



A Citizen of Liberty Avenue

My Experiences as a Member of the Background Cast
of the Showtime/Showcase TV series Queer as Folk.

By
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This book is dedicated to the many thousands of fans of the North American Queer as Folk television series who made it possible for the show to enjoy a wonderful five year run on Showtime Networks in the United States, Showcase Television in Canada and in many other countries around the world.

Acknowledgements

February 2006

Throughout the four years I was a member of the background cast of *Queer as Folk*, there were many people that helped make it possible for me to become associated with the series or who gave me support in my work on the show. I would like to acknowledge these people, in no particular order:

To my agents, Sherri Babbit of Premiere Extras and Nolan Greenwald for booking me on the series and allowing me to live the dream of a lifetime.

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To my partner, Brian Moses, for understanding and putting up with my endless *Queer as Folk* comments and banter through the years.

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To Gale Harold, Randy Harrison, Scott Lowell, Peter Paige and Michelle Clunie for allowing me to experience the joy of working with them and to watch true professionals in action.

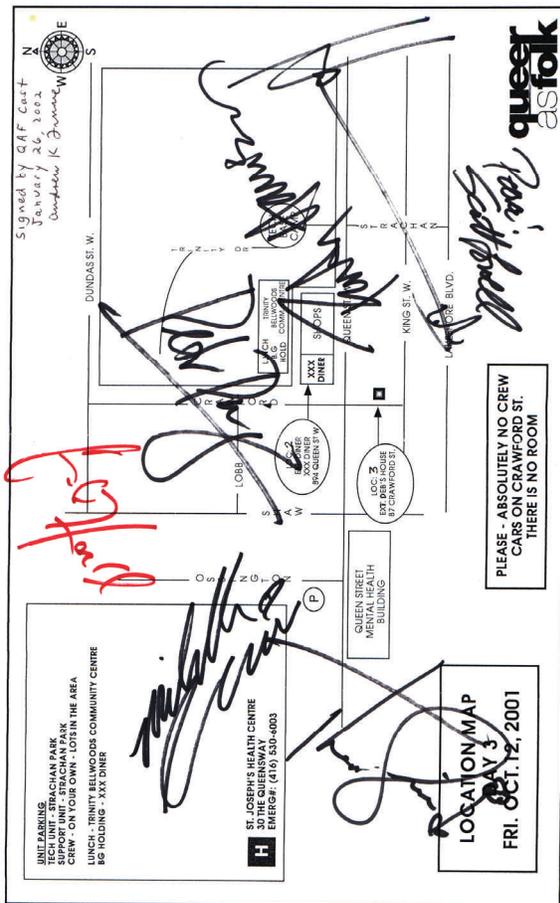
Extra thanks to Sharon Gless, Hal Sparks, Robert Gant and Harris Allan for being gracious enough to chat with me briefly on set over the years and allowing me to thank them for being on their show.

Super special thanks to Thea Gill who's kind words in response to a message I sent to her through the *Melanie Loves Lindsay* website was the direct inspiration for me to seek out a way to become a part of the series.

Prologue



My Question and Answer session at the 2005 Queer as Fans Convention in Toronto.



A copy of my first call-sheet, signed by most of the main cast of Queer as Folk from January 2002.

Monday night June 5, 2000, my partner and I sat down in our living room in Laval, Quebec and turned on the Canadian cable channel Showcase to watch a new British TV series we had just heard about called Queer as Folk. We didn't know much about the show other than it was going to be about the lives of some gay friends. We had seen one commercial for it previously and it looked very interesting. We had a feeling that we were about to see something quite different. Little did we know that what we saw was just about the most unique presentation about gay life that we had ever seen. And, we could never have known that what we saw that night would change my life forever.

Queer as Folk UK, the original Russell T. Davies production, was the very first true-to-life television series that depicted some of our gay lifestyle. Gay things we knew about and even sometimes had done. But we had never ever seen it shown on TV before. This program pulled no punches and I immediately knew I wanted to continue to watch the series and see how all the characters and story lines developed.

I absolutely loved it. Seeing gay characters being really openly gay was eye-opening, provocative to be sure, but amazing and I was so happy that someone had finally found the guts to put something like this on TV. I wanted to make sure that I saw all of the episodes and, to be honest, felt a little jealous that it had been the Brits who had taken the chance to make this series. I really wished the show had been made by Canadians. How prophetic that feeling came to be.

