

## BURNING DESIRES

Twenty-five years later and we'd still totally do her. ✨ By Katrina Fox



**L**ONG BEFORE SHE became an icon for gay men in her role on *Queer as Folk*, Sharon Gless was a “dykon.” The minute she appeared on TV screens in the 1980s as tough-talking detective Christine Cagney, in the hit series *Cagney & Lacey*, lesbians the world over fell instantly in love with her—and she welcomed us with open arms. Now back in the spotlight as Madeline Westen on USA’s *Burn Notice*, Gless is definitely one hot mama.

**You’re one of those rare creatures who is revered by both gay men and lesbians.**

Thank you! I’m honored to have that reputation.

**Did you have women coming on to you all the time during the *Cagney & Lacey* years?**

Well, let’s just say there have been many misunderstandings! I remember the first time a girl told me she was in love with me. I was 19; I’d run away from home and lived at the Y for a year. The only person I really became friends with was this gay girl who took me to a gay bar, and one night I went into the ladies

room and somebody followed me in there. They looked like they were going to rough me up...and my little friend of about 4-foot, 2-inches came in and said, “Lay off her, she’s straight!” Then I was standing in a phone booth a week later, talking to my brother, telling him I wanted to come home, and my little friend—who had never professed anything to me before—got into the phone booth, closed the door and said, “I love you.” I said I was sorry but I was straight and she said, “I know, but I wanted you to know that.” It was very sweet.

**How did you feel about the rumors that you were gay?**

All through *Cagney & Lacey* nobody believed I wasn’t gay. I didn’t even try and fight it. I didn’t matter to me. I thought, How flattering is this? I guess it was because of the character and the following I had—they must have thought, 50,000 women can’t be wrong. And I wasn’t married. I didn’t get married until I was 48 years old.

**You married the show’s producer, Barney Rosenzweig, who’s written a book about the show, right?**

Yes, and there are still people who think Barney’s my beard.

**It didn’t freak you out that people thought you were gay?**

Oh no, I was flattered. My lesbian fans made my career.

**And even the time in 1990 when a lesbian stalker broke into your house brandishing a gun—that didn’t put you off us?**

That was scary, but I knew it was a very specific case. When a policeman talked to me afterward, he asked me if I was afraid and I said, “No, all my fans are smart, educated women.” Then he told me, “She has an identical twin sister, equally anti-social.” If you put that in a movie, no one would believe you. That was when I was the most frightened. So I hired some bodyguards and for about two weeks I had these retired FBI guys. Then I got their bill and I said, “I’m not that afraid!”

**You were out of the spotlight for a while before *Queer as Folk*. What did getting that show mean for you?**

It really changed my life because I’d turned 50, put on a lot of weight, and you know how Hollywood is with women, so I wasn’t working a lot. I was doing a play by a wonderful lesbian playwright in Chicago, and while [I was] there an agent sneaked me a script called *Queer as Folk*. I read it, called Showtime immediately and said, “I want that part.” They offered it to me and said they didn’t care what I looked like. The show also made me much more aware of the heartbreaking aspects of being part of the gay community.

**You’d like to play a lesbian. What about *The L Word*?**

Well, everyone is young and beautiful on that show. If they asked me, I’d go do the last season. I think it’s a very fun show. I always look at it like a Victoria’s Secret catalog. The women are beautiful to look at and I love the lingerie!

**You’re currently starring in the hit show *Burn Notice*.**

It’s very fun. The leading lady is Gabrielle Anwar, from the movie *Scent of a Woman*. Oh, you’d love her! She’s very hot and very sexy. ■