

SHINING A LIGHT



ON RAINBOW LIFE

A ZINE BY THE QUIRK-E ZINERS

QUIRK-E
Queer Imaging & Riting Kollektive for Elders

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We are grateful to be living and working on the unceded and stolen land of the Coast Salish people, the First Nations. We acknowledge the responsibility we have as colonizers to reconcile with and support Indigenous Nations. It wasn't until 1960 that First Nations people were allowed to vote, and it wasn't until 1996 that the last horrific Residential School was closed. Canada stole their land and their children and still operates under the oppressive Indian Act. We must do better.

INTRODUCTION

Val Innes

The purpose of the Quirk-e Zine group is to provide a platform to write on specific topics that are important to us as individuals, as members of our queer community and our larger society. In this zine we called for queer elders to write about what their lives have been like, what's important to them and what matters, under the heading *Shining A Light On Rainbow Life*. So the focus is on facets of how our lives have been and still are as seen from a queer elder perspective because if we don't tell our stories, no one else will do it for us. We have lived through major social, attitudinal and legal change for queers in our lifetimes in Canada, and how we live those lives is important, personally and historically.

In the background of the writing of this zine, of course, is currently a hugely uneasy world, which affects us all whatever our sexuality or gender. We live in difficult times these days. There's climate change forcing a planetary crisis of a magnitude that our civilizations have never before faced, one that many would rather deny than face. There's the Israel/Gaza war, front and centre in the news, and there's the Russia/Ukraine war. Both are heartbreaking and both have massive involvement of the military industrial complex which is making huge profit off human misery. At home, there's the consistent racism and colonialism that birthed Canada and which continues. There is also the ongoing national public health crisis in Canada, and there's an increasing gap between the rich and the poor with poverty affecting seniors even more. Also, there are serious questions about how democratic our democracies really are and how well we take care of each other and of our seniors. On top of that, for we queer elders, there's still the homophobia and transphobia of a small but very vocal minority.

However, even difficult times have their good facets as well as their bad ones. One of the good facets is that we're part of steadily growing movements fighting for change -- real, positive change. We also have the experience of being able to change attitudes, law and political policies as we did in winning queer civil rights and marriage rights over twenty-eight years of protest and legal action, so we know, at a gut level, that we can make change happen. Our stories will reflect some of that history and that ability to work for change.

Queer people live lives just like straight people in many respects: we eat, drink, shop, care for our families, fall in love or not, go to school, travel, find work, have friends, and celebrate birthdays and marriages; we build lives for ourselves. And then there's the other side; we're different from the mainstream, and we know it. We're often far more politically involved than most heterosexual people because we have had to be. Our families tend to be extended families of friends and other queers as well as those related to us who might or might not support us. Quirk-e itself is family to most of us in it.

So now let's have a look at the stories, the lives of our queer writers. There's memoir, fiction, and non-fiction as well as some art; you'll find all kinds of creativity here. But first, a declaration to note.

QUIRK-E DECLARATION

The Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders hereby declares its adherence to the Canadian and BC Human Rights Codes, including, but not restricted to, prohibition of discrimination in publication or speech, because of the Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or age of that person or that group or class of person.

REFLECTIONS ON A QUEER LIFE

Annie Newman



This is me in September 2023 looking out onto the Petrified Forest National Parklands in Arizona.

As I reflect on what my life has been like living as a queer person, I realize that I experience myself much more fully. By saying that, I mean that coming out and being open about my sexual orientation in 1996 helped me get in touch with my life energy. For instance, I can now be the same person who relates to friends, family members, and organizations. I don't feel like I have to split off and hide my desire for women from anyone. I have become more aware of the parts of myself that struggle emotionally and spiritually, yet are looking for creative outlets as part of my healing process.

I was 43 when I came out, and the real struggle for me was hiding away from myself and others for decades and decades: one unhappy heterosexual relationship after another. I turned to Buddhist Meditation Practice in my late 30's, wondering if I could find a way to get rid of the deep unhappiness I was feeling. I discovered that learning to meditate wasn't about "getting rid" of anything, let alone my suffering, but rather, acknowledging my experience and exploring it. It was hard work, attending retreats, focusing on my breath, being in the present moment. The last place I wanted to be, at times! But paradoxically, it was a success, despite being honest about my misery. I didn't have to tense up in denial anymore.

I've been in a happy, evolving relationship with a lovely woman for twenty-six years now. We keep learning about our new strengths and vulnerabilities while creating our retirement amongst our family and friends. My community is a supportive circle of friends, many who I have known for over 30 years through work and community groups. They are family to me. My immediate family consists of my younger sister. We have weathered the loss of our elder sister and parents together, which has brought us closer. I am connecting much more actively now with my elder sister's sons and have been meeting up with cousins who live out of province. Extending the family tree roots feels gratifying.

Now, being 70, I can say that so far I have aged well as a queer, despite some major health challenges in my 50's and 60's. I always wondered, though, how my needs as a queer elder woman would be addressed in the health system. My sexual orientation has never been a point of inquiry by medical personnel, except for one long-term family physician I had. He asked in order to understand my family background, and me, he said. It was an appropriate question asked with respect. Otherwise, it is not a subject that is raised when I meet different medical people. I am treated respectfully, but not as a whole person with a sexuality.

I have been fortunate to be able to advocate for my health needs so far. Being a former mental health therapist has helped me become more sensitive to the value and need for self-advocacy and the obstacles present for many people in a complex health system which doesn't prioritize individualized treatment. I've had an occasional struggle speaking up and being heard. I had to repeat myself several times when asking a male doctor to see a female specialist for gynecological treatment. The male physician was vigorously offering the services provided by the family physician's office, and I had to state clearly that I wished to see a woman gynecologist. I did not have access to a female family physician. Travelling has always been a passion and educator for me, teaching, up close and personal, how people from other cultures and levels of opportunity make their way. I have been a long-time singer in a community choir,



called Out in Harmony, and love the community and music. It is an inclusive choir that extends its membership to include Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Lesbian, and Friends. It's a supportive singing group that identifies as "non-straight-and-narrow."

Being part of Quirk-e is a joy for me. I derive encouragement, connection, and inspiration. I have realized, through Quirk-e, that writing can be a potent form of social and political activism. My writing has increased since joining the group a little over a year ago, and I feel thankful to be a member.

From inside the sandy walls of Antelope Slot Canyon, Arizona. Like a natural cathedral!

THE LOVE THAT DARES NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

Lorri Rudland

In this bloated world of greed
Famine, flood and running blood

I fell, wounded, into eyes,
Black, as coal, like midnight's soul

Her eyes of timeless night sky
Broke my deep and darkening sleep

Black fire made the darkness melt
Healing pain in tongues of flame

Suddenly, our silence cleaved
The dogs of war, the righteous roared

It's blasphemy, unnatural,
They slashed and cried. But as she died

She whispered, Love is stronger than
The sword or pen of frightened men.

Surely she, who dared to speak
Love's name, is God, if God is love.



EVOLUTION

Adriaan de Vries

Confusion → Focus
 Separation → Advocacy
 Fear → Fulfillment

Looking back over the years that I have lived, viewing them as some progression, I start to see beyond the day-to-day incidents to a pattern of greater scope beyond the brushing of teeth, the going to work, the eating food to sustain the body. I see some evolution in my living. Much of this progress is beyond conscious doing. Although individual results were hoped for, and actions appear to be planned. They were. However, the destination was as much intuitive as it was conscious.

I straggled into my 20s, finally and reluctantly aware that I am queer. In the conservative time of the 50s and early 60s and growing up in a religious community and family, I was very confused by this inescapable fact of my life. I did not ask for this. I did not plan for this. How did this happen? If God makes us all, why did he make me a human being that he could not accept and would burn for eternity in punishment for that?

The confusion went much further. How do I live in this rejecting society? I felt like a pariah and could not face my own truth. I hid. At least, I thought I hid. I especially separated from my family, anticipating rejection and condemnation. I tried as hard as I could to act the way I thought I should. I hid everything about me and buried myself in academics, in work, and in hiding. During the week, I worked, kept quiet and did not discuss my life with anyone. On the weekends, I moved into my other world. I would visit my first queer friends who likely were as self-loathing as I was. Then we would go out to queer bars and clubs in a haze; a cloud of booze and drugs that I needed to be able to venture into the dungeon of my life. My weekend life was getting high, having one-night stands, and having a hangover in the morning and feeling guilty about the high but especially guilty about the sex.

Then an apocalypse happened. In my mid 30's, the world I was just getting to be OK with, detonated around me and my confrères. The life of hedonism without restrictions that I had secretly embraced was over. HIV / AIDS happened. Friends and my belatedly accepted community were dying. Once we knew how this happened, I felt that I could [should] be next in the Grim Reaper's clutches since I was no different from the people I knew who were dead. No one cared. The world at large noticed but did little. The attitude was that the queers brought it on themselves with their disgusting sex lives. I had to act. I had to help myself. I started to volunteer in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community with the queer grassroots AIDS Committee of Toronto. I marched for the first time in my life. I made myself dangerously [to me] visible in the wider world. I worked and fought for queers . . . and for myself. I was separate from the mainstream, but I had a collective, a community to which I realized I belonged, a community in peril. I had to help it, to fight for it. I raised money. I counselled. I did administration. I educated. I became an advocate. I became focussed on the highly personal: my identity and my life.

Perhaps this was the beginning of my queer self-worth. Five years into that pandemic, at age 40, I intuitively sought self-care through meditation and then through yoga. There was no careful planning as with all my other life decisions. I just sought it and did it. My instinct led me to self-care. I chose my diet with more care, finally choosing a vegetarian life after many false starts on that road. I exercised regularly – as much for looks in the queer men's premium on being buff but with the prophylactic effect of fitness and increased immunity – immunity being the key word of



the pandemic and my safety. I formed a relationship that would fill me more for some 16 years, growing together until we grew individually and struck out solo again.

At age 41, I moved to the West Coast and found my home: mountains and seascapes. With the move, I abandoned clubs and bars, again without planning it. I had grown into a person no longer needing the numbing that I found there. I recovered from burnout following years of advocacy and the psychic impact of HIV / AIDS. I allowed myself to follow my bliss.

At 51, I left the mainstream work world and spent a few years studying spirituality and healing my soul. Then I took a step I never anticipated in my early years. I worked for a queer non-profit. That was an unconscious choice to contribute to my community, and to grow myself in integrity, to greater fulfilment. By 61, I embraced my family. At my mom's funeral, I appealed to my brothers to keep on with periodic family reunions since I had no family of my own, telling them that they are my family. They embraced me fully and do so more each passing year. We reunite, coming from across Canada, the USA and beyond every three years. During my 60's, I expanded my life through therapy and by joining a group of gay hikers. I trained to become a yoga instructor at 68. I found like-minded friends, interested in health, the environment and personal, collective well-being. I found a soothing balm hiking in the mountains that I had been drawn to 20 years earlier.

I reached out to advocate for queer refugees after lengthy contemplation of my freedoms as a gay man lucky to live in Canada. At 71, I helped to bring an individual to Canada, and I found a son. That was an incredible experience of learning what unconditional love is, a huge first for me, finally realized at 73. My advocacy grew organically to embrace the underdog; especially institutionalized, systemic discrimination against queer seniors, POC, First Nations, addiction, homelessness, mental health, poverty and inequality.

I am now 77. I continue learning, growing, giving, and receiving much more than I give. I teach yoga 3 – 5 times a week with yogis who have practiced with me for years. In the past 12 months, I organized a gay men's discussion group, sort of a modern-day salon. I also joined a queer seniors' writing group, and that is allowing me to heal feelings and wounds that I have hidden from myself and the world for 70 years. It is an amazing liberation that I had never dreamed possible as a senior queer.

I am focussed on advocating for others and finally, for myself. I continue in amazing discoveries, learning and growth. I feel fulfilled. I am fulfilled.



Our next writer, River Glen, shares a story she wrote, a story of two very different queer relationships . . .

The Women Downstairs

River Glen

Upstairs . . .

The sun's last rays cast the living room in a orangey gold glow. The cat of the same colour yawned widely and stretched with his rear end in the air, then reassumed a curled up position. From the kitchen came the first whistle of the kettle.

"Mint or Rooibos, Sans?" From the kitchen, called Comfy over the noise.



Sans thought for a moment and replied, "You know it is five o'clock somewhere," which made Comfy laugh because it was actually six. Comfy set aside the tea making and found the chilled chardonnay and two glasses.

Dr. Sanatee Able smiled up from her book and then, reaching for the glass, enjoyed how the sunlight, just fading, still made the glass sparkle. Comfy sank into her pillowy recliner, taking in the sight of Sans' short afro, now frosting a little with grey, a halo around her handsome, heart shaped face. "How's the book? Worth reading? Comfy asked.

"Well yes it is already intriguing, with some interesting perspectives. How's the new cookbook you are reading so intently", Sans asked, with a slightly bemused mouth but affection in her eyes.

"Oh, it is full of beautiful pictures, and I think I have already decided to make a dozen things as soon as we hit tomorrow's Farmer's Market."

"Cheers to that good news;" Sans leaned over to click glasses.

A huge bang from downstairs just as the glasses met almost made Sans drop hers and, some of Comfy's wine splashed on her own hand.

"Oh dear, that doesn't sound very good. I wonder if it's going to escalate again tonight?" Comfy sighed wiping her hand on her old jeans.

Sans was never one for confrontation, especially in the heat of the moment, but carefully and artfully in the past had tried speaking with both Aluna and her current girlfriend Moodie. "Well they always seem to still be walking around after their kick ups, and they don't seem at all concerned who hears them. I suppose, if they are still at it after eleven, I'll try banging the floor with the broom handle," Sans said in the most no nonsense voice she could come up with.

Comfy chortled on her sip of wine, glaring at Sans in pretend dissatisfaction, "That's my fierce old dyke laying down the law. Hum, I could go down with some of the cookies I made as a peace offering and maybe it might cool off some of the heat."

Sans knew Comfy would bravely walk into to a lion's den with just a meat pie; she had just that much faith in her own ability to influence with kindness.

Downstairs . . .

The downstairs suite was smelling a little funky from dishes in the sink, overflowing trash can and an ashtray full of butts. Clothes were draped over chairs, and Aluna was raging about how Moodie never did a damn thing around the place. Moodie shouted back at Aluna, "You're working part time; why aren't you doing anything. Yesterday you were so lovey-dovey, bringing home take-out and putting up with my TV show, but today you are . . . your same old bitchy self."



"Oh, so I am to blame; you with the rich family, you who could pay for a cleaning service if you weren't so cheap," retorted Aluna, at even higher volume, bumping into the end table, making it and the lamp crash to the floor.

Moodie yelled, " My lamp, oh god, that lamp was my grandmother's, look you've broken it into pieces."

"Good, I hate your ugly old shit around here," snapped Aluna, dyed fire-engine red hair swinging and green eyes on fire. Moodie was crying now, not her usual manipulative tears but some actual real ones, feeling like a piece of her dead grandmother was just murdered.

"Oh, for fuck sake, you don't care about that junk; you're just trying to guilt trip me again. I'm going to the pub; maybe I'll come home tonight, and maybe I won't," Aluna threatened as she grabbed her jacket and car keys, making sure the door slammed on the way out.

Moodie sat back on her heels kneeling beside the damage. Her lanky brown hair curtained her face as did the fingers with chewed off nails. She rocked back and forth as all the things that had ever hurt her

started running through her mind on their well worn track, and she soon was keening for all her many losses.



