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After 303 Creative: Inequality and the Harm to Children

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

The U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling in 303 Creative v. Elenis was "profoundly wrong," wrote Justice Sonia Sotomayor in her dissent, where she also pointed out the harmful message it sends to children with same-sex parents. Anti-LGBTQ individuals and organizations have been trying for decades to own the idea that they are acting in defense of children, even as their actions in fact cause harm. LGBTQ families and other advocates have made some progress against this—but as this case and other recent events make clear, we need to redouble our efforts.

The majority in 303 Elenis ruled that a Web designer may refuse to create custom wedding websites for same-sex couples, despite state nondiscrimination laws. LGBTQ legal experts from Lambda Legal, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) have all released statements emphasizing that the decision is a narrow one, limited to businesses doing custom, creative work. Yet as Lambda Legal Chief Legal Officer Jennifer C. Pizer said, "The door has been opened for potential future cases to expand this limited carve-out."

Even before that might happen, however, the harm is evident. Justice Sotomayor's dissent, in which she was joined by Justices Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, explained, "Imagine a same-sex couple browses the public

see **MOMBIAN,** *page 4*

Boston Pride for the People Brings the Community Together

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

The Boston Pride Parade is back, and no better reminder of it than the familiar roaring and thunderous sounds from the Moving Violations women's motorcycle club to kick it off. The day reminded many, after a four-year hiatus, of the good feelings of seeing the entire community enjoying themselves. "I was happy to see so many seniors and young people celebrating Pride together!" Mary Leno told me. Leno is an active senior resident of Cambridge's LGBTQ community.

Maura Healey, the state's first openly lesbian governor, hugged and high five spectators along the parade route. Everywhere Healy went these days, she invited people to come to Massachusetts.

"I'm just so proud to be a part of it. I'm proud to lead this state. I'm grateful for the support," Healey told reporters at Pride. "And I just want people to know, in this time where there are other states going backward — come to Massachusetts. It's a great place to live, raise a family, and grow a business."

The Boston Pride parade returns at a time when LGBTQ+ Americans are witnessing a backlash against our civil rights. At least 650+ anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in Congress, with over 400 targeting our trans population, banning them from sports, gender-affirming surgery, and Drag Queen Story Hour in some states. HRC has declared a state of emergency for LGBTQ+ Americans.

see **MONROE,** *page 4*

SCOTUS Sides with 303 Creative

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

In a 6 to 3 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court today (June 30) that a state law can not require a business owner to comply with a state law against discrimination in public accommodations if the business owner claims their services or product expresses their "beliefs." The decision arose out of a case in which a wedding website designer asked federal courts to declare she did not have to create wedding websites for same-sex couples. Many legal observers believe the decision will have consequences for LGBTQ people and other minorities beyond beliefs about marriage.

The vote was 6 to 3, with Justice Neil Gorsuch (a Trump appointee) writing for the majority. He was joined by Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett, all Republican appointees.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor (an Obama nominee) wrote for the minority, which included Elena Kagan and Ketanji Jackson, all Democratic appointees.

In the opening sentence of her dissent, Sotomayor quoted a conservative majority's opinion in Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado: "Five years ago, this Court recognized the 'general rule' that religious and philosophical objections to gay marriage 'do not allow business owners and other actors in the economy and in society to deny protected persons equal access to goods and services under a neutral and generally applicable public accommodations law.'"

"...Today, the Court, for the first time in its history, grants a business open to the public a constitutional right to refuse to serve members of a protected class," wrote Sotomayor. "...This is heartbreaking. Sad-

see **SCOTUS,** *page 4*

How Bad is the 303 Decision?

Depends on who you ask

By Lisa Keen
Keen News Service

Some believe the U.S. Supreme Court's decision June 30 in 303 Creative v. Elenis may be one of the most consequential in LGBTQ legal history—a kind of "separate but equal" pronouncement on how the courts should treat LGBTQ people under the law. Others see a "narrow" injury to the right of LGBTQ people to equal protection of the law and one that will come into play very rarely.

The true consequences will likely take many years to realize. That was the case with the notorious and widely harmful 1986 decision in Bowers v. Hardwick. The 5 to 4 decision said states could prohibit same-sex sexual relationships, and it was wielded against LGBTQ people both legally and socially. It took 17 years to overturn.

In that 17 years, seven of the nine justices who were on the high court and voted in Hardwick left the bench, including three of the five who had voted to allow bans on same-sex relationships. One of the five, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, changed her mind. So, when the vote on so-called "sodomy laws" came up again, in Lawrence v. Texas in 2003, the vote was 6 to 3 to strike down such bans.

Twenty years have passed since Lawrence, and only one justice who was on the bench in 2003 is still there now: Justice Clarence Thomas. He and five of his conservative Republican appointees voted June 30 to approve the first ever exemption to state laws that prohibit

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Reaction to 303 Creative Decision

Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Grace Moreno released the following statement about the 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis SCOTUS decision backing a business opposed to same-sex marriage.

