Obituary

Remembering Vin McCarthy, political trailblazer

By Sue O’Connell

Vincent “Vin” McCarthy was a news reporter’s dream: a well-connected and loquacious source who was reliable and endlessly quotable. But reporters had to work for the information they needed, as it often came couched in multiple digressions, anecdotes, and monologues punctuated by his bursts of laughter. McCarthy was a great storyteller—especially when he was the subject of said story.

This 1999 Bay Windows interview, for instance, perfectly encapsulates what McCarthy was all about, as the "Spend more time on your knees than on the internet.”

— Vice President Mike Pence shares his advice at a Christian school. I’m not sure what one has to do with the other—except for gay sex. In which case, he’s preaching to the choir.

find Billy Masters on page 8!
McCarthy

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attorney and long-time activist sounded off on a host of experiences, such as the confusion that ensued when a right-wing attorney, also named Vincent McCarthy, surfaced to challenge Boston’s domestic partner ordinance. “He thinks he’s doing God’s work and I know that I’m doing God’s work—the liberation of gay people is one of the great works of God in the 20th century and it cannot be stopped,” said McCarthy.

Then he discussed his ill-fated marriage to a woman: “When we met each other on our first date we had eight or nine scotch and sodas apiece. She talked about being a tomboy and I talked about being a sissy…It was love at first sight.”

From there, McCarthy turned to his “life after life experience” on a hospital operating table in 1975: “I was in this black box with a white light and I went, ‘Fuck this, I don’t want to die yet,’ and I sat up on the table and I started talking.”

He also opened up about his then-current battle with Barrett’s Esophagus, which is often a precursor to esophageal cancer. “The nature of this malady that I am currently dealing with is that I could be dead within 12 months. The other side is that it is more than likely that I will beat it. But if I beat it, I will be one of the few who beat it.”

But McCarthy’s most revealing comment was his certainty about one side effect of his illness: “Something will come out of this crisis. Something good will come out of it.”

Indeed, the throughline of McCarthy’s life was channeling hard life lessons and challenges into activism and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable people. As a result, he left a long and admirable legacy of social justice work when he passed away Jan. 29 at age 79.

After presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in 1968, McCarthy, who managed Kennedy’s campaign in Massachusetts, was among a group of supporters who funneled their grief into founding the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corp., an organization dedicated to uplifting disadvantaged and at-risk youth.

When McCarthy entered recovery from alcoholism in the early 1970s, he started doing pro-bono legal work for the newly-opened homeless shelter Pine Street Inn—the beginning of a near-50-year tenure of service to, and support of the organization and its mission. “Vin, in particular, really understood what life was like for guests,” Pine Street Inn Executive Director Lyndia Downie told the Boston Globe last month. “He never let us forget what it was like for people to come in and have that sense of your life going (sour).”

As a partner at the prestigious firm Hale and Dorr (now known as WilmerHale) in the early 1980s, McCarthy, who grew up in Brookline and graduated from Harvard Law School, did the unthinkable: he came out publicly as a gay man. Not surprisingly, he then turned his attention to gay rights advocacy, becoming a co-founder and early board member of the Human Rights Campaign, a co-founder of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Bar Association, chair of the first-in-the-nation Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth under Gov. William Weld, and a member of Harvard AIDS Institute’s (HAI) International Advisory Council, among many other contributions to our community. McCarthy maintained a close friendship and co-parenting relationship with ex-wife Mary Crosby for the remainder of his life; they were jointly honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards for their community service by the Family Pride Coalition (now the Family Equality Council) in 2004.

As the coronavirus pandemic tests our societal bonds, I’ve thought a lot about McCarthy’s unwavering belief that good things could arise from a crisis. He knew it was true because he continually worked to make it so. What a wonderful lesson for us all in these trying times.

Rest in peace, Vin McCarthy.
hands. In 1982, White House Press Secretary Larry Speakes turned a reporter’s question about AIDS into a homophobic joke. It took four years to develop a blood test for HIV.

