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Markey Hosts LGBTQ+ Roundtable

Announces new call on VA to provide gender-affirming surgery for trans veterans

Submitted by the office of Senator Markey

Photo courtesy of the office of Senator Edward J. Markey.

Amid the state of emergency that transgender and nonbinary people in Massachusetts and across the United States are experiencing – including increasing reports of violence,

see **MARKEY,** *page 2*

New Study Looks at How Children of LGBTQ Parents Experience Stigma at School

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

A new study of LGBTQ parents found that two-thirds of the participants—and especially trans parents—said their children experienced structural and/or interpersonal stigma at school. The parents, however, shared a variety of proactive and reactive ways they worked to prevent or offset such stigma.

The research is part of a larger study of LGBTQ family building and parenting, led by Professor Abbie Goldberg of Clark University, with data gathered via an online survey in the summer of 2020.

For the current paper, "LGBTQ Parents' Accounts of Their Children's Experiences With Heterosexism in Schools," published in the journal Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (March 14, 2024), Goldberg and independent scholar JuliAnna Smith focused on the responses of 419 LGBTQ parents, consisting of 65% cisgender women, 22% cisgender men, and 13% transgender or nonbinary parents. Previous studies of LGBTQ families and schools have used much smaller samples and focused only on

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

Last train to Washington

During Holy Week, fundraising for democracy

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

"Let them go," President Biden said of the pro-Palestinian protesters who heckled him during a campaign fundraiser with former presidents Clinton and Obama on March 28 at Radio City Music Hall. This contrasted with Donald Trump's comment about protesters in 2016, "Knock the crap out of 'em."

I had the good fortune to attend the Radio City event thanks to a friend who was inspired by a commentary I wrote in February to make a large donation to the Biden campaign. He was out of the country, so he invited me and another fellow to represent him.

The event was packed with donors and surrounded by security. The controversies swirling on social media seemed light-years away as I was greeted by Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison and met the three presidents at the pre-event VIP reception. I was amazed by the number of staff required to pull off such an event. All were gracious and helpful.

The musical guests on stage included Lizzo, Queen Latifah, Ben Platt,

see **ROSENDALL,** *page 4*

Coalition Calls on Passage of Mass Parentage Act

Following Michigan Governor's Action Today

Submitted by Massachusetts Parentage Act Coalition

BOSTON - The coalition working for the passage of the Massachusetts Parentage Act today called on the Massachusetts legislature to advance the bipartisan bill that would, among other things, protect LGBTQ families in forming the legal bond of a parent-child relationship. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer today signed a similar piece of legislation into law. Massachusetts is the only New England state without the protections.

"Let's go, Massachusetts! We've been proud to be a national leader and trailblazer when it comes to LGBTQ+ equality, but we've got some catching up to do," said Governor Maura Healey. "Let's pass the Massachusetts Parentage Act to make sure every family has the legal protections they need and deserve."

"Our state parental laws have not kept pace with the diversity of modern-day families, and as other states

see **MPAC,** *page 4*

Golden Rainbow TIMES

The Mother I Wanted

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

"There are no good options here," the surgeon said, confirming what I had just figured out, the realization snaking its way into my mind and body. Standing on Harvard Street in Brookline on a blustery day in early January, ten minutes out of therapy where I told my therapist that my mother, getting hospice services in her assisted living apartment, was rushed to the ER the night before due to heavy internal bleeding.

The surgeon confirmed what the hospitalist, the generalist who spoke with me a few minutes earlier, had said: my mother had a perforation, a hole in her colon. Until the hole was closed, she couldn't eat or drink, and couldn't process food. There was no way my Mom, who had been through so much in her 95 years, could survive a major operation and the recovery that would go along with it.

My mother's care manager, Rita, a social worker with a heart of gold, had been my Mom's advocate for 15 years. Now, she filled me in, confirming the doctor's prognosis over the constant beeps of the heart monitor, the static of my cell connection, the buzzing of my own mind as I tried to absorb the reality that my mother—a constant presence for all of my 66 years—had weeks, or possibly just days—to live.

Two months earlier, when my mother suddenly lost 10 pounds and

see **JUDAH,** *page 5*

"His butt, for sure! He knows that. I told him, 'I didn't marry you. I married your butt.' He doesn't love this answer, but I love his eyes, too."

— Rodrigo Aburto reveals his favorite part of hubby Matteo Lane.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

Photo via soyrodrigoaburto, Instagram.

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Markey

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discrimination, and fear, Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) today hosted an LGBTQ+ Community Convening to hear from individuals and organizations about the need to better support the transgender and nonbinary community.

