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Boys do cry

**The murder of Pfc. Barry Winchell
and his love affair with
Calpernia Addams come to life
in a shocking new film**

***Soldier's Girl* stars
Troy Garity and Lee Pace**

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COVER STORY

Lovers in a dangerous time

In the groundbreaking film *Soldier's Girl*, actors Troy Garity and Lee Pace take on the real-life romance between Pfc. Barry Winchell and transgendered entertainer Calpernia Addams—an affair that led to Winchell's brutal murder

By Michael Rowe

It's a sultry summer evening on the Toronto set of *Soldier's Girl*, and the film's star, Troy Garity, is almost ready to talk about playing murdered soldier Barry Winchell. The keyword is *almost*. Garity has been a distant, looming presence

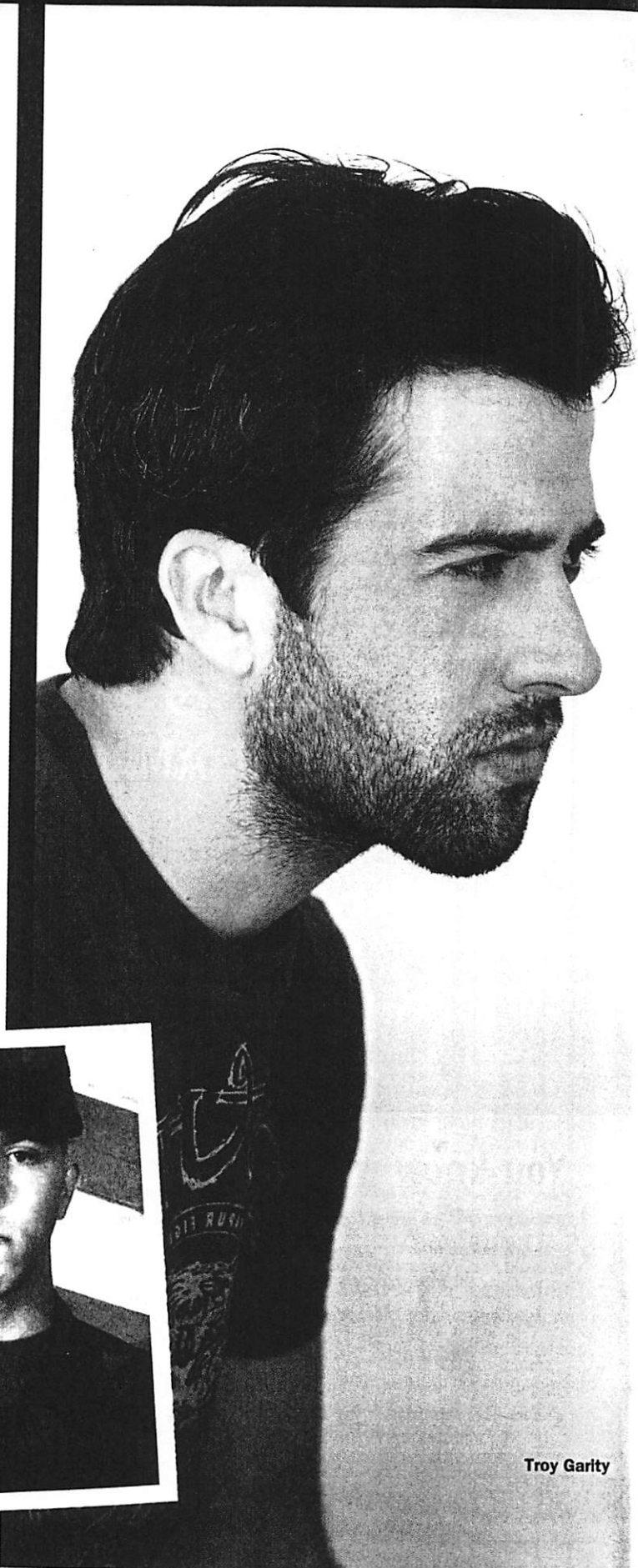
throughout most of the shoot, accessible to his immediate colleagues, but wary of most everyone else, particularly anyone resembling a journalist.

Now, a month into the filming, it's coincidentally three years to the day since Pfc. Barry Winchell's death. In the predawn hours of July 5, 1999, inside the 101st Airborne infantry barracks at Fort Campbell, Ky., Winchell's head was smashed to pieces against his pillow with a Louisville Slugger baseball bat while he slept. The force of the blows was such that bits of brain matter and bone fragments mixed with blood splattered against the wall behind him like a crimson halo.

