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BOOKS
Cher, The Memoir Part 1

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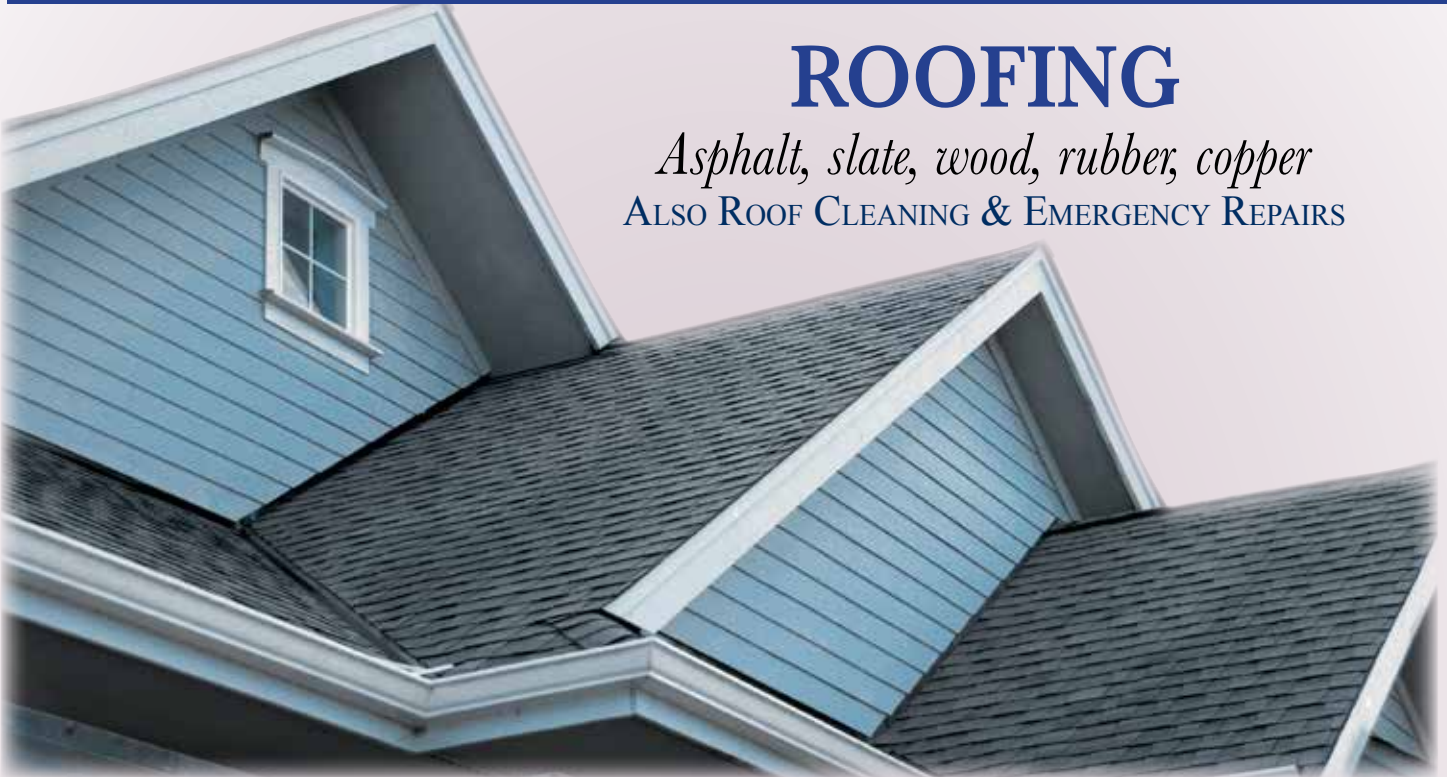
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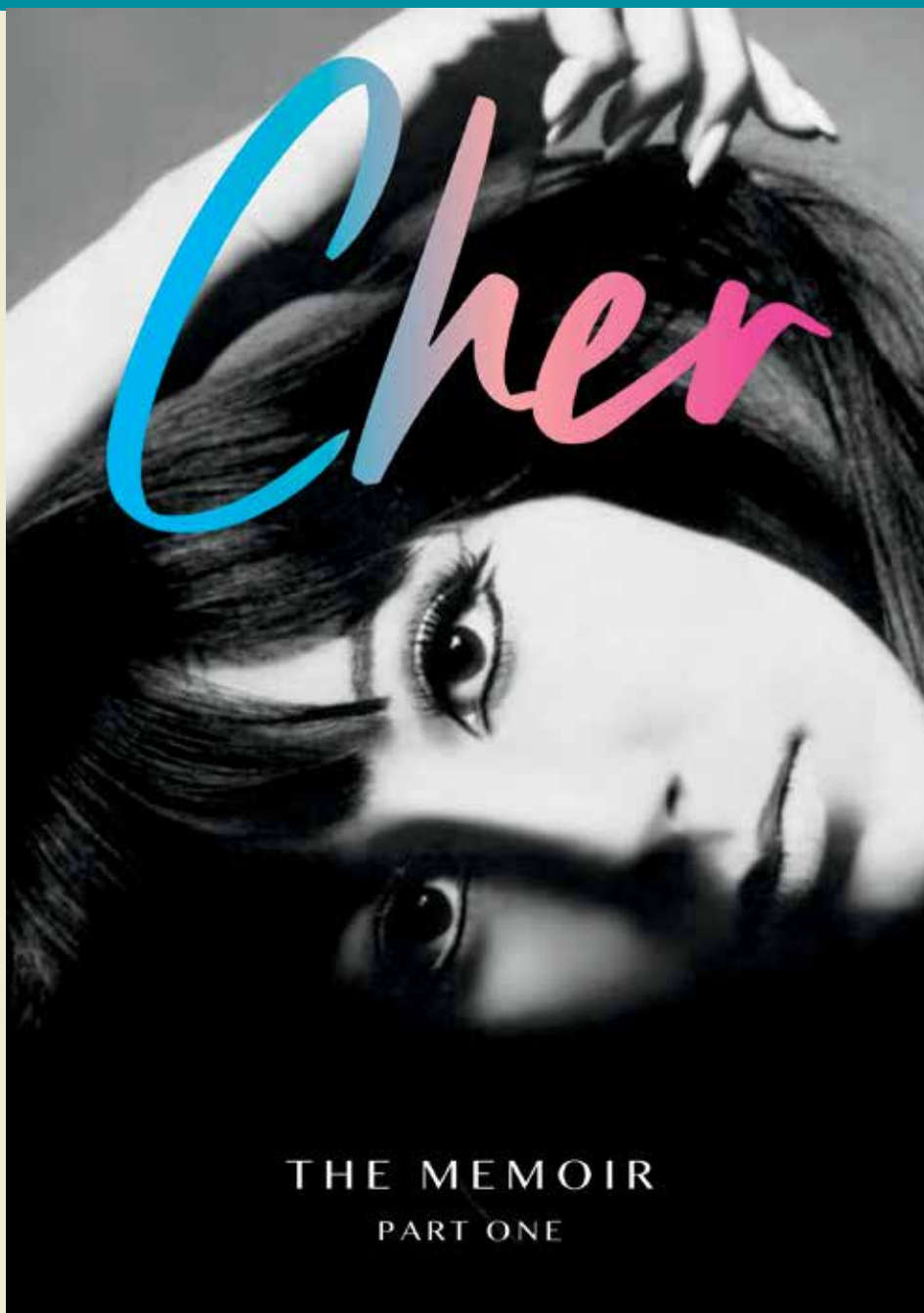
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Book Reviews by Terri Schlichenmeyer

“Cher: The Memoir Part One” by Cher
c.2024, Dey St., 413 pages

Mother knows best. At least that’s what she’d like you to think because she said it a hundred times while you were growing up until you actually believed. One day, though, if you were lucky, you learned that Mother didn’t always know best, but she did her best – like in the new book “Cher: The Memoir Part One” by Cher, when Mom helped make a star.

Though she doesn’t remember it, little Cheryl Sarkisian spent a few weeks in a Catholic Charities orphanage when she was tiny because her father had disappeared and her mother couldn’t afford to take care of her. “Cheryl,” by the way, was the name on her birth certificate, although her mother meant to name her “Cherilyn.”

That first time wasn’t the last time little Cher was left with someone other than her mother, Jackie Jean, a beautiful, talented, struggling singer-actress who’d been born into poverty and stayed there much of her life. When money was tight, she temporarily dropped her daughter off with friends or family, or the little family moved from house to house and state to state. Along the way, relocating in and out of California gave Cher opportunities to act, sing, and learn the art of performance, which is what she

loved best.

In the meantime, Jackie Jean married and married again, five or six husbands in all; she changed her name to Georgia, worked in the movies and on TV, gave Cher a little sister, moved the family again, landed odd jobs, and did what it took to keep the lights on.