Participants discussed how the federal government can advance the health, safety, and well-being of the community, including fighting back against harmful Republican rhetoric and misinformation about transgender people, ensuring that all members of the community are included in policymaking, improving access to health care, housing, and other basic necessities, and celebrating transgender and nonbinary people.

As part of the conversation, Senator Markey announced his new call on the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to remove restrictions on, and provide health care coverage for, gender-affirming surgery for transgender veterans. Despite the VA already offering other types of gender-affirming care, including pre- and post-operative care for gender-affirming surgery, the VA does not cover surgery itself.

In their letter to the VA, the lawmakers highlighted that gender-affirming surgery is associated with reduced gender dysphoria, improved quality of life, and decreased anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation, which remain especially critical given the higher rates of suicide among veterans in comparison to civilians. Transgender veterans are 20 times more likely to die by suicide than their cisgender veteran peers. Cosigners of the letter include Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawai'i), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), and Peter Welch (D-Vt.).

"We can make every day Transgender Day of Visibility when we commit to justice and equality for the transgender and nonbinary community," said Senator Markey. "We need a whole of government commitment to transgender and nonbinary individuals. That is why I am calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs to take immediate actions to cover gender-affirming surgery for transgender veterans. Thanks to the efforts of the local leaders who we heard from today, Massachusetts has long led the nation in the fight for equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community. Despite the brutal threats and attacks, we cannot stop advocating for greater access to gender-affirming care. We know that transgender health is health, and health care is a human right, and we will always fight on the frontlines for equality."

"I am really grateful for this event and for the chance to highlight key issues at a pivotal moment for the LGBTQ+ community. I am also very grateful for Senator Markey's support and all our allies in Congress, the Senate, and the general community," said Sandra McDonald, Steering Committee Member at Human Rights Campaign New England.

"Senator Markey and his team are leading the way for trans rights in the country. This work is needed now more than ever. It's clear that the Senator's fight for freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness rises all tides. We are looking ahead to this Transgender Day of Visibility and beyond with joy and hope," said Dallas Ducar, Chief Executive Officer of Transhealth.

"We're grateful to be a part of this discussion with Senator Markey to ensure that the needs of trans and non-binary Bay Staters are heard and amplified all the way to Capitol Hill," said Kelsey Grunstra, Executive Director at Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition.

"I am excited to be included in this pivotal conversation about the needs of the transgender community and grateful to Senator Markey for his continued allyship and support," said Tanya Neslusan, Executive Director at MassEquality.

"I'm grateful to be a part of this conversation. The Commission commends Senator Markey for his efforts to make equity for trans people a reality and to codify their rights into law. We stand in solidarity with Senator Markey in his efforts to free the most marginalized person in the room and fill the gaps in service provisions for all LGBTQ+ people," said Shaplaie Brooks, Executive Director at Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Youth.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to discuss LGBTQ+ rights with the Senator and the importance of education, access to care, and active allyship," said Dani Chase, LGBTQ+ Activist, Author, and Speaker.

In March 2023, Senator Markey and Representative Pramila Jayapal (WA-07) introduced the Transgender Bill of Rights, a landmark resolution to recognize the federal government's duty in protecting and codifying the rights of transgender and nonbinary people, as well as to ensure transgender people have access to medical care, shelter, safety, and economic security. In June 2023, during Pride Month, Senator Markey introduced the Gender Affirming Care Access Research for Equity (CARE) Act to authorize $25 million annually over five years for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to research barriers to gender-affirming care and the impact of those barriers on health. In September 2022, Senator Markey sent a letter to the Biden administration on lifting barriers to testosterone and expanding access to gender-affirming hormone therapy for transgender people, including transgender men and transmasculine nonbinary people.

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The Trump camp and the White House clash over Biden's recognition of 'Transgender Day of Visibility'

By Josh Boak
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is facing criticism from Donald Trump's campaign and religious conservatives for proclaiming March 31 — which corresponds with Easter Sunday this year — as "Transgender Day of Visibility."

The Democratic president issued the proclamation on Friday, calling on "all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout our Nation and to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity."

But in 2024, the March 31 designation overlaps with Easter, one of Christianity's holiest celebrations. Trump's campaign accused Biden, a Roman Catholic, of being insensitive to religion, and fellow Republicans piled on.

"We call on Joe Biden's failing campaign and White House to issue an apology to the millions of Catholics and Christians across America who believe tomorrow is for one celebration only — the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign's press secretary. She assailed what she called the Biden administration's "years-long assault on the Christian faith."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on social media that the "Biden White House has betrayed the central tenet of Easter" and called the decision "outrageous and abhorrent."

