I saw a drag king perform Bruno Mars' song "Treasure" and thought that it was super hot, and maybe that could

be me. I slowly grew comfortable being openly queer, and learned to seek out LGBTQ+ spaces in my community.

But even in 2017, coming out to my high school classmates was not an easy process. Ignorant comments from strangers didn't really bother me, but the ones from friends did. My first relationship was fraught with complications because my

then-partner's family was deeply homophobic; if they were dating a woman, they wouldn't allow them to live at home.

Beyond my own personal experience, there's also U.S. politics, which is steeped in turmoil and controversy around queer and especially trans people's right to

See [Moving to Spain](#), page 22

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An interior shot of Jupiter Contreras' RV as they prepared for the big move. Courtesy photo

## Moving to Spain

Continued from page 20

merely exist. Every day I open social media and see headlines about regressive laws banning drag queens and bills criminalizing trans identities. An ocean away, I often feel powerless and deeply discouraged.

Then, there is Spain, the country I now tentatively call home.

The nation's government recently passed a bill that allows anyone over the age of 16 to change their gender on their ID card, with no requirement for medical documentation of gender dysphoria. Spain also legalized gay marriage a whole 10 years before the U.S. did. Homophobia and transphobia don't exist in Spain; there are certainly people and political groups that want to restrict the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. It is true, however, that queer and trans people can express themselves outwardly without fearing for their lives.

Where I live in Madrid, there is an entire neighborhood, called Chueca, dedicated to LGBTQ+ people. It's hard to step out on the street without seeing lesbians pressed up against one another or gay people holding hands. A few days ago, I returned

home to my apartment to see two drag queens embracing in the doorway of the building. I politely asked them to move aside, and they obliged, laughing, without letting go. Such queer joy and visibility is simply the norm here, but for me, it feels like a revelation.

In some moments I feel the dissonance between my country of origin and my new home quite acutely. When I heard of the shooting at Club Q in November I was shaken and not sure where to turn; my queer community at home was far away, and my queer community in Spain did not feel the same connection to the tragedy that I did.

A few nights afterwards, I went out to a gay club with my partner and some friends. It dawned on me later that I hadn't thought to check the exits, or share my location with a friend, or stay sober in case something bad happened. These precautionary measures simply weren't necessary. Amidst the revelry, I felt guilty that I could dance and celebrate without worrying, while people at home grieved.

But I do not think that guilt is the solution to the rampant hate in the U.S., nor to any problem. Instead, I have come to prioritize cultivating joy with queer people I love and a culture that, for the most part, loves

us back. Dancing and singing and embracing does not mean that I am turning my back on queer people in my home country, but rather, that I am celebrating how our lives could be and what our existence could mean.

Not every LGBTQ+ person can move abroad and start over, nor should they. Instead, as queer people in and from the U.S., we can turn to other cultures and societies to re-construe what our home could be like. Acknowledging legislative progress and queer joy in other cultures can push us forward in our fight for rights and recognition at a time when such fundamental aspects of our humanity are threatened.

There is hope, and there is precedent. When our imaginations for a queer future grow tired or fail us, we can look to countries like Spain that already champion acceptance and find solace and inspiration. We can remind ourselves what home could be like and do everything in our power to create that, no matter where we are.

*Emma L. Smith is a part-time freelancer and full-time lesbian currently based in Madrid, Spain. Her passions include writing, travel and taking pictures of dogs on the street. Follow her on Twitter @elsmith\_8.*

## Home on the Road

Continued from page 17

hand, felt liberating.

Owning my tiny space allowed me to take ownership of the way I navigated the world. I put art on the walls. I changed my pronouns. I painted and repainted my cabinets until they made me beam with joy every time I saw them. I introduced myself by a different name in every new town I rolled through until I found a name that brought me that same joy. I got piercings that made me fall in love with the face I saw in the mirror. I dyed my hair in hues that made me squeal with delight. I booked a top surgery consult and chose clothes that felt true to who I was and who I was becoming. I built my home and travel itinerary with my own two hands. And similarly, I built myself.