"In the last 48 hours we have seen rulings from the Supreme Court that drastically set our country back and harm historically marginalized communities. Let's be very clear: today's ruling in the web designer case is an attack on not just the LGBTQ community, it is an attack on the very freedoms our constitution holds most dear. It is evident that all settled law is now vulnerable to the whims of right-wing ideology. Our LGBTQ community is not the first, nor will it be the last, to be targeted. Our Chamber will be relentless in our pursuit of justice and equality in spite of the political extremists who have placed Justices on the Court who are dragging us backwards."

SEE MORE REACTIONS ON PAGE 3

"If you're around your parents a lot, you see them in ways that almost no one else does. And I never saw a hint of that. I think I would have picked up on it — not that I would've cared."

— Jennifer Grant, on rumors that her father Cary Grant had gay relationships, specifically with Randolph Scott (who he was close to for about a dozen years).

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

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discrimination based on sexual orientation in the public marketplace. Thomas is 75; the other five range in age from 51 (Amy Coney Barrett) to 73 (Samuel Alito). If each current justice retires at 80 (the approximate average age that a justice retires these days), and if a pro-LGBTQ president is in office when each retires, and if nobody dies, the soonest 303 Creative might be overturned is 2030.

So, how did this happen?

First, of course, then Republican Senate President Mitch McConnell denied a confirmation vote on Obama nominee Merrick Garland. Then he raced three Trump nominees through, creating a super majority of six conservative Republicans on the court.

With six conservatives on the court, the Alliance Defending Freedom, a national conservative litigation group seeking to undermine equal rights for LGBTQ people—and which was consistently losing at the lower court levels-- accelerated its efforts to get appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court.

One case it had in the pipeline was 303 Creative v. Elenis. It involved a website designer, Lorie Smith of Colorado who was willing to say that she was opposed to same-sex marriage for religious reasons and that she had "worries" that a same-sex couple might come to her and ask her to design a wedding website for them. If a gay couple did, she said her Christian beliefs would require her to say no, thus putting her in violation of Colorado's law against discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations.

There was no evidence that any same-sex couple had ever asked her, and this is a particularly interesting point. Typically, courts won't take a case unless there is a real –not imagined— conflict. Presumably, the Alliance could not find a website designer who ever faced a real conflict, so it proceeded with Smith and her "worries." The litigation lost in the district court (which noted that Smith had not been faced with a same-sex couple's request) and lost in the federal appeals court (which said Smith's religious beliefs did not exempt her from obeying the law that applies to all businesses).

The next key turning point was when the Colorado attorney general's office conceded that Smith's plans to start designing wedding websites would constitute an "expressive" activity –or speech— protected by the First Amendment. Many, if not most, wedding websites simply take information and photos which a couple provides and plug those into existing website templates. Smith claimed that she would pour herself into the creation of each website, so much so that the couple's wedding website is really her speech, not theirs. So, if Colorado forced Smith to create wedding websites for same-sex couples' weddings, it would be abridging her First Amendment right to free speech.

And then, oddly, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the Alliance's appeal for Smith's case and, in doing so, stipulated that the only question it wanted to hear arguments about was "Whether applying a public-accommodation law to compel an artist to speak or stay silent violates the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment."

On its face, the answer seemed obvious: Of course, it does. The court's question presumed Colorado applied the state law to "compel" Smith to "speak or stay silent."

As ACLU legal director David Cole said in a New York Times guest column last December, "The right question is whether someone who chooses to open a business to the public should have the right to turn away gay customers simply because the service she would provide them is 'expressive' or 'artistic.'"

How bad is the loss?

LGBTQ legal groups released statements, saying the Supreme Court's 303 Creative decision was a disappointing but that it would have very little impact. After all, what LGBTQ person or couple would knowingly go to an anti-LGBTQ business to seek a pro-LGBTQ-specific product or service?

Lambda Legal's Chief Legal Officer, Jenny Pizer, said 303 Creative would have "limited practical impact in the marketplace."

"Given the uniquely creative service at issue here, the impact is likely to be minimal," said Pizer. "But the door has been opened for potential future cases to expand this limited carve-out. We will be vigilant against that possibility."

A statement released by GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (aka GLAD) said the "unusual nature" of the 303 Creative complaint "suggests the ruling has virtually no application to the overwhelming majority of businesses providing goods and services to the public."

Some pro-LGBTQ organizations were a less optimistic. The executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Imani Rupert-Gordon, issued a statement saying that, "While the Court's holding is narrow and will apply only to a very small number of businesses, the dissenting justices rightly stress that the decision creates an unprecedented exception to nondiscrimination laws."

