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OBITUARY

Larry Kessler

Bay Windows Staff

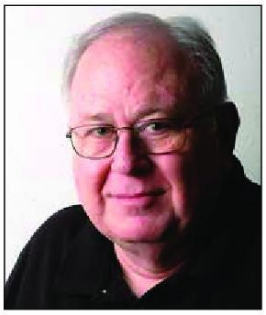


Photo courtesy of Fenway Health.

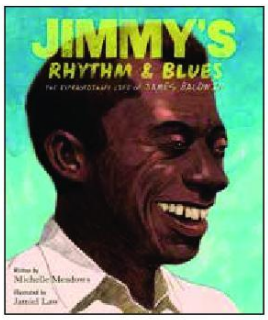
Larry Kessler, a pioneering force in HIV/AIDS advocacy, died at the age of 81 on February 1st, leaving behind a legacy that shaped the course of the fight against HIV/AIDS. He passed away peacefully in his residence at NewBridge on the Charles.

Kessler was renowned for his unwavering dedication and commitment, particularly during the early stages of the AIDS crisis. A beacon of hope and compassion, Kessler tirelessly worked to enact change and save lives. He was instrumental in establishing the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, serving as a guiding force from the 1980s through the early 2000s. Kessler played a pivotal role in raising aware-

see **KESSLER,** *page 7*

6 Picture-Book Biographies of Black LGBTQ Americans

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer



In honor of Black History Month—but best read all year round—here are some of my favorite recent children's biographies of famous Black LGBTQ Americans.

Brand new is the superb "Jimmy's Rhythm & Blues: The Extraordinary Life of James Baldwin," by Michelle Meadows, illustrated by Jamiel Law (Harper Collins). This blank verse biography honors Baldwin's legacy in the rhythm of its text, and offers young readers just enough detail to be informative without overwhelming. It looks at Baldwin's life from his childhood in Harlem through his outspoken and fearless work as a writer, and includes his romantic relationship with Swiss painter Lucien Happersberger. The warm, evocative illustrations are the perfect complement to the lyrical words.

Also new is "Glenn Burke, Game Changer," by Phil Bilder, illustrated

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

Fatal MAGA combo: shifty and shrill

This election should not be a close call

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

There is no greatness in the defensive crouch of resentment and suspicion encouraged by Donald Trump. America has always had isolationists and bigots, but we have also had the pioneering spirit that took us to the moon.

A portion of the population never accepts any change as progress. They would happily drag us back to the Middle Ages.

Fortunately this year, if Trump loses and incites another riot, he will not be president. Speaking of violence in Washington, a recent deadly carjacking prompted Republicans to decry my hometown as a crime-plagued, Democrat-led hellhole. In fact, violent crime in DC is lower than it was a

see **ROSENDALL,** *page 4*

A transcendent *Case*

A Case for the Existence of God, SpeakEasy Stage Company, Roberts Studio Theatre, Calderwood Pavilion, through February 17. 617-933-8600 or speakeasystage.com

Jesse Hinson (left) as Ryan and De'Lon Grant as Keith in "A Case for the Existence of God" at SpeakEasy Stage Company. Photo by Nile Scott Studios.

Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

Sometimes a disarming play can be very compelling. A terrific case in point is Samuel D. Hunter's two-character drama "A Case for the Existence of God." Set in a cubicle inside a Twin Falls, Idaho small business in the present or recent past, Hunter's seemingly simple play deals with efforts to secure a loan with the help of a mortgage broker.

A stressed out father hopes an acre-

see **CASE,** *page 3*

Was W. E. B. Du Bois a romantic at heart?

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

W. E. B. Du Bois. Photo by James Edward Purdy/ Adam Cuerden - National Portrait Gallery, via Wikimedia Commons.

Two activities converged for me during COVID-19: when not officiating funerals, I read romance novels and took long walks along the Charles River, thinking about W. E. B. Du Bois as a romantic.