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said the Republicans criticizing Biden "are seeking to divide and weaken our country with cruel, hateful and dishonest rhetoric."

"As a Christian who celebrates Easter with family, President Biden stands for bringing people together and upholding the dignity and freedoms of every American," Bates said. "President Biden will never abuse his faith for political purposes or for profit."

The advocacy group GLAAD said in a statement that people can both celebrate Easter and show their support for the trans community.

"The date of Easter moves each year, while Trans Day of Visibility is always recognized on March 31, but this year right-wing politicians and talking heads are using the coincidental timing to overshadow the hope and joy that Easter represents," said Sarah Kate Ellis, GLAAD president and CEO.

Biden first issued a proclamation on transgender visibility in 2021. Proclamations are generally statements about public policy by the president. But this year's overlap with Easter and the heated tensions from the presidential campaign made the latest transgender proclamation a way for many Republicans to question the Democrat's religious faith.

Biden devoutly attends Mass and considers his Catholic upbringing to be a core part of his morality and identity. In 2021, he met with Pope Francis at the Vatican and afterward told reporters that the pontiff said he was a "good Catholic" who should keep receiving Communion.

But Biden's political stances on gay marriage and support for women having the right to abortion have put him at odds with many conservative Christians.

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Mombian

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families with cisgender parents.

Goldberg and Smith found that parents of older children ages 11 to 18 were more likely to report stigma than those with children ages 6 to 10, who in turn were more likely to report it than those with children under 6. Additionally, trans parents were more likely to report this than gay male parents (and slightly more likely than lesbian and bi parents, but not to statistical significance. (See the paper for full statistical analysis.)

Many of the parents described structural, indirect ways their children had been marginalized, such as being "excluded via assignments, curricula, and language that was fundamentally heteronormative and cisnormative," the paper says. Several parents spoke of how a focus on "White, biogenetically related families" marginalized their children on the basis of race and adoptive status as well.

Some parents, most with elementary school children, said their children had encountered misunderstandings or confusion about their family without overt hostility. The parents knew this was "developmentally appropriate but also rooted in a heteronormative society and school system," the authors note.

The parents applied a variety of strategies to address this structural stigma. Many asked teachers for classroom changes related to Mother's/Father's Day assignments, family history projects, and use of the correct parental titles, among other things.

They recommended and sometimes donated books and other resources on LGBTQ families, adoption, and related topics. Some volunteered for school events or committees, hoping to normalize their family, promote understanding, and have influence in the school.

Others, most but not all with middle school children, reported that their children experienced more explicit anti-LGBTQ actions, usually by peers: for example, where children were told their parents would go to hell. Some parents, too, said their children had heard anti-LGBTQ slurs that were not directed at them. A few described teasing or bullying aimed at the children's own nonconforming gender expression.

Parents often spoke with teachers and/or administrators about such incidents, and these conversations "sometimes, but not always" led to positive change. A few families, however, filed formal complaints, requested different teachers, or even changed to a new school.

Many parents also undertook proactive strategies to reduce their children's exposure to stigma and build their resilience. These included conveying positive messages about diverse families, particularly when the children were younger. Some sought LGBTQ-inclusive schools or playgroups.

Regardless of whether they did, more than a quarter of the parents said they were intentionally open about their family and often had "purposeful conversations" with school staff at the beginning of the school year, offering details such as the name(s) the child calls their parent(s) or explaining the involvement of a birth parent or known sperm donor in their lives.

Parents spoke of "reducing their involvement and oversight" as their children grew older, though, encouraging them to "become their own advocates," and talking with them about safety and nonviolent ways of responding to anti-LGBTQ actions if they did occur.

And particularly in middle school, the children were sometimes less likely to disclose their family structure or parents' LGBTQ identities, in order to blend in or avoid questions. Most parents allowed them to make their own decisions in this regard, too.

The research has a few limitations, note the authors, including its reliance on parents' reports rather than those of the children, and on a sample of mostly White, well-educated parents. Additionally, the study excluded bisexual parents in different-sex relationships and single parents in order to focus on families whose parents are more likely to be viewed as a sexual or gender minority.

Further research, they say, should seek to fill these gaps and others—and to explore "how LGBTQ parents and their children are navigating increasingly hostile school environments" in the current political climate, amid a growing number of anti-LGBTQ curriculum laws and policies.

Goldberg and Smith say their study nevertheless shows a range of structural and personal ways children of parents across the LGBTQ spectrum have been excluded and stigmatized in schools and how this may be experienced differently at different ages. This may aid school professionals and therapists in understanding children's varied responses to stigma over time. The findings point to the need for more inclusive school policies, for teacher training on LGBTQ families, sexuality, and gender diversity, and for interventions in the early grades.

