Navigating Back-to-School Night
by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com

Those of us with kids in school know that this time of year means the approach of an event that can cause distress even in the hardest of us: Back-to-School Night.

This annual observance is on the surface a meet-and-greet with our children’s teacher(s), where they tell us all about the amazing things our children will be learning and doing this year, and we try to avoid signing up to bake cupcakes for school events. Usually, I come away a little jealous of all the great things my son will get to experience (though occasionally I’ve sat through a dreary, droning recitation of the syllabus).

For LGBTQ parents, however, Back-to-School Night can bring with it a host of additional questions: What if the teacher is homophobic or transphobic? What if the other parents are? Will I stand out because of my gender expression? Will there be other LGBTQ families there, or LGBTQ students in the class? Will there be LGBTQ-inclusive books and lessons?

Some of us may have already spoken with our children’s teachers to introduce ourselves and answer any questions they may have about LGBTQ families and individuals. This can be helpful, especially the first year in a school. Sometimes, however, our schedules prevent this; other times, we may choose to give our children, especially tweens and teens, the chance to control how and when to come out about their families. There is no one right answer for every family every year.

The first year in a school may require a different approach than the third. We may even mix methods the same year when dealing with homeroom teachers as well as music, art, physical education, and other specialists.

All of that means, however, that Back-to-School Night may still be a first encounter with some or all teachers, specialists, and other parents. Breathe. I can’t promise that things will always go swimmingly, but here are a few things to remember if you start to worry.

The first year in a new school or community may be the hardest. After your kids have been there a while, however, you’ll likely know at least some of the routine to set in your next year.

Why reparations from 1619 to now
by Rev. Irene Monroe

A year before the Mayflower arrived in 1620, the first group of enslaved Africans depicted as “20 and odd Negroes” arrived sometime during the final week of August to the Virginia colony of Jamestown. The fact that this exact date cannot be pinpointed assists in obscuring the origins of slavery in the United States.

What is incontrovertible is the fact that this month marks the 400th anniversary of black bodies arriving at these shores against their will. Little could these “20 and odd Negroes” fathomed these cargoes of chattel slaves and not as human beings.

America keeps running away from this story, albeit America will acknowledge slavery is its original sin. There are few accounts for its apology: Southern Baptist Convention in 1995; Former President Bill Clinton in 1998, U.S. House of Representatives (H.Res. 194) in 2008, and spiritual guru and presidential hopeful Marianne Williamson in 2018.

“On behalf of myself, and on behalf of my country, to you and all African Americans, from the beginning of our nation’s history, in honor of your ancestors and for the sake of your children, please hear this from my heart, I apologize, please forgive us,” Williamson told her audience during her “Love America Tour”.

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State high court sides with DA in spat over parade arrests

By PHILIP MARCELO
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP)—Massachusetts’ highest court has sided with Boston’s district attorney in a dispute over the prosecution of counterprotesters arrested during a “straight pride” parade over Labor Day weekend.

State Supreme Judicial Court Justice Frank Gaziano, in a single-justice ruling issued Monday, said Boston Municipal Court Judge Richard Sinnott had “no authority” to force Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins’ office to prosecute Roderick Webber, a counterprotester charged with disorderly conduct.

The judge ordered Sinnott to recognize Rollins’ decision to drop the case and have it expunged from Webber’s court record.

“The prosecutor’s sole authority to determine which cases to prosecute, and when not to pursue a prosecution, has been affirmed repeatedly by this court since the beginning of the nineteenth century,” Gaziano wrote.

Such a decision, in which a prosecutor decides how to allocate her limited resources, is made countless times every day in courthouses throughout the Commonwealth.”

Rollins had argued that Sinnott overstepped his constitutional authority in refusing her bid to drop charges.

see ARRESTS, page 4
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### Monroe

**Continued from page 1**

One of the lingering impacts of 250 years of slavery followed by 90 years of Jim Crow and then 60 years of “separate but equal” is a seismic wealth gap between white and black Americans. It is estimated that approximately $12-14 trillion of unpaid black labor is owed for 400 years of economic inequality.

Here in Greater Boston, which includes expensive Cambridge where I reside, for example, the median net worth for non-immigrant blacks is $8. When I first read it in the 2017 Boston Spotlight Team series on race, I thought it was a typo. I gasped in horror and sadness learning it wasn’t.

This year on Juneteenth (June 19 which commemorates the end of U.S. slavery) the House Judiciary subcommittee held a historic meeting on reparations. Economic initiatives are being discussed inside and outside the halls of Congress to remedy the consequences, and then subsequent disadvantages ensued as a result of the systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans.