After four years on the road, the person I am today is incredibly different from the version of myself that locked up that storage unit in 2020. I couldn't find space for my record player in my RV, but I found more than enough space for a beat-up guitar, two giant dogs and me, in all of my expansive, messy, radiant, boundless glory. For my first time living in less than 300 square feet, I think I did just fine.

*Jupiter Contreras is a wandering writer, traversing the lower 48 in an RV with their two dogs, trying to cram in as much fun as possible before starting law school in the fall. You can catch them on TikTok and Instagram @doesthiscountasvanlife (and yes, their DMs are always open for travel recs).*



Emma L. Smith at home in Spain. Courtesy photo

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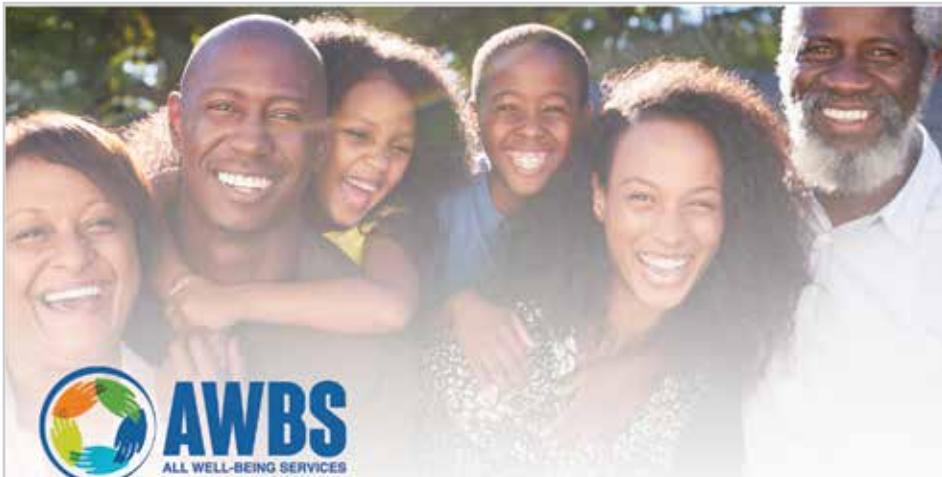
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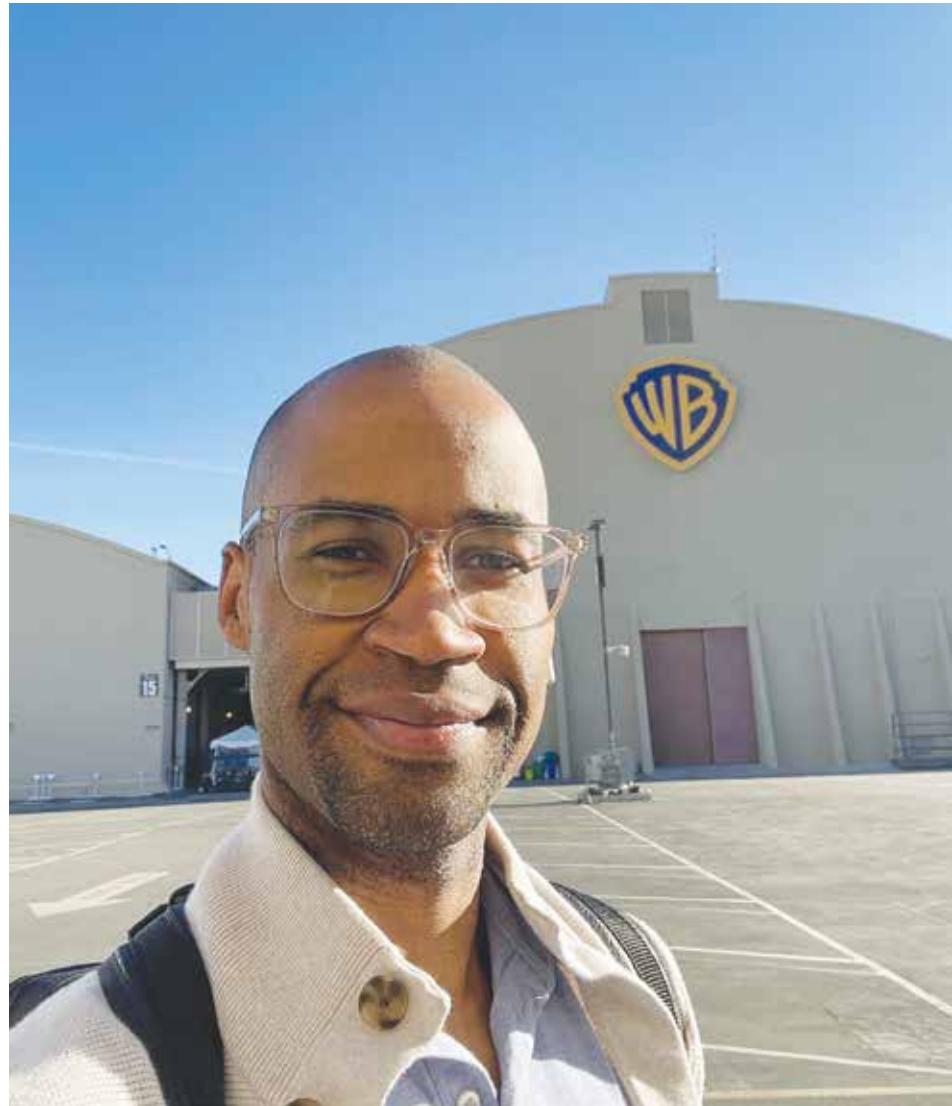
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Geoffrey Johnson in front of the Warner Bros. lot in California. Courtesy photo

