Fortune favors

Comic Fortune Feimster talks about her busy year

by Chris Azzopardi, Page 16
BIKTARVY®

This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

**MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY**

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection. Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV. If you have both HIV-1 and HBV, your HBV may suddenly get worse if you stop taking BIKTARVY. Do not stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months, and may give you HBV medicine.

**ABOUT BIKTARVY**

BIKTARVY is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in adults and children who weigh at least 55 pounds. It can either be used in people who have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements.

BIKTARVY does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS. HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS.

Do NOT take BIKTARVY if you also take a medicine that contains:

- dofetilide
- rifampin
- any other medicines to treat HIV-1

**BEFORE TAKING BIKTARVY**

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- Have any other health problems.
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if BIKTARVY can harm your unborn baby. Tell your healthcare provider if you become pregnant while taking BIKTARVY.
- Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed. Do not breastfeed. HIV-1 can be passed to the baby in breast milk.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

- Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- BIKTARVY and other medicines may affect each other. Ask your healthcare provider and pharmacist about medicines that interact with BIKTARVY, and ask if it is safe to take BIKTARVY with all your other medicines.

**POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY**

BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the “Most Important Information About BIKTARVY” section.
- Changes in your immune system. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that may have been hidden in your body. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any new symptoms after you start taking BIKTARVY.
- Kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys. If you develop new or worse kidney problems, they may tell you to stop taking BIKTARVY.
- Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- Severe liver problems, which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.

**GET MORE INFORMATION**

- This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit BIKTARVY.com for program information.

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Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and visit BIKTARVY.com.

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Luci Baines Johnson, daughter of President Lyndon Johnson, condemned the passage of House Bill 6, a voter suppression bill, out of committee. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed during the Johnson administration.

The Texas House Elections Committee voted its omnibus voter suppression bill out of committee, despite criticisms from local election officials, statewide civic organizations and large corporations based in the state, on Thursday morning, April 8.

“This bill is an affront to the Voting Rights Act but more importantly to liberty and justice for all,” said Johnson, who chairs Texas Right to Vote. “In the ’60s, my father saw measures like poll taxes and literacy tests for what they were, an attempt to deny voting rights to people of color. The proposed measures we are seeing today use different tactics, but the goal remains the same: to deny access to the ballot to certain groups of people.”

HB 6 has multiple clear voter suppression tactics. It adds or expands severe criminal penalties to every aspect of the voting process, from serving as an election official or poll worker to volunteering and voting itself. It makes it even more difficult for people who need help to get assistance with voting, allows poll watchers to intimidate voters, and prevents election officials from sharing basic information about voting by mail. It will impact every potential voter in Texas, but especially communities of color.

See related story on P. 8.

— David Taffet

Chorale emerges Stronger

The Turtle Creek Chorale announced its 41st season entitled Stronger.

“After a very challenging year of darkened stages, we are making our return the only way we know how — STRONGER!” the chorale announced in its press release. “The season features a virtual show, an in-person outdoor performance, and a return to the concert hall in the fall.”

“While our 40th season was not what we, or anyone, expected, we had time to consider who we were as a chorus, a family, and a member of the community,” wrote Artistic Director Sean Baugh. “This upcoming series of concerts reflects what we have learned – that TCC has a responsibility to be an outspoken member of the Dallas Arts Community, and a leader in choral music. We did not, and will not, fade into the background and this upcoming season is a statement of strength by all our singers.”

Already announced is Leavin’ on a Jet Plane, an April 16 concert that will be streamed on the chorale’s Facebook and YouTube pages.

They will sing “about all the places we didn’t get to visit throughout the ongoing pandemic” taking the audience to exotic places you never knew you wanted to go.”

On June 26, it’s “Christmas in June” at the Fair Park Bandshell. Reminiscent of the classic Holiday Bowl performances in Southern California, TCC will finally return to the stage after an 18-month hiatus.

For details on the rest of the Chorale’s 41st season, visit TurtleCreek.org.

— David Taffet
Meet Eric, an adorable, 7-year-old mixed breed gentleman. He weighs about 45 pounds and is mostly white with large splotches of black on his face and back. His floppy ears and big brown eyes give him a serious look, but don’t let that fool you. Eric is a sweet and athletic guy who loves to play with other dogs. He enjoys playing outdoors, wrestling with other dogs his size and nuzzling up to his favorite people for petting. Eric would prefer a home without young children and would do best with another canine companion in the household. The SPCA of Texas recommends you bring in your other dog for a meet-and-greet with Eric to make sure they are a perfect pair. Eric has been neutered and microchipped and is current on all age-appropriate vaccinations. Now through April 25, you can adopt any cat or dog 6 months old or older at the SPCA of Texas for 50 percent off their regular adoption fees. Eric is waiting to meet you at the Jan Rees-Jones Animal Care Center in Dallas. To request an appointment to meet Eric, please visit spca.org/adopt.