As Cher grew up in the shadow of her glamorous mother, she gained a bit of glam herself, becoming sassy and independent and prone to separation anxiety, which she blamed on her abandonment as a small child. In her mother's shadow, she'd always been surrounded by movie and TV stars and, taking acting classes, she met even more.

And then she met Salvatore "Sonny" Bono, who was a friend before he was a lover....

So, here's the very, very happy surprise: "Cher: The Memoir Part One" is a downright fun book to read.

If you've ever seen author Cher in interviews or on late-night TV, what you saw is what you get here: bald-faced truth, sarcastic humor, sass, and no pity-partying. She tells a good story, ending this book with her nascent movie career, and leaves readers hanging in anticipation of the stories she'll tell in her next book.

The other happy surprise is that this memoir isn't just about her. Cher spends a good amount of the first half writing about her mother and her grandmother, both complicated women who fought to keep their heads and those of their offspring above water. Readers looking between the lines will be enthralled.

Surely, "Cher: The Memoir Part One" is a fan's delight, but it's also a great memoir for anyone who particularly loves the genre and doesn't mind a bit of profanity. If that's you, then you got this, babe.

"Low-Hanging Fruit: Sparkling Whines, Champagne Problems, and Pressing Issues from My Gay Agenda"
by Randy Rainbow

c.2024, St. Martin's Press, 224 pages

Whine, whine, whine.

You got something to say, say it. Got an opinion? The world is waiting. It doesn't do any good to mutter, sputter, or whine when something's bothering you. As in the new book, "Low-Hanging Fruit" by Randy Rainbow, take it to the complaint department. Randy Rainbow has a lot to say, and he's not afraid to say it. For starters, he's "resigning from trying to fix you, effective immediately." Any boneheaded thing you want to do now, whatever. Nothing is his responsibility anymore. He has other issues

to worry about.

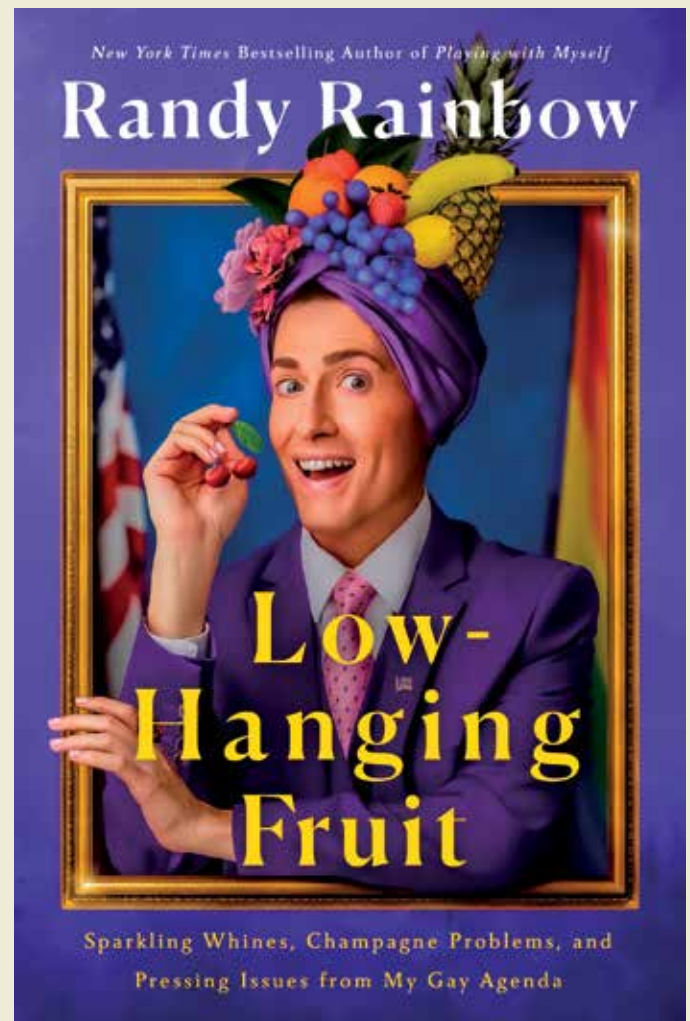
"The truth is," he says, "I have a lot of complaints about many things."

There are right ways of doing things, he says, and there are wrong ways, and we just all really need to know the difference — especially if you're a "Karen." Now, he's compassionate if you were born with that name, but not too much.

"I'm a flamboyant homosexual who's lived my entire life with the name Randy Rainbow, so you'll get little sympathy from me in this department."

Other than that, you may wonder what Rainbow's (ahem) "position" is: he's actually thinking about running for President as a member of "a Rainbow coalition..." He doesn't have much experience but, he says, if there's one thing we've learned in the past few years, that doesn't matter at all. He stands on a green platform, but he can't ban fluorocarbons because, you know, the hair thing and all.

Rainbow misses his twenties, old-school dating sites, hooking up, and his former attention span. He waxes nostalgic about the places he's lived, including an apartment overlooking a "fruit market." He wonders why teenagers are sud- ➡



denly “successful lifestyle gurus.” He hates when “stars begin losing their luster” and wishes again for actors like Hayworth and Garbo.

But, he says, “Diva-complaints aside... I really do thank God for all the opportunities I’m given.”

So the *Elephant in the Room* right now might be one you’ll (never?) vote for, but you know that author Randy Rainbow will reliably skewer that political animal online, hilariously. The fun-poking continues in the most deliciously snarky way in “Low-Hanging Fruit.”

And yet, that’s not the only subject Rainbow tackles. Readers who love catching his posts and videos are treated here to a random string of observations, opinions, and rants-not-rants with the signature sassy style they’ve come to expect. What you read can be spit-out-your-wine funny sometimes, and other times, it touches a nerve with nods toward culture, new and old, that’ll make you nod with recognition. Nothing in Rainbow’s path goes without sharp-edged comment, which is exactly what you want from his books. Unexpectedly, this one also includes a soft word or two and a few slight confessions that are gentle and that might even make you say, “Awwwww.”

If you’re ready for something snide and cynical that’ll make you laugh, something that you’ll want to read aloud to a companion, “Low-Hanging Fruit” is what you need. Look for this book now, and you’ll have no complaints.

“A Little Queer Natural History”

by Josh L. Davis

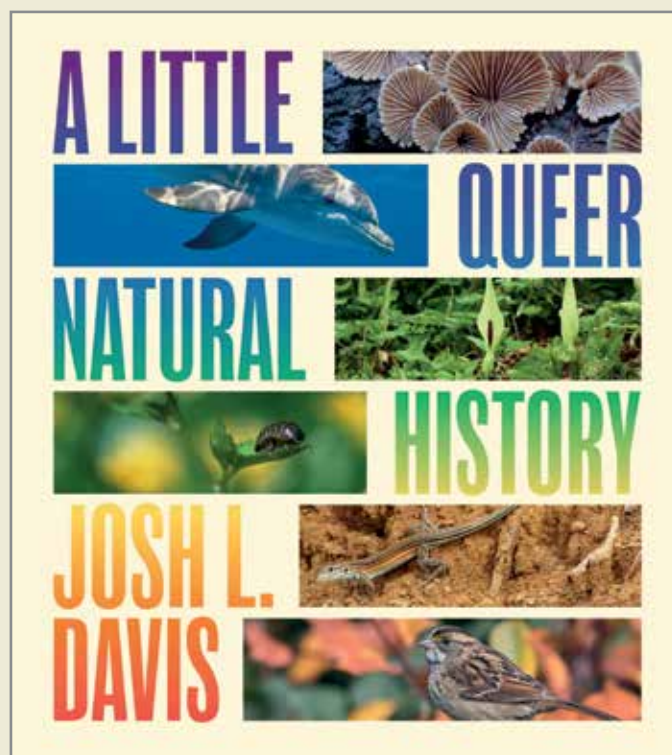
c.2024, University of Chicago Press, 128 pages

When you were a small child, someone taught you about the birds and the bees.

It might’ve been a parent or other adult who explained where babies come from or another kid who filled your head with scary, exciting things that you believed until you learned better. However you knew the facts of life, it changed you forever, and in the new book, “A Little Queer Natural History” by Josh L. Davis, there’s more to the wild story.

You are not alone. Just look around.

All kinds of creatures share the planet with us, but, in the same way that you shouldn’t judge a person at first glance, you can’t jump to conclusions about those creatures. That’s especially true with sexual behavior. While we can’t rightly attribute human feelings or intentions to them – animals likely don’t understand gay from straight – we may assume “that most species of animal probably exhibit some form of queer



behavior...”

Take birds, for instance: early-twentieth-century explorers noted the Adelie penguin for its male-male partnering activity. Female Western gulls often raise their chicks with female partners. Female pheasants may “present as males” if their estrogen is depleted.

As for mammals, Western lowland gorillas and bonobos both engage in sexual activity with either sex. Domestic sheep, hyenas, and giraffes also “could be considered to have a sexuality that we would define as homosexual or bisexual.”

