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MAY 2016

Billy Gilman

TALKS COUNTRY
MUSIC'S EVER-CHANGING
LANDSCAPE AND
HIS PLANS TO ROCK
DISCOVERY GREEN
THIS SUMMER.



STACEYANN CHIN

The poet, activist, and mother
discusses the complexities
of womanhood.

PLUS: TONI TENNILLE | VICKIE SHAW

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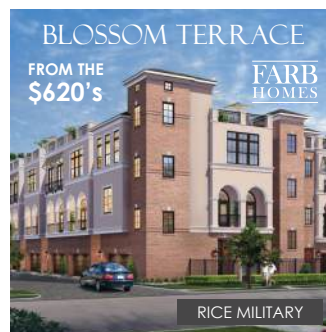
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Tim Curfman (far right) tells us how his mother-in-law (center) crow-barred her way into his heart. That's his husband and mother-in-law's beloved son, Jim, on the left.

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Free to Be You and Me and Pee

By Ryan Leach



Justice Served?

A new ruling from the Fourth Circuit Court of the United States has cast an uncertain future on North Carolina's discriminatory anti-LGBT HB2. The ruling holds that it is discriminatory for schools to segregate transgender students when schools elect to use sex-segregated restrooms. This has cast an uncertain future on North Carolina's discriminatory anti-LGBT HB2.

The following is a tale of unintended consequences.

Before starting his sophomore year, Virginia high school student Gavin Grimm informed the Gloucester County Public Schools that he was transgender. He told them that he had legally changed his name to Gavin and that he should be referred to with the male pronoun. In the fall, the principal allowed Gavin to use the boys' restroom, which he did without incident for seven weeks. A problem arose when parents and other outsiders took issue with this and pressured the school board to enact a new policy requiring students to use the restroom of the gender they were assigned at birth. Transgender students would have to be segregated to unisex restrooms—usually the school's clinic restroom. Gavin sued, citing discrimination in violation of Title IX, a federal statute that protects students from discrimination on the basis of sex and gender expression. In April, it was announced that Gavin won.

It took a while for Gavin to obtain this ruling. After being denied by the state's district courts, it was finally the Fourth Circuit Court of the United States that held that it was in-

deed discriminatory for schools to segregate transgender students when schools elect to use sex-segregated restrooms. This decision is important because the court affirmed the interpretation used by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights in enforcing Title IX. But this case does more than allow Gavin to once again resume using the restroom of the gender he identifies with. The Fourth Circuit ruling could undo—and possibly prevent—current attempts by some states to create laws that would mandate the same thing.

When school districts or states violate Title IX in the way that this Virginia school district did, it endangers their ability to collect federal dollars. In the past, it was Title IX that was cited when women dared to participate in sports traditionally dominated by men. If an institution, or school district, loses access to these funds, that can equate to millions of dollars. Or in the case of a statewide law, the loss can be in the billions. Which is where this story takes a few interesting turns—the first of which is to North Carolina.

In March, the state of North Carolina passed the broad and infamous House Bill 2 (HB2)—one of the most discriminatory laws

against LGBT people in the entire country. HB2, among other things, requires people to use the restroom corresponding to the gender that they were assigned at birth. This includes students in the North Carolina public school system. So how does Gavin Grimm's case relate to North Carolina?

The Fourth Circuit, which ruled on Grimm's case, is a part of the federal system of courts ranked just below the Supreme Court of the United States. Since the Supreme Court doesn't have the capacity to hear every single case, the federal court system is broken up into nine regional circuits in order to more effectively and efficiently answer legal questions that come up. Gavin's first lawsuit was in a Virginia district court, which only affects the laws of that state. When Gavin lost and appealed his case, it was moved up to the Fourth Circuit. The Fourth Circuit's ruling impacts Virginia as well as a small handful of neighboring states, one of which is North Carolina. Gavin Grimm's Fourth Circuit opinion out of Virginia has legal authority, or precedence, in North Carolina.

The plot thickens.

continued on page 14



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Please see Brief Summary of Patient Information with
important warnings on the adjacent pages.

Brief Summary of Patient Information about ODEFSEY

ODEFSEY (oh-DEF-see)

(emtricitabine, rilpivirine and tenofovir alafenamide) tablets

Important: Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with ODEFSEY.

There may be new information about ODEFSEY. This information is only a summary and does not take the place of talking with your healthcare provider about your medical condition or treatment.

What is the most important information I should know about ODEFSEY?

ODEFSEY can cause serious side effects, including:

- **Build-up of lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Lactic acidosis may happen in some people who take ODEFSEY or similar medicines. Lactic acidosis is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death. Lactic acidosis can be hard to identify early, because the symptoms could seem like symptoms of other health problems. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms which could be signs of lactic acidosis:**
 - feel very weak or tired
 - have unusual (not normal) muscle pain
 - have trouble breathing
 - have stomach pain with nausea or vomiting
 - feel cold, especially in your arms and legs
 - feel dizzy or lightheaded
 - have a fast or irregular heartbeat
- **Severe liver problems.** Severe liver problems may happen in people who take ODEFSEY. In some cases, these liver problems can lead to death. Your liver may become large and you may develop fat in your liver.

Call your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms of liver problems:

- your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice)
- dark “tea-colored” urine
- light-colored bowel movements (stools)
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- pain, aching, or tenderness on the right side of your stomach area
- **You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female, very overweight (obese), or have been taking ODEFSEY or a similar medicine for a long time.**
- **Worsening of Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection.** ODEFSEY is not approved to treat HBV. If you have HBV and take ODEFSEY, your HBV may get worse (flare-up) if you stop taking ODEFSEY. A “flare-up” is when your HBV infection suddenly returns in a worse way than before.
 - Do not run out of ODEFSEY. Refill your prescription or talk to your healthcare provider before your ODEFSEY is all gone.
 - Do not stop taking ODEFSEY without first talking to your healthcare provider.
 - If you stop taking ODEFSEY, your healthcare provider will need to check your health often and do blood tests regularly for several months to check your HBV infection. Tell your healthcare provider about any new or unusual symptoms you may have after you stop taking ODEFSEY.

What is ODEFSEY?

ODEFSEY is a prescription medicine that is used to treat HIV-1 in people 12 years of age and older:

- who have not received HIV-1 medicines in the past and have an amount of HIV-1 in their blood (“viral load”) that is no more than 100,000 copies/mL, **or**
- to replace their current HIV-1 medicines in people who have been on the same HIV-1 medicines for at least 6 months, have a viral load that is less than 50 copies/mL, and have never failed past HIV-1 treatment.

It is not known if ODEFSEY is safe and effective in children under 12 years of age or who weigh less than 77 lb (35 kg).

When used to treat HIV-1 infection, ODEFSEY may help:

- Reduce the amount of HIV-1 in your blood. This is called “viral load”.
- Increase the number of CD4+ (T) cells in your blood that help fight off other infections.

Reducing the amount of HIV-1 and increasing the CD4+ (T) cells in your blood may help improve your immune system. This may reduce your risk of death or getting infections that can happen when your immune system is weak (opportunistic infections).

ODEFSEY does not cure HIV-1 infection or AIDS. You must keep taking HIV-1 medicines to control HIV-1 infection and decrease HIV-related illnesses.

Ask your healthcare provider about how to prevent passing HIV-1 to others. Do not share or re-use needles, injection equipment, or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them. Do not have sex without protection. Always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom to lower the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.

Who should not take ODEFSEY?

Do not take ODEFSEY if you also take a medicine that contains:

- carbamazepine (Carbatrol®, Epitol®, Equetro®, Tegretol®, Tegretol-XR®, Teril®)
- dexamethasone (Ozurdex®, Maxidex®, Decadron®, Baycadron™)
- dextansoprazole (Dexilant®)
- esomeprazole (Nexium®, Vimovo®)
- lansoprazole (Prevacid®)
- omeprazole (Prilosec®, Zegerid®)
- oxcarbazepine (Trileptal®)
- pantoprazole sodium (Protonix®)
- phenobarbital (Luminal®)
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- rabeprazole (Aciphex®)
- rifampin (Rifadin®, Rifamate®, Rifater®, Rimactane®)
- rifapentine (Priftin®)
- the herb St. John's wort or a product that contains St. John's wort

What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking ODEFSEY?

Before taking ODEFSEY, tell your healthcare provider if you:

- have liver problems including hepatitis B or C virus infection
- have kidney and bone problems
- have had depression or suicidal thoughts
- have any other medical conditions
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if ODEFSEY can harm your unborn baby. Tell your healthcare provider if you become pregnant while taking ODEFSEY.

Pregnancy registry: there is a pregnancy registry for women who take HIV-1 medicines during pregnancy. The purpose of this registry is to collect information about the health of you and your baby. Talk with your healthcare provider about how you can take part in this registry.

- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed if you take ODEFSEY.
 - You should not breastfeed if you have HIV-1 because of the risk of passing HIV-1 to your baby.
 - At least one of the medicines in ODEFSEY can pass to your baby in your breast milk. It is not known if the other medicines in ODEFSEY can pass into your breast milk.
 - Talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

Some medicines may interact with ODEFSEY. **Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.**

- You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that interact with ODEFSEY.
- Do not start a new medicine without telling your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider can tell you if it is safe to take ODEFSEY with other medicines.

How should I take ODEFSEY?

- Take ODEFSEY exactly as your healthcare provider tells you to take it. ODEFSEY is taken by itself (not with other HIV-1 medicines) to treat HIV-1 infection.
- Take ODEFSEY 1 time each day with a meal.
- Do not change your dose or stop taking ODEFSEY without first talking with your healthcare provider. Stay under a healthcare provider's care when taking ODEFSEY.
- Do not miss a dose of ODEFSEY.
- If you take too much ODEFSEY, call your healthcare provider or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.
- When your ODEFSEY supply starts to run low, get more from your healthcare provider or pharmacy. This is very important because the amount of virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may develop resistance to ODEFSEY and become harder to treat.

What are the possible side effects of ODEFSEY?

ODEFSEY may cause serious side effects, including:

- **See “What is the most important information I should know about ODEFSEY?”**
- **Severe skin rash and allergic reactions.** Skin rash is a common side effect of ODEFSEY. Rash can be serious. Call your healthcare provider right away if you get a rash. In some cases, rash and allergic reaction may need to be treated in a hospital. **If you get a rash with any of the following symptoms, stop taking ODEFSEY and call your healthcare provider right away:**
 - fever
 - skin blisters
 - mouth sores
 - redness or swelling of the eyes (conjunctivitis)
 - swelling of the face, lips, mouth or throat
 - trouble breathing or swallowing
 - pain on the right side of the stomach (abdominal) area
 - dark “tea-colored” urine

- **Depression or mood changes.** Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms:
 - feel sad or hopeless
 - feel anxious or restless
 - have thoughts of hurting yourself (suicide) or have tried to hurt yourself
- **Change in liver enzymes.** People with a history of hepatitis B or C virus infection or who have certain liver enzyme changes may have an increased risk of developing new or worsening liver problems during treatment with ODEFSEY. Liver problems can also happen during treatment with ODEFSEY in people without a history of liver disease. Your healthcare provider may need to do tests to check your liver enzymes before and during treatment with ODEFSEY.
- **Changes in body fat can happen in people who take HIV-1 medicine.** These changes may include increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck (“buffalo hump”), breast, and around the middle of your body (trunk). Loss of fat from the legs, arms and face may also happen. The exact cause and long-term health effects of these conditions are not known.
- **Changes in your immune system** (Immune Reconstitution Syndrome) can happen when you start taking HIV-1 medicines. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that have been hidden in your body for a long time. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you start having any new symptoms after starting your HIV-1 medicine.
- **New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure.** Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys before you start and while you are taking ODEFSEY. Your healthcare provider may tell you to stop taking ODEFSEY if you develop new or worse kidney problems.
- **Bone problems** can happen in some people who take ODEFSEY. Bone problems may include bone pain, softening or thinning (which may lead to fractures). Your healthcare provider may need to do tests to check your bones.

The most common side effects of rilpivirine, one of the medicines in ODEFSEY, are depression, trouble sleeping (insomnia), and headache.

The most common side effect of emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide, two of the medicines in ODEFSEY, is nausea.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

- These are not all the possible side effects of ODEFSEY. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

This Brief Summary summarizes the most important information about ODEFSEY. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about ODEFSEY that is written for health professionals.

For more information, call **1-800-445-3235** or go to **www.ODEFSEY.com**.

Keep ODEFSEY and all medicines out of reach of children.

Issued: March 2016

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On March 31, the **TransVisible Project** held a press conference and launch party at Mixed Emotions Fine Art. Pictured are event attendees.



The **UH LGBTQ Alumni Network** held its RED Dinner on April 8 at the home of Kevin Hamby and Brian Waddle. Pictured are UH alumni and students.



On April 1–2, **Patrick Palmer Art** held a reception for the studio's spring painting collection, entitled "My Ancestors," at its Milford location. Pictured are **John de la Cruz**, Palmer, **Tori Chambers**, and **Scott Gibbs**.



The Montrose Softball League Association held its Miss MSLA pageant on April 16 at South Beach. Pictured are **Jessica Fox** (Miss MSLA 2016) and **Sasha B Frost** (Miss MSLA 2015).



On April 15, a candlelight vigil was held for **Shante Thompson** and **Willie Sims** at Houston City Hall. Pictured are the vigil's attendees.

The Grimm decision could effectively require the U.S. Department of Education to withdraw its \$4.5 billion dollars from North Carolina because, according to precedential case law, their HB2 clearly discriminates against transgender students in a way that the court says it can't. Under normal circumstances, Grimm's decision would most certainly be appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States. This could drag out the case for the next three years, and North Carolina could effectively avoid any fallout from the Fourth Circuit decision. But you see, these aren't normal circumstances, and the wrinkle in that scenario involves the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. (Stay with me here—we are going on a detour.)

Scalia died unexpectedly in early 2016. He was by far the most conservative justice on the Supreme Court. His death left a vacancy and an even number of justices. When the Supreme Court has only eight justices and they tie on an issue—four against and four in favor—there is no precedential ruling set, and the circuit-court ruling stands. So if North Carolina or the school district appealed the Fourth Circuit ruling the likely outcome would be that the Fourth Circuit ruling would stand or—even worse for North Carolina—the rights of transgender people would be recognized across the country when the Supreme Court likely ruled five to three in favor of Grimm.

So what is a North Carolina governor supposed to do when faced with tremendous public backlash, the loss of millions of dollars and jobs, and a tough re-election where he is now losing in the polls? Well, that question has yet to be answered. North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory has indicated that he will respect the will of the Fourth Circuit Court. What that means in regards to HB2, however, is anyone's guess. On April 25, a bill asking for the full repeal of HB2 was filed in the North Carolina legislature. Its chances of passage are unknown, but not good.

I wonder if those parents and the school board in Virginia now wish they had just let Gavin Grimm pee in peace? We may never know the answer.

The end.

Ryan Leach is a community leader and activist who is dedicated to the social and political advancement of the LGBT community, as well as all communities fighting for equality. He is also a board member for Equality Texas, and a former board member for the Houston GLBT Political Caucus. You can connect with his work by emailing him at ryanleach@outsmartmagazine.com.

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'Winifred'

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Tek Wilson has the title role in this world premiere multi-media production of *Winifred*.

GEORGE HIXSON



Theater LaB Houston rounds out its 23rd season with the world premiere of *Winifred*, a multi-media production that tells the story of Winifred Wagner, a woman of interest.

The British orphan was adopted by German relatives and married off to the closet homosexual son of opera impresario Richard Wagner. She did her duty by giving him four heirs, and when her husband passed (he was almost 30 years her senior), she took over run-

ning the Bayreuth Festival, an annual event presenting Wagner's operas.

Then the story gets really kinky: she became a close personal friend of Adolph Hitler. After World War II ended, she was stripped of her power, influence, and assets. She refused to apologize for her support of Hitler and the Nazi Party, and died in 1980.

Winifred's story bristles with themes of innocence and guilt, sexual politics, artistic purity, feminism and familial relations, and

it includes images of warfare violence, frank sexual talk, and loud noises like gunfire. It is not for children. Seriously.

TLH collaborated with Un-CommonWill Collective (UCWC), which includes artists Tek Wilson, of Houston; and Alva Hascall and Lisa Westkaemper, of Austin and Rockland, Maine. The production was five years in the making.

—Marene Gustin

Winifred
May 6-22
Theater LaB (thelabhou.org)
MATCH (matchhouston.org)
713.325.5370

📻 Radio

★ Performing Arts

🖼️ Art & Photography

🔄 Ongoing

+ Other Things

📅 Save The Date

1

Dollface ★ *thru 14* A play that exposes and explores the precarious space women occupy, both in history and today.
mildredsunbrella.com



3

Sidewalks 🖼️ *thru 5* This exhibit by Fikry Botros is part of FotoFest 2016.
archwaygallery.com
Made in Your Mind + *thru 8* Build and create with initiative, teamwork, and a DIY attitude.
cmhouston.org

4

Storm Songs & Stories ★ A multi-media, open-mic program about hurricanes.
houstongrandopera.org
A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder ★ *thru 15* Tony Award-winning musical.
tuts.com

5

Baja Terapia ★ *thru 8* A comedy about an unconventional therapy session.
gentedeteatro.org
Fiesta Cinco de Mayo + *thru 11* Learn about Mexico's history at the Children's Museum.
cmhouston.org

6

MFAH Mixed Media Party + Homage to the '80s with music videos of Julien Temple.
mfaah.org/a/mixed-media
Houston's 16th Diversity Summit + Embracing change through inclusive leadership.
diversitysummit.org

7

Dreams Can Come True ★ Houston Symphony concert for the whole family.
houston Symphony.org
Juxtaposition: Comparison & Contrast 🖼️ Works by a resident artist and a guest artist.
archwaygallery.com

8

Paul Anka ★ The man, the music, one night only at The Grand.
thegrand.com

9

Intrude 📅 thru 14 A site-specific art installation of giant bunnies. No, seriously. Check them out at **1600 Smith Street**



11

Galveston Arts Center 📅 thru 22 Three new exhibits by Texas artists. **galvestonartscenter.org**

12

Play It Safe Wonderweek + thru 18 Expand your electrical and fire-safety smarts. **cmhouston.org**
It's about Time 📅 Justin Garcia's latest exhibition depicts time through aging walls. **justingarciaart.com**

13

Houston Music Festival ★ Featuring Ginuwine, more. **ticketmaster.com**
Intercultural Play Reading Series ★ & 14 Three plays about reconstructing ourselves in the face of tragedy. **nextiterationtheater.com/ipsr**

14

Mamma Mia! ★ *last day* Can you ever get enough of ABBA? **thegrand.com**
Canon 📅 *last day* The U.S. debut of this exhibition. **mcclaingallery.com**

15

The Great Cape Rinderhorn 📅 *last day* German artist Thorsten Brinkmann's first solo museum exhibit. **ricegallery.org**

16

22nd Annual Charity Golf Classic + Raise funds for the National Museum of Funeral History. **nmfh.org**
PVRIS ★ Hot new band fronted by hot Lynn Gunn plays at House of Blues. **houseofblues.com** (See page 19.)

17

How Beautiful Tour ★ It's Florence + the Machine's hot tour featuring her 2015 hit album. **florenceandthemachine.com**

18

Charlie Kitchen New York 📅 thru 27 A show of the most recent photography and sculpture by San Antonio-based artist Charlie Kitchen. **bigeyedfishhouston.com**

19

Let Freedom Ring Wonderweek + Bring the kids to the all-day event. **cmhouston.org**
Cracked ★ thru 21 A dance/theater performance by Toni Valle. **6degreedance.org**

20

Vickie Shaw's 60th Birthday Bash + & 21 A two-day party with entertainment, food, drinks, and a surprise! **vickieshaw.com** (See page 00.)

21

2016 HRC Houston Gala + Party for the cause. **hrchouston.org**
Will Hoge ★ The singer/songwriter at Dosey Doe. **doseydoe.com**
11th Annual Love Party + Party for Hatch Youth. **hatchyouth.org**

22

Cigna Sunday Streets + Part of White Oak Dr. closed for a day of biking, more. **gohealthyhouston.org**
Just Gettin' Started ★ Christian McBride Trio and Houston Chamber Choir. **houstonchamberchoir.org**

23

Honoring Olivewood thru 29 📅 Photo exhibit of Houston's oldest African-American cemetery. **nmfh.org**
Mark Flood: Gratest Hits 📅 thru Aug. 7 First survey of his work from the 1980s to 2015. **camh.org**

LIKE

26

The Cosmos ★ thru 29 The final installment in a film trilogy. **houstonsymphony.org**
Simply Barbra ★ Steven Brinberg is Babs! Don't rain on his parade. **thelabhou.org** (See page 73.)

27

Charlotte Potter: Glass Amory 📅 thru Sept. 3 This solo exhibition investigates the physical manifestation of identity through the intersection of glass and the body's largest organ, the skin. **crafthouston.org**

28

Three New Exhibits 📅 thru July 9 At Box 13. **box13artspace.com**
Erykah Badu ★ Dallas native and queen of neo-soul comes to Houston for one night. **arenahouston.com**

29

Memorial Day Blowout ★ The Flaming Lips, Lucero, Title Fight, and more at WOMH. **whiteoakmusichall.com**

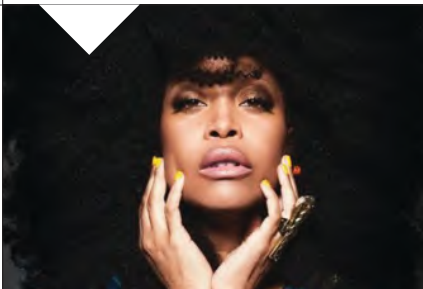
30

Sculpted in Steel: Art Deco Automobiles and Motorcycles, 1929-1940 📅 *last day* Classic cars and motorcycles from the past. **mfah.org**

31

Beautiful: The Carole King Musical ★ thru June 5 The Tony and Grammy award-winning hit arrives in Houston. I feel the earth move under my feet! **broadwayatthehobbycenter.com**

More CALENDAR →



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Calendar of Events

continued from page 17

PVRIS

May 16

Hot new band fronted by hot Lyndsey Gunnulfsen (aka Lynn Gunn) plays at the House of Blues tonight. Among songs in their set is "You and I" from the deluxe version of their *White Noise* album. The band was originally called Paris but they changed it to PVRIS (still pronounced Paris) and has been on fire for the past two years, including their music video for the 2015 hit "Fire." Their sound has been described as dark electro-pop and stadium-sized rock. Not only is Lynn Gunn a talented hottie and openly gay role model, but she was also romantically linked to girl-heartthrob Kristen Stewart last year. houseofblues.com



16

HRC Houston Gala

May 21

Do not miss this fabulous gala for one of the most important LGBT civil-rights organizations around. Help support the local efforts by attending this year's Houston gala at the Hilton Americas-Houston downtown. Enjoy wine and dinner, a silent auction with almost 1,000 donors, and guest speakers. This year features Chad Griffin, national HRC president. He was named 16th on *Out* magazine's Power 50 list in 2013. Also speaking at the gala will be Dana Goldberg, the funniest Jewish lesbian comic. Ever. hrchouston.org

21

Carl Han's 11th Annual Love Party

May 21

Featuring Marsha Mellow/Steven Tilotta and more. Snacks, cash bar and a \$10 donation for Hatch Youth, a local group dedicated to empowering Houston's LGBT youth. The group offers services at The Montrose Center for youth 13 to 20 years of age, and has a weekly radio show. Come out and show your support, have a good time, and enjoy the music! hatchyouth.org

21

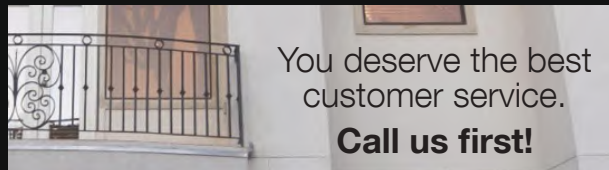
Free Press Summer Festival

June 4 & 5

Outdoor fest with music and more, including Matt & Kim and Preservation Hall Jazz Band at Eleanor Tinsley Park. This venue on the bayou provides ample space for multiple stages, food and drink booths, and can pack in plenty of people. Expect more than 55 bands, your favorite Houston food trucks and bites from restaurants across the city, as well as on site-activities such as photo booths, art installations, a laser light show, T-shirt stands, and much, much more. Bring the kids and pack the sunscreen, just leave the dogs and the selfie sticks at home, please. fpsf.com

June 4 & 5

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Shenanigans

... and malarkey.

