



# LESBIANS are MIRACLES

January 11, 2021

## THE WOMEN OF CUBBYHOLE

*Lisa Menichino and Debbie Greenberg Give Us an Inside Glimpse Into New York City's Iconic Lesbian Bar*

## THE 420 OLD FAT LESBIANS

*On Community, Authenticity, and Carving Out Space*

## CHOSEN FAMILY BUILDS QUEER RESILIENCE

*by Mona Williams*

## SAPPHIC ART

*by Our Favorite Queer Creators*

The Miracle of Queer Resilience

NO. 1



# **LESBIANS ARE MIRACLES MAGAZINE**

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# the miracle of queer resilience

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Lesbians are Miracles Magazine. We are so glad that you're here.

In the two and a half years of recording and producing our podcast, we remained especially conscious of one key tenet—we would not speak for the experiences of others. The queer experience is complex, diverse, unique, and multifaceted, and we've always been careful about walking the line between authentic, informed representation and telling the stories that were ours to tell. But the time came when we realized that our work was to create a safe and inclusive space for other people to tell their stories, too.

Our contributors are based in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Appalachia; New Jersey, Virginia, and Maine; France, Australia, Poland, Italy, and Germany. They are Black, white, Afro-Latinx, and Korean-American; they identify as gay, queer, lesbian, trans, and non-binary; they are visual artists, photographers, writers, poets, musicians, painters, and organizers. Their art explores themes of solitude and loneliness, togetherness and longing, passion and pain, activism and community, love and loss, celebration and despair, hardship and perseverance. The work collected in this issue represents queer resilience worldwide. We at Lesbians are Miracles are honored and humbled that these contributing artists have trusted us with the responsibility of featuring their work in our magazine, and are equally honored and humbled that you're here, experiencing it with us.

Here's to the miracle of queer resilience. May it continue to comfort you, inspire you, hold you close, and push you towards your most authentic self.

With warmth and gratitude,  
Lia Ottaviano  
Editor-in-Chief

# katie aki

go so far they all lose track



# Chosen Family Builds Queer Resilience

by Mona Williams

The dictionary has two definitions for the word resilience:

1. the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties, toughness.
2. the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

I love both definitions. Both are accurate and complement each other.



On the one hand, resilience means to be tough. To be sturdy. Strong. But it also means to be elastic. As tough as you are, you will be stretched thin sometimes. If you are truly resilient, you will get through situations that seem like the toughest you have ever faced in your life and still be able to find a way to bounce back to your true form. And here is the kicker: you will realize that it had a lot to do with the type of people you let into your life, the boundaries you make for yourself, and the kind of vibes you surround yourself with.

It has been nearly five years since I was forced to leave my parent's home for being queer and for not believing in their religion anymore. Some days, it feels like it was such a long time ago. And then there are days when it seems like it was just yesterday because something has caused the wound to reopen and the pain is bitterly stinging again. I miss my family and mourn for the rela-

tionship we used to have. There is no pain quite like being rejected by your own family. It cuts you. It dehumanizes you. It clouds all early childhood memories. It illustrates the grimmest depiction of conditional love. To cast your own child aside simply because they choose not to follow your way of life. Because they choose to be their authentic self.

Because they choose to love who they love without concern for arbitrary traditional standards.

I will never forget the moment when I moved out of The Bronx and into a Greenpoint, Brooklyn apartment with three dudes. It was my first time living outside of my parent's house and while the guys were nice enough, I was petrified. That day my cousin and a friend of his had helped me move all my stuff in a U-Haul (surprisingly for a queer, the only U-Haul I have ever made use of), and when we had situated the last of my furniture, a moment of true panic set inside of my soul. A panic I suppose most folks experience once they realize they really are on their own now and must fend for themselves. Was I going to make it or was I going to run back home with my tail between my legs?

Surprisingly, I did very well for the first couple of months. Sure, it was strange living with so many cis men in a tiny apartment where I was paying \$900 for a room with no closet (y'know, just another day for your average NYC livin')...but I had a full time job, I was paying all my bills on time, and I was only having a few panic attacks a month, so things seemed to be going pretty swell. Of course, the very girlfriend who prompted my exit from my parent's home dumped me about two months after I moved out because...of course. But like any young queer soon realizes, not every person you date is going to be the love of your life and the one you are going to marry. Some get lucky, but not I at that point in time.

There is then the initial moment where you think, well crap, I put my whole

life on the line and left my family for a girl who decided to break my heart in response. That is the irrational part of your brain, of course, because once you stop sobbing into your Haagen Dazs coffee ice cream you realize that you came out because you were going to one day anyway and that heartbreaker just happened to be the catalyst. And also, people break up with people all the time, dude: on to the next!

(Also, if you really want to follow queer stereotypes, you later become good friends or at the very least very cordial with that heartbreaker ex of yours and are able to chat amiably with each other at queer functions--back when it was safe to do functions.)

After a wild mixed cocktail of my traumatic post-move out breakup, getting a bad case of the flu and being unable to work for a month, and a sudden mouse problem which resulted in my immediately adopting a tabby cat named Olivia Benson, I realized that it was time to leave my Greenpoint apartment. This is where I started to realize that I was slowly accumulating my own chosen family and community, and that I was not alone even if it sometimes felt that way because of the loss I was dealing with.

Through connections and friendships that somehow all tie back to a little bar on the corner of West 12th and West 4th street named Cubbyhole, I was able to find an apartment in Bay Ridge that would eventually become my new "home." I have since ironically dubbed this little home of mine the Cubbyhouse because everyone who lives here was introduced to each other at Cubby at some point or another. Thus, it is almost as if I have formed my own little coven. Ironically enough, it is not just those I live with that can be tied back to the community, but pretty much my entire chosen family. It is the kind of connection and phenomenon that needs to be discussed in more depth at a later date, but all I can say is that special corner bar brings people together from all

walks of life. The community of Cubbyhole is up there on the list of reasons I have not completely lost all my marbles.

Because of that chosen family I have formed over the past five years, even during this absurd year plagued with a pandemic and political chaos, somehow, I have managed to remain resilient.

Up until recently, I still could visit my blood family every so often, and even during the pandemic we were finding ways to socialize virtually. It almost seemed as if we were on our way to repairing the relationship that was mostly severed five years ago.

But, for reasons that are theirs and theirs alone, they recently informed me that they would be limiting all contact with me if I had no desire to reshape my life back into what they thought was best.

There are zero reasons to turn your back on a child in my mind, but I also understand that for many, faith is even stronger than familial ties. I do not agree with it and I strongly believe that shunning in any form inflicts painful and severe emotional abuse. But my message is not to bash people for wanting to serve their God the best way they see fit.

I just wish the God they served left room for us to still be a family.

In the five years that I have adjusted to living on my own, there have been a lot of highs and a lot of lows. Naturally, when one is isolated from their family unwillingly, depression is bound to occur. I have always struggled with depression for a variety of reasons but being isolated from one's own family does not help. I often go through a thought process that I have no doubt many other members of the queer community face: Is it worth all this? Is being myself worth losing a relationship with my family? Would I be happier if I had stayed in the closet?

My answer is not always easily yes, though it gets there. Sometimes I fantasize about a version of the world where I did stay the good little heterosexual Christian cis girl everyone expected of me. Would it have been easier if I had just found a nice young man in the church to marry, so that we could "serve

the lord" together? I say this because the one thing I never want to do is invalidate those who choose to stay in the closet. The fact of the matter is, whether you are in the closet or not, you existing in itself is queer resilience. I could never lie to anyone and say that it has been easy to come out and live my life authentically and then lose pretty much all of my blood relatives in the process. I was lucky enough to live in New York City, possibly the greatest place in the world to be queer, and thus had the resources to find a new "chosen" family.

But not everyone gets that opportunity. Not everyone is that lucky. And for a lot of people, it's simply just not safe. Those that stay in the safe zone, quietly being queer, are just as resilient as anyone else. We all come from



different circumstances, privileges, ideologies, and principles. You being alive today, in your truth, in whatever that truth safely looks like for you, makes you resilient as hell.

For me, personally, staying trapped in a world where I had to conform to what others expected me to be would not have ended well. I may have a shitload of therapy to get through to get myself readjusted to a life without them, but I would rather that road than the alternative. So yes, I am incredibly happy that I was able to come out and live in my own truth. And I am learning what my truth is more and more every day.

There are parts of my life that my

my family knows nothing about and sadly probably never will. In many ways, they are more of a stranger to me than anyone or anything else at this point, and that sentiment is sad, but it is not anything I need to shed my own tears over anymore. How they have missed how their child has grown into their own and discovered more about themselves each and every day. They have missed my heartbreaks, my triumphs, my confusions and my euphoric conclusions.

March of 2021 will be the one-year anniversary of me coming out as non-binary—another part of myself that I had been warring with for quite some time before finally finding the right terminology. My blood family has missed getting to know how I have evolved and who I will continue to bloom into. But I was not alone through all of this. I truly could not have been as resilient as I have been if I did not have my chosen family. I have gained more queer moms, aunts, cousins, sisters, brothers, theydies, gentlethems and brethren than I could have ever imagined. We check up on each other weekly at bare minimum, we share each other's heartbreaks and triumphs. During this year's pandemic, we struggled together on Zoom calls and did what we could to maintain our bonds and hold each other accountable even when it seemed the outside world was crashing down on us. Whether it was video games, trivia nights, virtual happy hours, or Sunday brunches—it became clear to me that I had a family to hold on and get me through.

Luckily, I have even managed to find a loving, absolutely amazing partner who has opened their heart to me while we continue to walk through this wild journey of life. I am beyond excited to see where life takes us next.

All the people I have met along the way are now meeting this new version of me, this new vibrant human who is coming into their own, feeling confidence and cultivating resilience in a way that was never possible ten, even five years ago.

What can I say of those that are missing out on being a part of a pretty rad and joyous life?

That's no one's problem to solve but their own. ♦

# Leave No Trace

by Tanya Marquardt

**S**he rang my bell and when I opened the door all I could see was flowers.

*What's all this?*

Curly red hair peeked out from behind the bouquet, their own kind of flower, and whoever it was was hopping up and down, a nervous twitch.

"Hello?" I asked.

The flowers lowered.

"Hi, hi."

"Hi."

"Do you remember me? I'm Mia."

My eyes strained against the sun and I could make out a large grin with perfect teeth and a layer of soft freckles on Mia's cheeks. She looked like a Bobbsey Twin, her paisley summer dress hanging below her knees and Birkenstocks showing off newly manicured toenails. Her face looked familiar, but I had been a teen runaway who hardly bothered remembering people's faces, and my mind hazily recalled some dance classes earlier that summer, recommended by my college theatre professor as a way to keep training over the break. I showed up on the first day in pajamas smelling of rain and cigarettes and was pretty sure Mia had shown up in expensive yoga wear smelling of lavender soap, and I probably assumed she was a rich girl who wouldn't want anything to do with me. I wondered if we had even stood beside each other at the barre.

"Sure, yeah, sure," I half-lied.

"I was just, you know, driving by and I was — oh, oh, these are for you," Mia handed me the bouquet, clumsily held together with a half-broken stem. They almost fell apart.

"Oh, watch out," she reached to hold up some daffodils, "they're from a field near my house. I decided to stop on my way into town, since it's such a

great day to be outside. And, yeah, so, I was just in the neighborhood, and um, I drove you home the other day, after dancing, do you remember?"

"Yeah, right," I said, the memory of her finally coming to me, a group of us piling into her blue convertible after class, sweaty and driving with the top down, and me the first to be dropped off.

Mia and I stood on the porch, and I noticed she was practically on tiptoe, leaning forward in a state of hyper-anticipation.

*What does she want me to say?*

"Do you want to go for a drive?"

"A drive?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"A drive," I said.

"Only if you're free."

I had no idea why she was suddenly on my stoop asking if she could take me for a ride but I found her amusing. Wanting to prolong the moment and the fragrance of wildflowers, I leaned into the doorway to frame my unexpected pleasure.

"Sure. Okay."

I grabbed my backpack and went with her.

We drove in her car with the top down —two, three, four hours—city giving way to suburbs until we were close to Horseshoe Bay, where the edge of Coast Salish land gives way to the smell of salt water coming off the sea. I had been on the ferry to visit my Mom in Port Alberni, a mill town and Tseshah First Nation. But I never



drove around the Bay unless I was on public transit, the mansions looming over the bus, allowing us passage without letting us see into the world of old money and beach access, sun glinting off the tinted glass and shiny car windows in the driveways. Mia had long turned off the main road; I had no idea where she was taking me as she cruised slowly through the hills, pointing out local cafes and landmarks as we went. I kept thinking it should bother me, that she could be taking me anywhere, but it didn't. I was curious to see what would happen, a curiosity fueled by her curiosity, the way Mia had been looking at me all afternoon, a nervous slight head tilt when she smiled. I didn't worry at all and wasn't used to that feeling — the suspension of not knowing without fearing the possibility of violence. That had always been present when driving around with guys.

