

**Our democracy is at risk!
If we are complacent it will FALL**



When Kamala Comes to Town



**Gaston County
gay man Andy
Tench missing**

-pg 8

**Juicy Body
Goddess owner
Summer Lucille**



-pg 10

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Mission:

The focus of *QNotes* is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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Glitter and Life: An interview with Emily Saliers of Indigo Girls

Following a performance at David Geffen Hall in New York, Emily Saliers of the Indigo Girls talks about music, history and film, but the legendary folk musician has another message for all people of every age to keep in mind when elections roll around: "I could spend the next 20 minutes imploring anybody who's reading this to vote through a progressive lens," she says. "They're coming after us and we need to stand up for equal rights and for the future of democracy in this country."

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With Michele Morrow, it won't be a brighter tomorrow for North Carolina schools

GOP candidate for State Super of Schools Michelle Morrow is a former home school teacher. In years past she called for the execution of Barack and Michelle Obama and labelled the public school system as "centers for socialism and indoctrination."

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With Michele Morrow, it won't be a brighter tomorrow for North Carolina schools

Morrow — who had an upset win in GOP primary for state superintendent — advocates for dismantling of the public school system in the state



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

The North Carolina Constitution guarantees residents' rights to a free public education, stating "The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students."

The public school system has been under attack in recent years, as conservatives across the country have continued to claim these institutions are working to "indoctrinate" their children. Various "concerned parent" advocates and groups like Moms for Liberty argue public schools teach their kids "woke" concepts like Critical Race Theory. More than ever, these groups have been targeting LGBTQ+ topics and diversity training (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion or DEI), claiming those things don't belong in classrooms. Because of this, conservatives have called for the defunding of public schools in favor of vouchers for private or charter schools, also known as school choice.

One of those conservatives is running for the State Superintendent of Public Schools in North Carolina: Michele Morrow, a former nurse turned homeschool teacher who has become the face of a movement to defund North Carolina public schools.

Morrow is a new name in the North Carolina political scene — she won the Republican nomination in March against incumbent Caroline Truitt in an unexpected upset. Prior to securing the nomination, Morrow was relatively unknown in North Carolina, but in the days following, unsettling information about her came to light.

Ranging from social media posts calling for the public executions of former



Michele Morrow, a relative unknown in North Carolina, won the Republican nomination in March against incumbent Caroline Truitt. CREDIT: Facebook

President Barack Obama and current President Joe Biden to misinformation regarding the public education system, Morrow has begun to face criticism not only from "liberal snowflakes," but also from people within her own party.

North Carolina's public education system is facing a critical moment, and if it continues to go in the direction it has been, students in public schools will suffer.

The fight for equal opportunities for all North Carolina students

In order to understand the importance

of this race for state superintendent, it's crucial to know the context of the current state of affairs for North Carolina's public K-12 schools.

Public schools in North Carolina have been heavily debated for decades — in fact, in 1994, parents from five lower income, rural counties (Cumberland, Halifax, Hoke, Robeson, and Vance) sued the state. These parents claimed their children's schools weren't receiving the same level of attention or enough funding to ensure their students had the same opportunities

as more affluent school districts.

This ruling — known more commonly as Leandro — affirmed inequitable and inadequate school funding access to a sound, basic public education, and this right was denied disproportionately to students of color and those from financially challenged families. Some of the resources students across the state lack include access to technology, adequate school facilities, school nurses and guidance counselors, career training and advanced placement courses.

There has been a plan created (known as the Leandro Plan or the Comprehensive Remedial Plan) to help address these issues, and in 2022 the state Supreme Court said the legislature must fund years two and three of the Comprehensive Remedial Plan. But shortly after that ruling, the North Carolina Supreme Court went from a 4-3 Democratic majority to a 5-2 Republican majority, who then overturned the 2022 ruling.

In the two years following, conservative politicians in North Carolina have moved to support increasing public funding for charter school and private school vouchers rather than prioritizing funding the public education system. In fact, just last year the state passed a bill allowing for charter schools — a public school run by a private company or entity — to receive county building funds, giving charter schools a dedicated funding stream for the first time in state history.

Critics of this law claim this funding funnel for charter schools takes away money from traditional public schools, and as a result, lower income school districts are being impacted negatively.

Michele Morrow and her mission to dismantle the public school system

Morrow was born in upstate New York, where she spent most of her childhood until she moved to Charlotte as a sophomore in high school. She received her



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Bachelor's of Science Degree in Nursing from UNC-Chapel Hill and went on to work for hospitals and ICUs in Texas after marrying her husband, Stuart. They had five children, who she homeschooled and sent to private schools for most of their lives. Prior to running for State Superintendent, Morrow unsuccessfully ran for the Wake County Board of Education after becoming involved in the "parental rights" movement. Morrow taught homeschooled children, specifically high school-aged children, in subjects including biology, chemistry, Spanish and civics.

The homeschool parent is seeking to oversee the state's entire public education system — a system she has called a hub for "indoctrination centers" and "socialism centers." Her campaign website has a three pillar plan to address scholastics, safety and spending in schools, but each point in her plan demonizes public education. Under the first section labeled "Scholastics," Morrow targets curriculum regarding racially-aware and queer history, using buzz phrases including "teaching children racially divisive and sexually explicit content."

Morrow also claimed schools thrive best when they are "fueled by a fiscally conservative, free-market, and competitive environment." She provided a very vague plan, stating she would "identify, decrease or terminate wasteful programs at the state level, and end contracts with organizations that cannot demonstrate a direct, consistent, positive impact on student success and staff retention." What Morrow fails to do is define what programs would demonstrate a direct, consistent, positive impact on

student success and staff retention. Without a clear guide as to what a good program or contract looks like, it's left for the open interpretation of whoever holds the office.

In a campaign speech made in February, Morrow called for the state's legislature to add a constitutional amendment to abolish the state's Board of Education, which is responsible for creating policies and procedures for public schools in the state. By getting rid of the board, the state's education agenda would be under the control of the

superintendent and the state legislature, which currently is led by Republicans.

"I'd like to see a constitutional amendment to get rid of the state Board of Education," she said. "If the superintendent is elected and works under the legislature — knowing that they're accountable to the legislature to oversee the DPI and to oversee and have impact into the superintendents in the 115 districts, I think we would be so much better off because you don't have all these extra people right in mix."

This isn't even the most absurd suggestion by Morrow — four years ago, she took to Twitter to openly call for a televised execution of former President Barack Obama

and current President Joe Biden.

"I prefer a Pay Per View of him in front of the firing squad," she wrote in a tweet from May 2020, responding to someone who said they should send Obama to prison at Guantanamo Bay. "I do not want to waste another dime on supporting his life. We could make some money back from televising his death."

The call for executing public officials didn't end there — according to reporting from CNN, between 2019 and 2021,

Morrow called for many "traitors" to receive some kind of punishment, including Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, North Carolina's own Governor Roy Cooper, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, former Senator and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, Sen. Chuck Schumer and Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Morrow has continued to avoid questions regarding if she still stands by these comments, and, in fact, she's discounted these tweets as nothing more than "the dysfunctional media trying to create 'gotcha moments' out of old comments taken out of context, made in jest, or never made in the first place."

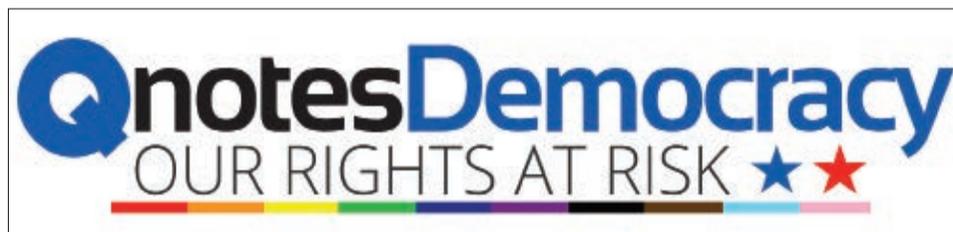
The North Carolina GOP was approached by WNCN in Raleigh and was asked if the party supported Morrow after her social media comments were publicized. They declined to comment all together and did not give Morrow their public support.

Morrow isn't the answer

It's clear based on the information available, Morrow isn't the best choice for North Carolina or its students. She has consistently called for the end of the state's public education system — the exact system she claims to respect and wants to run.

