

God *did* make Adam and Steve.



www.fishoutofwaterfilm.com
 directed by ky dickens
 original score by kaki king

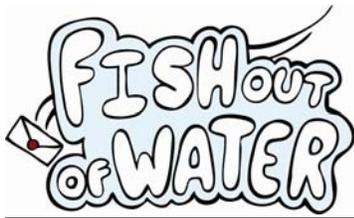


YELLOW WING

PRODUCTIONS 1408 W. Carmen Ave. Suite 2, Chicago, IL 60640

general contact: fawzia mirza
 fawzia@fishoutofwaterfilm.com
 312.399.7981

press contact: kristen kaza
 kristen@fishoutofwaterfilm.com
 312.771.8546



"It's the most convincing film I have seen on the topic of biblical verses and their interpretation. I don't know how anyone can sit and watch this film and not call into question how Scriptures have traditionally been cited in religious debate on homosexuality."

-Brenda Webb
Director, Reeling Film Festival
Quoted in: Chicago Sun Times

Synopsis

People

Screen Grabs

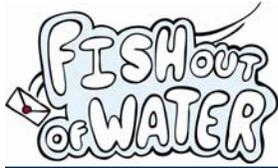
Press

RADIO

National Public Radio
Feast of Fun (National Pod Cast)
Queer Cast

PRINT

Jettison Quarterly Magazine – Feature
Chicago Sun Times – Feature
Time Out Chicago – Feature
Autostraddle - Feature
Windy City Times – Cover Story
Curve Magazine
After Ellen
Reel Magazine
She Wired
Chicago Reader
Bust Magazine
Out & About
Chill Magazine



Synopsis

You might think you know where the Bible stands on the subject of homosexuality, but when was the last time you actually checked?

In the spirited documentary *Fish out of Water*, filmmaker Ky Dickens explores the seven Bible passages notoriously used to condemn homosexuality and justify marriage discrimination.

With the help of a cartoon narrator, animated recollections of Bible passages and witty illustrations, *Fish out of Water* makes this polarizing subject accessible and non-threatening.

The film begins with an animated recollection of the fallout at Vanderbilt University when the film's director came out to her sorority sisters. Their rabid rejection sparks her search for Bible-based condemnation. Crisscrossing America and listening to the country's impassioned speech on this divisive issue, she speaks with ministers of all denominations, recording the experiences of the oppressed and the justifications of the oppressors.

Covering over twenty states and capturing the gay community's devastation immediately after the 2008 vote on Proposition 8, *Fish out of Water* presents the hyper-relevance of this old issue with concern, humor and creativity.

Golden-Globe nominated composer Kaki King (*Into the Wild*) delivers an original score that flows effortlessly through the film's diverse elements.

Ky Dickens
Director & Writer

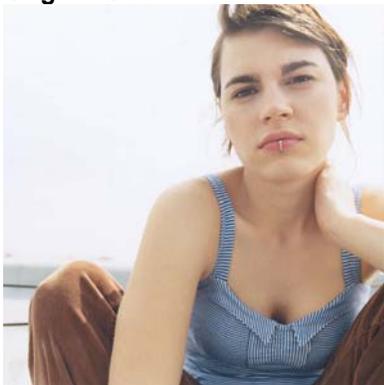


Ky started her film career at CBS (WTVR-TV), working as a Camera Operator for the evening news. In 2001, she moved to Chicago where she worked as a freelancer on music videos and independent films. Ky produced two independent films including *Range Life* written and directed by Robert Trondson and *Ante Meridiam* written and directed by Russ Blemker. Her videography career has included filming a variety of live musicians including: Concrete Blonde, Nina Hagen, Cat Power, Amy Ray, Bitch and Animal, The Brazilian Girls, Ember Swift, The Blue Meanies, Peaches, Leslie and the Ly's and many others. She has filmed meaningful events around Chicago, including the Decibel Music Festival, Gay Games, Gurlesque Burlesque and Estrojam. Ky also produces television commercials and has produced spots for some of the most renowned advertisers in the world including: Neutrogena, Coke, Popeye's, L'Oreal, Pantene, Clairol, Olay, Swiffer, McDonald's, Revlon, Cover Girl, Arby's, and Yoplait.

Fish Out of Water is a personal project that Ky has been crafting for the past three years under the umbrella of her own production company, Yellow Wing Productions. *Fish out of Water* wrapped in June 2009.

Ky graduated with magna cum laude honors from Vanderbilt University. At Vanderbilt, Ky completed a double major in sociology and communications and a minor in Fine Art.

Kaki King
Original Score



Kaki King is best-known for her gorgeous, percussive guitar playing, and her first two albums showcased her work on that instrument to great effect. Her third album, *Until We Felt Red* (Velour Records), introduced a gifted singer and songwriter, as well. Together with producer John McEntire (Tortoise, Stereolab, Sea & Cake), King has expanded her sonic palate to include everything from processed pedal steel and electronic distortion to live trumpet and strings and, most startlingly, her own voice, disarmingly winsome and sweet for a woman with enough attitude to launch her career playing for spare change on the New York subways.

In 2007, Kaki received a Golden Globe nomination for her work on *Into the Wild* score that she composed with Edie Vedder. Kaki also contributed her music to Warner Brother's 2007 feature film, *August Rush*. Kaki just finished an original score for the independent documentary *Fish out of Water*. *Fish out of Water* confronts issues that Kaki feels passionately about, religion and homosexuality, and she's thrilled for films 2009 release.

Fawzia Mira
Producer



Fawzia Mira

Fawzia Mirza received her B.A. at Indiana University in English, Political Science and Religious Studies. She then moved to Chicago where she received her J.D. at Chicago-Kent College of Law and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 2003.

She is now a full-time actor and producer in Chicago and the Midwest. She has done extensive work with Endless Eye Productions including co-producing their current documentary, *A Message from the East*. She is also a staff producer with Yellow Wing Productions and recently co-produced *Fish Out of Water*, directed by Ky Dickens.

Fawzia is an ensemble member of Rasaka Theatre Company, the Midwest's only South Asian Theatre Company. She also travels the country as an actor and educator with Catharsis Productions performing *Sex Signals*, an improv and sketch comedy-educational show about dating, dating stereotypes and consent.



Kristen Kaza
Producer



Since moving to Chicago five years ago, Kristen has worked in events management for Time Out Chicago magazine, marketing and community outreach for Whole Foods Market and recently was hired as the Marketing Manager for the Chicago Reader.

Kristen came on board as the *Fish Out of Water* publicist in the summer of 2007, and as her passion for the film grew so did her involvement in its development. Kristen focuses on the fundraising and outreach aspects of production by developing partnerships with various community and organizations, coordinating fundraising events and working with both the local and national media. Kristen feels incredibly honored to be a part of a project that is so deeply rooted in compassion and education.

Kyle Harter
Illustrator



Kyle Harter is an artist, illustrator and graphic designer whose work has been published in Chicago's UR Magazine, The Reader, Innerview Magazine, and Shades Magazine (online). In addition, Kyle has exhibited his silk screening skills, designing posters for several Chicago bands.

Numerous venues have exhibited Kyle's printed work, paintings, and mixed media pieces. Places include: Sine Qua Non Salon, South Union Arts, quennect 4, Recycle Clothing, Around the Cyoate art Festival and Columbia's A and D Gallery. The nonprofit organizations Art Fiend and Equality Illinois have also sponsored shows at which he has been a featured artist. www.kyleharter.com

Alan Saunders
Animator



Alan Saunders taught himself the fundamentals of traditional and computer animation at the age of 11. Fifteen years later, this Chicago based artist's work has been featured on MTV2 and Channel Frederator. Currently, Newgrounds.com is producing his first feature length homemade film. Alan also dabbles in web design and home music production.

Anna Patel
Online Editor, Co-Editor



Anna Patel has spent the last three years editing, directing and shooting for a content commercial company. As well as creating some very infectious viral spots for clients such as Tresemme, Stella, Treeless-Squirrel.com and SELF magazine she has also cut her way into trailers. Anna has edited trailers for several Documentaries and Foreign/Art House Films such as Martin Provost's, *Seraphine* and Emmanuel Mouret's *Shall We Kiss*. Her passion will render itself most in her films. *A Nephilim Grieves*, her directorial debut film, premiered at the Chicago International Film Festival in 2008. She is currently working on short documentary that will wrap up in 2009.

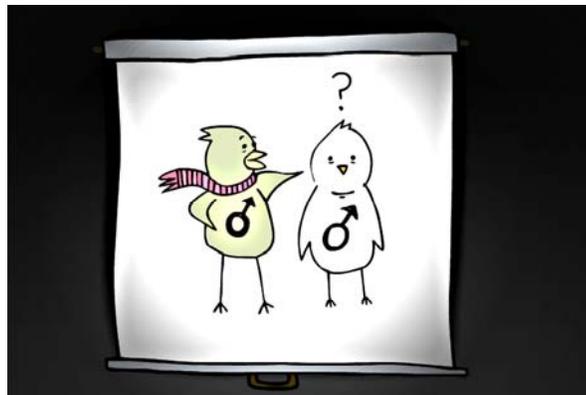
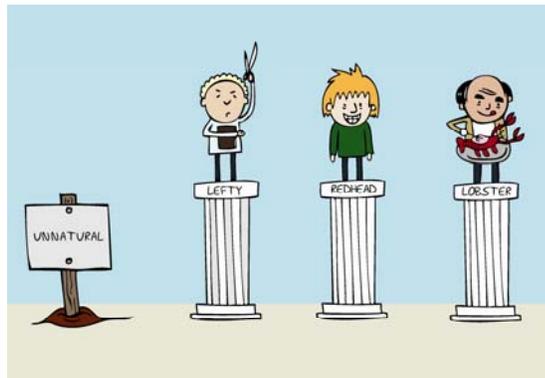
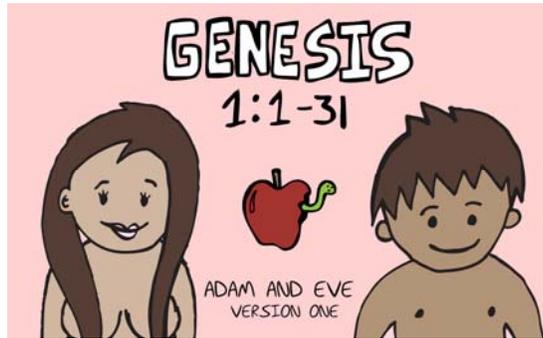
CJ Arellano
Editor



C.J. Arellano is a filmmaker, editor, and writer of all trades. He follows two commandments: love thy neighbor, and thou shalt not get caught wearing a bad outfit. Learn more at www.cjarellano.com!

FISH OUT OF WATER

Screen Grabs





National Public Radio

Member Station WBEZ

EIGHT FORTY-EIGHT 11/6/2009

Documentary Explores the Bible's Take on Homosexuality



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Nearly 10 months into Barack Obama's presidency, the issue of gay marriage continues to mobilize people around the country. Alongside calls for equality, protestors attend rallies with signs touting God's rejection of homosexuality. Scenes like this sparked first-time filmmaker Ky Dickens to hit the road to better understand what the Bible really says about being gay. The result is *Fish Out of Water*, the documentary centerpiece of this year's **Reeling Film Festival**. She tells us about her journey making the documentary.



Screening:

Fish Out of Water is the centerpiece of the **Reeling Film Festival**

Screens Sunday, Nov. 8 at 5 p.m.

Music Box Theatre on Southport

Listen Here: <http://www.wbez.org/Content.aspx?audioID=37956>

Chicago
Public Radio.





PROPHET RUNAWAY

Ky Dickens can't outrun *Fish Out of Water's* divine destiny
by Chris Stedman || photos by Amanda Clifford

Ky Dickens is in the belly of the beast, waiting for a sign.

Not literally, of course. In fact, right now she's sitting across from me in the sunroom of her beautiful apartment – probably as far from krill-filled whale innards as one could get. But don't blame her if she feels a bit like the biblical Jonah, stuck in the stomach of some great big sea beast because God selected an unwilling servant.

"Selfishly, I want to go do a project that's not so socially relevant," said Dickens, discussing the documentary film she directed, *Fish Out of Water*, which tackles homosexuality and the Bible.

"I have so many ideas that would be a lot of fun to do. But I feel like the movie has wiggled

itself into a social conversation that I can't abandon without being disrespectful to it and the people who care about it," Dickens said.

"It'd be like deserting your child – it's just irresponsible," she continued. "As a filmmaker, it's what you hope for. So as long as there is a demand, I have an obligation to the community."

The number of folks who count themselves in that camp is steadily growing. In a time when same-sex marriage and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" make headlines daily, *Fish Out of Water* has had a prophetic effect. And Dickens is the film's beating heart. Her story is the anchor of the movie, elevating it beyond mere scholastic summary.

Like a prophet, Dickens embodies the film's ethic – one that maintains that the Bible has been misinterpreted and does not actually say that LGBT folks



are innately wrong – and makes it personal. There is something individual at stake for Dickens in the project, as there is for any good prophet.