About the only thing that I found to be slightly negative for me was that since it was set in Manchester, UK, it relied on the British lifestyle in general and British humour and double-entendre which sometimes I understood and then again sometimes I had no clue as to its meaning. I could sometimes identify with the characters and sometimes not. But, in the whole scheme of things, it was only a minor criticism.

The show ran on Showcase over 5 nights with each night bringing more personal revelations. And then, as quickly as it had started, it was finished. I was filled with surprise and pride that this wonderful program had been made about something that was central to my life, being gay.

But, now the 10 episodes were done and over the next few months, the reality of the series was put in the back of my mind and forgotten. Other pressing personal issues came to the surface. My partner and I packed up and moved from Laval to Toronto to find new jobs and settled in by August of 2000.

Around that time, I began to hear rumours that Queer as Folk might actually be redone for North American tele-

vision. Like many who had heard the rumours, I assumed that if it were true, a North American version of the show would never be anything as bold as the British version had been. It was certainly going to be toned down.

As well as being toned down, I also assumed that if the series even made it into production, it would probably be made in Los Angeles since most American TV series were made in LA at that time. It wasn't until October that I learned that, yes indeed, there was going to be a North American Queer as Folk and that contrary to my assumption, it was already in production here in Toronto, not Los Angeles.

Of course I was intrigued by this development and was excited that, at least in Canada, we might get to see as bold a production about gay life as the British version had been. Even better, I was sure I was going to relate to it much better since I would be able to recognize a lot of the locations that the show would probably be using.

As we all know, the North American (or U.S.) version of Queer as Folk premiered in the United States in December of 2000. I knew this and was very frustrated since Showcase, which was going to carry the show in Canada, was not going to begin showing it for another 6 weeks. The wait became intense, especially after hearing reports from some of my American friends that the show was amazing and very graphic, even for U.S. television.

The long six week wait ended on January 22, 2001 when Showcase aired the Canadian version of the pilot (which was episodes 101 through 103 edited together as a TV movie). For me, it was instant love. Not only had this version retained the grittiness of the original but had gone even farther. And, as I thought, seeing so many recognizable landmarks, I immediately identified with it.

Yes, they said it was supposed to be Pittsburgh but I knew that the production had to say that to sell the show in the U.S. I knew the show was really about Toronto since many of the things they dramatized were much more likely to happen here than in Pittsburgh.

Then, the pivotal event in my life happened. The very next week, I watched episode 104 and saw Brian and Justin on the stairs of Woody's. Not more than 24 hours later, I was standing on the exact same spot down in Toronto's gay Village, at the foot of the staircase leading up to Woody's.

That's when I knew Queer as Folk was about me, about my city, about who I was and about what I stood for. It represented everything that formed the core of my

thoughts and feelings and my personality. Not in a literal sense because I am no club kid. But it was a no-holds-barred realistic account of some of our gay lifestyle and something I could really relate to. Even with the flaws, these characters spoke to me in a way that not even the British version characters had.

I was hooked and there was no turning back. How bad was I hooked? Well mid-way through the first season in the U.S., I had heard that a specific t-shirt had been shown briefly in one of the episodes...a grey tight t-shirt with the word CATCHER emblazoned on the front and a drawing of a baseball catcher. For those of you who don't know, "catcher" is gay slang for a bottom, the guy getting it. A "pitcher" is the opposite, the guy giving it. Well, I am a 100% catcher. After a quick search, I found a web site on the Internet that was advertising the shirt with the "As seen on Queer as Folk" tag line.

I knew it would be a month before the episode in question was going to be shown in Canada so the next day I ordered a copy of the shirt and, just in the nick of time, it arrived three days before the episode ran on Showcase. The night episode 110 ran for the first time in Canada, and that Catcher shirt was shown (it was worn by one of the identical twin brothers Brian was going to play with, the other brother wore the Pitcher shirt), I was wearing my own copy of the shirt while I watched the show. *That's* how much I was hooked.

I continued to watch season one through the end of episode 122 and Justin being bashed after his high school prom. Like everyone else, I was shocked and horrified and had personally felt the highs and lows of every plot during the season. It was then that another pivotal event occurred.

