

Dinah Shore | *South of Nowhere* | Janice Dickinson

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WOMEN'S LESBIAN MAGAZINE

Jackie Warner

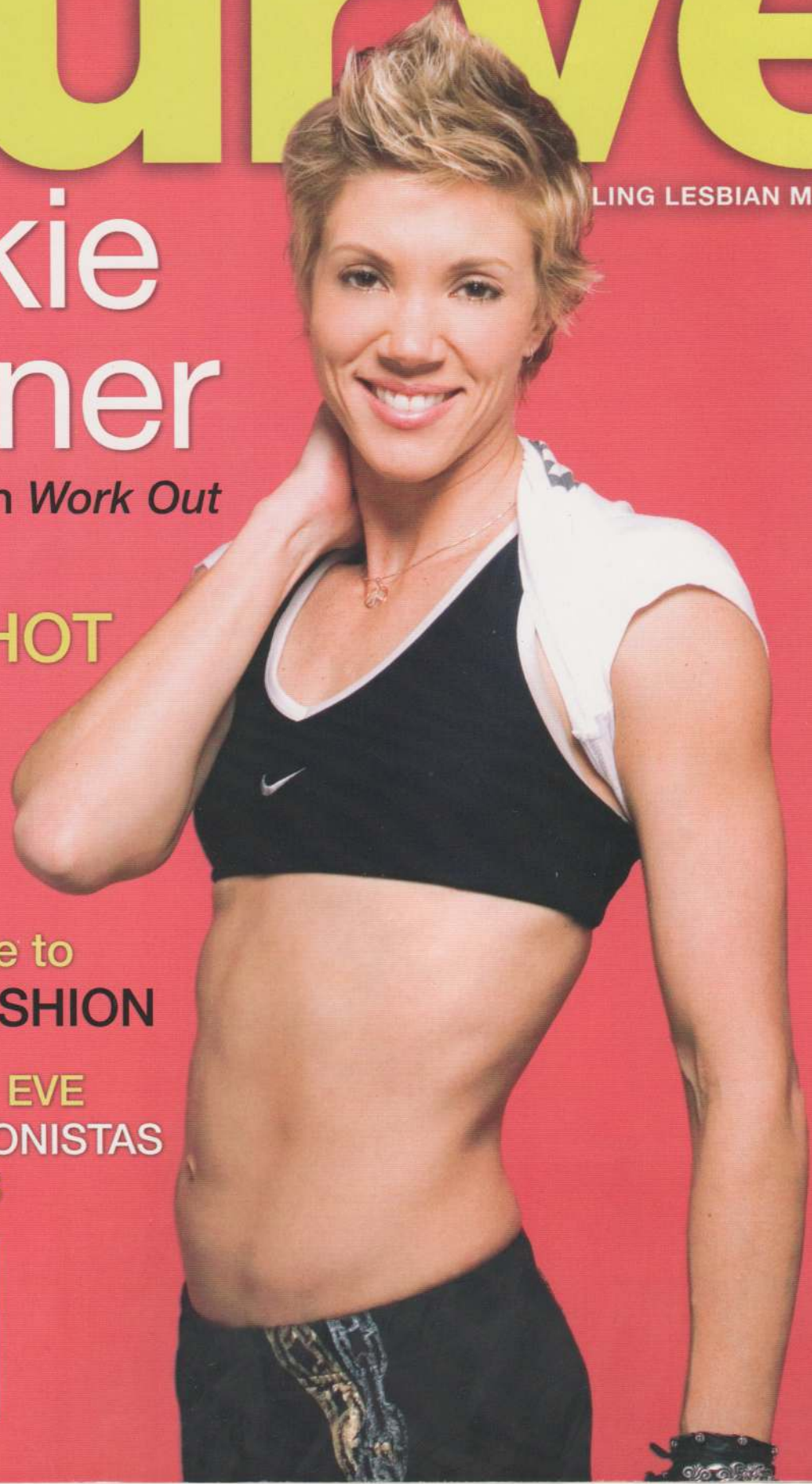
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Prime Time for Lesbians

This month marks the 10-year anniversary of Ellen DeGeneres' famed on-screen outing. A decade later, small-screen lesbians are still breaking boundaries, gaining visibility and showcasing our community's diversity.

