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2022: Gains made against a backdrop of attacks

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

There was no shortage of dramatic and consequential events to consider as the top stories for the LGBTQ community in 2022, and most of those events threaten to spill over into 2023: the Supreme Court's interest in significantly undermining equal protection of the law for LGBTQ people; the escalating number of attacks against LGBTQ Pride events, gathering places, and people; and Republican capture of the U.S. House majority. But for every troubling development, there was a happy or hopeful one. Here are our picks for the most important news stories of 2022 for the LGBTQ community:

Number 10:

Basketball star held by Russia

As the U.S. and its European allies announced sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities announced March 5 that they had detained an American in Moscow.

Brittney Griner, a lesbian professional basketball player and Olympic gold medalist, became the focus of months-long world-wide attention, after she was detained at a Russian airport, accused of possessing of marijuana. Authorities held her just a week before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Griner acknowledged having a small amount of "hash oil" in her bag, saying it was for medical purposes and that she had meant to leave it at home. Griner had been playing with a Russian women's basketball team for eight years, earning four times what she earns as an All-Star member of the Phoenix Women's National Basketball Association team. Russian authorities scheduled her for trial.

By May, the U.S. government announced it believed Griner was being "wrongfully detained" and Russian media began claiming that a deal was underway to for the U.S. to exchange a convicted Russian arms distributor for Griner's return. Meanwhile, Griner's spouse, Cherelle Griner, made appearances on national media outlets to pressure President Biden to do more to secure Griner's release.

Russian officials put Griner on trial in early July and declared her to be guilty. In August, they announced she was sentenced to nine years in prison. More than three months went by before the White House suddenly announced it had reached an agreement with Russian officials to exchange the arms felon for Griner. On December 8, Griner was freed and flew back to the U.S. She issued a statement December 16, thanking all the people and fans who provided love and help. She also noted that she will be playing with the Phoenix Mercury again next season.

Massachusetts Gov.-elect Maura Healey speaks during a Democratic election night party Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022, in Boston. (AP Photo/Michael Dwyer).

Number 9:

LGBTQ people targets of global attacks

Just three days before American Brittney Griner was released from a Russian prison camp, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law legislation to prohibit the expression or dissemination in social media, television, movies, or other media of any statements with positive information about "non-traditional sexual relations." A similar

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"We Have to Be Relentless"

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

Making Progress for LGBTQ Families in 2023

After a 2022 that brought a wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation, reproductive rights setbacks, and other challenges for LGBTQ families, where should we focus our efforts to make progress in 2023? Several leading experts shared their thoughts with me.

"Parentage, parentage, parentage" was the answer from Polly Crozier, director of family advocacy at LGBTQ legal organization GLAD. She noted the "patchwork" of state parentage laws and "still way too many states that don't have access to adoption for two single people, protections for children born through assisted reproduction, protections for children born through surrogacy, or gender-inclusive parentage laws." She asserted, "We have to have a scheme where every child is able to be secured to their family in every state. Until we do, we can't move on. We have to be relentless.

"It's not just an LGBTQ issue. It's a children's rights issue," she emphasized.

Stacey Stevenson, CEO of Family Equality, similarly said, "Our work to ensure that all LGBTQ+ people have the ability to find, create, and protect their family continues to be a priority." Her organization, too, will keep working with movement partners on updating state parentage laws "so that all parents have a pathway to obtain legal recognition of their parent-child relationships."

And although everyone I spoke with agreed that the Respect for Marriage Act, which passed Congress on December 8, was an important step forward, Jordan Budd, executive director of COLAGE, the national organization for people with LGBTQ parents, observed, "It isn't nearly enough. We need to codify Obergefell [which established marriage equality in every state] and states must act to guarantee equal parentage rights for LGBTQ+ families in the 30+ states that have inadequate or no protections. People with LGBTQ+ parents deserve to feel safe and secure in their families no matter where they live."

Additionally, Stevenson said, after the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision that overturned abortion rights and could threaten other rights, "it is more important than ever to ensure that LGBTQ+ parents understand how to protect their family and ensure that their parent-child relationships are legally recognized." She urged people to reference the guide "What LGBTQ+ Families Need to Know", created by Family Equality, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, GLAD, and COLAGE.