For us LGBTQ parents, I'll add, such research also provides examples of how other queer families have prepared for and handled stigma at school. No child should have to experience exclusion or marginalization, but until that perfect world is achieved, studies like this can offer useful insights.

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 1,500+ LGBTQ family books.

Rosendall

Continued from page 1

Lea Michele, and Cynthia Erivo. Then Stephen Colbert interviewed the presidents.

President Biden's main message was simple: "Our democracy is at stake."

I don't know how the hecklers got into the place, but they were unable to dent the upbeat mood of the crowd. Their role felt similar to that of the backup singers earlier. The presidents' statesmanlike responses showed their skill and grace in handling disruption.

"You can't just talk and not listen," Obama said to the protesters. "That's what the other side does." Clinton emphasized Biden's support for Palestinian self-determination and a two-state solution. Contrariwise, as James Risen writes in The Intercept, "Donald Trump and his MAGA cult of Christian nationalists would never force Israel to accept a ceasefire — or a Palestinian state."

The protesters refuse to confront the tangled reality of a long-running war, not to mention the terrorist attack by Hamas that started the latest violence. As I walked down Sixth Avenue after the event, screaming protesters accused me of supporting genocide. I told them they were wrong and were not helping their cause.

Truth be told, however, their cause is not actually to help Palestinians, but to gain the satisfaction of screaming at Democrats. This is the Left's politics of subtraction, in which they denounce anyone who doesn't completely agree with them. The idea is that when the Republicans win, things will be so bad that it will set off the Revolution the leftists dream about. In fact, what we actually got after Trump's 2016 win was a right-wing supermajority on the Supreme Court.

Even after leaving the massive police turnout behind, I felt entirely safe walking to Penn Station to take the last train to Washington. Despite a light rain, the city was bustling at 11:00 PM.

One guy stood across from Madison Square Garden pointing up at a photo of singer Billy Joel on the side of the building with a caption that it was the 100th concert of his residency there. I said to the guy, "A hundred? You don't look older than 40." He said, "You wanna fight me?" I said, "No, I'm just a smartass." He said, "I bet I could beat you." I said, "I'm sure." Then I turned and followed the sign, "To Trains."

New York felt like a big, friendly welter of barely-controlled chaos. It's all a bit much, but it works if you just go with it.

Back in DC on Holy Saturday afternoon, emerging from the Metro on my way home from a family Easter gathering, I saw a few hundred people demonstrating around the Dupont Circle fountain. A woman led chants with a megaphone; several people waved Palestinian flags. I was able to make out "End the occupation now!" and "Revolution!" repeated several times. I did not hear "from the river to the sea," widely understood to mean abolishing Israel. Then I headed down P Street toward home.

With the sounds of chanting and drumming receding behind me, I encountered an older man standing outside his house smoking and looking in the direction of the Circle. "They're calling for revolution," I said to him, "so stand back." He replied with a laugh, "I will indeed."

Six thousand miles away in Gaza, children starve while Hamas leaders refer to "the Zionist entity" and Netanyahu responds to war crimes with more war crimes. Closer to home, the Republican presidential candidate says migrants are "poisoning the blood of our country."

As humans, we have more work to do.

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

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MPAC

Continued from page 1

take the necessary steps to protect families, provide stability for children and advance reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights, it is clear it is well past the time for us to act and pass the Massachusetts Parentage Act," said Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell.

"The action taken by Michigan Governor Whitmer today is a potent reminder of what strengthening families should look like in 2024 and it should serve as an inspiration to Massachusetts," said Polly Crozier, Director of Family Advocacy at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders. "The Massachusetts Parentage Act, currently making its way through the legislature, is needed to fill gaps in our laws that leave some children vulnerable and to ensure all families, no matter how they are formed, have the legal security they deserve. We hope to see this bill passed into law this session so that Massachusetts can stand proud as a state that recognizes and protects the dignity and worth of all children and families."

The Massachusetts Parentage Act (MPA, H.1713/S.947) is currently being considered in the Joint Committee of the Judiciary. The legislation updates Massachusetts statutes to clarify who can be a parent and how to establish parentage. This bill is critical to ensuring that all children can access the security of legal parentage, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. The bill's bipartisan sponsors include Democrat Senator Julian Cyr, Republican Senator Bruce Tarr, Democrat Representative Sarah Peake, and Republican Representative Hannah Kane.

