Teen Abortion Bill Passes

By CURT FOLTS
Staff Writer

A bill that will prohibit doctors from performing abortions on minors without the notarized, written consent of their parents is now awaiting the signature of Gov. Ned McWherter to make it law.

The bill, passed in the state senate by a 25-5 margin, was overwhelmingly approved by members of the state house of representatives by an 82-8 margin, with nine members abstaining.

Unless the bill is vetoed by McWherter within ten days of receipt in his office, it will become law effective July 1.

"Opponents of this legislation stress the 'right' of a woman to choose an abortion. But these are children," said Dave Jones, spokesman for Tennessee Volunteers for Life, the most vocal supporters of the bill.

Jones added that a girl's health, her life and her ability to reproduce at a later date may all be placed in jeopardy because of an abortion.

However, Cathy Fenner, director of Tennesseans Keeping Abortions Legal and Safe (TKALS), took issue with Jones' comments.

"TKALS is working toward safe, legal and accessible abortion clinics throughout Tennessee. We are pro-choice, not pro-abortion," Fenner said.

Under the bill, minors seeking an abortion may do so without their parents' consent only if a judge deems the situation serious enough to grant the girl permission.

The judicial bypass is to be ruled upon within 48 hours of an appeal. Any appeal must be filed within 10 days of the decision. The hearing must be held in private with only the judge, the girl and an advocate present.

"Anti-choice religious groups are attempting to prevent the right of women to choose for their own bodies as determined by the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973," said Hedy Weinberg, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee.

Weinberg said the ACLU is actively working to get all women's groups together in an effort to form a "sound strategy and a strong lobbying effort" against further anti-choice legislation.

"The gay and lesbian community is asked to join us. We need to be ready to counter anti-choice legislation," Weinberg said.

"This bill, which was proposed under the guise of protecting teenage girls and promoting family communication, is endangering the lives of young women," she continued.

Fenner called the bill's passage in the state legislature "a big disappointment."

"But you never know what will happen in a year. The anti-choice people are very active and vocal. Although the legislators we know are in the majority, they vote with the more vocal constituents," Fenner warned.

Women in "Sticky" Business

By JEFF ELLIS
News Editor

Melanie Mayron and Catlin Adams have great hair. Great glasses. Great clothes. And one great little movie.

The two masterminds behind the just-released Sticky Fingers were in Nashville Sunday to promote the film's opening at Fountain Square, where they were surrounded by rabid fans and bemused onlookers.

"These are all-cotton T-shirts, all-cotton!" cried Adams, who co-wrote, co-produced and directed the film, as she admired the green official shirt proffered by a fan.

Although she stopped in Nashville for lunch last week, Mayron, her shock of red hair accented by the black-rimmed glasses she wore. She co-wrote and co-produced the film in which she stars as Lolly, a cellist with a problem.

"This is almost like shopping," chimed in Mayron, her shock of red hair accented by the black-rimmed glasses she wore. She co-wrote and co-produced the film in which she stars as Lolly, a cellist with a problem.

"This is by far the nicest center we've seen," Adams offered as she autographed a shirt proffered by a fan.

