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ERCOT posts tone-deaf tweet

In a tweet proving how tone-deaf ERCOT is, the organization responsible for not upgrading the Texas grid to work during extremely cold weather wrote, “Close your blinds to conserve heat. You already know what it looks like outside. #conserve.”

The message isn’t bad. The tone is terrible: “This is all your fault.” A better tweet might have begun, “Please help us conserve our limited energy. One way you can help us is by closing your blinds.”

But no, the collapse of the power grid is our fault because we have windows. Well, ERCOT executives, you know what doesn’t have windows? Jail cells. And that’s where you belong for ignoring recommendations from 10 years ago on how to prevent exactly what happened from happening again.

And please — yes, I said please — stop lying about things like wind power being unreliable during this freeze. How do they power research stations in Antarctica? With the same turbines we use in Texas.

— David Taffet

City expands emergency warming center hours

The city of Dallas’ warming center at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas, 650 S. Griffin St., has a 24-hour intake and is now open until further notice, city officials announced Thursday, Feb. 17. Residents can access the warming center via Canton Street (pass the guard shack and The Black Academy of Arts and Letters). The warming center is located in Exhibit Hall A.

Those using the warming center will be provided a chair and table but should bring in meals for themselves and their family if they are able to. Water, coffee and light snacks will be made available.

The warming center is not an overnight shelter, and cots will not be provided.

A COVID-19 screening is required at sign-in, but no ID is required. The warming center is set up for proper social distancing, and mask usage is required.

Officials said the city continues to identify resources, such as recreation centers and libraries, that can be used as neighborhood warming centers. The Oak Lawn library is a warming center. City officials are also working with Oncor to prioritize those sites for power restoration and exemption from rolling blackouts.

— Tammye Nash

The cold takes its toll:

Pipes burst at Sue Ellen’s

With temperatures dipping into the single digits — even below 0 in some places — lots of North Texans were feeling the brunt of this record-breaking winter storm. Thousands were without electricity Tuesday, Feb. 16, and many had been since early Monday morning. And no electricity means no heat. And that means frozen water pipes, which all too often become broken water pipes. And that appears to be what has happened at Sue Ellen’s, on Throckmorton near the Cedar Springs intersection.

Video at DallasVoice.com.

— Tammye Nash

Dan Patrick and his priorities

I got to my office this morning and was delighted to find an email from Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who’s always concerned about the truly important issues. You know, things like...

keeping trans kids from peeing. Here’s his concern this morning:

“Last week Dallas Mavericks owner, Mark Cuban, made a shocking announcement that he would no longer be playing the national anthem at home games. While the team was playing without fans in the arena, no one noticed, but as they began to let a few fans in, the absence of the anthem was obvious. Cuban’s decision was a slap in the face to every American and an embarrassment to Texas. In this time when so many things divide us, sports are one thing that bring us together — right, left, black, white and brown. Cancelling the National Anthem drives a wedge in an already divisive time.”

Yes, you may have no electricity or water, but Mark Cuban isn’t playing the national anthem. Oh, and I’m in the office keeping warm. Yes, it’s a delightful 58 degrees in here. But if Mark Cuban would just play the national anthem, things would be fine. And about the anthem, actually no one noticed. Mark Cuban was on the news announcing that they dropped the anthem and no one — not one complaint from anyone — no one noticed.

— David Taffet

Window broken at Out of the Closet

One of the windows at Out of the Closet, a thrift store at 3920 Cedar Springs Road whose sales benefits AIDS Healthcare Foundation, was broken out Tuesday. Owners had been notified, and, by about 8:30 a.m., the broken window was being repaired.

We have heard no word yet on how or why the window was broken, even though some commenters on social media were suggesting the window was broken by a homeless person looking for somewhere to shelter from the mind-numbing cold as a record-breaking cold spell that left millions without power continued to grip not just North Texas but the rest of the state as well.

— Tammye Nash
Meet Anya. She is a beautiful 7½-year-old shepherd mix with some interesting quirks. The most unique thing about her is her love for TV. Her second favorite activity is to sit with her stuffed toys and watch television while she plays with them. But her absolutely favorite thing in the world is to zoom around the backyard with her doggie buddies. Due to her rough start to life she’s a bit of a chicken, but she is getting much braver and has learned to love her walks. She has made amazing progress in her foster home, and her confidence continues to improve. Anya would do best in a quiet home with a doggie sibling or two and no children, as the little ones can overwhelm her. This sweet girl is spayed and microchipped and is current on all age-appropriate vaccinations. She is waiting to meet you in an SPCA of Texas foster home. To request an appointment to meet Anya, please visit spca.org/adopt.

Adoptions are available by appointment. Adopters should submit an adoption inquiry form in order to begin the adoption process and schedule an appointment to complete the adoption. Please browse our available animals at SPCA.org/FindAPet; visit SPCA.org/DogAdopt to inquire about a dog or SPCA.org/CatAdopt to inquire about a cat.

