

Quilting the Progression of Queer Rights in Canada

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Prince Edward County Quilters' Guild

November 12th, 2025

The Project – in a nutshell

Quilting the Progression of Canadian Queer Rights



- I am travelling Canada and interviewing Queer seniors (elders).
- These seniors represent as broad a cross section of the 2SLGBTQ+ community as I could find and are from many corners of this nation.
- While I travelled I lectured, like I'm doing tonight, to introduce folks to my work and issues important to me.
- I also led workshops based on the Canadian Quilters' Associations 'True Colours Quilt Along'.



- TRAVEL

- By the time I am done, I'll have visited every province and at least two of three territories.

- I will have complete interviews with 60 to 70 Queer seniors.

- In November I will interview in Montreal, Toronto and places closer to home with my focus on minority or under represented groups in my sample.

Legislation List

1. Bill c-150, the Criminal Amendment Act, 1968, 69 - On May 14, 1969 Canada **decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults** - Immigration Act, 1976 – 77, c.52, s.1
2. April 1, 1978 - the Immigration Act of 1976 came into effect on 1 April 1978, **lifting a ban prohibiting homosexuals from immigration**.
3. August 6, 1992 the Ontario Court of Appeal "**read**" **the term sexual orientation into the Canadian Human Rights Act**. This meant that whenever someone read the section, they had to understand that "sexual orientation" was also covered under the Act. [Haig and Birch v. Can., (1992)]
4. October 27, 1992 - Federal Court **lifts ban against gays and lesbians in the military**
5. June 30, 1993 the Supreme Court ruled that **gays and lesbians could apply for refugee status** on the basis of facing persecution in their countries of origin.
6. June 20, 1996 - Bill C-33: **Sexual Orientation included in Canadian Human Rights Act**
7. April 11, 2000 - Bill C-23 **gives same-sex couples the same social and tax benefits as heterosexuals in common-law relationships**.
8. July 20, 2005 - Bill C-38 **gave same-sex couples the legal right to marry**.
9. On June 19, 2017 - Bill C-16 updated the **Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include the terms "gender identity" and "gender expression"** and makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity or expression.
10. June 21, 2018 - Bill C-66: **An Apology and Erasure of Unjust Criminal Records**
11. December 8, 2021 - Bill C-4: An Act to amend the Criminal Code (**conversion therapy banned**)

The information from the interviews will be sorted into twelve (12) quilts.

Eleven (11) of these quilts will be based on Supreme Court decisions and legislative acts of Parliament that advanced Queer Rights in Canada.

The twelfth (12th) quilt will feature the 1980s when there were no advances in our rights, but when we came together to look after each other.

This is the decade where many of the organizations today that work for our rights and to provide us with services began.



This is a prototype of the quilts.

- It is my intent for them to resemble a flag flying ... but ... at the same time, to have the feel of being a bulletin board at a conference.
- They will be covered with 'sticky notes' featuring snippets from some interviews and with QR Codes leading to clips from others.
- Other QR Code links built into the quilts, will lead to news video from the time of the bill or decision to put it into a context.
- Additional information about the context for each quilt will be displayed with the quilts so that we can present both the social/societal context and the Queer context.



-
- Community Grant

For more information go to their website ...



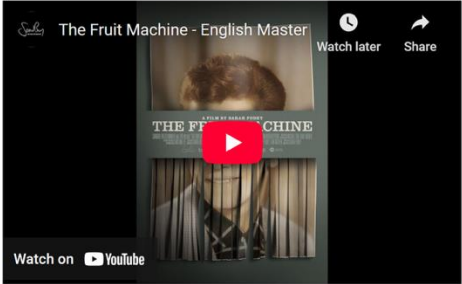
<https://lgbtpurgefund.com/>

Watch 'The Fruit Machine' from the link on the Rainbow Veterans website.
Explore their site while you are there.

Home Who We Are **The Purge** ▾ Class Action Suit Join Us Volunteer with Us News & Stories Social Media Resources

RVC Code Of Conduct Policy English Français

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Please Note:

1. The LGBT Purge Fund has purchased a license for individual viewing of *The Fruit Machine*.
2. *This copy is not for institutional use.*
3. For distribution inquiries, including licensing opportunities for workplace Positive Space initiatives;
please email: distribution@sandbayentertainment.com

<https://rainbowveterans.ca/the-fruit-machine/>

This 'must watch' documentary is available to watch through the National Film Board.



<https://www.nfb.ca/film/parade/>



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Ontario



Multi and Inter-Arts Projects

-
- **Number of Applications:** 174
 - **Total Requested:** \$2,523,836
 - **Number of Grants Awarded:** 27
 - **Total Recommended:** \$332,960



ColorWorks

Premium Solid 9000

see the difference, feel the difference



NORTHCOTT

Cottons that feel like silk

WWW.NORTHCOTT.COM

‘Even If Your Voice Shakes’

A Backpack Show
Autumn, 2025

billstearman.ca

[@bill_Stearman](https://www.instagram.com/bill_Stearman)



Meet Deanna Gaudaur!

For over ten years, this woman has been my quilter!!

Deanna Gaudaur has been turning my 'sow's ears' into 'silk purses' for almost 11 years now. Her skills in hand-guided free motion quilting know no limits.

She listens, asks questions, and then does the job. Beautifully!

I absolutely recommend her to anyone and everyone!

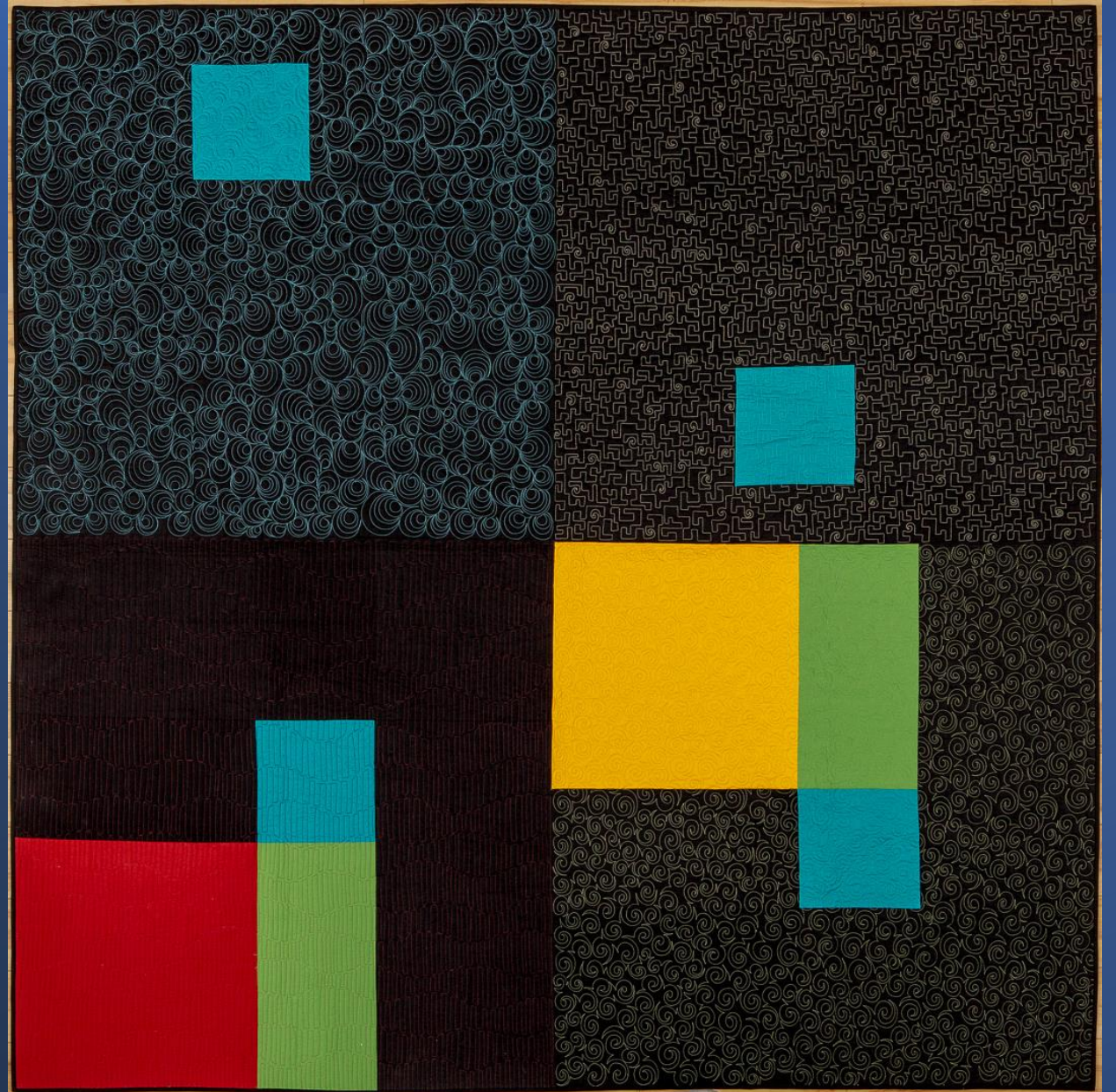
[DEANNA'S WEBSITE](#)



