December 26, 2024 - January 8, 2025
50 cents at newsstands Vol. 40, No 12

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Looking Back at 2024's Wins for LGBTQ+ Parents and Our Children

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The past year has not played out the way most of us in the LGBTQ community would have wanted, with another Trump presidency looming and anti-LGBTQ legislation moving ahead in many places. But 2024 also saw some progress for LGBTQ parents and our children, so let's remind ourselves of the advances we've made, even as we gird for the battles ahead.

Most notably, both Michigan and Massachusetts enacted legislation updating their respective parentage laws to better protect children with LGBTQ parents, single parents, or unmarried parents, and those formed via assisted reproduction. The new laws establish more equitable paths to legal parentage for all children in today's diverse families, including via a simple, free form that acknowledges parentage and can be completed at a child's birth. Michigan's legislation also decriminalizes contractual surrogacy (Michigan was the only remaining state that criminalized it) and provides clear protections for everyone involved, while the Massachusetts legislation clarifies that a de facto

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

Hope in the bleak winter

Let us be points of light

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

The Christmas carol "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Gustav Holst, with lyrics by Christina Rossetti, describes the winter weather of London, not the Mediterranean climate of ancient Bethlehem.

The world outside our skulls pays no deference to our habit of making everything about us. So while people indulge themselves with the comforting story of the ox and ass in the stable on a snowy night bowing to the Christ child, and the narrator in a hymn talks humbly of her poor offering, actual Palestinian children are getting the crap bombed out of them.

I have been careful, when criticizing Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli Defense Force, to note that Hamas is a terrorist organization that began the current conflict. I support the two-state solution, a longstanding American policy. Yet any criticism of the Israeli government, even echoing protesters who fill Israeli streets, brings

see **ROSENDALL,** *page 4*

When I accidentally outed Nikki Giovanni

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

On the evening of December 9, I read about the death of legendary poet and educator Nikki Giovanni while searching for something on the Internet. What a tremendous loss! I thought I was going to cry.

On November 9, a month before her death, I watched Giovanni's interview on iOne Digital wearing a T-shirt that said, "I write banned books." During the interview, she talked about getting old, finding joy, and, of course, banned books.

I LOVED Nikki Giovanni long before I LOVED Toni Morrison. During the Black Arts and Black Panther eras, I grew up listening and grooving to Giovanni's voice on scratchy vinyl albums as she read her poems, my favorite being "Ego Tripin'."

I wanted to attend Fisk University because she did, hoping it would make me as smart as she was. At Wellesley, my only appearance in a school theater production, I recited Giovanni's poem "All I Gotta Do." I hear it in my head now and smile.

see **MONROE,** *page 2*

Nikki Giovanni, poet and literary celebrity, has died at 81

Virginia Tech English Professor, Nikki Giovanni speaks closing remarks at a convocation to honor the victims of a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., on April 17, 2007. AP Photo by Steve Helber.

By Hillel Italie
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Nikki Giovanni, the poet, author, educator and public speaker who went from borrowing money to release her first book to spending decades as a literary celebrity who shared blunt and conversational takes on everything from racism and love to space travel and mortality, has died. She was 81.

Giovanni, subject of the prize-winning 2023 documentary "Going to Mars," died Monday with her lifelong partner, Virginia "Ginney" Fowler, by

see **GIOVANNI,** *page 7*

LGBTQ Holiday Shopping Guide Lifts Up MA Small Businesses

Photo via bit.ly/holidaycatalog24.

Submitted by the MA Chamber of Commerce

The Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce released its annual shopping guide, highlighting diverse businesses from across the Commonwealth selling both products and services available this holiday season.

"In a season, often characterized by consumerism, it's important to be intentional with our purchasing

see **GIFT GUIDE,** *page 2*

"Jesus Forgives. Santa holds a grudge."

- Sara Haines' quip on "The View" when Sunny Hostin argued it was wrong to use Santa to blackmail children to behave.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo by Jeff Lipsky., courtesy of ABC.

Monroe

Continued from page 1

Nikki's poem inspired my activism. So, I fought my own revolution against Black Church homophobia. I recited Nikki's poem with a Brooklyn black girl sass, imagining she'd have been proud.

In the 2000s, I was invited to deliver a talk on religion and homophobia at Virginia Tech. I was ecstatic beyond belief because Giovanni taught there. When I met her, I thought I'd faint. I meant to shake her hand, but instead, courtesy. I said while bowing my head, "I've been a fan of yours, Ms. Giovanni, since high school." She warmly smiled back.

