

LGBTQ HISTORY MONTH

Li Shiu Tong



Li Shiu Tong and Magnus Hirschfeld at the 1932 conference for the World League for Sexual Reform in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Photo by E. Ekan. Wellcome Collection via Wikimedia Commons.

The man behind Magnus Hirschfeld

By Jason Villemez

When Chinese medical student Li Shiu Tong met Magnus Hirschfeld in Shanghai during Hirschfeld's 1931 world tour, their relationship—in

which Li accompanied and cared for the famed sexologist across continents and the final years of his life—fell quickly into place. Li attended St. Johns University, which ran classes in English and prepared students for life in the international sphere. Grow-

see **TONG**, page 2



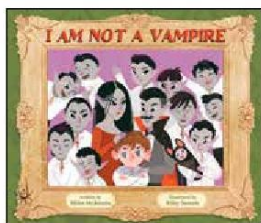
8 Spooky New LGBTQ+ Books for Halloween

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

Get your kids (and yourself) ready for Halloween with these recent LGBTQ+-inclusive books for all ages about witches, vampires, werewolves, demons, and other spooky beings.

Picture Book

"I Am NOT A Vampire," by Miles McKenna, illustrated by Riley Samels (Little Bee): This tale by Goosebumps actor McKenna stars a young child whose family are vampires—but he doesn't feel very vampire-like. One night, however, he is transformed—and affirmed by his family in his new iden-



tity. The story, published in partnership with LGBTQ+ media advocacy organization GLAAD, could be read as a kind

see **MOMBIAN**, page 5

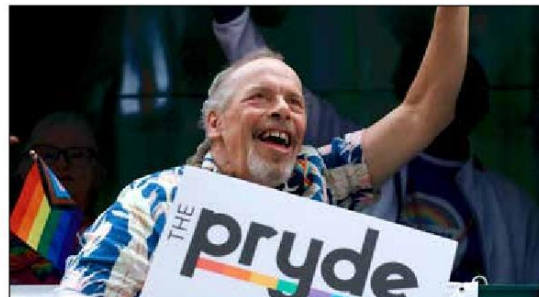
GBH Documentary Spotlights LGBTQ+ Elders' Resilience at Historic Boston Housing Community

Living in Pryde examines how residents of New England's first LGBTQ+-welcoming senior housing navigate past struggles and present threats

By Bay Windows Staff

GBH News' *Living in Pryde*, a 40-minute documentary exploring the lives of LGBTQ+ seniors at a groundbreaking Boston housing community is now available to watch online. You can

see **PRYDE**, page 7



Eddie Whitman, a resident of the Pryde, celebrates Boston's Pride parade in 2025. Screenshot via "Living in Pryde."

LGBTQ+ Movement Leader Tony Hoang to Receive 2025 Spirit of Justice Award

Submitted by GLAD Law

Annual Spirit of Justice Award Dinner in Boston Nov. 6.

New England-based GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law), one of the nation's leading LGBTQ+ legal rights organizations, will present its 2025 Spirit of Justice Award to Tony Hoang, executive director of Equality California (EQCA), for his visionary, influential, and intersectional leadership in the movement for LGBTQ+ equality. Hoang will receive the award at the

see **HOANG**, page 4

"Local leaders like Tony Hoang power the LGBTQ+ movement—working on the ground to identify needs in their communities, marshalling the resources to meet them through innovative programs and policy, and contributing to the playbook to expand protections and support for LGBTQ+ people around the country," said Ricardo Martinez, GLAD Law's Executive Director. "As leader of the country's largest LGBTQ+



Tony Hoang. Photo courtesy of GLAD Law.

Supreme Court Considers Conversion Therapy

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

The argument before the U.S. Supreme Court this morning (Tuesday, October 7) revisited the days between the 1950s and 1970s when the psychiatric profession considered homosexuality to be a mental disorder. CNN News' headline boldly declared after-

wards that the "Supreme Court [was] prepared to rule against conversion therapy ban." But the far-ranging discussion—from suicide and banning pitbulls in parks to speech in support of terrorism and electro-shock therapy—left no clear sense of how the justices might rule, other than their well-established political leanings.

The case before the Court was

Chiles v. Salazar (Colorado), asking whether a state law that bans therapists from using conversion therapy on minors violates the First Amendment of therapists. The state law in question was Colorado's Minor Conversion Therapy Law, passed in 2019. The law prohibits a physician or thera-

see **SCOTUS**, page 4



"So many closeted men in the Republican party. The people who want government out of their lives are obsessed with controlling other people's love, bedrooms while lying about their own. We see you, we see them, and guess what? If you're a hypocrite, I'm gonna out you."

- Don Lemon names names, including such alleged self-loathing gays as Mike Johnson, Benny Johnson, Lindsey Graham, and Tim Scott. As I always say, never piss off a gay man with a mike.