### Geoffrey Johnson

Continued from page 11

and there was this one scene I'll never forget," he says. "It was three couples dancing on stage — one couple was straight, one couple was two women and one couple was two men. They were all doing similar choreography, but that scene has always stuck with me. I was with my father at the time and there was no negative or positive conversation — it was just part of the theater experience."

"I do know that being on stage itself is important for our communities. My presence affects many people," he says. "Kids have conversations with me about feeling really inspired and as performers, that's what we're trying to do."

Johnson says the Detroit fine arts scene has been notably proactive when it comes to diverse representation. From making diversity-conscious decisions about which shows and artists to support to small things like a recent remodel of the DSO's dressing rooms to include gender-neutral spaces, the city, he says, excels in diversity and inclusion. "I don't take it for granted, because I have seen other cities where it's not the norm," he says. "Detroiters might take it as a norm at this point, but it's important, and Detroit

is doing it every day. It's a standard within the city now."

Happily, Johnson has had a positive experience as part of the DSO, which he says has been almost like a family to him over the past 15 years. "My colleagues know me very well," he says. "We've done tours together to places like China, where the culture is not as accepting of sexuality, and if anything, I'd say they're probably more protective when we travel. They care about making everybody feel safe — whether it's sexuality or ethnicity, the orchestra is very conscious."

Off stage, Johnson is able to connect directly to students as an oboe instructor out of his private studio. "I'm probably even more conscious of representation in that space," he notes. "I've had a student come out to me and kids who started with me as middle schoolers who are now high schoolers or even in college and I'm now seeing them be able to come out. I've also had a handful of students who are trans, which is really cool to see that their parents and families have embraced that."

"To deal with that, as a kid — I admire that so much. That's been one of the joys of teaching, seeing them live in a world I wasn't able to live in growing up. Really, it's the joy of a lifetime."

