



A Zine by the Quirk-e Memoir Writing group

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### **Quirk-e** is The Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders

The members of Quirk-e challenge stereotypical representations of what it's like to be old and queer through their writings, artwork and performances. We are committed to intergenerational dialogue. We meet at Britannia Community Services Centre in East Vancouver. We receive support from Qmunity and from the Arts and Health Project, City of Vancouver. <https://planetquirke.com/>

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## Queer 2018 in Vancouver

by Ellen Woodsworth

This is one of many mornings that I love. We bundle up and go for a walk along the pulsing Fraser River. It is rushing to the sea and the ocean tide is pushing against the flow. Seagulls, ducks, sometimes an eagle or two are soaring overhead buffeted by the wind. I love the intensity of nature along the Fraser on a cold winters day. Everything is struggling to live. A tug goes by pulling a huge boom of logs. Etsuko takes my hand and shares her latest crisis at the care facility or in a family home and I listen while taking pleasure feeling the warmth from her hand in mine. We are becoming a comfortable couple, which feels really good to me after several years of being alone. I remember our first walk along the river when twelve eagles soared overhead. She felt that it was a powerful auspicious omen about our relationship.

My feeling start to shift as I notice that people especially men, turn to look at her or us with a hostile glance, but especially her as they pass us on the narrow trail. I feel uncomfortable and a bit unsafe. I wonder if they are taking a second look because they can't tell if she is man, woman or trans. She had breast cancer so has only one breast. She wears a low baseball cap, jeans and a dark jacket. She has darker skin than I do as someone of Asian origin so they can't tell if she has facial hair. I think that she really does look androgynous.

There is nowhere to avoid the other people on the walk. The river is on our right only a couple of feet away and there are bushes on the other side. I try to ignore their stares and just pay attention to her. I don't say

anything because I don't want to disturb her but realize that she has been dealing with these looks for many years. I remember that when we were at the airport last spring she was constantly being pulling aside for security purposes. She was often addressed as sir or with some other male descriptor that she didn't like. She would become angry and tell me about what had happened. I wasn't sure how much of it was racism and how much was identity confusion coming at us. On the river it was really intruding into our private space.

I love the river because mostly people don't know me so I can relax into nature. I wonder if I will ever get used to these unfriendly stares. One woman almost spit on us. I think about how it isn't just homophobia, that I was used to, but now it was homophobia, trans phobia and racism I was experiencing with my new love. I guess a chunk of ignorance and curiosity thrown in would cover the emotions I am now facing walking along this lovely piece of river on an otherwise peaceful Sunday morning. The river battles the ocean, the tugs pulling their huge loads and the ducks foraging for their lunch. Like nature it is becoming a daily part of my life to fight for the right to my love as we push upstream against the power of the white, heterosexual culture..

## Meeting Marie-Belle

by Marsha Ablowitz

When my partner Laura left me after 18 years I was in shock, disbelief, suicidal then homicidal. A friend Sandra said. "Don't do anything for a year. Don't sell your house." After a year I stopped crying and I started to feel O.K. But I was achingly lonely. I needed to meet someone. But how could I start playing the dating game at my age of almost 60? I looked on the lesbian dating websites. The women were all so young. A lesbian relationship therapist told me: "Marsha don't get involved with the first woman you meet. Lesbians tend to do that and it's not a good idea. Date around first."

But I had no idea how to date around. I asked all my friends and colleagues to find someone for me but no luck. One day I met a very cute nurse at work. She had dark eyes and worked on call one floor down. I thought she might be Jewish like me. I ran into her again at a COPE civic election party. My friend Ellen said that the cute nurse was a single lesbian and gave me her phone number. I was scared to call. A few weeks later Ellen nudged me along: "Marsha just call and ask her for coffee." My hand was shaking as I called. .

"Umm this is Marsha from the Midtown Mental Health Team. I met you at the COPE party and Ellen Woodsworth gave me your number."

"Yes I know who you are."

"Well...umm...would you like to meet for coffee?"

She didn't reply. ..Then she said: "I'm surprised, and flattered...but no. Thanks for the invitation."

