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10 Things LGBTQ Families Can Do to Find Strength In 2025

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

As I write this column, we are just a few weeks away from arguably the most actively and intentionally anti-LGBTQ federal administration ever. It's going to be a rough few years for many of us. Here are 10 things we can do in the year ahead to support ourselves and our families legally, emotionally, and communally.

Make sure our legal parentage ties are as secure as they can be. Taking additional steps to secure parentage is especially important for nongestational and nongenetic parents, whose legal relationships with their children may still be called into question because of bias and discrimination, even if they are married and on their children's birth certificates. Both married and unmarried LGBTQ parents are therefore advised by LGBTQ legal experts to have the security of a court judgment (an adoption, court order of parentage, or equivalent), not just a birth certificate, to protect their child-parent relationships. Visit lgbtqparentage.org for a brief guide that GLAD Law and I created which explains more.

Protect our families further with

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

President Jimmy Carter was my first

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

We always remember our first experiences. 1976 was my first experience to cast a ballot for the president of the United States. James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Jr. (1924- 2024), an engineer, a former naval officer, a humble peanut farmer, and a born-again Christian, was a welcome candidate after the disgraceful fall and resignation of President Richard M. Nixon for the lying and covering- up of the Watergate scandal. Vice President Gerald R. Ford became president, the only person neither elected for presidency nor vice presidency, and pardoned Nixon. Carter got my vote when he told the American people, "I'll never tell a lie. I'll never make a misleading statement. I'll never betray the confidence that any of you had in me."

Jimmy the Baptist

Carter grew up as a Southern Baptist and was the first U. S. president to announce unabashedly he was a "born again" Christian. He proselytized his ideas with folksinger Bob Dylan and with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in the Camp David Accords in 1978 in brokering peace.

In 1976, Carter owed his presidential victory to White evangelical Christian voters. They lauded Carter because he didn't play down but lived out loud his meaning of being a born-again Christian entering American politics. During his presidential run, Carter unapologetically told the New York Times, "If there are those who don't want to vote for me because I'm a deeply committed Christian, I believe they should vote for someone else."

Carter taught Sunday School for de-

see **MONROE,** *page 7*

Mary Bonauto Receives Presidential Citizens Medal

Bay Windows Staff

Civil rights attorney Mary Bonauto, Senior Director at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law), was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Joe Biden at the White House on January 2, alongside 19 other recipients.

"It is an astonishing honor to receive this recognition, and to be in the company of other incredible individuals who have had such a significant impact on the lives of Americans," Bonauto said in a statement. "The Presidential Citizens Medal represents something fundamental: that we each have a role to play in fulfilling our country's promises of equality, dignity, and freedom."

The White House lauded Bonauto's pioneering work in legalizing same-sex marriage across multiple states, including Massachusetts, Ver-

see **BONUATO,** *page 5*

Screenshot via The White House, YouTube.

Takeaways from AP's reporting on Sarah McBride, the first openly trans person elected to Congress

U.S.-Rep.-elect Sarah McBride, D-Del., speeds her incoming Deputy Chief of Staff and Communications Director, Michaela Kurinsky-Malos, through the halls of Delaware Legislative Hall on a moving cart as they move out of McBride's Delaware state senate office in Dover, Del. Photo by Carolyn Kaster, AP.

By Tiffany Stanley
Associated Press

DOVER, Del. (AP) — Sarah McBride made history in Delaware as the first openly transgender state senator in the United States. Now she's making history again, recently elected as the first openly trans member of Congress.

Her political promotion has come during a reckoning for transgender rights when legislation in Republican-governed states around the country aims to curb their advance.

see **MCBRIDE,** *page 5*

Biden signs defense bill despite objections to ban on transgender health care for military children

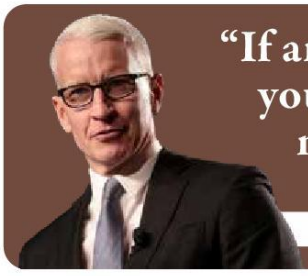
By Darlene Superville
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday signed into law a defense bill that authorizes significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to $895 billion despite his objections to language stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children in military families.

Biden said his administration strongly opposes the provision because it targets a group based on gender identity and "interferes with parents' roles to determine the best care for their children." He said it also undermines the all-volunteer military's ability to recruit and retain talent.

"No service member should have to decide between their family's health care access and their call to

see **DEFENSE,** *page 2*



"If any young people are watching, at a certain point in your life, you will become the people you used to make fun of. And that's what we've become."

- Anderson Cooper during his New Year's Eve telecast with Andy Cohen.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons.

The Jimmy Carter I knew

Public domain photo, via Wikimedia Commons.

By Mark Segal

In 1976, I invited Vietnam Veteran Leonard Matlovich to join me in Florida to campaign for Pennsylvania's governor, Milton Shapp, who was running in the Florida State Democratic primary for president. We were part of a group called "Gays for Shapp." Shapp didn't go very far in his quest for the White House, but his opponent — a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia — did. His name was Jimmy Carter.