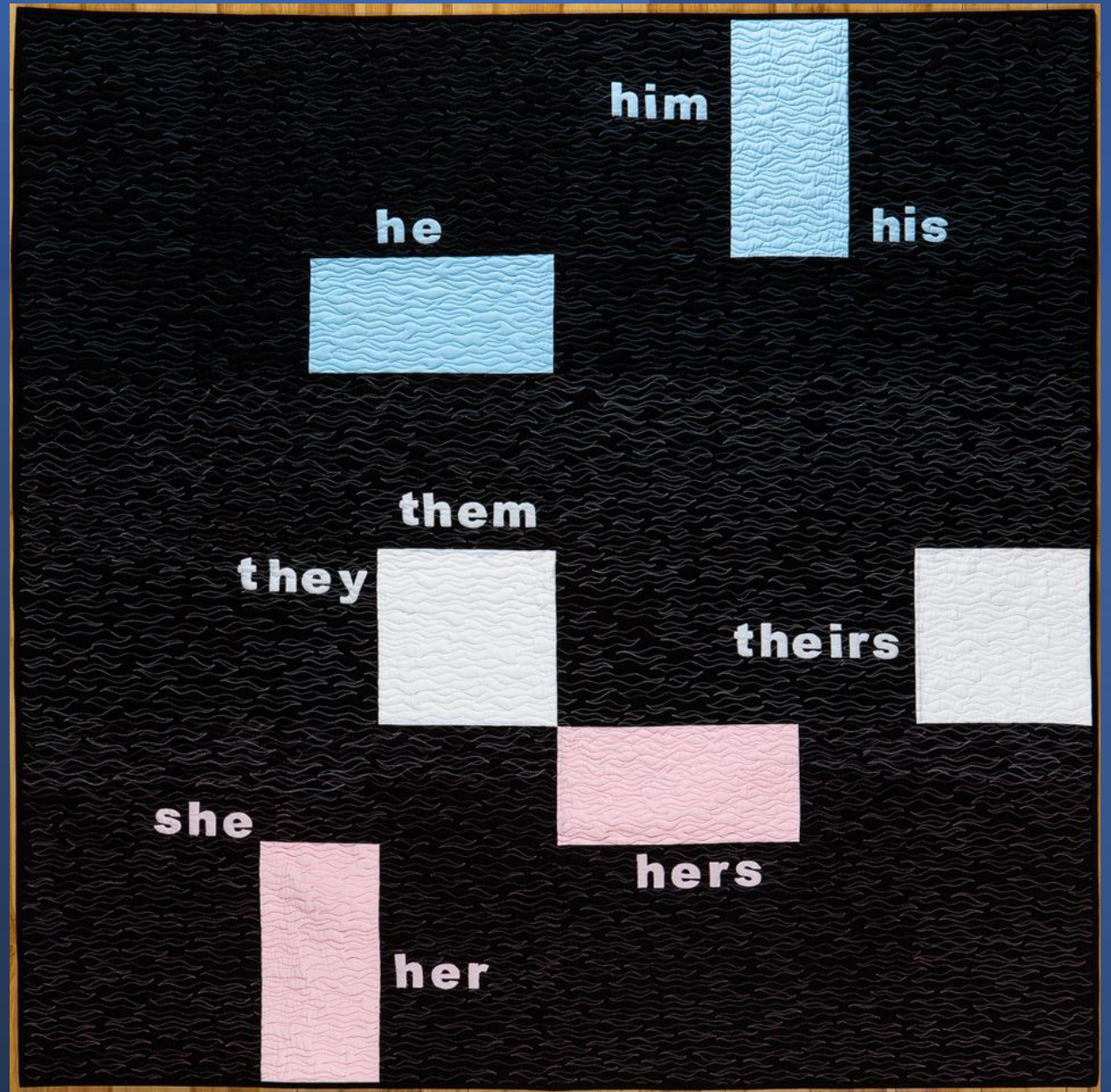
Even If Your Voice Shakes



The Power of One



The Power of One: Gender Fluidity



For the Oppression of Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and
Two Spirit Canadians,
We Apologize



Mr. Speaker — One of the greatest choices a person can make in their life is the choice to serve their fellow citizens. Maybe it's in government, in the military, or in a police force. In whatever capacity one serves, dedicating your life to making Canada — and indeed, the world — a better place is a calling of the highest order.

Now imagine, if you will, being told that the very country you would willingly lay down your life to defend doesn't want you. Doesn't accept you. Sees you as defective. Sees you as a threat to our national security.

Not because you can't do the job, or because you lack patriotism or courage — no, because of who you are as a person, and because of who your sexual partners are.

Now imagine, Mr. Speaker, being subjected to laws, policies, and living practices that label you as different — as “less than”.

Imagine having to fight for the basic rights that your peers enjoy, over and over again.

And imagine being criminalized for being who you are.

This is the truth for many of the Canadians present in the Gallery today, and many more listening across the country.

This is the devastating story of people who were branded criminals by the government. People who lost their livelihoods, and in some cases, their lives.

These aren't distant practices of Government long forgotten. These happened systematically, in Canada, with a timeline more recent than any of us would like to admit.

Mr. Speaker, today we acknowledge an often-overlooked part of Canada's history. Today, we finally talk about Canada's role in the systemic oppression, criminalization, and violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit communities.

And it is my hope that in talking about these injustices, in voicing to never repeat them, and acting to right these wrongs, we can begin to heal.

Since arriving on these shores, letters to this land brought with them foreign standards of right and wrong — of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Suitable and unsuitable interactions.

They brought rigid gender norms — norms that manifested in homophobia and transphobia. Norms that saw the near-destruction of Indigenous LGBTQ and two-spirit identities. People who were once revered for their identities found themselves shamed for who they were. They were rejected and left vulnerable to violence.

And discrimination against LGBTQ communities was quickly codified in criminal offences like “buggery”, “gross indecency”, and heavily biased provisions.

Bathhouses were raided, people were entrapped by police.

Our laws bolstered and emboldened those who wanted to attack non-conforming sexual desire.

Our laws made private and consensual sex between same-sex partners a criminal offence, leading to the unjust arrest, conviction, and imprisonment of Canadians. This criminalization would have lasting impacts for things like employment, volunteering, and travel.

Those arrested and charged were purposefully and vindictively shamed. Their names appeared in newspapers in order to humiliate them, and their families.

Lives were destroyed. And tragically, lives were lost. And this didn't end in 1969 with the partial decriminalization of homosexual sex. Up until 1986, a twenty year old gay man who had sex with another man could still be convicted of a crime.

But the imprisonment and criminalization of LGBTQ individuals wasn't the end of it. Other methods of oppression have been rampant throughout our society for generations.

Homophobia during the time of the AIDS crisis generated hysteria and propagated fear of gay men.

Books and magazines were stopped at the border under the guise of obscenity offences and customs regulations — the content of words and images deemed unacceptable.

And LGBTQ families have had to fight their own government for the right to benefits, and the freedom to marry, often at great personal cost.

Over our history, laws, policies enacted by the government led to the legitimization of much more than inequality — they legitimized hatred and violence, and brought shame to those targeted.

While we may view modern Canada as a forward-thinking, progressive nation, we can't forget our past. The same authoritarian culture of stigma and fear around LGBTQ communities. And in doing so, destroyed people's lives.

Mr. Speaker, a Purge that lasted decades will forever remain a tragic act of discrimination suffered by Canadian citizens at the hands of their own government.

From the 1950s to the early 1990s, the Government of Canada exercised its authority in a cruel and unjust manner, undertaking a campaign of oppression against members, and against members, of the LGBTQ communities.

The goal was to identify these workers throughout the public service, including the foreign service, the military, and the RCMP, and persecute them.

You see, the thinking of the day was that all non-heterosexual Canadians would automatically be at an increased risk of blackmail by our adversaries due to what was called “character weakness”.

