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Rehabilitated?

Convicted gaybasher speaks from prison on making amends

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by David Taffet, Page 8



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Design by Tammye Nash

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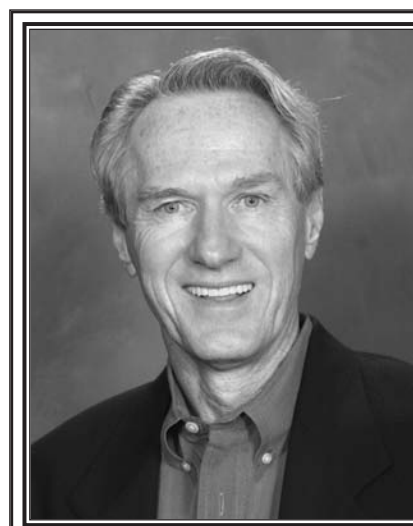
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Colbert arrested in L.A.

Dallas Police announced Thursday, March 3 that murder suspect Christopher Brian Colbert has been arrested in Los Angeles and is being held there awaiting extradition.

Colbert was arrested on warrants for tampering with a governmental record, securing execution of a document by deception and money laundering. He is also a suspect in the murder of Dallas gay man Ronald David Shumway.

Shumway, 57, was last seen alive in April 2015, shortly before his supervisors at Dallas Area Rapid Transit received an email purported to be from Shumway in which he resigned his job as a DART driver. His home at 725 N. Winnetka was then put up for sale and a man claiming to be Shumway appeared at the closing for the sale of the home in June, although he did not have his ID with him, faxing an altered copy of Shumway's driver's license to the office later on.

The new owner of the house on Winnetka found the unidentified torso of a man in a plastic bag beneath a concrete slab in the backyard of the house in September, prompting police to launch a search for Shumway. Because of posts made to his Facebook account after he supposedly resigned from his job, police believed Shumway had moved to Austin to live with a man he met online.

Investigators determined in February, through DNA testing, that the remains found in the backyard were, in fact, Shumway's, and that's when their attention turned to Colbert. Witnesses identified Colbert as the man who had represented himself as Shumway at the real estate deal closing last June, and police issued warrants for his arrest.

— Tammye Nash

New Travis County GOP chairman-elect is an absolute quack

For an election night that largely bode well for incumbents (but not for Rep. Molly Whitel!), a few bad apples still managed to eke out wins.

Among them is Travis GOP County Chairman-elect Robert Morrow, who according to the Austin American-Statesman, is a self-proclaimed JFK assassination expert who owns “about 400 books on the subject and believes that former President Lyndon B. Johnson had Kennedy killed.”

He thinks GOP presidential candidate and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio is “a gayman [sic] who got married.” The Republican National Committee is a “gay foam party.”

Dickey attributed Morrow's win to high turnout mainly triggered by the presidential primary.

“As you go down the ballot, there are bound to be races for which [voters] have no information,” Dickey told the Statesman. “It is probably



Christian Colbert

very likely that the vast majority of those people were, in fact, unfortunately guessing and guessed wrong.”

“I’m treating this as a coup and as a hostile takeover,” Travis County Republican Party vice chairman and GOP strategist Matt Mackowiak told the Texas Tribune.

Morrow's response?

“Tell them they can go fuck themselves,” Morrow said.

Morrow will take office in June.

— James Russell

ICE meets with Rainbow LULAC on LGBT and Latino issues

An official with Immigration and Customs Enforcement organized a roundtable discussion about the current state of affairs in the LGBT and Latino/a communities with Rainbow LULAC President Juan Contreras, Nell Gaither of Trans Pride Initiative, representatives from Cathedral of Hope and the ACLU.

They reviewed ICE's current LGBT memorandums and their plan to assemble a Transgender Classification and Care Committee (TCCC) at the new detention center in Alvarado. ICE asked Rainbow LULAC to find organizers to help with community programming at this center.

“We thought this was too much of an ask from volunteers and suggested that they create a contractor position,” Contreras wrote to Dallas Voice.

The group told the ICE representatives that although they would work with them to get to see members of our communities at this center, that doesn't negate the fact that LGBT Latino/a community organizers will keep organizing to fight systemic oppression in those communities.

— David Taffet



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THE GAY AGENDA

Have an event coming up? Email your information to staff writer James Russell at russell@dallasvoice.com by Thursday at 10 a.m. for that week's issue.

MARCH

• **Weekly: Lambda Weekly** every Sunday at 1 p.m. on 89.3 KNON-FM with guests John Horany and the Rev. Ben Hensley of Oak Lawn United Methodist Church; **United Black Ellument** hosts discussion on HIV/AIDS in the black community at 7 p.m. every second Tuesday of the month at 3116 Commerce St., Suite C; **Fuse game night** every Monday evening but the last of the month at 8 p.m. at the Fuse space in the ilume, 4123 Cedar Springs Road, Apt 2367; **Fuse Connect** every Wednesday from 7 p.m. at the Fuse Space.

For more information call or e-mail Ruben Ramirez at 214-540-4500 or rramirez@myresourcecenter.org.

• March 5: Moving the Food Pantry

Teams of volunteers needed to move the food pantry from its Denton Drive Cutoff location to 2701 Reagan St. To help, contact Volunteer Coordinator Deborah Cavazos at 214-540-4497.

• **March 5: Pride Easter Hunt and Pet Fest**
TCGPWA hosts a free and family-friendly event with vendors, games, entertainment and more at the Forest Park Shelter House, 2600 Forest Dr. S. For more information contact Richard Tinker at 817-921-3318 or tink2withu@aol.com.

• March 5: Resource Center's Toast to Life Mad Hatter's Ball

Enjoy a night of food from top local chefs and entertainment by DJ Bunny at this annual benefit for Resource Center programs from 7-11 p.m. at the Empire Room, 1225 N. Riverfront Blvd. For tickets and more information visit Bit.ly/1VnT1vq.

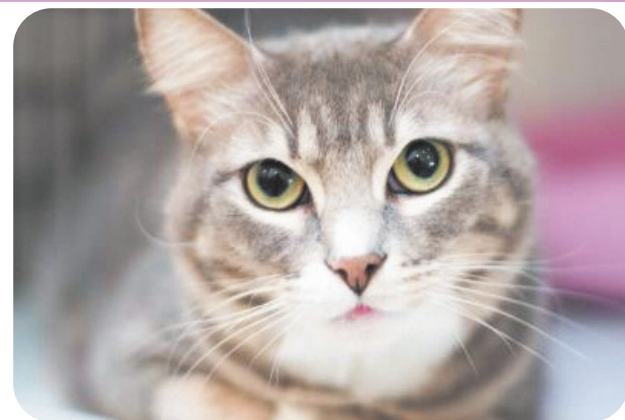
• March 5: Reverchon Park Roundup

The 18th annual cleanup includes planting flowerbeds, clearing out trash and removing fallen tree limbs. Pants, long sleeve shirts, sturdy shoes, gloves, rakes and other small tools recommended. 9:30 a.m. registration and orientation followed by 10 a.m. clean up and a complimentary lunch at 11:30 a.m. at 3505 Maple Ave. For more information and to volunteer e-mail reverchon.roundup@tsrh.org or call 214-559-7825.

pet of the week / JANUARY

January is about a year-and-a half old. She has green eyes and weighs nine pounds. She is fully grown and declawed, and ready for her forever home. Her adoption fee is \$135.

Other pets are available for adoption from Operation Kindness, 3201 Earhart Drive, Carrollton. The no-kill shelter is open six days: Monday, 3-8 p.m.; closed Tuesday; Wednesday, 3-8 p.m.; Thursday, noon-8 p.m.; Friday, noon-5 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; and Sunday, noon-5 p.m. The cost is \$110 for cats, \$135 for kittens, \$150 for dogs over 1 year, and \$175 for puppies. The cost includes the spay/neuter surgery, microchipping, vaccinations, heartworm test for dogs, leukemia and FIV test for cats, and more. Those who adopt two pets at the same time receive a \$20 discount.



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• **March 5-6: Dallas Home and Garden Show**
Features 250 vendors, entertainment and more from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. on Friday; 10 a.m.-7 p.m. on Saturday; and 11 a.m.-5 p.m. on Sunday at Dallas Market Hall Center, 2200 Stemmons Fwy. Ticket pieces vary. Discount coupons available at Tom Thumb and Randall's. For more information visit TexasHomeandGarden.com.

• **March 6: You'll Never Walk Alone**
Oak Lawn UMC presents *"You'll Never Walk Alone: A Community Gathering of Hope, Unity, and Support for the Oak Lawn Neighborhood."* The program expresses the community's appreciation for the leadership displayed by Mayor Rawlings and the Dallas Police Department in the face of recent violent attacks in Oak Lawn. Performances by the Dallas Police Choir, the Oak Lawn Band and Oak Lawn UMC's Chancel Choir. 6-7:30 p.m. at Oak Lawn United Methodist Church, 3014 Oak Lawn Ave.

• **March 9: Mother Michial Community Service Awards**
Awards presented by the Imperial Court de Fort Worth/Arlington with performances by category winners. 7 p.m. at Club Reflection, 604 S. Jennings St., Fort Worth.

• **March 10: 'Same Difference' documentary screening**
Screening of documentary about lesbians who discriminate against other lesbians based on gender roles at 8:30 p.m. at Angelika Film Center Dallas, 5321 E. Mockingbird Ln. Tickets

available at Tugg.com/events/87275.

• **March 10: Gray Pride: Senior Moments**
Get to know The Senior Source with special presentations by Gretchen Feinhals and Arreal Turner who will discuss provide an overview of the agency's variety of senior programs and services for the monthly meeting for LGBT seniors from 6-8 p.m. every third Thursday of the month at Resource Center, 2701 Reagan St. Free. For more information call 214-528-0144 or e-mail GrayPride@myresourcecenter.org.

• **March 11: 50 Shades of Gay**
Speed dating for gay, bi and trans men interested in men hosted by The Jennifer Experience. \$5 fundraiser for LGBTQ teen organization Real live Connection. From 7:30-9 p.m. at Alexandre's, 4026 Cedar Springs road.

• **March 11-13: Texas Bear Round Up**
Annual Texas Bear Round Up takes place at two hotels, Love Field Hotel and Suites, 1241 W. Mockingbird Lane, and Crowne Plaza Hotel, 7050 Stemmons Freeway. Day time events including registration is at Love Field and evening events at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. To register and for more information visit TBRU.org.

• **March 11: TBRU BearDance Fat Friday**
TBRU's biggest fundraiser featuring DJ Roke Cabrera and DJ Chris Spear at Crowne Plaza Hotel, 7050 Stemmons Freeway.

• **March 11-13: Imperial Court Coronation XXXVII**

March 9: Mother Michial Community Service Awards



Celebrate the accomplishments of Reign XXXVI Awards and the winners of Mother Michial Community Service Awards with the Imperial Court de Fort Worth/Arlington. Buffet dinner, drinks and performances by category winners. a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

Obituary



Mark Anthony Merrill, 51, died Feb. 24. He was from Longview and graduated from H. Grady High School where he enjoyed running track. Merrillk excelled in his professional field as a conflict analyst at Jenkins and Gilchrist Law Firm and at Strasburger & Price LLP.

Merrill accepted Christ early in his life. He had a presence that would just fill up a room, and he enjoyed exercising and traveling to different parts of the world. His favorite song was "His Eye Is on The Sparrow," so if you ever hear this song, please think of him.

Merrill never let anything in life keep him from achieving what was important to him. He befriended many people during his life journey and many people loved him. His favorite quote was "Bend, but don't break." He ran his race and finished his course and the Lord called him home.

Merrill is preceded in death by both his parents, Billy Joe Merrill and Marva Louise Chester; his sister Marion Edwards; his brother Kenneth Merrill; both maternal and paternal grandparents and great-grandparents. He is survived by his partner, Kenneth Jackson; four brothers, Ricky Merrill and wife Linda, Billy Joe Merrill and wife Linda, Gerry Merrill and Perry Merrill; two sisters, Karen Pugh and Georgia Marie Spears and husband Melvin; two aunts, Patricia Smith and Laura Lee; one uncle, Ronald Butler; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

Punking the Palace — The Windsors Meet Steampunk: An Evening at Buckingham Palace. Coronation is at 5 p.m. on Saturday night in the main ballroom of the host hotel. Radisson North-Fossil Creek, 2540 Meacham Blvd., Fort Worth.