PATRICK JOHN TESTER

Patrick John Tester, 61, died Jan. 29, 2021, at Methodist Hospital of Dallas.
Patrick was born May 4, 1959, in Park Forest, Ill. Raised in the Chicago area, he was a diehard Cubs fan. After high school at Rich South High School in Richton, Ill., he spent a year at Ripon College in Wisconsin before joining his family in Fort Worth, where he attended TCU.
Patrick loved to tell stories about working at Six Flags over Texas during the summers, an experience that taught him he had to work for something better. He earned a bachelor’s degree in education from TCU and then worked in education for more than 25 years in Austin, Denver and, primarily, the Dallas Independent School district, focusing on special education. He loved working for Dallas ISD.
Patrick retired from the education field in 2006 and then became a REALTOR. He worked with Abio & Associates, Keller Williams and Prudential before landing at Century 21 Judge Fite.
Patrick met the love of his life, Gary Swisher, in 1990. They spent the next 30 years together, until Gary’s death in April 2020. Patrick was also very involved in the local chapter of Lions Club International, where he supported programs that allowed him to lead by example, build relationships and improve the world through kindness.
Patrick is survived by his sister, Martha Tester of New Mexico, and many loving family members and friends. A memorial service will be announced at a later date. Memorial contributions may be made to Lions Club International at LionsClub.org.

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OBITUARY
The big freeze

Record cold spell disrupts North Texas routines

TAMMYE NASH | Managing Editor
nash@dallasvoice.com

Hopefully, by the time this Feb. 19 issue of Dallas Voice hits newsstands on Friday morning temperatures across Texas will be back above freezing and people will once again have power. But as I write this, temperatures in the Metroplex hover around 15 degrees and the second round of a record-breaking winter storm is settling in over the state.

Temperatures plunged on Sunday when the cold spell first hit, and much of DFW was blanketed in as much as four inches of snow — perhaps more — by Monday morning. From Monday night into Tuesday morning, the temperature dropped below zero, and that’s not counting wind chill.

With highs not getting out of the teens, the snow easily stayed around until Tuesday evening, when the second round of snow and ice arrived. Weather forecasters warned that the deep freeze was going to continue through at least Thursday morning, with temperatures not expected to get above freezing before Thursday afternoon at the earliest.

“Rolling blackouts” planned to take some of the pressure off of the state’s overworked power grid became just plain old power outages, with an estimated 4.4 million people across the state left with no electricity, some going on two days and counting. By Tuesday afternoon, nearly 254,000 customers in Dallas County were affected by outages.

In Tarrant County 204,000-plus customers were without power, while the number hit about 90,000 Collin County and 28,000 in Denton County.

No power means no heat to keep people and pets warm. But it also means no heat to keep water pipes from freezing and bursting, leaving many without water, as well.

Impact on the LGBTQ community

Providing safe housing for people impacted by HIV is the main order of business at AIDS Services of Dallas. This week’s weather has made that job more difficult, said Traswell C. Livingston, ASD’s president and CEO.

With “maintaining the safety and comfort of our residents [as] our top priority,” Livingston said, the agency’s personal care staff have “continued their round the clock duties and have been at the facilities 24 hours a day each day during this crisis.” Kitchen staff has been on-site preparing meals for residents and serving them door-to-door.

In addition, “we have had one of our maintenance staff move on-site to be available in case of an immediate need by residents,” Livingston said. “We are grateful that we do not get many cold days like this and look forward to the warmer spring days ahead.”

Cece Cox, CEO at Resource Center, said Tuesday that the center’s facilities would be closed through Wednesday, and that she and her staff would be evaluating the situation as it developed to make a determination about Thursday and Friday.

“If staff can’t get in safely, that’s a factor,” Cox said. Noting that facilities that would normally have clients coming in included the Nelson-Tebedo Clinic on Cedar Springs Road and LGBTQ Health clinic and the Food Pantry, both located on the agency’s health campus at 2701 Reagan St.

“We have been offering telehealth appointments, but power and cell outages have interrupted some of the appointments, and they have had to be rescheduled, Cox said.

Other services that are operating virtually, as they have been during the COVID-19 epidemic, include mental health counseling, Youth First, Thrive, advocacy, Dental, FUSE, UBE and Grupo Orgullo Hispano, she noted.

The winter weather has also had a significant impact on operations at AIN, according to Steven Pace, president and CEO.

“It is ironic that we had not missed a day of serving our clients all this past year during the pandemic, and yet this storm is causing increased hardships for our clients and the shutdown of our operations for now,” Pace said.

He said AIN is using telephones, the AIN website, social media and direct messaging “to spread information, especially to our clients without housing.” AIN is also directing clients to the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center “for shelter, food, and safety from the dangerous, prolonged cold temperatures.”

“Many of our clients, as well as most of our staff, are struggling with the electrical problems that are affecting all of Dallas, which means they may only intermittently have heat or water for many hours of the day,” Pace said. “Not having consistent electricity also means that people are limited in their ability to keep cell phones powered up, which also limits our ability to communicate with clients to conduct telehealth or other telephone appointments.