David Cole, legal director for the national ACLU, said the majority decision "opens the door to any business that claims to provide customized services to discriminate against historically-marginalized groups."

Most non-LGBTQ commentators were occupied with the only other decision released June 30, the court's last day in the 2022-23 session. That decision, Biden v. Nebraska, had the same 6 to 3 split as 303 Creative. It struck down President Biden's program to forgive up to $20,000 per person in federal student loan debt. But those media who did comment on 303 Creative, saw things more like Cole.

"The court handed a major victory to business owners who oppose same-sex marriage for religious reasons," said Amy Howe, who writes regularly for the popular scotusblog.com site.

New York Times reporters Abbie VanSickle and Adam Liptak said, "The decision also appeared to suggest that the rights of L.G.B.T.Q. people... are on more vulnerable legal footing, particularly when they are at odds with claims of religious freedom. At the same time, the ruling limited the ability of governments to enforce anti-discrimination laws."

President Biden issued a statement saying he was "deeply concerned that the decision could invite more discrimination against LGBTQI+ Americans."

"More broadly, today's decision weakens longstanding laws that protect all Americans against discrimination in public accommodations – including people of color, people with disabilities, people of faith, and women," said Biden.

Law professor and MSNBC legal commentator Joyce Vance said in her blog that the 303 Cre-

see **303,** *page 3*

Reactions

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GBPFLAG

GBPFLAG is resolved to continue the fight against discrimination.

This decision is a decisive blow in years of organized attacks that are chipping away at civil rights. Greater Boston PFLAG will continue to do our education work in schools, places of business, and community groups to ensure that students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and first-generation students all feel welcomed and valued in all institutions. We will also continue to work to create allies so that discrimination is seen and called out, not accepted and ignored. We will not stop doing our work until we create a more caring, affirming, and just world for all LGBTQ individuals and the people who love them.

Mass Equality

In an upsetting rebuke of equality, the Supreme Court today ruled in favor of a web designer who sought to refuse service to gay couples seeking websites for their upcoming wedding. Justice Neil Gorsuch, who wrote the majority opinion, affirmed the web designer's right to discriminate against LGBTQ+ couples in need of web design services. This decision marks a troubling instance where the Court failed to protect the principle of equal treatment for allindividuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

The case, constructed upon a deceitful narrative and centered around a business that does not specialize in designing wedding websites, undermines the urgency of presenting a genuine and pressing grievance before the Court. It is concerning that there was never an actual instance where a gay couple approached this business for a wedding website. This glaring lack of immediate relevance diminishes the gravity of addressing legitimate and time-sensitive concerns in front of the Court.

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ative decision sets up "an opening here to use the First Amendment to establish the primacy of one group's religious views in a way that is antithetical to the Founding Father's vision of a religiously-neutral government."

"That's the slippery slope here," said Vance, "and the rate of descent depends on how far this Court is willing to go."

Also getting considerable attention from general media were reports that the Alliance Defending Freedom filed documents with the court that included a significant piece of what appears to be false information. Specifically, the documents indicate that Lorie Smith said, under oath, that a same-sex couple had contacted her through her website to ask about creating a wedding design for them. This is important because courts do not typically take cases unless an "injury in fact" to the plaintiff's rights is either actual or "imminent."

According to the New Republic magazine and numerous other outlets, Smith identified under oath that a man named "Stewart" inquired about retaining her services to design something for his wedding to another man and left a phone number. Media calling the phone number got a "Stewart," but the man, who would not share his last name, told the media he is not gay, has never contacted Smith to ask about a gay wedding website, has been married to a woman for 15 years, and is himself a web designer. The Alliance's case, said the New Republic, was "built on nothing much more than imaginary Christian grievance."

Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe, in a Twitter post Friday said, "If this were a normal court, with real judges in the majority, it would take seriously the news that this was a fraudulent case and would vacate its opinion and direct the imposition of sanctions on the lawyers who hacked the legal system and perpetrated this hoax."

Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have laws on the books which explicitly, or by court interpretation, prohibit sexual orientation discrimination in public accommodations. "Public accommodations" means any business or venue that is open to and/or serves the public, including restaurants, hotels, means of transportation, entertainment or sports venues, and website designers.

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Responsibilities: Ensure the safety and well-being of the student population and assist the administration and faculty in maintaining a positive school environment.

Qualifications: Able to follow instructions and complete tasks efficiently. An ability to work with and understand adolescents and to de-escalate potential confrontations.

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Mombian

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market with their child. The market could be online or in a shopping mall. Some stores sell products that are customized and expressive. The family sees a notice announcing that services will be refused for same-sex weddings. What message does that send? It sends the message that we live in a society with social castes. It says to the child of the same-sex couple that their parents' relationship is not equal to others.'"

