Divorce, Reproductive Losses, and Other Queer “Failures”

When the first same-sex couple to marry legally in the United States, Hillary and Julie Goodridge, was feeling stressed from public attention, they didn’t want to seek couples’ counseling. Julie told NPR this past May, “It felt like too much of a risk.”

They divorced a few years later. Their daughter Annie, who was 10 at the time, said in retrospect, “I felt like our family let everyone down.” Their situation highlights a long-time problem for the LGBTQ community and other marginalized groups: the pressure to be perfect.

Two new books, however, each look at topics often associated with failure—relationship break-ups and reproductive losses—in order to help LGBTQ people and our children better navigate them.

In Reproductive Losses: Challenges to LGBTQ Family-Making (Routledge), Christa Craven explains that the past few years, with renewed attacks on LGBTQ rights after previous gains, “have created more pressure than ever for queer people to marry, have children, and create public narratives of LGBTQ progress.”

This means that “losses, challenges, and disruptions to stories of successful LGBTQ family-making are often silenced, both personally and politically.”

Craven, a cultural and medical anthropologist at the College of Wooster, tries to break the silence by drawing on interviews with 54 queer people who experienced loss as gestational parents, non-gestational parents with gestational partners, or through adoption loss (when a child is reclaimed by their birth family before the adoption is finalized), as well as from her own experience with pregnancy loss.

She observes that even for straight, cisgender people, reproductive loss is often hashed up in order to focus on success.

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Get Konnected! and Bay Windows have partnered to create the first ever 25 Most Influential LGBTQ+ People of Color list. An event honoring those selected will take place on Thursday, September 26th, 2019 and the list will be published in Bay Windows.

This year marks two significant milestones for the LGBTQ+ community; the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 which sparked the Gay Revolution and the 15th anniversary of marriage equality in the state of Massachusetts.

Honorees of the LGBTQ+ event will be selected from a variety of fields ranging from academia, the arts, technology, healthcare, financial services to retail, illustrating the diversity of the LGBTQ+ individuals who are contributing to the economic, social, and civic fabric of Greater Boston.

The event will be held on Thursday, September 26. More details will follow.

If you’d like to serve on the nominating committee please email Jeff Coakley at jcoakley@baywindows.com Or if you have an individual you’d like to nominate please go to http://bit.ly/GK25LGBTQ
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“happy endings”; for queer people, the “deafening heteronormativity” of family-making literature creates a “double invisibility” for queer family-making efforts that do not produce a “success story.”

She disperses some of this invisibility by exploring the queer-specific nuances of how her subjects experienced grief, the support (or lack thereof) available to them, how they commemorated their losses and found resiliency, and the intersections of social class, race, and religion.

Craven also makes a compelling argument for a communal response, which can help “combat the multiple cultural silences that surround reproductive loss, queer families, and queer ‘failure.’” To this end, Craven has launched a website, lgbtqreproductiveloss.org, to share further resources, stories, and images of how LGBTQ people have commemorated reproductive losses, from tattoos to physical memorials. Both book and website are must-reads for any queer person who has experienced reproductive loss or is supporting someone who has.

When it comes to relationship break-ups, too, we find similar pressure and silencing. LGBTQ Divorce and Relationship Dissolution: Psychological and Legal Perspectives and Implications for Practice (Oxford), edited by Abbie Goldberg, professor of psychology at Clark University, and Adam Romero, director of legal scholarship at the Williams Institute at UCLA Law School, offers more than 20 interdisciplinary and intersectional essays to break the silence.

Goldberg and Romero note in their introduction that “Discourse on divorce and dissolution among LGBTQ people … was and remains almost nonexistent” despite, or perhaps because of, the heroic efforts to achieve marriage equality. And Katherine Allen, professor of human development and family science at Virginia Tech, observes in her essay, “Same-sex couples may have constructed a reality around being perfect, or normal, or just like everyone else. They may be unprepared for when that image shatters.”

The volume seeks to change that, with essays on the interplay of social stigma, economic status, gender identity, legal recognition, immigration status, child custody, and other factors on LGBTQ people and their families as relationships end. They cover not only break-ups of legal marriages, but also those of non-married couples, polyamorous people, and families with more than two parents.