The HIV crisis also showed that the concept of “risk groups” is dangerous. When public health officials must take actions that are invasive and forceful, like quarantine or travel restrictions, they need to be based in real science and implemented transparently, without recycling prejudices against “risk groups.” In the 1980s, gay activists debated whether to ask city health departments to close bath houses and sex clubs, while the U.S. Centers for Disease Control warned that they were spots where the risk of transmission was high because people met there for sex. Some gay activists called for the bath houses to close, to save lives.

But many gay people had the opposite reaction. Amid virulent homophobia and stigma around AIDS—people losing their jobs, family members barring gay relatives from their homes, lifetime quarantine for HIV-positive people—shutting the bath houses sounded to them like a step down a slippery slope toward concentration camps. Gay communities resisted, and bath houses stayed open. In retrospect, to someone who studies gay politics and HIV, it’s shocking that the rhetoric of some key members of the Reagan administration, including then-House Coronavirus Coordinator, who has also been a involved in IV/AIDS research said on the news that the bat houses would be shuttering the bath houses sounded to them like a step down a slippery slope toward concentration camps. Gay communities resisted, and bath houses stayed open. In retrospect, to someone who studies gay politics and HIV, it’s shocking that the rhetoric of some key members of the Reagan administration, including then-House Coronavirus Coordinator, who has also been a involved in IV/AIDS research said on the news that the bat houses would be shut down.

In the early nineteen-eighties, soon after cases of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (aids) were first discovered in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control named four groups at “high risk” for the disease: intravenous drug users, homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and Haitians. Haitians became the visible scapegoats for some of the epidemic.

Mayer describes in her article in The Conversation: “the first reports of infection came from China. As the World Health Organization has pointed out, referring to it as “Wuhan virus” or “Chinese coronavirus” could lead people to hide their symptoms and avoid seeking health care. That will increase the risk for everyone. It is also misleading and stigmatizing, since it does not matter where the virus jumped from animals into humans, and the virus is not confined to any one country.”

So in 2020 it is the Chinese (or in some instances any Asian) who are the targets of racist attacks and xenophobia. As was also true in the 1990s the rhetoric of some key members of the current administration is not helpful.

Dr. Deborah Birx, MD currently the White House Coronavirus Coordinator, who has also been a involved in IV/AIDS research said on Good Morning America when asked about the similarities between the early days of the epidemic and now: “In those early days in the 1990’s the only ones out there fighting for themselves and what they needed. These were the people who were at the greatest risk. They were out there not because it would help them…many of them were already too sick; but it would help those who would come after them” That activism has reverberations today, in the work between public health and community health advocates. That’s a difference, not a similarity.

So, yes there is no question that I have been triggered!

I have been triggered by the images of people in masks and hazmat suits. I have been triggered by news about the rapid loss of life; I have been triggered by social and personal devastation being experienced globally.

I have been triggered by the caring reaction and concern expressed by government officials; triggered by the affirming news stories; and triggered by the desire of people to help.

And I have been triggered most by the thought about how, if in those early days, there had been a similarly swift and caring response such as we are now seeing with Coronavirus/COVID-19. If the response had been similar in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, I cannot help but think about all of the lives that might have been saved.

It is in times like these, that our mental health can suffer. We don’t always know it’s happening. You might feel more on edge than usual, angry, helpless or sad. You might notice that you are more frustrated with others or want to completely avoid any reminders of what is happening. For those of us who already struggle with our mental wellness, we might feel more depressed or less motivated to carry out our daily activities. It’s important to note that we are not helpless in light of current news events. We can always choose our response. If you are struggling, here are some things you can do to take care of your mental health in the face of uncertainty:

So here are some great suggestions from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Separate what is in your control from what is not. There are things you can do, and it’s helpful to focus on those. Wash your hands. Remind others to wash theirs. Take your vitamins. Limit your consumption of news (Do you really need to know what is happening on a cruise ship you aren’t on?).

Do what helps you feel a sense of safety. This will be different for everyone, and it’s important not to compare yourself to others. It’s ok if you’ve decided what makes you feel safe is to limit attendance of large social events, but make sure you separate when you are isolating based on potential for sickness versus isolating because it’s part of depression.

