



Lavender Notes

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December 2020 - Volume 26 Issue 12



Bruce Bierman

and

Gilberto Cesar Menendez

Imagine what you might get when you mix Flamenco with Klezmer, Spanish with Yiddish, Nicaraguan-born Catholic with California-born Jewish?! You get a delightful combination of fun-loving, sometimes volatile, creative, artistic and always-on-the-move proudly-gay married East Bay couple known as Bruce and Gilberto!

In April 1947, Gilberto was born the youngest of five children in a village near Nicaragua's third largest city, Estelí, 150 miles north of Managua, the capital city, and about three hours from the Honduran border. He had two older brothers and two older sisters.

"I always felt like I lived in a very small town," Gilberto recalls, "since I grew up in a close-knit family and protected community where everybody knows you and watches out for you. We were always out and about, playing, swimming, dancing and singing. We were never afraid to go anywhere or do anything, because we always felt safe. I was frequently asked to perform – sometimes poetry, sometimes dancing – I loved the attention."

The Catholic Church played a major role in his childhood and youth.

"Our family was very orthodox Catholic," Gilberto says, "including Latin mass –

which I loved – confession, first communion and I was an acolyte for many years. I felt fine about my relationship with God, so in the confessional, the priests would ask if I loved my mother or respected other people. When they asked more personal questions like ‘do you play with yourself’ or ‘do you imagine yourself playing with somebody else,’ I just answered honestly and took whatever ‘salvé maria’s’ or other acts of contrition meted out. Since I saw much hypocrisy in the church, as an adult, I only go to Mass if there’s a funeral or a wedding to attend.”

Gilberto attended elementary school in Estelí until he was 13.

“My brother first took me to school,” Gilberto recalls, “which helped me to enjoy school very much. I’m not sure why, but I always felt like a special one in my class, always being asked to perform poetry or participate in dancing or musical events. At home, I think I was my father’s favorite – and though he knew I was very attracted to him, he never pointed a finger at me or made me feel bad about it or made me think it was bad for me to be open about such things.”

From age 13, Gilberto lived with other family members in Managua, where he attended the largest high school with the best reputation for academic excellence.

“My mother came from a very large and well-known family,” he recounts. “Everybody agreed I should live with aunts, uncles, cousins and my older sister in Managua to get the best education possible. When I finished high school, I attended the first private university in Central America, La Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), founded by the Jesuits in 1960. Unfortunately, there were not many curriculum choices at the time – unless you wanted to be a doctor, lawyer or dentist, your only choice was business administration. So, even though I knew my heart was in the arts, I took courses in economics and business administration. Though I performed well enough in this coursework, I knew early on that my destiny did not involve business! The good thing about going to UCA was that I was allowed to openly question anything – including my religious beliefs and my sexuality – and get useful responses from the Jesuits. One thing was certain, though: any mention of a career in dance would’ve been met with laughter, ridicule or worse, since such a thing was not a career choice for a manly Nicaraguan!”

Faced with what he saw as a choice between joining Nicaraguan revolutionaries or leaving the country, Gilberto opted to leave.

“I just wanted to get out and see the world,” he recalls. “My passion was art, dance and music – not revolution – so I got a visa and came to Southern California where I first took classes at ESL High School, in order to be English-proficient enough to pass college entrance exams. Subsequently, I attended classes at CSU-Los Angeles and more expensive classes at UCLA. Though I took some business-related classes, I wound up focusing more on sociology and international relations, because political situations always interested me.”



Gilberto, arriving in the US - 1972

Though Gilberto accepted his gayness at an early age, he didn’t really have

the words for explaining it to himself or discussing it with others until after his move to California.

“While I was in Nicaragua, I knew I would probably never have a girlfriend, a wife or a family,” Gilberto explains. “I also knew I was in love with my best friend, but I wasn’t willing to risk my friendship by declaring my love for him. I still remain close friends with many of the straight men and their wives back home and have no problem being around them. I just knew I had to evolve into something different and that was not going to happen back there.”

One of the art forms Gilberto became quite passionate about was/is Flamenco. He performed in Penella’s “El Gato Montes” at the LA Opera Company, a production that was filmed for PBS “Great Performances”, 1994. It was the Flamenco community he was most immersed in when he and young Mr. Bierman met and first made eye contact.



Gilberto Citizenship, Mission San Juan Capistrano, 1995; in “El Gato Montes”, 1994; in Flamenco version of “Queer Carmen,” 1997

Meanwhile, in January 1965, that same Bruce Bierman was born in Whittier, an L.A. suburb. He and his two-years-older sister grew up largely in another suburb near San Juan Capistrano.

“My favorite thing to do as a child was to close my door, put on records – frequently Broadway musicals – put on Mommy’s clothes, twirl around and play all of the characters,” Bruce (aka Bruché) recalls. “I always thought the females had better parts to sing, but I sang the male parts, as well, since it was all about the magic of theater and music. You might say I was a bit of a loner through much of those early years, but I was having such a good time with myself. I could entertain myself for hours at a time. My Mom, Dad and sister all saw me performing such things in the living room, too, from time to time, and never made me think I was doing anything wrong in their eyes. I must’ve sensed that something wasn’t okay, though, because many of my more flamboyant moves were reserved for the solitude of my bedroom.”

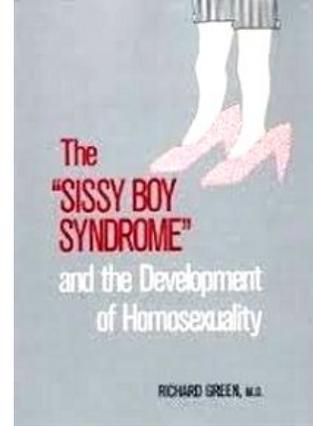


Bruce Baby Photo, 1965

One peculiar series of incidents took place in his life annually for about eight years beginning at age 5 or 6.