Adoptions will be available by appointment. Adopters will need to 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 and visit spca.org/dogadopt to inquire about a dog or spca.org/catadopt to inquire about a cat.

Legacy Counseling holds clothing drive
Legacy Counseling is holding its annual clothing drive for the Grace Project, the largest national conference for women living with HIV. Although the Grace Project is for women, the drive is accepting all clothing — many of the women attending have children and male partners or spouses.
Drop off donations on Saturday, April 10 from 9 a.m.-noon in the Legacy parking lot, 4054 McKinney Ave.

— David Taffet

Arkansas lawmakers override veto on anti-trans youth bill
Members of the Arkansas House of Representatives voted 71-24 and members of the state’s Senate voted 25-8 to override Gov. Asa Hutchinson’s veto of a bill that makes it illegal for transgender minors to receive gender-affirming medication or surgery. The ridiculously misnamed “Save Adolescents from Experi-

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Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson warns Republicans are chipping away at voting rights, especially for minorities

When Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson called this week to talk about state Senate Bill 7, proposed legislation dealing with voting in Texas, she warned that it would allow “legitimized voter intimidation,” adding that she is afraid of what might happen if it passes.

“Chip, chip, chip away at voter rights til our democracy is gone,” she warned.

SB 7, which passed the state Senate and has been sent to the House, would do several things if passed. Among those things is limiting voting hours, outlawing drive-through voting and giving power to partisan poll watchers, especially over those requiring assistance at the polls.

Originally, the bill would have limited voting hours to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. In the last election, Harris County extended hours to 10 p.m., mostly to accommodate shift workers. In the final bill, hours would be limited to 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Johnson pointed out that minorities make up a big chunk of shift workers, and, she said, the goal of the bill is to limit their chances of voting. The rule, she noted, has always been that if you’re in line by 7 p.m., you get to vote no matter how long the line is.

“Now, they want to make sure you can’t vote,” Johnson said.

It’s unclear if poll workers would be required to send away people who arrived and were in line by 7 p.m. but had not been able to vote by 7 p.m. because of long lines.

Drive-through voting, designed to make it easier for older and disabled citizens to vote, was greatly expanded last year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

With drive-through voting, a poll worker checks to make sure the person is registered before bringing a portable voting machine to the car. The voter then casts their ballot, and the poll worker takes that ballot inside to finish the process and returns to the car with a receipt that shows how the person voted.

SB 7 would allow a poll watcher to see how the disabled person voted and potentially interfere with the vote.

Johnson called it giving “poll watchers the right to intimidate and allow them to see how people are voting.” She recalled her own early activism where she went to the polls to pay the poll tax for people who couldn’t afford it. That now-illegal tax was designed to keep Blacks from voting.

Other proposals to suppress the vote are still floating around the Legislature. Among them, Johnson said, are efforts aimed at prohibiting voting mega centers. She said minority groups are most likely to have transportation issues, and the voting mega centers are more likely to be more accessible by public transport. Dallas County’s mega center was the American Airlines Center, centrally located and sitting right at a DART rail station.

One element of Georgia’s notorious new voter law prevents anyone from giving water to voters waiting in line. That wasn’t a problem at the American Airlines Center. Although thousands of people voted at the mega center, there
Clearing the rubble

ASD prepares property damaged by fire for construction, now awaiting building permits

DAVID TAFFET | Senior Staff Writer
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IDS Services Dallas is ready to begin construction on its new property at 511 Lancaster Ave. in Oak Cliff, where a then-existing building was destroyed by fire last summer, as soon as the city approves the permit. CEO Traswell Livingston said he’s been told delays in issuing permits are running as much as 10 weeks behind as a result of Winter Storm Uri in February.

“We are getting close to starting construction,” Livingston said.

Director of Development Chris Thurman said he’s raising an additional $500,000 for the project as a result of the fire that destroyed one of the two original buildings and the increased cost of lumber and building materials since Uri’s devastating freeze.

ASD, which provides housing to people living with HIV, acquired the Lancaster Avenue property in January 2019 and began a capital campaign then to renovate the properties into independent living apartments for its residents who no longer need a higher level of care.