Most AIN clients who had appointments scheduled had already cancelled, but case managers are continuing to monitor our most vulnerable clients to the extent possible, but all resources are limited by the impact of this winter storm. We remain very concerned for all our clients and continue to do what we can to help them. We are assessing the impact hourly, making decisions daily, and are committed to resuming operations as soon as possible,” Pace said.

Legacy Counseling Center and Legacy Founders Cottage have been dealt a blow as well, said Associate Executive Director Brooke Henderson. “Just when we thought we had successfully navigated the transition to telehealth services due to the pandemic, we are now faced with the winter storm which has brought its own set of challenges,” she said.
A conversation with Stonewall Democrats of Dallas President Todd Hill-Jones

In a recent interview, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas President Todd Hill-Jones talked about his election as Stonewall president and the political landscape for the LGBTQ plus community. In addition to his new role with Stonewall Hill-Jones has done work with public policy and political affairs committees, too. His background includes experience with The Urban Institute in the Housing Finance Policy Center; founding and running a political action committee and volunteering with, managing and consulting on political campaigns at all levels of government from, city councils to presidential elections.

― Anthony T. Eaton, guest contributor

Anthony T. Eaton: What made you want to be Stonewall president? Have you always been politically active? Oh, yes. I’ve been politically active, and I wanted to be involved in politics since I was young. I’m a recent graduate of the LBJ School of Public Affairs and went through their executive master in public leadership program. A distinguished faculty member, the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, used to say at the beginning of her classes “The first most ethical thing one can do is to be on time.”

I looked at Stonewall and our nation, what’s going on, the challenges that we’re facing as a community. As I did all of that contemplation, I thought to myself, you know, what ways can I contribute to mobilizing, energizing and inspiring people? And I looked no further than the Stonewall Democrats. I felt like right now is the time to be on time and show up for history’s calling.

Hearkening to what Barbara Jordan would say, I felt it was my time to try to inspire others to be on time and address what I think are historical challenges facing our community. And I’m thrilled that I did it, that I ran, and that the membership elected me with 72 percent of the vote. We have a lot of work to do despite having allies in Washington, D.C., with President Biden and Vice President Harris.

What sets Texas apart from other states in terms of the challenges we face? We know that we’re surrounded by a sea of red [in Texas] with every statewide office in Republican hands. And, of course, both the legislative branches, the House, and the Senate, are in Republican hands as well. So [Democrats are] still in the minority here. We know Republicans are relentless in marginalizing and legislating their hate against LGBTQ people. I just felt that if not now, then when, and I felt like this was the right opportunity for me to step up and provide some leadership as we moved into 2021.
Telehealth appointments have been limited by rolling blackouts that have interrupted or limited internet connections for virtual sessions. “Even phone sessions have been a challenge for clients and therapist as they are having issues getting good signals or forced to conserve energy,” Henderson said. “Clients are reporting issues with privacy as they may be staying with friends, family, or at warming stations to wait out the storm.”

Problems with the phones mean it is has been taking staff “at least 24 hours to return messages … . Often times we are calling clients back from numbers which are blocked or unfamiliar for clients, so they tend not to answer. We truly apologize for this inconvenience,” she said.

Limited staff relief at Legacy Founders Cottage, a 24/7 critical care facility, has left just two or three employees working together to rotate shifts and take turns sleeping and working.

“Despite these challenges,” Henderson said, “the staff at Legacy have worked diligently to develop plans and bridge the gaps to ensure the clients are properly informed.”

By early Monday morning, Legacy’s Homebase for Housing staff “internally shared housing resources with all the staff to help spread the message to clients who may be seeking emergency shelter,” Henderson said, adding that anyone who is unsheltered or staying someplace uninhabitable can go the main entrance of the Dallas convention center at 1212 Canton Street in Dallas.

“Therapists have continued to reach out to their clients to ensure they are safe and stable,” Henderson continued. “Telehealth sessions continue to be attempted if feasible. For the clients that are unable to connect virtually the option of phone sessions can be offered.” And Henderson herself is checking in with division heads routinely “to help be proactive about upcoming challenges or concerns. Most of this communication is being handled via cell phone since access to emails is scarce.”

It’s no secret that the Trump administration was openly hostile towards the LGBTQ community. Do you feel like the last four years have set us back? I think, in some ways, yes. And maybe other ways, no. I think in some ways, maybe the jury’s out a little bit. Over the last four years, the Trump administration assaulted the LGBTQ community and the progress made toward equality that we saw in the Obama/Biden administrations.

Despite the Trump administration and his Republican allies going after the LGBTQ community, it doesn’t seem that public opinion amongst Americans has changed. It seems to me that support has held steady, if not hardened over the last three to four years as we’ve been under assault from Trump and his Republican allies. I think all of that bodes well for what’s coming next.