Get outside in nature—even if you are avoiding crowds. I took a walk yesterday afternoon in my neighborhood. The sun was shining, I got a dose of vitamin D, and it felt good to both get some fresh air and some quality alone time commuting with nature. Exercise also helps both your physical and mental health.

Challenge yourself to stay in the present. Perhaps your worry is compounding—you are not only thinking about what is currently happening, but also projecting into the future. When you find yourself worrying about something that hasn’t happened, gently bring yourself back to the present moment. Notice the sights, sounds, tastes and other sensory experiences in your immediate moment and name them. Engaging in mindfulness activities is one way to help stay grounded when things feel beyond your control.

Stay connected and reach out if you need more support. Talk to trusted friends about what you are feeling. If you are feeling particularly anxious or if you are struggling with your mental health, it’s ok to reach out to a mental health professional for support. You don’t have to be alone with your worry and it can be comforting to share what you are experiencing with those trained to help. https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/?fbclid=IwAR1mYd5G4LcynR68fH4_42cDT7v673vY871C-NFy9vnmXVvqPnP0m6BammZ0

People who know better, do better. We owe it to those who didn’t make it, to do what we can now, to end this disease — after all, that’s what friends are for.
nation agency with many LGBTQ clients. “This is not a law, it is a guideline through the ASRM,” she explained in a phone interview. While fertility doctors don’t have to obey it, “most follow the professional organization’s guidelines.” The impact isn’t restricted to the LGBTQ community, she noted, but affects us because so many LGBTQ people rely on third-party assisted reproduction to start or grow our families.

There are many reasons for the restrictions. “Where there is enforced social distancing, people should not be going into clinics or to doctors for non-essential medical procedures,” she said. Although starting insemination or IVF may feel emotionally essential, she asserted, “It is non-medically required that those things happen right now.”

Another reason is that people often use a surrogate or egg donor who lives far away. Bergman explained, “If you’re surrogate is in, say, Oregon, and your IVF clinic is in California, the normal procedure is that she comes to California, has the IVF transfer, goes back home, is monitored locally in her own hometown by a clinic that does the labs as well as ultrasound follow up, and then is working in concert with the California doctor or wherever the IVF doctor is.”

Now, however, not only is travel restricted, but “all of those local monitoring facilities are closed.” No diagnostic labs are currently doing pregnancy tests because they are all focused on COVID-19. Additionally, “You can’t just walk into a hospital,” Bergman cautioned. “Normally, a lot of our surrogates, for example, have their scans at a hospital facility, but those facilities are completely off limits right now.”

One surrogate who is working with Growing Generations was sent a home pregnancy test by her local clinic—but that’s not a full solution, because normal monitoring goes beyond simple pregnancy detection. Usually, third-party assisted reproduction cycles “are really precise, well controlled, and managed,” Bergman explained. Doctors need to track things like progesterone level that help them assess the progress of the pregnancy, something they can’t do in the current circumstances.

“If you go forward with a cycle that’s not optimal, you’re still spending the same amount of money,” she noted. “It’s not just about the money, however. She’s had many conversations in the past week with clients whose cycles were cancelled. ‘It’s so disappointing and they’ve waited so long,” she said. “There were definitely people who pushed back, saying ‘Please, let’s go forward, I’ll take the risk.’ But it’s not their risk to take. They’re risking the surrogate, they’re risking an embryo, which they may not have many of, they’re risking the money, so we’ve had to say, ‘We understand emotionally you do not want to stop, but stopping is in your best interests.’”

The act of an inclusive community is a difficult concept and lived reality to actualize. Markel’s words that we should act like a community are heartfelt, particularly in this time of polarization we witness on local, national, and international levels. This “us versus them” mentality infects places like even our churches that by their very essence and ethos means community.

For example, on March 15, I was invited to be the guest preacher at a United Methodist Church. However, the ASRM said it will revisit its guidance no later than March 30 and “periodically as the pandemic evolves.” Bergman said this reassessment might be as often as every two weeks. She noted, “Everything is geared up so that as soon as things are safer and we get a green light, there’s going to be tons of cycles, more than usual.”

