

WINDY CITY TIMES

Greetings from Windy City Times'

VOL 37, NO. 3
JUNE 9, 2022



Spectacular!

Celebrate Pride with our LGBTQ travel tips both near and far

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ALEXANDRA BILLINGS

Icon pens memoir

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'THE MEANING OF PRIDE'

Artist Sam Kirk on new book

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IML 2022

Chicago contest returns to in-person

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Cover of 'The Meaning of Pride'
IML: Photo by Joseph Stevens

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POLITICS

Chicago abortion-rights advocate warns of emboldened right-wing

BY MATT SIMONETTE

The only aspect of the recent leak of Justice Samuel Alito's leaked opinion attacking Roe v. Wade that surprised longtime abortion-rights activist Terry Cosgrove is that anyone else was surprised by it.

"Donald Trump said he would appoint people who would overturn Roe v. Wade," Cosgrove told Windy City Times. "People are surprised, but he did exactly what he said he was going to do."

Cosgrove, who is gay, has been the president and CEO of the abortion-rights organization Personal PAC for 33 years. In that time, Illinois has become one of the only states in the Midwest with secure rights for people to secure abortions.

But Cosgrove warned that right-wing elements will not be finished attacking the rights of marginalized groups after the anti-choice opinion is officially released.

"If you go their websites, they have how an IUD is a murder weapon that kills a baby, and how a birth control pill kills a baby," he said. "They call it a chemical murder."

Allies have suggested to him that politicians would never interfere with birth control access, but Cosgrove cautioned that reversing abortion access once seemed unthinkable in the mainstream as well.

"I say, 'Okay: Don't believe me, but they've now done this once already,'" he added.

Cosgrove further warned that LGBTQ+-rights will undoubtedly be on the right-wing radar. "There is nothing that you can give to these people to make them say, 'You know what? We've done enough. ... They're just getting started with overturning Roe.'"

He added, "I've had a front-row seat to how horrible, violent and uninterested in human rights the other side is. Over my professional life I've seen 11 people, mostly doctors, gunned

down in cold blood. I have seen the arsons, and the death threats that I get at my office."

Anti-gay sentiment from the height of the '80s AIDS crisis still resonates for him as well. He remembers right-wing elements loudly wishing death from AIDS on gay men.

"If you don't take that seriously, then I don't know what you think that they're going to take seriously," he said. "If you think that there's someplace that they're going to stop, then you are living on a different planet."

Personal PAC's specific mission is supporting Illinois politicians who specifically state that they support abortion-rights. Promising "not to touch abortion-rights" is not sufficient to gain the organization's endorsement or escape their opposition.

Cosgrove and Personal PAC have been criticized by state political insiders for a no-holds barred approach—candidates who do not return Personal PAC's questionnaire run the risk of being labeled anti-choice. Cosgrove is unapologetic, and noted that each page of the questionnaire warned candidates that failure to return the form would result in that designation.

"What can I say? It's pro-choice or no choice," he said, noting that so many pro-choice conservatives wishing to quietly support abortion rights ultimately failed in various places to prevent their anti-choice colleagues from implementing or proposing draconian punishments for women seeking abortions.

"Pro-choice means that someone has the right to choose an abortion," he said. "I agree 1,000% if someone isn't comfortable having an abortion, they shouldn't have one. My calling card is: Not every pregnancy needs to be planned, but every child deserves to be loved and cared for. I wish more anti-choice people would adopt that motto and focus on providing the care that every single human being needs."



Personal PAC CEO Terry Cosgrove. Courtesy of Cosgrove

Cosgrove announced recently that he would be stepping down from his post next January, and he is helping Personal PAC gradually undergo the transition to new leadership.

"On Jan. 6, I am going to be 70 years old, and it's time," he said. "I just feel that with a lot of the changed and the future outlook of what's going on in the abortion-rights movement and LGBTQ movements, other people need to step forward and take a leadership role."

While Cosgrove is not sanguine about the ideological trajectory the current U.S. Supreme Court can lay out for the nation, he is not convinced that Americans cannot flex their political voices to reverse that trajectory either. He maintains that apathy, frustration and isolation are the emotions really hindering citizens wishing to make societal changes.

He explained that concerned voters need to both donate to organizations supporting candidates in favor of abortion- and LGBTQ+-rights and volunteer for those candidates.

"Winners make policy and losers make noise," Cosgrove said. "I wish everyone who marched would then volunteer to work in the campaign of a [supportive candidate] to make sure that they got elected, because that's the only way we're going to solve the problem. People are going to have to donate their time, and their money, and they're going to have to get very, very serious."



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ICONS

Alexandra Billings

Trans activist, actress and educator on new memoir, state of the world

Alexandra Billings. Courtesy of Billings

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

About three-fourths of the way through activist, actress and educator Alexandra Billings' *This Time For Me: A Memoir* (out via TOPPLE on April 1), written with Joanne Gordon, readers encounter these words: "I met Larry Kramer for the first time in 1996, and it split me apart forever." With this one line, Billings offers a window into her thinking about her life's trajectory.

"Larry was not only my guardian and an angel of light that lighted up my way, he was that for an entire queer generation," Billings told *Windy City Times*. "He was a beacon, revolutionary, poet, friend and he understood—I think better than anybody I knew, anyway—the plight of the queer person. He lived our struggle. He did not just talk about it or pontificate about it. He did not just lecture. He did all those things and he lived it in his bones. I really think that is why, when he left this planet, he left an indelible mark in queer history. He was not just a trailblazer, he changed the queer vernacular."

Billings candidly and, at times, humorously chronicles her life growing up in the Chicago suburb of Schaumburg; coming out as trans; her drug addiction and subsequent sobriety; being a sex worker in Chicago in the 1980s, when she was in her 20s, which she said "was actually kind of funny" and then became "an insidious nightmare;" being arrested and spending nights in jail; and experiencing homelessness and getting diagnosed with HIV in 1985.

She also writes about many professional endeavors, such as performing as Shante at Chicago clubs such as The Baton; her wide-ranging acting career that took her from small Chicago theater spaces to her most recent role as Madam Morrible in Broadway's *Wicked*; Hollywood behind-the-

scenes stories; a teaching career (she received her MFA in acting at California State University-Long Beach in 2014); and a decades-long romantic relationship with high school sweetheart Chrisanne Blankenship, whom she married—for the first time—in 1996.

The wedding chapter goes back and forth between Billings and Blankenship's first ceremony, which culminated at local nightclub Sidetrack; and their legal union in California in 2008, in the final hours before the anti-marriage equality Prop 8 became law.

"We made it just under the wire," said Billings.

A number of Chicago notables make cameos throughout the book, including Honey West, Mimi Marks and Chill Pepper.

When asked why she was so open throughout the book, especially in the chapters devoted to her 20s, Billings said that her "intention was to tell the truth. That is difficult for me to do. If people understood or found themselves somewhere in my story that is a plus. I just wanted to be as honest as I possibly could, so anything else that happened, I feel, is a gift."

Billings said the through lines in her book are "perseverance, luck and gratefulness."

This Time For Me is published by Amazon imprint TOPPLE, under the direction of Joey Soloway. Billings and Soloway met on the set of the TV show *Transparent*, where Billings played Davina and Soloway served as a co-creator, writer and director.

"Joey is the greatest," said Billings. "I have known Joey since the 1990s. Joey was doing Co-ed Prison Sluts and I was doing Cannibal Cheerleaders on *Crack* and we were in a battle for Chicago late-night theater. God, those were the days."

Billings credited co-writer Joanne Gordon with

convincing her to take her many Facebook posts on aspects of her life and turn them into a memoir. Billings would rewrite and expand those essays and then give them to Gordon to edit. She said the book was originally about 200 pages longer.

"It was like the *Les Miz* of autobiographies," said Billings. "The editors at TOPPLE and Amazon said I needed to cut this down. ... I would write it and then Joanne would take all of those essays, hundreds of them, and put them into some kind of cohesive order—I do not know how. Sometimes she would take one essay, and put it with another one, and marry it. She is the one who organized all of that stuff into a book. It would not have been done without Joanne. ... Everyone really worked together."