"I'm staying at my family's right now. They have a place out here, but they're gone for the summer, on vacation."

"Oh yeah," I said.

None of my friends had families who spent summers away. When we pulled into her driveway, I saw gigantic houses surrounding her gigantic house, noted the gardeners on the front lawns, the absence of families and

kids wading in plastic kiddy pools.

"Come on in," she said, leaving her front door open and disappearing inside.

I followed her but didn't know what I was doing in this monster of a house with a girl who I barely knew. I put my bag down next to the door and started to look around.

Mia's voice echoed into the hallway.

"Could you stay here while I go grocery shopping?"

"By myself?"

Walking into the kitchen, I saw two pantries and a stove that looked bigger than my bathroom.

"I'll just be out for a minute," she said.

Mia was practically running as she left, shutting the front door with its antique doorknob. I listened to it creak into echoed silence, alone in a stranger's house moments after entering it for the first time. Afraid that my hands were greasy, I went to her living room, where I didn't put anything on the coffee table, and sat on her pristine white couch. A white carpet covered most of the floor and a family photo hung on the far wall, with everyone in matching white turtlenecks. My mind flashed to my Dad's kitchen, where there was a picture of me on the wall in my thrift-store-polyester ski hat, sneaking a peek from behind a sign in our local park that read "Beware of Thieves."

I sat on my hands and waited for what felt like forever and eventually fell asleep, tentatively leaning back on Mia's couch with my hands folded under my armpits, trying not to leave my imprint in her cushions. She left me for over an hour. I found out later she had been driving around the block talking to her friends on speed dial.

"She's in my house, what do I do?" Mia would yell into the phone.

"Kiss her! Just kiss her!"

Mia finally came home with a bag of oranges and walked into the living room.

"Can I kiss you?"

And without thinking too much about it, about what it meant, about its implications, about whether or not love was present, I shrugged and I said, "Yeah, sure. Sure, okay."

Mia hesitated for a moment before she touched the sides of my face and pulled me down to her. All of my senses became one sense as I fought the urge to get down on my knees; I thought they might buckle under

But by then she knew that.

It was me who pulled the blankets down to our waists. I woke up before her, wanting to see her back to my front, the gathering of the sheets and her hair, red, blasting against the white coverlet and the edge of her pillowcase. I hoped Mia might get cold and wake up, ask me to touch her in all that stillness, the heat and the silence.

I was impatient when my fingers crossed the divide, testing, pressing lightly into the hard ridge of Mia's left hipbone. She stirred. I thought I felt her shudder. I stopped.

"Can I touch it?" I asked.

"Touch it," she said.

A thick pink scar, a ribbon of raised skin, marked her. Mia didn't turn to me but it felt like she was opening, becoming more tender, my hand moving, resting, reaching.

"There's steel in there," she told me, "but I've never let anyone touch there before. The hip socket. It's fused."

She moved my hand to the place she wanted and my eyes imagined the inside of her hip, a gleaming rod of stainless steel. I tried to be soft. Mia lay still and even in the softness didn't turn to me. I tried to hide the fact that it bothered me, that I was falling in love with her, pretending things weren't as far along as they were, her scar hiding scars on scars, the memory of pain underneath.

Mia was stronger than I was. I brought my lips to her skin, full of questions as I fought the urge to run, full speed, out of the room, to leave no trace on her steel bones.

*What does it take to show someone your scars?*

*And how do we make sure one doesn't turn into another? ♦*

## ***A white carpet covered most of the floor and a family photo hung on the far wall, with everyone in matching white turtlenecks. My mind flashed to my Dad's kitchen, where there was a picture of me on the wall in my thrift-store-polyester ski hat, sneaking a peek from behind a sign in our local park that read "Beware of Thieves."***

the electric friction of our touching lips. I had kissed girls, but only in the dark corners of bar bathrooms and once —quickly, gruffly, near black-out—underneath a kitchen table at a college afterparty. The wreckage of my childhood hung over me as well, full of booze, hitting and yelling, my body shown, over and over, that it didn't belong to me. I had never been touched the way Mia was touching me and eventually I did kneel, needing to be below her, wanting all of her to cascade into me.

Three months later, I woke up with Mia laying on her side, outlined against the dawn of the waning summer. I was barely twenty-two, terrified but trying not to show it, always wanting to put something in my mouth.

jess fry

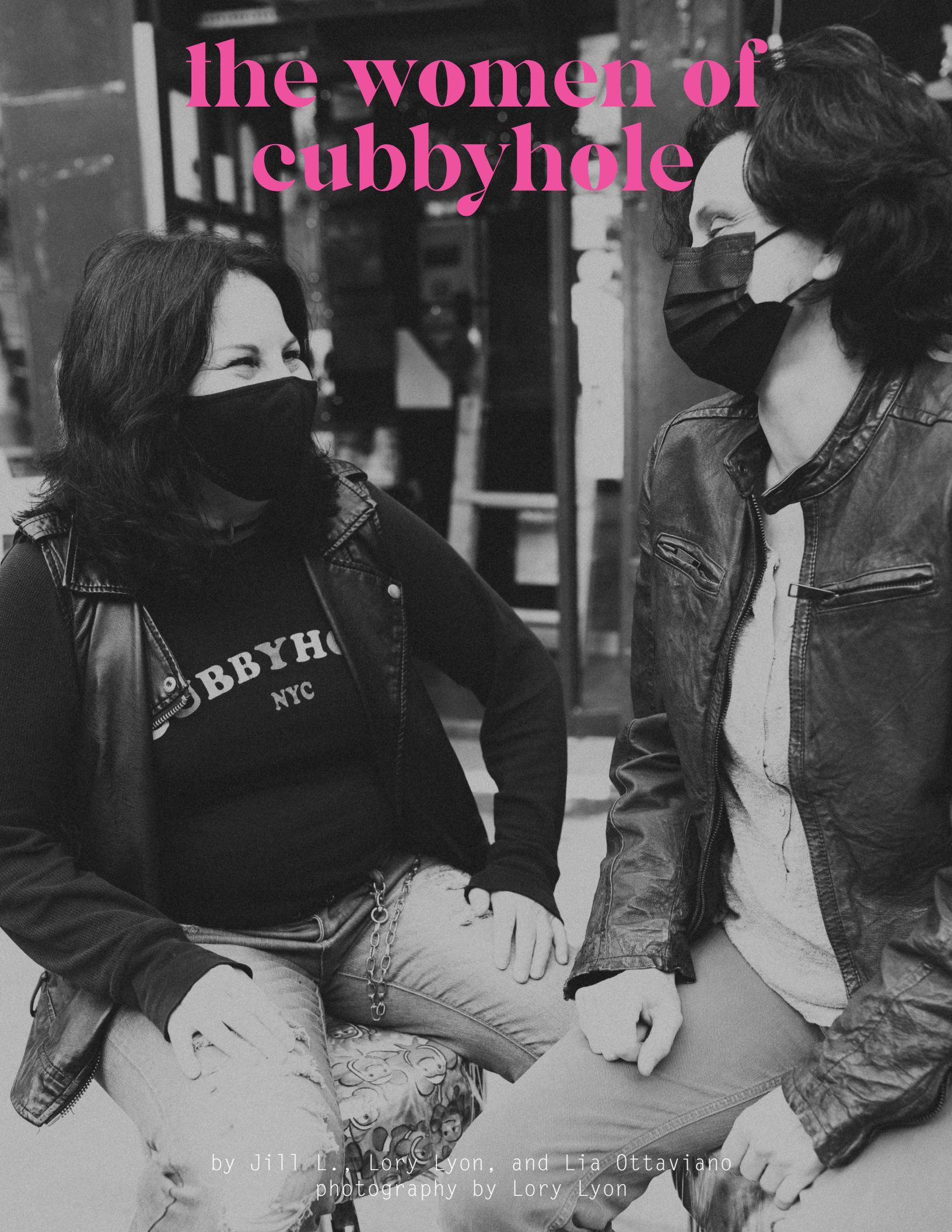


# giada rolundo

the charming secret of a woman wearing a suit



# the women of cubbyhole



by Jill L., Lory Lyon, and Lia Ottaviano  
photography by Lory Lyon

# lisa

How did you come to own Cubbyhole?

I have been with Cubby for almost 21 years. I was working as a social worker in family court and was feeling like I needed a break. I had always bartended through college and thought I would do that while I figured out what I wanted to do. A friend of mine was a bartender at Cubby, and introduced me to Tanya Saunders, the original owner, and I was hired. I immediately fell in love with the place, its owner, the staff, and the eclectic groups of patrons that would visit through the years. I became the manager for ten years, and when Tanya became ill, I pretty much ran it for her. When she passed away three years ago, she bequeathed it to me.

What parts of yourself do you see in/have given Cubbyhole? On the other side of that, what has Cubbyhole given you? What parts of Cubbyhole do you see within yourself?

I have given my time, energy, and youth to Cubby over the years. In my attempt to find the right career path, I found a second home. I read somewhere that almost 70% of people are unhappy in their chosen professions. I have been incredibly lucky in that I love going to work. I love being at the bar, steering the subtle changes, the fluidity of its continuity each year, and connecting with its patrons and staff. That's what Cubbyhole has given me, and despite the challenges and aggravations that come with owning a business, it's been a priceless gift.

Can you talk about Cubbyhole's role in the lesbian/queer community?

Cubbyhole has been a safe haven for the queer community and their friends since it opened its doors 27 years ago. A place where LGBTQ people can celebrate their identities in the amicable warmth and conviviality of its ambience. In the 27 years of its existence, Cubbyhole has never closed its doors.

For seven days a week, 365 days a year, through 9/11, Hurricane Sandy, blackouts, blizzards, and nor'easters, we opened, even if only for a few hours, until March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. We always wanted it to be a place our community could go and possibly ease the environmental stresses they were feeling, at least for a little while.



What are your hopes and dreams for Cubbyhole in a post-pandemic world?

My hope for Cubby post-pandemic is that we can resume the way we left off. This time next year I hope to be bringing in the new year with a packed bar and lots of mask-less hugging and kissing.

Cubbyhole is one of fifteen remaining lesbian bars in the United States. What do you think has contributed to Cubbyhole's resilience/staying power?

I believe Cubbyhole's staying power, in large part, is due to our openness. Although we are primarily a lesbian bar, we have always welcomed gay men, trans people, straight friends, and our neighbors living in the area. No one is ever made to feel like they don't belong. This, along with its easy-going atmosphere and warmth, makes it feel like a small town in a big city. That's not always easy to find, and I think people really appreciate it.

What has been the most surprising part about the support you've received throughout the pandemic?

The response to our call for support has been amazing, but what is equally amazing, and quite surprising and touching, has been the amount of heartfelt, emotional messages I've received from its patrons. They have written to me about first coming out, first kisses and dates, meeting their partners, marriage proposals, birthdays, engagement parties, anniversaries, and feeling better after break ups, or the loss of loved ones, after their visit. One woman, who lives very far away and has never been, has put visiting Cubby among the few things left on her life's bucket list. ♦

# debbie

Can you describe Cubbyhole for readers who might not be familiar with it?

To me, Cubbyhole is the adult Disney Land. You walk in and the first thing you notice is our ceiling with all these different beautiful decorations, from fish to mermaids to a lunchbox, Wonder Woman, superheroes hanging down off the ceiling. And the reaction is, "Wow!" It's like walking into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. Only with alcohol.

Why do you think Cubbyhole is so important to the queer community in New York City?

I think it's really important because Tanya, who made Cubbyhole what it is, made it a safe space for everyone. It's inclusive. And I think when she first started, "inclusive" was not a very prominent term—it was over thirty years ago. I think there was a lot of resistance, a very strict black and white, no gray area, of men and women, gays and lesbians. There wasn't what we have now. And I think she was ahead of her time in making it inclusive. Everyone felt safe there. To this day, everyone feels safe there. And I think it's because Tanya used the word "inclusive" thirty years ago.

How did you come to work at Cubbyhole?

I literally walked into that adult Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory and they couldn't get rid of me. Basically I went every night, as God as my witness—if I had a family function or I was out of town, as soon as I got back from the train, at 11 o'clock, I was there. I knew it was open always, seven days a week, 365 days a year. And I went and ingratiated myself. And I didn't know until I was a bartender how many people go up to the bartenders every day and said, "I want to work here, here's my number."

I stuck on Danny and Lisa's shift on Friday nights, and I started helping them out slowly, and they were so appreciative. And that's how I started. I kept helping and helping, and then Tanya noticed me big time. She used to go every day, but she



also went at night at the time. And she was there at about 11 o'clock at night, and the toilet overflowed. And I said to Danny and Lisa—Friday night at Cubby as we know is very packed—and I said, "I got it, I got it." And Tanya sees this little person in a crowd of people and she said, "Are you sure? What is your name?" And I introduced myself, and Lisa had me get the mop downstairs, and I came up with this big mop. The water closet was flooding—not poop or anything, just clear water [laughs]—and I started mopping it up, and Tanya noticed me. And as she was talking to me, I bent down, and this washer was in this puddle of water, and I haven't taken it off my neck in almost eleven years now. Tanya noticed me, and then I became barback for basically everyone, and the rest is history.

