

QUIRK-E The Queer Imaging and Writing Kollektive for Elders

QUIRK-E

Collected Writings

Volume I

November 2006

Congratulations on your purchase of Quirk-e's very first print publication. Good karma!

Quirk-e is the Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders. We began working together in spring 2006, and went on to become one of several pilot community art groups in the Arts, Health and Seniors Program - brainchild of the Vancouver Parks Department. We have been working together in this new form since September 2006.

We are 23 queer artists dedicated to telling our stories through combinations of words and digital imagery. We hope that this collection shows the range and depth of our various voices, and that it demonstrates our commitment to making honest art.

Claire Robson
Shelley Whitehead
(for the kollektive)

A GAY BOY IN A SMALL TOWN (A Fairy Story)

by *William Morrow*

row

ONCE UPON A TIME IN A CANADIAN TOWN,
A NORMAL PLACE, CONSERVATIVE, FUNDAMENTALIST,
CARING TO THOSE WHO CONFORMED
BUT REJECTING OF THOSE WHO DIDN'T,

there
was a
confused
fourteen
year
old
boy.

WHO WAS A SINNER!

He
masturbated
by himself
and with other boys.

WHAT WAS HE TO DO?

He
couldn't talk to
his parents,
family, friends or teachers

HE WENT TO HIS MINISTER.
THE MINISTER TOLD HIM THAT THE DEVIL HAD HIM
AND HE WAS GOING TO HELL.
THE MINISTER PRAYED FOR HIM.

THE MINISTER ASKED HIM TO COME ON SUNDAY AND STAND
BEFORE THE CONGREGATION SO THEY COULD PRAY FOR HIM.

The boy never came back.

The Road was Taking Me

by Claire Robson

I watched Luke negotiate the winding road around yet another fjord ("yet another fucking fjord," I swore inwardly). His Tubular Bells tape had ended, and he popped The Grateful Dead in the mouth of the tape deck, like a tranquilizer. As he sang along in his fake cheerful voice about Cajun women, whoever they were, I wished he'd go and find himself one, or any woman for that matter, and stick with her and leave me alone. His loyalty was one of the many things that made me want to hurt him.

Lesbian, I thought, trying the word out for the millionth time. I'm a lesbian.

Hello, my name is Claire and I'm a lesbian. But being lesbian sounded like having a condition, like being a diabetic. It meant being a sad person in the basement of a sleazy pub. I'm gay, I tried instead. It seemed a much nicer thing to be. No, I'm not married, I told some fictitious enquirer, I'm gay. It was like I was building a new identity inside me, stone by stone, each time I said it. I could feel the words piling up, becoming solid.

I'm gay. Actually, I said, I'm a big old dyke. I'm queer, bent as a nine bob note. I leave the fairy lights on my Christmas tree all year, because I'm like that. I'm a lezzy. I live with a policewoman on Lesby Avenue. Lezzy, lezzy, lezzy. I'm a big, butch, queer, dyke, bulldagger lesbian.

Each word was sharp and brought a little fear with it, like an inoculation, and a little excitement too. Each word was undeniably true. I could wind around the road as much as I wanted, but it was taking me to Oslo.

Did it Snow in Vancouver?

by Douglas Bacon

Did it snow in Vancouver
this week?

I guess so.

I guess it did.

I live in the West End,
and while there were
a few flurries
falling from the heavens,
for an hour or perhaps five,
no trace remained
for long
on the ground
or on parked cars
or even on trees –
not in our neighbourhood.

Of course
I could walk to Lost Lagoon,
and look to the North Shore
and delight
in the
stunningly
beautiful,
snow-capped mountains
that frame the edge of the
sky.

And at night
(which comes earlier and
earlier
now it's December)
I could see
the twinkling reflections
on the snow
of lighted ski-lifts
on Cypress,
Grouse Mountain, and
Mount Seymour.

They captivated me.
Their only competition
in the dark night sky
came from clear white
Christmas lights,
newly hung,
on apartment balconies
nearby.