When envisioning a prophet, some may call to mind Charleston Heston as an imposing monochrome Moses. The diminutive Dickens doesn't match this image, but then again, her message is a bit different, too.

"When I was coming out, I was being told that homosexuality was wrong. I've always been the type of person that needed to know all the answers, so I went out in search of them," Dickens said.

"What I found is that there are huge 300-page books that say that the Bible doesn't actually say that homosexuality is a sin, but I felt like there was this void for something that distilled the information in a fun, entertaining way."

And so she made a movie, weaving animation and interviews with scholars into an accessible and engaging documentary. But, for Dickens, creating the film – for which she collected donations and went significantly in debt. "I did the total indie filmmaker thing and put a lot of it on credit cards," Dickens said with a laugh– was just the beginning. Like any shepherd, she knows she needs to tend a flock if the message is going to last longer than her involvement.

"Making a movie is great, but making sure its intended use is implemented is more important," said Dickens.

"The movie is intended to promote an alternate idea of what the Bible says about homosexuality, and that requires dialogue,

which means this movie needs to have a long shelf life."

Sure enough, the movie has become something of a movement. This summer it will be the centerpiece of a campaign called "The Great American Outing," which will bring it to cities throughout the Bible-belt in hopes of spurring dialogue on its controversial subject matter.

Though the film has had a lot of traction in the LGBT and liberal religious communities, "The Great American Outing" aims to broaden the conversation around the film to include wider circles of people – especially individuals that are less sympathetic to its pro-LGBT message.

But even before the launch of the campaign, another community is beginning to warm up to the film: young urban-dwellers. Dickens, for one, isn't surprised by this.

"I think in a lot of ways the greater urban environment has misjudged the hipster," said Dickens. "The hipster contingent deeply values human connection, equality, progressive thinking, and intellectual attitudes. These are core hipster values. The film has really been resonating with the so-called 'aloof hipster' crowd, precisely because it doesn't really dumb down the facts."

Dickens suspects there is another reason this community is taking to the film.

"[*Fish Out of Water*] is also a film that doesn't take itself too seriously, and I think the animation is a big part of why it works. The topic is polarizing, but I want people to know that they can laugh at it," Dickens

said.

Still, Dickens herself has had her share of surprises when encountering advocates of the film.

“It has shocked me at screenings, the people who I’ve prejudged as people who wouldn’t be interested in it, that come up to me and want to share a part of their history and how the film impacted them,” said Dickens.

“People may talk about hipsters as disaffected, but I tell you: No one is too cool for connection and community, to want to be respected and loved.”

Though the film is making inroads among young urbanites, Dickens does recognize that some young people might not immediately see her film as necessary or important.

“Some people might think this [subject of homosexuality in the Bible] is an archaic conversation, that we’re in this new queer community that doesn’t need to have this conversation, but that is simply not true,” Dickens asserted.

“We all grew up in the same country, where 70 percent of the population are Christians and an overwhelming number believes gays are unnatural. Whether someone believes in God or not or is religious or not, all of the homophobic messages in our culture today stem from the Bible, and they contribute to the shame and insecurity all of us face to some degree.”

One of the biggest promoters of shaming LGBT folks in America today is the notorious Reverend Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church, who has cast himself as something of a prophet himself with his “God Hates Fags” campaign. Dickens indicated that people have had strong reactions to the film’s inclusion of



interview footage with him.

"I realize some people are like, 'why on Earth include him in this movie?' But it was strategic," Dickens explained.

"Even though Fred Phelps is extreme, he says things that a lot of people, on some level, agree with. The difference is that he looks like a frothing maniac. So people laugh at what he says, which is the easiest way to deconstruct an idea."

Phelps' presence contributes to the aforementioned tongue-in-cheek tone of the film, though Dickens questions whether even he takes himself seriously.

"They were so nice! We were all just shocked," Dickens said, describing the day she spent with the Phelps family.

"The moment the cameras came on, they were screaming 'God hates fags!' Then the cameras would leave and they would be the sweetest people you've ever met. It makes you wonder if their antics aren't just some big prank on the public."

But the strangest moment of the day happened at its start.

"We had just pulled up and were curious as to how the day would go. We called [the Phelps family] to let them know that we'd arrived. The way they answer the phone is 'God hates blank.' They say something different every time, like 'Good morning, God hates Canada!' Or 'Hello, God hates Margaret Cho, how can I help you?' We thought it was hilarious."

"Maybe at one point they'll be like, 'God hates *Fish out of Water*, how can I help you?' Then we'll have made it."

With or without the Phelps' acknowledgment, Dickens admits that she isn't sure what it will look like for the film to have "made it" because there are still so many people who believe that the Bible contains anti-LGBT decrees. But for now she will persevere because she passionately believes in the message of the film.

Alongside the contested texts that the film addresses, The Bible contains stories

of prophets such as Jonah railing against the narratives of their time. Often their words fell on deaf ears. Let us pray, if you will, that is not the case for *Fish Out of Water* – if for no other reason, so that Dickens will have fulfilled her prophetic duties and can take a break.

"This is a project where I feel I must be responsible for it every second of my life; in every sentence I speak, in every move I make, in every conversation," said Dickens.

"It would be nice to do something a bit lighter next time, something that I don't take to bed with me. But I'm dedicated to seeing this through. Those receiving the film will let me know when its time to move on."

Until that sign comes, her place remains – metaphorically, anyway – in the stomach of a creature that is totally at home in water. ▀

Fish Out of Water will be released on DVD April 20th, 2010. For more information on the film, visit fishoutofwaterfilm.com



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SUN-TIMES MEDIA

The Scriptures on sexuality

Reeling fest film takes on the issue of religious debate

BY MISHA DAVENPORT
mdavenport@suntimes.com

Chicago-based filmmaker Ky Dickens may have once been a fish out of water, but her career got a jump start thanks to her documentary based on her own experiences.

"I never intended to make a film about religion and homosexuality," she says in the opening moments of "Fish Out of Water." "It just sort of happened."

"Fish Out of Water" was selected as the documentary centerpiece of the annual Reeling Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival, which began Thursday and runs through Nov. 15.

"It's the most convincing film I have seen on the topic of biblical verses and their interpretation," says Reeling Film Festival founder Brenda Webb. "I don't know how anyone can sit and watch this film and not call into question how Scriptures have traditionally been cited in religious debate on homosexuality."

The film has also found success outside the gay and lesbian film festival circuit. In October, it was an audience choice runner-up at Wichita's Tall Grass Film Festival; due to demand, screenings were added at the Arkansas Hot Springs Documentary Festival.

"Something like 70 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian, so it doesn't surprise me that there might be interest in this film," Dickens said.

After graduating from high school in the Chicago suburb of Hinsdale, Dickens headed to Nashville to study at socially conservative Vanderbilt University.

"I had always romanticized the South, and with 5,000 students, Vanderbilt was the perfect size school," she said. "Unfortunately, it's also where many religious, conservative families send their kids."

Toward the end of her senior year, she came out as a lesbian to her sorority sisters, and it didn't go over too well.

"They came at me with litany of Bible verses," Dickens said. "It led me to read what the Bible actually says about homosexuality."

Of the 6,000 verses in the Bible, between seven or nine verses (less than 1 percent) are used to condemn homosexuality, she said. Dickens read each of them and then consulted with pastors before penning a six-page letter to her best friend that outlined her findings. When her friend replied with an apol-



The documentary "Fish Out of Water," part of this year's Reeling Festival, probes the religious debate about homosexuality.

REELING LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL

When: Through Nov. 15

Where: Landmark Century, 2828 N. Clark; Columbia College's Film Row Cinema, 1104 S. Wabash; Chicago Filmmakers, 5243 N. Clark; Music Box, 3733 N. Southport

Tickets: \$8-\$12; ticket packs, \$45-\$80; festival passes, \$125-\$175

Info: Call (773) 293-1447 or visit www.reelingfilmfestival.org

ogy, Dickens knew she had to make a documentary about what the Scriptures really say (or, in many cases, don't say) about homosexuality. It presented a bit of a challenge, though.

"How do you make a topic that is so polarizing entertaining and accessible to a wide audience," she said. "The film had to be non-threatening and easy to watch."

Her solution? Mixing traditional aspects of the documentary genre such as interviews and news footage with animation. "There is just something about animation that is non-threatening."

In the 60-minute film, she interviews religious scholars, clergy members and more than 170 people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community (many from the Chicago and the surrounding areas).

The main thing she has learned is not to take the Scriptures literally. If you look closely at what's in there, there might be a lot of stuff you probably won't agree with.

The best of the fest

A few of the titles not to miss at this year's Reeling Film Festival:

"Stuck!," 7 tonight, Landmark Century: Frank Krainz, Steve Balderson and Jon Niccum's "Stuck!" is both homage and loving spoof of the old "women-in-prison" films. Starina Johnson is Daisy, a naive girl wrongly accused of murdering her invalid mother and sent up the river by the testimony of her nosy neighbor (played by scene-chewer Karen Black). John Waters regular Mink Stole (as a born-again death-row inmate) and the Go-Go's Jane Wiedlin also appear in this film by independent cult director Balderson, an heir apparent to camp filmmaker John Waters.

"Fuera de Carta," 7 p.m. Tuesday, Landmark Century: Maxi (Javier Camara, nominated for a Goya Award for this role) is a highly strung head chef who is obsessed with earning his Michelin stars and keeping his small eatery open, and pulling his ragtag staff together.

His life becomes even more complicated when his ex-wife dies, leaving

him custody of a teenage son and young daughter just as he is beginning a relationship with a hunky and closeted former pro soccer player (Fernando Tejero). Nacho G. Velilla's film is equal parts French farce and brightly colored Pedr Almodovar comedy.

"Patrik, Age 1.5," 7 p.m. Thursday, Landmark Century: In this Swedish comedy, a gay couple (Gustaf Skarsgard and Torkel Petersson) find their dreams of adopting a toddler upended when a clerical error places a homophobic teenager in their home instead. It's well-acted and mostly avoids being too sentimental in its depiction of gay adoption and what it means to be a family.

"Oy Vey! My Son Is Gay!," 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15, Music Box: Could a movie about a Jewish mother (Lainie Kazan) obsessed with marrying off her closeted son (Broadway's John Lloyd Young) to a nice Jewish girl be any more clichéd? Doubtful, but that won't stop you from laughing. There's always next year's Yom Kippur if you feel guilty.

Misha Davenport

"There are eight types of families mentioned in the Bible, only one of which involves what we would call a traditional family," she said. "The rest include widows forced to marry their brothers-in-law, men with a wife and concubine and others. My personal stance on people who want to take the

Bible literally is: Are you worshipping the Bible or are you worshipping God?" "Fish Out of Water" will be screened at 5 p.m. Sunday at the Music Box, 3733 N. Southport. Tickets are \$5. Dickens will lead a Q&A session after the film. The film is also scheduled for a May DVD release.

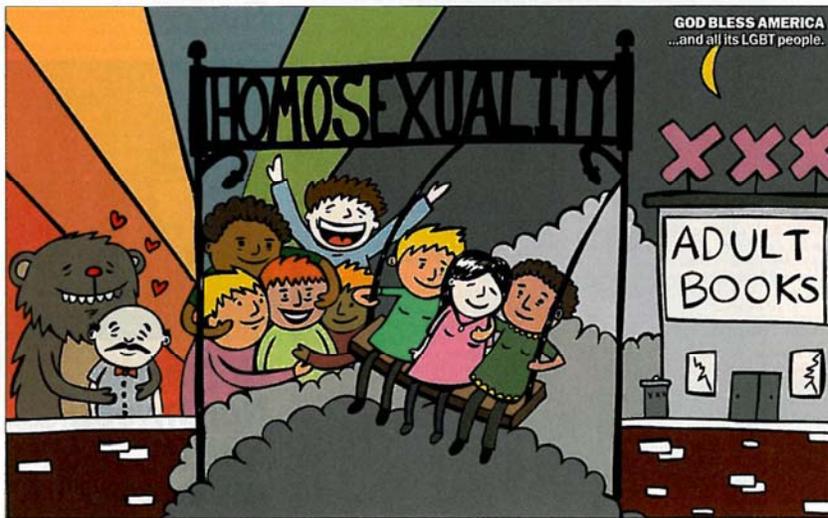
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Edited by Jason A. Heidemann
gay@timeoutchicago.com

Gay & Lesbian



Religious experience

A lively new doc aims its lens at biblical bigotry.

By Jason A. Heidemann

Name the moral of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Homosexuality is a sin," right? Well, what's omitted from that common, conservative understanding of the tale of Lot, who takes in two visiting angels disguised as men, is the fact that when the men of Sodom and Gomorrah surround Lot's house and demand he turn over the angels so that they might "know" (i.e., have sex with) them, Lot offers up his two daughters for the men to gang-rape. Later, he impregnates both of them.