I chose romance novels because no matter what the protagonist personally slog through in the narrative, there is always a happy-ever-after (HEA) ending. The long walks were a way to get out of the house and see people while I masked up and walked an appreciable distance from them.

see **MONROE,** *page 5*

"I personally wouldn't wait two hours to get a hot oil massage from George Clooney, much less a concert by anybody."

— Joy Behar shares her opinion on Madonna's tardiness to her own concerts.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo by Nick Step, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Case

Continued from page 1

age purchase will persuade a judge to allow him shared custody of his young daughter. Under the careful SpeakEasy Stage Company guidance of multiple talent Melinda Lopez (actress/writer/director), this deserving 2022 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award winner proves as much of an affecting look at male friendship and human bonding as at a potential transaction.

Do not be fooled by Cristina Todesco's wisely spare scenic design—a simple office cubicle featuring desk file drawers and two chairs. Hunter's 90-minute no-intermission play—with scene changes smartly indicated by Elmer Martinez's lighting and Aubrey Dube's sound design—richly explores the evolving terrain of human connection with the kind of striking insight this gifted playwright displayed in his earlier "The Whale." Here a deep connection initially appears to be unlikely as loan-seeking Ryan wants no middleman—which a mortgage broker Keith effectively is—and questions whether people are as much of a priority as business to him.

Ultimately, the possibility of real bromance and deep mutual caring becomes as important to both men as the fate of their individual parentings.

As Keith works with Ryan, common denominators are revealed. Both men have not only attended the same high school—even some of the same courses—but also share the fathering passion—with Keith fostering a toddler of his own named Willa and looking to adopt. Willa and Ryan's Krista also go to the same Sunshine day care and easily play together. As the very different men grapple with their respective challenges, Ryan reflects that they share a specific kind of sadness.

Eventually that sharing includes respective truth telling and whiskey (with dialogue and action indicating time at unseen Keith's place and the playground, for example). Straight Ryan has no negative reactions about Keith being gay. In fact, Ryan displays genuine empathy when Keith experiences a very stressful moment and even offers to hold Keith for a while. He goes as far as "offering to be physically close" with Keith.

Ultimately, the possibility of real bromance and deep mutual caring becomes as important to both men as the fate of their individual parentings. Will their friendship become as significant to Willa and Krista as Ryan and Keith's own narratives about their respective parents? Playwright Hunter provides a stunning and moving closing response.

From start to finish, De'Lon Grant as Keith and Jesse Hinson as Ryan make the men's respective journeys from acquaintance to real platonic male love equally moving. At the same time, Grant and Hinson capture the sometimes humorous exchanges as Ryan struggles to understand mortgaging terms. Grant catches Keith's ongoing concern for Willa and heartfelt openness to helping Ryan. His outburst as Keith suffers a personal defeat is very haunting. Hinson finds all of Ryan's self-deprecation and vulnerability as well as his remarkable feeling for Keith.

The provocative if mysterious title of Hunter's play may seem grandiose to some theatergoers. Still, the intriguing relationship of Keith and Ryan—rivetingly captured at SpeakEasy Stage—turns "A Case for the Existence of God" into a spiritually transcendent call for mutual understanding and love.

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Mombian

Continued from page 1

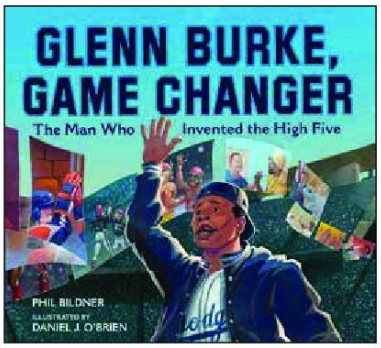
by Daniel J. O'Brien (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a powerful biography of the first openly gay player in Major League Baseball and co-inventor of the high five. Bildner, whose earlier middle-grade novel "A High Five for Glenn Burke" is about a gay boy inspired by Burke, knows how to write action, and his punchy sentences give verve to Burke's on-field play. Bildner also gives readers an unflinching but age-appropriate look at Burke's later struggles, including the homophobia he encountered, how he "got into trouble with drugs and the law," the car accident that shattered his leg, and his death from an AIDS-related illness at age 42. It is a compelling book that touches on some tough topics with thoughtfulness while celebrating the life of a changemaker.