In 2007, I wrote an article for The Advocate shortly after the Virginia Tech shooting titled "Virginia Tech's invisible gay angles." Cho Seung-Hui, a student at Tech, killed 32 people and wounded 17 others. I asked the question in my article, "Why did the LGBT community feel they had no part in the story of Cho Seung-Hui and the massacre he wrought?"

Also, I wrote that when Washington Blade reporter Lou Chibbaro inquired if there were any LGBTQ students or professors killed in the massacre, the president of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Alliance of Virginia Tech said, "Some were queer, and others were straight allies. The GLBT community at Tech grieves in the same way as others--deeply and as part of a greater whole... [the tragedy is] not a gay thing; it's an everybody thing."

And because it is an "everybody thing," it is precisely why it is important to know.

Because I knew Giovanni was lauded for being a first responder during the shooting, I wrote, "As with our fallen LGBTQ sheroes and heroes of 9/11 and this never-ending war, many of us in the queer community, myself included, would like not only to celebrate our fallen in the Virginia Tech massacre for being courageously out of the closet but also to show America that we too are everywhere in the human drama of life.

Where I blundered was with this sentence: "Case in point: Nikki Giovanni, a neglected and overlooked heroine in our queer community."

The backlash was swift. I received this email: "I work at Virginia Tech and am openly gay. Your article on advcoate.com caught my attention because it quoted my roommate, the president of the campus LGBTA. In the article, you write that Nikki Giovanni is an out lesbian. I do not think that is the case. I attended Virginia Tech as a student for four years and have worked here doing public relations for a year and have heard nothing of the sort. I was the president of the campus LGBTA in 2005 and can tell you that, if Nikki Giovanni is a lesbian, she is certainly not out. What is the source of your information?"

I cried throughout this incident. As an ardent fan of Giovanni's, I chided myself for knowing well how LGBTQ+ people live bifurcated lives between professional and social, but I did not think at the time if it was possible she was not "out!" I wrote back, conveying my most profound apology for any harm my piece may have caused the community, especially Professor Nikki Giovanni. I asked for her email address because I wanted to send a note of apology.

The school reached out to The Advocate. I worried I'd never be able to write a piece for The Advocate again. However, my editor was gracious and wrote this:" I get so tired of people codependently padlocking other people's closets, which is what happened in that instance with whoever called us from Virginia Tech. It's also true that Nikki, when I met her some years ago, wasn't exactly interested in confirming or denying. If not for that experience, I'd have let your piece stand online.

I wrote Giovanni an apology letter. I also thought of sending her flowers, but I realized that would've been over the top. However, I never heard back.

Love is love, and I still possess her albums from childhood and have all her works—spoken and in print to the present day. From time to time, when I need a Nikki Giovanni fix, I'll read some of her poems or listen to one of my scratchy albums to hear the lyricism in her voice talk to me.

I'm glad she leaves us as a revered LGBTQ+ icon.

May she rest in power!

Gift Guide

Continued from page 1

decisions," said Alexandria Eberhardt, Executive Director of the MA LGBT Chamber of Commerce. "By choosing to support, LGBTQ-owned businesses, customers are not only finding special gifts for their friends and family, but are also contributing to the growth and success of the LGBTQ-community, helping empower diverse voices and fostering a more inclusive economy."

The 2024 catalog includes more than 75 businesses from across the state from apparel and self-care/beauty products to home decor and food and beverage.

The full catalog is available for free online at bit.ly/holidaycatalog24.

The Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce is committed to improving the financial well-being of the LGBTQ+ community by fostering inclusive relationships to propel economic growth and social equity throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit malgbtcc.org.

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Marking Time

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

My face, my hair, my scalp, look up at me from this snapshot on my Northeastern University alumni ID, pre-pandemic, a younger version of myself. Not long ago, just the mid-2010s, and yet I'm reminded that this more hirsute, less age-lined version of me is gone, fleeting, like the freedom I felt before Covid, before I reached my sixties.

Now I mark time by noticing the changes in my body: hearing loss — almost total deafness in my left ear, which popped up suddenly before I turned 50; two bouts of melanoma and the surgical scars that mark my left arm; the morphing of my body and the power of gravity as lean muscle turns to, if not fat, then something else.

