



# HOT SWIMWEAR

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SUMMER 2021 ISSUE 13



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**RYAN O'CONNELL:**  
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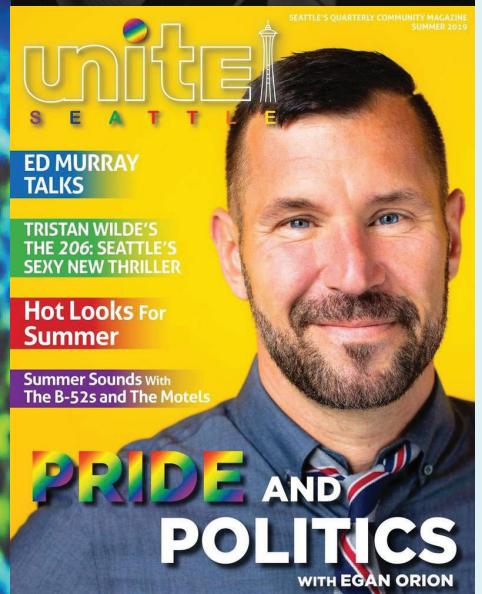
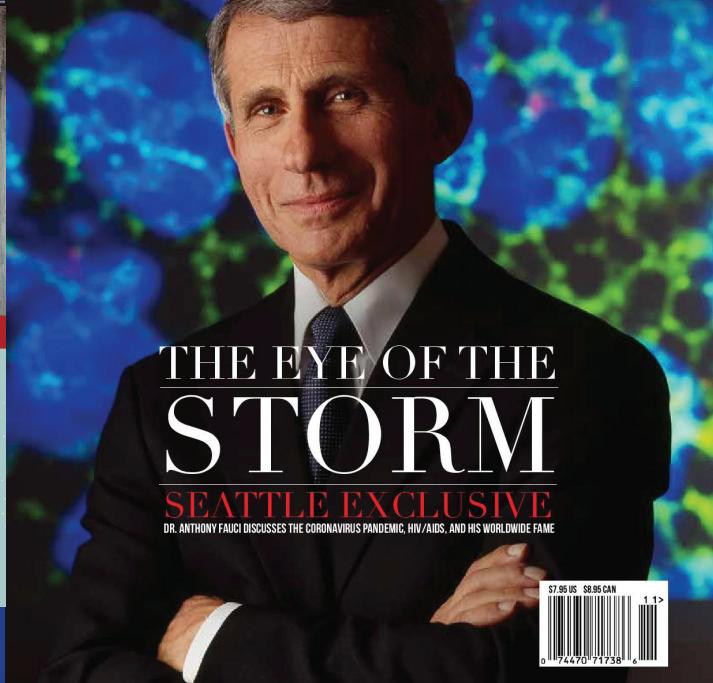
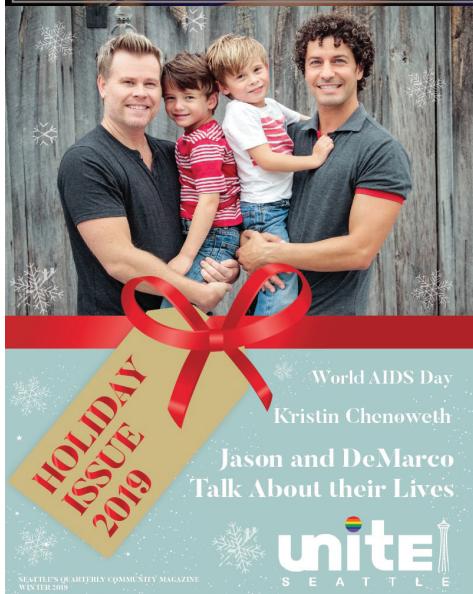
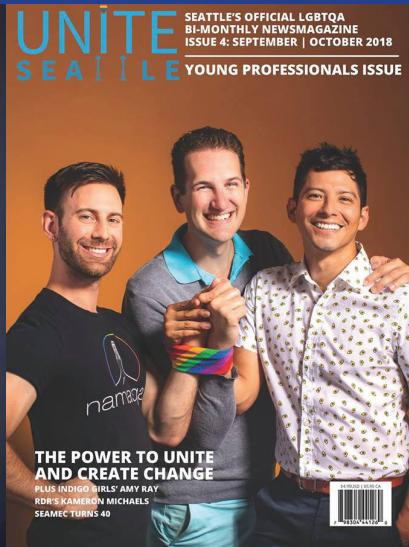
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*"When I give patients the vaccine, there's a tremendous sense of relief. We are all so tired of this, and the vaccine is our way out of these strange, weird times. If you're unsure, talk to people who have already had it. If enough of us get it we can stop transmission and return to a more normal life."*

*Peter Shalit, MD, PhD  
DoctorShalit & Associates, Seattle*



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FROM THE  
**EDITOR'S DESK**



## DEAR READERS,

As hotter weather approaches and we transition back into normalcy, I look forward to covering other areas related to community, personal struggles, and bigger challenges.

This issue's theme had to be summer and Pride. Summer reminds me of when I first saw the film version of Grease 43 years ago, so choosing Olivia Newton-John as our cover was a no-brainer. I first met and interviewed the pop icon five years ago for the Seattle Gay News and was thrilled to finally feature her in Unite. Plus, it looks like Pride events will last through early October.

Also featured is an interview with the writer and star of the Netflix series Special, Ryan O'Connell. I totally relate to Ryan because we are both gay and suffer from a mild-case of cerebral palsy (long story).

We also take a look at mayoral candidate, Bruce Harrell, who discusses some of the major issues facing our city.

Plus, we go back to Madison Beach two years later to view new swimwear from our wardrobe partner, UnderU4men.

Thank you to all of our advertisers, such as Turgeon Raine, Uncle Ike's, Carter Subaru, and Kaiser Permanente, among others!

Onward!

Mike Montgomery  
Publisher

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# SPOTTED

## CELEBRATING 3 YEARS OF PRIDE

2017 - VAN CITY PRIDE



2018 - SEATTLE PRIDE PARADE



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2019 - PRIDEFEST/THE CUFF



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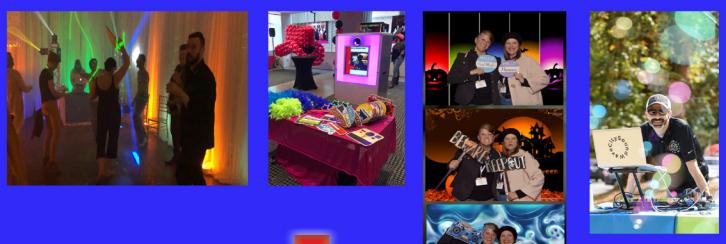


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# ===== positive thoughts =====

## I HAD TO GET PAST THE STIGMA OF HAVING HIV. THEN I HAD TO DO THE SAME FOR MENTAL ILLNESS.

BY MARIAH WILBERG

I was 19 years old and pregnant when I received my HIV diagnosis in 2006.

"This is punishment," I thought, just rewards for the survival sex I turned to on the streets of Minneapolis as a homeless, runaway teen. I already felt unlovable because of my history of sex work. Now it felt like the love I had to give would be literal poison.

My abusive partner, who tested HIV negative, reinforced these fears. He said I was lucky to have him. Without him, I'd still be on the streets selling my body, he said. And nobody else wanted a dirty, diseased bitch.

When he went to prison, I fell apart. I had no support system. I relapsed almost immediately, and I wasn't being the mother I wanted to be for my newborn daughter.

I stopped taking my HIV meds. It was so easy to take them when pregnant to keep her from being born with HIV, but then so hard to take them just for myself. Besides, the other drugs I was taking — cocaine and ecstasy — made me feel good. Unlike the HIV medications, which were a constant reminder of my unworthiness.

= When my daughter was eight months old, I was arrested for selling drugs. Out on bond, I impulsively fled from Minnesota to Texas. My daughter was safe at my parents' house, and I figured, "I already have a death sentence, so I'll be damned if I spend my last years, the rest of my life, in prison."

After I missed court, my parental rights were terminated and a felony warrant was issued for my arrest.

I buried my HIV deep and locked it away, telling no one. The one time I re-engaged with HIV care while on the run, a roommate discovered my pills and told our mutual friends and my then partner I convinced them she was lying to hurt me — and in the garbage went the HIV meds.

After four years as a fugitive, I was on my way home to visit my family for the holidays. I had just told my daughter I would see her in the morning over the phone; in fact, I was never to see her again, at least as of yet.

We were pulled over after that phone call, and I spent the holidays in jail, instead of with family. I was sent to prison shortly after.

There, I received an AIDS diagnosis. I was 25 years old. I could no longer afford the luxury of denial; it was killing me. In group therapy, I told my secret to a group of women I had come to know and love.

I saw no fear, no disgust.

"It could have been me," they said. "Thank you for sharing. I now think differently about HIV because of you."

My life suddenly made sense. I had the power to transform my pain into purpose. "I've made it this far so that I can help others," I thought. In prison, I began to learn how to love myself. All of me.

When I left prison in 2013, I knew I was done with closets. I settled down in St. Paul and was quickly embraced by Minnesota's HIV community — my community. I became a volunteer HIV educator, which quickly turned into a paid position. Learning that my undetectable viral load meant I was unable to transmit HIV through sex was the final blow to my internalized stigma. I could love without fear! I started dating, this time sharing my status.

I was relieved to find that most people were receptive after learning

more about HIV. However, it didn't all go smoothly. After disclosing my status to a potential partner, I noticed some red flags and stopped talking to him. In retaliation, he put my picture, name, and HIV status on social media. It was my community that kept me safe, holding me tight as I received death threats from strangers online.

That was the worst-case scenario I had always feared, but I was strangely relieved. Because I realized then that the fears were far worse than the reality.

Months later, I met my husband. He chose science over stigma, and we recently celebrated our sixth anniversary.

As an educator and prevention worker, I wanted to make sure all people living with HIV knew the truth about their bodies. So I incorporated the most recent science about treatment as prevention into the presentations I did.

Later, as a communications specialist for the State of Minnesota, I led us to becoming the third state to sign on to the "undetectable equals untransmittable" (U=U) campaign. I also coordinated a U=U transit campaign with millions of views.

Since 2019, I've been leading the implementation of END HIV MN, a comprehensive long-term plan to end new HIV infections and improve health outcomes for people living with HIV in Minnesota. Not only am I done with HIV stigma in my own life but I am also privileged to work alongside my community on statewide efforts to reduce stigma for everyone.

This is my dream job! It's the reason I sacrificed, spending seven years of full-time school on top of full-time work to earn bachelor's and master's degrees.

Yet as work-from-home dragged into the fall of 2020 because of the COVID pandemic, my dream job started to feel more like a nightmare.

I was wracked by guilt as the pandemic upended much of my work. Projects were moving slowly or put on hold as staff reassignments and a hiring freeze turned my coordinator position — designed to lead project teams across departments — into a one-person show.

I felt like a constant failure, like I was letting my community down. I was isolating myself, scared to leave the house, uninterested in video calls with family or friends.

I didn't think I was depressed. I told myself, "I can still get out of bed. I'm still going to work. I'm not sad; I'm just overwhelmed. Everything is just so hard." I was drinking more and more, mostly to escape the feelings of failure and get some sleep.

Then I suddenly developed an aversion to alcohol and quit drinking around the new year. I've done that before in the past, cycling through periods of heavy drinking and total abstinence. I was overdoing it anyway, so I didn't give it much thought. Besides, my husband and I are saving up for in vitro fertilization, so stopping was a good thing.

But sleep was elusive without the alcohol. My thoughts would race, magnifying my every fear. It might start with, "Should I have worded that email a little differently?" It always ended with, "You are failing, everyone secretly hates you, and you're terrible at your job."

Objectively, I knew that wasn't true. I was even participating in the Emerging Leaders Institute for the State of Minnesota. But logic

was no match for these feelings.

Then came the panic attacks. I usually have maybe one a year now I was having one every few days. My heart was racing, sometimes resting at over 120 beats a minute. I couldn't understand why my anxiety, usually limited to overthinking, was now showing up in my body.

I was worried about money. My husband had lost his day job during the pandemic. Ever since, he'd been working around the clock to grow his own automotive detailing business from part-time to full-time.