The topic, however, has been broached before and gone nowhere. First, with civil rights activist James Forman in 1969, and then with former Michigan Rep. John Conyers, Jr. proposing H.R. 40 Bill (referencing to the broken promise of “40 acres and a mule” to emancipated slaves), every year from 1989 until retirement in 2017.

Reparations in the form of monetarily compensating for black farmland confiscated or about to be seized by the government for back taxes, my spouse’s family would benefit from right now.

My spouse’s family on her maternal side are Virginians from Upperville, a small unincorporated town known for horse breeding farms. They have been in Virginia since the 1600s and with Ancestry.com may find their lineage points to one if not several of the “20 and odd Negroes” who first arrived. My spouse’s Uncle Will died last year at the age of 102. He and his siblings represent the second generation removed from slavery.

My spouse’s mother is the last remaining sibling. Uncle Will’s grandmother, my spouse’s great grandmother, was born into slavery and died as a free woman at the age of 108. Sometime during Reconstruction (1863 -1877), the great grandmother accrued a small plot of farmland that now awaits its fate as her brood scrape together enough money to keep it. By 1910, before Uncle Will’s mother gave birth to him on the family farm, black farmers operated approximately 213,000 farms, the height of black land ownership.

However, soon after black farmland was either forcefully taken by mob violence like the Klu Klux Klan or gradually taken by state and federal governments through legal trickery or discriminatory lending practices. In 1916, the beginning of the Black Migration to northern cities, Uncle Will was born. When he became a grown man looking for a better life and wages, Uncle Will left Upperville for Alexandria, and, so too, his siblings, one-by-one as they got older.

Miraculously, the farm has stayed in the family in spite of the various machinations the government — legal and illegal — employs to confiscate black farmland — except for the inexplicable claim of back taxes. The amount is unattainable, espe-
When most of us launch into a new morning it is nothing like storming Normandy Beach on D-Day.

Most of us are not being shot, deported, jailed, evicted, orstarved. Whatever brutal measures Trump and his minions have in mind, most of our freedoms have not yet been blotted out by a fascist state. We still have our voices and our power to act. It is for us to use them.

Some say we're letting Trump distract us from the harm he's doing. Really? We can't multitask? What is he up to that we're missing? Lining his pockets? Packing the courts? Rolling back environmental protections? Gutting USDA? Raidsing FEMA funds to cage more migrant children? Promising pardons to staff who follow his unlawful orders? Attacking immigrants and people of color at every turn? Deporting students and sick children? Bullying journalists and scientists who don’t echo his whistles? Letting Wayne LaPierre lead him around on a leash? Jerking off on the drapes? What?

If we are so unserious that we cannot keep track of this demagogue’s despoilments, we are done. I do not believe it. We will not all sleep through the next fourteen months. I may not be Edward R. Murrow reporting from a London rooftop during the Blitz, and you may not be Julia Child spying in Sri Lanka, but we can rise to our moment. We bring different gifts, but we all have a part in the election. Each of us can contribute: register voters, reach out to neighbors and family, have the difficult discussions, challenge our representatives, give our time and money to candidates, run for an office ourselves.

One of the best things we can do is simply not surrender to the erosion of standards. We don’t have to accept diminished expectations because of Trump’s unrelenting trash talk and provocations. We can stand our ground. We can defend things we care about regardless of what the man-child and his rabblesay.

Reality provides a backstop. Gay and trans people do not disappear because some wish to erase us. Women, people of color, immigrants, and religious minorities do not become devils or infestations or denizens of The Handmaid’s Tale because of a sociopath’s rants. Sea levels do not start rising nor storms growing more extreme by ignoring (or making) them. Mass shootings are not stopped by thoughts and prayers. Crumbling infrastructure is not rebuilt by neglect. Pesticides don’t stop killing bees because of Monsanto’s denials. Sooner or later, the truth bites us in the ass. Trump’s alternate facts (that is, lies) do not become true by repetition.

45’s incompetence causes harm that mean tweets do not mitigate. He weakens our standing in the world with his obliviousness to soft power. We, in the meantime, continue in our diversity to create, innovate, inspire, and enlighten. We do not require permission to step up and assert ourselves. We build and rebuild alliances and go where others haven’t because, as Murrow said in confronting Sen. Joseph McCarthy, we are not descended from fearful people.

