## **DATEBOOK**



### 'All we have is now. And each other'

Transgender writers facing second Trump era with renewed resolve. PAGE G6

## Facing another era of resistance

Trans writers in Bay Area find strength in art and community as threats rise

#### By Meredith Maran

Caro De Robertis spent election night 2024 in their Oakland home, huddled around the TV with their kids, ages 12 and 15.

"My kids are Black and Latinx, growing up in a queer family, with one trans immigrant parent — me," said the Uruguayan American author of six novels and a forthcoming work of nonfiction, "So Many Stars: An Oral History of Trans, Nonbinary, Genderqueer, and Two-Spirit People of Color." "They asked me whether we'd need to leave the country if Trump won.

My heart broke."
Since the election, De Robertis
has focused on protecting their
kids' mental health.

"I can't afford despair. Collectively, we can't afford despair. We can grieve, but we have to find the fuel that will allow us to keep going, for ourselves and for future generations," they said.

Many of the Bay Area's trans writers are facing President-elect Donald Trump's threats with determined resolve, finding strength in community and art.

"Tm an immigrant from a country that endured a brutal dictatorship. I know that political repression thrives on silence. There's too much at stake not to use my next book launch to fight for trans dignity and rights," De Robertis said. "The tour will go on, even in red states," they added.

Spewing hate toward the LGBTQ community, especially trans people, isn't new to Trump. Shortly after his first election in November 2016, a study by the

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alonda M. James/The Chronicle

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#### **COVER STORY**

"I can't afford despair. Collectively, we can't afford despair. We can grieve, but we have to find the fuel that will allow us to keep going, for ourselves and for future generations."

Caro De Robertis, author and

Southern Poverty Law Center identified "a hate crime surge" of almost 900 incidents of harassment, which the center attributed to "The Trump Effect."

Over the next four years, Trump enacted more anti-LGBTQ policies than any previous administration, blocking trans people from the military, opposing the Equality Act, appointing anti-queer judges, blocking job and medical protections for queer people, dismantling regulations that protected transgender students, and suspending investigations into complaints from trans students that they were denied educational access.

Recent data from AdImpact reveals that Republicans spent close to \$35 million on TV commercials for the 2024 election targeting transgender people. Some ads ended with the statement, "Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you."

Pushing radical gender ideology is pretty much the job description of transgender writers, now facing intensified threats for being who they are and doing what they do. Charlie Jane Anders (she/her), San Francisco author of several science fiction novels and the forthcoming "Lessons on Magic and Disaster," has been proudly trans for 20 years. She's more worried than ever.

"The vast sums spent on anti-trans ads feel like a recipe



Photos by Lea Suzuki/The Chronicle

for anti-trans crackdowns. The scary part is not knowing what could possibly happen, or when," Anders said.

She said her backup plan is to leave the country "in case things turn really dark." But for now, she promises to keep creating community, hosting a monthly Bay Area group called Trans Nerd Meetup. And she'll find solace and strength in her writCharlie Jane Anders, above, says she will continue to create community.

Children's book writer Kyle Casey Chu starred in a short film about a hate incident.

ing, which keeps her going, she added.

Kyle Casey Chu (she/her) knows the pain of transphobic violence. Author of the forthcoming children's book "The Queen Bees of Tybee County," Chu also starred in the short film "After What Happened at the Library," based on the hate crime she experienced in 2022. Chu was in her Panda Dulce drag persona reading to children at the San Lorenzo Public Library, an event that was stormed

by a band of Proud Boys.

"Once the Proud Boys were removed, I told the panicked kids, When you're different, sometimes people are afraid of you. Please don't let this dissuade you from being yourself.' Being myself is really exciting for me, but the coming administration makes it feel more dangerous than powerful," Chu told the Chronick.

In some states, Republican legislators, along with conservative and religious groups, have mounted a relentless effort to turn back the clock on trans rights — banning trans athletes from sports teams and censoring discussion of LGBTQ issues in schools. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, there are currently 574 anti-LGBTQ bills pending in the U.S., and 46

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Courtesy of Malik Daniels
Vera Blossom, a Daly
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#### WRITERS

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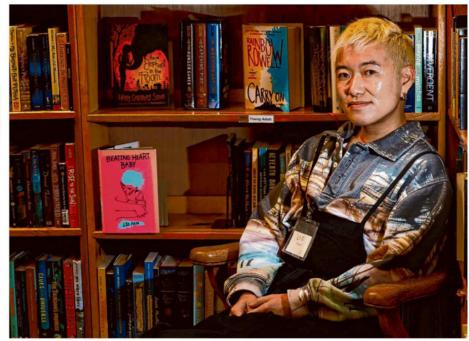
have already passed.

Vera Blossom (she/they), the Daly City-born, Filipina American author of 'How To F— Like a Girl,' came out at 16 and started transitioning to female at 20. She, too, worries for herself and others.

"Anti-trans legislation has been on the rise," Blossom said. "With a bigot in the White House, I worry about anti-trans violence becoming more common. I fear for my trans friends who depend on medical services to maintain their health and happiness."

Author of "Beating Heart Baby" and the forthcoming "The L.O.V.E. Club," Lio Min (they/ them) said, "I know of two deaths of queer young people since the election. One kid took their life on election night. The other died of an overdose. I'm afraid there will be more of that among our queer youth: despair, fear, suicide."

Michelle Tea, renowned West Coast literary organizer and the author of 20 memoirs, essay collections and novels, founded Dopamine Books in 2023 to publish, protect and promote



Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle

Lio Min, author of "Beating Heart Baby," can no longer wait to complete projects amid the urgency of a Trump administration.