Even though I knew winter is a slow season for detailing, I became suspicious of the fact that he wasn't pitching in as much financially.

And then, aha! Suddenly, it all made sense. The panic attacks, the insomnia, the racing heart: "It's my body telling me something," I decided. "I know what it is now. My husband is hiding something."

I became fixated. I was investigating him, looking for evidence to back up my fears. I found none, but that didn't dissuade me. My brain wove snippets of phone calls and meaningless events into an intricate story of a double life. I thought he was using our home security cameras to listen in and spy on me, to monitor whether I had learned his secrets.

I finally confronted him. He was adamant and believable in his denials. And a month prior, we were excitedly discussing the types of parents we'd be together. But I still had a gut feeling that something was wrong. Very wrong. I was so confused.

It felt like he was speaking to me in subliminal messages, trying to hurt me. I spent hours researching gaslighting, trying to understand why I was doubting my own perceptions. When he spoke to me, I sensed an underlying malice, hidden meanings. I finally told him that I wanted a divorce.

He stayed on the couch, where he had already been sleeping for days. I went upstairs to our bedroom and saw the smoke detector on the dresser, from months before, when I watched him take it off the wall because it was chirping.

Only this time, I wondered if he was planning to set the house on fire and kill me for insurance money.

That's when I knew something was very wrong — with me. My husband wasn't gaslighting me; my own brain was. I realized I hadn't eaten in days and had barely been sleeping. But I was neither tired nor hungry.

I asked my husband to take me to the ER. When I got there, my heart rate was over 180 beats a minute, and I had an immediate EKG test. Even as he held my hand tightly, I was flipping back and forth between understanding I was having a medical issue and fearing that he was orchestrating this, to get me admitted and out of the way.

Those thoughts only stopped after a medication to rebalance my neurotransmitters dissolved under my tongue.

As I calmed down, they told me I was experiencing mania. The fear and confusion, paranoia, altered perceptions, and false beliefs were symptoms of psychosis. The doctors said that had I wandered in alone in the state I was in, I would have surely been admitted. But since I had a support person with me, I should continue taking the medication they had just given me and follow up the next week.

As we finally got home after a very long night, I googled my new med, Zyprexa (olanzapine), an antipsychotic. I noticed a visceral reaction in my gut. I've been here before, confronting stigma in a pill bottle.

A little over a month later, I am still confirming the suspected diagnosis of bipolar disorder, with a full neuropsychiatric test scheduled later this spring. My new provider strongly suspects that I am living with attention-deficit disorder as well.

I am not afraid of these new labels; rather, I am empowered with this new lens. It puts so much of my life in perspective: running away from home, the homelessness, the sex work, my HIV diagnosis, my incarceration, my relationship with drugs and alcohol, my yo-yoing body weight.

Did I only gain 15 pounds during pregnancy from the HIV meds alone, or was I manic also? After my baby was born, was I really just a bad mom, or was it more likely that I had experienced postpartum depression?

Looking back, I have more empathy for my younger self. I don't believe in regrets — I am exactly where I'm supposed to be in life. But I do wonder if my child would be with me now, as I so desperately want, had I been diagnosed at a younger age.

I now see how my internalized stigma of mental illness prevented that earlier diagnosis. I channeled all my symptoms into two socially acceptable categories: I am anxious, or I am overwhelmed.

Once I recognized the stigma, I was set free. I have no desire to climb into a closet. Instead, I immediately knew that I would I must be open and transparent about this part of my journey. I know that our stories triumph over stigma. HIV taught me that.

I hear the stigma informing my friend's gentle questions: "Are you sure you want to be open about this?" "Don't you want to take some time and think about it?" and "As long as being open doesn't hurt other areas of wellness like employment."

They are not trying to silence me — they are my friends. But they worry about what I'm up against.

Unstable. Dangerous. Crazy. These are some of the many labels that society assigns to people living with mental illnesses or differences, people who aren't neurotypical.

But these do not describe me, not at all. I will not participate in stigmatizing myself. Just as I learned to reject labels like "dirty" or "diseased," I reject these labels, and the idea that I should keep this a secret.

I love myself, and my brain. The same gifts that have allowed me to build a life and career I am proud of are the same things that got dialed up too high during my episode. I wouldn't trade my brain for anything. I believe it is different but not ill.

Others in my life reacted warily to my suspected diagnosis and new mental health med. "You probably don't need to take them forever," they said. "Aren't you worried your personality will change?" "You're probably not actually bipolar."

But so far, my new medication, the antipsychotic, makes me feel great. It hasn't changed my personality or dampened my gifts. Rather, I feel like the best version of myself.

Gone are the racing thoughts, torturing me into the night. I am sleeping well, and I have no panic, no racing heart. I trust my husband again, even when he's working late. Since starting them, I feel even-keeled, more optimistic, more motivated, and happier than I have been in a long time.

For now, I'm sticking to prescribed medications and nonalcoholic beverages. I'm getting out of my own way and giving the doctors a chance to diagnose and treat the conditions that I've obviously been self-medicating my whole life.

I see how my trauma history is negatively impacting my relationship with my loving and incredibly patient husband. So I've also started EMDR therapy, which helps reduce the impact of trauma on your life.

I will accept whatever diagnosis aligns most closely with my symptoms, while also understanding that human diversity is rich, the line between "normal" and "ill" is subjective, and we don't fit neatly into checkboxes or categories.

This pandemic and isolation are hard for us all. Please, seek help if you need it. Don't let stigma stand in your way.



*Mariah Wilberg utilizes her lived experience with HIV, trauma, homelessness, survival sex, substance use, mental illness and incarceration to inform an award-winning career in public service that spans from public health to justice reform. This column is a project of TheBody Plus, Positively Aware, POZ and Q Syndicate, the LGBTQ+ wire service.*

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**Center for Spiritual Living**  
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**Emerald City MCC Seattle**  
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# HOUSE WINE TEAMS UP WITH HRC TO CELEBRATE EQUALITY

WORDS: ANTHONY GREER



To celebrate and support LGBTQ+ equality, House Wine has partnered with the Human Rights Campaign by to donate \$2 from every case of Rainbow Rosé Bubbles sold.

"We want to raise as much money as possible to support the work that the HRC does," said Brad Mayer, vice president of public relations and partnerships for Precept Wines (which owns House Wine). "House Wine is a brand that welcomes everyone, and we want everyone to enjoy our products, no matter who they are or where they are."

"The HRC is so well known and has strong brand recognition. I loved the idea of partnership with a company that does amazing work and also has strong visibility. They've also been great partners when getting the message out to their membership," Mayer added.

The idea behind House Wine, a Seattle-based company that was started in 2004, was to produce a wine that is accessible to everyone. In Europe, everyone has a favorite house wine for the daily dining table. House Wine echoes that philosophy. Its motto is "Don't overthink it, just drink it!"

House Wine teamed up with HRC three years ago, and has since raised over \$100,000. Mayer said that the HRC was "excited about House Wine cans, and the company is partnering with the HRC because we wanted to reflect the values of our wines, which is that we're accepting of everyone."

House Wine has donated cans to LGBTQ-related HRC dinners both in Seattle and around the country, as well as Seattle's 2019 Pride.

"House Wine cans are fun, part of a celebration, and easy to take with you, and they made me think of Pride," Mayer said.

Mayer described Rainbow Rose Bubbles as crisp, refreshing, not too sweet, and very effervescent. The cans are so popular that they're now sold year round.

"A lot of people in the beginning thought it was more of a summer type of beverage, but I think now people understand the beauty of it year-round," Mayer said. "It's an enjoyable wine, not overly complicated, and is meant for people to enjoy."

House Wine produces its product in Walla Walla. While it is sold all over the country, "at the end of the day we are local, and we have a lot of pride in our hometown," said Mayer.

You can purchase Rainbow Rose Bubbles at your local QFC, Safeway, Target, Bartell's, Whole Foods, or Amazon Go store. You can also enjoy them in many local restaurants and bars, including 5 Point Cafe, Captain Blacks, the Madison Pub, the Mecca Cafe, Redhook Brewery, Audacity Brewing, Rhein Haus, Rose Temple, Big Mario's Pizza, and Diamond Knot Brewery, to name a few.



# BUILDING HOPE AND A HEALTHIER FUTURE DURING OUR DUAL HIV/AIDS AND COVID-19 PANDEMICS

**WORDS: DR. COLIN FIELDS**  
KAISER FOUNDATION HEALTH PLAN  
OF WASHINGTON'S HIV/PrEP  
AND GENDER HEALTH PROGRAMS

Forty years ago, on June 5, 1981, the CDC shared troubling reports of a rare, severe lung infection in five previously healthy Gay men. We know today that this was the start of the AIDS epidemic, a period of enormous suffering in the LGBTQIA+ community, with ongoing ripple effects across our country and the world.

Occasionally, my patients at Kaiser Permanente ask me, "Is HIV still a thing?" and I have to tell them it absolutely is. In this era of COVID-19, we unfortunately have two simultaneous viral pandemics right now.

When a COVID-19 outbreak trapped passengers onboard a returning cruise ship off San Francisco last year, some of my older patients remarked how emotional it was to observe the parallels between an isolated group of people so quickly and publicly stigmatized during the virus's initial outbreak and the Gay community's experience during the AIDS epidemic.

Although we still have a long way to go as a society to address the fear and discrimination that can accompany the emergence of any new virus, medical care for patients living with HIV has evolved significantly since 1981. Today, living with HIV/AIDS is comparable to monitoring and managing many chronic health conditions. In addition to the landmark development of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) almost a decade ago, this year we saw the appearance of the first long-acting injectable antiretrovirals.

King County has been an impactful global leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS, one of the few places in the world that has met the United Nation's 90-90-90 target, and one of the earliest and most successful adopters of syringe exchange and HIV PrEP programs. Kaiser Permanente is proud to be part of this region's collective effort to combat the virus, and we are committed to continuing to support our patients who are at risk for contracting HIV or already living with it.

One way we've supported our communities most at risk is to expand our PrEP program in the past year to better serve patients who live in areas of Washington state without reliable, high-quality access to care. Providing more virtual care options, including video visits with a provider, has helped us reach patients who can benefit from PrEP but may not otherwise have access to the preventive care they need.

The 40-year legacy of AIDS is still with us, but modern medicine is continuing to evolve to deliver quality, inclusive care that meets the needs of diverse populations, where it has historically fallen short. Every patient, whether they're facing a diagnosis of HIV or of COVID-19, deserves the same high-quality care and a relationship with their doctor that supports their total health and well-being.

When I travel around Capitol Hill, I pass the AIDS Memorial Pathway (AMP), a public art project under development around the Capitol Hill light rail station. The AMP is just one reminder of the importance of understanding and honoring our community's history as we continue to build a healthier future.

*Dr. Colin Fields is the medical director of the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Washington's HIV/PrEP and Gender Health Programs. His practice includes care for adolescents, adults, and LGBTQ youth, as well as HIV and PrEP management.*



With a career stretching across more than five decades, Olivia Newton-John is still “the one that we want.”

And at 72, the four-time Grammy Award winner shows little sign of slowing down.

Earlier this year, Dame Olivia released a new pop duet, “Window in the Wall,” with her daughter, actress and singer Chloe Lattanzi.

“I’ve always loved recording duets and singing harmonies,” said Newton-John. “I had no plans to record at the time, but I knew from the second I heard the song that I wanted to record it with Chloe.”

Released in January, the stirring music video quickly hit #1 on the iTunes music video chart and stayed there for over a week.

In light of today’s turbulence, Newton-John shared that she felt connected to the song and its message of hope, love, and understanding.

“The last thing I recorded was with Barry Gibb on his *Greensfields* album. That was lovely,” said the forever-young performer. “But this song coerced me into singing it — there was no way I couldn’t sing it...”

“To be honest, I was a little nervous, because I hadn’t sung in the studio in a long time. ‘What if I don’t hit the notes, what if it’s not there?’ Yeah, it took a minute,” she laughed.

Trust and believe: that legendary voice was there.

Also there were Newton-John’s lifelong musical instincts regarding the musical arc, build, and storytelling of

# HOT SUMMER NIGHTS WITH OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN

WORDS: RANDY SLOVACEK

“Window in the Wall” as she worked with six-time Grammy Award winning producer Dave Cobb on the track.