Public domain photo, via Wikimedia Commons.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Tong

Continued from page 1

ing up in a wealthy family with a banker father who supported his academic pursuits, he had ambitions to study abroad and a sharp interest in Hirschfeld's work on sexuality. The 63-year-old Hirschfeld, who was one of the first public advocates for LGBTQ+ people and who campaigned against laws restricting homosexuality, had a reputation for fancying younger men socially. It would have been career suicide, and likely worse, to admit to any intimate desires beyond that.

In 1931, being openly gay meant being cut off from society. Finding and keeping employment would have been nearly impossible. Social circles, though expanding, were found only behind closed doors. And many countries—including America, which Hirschfeld traversed before he met Li—had strict laws regarding homosexuals, including denying them entry at borders, imprisonment or even death.

So the men's introduction, after Hirschfeld spoke to a group of Chinese feminists at an apartment complex, began with a professional communion rather than personal: Li offered to help Hirschfeld, who was German, Jewish, and 40 years his senior, navigate China.

Author Laurie Marhoefer, in her book "Racism and the Making of Gay Rights," which chronicles Hirschfeld and Li's journeys together and apart, wrote: "At that first meeting, Li made Hirschfeld a very generous offer that defined their relationship for its duration and transformed both of their lives. Hirschfeld wrote later: 'He offered himself to me, after my first lecture in Shanghai, as a 'companion' and 'protector,' to take care of me and help me wherever I might want to travel in China, in particular to stand by my side as a Chinese interpreter.'"

Li's services to Hirschfeld quickly expanded beyond telling audiences about the doctor's studies on topics such as hormones, birth control and homosexuality. The 24-year-old, whose father hoped would one day become as famous as the man he assisted, did everything including booking hotels, operating lecture slides, fetching medicine, and nursing Hirschfeld through illnesses, including malaria. His service also expanded beyond one country. When Hirschfeld's time in China came to an end, Li left with him aboard a Dutch ship heading for Manila.

"After I assisted him through China," Li wrote

in an unpublished manuscript read by Marhoefer, "he offered a scholarship to study medicine in Germany and to continue to assist him around the world to investigate human sexual behavior. My qualification was that he needed a hard-working medical student who would live a long life to continue his work. He thoroughly searched my work habits and was told that my grandparents lived up to around ninety years of age. I jumped at the offer."

Li spent the next two years with Hirschfeld, going from the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, India, Palestine, and eventually to a European continent on the brink of a Nazi takeover. In those countries, with his young assistant in tow, Hirschfeld did interviews, gave lectures, and appeared on radio programs to share his expertise. They visited remote towns and red-light districts, meeting people of all backgrounds, not just the educated and well-off. In India, the two men stayed with Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of India's independence movement, who later became the country's first Prime Minister.

By the time they got to Greece in March 1932, Hirschfeld's friends had warned him not to return to Berlin. Antisemitism was rising, and enemies of Hirschfeld had begun attacking him, both via the press, with one paper calling his work "Jewish propaganda," as well as via mailed death threats. So he and Li flitted between hotels in Vienna and later Zurich for the remainder of the year. Also that year, the two men co-authored a paper and presented it at a World League for Sexual Reform conference in Czechoslovakia. The paper featured ideas including "research on intersexuality" and "liberation for those affected from severe and antiquated laws," and it is one of the rare accounts of Li's academic achievements, though it's unknown if any copies still exist.

In 1933, Li and another of Hirschfeld's mentees, Karl Giese, snuck Hirschfeld, whose passport had expired and who wanted to distance himself further from Nazi Germany, into France. The three first settled in Paris, where Hirschfeld had secured a book contract and hoped to rebuild his Institute for Sexual Science (which had been destroyed by the Nazis), but Giese's subsequent arrest for public indecency in a bathhouse, coupled with a former colleague's denunciations, harmed Hirschfeld's reputation further. He fled Paris with Li in December 1934, moving south to Nice, where he remained until his death.

From the time Li departed China with Hirschfeld in 1931 until arriving in Nice, the

27-year-old had paused his formal education. He thought of studying in the United States, and even offered to pay for Hirschfeld's passage with him, but Hirschfeld thought himself too old for such a transition. So after helping Hirschfeld settle in, Li decided to enroll at the University of Zurich, which would allow him to continue his studies while being near enough to his mentor. Sadly, six weeks after he left, the man to whom Li dedicated four years of his life physically, professionally and socially, passed away. Hirschfeld, whose later years had been rife with health problems, died on May 14, 1935—his 67th birthday. Li returned to Nice soon after.

Physical records of Hirschfeld and Li's relationship contain no indication that the two were ever lovers. But subtextual evidence in various photographs and writings hints that the two were intimately connected. In Hirschfeld's journal, which Li saved until his own death in 1993 and which Marhoefer transcribed in their book, the doctor wrote: "I am highly reluctant to do without his true devotion and his for the most part very charming company (which however is not seldom disrupted by quite temperamental, nearly hysterical petulance). On the whole, I could not have a more beloved, sunnier, more helpful person around me." Shades of two bickering, loving companions abound.