During the campaign, there was a debate between the candidates, and at that debate, I had the opportunity to speak with Carter. There was only one question: Where did he stand on nondiscrimination against the gay community? He thought for a while, and it seemed to me that this was a question he hadn't been asked before. After a pause, he simply replied, "I'm against any kind of discrimination." That was the first time any presidential candidate spoke up on LGBTQ+ issues.

Later in the campaign, he backed that statement up in writing and never shied away from the subject. In doing so, he became the first presidential candidate to engage with the LGBTQ+ community. When he became president, his administration was the first to open the White House doors to the LGBTQ+ community. He appointed Midge Costanza as head of his Office of Public Liaison. Under the approval of President Carter, she arranged the first high-level White House meeting with LGBTQ+ leaders.

These were pioneering baby steps, and they were welcomed by a president who considered himself an evangelical Christian.

After leaving the White House, he spoke out against the Briggs Initiative in California, which would bar LGBTQ+ teachers, opposed the Boy Scouts' ban on gay scoutmasters, and even supported marriage equality.

His historic steps as president are chronicled in "The Carter Presidency and Gay Rights" by Harris Dousemetzis. But President Carter best described his actions in an interview in The Advocate in 2005.

Reporter Sean Kennedy asked, "You're a Christian, but you don't have a problem with gay men and lesbians as many other Christians do. Why?" Carter responded, "I'm a worshipper of Jesus Christ, who never mentioned homosexuals in any way–certainly not in a deleterious fashion. And when it has been mentioned in the New Testament, it's been combined with things like selfishness or something like that. So I've never looked upon it as any sort of reason to condemn a person. I think it's an inherent characteristic just like other things that we do with our lives."

Jimmy, rest in peace, and thank you!

Russian man arrested for allegedly running LGBTQ+ travel agency found dead in custody

By The Associated Press

A Russian man arrested for allegedly running a travel agency for gay customers was found dead in custody in Moscow, rights group OVD-Info reported Sunday, amid a crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights in Russia.

According to OVD-Info, which tracks political arrests, Andrei Kotov — director of the "Men Travel" agency — faced charges of "organizing extremist activity and participating in it."

OVD-Info said an investigator told Kotov's lawyer that her client had died by suicide early Sunday while in pretrial detention and was found dead in his cell.

Prior to Kotov's death, independent media outlet Mediazona reported earlier this month that Kotov had rejected the charges and said in court that law enforcement officers beat him and administered electric shocks during the arrest, even though he didn't resist.

Just over a year ago, Russia's Supreme Court effectively outlawed any LGBTQ+ activism in a ruling that designated "the international LGBT movement" as extremist. The move exposed anyone in the community or connected to it to criminal prosecution and prison, ushering in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

The LGBTQ+ community in Russia has been under legal and public pressure for over a decade but especially since the Kremlin sent troops to Ukraine in 2022. Russian leader Vladimir Putin has argued that the war is a proxy battle with the West, which he says aims to destroy Russia and its "traditional family values" by pushing for LGBTQ+ rights.

Defense

Continued from page 1

serve our nation," the president said in a statement.

The Senate forwarded the bill to Biden after passing it last week by a vote of 85-14. In the House, a majority of Democrats voted against the bill after House Speaker Mike Johnson insisted on adding the provision to ban transgender medical care for children. The legislation easily passed by a vote of 281-140.

Biden also objected to other language in the bill prohibiting the use of money earmarked to transfer detainees held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to some foreign countries and into the United States. He urged Congress to lift those restrictions.

The annual defense authorization bill, which directs Pentagon policy, provides a 14.5% pay raise for junior enlisted service members and a 4.5% increase for others.

The legislation also directs resources towards a more confrontational approach to China, including establishing a fund that could be used to send military resources to Taiwan in much the same way that the U.S. has backed Ukraine. It also invests in new military technologies, including artificial intelligence, and bolsters the U.S. production of ammunition.

The U.S. has also moved in recent years to ban the military from purchasing Chinese products, and the defense bill extended that with prohibitions on Chinese goods from garlic in military commissaries to drone technology.

The legislation still must be backed up with a spending package.

Associated Press writer Stephen Groves contributed to this report.

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Best Theater of 2024

Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

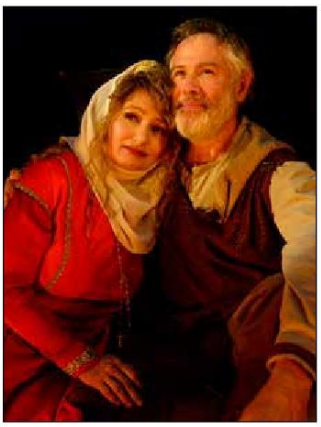
Explorations of identity, gender, diversity and tradition enriched much of the best theater of 2024. At the same time, inspired fresh revivals brought new insight to works by Moliere, Shakespeare and August Wilson as well as Tony Award-winning musicals. There were also significant collaborations between companies—notably Actors' Shakespeare Project and Hibernian Hall (continuing at the latter venue January 23-February 23 with Wilson's "The Piano Lesson"), SpeakEasy Stage and the Front Porch Arts Collaborative as well as Gloucester Stage Company and Teatro Chelsea—the last an ongoing new relationship.

