

The Rainbow Times

The Freshest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Newspaper in New England

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a Divine Exclusive**

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PHOTO: TLC

Remembering Leelah: You will always sparkle

By: Nicole Lashomb*/ TRT Editor-in-Chief

Leelah Alcorn, assigned the name of Josh Alcorn at birth, knew all too well what it meant to be ostracized by society, her parents, their Christian faith and even herself. After desperate attempts to be accepted by her family as the transgender girl she was, she took her life on Dec. 28. She was struck by a truck on Interstate 71, just 4 miles from her home in Montgomery County, Ohio.

The suicide note left by Leelah, scheduled and posted by her on social media, described her life of loneliness, of shame and despair and what ultimately led her to her fate. This kind of depression is only felt when someone is denied who they are repeatedly, regardless of desperate attempts to be acknowledged, supported and loved by her family, a fundamentalist Christian household that would not and still does not respect Leelah for who she was.

"Please don't be sad, it's for the better," she wrote. The life I would've lived isn't worth living ... because I'm transgender. I could go into detail explaining why I feel that way, but this note is probably going to be lengthy enough as it is. To put it simply, I feel like a girl trapped in a boy's body, and I've felt that way ever since I was 4. I never knew there was a word for that feeling, nor was it possible for a boy to become a girl, so I never told anyone and I just continued to do traditionally 'boyish' things to try to fit in."

"We don't support that, religiously," Alcorn's mother told CNN. "But we told him that we loved him unconditionally. We loved him no matter what. I loved my son. People

My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year... Fix society. Please."

needed to know that I loved him. He was a good kid, a good boy."

And, that is exactly the root of the problem. While I'm certain that her daughter's tragic death is a horrific event that she will carry with her for the rest of her days, it could have been prevented by one simple gesture ... being there for her, loving and supporting her when she needed it the most. Yet, throughout all interviews, Leelah was disregarded and referred to as her assigned name from birth, male pronouns and all. Although her mother spoke of unconditional love, the type of love expressed to her daughter was conditional and Leelah knew that.

According to Leelah's note, she first understood what transgender was at the age of 14. Once she understood who she was, she "cried of happiness."

See Leelah Alcorn on Page 6

Faith, Family & God: Finding your truth and relevance in 2015

By: Paul P. Jesepe*/TRT Columnist



Often when I conduct a workshop, speak before a civic group, or receive an email inquiry about spiritual counseling and inner wellbeing, there is a direct or inferred question about the meaning of life, or lack thereof. There is a hunger to connect to something bigger than self-interest. There is a desire to find relevance in a crazy world. There is a longing to transcend the mundane in our daily lives—like doing laundry, cleaning the toilet, or managing the office bully or nasty supervisor because bills must be paid. The mundane is part of everyone's reality, and dwelling on it serves no purpose.

Consider getting into the routine of crafting the right questions for your life as part of your New Year's resolutions. There are boilerplate questions too often asked that have no answers. "Why did this bad thing happen to me?" for example, is one of them.

There is a story that's been handed down about the Buddha. He lifted a flower. That's

What counts is the meaning of your life in this moment.

it. The whole lesson. What did it mean? Nothing.

What is the wasp's purpose? Does the tick who bites and infects have meaning? These irritants are part of everyone's reality. They appear to be useless creatures. You could draw from Jewish wisdom. The wasp and tick teach humankind humility since they were created before Adam and Eve, or you may conclude it doesn't matter. The reality is that they exist.

The Buddha advises against getting too caught up with the why, the external, and got-to-know, failing to focus on reality. Lost focus distracts from inner wellness. Think of your life as sacred. Does it really matter why the tick or wasp exists?

What does matter is that you exist. What counts is the meaning of your life in this moment. To modify an old saying, yesterday is gone forever (don't dwell on what you did or didn't do), tomorrow is something you plan for with no guarantees, and today is your reality.

How will you experience joy after reading this column, even though happiness might be illusive if you're struggling with debt, unemployment, or other personal issues? This question of personal meaning can take on a different dimension for LGBTQ persons ...

See Truth on page 10

Op-Ed: MassEquality's Grander Vision

[Bay Window's editor] Sue O'Connell's editorial on December 17, "Is it Time for MassEquality to Retire?" asks the wrong question. Instead, the question we should be asking is, "Are we as a community of LGBTQ and HIV-positive people up to the challenge of growing and innovating our movement, including our electoral and political advocacy, for the future?"

The answer to that question must be a resounding "yes" if we are to create a world that is even more just and affirming for our community, and if we are to ensure that equality is a lived reality for all in our community, and not just for some.

MassEquality has demonstrated its commitment to that grander vision. Although MassEquality began as an organization working to achieve marriage equality, their mission and work in this community over the past several years shows a deep and passionate commitment to equity for the entire LGBTQ community, and the Commonwealth as a whole. The work of LGBTQ advocacy benefits the larger landscape of the social justice movement, and with organizations like MassEquality, that movement is growing stronger.

MassEquality has worked closely in coalition with our organizations and many others across the state to advocate for transgender rights on the local and statewide level. The staff of MassEquality has been integral in the work to pass local ordinances for nondiscrimination, lending their powerful voice to this work in innumerable ways. With 11 ju-

risdictions in the Commonwealth voting in support of local ordinances that provide public ACCOMMODATIONS protections for transgender people, our community of advocates is primed to go into 2015 fighting for a statewide law that will ensure even more justice for our community.

MassEquality played a pivotal role in working with Governor Patrick to implement nondiscrimination policies based on gender identity and helping to pass the Transgender Equal Rights Bill.

The organization has also been a powerful voice on issues facing our youth. With roughly 6,000 estimated unaccompanied homeless youth in the Commonwealth, MassEquality has devoted itself to working in coalition with the state and several other organizations to tackle this epidemic. Nearly 40 percent of those youth identify as LGBTQ and MassEquality has played a pivotal role in educating the public about this issue and finding resources for these youth. According to the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a CDC-funded survey of high school students in the Commonwealth, LGB youth are more than five times more

Read the rest of this story at:
<http://tiny.cc/trtmassequal>

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

[Re: Promise Place School for LGBTQ Homeless Youth Holds 1st Annual Gala]

What a fantastic article on Promise Place.

I would like to donate time and resources to this amazing project to support transgender youth. This type of school is long over-due and the alarming statistics about transgender youth confirm the necessity of this effort to treat all students with respect and dignity...and to provide them the educational resources they need to survive and thrive.

—Walter Nicolai, Online

Dear Editor,

[Re: Promise Place School for LGBTQ Homeless Youth Holds 1st Annual Gala]

I was so honored to be asked by Erica-Kay Webster to help launch this 1st annual gala for Promise Place School. More than that, to hear the stories of courage, struggle, and overcoming all odds was so moving; the emotion in the room was palpable. The most eloquent and moving stories were by Erica herself; that she suffered such horrors and had such unwavering determination to make a better world for others, all the while maintaining grace and dignity throughout. She's my hero. God Bless you! —Irene Soderberg, Online

OUTVETS to make history marching in Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade

By: Clara Lefton/TRT Reporter

IN THE LIMELIGHT

Last month, The South Boston Allied War Veterans Council (AWVC) voted 5-4 in favor of allowing an LGBT veterans organization to march in South Boston's St. Patrick's Day Parade. This historic procession, first started in 1901, has had a long history of debating whether or not members of the LGBT community may participate.

"I'm ecstatic with the vote," said Robert Santiago, chief operating officer for OUTVETS. "[It] was based primarily on our status as veterans. All veterans deserve to be recognized for their service. We will be marching as veterans who happen to be gay."

From 1992-1994 state courts forced the AWVC to let the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston participate, but the event's sponsors responded by calling off the parades altogether. In 1995, this resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court voting unanimously to not allow LGBT groups to march via freedom of speech for the AWVC.

OUTVETS is the first nonpartisan, nonpolitical veterans organization in the nation. This lack of social agenda led the AWVC to decide that OUTVETS could participate. The vote comes after OUTVETS' historic appearance as the first ever LGBT group to march in Boston's Veterans Day Parade this past November. The group was able to rally a total of 23 people to participate.

In March 2014, AWVC organizers denied



Members of OUTVETS marching in Boston's Veterans Day Parade in November 2014.

MassEquality the opportunity to march in the parade. The decision resulted in Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, the son of Irish immigrants, publicly boycotting the parade, which typically draws thousands of spectators.

