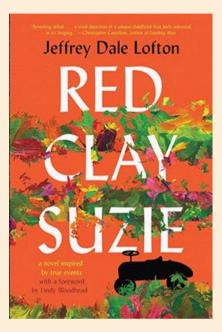
Book Club Box

Jeffrey Dale Lofton

2

a navel inspired by true events with a foreword by Lindy Woodhead

Book Club Box



To schedule the author for an in-person or zoom book club appearance, please visit: www.JeffreyDLofton.com/aboutRCS

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CONTENTS



Four-Year-Old Jeffrey Welcomes You to His World



Thank you for choosing *Red Clay Suzie* for your next book club read! Even though Philbet grows up in the late 1960's & '70s, many of the issues and feelings Philbet faces are just as relevant today. Those who are different feeling ostracized, bullied, or unable to be their true selves. Hopefully Philbet's journey allows you to see a glimpse into how someone who is different from their peers can come to embrace and feel comfortable with their unique identity and how we are all "normal," even if that means we are different

> from others. The materials in this package are designed to help enhance your group's conversation about Philbet and his journey.

Feel free to check my schedule online and see if I am available to attend your book club meeting via zoom.

Enjoy the book!

CONNECT WITH JEFFREY!

Warm regards. graffrey



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

A screenplay is in the works based on *Red Clay Suzie*. If it becomes a film, who would you cast as Philbet? Betty Tom? Grandaddy? Knox?



Share a favorite brief passage from the book. Why does it stand out for you?



What aspects of the author's story could you most relate to?



How well do you think the author built Philbet's world?



How honest about his own life do you think the author was being?



What's your favorite chapter title and why?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Was there part of the story that surprised you? That you didn't see coming?



Which other character would have made a compelling protagonist? (i.e., Whose story would you want to learn more about?)



Do you think *Red Clay Suzie* casts the South in a good light? Does it strike you as an accurate depiction of the rural South in the 1960s and '70s?



Do you think *Red Clay Suzie* is a good book for teenagers to read, especially those who feel like outsiders? Like nobody understands them? Young people being bullied and/or body-shamed?



Besides Philbet and Knox, which character would you want to chat with around the kitchen table over a cup of coffee or sweet tea?



There's another *Red Clay* book in the works. Where do you want Philbet and Knox's story to go from here?

CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Red Clay Suzie is described a a novel inspired by true events. How did you create your protagonist Philbet?

I looked inside myself. I examined my insecurities, my doubts and fears, my failed and my successful relationships, my small triumphs, in short, my life growing up as a gay, physically misshapen boy in a rural, deeply conservative family and community in Georgia.

Philbet was inside of me, long suppressed. I just had to coax him out, which I did writing furiously on my mobile telephone commuting on the subway (pre-pandemic) to and from my work at the Library of Congress. Creating Philbet was certainly part self-examination and catharsis. But it was also part Southern storytelling, with all that beloved form's beautiful quirks and wonderful eccentricities.



Jeffrey grew up in Warm Springs, Georgia and attended LaGrange College, just a few miles down the road. There, he received a degree in speech, communications, and theatre, furiously writing in journals that would become the basis of his debut novel. After graduation he moved to Washington, DC for an acting job, if you call cavorting about at a Renaissance Fair acting. He was welcomed by a vibrant community of theatre pros and decided to stay. Later he bid that world goodbye and took his love of storytelling to other jobs, other challenges. Today he lives with his partner and wee Petunia, their toy poodle in the city where he works at the Library of Congress surrounded by books and people who love them.

How did you choose the novel's title, and what does it signify for you?

Georgia soil is rich in iron oxides, which gives it a distinctive reddish hue, almost the color of terra cotta. Like our peaches, it says "Georgia" to me. And "Suzie," well, I can't give that away. What I will say is that it's as much a part of Philbet as "fixin' to," "over yonder," and "sad-streak pound cake with a green milkshake chaser." I dare not reveal more, bless your heart.

What challenges did you encounter in writing *Red Clay Suzie* and what advice do you have to other debut novelists?