“A lot of the records now, they’re kind of throwing the kitchen sink early, because they want to grab attention,” explained the Grease star. “But this needed to build. We worked on the bridge for a while to get that build. It was a really fun experience to do it.”

“Window in the Wall” was not the first time this mother-daughter duo teamed up in the recording studio. Their 2015 debut single, “You Have to Believe,” a remake of Newton-John’s #1 single “Magic” from the movie musical Xanadu, with additional lyrics by Lattanzi, reached #1 on the Billboard Dance Club Play Chart.

And speaking of Xanadu... Last August, the singer’s former husband (and father to Chloe, her only child), Matt Lattanzi, joined DJ Disco Vinnie for a virtual tea dance in Seattle celebrating the 40th anniversary of the movie musical.

Lattanzi, a Northwest native, not only made his film debut as a dancer in the flick but met the star... and... the rest is history.

Newton-John watched the streaming event from her ranch in Southern California and sent a video message as well. The nearly five-hour celebration raised over \$1,200 for the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre in Melbourne, Australia.

Around that same time, she announced the establishment of the Olivia Newton-John Foundation. The independent charity aims to fund cutting-edge research and more effective cancer treatment programs, with a focus on plant medicine.

“I have lived beyond cancer for the past 28 years, and I have learned so much about the importance of holistic care,” said Newton-John in a statement at the time. “On my breast cancer journey, I have always found incredible benefit from the use of various natural therapies, particularly plant-based medicines. Even through my experiences with surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy, I’ve always used a range of natural protocols.”

“The ONJ Foundation will find and fund individuals and organizations doing exciting and life-changing research, to challenge conventional thinking, taking us closer to a world beyond cancer,” she added.

But even as she steps up via her philanthropy, music still plays a central role in Newton-John’s life.

This spring the superstar also recorded a duet with iconic singer-songwriter Paul Anka: a new version of his massive hit, “Put Your Head on My Shoulder.” Released in May, the single went straight to #1 on the Amazon adult chart.

But wait... there’s more!

Not content to sit still, Newton-John is currently planning to release an album of duets spanning her five decades in music this August, titled “Just the Two of Us: The Duets Collection.” The newly remastered 32-track anthology will include some never-before-released collaborations with artists like Dionne Warwick, Jon Secada, Andy Gibb, Keith Urban, and others.

Plus, with 2021 being the 40th anniversary of her mega-hit album *Physical*, there are plans this fall for a special release to celebrate the milestone.

Factoid: Did you know the song “Physical” held the #1 spot on Billboard’s Hot 100 chart longer than any other song in the 1980s? And the music video was one of the very first to be honored at the Grammy Awards for “Video of the Year,” in 1983. That video was also considered somewhat “controversial” at the time for its ending, featuring some of the muscled hunks hitting the showers holding hands.

But that noise never bothered Newton-John. A longtime LGBTQ ally, she was famously one of the very first Australian celebrities to speak out in support of marriage equality. In 2012, she said in a statement, “With respect to marriage equality, I believe that no one has the right to judge and deny couples who love each other the ability to make a marriage commitment. Love is love.”

As an actress, Dame Olivia has appeared in a number of LGBTQ-themed films, including *It’s My Party* and the camp classic *Sordid Lives*, in which she played a guitar-toting lesbian bar singer “with a reputation,” Bitsy Mae Harling.

“I just think of gay people as people,” she says of her relationship with the queer community. “I have had a wonderfully strong gay following, and I’m very grateful for that. And they’re so much fun... I like to be able to laugh a lot.”

*Randy Slovacek is a Las Vegas based blogger, read his blog at [therandyreport.com](http://therandyreport.com)*



# Re-elect Teresa Mosqueda to Seattle City Council Position 8



**TERESA  
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for Seattle City Council Pos. 8

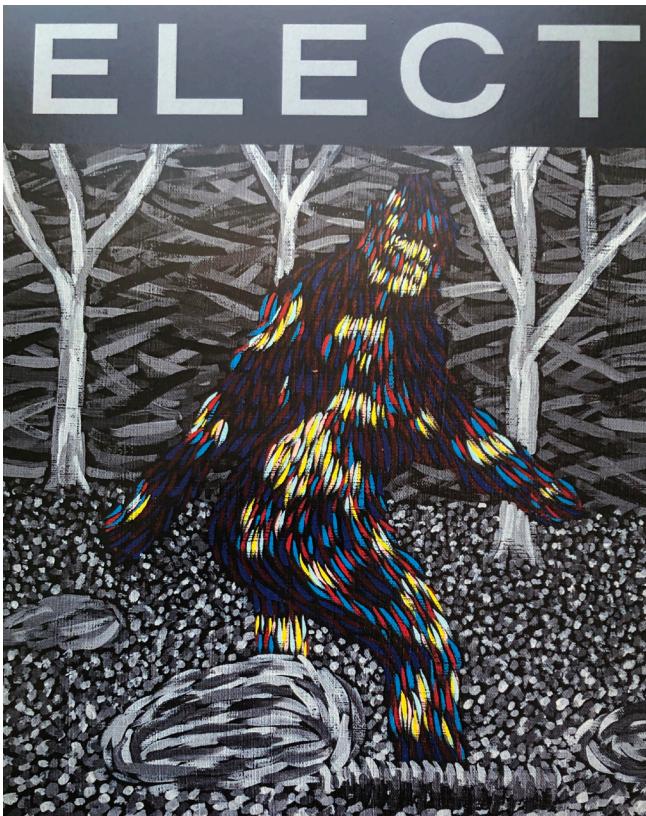
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As a progressive labor democrat, organizing has been a throughline in my career. For almost a decade, at the Washington State Labor Council, I fought for political inclusion and leadership of LGBTQ individuals. On Seattle City Council, I continue to stand in solidarity with LGBTQ community members and workers in the fight for housing, dignified workplaces, economic stability, and culturally competent health care for all! Then I ran for Seattle City Council to bring these values to legislation in Seattle's City Hall.

Together, on the City Council, we've built diverse coalitions to pass progressive and impactful policy change. This is what creates healthy, thriving communities—and it is what drives me to run again. With your support, we can bring these policies to City Hall once again to build a stronger, more inclusive Seattle.

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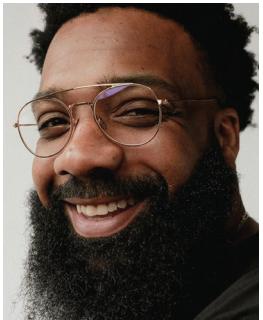
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An artistic illustration of a hand wearing a purple glove holding a wrench under a leaking teal-colored faucet. Water is shown dripping from the faucet into a white sink below. The background is a dark, textured blue. Overlaid on the image is the text "CALL NOW" in large white letters at the top left, and "WATER CLOSET PLUMBING" in large white letters on the right side. At the bottom left, there is a phone number "(253) 653-0393". At the bottom right, there is a list of services: "New Construction" and "Remodeling".

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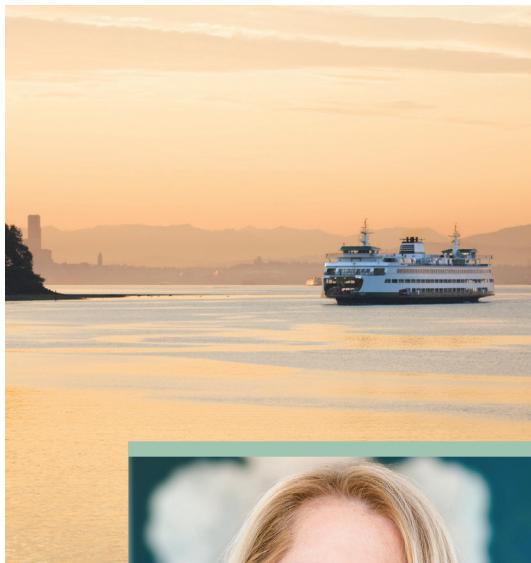
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# QUEER BOOKS FROM BEFORE THE LAST PANDEMIC

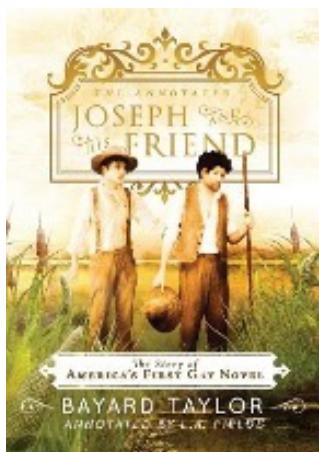
## SUMMER READING SUGGESTIONS FOR 2021

WORDS: VINCENT KOVAR

For us introverts, post-COVID King County is a peculiar time and place to explore questions like: Are we still queer without the physical acts of sex? Who have we been this last year without bars, parades (Seattle Pride is going virtual again this year), bathhouses, potlucks, drag balls, and all the other wonderfully colored inks in our fantastic palimpsest?

So, at the silent reading party at the Sorrento Hotel or while hiding behind a book on the shady side of Madison Beach, you can explore these topics with the Unite Seattle summer book list.

Those on the list are hardly new, though. Before Gide and Vidal, before the 1918–1920 Spanish flu pandemic, writers were exploring these ideas. And often the identities of those writers are at least as interesting as the books themselves. Here are five:

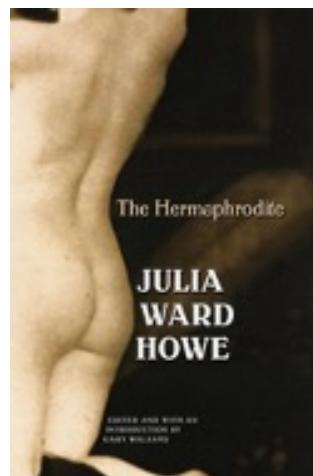


JOSEPH AND HIS FRIEND:  
A STORY OF PENNSYLVANIA [C. 1870]

The modern reader has to do some reading between the lines of what has long been regarded as the first “gay” novel in the US. Author Bayard Taylor later described the action in his book as “cryptic forces” that were necessary to understand if readers were to have any interest in the novel.

The story revolves around the titular Joseph, who marries a wealthy, manipulative woman just as he discovered his deeper feelings for his new friend, Philip. In essence, it describes an era before unsolicited genital close-ups on Grindr.

I recommend the annotated edition from Lethe Press ([www.lethepressbooks.com](http://www.lethepressbooks.com)). (Note: I do not receive any form of remuneration for this.)



THE HERMAPHRODITE [C. 1846–1847]

The first queer American novel in existence (though unpublished) may very well be *The Hermaphrodite* by the writer, composer, and poet Julia Ward Howe.

If her name sounds familiar, it is because she wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (“For mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord...”). Along with being a fierce abolitionist, Howe was also an early fighter

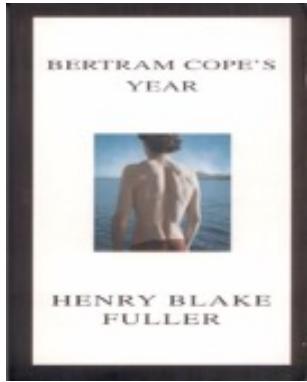
for women’s suffrage and, it seems, an advocate for ideas we now think of as intersex, transsexual, genderqueer, or even asexual.

*The Hermaphrodite* by Julia Ward Howe [c. 1846–1847]

Howe never had a chance, or maybe didn’t have the daring, to finish the novel, but about 400 pages of it were passed down and lurked in various archives until its publication in the 1970s. Fragmentary and still unfinished, it is a first-person narrative by a character named Laurence, who was raised as a man. Laurence experiences a series of confusing feelings and relationships, complicated by fluidity in both sexuality and gender.

Howe wrote the story when her husband became emotionally involved in a same-sex attraction and also when her own ideas about the place of women were being challenged by 19th-century norms.

“Fervent hearts must borrow the disguise of art, if they would win the right to express, in any outward form, the internal fire that consumes them.”