Thus far, the promotional tour for the film has taken the two, along with publicist Ed Cassidy, to Dallas, Seattle and New York. Although she stopped in Nashville for lunch once during a cross-country trip, Mayron claims this as her "first official trip" to Music City.
May
11-15 Wednesday/Sunday
Cobblestone Gallery
Tennessee Special Olympics Art Show. 9am-5:30pm. Free. Information phone 242-7054.
11 Wednesday
ACT UP Nashville
Meeting, Towne House Tea Room, 7pm.
12 Thursday
Nashville CARES- AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5pm.
Alternatives Alcoholics Anonymous
Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men, MCC. 8pm.
Gay Lesbian Adult Children of Alcoholics
(ACOA) Information phone 385-4776 or 352-5822. 8pm.
13-15 Friday/Saturday
Nashville CARES Volunteer training. Information phone 385-1510.
13 Friday
Gay Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, Belmont United Methodist. 7:30pm.
14 Saturday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm.
The Office Miss Gay Clarksville. $4. 9pm.
The Chute USA Male Revue. 10:30pm and 12:30am.
15 Sunday
Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm.
The Office Co-ed softball, Merciourt Park, Clarksville. 1pm.
Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Women's softball practice, Calvert Field. 1-3pm.
Pride Week Organizational meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 4pm.
Warehouse 28 Miss Tennessee-Continental. pageant. 5pm.
16 Monday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5:30pm.
Nashville CARES Gay Couples Support Group. 6pm.
Nashville CARES Family Support Group. 6:30pm.
Lambda Group Closed Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for gay men and lesbians, Unitarian Church. 8pm.
17 Tuesday
Vanderbilt Lambda Association Meeting. 6pm. Information phone 322-6026.
Nashville CARES HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm.
Al-Anon Meeting, MCC. 6:30pm.
Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous Closed meeting, MCC. 6pm.
18 Wednesday
ACT UP Nashville
Meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 7pm.
19 Thursday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5pm.
Alcoholics Anonymous Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men, MCC. 8pm.
Gay Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, MCC. 8pm.
20 Friday
Gay Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, Belmont United Methodist. 7:30pm.
21 Saturday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm.
Nashville CARES HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm.
Human Rights Campaign Fund Southeastern Gala, fundraiser, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta. 7pm. $150. Information phone 373-4047.
Nashville CARES HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm.
Al-Anon Meeting, MCC. 6:30pm.
Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous Closed meeting, MCC. 6pm.
22 Sunday
Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm.
The Office Co-ed softball, Merciourt Park, Clarksville. 1pm.
Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Women's softball practice, Calvert Field. 1-3pm.
Pride Week Organizational meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 4pm.
23 Monday
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Nashville CARES Gay Couples Support Group. 6pm.
Nashville CARES Family Support Group. 6:30pm.
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24 Tuesday
Nashville CARES HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm.
Al-Anon Meeting, MCC. 6:30pm.
Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous Closed meeting, MCC. 6pm.
25 Wednesday
ACT UP Nashville
Meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 7pm.
26 Thursday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5pm.
Alcoholics Anonymous Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men, MCC. 8pm.
Lesbian Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) Information phone 385-4776 or 352-5822. 8pm.
Nashville CARES Board of Directors meeting, Room 106, American Red Cross Building. 7pm.
27 Friday
Gay Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting, Belmont United Methodist. 7:30pm.
28 Saturday
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm.
Human Rights Campaign Fund Southeastern Gala, fundraiser, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta. 7pm. $150. Information phone 373-4047.
Metropolitan Community Church
29 Sunday
NAMES Project The Names Quilt, exhibit. Exhib Hall A, World Congress Center, Atlanta. 9am-11pm. Free.
Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm.
The Office Co-ed softball, Merciourt Park, Clarksville. 1pm.
Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Women's softball practice, Calvert Field. 1-3pm.
Pride Week Organizational meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 4pm.
30 Monday
Memorial Day
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5:30pm.
Nashville CARES Gay Couples Support Group. 6pm.
Nashville CARES Family Support Group. 6:30pm.
Lambda Group Closed Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for gay men and lesbians, Unitarian Church. 8pm.

Your event or organization can be listed at no charge in Dates or Listings. Just drop a postcard or letter to Dates, Box 40622, Nashville, TN 37204-0622, or phone 292-6026 and leave a message. Please include information about time, location, cost, sponsor, and a contact person's name, address and/or phone number for verification.

