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SGN

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SEATTLE'S LGBTQIA+ NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY SINCE 1974

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PRIDE: A DEEPER LOVE

by GS Matencio aka Gaysha Starr
SGN Contributing Writer

I am only one of millions of Transgender people in the US, let alone in the world, and relatively young in my transition, having only begun presenting full-time on September 17 of last year, although I remember having early memories of questioning my gender identity in elementary school, around the age of 6 in 1978, 43 years ago.

see PRIDE page 5



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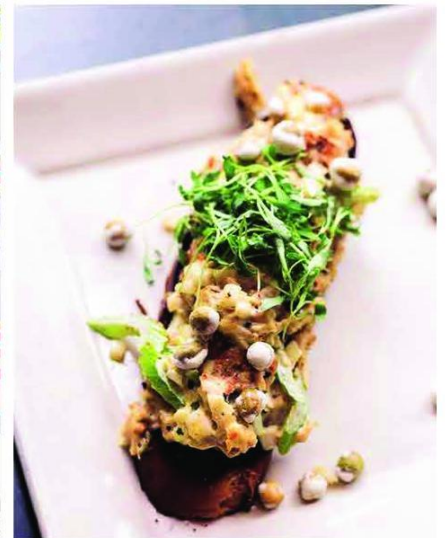
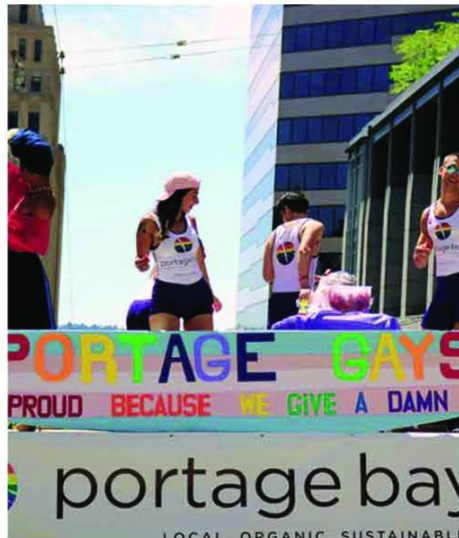
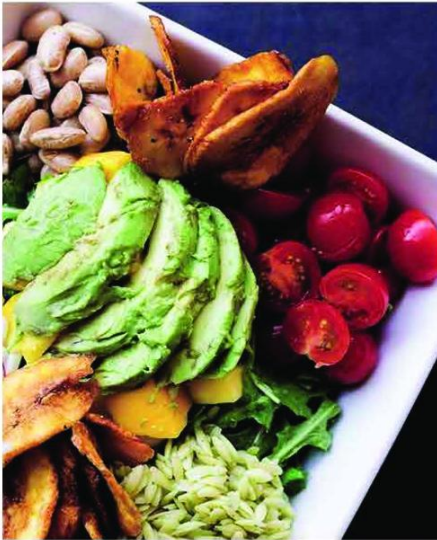


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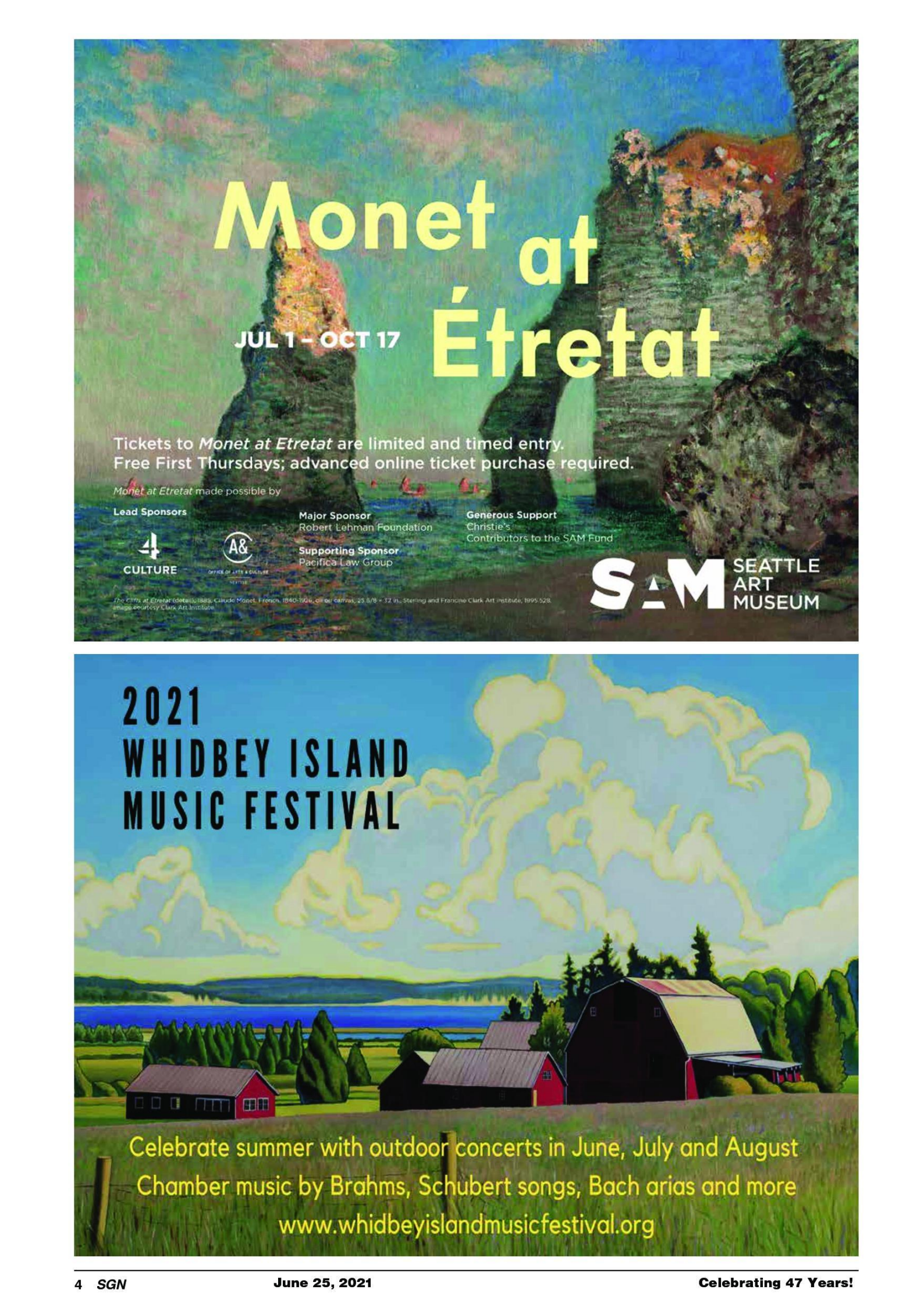
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The background of the top poster is a reproduction of Claude Monet's painting 'The Cliffs at Étretat'. It depicts a dramatic coastal scene with two prominent, dark rock formations (the 'Pinnacles') rising from the sea. The sky is filled with soft, colorful brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, and pink, suggesting a hazy or overcast day. The water in the foreground is dark and textured.

