A WORD FROM THE CENTER: FESTIVAL MICTLAN

A WORD FROM PRIDE: IN PRIDE AND SOLIDARITY

OCTOBER 2025

A WORD FROM THE ARCHIVES: LGBTQ+ DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

THE WORD ON ART: WHY SD MUST STEP UP FOR LGBTQ ARTISTS

THE WORD SAN DIEGO

Volume 3 | Issue 2

BEARS SAN DIEGO ROARS INTO
BEARQUAKE WEEKEND:
JIMMY TRIMBLE & GIOVANNI TEA
LEAD WITH PRIDE, PURPOSE AND HEART

THE WORD ON ART
TIME'S RUNNING OUT:
WHY SAN DIEGO MUST STEP UP FOR LGBTQ ARTISTS

THE WORD ON COMMUNITY
REV. DAN KOESHALL
RETIRES LEAVING BEHIND A MINISTRY ROOTED IN LOVE AND INCLUSION

ON STAGE
& JULIET HITS THE ROAD WITH A FRESH FACE
FABIOLA CARABALLO QUIJADA
AND A SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE (AND LIFE!)

THE WORD ON READING
COMPOUND FRACTURE
BURY YOUR GAYS

B-SIDE
APRIL
BY ROSE GRAY
LOVE CAN EXIST IN MANY FORMS. IT SNEAKS IN WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT



FREAKY KIKI HORROR BALL

IS QUEER, FIERCE, AND FEARLESS

A CONVERSATION WITH
JOSHUA NAPIER & JOE FEJERAN
FROM FRIGHT SCHOOL

AMBER ST. JAMES

SHRAVEN

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By **Gus Hernandez**

FESTIVAL MICTLAN:
A CELEBRATION OF THE UNDERWORLD

photo courtesy of **The Center**



Xoloitzcuintli, the sacred dog believed to guide souls through the underworld, reminds us that death is not an end, but a journey. It is in that spirit that The San Diego LGBT Community Center invites you to the first-ever Festival Mictlan: Celebration of the Underworld, happening Saturday, November 1, during Día de los Muertos weekend.

This first-of-its-kind event is more than a celebration, it is a statement. Festival Mictlan is a vibrant, intergenerational gathering that honors our ancestors, uplifts our Latin@x LGBTQ+ community, and invites everyone to participate. This event is hosted under the leadership of Psyche Calderon Vargas (she/her/ella), the new Director of Latin@x Services at The Center, whose vision and lived experience are already shaping the future of The Center's work with Latin@x communities.

A Cultural and Spiritual Gathering

Día de los Muertos is a sacred time for many in our community. It is a moment to remember those who came before us, to reflect on our roots, and to celebrate life in all its complexity. Mictlan is the Nahuatl word for the underworld, where souls journey after death. But this is not a somber affair. Expect music, food, altars, art, drag, and joy. Expect to see your neighbors, your chosen family, and your community in full color.

This event is part of the evolution of Latin@x Services at The Center which ensures that the needs, voices, and leadership of Latin@x LGBTQ+ people are central its mission. Latin@x Services is expanding its reach and deepening its impact by offering culturally responsive services, building coalitions, and creating spaces where Latin@x LGBTQ+ folks can thrive.

Meet Psyche Calderon Vargas

Dr. Psyche Calderon Vargas brings a wealth of experience in community organizing, healing justice, and queer Latin@x advocacy. Her leadership is rooted in ancestral knowledge, intersectional feminism, and a deep commitment to liberation for all. Festival Mictlan reflects her vision: bold, inclusive, and unapologetically Latin@x.

The Center as a Vote Center

In a powerful alignment of culture and civic engagement, The Center will also serve as an official Vote Center during the November Special Election, from November 1-4. That means you can come to Festival Mictlan to celebrate this cultural event, and then vote to ensure your voice is heard.

Voting is a sacred act, especially for communities that have historically been marginalized or excluded from the democratic process. For LGBTQ+ people, for immigrants, for people of color; our votes are our voices. And this year, those voices are more important than ever.

We also recognize that for many in our immigrant communities, especially those who are undocumented or mixed-status, the presence of law enforcement or federal agencies can be intimidating or even dangerous. That is why we are proud to say that The Center, as a Vote Center, offers a level of protection. ICE is prohibited from conducting enforcement actions at or near polling places, and our staff and volunteers are trained to ensure that everyone feels safe, welcome, and respected.

Build Power with Us

Festival Mictlan is launching at a time when our communities are under attack from anti-LGBTQ+ legislation to threats against immigrants and communities of color. But we are not backing down. We are building power, reclaiming space, and celebrating who we are.

Join Us

You are invited be part of this historic event. Whether you are lighting a candle for a loved one, dancing to the rhythm of salsa, casting your ballot, or simply showing up in community, your presence matters.

This celebration, presented in the spirit of a traditional kermés, will include:

- A Catrin@x Contest with wonderful prizes. Come dressed in your finest Día de los Muertos attire and skeleton makeup. Walk-ins for the Catrin@x Contest will be welcomed.
- A Community Altar Contest, with altars displayed throughout the festival as offerings of memory and love.
- Live presentations from local artists uplifting our ancestral heritage.
- A Beginner Salsa Class, inviting everyone to join in the dance.

We warmly invite you, your family, and community to come together in celebration, honoring our traditions while creating new memories through art, music, and collective joy.

If you wish to participate in any of the contests or activities, please sign up no later than October 24, 2025. To participate, visit https://bit.ly/festival-mictlan to sign up.

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By **Madonna Cacciatore**

images courtesy of **San Diego Pride**

DEAR SAN DIEGO PRIDE FAMILY



It is with deep humility and gratitude that I step into the role of Interim Executive Director at San Diego Pride. This is a pivotal time not only for our organization, but also for our community as we face continued assaults on LGBTQIA+ rights, on trans and nonbinary people, and on our very freedom of expression. In the midst of these challenges, I feel honored to join such a talented team of staff, dedicated board members, and incredible volunteers who embody the spirit of Pride every single day.

The assault on our first amendment right to freedom of speech is deeply personal to me. At this moment, when our rights are curtailed — whether through book bans, drag bans, the government crackdown on whistleblowers, or restrictions on protest — it is not only LGBTQIA+ people who suffer. These things add to the evidence of a rising authoritarian government, one that threatens the liberties of us all. History reminds us that attacks on one community are often a prelude to broader assaults on democracy itself.

Throughout my career, I have been committed to building spaces of belonging, resilience, and joy for our community. I know the power of Pride to transform lives — not just during the festival, but throughout the year as we gather, advocate, and care for one another. My role now is to listen, to learn, and to ensure that San Diego Pride continues to thrive and serve the movement. Our work is grounded in the understanding that queer liberation is inseparable from the broader fight for justice — disability justice, economic justice, environmental justice, gender justice, health justice, racial justice, and reproductive justice. Pride matters because it calls us to celebrate who we are and to resist every effort to silence, erase, or divide us.