Under the "Safety" pillar of Morrow's three-pillar plan, she says "fear of violence and fear of harassment is robbing too many children of their right to receive a sound basic education." What Morrow fails to recognize is part of the reason students fear being harassed and don't want to go to school is because of the hateful rhetoric she and other Republicans have used to dehumanize queer students and students of color. Their words enable the hate these students experience day in and day out, both inside and outside of the classroom.

It's not the increase in violence in schools that's preventing students from having a basic, sound education — it's the continual defunding of public schools at the hands of the Republican-majority legislature and the state superintendent. One thing is clear: with Morrow, there will not be a brighter tomorrow for North Carolina's most vulnerable students. ::



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Nearly 30 percent of Gen Z adults identify as LGBTQ+

According to a recent report titled “A political and cultural glimpse into America’s future,” nearly a third, or 28 percent, of Gen Z adults in the United States identify as LGBTQ+, a stark increase from older generations. The report was by PRRI, a non-profit that conducts research on religion, values and public policy.

About 6,000 people were surveyed for the report, the group ranging in age from ages 13 to 65 and older, but they overwhelmingly sampled Gen Z adults and teens during the timeframe of August 21 to Sept. 15, 2023.

The report revealed seven percent of

Baby Boomers and 16 percent of millennials identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or “something else.” Among adults aged 18 to 25, 72 percent said they identified as straight, five percent as gay or lesbian and eight percent as “something else.” This group of adults — known as Generation Z or Gen Z — make up about 20 percent of the American population.

The report also broke down how the generational groups are politically affiliated. Results showed 43 percent of Gen Z adults identified as liberal — a larger share than any other generation. The other generations surveyed showed that 39 percent

of Millennials and 25 percent of Gen X adults and 25 percent of Baby Boomers identified as liberal, according to PRRI.

Gen Z and millennials are also less likely to list their party affiliation as Republican, and nationwide, only a third of American adults identify as Republican, according to the report. However, only 21 percent of Gen Z adults identify as Republican, while 30 percent identify as Independent and 36 percent identify as Democrat.

Survey participants were asked about their views on the future and about gen-



erational change as a whole. Fifty-eight percent of Gen Z adults said they believed “We won’t be able to solve the country’s big problems until the older generation no longer holds power.” Only 43 percent of all respondents agreed with the statement. ::

—Taylor Heeden

MAGA explodes over Trans Visibility/Easter shared day

Members of the MAGA movement are outraged after President Joe Biden posted on social media recognition of March 31 as Trans Visibility Day. While Trans Visibility Day has been celebrated on March 31 every year since its inception in 2009, this year’s day of recognition coincided with one of the largest holidays in Christianity: Easter Sunday.

The proclamation issued by the Biden Administration stated Trans Day of Visibility is meant to recognize the “extraordinary courage and contributions of transgender Americans,” but Republicans have taken to social media to express their outrage regarding the coincidental shared day.

“We call on Joe Biden’s failing campaign and White House to issue an apology to the millions of Catholics and Christians across America who believe tomorrow is for one celebration only — the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” said Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign’s press secretary.

While some conservative Christians

have taken to social media to express their disdain for Trans Day of Visibility, others have gone for a different approach: one that looks to welcome instead of divide. Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte posted on Easter and Trans Visibility Day, stating its congregation “stands in solidarity with the trans community.” At the national level, the U.S. Presbyterian Church put out a statement on Easter Sunday to its social media channels, where the church expressed it believed Jesus came to save, not to oppress.

“Breathe courage and love into us today, Creator,” the post reads. “Make our words and actions those that overturn oppression and violence and create a world honoring every being made in your image.

“May we not rest until all may freely and abundantly live into the fullness of who you created them to be.”

The date Easter Sunday falls on changes every year — the Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant faiths celebrate

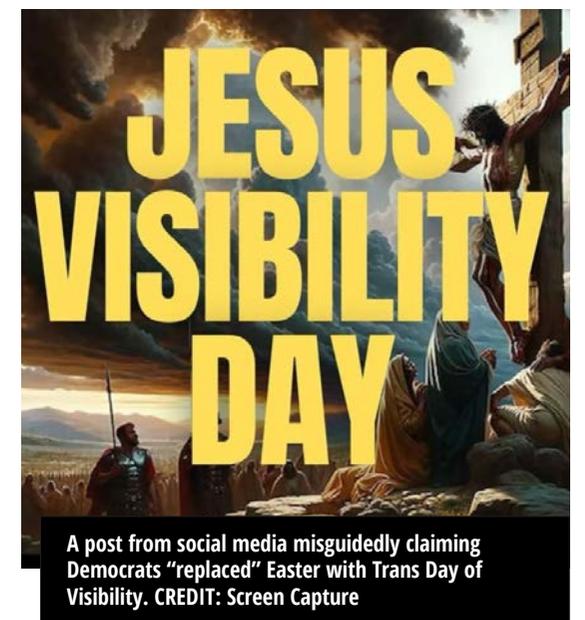
Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon that follows the spring equinox, which is widely believed by Christians to be the day Jesus rose from the dead.

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates called out Republicans, who were using the coincidence of Easter being on March 31, for “seeking to divide and weaken our country with cruel, hateful and dishonest rhetoric.”

“As a Christian who celebrates Easter with family, President Biden stands for bringing people together and upholding the dignity and freedoms of every American,” Bates said. “President Biden will never abuse his faith for political purposes or for profit.”

GLAAD president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis also pointed out the divisive rhetoric used by MAGA Republicans, saying people can celebrate both holidays while holding true to the real meaning behind Easter.

“The date of Easter moves each year, while Trans Day of Visibility is always recog-



nized on March 31, but this year right-wing politicians and talking heads are using the coincidental timing to overshadow the hope and joy that Easter represents,” she offered. ::

—Taylor Heeden

UNC’s Hamilton Hall to be renamed after Pauli Murray

UNC-Chapel Hill’s faculty has been organizing to rename Hamilton Hall — which houses the history, sociology, political science, and peace, war and defense programs — after North Carolina Civil Rights activist Pauli Murray. However, the Board of Trustees for the university has stalled the process, drawing it out, while supporters of the renaming are growing impatient.

According to reporting from The Daily Tar Heel, the chairs of all of the departments housed in Hamilton Hall sent a letter to then chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz calling for the renaming of the building. The chairs claimed renaming the building was not only “the right thing to do; it is the right thing to do now.”

Hamilton Hall was named after Joseph Grégoire de Rouillac Hamilton, who was a history professor at UNC from 1908 to 1948 and helped to establish the Southern

Historical Collection. However, Hamilton openly supported racist policies and was a white supremacist, using his research to support Jim Crow-era laws.

Murray — who current faculty and students are campaigning to name the building after — was a gender-nonconforming Civil Rights Activist in North Carolina who played a critical role in the reversal of Plessy v. Ferguson and setting the groundwork for the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“Pauli’s personal activism and professional work in the 1930s and 1940s built the foundation for civil rights law in the ‘50s and the ‘60s, including the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act,” Pauli Murray Center Executive Director Angela Mason explained to QNotes in an earlier interview. “As a feminist, they helped to found the National Organization for Women, they advocated for the rights of black working

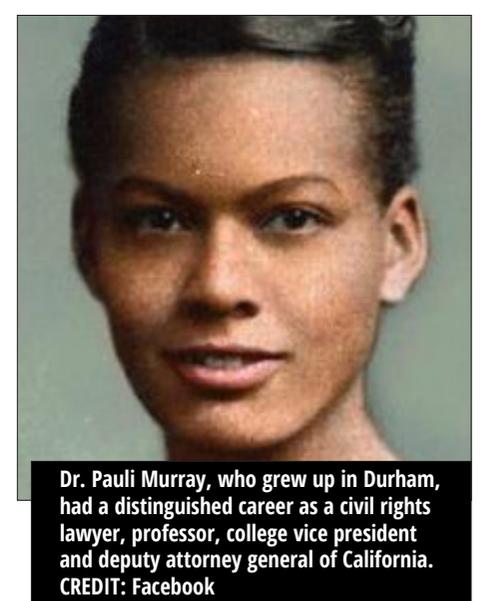
class women ... and they were the first perceived as a woman African American to be ordained an Episcopal priest.”