The campaign ahead will be long and nasty. When you feel overloaded, you may have wandered into Trump’s funhouse. “Aha!” his trolls love to cry, as if Putin’s useful idiot is above reproof and every journalist who issues a correction (as honest people do) should be dragged off in chains. Break out. Look around you to clear your head and reorient yourself toward the reality-based community.

The idea of America, if it lives at all, lives in us. That is our wellspring. All of us are its guardians. Federal employees in particular, including DOJ attorneys and Secret Service agents, take oaths to defend the Constitution. The great majority take their oaths seriously, as I did during my own federal career. Pledges of service do not morph into plunder because a toddler scribbles over them.

Don’t give Trump’s band of saboteurs rent-free space in your head. We might win, we might not. We don’t know. Cable news is full of experts who were wrong about the last presidential election. Much is at stake. There is no point in hand-wringing or giving up without a fight. We can do this. Let’s go.

Richard J. Rosendall is a writer and activist who can be reached at rosendall@em.com. Copyright © 2019 by Richard J. Rosendall. All rights reserved.

Mombian

Continued from page 1

the other families and have a general sense of the vibe of the school. Even if it isn’t particularly welcoming, you’ll at least know what you’re getting into. It might not be easy, but there will be less fear of the unknown.

When it’s been my family’s first year at a school (or even when it’s not), I try to focus on my commonalities with other parents. They probably have the same questions as I do about the class structure, curriculum, and practicalities of the school year. I try to engage them and the teacher in conversation about these topics, or at the very least, share an anecdote about back-to-school shopping. Building bridges isn’t always easy, but I try.

I also remind myself that non-LGBTQ families outside the one mom-one dad paradigm may have similar concerns about fitting in and representation. And both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ families whose other intersecting identities differ from the majority in their community may worry about a school’s response to those aspects of their lives as well. We may find sympathetic ears and mutual allyship in many places.

This year, we can take heart, too, knowing that six states (California, Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, and Maryland) have enacted laws requiring that schools teach about LGBTQ history and the contributions of LGBTQ people to society. Massachusetts does not require this, but last year gave school districts access to a curriculum on LGBTQ history, literature, and health that they may use if they wish. All of this is not immediately helpful for people outside those states—but I still find encouragement in knowing most of these moves (except in California) happened after President Trump took office. Even when the federal outlook for LGBTQ equality (and education generally) may seem grim, we can still make progress.

There are also many resources now to help us and to assist teachers and school administrators in being more welcoming to and inclusive of LGBTQ identities. Some of the best are from HRC’s Welcoming Schools, GLSEN, PFLAG, and Teaching Tolerance. (For a fuller list, see my LGBTQ Back-to-School Resources at mombian.com.)

Keep in mind that you’re not alone, even if you’re the only LGBTQ-headed family in your school. Find a local LGBTQ parent group through Family Equality (familyequality.org) or join one of the many queer parenting groups on Facebook or your favorite social media channel. Many LGBTQ parents are more than willing to share advice and offer support. They might not have all the answers, but can provide assurance that you’re not the only one asking the questions. My spouse is also fond of saying, “You can’t Nerf the world.” We don’t always have to run ahead and put soft foam over every bump on their school journeys. We want to protect our children—but we also need to help them learn how to handle questions and comments about their families on their own. We may find, too, that they are more resilient than we think.

Every family, child, and school environment is different, of course. The above is not meant as comprehensive advice for every situation. I hope it offers some support, though, whether you dance into Back-to-School Night wearing a shirt with a glittering rainbow unicorn on it, “pass” quietly in the back of the room, or anything in between. May we and our children have a year full of learning, laughter, and love.

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

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**Little Shop Explores Capitalism**

By Jules Becker

A blend of camp, comedy and horror, the Alan Menken-Howard Ashman rock and Motown collaboration (1982 Off-Off Broadway and Off-Broadway and 2003 on Broadway) ultimately serves up the dark side of capitalism as vigorously as the Vermont senator campaigning for President in one of his signature rallies.

At the same time, the abuse of the show’s flower shop worker Audrey at the hands of sadistic dentist boyfriend Orin resonates all the more tellingly in the era of the Me, Too movement. Gifted director-choreographer Rachel Bertone (the recent haunting Moonshot Productions staging of “Cabaret”) has brought her green thumb magic to the Lyric Stage Company of Boston’s 45th season opener and turned its revival of “Little Shop” into a winning blossom.

That magic begins with the Skid Row, New York (Los Angeles in the 1960 now cast classic film of the same name) ambiance of Janie E. Howland’s disarraying spare set. In the fairly intimate Lyric Stage Company space, a disheveled derelict struggles to find his bearing at the side of Mushnik’s initially run-down and poorly stocked flower shop.