"A Song for the Unsung: Bayard Rustin, the Man Behind the 1963 March on Washington," by Carole Boston Weatherford and Rob Sanders, illustrated by Byron McCray (Henry Holt), is a lyrical testament to Rustin and his work, not only conveying the story of his life from childhood but also helping readers emotionally connect with Rustin and the spirit of the era. Each spread includes suggestions for songs to sing, all drawn from the Civil Rights movement and Black spirituals. It's a powerful, interactive approach to bring readers into the story. The book sits at the older end of the picture book age range for the amount of text and complexity of vocabulary ("committed," "orchestrated," etc.) but nevertheless feels clear and understandable.

"Unstoppable: How Bayard Rustin Organized the 1963 March on Washington," by Michael G. Long, illustrated by Bea Jackson (Little Bee), begins with the assertion, "Bayard Rustin was a troublemaker." Readers soon see that he was making trouble for a good reason: to change the unfair laws and customs that kept Black people from freedom. And although some White politicians opposed the civil rights movement and attacked Rustin for being gay, and civil rights leaders worried that these attacks would harm the movement, "Bayard was proud of who he was—Black, gay, and an activist for peace." While this doesn't reach the lyrical heights of "A Song for the Unsung," it is an informative, intersectional, and inspiring look at the life and significance of this sometimes-forgotten civil rights leader.

"Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist," by Rosita Stevens-Holsey and Terry Catasús Jennings, illustrated by Ashanti Fortson (Yellow Jacket), is a moving biography in verse of the acclaimed activist, attorney, and Episcopal priest, from childhood in the Jim Crow South to involvement in some of the landmark civil rights cases of the 20th century. Stevens-Holsey, Murray's niece, and co-author Jennings note that while Murray did not use the same terminology we do today, "Transgender/is possibly/what Pauli would call herself…Pauli's pronouns/ may have been/they/them/their." The life of this "unsung force" in two overlapping social justice movements deserves to be better known, and this book is a great place to start.

For the youngest children is "Little Black Lives Matter," by Khodi Dill, illustrated by Chelsea Charles (Triangle Square), available as a regular hardcover or board book. Queer icons Marsha P. Johnson, James Baldwin, Billie Holiday, and Audre Lorde are among the Black lives celebrated in this rhyming book (though only Johnson's queer identity is noted). There aren't full biographies here, but each spread offers a quote and a little information about a historical figure, and tells us that they each lived "a little Black life" as a child



before becoming a changemaker. Although the book may inspire young readers to become changemakers, too, it also reminds them, "But don't forget the greatest life you can lead belongs to you." Even if one doesn't change the world, it implies, there is value in simply living a Black life.

For a few other children's biographies of notable LGBTQ Black Americans, including Laverne Cox, RuPaul, and Marsha P. Johnson, please visit my Database of LGBTQ Family Books at mombian.com. I'll note, too, that we could still use many more picture book biographies that show both the Black and the queer aspects of people's identities. It's shocking to me that there is not yet one of Audre Lorde, for example. There are many other figures, too, both historical and contemporary, whose lives could inspire and inform young people today. I urge authors and publishers to take action here as a way not only to look back, but also ahead.

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog and resource directory, plus a searchable database of 1,400+ LGBTQ family books.

Rosendall

Continued from page 1

year ago. But Trumpists never let facts hinder them. Do not be swayed by their hyperventilating.

The GOP's failed impeachment effort against DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas was purely political. His job is to follow the law as written. It is for Congress to change the law. Democrats agreed to a compromise on immigration, but GOP members are going along with Trump's demand that they pass nothing, to keep Joe Biden from getting credit. If migration is an "invasion," what sense does it make to put off dealing with it for a year?