And “When it comes to sex in plants,” says Davis, “all bets are off.”

Komodo dragons can reproduce through parthenogenesis or without fertilization. Parrot fish are able to change sex if they need to. Morpho butterflies are gynandromorphs, having “both male and female tissue within... a single individual.” Castrated male cane toads will develop egg cells due to a “Bidder’s organ.” Even dinosaurs are included in this book.

“Despite sex often being viewed as fundamental for life on Earth,” says Davis, “there is still a lot we don’t know about it, and scientists are constantly learning more.”

When you first get “A Little Queer Natural History” in your hands, you’ll notice how whisper-thin it feels. Don’t let that fool you; the pages may be light, but what you’ll find is not.

No, author Josh L. Davis stuffs each entry tight with real scientific information and uses actual scientific terms to do it. There’s zero dumbing-down in that, but Davis is quick to explain terms and ideas, which helps readers to completely un-

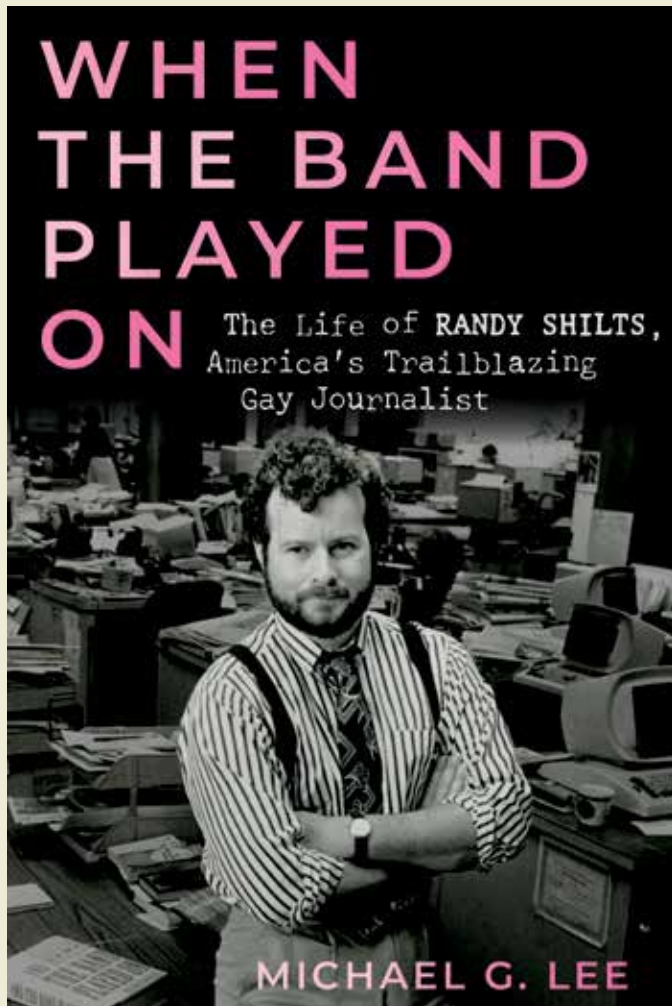
derstand what's here. For sure, you'll feel like a smarty-pants as you make your way through this book.

Readers, however, may scratch their heads and wonder why some of the entries are included – it may be a stretch to include fossilized creatures or male animals that care for their offspring, for instance. Chances are that you'll be so captured by the knowledge in each short chapter that you won't mind. "A Little Queer Natural History" is a smart book, perfect for quick reads at random at this time of year. If that's what you need now, enjoying it is a fact of life.

"When the Band Played On: The Life of Randy Shilts, America's Trailblazing Gay Journalist" by Michael G. Lee

c.2025, Chicago Review Press, 282 pages

You spent most of your early career playing second fiddle. But now you've got the baton and a story to tell that people aren't going to want to hear, though it's essential that they face the music. They must know what's happening. As in the new book "When the Band Played On" by Michael G. Lee, this



time, it's personal.

Born in 1951 in small-town Iowa, Randy Shilts was his alcoholic, abusive mother's third of six sons. Frustrated and drunk, she reportedly beat Shilts almost daily when he was young; she also called him a "sissy," which "seemed to follow Randy everywhere." Perhaps because of the abuse, Shilts had to "teach himself social graces," developing "adultlike impassiveness" and "biting sarcasm," traits that featured strongly as he matured and became a writer. He was exploring his sexuality then, learning "the subtleties of sexual communication" while sleeping with women before fully coming out as gay to friends. Nearing his twenty-first birthday, Shilts moved to Oregon to attend college and to "allow myself love." There, he became somewhat of an activist before leaving San Francisco to pursue journalism, focusing on stories of gay life that were "mostly unknown to anyone outside of gay culture."

He would bounce between Oregon and California several times, though he never lost sight of his writing career and, through it, his activism. In both states, Shilts reported on gay life until he was well-known to national readers and gay influencers. After San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk was assassinated, he was tapped to write Milk's biography.


By 1982, Shilts was in love, had a book under his belt, a radio gig, and a regular byline in a national publication reporting "on the GRID beat," an acronym later changed to AIDS. He was even under contract to write a second book.

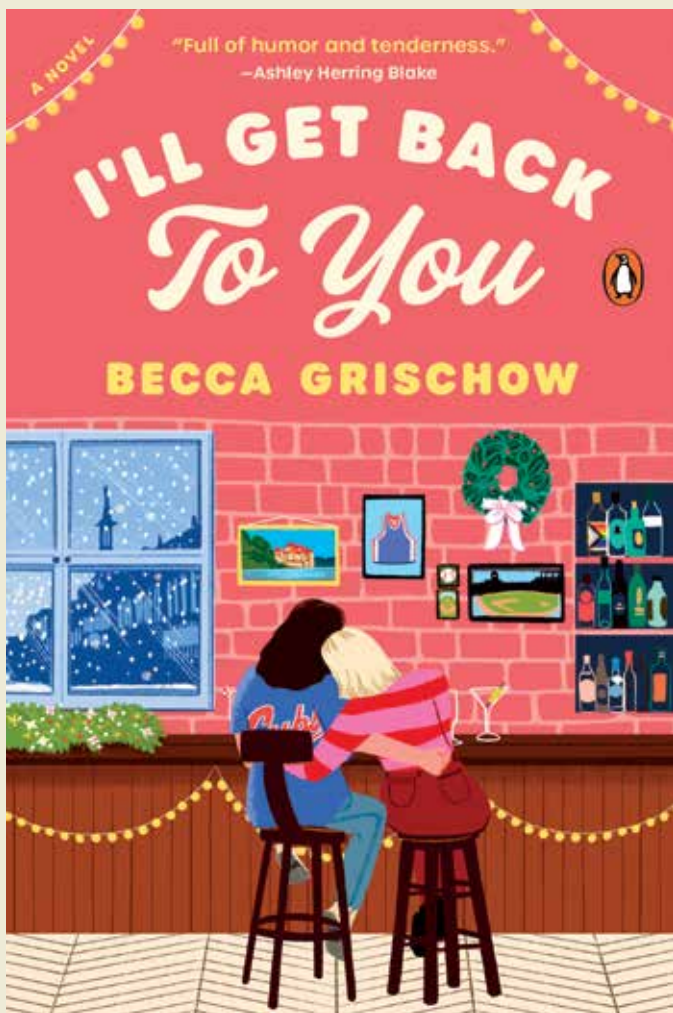
But Shilts was careless. Just once, careless.

"In hindsight," says Lee, "... it was likely the night when Randy crossed the line, becoming more a part of the pandemic than just another worried bystander."

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are two distinct audiences for "When the Band Played On." One type of reader will remember the AIDS crisis and the seminal book about it. The other is too young to remember it but needs to know Randy Shilts' place in its history.

The journey may be different, but the result is the same: author Michael G. Lee tells a complicated, still-controversial story of Shilts and the book that made America pay attention, and it's edgy for modern eyes. Lee clearly shows why Shilts had fans and haters, why Shilts was who he was, and Lee keeps some mystery in the tale: Shilts had the knowledge to keep himself safe, but he apparently didn't, and readers are left to wonder why. There's uncomfortable tension in that and a lot of hypothetical thinking to be had.

For scholars of gay history, this is an essential book to read. Also, for anyone too young to remember AIDS as it was, "When the Band Played On" hits the right note. 



“I’ll Get Back to You”
by Becca Grischow
 c.2024, Penguin Books, 320 pages

Christmas tree lots, ugh. Santa, New England, snowflakes, mistletoe, blah blah blah.

The cable TV line-up is full of that stuff this time of year, but it’s nowhere near as magical as Hollywood wants you to believe. Honestly, thinking of romance (or the lack thereof) right now is almost enough to bring out your humbug. Get this, though: there’s plenty of romance to go around this Yuletide, but in “I’ll Get Back to You” by Becca Grischow, it might take some planning to find it.