While this volume is aimed at scholars, therapists, lawyers, and other professionals working with LGBTQ clients, much will also be of interest to anyone who has been involved in the fight for LGBTQ relationship recognition and doesn’t mind some (generally accessible) academic lingo.

As Annie Goodridge’s comment above indicates, though, the pressure to be perfect can impact our children as well. Aaron Dickinson Sachs, the grown child of same-sex parents, writes in LGBTQ Divorce and Relationship Dissolution, “Like members of many groups battling negative social perceptions, I felt unable to discuss the difficulty of my parents’ separation, fearing it would ultimately validate anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.”

Furthermore, it isn’t just parental break-ups that can stress our kids, but also the ongoing pressure to be high-achieving, fault-free testaments to LGBTQ parenting. Any problems, from academic difficulties to substance abuse, may be hidden or ignored.

As Abigail Garner explained in her 2004 book Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is, “The fear that LGBT parents will be blamed and politically penalized for having less-than-perfect offspring forces these issues underground, isolating kids and families.”

For both our children’s sake and our own, then, let us be grateful to those who are sharing stories, conducting research, and providing resources around difficult issues that might look like imperfections—not to show that LGBTQ people are more flawed than anyone else, but to acknowledge that we are equally human.

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

Mombian
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San Francisco police chief apologizes to LGBTQ community

SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—San Francisco’s police chief apologized Monday for the way the department historically treated LGBTQ people and for “the harm that was caused.”

“Unless the wrongs of the past are acknowledged and dealt with appropriately, our past will continue to put a stain on the present and on our future,” Chief William Scott said during a “Reflection and Reconciliation Session” aimed at increasing trust between the LGBTQ community and police.

The forum was hosted by the Police Department and GLIDE, which provides social services to the homeless and others.

A department release said input from the forum and other planned “listening sessions” will move the department “forward in ways that emphasize respect, safety and diversity.”

It marked the 53rd anniversary of rioting in 1966 at Compton’s Cafeteria in the Tenderloin district after police were called to evict transgender people—many of them sex workers—who gathered there and tried to arrest a transgender woman.

The 1966 confrontation preceded by three years New York’s famous Stonewall Riots, which were considered a landmark in LGBTQ civil rights activism.

Historically, police were known for beating gay men in the Castro district and for arresting transgender women for wearing dresses.

“I and the men and women of this police department are truly sorry,” Scott told an audience at the Glide Memorial church. “We are sorry for what happened. We are sorry for our role in it. And we are sorry for the harm that it caused.”

Scott agreed to meet with LGBTQ community members after a Pride Parade march in July was disrupted by protestors opposed to a police and corporate presence.

About 40 people interrupted the parade for about an hour and two people were arrested after protestors broke down barricades, threw water bottles at police and at least one person fought with officers, authorities said.

On Monday night, some people submitted comments asking whether the Police Department would agree not to have uniformed officers march in the Pride Parade. But Cmdr. Teresa Ewins, a lesbian, said it was important “for kids to see us,” to show the LGBTQ presence in the department, the San Francisco Examiner reported.

“Many of us joined to make a difference,” she said. “It’s a special day for me as well as everyone in the department who is LGBT.”

Some speakers said more work needs to be done to reconcile police and the LGBTQ community.

Anubis Daugherty, 25, said he was homeless for six years and police sweeps of homeless communities disproportionately affected LGBTQ people who are a significant portion of homeless and impoverished people in the Tenderloin, the Examiner reported.

“I was born here, I was raised here,” Daugherty said. “If you want to truly apologize for something you have to stop what you’re doing.”

Police investigate possible hate crime in LA bar ouster

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The forcible removal of a group of transgender women and a gay man from a Los Angeles bar is being investigated as a possible hate crime, police said Monday.

Cell phone video showing security guards shoving and dragging two transgender women and a gay man out of the downtown bar was widely shared on social media over the weekend. Top police officials and Mayor Eric Garcetti promised a thorough investigation.

A complaint about an incident at Las Perlas bar Friday was filed with police and detectives are investigating, said department spokesman Officer Jay Chaves.

“Los Angeles is a place where hate against any person, regardless of gender identity, is not tolerated. My office is in communication with (at)LAPDHQ about the incident at Las Perlas, and will ensure a proper investigation is completed,” Garcetti said in a tweet.