The theologians interviewed in *Fish Out of Water*, a new documentary by local filmmaker Ky Dickens that screens on Sunday 8 as part of the Reeling Film Festival, point out this lesser-known aspect and argue persuasively that the story is actually not about homosexuality but rather a lack of hospitality. What's unexpected is that *Fish Out of Water* also offers a hospitable defense of the church.

Traveling throughout the country, Dickens, 31, a TV producer by day, talked with ministers on both sides of the debate surrounding homosexuality and the Bible to find out what they believe the seven biblical passages most frequently used in justifying religious-based bigotry really say. Dickens says what she learned surprised her.

"I thought I'd be making a film that was anti-church and anti-religion in order to give the gay community some perspective on the Bible in this debate," she says. "I realized there are many allies in the church, many ministers that deeply, strongly believe this homosexuality thing has been blown out of proportion and has no business even being discussed as a moral issue."

"I realized there are many allies in the church."

Dickens says she always felt like a fish out of water (hence the film's title) as a gay woman in the Christian church (she's a quarter Jewish and has a Muslim girlfriend and an atheist father). Born and raised in Chicagoland, she attended conservative Vanderbilt University, where she also ran a Bible study. Rejected by her sorority sisters after coming out to them in 2000, Dickens began a spiritual quest that led to the making of *Fish Out of Water*. She drove around the U.S. to find out just what religious leaders had to say about homosexuality and discovered that silence, not homophobia, most informed their teachings at the pulpit. "Ministers often feel like they can't speak out about the great moral issues of our time," Dickens says. "The number one thing

they say [is that] you cannot speak up, you have to preserve unity. If you don't, you can get removed or relocated at the drop of a hat. It's sad."

Fish Out of Water examines key passages in the Bible through lively animation that humorously illustrates stories like Adam and Eve and Sodom and Gomorrah. True, the debate is framed largely by liberal theologians with only two conservatives, including God Hates Fags' own Fred Phelps (at his campy best) offering anti-gay rhetoric. But the most passionate and resonant voices are those of the everyday LGBT folk who have been victims of religious-based prejudice. Dickens says dozens of gays and lesbians filled her apartment until the wee hours to talk about feelings of mistrust toward the church, a hunger for an inclusive faith experience and their own bias against Christians.

"One of the men I was interviewing was disowned by his family in the South and his church," Dickens says. "He became homeless because he had nowhere to turn in this time of turmoil. Whether you believe in God or not, the church always serves a role in society. This idea that one group of people could be barred from this sanctuary, this safety net, when the chips are down and they have nowhere to turn, to me was an outrage."

Fish Out of Water screens 5pm, Sunday 8 at the Music Box. See Listings.

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (gay@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to Jason A. Heidemann. Include details, dates, times, address of venue, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 6pm on Thursday, two weeks before publication date.**

- ♥ Geared for girls
- ♣ Geared for boys
- * Recommended
- ♠ Cheap

Thursday 5

Events & meetings

* **Jessica Halem: Twittering with Friends** Center on Halsted, 3656 N Halsted St (773-472-6469). El: Red to Addison. Bus: 8, 152. 8pm; \$15, VIP \$20, seniors and youth \$10. Brave and bawdy lez comic Halem headlines this night of comedy also featuring local queer jokesters Bill Cruz and Cameron Esposito.

* **Reeling: The Chicago Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival** For showtimes, tickets and venue information, visit reelingfilmfestival.org. Ousted lesbian b-ball players, gender-deviant rockers and Norwegian gay dads, oh my! Yep, Reeling, the second oldest LGBT film festival on Earth, returns for ten days of queer movie madness, and would you believe that a bunch of films at this year's fest are actually pretty damn good? It all kicks off tonight with *The Big Gay Musical* followed by an after-party at Architectural Artifacts.

Bars & clubs

* **FREE Amy & Freddy Roscoe's**, 3356 N Halsted St (773-281-3355). El: Red, Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Belmont. Bus: 8, 77, 152. 9pm. Amy Armstrong and Freddy Allen present *Sounds of Motown*, followed by an all-request show.

* **FREE FKA Big Chicks**, 5024 N Sheridan Rd (773-728-5511). El: Red to Argyle. Bus: 92, 151. 9pm. Queer girls, hottie trans-folk and indie gay boys shake and converge at this vibrant Uptown party.

* **FREE Frathouse Thursdays Scarlet Bar**, 3320 N Halsted St (773-348-1053). El: Red, Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Belmont. Bus: 8, 77, 152. 9pm. Step into a homo version of a Lincoln Park frat party (minus the Republicans) and revel in what has become the best Thursday bar night on Halsted's horny strip.

* **La Noche Loca Circuit**, 3641 N Halsted St (773-325-2233). El: Red to Addison. Bus: 8, 152. 9pm, \$5-\$10. Circuit's looking at you, amigo, with a night of caliente club beats and hombres galore.

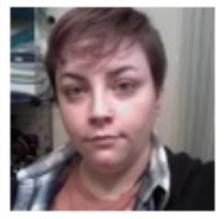
* **FREE Mint Male Launch Party** Mimbir, 3341 N Halsted St (773-871-6227). El: Red, Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Belmont. Bus: 8, 77, 152. 9pm. Chicago's online mag (mintmale.com) for fab gay boys celebrates the launch of its second issue with a chic night of cocktails and lounging.

* **FREE Moo Bingo Cattle Call**, 1547 W Bryn Mawr Ave (773-334-2525). Bus: 22, 84. 9pm. Angeliqe Munro and Miss Fozzie call the balls at this new night of bingo.

Browse: Home / Film + Theater / "Fish Out of Water" Tackles Homosexuality & The Bible: The Autostraddle Interview

DECEMBER 13, 2009

posted by



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"Fish Out of Water" Tackles Homosexuality & The Bible: The Autostraddle Interview

"My principal concern when crafting Fish out of Water was that love and humanity sparkled through the muddled mess of human interpretation" – Intern Elizabeth talks with the people behind the new documentary "Fish out of Water" about LGBT faith, the church, Kaki King, Fred Phelps, Wal-Mart and how you can see the film yourself!

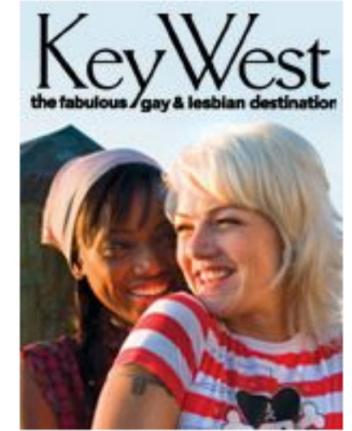
We first told you about [the documentary Fish out of Water back in April](#) and y'all totally freaked out with excitement because it's all about the issues surrounding homosexuality's shaky relationship with the Bible, which we've always had a lot of feelings about. (See: [Documentaries for Homos: Deliver Us from the Religulous Bible While Tying the Knot Before G-d](#) and [Autostraddle Roundtable: Religion & Sexuality](#).) (Also See: [the justifications for denying gay people equal rights in America](#)).

I was lucky enough to attend the two recent Chicago screenings and Q&A sessions for [Fish out of Water](#), and I read everything I could find about the film, so I'm here to give you the rundown [Creepy side-note: there's a review by a man in Kansas who has the same last name as me and I want you to know that we are not the same person]. I also met **Writer/Director Ky Dickens** and Producer **Kristen Kaza**, and talked to them and another one of the producers, **Fawzia Mirza**, online. Everyone involved in the making of this film is totally adorable!



KRISTEN KAZA, KY DICKENS, FAWZIA MIRZA AND MUSIC SUPERVISOR/ASSOCIATE PRODUCER KATY HAGGIS AT THE CHICAGO PREMIERE.

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From [the official Facebook page](#):

“FISH OUT OF WATER seizes the issue of homosexuality and the Bible, dissecting the impact it has had on American culture, politics, the LGBTQI community and the Christian Church as a whole. With animated historical clips and quirky interviews taken from barbershops to truck stops, the film will inspire, inform, and with hope, transform America.”



The film starts with an animated retelling of Ky’s personal coming out story (at Vanderbilt!). It then uses a combination of candid interviews and animations of the seven Bible passages typically used to condemn homosexuality to break down how people use these stories versus what is actually being said. It covers the procreation argument, ‘Adam & Eve, not Adam & Steve’, Sodom & Gomorrah (which is actually about rape and incest committed by HETEROsexuals), the cherry-picking of the laws of Leviticus, and what ‘natural’ and ‘sexual immorality’ really meant in the 1st century.

Yes, this movie covers all of the information you need to have in your brain to argue properly with your grandparents, your ex-boyfriend, and the television set.

Elizabeth: Firstly, how did you decide to make this film? And how/why did you decide on the format of part animation and part interviews?

Ky: When I was coming out and being pummeled with religious-fueled arguments, I didn’t know how to defend myself. There were no readily available resources to help me understand what the Bible said regarding homosexuality. At that point, I knew I wanted to create a film that could tackle this subject head-on. **I felt that in order for a film on this topic to be useful, it had to be entertaining and fun.** Talking about homosexuality and the Bible can be very boring and extremely polarizing. Using cartoons to tackle the topic makes this weighty subject easy to grasp and digest, while also making this topic disarming and accessible.

Elizabeth: How did the rest of you become involved in the making of this film?

Kristen: Initially, Ky approached me to help her with PR for a fundraiser in the very early stages of production. As I got more involved in the project and witnessed Ky's grassroots style of documentary film-making, I was hooked. It was a story that needed to be told, and **Ky's inclusive and community building approach was something I couldn't imagine not being a part of;** it was the project I had been waiting for. Things have a way of just falling into place like that, so I came on as a producer.

Fawzia: Ky and I met at a film festival two years ago. I was working on another documentary at the time, *A Message from the East*. A few months after knowing each other, she had seen my work and then Ky asked if I would work on *Fish out of Water*. I was so motivated by her vision and creativity and the message, that I agreed to come on as a producer.



Elizabeth: Has your opinion/faith changed since you started with the interviews? I feel like for much of the LGBT community, the image of religion that they have is that one of those extreme right-wing conservatives who think we are all evil sinners, and that has made them shy away from church settings.

Ky: I think that a growing majority of church leaders embrace the LGBTQ community and see us as an element of a diverse, beautiful human race. This sentiment is growing and powerful and I do think this will be the overwhelming opinion of the church within the next decade. The question is whether LGBTQ people will ever feel totally trusting, comfortable and safe around faith groups again. **The Christian church has scarred the LGBTQ community deeply and the queer community has every right to feel suspect and bitter when it comes to ides of church and faith.** The church will have a lot of work to do, to win back the trust of LGBTQ community.

Kristen: We hear a lot about how religious communities have hurt GLBTQ people, but rarely hear or experience how they can support and uplift them. It's important to share both stories, and I think we accomplished that with *Fish out of Water*. **Giving visibility to the folks that identify as gay and religious or spiritual is really crucial in bridging the gap that have divided families and communities for so long around this issue.** We aren't trying to influence anybody's feelings or perspective on religion or faith, but we do want to present as many voices as possible so that the topic is less polarizing.

Fawzia: As a Muslim working on this project, it was great to have the insight into Christianity and Jesus in a way I hadn't before. I also think the film helps people of all faiths fight these popular arguments. So much of the hate that is being slung at the gay community has its roots in religion, or should I say, misconstrued and misinterpreted religion- whether you are Christian or Jewish or Muslim. I also think that **people should be allowed access to religion if they want it,** it shouldn't be someone else's choice whether you can enter a synagogue or a mosque or a church or a temple.

“So much of the hate that is being slung at the gay community has its roots in religion, or should I say, misconstrued and misinterpreted religion.”

Elizabeth: Any plans to make more films of this ilk, perhaps focusing on different religions and/or religious texts?

Kristen: What's very clear to me after making this film is that people stay away from divisive topics like sexuality and religion because of how threatening or perplexing they can seem. With documentary films, we have an opportunity to make these topics more digestible, so I would say that at the most basic level,

any project we take on will aim to make the topic at hand more accessible and easy to understand, as we hope we have achieved with *Fish out of Water*.

Fawzia: Once you start digging into the misinterpretations, it is hard not to want to do more work like this, especially when you see so many people professing a need for it. We've talked about a few projects, but let's see what happens – join our mailing list on our website and you'll find out!

Ky: Many Americans feel uncomfortable asking religious, social, political, racial, or moral issues. I'd like to make films that can do this in an accessible, colorful way. There will be more movies to come!



Elizabeth: The Fred Phelps segments in the film, can you explain how those came to be? [sidenote: Fred Phelps was easily the funniest AND scariest part of all the interviews!]

Fawzia: We wanted an anti-gay minister that expressed the right-wing view on gay people, and even though some say he is too polarizing to be taken seriously, we have a lot of people in this country who quietly, internally, agree with his messages. Besides, a lot of us have heard that type of rhetoric before, and if you can disarm those words, make them funny, they won't feel like they hurt as much. As far as

specifically securing the interview, I contacted his family, Shirley Phelps, and we went from there. [In the first Q&A I attended they explained that they couldn't manage an in-person interview where one of them could be there, so they sent a list of questions and a camera person. I'd be grateful not to have to be in the same room as that man.]