• **March 16: An Evening on Lesbian Pregnancy**
Path2Parenthood and California Cryobank present a program focusing on critical information lesbians need to know when considering pregnancy. From 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Interfaith Peace Chapel, 5910 Cedar Springs Road.

• **March 17: GALANTX Third Thursday**
Third Thursday from 5:30-8 p.m. at Parkway Tavern, 3645 Dallas Parkway, Plano.

• **March 17: LGBT Reception for Fort Worth Police Chief Joel Fitzgerald**
LGBT community welcomes Fort Worth's new police chief from 6-8 p.m. at The Classic Wine Storage & Services, 2915 Riverglenn Dr, Fort Worth.

• **March 18: High Tech Happy Hour** and SMU Cox School of Business LGBTQ & Allies Texas Instruments Pride, the LGBT and ally diversity group, and SMU Cox School of Business Strategic Alliance LGBT and ally group hosts a special High Tech Happy Hour from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Meadows Museum, 5900 Bishop Blvd. Complimentary parking available in the two lower levels of museum parking garage. Complimentary hors d'oeuvres and cash bar. For more information e-mail Paul.von.Wupperfeld@pavw@ti.com.

• **Through March 18: White Rock Community Church Stations of the Cross**
The 14 Stations of the Cross are depicted by tattoo artists from Taboo Tattoo and Tigger's Body Art in Deep Ellum 6:30 p.m. each Friday through Lent at White Rock Community Church, 9353 Garland Road. To learn more visit Whiterockchurch.info or call 214-320-0043.

• **March 20: The Wedding Workshop: An LGBT Community Event**
Three-hour, hands-on seminar featuring wedding industry experts guides couples through all the steps for planning a memorable wedding. 9:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. at the Renaissance Dallas Hotel, 2222 N. Stemmons Freeway. For more information call 214-754-8710 ext. 126 or visit LGBTWeddingWorkshop.com. Admission and parking are free with registration.

• **March 20: The Wedding Party and Expo: An LGBT Community Event**
Presented by the Dallas Voice, the largest LGBT wedding expo in Texas includes exhibitors, a fashion show, food samples, a community marketplace and free cake. Donnie Brown serves as celebrity host. 1-5 p.m. at the Renaissance Dallas Hotel, 2222 N. Stemmons Freeway. For more information call 214-754-8710 ext. 126 or e-mail EXPO@dallasvoice.com. Register at TheWeddingPartyEXPO.com. Admission and parking are free with registration.



Rehabilitated?

James Laster says he wants to make amends to those he hurt

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
taffet@dallasvoice.com

"It took 45 seconds to throw away eight years of my life," 36-year-old James Laster said, speaking through a glass partition in the visitor's building at the Ramsey Unit prison in Rosharon. Laster is serving an eight-year sentence at the Texas prison unit south of Houston after pleading guilty to charges stemming from the 2011 gay-bashing attack on Burke Burnett in Reno, Texas, just outside Paris.

Laster said he keeps himself busy in jail. He gets up at 4:30 in the morning and does 300-400 pushups. After breakfast, he works as a teacher's aide in cabinetmakers class.

"I'm good at it," he said.

He said he enjoys showing others who've never touched a skill saw or a drill how to use them to build furniture. He called his job therapeutic.

Later in the day Laster said he works on his associate's degree. He's taking four classes this semester — government, history, geology and English. After dinner he spends time out in the rec yard, reads, does homework and writes. He has a TV in his cell, but said he rarely has time to watch it.

Laster was charged with three counts of aggravated assault after the October 2011 attack. He pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon (his hands and feet).

Burnett said everyone at the party they were attending that night was drunk. He said that when a fight broke out, several people — including Laster — attacked him, leaving him with cuts on his face, neck and arms from a broken bottle, contusions and burns resulting from when he was thrown or fell on a burning 55-barrel drum used to heat the barn.

Laster takes exception to some of the claims, say-

ing Burnett wasn't thrown onto a bonfire, as some news outlets reported, but fell on the burning drum, and that at least some of what police called stab wounds were from Burnett falling on his own broken beer bottle.

But Laster willingly takes responsibility for his part in the attack on Burnett, acknowledging that as he hit and kicked Burnett, he also called him "faggot," which led to hate crime charges being leveled.

Another attacker, Micky Joe Smith, who was 25 at the time, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Charges were dropped against a third man, Daniel Martin, after Laster told police Martin had already left the party when the fight broke out. Burnett said he remembers more than two people attacking him, but no one else was charged.

Laster wrote to Dallas Voice in January. In his letter, he said he wanted to make amends to the LGBT community. We get letters from inmates all the time, but there was something introspective and interesting about Laster's missing. Not only was his contact with us timely, coming as it did within months of a rash of attacks on gay men in Oak Lawn last fall, he also seemed to be taking responsibility for his actions. So I arranged a visit with him through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

The prison wasn't easy to find. Google maps sent me to the wrong place — or more accurately, the map stops about four miles short of the prison's location. But I was able to find someone who gave me accurate directions.

Laster was a little rattled as he came into the meeting room and sat behind a partition of glass and metal mesh. A guard had gotten him out of his class and brought him to the warden's office before escorting him to our meeting. He said he's trying to stay out of trouble, so a trip to the warden's office can be quite upsetting.

As a result, we were both a little anxious as we began to chat and started by just introducing ourselves to each other.

"I love to write," he told me. "If I'm frustrated, I can get a pen and paper out. Sometimes I write five pages."

In part, he said, his writing is what got him to Ramsey Unit. He began taking classes before being moved to the South Texas location. Ramsey Unit is the only prison in the Texas penal system that not only allows a student to get an associate's degree, but lets them advance their education to earn bachelor's degrees and even master's degrees. Several hundred inmates at the unit are taking classes, Laster said. After he's released, he'll be responsible for reimbursing the state for his tuition.

Laster insists he's not the same person he was when he entered prison. Burnett, reading Laster's first letter, agreed, saying he didn't recognize him from before, either.

"For the first two years, they punished me," Laster said about his current sentence. "Now, I choose to try to do something productive and become a better person."

He was first incarcerated in a prison near Palestine, where he described the treatment of gays and child molesters and said, "You see how they're treated. You see the mentality. It begins to mold you." Then, he said, he decided he was going to act like the kind of person he wanted to be treated as, and his behavior paid off.

Laster said he's thankful to be at Ramsey, where fighting isn't tolerated. He said prisoners who are repeatedly caught in fights find themselves on a bus for another unit.

How did he get here?

When Laster was 15, his mother died. He had

no relationship with his father, at the time, and no place to go. Child Protective Services had no options for him.

So some friends took him in and that's when he got involved in dealing drugs. Within a few months, Laster was arrested for possession with intent to distribute and put into the juvenile detention system, where he was housed with violent prisoners.

"There should be some alternative for non-violent crimes," Laster said of his first incarceration. "The state surrounded me with violence. All they did was prepare me for this" future of crime and violence.

But Laster is quick to stress that he isn't trying to dodge responsibility for his actions. "That's not an excuse, but an explanation," he said of his assessment of juvenile detention.

When he was released from Texas Youth Commission, Laster lived first in a group home in Marshall and then with his sister, who's less than a year older than he is. He described his work record outside of prison as spotty, and noted that he spent time in jail more than once, and when he was out, he often supported himself by selling drugs.

In his mid-twenties, Laster had a son, gaining full custody when the child was 18 months old. Laster raised his son himself — right up until the time his son was 7 and Laster was arrested for the attack on Burnett.

His son is still a source of great pride for Laster, whose eyes twinkle as he talks about his boy. "I taught him how to read and write," he said. "He plays the trombone. He's in National Honor Society and he's extremely smart."

Laster described what he called the best memory of his life — sitting with his son on the sofa, eating cookies and watching Sponge Bob Squarepants — before remorsefully acknowledging that he threw that away. "I chose this [violence and a prison sentence] over my son," he said.

Laster gets to talk to his son on the phone from prison, but not often enough, he said. Prisoners can only call approved numbers, which must be land lines or cell phones that are billed monthly. His ex has a cell she pays monthly, so that number can't be on his approved list. That means he only gets to talk with his son when the boy visits Laster's aunt.

Laster recalled one instance when his son once asked him, "Why are you in there?"

"I told him I was at a party," Laster said. "I told him I made a very foolish decision and I assaulted someone. I hurt this guy."

"How hard did you hurt him?" his son asked.

"Pretty bad," he said, adding that he apologized to his son for not being there for him.

Laster said his son was always a good kid he never had to spank, which means his son has "never seen the violent side of me." That makes him happy, Laster said, because his violent side scares even him.

"One of the worst feelings in the world is not being in control," he said. "I don't like that I'm subject to hurt someone."

He said that violent side only comes out when he's drunk or high and he wishes there was counseling available. Since there isn't, he has taken a course in prison called Christians Against Substance Abuse. But every time they were about to



talk about an issue, like anger, the subject changed to the Bible, and since, Laster said, he's not particularly religious, those classes didn't help him very much

But classes did encourage him to read some self-help books that were helpful.

"I was mad at myself, at everyone else, at the

What's next?

Laster had his first parole hearing last year. He described it as 10 minutes with people who wouldn't be voting on whether to grant him parole.

He said they asked him: "Why did you stab this person so many times?" Laster disputed that



James Laster, left, sits behind a glass partition during the interview for this article. Burke Burnett, above, seen just after he was attacked.

system," Laster said of what he has learned about himself. "My go-to feeling was, 'I don't care.'"

He described the night of the attack as one that began badly and quickly got worse. Already drunk, he got a ride to the party rather than drive himself. At one point he left and says now he wishes he hadn't returned.

characterization, telling them that he was in prison for assault with his hands and feet. But, he noted, the parole board sees all the charges as well as his full criminal history, which includes earlier drug charges and two DWIs.

Laster insists he's planning to remain sober. That's why, when he's released, he doesn't want

to return to Paris where he'd be surrounded by people who are still doing drugs.

"My sobriety is very important to me," he said several times during our visit.

In prison, among other skills, Laster said he has learned welding and hopes to find a job in that field when he is released. He also hopes to make amends to his son for not being there for him during the years he was locked up.

If he serves his entire sentence, Laster will remain in prison until Nov. 2, 2019.

Final words

Before I left Dallas, I asked Burnett if he had a message for Laster. He said nothing in particular he wanted me to relay, but told me I could tell Laster anything I thought was appropriate.

So I told Laster that after the sentencing, Burnett took a year to recover physically and emotionally, but now he's living near Dallas, has done a lot of good in the community helping other attack victims and has a very happy life.

During the two hours we spoke, Laster repeated that he took full responsibility for his actions, and stressed that he didn't want anything I wrote to sound like he was making excuses.

So, just before I left the prison, I asked Laster if he had a message for Burnett. Tears came to his eyes, and he thought for a moment.

"I apologize," he said.

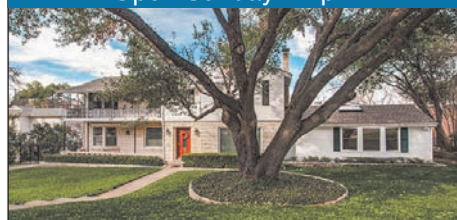
He tried to find additional words, then shook his head.

"Tell him I apologize."



InTown

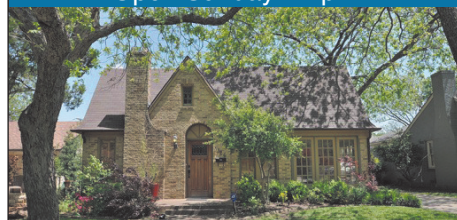
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A lonely man

Shawna Woods tried to help her stepbrother, but a 'brutal' upbringing and mental illness took their toll in the end.

DAVID WEBB | The Rare Reporter
nash@dallasvoice.com

CEDAR CREEK LAKE — For two weeks after a law enforcement officer shot him to death in a day-long standoff, James Frederick Torres, also known as Anthony Bertoni, lay in a funeral home, waiting for his next of kin to sign documents allowing his body to be cremated at county expense.

In death, Torres remained alone and adrift, much the same as he had for at least the last decade of his life, maybe much longer.

Law enforcement officers knew the identity of Torres' stepsister who had attempted to help him in recent years. But they knew little else about the reclusive, 56-year-old man who lived on Highway 274, on the Henderson and Kaufman county line, in a small, dilapidated house surrounded by an eight-foot chain link fence. Outside the fence sat an old, broken down car plastered with disturbing signs, on which were written "Murder" and "Suicide," and incoherent letters taped on the inside of the windows.