"We're very pleased to hear that OUTVETS will be marching in this year's parade," said Kate Norton, the press secretary for Mayor Walsh, in a statement. "Mayor Walsh has been advocating for an inclusive parade for quite some time. We're thrilled to

hear that the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council has decided to make the 2015 parade an inclusive event."

OUTVETS is a relatively new organization and was only incorporated this past September in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; it has since filed paperwork to become a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Despite being new, its founder and 20-year U.S. Air Force Veteran Bryan Bishop said he has been thinking about starting such an organization since he first entered active duty in 1987.

Bishop got the ball rolling with OUTVETS when he started discussing the idea with some coworkers at his day job as the chief of staff for Boston's Veterans' Services agency.

"I tasked Bryan with seeing what could be done with some of the negativity around the St. Patrick's Day Parade," said Francisco Urena, commissioner of Veterans' Services for the City of Boston. "So Bryan took the charge to gather a group of men and women who shared the same vision and created the OUTVETS group. We are extremely proud in the city of Boston to have a group of such character that assists these veterans and their families."

Although OUTVETS has roots in the City of Boston's Veterans' Services, the two organizations are independent of one another. Yet, it is possible that Veterans' Services could collaborate with OUTVETS on projects, as they would with any other veteran organization. Currently, the organization's operations include seven board members, who hope to have a chapter in all 50 states by the end of 2016.

"I would be interested in joining such a group," said Corey Hodges, a submarine warfare officer of the United States Navy. "I am an involved member of the veteran affairs and advocacy groups within my university. While there are a good number of benefits and support for veterans, I don't think these efforts commensurate with the sacrifices that most of our uniformed service members have to face during their time of..."

See OUTVETS on Page 6

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An exploration of male sex workers, broadening perspectives beyond the stigma

By: Paul P. Jesep*/TRT Book Reviewer

It's January! Time to snuggle up with a good read! "Male Sex Work and Society," (<http://tiny.cc/pfgzqx>) edited by Victor Minichiello and John Scott, is a scholarly, though highly readable collection of essays exploring male sex workers who have sex with men throughout the world. Contributors include academics, criminologists, psychologists, and social workers. Male "sex work is now part of the global economy," the editors observe, due in part to "new communications technologies" that have "expanded the reach of male sex workers."

The work looks at a reality of life, often harsh and unforgiving, for male sex workers in a global context. China, Germany, Latin America, Post-Soviet Russia, and Ireland (the republic and the north) are explored in a way that doesn't require you to be a clinician, social worker or nerdy researcher, though there is documentation in each chapter to back up findings.

Although the book covers several nations, discussions are often targeted and don't provide an extensive, integrated look at what occurs in those countries. Russia, for example, is extraordinarily diverse with a strong theme of xenophobia, homophobia and Eastern Orthodox nationalism weaved into its social fabric. The chapter on Germany focuses on migrant workers, not a wider industry of native Germans. Editorial commentary ties the various chapters together, suggesting the counterproductive nature to outlawing sex services, though legal in some countries.

Moral judgment or outlawing paid sex misses an opportunity to oversee one of the world's oldest professions, while protecting the industry's workers from exploitation, substance abuse, and managing the spread of disease. But why let logic, common sense and intellectual honesty get in the way? According to the editors, "the more liberal societies report less violence, safer and more productive client-worker interactions, and the development of a leisure sex industry that is both professional and responsible." Hmm, "professional and responsible." If only the banking industry behaved this way.

Too often, as one of the essays points out, the stigma of being a male hired for sex is overshadowed by the exploitation of women and children. Hence, males who are forced

into sex work are frequently ignored, as if there is always a level of consent. Minichiello and Scott make a startling and troubling conclusion, when they say "Male sex work has largely been undertheorized in the social sciences. One reason for this lack of attention seems to be the fact that most male sex work involves adult males and, as such, there is an assumed equality in the exchange with power relations often ignored." They also observed that "cultural assumption" concludes sexual encounters between men are positive and "actively sought."

The goal of the book is to "broaden perspectives" about male sex workers. It far surpasses this lofty pursuit. It dispels myths and societal judgments about clients and sex workers by using research and analysis. It takes a mature approach to sexuality. There's also the darker side of sex work evidenced in abuse and victimization that easily could be addressed with government oversight. Legalized sex work would have a direct impact on protecting clients, workers, and greater society from

STDs and lowering rates of substance abuse. It could be taxed, with revenue going to help workers.

The editors further conclude that the male sex industry creates "considerable challenges in the broader society, and some policymakers are responding creatively to issues related to public health, homosexuality, and the professionalization and commercialization of the male sex industry... the male sex industry—which includes highly diverse men of all colors, shapes, and sizes who sell sexual services—deserves significantly increased funding for future research on the basis of public health alone."

Although the work is readable and informative, it is also an invitation to readers to expand and build upon its scholarship in order to better understand a persecuted segment of society.

*Paul is an attorney, seminary-trained priest and founder of CorporateChaplaincy.biz, a firm committed to the spiritual wellness of professionals. He also is author of "Lost Sense of Self & the Ethics Crisis: Learn to Live and Work Ethically" (<http://tiny.cc/77ezqx>).



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PHOTO: HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Harvard University hosts *After Marriage: The Future of LGBT Activism*.

Harvard: Seminar series explores LGBT issues post-marriage equality

By: Clara Lefton/TRT Reporter

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—Throughout the 2014-2015 academic year, Harvard University is hosting a seminar series called “After Marriage: The Future of LGBT Activism.” As many states continue to pass legislation in favor of marriage equality, this series looks at what the most important issues facing the LGBT movement are now, including discrimination and criminalization of people with HIV, class and poverty issues, the debate over relying on federal law to grant equality, and the issue of religious exemptions that permit discrimination against LGBT people.

The series was organized by Michael Bronski, professor of practice in activism and media in Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality at Harvard University. The seminars are also the product of the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard and the Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, which produces an annual series on different topics pertaining to the department.

“Michael is a true visionary,” said Joey Mogul of DePaul University College of Law and the People’s Law Office, who gave the presentation “Deceptive Gender Benders, Sexual Predators, and Homicidal Homos: The Ongoing Criminalization of LGBTQ People in the U.S.” at the series in November. “He’s brilliant and perpetually, consistently, and principally always looking to ensure that the needs of all LGBT people, particularly those of color, are included in the conversations, [as well as] in the ac-

tivism with respect to the queer and trans communities. I am deeply honored to have been invited by him and I relish in the opportunity to ever be in his space, and to be able to talk about these issues.”

The series included a variety of activists and lawyers in the LGBT movement. Aisha Moodle-Mills from the FIRE Initiative at the Center for American Progress presented “Jumping Beyond the Broom: Class, Race, and Poverty in the LGBT Movement” in September. Kevin Cathcart, executive director of Lambda Legal, presented on “HIV Discrimination and Criminalization” in October.

The next event will be held February 12, 2015 and will feature Nan Hunter, associate dean for graduate programs and professor of law at Georgetown Law School, on “The Conflict Between LGBT Equality and Religious Liberty.” The series will then conclude March 27 with a day-long symposium where the four speakers will come back to do a panel discussion, as well as a keynote from activist and writer Jewelle Gomez. The theme for the symposium is “Holding Hands: Social Change Activism as a Way of Life.”

“It really is rewarding to hear, because a lot of times in political discussions it’s often either exactly what you expect to hear, or it’s people fighting in a way that’s not productive, and these were people who brought really new perspectives to a lot of the people who attended, and it really sparked very, ...

See Harvard on Page 14

In Mogul’s opinion, the importance of marriage equality is insignificant in comparison to fighting other basic discriminations such as protecting people from getting fired or harassed on the street.

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Leelah Alcorn: Her death cannot be in vain

The LGBT community and our allies are reeling from the news of Leelah Alcorn's death, a transgender teen who has died by suicide. While transgender children and youth are becoming more visible and finding more support and acceptance from their families and communities, this young woman felt rejected by her conservative Christian family who would not allow her to live openly as her affirmed gender and forced her to undergo conversion therapy.

Although familial rejection is a risk factor for suicide, youth suicide is a complex issue that rarely has only one cause. But stories like this are powerful reminders to our community about the wounds that rejection can inflict—as well as the protective potential of accepting families (<http://tiny.cc/6flwrx>).