Khloe Rios, who recorded the video, said she and a group of colleagues from Bienestar Human Services, a nonprofit that focuses on health issues in Latino and LGTBQ communities, were having dinner when a straight couple approached them and started yelling slurs.

“They said, ‘You guys are all men. You are not women. You don’t belong here,’” Rios said.

Rios, a program manager at the nonprofit, said she and her friends ignored the comments but then the woman became more aggressive and spat at them, pushed her and slapped a colleague.

The group stood up and huddled together to protect each other and that’s when security guards intervened and asked everyone to leave. They escorted the couple out but became aggressive with them, pushing and shoving them and even dragging one of her colleagues by the neck, she said.

“We thought the security team was going to protect us but instead they threw us out like trash,” Rios said.

Outside, the couple continued to yell slurs at them and threatened to kill them, she said. The couple ran away when they saw police patrol cars approaching, she added.

“Every single day I see trans women being harassed, being bullied and being discriminated. This was a horrible experience,” Rios said. “I knew I needed to record this to show how they treat us.”

Cedd Moses, chief executive of Pouring With Heart, which owns the bar, said in a statement posted to the Las Perlas’ Facebook page on Saturday the incident was “an escalated verbal altercation” that led the manager to remove those patrons who didn’t comply with a request to leave.

After a protest outside the bar that prompted the bar to close Saturday night, Moses apologized to the transgender community and said the security company working at the bar would be replaced.

“We are committed to working with the community and we are researching the right partner to help us move forward in the most positive way possible including staff and vendor training,” he wrote in a statement. Ohio attorney general joins federal argument against LGBTQ protections

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)—Ohio’s attorney general is joining the U.S. Department of Justice in arguing before the U.S. Supreme Court that federal civil rights laws provide no protection against workplace discrimination for LGBTQ employees.

The Columbus Dispatch reports Attorney General Dave Yost Friday he has joined a friend-of-the-court brief filed by other states arguing the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination based on gender doesn’t apply to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Yost says it’s up to Congress and not the judiciary to write laws expanding such protections.

The Supreme Court in April decided to hear cases involving people who claim they were fired because of sexual orientation and one that involves a homeless home employee fired after disclosing she was transitioning from male to female.


Attorney who challenged Arkansas gay marriage ban dies

BY ANDREW DeMILLO
Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP)—Cheryl Maples, an attorney who successfully challenged Arkansas’ gay marriage ban before the nation’s highest court said same-sex couples could wed, has died at age 69.

Maples died Thursday in Little Rock from complications of congestive heart failure, her daughter Melina Maples-Granger said.

Rosendall

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called as a witness at the trial in early May, which was not surprising considering how much less frightening Syring’s threats against me were than those against Zogby and his staff over a longer period.

As DOJ stated in a news release after Syring was convicted, “from 2012 to 2017, Syring sent over 700 emails and his staff over a longer period.

His threats were based on the employees’ race and national origin and their encouragement of civic engagement by Arab Americans.

Zogby’s father immigrated to America from Lebanon in 1922. Like his parents, Zogby is Catholic. I spoke with him and his wife outside the courtroom after the sentencing hearing on August 15. He described times when he picked his daughter up from school, and she looked at him and said: “He wrote to you again, didn’t he?”

To terrify a man, his family, and his staff with the possibility that on any given day your threats may escalate into violence, including death, is intolerable. U.S. District Judge Randolph Moss sentenced Syring to five years, of which he has already served six months. He is barred from Internet access. Prosecutors sought a sentence considerably longer.

This all happens within a wider context. Trump senior adviser Stephen Miller has been back in the news for his restrictionist policymaking on immigration. His anti-migrant polemics, his hypocritical insistence that immigrants already speak English (his own great-grandmother spoke only Yiddish), and his longstanding ties to white supremacists reveal someone at odds with the enriching diversity out of which America is irrevocably forged.

I attended the sentencing hearing to show solidarity with Dr. Zogby, who has demonstrated fortitude and grace as a voice for Arab Americans while being so much greater a target for bigots like Syring than I; and to show my respect for the public servants at FBI and Justice, whose example in upholding American freedoms at a time when they are under siege should inspire us all.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist who can be reached at rosendall@msn.com.

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Pride
Continued from page 1

rise out of vulnerable communities.
Boston Pride is not interested in responding to their bait. Our strength comes from directing our attention and energy to helping one another meet the challenges of intersecting oppressions. Boston Pride will continue to focus on supporting and empowering members of the LGBTQ community.