The shop owner and his abject clerk Seymour Krelborn look as forlorn as their rubbish-littered surroundings with only fellow employee Audrey dressed in a minimum of kitschy fashion thanks to Marian Bertone’s smartly chosen designs. Chiffon, Crystal and Ronnette—named, of course, to suggest doo-wop groups—enter and re-enter throughout in glistening matching outfits as they sing Greek chorus-like observations about the changes at Mushnik Florists and in plant-carrying Seymour.

Initially resembling a Venus flytrap, the plant—as fans of the show know—becomes a kind of growing Mephistopheles with whom Faustian Seymour makes a bargain for wealth and fame.

That deadly bargain involves Audrey II—the name Seymour gives the plant—demanding much more blood than the drops the somewhat desperate employee extracts from his own fingers.

As Audrey II grows from a hand-carried plant to a shop floor covering creature complete with sievable tendrils—kudos to puppet designer Cameron McEacharn, the enormity of Seymour’s brutal soul-selling becomes all the more evident.

Director-choreographer Bertone generally keeps Seymour and Audrey II’s by turns darkly humorous, ironic and macabre relationship well-paced and blocked—including rhythmic interactions during which the former feeds the latter. The same goes for Mushnik’s growing pride in Seymour’s entrepreneurial success.

Here Bertone smartly creates a “Fiddler on the Roof” riff as the shop owner officially adopts him as his son whom he calls boychik (Yiddish for ‘son’) and they dance a brief hora to Klezmer orchestration on “Mushnik and Son.” Hub veteran actor Remo Airaldi (an IRNE winner for “The Island of Slaves”) skoshes as Mushnik a Teyye in “Fiddler,” and Dan Prior frolics as once innocent but now shrewd Seymour. Airaldi proves the best Mushnik this critic has seen, and Prior fully captures the changes in Seymour.

Katrina Z. Pavas naturally catches Audrey’s vulnerability and vitality. She also finds her inner grandeur—particularly as she sings with lyrical beauty of Audrey’s suburban dream future on “Something That’s Green.”

Jeff Marcus has Orin’s nastiness with Audrey and demonstrates impressive versatility in a number of small roles. Pier Lamia Porter, Lovely Hoffman and Carla Martinez move in smooth sync and sing vibrantly respectively as Chiffon, Crystal and Ronnette. Tim Hoover is skillful as Audrey II’s puppeteer and Yewande Odetoyinbo enjoyably funny as her voice.

Are you looking for a take-off on horror stories? You will find it here. Are you looking for unlikely romance—between a man and a plant as well as two humans? You will find it here. As for a metaphor for selling out or living by honor, you will find it here, too. Lyric Stage Company’s revival of “Little Shop of Horrors” is a vivid bouquet with pleasures for everyone.

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**Arrests**

Continued from page 1

against Webber and other counterprotesters facing minor infractions following the Aug. 31 parade. Eight others have been arraigned on more serious violent charges, such as assault and battery on a police officer, and Rollins’ office is seeking to prosecute those cases. A total of 36 people were arrested. A spokesperson for Sinnott didn’t comment.

Rollins said she’s pleased with the decision and is evaluating the other non-violent cases, as well as looking into complaints that police used excessive force.

“‘This was a colossal waste of time,’ she said of the public dispute with Sinnott. ‘Anyone who has gone to law school knows that there’s a separation of powers’ between the judicial and executive branches of government, Rollins said.

Organized by a group calling itself Super Fun Happy America, the downtown Boston parade was meant to be a counterpoint to gay pride parades. It featured floats supporting President Donald Trump and conservative white nationalist speakers.

Rollins declined to say whether she thought Sinnott should be sanctioned further.

The Massachusetts Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers has called for the Administration of the Trial Court and the Massachusetts Commission on Judicial Conduct to review Sinnott’s actions, which included handcuffing and holding in contempt a defense lawyer representing one of the counterprotesters in court last week.

“We all have our bad days,” Rollins said of Sinnott. “This wasn’t his finest moment.”

But she suggested Sinnott’s denials were part of a broader pushback against her policies, which have put her at odds with the state’s judicial and law enforcement establishment.

The Democrat was elected last year on a campaign promise not to prosecute nonviolent offenses like drug possession, shoplifting and trespassing that she says disproportionately hurt poor and black communities.

“Change is really hard,” Rollins said. “But appoint- ed officials don’t get to influence their opinions into matters where the people of Suffolk County have spoken.”

