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"Stay Engaged": Making Progress for LGBTQ Families In 2024

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

After a 2023 that saw a rise in anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and more than 500 anti-LGBTQ bills introduced across the country, where should LGBTQ parents and our allies put our efforts to advance equality in 2024? Experts at several leading LGBTQ organizations shared their thoughts with me.

Updating state parentage laws will be a key focus for many. Stacey Stevenson, CEO of Family Equality, explained, "Many states have parentage laws that are several decades old." Updating them would "ensure that all children have equal access to legal parent-child relationships, regardless of the circumstances of their birth or the marital status, gender identity, or sexual orientation of their parents." Several states updated aspects of their parentage laws in 2023 and others have efforts underway, including Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. In 2024,

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

DignityUSA leader met with Pope Francis

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA with the pope. Photo courtesy of Irene Monroe.

DignityUSA is the world's oldest organization of LGBTQIA+ Catholics. Since 1969, the organization has advocated for change in the Roman Catholic Church. For three weeks in October, Catholics from around the world came to Rome for the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to discuss a range of topics confronting the present-day Church as it prepares to govern itself in the future. Among the many Catholics was Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA since 2007. Duddy-

see **MONROE,** *page 4*

MA police chief apologizes for search of middle school for LGBTQ book

Bay Windows Staff

Great Barrington Police Chief Paul Storti apologized after an officer searched the W.E.B. Du Bois Regional Middle School for a copy of "Gender Queer: A Memoir," an illustrated book on gender identity. The book has been banned in other districts.

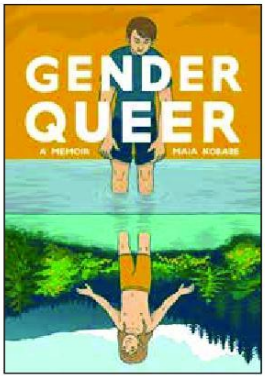
On Dec. 8, a Great Barrington Police Department plainclothes officer visited the school to look for the book after the department received a complaint about "concerning illustrations," the Boston Globe reported.

Storti told Boston.com they were "obligated and have a duty to examine the complaint further."

In a Facebook statement on Thursday, the chief apologized "to anyone who was negatively [affected] by our involvement at the WEB Dubois Middle School."

"Over the years, our relationship with our schools has been positive and collaborative, so together we worked with the school to try to navigate this sensitive situation," he said. "If our involvement caused distrust and alarm,

see **GENDER QUEER,** *page 2*



Under new FDA rules, some gays and bisexuals can donate blood

By Manuel Valdes and Claire Rush
Associated Press

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) - Over the last six years, blood center employee Dylan Smith was often asked how frequently he gave blood himself. His answer was always the same: As a gay man, he couldn't.

That changed this month.

Thanks to new federal guidelines finalized in May, gay and bisexual men in monogamous relationships can now donate at many blood centers around the country without abstaining from sex.

Bloodworks Northwest, where Smith works as a donor services supervisor, adopted the change on Dec. 6. He and his partner gave blood for the first time the next day.

"It's been really emotionally difficult just to explain every single time the reason why," said Smith, 28. "To be able to finally step up and support the mission that I really have just believed in since I started here just makes my heart feel so happy."

The new U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines are the latest step in a yearslong effort to reverse restrictions that were designed to protect the blood supply from HIV, but which were increasingly criticized as discriminatory following scientific advances that allowed better detection

see **BLOOD,** *page 7*

After approving blessings for same-sex couples, Pope asks Vatican staff to avoid 'rigid ideologies'

By Nicole Winfield
Associated Press

ROME (AP) - Pope Francis urged Vatican bureaucrats Thursday to avoid "rigid ideological positions" that prevent them from understanding today's reality, an appeal made days after he formally allowed priests to bless same-sex couples in a radical change of Vatican policy.

Francis used his annual Christmas greeting to the Holy See hierarchy to encourage the cardinals, bishops and laypeople who run the Vatican to listen to one another and to others so they can evolve to truly offer service to the Catholic Church.

Speaking in the Hall of Blessings, Francis told them it was important to keep advancing and growing in their understanding of the truth. Fearfully

see **POPE,** *page 7*

"No offense, but you look like Billy Masters."

— I don't know which part of this quip from a stranger insulted me more—that he didn't realize I am Billy Masters, or he thought someone would take offense to being told they look like Billy Masters.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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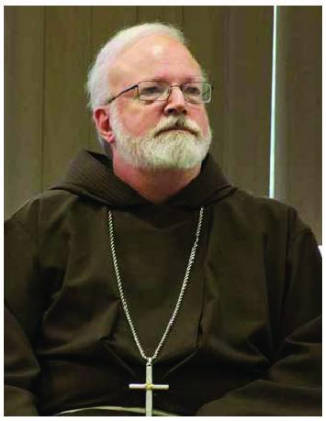
Cardinal Seán O'Malley Statement On Fiducia Supplicans

December 19, 2023



Cardinal Seán O'Malley. Photo by Scott Maentz, via Wikimedia Commons.