This thinking was prejudiced and flawed. And sadly, what resulted was nothing short of a witch-hunt.

The public service, the military, and the RCMP spied on their own people, inside and outside of workplaces.

During this time, the federal government even dedicated funding to an absurd device known as the Fruit Machine — a failed technology that was supposed to measure homosexual attraction. Canadians were monitored for anything that could be construed as homosexual behaviour, with community groups, bars, parks, and even people's homes under constant watch. When the government felt that enough evidence had accumulated, some suspects were taken to secret locations in the dark of night to be interrogated.

They were asked invasive questions about their relationships and sexual preferences. Hooked up to polygraph machines, these law-abiding public servants had the most intimate details of their lives cut open.

Women and men were abused by their superiors, and asked demeaning, probing questions about their sex lives. Some were sexually assaulted.

Those who admitted they were gay were fired, discharged, or intimidated into resignation. They lost dignity, lost careers, and had their dreams — and indeed, their lives — shattered.

Many were blackmailed to repeat their peers, forced to turn against their friends and colleagues.

Some swore they would end their relationships if they could keep their jobs. Pushed deeper into the closet, they lost partners, friends, and dignity.

Those who did not lose their jobs were demoted, had security clearances revoked, and were passed over for promotion.

Under the harsh glare of the spotlight, people were forced to make an impossible choice between career and identity.

The very thing Canadian officials feared — blackmail of LGBTQ employees — was happening. But it wasn't at the hands of our adversaries; it was at the hands of our own government.

Mr. Speaker, the number one job of any government is to keep its citizens safe. And on this, we have failed LGBTQ communities and individuals, time and time again.

It is with shame and sorrow and deep regret for the things we have done that I stand here today and say: We were wrong. We apologize. I am sorry. We are sorry.

For state-sponsored, systemic oppression and rejection, we are sorry.

For suppressing two-spirit judgments values and beliefs, we are sorry.

For abusing the power of the law, and making criminals of citizens, we are sorry.

For government censorship, and constant attempts to undermine your community-building;

For denying you equality, and forcing you to constantly fight for this equality, often at great cost;

For forcing you to live closeted lives, for rendering you invisible, and for making you feel ashamed —

We are deeply sorry. We were very wrong.

To all the LGBTQ people across this country who we have harmed in countless ways, we are sorry.

To those who were left broken by a prejudiced system;

And to those who took their own lives — we failed you.

For stripping you of your dignity;

For robbing you of your potential;

For treating you like you were dangerous, indecent, and flawed;

We are sorry.

To the victims of The Purge, who were surveilled, interrogated, and abused;

Who were forced to turn on their friends and colleagues;

Who lost wages, lost health, and lost loved ones;

We betrayed you. And we are so sorry.

To those who were fired, to those who resigned, and to those who stayed at a great personal and professional cost;

To those who wanted to serve, but never got the chance to because of who you are — you should have been permitted to serve your country, and you were supposed to that option. We are sorry. We were wrong.

Indeed, all Canadians missed out on important contributions you could have — would have — made to our society.

You were not bad soldiers, sailors, airmen and women. You were not predators. And you were not criminals.

You served your country with integrity and courage.

You are professionals. You are patriots. And above all, you are innocent. And for all your suffering, you deserve justice, and you deserve peace.

It is our collective shame that you were so mis-treated. And it is our collective shame that this apology took so long — many who suffered are no longer alive to hear these words. And for that, we are truly sorry.

To the partners, families, and friends of the people we harmed;

For spending your lives, and for causing you such irreparable pain and grief — we are sorry.

And as we apologize for our painful mistakes, we must also say thank you to those who spoke up. To those who pushed back when it was unpopular, and even dangerous, to do so. People from across the country, from all walks of life, and of all political stripes. We stand here today in awe of your courage, and we thank you.

We also thank members of the We Demand an Apology Network, our LGBTQ Apology Advisory Council, and the Joint Society Committee for Equity, as well as the individuals who have long advocated for this overdue apology.

Through them, we've understood that we can't simply point over this part of our history. To erase this dark chapter would be a disservice to the community, and to all Canadians.

We will work with the academic community and stakeholders to ensure that this history is known and publicly accessible.

We must remember, and we will ensure. We will honour and memorialize the legacy of those who fought before us in the face of unbearable hatred and danger.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that we will look back on today as a turning point. But there is still much more work to do ahead of us.

Discrimination against LGBTQ communities is not a moment in time, but an ongoing, centuries-old campaign.

We want to be a partner and ally to LGBTQ Canadians in the years going forward. There are still real struggles facing these communities, including for those who are intersex, queer people of colour, and others who suffer from intersectional discrimination.

Transgender Canadians are subjected to discrimination, violence, and aggression at alarming rates. In fact, trans people didn't even have explicit protection under federal human rights legislation until this year.

Mental health issues and suicides are higher among LGBTQ youth as a result of discrimination and harassment, and the homelessness rates among these young people is staggering.

And there is still work to do on blood and organ donation, and the over criminalization of HIV non-disclosure. The Government needs to continue working with our partners to improve policies and programs.

But there are important and significant changes coming — the repeal of section 159 of the Criminal Code is working its way through the House.

And, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that earlier today in this House we tabled the Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act. This will mean that Canadians previously convicted of consensual sexual activity with same-sex partners will have their criminal records permanently destroyed.

Further, I am pleased to announce that over the course of the weekend, we reached an Agreement-in-Principle with those involved in the class action lawsuit for actions related to “The Purge”.

Never again will Canada's government be the source of so much pain for members of the LGBTQ communities.

We promise to consult and work with individuals and communities to right these wrongs and begin to rebuild trust. We will ensure that there are systems in place so that those kinds of hateful practices are a thing of the past. Discrimination and oppression of LGBTQ Canadians will not be tolerated anymore.

With dialogue and with understanding, we will move forward together. But we can't do it alone.

The changing of hearts and minds is a collective effort. We need to work together, across jurisdictions, with Indigenous peoples and LGBTQ communities, to make the crucial progress that LGBTQ Canadians deserve.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's history is far from perfect.

But we believe in acknowledging and righting past wrongs so that we can learn from them.

For all our differences, for all our diversity, we can find love and support in our common humanity.

We're Canadians, and we want the very best for each other, regardless of our sexual orientation, or our gender identity or expression. We will support one another in our fight for equality.

And Canada will stand tall on the international stage as we proudly advocate for equal rights for LGBTQ communities around the world.

To the kids who are listening at home and who fear rejection because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity and expression;

And to those who are nervous and scared, but also excited at what their future might hold;

We are all worthy of love, and deserving of respect.

And whether you discover your truth at 6, or 16 or at 60, who you are is valid.

To members of the LGBTQ communities, young and old, here in Canada and around the world:

You are loved. And we support you.