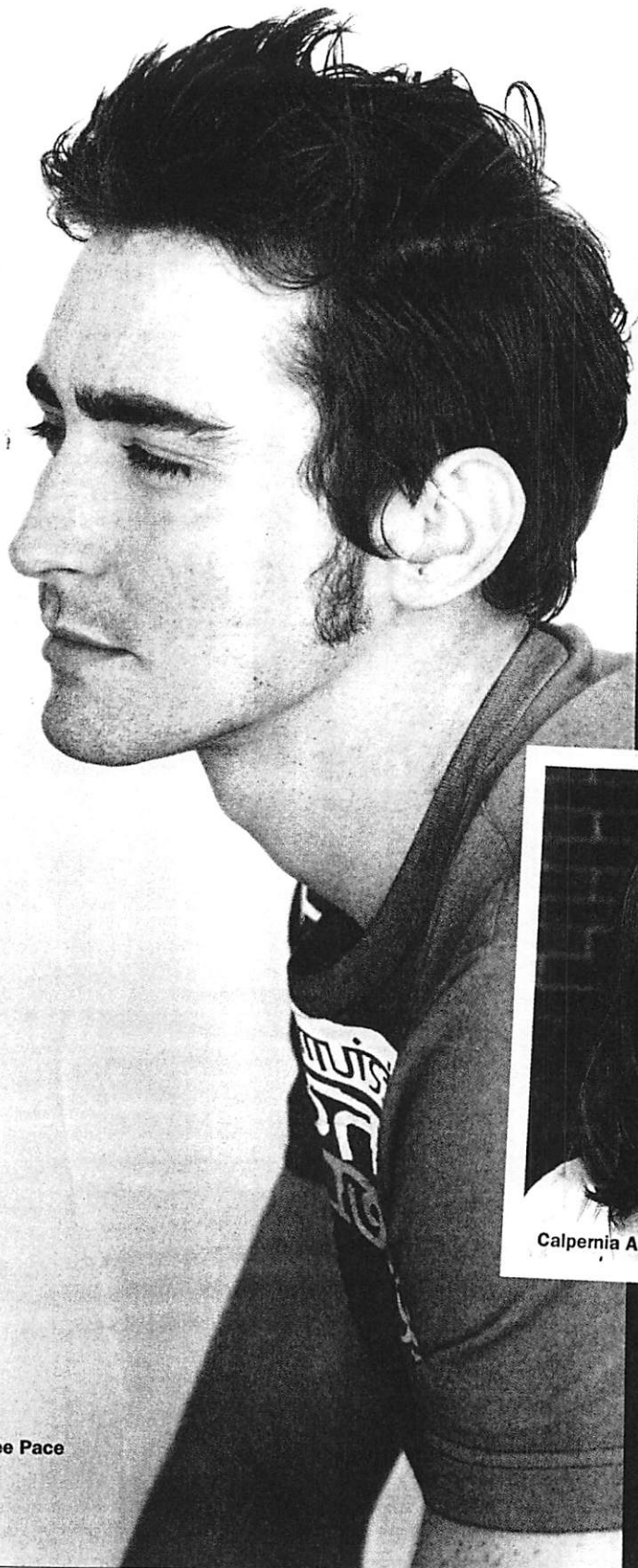
Garity was powerfully affected by the story of Barry Winchell's short life



Barry Winchell



Troy Garity



Lee Pace



Calpernia Addams

and brutal death. Inside his air-conditioned trailer, far from prying eyes, the actor almost apologizes for his reticence about being interviewed, conceding that the role is one of the hardest he's essayed. He lost 15 pounds to play the part, not only working out with a trainer but also working on building a house. "I tried to do as much manual labor as I could," he says; that included putting up dry-wall, digging holes, and smashing tile to bulk up.

Garity is very much his own man, and crew members have warned me to avoid bringing up his lineage to him at all costs. Production staffers feel the actor had fought long and hard to distance himself from qualifying titles: son of Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden, grandson of Henry, nephew of Peter, cousin of Bridget. Garity is his paternal grandmother's maiden name, and it's conceivable that a great number of viewers won't make the Fonda connection at all when they see him on-screen as Winchell, a role he has been fighting his way into since shooting began.