"We thank the Holy Father for his love and care of all the people in the flock. We caution and make clear that the Holy Father has not endorsed gay marriage, but has recognized all Catholics, including those whose unions are not recognized by the Church, as equally in need of God's grace and love.

It is the Church's mission to share God's blessings. "Fiducia Supplicans," issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and approved by Pope Francis, has brought clarity to how to impart those blessings. Pope Francis indicates that he is recognizing "non-ritualized blessings" that are spontaneous and for those who ask for them. Priests imparting these blessings need to be careful that it should not become a liturgical or semi-liturgical act, similar to a sacrament. The text stresses that Catholics should "neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation," but at the same time, "not prevent or prohibit" the Church from responding to people seeking God's help through "a simple blessing."

The document, therefore, offers a type of blessing that can be conferred on anyone to invoke God's help and mercy in their lives. It is the Church reaching out a hand of affection to all Catholics in the hope that these simple gestures provide an effective means of increasing trust in God on the part of the people who seek to be guided by a greater understanding of God's plan for love and truth."

Gender Queer

Continued from page 1

that was not our intention. I promise you our actions were not meant to disenfranchise anyone or influence school curriculum."

"Gender Queer: A Memoir," by nonbinary author Maia Kobabe, tells Kobabe's story from adolescence to adulthood and recounts the author's exploration of gender identity.

In a letter to the district, Berkshire Hills Regional School District Superintendent Peter Dillon and School Committee Chair Stephen Bannon said the district "does not support banning books."

"Also, we are committed to ensuring that all students feel safe as we support an inclusive environment at our schools," "The recent incident at the middle school has challenged and impacted our community...Faced with an unprecedented police investigation of what should be a purely educational issue, we tried our best to serve the interests of students, families, teachers, and staff. In hindsight, we would have approached that moment differently. We are sorry. We can do better to refine and support our existing policies. We are committed to supporting all our students, particularly vulnerable populations."

The district said it will hold several meetings so community members can discuss the incident, including at a scheduled School Committee meeting on Jan. 11.

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A year of awakening to the fascist threat

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

America has been down this road before

The biggest story of 2023 was the threat to American democracy posed by Donald Trump and his supporters. At its heart lurks a white Christian nationalism that targets racial and religious minorities and LGBTQ people.

45, however, did not start the fire. America's history is pocked with horrific episodes in addition to slavery. Here are some examples:

The Trail of Tears, which began in 1831, saw the forcible displacement of 60,000 members of five Native American tribes by the U.S. government. The Black Wall Street massacre in Tulsa in 1921 destroyed more than 35 square blocks of the Greenwood District, a thriving black community. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans were scapegoated for the Great Depression by the Hoover administration and deported. A rise in American fascism in the late 1930s included prominent figures like aviator Charles Lindbergh. Over 120,000 Japanese Americans were held in internment camps in World War II.

The Republican Party is now in thrall to a demagogue who is a willing tool of Vladimir Putin and a threat to the Western Alliance. Far from breaking with Trump after he tried to overturn the results of the 2020 election, they purged their ranks of anyone who crossed him. They have abandoned policy in favor of endless culture wars fueled by disinformation on social media.

Appeals to ignorance, fear, and prejudice have pushed us toward social disintegration. Dividing Americans by pretending diversity is a threat rather than an essential feature of our country is the far right's only path to power.

Efforts have been made to insulate us from Trump and the Supreme Court he packed. The Marriage Protection Act protects same-sex and interracial couples. A provision was inserted into the National Defense Authorization Act to prevent any president from withdrawing America from NATO.

The trouble is, a high court supermajority shaped by the Federalist Society cannot be counted on to respect those protections. A Trump returned to power could betray America's allies without leaving NATO.

Trump says of immigrants, "They're poisoning the blood of our country." My father fought in World War II against Nazi Germany when it was twisted by the same thinking.

I thought of comparing America's recurring bouts of intolerance to 17-year cicadas; but cicadas are harmless. When they land on me, I enjoy examining their beautiful wings. Know-nothingism is not at all like cicadas. It is less predictable and profoundly dangerous.

The response to a recent incident where a Senate staffer videotaped a sexual encounter in a Senate hearing room is instructive. The staffer shown in the video was quickly fired by Senator Cardin; but the fact that the staffer was Democratic and gay was used to attack all Democrats. A lewd, derisive meme with the phrase "Ridin' with Biden" appeared on social media.