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MAKOM trancends

MAKOM, Vertigo Dance Company, presented by Celebrity Series of Boston at the Boch Center Shubert Theatre, Boston, April 5 and 6. Exploring the Creative Process, a lecture/demo hosted by Boston's Center for Jewish Culture at Vilna Shul, Boston, April 4. Celebrityseries.org;VilnaShul.org

By Jules Becker
Contributing Writer

Vertigo Dance Company members in "MAKOM"--a Celebrity Series offering to be staged at Shubert Theatre. Photo courtesy of Vertigo Dance Company.

Two years ago Noa Wertheim was researching polarities. "We all have them," the co-founder and artistic director of Vertigo Dance Company recently told the South End News. One essential way of dealing with polarities, she offered, is to find the "centerline of the deep place within us and connect." Now dancers from her acclaimed Israeli troupe (founded in 1992 by Wertheim and husband Adi Sha'al)—at the Boch Center Shubert Theatre in its first Celebrity Series of Boston appearance since 2016—are exploring that line and path to connection in a polarity-transcending 2022 work choreographed by Noa and sister Rina Wertheim-Koren entitled "MAKOM"—Hebrew for 'place.'

For Jerusalem-based Vertigo Dance, this evening-length exploration contains "spiritual things." Observing that "We have the space and time," Noa revealed that "We created many places in the piece." That creation involves quality-centered Tselem—Hebrew for 'image'—and Tavnit— Hebrew for 'form.' That form entails the employment of an arc-like wood structure by Zohar Shoef. Dancers in Dani Fishof-Magenta's minimal lighting will move around and under that construct in neutral-hued costumes designed by Sasson Kedem. "Everything is ecological," Noa stressed. To that end, branch-like props will create such key objects as platforms, ladders and a bridge.

"It's a bridge they (the dancers) are building through the show," Noa explained. Sometimes there will be a circle representing community. "We have to support each other and be together. We should be one," she continued. "The circle can be like a folk dance," she added. At other moments, dance movement will suggest a Shevil—Hebrew for 'path.' That path may connect with the creation of "a bridge connecting between two different peoples." Some moves will connect "male and female, sun and moon and light and darkness." To that end, a sequence in which two male dancers lift a female one may signify a triumph over the harm of polarities.

"MAKOM" features Vertigo dancers Etai Peri. Sian Olles, Eden Ben Shimol, Micah Aimos, Ruth Ben David, Ilan Kolubovich, Shani Licht, Noa Israeli and Theo Samsworth. Ran Bagno provides original music. (American-born and Netanya,Israel-raised Noa,who studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, met her dancer husband at another Jerusalem troupe Tamar). Vertigo Dance, renowned for innovative choreography and technical precision, has committed itself to environmental sustainability. The company practices what it preaches. Adobe is used at the building, water is collected from the roof, and there is no plastic at its Jerusalem Vertigo Eco Art Village in the Ella Valley . "We are like a family," Wertheim concluded.

Judah

Continued from page 1

slipped under 80, I went back to Cleveland, and with her consent, signed her up for hospice. With the care and attention the hospice staff provided, along with her private aides, Mom rallied a bit over Christmas and New Year's, her appetite picked up, she might have gained a few pounds. (We stopped weighing her, and I finally let go of my focus on her weight, which I'd fixated on for years, during those last few weeks.)

In her late 80s and 90s, my mother was, as her primary care doctor told me several years earlier, "dwindling:" losing weight, energy, and mental focus. Gone was the energetic, compulsive, talkative woman who raised me, and who maintained both her energy and her ability to worry into her early 80s.

Over the past fifteen years, the script had flipped—in some ways I had a new mother—kinder, gentler, but more passive, dependent on the kindness of friends and family. Still, Mom always knew me when I called, knew herself, and knew where she was, even if she couldn't keep track of her aides' names. (At times, neither could I, as over the last few years she required 24/7 care, which led to a virtual smorgasbord of helpers, some regular and some fill-ins, along with a few who didn't quite work out).

But there were silver linings that went along with my mother's memory loss, which morphed from "mild cognitive impairment," to something called vascular dementia. Those silver linings meant that she no longer worried about what might happen, and couldn't pine over past losses: the death of my father, her first husband at 61, a few weeks after her 60th birthday, and the tragic death of her youngest son, my brother Russell, from liver cancer in his 50s, which occurred when Mom was 90, just as her short-term memory went south.

The mother who raised me was a classic redhead: prone to anger, mood swings, loving, fiery, and unpredictable. An anxious woman who grew up in a chaotic home, my mother craved order, routine, and cleanliness. But after her second husband died and she moved into an assisted living facility near her home outside of Cleveland, once the yoke of responsibility finally lifted, my mother thrived, mild cognitive impairment and all.