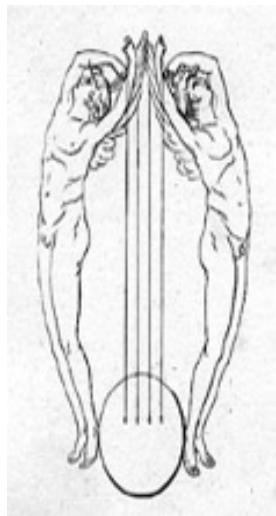
### A YEAR IN ARCADIA: KYLENION [C. 1805]

If you don't believe that either of the above books qualify as the first queernovel in the US, we might mark that down instead as Bertram Cope's Year. Written when the author, Henry Blake Fuller (an established novelist), was 62, the book follows young Bertram Cope as his friend, Medora Phillips, tries

to get him married off to various eligible society ladies. However, Bertram is only interested in his friend and roommate, Arthur Lemoyne.

Some of Fuller's contemporaries were shocked into silence. Others claimed that had another author penned it, the novel would have been suppressed and the writer put in jail. Overall, they agreed that, like Joseph and His Friend, Bertram Cope's Year would "probably prove unreadable to one who had no key to its meaning."

The title is available as a free e-book on Amazon.com.



### A YEAR IN ARCADIA: KYLENION [C. 1805]

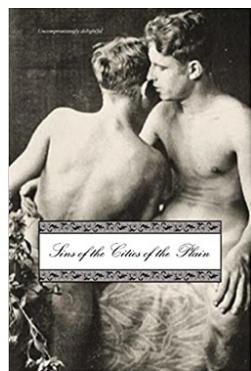
This is not a title from the US, but A Year in Arcadia is a strong contender for the first homoerotic novel since antiquity. The author, Augustus, Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, was a possible bisexual, a public transvestite, and a direct ancestor to most of the 19th century's European ruling families, including the present House of Windsor.

He published only this one book, a series of love stories set against the backdrop of Greek mythology. Most notably, one of

the stories involves two strapping shepherds. That particular piece was described by the Duke's contemporaries as stepping "over the bounds of manly affection into unseemly eroticism." But, when you're the grandfather of a future czar, a kaiser, and more than one king, you can get away with these things.

Unless you read 19th-century German, this book is only available in translation. Search for Year in Arcadia: A Shepherd's Calendar on Bookfinder.com. If you do read German, try the Frankfurt University website. The book is in its Goethe collection, as the polymath was a friend of the Duke. (Fun topic for the beach: some speculate Goethe was also queer.)

Maybe a few of you are looking for something a little more explicit – something a little more "Wilde." For you, dear readers, we present:



### THE SINS OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN OR, THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A MARY-ANN, WITH SHORT ESSAYS ON SODOMY AND TRIBADISM [1881]

There is no pretense here. This novel by Jack Saul is 19th-century porn, "plain" and simple. At times the book has been attributed to Oscar Wilde or other scandalous figures of the period, but, based on its style and the titular character's ever-renewing "first time," it is likely that it was assembled from stories

written by a number of different authors.

The stories purport to retell the experiences of John, an actual male prostitute of Irish birth, known as "Dublin Jack," who was involved in two homosexual scandals: the first at Dublin Castle in 1884, and then later the Cleveland Street scandal in 1889. The characters Boulton and Park may be based on an actual duo of Victorian transvestites/transsexuals who appeared as defendants in an earlier scandal in 1871.

The Sins of the Cities was privately printed in London, just a few years before the trials of Oscar Wilde and just over a decade before King County in its first sodomy conviction sentenced Charles Wesley to "seven years at hard labor" for "intent to know" Eddie Kalberg. Oscar Wilde himself only served two.

In 2019, the book was apparently adapted into an opera written in the gay dialect Polari in Seville, Spain. Maybe somebody should pitch the idea to the Annex Theater on Capitol Hill!

While reading a print copy in public would certainly get some attention, you can also find it for free in various e-book formats on Archive.org. Personally, I recommend buying a Kindle copy, as there is nothing quite as unique as hearing the story narrated in Alexa's cheerful monotone.

To find any of these books not available digitally; patronize your local bookseller, like ElliotBayBook.com.

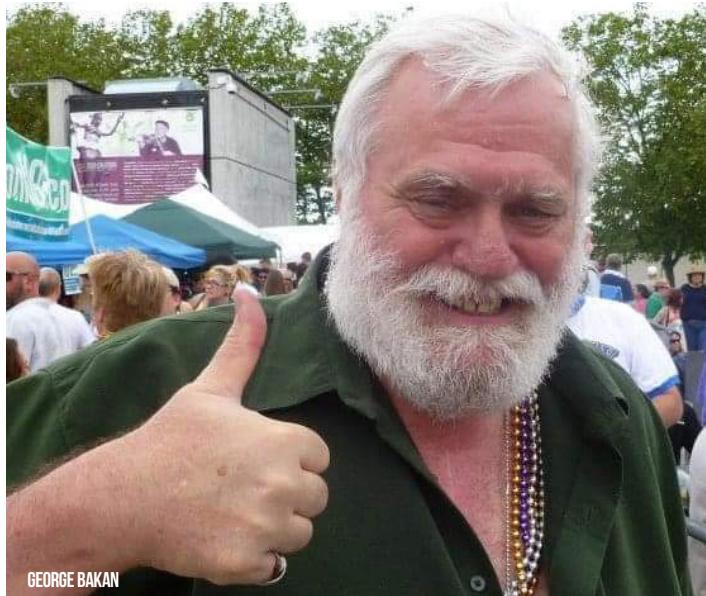


Vincent Kovar is an editor, journalist, and writing instructor living in Seattle, WA. He teaches at Antioch University, the University of Phoenix, and Richard Hugo House.

# IN MEMORIAM

THEIR IMPACTS ON OUR COMMUNITY WILL LAST FOREVER

WORDS: MAC SCOTTY MCGREGOR



GEORGE BAKAN



SHAUN KNITTEL

We have all faced so much uncertainty, change, and loss of control in the last year and a half. We have walked through a collective experience that few have walked. We have experienced the loss of control of our own lives when an unexpected pandemic took charge and changed every part of our routine. Some have lost jobs, family members, close friends, and mentors. We have lost businesses that we used to frequent. The very fabric of our community and how it looks has changed in immeasurable ways.

The Washington State and Seattle area LGBTQ communities have suffered some huge losses this last year. We have lost folks who helped forge the early path for LGBTQIA rights in Washington State and our Country. Some of these folks were on the front lines, battling for LGBTQIA rights when it was extremely dangerous to do so openly. They were courageous pioneers of our queer history. Here is a little about the recent monumental losses we have experienced as a community.

Charlie Brydon, LGBTQ activist and entrepreneur, died at 81 years old on February 9, 2021. Charlie was known as a master networker, establishing the Dorian Group in the mid 1970s. Under his leadership, the Dorian Group built

bridges and understanding with Mayors, Police Chiefs, and the Catholic Church. He built coalitions with the business community, politicians, and community activists. In 1993 Brydon also co-founded Hands Off Washington, which was an organization formed to fight civil rights discrimination and ballot measures that were designed to take away the civil rights of LGBTQ folks. Brydon “believed in working within the system,” says his niece, Megan Tracey. “He believed it was important to have more in-your-face activists, too.” He also earned two Bronze Stars for his military service in Vietnam.

Drew Griffin was the regional director for PFLAG and the PFLAG Washington State council’s vice president. He was an activist and advocate for LGBTQIA rights and creating safe spaces for queer folks to flourish. He grew up in Washington state and did all that he could to make this a better place for LGBTQ folks. “Throughout his time at PFLAG, Drew has been the consummate model of an LGBTQ+ community leader. As a role model, he has worked to ensure other LGBTQ+ people in Washington know they have a caring community in PFLAG. As a PFLAG leader, he has helped to elevate the role of PFLAG chapters in local communities throughout the Pacific Northwest,” said PFLAG

National Board President Kathy Godwin. Drew had been battling cancer for many years and passed in January of 2021 at only 47 years old. Drew is the co-founder of a non-profit called "Positive Masculinity" that he and I formed to help masculine folks do the work of dismantling toxic masculinity and work together to create a healthier model of masculinity for all people. That work will continue and forever be a part of his legacy.

Allena Gabosch was a community builder, educator, activist, and "Mama" to so many in our community, even though she bore no child of her own. Former owner of the Beyond the Edge Café on Capitol Hill, and one of the founders of The Center For Sex Positive Culture, known for many years as The Wet Spot. She was an out bisexual woman, who loved people, adventure, exploration, and who had a huge, open heart. She was a sought-after sex-educator who was committed to ridding the world and people of shame. She spoke at most of the colleges in the area and was appointed to one of the earliest versions of Seattle's LGBTQ Commission, which at that time was called The Commission for Sexual Minorities. She was fierce about defending the rights of folks around sexuality, gender, and their own body autonomy. She co-wrote the book Sex Positive Now, with Jeremy Shub. Allena passed in November of 2020 from cancer. Her tag line was "Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death," from her favorite movie, Auntie Mame.

Shaun Knittel was the founder of Social Outreach Seattle, which was formed to fight for Marriage Equality in Washington state. After the Marriage Equality law passed in the state, the non-profit went on to take on other community challenges, like safety, discrimination, education, and helping provide safe spaces for the LGBTQIA community. Shaun was also a writer and editor at Seattle Gay News and had been a journalist for many years, including when he was in the U.S. Navy. He was a Public Affairs specialist in the Navy and moved to Seattle in 2009. Shaun was also one of the producers of the Seattle Gay Pride Parade, Pride Asia, and many shows at Neighbor's Nightclub. When a rash of crimes began to happen in Capitol Hill, Shaun and I formed the Social Outreach Seattle Self-Defense and Safety Academy and taught many classes free, or on a donation-only basis to our community, at Neighbor's Nightclub. I was also on the board of directors for Social Outreach Seattle and worked very closely with Shaun. Shaun passed at only 39 years old.

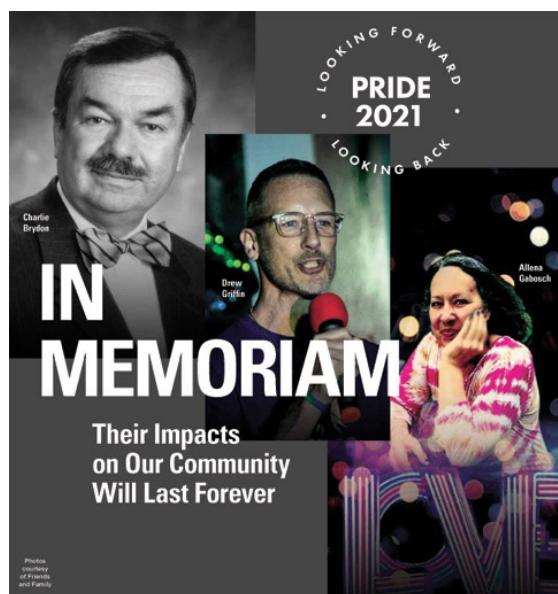
Don Paulson was a contributor to Seattle Gay News over the years, as well as a photographer. He began writing about the Seattle Drag Scene, and then, in 1996, collaborated with University of Washington Professor Roger Simpson on the book, An Evening at the Garden of Allah. Their book won the Governor's Writers Award. Don was a member of Black and White Men Together, an organization which was a gay interracial organization, dedicated to over-coming racial barriers and creating educational, political, cultural, and social supportive environments for all to address racism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism. Paulson lived the mantra, "There are no strangers, just friends I have not met yet".

Roger Winters joined the faculty at Central Washington University as a professor in the political science department in 1972. He began attending the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, which is where he became active in Seattle politics. He fought for anti-discrimination laws, marriage equality, and protections for LGBTQ folks. He also

held a great deal of Seattle's LGBTQ and political history. He was a part of the Dorian Group, co-chaired the first-ever candidate evaluation committee: Seattle Metropolitan Elections Committee, known as SEAMEC. In 1980 he gave the first-ever keynote speech at a Seattle Pride Parade and Rally. "Roger was a go-to leader and pioneer who helped pave the way for LGBTQ equality," former Seattle City Councilmember Tom Rasmussen said. He passed November of 2020 in his Shoreline home at 75 years old.