Addressing her years on *Transparent*, and working with former co-star Jeffrey Tambor, who played Maura, Billings was contrite about maintaining her silence when allegations of abuse by Tambor arose.

"I have to live with that for the rest of my life," said Billings, "I had already been through two other abusive relationships. I knew what they felt like, sounded like and looked like. Just because, and I am still unpacking all this stuff, Jeffrey was Maura, meaning in my head Jeffrey was a trans woman. Just because I talked myself into believing that was true, I let him get away with murder. And that is my own damn fault. I wanted to take responsibility. I am not trying to portray myself as some sort of warrior or whistleblower. I was just as guilty standing around and doing nothing as Jeffrey was standing around and doing everything."

Speaking about the events of the past few years, Billings said, like the early days of the AIDS pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic is "sear-

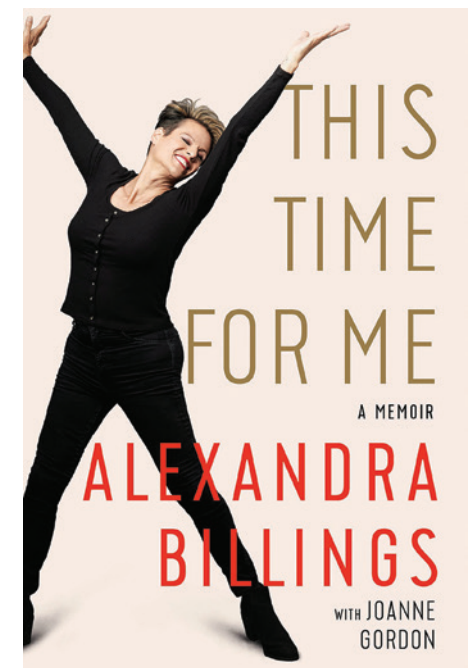
ing" memories into the younger generations' brains "that will never leave you, ever" because "years of isolation does not go away."

Because she is a teacher, Billings said, her students stay the same age while she gets older. Each generation of students has been less and less shocked when she tells them she has a long-term HIV-positive diagnosis, which has made her happy. She added that her generation never would have imagined this when they first faced the HIV/AIDS pandemic—that people would instead ask about it in a curious and caring manner.

This semester, when Billings told her students about her HIV diagnosis and "what it was like to walk down Halsted Street in 1989, when the smell of death just permeated the air," one of her students responded, 'I lost my mother to COVID a year ago and that is what happened to me when I walked down the street of my hometown. I literally just smelled death.' It really struck me because I think we have stumbled on a generation that I do not have to explain myself to."

Billings did not plan to end the book with a letter to her students. But as she wrote, she realized that instead of "leaving a legacy, a queer map of a 60-year-old trans woman" she wanted readers to "laugh occasionally" and "have faith in humanity." She wanted to encourage readers not to give in to despair, especially with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the myriad anti-LGBTQ laws being passed in GOP-controlled states in recent years.

The LGBTQ+ community has been marginalized in the past, Billings acknowledged, but "our gift is survival. The book is about survival however you survive, however you end up, however chaotic or broken or how many piece there are of you that just allows more light to shine through. The takeaway for all of us—not just in the book but the human experience in general—is that all this stuff that is happening to us is happening so that we fly higher."



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Actor/model David Pevsner challenges age and body stereotypes in recent book

BY MATT SIMONETTE

When writing his recent book—*Damn Shame: Desire, Defiance and Show Tunes*—actor/model/filmmaker David Pevsner noticed three themes coming to the fore: body shame, sexuality and ageism.

“All three of those are very polarizing subjects, and they are things people don’t want to talk about,” said Pevsner.

But body image is a central through-line in Pevsner’s story. His autobiography details everything from growing up in Skokie through his work

that that’s just not true,” he explained.

Now based in Los Angeles, Pevsner has numerous film, television and stage credits, among them appearances on *Modern Family*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, *NYPD Blue* and the 2012 Chicago-based film *Scrooge & Marley*, in which he was the lead. (*Scrooge & Marley* was executive-produced by *Windy City Times* owner Tracy Baim.)

In *Damn Shame*, Pevsner recounts a significant moment leading to his frustration with body-shaming. He had grown a beard in the early ‘90s—an era when many gay men were hyper-fetishizing hairless faces and chests—before ap-



Left: David Pevsner. Right: Cover of *Damn Shame: A Memoir of Desire, Defiance, and Show Tunes*.

Courtesy of Pevsner

on stage and his eventual decisions to publish “nudies”—a label he cribbed from *Valley of the Dolls*—of himself that have been online staples for several years.

Those subjects “became the trajectory for me to explore what it is that you read about in the book,” Pevsner explained. “It’s been a never-ending journey for me to come to terms with this body-shaming [and] my sexuality, with feeling comfortable about nudity, with being less judgmental about myself and comparing myself to other people.”

Once the three themes of *Damn Shame* became apparent to Pevsner, he resolved to be more kind to himself.

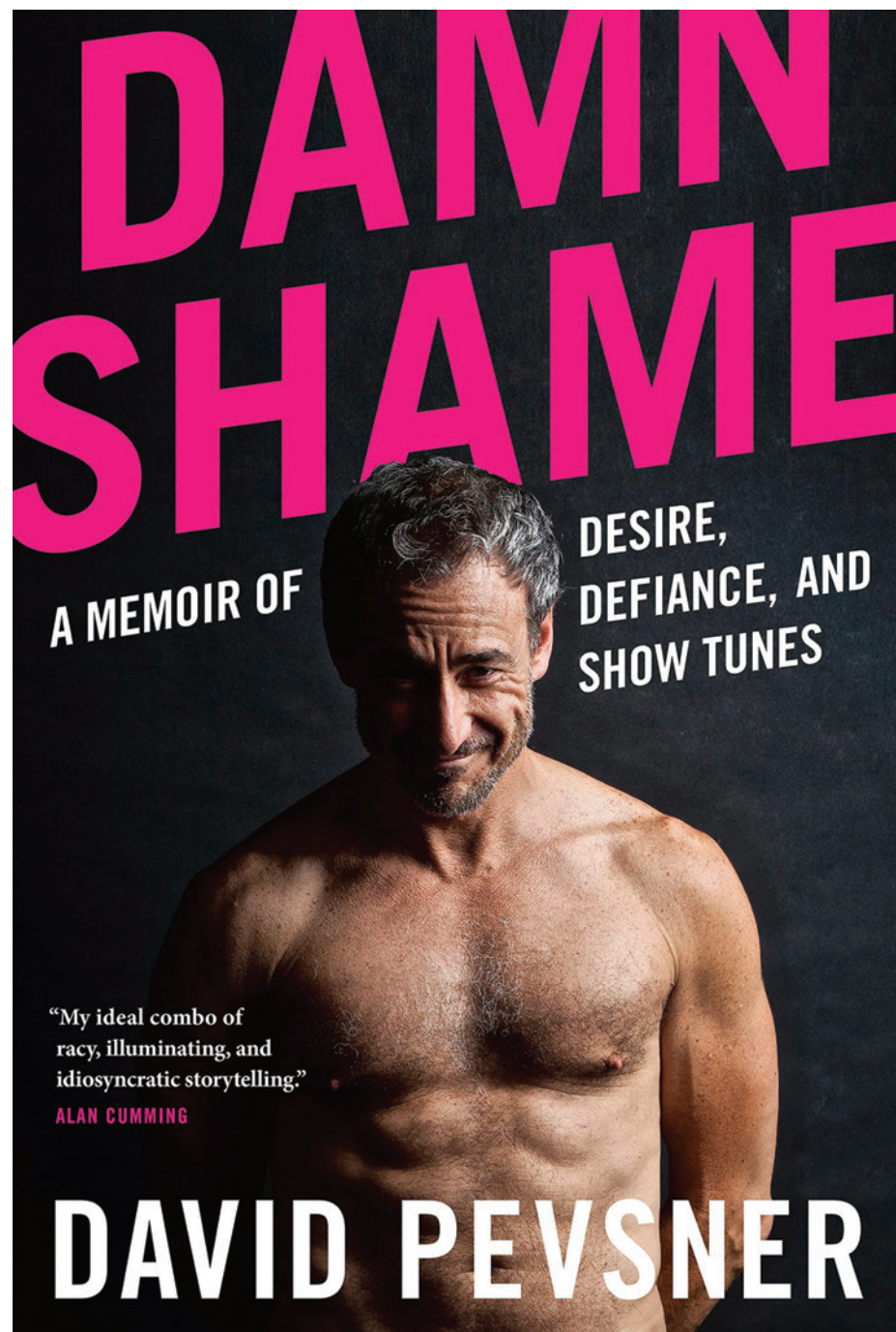
“It used to be that I had to be built and I had to be ripped, because that’s the only thing people want to see, and as I’ve gotten older, I realize

pearing in a revival of *Fiddler on the Roof* headlined by Topol. When Pevsner went out to bar during the show’s run, another customer made a “vomiting” gesture upon seeing Pevsner with the beard.