“Once a year, my Mom and I would drive up to UCLA where I would meet with Dr. Richard Green in the Psych section there,” Bruce recalls somewhat poignantly. “I would play with dolls, talk about my twirling in Mom’s clothes and other parts of my fantasy world, at the end of which he

would give me 25 dollars and we would be on our way. When he started getting more personal about my life – around age 13 – I declared to my Mom that I didn't want to see him anymore. Later, in my 20s, I was browsing the psych section in a bookstore and came across a most offensive title – "Sissy Boy Syndrome", published in 1987 – and decided to take a look at it. Omigod, I was one of the study boys for this federally-funded research project for all those years! Why hadn't my parents ever told me the reason for those annual pilgrimages to see Dr. Green? I turned my wrath on my parents, initially.



Bruce as "The Prince"

"Fortunately, Dr. Green turns out to have been a strong proponent of LGBTQ rights and wasn't trying to convert the boys in his cohort, like some of the other clinicians had been – using government funding, no less! In fact, he was one of the first psychiatrists to declare that homosexuality was not a disorder! Meanwhile, my folks were trying to make me more masculine with such manly pursuits as boxing!"

Bruce was originally scheduled to attend Dana Hills High School in Dana Point, but wound up at Laguna Beach High School, where he was more comfortable with his identity and interests.

"Being in the drama department at Laguna Beach was like my first gay acceptance club," Bruce recalls. "I had experienced taunting – and had heard about gay-bashing – at Dana Hills. I much preferred my own company in those days. Even at Laguna Beach, I had a few close friends – mostly female - but I felt safer there and better able to express myself. I only came out to myself when I was 17 or 18 years old, followed by coming out to my Dad a couple years later."



Family vacation in Acapulco, 1975



Bruce Bar Mitzvah, 1978



Bruce on Mission Bay, San Diego, 1977

After high school, Bruce went to live on a kibbutz near the resort town of Eilat in Israel. It was when his father came to visit him there that the subject of gayness came up for the first time.

"In high school, I may have pretended to date once or twice, though I was never interested in girls in that way," Bruce explains. "I fell in love with my roommate while I was in Israel – had a horrible crush on him, in fact – but he was straight, so obviously nothing happened. With all of those hunky, hairy Israelis around me, it was difficult to concentrate. Then my Dad showed up at a time when Rock Hudson was in the headlines, dying of AIDS. So Dad asked me point-blank 'are you into boys or girls?' At first, I thought I should say that

maybe I was bisexual. But Dad said it didn't matter which I preferred, he just wanted me to be happy – and SAFE! I know he was worried that I might never find someone to love – and I was clearly a 'late-bloomer'! I definitely haven't been with as many partners as the average gay man might've been."

Bruce's first boyfriend was an Assistant Director at the LA Opera Company.

"During my time with him," Bruce recalls, "I wound up on the same stage as Placido Domingo, where I played a bullfighter in "Carmen". Though my boyfriend and I lived together for about a year, it was not destined to last. After we broke up, he invited me to see a performance of "El Gato Montes" – just a couple days before the horrible Northridge earthquake – and there was Gilberto, this gorgeous man I had periodically run into and connected with at Flamenco events over the previous year!"

Yes, Bruce and Gilberto had met some months earlier, while both were involved with the Persian Dance Company in L.A.



Curly-Haired Gilberto and Baker Extraordinaire Bruce (he made the cake) on their first anniversary, 1995

"This incredibly sexy man had come to audition for the famous queer Iranian choreographer, Mohammad Khordadian, whose troupe I was in," Bruce recalls. "Gilberto had curly black hair, skin like canela; he was wearing a sexy white singlet or tank top – some called them the ludicrous name 'wife-beaters' at the time – from which one brown nipple was sticking out. Sexy man indeed! We had a delightful discussion on the break, including his mentioning the Flamenco community, which I knew nothing about. I became fascinated with the community – and with Gilberto, of course. We kept bumping into each other – total kismet – and each time we had delightful conversations. Finally, at age 30, I was truly in love!"

So how did these two decide to actually live together for most of the subsequent 26 years?

"Because of my interest in Flamenco, many people had urged me to travel to Spain," Gilberto recalls. "But, for some reason, I had never really wanted to go. Bruce was reading a book about Spain and suggested we might want to travel there together. Since it would be my first time in Europe – and I was indeed interested in both Spain and France – I decided it would be nicer to do it with somebody I enjoyed spending time with as much as I enjoyed being with Bruce. We got to know each other really well during that trip. On an early-evening train from Granada, we started talking about what we would do when we returned to the U.S. Somehow, we had decided that we would move

in together!"

Neither of the couple says they remember exactly who made the suggestion first, but it has turned out to be a champion arrangement for most of the 2.6 decades they've been together.

"Like many other couples, we've had the occasional ups-and-downs," Bruce recounts. "Once, for instance, we lived apart for almost a year, since I was perhaps a bit immature and afraid Gilberto wasn't being honest with me about his relationship with an old friend from Nicaragua. I moved to northern California – which was always a dream of mine, more my speed – and attended UC-Santa Cruz, where I met many people who are friends to this day. We took a second brief hiatus from each other more recently, but we decided to make it permanent and get married – we both knew that we couldn't possibly live without each other."