After his death, Anderson and Clayton Brothers funeral home staff and public officials struggled to unravel the mystery of Torres' life, so they could put him to rest and discover the evidence needed to close the Texas Rangers investigation into the day Torres suffered his last psychotic episode.

He started that day by firing a shotgun at a neighbor, then barricaded himself in his home for eight hours. He ultimately walked outside shooting a gun, and a bullet from a Texas Department of Public Safety marksman perched on the roof of the Calvary Baptist Church across the highway struck him down in what seems now like an act of "suicide by cop" — what it's called when a suspect deliberately acts in a way that an officer is forced to shoot him or her.

The standoff closed down Highway 274 and County Road 4044, disrupting the small Cap City community of the Cedar Creek Lake area for 36 hours. Afterwards, everyone struggled to make sense of what had happened. Few people in the community, except for Torres' immediate neighbors, knew that anyone even lived in the house. But clues begin to emerge in conversations with his stepsister, Shawna Wood, who never quit caring for the distraught, troubled man whom it is now known suffered from what is believed to be paranoid schizophrenia.

Wood, who lives in Oregon, said she visited with her stepbrother in 2010 at the house in the Cap City community where he died, and she realized then he suffered from delusions that frightened her. She said at the time of his death he lived in the house with no running water and 16 cats to keep him company. He suffered from a failing



James Torres, who used the name Anthony Bertroni when he moved to Texas, underwent experimental treatments for AIDS in the early 1980's. His sister, Shauna Woods pictured with him when they were teens, said his mother abandoned Torres when he came out as gay.

liver and kidneys decimated by a 35-year-long HIV infection and early experimental treatments. He only left the house to shop at Walmart at 3 a.m., wearing mirrored sunglasses. At times Torres called himself Jesus Christ, and at other times he referred to himself as being controlled by demons, she said.

Torres spent time in a Dallas psychiatric hospital in 2014, after law enforcement officers with whom Wood cooperated convinced him to admit himself voluntarily, and he showed improvement. Unfortunately, he quit taking the medication administered at the hospital upon release, and he relapsed, his stepsister said.

Wood said law enforcement officers attempted to talk Torres into returning to the psychiatric hospital, but he refused. They said his guns could not be legally confiscated, even though concerns about him being a threat to himself or others arose, she said.

His stepsister stayed in contact with Torres until his death, sending him food by way of public car-



Torres' adoptive mother divorced her first husband, and in 1970, when Torres was 11, she married Wood's father, a prominent doctor in Freemont, Calif., Woods said. Wood's father, having been recently widowed when his first wife died of cancer, allowed Torres' mother to rule the household in a miserly, vindictive way, Wood said.

Wood described her stepmother's treatment of both her and Torres as "brutal," saying the woman changed her home in ways that upended her whole life. She said her stepmother taped a picture of a pig on the refrigerator and told her she resembled the farm animal because of her weight, Wood added.

"Bitch' would be too kind," Wood said in describing her stepmother. "When my dad married her in 1970, the first thing she did was forbid me from visiting with my nanny, this wonderful Italian lady who promised my mother on her death bed that she would take care of us. After that, we raised ourselves. Next, I came home from school and my poodle Taffy was gone. She said she ran away. Years later one of the neighbors told me she put Taffy in the car drove her somewhere."

At age 15, Wood said, she went away to boarding school in Florida and finally began to enjoy life again. But her departure ended the close relationship with her stepbrother, Torres. She said that their relationship had become so close at one point that her stepmother insisted on Wood getting a physical examination to ensure no sexual activity had occurred between the children, Wood said.

"I couldn't take the bullshit anymore," Wood said of her reason for leaving. "I found out as an adult I paid for it myself with Social Security because my mother was a pediatrician. But I can't believe my Dad was an obstetrician and gynecologist and couldn't pay for it. After marrying her, it was like living in poverty in a wealthy household. It was just so bizarre."

Wood said her father wound up divorcing Torres' mother in 1995 after 25 years of marriage because he came to distrust her. After he died, Wood discovered there was almost nothing left of his estate, and she inherited only enough to buy a house.

"She ended up with nearly everything because at the time he had Parkinson's, and he didn't fight anything as he didn't have the energy," Wood said. "For years they had separate property, but in 1978 after he became Mormon, he put her name on everything. Essentially, anything that was my mother's became hers."

For several years Torres quit speaking to Wood, angry that she had inherited money from her fa-

ther while he likely would never get anything from his mother. "It didn't really make sense to me," Wood said.

Wood said Torres' mother, a devout Mormon, wanted nothing to do with her adopted son when he got older. He came out as gay as a teenager and contracted HIV in about 1981, when many people referred to the illness as "gay cancer" and scientists had not yet discovered the human immunodeficiency virus and coining the name "AIDS."

Wood said when her stepbrother was first hospitalized with an HIV-related sickness at a Freemont hospital, neither her father — who delivered babies at that hospital daily — nor his mother ever visited him, and the nurses there treated him like a leper.

"They practically slid his food trays under the door," Wood said. "He was put in quarantine."

Wood gave the funeral home, a title company lawyer representing a potential buyer of Torres' property and law enforcement officers her stepbrother's real name and the name of his mother, who along with her first husband, a man of Argentine descent, adopted Torres as a baby in Stockton, Calif.

None of the people searching for Torres' mother seemed to be able to determine if she was alive or to locate her. But an Internet search by the Dallas Voice found her living, at age 84, in Logan, Utah, and about to move into an assisted-living facility. The woman, who before retirement ran a school that taught medical office procedures, also authored two technical books and one murder mystery that are available on Amazon.com.

After sending emails to eight addresses listed for Torres' mother, at least one went through and a friend of hers responded by phone to find out what the inquiries concerned. The friend put his mother on the phone, and the mother participated in two on-the-record interviews over a two-day period.

During those interviews, Torres' mother said she was unaware of his death, and that she had not talked to him since he ran away from home at age 17.

"He just didn't like living with us," his mother said. "We were a religious family, and he didn't like going to church. We looked for him for years. He never came home." She acknowledged her church taught against homosexuality. "It probably did," she said. "I think most churches do."

On the second day, the mother called back, demanding under threat of legal action that her name not be used in any story about her son because of the potential embarrassment being associated with Torres and his troubled life and death could cause her.

"I have relatives living in Texas and friends all over the country," she said. "I don't want them to know about it."

When advised that the funeral home needed permission to cremate his body, she asked, "Who is going to pay for it?" After learning that Torres had owned a home that sat on commercial property that someone wanted to buy, she asked, "Who will get the money?"

The potential buyer told Torres' stepsister that

the dead man's mother called him the same night she learned about his death and the existence of his property, demanding a substantially higher price than he was willing to pay, according to Wood. When he explained the house would have to be torn down because of its deteriorated state, the buyer told Wood, Torres mother said she planned to immediately list it with a real estate agency if he failed to meet her price.

Torres' mother said as a toddler her son seemed hyperactive, almost angry, bouncing and banging his hands on the bedding. As a young child he and a friend started a fire in the garage, she said, and he and some friends stole a vehicle as teenagers and drove it to another state. Wood offered a different story, though, saying the vehicle belonged to Torres' adoptive father, and that it was more of a prank and a lark than a theft.

Still, his mother said, "My first husband and I wondered if there was something wrong with him."

When asked if she disowned Torres because he was gay and HIV-positive, she said, "Who told you that?" Advised that Torres told several friends of their estrangement and the reason for it, she said, "I don't remember that. I don't remember things well anymore. I have a disability."

Torres' mother said she remembers her adopted son was taunted at school by kids who accused him of being black because of his dark coloring. In fact, he was of native Hawaiian descent, she said. "He came home from school upset about that," she said. "I told him he wasn't black, but it bothered him."

His mother said she heard her son was living in San Francisco in his 20s with a psychiatrist, and she heard that he was gay and later that he was sick. "I didn't know what was wrong with him," she said.

Wood claimed that her stepmother and father never looked for Torres, and that they knew well the nature of his ailments. His mother abandoned him, she said. "My God, even in death she will deny the connection," Wood declared, after hearing her stepmother's version of Torres' life.

Wood said one of her biggest regrets now is that Torres will only be remembered for the tragic way he died and his suffering from mental illness and HIV-related issues. "He was fun," she said of her stepbrother. "He was the best. I will always wonder if Jimmy's life would not have been so tragic if she had not abandoned him."

Lisa Kaii, a lifelong friend of Wood's and her stepbrother, confirmed the account of Torres as a teenager and his mother. "He was so much fun," Kaii said. "He was always laughing and making us laugh. He made up jokes and songs all of the time. His mother was crazy. We didn't like to be around her."

Wood said her biggest goal now is to see her stepbrother's body treated with the dignity he deserved in the absence of a funeral or memorial service. She received good news to that end March 1.

"We're almost there," Wood said. "I just received an email his mother signed permission to cremate. Maybe soon he'll be at peace. Jimmy's life did matter." ■



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Jill of all trades



Paula Southerlin cuts pieces that will frame the new hearth (David Taffet/Dallas Voice)

Paula Southerlin has been working on home construction projects since 1990

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
taffet@dallasvoice.com

Before Paula Southerlin began her construction company, she worked in a law office, where, she said, "I wore heels and hose everyday."

But corporate America just wasn't for her. So she began repairing roofs after a hail storm, but she had to prove she was as good as any man doing

the job.

So Southerlin and another woman would race guys working on other roofs on the block to prove they could do it not only as well as but faster than the men.

Currently Southerlin is working on Matt Maynard's house in Perry Heights. She's already built a new luxury bathroom and closet for Maynard and his partner Shane, and she figures she'll be done with the new entrance to the house in about three weeks.

While she knows "lesbian with power tools" is

Habgood honor at TAR meeting



Steve Habgood, second from the left, was recently recognized for his service to the community.

Dallas REALTOR receives Omega Tau Rho Medallion of Service

FROM STAFF REPORTS

AUSTIN — Dallas REALTOR Steve Habgood was awarded the national Omega Tau Rho Medallion of Service during ceremonies at the Texas Association of REALTORS winter meeting, held in February.

The Omega Tau Rho Medallion of Service is awarded to REALTORS who meet specific leadership criteria on local, state and national levels. Once a medallion is awarded, the recipient is a member of the prestigious Omega Tau Rho fraternity for life.

"This award is truly an honor as it marks exemplary dedication and service by a very few select REALTOR® members to their organization," said Leslie Rouda Smith, chairman of Texas Associa-

tion of REALTORS, the largest trade organization.

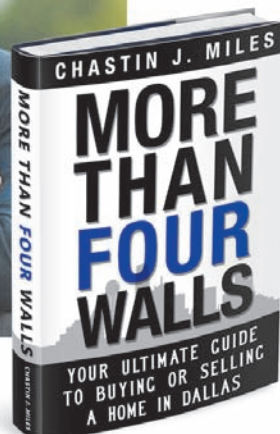
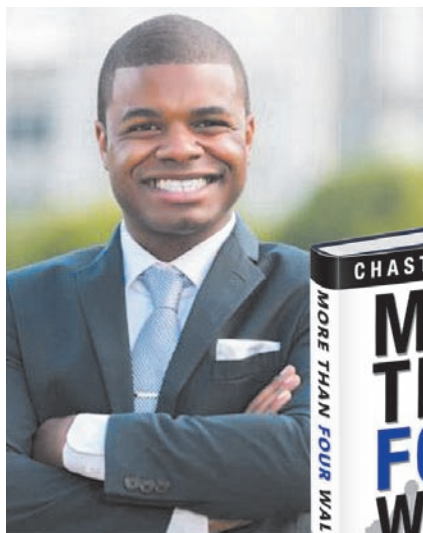
Habgood served as 2015 MetroTex president, NTREIS president, TAR regional vice president and NAR director. He is also a TREPAC major investor, and he holds the "historic house specialist" and "GREEN" designations.

Habgood is active in the community, having served as board chairman of the American Cancer Society/Dallas, and as co-chair of Dallas's AIDS LifeWalk.

Omega Tau Rho was created in 1950 and is a National Association of REALTORS honorary fraternity. MetroTex represents more than 16,000 members involved in all aspects of the real estate industry. MetroTex is the largest REALTOR member association in North Texas representing the entire region. Established in 1917, MetroTex is an advocate for the real estate industry and private property rights. ■

For more information, visit DFWRealEstate.com.

Dallas real estate agent releases new book



Dallas entrepreneur Chastin J. Miles has announced the release of his first book, *More Than Four Walls — Your Guide to Buying or Selling Real Estate in Dallas*.