The toughest part of designing and building my book was never veering from my premise, which became a mental discipline as I decided which real-life experiences distracted from my narrative arc. Not every realization or confrontation (however defining they may have been) served the story I was intent on telling. It can be wrenching to relegate an unforgettable memory to the rubbish bin if it gets in the way. But it's still vital to stick to the premise. As the saying goes: if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.

What literature inspires you?

I read voraciously and draw inspiration from so many books. Among the authors whose books currently reside on the shelf in my office are Christopher Castellani, Jesmyn Ward, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Conner, Rasheed Newson, Bushra Rehman, Zak Salih, Rafael Frumkin, and Ralph Eubanks, and M.F.K. Fisher. Why? Because their writing tunnels deep inside my heart and mind, provoking an examination of a piece of myself, my relationships, and my world view. And, they know how to grab me by the lapels and not let go until they're ready. Literary journeys and those who take us on them are something close to sacred.

If you could start a new movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

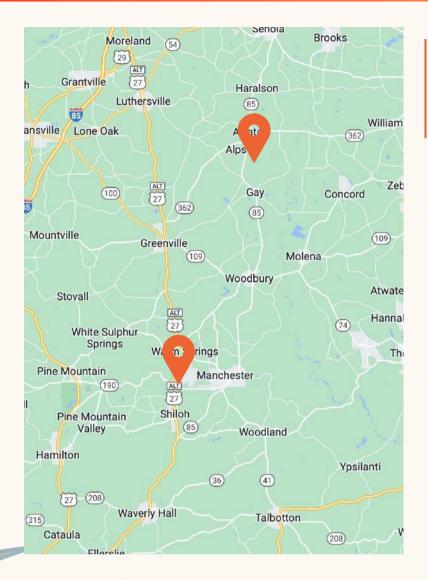
Rather than start a new movement, I would try to breathe additional life into the important work being done by such groups as the Born This Way Foundation and The Trevor Project. Both help atrisk youth realize that they are not alone in their struggles, that there are resources available to them to navigate through whatever difficulties they face. In fact, I am donating a portion of the proceeds from the sale of *Red Clay Suzie* to those two organizations whose work I so admire.



What do you want readers to take away from the novel?

Foremost, it is my fondest hope that *Red Clay* Suzie readers-even those who have never been relegated to outsider status-come to see that bullies are paper predators who have no more power than you yourself give them. They are as scared of life as you, and once you understand that, they lose their sovereignty. And I want them to know that whatever imperfections (real and perceived) their body may have, it is beautiful; it is precious. Like Philbet, I came to learn that there are caring individuals in those concentric circles of people around you if you will only open your heart and your mind. Oh, and love-real love-is never wrong. Bravely bestow it on whomever is worthy of the gift. That is what I wish my younger self had known. That is Philbet's story.

PHILBET'S WORLD



Growing up, Philbet Lawson's whole world is Alvaton, Warm Springs, and the 25-mile stretch of road that connects them.

Alvaton, GA

Alvaton was founded in the early 1900s and named after Alva Pinkston McCrary, whose father was a local physician and farmer. The town owes its existence to the expansion of the Atlanta, Birmingham and Atlantic Railroad, a 240-mile run from Montezuma, Georgia to Birmingham, Alabama. Residents of Alvaton saw their first post office in 1908. (Author Jeffrey Dale Lofton's greatgrandfather was postmaster.) Three years later, the Georgia Assembly incorporated Alvaton as an official town, a rural outpost where railroad jobs were its economic mainstay,

Alvaton did not prosper over time, however, and its "town" status was dissolved in 1995. It still exists today as an unincorporated community in Meriwether County at the crossroads of Griffin Highway and Millarden Road. There is no current population data for the place where Griffin and Millarden meet; it has not been included in the United States Census counts for a very long time.

A one-stoplight town? Nope, not even. Alvaton has one roadside flashing caution light, with plans for no more.



Warm Springs, GA

Picturesque, Victorian-era Warm Springs is best known as the home of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Little White House. The town is nestled among rolling hills and is famous for its geothermalheated, believed-to-be-curative waters. Completed in 1933, just prior to FDR's inauguration, The Little White House is a cottage really, surrounded by pine trees in the southern end of town and was Roosevelt's getaway during his four terms as President of the United States. As many of us know, he contracted polio in 1921 at the age of 39 and found soaking in the area's mineral waters therapeutic for his paralyzed legs. The FDR Memorial Museum in Warm Springs is imbued, in part, with Roosevelt's deep commitment to helping people with disabilities.