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The Cliffs at Étretat (details), 1885, Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926, oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 32 in., Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1995.528, image courtesy Clark Art Institute

The background of the bottom poster is a vibrant, stylized illustration of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, there are several buildings, including a large red barn with a white roof and a smaller red house. The middle ground shows a lush green field with tall grass and a line of trees. In the background, there is a blue body of water, likely a bay or inlet, and a range of mountains under a bright blue sky with large, white, fluffy clouds.

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PRIDE

continued from cover

Even back then, I knew I was different, but didn't know what the terms or words were. All I knew was I instinctively preferred to be in the company of girls, and enjoyed reading and playing with dolls. I wondered why I wasn't a girl and wished with all my heart I could be. I remember wanting the lavender Members Only jacket that all the popular girls had, and to be both on the dance team and cheer squad. None of those dreams came true.

A few months after coming out as Gay in January of 1993, I started doing drag as a way to express my femininity and began to create an identity for myself. Since finding the courage to come out as Trans, first to myself and then to the people in my life, starting about ten years ago, transitioning has had some high highs and some low lows. I don't know where I will go from here, and I will be curious to see, with God's blessing, what it will be like to read this series next year, when we celebrate a more traditional Pride and I am 50 years old.

Hate crimes on the rise

One thing that is certain is the increase in hate crimes against Transgender or gender-nonconforming people. According to the Human Rights Campaign, at press time, there have been at least 29 killings in this community, but there may have been two more and maybe others, as some stories may have gone unreported or misreported, and some people's gender could have been misreported. That is already 66% of the 44 total reported last year.

Please say their names in a moment of respect for our Trans brothers and sisters that have already lost their lives this year: Tyianna Alexander, Samuel Edmund Damian Valentin, Biana "Muffin" Bankz, Dominique Jackson, Fifty Bandz, Alexis Braxton, Chyna Carrillo, Jeffrey "JJ" Bright, Jasmine Cannady, Jenna Franks, Diamond Kyree Sanders, Rayanna Pardo, Jaida Peterson, Aidelen Evans, Dominique Lucious, Remy Fennell, Tiara Banks, Natalia Smut, Iris Santos, Tiffany Thomas, Keri Washington, Jahaira De Alto, Whispering Wind Bear Spirit, Sophie Vasquez, Danika "Danny" Henson, Serenity Hollis, Oliver "Ollie" Taylor, Thomas Hardin, Haven A Bailey, Poe Black, and EJ Boykin.

This is just in the US. Worldwide last year, there were at least 350 deaths of Transgender people that resulted from hate crimes, according to www.transrespect.org, with the largest percentage of victims (82%) being in South America.

To be targeted for your gender or gender expression is still a sad reality, especially in today's civic moment. Every day in my community, when one of us leaves our home we must think about personal safety, regardless if we are going to work, school, or just about our day. While some of us have cars, many of us rely on public transportation, which may put us in even more vulnerable positions.

We must worry about "passing" and trying not to provoke anyone as we just try to lead our lives as our authentic selves. We endure judgmental or mocking words, looks, and facial expressions. We might not even see the person who insults us ever again, but their words will stay with us forever.

Some of us make impulsive decisions or have a lapse of judgment just for a moment of intimacy and connection, which can lead to unsafe situations or injury, whether physically or mentally. Some of us are hurt by a stranger or someone we know, or sometimes we're simply at the wrong place at the wrong time.

While I can sometimes take for granted my ability to either "pass" or project enough confidence that others don't bother me, I still try not to put myself in situations in which I am alone or in which I know I cannot defend myself. I often have to be more aware of who is around me while I am walking my dog, Nico. Layer on that the possibility of someone targeting me because they think I am a cis female and want to assault me and/or the growing trend of anti-Asian hate crimes. For months now, one of my best friends has been insistent



Photo by Nate Gowdy
Styling by Kara Sutra

that I carry mace on me. However, I refuse to live in fear, and my freedom is something I will not give up, as I have waited all my life to be free.

Trans and nonbinary people are people, and everyone, regardless of who they are or how they identify, deserves a fair chance of living their best lives as their authentic selves. I hope that we can remember and honor that our time is here and now, and not just during Pride, Trans Awareness Week, or Transgender Remembrance Day.

Looking toward the future

While I didn't plan on writing this series for the *Seattle Gay News* or hosting several virtual corporate events this year, as the Pride events I normally get booked for are in person at an office, festival, or nightclub, I am thankful for this opportunity and excited to reconnect with my writing.

Reading and writing have always been passions of mine, ever since I hung out at the Columbia City Public Library reading Judy Blume books as a kid. I've also always looked up to Transgender author Janet Mock, as her books and writing and directing for *Pose* are things I have thought about pursuing.

During this writing and editing process, I have begun to dream again about being a

published writer, sharing the stories of my life, particularly my drag career and transition, as I have revisited my journals that were lying on my glass desk. I now get excited even when I don't know what I am going to say, staring at the blank computer screen and remembering things I hadn't thought about in years or wondering if my life can help someone with theirs.

I am growing to be the woman I have always dreamed about. But I hope my transness will not be the only thing people know about me but rather just a part of me, like being Filipinx, a drag queen, a host, an activist, or a store director, and maybe even one day a published writer and public speaker.

I'm hopeful for love and, yes, even heartbreak, as I didn't date in my Gay years. The one love I thought I did have, I recently learned the hard way to let go of, as our ages and life stages would never have worked out in our favor. But I won't give up, as I still want to experience those butterflies and to be 100% myself to someone. I want to know that side of me, as I have never been vulnerable or dependent on anyone.

But most importantly I want a best friend and partner who doesn't care what others think of him openly dating a Transgender woman. Instead I hope that he

would only care that I am a good person and that I will take care of him and treat him with all the respect and love I can give. I may want to even get married.