Bruce and Gilberto at Home, 2019

It was, in fact, Bruce's father – in the early stages of Alzheimer's – who strongly suggested it was time for the two to get married.

"Yes, my father gave us the ultimate stamp of approval for our relationship by suggesting we should get married post-haste!" Bruce recalls. "He was such a staunch FDR-type Democrat who wanted all of the problems of the world fixed ASAP. This little part of his world could be fixed by our getting married; he could leave this earth knowing his son was happily attached. Though Gilberto and I were a bit hesitant about the implications of this 'heterosexual' concept of marriage, we jumped in with both feet. We originally planned to have the ceremony at Dad's synagogue in Orange County. They were all delighted to have their first gay wedding until they found out that Gilberto wasn't Jewish – so that put a kibosh on that idea. Then we tried for my mother's childhood synagogue in Boyle's Heights, imagining this Jewish-Latino Ellis Island-type of ceremony which would bring two neighborhoods together. But that was too expensive. So we opted for a friend's mushroom farm in Sebastopol!"



Breaking the Glass, Wedding, 2014

The date chosen was 29th June 2014, which inadvertently happened to be San Francisco's LGBTQ Freedom Day, as well.

"There was klezmer music and theater," Bruce says, "though not so much in the traditional Jewish sense. There was Jewish history, culture, music – reflecting a spirituality of our own. We were married by a beautiful Israeli friend. We had lots of queer people, a gypsy picnic with multi-colored tablecloth outside, Flamenco music and dance. Friends sang and played the guitar – just a delightful day for all. Though Dad got to witness our Orange County wedding, he was unable to attend this more celebratory version. And, unfortunately, Mom died in 1997, so she was unable to be there, either, except

in spirit.”

Bruce became involved in Stagebridge – which shares many LGBTQ senior participants with Lavender Seniors – through a USCS friend, Josiah Polhemus, who asked him in 2008 if he would like to use his many theater-related skills to start a musical theater program. The group’s many theater credits in these last 12 years has included productions of ‘Hair,’ ‘A Chorus Line,’ ‘South Pacific,’ ‘Fiddler on the Roof,’ ‘Gypsy’ and other well-known musicals, in addition to lesser-known works like ‘Thomas and the Library Lady’ and ‘Wonder’, based on “Alice in Wonderland,” at the Phoenix Theater in San Francisco. Many with costumed LGBTQ senior performers!

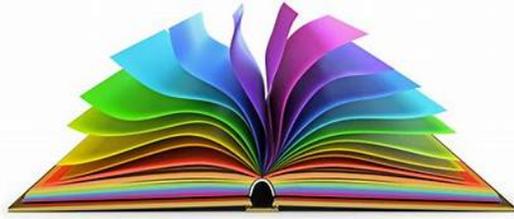
“One of my proudest works, however, was ‘The Blue Dress,’ produced at the New Conservatory Theater Company,” Bruce explains. “The play was based on that beautiful 1950s blue dress of my mother’s that I so loved to twirl around in. I felt so beautiful in it – a feeling I believe was captured in the play and conveyed to the audience. My Dad wanted to come and see the performance, something that facilitated some of the most incredible dialogue between us. I think he finally understood – perhaps for the first time – what I’d been going through as a child. Isn’t that the purpose of good art? To communicate some sort of emotion from the artist to his/her audience?”

Bruce’s father died after nearly a decade of struggling with Alzheimer’s, a fact that brought Bruce and his sister together for the first time in many years – as joint caregivers.

“After my father died – and Trump was elected – I went into the most profound depression of my life,” Bruce recalls. “I could hardly get up off the couch for days at a time. Then one of my UCSC friends living in France invited Gilberto and me to visit and travel a bit around Southern Europe. I didn’t know if I could make it at first, but remembered that travel can usually cheer me up. So we bought crazy tickets from San Francisco to Iceland to Berlin to Toulouse. We spent time in Cadaqués in Catalonia, visiting the haunts of Spanish artist, Salvador Dalí, and learning about how he and Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca, had made love there before Lorca was assassinated in 1936. It made me realize that people of the world have been in dark places before and survived. The trip – with all its gorgeous scenery, exquisite houses, magnificent food and wine – was very restorative during a time in my life that I felt almost totally hopeless and helpless.”

Bruce and Gilberto – like most everyone else in the COVID era – are adjusting to this temporary feeling of forced isolation that can lead to despair. But – like many others – they have begun to adapt to teaching classes on Zoom, to coordinating virtual performances. Bruce’s current project is to produce a film version of Sholem Asch’s three-act play, “God of Vengeance,” which also was adapted for Broadway (and at the 2019 Oregon Shakespeare Festival) in the form of “Indecent.” The play depicts the considerable fallout from the first lesbian kiss on Broadway (1923), resulting in nearly five decades of problems for Yiddish theater, in general, and Sholem Asch, in particular, since he was even called before the McCarthy House Unamerican Activities Committee in the 1950s.

You definitely can’t keep a drama queen like Bruce or a devoted Flamenco aficionado like Gilberto down, even with a world-wide pandemic! Thanks for



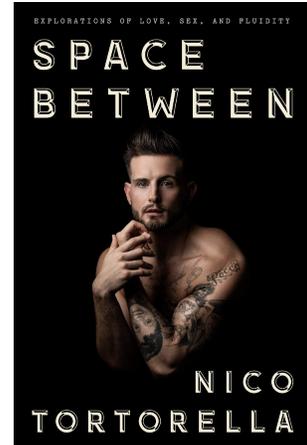
BOOK REVIEW

Space Between

By Nico Tortorella

Tortorella is an actor, a TV personality and author of a collection of poetry. He is the star of the hit TV series "Younger".