"O.K. thanks." I said

She added "See you around."

I replied "Maybe, good-bye."

As I hung up I expected to feel rejected, crushed, but instead I felt excited energized confident." I did it." Then I was invited on a ski trip to celebrate a friend's birthday I was not keen to go because the weather report was lousy. But since it was for my friend I went. On the ski trip were two mental health workers Katherine and Ann. They asked me if I wanted to meet someone? "Yes! Yes" I said." "Do you want someone younger than you?" Katherine asked. " "No. I tried that, it didn't work. "I said.

They looked at each other and nodded. "We have a friend who asked us to look for her. She's about your age. She likes skiing and outdoor stuff."

"Good." I said.

'She's a mental health social worker."

"Good"

"She's separated from her husband. She's got kids and grandkids."

"Good."

"She's only got one arm and she hates people helping her."

"No problem" I said.

"She lives in Roberts Creek."

"No way. I'm a city girl. I want someone in Vancouver. I'm not interested in a commuter relationship. Where is Roberts Creek?"

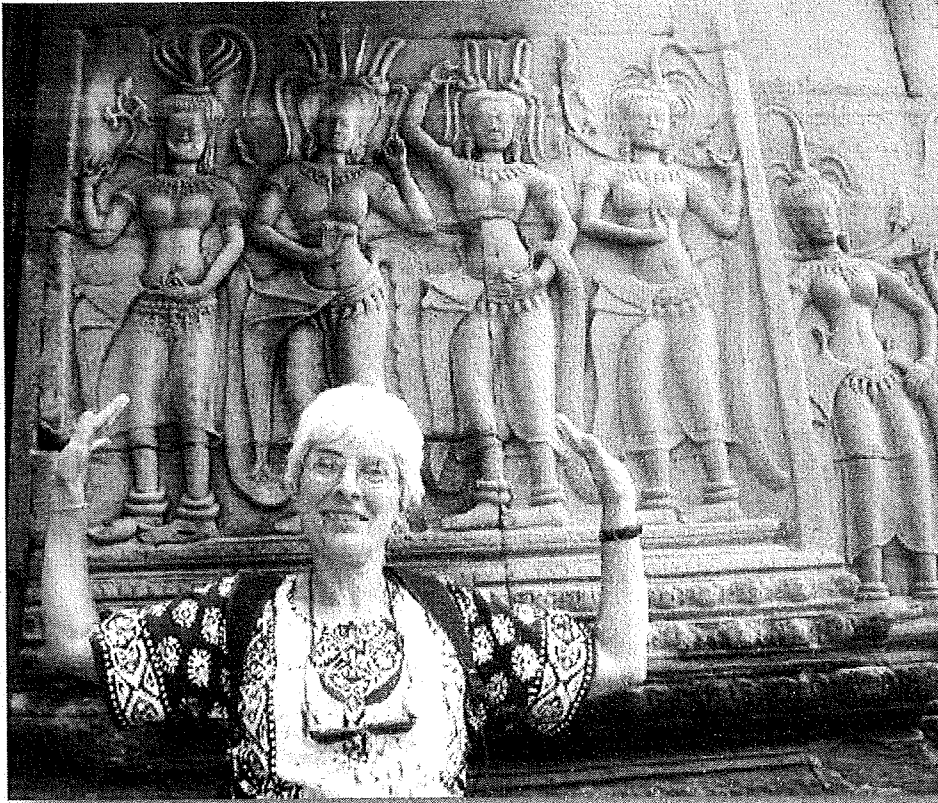
"Well you don't need to start a relationship with her. But you could meet to ski or hike. She's the most grounded mellow person we know."

"O.K. I'm always looking for a hiking partner."

I called Marie-Belle." Hi this is Marsha. Anne and Katherine gave me your number." She agreed. "I'll be in town on my way to Mexico. We could have lunch at the Thai restaurant near your office." She said.