Such a gift!
to be alive
and
to have eyes to see
this symphony in white,
this simple glow,
a metaphor of innocence,
a silent prayer
of ecstasy.
Amen.

Excerpt from the Memoir *Crossing the Fence*

by Gayle Roberts

It is Christmas Day morning 1951. Michael, an eleven-year-old boy, and his parents (George and Joyce) have just arrived in Toronto after emigrating from England two weeks earlier. After walking several blocks through a blizzard, they have just entered their hotel room and experience for the first time central heating. Michael wonders why English homes do not have central heating.

“Can you open the window George? It’s like an oven in here,” my mother asked my father.

“I’m going to turn the thermostat down too,” my father replied as he raised the bottom of the window a full six inches to allow Toronto’s frigid air to flood into the room.

I was amazed at how hot a room without a fire in it could get. I had never experienced central heating before. I was used to rooms with coal or coke burning fireplaces in them where, at times, clouds of black smoke would billow into the room. It seemed there were only two possible explanations for a smoking fireplace, something was wrong with the damper, and if that was not the cause, mysterious downdrafts were. Rooms without fireplaces were usually heated by paraffin heaters, which nearly always filled rooms with their distinctive smell. One never blew out the flame of these heaters, instead the fuel supply was turned off and the flame extinguished itself naturally. To do otherwise was to fill the room with fumes, which could only be removed by opening all the doors and windows for several minutes. Of course, the fresh air came at the expense of now having a cold room. When I asked why houses in England did not have central heating, the universal explanation by everyone from the “Old Country” was that central heating was not healthy.

Girls' Basketball and Friendships

by Roberta Claire

In 1963-1965 I played basketball for St. Francis Xavier University. In those days there was very little support for women's sports, financially or otherwise. The rules for women's basketball crippled the game. We had to stop after bouncing the ball three times. That was disastrous for me. I ran my heart out and it was virtually impossible for me to stop hard and fast after three dribbles. Inevitably I would take one or two small steps while stopping, and I would get called for "traveling". I was never able to bring out my best, to perform to my ability. As a result I wasn't played as much as I would have liked, especially during our second year.

That second year a new kid on the block, an American, was played a lot and I was played very little. On top of that Jody, the new player, became very close friends with my friend Carol. I felt that Jody had not only usurped my place on the team but that she had usurped my friend Carol too.

Many years later, after I had come out, I found out from Liz, a friend of mine who knows Carol, that Carol is also a lesbian. Carol probably discovered that she was a lesbian that year, with that woman. I think that Carol and I might have developed a deeper friendship if Jody hadn't come along, we might have been friends longer than we were.

Liz told me that Carol is a psychiatrist and that she tells the people from her hometown that she "works in a doctor's office". I wonder if Carol has so internalized our early upbringing that women mustn't shine, that women must toe the line, that she can't be joyfully open with the people from her hometown about the fact that she's a doctor, and quite possibly, about the fact that she's a lesbian. If that's so, that's too bad.

I remember Carol telling me while we were at university together, that I was insecure about my religion. I was at that time, but once I got clear that religion had little to offer me I left it behind. I kept the spirituality, but I dropped the dogma and moved on with my life. I feel free from religion now, and am a proud lesbian.

Say It With Flowers

by Harris Taylora

I didn't have much money, didn't have much courage. But I scraped together some of each and surveyed the florist's offerings for lovesick students. In a cold, glass case, long-stemmed roses taunted me - alluring yet aloof, petals pouting poetry of love. So like the female form. Your soft curves complemented those of the dangling rose, the only drape for your torso in the self-portrait you had tossed nonchalantly onto my sleeping bag on the floor beside your bed.

The roses commanded: "Say it with Flowers!" But at \$2.50 per stem, they also said "It's the thought that counts". Fifteen dollars would buy twelve red carnations, tax included. So what if I didn't eat for a week. I was fading to a wisp in any case. So a dozen red carnations and a card proclaiming the urgency of my love went FTD from Guelph to Toronto.