Upstairs . . .

"OK," said Comfy, shutting the oven door, "the casserole is heating on low heat; we definitely will eat in an hour." Her hand tucked the blond, going grey hair behind her ear before reaching into the bottom cupboard for a tin and beginning to fill it with cookies she had made the day before. "I'm just going to run these over."

Sans stood leaning on the island looking at Comfy over the rim of her reader's black frame. They had been together 17 years, in the rent controlled apartment. Both home and the relationship had always felt forever. Sans quickly analyzed the situation and knew getting in the way of Comfy on a mission was pointless. She still had concerns about her petit wife getting in the middle of a volatile situation, so emphasizing her words by speaking them evenly and firmly, Sans merely said, "I hold you to dinner in an hour."

Downstairs. . .

"Yes, yes no problem, I'm just handing them the cookies." Comfy hurried out of the apartment and down the hall to the staircase. She did have some apprehension. Aluna could be very intense and Moodie never wanted Comfy to leave. And there was that time earlier in the spring when Moodie had a bruise on her face, insisting she had bumped into a door. Just as Comfy reached the bottom of the stairs she saw Aluna's back as she pushed her way through the door to the carport. Down the hall, she could hear the sound of Moodie's cries. The car door slammed, the third attempt to turn the engine over worked followed by the gunning of it and a squeal of tires. Comfy realized she was grasping the tin with nearly white knuckles, took a deep breath and centred.

Using the knocker, she also raised her voice trying to get Moodie to hear her, but not getting anywhere, she let herself in. There was a heartbroken Moodie and a broken lamp. "Come on Moodie, she's gone, let me help you up; there be careful of the shards with your feet." She gave Moodie another little while to sob sitting beside her on the none-too-clean sofa. "Here's more tissues. Do you want a drink of water?"

Moodie wiped her thin pale face and managed to choke out a "yes", as the intervals between sobs lengthened. Comfy looked for a clean glass in the near empty cupboards and found a mug. "So", she said carrying the mug back, "I am glad the lamp looks worse than you. Was it special to you?"

It took Moodie a few minutes to get out that it had been her grandmother's, and even when her parents wanted nothing to do with her once Aluna had come into the picture, her Gran had been glad for her. Gran was glad that Moodie finally had a roommate, girlfriend, or whatever they wanted to call it. Gran had given them some things out of storage to outfit the apartment. Then Gran had to go and die on her. This recollection brought on another wave of tears. Comfy knew listening was the best thing to do to gain control of the situation. She held Moodie's cold hand and encouraged her to first speak of her grandmother, and after a while got around to the fight.

"I am so glad I have you for a friend", Moodie said when calm, now sipping some tea and eating a cookie. She watched Comfy sweep up bits on the floor and set them on a newspaper with the lamp. "I do believe with some patience and good glue you could put this together again; you know the Japanese hold mended things in high regard," Comfy paused trying to think of the word for it, but Moodie said, looking around her, "What's the point it's all junk nobody really wanted," and that thought brought a new wave of tears.

Comfy glanced at her watch. She thought, oh boy, I better get back to my own life. She gave Moodie more tissues for a few more minutes, and then gave her a hug. "I have to go now Moodie I have

something in the oven. How about I come back tomorrow with some glue?" Fully extricating herself took a few more minutes, but by the time Comfy got back, Sans had only been waiting an extra ten.

Upstairs . . .

Comfy felt so good to re-enter her peaceful home. Sans looked up from her book and smiled first, in relief, and then raised an eyebrow quizzically. Comfy smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Juice the cat, otherwise known as Orange Julius or Jules, wrapped himself around her legs and began demanding his dinner. "Alright you two dinner is coming." But before she could take a step Sans jumped up to wrap Comfy in her lanky brown arms and nuzzled her forehead a moment.

"Hey how about that wine you didn't get to finish; it's in the fridge," Sans suggested.

"It will definitely take an edge off now," agreed Comfy. The rest of the night was normal domesticity. With really no discussion of the neighbours because it was anyone's guess what would happen next downstairs, but some degree of chaos was always to be expected.

Upstairs Continues . . .

"I'm glad we decided to go to the Farmer's Market early this morning. The fruit was flying out of there fast. I'm making the frittata with a fruit salad for our brunch. Does that sound OK?" queried Comfy separating those ingredients out as Sans put the rest away.

"Of course Sweetie. It will be delicious." Sans moved over to the window in time to see Aluna's car screech into the parking area. "I think Moodie went to work this morning I heard the dumpster lid comedown at the time she usually leaves."

"I guess Aluna found some place to crash. If Moodie went to work she must not have been upset about that," sighed Comfy.

"Let's take a nice long walk after brunch and enjoy our Saturday. My research project this next week is going to make for long days," Sans said.

"Well I can pick up some overtime too; they are short nurses in ICU." Comfy replied half distracted with her cooking.



Downstairs . . .

Downstairs things were being picked over, thrown into suitcases and boxes. "I'm taking the hairdryer," Aluna declared out loud to herself, "and the coffeemaker and the vacuum. The lazy slut never will miss it." That afternoon Aluna made two loaded car trips and before pulling out she noticed the upstairs neighbours strolling off holding each other's hands. "Those stuck up bitches were always taking Moodie's side," her words smouldered under her breath as she looked up at their deck. She bounded up the stairs leading up to it, thinking she'd toss a plant or two off, but by chance discovered another way to get her revenge. Feeling satisfied with herself, she got in her car and roared off.

Upstairs . . .

A couple of hours later Comfy and Sans made it home and were relaxing in their living room. Sans stopped mid-sentence and look around with a concerned look creeping into her face, "Do you see Juice anywhere?"

"Now that you mention it I haven't seen him since we got home," said Comfy and went to the bedroom calling all his names, looking under the bed, in the closet and even in the drawers because once he did get accidentally shut in one. Sans look about the office and linen closet.

"Where could he have gotten off to?" Comfy said still more confused than worried. "I let him out on the balcony earlier when I watered the plants, but he definitely came back in." She tried the sliding door, "Oh goodness, I did leave it unlocked; damn, am I losing my mind? If I didn't lock the door, maybe I let him slip back out."

"No, Comfy, I saw him on his cushion before we left on the walk."

"Did you really? We are always so careful what with the coyotes and traffic around here." Comfy started getting more anxious.

"Let's not think the worst yet, Love. Let's go down and see if we can find him. You grab the cat kibble bag, and we can shake it a bit. He always comes running when he hears that sound."

Downstairs . . .

Downstairs, as the sun was well into its slide to the west, Moodie came home, tired from being run off her feet at her waitress job. She came through the door and couldn't believe how much worse the condition of the apartment was in. Drawers open, contents everywhere. Bedding stripped off the bed. The door to the refrigerator standing open, and the CD's collection looked halved. Moodie stood there mouth gaping, and felt like the air had been sucked out of her lungs. The realization that Aluna had left her started to sink in as she sunk on to a chair. She would have cried, but she was cried out from the night before. She could only feel numb, which felt much better than the usual pain. She sat for a long time not really thinking, but when she did get up, she started putting everything right and then called her sister, from whom she'd been estranged because of Aluna's and her family's mutual animosity. "Delphia", she said, "I'd like to come for a visit."

Upstairs . . .

Upstairs the women were still busy after an exhaustive canvassing of the neighbourhood. They made up some flyers and went back out, taping them to every pole and the grocery store bulletin board. There was a lady in the neighbourhood who voluntarily ran a pet search website and call-in service, and they called her. They reassured each other. Old Orange Jules was chipped, and someone would help him.

Upstairs Continues . . .

The next morning quite early there was a knock on the door. Moodie was standing there looking fresh, well groomed and with two bags of clothes in her hands. "I heard you guys moving around up here, so I was wondering if you could give me a lift to the bus station. If not I'll call a cab, but I do need to save some money."

Sans slightly cocked her head with a glance back at Comfy. "Sure I can do it. What's up?"

"Aluna has moved out. I have decided I'll visit my sister. The landlord said I can get out of the lease. There were enough noise complaints and all, so he is happy we will be out of here," Moodie summed up the situation.

"But how are you?" Comfy came over and gave her a hug and brought her inside, while Sans got her bag and keys.

"Comfy, I guess I feel hurt but also relieved. My long conversation with my sister was good. She made one stipulation -- that I should talk to a therapist she knows. I think I might try it, I know I have been sad and anxious a long time. I can quit the job I hate, too, and find something closer to my family. I plan on coming back to move out my things in a few weeks."

"That sounds like a plan to me," assured Comfy. "You know we will help you move."

"Thanks so much for all you have done for me. I will always remember your kindness. Oh and the landlord is changing the locks today. He doesn't want Aluna back here."

Epilogue . . .

That afternoon the phone rang in the upstairs apartment. It was the SPCA, and they had Juice. Someone had dropped him off in a box anonymously late the day before, and they were short staffed and sorry they didn't call right away. The upstairs women never got confirmation about how he got in the box and dropped off, but they had their suspect in mind. At the following week's Farmer's Market, they ran into a couple of friends and found out Aluna had hooked up with Dolores. Some patterns just keep repeating.



And now, back to memoir with Janie's story . . .

SYNAPSES

Janie Cawley

Have you ever had every synapse in your brain yelling at you not to say what you are about to say? Everything you know about the person you are talking with tells you not to say what you're about to say. You know to the core of your being that saying what you are about to say will only make matters worse, and you say it anyway? Well, here is a story of how that can so easily happen.

I walked through the downstairs entrance to the house and up the stairs. Beth was in the living room waiting for me.

"Well, she said, "with one hand on her hip, "what do you have to say for yourself?"

It was late. I was exhausted. I'd been at the university marking papers and exams to get the grades in before the deadline. This is always a week-long ritual at the end of every semester. I had submitted my grades and was ready for a little celebratory activity. It was clear that Beth was not in the same frame of mind.

"What do I have to say about what?" I asked cautiously. I knew that every conversation that started with a hand on the hip could tip over into something called "processing". Being very new at Lesbian relationships – this was my first – I was not sure if this processing was an inherent part of being in a relationship with a woman, or if the processing that went on in our relationship was an anomaly. I certainly had no previous experience with "processing." Long drawn-out conversations about any topic were not something our family did, and in my marriage, it had quickly become apparent that all decisions were made by the father of my children, no discussion necessary.

"You know very well what," Beth said.

"Well, no, I don't."

"If you truly loved me, you would know what was wrong – You wouldn't have to be told." Beth now had both hands on her hips. This stance signalled a long-drawn-out session of processing that would only end when I saw the light. I also knew it was foolish to try and guess what was wrong as this would often lead to outrage over why I would think she would be upset over such a trivial matter.



Speculation as to what Beth might be upset about had fertile grounds as any past misdemeanour could resurface at any time. I hadn't replaced the dishes in the right place after drying them; my little talk with my daughter about not putting scotch tape on the toilet paper roll had not had the desired effect; I had closed the basement door too loudly . . . "

I looked at her and said, "No matter how much I love you, I can't read your mind. Really, I want to know why you are so upset." I knew full well that guessing was not a good move, but desperation led me to ask: "Are you upset because I have been home late all week?"

It was my best guess. It seemed an unlikely source of irritation as she knew that this always happened at the end of every semester. We had agreed that my working at home was not a good idea as I seemed unable to confine my grading to one room, or even two. Equally she was unable to tolerate clutter, even for a short period of time. The probability of this guess hitting the mark was even more unlikely because I had spoken with her on the phone three times during the day. All three times she told me how sorry she was that I was stuck grading those horrid exams and papers, and she knew how she was going to cheer me up when I got home.

"Why would I be mad at you for that?" Beth responded.

I had fallen into the guessing trap. It could go on for hours. In the midst of pondering what else could have triggered this processing session – I used to call things like this argument, but I was now enlightened – Beth suddenly took her hands off her hips and looked at me intently.

“Do you think I am over-reacting?”

This was when my screaming synapses kicked in – Say no, for God sakes, say no. I knew that to say anything but no would kick this whole “discussion” into overdrive. But I couldn’t help myself.

“Well,” I said, “yes, yes I do think you are over-reacting.”

As the synapses predicted, this answer was not the answer Beth was looking for. We now started off on a whole new topic.

“You never respect my feelings about anything. How could you possibly say that I am over-reacting when it's my feelings we're talking about?” The issue of my not respecting her feelings, obviously the ones I would know she had if I loved her, went on for another hour or so. Suddenly we returned to the issue that had started this whole – whatever it was.

“Don’t you know how it feels to be home alone night after night?” Beth asked.

Ok, that was a conversation stopper, or rather should have been a conversation stopper, but I plunged in, admittedly somewhat indignantly.

“But when I asked you if it was my being late that had upset you, you asked why you would be mad about that.”

“Well,” Beth said, both hands now back on her hips “that was because you clearly didn’t believe that that was the reason I was upset.” Well, she had me there. My synapses finally won out, and I really needed to get to bed. I apologized for my insensitivity in not picking up on her feelings. To my great relief these were the magic words she needed to hear.

She said, “We’ll talk more about this tomorrow.”

I could hardly wait. Beth headed off to our futon bed in the living room, and I got into the empty bottom bunk in my daughters’ room. As I tried to get the Princess quilt to cover my feet, I was realizing this was not the idyllic relationship I had thought I was getting into. Surely an intimate relationship between two women should be much easier than this. It sure had looked easier when I was on the outside looking in.

Luckily, this was not my last lesbian relationship. I did move on and learned in kinder hands that processing was not in fact the art of showing a person the error of their ways, but rather a two-way conversation about how to resolve issues. Unfortunately, to this day, whenever I feel a conversation heading toward processing, those synapses of mine still twitch.

CARD ART . . . Cyndia Cole



THE CHRISTMAS ROOSTER

Lorri Rudland

My sister Bonnie was about ten years old when she tried to sell raffle tickets to our neighbor, Bill. He kept chickens and offered to buy the whole raffle book if she would accept a chicken in payment. He meant a roasting chicken and he asked my sister to pick out the one she wanted. She picked out a rooster. Our neighbor was surprised but he thought it was okay, because he had a few spare roosters. So Bonnie came home carrying an empty beer case with a rooster's head peeking through.

My mother was not amused because she had to pay for the entire book of tickets and didn't even get a roasting hen out of the deal. But Bonnie loved that rooster which she named Mitchell. He would jump up into her arms and she would pat him and coo and he would cluck back. They were very fond of each other. But that damn rooster was not fond of anyone else in the family, including me, Bonnie's older sister. Even the dog, a wonderful pointer named Red, disliked the rooster.



Mitchell lived outside. When I came home from school, I swear that bird knew I was walking into the yard. He would chase me and peck at my legs and sometimes it would hurt. I would run up to the back door and bang on it shouting, "open the door mother, open the door", which was always locked in case of rapists and undesirables. Sometimes I had to pound on both the front and the back door or go around the house twice. Needless to say I disliked Mitchell.

On Christmas day, the rooster made a very bad decision. He went for the dog's bone, while Red was gnawing on it. The dog, normally of a calm and unflappable disposition, lost his temper, and lunged the rooster with his mouth open, grabbing some tail feathers. The rooster flapped his wings and flew into the open back door of our house, while an angry Red followed. The rooster flew right through the house to the living room and ended on top of the Christmas tree with Red barking up a storm right behind him.

The rooster was flapping around at the top of the tree, while the dog was lunging after him in the branches, which caused the tree to fall over breaking many of the beautiful ornaments. My dad who was snoozing in his easy chair woke up with a start. He had grown up on a farm and was unintimidated by animals. When he woke to the fracas at the Christmas tree, he leaped out of his chair and grabbed Red's collar in one hand and some part of the rooster in his other hand, all the while shouting at me to open the front door.