Since Katherine and Anne had told Marie-Belle I was short she was expecting someone short and fat. She was pleased to see that I wasn't fat. I thought she was very cute despite having a broken collar bone and wearing a black polyester pant suit. On our first lunch I invited her to join our women's hiking trip to Mt. Kenya. On our second date she came to my house in jeans and a ratty sweat shirt. I relaxed. She dressed like me. I told her I was attracted to her. She said "At our age why wait." And she started kissing me and peeling off my clothes. "Umm Marie-Belle" I said. "Let's go up to the bedroom before someone come in."

She was a wonderful lover. I ignored the good advice from the relationship counsellor. Marie-Belle and I have now been together 16 years. I love Roberts Creek. I love her family, I love her dog. I even like the commute on B.C. Ferries.

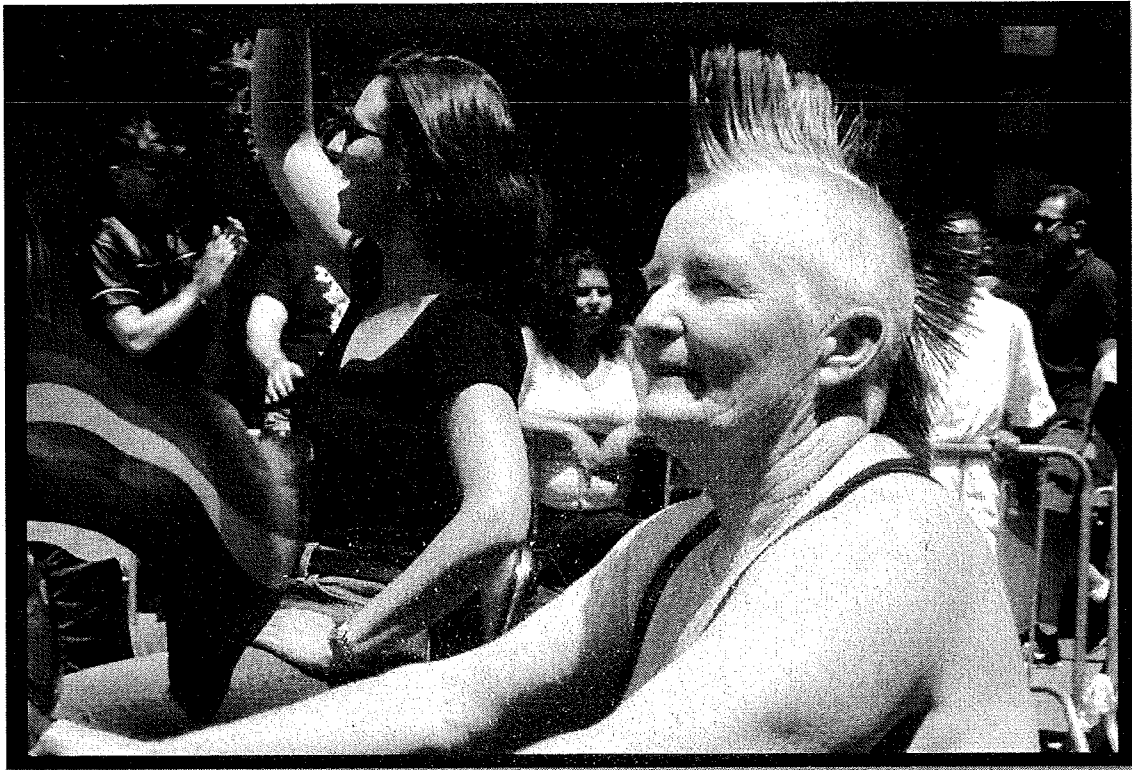


Marsha is looking for Marie-Belle



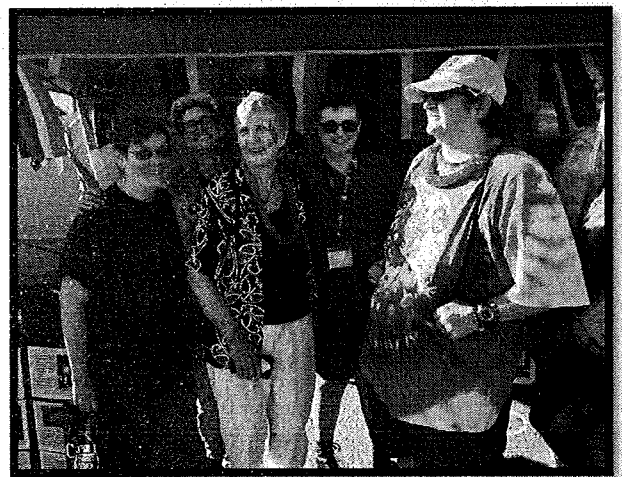
Here she is.

