

CHALLENGES . . .



. . . AND TRIUMPHS!

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. Canada stole their land and their children and still operates under the oppressive Indian Act. We must do better.

INTRODUCTION

River Glen

Welcome readers to our Fall 2024 Quirk-e Zine. 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. We editors and contributors invite you, our very precious readers, to explore this our latest Zine, *Challenges and Triumphs*. Our title for this edition reflects our taking stock of the ups and downs of living through the decades. There is pathos, humour, insight and the need to be seen in our full humanity. Every stage of life has challenges and triumphs. Some of our members have significant accomplishments that have received accolades, while some of us have waged very private battles and happily just managed to live through them. Thank you to all the writers offering their stories and insights because recognizing, connecting and inspiring are the zine's mission.

2024 sure has its challenges: war, climate change, global economics, the escalating "culture war" and election outcomes. It is critically important to share information, ideas and the real life consequences affecting society and the individual. Art is good at doing this. However, art across all disciplines is vulnerable to censorship, propaganda and excluding people who don't fit the dominant culture's criteria. Queer folks are only beginning to get space and representation in mainstream media. The controversies about queer content in the Paris Olympics or gender definitions illuminates the distance left to go. And around the world there are so many countries where queer folk are completely under siege. As we are about to send this zine to the printers, Donald Trump has just been elected once again. There are many unknowns as to how negatively many people and so many issues will be affected. Let's prepare for mass casualties. We will need to use all our wits, caring and decency to help in all the ways we can. Love has to win.

Quirkies bring to this Zine our foundational aspirations of: Creativity, Resilience and Advocacy. Yes to the liberation and appreciation of diversity and the celebration of life and love not limited by gender expression, patriarchy, ideologies or power inequality.



QUIRK-E DECLARATION

The Queer Imaging and Riting Kollective 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.

QUIRK-E.

Garth McIver

In April last year (2023) I attended a Qmunity event at Creekside Community Centre aimed at services and opportunities for senior gays. Part of the agenda included a panel of older gay writers reading short excerpts of memoirs, poems and the like. This was my introduction to Quirk-e. I had long contemplated writing, especially memoirs, but had rarely put pen to paper. But those kindly benign faces on stage looked like they might give me the encouragement and mentoring I needed to begin.



I inquired about the group and was given a member's phone contact and shortly after had a telephone interview. I was asked a number of questions about myself and then was told my interest in joining Quirk-e would be vetted by their coordinating committee before acceptance. He did suggest that I sounded like their type, but membership was limited, and there were only a few spots open. Well, I thought, I hope I'm gay enough, interesting enough or whatever is required and wondered just how exclusive was this group. Turns out I made the grade and was invited to join, but it was now summer, and for various reasons I was not able to attend my first meeting of Quirk-e until October.

My first meeting was on ZOOM. It was my first glimpse of the grey haired and balding members who occupied each of the gallery squares on my laptop. As usual, I found it comforting that my peers always manage to look so much older than I think I do. As the meeting progressed, all kinds of topics were brought forward. A major project was developing a web page so that others could find links to Quirk-e information, its history, stories and resources. Some members were facilitating a refugee family coming to Canada; SOGI was being threatened; the planet was dying, and so it went. Finally with a handful of minutes left in the two hour meeting, it broke into three small groups depending on the creative interest of participants. I went to the pan-memoir group. There was time for just one short reading.

When the meeting had ended, I thought about what I had observed and heard. Was my first introduction to Quirk-e what I expected? What had I expected? Maybe a tutorial on sentence structure or missing commas or dangling modifiers? Perhaps, but I do know that I had not expected to observe a forum of elder gays that were astutely political, anti-racist, refugee advocates, environmentalists and committed to Reconciliation for Canada's Indigenous people. As I attended a few more meetings, I began to appreciate that Quirkies had a fierce commitment to social justice. Yes, it was a writing collective, but the substance of their work was also meant to challenge inequality, the intolerant, and the misinformed.

On reflection, I should not have been surprised. After all, wasn't our generation of the baby boomer gays the progressive champions of social change? Isn't that how we learned to survive and thrive as a community? We have always known struggle. We have fought for rights that were denied us. We have fought injustice and inequality for our community and in turn had the backs of other marginalized minorities. Quirkies are tried and true old war horses, still trudging on, because their work is not done.



My politics are left of center, but I still have a lot to learn about the struggles for justice and equality for all peoples. Although I have participated in small ways in the past, I thought my days of activism were behind me, or at best I would be supportive from my easy chair or with the donor's cheque.

In the past few months, I have received encouragement and mentoring for my writing, but I am also

getting an education on discrimination, oppression and injustice. It has been a dividend to listen to the discussions promoting inclusive policies that embrace racial as well as sexual and oppressed minorities and the health of the planet. Activism is part of Quirk-e's agenda, through advocacy as well as through writing and documentation of our past and present struggles. Turns out I didn't join just a writing group, and I better not put my marching boots away just yet.

LETTER TO THE YOUNG

Cyndia Cole

Dear Young Folks,

Fifty six years ago, when I was eighteen years old in 1968, despite my settler, white-skinned, middle class, born in the USA privilege, because I was a woman, I could not attend Princeton University though I was qualified in all other ways. I could not pursue studies and a career in science, technology, engineering or math even though I loved and excelled in these subjects.

Because I was a woman, I could not wear comfortable clothing that allowed freedom of movement to school or to work, to church or to parties. I could not travel alone with the expectation of safety on planes, trains, subways, buses, bicycles or on foot especially to unknown places or at night.

Because I was a woman, I could not ask anyone out on a date or even for a dance. I could not rebuff sexual attention from any male without being ridiculed as 'frigid.' I could not accept sexual attention from any male without being shamed as a "whore."

As a woman, I could not expect to have the knowledge, means or social/medical support to experience any aspect of my sexuality with consent, pleasure, respect or safety and without force, unwanted pregnancy, STDs, condemnation, ostracism and guilt. I certainly could not raise a child alone.

Fifty four years ago, when I was twenty years old in 1970, I ran away to Canada with a man I was advised to marry to help him stay alive and out of prison, and I did. As a married woman, I tried to keep my maiden name but did not succeed.

Because I was married and a woman it was very unlikely that I could ever get the same work as a man, let alone a career or profession. But if I did, I could never expect to be paid the same as that man. I could not expect to ever have a woman boss or to be the boss of male employees.

Because I was a married woman, I could not be considered on my own merits. I could not apply for a job, a student visa or landed immigrant status unless my husband got these first on his own merits. I could not sign a lease, get a loan or a mortgage unless my husband signed for it. As a married woman I could not get a divorce unless I proved my husband guilty of some very serious wrong doing even if he also wanted a divorce. If he didn't want the divorce, I would be crucified for my wrong doings, real or imagined, and he would emerge blameless.

Forty eight years ago, when I was twenty six years old in 1976, because I was a woman, I could not kiss a woman without knowing that I might lose my job, my apartment and my entire network of social support including family, friends, neighbours, academic mentors and even heterosexual feminists. If I displayed any affection towards a woman, if I "looked like" a lesbian or if I simply seemed unresponsive or angry towards sexual attention from men in any public place, I might lose my physical safety. As a Lesbian-feminist woman, I could not expect support or solidarity from other women when I spoke out about anything, especially about experiences of sexual abuse, harassment or rape. Though when I did receive their support, it changed everything.



Cyndia reading this

Because I was a woman who loved another woman, I could not begin to imagine my reality today at the age of seventy four in 2024. We have a thirty-year partnership and March 8, 2020, International Women's Day is the 13th anniversary of our love being legally recognized. We have constructed a magnificent East Vancouver home which we share with chosen family. We're embraced by all of our biological family members and welcomed by our multicultural neighbours. We survived suspicion and harassment at work and are retired from honoured careers in elder care, mental health and addictions. For years, we gave our hearts and souls to supporting our brothers with AIDS. We are faith leaders who co-founded a Pride Group for SGI Buddhists thirty years ago. We live rich, authentic lives contributing to our Queer, Quirk-e and Britannia communities. We have found our voices through stories, poetry and humour. We mentor familial, queer and Buddhist youth. Because we are women, women together, we've made lives worth living, lives of happiness. Everything we risked and challenged and fought for was worth it. We were ordinary women who wanted to change our lives. We believed we could and we did. So can you!