A nervous night passed. A week. Two. Stone cold silence. So I couldn't afford roses. At least they were red carnations - an impassioned heart could surely transpose their song of love.

Dignity be damned. I had your number. And you had mine.

"Did my 'package' arrive?"

"It arrived."

"Did you like them? The florist assured me they'd arrive by Valentine's Day".

Silence. "When I got home from my trip, there was a really bad smell rising from a box on my doorstep."

"I just wanted you to know I ...was thinking about you."

Sometimes it's best to be tongue-tied.

Leaving the Moonies

by Chris Spencer

An argument was under way- Josh said “God does understand our doubting, but his love is steadfast.” Helen sat to Josh’s left, nodding in agreement. Both believed that I should stay. I was equally convinced I would leave.

We were sitting in a cabin in the California redwoods. Outside, the sun streamed through the huge trees. Inside, the stove had gone out but the embers left a lingering smell.

Helen, slim with dark hair and glasses had been my companion to this point. Josh, sharp and intense, leaned toward me as if to emphasize his points. He spoke with great concern for me and a great sincerity in his beliefs.

I was absolutely ready, bags packed. Josh’s last point was “God would not wait, I simply had to make the commitment right now.”

“You’re wrong, Josh: God will wait for me” was my parting shot as I left.

Racing up the highway in my car, I turned on the radio – a newsflash announced that Mount St Helens had just erupted, no further details at that point.

and I also want to know the meaning of pain and death
by Margo Dunn

What increment of a day or lifetime is spent
per Kleenex,
soap sudsed beachscape soused in a handwash
sprinkle of salt, micromillimeter of shoe leather
energy exacted in calories per serving, billable hours, spare
change
each pinch of a penny, clamps and sutures re-re-counted

hullabaloo of paper tearing, ums and ahs, beeps, floppy
shoes
susurrations of traffic background music lawnmowers
the weight of each decision
the infinite succession of forks in the road

What is the measure of success?

What happens to wasted time? Where's the wasted time
dump? Do bears
scavenge crossed-out words standing staring bluedays
in bed constipation
clutter the floral pattern of forgetfulness?
Do vultures tear off hours in waiting
rooms, do binners bring them to the unused life depot, do
scarab beetles
recycle them, now shorter, to someone else?

banks of votive candles offered up for the souls in Purgatory
I swallowed my milk to help the starving children in India

If you know the question, ask.
If you know the answer, please fill in the
blank

Go Ahead See Me Naked and Free

by Robert St. Julien

Free of the lies I was shaped and formed in

Go ahead and see me naked and free

To look at the truth, to see it all clear

Go ahead and see me naked and free

See me naked of defenses; see me as I am naked and free

Go ahead and see me naked and free

Its okay you do not have to run from it anymore

Go ahead and see me naked and free

Without façade of having to be good or, whatever

Go ahead and see me naked and free

A breath at a time and a willingness to look

Free of judgment, fear and beyond shame and shaming

Let the tears flow, held back for so long, let them flow

As you are, as I made you, beautiful and free.

hell is not down below

by Judy Fletcher

the only light comes from the bathroom across the hall
the only sound comes from the kitchen below
the smell of whiskey and cigarettes enters my room
the mountain of a man
huge and bristly grey and greasy
stands over me

laughter floats up from below
apparently something is very funny down there
not so up here

in the corner of the bedroom there's a hole in the floor
it's the reason I can hear them having such a good time
i wish there were a stovepipe in it
as the farmer who built this place intended
it would provide warmth for me
and a connection to the people downstairs
there is none

my bedroom floats free
they're oblivious

my body floats free
i'm

oblivious.

Whose Candy is It?

by Chris Morrissey

Ghosts and goblins; caramel apples and candy; hot dogs & hot chocolate. These are memories associated with my first Halloween in Canada. I was eight and a half. Kids in the neighbourhood that I had met over the previous few months were all excited about going out trick or treating.

“Daddy, can I go out with the kids tomorrow night?” I knew to ask him rather than my mom who would simply say, “Ask Daddy.”