Huntington Theatre—rightly acclaimed for its arresting earlier engagement with the entire Wilson "Pittsburgh Cycle"—staged Houston-set "Sojourners"—the inauguration of a partnering with area companies in producing the nine-play "Ufot Family Cycle" by Nigerian-American dramatist Mfoniso Udofia. A very different ambitious work—the pre-Broadway tryout at the Emerson Colonial Theatre of "The Queen of Versailles" (based on the documentary of the same name) featured the always-winning Kristin Chenoweth but proved to be a work in progress that needs a better book and a somewhat stronger score from Stephen Schwartz ("Wicked"). Chenoweth and Schwartz fans may find the musical sharper on Broadway—with previews slated to begin March 12 with an April 8 opening and July 8 closing. More satisfying were distinctive theater-dance works and meaningful solo efforts.

The following are this critic's choices for the best of 2024.

Theater

An American in Paris (Reagle Music Theatre). Director-choreographer Rachel Bertone sharply captured the dance and plot riches (the latter tied in with the Holocaust-surviving heroine) of this Gershwin-orchestrated Broadway gem.



Sehnaz Dirik as Eleanor and Anthony Mullin as Henry II in Theater Uncorked production of "The Lion in Winter." Photo courtesy of Theater Uncorked.

Kai Clifton (center) as Usher and the company of "A Strange Loop" at Calderwood Pavilion. Photo courtesy of Maggie Hall Photography.

A Case for the Existence of God (SpeakEasy Stage Company). A business relationship turned friendship and bromance in Samuel D. Hunter's affecting play—with heartfelt performances by De'Lon Grant and Jesse Hinson.

A Strange Loop (SpeakEasy Stage and Front Page Arts Collective). Gifted Maurice Emanuel Parent powerfully staged this provocative 2020 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner with riveting Kai Clifton as black gay protagonist Usher.

Dinner for One (Greater Boston Stage Company)Physically gifted Paul Melendy moved with amazing agility as Debra Wise beautifully underplayed in this disarming comedy.

Fiddler on the Roof (North Shore Music Theatre). Jerome Robbins would drink a L'Chayim to director Robert Schneider's labor of love revival.

The Hombres (Gloucester Stage Company and Teatro Chelsea). Director Armando Rivera brought fire and feeling to Tony Meneses' insightful examination of what it means to be a man and friendships between very different men.

King Hedley II (Actors' Shakespeare Project). James Ricardo Milord—one of the Hub's finest actors—found all of the title character's tenacity and vulnerability in ASP's stirring revival of this resonant Wilson play.

Leopoldstadt (Huntington Threatre). Director Carey Perloff turned Tom Stoppard's Tony-winning exploration of family, tradition and his own experience as a Jewish man into what is arguably the highpoint of 2024 area theater.

The Dybbuk (Arlekin Players Theatre). Igor Golyak caught the drama and the spiritual surrealism of the Ansky classic at the Vilna Shul.

The Lion in Winter (Theater Uncorked). Director Alison Olivia Choat and a superb cast made James Goldman's witty 1183-set play an entertaining battle royal.

The Winter's Tale (Commonwealth Shakespeare Company) Nael Nacer's sublime Leontes—initially chilling and eventually caring—headlined director Bryn Boice's exuberant

see **THEATER,** *page 7*

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Stranded in a hostile land

One refugee's courage and resilience

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

Tariq (not his real name) is a gay Ugandan who resettled last year in Toronto. Several weeks ago he was forced to return to Kenya to face bogus charges of human trafficking. In fact, he had helped gay men flee to Kenya to escape honor killings.

The hearing on those charges went well for him. He is no more a human trafficker than Harriet Tubman was. But the Canadians told him he had to find his own way back to Canada, including raising the money. They should have put him on a plane back home after forcing him to return to Kenya for the hearing. The behavior of the Canadian officials in this case is truly appalling.

After some time, the Canadians started being a bit more helpful. But they told him that he was no longer a refugee and could not simply be put on a plane back to Canada with refugees. That sounds like bureaucratic excuse-making to me rather than a good reason. There he was, stranded in Nairobi struggling to find a place to sleep. What would you call him? In any case, for reasons I do not understand, they told him he had to go first to Ethiopia, where they would put him on a flight to Canada.

As an advocate for LGBTQ refugees in Africa, I raised funds to provide help to Tariq for his lodging in Nairobi while he waited, his transport to the airport, his ticket to Ethiopia, and money for taxis and a two-night hotel stay once he reached Addis Ababa.

Once he arrived in Ethiopia, he told me the officials had changed their story and now he had to come up with the money for his airfare to Canada himself.

Luckily for Tariq, unlike refugees still waiting for their resettlement flights, he doesn't have to wait for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration; he can fly home to Canada as soon as he has the airfare.

So I'm sure I made the right decision to prioritize him over the refugees still waiting. Like a nurse in a busy intensive care unit, it is sometimes necessary to do triage. But it's hard to steel oneself against so much suffering that one cannot assuage. I know it's unreasonable to feel guilt simply because of my human limitations. We all have to fulfill our responsibilities and engage in basic self-care.

