

DEInsider

a diversity, equity, and inclusion periodical from Nukk-Freeman & Cerra, P.C.



INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

IT'S NOT JUST BLACK AND WHITE

BY YESSICA AURINGER

June 12, 1967.

Just a couple of days ago, this was 59 years ago. 59 Years Ago. Some of us are older than this number, as in – this was not that long ago. It was during this time that the Supreme Court struck down laws banning interracial marriage in the United States.

A couple by the name of Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter Loving legally married in Washington, D.C., in 1958. When they went back home to Virginia (not too far from Washington, D.C.), they were arrested. This is because in Virginia, interracial marriage was not allowed. Richard was a white male and Mildred was of African-American and Native-American ancestry. The Lovings were charged with violating the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924.

Who was the individual trying to preserve racial integrity?

Walter Ashby Plecker. Plecker was born in Augusta County, Virginia in 1861. He had an interest in medicine and received his medical degree from the University of Maryland in 1885. After obtaining his medical degree, he started working as a public health officer and became Virginia's first registrar of the Bureau of Vital Statistics in 1912. While he did have an interest in obstetrics and helped birth reduce mortality rate by 50%, Plecker was also very much into eugenics and specifically, white supremacy.

In 1924, after years of advocacy by Plecker and others, the Racial Integrity Act was passed. It required Virginians to register their racial classification and restricted marriage between those classified as white and those classified as colored. The term 'white' applied only to those who had no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian. Any other race that wasn't pure white, was considered "colored".

During this time, Virginia also recognized a law known as the "Pocahontas Exception". The exception allowed anyone who had 1/16 or less of American Indian blood and no other non-Caucasian blood to be classified as white. The exception was intended to preserve the status of descendants of Pocahontas and John Rolfe.

Plecker believed the exception would cause mixed-raced Virginians to claim they had Native American ancestry versus black ancestry. The Act was then revised to classify "colored" as anyone who held even "one drop of negro blood". Due to this change, many birth certificates issued prior to 1924 were revised from Indian to colored causing a mass erase of

Virginia Indian identity. Unfortunately, many Virginia Indians still face challenges tracing their ancestry today because of these record changes. Genealogical documentation is often required for tribal recognition, and the loss or alteration of records has made that process much more difficult. In attempting to separate races, Virginia's policies nearly erased the documented identity of another.

Although Plecker died on August 2, 1947, the policies remained in effect for decades. That is, until 1967.

When they met, Mildred Jeter Loving was 11 and Richard Loving was 17. They lived only 4 miles apart from each other. They grew up together and connected with their shared interest of music and drag racing.



Captions: Top left- Logo for website to commemorate the Lovings fight for Love, <https://lovingday.org/>; Right- Mildred and Richard in 1967. Bottom left- Mildred Loving holding a picture of her and Richard Loving.

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They dated on and off until they decided to get married after finding out Mildred was pregnant. Due to the hardships in Virginia, they decided to move to Washington, D.C. and start a life there. Since they had all of their family and friends in Virginia, they would constantly go back and visit them, usually separately to avoid getting into problems with the law.

After a while, Mildred decided to reach out to Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, for help. He told her to get in contact with the ACLU. That is where they were connected with Bernard S. Cohen and Phillip J. Hirschkop. It was when the Lovings came back to their home when they were arrested for violating the ban on interracial marriage in Virginia.

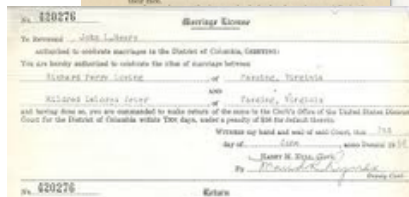
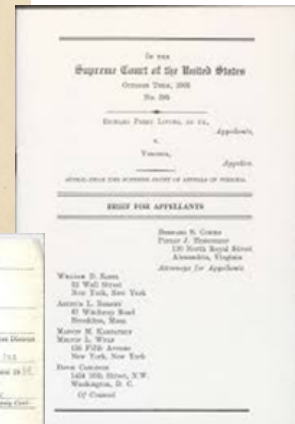
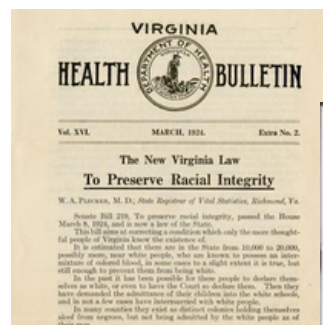
They were sentenced to one year in jail however, the trial judge suspended the sentence on the condition that the couple leave Virginia and not return together for 25 years. The Lovings decided to fight for their love and stand their ground by taking this fight to the Supreme Court, stating the Act was unconstitutional per the 14th Amendment, which provides equal protection regardless of race.