You're our favorite part about going to Cubbyhole. What's your favorite part about working at Cubbyhole?

I guess my favorite part about Cubbyhole is what it brought me. It brought me to me. The comfort of being around the family I gained, the people I work with, the customers, the whole LGBT community Cubby gave me. I've never been so me. Cubby gave me me, is all I can say. It gave me the sense of me.

What parts of yourself have you given Cubbyhole? On the other side of that, what has Cubbyhole given you? What parts of Cubbyhole do you see within yourself?

I've given Cubbyhole my whole entire being. I am who I am at Cubbyhole. And that's it. There's no bullshit. There's no hiding it. What you see is what you get.

I think what I've given to Cubbyhole is what Tanya gave me to give to the people. It's a place where they feel safe. You're coming

into our home to feel safe and to have a good time, and if you're not having a good time, I need to reflect upon what's going on in this shift. I'm happy hour, I mean, we gotta be happy. And I think Tanya drilled that into me. Make it a party. Make the lights nice and dim when they're walking in from work. That's what Tanya taught me—you have to make a beautiful home for these people when they walk in. And that's what I hope I'm doing for everyone.

Can you talk about your unique struggle during this pandemic?

It was two-fold to me. I was alone so much that when everyone got in lockdown, it was like everyone came to me. I got to talk to everyone again because no one was busy working. So all of a sudden, I'm part of game nights, and Zoom—I wasn't as lonely anymore. And for me, enduring this horrific time, I got the joy of being diagnosed. And thank god, and it's very rare what I have, which is Episodic type 2 ataxia. But for me, the first part of lockdown became a joy because I wasn't lonely anymore. I was so busy, my dance card had never been so full. But now, I have empathy so much more for what people went through the first time. I couldn't understand it then because I was there already.

Can you speak about the struggle of Cubbyhole?

It hasn't been easy. I don't think about it. I come from a mother who says, "put it in a box," and to me it's going to be okay. Of course it's going to survive. We have the most amazing community; we are going to figure this out. We have people like Lea DeLaria and the Lesbian Bar Project. Lea's on a roll now selling a T-shirt. And we have a few things hopefully down the pike that will happen for a fundraiser. I'm concerned about my colleagues—this stimulus package is a bunch of bullshit. Decompressing from working in a pandemic—that was hard. We didn't even think about it. And this past weekend, I'm like, we need a deep breath, we did it, we kept Cubby going, and none of us were decompressing about the efforts we put forth to keep Cubby alive because that's what you do. Tanya was always top of mind, for me anyway, and I'm sure for my colleagues. This is her legacy.

No matter what, we will figure this out. Cubby's not going anywhere. That's all I keep saying to myself. We will figure it out. That's all there is to it.

### How as the community come together to keep Cubbyhole alive?

I can't even tell you. First of all, from the support of the T-shirts and the sweatshirts these designers have made. We have a regular who designed these beautiful paintings. The Lesbian Bar Project—Jägermeister USA came forward and sponsored this. And the Cubbyhole GoFundMe—I think over seventy thousand dollars was raised. Not last weekend but the weekend before, when we thought it was going to be our last weekend, it was 22 degrees out with the wind and we had people coming out in the cold thinking it was going to be their last chance to visit [until we open again].

When I was sick, I knew how this community could pull together. But how they keep pulling together—there's no other. There's no other like the LGBT community—hands down. We are beyond lucky.

### Is there anything you've learned about the queer community that you may not have known before the pandemic?

I think that we're a community to be reckoned with, especially the younger generation. I think that the older generation did amazingly.

There are so many things that you have to be positive about. The pandemic: you just keep doing what you're doing to survive it. However, with that said, I think what has come out of this is the awareness that has been brought to everyone of what is happening in this country. The LGBTQIA community, I think that the generation before me, every generation, is learning now.

You know what the most important thing is within the LGBTQIA community? We're learning from each other. I

hear you, I hear everything you're saying to me. You guys are hearing us, we're hearing the older generation. I think everyone's just listening now. There are all these walls that have crumbled down. And we're not only inclusive in the bars, it's coming out of the bars now. Which is where it needs to go. Everyone is saying, I hear what you're saying to me, let's get this done. And I don't think that happened before. And I love that.

In what ways have you changed from the Debbie we first met all those years ago? In what ways have you stayed the same? What have you learned about yourself that you may not have known before?

I can definitely say I changed in the fact that I can do so many more shots than when I first started.

For me, nothing's black and white, and you see and hear so many different things, and you have to listen. Like I just said, it's not about, I'm older, I know better. It's about, I'm older and I don't know better. If I didn't listen to the younger generation, I wouldn't be talking to you like I am today.

### What does your ideal Pride 2021 look like?

We are so busy, everybody's outside, we have the frozen station set up inside Cubby like we do—because we used to only do those frozen drinks during Pride—and I'm behind the bar and we're all in there, all the bartenders, and we all have our shots, and we all toast each other like we always do, and whoever's in the bar at the time, we're toasting them, and outside, all the customers on line have their Jell-O shots like they usually do, and it's just huge and everyone is screaming at the same time and we do one big toast to 2021.

### What does queer resilience mean to you?

It has to be within the community. The strength has to come within. You have to be stronger together. You can't fight within. And that's where I see the growth in the community. Because it wasn't there. You can't be

angry at the gay men, at the lesbians. When I was growing up, my brother was gay. And his generation and the lesbians, they did not get along at all. I remember hearing my brother and his friends talking about the lesbians—it was a different generation.

You have to grow within, and that's it. You can't have this side, and that side, and start taking the letters [of LGBTQIA] apart. You can't have a fence between them. We're not different neighborhoods. We are one. We are a rainbow for a reason. We all blend together. We can't be against each other, because then we're no good. ♦



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# HAIRRARI

Hairrari is a gender-neutral, all-inclusive barbershop founded in 2011 by Magda Ryczko.

Hairrari specializes in individual styles for all. All of our barbers specialize in short hair and some also do long hair. Please check out our barber bios to choose the right stylist for your hair type. Whether it's creative, classic, transformation or editorial, we've got you!

At Hairrari, we are constantly growing, evolving and grateful for your positivity and constant support throughout the years. Whether you're new to Hairrari or have been coming to us for years, we want you to know that we appreciate you! To show our gratitude, we would like for you to be involved in our goals and missions.

Hairrari's mission is to spread love and the word about equal rights for everyone, raise awareness and educate all about queer stuff and, of course, hair trends! Hairrari is actively involved in charities like Planned Parenthood, HMI, LGBTQ Center to name a few. We try to provide free haircuts to people in need so please don't hesitate to email us if you know



someone who may need our services. When booking online, please feel free to add your pronoun next to your name or tell us when you visit.

Hairrari's known for its hair education. Oftentimes, Magda, the owner, trains or polishes the barbing skills of our receptionists and other stylists. It's a hands-on, individual-based, intensive training process that really helps wield talent and ensure

a consistent, high standard of quality. This provides new talent with a place to train, grow and work magic alongside seasoned professionals.

Customer service, positive energy, client and talent satisfaction are very important to us.



WE LOVE YOU!  
**HAIRRARI.COM**

b o t h

# window

If the poem's going to start in the middle, I'm going to ask you to pay attention from the beginning. Don't make me repeat myself,

repeat the truths about her  
I daydreamed admitting but  
tried not to think. Remember my hands?  
Tight around all the heavy nothing at my side

when you introduced us?  
Of course not, you staring up at her like she was both  
the stained glass and the light making  
love to the window.

(If I fell short of his idea of 'girl'  
and overshoot yours, whose rigidity will I  
measure my fluidity against? Who will  
help me carry all these cloaks?)

But in December came un-falling.  
Both of us churned out by the lake's icy  
waves, two shipwrecks of two perfect ideas.  
Still: dreams always yield to wakefulness, and I grow

tired of wringing my clothes.  
There is a box under my bed  
labeled "vices," and you know it's no metaphor, I  
used them all. Please

don't make me repeat them.  
But if I manage to write a new one, I could let  
you  
know.

&

# light

by Rachel R. Carroll

# **new love poem**

your eyes are heavy-lidded  
 and you have eyelashes you don't deserve  
 this is the first thing I notice in the morning  
 after years of mornings how your lips prune  
 from mouth breathing and your neck's the back road  
 to my grandmother's house how your hair stands  
 like a eucalyptus in the light and there's a mole  
 I've never seen that excites me, something new  
 after years of studying the anchor body that's held  
 back my boat from underwater canyons, unruly currents  
 shores riddled with refuse and wreckage I hold  
 your nose to wake you up it's a terrible gesture  
 in lieu of a kiss you shake my hand off and turn  
 your face I lay comforted by the thought of the hole  
 in your pajama pants, portal to the most restful place,  
 where I learn nothing necessary but joy\*, where after  
 so many years, resides there still, as a lake

\*borrowed from Gwendolyn Brooks' line "it was restful, learning nothing necessary"

# **for old love**

by Marina Carreira

Say with your limbs: my body is not a weapon.  
 My body is a vehicle for softness  
 My body is a home to Tender  
 and strength and kindness

The branches of this tree lift up to embrace the sky, do not carve themselves into spears  
 The mouth of this river spills open only to quench the valley  
 Boulders sit, quiet, patient; anticipate nothing.

My body does not say I'm Sorry  
 because it has nothing to apologize for.  
 Fields stretch wide awaiting the gentle fall of rain, joyful splash, the growth of flowers.  
 My body blooms movement, gifts a flurry of shape  
 Says to the open air: we are one breeze  
 Says: we are here together.

# **returning home**

by Moonlight



yuri



# vibing with the 420 OLD FAT LESBIANS

**How did you two meet? How long have you been together?**

We met on Plenty of Fish while we were both living in Florida. We've been together 13.5 years.



**When did each of you start smoking weed?**

**Sue:** I started in high school. The first time I tried it, me and my childhood friend stole some from her brother's stash, which back then was leaves, seeds and stems—but we were happy to get it. We were in Chicago, where we both grew up. Of course I loved it.

**Lee:** I smoked pot once in high school, Hawaiian, and it made me hallucinate so I didn't try it again for years. Since my neck surgery in 2008 I have been low dosing throughout the day to control pain.

**Can you tell us about how you came out?**

**Sue:** I never really came out...I just was. I didn't feel the need to explain it or announce it. My parents always accepted who I was with. My first crush was on a teacher in high school.

**Lee:** I came out to my parents when I was 18. My mother rejected me and sent me to live with my father in San Francisco. I still wonder what she was thinking sending me to the gay mecca.

**What inspired you to launch your Instagram account? What messages do you hope reach your followers?**

We semi-retired to Maine two and a half years ago after living in Florida for 30 years for work. We decided to make a social media account once we were settled in. Sue decided to name us what we are and represent. We want people to know the only true way to get through life is to be who you are, live authentically. No matter your gender, non-gender, sexuality, age, weight, smoking

preference—it's ok just to be your true self. We want to remove the stigma surrounding this.

**You've made a big name for yourselves, with over 140k Instagram followers at the time of this publication. What do you think it is that makes people so attracted to you and what you do?**

I think people are attracted to us because we don't pretend to be someone else. We are people who have made it this far not conforming to ridiculous standards created by our society. We also make a point to communicate with everyone and answer all questions, DMs, and comments. Everyone is important.

**What's the biggest perk of running @420oldfat lesbians? What do you love most about it?**

The best and most rewarding thing about our account is when people tell us we make them laugh or smile or just brighten their day. We also like the DMs when people tell us we have helped them come out or accept their weight, etc.

**What has been the most unexpected part about becoming fat-positive, weed-positive, dyke influencers?**

The most unexpected part of being 420oldfatesbians is when magazines, journalists, podcasts and other forms of media approach us for articles and photos. Lol... like why? We are just two semi-retired dykes living in the woods of Maine.

**How has expanding @420oldfatesbians expanded you in your own lives?**

We have only expanded in relation to our free time, which hasn't expanded but decreased. We stay busy most days due to our IG account. As far as our mind and soul, we are the same as we've always been.

**What does queer resilience look like to you?**

Queer resilience has definitely come on strong as our lives have progressed. It's beautiful seeing the LGBTQ+ community support each other, learn from each other and grow in a more accepting mindset of each other. It's also important for the older LGBTQ+ generation to be there for the younger ones and let them know being true to themselves is so important for the soul.