Tortorella's darkest secrets: drug addiction, alcoholism and adventures in Hollywood. He fights for the rights of kids and young adults. We are told that we must act like a man and screw like a man. The new generation acts like wild men, passionate men and illegal people. His love and needs are worth every word.



From the author: "**Space Between** opens the opportunity for discussion to everyone inside and outside of the queer community, and offers a dive into the depths of our collective consciousness and universal human understanding."

Readers will be rewarded and gratified by absorbing this powerful book.

- Frank J. Howell

BONUS BOOK REVIEW

Men on Men 2000: Best New Gay Fiction for the Millennium

Edited by David Bergman and Karl Woelz



This is the last known volume of eight anthologies spanning two decades from 1986-2000. The Men on Men series showcases the remarkable talent of gay literary writers. These venerable collections of short stories had become a gay literary institution, launching the careers of several, now luminary, writers – including Joe Keenan, Christopher Bram, Dale Peck, and David Leavitt.

True to its tradition, the 325-page *Men on Men 2000* brought bright new literary talent together with established writers – such as Edmund White and Brian Bouldrey – to offer a poignant collection of gay fiction that is provocative and illuminating at every turn. This diverse group of voices etches an indelible portrait of gay life at the dawn of the twenty-first century – when many

of us **Lavender Seniors** were still coming to grips with our own lives. These stories – of various lengths – address issues such as identity and gender stereotypes, the power of love, the lingering shadow of AIDS (more so at the time than now), and the then-new adventure of gay fatherhood.



One of the most poignant of the stories for this reviewer, "Erasing Sonny" (pp. 69-90), features a young and sensitive boy whose mother forces him to "chaperone" his older sister, only to be ditched by her each time while she has sex with her boyfriend. On one occasion, he innocently lets the boyfriend (who he has eyes for, of course) put a somewhat-blasphemous tattoo across his back at the top of his shoulders – something that must be hidden from the parents, of course. Much of the story involves his journey from confused and smitten teenager to hungry gay young man ready to embark on a life without that tattoo!

With a couple minor exceptions, a lovely walk down memory lane for some of us old codgers with reading time on our hands!

For more on all eight volumes (Men on Men, Volumes 1 through 7, Men on Men 2000): <https://www.goodreads.com/series/113468-men-on-men>

- John David Dupree, Tinamastes, Costa Rica

CONNECTIONS



Have you moved out of the area, do you want to get in contact with other Lavender Seniors near you or someone you have lost contact with? [Email us](#) and we will try to help out. No information will be shared without your specific permission.

LAVENDER SENIORS FRIENDLY VISITOR PROGRAM HAS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.

Volunteers with the Lavender Seniors Friendly Visitor program are background checked, interviewed and trained, after which they are matched with a senior to visit regularly, usually for a couple hours each week. Visitors can share stories, chat about mutual interests and current events, and if both are willing and able, volunteers can take their seniors out for a walk in the park, a bite to eat, a cup of coffee, shopping or maybe a movie or a trip to the museum.

We ask volunteers to make a commitment of at least six months.

If you are in need of a Friendly Visitor, we can help with that too!

Please contact us at karen@lavenderseniors.org or (510) 424-7240 and we will be in touch with you soon. Thank You!

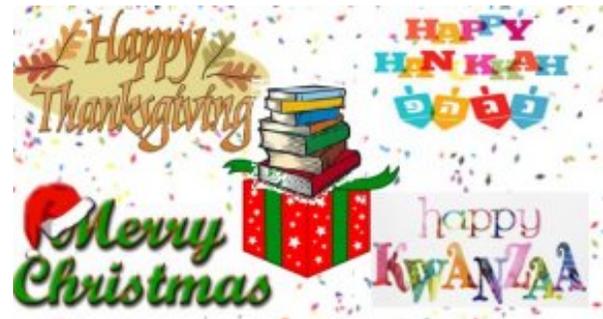


Sharing Various Holiday Traditions

At last month's Second Saturday Rainbow Lunch meeting – after checking in – participants contributed information on some of their favorite LGBTQ-themed films, given that so many of us had never seen a positive representation of ourselves on stage, on the silver screen or even on TV until we were well into – or past – middle age! We had previously exchanged information on LGBTQ authors or books that dealt positively with LGBTQ themes.

Clearly, our annual holiday pilgrimage to Harry's Hofbrau in San Leandro cannot happen this year.

Instead, for December's Zoom session, we will be sharing experiences of different holiday traditions (not necessarily just the "High Holidays") from around the world. If the past year of division in this country has taught us nothing else, it is that we need to be



learning more about each other and learning how to talk with people of different ages, genders, races, classes, sexualities, ethnicities, socio-economic & educational levels, abilities, etc.

The fact that over 80 million people voted for Biden and nearly 74 million voted for Trump is only one indicator of how divided we are and, perhaps, how little we know about ways the "others" look at the same world we're looking at!

Some believe the divisive elements in this country – which fuel such cruel attitudes toward each other as sexism, racism, classism, anti-semitism, islamophobia, homo- and trans-phobia – feel it's simply a function of what party we feel allegiance to or which news outlets we attend to – Fox News? CNN? Breitbart? MSNBC? Network News? NPR? PBS? The New York Times? The Wall Street Journal? The New York Post? The San Francisco Chronicle?