I obeyed and dad threw the dog out with one swing of his left hand and the rooster with his right. Then he slammed the door, growling "damn rooster." I dared to hope something might be done about that bird and my wish came true. Within two weeks the rooster was gone. Dad gently explained to Bonnie that the rooster was too wild and had been sent to a farm where he could roam freely. I secretly thought that was too good for him.

A few years later I learned the truth. A friend of dad's had taken Mitchell home and eaten him for dinner. He said the bird was a bit tough despite a sojourn in the stew pot. A slow smile crept across my face. Dad had heard many rooster complaints but until the fracas at the Christmas tree had never actually been involved. In a manner of speaking, the rooster cooked his own goose.

BIDING MY TIME

River Glen

I breathe in and out
 the refrigerator hums
 the numbers on the
 clock add up;
 there it is time to eat,
 well, as soon as I am
 hungry. Finished another
 episode on Netflix.
 Where are these words going?
 Down like the waning sun?
 Maybe I can walk more
 6k so far and two sets
 of my weights. I cleaned up
 dust bunnies behind my chair.
 Posted too, reaching for the
 pad like the numbing drug it is.
 Create! My conscience niggles
 as if I can find value worth
 dredging up to give me-time
 meaning. I'm mostly
 good at this aloneness;
 sure I laid low today,
 but maybe tomorrow
 I can fashion a bigger
 purpose from the messy
 threads of an old queer life.



LOVE AND RESPECT

Farren Gillaspie

Doctor: "Do you have any questions you would like to discuss Terry?"

Terry's eyes were welling up. The permanent easy smile was gone from his face and slight tremors were noticeable at the corners of his mouth.

"I would like to make it to my thirtieth birthday?"

Doctor, "I'm so sorry Terry, but that is off the table. The truth is you probably won't make it until Christmas. That means three months at the most." The doctor's gym bulked body seemed smaller, even a bit vulnerable. Compassion poured from his dark brown eyes. He looked straight into Terry's eyes, then looked to me.

I squeezed Terry's shoulder and pulled him closer to me. I knew this was coming but, like Terry I had been in denial. We had only been living together for a short while, but we were over the top happy. He brought out my inner clown, and we were constantly laughing. We didn't want to talk about hepatitis. He was healthy then, and that was all that mattered. Things took a turn when I had to rush him to ER with

excruciating pain. His kidneys were shutting down. This was the end of the road for him, which brought us to this discussion in the doctor's office. He had a birthday in October. His energy was low. I took him and his best friend on the Twilight Dinner Express train from North Vancouver to Porteau Cove and back. We drove his friend home, and I had to steady Terry as we made our way from the parkade to the elevator. He passed away November 5th. His closest friends and myself were there. There had been multiple trips to ER and a short stint in ICU.

I was the eldest in my family and always had to, "keep it together" even after my mother passed away. This, however, was totally different. I couldn't stop crying. It was as if I was crying for all of the sad times that I hadn't cried. The sun did rise again, the pain subsided a bit. The happy memories started to push through the pain, and I had to acknowledge that my time with Terry had been a true gift. I felt I had known love with him, and that experience was "it" for me.

I decided to cultivate and deepen my friendships. I had a close inner circle of three men and two women, all of us single. Instead of cruising bars, we went out for dinners, celebrated the holidays and our birthdays together. I felt fulfilled, appreciated and seen. It had been five years since Terry's passing. A friend decided to have a party and extended the invitations to some casual friends of his in the hope of expanding our circle. At the time, I remember thinking he was trying to match up one of our friends. I went along, thinking I wanted to see this for myself. Ian was meant to meet David, and they did. Unfortunately though, the attraction and newness seemed to wear off after a couple of months.

Meanwhile back at the party, I found myself sitting across from a handsome man who was quite engaging. His conversation was intellectual and was spiked with humorous anecdotes. Behind his glasses were twinkling brown eyes (brown eyes being a definite weakness of mine). The lights were on, and someone was definitely home. I asked him what he did for a living. He said he worked in mental health. Poor you, I thought, probably like me, probably working in the non-profit sector. His pilled sweater looked like it had seen better days. My mind started wandering, and I thought, I could share my sweaters with him.

"Did you drive here" I asked?

"Yes, how about you?"

"Well, I did, but I was nervous about it."

"Why were you nervous?"

"Well, it's snowing, and I had to come across the bridge. My El Camino is pretty useless in snow."

Jen looked at me with a questioning look. "Um, what is an El Camino?"

"Well," I explained, it's kind of a car truck. Looks like a car, but has a truck box at the back."

"Hmm, I can't picture that." Jen looked at me with that signature raised eyebrow of his.

"That's okay," I said. "If it stops snowing, how about I take you for a drive Sunday?"

"That sounds great. Do I need any special racing clothes, special visor or anything," he smiled.

"It's a date, Sunday," I smiled back.

Well the Sunday date came and went. By the early fall, I had sold my condo, put my things in storage, and moved in with Jen. My two Maine cats were part of the package. We had a realtor friend look for a house for us. We would look at online listings during the week. I would drive by them on my way to work, and our realtor would book appointments on the weekends. The intervening months were a great time for us to get to know each other, our likes and dislikes, and how to be with each other. We had similar tastes, and I just found myself liking myself more when I was in his presence, which was a



Farren, Jen, and Beckham

good thing, because I liked being in his presence. He was handsome, funny and caring. The complete package! He was forty and I was fifty one. Our lives and routines had already been established when we met, but they seemed to blend quite easily. There never seemed to be a need to change each other. Our differences, even in our cultures, only added to our love of each other. For awhile, it seemed a little too good, too easy. Drawing from past relationships and family, if it was too good, it wouldn't last. As one year grew into another, we evolved our own traditions, blended our friendships with others and became a solid unit. My Maine Coon cats passed away, and a few years later we adopted a rescue dog. He was a miniature poodle mix, and we became the three amigos. Beckham loves road trips with us. I don't think that there is much mystery about us when we walk down streets near our home or in our travels. A mixed race couple with a white poodle on a leash. It's a stereotype, and we proudly own it!

Oh and about that pillared sweater. I never did share my sweaters with him. He had multiple cupboards and closets filled with high end designer sweaters and clothes. He ended up sharing with me.

As we become older, losing friends to death is becoming more common amongst us . . . Here, Farren talks about his losses.

TREASURES ON OUR JOURNEYS

Farren Gillaspie

It has been said that none of us are getting out of here alive. My first experience of death was when I was a teenager. Two friends died in separate incidents within weeks of each other. One died with a friend of his when they tried to run a rail crossing and were struck by a VIA rail. All from trying to reach the beer store on a Saturday night before it closed at six o'clock for the weekend. It was the seventies. The second was a close friend who hitched a ride with a drunk driver, and they hit a tractor trailer head on. Until then only old people had died, not young people, and not my friends. After the second friend died, I spiralled, angry and raging. I had survivor's guilt which manifested in losing my hearing for a short period. When I came to my senses, I realized I needed to get a handle on this death thing, because obviously it was, for sure, one thing I would be experiencing again.

My journey was not always smooth. I renounced everything I had been taught to revere around god and religion. I realize now, I was wiping the slate clean and setting myself free, so I could put together my own belief system. I had several enlightened mentors over the years. In the eighties, I got to test my beliefs many times over, as many people I knew passed over from AIDS. Now this year, 2023, I have had three major friends pass away in as many months. It is interesting that I had known each of them for almost four decades. They were 72, 95, and 64 years old at their passing.



My 72 year old friend, Robert, passed first as a result of cancer. He was born on March 17th. I called him my leprechaun, He preferred the term faery spelt with an "e". I met him while teaching Reiki and wellness workshops from my home on Bowen Island. We hiked around lakes and a small mountain there. His eyes were always wide open in awe and appreciation as he told me the Latin names for most of the native plants. He had a look of innocence about him that combined with his perpetual smile, made people want to know him. We explored the depths of Reiki and many spiritual beliefs. When he first told me about his cancer, he said he was okay. He went into remission, but then it came back with a vengeance, and he was given two months to live. Again, he said he was okay. Yes, he was a bit scared but also excited, because he knew this wasn't the end. He felt he had been in touch with friends who had

preceded him. I told him I felt convinced there would be a party and a huge welcoming committee waiting for him.

My friend Anne passed away in July at 95. We became friends in 1983 when she started volunteering for one of my residents at work. We quickly discovered we had almost identical spiritual beliefs. She introduced me to a healer who was very prominent in her life, and I shared stories of my spiritual journey. Her husband passed away in 1997, a month before my partner at 29 passed away. We had a void in our lives, so we decided we would have lunch together every Monday. We ended up having lunch at the same place for 20 years and had the same waiter for 18 of those years. We would start talking when I picked her up, while in the car, through lunch and in the car while I drove her home. We were never at a loss for conversation. Most of our conversations revolved around our spiritual beliefs, in particular the afterlife. I found myself so enthralled with this that I had to remind myself to appreciate the journey in between! A short while before she passed, she asked, "what have I done that 'They' feel I needed to stick around for so long!" It didn't take long to answer; I said, "I think you still need to learn how to receive!"

"Farren, I'll start working on that right now, because I am getting tired!"



Brock at 64 was the third person to pass. His passing was a shock. He was one of the main reasons I stayed in my job for 37 years. He was deemed too disabled to live outside the institution. Two years after he was out, I drove him and his roommate and a volunteer across Canada to Ottawa! We slept in motels and ate in restaurants all the way and stayed at my family farm for a week. We were gone for a month. Brock was non-verbal but communicated quite well with his twinkling blue eyes and expressive eyebrows. I totally trusted his instinct when I was hiring staff. He was totally unapologetic. If he wanted a hug, he would just move in for one; if he didn't feel like one he would pull away, if he was happy, he would smile and raise his eyebrow. He often looked like he was planning something that would be a surprise, and often he was. If he was really happy, he would bellow, quite often shocking people around him, and then smile.

I was worried a bit because I hadn't cried and not really sure I was even really sad. I was excited that they were on to the next, "whatever." As I continue to reflect on it, I realize this is a different time in my life, but also these relationships were with peers. I had learned and shared with each of them about so many facets of life that helped make me a better more whole person. There are so many fabulous events with each of them that there really isn't any room or time to wallow. Do I miss them? Of course I do, but there is more to be grateful for.



CARD ART

Cyndia Cole



Many of us have become and stayed political throughout our lives. Here's the burning issue today. . .

QUEER VOICE

Val Innes

I am 77 and for 46 of those years, I have been a part of the LGBTQ2S+ movement in Canada. I remember clearly what it was like to be a lesbian in the seventies. I was outed at work in 1977, and I lost my job as an instructor with Brandon University, and, as I had no civil rights as a lesbian, I couldn't do anything about it. So I became actively political along with many other LGBTQ folk of my generation. And I became part of the Winnipeg queer community, although we didn't call it that in those days. We played; we danced; we sang; we talked; we listened to Heather Bishop, Chris Williamson and Ferron, and we made love and made friends. We built community, and we marched and protested. We made Purdy's and a Lesbian Conference at the University of Winnipeg happen as well as the Women's Building. We became a presence in Winnipeg.

By 1991, in BC when I started teaching at Kwantlen University College, my partner, Brenda, received benefits from the College as my partner. By 1995 I had civil rights, and by 2005, I had the right to marry my same-sex partner should I want to. That is the fastest social and legal cultural change in Canada's history: 28 years. We queers did that by peaceful protest and legal action. It wasn't a gift; we marched, wrote, phoned, protested and went to court because our lives as we wanted to live them depended on it. We won it. As we won trans rights in 2017.

We have a powerful voice, and when we use it, we create solid legal and social change. I'm still political, and I'm asking you now to use that voice again, this time for change that affects all the sentient life on this planet, not just we queers. In the background of writing this is currently a hugely uneasy world, which affects us all whatever our sexuality or gender. As I said in the introduction to this zine, we live in a difficult time. There's climate change forcing a planetary crisis of a magnitude that our civilizations have never before faced, and it's one that many would rather deny than face, including corporations and governments. The Israel/Gaza war, and the Russia/Ukraine war are both heartbreaking and causing a



huge increase in emissions with massive involvement of the military industrial complex which is making huge profit from people's misery and death. In the meantime, our future is at stake: climate change is affecting everyone everywhere. Extreme weather events are more frequent and intense, sea levels are rising, drought is leading to food scarcity, and many species are being driven to extinction.

And Canada is burning; we all saw that this summer. I watched in horror as friends were evacuated from Kelowna due to wildfires. And yet Canada gave 22 billion of our tax money to subsidize the fossil fuel industry in this country last year and has done very little to combat climate change. We're the only G7 country whose emissions have increased since the Paris Agreement was signed¹. "In 2021, top climate scientists issued a 'code red for humanity' warning that this is our last chance to implement the transformational changes necessary to keep warming below 1.5 C and avoid the most dangerous impacts of climate chaos."² We also have an election coming; if Polievre, as the polls suggest, wins, a Conservative government will do nothing about climate change -- and, judging by Saskatchewan's Conservative government recently, may again threaten our LGBTQ rights.

Other countries are doing better than we are in North America. But the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East, besides being heartbreaking, are creating massive emissions, and the fires and clear-cutting of forests all over the world, including here in Canada, are hugely adding to the problem. There is no Planet B; we fix this or we die out as other species of sentient beings are already doing. The only thing I can see that

will move our government to act is massive public pressure to do so. And that's where we come in. We're really good at public pressure!

I was in Manitoba in September, and one of the Provincial election signs I frequently saw stuck with me. Posted by the Nurses union, it read *Vote as if your life depended on it*. . . It worked: Wab Kinew, an Indigenous man, running on revamping health care, won with an NDP majority.

So, here I am writing to you, saying ***Speak up as if your life depends on it***. Urge government to take bold, ambitious climate action now! Join a march; start a march; talk to people; FB and Tweet, email your MP and MLA; organize; sign petitions; join Leadnow, call your MP, MLA and the Prime Minister. Use your voice before we lose our voice! And -- ***Vote as if your life depends on it***. In the face of climate change, your life does depend on it.



1 & 2. [Top 10 things you can do about climate change \(davidssuzuki.org\)](http://davidssuzuki.org)

Perhaps one of the most courageous acts in our society is transitioning from one sex to another. Here's Gayle's story to share with us that courage, that resolution and the determination required as well as the emotional cost of the journey. . .



TRANSITIONING AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM^{1*}

Gayle Roberts

The distance is nothing. It's only the first step that's difficult
 - Marie Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise du Deffand

To transition successfully, or as it is sometimes referred to as changing one's sex, it is best to have a plan.

Prior to 1995, my presentations as a woman occurred only at private meetings of the Vancouver based Zenith Foundation's Wednesday Night Group and at the Explorers' Group at the Gender Dysphoria Clinic. During the school year 1995 – 1996, however, my cross-dressing became much more public with my visits, after meetings of the Explorers' Group, to restaurants near the Clinic. Along with my increased public cross-dressing came increased fear of discovery by a student, a parent, or an employee of the Vancouver School Board. During this period, I experienced the most ongoing stress of my entire life. The last thing I needed was further stress that would inevitably occur if my cross-dressing was discovered. What would be the career consequences for me? All this stress affected my teaching. Ideally, when one teaches, one's focus is "outwards" on the students. One needs to be sensitive and responsive to both the class as a group and the individual students within it. Instead, I increasingly found my focus was "inwards" on me and my ever

1. This essay is adapted from *Transitioning in the School System*, first published by Alyson Books, **One teacher in 10**, (2nd Edition), edited by Kevin Jennings, ISBN-10: 1555832636; ISBN-13: 978-1555832636.

increasing stress. I was expending more and more of my limited personal energy on maintaining the impression of being the competent and respected teacher everyone had come to know over many years. Even though I still stubbornly refused to transition, I was slowly beginning to realize that *perhaps* the psychologists, psychiatrists and my trans friends were right – it might be inevitable. Added to that, were my wife Edith’s words to me, “I would rather have a live sister than a dead husband.”

