

# Boston Children's Theatre Makes History

New play about a high school boy who makes headlines — and history — when he wins his fight in court to take another boy to the senior prom

No, it's not a "Glee" storyline about Kurt Hummel. It actually happened — way back in 1980.

Aaron Fricke of Cumberland, Rhode Island became a gay rights poster boy when he sued Cumberland High School in U.S. District Court for the right to attend his senior prom with a male date. Judge Raymond J. Pettine ruled in Fricke's favor, and Fricke attended the prom, amid heavy security and without incident, with Paul Guilbert. At 17, Fricke wrote about life in "Reflections of a Rock Lobster," published by Alyson Books in 1981.

Thirty years later and nine years after the book went out of print, Fricke's story is about the take center stage — literally.



Aaron Fricke

"The story is timeless. It's not about me or a prom. It's about the first amendment."

The Boston Children's Theatre (BCT) is mounting an ambitious play based on Fricke's memoir. Burgess Clark, BCT's Executive Artistic Director, adapted Fricke's autobiography and will direct the world premiere of "Reflections of a Rock Lobster" which runs March 3-11, 2012. The play tackles relevant issues of bullying, coming out and tolerance, and while staying true to Fricke's '80s saga.

The production, says Clark, makes BCT, celebrating its 60th season this year, one of the only children's theater companies in the country to stage a gay-positive production.

"I read the book 30 years ago when I was a freshman in college and the story was all over the headlines. I've wanted to adapt the book for years," says Clark, who finally saw the opportunity with BCT's new mission to stage more contemporary and socially conscious works.

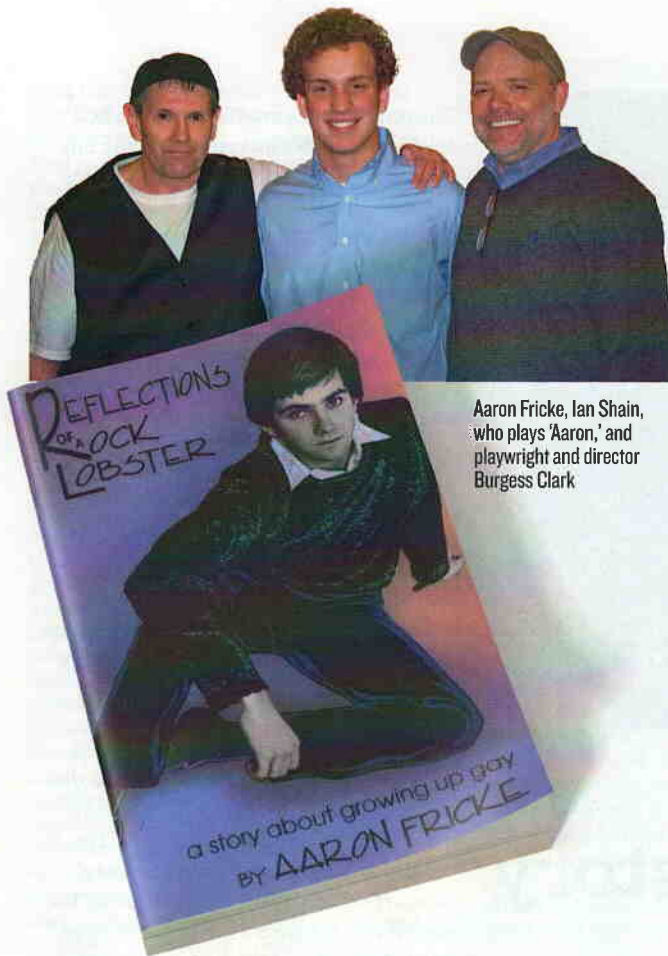
But Clark had to do a little sleuthing to find Fricke, who had moved to San Francisco in 1990. "Three were rumors he'd died of AIDS... it took me months to find him," says Clark. He discovered that Fricke had donated all his papers from the case to the San Francisco Public Library. A librarian there knew Fricke and put them in touch.

Fricke, now 49 and happily partnered for the past 20 years with Ron Calvillo, is thrilled that his story is being brought to a new generation of young people. "The story is timeless. It's not about me or a prom. It's about the first amendment," he says. It also remains a relevant case even today, as *Fricke v. Lynch* continues to be cited when schools try to ban same-sex prom dates.

Fricke will return to New England for the first time since 1997 to attend performances of the play and engage in post-show discussions with audiences.

In 1979, Fricke was newly out and had befriended Guilbert, another Cumberland High School student, who he'd met over a gay helpline. That year, Guilbert attempted to take Ed Miskevich, a senior at Brown University, to his junior prom. A furor ensued with the principal, Richard Lynch, threatening to cancel the prom altogether. "We thought Paul was nuts. Who wants to go to prom?" says Fricke. But when Guilbert backed down, Fricke decided that there was "unfinished business." The following year, Fricke declared his intention to attend the senior prom with Guilbert and, when Lynch opposed it, Fricke filed his lawsuit.

Fricke says he's lost touch with Guilbert since 1994 when they appeared together as guests on the daytime talk program, "The Rolonda Show." After "Reflections of a Rock Lobster," Fricke collaborated with his father, Walter, on another book, "Sudden Strangers: the Story of a Gay Son and his Father," about their relationship



Aaron Fricke, Ian Shain, who plays 'Aaron,' and playwright and director Burgess Clark

and Walter Fricke's coming to terms with his son's homosexuality. That book was published shortly after Walter Fricke died from cancer in 1989.

Clark says he's prepared for resistance to the show from people who "confuse children's theater with kiddie theater." But he's had no qualms from his cast of 30 youths, both gay and straight, ages 14 to 20, who hail from across New England and with whom Clark has been work-shopping the production for many months. "These kids are sophisticated. Their generation is more aware and informed. They are shocked that this was even an issue thirty years ago," he says. But the topical issues of prejudice and bullying allow BCT to use the play and its after-curtain discussions to educate and

inform audiences and school groups

That remains the most rewarding component for Fricke. "I'm prouder now of what I did than I was then. Now I feel it was the most patriotic thing I've ever done in my life," he says. "I won the right so cool kids never have to go to a prom again."

"Reflections of a Rock Lobster" runs March 3-11 at the Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont Street. In addition, BCT's Theatre for Young Audiences program provides affordable access to all BCT productions with performances for school audiences during the week. [x]

Boston Children's Theatre  
[www.bostonchildrenstheatre.org](http://www.bostonchildrenstheatre.org)  
 617-424-6634 x222



ROYAL SONESTA HOTEL  
 BOSTON

## eat, drink and be married...

and do it all in style. We offer Boston skyline riverfront views, creative cuisine, personal service and a specialty for making social events sparkle. We pride ourselves in making weddings memorable... from the grand to the intimate, to the cherished that is yours. Come have a tour.

**617.806.4200 • Sonesta.com**  
 40 Edwin Land Boulevard • Cambridge, MA 02142