In the past few years, anti-LGBTQ people and organizations across the country have continued to use a purported concern for children to ban LGBTQ-inclusive children's books from schools and libraries, to block discussion of LGBTQ identities and history in classrooms, to stop transgender youth from using facilities and playing on sports teams aligned with their genders, and to stop them from accessing proven, gender-affirming health care. Most recently, Casey DeSantis, wife of virulently anti-LGBTQ Florida Governor and presidential candidate Ron DeSantis (R), on July 6 helped launch the campaign's "Mamas for DeSantis" program "to protect the innocence of our children and to protect the rights of parents."

As study after study of LGBTQ youth and children of LGBTQ parents has shown, however, what harms children is stigma, bias, and exclusion, or forcing them to deny or hide their identities and/or families and bullying them if they don't. In other words, everything the DeSantises and their ilk, along with the Supreme Court majority, seem bent on doing.

We LGBTQ people have been fighting for a long time to prove we are no harm to children, and we've made progress in many ways. I want to focus on one such battle here. During the Proposition 8 conflict in California, marriage equality opponents tried to scare people by saying that marriage equality would require that children learn about "homosexuality" in schools, as if that were a bad thing. Prop 8 passed, and same-sex couples were barred from marriage.

Marriage equality advocates, however, then worked hard to transform "think of the children" from an argument against marriage equality into one for it. Some of the transformation came from statements by major medical, psychological, and sociological organizations that brought a growing swell of scientific evidence to bear. Much came from same-sex parents and their children (some grown) speaking out about their families.

By 2013, this evidence and many of these family stories were part of briefs before the Supreme Court. Justice Anthony Kennedy then wrote for the majority in United States v. Windsor that the Defense of Marriage Act "humiliates tens of thousands of children now being raised by same-sex couples.... [and] makes it even more difficult for the children to understand the integrity and closeness of their own family and its concord with other families in their community and in their daily lives."

Variations of that argument were then used to win almost every other federal decision on marriage equality, including the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges ruling that established marriage equality nationwide. More than half of the Obergefell plaintiffs were parents. Justice Kennedy reiterated in Obergefell, "Without the recognition, stability, and predictability marriage offers, children suffer the stigma of knowing their families are somehow lesser.... The marriage laws at issue thus harm and humiliate the children of same-sex couples."

Justice Sotomayor, in her 303 Creative dissent, is reminding us of the stigma and harm that inequality inflicts on children—and perhaps she is also signaling a way forward. We LGBTQ parents, our grown children, and parents of LGBTQ children can play a vital role in stopping the current wave of bias by being visible and outspoken about our own family stories—in our communities, in direct communication with our elected officials, on social media, in partnership with LGBTQ organizations, and elsewhere. If we cannot do so without risking our safety or our children's privacy, we can help elevate the stories of others.

Some talking points? "Parents' rights" include our rights. "Parents' rights" should never come at the cost of harm to children. Anti-LGBTQ discrimination harms children. Pass it on.

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 1300+ LGBTQ family books.

Monroe

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"I live in Des Moines, Iowa, and we have a very big gay community there, "Shelia Maddock told me. Shelia and her sister Carrol Maddock from Brighton, England, visited Boston for the weekend. "Des Moines is very liberal, but our current governor, Kim Reynolds, is atrocious. She has introduced a terrible amount of legislation, so it is nice to be in something positive here like Boston Pride,".

Also, the parade returned after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Boston Pride Committee's board of directors disbanded in 2021. However, in 2020, the murder of George Floyd and the resulting mass protests across the country was an inflection point for LGBTQ+ people of color in Boston concerning the police; it raised additional fear. The refusal of Boston Pride's board to publicly support the LGBTQ+ community of color position statement on policing simply further highlighted the decades-long racial strife, along with being too corporate where marginal groups were nonessentials except for photo-ops highlighting diversity.

Boston Pride For The People (BP4TP) has shown how to unite the community. When Boston Pride was dismantled, a coalition of LGBTQ+ community activists and groups reimagined BP4TP as a model organization where its long-ignored marginalized groups –especially communities of Queer and Trans Black, Indigenous, and people of color (QTBIPOC)- become essential actors in its new chapter. Last June, Pop-Up Pride laid a solid foundation for today's BP4TP serving Greater Boston: a rally with diverse community speakers, local artists, musicians, performers, community tables, food vendors, a family area, an LGBTQ+ youth area, and support from nonprofits.

"We had to be the ones to create something for our city where we all could feel included, respected, and accepted," Adrianna Boulin, president of Boston Pride for the People, told "Boston Public Radio."

BP4TP spent a year planning with a varied spectrum of intersectional diversity within our LGBTQ+ communities to create an inclusive Pride event. With the recent backlash against our communities, we are witnessing a deliberate campaign to expunge LGBTQ+ people out of public life, with the censoring of discussions about LGBTQ+ people in schools and the banning of books -by and about us. These attacks are why coming together as a community is imperative.