Each school year, public schools throughout British Columbia hold a number of Professional Development (PD) Days. The British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) stated in 1995 that “one of its primary goals was the continuous career long, professional growth of our members.” As part of that goal, a PD Day at the school was devoted to the topic of stress. A number of professionals in this field discussed topics such as what causes stress, how one can recognize it in one’s self and others, and what can be done to help minimize it, prevent it, and support students suffering intense stress. The workshop ended with comments by the principal and vice-principal on what their roles would be in supporting any student or teacher who might be experiencing excessive stress. I was impressed by their sincerity and, for the first time in my teaching career felt that it would be “safe” to reveal my gender dysphoria to an administrator.

A few mornings later before school had started and after breaking down crying in the privacy of my physics laboratory equipment storage area and office, I went to the administration and tearfully “revealed all.” Much to my surprise (despite their expressed sensitivity at the PD Day) they were incredibly supportive and emphasized a number of times that I had a medical condition, that it would be treated as such, and that I had no reason to be ashamed of myself. They then suggested that we should see the area superintendent (whose office happened to be in the school) and tell him what I had told them. He too was extremely supportive. Together, they told me that I was a respected teacher held in high regard by students, parents and educators alike and as far as they knew, I was the only Vancouver School District teacher to reveal having gender dysphoria. Their support for me was unequivocal.

Revealing to the administration my gender dysphoria and the possibility that I might have to transition lessened my anxiety. I now knew that my transsexuality would be supported by senior management in much the same way as it would be if I had heart disease or cancer. I also knew that if knowledge of my cross-dressing ever became public, it would not be a surprise as they were well informed about transsexuality in general and my situation in particular. They knew too that what I was doing to manage my gender dysphoria was based on what I believed was best for me, best medical practices, current research, and was endorsed by the Gender Dysphoria Clinic’s psychologists and psychiatrists.

Just before the end of the 1995 -1996 school year, a student informed one of my colleagues that she had seen me in a local restaurant, cross-dressed, and in the company of others similarly dressed to me. My colleague handled the situation perfectly. He supported the student, told her he would discuss the incident with the principal and would get back to her as soon as possible. Probably unknown to the student, he next told me about the incident. (Teachers are required to inform one another before discussing with an administrator anything which potentially could have a negative professional impact on the colleague.) Then, together, we saw the principal. Even though I knew that I would be supported by the school administration and the District’s senior management, my stress level increased dramatically as I now faced the unknown reactions of students, parents, and colleagues. Fortunately for me, the school year ended shortly after my cross-dressing was first known publicly by anyone at all involved with the school. Unfortunately, though, I had all summer to worry about what the impact of that discovery would be when I returned in September.



By September, I was, to put it in non-technical terms, a “basket case.” I was unable to focus on my students or teaching. I occasionally broke down crying – fortunately in the privacy of my physics equipment storeroom and, on one occasion, in the vice-principal’s office just before school started. It was now obvious to me and my wife that my gender dysphoria was so intense and constant that I had no choice but to

transition. I told the two administrators of my decision and asked them to read a one page letter which I had written to my colleagues explaining what gender dysphoria is, what the healthcare community recommends high intensity transsexual people like me must do to achieve peace of mind, and that I was taking an indeterminate leave of absence to transition. I did this out of respect for my colleagues and also to get the real reason for my absence from teaching out in the open. The last thing I needed was unsubstantiated rumours and incorrect explanations for my sudden and apparently unexplained absence from school and teaching. Adverse rumours about people have a life considerably longer than that of the truth. Within three weeks of starting my leave of absence, my transsexuality and decision to transition was known district wide by many students and parents and even former colleagues now teaching in other schools. I even heard that some of my former physics students, now undergraduates or graduate students at the University of B.C., knew that I was transitioning. It is difficult, possibly even impossible, to keep adulthood transsexuality and transitioning a secret from everyone.

Shortly before I took my leave of absence to transition, I met with the Vancouver School Board's Superintendent of Human Resources. Like other officials I had met, he was very supportive. He told me that like any other healthcare condition, my medical status would be kept confidential unless I explicitly gave permission for others to know. We then discussed my future. He told me that as far as he knew, I was the first person to transition in the Vancouver School District. (Both of us were aware that a few teachers in other local school districts had transitioned and returned successfully to classroom teaching.) He had only one condition that I must honour when I started teaching again; I was not to go back and forth – presenting one day as a man and another day as a woman. I assured him that having lived over 50 years as a male and not being comfortable with it, the last thing I would want to do was to go back to being a man. We then discussed what my return to work would look like; we agreed that when I was ready, I was to contact him and then, for the balance of the school year, work with science teachers throughout the district as a science education consultant based at the Board's main office. My other duties would include organizing a district wide conference for science teachers as part of their professional development, meet with the District's Science Department Heads once a month, and meet with any visiting scientists or science educators who could be from anywhere in the world. Then, I would be assigned to a school as a science teacher, starting in the September of a new school year.



I spent the next few months becoming more and more comfortable presenting to the world as a woman. It was during this period that I started female hormones which were delivered by means of a transdermal patch (Estalis) which I applied and replaced twice a week. Within a few months, I noticed that my body hair (excluding facial hair) became lighter and essentially disappeared. Also my small breasts, which had slowly developed over several years through the use of an anti-androgen medication (spironolactone) became larger.

After several months of leave to transition, I was excited about returning to work. The superintendent and I agreed, just before I returned to work, that it would be best if he told the entire staff in the Board's offices my medical condition. I have always believed that it is best to be open with people who know you or will interact with you over an extended period of time. Telling everyone gave them the opportunity to be comfortable with me and, if they wished, to ask me questions. On my first work day at the School Board's Offices, the superintendent and I spent about an hour walking throughout the Board's offices where he introduced me to everyone. Some of the people I met were former colleagues while others I had never met previously. That first day on the job was wonderful. On my desk in my office was a beautiful bouquet of flowers from my high school principal and a note wishing me success in my new role.

I knew that the people working in the Board offices were required to be civil to me, but I also knew that no one can mandate friendship. As I sat in my office wondering what my new role had in store

for me and whether or not people would interact with me at a personal level, one of my new colleagues came by, introduced herself and asked me if I would join her and some friends for coffee.

During the five months I spent at the Board office, I found that I was completely accepted. People asked me to join them for coffee or lunch or for walks in the neighbourhood. As people got to know me, some would ask me questions. I never talked about my transition unless requested to do so. One of my most memorable experiences occurred when a colleague gave me a lovely aquamarine ring. She told me that she did not wear it now and as she was going through her jewellery box she thought of me. For me it was, and still is, a symbol of acceptance in my new role as a woman.

As June approached, the superintendent and I discussed where it would be best for me to teach in September. We both wanted to maximize my chances of a successful in-school transition. Basically, I had two choices – one was to return to my old school and the other was to go to a different school in the district. In the end, we decided that I would have the best chance of success in my new role if I returned to my “old” school where I would not need to prove to students, parents or colleagues that I was a competent teacher.

Despite my good reputation as a teacher, I wondered how I would feel standing once again in front of students but this time as a woman rather than as a man. I also worried whether or not students would accept me in my new role. Would there be adverse reactions by parents and/or students to a transsexual teacher? As a way of increasing my self confidence, not as a teacher but as a woman, one of my colleagues suggested that I should apply to teach senior physics to young adult summer school students. If that experience went well, presumably when I returned to my “old” school in September, I would feel more comfortable presenting as a woman. My summer school teaching went well. The students, if they knew or realized I was a transsexual woman teacher, simply ignored it and accepted me.

So it was with a great deal of excitement and trepidation that I returned to my old school in September. My excitement was caused by my wish to meet my former colleagues and to return once more to teaching young people. Despite my successful summer school teaching, my major trepidation was how I would be received by former and new students. Would they accept me or see me as some kind of freak? Even though the Board supported me and had done everything they could to make my transition a success, ultimately my future teaching career (or lack of it) would be governed by the attitude of my students towards me. My ability to maintain a satisfactory learning environment within my classes would determine my future.

The first day in retrospect, was an indicator of things to come. I met my homeroom class, introduced myself as Ms. Roberts, took attendance, collected the usual fees, and then, as was school policy, dismissed the students for the day. None of the students made any untoward comments. They reacted to me as hundreds of students over the years had done before. So far, so good.

The following day, I thought, would be the real test as it was the first day I would meet the students I would actually be teaching. As it happened, the first class I met that day was senior physics. This class would have at least some students from the junior physics classes I had taught for three weeks the previous school year.

Believing as I do in good planning, I had given some thought to how I should greet this class. Obviously, all the students, whether or not they had had me as a teacher the previous year, knew that I was a transsexual teacher returning to the classroom. (You can't keep that a secret!) I believed I had to acknowledge that at least some of these students knew me previously as a man. At the same time, however, I really did not wish to open up discussion about my sexual and gender identities; at the back of my mind was the worry that there might be opposition to a transsexual teacher in the classroom (many transsexual teachers have experienced this and have been fired) or I might possibly



be accused of simply “promoting” transsexuality. My approach was to minimize or never discuss my transsexuality with students and simply say, “I am aware that you are aware of my changed circumstances.” I told them how much happier I was as a person. I also told them that I was really pleased to be back in the classroom to teach them, that the curriculum was rather lengthy, and I thought it best if we got started on the course. It was my hope that this approach would help any of my former students feel comfortable with me should they have had difficulties accepting me. For the students in my junior physics classes who had not had me as a teacher in previous years, I decided to say nothing to them about my changed “circumstances.” As I did with my homeroom class, I simply introduced myself as Ms. Roberts and approached the class much as I had done with classes in previous years. The school recognized the possibility that some students might have found my transition difficult, and counsellors were available to help them. I was told later that not one student took advantage of that opportunity.

The following days were very much like my first teaching day. The students reacted to me just as they had done in the past. It appeared to me that for them I was just another teacher doing the usual things that teachers do. The only one thing regarding me that was really important to them was how well I taught. As is normal in a class, some students interact with their teachers in a more personal way; they will tell you a little about themselves – their hobbies, goals, aspirations, and frustrations. Many of these students during the first part of the year came up to me and quietly told me how brave they thought I was. One student told me she thought I was an inspiration. That comment in particular brought me great joy; it told me that I was accepted, but no less importantly, that I was a role model with whom some students could identify. I don’t believe for a moment that this student had her own issues around gender – rather, I believe she saw me as a teacher who had had significant personal problems and was able to overcome them and become a much happier person. I believe she realized that she and other people could, in a similar way, resolve their own unique personal issues.

The next potential hurdle I felt I had to overcome was to meet and possibly be prepared for negative comments at “Parents’ Walk About” towards the end of September. It gives parents the opportunity to meet their child’s teachers and in the space of about ten minutes learn a little about the content of a subject and how students will be evaluated.

I expected that each of my classes of thirty students would be completely full with sixty parents and guardians. After-all, this was their opportunity to see the transsexual teacher – or so I thought. Instead, the usual half a dozen to a dozen parents visited my classroom and listened to what I had to say and asked me the usual questions about the curriculum or my approach to evaluation. One parent told me how pleased he was that a woman was teaching the physics course as traditionally it was taught mainly by men. His remark bolstered my confidence; I felt that it was unlikely that he would have said that if he had known that I was a transsexual woman. As one mother was leaving my class for the next one, she asked me if I remembered a student I had taught a few years earlier. I told her that the name was familiar. She



explained that he was her oldest son who was now at university. We talked a little about her son, and I asked her how and what he was doing. It was then she told me her daughter was in one of my physics classes and how pleased she was that I had returned to continue teaching physics. As she walked out of my classroom she turned to me and said, “You look very pretty.” I was overwhelmed! Here was a parent who managed to tell me, without once bringing up the subject of my transition, that she knew I used to be a man, that I was an excellent teacher and that she was totally accepting of me as a woman. I was so elated after meeting with the parents that I felt as if I was floating just above

the floor; it was a feeling that I had never experienced before. Later that evening, I talked to my principle and asked her if she’d had any comments from parents. She told me that only one parent had discussed

me with her, and that was to say that, “He looks much better as a woman than he did as a man.” My principal smiled as she pointed out that all of the parent’s pronouns were wrong, but her sentiments were good. A little later, as I walked down an empty hallway, I and that was to say that, “He looks much better as a woman than he did as a man.” My principal smiled as she pointed out that all of the parent’s became aware that I was holding my head high, and that for the very first time in my life, I was proud of who I am. I was shame free!

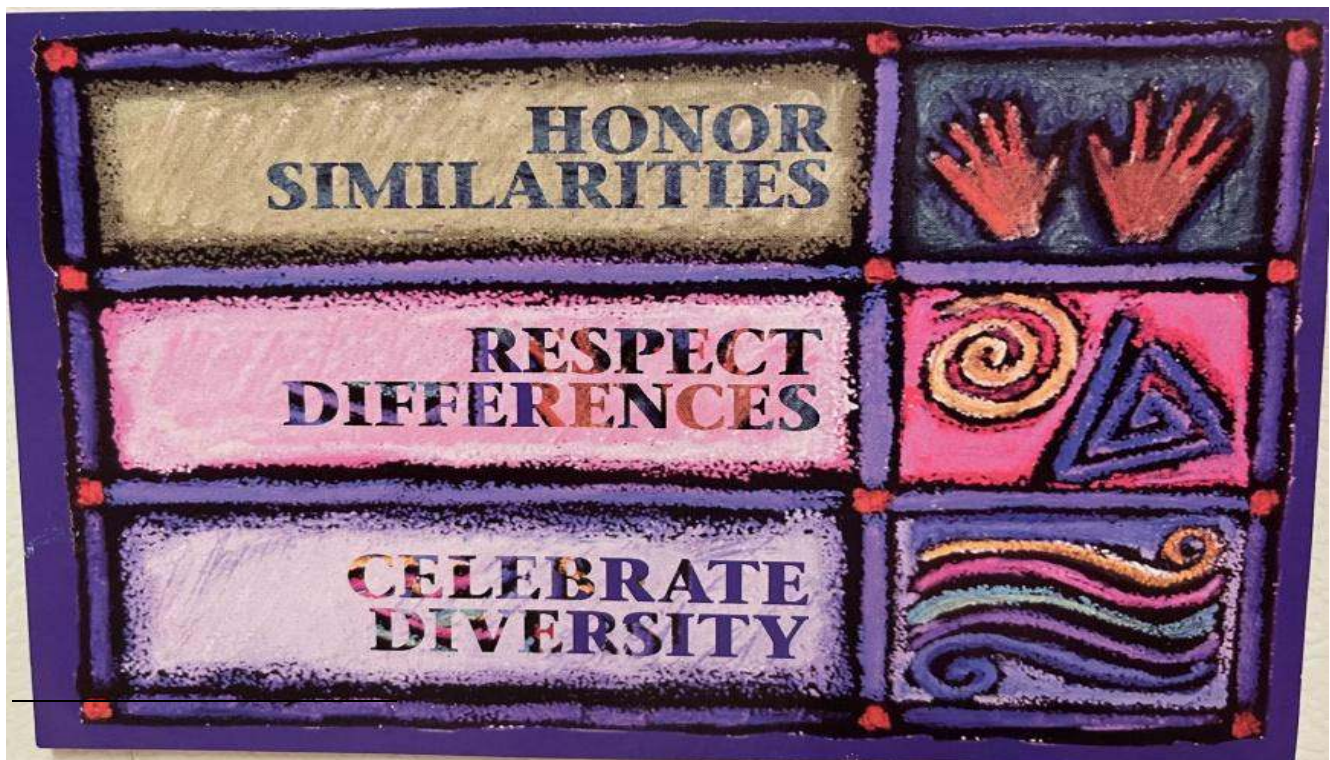
And so the year went on as it started. That year rolled by and then several more. It seemed so little time passed before I was standing in front of the school staff receiving from them retirement presents and heart-warming comments. When it came time to thank them, all my self-control was swept away as I cried and thanked them for the acceptance they had shown me. I left the school and drove home to my “new-sister” who loved, supported, and encouraged me as she lost her husband and gained a sister.^{2*}

2023 at a Quirk-e picnic -- Gayle and another Quirk-e member, Marsha.