**What advice would you give other queer people for sustaining queer resilience in these especially challenging times?**

Don't back down from your beliefs and always have an open mind when listening to others. ☮

# adrianna lukaszewicz

queer pride during global pandemic



@weird\_drawingz

AL

# LA Affairs

by Kirsten Judson

**W**hen I discover I like someone, I find myself continuously searching for things that will make them feel good. I have to remind the person (and myself) that what is happening is real. Through gifts, travel, and poetry I begin to create a life that becomes all about love. Inevitably, I swell to fill the spaces. As my therapist puts it, I “throw love bombs.”

A vital ingredient for one of my “love bombs” is traveling. I facilitate intimate memories by interlacing new experiences, breathtaking landscapes, and sensory overloads. This is easy in Southern California, a place where the abundance of nature allows for impressive jaunts: desert, beach, pastures, vineyards, coasts. On one occasion, I decide to take my lover to Santa Barbara.

The Route 1 coastal drive puts you in a dreamy, psychic state: one that makes you miss your passenger from the driver’s seat. I extend my arm to graze her thigh. Traveling north, the roads are adorned with greenery and wildflowers become a technicolor dreamcoat. The sun glares between branches, rays finding our faces, resulting in a gradual burn. Oh woman, a genuine smile and sweet chuckle. Oh California, a contentedness, between us and nature, that is mutual.

At the winery we play cards underneath the shade of coastal oaks overlooking the vineyards. The trees are magnificent, but even more magnificent is the space we occupy between them. She speaks of things I never knew. I listen. We charm the sommeliers. Or is it just her? I am learning I can be the quiet one. Together, we fascinate.

All day we drive past pastures: past grazing cows, past lounging sheep, telephone wires, pink wildflowers, yellow flowering shrubs. Every idea I have is nostalgia. Looking up, clouds swell, layers form, the scrub jays fly. They follow one another. I find solace in their patterns. Migration. On this occasion, I am two inches taller than I had been. Tonight, I have twice as many stars in my sky. My body rushes with newness and safety.

Soon enough, that cocoon of security and comfort is ripped apart when we are not let into a Funk Zone bar. We are making out in the queue, sunburnt in white linen. A queer Nancy Myers scene. A young, shaggy-haired surfer boy wearing a ripped Quicksilver T-shirt approaches us. With his laid back attitude, I imagine he’s going to tell us they are out of the pork belly. To my surprise, he simply states he cannot let us in. He cannot let us in for what reason? Because we are two women making out? Yes, apparently so. I’m astonished that the women who just charmed sommeliers could be refused service at an average bar. I am dizzy, confused, sucked into a maelstrom. Once surrounded by all-encompassing nature, I am now in the epicenter of solitude. What happens when you cannot stick up for yourself when you know it’s the right thing to do? This is horrible timing, one of those moments

when you know you should speak, but the silence echoes. Everything is unspoken, yet felt.

It takes several minutes to realize I am biting back tears. Now seeing everything from a different place. The wait staff on intercom, watching our moves, communicating amongst one another, “don’t serve them.” We’ve become nameless. Instead of seeing a world I cherish, I see only a world that cannot cherish us. What happens when you can’t stick up for yourself when you know it’s the right thing to do? I create a futile interlude.

We drive back to Los Angeles in silence, the Desert Island Discs podcast reverberating against the ruffled drone of traffic. Roar of tires passing by, the 101 becomes dark and dreary. I can hardly keep my eyes open. I speed home, surveying for sorrow, praying for green. No time for the sun, the gradual burn.

Unspoken tension permeates; she dumps me three months later. I’m no longer wrapped up in the colors of the sunset, no longer standing with a rose in my mouth. How can I make a stone flower? Now instead of seeing a woman I cherish, I see only a woman who cannot cherish me. What happens when you can’t stick up for yourself when you know it’s the right thing to do? I create a futile interlude.

One second I was holding you in bar queues, the next I was left in the thoroughfare. Was it something I did, something I didn’t do, something I should have done better? Perhaps I should have created a stronger love bomb. Serenity and beauty are only surface attempts to bandage a place of rejection. I cannot change these memories or fill the spaces with a golden sunset, a drive through the vineyards, a bouquet of flowers. I cannot convince myself that the city that once brought me love will continuously show me acceptance. I cannot convince myself that the woman who once brought me love will continuously show me adoration. I did not consent to be refused. I did not consent to be hurt. Now I must reorganize my memories so I don’t look at them too closely. I do not want to identify with a specific sentiment. What was once safe on Sunset Boulevard now drowns in Santa Barbara.

More than a few times I have felt the jolt of losing access to a lover. It feels like a crime against nature, a kind of torture, to be robbed of that presence. But loving a place, someone who cannot love you in return, is not failure...it’s one of the most fearless things you’ll ever do. That’s why I will never stop visiting Santa Barbara; that’s why I will never stop dropping love bombs. ♦

# ally zlatar

sorry i catfished you



the value of lightness



e

if you had told me that my office—  
the one with the ambient whirr of air conditioning  
and the gendered bathrooms  
and the supply room filled with boxes of cardboard  
tampons, neon highlighters, note pads, rollerball  
pens, and packets of generic aspirin...

X

the one with the coffee machine that was always  
broken  
and the fridge packed with forgotten lunches  
and the paper printouts of wi-fi passwords stuck  
to cinderblock walls with scotch tape  
and the colleagues who'd pass in and out  
of conference rooms like ships

C

—would one day become an archaeological site...  
a snapshot of life as it were  
standing calmly  
on the precipice of global disease and devastation  
i would not have believed you.

V

we were meant to return in a matter of days  
but my last memories in this place were raw and sour  
often, i would slip away unnoticed  
to the handicapped bathroom that smelled of musk  
and bleach  
or the mothers room meant for feeding milk to  
machines  
or the corner near the stairwell where others had no  
reason to lurk

a

a quiet place to hug my knees  
and listen intently to the ringing in my ears  
to feel the salt dry up on my cheeks

t

maybe that's why i didn't balk at a break.  
a few days when grief could bubble up at odd hours  
without shame  
days that stretched into weeks  
weeks into months

i

had we known, our site would not have existed  
belongings packed up in boxes  
transported and re-homed with rightful owners  
a clean break;  
total closure.

O

rather, i found our former lives suspended in time.

n

then and now  
a corkscrew on the counter  
a sweet, sticky spot where the wine splattered  
depleted condiment bottles and chips grown stale  
keyboards collecting dust in their crevices  
wires sprouted up from the floor like vines to nowhere  
coffee cups dried up, brown stains dotting their rims  
sweaters lain over ugly ergonomic chairs  
it was winter then.

S

the familiar click and rattle of the heavy glass door,  
the lights were off when i walked in.  
i traced the same footsteps  
toward the place where the ghost of my former self sat

waiting inside that ugly ergonomic chair

her pain was mighty and engulfing  
it struck me in a moment when we merged  
a familiar affliction  
like the obstinate ache of a once-broken  
bone that never considered retreat  
or stubborn wounds in grooves that split along  
their seams with each minor bother

but.  
she is there.  
i am here.

she is with the staling chips  
and the lifeless wires  
and the distant echo of voices that once reverberated  
against those cinderblock walls.  
a fixture of an archeological site  
that cannot be extracted

her world is not my world.  
the one where seedlings push through ripe, wet soil  
and flowers unfurl their petals to drink in sunlight  
where cheeks are dry  
and new skin grows over stubborn scars  
where hope is abundant even when it's not  
and we hug our knees in consolation with others.

isn't it remarkable how lives occur in shifts?  
love and then loss  
then love again

strength and then weakness  
then strength again

those who pick you up when you're down  
are lifted when your vigor restores

a perennial exchange of energies

we carry each other through  
in waves  
like the ebb and flow of the tides  
that trade fluidity and stability  
the brawn of the shore against frothy surf  
the force of the ocean against sweeping sands.

by Tara Suess

Tara Suess



# madelaine bullini



# courtney dudley



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I took this photo of my friends Kim and V on a cold winter's day in upstate NY. The physical frame serves as a barrier of protection from the outside world. Inside the partners create a space to nurture and of intimacy, enveloped in a soft, warm nest.

The photo freezes the moment in time, rendering it an enduring object of resilience; even on days when the wind howls against the four walls of our homes and the outside world of patriarchal structures and spineless politicians hurls obstacles our way, we can return to this image and the nests we've built, to refill and recharge our truest selves.

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# Queer Resilience in the Foothills of Appalachia

by L.B. Prevette

It feels redundant to even use “queer” and “resilience” in the same sentence. Resilience is woven into the very fibers of queer community. We walk through a world that wasn’t made for us, at times using language that hasn’t yet evolved enough to communicate how we feel.



I grew up in a trailer on a chicken farm in the middle of nowhere. Town was a twenty minute drive away, and town meant a Wal-Mart that closed at 9 p.m. My road wasn’t paved until I was nearly in my teens and my Dad used to shake his head in disgust any time a car would drive by too fast, stirring up too much dust.

My home is in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and our home sat in the middle of a rolling hayfield. Our background noise was the constant cluck of chickens and the summer lullaby of cicadas and tree frogs. I was always in love with not just the land, but our community. Farmers know that you can do everything right and still fail. Sometimes it doesn’t rain, sometimes it rains too much. Wells can run dry and creeks can run over their banks. It was a community that operated under the assumption that everybody had tried their best and if someone needed help, of course you were going to go help. That mindset has never left me.

Growing up, I went to church at least three times a week. Though my family was never what I would call devout, church was the center of social life. I thought of Sunday service as having two distinct sections: joy and fear. Service would start with joy. We sang hymns and caterwauled to the heavens. The preacher would tell us all to “turn and fellowship with one another” as we shook hands and said hello to our neighbors in the pews behind us.

Then came fear. The pastor would begin his sermon. I can’t remember ever hearing the red text as part of a sermon in my childhood. (Jesus’ direct words are printed in red in the Old King James’ bible I grew up reading.) Instead, we kept to the Old Testament and the condemnation. The pastor was known for his “kicking leg,” which he raised high as he told of the fire and brimstone that awaited sinners. That awaited me.

My neighbors, my family, my world at that age, all nodded along in agreement. I began to realize that there were terms and conditions to the love given within my community.

By the end of high school, my sexuality was the big open secret that caused a sneer when I walked by both my classmates and my neighbors. My family didn’t talk about it, hoping that if they ignored the obvious, it would eventually stop being true. I kept my head down. My girlfriend and I stayed as undercover as we could, and I spent my spare time hiding in the hills, day-dreaming about the day I’d have my own farm. My dad, however, was resolute that I would not be staying in this town. We’d be working in the chicken houses together and as we picked up the eggs he’d say, “Laura Beth, make sure you go to school. I don’t want you working like this the rest of your life.” So, I swallowed the idea. Being a lesbian made it easier. Of course, all the kids with potential were supposed to leave, but gay kids had to leave, no matter what. We heard it from every direction. The folks here didn’t want us around. And our powerful queer communities in the cities didn’t want to come here to save us.

The spring that I was wrestling with the thought of leaving brought Merlefest. Every April our community college is adorned with tents and concert stages for the largest bluegrass festival on the East Coast. By then I was old enough to hang out at the campgrounds when the music had ended. I was at a bonfire with friends after the Avett Brothers set. The night turned chilly and I left to get a jacket from my car. I rounded a corner, and suddenly I heard someone say, “You fucking dyke.” That was the last thing I remember before a branch came swinging to split open my face.

I woke up alone, God knows how long later, covered in mud and blood. This wasn’t my home—that had been made clear. I wasn’t welcome here. No matter how much love I had for this community, it was unrequited. I left for college the following fall and began to learn how to exist in my own skin. I was open and out and free. I had friends, I had girlfriends, and most importantly I had hope for what my life was going to be. But life always has a way of calling you home.

I was nineteen when my father died. I dropped out of college and returned home with my jaw set, ready to face the demons I was trying to outrun.

But I was surprised. Of course, the community didn’t support me as a lesbian, but they loved me as Kris’s daughter. And when my father passed away, the rest didn’t matter. The people of my town still showed up with desserts and hugs and helped us pick up eggs on the farm. They made sure we were taken care of and that we didn’t have to feed ourselves in the weeks following, because we couldn’t.

That was the community I had once loved so much. One full of people who, regardless of whether they agree with who you are or how you live your life, support you, are really good cheerleaders, and always take care of you. You know who your neighbors are and you know they'll show up when you're in need.

In the years following I wound my way out west. There I became more involved in queer community. I was happy and vibrant, but it all hit me one night as I stood in the LGBT group where we worked with the youth. There were more adults there than kids. All I could think about was home. I decided to move home in that moment, but a part of me still fought it tooth and nail. I was still convinced that the only path to success was staying in a city and chasing a dream of financial stability. But in the months to come I spent more time defining success for myself. Home needed me more than the city ever would. And so I did it. I moved back home to the foothills of Appalachia to try and be the adult I had always needed.

It was there that I met a miracle lesbian, Megan Barnett. Megan recognized the need to empower young adult voices and had just created a community action group for young adults in Wilkes County called Forward Wilkes, a nonpartisan organization focused on increasing civic engagement, spurring economic development, and actively engaging the youth of the area. Megan was able to build trust and connections within our town. We were overjoyed with the community that she had created.