"What a joyful crowd! Pride has been revived! "Estelle Disch, my friend, texted me. The new Boston Pride parade symbolizes hope for us to become a community again. I was overjoyed seeing the return of the amphibious Boston Duck Tours vehicles strolling down the parade route, marchers being cheered, bands playing, Rainbow Mardi Gras bead necklaces thrown to onlookers, Drag queen divas strutting and striking poses, and also being reminded by participants who memorialized transgender people who were murdered- some participants carrying photos of them and others holding placards that said: "We remember."

I watched the parade standing on a park bench facing Boylston Street in the Boston Garden, where I met the Maddock sisters. Carrol shared what the parade meant to her.

"I live in Brighton, England, and it is amazing to be here in Boston for Pride in what turns out to be an amazing day after a four-year hiatus. I can't believe it and cannot wait to text all my friends to say, "Can you believe I am here on Pride Day in Boston?"

I couldn't believe it either.

SCOTUS

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ly, it is also familiar. When the civil rights and women's rights movements sought equality in public life, some public establishments refused. Some even claimed, based on sincere religious beliefs, constitutional rights to discriminate. The brave Justices who once sat on this Court decisively rejected those claims....[T]he law in question targets conduct, not speech, for regulation, and the act of discrimination has never constituted protected expression under the First Amendment. Our Constitution contains no right to refuse service to a disfavored group."

The court's decision came in 303 Creative v. Elenis, a case involving a website designer in Colorado who asked federal courts to declare that she had a right to refuse to design wedding websites for same-sex couples. The Alliance Defending Freedom represented the web designer, Lorie Smith, in seeking a pre-emptive ruling. Attorney General Aubrey Elenis defended the state law of Colorado, whose governor, Jared Polis, is the first openly gay man to be elected governor of any state.

The Alliance, which has led numerous lawsuits seeking to undermine state laws that protect LGBTQ citizens, lost this case in federal district court and in the 10th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. The 10th Circuit said Colorado's public accommodations law was a neutral law of general applicability and that it was not unconstitutionally vague or overbroad, as the Alliance had argued.

The Supreme Court majority decision reversed the 10th Circuit decision yet spent much of its time trying to illustrate ways in which the appeals court and the majority agreed. Justice Gorsuch also spent an inordinate amount of ink defending the majority opinion from Sotomayor's stinging dissent –which characterized the majority decision as "embarrassing."

Gorsuch noted that the dissent accused the majority "is akin to endorsing a 'separate but equal' regime that would allow law firms to refuse women admission into partnership, restaurants to deny service to Black Americans, or businesses seeking employees to post something like a 'White Applicants Only' sign."

"But those cases are not this case," wrote Gorsuch. "Doubtless, determining what qualifies as expressive activity protected by the First Amendment can sometimes raise difficult questions. But this case presents no complication of that kind."

The Alliance claimed the web designer sought only the First Amendment right to express herself "in a manner consistent with [her] religious beliefs; [she] does not seek to impose those beliefs on anyone else." The designer claimed she would serve LGBT people as long as the message of the website they sought did not conflict with her religious views, opposing marriage for same-sex couples.

The Alliance and other extreme right-wing groups have been trying for years to win from the courts a broad exemption from various laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Alliance's argument was that the graphic artist had "the right to choose what messages her works convey" and that she chose to convey messages to "express what she believes is the beauty of God's design for marriage." The Alliance said the Colorado law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodation (including the marketplace) violates the graphic artist's First Amendment right to freedom of expression by "forcing" her and other artists "to speak messages that violate their deeply held beliefs." LGBTQ groups argued that the Alliance was trying to create an "unbounded exemption" to nondiscrimination laws, including the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, and would be a "dangerous change to longstanding law.

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Bouncing Back—Or Not: My Life at 66

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contributing writer

I live in a communal house in downtown Boston, on the city's historic Beacon Hill. My personal space is small—an 8x14' room that looks out on Chestnut Street, just a block from the State Capitol, its gold dome shining over Boston Common.

Living here, with 18 others, I have a sense of deja vu. After all, I lived in this same house from 1994–96, when I was in my thirties. After 25 years—and 20 years of living alone in a one-bedroom apartment, I moved back to this Quaker-connected community in fall, 2021.

The house looked the same—almost identical to when I left in the mid '90s, but the residents had all changed. (The Beacon Hill Friends House is designed for folks in transition; residents are limited to a four-year term.) Still, for the first few months I had flashbacks to '94, and half-expected some of my former housemates, who are now middle-aged, to walk around the corner or to be hanging out in the kitchen, as they had been almost 30 years before.

As I settled in and got to know the current residents—most of whom are less than half my age—the flashbacks grew sparse. But my sense of being in a time warp didn't disappear, instead it shifted, to a focus on my physical body and my sense that it (and I) cannot do some of the things now that I did then.