"We're four weeks into shooting, and I'm still finding out things about this guy," Garity says thoughtfully. "Whenever I think I have it, I realize I don't. I probably won't have it until the movie is done and over and I see it and I'll say, 'Oh, fuck, that's how I should have done it.'"

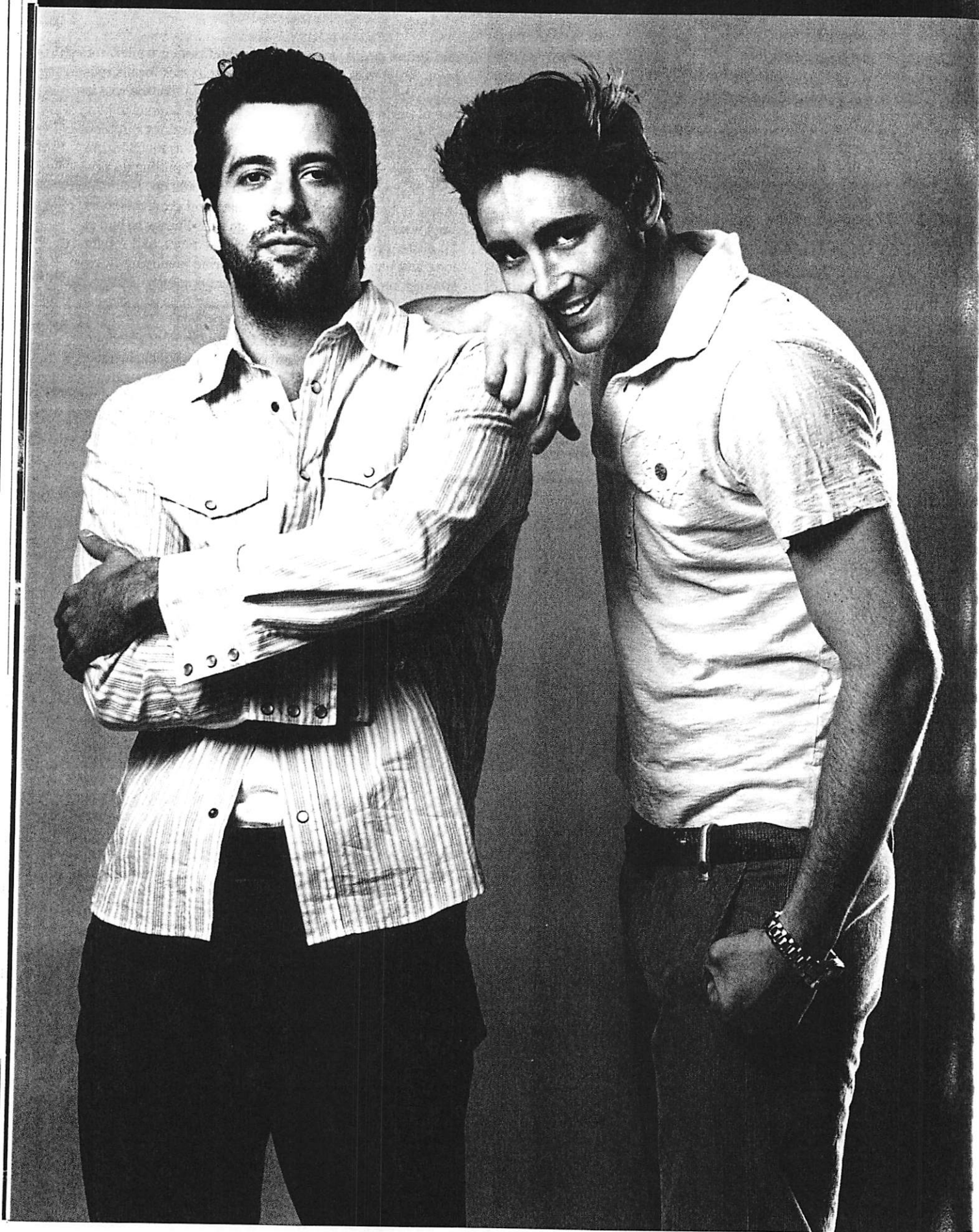
Winchell never regained consciousness after the beating, and he died at Vanderbilt University Medical Center the next day. His murderer, an emotionally disturbed 18-year-old near-alcoholic Army private named Calvin Glover, had been steadily provoked and manipulated into a drunken rage by Winchell's roommate, Justin Fisher, who had taunted Glover over having lost a fight earlier

that day to Winchell, "a faggot."