It was supposed to be a great dual-birthday celebration. Murphy and her BFF, Kat, planned a “Blackout Wednesday” of drinking and debauchery, followed by a sleepover and snacks

at Murphy’s house before they went to Kat’s parent’s place for Thanksgiving. That was the plan until Kat ruined it by bringing her new boyfriend, Daniel, along and assuming that Murphy didn’t mind.

Murphy minded very much. She hated being the gay third-wheel, and it was doubly annoying when they all ran into Ellie, who’d graduated a few years before Kat and Murphy.

Wait, Ellie was straight in high school, wasn’t she? Well, she wasn’t now and when Ellie, Kat, and Daniel started comparing notes about attending the U of Illinois, it was all Murphy could do not to roll her eyes.

She wasn’t feeling this holiday thing. She was feeling kind of loser-ish, in fact: still living in her childhood bedroom in her parent’s house, working a job she’d had since she was 16, still at Community College, and failing Accounting class.

And, apparently, failing at love, too, because Ellie told Murphy that they could be friends, and that was all. But when Murphy realized that Ellie’s mother was the professor who was about to fail her in Accounting class, Ellie came up with a plan.

If they could pretend to have a relationship, then maybe Ellie’s mother would grant Ellie her dream of attending college in New York City. And maybe she’d “play favorites” and give Murphy a passing grade.

It was a weird plan. Super weird. But like romantic relationships weren’t?

Alright, let’s just admit this: a book like “I’ll Get Back to You” isn’t going to change the world or influence people in high places. It’s probably not even going to land on the bestseller list. It’s just a light, fun little story – and isn’t that what you need during at times?

With your typical girl-meets-girl, struggle-and-argument, wacky-plan-happy-ending format, author Becca Grischow tells a tale of friendship and romance and growing into the place in life that’s meant to be, which is a good but subtle reminder for some readers who need it. Grischow gives readers a cast of characters that are kind but authentic, fallible but trustworthy, and mostly pretty likable, too, which makes this an easy book to enjoy at just the right time.

If you haven’t found your Romance for this year yet, here’s one to look for. Find “I’ll Get Back to You,” and you’ll like it. 🏳️‍🌈

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Deadloch's Nina Oyama, Kate Box and Madeleine Sami starring in a comedy/murder mystery in a small Tasmania town

by Mark Adams

Don't know about you, but I get so inundated with titles to see that I often find myself forgetting about them. So, I started a list of stuff that I definitely want to see on Google Docs. As of now, that list runs 12 pages. When I want to watch something, I seem to take it from the bottom of the list, leaving the ones at the top. I should get to them mid-century. And I have to wonder what algorithms some of these streaming sites use to determine what to promote on my feed. Do I really want to see the latest WWE wrestling match? When I was a kid, I would watch Killer Kowalski on a Saturday afternoon and get all hot and bothered, but certainly not recently (watching wrestling, I mean, not about getting hot and bothered).

But I digress. Here are a couple of goodies I found on my own, either strictly by accident or from the myriad of emails by some of my favorite reviewers (I only follow those who are as cranky as Moi).

"Australian Lesbians, Murder Mysteries and Hilarity."

Now, there's a review headline that attracted my attention. It led me to a mini-series called "Deadloch," a town somewhere Down Under, and features a cast of no one I've ever heard of, which was no surprise (some of them had apparently appeared in an Aussie women's prison series called "Wentworth," eight seasons of which I seemed to have missed). It was late at night, so why not? To no surprise, the headline was correct on all counts. Created by what I learned was a comedy duo, Kate McCartney and Kate McLennan, I would classify it as more of a comedy than a murder mystery. "Deadloch" the town is populated by mostly lesbians, reason enough to give it a try, and there are missing persons and lots of queer women who are a laugh a minute, with a script that offends practically everybody. What more can you ask? Actress Kate Box, who won an Aussie award as Best Actress in a comedy and is a hoot, is married in real life to non-binary actor Jada Alberts, who also appeared on "Wentworth," and Madeleine Sami plays a hilarious Eddie Radcliffe, a rough and tough police

detective with a potty mouth you have to admire. If you're offended by a barrage of four-letter words, avoid this. Otherwise, it's like nothing you've seen on American TV, certainly not "Law and Order." There is currently only one season of 10 episodes on Prime, which I binged in two days.

I was just thinking...call me crazy, but if you're in the mood for a really good women's prison series, check out "Prisoner: Cell Block H." It's from the early 80s, and it ran forever, but it had me hooked its entire run on late-night TV. You can find all the episodes on YouTube, last I checked.

And speaking of crazy, may I suggest "The Sticky." Better promoted than "Deadloch," maybe because it's from Canada, and Canada is closer to us than Australia; it will remind you of the "Twin Peaks" or "Fargo" series of many years ago, and it stars the



Classic Women in Prison Series from the Early 1980's, Prisoner: Cell Block H

always amazing Margo Martindale as the matriarch of a maple tree farm in Quebec and in a supporting role Jamie Leigh Curtis plays a lesbian, mob connected hit woman. Laughs and mysteries ensue, and it's a great show if you've got 30 minutes to kill. Only one season of 6 episodes, and it's also on Prime. 🏳️‍🌈

Mark Adams has been a popular contributor to LGBTQ+ media for many years, writing extensively on film and video of interest to the community. You can email him at vidioview@gmail.com with any of your favorites for a future scribbling.



Jamie Leigh Curtis and Margo Martindale in *The Sticky*

Our LGBTQ+ Ancestors

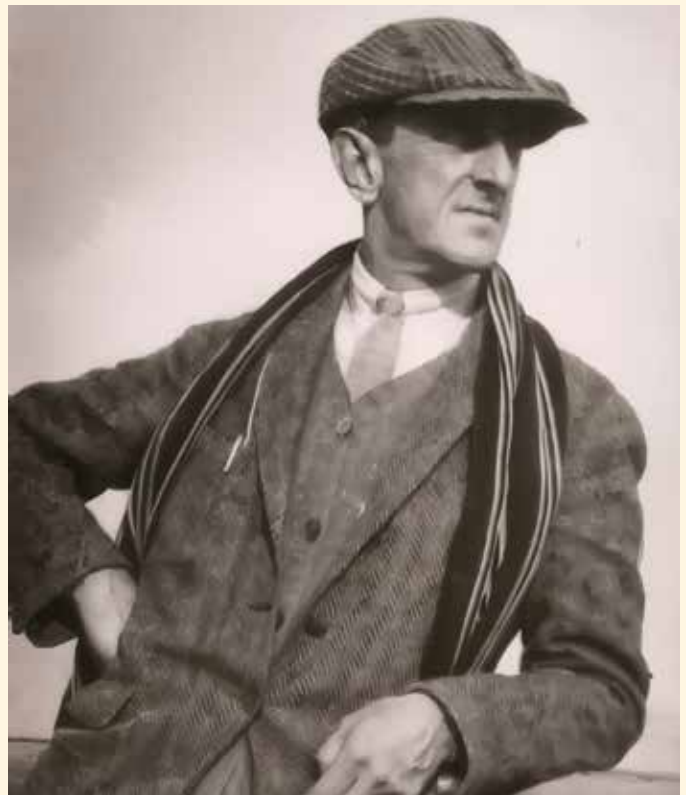
Marsden Hartley

by Jeff Parson

Marsden Hartley (1877–1943) was a gay painter who was an early member of Gertrude Stein’s circles in Paris, and he was promoted by photographer and art impresario Alfred Stieglitz, along with icons of American art, including Georgia O’Keeffe. Hartley was intensely private about his personal life and sexuality in his early work, but later in life, he took to painting muscular and athletic young men.

Born Edmund Hartley in Maine in 1877, Marsden Hartley had a lonely childhood. He was the youngest of nine children. His mother died when he was eight, and his father married a woman named Martha Marsden four years later.

When Hartley was 14, his sisters moved to Ohio, leaving him in Maine with his father, where he worked in a shoe factory for a year. He later recalled his New England childhood as



Marsden Hartley, Photographer unknown

a time of painful loneliness and wrote in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz that the New England accent was “a sad recollection [that] rushed into my very flesh like sharpened knives.”

After he joined his family in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1892, Hartley began his art training at the Cleveland School of Art, where he held a scholarship. In 1898, at the age of 22, he moved to New York City, where he took Marsden as his first name. He studied painting at the New York School of Art under William Merritt Chase and then attended the National Academy of Design. Hartley was a great admirer of Albert Pinkham Ryder and regularly visited his studio in Greenwich Village. His friendship with Ryder and the writings of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson inspired Hartley to view art as a spiritual quest.