2. At the end of the original version of this essay published by Alyson Books is the following statement: “This essay is dedicated to my new sister, my best friend and companion, Edith. During many painful years for both of us, she has encouraged and supported me. Just saying “thank you” seems insufficient. Losing one’s husband is not really balanced by gaining a sister. I am truly thankful to her for what she gave of herself.”

That statement is as true today as it was when first written thirty years ago.





THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Chris Morrissey

My life is a kaleidoscope of many colours, shapes and designs.

I remember the scary times before I came out. I was always afraid that I would be caught out. I was a Roman Catholic nun when I first realized that I was attracted to women. Not exactly the safest place to be as a young woman in the 1960's and 70's. I did my best to hide it, not always successfully. My first sexual experience was not something I initiated. It took me years to acknowledge that it was rape.

Turn of the kaleidoscope. In the 80's I lived in Chile during the dictatorship of Pinochet. Another scary time. I had been supporting a woman who had lived through a very traumatic experience that involved her husband. Eventually, in order to be safe, she decided to leave the city and move to the campo. After she had left home, the husband came to our house shouting. "Lesbianas". I couldn't go out of the house.

The colours and the images change again: Oppression, Liberation Theology, The Personal is Political, Organizing for change. After years of living with cognitive dissonance, these helped make sense of the many twists and turns of my life to begin coming together. A whole new picture emerges. In January 1990, my partner and I moved to Canada. For me, it was a return home. Not for Bridget. She became a visitor. This began several years of uncertainty and anxiety. Would we be able to stay together? We had no idea about the challenges that Immigration would present. Tears and lots of them. It has never been easy for me to live with uncertainty. Eventually, we came to a decision to challenge Canada's Immigration Law. Would this work? Would we be successful?

A new scene. Together, Bridget and I and gathering others, we began a journey that would eventually lead to victory. One step towards a more just society for people in same-sex relationships. Immigration recognized us as legally family. Through the magic of the internet the word spread to other parts of the world. Our movement grew to include refugees, LGBTQ people looking for a safe place to live. Now with many other LGBT Canadians, we support and welcome newcomers who have to learn to call Canada home.



Focus again, this time a rainbow of colours. They surround Bridget. The woman who loved me unconditionally for almost 40 years. The wonder as I see the look in her eyes from across the room, the warmth of her touch, her never-ending patience with me, her quiet, constant presence. This has always been there. A woman without guile who loved me and whom I miss dearly and daily.



When I was a young sister in the convent, I taught myself to play the guitar. The kids called me the singing nun. (If you were around in the 60's you'll remember The Singing Nun and her hit song. Still on YouTube.) Those were the folk song years. The words of one song based on the words of the prophet Micha have stayed with me. "This is what Yahweh asks of you. That you live justly, that you love tenderly, that you walk humbly with your God."

I am grateful that with Bridget's love and the friendships along the way, I have begun to learn that this is what I want to see with the final turn of the kaleidoscope.



CHRIS MORRISSEY: THE ORDER OF CANADA

Val Innes

Chris Morrissey is a dedicated activist who makes change happen; she's kind and cares deeply about people. She lives justly, loves tenderly and walks humbly, just as she wanted. Doing that, she achieves greatly. Her Order of Canada was a result of her advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees. In the 1990's, because they were a lesbian couple, Morrissey's Canadian citizenship was not sufficient to enable her partner Bridget's immigration to Canada. Morrissey mounted a constitutional challenge to Canadian immigration law, successfully paving the way for same-gender couples to receive equal protection under the law in Canada.



The Right Honourable Mary May Simon and Chris Morrissey
Order of Canada Investiture Ceremony October 26th 2023

Also in the 1990s, Morrissey and others founded the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Taskforce (LEGIT) in Vancouver to help same-sex couples of different nationalities find legal loopholes to enable their cohabitation within Canada. In 2000, Chris and Rob Hughes founded Rainbow Refugee to promote safe, equitable migration and communities of belonging for people fleeing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or HIV status.



Chris said to me that she and Bridget, as nuns, learned in Chile to challenge the oppressive social order and bring about social change, allied with the workers. That experience taught by liberation theology and feminism in Chile helped Chris be able to work for change here. There she learned the skills and attitude she needed to affect change here, and all LGBTQ2S+ folk in Canada have benefitted from Chris's work here.

In particular, every Quirk-e member, past and present, owes a debt of gratitude to Chris, as she started Quirk-e in 2006 by hiring Claire Robson to teach a four session writer's group which became the Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders, because we weren't willing to stop at four sessions! Chris and Bridget were members from the start, as I was, and Quirk-e has grown and flourished in the past seventeen years. Bridget's eventual dementia and death was a real loss to us. True to form, when Bridget was diagnosed, Chris went to the Alzheimer's society, and they started an LGBTQ group -- it's now on line. Individuals have power and can make sparks that start things changing, and Chris is definitely one of those individuals. We're very grateful to be part of her life, grateful she's part of Quirk-e and a coordinator.



WAIT, HOLD ON A MINUTE.

River Glen

Me: Hold that thought.
 Myself: Hold what thought?
 Me: The thought you had before I told you to hold on to it.
 Myself: You're saying I said something I should remember?
 Me: You need to take the pill.
 Myself: Yes, I know that.
 Me: Wait where are you going?
 Myself: I'm getting back to my show.
 Me: Yeah I like that show.
 One hour later-
 Myself: There was something I was supposed to do.
 Me: Really I can't imagine what it could be.
 Three hours later laying awake in the middle of the night-
 Myself: Oh yeah the dumb pill.



MEET ME WHERE I AM

River Glen

I hear you say you understand,
 your understanding is miles away
 from this island where I stand.
 If I just did this, or I just did that,
 you say I'd build the bridge
 to get off the island.

Meet me where I am, if you really want to understand.
 You'll see the tools or resources lacking.
 Or see the hole in my heart
 You wouldn't be so quick and flippant with the
 admonishing and flaunting the easy things that work for you.
 You might walk to me, in my footsteps, to where I am.

I look at the pile of tools at your feet,
 your complete plans, your hired help.
 I see no chains of doubt, fear or long fed
 sadness interrupting your journey.
 When you were a kid, the big people told you
 you can.

Where I am, just survival seems to have obstacles.
 There is only my brain, my hands, my hope,
 my energy, my resources, my blind spots,
 my laziness, my dead ends to use. I can hear the
 unspoken judgment that my island is all in my head.
 But what is in my head has to be the beginning.

PHILOSOPHICALLY

River Glen

I found myself alive. My powers never exceeded far beyond myself. I understand some things through reason and some through feeling. I have tried to grab, grasp and imprison the good stuff, but like the bad, it all passes. Aging has zapped the passions, though some need for approval still remains. The need and appreciation of connections still motivates. I look forward to the final episodes and the wrap up. Philosophically.

BEST FRIENDS

Judy Fletcher



WAR AND PEACE

Cyndia Cole

More than fifty years ago
 When my cousin was nineteen years old
 At war in Viet Nam
 He was forced to choose
 Between killing a boy of fourteen or
 Letting that boy kill his buddy.
 This broke his heart
 And tortured his soul.
 He died of heart disease
 Long before his time.



Gettyimages

More than fifty years ago
 When my ex was nineteen years old
 He was forced to choose
 Between killing boys or
 Losing his freedom and his home.
 After enduring a year
 In federal military penitentiary
 And another year hiding from the government,
 To soothe his heart and soul,
 We came to Canada.

For fifty years and more
 What breaks my heart
 And tortures my soul
 Are the decisions
 Of those in power
 To wage war
 To desecrate and throw away
 The precious lives of young people.
 What soothes my heart and soul
 Are the torchbearers of justice,
 Today's precious young people
 Who dedicate their lives to
 Creating a world of lasting peace.



The Torchbearers of Justice



DYKES TO THE RESCUE

Sheila Gilhooly

The feminist movement in the 1970s and the gay movement running alongside changed things for women, and lesbians got a chance to find other dykes. We organized actions: sit-ins on parliament hill and at City Hall, pro-choice rallies, and Take Back the night marches, protesting the abuse of women. Once we picketed a church on Easter Sunday. There was a community feeling, and we had each other's backs.

I remember a woman with two kids who had come to hang out at the woman's centre. She had left her husband who was a bully, abusive and mean. She was afraid for her kids and herself. However, she let him take the kids for a weekend. By this time, though, he had figured out she was a lesbian and that could be enough for him to have case for custody. This was before Interval house existed, with the support, information and protection it gave women. He wouldn't give them back and threatened to go to court, though he had never shown any interest in parenting. And he might have won, as being a lesbian was seen by the courts as worse than being abusive.

A group of us headed out with her in two cars to the apartment complex she had lived in. The unit was on the ground floor. It was summer, and the windows were open. One window had the glow of a T.V flickering, and the other was dark. There were seven of us. Four of us took the window with the T.V.; we were to control the husband. The kids' mom and the other women took the next window which was the kids' room.



The four of us at the T.V room window opened the window wide, swept back the curtain, and jumped in quickly. There was a western playing loudly, and a large man lying on the couch watching it. We surrounded him and scared the hell out of him. He leapt to his feet, yelping, waving his arms around, swearing and shouting that he was going to call the cops. He seemed to catch on that we were friends of his wife's and probably lesbians.

Meanwhile, the other women went into the place through the kids' bedroom window. Their mom explained to them what was happening, while the other women packed their clothes. Then, they lifted the kids out the window and headed for the cars. At the sound of the car horn beeping, we knew the kids were in the car, safe and on their way to the women's centre. It was time for us to split.

The four of us backed out the window, pushing back as he kept lunging and swinging and cursing at us. He punched me in the jaw as I was backing up and out the window, and as I hiked myself up, I managed a kick to his chest which set him on his ass. We ran across the grass to the other car and sped away.



And from Salt Spring Island, follows heartfelt memories of queer folk many of us here on the Mainland knew. . . .

A TRIBUTE TO FRIENDS WHO INSPIRED AND SHAPED US

Caffyn Jesse

So many stories are hidden, erased, untold. It's like a library with millions of books – each one visionary, funny, courageous, wise – but read by no one at all. Our stories get obscured by heteronormative thinking. They stay silent in social worlds that make no space for intimacy, and no time for listening with deep respect. **Bill Turner** (1945–2022) lived so differently. In the face of all the inner and outer forces that would prevent it, Bill shared life with us. He told his own stories. He coaxed others to share, and he listened. He lived and loved in ways that felt empowering to friends and strangers, and so transformative for this community.



To celebrate Bill's life and mourn his death, DAISSI hosted a memorial for him on Valentine's Day, 2023. It was the first time the LGBTQ community had been able to gather, after COVID restrictions, and it was a time for sharing stories.

I shared how I met Bill during a time when the organization called "Gays and Lesbians of Salt Spring Island" (now DAISSI) was struggling. Initial enthusiasm had waned after the society was founded in 1999. At the Core Inn one cold winter night, there was an AGM with only three of us present. Bill was elected president. To my horror, he decided to empty the society's bank account by hosting a party with free alcohol at the Harbour House Hotel. We showed an inspiring film, and shared our dreams. Twenty or more people got joyfully engaged. The organization never looked back – thanks to Bill's bold leadership. Bill was teacher, parent, grandparent, and long-time community leader, who wove connections between young and old, gay and straight. Remembering Bill, I am inspired to aspire to his way of sharing openly, staying curious, and delighting in difference.

At Bill's memorial celebration, organizers asked for names of other loved ones who had died during the pandemic. A hundred names were shared. We all lost dear friends and mentors over the last few years, when we had no access to community space to mourn, and share stories. As we grieve, we also feel the gifts they left us. We keep their stories alive in our ways of living. Here I will share a few stories of friends, and members of the Salt Spring LGBTQ community, who died recently, but who continue to shape my world.



Stronach O'Neill (1945 – 2019) was a magnificent, creative woman who loved women. Together with her partner of 36 years, Barb Conyers, she celebrated women's community wherever she went. During their years on Salt Spring Island, all women who loved women could feel delighted. Stronach worked as an energy healer, and she brought loving energy into every encounter. I was in awe of her capacity to radiate love – with strangers, friends and neighbours – and even those who brought conflict and harm.

For all our wondrous, troublesome human diversity, Stronach had love to spare.

For a short time, she offered classes sharing techniques from her healing practice, and I learned how she used imagination to draw on an ever fresh artesian spring of love that flowed through her. Stronach's teaching resources me every day – and I've passed it on to every student I've ever taught.

Ann Richardson (1923 – 2020) was a woman of phenomenal intelligence and fiercely-centered presence. She earned a Ph.D. and worked as a professor, but in her fifties a major life change brought her to Salt Spring Island. Here she hand-built a home, fixed her own car, kept sheep, grew prize-winning potatoes, played music, and made forever friends. She worked at a mental health clinic in Duncan, and did counselling for the Salt Spring Community Center. She was a founding member of the Salt Spring Vipassana Group.



Ann loved the natural world with passion and precision. She recorded hours of bird sounds for the Cornell Ornithology Laboratory. (Every time I use the “Merlin app” to identify birds, I give thanks to Ann!) In 1994 she and friends began creating the Salt Spring Island Conservancy. She guided the fledgling organization through challenge and frustration, to establish a legally-approved entity. Ann was a thrilling part of my wider social world, until the time I worked for her as a housecleaner, and we grew closer. Helping her always felt ennobling. I remember her as I savour forests, birdsong, and the conservation infrastructure that is her legacy.



When I first moved to Salt Spring Island in 1996, I was warned not to associate with **Ruth Simkin** (1944 – 2022). Ruth ruffled feathers as a bold lesbian who challenged discrimination. This was during the “gay marriage debates” of the 1990’s, when public discourse was rife with vitriol. Of course I couldn’t wait to meet Ruth, and she became a precious friend.

Ruth was larger-than-life – continually innovating and world-shaping, despite the huge health challenges she faced throughout her life. A pioneering doctor, she wrote medical papers, contributed to textbooks, served as a consultant, and gave countless presentations on Women’s and LGBTQ health. She founded Calgary’s first lesbian and gay political action group, and produced many concerts featuring lesbian-feminist artists. After ten years “in retirement” on Salt Spring Island, Ruth returned to work in the emerging field of palliative care. She loved the years she spent at Victoria Hospice, telling me, “This is the first time I have been able to practice truly patient-centered medicine.” Whenever I am daunted by challenges, I conjure Ruth, and feel resourced by her epic courage and capacity.