In the previous weeks, Winchell had been the object of mounting antigay harassment, taunts, and slurs because of his relationship with Calpernia Addams, a transgendered nightclub performer in nearby Nashville. While the explanations remain mostly speculative, the affair provoked Fisher to what appeared to be an obsessive, jealous fury. Although Winchell was murdered with a baseball bat, the real weapon appears to have been Calvin Glover, wielded by Justin Fisher.

The story captured headlines worldwide, as much for the unprecedented savagery of the attack as for the other elements: the increasingly desperate failure of the Army's profoundly homophobic "don't ask, don't tell" policy, the prurient hint of forbidden sexual and romantic scandal, and the near-Shakespearean tragedy of the circumstances surrounding Winchell's death. Here was a handsome, clean-cut, tough, stoic, all-American soldier in the classic mold—the sort the Army claims to venerate—murdered for no other reason than suspicion of homosexuality. Articles in *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New* ▶

WINCHELL: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; ADDAMS: KEN WOODNER/SHOWTIME; GARITY AND PAGE: KWAN/STOCKLAND MARTEL FOR THE ADVOCATE; GROOMING BY MIRIAM VULKICH FOR FACTORY ARTISTS; CLIFF HOPPUS FOR EXCLUSIVEARTISTMG.COM; T-SHIRTS BY DIESEL



York Times Magazine all asked the same question: Why?

Garity, although insightful, articulate, and politically precocious, has a professional armor that doesn't crack until he's asked at what point the intensity of his role struck him full force.

"There were two moments when it became overwhelming," he says. "Through the process of reading the script so much and doing a lot of research, I began to endow [myself with] certain emotions from the script, namely paranoia and fragmentation"—to the point that he began imagining that members of the crew were talking about him behind his back. "This happened specifically during the week we spent filming Barry in the middle of the witch-hunt on the barracks," he says.

"I feel disgusting saying that," he adds furiously, "because it has nothing to do with the hell this kid went through.

"The second moment," he continues, "was the day we filmed the murder scene." His voice trails off, and he takes a deep breath and leans forward, eyes downcast. When he looks up, his eyes have grown moist. "They had to put the prosthetics on my head to match the injuries that this kid endured. And to think of the misery that this act of complete cowardice cost, and this poor kid's family..."

His voice is now thick with tears. "I don't know how to play it honestly because I didn't know Barry and I don't know his family. He didn't tell anybody. Not once in these five months of torture he was going through did he complain. Not to anybody." He pauses, brushing away the tears with the back of his hand. "My goal is to take his face down off the poster and make him a real person again."

If the specific details of the last months of Barry Winchell's life remain visible only as an incomplete mosaic of recollections by the various people who knew him, much of the question of "Why?" seems to be answered by *Soldier's Girl*. The movie's script is the fruit of a long fascination with Winchell's life and death on the part of out screenwriter Ron Nyswaner (*Philadelphia*), who encountered the story in 2000 in one of the magazine articles detailing the murder and its aftermath.

"I called my agent on my cell phone and said, I've discovered the story I was

born to write, and you have to make sure I get the chance to write it," Nyswaner says. Initially without access to Addams or Winchell's friends and family, Nyswaner did as much research as possible via magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and trial transcripts.

"It always takes two things to interest me in a drama," Nyswaner muses, "and they have to be opposed to one another. There was Barry's Midwestern decency and Calpernia's articulate and somewhat ironic sense of herself." Later, when he met Addams, Nyswaner adds, she told him, "I know my life has a somewhat *Jerry Springer* tone to it." Says Nyswaner: "I thought, *This is someone who has irony and a sense of humor, even though she was involved in this horrible*

was then able to spend time in Nashville and New York with Addams while writing, and during the shoot they often spoke by telephone. Addams also supplied Nyswaner with material from a memoir she was writing (since self-published under the title *Mark 947*). Frank Pierson (*Truman, A Star Is Born*) came on as director, and casting began.