In his will, Hirschfeld designated Li as the person who would carry on his work in sexology, and it was made clear that any inheritance was not to be spent on personal expenses. Li accepted the charge, though not without concern, and took back to Zurich many of Hirschfeld's books, papers, journals, photographs and death mask.

After his mentor's death, Li tried to resume his studies. But like anyone who loses a spouse or someone equally close, the shape of his life had dissolved, and building it back up proved difficult. The privileges Hirschfeld enjoyed due to race, education and notoriety did not transfer to Li. With the Nazi ascent nearly complete in Europe, he left Zurich in 1940 and attended graduate school at Harvard for several years before going to Washington D.C. until the war's end. In 1958, while he was back in Switzerland, a German court made contact with him regarding claims against Hirschfeld's estate, but he wanted nothing to do with it. He lived in Hong Kong from 1960 until 1974, and then made one final move to Vancouver, where members of his family lived. Few records exist of his activities, profession or research during those decades.

Li never completed any degrees in higher edu-

cation. When he passed away in 1993, nearly 60 years after Hirschfeld, much of what he'd preserved of the sexologist's work had been thrown in the garbage, saved only by a neighbor who'd stopped to look through the bin. Another item rescued by the neighbor was an unfinished manuscript of Li's which contained bits of an autofictional narrative coupled with sexology research showing, among other things, that Li favored ideas including gender being mutable, homosexuality being shaped by environment rather than genetics (a stark difference from Hirschfeld's views), that same-sex couples be allowed to adopt children, that transgender people were more prevalent than widely believed, and that bisexuals outnumbered heterosexuals (another break from Hirschfeld).

The manuscript also revealed that Hirschfeld warned Li not to translate any of his work, due in part to the controversy and potential persecution it would bring. Over the decades that Li outlived Hirschfeld, risks of such persecution diminished as LGBTQ+ visibility increased and civil rights were won, though many countries, including the United States, still criminalize aspects of LGBTQ+ life that Hirschfeld advocated for more than a century ago.

The personal effects recovered from the Vancouver trash bin wound up in the care of the Magnus Hirschfeld Society, whose director in 2003, Ralph Dose, flew to Canada to collect them from Li's neighbor. Dose also met with members of Li's family to secure Hirschfeld's books, which they hadn't thrown out, as well as to learn more about the doctor's protegee.

"When Ralf Dose met members of Li's family almost a decade after Li's death," Marhoefer wrote, "they recalled that Li was a solitary person, without many friends, who spent much of his time with his books and manuscripts, aside from the sports things he liked to do, such as play tennis. Yet perhaps he had a social life his family did not know about; many queer people set up their lives in that way."

Magnus Hirschfeld shaped Li Shiu Tong's life more than Li shaped Hirschfeld's. Such would have been expected from a young student in the company of an established and world-renowned doctor. But Li's work with Hirschfeld as confidant and preservationist, along with his own research on sexuality, are worth remembering. And beyond the research, Li and Hirschfeld's relationship served as an example of gay male life in 1930: controlled, calculated and largely hidden, but ever present and meaningful, just as it is today.

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October 16, 2025



Too Much of a Good Thing?

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

Back in the aughts/'00s and teens/'10s, when I had a research job at Lesley University and later worked at Endicott College, time felt precious, my days busy and productive. After a full day in my Porter Square Office, I'd head over to the local gym in Medford. After a quick workout, I'd pick up something for dinner, head home, and then prepare my writing classes, which I taught once or twice a week.

My "day job" doing educational research had its moments, but after ten or fifteen years of doing the same thing, I looked forward to moving on and letting go of the confines of the 9-5 grind. So, just before turning 60, I left my job, ditched my daily commute, and focused on the work I wanted to do, teaching memoir-writing, telling stories, and writing essays.

Once Covid hit in 2020, I was reduced to teaching online and feeling isolated in my one-bedroom apartment. Suddenly I had way too much time on my hands and no one to spend it with. The next year, in the fall of 2021, I decided to move into a communal house on Beacon Hill—to live with 18 others, most of whom were half my age, or less.

The Beacon Hill Friends House is a Quaker-connected intentional community, where I'd lived for two years in the mid-'90s. Back then, I was in my thirties, going to Northeastern part-time, and living at the House was a great way to meet other young people. Now, in my sixties, I was the oldest man in the community. But community life filled my time and my social calendar -- Quakers are big on committees, and I got involved in house activities, planning social gatherings, doing my weekly chores, interviewing prospective residents, and just hanging out with my younger friends.

But the Friends House is designed for people in transition, with a maximum stay of four years. Many residents leave earlier, and after a turbulent third year in which conflict spread through the House, I decided to leave, too. Now I'm back in my small apartment in Medford, adjusting to living alone again in my late sixties.