Nikhil Vashee, Family Equality's director of education law & policy, said the organization is also "gearing up" to fight expected anti-LGBTQ bills targeting youth and families in many states, "such as the so-called 'Don't Say Gay and Trans' bills and book and curriculum bans passed in Florida this year." They asserted, "Parents want their children to be able to bring their whole selves to school and talk about their families without guilt or shame. This legislation causes harm to both LGBTQ+ children and children of LGBTQ+ parents, but the impact on the latter is often left out of the conversation. We are committed to making sure that the voices of LGBTQ+ parents and their children are heard."

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"He doesn't like gay people. Doesn't want them in Russia. And then he's got the wonderful basketball player and he won't let her out. Make up your mind! He's always acting so butch and strutting around. You know what that means, don't ya, uh-huh? The lady doth protest too much!"

—The late Leslie Jordan's two cents on Vladimir Putin.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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Equal Housing Opportunity

Year in review

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ban, directed only at "propaganda aimed at children," was enforced just before the Sochi Olympics. Under the new expanded law, violators can be fined up to $80,000.

The Indonesian parliament in December enacted a law penalizing sex outside of marriage in a country where same-sex couples are not allowed to marry.

In Qatar, LGBTQ rights gained considerable global attention. In a dramatic moment at a press conference at the world soccer championship, the media chief for the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) came out as gay and defended FIFA President Gianni Infantino against criticism that the host country and games were trying to halt any visibility of LGBT players or spectators. At a contentious November 19 press conference on the eve of the competition, the press pummeled Infantino with questions about various civil rights issues surrounding the games in Qatar, a country that makes sex between men punishable for up to three years. It was near the end of that press conference that FIFA media chief Bryan Swanson took the microphone to say he himself was gay and to vouch for Infantino's efforts to protect the rights of visitors to the games. Later, during one of the tournament's first matches, a man wearing a Superman t-shirt and carrying a rainbow flag ran onto the field to protest having the World Cup in Qatar.

In Iran, which has been experiencing unprecedented street protests against the government's harsh treatment of women, the government, in August, reportedly convicted two women in relation tof their efforts to help LGBTQ people escape the country. LGBTQ activist Zahra Sedighi-Hamadani and her associate Elham Choubdar were said to have been given the death sentences. The United Nations issued a statement in September, strongly condemning the death sentences and calling on the Iranian government to annul the convictions and retract the sentences.

Number 8:

Supreme Court appears poised to gut protections

The U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority seemed to signal December 5 that it is prepared to allow certain business owners to violate state laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations. The hints came pouring out of oral arguments in 303 Creative v. Colorado, a case staged by the ardently anti-LGBTQ legal group Alliance Defending Freedom. The Alliance filed the lawsuit for a web designer in Colorado who wants to sell custom-written wedding websites to heterosexual couples –but not same-sex couples. And the Alliance argued that the web designer's work amounts to an "expression" and that the public accommodations law is violating her First Amendment right to freedom of expression by requiring she serve same-sex couples. Colorado said the discrimination at issue is the web designer's discriminatory treatment of a group of people protected by the Colorado law.

Justice Neil Gorsuch stated that "what would be impermissible is discrimination on the basis of status, but what would be permissible is refusing service because of a disagreement about views." He offered the notion that the web designer was not discriminating against same-sex couples. His evidence? The web designer had LGBTQ customers for other products and said she would sell a same-sex wedding website to a heterosexual couple.

Because public accommodations laws typically prohibit discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and other categories, Justice Sonia Sotomayor warned during oral argument, "This would be first time in court's history that that it would say that ...a commercial business open to the public, serving the public, that it could refuse to serve a customer based on race, sex, religion, or sexual orientation...." While it seems unlikely all six conservatives will vote to gut public accommodations laws so dramatically. But there was little hope in the oral argument that the court might uphold protections for same-sex couples seeking wedding websites, cakes, and other services.