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# A GAYER ‘SCREAM’

## Jasmin Savoy Brown Is on a Mission to Make Her ‘Scream VI’ Character, Mindy, as Queer as Possible

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

**I**t took five “Scream” movies and 25 years before LGBTQ+ horror fans got what the original film only alluded to: full-blown, uncoded queerness. Kevin Williamson, the openly gay screenwriter of Wes Craven’s 1997 slasher satire, pleased many queer fans last year when he confirmed the widespread theory that the original killers, Billy Loomis and Stu Macher, had a relationship that was, he said, “very sort of homoerotic.”

But the franchise’s 2022 relaunch, also named “Scream,” went beyond queer coding. The film introduced Mindy Meeks-Martin, a queer Black horror film geek who managed to survive yet another Woodsboro massacre at the terrifying hands of Ghostface.

With a pronoun pin, an array of pro-gay shirts and a girlfriend she’s not shy about kissing, Mindy, who is played by Jasmin Savoy Brown, returns queerer than before in the new “Scream VI.” There’s also, of course, the fact that she’s no longer living in the small town of Woodsboro but New York City — a move that, despite the group’s effort to escape and heal from their gory, gruesome past, proves useless after Ghostface follows her and the “core four,” Tara Carpenter (Jenna Ortega), Sam Carpenter (Melissa Barrera) and her twin brother Chad (Mason Gooding), to the Big Apple.

As for Brown, she’s leaving her mark on more than just an iconic horror franchise: on “Yellowjackets,” the Showtime series about a group of plane crash survivors returning for a second season on March 24, she portrays the teenage version of Taissa Turner, who is also queer.

Recently, Brown talked about “Scream” gay fan fiction (she felt that sexual tension with Amber, too), her influence on Mindy’s queerness and how progress for LGBTQ+ characters in horror movies is sometimes as simple as just getting stabbed like everyone else.

**I was going to tell you that you are my favorite character of the core**



Jasmin Savoy Brown. Photo: Paramount

**four. I don't want to make anyone jealous, but they have to understand that I'm incredibly biased here because I'm also queer.**

Right, OK? Well, here’s my question for you. We’re going to turn the tables here. I’ve been interviewed all day. If someone else in the core four were to come out as let’s say bi, who would it be and why?

**Oh, it would be Mason.**

That’s what I think. It would totally be Chad, right? It would totally be Chad.

**Purely wishful thinking, and I can't be the only man out there who's wishing that.**

[Laughs.] I think most queer men are wishing that. And Mason said today, if we survive and if they write that as his story that he would be happy to play it and he could

see that for Chad. So let’s make it happen. Petition for Chad to be bi.

**Where's that paper at? I'm ready to sign. So I want to start, and this is not a spoiler because it's in some of the photos that have circulated, but in the movie, you wear a Lavender Menace shirt.**

Yeah, how cool is that?

**It's very cool. And please tell me that**

**that was ripped right off of a hanger in your own closet.**

Oh, I wish. I wanted to keep that shirt so bad. But that I owe all of the credit to my incredible wardrobe team who helped me bring Mindy to life on “Scream VI.” They were like, “Mindy’s in college and so she’s exploring her identity. Maybe she’s exploring with her gender.” I said, “I think Mindy is exploring all of those things and is expressing herself in her clothing and her style.” Now that she’s in school in New York, she’s learning about Stonewall and she’s learning about amazing queer poets and making her own clothes, like the Lavender Menace [t-shirt]. And I’m really excited for people to see that.

**What was it like for you as a queer person to be part of that process?**

It was just such an honor and so much fun because it’s very collaborative with this group of filmmakers, which isn’t always the case. Mindy’s onscreen kiss in “Scream V” was my idea that they accepted and same with the kiss in this film. And I appreciate that they’re welcoming feedback in ways that we can help bring her queerness more to life than it already is on the page. But I also love that Mindy is a queer person who’s experiencing trauma separate from the fact that she’s queer. The trauma that she’s dealing with is the same as everyone else: getting stabbed and everyone you love dying. But her trauma has nothing to do with coming out or being gay. No one could care less.