The process to remove a campus building’s name has many steps, starting with a written letter to the chancellor. The letter must state how the current name goes against University ethics, as well as provide evidence as to how it does. An appointed committee then meets to review the findings with the chancellor, who then decides if they are going to request removal to the Board of Trustees.

However, the board made it more difficult to rename buildings after the renaming of Saunders Hall to Carolina Hall. Per their policy, the request is deemed “weak” if the building’s namesake’s behavior was standard for the time and/or they made meaningful contributions to the university.

UNC Sophomore Kaili Monroe told The Daily Tar Heel in an interview she wants the push to rename buildings to continue and she is hopeful it will make students of color feel safer, as well as more included on campus.

“I think there are plenty of examples in the past where we’ve said, ‘Oh, they’ve had



good contributions, but they weren’t good people,” she said. “So we should look at how they treated other people, instead of just their contributions.” ::

—Taylor Heeden

Vice President Kamala Harris visits Charlotte

VP has long been an ally to the LGBTQ community



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Vice president Kamala Harris apparently likes North Carolina and it appears a lot of voters in the state have reciprocal feelings. She's been to Charlotte twice this year with a previous visit on January 11. In total, she's made 12 visits to the state since she was elected vice president.

Her reason for her latest visit to the Queen City? To open a campaign field office here, which will be one of 10 across the state. Not just to re-elect Biden and Harris, but to capture votes that are reflective of the state at large and elect more Democrats in the 2024 election.

On March 26, President Biden and Vice President Harris made an appearance in Raleigh to attend a private fundraising event and talk about their continuing efforts with affordable health care.

Mecklenburg County has remained a consistently blue county throughout the 21st century. Although Biden and Harris won the general election in 2020, Trump captured North Carolina by a razor thin 1.4 percent margin, labeling the state purple again, as it has remained since President Obama's first term in 2008.

With a continuing influx of new voters from blue states moving to parts of North

Carolina that typically identify as red, along with younger voters coming of age, progressives and moderates expect to see positive change in the state come election '24, despite district gerrymandering.

During Vice President Harris's recent visit to Charlotte she met with supporters and volunteers at the Naomi Drennan Recreation Center near Grier Heights, one of Charlotte's historically black neighborhoods.

"Elections matter," said Harris. "Organizing matters. Showing up matters. Remembering the strength and power of our voice matters. You know we're winning this election, right? We are winning this election."

Her visit to the state highlights the crucial role North Carolina will play in the upcoming collection.

But Harris didn't just talk politics. She also talked about clean energy grants specifically tagged for our state. "While every community has the capacity to join the clean energy community, not every community has had the opportunity to do that," she said.

"This is a new approach, which is saying we're going to put the federal dollars into communities directly and into the leaders in the community to then meet the needs that they uniquely know the community has.

"We're talking about real people, and their hopes and dreams and aspirations. It's a big deal."

Harris stressed that the grants were not just for cleaning up the environment and

global warming. She insisted they were also about new job opportunities and lowering the cost of utility services.

During her January appearance at Eastway Middle School, she talked about the administration's actions to reduce gun violence, and held a roundtable discussion with educators, counselors and gun safety advocates to announce funding from a bipartisan safer communities act. She also confirmed that North Carolina was likely set to receive 12 million dollars for mental health services in schools.

A longtime LGBTQ ally and advocate

Two years ago when Harris was honored at the Washington DC National HRC dinner, she spoke about her history with the LGBTQ+ community and her first experience in 1999 attending an HRC dinner in San Francisco.

It was there she reflected on the hard work of the LGBTQ+ community across the nation and how it resulted in the election of the Biden/Harris team. "The president and I are so proud to have led the most pro-equality administration in our nation's history," she said. "On the very first day we took office, President Biden expanded protections for LGBTQ+ Americans and housing, healthcare, education and the workplace.

"Working together, we are strengthening protection for LGBTQ+ children who live in foster care. We are combating the



Vice President Kamala Harris visited Charlotte to open a campaign field office.
CREDIT: Publicity image

dangerous and abusive practice of conversion therapy. And we reversed the ban on transgender service members. We are proud to have appointed leaders from this community and beyond to the highest levels of our administration.

An unwavering and long time ally and advocate to the LGBTQ+ community, vice president Harris spoke also about the importance of the continuing struggle for equality and acceptance during an appearance at the historic Stonewall Inn in New York last July during New York Pride.

"The LGBTQ+ movement is an expression of our love of our country and is rooted in an unwavering belief in the promise of freedom, equality and justice... Pride is, and has always been, patriotic. And as we confront the attacks on LGBTQ+ rights across the country, let us remember that we are in this together." ::



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Connecticut cites Mark Robinson's nomination as a reason for businesses to avoid North Carolina

The move mirrors similar actions made by companies and states after HB2 was signed into law in 2016



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

It seems North Carolina Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson is already impacting economic development in the state just after securing the GOP nomination, as Connecticut lawmakers target companies looking at North Carolina to conduct business.

Connecticut Democratic Senate leaders wrote an open letter to the state's Department of Economic and Community Development, saying the state should "explore opportunities to attract businesses from the state of North Carolina to relocate to Connecticut." Elected officials specifically mentioned Robinson's Republican gubernatorial nomination and his infamous inflammatory rhetoric, which targets LGBTQ+ residents and women.

"We are constantly looking for chances to diversify and strengthen our state's economy, and we believe there is a unique opportunity to reach out to businesses in North Carolina," Connecticut Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney wrote.

Robinson was first elected to office in 2020 and since being sworn in, he's

continued to spew misinformation regarding North Carolina's LGBTQ+ population, who make up over five percent of all of the state's residents. He's claimed "that God formed me" to fight against the push for LGBTQ rights and visibility, as well as publicly questioned women's ability to lead, if the Holocaust was "that bad" and openly offered that Jewish bankers secretly control the economy.

QNotes previously reported on how Robinson's rhetoric mirrored the same used in 2016 during the HB2 era and what that could mean for North Carolina. HB2 resulted in one of the largest economic fallouts in state history. The state lost \$4.8 billion in federal grants and contracts and over \$40 million in business investments, which resulted in the loss of over 1,250 jobs.

HB2 was ultimately repealed because of the backlash it received, and now, it's become clear Robinson brings an economic disadvantage to the gubernatorial office. In fact, The North Carolina Chamber of Commerce (who in the past has endorsed Republican candidates) wrote in a newsletter that the results of the primary election were a "startling warning of the looming threats to North Carolina's business climate."

"Many of the races we were watching

turned for candidates that do not share our vision for North Carolina," the chamber wrote, though they did not mention Robinson by name.

The open letter from Connecticut went on to say if Robinson wins the North Carolina governor's race, it will mean a mass exodus of businesses, and they hope to capitalize on that.

"These remarks not only undermine the values of inclusivity and tolerance of our nation, but should also raise significant concerns about the business environment and social climate in North Carolina under potential leadership that condones or ignores such divisive rhetoric," the Connecticut lawmakers' letter said. "In contrast, Connecticut prides itself on its commitment to diversity, equality, and fostering an environment where businesses can thrive while upholding ethical standards and respect for all."

Robinson's campaign responded to the concerns raised by the letter from Connecticut Democrats by doubling down on how Robinson believes Democrats are the real evil.

"Who cares what these northeastern liberals have to say?" Mike Lonergan, a spokesman for Robinson's campaign, said, according to WRAL. "Since they took



Mark Robinson's hateful rhetoric is already having a negative impact on the North Carolina economy.
CREDITS: Screen Capture

control of Connecticut, Democrats raised taxes and spending, creating a parade of jobs and businesses packing up and leaving their state. They should stop with silly PR stunts like this and take a page from North Carolina conservatives' book — cut taxes on families and businesses, reduce burdensome regulations and stop wasteful government spending." ::

Where is Andy Tench?

Charlotte Metro gay man was last seen March 25



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

In a social media account, Andy Tench readily identifies as an openly gay man. A native of Gaston County, he has called Belmont — a prominent Charlotte suburb — home base for most of his life. In recent years he made a move to Colorado, where he lived and worked in Denver.

He left Colorado in July of 2023 and returned to North Carolina. In the past year, Tench readapted to life in Belmont and Charlotte and reportedly made substantial positive progress in what had been a sometimes challenging life.

All of that seemingly came to a screeching halt on the late evening of March 24, or perhaps the early morning of March 25.

According to comments from his sister Natasha Newhouse, Tench left the home he shared with his mother and sister on the evening of March 24 to go out and celebrate his birthday, have a few drinks and shoot a few rounds of pool.