With love and confidence in your futures,
Cyndia Cole

THE CHALLENGE AND CELEBRATION OF BECOMING MYSELF

Adriaan de Vries

The challenge of becoming myself has been in front of me, clawing at my face, aggravating me daily, breaking my spirit, dulling my psyche, limiting accomplishment and robbing me of happiness by depression and angst for most of my life. Now, in my 79th year, I recognize that I have made great progress in the last decade in facing this challenge.

Over the past 10 years, I have noticed a gradual increase in my general well-being from year to year. I've experienced greater self-confidence, less need to people-please, and a subtle increase in contentment and peace. I'm happy with who I am. I embrace myself fully. I no longer live every moment in fear of what others think [of me], of how to act so I don't draw attention or judgement or feelings of inadequacy, of not being enough. I am finally good as I am.



Why was this personal evolution so tough? How did I get to the place of low self-esteem with corresponding lack of confidence, overachieving for acceptance and doubting everything I did, said or presented? I have spent a lifetime digging for the causes of my state: reading, work shopping, seeing a therapist, studying and endlessly analyzing. My interest, personal and professional, in psychology, led me to discover that the process of negation started the moment I was born. My parents were busy, rebuilding their lives in the Netherlands after World War II and this consumed them both, practically around the clock.

This meant I was not held, did not physically bond with them nor was I fed when I needed or wanted food. We had a nanny as my mother was required in the business, more reliable, trustworthy and cheaper than a hire. I was fed on Mom's work schedule, not on my

socio-physiological need. The nanny had lots of household duties and so, always quiet, I was mostly ignored.

It is established in psychology that not bonding with parents leads to considerable insecurity and loss of feeling safe. This is exhibited early in my life as hyper vigilance, which I experience to this day. At night, I wake up at hearing the drop of a pin in the next room. A larger essence of that is extreme awareness of anything unusual or seeming unfriendly. The imposed feeding schedule led to an eating disorder in that I always devour everything in sight as I don't know when the next meal is coming -- so better eat all now. These two factors set the basis for perpetual insecurity and overweening independence in which I insist that I can do everything for myself, avoiding asking for help lest my insecurity be reinforced by a refusal, seen by me as unworthiness. I always doubted myself, even when correct, when anyone disagreed with me, and still go there unless I challenge myself to stay the course. Perhaps this foundation led to my early recognition of not being the same as others, which I felt as early as age five. This foundation was added to dramatic incapacitation that I experienced early on attaining awareness of my queerness.

The next stage in building this edifice of shame, insecurity and unworthiness was religion. As early as age three, I was going to church where the women dressed in all black, twice each Sunday. Hellfire and brimstone, Calvinistic sobriety and "life is serious" will predominate as my life script well into my 20s. Everything pleasurable was potentially sinful and was akin to undesirable frivolity. Bible study, Christian schools and socialization only in the church community was my life until I left home to go to college. Self-expression, having a will and emotional life were unheard of for children - unaccepted and seriously looked down upon. Rules for life were set by the church and the paterfamilias, those authorities being ordained by God and unquestionable. You do as you're told... or else!

The roof on this hovel was overturned at the time of puberty by the realization that I am queer. It was an iconoclastic assault, weakening the whole structure. The contents of the hovel grew in insecurity and dissolved into shame, self-loathing, guilt, overcompensation, living a double life and belief of total rejection, manifesting in Dutch courage of booze and pot needed to go to queer bars or clubs, and to dancing with addiction.



There were a few other storms along the way, punching serious holes into the walls of the structure. The first of these was the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I was directly involved at the front lines as a volunteer and as a professional for some 20 years. There was shock, grief and questioning of culpability that came as a fairly natural adjunct to the pandemic. For me there were two opposite impacts. One was the traumatic impact of PTSD and ASS [AIDS Survivor Syndrome],* which would bring me two occasions of burnout requiring 8 and 15 months of recovery respectively. The opposite impact was my awakening to my community and my humanity as a vulnerable while being worthy of care, not guilty of anything. This spurred me to my first queer activism which carries on to this day and brought me small personal pride, growing to a full robust pride today.

The second storm was the trauma and grief experienced at the suicide of a close family member. Actively supporting others closer to the lost one, I did not allow myself to grieve. The damage to my psyche resulted in incapacitating depression, exploding from low-grade depression that I had from birth, but was unaware of. I had good support and went on meds relatively soon and realized I had always been depressed. Several traumatic efforts to come off those meds finally convinced me that my brain doesn't work right physiologically, and medication is my route to happier functional remaining life.

The journey out of that dysfunction and pain is not as dramatic as getting there. It is based on a human urge to survive and thrive, some of it more instinctive than conscious. I have been meditating for 36 years and did not know why when I started. I spent lots of time in self-analysis, therapy, growth groups and workshops, exercise, a healthy diet and reaching out. Gradual realization that my brothers and family accepted me as I am, also fed me a lot.

However, I believe the main thing was that I never lost hope for a contented life. Along the way, I found family, community and connection. It helped me to see myself more clearly through other people's eyes. Continuing in activism and seeing the wonderful life that I really do have all helps me heal, change my perspective on myself and come to the contented individual, the fulfilled person, that I am today. The hyper vigilance, the crazy eating, the depression are all still there and still emerge. They are a part of me. However, I am content. I am at peace. I care about others and most important in this journey, I care about me. I celebrate that!

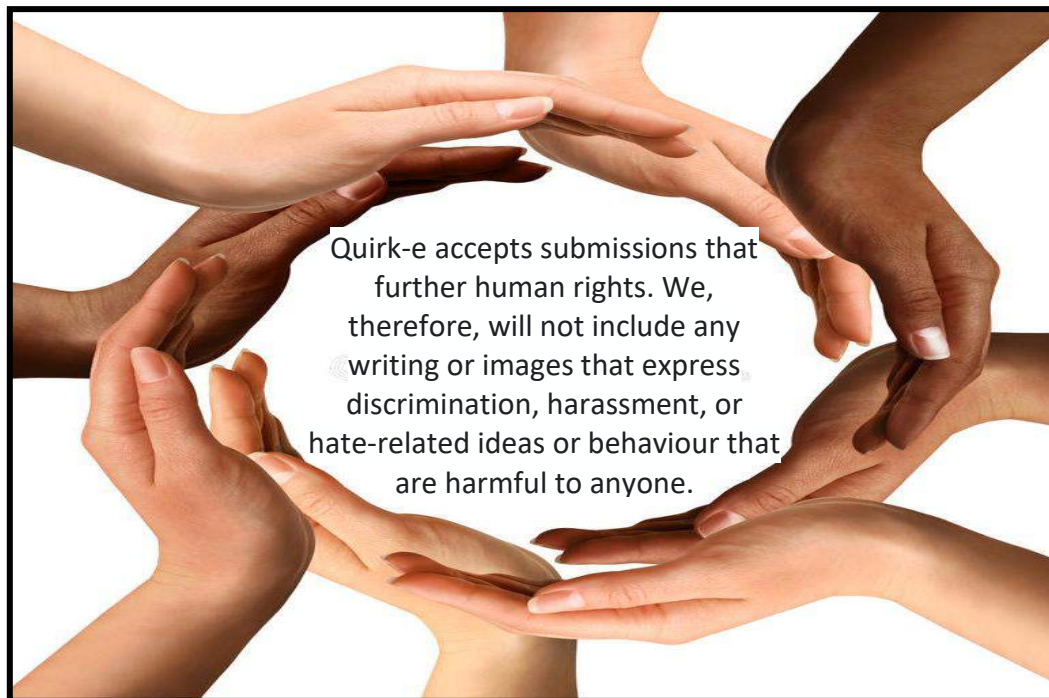


*<https://www.sfaf.org/collections/beta/what-is-aids-survivor-syndrome/>
<https://letskickass.hiv/what-is-aids-survivor-syndrome-dc0560e58ff0>

REAL RECONCILIATION

"Reconciliation is more than just an opportunity for us to forgive others and each other. It is a chance to give the world something it has been lacking for more than seven generations: the full contributions of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and knowledge."