What do you see as the biggest challenges for our community? We’re in Texas; we’re surrounded by a Republican majority at the statewide level and at the legislative level. So we’re under assault. In the current legislative session, we’ve already seen a number of pieces of legislation that are anti-LGBTQ — legislation around transgender teens and criminal-
How do you see the future of activism in our community? The north star that we as a community were pushing towards was marriage equality. By 2015, when we finally achieved that really big goal, we started looking for our next big achievement. What’s that next big goal? What’s that north star? I think the answer is there are a lot of stars that need our attention. I think multiple things are going on in our society that help align us with other communities and diverse populations.

For example, the Black Lives Matter movement we saw last summer across the nation and here in the Dallas Fort Worth area — a number of LGBTQ people participated in those rallies and protests. I think you’re seeing a blending of diverse communities to help each other out. If we have learned anything over the last four years, it’s that if we work together, we can make progress together. And that makes it harder for our opponents to push back on us, to roll over us.

I think now we’re picking up many causes as a community, not just our own community. For example, income inequality, the pursuit of homeownership, addressing gender wage gaps, making sure that our transgender brothers and sisters have the same justice and protection under the law that we feel we should. We’re bringing a lot of causes together, and we’re working together more. There’s a lot of new tools. There’s a lot of new platforms. So making sure that we’re embracing all of these tools as we evolve and push for these things only strengthens our ability to get the change that we want.

You and your husband are fostering a child right now and are certified to adopt. Have you faced any challenges as you worked through the system and that process? I think we were both a bit surprised with the ease with which we, as an openly gay and interracial couple, were so welcomed. You know, we never once felt sort of ostracized or in any way discriminated against through the process of pursuing foster to adopt certification. Texas is a good example of a state with a lot of abused, abandoned and neglected children. They need loving homes. LGBTQ families are fully capable of providing loving homes. So, denying LGBTQ families the ability to pursue foster care, adoption, surrogacy or anything of that nature that allows us to build families is only harming children. It’s a disservice to those kids out there that need loving supporting families.

How can people who are perhaps not politically active, but want to do something, want to be more involved in the community get involved? If they are inclined to be involved politically, or even if they’re curious or want a better understanding of politics and the process of how they could sort of plug in, they can check out the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas at StonewallDemocratsOfDallas.org. There are sister chapters in other counties as well. Tarrant County has one, of course, and Austin and Harris County. The large counties in Texas generally have them. If someone has a political inclination, that would be step one.

Step two, whatever your passion is, get involved. There’s likely an organization that exists for whatever you’re passionate about. Plug in, get information, volunteer your time, make a financial contribution. The third thing is to consider running for something or consider taking ownership of a campaign or becoming a staff member in a campaign to influence policy. Be that candidate who eventually gets to the table to address some of the issues we talked about today. And don’t do it alone; bring your friends. It’s important to make sure that we’re bringing people with us as we get involved so that everyone is working together so we can achieve the same objectives.

What are your future plans? Right now, I’m 100 percent focused on my position with Stonewall. And I always want to lend a hand to the future leaders.
American Girl dolls are pretty ubiquitous these days. These expensive dolls have an endless collection of accessories and outfits that your stimulus check won’t even come close to buying. There are also books — so many books. The dolls have their own history and backstory and kids apparently really dig it. Sounds pretty innocent. But it is NOT.

Or so say the One Million Moms group that is throwing a fit over Kira, the new American Girl doll.

Apparently American Girl chooses a Girl of the Year each year and makes said girl into a doll? And there’s a book that goes along with the doll. Kira is the Girl of 2021, and in her book she travels to Australia to help work at a wildlife sanctuary where she gets to bottle feed Koala bears and stuff.

Kira’s transgression? She has lesbian aunts in Australia. Two ladies. Married. To each other!

One Million Moms, which does not actually have one million members, is livid. They are now boycotting American Girl until they do the right thing and kill off Kira’s lesbian aunts in the next book.

Oh, wait. I have that wrong. They want the aunts GONE. NOW. Like, burn the books gone.

In the One Million Moms petition they plead, “Please stick to making innocent dolls and books appropriate for any and all ages and refrain from making political and social statements. I urge American Girl to discontinue its storyline that includes Kira’s two lesbian aunts — immediately.”

You hear that? IMMEDIATELY! Off with their heads.

“I’m not buying into your social agenda to push homosexuality,” the Moms continue. “Your 2021 Girl of the Year Kira Bailey storyline offends me and many other Christians and conservative families. Your company did not even include a warning so parents would have a heads-up.”

I’m trying to imagine what such a warning would look like: “Rated LA for Lesbian Aunts” or “Parental Advisory: Existence of Lesbians.”

It’s exhausting, frankly, to have groups like One Million Moms claim that the very existence of LGBTQ people is a threat to children. It’s also astonoshing to me that they think if their children never learn about lesbian aunts then they can never become lesbian aunts — or lesbian unicorns for that matter.

Kira’s book also deals with the topic of climate change, something a lot of those One Million Moms probably also find objectionable. Everyone knows that global warming is a hoax and that forest fires are started by Jewish space lasers (if that doesn’t make sense to you, Google it or ask U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene).