I am profoundly grateful to the generations of movement leaders who have laid the foundation for the work we continue today. Together, we will keep advancing the mission of fostering pride, equality, and respect for all LGBTQIA+ people — locally, nationally, and globally.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the weeks ahead and to building on the strong foundation this community has created. Thank you for trusting me with this responsibility during this time of growth and transition.

In Pride and Solidarity,
Madonna Cacciatore
Interim Executive Director
San Diego Pride

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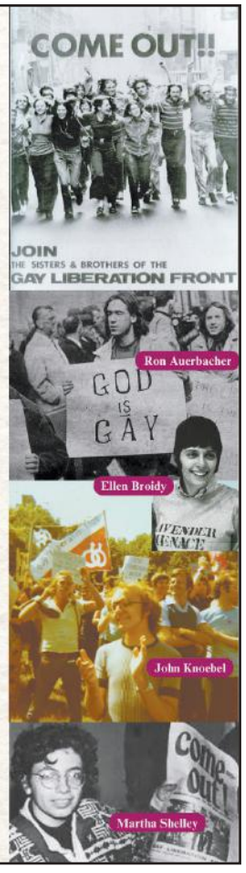
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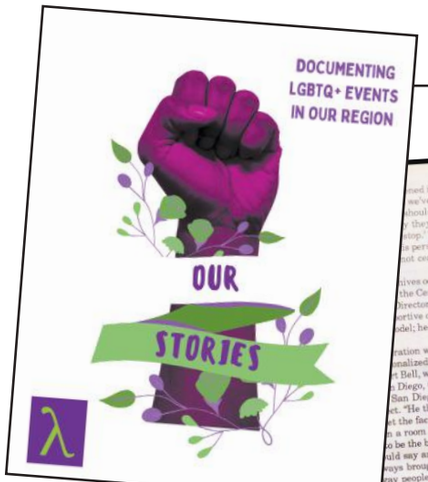
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By **Lambda Archives Team**

Images courtesy of **Lambda Archives**

COMMUNITY-POWERED

LGBTQ+ DOCUMENTATION PROJECT





San Diego Lesbian And Gay Archives Carry on The Dream

By Leigh Stone

The Lesbian & Gay Archives of San Diego was created by R. "Jess" Jessop for this reason: to eliminate those feelings of isolation through education.

That feeling, like an outsider or intruder in a world where "your kind" is not wanted, is all too common to all minorities. Through the creation of a lesbian and gay archive, Jessop had hoped to bring about awareness to the achievements made by members of the community in his efforts to combat homophobia.

Jessop had previously stated that because of the lack of lesbian and gay studies in high schools and colleges throughout the country and almost universal homophobia, many lesbians and gay men know nothing of their heritage.

The Lesbian & Gay Archives, now in its second year, strives to educate the lesbian and gay community of its history, especially of the last 15 to 20 years, during which great strides were made.

The Archives continually works to teach the community its history by spreading knowledge of achievements by gays and lesbians in science, medicine, education, religion, art, sports, government and other fields.

The members of the Archives are working to present programs of interest to the community, including libraries containing audio and video as well as printed materials, historical memorabilia and artifacts, art, seminars, exhibits and presentations.

The materials collected are currently housed in private homes throughout San Diego. The collection grows constantly from donations and through daily documentation of events.

An Archive planning committee has been formed with the goal of establishing work groups chronicling the history of AIDS, individual profiles, research and the list grows.

The Archives of San Diego still needs volunteers for various tasks—collecting information, organizing, planning and teaching. Anyone interested in supporting the organization with time, materials or money, please call 280-7411 or write "S.A.G.E. of California, Inc., Archives Committee, P.O. Box 4186, San Diego, CA 92104.

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Lambda Archives exists to collect, preserve, and share our local LGBTQ+ history. This mission is not just retrospective, but an urgent and vital act of resistance. By collecting our stories today and documenting our history as it happens, we claim our right to exist, to be seen, and to create a powerful, community-built record that centers our voices and our truths.

The power of community archives lies in our collective voice. When we document our own history, we create more than historical records; we build solidarity, validate each other's experiences, and ensure that the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ life is preserved and celebrated. Every gathering, every act of organizing, every moment of community joy becomes part of a living testament to who we are and what we've built together.

Our community here at Lambda including program participants, interns, volunteers, community partners, online supporters, and more not only access the stories in our collection but actively build it. As a community archive, we depend on you to help us capture the full breadth of LGBTQ+ life happening across San Diego County, Northern Baja California, and Imperial County. No single organization or person can document everything, but together we can create a lasting record of our history.

This project, **Our Stories: Documenting LGBTQ+ Events in Our Region**, invites the community to participate in ensuring our history survives and speaks truth to power.

Two Ways to Contribute

The first opportunity is to Submit an Event, which provides an essential opportunity to contribute significant events from the past and present to be recorded in a public spreadsheet and timeline preserved for generations. This includes events that have already passed from any year as well as upcoming events including everything from grassroots protests and community organizing meetings to celebrations and cultural gatherings. Every march, every rally, every community forum, every moment of collective action matters.

The second opportunity is to Submit a Reflection about an Event, providing a powerful opportunity to contribute your firsthand experiences at significant events, ensuring that the human stories behind the headlines are never forgotten. Your voice, your perspective, your truth becomes part of the permanent record.

Ready to Make History?

In times like these, documentation is resistance. Your participation ensures that future generations will know we stood up, spoke out, and built community even in the face of adversity. Every submission helps guarantee that our community's stories are told by us, for us - not filtered through others' perspectives or lost to time.

Visit our project page using the QR Code to explore the submitted events spreadsheet, add new events that matter to you, or share your reflections on moments that shaped our community. Please read the instructions carefully before submitting your form.

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By **Cesar A Reyes**

main photography by **Cesar A Reyes**

JOSHUA NAPIER & JOE FEJERAN'S

FREAKY KIKI HORROR BALL

IS QUEER, FIERCE, AND FEARLESS



Joshua Napier and Joe Fejeran are the creative forces behind Fright School, a podcast that dives deep into horror movies from a queer perspective. Joshua, who calls himself a "friendly neighborhood Spooky Kook," brings this warm, passionate energy — a lifelong horror fan who's all about building and supporting queer communities in Southern California, especially San Diego. Joe matches that passion with an infectious enthusiasm and a bold statement: "Horror IS queer. It is a genre that is for queer people, and always has been." Together, they blend sharp insights with playful geekiness, making their work feel like a conversation between friends who just happen to love spooky stories and queer culture.

Together, they dreamed up something really special — the Freaky Kiki Horror Ball. It's this wild, fabulous fusion of queer ballroom culture and horror fandom where people don't just watch horror, they embody it. When Joshua and Joe linked up with Amber St. James, Shraven 007, and Lambda Archives, it all came together. Joshua told me they wanted to make a yearly event to support queer folks and organizations in SoCal, but mostly in San Diego, because they saw how vibrant the community is here but also how much it needs spaces like this. Joe even joked about imagining ballroom houses named after horror icons — "The House of Craven," "The House of Carpenter," "The House of Romero." It's hilarious but also speaks to how deeply they love both worlds.