Back in the '90s, I had a prodigious supply of energy; sometimes more than I wanted. I managed that by running, calming mind and body by loping along the Charles River, crossing the Mass Ave Bridge by MIT, and coming back along the Cambridge side of the river, a stirring three-mile run.

Today, that three-mile jog seems inconceivable. I'm still lean, limber, and reasonably fit, and yet my energy-level cratered in my late fifties and never came back. Diagnosed with sleep apnea, and unwilling/unable to use a c-pap, I get by with an oral device designed by a dentist, which gives me a fair but not-very-good night's sleep.

Poor sleep is not my only issue; now when I get sick, it seems to take weeks—and sometimes months—to recover. In early December I developed a cough; three months later, I still couldn't take a deep breath without coughing. Finally, after multiple doctor visits, I got an inhaler and conquered the cough, at least for now.

Now, as winter turns to spring, I'm looking for gentler ways of moving my body. I go to moderate yoga classes and I'm about to unpack my bike. Instead of running along the Charles River Esplanade, I'll pedal my bike, breathing in time with my body along the flat surface of the bike path.

I don't have the energy or the drive I had at 35. But I also lack the anxiety, the depression, the angst that kept me buzzing, restless, that fed my need to run until I hit my forties. Now, whether I like it or not, I don't have the mental, emotional, or physical energy to constantly worry about what might happen down the road.

I have my hands full living in the here and now, focusing my limited energy and trying to make the most of today.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher, and storyteller in Boston. He will be performing his one-man show, "It's Now or Never," at the Duxbury Senior Center, Thursday May 25 at 5:30 pm. Contact the Center at www.facebook.com/duxburyseniorcenter to sign up.

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billy masters

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If it's July 4th in the US of A, it's Billy in Provincetown. This year, our nation's birthday was marred by bad weather, not unlike when Washington crossed the Delaware (which I suspect had just as much debauchery). But the rain did not dampen my spirits when it came to shows and sex and such. Given my unique perspective, let me suggest what you should be seeing should you venture to our little fishing village on the edge of forever.

This will be the last season for the Provincetown Art House —at least under the aegis of **Mark Cortale**. But he's certainly going out with a bang. I zipped into town in time to see **Max von Essen**, ably accompanied by the legendary **Billy Stritch**. As I thought about my review while sitting in the darkened venue, I ran out of superlatives. Obviously, Max is attractive. He's charming. He's personable. He sings like a dream. He moves with ease. He, in short, is the whole package —and let us not even discuss his package. From the lowest notes of his range, to the top (so to speak), the voice is perfectly placed and borders on luxurious. More than anything else, Max knows how to use his lyrics to tell a story —and chooses material ideally suited for his abundant gifts. And I am not exaggerating. Go see him whenever you can. The rest of this season can be found at PtownArtHouse.com.

Then there's **Varla Jean Merman**. You will not find a stronger, more talented performer anywhere in the world. What Varla does is something nobody else could do —marry impeccable vocals with ideal timing and outrageous material. She will deliver a joke or a premise and you will think it couldn't be funnier —and then she'll top herself...something hard to do in Ptown, a city with nary a top in sight! Merman's show this year, "Stand By Your Drag", is timely with all the anti-drag legislation. The material is fresh, the original songs are tuneful, and the lyrics are laden with single, double, and even triple entendres. She's at the Crown & Anchor, which is one-stop-shopping for your gaycation needs. Check out their fully-packed schedule at OnlyAtTheCrown.com.

I then sauntered over to the Post Office Café and Cabaret, but only partook of the Cabaret portion (I will return for the Café). First up was the hysterical **Judy Gold**, whose new show is called "Everything Hurts Everywhere All At Once". She's one of those rare comics who can seamlessly weave spontaneous banter with the audience amongst tried and true material. If there's someone funnier, smarter, and with more charisma —I've not met them. Always provocative, always hysterical, and always delivers. She is only performing Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, with tickets at PostOfficeCafe.net.

Also at the Post Office is "Schartt$ Creek" —a parody of "Schitt's Creek". This is an alternate ending by writer and performer **Jamie Morris** (of "Mommie Queerest" fame), who plays Moira. And it's a HOOT! Actually it's a hoot and a half, but I'm not sure how that translates for our metric-crazed Canadians. Nonetheless, I highly recommend checking it out on Sundays, Wednesdays and Saturday.

Let's talk for a moment about mental illness —which is no joking matter. And I know this because I, your humble scribe, have been touched by mental disorders. Never forget —everyone has something. Acknowledging it is the first step. And yet, I was still taken aback when **Bowen Yang** admitted that he is suffering from "bad bouts of depersonalization". I thought that was when you ask a jeweler to erase an engraving before you regift! But here is how the Mayo Clinic defines depersonalization disorder: "When you persistently or repeatedly have the feeling that you're observing yourself from outside your body or you have a sense that things around you aren't real." How does that apply to you? Imagine you get to have sex with someone out of your league and you can't believe it's happening. Or perhaps see yourself having sex in an overhead mirror. That's depersonalization. Admittedly, it's not always quite so titillating. But the point is, Bowen is getting help.