“When you show up as you are—with your face or your body—there’s kind of nothing that you can do to change that,” he said. “No matter what I had done to [improve] my body, the beard was something that I couldn’t change in the moment and it was something that people had a strong reaction to, and it usually wasn’t very positive.”

Pevsner now refuses to define himself by others’ expectations.

“People want to see all kinds of bodies and all ages,” he said. “Not everybody—there are a lot of guys who will look at a 60-year-old guy like me naked in a photo and think, ‘Ew, put it away.’



“My ideal combo of racy, illuminating, and idiosyncratic storytelling.”

ALAN CUMMING

DAVID PEVSNER

But there’s other guys who are like, ‘Oh, Daddy.’ I’ve become, ‘This is who I am. This is what I’m putting forth. I know it won’t please everybody, but I know it will please some people.’

Pevsner had long been posing for erotic photos over the years, but his pictures began to develop a following thanks to Tumblr, which, under its previous ownership, was widely utilized by various adult communities. Recently, he has been starring in and producing erotica for his OnlyFans page.

“During COVID, when I was mostly on my own, I tried to think of creative ways that I could present myself sexually,” he said. “With the photos I take, and the videos that I shoot, we try to put them on the creative end as well as erotic and XXX, and wherever it goes. There’s a lot of time and editing that goes into it. With the photos, I

try to find a story to tell—sometimes it’s with a series of photos and sometimes it’s with a single photo, and I will write all kinds of erotic stories, or whatever filth I can come up with in my head. I love that I have a pretty filthy brain, and that I finally chose to express it.”

Pevsner said he’s heard from a diverse group of readers after publishing *Damn Shame*, and hopes even more audiences besides gay men will find inspiration and comfort from his story.

“I think I’ve done my best to make this all very relatable and very universal, and hopefully make people feel a little kinder to themselves—to be less judgmental about their fantasies and to be less judgmental about where they are in that moment, to love themselves a little bit more,” he said.

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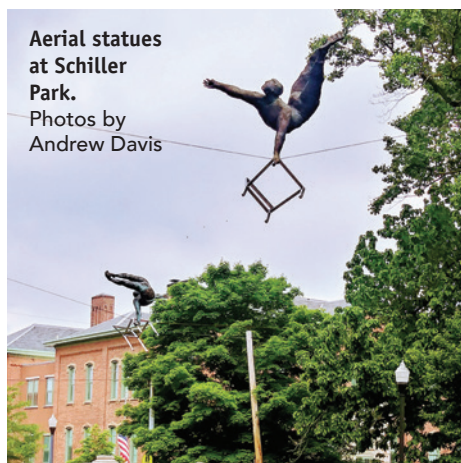
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Columbus, Ohio

A tantalizing mix of the old and the new



Aerial stunts at Schiller Park.

Photos by Andrew Davis



Items at Samson for Men.



Charmy's Persian Taste co-owner Rezi Haghiri (who runs it with wife Sherry Bayegan).

BY ANDREW DAVIS

I have had the good fortune to visit Columbus, Ohio, several times—and there's a lot more to the 14th-most populous city in the country than The Ohio State University (and, yes, be sure to include “the”).

In essence, it's a case of “the more things change, the more things stay the same”—and by the latter, I mean that the levels of quality and fun have been unchanged for the decade (and more) that I've explored the city.

To be sure, there's a lot of change that constantly occurs here, and that's to be expected in a place where the population is exploding (with some residents moving from Chicago). But Columbus is just a five-and-a-half-hour drive (or 50-minute plane ride) away from the Windy City—and a world of wonders awaits.

Luxury at LeVeque

Hotel LeVeque (50 W. Broad St.; <https://www.hotellevequecolumbus.com/>) is a 149-room boutique hotel in downtown Columbus.

Since 1927, the historic LeVeque Tower has been a shining star lighting up the skyline, and the hotel maintains that astronomical connection in several ways—including having astrolabes and machines in rooms that cast astral projections.

Patrons might feel like stars themselves (the celebrity kind, of course) as the hotel attends to every whim. (When the fitness center ran out of sanitizer, it was replaced quickly.) In addition, there's the restaurant Keep, which serves breakfast and dinner (the latter including a lovely buckeye truffle for dessert).

Food and drink

Chicago may have an impressive culinary scene, but Columbus can certainly boast of many high points in the areas of food and drink.

A good starting point is the acclaimed and relatively new **Chapman's Eat Market** (739 S. 3rd St.; <https://www.eatchapmans.com/>). The joint was certainly jumpin' on the night I went

with a dining companion—and it's no surprise. The dishes are certainly enticing, especially the General Tso's cauliflower and the com tom (lemongrass pork shoulder over broken rice, chile cucumbers and pickled carrots). The cocktails (such as the Ohhh, What's That?, a concoction of gin, lavender, purple yam, citrus blend, aquafaba and soda) are equally intriguing.

In Columbus' popular Short North area—which has undergone changes of its own—one stalwart business is **Northstar Cafe** (951 N. High St., among other locations; <https://www.thenorthstarcafe.com/>). Famed for its breakfast items that range from mushroom frittatas to the ham-and-cheese scone to the Everyday Egg Sandwich, there's something delectable for everyone.

Charmy's Persian Taste (inside the Hills Market, at 95 N. Grant Ave.; <https://www.charmyspersiantaste.com/>) offers delightful dishes such as mirza ghasemi—grilled eggplant, egg, tomato and garlic, served with traditional Persian bread. Another fascinating aspect involves co-owners Rezi Haghiri and wife Sherry Bayegan, who came to the United States seeking asylum from their native Iran. (Haghiri told Windy City Times she's been to Chicago once—in 2014 to gain said asylum.)

Brassica (680 N. High St.; <https://brassicas.com/locations/short-north/>) is another Middle Eastern spot (although arguably of the fast-food variety), and it's undeniably popular, as the line to order food is often out the door. (It's owned by the same people who run Northstar, btw.) Pita bowls and salads are assembled in a Chipotle-like atmosphere, with ingredients like falafel, chicken, brisket and vegetable. Grab a tahini chocolate-chip cookie and a minty pink lemonade to make a great meal.

And just down the street from that restaurant is the world-famous **Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams** (714 N. High St.; <https://jenis.com/>). Chicagoans certainly know of Jeni's, which originated in Columbus (like White Castle, believe it or not), as well as its vast catalog of innovative flavors that include Powdered Jelly Donut, Pineapple Upside Down Cake and Goat Cheese with Red Cherries,

among many others.

Pistachia Vera (531 S. 3rd St.; <https://www.pistaciavera.com/>) is a charming and enduring spot in the city's German Village area. People can order quiches and sandwiches—but the place is best known for its decadent pastries and sweet treats such as macarons (not to be confused with macaroons). The next time I stop here, I'll have to get the cocoa buttermilk cake. (Note: Patrons can dine here, but only outside because of self-imposed COVID-19 restrictions.)

The North Market (59 Spruce St.; <https://northmarket.org/>) is a public market made of Ohio's best independent merchants, farmers and makers. From the vegan soul-food spot Willow-beez Soulveg to Flavors of India to the American Nut Co. (where I discovered addictive lemon-creme almonds), there's something for all.