After a successful capital campaign, the agency broke ground on the renovation project in February 2020. But then, just weeks later, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the state and work never got started on the remodel. So the property was kept fenced and locked.

In August 2020, however, one of the buildings on the property burned to the ground, and about 20 percent of the second building sustained damage. Fortunately, no one was hurt. But remodel plans had to be revised.

At the time of the fire, Livingston said the new design might be for a three-story building, but this week confirmed the project would be two stories with the same 16 units originally planned. Without an underground garage, building more units is not feasible, Livingston explained, and that need for additional parking made a larger project cost-prohibitive.

One of the biggest improvements the agency was able to put into place was adding washers and dryers in each apartment rather than having a central laundry room outside.

The property will be gated with covered parking and will include an area for dogs to run.

Last week, rubble from the fire was cleared to allow construction to begin as soon as the permits are issued. Only the remains of the one building destroyed in the blaze were cleared. After the fire, Livingston said he wasn’t sure if city inspectors would allow the second building to remain, but damage turned out not to be as extensive to the structure as originally thought.

Original plans called for both buildings to get new roofs. The new design, though, extends the roof over the balconies so that they’ll be covered. And entirely new plumbing was always in the plans, so the February freeze didn’t change that part of the design.

Thurman said he is still fundraising for the project, but insurance money, money already raised and federal grant money from HUD will allow the project to begin. To donate to the project, visit the organization’s website at AIDS Dallas.org or call Thurman at 214-941-0523.

Livingston said he’s hoping for a much better year, financially, for ASD, with the return of No Tie Dinner in April 2022 and what he called a firm completion date for the Lancaster Avenue project in the summer of 2022.
U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin on Monday, April 5, submitted a congressional inquiry with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding an HIV outbreak in West Virginia’s largest county. The West Virginia Democrat asked for the inquiry on behalf of the Kanawha County Commission two months after a CDC official warned that the county’s outbreak was “the most concerning in the United States.”

Commission President Kent Carper said in a statement that the outbreak “is an important public health issue and is deserving of our full understanding.”

In a letter to Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, Manchin asked the CDC review the commission’s concerns and reply by April 9.

In early February, Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, the CDC’s chief of HIV prevention, gave a presentation at a meeting of a Kanawha County HIV task force. “It is possible the current case count represents the tip of the iceberg,” Daskalakis said. “There are likely many more undiagnosed cases in the community. We are concerned that transmission is ongoing and that the number of people with HIV will continue to increase unless urgent action is taken.”

As recently as 2014, only 12.5 percent of HIV cases in West Virginia were the result of intravenous drug use. By 2019, 64.2 percent were drug related according to state health department data. The increase was due primarily to clusters in Kanawha and Cabell counties.

Kanawha County, which includes Charleston and has 178,000 residents, had two intravenous drug-related HIV cases in 2018. The number grew to 15 in 2019 and at least 35 last year, said Shannon McBee, a state epidemiologist.

By comparison, New York City, with a population of more than 8 million, recorded 36 HIV cases tied to intravenous drug use in 2019, according to the CDC. Counties in other states with populations similar to Kanawha had an average of less than one HIV diagnosis among people who inject drugs, Daskalakis said.

The surge, clustered primarily around the capital of Charleston and the city of Huntington, is being attributed at least in part to the cancellation in 2018 of a needle exchange program that offered clean syringes to injection drug users not able to quit the habit altogether.

Needle exchange programs are included in the CDC’s recommendations for controlling disease outbreaks among intravenous drug users. Such programs exist in dozens of states, but they are not without their critics, including in West Virginia, who say they don’t do enough to prevent or stop drug abuse.

A proposed ordinance that would restrict local needle exchange programs was before the Charleston City Council recently, and the state legislature is considering a bill to regulate needle exchange providers.

The nonprofit organization Solutions Oriented Addiction Response provides addicts with clean needles in Charleston, and the group shares information about HIV testing with residents, including the homeless. SOAR co-founder Sarah Stone has said the state bill could shut down her group’s needle exchange program.
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were a lot of check-in stations for a long bank of voting machines. Using a large facility like that also allowed one-way flow of people, which was safer during a pandemic.

One get-out-the-vote technique that worked last November was what Johnson called getting “Souls to the Polls.” After attending church on Sunday, buses ferried people to an early voting location. That solved a transportation problem for some voters as well as a time problem.

“Church buses took people to the polls while they were already out for the day,” Johnson said.

Johnson noted that among some Blacks, there’s still a fear that their employer might find out how they voted, putting them in danger of losing that job. She recalled days when employers threatened their employees to vote one way or another, adding that over the years, she has had to make many assurances that a person’s vote was private.