The Supreme Court unanimously voted that banning the Lovings' marriage was unconstitutional and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. This ruling not only was a huge change regarding interracial marriage, but it was also a great progress for Civil Rights, precedent for future cases, and provided more individual liberty.

Our country has come a long way. Many states now celebrate this day with festivals and campaign events. You can visit lovingday.org to read stories and see images from blended love couples around the world. There is also a movie based on Mildred and Richard's story called *Loving*. Even though Plecker tried to keep races separated, he was unsuccessful, and love won.

I believe this has impacted every single one of us in one way or another. It especially impacted me by allowing me to love my other half. He is Jamaican, Irish, and German. I am a Salvadoran American. Even before we met, races were already intertwined. If it wasn't for the Lovings fighting for their true love, I wouldn't have been able to say "I do" to mine.

Love Won, Love Wins and Will Continue to Always Win.



Captions: Top left-1924 Bulletin from the Virginia Department of Health announcing the new racial integrity laws; top right - Cover page of the Supreme Court brief filed by the ACLU in the Loving case. American Civil Liberties Union Records; middle left - Richard and Mildred's marriage certificate, dated 06/02/1958; middle right - Mildred and Richard with their children on the steps of their home in Virginia after returning to the state post their victory in the case "Loving v Virginia". 1967; bottom left - Cover for Loving movie based on the Lovings' story, released 11/04/2016; adjacent...our very own Jessica and hubby Racine "Ray" on their special day.

WITNESSING A CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

BY IMAN A. WELLS

THROUGH PORTRAITURE, DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY, AND EXPERIMENTAL WORKS, THE NATIONAL GALLERY EXHIBITION ILLUMINATES THREE DECADES OF BLACK ARTISTIC INNOVATION, COMMUNITY, AND ACTIVISM.



A few months ago, Charlie and I attended the Photography and the Black Arts Movement, 1955-1985 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. The exhibit explores how photographers helped shape the cultural and political energy of the Black Arts Movement during the Civil Rights era and beyond. Featuring more than 150 works by over 100 artists, the exhibition highlights powerful images of Black identity, creativity, activism, and everyday life. Through portraiture, documentary photography, and experimental works, the exhibit reveals photography as both an artistic practice, a tool for social change, and cultural preservation.





Turning Heartbreak into Purpose

BY BROOKE BUCKNUM

“BE KIND. FOR EVERYONE YOU MEET IS FIGHTING A BATTLE YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT”

Blink and you'll miss it. Life can change in an instant. All the clichés ring true.

One minute you are halfway around the world, celebrating your anniversary and your sister's birthday with a group of friends. The next, you get a phone call: your oldest son is missing.

Then comes the horrifying truth—just two months shy of his 30th birthday, Tyler Michael Smartt-Garrow (pictured above) lost his battle to suicide on a bright Tuesday in October 2023.

Tyler was an older brother. The best friend anyone could ask for. A weirdo and self-proclaimed “jack of all trades, master of none.” He marched to the beat of his own drummer—the “coolest human ever.” But like so many, Tyler had demons he couldn't outrun and often found himself needing to escape reality. He found solace in music, yoga, free skates, sound healing, and supporting others in ways only Tyler could—through connection and deep conversation.

The statistics are staggering. According to the most recent data from the CDC in March 2025, suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals aged 10-34, and men have much higher suicide rates than women (22.8 per 100,000 for men vs. 5.9 per 100,000 for women).

Given the statistics, one can argue young adult male suicide should be treated as a DEI and health-equity issue. Many young men face measurable disparities in suicide rates and mental health access yet are not always recognized as an at-risk population.

“THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.” - LEONARD COHEN

Your life becomes defined by an inflection point – before and after Tyler passed. You become a statistic. And when you stop moving, stop running, the stillness constantly reminds you of what is missing; what you are missing with every ounce of your being. How do you then cope with the knowledge that what once was will never be the same again? When your new reality feels impossible to grasp, how do you move forward? How do you turn heartbreak into purpose?