But Megan and I wanted to do more, and it wasn't too long before our proudest achievement, HangOUT, was born. HangOUT is a partnership with St. Paul's Episcopal Church where we host events for queer youth to come be in fellowship. Children in Appalachia who are LGBT can face discrimination from their own families to the point of homelessness. If you're homeless in rural Appalachia, the resources you need to get back on your feet are faith-based. Faith is the cornerstone of most organizations that provide necessary resources to my neighbors in need. With HangOUT, we were able to create open and affirming spaces where kids know they can be fully seen as themselves and still part of the faith community, if they want to be. Both of those identities can co-exist.

At some Hangout events, only two or three youth would arrive. Other weeks we would fill the room wall to wall. HangOUT became an event that we looked to not only as a chance to serve our community, but as a way to connect with our neighbors that don't often get the opportunity to share their stories. At one HangOUT, a youth was attending for the first time. We keep name tags with pronouns at the door for attendees to fill out. This kid stared at the nametags but never reached to grab one. I asked them their name and they just looked up at me with wide eyes of panic. They were wearing a pretty funky pair of glasses so I said, "Is it ok if I just call you Specs? Because your glasses are great." They nodded with a downcast smile.

Specs came back to the next HangOUT. They walked right up to the stack of nametags, grabbed one, circled their pronouns, and proudly wrote "Max." "Hey, Max," I said as they passed by. Later they told me it was the first time an adult had ever called them by their real name.

At the same time Megan was dreaming up and founding Forward Wilkes, I had decided to run for County Commissioner. The incumbent had been recently exposed as part of deep financial malfeasance within our transportation authority, a service that is vitally important to our most vulnerable community members. There's no public transit here. Not even Uber. And he was running without a democratic challenger.

I had no dreams that I would win, but I knew I wanted to fight. My campaign gained momentum and started to grab the attention of folks from outside Appalachia. Then David Brooks of *The New York Times* came to Wilkes as part of an initiative through The Aspen Institute called Weave: The Social Fabric project. He came to listen, and for the first time, somebody let us tell our own stories.

I didn't win my election, but I did win the attention of those folks. Since then I've been fortunate to tell the story of my town across the country. To challenge the stereotype of Appalachia. To talk about this community of great people who dream big and follow through. Who lead through service. Who lead with love. It is a shame that it has taken this long for Appalachia to be seen for who she really is, a community grounded in love for her neighbors.

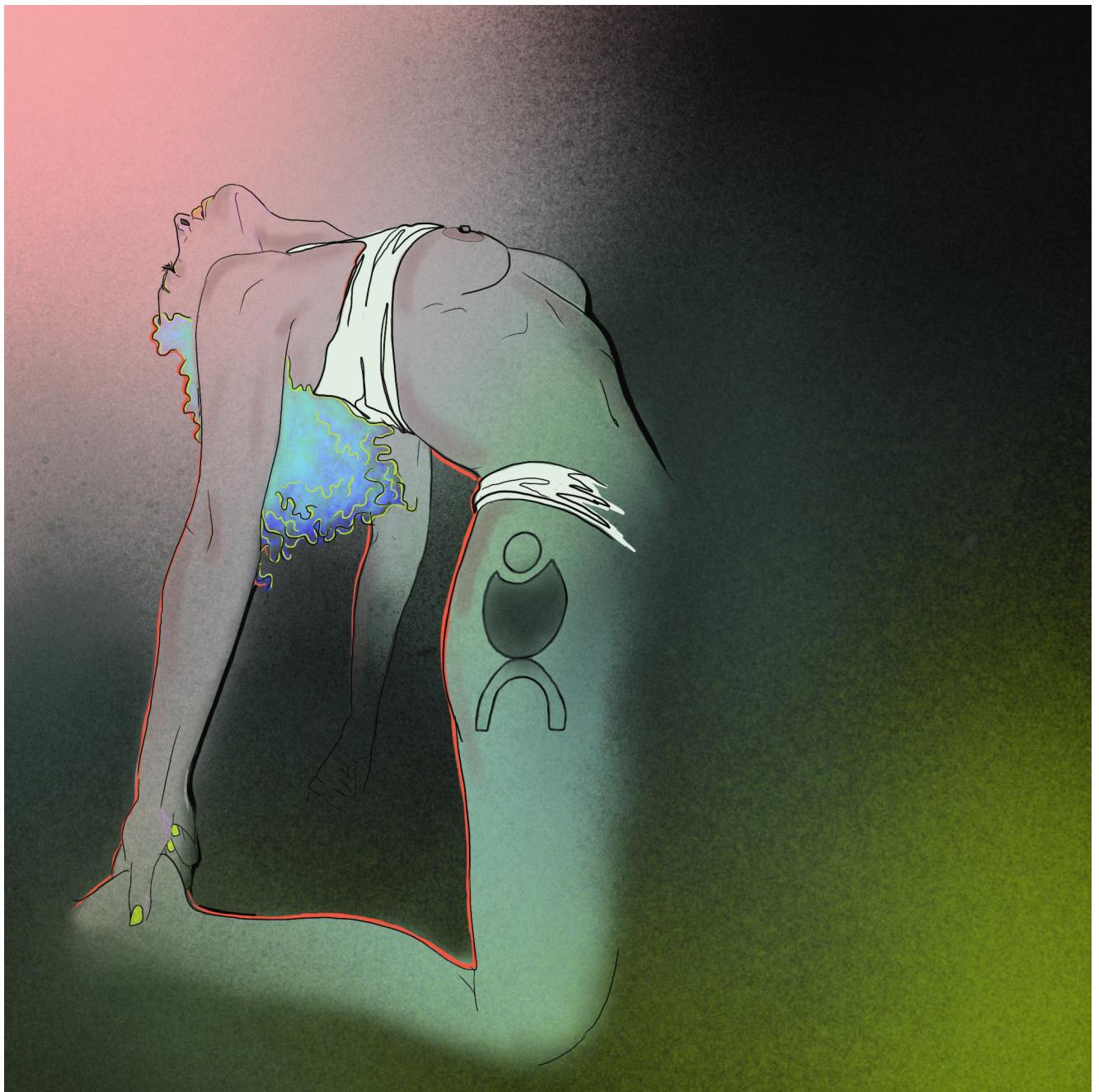
I straddle two worlds. And I love them both. Most folks would say to live in one would be to deny the other, but there is a toll that is taken on your soul when you deny any part of your truth. If you can't be yourself in your day to day life, find a place, whether that be online or in a trusted confidante, where you can be yourself. All of yourself. Even if those ideas seem in conflict. You need a place to be honest. A place to heal.

And if you can come out, come out. The fear and anxiety that kept me up all night was never worth it. I was afraid of the opinions of people that didn't matter. And because I didn't have anybody that I let in to my truth, I didn't have anywhere to go when I was face-to-face with violence. I instead had a secret that I carried for nearly a decade. The weight of that pain influenced every decision until I finally set it free.

Choosing to come home meant that I no longer belonged to anybody. The queer community laughs at my accent and manners, while the folks back home raise eyebrows and shake their heads as I walk down the street hand in hand with my partner. And that's okay. For right now I may live in liminal space—both wholly queer and wholly Appalachian. But one day, these won't be mutually exclusive ideas. One day folks will see us. Folks will know that these identities can, and do, coexist.

For too long the queer community has been represented solely through metronormativity. The absence of rural queer life in the media leaves folks having to choose: Which community defines me? Which community am I allowed to love? When the real answer is both. Small towns create the opportunity to connect as people. To see and know each other not as monoliths representing a subculture, but as people who have experienced love and pain, just like everyone else. That connection is where real change happens. One person at a time. ♦

ariana carrera



janice lee  
avocados



# Because Emma

Emma Larson is a queer singer/songwriter based in Philadelphia, PA. We had the pleasure of speaking to her about inspiration and motivation, art and queerness, community, creative process, and her hopes and dreams for making music in a post-Covid world. Stream her music on Spotify and follow her on Instagram @emmalarsonmusic.

## **When did you first start singing? When did you start writing music?**

I started playing the piano when I was eight, and started taking voice lessons when I was twelve or thirteen. I was thirteen years old when I wrote my first song. It was about a very silly middle school relationship—I liked this boy, or I thought that I did at the time. I wasn't really raised on pop culture, but I started getting into Sara Bareilles' music, and I really liked her vibe and what she was about. And I remember I looked her up and I realized oh, she writes her own music. I didn't even know how that worked then. So in my mind, I thought, to become a singer, I need to write my own music. That's when I sat down at the piano and I wrote my first song. That's what made sense in my brain—to be a singer, you have to write your own stuff. I don't know why that was the conclusion, but I'm glad that it happened. And then I just didn't stop, so I'm very thankful for that.

## **Who or what is your biggest inspiration?**

My biggest inspiration to continue writing music is the idea of writing these queer ballads and trying to be another voice for the kid that I was growing up. My inspiration is young, in the closet me and everyone out there that feels or has felt like her. I want to put out something that reflects what I've learned in my experience, and hopefully people can relate. I think that's so important, especially in creativity. That's definitely what drives me now to keep creating—to be a queer person who makes art and music to uplift people and help people feel like they're not alone.

## **Who or what is your biggest driving force?**

I think both the queer community and the folks that I have reached with my Instagram who then listen to my music. To hear that feedback, and to gain a positive response on something that I've always believed in, is what really drives me. But it's also the fact that I don't have a backup plan, at all. I went to college and of course I got a degree and am excited to work in my field, but I never had a specific "dream job" in mind—it was always just this. It's a combination of having a really fantastic and really supportive platform, but also that this is the only option that I've really considered for myself.

## **What are the common themes or threads in your music? Who or what do you most often write about?**

It's always been about relationships. I have a nice Libra moon,



so I'm just really invested in my relationships. When I initially started writing, my songs were all about boys. It's so weird to go back and listen. I identify as queer, and at a certain point when I was growing up, I knew that men weren't really an option for me anymore. Some of my old EPs that are out on Spotify have very heteronormative storylines. Because that's also how I grew up, as a lot of queer kids do.

The only song I've ever written about a happy relationship is *Because You*, and it's about my lovely partner, Jess. But otherwise my music has been about unfortunate relationship scenarios. I just find a lot of comfort writing about not the happiest stuff. When I'm writing something happy, I almost get the feeling of, who cares? And I would love to write more happy music—it's just not something that I've really honed into. The more unfortunate parts of my past relationships get written about because I try to process the bad stuff through writing—that's kind of my way of gaining closure.

## **In what ways has your queerness influenced your art? In what ways has your art influenced your queerness?**

Definitely stepping out of that box where I was using "boy" or "he/him" pronouns in my music. It was so empowering because I was finally singing about what I felt and who I felt it about, finally saying okay, I'm out, and now my music can reflect that. It's such a small switch, too, but it matters a lot. Being able to write about the person that you love openly and being able to reference them—that's the main thing, I'd say. I mean otherwise, I just probably got more honest in my lyrics.

In terms of art reflecting my queerness, this is something I've been thinking about recently. In college, I remember asking my manager "What's my image? I just don't know. I feel like I barely even know who I am." This was when I was twenty. I had just cut off all my hair, but it wasn't really me—it wasn't really clicking. And so recently, in quarantine, I feel like I'm starting to present more as the artist I would like to be. I have been experimenting with my fashion, hair, makeup. And I think that coming fully into my queerness has helped me so much to realize that there are no rules. I don't have to look a certain way.

## **How has your creative process changed during quarantine? How has it stayed the same?**

It's changed so much. To preface this, I really put making music on hold in college. I was part of an a capella group, and I did some open mic nights, but that was it. I thought when I graduated college I would have all this time to pursue my dreams, but of

course bills need to be paid, and I kept making excuses like, oh, I can't do it now, I'm job hunting and that's all I have time for.

And then in quarantine, it was by a stroke of luck that we met the producer I have been working with. When that happened, I finally sat down and said, I need to stop pushing this off. I have found that sometimes I need to sit down and even if it's garbage that I'm making, just get something out on the page. And I finally did sit down one day, and I started to play Because You on my ukulele. And then I played it for this producer, and he said, I like this, let's record it. And now here it is, out in the world, along with another song we worked on together called Honey Pie. Now that I have this producer that I really click with, I also have this new motivation.

Ultimately, I finally said, let's stop making excuses, we're in quarantine, we have some free time. And the feeling that I got when I released Because You was unlike any other. It's the best feeling to be able to say, alright, this is what I've created, and hopefully people will like it. And they really did. I also have an insanely special support system. That is so much of it, too—I have so many people that love and believe in me. All of this makes me feel like it's really just now or never. Let's do this.