I want to experience all the things I never did before. Last month I hiked Lake 22 totally unprepared, but I pushed myself physically and mentally, and I now know what I need to do to be better prepared the next time I hike. I also went wine tasting in Woodinville, and while I drew some looks, I am beginning to not worry if I am being recognized as a Transgender woman, but rather as a woman who happens to be well put together and maybe a little taller. I want to travel as myself to places I have only dreamed of. I want to maybe even own my own modest home.

I am hopeful and grateful to have another chance at life, as some never get an opportunity to come out and live as their authentic selves. In light of everything we have endured this past year, I wish you and your loved ones the very, very best. We all deserve it, regardless of how we identify and whom we love.

Happy Pride!
XO,
GS

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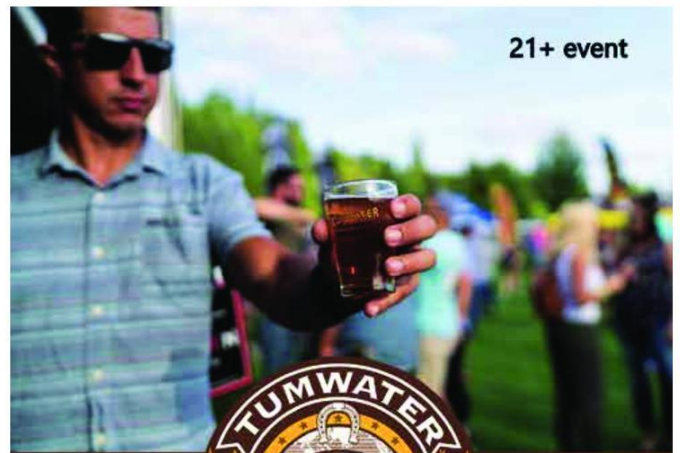
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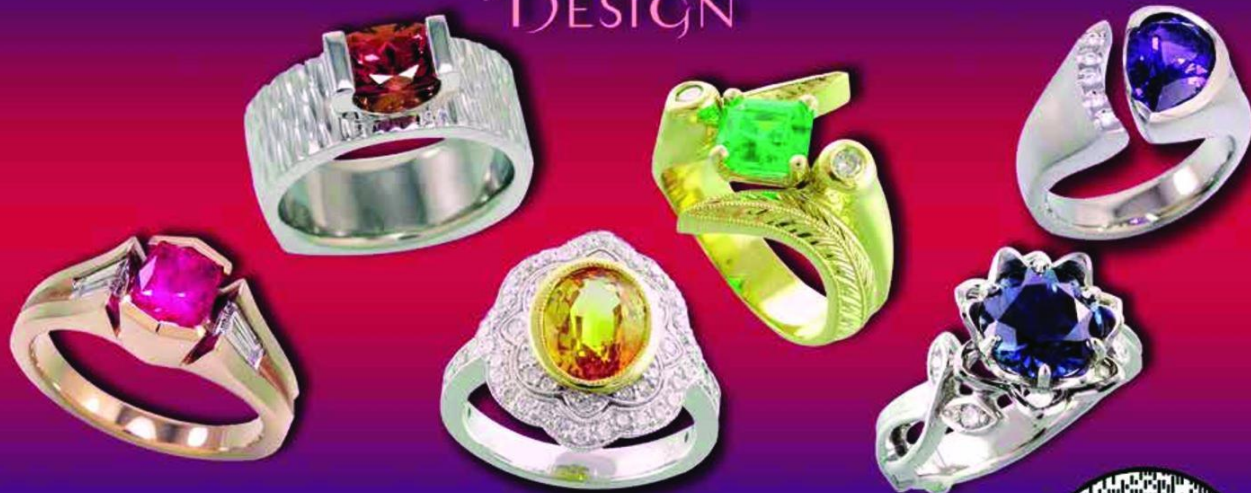


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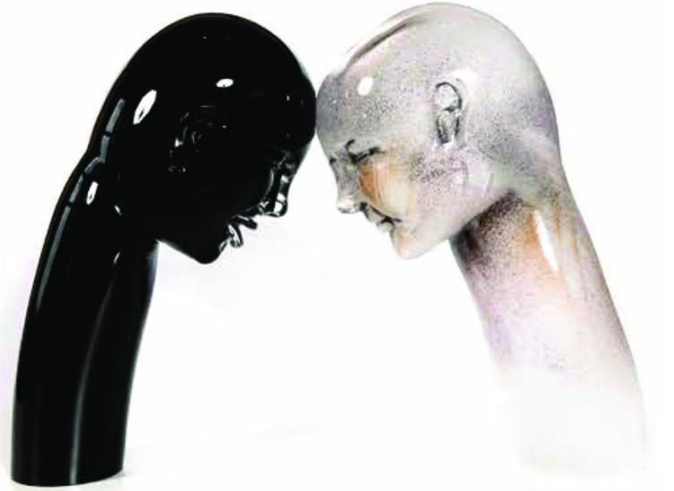


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Pearl Dick, *Us*, 2017. Blown, sculpted glass; 12 1/2 x 16 x 6 inches.
Photo by Randy Korwin. Courtesy of the National Liberty Museum.

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Image: Gary Simmons, *George Bond* (in all), 2021. Various materials. Courtesy of the artist. Installation view of Gary Simmons' *The Engine Room*, 2021, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. Photo: Jonathan Vanderweilt, courtesy of the Henry Art Gallery.



WASHINGTON'S LGBTQ+ FOSTER CARE CRISIS



Photo provided by the family

by Lindsey Anderson
SGN Contributing Writer

A startling statistic from ChildrensRights.org found that over 30% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ+. This is staggering, considering that only 11% of children outside of foster care identify as such.

While many LGBTQ+ foster kids end up in the system for reasons similar to those of heterosexual youth (parental abuse or neglect), some find themselves cast out of their homes just because of who they are.

For any foster child, the experience of being bumped around the system and searching for any sense of normalcy is common, but statistically, LGBTQ+ foster kids are more likely to experience rapid placement turnaround or placement in a group home. A 2014 study out of Los Angeles found that LGBTQ youth in the foster care system experience on average 6.35 different placements, while the general foster care population experiences only three on average.

The statistics don't lie. Kristopher Sharp, a former foster child, spent eight years in the system, "I was told that foster families didn't want a gay kid in their home, so I grew up in group homes and residential centers, where I was abused sexually, physically, and emotionally."

A New York study found that 78% of LGBTQ+ youth had run away from a foster placement that had shown hostility toward their gender identity or sexual orientation. The study also found that 100% of LGBTQ+ youth in group homes experienced verbal abuse and that 70% reported physical abuse.

Washington state

Currently, Washington is one of only 14 states that include sexuality and gender iden-

tity as a part of nondiscrimination laws protecting foster children, but even so, the state's overall foster care system is lacking when it comes to educating potential foster parents of the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ youth.