“Why? What’s happening tomorrow?” he asked.

“It’s Halloween and the kids are going out trick or treating. Can I go too? Please. Please.”

“Oh. Yes. I’ve heard of that ridiculous custom. No! No child of mine is going door to door begging. Besides it will be cold and dark and past your bedtime.”

The next day I broke the news to my newly-found friends. They were all older than me and fascinated by my English accent. “Oh well,” said Elsie, “You’ll just have to sneak out.” What an idea! I never even thought of that!

That night after what I hoped was a reasonable amount of pleading my case, I went sulking off to bed. I felt a little scared but I really wanted to go out with the other kids. After waiting what seemed like an eternity with heart pounding in my ears, I quietly and quickly put on some clothes and crept out the side door.

Elsie and the other kids were waiting for me with a sheet and in an instant I was transformed into a ghost. “Now remember. Don’t open your mouth!” warned Elsie

We went from house to house. The scariest house was the

Goudreaus. They were friends of my father's and I was sure they would recognize me or that I would forget and start to talk. Despite my fears, I was able to enjoy the hot dog, another new experience for me.

I ate a bunch of the candy but still had two shopping bags full. What could I do? I didn't want to just dump it all or give it away. Then I had this great idea. I would hide it.

The next day, Mummy came to pick me up from the bus stop, little brother in hand. As we climbed the hill, I "discovered" two bags of candy in the bushes! "Well, I suppose you can take it home," said Mummy, "But you'll have to share it."

"How wasteful," said Daddy. "See how irresponsible children in this country are!"

I enjoyed my candy, feeling a little guilt but pleased with myself. I had done it!

My 17th Summer

by Greta Hurst

When I was 17, mother arranged summer childcare jobs for my sister, Kari, and me. We had no choice about taking these jobs where we would be supervised, earn a little money and, not least, wouldn't be able to move about freely as Lac Louise was unknown to us. I had just failed tenth grade and was despondent about the bleak future ahead as my father decided it was time for me to go to work. One of the reasons for my scholastic failure was I had fallen in love with Jimmy, the new boy across the street. It was a secret relationship as we knew neither his mother nor my parents would allow us seeing each other. It was probably one of the reasons that we were spending the summer some hours north of Montreal in an unknown and isolated area. I felt trapped in this boring job of minding children just slightly younger than I. I had also just discovered my sexuality in the privacy of my bedroom and was feeling very restless and lonely for Jimmy.

I decided one Sunday afternoon to paddle across the lake to spend some time with my sister. Asking permission to borrow the family canoe, I set off. It was a long trip but the sun was warm and I needed to get away from the family I was working for. I was also pining for Jimmy and wanted to see him but had no way of contacting him. I wasn't concerned about the long distance I was undertaking as I needed to be alone and to think about how I could get myself out of this situation.

Near the end of the afternoon's visit with Kari, I noticed the sky suddenly turning grey and threatening. As summer storms in the Laurentians come up quickly, I decided to paddle back immediately. It happened in the middle of the lake. Luckily the wind was blowing the waves in the direction I was going but although I had been swimming since I

was six, I still find deep water scary and no one knew where I was. Suddenly the rain poured down, thunder roared and lightening flashed close by; I was terrified. I decided to sit in the bottom and middle of the canoe and paddled furiously. I was soaked to the skin and frightened I'd overturn the boat because of my inexperience. Despite my terror, I knew I'd make it to shore. I was resolved—I wasn't going to die at 17. All my life I was a shy, obedient child; I did what I was told and seldom argued. Where had that gotten me? I didn't want to stay with this family where the wife suddenly decided she was inviting lots of people next Saturday night and I, not asked, was to serve canapes. I was missing my first real boyfriend who was working in the city and I wanted to see him. In those frightening moments, I became a determined woman. I was a child no longer and I was paddling for my life, not a grave at the bottom of the lake.