This month, we're gonna talk about two things: shenanigans and malarkey.

First, the shenanigans.

Yesterday I noticed that I should have noticed something. The media have been talking about Donald Trump far too much, considering that the Trump alternative—Ted Cruz—is worse.

I'm fixing to tell you an absolutely true, certified military-grade story.

As you know, what grows best in Texas is crabgrass, fire ants, and Baptists.

If you do the math, you might conclude that they accidentally invented a fertilizer to grow Baptists while trying to chemically kill fire ants. There's really no other explanation, because Baptists, for all their talk about it, never have sex.

Baptists will tell you that we do not cotton to people having sex toys in Texas. Making whoopee should not be fun, so no toys should be involved. In 2003, a mother was arrested by undercover agents for hosting a "passion party" where devices of a sexual nature were being sold to women in the privacy of their homes, kinda like Tupperware. The State of Texas considers lady parties to be obscene. They have not taken an official position on Tupperware, but I suspect it's okay as long as there are no items that can get an erection.

Now, before I forget where I was going with the story, you need to know that back when this passion-party brouhaha was happening, Ted Cruz was the solicitor general of Texas. That means he defends Texas in lawsuits.

Ancient warriors threw spears at each other. Lawyers mimic that by throwing paper at each other. Court files can grow so large that they need a forklift to carry them around, and this case was no different.

The papers that Ted Cruz filed with the courts had this as its central theme: "There is no substantive-due-process right to stimulate one's genitals for non-medical purposes unrelated to procreation or outside of an interpersonal relationship."

Okay, write that down somewhere and figure it the hell out. I do not know what disease you'd have to treat by medically stimulating your genitals, but bygawd, I hope I catch it.



PALIN: PETE MAROVICH/GETTY IMAGES; CRUZ: ANDY KATZ

Name Change?

Sarah Malarkey Palin (l) and Ted Shenanigans Cruz.

I'm sad to tell you that Ted wasn't finished with his paper-throwing legal defense. He argued that there is a "government" interest in "discouraging . . . autonomous sex."

I am not kidding you. You can look it up on the Internet machine or in the damn *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

This means that Ted Cruz believes the pursuit of happiness should not include masturbation, and the police should be able to barge into your home at any time to see what manner of naughtiness your hand is up to. I guess because they've had a lot of practice at saying "Hands up!" I dunno, maybe. You gotta admit that's a possibility.

Up until Ted Cruz's goofy argument to the courts, Texas' policy was that you could own a sex toy, but you couldn't buy one. Honey, if that law had been upheld, sex-toy craft classes would have had their own HGTV show.

The courts have overruled Ted Cruz's argument, and that's when Texas women decided that Ted Cruz was our dildo.

And now for the malarkey.

It was tragically and erroneously reported on the Internet that Sarah Palin was going to debate Bill Nye the Science Guy about climate change. Sarah Palin is a woman filled to the brim with loose ends.

I say "tragically" because I was so damn excited about it that I had to walk sideways to keep from flying. I even had a plan.

Sarah Palin was correctly quoted as saying that she was "very passionate about this issue." Darlin', I'm kinda passionate about my car, but I don't know diddle squat about building one.

My friend Verdellia—you know, the one with a leopard-skin-covered golf cart at the River

Oaks Country Club—said that she would even watch Sarah Palin debate Bill Nye on pay-per-view. So, that got me to thinking: how much would I pay to see this debate?

Let's start with a base payment of 10 bucks. Hell, you know you'd pay 10 bucks just to see which semi-creepy 1980s outfit Sarah Palin shows up in.

If Palin is drunk again, that's another 10 bucks. If Palin is drunk and Nye is high, you gotta go with \$30.

If Nye agrees to tie 100 IQ points behind his back, it's another 10 bucks to see him drool and still whip Palin.

If Nye walks across the stage and smacks Palin over the head with an atlas, viewing rights go up at least \$7.50, right?

If there's sideline climate-change commentary by Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, they can have my retirement fund, because I'd just die right there.

Then they ruined all my fun when they announced that Sarah Palin wasn't actually going to debate Nye in person. She is going to debate video clips of him. So she's going to debate against someone who isn't there. That means she would be debating autonomously. OMG y'all, she's gonna be a master-debater!

I wish you May flowers with this thought: I just wish that Republicans were as worried about the wrong person getting a gun as they are about the wrong person getting a wedding cake.

Susan Bankston lives in Richmond, Texas, where she writes about her hairdresser at *The World's Most Dangerous Beauty Salon, Inc.*, at juanitajeane.com.



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... when taking the next step in your relationship.

If you've found "the one," and you're ready to take the next step by sharing your lives together under the same roof, you both have a lot to think about. This can be an exciting time as you think about sharing all of the day-to-day events that couples get to share, cementing your bond even further.

And since so many laws have changed in our favor over the past few years, you may even be discussing the ultimate commitment—marriage. But before you start picking out the china pattern, there are some financial issues that you both should consider—and discuss—prior to moving forward.

Protecting Your Equity

When dating, or even living together, couples should not simply assume that they have the same rights to each other's assets as spouses do. However, when you take that next step in your relationship and tie the knot, you may also want to take steps to protect the equity you've built in a home that you purchased prior to the start of your relationship.

Typically, assets—including real estate—that are owned prior to marriage are considered to be separate, unless those assets become commingled with marital money. Co-mingling occurs when your spouse contributes toward the mortgage payment, or makes contributions toward any improvements on the property.

Therefore, in order to protect your equity in the home, you will need to avoid making shared payments for the mortgage, or for repairs and improvements. And, just to be sure, you may also want to have your spouse sign an agreement—and have it notarized—stating that he or she won't claim the home in the future.

Holding Assets Together or Apart

That being said, there are some positives to



holding real estate jointly. For starters, if something unexpected were to happen to you, then your spouse would not be left without a place to live—which, unfortunately, can be an issue for some LGBT couples whose families may not approve of the relationship.

When it comes to financial assets, there are actually several forms of ownership that may be chosen, and each can have advantages and disadvantages, depending on your specific goals. These include the following:

- **Sole Ownership (Fee Simple)**

As the name implies, with sole ownership, the asset is owned by one single individual. Certainly, an advantage here is that this form of ownership allows the owner to have complete control over what happens with the asset. However, the asset will typically be required to go through probate at the owner's death.

- **Tenancy in Common**

With tenancy in common, each owner of the asset has a distinct, separately transferable interest. Consent of the other owner (or owners) is not required in order to sell or dispose of another owner's share.

Some advantages of tenancy in common include the fact that owners can have unequal proportions, and they can control the disposition of their asset both during life and at death. There can also be an unlimited number of asset holders.

There are also a few drawbacks with tenan-

cy in common, since the asset must be probated at the owner's death. Concurrent ownership can also make management of the asset more difficult.

- **Joint Tenancy with Right of Survivorship (JTWROS)**

Joint tenancy with right of survivorship allows the interest in the property or asset to pass to the surviving owner or owners by operation of law—and because of this, it avoids going through probate. This makes JTWROS a beneficial form of asset ownership for couples, whether they are married or not. However, JTWROS requires ownership in equal proportions.

- **Tenancy by the Entirety**

Tenancy by the entirety is a type of concurrent estate in real property. This form of ownership is unique in that it occurs when the owners of the property are a married couple, and each spouse has an "equal and undivided" interest in the property. This type of ownership can also avoid probate; however, the owner has no absolute right of lifetime disposition.

- **Community Property**

Community property is a marital property regime under which most property that is acquired during the marriage—other than gifts and inheritances—is considered to be owned jointly by both of the spouses.

Texas is a "community property" state, which means that property acquired during marriage belongs to both of the spouses, and must be divided at divorce. Each of the spouses is allowed →

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MONEYSMART

continued from page 22

to keep his or her separate property when the marriage ends through divorce or death.

Considerations Regarding Tax Returns

Marriage can also bring about some considerations when it comes to filing your tax return. In general, filing your return jointly may provide you with a larger refund, or with less taxes due.

When you file your taxes separately, your tax rate may generally be higher, and you will likely not be allowed to claim various deductions such as:

- Earned Income Credit
- Education Benefits
- Child and Dependent Care (in most cases)
- Adoption Credit (in most cases)
- Itemized Deductions (if your spouse has already claimed these, or vice versa)

It is also important to note that based on the 2015 Supreme Court decision, all legally married same-sex couples are now required to file as married—either jointly or separately—on their tax returns.

In many instances, it will make sense for married couples to file their taxes jointly because you will typically end up with a lower tax rate. However, in certain instances, it may turn out that you will be better off filing separately, especially if you and your spouse earn a substantially unequal amount of income.

In fact, in some cases, it may even make sense to remain unmarried when it comes to filing taxes—especially if one spouse may be subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax, or AMT. The AMT applies to taxpayers who have high incomes, and it basically helps to ensure that these individuals pay at least a minimum amount of tax.

AMT can essentially be thought of as a different type of tax system that “resembles” the regular tax system, with the big difference being that there are certain types of income that are tax free. Some types of income that are deductible under the regular system are not deductible under AMT. For example, having a spouse and children—which are considered personal and dependent exemption deductions under the regular tax rules—are not allowed as deductions under the AMT rules.

Credit and Debt Considerations

Although looking ahead to the future with your new partner or spouse is always exciting, it is also important to have discussions about his or her financial past. This is because you don’t want any of their previous debt to come back and haunt you (or vice versa).

As an example, getting married will not affect your credit score or your individual credit report. You and your spouse will continue to maintain your own separate credit reports and scores, so if he or she has a bad credit history, that won’t be merged with yours. →

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MONEYSMART

continued from page 24

However, if you become a joint account-holder on any accounts with your spouse, then the missed payments will show up on your credit report as well. This is because, as a joint account holder, you have agreed to share full responsibility for the debt. In other words, if your spouse has had a credit card for many years, and you now become a joint card holder on that credit card, you will also become responsible not only for what happens going forward on that credit card, but also for any missed payments from the past.

The same holds true for any new joint accounts that you open in the future. These accounts will affect both of your credit reports, regardless of who uses the account or who pays the bill. With that in mind, be sure that you are aware of your spouse's past financial history prior to moving forward with merging any credit-card or other types of financial accounts.

Should You or Shouldn't You Tie the Knot?

Meeting the person of your dreams may not always mean that he or she shares the same financial background, sense of responsibility, or portfolio size that you do. The good news is that there are ways that you can protect yourself and each other while still moving forward in your relationship.

Bad financial or savings habits are certainly not a reason to avoid getting married. However, it is a good idea to be aware of your spouse's financial standing long before the wedding takes place. This can help to minimize a great deal of stress and conflict after the honeymoon is over.

Taking the Next Step

Because all situations are unique, there is no specific right or wrong answer across the board for everyone. So it is important to really weigh your options, discuss all of your alternatives, and ultimately make decisions that are best for you.

When you do, be sure that you continue to work with financial and tax advisors who are geared toward the needs of the LGBT community. That way, should any additional rules or laws be updated or changed, your advisors can help to guide you going forward.

This information is not intended to be a substitute for specific, individualized tax or legal advice. We suggest that you discuss your specific situation with a qualified tax or legal advisor.

Personal finance-related questions may be emailed to grace.yung@ipl.com.

Grace S. Yung, CFP, is a certified financial planner practitioner with experience in helping domestic partners plan their finances since 1994. She is a principal at Midtown Financial LLC in Houston and was recognized as a "Five-Star Wealth Manager" in the 2014 September issue of Texas Monthly.



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A full-page photograph of two men standing on a wooden bridge with a metal railing. The man on the left is smiling, wearing a denim jacket over a black t-shirt with a bicycle graphic and the word 'DUST', and tan shorts. The man on the right is wearing sunglasses, a dark blue hoodie with 'HOUSTON' and 'FOOTME TIGHT.' printed on it, and blue shorts. A red bicycle is parked on the left. In the background, several tall skyscrapers of Houston are visible under a clear blue sky.

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My Gay
HOUSTON

Location: Buffalo Bayou, Downtown. Photo Credit: Spencer Harrison

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FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Check out these fabulous events co-sponsored by OUTSMART and our marketing partners.



May 5: Out@TUTS Night presents *A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder*. Join us the first Thursday performance of each show. After the performance, mingle with the cast and listen to fabulous cabaret music with your LGBT friends. INFO: TUTS.com/Out

May 22: Houston Pride Band "True Colors" concert at Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church. INFO: houstonprideband.org

SAVE THE DATE

June 3: Timeless History Gala benefiting Gulf Coast Archive and Museum. INFO: timelesshistorygala.com

June 11: Rainbow on the Green is a free citywide celebration and dance party under the stars at Houston's own downtown Discovery Green park. INFO: discoverygreen.com/rainbow

June 25: Pride Houston Festival & Parade Celebration Festival to be held around City Hall, Hermann Square, and Tranquility Park, noon-7 p.m., and the parade begins at the intersection of Milam and Walker streets at 8:30 p.m. INFO: pridehouston.org

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Photos by Dalton DeHart

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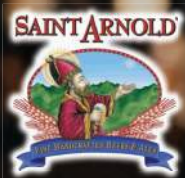
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Writer/Activist/Mother

Staceyann Chin fiercely embraces the complexities of her womanhood.

By **B. Root**

A spoken-word poet, performing artist, and LGBT activist, Staceyann Chin is a force to be reckoned with. Her work has been published in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and on Huffington Post. Chin has appeared on television and radio, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, CNN, and PBS, to discuss issues of race and sexuality. Her 2009 memoir *This Side of Paradise* recounts her experience growing up and coming out in Jamaica. Chin announced in 2011 that she was pregnant with her first child through in-vitro fertilization. In January of 2012, her daughter, Zuri, was born.

I had the opportunity to speak with Chin about identity, politics, and motherhood.

B. Root: In a recent interview, you discussed how you moved from Jamaica at 24 because it was too difficult to be gay there. Once you relocated to New York City, you said you found the freedom to be a lesbian, but quickly discovered the dissonance of being black in America. What has your experience as a gay woman of Chinese-Jamaican and Afro-Jamaican descent been like?

Staceyann Chin: It's interesting, because when you're mixed-race—in fact, when you're a double-minority mixed-race person—when you are in the space with either of those cultural groups, you wear it on you very clearly. So when I'm in the black space, everyone is very aware; everyone can understand in a very clear way that I am not only from black parents. And I think when I'm in a Chinese space, it's apparent that I'm black.

I think nowhere else is the “one-drop rule” enforced more rigidly than here within the boundaries of the U.S.—especially for black people. So when I came here, I immediately became nothing but black. I think if I were a person whose name was Jones or Smith or

Williams—one of those kinds of names that could come from anywhere—I don't think that anyone would even query my Asian roots. But because I am Staceyann Chin, people always ask, “Where does that ‘Chin’ come from?” I find myself answering that question even though they're not really asking about [my] Chinese origins; they're really asking, “How does a black girl bear the name *Chin*?”

So my name, I think, provokes the conversation [where] I'm forced to talk about my relationship (or my non-relationship) with my father, or the fact that Jamaica has a strong Chinese cultural presence, or my complicated relationship with being Chinese.

When I was a child in Jamaica, my black mother had abandoned me and my Chinese father had never come forward to claim me. So I was left to my black relatives who had responsibility for caring for me. I grew up knowing that I was something else that I was not connected to. There's always a longing in me for my Chinese-ness. I longed for my father. I longed for the culture.

I think the question [of my Chinese origins] provoked the conversation inside of me. I wrestled with it when I came here because identity is such a big thing in America; I need-

ed to talk about the parts of me. I was supposed to articulate my Chinese-ness, my gayness, my Jamaican-ness, my blackness, my mixed-race-ness, my immigrant-ness, my woman-ness, my feminist-ness. All of these things I was articulating, and I know that my Chinese-ness has always been problematic in terms of claiming it or holding on to it.

You have been very open about having your daughter Zuri through in-vitro fertilization. In fact, you recently wrote and performed a biopic play called *Motherstruck* about your journey to motherhood as a single woman without healthcare or stable finances. What was it like sharing your personal experience with motherhood on such a public platform?

It was so empowering and affirming. Because here I was, thinking that there was a fringe group of women who are doing this kind of like crazy thing of making babies by themselves or buying sperm. But because it's become the norm for a woman to have a career in most modern cities of the world, we have been putting off getting pregnant for a long time. It's becoming very normal for women [to join] →



© **Like Mother, Like Daughter**

In 2011, Staceyann Chin announced she was pregnant with her first child through in-vitro fertilization. Chin and her daughter, Zuri, now have a YouTube series where they address critical social issues.

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continued from previous page

the workforce in their 20s and spend their 30s working. Early marriage—and even marriage itself—is no longer the norm for so many people, and so “marriage-then-babies” isn’t really happening as much as it used to. So when women find themselves with a desire to have families, they are having to walk the same route I did. And because women are putting off getting pregnant until later, the problem of infertility is becoming a more widespread issue for women.

In the show, I talk about my threatened miscarriage. That’s another silent group of women—and the number is much larger than anyone is talking about—who are miscarrying. These are the realities. My story is far more common than people have been talking about. I think it was very empowering to sit in rooms where, every evening, I could spot the women who share parts of my story. I could see them holding on to their partner’s hand and weeping more at this part, or tensing up more, or they come to whisper in my ear after the show, “That happened to me, too. Thank you so much for giving voice to it.” It shows that it really struck a chord of universality.

You will be giving the keynote address at the Rainbow Families Conference this year. Held every two years in Washington DC, Rainbow Families provides an opportunity for LGBTQ parents, family members and their children, as well as prospective parents, to gather for a day of learning, networking, and fellowship. What are some things you plan to address in your keynote?

I’m definitely going to tell them how much I found out I don’t know about being a parent. I think that the most helpful lesson I’ve learned is how important it is to not be married to [a preconceived] idea of parenting. You always have some idea about how you think it’s going to be, but you can’t assume anything. It’s just this everyday, unfolding surprise about being a parent, and that teaches you that you have to be able to shift with a situation, and you have to be able to apologize quickly, and you have to be able to stand your ground when you know something’s really good for her and she hates it.

You and Zuri have an ongoing video series on YouTube called *Living Room Protests*, where you both address issues ranging from police brutality to affordable education. In one of your most-viewed videos, you and Zuri speak out to defend Planned Parenthood. What has been the reaction to these conversations you and Zuri have been having?

They have been overwhelmingly positive. But

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the people, of course, who have been negative have been loudly and viciously so. There are moments when I question, “Am I doing the right thing? Should I be protecting my kid from all of these nasty comments?”

So that’s something I will have to figure out—a negotiated balance with my child as she grows older, because right now I tell her that I’m going to post something and she’ll say, “Fine. Sure.” I imagine that it would be a very different conversation when she’s actually cognizant of what it means for her image to be out in the public space like that. Which brings me back to the thing I said in the beginning: you have to be willing to change should the situation require it, should the child require it. I always tell people that raising a kid is like this grand experiment.

Before I had a kid, I worried that after I got pregnant and I had this life growing inside me that I desired so deeply, that it would compromise my feelings about being pro-choice. But I know that the sacrifices and the change in everything—in my life, in my body, in my thinking, in my ability to feel, in my ability to know—is so deeply affected by my child that it has completely reinforced my belief that a woman should be completely all in before she makes that choice. And she should be allowed to defer if she doesn’t want to become a parent, because the toll is so great. I mean, the joy is so great, but how it changes your life and the scope of that change is so significant that no one should be forced to make that choice, for that woman’s sake as well as the child’s. The unwilling, resentful parent is a disaster for the creation of an unwilling, resentful adult.

With Mother’s Day coming up this month, do you and Zuri have any big plans?

I don’t know if she has any plans. Maybe she’s keeping them secret. Every Mother’s Day, something arrives in the mail that says “From Zuri,” but I suspect she either has people who are helping her or they’re acting on her behalf. Things arrive in the mail, and it’s wonderful because I don’t have any family, really. I don’t have a mom or siblings or an extended family that is present with me. So my fans—I don’t want to call them fans, [but rather] the people who believe in the work I do—show up in this amazing way. Maybe at least half of the gifts that came to us when Zuri was born came to us from people who I probably hadn’t even met yet, or people who I had only met online. That stands as a testament to the power of belonging to a global community. You know, you talk about belonging. For the girl who felt like she didn’t belong to all these different groups that she had a right to be included [in], she certainly now belongs to this global army of activists and progressive thinkers and radical feminists and anti-racist workers.

B. Root is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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Gilman on the Green

Out country star Billy Gilman talks fans, coming out, and Discovery Green.

By David Goldberg

Every year, Pride season officially begins with a smashing celebration on the grass at Discovery Green's "Rainbow on the Green" event. This year promises to be no different, with high-energy performances from country-music wunderkind Billy Gilman and unstoppable pop queen Taylor Dayne. We spoke with Gilman about coming out in the country music industry, LGBT politics in Nashville, and performing in Texas.

David Goldberg: What kind of people make up your audience?

Billy Gilman: I have been very fortunate to have come across a fan base like mine. You get the young kids—even still, and I haven't had a major song on the radio in a long time. There's the parents that come with the kids. I've always had an ages-9-to-90 kind of following, which is remarkable because not many 90-year-olds want to hear young kids singing nowadays.

Has your audience changed since you've come out?

There was not a drastic shift or opinion change, but there's always going to be comments and opinions thrown around—that's the kind of business we're in. I'm a very private person, and I'm in an industry that's so not private because of Facebook and Instagram. I just like to give you what I need to give you, and then I come home. But that's not the way our field works any more. About two years ago, I was with my boyfriend at a local festival and I wanted to take a picture, and I asked someone who had a very expensive-looking camera, and he said, "By the way, are you Billy Gilman?" and I said *whoops!* I thought, "Shoot, I'm not a megastar, but there could be some leaks and it could be filled with not-true statements," and I realized that I had to get a grip on this before someone else did. I kept thinking that my major upset is going to be my fans. You can



On June 11, Billy Gilman plans to serenade Rainbow on the Green fans with everything from Roy Orbison to Martina McBride to some of his own originals.

write the best song in the whole world, but if you don't have a fan base that's there supporting, you're dead in the water. So that was my number-one scare. But they've been so overwhelmingly positive for my cause. The fans didn't really change, to my knowledge, quite that much.

In your coming-out video, you said that "being a gay male country-music artist is not the easiest thing." Would you say that since you've come out your career has changed? Has it been easier or harder in your industry?

Lately, there has been a lot of inequality and discriminatory issues that have come across the Nashville legislature, and I can't believe it. I thought with the advancements with my coming out, [with] as big of a voice as I have, who knows? But is it Carrie Underwood or Tim McGraw speaking out? Unfortunately, no. I think it stems further back than a celebrity. It has to be a bigger movement than that. With all the advancements, with the millions of viewers that *Nashville* is getting, and with the gay character Will, I thought maybe this is a hint that in the next two or three years we are

really going to see something. And then, all of a sudden in the past couple of months, the developments down south have really upset me. It's going to be a long road. I don't understand why they want to disable someone's happiness when that's all we want, and to be ourselves. I don't see why someone can discredit that ability other than a god—if there is one—that should judge.

I know there are so many gay country artists who aren't coming to grips with the whole coming-out situation because they are afraid. It baffles me. Hopefully, in time, I want it to be at a place where it's not a big deal and no one cares. From the hundreds (or, I would speculate, thousands) of emails from youth that I got in the South, it was just unbelievable the respect and the you're-not-alone feeling that I gave to a lot of kids. It meant a lot to me, so I know there are a lot of people that do not have a voice that need one. I'll stop at nothing, and I'll keep pressing on to be who I am, and in that there comes a true form of silver lining, I hope.