Hartley traveled to Europe for the first time in April 1912 and entered Gertrude Stein’s circle of avant-garde writers and artists in Paris, where he met Pablo Picasso and Robert Delaunay and received encouragement to write and paint from Stein, Hart Crane, and Sherwood Anderson. In April 1913, Hartley relocated to Berlin, the capital of the German Em-



Madawaska, *Acadian Light-Heavy, Third Arrangement* 1940



Give Us This Day 1938

pire, where he befriended painters Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc and reportedly fell in love with a German officer. Hartley finally returned to the U.S. in 1916 after The Great War broke out. Upon his return, Hartley painted *Handsome Drinks*, which recalls the Gertrude Stein's gatherings. From 1916 to 1921, Hartley lived and worked in Provincetown, Bermuda, New York, and New Mexico.

In 1922, he returned to Maine and drew upon local types at this time to create a mythic view of the state's inhabitants as rugged individualists. He found the ideal model in Lionel Daigle, a French-Canadian boxer from the town of Madawaska, Maine, who modeled for a series of paintings. "I have for the first time a real live model, a magnificent young feller... His body is so fine and dear I could work almost without end from him."

Hartley had not been overt about his sexual preference, often redirecting attention to other aspects of his work. Still, Daigle's body allowed him to express his sexuality, and Hartley emphasized Daigle's strong physique, exaggerating his anatomy and originally painting him nude (subsequently adding the brief covering). Ironically, critics in the 1940s applauded the work as a display of heteronormative masculinity.

Other works, such as *Portrait of a German Officer* and *Handsome Drinks*, were coded ways of honoring lovers, friends, and inspirational sources. By the time Hartley reached his sixties, he no longer feared people's reactions to his work. His figure paintings of athletic, muscular males, often nude or garbed only in briefs or thongs, became more intimate.

Hartley was plagued by poor health in the final years of his life and died from terminal heart failure in Ellsworth, Maine, in 1943. 🇺🇸



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Dan with Morgan on a hike in the North Lykken Trail in Palm Springs, CA, Photo by James Egan

Who Saved Who? A man and his dogs saved each other's lives

by D. Bullen

Dan Perdios credits his dogs with saving his life. Not just because his second golden retriever, Willy, a trained service animal, pawed at him one night when he had taken his hearing aids out to let him know that there was a fire in the kitchen – then came to paw at him again to let him know that the burning oil Perdios had thrown outside had caught some rags on fire on the porch.

Perdios' golden retrievers saved his life from the despair and grief he felt as a gay man carrying an HIV+ diagnosis since 1978, managing his fragile health and watching his friends die off through the depths of the pandemic in the 1980s.

Perdios had been politically active in San Francisco. He got to know Harvey Milk in his first year there, volunteering on his winning campaign. He marched with Harvey in protest when Anita Bryant led a 1977 crusade to repeal a Dade County ordinance that gave certain equal rights to homosexuals in Florida. When Harvey Milk was assassinated, Perdios joined 30,000 other mourners in a candlelight march to San Francisco City Hall.

For fifteen years, Perdios says, his life was consumed by AIDS activism, joining Act Up and AIDS Watch with Project Inform, in addition to working with the local AIDS commission. Perdios went to schools and Rotary clubs, talking about HIV and prospective treatments, identifying medications, and getting them to patients.

Perdios and his partner Rick also got a golden puppy together in 1983, a dog they named Nicholas, after Saint Nicholas. Rick was in law school, and the little saint of a puppy taught Perdios the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership, first in San Francisco, then in their house on the Russian River among the redwoods in northern California.

Perdios says that when he met Nicholas for the first time, "I felt like I had to get as much love in as possible right there and then before someone took him away. I couldn't believe he was ours."

When HIV and recurring ear infections took Perdios' hearing from him and then took his partner, Rick, who died in 1987, Perdios says that Nicholas got him through the worst of it. His dog was the only thing that brought him solace. Going to bed with him and waking up to him gave Perdios a routine that brought him joy even in the darkest time.

When the mid-1990s brought the Cocktail, Perdios says that he was terrified to be cast out into regular life, free from the immediate threat of dying, but not yet completely healthy. Here, his second golden, Willy, brought him hope that made life bearable.

"People changed when they met Willy," Perdios says. "Their tension would melt away, their faces would light up." Recognizing his dog's gift, Perdios made it his mission to help Willy carry his joy into the world. Perdios needed to release the ghost of his past, so he sold the house on the Russian River where he had lived with Rick. "I had a hard time letting go," Perdios says, "but Willy was determined to drag me into the future." Together, they moved to the desert in Palm Springs, east of Los Angeles, near Joshua Tree. In addition to saving Perdios' life from a house fire, Willy also brought love into his life again. One day, when Perdios took Willy to a café, Willy started begging from an attractive man seated nearby. Perdios apologized, and the man said that he did not mind. The two began conversing about their lives, Perdios' activism, and James' work as a film producer.

Soon after they met, James sadly told Perdios that he was going to the Cape for six weeks to film "Wild About Harry," a true story of two dads raising teenage daughters in Dennis in 1973. "Can you get me a job on the production?" Perdios asked. "My



Franklin with his Dads Dan and James Egan, Photo by James Egan



Dan with
Franklin,
Photo by
James Egan

family has a home in Hyannis, and I know the Cape well.”

Perdios had never worked on a film before, but James agreed to hire him as the assistant prop master, a role in which his local knowledge would become a huge asset. Perdios knew where to find the period props that would give the film historical legitimacy.

At this point, Willy was about 10. On the set, he quickly became the mascot of the production. Filming a period narrative of two gay men facing discrimination in the early 70s was sometimes grueling. Fortunately, Willy became the on-set therapy dog for actors and crew alike. He channeled his superpower of spreading joy and lightening people’s moods.

Working on this film brought Perdios back to life. He says it was the first time he’d worked on a project that did not revolve around AIDS. The movie also strengthened ties between Perdios and James, who currently live together on the Cape (although it took them more than ten years of periodic visits from California to return for good).

When director Gwen Wynne wrapped the six weeks of shooting, James, Dans, and Willy took an extended honeymoon trip up and down the Cape, including Nantucket. In Provincetown, Perdios met James’ long-time friend, John Waters, who took their

first portrait as a couple.

Sadly, after returning to California together, Willy unexpectedly became ill and passed away in the middle of the Great Recession in 2008.

Perdios’ first two dogs had come from breeders, but now Perdios wanted to give back to the golden retriever community by rescuing one. Five months after Willy died, he adopted Sparky, an abused, aggressive, anxious, and undernourished one-year-old. Perdios thought that love would suffice to turn the dog around, but Morgan (they renamed him after Captain Morgan’s Spiced Rum) lived up to his spicy name and bit both Perdios and James over food issues and showed dangerous aggression toward other dogs.

Perdios felt committed to this abused puppy, so he did not try to rehome him. He stuck with it, but Morgan was too unruly for the positive reinforcement approach advocated by the trainer he worked with, who had trained the dogs of well-known celebrities.

As a last resort, Perdios turned to Officer LaMaster, a local handler who trained police dogs. LaMaster witnessed Morgan’s outbursts around other dogs on the first night of class. He took control of the lead and led Morgan to a fresh dog. When Morgan showed aggression, LaMaster checked Morgan hard with the leash, flipping him backward. He brought the dog back to Perdios and said he would not show any more aggression toward other dogs. Then LaMaster barked, “And if he does, I want you to do that! You’re in charge. Not the dog.”

By learning to speak to Morgan consistently, he understood and established himself as the alpha dog of Morgan’s pack; Perdios helped Morgan complete his “Good Neighbor” certificate and become a certified service animal to help compensate for Perdios’ lost hearing.

Morgan lived a long and adventurous life for fourteen

and a half years, dying in Perdios' arms on February 12, 2022. Even though he was not ready to move on from Morgan, six weeks later, Perdios fell immediately in love with his next rescue, Franklin, a cream-colored Golden. Franklin was a six-year-old service dog who weighed ninety-five pounds and had proved too much for the veteran he had been assigned to. Perdios put him on a diet, and now that he has shed the extra weight, Perdios says that Franklin looks sleek like a racehorse from daily swims in the ocean and in the bay, and he spreads joy everywhere he goes as Golden do.

Since early in his career, Perdios penned op-eds for local newspapers, speaking up for those who were too afraid or not well enough to speak for themselves. Unexpectedly, he found that people liked his writing best when he wrote about his dogs. Taking the hint, he has gone on to publish two dog books.

The first, *A Golden Retriever & His Two Dads: An Adventure on Cape Cod*, offers a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the film, "Wild About Harry." The second, *Rescuing Morgan*, tells the story of rescuing an abused Golden Retriever and how it changed Perdios' life. Perdios is currently writing a book about Franklin, from the dog's point of view, in Franklin's often-hilarious voice, and expects to publish it in the summer of 2025.

Perdios has also been using his book sales to give back to the community that saved him. A lifelong activist, Perdios had worked with a city councilor in Palm Springs to start the no-kill animal shelter there, and he has been using his readings to raise funds for animal rescue groups. Perdios has taken his love of nature and his dogs a step further. Now, he focuses all his activism on the animal rights movement.