Whether or not Gov. Greg Abbott seeks to foment a civil war in his belligerence toward federal officials, societal fragmentation is a likelier outcome than security. When an anti-immigrant convoy arrived in the border area last week, Texas Latinos felt a target was on their backs.

Issues nowadays are often framed in the most extreme and inflammatory terms. Where is the evidence of the transgender menace that the fearmongers rant about? Alas, it seems that as long as you have a narrative to fit your prejudice, evidence is superfluous. When your nightmare vision gets more clicks than reality, you embrace the fiction.

Another example of cloaking intolerance in the guise of social standards is the suspension of Texas high school student Darryl George for his natural African hairstyle as a dress code violation. Barbers Hill Independent School District Superintendent Dr. Greg Poole wrote in a Houston Chronicle ad, "Being American requires conformity." This despite the state's passage last year of the CROWN Act prohibiting race-based hair discrimination.

One of the law's co-authors, State Rep. Ron Reynolds, said, "The message they're sending … is, 'You either conform to our European standards of what a student should look like and dress like and act like, or else you're going to face the same consequences as Darryl."

MAGA cultists are blinded by their refusal to distinguish between justice and score-settling. Trump's political opponent may be Biden, but his personal nemesis is a jury.

As a gay child I knew my nature at an early age, but conformed as best I could to survive. I found my strength and endured the years of secrecy; but isolation is especially hard on a child. How can a society thrive when it aggressively smothers so many of its people?

If you expect your own children to be treated like human beings, you should not accuse brown families crossing our border of poisoning our blood and try to drown them with razor wire.

If you are serious about public health in a pandemic, you should not avail yourself of vaccines while spreading conspiracy theories against them.

If you care about the economy, you should not prefer a man who presided over the greatest job loss since the Great Depression to one who presided over the greatest job creation.

If you take an oath to defend the Constitution, as I did when I began my federal employment, you should honor it, not play semantic games to weasel out of it. If you refuse, do not style yourself a patriot.

If you ever plan to be serious about subpoenas, you should not cherry pick which ones to respect and which to ignore.

If you are concerned about crime, you should have a single standard that applies as much to a presidential rapist and insurrectionist as to a common citizen who commits carjackings.

MAGA cultists are blinded by their refusal to distinguish between justice and score-settling. Trump's political opponent may be Biden, but his personal nemesis is a jury.

This year's election should not be a close call. Our highest values are degraded into hollow mockery when a commander-in-chief calls fallen service members "losers" and "suckers" for giving what Lincoln called "the last full measure of devotion." Trump disqualified himself with that desecration, regardless of his 91 felony counts.

Those of us who still uphold American values must use our voting franchise to demonstrate that, despite the distraction of disinformation on social media, we can still distinguish between a good person and a scoundrel.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist at rrosendall@me.com.

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PO BOX E14,
Boston, MA 02127

Publishers Emeritus:
Jeff Coakley
Sue O'Connell

Editorial:
Editor-in-Chief
Sue O'Connell
sue.baywindows@gmail.com

Contributing Writers:
Judah Leblang
Billy Masters
Richard J. Rosendall
Dana Rudolph
Rev. Irene Monroe
Jules Becker

Letters to the Editor:
letters.baywindows@gmail.com

News tips:
news.baywindows@gmail.com

Calendar listings:
news.baywindows@gmail.com

Announcements:
announcements.baywindows@gmail.com

Advertising:
Display Advertising
sales@baywindows.com

Classified Advertising:
classifiedads@baywindows.com

Editorial Design Manager:
Julie Walker Palmer

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Monroe

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During my morning constitutional, I intentionally passed 20 Flagg Street, where sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, resided from 1890 to 1893 while a doctoral student because of the university's segregation housing policy prohibiting blacks in the dorms. Since 1994, thanks to then Mayor Reeves (the first gay and black mayor of Cambridge), the house is part of the Cambridge African American Heritage Trail, and the Cambridge Historical Commission placed a marker on the front yard to commemorate Du Bois's life.