It occurs to me that Republicans might have overlooked the video entirely had it been labeled, "The sacking at the Capitol."

Decades ago, when Ted Bundy was convicted as a serial killer of women, no one blamed straight white men in general for his crimes. But when Jeffrey Dahmer's gruesome murders of men in Milwaukee came to light, there were attacks on gay bars.

Hypocrisy is essential to scapegoating. The dominant group ignores its own members' lapses while harshly judging minorities for any offenses—real or imagined—by theirs.

Given that the GOP's leading presidential candidate has been found liable for the rape of E. Jean Carroll (kudos to her attorney Roberta Kaplan), you might think Republicans would know better than to cast aspersions. You would be wrong.

A White House Christmas video featuring a variation of "The Nutcracker" and including black dancers has been seized upon by the right as an example of woke depravity. Those wedded to perpetual outrage are always seeing a War on Christmas that is not happening.

The Democratic campaign must lacerate this do-nothing Congress that is all smears and revenge and refuses to govern. Democrats have a serious agenda on behalf of the American people, and a record of delivering for them in the previous Congress.

Democracy's defenders have a couple of advantages: we are aware of the threat, and are not about to relinquish our freedoms easily.

Trump is a master at bringing out the worst in people, and has many enablers. But Democrats have plenty of talent—not to mention sanity and decency—on our side. It is time to get our fight on.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries wrote on December 18, "Light will prevail over hatred." We'd better make sure it does.

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

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Trump is a master at bringing out the worst in people, and has many enablers. But Democrats have plenty of talent—not to mention sanity and decency—on our side. It is time to get our fight on.

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Mombian

Continued from page 1

Stevenson said, "We intend to capitalize on that momentum to protect LGBTQ+ families."

Polly Crozier, director of family advocacy at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), concurred. "It's not a political issue, it's a child issue, making sure all states have more paths to parentage for children," she said. "I think there's a lot of work still to be done."

Jordan Budd, executive director of COLAGE, the national organization for people with LGBTQ parents, similarly noted, "All children, no matter who their parents are, deserve to feel safe and secure in their family." COLAGE's top priorities for 2024 will be "culture change and education around our families, what they look like, and how they form, as well as fighting for parentage reform in as many states as possible." "The good news," he said, "is that a sizable number of states are already considering action on this topic for 2024." He encourages LGBTQ families to get involved.

Other types of bills may warrant caution. Crozier warned of the "unintended consequences and tremendous dangers" of a national push to pass fertility fraud and gamete regulation bills, which began in 2019 with a narrow bill in Utah criminalizing doctors who use their own sperm to impregnate patients. While that in itself wasn't bad, Crozier explained that we are now seeing "really broad bills criminalizing not only doctors who willfully do that but also gamete donors, for misrepresenting any information about themselves they should have reasonably known, which is problematic for many reasons." Donors could be criminalized "because you didn't realize that your mother had breast cancer when you were a baby, or whatever. It just puts the bar so high," she said. This could reduce the donor sperm supply "to such an extent it is not available."

While she is sympathetic to those who want "truth and transparency" in gamete donation, she nevertheless asserts, "Criminalizing donors does not get you truth or transparency. Transparency is a system where people feel able to fully disclose anything and not risk criminalization." She urges those working at the intersection of reproductive justice and LGBTQ justice to make sure these bills are not "inadvertently shutting down an area of medicine that our families need to build themselves."

For Shannon Minter, legal director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), "The single most urgent priority is getting rid of state laws that ban medical care for transgender adolescents. These laws affect only a very small group of young people, but their impact on the transgender youth who need this care is devastating. And they set a dangerous precedent of allowing the government to deny medical care to stigmatized minorities," which "should not be permitted in any democratic country." He noted that NCLR is petitioning the Supreme Court "to review the Sixth Circuit decision reversing our successful challenge to the ban on medical care for transgender adolescents in Kentucky."

Sarah Kate Ellis, president and CEO of LGBTQ media advocacy organization GLAAD, agreed that a focus should be "pushing back against bills banning healthcare for trans folks and ensuring the safety of trans youth at school, as well as their free and equal participation in extracurriculars like sports. And lastly, which is where GLAAD comes in, fighting misrepresentation and dehumanizing narratives around transgender people, while also providing the resources to accurately cover transgender people and issues."

More broadly, she also sees "opportunities in accelerating LGBTQ acceptance in the business world." She observed that "While Anheuser-Busch and Target suffered in the long run by caving to anti-LGBTQ extremists and backtracking on LGBTQ support, hundreds of companies, like Nike, Walmart, Sesame Street, and more, proudly incorporated Pride and other LGBTQ-inclusive marketing." GLAAD has data, she said, showing that "Americans are twice as likely to buy or use a brand that publicly supports LGBTQ people and our rights."