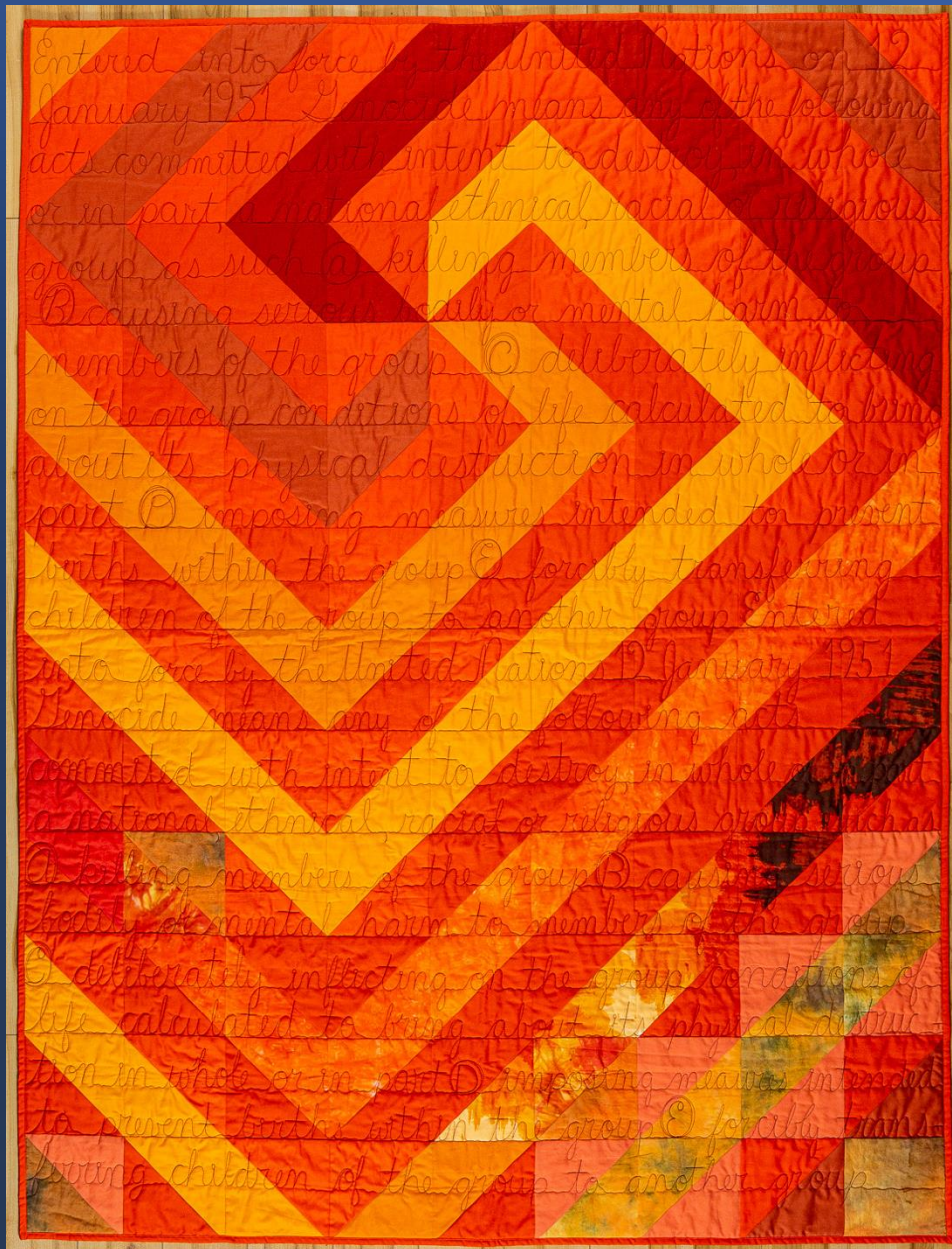
Canada gets a little bit stronger every day that we choose to embrace, and to celebrate, who we are in all our uniqueness. We are a diverse nation, and we are enriched by the lives, experiences, and contributions of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit.

To the trailblazers who have lived and struggled, and to those who have fought so hard to get us to this place: thank you for your courage, and thank you for lending your voices. I hope and I know that you look back on all you have done with pride.

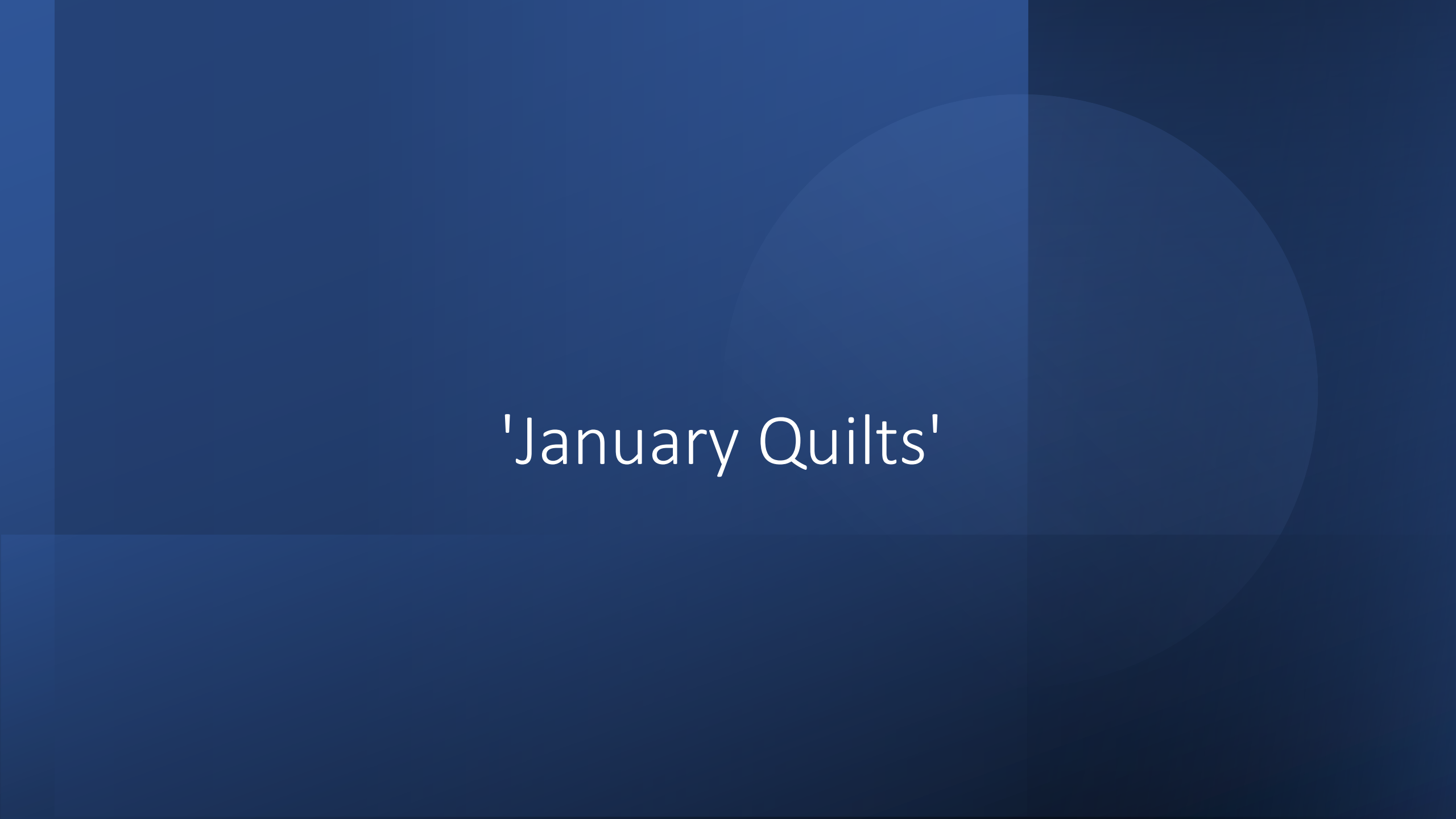
It is because of your courage that we're here today, together, and reminding ourselves and each other that we can, and must, do better.

For the oppression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit communities, we apologize. On behalf of the government, Parliament, and the people of Canada: We were wrong. We are sorry. And we will never let this happen again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