Young people are often the most understanding of two people who love each other. I remember helping out at a Valentine’s Day party when my son was in Kindergarten. While he and another boy cut out heart shapes the other boy asked him, “How come you have moms but no dad?” To which my son replied, “Because my mom married another mom.” And they went on crafting.

It’s really not confusing. Some people are not heterosexual. That’s just a fact. And the existence of LGBTQ people is normal. We’re here, we’re queer — no, seriously, we’re right here.

I’m a mom. And I’m married to a woman. And we love our son very much and the idea that we’re harming him by being his moms is what’s truly offensive here. Would a “F**k Off One Million Moms” be offensive here? Good.

D’Anne Witkowski is a poet, writer and comedian living in Michigan with her wife and son. She has been writing about LGBTQ politics for over a decade. Follow her on Twitter @ManalDWitkowski.
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Like a hummingbird

Former Dallasite Blake Wilkinson shares his travels around Mexico through his Colibri Travel YouTube channel.

DAVID WEBB  Contributing Writer
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Video creator Blake Wilkinson named his YouTube channel Colibri Travel, after the Spanish word for “hummingbird” because, he said, the hummingbird reminds him of his life today exploring Mexico.

“It’s a bird that is only found in the Americas, and, given that I’ve traveled so much of North, Central and South America, I thought it was appropriate,” Wilkinson explained in recent phone and text interviews from Merida, Yucatan. Wilkinson and his dog, Binks, were staying in an Air B&B in Merida until he was ready to move on to another shooting location.

“Also,” he added, “just the idea of a little bird that goes from place to place was appealing to me.”

Wilkinson, known in Dallas as the controversial founder, in 2009, of the protest group Queer Liberation, landed in Guadalajara, Jalisco, two years ago and is now a temporary resident there. After leaving his native Dallas, he said he spent large chunks of time in San Francisco, Portland and Santiago, Chile, as well as spending a year touring the Western United States in a Jeep pulling a teardrop trailer, before heading south to Mexico.

In a video called “All About Me,” filmed while he was driving from Guadalajara to Pachuca, Hidalgo, Wilkinson spoke of spending time in rehab for excessive drinking after a year of staging protests around the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex that often angered other gay activists. One of those protests was at a Fort Worth City Council meeting concerning the infamous police raid of the Rainbow Lounge, a then-newly-opened gay bar, that happened on the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. Wilkinson and several other members of Queer Liberation were ejected from the meeting by law enforcement.

The videographer said that although he felt support from some in Dallas’ LGBTQ community, he felt “almost ran out of town” by those who did not appreciate his contribution to the gay rights movement. He described his most vocal critics as “unkind;” his detractors at the time often described him as self-serving and more interested in promoting himself than advancing LGBTQ rights.

“It’s just incredible the backlash that you get,” Wilkinson said of that time in his life. “It’s almost scary the level of fascism, not only from the right but from the left. I got to a breaking point. I just couldn’t take it anymore.”

Eventually, Wilkinson said, he realized it was time to move on. And he decided to return to what he likes and does best — traveling around the world. Now at 39, he has spent time in 39 countries. He will, he noted, turn 40 in August, so “I need another country before my birthday, or I will be indebted.”

Wilkinson, who is a vegetarian, described himself as a “hippy-dippy, liberal leftist.” His favorite spots to make videos are random and off-the-beaten tourist path, he noted. In the gay playground of Puerto Vallarta, he took viewers on a hike in the jungle above the beach rather than through Gringo Gulch and the many shops, bars and restaurants there that cater to tourists.

The budding travel guru got his first taste of exotic travel at the age of 11, when he went to Cancun, Mexico, with his family. At age 13 while attending the college preparatory academy Bishop Lynch, he visited England on a school trip. But, he said his wanderlust really set in deeply when an aunt who loves to travel, like in the movie Auntie Mame, began taking him along on her excursions.

Later, Wilkinson attended DePaul University in Chicago where he majored in anthropology and where he advo-
Take another look

Criterion Films celebrate diversity in all its forms

CHRIS AZZOPARDI | ScreenQueen
Twitter: @chrisazzopardi

Paris Is Burning

In Paris Is Burning, a strut is a defiant act, an exertion of suppressed power. In the mid-to-late 1980s, when the landmark documentary was filmed, these moves couldn’t be showcased just anywhere. Today the same is true, as the call to end violence against trans people and to confront transphobia persists.

Given the number of trans people killed since the doc was released (and the surge of trans murders currently making headlines), that call seems, still, to fall on deaf ears. And so white, queer, non-trans director Jennie Livingston’s 1990 film remains fiercely important, as much a time capsule as a reflection on how much progress has been made (and has yet to be made), its haunting relevance resonating yet again during our modern LGBTQ and Black Lives Matter movements.