Ellen Kahn, senior director of programs and partnerships at the Human Rights Campaign, stressed the need for local action, saying, "I think a top priority is for LGBTQ+ parents to organize locally with like-minded organizations to ensure that our school boards provide inclusive leadership, and protect and expand policies that support LGBTQ+ families, and this includes running for school board positions as well as fully vetting candidates and campaigning for those who are unwavering on our issues."

She added that although opponents of LGBTQ equality have concentrated on "stripping rights away from trans youth, and to some extent, trans adults," their goal is broader. "They do not want us to be married, to raise kids, to teach in schools, to have any power—so stay engaged at both the local and national level, vote, speak up, and find a community that will have your back."

And Crozier advised that despite the anti-LGBTQ action and rhetoric that we've seen over the past year, "We've just got to keep believing in ourselves, because all this media attention, all these bills, all these court cases, are trying to tell us we are one thing—but we're freaking awesome and our kids are awesome."

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, plus a searchable database of 1,400+ LGBTQ family books.

Monroe

Continued from page 1

Burke traveled to Rome with members from the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, founded in Rome in October 2015 by more than twenty LGBTQ+ communities worldwide, including DignityUSA. Pope Francis met with the leaders of both groups. Duddy-Burke granted me an interview.

When we spoke in October, you'd just returned home from Rome. You, unlike many, had the coveted opportunity to speak with the Pope. What was it like to meet Pope Francis?

Having the Pope meet with leaders of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, a group of Queer Catholic organizations on six continents, marked a new moment for our movement. His encouragement of our work, pressing for decriminalization of LGBTIQ+ people and for a more inclusive and supportive church, has heartened us. For organizations like DignityUSA, officially considered a dissenting organization and banned from Catholic spaces, having a personal encounter with the Pope is truly miraculous.

What were your thoughts on traveling to Rome?

I went to Rome with my DignityUSA colleague Sam Albano with the goal of making LGBTQIA+ people visible to Synod Delegates, since there were no openly LGBTQIA+ people among the Synod Delegates.

We also wanted to be among the Catholics who gathered in Rome, the seat of our Church, to remind everyone that the Church is so much larger than the folks assembled in that meeting room.

The acronym 'LGBT' was never used. What are your thoughts about that?

The erasure of LGBTIQ people from the Synod process by failing to name us in the report is sobering. That signals a devaluing of our lives and our place in the Church, and demonstrates how very important it is for LGBTIQ people, in Eastern Europe, in Africa, in the Caribbean, in every place where church leaders are not honoring our dignity and human rights to keep telling their stories.

Moving away from the Synod, in November, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) declared that some transgender people, including those who have undergone medical gender affirmation, can be baptized if the baptism of a transgender person is not likely to cause "scandal." What do you think of this depiction of LGBTQ+ Catholics to receive baptism?

It is encouraging to see the Vatican making it clear that LGBTQ+ people are not automatically banned from our Church's sacraments. There have been too many bishops and priests who have made it difficult for members of our community to receive sacraments like baptism and even Communion, which are central to our lives as Catholics.

We remain concerned that our identities continue to be seen as causing "scandal." LGBTQIA+ people around the world, and certainly in our country, are simply exercising our human rights to live in our true identities, to marry the people we love, and to raise children. The religious teachings that discount those rights are the scandal. They damage and dehumanize LGBTQIA+ people and need to be revoked.

Significant pockets of resistance in the Church have been seen as a lack of adherence to dogma and tradition. Do you see the Church moving away from it?

Pope Francis has appointed the majority of Papal electors. I hope that means that some of his key efforts will be continued whenever the next Papacy begins. I think many church leaders have realized that our Church must change to survive in today's world. Insisting that divine revelation is the only source of truth or that Catholicism holds some special authority does not work. We must refocus on serving the most vulnerable and ending structural injustice. Those goals are not furthered by a focus on enforcing rules that deny human realities.

Given Pope Francis's advanced age and health challenges, what is the future of the Catholic Church?

We certainly hope and pray that Pope Francis has the strength to see his current work through. His vision of a more responsive, universally inclusive, and collaborative church structure is one we share.

Many church leaders have come to realize that our Church must change to survive in the world of today. Insisting that divine revelation is the only source of truth or that Catholicism holds some special authority does not work. We must refocus on serving the most vulnerable and ending structural injustice. We need to remember that the Church is NOT the hierarchy. It is the people of God, all the people.