What attracted you to the Discovery Green event?

I've always loved Houston, actually. I've been →

GILMAN ON THE GREEN

continued from previous page

there a couple of times for shows and corporate gigs, so when they approached me to do it, I said of course. It's a little different than doing a Pride event in Boston or Michigan or somewhere in the North, so I'm interested to see the response and the crowd. I'm going to bring some variety to the show, from Roy Orbison to Martina McBride and some of my songs. It's going to be a fun show, and I'm really looking forward to it.

Have you had any great experiences in Houston you can share?

I've performed in Tyler, Houston, Dallas, at the halftime for the Dallas Cowboys, for the Salvation Army's Kettle Kickoff, and that was so cool. I stood on the stadium stage with Jessica Simpson, and it was such a moment. I have many memories of Texas.

What: Rainbow on the Green

When: June 11

Where: Discovery Green,
1500 McKinney St.

Details: discoverygreen.com/rainbow

David Goldberg is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



Pop Queen

Taylor Dayne, best known for her '80s hit "Tell It to My Heart," will perform on June 11 as part of Discovery Green's Rainbow on the Green.

Taylor Dayne

David Goldberg: What made you agree to perform at the Discovery Green Pride event in Houston? What kind of show are you preparing?

Taylor Dayne: After performing this for many years, I enjoy my Pride parades. These performances and yearly celebrations are milestones in the cities and states I perform in, showing how far the communities have come.

Why do you think you have such a loyal LGBT following?

I feel it always starts with the music. 27 years ago, I released "Tell It to My Heart," and that song and music video had a global impact and changed my life. My career began and my fan base started. A lot of that base was in the clubs, losing themselves in my music. From there, the LGBT community grew and embraced me. I perform for my audiences and sing for my supper. I never hold back. When it's time for the last note, I go for the back of the audience.

How did you and RuPaul get together and decide to make "Be Someone"?

Ru and I have known each other for many years now, and have a warm friendship. I adore him. He's a true musicologist, a true gentleman, and a true lady. When he calls, I come. —David Goldberg

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Keeping It Together without the Love

A chat with Toni Tennille
about her new memoir.

By Neil Ellis Orts

Photo by Flip Minott

Toni Tennille, half of the 1970s pop duo Captain & Tennille, sang and danced on weekly national television with her infectious smile and boundless energy while her quiet, seldom-smiling husband, Daryl Dragon, played banks of keyboards. They looked like the perfect example of “opposites attract.”

A new book, *Toni Tennille: A Memoir*, written with her niece, Caroline Tennille St. Clair, tells another story. Their breakthrough hit, “Love Will Keep Us Together,” might have been better titled “Music Is All We Have in Common.” The couple divorced in 2014. Now 75 years old and living happily in Florida near her family, Tennille finally feels able to tell the world her story—not only about a difficult marriage in the shadows of the spotlight, but also of a childhood in 1940s and ’50s Alabama, just as the civil-rights movement was beginning to take shape. It’s a more interesting read than the average celebrity memoir.

As a fan of Toni Tennille since 1975, it was a thrill to be able to talk with her for an hour. Our conversation covered a lot of ground, and what follows are just highlights. Despite the difficulties she reveals in her book, she remains upbeat and personable.

Neil Ellis Orts: You grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, at a really interesting and volatile time in history.

Toni Tennille: Yes. There were rumblings going on, but my parents sheltered all of us girls when we were young. I don’t know if they understood what was going on. One of our housekeepers—the last one we had, Lucille—when Jane and I would drive her home to the other side of Montgomery where the black

people lived, we would drop her off at her house and she would always turn to us and say, “Now you girls lock these doors and get out of here.” We weren’t really scared, because we were so sheltered. We never thought anyone would ever harm us. We thought she was being extra-careful because we were her charges. So we drove off and did things we weren’t supposed to do before we went home. But she knew. I know now, looking back, that she lived where the unrest was coming to be. We didn’t know. As kids, we didn’t know.

As you started to play music after your family moved to California, it appears you took opportunities that

We Never Really Say Goodbye

Toni Tennille, though no longer with “The Captain” (Daryl Dragon), still talks to him regularly.



TONI TENNILLE

A MEMOIR



TONI TENNILLE
with CAROLINE TENNILLE ST. CLAIR

came your way and you had a work ethic, but I don’t sense you had a drive to succeed at all costs—the way it seems when I read about someone like Madonna. Am I reading that wrong?

No, you’re reading that absolutely right. I never, ever in my life had the rage to succeed, which is something that I know a lot of other people in various artistic and other careers have. I just didn’t. The reason that I did the things I did, the music and the songs and writing, was because it was joyful to me. I loved it. I loved making music and I loved being in theater and acting. It wasn’t that I ever expected or wanted to be famous. That happened →

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KEEPING IT TOGETHER WITHOUT THE LOVE

continued from previous page

because Daryl and I happened to be in the right place at the right time with the right music.

I found it funny that some people thought your song "Gentle Stranger" was a hymn to Jesus.

That really surprised me! I wrote it, frankly, about a one-night stand I had with this lovely young man on the beach in Malibu. We never saw each other again. He was lovely. The whole experience was ideal and gentle and kind—it was just a beautiful, beautiful thing. That's what I was writing about. I thought, well, it could work for Jesus if you thought of it that way—and a lot of my Christian friends did, I guess.

Well, because it wasn't explicit, as a naïve and very religious young man I pictured this very chaste evening of dinner and conversation into the late hours, and then you just drifted off to sleep "softly in your arms."

No, no, there was more to it than that. *[Laughs]* And Neil, that's fine. That's the way you saw it and it meant something to you, and that's lovely.

I have to tell you a really darling story about "The Way That I Want to Touch You," which was the first song I wrote for Daryl. After it became our second gold record, I got a call from a gay women's chorus from Palm Springs, California. They said, "Would you mind if we sang this song in our concert?" I thought, well, wait a minute—"I never wanted to touch a *man* the way that I want to touch *you*." And I went, ooh, that works! And I said, of course!

Speaking of gay subjects, you became close friends with gay lyricist Howard Greenfield.

One of the dearest men I ever met in my life. When we recorded "Love Will Keep Us Together" and it was first being aired on the radio in Los Angeles, and Howie and his partner, Tory Damon, lived in Beverly Hills, he called A&M and asked who the group was [who had recorded his song]. Of course, he wrote the lyrics with Neil Sedaka, who wrote the music. And he said, "I want to meet them." So we met, and Howie and Tory invited us over to their beautiful home and we got to know them quite well. And when I think about it even now, it kind of makes me teary, because when we lost him to AIDS, and then Tory a little bit later, it was devastating. He was a dear and wonderful man, very special to me.

Turning back to your memoir, and specifically your relationship with Daryl. A few years ago, you had a blog on the Captain & Tennille website. You always seemed protective of Da-

ryl even as you were sometimes exasperated with him. Then you sort of said, "I don't know what to say any more. We're retired, we live a private life." I have to wonder if you stopped because you didn't know how to write about this relationship.

I had fun writing that blog. And you're right, I stopped. That's interesting that you would suggest that I stopped because I didn't want to say too much about Daryl. I wasn't sure what was happening with him. I grew up in a very loving family. Even though my dad was an alcoholic, he adored his daughters. We had a very loving family, and Daryl did not. His family was extremely difficult, and he has a lot of reasons for the way that he is. I don't want to dis Daryl, because he can't help the way he was. I don't blame him for the way things turned out. It's not his fault—it's mine, because I saw this man who I thought, "Oh my God, this is the man, he's deep and dark and mysterious. And we've got this wonderful musical thing going on between us!" So I spent [my earliest] time with Daryl stubbornly thinking, "I can bring him into the light, I can show him what love is." And then it went on and on and on. And then finally it dawned on my thick skull that I'm not ever going to change this man. I'm not ever going to bring him into a good place. Eventually, I just gave up.

You know, I talk to Daryl every week to 10 days. We still have a business together, we still own our publishing company together. I still care about him. I ask him, "How are you doing?" and it's always [just a moaning sound]. *[Laughs]* But he's been that way since I've known him. He's just his own worst enemy.

I find that creative people seldom ever really retire, so after this book, do you have other projects?

I'll tell you something I just thought about [in these past few] weeks since Harper Lee died. She lived all her life in Monroeville, Alabama. She lived a quiet life. She never had the kind of career that I had, where I was on television and all that stuff. But I loved the way she lived. I want to live a quiet life. I want to do some gardening, I want to watch birds, I want to enjoy my friends—just do simple things. It's time now. I lived my life in the public eye for so long, I just want a quiet life. After all this is done and we have the book launched and Caroline has her shot at being a published author, which she richly deserves, I think I may just be Harper Lee for the rest of my life.

Toni Tennille: A Memoir is available through Taylor Trade Publishing (rowman.com/taylortrade).

Neil Ellis Orts is a frequent contributor to OUTSMART magazine.



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Everybody Loves Raydell

Small-town PFLAG mom welcomes all with an open heart.

By Donalevan Maines

Carrying a plate of homemade cookies, the loving mother of Houston's Ted "TR" Bowen IV arrives early at a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meeting in Boerne, Texas, a small town about 30 miles northwest of San Antonio.

Bowen's friends know Boerne because they enjoy an open invitation to the home of his mom, Raydell, who is 65. Any friend of her gay son is a friend of Raydell's. "I have a ton of adopted kids!" she says. "They are all special to my heart. They are always welcomed, whether as a group or alone."

About the PFLAG group in Boerne, Raydell says, "We are not big, but we are dedicated."

Twice a month, Raydell and about 10 others meet in the Cub Scout hut at Boerne's First United Methodist Church. But every day is PFLAG Day for Raydell.

"If I had a problem, she would be here in a heartbeat," says Mitch Martin of Dallas. "She is a very kind and caring woman. If she sees me on Facebook having a bad day, she calls, I talk, and she listens. When I met TR 15 years ago, Raydell took me under her wing. There is no one like her. She is the sweetest, most beautiful woman."

Fritz McDonald, who lives in the Heights, agrees. "Several years ago, when Raydell heard that I would be spending Thanksgiving alone, she insisted that TR bring me to Boerne for the whole weekend. She is such an openhearted person, and she and TR are two peas in a pod. She is a wonderful woman, deep and insightful, and that carries forward from Raydell to TR."

Longtime family friend Lorie Crawford knows them both. The mother of a lesbian, she never guessed her daughter was gay, but TR's coming out was no surprise. "Since I had known him since he was a little boy, there were

"I have a ton of adopted kids. They are all special to my heart. They are always welcomed, whether as a group or alone."



Unconditional Love

As a member of the Boerne, Texas, PFLAG group, Raydell (l) not only supports her gay son, Ted "TR" Bowen IV (r), but her "adopted" kids as well.

signs all along his growing up that he was gay," she explains.

It's not that Bowen played with Barbie dolls; rather, he displayed a playful exuberance unlike many boys who aren't gay. "I always played outside, fishing and hunting, shooting guns and riding four-wheelers," he explains. "I was quite the handful, like Dennis the Menace."

Crawford adds, "I love him so much. He has always been the life of the party, and any gathering with Bubba [TR] was turned into a party. Of course, he's got that 'crazy' gene from his mother! He is also as kind and generous as Raydell.

"I remember vividly the day she told me he was gay," she says. "I remember crying with Raydell when she told me. It was not a surprise, but it was still hard to take. She worried that he would be a victim of a hate crime or of AIDS. She tried talking him into being into girls, and that was a waste of time. Girls loved TR, but not in that way. It has taken a few years for her to come to terms with his sexuality, but she has adjusted and seems to fully embrace his lifestyle and his friends. He is her pride and joy."

Raydell says she never feared that TR's

life in the gay world would cause a separation between them. "It never entered my mind. Are you kidding? I *am* his world!" she laughs.

One of Raydell's sisters, Charlene Lindsey, retorts, "And he is *your* world."

Raydell also has a daughter, Julie; a son-in-law, Kurt; and grandchildren YaYa and Angela. "I also have two stepchildren."

She doesn't expect any grandchildren, much less a permanent son-in-law, from Bowen, who is 38. "Ya never know," he laughs. "If gay marriage had [always] been legal, I would have been married and divorced seven times by now. I would give Elizabeth Taylor a run for her money." The past five years, says Bowen, "I've been with the same guy off and on. It's 'on' now, but by Mother's Day, ya never know."

Bowen lives in Houston's Midtown district, lending his charisma and enthusiasm to the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau as a national account executive. "Every day, I sell Houston," he explains.

Growing up, Bowen remembers his mother as "always beautiful and stylish, and so much fun."

A wall at the Fort Bend Museum in Bowen's hometown of Richmond, Texas, traces his father's side of the family back to "the old →

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EVERYBODY LOVES RAYDELL

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300" colonists whom Stephen F. Austin led to Texas when it was Spanish territory.

After graduating from high school, Bowen attended Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches to earn a degree in journalism with emphasis on public relations and advertising, with a minor in radio/television/film.

During the summer break between his sophomore and junior years, Bowen dated a fellow lifeguard at Weston Lakes Country Club in Fulshear. He says it felt like the right time to come out to his parents, who by then were divorced and each remarried.

"What was I afraid of?" he asks. "There wasn't anything to be afraid of. My parents didn't have any gay friends that I knew of, and gay people didn't come around our house. I guess I felt I was too different from who they were. But coming out wasn't bad. My dad told me, 'I still love you,' and I knew everything was going to be okay."

Bowen is happy and proud that Raydell is such a beacon of light for him and his friends. He plans to joyfully share her with Raydell's "adopted kids" when Mother's Day is celebrated on May 8.

Donalevan Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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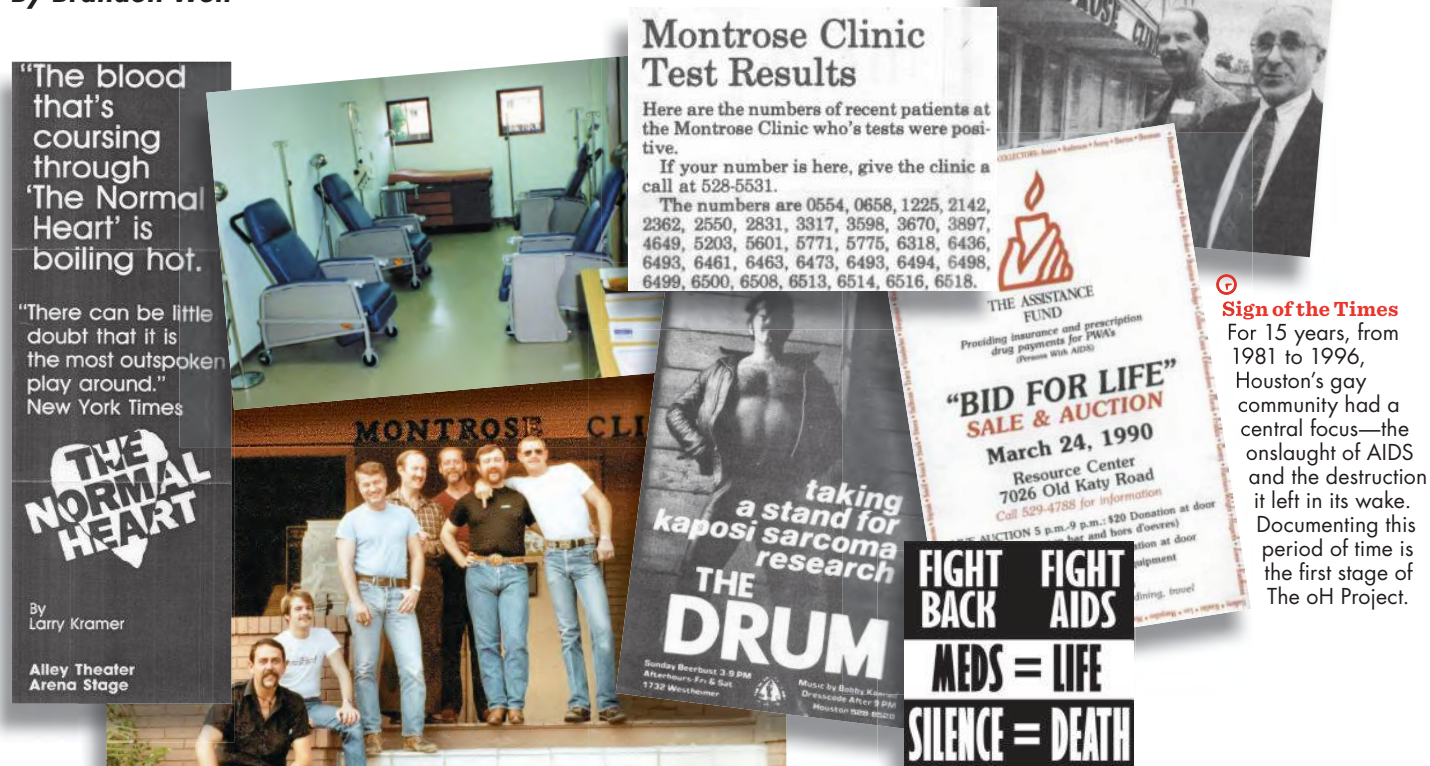
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Oral History Project Capturing the History of AIDS in Houston

The first 15 years of the epidemic were particularly cruel.

By **Brandon Wolf**



In this age of PrEP therapy and antiretroviral cocktails, the devastating early years of AIDS seem hard to imagine. And many who lived through that era have shut a mental door on those memories.

However painful the brutal memories are, it would be tragic to allow them to be lost to history. Toward that goal, The oH Project has been founded to collect, preserve, and make available the experiences of people impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Houston, Harris County, and Southeast Texas, with special emphasis on the early years of the epidemic.

A Ruthless and Relentless Killer Stalks the Gay Community

In June 1981, AIDS first became known to Americans through media reports of five men in Los Angeles who had died from “gay cancer.”

In truth, it was not cancer, but rather a retrovirus that was capable of destroying the human immune system.

The syndrome began to spread rapidly. There was no medical explanation, and no way to test for it. Flying blind, medical professionals treated the suffering amidst an environment of mystery and fear.

By 1984, the HIV virus had been identified in the blood of those afflicted. Gay men were warned to avoid intimate contact with bodily fluids. But for those who had contracted the virus, there was no remedy. AIDS was a death sentence. Typically, friends, loved ones, and others died within six months of diagnosis. Spreading exponentially, the virus showed no mercy.

In 1987, researchers cracked the code of HIV’s reproductive process. The virus attacked CD-4 cells (the immune system’s

“fighter cells”) and turned the cells into HIV factories. It destroyed healthy immune cells and flooded the bloodstream with larger and larger quantities of HIV virus.

Not until 1995 was an effective means of stopping this reproductive cycle found. Early antiretroviral treatments stopped HIV temporarily, but the retrovirus usually mutated past the medication. Finally, a combination of antiretrovirals that provided roadblocks at numerous points in the reproduction cycle stalled the mutation.

That same year, the growing death toll spiked at an all-time high before finally starting to diminish. While the news was welcomed with a collective sigh of relief, it was set against a 15-year rampage that had left the LGBT community physically and emotionally devastated. →

Sign of the Times

For 15 years, from 1981 to 1996, Houston’s gay community had a central focus—the onslaught of AIDS and the destruction it left in its wake. Documenting this period of time is the first stage of The oH Project.



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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

continued from previous page

A Disease with Cruel Ramifications

For many gay men not yet out of the closet, HIV was a double blow—they were outed both as gay and as living with HIV. And the fear and suffering were only the beginning as evangelical leaders zeroed in on those with AIDS, telling them it was God's punishment for homosexuality. Conservative politicians all but ignored funding the treatment of AIDS, with the flippant attitude that promiscuity had its consequences.

Gay men were fired or forced to leave their careers because of deteriorating health. Those without health insurance were at the mercy of local charities, some of which refused to involve themselves with the epidemic. Some families disowned their sons, leaving them to die alone and unwanted.

AIDS became the central focus of Houston's gay community. The aura of the Stonewall liberation that had been celebrated for a decade was replaced by a cloud that grew darker each year. It was no longer "gay" to be a homosexual.

The Emergence of The oH Project

The oH Project was founded in 2015 as a collaboration between community activist Tori Williams and Harris County archivist Sarah Jackson. The two first met in 2014 when they were brought together to review boxes of Ryan White Program materials that had been collected for years at the Harris County Records Center.

Paul Scott, the county's records management officer, had retained these records because of his vivid childhood memories of the effects of polio on society. He felt that AIDS would also have a profound effect on shaping our history, and he was determined to make information available for historians.

While sorting through the records to retain those with historical value, Jackson told Williams that she had captured several oral histories from Harris County employees who were involved with AIDS programs. Jackson longed for a comprehensive AIDS project, but only county employees were within her purview.

Six months later, Williams put together an AIDS timeline for the "ThroughOut! Houston's GLBT History" exhibit at the Heritage Society. The timeline project also left her eager to create a more complete history of AIDS in Houston. Together, the two decided to create an oral history project that would capture Houston's response to AIDS.

Williams assembled a group of 12 volunteers—longtime AIDS survivors, family members, historians, and others—to serve as an advisory board and working committee. Individuals accepted responsibility for fundraising, financial control, graphic design, publicity, recruitment of interview subjects, and transcription. Several trained historians are now supervising the three individuals selected to conduct the oral histories.



Revisiting History

The oH Project co-founders Sarah Jackson (l) and Tori Williams look through Ryan White Program files at the Harris County Records Center.

The project's mission is to capture "the real story of AIDS," Williams says. She cites the courage of those affected, the compassion of those who worked to provide care, the commitment of volunteers, the cowardice of those who turned their backs, and the confrontations of activists who worked to change government policies.

The project has committed itself to gathering 100 histories representing the diverse face of AIDS in Houston. It will document various affected groups such as gay men, children, and heterosexuals infected by their sexual partners. The epidemic will be viewed from a variety of perspectives—personal, social, medical, political, cultural, and religious.

The project hopes to complete its mission

in three to four years' time. Interview subjects are being chosen for their diversity, for the roles they played during the epidemic, their current health status, and the time period of their involvement. The project's first stage will focus on the first 15 years—the darkest days of the epidemic.

The Woodson Research Center at Rice University has agreed to be the repository for the histories and accompanying transcripts. The Montrose Center, a 501(c)(3) organization, is the fiscal agent. Legacy Community Health Services has pledged to underwrite a major portion of the project expenses, with additional funds coming from the John Steven Kellett Foundation and friends of the project.

The Co-Founders Remember AIDS

Williams says her personal involvement with the AIDS crisis began in 1983 when she was helping a lesbian friend find a sperm donor. She was surprised when one gay friend told her he could not participate because he had contracted what was then called GRID, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency.

While volunteering at AIDS Foundation Houston in 1986, Williams found that pet care was a major concern of those affected. In response, she founded the Pet Patrol, which came to have hundreds of volunteers who served several thousand clients and even more pets.

Professionally, Williams has worked with AIDS efforts at United Way, the Foundation for Interfaith Research and Ministry, and the Houston chapter of DIFFA (Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS). In 1998 she began her ongoing career as manager of the Office of Support for the Houston Area HIV Services Ryan White Planning Council. The Council is responsible for directing federal funds for the planning and delivery of HIV services in a 10-county area.

Jackson remembers becoming aware of the disease in the early 1980s when her husband, a family physician, got daily reports from the Centers for Disease Control via a primitive dial-up modem that allowed him to closely follow the progression of AIDS.

Beyond that, Jackson's knowledge of →



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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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AIDS came from the news and entertainment media. She was especially affected by *Angels in America* and *Philadelphia*. While reviewing the Ryan White Program records in 2014, she researched Houston's response to the epidemic and found that no academic papers were available.

More Than Just Chatting into a Microphone

Professional oral histories are not just spontaneous conversations in front of a recording device. The interviewer first holds a pre-interview with the subject, and together they determine an outline of what will be discussed. The actual interview is not scripted, but the outline helps keep them on topic.