In fact, some of Bergman’s clients who hadn’t felt quite ready to begin have recently told her that the pandemic has given them a new perspective, saying, “Now I see what’s really important in life. It’s me being a parent and I want to go for it.”

Of course, anyone wanting to use third-party assisted reproduction will have to wait until the restrictions lift. In the meantime, Bergman offered the words of comfort she gives anyone going through infertility or the IVF process: “It will happen. You will be a parent.”

She added, “In the marathon of family building, you’re going to have some really exhilarating miles, some really hard miles, some tedious miles, some boring miles, some joyful miles. Every mile’s different and it’s a really long road. This happens to be probably one of the hardest miles we’ve ever had, collectively, but like any marathon, we will get to the finish line. People will still be mommies and daddies and people will have their families.”

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of Mombian (mombian.com), a GLAAD Award-winning blog and resource directory for LGBTQ parents.

The officer has served for nearly a decade, including two extended tours as a surface warfare officer, according to her complaint. She was diagnosed with gender dysphoria two months after the policy went into effect in April 2019 and told her commanding officer she is transgender shortly after, her lawyers said.

“Lieutenant Doe is now subject to discharge for being who she is, unrelated to her fitness to serve in the military,” the lawsuit says.

Amherst College puts lacrosse team on probation, fires coach

AMHERST, Mass. (AP)—Amherst College has placed its men’s lacrosse team on probation and is firing the team’s coach following complaints that players used a racial slur.

Masslive.com reports that the team will be on probation through June 30, 2021, and is barred from meeting for practices or other gatherings until November 2020. The college also announced it is firing Coach Jon Thompson, saying a change of leadership was needed. Amherst President Biddy Martin said the college will not tolerate a team culture “that repeatedly violates standards of human decency and then protects those who have perpetrated these violations.”

The college’s student newspaper, the Amherst Student, reported that three members of the men’s lacrosse team chanted a racial slur outside a black player’s hotel suite on March 7. The newspaper reported that it followed another incident in which players drew a swastika on an unconscious student’s forehead at a party in December 2018.

Martin said the lacrosse team has been responsible for other violations in recent years, including vandalism in dorms, and she said players had ridiculed transgender members of the team’s staff.

“These failures have exacerbated the harm to those directly affected and to our broader community, including those alumni who experienced racism and other indignities while at Amherst,” Martin said in a statement.

Team members will also be required to go through an educational program as part of their discipline. The private, liberal arts college enroll's about 1,800 students.
Monroe

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I didn't preach because of COVID-19 warning to remain out of congregational settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintain distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters). For months the senior pastor and I had been finalizing plans for me to come out to preach and celebrate with the church in upcoming 15th anniversary as a Reconciling Congregation in March. UMC Reconciling Congregations welcome people of all gender expressions and sexual orientations. In his letter inviting me he wrote the following:

“Given the proximity of this year’s observance to the next UMC General Conference vote re: LGBTQ Legislation in May 2020, it is important to us to invite a preacher who will encourage us during a tumultuous time in our relationship with our global connection and, to be honest, in our congregation’s own internal connections.

Just minutes after our phone call ended, my smartphone flashed the Associated Press headline: “Methodists propose split in gay marriage, clergy impasse.”

I let out a long sigh of despair, thinking, why are we LGBTQ+ people of faith loving a church that doesn’t love us. On March 15, I looked forward to delivering a homily about healing our congregation’s own internal connections.

The proposed schism to be voted on in May at the General Conference in Minneapolis would divide the nation’s third-largest denomination worldwide. While the current UMC will allow LGBTQ marriage and clergy, the impending split will create a new “traditionalist Methodist denomination,” allowing outright discrimination and denunciation of LGBTQ people in the name of God.

“The best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person,” the proposal, “PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION & GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION” stated.

In the sermon I didn’t preach, I wanted to convey that it is not enough just to look outside ourselves to see the places where society is broken. It is not enough to talk about institutions, churches, and workplaces that fracture and separate people based on race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, and not see these prejudices and bigoted acts in ourselves. We cannot heal the world if we have not healed ourselves. So perhaps the most significant task, and the most challenging work we must do first – is to heal ourselves. And this work must be done in relationship with our justice work out in the world. This pandemic we are experiencing shouldn’t divide us as a community, a nation or a world.

In Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” he was struggling to change a nation. King was disheartened to receive criticism from clergy he considered to be his colleagues and on the battlefield toward justice with him. However, King understood the interconnectedness of human life and the intersectionality of oppressions. His worldview of a global community resounds in these words:

“In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

Let us be united in this struggle together not only heal ourselves of our indifference toward one another but to also heal a world fighting to save its life.

We have never been where we are today as a nation, from natural disasters to terrorist attacks, hate crimes and unmentionable acts of violence, to now a health pandemic.

In honoring the sanctity of all human life, let’s care for ourselves and each other.

Where will you live until you can call this ‘Home’ again? Your association policy won’t cover your additional living expenses. Condo owners NEED Personal Condominium Insurance for that. Aside from replacing your personal property, it will help you with rent, while you’re still paying your mortgage. Contact us.

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DESCOVY for PrEP is not for everyone:
• It is not for use in people assigned female at birth who are at risk of getting HIV from vaginal sex, because its effectiveness has not been studied.
• You must be HIV-negative before and while taking DESCOVY for PrEP.

Ask a healthcare provider if DESCOVY for PrEP is right for you. To learn more, visit AboutDescovy.com.

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT DESCOVY (des-KOH-vee)
This is only a brief summary of important information about taking DESCOVY for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). This does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your medicine.

MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT DESCOVY for PrEP

Before starting and while taking DESCOVY for PrEP:
• You must be HIV-negative. You must get tested for HIV immediately before and at least every 3 months while taking DESCOVY. If you think you were exposed to HIV, tell your healthcare provider right away. They may want to do more tests to confirm that you are still HIV-negative.
• Many HIV tests can miss HIV infection in a person who has recently become infected. Symptoms of new HIV infection include tiredness, fever, joint or muscle aches, headache, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, night sweats, and/or enlarged lymph nodes in the neck or groin. Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a flu-like illness within the last month before starting or while taking DESCOVY.
• DESCOVY does not prevent other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom to reduce the risk of getting STIs.
• DESCOVY by itself is not a complete treatment for HIV-1. Do not take DESCOVY for PrEP unless you are confirmed to be HIV negative.

DESCOVY may cause serious side effects, including:
• Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection. Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV. If you have HBV and stop taking DESCOVY, your HBV may suddenly get worse. Do not stop taking DESCOVY without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check or give you HBV medicine.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF DESCOVY for PrEP

DESCOVY can cause serious side effects, including:
• Those in the “Most Important Information About DESCOVY for PrEP” section.
• New or worse kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys before and during treatment with DESCOVY. If you develop kidney problems, your healthcare provider may tell you to stop taking DESCOVY.
• Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
• Severe liver problems, which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.

ABOUT DESCOVY FOR PrEP

DESCOVY for PrEP is a once-daily prescription medicine for adults and adolescents at risk of HIV who weigh at least 77 pounds. It helps lower the chances of getting HIV through sex.

DESCOVY for PrEP is not for everyone:
• It is not for use in people assigned female at birth who are at risk of getting HIV from vaginal sex, because its effectiveness has not been studied.
• You must be HIV-negative before and while taking DESCOVY for PrEP.

To help determine your risk of getting HIV-1, talk openly with your healthcare provider about your sexual health.

Do NOT take DESCOVY for PrEP if you:
• Already have HIV infection or if you do not know your HIV status. If you have HIV-1, you need more medicine than DESCOVY alone to treat HIV-1. If you have HIV-1 and take only DESCOVY, your HIV-1 may become harder to treat now and in the future.

Your healthcare provider will test you for hepatitis B (HBV) before you start taking DESCOVY for PrEP. Your healthcare provider will check your HBV throughout treatment. Your healthcare provider will check your HBV before you start taking DESCOVY for PrEP. Your healthcare provider will check your HBV throughout treatment. If your liver or kidney tests show problems, DESCOVY may not be right for you. If you have HBV and take only DESCOVY, your HBV may become harder to treat.

