

CHANGING TIMES

The Nov. 20 national Sunday edition of *The New York Times* includes a feature article, "Zelda's Unwavering Love Is No Longer Required," about Sheila Kuehl. Kuehl—who starred as "Zelda Gilroy" on the popular sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-1963)—has become the first open gay man or lesbian to win election to the California state legislature. She will represent some 370,000 people in the State Assembly.

Written by David Dunlap, the *Times* feature story begins: "Zelda Gilroy should only have known, as she longed hopelessly more than 30 years ago for the indifferent Dobie Gillis, that the boys who truly fancied her were legion. And so, it turned out, were the girls." The feature traces Kuehl's history, from the time she was expelled from her sorority for being a lesbian to her recent victory in California's political arena.

Of particular interest to media watchers is Kuehl's explanation of her own political success, which she attributes—in part—to the "Zelda Factor." According to Kuehl, her visibility as a television celebrity allowed some potentially phobic voters to overcome their "aversion" to her lesbianism. Says Kuehl: "When people know gay people personally, they tend to feel differently about the whole community. And all of a sudden, here's a person that they know very well that they found out was lesbian."

Direct feedback to Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr., publisher, *The New York Times*, 229 W 43rd St., New York, NY 10036, (212) 556-1234.

LIKABLE FILM

The Columbia Pictures film *I Like It Like That* explores the micro-culture of a Bronx neighborhood. Included amongst the cast of characters is "Alexis"—who was born as "Alex." The transgendered character is developed without the typical stains of exploitation or tragedy. Instead, Alexis has been described by moviegoers as funny, sensitive, believable and, yes, likable.

Send your comments to writer-director Darnell Martin, *I Like It Like That*, c/o Bobbi Thompson, William Morris Agency, 151 El Camino Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212.

VANITY UNFAIR

In the December 1994 issue of *Vanity Fair*, you might be surprised to see a potentially defamatory comment on page 178. In his "Vanities" column, writer George Wayne asks former Oakland Raiders star Howie Long, "Do you think there are any homos playing football?" Long responds, "Well, I read an article once where they said one out of every 10 individuals is homosexual. So I was sitting in the locker room one day, and there were 55 guys there, so I go: 'One, two, three, four, five, six...' but I've never been approached. Look, I told you before, I don't care what you do—if you can play defensive tackle, please line up."

Wayne then asks this rapid follow-up: "How about tight end?" Howie Long, apparently taken aback by this inquiry, replies, "Well you're diving into a whole new area. I have no frame of reference."

Readers might be surprised to learn that Wayne is gay. His baited questions do little to dispel the stereotypes about gay men and sports. On the other hand, Long is to be commended for dignifying Wayne's questions with thoughtful, courageous and open-minded responses.

Send your comments to: George Wayne, and/or Graydon Carter, editor-in-chief, *Vanity Fair*, 350 Madison Ave., Fourth Floor, New York, NY 10017, (212) 880-8800.

LIFESAVING TELEVISION

The Dec. 22 episode of *My So-Called Life* (ABC) included a story line in which teenager Rickie Vasquez is forced from his family home because of his sexual orientation.

Wilson Cruz, the 20-year-old actor who plays Rickie, says that the story line was based on his

real life experiences—his father asked him to leave home just before Christmas last year.

Cruz, who is gay, recently told a *TV Guide* interviewer why he decided to come out. "In order for my character to have any effect on people, I can't live a hypocritical life," he said. Asked if he thought his character would find romance on the show, Cruz replied, "When he's ready."



Wilson Cruz

Currently, *My So-Called Life* is the only network television program that features a recurring (and potentially life-saving) role model for lesbian, gay and bisexual teens. Unfortunately, as one critic put it, the program is "ratings starved." ABC has announced that, as of Jan. 26, the series will be placed on hiatus and might not be renewed next fall. Grass-roots efforts to save *My So-Called Life* have sprung up around the country, and supportive letters could make all the difference.

Write to Randi Cohen, ABC Productions, 2020 Avenue of the Stars, Fifth Floor, Century City, CA 90067, (310) 557-6901, fax (310) 557-6147; or Marshall Herskovitz and Ed Zwick, executive producers, *My So-Called Life*, Bedford Falls Company, 409 Santa Monica Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401.

ANOTHER GOOD DATELINE

NBC's newsmagazine show *Dateline* has once again provided good coverage of a significant lesbian and gay news item. The program's Oct. 21 episode included the segment "Family Feud," produced by Joe Decola. The segment covered the custody case being fought by Sharon Bottoms, a lesbian mother whose son, Tyler, was taken away from her by the Virginia courts. Sharon was accused of engaging in "oral sex" (a felony in Virginia) and "open displays of affection."

The *Dateline* segment allowed ample time for Sharon and her lover, April, to make the case for their fitness as parents. Sharon's mother—who filed for custody of Tyler on the grounds that her daughter is a lesbian—came across as the moron she is. For example, when pressed to explain just how, exactly, Tyler would suffer from living with his lesbian mom, all Sharon's mother could say was, "Tyler will be messed up."

Significantly, *Dateline* did not drag out any hysterical, Bible-thumping homophobes to condemn all lesbians to hell. Instead, a university researcher—and actual expert—was interviewed. University of Virginia psychology professor Charlotte Patterson explained that, after an exhaustive review of the research literature, she could not find a single shred of evidence to support the notion that lesbian parents are harmful to a child's development and welfare.

Encourage *Dateline* to continue reporting fairly and accurately on lesbian and gay subjects. Send compliments to Joe Decola, *Dateline*, NBC News, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10021, (212) 664-4444.

Compiled from "GLAAD Media Watch" reports by Al Kielwasser and Tom di Maria

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