We will continue to focus on the needs of people of color, trans individuals, and all those who have experienced racism, xenophobia, and sexism.

We remain thankful for the estimated one million people, including our straight allies, who joined us at the 2019 Boston Pride parade and festival on June 8th and we’re looking forward to planning our 50th anniversary celebrations for June 2020.

Log Cabin
Continued from page 1

Log Cabin’s approach to defending its Trump endorsement in the media were key among her reasons for stepping down.
Charles Moran, a Log Cabin spokesperson, confirmed Henry “did tender her resignation,” saying that occurred Monday.
You can read the entire story at www.washingtontblade.com

Special prosecutor named to look into Jussie Smollett case

By MICHAEL TARM
AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP)—A judge appointed a special prosecutor Friday to look into why the Chicago state’s attorney’s office abruptly dropped the case against Jussie Smollett, leaving open the possibility that the former “Empire” actor could yet face charges in what police say was a phony attack.

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Maples represented same-sex couples who challenged Arkansas’ constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman. A Pulaski County judge struck the amendment down in 2014, which led to more than 500 same-sex couples marrying before the ruling was suspended by the state Supreme Court. The state’s high court didn’t rule before the U.S. Supreme Court legalized gay marriage in 2015. A federal judge also struck down the Arkansas ban in 2016 but also suspended her ruling.

Maples argued that the ban, approved by voters in 2004, violated fundamental rights enshrined in both the Arkansas and U.S. Constitution and could not stand.

“The voters can’t just vote a change to an inalienable right,” Maples told The Associated Press in 2015.

Maples won victories for LGBT rights on other fronts in Arkansas, representing couples who successfully challenged the state’s birth certificate law, which defined parents by gender. The U.S. Supreme Court in 2017 reversed a state high court decision that married lesbian couples must get a court order to have both spouses listed on their children’s birth certificates.

Maples also successfully sued to force the state in 2015 to recognize the hundreds of same-sex marriages that were performed in 2014 before Pulaski County Circuit Judge Chris Piazza’s decision against Arkansas’ ban was suspended.

“Cheryl was a deeply passionate fighter who loved her clients and she will be missed,” said Holly Dickson, legal director and interim executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas.

Maples-Granger described her mom as a “social worker with a law degree.”

“When she met someone who needed help, she’d help them,” she said. “She couldn’t help but help them and that’s who she was.”

Follow Andrew DeMillo on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ademillo
on himself that he staged to get attention.

Smollett, who is black and gay, maintains that he was the target of a racist and homophobic attack in January. But if the special prosecutor, former U.S. Attorney Dan Webb, determines that the charges shouldn’t have been dropped, he could recommend that they be reinstated or that new charges be brought.

Webb, who was appointed by Cook County Judge Michael Toomin during a Friday hearing, told reporters afterward that he would move the investigation along as quickly as possible. Such probes typically include impaneling a special grand jury, issuing subpoenas, taking witness statements and a final report.

“I intend to expedite everything. But the facts will take me where they take me,” Webb said. “I’m going to start fresh and see where it goes.”

The Cook County state’s attorney’s office charged Smollett in February with 16 counts of disorderly conduct for allegedly staging the attack and lying about it to investigators. However, it dropped the charges a month later with little explanation, angering city officials and the police.

Webb, who served as U.S. attorney in Chicago during the 1980s before going on to become arguably the city’s most high-profile defense attorney of the last few decades, has been tapped to serve as a special prosecutor on five previous occasions. His list of high-profile clients has included former Illinois Gov. George Ryan, tobacco company Philip Morris and, more recently, Ukrainian energy
As a special prosecutor in 2012, Webb was asked to reopen the investigation into the death of David Koschman, who died after being punched in 2004 by then-Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley’s nephew. After an investigation of more than a year that included testimony from nearly 150 witnesses, Webb determined that charges were warranted.

Toomin said the 73-year-old Webb wasn’t the first person he considered for the Smollett case. The judge was required by law to first see if the state attorney general, the appellate prosecutor or a state attorney from elsewhere in Illinois wanted the job. During Friday’s hearing, he suggested several other qualified individuals had been considered.