Miles, 26, envisions himself as a "lifestyle agent" committed to informing and connecting local communities as well as the real estate agent for DFW millennials, specializing in Dallas real estate, lifestyle management and client representation in single-family residential sales, condo and development sales, commercial real estate and luxury leases. He says he offers his clients "the complete end-to-end real estate relationship."

Miles will be signing copies of his new book at a red carpet event, hosted by Mylo Draven, on Friday, March 11, 4-7 p.m. at 7160 Dallas Pkwy., Ste. 135. ■

— From Staff Reports

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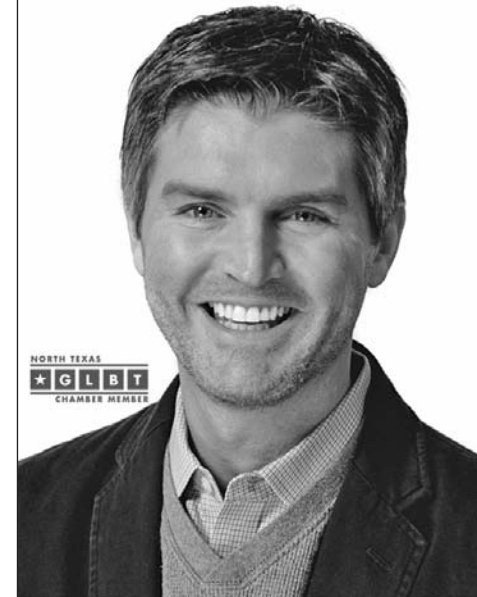


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UIL's new trans rule could lead to lawsuits



Rafael McDonnell

Advocate concerned over Dallas ISD's apparent double standard

JAMES RUSSELL | Staff Writer
russell@dallasvoice.com

Neither letters from national advocacy and local groups nor the threat of lawsuits has prevented an overwhelming majority of Texas school districts from passing a rule barring transgender student athletes in sports.

The 586-32 vote to ratify the policy came after the 32-member legislative council of the University Interscholastic League, the statewide body overseeing high school sports and other extracurricular activities, voted in October to send the rule to member schools.

The rule states "gender shall be determined based on a student's birth certificate. In cases where a student's birth certificate is unavailable, other similar government documents used for the

purpose of identification may be submitted."

Rafael McDonnell, communications and advocacy manager for Resource Center, lobbied aggressively against the rule. He said he is disappointed with the results, including the Dallas school district's vote for the rule. McDonnell said he thought officials with Dallas ISD, which is the largest school district in the region, would vote against it.

A breakdown in communication occurred somewhere, McDonnell said. But the question is, where?

"I had a discussion with Dallas Independent School District officials about what went down ... and what went wrong. The vote is inconsistent with how I perceive the district to be on LGBT issues," McDonnell said.

He cited the school district's inclusive anti-bullying policy and other measures that ensure equal and fair treatment for LGBT faculty, staff and students.

Past experiences with the district made the vote even more surprising.



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"If there was ever a problem, it was always handled when you contacted the right person. That's what makes this vote more stunning," McDonnell said.

McDonnell said the board was not briefed on the vote either.

"To take them out of the loop is not a good thing," McDonnell said.

As of press time, Dallas school district officials had failed to follow through in commenting to Dallas Voice.

Ongoing conflict

While Charles Breithaupt, UIL's executive director, has repeatedly said the rule simply codifies what has been informally applied in the past, McDonnell said that does not mean it could be upheld in court.

McDonnell e-mailed his concerns to Breithaupt. He noted the proposed rule violates a 2014 determination by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights that under Title IX, the federal law prohibiting sex-based discrimination in any federally funded program, discrimination on the basis of gender identity is a form of sex discrimination, extending the protections to transgender students.

To resolve the issue, McDonnell offered to arrange a meeting to discuss the changes.

But in a Nov. 5 response, Breithaupt defended the proposed policy. And he declined to meet with McDonnell.

"The UIL appreciates your concerns but respectfully disagrees that the UIL has made a 'grave error.' The UIL makes every effort, in both rule and practice, to provide fair and equitable competition in compliance with state and federal law. While I appreciate your desire to discuss this matter further, you clearly do not agree with the UIL's passage of this proposal," Breithaupt wrote.

Graeme Reid, director of the LGBT Rights Program for international human rights advocacy group Human Rights Watch, wrote in November, warning the rule would impose a "stricter standard" than other collegiate groups, including the National Collegiate Athletics Association and the International Olympic Committee.

His letter could not have come at a more convenient time. Just two days before Reid sent his letter, on Nov. 2, the Education Department ruled a Palatine, Ill. school district violated Title IX by refusing to allow a transgender girl on a girls' sports

team to use the girls' locker room.

Texas is going against the tide with its new rule, even against other reliably conservative states. Despite the assault on transgender individuals in statehouses around the country, one Republican governor vetoed such a bill.

Many states have passed laws allowing transgender student-athletes to play sports based on their identity.

On Tuesday, March 1, South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard vetoed a first-of-its-kind bill that would restrict use of bathrooms by transgender students after meeting with transgender South Dakotans. In his veto letter he wrote the legislation "does not address any pressing issue." on Thursday, March 5,

the legislature failed to override the veto.

Internationally, medical officials with the International Olympic Committee recommended transgender athletes be allowed to compete without gender reassignment surgery.

According to the new recommendations, female-to-male athletes will be able to participate in men's competitions "without restriction." Male-to-female athletes, however, will need to prove their testosterone levels have been below a certain level for the past year to be allowed to compete.

Societal changes and scientific research contributed to the changes, according to an IOC document.

While UIL officials argue the rule just codifies

longstanding practice, McDonnell said that is no justification for discrimination.

"Over the history of our nation we've codified lots of [unjust laws]. Tradition should be a guide alone," McDonnell said.

The negative impact on transgender students notwithstanding, McDonnell is concerned it's "a lack of the left and right hands not knowing what each other are doing."

"I don't know where the breakdown happened," McDonnell said. "How you resolve it is the big question right now. Ultimately I think it will be resolved in the courts by a transgender student athlete or the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights."

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My mom died when I was young — 15. I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't understand myself. I became self-destructive and got locked up for selling drugs. I was unhappy for years.

It was more than 10 years before I actually started to get over losing her.

Eventually, I became sick and tired of being down and out. I realized I was not happy. My "happiness" was based on all the wrong things: drugs, alcohol and other people.

As I began to look at myself, I knew I had to change. And change I did. I no longer need anyone else to be happy.

What you think about me is not my happiness. I don't need other people's approval to be happy. And I realize now that while I'd love to have had my mom around, I don't need her to be happy, either.

I don't even need my freedom. Locked in a cell with little connection to the outside world, surrounded by solitude, I can still enjoy happiness and enjoy myself.

One thing I learned while I was sitting in solitary confinement is once you are in a cell long enough, you begin to look closely at yourself. You have plenty of time to think. Not only are you locked in by yourself, you're also locked in *with* yourself.

And if you don't like who you are or if you are



James Laster
Special Contributor

the mirror, I can honestly say that I really like who I see.

I used to be unable to say that. I've taken some big steps in a short time. I am a completely different person than who I was five years ago. I take my sobriety seriously. I take my workout seriously. I take the way I conduct myself and the way I view and treat others very seriously.

Life is a gift and I love it.

In prison, I have discovered what it means to be happy. Yes, I'd much rather be free. But my happiness does not come from outside sources such as relationships, freedom, money, love, educational or business accomplishments or alcohol. My happiness comes from within.

I still have rough days, but overall, I love life.

It's been a bumpy road and I've been through a lot. I have endured, and I have overcome, and I will continue to overcome.

Eventually, within the next three years, they will open up these gates and let me out to begin the

unhappy, you're going to have a tough time.

I now recognize my past mistakes. I no longer let them define me as a person. I no longer beat myself up. I can be perfectly happy all alone. Because I love myself. When I look at the man in

next chapter in my life. And I don't have anything out there: no home, no car, no clothes.

What I have is determination and happiness.

I'm not even discouraged by these truths. I don't have a clue as to how I'm going to put my life together and start my life over. All I know is that I'm going to do it. At all costs. My intention is to shine as bright as the sun on the morning my only child was born.

Until then, I will continue to educate myself and learn all I can to help me in my journey. My prison sentence is the easy part. The hard part lies ahead of me once I am released.

And yes, it will be hard. But I will find a way to make things work.

The lifestyle I used to live is behind me. I have no desire to live like that anymore. I will not surround myself with people who indulge in criminal activity, drugs, violence and things of that nature. I hope to find new friends and a new support system of people who are interested in seeing me succeed.

I want to be someone the community is proud of. I want to give back to the community and, if possible, I would like to help people avoid situations such as my own.

And when these gates roll open, I'll have my chance and I look forward to taking full advantage of it.

Live and let live. ■

James Laster is serving an eight-year sentence for aggravated assault on a gay man. In a recent interview with Dallas Voice, he talked about turning his life around and wanting to make amends to his victim and the LGBT community.

The cult of ignorance

When I was a kid Anytime I start a column with this phrase, you can bet there will be at least one quote from my grandfather.

My grandfather was a genuine hillbilly, a blacksmith from Giles County, Tenn., who moved to Texas to raise a family. He played a fiddle and chewed tobacco and was functionally illiterate.

You might imagine he was suspicious of anyone with an education, but that was not the case. He married a kind woman who raised chickens in the back yard, threw down some scrumptious Sunday dinners and tutored calculus on the side.

Add Rambo — that was his name not a mathematical formula — may have been uneducated, but he valued intelligence. He loved telling the trick of the "blacksmith's gambit" for anyone too stingy to pay his price for shoeing a horse. He would tell them he could charge by the nail: a penny for the first one, double that for the second and double that for the next, and so on.

There were 8 nails to each shoe. The total for that little bargain works out to this: 2^n-1 which totals \$42,949,672.95 rounded up to \$43 million.

No one ever took him up on it.

I tell this little anecdote to illustrate how someone as simple as a blacksmith can value knowledge. Those were the days.

Today, our country has somehow fallen into a cult of ignorance, where stupidity and patently false information is revered as long as it is deliv-



Hardy Haberman
Flagging Left

ered by a convincing spokesperson. And as someone who has been in advertising for a good deal of my life, I can assure you that the right personality could sell refrigerators to Inuit (Es-kimo is considered a derogatory term today).

Leading this charge backward into ignorance is the Republican Party, which has discovered that a stupid electorate is a pliable electorate. Not only have they fed our country a steady diet of lies, half-truths and hokum, they have used their spokespersons, like Fox News, to give stupidity a cache.

It is not unusual to see televised sound bite interviews with people agreeing proudly with complete fabrications as though they were truths that were passed on from on high. "Climate change deniers" and "sovereign citizens" are only the tip of the stupidity iceberg, and now we are faced with folks believing that their "religious liberty" is at stake if they are not free to discriminate and bully anyone they want, as long as they can justify it with "strongly held religious beliefs."

These are the same folks who read the Bible like

it was a single book and who want "less government" unless it concerns LGBTQ people, then more government is OK.

Those are the hard core believers in this cult. But they have developed hangers-on who, by virtue of their intellectual incuriosity, are vulnerable to every fake news story on Facebook or Twitter. What we have is a growing population of people that are proudly basing their decisions on utter lies.

Is it any wonder Donald Trump has struck a chord? He speaks to the ignorant with authority and because he says it with such a bombastic style, they nod in approval. The idea that "he speaks his mind" makes him virtuous, even if he is spouting nonsense and bigotry, proves my point.

At a recent caucus, Republican voters were asked if they approved of repealing slavery and 20 percent did not! This should send shivers down the spine of anyone with a high school education.

The stupid are rallying and if the rest of us do nothing, they will triumph. The Age of Enlightenment is in serious danger of becoming a dim memory.

What can we do? Well, perhaps we should do what my grandfather told me when I was a kid: "Vote! And if your hand ever touches that Republican lever it will catch fire" (his words not mine)! ■

Hardy Haberman is a longtime local LGBT activist and board member for the Woodhull Freedom Alliance. His blog is at DungeonDiary.blogspot.com.



PAULA, From Page 12



The bathroom redo features Italian tile and six body jets in the shower. (David Taffet/Dallas Voice)

a cliché, Southerlin said there are really very few women doing what she's doing. Women have hired her because they're impressed that she's so good at what she does or because they're comfortable having her in their house.

But men are often confused.

While Southerlin was doing brick work on Maynard's home, she asked a bricklayer doing a large addition to the house across the street come look at her work. She thought she might hire him to help build the new brick arch over the new entrance.

"Where's the guy who did this?" he asked her, impressed with the work.

"I did it," she told him.

