

# A transcendent year

DISPATCHES FROM  
PRIDE 2016

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**W**hile planning *EW*'s second annual PRIDE issue, we made no deliberate decision to focus on trans women; the stories just emerged organically. *Why?* we wondered.

The answer was obvious to many trans women, scholars and activists who contributed to this issue.

"Trans women are in the spotlight nationally, especially with Caitlyn Jenner and her entire show," says Jam Tolles, a local artist beginning her transition (see "Contemporary Calico" this issue).

Caitlyn Jenner, formerly known as Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner, affirmed her identity as a woman publicly in the summer of 2015, an unparalleled moment for the LGBTQA community. Tolles points out that Jenner's reality show, *I Am Cait*, has not only made trans identity more palatable for the masses, but also features two leading trans scholars, Jennifer Finney Boylan and Kate Bornstein, who wrote the seminal work *Gender Outlaws: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*.

"One of the things Kate Bornstein was saying in *Gender Outlaws* is the AIDS crisis really killed off this entire generation of trans women," Tolles says. "So trans men brought trans-ness to the forefront of our culture." But now, three decades after the AIDS epidemic began, Tolles says a new generation blossoms.

Alison Gash, an associate professor of political science

at the University of Oregon who researches transgender issues, sees another reason for the focus on trans women: the bathroom and gender identity debate thrust into the mainstream by North Carolina's House Bill 2, which requires people in government buildings to use bathrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate.

"What has tended to happen in the context of those debates is particularly trans women being targeted as problems for the trans bathroom movement," she tells *EW*, adding that the argument is "that trans women are predatory; that a policy that would permit a trans woman to use the bathroom would also permit a predator."

Of course, Gash knocks down this argument as bigoted nonsense with no statistical backing and smacking of the same unsubstantiated rhetoric that linked gay folk to pedophilia back in the "good ol' days."

Gash explains that demonizing trans women follows historical trends — trends that say "it's OK to be more male," but not the other way around.

"There isn't acceptance for men who want to adopt more traditional feminine attributes," Gash says. "Any time that shift is made, I think people's sort of latent prejudices shine through."

Shine through they did for Skye Mockabee, a 26-year-old trans woman who was murdered in Cleveland last week. According to the New York City Anti-Violence Project, Mockabee was the third reported killing of a black

trans woman in the U.S. in July 2016 alone.

A 2013 National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs report shows that 72 percent of hate-crime homicides in 2013 were against trans women.

"This violence is reaching an epidemic," Gash says. "It's always been bad" for transgender people, but with the marriage equality ruling in 2015, social conservatives have had to shift their focus, making bathrooms the new battleground. "People are just primed by the political rhetoric to take their aggression out on trans people," she says.

In Oregon, a rainbow, however faint, shimmers in the darkness: Oregon is consistently ranked in the top five states for trans rights, as one of about 15 states with policies protecting persons from discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, while also passing anti-bullying policies covering LGBTQA students in schools, as well as others.

And in 2015, Oregon's Medicaid began covering the costs of procedures for "gender dysphoria" such as gender confirmation surgery and hormone therapy; Oregon is one of only a handful of states to do so.

In spite of this, the hostile and discriminatory dialogue on the national stage in 2016 proves there is much work left to be done, especially by the most privileged among us. It's past time to move beyond "It Gets Better" and take a more active stance: *We will work to make it better; we have to.*