Elizabeth: Did you encounter a lot of opposition when trying to get interviews? Negative feedback? Or did it feel like most of the religious figures wanted to help sort of dispel all the myths/misuses of the Bible passages 'against' homosexuality?

Ky: I was anticipating a lot of opposition but ministers on both sides of this issue were eager to speak. Regardless of which side of the debate they fell, religious leaders felt it was a moral obligation to weigh-in on this controversial topic. **The most opposition I encountered was from the LGBTQ community.** The queer community has been badly burned by religious sentiment and Bible-backed discrimination and it took an enormous amount of relationship-building and explaining my intentions to get the LGBTQ community to open up with their feelings and to trust me with their stories.

Elizabeth: How did Kaki King come to do the score for the film?

Kristen: We knew very early on that we wanted [Kaki King](#) to compose our score; her style seemed like the perfect fit for our unconventionally colorful and fast paced documentary. Kaki is a seasoned guitarist and composer, so we knew it was a long shot, but when she had a show scheduled at the Empty Bottle in Chicago back in the Spring of 2008, we knew we had to jump on it. We met her backstage and brought her and her band tamales and showed her the trailer. I think the message of the film really resonated with her, and she agreed to compose an original score for us. Considering we were at such an early stage in production, it was pretty remarkable to get her to sign on so soon and with such little information; I think speaks for the integrity of the project. **We couldn't be more proud of the work she produced**-the score truly is an essential character in the film.

Elizabeth: Ky, I read on your Twitter that a Walmart big-wig wants to help support *Fish out of Water*... did your head explode? Because I'm still trying to wrap my head around that fact.

Ky: We keep finding allies in the most unlikely places. *Fish out of Water* has an inclusive, hopeful tone and because of that, it brings people into this conversation that might usually shy away from discussing gay issues. Folks from Wal-mart might help sponsor some screenings in Arkansas. Living in a big, liberal city, I've always considered Wal-mart as a symbol of the deep red south. However, things are obviously changing.



Elizabeth: Is there anything you wish you had done differently? Something you wanted to put in or leave out of the film? Someone you wanted to talk to?

Fawzia: You know, when you make a film, there is always something you can look at afterwards and wish you had added, or changed, or tweaked, or if you had more money, you would have done a, b, c. But, to be honest, this film is something we are all really proud of, and the thing that reminds us of that is people's reactions after watching it.

Ky: Every time I watch the film, I see something I wish I could change. And like Fawzia said, if we had the money or time to do everything we wanted to do, the film would have been longer, covered more themes and included more people. **However, my principal concern when crafting *Fish out of Water* was that love and humanity sparkled through the muddled mess of human interpretation.** I think we succeeded on that front. I hope so... I guess we'll see.

Elizabeth: I read in an earlier interview that you were going to take the film across country in a pink VW van, but I don't remember seeing any pink van outside the Music Box Theatre [where *Fish out of Water* had its Chicago premiere as part of the Reeling Film Festival]...

Ky: The "Great American Outing" van tour will be taking place next July and August [2010]. We'll be traveling through the South and Midwest offering free screenings of *Fish out of Water*. We're heading to Dallas, Oklahoma City, Little Rock, Jackson, Birmingham, Nashville, Atlanta, Asheville, Charleston, Louisville, St. Louis, Des Moines, Lincoln and Kansas City. **We're actively looking for field producers in each city to help us plan our screenings on the road. If anyone out there lives in one of these cities and would like to be one of our tour producers, please contact us ASAP at screenings@fishoutoffwaterfilm.com.**

Churches, schools and community centers can book screenings in their neighborhood at anytime. On our website, they need to click on the "Book a Screening" tab. This will lead them to the correct form to fill out. Then we take it from there!**At the end of the second Q&A a woman asked Ky to sum up *Fish out of Water* in three words. After everyone laughed at how absurd that seemed, Ky simply said, 'Think for yourself.' Perfect.**



Fish out of Water will be released on DVD in April 2010 by First Run Features (which also brought us [For The Bible Tells Me So](#) and [A Jihad for Love](#), which you should also watch!) and it will also be available on Netflix and iTunes. I want to buy a case and send it to Obama, NOM, California, Maine, and the 38 Senators who just voted NO in New York...

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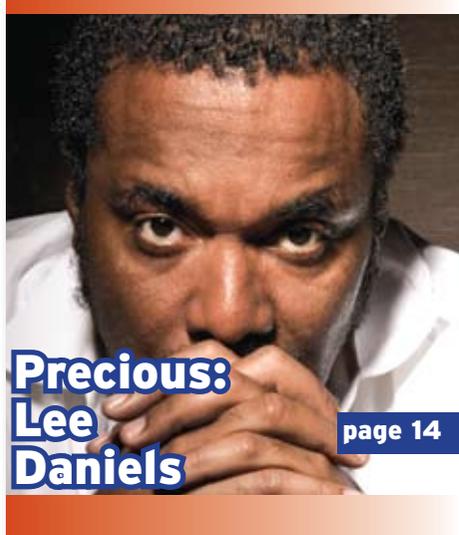
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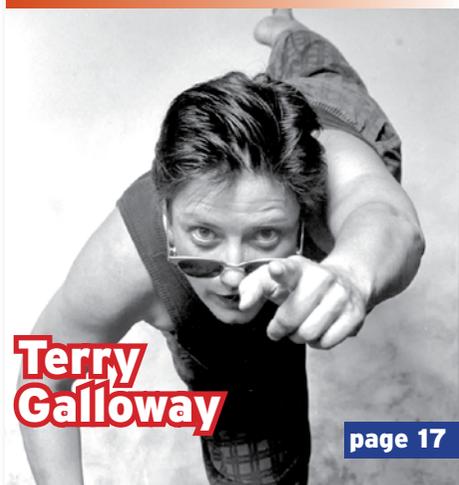
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Maine voters repeal marriage-equality law

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

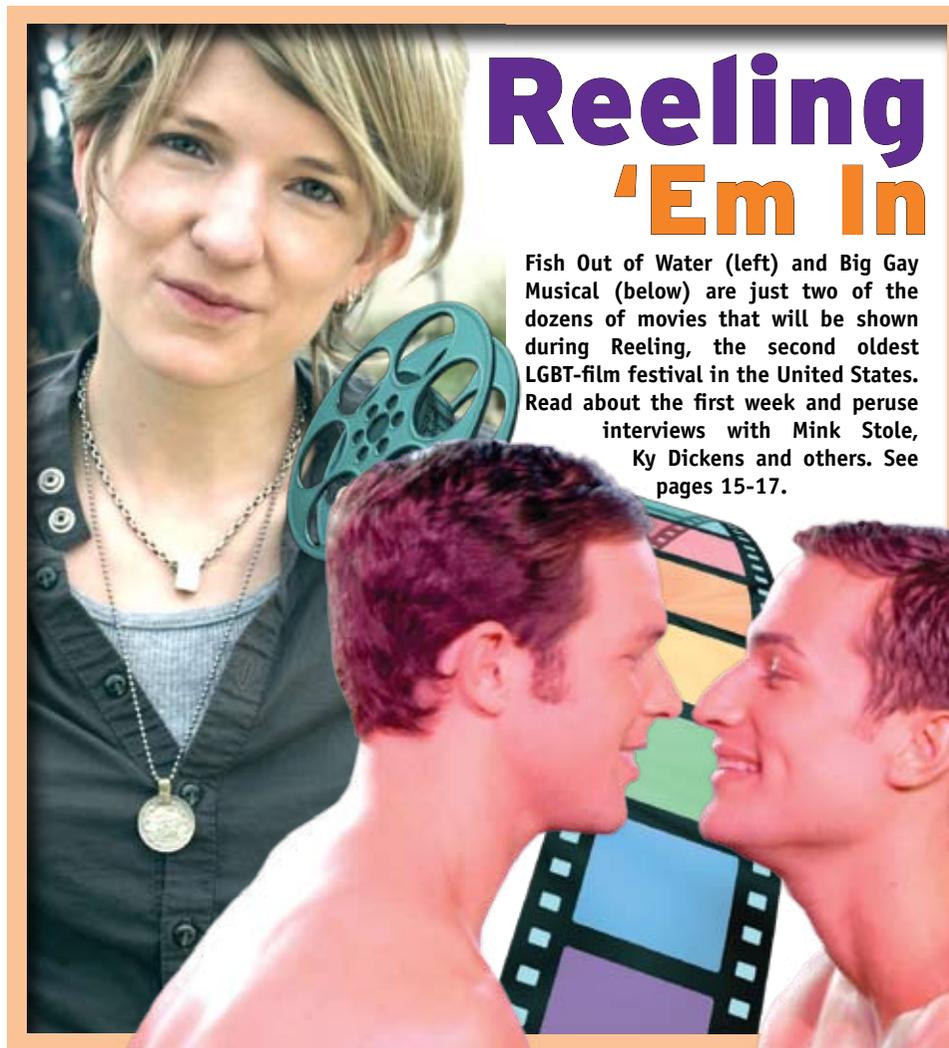
Portland, Maine—The vote tally in Maine Nov. 4, while not complete and not official, suggests an effort to repeal the state's newly passed marriage-equality law has succeeded.

With 93 percent of the precincts reporting in as of 9:25 a.m. Nov. 4, the "Yes" votes to repeal the law totaled 53 percent of the vote, while the "No" votes against repeal numbered 47 percent. The Bangor Daily News provided the tallies. The state's director of elections, Melissa Packard, said her office would not report results publicly until they are certified—in about 20 days.

The apparent vote marks a significant defeat for marriage-equality supporters, who were hoping to regain ground lost last year when voters in California narrowly approved Proposition 8 to amend the state constitution to ban gay marriage and undermine a court ruling that had enabled some 18,000 same-sex couples to marry in 2008. (The vote in that 2008 initiative was 52 percent for, 48 percent against.) It also appears to provide momentum to the anti-gay marriage movement, which is now attempting to stage an initiative against same-sex marriage in Washington, D.C., and which has a bill pending before the New Hampshire legislature to repeal a bill enacted there earlier this year.

In a ballroom at a Holiday Inn in downtown Portland, "No on 1" campaign manager Jesse Connolly announced to a hushed crowd of a few hundred supporters still on hand at 12:30 a.m. Nov. 4 that the campaign was not conceding

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Reeling 'Em In

Fish Out of Water (left) and Big Gay Musical (below) are just two of the dozens of movies that will be shown during Reeling, the second oldest LGBT-film festival in the United States. Read about the first week and peruse interviews with Mink Stole, Ky Dickens and others. See pages 15-17.

Obama ends HIV travel ban

BY LISA KEEN
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

President Barack Obama announced Oct. 30 that his administration will end the long-standing policy at Health and Human Services (HHS) that banned immigration by people with HIV. He announced the policy change during a ceremony at the White House, where he signed a bill to reauthorize the Ryan White program to help people with HIV and low incomes.

President George W. Bush signed legislation last year that ended a 1993 statutory ban specifically against people with HIV. That law was

called the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). But it did not end the policy of the Health and Human Services Department that excluded people with a "communicable disease of public health significance." That policy also excluded people with HIV. And many HIV- and civil-rights organizations said the law Bush signed did not really end the discrimination against people with HIV.

"Practically speaking, with the ban once again under the purview of HHS, nothing has changed for people living with HIV traveling through or immigrating to the United States," stated a press release from the Community HIV/AIDS Mo-

bilization Project (CHAMP).

In his remarks at a White House ceremony, Obama noted that he and First Lady Michelle Obama had taken HIV tests during a visit to Kenya to help combat the stigma attached to the disease. He said his administration would take "another step toward ending that stigma." He said HHS would publish a final rule that will eliminate the ban effective in 2010.

"This is a battle that is far from over," said Obama, noting that 1.1 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV and 56,000 are newly

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REELING FILM FEST 2009

Reeling in the 'Fish'

BY BYRON FLITSCH

Various churches and religious leaders have spoken against homosexuality citing the Bible as their main resource. But does the Bible really say anything about homosexuality?

Filmmaker Ky Dickens tackles that exact question in her documentary *Fish Out of Water*. The film asks LGBT church figures and other people (e.g., the Rev. Fred Phelps) their interpretations on homosexuality in the Bible while unveiling new perspective on seven Bible passages that have been commonly used against homosexuality and same-sex marriage rights.

Windy City Times: Let's get right down to it. You've tackled two of the stickier moral debates [homosexuality and religion] in one film. Where did you get the bravery and inspiration to make such a project?

Ky Dickens: I wouldn't say bravery as much as necessity. When I came out to my sorority friends in college [Vanderbilt University] I was approached with so much judgment and the majority of the judgment was based on these religion-based beliefs. You know—"You're going to go to hell!" or "That's a sin!"—and at the time I didn't really have any facts to disprove what people were throwing at me. So I started to do research, which led to the documentary.