We are effectively living in wartime. We cannot give up our need for joy until the struggle and the persecution are over. Of course we must honor and mourn the fallen and the suffering, do what we can, and encourage others to do likewise.

Yet we must also remind ourselves of the many reasons we have to affirm life. We light our lights in defiance of the darkness. It is fitting that we dance with the gifts we are given, not hobble ourselves in despair.

The situation for LGBTQ people in eastern Africa is awful and getting worse. At least the Biden administration has been friendly toward our concerns. The Trump administration will not be.

The bigotry, cruelty, and greed in the world can defeat us if we give in to them. Sometimes all we can do is keep our little flame of hope lit and carry on as best we can.

Tariq, after a meeting at the Canadian Embassy where he was told he was on his own, was punched so violently by the guard outside that he vomited blood and broke a bone to his sternum. He also developed typhoid and pneumonia from living in the streets for four days.

I was able to find additional money for more extended lodging and medical care. If he makes it to the end of January, I can send him airfare to return to Canada.

Beyond dealing with his immediate situation, there is a need to demand accountability for the Canadian officials' cruelty and bureaucratic rigidity. There is also a desperate need for more non-governmental organizations with the funding, staffing, expertise, and goodwill to deal with the crisis of displaced LGBTQ people in Africa.

In the meantime, I am inspired by one man's courage and fortitude amid hardships in a hostile land. Tariq sent a note of appreciation for my help, then put down the phone to get some sleep.

Rest, my warrior. In your brave spirit live the hopes of those we have lost, and of those who still dare to dream of a more decent world.

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

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Mombian

Continued from page 1

wills, powers of attorney, and healthcare proxies. Trans parents may also have additional legal needs and concerns; see the "Trans Legal Survival Guide" from Advocates for Trans Equality for more information. For all of the above legal issues, it is important to get advice from someone well versed in LGBTQ family law in your specific state. If you need assistance, the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association maintains a Family Law Attorney Directory of experienced LGBTQ family law practitioners. Additionally, several major LGBTQ legal organizations offer helplines that can address questions, provide attorney referrals, and direct you further: GLAD Law Answers Legal InfoLine, Lambda Legal's Help Desk, NCLR Legal Information Hotline, and the Transgender Law Center. Find them all with a quick online search.

Talk with our children (if they are old enough) about their ongoing feelings around the election and the incoming administration. My son, when he was younger, would hear things from classmates and see headlines that could be frightening. I tried to assure him that not everyone thinks the same way, that we do have a system of checks and balances, and that his family will be here for him no matter what.

Be as out and visible as we feel we safely can. No matter what happens over the next four years, LGBTQ people aren't going anywhere, and must continue to remind people of our presence. We should temper this with reasonable precautions about our safety and an awareness that our children may sometimes wish to come out about their families in their own way and time—but if we feel able, being out and visible in our communities can do a lot to spread understanding and to make people think twice before saying or doing something queerphobic.

Find community. We're going to need each other more than ever for both practical resources and emotional support. This could involve being part of a local queer parenting group or online support group, engaging with other LGBTQ parents on social media, or turning to existing family and friends. Seek out the community (-ies) that you feel you need, and offer a welcome to new members in turn.

Stand with and speak out for people of marginalized groups not our own. LGBTQ people won't be the only ones targeted by the incoming federal administration. We will all be stronger if we can build a network of understanding, allyship, and assistance.

Stay informed by reading reliable news sources, both mainstream and niche--but crosscheck facts across several sources to avoid spreading misinformation. Take time, too, to occasionally read niche news sites or blogs that focus on identities not your own. I've found this is a great way to gain perspective, and I hope it helps me be a better ally.

Continue to fight book bans and to support the publication of quality, LGBTQ-inclusive, diverse children's and young adult books. Unite Against Book Bans (uniteagainstbookbans.org) is a good starting point for learning how to stand against censorship in your community and beyond. You can also buy LGBTQ-inclusive children's books, borrow them from (and suggest them to) local libraries, and share about ones you like with family, friends, and on social media.

Reach out to our elected officials about issues that matter to us. Even if they aren't the people we voted for, we shouldn't let that silence our voices. (See USA.gov for contact information.)

Know that we are strong. The suggestions above are based on ones from a similar column I wrote eight years ago at the start of the first Trump administration. While the threat is greater now, I believe, since Trump and his allies have more experience behind them, I also know that our community is still here and still queer. That gives me hope for the next four years. It won't be easy, of course. We will have to support each other—especially our transgender and nonbinary members, who bear the brunt of the new administration's anti-LGBTQ attacks—as never before. We and our children have shown strength and resourcefulness time and time again, though, across millennia. May we hold that in our hearts as we and our families find joy in each other and resilience for the year ahead.

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.