The recording is then transcribed and submitted for review by both parties. After being revised if necessary, the oral history is complete when the transcription is approved and signed by the subject.

The transcription, recording chip, and any photos provided by the interviewee are then given to the Woodson Research Center, to be stored in a secure, climate-controlled environment. With the subject's permission, some interviews will be posted to the Internet and be available for research and education. Other interviews will be controlled by confidentiality agreements if the subject desires anonymity.

The project has one completely finished interview and seven others in process. These include: Don Gill and Brian Keever, community AIDS activists; Michael Peranteau, co-founder of the Center for AIDS; Frank Staggs, an early Bering Community Services fundraiser; Bill Jones, co-founder of Casa de Esperanza de los Niños; Pete Rodriguez, former nursing staff member in the AIDS Wards at Park Plaza and Ben Taub hospitals; and Dr. Lois Moore, a former administrator at Harris County's Jefferson Davis Hospital, which started treating AIDS patients in 1981.

The community is encouraged to offer themselves or recommend others as interview subjects for the project. To do so, simply fill out the form found at http://tiny.cc/oh_referral.

Long-Term Survivor Brian Keever Remembers

Brian Keever has been an integral part of Houston's gay community for the last 35 years, and these recollections from his completed oral history demonstrate the richness of a personal perspective on the larger picture of AIDS in Houston.

Moving from his home state of North Carolina in 1981, Keever recalls the lure of a big city for a young gay man: "I was not super-political, but I got involved with [what is now the Houston GLBT] Political Caucus because they were endorsing a woman to be mayor of the City of Houston, Kathryn J. Whitmire. And



ERSICSS Empress X

Long-term survivor and activist Brian Keever with alter ego Damita Jo.

so I helped hold signs at the corner of Montrose and Westheimer that said 'Vote for Kathy Whitmire'... for hours."

Paralleling his move to Houston, the AIDS epidemic began to surface: "The McAdory House was the first place I remember, because that was where those AIDS guys went, and it was over here on California. And people—gay, young, white men—[would not even] go over there, because they were afraid, just like everybody else.

"Thinking back, it was just so surreal—I was nervous, but going, 'I don't know what this is, what's really going on, but I see people very sick, and they're saying we need to help, so, okay.'"

In 1983, Keever's friends were concerned about his weight loss, and eventually accompanied him to see Dr. Patricia Salvato: "'Okay,' she goes, 'you're having some serious issues here. We need to have a sit-down talk.' And she goes, 'I want to be honest.' And I went, 'I prefer it.' And she goes, 'I need to send you over to M.D. Anderson.' And I went, 'Oh.'"

"I got in to M.D. Anderson at Station 10, which was the area where they were keeping the gay-cancer people. You went, and you showed up at 8 o'clock in the morning and waited for them to get to you. That was the only place that would accept and see you, because of all the fear and all the anxiety and unknowns."

Twelve Oaks and Park Plaza were the two "AIDS-friendly" hospital facilities. Keever remembers volunteering to visit patients: "You weren't sure if they had relatives or loved ones, and you wanted to make sure that they weren't in there alone and no one cared.

"In the early days, outside the rooms was a table. You put on your gloves, you put on your mask and all. Once you got in the room and shut the door, most people took them off, but hospital protocol said you had to do that. And you hand-sanitized yourself, before and after, because you could give them something."

Keever became a member of the Empire of the Royal Sovereign and Imperial Court of the Single Star (ERSICSS), and won the title of

Empress X in 1994. Representing the Houston Court, he traveled widely, but remembers Denver particularly well: "So there were four of us traveling, and you go through where they X-ray. And the lady, she sees one, okay; two, she brings it back, goes through; three, brings it back. By the time she gets to four, she's going, 'What are you all doing? Are those crowns or what?' And one of my more flamboyant friends goes, 'Well, of course it is. We're going to a pageant.' And I'm, like, 'Oh, my God.'"

San Diego is also a special memory: "The Friday before coronation, which is always on a Saturday night, we hopped on a bus and went to Tijuana just across the border. We went to a gay bar in Tijuana, Mexico, and painted and did a drag show for the Tijuana AIDS project in Tijuana to help raise money for them down there."

Keever found work with Hannah Niday Flowers for several years, and then worked 11 years on the staff of *This Week in Texas* (TWT) magazine, a gay publication. "It became very much of an issue to put your lover's obituary in the magazine. And it got to the point [where] we had four, six pages of obituaries every week. People actually had to show up at our office to give us the picture of their lover who had passed and to write what they wanted. And nine times out of ten, I'd end up doing it."

Reflecting on his AIDS activism, Keever says: "I was married to the movement. If you had a nice 9-to-5 job and either a woman or →



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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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a man at home waiting on you, and pets and all the other, that's what you did. If you didn't, you went to board meetings, you went to fundraisers, you went to picket in front of Circle K, picket in front of Randall's—just different things that you did. So there had to be some people that did that. And I'm very happy that I was able to do that."

Epilogue

From 1981 to the present, 20,000 Houstonians have died from AIDS. Two-thirds died before 1996, when antiretroviral combination therapy finally slowed the virus. J.D. Doyle's "Texas Obituary Project" records show 1,212 who were gay—a number that is extremely conservative due to the fact that so many deaths were not recorded in any media, or the word "AIDS" was not used in some obituaries.

The numbers are sobering. The effect on Houston's LGBT community cannot be adequately expressed with simple text. But The oH Project's completed body of work will provide a look behind the statistics, reflecting the humanity of those who died and those whose lives were changed forever.

Brandon Wolf is a frequent contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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2016's Top 10 LGBTQ Asian-Americans Leading Houston

Honoring these community members and their contributions.

By Megan Smith

As award-winning author and journalist Helen Zia once wrote, “With each individual who comes to realize that there are Asian queers and queer Asians, that space where the gay zone meets the Asian zone opens up a little more.” While Asian-Americans in Houston are constantly pushing the limits in medicine, business, music, fashion design, and more, they are also si-

multaneously changing the LGBTQ landscape for the better. To pay tribute to these movers and shakers, OUTSMART reached out to the community for nominations of LGBTQ Asian-Americans leading the way in Houston. Below, a handful of our nominees discuss their current strides for community betterment, their visions for the future, and where they will be jetting off to for summer vacation.

Rafferty Laredo

This summer, Houstonian Rafferty Laredo is lucky enough to have not one, but two vacations planned—one to Mexico and the other

to the Pacific Northwest for some much-deserved rest and relaxation. Laredo, who is an occupational therapist of 15 years, currently serves as the executive director of the United Spinal Association

of Houston, a nonprofit that focuses on supporting individuals with spinal-cord injuries and spinal-cord disease, as well as others in the disability community. “Our programs exist when traditional hospital-based health-care coverage is no longer available,” Laredo explains. “This may occur oftentimes less than 40 days after unexpected, permanent paralysis strikes.” The United Spinal Association of Houston’s three main service projects include Project Hope, Connections Peer Network, and Lazarus House, Laredo notes. “I am inspired by our disability community, whose strength and courage proves to me every day that the human spirit has no limits,” he says. “Paralysis and mobility-limiting diseases will spare no one over our lifetime. But, through a cohesive network of dedicated peers, family members, healthcare professionals, donors, and friends,

a happy and purposeful quality of life can be achieved. We are better together.” Outside of work, Laredo also supports the work of the Human Rights Campaign and the Victory Fund. “It is critical that we continue to move forward in our advocacy work for fair, inclusive, and respectful rights for all,” he says. “This is imperative across the lines of disability, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation.”

Phuctritam Nguyen

While Phuctritam Nguyen may not be traveling this summer, she’d never turn down a trip to her favorite destination, Singapore. “It is a diverse country with many beautiful cultures,” she says. But Nguyen has also gotten to know many different people, cultures, and identities here at home, through her work as president of PV Spectrum, Prairie View A&M University’s newly established LGBTQ student organization. “It has been almost a year [since the organization started] and the experience has been amazing,” she says. “I have such great support from everyone, including my fellow officers and the organization’s advisors. I want people to understand that [those who either self-identify] or are called lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer can be professional, educated, creative, loving, caring, and much more—just like everyone else. While society has come a long way, we still need to make improvements. I believe that in order to improve, we need everyone, including allies, to stand up for what is right. When people come together as a strong community and fight alongside each other, equality and justice will be within an arm’s



P. Nguyen

reach.” Beyond her campus advocacy, Nguyen also volunteers with C-STEM (Communication, Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) programs, with her church’s activities, and with local animal shelters. “I

want to help those in need, as well as animals, simply because it’s the right thing to do,” she says. “I am a person with compassion, and it is impossible for me to just walk away without doing anything to help.”

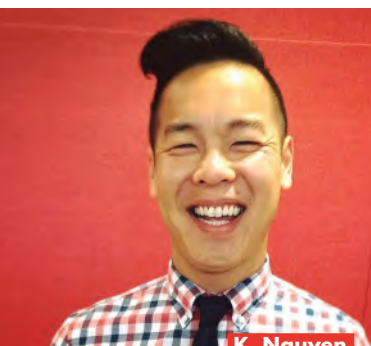
Kevin Nguyen

For most of his life, Kevin Nguyen has called Houston home. While California stole him away for graduate school (he received his master of science degree in college counseling in 2010), he made his way back to Space City to take a job at the University of Houston as an academic advisor for prospective students interested in pursuing an undergraduate degree in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. “One of the greatest assets that the City of Houston has to offer is its diversity,” says Nguyen, who is openly gay. “Throughout my time back in Houston, I have been able to venture out and see the development of the →

TOP 10 LGBTQ ASIAN-AMERICANS

continued from previous page

city's LGBTQ community and how I could be involved." As a result, he has volunteered with



K. Nguyen

the UH LGBT Resource Center, the Houston Diabetes Walk, the Human Rights Campaign, the Houston Food Bank, Lambda NextGen, and Houston Pride. "I love finding new chances to get involved in the community, because they are great avenues to meet people within the different niches of the community, hear their experiences, and learn about how their organization is transforming and leading the community," he says. "Within my work and my lifestyle, I want to produce a certain sense of inclusivity, curiosity, and mutual respect for those I interact with. I think one of the issues about Houston being so diverse is that sometimes in order to understand one another more systematically, the LGBTQ community starts sectioning off and enforcing labels for

individuals, groups, and organizations. I think one way to combat this issue is to be attentive towards people's perspective and goals, and one way to do that is volunteer experience." Nguyen's siblings have also been very supportive of his volunteer work, even joining him at numerous philanthropic events. "They've learned a lot about the LGBTQ community and love supporting our friends and causes," he says. In June, however, Nguyen gets to show a little love to his sister as they travel to Las Vegas for her birthday celebration.

L.K. Hight

Rather than going out of town this summer, nature-lover L.K. Hight plans to opt for a *staycation* in Houston. "Hopefully I can take a tour of Buffalo Bayou and see what is left of the natural river," he says. It was in Bayou City that Hight first became involved with the larger LGBTQ community, serving on the host committee for the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change conference in 2013. "Developing skills for behind-the-scenes organizing and helping to create something larger than myself was a rewarding way to serve my community," Hight says. "However, I was left feeling that not all of the community was equally represented or served, and wanted to dedicate my time to local efforts advocating for the transgender community." That opportunity presented itself three years ago when Hight



Hight

was voted onto the board of Montrose Grace Place, helping to provide food, clothing, and affirmation to the area's homeless LGBTQ youth. "As a mixed-race transgender gay man, finding community and narratives that reflect my experience is not the simplest thing," Hight says. "When I came out as queer, I found the LGBT social scene, media, politics, and even LGBT support groups I attended, assumed being white and cisgender was the norm. The rift between the reality of my LGBTQ community, which is made up of boundless intersections of identity and marginalization, and the white cisgender fraction represented in mainstream culture, convinces me there is a great deal of work to be done within our community. I am inspired—[especially] by the youth (mostly people of color) that Montrose Grace Place serves—to advocate for and listen to all the voices of the LGBTQ community and to continuously educate myself on experiences that differ from my own." →

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Jasmine Dao

Houstonian Jasmine Dao is ready for adventure this summer as she heads to Monterrey, Mexico, to see the Cola de Caballo waterfall and Garcia Park, among other sights. "I hope to have lots of pan dulce and coffee while I'm there," she says. While she may be taking care of her sweet tooth while in Mexico, Dao spends most of her days taking care of children as a doctor at NightLight Pediatric Urgent Care. "What I enjoy focusing on most is helping children be happy and healthy," she says. "My passion stems from a desire for equality, healthcare, and education." She also serves on the care center's values committee, which includes planning the company's community outreach. "Most recently, we've been at the Houston Children's Festival supporting Advocates, Inc.," Dao says. "We have also discussed having a mobile program [that would]



Dao

provide meals and books to children. Feeding bodies and feeding minds. Most of all, I am lucky to be surrounded by like-minded, action-oriented people," she adds. "We inspire each other's creativity and innovation, coming up with new ideas and facing challenges together. With that support and unity, there is definitely a feeling of possibility and accomplishment." Dao also notes the need to join forces to protect the environment. "Clean water, air, and land are just as important to health as vaccines and antibiotics," she says. "It can be as easy as starting recycling in your own home or office, planting more flowers for bees, or participating in the cleanup weeks at the bayou. Get up and try, and you'll be surprised by how easy it is to find ways to help."

Nicholas Nguyen

Acclaimed and out fashion designer Nicholas Nguyen knows what it's like to be a dreamer. His dreams and aspirations are what gave him the courage to leave his home country of Vietnam and move to the U.S. when he was only 15 years old, and to further his education at the University of Houston-Downtown. Now, he is the founder of Mysterious by NPN, a highly successful luxury clothing company based in Houston. "I was born and raised in Vietnam where freedom was never a part of growing up," he says. "I want to be someone who can inspire everyone to be who they are. The LGBT



N. Nguyen

community is still fighting so hard for equality and teaching young people to express themselves. I want everyone to understand that being different is okay, especially within this community." This summer, Nguyen will take some of that love and support back with him

to Vietnam when he travels there for work. "If you have the chance, you must visit Vietnam at least once in your life," Nguyen says. "It's a beautiful country and has beautiful resorts with gorgeous beaches, and delicious seafood!"

Paul Huynh

Though he won't make it there this summer, Paul Huynh loves to visit Tokyo, Japan. "My husband and I got to travel there last fall, and we had an amazing experience," Huynh says. "It is basically the mecca for gaming and anime nerds." That means Huynh was in heaven, because for the last five years he has served on the board of the Houston Gaymers, helping to organize the group's events and gaming tournaments. "I enjoy bringing people together with my love of gaming," Huynh says. "I'm

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usually the one going out of my way to get shy members to meet new people in the group. There's a special bond between those playing games together. Sharing that gaming experience and culture really helps connect people on another level." However, Huynh wasn't always this outgoing, he explains. "My first couple of years with the gaming community, I did not have much of a social life," he says. "I was limited to a handful of online friends that I only interacted with through the massive online multi-player game, World of Warcraft.



Huynh

But after joining Houston Gaymers, I had a reason to get out of the house and be social playing games with people in real life. Now, [as] a board member, I love facilitating and bringing this same experience to others."

Lakshmi Kennar

For the past 10 years, Lakshmi Kennar has been a dedicated advocate for trans women of color across the world. "I am inspired by the untapped courage of every individual on

this gender journey," she says. "I get inspired because there's a need to increase the visibility of people of color in the LGBTQIA community and to achieve a beautiful balance of living in diversity, and acknowledging ethnicity. When a person transitions, everyone around them also transitions—which gets threefold-intense in ethnic communities." Kennar also strives to reach the larger community to create allies for the transgender community.

She has worked on related research papers, health surveys, educational and professional panel discussions, and hosts fundraising events to showcase the beauty of South Asian dance forms. Activist work surrounding the transgender community is extremely critical at this time, Kennar says, because of the upsurge of discriminatory so-called "bathroom bills" currently plaguing the country. "This affects trans women of color, as they have the least protection given the preconceived bias of authorities and barriers of language, isolation, skin color, 'passability,' and immigration



Kennar

status that makes them most vulnerable," she says. "[We need to] educate the greater society beyond the LGBTQIA community through a focused awareness campaign before clear minds are further maligned." She encourages trans women and their allies to contact her at laksh-mikennar@gmail.com. Kennar may get a well-deserved break from her advocacy this summer, as she hopes to travel to her favorite place, New York City.

Dr. Terence Chang

As a member of the Lone Star Volleyball Association, Dr. Terence Chang is hoping to bounce around to a lot of different cities for tournaments this summer. But until then, he's busy bouncing around treating patients. A little over two years ago, Dr. Chang started a house-call practice as a general-practice doctor seeing patients at their homes, offices, or hotel rooms. "I wanted to simplify things for the sick mom in her own bed with the flu, the out-of-towner streaming Netflix on his couch at home →

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TOP 10 LGBTQ ASIAN-AMERICANS

continued from previous page

rather than in a waiting room, and the sick kid home from school with the grandparents while both parents are stuck at work," he says. "People are always a little shocked when I tell them I do house calls as a doctor, but honestly it's very rewarding work. What inspires me are the people of Houston and their stories. When



Chang

I travel to see a patient, they welcome me into their homes. Symbolically they welcome me into their lives, their community, and their stories. I once took care of a bartender

in the back office of the restaurant, because he couldn't afford to be sick and take time off from work. I've been called to someone's home to start post-exposure HIV prophylaxis medications, because he was too embarrassed and traumatized to seek medical care at a clinic. When I see patients at the hotels, I meet some amazing people who come from all over the

world. As an out-of-the-closet Taiwanese-American who grew up in Alief, I can appreciate a lot of these stories, and I love serving the people of this great city." For the gay community, Dr. Chang says it's important to get proper treatment for "The Big Three"—depression/anxiety/suicide, drugs and alcohol abuse, and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. "There's a central theme in all three, the way I see it," he says. "I think it has to do with how we form relationships and friendships, individually and as a community. As we become a more open and accepting society, we bring a lot of people who suffer with these conditions out of the shadows. We get them the help they need."

William Fu

In 2009, a little over a year after William Fu came out, he joined the Houston Pride Band as a clarinet player. After immediately being welcomed with open arms, he knew he had found his second family. "I loved the fact that no auditions were required to join and we welcomed anyone that could read music and play an instrument," Fu says. "Our concerts are also free, so anyone with a love for music can come enjoy them. Connie Moore and Debbie Hunt were two of the many wonderful people I met when I joined, and it wasn't until later that I learned how much of an impact they've had on the Houston LGBT community. They inspired me to become more involved and run for the Hous-



Fu

ton Pride Band board of directors in 2010, and I've been on the board ever since." Fu currently serves as the board's vice president and on the organization's

membership and fundraising committees. "Finding ways to give back to the community is very important to me," Fu, who is also a nurse, says. "Playing with the band these past seven years has been such a joy, and I hope to continue to use my skills and talents to help spread the love of music to the Houston community. A great way to become more involved is to seek out one of the many great nonprofits within Houston and donate some of your time and skills. You may find that it lights a fire within you that you didn't even know you had." And while he'll spend the summer practicing for the Houston Pride Band's march in Houston's annual Pride parade, Fu hopes to travel abroad soon. "I hope to eat my way through Europe and Asia," he says. "They have some delicious cuisines that I'd love to try." ■

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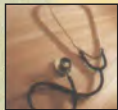
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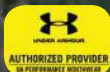
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Telling Her Truths

Valerie James divulges the realities of being an openly gay veteran.

By **Donalevan Maines**

Photo by John Everett



© **Sharing Her Story**
In March, Valerie James detailed her experiences while in the military as part of The Telling Project.

Valerie James—out soldier, soulful survivor—is “decompressing.”

Last month, she portrayed her experience as a suicidal schizophrenic—twice in the military and twice homeless—in *Telling: Houston* at the Alley Theatre. “People came up and touched me,” she explains. “They prayed over me. People cried every night. It was cathartic. It was terrifying.”

James would like a minute to take it all in.

The Montrose maven compares her military experience to what the LGBT community faces every day. “The difference is that we were trained for war,” she says. “Gay people are just born into it. Like veterans, the gay community suffers PTSD from persecution. We all need help, but in the LGBT community, we also have the judgment, the ridicule, and the potential for violence.”

James smiles. “It’s really cool: the first time I knew I was gay, I was 10 years old,” she says.

“A 14-year-old girl was making me a sandwich. She smiled and I literally could not take my eyes off of her.”

A memory like that “elevates” her, says James. “When you start feeling depression, it’s all about what can elevate you at that moment,” she explains. “I will walk. I will get a friend on the phone, even if I don’t feel like talking, because your friend gets happy to hear your voice and they get excited, and that elevates you.”

Telling: Houston marked the 37th time the Austin-based Telling Project Institute has gone to a U.S. city, conducted interviews, then constructed a script interweaving the participants’ stories into a three-act play. James and five other U.S. veterans, plus a military spouse, were cast in *Telling: Houston*, following interviews in January.

“It’s our story,” states Reda Hicks, the Humble lawyer who portrayed her experience of raising a baby boy while her husband fought

in Afghanistan. “My part focused on the challenges of a geo-batch, or geographical bachelor. Geo-batch is sort of inside-baseball for living apart. You come up with humor like that to make up for a bad situation. As my husband told me, we have to embrace the ‘suck.’”

James introduced herself to the audience by saying, “I’m currently studying psychology at the University of Houston-Downtown. I’m fascinated by the human mind. What breaks it. What happens.”

She tells OutSMART, “At the end of this semester, I will need two more classes to graduate. I will definitely take them this summer. I lived through Afghanistan; I *will* get that bachelor’s degree, damnitall.”

James told audiences that she joined the military “out of survival.”

She explains, “I was a Jersey Girl, raised in Jersey City [New Jersey]. It was a nervous neighborhood, a very violent place.”

In her freshman year of high school, she explains, “I started hearing voices telling me to kill myself. I had horrible panic attacks that led to a kind of catatonic state. I couldn’t be around people, so I hid in a little attic for three years. In my senior year, I came out of it. By that time, one of my siblings was dead, another was in jail. My friends were dead or on drugs or prostitutes. I think God kept me in my little attic and away from all that. When I woke up, I thought, ‘I’ve got to get out of here.’ I called a recruiter. I told him my history. He should have said, ‘Oh, hell no.’ But I think he felt pity for me and said, ‘Okay.’ So, in 1985, I joined the Army.”

James told Alley audiences, “It’s strange to enter the military when you’re not quite crazy and not quite sane.”

She was trained as a counselor, with her first duty station a lockdown mental unit at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington DC. “I thought, ‘This is apropos.’”

Six years later, James left the military for a life on the streets.

For a year, she lived in a storage unit. “I already had my blankets in there,” she explains. “It was dark. It was beautiful. The dark felt really, really good.” →

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TELLING HER TRUTHS

continued from previous page

Eventually, however, James realized, “What feels most comfortable will kill you.” Rejoining society, she says, “Life went on. I was working. But then came 9/11. I was in Maryland, 10 miles from [the attack on Washington DC], and something triggered. I don’t want to say ‘triggered.’ It ‘happened again.’ I had friends in Houston, so I grabbed my suitcase and came here with a little bit of money.”

Again, James went homeless. “The program that took me off the street was U.S. Veterans Initiative,” she says.

In 2011, when James returned to Houston after her second deployment, U.S. Veterans Initiative hired her as a case manager. She remained employed with them until earlier this year, when she stopped to focus on graduating from college.

James says that like other members of the LGBT community, she still has “war wounds” from discrimination—especially the “witch hunt” that was Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.

“But look at the changes,” she says. “We can get married in a state like Texas. If that is not progress, what is?”

Donalevan Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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The State of Women's Healthcare

Love the women in your life
by supporting their health needs.

By James Lee

From Ann Richards to Selena Quintanilla, and Barbara Jordan to Annise Parker, the Lone Star State is home to some of the most remarkable women in recent history. Unfortunately, women's healthcare in Texas is nothing to write home about.