# Pride . . .



*Gay Lesbian Bi Trans Queer  
Questioning Asexual Intersex  
2 Spirit +*

*We stand proudly on our patch of  
grass.*





# **Chronically Queer**

**By Christine Waymark**

**The sun shone through a bank of windows as I entered the room. There were 2 desks with computers and cupboards that seemed to take up the entire wall between. Around the room were many posters. They were proclaiming things like “who is the queer” or events that were upcoming. Photos and rainbows were an important part of the décor. There was a circle of chairs in the middle of the room. Some were occupied, some waiting.**

**The first person I noticed was Chris. I already knew her. She stood out in a black t-shirt with a feminist design. She smiled as I came in the door. The woman in the wheelchair had a shock of black hair and a purple cloak loosely over her shoulders. She too wore black. A youngish man with tremors was casually dressed with an open neck shirt. A small bright-eyed man had a suit jacket, he might have removed a tie. A tall woman with grey flecked hair had her cane on the floor beside her. Another woman was lying on the floor. She looked young and slim. The final person was a plumpish man whose hands trembled. His hair was thinning and he looked sad.**

**Chris welcomed me into the group and said that we were all queers who lived with a chronic illness or disability. We did a round where each person said who they were and why they were there. I knew that I had found a place where I could be Queer and disabled. It was the only**

place where both were equally important and I could begin to see the interaction between them for myself and with others.

Later, we turned our talents to educating the Queer community about people with disabilities and the disabled community about Queers. I realized that after a long period of isolation because of illness, I had found my way back to my community and to my activism. This was a new beginning.

I will never forget the Pride parade where for two blocks I rode my shiny red disability scooter behind the Women in the Dykes on Bikes, my left arm raised in triumph and my right hand firmly on the going forward button on my vehicle. As our group worked together we found that by sharing our strengths and getting the help we needed there was little that we couldn't do. We experienced that "dis" ability was much less evident when we had what we needed. Three of us went on to join Quirke, one person moved into Vancouver from New Westminster to be nearer the resources she needed, another member went back to school. We made some lasting memories and friendships that will never be forgotten.

We named ourselves Chronically Queer and I, for one, felt much less disabled as we found what we needed to live in our strengths.

# Listen

by Cyndia Cole

Listen is the name of a young queer  
who says, "call me they."  
Not an easy ask for an old lesbian  
like me trying to unlearn  
almost seven decades of speaking a he - she world.

But I want to.

I want to make way for the new way  
they are creating.

I need Listen.

I need to listen.

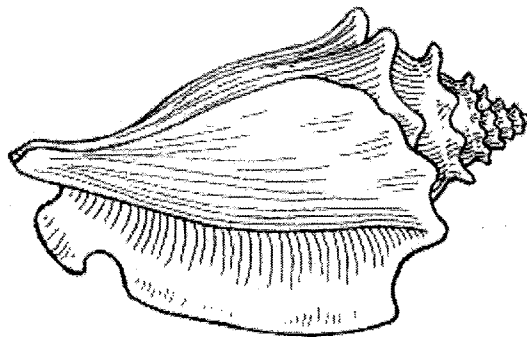
I fought so bravely in my youth  
to the refrain of the Freedom Song  
"keep on a-walkin, keep on a-talkin,  
gonna build a brand new world."

I love the youth who are doing this today.

Listen.

I can.

I will.



# So

by Cyndia Cole

So, bad things happen.  
It's such a shame.  
But what happened is not  
Who you are.  
So take your shame  
And crumple it up  
Like a first draft  
But don't toss it.  
Nothing is wasted.  
It's your story.  
You're the author  
So, re-write.