Robin Irving (1939 – 2022) was a tiny human with a giant heart. She moved to Salt Spring in 1973, and she embraced island life – boating, camping, gardening, celebrating Pride, and caring for lifelong friendships. Robin always spoke her mind, especially when someone was being unfair or unkind. She was a courageous adventurer who travelled to six continents with her partner Anne Zeller. Yet Robin stayed focused on the value of home. She wasn’t wealthy, but she had a lawyer’s training, a carpenter’s skills, a fertile imagination and a generous spirit. With very little money, she did much to support people in being well-housed. While working as a lawyer, she helped save Vancouver’s Chinatown from urban development and wrote the Strata Titles Act for the NDP government. Later she renovated a building with multiple apartments, in Ontario, to create low-cost housing options. She crafted a strata subdivision project on Galiano. She sold a home to a friend, with a vendor-take-back mortgage – and made many financial gifts and loans to ensure that people she knew could stay housed. In all the turmoil of the current housing crisis on Salt Spring, Robin’s example of small and large things that one person can do offers solace and inspiration.



These friends, along with so many others, have inspired the evolution of the Salt Spring Island community over many years, in many different ways. Since I moved here in 1996, Salt Spring has grown from a place where – as elsewhere in Canada – self-identified queer folk comprised a small minority of around 4%, to become a place where 20.6% of islanders self-identify as non-heterosexual, according to a recent report from the SS Island Foundation. I don’t think the population here is so different from elsewhere. What’s different here is that openly LGBTQ people are practicing many forms of love-based activism. They have freed our imaginations, so that many more people feel empowered to imagine or explore gender and sexual orientation outside the box. The binary either-or option cannot contain us, or keep those we call “others” so distant and different. When we take time to listen to each other’s stories, and reimagine our own, we can forgo the punishing paradigms of normative belonging. The ancestors of our chosen families inspire, and continue to shape our living and loving.

Caffyn Jesse is an intimacy educator and queer activist who lives on Salt Spring Island. They are the author of Love and Death in a Queer Universe and many other books.

WHY WE CELEBRATE PRIDE TODAY

Cyndia Cole



They like to attack children.

The people who say they are protecting children.

They like to attack the children who are different, struggling and shy.

Like the children we met at the community centre's Queer Youth Drop In.

Children who never feel safe or comfortable or accepted or treasured in the clothes or bathrooms or sports teams or schoolyards or pronouns they are expected to inhabit.

They like to attack parents.

The people who say they are defending parents rights.

They like to attack the parents who love, accept and treasure the children who are different, struggling, shy and unsafe.

Parents like my friends in Langley who listen to their children and who seek out doctors and therapists who listen to their children and who treat them with respect and best practices.

Parents who desperately want their children who are attacked and who never feel safe to live through childhood and adolescence long enough to grow up and not need them.

Parents who discover that their caring, nurturing, guidance and sheltering for their children who are attacked will be constantly questioned, tested, contested or blocked.



They like to attack teachers.

They people who say they want to teach children that there is only one way and only two genders.

They like to attack teachers who educate and welcome the children who are different, struggling and shy.

Teachers like my nieces who want no child to be left behind or excluded and who want all children to be safe.

Teachers who have learned that each young person already has their own mind and heart and identity. Children who can blossom and flourish if teachers introduce them to a world of experiences, concepts and ideas outside their own.

Teachers who withstand the attacks because of their commitment to fostering the lives of the children the others like to attack.

They like to attack books and authors.

The people who say our stories are controversial, political, ideology, an agenda.

They like to attack books like the ones I author with my friends in the Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders (QUIRK-E).

Books authored by those of us who once were children who were different, struggling, shy and unsafe, and who lived long enough to survive the attackers.

Books full of stories and poems and pictures that show the truth of what we survived, the truth of how we survived, and the truth of how we now thrive.



They like to attack librarians.

The people who say knowledge is inappropriate and must be restricted.

They like to attack librarians who open their doors to the children who are different, struggling and shy.

Librarians like my sisters and former partners who make the world of books a safe place for the children that are attacked.

Librarians who welcomed my mother and me each Saturday morning to return last weeks adventures and who offered us new ones for free.

Librarians who treasure knowledge and the world of possibilities and who stand up to the attacks, because unlike the Saturday morning malls, the refuge they offer is priceless.



They like to attack colleges and universities.

The people who say that wokeness must be stopped because the young people, no longer children, who may still be different, struggling, shy and unsafe must be put to sleep.

They like to attack and silence the truths that universities and colleges teach.

Truths that make them uncomfortable. Like that racism and genocide are real, have long histories and continuing effects.

They like to attack New College in Sarasota, Florida where in the 1960*s I went to my first political protest, silently walking out on a campaign speech by Richard Nixon filled with lies about his war against the people of Viet Nam.

They like to attack the college where I took part in a Black civil rights action to keep one single public school intact in the red-lined Black community.

They like to attack the colleges and universities that allow the youth who once were attacked to wake up to social injustice and to act.

Since their attacks one half of the teachers and scholars have fled New College because they are Scholars who cannot educate the youth who once were different, struggling and shy in a place where Learning Goes to Die.



They like to attack entertainers who dress up in drag.

The people who say when they dress up it's a joke and all in good fun, but who call Barbie, Disney characters, Kings and Queens lewd and dangerous.

They like to attack the people who are the best at creating fantasies and dressing up as someone else to entertain and bring joy to the children they like to attack.

Entertainers like my friend who studied ballet for years but who delighted me most when he wore ruffled crinoline petticoats and high heels and did cartwheels all the way down Beach Avenue in our first Pride Parade.

I got to dress up as a rainbow clown and entertain by giving candy to the watching children, the children that they like to attack.

Children who are usually different, struggling and shy but who were laughing and who felt safe that day.

That one day.

That day when, no matter how much they attack the children and those of us who once were those children, or those who love, teach, educate and treasure those children,

That day we have Pride and feel Joy.

That day is today!



Vancouver Pride Parade 1996



The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds.

David W. Orr



CARD
ART

Cyndia
Cole

QUIRK-E ZINE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Quirk-e Zine welcomes non-fiction, fiction, short stories, personal essays, interviews, poetry, and calls to action, up to 3000 words usually, that reflect life within the queer community. We also welcome photographs and images. We cannot guarantee all submissions will be published.

- Submissions must be your own, original work.
- We reserve the right to edit for grammar, clarity and length.
- Quirk-e is committed to promoting inclusivity and respect. We do not accept submissions that contain hate speech, discrimination, harassment or hate-related ideas or behaviour that is harmful to anyone.

A WOKE WEDNESDAY IN THE LIFE

Adriaan de Vries

4:15 am. I'm fully awake. After four hours of solid sleep, I don't seem to need any more. That's not necessarily an age thing. I've been an early riser all my life. In university during times of writing essays, preparing for midterms or finals, most of my peers would burn the midnight oil and go to bed at 2 or 3 am. But I, being mentally non-functional in the evening, would go to sleep at 8 or 9 pm and get up at 2 or 3 am and do my cramming; getting in productive studying and writing. But I'd like to think that now, I'd be able to sleep more. Lying there, enjoying it. Well, that's what I do. It seems too early to get up, so I loll for another hour or two.



But I don't just lie here. This is the best time of my day. My mind is alert and active. It comes up with good ideas and possible solutions to things I've been pondering, puzzling over. Today I am leading a yoga practice with the Qmunity seniors' group. I map out a practice plan. On other days, I might plot out an email reply on a thorny issue I'm facing, a needed phone call or text, solve some logistical issues, anticipate a meeting or coffee with a friend or plan something that I want to write.

Long after my university days, I partially understand why that time of the day so resonates with me. I have always been an early riser often being at work at 7 am. I have been a meditator for 38 years. I was committed to meditation and so I would get up at 4:30 am to prepare for work and make time for meditation. Eventually I sensed that at that time, especially in an urban environment, the myriad of energies that thousands of people generate are at their lowest ebb. Late night carousers have gone home and are finally in bed, while the early risers are just waking and have not yet tumbled full bore out into the world. The energies produced and transmitted are at the lowest and calmest at that time. I find that this calm, low energy vibration is most conducive to deeper meditation. This leads to greater healing and calmness for the start of the day. Because of this quiet in the diurnal vibrational energy patterns, I prepare myself to meet the oft vibrational madness of the external world, of the work-a-day hustle and bustle.

Back to the getting out of bed narrative: at around 5:30, I get antsy. I usually get up at six. I do what recently began as a nod to my age and changing body. I stretch while still in bed, bringing each knee up to my chest, bicycling my legs, then lifting the soles of my feet to the ceiling in a yoga "waterfall", hands up to the ceiling, then in "cactus". I sit on the edge of the bed and again bring my knees and hold them up to my chest one at a time. I sit on the edge of the bed doing side bends and spinal twists. Finally, I hold my arms straight out in front of me and slowly lower my palms on to the floor between my ankles. I hold the stretch and relax until my torso come down between my knees. It helps loosen my joints and stretch those muscles shortened during the stillness held in sleep. That is particularly helpful to loosen my lower back – I had surgery for a herniated disc back in 1979 [which they'd never do today!]. I never used to need this, - well, maybe I needed it, but I never did it. It's a wellness adaptation.



Since I brought up leading yoga, I should explain my history with that meditative practice as my yoga story is unique. I have practiced yoga off and on for about 30 years. When I quit work in 2012, I had the quandary of how to live in retirement. Fitness has always been important, and I wanted to do something that I could do well into my 80s or 90s. Yoga seemed the obvious choice to me. I've spent years running and don't see that going on forever. Now as a yoga guide, I see that running often does damage to knees, ankles, and hips, so I'm glad I stopped that. I decided I wanted to learn more about yoga and took teacher training, although I had no intention of teaching. I

took the basic 200-hour course in the spring of 2014 and took another 300 hours for full for advanced certification the same year. Included in that was some practice teaching. I found over the years as I evolved into and in guiding / teaching seminars, etc. that I really enjoy guiding/teaching. I learned how to go into my guide/ teacher persona and be totally different than the day-to-day introvert I am. Yoga was no different. I started subbing in 2014 and have been at guiding yoga classes since – 3 to 5 classes per week.

Teaching is the best way to learn. What I love about it, is that as a senior, it provides me with considerable social contact. That is great for me, being prone to self-isolation. It also enhances my own practice of stretching and muscle retention. It stimulates me to continue improving my guiding/teaching, and in finding better ways to engage those interested. It feeds my inherent urge to community contribution. Yoga has many benefits: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. It is a meditative practice after all, with seven facets in addition to physical yoga that westerners know.

I get up and make my way to the bathroom for the usual ablutions: brushing teeth, shaving, showering etc. An important ritual is taking my medications. I have ritualized it first thing every morning, so I do not forget my two meds. The first is for high blood pressure. This is genetic. My lifestyle should have protected me from high blood pressure. I am vegetarian. I meditate. I exercise. I practice yoga regularly and I am active. Each of my brothers has gone on to blood pressure medicine as they hit their mid 60s although they too are healthy. Genes control.

The second medication is an anti-depressant that I have been on since January 2007. Depression percolated into my being during the months following the suicide of a family member. During those months, I actively supported the bereft parents, and then my own repressed grief overwhelmed me. Once I was fully on the anti-depressant, I realized by way of the significantly greater well-being than I experienced before, that I have been depressed all my life. I was functional and did not know any other way. My life was a dreary flat mindscape. I eventually found out my father was depressed. I discovered he was on anti-depressants when I visited once in his late 70s. This was not shared with the family and was not spoken about. I do not think any siblings were aware of the medication.

Genes? Perhaps. Or perhaps correlation within average population statistics. 5.4% of people experience depression, and some 25 % have some mental issues by age 18. In my immediate family confirmed depression is at 30%. In my extended family confirmed depression stands at 10%. What does that translate to?

My father had a brother in the “old country” who was institutionalized for most of his life. I never found out what for. He was not talked about. My brother has struggled with depression since his teens, even though I didn’t know it at the time. At university, he would sleep until four or five on weekend afternoons, a sign of depression that I wasn’t aware of then. He and I were both severely repressed as kids, knowing we were different, living in a fundamentalist, full of sin, abusively religious world. During the 80s and 90s, we would both develop PTSD and/or AIDS Survival Syndrome [ASS] compounded by crippling anxiety because of the many AIDS related deaths in our community. The ongoing trauma was exacerbated by vituperative hatred, discrimination, shunning, and disgust. I exhibited 14 out of 15 listed ASS symptoms, as did my brother.

In the family, we have two great nephews who also manifest. As a teen, one had depression while living with his family in Central America, and eventually got onto meds. The other great nephew in his 20’s, had depression, and acute paranoia. He locked himself in his bedroom for seven months, sleeping during the day and living in cyberspace by night, checking his bank account multiple times daily because he believed it was being hacked. He accused an art instructor of plagiarizing his ideas. He eventually agreed to talk therapy and medication and is now making progress, recovering his previous life as a noted budding artist, and completing his Bachelor of Arts degree.

I move on to my next morning ritual. I sit at my computer and check my email. Today there’s an interesting reply to a Tyee article about the recent cross-Canada anti-SOGI protests that I sent out to some friends yesterday. It is from Ben. We met in January 1970 at the Diplomat Bar in downtown Detroit. We

have remained friends ever since, 53 years now. I was living in Windsor, Ontario for a few months doing my first Master of Social Work practicum from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. Ben was from Windsor. We were at the Diplomat as there was no safe queer space in Windsor that I knew of. We hit it off as friends and stayed connected through the years even during my time in England and Ben's time in France. I was fully embraced by his mother. That was impactful for me, being known as queer and still accepted by a straight adult without judgement or shaming. I was 23 and really struggling with my sexual orientation. Ben's mother was an amazing figure in my life, always remembered her.

Ben's email waxed philosophical about topics we often discussed: tolerance, acceptance as LGBTQ people, the tenuousness of queer equality's progress, and our individual good fortunes in life. Ben's comments were salient and to the point as always. I totally understood what he was saying, and I quote from it here. The context is the anti-SOGI protest of last Saturday.

“. . . that's proof of the fact that we are tolerated and not accepted. This may sound inappropriate, but I think we may have been pushing the envelope by expecting them to accept, even tolerate men dressed like women reading to their precious possessions, their sacred offspring. That seems, in my estimation, to have been all they needed to justify their response. I have always known that anything we have managed to secure was not to be taken for granted and that we must remain vigilant. Thankfully, the law is still on our side but that too can change and if Trudeau keeps fucking up that may well happen . . . especially with Poilievre winning favour as he waits in the wings.“



been pushing the envelope . . .”

I wrote to Ben: “I agree with you that parts of our community push the conventional, cis- het dictated envelope. However, I hesitate to point fingers since the evangelicals, fascists and Nazis want us to be invisible, so they don't have to acknowledge that we exist. Your basic garden variety homos as opposed to trans people and drag queens, were the targets in this war not long ago – we were there, and inevitably will be again if these troglodytes succeed.