His destination turned out to be a Charlotte gay club known as The Bar at 316, which is located in Charlotte's Dilworth/Southend area.

Later that evening, or early in the next morning, his car was found unoccupied, first at one intersection headed east in Monroe and then two hours later at another intersection headed west back towards Charlotte.

Newhouse spoke with Qnotes through

social media messenger.

"We initially thought he was going to the Woodshed but turns out he went to another bar. We are not sure what happened after the bar closed or if he even stayed until closing. We are certain phone records and financial records have been obtained and they are working on leads. We don't believe he drove to Monroe where his car was located and towed."

When questioned further, Newhouse said that she wasn't sure if she should divulge the name of the bar at that time because she was concerned it might jeopardize investigation efforts by local police.

She punctuated that with the following statement: "They aren't wanting to tell us much."

Less than 24 hours later Newhouse and Tench's mother Tracii Blanton went public on a recently created Facebook page called "Find Andy Tench."

"Answers are not coming fast enough for us! We do know he was spotted at Bar 316. We plan to get as many people as we can to meet in the area and walk and see if we can find any signs of Andy or his belongings."

That was scheduled for April 6, but for unknown reasons, did not happen as planned.

Said Blanton on Facebook, "It was at Bar at 316, but got way off track. I'm planning another search for maybe this weekend if Andy isn't home by then. Will post as I get it organized. Hope you can join us."

Research through public set social media posts make it clear: Tench faced difficult challenges in his personal life, as indicated in this

Facebook comment, dated June 24, 2022.

"Since I lost my partner six months ago, I haven't met another person because it's too hard to move on. I am six months sober from meth and alcohol, and I'm proud of myself but now I'm in a very tough situation ... I just started my new job after being laid off and after paying for this room they want to reimburse me the difference. I will be homeless on July 1 and my car has two flat tires. I know that I should be making it on my own and I'm trying my hardest and I know I will make it ... I never saw this coming..."

On October 14, he posted another sad and disconcerting comment:

"Seeking help after a suicide attempt at the beginning of this year has just caused me to get disqualified for a job."

It also appears he and his family had a history of difficulties.

A post on Facebook from December 2018: "Attention family! Let me speak my mind for a second... Family comes first no matter what... I'm ashamed on both sides to call some of you my family. It's f*cking Christmas. If you all can't straighten your sh*t up, I will not be visiting for a very long time."

And Tench was never anything less than upfront about his life and political viewpoints. Throughout posts on social media he is known to have confirmed his sexual orientation as early as 2015. He showed his support for Ukraine in the ongoing conflict with Russia and his opposition to harassment of Black males by police forces; and his support for trans individuals who have suffered the ignorance of fanatical right wingers across



Sometimes troubled, yet often deeply compassionate: at press time Andy Tench had not been seen for nearly two weeks.
CREDIT: Facebook

the country on multiple occasions.

Despite the challenges he faced in his own life and with his family, it appears amends were made and bonds were reconstructed. He is seen on social media posing with them at family Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations just this past year.

During the holiday season he posted: "Had a wonderful Thanksgiving with the fam. First one I've been a part of since 2016. Love you all so much!"

In one of his last written posts before his disappearance, Tench indicated he was seemingly finding a place of happiness and self-worth.

"It's easy," he wrote, "to be happy when you are surrounded by people who see the best in you, rather than the problems in you."

At press time, there was no new information regarding Tench's whereabouts. ::

Four LGBTQ+ Appalachian State staff fired, raising questions from students and faculty

All terminated parties were affiliated with the Queer and Trans Staff and Faculty group on campus



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

Four LGBTQ+ Appalachian State University staff members have been terminated since last year, according to reporting from Inside Higher Ed. When the employees asked for a reason behind their termination, the university responded by saying “North Carolina is an at-will state.”

According to the website labor.nc.gov, the term used, “at-will,” means that unless there is a specific law to protect employees or there is an employment contract providing otherwise, then an employer can treat its employees as it sees fit – including the assignment of tasks – and the employer can discharge an employee at the will of the employer for any reason or no reason at all.

That does raise a question: can the fired employees expect any protection against possible LGBTQ+ employment discrimination from the federal level Title VII law, which applies nationwide and protects employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity?

The four people who were dismissed include Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Educational Development Jax Lastinger (they/them); Interpersonal Violence Specialist Sarah Hoffert (she/her); Title IX Investigator MB Bowen (they/them); and Housekeeper Kora Smith (she/her).

All of these people came from different departments in the university, but all of them had one thing in common: they were affiliated with Queer and Trans Staff and Faculty (QTSAF) – a special group dedicated to bringing LGBTQ+ staff together.

These four individuals have raised



Appalachian State administration has denied any attempts to eliminate or reduce DEI programs or terminate employees supportive of those initiatives. CREDIT: Facebook

concerns regarding this, saying they believe it may be part of an effort by the university to cut back on DEI programming and restrict pride events. The General Assembly in March 2023 requested information regarding the cost of DEI training and how much of the state’s university system budget is used to pay for them.

The firings started in March 2023 when one of QTSAF’s leaders, Bowen, was fired. Hoffert, who worked with students who were victims of violence on campus, told Inside Higher Ed she was involved in heated arguments with her previous supervisor in

the months leading up to her termination over what she said was unequal access to remote work and chances to grow professionally. However, when she was terminated, the current supervisor wasn’t even in the same room.

“I just found out one day in October, which was like the busiest month for reports for sexual violence ... they were like, ‘Today’s your last day, you won’t be able to act in any way as an employee of the university,’” she said. “I couldn’t even sign into my email after that.”

Smith — who is very active in the App

State LGBTQ+ community — was also a leader in QTSAF. She said she was always misgendered or called by her dead name while working as a housekeeper, and though Smith filed complaints, nothing was ever done about it.

“The whole thing felt really rushed and under the table and unprofessional,” Smith said. She went on to explain she was often given more work than other housekeepers, which caused the quality of her work to suffer. She also received no notice of her termination.

App State administration has denied any attempts to eliminate or reduce DEI programs or terminate employees who are supportive of those initiatives.

“We are committed to the work of our strategic plan, which includes cultivating and supporting a welcoming university community and an academic culture of collaboration and respect through education and inclusive practices, as well as the UNC System goals related to providing academic, financial, and cultural support for students from all walks of life,” Megan Hayes, a spokesperson for the university, told Inside Higher Ed in an email.

While the university continues to be adamant it’s not actively trying to wipe out these programs, Hoffert says the impact of these firings is still going to be felt by students.

“I think it’s harmful to students. I think it is harmful to the [campus] environment,” she said. “Honestly, before I got fired, it was scary to see it happen to other people, and I just think employees deserve a safer, better environment, and queer people deserve to feel like they’re not targeted.” ::

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Juicy Body Goddess goes viral on TikTok

Boutique empowers plus size and trans women



by Taylor Heeden
Qnotes Staff Writer

Summer Lucille wasn't always comfortable in her own skin.

She graduated from college with a degree in computer science and worked at Bank of America in Charlotte. On the outside, it appeared Lucille was living the life people dream of, but for her, it wasn't fulfilling.

"That nine [to] five job, it was just so boring," she explained. "I was going crazy because it wasn't fulfilling."

Then, in 2011, Lucille's life changed when she unexpectedly lost her mother. Six months later, she was laid off from her job with Bank of America, and it was then Lucille decided to find work in something she was truly passionate about.

"I did technology just to have that future security, financially, but then sometimes you just gotta do what you love," she said. "I've really wanted to try it and just live and see what's really something I want to do, and now, here we are."

Fast forward to present day: Lucille owns the TikTok viral Juicy Body Goddess Boutique — a safe haven for plus-size women of all walks of life.

When Lucille was first beginning her search for her passion, she opened Material Girl Hair — her own wig and hair extension business. When she opened Material Girl Hair, she began to experiment with selling clothes and getting more and more into the fashion scene. However, she only sold clothes for slim bodies at first, only carrying womens sizes two through 10. The reason behind this, according to Lucille, was because of her own lack of confidence.

"I've done every diet, starving myself," she recalled. "I did that for years...I didn't have the confidence, and I hated myself to a point where I didn't want to be fat, so I didn't want to identify with being fat. So, I went into just selling smaller clothes because I had this sick image pushing on mine."