Economic insecurity plays a substantial role in limiting access to care. Women in Texas are more likely to earn less income than men, and are also more likely to live in poverty. There are over three million Texas women at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, earning \$23,000

or less per year. And we know women in poverty and their children are more likely to face health challenges like heart disease, cancer, and chronic

respiratory disease. Lesbians and transgender women face similar risks to their health, with added risk of obesity, suicide, and violence.

While many of the ailments that affect Texas women are preventable, there are numerous barriers to accessing healthcare—and state government isn't making it any easier.

Women in Texas have some of the highest uninsured rates in the country, and face higher healthcare costs as a consequence. The Affordable Care Act, more commonly known as Obamacare, was created to remove some of the barriers to healthcare, including making insurance more affordable. Under the law, Texas would have received over \$100 billion over 10 years to implement changes to the state's healthcare system, and as a result would have seen a sharp decrease in the rate of uninsured women. However, some conservative lawmakers argue Obamacare encourages dependency on the government and have refused to implement the law since its passage in 2010, despite support from numerous business coalitions and medical providers.

Some women have experienced refusal of care because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status.

In 2011 Texas saw massive budget cuts to women's healthcare, forcing many health facilities to shut down. Lawmakers behind the cuts sought to remove Planned Parenthood from state funding in order to reduce the number of abortions in Texas. Despite numerous reports, state legislators looked past data warning that the cuts would affect the well-being of all low-income women, and not just those of child-bearing age. After the cuts, 30,000 women were left without access to cancer screenings, well-woman exams, and sexual health services.

While the state has worked to correct the shortfalls caused by the cuts, many Texas women were and are left without access to basic preventative care, and according to a 2016 report by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, it increased the number of taxpayer-funded childbirths.

Over 100,000 uninsured LGBT Texans are estimated to live in the Houston area. In addition to the existing barriers to care for these women, the growing anti-LGBT rhetoric creates an unnerving and unhealthy environment. When transgender women, for instance, are able to access healthcare, many report having a negative experience visiting the doctor's office. In some instances, women have experienced an outright refusal of care because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status, regardless of the reason for the patient's visit. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, when LGBT patients experience this kind of treatment, they are less likely to return and more likely to self-medicate, leading to further health complications.

The most recent cause for concern for pregnant women's health in the Lone Star State is the increasing threat of the Zika virus. The virus is causing birth defects in thousands of

pregnant women who live in Central and South American countries. The U.S. alone has seen more than 350 cases—with a growing number in Texas—due to travel to the affected countries. The Obama administration has called on Congress to release emergency funding in response to the potential public-health crisis, but congressional lawmakers have yet to act. Legacy's CEO, Katy Caldwell, has said, "Partisan wrangling over public health should not slow the all-hands-on-deck response we need to find a vaccine, increase mosquito controls, and help patients with care."

Texas lives up to its powerhouse reputation, but there is surely a lot of room for growth when it comes to women's health. If you want to support the women in your life, support them with more than just flowers on special occasions every now and again. Support the women in your life by advocating for their healthcare. When women succeed, we all succeed.

James Lee is the public affairs field specialist at Legacy Community Health and focuses on minority health, mental health, and civic engagement. Lee is an alumnus of the University of Houston and can be found on Twitter @jamesmateolee.



Cutting Care

The 2011 Texas budget cuts to women's healthcare left 30,000 women without access to cancer screenings, well-woman exams, and more.



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Eric William Carter, a native Houstonian, received his Juris Doctorate from the South Texas College of Law. Experienced in both the public and private sector, Eric is a well-rounded attorney with a focus on community and giving back. Eric is endorsed by the Houston GLBT Political Caucus because he believes in treating everyone with equality, fairness and respect, and pledges to carry those qualities into Court every single day. Eric is also bilingual, capable of serving in English and Spanish. Please support him with your vote in May!

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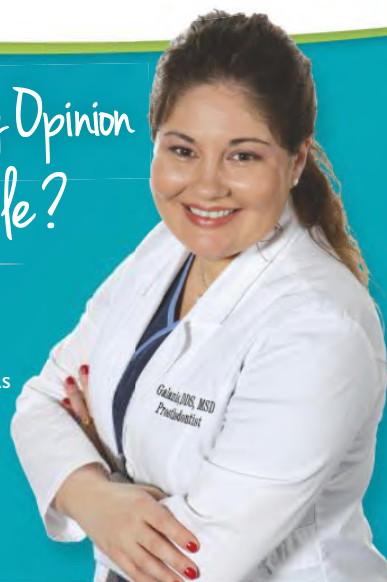
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'Texas Competes'

Sometimes the best defense is a good offense.

By Ryan M. Leach

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community is under attack. That is not an exaggeration. State after state has either passed or attempted to pass legislation that allows for blatant discrimination against members of the LGBT community, and they are making fast progress. The next battleground is Texas, and a program called Texas Competes hopes to help prevent that.

North Carolina, Mississippi, Kansas, Indiana, and Tennessee have all passed uniquely awful anti-LGBT laws. State legislatures often present their discriminatory bills as "Religious Freedom Restoration Acts" or RFRA. RFRA supporters say these laws are designed to protect the individual's ability to practice their religion without the cruel impact of big government coming in to stop them. But the thing is, we already have a law that does that, and it is called the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment, and subsequent case law interpreting it, allows Americans to practice—or not practice—religion in any way they see fit. There are, of course, reasonable restrictions on this. For instance, human sacrifice—that's a no-no.

So why the need for *another* law that allows us to do what the Constitution already says we can do? Well, as with most things, the devil is in the details. RFRA actually create loopholes that allow business owners to deny goods and services to people who don't particularly jive with that owner's specific set of religious beliefs. These laws were created so that the baker who has opened her doors to the public can tell same-sex couples that she will not bake a cake for their wedding because gay sex is an abomination, or something along those lines. That is not religious freedom. That is discrimination. If you are a business that is open to the public, federal law prohibits you from discriminating against members of the public for reasons based on race, gender, age, or religion. However, because federal law does not currently



Promising Equality

As of April 20, more than 850 Texas economic stakeholders have signed the Texas Competes pledge stating that protections for LGBT people are good for business. *INSET:* Texas Competes managing director Jessica Shortall

protect sexual orientation and gender expression, we have no legal protections from LGBT discrimination in Houston, Texas.

It has been argued that RFRA laws do allow for discrimination against the other legally protected classes as well. If people are allowed to discriminate against others based on their religious beliefs, then who is to say that this cannot extend itself to discriminate against Muslims? (wait, that already happens) or black people? (wait, that still happens, too) or disabled people (crap)? Well, it's not supposed to happen, but it could.

In a conservative state like Texas, our top leaders (who are self-professed ultra-conservative evangelicals) have to feed their base something in order to secure their position among voters. At the top of that menu—alongside women, immigrants, and the poor, are usually LGBT citizens.

This time, Texas has an advantage through a statewide program called Texas Competes. The program's managing director, Jessica Shortall, explains that "Texas Competes is a coalition of Texas employers, chambers of commerce, and industry associations making the economic case for an LGBT-friendly Texas. As of April 20 more than 850 of Texas' economic stakeholders have signed the Texas

Competes pledge, because they recognize that their ability to attract talent, corporate investment, and travel and tourism will be significantly hindered if Texas projects an unwelcoming brand toward LGBT people."

Texas Competes just celebrated its first anniversary. The coalition started in 2014 and launched publicly during the 2015 legislative session, which saw over 20 anti-LGBT bills filed. None of these bills ultimately came up for a vote. The coalition's goal is to have at least 2,000 members before the 2017 session commences in January. Even though the legislature is not in session, that does not mean there is not work to do, according to Shortall. "This work is important year-round. The Texas economy is 24/7, and businesses, cities, and chambers of commerce are always trying to attract the best talent, events, and investments. It's crucial to the Texas economy that the business community make its stance on these issues clear, now and at all times."

The Texas Competes coalition is made up of a wide variety of Texas business owners by design. The economic engine of Texas is not powered by big business alone, and it is important that all groups have an opportunity to join their voices as a coalition and signal to lawmakers that Texas is open for business for →

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'TEXAS COMPETES'

continued from previous page

everyone, including the LGBT community. "Examples of big businesses include Salesforce.com, Hunt Companies, Sammons Enterprises, American, Southwest, United, JetBlue, Alaska, and Virgin Airlines, most of the major hotel groups, Texas Instruments, Tenet Health, sporting entities like the Dallas Mavericks and the Houston Super Bowl Host Committee, and many more. More than 600 small businesses from all over the state have signed—urban and rural, in every industry," says Shortall.

Shortall points out one special distinction about the coalition: "Texas Competes does not lobby on any legislation. Of course, we are aware that legislators and leaders in the state are paying close attention to our rapid growth, because it represents a clear stance from the business community on LGBT issues, and because our state's business leaders are experts in what drives job creation in Texas."

If you or a business you know would like to join the free, nonpartisan coalition, you can at pledge.texascompetes.org. Any Texas employer, whether headquartered in Texas or not, can sign.

Ryan Leach is a community leader, writer, advocate and humorist. You can reach him at ryanleach@outsmartmagazine.com.

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Trans Texans Speak Out

The TransVisible Project elevates transgender voices in the Lone Star State.

By Megan Smith



Houston Proud

Each photograph in the TransVisible Project features a different transgender Houstonian and a unique quote matching the individual's personality. The goal is for viewers to connect with the pictured person's words and, therefore, to normalize the trans experience.



Transgender people are our neighbors and family members, our co-workers and friends, and our fellow Houstonians and Texans. But on November 3, 2015, as the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) was defeated at the polls, Houstonians were left looking less than *neighborly*.

In response to this devastating civil-rights defeat, Equality Texas and transgender Houstonians have banded together to launch a new public-education campaign to help the media and general public better understand who transgender folks are, and to raise awareness surrounding trans issues. "The general public doesn't know a lot about transgender people," Lou Weaver, Houston trans man and transgender programs coordinator for Equality Texas, explains. "About 80 to 90 percent of the population knows an out gay or lesbian person right now, but only about 10 percent of the population knows an out transgender person. What we have right now is the incredible op-

portunity to do some education, and we need to focus on elevating transgender voices."

This campaign, appropriately named the TransVisible Project, was first conceived by Weaver and Brad Pritchett, the policy and advocacy strategist for the ACLU of Texas. The pair teamed up with volunteer photographers Eric Edward Schell and Alex Steffler to present a series of photographs, each depicting a different transgender Houstonian along with a unique quote that speaks to that individual's personality. The goal is for viewers to connect with the pictured person's words, therefore helping to normalize the trans experience. "[This project] gives transgender folks a voice and a narrative, and shows that we are people just like everyone else," Weaver says. "For example, mine says 'I'm an avid soccer fan, and I enjoy rooting for both the Dash and Dynamo! I am a transgender man, and Houston is my home.' Other Houston soccer fans can connect with that."

The project's participants also reflect

Houston's flourishing diversity, spotlighting trans people of different races, ages, gender expressions, and gender identities. "We are here to let people know that it's okay to love us and accept us for who we are as people, and it's important to tell them that we are at their post office, in their grocery store, in their place of worship. We bank with them, and we do business with them," says Reagan White, a Houston trans woman of color and TransVisible Project participant. "We are a part of society. We pay taxes, we're homeowners, and we want to be accepted just like everyone else."

"Most of us are pretty boring," Weaver laughs. "We go to work, we have a dog, and we have a partner."

The TransVisible Project's educational work comes at a very critical time, Weaver adds, as anti-LGBT "religious freedom" laws, like the ones passed in Mississippi and North Carolina, are expected to come before the Texas legislature in 2017. Reports show such →

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TRANS TEXANS SPEAK OUT

continued from previous page

discrimination against transgender people leads to disproportionately high levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, inadequate medical care, incarceration, and violence. The murder rate of trans people also continues to be extremely high—Shante Thompson, a trans woman of color, was murdered in Houston's Midtown neighborhood just last month, marking the third trans person of color murdered in Texas this year. "We do believe [this fight is coming to Texas] in 2017," Weaver says. "We need to be proactive and educate people on who trans folks are now, and not wait. We have a lot of work to do, and this is just one way we're going to do it."

As for the best way to be a trans ally? "Vote!" says Weaver. "And get others to do the same. People misgendering us by using incorrect pronouns can also really be a form of assault," he adds. "It's not always safe for a trans person to call out transphobic language, so we really need our allies to call people out on that behavior."

The TransVisible Project officially launched in Houston on March 31, the International Transgender Day of Visibility. The campaign plans to expand to San Antonio, El Paso, and the Rio Grande Valley in upcoming months.

For more information, visit facebook.com/texas-transvisibleproject.

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Safety from the Streets

Homeless Gay Kids-Houston fundraises for a drop-in center for homeless LGBT youth.

By **Donalevan Maines**

Photo by ZoomWorks Photography

A drop-in center for homeless gay teenagers could open as soon as this summer in Montrose, thanks to fundraising efforts such as a recent social event at the enchanting Heights home of Sean Clarry and music artist Pierre Alexandre.

Demand was so great for “Le Jazz Noir,” billed as a Creole night of wine, Southern bites, and jazz, that it morphed from a one-evening event into the March 25–26 preview of a 12-song concert Alexandre plans to mount this fall as a benefit for homeless gay kids in his homeland of Haiti.

“More than \$45,000 was raised,” says Al Amado, a founding board member of Homeless Gay Kids-Houston (HGK-H). “Without support from people like Pierre and Sean pitching in, we couldn’t open the drop-in center. Our goal is to not accept any government funds at first, because there would be a lot of strings attached. We decided to raise money as quickly and directly as possible to meet this immediate need by asking everybody in the community to reach into their pockets to fund it.”

Meanwhile, Alexandre progressed to his current role in the musical *Heathers*, in which he portrays the father of Kurt, a teenager who presumably kills himself for being gay. The production, based on the 1988 black-comedy film starring Winona Ryder and Christian Slater, continues through May 8 at TUTS Underground, the Theatre Under the Stars lineup of edgy fare presented at the downtown Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.

Ironically, Kurt in *Heathers* perfectly portrays the 13–18-year-old demographic of gay teenagers that the HGK-H drop-in center hopes to serve.

“We couldn’t wait for the government to fund it. We needed to get this rolling with very little bureaucracy and no paid staff.”

Alexandre’s big number in the musical is “My Dead Gay Son.”

“You really cannot go around Montrose without running into homeless gay kids,” explains Amado. “Gay youth, in particular, don’t want to be detected, because often they are the victims of foster care or their families, and religious persecution. They are reluctant to participate in programs that are religiously based and [possibly disapproving] of their lifestyle.”

Amado is a Lamar High School graduate who holds both a law degree and a master of laws (LLM) that includes training in the rule of law in Latin America.

Alexandre was born to a judge and his wife in Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti, in the Caribbean. However, Alexandre’s mother left the family to make a home for her children in New Jersey before sending for Alexandre

and his sisters when he was eight years old. “My mother still talks about how she wishes she could get back those years without her children,” he says.

Moving to the United States “was a culture shock,” he adds, explaining that in Haiti, there was no middle class beneath him, just peasants. “Every child had a maid, but in America, we had to do it all for ourselves. I was bullied in school, but my life changed as soon as I got to high school and a teacher found out that I could sing.”

Alexandre won a full scholarship to Point Park College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He also attended a conservatory program at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City, which led to a year in Japan singing—in Spanish—with Gloria Estefan. “Japan, for me, was another culture shock,” says Alexandre.

Next, the singer performed in many popular Broadway musicals in Europe, including *A Chorus Line*, *Hair*, *Rent*, *West Side Story*, *The Wild Party*, *Cats*, *Dirty Dancing*, *The Blues* →



Artistic Charity

Music artist Pierre Alexandre (above) and his partner, Sean Clarry, recently opened their home to host Homeless Gay Kids-Houston’s “Le Jazz Noir” fundraiser, which raised more than \$45,000 for the group’s planned drop-in center. Alexandre is shown here from Disney’s *The Lion King*.

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SAFETY FROM THE STREETS

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Brothers, La Cage aux Folles, and Disney's The Lion King.

In Holland, Alexandre met Clarry, a Houstonian who was working there as a top manager for an international oil company. "It was literally love at first sight," says Alexandre. "I was not up to it, but I fell in love."

Soon, the couple was transported to Houston, to a large, white "California meets Victorian" house at 2200 Harvard St. "It's a show-stopper," says Alexandre, describing its bold rooftop steeple as "Gregorian." It's on the annual Heights Home Tour, mesmerizing guests with its pink meditation room (with a secret entryway to the spare "Winter Bedroom"), Brazilian cherry-oak floors, four wood-burning fireplaces, iridescent lighting, and a luscious garden.

Alexandre and Clarry graciously opened their home to tours for the March events benefiting HGK-H, says Amado. After touring the home, guests enjoyed sampling a variety of fine wines hand-selected by sommelier Marc Borel and delicious Southern bites prepared by chef John Klosterman, says Alexandre. (Did I mention that the dress code was "black with a touch of leather"?)

Amado explains that HGK-H was incorporated last summer as a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide a dependable, safe place where homeless LGBTQ kids under 18 can find support and access to services that will help them survive and thrive.

The idea for a drop-in center came to the late Tony Carroll early last year, in the midst of Carroll's psychotherapy work involving family reconciliations. "Separate and apart from that," explains Amado, "Tony contacted me about the need for some sort of facility for young gay teens who were out on the streets."

Carroll proposed a grassroots campaign for a facility that would be different than a shelter with overnight accommodations—a place where kids can show up for basic services, or referrals to services. "If they need clothing, we give them clothing. If they need a meal, we give them a meal or nonperishable snacks to take with them. We could also provide them with backpacks and hygiene kits," adds Amado.

Carroll identified the need to serve kids 13–18 because they are "very vulnerable" and at risk for drug and alcohol abuse, and what the late psychotherapist termed "survival sex" with people who offer them a measure of help in return for sex, but often put the kids at risk for STDs.

Carroll's spouse, Dr. Bruce Smith, a Montrose dentist, likened the campaign to "when we started fighting AIDS in the 1980s," says Amado. "We couldn't wait for the government to fund it. We needed to get this rolling with very little bureaucracy and no paid staff."

The group's website, homlessgaykids.houston.org, explains that its mission is "to →



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SAFETY FROM THE STREETS

continued from previous page

provide a dependable, safe place where homeless LGBT kids under 18 can find support and access to services that will help them survive and thrive."

The center plans to be open seven days a week "to provide for kids' immediate needs as well as a place where they can learn life skills for a better future. The drop-in center will be a day shelter providing services such as:

- Food
- Skill-building—teaching life skills and survival skills
- Referrals to resources
- WiFi and phone charging
- Backpacks and hygiene kits
- Ongoing compassion for building positive relationships."

Adamo says the group is also actively engaged in a campaign to raise \$150,000 in honor of naming the center Tony's Place, in memory of Carroll.

The website also details ways that supporters may volunteer in efforts such as administration and finance, development, young professionals, marketing and outreach, and partnerships and collaboration.

Donalevan Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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Birthday Bash

Lesbian comedian Vickie Shaw celebrates 60 with a bang.

By Kim Hogstrom

Houston's own stand-up comedian Vickie Shaw is celebrating her 60th birthday in a big way, and everyone—LGBTQQIA and S (the entire alphabet)—is invited!

Shaw has assembled some of the most talented women in Texas for her birthday and “Super Bowl of stand-up comedy” to be held at South Shore Harbour Resort and Conference Center in League City on Friday, May 20, and Saturday, May 21. Expect food, drinks, and dancing 'til the wee hours, and more laughter than should be legal during this two-day event.

Now in her 20th year as a headliner with Olivia Cruises, Shaw has a remarkable background. She appeared in the movie *Laughing Matters More*, and she has performed on Comedy Central, in four comedy specials for the LOGO channel, and on “Late in Life Lesbians,” to name only a few of her credentials.

OUTSMART was fortunate to spend a few minutes with the talented Shaw, talking about the origins of her comedy, her birthday, her life as a lesbian, and more. Read on!

Kim Hogstrom: Tell us about your background—are you from Houston?

Vickie Shaw: I was born in Beaumont, and grew up in Houston. I got married here and had all three of my kids here. I also got my start in the comedy clubs in Houston—the Laff Stop, the Comedy Workshop—all of them. The owners would sort of promote me among themselves, recommending me. They were very supportive.

When did you come out? Did it influence your work?

“I’ve always said comedy is not something you choose to do, it’s something you have to do.”

You know, I sort of started doing stand-up comedy and came out as a lesbian all at the same time. Comedy is about anger and truth, and comedy took me to a place in myself I had never been before. I thought, “Oh, so I’m a lesbian. Well, that explains a lot! What do I do now?” For a while in the 1990s, I was a puddle. A mess. I got a divorce and started life again from a new angle.

Did recognizing your truth change your comedy?

My act has always been about my life, so all of a sudden I am no longer a married woman with three kids! I’m single with kids, dating women. I had new material. That’s the thing about comedy—you can’t do it and maintain a wall between you and truth and your audience. You have to be open, to be honest. You have to be who you are.

Has that honesty resulted in hecklers interrupting your act?

I have never, ever been heckled. What I do see is men sitting with their arms crossed when I first get on the stage. Men sort of dare you to make them laugh. You have to prove to them

that you are funny. Women, on the other hand, expect to be a part of the humor. They think, “Okay, here she goes making fun of our periods,” or something like that. They relax when they realize I’m not going to make them into a punch line.

Are straight audiences as receptive to your humor as gay audiences?

Yes, although sometimes I do hear straight guys say, “No, you’re not really gay, are you?” I always laugh and say, “Well yes, yes I am.” I think people respond well to my work because it’s funny and true. It’s also very rewarding for me, and there’s nothing I would rather do. It’s a good thing, too, because I’ve always said comedy is not something you *choose* to do, it’s something you *have* to do.

Tell us about your Big 60 Birthday Party—how can we attend?

On Friday, May 20, we’ve arranged for a giant show with dinner and dancing at South Shore Harbour Resort in League City. Six entertainment greats will be appearing, including Kate Clinton, Suede, Roxanna Ward, Lisa Koch, Karen Williams, Jennie McNulty, and of course, myself. We have a range of ticket →



Funny Lady

Vickie Shaw has performed on Comedy Central, in four comedy specials for the LOGO channel, and more. The comedian celebrates her 60th birthday in Houston on May 20 and 21.



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BIRTHDAY BASH

continued from previous page

prices to accommodate any budget, and South Shore Harbour even offered us special room prices for the weekend. Plus, Olivia Cruises is raffling a free cruise for two that night, so some lucky person will win right there. And the entire event is a fundraiser benefiting Houston's Lesbian Health Initiative. LHI has taken good care of me over the years, and it's time to return that.

On Saturday, May 21, we're all performing again at South Shore, then moving the entire party to my (and my partner of 17 years) house in League City where there will be a really special surprise. For those considering attending the best party ever, I recommend putting a hold on a room at South Shore Harbour. For more information or tickets, go to vickieshaw.com. Everyone is invited—hope we see you there!

What: Vickie Shaw's 60th Birthday Bash

When: May 20–21

Where: South Shore Harbour Resort and Conference Center, 2500 South Shore Blvd., League City

Details: vickieshaw.com

Kim Hogstrom is a guest contributor to OUTSMART magazine. She is also a documentary film producer and slave to a spoiled Chihuahua.

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Color Him Barbra

Could Steven Brinberg's Streisand be better than Babs herself?

By Donalevan Maines

Photo by Mark Rupp

Steven Brinberg is “simply Barbra,” except when he’s not. Offstage, he says, you might mistake him for Streisand’s out son, Jason Gould, rather than the diva he portrays in *Simply Barbra*, which Theater LaB Houston (TLH) presents this month at Midtown Arts Center Houston (MATCH).

“The nails, I think, are the most important prop,” he says. “Her hands are so expressive. I could do the show in a tuxedo as long as I have the nails.”

But Brinberg doesn’t do the show in a tuxedo. Bronx-born like Babs, he gets all dolled up so that he looks like the legend, while singing live—no lip-synching. He also approximates Streisand’s pipes in patter with the audience. “I say some things that Barbra might be thinking, but wouldn’t say,” he explains. “Like, ‘Wow—you are sitting so close, you could practically reach out and touch me. But don’t do it.’”