The system is aware of cultural and social differences in children from different racial backgrounds or those with disabilities. It not only works hard to educate foster parents on these differences but also provides the information to the prospective parents first, asking if they would be comfortable or able to care for these children.

However, the system does not currently educate on topics of sexuality and gender and does not disclose whether the prospective foster child is a sexual minority.

Robert Crowley, a former foster parent and now the adoptive father of three children, explained firsthand the lack of information for prospective foster parents when it comes to sexuality. "There's a lot of work done on terms of race, culture, religion, all kinds of those things. But one of the questions that does not come up for the... parents is, would you be interested in fostering a child that identifies as gay, lesbian, transgender, nonbinary?"

While this lack of transparency when it comes to sexual and gender identities might not seem like a major issue on the surface, it is one of the main reasons LGBTQ+ foster children encounter such frequent difficulties in finding a permanent placement.

"There are these cases where children are kicked out of their homes because of their orientation and then placed into foster care homes where they are still not accepted," Crowley explained. "And these families try either to convert them or keep them from going that way, and some have even suffered abuse in their foster home after being kicked

out of their birth home for abuse."

Disclosing to potential foster parents that they may be matched with an LGBTQ+ child would allow the bigoted ones to opt out of taking in an LGBTQ+ child, preventing further abandonment and displacement in the child's life.

Foster care crisis

It is no secret that Washington state is facing a foster care crisis. According to PartnersForOurChildren.org, Washington has on average 8,800 children in home care. The average age of a child in foster care is just six and a half. Displacement at such a young age can be traumatic for a child and wreak havoc on their cognitive and emotional development. Even harder is when children are repeatedly moved out of homes, leading many to develop attachment disorders.

The experiences of older foster children can be just as damaging. Twenty thousand children age out of the system each year without the money or family support to help start them off in life.

For more information on the foster care crisis facing Washington state, I turned to a social worker based in Spokane, who preferred to not be named. Spokane County is home to 800 foster kids each year, and as it's more conservative, it can be much harder for those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Crowley and his husband, Robert Martin, considered Spokane when looking for a foster placement. "I remember when we were first deciding on which organization to go with, we were looking at all sorts of different ones, and a friend of ours had recommended one in Spokane, and a friend of hers had adopted very, very quickly from Spokane," Martin said. "I contacted them, gave them a little blurb in my email, followed it up with

another email, and didn't hear anything. I called and I called, and nothing.

"Finally, I got a hold of somebody, the executive director of the organization, and she said, 'Mr. Martin, I have received all of your communications, but I am here to tell you that none of our birth mothers would be interested in a family of your makeup.'"

The Spokane social worker confirmed this, informing me that while there are many open-minded and loving families in Spokane who would be willing to take in an LGBTQ+ child, there are just as many who would find discomfort in the idea.

Solutions

The solution to the issue, both Crowley and the Spokane social worker informed me, is that we need to see more LGBTQ+ parents willing to take in older youth. Children over five, who make up 49% of those currently in foster care, have a much harder time finding placements, and they struggle even more in finding adoptive parents.

Providing disclosure of sexual identity when it comes to youth in foster care could also help match LGBTQ+ identifying youth with parents and placements who identify the same way.

While making the decision to become a foster parent is a big step, doing so changes the lives of children, especially older LGBTQ+ children who have already experienced much rejection and heartbreak.

Crowley and Martin have a full house right now, but they are keeping the door open to possibly helping an LGBTQ+ foster child know that they are not alone.

"One thing we've always talked about is eventually fostering an LGBTQ child, or even possibly adopting," said Martin.