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**Judge**

Continued from page 1

De Jesus said she waited in court for the background check process on her chosen name. “My court time was 9 a.m. and it was just pushed back and pushed back,” she said. “I didn’t get to leave until it was almost 3 o’clock.”

In a second hearing over five hours after she arrived in court, the check for prior arrests cleared, and the charges were dropped.

“It was a major win and I was very happy, but it felt like a victory of its own,” she said. “I don’t get to leave until it was almost 3 o’clock.”

De Jesus, a freshman at Harvard University, says she has not yet legally changed her name due to a “convoluted” legal process.

She says she felt disrespected by Sinnott in the court-room. “I felt treated unfairly when the judge explained, condescendingly, ‘apparently Miss De Jesus has an alias — and have we run that yet?’ And it was just very uncomfortable and unsettling.”

According to retired federal judge Nancy Gertner, Sinnott is not legally obligated to refer to a defendant by their legal name in a courtroom.

“The judge has the discretion I suppose to call it an alias,” she said. “It is disrespectful to the defendant, but it’s certainly the judge’s discretion to do that...it’s an issue of how he’s running his courtroom. It’s not a way that others would have done it but he certainly has the discretion to do that.”

Gertner, who has criticized Sinnott for his decision to move forward with arraignments in cases where the prosecution recommended dismissing charges, says Sinnott’s decision to not accept De Jesus’ pronoun may be interpreted as a sign of bias.

“If someone doesn’t change their name legally and says my pronoun is ‘she,’ a judge is not obligated to accept that,” she said. “Certainly, the failure to accept it may raise questions about bias and the appearance of bias. The lawyer could then say, ‘well this is a judge who seems...’”

But she suggested Sinnott’s denials were part of a broader pushback against her policies, which have put her at odds with the state’s judicial and law enforcement establishment.

The Democrat was elected last year on a campaign promise not to prosecute nonviolent offenses like drug possession, shoplifting and trespassing that she says disproportionately hurt poor and black communities.

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**Letters to the Editor**

Conduct to review Sinnott’s actions, which included rhythmic interactions during which the former feeds the latter. The same goes for Mushnik’s growing pride in Seymour’s entrepreneurial success.

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Submitted by TTO

The Theater Offensive (TTO), Boston’s longest-running LGTBQ theater company, founded in 1989, is in the midst of an important transformation. After a year-long planning process, the TTO Board of Directors has voted unanimously to adopt a new mission, a new leadership structure, and a new strategic direction. Performing Arts Supporter Ellen Poss has made a $1 million gift in support of this new vision and strategic direction — the largest contribution ever received by The Theater Offensive.

TTO is announcing a major operating gift in support of its new mission, leadership structure, and creative direction. Brookline Performing Arts Supporter Ellen Poss is making a contribution of $1 million, which will provide stability and strength as TTO begins to implement its new strategic plan,

examine new programmatic directions, and explore options for a permanent space for the company.

“We are full of gratitude for this magnificent gift, which will accelerate our work and ultimately catalyze the artistic expression of Queer and Trans People of Color, who will benefit most from Ellen’s bold philanthropy,” offered Steward and Francis when announcing Ms. Poss’s support.

“For over 30 years, The Theater Offensive has provided an artistic home for young, emerging LGBTQ artists of color to share their stories through inspiring art, and has been a leader in the movement for social change, said Poss. “TTO is working to create a better Boston for all of us, and I’m proud to be a part of it.”

TTO was founded by Abe Rybeck in the 1980s as an underground movement of young Queer outsiders on street corners and in basements of Boston, demanding a place in the cultural dialogue. In the spring of 2019, when Rybeck formally announced he would relinquish his day-to-day duties, TTO launched a love-filled transition, honoring Rybeck at its annual fundraiser, ClimACTS! DYNASTY. Rybeck will continue to collaborate with TTO as an organizational consultant.

Interim Executive and Artistic Directors Harold Steward and Evelyn Francis have been named as Producing Co-Executive Directors of TTO. Francis has worked at TTO in several capacities since 2001 and brings significant experience executing programs to challenge the status quo and set new standards of excellence within the arts sector in Boston. Steward’s tenure at TTO began in 2017 when he moved to Boston from Dallas, Texas, where he served as Director of the South Dallas Cultural Center. Steward has led TTO’s strategic planning process.

As this new configuration of the company emerges, TTO is employing change management and organizational structures inspired by Black Queer feminist perspectives— particularly the work of Adrienne Marie Brown (author of Emergent Strategies and Pleasure Activism). Brown’s work examines the human relationship to change, asking us to shape our futures as we imagine them while co-creating the world we aspire to live in. Moving forward, TTO will apply a distributed leadership model that supports Queer and Trans People of Color racial justice values, recognizing the centrality of People of Color, women, Trans, and Gender Non-Conforming people within the organization.