Mimicry has always come easy to Brinberg. “Every year, by the third week of school, I could imitate all my teachers,” he says. “I could hear their voices in my head and repeat what they said. Same with my friends.”

As a youngster, Brinberg performed in musical theater, then “backed away from it” until he got to college at The New School in Greenwich Village. In vocal class, he says, “I realized, ‘Oh my God, I love singing!’ I started out singing as myself—my real voice is very deep—but I would also do imitations. One day I put [my imitation of] Barbra’s voice on a tape recorder, and that was the beginning of this.”

Brinberg booked just four nights of his Streisand show at the legendary Manhattan cabaret Don’t Tell Mama, but it was so popular that he continued appearing there every Saturday night for three years.

He also toured the world, including Houston’s First Ward, where he appeared twice at the original Theater LaB space on Alamo Street. “I’ve performed in more cities

than Barbra,” says Brinberg, “but I don’t get as many zeroes at the end of my check.”

The *New York Times* once noted, “He’s been doing Streisand so long, he’s better at it than she is!”

“Off and on for 10 years,” Brinberg appeared regularly in symphony concerts with the late Marvin Hamlisch, who composed “The Way We Were.”

“He was the nicest guy,” says Brinberg. “He was so down to earth, this man with Oscars, an Emmy, a Grammy, and a Tony, but he was just as excited as I was about finding some great dessert.”

On the subject of food, he adds. “I like coming to Houston for Luby’s Cafeteria. I love food. I’ve been lucky so far that I can still eat what I want and still fit into Barbra’s gown.”

Brinberg most recently appeared in Houston as the star/headliner at TLH’s 10th-anniversary gala at Zilkha Hall in The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. “So it’s been 12 years,” says TLH founder and producing director Gerald LaBita.

Meanwhile, Brinberg has appeared on stage and television, and in movies—from *Camp* in 2003 to the just-completed *Thirsty*, in which he plays both a backup dancer in drag and a truck driver!

“If you saw me on the street,” he insists, “you absolutely would never guess that I do Barbra. I could be Jason Gould’s brother, if

A Star Is Born

Steven Brinberg as Barbra Streisand—no lip-synching.



you think about it. And what I do is not a drag show. It is quite different; it’s not outrageous or raunchy. It’s fun. You can bring the family. I’m just playing a character who happens to be a famous woman, and there are all these great numbers.”

Offstage, says Brinberg, “I’m single and searching. It’s a little difficult, doing what I do. When I meet someone, at first I say I’m an actor, I’m a singer, before I tell them I do Barbra. I don’t dress like her to vacuum—not that there’s anything wrong with that.”

What: *Simply Barbra*

When: May 26–29

Where: Midtown Arts Center Houston (MATCH), 3400 Main St.

Details: matchouston.org or 713.521.4533

Donalevan Maines is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.

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A Charming Taste of Italy

Luigi's Cucina Italiana.

By **Marene Gustin**

Photos by Luigi and Martha Ferre

Audley is an odd little street, running as it does from West Alabama down to the Southwest Freeway. Mostly small businesses, near a '70s-era condo complex. If you don't turn onto Audley from West Alabama, you might never notice that inside a square little building behind Lamar High School is the most charming little Italian family restaurant.

As you step inside, you are transported to another world: high ceilings with wooden beams, textured walls, and Renaissance-style paintings. A long wooden bar lines one side of the space, and colorful Italian ceramics are scattered almost everywhere.

"Many years ago," says chef/owner Luigi Ferre, "I was in a little town near Florence and saw this little family restaurant. That is what I wanted to create here."

And Luigi's is, in fact, a family restaurant. Ferre can always be found in the kitchen, or occasionally stopping by tables to say *Grazie*. Wife Martha works the front of house, and both grown children work at the restaurant as well.

Ferre was born and raised in Italy and learned to cook from parents who relished the traditional Italian fare made from fresh ingredients. After some culinary training in his homeland, Ferre came to Houston where his aunt and some cousins were living. He wound up in the kitchen of Damian's Cucina Italiana, working his way up from line cook to chef before helping start



Enjoy an authentic, three-course Italian meal from Luigi's (clockwise from top left): Polpo ai Ferri (grilled octopus), Cotoletta di Agnello (baby lamb chop), and the Dolce Trio.

the original Carrabba's.

It was then that George Mitchell asked him to go to Galveston Island and open a restaurant there. For 17 years he ran the first incarnation of Luigi's in Galveston, racking up a devoted following before his family decided that they wanted to come back to Houston. So, two years ago he opened this Upper Kirby location in a building that formerly housed Rosemary's Catering.

The menu is as comfortable and satisfying as the décor. There are some classic northern dishes, a Black Hills Ranch Ossobuco, a wonderful grilled salmon topped with crabmeat, and even a five-course tasting menu created and cooked by the chef himself for dinner. But don't think that this is a fancy Italian restaurant—everything here is very comfortable, from the chairs to the portion sizes.

At lunch, a simple glass of vino, a Caesar salad, a pepper soup with house-made sausages, or a personal-size pizza offer sustenance—although larger appetites might want to fill up on the lem-

ony chicken picatta with a side of pasta. (It's the house-made pastas that Ferre himself prefers for lunch.)

"I'm in the kitchen all the time," he says. "I love to cook and drink a little wine, and I make everything by hand, from the sauces to the pastas. I like to be creative—the other day I made a linguini with smoked salmon on top."

And dessert. He also likes dessert.

"Every week, I like to try new desserts. I make a cannoli, or [you could] try a raspberry tart," he says. "It's a very Italian thing," he says with a smile.

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Marene Gustin is a regular contributor to OUTSMART magazine.




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Come for the Signature Pizza, Stay for the Salumi

Openly gay chef brings his Italian culinary expertise to Enoteca Rossa.

By Joanna O'Leary

Most 13-year-olds are primarily concerned with navigating schoolyard dramas, scoring a date to the dance, and convincing their parents to extend curfew. The 13-year-old Carlo Alberto Olivieri was obsessed with learning how to cook the perfect pizza.

Born in Bardolino, Italy, a small town just north of Verona, Olivieri honed his peerless pie-making skills by working in a pizzeria throughout his teens, and then further developed his culinary prowess by attending culinary school. In Italy, Olivieri not only discovered his love (and talent) for cooking but also the love of his life, Christian. The couple has been married for one year and together for more than 12, and they now call Houston home.

Olivieri's second home, however, is the newly opened restaurant Enoteca Rossa, where he has been serving as chef as well as studying diligently under executive chef and master salumiere Roberto Crescini. Born in Gavardo, Italy, Crescini began his culinary training at the Medici Institute of Culinary Professionals, and then for the next 10 years apprenticed under three master chefs before opening his own restaurant. At Enoteca Rossa, Crescini strives to deliver traditional, classic Italian cuisine: "We use only the freshest of produce and proteins," he explains, "in order to allow each component to express its individual flavors and characteristics." Alongside Chef Roberto, Olivieri has made his own enviable contribution to the restaurant's wonderful repertoire of Northern Italian dishes: a signature pizza that looks and tastes like nothing you have ever encountered. But more on that later.

Located in historic Bellaire, Enoteca Rossa won early raves from patrons for its well-



executed antipasti, primi, and secondi dishes, as well as its attentive, never-officious service. One recent balmy evening, I stepped into the restaurant's dining room, pleasantly crowded even for a Tuesday, and was struck with the presence of a most intimidating burnt-orange tiled dome, which I later learned was the "Ferrari" of pizza ovens. Such an investment, as well as Enoteca Rossa's strict dedication to using only the finest ingredients (many of which are flown in from Italy) is evidence of their serious commitment to authenticity.

One sees this commitment both in their tools and ingredients, and in their finished products. Standout antipasti selections include the *burrata pugliese*, a creamy oversized orb dressed with a tomato confit, and the *bruschetta alla Spoletina*, unctuous toasts topped with earthy chopped mushrooms, black truffle, and fresh pecorino. Fruits of the sea come in the form of the perfectly grilled octopus, whose subtly spiced tentacles are easily sliced for sharing. Finally, the simply titled *salumi* is also not to be overlooked, as the sophisticated cured meat wreaks pleasant havoc on your palate. All of the aforementioned were well bal-



Oh My, Pizza Pie!

Chef Carlo Alberto Olivieri's signature Enoteca Rossa pizza features scoops of ricotta laced with truffle oil. *INSET:* Olivieri (l) with executive chef Roberto Crescini.

anced with a crisp glass of Zardetto Prosecco, a welcome recommendation from our waiter.

Resist the urge to fill up on these dishes, as your next course should be Enoteca Rossa's signature pizza, whose unique preparation requires the adroit skills of Olivieri. Generous scoops of ricotta laced with truffle oil and cherry tomatoes are portioned into each quarter of a circle of fluffy dough. Then Olivieri deftly folds the pizza into quarters such that it assumes a pinwheel shape. Following a brief bake in the oven, the pie is drizzled with balsamic vinegar and crowned with burrata. The collaboration of sweet acidity, dairy richness, and interspersed refreshing vegetable notes is singularly delicious, and almost completely distracts you from the fact that the dough itself is remarkably fragrant. Although pie is never my dessert of choice on my birthday, this coming September 6, I will be requesting this pizza. Should Olivieri not be on hand to construct his amazing creation when you visit Enoteca Rossa, the margherita or divola pizzas (with tomato, mozzarella, and najuda, a spicy salami from Calabria) are most satisfying substitutions. →

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COME FOR THE SIGNATURE PIZZA . . .

continued from previous page

In the realm of carbohydrates, second prize goes to the decadent house-made pumpkin-stuffed cappelletti, paired with prawns and bathed in a buttery New Orleans-style cream sauce. It should be noted that others in my party were also quite smitten with the fettuccine studded with tender chunks of Texas lamb in a light vegetable gravy.

For your meat course at Enoteca Rossa, order a second helping of the *salumi*. (Just kidding—but seriously, it's *that* good.) I was very impressed with a well-seasoned steak ordered by my companion, though truth be told, I would have requested a slightly rarer preparation.

What's more to love about Enoteca Rossa? They also serve breakfast and lunch, so you needn't just wax nostalgic about last night's supper. Experience another dimension of chefs Roberto and Carlo's culinary talents with a morning or mid-afternoon snack of panini and espresso. Or, in my case, just more *salumi*.

Enoteca Rossa
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Joanna O'Leary is a freelance food and travel writer based in Houston. Her exploits are chronicled on brideyoleary.com.

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Mexico City: Ancient and Modern

And the authentic Mexican food is fresh and delicious.

By Brian Waddle

Photos by Brian Waddle

Imagine having four days on your hands that you didn't know what to do with. No family in town, no parties scheduled, and work was even giving you a break. What would you do? Where would you go?

May I suggest a long weekend in Mexico City?

Wait—don't stop reading. Thanks to Sean Penn, "El Chapo" has been apprehended—again—so now there's nothing to stop you from enjoying one of the most beautiful, romantic, historic, and truly yummy cities on the face of the planet. Yes, *yummy*. No doubt, we have world-famous Tex-Mex cuisine right here in our hometown, but just like wine that tastes better in Paris, authentic Mexican food in the vibrant *corazón* of our southern neighbors is undoubtedly one-of-a-kind. You'll discover that pastries and sweets have never tasted so fresh and delicious as when they are brought to your table warm from the oven. Coupled with Mexican espresso, it is a match made in heaven. Café de Tacuba has been perfecting this experience since 1912. The ambiance, the uniforms, and the artwork all conspire to make it a cathedral of cuisine.

Yes, you could stay much longer than four days, but not many of us have that luxury any more. Four days in Mexico City will leave you wanting more—and maybe even planning your next visit before you even leave the airport.

Mexico City was built in the base of an ancient volcano, 7,000 feet above sea level. What does that mean to Houstonians accustomed to being 30 feet above sea level? Research it online, but let's just say you'll feel tired for half a day, so plan to arrive at night in order to sleep off most of the altitude sickness. A good meal and lots of bottled water will make you feel better.

Another good thing to know is that the city is simultaneously ancient and modern.

Don't let your limited skills in Spanish dampen your spirits. Love is the international language.



A Feast for the Mind and Body

The Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption is a Baroque masterpiece that was 300 years in the making.

INSET: Only a few blocks from the cathedral, Brian Waddle is about to enjoy Pan Dulce served with a Mexican cappuccino at Café de Tacuba, a Mexico City culinary institution since 1912. In describing the lemon curd pastry, Waddle can only say that "the French don't hold a patent on using butter in pastries."

You can ride the subway most anywhere you would want to go, but for pennies on the dollar, you can take an Uber with drivers who know the lay of the land. Learn the exchange rate and how to calculate what you are being charged—not just in taxis, but everywhere. Simply dividing the number of pesos by 17 (this rate will vary) will tell you how much you're paying in dollars. But believe me—you can ride

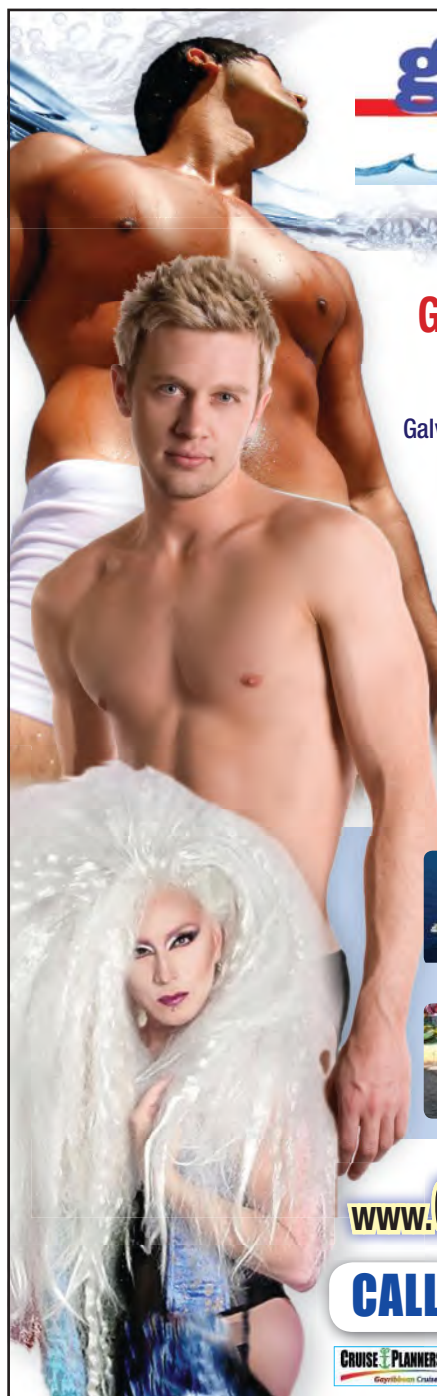
from one side of the city to the other in a very nice Mercedes or Escalade and have less than \$20 charged to your Uber account. And like Houston, Mexico City is sprawling—and I mean *massively* sprawling. Metropolitan Houston has six million or so residents. And Mexico City? 25 million—all trying to get somewhere on the interwoven freeways and toll roads. Uber is not optional—it is a must.

And as in any great metropolis, you can do anything imaginable—indoors or outdoors, active or chill, it's all up to you. But don't try to do everything. Choose two or three things, plan your visit, and make it happen. There are pyramids to the north that pre-date many nations,

dozens of Aztec temples, and historic spots perfect for taking selfies. Much like Texas, Mexico was ruled by the same usual suspects: native civilizations, Spain, and France. But unlike Texas, they have the architecture and cuisine to prove it. History and culture are at every doorstep. While you can find hour-by-hour tour itineraries on the Internet to guide you, yours truly is going to offer some personal experiences to get you started.

First, spend some time in the *colonias*. Much like Houston, Mexico City is a collection of neighborhoods. Santa Fe, Polanco, San Ángel, and of course, the Zona Rosa are all timeless and interesting. And as the national capital, Mexico City has monuments galore and incredible national museums. Don't miss the one in a quiet neighborhood that's the former home of artist Frida Kahlo. Buy your tickets in advance. The line is always long, and like most things worthwhile, it will take some effort.

San Ángel is a quiet, beautiful neighborhood with historic Spanish colonial haciendas-turned-artisan havens and markets. Jewelry, art, music, and food are all within three →



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MEXICO CITY: ANCIENT AND MODERN

continued from previous page

blocks, and it all feels familiar and new at the same time. On the western edge of the city is Santa Fe, one of the most modern and posh neighborhoods. Think of our Galleria (if it had the embassy of the Netherlands) complete with indoor shopping, ice rink, and a movie theater. Polanco is the River Oaks of Mexico City—upscale, old money, with the boutiques and restaurants to prove it. At our dinner at Porfirios, the waiter brought a large, gorgeous wooden box to the table, filled with a selection of “reader” eyeglasses for easier reading in the low, romantic lighting. The food and service that followed was on-point. Finding incredible culinary experiences in Mexico City is not a problem.

Another required experience is the Zócalo, the aorta of the heart of the nation. Known formally as the Plaza de la Constitución, this huge central square has been the main ceremonial center of the nation—both Aztec and Mexican—for hundreds of years. It is framed on three sides by the national cathedral, the presidential palace, and the Supreme Court. One block away is the Templo Mayor, one of the main Aztec temples of the former city of Tenochtitlan. Begun around 1325, it sits in startling architectural juxtaposition to the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption, a Baroque masterpiece that was 300 years in the making, and the largest cathedral in the Americas. Rounding out the square are hotels and restaurants; try to find one with balcony or rooftop seating for a view you won't want to miss.

And don't miss going out to the Zona Rosa—and don't let your limited skills in Spanish dampen your spirits. Love is the international language, so you don't really need to talk, do you? There are LGBT bars and clubs to suit all tastes, but do your research; you won't want to leave this part of your trip to serendipity or chance. Personally, I recommend Nicho. You don't need to be a bear to enjoy yourself, but it won't hurt. Chasers and otters abound. Ice-cold Coronas or Pacificos are 50 cents. Go crazy.

Finally, *mezcal*—one word that will change your life. This cousin of the agave plant is the Scotch of the agave world; the word literally means “oven-cooked agave.” Try it with an orange slice rather than lime. Smoky, smooth, and addictive.

So what's the key to the whole Mexican experience? Allow yourself to be immersed in the culture, absorbing the music and magic of the atmosphere. Appreciate the beauty surrounding you—whether it's an architectural icon or a cute boy or girl sitting across the bar. Both remind you of why you're here: to escape from the routine. Mexico City is kryptonite for the ordinary.

Brian Waddle holds a U.S. passport and uses it as often as possible to travel near and far, working to make every day a photo op.



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Head for the Hills

Plan a weekend getaway to the cutest dang small towns outside of Houston.

By Joanna O'Leary

The bluebonnets are bloomin', gas is cheap, and you're feeling restless—it must be time for a road trip! Assemble your crew, your inamorato/a, or just your lone-some self for a tour of some of the cutest dang small towns just outside of Houston.

Hop onto I-90 for just under 90 minutes (traffic permitting) and you will reach **Schulenberg**, perhaps best known as the home of the painted churches. These divine sanctuaries, decorated with ornate stenciling, oil pastels, and celestial frescoes by 19th-century Swiss and Czech artists, are located just outside Schulenberg in the communities of Dubina, High Hill, Praha, and Ammannsville. Grab a map at the Schulenberg Chamber of Commerce to chart your own route; alternately, take advantage of the bus tour (\$20 per person) that departs every Monday at 10 a.m. and includes a lunch stop at Oakridge Smokehouse (ribs not included in the ticket price, natch). By the way, if any philistines in your group claim that if you've seen one painted church you've seen them all, reassure them that each church boasts a subtly different style of iconography.

Also on offer through the Schulenberg Chamber of Commerce is a tour of local museums, including the Schulenberg Historical Museum, E.A.

Arnim Archives and Museum, Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum, and the Polka Museum. This eclectic itinerary is guaranteed to satisfy a diverse group, from history buffs and aviation aficionados to those who, well, really enjoy frolicking to half-tempo melodies while wearing colorful vests and lederhosen.

From Schulenberg, mosey (and we do mean “move in a leisurely manner”) to **La Grange**, whose best attractions lie outside the main town square (though it is darling). While La Grange is generally quiet and peaceful, the town livens up considerably during “Antique

This eclectic itinerary is guaranteed to satisfy a diverse group, from history buffs to aviation aficionados.

Weekend,” which has morphed into two massive two-week celebrations of antiquarian material culture that end on the first weekend in April and October each year. As one of the “major cities” close to the festivities (held mostly in the tiny communities of Roundtop and Warrenton), La Grange is home base for the thousands of visitors who flock to Antiques Weekend, so plan ahead with regards to accommodations if you're just passing through during these periods. That being said, if you and your partner are looking to decorate your love nest, then by all means

linger, as this massive marketplace of American, European, and vintage artifacts is guaranteed to hold singular treasures.

Year-round La Grange is home to another terrific attraction, The Jersey Barnyard, a fully functional dairy farm where you can bottle-feed a calf or piglet, commune with goats and a miniature pony, and buy some *really* fresh milk and locally made cheeses. The owners and staff are ridiculously helpful and so friendly that you will leave vowing to return with friends—and also wondering if an agrarian lifestyle should be in your future.



A Texas-Sized Road Trip

Schulenberg, La Grange, and Fredericksburg may be small towns, but they're packed with big fun. Visit painted churches, antique markets, and Texas wineries in these Hill Country hidden gems.

By now you may be ready to set up camp for the night. Chain hotels and motels such as the Hampton Inn and Best Western can be found nearby, but for infinitely more charming accommodations, make a reservation at the Brendan Manor Bed & Breakfast. Run by friendly owners Brenda and Dan, this B&B comprises five rooms decorated with well-curated antiques designed to reflect the mansion's 19th-century origins. After check-in—and perhaps a short nap—venture into town for dinner.

Online reviews suggest that Bistro 108 is the *best* restaurant in town, and indeed they should receive props for their wine selection, as well as well-executed regional fare such as pecan-crusted catfish beignets and beef tenderloin with rosemary butter. Or try the grilled quail, *camarones a la diablo* (jumbo shrimp with bacon-wrapped jalapeños stuffed with jack cheese), and the spicy fajitas with beef.

The serious accolades, however, go to Las Fuentes, which serves Tex-Mex that easily stands up to that found in H-town. The gargantuan menu (which features no fewer than four different types of nachos!) will leave the picky eaters in your party overjoyed and the indecisive members overwhelmed. Seek out any of →

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MARY KAY

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

continued from previous page

the multitude of combination plates featuring tacos, enchiladas, tamales, or quesadillas.

Although the margaritas may tempt you to sleep in the next morning at the Brendan Manor, the sweet and savory fragrance of the home-cooked breakfast will rouse even the most fatigued to their feet. Served under the crystal chandelier in the first-floor dining room, breakfast includes comfort fare such as quiche, oatmeal soufflé, plus biscuits, fresh fruit, and some very strong coffee—perfect fuel for the two-and-a-half-hour ride to **Fredericksburg**, the last but certainly not least stop on our mini-break itinerary.

This quaint Germanic town, deep in the heart of Texas Hill Country, is perhaps best-known for its German kitsch, numerous award-winning wineries, and restaurant scene. Naturally, Fredericksburg is busiest and most vibrant during Oktoberfest (September 30 to October 2, 2016), which brings together a full German-themed entertainment lineup, local craft brewers, and vendors selling a wide range of treats including (but not limited to) currywurst, schnitzel burgers, *pfeffernusse*, potato pancakes, and German tacos. The rest of the year holds just as many opportunities for fun, such as perambulating through the monthly “First Friday Art Walk,” hiking the trails at the Fredericksburg Nature Center at

Lady Bird Johnson Park, or blazing through the Gillespie County tour of historic one-room schoolhouses.