I tend to zero in on whatever new flaw shows up, whatever I notice in the unflattering light of my bathroom mirror. Lately, I've been laser-focused on my hair, and the lack thereof. My yarmulke-sized bald spot is advancing, claiming new terrain on a weekly basis. Soon it will resemble a crop circle, an unnatural event, for which I cannot blame aliens — just Mother Nature and Father Time.

As much as I fight this — hair loss and aging in general — I know it's a natural process, one which will not get better over time, but will lead inevitably toward less hair and more scalp, the uncovering of my egg-shaped cranium. Many men, including several of my friends, look good bald, their round heads an expression of their masculinity. But, with a long, narrow, angular face, I am not one of those men; this is a club I don't want to join.

Back in the 1970s and '80s, I had too much of a good thing; my hair was wavy, wild, and poufy. It seemed to have a mind of its own, willful and hard to control. But around the time I turned 40, a small bald spot appeared like an unwanted dinner guest, a precursor of the male pattern baldness that runs in my family. Determined to hold onto what I'd got, I started taking Propecia and reached an uneasy standoff with my hair loss. Though my hairline receded, my bald spot was stable, and amenable to my stylist's wizardry.

Fast forward five years, or ten, and as I added several other medications to my daily routine for cholesterol, blood pressure, and sleep, taking a drug for cosmetic purposes felt a bit over the top — the height of vanity.

But here's the thing: I'm a single, gay, sixty-something man, who is unwilling and maybe unable to say goodbye to his formerly-reliable hair. Now, as my head covering beats a retreat, as the crop circle and hairline threaten to join forces, I may be facing the inevitable, a buzz cut. But given my narrow face, I'm afraid I'd look like a recent escapee from the nearest gulag, (a realistic scenario in the upcoming Trump-era redux.)

Today, as I study my face in the harsh light of my bathroom mirror, I mess with the frizzy, thinning, mane that almost covers my head, doing my best version of a combover. I recently got a roll-on "DHT blocker" designed to stimulate hair growth. Yet, ultimately, I know I'm fighting a losing battle, one of many on the downhill slide of late middle age and whatever comes next.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston, and the author of the memoir, Echoes of Jerry. Find out more at judahleblang.com

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Mombian

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or functional parent has equal rights and responsibilities to any other type of parent. Both states' bills were promoted by broad coalitions of parents, families, and LGBTQ, reproductive rights, family, and child welfare organizations, and passed with bipartisan support; the final vote in both Massachusetts chambers was unanimous.

Michigan and Massachusetts became the 8th and 9th states to enact legislation based on or substantially similar to the 2017 Uniform Parentage Act (UPA), a model law developed by the bipartisan Uniform Law Commission. Among other things, the 2017 UPA ensures that state parentage laws remain constitutional by providing equality and clear, secure paths to parentage for LGBTQ families. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington also have laws based on the 2017 UPA, while New Hampshire and New York have similar comprehensive parentage legislation that is not based on the UPA, per the Movement Advancement Project. Additionally, Minnesota passed a bill this May based on the section of the UPA dealing with assisted reproduction—an important step forward, although more work remains to be done.

LGBTQ parents forming families in states without comprehensive, LGBTQ-inclusive parentage statutes may find that establishing parentage is confusing, expensive, humiliating, and lengthy, leaving children vulnerable. A UPA-based bill in Pennsylvania was introduced this past legislative session, but did not move out of committee.

A notable parentage win in the courts this year, though, was the unanimous New Mexico Supreme Court ruling in July that affirmed a nongenetic mother is a legal parent to the children her former spouse gave birth to during their marriage. The decision held that the best interests of a child, not just the genetic connection to a parent, must be considered in determining parentage. It also reaffirmed that a child born into a marriage is presumed to be the child of both spouses, regardless of the spouses' gender(s). This is a presumption that all 50 states should have been recognizing since the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions in Obergefell (2015) and Pavan (2017)—although some state trial courts (including ones in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania) have ruled otherwise in recent years. The New Mexico decision, while not legally binding in other states, nevertheless sends a reminder of what should be.

Moving to family building, healthcare insurance giant Aetna agreed in May to a settlement after improperly making single policyholders and those in same-sex couples pay out of pocket for multiple rounds of assisted insemination before they could access in vitro fertilization (IVF) benefits, whereas different-sex couples could simply attest to having had regular, unprotected sexual intercourse for a number of months. Aetna will now include assisted insemination as a benefit for all members and ensure that clinical requirements for proceeding to IVF are no more burdensome for LGBTQ people than for others. It will also revise its clinical policy to be consistent with the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's latest (2023) guidelines, which define "infertility" to make it more inclusive of LGBTQ and single people who need fertility treatments for any reason, either as an individual or with a partner.