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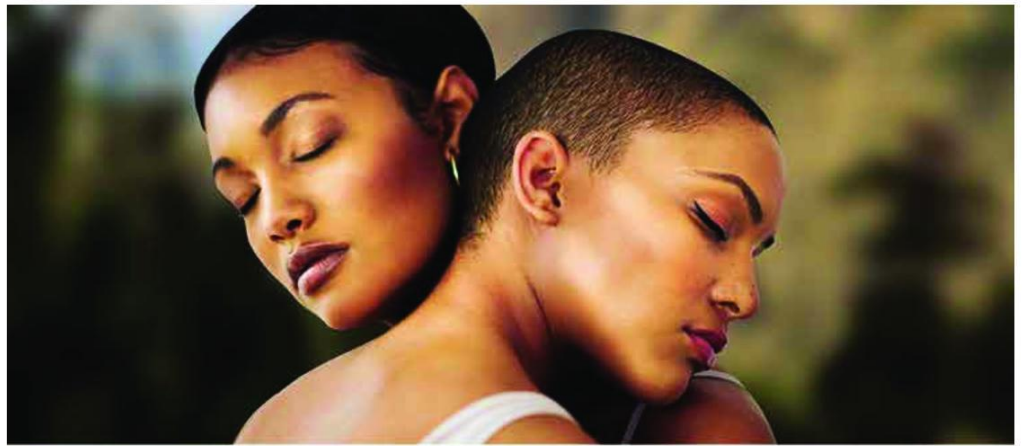
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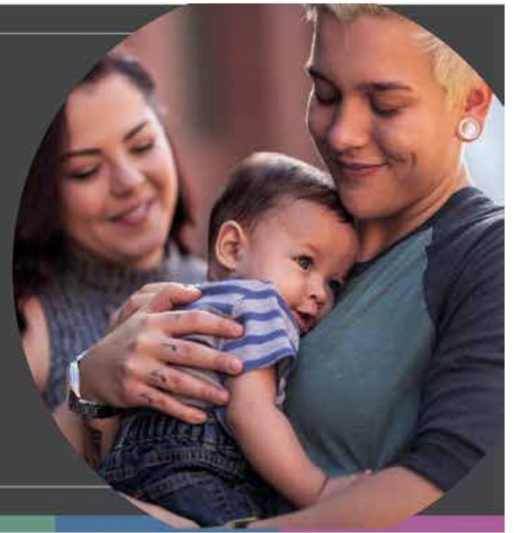
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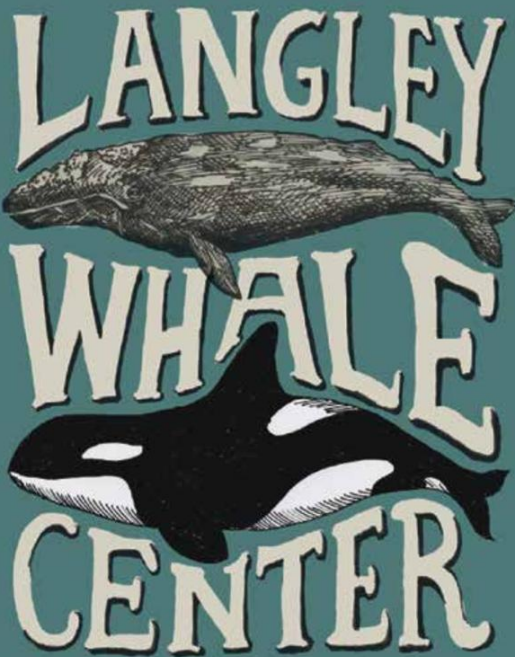
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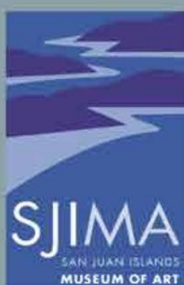
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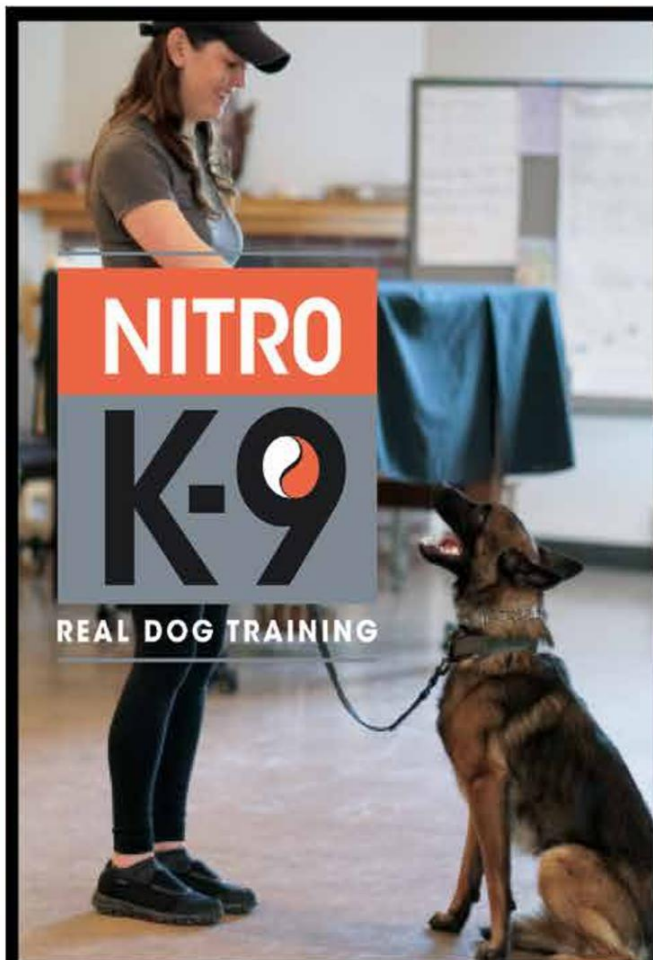
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FUTURE CRYSTALS

The Queer BIPOC artist, activist, and independent journalist who is changing the game

by Renee Raketty
SGN Contributing Writer

If you've been following the Black Lives Matter protests in Seattle, you should be familiar with Future Crystals, the 25-year-old artist who took their cell phone into the streets and helped to shape the narrative that will define this moment in local history. While that name has been around for over five years, it is now synonymous with the one-person independent media powerhouse.

"I've been focusing on boosting people's voices, especially amazing BIPOC folks. Not only boosting their voices but being able to capture the moment when possible," explained Crystals. "That can be just filming someone speaking or reposting a flyer [on social media]. I like sending people in certain directions, to convince people to get to know each other more... place the keys in the right hands."

"A lot of streams in the past were pretty violent or chaotic situations. However, there were also ways of being able to have dialogue and use the situation to hear people's points of view... a back-and-forth with cops or... a fascist."

Getting started

It all began at home, where they were playing with VHS tapes and mixing videos to create new pieces of visual art. The videos caught the attention of local rappers, who asked them to make music videos. Many of these are available online at their YouTube channel.

"I kind of like messing with video footage and just, like, scrambling it," they said. "I try to find elements that are cherished in certain ways, like music videos for instance. I just like putting my own twist on it. I specialize in VHS, film work."

"Back in the day, there was this art show we did every Thursday in Pioneer Square at the Box House. We would have visual performances," Crystals said.

From there, their work morphed into textiles and merchandise. "I think I made my first 'merch' in 2018. I ordered some patches, and I was sewing them on hats and stuff... on ski masks and whatnot," they said. "Then, instead of just throwing patches on, I was actually starting to rip apart hoodies and put my own things on it. Eventually, I progressed to making purses, COVID masks, and all types of random stuff."

Crystals credits their textile success to Dan McLean, a local Queer designer best known for making custom plus-size clothes, reworking old designer brand items, and her femme-empowering pieces. "She definitely pushed me to go even further in that realm," they said. "Dan is one of my best friends. I'm always with her and around it, but I'm not personally focused on it anymore. I'm getting ready to do more though. I have some hats and balaclavas left in the middle of sewing and, hopefully, I'm going to put them online for sale."

Another mentor that they credit for helping them to "get on my way" is Carolyn Hitt, the creator behind Blue Cone Studios and community organizer with Forever Safe Spaces. Crystals had been featured in Blue Cone's annual yearbook, *Relevant Unknowns*, and became an "artist in residency" at the Capitol Hill artistic landmark. Forever Safe Spaces, a collaboration between Blue Cone and community organizations to support minority artists, even helped them to find their new home.

Black lives and murals

However, Crystals' most well-known piece of art isn't in a gallery or in someone's closet. It's now part of the iconic Black Lives Matter mural on Pine St., between 10th and 11th Avenues. You can distinguish their letter from the rest due to their crystal-cluster trademark, which was painted into the last E during the Capitol Hill Organized Protest last summer.

"It all started when I heard that people were thinking it would be cool to do a BLM mural... There was a trend of people doing murals like that," they said. "I was one of the first people that I remember them talking to about it. I was so busy that I didn't really have time to put energy into it, if that makes sense. I didn't really get to choose my letter or anything. I was happy with the E in the word 'Matters.'"

"There were a lot of people just kind of coming up and helping to paint, either people who were walking down the block or other artists. They saw the painting and they just started helping paint. I kind of put the vision out there, but then people just kind of started to make it come together."