If Warm Springs is on your travel itinerary and you want a literal taste of Southern Hospitality, try Bulloch House, a meat-and-three restaurant widely known for their buffets featuring fried chicken, fried green tomatoes, and coconut cake. For lighter fare, try their Lightnin' Bugs Bakery and Cafe.

Franklin Delano Roosevelet died unexpectedly in one of The Little White House's six rooms in 1945. The menu of his last meal and the collar of his beloved Scottish Terrier, Fala, are on display in the cottage. Fala, a news media sensation for much of his life, outlived Roosevelt by seven years and is buried near his humans (Franklin and Eleanor) at Springwood, the Roosevelt estate that overlooks the Hudson River.

MATCHBOX CARS

Toys, Yes, but So Much More

Countless car enthusiasts around the world can trace their love of cars to Matchbox, originally produced by Lesney Products, an industrial die-casting company based in Hackney, a borough of London, England. The company's name is a mashup of its two founders' first names - Leslie and Rodney, two childhood friends who served together in the Royal Navy during World War II.

Lesney's bread and butter was making castings for automotive and agricultural companies in addition to specialty products such as a press used by anglers to shape small pieces of bread into fishing-hook bait.



Shortly after World War II, Leslie and Rodney met Jack O'Dell, an engineer who rented space in Lesney's workshop. O'Dell designed Lesney's first toy in 1948, in what was considered at the time a strategic move to keep production lines humming when industrial orders were slow-that toy was an Averling Barford road roller.

Next, Lesney produced a replica of Queen Elizabeth's coronation coach in celebration of her being crowned Queen of England in 1951. Over a million replicas sold in just three months, a success that both surprised and prompted the partners to focus solely on die casting model cars from then on.

Matchbox really became 'Matchbox' when O'Dell wanted to surprise his daughter with a toy car that she could take to school for Show and Tell. School rules dictated that no toys-from-home were allowed unless they fit in a matchbox. So, O'Dell scaled the toy car accordingly, and the Matchbox name stuck and the new line was born.

Straightaway, the company developed a line of 75 model vehicles, all sold in a box designed to look like a matchbox. By the 1960s, Matchbox was the world leader in diecast miniatures; they produced about a million of them each week. One key to their success was the price. Matchbox cars were less than 50 cents when Philbet was a little boy.

Lesney wasn't without competition-stiff competition. And it came from Hot Wheels and Johnny Lighting toys. In response, Lesney developed a line of King Size and Speed Kings models, along with a series of tracks. They followed that manufacturing evolution with Matchbox Models of Yesteryear (hitting paydirt with collectors), a series of 66 historic vehicles, the crown jewel of which was the coronation coach that started it all.

Lesney Products was purchased by Mattel in the late 1970s, uniting rivals Matchbox and Hot Wheels under one roof. In 1985,Matchbox manufacturing had ceased in England. Select Matchbox models are still made today, marketed not as toys, but as collectibles.

Red Clay Suzie's Philbet, the boy who wanted a car for everyone he ever loved, wouldn't care. He'd still want every model he could get his hands on.



Celebrate *Red Clay Suzie* with Recipes Inspired by the Novel

Southern cooking serves up tastes and smells that feed the body and nurture the spirit. It's comfort food of the first order.

Here are seven recipes that make for great eating as you read, talk about, or re-read *Red Clay Suzie* and immerse yourself in Philbet's world.

Everything from Philbet's beloved green milkshakes to his mama's yummy sad-streak pound cake–with some wonderful Georgia delicacies in between!

Nothing beats a sweet tea, a peach hand pie, and a good reading lamp. Southern paradise.



<image>

Sunday Cinnamon Toast

Ingredients:

- 4 slices of white bread
- 1/4 cup unsalted, softened butter
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- a pinch of salt

Method:

Preheat the oven to 350F. In a small mixing bowl, using a spatula, combine the softened butter, the sugar, cinnamon and salt until it has a paste-like consistency.