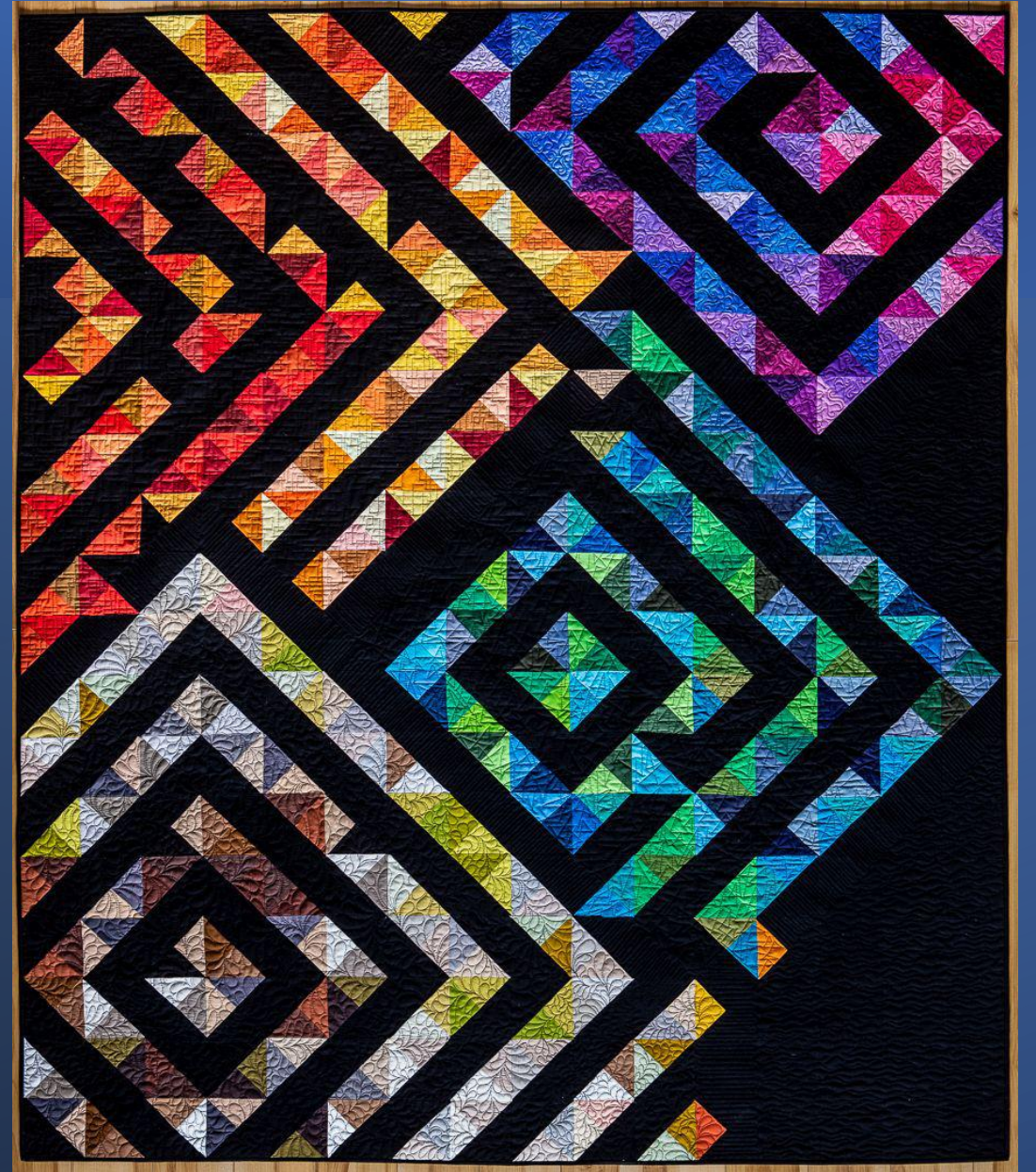


Canada Day, 2021

The background is a solid dark blue. It features a large, semi-transparent light blue circle on the right side, which overlaps a vertical light blue rectangular bar that runs from the top to the bottom of the frame. The text is centered horizontally and vertically in the space created by these shapes.

'January Quilts'

Surviving January





Orbiter Quilt





Not Drowning

Sometimes, my bouts with depression bring dreams of drowning – the sensation of drowning. I actually feel myself sinking deeper and deeper until there is barely a glimmer of light at the surface. And it just feels right. But only until my lungs swell and I think they're going to explode. Then terror sets in. At what seems like the last minute, I am drawn to the light, and I swim toward it. First one kick and then another. The kicks come faster as the light gets brighter. And I break the surface gasping for air, sputtering out far more water than I thought I had swallowed. Always it is just in time. And always I am glad to be alive. This quilt is about the feeling of NOT drowning – of floating in the light instead. I know that I will sink again. But I also know that I will again find the light and float above the darkness. For a while.