Last, but certainly not least, on the culinary trail is the **Budd Dairy Food Hall** (1086 N. 4th St.; <https://budddairyfoodhall.com/>). The huge area (which, thankfully, has a large parking lot) houses such restaurants as Borgata Pizza, Pokebop, Cousins Maine Lobster and (my fave name) Cluck Norris—which brags about having “ass-kickin' chicken.” However, there's more than just food: People can relax on the rooftop, play games such as Skee-Ball and take part in events such as “The Big Bad Music Trivia Show with Mark Dantzer.”

Oh, but wait: There's more. For those whose interests gravitate toward alcohol-related pursuits, the city has the **Columbus Ale and Distillery trails**.

Dozens of breweries make up the Ale Trail, and participants can pick up passports to get stamped at each stop—with a limited-edition T-shirt going to those who visit all 34 before May 1, 2023. Just a few of the participating businesses include Land-Grant Brewing Company, Endeavor Brewing & Spirits, and the new spot Combustion Brewery Clintonville (which opens in June).

As for the Columbus Distillery Trail, people can visit spots such as Middle West Spirits, Watershed Distillery and Noble Cut Distillery, among others.

Noble Cut Distillery (750 Cross Pointe Rd.;

<https://noblecutdistillery.com/>), which I had the pleasure of visiting, specializes in flavored limoncello (80 proof), flavored whiskeys (liked salted caramel) and vodka. All of the items I tasted were quite smooth—and, as a bonus for LGBTQ+ people, the distillery sports the Progressive Pride flag, a nod to founder Tony Guilfooy's aunt. (CEO Shawn O'Reilly was an extremely knowledgeable and genial host.)

A little shopping

No excursion is complete without at least a little shopping. Thankfully, Columbus offers a wide variety of shops—including many that are LGBTQ+-owned.

Two such shops are side by side in the Short North Arts District. **Samson's Men's Emporium** (772 N. High St.; <https://samsonmensemporium.com/>), run by the always smiling Travis Samson, feels like an issue of Esquire magazine that's come to life. It offers timeless and refined men's items that include leather, jewelry, shaving products, outerwear and even barware. **Torso Menswear** (772 N. High St.; <https://torsomenswear.com/>) offers items that whimsical, in-your-face fun and/or even naughty. Think Andrew Christian underwear, LGBTQ+-themed T-shirts and bars of soap that read “Gay Soap.”

One might not think of purchasing books while in Columbus—but I'm here to advise you to check out at least two spots. **The Book Loft of German Village** (631 S. 3rd St.; <https://www.bookloft.com/>) is a labyrinthine business that you could easily visit for an entire afternoon—in fact, it's one of the country's largest independent bookstores (with 32 rooms of bargain books, and they're all new). The books cover almost every conceivable genre, including manga.

And then there's **Two Dollar Radio** (1124 Parsons Ave.; <https://twodollarradio.com/>), which is substantially smaller than The Book Loft but is just as compelling. Owner Eric Obenauf would be the first to admit that the books in his store/vegan cafe aren't for everyone—but if you're in the market for literary jewels by underground writers, this is your spot. Two Dollar is an enticing book-

Hotel LeVeque.
Publicity photo



ness that's as laid-back as Obenauf.

For those who are into vintage and even campy items, **Flower Child** (now at 233 E. 5th Ave.; <http://flowerchildvintage.com/>) is a must-visit shop. Actually, "shop" might give short shrift to this place, which has items spread over more than 30,000 square feet. Around every corner is more great vintage, hand-selected and displayed as it would have been when originally sold. Offering clothes, jewelry, furniture, music, candy and even skin mags that span decades (1930s to the 1980s), Flower Child is a cool time-traveling experience. (By the way, there's a felt-and-vinyl chair that I came so close to purchasing. To the purchaser: Treat it well.)

Otherworldly art

One of the most beguiling sites I visited in Columbus is far removed from downtown. **Otherworld** (5819 Chantry Dr.; <https://otherworldohio.com/>) is an immersive art experience that occupies 30,000 square feet in a strip mall—and will probably be very popular on Halloween.

That's because Otherworld bears a striking resemblance to various horror movies (including Resident Evil) as well as the Upside Down in the Netflix series Stranger Things. Then again, other aspects will take you to an electronic forest where you can almost see fairies hiding behind branches. More than 40 creatives with backgrounds in programming, metalworking, animation, sculpting, digital fabrication, creative writing and other mediums have worked to put together bioluminescent dreamscapes. "Just be sure to touch everything," a couple told a friend and myself. You should—your experience will definitely be enhanced.

Franklinton

One of the most intriguing neighborhoods in Columbus is Franklinton—and to stay it's been transformed is an understatement.

Considered one of the more undesirable places to live/visit in the city, the area's change happened in large part because of the efforts of former Mayor Michael B. Coleman (who ran the city from 1999 to 2016). A stone's throw from

downtown, some of the highlights include the science museum COSI; businesses just as plant shop Jewel Weed and Body Beautiful (where one can take intimate portraits); and the Franklinton Arts District.

Another interesting site is the **National Veterans Memorial and Museum** (300 W. Broad St.; <https://nationalvmm.org/>), which can be an emotional visit for many. Among the displays is the "The Twenty-Year Exhibition," which shares the diverse experiences of Veterans who served during the Global War on Terror. Moving through the exhibits program, "Veterans Among Us," there are 14 thematic alcoves highlighting key themes and moments in veterans' journeys and incorporates personal stories. There's also a Remembrance Gallery on the mezzanine level that is a space for reflection and recollection of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. (Unfortunately, there's no part of the museum devoted to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"—yet.)

Park it

Lastly, after ALL that, relax at a park. **Schiller Park** is a 23-acre municipal park in German Village—and it is the second oldest such spot in the city, after Goodale Park. While watching all the wildlife (mainly squirrels, ducks and Canada geese), take a gander (get it?) at the spectacular statues, aerial and otherwise, on loan by Polish artist Jerzy Kedziora.

Another cool spot to visit is **John W. Galbreath Bicentennial Park**, which features, among other things, a performing-arts stage and the Scioto Mile Fountain. While there, consider seeing Columbus another way—by kayak or paddleboard, courtesy of **Windrose Outdoor** (<https://windroseoutdoor.com/>).

Bicentennial Park is one of two dozen stops on the Columbus Outdoor Trails Pass. Explore beautiful spots like Indian Run Falls Park's Emerald Trail and Wolfe Park's Alum Creek Trail.

As you can hopefully see, Columbus has so many options, inside and outdoors. Special thanks go to Weirick Communications and Experience Columbus for arranging this visit.

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Scan to see Dimitri's story.

Descanso is Palm Springs newest gay resort

The luxury property is the first to go gay in the city in more than a decade

BY DAVID TAFFET | DALLAS VOICE
COURTESY NATIONAL LGBT MEDIA ASSOCIATION

Descanso is the first resort for gay men to open in Palm Springs in more than 10 years, and “The response has been beyond expectations,” said general manager Kent Taylor. Weekends are already booked through June, although some weeknights are still available during Pride month.

Taylor said the trend among the areas gay resorts in recent years has been to go straight, and his property was one of the first to do so. Formerly called East Canyon, it lasted as a straight resort for about four years.

Now, however, the property has been completely renovated and has re-opened with amenities “to create a special men’s experience,” Taylor said. Currently the resort features 14 rooms, but two more will come online once they’ve been refurbished to Descanso standards.

Rooms feature king-size beds. There is a heated salt water pool with spa. For relief from the heat, an outdoor misting system moderates the temperature. Breakfast and “stay and splash poolside lunch” are included with the room rates.

A cantina offers complimentary snacks and beverages. For dinner, plenty of restaurants are within walking distance.

Many guests arrive by car, and those vehicles can remain parked throughout their stay in the off-street overnight parking the resort provides.

For those who prefer to mix their pool time with sightseeing, there’s plenty to see and do in Palm Springs, and the resort lies just two blocks from the beginning of the city’s commercial area.

First on the list for anyone from the flatlands of Texas has to be the aerial tramway. Get a fantastic view of the Coachella Valley from 8,500 feet high in the sky. When you reach the top, you can enjoy the trails and hiking as well as a restaurant, bar and cafeteria.