On a similar note, California passed legislation in September that also updates the definition of "infertility" to be more inclusive of LGBTQ and single people and requires large insurers to cover fertility diagnosis and treatment, including IVF, for any policyholders. When the law goes into effect (in July 2025 for most people), California will become the 15th state, plus D.C., to require IVF coverage, per RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association.

In other good news, Florida's infamous "Don't Say Gay/LGBTQ" law was defanged in March. More than a dozen Florida parents, students, and teachers, plus LGBTQ organizations Equality Florida and Family Equality, who had challenged the law's constitutionality, reached a settlement that removes the most harmful anti-LGBTQ aspects of the legislation. The settlement does not repeal the law, but secures several critical protections and clarifications: affirming free expression; strengthening anti-bullying protections and assuring non-discrimination; and allowing references to and books about LGBTQ identities in classrooms, student clubs, and extracurricular activities. The law still prohibits "classroom instruction" on sexual orientation or gender identity, but that must be applied "neutrally" to both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ identities. That's not ideal, in my opinion (classroom instruction on these topics in health classes, at the very least, feels necessary), but nevertheless, the settlement achieves some important goals.

It won't be easy making progress for LGBTQ people and families over the next few years, but I hope we can look to the above examples of successful bipartisan cooperation, coalition building, and hard work to power us forward.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog plus a searchable database of 1,700+ LGBTQ family books.

Rosendall

Continued from page 1

accusations of antisemitism. I wonder how many antisemites have contributed to the purchase of a Torah scroll for a gay synagogue.

Trump's ambassador-designate to Israel is former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, a premillennial dispensationalist zealot. The fact that the End Times narrative includes Jews does not mean it has a place for them in heaven, any more than it adheres to the teachings of Christ.

I was glad to see Syrians celebrate the fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad, which was a blow to both Russia and Iran. The Salafi jihadist group ISIS is still active there. Time will tell if the celebrations turn sour like those in Egypt years ago. The United States has 900 soldiers in Syria.

I interrupt this discussion of violent conflict in the Middle East to wish you Peace On Earth.

We take so much for granted while fools and fanatics who call themselves patriots do all they can to turn our country's constitutional government on its head. To them, diversity is not a simple reality of our country's population, but a radical leftist plot to be conquered with cruel policies.

Trump's slogan is "Make America Great Again." There is no greatness in the attitude that any Republican official who opposes a thing Trump does is an enemy, nor in the endless nursing of grievance and prejudice by people who pose as victims when their bigotry is pointed out.

In this season of "Messiah" sing-alongs, I think of Psalms 2:9, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron. Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Pardon the violent biblical imagery. I am grateful to the Democratic opposition for their mounting resistance to the Trump-hijacked GOP's cruel and heartless policies.

I think Trump's dictatorial demands and contempt for medical science and all other expertise make him vulnerable. Even Mitch McConnell, who had polio as a child, is pushing back against opponents of that proven life-saving vaccine.

Those of us who expect better of our country than endless scapegoating of trans people and immigrants of color need to step up. The prospect of having to fight to protect gains already made is dispiriting. We must turn to one another for support. The social media used by others to spread disinformation and hate can be used to organize and fight back.

Here in the bleak early winter, I pause for self-care. This means taking things day by day and finding comfort in books, movies, music, and friends. I think of my fiancé and his son across the sea; I will see them in the new year.

I skipped a Dec. 12 National Faith Advisory Board prayer call with Mike Huckabee. I also did not buy a Christmas ornament from President-elect Scrooge, nor anything from Time's Person of the Year Collection.

Instead, on the darkest night of the year, I light a candle and renew the oath I took as a federal employee to defend the Constitution. I also embrace the words of Abraham Lincoln quoted by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan at the Democratic National Convention in 1976:

"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is not democracy."

I do not know how long the current struggle will last. But ultimately, freedom and equality will remain the right of every American, both native-born and immigrant—not automatically, but because you and I fight to uphold them.

The darkest of nights is illumined by the stars. Amid our beloved country's encroaching darkness, let us be points of light and hope.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rrosendall@me.com.