A former state appellate judge, Sheila O’Brien, petitioned for a special prosecutor earlier this year in what many believed was a long-shot to reopen the case. But in a surprise decision, Toomin ruled in June that a special prosecutor was, in fact, called for, citing “unprecedented irregularities” in how the case had been handled.

A Smollett spokesman declined to comment Friday. But in court filings last month, Smollett’s attorneys sharply criticized Toomin’s decision to appoint a special prosecutor with broad powers, calling the process a “travesty of justice.”

Smollett, now 37, told police he was walking home early on Jan. 29 when two masked men approached him, made racist and homophobic insults, beat him and looped a noose around his neck before fleeing. He said his assailants, at least one of whom he said was white, told him he was in “MAGA country”—a reference to President Donald Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again.”

Several weeks later, authorities alleged that Smollett had paid two black friends $3,500 to help him stage the attack because he was unhappy with his salary as an actor on “Empire” and wanted to drum up publicity for his career.

In his June ruling, Toomin suggested that the county’s state attorney, Kim Foxx, mishandled the case by appointing a top aide to oversee it after she recused herself.

Foxx had been in contact with a Smollett relative and was approached by former first lady Michelle Obama’s one-time chief of staff on behalf of Smollett’s family. Foxx explained at the time that she was recusing herself to avoid “even the perception of a conflict” of interest.

Facts has said that Smollett was treated no differently than thousands of other defendants in low-level cases whose charges have been similarly dropped. She also publicly wondered if her being black had anything to do with the criticism she received.

She released a statement Friday pledging her office’s “full cooperation” with Webb’s investigation.

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter: @michael_tarm

Appeals court upholds ruling on fees in gay marriage case

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP)—Federal appeals judges have upheld a ruling that the state of Kentucky must pay $224,000 in legal expenses stemming from a former county clerk’s refusal to issue same-sex marriage licenses.

News outlets report a three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati on Friday upheld a 2017 ruling that the state must pay attorney fees and costs incurred by same-sex couples who sued.

Lawyers for Gov. Matt Bevin, who supported former Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis when he ran for election in 2015, argued in January that Davis should pay the fees, not the state. A Bevin spokesman said in a statement, “We respect the court’s decision.”

The lower court ruling said the state should pay because it’s primarily responsible for regulating marriage.

Minnesota filmmakers’ lawsuit over gay weddings reinstated

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—A federal appeals court on Friday reinstated a lawsuit filed by two Minnesota filmmakers who want the right to refuse to film same-sex weddings, saying that videos are a form of speech with constitutional protections under the First Amendment.

Carl and Angel Larsen, who run a Christian business called Telescope Media Group in St. Cloud, sued the state’s human rights commissioner in 2016, saying Minnesota’s public accommodation law would result in steep fines and jail time if they offered services promoting only their vision of marriage.

A federal judge dismissed the case two years ago. But a three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that decision Friday. The panel sent the case back to the lower court with instructions to consider a preliminary injunction that would allow the Larsens to operate their business without fear of being found in violation of Minnesota’s Human Rights Act, the Star Tribune reported.

Judge David Stras, a former Minnesota Supreme Court justice, wrote in Friday’s opinion that wedding videos involve editorial judgment and control and “constituted a media for the communication of ideas.” He said the Constitution’s First Amendment allows the Larsens to choose when to speak and what to say.

Judge Jane Kelly issued a dissenting opinion.

“That the service the Larsens want to make available to the public is expressive does not transform Minnesota’s law into a content-based regulation, nor should it empower the Larsens to discriminate against prospective customers based on sexual orientation,” Kelly wrote.

The state Department of Human Rights said it was disappointed by the decision and was working with the attorney general’s office to explore its legal options.

“Minnesota is not in the business of creating second-class community members in our state, the agency’s commissioner, Rebecca Lucero, said in a statement. "Time and again, Minnesotans have chosen love and inclusion in our communi-
School district bans trainings based on gender differences

By DAVID PORTER
Associated Press

A New Jersey school district has agreed not to use training methods promoted by a group that stresses gender differences and holds positions including that girls don’t perform as well on timed tests as boys because they are threatened by pressure and that boys are bored more easily.

The West Milford Township School District had contracted with the Spokane, Washington-based Gurian Institute for teacher training sessions on three occasions in 2017. The Gurian Institute referred to itself as “a powerful deep dive into the minds of boys and girls that has been proven successful in helping schools and communities throughout the world.” The website features links to numerous newspaper articles focused on single-gender learning, and lists dozens of public, private and faith-based schools around the country that it says have implemented its methods successfully.