This tragedy also highlights the dangers of so-called "reparative" or conversion therapy, therapies based on the false and damaging idea that being gay or transgender is a mental illness and meant to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Such therapies (<http://tiny.cc/7glwrx>) are generally considered harmful to the patient's mental health, and have been universally opposed by organizations like the American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, and many other such organizations.

The social media response to this tragedy has also been powerful, including the trending of the Twitter hashtag (<http://tiny.cc/ailwrx>) #RealLiveTransAdult, which encouraged transgender adults to share their stories of success and how they overcame the challenges of their teens.

...[she] felt rejected by her conservative Christian family who would not allow her to live openly as her affirmed gender and forced her to undergo conversion therapy.

1. If you're a youth and need to talk to someone, call The Trevor Project (<http://tiny.cc/trevorproj>), which provides a 24-hour crisis hotline for youth, at 1-866-488-7386.

2. If you're a teacher or parent and want more information on how to create safe and welcoming schools for all children and families, visit www.welcomingschools.org.

3. If you're an ally and want to learn more about transgender advocacy, visit www.hrc.org/transgender, and also the sites of the National Center for Transgender Equality (www.transequality.org/) and the Transgender Law Center (<http://tiny.cc/translawctr>).

4. If you are a youth-serving professional, please consider attending HRC Foundation's 2nd annual Time to THRIVE (<http://tiny.cc/pmlwrx>) conference—promoting safety, inclusion and well-being for LGBTQ youth.

As we begin a New Year, let 2015 be a year when more LGBT people of all ages find acceptance and equality in their homes, states and communities.

Leelah Alcorn from page 2

"After 10 years of confusion, I finally understood who I was. I immediately told my mom, and she reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong. If you are reading this, parents, please don't tell this to your kids," the note says. "Even if you are Christian or are against transgender people don't ever say that to someone, especially your kid. That won't do anything but make them hate [themselves]. That's exactly what it did to me."

The note described a long struggle to gain her parent's acceptance as a transgender teen, but deep roots in Christian fundamentalism, prevented any type of understanding from the family.

"My mom started taking me to a therapist, but would only take me to Christian therapists, (who were all very biased) so I never actually got the therapy I needed to cure me of my depression. I only got more Christians telling me that I was selfish and wrong and that I should look to God for help."

Realizing that she would have to wait until she was 18 to receive any medical treatment to transition into the woman she was, she finally succumbed to hopelessness.

"I was just going to look like a man in drag for the rest of my life," she wrote.

It all began to feel like "too much weight" to the 17-year-old, she wrote. With few friends, saving money to move out of her parent's home, keeping her grades up and facing the church congregation who she felt had only judgment for her, there was nowhere else for her to turn, as she described it in her final letter.

According to a 2011 study by the National Center for Transgender Equality, it was found that approximately 41% of 6,450 responding transgender and gender non-conforming people had attempted suicide.

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights," the note continues. Gender needs to be taught about in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year...Fix society. Please."

Over the past several weeks, I've been tuned into a series offered exclusively on

Although her mother spoke of unconditional love, the type of love expressed to her daughter was conditional and Leelah knew that.

Amazon called "Transparent." This series, undoubtedly, is breaking down the barriers that exist between transgender people and society in general. This raw footage exploits the plights of the transgender community in a way that stimulates intellectual thought about the struggles of transgender lives.

"Transparent" doesn't just aim to tell the story of a trans character, but of an entire family questioning their understandings of gender, sexuality and identity, and learning to accept and love one another as they each evolve into who they are. Even if you are an ally of the trans community and think you understand it all, you don't. There is always something to learn. There is always a Leelah to support.

If you are contemplating suicide, please remember that there are people who understand, care for and love you just the way you are. There is community, there is support. If you're thinking about suicide, you deserve immediate help. Please call the Trevor Lifeline at 866-488-7386 or visit www.thetrevorproject.org. On page 6 of this issue, there is a transgender resource list for transgender individuals, parents, professionals, friends and allies seeking support or services.

Editor's note: The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13-24.

OUTVETS Interview from page 3

service. Some groups have it harder than others. During my time, the LGBT community in particular was one such group. Although things are getting better by way of new policy, changes in administration, and conformance to the national sentiment, the LGBT community is still an extremely difficult and isolating community to be a part of while serving. Any group that advocates lessening or abolishing such adversity is worth its salt and is an organization of which I would gladly be part."

In his 20 years with the Air Force, Bishop has experienced the military before and during Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), the nation's former military policy of prohibiting military personnel from revealing if they were lesbian, gay or bisexual and discharging those who were found out. One of the many goals OUTVETS hopes to achieve includes declaring September 20, the day

DADT was repealed, as LGBT Veteran Freedom Day. Bishop foresees a rally, ceremony and military ball if such a day is declared.

"They could really go down on witch hunts and try and kick you out, and DADT kind of just masked it," said Bishop. "It was a little bit harder to get people out, but people were still getting discharged because of their sexuality. The military as a whole lost such great talent when they did that and they realized it. Thank God DADT went away and now everyone is open. For the most part it's gone off without a hitch."

This January OUTVETS will be holding a blanket drive for the New England Center for Homeless Veterans. The donations will kick off at Boston's Club Cafe at 1 p.m. January 11 with an OUTVETS brunch. Other blanket donation spots will be available throughout Boston.

For more information about OUTVETS visit www.outvetsamerica.org.

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Family Equality Council to host workshop for cross-racial adoptive families in Boston

By: Lauren Walliser/TRT Assistant Editor

SOMERVILLE, Mass.—Family Equality Council (FEC)—a national organization that connects, supports, and represents the three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer in the U.S. today and their six million children—will present a workshop in Somerville in January entitled “Fostering Healthy Racial Identity Development in Trans-Racial Adoptive LGBTQ-Parented Families.”

Hosted with the Rainbow Initiative Parent Group, local expert Johnny Cole will provide LGBTQ parents with an opportunity to consider issues of race, racial identity development, racism, stereotypes, and prejudices.

“In cross-racial adoptive families, one or both parents are typically white, so we will discuss how parents can navigate a positive racial identity development for minority children from a racially privileged position,” said Cole.

Brent Wright, director of programs at Family Equality Council, said part of the nonprofit’s work is to foster supportive communities, educate the public, and pursue policy change that advances equality for all families, including those that are LGBTQ-headed.

“Workshops such as these are not only examples of the wide range of supports which we strive to offer families to directly empower them in their daily lives, but the workshops are also examples of our commitment to partnerships,” said Wright. “Family Equality Council embraces the power of collaboration because we believe



PHOTO: FAMILY EQUALITY COUNCIL

Family Equality Council hosts International Family Equality Day annually, along with other events and workshops across the country. Family Equality Council will host their 20th annual Family Week in 2015.

that working in a coalition to build move-

ments is the only way to accomplish lasting social change.”

Wright shared that Family Equality Council sponsors and directly offers hundreds of workshops and panels discussions across the country each year. Some of the topics include effective parenting, financial literacy, using your personal narrative to foster allies, family-building options, promoting inclusive educational settings, and legal supports.

Cole shared what he believes are issues that many cross-racial adoptive families face, both from external forces and within the families themselves.

“Common issues include advocating for children of color in school, navigating cross-racial social interactions for children, providing authentic cultural experiences specific to a child’s racial identity and talking to children of color about race and racism in an age-appropriate manner,” said Cole.

Wright said that the Parents Groups, like Rainbow Initiative, are community-run networks of LGBTQ-headed families. Some are specifically supportive of the community they are based in, while others have a national focus. They aim to create safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ parents and their families, providing educational conversations and social meet-ups. Many groups have moved to an online platform since the rise of social media, according to Wright, providing online discussion forums.

“Whether in-person or online, at the heart of the work of all Parent Groups is their commitment to introduce families to others within the broader LGBTQ parenting community,” said Wright. “When families with shared identities connect, laugh together, discuss shared challenges, offer help and re-

sources to one another, there is a stronger sense of community, of understanding not only one another, but also ourselves. Family Equality Council strives to serve as a national coordinator between LGBTQ parents and their families and these Parent Groups that support them.”

Wright shared that Family Equality Council staff talk with LGBTQ parents and their families in communities across the country every day.

“We place great value on hearing firsthand their wants, needs, and their ‘lived equality’ experiences,” he said. “To best understand the impact our work has on these families, I think all you have to do is take a few minutes to view the annual video (tiny.cc/jnflqx) that we make, where you can clearly see what it means to have a community of true support reflected in the faces of these parents and their children.”