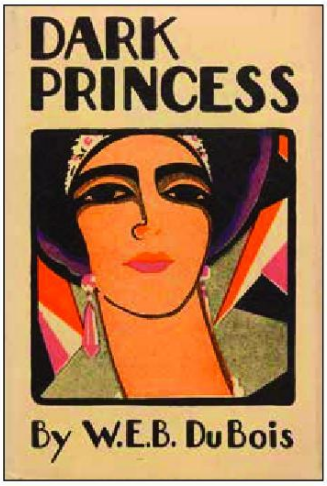
In wanting to download something to read on my Kindle in the evening, I happened across a romantic novel by Du Bois titled "Dark Princess, A Romance Novel." I was in disbelief. In learning more about the book, Du Bois said of his body of work, "Dark Princess, A Romance Novel" was his favorite. Because the book was on sale on Amazon as a Kindle ebook for $2.99, I thought to myself, what did I have to lose? However, the book piqued my interest. The thought of Du Bois having written a romance novel didn't fit the image of the man I learned about in college.

Born three years after the American Civil War in 1868 and died one day before the historic March on Washington in August 1963, Du Bois is known as one of last century's preeminent scholars on African American life. Known as Willie to family and friends, Du Bois spent his formative years in the Berkshire community of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, approximately a 2 1/2 hour drive from Boston. I wonder if it was during his time in Great Barrington, with less than thirty African American families, that the seed of his concept of "double consciousness" began to take root when he depicted his 1903 seminal and autoethnographic text the "Souls of Black Folks,"

"One ever feels his 'twoness' — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

"Dark Princess" was written in 1924 during the Harlem Renaissance. This cultural and artistic movement promoted the causes, hopes, dreams, and genius of black America through its black intellectuals, musicians, writers, poets, and artists. "Dark Princess" was Du Bois's effort to showcase black love while illustrating his concept of the "problem of the color line" at home and abroad and the need for solidarity across races. While the book shows that Black and Brown lives globally are constantly challenged, we must find time for joy, love, and celebration as a radical act of liberation.

The protagonist, Matthew Townes, an aspiring obstetrician student, is told because he's African American, he'll not be permitted to treat white patients, bringing the opportunity to complete his studies to a halt. With shattered dreams, Townes is exiled to Berlin, where he meets Kautilya, a Southeast Asian princess who's the daughter of Maharaja of Bvodfur. While Kautilya educates Townes about the racial struggles all people of color confront globally against white supremacy, a romance blooms between them, and they marry.



African American life in the U.S. is primarily depicted as a struggle devoid of romantic love, a radical act of living liberation, and growing families. Under the tyranny of colonization, slavery, Jim Crow, and simple everyday life, how do we have time for romance? Or a softer racial spin on the subject, I've been told that, as a people, we are so fixated on freedom that we're not capable of romantic love. Also, bombarded by the iconography of negative images and racial tropes on multimedia platforms as emasculating females, welfare mothers as black women and "super-predators," pimps, and roving phalluses as black males the perception is Black people don't engage in romance- we have sex, and we make babies.

Du Bois concludes the novel with the birth of Townes's son, signifying a movement toward the love of black families.

In 2023, as a "Love letter to Black Families," an Atlanta-based black couple was inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Brownies's Book" with their version. Between 1920- 1921, the book was a monthly magazine, Du Bois depicted as for "Children of the Sun ... designed for all children, but especially for ours." Du Bois wanted black children to hear positive stories and see positive images of themselves while growing up during the Jim Crow era.

Similarly, the now husband and wife duo Charly Palmer and Karida L. Brown saw the need for an expanded version of the book today. At that time the two were working on "The New Brownies' Book: A Love Letter to Black Families," a romance was blossoming between Brown and Palmer.

"We want the book on the coffee table of every Black family across the country and around the world. It's a love letter to Black families. We want Black families to know they are loved."