In a phone interview Friday, Gurian Institute co-founder Michael Gurian criticized the ACLU’s action as “a political frame.”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with education,” Gurian said.

According to the state civil rights division, the training materials distributed to West Milford teachers included “stereotypes about what boys and girls are interested in... recommended that teachers instruct students based on those stereotypes—for instance, assigning girls relationship-oriented books rather than action-oriented books, and placing them in small, non-competitive math and science groups.

“Stereotypes have no place in the classroom,” said Elyla Huertas, an attorney who worked on the case for the ACLU. “All school districts should be looking to evidence-based strategies to support students, not learning styles based on gender.”

Court: Idaho must give transgender inmate gender surgery

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP)—A federal appeals court says Idaho must provide gender confirmation surgery to a transgender inmate who has been living as a woman for years but who has continuously been housed in a men’s prison.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday agreed with a federal judge in Idaho that the state’s denying the surgery for Adree Edmo amounted to cruel and unusual punishment, a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

U.S. District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill in December ruled that Edmo showed she had a serious medical need and that failure to treat her medical condition could result in significant further injury or the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain.

Idaho Department of Correction spokesman Jeff Ray said the department was reviewing the ruling and couldn’t comment.
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Even though I'm constantly globe-trotting, I must confess I don't keep up with international affairs... unless I'm in the middle of them! Therefore, I had absolutely no idea the United States was looking to expand until I read that President Donald Trump attempted to purchase Greenland from Denmark... at a discounted price! First, who knew Denmark owned Greenland? Second, isn't making a lowball offer kinda like trying to buy a house that isn't for sale for less than it's worth? Crazy. His stunt came on the eve of a scheduled trip to Copenhagen to visit Queen Margrethe II on her birthday back in 2004, but that's neither her eller der (which is how the Danes say "here nor there"). The Danish prime minister refused the offer, saying, "Thankfully, the time where you buy and sell other countries and populations is over. Let's leave it there." Donald retaliated by cancelling his trip and calling the prime minister a "nasty woman"—cause that's what he does. But didya know this whole episode is NOT unprecedented! In 1917, after 30 years of negotiations, the US bought the Virgin Islands from Denmark.

Another year, another season of "Dancing with the Stars". As in recent years, the term "stars" is being used loosely. I certainly consider James Van Der Beek, Christie Brinkley and Mary Wilson stars. And I suppose one or two of the others are notables in their fields. But the bulk of the lineup is what I like to refer to as a "bunch of nobodies". One name is getting lots of attention—former White House press secretary Sean Spicer. Political figures are nothing new to DWTS. But this one has drawn the ire of an unlikely person—host Tom Bergeron.

It is unusual for Bergeron to voice an opinion about a contestant, and unheard of for him to criticize his own network. But Tom did both. In a lengthy statement, while acknowledging that he has no say in the show's casting, he discussed a lunch meeting he had with the executive producer regarding the direction of the show. He hoped that DWTS "would be a joyful respite from our exhausting political climate and free of inevitably divisive bookings from ANY political affiliations. I left that lunch convinced we were in agreement. Subsequently (and rather obviously), a decision was made to, as we often say in Hollywood, 'go in a different direction'."

While Bergeron didn't name anyone specifically, it's clear what he meant by "divisive bookings from ANY political affiliation." Spicer took the bait and responded via "The Blast": "Tom has been a great host to this show for 28 seasons. I actually think that this show is a great opportunity to be an example, how we can have better dialogue and respectfully learn from each other.

I wouldn't hold my breath.

Elsewhere on ABC, we got the heavily promoted "Bachelor in Paradise", alums from the franchise are thrown together on a secluded resort, ostensibly in hopes of finding romance. If they are unsuccessful in making a connection, they're booted off—after creating havoc. This year, we have Demi—a cast-off from Colton's season who claims to have recently experimented with lesbianism. Although she made a connection with mega-hot Derek on the show, she also harbored feelings for her hometown lady-love. She voiced these concerns to Chris Harrison. In the past, anyone in such a conflict would simply leave "Paradise". But suddenly, if as a gift from the gods, Demi's lesbian lover almost immediately materialized in "Paradise"—in a way that I'm sure was not intended to appear planned. The two women reunited with the most non-sexual, awkward kisses ever, went public to the rest of the cast, and everyone applauded Demi for her bravery...with the exception of Derek, who awkwardly shook hands with his female replacement. You probably expected the ladies would leave "Paradise" happily ever after. But, surprise, Chris Harrison said they could stay and explore their relationship off-camera. Presumably, more drama will ensue.