Moves by Republicans to restrict voting across the country come after last November’s election which saw record turnout that, on a federal level, put the White House, the House and the Senate in Democratic hands, followed by claims from Donald Trump — echoed by Republicans down the line, including Texas’ own Sen. Ted Cruz — of widespread voter fraud. Those claims were proven false in every court that considered, up to and including the U.S. Supreme Court, and no valid evidence has yet to be presented.

And yet, the GOP continues to try and perpetuate the fraud with voter suppression laws. Just as many were finally accessing their right to vote, Republicans are trying to take those rights away. And that cannot be allowed, she said.

“Voting is essential to democracy,” Johnson said. “We have crossed the Pettis Bridge.”

OTHER ISSUES

Johnson, who chairs the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, floated some ideas about protecting the Texas electric grid, and the House passed a bill on weatherization. She said Texas Sen. John Cornyn contacted her about working with her on a nonpartisan bill to fix the grid, which they were set to jointly announce on Thursday, April 9.

“The POWER ON Act aims to prevent a future severe storm, like the one Texas saw in February, from crippling our electrical grid and leaving countless Texans without electricity for days on end,” Johnson’s office wrote in a press release. “It will assist Texas power providers, distributors, and suppliers with funding to winterize their facilities and infrastructure to prepare for future extreme weather events.”

Also on Tuesday, Johnson noted the death of her colleague Florida Democrat Alcee Hastings earlier that day. “He was a classmate of mine,” she said.

By classmate, she explained, she meant they were both first elected to Congress in 1992, the year the Congressional Black Caucus doubled in size. In 1994, gerrymandering districts went full force and was the first time Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives in 43 years.

Hastings died of pancreatic cancer.

“I checked on him often,” Johnson said sadly. “He put up a royal fight. He had a brilliant legal mind and was very likable. He was a good, fun buddy.”

On another colleague, Matt Gaetz, who is under investigation for sex trafficking, she said, “I don’t see how he can stay in office.” But she cautioned for patience. “It’s a long, slow process to guarantee fairness.”

Finally, Johnson shared her thoughts on the 2022 governor’s race in Texas: “Abbott will run until he thinks he can win the presidency,” she said.

Johnson said any Democrat will have trouble with name recognition because no one in the party has held statewide office since the early 1990s. But she said she hopes Beto O’Rourke throws his hat in the ring, because he’s done such good work with voter registration and participation and is probably the best known Democrat in the state. And she said she hopes he jumps into the race soon for fundraising purposes.
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A few questions for the deity

Dear God,

I have so many questions. Ten people were murdered in a Supermarket; where were you? The Texas Legislature wants to allow your followers to use their beliefs to harm or refuse help to people like me; why?

And I have more questions.

How can so many people read the same book and come up with so many different answers? The Southern Baptist Convention openly despises people like me in the LGBTQ community. Yet, Katie and I were married by a professor of theology and an ordained Baptist minister who doesn’t believe we are an abomination and that we aren’t hell-bound for loving each other.

What gives?

If all religion is “open to interpretation,” who is to say I am wrong and that I’m damned to the lake of fire for all eternity? If there is that much moral flexibility and interpretation, doesn’t that render the whole thing, if not meaningless, then at least “questionable?”

So, what did Jesus say about net neutrality? Would Jesus have a Twitter account? If He did, would we be so cavalier about saying “Look! Jesus just Tweeted this! Let me tell you what He MEANT!”

If you have two religions, and they disagree on fundamental issues and laws, then surely one of them is wrong. (Take pork, for example.) There are literally hundreds or thousands of religions, and they can’t all be right.

So what makes someone so sure that their religion is THE right one? Especially when they haven’t been exposed to all of them?

Is it a coincidence that the vast majority believe in the religion practiced in the area where they were born/grew up?

How can people follow a guy like Jesus, look at his teachings of kindness and compassion and read that to mean they should strip away human rights from those who don’t believe the same way?

Why are women not equal in the eyes of God?

How do biblical literalists not stone condemned to the same fate?

If the excuse is that the New Testament changed the rules, then why keep the Old Testament? How do believers pick and choose that which they will obey and that which they will sweep under the rug?

How do you reconcile religious law with secular law? Which prevails? Does that same rule apply to all religions? Christians are keeping me from buying wine on Sunday before noon, so can those who keep Kosher, keep non-kosher foods from all supermarkets?