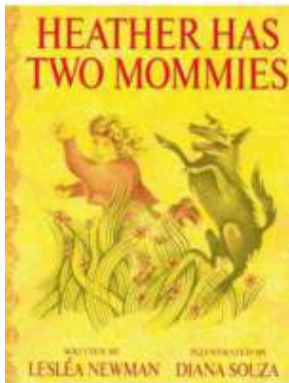
People of noticeable difference have been around for centuries, even millennia, and in many, notably non-Christian cultures, are totally incorporated. Two Spirit members of First Nations are accepted as they have both the feminine and masculine in their spirit. They were seen to be more closely connected to the divine, thus honoured as shamans and spiritual leaders. Not so much anymore due to the negative Christianizing impact of the white colonizers.

The Hijra in India are recognized and accepted as a third sex and have been part of open society there for thousands of years. Hijras held important positions in court administration from the 16th to 19th century. They hold religious authority and are sought out for blessings. Many African tribes were similar, certainly much more accepting than post-colonization. They did traditional women's work and communicated with the spirit world. Due to their masculine/feminine duality, they were seen as better suited to serve as messengers between the human and spirit worlds. The anti-SOGI people have had a devastating effect with their hateful proselytizing in African countries recently, ramping up anti-LGBT,



hatred and oppression. Some southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Laos and Cambodia also have traditions that incorporate transexual and transgender identities known as Kathoey [Ladyboys today]. Kathoey has been accepted for 100s of years as they do not claim to be actual women. They are identified as a 3rd gender: neither male nor female. In Buddhism, dominant there, Kathoey are seen as the result of bad karma for sexual misconduct. This is fully accepted in this lifetime.

I am not going to judge our Ladyboys. Were you and I afraid of anything beyond the binary back in the day? Certainly, I was, even though I had no urge to do that. Or did fear of stigma and being singled out kill any urge that I might have had? That could well be, as I remember playing house with my brothers around the ages of 6 to 8, and I would play the role of 'Mother'. It's a difficult area, as I know that they'd rather we just go away and be quietly, invisibly "perverse" and "sinful abominations". Nothing can be taken for granted. Look at the recent claw back of rights, pushed by the right wing of evangelicals and Fascists.



A friend of mine went to the protest here last Saturday and tried to talk to the protesters. They spoke from an obvious script, carefully crafted and stringently adhered to. They were aggressive. They wouldn't let him get a word in, all the time spouting imagined or fabricated science. There is clearly an agenda pushed by American evangelicals and money into Canada. They've been doing this for a long time. Look at what they've convinced some African countries to do such as Uganda and Kenya, as I already noted.

After finishing with my emails, I move on to my daily meditation. Recently, I have added chanting to my ritual. I fully believe in the multiple benefits of both meditation and chanting. The benefits and impacts have been scientifically validated. They improve the immune system and reduce levels of depression. They both stimulate clarity of mind, focus and greater connection with the subconscious. The physical vibration of chanting stimulates the vagus nerve which connects the brain to the gut. This vibration has many benefits, including relaxation, decreased anxiety and depression, and better physical and emotional health. The main benefit as I see it, is that it takes the brain into gamma waves, taking the mind out of the rational sphere and preoccupation with the material realm into the subconscious, esoteric realm. It opens us up to intuition, to 3rd eye perception, subconscious solutions and getting in touch with greater consciousness, or spirit, if you will; with the non-physical. That is why most spiritual traditions have some form of vocal vibration in their rituals, including chanting, hymns, oral prayers, calls to worship, incantation, singing the Rosary with the Apostle's Creed as its mantra, and more.

Now I hurry along to lead my Qmunity yoga class. I meet with a small group that are now friends, having practised together for several years, some more than 5 years. We invariably begin with some banter including gossip or topical issues. Today we discuss the anti-SOGI march and the impacts of that organized hate.

Then home to join the QUIRK-E weekly Zoom meeting. It is a welcome refuge, sharing time and thought with motivated, aware, action-focused, peers. We start out with the check-in for each to share the significance of their beings. We move on with stimulating and vibrant exchange of ideas, advocacy needs, discussion, and written work. Two hours is full of variety and passes quickly.

Then I am ready to relax over some late breakfast. I settle into some reading and writing. Once my brain really turns to mush after about 6 pm, I indulge in mindless Netflix; a special, perhaps a now more frequent documentary on the rise of dystopian fascism and fundamentalist evangelicals catapulting humanity to Helter Skelter and 1984.

I chant. I meditate. I sit in silence. Then I retire.

A LITTLE MEMORY FROM WAY BACK

River Glen

I remember going to the old Los Angeles airport around the time we moved to Westchester, the neighbourhood north of the airport, in around 1957, and I was four years old. I remember an outing with my parents and the grandma I was soon to lose. We went to the restaurant located in the single, little terminal. I don't know why I still remember it, and the memory I'm picturing looks like the picture here.



With LA growing all the time, a new international airport was needed and then created. As a little girl I watched the control tower and Theme building built. We had no idea of the impact it would have on our lives and the community. Ultimately it wasn't good. Over the course of my childhood, the roar of the planes had us pausing conversations until a plane passed, or running to the TV (no remote) to turn the sound up then run to turn it down. The teachers at school had to contend with it. I can remember

sonic booms so loud we covered, or the times when a plane was flagged off the runway, so incredibly low overhead, it was like a cruise ship hanging above you then roaring away. Of course, there was the jet fuel hanging in the air as well. Needless to say with the completion of the north runway and the ever bigger jets, it wasn't safe for our neighbourhood. The powerful people in charge decided, as funds became available over time, that the residences would be condemned and owners modestly compensated. There were many in the community who fought losing their homes for years, but the exercising of 'eminent domain'* slowly rolled over block by block of houses, taking more than a decade to eliminate them all.

As teenagers we'd go all over the airport terminals. We never ran into any security back then. We even wandered down an underground tunnel once, and once a few of us strolled around with some guy's boa constrictor snakes around our necks. Year after year, the airport bought up more houses, but I had already moved out in the early seventies when my parents, on the last block, got the check. Post high school, I worked at a food counter in one of the terminals for a while for \$1.90 an hour. My mom worked for the airport security that they finally had in the seventies. She was 5'2 and took weapons away from people. She was a character and made friends with her young coworkers, other airport employees and the passengers. A few movie stars knew her from MGM in the late 1940's where she had worked and greeted her like a long lost friend.

I got a job as a Budget rental car agent, and Mom would come by and chat at my counter. From my counter in the arrival lounge, I would look up from the paper work and see Clint Eastwood, Jack Lemon, James Coburn, Shirley MacLaine, Walter Matthau or dozens of others walking by or stopping to rent from me. The Budget Hollywood location had a big fleet of luxury cars, and one would be delivered curb side to the VIP's. I really liked the job, seeing the worldwide human race walk by. In between flights, when the those who had deplaned had their cars, we smoked cigarettes at the counter, ate bake goods and read piles of magazines my fellow workers brought in. There was one fellow counter girl, I'll call M&M, I crushed on, and her being there made being there fun. I smoked a few jays with the Skycaps up on the Theme observatory or in a parkade during the 3 years I worked there. One time, eating lunch in the international terminal, I sat beside Jack Palance. He was crazy funny. The original owner of Budget, Morris Mirkin, still owned the LAX and Hollywood locations; eventually the rest was made part of the Transamerica corporation. He treated all the employees so well. He hired minorities and women managers; he gave us corsages every Hallmark holiday, and a manager would show up with donuts, throwing in a couple of turkeys and bonuses every year for the holidays, and they had buffets spread out during meetings at the off-site lot. Most incredible was that management had our backs when we had to deal with irate

customers. I made pretty good money for the time. You shouldn't have to depend on the luck of a good boss though, and in subsequent jobs, I had jobs with unions.

After the check for the house came in, my parents divorced. They had been held hostage in a terrible marriage with an un-saleable house as the neighbourhood had gradually dissolved on the airport's timeline. Add to that, in the late 1960's my father lost his career as a photoengraver at the Herald

Examiner Newspaper where he'd been for 25 years. Hearst, the owner broke the union after a 3 year strike locking out the workers, so he could retool, computerize everything and bring in lower wages. My dad never did earn much after that. My mom went to night school, and after I graduated high school, she got her GED diploma and her first job since having kids with the airport security. My father moved to Ensenada, Mexico, and Mom moved to an apartment on Imperial Avenue by the south runway on the other side of the airport in El Segundo.

After a year she married Richard who lived upstairs in her building. I was on a rebound from misadventures in San Francisco, and my brother had finished up with the army, so we had both moved in to her unoccupied apartment, fully furnished with all her stuff. She and Richard had a great year and a half together. They married in Kauai, visited London and were planning a trip to Egypt when she died from a sudden heart attack. I had just turned 25. My brother and I gave moral support to the twice widowed Richard for some time, but as soon as I could, I gave notice to her landlord. I moved to North Redondo, and my brother hung on in El Segundo for a number of years. Richard visited Kelowna once where I had settled on an orchard. A couple of times on vacation in LA over the years, my brother has driven me to the area where we lived. All the houses are gone, but the Emerson Manor elementary school where we went, located at the end of what had been my block, is still there, and it is currently used for adult education programs. The businesses, one block east on Sepulveda Boulevard, are still there as well, and further west, Westchester High School (now a Magnate School), never closed. Maybe it's considered safe for people being in the area less than 24/7. . . I don't know.

I guess I'm trying to say here that society keeps changing, and the little lives of people are affected, and one just needs to cut their losses, gather up what they can and move on.

1. The right of a government or its agent to expropriate private property for public use, with payment of compensation.

* Photo credits: Facebook post by Jason Horton and Theme Building and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Los_Angeles_International_Airport.



WINTER WARM-UP '23: QMUNITY Holiday

Open House

Senior's Program Holiday Package

QMUNITY, 1170 Bute Street, Vancouver, BC V6E 1Z6, Canada

Friday, 15 December 2023 from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (PT)

Free -- Order on Eventbrite



NENA RAWDAH INTERVIEW October 19, 2023

Annie Newman

The Cross and Crows bookstore (crossandcrows.com) is an amazing Queer gathering and reading space at 12th and Commercial (2836 Commercial Drive, Vancouver). Along with being warmly welcomed by Nena Rawdah, I could easily sit and browse through the new and used books for awhile, because of the comfortable wing-backed chairs interspersed in the aisles. Nena exuded excitement about literature, social change, and community. She opened the Cross and Crows in July 2023.

Annie- “How did you conceive of the name for your store, The Cross and Crows?”

Nena- “We have this gigantic cross over here, hello, thank you Ken (**Ken Lum**, a renowned Vancouver artist). And all these crows form a river from Clark Park, in the evening, during the golden hour, to Still Creek on their flight commute.” She mentioned how the business registry challenged their store name submissions because they were too similar to other companies. Nena said she was encouraged to come up with a name that sounded like a pub: “something and something.”

Annie- “I am also curious about your passion for being a bookseller?”

Nena- “People.” She talked about people who fall in love with rare books; “the book as object,” or people finding Queer books they need, or people being able to gather and share appreciation for the author at book events. “It’s really about human beings. Books don’t matter unless people interact with them. It’s people giving a space meaning.”

“Last night I had **Tom Prime** here, for a reading.” Tom’s solo collection of poetry, ***Male Pregnancy in Reverse***, was released on New Star Books in September, 2023. Tom has authored and co-authored extensive collections of poetry. Nena said that to celebrate Queer and Trans-related work with others, who are “happy to focus on artistry,” and to experience people coming in to get what they need, is a lot of what makes bookselling a joy for her.

Annie- “When it comes to people launching their books and other works: do they come to you, you to them, or is it a combination?”

Nena- “A bit of both. I missed the catalogue (**a publisher’s catalogue of new book titles and their authors**) season of the year, because the bookstore opened 3 months ago. But I managed to have 6 book events in a month’s span. **Nick Marino** is different for us, because this is a neighbourhood store and not exclusionary in what we stock. The focus for events is really for Queer books. But Nick has written about this neighbourhood. He wrote ***East Side Story: Growing Up at The PNE***. And he’s coming here. To read from this lovely memoir about working 6 boyhood summers at the PNE.”

Annie- “I am curious about what led you to coming to Vancouver to start up your store?”

Nena- “My partner. I was running a bookstore in Portland, Oregon. We had a 15 year cross border relationship. My partner was in Canada and was not going to come to the States.” Nena talked of wondering how to work on her relationship and bookselling business when she was so “deeply rooted” in her St John’s, Portland neighbourhood. Then a chunk of the facade of her St. John’s, Portland shop fell off. Literally, fell off! It was a rented building, and the roof hadn’t been worked on for 45 years. Nena had to stop working, off and on for months, while the landlord dealt with city engineering and repairs were done. The community held fund raisers for Nena. The Mayor even showed up. “It was incredibly moving” she said.

“And I wanted to figure out a path forward. Like in Vancouver, costs were going up and commercial leases were rising. It was not a happy time.” “But I thought I would look at this as a liberation. I would choose to go to Canada, and I immigrated, and we chose to get officially married and make it smoother. We ended up in Vancouver in November, 2016 and moved to this neighbourhood (**Commercial Drive**). Even though this neighbourhood is busier, it's a lot like St. John's: close knit, working class roots. Being back in business is a joy.”

Annie- “So isn't this interesting. A roof falls and an opportunity comes!”

Nena- I was so loved there (St. John's), and the idea of letting go of that was really, really hard. I had to have something to look forward to because I was tearing out my roots.”

Annie- “You worked at Powells, at Annie Blooms Books, and you also had your own bookstore.”

Nena - “Yes, St. John's Bookstore.”

Annie - “I could see how you needed to feel you were moving towards something that was loving and positive for you, after having that real sense of community and care.”

Nena - “It was a big deal.”

Annie - “And there's that sense here. A feeling of caring in this space.”

Nena - “And there's an additional story for you.”

Nena talked about how she had been looking at different business options, after working at the St. John's bookstore before she decided to move to Canada. This included considering the purchase of a bookstore from another bookseller in Portland, when invited to do so, by the owner. After considerable deliberations, it was clear this wasn't the path to take. She also mentioned that she worked as a book editor, while in the States, and still does, here in Canada.



Martha Shelley, the author (***We Set the Night On Fire: Igniting the Gay Revolution***), a friend who lived near Nena in Portland, was the first person to ask Nena, if she had arranged a **Go Fund Me Campaign**, when Nena was considering other bookstore options. Martha wanted to know where she should send the Go Fund Me cheque. Nena received \$22,000 through the Go Fund Me proceeds. The bulk of the money came through her customers.

Nena- “Martha, in addition to a first author I interviewed at Powell's over 20 years before, and a family friend's mom, dug into their pockets, because they wanted to see me set up a new bookstore. So this bookstore is in part a gift from the reading, writing community of St John's.”

Nena - “I need to make it here, because they believe in me. So, it's a responsibility. And I'm so incredibly lucky. This is my second shot at something that some people don't get one shot at. I get misty. I have it in a significant part because of the love of people who never see it.”

Annie – “**My next question for you: How do you decide on genres of books? I know you have second hand books and new books.**”

Nena - “It's a combination of experience and personal tastes, also a sense of the neighbourhood, the purpose of the store: this is a queer centric store. It is run by Queer people. Literally, our entire family is queer, both my kids. So, this is not a side thing, this is central. So how is that reflected in what we do here. There still are not enough Queer books in the world. There just flatly are not. “But not enough to fill the store, right? The first place our money goes is the Queer books. When we have to budget for the new books, it's Queer, Queer, Queer, oh!

“And that's true with the used books as well, but we can't control the flow of used books. But in a pile, I will take the Queer books over the others. That's the first thing that's going to be reflected. And then

with cookbooks: will I eat that? Do I know someone who will eat that? Have I seen this person around the neighbourhood? Do I have a sense of who they are? Is this a book that's likely to only sell on-line? A lot of the answers to these questions come from experience and I have almost 29 years of experience."