Following his passing, Tyler's mom, Jenn, needed an outlet to channel her grief into something positive—to give meaning to and reframe the loss of Tyler. She created “Tyler's Tan Co.,” a mobile spray tanning company here in San Diego County.

Its mission is multifaceted: to keep Tyler's story alive, connect with others, and make people feel good about themselves. One step and one tan at a time. She also donates a portion of proceeds to organizations supporting mental health, suicide awareness, and nonprofit yoga programs—all passions of Tyler's.

Utilizing social media and with the support of a vast community of friends and family, to date, Jenn has met and/or exceeded her goal of donating at least 10% of the profits, including nearly 3 times her goal in 2025. Donations have been made to Mental Health America, which offers educational programs through their website, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, who among other initiatives, support annual charity walks through their chapters. I had the privilege of walking in Tyler's honor last October at the AFSP San Diego Chapter annual walk. To say it was transformative and incredibly emotional would be an understatement.

“SOMETIMES THE SILENCE SCREAMS SO LOUD IT'S DEAFENING.”

Here is what I've learned from my friends: To not want to get out of bed in the morning, deep in the trenches of grief and paralyzed by the fear and knowledge that you won't ever wake up from a living nightmare, is human. To make the conscious decision to get up anyway, to find the light in the vast darkness, to find the good when it feels impossible to do so, to turn heartbreak into purpose, is **superhuman**.

“WE ARE ALL JUST WALKING EACH OTHER HOME.”
- RAM DASS

In a workplace that values diversity, equity, and inclusion, equity also means recognizing the struggles we don't see. Young men, like Tyler, are part of a group facing a quiet but significant disparity in mental health outcomes, yet they are not always named in these conversations.

Inclusion is about more than who is present; it's about who feels safe enough to speak, to ask for help, and to be heard. Therefore, it is incumbent upon those of us who are charged with creating those spaces, to also create space for honest conversations, especially with those least likely to start them because it matters.

DEI is, at its core, about belonging. And belonging means ensuring no one is invisible in their struggle. If sharing Tyler's story encourages even one conversation or helps one person feel less alone, then his light continues to reach further than we can see.

For additional information regarding the AFSP or Mental Health America, please see the links below. And, if you are interested in learning more about Tyler's Tan Co., please don't hesitate to reach out to Brooke.

AFSP - <https://afsp.org/>

Mental Health America - <https://mhanational.org/>

*****If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, please know you are not alone and help is available. Please call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 24/7. *****

POPPY SAL'S RECIPE (PART V)

The Beach Sandwich: A Taste of Summer



BY SAL LIPARI (AND PHILL)

Some recipes are fancy, and some recipes are unforgettable because they carry memories. For me, summer has always tasted like a "beach sandwich." Growing up in our New Jersey Italian-American family, every summer meant heading to the shore. Back then, life was simpler, and some of the best meals came from the smallest traditions. My mother would walk to the local deli, come back with fresh rolls, and make what we simply called "beach sandwiches."

They were nothing complicated – just thick slices of fresh Jersey tomatoes, thin-sliced red onion, mayonnaise on both sides of fresh Kaiser rolls or soft white bread, finished with salt, black pepper, and garlic powder. Sometimes, she would add very thin sliced imported ham, capocollo, or roasted turkey, but the tomatoes were always the star. My brothers and I would easily eat two or three (or four) each. I have especially fond memories of my Grandpa Salvatore and Uncle Tony competing every summer over who grew the best tomatoes. Their gardens were filled with beautiful Jersey tomatoes, basil, arugula grown from seeds sent by relatives in Italy.

Now, at 66 years old and as Poppy Sal to five beautiful grandchildren, I've had the chance to make these sandwiches for my kids and see my kids make these sandwiches for my grandchildren. Over the years, the sandwich has evolved a bit (options listed in the recipe below), but the heart of it remains exactly the same:

Fresh sliced Jersey tomatoes.

Mayonnaise.

Thin sliced red onion.

Salt and pepper.

That's summer.

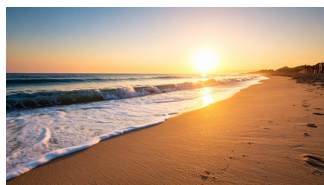
That's the "beach sandwich."