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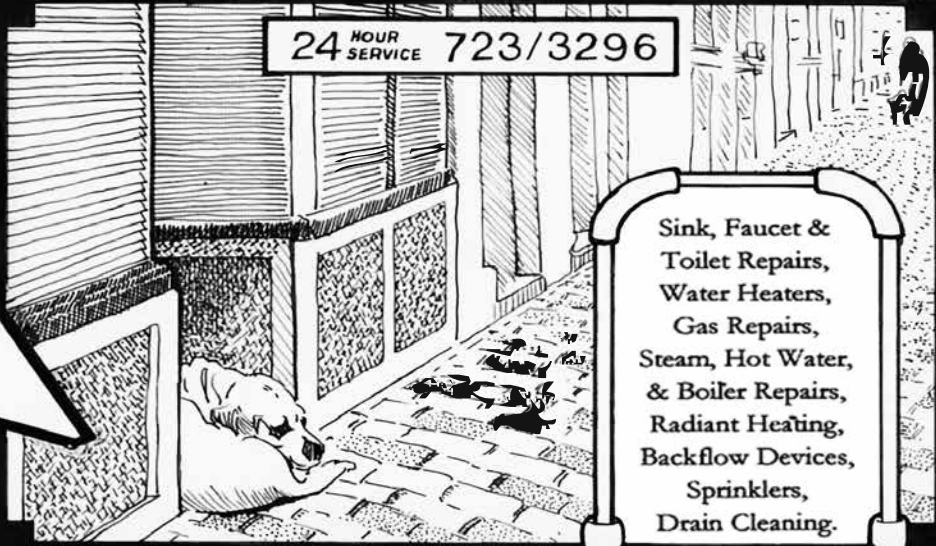


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THE MAKING OF PRYDE LGBTQ+ SENIOR HOUSING



by D. Bullen, Photos by Robert Benson Photography

Something extraordinary is happening in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston, where a few community leaders have harnessed their talents to form LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc., an organization that developed an unprecedented project around a simple proposition: LGBTQ seniors should not be isolated as they age.

This project is a labor of love for Philippe Saad, co-founder of the organization, the lead architect from DiMella Shaffer Architects, an out gay man who has worked pro-

fessionally in the senior living field for years.

“His love and care have renovated the building,” says Gretchen Van Ness, the Executive Director of LGBTQ Senior Housing, an out lesbian Best of Boston attorney with experience in discrimination law, and a two-time candidate for state office who has built extensive ties throughout the Hyde Park community.

Van Ness was recruited into the project by retired registered nurse and licensed acupuncturist Aileen Montour, who is a co-founder of LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc. and



l to r: Aileen Montour, President LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc., Philippe Saad, lead architect, Gretchen Van Ness, the Executive Director of LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc.

served on the Immigrant Rights Working Group of RISE (Roslindale Is for Everyone) before she saw an opportunity to build LGBTQ-welcoming senior housing when the Boston Public School system started to look for ways to dispose of school buildings that were in disrepair.

One of these schools was the William Barton Rogers School in Hyde Park, closed at the end of the 2015 school year when they locked the doors and never returned. Police had used the building for training, but parts of the building had been condemned.

LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc. and Pennrose did not take the typical real estate developers' approach when submitting their permitting applications to the state. Montour, Van Ness, and Saad started by going to the community to win support for the project before the proposal request was even published in 2019 to ensure the neighborhood would be welcoming.

In fact, the abandoned school was an ideal location. It was within walking distance to the commercial area of River Street, with a library across the street, so seniors would not be isolated. LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc. partnered

with community organizations, doing extensive grassroots work to determine what the community needed, and they started to envision a historical adaptive reuse of the building to include 74 units of affordable senior living for about 100 people.

The project is not for the LGBTQ community exclusively since LGBTQ seniors are not a protected class under Massachusetts law, so the fair housing lottery for the 74 units in the mixed-income, income-restricted building was administered by the city of Boston and was open to everyone.

Van Ness says that the community did not object to the LGBTQ aspect of the project; they were much more concerned about how the planned renovation would affect parking in the neighborhood.

By the time LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc. submitted a proposal, they included 400 letters of support from the community. They won the bid and acquired the building, partnering with Pennrose, who had developed this type of project in Philadelphia.

Before construction could even begin, one of



Outside space



The Auditorium Before and After

their first tasks was to find homes for all the desks and tables, chalkboards, and whiteboards left behind, donating them to schools that could put them to use.

Then, they had to confront the problems with the school building itself, which had been built in three stages in 1902, 1920, and 1930. Parts of the building had been condemned, but the renovation was compounded by the fact that the building is a historical landmark, so LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc., Pennrose, and DiMella Shaffer had to work with the National Park Services (NPS) to preserve

the historic fabric of the property. This meant including chalkboards in kitchens and living rooms and occasionally as headboards in bedrooms, in addition to retaining historic millwork and drawers appearing in living rooms and bedrooms. Pieces of the school hallways, including bells, were also preserved. One of Saad's design challenges was to incorporate the numerous doors into the design since each classroom had two doors, but most of those doors would not be needed. The solution: functional doors were painted in bright colors, whereas no longer functional doors were painted to match the walls.



Hallway Before and After

The renovation also had to preserve historic interior moldings, which were removed so that the interior walls could be disassembled down to the brick. Insulation was added to make the building airtight. New drywall was added, and the historic moldings were reinstalled to meet NPS regulations, LEED gold standard, and FitWell healthy building standards.

In addition to senior housing, the community wanted a place that would honor the 54th Regiment, the first all-black Regiment in the Civil War, which mustered in Hyde Park – celebrated in the movie *Glory*. So accommodations had to be made to house the implements, historical pa-

1,000-fold.

The renovation divided the 100,000 sq ft building into two sections: a residential side and 10,000 sq ft of community space – with security between them so that the residences – with units ranging from 380 sqft studios up to 900 sqft two-bedrooms– are not accessible to the public.

Residential units were designed around the concept that LGBTQ seniors should be able to age in place, with accommodations for nurses or caregivers. There are also two-bedroom apartments for applicants who do not have partners or spouses but have lived all their lives with a roommate.



Interior Common Space

pers, uniforms, and tents stored in members' garages and basements.

The school building was not simply being renovated; it was being repurposed, transitioning from daytime use as a school to 24x7 use as a residence. This was a complex transition. The school was not accessible, as there were numerous steps for elevation changes and no elevators, so Saad had to add three elevators in addition to creating accessible entrances. Today, 100% of the kitchens and bathrooms are accessible, exceeding requirements by

The project is rainbow-themed in its design and paint schemes, so everyone who applies understands that the property is LGBTQ-welcoming. The doors are painted bright colors to help with wayfinding and to eliminate the possibility of confusion, using two-color pairs drawn from the rainbow for each floor: red-blue, orange-purple, pink-brown, and green-yellow. There is also a gigantic rainbow across the community room floor to mark out a dedicated pathway connecting the only two separated units with the elevator.





Entrance Hallway

In addition to elevators, Saad added the sunroom, which filled the building with light and modern design elements that contrasted with the historical brick. Saad says that in the process of learning about the population, they found that the LGBTQ population they spoke to did not all want to be visible all the time. However, there was still a need for a space that brings people together, a magnet that encourages socialization. For this reason, the sunroom has an informal feel, with built-in flexibility, including nooks for reading and hubs for socializing, in a free-flowing, informal space.

The window-filled sunroom also provided residents with a relationship to the grounds outside, designed by international design firm Mikyong Kim Design, where the parking lot and playground have been turned into a courtyard with chess tables and nooks for visiting as well as raised beds for residents who would like to garden.

A unique element in this project is a 10,000 sq ft community center that ties the Pryde closely to the Hyde Park community, with a library, art studio, and art gallery, as well as office and conference space and a multi-purpose room for community events such as family movie night, or the recent three-day Ceremony of Trans Remembrance.

The building has a state-of-the-art two-way AV system for live streaming to support a virtual community center so that events are televised for residents, who can Zoom into events.

Van Ness says that residents who have started to move in represent a cross-section of the community, including a straight couple, Latino and Haitian grandmothers, LGBTQ individuals and couples, as well as authors and artists. Van Ness says they have had applications from people who attended school or worked in the building. After only a few weeks, residents are saying that

they never realized how depressed they were before. A trans woman feels free to live openly. Another resident said he met more residents in the first weekend than in the last eight years at his previous residence. There's a sweet irony in LGBTQ residents coming back to age in a middle school, but this time around, they can be who they want to be without the struggle for acceptance most LGBTQ people experience as teens. Instead of unsympathetic principals and guidance counselors, the property is run by a grassroots, majority-minority board of directors with a fundamental anti-racism commitment. Saad says that they expect that the building will only get better over time as people live there, but they are waiting to find out what needs to come forward as The Pryde starts to be put to use. While they hammer out self-governance models, they are planning a transit van for demonstrations, in addition to supporting a grassroots effort to bring a community health center to the neighborhood, to minimize the need to travel for medical care and to bring in services such as acupuncture and yoga. Van Ness says that LGBTQ Senior Housing Inc. is already considering finding other opportunities to replicate this vision in communities that could use housing for LGBTQ seniors. Van Ness serves as a special advisor to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs, where she is formulating a five-year plan for the state to reimagine aging and dementia care state-wide.

