

COMING OUT COMEDY

Bruce Fessier

May 27, 2008

Gloria Laskey didn't like the way her son was dressed for a photo shoot at her Cathedral City home.

"I have a T-shirt," she told Jason Stuart while gently lifting his hands for the camera.

"I have a T-shirt," replied Stuart, wearing white short pants, white tennis shoes and a T-shirt that said "Vote."

"Look, she's telling where to put my hands!"

"Well, folding them in front of you looks silly!"

Stuart, a Los Angeles actor-comedian, has been building a multidimensional show-biz career for more than a quarter-century. But now, it's taking off.

A short film he produced and co-stars in, "Twisted Faith," played the Cannes film festival and will continue on the film festival circuit June 18 at the ReelHeART in Toronto.

He just finished starring in the Los Angeles play, "Biking With Andrew Scott," and recently guest starred on the TV sitcom, "Everybody Hates Chris."

IMDb.com says he has eight film or TV projects slated for release, not including, Stuart said, roles in the indie films, "One Degree" and "Case Book."

He does stand-up on the comedy circuit and at charity events. He just became host of a weekly talk show about relationships on the National Lampoon radio network, and his first stand-up TV special, "Jason

Stuart: Making It To the Middle,” still pops up on here! TV after a month-long run in April.

Stuart says his mom is his greatest influence.

“She was always really, really funny when I was a kid,” he said. “She was always very flirtatious and all the guys wanted to have sex with her. So, I wanted to be just like my mom.”

Stuart brands himself as the first openly gay stand-up comic. He came out professionally in 1993 – when Kate Clinton was well into her career as an openly lesbian comic – and started talking about his life.

He’d tell an audience, “When I was a kid, my mother would go to the beach and wear complete jewelry and hair and makeup and a leopard bathing suit. That’s why I’m gay.”

Asked when he knew he was gay, Stuart replies, “Thursday. It happened last Thursday. They were having a meeting at Elton John’s house and they picked me.”

But, seriously folks: “There wasn’t a day I thought I wasn’t gay. There was a day I thought I wasn’t going to be straight. I was coming home on the bus from the West Side Jewish Camp. Michael Jackson was playing ‘The Love You Save’ on the radio. When all the kids were coupling up on the bus, I thought, ‘This is not going to happen. This is not going to be my life.’”

Laskey says she and her first husband, Stuart’s father, discussed that.

“He was just different,” she said. “He made a Barbie Doll a man doll.”

Laskey asked if Stuart was gay when he was 19. But, at that point, he had been taught to believe being gay was bad.

“I don’t remember if we ever talked about this,” he told his mom, “but, we were standing in line at CBS to see a TV show. There was a guy who walked by and he was wearing jeans with studs, a yellow shirt

with rhinestones and died blond hair. And he was very feminine. My mother looked at me and said, 'You don't want to be like that, do you?' I said, 'Of course, no.' So I knew it was bad."

Stuart came out to his mother at age 24.

Laskey said she didn't know how to accept it at first. "It's just that when I heard my son liked men more than he liked women, I didn't think that was the normal way to be," she said. "It was hard for me."

It became easier when he started doing stand-up. His mother liked the jokes he told about her, and audiences did, too.

"I didn't start off wanting to be a comedian," Stuart said. "I always wanted to be an actor. But, when I was in my 20s, I couldn't get arrested. So I started doing stand-up thinking people would see me. And they did.

"Then, when I came out in the early '90s, I started to really be able to make money. That's when everything changed and I started to work."

Now, Laskey says, "We talk about it all the time. We're both boy crazy."