"No, the guy who did the actual work," he wanted to know.

When she explained that she laid the bricks herself, the man just looked at her in disbelief.

Maynard raves about Southerlin's work and is glad he found someone who loves his house as much as he does.

"We eyed this neighborhood for two years," Maynard said, adding that he and his partner even put a bid in on the house before it went on the market and were only able to buy it when another bid fell through.

Maynard said Southerlin appreciates the historic value of his 90-year-old home. She rescued a piece of original wallpaper hidden under several layers of paint and sheetrock, and he's planning to have the antique wallpaper fragment framed.

A full master bathroom and closet redo was the first project Southerlin completed for Maynard.

That includes a washer-dryer hooked up in the spacious new dressing-room closet. The walk-in shower has six body jets, recessed shelf with lighting and a vent system to keep moisture away from the closet. The custom-made vanity has granite countertops and a back-lit mirror. Italian tile and Kohler fixtures finish out the bathroom.

The current project is the entryway. Southerlin enclosed the porch, is widening the stairs and saved the original brickwork from the old patio. Arched brickwork will go up around the door that will mimic other houses built in the same period in the neighborhood. She's breaking through a wall from the newly-enclosed area to the living



room, redoing the fireplace in the living room and fixing sections of the hardwood floors.

How did Southerlin get so good with such a variety of specialties?

She said she started her construction career with roofing but when hail on one house ruined the ceiling, she began doing drywall. When she needed to do some carpentry, she learned carpentry. When a client needed tile work, she learned how to do it. She can do some minor plumbing but relies on a licensed plumber for extensive repairs and renovations. Her son, Brad, works with her as the licensed electrician on the job.

She said she's picked up one trade after another over the years by contracting certain jobs, watching and picking up tips from experienced craftsmen.

Southerlin's done more than just homes. She's built out several Starbucks and Monarch Dental offices in the area.

Despite the surprise from a number of people that she's the one doing everything from bricklaying to carpentry to roofing, she said she doesn't think she's ever lost a job because she's a woman.

"My prices are fair," she said. And most of her work is on referral, so potential clients know what she can produce. Maynard said he stole her from a neighbor and she has more work lined up down the street when she finishes his current project.

But Southerlin said she'll be back. Their next project in Maynard's house is opening the kitchen to a bedroom in the back of the house to enlarge it, modernize it, update the fixtures and cabinetry.

Maynard laughs and said he and his partner have begun saving for that project and they wouldn't have anyone else work on their house.

"She takes care of it as if it's her own," Maynard said.

Southerlin uses her initials — P.S. — as part of her company name — P.S. Contractors — with the tag line, "You'll never be an afterthought." ■

Contact Paula Southerlin at 214-715-6679.

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You have your choice of vocal ranges at Dallas Opera's 'Manon,' with out singers Troy Cook and William Ferguson

ARNOLD WAYNE JONES | Executive Editor

jones@dallasvoice.com

In many ways, Will Ferguson and Troy Cook couldn't be more different. Ferguson is an operatic tenor, with a peripatetic repertoire that has taken him to New York City Opera and The Met (in the city where he lives), in addition to recitals specializing in interpretations of new composers. Cook, a baritone (so typically cast in heavier roles) has been gifted with an international career of mostly classical roles, including recent appearances in Madrid and London's Covent Garden, but lives in rural Bucks County, Penn.

But they share one commonality: In addition to having featured roles in the Dallas Opera's latest production, Massenet's *Manon*, they are both out gay singers in the rarified world of opera.

There was a time you didn't see that much — directors, conductors and designers? Yes. But onstage? Not so much. That has been changing, though ... for men and women.

Although both have been openly gay in their personal and professional lives for decades, they agree that the practice of greater openness has grown.

"I have seen singers who are gay but don't talk about it much — but they are mostly non-U.S. citizens," Ferguson observes.

"Their [native countries] are less accepting [of gay people], and they are often huge national celebrities there. In the late 1990s,

there were a bunch of people who started to come out — largely women, like Beth [Clayton] and Patricia [Racette]. Then counter-tenors like David Daniels — I'm not sure why that is. But I also think the audience is changing."

MANON

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Cook is quick to agree. "Opera companies have been cultivating that market. It's a way to create a sense of community around the opera — a 'rainbow series.' We have been fighting for full acceptance [in mainstream society] — to be just like everyone else. And now we seem to have it."

Still, acceptance hasn't seriously altered how openly either singer has lived — both enthusiastically talk about their husbands, to whom each have been partnered for 16 years or more and now legally married. Ferguson's husband, Kim, is also a singer (though of the pop-cabaret variety); Cook's husband, Rob, is a gardener (who, he says, couldn't carry a tune with a handle). For Ferguson especially, marriage equality has made a significant difference in his home life: Kim is a native Australian, and federal recognition of their marriage has facilitated his immigration status.

Ferguson and Cook both extol their fondness for Dallas — from its cosmopolitan qualities to its architecture and people. This is Ferguson's fourth production with the DO in three years, and Cook's first ... though he performed years ago with the Fort Worth Opera. And they can't say enough about the Winspear.

"I have to say, this opera house is one of my favorites in this country," Ferguson says. "Aesthetically, it's gorgeous but just to sing in there is great — the sound in there is amazing."

"It's a more intimate experience, more purpose-built," Cook adds. "It's the right shape, the right style for our art form."

Audiences will get a chance to see how good they can sound in it for four performances of *Manon*, in a production originally conceived by out opera director Sir David McVicar. The two share a lot of stage time together, though they are something of romantic rivals for the attentions of Manon (played by the breakout star of last year's world premiere of *Great Scott*, Ailyn Perez).

"I've done *Manon* at The Met before, but in a different role," Ferguson says. "I guess that's the kind of singer I am — different



ARIA THERE YET? | Troy Cook, left, and Will Ferguson are old friends reunited as rivals on the Winspear stage for Dallas Opera's production of 'Manon.' (Arnold Wayne Jones/Dallas Voice)

companies hire me for different kinds of ways. It's great." For *Manon*, he's playing a much older character than he is. "The character is so different from what I look like or who I am — I get to play dress up and be the villain!"

Cook, by contrast, "plays the savior of Manon who truly falls

for her, all the while knowing she admires him and all he's done for her but doesn't really love him."

Yeah, we've all been there. ■

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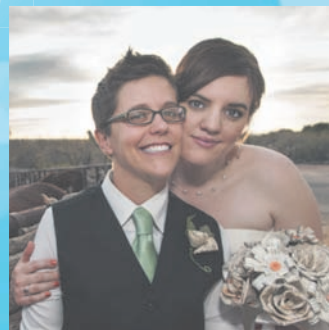
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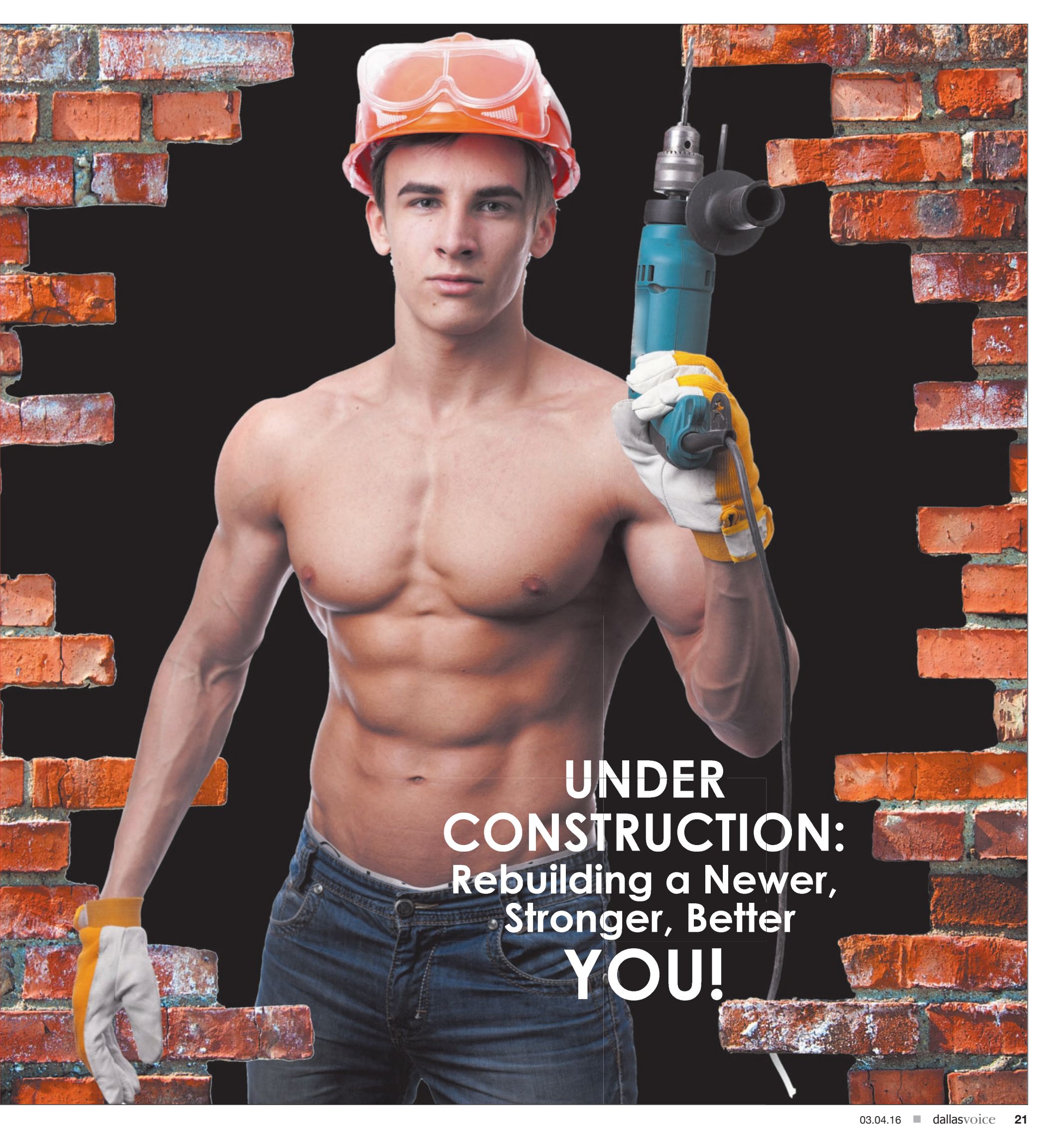


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Canada's national sport gets a rainbow-colored makeover that unites 'hockey & human rights'

The tale of the tape

According to Kris Wells, Canada is known for two things: "hockey and human rights."

If that's true, he has reason to be proud. He's a creator of Pride Tape, a new product that wraps those two things together. And it's taking his country by storm.

Kris Wells — more formally Dr. Kristopher Wells — is an assistant professor of education at the University of Alberta. The Edmonton native also serves as faculty director of the school's Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (ISMSS).

One of the institute's research projects tracked the use of "casual homophobia" on Twitter. The enormous prevalence of words and phrases like "faggot" and "no homo" led Wells, his colleagues and students to wonder how they could raise awareness of harmful language, and reduce it.

"Schools and sports are the last two areas of institutionalized homophobia and transphobia," Wells says. "That's why we've partnered with the You Can Play Project," the organization dedicated to ensuring equality, respect and safety for all athletes, without regard to sexual orientation, co-founded by National Hockey League executive Patrick Burke.

But, Wells continues, "there is still not one out NHL player. They're role models for so many people. We wanted to find a way to get them involved in the dialogue."

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During the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, the Russian government's anti-gay propaganda law sparked a backlash by human rights activists. Rainbow flags flew all over the city, in a show of solidarity with LGBT athletes and spectators.

Those six colors — universally recognized as symbols of gay Pride, and support of LGBT issues — also appeared on t-shirts and souvenirs. Now, thanks to Wells and the ISMSS, they'll be wrapped around hockey sticks all over the country.

Tape is ubiquitous in the sport. Players use it to better grip a stick; to protect the stick from wear and damage, and to impart more spin on shots and passes. For decades, it's come in only two colors: white and black.

Now there's also red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet.

"This is a way for teams to signal support to kids at rinks everywhere," Wells says. "Research shows that LGBT youth are less likely to participate in team sports, because of the homophobic culture of the locker room. The higher the level of play, the more hypermasculine the environment. Rainbow-colored tape is a badge of support to LGBT youth, which everyone can see. These six colors can change the hockey world."