The Lavender Seniors board has adopted numerous vital policies, including no-conflict-of-interest, inclusiveness, bans on sexual harassment and, most recently, a Statement of Support for the Black Lives Matters movement (available on our website). But at the heart of it all, person-to-person understanding is how many of us have overcome homophobia and trans-phobia in our own personal lives, with families, friends, religious institutions and communities. During the AIDS epidemic, there was no speaker more effective in educating the public and demystifying the disease than a Person with AIDS and his/her family member. A breast-cancer or testicular-cancer survivor is most effective at encouraging members of the public to do regular self-exam and seek treatment for any irregularities.

Similarly, many of us – who live in perhaps more of a cocoon than we did previously because of COVID – know so little about each other. Some peace-

oriented individuals among us think it's time to change that. In a culture where official government policy became a "Muslim ban", for instance, how many of us – who may have first-hand knowledge of Christmas trees, Seders and Kwanzaa candles – have experienced living in a culture which annually observes Ramadan – a month-long fast ending in Eid al-Fitr – and two months later observes Eid al-Adah, signaling for nearly a quarter of the world's population (1.8 billion) the time for some to make a once-in-a-lifetime Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca? In dozens of countries world-wide, these are official national holidays. There are, of course, no such official national holidays for the 3.5 million American Muslims, who have to "take the day off" for their holidays.



Ramadan Lanterns



Ramadan ends in Eid al-Fitr



Two months later is Eid al-Adah observance

Though this month's Zoom meeting will likely focus on Christian, Jewish and Kwanzaan holiday traditions many of us are familiar with, we are attempting in 2021 to locate LGBTQ+ people, their families and friends who can help educate us during these meetings on what it's like growing up as LGBTQ+ in, for instance, Buddhist, Islamic, Shinto, Taoist, First Nations, Sikh, Hindi or animist cultures. Some may have noticed that – in the last five years of producing the "Stories of Our Lives" column in this newsletter, we have only had one Muslim LGBTQ person featured (July 2019 – for any who might want to review it):

<https://lavenderseniors.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Lavender-Notes-July-2019.pdf>

This is not for lack of LGBTQ+ Muslims in the East Bay or Greater Bay Area. We are hoping to engage speakers like those from the Qal'bu Maryam Women's Justice Center in Berkeley to kick off this 2021 quest for knowledge of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in various faiths around the Bay area. With help from readers, we will hopefully locate atheist and agnostic LGBTQ+ individuals and groups to recruit as speakers, as well. We will, of course, continue to alternate education and entertainment across the spectrum of wishes expressed by our constituents.

Meanwhile, Lavender Seniors has taken a proactive approach to planning ongoing Zoom gatherings for the next year. Hopefully, we will be meeting face-to-face long before then, but we have arranged Zoom gatherings through December of 2021, just in case. Here are the details for the December 12th meeting:

Gwendolyn Booze and John David Dupree are inviting you to a scheduled **Second Saturday Rainbow Lunch** meeting on Zoom.

Topic: Second Saturday Rainbow Lunch

Time: December 12, 2020 12:00 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89671026595?pwd=TGRtYkxaTzZGbWFFTTB1WWpQNpWZz09>

Meeting ID: 896 7102 6595 - Password: 153953

Dial by your location

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 896 7102 6595 - Password: 153953

Hopefully, you can join us for some or all of these meetings. Meanwhile, best wishes to each of you for whatever upcoming holidays you may observe (or not) into the New Year! All best for 2021 and beyond!



Stagebridge Students Follow Successful
Mothertongue Performance

Third Friday Lunch Bunch Marches On – Virtually!

The delightful LGBTQ+ community of seniors served by Lavender Seniors has – once again – shown how it can (eventually) catch up with the millennials and teenagers during this once-in-a-century pandemic!

For the first history-making 5+ months of the shelter-in-place orders in the six Bay Area counties, Lavender Seniors kept its long-held tradition of holding Third Friday Lunch Bunch and Second Saturday Rainbow Lunch meetings via Zoom as just a “brief” stop-gap measure until we could all meet again face-to-face at the North Oakland Senior Center and All Saints Episcopal Church, respectively. It was seen as a way to continue offering LGBTQ+ seniors an opportunity for social interaction with our peers (minus the nutritional lunches previously provided).

Then we decided to start offering – in addition to “check-in” times for everybody – educational presentations (e.g., the politics of November election, using technology to combat isolation). In November, we wanted to carry on the four-year-old tradition of having annual performances by Mothertongue Feminist Readers Theater. The technological aspects could have bamboozled the effort – bringing the tradition to a screeching halt on the spot.

But six of the group’s intrepid creative souls spent long hours – with freely-provided technical assistance from Heather Morrow – crafting a brilliantly-done, mesmerizing and technologically unflawed performance for about 30 people attending November’s Third Friday Lunch Bunch!



Full Screen (sometimes "loses" people to 2nd screen) – Vertical Screen Spotlighted – Horizontal Screen Spotlighted

Okay, so we had to learn some new technical terms (e.g., "spotlighted" we always thought had to do with Doris Day and Rock Hudson – or a grand opening at some gas station somewhere!) and one of the several hosts didn't call on some of the folks who weren't visible on his screen. It was all-in-all a knock-out performance! We are incredibly indebted to Mothertongue – and to Heather Morrow for her technical assistance! Contributions during Q&A from those attending were valued, as well, bringing up many reactions from the emotional to the humorous.

For those who were unable to make the performance – or those who want to better digest the warmth, humor and compassion that they didn't have time to do when they were attending – a video of the performance ("Turning the Lemon of Isolation into Lemonade") has been posted on the Mothertongue website (<https://mothertonguefeministtheater.org/videos/>).