Number 7:

Democrats control White House and Congress

President Joe Biden and the Democratic-controlled Congress gave enormous consideration to LGBTQ people during 2022. There were the perennial June Pride-related events held by other Democratic administrations. And President Biden signed an executive order directing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to increase access to mental health services for LGBTQ youth and to eradicate the promotion of conversion therapies. The White House distributed thousands of Mpox vaccines to cities with large Pride events taking place. At a White House Pride celebration in June, Biden said his administration has "more

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Year in review

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LGBTQ+ people than any administration or every administration combined –I really mean it." Biden made many appointments in 2021, including the first openly LGBTQ cabinet member (Pete Buttigieg) and the first federal circuit appeals judge (Beth Robinson). In 2022, he promoted an openly LGBTQ person to be his chief spokesperson: Karine Jean-Pierre. In May, she became both the first Black person and the first lesbian to serve as White House Press Secretary.

In Congress, 10 years ago, there were only four openly LGBTQ members of Congress –all members of the U.S. House. By the end of 2022, that number had grown to 13. In the upcoming new Congressional session, there will be 11 openly LGBTQ House members (even though two incumbents lost re-election) and two senators. Having openly LGBTQ members in Congress has had obvious positive impact on the community. They were crucial in pressing for the passage of the Respect for Marriage Act which helps protect the right of same-sex couples to marriage equality.

Number 6:

Two lesbians elected governor

Two lesbians were elected governor of their states in 2022: Maura Healey did so in Massachusetts where she won in a landslide on election day, and Tina Kotek won in Oregon in a close race that took a week before the result was known.

Healey served for eight years as the state's attorney general, along the way becoming a popular Democrat in a deeply blue state. Her victory November 8 made her the first lesbian to be elected governor of any state. Healey, who helped lead the legal battle against the federal Defense of Marriage Act and for marriage equality also championed many legal challenges against Trump administration policies.

Appearing on MSNBC's Alex Wagner show December 13, Healey said, "I probably would not be here today were it not for that case [challenging DOMA] and what it taught me about the importance of government and law and making sure the right people are in places to stand up and fight for people."

Kotek was declared the winner of Oregon's gubernatorial race November 9, a full week after the voting, winning by more than four percentage points.

Jared Polis, the nation's first openly gay male governor, won re-election to the Colorado governor's office November 8, meaning three of the nation's 50 governors will be openly LGBTQ in 2023. Bisexual Kate Brown, the departing governor of Oregon, was the nation's first openly LGBTQ governor, finishing out a term of a previous governor and then winning election herself in 2016.

Number 5:

Republicans win the House; Democrats the Senate

Republicans won a nine-seat majority in the U.S. House in the mid-term elections, and Democrats retained the Senate. Initially, Democrats could claim 49 Democrats and two independents caucusing with the Democrats for the upcoming new session. But in what many considered a surprise move, bisexual U.S. Senator Kyrsten Sinema announced December 8 that she was no longer identifying as a Democrat.

"I've registered as an Arizona independent," Sinema told CNN. "…"I've never fit neatly into any party box. I've never really tried. I don't want to." Sinema made her announcement after Georgia Democratic incumbent Senator Raphael Warnock won his runoff to win re-election.

Sinema becomes one of three independent members of the U.S. Senate and has indicated she expects to caucus with Democrats.

While Democrats will continue to hold the power in the Senate, Republicans will now take over leadership in the House in January. Among the 222 Republicans in the House will be George Santos, an openly gay investor who beat an openly gay Democrat to represent the Congressional district covering Queens and Long Island, New York. Santos acknowledged attending the rally prior to the January 6 insurrection riot. Santos has said he would support marriage equality but also would support the current "Don't Say Gay" legislation pending in Congress.

The New York Times reported that Santos attended a gala in New York City December 10, one that attracted white nationalists and far right activists. Meanwhile, Republicans appear to be splintering over such things as who will be their leader. Rep. Kevin McCarthy is seeking to win the Speaker of the House gavel. To do that, a candidate must win more than half of all 435 votes in the House (or 218). With only 222 Republicans in the chamber, any Republican candidate for Speaker must win support from all but four Republicans. Political observers have suggested voting might go on for a prolonged and contentious period of time before the next session's Republican leaders emerge.