Finally, There is
Joy



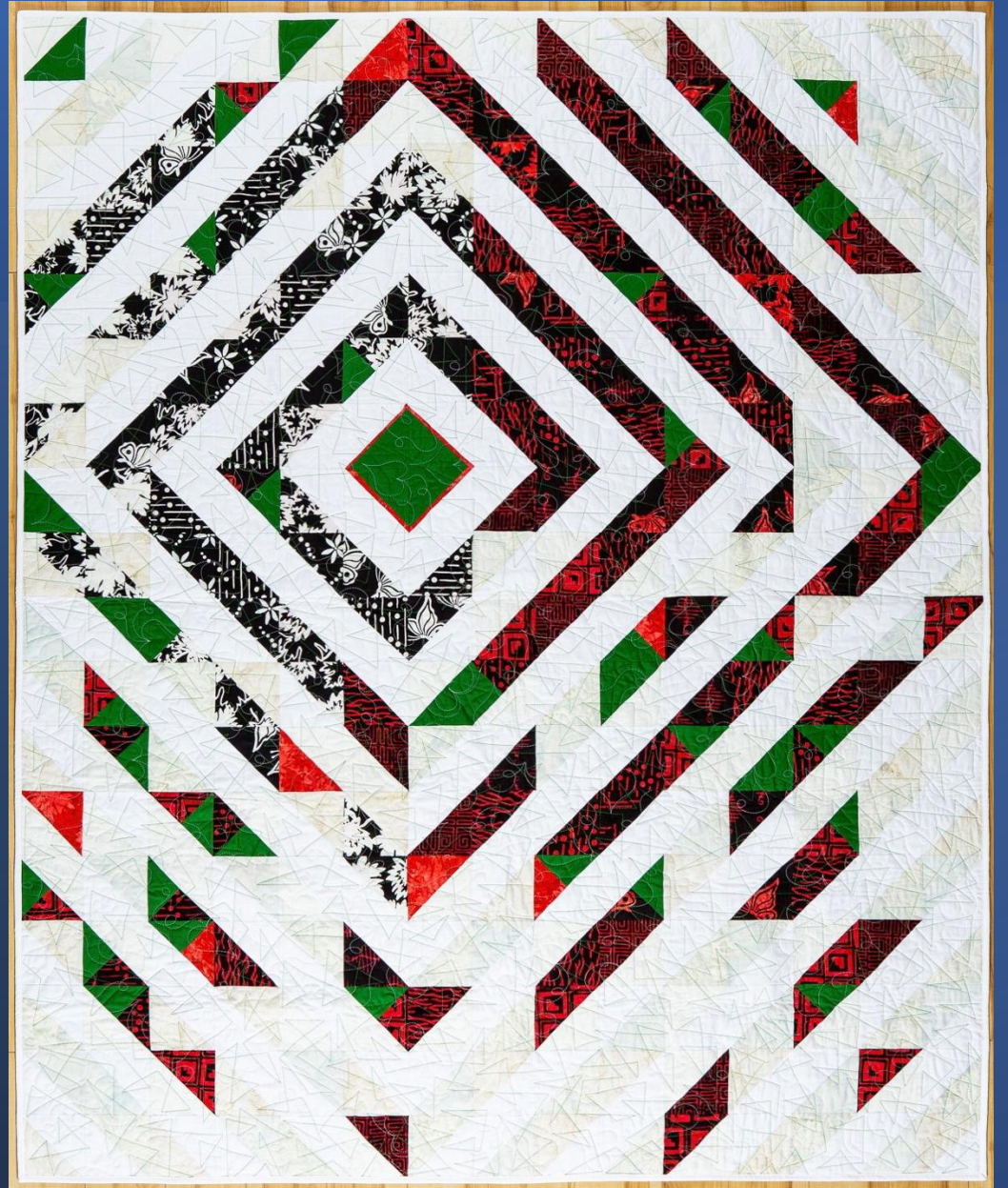
Two Years Past My 'Best Before' Date

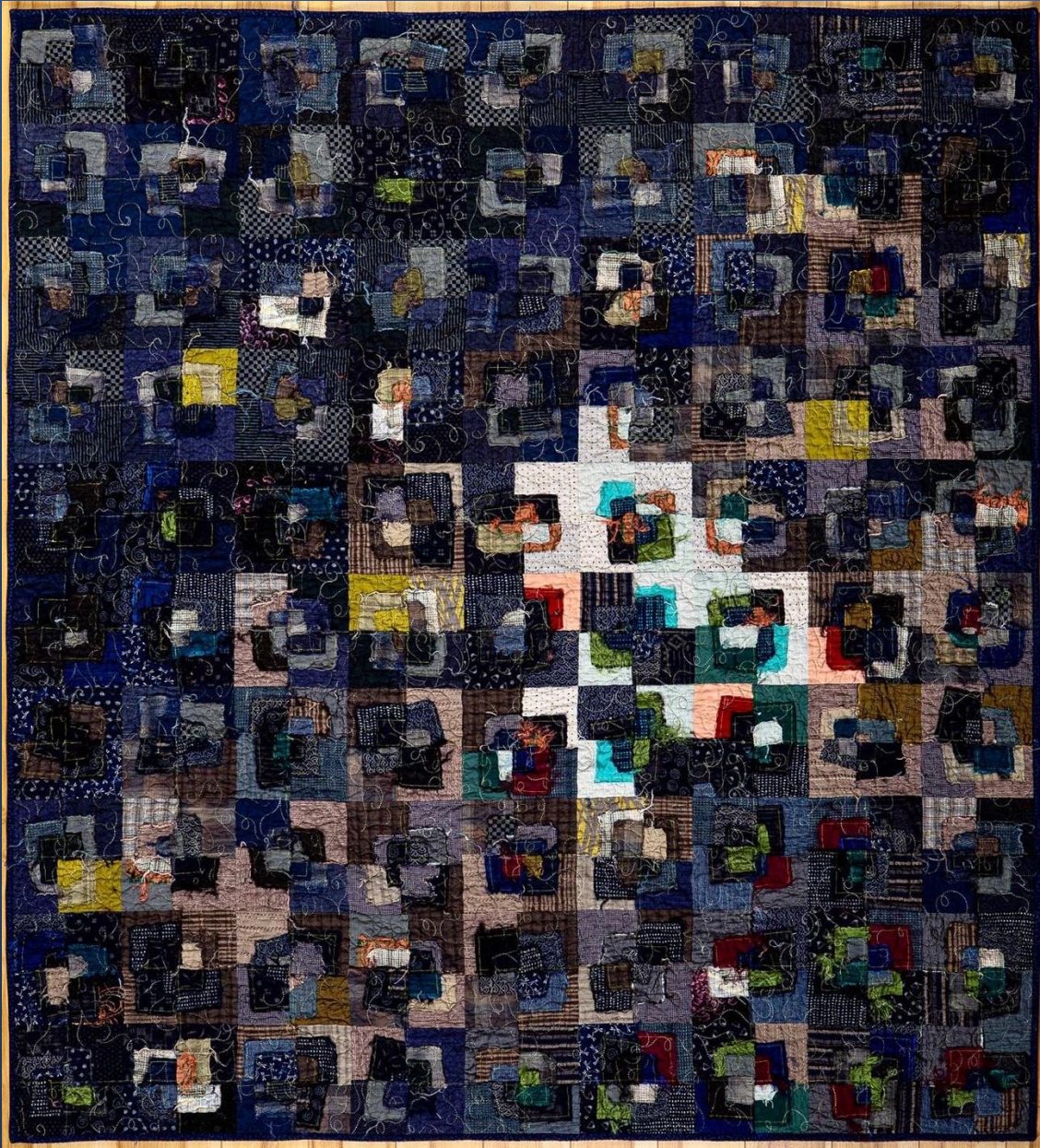
... a story



January 5th, 2021

His Name is Clarence





Finding Comfort in Dying



Before I Made Quilts

The Queer Quilts

(and a focus on Sustainability in quilt making)

The Joke's on Them



The Fourth Pillar





Maintain the Wave



'MAINTAIN THE WAVE'
2023
Bill Stearman

Artist's Statement:

As a gay man, the erosion of basic human rights south of our border terrifies me. This quilt speaks to the story of progress made in Canada within my lifetime. And it speaks to my own coming out story. No story is done. We can't let human rights move backwards, that's our collective, and indeed our personal responsibility to protect and advance Canadian values. Maintain the wave!

Original quilt made with certified cotton + recycled polyester.
Quilting executed by Deanna Gaudaur. Photography by Mi

@bill_stearman
@quintequilter

The Way Forward

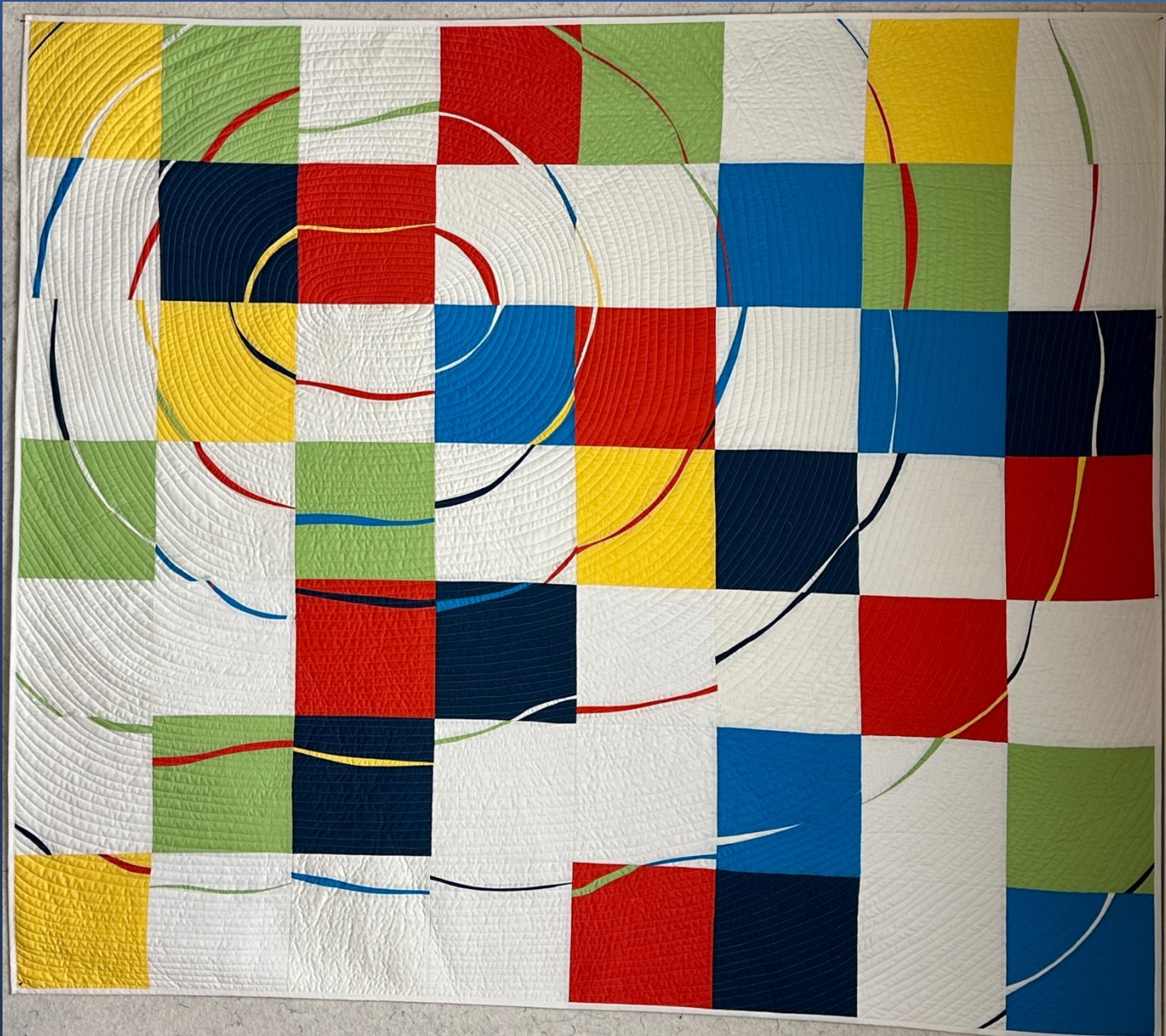




1971, Before We Could Ask

I Choose Queer
- From All the Names I've
Had Thrown At Me





Don't Just Sit There
and Take It!
Make Waves!