Listings

RESTAURANTS AND CLUBS

Nashville
The Chute 2535 Franklin Rd 297-4571
Clown Colie 607 4th Av South 256-9134
Crazy Cowboy 2511 Franklin Rd 209-5518
The Gap Line 167 1/2 6th Av North 256-1237
Justice 1700 6th Av South 256-9981
The Jungle 306 6th Av South 256-9411
New Attitude 1805 Church St 580-3594
Repeal Backside Hill Tavern 535 2nd Av South 256-9882
Vic's/ Vic's 111 8th Av North 244-7256
Warehouse 28 2529 Franklin Rd 385-4589
World's End 1713 Church St 329-5480

CLARKSVILLE
The Office 150 Franklin St 665-1157

CHATTANOOGA
Alan Gold's 1100 McClain Av

ORGANIZATIONS

American Civil Liberties Union Hedy Weinberg, Director Box 120160, Nashville 37212
Condoms: Box 4281, Nashville 37204
Nashville CARES Sandee Peters, Director Box 25107, Nashville 37202
Nashville Women's Alliance Box 25107, Nashville 37202
Nashville Women's Alliance AIDS Crisis Line 365-4524
National Organization for Women (Tennessee) Elizabeth Jamison, President Box 120854, Nashville 37212
Tennessee Gay and Lesbian Alliance (T GALA) Elizabeth Jamison, President Box 120523, Nashville 37212
Tennessee Gay and Lesbian Task Force (T GUTF) Caroline Cunningham, President Box 24181, Nashville 37212
Tennessean Keeping Abortion Legal and Safe (TKALS) Box 12878, Nashville 37212
Vanderbilt AIDS Project Hotline 322-AIDS

Vanderbilt Lambda Association Box 12743, Nashville 37212
Women's Resource Center (YWCA) 600 Woodmont Blvd 385-3952
Serious 600 Woodmont Blvd 385-3952
Jane Poitier Attorney 1008 Woodmont Blvd 227-3958
James K. Brouer, Ph.D. Psychologist Suite 224 B, 4004 Hillsboro Rd 298-5369
Ralph's Restaurant 131 15th Av North 320-0288

Metropolitan Community Church Rev Paul Tucker, Pastor

The Southern Project The Southern Project, exhibit. Exhibit Hall A, World Congress Center, Atlanta. 9am-11pm. Free.
Metropolitan Community Church Worship services, 11am and 7pm.
The Office Co-ed softball, Merciourt Park, Clarksville. 1pm.
Tennessee Association of the Deaf Women's softball practice, Calvert Field. 1-3pm.
Pride Week Organizational meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 4pm.

26 Saturday
NASHVILLE CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm.
Human Rights Campaign Fund Southeastern Gala, fundraiser, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta. 7pm. $150. Information phone 373-4047.
Metropolitan Community Church
29 Sunday
NAMES Project The Names Quilt, exhibit. Exhib Hall A, World Congress Center, Atlanta. 9am-11pm. Free.
Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm.
The Office Co-ed softball, Merciourt Park, Clarksville. 1pm.
Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Women's softball practice, Calvert Field. 1-3pm.
Pride Week Organizational meeting, Towne House Tea Room. 4pm.

30 Monday
Memorial Day
Nashville CARES AIDS/ARC Support Group. 5:30pm.
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Health Department to Trace Contacts

By STUART BIVIN
Editor
Tennessee Department of Health and Environment Commissioner James Word has announced a program designed to trace sexual contacts and those who have shared needles with people who have tested positive for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

Department employees have been directed to begin the contact-tracing program in order to warn the contacts that they are at risk for AIDS.

Word said the Nashville Banner last week that "We will do everything we can to actively get the names" although those who test seropositive cannot be forced to reveal the names of their contacts.

The new program is designed to bring Tennessee into compliance with federal Centers for Disease Control requirements that states receiving CDC funding implement contact-tracing programs.

Tennessee received approximately $900,000 from CDC last year for AIDS education, counseling, testing and services. Although no record is kept of how many.Tennesseans are tested for the virus each year, there is an estimated 15,000 Tennesseans who carry the virus.

John Fortune, coordinator of Tennessee's AIDS Notification and counseling program, is optimistic about the program's chances for success.