Edmonton is a natural birthplace for Pride Tape. Two years ago Andrew Ference — captain of the Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins — was traded to the Oilers. He'd been involved

with You Can Play, and asked Wells how to stay involved in his new city. That June, when he marched with the Camp fYrefly youth group, he became the first captain of any professional sport to participate in a Gay Pride parade.

Last year, Ference was joined by Oilers' goaltender Ben Scrivens (traded last month to the Montreal Canadiens), and Scrivens' wife Jenny, also a professional goaltender.

The tape was created by Calder Bateman, an Edmonton marketing, design and brand management agency. Creative director Jeff McLean says, "Unfortunately, too often sports remains a holdout in creating a welcoming environment for LGBTQ youth. That's why I feel strongly about the ongoing relationship we have" with the ISMSS.

Getting Pride Tape to market was not as easy as slapping a rainbow on cloth, however. Professionals demand high-grade tape, and blending six colors proved difficult.

The manufacturer also had a minimum run: 10,000 rolls. The cost is nearly \$40,000. (A Kickstarter campaign ended last month, but you can check it out at PrideTape.com.)

Wells is confident the goal will be reached. Five thousand rolls of tape will be given to minor league professional hockey teams (hopefully NHL squads, too). Other rolls will go to backers who contributed \$30 or more. The tape will also be sold to the public. Proceeds will be split between ISMSS and You Can Play.

Pride Tape has received strong press coverage. A nationwide multimedia campaign was launched in mid-December. Every major television network provided free spots for a commercial featuring Ference (and produced gratis) by Global. In addition,

NewAD contributed space for printed materials in restaurants and bars across the country.

Feedback has been powerful. Email and letter writers say that seeing rainbow tape when they were younger would have made a major difference in their lives. One man wrote, "This could have kept me playing."



As Wells prepares for a national rollout of Pride Tape, he's already looking ahead. Tape is used on tennis racquets, baseball bats, lacrosse sticks — even on socks — for nearly every sport. Soon, rainbow tape might be as ubiquitous as the rainbow flag.

— Dan Woog

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The **Pink** Elephant in the room

Dallas-based queer musician **Lady BSmooove** heads to Austin for Pink Elephant, the inaugural festival of LGBTQ hip-hop artists

SCOTT HUFFMAN | Contributing Writer
scott_in_dallas@yahoo.com

Hip-hop — the music *and* the resulting movement — was created to give a voice to the unheard. Minority groups in general and African-Americans in particular were the first to embrace the genre. Yet somewhere in its development, a culture born of revolution began shutting out its own — specifically, its LGBT members. Fortunately, out Dallas native Lady BSmooove (aka Brandy Simington), 38, like many other hip-hop artists, is undaunted by exclusionary maneuvers.

“I can’t say that I’ve allowed it to hold me back,” says Lady B, as she is affectionately known. “I am a woman first, I came out black, and I happen to be gay. I put all of those things in there. I think in a lot of aspects that has helped me. All those things have helped me. I’m able to bring crowds together.”

Lady B considers herself primarily a spoken word artist — as she explains, spoken word is the act of “bringing alive the words you wrote in your poetry” — and secondarily a singer-songwriter. She is excited to have been asked to perform at the inaugural Pink Elephant Festival in Austin. The conference, one which showcases LGBT hip-hop artists from across the country, runs March 10 and 11 and leads up to the annual South by Southwest Music Festival. Lady B considers the invitation to perform nothing short of an accolade.

“I’m excited to represent my city first, and then I’m representing the gay community within Dallas,” Lady B says, describing her reaction when fellow hip-hop artist Japan, one of the event’s coordinators, requested her appearance. “He was like, ‘Lady B, you have to be a part of this!’ He loves my music that much that I had to be a part of it. I even got happy because I know it is a hip-hop festival. Hip-hop is derived from spoken word. For them to ask me to make sure that I speak [include] spoken work in my per-

formance, I was honored.”

Lady B knew from an early age that she wanted a musical career. Both her father and her grandmother were singers. With roots in gospel music, Lady B credits both God and love as inspirations for her work. But for the title track of her second self-released album, *Live, Love ... Dream*, she specifically credits wall art bearing three Chinese symbols.

“I was actually walking through Garden Ridge, and I saw a picture with Chinese letters [characters]. It said: *live, love, dream*. I left it in my soul for a while. Then I got it tattooed on my left arm. I started to live by it. I applied this to my life, and I said, ‘That’s what I’m going to name the album.’ I wrote the album to those words to try to give people that insight.”

Lady B’s interests, however, aren’t confined simply to music. She is also known as a community advocate for HIV awareness and black youth. In fact, the hip-hopper’s participation in several local events including AIDS Walk South Dallas has earned her an unexpected yet welcomed political title.

“I don’t consider myself an activist, but for some reason everyone else does,” she says. “I’m passionate about HIV prevention and knowledge, so I show up to those things. I am a black woman, so I am passionate about what’s happening to black youth. People see me going to different things. I go to where the kids are, and I will perform and reach them. Somehow every-



LOOMIN' LARGE | Dallas' Lady BSmooove and her fellow musicians at the Pink Elephant Festival in Austin hope to change the reputation of hip-hop as homophobic. The international gathering precedes SXSW. (Photo courtesy DJ Matic)

one has equated that into activism. Sometimes I feel like I’m not doing enough.”

Her community involvement has not gone unnoticed. Dallas men’s group United Black Ellum has twice nominated Lady B for its Ally of the Year award. Moreover, she attributes much of

her early success to the black gay men of Dallas.

“I give the black gay men a huge credit for Lady BSmooove being who she is,” she says. “Black gay men were the first people to say,

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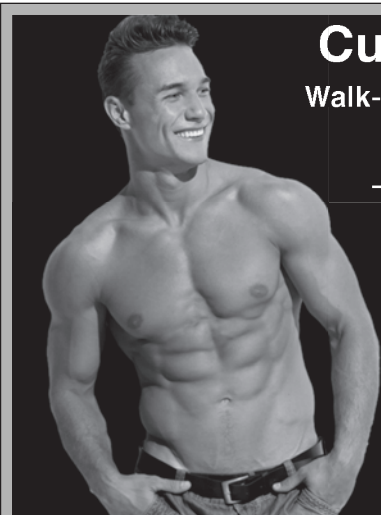
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L+S music

■ LADY B, From Page 24

'Come perform for me.' I commend them for that. I cannot wait to get my Grammy so that I can thank the black gay community. I cannot say anything about the women. Any black gay woman who saw Lady B perform [saw it] because she was at a black gay men's event. But I'm thankful for that. Those women who showed up became fans."

With two albums behind her, Lady B now looks to the future. One goal is to produce a gospel album. Another, to which she earlier alluded, is to be the first spoken word artist nominated for a Grammy. She is also open to the idea of adapting her work for theater.

"Someone actually put the idea in my head,"

Lady B says. "She is a director at the Irving Arts Center. She heard my album, and she came out to see me. She said, 'When I listened to your album, the first thing I thought was that this could be a play.' I was like, 'Really? A play?'"

In the meantime, Lady B will keep her day job in computer support. "I'm a help desk service technician," Lady B says. "I help people. I'm still a geek. I like breaking stuff in a computer to see if I can fix it. I love being able to teach people things. That's what I do for a living until these royalty checks start coming in."

Lady Bsmooove performs at Austin's Victory Grill March 10 at 9 p.m. For complete event information and scheduling, visit PinkElephantFestival.com.

A BRUNCHING OF GAYS: The Social House

With news last week that Dish Restaurant at the ilume would be relocating — and that Feb. 28 would be the last "Drag Brunch" in that space, at least until owner Tim McEneny opens Dish's replacement concept, Cedar Grove (planned for Memorial Day) — came the sudden realization that some queer folks would be without their traditional brunch hang. And since I believe the proper collective noun for gay men should be "a brunching," it falls upon me to come up with some alternatives. Here, then, the inaugural column looking for new spots to mimosify and gossip on a warm spring Sunday. First up: **The Social House**.

My initial foray to scavenge for a suitable booze-and-protein-binge before 5 p.m. took me to this prodigal gastropub in Uptown. Prodigal only because it initially opened its doors in the West Village, only to relocate to Addison a few years later. Then about three years ago, it returned to Central Dallas, this time tucked away in a quaint, parking-challenged corner between the Quadrangle and Gold's Gym. But really, that just creates a little more buzz, a bit greater intimacy. Social House has "social" in its name, after all; you're meant to feel the bustle and hear the hum.

And hum it does. On our visit — a gorgeous Sunday around 1:30 p.m. — the patio was packed with energetic (and good looking) diners, a diverse and friendly crowd that was also reflected in the servers, all of whom were gracious and easy-going. We didn't make a reservation, so had to wait half an hour for our table, but no worries — bellinis and mimosas are available by the carafe (10 bucks!), and you can buy those at the bar and set up shop inside the foyer, where a shelf makes for the perfect setting to hold a flute or two of bubbly and o.j. (The two of us got two carafes before the meal was over; don't judge.) The full menu — with its selection of burgers and tacos, pizza and pub grub — was available, and while my dining companion was focussed on the adult beverages, I came for brunch food.



The selection was what you'd expect at a gastropub in Texas: eggy offerings, gourmet meats and a dose of Tex-Mex sensibilities. I was drawn to the steak benedict (\$13.95) or the breakfast tacos (\$9.95) or even the chicken and waffles (at \$15.95, the priciest item on the very reasonable menu), but stuck with my favorite Latino standby: chilaquiles (\$9.95). Triangles of crisply-fried corn tortillas serve as the foundation upon which are dome of ingredients create a kind of working-class casserole: marinated pulled pork weaves between a salad of lettuce, avocado, salsa, onions and an smattering of diced tomato, capped by a fried egg with lovely runny center, queso fresco and its French cousin, creme fraiche. It's a full meal on a plate, with the added benefit of texture, deftness and a cocktail close at hand. My dining companion's decision to order from the house specialties was forgivable. That's the beauty of brunch: Something for everyone, and everyone feels at home.

— Arnold Wayne Jones

2708 Routh St. Sunday brunch from 11 a.m.
Have a suggestion for a brunch place in or around Uptown that we should check out? Email your recommendation to jones@dallasvoice.com or tweet it to @criticalmasstx.



Friday 03.04 —
Sunday 03.06

Spring in the air, so home & garden shows bloom

The weather has been gorgeous, which means two things: 1. Time to start working on your Speedo body; and 2. time to do a little spring cleaning, from planting new flowers to refreshing that tired furniture. Two events this weekend — one in Cowtown, one in Big D — provide ample opportunity for you to discover lovely new works of art to enliven your decor, as well as gardening tips, antique to invest in and more. Take your pick!

DEETS: Fort Worth Show of Antiques and Art, Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3400 Burnett-Tandy, Fort Worth. Friday–Saturday. \$8. FortWorthShow.com.

37th Annual Texas Home and Garden Show, Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N. Stemmons Freeway. Friday–Sunday. \$10. TexasHomeAndGarden.com.

Thursday 03.10 —
Sunday 03.13

Texas Bear Round Up returns for 21st annual celebration of men

If you're out and about starting Thursday and notice a lot more beefy, furry, friendly guys than normal around the gayborhood, don't worry that hibernation has ended ... or that *The Revenant* is filming a sequel. Nope, it's just the 21th annual Texas Bear Round Up. The Dallas Bears' TBRU gathers thousands of bears, otters, wolves, polar bears and their admirers (aka "chasers") for four days of fun, fur and frolic. Among the attractions are parties at the two host hotels, the BearDance and Mr. TBRU Contest, but there's a little something for everyone. So be nice and say hello — they won't bite ... hard.

DEETS: For a complete schedule of events, visit TBRU.org.