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billy masters

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One of the few countries I've not been to is Sweden — which is strange given my penchant for blonds. But I'm going to have to put it on my list for one important reason — I want to go to McSki! Yes, McDonald's has a very popular location in the Lindvallen ski resort, which is roughly 200 miles from Stockholm. We hear that people finish off their runs by stopping by quite literally going to the ski—thru window. Sign me up.

I don't know what caught my eye first. The headline, "Queer Couple Found Guilty of Horrific Murder of Gay Couple's Son" or the photo of the unphotogenic assailants. This crazy crime took place in San Francisco — surprising those of you who think these things only happen in Florida. **Gerald Rowe** and his partner, **Angel Anderson**, who is trans, met up with 23-year-old **George Randall-Saldivar** and had a sexual encounter with him in the Donnelly Hotel — an establishment primarily populated with low-income and homeless people. Amazingly, surveillance video from the apartment captured all of the gruesome details. After the sex, the couple attacked George with a machete — which I don't believe you can buy with food stamps! Randall-Saldivar was placed in a noose and tethered from a pulley hanging from the ceiling — think of **Dabney Coleman** in "9 to 5". I won't get into the rest of the details — which included pliers, a plastic bag, some fentanyl, a suitcase, and a guitar.

Yet another passenger died on the latest Atlantis cruise. Initially details were slim. All Atlantis would say was that there was a death and it was "unexpected and not suspicious". We now know that person was **Jonathan Mindrum** from Chicago. His father called Jonathan a "brilliant person as a professional consultant and thinker". Enough said.

If you're not listening to **Shannen Doherty's** podcast "Let's Be Clear", you're really missing out. So far, she's chatted with **Jason Priestley**, her cancer doctor (and Liza's bff) **Lawrence Piro**, and "Charmed" co-star **Holly Marie Combs** — who chatted about why Shannen got fired. They reveal that **Alyssa Milano** made formal complaints claiming that Doherty created a "hostile workplace environment". Alyssa allegedly gave the network an ultimatum — "it's her or it's me". In response, Milano firmly stated, "I did not have the power to get anyone fired". She added, "I'm the most sad that a show that has meant so much to so many people has been tarnished by a toxicity that is still to this day, almost a quarter of a century later, still happening. And I'm sad that people can't move past it." Easy to say when you weren't the one fired!

Getting back to Shannen's podcast, one of her guests was pal **Chris Cortazzo**, realtor to the stars. They spent time talking about Doherty's funeral — as one does. Shan said she wants it to be a party — and would like it to take place in her house. As to the guest list, she was pretty clear. "There's a lot of people that I think would show up that I don't want there. I don't want them there because their reasons for showing up aren't necessarily the best reasons. Like, they don't really like me and, you know, they have their reasons, and good for them. But they don't actually really like me enough to show up at my funeral. But they will, because it's the politically correct thing to do and they don't want to look bad. So I kinda want to take the pressure off them and I want my funeral to be like a love fest. I don't want people to be crying or people to privately be like, 'Thank God that bitch is dead now.'"

Which leads us back to **Alyssa Milano**. Her latest scandal seems to be one of her own making. It started with her 12-year-old son's basketball team's GoFundMe page, which was raising money for a trip to Cooperstown, NY. Being a good mom, Alyssa shared the campaign on Twitter (now known as X, but I really hate typing that). "Any amount would be so greatly appreciated. You can read more about the team and make a donation." Well, people got angry. One person wrote, "Imagine being so out of touch that you ask your followers to contribute money to your child's trip when you have a net worth of 10 million dollars. That is gross. Pay for it your own damn self." I was totally on Alyssa's side — why should she pay for all these kids? Teach them that they have to raise it themselves. Then I discovered that Alyssa actually started the GoFundMe campaign — under her married name **Alyssa Bugliari**! I don't know what disappoints me more — that she did this, or wasn't clever enough to cover her tracks? Have we learned nothing from **Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman**?