"These are people who are at extremely increased risk, and they need to know about it," Fortune said.

Although those who test positive at the state's 13 public health centers will be asked about their contacts, no lists will be kept of those contacts.

Instead, Fortune explained, detailed information about the contacts will be gathered from the client and the contacts will be notified by a trained counselor who will urge them to come to the center for testing and counseling.

All information about the contact will be destroyed once counselors have communicated with the contact.

For those who worry about confidentiality, Fortune offered anonymity. He said that health workers will meet contacts wherever it is most convenient for the contact, such as at home or on the contact's break at his or her workplace, without ever learning the contact's name.

The state health department offers free and anonymous testing at Lentz Public Health Center, 311 23rd Avenue North, 327-9313.

Mother Teresa to Memphis

Nobel laureate Mother Teresa is expected to set up a Memphis mission for AIDS sufferers or homeless mothers and children, according to the Rev. Pete Sartain, chancellor of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis.

Sartain said nuns from the Missionaries of Charity order founded by Mother Teresa will run the proposed mission.

"They do the kind of work that not everyone is attracted to," Sartain said. "It's very humble work, very simple and it's with the sickest of the sick and the poorest of the poor."

Memphis Bishop Daniel M. Buechlein has been corresponding with Mother Teresa for more than a year in hopes of interesting her in working in Tennessee. Last week Buechlein received a letter from Mother Teresa saying she would come to Memphis soon.

Government AIDS Booklet

Every American household will soon receive a historic pamphlet with explicit advice on how to avoid AIDS, including the use of condoms.

Health and Human Services Secretary Otis R. Bowen said the $17 million undertaking represented "the first time the federal government has attempted to contact virtually every resident, directly by mail, regarding a public health crisis."

Surgeon General C. Everett Koop was asked to play a leading role in the project because, Bowen said, "Americans know and have faith in the health advisories of the surgeon general, and that trust will help ensure the success of this effort."

The eight page booklet, which contains explicit language, will start appearing in mailboxes the week of May 26. A series of promotional spots will begin airing on television prior to the mailing.

Representative Dyson Says He's Not Gay

Maryland Congressman Roy Dyson last week firmly denied he is a homosexual, following the apparent suicide of his top aide, Tom Pappas.

Dyson told reporters at a news conference that he thinks Pappas committed suicide because he believed his reputation would be destroyed by a Washington Post news story.

Dyson denied allegations that Pappas was also gay.

The story in the Post reported that Pappas imposed unorthodox demands on young male staffers, requiring them to attend social functions, asking one to perform a strip tease at a staff retreat and firing another for leaving a cocktail party early.

Pappas, Dyson's administrative aide throughout his political career, died in a fall from the 24th floor of a New York hotel Sunday, May 1.

The Maryland Democrat said he and Pappas "were very good friends. He was like a brother. We had a personal and professional relationship."

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Men in Dresses: Doing Drag in Nashville

Bobbie Phillips, 34, was a drag performer in the past but now performs only occasionally. He decided he couldn't make enough money as a drag performer to support himself as well as he wished and couldn't see himself performing all of his life, so he developed a "straight" career. Phillips prefers to dress in women's clothes at home. Whether relaxing or going out, Phillips says he feels more comfortable in women's clothes.

Fearing that they might find him less attractive as a man than as a woman, Phillips also prefers for gay people to meet him first in drag. After they get to know the "real" Phillips, he will let them see him out of drag.

Asked why he feels more comfortable in women's clothes, Phillips says, "Inside I think like a female. I have the emotions of a female." He associates women's clothing with traditional feminine characteristics, like sensitivity and thoughtfulness.

Phillips is dismayed that drag queens are not always welcomed by the gay community. "Queens are stigmatized, set aside until the time comes to make money. It's hard enough to handle straight society, but when your own people turn against you, use you...They should let each person judge their lives for themselves."