The video was made at one of Family Equality Council’s annual events, Family Week, which is held in Provincetown, Mass. and will celebrate its 20th anniversary July 25 through August 1, 2015. Other upcoming events include the Los Angeles Awards Dinner in February, Family Weekend in the Midwest, Night at the Pier in New York City, International Family Equality Day, celebrations for Pride all over the country, Families on the West Coast, Family Weekend in the Southwest at Austin Pride, Family Weekend at Gay Days Anaheim, and Family Halloween Parties.

According to Wright, Family Equality Council approaches their work in two ways—through programming and through policy—at the state, regional, and national levels.

See FEC on Page 10

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Gay Floridians say "I do" this month

By: Viviana Valiente/TRT FL Correspondent

FLORIDA—The legalization of same sex marriages in Florida, many attest, is remarkable. The definition of marriage is no longer restricted to that given to it by religious groups. Because of it, this ruling is one of the biggest civil rights feats of this generation. In Florida's case, Attorney General Pam Bondi led a very lengthy and relentless campaign against same-sex marriage, but the court made a final judgment in its favor. Nationwide, by the many rulings in favor of marriage equality, it can no longer be denied that marriage is a civil institution with built-in benefits; one that should not be defined with religious terminology, but in terms of full citizenship.

For this historical moment, TRT wanted to interview a couple from the area. To that effect, Monica Cernadas, 48, and Natasha Parefs, 52, from Kendall, FL were sitting on their beach chairs, across from Palace Bar, an iconic Miami Beach spot on Ocean Dr. They were holding hands while crossing the street when this Florida correspondent decided to approach them. Immediately, we asked them about the decision and the upcoming date: January 6th.

Viviana Valiente: How do you feel now that same sex couples can get married in FL as of January 6th?

Monica Cernadas: We have been together for 27 years; we don't need a piece of paper, but what if something happened to one of us. Marriage has its benefits.

Q: Do you think businesses will be reluctant to offer services for same-sex weddings?



L-to-R: Monica Cernadas & Natasha Parefs on the historical FL marriage equality ruling.

PHOTO: TRT/VIVIANA VALIENTE

A. We are in the flower business; this might be good for the economy, with all the new weddings, etc.

TRT: Do you expect opposition to the ruling on January 6th?

Natasha Parefs: I don't think they are going to oppose it any more. I think they have tried so hard—it's done. They can't stop it. Attorney General Pam Bondi said she won't fight it. She made it her biggest issue to get votes, but at the end, she lost.

Attorney General Pam Bondi has stated via numerous media outlets that she will not oppose Judge Robert Hinkle's decision to make it obligatory for clerks of courts in all FL counties to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, as of January 6th. According to some local people who requested

See Florida Marriages on page 11

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An angel is among us: A TRT exclusive with TLC's guardian angel vessel, Rosie Cepero

By: Nicole Lashomb/TRT Editor-in-Chief

Rosie Cepero, the leading star of TLC's "Angels Among Us" has an undeniably unique gift—the ability to communicate with our loved ones who have passed—more specifically, our guardian angels, as she refers to them. To skeptics, this may sound unfathomable, but to believers, miraculous. I'm a believer. It happened to me, right in the middle of this exclusive interview for The Rainbow Times when my dad made an entrance with specific messages unique to me—messages impossible for anyone else to know, other than those who knew him well and some that only I would understand.

This interview was unlike any other. The warmth and kindness of Rosie's voice and calm demeanor was palpable to anyone listening. Love is a big part of her work, and that was more than apparent in how she conducted herself. Not only did I have the opportunity to connect with my guardian angel, something I have longed for during these last 6 years, but I also received some well needed and unexpected guidance.

In this exclusive TRT interview, Rosie candidly discusses her gift in detail, especially as it pertains to gay youth, coming out, bullying, parental understanding, etc. The comfort and healing that she brings to others is done with the support of her loving family by her side—her husband George, and three sons Frankie, Georgie and Joey.

The Rainbow Times: How would you describe exactly what it is you are able to do?
Rosie Cepero: What I am able to do is bring comfort to the hearts of people who suffer with questions that are unanswered.

Q. Would you consider yourself a medium or do you describe yourself in a different way?

A. I always say that I am a spiritualist. A spiritualist is a person who works with spirit and we're mediums. I always say I was born and raised a Catholic and I still practice the Catholic religion, but I've always considered myself a spiritualist. To me, connecting with angels, connecting with saints, connecting with what I do is more than that. It is about spirituality. It's about teaching people faith. It's about living a life of well-being ... it's your inner soul; it's everything, the body, mind and spirit.

Q. That's very important because many young and, not so young, members of our community find themselves ostracized from their respective churches, from parents, family members, friends, etc., and they don't know where to turn to. Have you done readings with gay couples or gay people?

A. I embrace everyone, whether you're gay, whether you're straight, whether you're white, black, Japanese, ... to me, I just embrace everyone. So yes, I've had readings with gay couples, absolutely! Gay men, gay women ... yes! I embrace everyone.

It's true, [that] it's not only about connecting them



Rosie Cepero of TLC's hit series, *Angels Among Us*, has a beautiful family and her son Frankie is a proud member of the LGBT community.

with their guardian angels, it's about connecting with their souls to make them understand that it's ok ... it's who you are, not what others want you to be. I help them to come out of their own shell that they need to be born. *It's ok to come out*; to speak about who you are.

A lot of kids that I've helped have come to me because I've been doing this my whole life—I've connected with a lot of young people who are afraid to say that "I'm gay." I speak with them and I let them know that it's ok. Be who you are. It's at a spiritual level; it's at a different level.

My son Frankie, he's gay, so I know what it's like as a child to be bullied, you know? And, it really comes from the parents because some parents are really ignorant. People don't understand what it's like to be gay. And, the parents, instead of helping their children, they shut them down. Shame on them! Shame on the parents that are not there to hold their child's hand and be their protector because as their parent, you are here to protect them. You know?

Q. You come from a lineage of women who have been blessed with this gift. Did you grow up and watch them connect people with their guardian angels or is this some-

thing that you decided to branch out and do on your own?

A. My grandmother would sit with people all the time. I watched her, she was also a healer. She would connect amazingly with angels and was such a devout Catholic and my mom was the same way. Miracles have happened in our family generation after generation because of faith. Because faith will move mountains ... Have faith in your core and anything you want in life will happen. My mom and grandmother always told me, speak the truth, have your faith and integrity and you will be amazing. I was raised that way. Have faith and be who you are, be strong.

Today, it's about spirituality. It's about connecting with God and all the angels and saints so people are a lot more open to this now than they were back then. When I was a little girl and in the supermarket with my "mommy," she told me not to talk too much because people in the 60s would have considered us nutty, you know?

For me, it's all about healing, I love to heal. That is very important to me and I've raised my boys the same way.

Q. Do any of your boys have the gift?

All three of them have the gift. Two of them use it for themselves, but Frankie is more like the therapist. He's there to help everyone. Frankie is more open to it.

Q. What do you say to skeptics that have a guardian angel with a message to give them?

A. Well, everyone has an opinion. I'm not the type of person to argue with anyone so I really don't. I just tell them to sit, relax, and if there is a connection at the end of the conversation, or the session, you'll either embrace it, and I understand, or you won't.

There's not much I can say. They are individuals and they have an opinion. I go to group readings and 70 percent of the people are there open, they embrace all of this and of course, there is this 30 percent that have a block. They make faces, make noises, you know, but when they're done, they're all smiling; they give me a big hug. It's hard for them to embrace the unknown.

You're [also] always going to get that one person who is a skeptic but when they leave, they are believers. When we are done, I look at them, I hug them and I thank them for embracing this, this beautiful connection.

Q. How would you compare religion to spirituality?

A. I believe that there is one God and I embrace all religion.

Q. How does your family react to this gift?

A. My husband George is my best friend, he is my rock. I couldn't ask for a better partner who understands me and believes in me and my gift. He knows that what I do is about bringing the gift of healing to someone's...

See Rosie on page 11

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The year in Gay & how it promises to get even better

By: Romeo San Vicente*/Special to TRT



Once upon a time, in the bad old days of closets and media resistance to gay stories of any sort (much less attempts to cover the entire

LGBT spectrum with anything resembling nuance or empathy), we would have struggled to come up with enough events to fill an year-end column about developments in queer entertainment. Now we have to edit out the ones you've heard about a million times already (sorry, *Looking*, everybody knows you exist now). Here's what gave us life this year:

1. Laverne Cox on the cover of TIME

The Emmy-nominated actress was the face of TIME magazine's "trans 101" article. It was a first. It was history. It was remedial, too, but what can you expect from straight people (and clueless gays, too, don't forget)? Even better, Cox co-hosted *The View* more than once, which is going to reach millions more people than a print magazine. Watch her run.