RECIPES

Spread the mixture evenly over one side of each of the 4 pieces of bread, being sure to spread that goodness all the way up to the edges.

Place the bread on a baking sheet and bake it in the oven for 10 minutes. Next, turn on the broiler and broil the toast until it is a deep golden brown, the sugar bubbling. You might want to watch it through the oven window or slightly crack the broiler door 'cause it doesn't take long, and you don't want to burn this Southern Sunday staple.

Serves 4

I decided that Mama and Daddy liked each other better for a few days if we had cinnamon toast on Sunday before church. If we didn't have cinnamon toast before church, they didn't get along as well all week long. I thought that if we had cinnamon toast that morning, then it might not be too late for us to have a good

week.

-Chapter Seven A Car for Everyone I Ever Loved

Philbet's Green Milkshake (sort of)

Ingredients:

- 10-15 fresh mint leaves
- 3/4 cup milk (no less than 1% fat)
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups vanilla bean ice cream
- Just a touch of peppermint extract (optional)
- Whipped cream (optional)



In a high-speed blender, combine and blend mint leaves, milk, and vanilla until leaves are pureed and the mixture becomes light green in color.

Method:

Add ice cream and pulse until combined. Next, add a few drops of peppermint flavoring, tasting a bit along the way to get it to your liking.

Serve in a chilled glass topped with whipped cream if you're feeling extra decadent.

Single Serving

"MawMaw, I'm thirsty," I said. "I want a milkshake. A green milkshake." For as long as memory served green milkshakes were my favorite. She led me to the kitchen, poured milk into a glass, added vanilla extract and food coloring, put her hand on the top and shook it. A true milkshake–shaken milk.

> -Chapter Three The Green Milkshake Cure



Jorma's Sweet Tea

Ingredients:

- 6 tea bags (Black tea is the Southern standby.)
- Just a pinch of baking soda
- 2 cups boiling water
- 3/4 cup white granulated sugar
- 6 cups cool water

Bring 2 cups of water to a rolling boil. Next, put your pinch of baking soda into a 64-ounce pitcher. If it's glass, make sure it is designed to take boiling water without shattering. Pour in boiling water, and then add the tea bags. Allow to steep for 15 minutes.

Method:

Then, remove the tea bags and discard. Stir in your sugar until it's dissolved. Pour in cool water and refrigerate until cold, probably 2-3 hours. When ready to serve, pour over ice in a tall glass, and maybe even garnish with a sprig of mint from Grandaddy's garden.

It was the most delicious, easy, comforting thing in the world to run around with half a sandwich in hand, stopping long enough at the TV trays set up in the backyard to gulp some sweet tea from one of Jorma's aluminum cups, the colors of the rainbow.

> -Chapter Four Tomato Sandwich Air

Grandaddy's Yellow Tomato Sandwich

Ingredients:

- 2 slices of white bread or whole wheat (in honor of Roman Meal Bread)
- 1 ripe yellow tomato, medium-sliced
- 1 sweet onion (Vidalia if you can get them!)
- 1/2 teaspoon mayonnaise (Duke's brand is a particular Southern favorite.)
- Two strips of fried bacon and a leaf of lettuce (optional)
- 1 pinch of salt

Method:

Toast the bread so it's nice and crispy. Core and cut the tomatos into 1/8th inch slices. Coat the bread with mayonnaise and layer the tomatoes as thick as you like. Top off the tomatoes with a slice of onion (and some bacon and lettuce if you like), and close the sandwich.

Eat with a side of paper napkins to catch the juices as they run down your chin. Tasty, y'all, so tasty.

Single Serve

The shade of the pecan trees was like being in a room outside with only the breeze for walls. And we always had sweet tea and tomato sandwiches. I liked mine with mayonnaise and yellow tomatoes.

Everybody else liked red tomatoes, and that must have been all right with Grandaddy because the yellow tomatoes were hard to grow. What the birds didn't eat, the bugs did. But I think Grandaddy used to go to the peach stand down the highway and get me yellow tomatoes because there were always yellow tomato sandwiches whether it was Saturday, Sunday, or any day.