How about Halal? No pork for you? Just because of Islamic Law? Ribs are so good! (Sinfully good?)

The First Amendment guarantees the free practice of religion. What happens when two religions collide? That same amendment to the Constitution forbids the establishment of an “official” religion, or the favoring of one over another. Yes, some view religious laws or practices as interference in their lives, be they of a different religion or a group of people whom that religion views as unclean or in violation of God’s laws.

What do you tell those people? Believe as we do and we will respect you as a human being?

Religion is a choice. Some are born into a religion because they are indoctrinated as children; are they any more or less devout or legitimate than those who find religion later in life? What does faith look like? How does it feel? Is your faith in things unseen more real than my faith in who I am as a woman?

To me, religion serves to explain the unexplainable: “It’s God’s will.” Sure, to some that might be comforting, but tell that to the families of the over half a million Americans that perished over the last year, alone and suffering, gasping for their last breath. I was told since I had the ability to understand that God can do miracles; He can do anything. He created the universe and all life. Was He too busy, too indifferent, to save these people? Or to allow them to hold their children one last time?

There is so much suffering on this planet; we are told could all be avoided with the wave of His hand. And yet, it’s not.

There was a piece of legislation recently sent to the desk of Gov. Asa Hutchinson in Arkansas that would have allowed a medical professional — be that doctor, EMT, nurse, etc. — to legally refuse care to people like me because of that medical professional’s religious beliefs. The governor in Arkansas vetoed that bill, but there are plenty other such measures moving through state legislatures across the country, including here in Texas.

But really? Where is that in ANY holy book? Is that what the free practice of religion looks like? Withholding care from the sick or dying because you disagree with who they love? Is that in line with a “Pro Life” stance? Or is it just “Pro Birth?”

If I follow a religion that says God wants me to be able to honor Him by consuming alcohol at any time I want, should all bars have to stay open 24 hours a day to accommodate me? A cake shop in Colorado refused to sell a wedding cake for a same-sex wedding. Another refused a gender reveal cake for a transgender child. Are only the beliefs of the baker respected?

So, God, what’s the answer? Asking for a friend . . .

Sincerely, Leslie

Leslie McMurray is transgender education and advocacy associate at Resource Center in Dallas. She is also a regular columnist for Dallas Voice. Read more of her blogs at lesleimichelle44.wordpress.com.
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Fortune Feimster on her pandemic success, going hard on the wine and getting closer to an even bigger break

Fortune Feimster’s mouth has been going and going and going. “I talk a lot right now,” says the Southern comedian who hails from North Carolina, coughing and clearing her throat as we — that’s right — talk on Zoom.

In addition to a daily radio show and her weekly podcast, Feimster, who rose to fame as The Person You See Everywhere in Bit Parts (including Chelsea Lately, The Mindy Project and The L Word: Generation Q), has been doing press to talk about the projects she’s a part of recently. The pandemic has been good to her — in the last six months, she has starred in an animated series, Bless the Harts, for Netflix. On TV, she stars in Kenan Thompson’s NBC sitcom Kenan and voices multiple characters on the Fox animated series Bless the Harts.

The pandemic has been good to her booming acting career, but also to her love life: Feimster married wife Jax during quarantine. “I got to hunker down with my lady Jax and my dogs. My pets — that’s who got us through this time, for sure.”

Shit got real at that point. It got real. I don’t know why it took that. That first half … you know, I was supposed to go on this big tour, and my first tour date was actually going to be Grand Rapids on March 15, and they canceled it the night before I was supposed to leave. We were so excited to go to Michigan, ‘cause all [Jax’s] family was coming in. But then it just kept going and kept going. (Laughs.) And everybody had to kind of make the most of it. But no one was, like, having a great year, so you have to think and realize the whole world is going through this really hard time. And I think we’re getting through it, so I’m feeling optimistic.

A year ago, it was like, “OK, 14 days. Just stay in your apartment. Don’t leave.” And then it’s gonna be over.” Yeah, we were so naive. We were rescheduling shows for May of last year, which seems laughable now, because we’re still trying to figure it out for fall of 2021. I was lucky I got to hunker down with my lady Jax and my dogs. My pets — that’s who got us through this time, for sure.

Are you still on the bottle-of-wine-every-other-day regimen? I got better. That was definitely the first, like, four months. We had to finally be like, “OK, maybe not every night. Maybe once every couple days.” Thank god Hollywood started trying to get back rolling [in], I want to say, October or so. So I’ve been really lucky the last few months to be working again. And so, I feel some normalcy when I go to work, even though it’s very different at work. Everyone’s masked up and [in] face shields. It’s a different environment, but whatever it takes to get to do it.