2. Old gay guys at the movies

Love is Strange, a heartfelt and moving feature from director Ira Sachs, explored the trauma of being gray, gay and separated from your spouse due when resources, both financial and social, are

strained. Alfred Molina and John Lithgow were the most tender big screen LTR of the year.

3. *How to Get Away With Murder* *Scandal* was just the beginning of major networks getting pushy with gay sex scenes. This show just upped the stakes. You haven't seen guys getting down on primetime like this before. Proof that Shonda Rhimes does whatever Shonda Rhimes wants.

4. **Brendan Jordan mopping the TV news** "Mopping," of course, means stealing (and if you don't know that, then you've got some *Paris is Burning* homework to do), and that's what 15-year-old Brendan Jordan did to local news segment when everyone else in the crowd stood behind the reporter behaving themselves. The teenager chose to vogue, as one should, and now he's a sassy, face-giving YouTube star and a model for American Apparel. Flamboyance is the new black.

5. Michael Sam and that kiss

NFL pick (and then NFL drop) Michael Sam reacted to being the first openly gay NFL draft pick by kissing his boyfriend in a sweet, spontaneous act of joy. And then everyone freaked out about it. So we haven't come as far as we'd like. But now that door is open. And he is the man who opened it. May it never close again.

6. Sam Smith singing love songs to men on the radio

It's happened before, of course, but for some reason, when Erasure's "A Little Respect" was popular in the '80s, the media tried to pretend they hadn't heard Andy Bell ask a man not to forsake him.

Read the rest at: <http://tiny.cc/10lyrx>

PHOTO: FAMILY EQUALITY COUNCIL



Family Equality Council will host their 20th annual Family Week in 2015.

FEC from page 7

"Our strategy is to maintain focus on three components that we believe are critical to change lives and laws: strengthen communities and local leaders through programs and events; educate those communities, surrounding communities, and political leaders through campaigns, sharing stories, providing resources, and training advocates; pursue policy changes that directly affect the

lives of our families through changing forms, advancing bills, and providing strategic support," said Wright.

The workshop on cross-racial adoptive families will take place January 31 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Armory in Somerville. A \$10 donation is suggested. To RSVP, visit tiny.cc/18e1qx. For a full and continuously updated list of events, visit www.familyequality.org.

Truth from page 2

of faith belonging to a certain tradition, like Catholicism. The issue is not why Rome misunderstands and treats LGBTQ people harshly, because that's reality. The deeper question is: how does an LGBTQ person who identifies as Catholic (as one example) manage the current limitations of their denomination while seeking to bring about institutional change?

You can expand this question to the tragedies and injustices all around us. LGBTQ hate crimes haven't ended. Abuse and victimization against God's transgender (tiny.cc/t0ezqx) children are especially high.

The question isn't "Why does God (defined gender neutral) allow injustice to occur?" Whether God is responsible for injustice is a pointless, academic exercise.

The better question to explore is "How do I participate in my truth in making a difference in the reality as it exists?"

As you reflect on the past year and look hopefully on the new one, think about crafting personalized questions unique to your sacredness. Don't expect answers to hit you over the head. Instead, do what the poet Rilke counseled a young man wondering about his path in life to do. Live and experience realistic, practical questions as part of your life's journey, accepting the realities you can't change that confront us all.

*Paul is an attorney, seminary-trained priest & founder of www.CorporateChaplaincy.biz, a firm committed to the spiritual wellness of professionals. He is also author of "Lost Sense of Self & the Ethics Crisis: Learn to Live and Work Ethically" (tiny.cc/77ezqx).

TOP 10 BEST SELLER VIDEOS

- LESBIAN TOP 10**
1. Tru Love
 2. The Nicole Conn Romance Collection
 3. Happy End
 4. Orange Is the New Black: Season 1
 5. Stud Life
 6. Heterosexual Jill
 7. Reaching for the Moon
 8. Lady Valor: The Kristin Beck Story
 9. Blue is the Warmest Color
 10. I Can't Think Straight

Courtesy: WolfeVideo.com

- GAY TOP 10**
1. Boys
 2. Love is Strange
 3. Sordid Lives: Blu-ray/DVD
 4. Looking: The Complete First Season
 5. The Dark Place
 6. Lady Valor: The Kristin Beck Story
 7. Lilting
 8. Getting Go: The Go Doc Project
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¡Vive la vida y cada día en el 2015 con esperanza y amor!

Por: Wilfred W. Labiosa*/Columnista de TRT

LATIN VISION



PHOTO: ERIC HESS

El 2014 fue, para mí, un año de muchos cambios y aunque nunca suelo escribir de mis cosas personales, quiero comenzar el 2015 con una nueva expectativa y un plan nuevo. Me mudé de Boston a mi Puerto Rico debido a la salud de mi mamá. Después de 25 años viviendo en esta bella ciudad de Boston y hacer tantas cosas para la comunidad Latina y LGBT, ahora me estoy estableciendo en Puerto Rico y pienso hacer similar trabajo acá. Poco a poco sucederá.

Ya comencé trabajando como consejero de salud mental en el Centro Comunitario LGBT de Puerto Rico y trabajo a tiempo completo haciendo recaudación de fondos para las Misiones Capuchinas en Puerto Rico. Comencé, con mi colega Cecilia, a presentarme como locutor del programa radial "Saliendo del Clóset". Cecilia fundó este programa semanal. Es el espacio de más larga duración continua en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hacia la comunidad LGBT. Es un espacio donde la comunidad puede escuchar temas de importancia local y mundial. ¡Gra-

cias Cecilia por dejarme participar de tan importante espacio! Está disponible via Univisión Radio o por Uforia App y busquen Saliendo del Clóset, WKAQ 1030 AM Puerto Rico. Al mismo tiempo estoy en diálogos con los organizadores de la parada y festival en el área metro para poder hacer unos cambios y que progrese esta parada y festival. Sigo balanceando mis cosas, tal como lo hice en Boston por tanto tiempo, pero estoy positivo de que las cosas van a progresar acá en Puerto Rico. Hay mucho por hacer; en estos momentos, en Puerto Rico se "siente" el cambio en la comunidad LGBT. Hay más visibilidad de nuestra comunidad y de los temas que nos afectan. ¡Estoy optimista por lo que viene y lo que yo puedo aportar para que este cambio venga ya!

En Boston, a los/as líderes les deseo suerte con los proyectos y cuentan con mi apoyo en todo ya que Boston siempre será mi ciudad donde nací como líder comunitario, activista y profesional. Les deseo a todos/as que el 2015 les traiga muchas esperanzas, igual o más de las que tengo en estos momentos; un año 2015 lleno de amor, paz, y prosperidad, de alegrías y de sentimientos positivos para todos/as.

Espero que tod@s puedan comenzar el 2015 con un nuevo amor. Un amor a la vida, a las amistades, a la paz interna, a la felici-

dad y a la prosperidad posible en cada uno de nosotros. Recuerden el proverbio Chino que dice que la vida es un eco, lo que se envía siempre regresa. Vamos a vivir nuestras vidas en el 2015. Hay demasiada tristeza, frustraciones, guerras y peleas en nuestro alrededor, pero si cada uno de nosotros siembra una semilla de alegría y amor, imagínense lo que podemos cultivar. Como dijo San Francisco de Asís, "Nunca debemos desear estar por encima de los otros, sino que, de lo contrario, debemos ser siervos y estar sujetos a toda humana criatura por Dios".

A mis hermanos/as en Cuba, les deseo que las cosas sigan mejorando para ustedes y recuerden que tienen a un hermano Boricua acá que siempre los recuerda con mucho cariño; tengo esperanzas que las cosas van a cambiar y que las cosas van a mejorar. Creo que así todo puede ser; si uno tiene fe y esperanza, algún día las cosas pueden cambiar. Todo toma tiempo, pero el cambio llega. Para unos más rápido que para otros, pero llega. ¡Les deseo lo mejor para el 2015!

