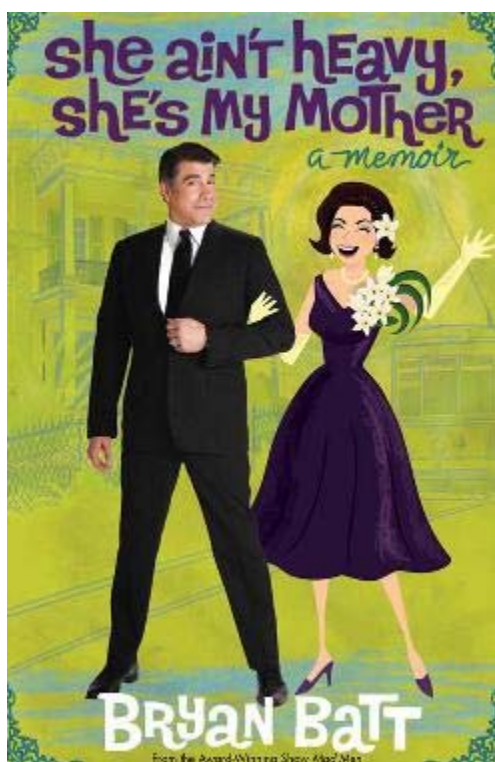




# Q&A: 'Mad Men' star Bryan Batt and his tribute to mom Gayle

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By **Craig Wilson**, USA TODAY



Bryan Batt is best known for his role as Sal Romano, the former art director for the Sterling Cooper ad agency on AMC's hit show *Mad Men*. Now he's out with a memoir, *She Ain't Heavy, She's My Mother* (Harmony Books, 288 pp., \$24), just in time for Mother's Day. Batt, 47, spoke with USA TODAY about, well, his mother, Gayle Batt, 79, and an assortment of other Southern treasures.

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**Q: So, your mom. You thank her for allowing you to be who you are today. How early on did you know she was something special?**

A: At a very early age. At about 3 or 4. She was a magical influence on my life.

**Q: And how early on did she know you were something special?**

A: She would like to think at birth! We just connected. We clicked on loving art and theater. We shared the same *joie de vivre*.

**Q: What are you doing for her on Mother's Day?**

A: We'll be together. We scheduled the New Orleans book launch around Mother's Day. We'll all be together for a brunch.

**Q: What do you think kept her going through your alcoholic father's infidelities and now her battle with lung cancer. And a gay son to boot!**

A: I think there is this steely strength beneath this beautiful veneer that a lot of women possess. I can't fathom or understand it. I would be jumping off a bridge if I had to deal with half of what she dealt with. And with such grace. She's going through a new protocol for her chemo and she's still battling. They're going to have to drag her kicking and screaming from this planet. I wish we could bottle her spirit. We'd make millions.

**Q: You played Darius in Paul Ridnick's play and film, *Jeffrey*, the AIDS comedy. Has humor always**

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**worked for you in times of tragedy?**

A: Yes, most definitely. It's my one true coping mechanism. At an early age I learned that if I could make someone laugh, it could be a cure.

**Q: Why do you think *Mad Men* has been such a hit?**

A: Well, it's because it's so smart. In these days of political correctness, we forget how badly people used to behave. And they still do. You can't change the caveman. Plus, it's done beautifully.

**Q: Did you ever feel typecast as Sal on *Mad Men*? Not that you were ever that confused about your sexuality. I mean, you begged to go see *Cabaret* when you were 7.**

A: Oh, I had no idea what was going on. The writing was so clearly written on the wall about me, but I didn't see it. I had no role models. I didn't know there was even a possibility of being gay. I battled with it, but this was the way God made me. If you have a problem with it, take it up with the man upstairs. As for Sal, that was a time when (being openly gay) was not an option for him.

**Q: So, your character got fired at the end of the last season. Are you coming back?**

A: That's the million-dollar question. I don't know. The show is so blanketed in secrecy. People will have to watch and find out. (*Mad Men* is returning for its fourth season on AMC on July 25.)

**Q: And you were on *Ugly Betty*, which is no more. What are your plans?**

A: There are a couple of irons in the fire. I'm working on another book called *Mad for Design*, pegged to the store (his New Orleans boutique) and my design work.

**Q: My goodness, all those photos in the book. You had more outfits growing up than Auntie Mame had in her whole life. You were a royal page, a clown, a song-and-dance man, Uncle Sam. Did those satin pants match that satin cape?**

A: Oh, yes. They were just a lighter shade of pink. I searched and searched for that picture. We have a costume closet at home. My family will put on a costume for any excuse.

**Q: What is it about the Deep South and your hometown of New Orleans? Why do they seem to have more "characters" than anywhere else in the United States?**

A: It's the humidity and the alcohol. The mixture of the two. [Dixie Carter](#) once said, "We don't hide our

crazy people. We bring them out and parade them around. "

**Q: Have you and your partner of 19 years, Tom Cianfichi, gotten married yet?**

A: There was a rumor that said we were getting married at Christmas. We were going to before Proposition 8, but Mom was going through chemo. We want our families there. We're trying to figure something out. Down the line something will happen.

**Q: How's your New Orleans home accessory boutique, Hazelnut, doing these days? Any spring sales?**

A: Well! We just revamped our website ([hazelnutneworleans.com](http://hazelnutneworleans.com)). Business has been wonderful. Tom and I just bought a house. I want to stay here and work.

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