Instructions:

1. Spread mayonnaise generously on both sides of the bread.
2. Layer thick slices of fresh tomatoes.
3. Add thin slices of red onion.
4. Season generously with salt and fresh cracked black pepper.
5. Add a light sprinkle of garlic powder if desired.
6. Add fresh basil and/or your protein of choice if using.
7. Close the sandwich, press gently, and serve immediately.

Chef's note:

Best enjoyed near the beach, preferably with sandy feet and family nearby.



Ingredients:

- 2 large ripe Jersey tomatoes, thickly sliced
- Thinly sliced red onion
- Mayonnaise
- Salt
- Fresh cracked black pepper
- Optional: sprinkle of garlic powder
- Optional: fresh basil leaves

Bread Options - choose one:

- Kaiser rolls
- Soft white bread
- Wheat bread
- Crusty boule, sliced
- Sourdough
- Crusty baguette (lightly scooped)

Optional Additions:

- Thin sliced imported ham
- Capocollo
- Roasted turkey
- Fresh mozzarella
- Grilled chicken breast
- Chicken cutlet

Note from Phill: My father isn't exaggerating. This sandwich is a staple in our family. (My wife may actually be its biggest fan at this point!) That said, I wanted to offer my preferred variant, the Breakfast-Beach-Sandwich: one thick Jersey tomato slice, bacon, plain cream cheese, and salt/pepper on a plain bagel (toasted). Salute – and have a wonderful summer, everyone! –Phill

The Last Visitors

Standing at my grandparents' graves in Virginia, I found myself thinking about legacy, sacrifice, and how a nation remembers its fallen.

BY JESSE GRASTY

A few weeks ago, my wife and I made an impromptu trip to Charlottesville for a concert. Because we often travel last minute, all the hotels in town were booked, so we ended up staying about 30 minutes west of Charlottesville. That put us just a few miles from Staunton, Virginia, where my dad's parents — and his grandparents — are buried.

I knew my dad's mother quite well, but I never met his father. He was a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute in 1934 when he landed on the front page of *The Washington Post*, shaking hands with then-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He later served in the South Pacific during World War II. Shortly after the war, he was diagnosed with cancer — suspected to be due to radiation exposure — and passed away when my dad was just 15.

The Civil War remains by far the deadliest conflict in American history. Between 600,000 and 750,000 Americans died — roughly 2% of the population—about five times the number of American casualties in World War I and 50% more than in World War II.

With so many deaths, burying and memorializing the fallen took on new significance. During the war, women began the formal practice of decorating soldiers' graves.

Many cities claim to have held the first formal ceremony, and the question remains debated. The Department of Veterans Affairs credits Mary Ann Williams of the Ladies Memorial Association of Columbus, Georgia, who in March 1866 published an open letter calling for a holiday to decorate the graves of soldiers throughout the South. Her appeal was also published in the North. Other historians point to a ceremony held by a group of formerly enslaved people in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1865. (In 1966, Lyndon Johnson issued a proclamation declaring Waterloo, New York, the official birthplace — though that, too, is disputed.)

Nationally, Memorial Day — then known as "Decoration Day" — was first observed in 1868 following a proclamation by General John Logan. That year, ceremonies were held at 183 cemeteries in 27 states, with the largest at Arlington National Cemetery. By 1870, nearly 300,000 Union soldiers had been reinterred in 73 national cemeteries.

New York was the first state to formally recognize Decoration Day as a holiday in 1873, and by 1890 every Union state had followed suit. Although there was no standard program for these ceremonies, they were typically organized by the Women's Relief Corps.

The name "Memorial Day" first appeared in 1882, but it did not become widely used until after World War II and was not officially adopted until 1967. The following year, Congress moved the holiday from May 30 to the last Monday in May as part of the Uniform Monday Holiday Act.



After our visit, it occurred to me that, given my parents' age and where the rest of our small extended family lives, we may be the last people who will ever visit their graves. That got me thinking about how we honor and remember those who came before us — and the sacrifices they made — especially with Memorial Day around the corner.

For many, Memorial Day marks the unofficial start of summer — a time to travel or gather with friends, barbecue, and have a few drinks. But the day is intended to honor those who died in the line of duty, tracing its origins back to the Civil War.

Did you know?

Red Poppies Became a Memorial Symbol Because of a Poem...



The red poppy became associated with remembrance after Canadian physician Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae wrote In Flanders Fields in 1915, describing poppies growing among soldiers' graves in Belgium during World War I.

