ON OUR SHORT LIST

COME OUT, COME OUT
Michelangelo Signorile is calling gay men and women out of the closet.

As a younger growing up in Brooklyn, Michelangelo Signorile dreamed about writing a book. But not this one. Not something as contentious as *Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power*.

"I always thought it would be about something less controversial," admits Signorile, a surprisingly soft-spoken New Yorker who majored in public relations at SU’s Newhouse School of Public Communications and graduated in 1982. "But at the same time I do remember, when I was a teenager, coming to terms with being gay, having fantasies about speaking to large groups of people and explaining to them that this was okay."

Homosexuality, he says, isn’t a lifestyle, but a life. In his book, published this summer by Random House, Signorile argues that it’s a painful life when lived in the proverbial closet. That’s why he wants everyone out, ready or not.

Signorile has long advocated exposing public figures who are homosexuals, a practice dubbed "outing." Writing primarily for gay and lesbian magazines, he has outed the late Malcolm Forbes, Hollywood billionaire David Geffen, and Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams.

No new names are outed in Signorile’s book; he didn’t want the controversy to overshadow his call to arms. Instead, Signorile wants to help dismantle the closet erected by a powerful American triumvirate: the New York media, Washington politicians, and Hollywood entertainment moguls.

"I think there was a perception that the closet was a place where gay people went on their own when they realized they were gay, that this was a safe place to be," he explains. "But it’s destructive."

Despite the anonymity of many homosexuals, there has been progress in the fight for gay rights, especially in the era of AIDS. "There have been enormous changes in the last five years," says Signorile. Those changes have brought about more media coverage, political debate, and a higher gay profile in Hollywood, including the upcoming release of *Philadelphia*, a film starring Tom Hanks about an AIDS-infected man. But change has yet to bring about acceptance, says Signorile.

“We haven’t won anything except the right to have our grievances aired,” he contends. “That’s it.”

But for Signorile, that’s a start. It’s also the most satisfying aspect of his first book. "Inspiring people," he says, "that’s the real accomplishment."

—KEVIN HAYNES
Allemtown or Bust

Ellen Baker Baltz '73
Charles Richter '73

In a renovated old brick church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a woman wearing a large cowboy hat greets theatrogoers with a friendly "Howdy."

Ellen Baker Baltz, managing director of the Pennsylvania Stage Company (PSC), strives to welcome the community into the theater and the theater into the community. She considers the survival of her company to be at stake.

"Many people in the arts take for granted that the arts are also fundamental in other people's lives, but that's not so," she says. "The arts are competing with videotapes, sports, TV, and a whole host of other activities that don't ask you to donate money like we do."

Recently arrived from Texas, where she started a professional touring/teaching theater company, Baltz now uses some of the same techniques to send actors from PSC, a nonprofit regional company, to visit schools, nursing homes, and other institutions, and to bring groups into her theater for workshops.

While the number of regional theaters in the nation has seriously declined in the past decade, with many of the remaining ones in debt, the 60 or so left are vital to the American cultural scene, Baltz says.

"Some really exciting theater is coming out of regional theater," she says. "Even your Stephen Sondheims are using them as an incubator."

Baltz, a 1973 speech communication graduate, was recommended for her job by PSC's artistic director, Charles Richter, also a 1973 graduate of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. The two have kept in touch since they met on the first day at Syracuse University, when they were paired as acting partners in a drama class.

Richter, chairman of theater arts at Pennsylvania's Muhlenberg College, strongly supports regional theater.

"We can do plays that are not primarily commercial," he says, "plays of significance and meaning, in high-quality productions with honesty and artistry."

-Margaret Bloch Eisen
IN HIS OWN DEFENSE

Blaise Winter '85

M y life seems to have been a series of overcoming challenges," says Blaise Winter, whose seven-year career as a football player appeared to be over when he was released by the Green Bay Packers after the 1990 season. Unable to latch on with another team, Winter was forced to sit out the 1991 season and was advised by many people to retire. He told them to think again, then went about a determined quest to return to the National Football League.

Winter, a 1985 SU physical education graduate, spent $2,000 to produce a short video titled Blaise Winter Wants to Play Football, which he mailed to all 28 NFL teams. He wrote letters, spent hundreds of dollars on phone calls, then drove more than 7,000 miles to visit NFL clubs to request a tryout.

He got his opportunity in San Diego, due in large part to his association with George O'Leary, an assistant coach with the Chargers and Winter's position coach during his days at Syracuse University.

"I think people looked at him as a kid who would give you everything he had but was not really good enough," says O'Leary. "Sometimes coaches need to look beyond a person's height, weight, and speed stats and see what's inside."

Winter made the Chargers, became a starter at defensive tackle, and helped the team win its first division title since 1981.

"Last year was great for me because I defied the odds and proved everybody wrong who told me to move on with my life," says Winter.

It wasn't the first time Winter rose to the challenge of doubt. Born with a cleft palate, he underwent speech therapy as a child and was briefly mistaken for a developmentally disabled student. Tumors were removed from both Winter's ears, leaving him 90 percent deaf on his right side. He became a football star in high school but wasn't highly recruited by colleges. He received the last available scholarship from Syracuse in 1980, and then only because another player decided to go elsewhere. He eventually became a co-captain during his senior season in 1983.

"I've always felt I have to work every day to prove my worth and overcome the labels put on me," says Winter. "I enjoy proving people wrong."

—Bob Hill

As a defensive tackle with the San Diego Chargers during the 1992 season, Blaise Winter fortified one of the better defenses in the National Football League.
Tammy Tarbell celebrates her Iroquois heritage through sculpted clay dolls. She hopes her work—decorated with fur, feathers, and beads—helps viewers appreciate the diversity of Native American culture.