Then the indomitable - George Bakan was raised in rural Bellevue, moving to Seattle in 1980. He took the helm of Seattle Gay News in 1983, a time when the AIDS crisis was the dominant story of our community. Also in 1983 he organized The Seattle AIDS Action Committee, which later became Mobilization Against AIDS. He co-chaired The Freedom Day Committee, which is now known as Seattle Out and Proud. From 1987 to 1993, Bakan served as regional chair for Marches on Washington, during which time he pushed for bisexual and transgender inclusion at those events. He was on the Hands On Washington executive committee, and worked tirelessly his entire life to support good LGBTQ candidates and issues. George was known as The Governor of Capitol Hill to many, and he held so much of our state and local LGBTQ history. He was fair, and loved a good debate, and always fought for the marginalized. He passed at 78 years old, working at his desk, like he had been doing for so many years.

One of the hardest things about loss during the pandemic is that we have not been able to gather as a community to mourn. That gathering is an important step in healing. Hopefully soon we will be able to have a big gathering, to be in-community, and celebrate the lives of all whom we have lost during this trying time. Our community has lost some warriors! We must carry their torches, their passion for creating safe spaces and fighting discrimination, and never forget the many gifts they have given to our community.



Follow Mac Scotty McGregor via Facebook at [The Gender Sensei](#) and Mac – Activist – Politician. He's also on Twitter @McKick. You can also learn more about his political work via the website [www.votemacmcgregor.com](http://www.votemacmcgregor.com).



# BRUCE HARRELL WANTS TO BE YOUR NEXT MAYOR

WORDS: ANTHONY GREER

Three-term Seattle City Councilmember Bruce Harrell discussed his holistic approaches to the homelessness crisis, institutional racism, police reform, and small business revitalization, and why he's best suited to become Seattle's next mayor.

"I think that this is going to be the most important era in Seattle in the last 30 years," Harrell explained. "The strategies that we put in place now will define the city for the next 20 years."

As the son of a Black father and a Japanese mother, Harrell was raised to respect both where he came from and to believe in what was possible.

"While Seattle has its history of discrimination and racist and oppressive laws, it was much different than where my Black and Japanese grandparents had left," Harrell says. "I saw Seattle as a young person as a city that I wanted to give back to. I would do the things I wanted to do in life but make sure that those who come after me were awarded the same opportunities. I saw politics as a way to achieve that end."

## HARRELL'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Some of Harrell's biggest accomplishments include the following:

- Sustainable race and social justice legislation that changed how the City of Seattle views its policies and budget decisions
- Serving as a lead negotiator and the "unsung hero" of the minimum wage increase
- Spearheading the City of Seattle's first tuition assistance program formally known as the 13th Year, which is now part of the Seattle Promise Program

As a mayoral candidate, Harrell believes he has the best narrative of truly being a positive leader. "While I hear others talk about collaboration, vision, and unity, I think I have the strongest track record of being as such. I also think my life experiences lend themselves to creating a vision that is quite different from my opponents... it not only speaks to lived experiences, but also my strong and clear legislative records reflecting those values."

## THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS AND LOW-INCOME HOUSING:

The homelessness crisis has been one of Seattle's biggest problems for years. Despite increased spending year over year, the number of homeless Seattleites remains roughly the same.

"Our state legislature, our federal legislators, and our local legislators need to all work zealously on recognizing that we as a country have created a subclass of poverty and people with housing insecurity," Harrell added. "This problem is much more complex than one city council or one state legislative body."

To solve the crisis, Harrell stresses that we need a more holistic, data-driven approach.

"I think the data will show that predictors of people who may be homeless in five, ten, fifteen years from now can be analyzed. My focus will not just be on housing the homeless but also looking at the predictors early in their lives as to where systems fail," he said. "Causation is very complex. It's not just about treating someone who, for example, has drug and alcohol dependency problems, but to try and figure out how that developed earlier in their life."

Harrell also believes that low-income housing is of critical importance. "I will aggressively implement a housing levy to double down on low-income housing. We will continue to aggressively look at our zoning laws to see where there are great opportunities around transit, light rail, arterials, where it continues to make sense to create as much density as possible.

"We will also look at the employer community as to what their corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives are and if they can invest in affordable housing options for their employees. In short, we will do everything and use every tool state legislation has given us to achieve density and affordable low-income housing."

## INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND THE RACE AND DATA INITIATIVE

"We need to defeat institutional racism, including but not limited to police reform," Harrell said. "But our work cannot stop there. In our communities, we still have disparities in job opportunities and health outcomes and housing opportunities. Our work has to address those disparities as well."

Harrell is introducing the Race and Data Initiative to take a closer look at the causes of job, housing, and prosecutorial discrimination, as well as sentencing disparities in the judicial system.

"We will do a deep analysis of the causes and effects, and we will implement policies accordingly," he said.

"Institutional racism is often hard to see with the naked eye. Years ago, I examined why streetlights failed in what seemed to be poorer parts of the city. The city didn't have an intentionally racist policy in place. Their policy on repairing street lights was that, when people complained, they would take it upon themselves to have the lights repaired by a certain time across the board," Harrell explained.

"What they didn't take into consideration is that communities complain differently. Many communities come from immigrant or refugee life, and were not quick to call the government to complain.

"We changed our policy on how we replace streetlights, based not on a complaint system but on a quadrant system by dividing the city into quadrants and recognizing that

we could mathematically tell the life-cycle of, at that point, a high-pressure sodium streetlight. We took out what turned out to be an institutional practice that had a [disparate] impact [by] race, even though there wasn't a person saying, 'Let's perpetuate a racist policy.'

Harrell believes the Race and Data Initiative can be used to identify many other intentional and unintentional institutionally racist practices.

## POLICE REFORM

Harrell explained that his life experiences lend themselves to creating a vision that differs from his opponents with regards to police reform.

"It's hard to talk about why police reform matters so much when you haven't experienced unkindness from police," Harrell sayssaid. "It's hard to talk about changing the police culture when you haven't cross-examined police officers on the stand as I have.

"I believe the only way we truly achieve policy reform is through cultural change in the police department. We've already had citizen review panels, use-of-force guidelines in place, and we are under federal consent decree," he said. "Under my leadership, the officers will break the code of silence, we will reestablish what behavior is acceptable and what is not tolerated, and we will be the leaders in this country in DE-escalation.

"I will bring in a team of people to help me, and we will change the narrative with respect to our police department. It will be re imagined and realigned, and we will ask the fundamental question: Does a gun and badge need to be going into places they're currently going in? I will truly change the culture of the police department. It will take a lot of work, but I'm going to do it."

## SMALL BUSINESS REVITALIZATION

The pandemic had a devastating toll on many of Seattle's small businesses. Many that have been around for 20 or 30 years will likely never return, and e-commerce has exacerbated the vulnerability of small brick-and-mortar stores.

"The City of Seattle has to optimize its ability to support small business employers and employees to figure out what a 2022 city should look like in the world of ecommerce," Harrell said. "I am creating a Seattle jobs center as one means toward this strategy.

"A Seattle jobs center will allow small business employers to find employees. Most importantly, it will allow potential employees to find resources, grant opportunities, and training opportunities to align themselves with the field of employment they would like to enter. With the Seattle jobs center, we are going to allow people to pursue their dreams and employers to find the talent they need.

"That should be the city's role: to be the biggest evangelizer of the jobs market," Harrell added. "Post-pandemic, there will be winners and losers in the jobs war. The cities that figure out how best they can win the jobs war will be the better cities in this country."

To learn more about Bruce Harrell,  
visit [www.bruceforseattle.com](http://www.bruceforseattle.com).



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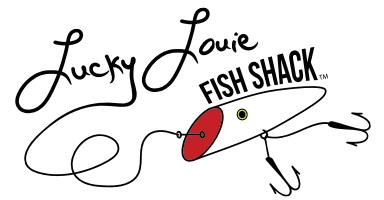


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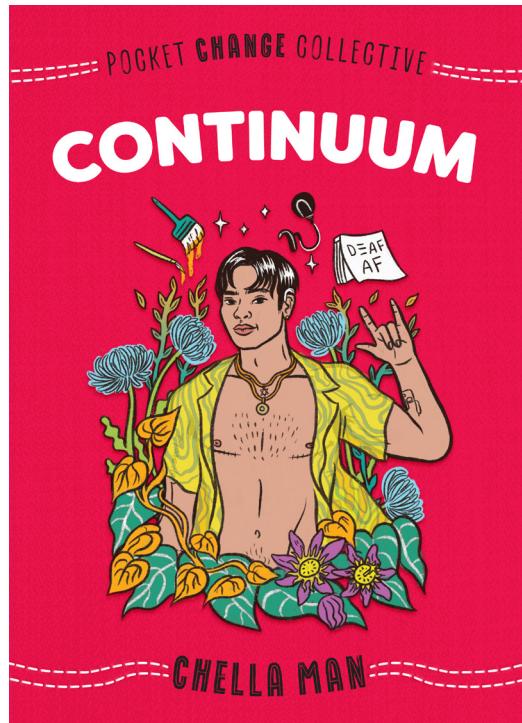


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# GENDERQUEER ARTIST-AUTHOR **CHELLA MAN** WROTE HIS BOOK ‘CONTINUUM’ DURING THE PANDEMIC

WORDS: LAWRENCE FERBER

It's hard enough finding a role model and road map for life as a marginalized individual. Chella Man already knows this, of course. The artist, actor, model and activist is deaf, genderqueer, Jewish, half-Chinese \_and\_ pansexual.

Yet the Brooklyn-based 22-year-old, best known for his art-design collaborations with fashion brand Opening Ceremony and for playing mute superhero Jericho in DC Universe TV series “Titans” in 2019, will ensure that new generations can access his inspiring, multi-layered life experience widely this Pride season through “Continuum.” The book is a revealing autobiography from Penguin

Random House’s YA-geared Pocket Change Collection. Authored by LGBTQ+ and BIPOC activists, other releases include Leo Baker’s “Skate for Your Life” and Alok Vaid-Menon’s “Beyond the Gender Binary.”

The emergence of “Continuum” was serendipitous: Penguin approached Chella about the collection, which included close friends of his like Kimberly Drew, a former social media manager for NYC’s The Met and Vogue writer; Adam Eli, founder of nonviolent direct action group Voices4, and Vaid-Menon, a writer and performance artist. He loved the books’ accessible presentation.



"I got to a point in my life when I realized there have been so many checkpoints, so I wanted to take a moment, reflect and unpack what I've been through," says Chella, who wore cochlear implants, a small electronic device placed in the ears that partially restores hearing, during our recent interview on Zoom.

Written while quarantining at his central Pennsylvania family home during the pandemic with artist and photographer girlfriend MaryV Benoit (during this time, the whole family contracted COVID-19 and recovered, although "my dad got very sick and it was very scary"), "Continuum" sees Chella dive right into his childhood as "Rachel."

"I don't feel like it's a deadname," he says. "I once did, because I internalized other trans individuals' ideas of what their names meant to them, but I'm OK sitting with and being close to the name I was given at birth. If you look at my name now, I actually kept some of it. I took Rachel, cut off the 'ra' and added the little 'la' and here I am: Chella. And because I always still felt connected to what society deems feminine and femininity, I identify as genderqueer and felt I wanted to keep some of that with me."

In "Continuum," Chella recounts going deaf as a child and early gender identity epiphanies, the trauma puberty wreaked in middle school, and accessing first images of LGBTQs, including those of gay men kissing in public and lesbians holding each other. Contributing to the vividness of these memories was the fact Chella kept a diary over the years from which he could cull and repurpose entries. He said writing the book in the same family home he experienced the intense isolation and trauma of his youth was a "blessing and a curse."

"It connected me to memories I wouldn't have otherwise, but at the same time it was very heavy because I felt everything so deeply," he recalls. Referencing the diary entries helped him formulate a fluid story, despite having lived a life that he says has been "extremely non-linear."

"How do you explain systemic oppression to a child? I thought that was interesting," Chella says, "and it encouraged me to look back on things I initially thought were complex to simplify them, and I realized they aren't so complex after all. The world just makes us believe they are."

Later passages in the book cover his move to New York to attend Parsons School of Design (he was admitted to its early acceptance program while still a high school junior), transitioning via top surgery and testosterone — a process he shared at the time via social media and columns for LGBTQ+ digital news platform them. — and his relationship

with MaryV, whom he says was encouraging throughout the process. "She wanted me to express myself freely and share without restriction," he says. "The first time she heard it, I read it to her. She has dyslexia, so I loved being able to see her reactions to each part, and it felt more intimate to be the one to read it to her."