Speaking of potential lesbians, rumors swirl that Miley Cyrus has left Liam Hemsworth for another woman. The rumors were fueled by Miley being spotted with one Kaitlynn Carter, who just happens to be Brody Jenner's ex (which I guess makes Caitlyn Jenner her almost-mother-in-law). Typically I'd shrug and say "So what?" to such twaddle. But the two were photographed kissing in Italy and even then were seen having lunch with Miley's mom back in Los Angeles. Who do they think they are with all this kissing and travelling? Me?! While Billy Porter has had a great year, it hasn't been without some ups and downs. When he got the script for a recently aired episode of "Pose", Porter was shocked to learn he'd be doing a love scene—with nudity! He always knew it was a possibility. "Listen, listen to me. I got that contract and that contract said, 'Nudity Clause', and I literally sat and went, 'Child, they don't want to see my black ass.' And I signed it, never thinking in a million years that anybody would call me on it. These bitches wrote a script where I show my ass!" Still, he took it not only in stride, but as a major stride forward. "I have spent my entire career not being the object of anyone's affection. They cut our dicses off. So to be turning 50 on September 21, and having a very loving, connected sex scene is sort of blowing my mind."

You can check out the scene on BillyMasters.com.

Remember those allegations that Nicholas Sparks was homophobic because of policies at his Epiphany School—the details of which he reiterated in an explosive e-mail to the former headmaster? That guy sued him, claiming that Sparks created a negative environment by discriminating against LGBTQ and minority students. Well, the jury returned a verdict—siding with Sparks. Another chapter closed...at least legally.

Then there was that bishop from Cyprus who claimed that women who have sex and enjoy it while pregnant will give birth to queer children. He not only presented this as fact, he backed it up with a letter signed by 40 international scholars. Problem is, the letter and signatures were forged! Oopzid!

Since I'm in Fort Lauderdale this week, I was able to see the world premiere of "Pray the Gay Away", starring the Zakar Twins (based on their best-selling book). The boys previously made it into this column last August, when they accused a photographer of sexual assault. Alas, that storyline didn't make it into this show, which is billed as "A true life coming out comedy". You know how Jerry Seinfeld surrounded himself with a talented cast of actors on "Seinfeld"? The Zakars have done the same thing—and for the same reason. Vince Kelley all but steals the show at their mother, knocking the fourth wall down with aplomb and reacting on the spot to mishaps (like singing during his entrance, saying, "That was supposed to be my sound cue"). Close behind Vince in the scene-stealing category was Jeffrey Fox, who plays numerous roles—most of which require nudity. It is rare to find someone you'd want to see naked who not only can act but also is funny. Fox is one such person. Cory Shorter made it clear he was the star of every scene he was in, while Zachary James Morgan held up the rear...literally.

As to the Zakar Twins, one must admire them. They've taken virtually nothing and developed a following based on...well, virtually nothing. If you want to see them nude, save your money—that doesn't happen here. If you expect some mildly incestuous twin action, you'll also be disappointed (for that, check out BillyMasters.com). If anything, the boys come off decidedly asexual. They've got spunk, but I hate spunk. They have perseverance, but they don't have presence. They've created a brand, but they can't even convincingly play themselves. In spite of them, the show is entertaining. So, even with all these caveats, I recommend going. And you may get the chance to see it since the show is touring. This world premiere was billed as a National Off-Broadway Tour. Well, it doesn't get more off-Broadway than Fort Lauderdale. Keep up with the boys and their travails at ZakarTwins.com.

When the Zakar Twins are more famous than most of the people on "Dancing with the Stars", it's definitely time for me to end yet another column. To keep up with the latest dish, check out www.BillyMasters.com—the site that enjoys twins... and the occasional set of triplets. If you've got a question for me, send it to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Miley turns up on "Bachelor in Paradise". Until next time, remember, one man's filth is another man's bible.
Life Reflected.

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