I'm living with a conundrum. I have both too little time and too much. Too little: I'm 68, and though my last name literally means "live long" in German, men in my family usually don't. (My fa-

ther died at 61, his father was 65, and my younger brother was 56). So, I want to make the most of now/today/this week, month, and year. Yet I often feel like I have too much unstructured time. Lately, I've been spending too many hours doom-scrolling on my phone, engrossed and grossed out by the constant drama unfolding in Washington. Every day there's a new grift, a new crisis created by Trump, and a new threat to our teetering democracy.

I veer between scanning progressive pundits on Bluesky for the latest outrages and watching reels of cat videos, contestants on the Voice, or skits from Saturday Night Live. Then I feel guilty for wasting time, squandering a precious resource while knowing that my life/all our lives flow in only one direction.

Sometimes I feel like Mildred Montag, the fireman's wife in Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*, who is transfixed by technology and lives her life absorbed in the dramas taking place on her TV screen, disconnected from the real world right in front of her.

I'm not a total couch potato. I've been traveling, doing my one man show at Fringe Festivals in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Elgin, Illinois, teaching a writing class, and meeting with a tutor to re-learn American Sign Language. (I taught deaf children in the '80s and worked as a sign language interpreter in the '90s, but after 25 years away, my signing skills are rusty).

But I think of all I got done in my forties and fifties, balancing my job with part-time teaching, writing a show, and finishing a book. Of course I had more energy back then, but I'm still capable of working out, teaching, and writing.

There's a certain hubris in my advanced practice of procrastination, as if I had all the time in the world, while knowing that I don't. I want to use that time more effectively, to make the most of the days I have left, however long or short they may be.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston. He will be performing his one-man show, "It's Now or Never," at Morrill Memorial Library in Norwood on Saturday November 1 at 1 PM. Register (free) at: <https://norwoodlibrary.assabetinteractive.com/calendar/judah-leblang-presents-its-now-or-never/>

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SCOTUS

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pist from using conversion therapy on any young person under 18.

The Alliance Defending Freedom challenged the Colorado law's prohibition on "talk therapy," saying a Colorado Springs therapist named Kaley Chiles, who identifies as Christian, wants to administer "talk therapy" to minors who are struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity. The law, says the Alliance, violates Chiles' First Amendment right to free speech.

Conversion therapy is an umbrella term to describe efforts to change a person's sexual orientation, same-sex sexual activity, or gender identity from LGBTQ+ to heterosexual. Practitioners of such therapy use not only talk but also electroshock therapy and forced vomiting, among other things. Some studies have indicated the treatment often leads the minors to attempt suicide.

On three occasions, the Supreme Court has declined to review similar legal challenges to conversion therapy bans—in California, New Jersey, and Washington State. Some federal appeals courts have ruled, like the Tenth Circuit did in Chiles, that "talk therapy" is "incidental" to conversion therapy. Other circuits have ruled it is protected speech.

In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled against a California law requiring family services clinics to make women aware of how to access abortion services. The *NIFLA v. California* decision, written by Justice Clarence Thomas, said the requirement plainly violated the First Amendment rights of the clinics that opposed abortions. But the decision also noted that the Supreme Court has "upheld regulations of professional conduct that incidentally burden speech."

This year, it took up the Alliance's challenge to the Colorado ban and the Tenth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruling last year that said Chiles and her attorneys failed to show the Colorado

law "lacks neutrality" or that it was targeted at therapists whose religious beliefs oppose homosexuality.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor noted near the top of the hour-plus argument that Chiles was an "unusual case." It was clear, she said, that the law did not have a chilling effect on therapists because—prior to the Alliance pressing its challenge—the Colorado law had not been enforced against any therapists.

"Why do you call that an imminent threat?" asked Sotomayor. Typically, the Supreme Court takes only cases where the threat of enforcement or irreparable harm is imminent.

Alliance Chief Legal Counsel James Patterson said therapist Chiles has "had credible threats of enforcement," though he did not provide details.

Sotomayor told Patterson that studies have shown conversion therapy "does harm to people emotionally and physically."

Many justices seemed to be interested in a question raised by the Trump administration's Deputy Solicitor General Hashim Mooppan, who noted that, before 1973, the medical establishment considered same-sex orientation and behavior to be a mental disorder. Mooppan asked the court to imagine if a state had passed a law prior to 1973 that said therapists could not provide talk therapy to minors who sought to become comfortable with their same-sex feelings or identity.

Mooppan and the Department of Justice submitted a brief in support of the therapist and against the Colorado law. It said the Colorado law was "muzzling one side of an ongoing debate in the mental-health community about how to discuss questions of gender and sexuality with children."

The state of Colorado's brief said the law allows therapists to engage in a wide range of therapies for minors regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity, "including minor patients who do not wish to act on their sexual attractions for religious or any other reasons." The only thing that the law prohibits therapists from doing," said

Colorado's brief, "is performing a treatment that seeks the predetermined outcome of changing a minor's sexual orientation or gender identity, because that treatment is unsafe and ineffective."