For zoo lovers, Taylor said, the 1,200-acre Living Desert is ranked among the top 10 in the U.S. Visiting in summer when the temperature in Palm Springs often soars over 100 during the day? Visit the Living Desert for a night walk for a nocturnal zoo experience.

Palm Springs is known for its mid-century modern architecture and its variety of stores that feature furniture from that period. To tour the neighborhoods, Taylor said the best way is by bike, which Descanso offers complimentary to its guests.

Palm Springs is known as a celebrity hangout and hideaway. Stars have lived in this desert resort and others have been frequent visitors since the 1920s. Sonny Bono served as the city’s mayor. To honor them, The Palm Springs Walk of Stars features blocks of sidewalk stars including one for Dallas favorite Del Shores (Sordid Lives) at 538 N. Palm Canyon Drive.

Joshua Tree National Park is an hour drive from

Palm Springs. This portion of the Mojave Desert ecosystem features the spiky Joshua trees, boulders and a surprising variety of wildlife in this desert habitat.

If you’re looking for museums, Palm Springs has one of the country’s top air and space museums as well as an art museum that’s quite good.

Palm Springs recently saw the 2020 version of its biggest gay event, The White Party, the granddaddy of circuit parties. Palm Springs’ Pride weekend is held during cooler weather; this year it’s scheduled for Nov. 3-6. Leather Pride Weekend is Oct. 27-30, and Western Exposure’s Dadfest celebrates daddies on July 4. Descanso recommends the all-day pool party as the best way to enjoy

the event.

Next year’s Palm Springs International Film Festival takes place Jan. 4-15. It is one of the largest in North America, attracting 135,000 people.

Many Descanso guests just remain on property during their stay, enjoying the resort experience and walking or Ubering to nearby restaurants for dinner, Taylor said. On its website, staff’s picks of favorite restaurants include something for everyone.

Fisherman’s Market, located downtown, is recommended as “Definitely a great place for fish and chips, grilled seafood.” In the desert.

Al Dente and Il Corso are staff picks for Italian food. Jake’s is an American bistro. Johannes is a “local favorite” for modern European cuisine from an Austrian-born chef.

The Sandwich Spot offers “fun concept sandwiches. Not your standard sub shop.”

A number of Mexican offerings include La Bonita’s, Rio Azul Mexican Bar & Grill, home to Palm Springs original drag brunch, and La Tablita in neighboring Cathedral City, which is listed as “absolutely a local favorite.”



The pool at Descanso.
Courtesy of National LGBT Media Association



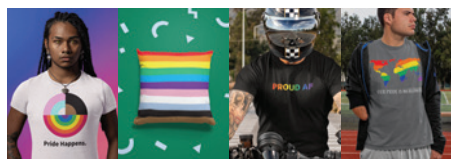
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TRAVEL

Rolling into TEXAS

Palestine—just a hop, skip and a jump from Dallas—offers a blue dot of small-town charm

BY JOEY AMATO



Above: Joey Amato and the goats of Oh My Goat. Left: A dogwood blossom, as could be found at Davey Dogwood Park. Right: The Redlands Hotel. Courtesy of Amato



I had a trip to Texas planned prior to the introduction of the anti-transgender bills in state Congress. I considered cancelling the trip completely, however I realized that there are thousands of LGBTQ people living in the state who would be negatively affected by boycotts and travel cancellations, so I decided to forge ahead. Texas is a red state with multiple blue dots including Austin, Houston, Dallas, and others.

I started my road trip in Dallas, a place I have visited multiple times before for business. Dallas is a fun city with a thriving LGBTQ culture. The city's nightlife is centered around the Oak Lawn neighborhood and its main thoroughfare Cedar Springs Road. Dozens of LGBTQ-owned shops, restaurants, salons, and bars line the street giving locals and tourists a variety of options to choose from.

Don't party too hard because we are about to hit the road and venture to **Palestine, Texas**, a town located about 2 hours away. Upon arrival, it doesn't seem like much, but as you explore the East Texas town you begin to notice its charm and appeal. Many coupled LGBTQ families are relocating from Dallas—or buying second homes here—because of its proximity to lakes and natural wonders.

One such park is **Davey Dogwood Park**. The 254-acre park is open year-round and offers eight miles of hiking trails. I was a bit early to see the bloom of the beautiful dogwood trees, but I heard it is quite a remarkable sight. I was visiting during the Texas Dogwood Trails Celebration and Davey Dogwood Park was the centerpiece for one of the key components of the festival, the Fairy Garden Trails. Dozens of locals recreate miniature fairy lands throughout the park for guests to view. I can honestly say this is the first time I've ever seen such a display.

After your morning hike, head to **Shep's Bar-B-Q** (1013 E. Palestine Ave; <https://www.facebook.com/Sheps-Bar-B-Q-Catering-121415241202296/>), a favorite among the Palestine locals. The family-owned business has created quite a name in the town, so expect a long line when you arrive to the restaurant. It doesn't look like much from the outside, but once you taste the food, you'll realize why it has become so popular.

Spend the night at the historic **Redlands Hotel** (400 N. Queen St.; <https://theredlandshotel.com/>), located in the heart of Palestine. The property was built in 1914 and features 20 unique suites. I stayed in a fabulous corner suite which reminded me of boutique hotels in South Beach. The modern room featured white linens with pops of color. There is also an art gallery located in the lobby which features works from East Texas artists including Stacy Campbell and Cecilia Bramhall. I acquired works from both of those artists during my stay.

After breakfast head to **Oxbow Bakery** (215 E. Crawford St.; <http://www.oxbowpies.com/>) for a slice of their world-famous pies. It's never too early for pie, especially when they have been voted one of the 'South's Best Pies' by Southern Living Magazine.

Walk off your pie during a visit to the **East Texas Arboretum & Botanical Society** (1601 Paterson Rd. Athens, Texas; [https://www.easttexas-](https://www.easttexas-arboretum.org/)

[arboretum.org/](https://www.easttexas-arboretum.org/)), about a 20-minute drive from Palestine. Enjoy two miles of hiking trails, live (enclosed) honeybees and the historic Wofford House Museum, the oldest home in Henderson County, built in 1850. The arboretum is dedicated to the preservation of the natural environment and the creation of formal and informal plant collections.

Not too far away is **Oh My Goat** (214 ACR 469; <https://www.ohmygoatyoga.com/>), a family-owned farm offering goat yoga. I had been anxiously awaiting this the entire trip as I had never done goat yoga before. I was expecting two, maybe three goats interacting with me as I performed yoga poses, but as we settled on our mats, the owners opened the gates, a herd of goats swarmed the pen. They were so cute and curious, each with a unique personality. The baby goats were my favorite of course. They were so inquisitive and friendly. At one point, I had four goats laying on my mat. It made it difficult to focus on my yoga form, but I didn't care. Oh My Goat also features a cute shop where people can purchase t-shirts to remember this memorable experience.

Head back to the Redlands Hotel for a quick wardrobe change before dinner. You can visit any one of numerous restaurants located throughout the town, or if you are tired from playing with the goats, try the hotel's restaurant, **Queen St Grille** (<https://queenstgrille.com/>). The causal fine dining restaurant has been voted one of the best in the city and features a variety of southern favorites at a moderate price point. Most of the entrees are under \$30 so feel free to indulge!

Palestine is also famous for its railroad history. Train enthusiasts will love taking a ride on the **Texas State Railroad** (789 Park Road 70; <https://texasstaterailroad.net/>). Book your adventure well in advance because this experience is typically sold out during the spring when the dogwood trees are in full bloom.

Don't expect to see many rainbow flags in this part of Texas as it is quite conservative. However, the people are friendly and welcoming, so if you like exploring small towns, then a weekend visit to Palestine should be on your radar.

Enjoy the journey!



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This event is made possible thanks to the support of the Chicago History Museum, the OUT at CHM advisory committee, AIDS Foundation Chicago, Chicago Dancers United/Dance for Life, Howard Brown Health, Center on Halsted, Giordano Dance Chicago, and Chicago Dance History Project.