"We struggled with the role of Calpernia the most," Nyswaner says. The actor would have to be believable as a pre-op transsexual, neither a fully anatomical woman nor a drag queen. After auditioning countless actors, the film's creators decided on Lee Pace, an Oklahoma native fresh out of Juilliard whose audition had stunned everyone. "Lee's talent was so spectacular that it seemed

"This story goes beyond gay rights," Garity says of *Soldier's Girl*. "It goes into the very core and makeup of our society as a whole. This story is about people not being able to express themselves and being punished for difference."

tragedy. Those two things coming together interested me."

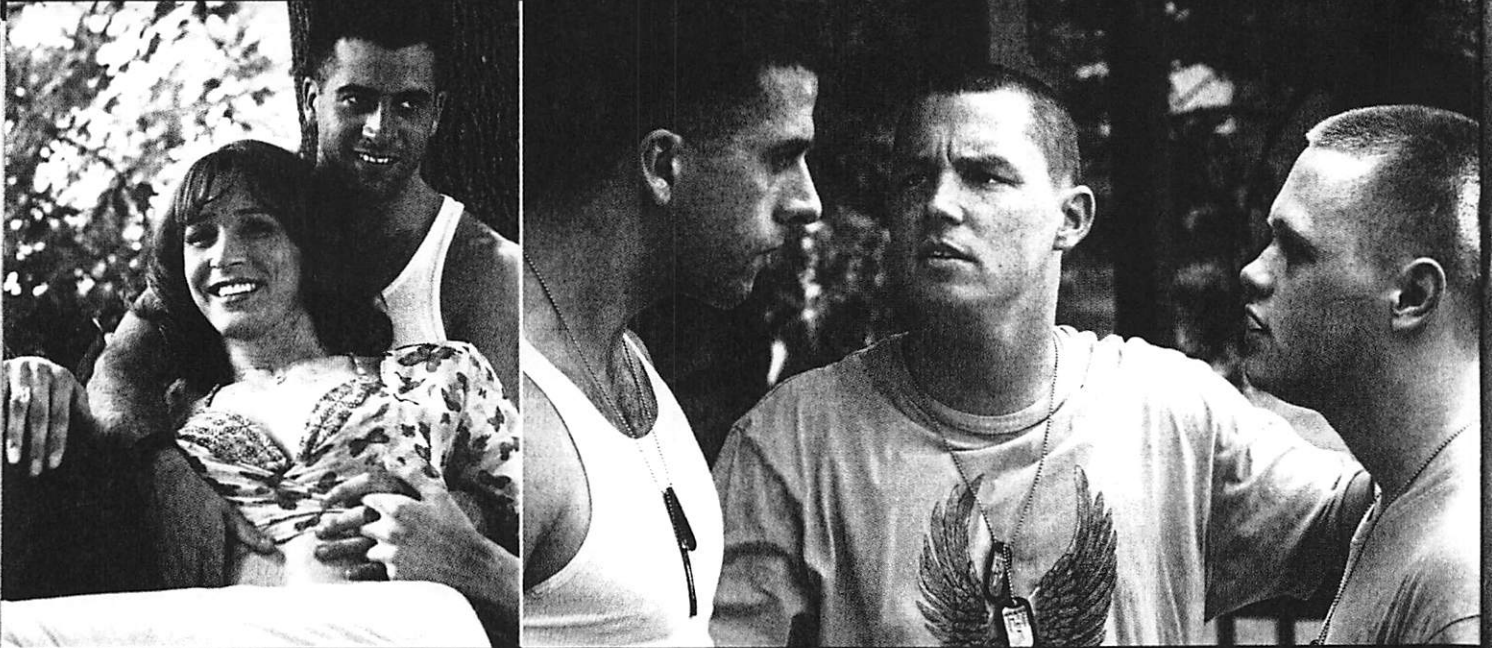
Meanwhile, unknown to Nyswaner, producers Linda Gottlieb (*Dirty Dancing*, *Citizen Cohn*) and Doro Bachrach (*Citizen Cohn*, *Truman*) were setting up their own Winchell-Addams project at Showtime. By serendipitous coincidence, a mutual friend of Nyswaner's and the producers was at a dinner party and heard Gottlieb speak about their Winchell film. The friend reported the conversation to Nyswaner, who tracked down the two producers and offered himself as screenwriter.

They accepted and provided Nyswaner with the firsthand source he had been lacking: Calpernia Addams, who had sold the rights to her life story to Gottlieb and Bachrach and was a consultant on their film. The screenwriter

obvious to choose him," Nyswaner notes, "but we were concerned about his physical build. He's very tall, very broad-shouldered, and he's a good-looking, lean, but hunky guy. In the end, someone said to the director, 'Frank, you always go with talent. The other stuff can be worked out.'"