Since completing "Continuum," which Chella Man also illustrated, he has served as an executive producer on Topic's documentary series "Trans in Trumpland" and collaborated with NY genderless streetwear brand Private Policy on a line of ear jewelry that celebrates "the beauty of being deaf" and directed its video promo, which is set underwater and features deaf BIPOC models (50 percent of pre-order profits go to Deaf Queer Resource Center).

"That was a dream come true, because since I was a kid I imagined that vision of, 'How can I let people know how fucking beautiful it is to be deaf?'" he says. "I was surrounded by people who weren't disabled and didn't understand, and I wanted to amplify that and what's more beautiful than being able to communicate underwater?"

Chella is reticent to discuss other upcoming projects, barring a potential zine. About the zine, which is personal to him, he says, "It would be an accumulation of my thoughts or streams of consciousness that's very unfiltered, but not on Instagram because I think Insta isn't the place sometimes, and I'm looking for queer disabled printers to work with and think that could be a very special collaboration." He's also hoping to embark on a book reading tour at schools, bringing visibility and inspiration to any baby Chellas out there.

"I have, actually, this past year, been most privileged to mentor an 11-year-old who is deaf, genderqueer, Jewish and Chinese!" he says, enthused. Every so often, they meet on FaceTime, where Chella mentors the child. "I never thought I'd meet someone like that," he says.



NY-raised entertainment and travel journalist Lawrence Ferber has contributed to publications including *Entertainment Weekly*, *New York Magazine*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Advocate*, *NewNowNext*, *The NY Post* and *TripSavvy*. He also co-wrote/co-created the 2010 gay romcom "Bear City" and authored its 2013 novelization.



# RYAN O'CONNELL WANTS YOU — YES, YOU! — TO TALK MORE ABOUT QUEER PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

A gay man with cerebral palsy: you won't find that kind of important representation just anytime you flick on the TV. Which is why Ryan O'Connell's Netflix show *Special* has been so uniquely refreshing and profoundly revolutionary.

It began as his memoir, entitled *I'm Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves* and then evolved into a full-fledged, semiautobiographical dramedy in 2019. He created it, he stars in it, and he writes it.

And he does so once again in the second and final season, whose episodes have expanded from short bits to sitcom-length servings, with openly gay actor Jim Parsons still producing. During this season, which premiered on May 20, lead character Ryan (who shares his name and cerebral palsy with O'Connell, who plays him) continues his journey to self-fulfillment. That path is lined with hiccups involving an open relationship, topping, and his mother.

I talked with O'Connell about his honest approach to gay sex (and why he thinks most gay sex on TV is "dire"), deciding to incorporate a storyline on the, uh, shitty part of butt play, and how it's important for him to still, after *Special*, create stories about people living with disabilities.

**Chris Azzopardi:** I'm gonna miss "TV Ryan."

**Ryan O'Connell:** Oh, I know, I know. It's a bummer. But, uh, at least you get more time with him for season 2, right?

How're you feeling now that the show has come to an end?

Honestly, it sounds weird to say, but I feel pretty good about it. I mean, obviously, the decision to end the show was not mine, but here's the deal — I'm gonna give you a little blurry timeline of the show. We pitched it in 2015; it took four years to get made. Then it came out April 2019, and it took us five months to get renewed. And then COVID shut us down. [It took] us two years for season 2.

So, as amazing as the show has been, and incredible, it's also kinda been like a bad boyfriend. This has been a part of my life for six years, so because we knew from the jump that this was going to be the last season, we were able to really craft, I think, a really complete and final season.

So, from the storyline perspective, it feels totally right. *Special* has been really incredible, but it's been a really, really difficult show to make, and it feels like it's always hanging on by a thread and, yeah, I think I'm ready [laughs] for a new anxiety moment.

Difficult in the sense of you being so involved in every aspect of the show or...?

Well, no. That I love 'cause I'm a Type A Virgo from hell, so that's where I thrive. I refused to do [15-minute episodes] again, so we had to do a whole new deal, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Everything was really protracted, and it's been a journey with the show, man. She has not been easy!

Listen, boyfriends are work too.

They [are], and they give you amazing orgasms sometimes. So what you're saying is the payoff was worth it in the end? The payoff was totally worth it.

In this season, where do you end, and where does the other Ryan begin?

As the show's gone on, the character of Ryan has become less and less like me, especially in season 2. Season 1, honestly, wasn't really like me either [laughs]. I mean, I was never like this character; I was never this arrested development. I moved

out of my parents' house at 18 right on schedule! Lost my virginity at 17 right on schedule!

What I do relate to with this character of Ryan in seasons 1 and 2 are the emotional themes, like what he's struggling with, this feeling of "is he enough." This struggle with self-worth and independence. That really resonates with me deeply. But in terms of the situations this little goof troop finds himself in, I don't relate to that.

Like, I would never date someone in an open relash who has all these convoluted rules and be like, "Sure, I can see you Tuesday evening, and I'm totally OK with that." I mean, maybe I would've, honestly. I would have done that in my early twenties. But the situation never presented itself to me. But emotionally I get it. I've been through what he's been through.

I'm calling this season "Ryan's journey to being a dom top."

Oh my. Well, at least emotionally, yeah. And actually, you're right, he does top! Oh my god, you're right! [laughs]

How could you have forgotten?

The metaphor is very thinly veiled, I would say. Very thinly veiled.

And I'm just obviously being as literal as possible.

Well, I think it works both ways, baby. I think Ryan has been emotionally and physically bottoming for a lot of people, and this season is all about him coming into his own and asserting what he wants and not apologizing for it. He's not apologizing for taking up space; that's something I really, really relate to.

A couple years ago, I really experienced a shift in terms of realizing how much I was contorting myself to make everyone else around me comfortable while never asking, "Am I comfortable? Do I want to do this?" And then I would see straight, white males waltz around the world with such confidence, engaging their female baristas in nonconsensual conversations about their band, and my blood would boil, because I'd just be like, I can't imagine going into an interaction not fully wondering what the other person is feeling and taking their feelings into account. I feel like I'm so hyperaware of how I'm being perceived and making sure that everyone else around me is OK with who I am.

But I really have learned to let go of that completely, and I just try to walk around with the confidence of a New York straight, white male. I cosplay as one every day. Not at the coffee shop, though. I leave those baristas alone. They don't need any of this, they don't.

They're getting enough on their own.

Exactly, exactly. They don't need to hear about my day, I can tell you that right now.

It sounds like you had a past as a barista...

No! As if I could carry anything, are you kidding me? A barista is a guy with cerebral palsy's worst nightmare. It's like all the things he can't do: hand-eye coordination, like balancing. Oh my god, I would be fired immediately. It would be a lawsuit waiting to happen.

As for the gay sex on Special, it's not the kind of gay sex that's watered the fuck down to make straight people more comfortable, which is why I love it so much.

Yes, it's definitely... you can tell it's written and performed by a gay person. And also, I've been very vocal about how I only hire gay actors to play gay roles, and people are like, "Um, it's called acting, ever heard of it? That's their literal job." And I'm like, "Honey, sweetie, darling, baby, that's not what this is about. I understand, I'm very aware of what acting means, but we don't live in a world where there's an equal playing

field, and that's why I wanna give people opportunities to get parts, because not a lot of people are giving them those opportunities."

And also, from a selfish point of view, it's much easier to shoot a gay sex scene with a gay actor than it is a straight actor. I don't wanna fucking explain the mechanics of gay sex to a straight actor. Life is too short, honey.

Somebody had to say it.

Yeah. But we definitely pushed the envelope. And then we cum all over it for season 2 in terms of sex. Sex is my muse, for better or for worse. I just don't understand why the representation of gay sex has been so dire. It's either hypersexualized and very porny and erotic, or it's done in a tent, off-camera, and you just hear lots of grunting and moaning.

So it was really nice to not do any of that and also not have sex that's cloaked in shame or secrecy. I'm not saying that there's not value to those stories 'cause it is a part of our existence, but I think we've reached a point where I'm like, "OK, I'm ready for us to level up for gay storytelling." I'm interested now in stories that don't revolve around our trauma and our pain, or that include our trauma and pain but also include like, you know, anal sex jokes. We contain multitudes.

Season 2 also explores the pleasures of being gay.

Which there are so many of. You couldn't pay me to be straight; it's horrifying. So I just think it's really, really important that we tell a different kind of story, 'cause I think we've earned it, and I think we're ready.

From what I know, this season was shot entirely during the pandemic, which means the sex scenes were also shot during the pandemic. Is that right?

The first four episodes were shot pre-COVID. So what I'm saying is they were real [laughs]. And then COVID came along and we're like, "Oh no, I guess we have to fake it."

Just kidding! The first four episodes were done pre-COVID. It's so funny watching the first four episodes, 'cause I feel like I have a literal record of the last month of the world before it changed aerobically forever. It's so eerie.

But again, with me and Max Jenkins [who plays Tanner]... Max is a friend of mine, and I've known him for a long time, and there's just a level of comfort between the two of us that, again, is another benefit of just shooting with gay friends. There's this ease that I feel I wouldn't have with some rando straight stranger.

So I don't feel like the pandemic actually made the sex scenes suffer. And I know that some people were cutting sex scenes throughout the pandemic, and I was like, "This is the DNA of the show." Like, I can't. I was like, "I will die on this literal sex hill." Truly. Like, literally die. When we talk about dying for your art, I didn't realize I was going to be really metabolizing that in a literal sense for block two of shooting, but here we were, baby, here we were.

And those sex scenes, even for gay actors, are still pretty choreographed, right?

Yeah, it is. Again, when you're doing it with another gay guy, it's pretty intuitive and very easy to construct, because we've all done it and we've all been there. It's not like "Building a Mystery" by Sarah McLachlan.

On the topic of sex, I want to say that I really appreciate the storyline involving anal sex and poop.

Oh my god, I know. Why has no one talked about that? That's crazy.

Well, this is why we're gonna talk about it. I want to know everything about that bit in the show, and mostly why you

decided to write a storyline involving the part of butt sex so few gay men talk about.

Well, because it happened to me when I was 17, losing my virginity: I shit on my boyfriend-at-the-time's dick and, again, there was no reference point for anal sex in 2004. There just wasn't anything; there was no Netflix series tackling it with care [laughs]. So you kind of had to wing it. And, uh, anal sex was really intense!

I remember the first few times we tried fucking, it hurt too bad 'cause I don't think we even realized lube was a thing. I mean, it was all very weird; it was a DIY affair. Then, finally, when I did my emotional exercises and was ready to do it, then that's when I had the accident and I remember thinking, "Oh my god, is my asshole broken? Is this like a cerebral palsy thing? Like, what the fuck is going on?"

I remember Googling — or I don't even know if there was Google, but whatever it was in 2004 — "Anal. Shit. Sex." Nothing really came up. So I remember feeling a lot of shame about that, and I didn't know about douching or anything like that, so whenever I have to go through something and suffer, I'm always like, "Wow, this is a nice opportunity for someone who is a teenager who may be thinking about having anal sex for the first time to know that this does happen." Shit happens, literally. And you're not freakish; your asshole is not broken. Honey, it's a part of the fabric of our gay-ass lives.

And in the show, you take the shame out of it, which is great.

Yeah, I actually just thought it was an interesting kind of turn for Tanner [Jenkins] to have the sexual misstep, as it were, and have Ryan not respond in a kind of chic, compassionate way, because Tanner's been kind of compassionate with him, and anytime that Ryan kind of acts in an uninvolved way is very interesting to me.

I'm a big advocate that marginalized people exist, but they can also exist as very flawed and not always doing the right thing, 'cause I think, again, we're given this tiny space to exist, but we better be virtuous and be magical and wonderful. And so I thought it was an interesting way to make Ryan sort of the asshole, as it were, in the sexual experience with Tanner. I thought it was just an interesting little wrinkle for their doomed relationship.

Something that I have also never seen on TV: the guy who you meet who fetishizes disability. Were you faced with a situation like that in your own life?

I've never been fetishized, but I've heard about it, and I know that it's a thing. I think they're called "devotees," and I thought it was an interesting way to explore Ryan grappling with his self-worth. So it was really important to me that it was very clear that this is a consensual experience. Ryan's not being sexually assaulted. The guy says, "Is this OK?" and Ryan says yes, because that's a very real thing that we don't talk about, which is basically sex that you're not comfortable having but you don't necessarily have the self-esteem to MacGyver yourself out of.