Lucille's confidence at the time was at a low point — she was still grappling with the pain of losing her mother while

trying to get her business off the ground. In 2016, Lucille faced another challenge: her relationship with a boyfriend of eight years ended.

The breakup pushed Lucille enough to prove herself, so she opened a new business, one where plus-sized women like herself could shop without worrying if the store carries their size.

Juicy Body Goddess was born and was originally marketed as a fashion line offered inside of Material Girl Hair on N. Tryon Street in Charlotte. For the first four years of Juicy Body Goddess, Lucille used her job as a way to distract herself from the pain she was still experiencing after losing her mother.

Then, the world stopped in 2020 when "nonessential" businesses were forced to shut their doors as COVID-19 surged across the United States.

"When COVID happened, I had to sit down, and I only could look at me, that changed everything," she said. "I had to deal and unpack a decade of pain and trauma in a few months ... COVID was the best thing that happened to me because I had to face it."

Fast forward to March 2021: Stores were once again open to customers, though with some restrictions. Lucille decided to create a TikTok account for Juicy Body Goddess, especially as the app had blown up over the quarantine months.

She started posting videos, garnering national attention for Juicy Body Goddess's mission of empowering and lifting up women from all walks of life. After Lucille's first viral video, the store's account gained almost 400,000 new followers. Now, Juicy Body Goddess has 1.4 million followers and counting.

People from all over the country book appointments for consultations at Juicy Body Goddess. In fact, when QNotes' own Jim Yarbrough was at the store taking pictures of Lucille, there was a girl and her family from Colorado trying on dresses.

"I just try to give them a little bit of love," Lucille said. "I just want people to feel safe, and I want them to feel just like everyone else when they shop."

Empowering LGBTQ+ women one consultation at a time

There is a rule regarding how customers are treated at Juicy Body Goddess: "Treat them like Beyonce."

"I don't treat them like gold, I treat them like Beyonce," Lucille said. "You are royalty. You are a celebrity, and I want to make sure everyone is treated that way."

That rule is applied to anyone who walks through the store's doors, but especially for those women who've struggled in their journey to self-love and self-acceptance. A group who Lucille realized needed special attention, reassurance and confidence-boosting experiences is trans women.

Lucille is originally from Columbus, Ohio, where she said



Juicy Body Goddess owner Summer Lucille combs through racks of clothes for a consultation at her store. CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

the LGBTQ+ community was very present. So when she moved to the South and learned how queer and trans people were treated, she was shocked.

"It finally hit me what trans people have to go through down here," Lucille explained. "I knew I had to do something."

When Juicy Body Goddess outgrew its first location, it moved to Northlake Mall.

Lucille was able to add different types of consultations to the services offered at Juicy Body Goddess. One of the consultations Lucille offers is called the "Gender Affirming 1-on-1," which is designed to "assist in learning how to dress your body to achieve your dream look, help you customize and curate your wardrobe, and nail down what styles look and make you feel like your best self."

"Some just want that privacy — they just don't want a lot of people looking at them," she explained. "Some just want to come in at a different time so [there are] so many different reasons why they have their own consultation."

Lucille said she doesn't want to stop there — a few weeks prior to interviewing with QNotes, she had a young girl come in for a prom consultation with her parents, wanting to find a suit to wear to her prom. Her parents quickly voiced their opinions, saying she couldn't wear a suit to the prom and so therefore, she could only try on dresses. So that's what she did — about seven to eight dresses, to be exact.

"No matter what dress she tried on, he wasn't gonna like it because it wasn't what she wanted, and in my heart I knew," Lucille recalled. "I told her that I will tell her parents I don't have a dress for her if that's what you want me to do — she could blame me."

That experience moved Lucille, and now, she wants to find a way to give teen girls who may be closeted or have close-minded families a safe haven where they

can put on the clothes they want to wear.

"Young people, they really have a tough way if their parents are very close-minded conservatives and they're stuck until they're 18 and they do a no contact type of situation," she explained. "I want to do those types of appointments, just for people to feel safe, feel normal, feel like everybody else."



Window display for Juicy Body Goddess at Northlake Mall. CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

Juicy Body Goddess is meant to be a true, safe space for those women who don't always see their size hanging on the racks of most stores. It's a place where Lucille hopes women like her can feel confident and beautiful in their bodies, and in turn, they can love themselves just a little more.

"I wanted a safe space where bigger girls can go in, and it's just for us," she said. "You walk in to Juicy Body Goddess, you see bigger people working — we all have flabby arms, we all have bellies, and the customers feel comfortable with someone like them. It sends a message...I want them to feel welcome and I want them to know it's safe." ::



Summer Lucille is the proud owner of Juicy Body Goddess Boutique, a store made just for plus-sized women. CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

Las Vegas

Pride Journey



by **Joey Amato**
Qnotes Staff Writer

Las Vegas, known for its vibrant and inclusive atmosphere, embraces LGBTQ culture with open arms, making it a thriving hub for the community. Iconic events like the annual Las Vegas Pride Parade and Festival bring together people from all walks of life to celebrate diversity and unity. Las Vegas Pride is typically in early October so start planning now.

The city's commitment to inclusivity is reflected in the diverse range of LGBTQ-friendly accommodations, ensuring that visitors feel welcome and respected. Beyond the nightlife, Las Vegas hosts a variety of LGBTQ-focused community organizations, support groups, and cultural events that contribute to the rich tapestry of the city's inclusive ethos. Whether exploring the famous entertainment offerings or participating in community-driven initiatives, LGBTQ individuals and allies alike find a warm and accepting home in the vibrant tapestry of LGBTQ culture in Las Vegas.

Ever since I was young, I have always wanted to stay at Bellagio. Their iconic foundations have fascinated me for decades. The hotel stands as an epitome of luxury and sophistication, offering an unparalleled experience that seamlessly blends opulence, entertainment, and fine dining. From the moment you step into the grand lobby, it's evident that Bellagio is committed to providing a world-class stay, especially when you glance at the ceiling adorned with Chihuly glass sculptures.

I stayed in a recently renovated room in the Spa Tower with an unobstructed view of the Vegas strip and the fountains. The attention to detail is evident in the tasteful decor, plush furnishings and modern amenities. Beginning at 3 p.m. on weekdays and noon on weekends, the choreographed water show set against the backdrop of the Las Vegas Strip is a mesmerizing display of artistry, combining music, light and water in perfect harmony. It sets the tone for the exquisite experiences that await within Bellagio.

Bellagio is also home to the famous Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, a lush oasis that undergoes seasonal transformations, displaying stunning floral displays and thematic installations. This botanical escape provides a serene contrast to the lively atmosphere of the casino and the bustling Strip. During our stay, the staff were completing their new Springtime exhibition, which gave us Alice in Wonderland vibes.

For those seeking entertainment, Bellagio offers the spectacular "O" by Cirque du Soleil, a water-themed extravaganza that complements the hotel's overall theme. Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art is another cultural gem within the hotel,



featuring rotating exhibitions that display masterpieces from around the world.

Although it is possible to never leave the hotel, we wanted to experience other MGM Resorts properties, so we headed to LPM at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas for dinner. LPM offers an exquisite dining experience that effortlessly marries Mediterranean charm with the vibrant energy of the Strip. From the moment you step through the entrance, you are greeted by an ambiance that strikes a perfect balance between sophistication and conviviality.

LPM's interior is a visual feast, adorned with chic decor, warm lighting, and an intimate atmosphere. The combination of contemporary design elements and classic French accents creates a welcoming space that feels both elegant and comfortable. Whether you're celebrating a special occasion or seeking a romantic dinner, LPM's ambiance sets the stage for an unforgettable dining experience.

LPM's menu is a culinary triumph, highlighting the rich and diverse flavors of the French Riviera. The emphasis on fresh, high-quality ingredients is evident in every dish. We began our meal with a variety of appetizers, including the Yellowtail

Carpaccio, Escargots, and their signature Burrata prepared with heritage tomatoes and basil and topped with white truffles. For our main courses, we decided to focus on seafood entrees, so we tried the Lobster Risotto and grilled Chilean Bass. Both were prepared to perfection and paired very well together if you are looking to share entrees.

Of course, one of the biggest attractions of Las Vegas is the strip itself. Spend a few hours meandering through each hotel and taking in the Vegas vibe. There is no other place in the world quite like it.

