



The Gab

Let's Gab About Dallas

November 2023

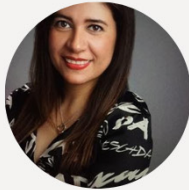


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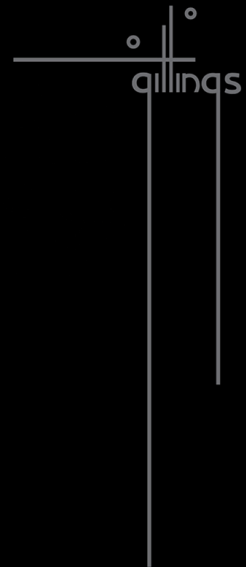
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BRYAN AND JAY

A Heartwarming Story

OF LOVE, COMMUNITY AND FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Bryan and Jay's love story is a testament to serendipity, community, and the enduring power of love. Born and raised in East Texas, Jay and Bryan's paths converged in the vibrant community of Oak Cliff in Dallas..

BRYAN'S EARLY DAYS

Bryan's journey took him from the Midwest to Oak Lawn in Dallas during the transformative 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by both the joys and hardships of the LGBTQ community. Bryan volunteered with the "Buddy Program," offering his support to individuals living with HIV. It was a profound time and experience that left a lasting impact on his heart.

His professional life took off when he helmed the Production Department for Auto Trader Magazines, where he published magazines across several states. Later, he moved to Oak Cliff, attracted by its picturesque landscapes, historic homes, and the diverse, welcoming community that made it truly special.

Bryan became an active member of the neighborhood, contributing to the Neighborhood Association, Old Oak Cliff Conservation League, and Oak Cliff Society of Fine Art. In the early 2000s, he embarked



on a journey to discover his Italian heritage, leading to his obtaining Italian citizenship and forming deep connections with his Italian family. Inspired by the Italian vineyards, Bryan founded Zerbina Wines, importing wine from Italy to share with the Dallas community. His wines found a home in some of the city's most esteemed restaurants and cultural institutions, like the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

INSPIRATION AND FATE

In 2010, while having dinner at Tillman's Roadhouse, Bryan and Jay's paths crossed. Seated at adjoining tables on their first-and-only dates with other people, they sensed an undeniable connection. The following day, they connected and began a journey of love and partnership that has since spanned 14 years.


They built a beautiful life together in Oak Cliff, complete with two beloved cats and a home they designed

and built themselves. Their small neighborhood of 15 homes, where 12 have been completed, has become a tight-knit enclave. Gathering with their neighbors on the front porch or in the cul-de-sac with their dogs is a cherished part of their life.

THE ENCHANTING PRESENT: BRYAN AND JAY

Jay, a gardening enthusiast, created a stunning landscape around their home, embracing Dallas’s extreme weather conditions. His gardening passion and design skills have brought joy to their lives and become a centerpiece of their home.

Jay’s career journey led him into Corporate America, where he’s been with ADP for nearly 28 years, currently working as a Project Manager. Outside of work, his heart belongs to gardening and landscape design, which he generously shares with friends.

Bryan and Jay’s love story is interwoven with their love for Oak Cliff, their community, and their shared passions. It’s a testament to the power of connection and the beauty that can emerge from unexpected meetings and shared dreams. Their hearts have truly found their home in Oak Cliff, a place where they intend to stay and live in their forever home! 





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THANKSGIVING

A Joyous Celebration of Diversity and Inclusivity

FOR LGBTQ+ FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

I met my partner's parents for the first time at Thanksgiving. As the day approached, I couldn't help but feel a mix of excitement and nervousness. They were devout Mormons. My partner assured me it would be fine, but I couldn't help feeling trepidation about how they would receive me as their son's partner of four years. Walking into their home, I felt the fear melt away. I was greeted by a warm and loving atmosphere. The genuine affection and acceptance I felt from his family immediately put me at ease.

A CELEBRATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Their home was a reflection of their hearts—beautiful, authentic, and without pretense. There was no judgment, only love. The air was filled with laughter, genuine conversations, and a sense of unity. The quieter, gentle peace of the home was unlike my family's Thanksgiving celebrations.