... from *The Reason You Walk*, Wab Kinew



SADDISH

Mela Brown

And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
Beloved on the earth.
From "Late Fragment" by Raymond Carver

Once you've come out as queer a few times, you find yourself embracing the concept for other purposes. Lately I've been coming out as saddish. Meaning, even when I'm having a perfect day, I'm a little sad. Why? Between 2018 and 2023, nine people I love died. This is the part of aging I didn't fully anticipate. Which is odd because generally I think through the implications of everything at least a thousand times.

I've done a crap tonne of processing and grieving, but so much of it has been private. Most of these folks were friends, and I was not in the inner circle with their family, and it was the pandemic, or I moved away, or they moved away. . . So, I haven't been to many memorials and only two in person.

At its worst, solo grieving is aching tears and longing for a lap to press my face into. Solo grieving, I have learned, never ends. Grief needs a witness to heal. If you continue to read, you're agreeing to be a witness, and my gratitude for your attention is immeasurable.

In chronological order: Su, Sharon, Jeannine, James, Ed, Tom, Donna, Irene, Lyn. In chronological order: Cancer, MS, cancer, heart attack, unknown, stroke, cancer/MAID, dementia/MAID, cancer.

Listing their names here in print feels important. I often run through them in my head, my own private dirge. Recently at a retreat, I made a little somatic art folding book. You start by decorating paper any way you want, and then you fold it into a book. The point is *not to plan* the book. I decorated my paper with collage, gold watercolour, red yarn stitches and after I folded it into pages, I added some tiny pop-up doors. As I flipped through the finished pages, the story my creative energy was telling became clear to my intellectual mind. Using a black pen, I slowly wrote each of the nine names into the book. The book was the first witness to my cumulative grief.

The first departure was 2018. Su. My oldest and dearest friend. The plan had always been to live out our twilight years together in an old farmhouse. I'm still grappling with that not happening. And I didn't get to see her before she died because the morning of her diagnosis, I was beginning four months of recovery after a serious cycling accident. Her text ended with, ". . . so if you want to see me, you better book a flight now."

I looked at my leg in traction and felt despair. I made it to her memorial five months later.

Then, six folks passed in 2021. Exactly one person died every two months for a whole year. I am not making that up. Tom died in July. Years before, after my dad died, he'd said I could adopt him as my brother. He'd lost his dad and knew I needed a place to lean. That had meant a lot to

me. I was just getting used to having a brother.

No one died in 2022 and that was a relief. Then two more in 2023. One of them was my aunt and the other, better than an older sister. The last time I saw her she said, "I'm not going to leave you alone." I



James



Mela and Lyn

knew it wasn't true, and I kissed her and told her I loved her. Lyn was a wise and compassionate friend. She had held me through all the other losses. I still don't know how to grieve her, without her.

Nine names in black ink. A rhythm, a nine-beat! Bam, ba-ba-ba-ba-ba, bam.... BAM. It's hard for my heart to beat when life feels like I'm hugging a woofer at a Rolling Stones concert. It's hard to breathe when it feels like there's no one left to phone on a windy winter Thursday evening after a crappy day at work. It's hard to move when it feels like anyone I want to visit will die before I get there. Bammmm. Damn.

I miss how they loved me. How I smiled when I was with them. The anticipation of typing their name into my calendar. The sound of their voices. Eating their casseroles and teriyaki chicken. Making salad to go with their teriyaki chicken. Following their advice and listening to their stories. I wasn't done being their friend! And yes, yes, you can still connect after death. I'm well aware. But it is very different. And lonely for a living person when it feels like almost all her friends are ghosts. You might say a living person with mostly ghosts for friends is in danger of wanting to fit in. To feel beloved, again.

So many of my memories connect to dead people and because of time and space and friend groups, hardly any of my current friends know my ghosts. So, often I'm alone in my mind, my heart, fondly remembering past times. I've noticed that in conversations, I don't always contribute what comes to mind, if they're dead friend stories. I hold back, because I'm self-conscious of my saddishness.



Mela and Su

At that somatic art retreat, I said to the facilitator, "I am reluctant to open up and connect with new people because I'm afraid they will die." She looked at me matter of factly and said, "not an irrational fear." As that kind-hearted validation landed with a gentle bah-bam, I suddenly felt how altered I am.

This nasty patch of loss has changed me. Foolishly, I thought if I tended my grief, talked to my counsellor, lit a candle on deathiversaries and let myself wail into a pillow when I needed it, I'd be okay. But I'm not. I'm sad. Not temporarily sad, but permanently saddish. Like as if it's part of my identity, now. All this loss has gutted me. I lost not only cherished friends, but primary pieces of me. Their memories of me.

And it's not only these ghosts and lost pieces. It's how the pandemic interrupted our communities. It's how much energy it takes to grieve. It's the existential threats. Our collective sorrows. It's my dwindling family and me, aging. Yet somehow mysteriously alive.

Alive... and reminded daily of my ghosts by the things they loved (not in chronological order): figure skating, community gardens, politics, pho, stargazing, silly puns, golden retrievers, making soup, friendly crows. And the things they didn't like: loud chewing, spiders, people who drink all your wine when they housesit, priests, cops, being rushed, tinnitus, sitting still, dirty mirrors.

And no, I am not sad as in depressed, as in I need meds. Not that I didn't consider that. Deeply. With input from professionals. I am sad as in I lost nine people I love over six years. And it's changing me. An aging, now officially saddish, queer.

Thank you for witnessing my grief.

May you always feel yourself beloved.

1. Images provided by Mela Brown

PRACTISE KINDNESS. IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY, BUT IT'S ALWAYS WORTH IT.

A LESBIAN EXPLORES HEALTH TOURISM IN VIETNAM

Paula Stromberg

I'm a 73-year old lesbian. Of course I want a clear picture of my health. Being this old means living in sniper alley. Do I have some undiscovered medical situation readying for a sneak attack? Of course I worry, as do thousands of fellow Canadians struggling to access care in our stretched medical system.

Recently I was in Vietnam and saw ads for medical services including full-body screening offered to foreigners. Certainly there are better-rated countries such as Singapore or Thailand that offer medical treatment or surgeries, but I happened to be in DaNang and wanted only a health overview. I'm not knowingly sick. I decided to take the plunge. This ostensibly healthy Canadian would sign up for a unique 'tour' in Vietnam: a tour inside my aging body that included digital snapshots.

Canadian news media often reports on treatment delays and healthcare missteps: the hard-to-get doctor appointments, physician burn out, emergency room closures, staff shortages, and diagnostic oversights. But I hadn't had a full physical exam in seven years and am peeved that in 2024, long after the pandemic, my doctor still prefers Zoom or phone chats instead of in-person appointments.

According to research from Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins University, lesbian and bisexual women have a greater risk than heterosexual women of developing breast cancer, anxiety, heart disease, endometrial/ gynecological cancers, depression, obesity, and chronic diseases such as asthma and arthritis. Research findings show lesbians face poorer health outcomes due to stigma in reporting sexual orientation, lack of appropriate physician training, social stress, low income and family rejection. Statistically-speaking, lesbians are also more likely to delay seeking treatment.