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POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF DESCOVY FOR PrEP (cont’d)

Common side effects in people taking DESCOVY for PrEP include diarrhea, nausea, headache, fatigue, and stomach pain.

These are not all the possible side effects of DESCOVY. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking DESCOVY for PrEP.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Your healthcare provider will need to do tests to monitor your health before and during treatment with DESCOVY for PrEP.

BEFORE TAKING DESCOVY FOR PrEP

Tell your healthcare provider if you:
• Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis.
• Have any other medical conditions.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:
• Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
• Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about medicines that should not be taken with DESCOVY for PrEP.

HOW TO TAKE DESCOVY FOR PrEP

• Take 1 tablet once a day, every day, not just when you think you have been exposed to HIV-1.
• Do not miss any doses. Missing doses may increase your risk of getting HIV-1 infection.
• Get tested for HIV-1 at least every 3 months. You must stay HIV-negative to keep taking DESCOVY for PrEP.

HOW TO FURTHER REDUCE YOUR RISK

• Know your HIV status and the HIV status of your partners. If your partner is living with HIV, your risk of getting HIV is lower if your partner consistently takes HIV treatment every day.
• Get tested for other STIs. Some STIs make it easier for HIV to infect you.
• Practice safer sex by using latex or polyurethane condoms.
• Talk to your healthcare provider about all the ways to help reduce HIV risk.

GET MORE INFORMATION

• This is only a brief summary of important information about DESCOVY for PrEP. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
• Go to DESCOVY.com/prep or call 1-800-GILEAD-5
• If you need help paying for your medicine, visit DESCOVY.com/prep for program information.

*Advancing Access® co-pay support is available for commercially insured eligible patients only. Subject to change; for full terms and conditions, visit GileadAdvancingAccess.com.
Does anyone remember Sylvia Browne? She was the psychic who would run her long nails across her teeth when she was communing with...well, whoever is the god of acrylics. She helped police with missing person cases—usually saying that the victim was dead down by a river. That worked out well until she said it to Amanda Berry’s mother. Nine years later, Amanda turned up alive, being abducted. Oops. In her 2008 book, “End of Days: Predictions and Prophecies About the End of the World”, Sylvia made this prediction: “In around 2020, a severe pneumonia-like illness will spread throughout the globe, attacking the lungs and the bronchial tubes and resisting all known treatments. Almost more baffling than the illness itself will be the fact that it will suddenly vanish as quickly as it arrived, attack again ten years later, and then disappear completely.” What kinda prediction starts with “In around 2020”? Could you be more vague? It doesn’t matter—most of her other predictions haven’t come true.

Now let’s get back to me. As I was being prepped for surgery, a Filipino nurse took my blood pressure and said, “WOW, that’s high.” Not what you want to hear before they roll you into the OR. Before he took it a second time, he asked me to extend my arm so that it was horizontal with the floor. His computer was on a rolling, portable desk with a shelf that held a basket of patient charts—roughly at my shoulder level. He had me rest my arm there, and then my pressure was a less alarming 115/80. “PHEW—that’s better,” he said. “That’s because you had me hold onto your basket,” I quipped. There was less laughing when my surgeon came in with the sniffles!

Regardless, I’m alive, but confined to my bed—and in a sling (which is not nearly as much fun as you’d think). But even in my compromised state, I am still entertaining the masses...albeit rockin’ one arm. While most print publications are taking a break, new columns will appear every week on BillyMasters.com. I’ll even be posting more on Facebook.com/Filth2Go. We’re planning some live events with friends, tentatively beginning on Tuesday at 3PM EST. I was inspired by pals Seth Rudetsky and James Wesley, who are doing great things online every day for the Actors Fund. They’re at 2PM, I’m at 3PM—no conflict there. And what a great lead-in.

Now that the rest of you are self-quarantining, I feel like we’re on the same page. We’re separate, but together—my favorite kinda relationship. Still, how much fun can you have alone? As luck would have it, “The Sun” in the UK has given us a helpful tip to combat illness—masturbation! Yes, according to unnamed experts who surely don’t exist, jerking off will allegedly boost your immune system and raise your white blood count. I still suggest vigorously washing your hands with soap and hot water first. After all, you don’t know where you’ve been!