How do you hope Special has enlightened people within the LGBTQ+ community, and beyond, who haven't really considered the experiences of a queer person with a disability?

I hate the word "normal," 'cause what is normal? But so little is discussed in terms of disability. I feel like disabled people often exist on the fringes of our society, because they are quite literally shut out, based on this world not being accessible on a very basic level.

So I think that the dialogue around disability is happening,

but I still think it's not happening to the level that it should, and I think people feel uncomfortable when talking about disability. I feel like they're worried about saying the wrong thing.

I think with Special, you know, comedy is the best superpower that I have, that I've used throughout my life to get through it. And I think that when you give people permission to laugh, it creates this general ease and comfort.

Ryan is disabled, but you don't have to be disabled to be feeling the things that he's feeling. So I think it's really just important to show a gay character who doesn't fit the physical ideals. I hope that it normalizes disability, and I hope that it adds more texture to the queer experience, because in a lot of ways, TV is gayer than ever. I feel like you can't sell a pilot without including a gay guy in there. But I still think that gay men are rarely allowed to be the complicated main course of the show. I think they're often relegated to being the appetizer. So I think it's really important that we show gay men and [their] rich interior life, not just in the context of them, like, shopping or being comedic relief.

Totally, which is what you do. You accomplish that in season 2 with Ryan. There are moments when he's not particularly likable.

We're not all likable. I just feel like TV exists in this really binary way, where it's either someone is really virtuous or amazing, or they're a fucking asshole. People aren't total assholes, and they're not totally amazing. They exist in between, and I think that's always what I try to show with Ryan and other characters: that, yes, they can act deeply flawed, but they can also be incredible.

Looking ahead, what kind of stories do you want to tell next or be a part of? And in what form: film or television?

Picasso had his Blue Period, and I'm still in my Gay Disabled Period. So I wrote a novel called *Just by Looking at Him*, which is about a gay guy with cerebral palsy who writes for TV. What?! She didn't stray too far for this one! That's being adapted into a movie with Greg Berlanti producing, so I'm gonna be writing that and starring in it, which will be really great.

Then I sold a show to HBO Max called *Accessible*, which is a teen disabled comedy, which I hope gets picked up to series.

Sometimes I feel like, "Should I really kind of dive into disability again?" or "I've already done that," but the fact is that there's so much that has not been explored, and that's what really gets me excited as a storyteller: when you can say things like, "Wow, I've never seen that on TV before."

It's crazy that we're still saying that in 2021. Even though there are approximately 40 million shows on the air, there are things that still have stigma and still have taboo. So I'm only going to be playing in the world of disability for a little bit longer! And we'll see what happens.

*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

Chris Azzopardi is the editorial director of Pride Source Media Group and Q Syndicate, the national LGBTQ wire service. He has interviewed a multitude of superstars, including Cher, Meryl Streep, Mariah Carey, and Beyoncé. His work has also appeared in the New York Times, Vanity Fair, GQ, and Billboard. He can be reached via Twitter @chrisazzopardi.

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# MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

WORDS: JOEY AMATO

## PRIDE JOURNEY



and his father served as Monterey County treasurer. The area is adorned with tributes to Steinbeck, such as statues erected in his honor and buildings bearing his name.)

If you have a chance to stay at the Monterey Plaza, ask for the owner's suite, which comes complete with a baby grand piano, dining table that seats eight, two full bathrooms, and three wrap-around porches. Not to mention unobstructed views of Monterey Bay! We did not even need an alarm, as each morning we were awoken (not too early) by the barks of the sea lions that gather along the coastline.

Monterey is home to a ton of sea life. We had the opportunity to take a guided kayak tour of the bay, given by a company called Adventures by the Sea. During our one-hour excursion, we passed dozens of seals, otters, sea lions, and other marine animals.

The city has a cute downtown, with many locally owned shops and restaurants. If you are in the mood for a pre-dinner drink, swing by Montrio Bistro for one of its signature cocktails. At the time of our visit, California had strict COVID-19 restrictions, so masks were required everywhere, and restaurants were only allowed to offer outdoor dining. But since many have great views of the water, I did not mind dining al fresco.

Schooners Coastal Kitchen & Bar, located in the Monterey Plaza Hotel, features a wonderful selection of seafood entrées. When dining on the water, why not order the specialty? Joey and I began our meal with the fresh catch, which consisted of Morro Bay Pacific Gold oysters, black tiger prawns, and octopus ceviche; I fell in love with the prawns and the homemade cocktail sauce. While Joey decided to go with panini as his main course, I stuck with seafood. One of my favorite dishes is cioppino, which I first had during a visit to San Francisco many years ago; I order every time I can. Each establishment has its own twist on this entrée—Schooners' version contained shrimp, clams, mussels, calamari, and seasonal fish, all in a delicious saffron Dungeness crab broth.

Walking along Cannery Row like taking a walk through history. Many of the old buildings still exist, although they are repurposed into hotels and retail establishments. There are dozens of cute boutiques and hidden gems in every nook

For nearly a decade, Monterey has been on my bucket list of US destinations I wished to visit. The picturesque seaside town always seemed to pop up in my social media feed just when I was in need of a relaxed vacation.

So I decided this would be the year I ventured there. I flew into the San José airport, where I met up with Joey Suarez, a friend and EDM musician who decided to tag along for this journey. It was also Joey's first time visiting Monterey, so we had the opportunity to explore the city for the first time together, which was quite a fun experience.

The first thing we did upon arrival was check in to our hotel, the beautiful Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa, located right on the water in the Cannery Row district, which got its name for having been home to dozens of sardine canneries.

(Cannery Row was also the setting of John Steinbeck's novels *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*. The author was born in nearby Salinas,

it



is



and cranny. Soap Confections makes handcrafted soaps in a variety of shapes and scents, while Global Candle Gallery creates one-of-a-kind candles right in front of your eyes.

Along the way, we stopped at **Coniglio Brothers Italian Deli** for a delicious charcuterie platter. One thing is for sure: they do not skimp on the meat and cheese. There was so much prosciutto that we had some to bring back to our hotel for an afternoon snack. That said, we needed a nice bottle of wine to pair with our leftovers, so we stopped by A Taste of Monterey, a wine market and bistro that offers an extensive collection from Monterey County winemakers.

Since many of the indoor attractions, such as the **Monterey Bay Aquarium**, were still closed due to pandemic restrictions, we had a lot of free time to walk around the town and eat...and boy, did we eat. The Fish Hopper is a family-owned restaurant founded in 1950 that affords stunning views of the bay and incredible cocktails. Since I was on vacation, I went for the toasted coconut colada, made with Skyy pineapple vodka, pineapple juice, a splash of amaretto, and a house piña colada mix. It was the perfect way to enjoy lunch with great company.

To cap off our culinary journey of Monterey, we visited **The Sardine Factory**. Do not let the name fool you: the establishment is one of the most incredible fine-dining experiences I have ever had, all underneath a tent. Although customers are not allowed inside the building (except to use the restroom), we got a private tour of the property, which includes an elaborate wine cellar fit for king (over 2,000 labels

and 20,000 bottles), complete with a custom wooden table large enough to seat 24 guests. As you would expect, the place is known for its extensive wine list, one of the finest in the world; it also offers private wine



lockers for its frequent patrons. I will not disclose all the celebrities whose names adorn the lockers, but I will say one goes by the nickname "the Governor."

I was already in heaven, and dinner had not even begun. We had the great pleasure of meeting two of the owners, one being the head chef. I told him to bring us whatever he wanted. The rest of my party seemed a bit perplexed by this, but having written many dining reviews in my career, I find this request to be not only fun for me but also exciting for the chefs, as they get to prepare their favorite dishes — some of which I probably would not order on my own.

We began with the famous abalone bisque, a smooth seafood soup prepared with bacon, chives, and Madeira wine. Talk about historic: this specialty was served at President Reagan's inauguration. The dish was followed by one of the day's specials, a pan-seared sea scallop over foie gras. I will admit, I am not a big fan of foie gras, but I do love scallops. They paired perfectly together. Next came one of the chef's favorite dishes, linguini carbonara, homemade pasta prepared with Parmesan and Romano cheeses, egg, scallions, chives, pancetta, and black pepper. Growing up in New York, I had eaten this many times, but this was the best I have ever had and my favorite dish of the entire trip.

Chef Cutino decided we had not tried enough, so he brought us his version of surf and turf, which in this case was veal and lobster. To end the evening, he prepared delectable



chocolate-dipped bonbons served over dry ice — which made for great Instagram photos and videos — in addition to his homemade chocolate-Kahlua-cinnamon gelato and "The Factory" spumoni. I am still dieting!

It was the perfect way to end a much-needed vacation by the sea. Being by the water always relaxes me, and of course being surrounded by great people and great food never hurts either.

*Joey Amato is the publisher of Pride Journeys and is the founder of the UNITE brand. Amato resides in Indianapolis, IN with his cat, Cheyenne.*

# #FAKE NEWS

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## STORY #1: CDC ANNOUNCES MASKS OPTIONAL, GLARING AT MASKLESS PASSERBY STILL REQUIRED



Under pressure to clarify its COVID-19 guidelines, the Centers for Disease Control this week announced an update to its recommended precautions: Masks are now optional, but glaring at all maskless passersby will still be required for the foreseeable future.

"We've found that while outside, the risk of transmission between vaccinated individuals is virtually zero, so masks aren't necessary," said CDC spokesperson Daniel Jernigan. "That being said, out of an abundance of caution, it's still a good idea to give major side-eye to anybody who actually follows that advice."

Many medical experts agree with the hateful glances recommended by the CDC, stressing that small actions like washing your hands often and assuming everyone around you is an anti-vaxxer piece of shit are as important now as at the height of the pandemic.

Seattleites seemed to take the new guidance in stride, with people all over the city ditching their masks and heading outside. In Capitol Hill, the streets overflowed with maskless folks enjoying the fresh air, sunshine, and sneering with disgust at their neighbors.

"Oh, the announcement makes me feel a lot better," said Megan Frank, a Wallingford resident, removing her N-95 and trading scowls with a nearby family. "People have been so reckless lately, smiling at me like we aren't still in a pandemic. They'll make a big deal about it, but honestly, I don't mind having to give nasty looks to every single person at Volunteer Park – it's the new normal."

King County Public Health shared the new CDC guidance on their Twitter account, chiming in, "Keep it up, Seattle! And remember: vaccinated or not, fuck you."

## STORY #2: RAINIER BEER UNVEils NEW SEATTLE-THEMED SELTZER FLAVORS GREEN LAKE WATER, DICK'S DELUXE AND GUM WALL



Icnic Seattle beer brand Rainier has recently announced that they are hopping on the red-hot hard seltzer wave, revealing a bevy of new locally inspired flavors including Green Lake Water, Dick's Deluxe and Gum Wall.

"Most of the existing market has cornered the more conventional seltzer flavors like mango and lemon, so we've decided to go in a different direction and highlight the unique flavors that celebrate the city of Seattle, like Dick's Deluxe and Burnt Starbucks Beans," said Rainier spokesperson Harrison Moss. "In addition to our inaugural batch of seltzers, our brewmasters are working around the clock to develop new flavor profiles that evoke the Seattle experience, but we're most excited to premiere Gum Wall later this summer. Each can will have its own unique chewed gum flavor that will surprise and delight. Will you get a hint of stale peppermint? Lingering coffee breath? Gingivitis? The fun is finding out!"

The locally inspired seltzers have been a hit with longtime Seattle residents and transplants alike, who have marveled at the accuracy of the locally sourced flavors.

"One sip of Pike Place Salmon Toss from the variety pack and I feel like a grizzled Seattle fishmonger just slapped my tastebuds with a shimmering sockeye salmon," said Brad Sakamoto, gulping down a fizzy seltzer. "You can really taste notes of lingering seawater and roe. So far I've tried Neighbor's Dancefloor Sweat, Office Dog, Mariners Fan Tears, but I think my favorite so far is Green Lake Water. I don't know how these madmen did it, but it tastes exactly like cyanobacteria!"

The burgeoning seltzer brand also announced it would be commemorating the one-year anniversary of CHOP this summer with a limited time run of its spicy SPD Habanero Pepper Spray Seltzer, which is sure to trample your taste buds and your civil liberties.