Awards season is not limited to Hollywood. Last week, the Oscars of gay porn took place at Resorts World in Las Vegas. And I should know — your beloved Billy Masters was a judge. In fact, I've been a judge every year since the GayVNs began. And you know what that means? All of my trysts are tax deductible. Business expense, sweetie! Alas, I wasn't able to attend in person. But I hear that my pal **Alec Mapa** once again hosted with aplomb. Congrats to everyone who won, who was nominated, and even those who just showed up!

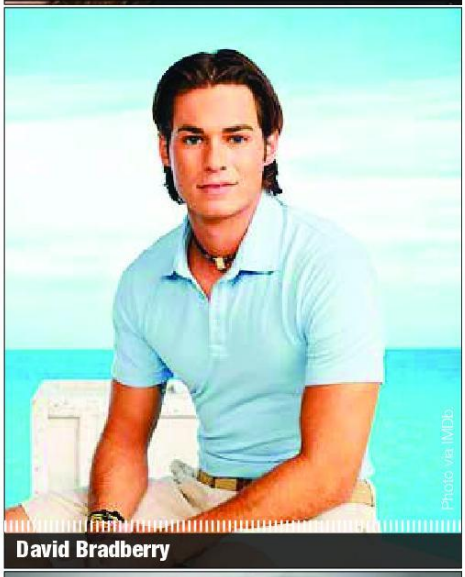
I heard that the UK docuseries "Panorama" recently did an episode called "The Abercrombie Guys: The Dark Side of Cool". I sat down with my popcorn, ready to watch, when all of a sudden I said, "That's David!" Yes, on the screen as one of the primary talking heads was **David Bradberry**, who had a litany of stories to tell. But, full disclosure — because I'm sure someone will find photos of us on the Internet — yes, I was close-ish with David shortly after the events he talks about in this doc. Many of you probably remember him from "Below Deck". Getting back to the doc, it's primarily about **Mike Jeffries**, former CEO of Abercrombie & Fitch and possible victim of some sort of palsy. What this cyclops-esque guy seemed to want more than anything was to look like an A&F boy. What's the next best thing? Surrounding yourself with A&F boys in various forms of undress. Say what you will about Jeffries, he did transform a stodgy company into the "it" brand for a decade or so. Once his peccadilloes became public, he was pushed out and the brand became more diverse and approachable — to the point that nobody slows down by an A&F store anymore, let alone goes in. The other model interviewed is the lovely **Barrett Pall** — who I don't completely believe or trust. Each of the guys interviewed were clear that while they felt they had to "perform", they were never forced to do anything. And they were always paid for their "services" — and all had some sort of background in payment for sex on some level. To the best of my knowledge, none of them ever ended up working for A&F formally. But some of them did get flown to parties around the world. And got shaved...but that's another story.

In the nick of time, we have an "Ask Billy" question from Patrick in Chicago: *"What happened with that reunion **Madonna** was supposed to have with [former backup singers] **Niki and Donna**?"*

Oh, it's a sad, sad story. Everything I'm going to say at this point should be put under a huge "allegedly" umbrella. What I hear is that someone close to the ladies (allegedly, closer to Donna) reached out to Madonna to say the girls would love to go to the Madison Square Garden show on January 29th. Why that show? Because the duo, who perform as Niki + Donna, would have just wrapped up their weekend gigs at The Green Room 42, just down the street from MSG! We're told that Madonna happily set up tix for her former colleagues in the front row. Fans were excited that there might be some onstage reunion. However, not only was there no reunion, there was not even an acknowledgement from the stage. We hear the gals didn't even get invited to the post—show party. Why? Well, after the tix to the concert were arranged, someone allegedly showed Madonna videos of the duo performing some of her songs...and, let's just say she was not happy. So, while there had been an idea brewing of a reunion onstage to judge the "Vogue" dance—off, Madonna instead invited up her pal **Kelly Ripa**. Oh, the humanity!