The mother I knew, and the one I got to know in her 80s and 90s had some things in common: resilience and an iron will to get through challenging times; a small stature and lack of appetite—food was a means to an end, not a source of pleasure; loyalty and love for her family and friends. What emerged, when my mother no longer had to worry, when she let go of her need to control life, was a grace and warmth, a deep fundamental kindness I'd only seen in passing in my youth.

Mom was grateful, almost effusive when I called, daily, to make sure she was eating, to ask about her frozen shoulder, her oxygen level, her physical therapy. "I'm fine," she'd say, despite the aches, pains, and the hand tremors that made eating a labored, exhausting task.

"How're you?" My visits to Cleveland seemed to both buoy and exhaust her; she was determined to put on a good front, to go on our outings to a movie, for ice cream, for a drive around town.

The mother I had in my 50s and 60s, was in some ways, the one I always wanted. Or maybe, in those later years, I saw who she always was, without the static of her anxiety and my resentment.

By the time I got to Cleveland, my mother had moved from hospital to hospice house, was heavily medicated, and could no longer speak. Still, when I approached her, touched her shoulder and said, "I'm here," she opened her eyes, briefly.

I spent most of her last day with her, in that room. Her breathing was labored, and hard to watch. She seemed already half gone, looking off into a distance I couldn't see. That evening, when I left her room to get something to eat, she died quietly, sparing me the moment of her passing, a final kindness.

Today, two months later, I'm left with memories, gratitude for these years we had together, and a void, a chasm that will remain unfilled.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston. He will be performing his new one-man show, "The Expiration Date" at the Beacon Hill Friends House, 6 Chestnut Street in Boston on Sunday April 7 at 4 PM—on site, and online. For tickets and more info go to bhfh.org.

billy masters

Continued from page 1

The cover story of last Friday's "Hollywood Reporter" asked a seemingly simple question: "Would You Wait Six Hours for **Priscilla Presley's** Autograph?" I can give a seemingly simple response: "No!" The article is about The Hollywood Show — a place where fans get to meet their favorite stars. It used to take place at the Beverly Garland Hotel — back when Beverly Garland was relevant...and alive! Now it's at the Burbank Marriott. The lineup of celebrities this year included several notables from "Dallas" (both incarnations). Before you ask, nary a Principal in sight. Why isn't anyone worried about where she is? She either looks really bad, or is in the Witness Protection Program. Someone who did show up was Miss Presley (née Beaulieu), who had a long and winding line of fans that was compared to one of the more popular rides at Disney. One of her assistants said, "She will stay until the very last person leaves. She's like that. She won't disappoint." Unless you're a relative who comes between her and an inheritance, in which case I would advise you to sleep with one eye open.

A week earlier, Priscilla showed up at the very last public performance by **Tony Orlando**. This took place at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. Priscilla wasn't there out of love for Tony; she just happened to be doing her one-woman show in the same theater the next night. Tony was joined for part of the concert by his old singing partners, **Telma Hopkins and Joyce Vincent**, otherwise known as "Dawn". Fun fact: Telma and Joyce were not on the first recordings of the group. Back then, anonymous studio singers were used. Eventually, the ladies were cast as "Dawn" and stayed with Tony until 1977. They've reunited occasionally over the years and Tony couldn't say farewell to live performing without them. I watched most of the video from this concert and realized the only songs of his I knew were the ones with "Dawn" — whoever they were at the time.

One of Tony Orlando and Dawn's hits was "Say, Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose", a poignant song about a suburban mom who runs off to become a stripper, or a hooker, or a porn star — I was never quite sure. But I thought of the song when I read that convicted murderer **Gypsy Rose Blanchard** has broken up with her post—prison hubby after three months of wedded bliss. After a while, you can't sleep with one eye open. Ask **Lisa Marie**!

Rebel Wilson's memoir is being released this week. In "Rebel Rising", the funny lady doesn't hold back. In an Instagram post, she teased the following: "When I first came to Hollywood, people were like, 'Yeah, I have a no asshole policy, that means like, yeah, I don't work with assholes.' I was like, 'Oh, yeah, I mean that sounds sensible or logical. But then it really sunk in what they were meaning by that, older people in the industry. Because I worked with a massive asshole, and, yeah, now I definitely have a no assholes policy. Chapter on said asshole — it is chapter 23, that guy was a massive asshole." I might have hit my "asshole" quota for the entire year with this one paragraph. Once word of this chapter got out, someone threatened to sue. Rebel said, "I will not be bullied or silenced by high priced lawyers or PR crisis managers. The asshole that I am talking about in ONE CHAPTER of my book is: **Sacha Baron Cohen**."