Most disturbing to me was that a Vancouver friend had been reviewing her medical records at home and encountered a forgotten (pre-COVID) X-ray report noting a shadow on her left lung. Because pandemic backlogs had eased, she took the initiative and asked her doctor for follow up — and what a shock. Her long-overlooked tests revealed Stage 3 lung cancer. Her left lung had to be removed.

These realities propelled me through the doors of DaNang International Hospital (part of the Vinmec Health Care System) to request a private pay, full-body review of my condition. It was the last Thursday in March. Without an appointment, I arrived at the hospital admitting desk at 9:15am. Using Google Translate, the Vietnamese hospital receptionist understood my request. By 10am, I was sitting down with the Head of Department of Internal Medicine, Dr Pham Văn Hùng, who is also a Cardiologist. What thrilling Vietnamese efficiency.

Costs are lower than we would pay privately in Canada. (In BC for example, a private-pay MRI costs between \$700 - \$2500. A single shoulder or hip joint scan costs about \$950. A CT scan alone, including IV contrast, costs \$1,300.) The dollar sum of All These tests in Vancouver is beyond my financial reach -- far too expensive, especially when I didn't have any specific symptoms.) As our medical interview finished, Dr Văn Hùng tilted the monitor in my direction showing the English-Vietnamese translations and currency



Paula in Vietnam with friends

conversions. I agreed to every test on his list, including an iodine contrast injection that cost an extra \$200 to illuminate tiny blood vessels.

Also because I'd earlier expressed curiosity about the age and quality of the DaNang hospital equipment, I was given a technician's tour of the 640-slice Aquillon Computed Tomography (CT) scanner, Tesla 3 MRI machine, and digital X-ray installation. All equipment I was shown seemed fine, less than seven years old.

Not a moment wasted: Blood tests came first, and my lab report was finished within the hour. Then a medical assistant explained we'd resume procedures after lunch. Exactly as promised, at 1pm, I was in a sky blue cotton hospital gown being rolled inside various departments' 'heavy equipment'. First was a brain MRI on a Tesla 3 machine, a magnetic resonance angiography (MRA) on a TOF 3D silent sequence, then into the 640-slice, whole-body CT scanner. Lastly, a full-colour ultrasound where the technician spread icy gel over the carotid arteries on my neck, and pointing to my forearm, cheerily informed me that 'goose pimples' translates as *mun con ngõng*. I told myself this preventative check up would give me a sense of being in charge of my own health, and I studiously ignored the Buddhist maxim, "When it's your turn to die, even a toothpick can kill you."



All testing finished and at 3:15pm, I was back in Dr Vãn Hùng's office to review the findings. He and the translator were smiling. OK. Maybe no ugly surprises? Indeed, no cancer markers, no lung shadows, no stenosis, no lesions, no errant cells, no nodules, and best of all, no holes in my brain. After the doctor's caveat that the hospital tests still might have missed something, he pronounced me pretty healthy overall. However, he did point out a 20% plaque buildup in my left carotid artery. "This plaque is minor —it can be treated with a statin to lower your cholesterol," he assured me. I declined his written prescription and said I'd check about increasing the dosage with my doctor at home.

Time flies when news is good. By 4pm I was standing on the ceramic tiles by the hospital cashier desk, snapping down my credit card. Then an office assistant delivered my written results, the six-page doctor's report, instructions for accessing digital files online, as well as six black and white film transparencies of my brain and other body parts. By 4:15pm, I walked out of VinMec International Hospital into the sunshine. In this Land of Blue Dragons, I'd had two physician consults, more than a dozen tests and a full health review, all completed within five hours. In BC, there's a month's wait for a CT scan and the average wait for an MRI is 100 days.

I clutched my huge cardboard envelope, tingling with gratitude. I'd been declared pretty healthy. My gladness rose on giddy wings into the blue unknown. None of us knows how much time we have on this earth— but so far no hidden illness seems to be sneaking up on me. Simply put, goddess willing, I'll continue to age.



Although aging is better than the alternative, it does mean enduring a series of small losses along the way, uncomfortable physical changes — the losses that come from growing old. I suppose growing old means one is forced to embrace change. And although I love life, I do want to make the most comfortable slide into oblivion. With my wellness snapshot captured in the medical report, I hope I've given myself a high-tech foundation to make that 'comfortable slide'. And for those readers who are curious about cost: my entire hospital visit, including all tests, physician consults and translator, totaled 18,440,000 Vietnamese Dong, or less than \$1000 CAD.

SCARE

Annie Newman

It was May, 2024. My family doctor was the embodiment of my awaiting diagnosis, walking towards me down the hallway, step by step. I could see my pulse, just by looking at the tightened skin on my wrist, as it rose and fell against a gushing stream of blood and adrenaline.

He greeted me with a warm smile, "Hello, hello, how are you?"

"Nervous," I said, "Wondering about my biopsy results."

"Oh yes, well let's see." He logged into his computer, scrolling slowly.

Hurry up! I thought to myself. I wanted to know, now! How can he be so

damn relaxed? "Ahh, here it is," and he slightly shook his head. I nearly vomited when I

saw the shake of his head. "Invasive ductal breast carcinoma. Very small, but it has gone into your breast tissue." Air left me. "I am very scared, upset, Dr. W."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Do you know how long it will take, approximately, for me to have surgery, a lumpectomy or mastectomy?"

"I will refer you to a surgeon who only focuses on breast cancer rather than general surgery. By the time the operation is scheduled, probably three months."

"Three months!" I couldn't contain myself. I felt hit by a truck.

"But," he said, looking at me sitting there in shock, "My patients will often check with surgeons' offices to see if there is earlier availability. You can then call Alice, our MOA, and have a referral made." "I will. I've researched during my five weeks while waiting to have the biopsy. A nearby hospital has seven breast cancer surgeons."



Like hell, I thought to myself, that I am going to wait three months. An hour later I was at home and on the phone. "Is this Mount St. Joseph's Breast Centre?" I asked. The Medical Office Assistant said, "Once you have a referral from your doctor you can have surgery in approximately three weeks, not three months. We are a clinical treatment team and have additional resources compared to an individual surgeon's office." The referral was in by the end of the day. I finally felt a spark of promise, a wave of relief.

That same night, I had a dream. I was standing in the hallway of our current home, looking out the front door, dressed in my cute bright red skirt that I wore as a five year old. Even though my current age is seventy-one, it seemed that my lively little kid was very much with me, dressed in a colourful summer outfit! Suddenly, a gorgeous golden retriever puppy came bounding through the front door with his tail wagging, tongue lolling out in a big smile, right towards me. Ready to jump in my arms and play! This delightful furry creature brought promises of fun and companionship. Such teachers, children and dogs can be for us. They naturally respond from their hearts and senses. I believe the promise and relief I felt from the accomplishments of the day manifested into this joyful dreamscape. The dream confirmed my wish to tune into my own strength, wonder, and connection to myself and others.

I had the one hour breast surgery to remove the cancer, and just like I was reassured, it was three weeks later. It went smoothly in the surgical outpatient hospital clinic. However, the emotional territory beyond surgery was filled with fear for me. Would I find out from the surgeon that the cancer had spread beyond the breast to the lymph nodes? And so it turned out. During the next visit with the surgeon, my partner, Jan, and I were crushed. The test results confirmed that my breast cancer did spread to one lymph node. The doctor told me I would need preventative treatments such as radiation and hormone blocking medication. I may also need chemotherapy. The Cancer Control Agency would assess that with me.



Breast Centre at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital

Feelings of loss flooded in. I realized that my relatively carefree retirement would never be the same. There would always be some focus for the rest of my life on preventing cancer recurrence.

Since being diagnosed with breast cancer, over two months ago, I've felt most vulnerable when tired. Like there have been frenzied hamsters running on fretful wheels inside my head, screeching in high pitched voices: "I'm scared of surgery, chemo, and all the other treatments! Will I get infections, become too weak, or die?"