One particularly interesting brief, in support of the Colorado law, was filed by five parents of children who were given conversion therapy. Two of the five parents said they lost their children to drugs and suicide because of the therapy. Another brief, filed by nine former promoters of conversion therapy, said they "cannot take back the harm they caused, but they recognize their unique obligation and opportunity to prevent future damage by sharing what they learned through decades of failed attempts to change sexual orientation and gender identity." Their brief says conversion therapy is "fundamentally ineffective" and has caused "documented psychological harm, including increased suicide risk...."

Sotomayor suggested the Alliance was really relying on an argument about what level of review should be applied to the Colorado law; the Alliance wanted courts to evaluate the ban on "strict scrutiny," the most challenging one for laws to meet. But that argument, she said, should be decided below, then appealed to the Supreme Court.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson seemed to agree, noting that that Supreme Court should "give lower courts a chance to evaluate" what level of review was appropriate.

Even though every reputable medical professional association has discredited the practice of conversion therapy, the Court Tuesday seemed to struggle with the lack of solid clarity about various studies and even how its own precedents might play into this case.

Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson released a statement after argument, saying the Court "must allow states to hold licensed providers accountable to the recommendations of every mainstream medical and mental health association in this country."

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Hoang

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statewide civil rights organization, Tony brings the strategic leadership needed to fight the relentless attacks on our community, especially transgender and nonbinary youth. In a period of increasing political opposition to LGBTQ+ equality, Equality California has steadfastly worked to safeguard important civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ Californians. Tony's leadership to proactively secure fairness, safety, and dignity for LGBTQ+ people shows us we can create opportunities to advance justice even in a hostile climate. We're proud to honor him with this year's Spirit of Justice Award."

The Spirit of Justice Award recognizes individuals whose courage, vision, and impact embody the fight for justice.

Hoang has dedicated his career to advancing LGBTQ+ rights and has served as executive director of Equality California since 2021. His tenure with the organization dates to 2009, when he began as a field intern. He then held multiple roles including database and volunteer manager, director of operations, chief of staff, and managing director before his current position. The son of Vietnam War refugees, Hoang is the first Asian

American person to lead ECQA, bringing with him an understanding of the marginalized intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and immigration status in the U.S. Under his leadership, ECQA has significantly boosted its budget, staff, and programming—particularly its advocacy and racial justice initiatives.

California has long been a leader in protecting LGBTQ+ rights and contributing to the national conversation on equality. In recent years, as anti-LGBTQ+ extremists across the country—and now with the full support of the Trump administration—have worked to undermine supportive policies—particularly for transgender and nonbinary youth, EQCA has prioritized efforts to shore up protections for LGBTQ+ Californians. They have worked to pass laws strengthening protections for LGBTQ+ students, protecting access to transgender and reproductive health care, ensuring safe and equitable access to homeless services, expediting the legal process for transgender people to obtain appropriate identity documents, and supporting LGBTQ+ families.

"It's an honor to receive this recognition from GLAD Law, an organization that has spearheaded some of the boldest strategies and most significant advances in our movement to date, despite ever-present and powerful opposition," said Tony Hoang. "With our democracy under strain and hard-

won rights increasingly under attack, LGBTQ+ advocates across the country must continue to safeguard the gains we've made, model ways to make progress, and speak directly to the majority of Americans who believe everyone deserves equal opportunity, without discrimination, and who can help us expand protections for LGBTQ+ people regardless of the state where they live."

In addition to leading EQCA, Hoang also serves on the board of the California Community Foundation.

Now in its 26th year, the Spirit of Justice Award Dinner is GLAD Law's flagship event. Past Spirit of Justice Award recipients include Jennifer Finney Boylan, Kylar Broadus, Chai Feldblum, the plaintiffs in GLAD Law's landmark *Goodridge v. MA DPH* marriage lawsuit, the Honorable Eric H. Holder Jr., Tony Kushner, Massachusetts Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and his family, Bishop Gene Robinson, Nadine Smith, Urvashi Vaid, and Phill Wilson. The 2024 honorees were Shannon Minter, legal director of the National Center for LGBTQ Rights; and Jennifer Levi, GLAD Law's senior director of transgender and queer rights, two of the country's foremost LGBTQ+ civil rights attorneys and experts on transgender rights litigation.

Learn more: www.gladlaw.org/events/2025soj

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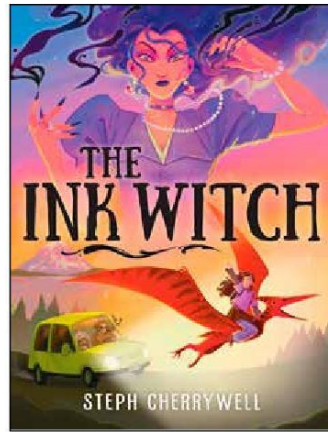
Continued from page 1

of queer allegory or as a more general one about self and acceptance. Either way, it carries a valuable message.