Strike through the evasions  
and cover-ups.  
Strike your anger against your hurt  
Like a match.  
Light it up.  
Fuel the re-telling.

Why fear the hurt?  
You already know hurt.  
So give the hurt meaning.  
It's not de-meaning  
Every story needs drama,

Even tragedy and trauma.  
The arc of the tale  
From shame and pain to compassion  
The tension in the line  
Makes the bow  
Propel the arrow  
So fast and fierce  
To pierce the heart.

No more bull!  
You are the toreador  
Magnificent with pride  
Dancing down the beast inside.  
Your fear turns to cheers of  
Brava, Brava, Bravisima!  
You, the protagonist, the She-ro

No need to write the trite happy ending.  
After so much suffering,  
The light of happiness is anything but  
trite.

The re-write is never an ending.  
It's starting anew.  
So powerful,  
So unexpected,  
So true.

***The Muff***  
by  
**Gayle Roberts**

The hallway was cold. Flakes of snow which had blown in with each opening of the outside door seemed to have a life of their own as they settled and remained unchanged on the row of coats hanging from their hooks arranged along a wooden board attached to the wall. Along the opposite wall, everyone's shoes and boots were similarly lined up underneath a narrow bench waiting for their owners' thick-socked feet.

Cousin Mary sat next to me. She was nearly two years older than me and we were celebrating her eighth birthday with a family outing to the pictures to see *Courage of Lassie*. Mary had long black hair, brown eyes and long eyelashes which curled upwards much more than mine did. She was pretty and I envied her. As we sat on the bench, I noticed that Mary was struggling to get her unworn fur lined boots onto her feet. They were the nicest boots I had ever seen. Unlike my boots, which in my mind were big, ugly, and heavy army boots, hers had no laces and were made of soft light brown leather with collars of fur just below her knees. They didn't have big metal cleats and Blakeys. They didn't shout out "tap, tap, tap" like mine did as I walked across the linoleum floor. In some strange way, my boots said loudly to me and for everyone to hear, "man, man, man."

"Don't forget to put your scarves on," Auntie Hilda said to Mary and me. "And button up well," she continued as she took our scarves and coats off their unreachable hooks and passed them to us. "It's bitterly cold out there. We don't want you coming down with colds." Auntie Hilda was the oldest of my aunts and she always took charge when things needed to be done.

I liked my winter coat; it was different. It always reminded me of the navy and sea captains. It was light brown and it didn't do up with buttons. Instead, I slipped wooden toggles through short loops of cord which were attached to the coat. I turned the collar up in anticipation of the blowing snow outside. Mary's coat was ordinary; it was red and done up

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1 The Muff, a short story by Gayle Roberts, will be published shortly as part of her upcoming book *From Shame to Freedom: A Gender-Variant Woman's Journey of Discovery*.

with buttons. I found myself wondering why it so strongly drew my attention. It wasn't the colour or what it was made of as I had a similar coat. Strangely, I realized that it was because Mary's coat did up on the opposite side to mine. That meant that it was a girl's coat and Mary could wear it. Her coat was also longer than mine and, even though she was wearing a party dress, her legs would stay warm unlike my bare legs with their nobly knees protruding from my short trousers. I had to hope that my socks would stay up and not fall down as they usually did, untidily, around the tops of my boots. As Mary finished doing up the buttons on her coat, she pulled out of one of the pockets a patterned knitted woollen cap which covered her ears. I watched her push back her long black hair around her shoulders and then created a huge bow under her chin with two woollen ties with bobbles on their ends. Mary was lucky.

"Don't forget to put your gloves on," Aunty Hilda commanded as she stood all bundled up next to the front door with her hand on the knob. I reached into my coat pockets, withdrew two woollen gloves, and dutifully slipped them onto my hands.

"Where are your gloves?" I said to Mary as I noticed her bare hands.