In the pre-*Ellen* era, seeing lesbians on TV pretty much meant you were watching cable (or late-night pay-per-view smut, of course). These days, queer girls appear just about everywhere, especially reality TV, which seems to hold a special place in its heart for girl-on-girl action. Arguably one of the gayest straight shows to hit the air, *America's Next Top Model*, leads the pack, feeding us a sweet dose of eye candy again this season with yet another queer contestant — and we're not complaining.

Cable is still kind to its lesbian viewers, and continues to break ground with shows like The N's *South of Nowhere*, where queer teens take center stage. Meanwhile, women like Janice Dickinson who take an unabashed approach to sexuality are changing the landscape for women of all orientations.

Even though we all love *The L Word*, options are always nice, and they're quickly increasing. Whatever your pleasure, the networks are finally catching up.



Why We Love *South of Nowhere*

A hot teen drama with a lesbian romance is changing the face of television. And we can't stop watching.

The second season of *South of Nowhere* opens as a mussed blonde teen Spencer (Gabrielle Christian) blinks awake in her best-friend's sun-flecked bed to coffee, compliments and tender strokes. The scene's morning-after glow, suggestive for a drama on The N aimed at a demographic (12-17) below the legal age of consent, is made exponentially edgier by the fact that Spencer's partner in bed is King High's sultriest, most rebellious and openly queer 16-year old, Ashley (Mandy Musgrave). Her sheets have surely been rumpled by more than gossipy whisperings at a run-of-the-mill sleepover, a fact confirmed by a cute act of processing: "Was I OK?" corn-fed Spencer bashfully asks. "Yeah," Ashley, slightly more seasoned, assures, "you were." "Thanks..." grins Spencer, "I'll get better."

After a tantalizing first season of anticipation for the joined-at-the-hip duo "Splashley" (the fanfic term for the darling melded mush that together

Spencer and Ashley make) to finally lock lips in season one's finale, producers started season two out with quite a bang. They ended with a bang of another sort: gunshots fired outside King High's prom night, and someone — to be disclosed in season three — gets wheeled off in a stretcher.

The brain-child of kid-friendly executive producer Tom Lynch (*KIDS Incorporated*), *South of Nowhere* plays like an after-school special version of *The OC* or *Beverly Hills 90210* transubstantiated into *The L Word*, minus on-screen skinny lesbian sex and over-the-top conceit. Still the show thankfully implies that (again, skinny) lesbian sex is actually taking place, if somewhere off-screen in our imaginations, and pleasures openly in its midribs, 'kewl' slang and *Teen People*-inspired stylings. *South of Nowhere*, which reaches approximately 54 million households, handles issues currently relevant to urban high school-aged kids: drug use and addiction; class, ethnic, religious and racial differences; using contraception and teen pregnancy; handling parental demands and pressures to succeed in sports or school; dealing with cliques and popularity contests; and negotiating single-parent households and troubled home lives. The second highest-rated show on MTV's youth cable network, *The N* (after *Degrassi: The Next Generation*), *South of Nowhere's* prime time successes prove that a show that revolves around a queer romance (rather than side-showing lesbian love, like *Buffy*

did) while juggling diverse topics and supporting characters can be successful with adolescent and teen audiences.

In fact, the series has gone so unremarked upon for having 'daring' content, that perhaps the half-hour drama marks a generational shift in how LGBTQ issues are received differently by the MySpace generation and signals how gay teens are being considered more as part of a spectrum of "normal" by their peers. Last year *South of Nowhere* was given the nod of nomination for a GLAAD Media Award for outstanding dramatic series for its honest, home-hitting portrayals of the coming-out process and young queer love. Although the more "mature" Angelinos of that other Los Angeles-based series, *The L Word*, won the GLAAD award, there's no doubt that *South of Nowhere* is gathering its kudos. Sporting a fast-paced handheld-camera look that shows off the vibrant cityscapes of Los Angeles, episodes have been directed by some beloved heavy hitters, including out lesbian directors Donna Deitch (*Desert Hearts*) and Rose Troche (*Go Fish*, *The L Word*).

While word is not yet out (as of press time) as to whether *South of Nowhere* will be picked up for a third season, sources on the team say they're definitely hopeful. Besides how could they leave us hanging off a cliff? We have to know for sure if our dear pair, Splashley, will prevail, hopefully minus a wound to the heart. — Candace Moore