The challenge will continue to be to find a way to live and be resilient with cancer, not fight back. I don't want to feel like I am at war with myself. I need to keep aware of my worry, yet not let it take over. It's going to be hard work at times. But thank goodness, I have a picture of five year old Annie, not only in my heart, but on my bedroom bookshelf. She looks right at me and my sweetheart, Jan. Hand on her hip, smiling and looking out into the sun, with her red skirt with decorative white flowers, happy and strong. She's not afraid of hamsters. That is who I really am too. She's five and seventy-one. Deep down, I believe we're going to find a way to help each other through this journey.

WHAT MAGGIE TAUGHT ME

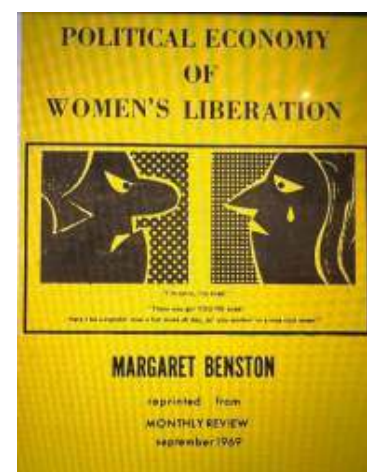
Cyndia Cole

Perhaps the thing I admired most about Maggie Benston was that she didn't just talk the talk. She walked the walk.

When I first ran up to speak with her after the guest lecture she did together with Pat Davitt about women's liberation, I was a bit star struck. It was in one of those 200-plus capacity lecture halls in the 60's modern concrete Academic Quadrangle of Simon Fraser University at some general 100 or 200 level PSA course (the Department of Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology).

Maggie was already known to me as author Margaret Lowe Benston who wrote "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." I had read this tattered little newsprint pamphlet more than a year before when I was three thousand miles away on the tiny campus of New College, Sarasota, Florida. The other pamphlets passed from hand to hand from the New England Free Press, like "Sisterhood is Powerful" and "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" had galvanized my emotions. But Margaret Lowe Benston's words grabbed my mind. She had me asking "what is the source of this persistent and enormous injustice women suffer?" (Which we now call Gender Inequity).

When I read her words, I was a nineteen-year-old fighting an uphill battle to be female and to live the life of the mind. The talk she talked in print gave me tools and gave me hope. Now here she was, by surprise, in person, right in front of me. She didn't look or act anything like the "women's libbers" caricatured, ridiculed and derided by the media. Maggie was tall and stately. She had a winning and ready smile. She radiated confidence, ease and good humour, not the anger, frustration and bitterness that we "libbers" supposedly exemplified. She had this long blond hair, wore a fringed poncho and maxi skirt. When I found out later that she grew up riding palomino horses on a ranch in Washington state, I thought she resembled one. Nowhere to be seen were the lab coat or pants suit of a PhD Tenured Professor of Quantum Chemistry nor the plaid shirt, work boots and jeans of a New Left unionist, though she was both of these things. She did seem a bit like a Folk Singer, and she was that as well.



By 1971, the media were highly engaged in creating the meme "bra-burners". Not one of us women's liberationists ever did this. Some of us just went bra-less. The press pounced on a spokeswoman, made her into a celebrity, dissected her appearance and personal life, distorted her ideas then isolated and trashed her. They did this to Betty Freidan, Gloria Steinem, Kate Millet and Germaine Greer.

Maggie recognized how easily she could be neutralized by becoming this kind of feminist celebrity. She resisted it with great success. And I was even going to play a part in that. So, despite my star struck first impression, I chatted Maggie up, and she invited me to a campus Women's Caucus meeting. Maggie was committed to working collectively with other women as equals. Despite her renown or organizational position, as soon as the spotlight was upon her, she pulled others in to share it. I was one of those. She showed me how by using her privilege to include others. That was the walk she walked, and I never ever saw her waver.

ARCTIC TRIP '24, CHALLENGES AND JOYS!

River Glen

It began early one morning. Graciously, my friend Val arrived before six in the morning to drive me to the airport. Give her the credit deserved, as she doesn't live in my city. We were a little unnerved by the route Google maps had us going on, but somehow it worked. I was at the airport in plenty of time to get checked in at Air North and through security. I bought a coffee and walked back, forth and around getting some steps in before being trapped in a seats for the flights. The first plane was a 737 with no screens and minimal leg room, but I was in the second row and on the aisle, so I felt slightly less claustrophobic. We received a beverage, sandwich and cookie. I began to regret not being able to look out the window because the glimpses of the country below, though obstructed by the passengers in between, seemed dramatic.

We made it to Whitehorse, where I had over an hour to wait. I was impressed by the taxidermy Caribous staged above the baggage claim turnstile. I walked around a bit; outside was mild and inside several little kids ran around and seemed to be having the time of their lives. There wasn't anyone official to ask, so I chatted with an older woman about where we should be waiting. We figured it out and stood there and after a while a plane full of passengers lined up behind us. There was no security; we filed across the tarmac to the ATR type plane (modest size prop job in my vernacular), and I was just snapping a picture when a woman in a yellow vest said no photos of the plane. Once inside, the seats were two across and hard as boards with lumps. Backache and butt ache followed. This time I hugged the window and ate the lemon pound cake and grapes offered. The land underneath me was mind-blowing in vastness and varied topography.



The plane landed in Dawson to let out and pick up more passengers, and one of them was my daughter-in-law, T. She and her dad had driven her car down the Dempster Highway to Dawson, because after years of working as a doctor in Inuvik, T was finishing her final contract. As much as could fit of the family's personal belongings needed to be moved back to Vancouver. It is prudent to travel the Dempster with a second person in the vehicle as it is rough and remote, so her dad had come up to help with that. In Dawson, T took advantage of buying some cheaper groceries to bring back. I had remained on the plane, so I waved excitedly when she came down the aisle and we soon were catching up.

Inuvik is the largest Canadian town in the Arctic Circle. I would like to acknowledge whose lands I am visiting. The Inuvialut's land claim was settled in 1984, and the Gwich'in land claim was settled in 1992. the people now have more self-determination, and their presence and possession of this land benefits Canadian Sovereignty and access to resources, including, sadly, petroleum (You can envisage Russia across

the ocean, and the loss of more sea ice all the time.) The people are preserving heritage in language, drumming, song dance, art and crafts.

We were soon landed at the Inuvik airport. It was like getting off the plane in Hawaii, temperature wise. I scurried around taking photos including the taxidermy polar bear looming large in the terminal. T's friend was soon there to give us a ride home. I, of course, I ate up my first visions of the lay of the land . . . short trees on a winding road, and almost immediately when we crossed the town boundary, there was the hospital and the Fourplex where T, my son, J and baby M, seventeen months old, lived. Thus began the two and a half week adventure.

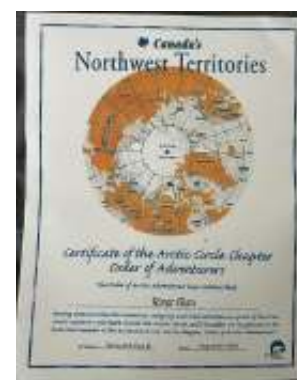


The day of my arrival, August 18, was the last hot day. Clouds rolled in, and the temp dropped from the high twenties to the teens and lower. A full day of rain, one of gusty wind, and then one of part sunny followed. I won't go on about the weather; just know it seems to run through a gamut and the weather app on my phone couldn't keep up. The night of August 22, the sun was down for about seven hours. The apartment heat was hot water and controlled by other units in the

building and it wasn't on for a couple of chilly days, but "sound the trumpet" when it came on! I took off my toque and two extra layers.