Annie- "That's a good background of experience, yeah."

Nena - It started out at Powell's, where used booksellers buy sometimes 10,000 used books a day.

Annie - "Holy Cow!"

Nena - "So it's incredible. Even when you're not a full time buyer; when you're a section head supporting buyers, you see a massive number of books. And cashiering, you see a massive number of books. And you get a sense of what people care about."

Annie- "**Regarding book buying: What is the process if I wanted to bring in some used books to you?**"

"You can. You can walk in the door with them and I'll take a look. You can email me pictures of the spine, I'll be able to tell you. I will tell you, I definitely want to see these, these I definitely don't want to see. Then when you come in I evaluate the condition but I already know the titles. Just make sure that the pages aren't stained and that they aren't very tobacco scented or something, and not too highlighted."

Annie- "**And are the books on a donation or sale basis?**"

Nena- "I won't say no to donations. I have mixed feelings about donations. Because then I have to deal with any donated books I am not keeping. And I cannot keep every book. But with the ones I do keep, any credit that is given for them, is donated for the community. If people do want compensation for their books, I do cash or credit. I give 20 % more for credit than for cash. I am picky."

Annie- " Makes a lot of sense."

Nena- "I'm even pickier with cash. That's not to say I won't look at books that may surprise. Because I've been surprised by what people choose."

Annie- **Do you have book recommendations for LGBTQ+ Elders?**

Nena- "What I have seen leaving, so far, is general fiction. This is a reflection of not enough books about us. New and Used books are important, but, if someone is writing something you care about, and you believe there needs to be more of that, if you are at all able to, buy it new. Become an advocate, a sales force for the book. Publishers really don't do that as much anymore. Individual books, unless it's anticipated that they are going to sell massively, don't get that care. It comes from individuals and individual book sellers, saying "hello," whether it's me or any of my neighbours up and down the street. There are five bookstores on the street right now and one around the corner on Hastings. We're the sales force for books that otherwise might not get the care. Because, that is what tells the publisher to make more. That's how Queer books get into the market, including the characters they are creating. I am considering what people leave with, and what I think people would like: **Ursula Le Guin's Hainish Novels - *Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, a few other novels, and a couple of novellas.** Even though it's dystopian, the main character, she's queer, but her identity is incidental. It's just there, hard to imagine."

Annie- In closing, the Cross and Crows is worthy of a browse, and you may have the pleasure of a conversation with Nena or an ongoing literary relationship.

Thanks, Nena



A Diverse Selection of Books at the Cross and Crows. Just One of the Many Shelves



And here's a teaser: this is the first section from Marsha's draft LGBTQ2S sci-fi novel written in the Quirk-e fiction group. To be published soon . . .

DAL'S CUBICLE
1A. AFTER DISASTER (A.D.403)
Marsha Ablowitz

On ruined planet earth, a Uni-federation child is trying desperately to escape: *I am Dal. If I stand and jump up, I hit the hard top. If I move this way, I hit the wall. Walls, walls everywhere. No way out. Teddy is warm and dances with me, but his colors and songs keep repeating. I must get out. Will Hanuman fly to rescue me? No, Hanuman never comes. Next time mommy closes the hard top, I will poke Teddy up there to keep it open.*



Sal looked up from her immersion array and pushed back her curly brown hair. She noticed that she hadn't heard a sound from the baby for a long time. Finding a link between transformation myths and the neo-human shape changers so excited her that she hadn't checked on Dal. It wasn't that she didn't care for her baby. In designing and creating her own dear, brown-skinned, curly-haired child, Sal had learned what it was to love another being even more than she loved her research. She scanned Dal's crib on her implanted monitor and gasped. The crib was empty. The baby proof triple locked hatch was open. Her heart racing, Sal leapt into her baby's life space. "Dal! Dal!" she shrieked. Then her eyes darted up the stained, loose, wall tiles leading to the air vent. Its lock had been deprogrammed. The cover dangled open revealing a dark gaping hole. How could any creature have bypassed her apartment warning sensors to steal her baby? Sal was gasping as she rang the alarm and shot her sleeve probe into the vent hole. There was the sound of something scrabbling in there. Sal screamed hysterically: "Dal! Dal! come back. Creature, bring back my baby, or I'll tear you apart! "

Sal leapt for the ceiling and grabbed the vent hole. She extended her sleeve probe, slithering it carefully along the dark vent tube. She gasped as she touched a little foot. Gently she wrapped the probe around her baby's foot and pulled. Dal screamed, but she was stuck. Sal pulled harder. Suddenly the baby shot out, knocking Sal to the floor. Sal clung to Dal, crying and rocking her screaming baby as her digesto sleeve sucked up their tears and snot.

(A.D. 405)

"Mom, it's Sal. Emergency. Please tune in."

"What is it now Sal? I'm busy with my beautification treatment." "You know I hate to ask for money, but it's Dal?"

"Oh dear gods. Is my tiny darling sick?"

"No. But it's urgent mom, I must buy Dal a Total Immersion Virtual Reality gym."

"Sal, that's ridiculous. Why does our sweet little tot need a gym? It's tricky enough finding spare credits to pay your rent."

"Mom, remember the last time she escaped? This time she stole my multi tool. She deprogrammed the locks on the garbage discinto chute. I grabbed her back foot as she was sliding down to the crusher."

"My gods! The little escape artist. You damn well better get proper locks."

"She deprograms all the locks, mom. She's too bright. She craves exercise and complex programs. She's screaming crazy from boredom."

"You programmed her with too much muscle and brain power."

"Oh mom, we've been through this."

"And you skimmed on her good looks. I've told you so many times, teach her more dances and songs and stories."

"Jees, Mom! I've taught her my whole kids' repertoire. It's not enough. She's desperate for more space. She's climbing the walls."

"Sal, I told you she just needs beautification and tranquilization."

"That didn't work for me."

"Obviously. That's why you're so dull brown and muscular. That's why I must risk everything to give you credits."

"Mom, don't be dramatic. It's not that risky. They'll never catch you."

"Sal, we shouldn't even be talking like this. Besides, do you think anyone would have listened to my songs of Peace and Love if I looked like you?"

"Mom, I can't be concerned about bright, straight hair and big boobs. I can't alter my body the way you did."

"I had to be beautiful, Sal."

"Those creepy guys fucked you over. Then they were finished profiteering off you. They just used you to end their war."

"Watch what you say Sal. I need them. You know they pay my expenses so I can afford to pay yours."

"It's a power trip. They pay your bills and don't give you access to your own credits."

"Yes, I should have read the fine print."

"Why were you so naive?"

"Love and fame. Sure Ku took all the profits. But he made me a star. And he had such beautiful eyes. Besides, you carry his genes."

"Thankfully not too many. Those jerks manipulated you. The arms oligarchs were fed up with their Uni-Xexar war. Jaz and Ku's sleazy fathers just wanted peace, so they sent their sons to sing backup with you. You were the one who charmed the crowds. It was your money."

"Yes I was the shining Uni star singing 'Lord of the Mountains'. By the end, both sides were losing too much and wanted peace."

"For life's sake mom, the next thing Ku did was murder his father."

"Don't talk like that. This link may not be secure. We need his credits."

"Sorry mom. You're correct. It always burns me up thinking about how they still control you."

"It's O.K. darling. Luckily, you love me. I don't have to worry about you or Dal plotting my death."

"It's no joke mom. I'm scared of them. They are psychos."

"Sal, don't panic. Sometimes everything is so sad and crazy and risky, we just need to laugh."



BILLIONS MORE REASONS TO CARE BC RESIDENTIAL LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES: THE BUMPY OPERATING FIELD

Adriaan de Vries

The British Columbia Seniors' Advocate has been hard at work for the last 10 years and has released important reports. The latest report was released on October 23, 2023. This is a follow up to an earlier report released in early 2019. The indictment of the most recent report is that very little has changed in long-term residential care since the report of four years ago in spite of specific, important recommendations.

Some key findings of the report titled: Billions More Reasons to Care, are outlined here.

Since 2017 / 2018:

- Direct care staffing costs have increased by 33%
- Indirect care staffing costs have increased by 33%
- Capital building [which includes mortgages] costs up by 18%
- Supplies and administration costs were up by 61%
- Profit [undefined] increased by 113%

Some significant differences were found again between the for-profit facilities [FP], and not for profit facilities [NP].

- NP spent 25% more dollars on direct care.
- NP delivered 93,000 hours more on direct care than funded for as opposed to FP's delivering 500,000 hours less than funded for. *[see note below]
- FP spent 66% more on capital building costs [includes mortgages on privately owned buildings paid by tax dollars]
- FP earned 7X as much profit as NPs. Profit is not defined. [this does NOT include management fees charged only by FPs and mortgage payments noted above].
- FPs overall pay staff significantly less than NPs and their staff are less qualified.

The four main recommendations put forward by the BC Seniors' advocate are:

1. Public money subsidizing long-term facilities **designated for Direct Care must be spent on Direct Care**, and not on other expenses. If not used for Direct Care, those funds must be returned.
2. There must be complete **transparency** in monitoring standards, and in reporting on performance using those standards. Reporting must also be standardized.
3. **Define profit.** Are management fees profit? Are mortgage payments for private facilities profit?
4. The **financial status and reports** of long-term care facilities that are publicly subsidized **must be made public.**

For much more rich information, read the report: Billions More Reasons to Care at the link. The executive summary, very informative and less than two pages long, is found on page 4.

<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2023/10/Billions-More-Reasons-to-Care-Sept-23.pdf>

Action Suggested: As a concerned British Columbian and a 2+SLGBTQI+ plus senior, you may wonder what you can do. There is a campaign by the British Columbia Health Coalition to send a postcard to the minister responsible for long-term care facilities: Adrian Dix. The BC Health Coalition will send you a postcard [stamped and addressed] on which you Write your views and concerns, plus your story.

Find out more about it and how to get a postcard for that purpose, at the link:

https://www.bchealthcoalition.ca/send_a_postcard_to_minister_dix

*Assuming a standard of 7 ½ hours worked per day, and 223 days per year worked [equal 365 days -104 weekend days, -15 vacation days, -13 statutory holidays, -10 sick days] that adds up to 55.6 full-time work years added by the NPs and 299 full-time work years not delivered by FPs. Assigning a wage of \$22 per hour that is \$2,092,284 of unfunded work by NPs and \$11,251,669 of taxpayer funding for work that was not delivered by FPs as budgeted.

TIPS FOR CYBERSECURITY

Mela Brown

I work in IT. I like to nerd out on stuff like information security and password managers. One of the things that makes me the angriest is how people, especially elders, are preyed on by cybercriminals.

Cybercriminals use social engineering to exploit compassion, fear, empathy, loneliness, pain, coincidence, confusion and so on. With the advance of Artificial Intelligence, the threat of cybercrime is getting worse.

The best protection is to train your brain to resist manipulation.

1. If you take anything away from this article let it be that you will remember the THREE RED FLAGS of cyber crime. When you experience one or a combination of these flags, take a beat. Think twice.
 - ⊗ It's urgent.
 - ⊗ Your personal information is requested.
 - ⊗ You are invited to click a link.
2. Don't give out information to someone who phones even if they say they are the Canada Revenue Agency, k.d. Lang, your bank or your doctor. If you're not sure if it's a scam, hang up and call the organization (or person) back at the number you have on file.
3. Create a safe-word with your trusted friends and family that only you would know. If you ever get a call saying a family member is travelling and needs money, or has been in an accident and needs money, ask for the safe-word. A good way to do it is with question and answer. For example, Q: Who is your favourite character from *Dykes to Watch Out For*? A: Sydney.
4. AI (Artificial Intelligence) can now create fake video and audio with only a small sample to replicate. AI can also fake images and writing such as correspondence. But it's not perfect (yet). Ways to spot AI generated products:
 - ⊗ Blended images (e.g., an ocean image where the waves are different)
 - ⊗ Lighting is often wrong (e.g., shadows in the wrong place, reflections missing)
 - ⊗ Faster video speed
 - ⊗ Humans in video are never shown in profile
 - ⊗ Hands and fingers look wrong
 - ⊗ In writing, odd words or wordiness
5. As queers, we're naturally good at cybersecurity because we've learned to trust our intuition and not make assumptions! Stay safe out there.





Donate to help a refugee family settle in Vancouver!

We are sponsoring a large family that includes a member of the LGBTQ community. They have actively protested the Taliban regime and their lives are in danger. The family has escaped Afghanistan and anxiously await our help to come to safety in Canada.

How can you help?

We need cash donations and contributions to our raffle and auction! With the \$120,000 we are raising, we will help the family relocate to Vancouver, find housing and health care, and settle into school and employment.

Who are we?

Rainbow Bridge is a Circle of Hope within Rainbow Refugee, a Vancouver organization that supports refugees seeking protection from persecution for sexual orientation, HIV status, and gender identity or expression.

DONATE



To learn more and sign up for our newsletter contact
Claire at clairerobson@shaw.ca
Please like us on Facebook to see our events and activities.



RainbowRefugeeCircles

We have raised over \$110,000 and need to raise another \$30,000 to bring the family to Vancouver and support them for a year while they find a home and settle into school and employment.

PLEASE HELP: donate what you can, and you'll receive an instant tax credit.

You will also know that, while you can't necessarily change the whole world, you can change it for these people who fought for women's rights in Afghanistan and became targets. They are in constant danger. This family desperately needs our help.



Q m u n i t y is a non-profit 2S LGBTQIA+ organization based in Vancouver that works to improve queer, trans and 2-Spirit people's lives, providing a safe space for them and their allies to fully self-express while feeling welcome and included.

Qmunity has a new building under construction which will be an even greater catalyst for community initiatives and collective strength.

Quirk-e has been in a mutually beneficial relationship with Qmunity for many years. Qmunity provides us with events that we can participate in throughout the year. In addition, Quirk-e's zine publications have been graciously printed and distributed by Qmunity.

Quirk-e looks forward to many more years of collaboration with Qmunity.

Qmunity- <https://qmunity.ca>, reception@qmunity.ca, 604-684-5307 ext. 102 , 1-800-566-1170

QUEER ORGANIZATIONS

If you're looking for connections within the queer community in the Lower Mainland or on Vancouver Island, the following contacts should be useful.

- Rocketman website with a list of queer organizations: <https://rocketmanapp.com/blog/13-organizations-supporting-lgbtq-communities-in-british-columbia/>
- Qmunity- <https://qmunity.ca>, reception@qmunity.ca, 604-5307 ext. 100 , 1-800-566-1170
- Vancouver Island Queer Resource Collective (Vancouver and Victoria)
<https://viqueercollective.com/>
- Dignity Seniors Society <https://www.dignityseniors.org/>, dignityseniorssociety@gmail.com
- Vancouver Pride Society <https://vancouverpride.ca/>
- Surrey Pride surreypride.ca
- Alex House alexhouse.net,
- New West Pride <https://newwestpride.ca>
- Youth 4 A Change <https://www.youth4achange.net>
- Egale [The Acronym - October 2023 \(salsalabs.org\)](https://www.salsalabs.org/)
- Vancouver Parks Board [Park Board Pride | City of Vancouver](https://www.vancouver.ca/parks-board-pride) available queer programs

Collected by River Glen and Cyndia Cole

CONTINUE SHINING A LIGHT



FIND AND USE YOUR VOICE!

QUIRK-E 
Queer Imaging & Riting Kollektive for Elders