> -Chapter Four Tomato Sandwich Air



Lawson Family Southern-Style Grits

Ingredients:

- 4 cups water
- 1 1/2 cups ground corn grits
- 2 pinches salt
- 1/2 cup grated cheese (Parmesan, American, cheddar ... your favorite)
- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 dried bay leaves (optional)

I saw Mama run into the store. I remember thinking that Daddy must not have any money on him and everybody knew you could get arrested if you take something without paying. pulled a chair up to the stove and stirred the grits because they stick fast if you don't stir them. My chest hurt, like I swallowed one of Daddy's fishing hooks. -Chapter Four

-Chapter Four Tomato Sandwich Air

Method:

In a large pot, put in 4 cups of water, then add grits, 2 dashes of salt, and 2 dried bay leaves (if you like). Bring to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, immediately remove pot from the heat, cover, and put aside for about 15 minutes.

Cut butter into 8 pieces. Grate your choice of cheese.

Uncover and return the grits to the stove, bring them to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir regularly with a spoon or whisk, scraping the bottom to prevent clumps, about 20 minutes should do it.

When the water is absorbed, your grits are ready. Remove them from the heat, discard the bay leaves (if you've chosen to add them). Stir in the butter pats, cheese, heavy cream, and serve.

Serves 4-6

Mama's Chili

The Dairy Queen put chili on their burgers, but it was different from Mama's chili. It was really smooth, and Mama's was chunky with meat and beans. I liked Mama's better.

> -Chapter Ten Good Grits



Ingredients:

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 15-16 ounce can of pinto beans
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small sweet onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 14.5 ounce can crushed tomatoes
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- Dash of cumin, pepper, and garlic salt

Method:

Brown the garlic and onion in a large skillet, cooking until light brown in color. Next, add the ground beef and sauté until meat is fully cooked (no pink).

Add and stir to combine the crushed tomatoes, pinto beans, beef broth, vinegar, brown sugar, cumin, garlic salt, and pepper.

Let your chili simmer on medium-low for 15 minutes. There will be a reduction of liquid, which is what makes the chili thick and yummy.

Garnish with cheddar cheese.

Serves 6

The Knox Slider

"Keebler, you cannot eat ten Krystals." [sliders] "Bet I can too!" And I knew I could because I'd already eaten nine a few months ago, and I could have eaten another one easy. I only stopped because I didn't have any more money, and I'd already beaten Jeb, who could only eat eight. "If you can eat ten Krystals, I'll buy all your Krystals for the rest of the year," Knox promised. Well, I wasn't going to let this challenge get by me. He'd have to be there every time I went to Krystal, and that was reason enough to risk the stomachache and throwing up.

> -Chapter Forty-Five Four on the Floor

Ingredients:

- 12 slider rolls (Southerners have a soft spot for King's Hawaiian Rolls)
- 1 pound ground chuck
- 12 slices of cheese (American, Swiss, Jack ... your favorite)
- 6 slices Bacon cooked/one half for each slider
- 1/4 teaspoon of salt
- Splash of olive oil
- 1Tablespoon of onion powder
- 1 teaspoon of garlic powder
- Half a stick of butter, melted
- Condiments you like-ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, sliced pickles

Method:

Preheat oven to 350F. Shape ground chuck into 12 small patties and cook in a large skillet, seasoning with pinches of salt and onion powder as you go. When your beef is cooked through, remove it from your skillet (setting it aside in a bowl is fine) and drain the grease from the frying pan. Now, cook the bacon in your skillet and drain on paper towel. Once it is cooled, break into 12 pieces.

Split slider buns in half and set the 12 tops aside. Place the bottom buns on a cookie sheet and cover each with one half of your 6 slices of the cheese of your choice. Place one patty on each bottom bun.

Next, add one half of the remaining 6 slices of cheese to cover each portion of beef, essentially encasing the ground chuck in cheese. Add a piece of bacon to each roll. No bacon nibbles if you can help it!

Add a dab or two or three of your favorite condiment. Knox likes ketchup and mayonnaise mixed together. Cap each creation with a bun top you set aside, cover with aluminum foil and bake for 15 minutes.