# RECIPE

## SHAKE SWIZZLE & STIRTM WITH KATHY CASEY

SERVING UP SUMMERTIME COCKTAILS FOR A CROWD



### HOPPY MELON RITA PUNCH

MAKES 16 – 20 SERVINGS

Beer in margaritas is great, and taking a cue from your favorite cocktails can be a great place to start when making punches. With that in mind, the Hoppy Melon Rita Punch calls for tequila, lots of bright citrus and luscious fresh watermelon, lengthened with

a summer style ale, to add a bubbly kick! Serve it up in tall glasses with a juicy wedge of fresh watermelon for garnish, and you're on your way to beating the heat in delicious style.

- ZEST OF 2 LIMES (ZEST BEFORE SQUEEZING FOR JUICE)
- 1 CUP SUGAR
- 1 BOTTLE (750 ML) SILVER TEQUILA 1 CUP FRESH LIME JUICE
- 1 CUP RUBY GRAPEFRUIT JUICE COCKTAIL
- 1 CUP FRESH ORANGE JUICE
- 2 CUPS DICED FRESH WATERMELON 2 (12 OUNCE) BOTTLES LIGHT AND CRISP SUMMER STYLE ALE GARNISH: FRESH WATERMELON WEDGES



In a large punch bowl (or large container such as a stock pot or pitcher) combine the lime zest, sugar, tequila, juices, and watermelon. Stir to combine well. (At this point you can refrigerate the punch for service up to 3 days in advance) Present in a large punch bowl. Add ale right before serving. Serve over ice in punch cups, or fun margarita glasses.

*Recipe by Kathy Casey Liquid Kitchen®*

Kathy Casey is an award winning celebrity chef, mixologist and known as a pioneer in the bar-chef movement. She is the owner of the Food Studios-Liquid Kitchen a global food & beverage development agency as well as Dish D'Lish, Rel'Lish Burger Lounge and her newest quick-serve concept Lucky Louie Fish Shack featuring NW wild & sustainable seafood served fast and fresh.

# SPARKLING TIKI PUNCH

MAKES 16 – 20 SERVINGS

This punch is bursting with island inspired flavors. A generous portion of sparkling brut added right before you serve will liven up any gathering. Present this tiki tipple in a punch bowl over a big ice ring studded with edible flowers and garnish with an umbrella of course!

To make the syrup: combine syrup ingredients in a medium sauce pan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat- then reduce heat and simmer slowly for about 3 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature before proceeding with recipe. Or you can prepare up to a week in advance and store refrigerated.

To make the punch: in a large punch bowl (or large container) combine the Spiced Syrup, rum, brandy, juices and bitters. Stir to combine well. (At this point you can refrigerate the punch for service up to 3 days in advance) Present in a large punch bowl. Add sparkling wine right before serving. Serve punch over ice. Garnish as your hearts desire!

*Recipe by Kathy Casey Liquid Kitchen®*

# PEACHY TEA PUNCH

MAKES 16 – 20 SERVINGS

Traditionally, rum is the spirit of choice for punches. Made with gin, however, the classic communal libation takes on a strikingly different botanical personality.

With its sunny collection of flavors, Earl Grey tea marries with the gin's floral notes, and lush peach nectar, ruby grapefruit and orange juice add just the right amount of summery sweetness. Fresh lemon adds a welcome hit of tartness, and just-picked mint sprigs tie everything together. Serve this up in mini mason jars for a charming presentation the perfect lazy-afternoon sipper.

To make the syrup: bring water and tea bags to a boil in a medium sauce pan. Then add the sugar, nutmeg and allspice, stirring to dissolve sugar. Remove from heat, let steep 10 minutes, then remove tea bags and cool to room temperature before proceeding with recipe. Or you can prepare up to a week in advance and store refrigerated.

To make the punch: in a large punch bowl (or large container such as a stock pot or pitcher) combine the Tea Syrup, gin, cranberry juice, orange

juice, peach nectar and lemon juice. Stir together and chill until ready to serve. (At this point you can refrigerate the punch for service up to 3 days in advance) Add sliced peaches and lemon to punch before serving. Serve in a punch bowl with an ice ring or in ice-filled glasses or punch cups. Garnish each serving with some of the cut fruit if desired.

*Recipe by Kathy Casey Liquid Kitchen®*

## SPICED SYRUP

- 2 CUPS WATER
- 2 CUPS SUGAR
- 12 EACH CLOVES, CRUSHED
- 1/4 TEASPOON GROUND NUTMEG 1/2 TEASPOON GROUND ALLSPICE 2
- CINNAMON STICKS, BROKEN UP

## PUNCH

- 2 CUPS GOLD RUM
- 2 CUPS BRANDY OR COGNAC
- 1 CUP GUAVA OR PASSION FRUIT
- NECTAR 1 CUP POM POMEGRANATE JUICE
- 1 CUP FRESH ORANGE JUICE
- 1 CUP FRESH LEMON JUICE
- 1 1/2 TEASPOONS PEYCHAUD'S BITTERS
- 1 BOTTLE CHILLED BRUT SPARKLING WINE



## TEA SYRUP

- 3 CUPS WATER
- 3 EARL GREY TEA BAGS
- 1 1/2 CUPS SUGAR
- 1/4 TEASPOON GROUND NUTMEG PINCH OF GROUND ALLSPICE

## PUNCH

- 1 BOTTLE (750 ML) GIN
- 1 CUP CRANBERRY JUICE
- 3/4 CUPS FRESH ORANGE JUICE 3/4 CUP PEACH NECTAR
- 1 CUP FRESH LEMON JUICE
- 2 PEACHES, CUT IN HALF, AND SLICED THIN
- 1 HALVED AND SLICED LEMON GARNISH: FRESH MINT SPRIGS

For more D'Lish recipes check out and Dishing with Kathy Casey Blog or catch her cocktail show Kathy Casey's Liquid Kitchen. Follow Kathy on @KathyCaseyChef on Twitter Facebook Instagram

# THE LAST WORD

## FOUR SIMPLE WORDS

WORDS: ROB SHUTER



Change your life with just four simple words.

At best, that sounds silly. At worst, sounds like a scam or a trick. Maybe a stunt.

Yet that is exactly what my new book, *The 4 Word Answer*, will do.

The *4 Word Answer* is no fairy tale. It is very real. The events and details in the book all happened.

But to say that I created *The 4 Word Answer* isn't exactly accurate. What is true is that it created me. It saved me from the lowest point of my life. In fact, I didn't believe anything could change my miserable life.

Ironically, to the outside world, things couldn't have looked better. I represented some of the biggest stars and brands in the world: Jennifer Lopez, Diddy, Bon Jovi, Alicia Keys, Jessica Simpson, Naomi Campbell, Kate Spade, Esquire Magazine, MAC Cosmetics, Estée Lauder brands, and even British royalty.

But what no one could see was that behind the scenes, everything was falling apart. Everything about me and my life was a big fat lie. I was a phony, a fake, a fraud! Pretending to be someone else, while the real me died a little more each day.

Then, one random morning, after I crawled out of bed hung over, with my head pounding, having no idea how I got home the night before, the solution appeared.

If I could tell you exactly who each of my famous clients were in just four words, why couldn't I do the same thing for myself?

Once I did, I went from a place where I was constantly worrying

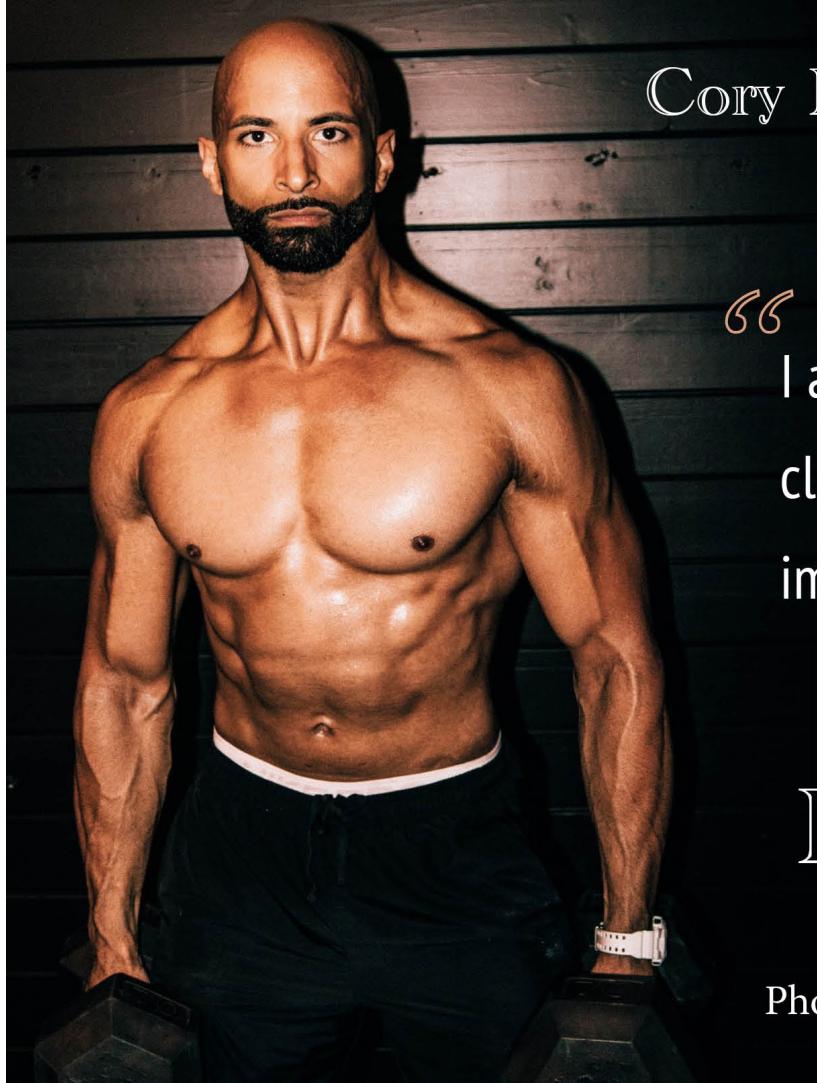
about paying my bills on time to having a savings account with over two years' salary in it. I have transformed from being a person who had lost his voice to becoming the number one entertainment columnist in the world. From someone who couldn't get out of bed in the morning to being a guest on America's number one morning show.

I'm a regular spilling the tea with Wendy Williams, and I'm booked so often on CNN that hunky Chris Cuomo knows my name. When Good Day New York needs a fill-in host, they send a car and driver to take me to the studio on 67th Street. And when VH1 wanted to create its own daily live morning show, *The Gossip Table*, they called me.

My I Heart Radio podcast, "Naughty But Nice with Rob," breaks Apple's top-10 charts on a daily basis, with millions of listeners each year. And I got to play myself on *Days of Our Lives*, even with my English accent!

Every great story begins with just a few words or, to be more precise, the right four words! So, if you are not living the life you want to live, the answer is just four words away. Who are you in four words?

*Rob Shuter is a nationally known gossip Columnist, Naughty, but Nice. Rob has appeared on Wendy Williams, CNN and others. Check out his book, The 4 Word Answer: Who Are You in 4 Words? available on Amazon.*



Cory Foster, GM / NASM CPT

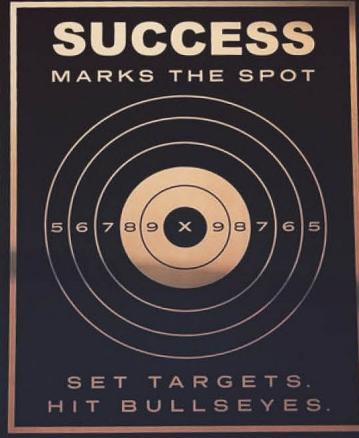
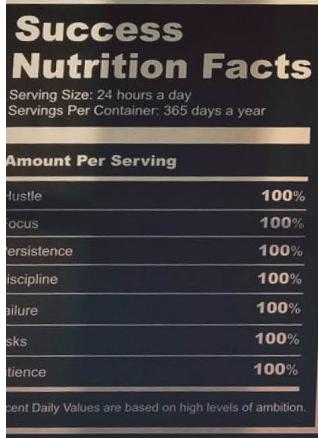
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