If you are in the mood for a little adventure, head to Area15, located about 10 minutes from the strip. Area15 is an immersive entertainment complex that blends art, technology, and entertainment in a unique and captivating way. Boasting an otherworldly exterior and a dynamic interior, Area15 is home to a variety of innovative experiences, including interactive art installations and virtual reality adventures. Its anchor tenant, the Meow Wolf's Omega Mart, is a surreal supermarket-like environment filled with mind-bending art and hidden mysteries. The venue also hosts concerts and live events including Beyond Brunch, a variety show hosted by

drag queen extraordinaire Andrew Ryan. The 2-hour spectacle includes a wonderful buffet and performances by talented acts ranging from hoop dancers to Cirque-style entertainers. The show is well worth the price of admission; it is not your typical drag brunch.

Spend the afternoon touring Area15 or head to The Sphere, Las Vegas' newest concert venue. Rock icons U2 opened the venue with a 40-night run, but guests can purchase tickets to Darren Aronofsky's multisensory film Postcard from Earth.

For a trip down memory lane, especially if you were born in the '70s or '80s, check out Retro by Voltaggio at Mandalay Bay. The restaurant owned by Top Chef stars, Bryan and Michael Voltaggio, takes diners on a nostalgic journey through time, blending modern culinary techniques with comforting flavors reminiscent of classic American dishes set in a retro-chic environment. The space is adorned with quirky memorabilia, neon accents and a colorful palette that captures a sense of nostalgia without feeling overly kitschy, creating a welcoming environment for diners to unwind and enjoy the culinary adventure.

Retro by Voltaggio's menu is a playful exploration of classic American favorites. We started our dinner with the deviled eggs with smoked trout roe along with the beet steak tartare, which was incredible. Next came the bluefin tuna ceviche served over coconut crushed ice. For our entrees we tried the trout meuniere, which was served in a lemon and caper sauce, as well as the lobster thermidor with lobster waffles...yes, you read that correctly. It was as delicious as it sounds.

Save room for the dessert cart which contains innovative creations that satisfy the sweet tooth. Whether you're a fan of nostalgic flavors or simply seeking a unique and enjoyable meal, Retro by Voltaggio is worth the visit.

After dinner, catch a performance of Michael Jackson "ONE" by Cirque du Soleil also at Mandalay Bay. The show is a captivating tribute to the King of Pop that seamlessly blends the magic of Cirque du Soleil with the timeless music and iconic choreography of Michael Jackson. From the moment the lights dim to the final bow, the show is a high-energy, emotionally charged celebration of the legendary entertainer's life and legacy. This isn't your typical Cirque du Soleil show and is more like a concert featuring all of Michael's greatest hits, memorable dance moves, and state-of-the-art production. I felt like "ONE" is the type of concert Michael would have wanted to perform if he were still with us.

The thing I like most about Vegas is it is always evolving. Every time you visit, there is something new to see or do. Viva Las Vegas!

Enjoy the Journey! ::

Glitter and Life

An interview with Emily Saliers of Indigo Girls



by Gregg Shapiro
Qnotes Staff Writer

The Indigo Girls – Emily Saliers and Amy Ray – are having a moment. Since the release of Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie” movie in the summer of 2023, in which the queer duo’s “Closer to Fine” was heard repeatedly, to today, when they are prominently featured in Tom Gustafson’s “Glitter & Doom” and Alexandria Bombach’s doc “Indigo Girls: It’s Only Life After All,” Indigo Girls are hotter than ever. That’s just the half of it! In addition to a well-received performance on the “Today” show, Indigo Girls are embarking on a multi-city concert tour, including several dates with Melissa Etheridge. In the midst of their super busy schedule, Emily was generous enough to make time for an interview. [Indigo Girls perform on April 12 at Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts in Boone.]

Gregg Shapiro: In the introduction to my favorable review of Alexandria Bombach’s documentary “Indigo Girls: It’s Only Life After All,” I talk about how since the summer of 2023, when “Closer to Fine” was featured prominently in Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie” to today when we are speaking, Indigo Girls are having an amazing year. So, I’d like to begin by asking you to say what it meant to you to have “Closer to Fine” heard in “Barbie.”

Emily Saliers: First of all, it was a huge surprise to be asked. And it was an honor because both Amy and I adore Greta Gerwig’s work. It just kind of fell out of the sky, this massive gift. We knew it was going to be in the trailer, but we didn’t know it was gonna be in the film. We certainly didn’t know that was going to be featured in its own way in terms of its content in the movie. It was so exciting and so gratifying because we love Greta’s work. I loved the movie, too. I thought it was amazing on so many levels. The issues it delved into, the way it looked, how stylized it was, how funny it was, how clever, and the dancing. The whole thing was like this big experience. So, to have “Closer to Fine” included in something that I really loved so much as a piece of art was fantastic. Then, of course, there was a spike in interest, I think, in the Indigo Girls’ music. What a gift that was to come out of nowhere and take hold. I think we’re still feeling the repercussions of that in a positive way.

GS: As I mentioned, I enjoyed the doc “It’s Only Life After All.” How did it feel to be the subject of a documentary and have your life and career highlighted that way?

ES: We met Alexandria, the director, through Kathlyn Horan who was one of the producers on the documentary. We had lunch together and she said, “I’d like to make a documentary about y’all. I can see that that’s never been done before.” In our conversations, we were clear with Alexandria that we wanted it to be not so much just about us, but about our community. About



CREDIT: Facebook

a community that has gone through these things together. I think she handled that very deftly and respectfully. Instead of feeling like, “Here’s a movie about y’all,” it feels more like here’s a movie about the power of music and community. Especially for queer folks or people who don’t fit inside a box, for them to have an openness and expression. And for us to go through our hard times in life together. The fact that it landed within the scope of the time of “Barbie” and “Glitter & Doom,” was just kind of like, “Wow! What is happening?” This is like the giving season for the Indigo Girls.

GS: I’m glad you mentioned “Glitter & Doom.” When I interviewed Amy in 2023 about her solo album (“If It All Goes South”), I asked her about the possibility of a stage musical consisting of Indigo Girls songs, and that’s when I learned about “Glitter & Doom.” The movie not only incorporates many Indigo Girls songs, but you also appear in the movie as the character of The Dream. What was that experience like for you?

ES: We read the script -- we get script submissions sometimes -- but this one really stood out. We loved the story. Then we heard the music, Michelle Chamuel’s

arrangements and production, and how our music was arranged, produced, and performed in a way that we’d never heard before. That was really exciting for us and we loved it. We love Tom (Gustafson) and Cory (Krueckeberg) who co-directed the film (written by Krueckeberg). To be a cameo – Amy, I think, was terrified. Amy will tell you she does not like to act. I think she did an amazing job. For me, it was exciting. I was in high school theater, and I don’t mind that. We had a different experience of actually being in the film. We both love the movie and it just premiered in a theater in New York. It’s so well done. It’s a colorful and well-directed film with the songs. The actors are captivating. I love the story. Again, it was this wonderful piece of art that someone was creating that they invited us to be part of with our music. That feels good. Also, the other thing, Gregg, that’s important to me and Amy, is that when we were coming up, I remember this growing up as a young queer in Atlanta; there was a divide between the gay male world and the lesbian world. There was the complexity of the horror of the AIDS crisis, but beyond that, there was a separation, sort of never the twain shall meet. I feel like this experience with Tom and Cory and the gay male presence, the queer presence

in the film, and then bringing in the lesbian artists to contribute was such a great energy and a great confluence of things that historically has not always happened. It’s sort of like bringing all the queers together. That was profoundly moving to me and Amy, as well. I think it was important. I don’t know if you remember that divide.

GS: I do! We’re close in age, and I remember that divide within the community. When I would tell people about “Glitter & Doom,” about how it features the Indigo Girls’ music, they would ask if it was a movie about a lesbian couple. I’d tell them, no, it’s about a male couple and they’d say, “Wow! Indigo Girls songs in a movie about a gay male couple!” So, yes, you’re right. “Glitter & Doom” attempts to bridge that gap.

ES: It does. I knew it, intellectually, but sitting in the theater and experiencing it was a whole other thing. It brought to life the way that queer people come together and the power of that, artistically, politically, socially, in every realm. Amy was sitting there in the theater experiencing the same thing and we didn’t realize it until we started answering questions during the Q&A after the film was shown.