On the set, Pace seamlessly created the illusion that he was Addams, and he was rarely seen without the three hours' worth of prosthetics and makeup it took to turn him into a preoperative transsexual. Male crew members fell naturally and unconsciously into treating him with gender-based courtesies: holding doors for him, touching him lightly on his back as they guided him onto the set.

"I'm clearly a guy," says Pace today, laughing. He is just back from a weekend in upstate New York, visiting ►



Garity and Pace as lovers Winchell and Addams (left); Shawn Hatosy (right, center) and Philip Eddolls portray Winchell's antagonists, Fisher and Glover.

Nyswaner, during which he acquired what has become a hellish cold. Dressed in cargo pants and a sweater, he has regained the weight he lost to play Calpernia, his eyebrows have grown in, and there is no real trace of the feminine persona left. A recent photograph in *Details* magazine reveals a jockish, broadly smiling Pace with his arm around costar Shawn Hatosy. "You're never going to forget that I'm 6 foot 3," Pace sighs. "That's never going away, no matter how many prosthetics you apply.

"As far as playing a role this specific," he continues, "I had to just trust that I was a woman and focus on Troy, falling in love with him and playing the scenes as honestly as I could."

Pierson advised Pace to avoid drag clubs and instead watch real women and let their physical and emotional movements guide his performance, both when he was alone and in his scenes with Garity. "Calpernia told me that they did behave in a very heterosexual fashion," Pace confides. "She really valued that in him, and that's what he was comfortable with in her."

Addams—who didn't consider Winchell gay and says Winchell didn't think of himself in those terms either—visited the Toronto set during the shooting. She gives Pace high marks for the subtlety and empathy of his performance. "I walked into the theater [set, where Pace performs as Addams] and it felt so

eerie," Addams says, "because it was such a close match to the theater I used to work in. It had the balcony and everything. There was a moment when I went into the lobby and peeked through a crack in the open door and watched Lee, and it was like looking three years into my past."

Having recently moved from Chicago to Los Angeles to start a production company called Deep Stealth, Addams, whose final gender-reassignment surgery was completed just after her visit to the set, is tall, slim, titian-haired, and camellia-petal delicate, and she bears more than a passing resemblance to Julianne Moore.

"It felt magical in a way," Addams confides of the time she spent on the set. "It gave me what I never thought I would have: a revisit of places and moments I thought were gone forever. It was a surreal, cathartic experience for me."

"Meeting Calpernia actually got me to tone down my performance," Pace says. "At the time I met her, I hadn't shot anything yet, [and] I was prepared to play her really girly and really flirty and lay it on really thick. But when I met her, I realized that she doesn't try that hard. She's serene. She just is. And

she's exactly as complicated as I thought she would be."

Speaking of the finished film, Addams is unequivocal. "It's hard for me to see this film as I would if it wasn't mine or Barry's story," she says softly. "It's hard to look at this in a detached way and judge it as a film, but Troy's performance was so beautiful. Obviously, he wasn't trying to clone or duplicate Barry exactly, but he got the core of it right: the powerful masculinity and the strength that was held in check by a peaceful, gentle spirit. The sense you get of Troy on the screen is the same sense you got of Barry in person: great strength controlled by a beautiful heart. He could have beaten up Fisher or Glover anytime he wanted to," she adds poignantly, "but he was a gentle and good man."

Almost a year after that first interview on the set of *Soldier's Girl*, Troy Garity is at his Los Angeles home. He has come in out of the sun, having spent most of the morning and early afternoon working in his yard. As he rummages around looking for some after-sun lotion, he reflects from a greater distance on the evolution of his performance as Barry Winchell. ▶

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"In the original draft, I think Ron was a little afraid of Barry," Garity muses. "I don't know whether that was out of respect or an inability to define his character. He was initially scripted as this 'gosh, golly' 1950s movie star, so incredibly chivalrous and shy that you wanted to vomit." He laughs. "In fact, Barry Winchell, although very decent and stoic and quiet, was very firm in his wants and desires. Barry was tougher than even I was able to portray; here's a guy who was catching people as they fell out of helicopters."