Crystals also shared their talents in Minneapolis, where they joined members of Creatives After Curfew, to paint a mural near the site of the wake for 20-year-

old Duante Wright, a biracial man shot by police during a traffic stop. The group is made up of other BIPOC and Queer artists and was formed in response to the murder of George Floyd. They had been in town to cover the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was recorded kneeling on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, and was there when the jury's verdict was announced.

"It was crazy. You know when you hear a good song or somebody says something super powerful and you get that tingle in your spine? I remember having that tingling feeling," they said. "There had been a Black woman speaking and she's like, you know, giving this motivational speech... She kind of starts stuttering a little bit out of anticipation. Then, this dude behind me, he's just, like, 'guilty, guilty.' He said it right behind me. You know, the crowd went boom."

"A lot of people out there [in Minneapolis] had a cousin, brother, or son get shot or beat up by the cops. A lot of them are even less lucky than that. I think that was one thing that really, as a whole, set them in a different place than what most Seattle people would understand — Seattle being mostly white or upper middle-class people. They stand in solidarity, but they haven't felt what it is like when it's their friend or family member."

A jury found Chauvin guilty of murdering Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man. A judge will determine his sentence.

Crystals says that they had been deeply affected by Floyd's murder and the resulting worldwide protests. "I think that it gave me and a lot of other people a harder push or more motivation to continue fighting for our rights, free speech, and equality. Liberation," they said. "I think there's a lot of people like myself that grew up, obviously, unhappy with the way the system had treated us and our community."

"When all that happened, there was so much support in Seattle from so many people that I think a lot of people finally felt strengthened to speak up and fight back. I'm happy it's happened, although many things have changed. I am just wondering what happens next?"

Growing up in Rainier Beach

Crystals gives some credit to their mom for their artistic abilities and social justice advocacy. She herself is a busy artist. Likewise, they credit their grandma for the way

they define their art. She helped to raise them during their early years, when they were surrounded by the Lesbian community and spent many summers at Pride parades and marches.

"That's what the crystals kind of represent. I've always had a hard time defining myself as an individual. I also had a hard time defining my art. You can't just put someone in a box," they said. "It's just like the art: artists aren't just a painter or filmmaker, artists are artists. The crystals — in my eyes — represent all the differences in you and me and whoever else. Even though my upbringing was different, I noticed there's a lot of similarities between us. Like a crystal cluster, each and every one is its own but are more similar than we recognize."

Crystals grew up in the Rainier Beach neighborhood of Seattle. They recalled that it had been the most diverse zip code in the nation at one time. Gentrification has changed all that. "There would be like a quinceañera or cookouts happening down the block from my house, and then there'll be some fucking douchebags doing yoga," they said. "Then, the ratio of douchebags doing yoga got pretty overwhelming, and there were no more quinceañeras or cookouts."

Crystals was part of that diversity. They describe themselves as mixed-race. "On my mom's side, I am Black, Native, Jewish, and Irish, or something weird like that. My mom's dad is African American. So, it's the energy that we were raised around," they said. "Then, on my dad's side — I didn't know him — I guess that he was Italian and Cuban or Sicilian and Cuban. I guess there's a difference between the two. I don't know my roots on that side of my family."

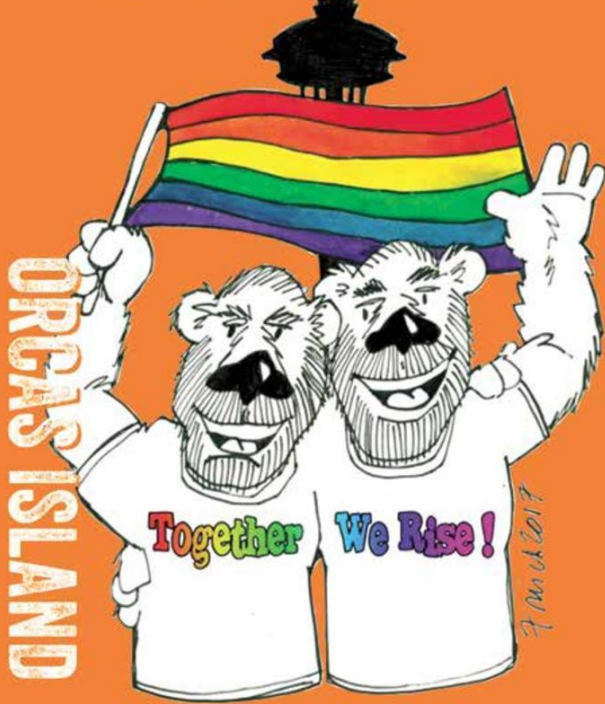
"Although it is confusing and it can get hard at times, it's also a blessing, because not a lot of people get to experience America from my point of view. I'm so mixed-race that you can't even latch on to any one thing. I think that there's gonna be more and more people like that... over time. Our grandmothers and grandfathers had to be married to a nice Christian white girl or — insert race here. Now, it's becoming okay to like who you like and be whatever you are."

Crystals plans to continue their coverage of the protests and events in support of Black Lives, but what else might lie ahead is a little uncertain.

"I don't know," they said. "Isn't it exciting. I guess we have to wait and see."