Looking forward to the December Zoom session, many long-time Lavender Seniors participants may be familiar with Stagebridge, the 42-year-old Oakland-based organization with a mission: "To foster a vibrant community where all lifelong learners are celebrated and enriched through the performing arts" (translated: you have to be an "older adult" – 50+ – to participate – though they probably don't "card" you)!

In September 2015, Bruce Bierman (see "Stories of Our Lives" above), an early contributor to the "musical theater" component of Stagebridge, came to the Third Friday Lunch Bunch and led the group in a rousing singalong of Broadway showtunes – imagine a lot of us old folks belting them out like we were in the shower!

In December 2019, a Stagebridge troupe came and delivered a magical holiday performance at Third Friday Lunch Bunch – dedicated to long-time Lavender Seniors and Stagebridge participant, Jerry Fishman (pictured here), who died a year earlier.



Bruce is currently teaching an on-line story-telling class and some of the students in that class have been strong-armed by Lavender Seniors to come and participate in this year's December Third Friday Lunch Bunch. We are hoping that some of those "lifelong learners" will join a few other Lavender Seniors participants – after the usual check-in period – coming informally armed with their favorite holiday or winter story. Though this is not an official Stagebridge function, it promises to once again demonstrate how the organization continues to engage the local senior community – including LGBTQ+, of course – in keeping their performing arts chops – and spirits! – in good shape. The next Stagebridge sessions run from

January 25 – March 19, 2021.

The multi-faceted scope for getting involved with Stagebridge includes the Performing Arts Institute, Grandparents Tales, Inter-generational "Seniors Reaching Out," Never Too Late, the Dreamers and Playback Theater Ensemble, among numerous other programs. For more information about Stagebridge, go to <https://www.stagebridge.org/about-1>.

Being proactive to a worst-case scenario, Lavender Seniors has booked its Zoom gatherings through the end of 2021 (see below). Though we are hoping that we will be back to meeting face-to-face long before then, we've learned over the years that it's best to be prepared.

Gwendolyn Booze and John David Dupree are inviting you to a scheduled **Third Friday Lunch Bunch** meeting on Zoom.

Topic: Third Friday Lunch Bunch

Time: December 18, 2020 12:00 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85235825964?pwd=WmptRG5SU2RDVUNyQ1hFWGM2NIZOQT09>

Meeting ID: 852 3582 5964 - Password: 569546

Dial by your location

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 852 3582 5964 - Password: 569546

Hopefully, you can join us. Whether you can join us or not, we are wishing you all the best for the upcoming "high holiday" season, whatever your holiday of choice might (or might not) be!



Powerful Voices Keynote Speakers

World AIDS Day 2020 - A National Conversation

Tuesday, December 1, 2020 – 10 AM PDT

Powerful Voices from the AIDS and COVID-19 Pandemics

Join us for an inspiring forum with leaders of both pandemics for an important discussion about health, activism, remembrance and hope

World AIDS Day 2020 – Be A Part of this National Conversation

The forum will be presented virtually and will be free to the public.

Save the date, December 1, 2020. Due to Covid-19, the National AIDS Memorial will hold its **World AIDS Day 2020** commemoration virtually, bringing together powerful voices from the AIDS & Covid-19 pandemics for an inspiring national discussion about health justice, social activism, remembrance, hope & resilience.

This year's World AIDS Day broadcast will spotlight the inter-connectedness of both pandemics - the lives lost, the survivors, the activism and the heroes. Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. David Ho are keynote speakers. They join a distinguished list of special guests, video storytelling, & musical tributes, as we explore how a nation confronts, responds, and heals; lessons that must be learned for the future.

World AIDS Day 2020 is a free event; we encourage you to invite your friends and colleagues and share the news on social media. **Please visit our [World AIDS Day website](#) to learn more.**



Host Your Own Curated Virtual AIDS Quilt Display; Part of National Exhibition

On World AIDS Day the National AIDS Memorial will officially unveil the first-ever virtual exhibition of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. The exhibition will feature over 10,000 Quilt panels representing all 50 states and U.S. territories.

“Our hope is to use the power and beauty of the Quilt to help our nation heal during these difficult times,” said Mike Smith, co-founder of the Quilt. “This first-ever virtual display will help us bring the Quilt to so many people in a year when we can’t do in-person displays.”

Due to Covid-19, Quilt blocks will not travel to communities across the country as part of World AIDS Day. We are inviting interested panel-makers, individuals, businesses, and organizations to be part of this historic effort — to become an exhibition partner and curate your own virtual exhibition. The exhibition will run through March 31, 2021.

Any Lavender Seniors participants who have made quilt panels themselves – or are interested in seeing panels made for loved ones lost during this epidemic should contact Info@LavenderSeniors.org to let us know the level of interest. It is particularly useful if you know the full name and panel number of the quilt you might be interested in seeing in such a virtual display.

Margaret Cho, Charlie Carver to Headline Outfest's Virtual Fundraiser

One of our Southern California counterparts, the Outfest LGBTQ Film Festival, is staging a virtual all-LGBTQ event, titled “Twas the Night Before Give-ma” at 6pm on Monday night, 30 November. A variety benefit hosted by



journalist Marc Malkin, it will feature drag performances, live music, and comedic sketches from artists, including Margaret Cho, Charlie Carver, Wilson Cruz, Cheyenne Jackson, Janaya Future Khan, Candis Cayne, Steven Canals, Jinkx Monsoon, BenDeLaCreme, select Out 100 honorees, and more "iconic queer crushes," according

to a press release.