During the first season, Showtime was hosting on-line Q & A sessions with some of the cast and in those days, it was still possible for a Canadian to participate. One Sunday night, Thea Gill happened to be the guest and I was able to ask her a question and though I don't remember what I asked her, she gave me a very gracious reply. I was totally blown away in that I now had, for a brief moment, connected with one of the cast members.

Three weeks later, I discovered the **Melanie Loves Lindsay** website and decided to post a longer message to Thea and include a general message I had written to the entire cast several months earlier but was sure none of them had ever seen. A few weeks later, to my delight, Thea replied via the website with a very warm response (my original message and Thea's reply can be seen in the appendix to this book).

It was at this point I realized that Queer as Folk had become such an important part of my life, and pro-

vided me with such a role model, that I was able to completely come out of the closet. And I also knew that I had to find a way to repay the show for that. I gave it a lot of thought and decided the best way to do that was to give back something to the show, so to speak. And that's when I decided to try and do something the average fan is almost never able to do...find a proper way to become a part of the production.

From that point on, I kept a watchful eye for any way I might be able to fulfil my goal. Not much happened until my partner and I dropped into the local Church Street Baskin Robbins on September 5, 2001. As we entered the store, I noticed a bulletin board flier from Premiere Extras looking for people who wanted to work on Queer as Folk. Well, as my partner will attest to, I went ballistic as I felt a wave of electricity sweep through me. I had found my holy grail.

I immediately called Premiere the next day and arranged for an interview which, because of a pre-arranged vacation my partner and I were going on, took place three weeks later. Within 20 minutes I had been signed up and told I would be called when a booking was available. In fact, as an omen of luck, while my partner and I were walking down Church Street back to our car, we actually ran into a location shoot the show was doing that day near the Church Street Community Centre. I stood and watched for a bit, knowing that soon, I would be one of them.

After a false start (I was called to be part of the Pride Parade shoot for episode 204 but had to refuse since I hadn't told my boss at my regular job yet about my intended work on the show), Premiere called me for a shoot on October 12, 2001 that was part of episode 206. This time, I said yes. And as far as I was concerned, I was on the moon. My most important dream was going to come true. I was going to be on Queer as Folk.

And what a dream it was. Over the entire four seasons I worked on the show, I was a part of 34 days of filming involving 49 scenes in 27 episodes. And while I was visible in only some of these, I always approached my participation on the show with the highest reverence and professionalism that I could. Queer as Folk was and still is sacred to me and always will be. It was truly my labour of love.

This book is an account of my experiences working in the background cast of the series and everything I did and observed while participating in one of the most ground-breaking and important television series of the 21st century. The memories of each of my experiences with the show are so burned into my mind that even now, four years after my first appearance, I was able to write this book from memory with minimal notes from the time frames the appearances actually took place.

From my first appearance at Woody's in episode 206 to my last appearance at Michael's press conference speech in episode 513, I always kept one key thing in mind. I always remembered the thousands of fans like me who would have given anything to be exactly where I was at any moment I was on a QAF set. It is for those thousands of fans that I wrote this book and it is to them that I dedicate "A Citizen of Liberty Avenue."

Andrew K. "Drew" Finnie
February 2006

P.S. In case you were wondering, I learned a few years ago that the original Catcher shirt was given to one of the crew members after it's one and only appearance on set. However, my Catcher shirt, the one I wore the night I watched episode 110, was worn six times on set during my four seasons on Queer as Folk including shoots at both Babylon and Woody's.

Epilogue

Within 14 months of writing this book about my experiences being in the background cast of Queer as Folk, I found myself at a studio near Vancouver, British Columbia, and this time I was a "first teamer," meaning I was actually a part of the cast of a TV episode being filmed. The show was a drama series called "Whistler" and ran from 2006-2008 on CTV in Canada and MTV's The N in the United States. You'll find the story about my adventure of landing my first scripted role on a TV series in the newly written Appendix 5 at the end of this book. It surely wouldn't have happened without the experience I gained from being a part of Queer as Folk.

Drew Finnie (now my official acting name)
April 2008



Dufferin Gate Studios (now known as Peace Arch Studios Toronto) is located in the southwestern Toronto borough of Etobicoke, Ontario. Initially, all of the sets were located here until QAF ran out of space. Most of the "public area" sets were moved to another studio for season three and then to a different studio for the final two seasons of the series.