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Out of Oregon

Beaverton refugee trots globe, makes it big

"Hollywood doesn't make our films. I figure I have to make our films and put myself in them." That strategy seems to be working for Beaverton native Jesse Archer, a delightfully outspoken actor who co-wrote and stars in *A Four Letter Word*, in which he reprises the flamboyant role of Luke, last seen in 2004's *Slutty Summer*. The film opens June 20 at Living Room Theaters.

Jim Radosta: What was it like growing up in Oregon?

Jesse Archer: I wasn't out at all. I didn't have many role models. I went to USC in California, and I came back in summers. At that point I was out, and I was frequently going out to The City Nightclub in its heyday, which was just fantastic. I think I have yet to be in a club that has as much personality and dirty, scary fun.

I still wish I bought a T-shirt that said, "I had sex in The City Nightclub bathroom." They're probably on eBay for thousands of dollars.

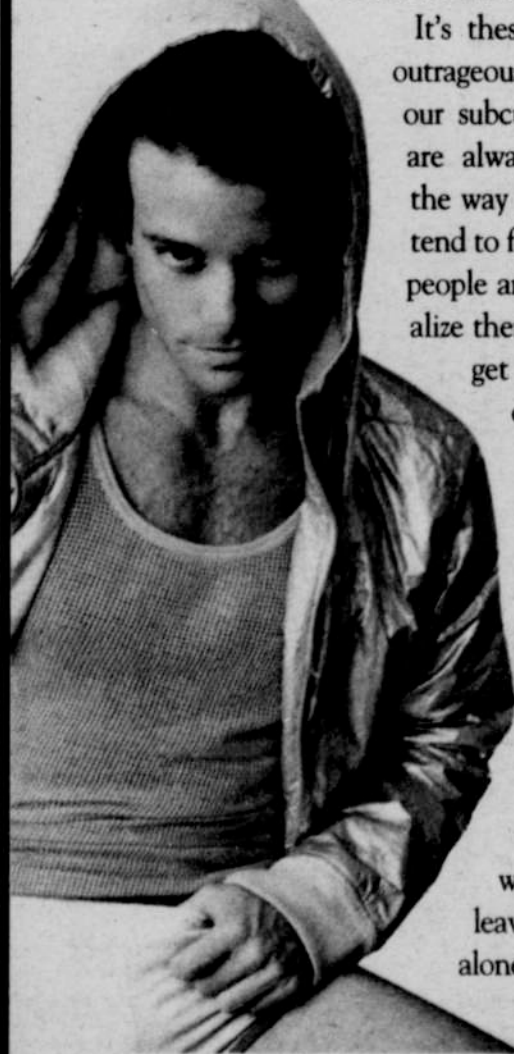
JR: You wrote a column in *Out* about being called a "fruit" at Fowler Middle School.

JA: Everybody knew except me. My family actually had to move from Tigard to Beaverton because I was beat up so much. Rough trade in Tigard!

It was the most difficult time of my life, and it affects me every single day, actually. I just try to make it affect me in a good, positive, creative way.

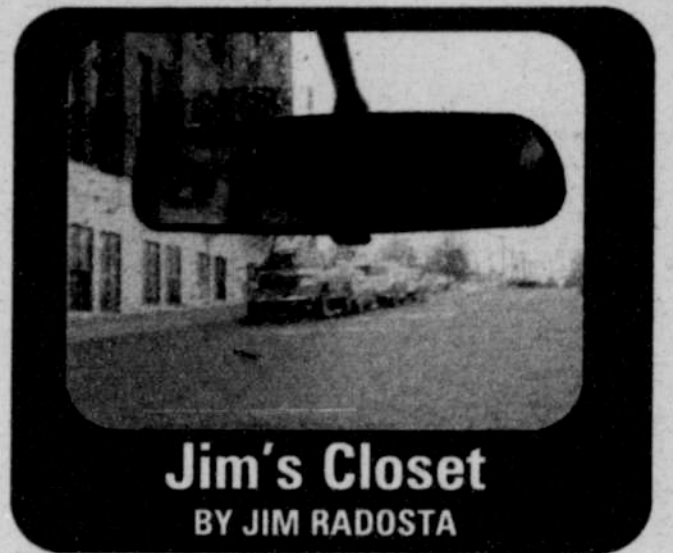
JR: Tell me about your "adventure memoir," *You Can Run: Gay, Glam and Gritty Travels in South America*.

JA: The book comes from two years I spent down in South America with my at-the-time boyfriend. We had a really horribly codependent, dramatic relationship. He's from Newport. I went to a Pride parade in Buenos Aires; the only people marching are some teenage runaways and a couple punks and mostly trannies—really bodacious trannies.



Jesse Archer, 33, lives in New York City.

It's these types of outrageous queens in our subculture that are always leading the way for us. We tend to forget these people and marginalize them once we get larger acceptance, and that's part of what *A Four Letter Word* is trying to say, too: The queens went first—leave 'em alone!



It's about the slut who falls for a hustler—it happens every day! Luke gets called a "gay cliché," but he thought of himself as more of this sparkly nightlife disco ball of a person. At the end, I think we realize that, no matter who you are, it's great to be true to yourself.

JR: The film addresses sex in a candid way that's been missing since *Queer as Folk* went off the air. Was that the idea?

JA: Well, that and also getting people in the seats. TLA Releasing told the director, "If you wanna earn the nickel, you gotta show the pickle!"

I think we wanted to throw people off; if that's all you want to see—this slutty, smutty sex and flesh—then that's all you'll see, but if you want to explore deeper, there's definitely themes of addiction, alienation and identity, but you have to read between the lines to see it.

And we wanted to explore this as a main character because I don't think it has been done before: All characters that are like Luke have been sideline characters, sort of punch lines, and we wanted to show that he's a person, too, with something to say.

JR: I loved your column that tore apart men who write "no fems" in their personal ads.

JA: It's just a lot of internalized homophobia. I think it's the greatest threat to the gay community, frankly. It manifests itself in so many insidious ways—the gay manager who won't let his gay actor take gay roles because he thinks he'll be stereotyped. Really disgusting.

I find that even sometimes our national gay publications don't put gay people on the cover or feature us as much as they feature, like, someone from *Gossip Girl* or this singer that's dating Jessica Simpson or even people like Heath Ledger. Are we only allowed to put people like that on the cover of our magazines and say: "Thank you for not calling us faggots! You're our hero!"? Why can't we have gay people playing our roles? It's bizarre to me.

The straight actors say, "When I'm really courageous, I'll play a gay role." I'm like: "You know what? When I'm feeling really courageous, I'll play a straight role." It's just not something that interests me. I'm much more interested in being myself and who I am and exploring facets of that. ☐

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. E-mail him at jim@justout.com.