Following a collaborative planning process involving TTO staff, board, artists, and community members, the organization has adopted a new mission, which is to present liberating art by, for, and about Queer and Trans People of Color that transcends artistic boundaries, celebrates cultural abundance, and dismantles oppression.

“From our conversations with stakeholders, staff, and board, it was clear that we needed a new mission and plan that centered racial justice in our efforts to combat homophobia. Racial justice has always been central to TTO’s work, but was never expressly stated in its mission. We want to make it clear that eradicating racism is central to our fight to combat homophobia as well,” notes TTO
TTO
Continued from page 5

Incoming Producing Co-Executive Director Harold Steward.

Incoming TTO Producing Co-Executive Director Evelyn Francis added, “TTO’s last major strategic shift in 2010 drew on our rich history of community-based work and we began to focus all of our creative resources on building safer, thriving communities in four Boston neighborhoods — work that focused on supporting Queer and Trans People of Color. We now want to be explicit about this focus and support all Queer and Trans People of Color, regardless of neighborhood. As the LGBTQ community has seen some advances in acceptance and rights won, we also have to acknowledge that these gains have not been as fully afforded to People of Color and Transgender people. As a result, we felt it was integral to our next phase to really prioritize and center around these artists and their stories in an effort to gain a fuller more inclusive liberation”
Recovering from My Vacation

by Judah Leblang | www.JudahLeblang.com
contribution writer

I was standing in a crowd in the middle of the fairgrounds at the Edmonton Fringe Festival, 2500 miles away from home, handing out postcards for my one-man show, “It’s Now or Never: My Life in the Late Middle Ages.”

It was late August, the last day of the festival, and I’d been in Edmonton for two weeks—and two weeks in Calgary (three hours to the south) before that.

Here I was, a sixty-two-year-old man with irritable bowel syndrome and dry eyes, wheedling, moaning, and practically begging the stream of middle-aged patrons, (my show is a mostly-humorous look at life past 50) to check out my show at a nearby venue.

Up until that point, I hadn’t generated much interest; with 250+ different acts—each doing 7 shows each—it was tough for an unknown performer like me to pull in a crowd.

The Edmonton Festival is the largest in North America, and when I got in last fall via a lottery, I didn’t want to pass up the chance to take my show on the road and perform in a new city. And since I also got into the Calgary Fringe, I could minimize my expenses by doing a total of 13 performances in the two cities, and earning enough money to pay for the trip, including airfare and expenses.

By the time I reached Edmonton and got a sense of the size and scope of their festival, I wondered what was I thinking? Being on the road for the month of August, sleeping in strange beds and eating on the run, had done a number on my late middle-aged body. And spending hours at the fairgrounds handout those postcards, telling folks that I’d won “best of festival” in Calgary and that the small crowds who had come to see me found the show funny and relatable, while true, was exhausting.

The program guide, which featured all 254 acts, stretched over 100 pages and it seemed I was lost in the shuffle in the same way that I, a natural introvert, felt lost in the crowds that streamed through the box office and lined up at the most popular shows. I found that I had to pace myself; after about two hours of hawking the show I hit my limit and had to get away to someplace quiet.

One day I found a cat café and sequestered myself there, a form of feline therapy.

On that last day, a Sunday afternoon, I found that many folks were “fringed out” and ready to relax. But I was slated for the last slot, at 8 PM and had sold only 20 tickets. So, I weathered several hours among the masses, and managed to pull in an audience of about 35 for that last performance, which brought me to the break-even point for the festival.

An hour after that last well-received show I was at Edmonton Airport, waiting for my midnight flight out. A red-eye to Toronto, another short flight to Boston and I was home, bleary-eyed and wiped out. Now, two weeks later, I’m still recovering from my Canadian “vacation,” and still unsure if I would do another fringe festival again.

In my mind, I’m still 35 or 40, but my body reminds me that I have to work within my limits and pace myself. Though I love telling my story and sharing my writing, and putting my work out into the world, I have to be smarter about how, when, and how much I do it.

I learn that lesson over and over again, until it finally starts to sink in.

Judah Leblang is a writer, teacher and storyteller in Boston. He will be reading from his new memoir “Echoes of Jerry” at a book launch event at Porter Square Books in Cambridge on Friday September 27 at 7 PM. The event is free. For more info, go to https://www.portersquarebooks.com/events

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BANGOR, Maine (AP)—Moviegoers from Maine who watch the film “It: Chapter Two” this weekend might recognize a scene that draws on a painful event from the state’s history.