"My rights and my safety have been precarious for as long as I've been alive. ... I'll do what I always do when things get hard: lean on my community, make room for joy, and work toward a better future."

Vera Blossom, author and activist

queer authors and their stories
— including Vera Blossom's.

"The election won't affect anything Dopamine does," Tea wwed, "although some of our writers will opt not to travel to red states where they feel extra unsafe. Dopamine will keep publishing the same bold queer writing, and we'll support our queer and trans family who are living in scary places that just got scarier."

"My rights and my safety have been precarious for as long as I've been alive," Blossom said. "I'm part of several communities that have been organizing and preparing for a Trump victory. Now that it's happened, I'm going to keep promotting my writing against his white Christian nationalist ideals, and in favor of raunchy sex and trans

love. If I lose access to the medical care I need, I'll do what I always do when things get hard: lean on my community, make room for joy, and work toward a better future."

Chu plans to meet the second Trump presidency with renewed art and activism. "I'm mad as hell," she said, "which is a potent galvanizing force for organizing and creating. My co-writer and I are busy writing stories of fiery resistance and Trans Asian American joy. I'm also releasing three books in the next couple of years — a middlegrade series and a picture book about a San Franciscan queer activist."

"No more waiting," said Lio Min. "Those projects I've had on the back burner, waiting for the perfect moment to put them out? I'm finishing drafts, prepping applications and proposals, and strengthening my local arts network. All we have is now. And each other."

Meredith Maran is a freelance

#### COVER STORY

# Nonbinary partner fears for family and marginalized people as Trump takes office

By Meredith Maran

My partner Denise is the bravest, most grounded person I know. Denise, who uses they/ them pronouns, has pulled me back from the brink more times than I care to count. I've never had to do that for Denise. I've never seen Denise afraid. Littil now.

Denise is terrified of what the next four years might bring, under a president who refers to their nonbinary identity as "left-wing gender insanity" and has vowed to revoke gender-affirming care.

The gender-affirming care Denise receives with their Kaiser Permanente coverage — hormone replacement therapy, monitoring, testing and access to supportive, well-trained medical professionals — helps them be the person they know themselves to be. Some cultures call it the "third gender," Native Americans call it "two-spirit," neither male nor female, embodying traits of both.

The 10-year-old Kaiser gender-affirming care department cannot protect Denise from being called "sir" at the grocery store or from being yelled at to leave women's bathrooms. But it has kept the promise stated on its website, to offer "supportive, inclusive care for all that is you," treating patients "with compassion and respect, using your true name and pronouns."

But President-elect Donald frump has promised to roll back transgender health care on Day 1 of his presidency. Without the medical and psychological treatment that gender-affirming care provides, Denise fears living their truth will no longer be possible.

Since the election, Denise and I have had sporadic, scary



Lea Suzuki/The Chronicle

Author Meredith Maran, left, and her partner Denise Bray are afraid of losing essential protections.

conversations about how we'll protect Denise's health if Trump makes good on his promise to eliminate genderaffirming care. Like so many other wannabe "Trump refugees," we've considered schemes as nutty as taking the four-year "Skip Forward" cruise being sold to Americans seeking refuge from the second Trump term, and as improbable as talking Denise's doctors into prescribing a four-year supply of Denise's meds, then hoping they remain viable until 2029.

We've imagined underground gender-affirming care clinics springing up like the underground abortion clinics of the past — and, grotesquely, the present. We've convinced ourselves that, along with immigrant families being wrenched apart and miscarrying women bleeding out in hospital parking lots, we'll survive a second Donald Trump presidency the way genderqueer people and other targeted minorities have always survived: with courage, determination and a whole lot of help from our friends.

We are not alone in these fears. After the election, I saw many friends, queer and not, put up the same two Instagram posts: an ACLU petition to "Defend Trans Freedom;" and a warning to trans people to seek resources now, before the new Trump administration takes them away.

Trump's threat affects not only trans people but all the Americans he calls "the enemy within": immigrants, queer people and their parents and children, women who are pregnant and women who want to be, people of color, students, Democrats, Republican foes, journalists, protesters — anyone who is critical of him.

On a recent visit to my friend Olivia, I was surprised to find her gregarious 22-yearold son in his room on a Friday night. "He's afraid to leave the house," Olivia told me, her eyes bright with tears. "He doesn't think it's safe out there for a young Black man anymore."

Kenny, the father of 9-yearold twins, texted me, "I'm trans. My partner uses she/ they pronouns. Both my kids are gender-diverse. So we're all feeling the fear." The election has also given Kenny a weighty deadline. "My daughter is trans. I'm racing to get her paperwork in order and get her puberty blockers before Trump eliminates gender-affirming

My hiking buddy, Phoebe, is a British citizen. She's lived in California all her adult life and birthed her three children here. Until Trump's second win, she never felt the need to apply for U.S. citizenship. Postelection, unasked, her American husband initiated the necessary paperwork. "In Trump's eyes, you're an immigrant," he told Phoebe. "Who knows what he might do to our family?"

And then there was my own, personal moment of panie: seeing CNN's list of the executive actions Trump is likely to take to reverse President Joe Biden's policies. Under "Most at Risk" were immigrants, abortion travel (suddenly a consideration since Roe v. Wade was overturned) and LGBTO rights.

The words shot through me. The last item on that list, that's

That realization brought to mind the words written by German pastor Martin Niemöller in the aftermath of the Holocaust. You might have heard it recently. Since the election, it's having a welldeserved moment.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.

Meredith Maran is a freelance writer.