### **How would you describe the music that you've created over the last nine months or so?**

To be quite honest, I haven't written a ton during quarantine. But I do have a lot of songs in my back pocket that I just never produced or released. That's where we're working on right now. I'm writing here and there, but we're more focused on getting everything I do want out in the world produced. I have songs about stories and situations from the past that are just now coming out.

I still have writer's block—that hasn't gone away, really. But at the end of the day, it's inspiring me that much more to start producing this music and see it through to fruition, and start thinking about, what do I want the next song to sound like? It really helps that we're taking from the archives and moving towards an official sound for me.

### **What have you learned or gained during quarantine that you didn't expect to learn or gain?**

I've gained a lot of free time. [Laughs.] But it's changed a lot. I think definitely patience. Quite frankly, I think this has been a trauma that we've all endured, this whole year. We all are going through this, and we're going to hold that for the rest of our lives. But it's taught me to be able to wait and see what happens, which I'm not good at, at all. I've always been the person that needs to know what's going on and needs to have a certain amount of control, and I just don't in this. So it's definitely had me taking a step back and just asking myself, what can I do with this scenario in front of me to make it the best that it can be?

### **What have you lost or left behind during quarantine that you didn't expect to lose or leave behind?**

In the beginning, I was all over the place, just very much "go go go," all the time. And I think that I had to let go of thinking that I needed to do a thousand things at once to be my most productive self. I'm one person, and I think that being forced to be in this situation has taught me a lot of patience and has made me grow up a lot more than I expected. Again, I think that I've left the idea of being able to control every situation. It's just been a lot of not knowing, and I'm terrible at not knowing. But that's what life is—a whole bunch of not knowing and working around it. Quarantine made me realize that we as humans really can't control everything that happens to us. And that's a good thing, I'd say.

### **What is your favorite part about being a musician?**

Singing is my favorite thing in the world. I've always felt so happy that I have this outlet. My voice is one of my instruments, and I've always been able to have that. Music has been the one consistent thing in my entire life, and I think I'm really realizing that now.

Another is just the response from people—being able to have somebody listen to one of my songs and really resonate with the lyrics. I can write it a certain way, and to me, the lyrics are strictly the story in my head, but when other people are listening to it, they interpret it however they need to. The messages that I get from people that say, I'm going through this, and listening to this made me feel like this—I can't imagine something more powerful, for me at least.



### **What are your hopes and dreams for making music in a post-quarantine world?**

Performing. I didn't really perform in Philly a lot when I moved here, and now I can't in our current situation. So that's my main thing, that I would like to get more into the Philadelphia music scene. Otherwise, I just want to keep writing. I'm trying to put out an album right now, so that's why we're releasing these singles. I think my answer is that I just want to keep doing it. I want to keep this momentum that I have. Because it's been working for me. I feel better mentally being able to create like this. I really want to take from quarantine the idea that I can make time. That's the main thing.

### **If you could give one message to young, queer artists who want to create something meaningful but don't know where to start, what would it be?**

Just start. What do you have to lose? I will have folks message me about their specific scenarios, and I always tell them, even if it sucks, just start. We as creative people are so hard on ourselves and we want everything to be perfect, which is a ridiculous standard to hold ourselves to, because nothing's perfect in the creative world. It's mainly about putting your expectation and your end goal aside and feeling it out. If you believe in it, you can do it.

### **What does queer resilience mean to you?**

I think that queer resilience is sticking to who you are, and that's a challenge to a lot of people. It's an act of protest, quite frankly, to be your most authentic self, and be out in the world. Of course there are nuances in all of that, but I think queer resilience is, at its core, being openly and loudly queer, and never having to apologize for it.

And of course there's so much that goes into coming out and even being a queer individual in general living in this society. But I just think that representation is queer resilience. Very much so. Representation is everything. It saves lives. ♦

# Wild Horses Run Faster

by Ashley B.

**W**hen I was little—I mean really little, I used to arrange my toy horses in parades throughout the house.

They'd circle endlessly on the round glass dining table (mingling with dinosaurs and Godzillas), trot bravely across the little lip in front of the fireplace, gallop through the shrubs and flowers of my mom's gardens. I have very little recollection of these early equine parades but there is photo evidence.

The thing I remember most about my childhood toy horses were the distinctions I made between them—specifically a pinto mare and foal set that joined the herd later on.

"You," I would think at them, "you are mustangs. You are wild and free. You are different." They were my favorite, and I never put them in any of the plastic corrals, nor in the custom barn my mother and I built out of cardboard and hot glue. I never placed a toy rope around their necks.

I often used the other toy horses as a herd of mustangs, but eventually they would return to more domesticated roles. The pinto set never did. I related to my imaginary mustangs in a way that I didn't relate to the other horses, especially when I set up the pair on a hill to watch the domesticated herd mill around the barn below. They were different, and they did not fit in.

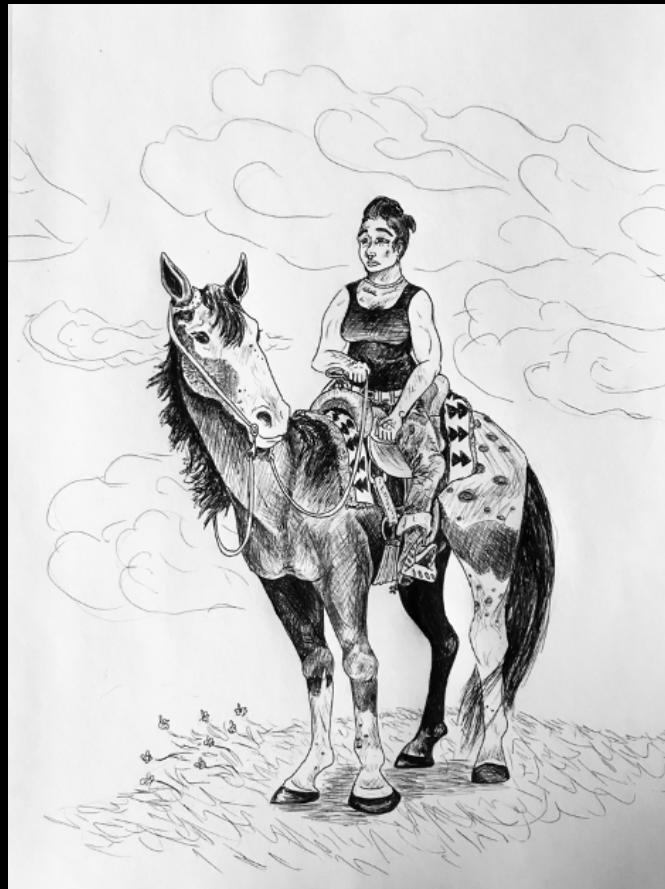
My veneration of "difference" extended beyond horses. In my mind, difference was to be celebrated. White tigers and black wolves, I thought, were obviously better in some way. Their uniqueness set them apart from the rest. I am sure my veneration of difference sprung from the influence of my mother, who taught me that being different was good and desirable. However, she indirectly taught me that it was a particular brand of uniqueness, stamped with her approval, that was to be celebrated. Not everything that was different or contrary was greeted enthusiastically. Being different in what she considered "the right way" was important.

In kindergarten, my four-foot-long, life-size plastic iguana was not welcome in the role as pet when kids wanted to play house. My desire to play at being a dragon or a lion or an adventurer had me quickly eschewed in a world where the only accepted roles to play were mother, daughter, father, son, maid, and, inexplicably, mailman. I don't recall adults enforcing these rules during our playtime. I remember them coming from the children I sought as playmates.

This came as a shock to me, as I had been playing more imaginative games at home with my mother, little brother, and neighborhood kids, or by myself. Wild mustangs, jungle explorer, things of the like. I don't think I had ever played house until I attempted to find a place among the kids at school, the kids that were so unlike me.

So, at school, I played alone. I have since heard several accounts

of queer kids refusing to participate in gendered role play games as small children, without knowing why the games felt *so wrong*.



Through mankind's very act of trying to catch, domesticate, conform, control, and tame, the mustang's plight and intrinsic existence stood above the rest to me. It's easy to look at a man on a horse and think that he is in "control." The reins, the bits, occasionally the spurs. It's easy for a person unversed in the world of mankind's connection with horse to see an animal submitted to the whims and direction of its rider.

I will not deny that some horses are broken to this.

But usually that is not the case.

Take a moment to think about the physicality of horses. Most of them weigh upwards of one thousand pounds. The average weight of a human is less than two hundred pounds. *One thousand pounds*. They are far swifter than we will ever be. Their teeth are larger than our knuckles. Have you ever seen a bucking horse? In person? One thousand pounds of force throwing a human into the air, faster than you can blink. The words "*get off me*" do not quite capture the visceral feeling of this action, this show of power.

There always exist relationships where one party is solidly in

control, dictating everything, but not all relationships are like that. Why would you want that? Why would you want to constantly force and harangue your partner into doing what you wished? Physically assert every decision? Not only does it feel wrong, but the act of constantly enforcing your dominance and direction is mentally and physically exhausting, be it with a romantic partner, a friend, or an animal. When one works with a horse, has developed a partnership, they learn and grow and decide together. The bits and reins are not weapons of control. They are tools to communicate, to ask your partner to do something, to move with you. Your partner trusts you as a leader and this is the language that you speak together. There is a reason it is no longer referred to as breaking a horse, but as gentling. Especially in the world of the mustang.

When I ride a horse, I do not yank on his mouth.

At present, the Bureau of Land Management is in charge of maintaining mustang herds on public land. It is a complicated situation, with the BLM attempting to maintain a balance with the ecosystem and the number of mustangs that can sustainably live within it. Nearly 50,000 mustangs and burros are currently living in off-range facilities, gathered up from the wild and put in holding. Some will be adopted out, though there is an average of 10,000 more animals added to holding each year.

Horses are prolific breeders and through human intervention the few apex predators that could prey on the horse to keep populations in check have been swept onto the endangered species list—often deemed too dangerous to exist in our now “civilized,” colonized world. Mustang slaughter and roundups were also used historically to handicap the Native American tribes—yet another form of control.

Were I a mustang...

Every time my mother said that women with short hair looked trashy was a rope around my neck, pulling me to the ground despite my rearing in anger. For every tattoo or piercing I thought was interesting, her telling me that they would make a bad person was a bit forced into my mouth. My mother calling any woman she thought unattractive an “ugly dyke” were spurs thrust to my bleeding sides. Her prohibiting me from seeing my friends or attending school events after tearfully coming out at sixteen was a corral wall to slam my body against. I was a mustang trying to exist as myself, and I was not being listened to, communicated with. There was no common language between me and anyone else in my world. There was no mutual respect through the subtle learning of reins and bits. What I experienced were harsher elements made of force.

I saw ugly hate in my mother’s eyes after I was allowed to attend school outings again, hate that told me that she knew the girl I had been with was going to be there. I had told her that myself, so she wouldn’t hear it from someone else. She must have forgotten. Her insisting, “I know you. I know you’re not gay. You just can’t be gay, I know you better than that,” was a whip lashing my sides. I saw crushing disappointment in my father’s eyes when he showed me that all of my texts messages after I came out had been copied to his phone. The communications between myself and the girl I had told them I’d broken up with, but hadn’t, because I was

young and in love. I wanted to lay down and die. After that, I let them put the bit in my teeth, stopped bucking, stopped screaming. I let their reins and spurs direct me, and all my bleeding became internal, from a broken heart and a shattered will. A wild mustang no more. One of the rarer cases of horsemanship I noted, where the beast is beat into submission: no respect, no partnership, no communication. I had been broke.

I have a hard time relating to other horse people. There are few LGBTQ+ people in the Western horse community. I am a poor, blue collar, rough and tumble butch lesbian who went to art school. My peers are generally monied people from wealthy families. Children who have never worried about where their meals will come from, have not avoided the doctor for lack of money.

Outside of the wealthy families that are equestrians as recreation, there are the conservative cowboy types. Sometimes they are young, sometimes they are old. Often Republicans, they don’t know what to make of my short, cantankerous, queer pagan ass. Blue collar, good ol’ boys that I would probably get along with if they could move past the homophobia and racism. We’re more similar than they think, though this realization would likely horrify them.

But instead they ask me on dates despite their knowledge of my girlfriend or shun me and tell me that mares do not want to be with mares. They want their stallions. (Which is actually not true—there are two mares on the farm where I work that actually seek the affection of our herd’s boss mare, the matriarch of the herd, when they’re in heat, rather than the stallion.)

I am no sleek thoroughbred, worth millions of dollars in racing and dressage. I am no well-bred quarter horse with a bloodline hundreds of years long. I am a short, scrappy, muddy mustang, hardy and wily, physically and mentally worth just as much as the other pedigrees, though some people do not think so.

I can be happy at least knowing that the gentling and training of adopted mustangs no longer consists of “breaking” the horse, but rather showing it that you as a human can coexist with it, learn from and with it, and teach it many things. You can build a partnership and a relationship of mutual understanding and kindness as you grow and learn together. I wish I had been treated with as much courtesy as a teenager when I came out. I wish the world could see all queer people that way, as people who, yes, are different, but are also worthy of friendship, trust, and existing just as we are.