Instead of politics, Phillips attributes this stigmatization to jealousy: "The macho men are afraid of the competition...I feel like all gay men wonder at some time what it's like to be a woman—they're envious of you because you're popular, pretty."

He's also disturbed that some bar owners will not allow customers to wear drag. He admits drag queens do solicit drinks and sex—the main reason owners give for prohibiting customers in drag—but says each person should be judged individually.

He equates drag with other types of costumes that are permitted: "They're saying that women dressed in men's clothes are okay, cowboys are okay, leather men are okay, but you [drag queens] can't come in because you're dressed like a female."

Phillips says drag performers have the same motivation he does: popularity. "Many would do it for free just for the applause and glamour and glory. It's something that's inside of them."

As to women who find drag demeaning: "They should just stay away. They don't have to watch."

Tim Reed, who performs as Carmella Marcella Garcia, is one of only a handful of drag performers in Nashville to work full time as a female impersonator.

Bobbie Phillips says drag performers have raised so much money for AIDS research and education. He says he doesn't feel taken advantage of but he expects something in return from the gay community. "When it comes time for my own fund raising [for pages, etc.] I expect support in return and I'm not hesitant to ask for it."

Reed sees the idea that drag itself is demeaning to women. He sees the desire by some gay activists to suppress drag as a prejudice from within the gay community.

Methodists Say Homosexuals Unwelcome

By JEFF ELLIS
News Editor

United Methodists last week slammed the church doors on gay men and lesbians seeking ordination by the Protestant denomination. By a 69% to 31% margin, delegates to the United Methodist General Conference last week in St. Louis soundly defeated moves to authorize the ordination of gay men and lesbians as ministers.

Delegates also reasserted that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" by an even larger vote margin—80% to 20%.

Voting on the homosexuality issue opened the General Conference's second week of meetings. The 996 delegates considered other issues, including establishing a college in Zimbabwe, during the two-week-long conference.

Tennessee's 10 delegates all voted in favor of the bans on homosexuals in the ministry. Despite pleas from spokespeople for the unofficial gay caucus of the denomination, delegates delivered a resounding "No" to homosexual issues.

Delegates to the General Conference had received some 700 petitions, containing 10,000 signatures, urging retention of the gay ban. Only 12 petitions to ease the ban were considered.

One delegate, an attorney, warned others that current church regulations against gay ordination are a "legal nightmare" that do not provide due process for those accused of being "practicing self-avowed homosexuals." In reaffirming the denomination's belief that homosexuality is "incompatible" with Christian teachings, the delegates also said, "We affirm that God's grace is available to all."
Reunion: A Family Comes to Terms With AIDS

Last in a five-part series

By JEFF ELLIS
News Editor

When you're five years old and the youngest child in a family of seven children, chances are you don't want to give up the spotlight.

But that is exactly what I had to do when my sister Stella gave birth to my nephew, Jamie.

To be honest, being called an uncle at so young an age was a pretty heady experience for me. Not even in school yet and I was an uncle - I thought I was more special than ever before. But I couldn't figure out how to keep my parents and other brothers and sisters from cooing over and cuddling the new bundle of joy.

I admit it. I was jealous.

But then as we grew up, Jamie and I became very close friends - closer than I was to my own brothers, who were all much older than me. They had each other to grow up with.

But I had Jamie to play with and to fight with. Not that we fought in the sense most little boys fight with each other - it was more like Krystle and Alexis.

During the past 25 years, we've changed a great deal but what has remained constant has been the strong sense of family loyalty with which we were raised.

Now that we know Jamie has AIDS, that loyalty has been tested and made stronger. We've gone from utter hopelessness to a life filled with great hope.

"It's amazing," Jamie says. "I feel so good now. You should see me, Uncle Jeff. You wouldn't believe how dark my tan is. I can't wait to go to Beverly Hills next month. I was just unpacking from a trip to Key West."

When he starts talking, you better watch out. Jamie loves to talk. During a recent telephone conversation, we talked about all sorts of things, from his treatment to his sense of self.