What kind of projects are you working on right now? I just wrapped the sitcom Kenan for NBC. I have a recurring role. I did not foresee that one coming, so that was a nice little cherry on top. I’ve been doing The Netflix Afterparty, which is really cool, with David Spade and London Hughes. And then I had all these movies — I think I’ve had five movies — come out in the last six months, which is crazy, but it’s because I filmed all of them before the pandemic, and they all got held up; the release dates got pushed. They were supposed to originally come out at different times and then, all of a sudden, it was just like, release the movies! (Laughs.) People are like, “You’re everywhere.”

So I have, in honor of Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar, this special little Barb and Star cup.

I love it. That was one of my favorite movies to do. That was such a treat, seeing that come out. The only bummer is, that’s a movie you want to see with a house full of people in a theater. It’s one of those movies, I think, that is infectious, ‘cause people are laughing, [and] it makes other people start laughing, and you’re all laughing together. So I’m glad it came out [so] people can enjoy something silly during quarantine. But hopefully — I don’t know if you can, like, release the movie online and then also put it back in the theater.

The movie’s gonna live on in gay cult film culture anyways, so every year, actually, it should get a theatrical release. I hope so. It does seem that gay men in particular really took to that movie, which makes me so happy. People either loved it and are obsessed with it, or they were like, “I hated it. I turned it off after 20 minutes.” And I just wanted to be like, “Well, maybe you aren’t the target audience.”

Did you know what you were getting yourself into when you signed up for that movie? I knew that my part was pretty subdued. Like, we were the Talking Club and that we were sitting around, talking about ridiculous stuff. I was on a plane and I read [the script], and I was cry-laughing reading this. Most scripts...
Lack of drama makes ‘From Archie to Zack’ dramatically special


The girl who sits right behind you at school is really nice. She shares her things if you ask nicely, and she likes to make you laugh. She seems very smart and polite, and she never says mean things to anyone, even if they deserve it. All the kids in your class like her; you like her, but in the new book From Archie to Zack by Vincent X. Kirsch, there might be someone you like just a little more.

There was no doubt in anyone’s mind. Everybody knew it: Archie loved Zack and Zack loved Archie.

The two boys were happiest when they did everything together, but the funny thing was, neither of them could say, “I love you.”

Oh, but you can bet they both really wanted to say it. Very much so. And then one day, Archie wrote Zack a note that said, “From A. to Z. it’s true. I love you.”

Archie read the note to himself, and it really made him smile. But that note wasn’t quite right, so he hid it in a tree, and Zack was still his best friend.

He wrote another note, kind of the same. He read it to himself but it just wasn’t quite right. He hid the second note in his band case, and he and Zack were still best friends.

Just before Halloween, Archie wrote another note, with just a little more oomph, and he read it to himself many times. What he wrote finally seemed right this time. He loved Zack! But for some reason, he couldn’t give the note to Zack, so Archie hid it in his desk at school.

Then one day, Zuzella found a note in a desk. Zinnia found one in band class. Zelda found one in a tree trunk — and all three girls knew who wrote them. They delivered the notes to Zack, and that made him smile, because he’d been working on a note that wasn’t quite right — one that said the truth that everybody already knew.

Nothing unusual. That’s not normally what you want to hear about a new book; you probably want to hear enthusiastic things like, “WOW!” But that’s not what you’ll find here. From Archie to Zack tells young readers a sweet story in a calm, even, nothing-unusual manner.

The lack of drama is where unusual comes to play.

Author-illustrator Vincent X. Kirsch lets kids know that Archie and Zack can love one another, and it’s okay. The children in their class don’t make fun of anyone. They barely even comment; in fact, they seem to think it’s wonderful, a lesson that pulses like a heart here. Even the action-rich illustrations tell a story here, a story about kids that also serves as a surprisingly grown-up conversation-sparker about love, whether it’s between friends, classmates, neighbors or a child’s two favorite uncles.

Perfect for anytime reading, kids ages 4-to-8 will love this book best. For them and for you, From Archie to Zack is a book to get behind.

— Terri Schlichenmeyer
you’re just kind of going through like, “Yeah, that’s cute. That’s cute.” You know? But this had me crying. So I knew the movie was insane, and I was like, “God, how are they going to pull this off?” And I was like, “If they’re asking me to be in this movie, I’m being in this movie. It’s the best thing I’ve read in so long.”