Chapter Books

"How to Win the Gruesome Games" (Villains Academy #3), by Ryan Hammond (Simon & Schuster): Werewolf Bram is back for his third adventure at the Villains Academy, where he and his friends are preparing for the Gruesome Games, "a field day for villains." With his two dads and the school's ghostly founders looking on, can Bram be bad enough to win in a game with no rules? The story is more silly than macabre; Bram is an engaging protagonist with a penchant for woolly sweaters, and other characters are amusingly over the top. We also get a sweet glimpse at how Bram's dad's relationship started.

"Witchycakes #1: Sweet Magic" and "Witchycakes #2: Changing Magic", by Kara LaReau, illustrated by Ariane Moreira (Random House): In this sweet new series, nonbinary witch-in-training Little Blue helps out their Mama Moon at the magical Witchycakes bakery. Each chapter takes Blue and their seagull familiar on a gentle adventure in their seaside town, where they use their magic to help neighbors (including one with two dads). Readers of many identities should enjoy the sweet series, although it may particularly resonate with nonbinary ones seeking tales with nonbinary protagonists that aren't "about" gender or being



nonbinary.

"Cooking Contest!" (Batcat #3), by Meggie Ramm (Abrams): Batcat and ghost friend Al are back in the third volume of this delightful early reader graphic novel series. This time, Batcat and Al (who happen to be nonbinary) are looking forward to Spooky Isle's fall Night Festival. Al wants to win the cooking contest—if only they can decide on a recipe. The eating contest is more Batcat's style. In the end, the duo learn that there are many ways to win, and that having a friend is one of them. Ramm creates a perfect balance of spooky and adorable, seasoned with puns and charm.

Middle Grade

"Beetle & the Chimera Carnival," by Aliza Layne (Atheneum): In this graphic novel sequel to the Stonewall Award honoree "Beetle & the Hollowbones," goblin Beetle, skeleton Kat, and ghost Penny are getting ready for the Chimera Carnival, where giant dragons showcase their magic. But one dragon gets injured, others are disappearing, and Beetle's magic is changing her in strange ways. Kat's overbearing parents are back in town, too, with a bias against her and Beetle's burgeoning romance. Can the friends figure out what's happening to their town and their selves and set things right? Once again, Layne blends fun and original world-building with relatable (albeit inhuman) characters. A thread about coming out both individually and as a couple is nicely integrated with the larger story.

"The Ink Witch," by Steph Cherrywell (Little, Brown): Bringing to mind classic tales from Ron-

see MOMBIAN, page 7



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In case anybody missed it, **Taylor Swift** revealed that **Travis Kelce** has “hot gay friends”. Of course, she didn’t just say it—if she had, it would have been our opening quote. Here’s what happened. Taylor was on Hits Radio in the UK. She was talking about her song “WiSh LiSt” (how **Ke\$ha** of her) which has a lyric, “Please, God, bring me a best friend who I think is hot.” She flashed her engagement ring to indicate she had such a friend. Then co-hosts **James Barr** asked, “Does he have any hot gay friends?” Taylor said “Yeah...I also have a lot of those.”

Someone else with a whole lotta gay friends is the much-beleaguered **Kristin Chenoweth**. Let’s skip past the whole ugly-cry-over-Kirk thing—been there, done that, posted the video. Anyway, Kristin has a whole lot going on. First up is that Broadway musical “The Queen of Versailles”, written for her by **Stephen Schwartz**...and his hair (speaking of Kirk). Should the musical not work out (nothing is a sure thing on Broadway), Chen has a contingency plan. She is in the midst of developing yet another sitcom—this time for NBC. “Stumble” finds Krissy leading a church choir as part of her community service. The writer is **Alissa Neubauer**, who helmed “Call Me Kat”—another show that never found an audience. A white version of “Sister Act”? How on point.

Of course, our gay patron saint is **Dolly Parton**, who has had some health issues since the passing of her husband, **Carl Dean**. Not only has she cancelled her Las Vegas residency this December, she also bowed out of the Academy Governors Awards, where she was to have received the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award. Then her sister **Freida** (no, not the “Band of Gold” Freda) made a curious statement: “Last night, I was up all night praying for my sister, Dolly. Many of you know she hasn’t been feeling her best lately. I truly believe in the power of prayer, and I have been led to ask all of the world that loves her to be prayer warriors and pray with me.” That set off a firestorm of speculation. So, Freida issued another statement as damage control. “I didn’t mean to scare anyone or make it sound so serious. She’s been a little under the weather and I simply asked for prayers because I believe so strongly in the power of prayer.” Perhaps, but I don’t think she’d ask people worldwide to pray if Dolly just had the sniffles, or a hangnail! “It was nothing more than a little sister asking for prayers for her big sister.”

Since that didn’t help, Dolly appeared—as if an apparition at Lourdes, except this was Instagram! She wanted to address the health rumors with an “impromptu video message” (and if you buy that, stop reading immediately). Looking quite sprightly, she admitted to having “some problems” and that she had “let a lot of things go that I should have taken care of”. She says she’s having “a few treatments” at Vanderbilt Medical Center outside of Nashville. She welcomed the prayers, but added, “I’m not ready to die yet—I don’t think God is through with me, and I’m not done working.” If anyone has earned the right to take a breather, it’s Dolly. Get well soon. But if you really want to rest, take a tip from Billy (as so many others have)—sleep on your back!