When anyone is being snubbed for Kelly Ripa, we've definitely come to the end of yet another column. While the passing of the legendary C**hita Rivera** is sad, 91 years is an awfully good run. And just a few months ago, Rivera appeared on PBS to celebrate 50 years of "Great Performances". You can see this and so much more on www.BillyMasters.com, the site that ain't going anywhere. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Sven and I end my first ski lesson with a Happy (Ending) Meal! So, until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Alyssa Milano



David Bradberry

Chita Rivera

Kessler

Continued from page 1

ness, delivering essential services, and advocating for policy reforms.

His advocacy efforts were instrumental in the expansion of Medicaid in Massachusetts, providing vital support to HIV patients facing financial hardship. Kessler spearheaded initiatives such as the AIDS Walk (now Strides for Action), mobilizing resources for HIV-related services. His advocacy encompassed a wide range of policy objectives, including securing increased funding for HIV research, treatment, and prevention, championing non-discrimination legislation to safeguard the rights of individuals living with HIV, and promoting access to affordable healthcare and medications. He also tirelessly campaigned for comprehensive sex education and the implementation of harm reduction strategies, leaving an indelible mark on the fight against HIV/AIDS in Massachusetts and beyond.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1942, Kessler's early life saw him working as both an ironworker and a seminarian. In his twenties, he immersed himself in civil rights and anti-poverty activism, founding and directing Project Appalachia in the late 1960s, and co-founding and directing Pittsburgh's Thomas Merton Center in the early 1970s. Upon relocating to Boston, he contributed to the expansion of the Walk for Hunger into Project Bread while working at the Paulist Center.

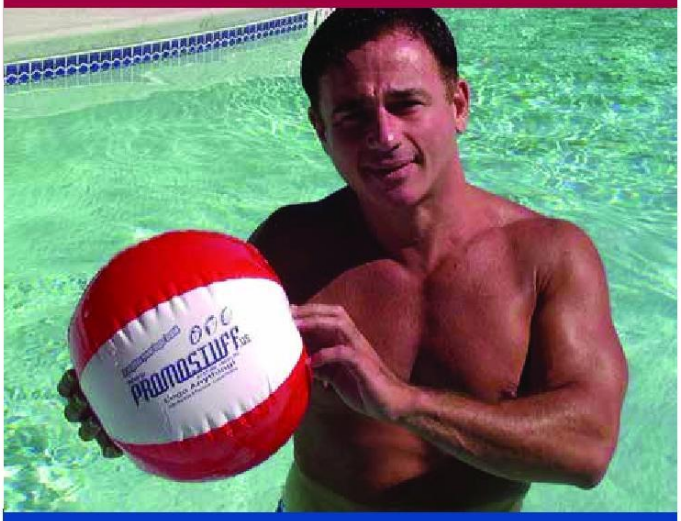
In the early 1980s, while running his own business, Copley Flair, and serving on the Board of Fenway Community Health Center (now Fenway Health), Kessler was instrumental in the formation of a special committee dedicated to addressing the emerging HIV/AIDS crisis. This committee evolved into AIDS Action, an independent nonprofit with Kessler at its helm as Executive Director and inaugural staff member.

Appointed to the National Commission on AIDS in 1988, Kessler continued his advocacy on a national scale, responding to the failures of the government response to the HIV epidemic. He transitioned to the role of Founding Director of AIDS Action in 2002, retiring in 2006. Following a merger in 2013, AIDS Action reunited with Fenway Health. In the same year, Kessler was entrusted with leading the Boston Living Center by Victory Programs, providing vital resources and support to people living with HIV. He retired for the second time in 2015.

Reflecting on their relationship, Dana Ellsmore, Kessler's husband, told the Boston Globe that Kessler's "thoughtfulness, his kindness, his patience. We both came to the conclusion that there was no mistake that we crossed each other's path initially and we both felt like we were each other's kindred spirit and soulmate."

A gathering to celebrate Larry Kessler's life will be announced.

HOT IDEAS



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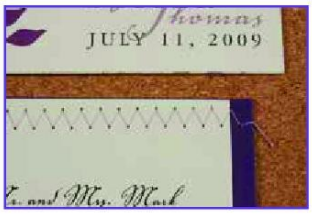

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