In *Yes Day*, you play Jean, the paramedic. Is it safe to say that you probably shouldn’t be, um, driving an ambulance? One-hundred percent, I should not be. Yeah, Jean [owns a] fleet of ambulances, even though she sucks at driving that one. It’s always fun to pop in as these characters, like you said, that kind of just are a little off. That’s kind of my brand of humor. And I love this movie, ‘cause, well, first off, Jennifer Garner. I’ve been a fan of hers for so long. And I was nervous to meet her just because she’s done so many projects and is still in my category of “movie star,” which you don’t have as many these days. And she was so lovely. In my very first scene with her I had to drive the ambulance. And I felt like Jean because I was ... I didn’t know. I mean, they teach you how to work everything and they make sure you’re comfortable, but I’m trying to do my scene and, like, pull the air brakes and do the siren, and it was just like walking and trying to rub your head and your stomach at the same time. It was a lot to sort of figure out, having just met Jennifer Garner.

What’s the history between you and the other ambulance driver, Karen, in the movie? Because I get the impression that they could have been a couple. I mean, you took her life savings. I know. I feel like they were alluding to ... I mean, they never told me what their actual relationship was, if it was a relationship, if it was best friends, if I was her best friend and took her life savings. Uh, then that’s a really bad friend. If it’s her partner, then that’s OK. (Laughs.) I’m gonna assume that Karen’s probably my partner and my lady.

You’re also featured in the upcoming FX docu-feature *Hysterical*. Can you talk a bit about your involvement and what it seeks to examine about you and other queer women comedians?

It was spearheaded by Jessica Kirson, who’s a very hilarious, respected comedian out of New York, who is also gay. She and the producers just picked what women they wanted to highlight, and we were lucky enough to be included and just share experiences about being a woman in comedy and what that means. They filmed us each at our house and then a little bit on stage. It’s definitely not easy being a woman in comedy. And so, it just sort of highlights our journey. It’s a story that isn’t talked about as much. You see tons of things on standup, and it’s usually very male-dominated. So this is just coming at it from a very different perspective, a very inclusive perspective, as far as LGBT and women of color. People with different backgrounds, people with different voices, women with different experiences and what they talk about on stage. I’m happy to be a little part of it.

Before you go, I want to wish you congratulations on your Netflix special, *Sweet and Salty*, which received a Critics’ Choice nomination. Oh, thank you. Appreciate it. Yeah, it was my first hour special. I had done a half hour with Netflix, and this was a big jump for me to get to do an hour. I was so ready for it. I was working this material a ton. I was really proud of it. And to get to share my story and my journey about coming out and figuring out who I was, and being representation for people and having it be on this worldwide platform, where people who might live in places where they don’t know a lot of gay people or they don’t see themselves in another person — it was really special to me to be able to do that and make people laugh at the same time.

I got so much love from it, and it was incredible, but I didn’t know if the industry was paying attention at all. That they are watching and that they saw something in it was really special, just really made me feel, finally, after all these years of being out in LA and putting in this work, that people noticed, and it meant a lot to me. And now I’ve got to work toward the next one.
04.12
Prism Health North Texas is partnering with Padilla Gallery to host an online art auction of curated pieces by local artists. Artworks up for auction span various styles and multiple mediums, including oils, resin and photography. Featured artists include: Daniel Padilla, Christina Yielding, Ginger Fox, Jay Maggio, Chris Babb, Shirley Schleuse, Patrick Crowe and Adam Deviney. Bidding closes at 7 p.m. on Monday. Secure.Qgiv.com/Event/artauction/register

04.09
Bruce Wood Dance presents CRAFT, cocktails and choreography with guest artist Omar Roman de Jesus and Bruce Wood Dance company members from 7-8 p.m. Free. Register at BruceWoodDance.org.

04.10
Join the Dallas Public Library for its monthly LGBTQ book club that meets the second Saturday of each month from 6:30-7:30 p.m. This month’s book is The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller, a reimagining of Homer’s The Iliad. Register at DallasLibrary.LibraryMarket.com/Events/Queer-Reads-Book-Club-3.
Hello beautiful people. You know what is one of the worst feelings in the world? It’s the sadness and emptiness you have when you read the very last page of an awesome book or, even worse, the last page of a book series. I literally suffered a little depression after I finished The Dark Tower series.

The thing about reading books is that it can be very lonely. You want to talk about it to anyone that will listen. I wish more of my friends not only read books but read the crap I like. I know a lot of you out there know exactly what I am talking about.

But do you want to know what is an even worse feeling? Loving a book or series of books and fucking hating the ending. You feel robbed and like you want to track down the writer and punch him in the face.