WHY THE 2026 SUPER TAZÓN HALF TIME SHOW HEALED MY INNER CHILD

BY CORASI CAICEDO

In 2006, I was 10 years old and living in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico. A relatively unknown town on the island. Back then, people only knew of San Juan, and maybe Ponce. During those years, I was surrounded by the sounds of the island. Yes, we are familiar with the sound of the coquí, the rooster's cry, and the ice cream truck bellowing for us to come outside and enjoy a sweet treat. A new sound was making its way into our daily lives. A thumping base, a rhythmic boom-ch-boom-chick, and lyrics depicting parties and living the good life. This was reggaeton, a new underground genre spreading like wildfire throughout the schools. Our parents hated it!

A year later my mom tells me we're moving to the U.S. While learning English and adjusting to the U.S school system was rough, making friends was even worse. I tried making friends with other Spanish speaking kids only to be ridiculed for my accent. It was considered "improper, wrong, and gross" amongst other horrible adjectives. Our dialect was seen as lesser; we were the bottom rung of Spanish speaking Latin America. As the years passed, our accent gained popularity with the same people that looked down on it years prior. Reggaeton was popular, mainstream even, in the whole world.

Fast forward to February 2026, and I was buzzing. Bad Bunny was set to headline that year's Super Bowl Halftime Show. The whole world learned what it meant to be Puerto Rican that day. Despite the hardships, the systematically broken power grid, and our political status, we chose to dance and express our joy through music. We are resilient people. And on that day, my inner child smiled because the same dialect that had been looked down upon 10-15 years earlier could now be heard across the world.



Bad Bunny's Super Bowl LX halftime show drew an average of 128.2 million domestic viewers across NBC and its streaming platforms. This made it the fourth-most-watched halftime performance in television history. During this performance, New York City experienced a massive drop in water consumption as fans stayed glued to their screens. In the 15 minutes immediately following his set, citywide water usage spiked to a level equivalent to 761,719 toilets flushing simultaneously.

NFC's DEI Calendar | June - November 2026

June

**MONTH LONG OBSERVATION:
LGBT PRIDE MONTH**

- 6 - D Day WWII
- 14 - Flag Day
- 16 - Muharram (Start of the Islamic New Year)
- 19 - Juneteenth Day
- 20 - World Refugee Day

September

**MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS:
AMERINDIAN HERITAGE MONTH
NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH**
(officially runs from September 15–October 15)

- NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH**
- 1 - Labor Day (U.S.)
- 2 - V-J Day, WWII
- 4 - Janmashtami
- 11 - 911 Remembrance
- 11 - Rosh Hashanah (9/11/26 - 9/13/26)
- 14 - Ganesh Chaturthi
- 15 - International Day of Democracy
- 16 - Mexican Independence Day
- 17 - Constitution Day and Citizenship Day
- 19 - Octoberfest (9/19/26 - 10/4/26)
- 20 - Yom Kippur (9/20/26 - 9/21/26)
- 21 - International Peace Day
- 23 - International Day of Sign Languages
- 25 - Native American Day *(California observed on 9/22/26)*
- 25 - Sukkot (9/25/26 - 10/2/26)

July

**MONTH LONG OBSERVATION:
DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH
SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH**

- 1 - Canada Day (Dominion Day)
- 4 - Independence Day (U.S.)
- 14 - International Non-Binary People's Day
- 27 - Black Women's Equal Pay Day

October

**MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS:
FILIPINO AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH
ITALIAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE MONTH
GERMAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
LGBTQ+ HISTORY MONTH**

- BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH
POLISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH
GLOBAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS MONTH**
- 10 - World Mental Health Day
- 11 - Navaratri (10/11/26 - 10/20/26)
- 12 - Indigenous People Day/Columbus Day
- 16 - World Food Day
- 24 - United Nations Day
- 24 - Make a Difference Day

August

- 9 - International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
- 23 - International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
- 26 - Women's Equality Day
- 28 - Raksha Bandhan

November

**MONTH LONG OBSERVATIONS:
NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN
HERITAGE MONTH**

- 1 - Dia de los Muertos (11/1/26 - 11/2/26)
- 8 - Diwali (Spans 11/6/26 - 11/10/26)
- 11 - Veterans Day
- 13 - World Kindness Day
- 16 - International Day for Tolerance
- 20 - Transgender Day of Remembrance
- 25 - International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- 26 - Thanksgiving Day