Last year was the first time they threw the ball and from what Joe told me, it was an absolute blast. One of his favorite moments? Seeing a bunch of people voguing as Jason Voorhees — you know, the guy with the hockey mask and machete — and just owning it on the dance floor. That's when Joe knew they'd created something special. Joshua admits it was a whirlwind for them — they had only about three months from idea to event — and they learned tons about ball culture, fundraising, and planning as they went. But all that hustle paid off, and this year's event is looking even bigger.

Speaking of this year, mark your calendar: October 17, 5 p.m., at the Soap Factory in Logan Heights. The theme is "Creature Feature Academy," which basically means you get to unleash your inner monster — in the most creative, gorgeous, and wild ways possible. There are categories like Runway, Sex Appeal, Performance, Bizarre, and yes, "Shake That Ass." It's not just a party; it's a celebration of queer creativity, horror love, and bold self-expression.



Joshua gets pretty serious when he talks about why this matters. He points out how horror, historically, has often excluded queer stories or turned queer folks and people of color into tokens or worse. And let's be real — it's sometimes been pretty rough on women too. But the Freaky Kiki Horror Ball flips all that. It invites people to reclaim those scary stories and characters — the ones that once caused pain or erased queer identities — and turn them into something fierce and beautiful. "It was a breathtaking spectacle," Joshua said, still clearly wowed by last year's event.

What do they want people to feel when they leave? Joshua hopes attendees come away with a fresh appreciation for San Diego's ball culture, which he says is "thriving" and deserves so much more love and support. He also wants folks to think about horror differently — to see it







as a space where queer people process fear, trauma, and resilience. Joe keeps it simple and real: "I hope they all leave wanting more."

And the final word: The WORD is FEARLESS. Joshua says it perfectly, "Even though we are here celebrating horror and the things that go bump in the night, the Freaky Kiki Horror Ball is about facing what makes us afraid and empowering us against the dark." It's about standing strong against forces that try to silence queer voices, all while looking absolutely fabulous.

Honestly? If you're in San Diego on October 17, you owe it to yourself to check this out. It's spooky, it's queer, it's wild, and it's exactly the kind of magic we need right now.

The Freaky Kiki Horror Ball is more than just a runway—it's a ritual. A celebration of queer creativity, horror fantasy, and the fearless beauty of ballroom culture. At the heart of it is Amber St. James, also known as Amber Celeste in the ballroom scene—a powerhouse event producer, drag mother, and unapologetic advocate for queer and trans liberation.

"We created this space for the outsiders of our world," Amber says. "For those most marginalized to come alive."

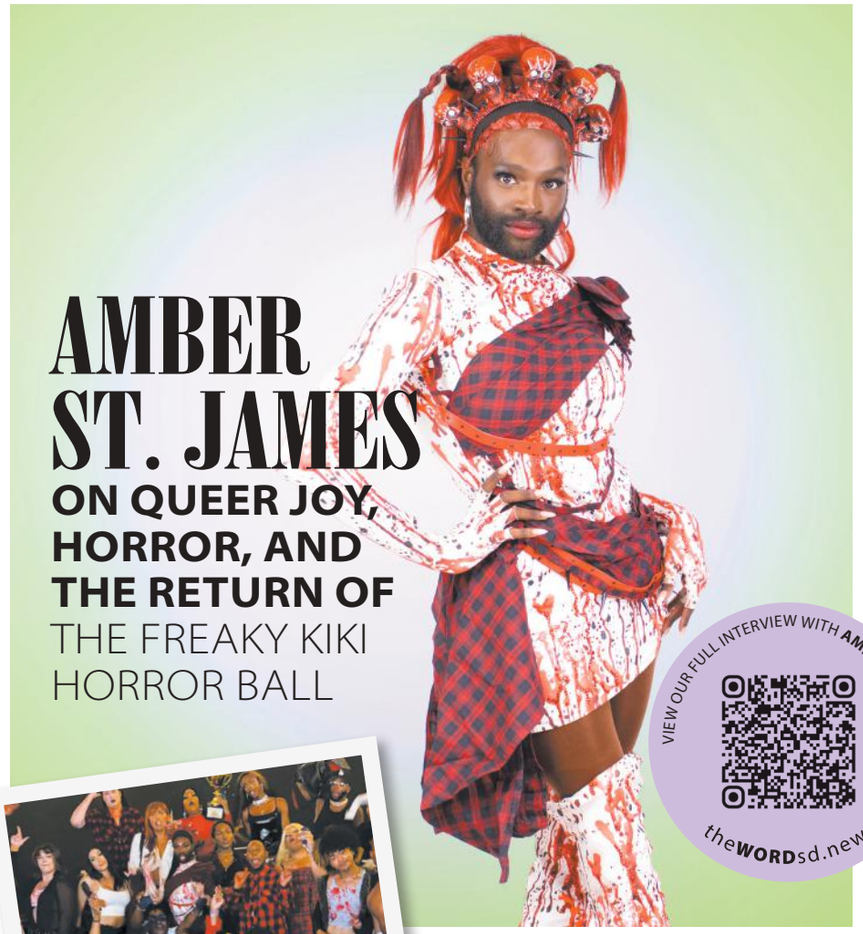
Freaky Kiki first came to life last year, sparked by a unique collaboration with Fright School, a podcast that dives deep into horror films through a queer lens. "They had this dream of a horror-themed ball where the horror and ballroom communities could collide," Amber explains. "I connected with Shraven, the Princess of San Diego Ballroom, and together we built out Fright School's idea, adding events that offered hands-on education about the culture and community."

That first year proved one thing for certain: the city was ready. "We learned that not only is there a hunger for more ballroom in San Diego," Amber says, "but that this city is primed to become a ballroom scene that's just as lively and impactful as LA."

This year, the Freaky Kiki Horror Ball returns with even more energy. The weekend kicks off October 17th at The Soap Factory in Logan Heights, starting at 5 PM. Tickets are already live—just search "Freaky Kiki Horror Ball" on Ticketleap. Link is here: Sixteen categories will light up the floor, from ballroom staples like Runway, Face, and Performance, to some wild and welcome additions such as Bizarre and Shake That Ass. "All the details are on our Instagram @fkhball," Amber notes. "This year's theme is going to push imagination and embodiment even further."

And no, you don't need to be part of a house to walk. "Everyone is encouraged to participate," Amber emphasizes. "House or no house. All we ask is that people educate themselves on the categories they're walking so they can really show up and honor the space."