The scene involves a gay character named Adrian Mellon being attacked by teenagers and his subsequent encounter with Pennywise the Clown. The scene is based on real-life Bangor resident Charlie Howard, who was attacked and thrown off the city’s State Street Bridge in 1984.

Stephen King tells the Bangor Daily News that the killing still had currency when he was writing the book on which the movie is based.

"At the time I started writing ‘It,’ the Howard murder had just happened. It was fresh in my mind and fitted my idea of Derry as a place where terrible things happened," King said. "And, maybe needless to say, I was outraged. It was a hate crime."

In the book, Mellon, like Howard, is in his 20s and was walking home with a male friend when he encountered homophobic teenagers. The scenes play out in a similar fashion, except the book and movie feature an appearance by the garish clown who lives in the sewer.

The scene is not included in the 1990 TV miniseries, but that changes with “It: Chapter Two,” with the character of Mellon being portrayed by Xavier Dolan.

King said in 2014 on the 30th anniversary of Howard’s killing that the Bangor community doesn’t bear responsibility for the crime.

"But it’s our town. We live here," he said. "Which means we have to live with Charlie, and continue trying to make it right."

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I’m fascinated by people who dedicate their lives to conversion therapy. It just always strikes me as...I dunno, peculiar. Or more often than not, just the last part of that word—“peculiar”. So, color me surprised when I heard that the leader of one of the largest conversion therapy programs came out as...wait for it...

GAY! McKrae Game ran “Hope for Wholeness” for almost two decades. Not only is he now admitting to being gay, he also has some choice words for his former vocation. “Conversion therapy is not just a lie, but it’s very harmful. Because it’s false advertising.” He may no longer be on the field, but he hasn’t left heterosexuality completely behind. He is, in fact, still married to a woman. BTW, he says she knows he is gay. If she didn’t before, she certainly does now!

Last week, Ryan O’Callaghan, an openly gay former member of the New England Patriots, released his memoir, “My Life on the Line”. One passage has drawn quite a bit of interest: “I can promise you there’s plenty of closeted NFL players. I think it’s safe to say there’s at least one on every team who is either gay or bisexual.”

A week before that book was released, NFL free agent Ryan Russell published an essay on ESPN.com. Here’s the salient passage: “Today, I have two goals: returning to the NFL, and living my life openly. I want to live my dream of playing the game I’ve worked my whole life to play, and being open about the person I’ve always been.” Apparently that person isn’t gay—he’s bisexual. Let’s check back in a few months and see how that’s going.

Then there’s Jerry Falwell, Jr. and Ben Crosswhite, his “personal trainer” (so that’s what we’re calling it now). It’s been reported that in 2016, Falwell signed documents transferring ownership of an 18-acre fitness facility owned by Liberty University (his very Christian college) to Crosswhite, a recent Liberty graduate. While the purchase price was $1.2 million, the university reduced that by $650K in order to lease the tennis courts back from him through 2025. On top of that, Liberty financed the balance at 3-percent interest. Such favorable terms leave me with one question—exactly what is Crosswhite training? Publicly, Falwell credits Ben for helping him lose 75 pounds. Whatever they were doing, I suspect the word “pound” was employed. It bears noting that Crosswhite has been a consistent presence and a big personality to match. Very quick, very charming when you wanted to see him in Spandex. To calm down, Beek exchanged some choice words for his former vocation. “Conversion therapy professionals. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com. When you want to see him in Spandex, to calm down, Beek drank something he shouldn’t. You can see how it turned out on BillyMasters.com.

Mayor Pete Buttigieg just released his first national TV commercial for the 2020 campaign. But he’s not letting it all go to his head. He turned down Tom Ford’s offer to become his “personal stylist” (so maybe that’s what we’re calling it now). Ford took the rejection in good spirits. “Obviously he can’t wear my clothes. They’re too expensive, they’re wrong, they’re not made in America. And, besides, whatever he’s doing is working.”

One thing Mayor Pete is doing is letting President Trump know he’s not rolling over for anyone (except, perhaps, his husband). After The Donald quipped that a guy he thought was protesting him had “a serious weight problem”, Buttigieg said, “People in glass houses. Look, nobody should fat-shame anybody, but certainly, I mean, I’m not even gonna say it. Nobody should fat shame anybody.” Sounds like fat shaming to me—not that I don’t approve.