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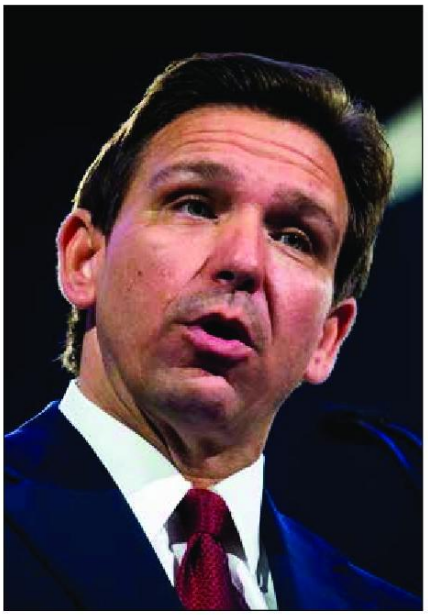
VERIFIED AUDIT CIRCULATION

DeSantis spread false information while pushing trans health care ban and restrictions, a judge says

By Brendan Farrington
Associated Press



Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis. Photo by Tom Williams, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) - A federal judge hearing a challenge to a transgender health care ban for minors and restrictions for adults noted Thursday that Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis repeatedly spread false information about doctors mutilating children's genitals even though there's been no such documented cases.

The law was sold as defending children from mutilation when it is actually about preventing trans children from getting health care, Judge Robert Hinkle said to Mohammad Jazil, a lawyer for the state.

"When I'm analyzing the governor's motivation, what should I make of these statements?" Hinkle asked. "This seems to be more than just hyperbole."

Hinkle said he will rule sometime in the new year on whether the Legislature, the Department of Health and presidential candidate DeSantis deliberately targeted transgender people through the new law. He raised some skepticism about the state's motivation as lawyers gave their closing arguments.

Jazil said the motivation behind the law was simply public safety in an area that needs more oversight and can have permanent consequences.

"It's about treating a medical condition; it's not about targeting transgender individuals," Jazil said.

Jazil added that if the state was targeting transgender people, it could have banned all treatment for adults and children. Hinkle quickly replied that Jazil would have trouble defending such a law.

Hinkle, who was appointed by former President Bill Clinton, has temporarily blocked enforcement of the law as it pertains to minors, pending the outcome of the trial. The lawsuit also challenges restrictions placed on adult trans care, which have been allowed to take effect during the trial.

At least 22 states have now enacted laws restricting or banning gender - affirming medical care for transgender minors, and many of those states face lawsuits. Courts have issued mixed rulings, with the nation's first law, in Arkansas, struck down by a federal judge who said the ban on care violated the due process rights of transgender youth and their families.

Enforcement is blocked in two states besides Florida, and enforcement is currently allowed in or set to go into effect soon in seven other states.

Thomas Redburn, a lawyer representing trans adults and the families of trans children, said DeSantis and the Legislature have shown a pattern of targeting transgender people. He listed other recent laws that affect the community, including restrictions on pronoun use in schools, the teaching of gender identification in schools, restrictions on public bathrooms and the prohibition of trans girls from playing girls sports.

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NEWS FROM...

Rainbow Lifelong Learning Institute

OnLine Meet & Greet via Zoom
Tuesday January 2nd at 12:00 PM
(Pre-registration required, see link below)

Rainbow Lifelong Learning Institute is excited to preview our Winter 2024 session (January 16th through February 14th) at this event. The Winter session will have classes on zoom both on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Please join us on Tuesday, January 2nd, for our pre-semester Meet & Greet event. This will be a "zoom gathering" at noon. Course descriptions and Registration for our fall classes will be posted on https:/www.rainbowlliboston.org immediately after the Meet & Greet.

For those of you not familiar with the Rainbow community, this is an opportunity for you to learn about us, "Meet" members of the community and learn about our on-line registration process.

For those of you who know us, this will be a chance to "Greet" and connect with those you have not seen in awhile.

We will be offering 5 courses for the winter session. Instructors will be at this event to preview their courses, and answer any questions you may have.

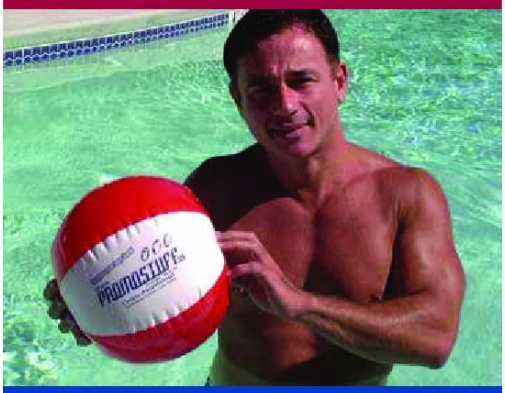
We sincerely hope you'll join us — returning Rainbow folks and new folks alike — in this intellectually curious community where we come together to learn, network and enjoy time with others who have similar interests.