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McBride

Continued from page 1

During an election where a deluge of campaign ads and politicians demeaned trans people, McBride still easily won her blue state's only seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

But even before she is sworn in, her reception from congressional Republicans has been tumultuous. Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina targeted her by proposing to ban transgender people from U.S. Capitol restrooms that correspond to their gender identity — a ban that House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., enacted.

McBride tried to defuse the situation, saying she would follow the rules. "I'm not here to fight about bathrooms," the 34-year-old wrote in a statement.

Here are other takeaways from AP's reporting about McBride:

Early promise and a meteoric rise

Growing up in Wilmington, Delaware, McBride was the type of child who practiced Democratic political speeches in her bedroom at a makeshift podium. By high school, she had worked on multiple campaigns, including that of Beau Biden, the president's late son and former Delaware attorney general.

Though she seemed destined to work in politics, McBride once felt revealing her gender identity would derail those ambitions. She was 21 and the president of American University's student government when she came out as transgender, first to her friends and family and later in a public post that went viral.

Says McBride, "Coming out was without question the hardest thing that I had ever done up until that point. And yet it was still relatively easy compared to the experiences of so many people."

A supportive family and pastor

Her parents have been her biggest supporters, but they worried for her. One of their first calls after McBride came out was to their pastor, the Rev. Gregory Knox Jones of Westminster Presbyterian, a progressive church where Sarah was a youth elder and Jill Biden is a member.

"We talked about the fact that this was your child. You love your child," Jones recalled. "You can't think of losing a son. You've gained a daughter."

David McBride, Sarah's father, said that kind of support has made all the difference for their family. "Our life and Sarah's life have been made by the response that we and she got first from our friends, our church, our community."

A rapid series of firsts

McBride would go on to forge a trail through a rapid series of firsts. During college, she became the first openly transgender woman to intern at the White House. At a reception there, she met and later fell in love with a young lawyer, Andrew Cray, a trans man and LGBTQ+ health policy advocate.

As an activist at 22, McBride was instrumental in helping pass a transgender nondiscrimination law in Delaware. She worked as the spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, a leading LGBTQ-rights group. In 2016, she became the first openly trans person to speak at the Democratic National Convention.

In the legislature, a hard worker — fueled by coffee

As a state legislator, McBride was known for her hard work. She rarely stops to eat on busy days, instead subsisting on a steady diet of coffee, heavy on the cream and sweetener.

Nowhere is her boundless energy more evident than when she talks about the minutiae of policymaking. She likes kitchen table issues: health care, paid family leave, childcare and affordable housing. In the state Senate, she chaired the health committee and helped expand access to Medicaid and dental care for underserved communities. Most of her bills got bipartisan support.

Her signature accomplishment was helping pass paid family and medical leave in Delaware. It was personal for McBride.

Her partner, Cray, was 27 when he was diagnosed with oral cancer. Within a year, the prognosis was terminal. They moved up their wedding plans, asking the Rev. Gene Robinson, a friend and the first openly gay Episcopal bishop, to officiate.

They married on the rooftop of their apartment building in August 2014. Cray died four days later at the hospital.

Aspiring to a politics of grace

In her 2018 memoir, McBride wrote a chapter titled "Amazing grace," about "beautiful acts of kindness" she witnessed during the last weeks of Cray's life.

"A lot of times when people go through loss, it can be either faith-crushing or faith-affirming. And for me, it was faith-affirming," she said.

In the decade since, she often asks herself, "What would Andy do?" And she seeks to follow his example of compassion and "principled grace" toward anti-LGBTQ politicians. "His kindness, his decency has provided for me a North Star."

Some activists criticized McBride for not fighting back more forcefully against the Capitol bathroom ban. She agrees it's important for trans people to access public facilities, but says she will respond with grace.

"At the end of the day, our ability to have a pluralistic, diverse democracy requires some foundation of kindness and grace," McBride said. "And I believe in that so strongly that even when it's difficult, I will seek to summon it."

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Bonauto

Continued from page 1

mont, Connecticut, and Maine, culminating in her argument before the Supreme Court in Obergefell v. Hodges, which established nationwide marriage equality. "Her efforts made millions of families whole and forged a more perfect Union," the White House statement noted.

The Presidential Citizens Medal honors Americans who demonstrate exemplary service to their country or fellow citizens. The White House emphasized that these recipients are "bonded by their common decency and commitment to serving others."

The ceremony was broadcast on the White House's YouTube Channel.

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billy masters

I dunno how it took 29 years of columns and scores of Hallmark movies for me to finally recognize the truth in something I've said for years—you CAN'T have it all. People tell you that you can, but let me tell you the first truth of the New Year. Life is full of hard choices. If you really want one thing, you must miss out on something else. If you want to lie on the beach, you cannot be in Antarctica. Take it from me...and **Lacey Chabert**.

Let's make that my New Year's resolution—to tell you the absolute truth...as often as humanly possible. So here's one—for the first time in decades, I did not ring in the New Year with a **Lindsay Wagner** movie. That's because Miss Wagner didn't make a movie this year. I ran into this problem last year, when I reached out to the producer of "When Jack Came Back"—a film that hadn't yet come out (it can now be seen on Tubi). I was one of the first people who got to see Lindsay playing a mother with Alzheimer's. How many of her dozens of fans around the world can say that?