We've had a spate of gay breakups that make one take pause —depersonally, if possible. Most notable is **Ricky Martin and Jwan Yosef**, who are divorcing after six years. "We have decided to end our marriage with love, respect and dignity for our children and honoring what we have experienced as a couple all these wonderful years." How many publicists and lawyers did it take to craft that? Not that I don't believe the sentiment, but the legalese is thick. Other reports claim the relationship was "open"...lest we forget the nephew's allegations. Going back to the official release, it mentions Ricky had twin boys 11 years prior to marrying Jwan —"whom he will continue to raise as a single parent". So Jwan was married to a man with kids ages 9 through 15 but wasn't a parent? Skeptical.

Then there is **Billy Porter's** break with **Adam Smith**. The press seems fascinated that they married after a two-week engagement —like they're **Kardashians**! To be accurate, the couple dated for a year back in 2009. For whatever reason, it didn't work out. Then in 2015, they reunited, dated for almost two years, and then got engaged and married a fortnight later. "The decision was an amicable and mutual one and made after much consideration," says publicist Simon Halls —enough said! I couldn't help but note that both these breakups happened after six years of marriage. The straights have the seven-year itch. Maybe we gays figure it out quicker!

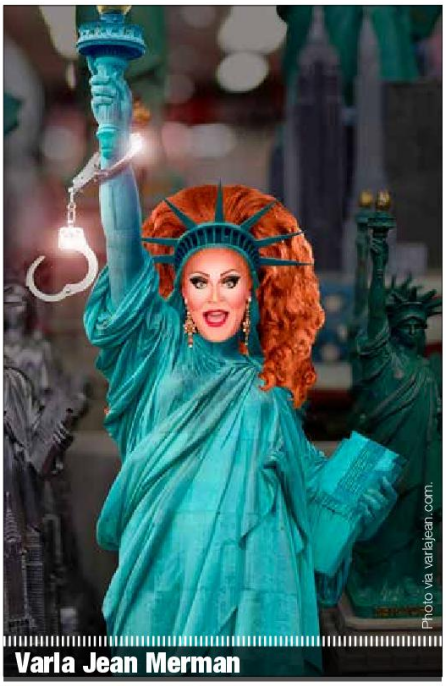
It is amazing how far people will reach to say something positive about our most recent former president. Here's a headline I read last week: "**Donald Trump** is the only living US president whose ancestors didn't own slaves". Delving deeper into the report, I learned the reason for this great achievement —his family didn't come to the US until after slavery had been abolished! The report, done by Reuters, did not mention that he is also the only former US president to have had no political or military experience, the only one to have been impeached twice, the only one to have been indicted on a criminal charge, and the only one to have had three wives. On the positive side, he is only the second president mostly likely to get stuck in a bathtub! Thanks, Taft!

Then there's those pesky dozen sexual assault charges against **Kevin Spacey**, which finally hit London's Southwark Crown Court. In opening statements, the beleaguered actor was described as, "A man who does not respect personal boundaries or space, a man who it would seem delights in making others feel powerless and uncomfortable —a sexual bully. His preferred method of assault is, it appears, to grab aggressively other men in the crotch." In other words, he could run for President of the United States! Spacey's lawyer, not surprisingly, denied that any of the sexual acts were non-consensual. We hear the trial could last through the month of July.

A federal judge in Orlando, FL, put the kibosh on **Governor Ron DeSantis'** ban on drag performers. You'll recall that Hamburger Mary's in Orlando filed a suit against the governor, the State of Florida, and various other officials. U.S. District **Judge Gregory Presnell** agreed with plaintiff's claims that this is a First Amendment case, and said of the law, "This statute is specifically designed to suppress the speech of drag queen performers." Of course, this doesn't overturn the anti-drag bill. But for now, it cannot be enforced —pending the outcome of the trial. Judge Presnell also denied the state's efforts to have the lawsuit dismissed. Stay tuned.

Pride Month ended with a thud in San Francisco. For years, Google has sponsored a series of LGBT events and this year, planned to close out Pride Month with a "Pride and Drag Show" at Beaux, a local bar. Then a coalition of Christian employees circulated a petition claiming it was offensive to their religion —because we all remember the passage where Jesus chastised the apostles for lip-synching for their lives! The group had a strong argument since headlining the event was drag legend Peaches Christ —whose appearance was called "a direct affront to the religion beliefs and sensitivities of Christians". Alas, the team that planned the event neglected to go through the company's "standard events process" —whatever that means.

see **BILLY MASTERS,** *page 7*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Varla Jean Merman

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Sarah Jessica Parker

Photo by Canada Film Centre, via Wikimedia Commons.