At the time of its release, Livingston’s doc illuminated issues of transphobia, racism, AIDS and poverty through intimate, everyday depictions of legendary voguers, drag queens and trans women, including Pepper LaBeija, Dorian Corey and Venus Xtravaganza, as they found both refuge from the oppressive outside world and a unifying sense of community within the drag-ball scene.

Paris Is Burning introduced shade and voguing; it was the doc that opened the door for TV’s groundbreaking trans-centric show Pose and Netflix’s new doc on trans depiction in media, Disclosure, which acknowledges the classic doc’s historical significance while also critiquing it for being exploitative of a seriously marginalized community.

The Criterion Collection’s digital restoration of the film features an episode of The Joan Rivers Show from 1991, with Livingston and ball community members, who teach Rivers queer slang; a new sit-down with Livingston, Sol佩ndavis, Freddie Pendavis and filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris, and more than an hour of never-before-seen footage.

“No more than ever, the call for realness, that reverberating standard of ball excellence, is required,” writes Black LGBTQ activist and filmmaker Michelle Parkerson in an essay in the 38-page liner notes of the Criterion release, which also includes a 1991 review by the late, Black gay poet and activist Essex Hemphill. In 2020, the film’s urgency can be heard loud and clear; our greatest act of defiance, it reminds us, is living authentically, for the whole world to see.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire

Forbidden love flourishes in the quietest of corners, outside of view, beyond the patriarchal pressures of conformity. So it goes in writer-director Céline Sciamma’s achingly beautiful, queer-feminist love story Portrait of a Lady on Fire, where fire, often in a literal sense (there is lots of actual fire), burns fiercely and freely between two women, one an enamored painter, the other her reluctant subject.

Sciamma sets her story in the late 18th century, during the dawn of the Romantic era. A young painter, Marianne, played by French actress Noémie Merlant, arrives on a remote island off the coast of France to paint Heloise, played by French actress Adèle Haenel. The portrait is to be her wedding portrait, but Heloise doesn’t want to marry the man she is about to wed, so she refuses to pose. As Marianne’s relationship with Heloise blossoms, it’s clear she will have a better chance at capturing Heloise than the previous portrait artist, who left without accomplishing the task of painting Heloise.

But Marianne is different, patient. She draws Heloise from memory in secret until she establishes her trust; she speaks to her in a way no one likely ever has, her attraction expressed fervidly through sometimes nothing more than small, stolen moments when she...
fixes her enraptured eyes on Heloise.

Aesthetically, the film is a ravishing work of art all its own, a kind of visual poetry that cinematographer Claire Mathon captures to breathtaking effect. In stunning 4K, Criterion emphasizes the sumptuous beauty rendered in each scene.

Beyond the film itself, the Blu-ray includes a new conversation with Sciamma and film critic Dana Stevens, new interviews with Haenel and Merlant, and an interview with Mathon.

**All About My Mother**

In the 1999 Spanish drama *All About My Mother*, celebrated gay film visionary Pedro Almodóvar’s reverence for women movingly permeates every vibrant frame of his loving ode to sisterhood. Self-assembled family units are, of course, a dynamic that is an oft-necessary way of life for members of the LGBTQ community, which *All About My Mother* honors through the characters of Agrado (played by Spanish actress Antonia San Juan), an early figure of transgender representation, and the way in which Almodóvar matter-of-factly folds her into a blended family of characteristically diverse women.

Those women include Sister Rosa (Penélope Cruz), an HIV-positive nun; Huma Rojo (Marisa Paredes), an iconic actress, and the film’s grief-stricken protagonist, Manuela (Cecilia Roth), whose determination to stay connected to her teenage son after his sudden death leads her to discover the magic of chosen family and the healing bonds those relationships engender.

In a 1999 written tribute republished in Criterion’s digital restoration of the film, Almodóvar reflects on whimsical distortions of truth for the screen, and a perspective his mother shared with him as a child that became the impetus for *All About My Mother*, one that is hard to argue with: “how reality needs fiction in order to be complete, more pleasant, more livable.”

Elsewhere, Criterion’s Blu-ray release includes a 52-minute documentary from 2012 on the making of the film, a TV program featuring Almodóvar and his mother, and a post-screening Q&A from 2019.

**The Prince of Tides**

Barbra Streisand has garnered far less attention for her work behind the camera than in front of it, even though she was instrumental in dismantling the status quo of male-dominated directors. And so her film *The Prince of Tides* rightfully deserves Criterion treatment, with all the bells and whistles presented here, including a stunning 4K transfer and lots of Babs.

She is featured in several interviews, and provides a thoughtful audio commentary, recorded in 1991 and updated in 2019. There’s audition and rehearsal footage, behind-the-scenes footage and an alternate ending that features a song that Streisand wrote for the film called “Places That Belong to You,” cut from the movie so as not to distract from the film’s central character study.

Released in 1992, *The Prince of Tides* was Streisand’s second feature as a director, after her 1983 telling of *Yentl*. So emotionally invested in Pat Conroy’s novel of the same name years before its release, Streisand’s cinematic take on the story, which she also starred in and produced, scored seven Oscar nominations and traverses genre borders, from schmaltzy romance to family drama and, during the film’s most horrific reveal, a shocking thriller.