A mis amistades, familiares, compañeros de lucha y a mis colegas que me apoyan, y en especial a Nicole y a Grisel, de este periódico, sólo les deseo lo mejor para el 2015—les tengo cariño y mucho amor aún y cuando estamos todos más ocupados ahora que antes. Les deseo muchas energías para

que sigan en el trabajo que está por hacerse. A mi ex-compañero (esposo) sólo te deseo lo mejor desde el fondo de mi corazón. ¡Siempre serás mi Pumba especial! A ellos/as que no me hablan por los cambios que hice en el 2014, sólo les recuerdo con mucho amor y siempre tendrán un pedacito de mi corazón. ¡Los/as quiero a todos!

A todos los lectores de esta columna que ya más de 13 años me han seguido, gracias y les deseo todo lo mejor. En Mayo del 2015, esta columna va a cumplir 14 años de ser publicada en medios LGBT de Nueva Inglaterra (y en este periódico más de 8). ¡Gracias a todos/as los que han contribuido a su éxito! A mis invitados/as escritores, ¡gracias mil! ¡Les deseo a todos/as un Feliz Día de los Reyes, Felices Fiestas y Octavistas, de San Juan Bautista, de San Sebastián, y Feliz Año Nuevo 2015! Les deseo mucha adrenalina para todo el 2015, energía, paz y prosperidad para confrontar cualquier cosa que venga. Siembren semillas positivas en el 2015 y vivan cada día—no se duerman que ¡el 2015 viene con muchas cosas buenas para tod@s! ¡Felicidades!

* Escrito por Wilfred Labiosa, activista y organizador comunitario, trabajador social y locutor en la radio Puertorriqueña. Editado por Grisel Martínez Ocasio, publicadora de este periódico.

Rosie from page 9

heart and their soul. My children embrace me and my friends do too. But, my husband George, we've been married 33 years, together for 40 year, and he embraces everything.

Q. I read about a man who sent you a letter and he asked you to call him because he was lonely. You called him immediately to give him a message from his guardian angel. The next morning, his guardian angel thanked you. Can you tell us more about that?

A. I get lots of fan mail and I pray over all the letters I receive every day. That morning, I picked his letter that said "please, please, call me." I heard spirit guide me to call him. All he wanted to do was talk because he was lonely, he wanted to say hello, and that he loved the show. So, I stayed on the phone and just felt in my heart, "oh my Gosh, he is so lonely." We were on the phone for quite a while and immediately after 30-45 minutes on the phone, his best friend came through and

gave him a message.

Q. Does this gift bring you peace? Do you consider your gift to always be good or can it be bad at times?

A: Sometimes when people don't take a warning that a guardian angel gives to them, and they don't take the advice in the warning, things happen. I just want them to listen because things can be prevented. And, people don't have to miss out on things if they listened.

Q. I read about your cancer scare. We know your dad is your guardian angel. When people you love pass and become your guardian angels, do they keep their personality traits as spirit?

A. Oh, my God absolutely! We are who we are. The minute we are born, the minute we die and it's as we are in spirit.

Q. Do they become a divine person?

A. All it is, a divine spirit, is a spirit that's just passed. It doesn't change who we are.

See Rosie on page 15

Florida Marriages from page 8

anonymity, opposition may be expected from religious groups such as Florida Family Action. FFA has already filed a lawsuit for an emergency injunction. In addition, a number of counties will end all courthouse weddings so that they don't have to marry same-sex couples.

This Florida correspondent's feelings can be summed up by: "So, who cares, we can get married at the beach. Those are just delay tactics that will not stop same-sex marriages from happening, soon, from January 6th and on." More developments, on Dec. 3, could signal that marriage equality in Florida may start on January 5th. Plain-

tiffs request the Court "lifts its stay of its July 25, 2014 ruling immediately. Lifting the stay would be consistent with the actions of the U.S. Supreme Court and federal circuit and district courts in similar cases in which orders striking down state marriage bans have been permitted to go into effect while appeals are pending." The motion also states that "maintaining the stay in this case is no longer warranted and would have no practical effect other than to cause potential confusion."

Regardless of the decision, all eyes will be on Florida this week and there on.

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Was Whitney Houston Gay? Yolonda Ross plays Whitney Houston's rumored lesbian lover

By: Mark Dawson/Special to TRT

LGBTQ POC

There's one thing Yolonda Ross, the actress who plays the role of Whitney Houston's rumored lesbian lover in the upcoming Lifetime movie, knows for sure about Whitney and her gal pal, Robyn. "They were two people that deeply loved, cared for and respected one another," she says. "Theirs could have been more than a friendship and if so, it's really unfortunate if others got in the way of it or compromised it."

Directed by Golden Globe® Award winner and Academy Award® nominee Angela Bassett, Lifetime-TV's *Whitney Houston* will focus on the singer's rise to stardom and her stormy relationship with Bobby Brown. It's set to air January 17.

To prepare for the role, Ross feverishly studied Houston and her longtime assistant Robyn Crawford. According to reports, the two met at 16 during a summer job in East Orange, N.J. and soon began an alleged romantic relationship. They broke up when Houston married Brown in 1992.

"Robyn seems to be a straight-up, very grounded person," continues Ross. "Somebody who, no matter what the situation, has got your back or is gonna set you straight. She offered security to Whitney and uncompromised companionship."

The film is the first-ever produced about the life and death of Whitney Houston. Ross predicts it will be a piece of history. "Like *The Jackson's* movie, *The Temptations* and *The Five Heartbeats*: three movies every

black person in America has seen at least once in their life. This will be one of those, but reach an even wider audience due to today's global media."

Yolonda Ross made her feature film debut in 2001's Award winning "Stranger Inside." The film earned the actress her first Film Independent Spirit Award nomination, along with the IFP Gotham Award for Best Breakthrough Performance.

Ross went on to appear in Denzel Washington's *Antwone Fisher*, Woody Allen's *Whatever Works*, David Mamet's *Phil Spector*, HBO's *Treme* and the independent film, *Yelling To The Sky*. Earlier this year, she starred in John Sayles *Go For Sisters*, a film that has done what no other has; featured two black women leading a buddy film. This role earned the Omaha native her second Spirit Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress.

She has several films slated for 2015 in-



PHOTO: LORA WARNICK

Yolonda Ross plays Whitney Houston's rumored lesbian lover in the upcoming Lifetime movie

cluding the indie drama *Meadowland* with Olivia Wilde and *Lila and Eve* starring Jennifer Lopez and Viola Davis.

"I've always been creative," she explains. "I paint, write, sing, and play instruments."

However, she never imagined she'd pursue a career in acting. "I have always been painfully shy," she admits. "Getting in front of people and acting something out was nothing I ever thought I would do."

That all changed when she moved to New York City and realized she would need extra money to get by. "I was in school and friends convinced me to try commercials and music videos. The opportunity came to do extra work on *Saturday Night Live*. It got me my AFTRA card and an agent. I didn't hear from the agency for a while, but out of the blue, they sent me on an audition for *New York Undercover* and I booked it. Months later they called me for another au-

dition. It was for an HBO movie called *Stranger Inside*."

That film, and her groundbreaking portrayal of Treasure Lee, would forever change the course of the young actress' life.

"I had never taken an acting course," she says. "But I was blessed with a gift and I have always studied people, and used music to help me create. I just applied that knowledge to scripts."

When taking on a role, Ross' objective is to embody a character to its fullest. "I aim to be that person inside and out, from the way they smell to the way they think. I want to know their ticks and personal traits. I want the character to speak through me and to make the viewer feel something," she explains.

It hasn't been smooth sailing. Ross describes being a young black woman in Hollywood today as "swimming upstream against the current and sometimes having rocks thrown at you."

There are multiple hurdles. "Where roles for white actresses are endless, we only get to play limited types of characters," she says, "and many are side roles that are only given few lines in a movie."

She also sites lack of support from the black community. "We need black publications to help inform viewers about new content from black actors, producers, and directors. Not just the major films. 'Shadow and Act' and Wilson Morales shouldn't have

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Transitioning at Work: Are you ready? Are they ready? Let's see how it unfolds

By: Deja Nicole Greenlaw*/TRT Columnist

TRANS NEWS



Transitioning to your true gender is a wonderful thing. You've gotten to the point where you're finally on the right path, and you're eager to begin your new life. At the same time, people have to adjust to you as your new self.

One of the places that you have to deal with these changes is at work. Where you once were a male coworker, you may now be a female coworker, or where you once were a female employee, you may now be a male employee. It can take some adjusting for everyone. In my case, I was working for my employer as a male for 14 years before transitioning to female in late 2007. I can vouch that, yes, adjustments were necessary.