**How happy did it make you to be able to delve even deeper into Mindy's queerness in this movie? I've been following this franchise for a long time, so I know how rooted it is in queer theories. But to be a part of someone's journey as an overtly queer character has to be exciting, but maybe it comes with a lot of pressure.**

There is pressure, but the pressure for me comes from a place of wanting to do right by the fans, and especially the queer fans who have

stuck by this franchise. They stuck with this franchise for five movies before they got a character who was out and queer. And now for her to come back, I really want everyone to be happy and proud and so that's where the pressure comes from.

But to get to dive more into her queerness was really fun. And if Mindy survives, I hope that we would get to continue to explore that, and that maybe the queerness onscreen will just continue to multiply, that it won't just be Mindy and a friend or a girlfriend, but maybe the random cop or maybe Ghostface is wearing stilettos. Who knows?

**In my mind, Ghostface is wearing stilettos now. I'm not sure I can see any of the screen movies now without Ghostface in some pumps, so thank you so much.**

You're welcome. Thank you TikTok for giving me that image in my head. Pole-Dancing Ghostface, I'll never unsee it.

**Maybe there'll be a Ghostface coming out movie.**

Honestly, I would cry. That's why Ghostface is so angry.

**Funny that you mention that. What did you make of Billy and Stu's relationship? Did you ever think there was some kind of romantic –**

Gay stuff? I'm sure there was some gay stuff. There so often is gay stuff that is hidden behind toxic masculinity and anger and violence. And perhaps if as a culture we embraced our gay stuff with more ease, we wouldn't be so violent and angry.

**What do you hear from queer fans who see themselves in Mindy and what does that mean to you that they do?**

Oh, it feels so good. It's like a relief that people are seeing themselves and feel represented and celebrated. It's a relief and it's exciting because I know how that feels. I know what it feels like to see myself on screen. And it's something that fortunately is happening more and more. And it's just such a concept to me that teenagers today will grow up having always seen themselves on screen. That's so cool. And to be a small part of that means a lot to me.

Yeah, I love seeing all of the art. People are so creative and so talented. And I haven't really read any ... I did read one fan fic. It was like, Mindy and Amber [from "Scream V"] were in love or something, and I thought that was funny. There was definitely some chemistry between Mindy and Amber in

the basement when Mindy was like, "I'm the killer." We were like, "Are we about to kiss right now?"

**Oh, people were thinking that that was going to happen?**

I think because we were thinking it might happen! In the moment it was kind of hot. I don't know why.

**Was there talk about that behind the scenes? I think we're past the point of coding things...**

It might be more because Gen Z, pretty much everyone is queer, kind of, right? I think there just is sexual chemistry. Also, Gen Z just isn't afraid of or shying away from their sexual energy or chemistry as much as generations past. I think they're probably the least Christian generation that we've had in this country, so they're not afraid of sexual feelings. So I don't think anything was coded. I think there just were vibes just for vibes.



Melissa Barrera, Jenna Ortega, Jasmin Savoy Brown and Mason Gooding in "Scream VI." Photo: Paramount

People caught that.

**Going back in your own life, when did you first experience queer representation in the way that people are experiencing it with Mindy? And what did that mean to you?**

I know it happened before this, but the first thing that comes to mind, the first time I fully saw myself, every box ticked, was an episode of "Easy" called "Vegan Cinderella" with Jacqueline Toboni and Kiersey Clemons, an interracial, lesbian couple. One is vegan. They're young and they're trying to impress each other, and they're early in their queerness. And she literally looked like me and Jacqueline Toboni's character looked a lot like my ex in certain ways. And it was just like, "Whoa, this is actually my life and it's so modern and they're young and they're having little dinner parties," and that was so exciting. And also, they're both really good actors.