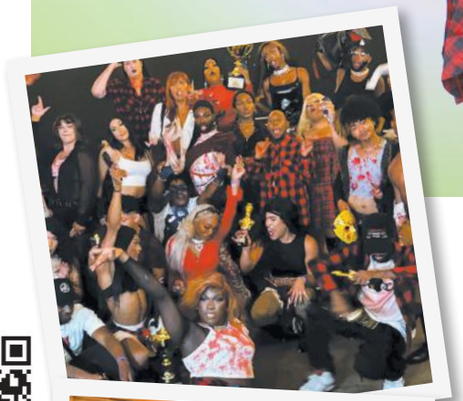
But Freaky Kiki isn't just about a show—it's about shifting culture.



AMBER ST. JAMES

ON QUEER JOY, HORROR, AND THE RETURN OF THE FREAKY KIKI HORROR BALL

VIEW OUR FULL INTERVIEW WITH AMBER ST. JAMES
theWORDsd.news





"Through our imaginative categories, we highlight the creativity of our queer community, especially in how we queer fashion and incorporate horror," Amber says. "Horror has historically been a space for outsiders to challenge identity norms and affirm themselves."

So, what's the vibe this year? What should people walk away with?

"We want folks to leave with deeper education about ballroom if they're new," Amber says. "And for those already in the scene, we want them to feel inspired, seen, and excited for what's next. We want real joy. We want deeper community bonds."

Asked to capture it all in one WORD, Amber doesn't miss a beat: The WORD is "Transgressive transformation." Because at its core, Freaky Kiki is about breaking boundaries and becoming something more: something freaky, fabulous, and completely free.

By **Cesar A Reyes**

main photography by **Cesar A Reyes**

‘WE CAN DO IT OURSELVES’: SHRAVEN ON QUEER ART, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE FREAKY KIKI HORROR BALL





When you meet Shraven, it’s clear right away this is someone who lives and breathes creativity. She's not just part of the San Diego Kiki ballroom scene; she's helping shape it. With three years in ballroom under her belt, Shraven moves through the culture not just as a performer, but as a connector, an advocate, a builder.

“I’ve always seen myself as an artist,” she says thoughtfully. “Anime, makeup, cooking, hair, music, dance—I’ve had my hands in all of it. Growing up in a third-world country, the arts were my escape. My safe place.”

That sense of safety, of finding a world where expression isn’t just allowed but celebrated, is what drew Shraven to ballroom in the first place. And it’s what fuels her work behind the scenes of this year’s Freaky Kiki Horror Ball—one of the most anticipated events in San Diego’s queer cultural calendar.

While she isn’t the founder of the ball, Shraven has been working closely with others in the community to help organize and bring it to life. The horror theme? That’s personal. “My birthday falls on Samhain,” she says, smiling. “So I’ve always felt a natural pull to the spooky, the strange, the theatrical.” But it’s also about something deeper: creating a space that feels rooted in the legacy of ballroom and fully owned by the community. “I wanted to help show San Diego’s scene—especially the newer generation—that we can create something for ourselves. We can do it right, and we can do it together.”

She’s quick to acknowledge those who paved the way: “I have to give props to the Queen of San Diego herself, Founding Mother Strawberry Mehron. She’s the one who truly brought ballroom here. We wouldn’t be doing this without her.”

This year, Shraven is excited for what’s coming: the growth, the energy, the families from Los Angeles coming to support, and even folks from the East Coast making the trip to walk and showcase their styles. “That kind of cross-country love and presence? It means a lot to us.”

And if you’re wondering who’s allowed to walk in the ball—Shraven’s answer is simple: “Everyone. You don’t have to be part of a house. Just come prepared. Know your category. Do your research. We’re open, but we also respect the culture.”

For Shraven, ballroom is sacred ground. “It was created by our Fem queens—trans women who built these spaces so Black and brown queer folks could have somewhere to feel free. Somewhere to exist. To compete. To matter.”

She talks about how ballroom once taught people how to survive—how to blend in, how to be “real” enough to stay safe. “That was the whole point of the realness category back in the day. It wasn’t just for fun. It was survival.”

And though times have changed, the spirit of ballroom hasn’t. “It’s the root of so much of today’s pop culture, even if we don’t always get the credit. Ballroom is authenticity. It’s raw. It’s joy. It’s truth.”

So what does she hope people feel when they leave the Freaky Kiki Horror Ball?

“I just want people to remember the feeling. The moments. And then—maybe—go home and start digging. Learn where all this comes from. Understand why it matters.”

When asked to choose a word that captures ballroom’s soul, Shraven pauses, the WORD is Eclectic and Eccentric. The kind of art you see in ballroom? It’s pure. It’s blood, sweat, and tears. People live this. And because of that, we’ve been able to shift how the world sees us—as queer people, as artists, as leaders.”

She sits with that for a moment. Then adds, “I’m forever thankful.”

VIEW OUR FULL INTERVIEW WITH SHRAVEN
theWORDsd.news

By **Neal Putnam**

main photography by **Cesar A Reyes**

REV. DAN KOESHALL

RETIRES LEAVING BEHIND A MINISTRY ROOTED IN LOVE AND INCLUSION

Rev. Dan Koeshall's love and empathy towards others are key ingredients of his effective, longtime ministry at Metropolitan Community Church which comes to a close on October 5.

"What a ride it's been!"
said Pastor Dan.

Koeshall, 65, announced his retirement almost nine months ago and his last sermon will be at the 10 a.m. service with a reception afterwards. (Tickets to a farewell dinner on Oct. 4 sold out within a week of the announcement.)

Dan went through the wringer in his faith, growing up in a fundamentalist family and even went through attempts to become straight at a 20-week so-called "gay conversion camp" when he was quite young. It did not work.

A congregational vote for a new senior pastor candidate, Alisan Rowland, was scheduled to be held Sept. 28. Alisan has held numerous positions at MCC in San Diego and was senior pastor at the New Orleans MCC before becoming a hospital chaplain in Washington. She was ordained in 2013.

Pastor Dan is greatly loved and has been senior pastor since 2008. He became the minister of music in 1999 and served other roles.

MCC sold its building in North Park to another church in the 1990s and for several years met at The Center until securing another church building at 2633 Denver Street under Koeshall's leadership.



THE SERMONS BY PASTOR KOESHALL AND OTHERS ARE AVAILABLE TO LISTEN



"He is one of the warmest, most welcome people I have ever known," said longtime member Gregory Ragsdale. "You cannot spend any time in this man's company without feeling God's love and warmth all around you."

"He truly brings the Spirit into every day life, not just from the pulpit but in our home, at a concert venue, a bar, or walking along the Pride Parade route," said Ragsdale. "He will be missed in his capacity as pastor, celebrated in his role as lifelong friend."

Dan gave his most personal sermon Aug. 24 and recounted a familiar story how he was tossed from the ministry of a fundamentalist church in North County after they found out he was gay. (Dan asked that church's name not be used in this story, perhaps in hopes they may one day change their policy.)

"Toxic theology can do such damage to a young soul," said Dan. "If you really want to mess up someone emotionally, give them shame, wrapped in a prayer. But God never gave up on me."