Pre-registration is required in order to attend the Meet and Greet. Please pre-register by typing in this link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEtd-itpzMpG9Xq7sl1iy1wky9LAPECz-nL

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Registration for Classes opens after the Meet & Greet. You can register via our https://www.rainbowlliboston.org/

HOT IDEAS



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billy masters

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This was a strange year for someone who writes about the entertainment industry. After all, most of it was shut down due to those pesky strikes. And yet, we rallied on. One of the sticking points in negotiations was the threat that AI would eliminate people's jobs. So we put it to the test. I asked ChatGPT to generate the opening of a Billy Masters column. This is what I got: "Ladies, gentlemen, and those of you who are still deciding what fabulous category you fall into. I'm Billy Masters, and I've got a mouthful of sass and heart full of glitter." The fact that highly advanced computers took almost three decades of weekly columns (that's over a thousand columns) and came up with such drivel proves that my position as the most beloved of gay columnist is as secure as ever.

Sitting here aloft my perch, I surveyed many stories. But I don't think anything grabbed my interest more than the battle between **Billie Lourd** and her entire family. For those of you who don't know (and, frankly, why should you), Billie is the only child of **Carrie Fisher and Bryan Lourd**—who is gay, but that's another story. Carrie's brother, **Todd Fisher**, had applied for Carrie to get a long-overdue star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and was told there's a three-year waiting period for a posthumous star. Years go by, and one day Todd gets a call from a friend saying, "I'll see you at Carrie's ceremony on May the 4th" (as in "May the force be with you"). This was news to Todd, so he called the people at the Walk of Fame. They say the guest list is being handled by Disney. He calls Disney and they tell him he's not on the family's guest list—run by Billie. Turns out Carrie's half-sisters **Joely and Tricia Leigh Fisher** were also not invited—which begs the question, is Billie talking to any members of her family? She didn't respond to any of their calls, so Todd went public with his frustration. Then Billie issued a statement: "The truth is I did not invite them to this ceremony. They know why." Billie is upset that Todd wrote a book about his sister and mother (**Debbie Reynolds**), and she's upset that Joely talked about them in her memoir. Todd considered just showing up at the ceremony, but was told that Billie would not come out if any of the Fishers were there. As a writer, I love this story. As someone who knew Carrie and Debbie, I think Billie needs to grow the fuck up.

Was anything sweeter this year than **Kim Cattrall's** triumphant return to the "Sex and the City" family? After everything that went down, nobody expected a rapprochement. And just like that, there she was. The fact that the head of HBO called her directly and brokered the deal—without any input from the creatives or cast from "AJLT"—speaks volumes of Cattrall's cache. She got to call the shots on every aspect of her appearance—except for the spin the show put on it. Still, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Alas, we can't look back on 2023 and not mention the J-word. Yes, **Jada**. Bottom line—I don't believe a word anyone in the **Pinkett-Smith family** says. I think there are major psychological problems afoot—but I'm no psychiatrist (or podiatrist, for that matter). In the past, one would call **Will** "cuckolded". Then we heard a fascinating tale from Will's former assistant and former best friend, Brother Bilal. He went on a podcast and claimed that he walked in on Will being...how shall we say it..."sodomized" by **Duane Martin**. How does he explain Jada's role in all this? "I am saying to you if a woman is used to something the size of a baby leg and you come in with a pinkie toe, there's nothing you're gonna do to please her...If she's itching for that baby leg, she want that baby leg!" I dunno about you, but I suddenly feel dirty. And slightly aroused. And a little bit hungry.

Florida **Governor Ron DeSantis** launched his "War on Drag" by enforcing a law from 1947—which stated that men impersonating women is too indecent for children. So he ruled that drag queens fell under "adult entertainment", and if a minor were there, you could be fined...or worse. People claim this started as a way to stop drag queens from reading stories to kids in libraries—and let that sink in. It had unintended consequences. Stage musicals like "Hairspray", "La Cage", and most of Shakespeare's plays feature men dressed as women—and they could be shut down. Drag queens in gay pride parades in public could be arrested. Then the Orlando franchise of Hamburger Mary's restaurant filed a suit against the governor and the State of Florida for infringing on their First Amendment rights. And they WON! **U.S. District Judge Gregory Presnell** ruled, "This statute is specifically designed to suppress the speech of drag queen performers." It doesn't overturn the law, but it does make it unenforceable.

Around the same time, the phenomenal **Jinkx Monsoon** made Broadway history by playing Mama Morton in "Chicago". Jinkx was sure to let people know she didn't do it alone. "I'm following in the footsteps of my sister **Peppermint**, who broke ground as the first Ru girl, drag queen, trans woman to perform on Broadway in "Head Over Heels". And now I get to take the torch and do my own thing with it." Speaking of torches, flaming **George Santos** made history by being elected to the House of Representatives and being thrown out within the same calendar year. Perhaps he'll go back to doing drag...anywhere other than Florida, naturally.