WCT: Do you think this research and the evolution to the documentary was also about coming to terms with your own sexuality and acceptance?

Ky Dickens: Absolutely. I needed to know what was true and what wasn't and I started to discover that the Bible really doesn't say anything about homosexuality in it. Actually, the word homosexuality isn't even in the Bible. Most of what people use to call homosexuality is a sin based on interpretation; I started becoming more interested in what everyday people's thoughts were about religion and those misconceptions.

WCT: The title of your documentary, *Fish Out of Water*, is a popular metaphor, but what does it mean to you and to the film?

KD: Well, it's a double entendre! You may know this, but the fish is a symbol of Jesus. So that's one angle. The other involves the idea that gay people are already a fish out of water in society. When the church doesn't show much acceptance, where does out community get to go? We're literally fish out of water. It's fun imagery.

WCT: Speaking of imagery, your film has



Fish out of Water.

some fun aesthetics. You use animation mixed with live-person interviews. Can you explain the reason of using cartoons?

KD: I wanted the documentary to be accessible to everyone and—let's face it—talking about religion can get pretty boring. Two animators from Columbia College [Kyle Harter and Alan Saunders] took on some of my ideas I had to visually describe certain Bible scenarios. It makes it easier for people to separate certain scenarios and characters, too. Like, "Oh, that funny looking character was introduced to us before when we were talking about Genesis."

WCT: It probably lightens up what can be a pretty heavy topic.

KD: Totally. Our goal wasn't to throw opinions at people. It was to comfortably integrate facts about something that people have a lot of misconceptions about. I wanted any audience to walk away with knowledge and not feeling like they were just talked at for the entire documentary.

WCT: You got a talented name to do the soundtrack—Golden Globe nominee Kaki King. How did you get to work with her and how was it?

KD: That's one of the great things about this project. When I first started, I thought it was going to be incredibly hard to get people to help. But it was the opposite. I had a bunch of people approach me on their own or if I asked. Kaki came along when a friend and I went to a concert of hers and got to meet her back stage. We brought her some tamales from a stand outside and talked about the film. She was all about it. The score is original. We really didn't want it to overshadow the rest of the film, but we wanted her style to be recognizable.

WCT: So, looking back, what was your biggest challenge with making this documentary? Was it asking the tough questions to religious figures?

KD: Aside from the actual production difficulties, the biggest challenge I still think about

was getting the LGBT community to trust this film.

WCT: Because it's about religion?

KD: Well, it's about church and religion and because the LGBT community has been shunned or judged so harshly by the church we've placed this stigma on how terrible it is. When people hear "another film about religion," right away they want to put up defense. It makes people uneasy. I was afraid that I wouldn't reach many audiences because of the topic. But it's been the total opposite.

WCT: Well, I think you've done your job now that you're highlighted as the centerpiece

documentary at the Reeling Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. What's next for your film?

KD: We're heading out on the road. We're going to do some street marketing and handing out information to people to get the film out. The DVD will be available in the spring of 2010 to purchase and to rent. We just want to keep getting the word out.

Fish Out of Water will premiere at the 2009 Reeling Film Festival on Sunday, Nov. 8, at the Music Box Theater, 3733 N. Southport, at 5 p.m. A post-film discussion will take place at In Fine Spirits, 5420 N. Clark. See www.reelingfilmfestival.org.



Ky Dickens.

REELING FILM FEST 2009

A closer look at 'Baby Formula'

BY TRACY BAIM

Mockumentary-style filmmaking is among my favorites, but it has been over-indulged and not true to its form in some recent TV shows and movies. However, *The Baby Formula*—playing Friday, Nov. 6, at Landmark's Century Centre Cinema, 2828 N. Clark, at 9:15 p.m. as part of the Reeling Film Fest—is among my new favorite lesbian films.

I had a chance to meet the film's director, Alison Reid, and her partner, Cheryl Izen, at San Francisco's Frameline Film fest this summer, when *Hannah Free* premiered, and they were very generous in offering advice about their road so far with their first feature film. I had loved the trailer for *Baby Formula* but, as with a lot of lesbian films, I feared the trailer would not live up to my expectations. It does, and I highly recommend this comedy for your Reeling viewing pleasure.

The Baby Formula, made in Canada, follows the exploits of a lesbian couple who are on the sci-fi fertility cutting edge, in a perhaps not-too-distant future when lesbians can actually have each other's babies rather than need an outside donor. Holy hormones, Catwoman!

Watch out as the tears and laughter begin.

Angela Vint (Athena) and Megan Fahlenbock (Lilith) are well-cast as these partners in parenting, and you have a real sense of their screen partnership. In real life, director Reid managed to shoot this film timed to the actor's real pregnancies. The water breaking? That was happening in real life the same day. I can't even imagine how difficult this shoestring budget was with the added dimension of real pregnancies.

The science in *Baby Formula* has the spark of reality because Reid did her research, speaking to scientists and bioethicists.

"Until recently, it has been impossible for gay couples to conceive of the idea of being able to combine their genetics and have their own biological children," Reid writes in her press kit. "That has always struck me as sad. When I read an article about some science that made it possible to create offspring from two female mice, it resonated with me, and inspired me to make this film."

The two leads are wonderful, but Jessica Booker is particularly great as Grandma Kate, who steals the scenes she is in. Each of the family members have their own troubles, and the actors are allowed to seem human, not stereotypes. And wait for the credits, because the scene with the stars singing Black Eyes Peas' "My Humps" is not to be missed.

See www.reelingfilmfestival.org.

From left: Megan Fahlenbock, Alison Reid and Angela Vint in *Baby Formula*.

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THE BEST-SELLING LESBIAN MAGAZINE

Q+A Ky Dickens

As a Michael Moore-style documentary crusader, Ky Dickens is taking religious leaders to task in her new film, *Fish Out of Water*. Bolstered by Bible-belt interviews and fun animated sequences, Dickens seeks to expose the perception that gays and religion should not mix. — *Melany Walters-Beck*

How did you get interested in filmmaking?

I got a camera for my 12th birthday. It was a pink disc camera. They only had 15 shots per roll and I'd go through those so quickly that my parents gave me a video camera. It kept me entertained for hours. Then a close friend of mine died in high school, and all this footage of him became invaluable. It taught me how powerful film can be in preserving human beings in matters of time.



Your newest project, *Fish Out of Water*, deals with the relationship between homosexuality and religion. What led you to examine this controversial topic?

After the moral values debate in 2004 that determined the presidential election, I became very interested in "the others," the boogymen from the red states that are portrayed in the media as basing their views solely on religion. That bothered me as much as someone assuming [that] just because you're gay you're going to be one way or the other. Having the gay community as the group that galvanizes people around certain causes I think makes us a part of something bigger than ourselves. For the film, we went to Texas, Chicago, New

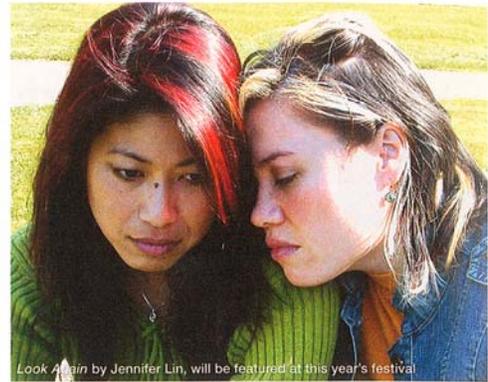
York, Florida, Iowa and many other places to talk about what they thought the Bible said about sexuality. Talking to people, [I found that] our experiences with religion are very individual, but as a community our experience surrounding religion is unified.

Have you met with much resistance?

When I started the film, I really thought it would be gays versus the church, but what ended up happening is that there are ministers and preachers and rabbis in every part of the country that are just as devastated and enraged about how their faith has been used to validate discrimination as we are. The Bible has been used as a weapon, and religious leaders feel that they have to be silent or they could lose their congregations.

When will theatergoers get a chance to see the film?

We want small-town folk who wouldn't normally see the film to watch it, so we plan on touring in a pink van, hoisting up screens and stirring things up next summer. We'll also do a special director's cut [in] Chicago, then the festival circuit this fall and next spring. ■



Look Again by Jennifer Lin, will be featured at this year's festival

A Rare Kind of Festival

From the lovelorn innocence of a little girl finding her sexuality to the woman trying to discover what she wants in life after a string of breakups, these films paint a picture that audiences rarely get to see.

The Queer Women of Color Media Art Project presents the fourth annual Queer Women of Color Film Festival in San Francisco from June 13 to 15. Festival manager Kebo Drew says such festivals are necessary because they are ways for queers of color to express themselves.

The festival is a place for such artistic expression to flourish. What initially began as a celebration of queer African American women has grown to include all queer women of color.

"When we did the Queer Women of Color Film Festival, because it was focused on queer black women, queer women of African descent, you would not believe the response," says Drew. "It was just like, people were so, so hungry. So hungry for the images because they're not like the ones that are out there." Back then, she says, people were "still watching *Set It Off* with Latifah and taking anything we could take."

Drew says the event today attracts diverse crowds. "At our film festival, all these different groups of people end up mixing. It's an amazing feeling."

This year's festival features four categories with eight films each and covers the spectrum of queer life: spiritualism, family, sex, sexuality and culture. There is even an entire category devoted to the lives and loves of queer Asian Pacific Islander women.

Drew says that film festivals are a great place to celebrate queer women of color and their lives. Queers of color often find themselves categorized by either their sexuality or their race, but almost never by both.

"There's a tendency to think that people lead single-issue or single-identity lives and we don't. Especially for queer folks of color, it's like we're not just concerned about sexuality, our sexual orientation and gender identity," says Drew. "We're also concerned about class issues, [and how] the rest of our community is doing."

The film screenings (clocking in at 60 to 77 minutes) are free; however, tickets for the 90-minute panel and retrospective screening by featured directors (including *Nina's Heavenly Delights'* Pratibha Parmar) range from \$10 to \$20. — *Kory Tran*

BUST

MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 09

FISH OUT OF WATER IS GOING TO BE *THIS* BIG

So what have you been up to for the past few years of your life? Did you happen to make a massively important documentary that explores the controversy over what the Bible has to say about homosexuality being a sin? NO? Well Chicago filmmaker Ky Dickens did.

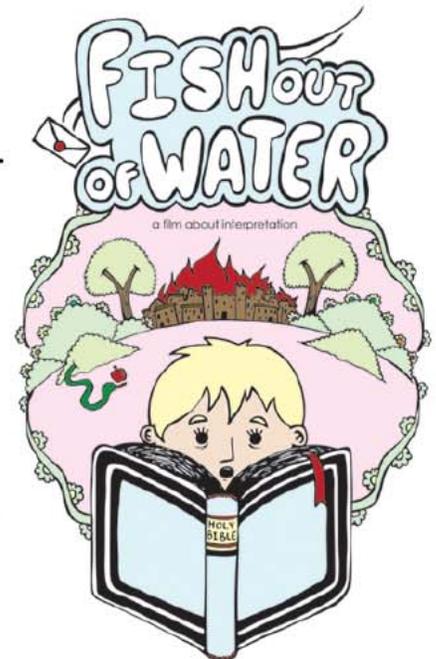
For the past few years, Ky and Producer/PR lady Kristen Kaza traveled from city to small town, to armpit of the world in order to interview common folk and religious leaders from both the team gay and team 'you're going to hell' spectrum of this long running debate. The result of their filming and research is a documentary called Fish Out of Water.

Fish out of Water combines interviews with queers from various cities with information heard directly from the sources of religious leaders who dispel the age-old myth that only angels, not fairies, can truly earn their wings.

If you should happen to live in or around the Chicago area, you can catch the Windy City premiere of Fish Out of Water at the Music Box Theater this Sunday (11/8) where it's being shown as part of the Reeling Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

Added bonus to the film = an original score by Kaki King, and animation sequences that break down the heavy bits, provided by Chicago illustrator Kyle Harter. Oh, and I'm totally in this movie. Just sayin'.

-Kelly McClure



God did make Adam and Steve.



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from **November 05, 2009**

Producer cashed in her IRA to fund film

Ky Dickens' doc got top spot at Gay/Lebian Fest

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Ky Dickens,

"All truth passes through three stages," Ky Dickens, a producer for commercial MK Films, says in her documentary "Fish Out of Water." "First it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. And third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

"Fish Out of Water" screened Sunday as the documentary centerpiece of the 29th Reeling: Chicago Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival.

Dickens interviewed religious figures, scholars and everyday Americans in more than 20 states about shifting religious, social and political views on homosexuality.

Dickens traces the seeds of "Fish Out of Water" to when she came out to her sorority sisters at Vanderbilt University in the late '90s. "They reacted with unexpected judgment and religiously fueled homophobia," Dickens says.

She turned to the bible for its take on homosexuality, and found there wasn't much there. "Not only is the word 'homosexual' never used in the Bible, as the word didn't exist in Greek or Hebrew, but the verses used to condemn gays have been grossly misinterpreted," she says.