I beg your indulgence—follow me on this one. I recently was watching an old video of David Letterman interviewing Oprah Winfrey. She was telling him about a pair of glasses she hated as a teenager. However, they were all her mother could afford. She was cautioned not to break them, but she wanted to get out of wearing them. “I broke them and staged a robbery and put myself in the hospital and pretended to have amnesia when [my mother] came to see me,” said the Queen of Television. She shrugged it off by adding, “I was just a kid.” As she was telling this story, I couldn’t help but wonder if Jussie Smollett had seen this clip and perhaps been inspired.

Smollett continues to criticize the City of Chicago for investigating how officials handled his “incident”—specifically, why no charges were filed. While Jussie is kvetching, it should be noted he was offered the opportunity to repay the city the amount spent on the investigation, which he declined. You snooze, you lose.

Although we know this will be the final season of “Empire”, Fox has made it clear that the network is open to “potential spin-offs”. “We’re in the Lee Daniels and Danny Strong business—if there is more story to tell, we want to hear it,” said Fox’s CEO. In other words, they’d like to keep the “Empire” empire—just without Jussie.

It was announced that “Grace and Frankie” will end with season 7. But, don’t panic just yet—they haven’t even aired season 6! That drops in January. When the series does end, it will have a total of 94 episodes, which is the most of any original series on Netflix. Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin issued a joint statement, saying how grateful they are to the network and their fans. “We’ll miss these two old gals, Grace and Frankie, as many as many of their fans will, but we’ll still be around. We’ve outlasted so many things—just hope we don’t outlast the planet.”

Details of Ryan Murphy’s marriage with Netflix are starting to take shape. There’s a new show called “The Politician” which debuts later this month and stars Ben Platt, Jessica Lange and Gowynnh Paltraw. Speaking of Miss Lange, she will star in a series about the legendary Marlene Dietrich. Ryan also plans lots of Broadway-centric shows, including the just-filmed “The Boys in the Band” starring the entire cast from last year’s Broadway hit, a film version of the Broadway musical “The Prom” starring Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep, and a miniseries about “A Chorus Line”. There will be a limited series under a signature Halston starring Ewan McGregor, and a docuseries about Andy Warhol. Most tantalizing for me are two projects. One is a series called “Ratched” starring Sarah Paulson in the origin story of the nurse from “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”. Paulson’s real-life love, Holland Taylor, will join Patti LuPone for “Holloywood”, which explores Tinseltown’s relationship with the sex industry. That series will also star Darren Criss, who is an executive producer, and is due to debut next May.

Speaking of Patti LuPone, she is returning to Broadway. I reported it months ago, but it’s now official that she will reprise the role of Joanne in the transfer of the West End production of “Company”. As you’ll recall, that production was notable for swapping the gender of several characters, most notably the lead Bobby, who became Bobbie. While Rosalie Craig led the London cast, Tony winner Karntna Lenk will play Bobbie on Broadway. The show opens on March 22nd, which just happens to be Stephen Sondheim’s 90th birthday. See ya there!

You know where else you might see me? At the upcoming Gay Days Anaheim October 4-6. Way back in 1998, I was part of a scrappy band of people who wore red T-shirts and descended on Disneyland. From those roots, it’s grown into a destination for gay people around the world. I don’t take any credit, but as they say in “Hamilton”, I was in the room where it happened. There are a plethora of events, but the highlight for me is the Saturday night Kingdom dance party at the new House of Blues. You can get more details and tickets at GayDaysAnaheim.com.

This week’s “Ask Billy” question is one many of you had. Karl in Chicago writes, “You said James Van Der Beek will be on Dancing with the Stars! But hasn’t he already done that show? You ran photos of him dancing.”

Yes and no. While playing a fictionalized version of himself on “Don’t Trust The B---- in Apartment 23”, his character competed on DWTS. Alas, his competition included Dean Cain—back when you wanted to see him in Spandex. To calm down, Beck drank something he shouldn’t. You can see how it turned out on BillyMasters.com.

When Dawson’s going up the creek without a samba, it’s definitely time to end yet another column. Before closing, I must acknowledge the passing of “Project Runway” alum Chris March. He was one of those people who lit up a room. He was a formidable presence and a big personality to match. Very quick, very funny, and beyond talented—my kinda guy. It’s being reported that he had a massive heart attack at 56. Although I’m heading down to Florida this week, I am always updating www.BillyMasters.com—the site that happens to be very popular with conversion therapy professionals. If you have a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before the NFL sends rookies to Ben Crosswhite for training (yes, that’s what we’re calling it now). Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
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