Prior to 2023, nobody knew **Lukas Gage's** name. All we knew was that he was a cute guy whose apartment was trashed by a director during a Zoom casting session. Looking back, I wouldn't be surprised if Lukas leaked that footage himself, and used the sympathy as a launching pad. We next saw him bent over a desk getting rimmed—not that there's anything wrong with that. Then he was all over social media cavorting with hairdresser to the stars **Chris Appleton** (another name I'd never heard before). Within days, they were dating and expressing their love for each other on television. In the blink of an eye, they got married in a ceremony presided over by **Kim Kardashian**. That it lasted a few months was the most shocking part of the story to moi. Somehow in the midst of it, Gage got to make a movie that received a teensy bit of attention. What will happen to him? It depends on who he meets next.

Let's congratulate a few couples who found each other. Comedian **Matteo Lane** tied the knot with his short-term beau, **Rodrigo Aburto**. I hate to point out they knew each other for less time than **Lukas and Chris**, but at least they're still together...for now. Then there's singer **Ty Herndon**, who also tied the knot. "Never in a million years would I have imagined meeting someone who would bring so much love and light into my heart." This inevitably leads to talk about breakups. **Ricky Martin and Jwan Yosef** divorced after six years. So did **Billy Porter** and his hubby **Adam Smith**. Straights have the seven-year itch; we have six. I guess we gays just figure things out quicker! On the other hand, **Antoni Porowski** didn't even make it to the altar with **Kevin Harrington**.

One of the most shocking stories of 2023 was about the "suicide" of **Jeff Thomas**—a stunning fitness model. In an unreleased interview, Jeff revealed he was "kept" by married gay entrepreneur Peter Thiel. His availability didn't come cheap. "If I'm gonna give up relationships I have and give up my dreams right now, during Covid, or dating other guys or pursuing people, then I'm going to get a $300,000 car and I'm going to get a $13 million home." The arrangement worked for a while, but Jeff eventually tired of the Hollywood lifestyle and abruptly moved to Miami. How independent he was is questionable. He showed up at Thiel's New Year's Eve party, and let's just say he wasn't welcomed with open arms. Peter's partner asked security to escort Thomas off the property. Jeff was lost and couldn't figure out his next move. Maybe he'd become a firefighter. Or EMT. A few weeks later, he was dead on the pavement far below his deluxe apartment in the sky. His brother stated, "Jeff struggled with addiction and mental health challenges, which ultimately led to his tragic passing." To date, Thiel has not issued a comment.

There were other notable deaths in 2023. None hit closer to home than the passing of **Momma**, a Los Angeles institution. For seven consecutive years, we were joined at the hip hosting Los Angeles Pride and **Will Clark's** legendary Bad Boys Pool Parties. Talk about versatility. San Francisco's legendary Heklina passed away while on tour in London. And then there's the passing of **Dame Edna Everage** and her creator, **Barry Humphries**. That left the world just a bit gloomier. Leave to Richard Belzer to not go softly into that good night. His friend, **Bill Scheft**, claims that the caustic comedian's last words were, "Fuck you, motherfucker." I think that says it all.

Could it be that a new "Catfish" hit the web? So say folks who followed the online drama between two ridiculously named nuts right out of "The Gilded Age". The Herculean hunks posted photos rippling with muscles and dripping of AI—while slinging mud that their same-sex marriage was mired with wilting wealth and cheating cads. All of their online "friends" and family had just as questionable pedigrees—to say nothing of nonsensical names. That this column exposed the cadre was not surprising. That I vanquished them is my holiday gift to the world. While it all seemed pointless, an exposé is an exposé.

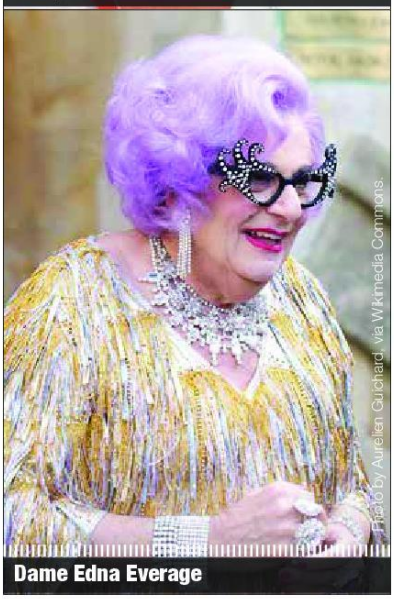
When I'm flexing my investigative muscles, we've definitely come to the end of another year of columns. This list is far from exhaustive—I skipped many worthy stories. If I left you wanting more, go to www.BillyMasters.com, where I'll give you more than your fill. If you have a question going into the New Year, send an email to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before someone realizes looking like Billy Masters ain't so bad! So, until next year, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Photo by Gage Skidmore, via Wikimedia Commons.