My First Drag

by Pat Hogan

Seventh grade, Putnam Connecticut, population 3000, circa 1950. Linda Carleton moves to town with her mother and sister in the upstairs apartment next to Daisy Thatcher's, our landlady. Daisy owns 24 cats who eat with her at the table. We think it's disgusting. Linda's new home is across the street from the war monument, where Putnam's parades start—4th of July, Memorial Day and others. The Mansfields are also Linda's neighbours, a New England family going back for generations. I lived around the corner at 40 Brown Street.

Linda was everything I wasn't. Cool, sophisticated, wore makeup, talked about things I knew nothing about, dressed in tight skirts, hush puppies short sleeved sweaters—the new synthetics. MOST impressive about Linda though was she had total freedom to do what she wanted!!! I was in awe. And...she smoked!!!

I found out she, like me, was raised by a single mother, no father in sight. Unlike me, however, her mother was DIVORICED and glamorous! Deep throaty laugh, red lips, blond hair. She and Linda acted like girlfriends, not mother and daughter, talked about sophisticated things. A divorced woman, alone, was unheard of in Putnam. It hinged on scandal, titillation, and for me, awe. Linda's mother dated and as mentioned, let Linda do what she wanted because she was too busy with her own life. Elaine, Linda's younger sister, was more or less raised by Linda.

My mother, on the other hand, was a widow, raising 3 kids on her own since my birth. She worked hard, didn't have time nor money to "fix herself up". I was often embarrassed because she didn't look like other mothers who didn't go off to work, who had time to sit on the porch, who dressed up occasionally..

Linda loved to come over to our house. Much later in life she told me it was because we had the family life she didn't have, kids hanging out on our porch my mother welcoming them. It was a warm atmosphere. At home, no one was there for Linda. Funny, isn't it; I envied her.

One day, Linda came over with cigarettes in her pocket. We were about 12 years old, in the 7th grade and a year younger than everyone else in our class. She pulled out the cigarettes, looked me in the eye and said "want to try one?" with a challenging grin. Gulp. I was shocked, but tried not to show it. I couldn't say no.. I had to act cool I reminded myself.. "My mother will kill me if she finds out" I blurted out, instantly realizing how dumb and childlike I sounded. Linda replied reassuringly, "Oh don't worry, she'll never know. We'll hide it". That was all I needed to hear. Of course. Linda has done this before; she knows what to do. No need to worry.

We decided to smoke in the back bedroom which I shared with my sister She wasn't home. We closed the door, opened the window and sat on the old cedar chest that had been in our family as long as I could remember. Linda lit up a cigarette with a lighter—another example of her sophistication!—took a deep drag, blew circles of smoke out the window in view of neighbours' houses, and then handed it to me. I tried to imitate her but my first intake was disastrous. I coughed and gagged gasping for breath, then dashed to the bathroom for a drink of water. This was not looking good! Linda laughed and told me not to worry, it would get easier. And it did, puff after puff.

We probably didn't smoke much but then it seemed so. We blew smoke out the window, not to leave traces in the bedroom. I wonder what Mrs. Lattici, a tiny Italian woman who lived behind us, hanging clothes out on her line, thought as she glanced up at our window frequently. I could have cared less. Linda and I talked and laughed for what seemed like hours and I felt very grown up and wise.

At dinner that night, after Linda had gone home, my mother turned to me mid meal asked if I had been smoking. "Of course not" I replied with a shocked voice. My mother went on, in a stern voice, "Well, why then, was I was hit with a cloud of smoke when I walked into your bedroom? Do you still say you didn't smoke?" Which was worse, smoking or lying? I should never have closed the window. I'll get now and Linda goes home scott free.

Contributors

Bill Morrow
Chris Morrissey
Chris Spencer
Douglas Bacon
Greta Hurst
Claire Robson
Gayle Roberts
Harris Taylor
Margo Dunn
Pat Hogan
Roberta Claire
Robert St. Julien

Layout by Shelley Whitehead

For more information about QUIRK-E, contact:

Claire Robson: crobson@dccnet.com
Shelley Whitehead: s.whitehead@inbox.com
Juan Gabriel Solorzano: jugasolo@gmail.com

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