The coronavirus has a face—Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. On one hand, Rita Wilson FINALLY has a credit to her name. Still, it must irk her to no end that many reports simply say “Tom Hanks and his wife”. Rita has striven to not simply be “wife”. She’s acted, sung, and even produced. Yet whatever she does, her most notable credit is “wife”. The couple’s position as the face of CO-VID-19 was short-lived once Idris Elba came forward. And then, Daniel Dae Kim. If all of these people perish, they’d likely be remembered during the Oscars’ “In Memoriam” as “Actor”...except for Rita Wilson. If she even makes the cut, I suspect she’ll simply be referred to as “Wife”.

You know the coronavirus is losing some of its cache once former “Bachelor” Colton Underwood got it. Elsewhere on TV, we must add dear Andy Cohen to that list.
Evading ‘covidiot’ and riding out a plague
Hunker down, others are worse off
by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

Once in the snack bar at the Labor Department I saw a lady touch several crullers before deciding which one she wanted. I told her that she shouldn’t touch pastries that she wasn’t going to buy. Naturally she became indignant, while I lost my appetite.

Now we endanger one another with unsanitary habits less blatant.

If the COVID-19 deniers, or covidiot (to adopt a new coinage) only harmed themselves, we could chalk them up as Darwin Award contestants and let nature take its course. Alas, they are but a few degrees of separation from the rest of us, in a society full of people with whom we have to plead just to wash their hands.

Stir-crazy from social distancing, I think of friends in Africa suffering greater isolation. A gay refugee named Desire has emailed me from Khartoum, where he is held by Sudanese police who apprehended him on his journey from Kenya to Egypt, which he somehow decided was a welcoming place. I wonder at his bravery and resourcefulness in trekking 1200 miles from Nairobi to Khartoum.

The image of Huck and Jim on a raft comes to mind, only in this case it would be the Nile, not the Mississippi. I imagine lighting out for the territory myself. But where would that be? West Potomac Park? The National Arboretum? The banks of the Anacostia?

I do not light out for the territory. The farthest I go, other than to the grocery and the pharmacy, is two flights up to the roof deck, where I get sun and fresh air. I talk pleasantly to a blackbird that lands on the white fence and squawks at me. I do not take it as an omen; it is just a blackbird. If I had grapes, I would offer it one.

Few of us other than molecular biologists anticipated this virus. Jelani Cobb, writer for The New Yorker and journalism professor at Columbia, tweeted on March 19, “Just how much of other people’s saliva were we inhaling before?” I replied, “Now there’s a sentence I bet you never expected to write.”

I submit these commentaries electronically, with no micro droplets of spittle involved. We are used to receiving payments by ACH transfer. For all our filthy spraying and pawing, we do a lot of sterilizing and over-packaging. We devise ever new ways of avoiding direct interaction. At the same time, most of us cannot bear being isolated like people in The Matrix or the severely immunodeficient child raised in a bubble.

As Gov. Cuomo said, we don’t know how long this will take. It depends on what we do. Nor do we know how many people we will lose. I think of Stella (real name Tom) from the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington in an ICU at Washington Hospital Center in 1986, telling an elaborate joke for which he periodically removed his oxygen mask. He also told us of a nurse apologizing that she needed to give him a suppository, and he laughed and told her, “Honey, go right ahead,” that it wasn’t exactly an untrafficked country lane.

Thus we who are old enough recall vanished friends as we balk at a second plague, like my father being asked to reenlist for the Korean War after surviving a German POW camp. He was able to decline. We merely hunker down with provisions. Food delivery services must be ramping up. My coffee shop group and Saturday breakfast club have gone on hiatus just as spring arrives and outdoor seating beckons.

Lest I bewail these deprivations, I remember Desire in Khartoum, and the other LGBT refugees languishing in Kenya. They are people without a country in a hostile land. UNHCR has suspended refugee resettlement flights due to the coronavirus. I text my displaced friends via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, which briefly alleviates their isolation.