With so many cute B&Bs in Fredericksburg, quality accommodation options are easy to find. One of our favorites is Der Stall (The Barn) B&B, a replica of the owner's ancestral family barn in Reifenberg, Germany. And though you may not have been raised in a barn, you can stay in one at Der Stall, where guests are afforded an entire stable to themselves equipped with a master bedroom with whirlpool, second-floor “hayloft” with two full-size beds, and an authentic German hutch. Each morning at 8:30 a.m., fresh fruit and affenbrot (a pecan-cinnamon cake made from an old family recipe) are delivered to your door. We recommend you enjoy your breakfast al fresco at the picnic tables overlooking the 380-acre property populated by three amiable white-tailed deer—Mary, Alice, and Red.

Unfortunately, all mini-breaks come to an end. While you will eventually have to leave (okay, wrench yourself away from) Fredericksburg in order to return to reality in Houston, derive comfort from the fact that you will be taking with you fond memories—and perhaps some photos and a few bottles of Texas cabernet.

Joanna O'Leary is a freelance food and travel writer based in Houston. Her exploits are chronicled on brideyleary.com.

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WHAT DID YOU DO LAST WEEKEND?

Off the Beaten Path

Emily Nesselrodt and Jackson Fox's whirlwind romance transitions into the marriage of their dreams.

Love Will Find a Way

When Jackson Fox (r) came out to Emily Nesselrodt (l) as a transgender man midway through their relationship, she knew their love was strong enough to make it through his transition.

By Henry V. Thiel

Photos by Heather Tusing

“Jackson and I met in October of 2012,” Emily Nesselrodt recalls. “I had just moved to Houston and started a new job at Methodist Hospital. Jennifer Wills, an acquaintance who now is a dear friend, worked with Jackson [who was born Rachel Fox] and sent me a text saying, ‘I think I have the perfect girl for you.’”

“Keep in mind I had just moved 1,100 miles for a girl who promptly broke things off after just nine days together, so I was super gun-shy,” Emily says. “So my response was, ‘Um, no thanks.’”

But Jennifer was persistent. She kept saying Rachel was perfect for Emily: tall, tattooed, and a super-polite, kind southerner who also worked in a hospital. Emily relented, and though still skeptical, she asked for photos. Whatever doubts or misgivings she had promptly vanished. “Within minutes, I got two pictures that would change my life,” she recalls, all wide-eyed with a big smile. “I still have those two photos on my phone!”

The next day Emily received a text: “Good morning, Emily, this is Rachel. How are you?”

“I’m sorry I did not text you last night. I’m

not very good at this stuff lol,” was Rachel’s second text.

After about a week of texting, Emily called Rachel. They made plans to meet. When that fell through, Emily decided to visit Rachel at work.

As Emily sped up Interstate 45 to Rachel’s office, she was certain they would fall madly in love.

When she saw a tall woman wearing khaki

**“It was, quite simply,
the most magical day of our lives.”**

pants and a collared shirt with rolled-up cuffs that just barely revealed full-sleeve tattoos, she walked right up.

“Hi Rachel, I’m Emily.”

Rachel politely shook her hand. Smiling while they made small talk, Rachel finally stopped stealing looks at her watch.

“Oh, it’s a pleasure to meet you finally.” She smiled. “I’m sorry to be rude, but I really need to get back to work.”

“I felt foolish,” Emily confesses. “I didn’t even think about how much of a nuisance I was being. I figured I’m not ever going to ever see her again, so I planted a big one on her lips!”

Rachel smiled sheepishly.

“What’s that for?”

“Just for being you,” Emily replied.

They went to dinner at Chuy’s two nights later. They’ve been sharing Mexican food ever since.

After moving to Virginia, they discovered there were many ups and downs to living together as a lesbian couple. Emily began to accept the fact that she couldn’t make Rachel happy.

Then one day, Rachel came to Emily.

“I haven’t been honest with you this whole time. And you deserve to be told the truth, and be given the opportunity to leave if you so choose.”

Emily was terrified. Was Rachel not attracted to her? Was she dying of some terrible disease?

“I’ve never felt like a girl,” Rachel admitted. “I have always known that I was supposed to be a man, but I could never do it. I didn’t want to disappoint my family, or lose them again. →



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True Companions

Emily (I) and Jackson were married in an intimate ceremony at The Golden Horseshoe Inn in Standardsville, Virginia.

After catching her breath, Emily remembered a brief conversation she had with Rachel within the first few months of dating. Rachel had asked how Emily felt about transgender people. Emily told her she didn't feel one way or the other. She confessed she wasn't interested in that type of person, though at that time she didn't know any.

WEDDING GUIDE

continued from previous page

I didn't want to lose my partner at the time. But now, I'm scared I'll die if I don't do this. I am going to transition, and I totally understand if you can't be a part this—if you want to be in a relationship with a woman, and I'm not a woman. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, and for how I've been treating you. This is my issue, and I just didn't know how to deal with it."

By March of 2014, Rachel and Emily had made it through the start of transitioning together. Rachel would now be known as Jackson. They started telling their friends and family. It was on a long weekend away in Philadelphia, where it was cold and rainy with flash floods the entire weekend, that Jackson popped the question.

Jackson decided to cheer Emily up by taking her to dinner at Bonefish, her favorite restaurant, where Jackson had conspired with the waiter. When the waiter arrived with dessert, he presented a plate with the words WILL YOU MARRY ME? encircling a strawberry shortcake and, in the center, a ring. Emily remembers saying, "Yes, of course!" while everyone in the restaurant applauded.

Since their families haven't always been on board with their relationship, they decided to keep their wedding intimate. Emily decided to borrow a coworker's wedding dress, and a headpiece from an old high-school friend. Everything was coming together—except for the venue.

After months of searching, Jackson found The Golden Horseshoe Inn, in Standardsville, Virginia.

The owners are a father-and-daughter duo who had run the inn for over 30 years. Emily liked the fact that they featured a few gay and lesbian couples on their website. They invited six friends to their wedding, which was held outdoors on the patio, overlooking a river surrounded by fall foliage in vivid oranges, reds, and yellows.

The laid-back couple chose a traditional Irish blessing as part of their ceremony, as well as verses from the Song of Solomon. Emily's twin brother walked her down the aisle. Their first dance as a married couple was to "True Companion" by Marc Cohn.

"It was, quite simply, the most magical and lovely day of our lives," Emily exudes.

Henry V. Thiel is a principal with The Epicurean Publicist.

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**A Dynamic Duo**

Michael Shallis (l) and Bill Dunseth held a Texans-style wedding reception at Villa Capri Italian Garden Restaurant on January 9, 2016.

A Winning Team

Sports fans Michael Shallis and Bill Dunseth throw a touchdown of a wedding.

By Henry V. Thiel
Photos by Dalton DeHart

One passion that Bill Dunseth and Michael Shallis share is sports—both playing and watching. “As fate would have it,” says Michael with a big smile, “Bill’s softball team was putting on a kickball tournament, and my football team decided to participate. Bill was one of the home-plate umpires, so I gave him a hard time regarding the rules I was purposely not following as a way of flirting with him. He didn’t realize what I was doing, so his first impression of me was that I’m a jerk who complains and argues about everything,” he adds with a laugh.

Bill must have changed his mind rather fast, because the two started dating soon after. Two months later they became exclusive and moved in together, and five months later they purchased rings! To say it was a whirlwind romance would be an understatement.

“The truth is that neither one of us had thought Texas would legalize gay marriage in the near future,” says Bill, “let alone as quickly as it passed last year.” Bill and I never had any resentment about not being married, because we felt our relationship was just as strong as those who had

a piece of paper legalizing it. But once the law had passed, we were receiving phone calls, emails, and messages asking when we were going to get married. Being half-embarrassed and more than half-stubborn, we had decided that we’d get married when we were ready, rather than because we [were suddenly] able to do so.

“So a few months went by without either of us bringing up the subject,” shares Bill. “Then one Saturday afternoon while we were sitting on the couch watching a game, out of the blue we start talking about it—as casually as if we were figuring out what we wanted for dinner. I remember the discussion going something like this:

Bill: So, do you think we should go ahead and get married?

Michael: Yeah, I guess it’s about time we figured out what we’re going to do.

Bill: Any thoughts?

Michael: Well, to be honest, I’d really want to have it all done before my next semester starts. I don’t want to stress out about the wedding while taking Anatomy and Physiology II. [Michael is studying physical therapy at HCC’s health-sciences college.]

Bill: Good point. Well, I guess we better →

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WEDDING GUIDE

continued from previous page

start by picking a date.

They were married two months later.

Together they decided to have a private wedding ceremony on January 7, 2016, officiated by their friend Judge Jerry Simoneaux in his office, with Michael's mother and sister as their witnesses.

Two days later, they hosted their wedding-reception dinner for their friends and family at Villa Capri in Seabrook. "It's one of our favorite Italian restaurants," adds Bill.

"Plus, we know the owner, who is also gay, and we both love the view. It's right on the water," says Michael.

In planning the wedding, Bill and Michael didn't have any family traditions they wanted to include, so Michael tried to start a new one. "Since the Houston Texans home playoff game wasn't decided until the week of our wedding, I was very displeased that it was scheduled to still be playing two hours into our reception. I am a very passionate Texans fan, as are many of our friends and family whom we invited. Some of my friends already had tickets to the game, and had given them away. So, long story short, I hooked up a 46-inch TV in the main dining room for anyone who wanted to catch the rest of the game. It was a blowout, so I turned off the game, plugged in a jump drive loaded with photos of Bill and me, and had the slide show playing throughout the evening."



Post-Wedding Glow

Despite the Texans losing their playoff game, Bill (l) and Michael were all smiles at their wedding reception.

For their honeymoon, Bill and Michael went to Palm Beach, Orlando, and Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, where they visited with close friends who weren't able to attend their wedding.

"It was a terrific way to conclude our wedding experience and start our life together as a married couple," beams Michael.

Henry V. Thiel is a principal with The Epicurean Publicist.

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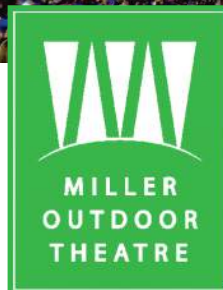
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▼ The Simpsons

(The Huffington Post, 4/1/16, Curtis M. Wong)

Longtime *Simpsons* writer Rob LaZebnik said he wrote "The Burns Cage" [episode] in honor of his own son, Johnny, who is gay. [The episode aired] just five days' shy of Johnny's 22nd birthday. "I am a Midwestern guy, so I don't tend to wear my emotions on my sleeve," LaZebnik told *The New York Post*. "But I thought, 'What better way to tell my son I love him than to write a cartoon about it?'"

Johnny LaZebnik, who came out to his parents when he was in high school, called the tribute "especially meaningful," and said his relationship with his "unbelievably accepting" father couldn't be better. "We're as close as a straight dad and a gay son could be," Johnny, who is studying psychology and film at Connecticut's Wesleyan University, told *The New York Post*. "My favorite thing that I've never heard any other dad do is, whenever I have a breakup, he'll call me and just make sure I'm okay."



Feel the Burns

Waylon Smithers (r) is about to be devastated to find out that his boss, Mr. Burns, doesn't share the same feelings he has for the evil old geezer.

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⊙ Somewhere in Between

James Franco (seen here with Zachary Quinto in the 2015 film *I Am Michael*): can he teach anything to the straight and gay communities?



► Will Hoge

(Facebook, 3/23/16)

Ok. Here's the thing. I'm voting for Bernie Sanders for president. Why? Because I want change in our government. I want a system that works FOR working people. I want real equality for EVERYONE. My brothers and sisters of ALL colors. People of all or no faith(s). Folks of all sexual orientation. I want the income gap remedied in our country. . . . I would simply like to see some very common sense and comprehensive reforms

▶ Jessica Alba

(Vanity Fair, Holiday 2015/2016, Derek Blasberg)

Re: at the age of 12, she became a devout, born-again Christian and member of a conservative Christian youth group.

"I was seeking a purpose. I wanted to exist for a reason." This lasted until she was 17, when, she says, she was turned off by the boundaries and labels set by fellow churchgoers. That year, she "fell crazy in love with a cross-dressing ballet dancer who had a baby and was bisexual. I was like, 'There's just no way he's going to hell!' I felt like, at the end of the day, God is love and everyone is human."

Everyone Is Human

Jessica Alba (pictured here at a recent event in L.A.): who did she fall in love with when she was 17 years old?

◀ James Franco

(New York, 4/18/16, Jerry Saltz)

I like to think that I'm gay in my art and straight in my life. Although, I'm also gay in my life up to the point of intercourse, and then you could say I'm straight. I am a figure who can show the straight community that many of their definitions are outdated and boring. And I can also show the gay community that many of the things about themselves that they are giving up to join the straight community are actually valuable and beautiful.

SIMPSON - FOX; ALBA - HELGA ESTER/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; STEWART - CHELSEA LAUREN/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

▼ Patrick Stewart

(Vanity Fair, 4/16)

Vanity Fair: What is the quality you most like in a man?
Patrick Stewart: Embracing his inner woman.



Pretty in Pink

Patrick Stewart appeared in drag at an L.A. panel discussion to promote the second season of his Starz sitcom *Blunt Talk*.



to make sure our tax dollars are collected and spent in ways that benefit ALL of us and not just a tiny percentage at the very top. Sen. Bernie Sanders... is who I will vote for. As for the, 'well if he doesn't get the nomination you HAVE to vote for Hillary' argument, let me simply say this, 'No I don't.' I will vote for Bernie Sanders. Hear me again, I WILL VOTE FOR BERNIE SANDERS. Yes. You heard me correctly. I will be voting for Bernie Sanders in November. I will write him in if necessary. ... You can say, 'well, you're giving Trump the presidency', or, 'you're not being a good democrat'. Well, I'm sorry. I'm not a good or bad 'democrat'. I am NOT a democrat. I'm a human being. I'm a father. I'm a husband. I'm a son. I'm a friend. I'm a musician. I'm a small-business owner. I'm lots of other things too. ... Can he do all the things he talks about? ... Nobody can. However, he WILL fight for those things every single day. He always has. ... He's bringing together people of all ages, races, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. He is passionate. He is dedicated. He is inspiring. He is right.

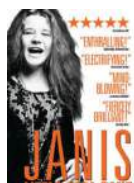
EDITOR'S NOTE: See Will Hoge at Dosey Doe (doseydoe.com) on May 21. More at willhoge.com.



'Orange Is the New Black'

Queer women are in the spotlight in season three.

Janis: Little Girl Blue



This is an intimate portrait of the iconic but troubled rock 'n' roll singer Janis Joplin. It's got electrifying archival footage, exclusive interviews with friends and family, and rare personal letters from the rocker herself. The film features Pink, Melissa Etheridge, and many more. FilmRise (filmrise.com). —**Suzie Lynde**

What We Have



Fleeing from his troubled past in France, Maurice's (Maxime Desmons) romantic sense of Canada leads him to seek refuge in a remote community where he discovers little outlet for his Parisian appetite for one-night stands. But things get complicated when he starts tutoring a 15-year-old male student struggling at school and with his sexuality... and even more complicated when he falls for another man. TLA Releasing (tlareleasing.com). —**Troy Carrington**



Prison Romance

Sparks fly between Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) and Alex Vause (Laura Prepon) on *Orange Is the New Black*.

The cable antihero has gained luster over the past 15 years with the likes of Don Draper, Walter White, and Tony Soprano. Suffice it to say, they are all men, all drunks, and all depressing. But while they committed spousal abuse and cried over Scotch, show-runner Jenji Kohan was introducing the first of a wave of epic, dangerous women on her Showtime comedy *Weeds*. Over eight seasons, Nancy Botwin (Mary Louise Parker) transforms from pot-dealing suburban mom to drug kingpin, outlaw, and possible sociopath. With every lethal mistake Nancy made, Kohan asked: can a female protagonist be the villain of her own story? Based on audience response and the deluge of female stars flocking to TV for their own cable showcases, *Weeds* was on to something.

In 2013, Kohan unveiled the latest privileged white woman to be thrown into danger with *Orange Is the New Black*'s Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling), a Brooklyn yuppie who must serve time in a federal penitentiary for youthful drug smuggling. Once inside, Piper encounters women from an ocean

of backgrounds, dealing with their own mistakes, circumstances, and ethical footing. An unprecedented armada of black, Latina, and LGBT women get the spotlight with flashbacks and monologues that reveal them to be more than just victims or perpetrators. With every episode, the series becomes a richer mosaic of personal perspectives. *Weeds* challenged us to accept the immorality of one white lady; *Orange Is the New Black* argues that no woman—regardless of her class, race, criminal history, or sexual orientation—can be judged, whether by an audience or a jury.

After an epic, apocalyptic second season that pitted most of the cast against one another in a racial turf war, season three sees the women of Litchfield Penitentiary return to a status quo of individual survival, while the administration considers selling out to devious corporate overlords. Without as much of an overarching story, this season's *Orange* patiently and responsibly follows its characters on personal journeys to seek meaning in a brutally meaningless system. Morello (Yael Stone) courts pen-pal

fiancés, Flaca (Jackie Cruz) betrays her sisters for a career opportunity, and Black Cindy (Adrienne C. Moore) considers Judaism.

More than in the previous two seasons, season three pushes its queer women out of the role of sassy sidekicks and into active, complicated territory. In a stand-out episode called "Finger in the Dyke," the resident butch badass, Big Boo (Lea Delaria), considers faking a conversion to heterosexuality in order to receive donations from religious-right fanatics. In a series of stellar flashbacks, we learn that Boo has used her militant appearance to provoke confrontation about her lesbian identity; in her stubbornness to stand up for her own individuality, she refuses to compromise with her loved ones, and loses her mother without saying goodbye.

Laverne Cox's Sophia finds herself at odds with the razor-sharp mother of the Latina gang, Mendoza (Selenis Leyva), when their sons form a friendship that leads to bad behavior. Sophia assumes that her child picked up violence, foul language, and misogyny from spending time in Mendoza's low-income urban environment, but eventually must face the truth that her boy acts on his own, and that she must accept blame as his mother. The Latina community turns the prison against Sophia, which sparks a wave of horrific transphobic violence.

The role of Sophia has elevated Cox to the status of an icon, and she's proven to shine as a champion for trans rights. But she fails to imbue Sophia with enough depth to make her anything more than a victim, and, when paired with the scene-skewering Leyva, her scenes often feel flat.

For most series, just featuring an LGBT character would seem like enough work on the show-runners' parts, but Kohan and the writers of

Orange move beyond inclusion and grant their lesbian and trans characters the chance to be dirty, vengeful, and even wrong. Big Boo and Sophia face hate for their gender and sexual identities, but they often use these signifiers to shield themselves from taking responsibility for their own failings. In letting them make mistakes, Kohan fully integrates Boo and Sophia with the other women.

Meanwhile, having lost faith in ever finding a welcome return to the safe, hetero-social outside world, Piper embarks on a Nancy-esque illegal business operation and quickly gives in to the power trip, fast spiraling from hapless outsider to stone-cold head honcho. After all the upheavals, lessons, and bonds Piper has experienced, is it possible that she will leave prison a worse person than the one she entered? Like the other women of the unit who make rough compromises for their survival, Piper's story does not necessarily follow a traditional moral arc.

Not every story about prison ends with redemption, and not every woman should have to discover an innate goodness. Otherwise, they'd all be the same, and the constellation of identities and personalities on *Orange Is the New Black* wouldn't shine so brilliantly.

Available May 17 from Lionsgate (lionsgatehome.com/orange-is-the-new-black).

David Goldberg is a frequent contributor to OutSMART magazine.



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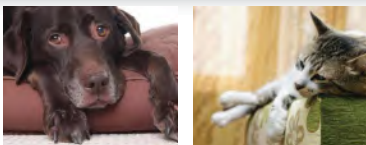
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New Wavy

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Rachael Sage Choreographic



On her latest offering of self-described "ballet-pop," Sage delivers a musically ambitious and emotionally ac-

cessible tribute to her very first love: dance. Connecting to her roots in ballet, Sage (an out lesbian) "envisioned each song as a fully-choreographed multi-media experience" while crafting the album. The result is an inspired set of piano-based chamber-pop merging orchestral elements with her signature blend of folk, pop, and rock. Available May 20 from MPRESS Records (mpressrecords.com, rachelsage.com). —**Suzie Lynde**

Original Cast Recording First Daughter Suite

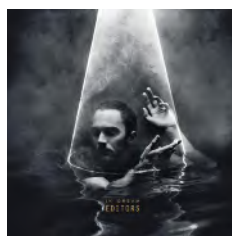
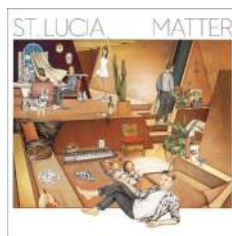


An historical fantasia in four parts, *First Daughter Suite* follows First Lady Patricia Nixon and her

daughters Tricia and Julie, Rosalyn and Amy Carter, Betty and Susan Ford, Patti Davis and mom Nancy Reagan, and Barbara Bush and daughter-in-law Laura as they strive to live meaningful lives in the public eye, while dealing with the complex private relationships all of us face with our parents and children. Ghostlight Records (sh-k-boom.com). —**Troy Carrington**

New-wave music and the acts associated with the genre have managed to hang tough over the years since the musical style reached its peak in the mid-1980s and was then revived beginning in the late 1990s. **Gary Numan**, one of the forebears, especially in terms of synthesizer use, even experienced a bit of a career resurgence when he toured with Nine Inch Nails a couple of years ago. More recently, Numan's recordings have become the subject of a vinyl reissue campaign via Beggars Banquet's catalog and archive department known as The Arkive. **The Pleasure Principle** (Beggars Banquet) from 1979, for example, "mastered from HD digital 96/24 transfers of analogue tape," contains Numan's massive hit single "Cars," as well as classic tunes including "Observer," "Conversation," and "Engineers."

The late **David Bowie** (it's still strange to write that) was the ultimate musical chameleon who enjoyed artistic and commercial success in a multitude of musical styles including glam rock, dance music, punk, soul, pop, and of course, new wave—to name a few. Released in early 2016, a mere two days before his death at 69, **Blackstar** (Columbia/ISO) might be the all-time greatest farewell gift a musician has ever given his fans. Not nearly as accessible as its exceptional 2013 predecessor *The Next Day*, *Blackstar* is nevertheless essential Bowie, finding him continuing on his path of innovation and experimentation. Almost everything Bowie sings on this seven-track disc, the shortest number of songs on a Bowie album since *Station to Station* from 40 years before, is



weighted with what we now know—that Bowie was dying of liver cancer. As with *Station to Station*, *Blackstar* opens with an epic title tune which, at almost 10 minutes in length, is one of Bowie's most daring and theatrical compositions. Clocking in at nearly six and a half minutes, "Lazarus," which begins with the lines "Look up here, I'm in heaven/I've got scar that can't be seen," as well as its accompanying music video, subtly sends listeners a message from beyond. Also remarkable is album closer "I Can't Give Everything Away," the most accessible song on the disc, which deserves to be Mr. Bowie's final hit single.

How far does Bowie's new-wave influence extend? Well, you can certainly hear it on **Art Angels** (4AD), the latest acclaimed album by **Grimes** (aka Claire Boucher). Considered by some to be Bowie's "true spiritual successor," Grimes, like Bowie, definitely has a way of putting art into her art rock. From the stringy and theatrical opener "Laughing and Not Being Normal" to straightforward new-wave-revival dance numbers such as "Flesh without Blood," "California," "Venus Fly," "World Princess Part II," and the title cut, Grimes takes being weird seriously. Even more impressive is the way she isn't afraid to merge the mood of the past with the mind of the present on standouts such as "Kill V. Maim," "Realiti," "Scream," and "Butterfly," staking her claim on the dance floor. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Grimes performs on May 17 at the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion.]

St. Lucia (aka Jean-Philip Grobler) bypasses Bowie and goes straight for Tears For Fears and Thompson Twins on its second album, **Matter** (Columbia/Neon Gold). Backed by a synth and beats-driven

band, including his wife, Patricia Beranek (who also serves as exec producer of the disc), St. Lucia focuses on the nostalgic dance floor on almost every one of the 11 tracks. Of particular interest are clubby tracks such as "Rescue Me," "Stay," "Home," "Physical," "Help Me Run Away," and "Dancing on Glass."