Dan said he often felt "you are called" to be a minister. "That message would not leave me," he said.

He was in his 30s, and working for a fundamentalist church when someone he described as "a former friend" alerted the church he was gay. The denomination held a private rebuke and an employment termination hearing at their headquarters in Orange County.

Dan said he asked the official this question: "You are telling me that God loves me as I am, but you don't?" A long silence followed. "Yes," replied the official.

"I thanked him for that clear message," said Dan, adding that he "felt like Charlie Brown when Lucy pulled the football away." He added: "I knew God was with me."

"You will leave this church forever," the official told Dan sternly, he recalled. "May the slamming of the door behind you reverberate in your ears for a long time to come."

"A whole new world opened up! Out of the pain came great joy!" exclaimed Dan. "There is room at the table for me, for you, for every queer, for every hopeful, for everyone questioning, every broken person on their journey."

"I found it here! That message is here at MCC. I found it in you!" said Dan to the congregation. "We exist to bring people closer to God and one another."

Longtime member Maureen "Mo" McElroy, said Pastor Dan was "definitely going out on a high note." She said he has "made such a difference in so many lives."

In a personal letter to Koeshall, McElroy wrote "there surely is a comfy lounge chair in heaven with your name on it."

A love offering will be taken for the retiring pastor, who will be greatly missed. Koeshall was one of many rotating clergy persons in San Diego who offered prayers at government meetings and was very active in the community.

COMMUNITY FEATURE

By **Cesar A Reyes**

main photography by **Cesar A Reyes**



BEARS SAN DIEGO ROARS INTO BEARQUAKE WEEKEND:

JIMMY TRIMBLE & GIOVANNI TEA

VIEW OUR FULL INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY & GIOVANNI
theWORDsd.news

In San Diego's vibrant LGBTQIA+ scene, Bears San Diego stands as a beacon of community, acceptance, and celebration. This year, the organization is proudly represented by Jimmy Trimble (he/him), Mr. Bear San Diego 2025, and Giovanni Tea (they/them), San Diego Leather Bear 2025—two leaders whose stories and passions together illuminate what it truly means to belong.

Jimmy's year as Mr. Bear San Diego has been groundbreaking in many ways. As the first trans man to hold the title, he carries not only a personal honor but also the hopes of many who see in him a path toward greater inclusion. "I hope it shows other trans folks that they, too, can step into spaces like this if they want to," Jimmy shares. For him, this role has deepened his connection to a community that embraces all identities and offers a home where everyone is welcome just as they are.



One of Jimmy's most vivid memories from the year was riding in a red Jeep during the Pride Parade, waving to a sea of smiling faces. Moments like that remind him—and all of us—why these spaces matter so much. Beyond the celebrations and events, Jimmy stresses that Bears San





"You don't need to identify as a 'bear' to join us."



Diego is not exclusive. "You don't need to identify as a 'bear' to join us," he says. The community thrives on diversity, welcoming people who might not fit into typical social boxes. Monthly dinners, movie nights, bar gatherings, and fundraisers provide countless ways to connect, grow, and feel at home.

Jimmy's advice for future titleholders is straightforward but wise: be ready to build confidence and social skills, because this role challenges you in new and unexpected ways. Yet it also offers growth and the chance to contribute meaningfully to a community that's become a family for many.

Alongside Jimmy is Giovanni Tea, San Diego Leather Bear 2025, whose presence brings another vital dimension to Bears San Diego. As a queer, non-binary leather artisan, Giovanni's passion for creating leather clothes and gear is matched by their dedication to cultivating spaces of acceptance and creativity. For Giovanni, being a Bear is "more than an identity. It's a state of being welcoming, friendly, and laid-back." This spirit is something they've embraced fully, inspired by Jimmy's leadership and the community's openness.

Giovanni's year has been about carving new paths and making opportunities rather than waiting for them. They emphasize the importance of kindness, especially when people look to them for steadiness: "Survival teaches us how to get by, but thriving requires learning when to let go and protect our peace." This balance between resilience and self-care is a thread woven through their work and leadership.

Events like the Queer Pink Pony Daytime Dance Party and the Queer Leather Fantasy Film Fest, both curated by Giovanni, stand as testaments to their vision. These gatherings weren't just fundraisers—they were celebrations of queer identity in all its beautiful complexity, places where people could come as they are and leave feeling welcomed and connected.

The political climate has made organizing these events more challenging, as Giovanni notes that simply gathering can feel risky for people with intersecting marginalized identities. Yet, the courage of community members who show up continues to inspire both Giovanni and Jimmy.

As BearQuake 2025 approaches, both Jimmy and Giovanni are gearing up for a weekend filled with connection and celebration. Here's the full schedule for the weekend:

Thursday, Oct. 16: The weekend kicks off with the **final All-Clubs Bonfire** at **Vacation Isle**, followed by a **Bear-themed night** at **Club San Diego**—perfect for gathering old friends and making new ones in a relaxed atmosphere.

Friday, Oct. 17: The energy ramps up with the **Bearly Legal Jock Party & Auction** at **PECS** starting at 8 pm. This lively event features models of all shapes and sizes and benefits from sponsors like Humanity, BearSKN, and JockMail, blending community fun with fundraising.

Saturday, Oct. 18: The party continues at **AWOL** with a roast in honor of **Jeff Breeze's 50th birthday**, an evening filled with laughter, love, and celebration for a beloved community member. Before that, there's a **Bear-Quake Brunch** at **R Place**.

Sunday, Oct. 19: The weekend closes with the **Grand Finale** at **Rich's**. Doors open at 5 pm with a reception, food, and plenty of auction items to explore. This event includes an incredible drag show featuring Marty Mars (Miss Goldilocks 2026), CleoFatra, Prince Iridescent, Whorchata, and more. It's also the night Jimmy will step aside to welcome the new Mr. Bear San Diego 2026.

Though the Bear Flag won't be raised at Pride Plaza this year due to construction, the weekend is packed with events that capture the heart and spirit of the community.

Together, Jimmy and Giovanni embody the heart of Bears San Diego: a community that lifts up all identities, encourages kindness, and offers a place where people can be their full, authentic selves. Giovanni reflects on the acceptance they've found here: "Bears San Diego has accepted me in all my complexity, without asking me to change who I am." Jimmy's closing thought sums it up, "To me, Bears San Diego is all about creating a place where everyone feels at home, just as they are."

In a world often marked by division and expectation, Bears San Diego and its leaders remind us of something essential: a true community welcomes you not despite your differences, but because of them.

By **Patric Stillman**

TIME'S RUNNING OUT:

WHY SAN DIEGO MUST STEP UP FOR LGBTQ ARTISTS

"This piece departs from my usual reporting on San Diego's art scene. It is written as an editorial, reflecting my perspective on the challenges facing independent artists and galleries in our community."