Speaking of ailing parents, the news is not good from Casa Masters. It started a few months ago with Big Daddy. Now Big Mama is laid up. And you know who picks up the slack...among other things? Yours truly. You know what a crimp this puts into my sex life? "What's that beeping? That's just Mama's life support, baby. Does it turn you on? No, that steady noise doesn't mean anything!" It's been hell! I certainly don't begrudge them the care and attention they deserve. And I certainly don't wish them ill. But lately I'm starting to envy **Conan O'Brien**.

Patti LuPone hosted a swanky New Year's Eve shindig with a number of queer (and queer-adjacent) guests. Folk like **Randy Rainbow, Cole Escola**, and...wait a minute—was that **Nicole Scherzinger**? Yes, the former **Norma Desmond** and the current Norma Desmond joined forces for a spirited rendition of "Auld Lang Sync"—complete with at least two-and-a-half part harmony. That they didn't duet on "The Perfect Year" is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity lost forever. At least they toasted each other with Norma's last line from act one of "Sunset Blvd"—which you can see on BillyMasters.com. BTW, after their duties on CNN, both **Anderson Cooper and Andy Cohen** slipped into the soiree—at least I think it was a soiree they slipped into.

By the by, Patti is everywhere. After enjoying a scenery-chewing role on "Agatha All Along", we hear La LuPone will be featured on several episodes of "And Just Like That..."—whenever that long-awaited third season drops.

Believe me when I say this next story shocks me. I can't believe it, but I have to kick off the New Year by talking about **Blake Lively**. But I was intrigued when I saw there were claims of sexual harassment. How disappointing to find out that in the marriage of Blake Lively and **Ryan Reynolds**, the one being sexually harassed is....BLAKE! It's a world gone loco. She filed a suit against **Justin Baldoni**, co-star and director of "It Ends With Us" (he's quite a looker, too). He claims that his countersuit will "shock everyone". I don't know how many shocks I can take—I'm already shocked I'm writing about Blake Lively! In Baldoni's $250 million suit against "The New York Times", he talks about a meeting with Lively and Reynolds. Allegedly Ryan "aggressively berated Baldoni during a meeting at their penthouse in New York, accusing him of 'fat shaming' Lively." Justin says it wasn't "fat shaming". He says he simply asked how much Miss Lively weighed before a scene where he had to pick her up. Why? Baldoni has chronic back issues and wanted "to ensure he could safely perform the lift without injury." Calm down, Justin. You're lifting Blake Lively—not **Chrissy Metz** (and that's not fat shaming—that's just physics).

Wendy Williams rang out the new year by landing back in the news. On the positive side, she was celebrating her son Kevin's college graduation in Miami. Paparazzi spotted her outside a restaurant on a scooter—yes, a scooter. She was overheard yelling to someone, "And then both of you walked away leaving my shit in the street? Just get the car, please—and make sure it's the right car!" When asked if everything was OK, she explained that her caretakers called the wrong car. While they went to find the right car, they left her scooter unattended and she was not having it. "This cost a fucking mint, and they just left my shit out here." At least she sounds feisty.

It's only the first week of January and we've already got a story that we're filing under "Strange But True"—and, no, it's not about Blake Lively! This is about someone I hold in almost equal esteem—**Keanu Reeves**. Sidebar: a few months ago, I told you that he's reuniting with his "Bill and Ted" co-star, **Alex Winter**, for a Broadway revival of "Waiting for Godot" by **Samuel Beckett**. Didya know that production will be staged by **Jamie Lloyd**, who directed the hit revival of "Sunset Blvd"? And, no, none of this has anything to do with the current story. Last year, Keanu's LA home was burgled. Fast forward to the final days of 2024, and police in Santiago, Chile seized loads of stolen property. And what do they find? A Rolex inscribed, "Keanu Thank you JW4 2021". It was a thank you gift he received at the wrap party of one of those "John Wick" movies that I've never seen.

Before we filed this column, I saw this headline: "**Josh Duhamel, Dylan Sprouse & Til Schweiger** To Topline Action Thriller 'The Neglected'". OMG, have I fallen into a time warp? Is it 1995 all over again???

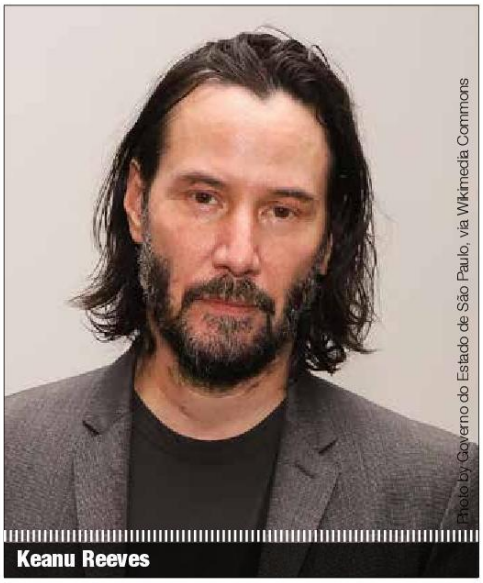
Just before 2024 closed, a couple of deaths crept in. The first was the beloved **Linda Lavin**, who died on December 29th. Her representative stated, Linda passed "unexpectedly due to complications from recently discovered lung cancer". Days earlier, she wrapped filming on the seventh episode of "Mid-Century Modern"—a sitcom for Hulu already being called a gay "Golden Girls". It concerns three gay men who live together in Palm Springs, one of whom (**Nathan Lane**) is accompanied by his mother (**Linda Lavin**). When Linda learned of her diagnosis, we hear she told producers she wanted "everything out there on the show". There are already plans to write her character's passing into the penultimate episode of the first season. What will happen during season two? Stay tuned.