I went for a little walk though a pretty grove of Aspen trees on Thursday afternoon, then over to the greenhouse for the new elder program of coffee and a sweet. Two charming young men served me lovely rich coffee and bannock with a wild berry jam. Delicious. I sat and talked with an older white couple. She had driven a van with all her daughter's (who will be working in Inuvik) stuff from Toronto. The woman had been there two weeks and knew the lay of the land, and the husband had just flown in that day. I stuck up a conversation with the organizer, who knew T and J. She was drinking out of a cup that had a Pride flag decal. I identified myself, and she told me she really was glad to connect because there are so few queer resources there. I already knew there are some (T had mentioned that she rode in the Pride parade). You can google it, it was organized by fifteen youth, with one hundred and sixty people in it. Anyway, we exchanged info, and I showed her the Quirk-e web site. I let her know our Quirk-e advocacy mandate and that we would love to offer connection to this community.

Time was passing, and with the weekend, the visitor's centre opened, and I got some pamphlets and a certificate for being up there. They should have an even more notable certificate for those who are up there in the dead of winter! J and I went to the downtown, about a block worth of businesses. We visited the Post Office, the pharmacy, and a couple of souvenir shops. I wanted to buy, but I couldn't afford anything at the souvenir shops with prices starting at over a hundred dollars. Then we went on to the grocery store where you have to afford to buy, whether you want to or not. T said the prices are better during the summer when the trucks can come up, but in the winter everything is flown in.



On August 24, J and I stopped by the little outdoor Saturday market: only several tables, a couple selling hot Filipino food, some more little handcrafts for \$125 or more. I bought two postcards for ten dollars. Let me interject here the interesting fact of diversity. There is a mosque and there are people from Nigeria, El Salvador and others from around the world working up there. We then went over to the greenhouse to pick greens from J and T's plot for salad.

At this time, the baby caught a cold at daycare. She was still very energetic, and, of course, clever, sweet, beautiful, saying Mama, Dada, and I swear, I heard her call me Grandma! At least, I convinced myself. Life continued with making meals, domestic cleaning up, baby

wrangling, etc. We had a borrowed vehicle, which we used to go ten minutes out of town to a campground and lake. J said eventually he learned the park's name, Ja'k, was pronounced Chuk. The lake had loons with lovely wild calls and a sign that said 'bears in area'. It was a nice walk around, getting my daily steps in. That evening, we ate some nice fish for supper. J and T went next door to a bonfire party, and I happily stayed in as Little M slept, and I watched a Netflix offering on my computer in my cozy bed.

The 25th of August I woke up to more rain not in the forecast again. This is a rainy month the info brochure says. Then the sun came out. Sun, sun, SON...it was J's birthday. The oven was on duty turning out another loaf of bread, a quiche and a cheese cake. It was not all roses, as my fibromyalgia cycles through my body with the vacillating weather, amping it up. But this is a day for more adventure, and J and I hit the road to Tuktoyaktuk, a hundred and forty-eight kilometers away, approximately two hours twenty-three minutes each way. It was cloudy, but halfway along the sun showed up. Traveling via the Dempster meant gravel, mud, potholes and washboard, so no more than seventy kilometers per hour is possible. It was a super internal organ message. But then true adventure for this one normally is riding a recliner. On the tundra, we saw a few types of critters: ravens, swans, Rock Ptarmigan, a couple of arctic ground squirrels and seagulls by the ocean. A few other things of interest to me were pingos, which are a unique geological feature in the arctic, that people park their skidoos out on the tundra and leave them there all summer, and that there are methane measuring devices off the road all along the highway. Melting permafrost will affect climate change.

To get in to Tuktoyatuk, you drive by the dump. OK, that is different. We passed a baseball diamond, and it looked like most of the town was out enjoying the game. Yes, I put my fingers in the Arctic Ocean, and it was the same temp or so as the air. I know a Quirkie who would find it a refreshing swim. At the sign declaring the Arctic Ocean, were several Japanese tourists very excited to be there. There were also some



other cars of tourists. The signs are the big draw. I did have a nice chat with the fellow at the visitor centre. He suggested all the hot spots at which his relatives offered services. We drove by the likes of the sod house and the boat the priest used to cart off kids to residential school. We headed home. When we got back home, J and I ate tasty leftover . . . kind of a nada of a B-day for him . . . but he probably likes no fuss best of all.

August 26, Baby M is too sick for daycare, and T is working 12 hour shift. J, luckily, had an easy workload, so we both wrangled M. I got in a walk to the grocery store, pushing the stroller and then a second trip downtown to the pharmacy, so I got seven thousand plus steps in, and that's with the feeling that I am fighting a cold invasion. The sun was out, and people greeted us. Two ladies helped me get upstairs with the stroller . . . and now I know to go in the back door of the store, though the doors were not working automatically. This is not riveting reading, but it is representative of the challenges of day to day life here.

Here is some more not really riveting reading. By August 28, I was dealing with a cold, but after a few days, M was able to resume daycare. I helped around as I could: taking her to and fro from daycare, washing dishes, doing store runs, chopping veggies. When I was folding clothes, I saw T's Pride tee-shirt that she wore with the healthcare professionals in the Inuvik Pride parade, and I took a picture of the Pride flag flying outside the hospital. It is a hug for a queer old granny far from home. I read and then listened to my audio book when I got bleary eyed.



On August 29, there was a call out to the community for a healing circle. Two things have rocked this tight knit town this month. (See <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/beaufort-delta-educator-bail-sexual-224740840.html>) A teacher is facing nine charges related to alleged sexual offences against a minor; he is out on bail. Just think about how the trauma of residential schools still effects the people; this is adding insult to injury. (And also see <https://cklbradio.com/2024/08/27/two-inuvik-women-charged-with-murder->

[performing-an-indignity-to-human-remains/](#)). Two Inuvik women, twenty and twenty-four, have been charged with murder and performing an indignity to human remains when early Sunday morning a man was found dead behind a building. The town only has a bit over three thousand residents. Everyone knows everyone.

Trigger warning for vegans and vegetarians: skip this next paragraph. It's about "country food". The pantry, fridge and freezer are demanding consumption. J made sushi and spring rolls another time. On to moose meat, spaghetti sauce . . . I couldn't tell the difference from beef. It was really tasty. Next night we used the rest of moose to make Ma Po tofu. Yum. T made a great Musk Ox bourguignon which tasted like what you'd get in a French restaurant. Then a "Peking" wild duck was created. We also had delicious Arctic Char.



August 31, coming back from trek to daycare and a few metres from the backdoor, I slipped on boards that are strung over mud patches to walk on. All my weight fell on one knee and my big toe. I got up, and after a dizzy few minutes knew I was alright, minus a layer of skin on one knee and a toe unable to wiggle. A little backslide on day four of the cold had me coughing half the night, but we were on

the last leg in terms of time as it was September 1, and our flight home was on the 6th. The clock was ticking on for evacuating permanently, which meant Facebook market place was getting the furniture and baby equipment a bit at a time. T had a nice party with her doctor friends saying goodbye to years of these relationships. J was at the barbecue. I was still trying to fight off the nasty cold, so baby M and I retired early. Furniture and lots of possessions were flying out the door through Facebook Market place. Already gone were the dresser and nightstand I was using. J came in my room one morning and, though he was unsure of the exact timeline, said the wifi and my bed would be going. Being sick, these things were my refuge, but it all worked out. We left for the airport before the last bed left the apartment.

September 6, we flew from Inuvik to Yellowknife, then Yellowknife to Vancouver. If I hadn't been sick, I would have really enjoyed it. I am sure the other passengers thought I was Typhoid Mary, but I wore my mask and did everything I could to suppress coughing and luckily wound up having the three seats to myself. Another bit of "Northern Queer Presence" excited me!!! The in flight magazine "Up Here" had an article, "How to Grow a Community" by Michele Genes, about Ivan Coyote's thirty strong Whitehorse writing group. Ivan's position at Yukon University is addressing diversity and inclusion through literature. You can find the article online. Baby M was a good traveler because her parents have perfected the process. She had already been to the other side of the earth earlier this year.