"I have a muff!" Mary said with the emphasis on "I". "It matches my boots." With that, Mary picked up her muff from the bench where she had been sitting, placed the loop of cord over her head and tucked it under the collar of her coat. The muff hung at waist level waiting for Mary's hands to slip into the welcoming cocoon of fur.

The only muffs I had ever seen before were at the pictures where elegantly dressed women and girls in long flowing dresses wore them when they were outdoors. Muffs, I learned, were for the rich and well educated. But, most importantly, they were never for boys and men.

"Here, try it. Put your hands inside my muff. It's so warm," Mary said as she bent over to lower it for me.

"Boys don't wear muffs," I replied with disdain and stomped over to stand beside Aunty Hilda at the door.

"Are we all ready for the big, white world out there?" Aunty Hilda said opening the front door for us.

Mary stared at me for a moment, put her hands inside her muff and walked through the doorway with her head held high. I followed her into a world of whirling snowflakes and coldness that quickly engulfed me and chilled me to my core. It was an empty, silent world. I thrust my hands deeper into my pockets and walked on.



J. Fletcher.

*Don't go . . .*





## **Ericka** by Lari Souza

Morning, August 9, 2011  
Indore, Madhya Pradesh - India

She had been in the hospital for almost a month and just a few days earlier had been transferred to the intensive care unit. Her condition was deteriorating fast and the treatments did not seem to be effective anymore. Her skin was pale and dry, the whites of her eyes showed blood clots which contrasted with her dark brown eyes. Her body was entirely swollen, doubling her size. She was not as talkative as she had been. I tried to talk to her several times but the most she could do was shake her head or squeeze my hand to respond to my questions. When I asked her if she was excited that her birthday was coming in 3 days, she tried her best to smile. She would be turning 33 and, as her oldest child, I had just turned fifteen.

She was in so much pain that day, it was extremely difficult for me to look at her and not cry. She could no longer walk, so the nurse put a wrap around her legs that would vibrate to get some circulation and reduce the swelling. That used to be too painful but now she could no longer feel her legs. Her baths were now wet cloths that the nurses carefully ran down her body.

Friends were by her bed, trying to cheer her up and to get any word out of her mouth. They had brought cake to celebrate her birthday early. We sang happy birthday and I could see she was trying very hard to seem happy. But her pain was so great that she could barely smile. She couldn't eat the cake either.

Afternoon at Bombay Hospital

The doctors injected higher dosages of painkillers into her veins. She was extremely weak and losing her grasp on reality. She had told me to ask our friend Mishi to return her yellow dress and slippers because she missed them. I told her I would ask Mishi to return those things right away even though he had never borrowed them.

She ate a few spoonful of soup, it was the first time she had eaten something that day. I sat by her side quietly, watching her breathing and heartbeat on the monitor. She was very weak, she fell asleep for a few hours holding my hand. I vaguely recall that she talked to me after she woke up. It pains me that I do not remember what she said to me.

## A Very Warm Evening

She seemed to regain some of her strength, she had a smile on her face. However, she was extremely cold. She shivered. My brother, Vini was asked to bring blankets from home quickly because the hospital could not supply more. I rushed to her side and held her body as close as I could, hugging my arms around hers in an attempt to generate heat. She said nothing to me, she did not want to talk. She could not. Eventually, she fell asleep.

The doctor called me outside the room, and with a serious but sorrowful expression told me that the chances of her making it through the night were very slim. I began to cry and could not breathe. Since the others could not understand English, they kept asking me what the doctor said. Sobbing, I translated it into Portuguese for them. I regained my strength and pushed my emotions aside to go back into her room. I sat by her bed and told Vini on the phone to hurry up with the blankets.

August 10th, 2011

It was midnight, she was still and only semi-conscious. Her lips were extremely pale and dry. The hospital's blankets still did not keep her warm. We sat helplessly by her side. We hoped the doctor was wrong.

At close to 1 am, the nurse came to check on her. She was lying down on her right side, staring out the window. The nurse had to turn her in order to check that the leads on her chest were still in the right place. As I was standing directly in front of the hospital bed, the nurse turned her carefully.