Number 4:

Don't Say Gay and anti-LGBTQ bills abound

Likely Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis, governor of Florida, encouraged and signed into law a bill that severely curtails teachers from discussing sexual orientation or gender identity in schools. Copycat "Don't Say Gay" bills sprung up around the country, including Republicans in Congress who introduced a similar bill in the U.S. House.

This was part of a nation-wide barrage of anti-LGBTQ legislation and governors' directives. DeSantis took another dramatic step in December, bypassing the Republican-controlled legislature to issue an order to block transition medical care for transgender minors. In May, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the governor's order to direct child welfare workers to report any instances of gender-confirming health care for children. Arizona passed a bill to prohibit transition surgery for young people and to ban transgender girls from participating in girls' sports. Alabama passed a bill to make it a felony to offer gender-affirming health care to transgender people under the age of 19. Other states followed suit, filing similar legislation, much of which is now pending for the 2023 session.

Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson told a U.S. House hearing in December that the "onslaught" of anti-LGBTQ bills in 2022 totaled at least 344 bills in 23 states.

"More than 25 of these bills were ultimately enacted across 13 states — 17 of which have a disproportionate or targeted impact on transgender people.'

Number 3:

Escalation in physical violence

A 22-year-old male in November shot and killed five patrons of Club Q, a Colorado Springs bar popular with LGBTQ people and their allies. The gunman also injured at least 17 others in the shooting spree on November 19. The killer opened fire with a rapid-fire military assault-style weapon until a U.S. military veteran who was a patron at the bar knocked the gunman down and, with the help of one of the club's performers, subdued him. A November 30 bulletin from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned of potential additional attacks on LGBTQ bars. It noted that, after the Club Q shooting, the DHS observed messages "on forums known to post racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist content praising the alleged [Club Q] attacker." Club Q had operated in conservative Colorado Springs for 21 years without any threats or attacks.

The Club Q attack, which took place just minutes before midnight and the start of an international Trangender Day of Remebrance, brought back many memories, including the 2016 attack on the Pulse, an LGBTQ bar in Orlando, Florida. There, a lone gunman killed 49 patrons and injured more than 50 more.

Some news reports focused on the fact that Club Q was featuring a drag show. They noted that right-wing political activists have in recent months made concerted efforts to publicly malign drag queens and revive an old scare tactic that claims LGBTQ people are a threat to children. A Human Rights Campaign report in November indicated at least 32 people had been killed thus far in 2022 because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Sixty-five percent of those victims were black transgender women.

Pride Day events in several cities were attacked, including gun threats in Idaho which forced the cancelation of a celebration. In Couer d'Alene, Idaho, police arrested 31 men in their twenties in June in connection with a plot by the white nationalist group Pride Front. Reports said the police found the group waiting in a U-Haul, carrying metal pipes and wearing riot gear, with a plan on how to disrupt the family-friendly LGBT festival there. The Washington Post quoted a researcher as saying that groups which attack LGBTQ events tend to be "far-right extremists, who he said adhere to a hypermasculine worldview and the belief that other, often marginalized groups, are making gains at their direct expense."

In December, the Human Rights Campaign issued a report showing a "highly organized attack" was being waged against more than two dozen hospitals which provided gender-affirming care. But the organization also released a report in November, showing that a record number of cities across the nation (120) earned its highest score (100) for having pro-LGBTQ laws, policies, and services in place. The study, done with the Equality Federation Institute, looked at more than 500 cities. Some of the expected perfect scores included Los Angeles and San Francisco; Wilton Manors, Florida; Ann Arbor and Detroit; Atlanta; Chicago; Boston; Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio; Trenton; and New York City.

Among the unexpected cities scoring 100 were: Birmingham, Alabama; Juneau, Alaska; and Columbus, Ohio. And five cities which scored the absolute worst –zero-- were: Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; Florence, Alabama; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Pierre, South Dakota; and Rock Spring, Wyoming.

Number 2:

Enactment of the Respect for Marriage Act

President Biden on December 13 signed into law a federal bill to repeal the now-defunct Defense of Marriage Law and to require states to recognize any marriage, including a same-sex marriage, licensed by another state.