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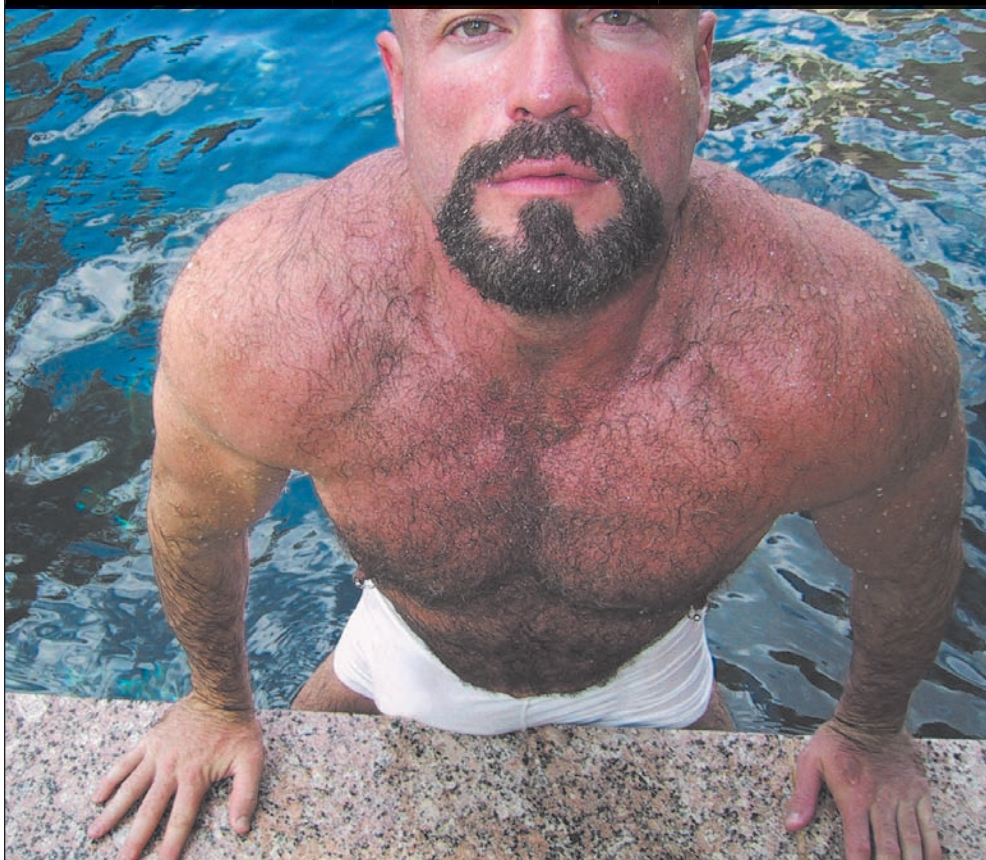
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calendar highlights



Dallas Black Dance Theatre performs outside its usual performance space twice this week with the program *Dancing without Borders* North (and the Eisemann Center in Richardson on Friday) and West (at the Scott Theatre in Fort Worth on Thursday).

ARTSWEEK

THEATER

Out of the Loop Fringe Festival. WaterTower Theatre's 14th annual celebration of intimate and quirky performances, including music, solo performances and comedy. *Final weekend.* Addison Theatre Centre, 15650 Addison Road. Visit WaterTowerTheatre.org for full lineup of performances.

One-Act Festival. Six plays by six women over six nights, including a regional premiere from Obie Award-winner Charlayne Woodward and local playwright Vicki Caroline Cheatwood. Presented by TeCo Theatrical Productions. *Final weekend.* Bishop Arts Theatre Center, 215 S. Tyler St. BishopArtsTheatre.org.

All the Way. The Dallas Theater Center's first-ever co-production with Houston's Alley Theatre is this staging of the acclaimed Tony Award-winning play about LBJ. Wyly Theatre, 2400 Flora St. Through April 6 (extended). DallasTheaterCenter.org.

I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard. The third show of Kitchen Dog's 25th season, a dark comedy about an actress and her playwright-dad. The Green Zone in the Design District, 161 Riveredge. Through March 12. KitchenDogTheater.org.

Long Day's Journey into Night. Eugene O'Neill's monumental family drama. *Final weekend.* Undermain Theatre, 3400 Main St. Evening shows at 7:30 p.m. (earlier time). Undermain.org.

Isaac's Eye. A dark comedy about the unscrupulous steps some people will take to achieve fame — even Isaac Newton. Presented by Amphibian Stage Productions. *Final weekend.* Milburn Theatre, 120 S. Main St., Fort Worth. AmphibianStage.com.

Clever Little Lies. Gay playwright Joe DiPietro's story of love, marriage and secrets. Features Bill Jenkins and Linda Leonard. *Final weekend.* Circle Theatre, 230 W. Fourth St., Fort Worth. CircleTheatre.com.

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change. Gay playwright Joe DiPietro co-wrote this popular musical revue about relationships. *Final weekend.* Theatre 3 in the Theatre Too space, 2800 Routh St. in the Quadrangle. Theatre3Dallas.com.

OPERA

Manon. Massenet's masterpiece, starring Ailyn Perez

(*Great Scott*) as the heroine. Out singers Troy Cook and Will Ferguson have key roles. See our interview with both, Page 18. Winspear Opera House, 2403 Flora St. March 4–12. DallasOpera.org.

DANCE

Dancing without Borders. Dallas Black Dance Theatre presents two special performances — one “north” at the Eisemann Center for Performing Arts in Richardson, 2351 Performance Place, March 4; one “west” at the Scott Theatre in Fort Worth, 3505 Lancaster Ave., March 10. 7:30 p.m. DBDT.com.

FINE ART

Jackson Pollock: Blind Spots. An exclusive exhibit of the innovative American painter's late work, a departure from his classic “drip” paintings, but also showing the span of the artist's work. Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 Harwood St. Through March 20. Special exhibit fee. DMA.org.

Vermeer Suite: Music in 17th Century Dutch Painting. A lovely original Vermeer (one of only three dozen in the world) is among the seven paintings in this intimate exhibit that explores themes in Dutch art. Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 Harwood St. Through Aug. 21. DMA.org.

FRIDAY 03.04

COMMUNITY

Panoptikon. The weekly retro disco dance party, presented by Lord Byron. Red Light, 2911 Main St. Doors 9 p.m.

DANCE

Wood Works Master Classes. Bruce Wood Dance Project holds a series of classes for advanced and professional dancers with guest instructions this weekend and next. Bruce Wood Dance Gallery 101 Howell St. March 8–11, 14–18. 10 –11:30 a.m. \$15. BurseWoodDance.org.

DIGS

Fort Worth Show of Antiques & Art. Vintage displays of furniture and household goods. Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3400 Burnett-Tandy, Fort Worth. March 4–5. \$8. FortWorthShow.com.

37th Annual Texas Home and Garden Show. Three-day celebration of spring, with booths, demos, gardening tips and even a blood drive. Dallas Market Hall Center, 2200 Stemmons Freeway. March 4–6. \$10. TexasHomeAndGarden.com.

SATURDAY 03.05

FINE ART
Spring Fever Art Show. An art sale and exhibit of colorful “light palette” paintings by Robb Conover. Gallery 3, 1319 W. Davis St. 7–9 p.m.

SUNDAY 03.06


WORSHIP
Dignity (LGBT Catholics). Worship the first Sunday of each month, led by ministers Cliff and Jon Garinn. Interfaith Peace Chapel (lower level), 5910 Cedar Springs Road. 6 p.m.


MONDAY 03.07

BROADCAST
RuPaul Drag Race. The 100th episode with the 100 queen on this bonus-sized seventh season opener. Logo at 8 p.m.

TUESDAY 03.08

FILM
Laura. Clifton Webb delivers one of screendoms legendary characterizations, the brittle, sinister cynic Waldo Lydecker, one of the slate of suspects in the apparent murder of a beautiful woman. Screens as part of the Tuesday Big Movie New Classic Series at Landmark’s Magnolia Theatre in the West Village, 3699 McKinney Ave. Sponsored by Dallas Voice. Screens at 7:30 p.m. and 10 p.m.

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For a more complete Community Calendar online, visit Tinyurl.com/dvevents.

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this week’s solution

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THURSDAY 03.10

CABARET
Judy Chamberlain Jazz. The jazz vocalist’s weekly cabaret performance in the back room of Zippers Hideaway, 3333 N. Fitzhugh St. 9 p.m.

THEATER
Laughing Wild. L.I.P. Service Productions, which last year staged the rarely-performed gay-themed play *Streamers* (with a trans actor), now tackles out playwright Christopher Durang’s quirky absurdist comedy. The Firehouse Theatre, 2535 Valley View Lane, Farmers Branch. March 10–26. 8 p.m. LIPServiceProductions.info.

The Nether. Stage West presents this play of a dystopian future where the internet is a policed realm. Randy Pearlman, Aaron Roberts and Allison Pistorius appear; Garret Storms directs. Stage West, 821 W. Vickery Blvd., Fort Worth. March 10–April 6. StageWest.org.

Light Up the Sky. Theatre 3’s season continues with this classic comedy by Moss Hart. Theatre 3, 2800 Routh St. in the Quadrangle. March 10–April 3 (in previews through March 6). Theatre3Dallas.com.

COMMUNITY
Texas Bear Round Up 21: Mardi Gras. TBRU “gets



Allison Pistorius and Randy Pearlman appear in Stage West’s dystopian drama ‘The Nether.’ (Photo by Buddy Myers)

legal” and celebrates its 21st birthday with a New Orleans-themed gathering of hairy gay men and their admirers, sponsored by the Dallas Bears. Events include BearDance, Mr. TBRU Contest and plenty of parties at the host hotels and elsewhere. March 10–13. For a complete schedule, visit TBRU.org.

FRIDAY 03.11

THEATER
Disney’s The Little Mermaid. Dallas’ Doug Wright wrote the book to this tuneful musical adaptation of the animated classic. Fair Park Music Hall, 901 First Ave. March 11–27. DallasSummerMusicals.org.

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Cassie Nova

Cassie and Celeste go wig shopping

Hey-diddy-ho, gayborinos! I hope you're all having a fabulous day.

Over the years, I have had a few young queens ask me if I would be their drag mother. For those that don't know, a drag mother is a more established drag queen who finds it in their heart to help a little newbie in the ways of a showgirl. A drag mother helps their child with all things drag-related: makeup tips, wigs, lets them borrow clothes and costumes and sometimes lets them use their last name. There are quite a few O'Haras, even more Davenports and even a few Summers babies.

But alas, there are no baby Novas running around annoying the masses. Nova is just *not* a great last name for anyone but me. If I did have a drag child, I would want her name to be Bella. She would have to be funny, but not too funny. Pretty, but not too pretty. She would have to be a smart ass without being a cunt. Edgy, but still true to the art form. In other words, I am barren because of my high standards. I'm not going to let some little sissy-boy walk in and ruin the good name Nova.

I had a few queens help me along the way but only one I would call my drag mother: Celeste Martinez. In the early days of Cassie Nova, Celeste taught me to do hair, let me borrow clothes and taught me some valuable lessons, but most of all, she always had my back.

The timing for us to be friends was perfect. She needed a roommate and I needed a place to stay,

and we got along, so for me it was a match made in heaven. Looking back, I feel sorry for her. I wouldn't wish me on anybody. I was messy, loud and annoying. Thank God I have changed (I'm not as messy now).

I remember once when Celeste and I were going to pay the rent. We decided to stop in the wig store that used to be across the street from where Whole Foods is now. It was very uppity, bougie and way overpriced. The lady that ran the place looked like an Asian Tammy Faye Bakker but spoke with a Russian accent and had on a long blonde fall on the back of her head, while her bangs were teased up and out. From the moment we walked in, the store she was on us. She looked down her nose at us and was very rude. "Whatchoo need?" she demanded. Celeste asked if she could see this lovely long brown wig that was up on a shelf; that bitch replied, "Dat one iz berry expensive." Celeste looked at me like, "did this bitch really just go there?" I looked at her like, "Oh no she better don't." Then Celeste got this twinkle in her eye that said, "Watch this!" Celeste reached into her bag and pulled out our rent money. Yes it was all in cash, as we were on our way to get a money order. And you know coming from two drag queens it was a huge pile of bills. It was a few hundred dollar bills, a shit ton of twenties, tens, fives and ones. We looked like we was big pimpin' and Celeste told her that money was no object.

The woman's whole demeanor changed and she was suddenly our best friend. "Ooooh, dis wig look good on yoo skin tone. Dis one highlight yoo pretty face." Celeste said we would take them all. Miss Bitch got so happy, running around the store almost dancing getting us whatever we needed.

We get up to the register and the bouncy happy bitch starts to ring the wigs up when Celeste said,

"Hold on. You know what? Never mind. We are going to go down the street to Lemmon Wigs and get this same shit cheaper and without the bad attitude, but thanks. Bye!" Celeste put away the wad of cash and we sashayed away out of there. If looks could kill, we both would have been vaporized. It felt very *Pretty Woman*.

Here's another memory. Every year, Caven Enterprises — which is the parent company for the Rose Room and the surrounding clubs — would have a huge Christmas party. The first few years I worked for Caven we had the party at the Lizard Lounge in Deep Ellum. It was always a blast — free food and free liquor. Celeste and I went one year out of drag. Just a chill night of fun was what I was hoping for, but No... I had to go and get in a fight.