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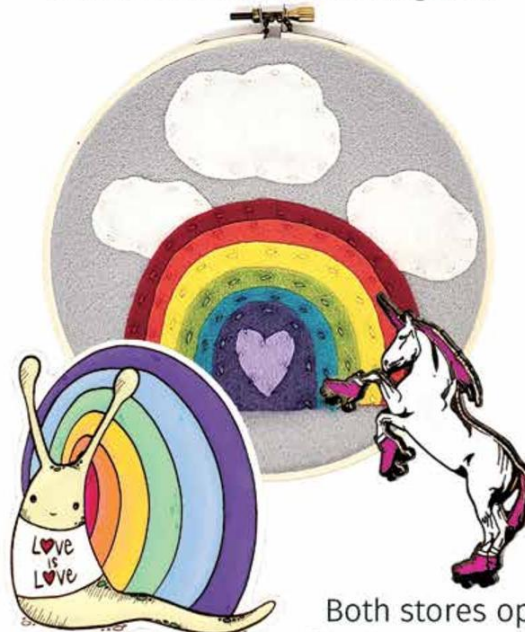
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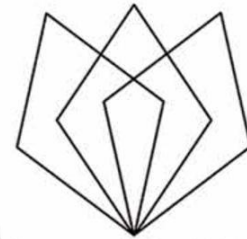
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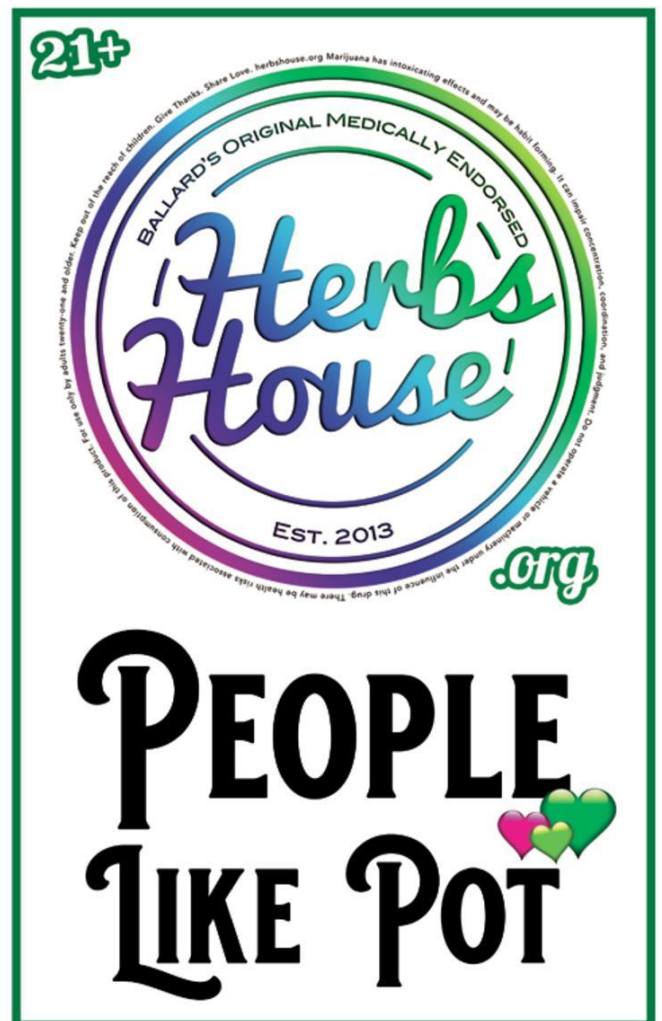
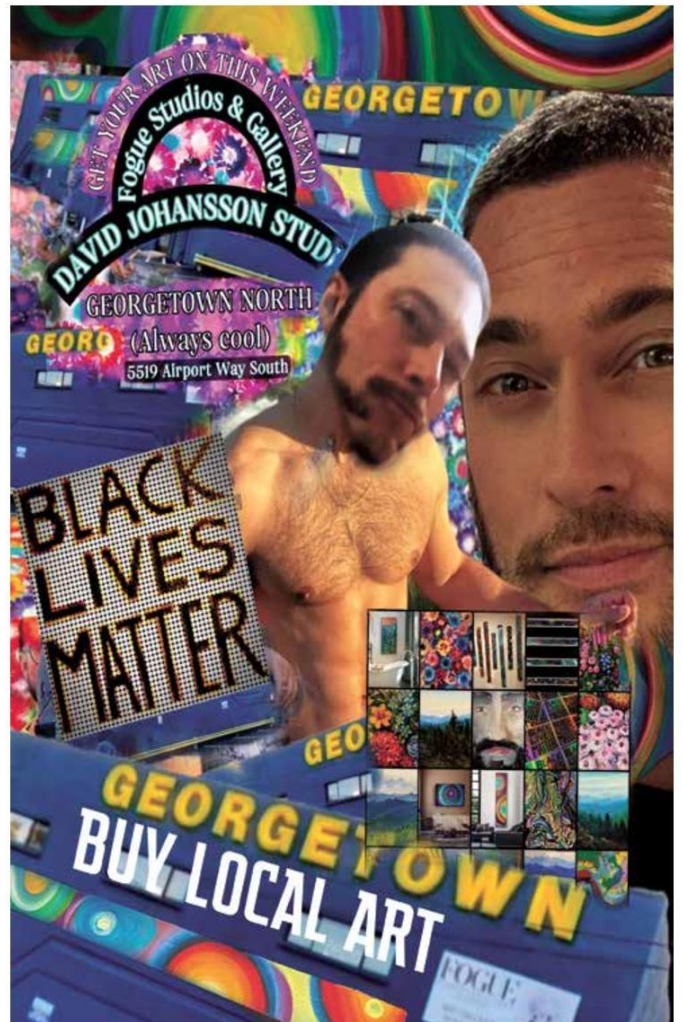
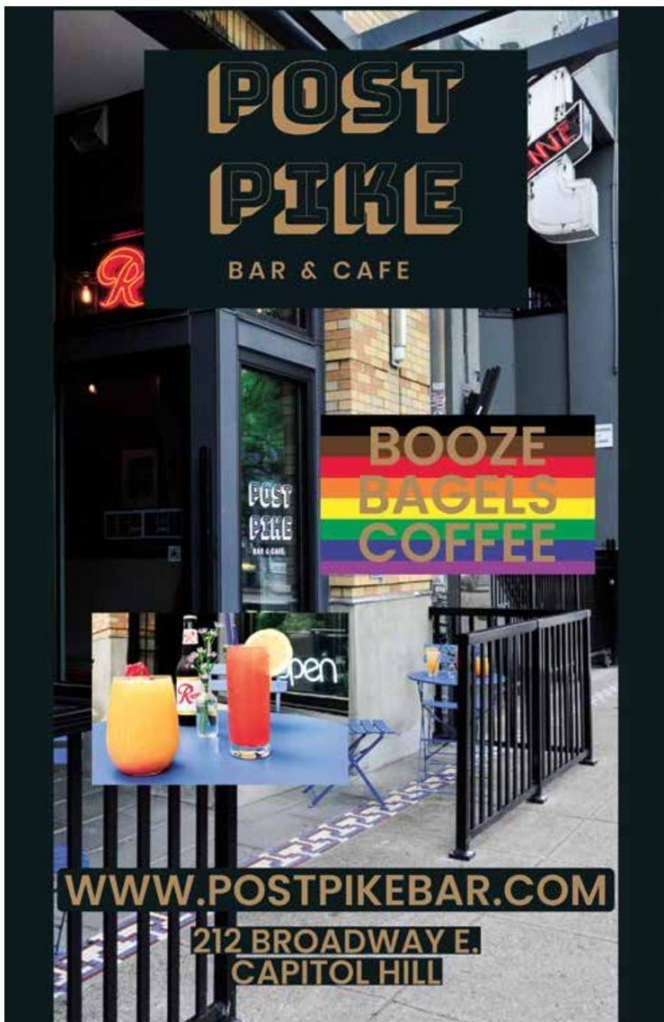