My iPhone needs recharging, and my empty can of Arizona Iced Tea skitters across the table in the breeze. I pick it up and think of Trayvon Martin, who carried a similar drink on that terrible night in 2012 in Sanford, Florida, and I count my blessings as I wipe the doorknob and head back downstairs.

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

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A bright ray of articulate Meredith Vieira an hour later, she’s the perfect fill-in. In fact, everything about her is perfect. She is perfectly
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is moderating from home. The bright side is the “The View”, being of a certain age, is taking time off and sequestering herself in her Hamptons abode. Whoopi is moderating from home. The bright side is the perfect fill-in. In fact, everything about her is perfect. She is perhaps the most ideal “View” co-host since Meredith Vieira. A bright ray of articulate sunshine and smarts to start my day. It doesn’t hurt that she has a hot gay brother. Yes, Joe, I’m talking to you. Since we’re both just sitting home, drop me an e-mail, message me on Facebook, and let’s see where this goes. According to “The Sun”, it could boost both of our immune systems!

Leaders are not exempt from the coronavirus. West Hollywood Mayor John D’Amico has tested positive. So has Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. Even my buddy Prince Albert of Monaco has it. So, it didn’t surprise me that England ain’t taking any chances when it comes to that old woman. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip have taken social distancing to an extreme and travelled to be sequestered at Windsor Castle...separately: Lizzie drove, Phil took a helicopter. Rumors rapidly rose that the 98-year-old Phil died in his sleep (which, let’s face it, is plausible). We’re told that not only are Liz and Phil fine, all other senior members of the royal family are self-quarantined at their respective homes. And, ‘cause I know you’re interested, Harry and Meghan are fine, too.

I love that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo is having prisoners make hand sanitizer. “NYS Clean” is said to have a “floral bouquet” and costs only $6/gallon to make. They are currently making 100K gallons a week, and are scaling up production. Next stop for Cuomo—“Shark Tank”? We heard he enlisted the aid of designer Christian Siriano to make surgical masks for medical workers. Sure, they’re more expensive, but they go with everything. Drag queens are also making some. This is smart outside-the-box thinking. Many are looking to Cuomo for guidance and comfort. Some are even suggesting he could jump into the presidential race. At least he’s under 70!

Not all local government officials are created equally. Take Andrew Gillum. Just before the pandemic hit the US, Gillum (a Democrat who almost became Florida’s first black governor) was caught in a South Beach hotel room with another guy. Making matters worse, the other guy was allegedly ODing on crystal meth. At some point, a third man arrived, found Gillum vomiting in the bathroom, and his companion unresponsive in bed. He called 911 and began chest compressions (presumably on the unresponsive guy). When the cops and paramedics arrived, they found a room riddled with baggies of drugs, empty bottles of (ironically enough) Corona beer, various prescription meds, and soiled linens. I know...icky! They also found an injectable medication for erectile dysfunction—cause, you know, when you’re drunk and high, sometimes you simply cannot perform. When the officers tried to question Gillum, he was unable to provide coherent details—for obvious reasons. And yet, inexplicably, they didn’t take him into custody. He checked out of the hotel and returned to his home.

What makes this all worse is that 1) Gillum is married to a woman and has three kids and, b) the companion who was ODing was male escort Travis Dyson. Actually, his “working” name is Brodie Scott—which doesn’t sound nearly as porny as Travis Dyson. Anyway, he’s mighty hot and mighty hung—and you can see for yourself in the many photos and videos posted on BillyMasters.com. I’m not completely sure, but I think the third guy who stumbled into the hotel room and called 911 was Travis’ fiancé. Hmmmm...more to come, I’m sure.

When we’re all in bed together, it’s time for me to end yet another column. Before closing, I must acknowledge the passing of Kathy Griffin’s mom, Maggie. In person, she was everything you’d want...and more. She was a helluva gal, and we’re tipping it in her memory. If you don’t have a box of wine handy, you can simply head on over to www.BillyMasters.com—the site that’ll keep you amused (and healthy) through this crisis. If you have a question, send a note to Billy@BillyMasters.com, and I promise to get back to you before we get to the bottom of Andrew Gillum. So, until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
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