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PO BOX E14,
Boston, MA 02127

Publishers Emeritus:
Jeff Coakley
Sue O'Connell

Editorial:
Editor-in-Chief
Sue O'Connell
sue.baywindows@gmail.com

Contributing Writers:
Judah Leblang
Billy Masters
Richard J. Rosendall
Dana Rudolph
Rev. Irene Monroe
Jules Becker

Letters to the Editor:
letters.baywindows@gmail.com

News tips:
news.baywindows@gmail.com

Calendar listings:
news.baywindows@gmail.com

Announcements:
announcements.baywindows@gmail.com

Advertising:
Display Advertising
sales@baywindows.com

Classified Advertising:
classifiedads@baywindows.com

Editorial Design Manager:
Julie Walker Palmer

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NATIONAL LGBTQ TASK FORCE

billy masters

With the year swiftly coming to an end, we come to our last column before Christmas. Next week, we review the best of 2024. So I thought this week we'd update some recent stories. Let's start with one of my favorite people, **Belinda Carlisle**. In 2014, she co—founded Animal People Alliance (APA), taking care of displaced animals in Asia. Since 2021, she's hosted a holiday party at The Abbey in West Hollywood as a major fundraiser. Every year, I swear I'll go — and every year, I'm already back east with the family. This year was no different, so I missed out on the fabulous festivities that brought in about $186K. It was hosted by **Sandra Bernhard** and performers included **Taylor Dayne and Michelle Visage** (in addition to Carlisle herself). Congrats!

By the by, Belinda's son, **James Duke Mason**, recently went to the swanky soirée of stylist René Horsch. Dukey posted one photo that caught my eye — with **Dame Joan Collins**. What's interesting about that is before marrying Belinda, Duke's dad **Morgan Mason** dated Dame Joan! One doesn't think of Carlisle and Collins in the same category, so I'm not sure Morgan has what I'd call a "type"... aside from gay icons!

I definitely didn't miss the reunion of "Hairspray" ladies **Marissa Jaret Winokur**, **Laura Bell Bundy and Kerry Butler**. No, I didn't see "Mama, I'm a Big Girl Now" off—Broadway, but I saw it pre—NYC at The Wallis in Beverly Hills. I'm told that the New World Stages run was a smash with most shows sold out. Being in the Big Apple, many "Hairspray" friends and family dropped in — like creators **Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, Andrew Rannells, Ross Mathews, Jonathan Groff,** and even original Link, **Matthew Morrison** — who joined the gals for "I Can Hear the Bells". It's a great moment, which you can see on BillyMasters.com.

I may not have seen the revival of "Sunset Blvd" on Broadway (yet), but heaven knows I've written about it enough. However, **Patti LuPone** did see it and just weighed in. I guess she was curious. After all, she did originate the role of Norma Desmond onstage. And certainly she's conflicted about the show (aside from that whole **Glenn Close** thing). What did she think? "I went in with trepidation because I have strong feelings about 'the show' — not what happened to me in the show, but 'the show' — period. I loved this production! I thought Nicole [Scherzinger] and Tom [Francis] were stunning. I thought Nicole was unbelievable — she broke my heart. She is a force! I thought the cast was fantastic. The lighting, the use of the filming was something that I questioned because I don't know where I am — am I in a movie or I'm at the theatre? This worked brilliantly. The whole thing. The WHOLE thing. I was energized when I left the theatre. I love it!" Put that on the side of a bus!

"Wicked" is everywhere for the holiday, and that isn't making everybody happy. "One Million Moms" is campaigning against the film for subliminal gay content. It all started when **Ariana Grande** said, "Glinda might be a little in the closet. You never know. Give it a little more time." Original Broadway Glinda **Kristin Chenoweth** said, "I thought so too way back when..." This queer chatter got the "Moms" panties in a collective knot. Krissy wasn't having it, and issued the following statement: "Everyone knows that the 'one million Moms' are a mere few hundred. Maybe. It's called entertainment. Artistry. I am a Christian woman [who] originated the role of Glinda and all the silliness that these women spew out of hate. No no no. I can't help it: I try to love 'em anyways. For they don't get it. For anyone who wants to see girl power, then go [see] WICKED. Onstage or in a movie theater."

I previously told you that **Bob Mackie** was auctioning off a number of his creations. Well, **Miley Cyrus** made sure that her favorite frock didn't end up on the auction block. She wore a Mackie original at the most recent Grammys, and she wanted that dress... bad! She contacted Bob and made a deal, with the profits going to MusiCares. "As the designer of this dress, I couldn't imagine it on anyone else. That girl was born to perform!" said Mackie.