At my family's house, the energy was different. My loud New York family, with its blend of boisterous personalities, seemed like a brass band in comparison to the more reserved and conservative



nature of my boyfriend's family. The chaos was always joyful, albeit less peaceful than the other Thanksgiving gathering. As we sat down for the Thanksgiving meal, I couldn't help but notice two unexpected guests—homeless individuals who had been invited by my well-intentioned, progressive-minded mother.

HARVESTING LOVE

When we bowed our heads to say the blessing, silence fell over the room. I could sense my father's discomfort and concern over the presence of these strangers at our table. The tension was palpable, threatening to overshadow the spirit of gratitude

that the day should embody. It was at that moment, my mind reflecting on my boyfriend's family, that inspiration struck—a way to bridge the divide and infuse the room with love and acceptance.

Drawing from the tradition I had witnessed at my boyfriend's family gathering, I suggested that we go around the table, each sharing what we were thankful for. I started by expressing my gratitude for my loving parents who had supported me unconditionally. My sister Maureen followed, acknowledging her gratitude for her siblings' love. Monica, my other sister, shared her excitement for her new house, temporarily overlooking the presence of the homeless guests.

Then it was my brother Michael's turn, who at the time, was on the brink of ending a long-term relationship. Unexpectedly, he expressed gratitude for me, his gay brother, for finding love and being treated with respect. The room fell silent, absorbing his words, and a wave of understanding washed over my father's face. He had often struggled with accepting my sexuality, but at that moment, he saw the love and happiness my relationship brought me.

Next, my brother-in-law Marco spoke, expressing gratitude for the good health and love within the family. It was then that Maryann, one of the our guests, bravely shared her gratitude for the meal and her recent completion of cancer treatment. She expressed thanks for a newfound apartment.

A man named Cleophs, the other guest, stood up and shared his gratitude for the love in all its forms—the love between siblings, between spouses, and even the love shared by two men. He spoke of his time in the Navy, hinting at a story he would save for another day. He mentioned the three buses he had taken to reach our gathering, revealing his commitment to being present.


As Cleophs shared his gratitude and stories, a subtle concern flickered across his face. He seemed troubled as if a weight had settled upon his shoulders. Sensing his unease, I gently inquired about his thoughts. Cleophs looked at me, his eyes filled with a mix of sincerity and worry. "You know," he began, "I couldn't help but notice that Keith's name doesn't start with an 'M' like the rest of you."



Surprised by his observation, I paused for a moment, reflecting on the tradition my family had of giving names starting with the same letter to siblings. Cleophis, despite being an outsider in this gathering, had astutely noticed this detail. His concern for my perceived exclusion touched a chord within me. With a smile, I responded. “You’re right, Cleophis. Our family has a tradition of ‘M’ names, but that doesn’t mean we exclude others. It’s about love and acceptance, regardless of the initial letter. Keith is embraced as a cherished member of our family, just like you are today.” Relief washed over Cleophis’s face, and he let out a deep breath. It was a reminder that sometimes, even in the face of our own traditions, we can inadvertently create a sense of exclusion. But at that moment, we had the opportunity to reaffirm the importance of inclusivity and understanding.

Cleophis, with newfound comfort, continued sharing his stories with a renewed sense of enthusiasm. As he spoke, it became clear that his concern for my name was not merely about a letter, but rather a reflection of his own longing for acceptance and unity.

spoke, it became clear that his concern for my name was not merely about a letter, but rather a reflection of his own longing for acceptance and unity. In a remarkable act of kindness, my father offered to drive Cleophis home, breaking down the barriers that had initially separated us. The room was filled with gratitude, understanding, and the realization that love knows no boundaries. It was a Thanksgiving that transcended stereotypes, prejudices, and preconceived notions.