The film features the multi-hyphenate living legend as Dr. Susan Lowenstein, a psychiatrist who unearths one family’s buried trauma. She does so through regular meetings with Tom Wingo (Nick Nolte) after his sister, Savannah, attempts suicide. Of note: George Carlin as Eddie Detreville, Savannah’s trusted gay neighbor, and Streisand’s gay son Jason Gould, who plays her son in the film.

Moving through, and past, trauma is the film’s crux, until it makes a full-on soap-opera leap and centers the soppily love-conquers-all romance between Streisand and Nolte, undermining the drama’s stronger, more complex themes. What’s admirable, though, is how, nearly three decades ago, Streisand shined a light on the potential danger of toxic masculinity and nurtured a project that encouraged men to embrace sensitivity and vulnerability.
SUN 02.21
**The Vivian Maier** exhibit capturing the street life of Chicago and New York and including a number of Maier’s self-portraits, closes Sunday at The Arlington Museum of Art, 201 W. Main St. **Tickets are $10, available at ArlingtonMuseum.org.**

THU 02.25
**The Texas LGBTQ Chambers of Commerce hosts Pride Across Texas,** its quartely virtual networking event to connect LGBTQ and allied business owners through the Austin LGBT Chamber, Greater Houston LGBT Chamber, North Texas LGBT Chamber and San Antonio LGBT Chamber. Texas LGBTQ chambers of commerce have more than 1,000 members, giving participants a chance to reach beyond their city, county and region to create new business networks. Advocacy specialist Angela Hale, Managing Partner of Red Media Group, will give a brief update of the 87th Legislature, updating information on bills to watch and ways individuals and small businesses can advocate for or against specific legislation. 4-5:30 p.m.; visit https://bit.ly/PATQ12021 to register.

MON 02.22
**Human Rights Campaign** offers a virtual update on Texas’ 2021 legislative session with HRC CEO Alphonso David, HRC Texas Director Rebecca Marques, Texas state Reps. Julie Johnson and Jessica Gonzalez. 6:30 p.m.; register at https://hrc-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/IJctcOGupwrQG9zasOMgQHjc9KKSswAn.

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Ask Howard
How to do the wrong thing right

You say you won’t do it. You say you’d rather grow old gracefully, that you don’t mind looking your age — just so long as it’s at the best you can be.

Yeah, you say all that mind-fuckery — so condescendingly, too, since to the sunny side of 50 — only to flick on the bathroom light’s reflection from your mirror one morning, and scream, “Intruder!”

Alas, your dear Howard here knows of what Penny Dreadful scenario he speaks; I just turned 59.

Nobody ever believes one’s age on the years it ends in 9; it’s simply presumed you’re lying by understating. So I’m just skipping it over altogether and instead you’re lying by understating. So I’m just turned 59.

Scattered reversals define the lot of us these days: Time courses backwards on my face, and everybody’s gone suddenly Oblomov — we’ve reached “the ultimate incarnation of the superfluous,” an entire year now of nothing but COVID everywhere, all the time. Its resultant ennui, like vaping, has now narcotized an entirely new generation, sapped of strength enough to even blow on a feather. All’s turned numb, hypocrisy rules, pleasure subjuges, and the upside-down questions I’m receiving seem to be kaleidoscopic variations along the same dissolve theme.

Call me Dr. Strangelove if you like, and let’s just blast hell’s atomic bells right to it:

Dear Howard: Where can I find better, more sadistic playroom toys? My pleasure chest seems so unsatisfyingly vanilla lately. There’s actually a cobweb in the corner of my sling! Apparently, my ill’ right shoulder-devil’s run off somewhere more degenerately accommodating during these lilac days of COVID. My foot-long dongs are about as fulfilling as tampons. Where’s all the “Hunts So Good” gone? I’m bored as a paddle.

—Perv Booger

Dear Crusty Mucus Slime: OK, here’s the deal, Boog. Upon deplying every possible combination of Rubik’s Cube-like website titles that might possibly feature debauchee “Sex Toy Lines of Evil” until I was cross-eyed, finally — as blind luck often does — jackpot came accidentally by punching a wrong keystroke. And there she glimmered: Just a simple one-word, one-syllable, seven-letter web address and just as cracked as all get-out. Alas, said site’s name I’m not paid to advertise here, but I sure found that “Top 25 Most Disturbing Sex Toys” for which you’ve been jonesing.


Keep in mind, Boog, I’m not peddling this smut; I’m just the messenger. Perhaps coronavirus, too, shall turn out to be that best of bad cliches, after all: a blessing in disguise, Rona driving the safari jeep, with former-person Trump riding shotgun beside her, may very well have been just the nudge we needed, as a country, to, in the words of Cher, “Snap out of it!” All this lethargy, our patriotic malaise and nihilistic apathy.