Last November, Jamie was finally approved for treatment with AZT, the so-called wonder drug that helps some AIDS patients. Doctors have told him that he may go for "seven or eight months with no outward signs of the disease" thanks to the drug, Retrovir.

"I had one seizure soon after starting the drug. The doctors took me off it for a while," he says. "Now my dosage is cut in half because I had to have more blood transfusions because the AZT was making me anemic."

The AZT treatment follows a regimen of holistic treatments Jamie tried in order to keep the disease at bay. He tried crystals. He tried yoga.

But the yoga proved to be too difficult for him: "It was too hard on me because I had lost so much weight and it hurt me to try it."

Now at a trim 150 pounds, when I visited him last November he weighed only 89 pounds. Because of the rapid weight loss, he had lost much of his hair and his ribs were evident even under his clothes.

Now by the sound of his voice alone you can tell his health is improved. And so is his Outlook.

"But I'm very hopeful. Anything could happen. They could find a cure any day now. And I can't wait to go to California to see my friend, Tom. Lee's going to take his vacation then so he can come. I hope we see lots of celebrities while we're there. You know, I saw Whoopi Goldberg on my last trip."

Jamie loves to talk, but every conversation must end, and when we say goodbye I always wonder if I'll get to talk to him again - or to see him again.

I'm always a little sad after talking to Jamie, so Stuart will give me a hug and I'll feel my eyes start to burn. I'll cry for a couple of minutes and then go on about the business of the day.

I wait and I hope.

And so does Jamie.
Between the Lines

Thanks for Getting to Know My Family

By JEFF ELLIS
News Editor

Several weeks ago, during a staff meeting, we began to discuss various story ideas. Only a few weeks earlier, my mother had been told that my nephew Jamie had been diagnosed as having AIDS. Her reaction, and the effect of Jamie's illness on my family, had been quite dramatic. And in the process of writing the series "Reunion: A Family Comes to Terms with AIDS," I was forced to examine my own feelings about Jamie, AIDS and my family.

I worried initially, that the series would be considered too personal by some people. But my family is pretty much like everyone else's, I think. We love one another, but there are times we don't like one another very much. We're scattered all over the country, so we don't talk to one another all the time, but we're still very close-knit. AIDS is a disease that affects not only the person who has it, but everyone around him. That's why I wanted to write the story, to share my personal point of view of those effects. It's been very difficult. Since Jamie told me he was sick, I had tried not to think about it. It's very frightening to be told someone you love may die. The time had come, however, that I had to consider the consequences. I had to face my own fears and prejudices, just like everyone else.

Frankly, I cried every time I sat down to write an installment of the series. I cried because I hate to see my mother's anguish and worry. I cried because I couldn't understand my sister's reaction to her child's predicament. And I cried because Jamie may die.

It was a gut-wrenching, emotionally draining experience. But it has made me stronger and more aware, I believe. It is my hope that you've enjoyed reading "Reunion" and that you were touched by it. I firmly believe it is the role of the press to provide a forum for the expression of ideas and thoughts - whether they be personal or universal.

Thank you for getting to know my family.
Bessie Smith: Chattanooga's Empress of the Blues

By SHERRI DRYDEN
Book Editor

Bessie Smith was unquestionably the greatest of the blues singers. Born in poverty in Chattanooga, by age 30 she was the highest-paid black performer of her time. She was also a lesbian.

At the age of nine, Smith was already singing on the streets of Chattanooga for nickels and dimes and reportedly made her singing debut at Chattanooga's Ivory Theatre. At some point, perhaps as early as 1910, she joined blues singer Gertrude "Ma" Rainey's traveling show.

Rainey's songs explicitly stated her preference for women, leaving no question that she was willing to be open about being a lesbian. Although Smith denied that she and Rainey had a sexual relationship, it is likely that they were lovers.