When I approached my Human Resources Director with my intentions to transition, she was very receptive, but she asked for a couple of days to contact the home office to find out the proper procedures. Once she got her directions, we both decided on a date that I would transition. She had a presentation to give, so she added the news of my transitioning at work to it, sharing it with all three shifts.

There were two questions that came up in each of the presentations: What bathroom would I use, and if someone referred to me as my old name would they be fired? The answer to the first question followed a previously established company policy. I was to use the women's bathroom closest to my workstation, and if anyone had a problem

As for my coworkers, most people were okay with me transitioning at work, but there were a few that had a little trouble with it. At first, some people just did not want to deal with me at all, so they kept their distance from me. That was fine. I know that people are different and that they react to things differently. Some can handle change

2007 and not a lot of people knew about transgender people. Being the first transgender person that they ever saw, I was a sort of attraction, I suppose. Luckily, I tend to be an extrovert, so dealing with people was not difficult for me. After meeting me, things were fine.

My transition at work went fairly smoothly, and I've known several other trans people for whom it also went well. I've also known some whose transition at work didn't go so well. One trans woman who works in a male-dominated field found that her input was suddenly not taken as seriously as when she was a man after she transitioned. Interestingly, this was not because she was seen as a trans person, but because she was now seen as a woman.

Thankfully, that wasn't my case. When I transitioned at work, one of my internet trans friends asked me if I was more docile at work now since I am female. I told them I wasn't, further adding that now, as a female; I wanted to run the whole place.

Transitioning at work is venturing into new territory for you and your coworkers. You really have to be ready for anything. They do too.

**Deja Nicole Greenlaw is a local trans woman who has three grown children and works at 3M. She can be contacted via her direct e-mail: dejavudeja@sbcglobal.net*

One trans woman who works in a male-dominated field found that her input was suddenly not taken as seriously as when she was a man after she transitioned. Interestingly, this was not because she was seen as a trans person, but because she was now seen as a woman.

with that then they would have to use another bathroom. The second question was answered by assuring folks that they would not be fired, but they had to treat me with respect as a female. I liked this answer, and I admit that I sometimes used it to my advantage. If one of my superiors was admonishing me and referred to me as my old name, I would immediately correct them. They would stop, realize their error, and then offer an apology. It took the steam right out of the admonishment. Yes, I had this new power, and I liked it!

faster and easier than others, and I realized that some folks needed to work through it. I just gave them space and time. Eventually, they all came around to accepting me.

Inside the women's bathroom it was a little awkward at first, but after the first week it was fine. Soon I was conversing with my female coworkers in the bathroom, and their acceptance of me grew stronger, the awkwardness quickly vanishing.

Right after I transitioned, people from the other plants would stop by and visit me when they came to our plant. After all, it was

Ask a Trans Woman: A scene of the banality of everyday transgender discrimination

By: Lorelei Erisis*/TRT Columnist



It being a new year, I thought I'd give you something very different this month: a little glimpse inside an all-too-common moment. I think it's one many trans people will recognize. The specific incident is fictionalized, as are the characters involved, though the scene is drawn directly from my own actual experiences and the characters based on an amalgam of people I have known. Sometimes it's more effective to show than it is to tell.

"I'm just not going to be able to call you Jennifer. I can't think of you as anything but Jack. I've known you too long. You understand?" my old friend Nick tells me with a perfunctory question mark.

"You will. Now that you've seen me in person, you're gonna have to." I pause to redirect the conversation.

"Have you figured out what you're ordering? I think the pastrami sandwich looks good. With lots of mustard."

"You hate mustard," Nick reminds me. "You used to scrape it off your sandwiches at school."

"Weird side-effect of the hormones for me," I explain.

"One day, like seriously, I went on a Wikipedia binge reading about mustard and just decided I really wanted to like it. Now I love it. All kinds. I still think that bright yellow stuff people put on bologna and white bread is pretty nasty, but besides that."

Staring distractedly away from me, my friend says, "I keep trying to get the waiter's attention, but he won't even look over here." I glance over at our waiter, who is determinedly wrapping silverware in napkins.

"Yeah, well, he doesn't seem real happy to be waiting on us. He keeps giving me dirty looks. He called me 'sir' when he dropped off the waters."

"I didn't hear that."

"Yeah, he did it a couple times," I point out.

... he doesn't seem real happy to be waiting on us. He keeps giving me dirty looks. He called me 'sir' when he dropped off the waters.

"The first time, I just let it go. I didn't want to interrupt the flow of our conversation. Then, when he did it again, he was gone before I had the chance to correct him."

"Dude, that's messed up." Nick catches himself and awkwardly stammers out, "Uh, sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to call you 'dude', I... I mean..."

"It's cool. I think of 'dude' and 'guys' as Gen-X Gender Neutral. So what are you gonna have anyway?" I say, shoving the conversation back on track.

"The steak bomb," Nick answers, appreciative to be back in familiar territory. "I can't eat them at home. Sara doesn't like it. Besides, you can't find a good East Coast steak and cheese grinder in Chicago. It's all Italian beef."

"I have to pee. If I pass our waiter, I'll tell him we're ready to order."

"Make sure you wash your hands, Nerd face," Nick jabs at me with an old, old nickname.

"You're never gonna let me live that down are you?" I ask, knowing the answer.

"Nope."

"Jerk."

"Oh, hey, I think he sees me," Nick makes a

big wave with his arm. "Hi! Waiter! Can we order?"

Approaching the table with the barest hint of a clearly fake service smile, the waiter addresses Nick directly.

"What would you like?"

"I'll have the steak bomb. No mushrooms. A side of fries. And a cup of coffee," Nick tell him.

"Cream and sugar for the coffee?" the barely smiling waiter asks.

"Yes, please."

The waiter turns to me, dropping even the slight hint of a fake smile he had been wearing.

"And you, sir?"

"Ma'am," I insert simply, as I have a half dozen other times just today.

Making it clear he was not making a mistake, the waiter looks directly in my eyes and responds with a very definite, "Sir."

Smashing down the rage boiling inside of me, I lock eyes with the waiter and clarify.

"No, actually, it's Ma'am. I'm a woman. A transgender woman."

"Hm," is the only response my explanation and self-outing elicits.

Out of habit and self-preservation I move on, before the sick feeling in my stomach makes me start to sob or scream.

"I'll have the pastrami and Swiss on rye, extra mustard please."

Returning to the expected script the waiter barely asks, "Anything else?"

"I'll have coffee too. With cream and sugar." Before I can finish, our waiter turns on his heels and is gone.

"..... Ah. Okay... Ummmm, thanks... Bye..." I say to the spot where the waiter had been standing.

My friend Nick and I are silent for a moment. He breaks first.

"Dude! Sorry. That was so rude! He didn't even apologize or correct himself, and then he just walked away!"

"Yeah. I wish I could say that kind of thing never happens," I tell him flatly.

"Weren't you about to go to the bathroom?" Nick asks, grasping for normality.

Comforting myself with the snark of old friendship—and also, now nervous to use the restroom, but not wanting to say so—I reply, "Yeah, I'll wait. No way am I leaving you alone and taking the chance of the food coming while I'm gone!"

"Heh-ha," Nick smirks.

"We've known each other since we were kids, Nick," I continue, clinging to the normal feeling and comfort of familiar banter. "You're the closest thing I have to a brother. I'd trust you with my life, but I'll never trust you alone with my food. I've had about as much salty tea and pepper filled cornbread muffins as I ever want to taste, thank you very much."

On more solid footing, Nick glances to see the waiter solidly not looking towards us.

"Hey, let's mess with this a**hole and loosen the caps on all the condiments before we leave."

"I love you too. Jerk."

"It's really good to see you... Jennifer. Nerd face."

**Lorelei Erisis is an actor, activist, adventurer, and pageant queen. Send your questions about trans issues, gender and sexuality to: askatranswoman@gmail.com.*



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Harvard from Page 5

very good conversations," said Bronski of the previous seminars.

The root of these conversations is based in the LGBT community's struggle for marriage equality rights for the last two decades, and whether or not this issue is crucial. In particular, Mogul's November discussion focused on the criminalization of LGBTQ People in the United States. Mogul's stance was that marriage is a much smaller piece of a bigger pie in terms of LGBT civil rights. In Mogul's opinion, the importance of marriage equality is insignificant in comparison to fighting other basic discriminations such as protecting people from getting fired or harassed on the street.