After those 15 minutes, take out of the oven and remove the foil. Brush with the melted butter mixed with garlic powder. Then, it's back in the oven for 3-to-5 minutes, or until the cheese is completely melted. Betcha can't eat 10 like Philbet!

Serves12



Jorma's Short-Cut Peach Hand Pies

Ingredients:

- 2 store-bought refrigerated pie crusts
- 1 (21 ounce) can of peach pie filling
- 1 large egg white, beaten
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- Optional glaze
 - 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
 - a splash or two of whole milk

Method:

Preheat your oven to 425F. Next, remove pie crusts from packaging and allow them to come to
 room temperature while you focus on the filling.

Scoop out the pie filling into a shallow bowl. Cut the peaches into bite-sized pieces and add the cinnamon. Mix well, and set aside.

Unroll pie crusts and cut 6 circles from each. If you have a 4-inch biscuit cutter, use that. If not, fake it the way Jorma does. Re-roll the scraps as needed to make 6 circles.

Evenly divide the peach pie filling and spoon into the center of each pie crust circle. Next, fold in half and press edges closed with the tines of a fork to seal.

Beat egg white in a small bowl until frothy. Poke each hand pie with a fork just once, to let out the steam as it bakes.

Brush over the tops of each hand pie with your beaten egg white, and bake 1 inch apart on a cookie sheet for 15 minutes or until they're browned. Hint: Jorma lined her cookie sheet with parchment paper from the Dollar Store. Let your hand pies cool for 5 minutes, and they're ready to serve or sit in the pie safe.

If you would like to glaze your hand pies, whisk powdered sugar and a splash or two of milk and drizzle on top of each pie before they cool completely.

Serves 6

She didn't walk in from the kitchen wiping her flour-caked hands on her apron, declaring with a smile, "Peach hand pies for anybody who wants one!"
Nope, the pies were just there in the pie safe, every bite as bitter as a raw lemon. Her peach hand pie crusts bore the markings of her weapon of choice, a fork.
Oozy peaches ripped too soon from the tree bled from the fork-crimped, charred

edges.

-Chapter Six MawMaw and Jorma

Betty Tom's Sad-Streak Pound Cake

Ingredients:

- 3 cups white flour (not self-rising)
- 3 cups granulated sugar
- 3 sticks of sweet cream butter (no margarine or butter-margarine combination will do)

• 8 eggs

Important Note: This cake recipe requires no baking soda or baking powder.

<image>

RECIPES

Method: Preheat oven to 300F. Cream the butter and sugar well in a mixer. The resulting mixture will take on a light, lemony look. Next, add eggs, one at a time, beating each time until egg yolk is dispersed.

Sift flour and then add to mixture in small amounts (a half cup at a time is about right here), mixing each time. (If short on time, the sifting step is not a requirement for a wonderful outcome.)

Bake in a decorative bundt pan (well buttered and floured) for 1 hour and 15 minutes; and please don't open the oven door until Betty Tom's pound cake has baked at least one hour, or it will not rise properly. May require an additional 3-5 minutes, if your oven runs slightly below settings, but don't overbake or you won't have that yummy sad streak.

Serves 12-16

I liked Mama's cakes 'cause she under baked them. There was always a gluey, moist streak running right through the bottom sitting just inside the brown crusty bottom layer.

"Why do you call it a sad streak, Mama?"

"Well, if you press a finger on top of a piece of just cut, still warm poundcake, a little sugary and buttery batter seeps out. It weeps a little."

I felt the moist cake in my mouth each time I took a bite, and I thought it must have been sad because it didn't get to be what it was supposed to be. Close but not exactly right.