Nik Boivin in his Studio

San Diego likes to boast about its vibrant arts scene. We have more than a thousand arts nonprofits across the county from museums to performing arts organizations to community centers. Yet as the banners fly and the grant announcements pile up, something essential is slipping away. Our independent art galleries. The very places where working artists cut their teeth, sell their first pieces, and tell the stories larger institutions often ignore.

The reality is stark. SD Art Advisory (Mission Hills), Emerald C (Coronado), and Trash Lamb Gallery (South Park) storefronts have recently closed or are in the process. Others are struggling.

"I got the grant!" is not something small, artist-run galleries or individual creatives get to shout. Funding overwhelmingly favors established nonprofits, while the small businesses and artist entrepreneurs who incubate local culture are left to navigate rising rents, shrinking audiences, and an economy that feels like a game of musical chairs with fewer and fewer seats left.

It is not just galleries feeling the squeeze. Working artists themselves face impossible odds. In the past decade, the number of working studio spaces in San Diego has fallen by more than half. Redevelopment has swallowed entire blocks where artists once painted, sculpted, and built community. The cost of renting what little remains has soared.

The patron base, too, has shifted. Older collectors are downsizing, redirecting funds toward other causes. Younger audiences, raised with little arts education and now inundated by AI-generated images online, often see creativity as free, instant and disposable. Social media, once the perfect tool to communicate directly with patrons, has failed artists with the increase in AI slop (low-quality digital clutter), shadowbans and algorithm fatigue drowning out authentic voices. Taken together, these forces leave artists uncertain where to focus their efforts.

For small galleries, every additional barrier between a passerby and a gallery door is one less chance to make a sale, to spark a connection, to survive. Short-term and long-term challenges are plentiful. Construction projects causing traffic congestion, empty neighboring storefronts and rising costs for parking meters, bus fares and parking lots challenge visitors. All while tourism dollars and public engagement in bars and restaurants continue to dip. The sense of isolation for galleries and artists compounds.

And yet, against the odds, creativity finds a way. New spaces like Woodward Contemporary in Old Town bring working studios and exhibitions under one roof, while Chula Vista's Cultural Center has launched the city's first artist-in-residence program. Established gallery, Sparks Gallery introduced its 'Gateway to Galleries' initiative helping artists navigate the realities of commercial representation. Earlier this year, Sparks Gallery, Adelman Gallery, Meyer Fine Art, and my own space, The Studio Door, came together for the inaugural Art Gallery Month, a rare collaboration that proved what is possible when independent galleries pool resources rather than compete for scraps.

At The Studio Door, we have long championed LGBTQ+ artists whose work is often overlooked. Galleries often fear queer themes may alienate patrons, while museums confine our stories to token shows instead of weaving them into the

Images by **Patric Stillman**

larger cultural fabric. For nine years, our annual PROUD+ exhibition has connected local LGBTQ+ artists with national peers and arts leaders, while Words of Pride, featuring 30 queer-identifying artists, will soon unveil a fourth panel at the North County LGBT Center. Along the way, we have partnered with San Diego Pride, Lambda Archives, Bears San Diego, SD Leather Community, Out Professionals, the San Diego Equality Business Association, the Tourism Authority and the San Diego History Center. All while keeping art conversations alive through my column in The WORD San Diego.

But visibility alone will not pay the rent or buy materials.

Supporting LGBTQ artists is not charity; it is cultural preservation. For generations, queer artists have chronicled lives that mainstream society tried to erase, offering future generations a record of love, resilience, and defiance. Today, the rising cost of living is pushing them out of studios. Social media has lost their direct conversations with patrons. And still, artists are asked to donate artwork for auctions while failing to purchase it for our lobbies, our offices, or our homes.

That must change.

Buying art, even a small piece, keeps creativity alive in our neighborhoods. Commissioning murals, attending exhibitions, sharing artists' work online, mentoring emerging talent, advocating for arts funding. All of it matters. When local organizations build permanent collections, they invest in cultural memory instead of treating artists as one-time fundraisers. When audiences buy work directly from creators, they ensure those creators can afford to keep making it.

San Diego risks becoming a city without a visual LGBTQ representation for future generations, even in the heart of Hillcrest, "San Diego's LGBTQ+ Cultural District," if we do not act. We need community to come together to support artist-entrepreneurs, honor our local artists, and build an understanding that art is the heartbeat of our community.



Sally Moluf Hoss at The Studio Door



Tommy Diethert in his Studio

When The LGBT Center purchased artwork for its renovated lobby a few years ago, it signaled what was possible. But it happened only once. Even paying the artists for the new mural at the Pride offices had to be privately funded as opposed to organizationally supported. Too often, artists hear from organizations only when free art or cheap murals are needed.

Our artists deserve more than that. The arts should be central to who we are as a city and as a community. They deserve to be seen, supported and collected. When we lose LGBTQ+ artists, we lose the storytellers who chronicle our history, identity, and resilience. The very voices that gives our community its cultural heartbeat.

It may be too late to mourn the galleries and artists we have already lost, but it is not too late to step up, to rethink how we support one another, and to recognize the essential role LGBTQ art plays in keeping our community alive and thriving.



VALENTINE HOOVEN: A LEGACY IN ART

October 4 – 26, 2025

In honor of LGBT History Month, The Studio Door is proud to present the artwork of Valentine Hooven for the first time in San Diego. Renowned for his striking woodburnings and oil paintings, Valentine's work captures the humor, intimacy, and humanity of gay life with boldness and heart.

His creative legacy spans decades: author of Beefcake, a retrospective of physique photography; longtime columnist and illustrator for The Advocate and Blue Boy; and biographer of Tom of Finland: His Life and Times. As director of the Tom of Finland Foundation, Valentine worked closely with Tom himself, helping to shape the early years of the Foundation while championing erotic art and mentoring emerging artists.

Now living in an assisted living facility in San Diego with the complications of aging, Valentine's legacy continues through pieces recently acquired by Lambda Archives of San Diego and works for sale available directly from the artist. This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to celebrate the art and life of a man who helped shape the story of our community.

Alongside Valentine's work, The Studio Door will showcase outstanding pieces by Southern California artists Trevor Copenhaver, Kenda Francis, Debbie Korbel, and Andrea Overturf. The gallery is open free to the public, Tuesday through Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM.

By **Korie Houston**

APRIL
BY ROSE GRAY

photo by **Kaplan Photography**

When it comes to love, I do not do anything halfway. b-side is where I unpack the messier, quieter parts of dating. The stories that do not always get a fairytale ending. Through music and memory, I try to make sense of what it means to love, to lose, and to feel everything in between. Flip the record with me.



Love can exist in many forms. It sneaks in when you least expect it, not always as romance. Sometimes it comes as friendship. The people that lift you up when you feel yourself falling. Who is your April? It can be anyone: a friend, a chosen family member, someone who shows up and refuses to let you go.

"Her name was April, dressed like an angel. We came together soon as I met her."