"I especially appreciated Mogul's in-depth discussion of the multiple ways in which minority statuses intersect to place LGBTQ folks in danger, to criminalize them, and to make legal justice elusive to them," said attendee Dr. Caroline Light, a Ph.D. lecturer and director of the Undergraduate Studies Program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. "I will definitely attend the rest of the events in this series!"

Bronski said the series has attracted nearly 60 people per event, which he attributes to his effort to market the series outside of the university, something which has not been done previously. Therefore, atten-

dees have included a majority of activists rather than students.

"As somebody who deeply believes that there's a real place for interactions between universities and community organizations, between universities and the towns and cities in which they are placed, and also an intellectual examination of issues and on the grounds, grassroots activist approach, it seems to me that this is doing exactly what I wanted, [which is] to bring people together for really good conversations," said Bronski. "People are really involved. People really responded. Some really [difficult] issues were sort of approached and people discussed them in a really productive way that moved the conversation forward."

Sponsors for the series aside from Harvard include the Hispanic Black Gay Coalition (HBGC), the Open Gate Foundation, as well as the Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD).

"This is a worthy and timely conversation," said Carisa Cunningham, director of Public Affairs & Education at GLAD. "It's important for us to envision and work for a world in which all of us, including the most vulnerable, are not only safe from discrimination and violence, but are celebrated and affirmed."

Tickets to the day-long symposium will be free but require online registration for about 100 spots. Breakfast, lunch and dessert will be served throughout the day for those who register. Bronski said he does not plan to hold the same seminar series next year, but hopes to hold similar events in the years to come.

For more information on the upcoming events in the series visit their site at: www.wgs.fas.harvard.edu/aftermarriage.




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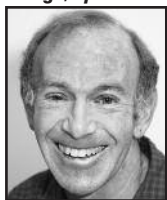
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The OutField: 'Big News' on the LGBT sports front

By: Dan Woog*/Special to TRT

Q SPORTS



Back in the day — “the day” being, say, 2012—an athlete coming out as gay or lesbian was Big News.

In 2014, you had to do something really outstanding to make headlines. You had to be a National Basketball Association player, like Jason Collins—and then you had to sign a contract with a big-city team like the Brooklyn Nets. And your #98 jersey (worn to commemorate the year Matthew Shepard was killed) had to become the bestselling sports shirt in the country. Not just for basketball, but any sport.

You had to be a college football player like Michael Sam. Not just any football player, mind you, but one who was a consensus All-American, and your league's Defensive Player of the Year. Then you needed to endure the media circus known as the NFL draft. And when you were drafted, you had to kiss your boyfriend, as cameras clicked and whirled.

You had to be a Major League Soccer player like Robbie Rogers. And because MLS is off many sports fans' radars, you had to do something like play in your league's championship game. And help win it.

You must have done those things because,

in 2014, it was not just enough to come out as an openly gay athlete. Dozens of men and women did it. They were college football and basketball players, swimmers, baseball players, volleyball players and shot putters. They were Olympic speed skaters, lugers, rowers and gymnasts.

They were non-competitors too, but working in the sports world nonetheless. Coaches declared their sexuality publicly. So did pro teams' front-office executives and college teams' sports information officials.

Major League Baseball umpire Dale Scott came out too. A year or two ago, that would have been big Stop the Presses News. Now it was so unremarkable that—after he mentioned his partner in a Referee Magazine article—it went unnoticed by everyone for a couple of months.

This long-awaited-but-still-unexpected state of affairs—an outpouring of openness across a broad swath of the sports universe—has created a gigantic ripple effect. Straight teammates have reacted with a range of emotions. Some give virtual high-fives, tweeting messages of support. College and pro teams have produced “You Can Play” videos, conveying the message that if you can dunk, dribble, pitch, row, run, dive, or do any other type of athletic activity, just go right ahead and do it—sexual orientation be damned.

Other teammates have reacted with who-cares shrugs. That's appropriate too.

The ripple effect has reached down to high

schools, and beyond. An entire generation of boys and girls are growing up knowing that they will have—may already have, in fact—LGBT teammates and coaches. It's the same as realizing they'll meet people of different colors and religions. Sports teaches many life lessons, and this is just one more.

The lesson is more profound for young LGBT athletes. They are joining the big, wide, only slightly dysfunctional sports world on their own terms, not even realizing that just a few years ago they would have faced formidable barriers to entry. This does not mean that thousands of gay boys and lesbians are suddenly signing up as out, proud Little Leaguers. Many of them have not yet figured out who they are. But they are playing their games in a rapidly changing environment. And as they concentrate more on batting and passing and shooting and whatever, they'll spend less time on hiding.

Though, as with the rest of society, change comes more slowly in the transgender arena than others, the field is shifting for trans athletes too. But if a trans-inclusive vote earlier this month by Minnesota's high school sports governing body is any indication—and why shouldn't it be?—the “T” in LGBT

sports is becoming more than just an afterthought.

So if in the year ahead you have to do something truly outstanding to make LGBT headlines in the sports world, what do you do?

Fortunately, there remain a few frontiers to conquer. You can be a professional sports franchise owner who hires the first openly gay head coach. You can be an ABC, CBS, NBC or ESPN TV announcer who announces, on air, that you are so proud of out athletes because you yourself are gay.

Or you can still be that elusive, still-unidentified-but-we-know-you're-“out”—there man: a professional superstar, at the top of his game. You can be the guy to say—holding aloft the Super Bowl, World Series or NBA championship trophy—“I'm here. I'm queer. I'm going to Disney World.”

Even in 2015, that's guaranteed to be Big News.

*Dan Woog is a journalist, educator, soccer coach and gay activist. His latest book is “We Kick Balls: True Stories from the Youth Soccer Wars.” He can be reached care of this publication or at his direct e-mail at: OutField@qsyndicate.com.

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Rosie from page 11

We curse every day, we pray, we joke and then all of a sudden we die. We are who we are and we are at peace and we'll always be at peace. There's no more cancer. There's no more disease. But we are our personalities. It's beautiful. I know who my dad is because when he came to me, [I recognized him], “it's my dad, and it's who he is!”

Q. Can you give a general or broad message to the gay community who may be feeling in despair or a loss of hope or suffering from depression? What would you say to them about their lives and their time here on earth?

A. I would say to everyone to look in the mirror, say you love yourself, be who you are and not what others want you to be, have faith, never give up, smile, smile. You have to have faith. You know faith is love.

Q. I read that you don't charge for readings. Is that correct? And why is that?

A. When messages have to come through, I am compelled to give a message. It's like my job. That's what I have to do. If I am at the supermarket and I hear a message from somebody, am I going to stop someone and tell them “please give me \$20 or I can't give you a message from your mother?” I mean, how rude can that be? But, what I do is charge for travel, I ask the seminar [people] to pay for my stay, for my guest, for my time, because it takes away from my real estate, it takes away from doing work for my

fundraiser, you know, I have *Pink Faith**, it takes away from my own duties as a mother, as a wife; it takes away from my family. So, if I do group readings, I do charge. But, if it's one-on-one, no I don't charge. Or, if I am at the supermarket and a spontaneous reading happens, no I don't charge. Now when I do events, like workshops, I do charge because I teach people how to connect and how to embrace this beautiful spiritual connection I have to them. I want everyone to know that angels exist—guardian angels exist. Divine spirits are here to help us, to guide us, to protect us, and they need to know why, why are they here.

Q. Lastly, what do you do with all those letters you receive from your fans?

A. I keep every single one.

If you are interested in getting to know Rosie, please tune in to TLC's *Angels Among Us*, Sundays at

10 p.m. EST, or check out her website (www.rosiecepero.com/#), in which you can contact Rosie for a reading or book an event, follow Rosie via Facebook (http://tiny.cc/fb_rosie), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/RosieCepero>), etc. To contact Rosie via regular mail, please send your letters to: Rosie Cepero, P.O. Box 88, Harpursville, NY 13787.

**Pink Faith* (<http://tiny.cc/6f3yrx>) is a non-profit organization founded by Rosie Cepero. According to its Facebook page, the organization helps breast cancer patients financially in their time of need.

People don't understand what it's like to be gay. And, the parents, instead of helping their children, they shut them down.

We should all have the right to make our own end-of-life decisions.



To get involved on this important issue, connect with us:

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