Val insisted on collecting me from the airport. While I was waiting for her, I glanced up and saw a progressive Pride flag on a airport causeway. It is a gesture that I am sure warms other queer hearts as well and neatly finished up the queer acknowledgement I felt during the trip. I got home and figured resting for a few days would finally cure me, so I lay there for four days too long with pneumonia, sadly, until I finally got some antibiotics, and another week later I was finally getting better.

My big adventure had one good week, and then I got slammed with being sick, and I wasn't able to learn more about the culture as I had hoped or be as helpful as I had hoped. But there was valuable time with my granddaughter and her parents, and I was introduced to some very nice people holding space and helping sustain community in the far reaches of Canada. There is beauty and wildness in the land. There are climate change concerns, high prices and some social legacies of

colonialism. I have a first-hand appreciation for these things now. I also know I like my Lower Mainland life style with coffee shops, restaurants, theatres and stores. There was darkness that increased while I was there, and I didn't get a chance to see the aurora borealis, a beautiful thing I am sure. But I really can't imagine living through the 24/7 darkness in winter or light in summer without being affected. Again, I have much appreciation for the people demonstrating the human capacity to make things work.

1. Photos provided by River Glen

FLASH AND DASH

Sheila Gilhooley

One time when I was visiting Deedee in San Francisco, she took me to the Museum of Modern Art. We drank in the art and culture till we had to pee and then headed for the washroom. We got into cubicles without incident, but when I exited the stall, there, at the mirrors between me and the door, were two women. They were thin, starchy and brittle looking, made up with everything sprayed in place. They were busy applying more makeup when they caught sight of me and gasped in unison. And horror.

One said, "What are you doing in here? This is the ladies washroom." I replied quickly, "No, It's the women's," feeling pretty smug with my quick repartee. "What kind of freak are you?" said the other. "You're too rough to be a woman, and too ugly to be a man." I mean, go figure, I wanted to take her up on the incredible lack of logic in her statement. On her part, though, she was looking pretty smug, like she got a good one off. The clone pal said, "We certainly know how women are supposed to look, and you are not one."

All this happened pretty quickly really, and suddenly there was a commotion, a door banging hard on its hinges, causing all three of us to look and see. Deedee was emerging from the stall, her pants about half way up her legs, with her tugging them up with one hand, and struggling with the other hand to free her bag which was caught in the door. She finally broke free, kind of lurching toward us at her sudden release, while still pulling up her jeans.

She lit into the two women, and they were open-mouthed and speechless. She told them that her beautiful friend was so much more a woman than they could ever aspire to. She was in a fury, and she was eloquent! She finished her tirade by saying that we were the ones who knew who the real women were, and as she said it, she yanked up her shirt and flashed them head-on and dead-on. I was as surprised as the witches, only of course, I was thrilled, and them . . . not so much. We swept out on that note. On another occasion, I was visiting a friend in Toronto. One Saturday, she arranged for us to have lunch with her old friend from high



Sheila reading Flash and Dash



gettyimages

school. We went to Graf Bobby's, a pretentious, chi chi bistro near Union Station. Their specialty was steak tar tare. At some point, I had to use the washroom. I entered it upon three young, stick-figured women, primping at the mirror and chattering meanly about somebody. Before I could get by them, I was spotted, and all their nasty energy was turned on me, like wave.

"This is the ladies," said one, "Get out of here!" I countered with, "I may not be a lady, but I am a woman, and this is the woman's washroom, not just for 'ladies'. But I didn't get it all out because when I said "I'm a woman," bitch number two barked,

"Like hell you're a woman!" The third woman said, "I think it's an it", not to be outdone or left out. I wanted to bolt, but I couldn't let myself, so I continued into the cubicle. All the while I was in there, they talked at me, using 'it' over and over, like little kids, cracking each other up with their nasty wit and hilarity.

As I pulled up my jeans and got ready to exit, I remembered Deedee and San Francisco. So, I opened the shirt I was wearing, and held my coat closed in front. As I passed them, I gave them a great big old flash, and they shut right up all at once, like an off-switch, and they gaped. And out I sailed, quickly doing up my shirt, and bolting from the washroom. My heart was pounding as I headed back to our table. My lunch mates were in the middle of some long story from the past, so I slipped into my seat and wondered if I should tell them what happened or wait until my friend and I were alone. While I was thinking about it, I saw the three ~~witches~~-nasty-women leave the bathroom and start talking to a restaurant staff.

So then I thought I should tell them what had happened. I didn't want them freaked, and it seemed bad form not to warn them. I wanted us to be on the same page. So I interrupted and said "I just had a scene in the washroom, and it looks like it might not be over." I quickly described what had happened. My friend's friend looked appalled, horrified and like she wished she was anywhere else. My friend, on the other hand, looked angry. I was happy to note that, until she opened her mouth and turned on me to say, "How could you do something so gross?"

"They were being gross," I protested. "I told them I was a woman, and they wouldn't believe me. How is that my fault?" Continuing to be angry, she replied, "Well you knew they wouldn't believe you. You know you don't look like a woman, and you get off passing as a man. You've said yourself you did feel safer on the street at night and counted on being taken for a man. As a matter of fact," she continued, "I often feel uncomfortable knowing we're being taken for a het couple and so, cashing in on all that privilege."

The manager never came over. I felt crushed by her response, but did not yet know enough to feel furious and entitled to be believed when I say I'm a woman.

REFLECTIONS ON A QUEER LIFE

Annie Newman

I came out in 1996. Since then, I have discovered my vital life energy. My laughter and heart are freer. I am the same person who relates to myself, friends, family members, and community. I don't feel like I have to split off and hide my desire for women. I am much happier in my life since I acknowledged fully to myself and those around me that I am queer.

I was 43 when I shared my sexual orientation. Before then, I isolated myself in one sad, romantic heterosexual relationship after another. I turned to Mindfulness Meditation in my late 30's, hoping I could find a way to get rid of the deep misery I felt. But meditation actually brought me more physical and emotional awareness of my reality. It was a very grounding experience that helped me tolerate my unhappiness that I had carried with me all the years I hid my sexuality. Meditation encouraged me to focus on my breath and the present moment while I learned how to practice sitting and walking meditation. My building mindfulness assisted me to feel and contain my fear and other challenging emotions as I reached out to women, in my longing to create new relationships.

Dating is complicated, for any sexual orientation. So there I was, on my first date with a woman, Cay. It was a HORRENDOUS date. To my great shock, the woman caressed the plaster of Paris breasts of the female statues in the local Italian coffee shop while we waited for our coffees. That was just the BEGINNING of our visit! While we talked over our Cappuccinos, CAY, shared her terrible marriage she had recently broken up from: "Oh Annie, she was so jealous of any friends I would have over, just for tea! I am finally free of her! But I still have



nightmares about her, even after a year.” After listening to her, I shared my struggles with coming out, and told her that therapy helped me: “I had a therapist, Cay, who I could talk through my angst about coming out. Have you ever considered therapy to discuss your nightmares?”

She glared at me with her piercing blue eyes, “Well, I don’t think your psychotherapy did YOU any good! You are so sexually uptight! I saw the look on your face when you saw me caressing those beautiful statuettes. And you think I’m screwed up. Take a look in the mirror, lady.” Cay jumped up suddenly, grabbed her bag, spilled her cappuccino, and stomped off. Dripping brown liquid, oozed onto my bright red slacks! I wore the emotional crap that was slung at me on that date. I felt right out angry!

I kept answering Romance Ads for a year and a half, and fortunately, much more sedate dates followed. However, just like I said dating can be complicated, so are relationships, even long-term loving relationships. It seems that the classic trajectory of love affairs is that they often start out with dreams and hopes of the couple’s future together, accompanied by lots of fun and sex.