Rebel played Sacha's wife in the film "The Brothers Grimsby". Anyone? Hands? I haven't seen the flick or, for that matter, read Rebel's memoir. But Wilson claims that Sacha "pressured" her to appear nude and "do other unsavory things". Cohen's team claims that all intimate scenes "adhered to guidelines and contractual requirements" and "these alleged asks were recorded by the cameraman on a film set for a movie, and followed a script that had been approved by all the actors." All this fuss over a movie I never even heard of!

Brit pop singer **Robbie Williams** (formerly of "Take That") is troubled that people are no longer speculating about his sexuality. "When 'Robbie Williams Gay' stopped being the top Google search my genuine thought was, 'Am I ugly now?' Not that I've ever thought I was a looker in the first place." I think it's just that he's gotten older...as have we all. If it's any consolation, Robbie, we rarely speak of **Bieber** anymore...and that truly saddens me.

My indifference to anything **Taylor Swift**—related is well—documented. That said, I must sheepishly admit that I've been mistaken. All this time, I thought her tour was called "The Heiress Tour". Apparently, it is "The Eras Tour". Potato/Potahto. At least now I know she's a whole lot older than I thought! On the plus side, I have to appreciate that she's banging a guy described as having a "dad bod" — who also says he doesn't care. Bravo to that.

A pop princess I do enjoy is Aussie **Kylie Minogue**, even though I heavily criticized the fact that buying a ticket to see her in Vegas would require mortgaging some property and selling an organ. Well, you'll soon get a chance to see Minogue strut her stuff in Los Angeles. Kylie will headline a show celebrating West Hollywood Pride at the OutLoud Music Festival, which takes place June 1—2. Also performing over the weekend are **Janelle Monáe, Diplo, Keke Palmer, Trixie Mattel**, and others. Here's the catch — they haven't announced who is playing on which day. So, unless you want to risk the show selling out, you'll have to buy a weekend pass — which is quite pricey. Sneaky!

Last week, I posted my review of the Broadway revival of **Stephen Sondheim's** "Merrily We Roll Along". I am pleased to report that I contributed to the show recouping its $12 million capitalization. Although I was at the Saturday matinee, a notable star attended the Sunday matinee — **Jennifer Lopez**. J—Lo (and her crew) attended because her child Emme wanted to see the show. I say "child" because I'm not exactly sure how to refer to Emme. While Emme was born female and the headlines about going to "Merrily" say, "Jennifer Lopez and Her Daughter Emme Enjoy a Date on Broadway", I seem to remember other articles saying that Emme is non-binary and eschews feminine pronouns. Jennifer refers to her twins as "Coconuts", but I don't think I could use that term — particularly since Big Daddy Masters used to bathe me while singing, "I've Got A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts". But that's a story better left between me and my team of therapists. It should be mentioned that accompanying the photo of Emme hugging "Merrily" star **Jonathan Groff**, "People" magazine used the term "they".

Here's a story I hate to even bring up — because I know, and you know, and even **Liza** knows it was a typo. But what a typo it is! On April 13th, the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles is mounting **Michael Feinstein's** latest venture — "Rainbow: The New Judy Garland Musical". Not only has he put this show together, he's in it! I wouldn't be surprised if Liza shows up — which makes this all the more juicy. The press release issued by the Center Theatre Group (parent company of the Taper) said the following: "The show is executive produced by Michael Feinstein and Liza Minelli." Don't they know? It's Liza with a "Z", not Lisa with an "S", 'cause Lisa with an "S" goes Ssss not Zzzz. It's "Z" instead of "S", "Ly" instead of "Lee". It's simple as could be. See, Liza. It's "M" "I" double "N", then "E" double "L" "I". You double up the "N" that's Nnnn not "Nu". Then "E", double the "L", end it with an "I". That's the way you say "Minnelli"!

The opening quote for this week's column was almost this: "I know how to use my femininity" — says **Kristen Stewart**. Billy Masters asks, "What femininity?"

Remember the movie "Titanic"? Oh, if only I had those 72 hours back! Remember the climatic scene? When big, strapping **Kate Winslet** hoists herself onto a door, and holds the hand of little waifish **Leonardo DiCaprio**, crying, "I'll never let go, Jack" — only to cast him off without a second thought? Well, that very door just sold at an auction for over $700K! Winslet has decided the time is right to defend Rose dumping poor Jack to his icy death: "So, you've heard it here for the first time. Yes, he could have fit on that door, but it would not have stayed afloat. It wouldn't." I recall **Rex Reed** writing about their love scene when the film first came out by saying something like: "It was like watching a Chihuahua trying to mount a Golden Retriever!"