U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), a longtime friend of the LGBTQ community, introduced the legislation to the House in July, and it passed the House right away on a 267 to 157 vote. It was after mid-term elections that it finally started moving in the Senate, where it was led by openly lesbian U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.). There, it passed 61 to 36 (three not voting, including Georgia's Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock, who was locked in a December 5 runoff election against Republican nominee Herschel Walker). The New York Times gave much of the credit to former President George W. Bush's now openly gay campaign manager, Ron Mehlman, and a group of other Republicans for lobbying Republican senators to secure the 11 GOP votes they needed to pass a procedural hurdle to take a vote on the measure.

"It involved flooding the phone lines of Republican senators with calls from constituents who favored the same-sex marriage measure," said the Times, "presenting them with polling that showed that voters were more likely to support a proponent of the bill than somebody who opposed it, and a public pressure campaign aimed at demonstrating widespread conservative support for the legislation." Twelve Republicans were among the 61 senators who voted yes for the bill.

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Such legislation has gone hand-in-hand with broader anti-LGBTQ sentiment. Sarah-Kate Ellis, president and CEO of LGBTQ media organization GLAAD, urged, "We need to call on politicians to stop the anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. False claims, like 'groomer' rhetoric, and the spread of disinformation is translating to real-world harm for LGBTQ parents and our children. We've seen a 406% increase of slurs online, and GLAAD has documented 124 attacks against drag events in 47 states this year alone. Enough is enough."

Crozier, too, pointed out the "threats to safety and affirmation in schools," but noted that she's also heard empowering stories of community members who have spoken up about who they are and about their own families. "Their local voices," she said, "have really been so powerful in shutting down some of these conversations." Going forward, "Our families really need to dig in locally," she advised. "We need to be in community with others working intersectionally because we are seeing so many more of these struggles and we're going to see even more." She also recommended that we "proactively educate our communities as best we can before we hit those moments."

Several other areas also warrant our attention in 2023. Crozier noted that post-Dobbs, access to fertility care is "taking on greater importance." She explained, "When we talk about reproductive freedom, we need to remember that so many people lack access to fertility care. There's a fertility mandate for private insurance in only about 15 states, and in fact no state fully covers access to fertility care for people on Medicaid."

And after collaborating in 2022 on bills in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and California that protect people providing or accessing reproductive and gender affirming health care, she said, "I think other states outside of New England will be doing that work in this upcoming legislative session."

Child welfare is another place for improvement, and Family Equality will continue to prioritize its work there, said Policy Associate Laura Brennan. This includes "advocating for nondiscrimination protections in child welfare at the federal and state level; collecting nationwide SOGI [sexual orientation and gender identity] data for LGBTQI+ youth, families of origin, and current and prospective foster and adoptive parents; and making sure the one in three youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQI+ receive affirming care."

Ellis stressed, too, "We need to focus on protecting access to trans-affirming healthcare. It saves lives, and every major medical association in the U.S. agrees. LGBTQ parents and our children need to tell Republican lawmakers that they have to stop ignoring facts and science, and to stop using our kids as tools for political gain."

Budd sees an opportunity for advances in 2023. "The midterm elections have opened up several potential opportunities at the state level for moving pro-LGBTQ+ family policies, so I am looking forward to taking advantage of those opportunities in next year's legislative sessions," he said.

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billy masters

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Around now, everyone will be doing their 2022 retrospectives. And far be it from me not to jump on a bandwagon. I think we can all agree that the most scandalous moment of the year happened at the Academy Awards. Why, it was the most outrageous thing to happen on live TV since that incident with Jack Ruby! In case you were under a rock, **Chris Rock** made an innocuous joke, and **Will Smith** went crazy, strode onto the stage, and slapped Rock. Oh, yes. Not a punch —a slap! How metrosexual of him! What I found most shocking is that this obvious assault happened in front of thousands of people, and there were absolutely no ramifications. Strike that —the assailant was later given an award... and a standing ovation! Since then, the Academy has banned Will from the festivities for the next 10 years. Which I'm sure thrills the producers of his most recent oeuvre.