It was a festive atmosphere and I was walking around, mixing and mingling. I stopped to talk to a group of friends and strangers and casually inserted myself into the conversation. It was just some light banter, nothing too serious. Then Valerie Lohr walked by with her husband Johnny, I yelled hello to them both and waved like some weird fanboy. I turned back to the group and said, "Oh my God, I love Valerie Lohr." This one guy, kind of tall and good looking, had this look of disgust on his face. He said, "Gross, I hate drag queens." I immediately got defensive and said, "Whatever dude! You don't even know her, she's..."

Then BAM! He punched me in the face.

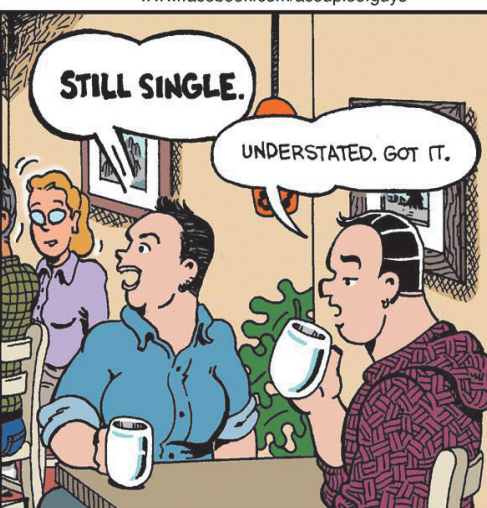
I swear I don't remember the next few seconds, but apparently I grabbed him and started to punch him repeatedly in the nose. Then someone broke us up. I do remember when it was over and seeing blood on the ground. I just knew I was going to be fired, I was never going to be booked again. I was crying hysterically like a pussy, overcome with emo-



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tion. I had only been in a few fights growing up but I had never been punched in the face. It was shocking to say the least.

My friend Celeste was there telling me to calm down, everything was going to be okay. I looked around for the douche that popped me and realized the blood on the ground was not mine. We followed it to the front door, they had thrown him out and I figured I was next to be escorted out. Then I saw Paul Lewis, our big boss. He was my bosses' boss and what he said was law. I saw him and started to cry again. He was a father figure to a lot of people in our community and I feared and respected him. He came up to me, put his arm around me and said, "I think you broke his nose." Then he started to laugh. "He started it, you finished it. I tell people all the time, you don't mess with a drag queen." Then told me, "Let's go get a shot." And we did and all was well.

The dillhole that punched me was apparently some random dick dancer. I *did* break his nose. His ex-boyfriend still comes out to the Rose Room and tips me on occasion and every time he gives me a dollar he says, "Remember that time you broke my boyfriend's nose?" and I always say yes, I remember.

My favorite part about this story is something I did not see, but which many people have told me: That when I got punched, my good Judy, Celeste Martinez jumped over a table and ran to the action to help me out. Just like Wonder Woman ready to kick some ass. There is no better feeling than knowing someone has your back. Celeste and I are not as close as we once were, she is off on a great adventure, but I will always consider her one of my best friends and my drag mother. I love that bitch!

Remember to always, love more, bitch less and be fabulous. XOXO Cassie Nova.

Photo courtesy Krisofer Reynolds



Anne Steele at The Rose Room.

Making the **SCENE** the week of **March 4-10:**

- **Texas Bear Round-Up:** March 9-13.
- **Alexandre's:** *Girls Night Out with Peggy Honea* on Friday. *Mi Diva Loca* on Saturday. *Chris Chism* on Wednesday. *Alicia Silex* on Thursday.
- **Brick/Joe's:** *Masquerade 2016* presents *Betty Neal's Birthday Bash* featuring *Tommie Ross* on Saturday. *Miss Diva* all-stars fundraiser to host the *2016 North American Gay Volleyball Association* from 7-10 p.m. on Saturday.
- **Club Reflection:** *Imperial Court* meet the candidates barbecue from 3-6 p.m. on Saturday. *Texas Gay Rodeo Association* meeting at 2 p.m. on Sunday. *Cowtown Leathermen* cookout at 4 p.m. on Sunday. *Mother Michial Community Awards* buffet at 7 p.m. and awards at 8 p.m. on Wednesday.
- **Dallas Eagle:** *Leather Knights Chili Cook-Off* from 5-7 p.m. on Friday. *United Court of the Lone Star Empire* show at 7 p.m. on Friday. *Dallas Bears* and *Leather Knights* club night. *Girls of Leather* monthly meeting at 5 p.m. on Sunday. *Bear of the Month Contest* at 10 p.m. on Saturday.
- **JR.'s Bar & Grill:** *Dream Girls* with *Chanel, Raquel, Fantasha, Kandy* and *Athena* on Thursday.
- **Round-Up Saloon:** *The National Showman 2016* honoring *Braxton Davidson* at 8 p.m. on Sunday.
- **Sue Ellen's:** *Heather Knox Band* on Friday. *CHIX* on Saturday. *Kathy & Bella* at 3 p.m. and *Barefoot Hippies* at 6 p.m. on Sunday.
- **The Rose Room:** *Miss Highland Park Us of A* on Thursday.
- **Urban Cowboy Saloon:** *International Gay Rodeo Association* show at 8 p.m. on Saturday. *Imperial Court In-town Show* at 8 p.m. on Thursday. ■

Scene Photographers: *Kat Haygood* and *Chad Mantooth*.



Customers and crew at Alexandre's.



J.C. and Mindy May at Sue Ellen's.

The last (for now) Dish Drag Brunch



CSMA's March Wine Walk





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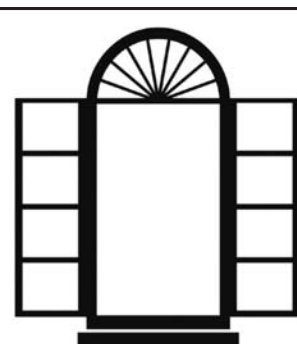
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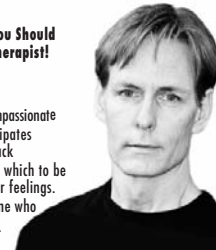
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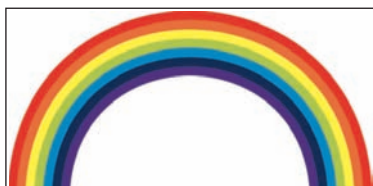
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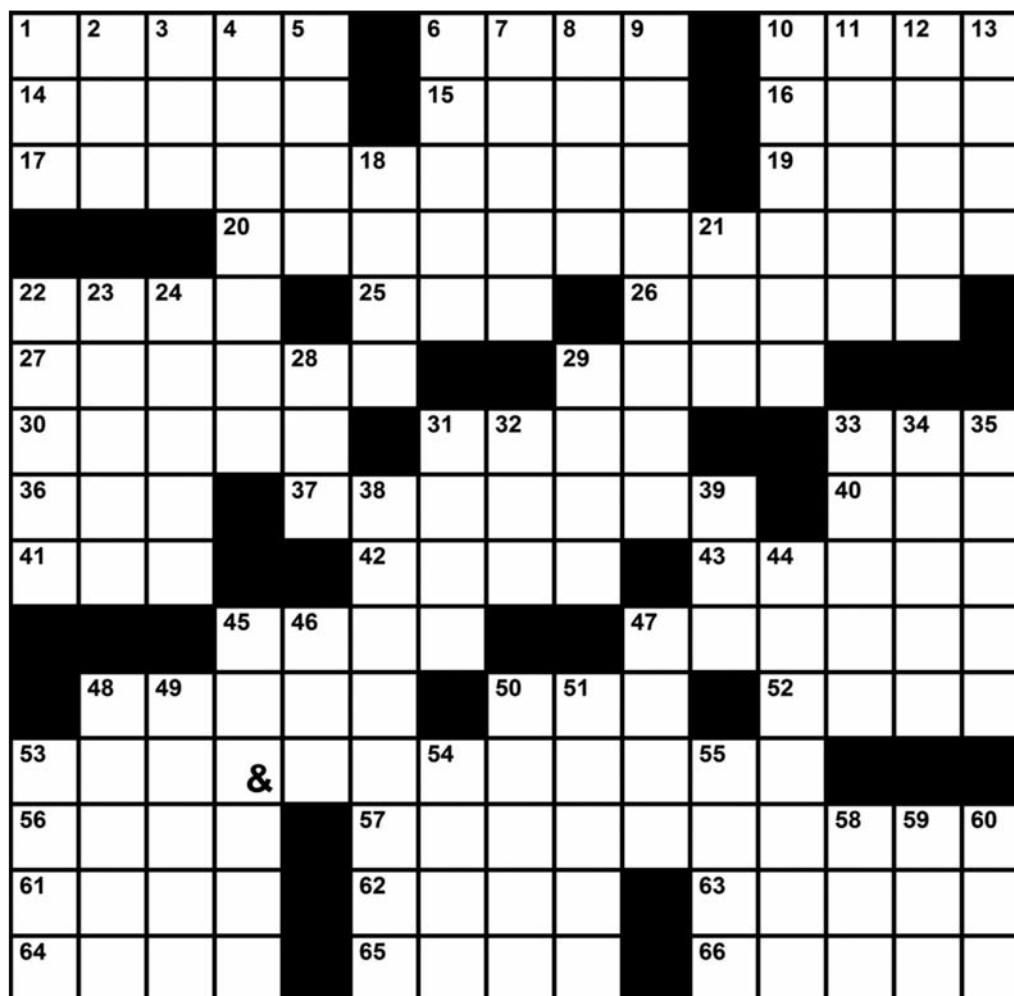
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q-puzzle



You've Got the Wong Man

Solution on page 29

Across

- 1 "Look but don't touch" type
- 6 Debussy contemporary Satie
- 10 Broadway opening for a lot?
- 14 Drag queen Joey
- 15 Man-to-man offense, in Leviticus
- 16 Vegetarian's staple
- 17 Countries where people drive?
- 19 Larry Kramer and peers
- 20 B.D. Wong movie set on an island
- 22 African queen
- 25 Halloween mo.
- 26 Black to Bonheur
- 27 Dwarf tree in the land of the samurai
- 29 Watch a NY Liberty game here
- 30 With 37- and 43-Across, start of a B.D. movie set in Asia
- 31 Use your tongue
- 33 Neighbor of Kan.
- 36 *Heather Has* ___ *Mommies*
- 37 See 30-Across
- 40 Charlottesville sch.
- 41 "Oy" follower
- 42 Alison Bechdel cartoon character
- 43 See 30-Across
- 45 Barenaked Ladies' "Am ___ Only One"
- 47 Bath tub Madonna, e.g.
- 48 Sri ___

- 50 Harry of the Mattachine Society
- 52 "Nuts!"
- 53 B.D. Wong TV show about fighting crime
- 56 Slangy suffix
- 57 Time long ago
- 61 Queer spelling of a word for ice house
- 62 Tops a cupcake
- 63 Vanilla, in the sack
- 64 Ending with Pride
- 65 Triangle ratio
- 66 Peter the Great, and more

Down

- 1 Tic ___ (sometimes fruit candy)
- 2 Bill written by Alice Paul
- 3 Football center?
- 4 City in a Dionne Warwick hit
- 5 Victim of Jacob's tricks
- 6 Seminal computer
- 7 Layer's lair
- 8 Chelsea Pines and others
- 9 *Being There* novelist Jerzy
- 10 Come between parties, perhaps
- 11 Kind of bear
- 12 Like a flaming queen?
- 13 It's sent from animals
- 18 *Star Trek* counselor Deanna
- 21 Persona for one of the Village

People

- 22 *I Love Lucy* venue
- 23 *My Fair Lady* composer
- 24 Diplomatic agent
- 28 E. Lynn Harris' ___ *Way the Wind Blows*
- 29 *Showboat's* "Nobody ___ But Me"
- 31 "The Black Clark Gable" Diggs
- 32 Indiana Jones's quest
- 33 Homeland of Princess Aida
- 34 Circuit party, for example
- 35 Motel name in an A&E series
- 38 Oscar nominee for *The Hours*
- 39 Ordinal for John Nash
- 44 Bursts in
- 45 1997 Kevin Kline flick
- 46 Boxing ref's end to a butt-whipping
- 47 Part of DOS (abbr.)
- 48 Inevitable online claim
- 49 Soldiers that get off
- 50 Macho dudes
- 51 End of a Stein quote
- 53 Son of Eric the Red
- 54 Prefix meaning "tenth"
- 55 One of three pieces
- 58 Org. that comes when you break down
- 59 Title for Ian McKellen
- 60 Scores by David Kopay

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