

exclusive with
Thom Bierdz

In 1989, Bierdz's character, Phillip Chancellor III, was killed in a tragic car accident. In fact, Phillip Chancellor III faked his own death, unable to live up to his family's expectations and live his true life: that of a gay man. His triumphant return to daytime television makes Phillip the first openly gay character in a daytime soap opera.

Thom's off screen life, however, reads like one of his *Young & the Restless* scripts. One month, Phillip Chancellor III was killed; then Thom's paranoid schizophrenic brother, Troy, killed their mother. In 2002, his other brother, Craig, committed suicide.

Channeling his grief into creativity, Bierdz left acting to pursue his passion to paint and has since painted over 400 canvases. In addition to being a renowned artist, he recently wrote "*Forgiving Troy*," detailing his journey to finding peace with his brother.



Photo: John Paschal www.jpistudios.com

Outlooks: Was it your idea or the producer's idea to have you back as an openly gay character and if so, why was that important to you?

TB: I had told Josh and Maria that I would come back to Y&R and be Phillip IF he were to be gay. That was the only reason I could see acting again. For the last six years, all my focus had been on my painting career, which I love to do. But to "redo" my soap opera years as an out-gay man playing an out-gay man is such an honour! Who wouldn't love to do what I am doing? 20 years later? I am so lucky!

Outlooks: What kind of feedback are you getting from your fans about this new and improved Phillip Chancellor III?

TB: So many straight people are thrilled with the new Phillip. Not only is it interesting new material, but timely.

Outlooks: Is there the possibility of an on-screen gay romance?

TB: I hope so.

Outlooks: In "*Forgiving Troy*," you write about your relationship with your brother. What prompted you to write the book?

TB: I was sitting on a park bench in 1994 after my bizarre reunion with him five years after he killed our mom. I realized then, that what happened was so unreal that people would actually find it hard to believe. That's why I exposed so many secrets about me in my book, so that the reader would know it is all true. The journey of my brother and myself continues to grow.

Outlooks: Did you forgive Troy before you wrote the book, or did writing the book get you to this point?

TB: Writing the book got me here.

Outlooks: How does the rest of your family feel about your candidness?

TB: They're horrified by it. Seriously, they just don't get why I am so open about everything. But I feel that if it's true, why not share it?

Outlooks: How is Troy doing now?

TB: He has been in prison for 20 years and has 30 more to go. He is actually lonely and asked me to set him up with a girlfriend, which is not an easy task.

Outlooks: Do you see or speak to him often?

TB: He calls almost every day. He is actually a sweet, mild-mannered man today—but he's on medication for his paranoid schizophrenia. We talk about Y&R and *Twilight Zone*.

Outlooks: What advice do you have for those who struggle with forgiveness?

TB: Don't let bottled up hate and bitterness give you cancer—forgive and you'll feel better. You can't change the past, but you can change your future so easily.

Outlooks: How have the tragic events in your past changed you?

TB: In "*Forgiving Troy*," I share my darkest times and my anxieties. My ex-boyfriends are

amazed that I have regained enough confidence to actually perform on the soap opera set without alcohol. I thought that, at this age, I would know who I am—but I am still a work in progress, trying to be someone I am not yet.

Outlooks: What inspires your painting?

TB: Everything! My dogs, architecture, thoughts, evergreens, and faces in the grocery store.

Outlooks: How can we Canadians get our hands on a Thom Bierdz' painting?

TB: I deal with people directly, so please email my website. Let me know what you like and your price range. I do a lot of commissions, too. I'm happy to.

Outlooks: Tell us about the award you just received?

TB: *The Human Rights Campaign* gave me the Visibility Award for being out and proud, and I am very proud to be gay. I have never been attracted to women, never doubted my sexuality, and I have every right to be gay. We all do. God loves gay people, and it's so sad that some people believe otherwise.

Outlooks: You're actively involved with many charitable organizations, one of which is the *National Alliance of Schizophrenia and Depression*. What do you think everyone should know about this cause?

TB: It was started with heart, from a family that has a schizophrenic daughter. Really good people are behind this, and 90 of the best doctors are working on degrees of mental illness.

Outlooks: Between acting, writing and painting you're a busy man. Is there time for dating?

TB: There hasn't been since I started back on *Y&R*.

Outlooks: Do you have a guilty pleasure?

TB: Reality TV.

Outlooks: What's next for you?

TB: Falling in love. Not like I know with whom though. **O**



Thom Bierdz and Joe Argazzi HRC. Photo: Sophia Hantzes.

On September 12, 2009, at a black tie gala for 850 people in Minneapolis, MN, *The Young and the Restless* star, Thom Bierdz, received the 2009 Visibility Award from *The Human Rights Campaign*. During his acceptance speech, Thom said he shared the honour with *Y&R*'s head writer Maria Arena Bell and producer Josh O'Connell for their courage to write his character, Phillip Chancellor III, back into the show as a multi-dimensional gay man—a storyline that had not been seen before.

TV GUIDE CANADA recently named Thom Bierdz one of the top 25 powerful people in daytime!

Show your support for Thom and his character, and encouragement for further gay storylines, by emailing *Y&R* at yrbb@tvc.cbs.com or writing to:
 The Young and the Restless
 Maria Bell
 7800 Beverly Blvd.
 Los Angeles, CA 90036

Forgiving Troy is currently not available in Canadian bookstores, but can be ordered from www.forgivingtroy.com or thombierdz.com. Bierdz says that, although there is a \$10 shipping cost to Canada, he'll ship a second autographed book free to the same address.