I would love to do a project like that. But it meant so much to me. I didn't know how hungry I was for it until I saw it. And I was like, "Oh my god, this is what it's like to be a white man? No wonder they have the biggest egos ever because they're constantly walking

See Jasmin Savoy Brown, page 31

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Josh Oikarinen and Travis Adler. Photos: Andrew Potter

## The Plants of Grindr

Continued from page 15

ask to see. When it took me a few minutes to reply, he began sending additional messages asking where I'd gone. I hadn't gone anywhere. I was just moving slowly.

I realized that this was probably how he messages everyone. I was as un-special

as one of a million tulip bulbs he might plant. Not long after, someone reported my account for impersonation. I'd created a second Grindr account so that my plant chats could be separate from my personal DMs. Some plants, like aspen trees, are so good at cloning that what looks like a whole forest can actually be just one plant

joined underground by a massive root structure. Someone on Grindr didn't think two accounts that looked like me

could be connected, though. I lost most of my plant chats. It all felt very seasonal.

Plants themselves don't use Grindr, but I like to imagine what that could be like. Maybe, like "Plant Daddy," they'd send rapid-

fire demands. "U got water? Water? You got water? Looking for water." Maybe, like ephemeral flowers, a plant would log on for one hour a year and then delete its account. Or like invasive kudzu, one profile picture would slowly take over the entire grid as your dating selection was narrowed down to one intellect operating an ever-growing number of bodies. Don't report them for impersonation, though. They're just writing an article.



Jasmin Savoy Brown in "Yellowjackets" Season 2. Photo: Showtime

## Jasmin Savoy Brown

Continued from page 29

around seeing themselves reflected. That's really cool."

**I think that the horror genre as a whole has not been especially kind to the queer community when it comes to representation. It sounds like you can at least acknowledge that because you're shaking your head based on what you know.**

Oh, absolutely. I don't think it's just the horror genre's fault. I think every area of Hollywood was afraid of embracing queerness in a commercial sense for a long time, the same way that we've been afraid of all powerful beings, aka minorities. And that's a shame because we've had many amazing stories to tell for a really long time. And queer people were used as bait and then tossed to the wind, whether that be in kill scenes or whatever.

But it's really exciting that now "Scream" has a gay character who's experiencing trauma, but the trauma isn't that she's gay, and that's only fair. Mindy should also be getting stabbed up and chased and hurt and crying and screaming, but nothing to do with her sexuality. And that's exciting and I hope that more of every genre continues to follow in the footsteps of these films and employ queer actors and have queer characters, but never talk about their queerness because what does that have to do with the story? Nothing.

**I want to ask you about "Yellowjackets" because that's also been a big queer role for you, playing Taissa. What can you share about Season 2? What can fans expect from her journey?**

Well, Tai is just as gay as ever before. More hungry than she's ever been before, probably older and younger. I can say that everything that you expect will be exceeded, that it's really disturbing, and that everyone's acting is even better than it was before. That's the thing, is these casting directors did an amazing job. Obviously casting lookalikes

or essence-alikes, but also casting really strong actors. You have to be really good. Because this season especially, my god, all of the scenes are traumatic. And some scenes you'll shoot for five hours, and it's literally just experiencing a trauma over and over and over at every angle. You have to kill it every time, and everyone does. I'm really proud of everyone's work.

**I don't know how much you think about your influence, but last year, for example, you made it on the Out100 list. What would be your message to queer Black youth who might be like, "How did Jasmin get to where she is right now, and how do I do that?"**

What a question. I can go so many directions with that. I think it comes down to community. I grew up in Oregon. And I love my friends and family from Oregon, but/and it's a really white space. And so no matter how excellent I was, I was never going to feel that good because when you don't have anyone that looks like you, that represents you in the room you're in, you have no one to really see you and tell you that you're on track or tell you that you're loved and safe.

And so moving to L.A., I really was intentional about finding a community of my people, of queer people, of people of color — not just Black people, but anyone that isn't just straight and white. My friend group is really diverse and really colorful in every aspect of that word. And so I have people that really see me and know me and can lift me up when I'm feeling bad and can say, "You're killing it, girl!" Or like, "Hey, you need to take a nap." Or, "Hey, I'm going to go grab you some food." And we really lean on each other, and I think that's the key to so much of my success: the people that I surround myself with. So surround yourself with good people chosen and make sure it's a diverse group. Ties right back in the "Scream VI."