When is a farewell not a farewell? First, I was dealing with the fact that **Cyndi Lauper** did her farewell at the Hollywood Bowl with **Cher**, and I missed it. Then I was heartened that CBS/Paramount captured the event. So color me confused when I read that she’s gonna play Vegas! Here’s the headline verbatim: “Cyndi Lauper Announces Las Vegas Residency, Following TV Special and Wrap-Up of Farewell Tour.” Seems to me like she’s following in Cher’s footsteps! Cyndi did a very **Belinda Carlisle** thing (we’ll get to her in a minute) and clarified that the farewell was to touring—not to doing a few concerts here and there. You say potato, I say ka-ching!

In the past, Belinda Carlisle has announced the end of **The Go-Go’s** career no fewer than five times. Now she comes out and says, “It’s gotten ridiculous—we announce a farewell and then something comes up so we’re back. I’m never saying never again.” While this is not a Go-Go’s story, it’s been announced that the mega-hot British boy band **Take That** will be doing a stadium tour. And who is their opening act? Belinda Carlisle, that’s who!

You know what I’m against? Performers who do more than two shows at the same venue and calling it a residency. A residency is when you move to a city, get an apartment, and live there by day and work by night. Kinda like what **Sam Smith** had planned once the refurbished Castro Theatre opens in February 2026. He announced two weeks of four shows each for his “To Be Free” stint in SF. I’d call that residency-adjacent. Those sold out pretty quickly, so he added another four. Poof—sold out. As of this writing, he’s up to 16 shows over four weeks. That is definitely a residency. He’s doing a similar schedule at Warsaw in Brooklyn over October, November and December. To get the most up-to-date schedule, check out SamSmithWorld.com.

Since we’re talking New York, you know that Halloween is right around the corner. And this will mark the 10th time the delightful **Jay Armstrong Johnson** has presented his wildly popular “I Put A Spell On You” benefit to raise money for the Ali Forney Center. Seeing Jay as Winifred Sanderson—well, you can’t put a price on that. This year’s show will take place on October 20th at Webster Hall in NYC. You can get tickets and information at SpellOnYouNYC.com or JayArmstrongJohnson.org.

Last year marked the 25th year **Charles Busch** and his merry band performed his play, “Times Square Angel”. Since this is typically when tickets go on sale (and sell out in minutes), he made the following announcement. “Last year marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of performing the play as a one night staged reading. To **Carl Andress** and I, that seemed like an achievement to be proud of and time to call it a wrap. At the risk of sounding like **Anton Walbrook** at the end of the movie, ‘The Red Shoes’, we won’t be performing ‘Times Square Angel’ anymore. Nothing goes on forever and time and the vagaries of age and the prosaic details and exhaustion of doing theater on a shoestring have gone into this decision. What a joyous ride it’s been...To those who have joined us all these years, thank you so much for your loyalty and enthusiasm. What a joy it’s been to share this play and experience with you. And to our cast and band, designers and crew, my love, gratitude and admiration. A special thank you to Theater for the New City and the indomitable **Crystal Fields** who for six decades has given so many theater artists a home. Thank you all for twenty-five years of ‘Times Square Angel’. I exclaim this from my heart, truly, and sincerely, bless you, darlings!” In the words of Belinda Carlisle, never say never...

By the by, the print edition of Busch’s play “The Tale of the Allergist’s Wife and Other Plays” turned up at the recent Julien’s Auction of Joan Rivers’ belongings. The volume was autographed by Charles to Auntie Joan in 2007, and he wrote the following: “To Joan—Your early enthusiasm over these plays meant more than I can say. Thank you.” It was bundled with a few other entertainment books and sold for \$320. I’m sure Missy thanks you.

Our “Ask Billy” question comes from Jonathan in Las Vegas: “I heard that the **Robert Irwin** is going to join *The Chippendales* for their Las Vegas show at the Hard Rock. Any truth to the rumor?”

It is true that The Chippendales reached out to Robert. And they aren’t the only ones. The Thunder Down Under boys also would like him to join them—and being from Australia, they could have the edge. Alas, Robert has turned down both offers. “Not for me. Not right now. I’ll take the shirt off every now and again, I’m going to draw the line there...for now.” So if you want to see Robert shirtless, you’ll have to check out BillyMasters.com.