"I think I idolized Barry a little bit,"

Nyswaner admits. "I felt I was making a tribute to him—an homage—and I think I initially erred in my first screenplay by making him too Gary Cooper-ish and almost subarticulate. I had always seen Justin Fisher as an Iago, and I gave him these wonderful, florid speeches. Troy walked on the set and said, 'Why is my character not as exciting as the other characters, and why isn't my dialogue interesting?' And I took that to heart. Troy really wanted to emphasize the fact that Barry was a sexual person, that he desired Calpernia and was turned on to her. He loved rock and roll, and the

sexy heavy-metal rock and roll fan persona wasn't originally present in my screenplay."

Garity, growing up in a politically active Hollywood family, had the importance of public service instilled in him at an early age. Balancing his career with activism, Garity is founder of the Peace Process Network, a worldwide anti-gang violence network. For the son of Jane Fonda and onetime California state senator Tom Hayden, politics is something of a birthright.

"Perfect parents we weren't," Jane Fonda concedes on the phone from At-

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Leaving Philadelphia

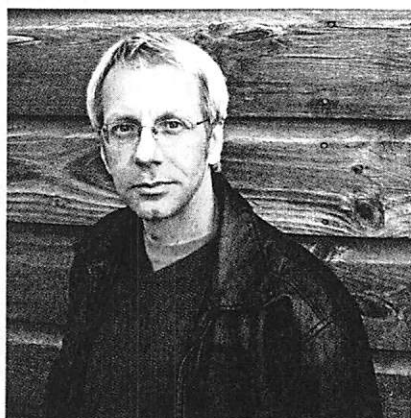
Has America embraced our lives in the past decade? Ron Nyswaner, the screenwriter of *Philadelphia* and *Soldier's Girl*, takes stock

When *Soldier's Girl* airs on Showtime May 31, 9½ years will have passed since the release of *Philadelphia*. And the world has changed, more or less: Gay and lesbian characters are staples on television, and same-sex kisses are featured in the *The Hours*. Perhaps being gay isn't the issue it once was.

Homosexuality seemed controversial in the pre-AIDS era, when, in film school, a screenwriting teacher barred me from reading aloud from my gay-themed script. Although I protested, the seeds of compromise were sown: My second script told the story of a wedding, with no gay characters, not even a wisecracking caterer.

I continued writing scripts about heterosexuals and found success. It didn't seem cowardly at the time; after all, I was open about my homosexuality with everyone, including employers.

In the mid 1980s, during the teen-film craze, I developed a script at Fox about a gay teenage boy and his best friend, a straight girl (presaging *Will & Grace* by a decade). The project was abandoned after three drafts. I heard a rumor that a junior executive had campaigned to keep the story line alive, only dropping the gay aspect.



Soldier's Girl, says Nyswaner, "has given me the opportunity to be sexual, explicit, funny, furious."

This executive, by the way, is gay.

My first writing-directing foray, *The Prince of Pennsylvania*, features Keanu Reeves battling his coal miner father. The character is ostensibly straight but artistic and sensitive. This is what is known as subtext.

Philadelphia was born of grief when a beloved young relative was diagnosed with AIDS. While I understood the outrage that others had the courage to express, my own anger was muted—each of us reacts differently to pain. Hence, *Philadelphia* is somber rather than fiery and was—by some—harshly criti-

cized. I accept the criticism. *Philadelphia* did a lot of good; I meet people all over the world who tell me that it changed their lives. Still, I agree that it is incomplete.

Soldier's Girl—the story of the murder of Pfc. Barry Winchell—has given me the opportunity to come all the way out of my closet: to be sexual, explicit, funny, furious. Ironically, it isn't really a gay film. The characters' sexual identities are difficult to categorize: Barry Winchell was in love with transgendered Calpernia Addams, who considered herself to be a woman, despite her male genitalia. The gay issue seems, in a way, dated. To quote my own script: Very few people are 100% anything these days. Still, Barry Winchell was hounded and murdered because—to his tormentors—he was a faggot.

Have we reached the mainstream? Is our movement running out of steam? Perhaps this question ought to be posed to the parents of Barry Winchell, Allen Schindler, or Matthew Shepard.

Or Eminem. ■

Nyswaner's writing credits also include Swing Shift and Mrs. Soffel.