It takes lots of drama to make the world pay attention to Broadway. From the beginning, the "Funny Girl" revival seemed ill-conceived. Based on a flawed and forgettable UK revival, it lacked the show-stopping glamour required to evoke the Ziegfeld Follies. And **Beanie Feldstein** seemed to lack the vocal chops to play Fanny Brice. Along came **Lea Michele** (and a rabid group of "Gleeks"), who felt that she was being robbed of some kind of birthright. She didn't openly campaign against Beanie, but she let the powers that be know she was available if they needed her. And need her they did. Feldstein's notices were unremarkable, while Lea was giving concerts around the country...singing songs from "Funny Girl" to acclaim. Something had to give, and negotiations were made for Michele to replace Beanie. Feldstein caught wind of the skullduggery and left the show prematurely. This allowed her standby, **Julie Benko**, a moment to shine while Michele got up to speed. The end of this story was like every Hallmark movie. Lea went into the show, got great notices and re-recorded the soundtrack in time for the holidays.

Except (there's always that except) she can't win a Tony Award because she's a replacement. Or can she? Back in 2005, the Tonys ruled that "high-profile replacements" can in fact be nominated for an award. If that doesn't work...Lea's best friend is in a show that is slated to transfer to Broadway late next year. My sources suspect Michele is angling to oust the current female lead and replace her. That way she can originate the role on Broadway and win that Tony. Sounds far-fetched? Go back and read that "Funny Girl" paragraph again.

Not all diva-drama is limited to Broadway. Another big scandal of the year took place in Las Vegas when **Adele** cancelled her entire run at Caesars Palace 24 hours before opening night. "I'm so sorry, but my show ain't ready," she said. This did not make her fans happy —fans who had flown in from around the world! But, the story has a silver lining. Someone came up with a concept Adele liked, and she debuted six months later to acclaim.

On the small screen, my pal **Sherri Shepherd** has a hit on her hands. It started by filling in for the "indisposed" Wendy Williams, and led to her own show —with much of the same production team in place. While a flurry of other daytime talkers have debuted this season, "Sherri" has emerged as the highest-rated newcomer. Meanwhile, Wendy has been seen strolling the streets of NYC late at night, buying booze and smokes.

In primetime (admittedly, on a streaming service), **Shangela** made history as the first drag performer to compete on "Dancing with the Stars". The real-life DJ Pierce tackled each challenge with aplomb and knocked everybody's socks off. And took third place. We haven't heard the last of Shangela —she's poised to mount a nationwide tour starting in my native Boston in January.

Elsewhere in Massachusetts, another drag diva was felled. The vivacious **Varla Jean Merman** was performing "Varla Jean Merman's Ready to Blow" at Provincetown's Crown & Anchor. At one point in the show, she downed numerous pills —for stage purposes, the pills were Tic Tacs. One errant edible was underfoot as Varla launched into her big dance number from "Anything Goes". Her shoe landed on the candy and she tumbled with a thud! Patrons thought this was part of the show, when in fact Merman suffered a complete detachment of her quads at the tendon and fractured her kneecap (I keep copious notes). Always the trooper, she returned to the stage several days later in a wheelchair with her newly-adapted show, "Varla Jean Merman's Ready to Blow...On Wheels!" Alas, most of her engagements for the remainder of 2022 had to be cancelled. While you can make Varla go down, you can't keep her down. She's rescheduled those dates and has emerged triumphant.

Less triumphant was **Billy Eichner's** assault of the big screen. Much of the damage was done during the advance publicity —which included Eichner mocking the successful streaming film "Fire Island". When "Bros" was released, it was met with mostly positive reviews, but largely ignored by the ticket-buying public. That said, the film is entertaining and is doing well...ironically via streaming! While Eichner is undeniably funny, he's also unlikeable. But in the right role —the caustic best friend, the catty neighbor —he'd steal the show. I'm told that the limp response to this maiden endeavor puts many of his future plans in flux.

This inevitably leads to celebrity deaths. In terms of sheer drama, nothing will ever top **Anne Heche's** immolation. After erratically driving through an LA residential area, she literally plowed into a woman's living room. It took emergency workers close to an hour to extricate her from the blaze. When the gurney finally emerged from the scene, a sheet was over the body. And then, as if out of a movie (admittedly, not a very good movie), Heche popped up as if to say, "Fooled you! I'm alive!". That burst of energy was her last, and she succumbed days later.