The heart monitor went flat. The sound that would give me nightmares would not stop. I ran to her bed and began shaking her lifeless body constantly. I screamed. I cried out her name and pleaded to God to make that horrifying sound stop. The nurse came running to the room and forced us to stay outside. But it was too late.

That was the last time I prayed to God, that I believed in the existence of such a thing.

I held my mother's hand and kissed her goodbye. I hoped she could tell "god" what a bastard he was.

## **Travel to El Rocío, Spain, explains dairy label: *Riding Cream***

**by Paula Stromberg**

I am not one to sob in public. But when visiting a unique Spanish village this winter, I was aghast as tears of awe and snot wet my cheeks. I had been ambushed by beauty.

Let me start at the beginning: I had chanced upon Doñana National Park on Spain's southern coast, a UNESCO heritage site that is the most important wet-land ecological reserve in Europe — famed for birdwatching, Astrotourism — and oh my goodness... so much more.

At the outskirts of a village, the streets grew strangely deep with sand, so I parked and began to walk towards several horse-drawn wagons of Spaniards holding picnic baskets. Gaydar kicked in: I noticed a group of young guys with man buns, smooching each other over champagne flutes in a gaily-painted carriage. Ah yes, LGBTQ-friendly Spain — among the first countries to allow same-sex marriage. I felt extra happy to be here.

As I approached a village square, I heard jingling harnesses, thudding hooves; smelled grassy manure and saddle leather. Were they shooting a movie? Hundreds of horses were prancing on side streets and through the square — dappled-grey Andalusians with big necks, long tails, and the magnetism of movie-stars. These are the white Andalusians famous for ariel kicks and horse ballet. Some tossed their long, rippling manes while others, arching with button braids, did cross-legged diagonal trotting or the proud Spanish Walk.

It is one thing to see horses in a show ring, and quite another to wade through traffic jams of these flamboyant athletes, to smell the sun on their elegant, sweaty flanks — to walk beside horses on spring-loaded hooves ridden by Spaniards with gleaming boots and a whip. I raced down one street and the next.

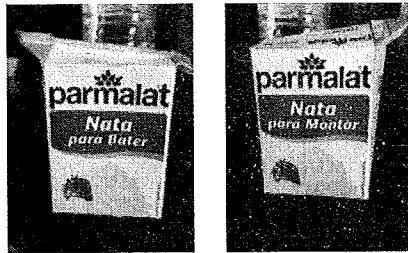
The village of El Rocío is a modern-day Wild West, where proud Andalusian horse owners socialize along wide, sandy streets lined with white terrace cottages, fronted by verandas and hitching posts. I walked past two alfresco dinner parties with guests' breath-taking horses tied out front.

Everything happens on horseback here: Riders socialize at corner wine bars. Window shoppers trot past stores selling fringed shawls and flamenco dresses. I

snap photos of three fierce-looking young women in flat-brim hats, puffing cigarettes, texting and taking selfies on horseback.

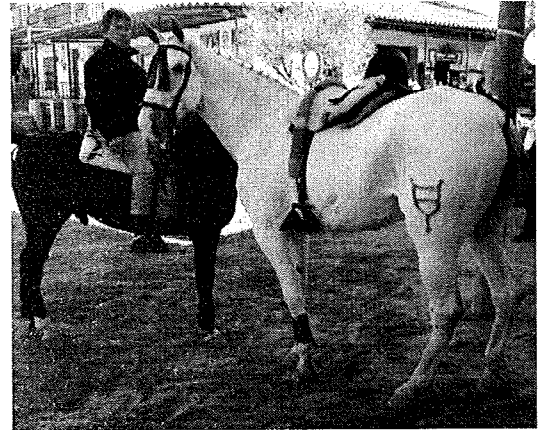
Did I mention everyone carries a whip? Children in tailored vests drove miniature donkey carts with long whips bobbing beside them, and women in ankle-length skirts ride traditional side saddle, clutching cell phones and whips.

Normally I am not horse-mad, but I am counting the days until I return to Spain's magical village of El Rocío.