GS: “Glitter & Doom” also includes a song from your 2017 solo album “Murmuration Nation.” What does that inclusion mean to you?

ES: When I heard the way it’s treated in the movie, it was so thrilling. I wrote that song, “Match,” with Kristen Hall, one of the original members of Sugarland. It takes a seed of a song that was written so long ago for fun with a friend, and it makes it become this whole world of its own in the context of the movie. I love the way it was treated musically. In a way, it’s like sitting outside of something and hearing something beautiful, but then it’s connected to you because you created it. It’s hard to articulate, but I thought it was really cool that they included a solo song from each of us in the whole body of work for the movie. For me, sitting there as an audience member, I was like, “Oh, who wrote this song? It’s pretty. This is really working [laughs].” It was the experience of being outside and inside at the same time and I don’t get to experience that a lot. It was really cool.

GS: We’re speaking on March 28, and later today Indigo Girls perform at David Geffen Hall in New York, and the concert includes a conversation with the brilliant music journalist Ann Powers. What are you most looking forward to about that?

ES: Amy and I have the utmost respect for Ann Powers. When we first met her, we were so intimidated, I don’t think we could barely speak [laughs]. Now, our paths have crossed through the years. To sit in an intimate gathering and talk with Ann, it’s always an honor to have anything mediated by Ann. She’s such a stellar journalist, a journalist of incredible pedigree. It’s going to be intimate because Amy and I won’t be standing up at our mic stands and doing a whole show. We’re seated and we’re playing songs and Ann is asking questions about the process.

It's going to be a much more intimate experience. Of course, to be in New York, it's one of my very favorite places to play. We're looking forward to it. Lincoln Center is beautiful. It's sold out. They're going to be showing it on big screens outside the theater, and that will be cool, too. I'm looking forward to the whole experience of it.

GS: Speaking of concerts, Indigo Girls are touring with Melissa Etheridge. How did this amazing combination come to be?

ES: It is so cool! We've never done anything like this with Melissa. Of course, we have such respect for her career and her music. She was doing one of those rock cruises and we got invited to be on that, and we couldn't do it. But the speed was planted. After all these years, there was interest from both parties to play some shows together. Then it turned out to be playing summer sheds together. She'll have her thing and we'll have our band, and we'll do some stuff together. Then it turned into this run of shows. When we first announced to a crowd that we were doing shows with Melissa Etheridge, it was in the Northeast somewhere, people screamed [laughs]! It was like, "Okay, this is a good decision." We've been in touch with each other about doing a song together or whatever the case may be. It's the first time we've done something like this with a storied artist like Melissa and we're both so excited.

GS: Additionally, on Sept. 1 Indigo Girls are playing Town Hall in Provincetown.

ES: Woo hoo!

GS: This made me wonder if Lea DeLaria, who not only appears in "Glitter & Doom," but is also a presence in PTOWN might be joining the Indigo Girls for a number.

ES: We haven't heard from Lea, but we would always welcome Lea with open arms, of course. We love Lea, and if Lea is there, of course we'll do something together. But we haven't gone through official lines. Maybe you're putting the bug in Lea's ear right now.

GS: I'm sure you don't need to be reminded, but it's been four years since the release of the Indigo Girls' "Look Long" album. Is there a new Indigo Girls album in the works?

ES: It's kind of floating in the ether. Everything is meeting at this juncture where we have the documentary and "Glitter & Doom," and then "Barbie" happened, and we're doing a lot of symphony shows and touring. At the same time, Amy has a 10-

year-old-daughter and I have an 11-year-old daughter. We're feeling the pain of missing life. So, we're trying to orchestrate how to keep our lives in balance with home life and touring. Then Amy had a super long tour with her solo band. And I'm writing for musical theater. To answer your question, as we're getting older we just seem to be getting busier [laughs] with these projects that are all wonderful. We have talked about the next album, and we started tossing around ideas, but we're going to take a little bit of a mental break this summer and spend time with our family. Then I'm sure we'll be refreshed after that and from the tour with Melissa and Amos Lee and start to really focus in on when we can do the next album. There will be a next album, it's just been such a busy time.

GS: Finally, because Indigo Girls are renowned for their activism, do you have any words of wisdom regarding the upcoming 2024 election?

ES: [Long pause] I'm just going to come out and say I'm voting for Biden. I'm going to say that it is absolutely critical that if you're of voting age and ability, you have to vote. You cannot be distracted by the media that may pull you one way or another. I encourage you not to be distracted by a feeling of, "Well, my vote doesn't count," because this election is as critical as any election has ever been. We're seeing a shift after Roe V. Wade was overturned in local and state politics. The onslaught of legislation against queer people, particularly trans people; conservatives are coming for all our rights, all of them, I would say, please vote, vote progressive. Don't be distracted by anything, even if you feel you have to vote for the lesser of two evils in your mind, vote for the lesser of two evils. This is an absolutely critical juncture for obvious reasons. I truly believe that the fabric of democracy is coming apart in this country, but we have to protect our queer family. We are under attack, and you have to vote for the candidate who supports us. That candidate is obviously Biden. It's extremely important to vote in your local elections because conservatives who are anti-queer are taking over school boards. You know what they're doing; banning books. Gregg, I could spend the next 20 minutes imploring anybody who's reading this to vote through a progressive lens. They're coming after us and we need to stand up for equal rights and for the future of democracy in this country. ::



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“Unswerving: A Novel”

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Qnotes Contributing Writer

“Unswerving: A Novel” by Barbara Ridley
c.2024, University of Wisconsin Press
\$19.95
227 pages

It happened in a heartbeat. A split-second, a half a breath, that’s all it took. It was so quick, so sharp-edged that you can almost draw a line between before and after, between then and now. Will anything ever be the same again? Perhaps, but maybe not. As in the new book “Unswerving” by Barbara Ridley, things change, and so might you.

She could remember lines, hypnotizing yellow ones spaced on a road, and her partner, Les, asleep in the seat beside her. It was all so hazy. Everything Tave Greenwich could recall before she woke up in a hospital bed felt like a dream.

It was as though she’d lost a month of her life.

“Life,” if you even wanted to call it that – which she didn’t. Tave’s hands resembled claws bent at the wrist. Before the accident, she was a talented softball catcher but now she could barely get her arms to raise above



her shoulders. She could hear her stomach gurgle, but she couldn’t feel it. Paralyzed from the chest down, Tave had to have help with even the most basic care.

She was told that she could learn some skills again, if she worked hard. She was told that she’d leave rehab someday soon. What nobody told her was how Les, Leslie, her partner, girlfriend, love, was doing after the accident.

Physical therapist Beth Farrington was reminded time and again not to get

over-involved with her patients, but she saw something in Tave that she couldn’t ignore. Beth was on the board of directors of a group that sponsored sporting events for disabled athletes, she knew people who could serve as role models for Tave, and she knew that all this could ease Tave’s adjustment into her new life. It was probably not entirely in her job description, but Beth couldn’t stop thinking of ways to help Tave who, at twenty-three, was practically a baby.

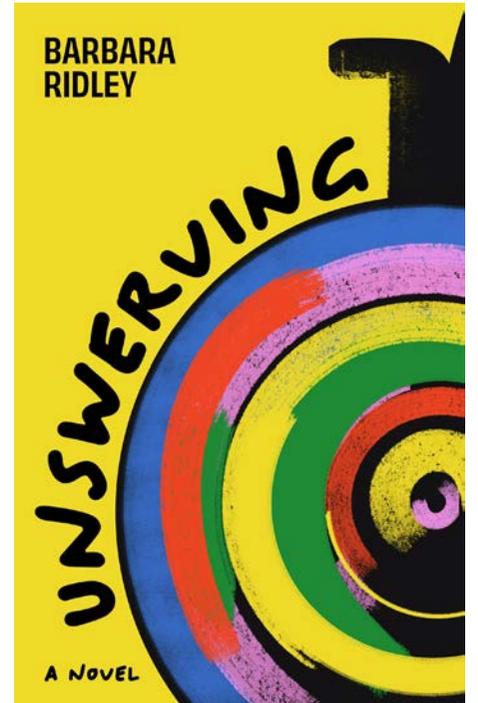
She could, for instance, take Tave on outings or help find Les – even though it made Beth’s own girlfriend, Katy, jealous...