"We've learned so much about systems that should be working," Van Ness says, "for vulnerable people, elders, the disabled, and members of marginalized communities. Those systems are very broken."

The Pryde's unique partnership between nonprofit and development is charting a way forward for community organizations to meet their seniors' needs for affordable, independent living housing while preserving the historic elements and the local ties that support a healthy community. 

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Johnna Joy designs

by Nicholas McCarty

Esty has become a showcase for talented LGBTQ+ Jewelry Designers and in Johnna Joy case also a manufacturer. With nearly a fantastic 500 pieces on Esty, she offers a variety of unique, handmade pieces, from crystal Pride flag earrings and D20 dice necklaces to cottagecore beard ornaments and lightsaber bracelets. “One of my biggest goals with the shop was to make LGBTQ+ designs that, simply put, I wanted to wear,” Johnna tells them. “I wanted pieces I would wear year-round, not just at Pride events!”

Since 2014, Johnna has been dreaming up new jewelry designs that will “take an otherwise



Designer Johnna Joy, Photo Courtesy of Them

simple outfit to a whole different realm.” As a plus-size queer person, Johnna says finding clothing that fits well, matches your aesthetic, makes you feel good, and is in your budget can be difficult but “jewelry has helped



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me bridge those gaps of personal expression in such a significant way. [It's] an incredibly powerful detailing tool."

Most of her earring wire is sterling silver or gold-plated sterling silver, except lever-back, hoop, and post designs, which vary. She says, "I'm happy to work with her clients on upgrades!"

Her necklace chain varies but is primarily sterling silver, 14k yellow/rose gold-filled, or stainless steel. The finding (lobster clasps, jump rings, wrapping wire) are generally gold or silver-plated metals. This works for people who have mild to no sensitivities. She says, "she is happy to make it 100% sterling silver or gold fill for hyper-sensitive skin. This is not possible for all designs, but I am happy to do what I can!" On the flip side, She says, "I can also make most



Photo Courtesy of Esty

Pride Flag Gemstone Necklaces, Solid Sterling Silver Chain

designs at a cheaper price point. If you'd like to switch to a plated chain."

Her community focused business model allows for a sliding scale on many items. She says, "The world is hard, and being a person in this economy is tough." She believes art can help people through hard times and likes to keep things as accessible as possible, "if you are a low-income person who would like to purchase something that isn't quite in your budget," she is open to sliding scale pricing. Although not available for every single item, but the majority of items this is.

On a personal note, Johnna is a resident of a small but beautiful town in Iowa! I live with my amazing kiddo and fiancé and work out of my little basement studio! Designing is one of my absolute favorite outlets for my mind/soul/creative fulfillment, and I feel so grateful I have made it by on my Etsy earnings since 2020. You all who support my little shop quite lit- ➡



Gold Rainbow Simple Statement earrings, Photo Courtesy of Esty

Johnna Joy


erally give me life, and I am humbled by the support I get, especially from my fellow queers.”

She says, “When not designing art and jewelry, you’ll find me playing lots of board and card games with family and friends, organizing for Cass-At-



Vice-Admiral Holdo Arm Cuffs,
Star Wars The Last Jedi Cuff *Photo Courtesy of Esty*

lantic Pride (<https://linktr.ee/casspride>), or hours deep in an audiobook (it’s probably science fiction).

All her designs can be found on Esty at www.etsy.com/shop/JohnnaJoyDesigns?ref=profile_header 



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Unconventional LGBTQ+ Weddings

Leon and Russell, White Photography

By Chloe Belle

Same-gendered weddings are far from traditional in and of themselves. Still, the pull for a traditional event is substantial since legal weddings have been denied to our community for so long. That being said, not all community members want a conventional wedding. Weddings with unusual venues, unconventional wear, and themes can be as creative and quirky as the couple wants. Below are examples of approaches you might choose for your wedding from same-gendered couples in their words.

Joe and Bill

We solemnized our own marriage and instead of a traditional reception we wrote a wedding themed trivia game. And it was Deadpool themed. One of my coworkers even came in full Deadpool costume!

Sandy and Diane

We're doing a wedding at an old bank from the 1800s, the day after Halloween romantic gothic spooky fun! We're both super queer, super nonbinary, and very genderless!

Jill and Deb

Instead of a cake cutting later in the reception, we did a pizza cutting to start our reception. (Our first date was at a pizza place). Instead of a guestbook or photo booth, we hired a silhouette artist because we love classic amusement parks and got our silhouette cut on our first trip to a theme park together. It seems like you're already doing this, but just think of things personal to your story, and add it in! Food, music, activities, clothes, mementos...

Jane and Harriet

We had a gelato Vespa and a little prosecco truck around the dancing instead of a cake (did a small, but very over the top, Tuscan wedding). My wife wore a white suit from Knot Standard, my dress was white. We both wore Gucci shoes (we were in Italy, we committed to that apparently). Our florist spoke to us each to make bouquets that complimented our florals, but were totally unique to each of us. We had a quartet for ceremony and cocktail hour.



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Unconventional Weddings

Joan and Heather

We had a mixed gender bridal party and everyone wore suits, so my wife was the only one in a dress. Each suit was a different complementary color based on their role in the wedding. Everyone, including my wife and I, wore sneakers. We had ours custom made based on a couple of our favorite comic book characters. We had our first look photos at a comic book store. We had a full marching band lead us into our grand entrance for reception. We had a drag performance during the reception. We had a taco truck pull up for a couple hours for a late night snack. This was probably one of our guests favorite non-traditional elements. Our bachelorette parties were in the same city over the same weekend. All of our activities were separate except for one night where both crews came together for a super party. Everyone in the bridal party was an adult, including the flower girls and ring bearer. We had a circular stage in the center of the room with a connected runway for the ceremony so we were surrounded by everyone instead of in the front of

the room. We did a tasting ceremony with bitter, sweet, spicy, and sour shots that we took during our ceremony to represent the different “tastes” of moments we’ll experience during marriage.

Tom and Matt

My husband and I did ours in our back yard ... and yes what I am about to write sounds the most white trash thing ever...

We took the trusses from a rose bush and arched it and then tied black and purple balloons all over it, there was black and purple streamers along the lawn chairs. Every one wore black and purple tees and jeans or shorts. Me and my husband had matching dragon shirts and matching camo shorts. We walked down together to the song Halo. After we were married, everyone that was there danced to the cupid shuffle. I am a pastry chef so I made our three tier cake that was batman and joker themed.

And we were the first gay couple in SC to get married on the day it was passed into law ... so yeah it might have



Costumes work for this couple, Rocket Photography



Unique outside locations for this stylish couple , Rocket Photography

been red neck . It might have been white trash. But in the end I got to marry my best friend and we have been together a total of 14 yrs, married 7. And I wouldn't change it for the world.

Rosemary and Denise

We did not do garters or bouquet toss, but we had lots of card/board games set up, a custom cornhole set with our new last name initial on the boards, and hockey mini sticks (she works for a big sports corporation and got her start in her career through women's hockey).

For the kids who came to the wedding, I gifted them crayons and wedding themed colouring books that had depictions of two brides in them, with no grooms/husbands to be seen. The books were so cute and the kids loved them.

June and Maria

We had a joint bridal shower in the party room at her grandma's condo complex. We hosted a game show where each table competed as a team in games like jeopardy, are you smarter than the maids of honour, etc. The shower theme was retro/groovy, with the colours being lesbian

flag colours. The majority of our wedding registry was camping equipment. We named one of our signature drinks after our cat.

Six Tips for Creating an Unconventional LGBTQ+ Wedding

1.) Rides

If the thought of arriving by limo, or sleek Rolls-Royce to your wedding feels a little cliché, or not really you, why not consider an entrance that's a little more, unforgettable? You'll certainly turn some heads if you arrive by Harley-Davidson! Or you're whisked off to your honeymoon by the number 39 bus. Our rule, as long as you can get your wedding gown on it, it's suitable as wedding transportation!

2.) A Non-Traditional Flower Girl/Boy

Not all flower girls have to be under 9, or girls for that matter. In fact, you could have your beloved pet performing this sacred duty. Or grandma? How sweet



would grandma look walking down the aisle, chucking petals as she went! You may also have that friend who always wanted that job as a kid, but never got it... Now's your chance to fulfil their lifelong ambition, and make them your grown-up flower girl.

3.) A Surprise Wedding

Just imagine your friends faces when they realise the engagement party they've turned up to, is actually your wedding. Wow! It would certainly be memorable.