Billie Lourd

Photo by Eva Rinaldi, via Wikimedia Commons.

Ricky Martin



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Dame Edna Everage

Blood

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of the virus.

In 2015, the FDA dropped the lifetime ban on donations from men who have sex with men and replaced it with a one - year abstinence requirement. The agency shortened the abstinence period to three months in 2020 after donations plummeted during the COVID - 19 pandemic.

The American Red Cross, which accounts for about 40% of blood and blood component donations in the U.S., began implementing the new guidance in August.

About half of the 16 independent blood bank organizations that are members of the Alliance for Community Transfusion Services have rolled out the new guidelines, with more expected next year, the organization said.

"It is going to take time," said Benjamin Prijatel, president of Shepeard Community Blood Center in Augusta, Georgia. "Blood centers and health professionals are going to have to put forth the effort to engage and educate this community in order to overcome years of distrust. That's the only way this rule change will translate into additional donations."

The change puts the emphasis on sexual activity rather than on sexual orientation. All potential donors are screened with a new questionnaire evaluating their HIV risk based on sexual behavior, partners and other factors that can contribute to the spread of blood - borne infections, such as intravenous drug use or recent tattoos or piercings.

Potential donors who report having anal sex with new partners in the last three months are barred from giving until a later date, and anyone who has ever tested positive for HIV will continue to be ineligible. Those taking pills to prevent HIV through sexual contact are still barred until three months after their last dose; the medications, known as PrEP, can delay the detection of the virus, the FDA said.

Donated blood is then tested for HIV, hepatitis C, syphilis and other infectious diseases.

Bloodworks Northwest, which supplies blood to more than 90 hospitals in the region, isn't keeping track of how many newly eligible donors are coming in, said Dr. Kirsten Alcorn, the nonprofit's co - chief medical officer. But workers have heard plenty of stories from people excited to give.

"It feels very meaningful to many of them to now be able to contribute to somebody's survival," Alcorn said.

Bloodworks executive Aaron Posey, whose own life was saved by a transfusion when he fell down a set of stairs and broken glass sliced an artery, welcomed the new guidance. He said hospitals and patients need access to a new pool of donors.

"Having always witnessed a shortage in the blood supply, it has at times been very frustrating," said Posey, who first donated blood during the pandemic when the abstinence period was cut to three months.

Smith learned of the restrictions on gay men giving blood when he was screened while trying to donate his freshman year of college in 2013. The rules blindsided him, he said. It was a long time to wait before he could finally donate with his partner and other friends.

"Just being able to see them donating next to me, smiling next to me ... meant so much," Smith said.

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Pope

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sticking to rules may give the appearance of avoiding problems but only ends up hurting the service that the Vatican Curia is called to give the church, he said.

"Let us remain vigilant against rigid ideological positions that often, under the guise of good intentions, separate us from reality and prevent us from moving forward,"the pope said. "We are called instead to set out and journey, like the Magi, following the light that always desires to lead us on, at times along unexplored paths and new roads."

Francis' annual appointment with members of the Vatican hierarchy came the same week he formally approved allowing priests to bless same-sex couples, as long as such blessings don't give the impression of a marriage ceremony.

The approval, which Francis had hinted at earlier this year, reversed a 2021 policy by the Vatican's doctrine office, which flat-out barred such blessings on the grounds that God "does not and cannot bless sin."

The Vatican holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect but that sexual relations between people of the same sex is "intrinsically disordered." Catholic teaching says that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman, is part of God's plan and is intended for the sake of creating new life.

Progressives and advocates for greater LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church hailed Francis' declaration as a long-overdue gesture of welcome and acceptance. Conservatives and traditionalists have blasted it as contrary to biblical teachings about homosexuality.

Francis didn't specifically mention the decision Thursday. He kepthis remarks vague and tied to the biblical story of the birth of Christ. Citing the teachings of the modernizing Second Vatican Council, he urged the assembled prelates to listen to one another, discern decisions and then journey forward, without being tied to preconceived prejudices.

"It takes courage to journey, to move forward," he said. "Sixty years after the council, we are still debating the division between progressives and conservatives. This isn't difference. The real difference is between lovers and those who have lost that initial passion."

The annual greeting is a high - profile event to which all Rome-based cardinals are invited. One conspicuous absence this year was Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who was convicted over the weekend of embezzlement in a big financial trial and sentenced to 51/2 years in prison. He plans to appeal.

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