So, here’s a little something to know before you start reading “Unswerving”: Author Barbara Ridley is a former nurse-practitioner who used to care for patients with spinal cord injuries. That should give readers a comfortable sense of satisfaction, knowing that her experiences give this novel an authenticity that feels right and rings true, no faking.

But that’s not the only appeal of this book: While there are a few minor things that might have readers shaking their heads (HIPAA, anyone?), Ridley’s characters are mostly lifelike and mostly likable. Even the nasties are well-done, and the mysterious character that’s there-not-there boosts the appeal. Put everyone together, twist a little bit to the left, give them some plotlines that can’t be ruined by early guessing, and you’ve

got a quick-read novel that you can enjoy and feel good about sharing.

And share you will because this is a book that may also open a few eyes and make readers think. Start “Unswerving” and you’ll (heart) it. ::

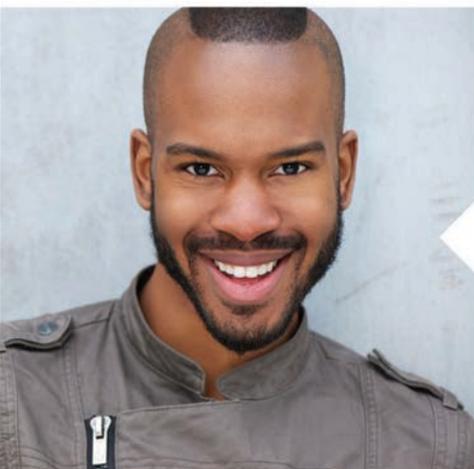


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Luvleeh

Our People



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

About four decades ago a music teacher and a substance abuse counselor had a lovely baby girl. Today, she's all grown up and goes by the name Luvleeh, though her parents named her Leandra Juanita Hill.

At 18, Hill adopted a new name, a hybrid of her birth name. Initially, the change came about as a result of her need to create an email account with a sign-on name that hadn't yet been taken. But it was bigger than that. The sign-on handle that she became known by was an affirmation for a young woman who didn't feel pretty, accepted or love for herself.

Luv plus Lee (her family nickname) and an H at the end for Hill became Luvleeh – a Black and queer creative artist who today, loves herself and does a darn good job of supporting and showing love to others as well.

Luvleeh will be appearing at Charlotte's annual BOOM Arts Festival at the end of this month for multiple performances. During this interview, we took the opportunity to learn about the woman and her words.

L' Monique King: Where are you originally from?

LJH: Newburgh, New York. Good ol' Hudson Valley.

LMK: Do you have any siblings?

LJH: I have two brothers, both older.

LMK: How long have you lived in Charlotte?

LJH: I've been here on and off my whole life visiting family but officially moved here in 2006, left in 2009 and returned in 2012.

LMK: Where in Charlotte do you live?

LJH: East Charlotte, so I'm told. <Chuckles> In an apartment.

LMK: Do you share your living space with anyone special?

LJH: Yes, my mother. I'm so grateful to share a space with her [as her daughter and caretaker] and Shakespeare and Angelou, my two dogs.

LMK: What brought you to the Carolinas this time around?

LJH: School. Elizabeth State University. But I fell in love with the South. I always felt good here. Whenever I visited as a child, I'd stay with my grandmother. She was such a free-spirited carefree grandma. We played outside, she taught us how to swim and how to play spades <laughter>.

LMK: How do you identify?

LJH: As of today, Queer. It didn't start out that way, but I found myself [through] the years and understanding that for me, it's just above love. I started out as bisexual and went through several of the letters identifying the LGBTQIA+ [commu-



As she readies for her upcoming Boom Charlotte appearances, Luvleeh the poet and spoken word artist talks about being queer and creative in the Carolinas
CREDIT: Leandra Juanita Hill

nity] and eventually found my happy place identifying as Queer.

LMK: How'd you get into performing your poetry?

LJH: Poetry first came in my youth after finding my brother's poem about the relationship he had with my mom. I took it, folded it up and kept it in my wallet for years, before losing it. Later, while attending ECSU [Elizabeth City State University] they had an open mic. At the time, I was too afraid to perform [my work] so I had a friend perform my poem. She did a good job, but it wasn't how I wanted it delivered so I tried it for myself. After that I took speech and debate classes which spear-headed me to being more comfortable on stage. Later that year at another ECSU event I met J. Ivy [James Ivy Richardson] – the first poet to win a Grammy for a Spoken Word Album and was further inspired to continue to perfect my craft.

LMK: What's the Charlotte Queer Creative scene like?

LJH: I wish I could honestly say more about it, but outside of parties I don't know and that's solely because I don't see it existing where I am. At one time I was like the resident poet for "Free Your Mind," an open mic [event]. Through "Free Your Mind" there were other events and opportunities for members of the community to perform. It was great, and fluid. But once the organizers moved away – I really didn't have any other connections to creative things going on.

LMK: What's happening in your poetic life now?

LJH: Currently I host an open mic that's open to all art forms "Say It Tuesdays." It's free and we keep it free because we have a lot of artists who have come to us over the years who did not

have housing or a platform to express themselves. Keeping it free means artists of all types have a place to come – even if they're sleeping in their cars. Outside of that I have – there's Boom and several other events coming up. I'm featuring at "Soul, Sticks and Stilettos" [an open mic] in Concord. And I'm always available for bookings of all types – private, commercial, non-profit, festivals, the works.

LMK: What if any challenges come with being a Black female Queer Spoken Word Artist?

LJH: I don't know if it's because of all those things but I recently realized that we're not represented a lot. I don't see us existing in spaces where I think we should exist. It's very male dominated [the poetry scene].

LMK: Who are your top three favorite poets, known or unknown, living or not?

LJH: Poet Gold, she's a Black lesbian woman from Poughkeepsie, New York; Sir Abstraxxx, I listen to him on Spotify and he's from Charlotte. And oh! Tank from Tank the Bangers, she's literally talked me off a ledge.

LMK: What have you not written about that you would like to?

LJH: I really want to write more spiritual poetry. I write about my own journey and my own healing but I've never written about the other side of being in tune with myself spiritually. I've written about trauma, survival energy – but now I want to write about how I experience and nurture my own African spirituality and put that into words.

LMK: What's the best thing about performing for you?

LJH: Everything that I could be dealing

with in my day to day [life] gets left on the stage because I can pour out my art and that is my healing, my walk. There are times when being on stage has saved me from going into a dark space. It's my medicine.

LMK: What is the worst thing about performing for you?

LJH: Judgment, because I am not a poet who has my poetry memorized.

LMK: When you're not writing, reciting or organizing a poetry event, what are you doing?

LJH: I am taking care of my mother, creating artwork, making jewelry, pressing shirts, volunteering, walking my dogs, probably crying because I need to release some shit or finding something to get into like an art gallery or an open mic, and by the grace of God if there is somebody who can watch my mother for an extended period of time, I'm trying to travel.

LMK: What's on your playlist? Tell us the last three songs you listened to? No cheating, no judgment.

LJH: Today has been high energy, so I tapped into my Jersey Club Mix with Strings by Max, Do 4 Luv by Tre Oh Fie and Orange Soda, the remix by SJayy.

LMK: What gets under your skin? Tell our readers what works your last nerve?

LJH: <Without hesitation> Wasted time.

LMK: Okay then, let's get right to it with a few little this or that questions? eBooks or hard cover?

LJH: Believe it or not, I'm a hardcover girl, but in the last several years I've gotten into audio books.

LMK: String beans or broccoli?

LJH: Bro-cco-leeeeeee! <Laughter>

LMK: A walk in the park or a walk on the beach?

LJH: <Silence> Hold on, let me think on that. I would say, if I could, I would walk on the beach but my caregiver responsibilities often keep me away from the water. So, I often go to parks with water. Most people don't know this about me, but I collect sand from all over the world. It's part of my affinity for the beach, a connection that has me ask all my friends to bring me back sand when they travel.

LMK: Before we let you go, we'd love to leave readers with a smile. What makes you laugh out loud?

LJH: Goofy shit! I love those moments when you just laugh. Have you ever been at a place where it's not appropriate to laugh but a thought comes into your head and you're suddenly dying laughing? I love those moments.

Luvleeh will perform at Boom Charlotte on Friday, April 26, from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at McFly Fresh. Additional appearances at McFly Fresh during the festival include Saturday, April 27, 5-6 p.m. and Sunday, April 28, 5-6 p.m. ::



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