As we bid farewell to our unexpected guests, the true essence of the day became clear — we had come together as a diverse group, accepting and loving one another without judgment. The power of gratitude, empathy, and compassion had transformed a potentially divisive gathering into a celebration of unity. In the end, Thanksgiving had taught us all a valuable lesson. It reminded us that love knows no boundaries and that genuine connections can be formed when we open our hearts and embrace the differences that make us who we are. It was a day to be truly thankful for the transformative power of love and the capacity to see beyond our perspectives, allowing unity to flourish in the most unexpected of circumstances. 



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NIKKI GIOVANNI WATSON

Gal Pal of the Month

THE HEART OF DALLAS DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

Nikki Giovanni Watson had always believed in the transformative power of design. Born and raised in the heart of Dallas, Texas, she had a natural flair for creating spaces that breathed life into the mundane. From a young age, Nikki had a knack for blending colors and textures, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. But it wasn't just her talent that set her apart; it was her love and commitment to her community that made her a true star.

For this month's Gal Pal of the Month award, we are delighted to shine a spotlight on Nikki Giovanni Watson. As a devoted HGTV star and stager, Nikki has spent years turning houses into homes. Her charisma and creativity made her a fan favorite on the network, but it was her genuine care for her clients that endeared her to viewers. She believes that every home has a story to tell, and she is determined to help her clients tell it beautifully.

A REMARKABLE JOURNEY

Nikki's journey into the world of design had been a remarkable one. Growing up in a modest neighborhood in Dallas, she had always been surrounded by diversity. She often reminisced about the colorful mix of cultures and backgrounds that made her community a true

melting pot. It was this early exposure to different perspectives that had shaped Nikki's worldview, teaching her to value every individual's unique story. She attended a local community college, where she studied interior design while working part-time at a small staging company. It was here that she honed her skills and discovered her passion for transforming spaces. Her talent was undeniable, and soon she was chosen to star in her own show on HGTV, "Designing Dreams with Nikki."



Nikki's show quickly gained a dedicated following. Her charismatic personality and infectious enthusiasm made her a beloved figure in the world of interior design. But Nikki was more than just a talented designer; she was a champion for inclusivity and unity. She believed that beautiful spaces should be

accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or financial situation.

Nikki has earned the title GAL PAL of the month due to her excellent service both to the real estate community as a whole and the community itself, which includes an HVAC unit drive for less fortunate individuals in our community. This loving action rescued many Texans from the summer heat.

NIKKI WATSON: A REMARKABLE GAL PAL

On a crisp autumn afternoon, Nikki sat down for an interview with THE GAB DALLAS magazine. The sun bathed her in a warm glow as she shared her thoughts and feelings about the nomination.

“I’m truly honored to be named Gal Pal of the Month,” Nikki said with a genuine smile. “For me, design has always been about more than just aesthetics. It’s about creating spaces that reflect the people who inhabit them, their stories, and their dreams. Every community, no matter how diverse, has something beautiful to offer, and I want to celebrate that.”


Nikki’s passion for her work shone through as she spoke about her journey. She described her early experiences in Dallas and how they had shaped her perspective on life and design. She owns one of the largest staging companies in North America called The Design Quad located in Dallas Texas.

A FRIEND AND ALLY

“Dallas has always been a place of inclusion and diversity,” she explained. “I grew up surrounded by people from all walks of life, and I learned early on that everyone faces challenges. But those challenges make you stronger, no matter who you are. It’s about finding strength in our differences and celebrating the beauty of our shared humanity.”



The interview touched on Nikki’s work in various communities, from revitalizing historical neighborhoods to helping families create functional and beautiful living spaces on a budget. She spoke passionately about her commitment to making design accessible to all, emphasizing that everyone deserved a space that felt like Home!

In the heart of Dallas, where diversity thrives, Nikki Giovanni Watson remains a shining example of how one person’s passion and love for their community could touch the hearts of many and make the world a more beautiful place, one design at a time. And as she looked back on her remarkable journey, she couldn’t help but remember the humble beginnings; like the time she bought her first bedspread at Steinmart with a 40 percent off coupon, a reminder of the simple joys that had led her to where she was today. 





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