"I instantly knew I wanted to make a film on the topic as there were very little tools out there that broke down this topic in an entertaining, accessible way."

Cartoon bird narrator evolved into version of Dickens

To finance the film, Dickens cashed in her retirement plan and held costume fundraisers at the Holiday Club every month for a year with producer Kristen Kaza. "I'm still carrying tens of thousands of debt on my credit card," she says.

Alan Saunders and Kyle Harter came on before shooting even began, to provide extensive, playful animation, "to make a witty, entertaining film on this boring, polarizing topic," Dickens says.



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What began as a cartoon bird narrator evolved into a cartoon version of Dickens herself. "I fought this for a long time as I didn't want to be in the film," she says, but "eventually our team realized that the personal element of my story helps to ground the film with some humanity."

Dickens and editor C.J. Arellano off-lined on Dickens' Final Cut Pro suite. Anna Patel on-lined and did some creative editing at Foundation Post, which provided its services pro bono.

The score is by guitar hero Kaki King, a Golden Globe nominee for her work with Eddie Vedder on the "Into the Wild" soundtrack.

"Fish Out of Water" had its world premiere at L.A.'s Outfest in July. It played the South Africa, Hot Springs, Rhode Island and Tallgrass festivals. First Run Features will release "Fish Out of Water" on DVD in April.

Dickens is continuing a festival run and planning a tour of high schools and colleges. Then next summer she plans a series of free screenings across the South and the Midwest, she says, "to really bring our film's message to folks who may never otherwise hear it."

The 29th Reeling: Chicago Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival will showcase 150 films in 59 different screenings at venues including Landmark Century Cinema, Music Box Theatre and Chicago Filmmakers. The festival runs through Nov. 15.

See fishoutofwaterfilm.com.

See trailer at www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU2hWgu_uGE. —Ed M. Koziarski

Ed M. Koziarski is co-director of the feature film "The First Breath of Tengan Rei".



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Kaki King talks religion and why she hates "The L Word"

by [jamie murnane](#)

Kaki King has been quite busy since her latest album, *Dreaming of Revenge*, featuring the single "Pull Me Out Alive," was released in March. The out musician has toured with the **Foo Fighters** (Dave Grohl's a fan), scored music for *CNN Heroes: An All-Star Tribute* toured like crazy, recorded *The Mexican Teenagers EP* for her upcoming tour of Australia/Europe tour and just [collaborated with mega-star producer Timbaland](#).



King must not sleep much, because during all of that, she's also been working on doing an original score for an upcoming documentary on religion and homosexuality, called [Fish Out of Water](#).

While she's no stranger to providing music for films, (two of her songs were featured in the 2007 **Sean Penn** film *Into the Wild*, and she was also **Freddie Highmore**'s hands in *August Rush*, playing the guitar parts), this is the first time there's been a personal connection to a film project.



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Somewhat of a rarity, King is known as simply a great musician (and "guitar virtuoso," "indie songstress, *Rolling Stone's* first-ever female "Guitar God", etc.) as opposed to a great queer musician. Though she's out, her talent transcends label and sub-genres. So it might seem odd that she's chosen now as the time to tie herself to such a gay project.

"It didn't take much convincing," she told me, adding that it was the Chicago-based filmmakers, **Ky Dickens** (director/executive producer) and **Kristen Kaza** (producer) that inspired her to get involved. "It's a project they've been working on so hard, for so long. They were just really inspiring. As well as the subject matter itself."



King grew up in the south, attending Christian schools and Sunday schools, so she's very familiar with religion and the skewed views many Christians have on homosexuality.

"I've had people call me a sinner, and I'm like, 'I'm not a sinner, I'm a great person,'" she says. "I'm a big fan of Jesus, even though I'm not a Christian, but in his role as a philosopher. His message and the message of Christianity can get so twisted, and for such weird reasons."

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"I've had people call me a sinner, and I'm like, 'I'm not a sinner, I'm a great person,'" she says. "I'm a big fan of Jesus, even though I'm not a Christian, but in his role as a philosopher. His message and the message of Christianity can get so twisted, and for such weird reasons."

King wrote seven different pieces for the film, to tie into various scenes, including interviews with priests or other religion experts, members of the queer community as well as animated scenes. She said she'll be wrapping up her commitment with the film sometime next month, and that the film should be released sometime in the next year.

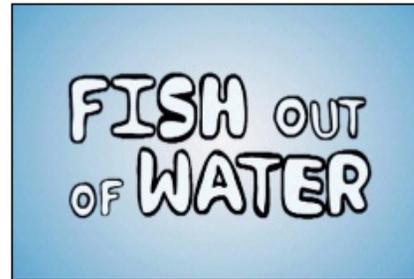
In the next few months, King will be touring Australia and Europe — and definitely not watching *The L Word*.

"I will go on record just so every lesbian in America will hate me," King says. "I don't think *The L Word* has ever been a very good show. I don't think the writing is all that good and I surely don't think the directing has been all that good. And sometimes I think the acting has just sucked. ... It's a soap opera about lesbians and a lot of times it's flat out terrible."

If one thing's for sure about Kaki King, it's that she's quite passionate about what she believes in (or believes totally sucks).

This Weekend At Outfest: 'Fish Out Of Water'

by Lesley Goldberg | Article Date: 07/15/2009 10:01 AM



Coming out of the closet can be a challenging experience, and for Ky Dickens, her experience coming out to friends at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., led to *Fish Out of Water*, a documentary that explores the "seven most notoriously homophobic Bible passages" which screens this month at Outfest.

"Most of my friends were from Southern, conservative families," the writer-director says. "I knew coming out wouldn't go smoothly but I had no idea that they would wail me with an arsenal of Bible-backed condemnation. I didn't know how to defend myself to the variety of claims they were making so I went and talked to ministers throughout Tennessee about what the Bible says about homosexuality."



Dickens, who was "shocked to hear that very little was said in the Bible about homosexuality and what was stated was grossly misinterpreted," knew after the 2004 elections used gay marriage as a "wedge issue" that she had to take the information she gathered and "present it to the country as a way to set the record straight."

"So many people use the Bible as a way to condemn the gay lifestyle but so few people understand what the Bible actually says on the topic," she says.

The doc, a "genre-bending, intellectually condensed, power-packed analysis of the religious arguments used to condemn homosexuality and justify marriage discrimination," is a mixture of animation, interviews and expert analysis from theologians across the country.

"We interviewed a lot of the movers and shakers in this debate," the first-time director says. "I spent a year researching the most prominent voices on the subject and then started reaching out to them in hopes that they'd participate. In the end, we found a great cast of experts from every region of the nation who offer and exceptional recompense of expertise and insight into the subject."

The theologians include Dr. Amy Jill Levine, one of the foremost Greek and New Testament scholars in the country; Bishop John Shelby Spong, one of the first Episcopalian Bishops to embrace the gay community; Rev. Dr. Fred Niedne, the head of the Theology Department at Valparaiso University; and ministers from Texas to Missouri "who have risked their lives and careers to embrace the queer community, and even conduct gay marriages," Dickens says.

As for the "seven most notoriously homophobic passages," Dickens says there are four in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament and the film shows how each of these verses is "manipulated to bolster various claims against gay people."

"Two of the verses come from the creation stories in Geneses," she says. "Then there is the story of Sodom & Gomorrah, also in Geneses. After that is the 'man shall not lay with another man' verse found in Leviticus 18:22. In the New Testament, you have the verses that link homosexuality to sinfulness and hell."



Dickens, meanwhile, says the title of the documentary, *Fish Out of Water*, is meant as a double entre.

"It represents the feeling of exclusion that many gays feel from religious institutions, society and even family," Dickens says of the film, her first to bring to fruition. "Secondly, the fish was a 1st century Christian symbol. The symbol represented unity and belonging to members of the early Christian church, which was a radical institution because it sought to embrace the marginalized and outcasts. Today, many Christians who brand their cars and things with the fish symbol are casting stones and dividing communities instead of truly being stewards of that powerful 1st century symbol."

As for gathering the subjects interviewed in the film about their personal experiences of homosexuality and the Bible, Dickens says she spent about four months in 2007 looking for participants through social-networking sites like Facebook and through advertising at community centers, health centers and gay bars in five different states.

"In the end, we had over 200 folks show up for interviews," she says. "It was the most diverse sampling of the queer community I've ever seen. We had everyone from homeless gay men to immigrants from South America to hipsters from urban Detroit. It was amazing."

After securing interview subjects and a wide range of theologians, Dickens says the main obstacles she faced were money and time.

"When I started making the film, it was due to passion and necessity. I went after it despite the fact I didn't have finances to back me up," she says. "My inventive producers hosted a variety of fundraisers to keep production rolling, but it was always a struggle to find funding. When Prop. 8 happened (in California), we didn't have the time or money to wait so I did what so many other filmmakers have had to do: I took out loans liquidated my savings, racked up credit cards and begged a lot of very talented people for favors."

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Among those contributing to *Fish Out of Water* was lesbian singer-songwriter Kaki King, who, after seeing the trailer for *Fish* and getting to know the filmmakers, provided the score for the doc.



"Her score for *Fish Out of Water* is mesmeric," Dickens says.

Fish Out of Water will host prescreening parties at Here Bar in West Hollywood on July 9 and 10. The documentary screens at Outfest at 7:30 p.m. on July 18 at the Fairfax Cinemas.

Our Town

Get in the (Pink) Van

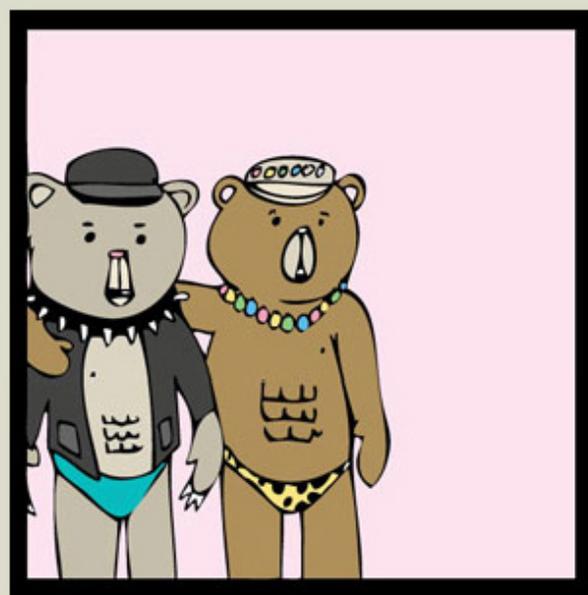
A local filmmaker tours the nation to change Americans' minds about homosexuality.

By Kelly McClure

October 11, 2007

Ky Dickens remembers watching *Freaky Friday* as a seven-year-old in Hinsdale and praying to God that one day she'd find herself in the body of a boy, just long enough to kiss a girl. At 13 she got obsessed with the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*, watching Idgie and Ruth's romance unfold almost daily. Dickens didn't come from a very religious family—her father is agnostic; her mother took them to a local Lutheran church only on holidays—but she was still scared to tell them she was lesbian. And when she tried to come out, at 16, it didn't go so well. "Mom, is there anything I could tell you that would make you disown me?" she asked. "And she said, 'Well, yeah, you could tell me that you're gay.' She said it like, 'Dinner's ready.'"

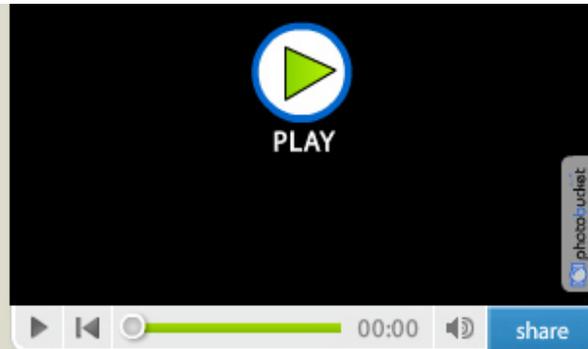
Dickens's first choice for college had been UCLA—she'd made videos since she was 14 and wanted a career in film—but her mom



put her foot down. California, she said, was "that place for fruits and nuts." Dickens thought, "If I can't move to California, where can I go where I can be totally gay?" She settled on Vanderbilt University in Nashville; her idea of the south was based on characters like Idgie and Ruth and *To Kill a Mockingbird's* tomboy Scout. "I don't know what I was thinking," she says. "Vanderbilt was the epitome of southern conservative culture. I joined a sorority, I was a long blond-haired Tri Delt, and I dated the lacrosse captain." When she came out in the last semester of her senior year, "it was so scandalous the story ran in the *Vanderbilt Hustler*. The newspaper. The school newspaper!" Now Dickens, who's 29 and lives in Andersonville, is making a documentary about homosexuality and organized religion inspired by the "Bible abuse" she came up against there.

At 20 Dickens decided to start her adult life "honestly" and tell someone she was gay. She let the cat out of the bag during a class trip to Florida. "I told the person with the biggest mouth, her name was Hope, 'I need to tell you something . . .' And then a day or two later all these southern girls were like, 'Wait a second now. Do you have a crush on me? . . . Why not? Am I fat? Am I ugly?'"