This past summer I saw up and coming pop girly Rose Gray at West Hollywood Pride. She was ethereal. The song "April" was not released when I saw her perform, but once I listened, it took me back to the moment my friends and I put our problems aside and just danced. Her voice and energy turned what was a hard day into an unforgettable experience. I realized that day that love, the kind that anchors you and pulls you to the metaphorical and literal dance floor, can arrive in unexpected ways.

"The colors rising, we're coming together. Feels just like we're getting started, never felt better."

There is something remarkable about friends who know how to pull you back into yourself. They remind you, with laughter or late-night talks, that you are more than your heartbreak or your losses. They see you fully, even when you are not ready to see yourself. There is so much beauty within friendships that we can sometimes take it for granted, especially when we get lost in romantic relationships and overlook the platonic ones.

"She takes me by the hand and she pulls me to the dance floor."

I would not have made it through the biggest lows and losses of my life without friends to anchor me, the ones who reach out and pull you back when the world feels heavy. I have so many moments of pure euphoria when I call back to the memories I made during the past several years. But I truly never have felt more alive than in those moments with my loved ones after my heart was broken. My friends do not need to check on me in the same way anymore. It is a good thing because I am taking care of myself again in a way that I was not before.

"She wears her heart on her sleeve like she never been hurt before."

That line hits me. The lyric is a reminder that being open is not weakness; it is power. One of the greatest lessons on love that I have learned comes from friends who keep showing up, open-hearted, even after life has given them every reason to close off. Their courage is to not be hardened but to stay soft. In most songs I listen to, I find comfort in exploring the love an artist has in creating the piece. For Rose Gray, as much as her music has a sense of partying, there is also wonderment and longing to be seen. I have people in my life who do see me.

"Playing with my feelings, I could touch the ceiling. Move it like you mean it, serotonin reset."

Friendship has a way of turning pain into something bearable. A night of dancing, a shared meal, a simple check-in; these small moments feel like medicine. They do not erase the ache, but they let light in again. The desire to be happy is one of the most fundamental experiences we all share. As many times as I question the intentions of potential romance, I never once questioned my friends' intentions and that is a testament to the people who I want in my life.

"So, show me what you want, what you need, what you live for..."

Love does not have to look picturesque. Sometimes love looks like the people who wear their hearts on their sleeves, who show up, and who live out loud alongside you. The year is not over yet, but I would be remiss to not thank the people who have gotten me this far. I do not need to name them all, but they know who they are. As much as I want these pieces to be a love letter to music, to the ones I loved before, I also want them to be a declaration to the ones walking this path with me.

A good soundtrack comes from the people we met along the way. Their laughter, their honesty, and their insistence that you keep dancing, even when the music feels a little distant. Know they will be there taking your hand and helping you back up.

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By **Cesar A Reyes**

Photo courtesy of **Broadway San Diego**

& ***JULIET*** HITS THE ROAD WITH A FRESH FACE

FABIOLA CARABALLO QUIJADA

AND A SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE (AND LIFE!)



What if Juliet did not end it all for Romeo?

That is the big, bold, and kind of brilliant question at the heart of ***& Juliet***, the hit Broadway musical that is shaking up Shakespeare. And now the musical is heading on tour across North America with a fresh new face in the spotlight. Say hello to **Fabiola Caraballo Quijada**, who is about to take her biggest stage yet as she steps into the title role of *& Juliet* this fall.

Just months ago, Fabiola was a senior at Tyler Legacy High School in Texas, closing out her high school years with one of the most prestigious honors in musical theatre: a win at the 2025 Jimmy Awards. Now, she is leaping straight from the school auditorium to starring in a national tour. The transition is almost unheard-of but one she embraces with humility and passion. "It's definitely scary, seeing my life change completely and unexpectedly in the way that it has," Fabiola says. "But it truly is beautiful to witness God's plan for my life unfold like a perfect puzzle, every piece falling into place to reveal the beautiful picture I'm now a part of, which is the face of a production as special as *& Juliet*." Her debut performance as Juliet took place September 23 in Sacramento, with San Diego audiences getting their first look October 14–19. Fabiola's rise is a testament to the power of persistence, self-belief, and the kind of work ethic that develops when passion meets opportunity. "The Jimmy Awards provided me with the perfect environment of passion, encouragement, and opportunity to allow me to learn so much about myself and the performing industry in ways no other place ever had," she explains. "The professionalism, discipline, and love for my craft I developed at the Jimmy Awards are what I carry with me every day into the story of *& Juliet* and the process of bringing it to life for hundreds of people across the nation."

The musical itself is an exuberant remix of one of Shakespeare's most tragic love stories. Created by David West Read, the show asks: what if Juliet did not die for Romeo? What if she lived and wrote her own story? Set to a soundtrack of iconic Max Martin pop hits like "Since U Been Gone," "Roar," "Baby One More Time," and "Larger Than Life," the show is part comedy, part romance, and full-throttle empowerment anthem. For Fabiola, it is a role that allows her to explore the full spectrum of emotion and bring her own identity into the performance. "This truly phenomenal musical … has so many elements of wonder, positivity, and enjoyment that let its performers find the spaces to have unbridled fun and not one dull moment onstage," she says. "Juliet herself is written in such a beautiful way that allows me to constantly be making discoveries about who she is and how she goes through her journey in this unique story. In my performance, I choose to go through all of Juliet's emotions along with her: her pain, her frustration, her happiness, excitement, and self-acceptance."

But playing Juliet eight shows a week on a national tour is as demanding physically as it is emotionally. Fabiola is learning to navigate playing the role as she adjusts to professional life. "I am still learning to take care of myself, find my body's physical needs and limitations, routines that help me recover after days of hard work and prepare for long days of performances, rehearsals, and press events," she says. "But lots of sleep, liquids, and anti-inflammatory foods are my way of making sure my body can give the performance my heart wants it to every night." Just as important, she finds joy and peace outside of the theater, making time for herself and the things that ground her. "I make sure to still do things I love



& Juliet
OCT 14 - 19
Civic Theatre
broadwaysd.com



The company of the North-American Tour of *& Juliet* photo by Matthew Murphy



Mateus Leite Cardoso and Nick Drake in the North-American Tour of *& Juliet* photo by Matthew Murphy

when I'm not at the theater."

The contrast between high school theater and the professional stage is sharp, but not in the ways you might expect. For Fabiola, the heart of performing has remained steady, even as the scale has changed. "The level of professionalism, complexity, accountability, and responsibility behind the curtain is definitely different from high school to professional theater, but the passion and motivation behind what we do as performers onstage never changes," she says. "It's comforting to know that … there is a team of technical, musical, and artistic professionals that will always work hard to have my back, keep me safe, and allow me to enjoy doing what I love." That support system is vital, especially as she adjusts to the rigors of touring life and aims to sustain the energy and artistry needed for consistently inspiring performances. "I'm so excited to learn about myself on tour, discover what my needs are to keep my body, voice, and mind healthy," she adds. "I'm also looking forward to explore different parts of the country, try new things, meet new people, have fun."