Reflecting on AIDS
After Living Through COVID

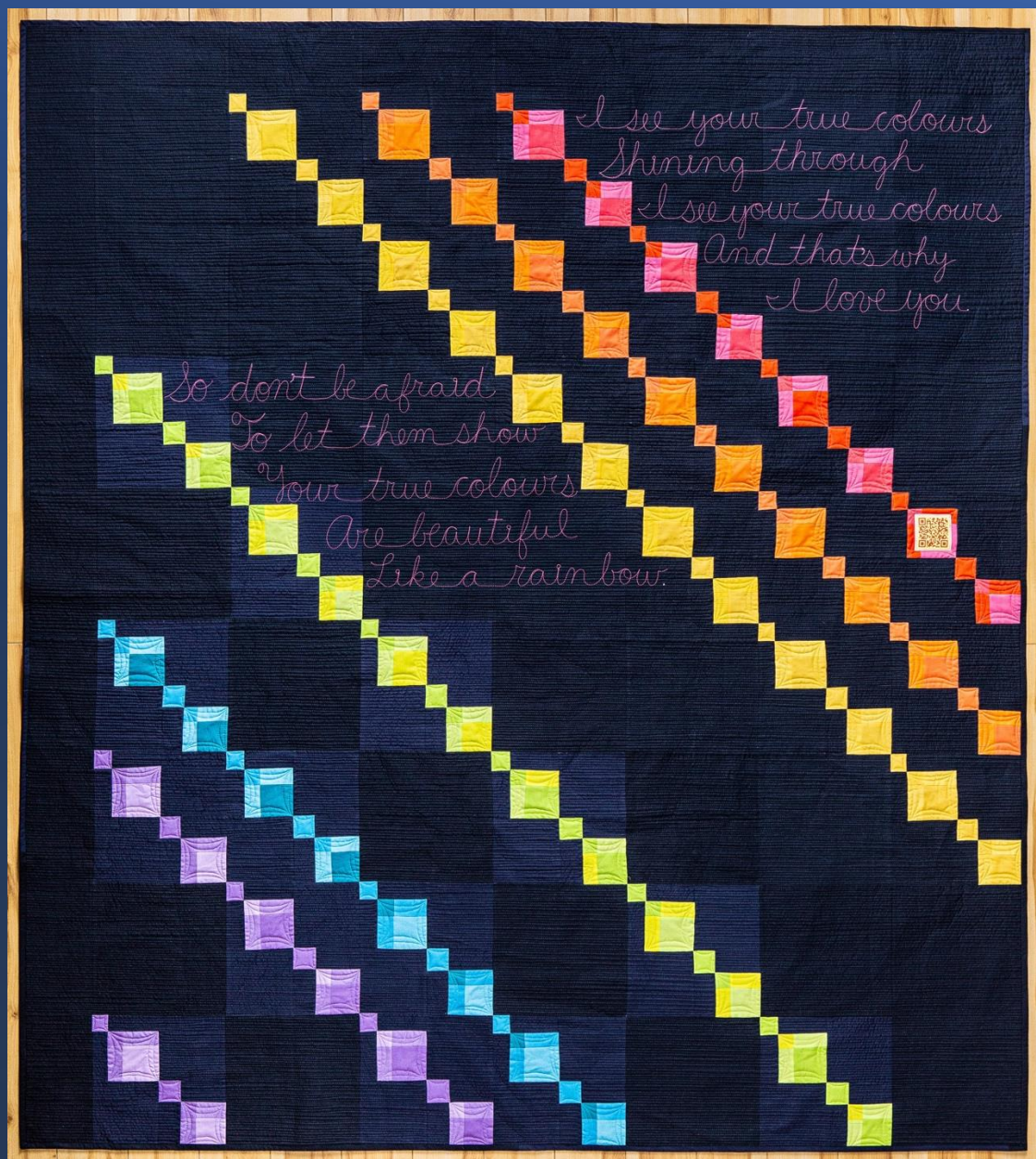




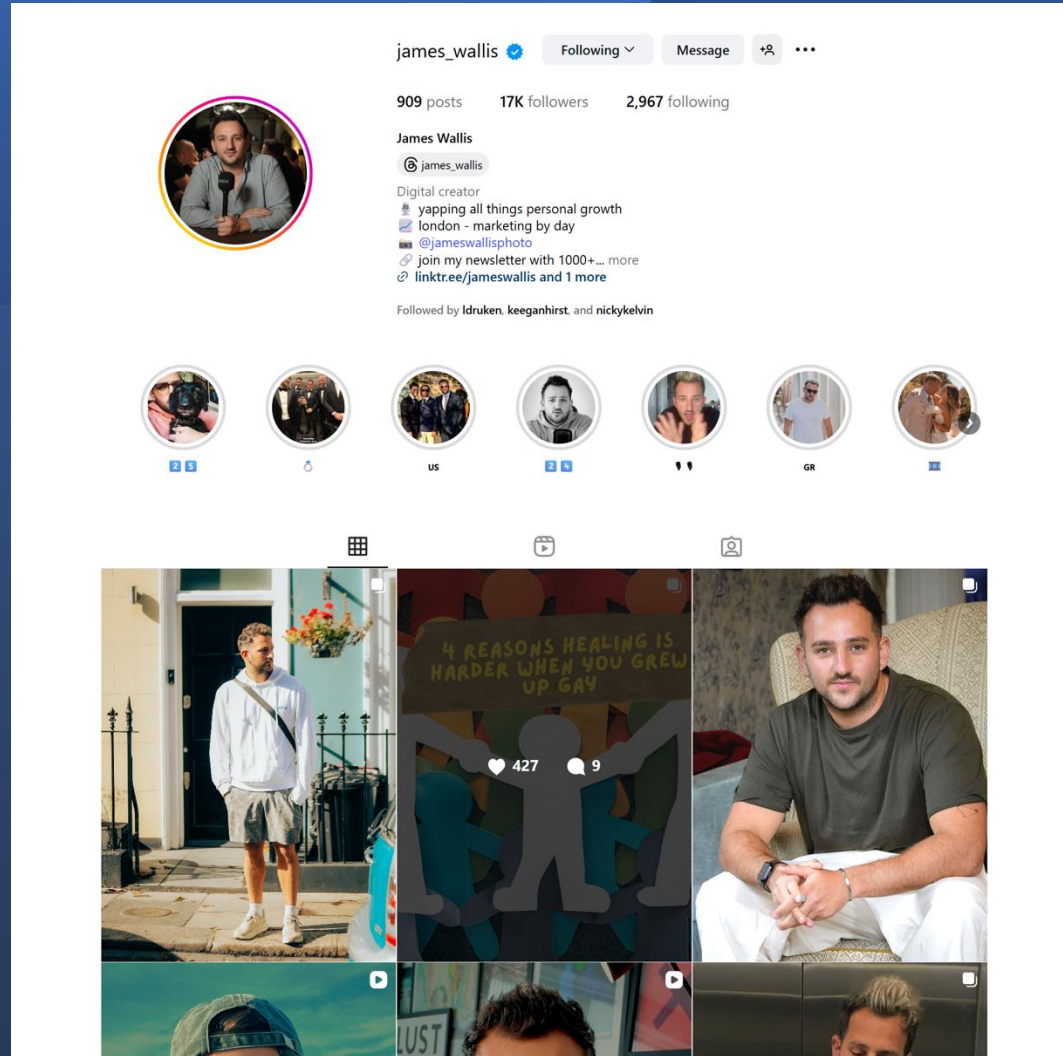
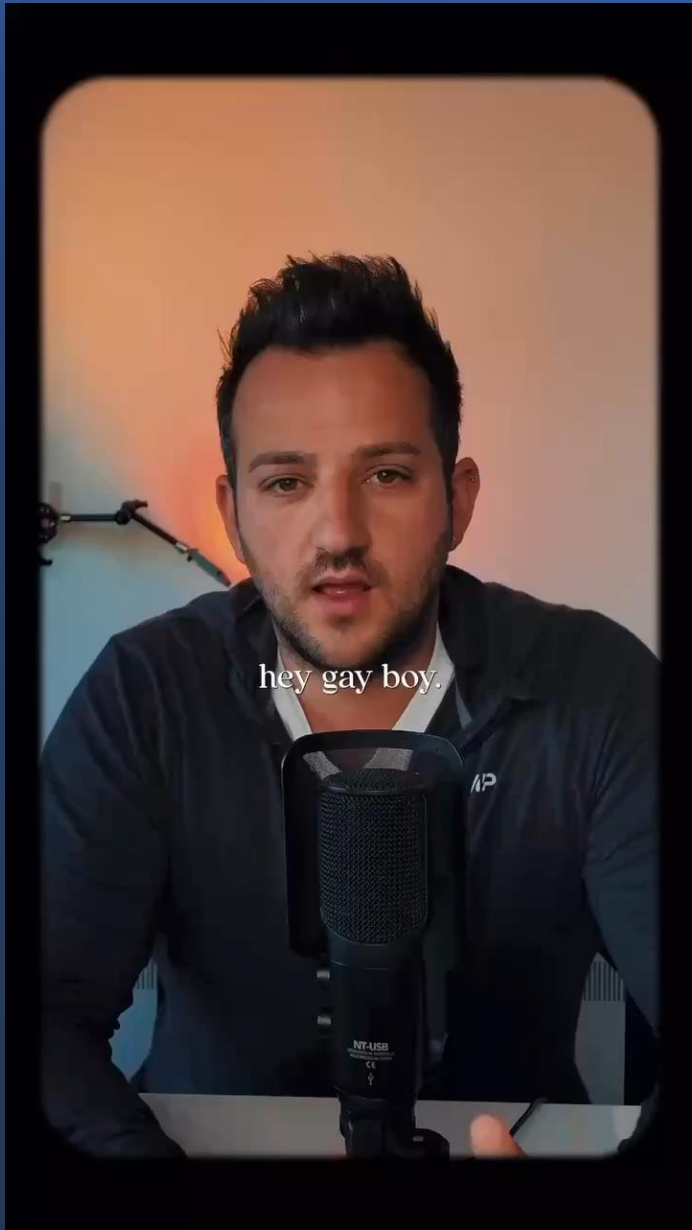
Fix the Village:
Trans Rights Are Human Rights