Her friends were confused but generally supportive. Conservative Christians with a deep-seated belief that homosexuality was wrong, they worried that the devil had taken hold of her and that she'd burn in hell. "And then my best, best, best friend, who would go out drinking and partying with me all the time, suddenly turned holier-than-thou." The girl's parents led a Bible group for the Florida State Congress and she couldn't reconcile the Bible's teachings with her friend's sexuality. "It completely ripped us apart. I think out of defense—maybe it was a prideful thing—that's when I really started talking to priests, ministers, and rabbis and stuff."



Ky Dickens; *Fish Out of Water*

Robert Drea

Role Play

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Dickens, who doesn't practice any particular faith herself, spent two months talking with local religious leaders about homosexuality. Time and again she was told that if Jesus were alive today, the last thing he'd worry about is who was sleeping with whom. The handful of Bible passages commonly invoked to denounce gays, she was told, were often taken out of context for political purposes. This was a message she wanted to spread. "In order to survive, I felt like my only option was to change people's minds. I thought that if they saw that their views were spoon-fed they could change." But the timing wasn't right. "It was still taboo. A lot of the priests said they'd talk to me when they were retired." Seven years later homosexuality is a major wedge issue and, Dickens says, religious leaders are looking for a forum to discuss it.

Dickens, who returned to Chicago in 2002 and produces commercials at MK Films for big-name clients like Neutrogena and Coke, started work on *Fish Out of Water*, her first independent feature, in January 2006. Since then she and coproducer Tristan Silverman have been recording interviews with a range of religious leaders—from Methodist ministers to Scientologists—all over the country, in cities like New York and Chicago but mainly in "real America" towns like Garland, Texas, and Valparaiso, Indiana. They're also talking with members of the GLBT community and random residents of each city, targeting barber shops and hair salons in particular, "because everybody gets their hair cut."

"We got kicked out of a lot of hair salons," says Dickens. "We'd break people in by asking preliminary questions like, 'How do you feel about divorce?' Then once we started asking about homosexuality we'd get ushered out." A lot of people said they believed homosexuality was simply wrong. "When you asked them why they'd say, 'Oh, it just is.' And if you asked them to give you a place in the Bible where it mentioned that, they'd either say the whole Adam and Eve thing or Sodom and Gomorrah."

Several religious leaders have told Dickens that many people insist on the Bible's authority in denouncing homosexuality because that authority has been increasingly dismissed by the general population, particularly when it comes to social justice issues. "Almost always the church sides on the side of justice in major issues of debate," Dickens says. "Martin Luther King himself was a minister." But things get complicated when people on the other side of the debate cite passages from the Bible to defend their arguments.

In the coming months Dickens will be interviewing former members of the Institute for Religion and Democracy, a D.C.-based political think tank that aims to bring conservative Christian churches in line "with biblical and historic teachings" and puts a great deal of manpower and money into influencing legislation on issues such as immigration, welfare reform, and tax policy. The IRD itself acknowledges in its own materials that these are issues on which "there is no definitive Christian position."

Many members of the religious community, like John Shelby Spong, a liberal theologian, biblical scholar, and retired Episcopal bishop, insist the Bible will become less valid as a tool of faith and turn more people away from the church if it's used to build an argument for hate. "Preachers everywhere, most of the ones I talked to, are horrified that if they hold on to this that they will just keep losing numbers. Because you can't be discriminatory and hateful and think that people are gonna want to keep walking through your doors," Dickens says. According to a 2006 Harris Poll of 2,010 U.S. adults, only 26 percent attended weekly church services.

Dickens has hired local artists Kyle Harter and Emily Carter to create animated sequences to illustrate such points, tie together her interviews, and accompany quotations from the Bible. "Any place where I bring up religion it's animated. Because, one, it can be boring. And, two, some of these stories are so far-fetched that animation helps you realize how far we are from the context in which the scripture was written."



Dickens has bankrolled much of the project with her own money and through fund-raisers but estimates she'll need about \$80,000 more to finish, including editing, licensing, and legal fees. She's applied for grants and received a couple of generous personal donations. Kristen Kaza, who is handling publicity for the film, started a monthly themed dance party at the Holiday Club this summer called Role Play to help out. The first night they raised enough to cover

Dickens's and Silverman's airfare for their next set of interviews, with former IRD members in New York.

Dickens debuted the film's trailer at another fund-raiser in July (it can be seen at myspace.com/fishoutofwaterfilm) and expects to wrap up work in March of next year. After that, she'll seek screenings at film festivals and on cable and then make a traveling show of it. "I'm very lucky to have a brother who's a complete hippie and has two Volkswagen buses and knows how to fix them," she says. "We're going to get one of his buses, paint it pink, and tour the film in the most conservative, small, untouched areas of this country we can find. We're gonna put up projectors in parks, on corners, and if we get kicked out, fine, we'll just go somewhere else. This is a real grassroots production."

Dickens says one of the preachers she spent a great deal of time with, John Fellers, "fought his whole life in Texas on this issue." Fellers died the day she debuted the trailer. "I received an e-mail from Laura Young, the wife of another preacher and a woman I have formed a friendship with and ended up making a producer on this film," Dickens says. "She said, 'He lost his fight the day you launched yours.'"



Dickens revisits Vanderbilt to screen debut film

Fish out of water tackles Biblical, coming-out issues

by Ben Grimwood

Apr 1, 2010

photo by Adam Bouska

“Lesbians are OK in the South, so I went to Vanderbilt,” documentary filmmaker Ky Dickens giggled over a glass of red wine in the lounge at the Vanderbilt Marriott Hotel.



Through the laughter, the Chicago native describes one motivating factor for coming to Vanderbilt University as an undergraduate: the homoerotic, Southern female protagonists of the film, *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991). “I mean, if Mary Stuart Masterson and Mary Louise Parker could make food fights so sexy and if everyone in the film seemed OK with them, why would lesbians not be okay in the South,” she thought.

Alas, before graduation day in 2000 Dickens, who graduated magna cum laude with majors in Human and Organizational Development (HOD) and Sociology, obviously discovered the flaws in that logic. After all, Dickens’ debut film, *Fish out of Water*, was inspired by the opposition she faced when coming out as a lesbian to her sorority sisters during her senior year at Vanderbilt, a decision which Dickens reveals was provoked by a moving screening of Kimberly Peirce’s *Boys Don’t Cry*.

Dickens is a fascinating conversationalist. Her favorite filmmakers and films include the films of Todd Haynes, the films of Werner Herzog (which she describes too accurately as “crazy”), Michael Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and Alfonso Cuarón’s *Y Tu Mamá También*. She also shares greatly admires Oscar winner Paul Haggis (*Crash*), who even read a draft of her film’s screenplay. His daughter, Katy Haggis, is a producer for *Fish out of Water*, and Dickens got to know her father’s work as a result. I met with Ky Dickens in order to talk about *Fish out of Water* after its debut screening on Vanderbilt campus on March 22, a screening which she called “cathartic.” It was the first event in the Vanderbilt Lambda Association’s Rainbow ReVU week. The film will also be screened at the Nashville Film Festival in April.

O&A: Can you tell me what influenced you to make yourself an animated character in your documentary?

Dickens: I did not want to be in the film at all because I was very intent on this movie not being about me, and I’m very camera shy in general. The first draft of the film had a bird narrator. It was a little yellow bird, and there’s a whole beginning story about how a fish flips out of water and turns into a bird. It was very far-fetched. And I did a screening party to raise money and the funds to finish the film, and we showed a 30-minute clip of the film and then had a Q&A. After that, people were coming up to me, saying, ‘The bird thing confused me.’ That was usually their first comment. And their second comment was, ‘The story about your friend and Vanderbilt and the letter was so awesome and inspiring. Why aren’t you telling this from your perspective? The film would be so much easier to understand and more relate-able if you put yourself in it.’ And I fought against it and fought against it and did not want to do it. And we had a big team meeting one night and that’s when it was decided, hey, let’s just make an animated character of me, and that way, it would go with the animation and we wouldn’t have to go back and re-shoot anything. It was kind of a very late-in-the-game choice to bring everything together after – almost like focus groups and showing the screenings and stuff.



Dickens revisits Vanderbilt to screen debut film

O&A: How familiar were you with websites such as Soulforce.org before you made *Fish out of Water*? For the record, Soulforce has a similar mission to demystify passages of the Bible used by Christians to try to condemn homosexuality.

Dickens: Well, I'd heard of Soulforce, and they were just getting started around this time [*Fish out of Water* was made]. What's funny is the Web wasn't as connected as it is now. You know, I don't even know if they had a website at that point. [...] I'm not sure where [they were getting started], but they were just getting off the ground. I'd heard about a lot of their missions, and a lot of their ministries were in line with what we were doing. The difference is I wanted to make it easy for people to get all the information in one fell swoop that would be non-threatening, quick and entertaining. And instead of having people have to read it for themselves or pick through web sites or go to seminars or that type of thing, which is all valuable and important for our community, I thought it needed to be in film format, so I think that's kind of why I went my route.

O&A: Has *Fish out of Water* been picked up by a distributor yet?

Dickens: It has. It's been picked up by First Run Features, who distributed *For the Bible Tells Me So* and *A Jihad for Love*, so a lot of films that deal with the religious gay issue. We are being released [on DVD] April 20.

O&A: How long did it take you to make this film?

Dickens: It took about three-and-a-half years, but the idea for it came 10 years ago at Vanderbilt. It took me some time to gain confidence both in the queer community and in the film community before I wanted to undertake the feature. And it kind of paid off because just the networking with editorial houses, color-correction houses, equipment houses, [and] that sort of thing in Chicago helped making the film financially in ways that I could never have done without, you know, kinda getting established a bit before diving right in.

O&A: Is *Fish Out of Water* a one-off, or do you intend to make another film? If so, what is your next film project?

Dickens: I had a film I wanted to jump right into, but once this started going around the festival circuit and then screening in churches and schools and that sort of thing, I realized that it would be doing a disservice to this project if I just kind of abandoned it right now and went on to the next thing. I feel it's going to take maybe another six months, maybe another year. The country will kind of tell me, I think, when it's time to move on, and not vice versa. I want to make sure the film and its message reaches as many people as possible, and that's gonna take just more work and continuous e-mails and networking and bringing, you know, being a shepherd for the film for a while longer. But hopefully by 2011 I'll be starting on another film.

O&A: Can you give us any ideas about what it might be about?

Dickens: It won't be socially heavy; it's gonna be a little bit lighter. I don't want to say anything right yet because you're always scared your documentary ideas, you know, coming out so quick, they could change or who knows what. So I definitely look forward to doing something a little less socially polarizing.

O&A: I noticed that *Fish Out of Water* is structured rather like an essay, punctuated by the animated you delineating your narration with lots of firsts and nexts. This narrative style stands out to me because I have never seen anything like it. Did your training at Vanderbilt, with its emphasis on strong writing practices, have an influence on this structure?

Dickens: I think writing style did come into it, and I learned that more from my father than Vanderbilt. By the time you come to college, your writing style's kind of been mostly chiseled out. But it was a very deliberate style that was tailored to this film specifically, and that's because the Bible, as you know, there's so much information and it's so polarizing that I felt like it had to be watered down and put into basic sentences and [to] really take audiences by the hand and walk through it point by point by point, so it would be easy to understand, very accessible, and people wouldn't get lost. It's so easy to just drift off when talking about the Bible or something so old and threatening as the Bible. So by taking people almost from a 3-year-old's point-of-view, really step-by-step, I think it makes it easier to follow, and yeah, so it was a specific choice for this film. I don't know if I'll ever have the need to make a film like that again in this format, but I think it works for *Fish out of Water*.

Dickens revisits Vanderbilt to screen debut film

O&A: What influenced you to use Fred Phelps as a talking head for your interviews of theologians and religious figures, especially in a film trying to justify GLBTQ people to God and his people?

Dickens: Two reasons. One is, you know, Fred Phelps is very extreme in how he carries out things. There are a lot of people out there who really agree with him. And by using Fred Phelps, who is, really, he's laughable in the film because he's this frothing maniac, and people laugh at him. He was used as this comic relief, and when people can laugh at something, it empowers them, and it disarms the words. And by having Fred Phelps say these words that people hear coming from their own fathers and brothers and mothers, suddenly, those words become invalidated, and you're able to laugh at them. And then secondly, you know, within the process of making the film, I really realized that there's no middle ground: It's either hate or love, or intolerance or acceptance, and there's no polite intolerance or "love the sinner, hate the sin" type of thing. And to have a very "polite hateful" talking head in there is making it seem like that's an OK point of view to have, that it's an acceptable point of view, and in my opinion, it's not. You're dis-loving and un-accepting of gay people, [so] you're in a category by itself. And I think people need to kind of start wrapping their head around that. Until we kind of force that task upon people, nothing's going to change.