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

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‘The Queer Family Podcast’ Is Helping Queer Parents with Childrearing

BY DANA RUDOLPH

When Jaimie Kelton launched a podcast for queer families in 2018, she thought, “This would be a fun side project.” Now, 11 seasons later, she’s interviewed hundreds of queer families, published a book based on many of their stories, and has just rebranded the podcast to emphasize the range of queer family experiences the show covers.

Kelton said that she and her original co-host Robin Hopkins, both white lesbian moms and actors, “had no idea it would take off the way it did. These stories needed to be told; people wanted to hear these stories and people wanted to tell their stories.”

Hopkins has gone on to other ventures, and Kelton has launched the show’s new season under a new name, “The Queer Family Podcast,” with the encouragement of actor Rosie O’Donnell and Black trans activist and writer Tiq Milan, both interviewees and fans of the show. Kelton explained that the original name, “If These Ovaries Could Talk,” no longer fit because “We weren’t just telling female stories anymore. We were telling trans stories [and] nonbinary stories.”

Kelton is also expanding diversity among the show’s hosts. E Bradshaw, a nonbinary Black parent, was co-host for one season, and now Kelton is bringing in interviewees from previous episodes as guest cohosts, “from all different backgrounds, all different sexualities, all different

genders,” she said.

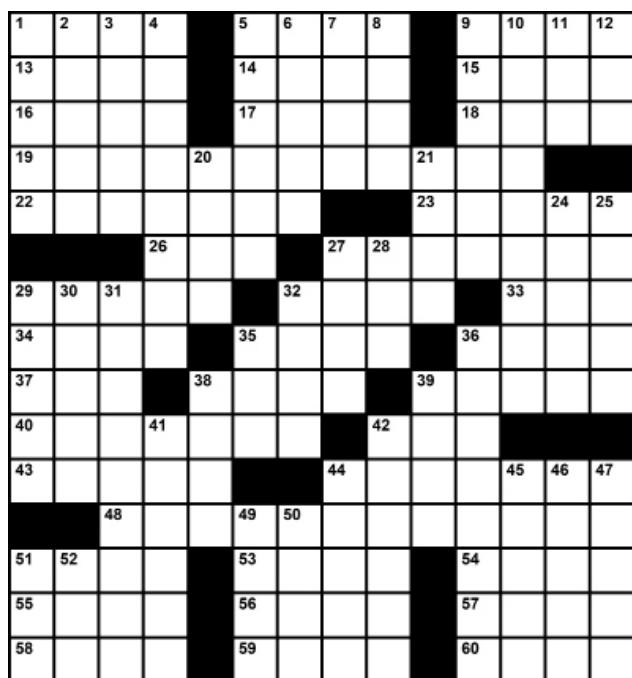
Kelton wants to keep telling queer family stories because queer families “are not represented in mainstream media like we should be.” She added, “What we see in mainstream media is not the truth of the world around us, and that needs to change. The point is to highlight, normalize and uplift queer families and queer people in general so that the rest of the world can see that we’re just like them, except we work a lot harder to make our freakin’ families.”

Reaching a mainstream audience has been challenging, though. While she’s had some straight allies tell her things like, “I didn’t know everything that went into [queer family building] and I’m learning so much,” she still feels that the podcast isn’t where she wants it to be in the parenting podcast world because the show gets categorized as “queer first and then parenting,” Kelton said. She’s even had conversations with television producers who have told her, “This is just such a niche topic,” and “Our audience is just not ready for this yet.”

Her frustration is evident in her retort: “What do you mean? Look at the world around you!”