The day after the Mackie sale, property belonging to **Olivia Newton-John** hit Julien's Auctions. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, but Livvy's leather jacket from "Grease" went for just under half a million dollars!

A new version of the TV series "Prison Break" has gotten the green light from Hulu. While this is not technically a reboot, you may see a few familiar faces since it takes place "within the same universe". Both **Wentworth Miller and Dominic Purcell** (the hot brothers at the center of the original series) have said they will not participate.

Nobody is safe from the homeless crisis, and that includes the venerable "Sesame Street". No, they're not introducing a displaced family. But the show itself will soon be homeless! Since 2016, HBO has been producing new episodes of the beloved classic. Their 10—year agreement is up soon, and HBO has opted to not renew. While that leaves new episodes up in the air, Max will continue to be the repository of the library until 2027.

Speaking of shows geared to kids of all ages, Disney pulled the old switcheroo for Pixar's "Win or Lose". The streaming series debuts on Disney+ in February, but it'll be a bit different than planned. It's still about a co—ed middle school. The later episodes were supposed to include a very minor transgender storyline. How minor? So minor it's now been cut. Disney said, "When it comes to animated content for a younger audience, we recognize that many parents would prefer to discuss certain subjects with their children on their own terms and timeline."

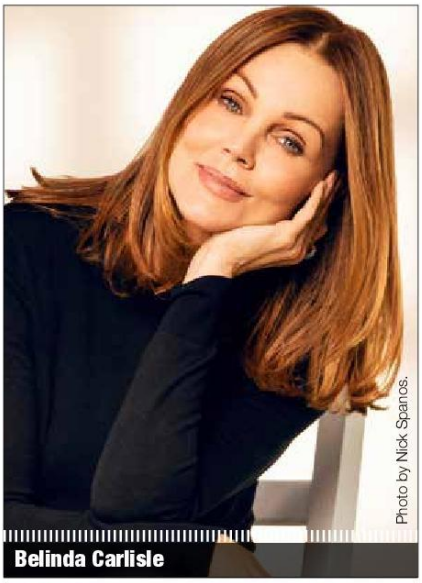
Last year, one of the most popular gifts we suggested was **Tom Daley's** knitting kit. Yes, you too could learn how to make a "cock cozy" with your very own hands — although, frankly, I preferred real hands keeping my cock cozy. As with so many other hot men who have charged for their services, Tom is now giving his away. And he's giving them away on the public airways! "You know me. I love a bit of competition. But lately, it's been less about the pool, and more about the...wool. So I'm super excited to announce that I'm going to be hosting a brand new knitting competition show." Did I miss an "old knitting competition show"? Well, Tom's venture will be called (wait for it) — "Game of Wool". Doesn't that make you all a-quiver? Or, at the very least, itchy? A competitive knitting show? What could be more scintillating? C-SPAN springs to mind. The eight-episode run will focus on amateurs creating numerous objets d'art. It will air on UK's Channel 4, but I'm sure you'll be able to find it on YouTube eventually.

And now, the final installment of "Billy's Holiday Gift Giving Suggestions". We saved this one for last because you can't get it yet. Sexy Matteo Lane is not only a talented comedian, he's also a good cook with a rockin' ass (FYI, my computer autocorrected this to "he's also a good cock"). He has a new book coming out on April 1st. "Your Pasta Sucks: A 'Cookbook'", has a cover featuring Matteo bending over a pot of pasta in an apron, some undies, and a smile. Well, he's smiling because it's his pasta. You'll smile because... well, 'cause he's bending over! In fact, the bottom of the photo has this phrase: "Flip Me Over". Gladly. People tell me the book is terrific — with hysterical anecdotes and some actual recipes. You can pre—order it on Amazon.

In our final "Ask Billy" question of 2024, Roger in Chicago asks, *"What can you tell me about **Jermelle Simon**? His character on "The Upshaws" is gay. What about him? He's so funny...and hawt!"*

Jermelle may have had a hand in his character coming out — something that happened in 2023. He was not out at the time, but he changed that on October 11, 2024 — National Coming Out Day. "I have decided that I am enough, and I want to thank everyone who has helped me to get to that place where I feel seen, where I feel like I belong, where I feel loved. Thank you for providing a space where I can come on the internet and say, 'I am a Black gay man.'" Actually, he's a hot Black gay man — and we'll prove it with some sizzling snaps on BillyMasters.com.