Hours before midnight, **Jocelyn Wildenstein** died on New Year's Eve. Affectionately known as "The Catwoman", Jocelyn was the face of bad plastic surgery—the epitome of the word "botched". She was also a very wealthy lady, receiving a $2.5 billion divorce settlement and alimony of roughly $100 million per year! Her longtime companion, **Lloyd Klein**, said she died while taking a nap prior to heading out for the festivities—"just to look good before getting dressed". How'd that work out? By the by, the 84 year-old never admitted to any of her "procedures".

Our first "Ask Billy" question of the year comes from Ray in Seattle. *"What do you know about **Denali Foxx**? I just saw some pics he posted online and couldn't get over his really hot body. Has he ever done porn?"*

I'm always glad to talk about someone I've never heard of. Denali Foxx (aka Denali) was on "RuPaul's Drag Race" back in 2021. Looking online, I see Ray is correct—Denali is quite buff. Not a big surprise, because many of the most fetching fellas who wear frocks are in incredible shape. His birth name is **Cordero Matthew Zuckerman**, and here's a fun fact—he's a double gold medalist in US Figure Skating! He also worked with Cirque du Soleil, Royal Caribbean Cruises, and SeaWorld—but don't hold that against him. Last year he got engaged to longtime beau Alexander. He posted this: "Six years ago you asked me to dance... and six years later I asked you to marry me on your 30th". I don't believe they've tied the knot...yet. To answer Ray's other question, I don't find any evidence that Denali has done gay porn—but I bet he'd be pretty popular, as you'll see on BillyMasters.com.

When we're kicking off the year talking about Blake Lively, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Here's yet another fun fact—most drag queens out there are tops! They'll fuck you with their pumps on (don't ask me how I know). More bits of my sage wisdom can be found on www.BillyMasters.com—the site that certainly ain't botched. New year, new questions. Send them along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Lindsay Wagner makes another movie! Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.



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Keanu Reeves

Photo by Louise Palanker, via Wikimedia Commons

Linda Lavin

Photo by DVSHOSS, via Wikimedia Commons

Denali Foxx

Theater

Continued from page 7

revival.

Urinetown (Lyric Stage Company of Boston). Greg Kotis' prescient book about water and corporate greed and Mark Hollman's witty score found fresh currents of fun and insight in this rollicking revival.

Solo Performance

Driving in Circles (at Boston Playwrights Theatre). Multi-talented Jay Eddy wrote, composed and performed this blisteringly powerful and personal musical focusing on recovery from abuse.

Golda's Balcony (Shakespeare & Company at Emerson Paramount Center). Annette Miller brought new resonance to her award-winning portrayal of Golda Meir.

Robert Frost: This Verse Business (Spring Pool Arts at Calderwood Pavilion). Gordon Clapp brought Frost to life and declaimed his poetry with equal vitality.

Distinctive Dance-Theater

Diary of a Tap Dancer (American Repertory Theatre)—Writer-choreographer Ayodele Casel and seven equally talented performers dance out both her own story as well as the timely yet virtually untold history of black women tap dancers.

Message in a Bottle (Sadler's Wells and Universal Music UK with Zoonation: the Kate Prince Company,at Emerson Colonial Theatre) This touching look at family challenges danced out its appeal to love and understanding in the most exciting such effort since "Movin' Out."

Rachel Simone Webb as Juliet and Michael Canu as Romeo in "& Juliet" at Citizens Opera House. Photo by Matthew Murphy.

Tours

& Juliet (Broadway in Boston at Citizen Opera House)

Company (Broadway in Boston at Citizen Opera House)

An Evening with Audra McDonald (Celebrity Series at Symphony Hall)

Patti Lupone: A Life in Notes (Celebrity Series at Symphony Hall)

Honorable Mention

Beyond Words (Brit d'Arbeloff Women in Science production at Central Square Theatre)Cost of Living (SpeakEasy Stage)

John Proctor Is the Villain (Huntington)

Moby Dick (Arts Emerson)

South Pacific (Reagle)

The Minutes (Umbrella Stage Company)

Titanic (North Shore Music Theatre)

Trouble in Mind (Lyric)

Wipe Out (Gloucester Stage)

Yellow Face (Lyric)

Monroe

Continued from page 1

cades, and Carter's favorite Bible verse was from Micah 6:8. "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." He lived by it!