She is, however, having a significant impact on her LGBTQ+ listeners, many of whom have used the podcast to help them figure out their journeys to parenthood. Kelton explained, “There are so many decisions when it comes to queer family

See *Queer Family Podcast*, page 34



## Asexuality

## Q. Puzzle

### Across

- 1 Margaret Cho's "All-American \_\_\_\_"
- 5 "Stone Butch Blues" hero
- 9 It comes before ass
- 13 Nonheterosexual conception
- 14 Gardner of mystery
- 15 Vaulted Cathedral of Hope area
- 16 "Atlas Shrugged" author Ayn
- 17 Irritated state

- 18 Aides superiors
- 19 Start of what asexual comic Paula Poundstone says about sexual people
- 22 Nevertheless, archaically
- 23 French composer Erik
- 26 Addams family member
- 27 More of the quote
- 29 Peter of "The Maltese Falcon"
- 32 The Oscars, e.g.

### Down

- 1 Circumference over a circumcision
- 2 "My Own Private \_\_\_\_"
- 3 Continue to get "On Our Backs"
- 4 Johnson lover?
- 5 Pope Francis, for one
- 6 Adolf's intimate Rohm
- 7 Cut
- 8 Green of "Buffy" fame
- 9 Deli confection
- 10 Cocktail, perhaps

- 11 Mil. sub-division?
- 12 "\_\_\_\_ Miz"
- 20 Portion (out)
- 21 Nick and Nora's dog
- 24 Nuts
- 25 Samantha not of "Bewitched"
- 27 First of the Democratic ass drawers
- 28 Cheer for Lorca
- 29 Vowel sound in "gay"
- 30 Tear producer
- 31 Buddhism and the Divine Miss M cult?
- 32 Secluded valley
- 35 "The Name of the Rose" writer
- 36 You can suck it
- 38 Response to a joke, with "it"
- 39 "Oz" setting
- 41 First year in a gay decade
- 42 Mapplethorpe often shot them
- 44 Word used in dating
- 45 Cause to come out
- 46 Robin Williams' "Aladdin" voice role
- 47 Artist Hernandez
- 49 Word on either lesbian's towel
- 50 Toledo's lake
- 51 Eleanor's beard?
- 52 Gielgud's john

See p. 10 for answers

# Prism of Possibilities

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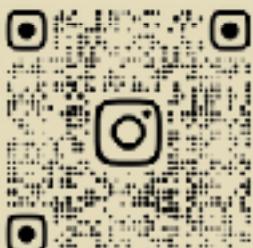
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**Queer Family Podcast**

Continued from page 32

making. We have to start from a place of intention way before we even start the process." She said that she often gets feedback from listeners saying, "I didn't know how to do this" or "I didn't even know this was an option for me. Then I heard these stories and I slowly was able to see this is an option and this is the route that I want to take."

She also loves that there are queer parents out there "breaking the mold," because, she said, "We don't fit the mold to begin with. We feel this freedom to bust outside the box and make our families completely unique in this world of very heteronormative families."

She observed, "There are folks who are not only breaking barriers with their parenting, with the way they build their family and how they show up as families, [but] they're also working to change systems that are not set up for us." One couple she interviewed, for example, a cisgender and a nonbinary parent, "experienced some serious microaggressions at their fertility clinic." Instead of getting angry and suing, "They worked with that clinic and changed all of it from the inside out, the whole structure," including making the clinic's forms more inclusive.

"There's a lot of us out there who are working really hard to change these systems, chiseling



Jaimie Kelton. Courtesy photo

away one little clinic at a time, but it makes a difference. It's really inspiring to hear these stories of folks who are working to make it better for the LGBTQIA+ community," she said.

The current season of the show brings even more stories about the wide variety of queer families, including one guest who was conceived in the 1980s by gay moms and is now a queer mom herself, with children via fostering, adoption and being in a blended family with her partner, who has a biological child. Other episodes feature international guests and others from across the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

"That's the beauty of this show," Kelton said. "It just shows the humanity behind all of our journeys and all of our families."

*Listen to "The Queer Family Podcast" wherever podcasts are found.*

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