In the last five years that I have been working with horses, they have helped me see the anger and pain that still resides in me. They have helped me work through my emotions, sometimes with snotty tears (mine) and sometimes with smiles (ours) and gentle noses (theirs) whiffing in my hair. Horses are great therapists when you learn to be friends with them. I still have so much pain in me but I am also full of love and gentleness, and the knowing of just letting things be.

I am ready to share this knowing, to help as I have been helped, and am looking to adopt a mustang out of holding so that I may remind it of the gentleness of existence. So that I can offer it partnership and the calm, knowing hand of a person who sympathizes with and understands what it is like to be forced out of herd and home, and into the unknown. ♦

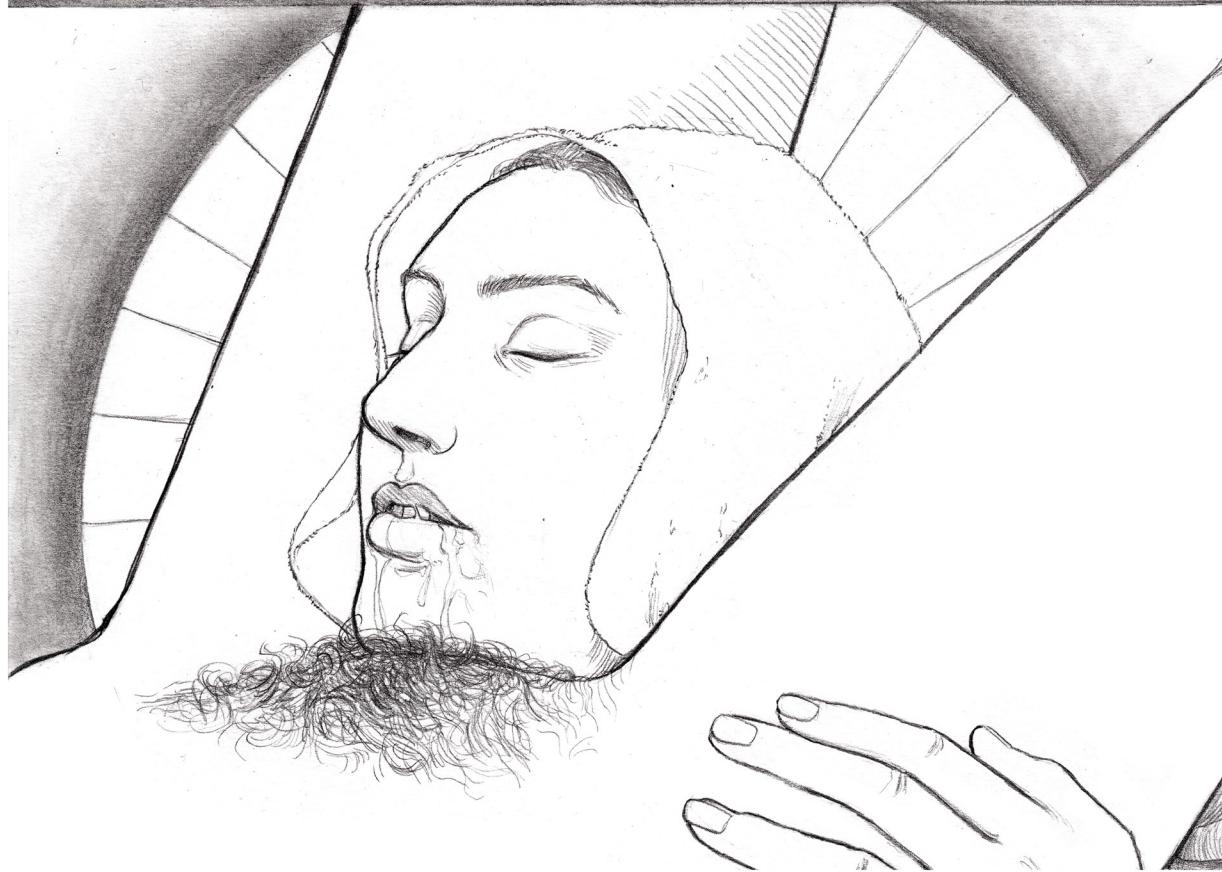
# emery jordan

dyke collage



# leïla flayeux boulkenafet

jeanne d'arc



the Pulse of our hearts  
beating with intention  
opening eyes  
to the beauty of  
chromatic spectrums:  
the air to our lungs.  
bullets pierce flesh  
but pride won't die  
bodies may rest,  
we still defy.

# pulse

by Steph Carlin

I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY:

TO THE BOY I KNEW I'D NEVER LOVE  
WHO CRIED ON MY MOM'S FRONT LAWN  
TO THE SHY BOY  
WHO SAID I BROKE HIS HEART INTO A MILLION PIECES  
TO THE BOY I SAID I LOVED, BUT DIDN'T  
WHO TOOK ME TO MEET HIS PARENTS  
TO HIS PARENTS  
WHO TOLD ME NOT TO HURT HIM  
TO THE BOY WHO LOVED ME FIRST  
THEN STOPPED LOVING ME BEFORE I WAS READY  
TO THE BOY WHO LOVED HEROIN  
WHO LOVED IT MORE THAN HE'D EVER LOVE ME  
TO THE BOY EVERYONE HATED  
WHO SAW SOMETHING IN ME  
TO THE BOY I NEVER LOVED  
WHO NEVER LOVED ME  
TO THE BOY THAT LOVED ME  
WHO MARRIED ME  
WHO I LOVED UNTIL I DIDN'T  
TO THE WOMAN I TOLD MYSELF I WOULDN'T LOVE  
WHO I STILL LOVE  
I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

by Sarah Herbst

# BLOODWORK

ginger ale makes me sneeze  
the good kind anyway but I'll take a  
green aluminum can over nothing  
we met in a month where the  
season started to change—that's a  
specific time of year to meet someone  
we both got blood drawn that month  
for unrelated issues. I was taking  
care of myself and my chaotic stomach  
(this is why I know so much about ginger ale)  
you were monitoring the tumors  
in your uterus and taking care of yourself  
we both did that separately but the context  
that now I get to exist alongside you  
changes everything.

I don't wince at a needle's pull I know you  
don't either, we've both been through so much  
I like that about us, it makes our love  
more candid. There's so much satisfaction in  
getting one's hands covered in earth and debris  
and then washing them clean.

the moon was kind of elusive when we stood  
watching it on a bridge, you pulled out your phone  
which told us the star I was inquiring about  
was part of Serpens, a constellation in the  
northern hemisphere, coined by the 2nd astronomer  
I always want to name stars as planets  
everything always exists alone to me and then you  
pulled out your phone and told me the star  
I was pointing to was part of a constellation  
which reminded me everything belongs somewhere  
In mythology Serpens represents  
a healer holding a giant snake who was  
said to bring back people from the dead

today you went for a run said it felt so  
good but that you also felt weak, last night  
I drank a ginger ale because my stomach hurt  
next week we talk to our doctors separately  
because I get to exist alongside you it  
changes everything. I ordered the bloodwork  
before we met it's just that now I feel  
brought back from my own sort of dead  
a kind of dead where I've practiced so many times  
how to exist alone in the world I forgot about the  
possibility of existing alongside you:  
healer, patient, constellation.

by Xenia E.

# Coming Back to Earth

by Sylvia Gladstein

It was springtime, early April. I was fifteen and barely ever lucid. I was not sure if my unwillingness to be seen, heard, or understood was by necessity or choice, but looking back, I think maybe it was both. I cried a lot back then, and my bones showed in places I had never seen them show in before. I was learning a lot about anatomy. I would take long walks around my neighborhood in Minneapolis. To the train tracks, the elementary school, the smoke shop, the park, and repeat.

On one of those walks, I was holding a sock that my friend Lou had given me. I had just escaped a family dinner and was walking as fast as I possibly could. He gave me the sock at school that morning and told me there was a gift inside. One Marlboro Light, broken into about three pieces. I took the piece that was still connected to the filter and lit it with the joy of a child doing something they know they aren't supposed to be doing.

I knew he had taken the dart from his mother. She was a loveless woman, and he had told me about the severity of her habit. His first memory was her telling him she would be "gone for five minutes," omitting the details of the tobacco industry's stronghold on her priorities. To this day, "five minutes" was a household phrase for him. He hated her, and so I did, too. We promised each other to never be old and cold in that way.

It was my first cigarette. I made sure the men in the park saw me smoking it. I took a video. I emptied myself on the steps of the elementary school, walked around a bit to rid my body of the smell, and went home.

A year later and Lou and I were in love with the same woman. I loved her for the way she moved, he loved her for her friendship. We both loved her for her drugs and capacity to not give a fuck. Nothing could get in the way of our having a good time. It was incredible, really. I was 16 and owned the world.

The three of us spent Christmas that year in the basement of some guy none of us knew, getting higher than we ever thought we could. I think we all fell in love then. Forgetting ourselves, there was only one another.

Sariah and I were both women who were sickened by the world. We felt its weight so heavily, though we never spoke about it. We both had an incredible distaste for food at the time, and I think fasting for days was just one of our many attempts to avoid any glimpse of reality. We were not good for each other. If she was thin one day, I would be thinner the next. I have always regretted letting my first love and my eating disorder fraternize with each other in that way. I think that might be the worst thing I ever did. But it was an addiction for both of us, and we had no intention of overcoming it anytime soon. We never wanted to notice anything. We never wanted to be all



there. Not even with each other.

We especially didn't want to notice the way people looked at us when we were together. Two girls: making out in the hallway. Each a little too femme to avoid being objectified. The boys in our school would try to get close to us for reasons that were less than holy. It wasn't something we wanted to see. We wereouted to her mother in January, not just for our love, but for our drug use as well. We didn't know what to do, so we sat on the bathroom floor at school and cried, until we had the idea to each take enough pills that we wouldn't remember the day.

Waking up, alone, in the epicenter of my bedroom after blacking out at school—with piles of dirty clothes and stacks of half-used plates threatening to engulf me—was not a pleasant experience. I was failing pre-calculus, and my car was leaking oil. The friends I had didn't look at me the same way anymore. Somehow, it was all worth it. I was having the time of my life. Even the parts that hurt like hell were beautiful. That was what mattered to me then.

LSD, mushrooms, marijuana, Xanax, Adderall, nicotine, alcohol, Percocet. The works. Whatever we could get was what we did. Eventually, these patterns became impossible to ignore, and I landed myself in a program. Outpatient drug addiction treatment for me was nothing but staring at doctors until I could figure out what they wanted me to say. All I wanted was to be done with treatment as quickly as I could be, because I wasn't an addict. I was a scared, young girl who wanted to forget things sometimes, but never an addict. I had been asked to stop, and so I did. It was that simple for me.

Sariah left me after she was hospitalized. She had tried to run away and I had tried to help her. She called me from the phone on the unit and told me I had destroyed her life. I told her I never meant to do that. I cried for days and started smoking cigarettes again.



I had quit the habit for her (she didn't like the taste), but no one could stop me now. Lou held me while we ate ice cream and watched TV.

After that, it was just cigarettes and me. Every time I tried to take even a puff of a joint, my body descended into panic and I was breathless. Terrified. It wasn't worth it anymore, it wasn't fun anymore.

I met my new girlfriend in a new basement of some guy I didn't know. He was covering Jimi Hendrix with his band and nobody could hear each other over that precious noise. The basement was packed, and she was at the front. I was at the side, puffing on a light blue American Spirit, wearing an XXL suit jacket and a miniskirt. She danced in the red light of that basement in a way that inspired me.

When we finally spoke, she told me she was on molly, and asked if I wanted to roll, too. I said no, but that I was happy to observe. We shared a cigar and a heart-shaped sucker that night. I fell in love with her freedom.

Grace and I spent two years together. Partying and loving. We took mushrooms together in March. We listened to Paul Simon's *Graceland* on vinyl and smoked Spirits out her bedroom window, sticking out our legs into the spring air. I told her that it felt like I was being filmed for a movie. My life felt so beautiful then, so worthy of being shared. It was beyond special, it was transcendent. We stared at each other for so long that we convinced ourselves we were soulmates. We weren't.

Eventually, we grew up. I don't know how it happened. Not much seemed fun anymore. Going to Taco Bell after 11pm was

our biggest thrill, and we no longer loved each other, though we said it all the time. The magic of living for today didn't feel so magical anymore, and we were boring. The problem was, nothing was beautiful. Everything was grey.

We left each other's lives just before the summer. Everything was hot in the grossest way possible. I cried once and moved on.

When I was 15, the air would strike my lungs in a certain way when I saw or heard something gorgeous enough to hit that secret part of my soul. That air was different air. It was sweet, but like honey, not sugar. Sweet and natural like dirt and the smell of lying your head on someone else's chest on the beach. I was convinced no one had as much pain as me, and so I was also convinced that no one had as much beauty as I did. I hoarded that beauty, too. I wanted everyone to see, but only a few were allowed to steal.