I have felt that a couple of times in recent months.

It happened first off with Ready Player Two by Ernest Cline. I absolutely loved the first book, Ready Player One, and keep in mind, I am talking about the books here, not the movie. To be honest, when I first finished the second book, I felt very meh, like I felt let down, but I had enjoyed some of it enough to say it wasn’t a total waste. It stayed on my mind, and not in a good way; the more I thought about it, the more I disliked it.

I am not going to get into major spoilers for those of you that plan on reading it, but I will mention a few of the small things that ended up really bothering me.

So, the lead character, Parzival/Wade Watts, just casually mentions that he has had virtual gay sex and how everyone in the future, because of the technology, is much more sexually fluid. Cool, awesome, love it — but it felt like an afterthought, and the weight of such a statement and its implications were just dropped.

The author introduces a trans person who plays kind of a big role in why things work out the way they do, but he then does so little to tell any of their story. It just seemed like pandering. When I first read it, I was excited for the inclusiveness, but after thinking about it for a while, I just feel like the character deserved so much more. And the writer’s use of “non-binary” seemed uninformed and, well, not misused, just odd. Like he googled the words and loosely added it to his story to somehow score points for being so woke and inclusive.

This is just my opinion. Read the book and let me know what you think. Or don’t, because it ended up being such a letdown.

I did like most of the 1980s stuff — lots of John Hughes and Prince — but the story that ties the ’80s themes together just does not work.

The next book series ending that truly let me down was Hannibal by Thomas Harris. So help me God, if I ever meet Thomas Harris, I will punch him in the dick so hard! I will absolutely be talking spoilers from here forward, so if you haven’t read the books and plan to, turn away now. But this book came out in 1999, so you have had plenty of time to read it. I was extremely late to the game.

Silence of the Lambs is one of my all-time favorite movies, and I have always planned on reading the series. I started with Red Dragon — great book, and the movie did the book justice. Then came Silence of the Lambs — amazing book, and, again, the movie really stuck close to the book. I will say that Red Dragon and Silence both felt very dated, though not necessarily in a bad way. The way forensics and photography have grown and advanced so much since these books were written, it feels almost ancient in the way they did things back then.

Then came Hannibal. Compelling story with characters so very unlikeable that you couldn’t wait for them to get their comeuppance. I also loved the growth of Clarice Starling from a smart, brave but timid FBI trainee to more of a badass FBI agent. She’s a strong woman with an absolute moral compass. Everything she does in her life she does to make her dead father proud. She idolized her dad and would never do anything that he would have seen as unlawful or evil.

Then, after she attempts to rescue Dr. Lecter from crazed Mason Verger’s pit of man-eating pigs and ends up being rescued by Hannibal himself, she starts to change. Granted, Dr. Lecter does keep her drugged for days on end, and he is a trained psychiatrist and a brilliant man. But do you really want me to believe that in those days with Lecter, through their many “talks,” Clarice is suddenly cool with eating Paul Krendler’s brains?!

Yes, she absolutely hated him, but did she hate him enough to dine on human flesh? NO!

Then the book ends with Clarice Starling being totally okay with just being Hannibal Lecter’s arm candy and falling in love with a man that has killed so many? So just fuck her moral compass that the writer has developed over the last two books. He completely changed who she was fundamentally and has her ride off into the sunset with a man that she believes will eventually kill her with a crossbow.

BULLSHIT!

Every time I think about it, I get heated. I am clanking on this keyboard so loud right now it sounds like gunfire.

Jodie Foster made me love Clarice Starling — smart, strong and virtuous. I read the books with such an excitement to really get to know that character. And in the last few chapters of his book, Thomas Harris fucked it up. I know they are his characters, and he can do with them what he wants. But dude! That was a dick move!

I was so mad when I finished Hannibal Rising that I hate-read Hannibal Rising. It was a prequel, so I felt it was safe. I didn’t hate the book, and I love the character of Hannibal Lecter, so it was a mediocre thumbs up for me. The movie stuck to the book pretty well, but luckily the movie Hannibal did not stick to the book. I just need to put those last chapters of Hannibal out of my mind.

The new television series Clarice is redeeming the legacy of Clarice Starling for me. It picks up a few years after Silence of the Lambs and barely even mentions Hannibal Lecter, so it will be interesting to see where it goes.

I apologize for needing to vent, but dammit! I get very invested in these books and stories! Remember to always love more bitch less — Ha!— All I have done is bitch — and be fabulous. XOXO, Cassie Nova
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