Kim Cattrall

billy masters

Continued from page 6

Google quickly distanced themselves from the show and planned a competing event in the office. However, many employees still went to the drag show —and "Booed". After the fact, Peaches said, "This thing that happened with Google, unfortunately for this event, is actually indicative of a huge groundswell of hatred across the country using drag queens and trans people as scapegoats." Oh my! As if drag and trans weren't enough, now we're bringing in goats!? Well, it is San Francisco.

Ryan Seacrest continues his quest for world domination by taking the reigns of the popular game show "Wheel of Fortune". Yes, once **Pat Sajak** retires at the end of next season, Ryan will host the show, which kinda makes sense since it was created by his former "mentor", **Merv Griffin**. But what will happen to **Vanna**? Ryan went out of his way to say, "I can't wait to continue the tradition of spinning the wheel and working alongside the great Vanna White." Nice words, but it's not a done deal. Yes, White has an additional year on her contract, but she's also secured the services of a lawyer to get what is being called "pay equality". Apparently, she gets one-fifth of Sajak's salary (she gets $3 million to his $15 million). Adding insult to injury, Vanna has not had a raise in 18 years. To be fair, I believe that's when she stopped actually turning letters!

Sarah Jessica Parker may be returning to another of her former roles. We hear that a third "Hocus Pocus" flick could well be in the works. According to rumors, Walt Disney Pictures president **Sean Bailey** would like to fast-track another installment and has put the project in development. There have been rumors that the next chapter could revolve around the new witches introduced in the recent sequel. Of course, that was the plan for the last film —until the original trio agreed to reunite at reduced rates. Yes, once again, **Bette** has been marked down by Disney.

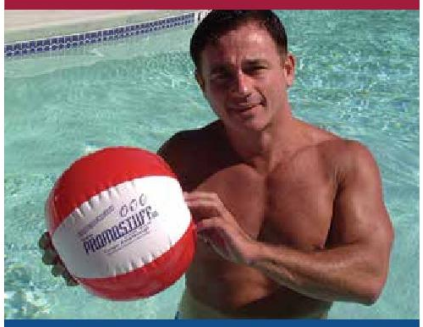
Turning to her current project, SJP found a way to get in front of **Kim Cattrall's** cameo on "And Just Like That...". You'll recall that none of the "AJLT" costars had any idea Cattrall was even shooting a scene. Kim was more direct about how it came to be during an appearance on "The View". "It's very interesting to get a call from the head of HBO saying, 'What can we do?' And I went, 'Hmm, let me get creative.' And one of those things was to get [costume designer] **Pat Field** back, because I just thought that if I'm going to come back, I gotta come back with that Samantha style. I gotta push it." Parker was quick to put her own spin on the situation. "We've been really thoughtful about the ways in which we've, you know, approached characters that haven't been around, the ways we have invited actors back, and it's been, you know, really fun and exciting and certainly nostalgic. But I think, more than that, it's been a lot of joy." Yes, being told after the fact that Kim filmed a scene on a secret set...that's my definition of joy!

Our "Ask Billy" question comes from Ed in Dallas: *"What is going on in England? You wrote that story about the morning TV host who was dating a teenage boy. Now some other host paid a teen boy for nude photos."*

A woman made this shocking claim against a BBC presenter (TV or radio unspecified): "There were huge sums, hundreds, or thousands of pounds at a time... The money had been in exchange for sexually explicit photographs of my child." The unnamed boy was allegedly 17 when this started (it is illegal in the UK "to make, distribute, possess or show any indecent images of anyone aged under 18" —he's 20 now) and made close to $50K. Mum produced bank records proving the payments, which she claims fueled her son's crack cocaine addiction. The host has also not been disclosed, but has been described as a "household name" who was recently taken off the air. The public is now playing "Name That Host". First guess was **Rylan Clark**. "Not sure why my names floating about but re that story in the sun —that ain't me babe. I'm Currently filming a show in Italy for the BBC, so take my name out ya mouths." **Jeremy Vine** says, "I'm very much looking forward to hosting my radio show on Monday —whoever the 'BBC Presenter' in the news is, I have the same message for you as Rylan did earlier: it certainly ain't me." **Gary Lineker** posted, "Hate to disappoint the haters but it's not me." Lastly, Nicky Campbell struck out at the haters: "I think it's important to take a stand. There's just too many of these people on social media. Thanks for your support friends."

When I have a blind item courtesy of the Beeb, it's definitely time to end yet another column. Since we ran long, let me direct you to www.BillyMasters.com —the site that never scrimps on size. If you have a question, send it to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I'll get back to you before the next gay divorce! So, until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.

HOT IDEAS



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