I had been in a drug, starvation, and love-induced delirium for four years, and watching it go was one of the greatest grievances of my life.

Maybe it was innocence then, or the newness of everything, but being high is dull to me now. Then it was gorgeous, and sometimes terrifying, but always gorgeous. Recovering from my eating disorder felt like a loss. It too had been something that was only mine. I sustained it, I kept it alive, almost like a child, until I couldn't anymore. And once that was gone, who did I have to take care of?

What I used to call love began to feel transactional. I hated that. I hated the loss of magic, the loss of care. The women before I grew up were careless in the most beautiful way. The women after had jobs to get to, and one night a week for us. It felt so tight. So fake. As if we were business partners, and although we weren't bringing in much revenue now, we knew we'd be rich in the future. I wanted the payout immediately.

I had to learn that there could be beauty beyond delirium. The lifestyle that I had fetishized for so long was no longer sustainable, but my boring, grown-up life wasn't sustainable, either. I needed something to make me feel like a gorgeous being again, something to help me transcend (at least on the weekends).

So, I found it. I found that there were still basements full of love and music and bodies hitting each other unapologetically. There was still Jimi Hendrix, Paul Simon, and the Rolling Stones. There were still stories so beautiful that they made the air feel different when it hit my lungs. Honey tasted just as sweet.

And more than anything, there was still me. I watched my body grow, and I decorated it as much as I could afford to. When I ran out of tattoo money, I planned my next one. I put a star on my finger and a knife on my arm. Always protected, always free. And always present.

For the first time in a long time, all of me had to be there. There was nowhere left to put the part of myself that didn't want to see or be seen, so I let her out and observed who stuck around. I still had my people. Lou and I share Marlboro Lights when the moment feels right. Being on earth isn't easy for any of us, but to live fully on earth is hardest. ♦

# brittany hayden

the after party



# katie aki

pray for dry eyes



# we love our CONTRIBUTORS!

**Ashley B.** (she/her/they) is an alumni of the Kansas City Art Institute. She is a butch lesbian, freelance illustrator, writer, and part time ranch hand working with horse breeders. Ashley's work can be seen in the Center Spiral Magazine, at [ashbilke.wixsite.com/ashley-bilke](http://ashbilke.wixsite.com/ashley-bilke), and on Instagram @blackfeathrart.

**Leïla Flayeux Boulkenafet** is a French cinema student who was born to serve our queer landscapes and draw bloody pussiz everywhere. Follow Leïla on Instagram @diptyquerotique.

**Madelaine Buttini** (she/her) has shown her artwork in exhibitions and music festivals around the globe, most notably in New York and throughout the East Coast of Australia. She is an internationally recognized visual artist currently living in Brisbane, Australia. Exploring hand cut and digital collage whilst using vintage and modern materials, she has been commissioned to produce work for Parade, Abrand Jeans, Elle Magazine UK, Adidas Italy, Gwyneth Paltrow's goop and The BBC to name a few. Madelaine is currently represented by Sydney based Zeitgeist Agency. Her work reflects upon the challenges she has faced as a friend, girlfriend and feminist whilst also celebrating women, femininity and flora. Follow her on Instagram @madbutt.

**Steph Carlin** (she/her) writes poetry and takes photographs as a colorful escape from her often black and white day job in Finance. Steph lives in New Jersey with her wife Emily and two kids. Follow her creative account on Instagram: @bourbonandbitters\_poet.

**Marina Carreira** (she/her) is a queer Luso-American writer and multimedia artist from Newark, NJ. She is the author of *Save the Bathwater* (Get Fresh Books, 2018) and *I Sing to That Bird Knowing It Won't Sing Back* (Finishing Line Press, 2017). Marina is a recipient of the Sundress Academy for the Arts Summer 2021 Residency fellowship and a finalist in the Platypus Press Broken River Prize 2020. As a visual artist, she has exhibited her work at Morris Museum, ArtFront Galleries, West Orange Arts Council, Monmouth University Center for the Arts, and Living Incubator Performance Space (LIPS) in the Gateway Project Spaces in Newark, NJ. Follow her on Instagram at @savethebathwater.

**Ariana Carrera** (she/her) is an endlessly curious coastal freak oriented towards an equitable future resourced with aesthetic sensibilities, discernment + cosmic jokes. Follow her on Instagram @ariana.courtney.carrera and @mutualmuze.

**Rachel R. Carroll** (they/them) (Ray if you're nasty) is a non-binary poet who is also hard at work on their first novel. Their work has appeared in *Polaris Magazine*, *The Gravity of the Thing*, and *SUGAR Magazine*. After studying Creative Writing and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California, Ray moved to Brooklyn, where they have

worked as a bookseller and special educator. When not busy pursuing their masters in middle school education, Ray can be found reading compulsively, maintaining their snail mail correspondences, or desperately trying to establish trust with the colony of cats living outside their bedroom window.

**Courtney Dudley** (she/her) is a passionate interdisciplinary artist with a specific interest in craft materials. Her practice includes research in archaic processes, resulting in creation of works that position the artist and viewer in relation to geologic and cosmic time, underscoring the brevity of current power and social structures. Courtney completed a MFA from Pratt Institute in 2018 and most recently attended residencies at Wassaic Project and The Studios at Mass MoCA. She has exhibited throughout Brooklyn and New York, including a 2020 solo show at Paradice Palase in Brooklyn. Follow her on Instagram @courtneydudleyart and visit her at [www.courtneydudley.com](http://www.courtneydudley.com).

**Xenia E.** (she/they) is a freelance writer and singer/songwriter. She graduated from The New School with a degree in literary studies. She loves movies with horses in them. Follow her on Twitter @ \_xeniae and on Instagram @xenia.elle.

**Jess Fry** (she/they) is a nonbinary lesbian artist living and creating in the US Midwest. Her formal background is in both oil and acrylic painting, but her most recent work is an experimental mixing of watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil as she continues to play with color, abstraction, and movement in her figurative work. Her art is a labor of intention and celebration for all that is femme, scarred, fat, aging, wild, wounded, raw, and honest about it. Grief work—death in all its kaleidoscopic forms and the labyrinthine navigation of trauma—is the soul of her artwork. She believes mourning is sacred, creative alchemy. She is inspired by queer mysticism, time travel, mourning rituals, shadow work, winter, and water. Follow Jess on Instagram @heartlandadventures and visit her at [www.jessicafryart.com](http://www.jessicafryart.com).

**Sylvia Gladstein** (she/her) is a Minneapolis based writer and artist. She believes that those who have the bravery to emote and connect will save the world. Follow her on Instagram @catharsisjunkie and on Twitter @katharsisjunkie.

**Brittany Hayden** (she/her) is a lesbian painter living in Brooklyn by way of Texas. She is soon to be a member of Oasis Studios with Paradise Palase 2021.

**Sarah Herbst** (she/her) is an INFP Pisces with a secure attachment style and *quality time* love language. Currently living in Brooklyn by way of California, she is attempting to function as a «creative video producer» though she does not dream of labor. Follow her on Instagram at @instahsarah and visit her at [sarahherbst.com](http://sarahherbst.com).

**Katie Aki Holloway** (she/her) is a 29-year-old, mixed-race sansei lesbian from Southern California, now living in Virginia. She earned her BA in studio art with a focus on printmaking from Sweet Briar College in 2013. She mostly makes gouache paintings, typically about a loving society in a cruel post-apocalyptic desert world, usually with a lesbian-centric narrative. Follow her on Instagram @miss\_luckyCat.

**Emery Jordan** (she/they) is a writer and multi-disciplinary artist from the Chicagoland area. She makes collages, poetry, illustrations, and sequential art about lesbian/dyke culture, afro-futurism, and mental health. Their work explores themes of Black culture, queer/lesbian identity, mental health, and spirituality. After viewing her work, think about the intersections of identity and culture in your own life. Follow her on Instagram @emmydoesit and @dykeagenda and on Twitter @emmydoesit.

**Kirsten Judson** (she/her) is queer, a writer, a producer, a poet, in no particular order. She lives in Los Angeles via New York. Find more of her musings on Instagram @sorrymsjudson.

**Janice Lee** (she/her) is a queer Korean-American artist/musician/goofball who is passionate about the intersectionality of queerness, racism, feminism, and mental health issues. She spends her free time painting brains, drumming in a band called Dykon ("because we're all Asian-American and queer"), and attempting to make music. Her Instagram handle is @jawniece and her art account is @janice.art.studio.

**Adrianna Lukaszewicz** (she/her) is a queer artist from Poland. Her illustrations are mainly inspired by other women, the LGBTQIA+ community, and social issues. Her featured work represents queer pride during global pandemic. Adrianna writes, "Celebrating our queerness and embracing our history is crucial. Our community won't be silent even in these difficult times. We're resilient and we'll keep supporting each other through the internet, despite inconvenient circumstances. My illustration is a reminder that even though we can't march on the streets, we can still celebrate our pride in a safe-at-home way."

**Tanya Marquardt** (they/them) is a genderqueer writer and performer, whose book *Stray: Memoir of a Runaway* was published in 2018 and named a Best Queer History & Bio in LGBTQIA2S+Magazine *The Advocate*. The performance version, commissioned by Theatre Conspiracy and written with Tim Carlson, toured both Canada and the US. Their essays have appeared in Medium, Huffpost, Howl Round, Grain, DanceGeist, and Plentitude Magazine. Tanya has performed with Jerome Bel, Mabou Mines, Ballez, the only animal, radix theatre, and the Leaky Heaven Circus. Their theatre works have been presented at Dixon Place, BAX, PuSh, VIDF, The Tank, Summerworks, foldA, the Collapsible Hole and the Brooklyn Museum. They graduated with a BFA in Theatre from Simon Fraser University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Hunter College. Currently, Tanya dances in their kitchen, writes memoir, and sends you all queer love during this strange, strange time. Follow them on Instagram @tanya.marquardt.

**Moonlight** (they/theirs) is a queer femme poet and performance artist. They have been a longtime featured artist with the Poetry Society of New York and their work has been shown globally, defying genre via mixed mediums of ground and aerial dance, performance art, sculpture, and poetry. Through work that examines the function of trauma in interpersonal experience, Moonlight aims to confront ancestral pain, perpetuate compassion, and heal the self & the audience simultaneously. Their work can be found on Instagram at @moonlight.uncensored, and through the PSNY website.

**Laura Beth Prevette** (LB) (she/her) returned to her Appalachian home after studying on the West Coast. Since 2012 she has been working in her hometown to create meaningful change by breaking down social barriers and creating an inclusive community. LB is a Fellow of the inaugural class of the Civil Society Fellowship, aggressive friend, and doting dog mom.

**Giada Rotundo** (she/her) is an artist who works near Milan, Italy. Her research was, at the beginning, founded on images of the past. Her art reflected the understanding of what has happened, at times forgotten, but represented in a modern way. Nowadays she is facing up new themes that include horror and splatter in art. She has collaborated with the Visioni Altre Gallery, David Goldman Agency, Pepita Ramone Space, Open Space Art Living, Metodo Milano Artist-run Space, Tirabasso Gallery, Passepartout Unconventional Gallery, Artepassante Project, Benjamin Mac Gallery, Tail Online Gallery and GalleriaZro. Follow her on Instagram @giada.rotundo.

**Tara Suess** (she/her) is a copywriter and painter living in Brooklyn. Follow her on Instagram @tarasucess and Twitter @realtarasuess.

**Mona Williams** (they/them) started out life as a very sheltered little Afro-Latinx in The Bronx. Through lots of time, research, and exposure to the real world they discovered how to live life comfortably in their own skin. Now based in Brooklyn, Mona works in the non-profit world to help ensure that other queer folk can feel just as affirmed and safe throughout their journey in life. Feel free to follow them on Instagram @CaptainxMona and Twitter @TheCaptainMona.

**Yuri** (she/her) is a queer artist from Germany. Her work is inspired by other queer women and the big and small things in their lives. You can find her on Instagram @yuriworldwide.

**Ally Zlatar** (she/her) holds a BFA in Visual Art & Art History from Queen's University & an MLitt Curatorial Practice from the Glasgow School of Art. Currently, she is pursuing her Doctorate of Creative Arts with the University of Southern Queensland. She has dualistic experience as a curator/ artist and has been involved in many projects and galleries globally. She explores her artist practice as a methodology that suggests the human condition is more complex than it is currently understood. Using primarily painting, she examines, instigates, and provokes notions of the individual experience through focusing on philosophical discourse, body image, embodiment, and ethics. Follow her on Instagram @allycardone and visit her at allyzlatar.cargosite.com.

WE DELIVERED THROUGH IT ALL.

NO FERRIS

6

Do not hold doors

5

Do not hold doors



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