TRAVEL

Here comes the sun

Chicago theater blooms outside and out of town

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Chicago Shakespeare Theater is keeping its show docked at its Navy Pier facility and Oak Brook's First Folio Theatre is taking the summer off before re-commencing in the fall, but playgoers eager to swap the urban concrete for wide-open greenery can still find opportunities for scenic road/Metra excursions, fresh-air picnics and entertainment under starry skies.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Midsommer Flight, July 15-Aug. 21. Lovers and pixies and clowns romp Shakespeare's Athenian forests in Chicago parks on the North, South and West sides this summer. Details: MidsommerFlight.com

The Winter's Tale, Oak Park Festival Theatre at Austin Gardens in Oak Park, July 16-Aug. 20. A tale begun in winter needs a happy ending in a summery setting (after a BEAR chase) and Shakespeare provides us both. Details: OakParkFestival.com

Midsummer Mayhem: Mad World, Shakespeare's Motley Crew, July 30-Aug. 28. The merry rag-tag rascals of Ravenswood's Independence and Winnemac Parks present their annual show-

case, this year featuring favorite looney scenes from Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Details: SMCplays.com

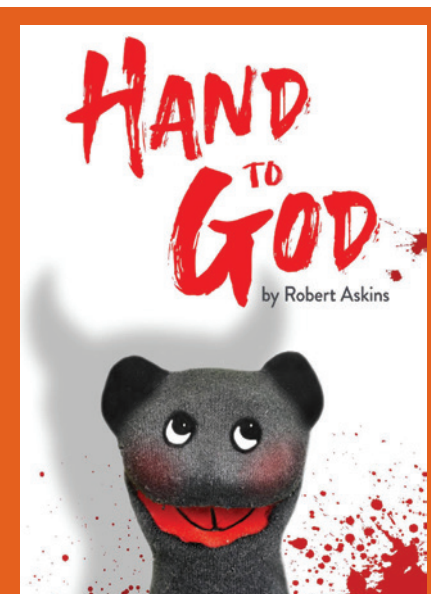
Pearl's Rollin With the Blues, Writers Theatre in Glencoe, June 23-July 24. Whenever you see the names of diva Felicia P. Fields and director Ron OJ Parsons on the same playbill, good times and splendiferous music are guaranteed. Details: WritersTheatre.org

Dear Jack, Dear Louise, Northlight Theatre in Skokie, July 7-Aug. 7. What could be more romantic than a pair of lonely "pen-pals"—one, a doctor in the army and the other, an aspiring actress in New York City—conducting pre-Facebook trysts during World War II? Details: Northlight.org

Zorro: The Musical, Music Theater Works, Aug. 11-21. Spiderman, Superman and the Scarlet Pimpernel all have their own musicals, so why has it taken so long for someone to write some swashbuckling songs for this Latino-American masked crusader? Details: MusicTheaterWorks.com



Home, Fleetwood-Jourdain Theatre at the Noyes Arts Center in Evanston, June 5-19. Samm-Art Williams' 1978 play (presented by Tim Rhoze as an old-fashioned "tent show") recounts the re-assimilation struggles of a Black draft-evader in a society still reeling from the recent wars at home and abroad. Details: FJtheatre.com. Photo by Kara Roseborough



Hand to God, Paramount Theatre Productions at the Copley Theatre in Aurora, June 1-July 10. Richard Askins' searing criticism of religious dogma and teenage angst carried to extremes does for fuzzy sock-puppets what Stephen King did for clowns. Details: ParamountAurora.com. Below: Hand to God's Jessica (Felicia Oduh). Photo by Amy Nelson



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Silk Road Rising co-founders and spouses Jamil Khoury (left) and Malik Gillani. Photo courtesy of Silk Road Rising

THEATER

The road back

Silk Road co-founders talk about journey from medical setback

BY ANDREW PIRROTTA

Malik Gillani co-founded Silk Road Rising—a theater company focused on sharing the life stories of the overlooked and underrepresented people living along the Silk Road in Asia and the Middle East—with his husband, Jamil Khoury, almost 20 years ago.

Two years ago, Gillani suffered a debilitating stroke that left him with aphasia, the loss of ability to express speech. This traumatic event has forced him to spend these last two years diligently working to regain crucial functions through the help of speech therapists as well Khoury and his own unshakable spirit of positivity.

Windy City Times spoke with Gilliani and Khoury.

Windy City Times: With aphasia being in the news with such a big name as Bruce Willis having the disease, it seems that there is a lot of misinformation regarding the forms this disease takes. Can you speak about what the main thing you believe people should know about aphasia?

Malik Gillani: Reading, writing and talking.

Jamil Khoury: It is important to note that there are different types of aphasia.

Most aphasias tend to be a result of a stroke, traumatic brain injury, or an aneurysm. ... Depending on how the language center is affected by the stroke, it can manifest in different ways. The form of aphasia Malik has is called Broca's

aphasia. [It's a] non-fluent aphasia, so he has all of his comprehension. He understands everything. His cognitive abilities and memories were not impaired. The problem is finding the words.

He also has a condition called apraxia, which is a speech disorder. Apraxia is making the sounds that produce the words. [With] Bruce Willis, everyone is grateful that he has come forward with his story, because so few people know about aphasia; we did not know the word prior to Malik's stroke.

We believe [Willis] has a condition called primary progressive aphasia, which is not stroke-induced. Primary Progressive aphasia is more akin to Alzheimer's or dementia. ... His family has not yet confirmed that, so we are just speculating. With primary progressive aphasia, it is a downward trajectory, while Malik's form of aphasia you can work to restore those abilities.

WCT: How has this [condition] influenced the art you make and the way you make it?

JK: Malik has spent a good many years—18 years prior to the stroke—fighting to give people a voice and create space for voices that weren't being heard; now, he is without a voice. He has quite literally lost his voice. He is working to recover language, and to recover his voice. So we see a parallel between the struggles that Silk Road Rising has tried to address—which has to do with people who have been excluded from the American story—and now the challenges that people with aphasia face to be understood.

Turn to page 26



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BOOKS

'The Meaning of Pride'

Artist Sam Kirk illustrates new book

BY ANDREW DAVIS

In the children's book *The Meaning of Pride*, Rosiee Thor pens an ode to LGBTQ+ culture and identity by celebrating the beauty, significance and many dimensions of the concept of Pride—and showing that the word can mean many different things to people.

Award-winning artist Sam Kirk—a biracial, queer woman born and raised in Chicago—played a crucial part in the book by providing the vibrant illustrations of various icons. She also had a hand in deciding who would be included in *The Meaning of Pride*.

Recently, Kirk talked with *Windy City Times* about the book, changes within herself—and, of course, pride.

Windy City Times: This is such a cool book. Even though it's primarily geared toward kids, it would seem that adults could benefit from reading this, too.

Sam Kirk: Yeah, I think it's definitely a book for all ages, as it includes history. Also, I'd say with coming out and exploring identity—the ways we go about doing those things can happen

at all ages. I speak from experience. [Laughs]

WCT: I didn't know all of the figures in this book, although I recognized about 95 percent of them. If I'm with an LGBTQ+ media outlet and didn't know all of them, I think most others could learn from the book. And I appreciated there are biographies of those people at the end of the book.

SK: Yeah, I really appreciated that, too. And I'm sure you recognized some Chicago people... [Laughs]

WCT: Like Shea Coulee...

SK: Yes! There are Shea Coulee, Fawzia Mirza, Mercedes [Santos] and Theresa [Volpe]... We surprised [Mercedes and Theresa] and showed them the book. They had no idea they were in the book. They were absolutely shocked! [Laughs] Their youngest son actually took the book to school the next day to share with his classmates and it was read out loud at the library.

WCT: That's really sweet. Tell me how the collaboration came about with Rosiee.

SK: Sure. In 2019, the team at [HarperCollins imprint] Versify reached out to find out if I was even interested in illustrating a children's book. Until this point, I had illustrated covers and done

some things for magazines, but I had never done a cover-to-cover piece. And I usually shy away from that because the idea of drawing the same character over and over never really [appealed] to me. But since this involved so many different figures and characters and because the focus was on Pride, I said, "Yes, absolutely."

I think even if it was the same character, I would've been interested just because of the opportunity to create a children's book. I came out in the late '90s as a teenager. I wonder how much my life would change if I had a book like this back then. It's really meaningful to do this.