Ten years after releasing its acclaimed debut album, **Editors** returns with the strongest album of its existence, the stunning **In Dream** (PIAS). Editors have mastered the art of sounding of the moment while respectfully honoring the new wave of the past. Whether aiming for the dance floor, as on "Our Love," "Life Is a Fear," and "All the Kings," or artfully sculpting a mood on "The Law," "Ocean of Night," and "Marching Orders," Editors is a "dream" come true. The double-CD edition features eight bonus tracks.

Like some other first-wave new-wave bands, **Givers** generously incorporates a number of musical influences, including Afro and world beat, zydeco (Givers hails from Louisiana, after all), glitch, and fuzz (to mention a few) on its second album, **New Kingdom** (Glassnote). The disc also showcases some great mixed-gender vocal give-and-take (check out "Sure Thang," "Blinking," "Sleeper Hold," "Wishing Well," and "Lightning"), while also giving Tiffany Lamson plenty of room to strut her own stuff.

Gregg Shapiro is a regular contributor to OutSmart magazine.

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'The Battle for Room 314'

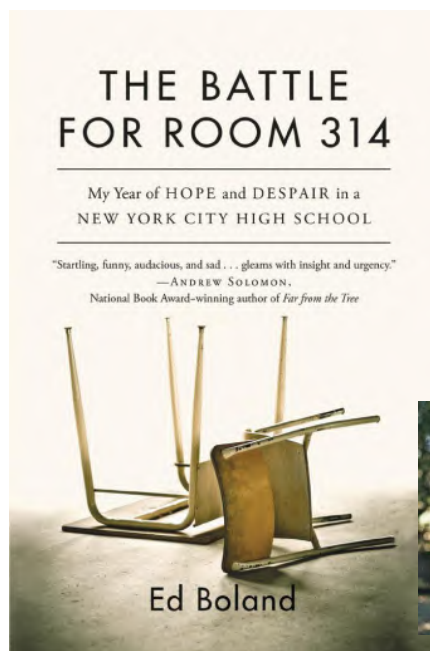
Today's classroom.

Mama Dragon Story Project: Essays from Mothers Who Love Their LGBT Children



Twenty women, many with Latter Day Saints or Mormon ties, share essays of love and support for their LGBT children. Portraits of each mother show their fiery resolve as they bear the

title of "Mama Dragon." Loving LGBT children within a strict religious environment poses some challenges; reconciling those challenges and moving forward in peace is the focus of this book. Showing mothers, and other allies, that they can wrestle with these challenges, soften attitudes at home, and openly accept their LGBT child is the reason for these essays and portraits. Self-published (blurb.com). —Suzie Lynde



The Battle for Room 314
by Ed Boland
2016, Grand Central
(hachettebookgroup.com)
243 pages • \$26



Ed Boland

What was the name of your favorite teacher—perhaps the one who changed your life? Even after all these years, you still remember the smell of chalk, the sound of her reading aloud, the way he pulled ideas from your head, or music from your fingers.

In *The Battle for Room 314* by Ed Boland, you'll get a view of today's classroom—one you'll barely recognize.

What was a nice, educated gay man doing in a snarling pit of teenage attitude? With sweaty palms and a worthless planner, newly minted teacher Ed Boland wondered that himself. Inspired by teachers in his family, he'd given up a well-paying job to teach, but the ninth-grade class he'd gotten wasn't what he bargained for.

Because Boland had spent a year teaching English in China, he figured he had a "leg up" on a job at Manhattan's Union Street School, a combined middle school and high school that focused on history and international studies.

He had been led to believe this would be his dream job, and since he'd already worked with "promising" but disadvantaged New York-area minority students through Project Advance, he thought he knew the kind of fresh-faced students he'd have.

Instead, what he found in the classroom that fall were sullen, sometimes violent young adults with attitude, many (if not most) of whom were dealing with absentee parents, drug abuse, poverty, pregnancy, and bullying. Some were in their very late teens; many were unable to write in complete sentences or do age-appropriate schoolwork. At least one barely spoke English.

And yet, with a Hollywood happy ending on his mind, Boland persevered. He hoped to connect with the kids, though they were often uncontrollable. He dreamed they would eventually learn something, though they usually ignored his

lessons. And when the year was over, he had considered staying at Union Street, but he just couldn't.

"I so wish it were a different ending for me and for the kids," says Boland, "but some stories have to end like a '70s movie—gritty, real, and sad."

The solution to the country's crisis in education, says author Ed Boland, is a multi-faceted one, beginning with more education for the educators. There are other fixes, too, and *The Battle for Room 314* offers them.

But that's not all: Boland, overall, tells a story that's both shocking and unsurprising—part *To Sir*, *With Love* and part battlefield skirmish. There are occasional moments of too much information (involving both himself and his students), but even more moments of frustration and missed opportunities (again, on two levels). What Boland shares left me feeling glum, mostly, but there are shadows of hope in this book—especially at the end, when he wraps up his story with a chapter of follow-ups.

Though you should be reminded that this is just one man's experience in one school, this book offers hard lessons. Still, if you've ever fretted about the state of education—on either side of the teacher's desk—*The Battle for Room 314* goes to the head of the class.

Terri Schlichenmeyer has been reading since she was three years old, and she lives on a hill in Wisconsin with two dogs and 11,000 books.

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AHF Wellness Centers are designed to make STD testing and treatment accessible, convenient, and affordable, as well as to encourage regular sexual health screenings for all sexually active people. "We are excited to add our Wellness Center services to our Houston Healthcare Center and expand our ability to offer STD and HIV screenings for sexually active adults in a convenient, confidential environment," says Bret Camp, AHF's regional director for Texas. "With cultural changes and the rise of mobile dating and hook-up apps helping to fuel the rise of sexually transmitted diseases—especially among young adults—we want to empower people to make routine STD screenings a key

component of their plans for healthy living."

The Wellness Center will be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m. For more information about Wellness Center services and locations, visit freestdcheck.org.

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—Karen Derr

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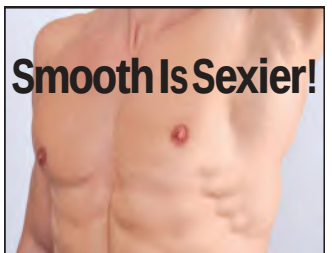
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Houston

13 ENTERTAINMENT

This comfortable club located in the Heights is a convenient alternate to inner-Montrose haunts. Patrons journey past the comfy seating and romantic lighting to find a spacious patio where they sometimes fire up the barbecue grill. 1537 N. Shepherd • 713.426.1313.

BAYOU CITY BAR & GRILL

This always-fun party bar opens daily (7am-2am Mon.-Sat., 11am-2am Sun.), serving fantastic food (11am-9pm) daily. Fifty-cent wing specials on Tuesday and Thursday pack the house. "Let Us Entertain You" with our Sunday drag performances. Party promotions nightly. Crawfish served every Sunday 11am-9pm. 2409 Grant St. • 713.522.2867 • bayoucitybar.com.

BLUR

This multi-level dance club features a patio upstairs lounge and balconies that overlook Pacific St. Ladies enjoy Wet and Wild Wed., 18-year-olds are welcome on Thurs., resident DJ Lorenzo spins Wed.-Sat. nights, DJ Pollo spins Karumba Latin night on Sun. Happy hour 8-10pm; free cover before 11pm. 710 Pacific St. • blurbar.com.

CLUB 2020

Located downtown, this urban club features Clubbers Friday with male and female dancers. Its 6,400 square feet also offers theater-sized viewing screens and VIP rooms. 2020 Leeland • 713.227.9667 • club-2020houston.com.

CLUB CRYSTAL

If you miss the now-closed Inergy, you'll find many of its former staff, management, and décor at this two-room Latin/hip-hop club. Sunday evening drag shows rule the roost. 6680 Southwest Frwy, next to Colorado • 713.278.2582 • crystaltheclub.com.

CROCKER BAR

Resident DJ Johnny spins on Fri. and Sat. nights at this comfortably remodeled Montrose nightspot that also offers karaoke on Tuesdays and Thursdays and extended happy-hour prices throughout the week. 2312 Crocker • 713.529.3355.

F BAR

Award-winning DJs spin nightly at this "boutique nightclub" that offers elegance without arrogance and features a stage, dance floor, VIP area, glass-encased quiet bar, and attractive patio. Tues. and Sun. drag shows feature frequent special guests. 202 Tuam St. • fbarhouston.com • 713.522.3227.

GEORGE

Regulars rule at this comfortable neighborhood sports bar, just like most other neighborhood sports bars in town. Sports Saturdays and Sundays start at 3pm with dart and pool tournaments. 617 Fairview • 713.528.8102.

GUAVA LAMP

This trendy and friendly video and cruise bar gets busy during happy hour and stays busy 'til closing. Karaoke on Wed. and Sun., sometimes offering prizes, always packs the place. 570 Waugh Dr. • 713.524.3359 • guavalamphouston.com.

JR'S BAR & GRILL

With house emcee Kofi, OutSMART's Gayest and Greatest reigning drag champion, this Montrose standard offers drag and strip shows throughout the week, karaoke Thurs. and Sun., plus pool tables, male dancers, and award-winning cocktails. 808 Pacific St. • jrsbarandgrill.com • 713.521.2519.

METEOR

The men of Manwatch and Muscles in Action rinse down in the "Meteor Shower" stall in this posh but comfy lounge on the downtown edge of Montrose, accompanied by DJ Athena on Friday and award-winning DJ Eddie E on Saturday. Open Thurs.-Sat. 2306 Genesee St. • meteorhouston.com • 713.521.0123.

MICHAEL'S OUTPOST

Jerry Atwood, Clay Howell, Neil Massey, Steve Wheaton, and Roger Woest take turns at the keys at this comfortable neighborhood piano bar. 1419 Richmond Ave. • 713.520.8446.

MINISTRY

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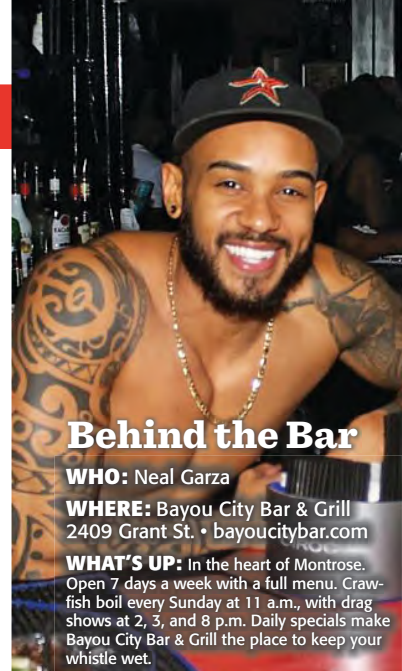


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the historic Magnolia Ballroom. Thursdays are Hip Hop, Fridays (Electro House), & Saturdays (Dubstep, Trap, and House). @MinistryHouston • ministryhouston.com • 709 Franklin St.

MONTROSE MINING COMPANY

Studly male dancers bump and grind every night at this leather/denim spot, offering Montrose's lowest vodka drinks with Trash Disco Sundays. The two-tier back patio bar provides a perch for viewing the Pacific Street scenery. 805 Pacific St. • theminehouston.com • 713.529.7488.

NEON BOOTS DANCEHALL & SALOON

Houston's only LGBT country dancehall is located in the historic Esquire Ballroom and opens Wednesday-Sunday. The new outside patio and stage are open. Wednesday features Steak Night and Bingo. Free dance classes on Thursdays and Karaoke. Saturday night the dance floor fills with the best C&W... check their website for all specials, events and times. 11410 Hempstead Hwy • neonbootsclub.com • 713.677.0828.

PEARL BAR

This LGBT-friendly lounge is open under "familiar" management in the Washington corridor. Daily highlights range from open mic night to steak night to appearances by DJ Kittie and DJ Ben Phoenix from KRBE. Drink specials and more. 4216 Washington • pearlhouston.com.

THE RIPCORN

This well-kept, multi-roomed leather bar for men and their friends boasts a busy patio, especially on the weekends. The Black Hawk Leather shop is located inside the club, providing BDSM essentials. 715 Fairview Ave. • 713.521.2792.

RUDYARD'S

The eclectic British pub is known for its craft beers as well as for the burgers. Most weekends you'll find up-and-coming local bands rocking the house. 2010 Waugh Dr. • rudyardspub.com • 713.521.0521.

SOUTH BEACH

This mega-dance club is a frequent winner of OutSmart's Gayest and Greatest awards, with DJ Eddie E spinning on Fri., and DJ Joe Ross playing pop & dance music videos on Sat. No cover before 11pm. 810 Pacific St. • sobehouston.com • 713.529.SOBE.

TC'S SHOWBAR

With the longest daily happy hours in Montrose (8am-10pm), it's no wonder this

neighborhood watering hole is so popular. Owner Tim Pugh says TC's has built quite a reputation as the perfect spot to celebrate special occasions. Other big draws are the drag shows Wednesday-Sunday and karaoke Monday & Wednesday. 817 Fairview • 713.526.2625 • tcshowbar.com.

TONY'S CORNER POCKET

This comfortable club located close to downtown has one of the friendliest bar staffs in town, both inside & outside at its patio bar. The raised stage where local charities perform also features an amateur dance contest each Thurs., Fri., & Sat. at 11pm. Opens daily at noon. 817 W. Dallas • 713.571.7870 • tonyscornerpocketbar.com.

VIVIANA'S

This club, in a new location, appeals to fans of Latino music and drag alike. 4624 Dacomia • 713.681.4104.

Beaumont

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Bryan/College Station

HALO VIDEO BAR

The only LGBT dance club in Bryan/College station, this sleek spot is open Thurs.-Sat. Smack in the middle of Aggieland, "our venue is always packed with the hotties," the owners promise. 121 North Main • 979.823.6174 • halobcs.com.

Galveston

23RD ST. STATION

A new face on the Island bar scene is here. The bar features a neighborhood-bar feel with octane. Drink specials daily and the weekend is filled with pulsing music, hot dancers, drag shows, and a Sunday Tea Dance. 1706 23rd St. • 409.621.1808.

ROBERT'S LAFITTE

A neighborhood bar, the Island institution attracts a colorful crowd of regulars and travelers. The private patio includes a swimming pool. On Sat. and Sun. nights, the Ladies of Lafitte show takes the stage. 2501 Avenue Q (at 25th) • 409.765.9092.

THIRD COAST DOWNTOWN BAR

The newest and largest dance club in Galveston features the best shows on the island Friday and Saturday nights hosted by KiKi Dion Van Wales. Sunday Fun Day features Drag Bingo, followed by The Chat—an hour of humor and topical discussions. Then there's the Texas Hold 'Em tournament, and finish the night with karaoke hosted by Taylor L. Much more Monday through Thursday. Doors open at 4 p.m. Mon.-Sat., and at 3 p.m. Sun. 4216 Postoffice St. • 409/765-6911.

Spring

RANCH HILL SALOON

With its two pool tables, 52-inch plasma televisions, and large dance floor, this popular northside spot also offers DJs Thursday-Saturday. 247041 I-45N Suite 103 • 281.298.9035 • ranchhill.com.

THE ROOM BAR AND LOUNGE

One of only two LGBT hangouts in North Houston/Spring, this bar and video lounge has a laidback atmosphere where everyone is welcome and everyone is friendly to each other. The Room Bar and Lounge offers something for everyone, including daily drink specials, karaoke, free pool, drag shows, and live DJs several nights a week. 4915 FM 2920 • roombarspring.com • 281.907.6866. ■

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Mercury Retrograde

Delay start of new projects.

As we start the month, Mercury is retrograde until May 29. It's better to pay attention to existing projects and delay the start of new projects until after that time. Mars is also retrograde, which is making us feel a lot more sluggish. Mars retrograde is also not a good time to start new things. It will be mid-July before the time is right to start new enterprises. Focus on finishing what you have in front of you. • Positive days this month are the 1st, 3rd, 7th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 13th, and 30th. Days of greater tension are the 21st, 22nd, 24th, and 26th. The effects of Mercury retrograde are strongest on the 20th through the 24th, when Mercury is at its slowest movement.

ARIES (March 21–April 19). With your ruler, Mars, retrograde, you are a bit more laid-back. This is a great month to get your financial affairs in order. You are also re-evaluating your sense of self worth and may be considering asking for a raise or increasing your fees. Your focus on improving your health continues, and is even stronger as we get near the end of the month. You are in an internal place this month, but it does get a bit lighter near the end of May.

TAURUS (April 20–May 20). This is an interesting birthday time period for you. Normally, this is your personal yearly cycle where you begin to finish personal projects and establish some new goals. However, with Mercury retrograde in your sign, this is a very introspective time for you. You may need some time to yourself to get centered. Friends can be very supportive at this time, if you open yourself up to them. Relationships take on some of the spotlight toward the end of the month. Address your problems and don't let them bubble up to the surface. You are more communicative after the end of the month.

GEMINI (May 21–June 21). With your ruler, Mercury, retrograde, you will want to slow down and take your time for the whole month. You are naturally more introverted during this time of year anyway, so you may not notice your desire to retreat some from your activities and obligations. Toward the end of the month, relationships become more of your focus. Overall, you are

still in a big time of review about your life, your career, relationships, and plans you are considering for the future.

CANCER (June 22–July 22). Friendships, along with community and business organizations, are dominating your attention as the month begins. You are reconsidering your role in any organizations you belong to. You will also hear from people from your past. Continue on your health regimen, even though you are not feeling as motivated. That will come back in mid-July. Toward the end of this month, you are in a retreat period prior to your birthday. You may need more time to yourself than you have had in the past. Make healthy choices about your love and your time.

LEO (July 23–August 22). Your career is in the spotlight this month, especially with Mercury retrograde influencing that part of your life as well. This can be an excellent time to re-evaluate your career choice. You will be able to see the problem areas more clearly, even if you are just trying to get that part of your life in better order. Family issues resurface at the end of the month. This would be a good time to connect with family or to have a barbecue in your backyard. Friends and community organizations could stimulate your life toward the end of the month.

VIRGO (August 23–September 22). You continue to be busy even with your ruler, Mercury, retrograde until the end of the month. Opportunities continue to open up for you. You are taking your time about accepting things, which is the right course until Mercury moves forward. Relationships are very positive now, and it seems to be even easier to connect to your romantic partner. With this retrograde, it's a good time to reconnect with business clients from the past. By the end of the month, you are beginning to focus on your career even more strongly than you are now. You have more time than you think.

LIBRA (September 23–October 23). For your relationships, this is a time when you will be looking to gain a greater sense of emotional intimacy with those you are closest to. This applies to romance, business, and close personal friends. This is a good time to get away and renew those ties with your romantic partner. On the more mundane side of the world, this is an excellent time to focus on finances and getting that part of your life more organized. As the month ends, you are in a lighter mood, which should continue through next month.

SCORPIO (October 24–November 21). May is always the time of the year when you focus more on your relationships. This is going to be more intense than usual with Mercury retrograde in your arena of relationships as well. You can use this time to renew your partnership via a trip out of town or to bring old issues to the surface to be dealt with. Relationships that are difficult

can often be eliminated at this time. Paying more attention to your health regimen can be especially fruitful over the next three months. This is a great time to get rid of those bad habits.

SAGITTARIUS (November 22–December 21). Until recently, you had been moving forward in a slow and steady manner. There have been lots of new developments with your relationships that have forced you to pay more attention to the now! You are finally getting some time to think about where you are. Pay attention to your routines so you don't overdo it. You will need more time for rest and retreat through mid-July. Relationships are highlighted toward the end of the month, but you are ready to do what you have to. Career energies are still positive, but you need to watch your commitment levels.

CAPRICORN (December 22–January 19). Normally, Capricorns are some of the hardest working people you will ever meet. They look for things to do even when they could be resting. This is a much easier month for you overall. You are not feeling the pressures that were driving you for the last couple of months. Even with Mercury retrograde, you are able to lay back and let the energies work for you. Toward the end of the month, you are ready to get back into your routines with both health and work. Be careful that you don't take on too much as the end of the month comes around.

AQUARIUS (January 20–February 18). You are paying attention to your home and family this month. With Mercury retrograde there as well, you may be doing a whole spring cleaning! This is a good time to finish up those weekend-warrior projects. This can be a great time for a family reunion! You have been re-evaluating your participation in groups and organizations. You are wanting more from where you invest your time, love, and money! You could be considering taking on a leadership role, but you may delay your decisions about that until mid-July. You are more creative and playful toward the end of the month. Take your inner child to the park and have some fun!

PISCES (February 19–March 20). You are, and have been, in a big time of review-and-renew in almost all areas of your life. You are reviewing your career direction, and needing to make a commitment to a specific direction. You are hesitant, but you will definitely feel clearer about this in mid-July. You are also not as tolerant as you usually are. Immature people can really bug you! You are just not able to hold in your feelings for the sake of others, as you would have done in the past. You will feel a bit more stable at the end of the month. Home and family take center stage!

Read Lilly Roddy's 2016 forecast at OutSmartMAGAZINE.com. For more astro-insight, log on to lillyrodgy.com.



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OUT IN HOUSTON



On March 26, the Lone Star Volleyball Association held its 2016 Volleyball Classic Awards Banquet at the Crowne Plaza River Oaks. Pictured are **Travis Ochoa**, **Jason Fallon**, **Brian Crumby**, and **Rick Talley**.



The OUT@TUTS performance of *Oliver*—sponsored by OUTSMART—was held on April 7 at the Hobby Center. Pictured are Judge **Barbara Hartle**, **Vallarie Fisher**, **Bolivar (Bo) Fraga**, and Judge **Jerry Simoneaux**.



On April 9, **Dr. Keith Clarke** and **Dexter Williams** held their fourth annual community picnic at Buffalo Run Park. Pictured are **Derrick Nash**, **Williams**, **Marion Jenkins**, and **Clarke**.



In April 13, the **Houston GLBT Political Caucus** held its volunteer appreciation party at Guava Lamp. Pictured are the Caucus' volunteers.



Lambda Legal held its April mix and mingle event on April 7 at Brenner's on the Bayou. Pictured are **Alan York**, **Kathy Silver**, **Mike Henning**, **Amy Blumrosen**, **Roger Poindexter**, **Rhonda Sigman**, **Travis Torrence**, **Victoria Matthews**, and **Beau Miller**.



The Bering Support Network held its annual "Oodles of Noodles" fundraiser on April 16 at Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Pictured are **Lary Barton**, **Mary Parker**, **Larry Leutwyler**, and **Pastor Ernie Turney**.



On April 9, the Rexanna's Foundation for Fighting Lung Cancer held its Lone Star Huddle Up fundraiser at Armadillo Palace. Pictured are **John Averett**, **Lynne Averett**, **Mary Lisa Spain**, **Dr. Don Gibbons**, and **Michelle Gibbons**.



The Bayou City Performing Arts held "Spring Sing," a roaring '20s-themed murder mystery dinner on April 10 at MATCH. Pictured are **Jacobi Montgomery**, **Kenneth Clayborne**, **Erin Maxwell**, **Tyler Ruberg**, **Laura Kurtz**, and **Andrew McDiarmid**.



Lambda NextGen held its March happy hour on March 29 at Revelry on Richmond. Pictured are **Bradley David Janacek**, **Courtney Mayfield**, **Antonio Veal**, **Lindsey Scheinthal**, **Reza Nouri**, and **Cameron Phillips**.



On April 6, the Diana Foundation held its April happy hour at FBar. Pictured are **Eric Hulsey**, **Jacques Bourgeois**, **Nicholas Montebello**, **Kymberlie McGuire**, **Tanner Williams**, **Victor Torres**, **Brandon Griffin**, and **Cory Jefferson**.



On April 17, the Victory Fund held its Houston Champagne Brunch at the Corinthian. Pictured are **Ryan Lindsay**, Council Member **LaWana Mayfield**, **Tammi Wallace**, **Elizabeth Campbell**, **Debbie Hunt**, **Aisha Moodie-Mills**, and Rep. **David Richardson**.



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