When we're cooking up more hot gay men, it's definitely time to end yet another column. And that got me thinking — people come out each and every day. Yet, the ones people always ask me about are the hot ones. Why doesn't anyone write in a question about some fatty who likes men? While I ponder pounding that, let's slip in one last—minute gift suggestion. I bet anyone reading this would probably enjoy a membership to www.BillyMasters.com — the site that makes a perfect stocking stuffer. In fact, I'm willing to personally do that for you — regardless of girth. Just send a note with an address along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to cum down your chimney before the New Year! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.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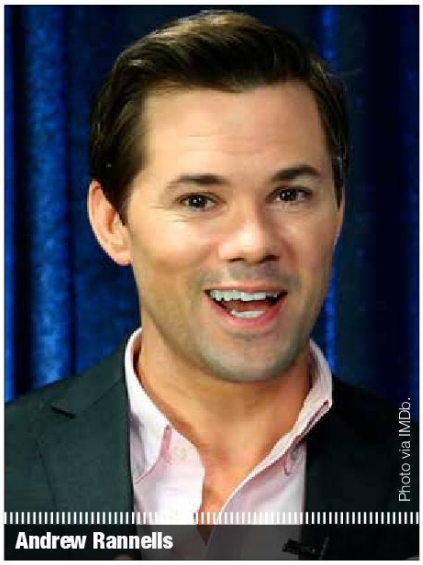
Photo via IMDb.
Andrew Rannells

Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures
Ariana Grande

Giovanni

Continued from page 1

her side, according to a statement from friend and author Renée Watson.

"We will forever feel blessed to have shared a legacy and love with our dear cousin," said Allison (Pat) Ragan, Giovanni's cousin, in a statement on behalf of the family.

The author of more than 25 books, Giovanni was a born confessor and performer whom fans came to know well from her work, readings and other live appearances and her years on the faculty of Virginia Tech, among other schools. Poetry collections such as "Black Judgement" and "Black Feeling Black Talk" sold thousands of copies, led to invitations from "The Tonight Show" and other television programs and made her popular enough to fill a 3,000-seat concert hall at Lincoln Center for a celebration of her 30th birthday.

In poetry, prose and the spoken word, she told her story. She looked back on her childhood in Tennessee and Ohio, championed the Black Power movement, addressed her battles with lung cancer, paid tribute to heroes from Nina Simone to Angela Davis and reflected on such personal passions as food, romance, family and rocketing into space — a journey she believed Black women uniquely qualified for, if only because of how much they had already survived. She also edited a groundbreaking anthology of Black women poets, "Night Comes Softly," and helped found a publishing cooperative that promoted works by Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker among others.

For a time, she was called "The Princess of Black Poetry."

"All I know is the she is the most cowardly, bravest, least understanding, most sensitive, slowest to anger, most quixotic, lyingest, most honest woman I know," her friend Barbara Crosby wrote in the introduction to "The Prosaic Soul of Nikki Giovanni," an anthology of nonfiction prose published in 2003. "To love her is to love contradiction and conflict. To know her is to never understand but to be sure that all is life."

Giovanni's admirers ranged from James Baldwin to Teena Marie, who name-checked her on the dance hit "Square Biz," to Oprah Winfrey, who invited the poet to her "Living Legends" summit in 2005, when other guests of honor included Rosa Parks and Toni Morrison. Giovanni was a National Book Award finalist in 1973 for a prose work about her life, "Gemini." She also received a Grammy nomination for the spoken word album "The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection."

In January 2009, at the request of NPR, she wrote a poem about the incoming president, Barack Obama:

"I'll walk the streets
And knock on doors
Share with the folks:
Not my dreams but yours
I'll talk with the people
I'll listen and learn
I'll make the butter
Then clean the churn"

Giovanni had a son, Thomas Watson Giovanni, in 1969. She never married the father, because, she told Ebony magazine, "I didn't want to get married, and I could afford not to get married." Over the latter part of her life she lived with her partner, Fowler, a fellow faculty member at Virginia Tech.

She was born Yolande Cornelia Giovanni Jr. in Knoxville, Tennessee, and was soon called "Nikki" by her older sister. She was 4 when her family moved to Ohio and eventually settled in the Black community of Lincoln Heights, outside Cincinnati. She would travel often between Tennessee and Ohio, bound to her parents and to her maternal grandparents in her "spiritual home" in Knoxville.