Carter upheld the total separation of church and state. He opposed public money and tax exemptions for religious schools and institutions. He discontinued the tradition of inviting evangelicals to conduct White House prayer services, a once cozy niche for prominent evangelicals like Rev. Billy Graham, who he admired.

However, if Jimmy Carter were running for president today, they would consider him a heretic and excommunicate him for his stance on Christian nationalism, white supremacy, reproductive justice, LGBTQ+ rights, Palestine, and interpretation of scripture, among others.

Son of a segregationist

Carter, a Georgian like many of the civil rights leaders of the era, wasn't involved in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, never confronted his father's pro-Confederate views nor his denomination's support of slavery, nor met with MLK. "Carter never did anything racist himself. But he didn't participate," Carter's biographer Jonathan Alter told AP News. "And King was right there." However, to the shock of his white evangelical base and the awe of the black voters, Carter, at his inauguration, issued an edict: "The time for racial discrimination is over."

Carter appointed the first Black woman to serve in a presidential Cabinet and the first Black, Andrew Young, an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. He also formed a relationship with King's family.

LGBTQ+ Ally

During Carter's administration, he was concerned about LGBTQ+ issues, like employment discrimination. After his presidency, he advocated abolishing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

As an honest man, Carter was candid about his struggle with marriage equality. But he leaned into his faith to guide him. In 2005, an Advocate reporter asked him why he had no problem with gays and lesbians like many Christians. "I'm a worshipper of Jesus Christ, who never mentioned homosexuals in any way — certainly not in a deleterious fashion," Carter replied.

In 2015, in the SCOTUS's Obergefell v. Hodges decision, which legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states, Carter publicly gave a shoutout of approval.

"I think Jesus would encourage any love affair if it was honest and sincere and was not damaging to anyone else," he told HuffPost Live. "I believe Jesus would approve of gay marriage."

Walked the talk

Faith was foundational to Carter's politics. However, his faith-driven public service bloomed after his presidency; he became the quintessential statesman and the nation's greatest ex-president. Like many Americans, I hold Carter in high regard. I liked his calm demeanor and balanced approach in difficult conversations and heated debates. He was not an alarmist but a measured man, thoughtful in his actions and responses. I admired the type of man he walked in the world.

I'm glad President Jimmy Carter was my first.

May he rest in peace.

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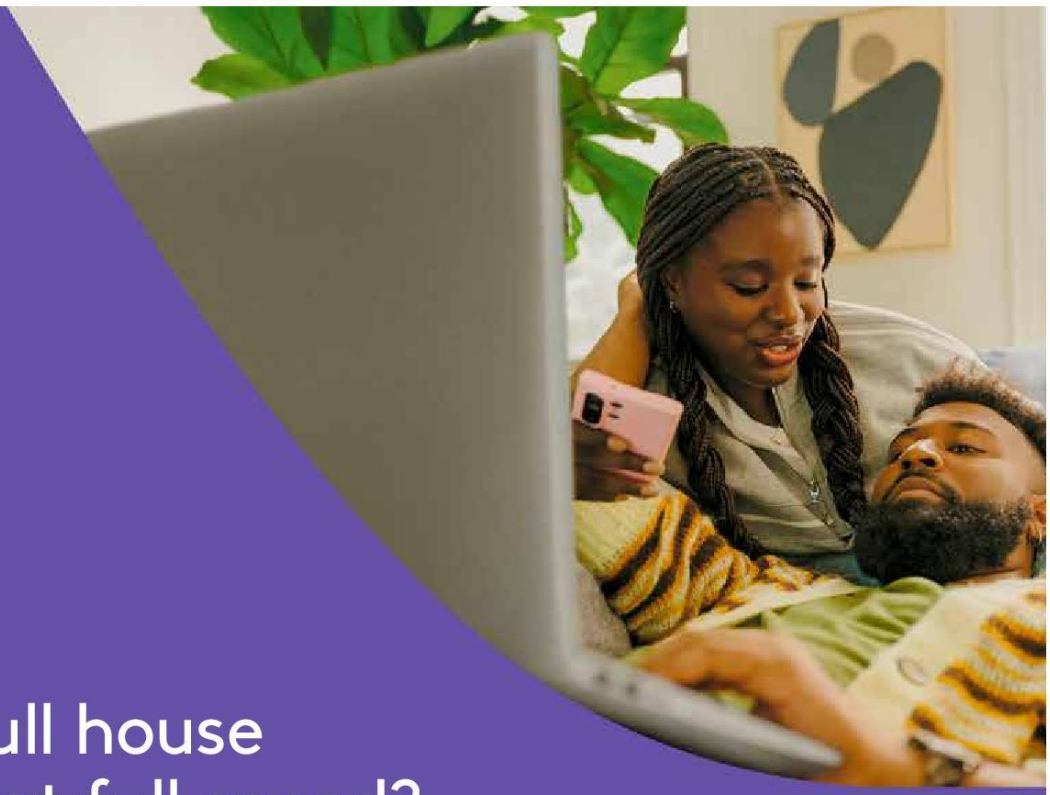

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