WCT: Was there a figure that was harder to draw than the others?

SK: It's always harder to draw actual people because you have to capture their likenesses. Also, I want to make sure I capture that person's energy because that's what brings it to life. I spent quite a bit of time researching and looking at video clips of the different individuals to see how they expressed themselves.

With the other images, I could play with the body language differently. It's easier to do when it's an interpretation versus an actual person.

WCT: Some of the groupings of people are quite interesting. For example, Frida Kahlo is paired with Laverne Cox. How did that one come about?

SK: The book was definitely a collaboration, and I definitely received suggestions about who they wanted to include. The way that went about is that I asked if I could give feedback about the notes, and they said, "Yes." I went through the



Artist Sam Kirk.
Photo by Tamara Hijazi

script and illustration suggestions—and actually replaced quite a few people and suggested new people.

There are quite a few POC individuals who were not included in the initial notes. That was part of my participation to make sure representation across many cultures was included. I was focused on who was represented in the book and where they showed up.

BOOKS

Gayla Turner talks about uncovering her grandmother's secret queer identity

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

In Gayla Turner's debut book, *Don't You Dare: Uncovering Lost Love*, she reveals her Grandmother Ruby's (1896-1977) century-old secret queer identity that she hid from the wider world. This revelation became clear to Turner when she saw Ruby and another woman named Ella (who was dressed as the groom) in a June 8, 1915 wedding photo.

"When I found my grandmother's photos, I knew they were important to me," said Turner when asked why she decided to tell her grandmother's story. "However, it was not until I started putting the pieces together that I realized how important the pictures and story were to our LGBTQ+ history. Initially, the story was only going to be about my Grandma Ruby. However, as I researched her past, a bigger story started

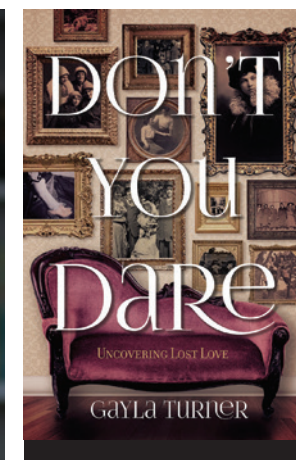
forming that needed to be told. Her photos and captions tell a story. They are funny, witty, beautiful, and loving—unlike the typical stoic photos taken back then. The pictures were not just one event; instead, they depicted a series of events that involved a substantial group of people.

"I often think about how difficult it must have been for them. Even keeping the photos was very dangerous. If anyone outside the circle of friends found out how deep their relationships really were, everything would change. They could be forced to marry a man their parents selected, run out of town, put into a mental institution or physically attacked."

The book moves between Turner's discovery of those photos and the story they told alongside her research process that brought her to rural Amherst, Wisconsin, where her grandmother grew



Left: Author Gayla Turner. Right: Cover of Turner's book, *Don't You Dare*.
Turner photo by Paco Silva



up.

While researching, Turner approached it much like she would do a large work project. Turner is a bank examiner by day and that entails evaluating and inquiring about financial information to make sure banks comply with the rules.

Turner's true passions lie in the creative world and that includes playing guitar and piano. She got a music degree in college and later wrote and played music in local Los Angeles bands in the

early '80s. When Turner could not afford to pay the rent with music gigs alone she got a job at a credit union and that has led to a 30 year career in the banking world. Turner said a part of her wished she had stuck it out in the music world. Writing this book has enabled Turner to use both her creative and analytical skills at the same time.

At first Turner looked online but she quickly realized that this would be a more difficult process

WCT: There are so many people to choose from to include in this book. For example, in the music section, there could've been Sylvester or George Michael.

SK: So, for the music portion, I actually did change quite a [few of the people]. There were Elton John, Sam Smith and several other folks, but Ricky Martin and Janelle Monae were not originally included. So when I was looking at that portion, I was thinking, "Who else can we include to represent different ethnicities?" I also wanted to make sure different generations were represented.

Also, we had [original Star Wars actor] Billy Dee Williams in the book—but then took him out because, in my research, I discovered several statements from him denying he was part of the LGBTQ community. [Note: In 2019, Williams told Esquire, "And you see I say 'himself' and 'herself,' because I also see myself as feminine as well as masculine." NBC News noted that he later walked back those comments, telling The Undeclared he "was talking about men getting in touch with the female side of themselves."]

But there were some really wonderful things I'm glad we caught before the book went to print, like Elliot Page transitioning.

WCT: So I have to ask: What does pride mean to you?

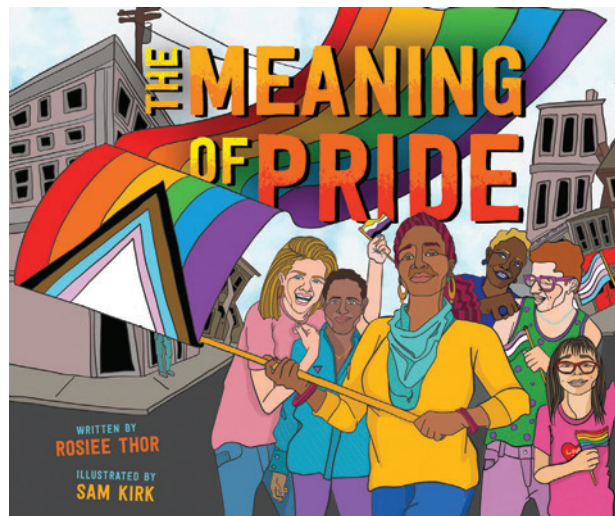
SK: Well, pride represents freedom to me—freedom to express exactly who you are and be 100-percent comfortable in your own skin. That's really the goal of my work: to create pieces that help people to feel proud of who they are. Even in

my public works and murals, I try to push [boundaries] and reflect ourselves in those pieces. That's probably my biggest challenge as an artist.

WCT: This book is geared toward kids. Of course, there are areas in this country where this book won't be allowed. What's your response to that?

SK: I don't understand how we're going to be more united and see what that will look like if we continue to have this exclusion of people. It's sad because, for a while, it felt like we were progressing and moving forward.

WCT: I've asked a variety of people this question: With the pandemic and the racial



Cover of *The Meaning of Pride*, written by Rosiee Thor and illustrated by Sam Kirk.

that required outside help. This included hiring a writing coach, joining a writing group and becoming a Wisconsin Historical Society member.

"It turned out to be a 10-year project, and I still feel like I am beginning to understand and trust the writing process," said Turner. "I traveled to Amherst a couple of times because I had a deep need to see, in person, the house where my grandmother lived and to walk the streets she had walked. Most importantly, I felt I needed to breathe the air and smell the ground where everything happened."

Although Turner is not an academically trained historian, she became passionate about LGBTQ+ history while researching for this book but what she found was there is scant information documenting that history.

"I hit many roadblocks along the way," said Turner. "The funny thing is, every time I thought I could not move forward in the story, information I did not see before would be revealed to me. I began expecting the roadblocks and always thanked Grandma Ruby for supplying me with the right hint when I needed it most."

Turner decided to combine the facts she was able to uncover via multiple resources together with her "own interpretation of events" to tell Ruby's story. She said it felt very "organic" to her to do it this way because if she only wrote about the facts the book would be too clinical.

"I have always thought of it as a love story," said Turner. "I often thought about what my grandmother and others were doing right before a photo was taken. And at times, it felt as if I was

right there with them. I want the reader to feel and/or understand what it may have been like to be queer a hundred years ago."

Among Turner's findings was a secret lesbian social club led by a local businesswoman named Cora who threw parties for her fellow queer women and their allies at her home. Women from as far as Chicago would travel by train to these gatherings. Turner writes that the locals thought these parties were held so women could strategize ways to find husbands.

"Little did they know, finding a man was not a subject of their conversations," said Turner.

Turner also discovered that the women who wore gentleman's attire like Ella would be called chums or pals in Ruby's photo captions.

In terms of the wedding photos, Turner realized that Ruby's younger brother Leroy and another man she named Wallace (since she was never able to find out his real name) were in some of the pictures. Due to what Wallace was wearing, Turner surmised Wallace must have been a farmhand for Ruby's family and was an unwitting witness along with Leroy to Ruby and Ella's wedding ceremony.