There is something electric about watching a young artist step into her moment, and even more powerful when she knows the kind of influence she wants to have. "Keep your mind and your eyes open to any opportunity close to you that will help you grow in what you love," she advises fellow young artists. "Find people who are willing and happy to help you succeed, show them how hard you're willing to work ... Always believe in yourself, even if no one else does." That belief is central to Fabiola's journey and it is the very essence of & Juliet. The show's reimagining of Juliet's story is about rewriting your life on your own terms.

"The WORD is Power," she says. "There is so much power in the story being told in *& Juliet*, the countless messages of love and acceptance it leaves the audience with as they leave the theatre that have the power to change lives." And as Fabiola continues growing into her own strength, both onstage and off, she is discovering the deeper meaning behind that word. "This experience is teaching me to find my own power in several ways: power in my individual performance and artistry, in the way I treat others with kindness and respect, in the bond I share with my cast and crew members, and in the impact I leave on the audiences," she reflects. "Still, I know I have a special power within me, one I may not be aware of yet, but that will rise up as time and experience mold me into who I'm destined to be."

From Shakespeare to stadium-worthy pop, from Texas high school stages to national spotlight, Fabiola Caraballo Quijada's journey is already rewriting what is possible in American theatre, and she has only just begun.

"Still, I know I have a special power within me, one I may not be aware of yet, but that will rise up as time and experience mold me into who I'm destined to be."

— Fabiola Caraballo Quijada

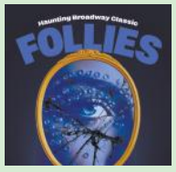
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By **Vaughn Frantz Miller**

COMPOUND FRACTURE

ANDREW JOSEPH WHITE



We have got coast-to-coast, all-American horror this month! With this recommendation, we are starting in the East, in a small (fictional) mining town called Twist Creek. When I say all-American, I mean it. This book has unions, guns, a century-long blood feud, and the undying willingness to stand up and do what is right.

The author's note at the beginning of the book promises a happy ending, so I do not mind sharing the same spoiler in this article. I will be honest though, even in the last few dozen pages of the book I was not exactly sure what that ending would look like.

Compound Fracture by Andrew Joseph White starts with a teenager sending an email to his parents coming out as transgender, so the reader knows this is a book for our community straight away. I really appreciate books which highlight transgender identities without making the focus on their transition, and this book does exactly that. More pressing than his gender identity, the protagonist Miles struggles to survive and keep quiet about his part in the long-standing blood feud between his family and the Sheriff's.

The origin of the blood feud began when the Sheriff's family murdered Miles's great-great grandfather, Saint Abernathy - "a union man, a mean son of a bitch who did everything he could to make things better for his people, even if it didn't really work out in the end." Everyone in town knows who was responsible Saint Abernathy's murder years ago, just like everyone knows who is responsible for Mrs. O'Brien being burned to death a few years ago. In Twist Creek, the Sheriff can waltz into your home and take a helping of your breakfast, smiling so you would think he has no idea that his son nearly murdered your child. But he knows. And you know. And you still have to let him clear the breakfast out of your house. But that is not even the scariest part.

Compound Fracture is a really good book and an enjoyable read. Its has some pretty gory sections, so be forewarned. But I am not a fan of gore and I still had trouble putting this book down.

The author lets Miles keep some of his Southern accent on the page, so it feels like you are hearing someone tell you a story. A terrifying story, but one you stay seated for to find out what happens next. The book touches on modern issues such as the struggle of preserving LGBTQ history, especially from long ago. The book was published in 2024 (though seems to take place closer to 2019 or 2020), and gives the reader a good perspective of someone who is trapped in a generally conservative area but who still loves his home too much to ever leave. It maps the political landscape honestly and with as much reasonable hope as can be found.

As always, you can order *Compound Fracture* from your local bookstore. Otherwise San Diego Public Libraries have three copies available to borrow.

BURY YOUR GAYS

BY CHUCK TINGLE



Queer horror fans, this one is for you! Chuck Tingle's ***Bury Your Gays*** brings us the terrors of a screenwriter's work coming to life. The main character, Misha, is trying to survive the monsters he created as he is fighting with the new board of executives over whether or not to kill off his budding gay characters in the hit sci-fi series he writes. Misha starts this book fighting for the fictional happy ending for his characters, but too quickly realizes it is his own life which may not have a happy ending.

What's going on? Is it some whacko stalker, fan gone foul? Is he loosing his mind? Is it just a weird practical joke? Misha will have to wade through a lot of blood to find the answer.

Bury Your Gays is a gruesome book, no doubt about it. The author explores the homophobic childhood Misha had to navigate and the semi-closeted life he pursues as a consequence. The book fluctuates well between stalking terrors and relevant literary commentary about why gay characters are constantly killed off in stories because our deaths and tragedies sell but our love and victories do not. I will not spoil the ending but the book is worth the read.

Bury Your Gays is available at multiple San Diego Public Library locations.

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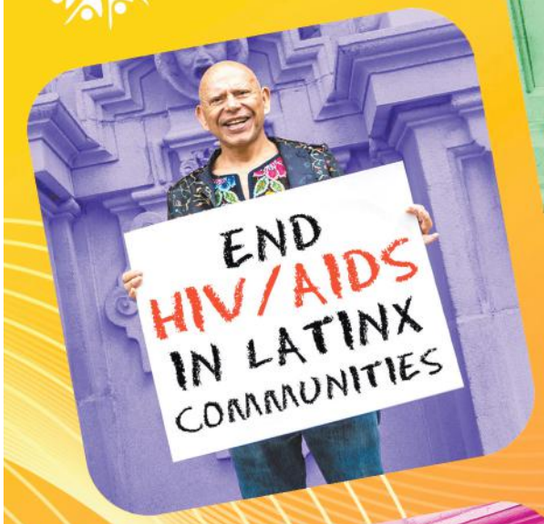
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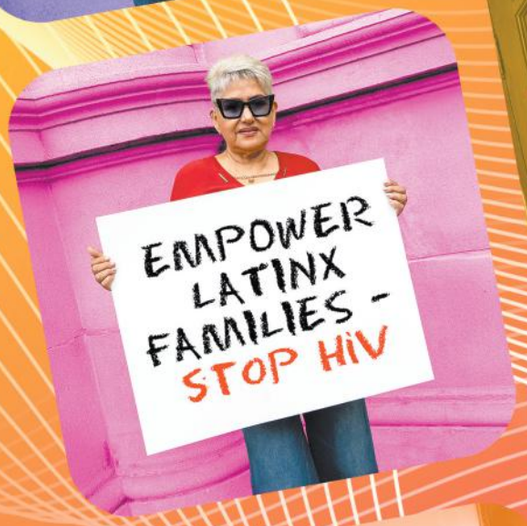


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