For the next few years Smith traveled the south with carnivals and minstrel shows, sang in waterfront dives and cabarets and later appeared on the black vaudeville circuit in the ghettos of Atlanta, Birmingham and Memphis. She toured with the Florida Cotton Pickers and her own Liberty Belles until pianist Clarence Williams took her to New York.

About 1920 she married Earl Love, who died shortly afterward. Three years later she married John Gee, a Philadelphia police officer who resigned to become her manager. The marriage was stormy with frequent public fights and scenes. In 1926, the couple adopted a relative of one of the women in Smith's troupe, naming him Jack Gee, Jr. In 1930 Smith and Gee separated.

Although Smith probably made a record in 1921, it was never released, and her real career as a recording artist began in 1923 with Downhearted Blues. After signing an exclusive contract with Columbia (her records reportedly saved Columbia from bankruptcy) she recorded regularly until 1928, with some records selling 100,000 copies a week.

"The Empress of the Blues" dressed strikingly, sometimes wearing a regal headdress and white satin gown, dramatized by shifting colored spotlights. She played largely to black audiences, singing of poverty, sex, joy, and grief. In 1929 she appeared in St. Louis Blues, a tough, ironic film banned for its realism.

Her popularity declined as increasing alcoholism made her an unreliable performer. When the Depression led to an end of the craze for the blues, she was dropped by Columbia. Plunged back into poverty, she returned to performing in road shows and night clubs.

A last recording session in 1933 combined her talents with those of some of the best swing musicians, and by 1936 she had begun to attract the attention of white audiences. She hoped to make a comeback, but died before her next recording session.

Some accounts describe a rough, violent woman who drank excessively, recklessly squandered her money and became involved in numerous fights. She got drunk at a reception given by Carl Van Vechten and flattened his wife Fania in full view of the others.

When Gee caught her with one of the women from her troupe, he chased them through the hotel. They hid and when Gee ran down the street thinking the women had escaped, Smith's whole troupe ran for the train depot. Still in pajamas, they quietly slipped out of town.

Others who knew her recalled a kind and generous Bessie Smith who once cancelled her engagements to take over housekeeping duties so her business manager's wife could nurse their seriously ill son. She often handed out cash to strangers and attended church whenever she could.

Smith died in an automobile accident near Clarksdale, Mississippi. An account was circulated that she died because a white hospital refused to accept her, a legend strengthened by Edward Albee's play The Death of Bessie Smith.

Actually, she was taken directly to the black hospital in Clarksdale after a Memphis physician who happened upon the accident provided emergency treatment. She probably died of internal injuries soon after arrival at the hospital. Her grave remained unmarked until Janis Joplin and a Philadelphia nurse, Juanita Green, provided a headstone in 1970.

Louis Armstrong said, "She used to thrill me at all times, the way she could sing. ." Another musician, Cab Calloway, said, "She was the best blues singer there was," remembered clarinetist Sidney Bechet, "but that trouble was inside her and it wouldn't let her rest."
Sunday, May 15

Miss Continental USA 1988
Tennessee Preliminary Pageant

Special Guests
Dana Douglas
Miss Continental USA 1987
Dina Jacobs
Miss Tennessee-Continental 1987

Categories: Eveningwear, Bathing Suit, Interview, and Talent
Prizes: $400 winner, $300 1st Runner-up, $200 2nd Runner-up

Always a Glamorous Affair
Doors open 8 pm Pageant-time 9 pm

Every Tuesday, 11:30 pm
STARS '88 Talent Search
Starring
Carmella Marcella Garcia

Every Wednesday, all night
50-Cent Night
50-cent draft, wells, wine and schnapps

Every Thursday, 11:30 pm Showtime
featuring
Rita Ross, Harlowe,
Carmella Marcella Garcia and Greg Fisher

Coming Events

Sunday, May 22
The Slut Sisters
from Knoxville

Sunday May 29
Memorial Day Show
Starring
Carmella Marcella Garcia

and much, much more

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