I Came Out at Age 47:
a coming out story in braille



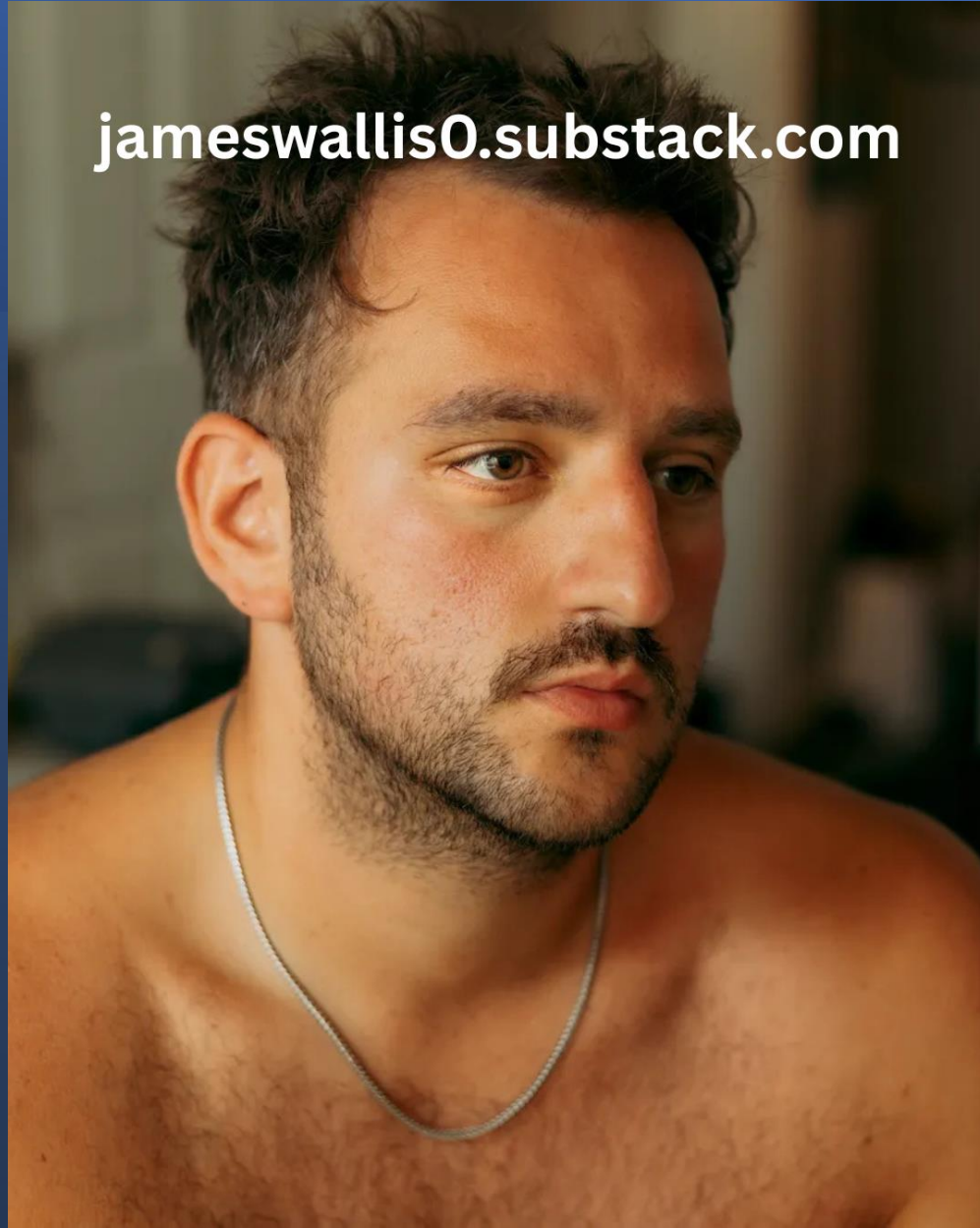


You With the Sad Eyes, Don't Be Discouraged



@james_wallis

jameswallis0.substack.com





Letter to My Thirteen Year Old Self

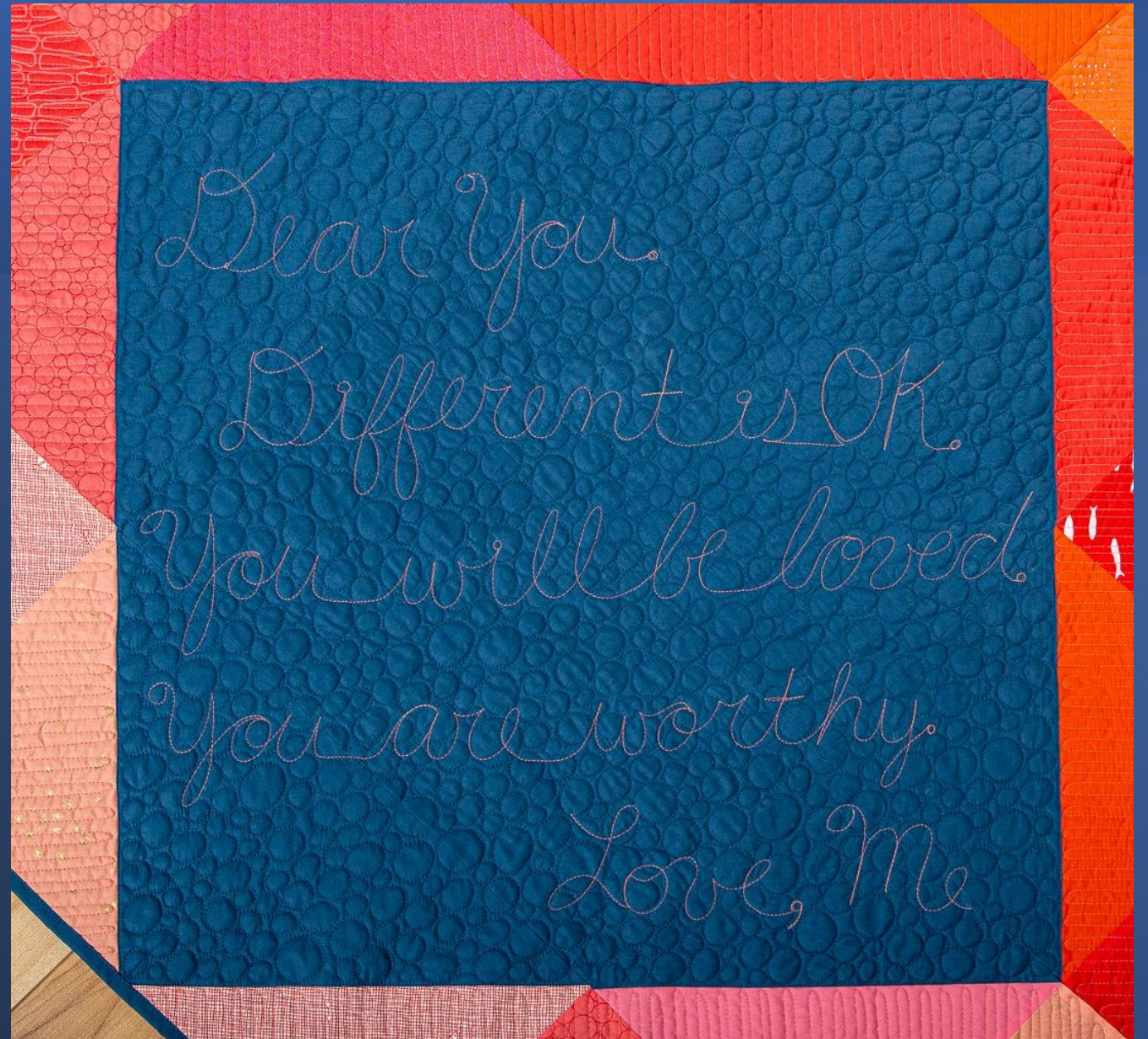
Dear You,

Different is OK.

You will be loved.

You are worthy.

Love, Me



If Only Kisses Could Make it Better



Thank you!

To donate in support of the Queer Seniors Project, e-transfer funds
to b.stearman@hotmail.com

... or use this QR Code to donate through Square