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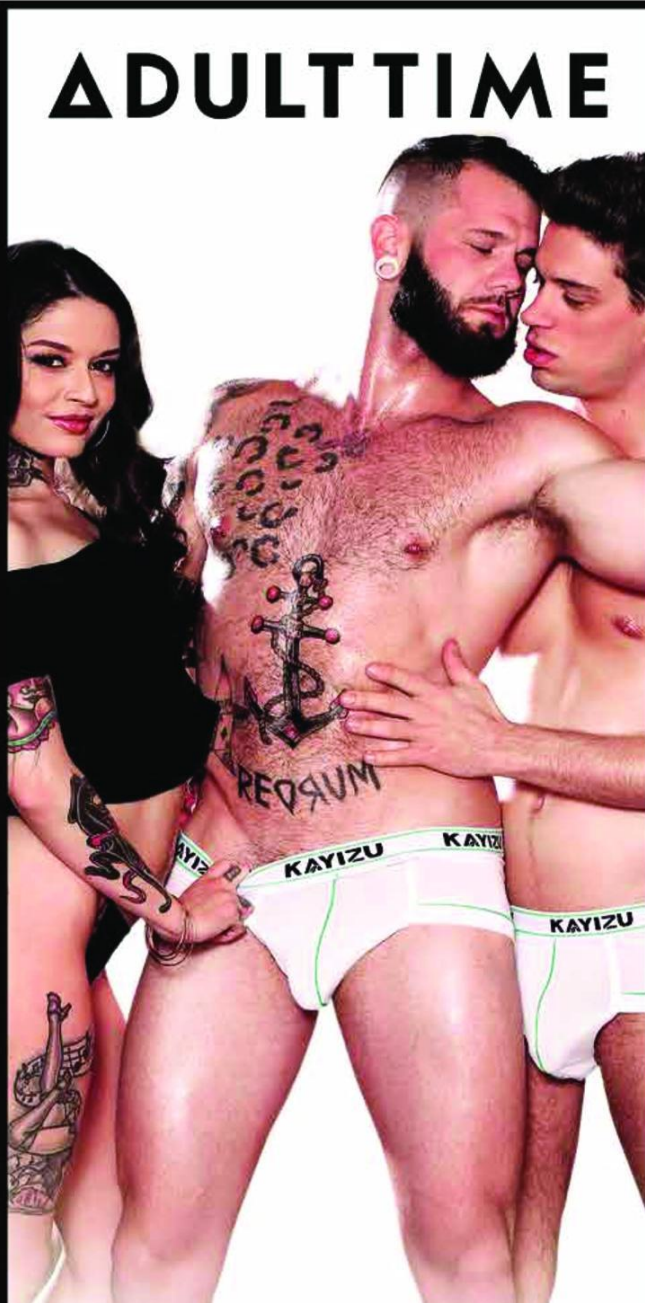
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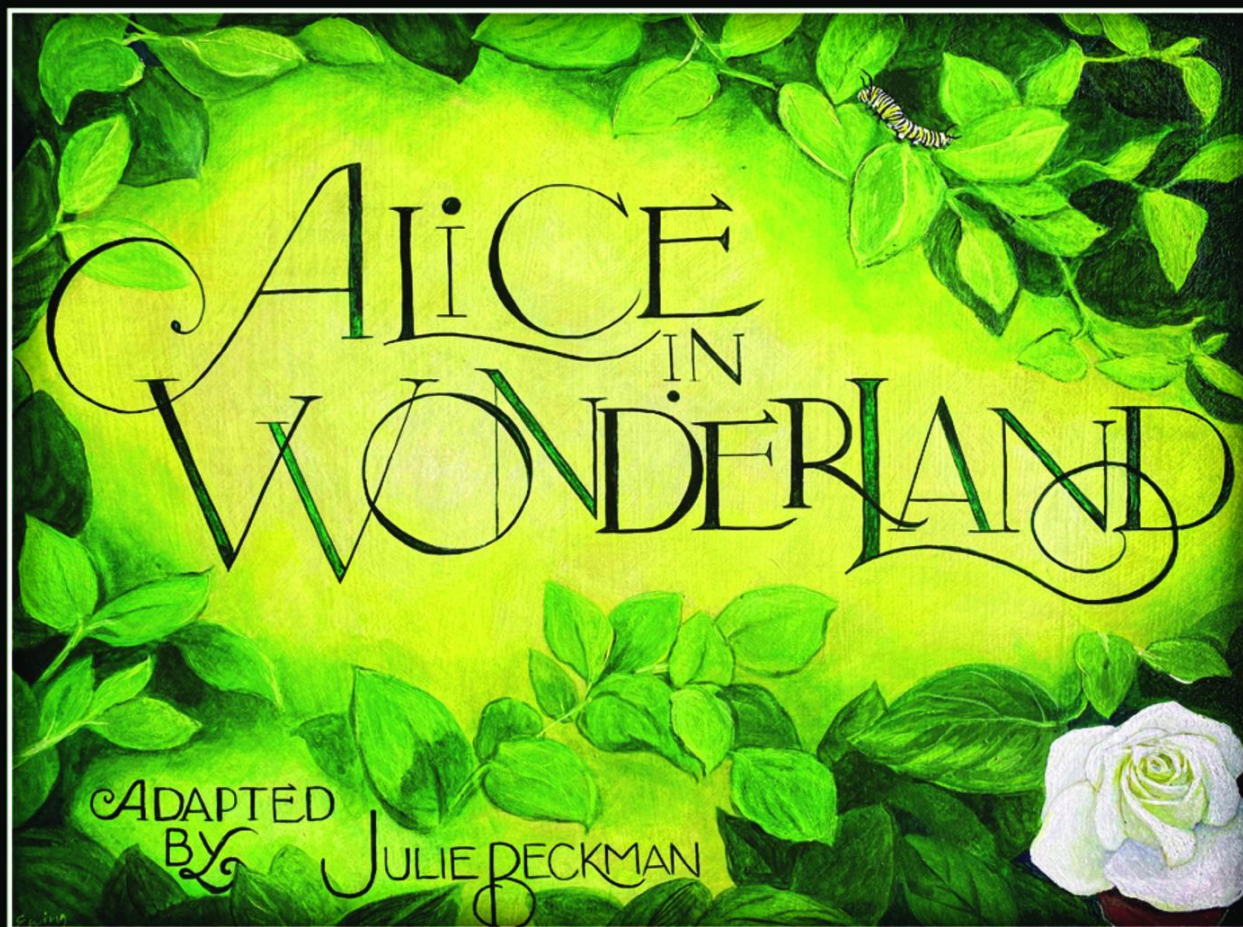
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