Far more notable for many in our community was the passing of **Leslie Jordan**. While the coroner has yet to determine a cause of death, it is assumed he had a cardiac episode during rush hour while driving to film his sitcom, "Call Me Kat". Leslie made an indelible impression on everyone he met, and many whom he didn't. He was a pint-sized dynamo who packed a whole lotta living in his brief 67 years. He left the world a bit better by being in it.

I could write endlessly about **Betty White, Olivia Newton-John, Judy Tenuta, Nichelle Nichols, Angela Lansbury**, and many others. But kudos to **Tony Dow**, who managed to die not once, but twice. Take that, Heche!

What can you say about **Queen Elizabeth II.** Few can remember a time she wasn't a part of their lives. She was not only a witness to history —she was history. QEII was a stabilizing force in a turbulent world. She grew into her role as the world's grandmother —a role that is impossible to fill. Long live the Queen.

I know my audience —you love the hot guys. Most recently, people have been lusting over Big Daddy on "American Horror Story" (played by bodybuilder **Matthew William Bishop**). But it was **Jesse Williams** in the Broadway revival of "Take Me Out" that made the biggest stir. And, without a doubt, that brief clip that leaked shows Jesse's stirrer is sizeable. And he's in good company. You should check out the entire cast of the show in some exclusive shower footage that can only be seen on BillyMasters.com.

When we're wrapping up with a gaggle of nude guys, we've definitely come to the end of yet another column. Trust me, if you were gonna gag, you could do worse than the boys on www.BillyMasters.com —the site that has no gag reflex! If you'd like to sample our wares, reach out to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before my balls drop! Until next year, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Shangela

Billy Eichner

Anne Heche

Year in review

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The Washington Post gave much of the credit to Baldwin.

The Respect for Marriage Act originated in 2009 but was refurbished by Nadler this year after U.S. Supreme Court conservatives made clear many of them were eager to revisit the landmark Obergefell decision in 2015 that had struck down state bans on same-sex marriage.

Number 1:

Roe overturned; marriage equality targeted

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 24 that the Constitution "does not prohibit" states from banning abortion. While on the face of things, one might not immediately see why LGBTQ people were deeply alarmed by the decision. But in a concurring opinion, Justice Clarence Thomas made sure that everyone knew that, with the court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson, the hourglass was being turned over for same-sex marriage and relationships. Oddly, Thomas said he agreed with a statement in the majority decision (written by Samuel Alito) that "nothing in [the Dobbs opinion] should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion."

"For that reason, in future cases," wrote Thomas, "we should reconsider all of this Court's substantive due process precedents, including Griswold, Lawrence, and Obergefell." Lawrence struck down state bans against same-sex sexual relations; Obergefell struck state bans against marriage for same-sex couples; and Griswold struck bans against couples using contraceptive.

Jenny Pizer, senior legal counsel for Lambda Legal, called the 6 to 3 conservative majority "the most shockingly activist Court we have seen in any of our lifetimes." The majority opinion in Dobbs overturned two major precedents: Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood v. Casey. The 1973 Roe decision said the Constitution implies that citizens have a right to privacy and liberty and that those rights cover the right to choose an abortion. The 1992 Planned Parenthood decision said states could regulate abortion once a fetus becomes viable as long as the regulations did not create an undue burden to women who seek an abortion.

National Center for Lesbian Rights Legal Director Shannon Minter said the Dobbs decision put LGBTQ rights "on the chopping block" and that "we must turn to our local, state, and federal representatives to secure fundamental freedoms through legislation."

"We are witnessing a full-scale assault on the rights of women and LGBTQ people," said Minter, 'and the moment to act is now."

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Mombian

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In addition to the political strategizing and legislative plans, Stevenson also sees one simple thing as having a big impact. "One major focus for Family Equality in the coming year is to lift up the LGBTQ+ family by telling our stories," she said. "If we don't, others will tell our stories for us and we can't let that happen. The voices of LGBTQ+ families must be heard."

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, with a searchable database of 1000+ LGBTQ family books, music, and more.

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