**Cultural differences:** Google translated the product name on these Spanish cream cartons, Nata Para Bater & Nata Para Montar as 'Riding Cream' — Not Whipping Cream but Riding Cream. Perhaps Whipping and Riding seem synonymous in never-a-horseless-moment Spain.

El Rocío is also internet-famous for a religious gathering each June when a million pilgrims and 15,000 horses trot into town and carry a virgin's statue down the street (Madonna of the Dew) .... but the horse scene itself is year-round.



Andalusians are rockstars of the horse world. But they keep a common touch. One actually turned her head one way and then the other, staring into my camera with wet, kind eyes. Stars expect photographers.

Run with the bulls or prance with Andalusians?

## Going Up the Mountain

by Greta Hurst

Memories started coming to me, driving the long, serpentine road up to the Simon Fraser University campus. We were going to speak with students in residence as guests at their intergenerational LGBTea. Many years ago, I had taken courses at SFU, but the other two speakers, Cyndia and Jill, lived in residence when they were working towards their degrees. I could now understand how isolating being so high up on the mountain truly is. It reminded me of the isolation I felt when I came out, left my family home in Belgium, and the women in the neighbourhood damned me to my face about my abhorrent move.

The room in the residence where we met in was dreary. Sectional seating filled a lot of the room but the plastic covering had seen much wear and tear. It brought back memories of the dingy former post office in Brussels where our feminist meetings were held. A lot of amazing experiences and knowledge came to me in that place so I hope some students connected with our experiences, listening to us. I'd be thrilled to hear that.

Our hosts, Emerald and Russell brought in coffee and timbits. Just after 6PM, people started arriving. There were four women and six men; their ages ranged from late teens to mid-20s. Many people didn't seem to know the others. One young man shared that he came out at 13 when he had been living in Toronto, which was definitely the most established gay scene in Canada at the time. I also experienced that openness when I lived in Toronto in the 80's for ten years, enjoying meeting queers and participating in interesting, fun activities. Russell shared he had many queer friends but, to his regret, had no queer community on campus.

Emerald and Russell were both C.A.s Later I found out this is a person who is paid to support dorm residents in their academic and personal lives, providing them with resources, organizing events for them to have an opportunity to learn and build community as well as responding to crisis. They would be on call for 24 hours if a dorm student was feeling

suicidal. They wore a 'button' on their clothing which signaled the wearer when a student called asking for help. I thought it was great that there are young queers with this responsibility.

We had been asked to tell our 'coming out' stories. I told the story of Bill (another Quirke member) who, in his early teens, confided to his minister that he was gay. The minister told him that he had to confess to the congregation on the following Sunday, asking for their prayers and forgiveness. Because of this, Bill didn't go back to church. This intense homophobia was not unusual in the 1940s, a time when gay men went to house parties to meet other gay men asking, at the door if Dorothy was home which was the code to gain entrance. In the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy's friends were played by actors presumed to be gay. Police invaded bath houses and arrested the men they found there. Later the police would give the names of those arrested to reporters who printed their names in the next day's newspaper. Being "outed" in that era could destroy your life. Some lost everything, others killed themselves.

I had my first love affair with a woman when I was in my early 20's in 1957. I had told my sister in strict confidence but she immediately told our mother. Mother ordered me to stop seeing my lover or move out of the family home. I chose to move into my lover's and her husband's home. (He didn't know the real reason why my mother kicked me out.) All my friends that I shared with my sister disappeared – I never saw them again. Not knowing any other gay people, we were very isolated. And a year later my lover returned to her home many thousands of miles away. Three years after that, on the advice of my mother, I married my husband. I came out as a lesbian 20 years later in the 1970's, when I was in my forties. Probably the most painful experience of my life was leaving my three young children with their father.

Hopefully by sharing our stories, it helped our audience to understand how queer history evolved to the present day and how much more needs to be done. I don't want any of them to live through so much isolation when the possibility of community with each other is right there on that mountain.

# Contributors



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*Gayle Roberts*



*Greta Hurst*



*Christine Waymark*



*Cyndia Cole*

The Most Important Person is

The One right in Front of You.

The Most Important Place is

This Patch of Grass on Which

We Stand