The virtual event is being held on the eve of World AIDS Day, as well as Giving Tuesday, the annual event supporting nonprofit organizations. It will be livestreamed at [Outfest.org/givemas](https://outfest.org/givemas), as well as [OutfestNow.com](https://outfestnow.com) and via Outfest's social media handles. Though this is being billed as "free", it is presumed that they would like a donation to Outfest (after giving to Lavender Seniors, of course, via <https://givingtuesday.mightycause.com/story/Lavender-Seniors-Of-The-East-Bay-Fundraiser>) to help keep queer film alive and well.

"In a year which so much is different, there is one thing that I'm hoping everybody can relate to: that is the incredible work of the artists and storytellers of our community," said Damien Navarro, Outfest's executive director.

"Pairing this incredible talent roster with an event to support our incredible programs and mission will help Outfest meet the many challenges we are facing during these unprecedented times," Navarro continued. "With the difficult holiday season ahead, we hope that this event brings a much-needed smile and short escape from the struggles we are all facing daily."

Proceeds from the 75-minute fundraising event will benefit the work of Outfest, which in addition to its annual LGBTQ+ film festivals provides programs in education and film preservation. It will also help its new streaming service, Outfest Now. It is partially sponsored by Pride Media, The Advocate's parent company.



News of the benefit comes on the heels of **Saturday's Outfest Legacy Awards**, a drive-in gala honoring Joe Mantello with the first Terrence McNally Award as well as Dreamworks. The Out 100 were also featured at the event in Malibu, Calif.

Next year, hopefully, Lavender Seniors will try to sponsor a similar gala to help keep services for LGBTQ seniors alive and well in the East Bay! Anybody want to help? (If so, please contact Info@LavenderSeniors.org – all fund-raising ideas and/or energy welcomed!)

New Gay Film on Amazon Prime

For those who have access to Amazon Prime, a new gay film, "Uncle Frank,"

has begun streaming, as of Thanksgiving weekend. Some Lavender Seniors board members and friends have watched it and recommend its current billing as "Spend your holidays with UNCLE FRANK"! Though there are some moments that might bring back unpleasant memories for those coming from homophobic sections of America's South or heartland, there are more redeeming than discouraging parts to the film. Though the hero is purportedly only 48 years old, many LGBTQ+ seniors might resonate with his story.

Spend your holidays with UNCLE FRANK



UNCLE FRANK now streaming on Amazon Prime Video!

A teenage girl and her gay uncle take a road trip back to their hometown in this hilarious and heartfelt tale from Academy Award-winner Alan Ball.

Written and Directed by Alan Ball

Starring: Paul Bettany, Sophia Lillis, Peter Macdissi, Judy Greer, Steve Zahn, Lois Smith, with Margo Martindale and Stephen Root



In 1973, teenager Beth Bledsoe (Sophia Lillis, SHARP OBJECTS) leaves her

rural Southern hometown to study at NYU where her beloved Uncle Frank (Paul Bettany, *THE AVENGERS*) is a revered literature professor. She soon discovers that Frank is gay and living with his longtime, loving partner Walid “Wally” Nadeem (Peter Macdissi) — an arrangement that he has kept secret from all but one of his uber-Southern-Baptist South Carolina family for years. After the sudden death of Frank’s father (and Beth’s grandfather), Frank is forced to reluctantly return home for the funeral with Beth in tow, and to finally face a long-buried trauma that he has spent his entire adult life running away from. In addition to layered character work from the three leads, writer-director Ball (*AMERICAN BEAUTY*, *SIX FEET UNDER*) elicits strong turns from the superb supporting cast, including Stephen Root, Margo Martindale, Steve Zahn, Judy Greer, and Lois Smith.

How Seniors Can Maximize Their Social Security Benefits

According to our local Social Security office, seniors relying on Social Security benefits to help them cover living expenses and medical expenses that aren’t covered by insurance should do everything possible to make sure they’re maximizing their benefits. There are several different programs that can help seniors, but many seniors don’t realize that they can qualify for these programs in addition to their Social Security retirement benefits. Here’s a quick look at easy ways to make sure you’re getting all of the Social Security benefits you’re entitled to:

Social Security Retirement Benefit

If you want to make sure you receive your full Social Security retirement benefit you need to wait until you are 66 years old to file for your retirement benefits. But, if you need to retire sooner than that or if you’re over 60 and having trouble finding a job that will help you make ends meet until you are 66 because you have a medical illness you can file for Social Security [disability benefits](#) now. As long as you meet the criteria for an illness that is listed in the Blue Book you can file a claim for disability benefits. You can switch to your retirement benefit after you turn 66 if you would prefer to receive your retirement benefits instead of disability benefit.

Survivor’s Benefits

If you are married to someone receiving Social Security disability benefits and that person dies you are entitled to collect survivor’s benefits. You may be eligible for [survivor’s benefits](#) if:

- You are the primary caretaker for a child under the age of 16 you can receive up to 75% of your spouse’s disability benefits.
- You are 50 years old or older and disabled and you have been on disability benefits since before your spouse died or you started receiving disability up to seven years after your spouse’s death you will receive 71% of your spouse’s disability benefits.
- If you are between 60-65-year-old but not yet eligible for Social Security retirement benefits you can receive anywhere from 71-99% of your spouse’s disability benefit.
- If you are 66 or older you can receive the entire disability benefit that was being paid to your spouse.

- If you're confused about your options or not sure if you're eligible for survivor's benefits you can talk with someone at your [local SSA office](#) and they will help you see what benefits you are eligible for.

Auxiliary Benefits

Auxiliary benefits are paid to family members of someone receiving Social Security disability benefits. These benefits are paid to family members who meet the eligibility requirements for disability benefits and also must be:

- Children that are under the age of 18, enrolled in school full time, and not married.
- Spouses that are under the age of 62 and joint caretakers to the children of the person that is receiving the disability benefit. The children must be under the age of 16. Divorced spouses may qualify for Auxiliary benefits if they meet these requirements and the marriage lasted for at least ten years.