Find *The Advocate's* previous coverage of *Philadelphia* and Ron Nyswaner at www.advocate.com

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lanta, "but we lived our politics. It wasn't lip service, and he grew up with that. And it wasn't always pretty, as I'm sure he told you. It wasn't easy as a kid to grow up [in a political environment], and he saw up close the battle of gender issues. You can trace any issue back to hierarchy, patriarchy, and power. It's why gay people, men and women, are so vulnerable, now more than ever. They challenge the most fundamental structures of our society. For me, Troy is the perfect man: He's truly androgynous." Early on, Garity, who is straight, approached his mother for advice on the possible impact of playing a potentially controversial role.

"He called me up and said, 'Mom, do you think it could hurt my career to kiss a guy on the lips?' and I started listing

Nyswaner points out that like all great tragedies, the story being told in *Soldier's Girl* requires a complex range of interconnected characters. Some of his most revealing discoveries in his research were not about Winchell and Addams but about the killers, Nyswaner says: "In my research, I found that Justin and Calvin had very troubled pasts and had been dumped in the Army as a last resort." Nyswaner spoke to several sergeants—the officers directly responsible for enlisted men—who told him off the record that "there are troubled people in the military who are sent there as a last resort when schools, churches, and families fail to help kids," he says.

"One of the reasons the movie is so disturbing is that Shawn Hatosy is so

to Addams, engaged with all of her physicality.

"Unfortunately, he died too young," Garity says. "Sexuality evolves with us. Part of our journey on this planet is the discovery of our sexuality. He was attracted to this female figure and was ultimately able to fall in love. We didn't have the luxury of asking him questions. He never complained to Calpernia or his parents. He had a slogan: 'Suck it up and move on.'"

Likewise, Nyswaner feels the film will find its audience, gay or straight, and that everyone who watches it will bring something of their own to the table. "I write what interests me," he says, "and what interested me in this story had to do with universal themes: people who love unconditionally and people, like Justin Fisher, who are tortured by repression. These themes apply to all human beings."

"What I want people to understand about this film is that the story goes beyond gay rights," Garity says thoughtfully. "This goes into the very core and makeup of our society as a whole. This story is about people not being able to express themselves and being punished for difference. And there is no one in our elected offices who is willing to fucking sit down and deal with issues of difference. Now we have a situation where we're at war, and young men like Barry Winchell are out fighting [in Iraq] not for any concept of 'liberation' but for the policies of the corrupt 1% who run this country. We have the greatest soldiers in the world, and [many of them] are constantly being abused and betrayed by their leaders. I can't expect my country to go liberate another country when we're unable to liberate ourselves."

Nyswaner also believes the military is betraying its own members. "Don't ask, don't tell" played an incalculable role in Barry Winchell's death," he says, steel in his voice. "The people who crafted it have a lot to answer for. It's a heinous policy and one of the great political failings of the Clinton administration. The implied message is one that all gay people have had to live with our whole lives: 'We'll pretend you're OK as long as you don't tell us who you are.'" ■

Rowe edited Queer Fear II, a fiction anthology nominated for two 2002 Lambda Literary Awards.

"Gay people are so vulnerable, now more than ever, because they challenge the most fundamental social structures," says Jane Fonda, Garity's mother. "For me, Troy is the perfect man: He's truly androgynous."

all the actors who'd done it, and I said no," Fonda recalls. "As a mother, it wasn't the love scenes that were hard for me; it was the beating."

"I had heard about the Barry Winchell incident," Garity says, "but I had filed it away with all the other hate crimes I hear about day in and day out. It didn't really have much gravity in my belly, because I didn't assume it had anything to do with me. And now I see how gravely wrong I was. I see that the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy is responsible for the death of Barry Winchell and the ruination of the lives of those two young men who are in prison forever, and it moves beyond the military compound. The policy is something that exists in our homes and our schools. The preposterous notion that silence is going to resolve conflict is absolutely crazy."

good in the role of Justin Fisher," Nyswaner says. "He's Iago. He saw that aspect of the script and ran with it. You never know if Justin is being completely manipulative or if occasionally some humanity leaks through. For an actor to bring that complexity to a 'villainous' role is a great contribution."

Fisher's obsession with Barry Winchell struck many involved in the investigation as excessive. Given Fisher's own experiences within Nashville's gay nightlife, he appears to fit the profile of a self-loathing gay basher: a straight-identified man struggling with his own sublimated homosexual desires who in a rage annihilates the person who stirred that same-sex attraction.

Whatever Fisher's sexuality, Winchell's will never be known. He related to Calpernia as a woman but, according