As a girl, she read everything from history books to Ayn Rand and was accepted to Fisk University, the historically Black school in Nashville, after her junior year of high school. College was a time for achievement, and for trouble. Her grades were strong, she edited the Fisk literary magazine and helped start the campus branch of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. But she rebelled against school curfews and other rules and was kicked out for a time because her "attitudes did not fit those of a Fisk woman," she later wrote. After the school changed the dean of women, Giovanni returned and graduated with honors in history in 1967.

Giovanni relied on support from friends to publish her debut collection, "Black Feeling Black Talk," which came out in 1968, and in the same year she self-published "Black Judgement." The radical Black Arts Movement was at its height and early Giovanni poems such as "A Short Essay of Affirmation Explaining Why," "Of Liberation" and "A Litany for Peppe" were militant calls to overthrow white power. ("The worst junkie or black businessman is more humane/than the best honkie").

"I have been considered a writer who writes from rage and it confuses me. What else do writers write from?" she wrote in a biographical sketch for Contemporary Writers. "A poem has to say something. It has to make some sort of sense; be lyrical; to the point; and still able to be read by whatever reader is kind enough to pick up the book."

Her opposition to the political system moderated over time, although she never stopped advocating for change and self-empowerment, or remembering martyrs of the past. In 2020, she was featured in an ad for presidential candidate Joe Biden, in which she urged young people to "vote because someone died for you to have the right to vote."

Her best known work came early in her career; the 1968 poem "Nikki-Rosa." It was a declaration of her right to define herself, a warning to others (including obituary writers) against telling her story and a brief meditation on her poverty as a girl and the blessings, from holiday gatherings to bathing in "one of those big tubs that folk in chicago barbecue in," which transcended it.

"and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy"

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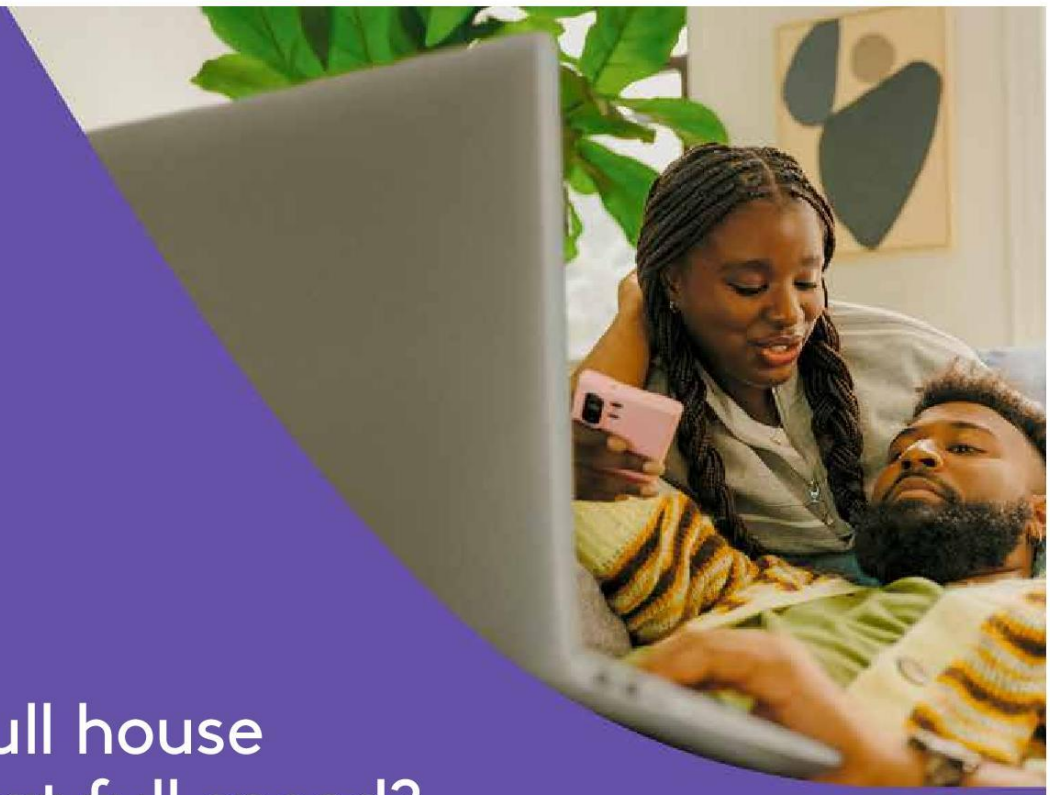

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