When we don't have time for an "Ask Billy" question, but we can fit in a questionable bestiality quip, we've definitely come to the end of yet another column. And what a long column it was. I barely have time to remind you to check out www.BillyMasters.com, the site that'll show you a lovely bunch of coconuts. If you have a question you're confident will fit in, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before we find out if **Vicki Principal** is in hiding with **Shelly Miscavige**. So, until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

Photo by Rob DiCaterino, via Wikimedia Commons.

Priscilla Presley

courtesy of Paramount Pictures

Leonardo DiCaprio & Kate Winslet

Photo by Alan Light, via Wikimedia Commons.

Victoria Principal

Registration Now Open for Boston's LGBTQ+ Pride Parade and Festivals

BOSTON PRIDE
FOR THE PEOPLE

Boston Pride Parade 2023. Photo by Bay Windows Staff.

Organizers Seek Sponsors for June 8th Celebration

Submitted by BP4TP

Boston Pride For The People (BP4TP) today announced the opening of registration for the 2024 Pride Parade, as well as the festivals to be held on Saturday, June 8th, 2024 on Boston Common and City Hall Plaza.

The parade will start in Copley Square at 11 A.M. and move through the city's South End, finishing at Boston Common where everyone can enjoy the festival that includes performances from local and national entertainers. City Hall Plaza will host a Block Party for those 21+ that begins later in the afternoon. All BP4TP events are free to attend.

Last year, more than 1 million people attended Pride, the region's largest LGBTQ+ event.

Parade + Festival Registration will be completed online via Eventbrite, where interested parties will reserve their place in the parade and/or space at the festivals. Registration fees and payment options are outlined at https://www.bostonprideforthepeople.org/

Several hundred community groups, businesses, schools, government agencies, employee resource groups, elected officials, and others are expected to march in the parade. Organizers estimate that the number of booths available for vendors at the festivals will be 250 and are likely to sell out.

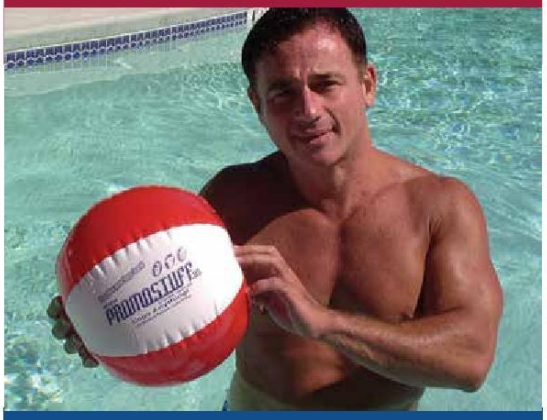
Sponsorship Opportunities are available, at levels ranging from $5,000 to $50,000. The cost of producing the parade and festivals is estimated at nearly $1 million. In addition to registration fees, contributions from community and businesses are an essential source of financing the events.

A Partnership Package is available for corporations and non-profit organizations interested in supporting this year's Pride. It includes the dates for informational sessions for interested sponsors and can be found on the BP4TP website: www.bostonprideforthepeople.org

Boston Pride For The People (BP4TP) is the volunteer and community-run non-profit organization working to empower, celebrate, commemorate, and educate in partnership with Boston's LGBTQ+ communities. In 2023 BP4TP hosted and managed Boston's first Pride parade and festivals in more than three years, bringing New England's largest Pride parade back to its home in Boston. For more information visit: bostonprideforthepeople.org.

Get more information at
www.bostonprideforthepeople.org

HOT IDEAS



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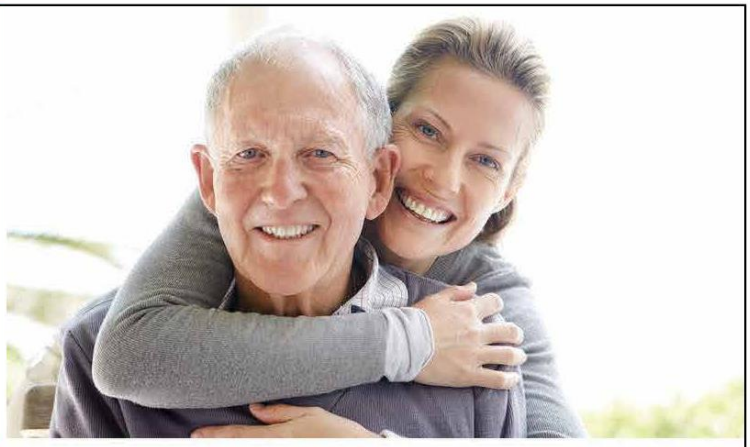

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