Turner believes her grandmother would be "thrilled" to see her story told if she were alive today.

"I am sure she never imagined a time when she could have legally wed the person she loved," said Turner.

Turner also gives readers a history lesson on the National Purity Party that existed when Ruby was coming of age and how there are organiza-

awakening, we've all time to self-reflect. What have you learned about yourself these past two years?

SK: Oooh—that's a good question. If you had seen me before the pandemic, my hair was very big and long. I've gone through yet another round of exploring my identity—and I didn't realize how much I was using my hair as a way of hiding. This is another new journey, and it feels good. It's such a simple thing but it allows me to be creative. And my wife is always saying, "Wear colors and some patterns." [Laughs] And I think my personal stories will start to show more in my work.



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Continued from page 22

WCT: The disabled/differently abled community has faced a lot of marginalization, as well as the LGBTQ+ community. Do you think that more involvement and inclusion from both communities would prove a powerful way to bring about change?

JK: I think [there] is an intersectional case to be made. We have always integrated queerness into many of the stories that we tell, and working with queer playwrights to grapple with issues within the community, so neurodiversity is something that affects the LGBTQ community as well.

[There are related issues regarding] visibility, cultural capital, invisibility and a certain marginalization. So much of the face of stroke recovery in this country happens to be straight and white; Malik is a Brown, immigrant, Pakistan, queer Muslim.

MG: Invisible.

JK: And now disabled.

WCT: You’ve recently partnered with Texas Tech’s STAR program. [Note: The STAR Program of Lubbock, Inc. strives to maximize communication abilities and life participation for persons and their families who are affected by aphasia and other communication challenges.] It speaks about music being an influence on recovery. Will you be incorporating music into your productions?

JK: We have created something that is very much in the early development stages, called Aphasia Arts Forum. This is part of our partner-

ship with Texas Tech. There is a pre-existing relationship between the art school and the STAR program. ... There is a role that art plays in stimulating and building new neural pathways. If the part of the brain is destroyed, that part is not coming back; the amazing thing about this organ is that the remaining parts can take on this process of building new pathways, [although] that can take years. We talk about rewiring and remodeling our brain, and there is truth to that.

We do plan to create art here [Chicago] ... and are utilizing the work we are doing with Texas Tech to lead to the creation of a work that audiences will be able to engage with. There is a lot of work being done at different universities looking at how art and the brain work together, how art is an ally to neuro-healing. ... This can be applied to cases of childhood autism or Alzheimer’s and dementia. People are looking at art as an intervention.

WCT: Before your stroke, you seemed to be involved in the back end of things. Do you have a desire to perform?

MG: Yes, [to be an] actor...

JK: Malik now has a desire to be onstage. The play is called *The Art of Aphasia* and it will be written over the next few years. Our goal is to produce it in 2026 and for Malik to perform it. So we want to give him the time to learn a lot in our collaboration with the university, and we have set that as a goal.

For more about Silk Road Rising, visit <https://www.silkroadrising.org/>.



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IMAGE CREDITS TOP TO BOTTOM: American Framing, Installation view of American Framing at Wrightwood 659, 2022, AlphaWood Exhibitions, LLC, Chicago. Photo: Michael Tropea. Installation view of Rirkrit Tiravanija: *(who's afraid of red, yellow, and green)* at Wrightwood 659, 2022, AlphaWood Exhibitions LLC, Chicago. Photo: Aleya Cydney Photography. Moga: Modern Women & Daughters in 1930s Japan, Miwa Toshiro, Playing in the Water, 65 x 57 in, Private Collection of Naomi Pollock and David Sneider, USA. We Shall Defy, Photo of Shaidul Alam by Mohammad Shahnewaz Khan.





Late photographer/leatherman Ed Negron honored with street sign

On May 30, during Memorial Day/International Mr. Leather (IML) weekend, the leather shop 64TEN honored late photographer/leatherman Ed Negron with a tribute and honorary street-naming ceremony.

The events were held at the corner of Clark Street and Devon Avenue.

A press release from 64TEN stated, "Ed Negron was such an inspiration to our 64TEN family and

the community. His countless contributions to the LGBTQ+ community and his selfless and caring attitude proved how and why he touched so many people's lives."

Among those who attended were many of Negron's friends and family members such as brother Leo Negron Rodriguez and mother Osnaida Rodriguez.

Photos by Tim Carroll



Left above: Ald. Andre Vasques presents Ed Negron's brother Leo Negron Rodriguez and mom Osnaida Rodriguez with copies of the honorary street sign. Left below: Illinois state Rep. Greg Harris presents Leo Negron Rodriguez with a decree honoring his brother Ed.



Left: Leo Negron Rodriguez and his mother, Osnaida Rodriguez, unveil the street sign in honor of Ed. Above: Monica Rodriguez and her son Nathaniel are interviewed by a documentary crew.



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International Mr. Leather
Gael Leung Chong Wo
(right) with International
Mr. Bootblack Alistair
LeatherHiraeth.
Photos by
Joseph
Stevens



More than 10,000 attend in-person IML weekend in Chicago

Memorial Day weekend is also typically when International Mr. Leather, or IML, and International Mr. Bootblack are held—and over 10,000 people attended the in-person event that took place in Chicago on May 26-30.

It was the first time IML was held in person this decade because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Congress Hotel and Convention Center once again hosted, and the May 28-29 contest events were held at a new venue: The Arie Crown Theater at McCormick Place.

Some of the many events that took place included the Leather Archives & Museum silent auction and pop-up shop; First Shine

(when bootblack stands open with female members of the bootblack community as the first customers); panel discussions about everything/everyone from kink to people of color; “ONYX Dance: Climax;” the IML Pecs and Personality Contest; the International Mr. Leather Contest; the Black and Blue Ball; and the ever-popular IML leather market.

Gael Leung Chong Wo (Mister Leather Belgium 2020-21) was crowned International Mr. Leather 2022 while Alistair LeatherHiraeth (European Bootblack 2020) was named International Mr. Bootblack 2022.

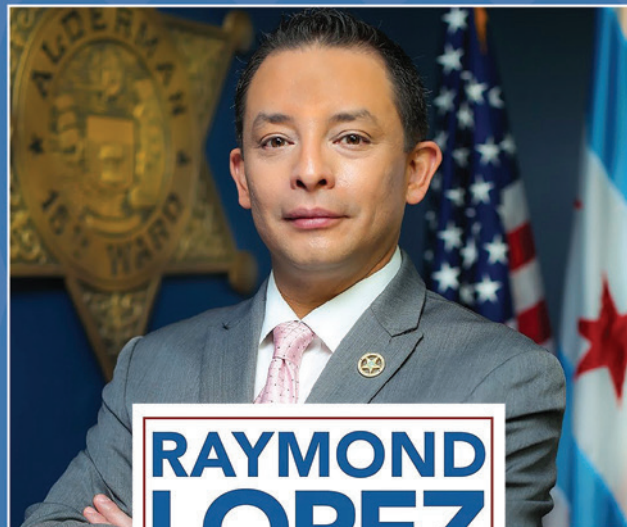
For more about IML, visit IMRL.com.



A couple of pups at the IML Leather Market.



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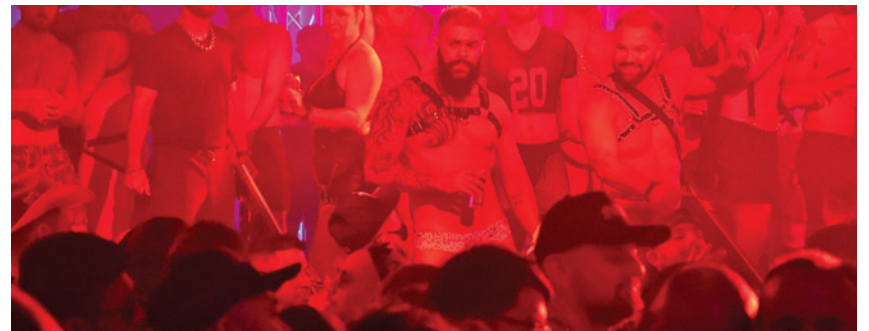
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