O&A: In what way do you see *Fish out of Water* as being indebted to the independent gay and lesbian films of the 1990s and 2000s that preceded it?

Dickens: Well, I think every gay film that has come before any other film opens the door, or finds a new audience or secures its place at a festival that will help secure your place later. Because everything is related to audience, as well as money and as impact, it all affects everything else. *For the Bible Tells Me So* is the most striking example, and it's been the most personal because, specifically, the distributor that picked us up said, 'Hey, *For the Bible* did great for us, so we wanna give *Fish out of Water* a try, too, and bring you on.' I don't think it would have happened if it wasn't for *For the Bible*. And, you know, when *For the Bible* was going out there, I don't think anyone who would have watched a film about religion and gays thought it would work. Any film about religion and gays at some point felt dry and boring, then someone did it right and someone did it well, and then there's something that's done great and well [*For the Bible Tells Me So*], and then we came along and we're kind of given our fair shake. You know, everything is a big domino effect, in terms of filmmakers coming before me, even in terms of raising money, even in terms of a movie getting made. There's no way to know how much influence.

O&A: The funny thing is that, especially in the gay and lesbian films that hit the independent circuit in the early 1990s, they were all about doing away with trying to make gay images more "squeaky clean," so then you get films like *Poison* and *The Living End* and such. It's like, "We're here, we're queer," and, as B. Ruby Rich said [in her 1992 essay, "New Queer Cinema"], "Get hip to [us]." In what way do you see a different trend sort of coming in specifically gay and lesbian independent films making the rounds that now get to be more about educating than about being outright "Here we are."

Dickens: There's kind of two movements that have sprung up. The first one in queer cinema was the idea that our characters and our representations have never been seen before. People were writing characters that were extreme: very flamboyant men that were easy to laugh at, you know, kind of the jester, or butchy women. There was kind of stereotyping of our roles, and there was almost no apologizing for the 'Hey, this is who we are. You're gonna accept us exactly for our differences and celebrate those differences.' And now since the 'post-gay gayness' of wanting to really fit in, and we're kind of this big queer community, there's kind of this idea of not necessarily wanting to celebrate our differences but wanting to celebrate our similarities and our likenesses, so our characters are like this and this and this and 'Oh, I also happen to be gay.' And I think that's great, too, but it's gonna take both because we don't want to get rid of the sweet, flamboyant guy and the super bull dyke or whatever because then we're missing those important factors in our community. BDickenut there is a difference happening, I think, in queer cinema between celebrating our differences and celebrating our similarities. It's interesting.



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Calling all Queers

Local filmmaker seeks GLBT participants for documentary on gays and religion

By Alicia Kismet Eler

For the past six years, Chicago-based documentary filmmaker Ky Dickens has been contemplating what the Bible really says about homosexuality. Through interviews with religious leaders from all sects of Judeo-Christianity, religious scholars, academics specializing in religious studies, and members of the GLBT community, Dickens' upcoming film *Fish Out of Water* reveals that right-wing fundamentalists have wrongly misinterpreted the Bible. Dickens is hopeful that the film will be completed by the spring of 2008, right before the November 2008 presidential elections. She wants to rock the religious right and, hopefully, start a revolution against homophobia within organized religion.

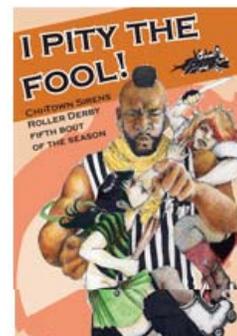
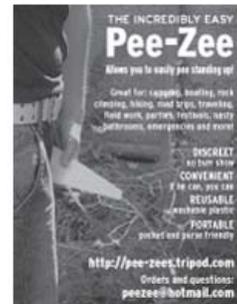
CHILL: How did you realize that you wanted to produce/direct documentary film?

Ky Dickens: I got my first video camera when I was 14 and became obsessed with taping everything going on in my life—the video camera became an extension of my own body. I always thought that human interaction was more interesting than fiction. I started making documentaries in high school when my good friend died. In college, I made a plethora of documentaries about being down in the South, and when I started coming out of the closet I made a film about that. When I got out of school I started working on commercials—you know, it pays the bills. However, documentary film is my passion and, I believe, the most truthful type of art that there is.

CHILL: Where did you get the inspiration for *Fish Out of Water*?

KD: When I came out my senior year of college at Vanderbilt University, I was shocked by how pelted I was with religious rhetoric and what I've come to refer to as "bible abuse." At the time, I didn't have the resources to fend off peoples' claims about homosexuality being sinful and perverse.

After I graduated, which was about six years ago, I started talking to priests, rabbis, theologians, and other religious figures to see what they really thought about the "homosexual lifestyle," and I found that not just a few, but hundreds and thousands across the country think that homosexuality is a normal, healthy way of life, an identity to be celebrated and not shamed by. However, six years ago, a lot of religious leaders would not come out and say this on tape—they thought that they would lose their jobs and they weren't ready to talk about the homosexual issue. And that's where I got inspired: I decided that I had to make a documentary about this. I thought if I could get religious leaders to speak out, a lot of queers who struggle with their sense of spiritual identity could finally get some vindication.





CHILL: Tell me more about the spiritual leaders and academics who are standing up for GLBTs. What are they saying?

KD: I have talked to people in every single faith group including rabbis, priests in the Catholic Church, ministers from the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and many more. I don't think that it's a matter of denomination, it's a matter of interpretation that got lost along the way. Though it might be obvious to you and me, it is critical to go back to the Old Testament and the New Testament and realize how they were originally written and interpreted. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah from the book of Genesis, which is often used by the religious right to demoralize homosexuality, is really a story about hospitality. There are many examples like that, and the film interviews many spiritual leaders who analyze and discuss them.

CHILL: Tell me about the interviews you would like to do with members of the LGBT community.

KD: On March 10th and 11th from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at 1408 W. Carmen Ave. (one block east of Clark and two blocks south of Foster), I'm conducting a drop-in interview event for any members of the GLBT community who are willing to talk about their feelings on organized religion and the oppressive claims made by some religious groups. You do not have to be religious or even spiritual to participate in this event. We will provide all participants with free food, beer, champagne and wine. Please stop by if you can.

As a filmmaker, I respect peoples' privacy and will shadow-out faces of those who are concerned about confidentiality. My goal with these two interview days is to create a thumbprint of our community's feelings around spirituality. These short interviews will serve as one of the most compelling and engaging aspects of the film. I encourage all members of the GLBT community to bring friends and partners to attend.

CHILL: Whom do you want to reach with this film?

KD: I am making this film to help members of the GLBT community who struggle with the issue of being religious and queer, and who have personally experienced "bible abuse" from a friend or family member(s). My target audience, though I am not sure if I will be able to reach them, is the religious right. So many minds are closed on the religious right, and many politicians are galvanized by the evangelical voting block. One of the things that enthralls these politicians is the homosexual issue. Unfortunately, they are operating from a place of blasphemy and hypocrisy; I'm hoping that if I can get just one Evangelical to scratch their head and think "Hmm, maybe I'm wrong," then change will have a chance to happen. A storm starts with only one drop of water.

If you would like more information about the film, please e-mail Ky Dickens at documentary@msn.com.

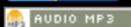


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By Marc Fellon | November 4, 2009

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VOTED: Pick of the Week!



Many of the world's religious leaders disagree on a lot of things, but one thing that brings them together is their condemnation of the gays. But why pick on the gays at all? Isn't God all about love anyway?

Today we're talking to filmmaker Ky Dickens about her fascinating new documentary "Fish Out of Water" which details her struggle to come to terms with how religious people view same-sex loving folks.

Ky came out as a lesbian to her friends in college but was met with hostility and religious condemnation. She was encouraged to seek counseling and reparative therapy. Instead, she sought out all the specific references in the Bible to homosexuality and debunked them.

After finding out that the few mentions of homosexuality in the Bible didn't carry much weight when taken into context, Ky wrote a letter to her friend detailing what she found. Her friend not only understood her message but apologized. This powerful moment inspired Ky to reach out to a larger audience with a documentary on what she found out.

Listen as Ky talks about interviewing everyday Americans in truck stops, barbershops and shopping malls about the Bible's take on homosexuality.

Hanging out with Shirley Phelps- is she for real? Who are the good guys fighting the good fight? And why don't more ministers and churches stand up for equality?

Fish out of Water shows this Sunday in Chicago at the Music Box theater as part of [Reeling, the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival](#).

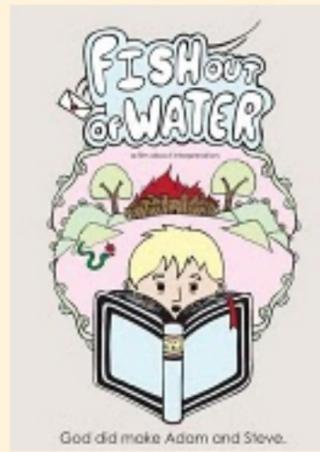
We Have the Stars ★★★★★

MARCH 28, 2010

Fish out of Water

*** out of ****

If someone were to ask you where in the Bible is a reference to homosexuality, could you tell him or her? If someone were to attempt to persuade you the Bible claims outright that homosexuality is wrong, could you defend yourself?



Ky Dickens' didactic "Fish out of Water"

(2009) is an engaging resource for those that cannot defend themselves against those who take it upon themselves to be "Biblical spokespeople." The part-2D animated film, part-documentary delineates the "grossly misinterpreted" Biblical passages used ritually to condemn those who identify as GLBTQ, including the stories of Adam and Eve and Sodom and Gomorrah, the passages of Leviticus, and the writings of Paul in Romans, Corinthians, and Timothy.

Although it plays like a History Channel program, with its assemblage of found footage, including photographs, statistics, newspaper headlines, instructional videos, amateur footage, old films, and art, "Fish out of Water" uses these tools to its advantage in involving the spectator, who probably identifies as GLBTQ. Hopefully eventually, this adorable film can find its rightful audience in the mainstream, which seems to be Dickens' intention all along - to communicate this information through the widely disseminated medium of film.

Dickens claims rightfully that religious conviction plays a huge role in modern discrimination against gay marriage rights, including the institution of Prop 8 in California. Moreover, Dickens asserts rightfully (again) that many of these religious beliefs are often personally un-researched and founded in hearsay. Her film's goals, then, are threefold: 1.) To "out," so to speak, these popular convictions based on hearsay; 2.) To prove how the Bible - being a book - cannot be interpreted without its cultural, social, and linguistic contexts; and 3.) To change people's minds by informing the mainstream why they have been wrong to discriminate against GLBTQ people.

Although Dickens' film is multifaceted and multifarious in its uses of the film medium (documentary, animation, etc.), I see something in her film that is rare in others: It is structured like an essay. This aspect is important because it assigns her narration a level of intelligence that makes her statements hard to brush off (not to mention the intelligence of the educated theologians she calls on to teach these commonly misinterpreted Biblical passages to viewers.) Dickens delineates her film with theses, "first"-s, "next"-s, etc. A Vanderbilt alumnus, indeed, as Dickens notes in the exposition of her film.

Besides theologians, Dickens films interviews with staunch opponents of GLBTQ rights, such as Fred Phelps, famously of the Westboro Baptist Church (a.k.a. God Hates Fags). Although he speaks his mind, often conflating members of the groups he opposes, including Jews and gays, Phelps' outrageous statements end up being completely laughable, surrounded as they are among a sea of educated responses. Oddly enough, they might be the (very ironic) comic relief of the film.

Besides theologians, Dickens films interviews with staunch opponents of GLBTQ rights, such as Fred Phelps, famously of the Westboro Baptist Church (a.k.a. God Hates Fags). Although he speaks his mind, often conflating members of the groups he opposes, including Jews and gays, Phelps' outrageous statements end up being completely laughable, surrounded as they are among a sea of educated responses. Oddly enough, they might be the (very ironic) comic relief of the film.

Dickens is only a first-time filmmaker, but her work is compelling and likable. Many who identify as GLBTQ - myself included - would have begged for a resource such as this one prior to this film's creation. Well, here it is: cute on the outside, subversive on the inside. Dickens might have felt like a "fish out of water," referring to the film's title, but she brings everyone in right with her.

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SHOW DETAILS

WCQ335 Ky Dickens, Director of Fish Out of Water

2009-10-22



Host: Amy Matheny

Amy is running solo today and gives us some bulls-eye gossip from her entertainment bible including Wanda Sykes and Cherry Jones.

Guest: Ky Dickens, writer and director of the film, Fish Out of Water. The film explores the impassioned relationship between homosexuality and the Bible. Ky explains the evolution of the long journey involved to have the film made. She also describes the 7 passages in the Bible that are used to condemn homosexuality. For more information visit www.fishoutofwaterfilm.com. If you're in Chicago, it'll be the centerpiece documentary at the Reeling film festival so visit www.reelingfilmfestival.org

Follow Amy on [Twitter!](#)

Music Featured in This Queercast:

The Fray - "All At Once"
Angel Taylor - "Like You Do"

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