-Chapter Eighteen *Wonky Me*

RESOURCES



Born This Way Foundation

Created by Lady Gaga and her mother Cynthia Germanotta to support the wellness of young people to empower them to create a kinder and braver world.

www.bornthisway.foundation

info@bornthisway.foundation



The Trevor Project

Focused on suicide prevention, they offer a toll-free telephone hotline staffed by trained counselors for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth.

www.thetrevorproject.org

1-866-488-7386



PFLAG

The largest organization uniting parents, families, and allies with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

www.pflag.org

202-467-8180



Human Rights Campaign

Fighting for the rights of LGBTQ people in every state.

www.hrc.org

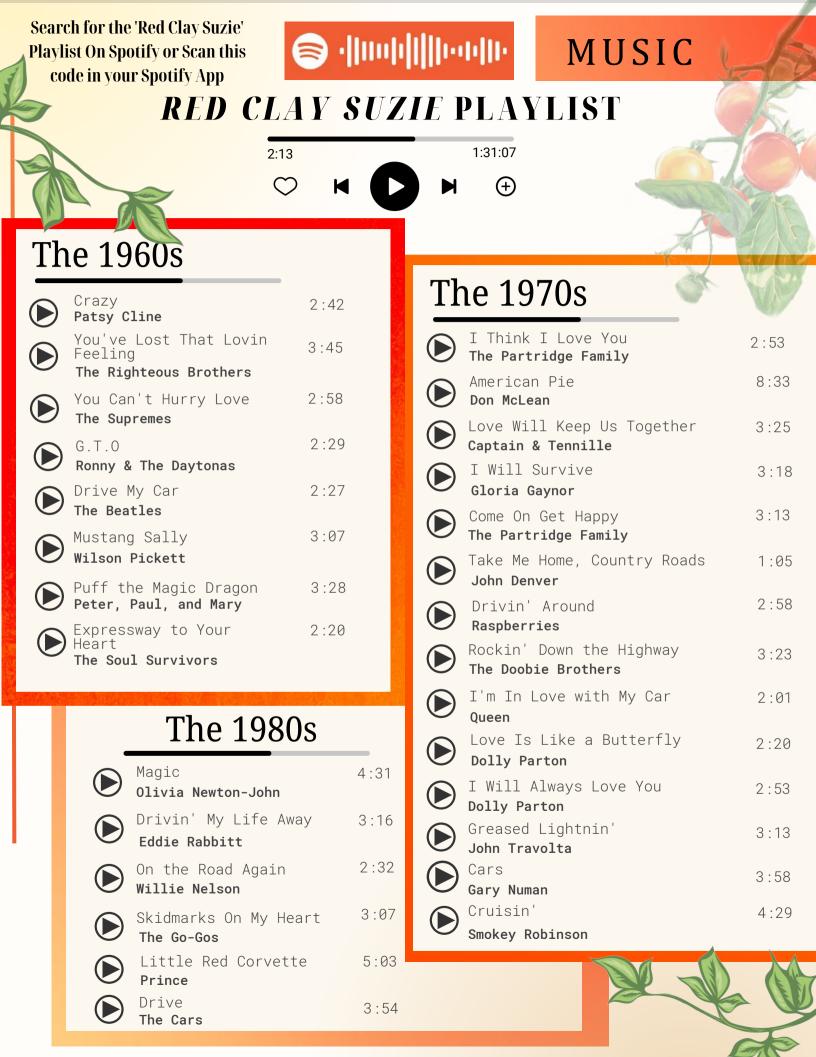
1-800-777-4723



GLAAD

Focused on how the entertainment and news media portray the LGBTQ+ community, they have a comprehensive resource list on their website.

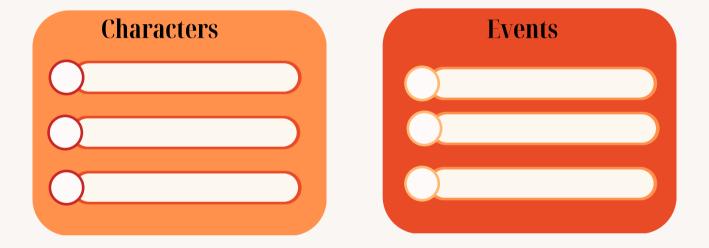
www.glaad.org/resourcelist



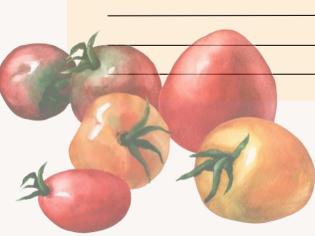


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Favorite Chapters



Favorite Quotes



Notes



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