It can be confusing to know what benefits you are eligible for but because there are many different situations which can qualify a person to receive benefits it's worth making the effort to talk to someone at the SSA to see exactly what you're eligible for. You could be eligible for additional benefits that will make it easier to maximize your Social Security benefits and give you more peace of mind as you get older.

Resources:

Disability benefits:

https://www.disabilitybenefitscenter.org/disability_benefits.shtml

Survivor's. Benefits: <https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/survivors/>

Local SSA Office: <https://www.disabilitybenefitscenter.org/state-social-security-disability>



LGBT Online Support Group for Caregivers

If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and caring for someone with ongoing health problems...[you are not alone!](#)

Family Caregiver Alliance's online LGBT Caring Community Support Group connects you with others facing the day-to-day challenges of caregiving. If you're assisting someone with Alzheimer's, stroke, Parkinson's, traumatic brain injury, or other chronic health problems, you can get support from the convenience of your home.

Share experiences, resources, and ideas in a supportive, caring environment.

Available 24 hours a day, all you need is e-mail, and it's free!

Visit [LGBT Caring Community Online Support Group](#).

Well Connected

Enriching lives and supporting well-being.

(FORMERLY SENIOR CENTER WITHOUT WALLS)

Community Phone Calls

This award-winning program offers activities, education, support groups, and friendly conversation over the phone or online.

Just a few of the things offered:

(The times are no longer listed in the generic catalog, once you have signed up you will get a link to a catalog with times in your time zone)

LGBTQ Chat 2nd and 4th Mondays

This group is open to all LGBTQ older adults to connect with others socially in a supportive environment where participants can share individual and collective experiences. Facilitated by Ariel Mellinger, ASW, Support and Wellness Coordinator, Openhouse SF

Music's Memory Lane Tuesdays

Each week we'll discuss a hit song, vintage television variety show, or a memorable musician in music history. From Big Band music to the Beatles, we'll dive into our recollections of concerts, lyricists, and pop culture.

Facilitated by Steve Maraccini

Perplexing Questions Sundays

Have you ever wondered how a fly can walk upside down on the ceiling? Or how a camel can go so long without water? Find out the answers to some head-scratching questions. Facilitated by Sharon Schwartz

View the Current catalog of community phone calls [here](#). Check the [website](#) for more information. To participate in these or other Well Connected telephone activities, or to learn more about their programs, call 877-797-7299 or email coviaconnections@covia.org.



**Save
the
Date**

Giving Tuesday

December 1 <https://givingtuesday.mightycause.com/story/Lavender->

Seniors-Of-The-East-Bay-Fundraiser

Check the separate email sent on Nov 29 for more info.

Out Standing Seniors - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 1 & 15, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. (1st and 3rd Tuesdays)

Meets via Zoom email outstandingseniors2@gmail.com for info.

A space for LGBTQ seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

LezBold Peer Support Group

Dec 3,10,17,24 2:00 p.m. (Thursdays)

Meets via Zoom email lezboldgroup@pacificcenter.org for info.

Find support and like-minded wonderful people!

Older & Out Therapy Group - Berkeley - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 4,11,18, 3:00 p.m. (Fridays)

email Anne@pacificcenter.org for current meeting information.

Free drop-in therapy group for LGBTQ community members age 60+

Older & Out Therapy Group - Oakland - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 4,11,18, 2:00 p.m. (Fridays)

email Anne@pacificcenter.org for current meeting information.

Free drop-in therapy group for LGBTQ community members age 60+

Older & Out Therapy Group - Hayward - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 7,14,21,28, 1:00 p.m. (Mondays)

email Anne@pacificcenter.org for current meeting information.

Free drop-in therapy group for LGBTQ community members age 60+

Rainbow Seniors - Sponsored by Pacific Center & Lavender Seniors

Dec 8 & 22, 12:30 -1:30 p.m. (2nd & 4th Tuesdays)

Meets via Zoom contact rainbowseniors@pacificcenter.org for info.

A space for LGBTQ seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Living OUT in Livermore - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 1, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m. (1st Tuesdays)

Meets via Zoom email Anne@pacificcenter.org for info.

A space for LGBTQ seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information, and support. FREE, though donations are welcome.

Lavender Seniors Board Meeting

Dec 9 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. (2nd Wednesday)

via Zoom

A portion of this meeting is open to the public.

Lavender Seniors Second Saturday Rainbow Lunch

Dec 12, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. (see info above for joining us via Zoom)

Lavender Seniors LGBTQ Film Series

Look for announcements...returning soon via Zoom!

Tri-Valley Rainbows - Sponsored by Pacific Center

Dec 17, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. (3rd Thursday)

Meets via Zoom email Anne@pacificcenter.org for info.

A Peer Support Group is a space for LGBT Seniors 50+ to safely share thoughts, feelings, resources, information & to support one another.

Oakland Third Friday Lunch Bunch

Sponsored by City of Oakland Aging/Adult Services & Lavender Seniors of the East Bay

Dec 18, 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. (see info above for joining us via Zoom)

Lavender Seniors of the East Bay Board of Directors

President: Victor Aguilar Jr

Vice President: Gwendolyn M. Boozé

Treasurer: Carmen Chiong

Secretary: John David Dupree

Founding Member: Barbara Jue

Communication Director: Melissa West

Member: Ana Bagtas (on hiatus)

Lavender Seniors of the East Bay

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