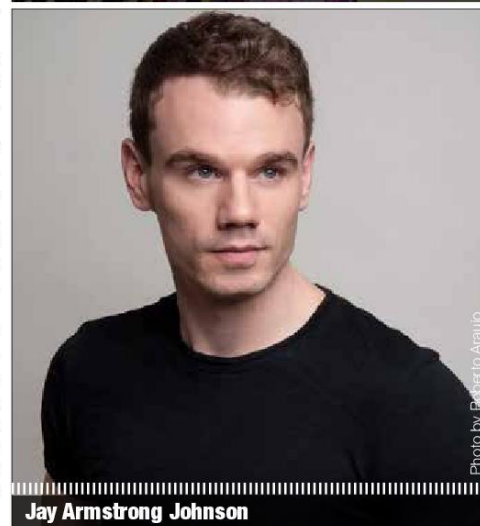
When two residencies are vying for an Irwin, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. And at least they didn’t reach out to Bindi! For other heavenly bodies, head on over to www.BillyMasters.com—the site that will leave you breathless. If you have a question you’d like me to grab ahold of, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before I announce my residency (which ain’t happening anytime soon). Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.



Dolly Parton



Cyndi Lauper



Jay Armstrong Johnson

Photo by: Kugkephoto.com, via Wikimedia Commons.

Photo by: Ruven Afanador.

Photo by: Roberto Araujo.

Mombian

Continued from page 5

ald Dahl and Lemony Snicket, this uproarious tale is also sparkingly original. The story centers on a child at the brink of puberty who suddenly discovers she's a witch. But unlike the series-that-shall-not-be-named, this one doesn't take place at a magical school—and its protagonist is a transgender girl. It's a chaotically exuberant adventure, with top-notch worldbuilding, hilarious dialogue, and quirky characters—but Cherrywell also thoughtfully explores the importance of being seen for oneself and forging one's own identity even while part of a group. Becca's transness is not the focus, but comes up in ways that feel authentic for the character. Cherrywell also gives us one of the strongest affirmations of chosen names I've ever seen,

not simply asserting that we should respect them, but weaving their power into the plot itself.

"A World Worth Saving," by Kyle Lukoff (Dial): In this finalist for the National Book Award in Children's Literature, a Jewish, transgender boy tries to save the world from anti-trans demons. It's an exciting and cathartic adventure—but it's also a powerful story of transformation and human relationships by Newbery Award honoree Lukoff. Jewish values, traditions, and history underpin the story, but one doesn't have to be Jewish to appreciate the themes that Lukoff surfaces from his interpretation of Jewish texts and thought: the holy nature of being trans and the spiritual power of being oneself.

Grown-up

"Lessons in Magic and Disaster," by

Charlie Jane Anders (Tor): Jamie is a graduate student in 18th-century literature and a trans woman. She's also secretly a witch, and decides to teach her mother Serena about magic in order help Serena move forward after the death of her wife, Jamie's other mom. But Jamie didn't predict the dangerous direction that Serena will take her new-found skill. To save them both, Jamie races to learn more about the nature of magic by unlocking clues hidden in a novel from 1749. Anders's writing is simultaneously erudite, hilarious, and revelatory, creating a story that is entertaining, thought-provoking, healing, and queer as heck (though definitely for adults).

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of *Mombian* (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog for LGBTQ+ parents plus a searchable database of 1,900+ LGBTQ+ family books.

Pryde

Continued from page 1

watch the film now GBH News's YouTube channel as part of the Local Lens series.

Set in *The Pryde*—New England's first affordable senior housing community intentionally welcoming to LGBTQ+ residents—the documentary follows elders who came of age during some of the darkest periods for queer Americans. Residents of the former Hyde Park public school building share stories spanning decades of activism, from the AIDS crisis to marriage equality and transgender rights.

The film arrives as LGBTQ+ rights face re-

newed challenges nationwide. The documentary's subjects, many now in their 70s, were children during McCarthyism's targeting of gay federal workers and young adults when homosexuality was still classified as a mental illness. They didn't see same-sex marriage legalized until they reached their 60s.

These historical obstacles have lasting consequences: LGBTQ+ seniors are twice as likely to live alone as their non-LGBTQ+ peers, and 20 percent have experienced homelessness.

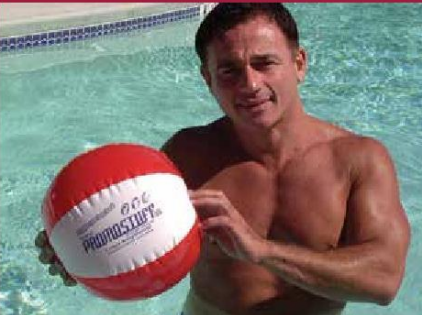
Eddie Whitman, 67, an HIV/AIDS survivor, draws parallels between past and present. "I see what's going on in society now, and I have flashbacks to what it was like in the early part of the AIDS epidemic," he says in the

film. "It wasn't just people getting sick and dying, it was hatred that went along with it."

For residents like Thea Ilerall, who remarried her wife Shirley Riga last December as protection against potential federal rollbacks, *The Pryde* represents both sanctuary and solidarity. "We have made a commitment to be living here with other gay people and to stand together," Ilerall says. "You have to make your voice larger to be heard. And that is through community."

The GBH News team spent six months with *Pryde* residents, documenting stories of family rejection, forced closeting, and the trauma of the AIDS epidemic—as well as the power of community in continuing the fight for equality.

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