Of all the alternative wedding ideas we're featuring, this could be the most controversial! As there may be some guests who are not too keen on being kept in the dark. However, we all know who those people are in our friendship group, or family. So, either live with their disappointment at not being involved, or create a little surprise wedding planning gang, and let them help you create the big day.

4.) Host Cocktails Instead of a Sit Down Reception

A cocktail reception with canapés is a lovely way to celebrate your nuptials. Without the formality of a sit-down meal. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but as long as the snacks on trays are constantly floating about. And guests do not need to linger by the kitchen door just to grab a morsel of food. You should see no problems. And in fact, it's a nice way for everyone to catch up, freely, without feeling like they should stick to their allocated position.

5.) Host a 'Backyard Wedding'

We're borrowing the phrase from our friends across the pond, as it fits the feeling exactly. Obviously, there were a lot of 'backyard weddings' during the height of Covid-19. But post-lockdown, these smaller, more intimate at-home celebrations are still taking place. And for the lucky few who have had access to a large outside space, they've been a godsend. As they have allowed couples to host an outdoor wedding, that is totally there's. Free from the constraints wedding venues often place, and blessed with the comfort a home provides.

These garden weddings often have a much smaller guest count, which when you think about cost, and the fact that you're not renting a venue and can seriously save some money. Meaning much more wedding budget can be used to buy a house, or splash on an epic honeymoon!

6.) The Weekday Wedding

Have you noticed that your weekend diary is looking a little full in this year? So many weddings got delayed over the last two years, and it's only now that venues are starting to catch up!

Weekend weddings are now hard to book for many engaged couples looking to tie the knot this year. So, why not, say hello to a Thursday celebration? Less money, less hassle, quieter, and you'll know who really wants to come to your wedding! Those people willing to use up their work holidays to see you say your wedding vows, those guys really love you! 🇳🇮

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Time to stop hiding **Jai Santora mechanic**



Jai Santora at her shop Santora Automotives LLC, Courtesy of the Worcester Telegram

By John Axelrod

Jai Santora's auto repair business went into a slump when she started to transition. She had not transitioned socially, but she says that "clients, vendors, and employees had all noticed gradual changes in my appearance and how I dressed. Appointments were being scheduled less frequently." Santora also says that now that she was presenting as a femme, she experienced "misogynistic attitudes that I had never experienced before," being second-guessed about parts or mechanical processes. "Life and running a garage had become challenging," she says.

When reporter Meg Trogolo contacted Jai about doing a feature on her experience as a trans femme woman running an automotive repair shop, Jai says that she was apprehensive about saying anything that would constitute coming out. She had not yet come out formally. "I hadn't even told my family. The only people who knew were my closest friends." Her original response to the reporter's questions about coming out was hesitation until she suddenly realized it was time to stop hiding. "I had been living in hiding my entire life," she says. "I refused to continue living in the shadows. I had to hold my head high and face the consequences."

Jai wrote about the experience later, in an article for Central Mass Pride titled *An Unintended Coming Out: A Story of Triumph and Endurance*. She speaks openly about her experience and says that she told the interviewer a dark joke about checking with her insurance to make sure she was covered if her shop burned down. But says that she answered honestly, and when the article ran, there were a few unpleasant comments on the article, but the response was tremendously supportive. When the phone started to ring, it was not with harassment but with clients



Jai Santora

looking for help with their cars. An early interest in automobiles Jai Santora had grown up using her interest in cars as a way to pass in a world where her femininity made her different; she says she remembers being “teased, being harassed, being pushed around...every day,” starting in adolescence. She says that she had originally fought back, but it eventually became easier to hide. Jai had started working on cars to help her father, and she made it a career. She took a technician job



Jai Santora, Courtesy of www.santoraautomotives.com

in a dealership and then in a respectful family-run repair shop, where she heard women customers’ stories about being treated as second-class citizens in the auto repair world.

Santora says that, in general, people mistrust mechanics because they do not understand their own cars. In automotive culture, customers expect to be abused, overcharged, or charged for unnecessary parts or repairs because automotive knowledge is strangely presumed for everyone. Even if you are a professional in another field, you are expected to know about fixing your car, and if you are not literate about automotive systems, you are susceptible to abuse and judgment.

Hearing these stories about customers’ experiences made Santora want to go out on her own and run a shop where the customers’ needs could come first. She could earn customers’ trust by providing high-quality



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“In just a year,” she says, “I went from contemplating whether or not to close my business to becoming the only Gay-rahj in central Massachusetts. Customers started driving from New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, the north and south shores, and Amherst. I even have a few customers from Provincetown.”

Santora Automotive gained a reputation as a garage where customers could be their true selves, even if they present other selves in other places. Santora says that some customers will drop off their cars presenting as one gender and pick up their cars later, presenting as another. Santora has hired trans technicians and also had a couple of cis mechanics, who all receive training about pronouns and names, working together in an environment of customer-focused support and teamwork that has increased her LGBTQIA2S+ customer base, in addition to attracting “straight clients who appreciate authenticity and honesty.” It turned out that being true to herself in her identity was also good business.

Santora says that she had also been doing herself, her two teenage kids, and everyone around her a disservice “by not being my authentic self and not showing people that there is nothing wrong with who or what I am. How can I teach my kids to grow up and be proud of themselves when I’m hiding who I am?”

Santora says coming out has cost her some family. Still, she spoke out about her experience because she thought it was important to show people that there are challenges but that the benefits outweigh them and that they were not going to ruin her life or career.

“58% of Americans,” Santora says, “will tell you they don’t know trans people.” If they do know them, she says, they are much more likely to support trans rights and healthcare.

“We need more visibility and representation,” Santora says, “We need more people to be loud and proud, and we need more consistency from allies,” so that the types of discrimination Santora experiences regularly are never

normalized or accepted.

“Being queer is not something to be ashamed of and hide from, she says. “It’s a superpower that should be celebrated.”

Coming out turns to activism

Jai was inspired in her journey by community leader Laura Marotta, the Executive Director of the Creative Hub in Worcester, who had been fostering marginalized communities for years. Marotta is currently breaking ground on a \$14 million center for the arts that has been 10 years in the making, and she was recently awarded the Portraits of Pride Founder Award in Boston, along with The Creative Hub Co-Founder Stacy Lord.

Once Jai came out through the feature article, Marotta helped her navigate life in the public eye. When Santora saw no recognition for Trans Day of Visibility in the spring of 2023, she organized a gathering outside of Worcester City Hall with guest speakers to provide visibility and representation to whoever showed up.

This led her to establish a nonprofit this past year, Central MA Trans Visibility, to provide visibility for the trans community and to honor and remember those lost to violence or suicide. The organization has received deep support from the community, including elected officials.

Around Trans Day of Remembrance, in the fall, the group buries bulbs in the newly developed Sever Street Park Garden, symbolizing trans lives lost over the past year, and they also co-organize a recognition of the day at various venues across The City of Worcester. This year is being hosted by The YWCA of Central Mass.

Trans Day of Remembrance was founded in Massachusetts in 1999 to memorialize the murders of Black transgender women Rita Hester and Chanelle Pickett, to remember and honor those lives lost to senseless violence, and to raise awareness and promote more acceptance and understanding of the trans/queer experience, ultimately to normalize it.

In the spring, the group will co-organize Trans Day of Visibility at a local venue. Then, once the




Jai Santora

flowers bloom in all their bright glory, there will be a gathering to celebrate the resilience, triumphs, and accomplishments of the trans community.

Through her new nonprofit and organizations like Safe Homes, Out MetroWest, Chastity Bowick Talent, and Consulting Agency, and through the Creative Hub Worcester, Santora found and helped to create a community that showed people that there is a place where they can find other like-minded people.

She says that Worcester Queer AF's art and fashion show "originally gave me the courage to come out and to be myself, just seeing that this was all possible right in my own backyard." By running Santora Automotive, and now through her nonprofit and her community, Santora says that she wants to reach out to closeted trans or queer people "and have them see the community and realize the world isn't half as scary as you think it is. We're here, and we're going to help you out and take care of you. We're a chosen family."

Santora has started writing articles about her experiences in the garage and in the nonprofit, in 

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Jai Santora

addition to writing editorials about personal things. She has confronted school administrators and church leaders who knowingly or unknowingly foster and perpetuate policies that disrespect trans and queer people, driving them back to the closet. As a pagan practitioner for Wicca, she finds peace in nature and the world's magic and wishes that the church hewed more closely to its own teachings. "Jesus said that we are all children of God," she says, "and I would like more religious leaders to take that approach."

Santora is considering writing an autobiography to express her unique background and experience. However, she acknowledges that activism and running an automotive repair business can add to many conflicting demands on her time. But she is moved by the motto that "no one is free unless we're all free," she says, "What keeps me going is knowing the importance of the service it provides for the community by offering this safe space for people who need it." 🏳️‍🌈



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