Bubbles of life beneath the swamp muck are popping to the surface again. The days are noticeably lengthening again. The things Trump didn’t understand — like science, empathy and foresight — he discarded, derided and detonated. L’Orange proved, if nothing else, that inertia can’t go back again to whatever made us “great” 50 years prior.

Fossil fuels (big coal, gas) are dinosaurs glancing up in awe at the asteroid’s approach. The cost of modular solar energy has declined by 99.6 percent since 1976. Geothermal breakthroughs are allowing scientists to extract energy from our earth’s molten core. Compact thermonuclear reactors are no longer the stuff of Hollywood sci-fi, nor are those self-driving vehicles we’ve been promised we’ll be driving. They’re here, folks: blue skies, through the tears in our eyes! All we need do now is pull in the rope Trump hung himself with, and dust off our hands — rather, wash them thoroughly for 20 whole seconds with good soap and running water, then towel completely dry.

To quote that late, great drag icon of bubble-babe divinity, Billie Burke (Glenda, the Good Witch of the North from Tinsel Town’s 1939 classic The Wizard of Oz) on the topic of achieving Hollywood-esque aspirations: “To survive there, you need the ambition of a Latin-American revolutionary, the ego of a grand opera tenor and the physical stamina of a cow pony.”

And on the topic of big floating burlesque bubbles full of fluff, our quote of this month arrives courtesy of the recently deceased Larry Flint (whom, I assume, needs no further introduction among this crowd). Flint chimes, “If the First Amendment will protect a scumbag like me, then it will protect all of you. Because I’m the worst.”

Remember this number: 96.5. According to the latest CDC findings, that’s by how much simply keeping ‘em masks on — along with doubling them, or by tightening them up — can stop coronavirus in its tracks. 96.5 percent! We’re talkin’ A-plus territory here, kids. Either you can wear two masks, or just pull one of ‘em tighter. It ain’t hard to reduce viral transmission. It’s SO easy, in fact. All you gotta be is just a little bit less than full-lazy.

The director of the CDC explains, “The bottom line is this: Masks work, and they work when they have a good fit and are worn correctly.”

Just stay always a pace ahead, kids, never veer off the Yellow Brick Road, and remember now, too: Be wary of the Ides of March, wicked witch Rona of the East’s first birthday! Yes, oh, the variants are comin’, my little pretties, the variants are comin’!

—Howard Lewis Russell

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## q-puzzle

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**Solution on Page 18**

### Across

1. Bas reliefs of Lincoln  
6. Verdi slave girl  
10. Macbeth segments  
14. Words before once  
15. Barneys, e.g.  
17. Cobblers put the tongue here  
18. Start of a quote by ceramic artist Colin J. Radcliffe  
21. Woolf in blue stockings?  
22. Dukakis of *Tales of the City*  
23. All’s Well That ___ Well  
24. Gladiator area  
25. Other people’s children.  
28. More of the quote  
33. Unwelcome ink color  
34. Ref for Lytton Strachey  
35. Stephen of *Breakfast on Pluto*  
36. Insurance worker  
39. It swallows plastic  
40. Two-timer’s liaison  
43. More of the quote  
45. The Children’s Hour playwright  
46. Stonewall rioters and cops  
47. Get back, as losses  
48. Iniital serving with meat in it?  
49. Waikiki paste  
50. More of the quote  
53. End of the quote  
58. Tigers of the NCAA  
59. Cruising, maybe  
60. Stud fees?  
61. Auto of Pasolini’s land  
62. Kind of mill  
63. Howard, who crossdressed for *Miss America*  
64. Like a top  
65. Nuts don’t have this  
66. Bodybuilding mag  
67. Roz portrayer on *Frasier*  

### Down

1. Cable syst.  
2. K-12 grades, collectively  
3. Glenn Burke, formerly  
4. Backside, to a top  
5. Gertrude with a beer mug?  
6. Town in da Vinci’s land  
7. “___ shame”  
8. Toon canine Scooby-___  
9. With thick plates  
10. Disney lyricist Howard  
11. Shot type for Patty Sheehan  
12. Tara portrayer Collette  
13. Video game name  
16. Lurer of phallic fish  
20. Timothy Daly’s sister  
24. “Beg pardon…”  
25. A Village People character  
26. King Lear daughter  
27. “Hello” singer  
29. Mark on Bernstein’s staff  
30. Where the bouncers are friendly?  
31. Future queen of *Star Wars*  
32. Craft store bundle  
37. Indicator of too much sex  
38. Scandal involving bottoms?  
39. Capp and Capone  
40. Old nuclear power org.  
41. Gay pride parade sight  
42. Totally screw  
44. Phi ___ Kappa  
45. Young farm animals.  
47. Team lineup  
49. Bicolor mount  
51. Old line for cockpit workers  
52. ___-frutti  
53. Luggage  
54. To be _lesbienne_  
55. “Beauty ___ the eye…”  
56. Pole of your first mate?  
57. Dickinson’s “There ___ frigate like a book”  
61. Metrosexual

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