When I met Claire, an auburn-haired beauty with a lilting laugh, we had just that. Fantastic! For a short time. She was my fortieth date. Then it became god awful. She was a single parent with a cute seven year old daughter, dark-haired Crystal, who ran around with her Barbie dolls, wanting me to play the role of Prince John and many other characters who populated her imagination. That was when we were playing. As Claire and I got closer, and eventually moved in together, Crystal realized, of course, that I wasn’t just a playmate anymore. She felt that I turned into a rival for her mother’s affection. War was on in her insecure child’s heart. Then the beautiful love scenario I had stepped into tragically ended.

When we started living together, I kept forgetting that Crystal was nine, because she had the fury of my seventy-five year old mother. The fury that I had lived with, in the relationship with my mom, since childhood. Crystal didn’t know how to adjust to a new person in her life, me, and it was very threatening for the both of us.



Day after day of her screaming at me, “I hate you, I hate you! Go away! You’re not my mommy!”

This is when I literally ran into therapy. I was terrified of all my anger, helplessness, sadness, and fear churning inside of me. I was avoiding going home after work, and when Claire and I were together, I was telling her repeatedly that I wanted to leave the relationship, and we were arguing all the time. I started yelling at Claire. I never hit either of them. But raising my voice was bad enough for all of us. It was hard working every day as a mental health therapist, while all of this was going on at home. I felt like a hypocrite at work. In therapy, I focused on my emotional reality as real and valid as I developed a trusting connection with my therapist, talked, and truly heard myself.

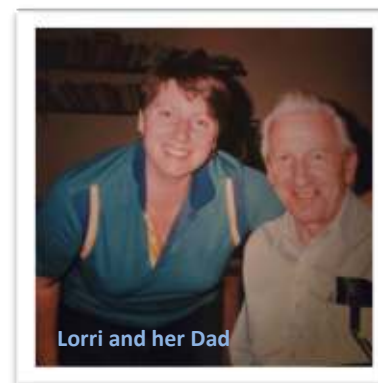
Then I articulated my experience to Claire, rather than holding it in, due to guilt, then exploding and yelling. She could hear me. We became more of a couple as we learned to talk with each other. We also realized that we couldn’t keep scaring each other with escape plans when the going got tough, threatening to leave. This helped us feel safer with each other. Everything definitely didn’t become hunky dory, but we settled down more and were happier.

I am happy to say that Claire and I are still together, for twenty-six years, many celebrations and shared sorrows later. Crystal is thirty-three, and we get along. The three of us have all worked hard at “getting along,” with each other, and within ourselves, over the years, and I am proud of us. I am sharing a significant reflection of my Queer Life: Coming Out. It was, and is, worth it.

AN EFFORT TO SAVE MONEY ON MY FATHER'S FUNERAL

Lorri Rudland

I first became aware of my father's frugality when on my eighth birthday he bought me a full-size ladies bicycle with the comment "you'll grow into it." The front of the seat rubbed up and down against my back as I pedaled, and I was unable to sit down, so I wondered how long it would take to grow into it. But this way, he saved money, and only had to buy one bike. We were a working class family, and I wouldn't say we were poor, but every penny counted. When dad unexpectedly passed away in 2002 due to a heart attack, two weeks before his eighty third birthday, it occurred to me that he would be horrified at the high cost of funerals. I decided to channel his frugal energy in an effort to save money on the funeral costs. Someone I knew had organized their whole remembrance for a thousand dollars.



My two younger sisters and I were very sad as we gathered together at my sister Bonnie's home. In general, we got along very well together, and we agreed that Bonnie would make an appointment to begin planning the funeral. But I had a plan. As soon as a price was quoted that I thought was too high, I would try for a reduction. I should have known better.

When we arrived at the funeral parlour, we were met with a soberly dressed and very dignified young woman who showed us into a meeting room and began to lay out our options. She began by asking us if we wanted a burial or a cremation. We agreed on cremation. She asked us if we wanted to bury my father's post-cremation remains in an urn? We thought that would be nice. "Did we want the funeral parlour to provide the urn or would we be providing our own?" I asked how much their urn would cost? She replied, "About eighty dollars." I responded, "I loved dad but eighty dollars for an urn that's going to be buried seems a bit steep. Sheesh, we could use a tobacco can and save money."



Bonnie said, "Lorri, we're not using a tobacco can." The dignified young woman continued, "And you will have to pick out a cremation container." I asked how much that would cost and she said the most cost-effective container would cost three hundred dollars. I gasped, "What do you mean three hundred dollars for the coffin? Won't he just be cremated? I could build a cheaper box." The dignified young woman didn't miss a beat, speaking slowly and carefully, "Yes, you could, but you can't use nails."

"No nails. Right, the cremation. You don't have any cardboard boxes, do you? I've heard some funeral parlours use cardboard boxes." She replied, "Yes, some do, but we don't." My youngest sister Anne turned to me and said, in a horrified tone of voice, "Lorri, you're not going to build the coffin?" "I'm just considering our options," I replied. "Three hundred dollars to burn the box seems wasteful."

At this moment, the young woman said "I'll give you some time to think things over" and left the room. The minute she left something happened to us, and we started to laugh, not smile or smirk, but laugh, belly laugh, howl. We couldn't stop. Every time we looked at each other, we were off in an explosion of giggles. The three of us had always had a good sense of humour. We deeply cared for our father, but I think the combination of the stress of his passing, my comments and the commercialization of death just did us in. At that moment, the door opened and the dignified young woman half entered the room. Seeing the grins on our faces and hearing the laughter, she asked us very sedately, with her head bowed, did we need more time, as if we were deep in mourning instead of deep in laughter. We couldn't even speak, just nodded our heads. The young woman backed out of the room. With a great effort, we pulled ourselves together in time for her reappearance.

Bonnie took the lead in the negotiations, and, quicker than you could say three hundred and eighty dollars, we bought an urn and a very fancily named cremation container. The young woman continued, "Will you be wanting a memorial stone to mark your father's final resting place? That was to mark the urn that contained my father's remains. Bonnie answered quickly, "Yes, we would."



"And what size would you like, the medium size or the larger size?" and then she gave the dimensions. Bonnie and Anne looked at each other. Some wordless communication passed between them. Bonnie answered, "The big one." The big one measured 28 inches by 16 inches and was made of bronze. I asked how much it would cost. They turned to me and Bonnie said, "It doesn't matter - you're outvoted. We want the big one." Channeling my father's frugal energy to save money clearly wasn't working. The young woman asked what we might like outlined on the stone? We started to chat, and she said, "I'll give you some time to discuss your preferences." After some discussions, my sisters decided upon a man gold panning in one corner, a moose in the other corner, a giant Egyptian bird with wings outstretched in the lower middle, a large pyramid outline in the center containing his name, date of birth and passing, an Egyptian key of life and a short verse. I had always been known as Lorri the Eldest, and my voice carried some weight, but that weight seemed to have disappeared. I was outvoted. We had become a democracy. As for the objects on the stone, the moose was selected because dad liked to hunt, the gold pan because dad liked to pan for gold on his holidays, and the Egyptian symbols because they linked to his spiritual faith. Bonnie was an artist and she would create the art for the stone.

The negotiations continued as we discussed the funeral. The result: a very costly funeral service. "It's for dad," my sister Anne said, "It's for dad." But I thought, no. It's for you and Bonnie, but I had changed and had completely let go of my attempt to save money. I didn't begrudge them their choice for a fancy funeral. If it made them feel better, that was fine with me. Besides he was paying for it. I could imagine him rolling over in his urn at the expense. But he got a great sendoff and a big spread. Because he had served in the military during World War II, a trumpeter from the Canadian Legion came and played The Last Post and the Rouse. We were all deeply moved. As for the memorial stone, the quietest, most unassuming man in the cemetery was laid to rest with one of the largest and most interesting headstones.

1. Photos provided by Lorri Rudland

Val: Next we have two articles by Greg Bourgeois who was active in Winnipeg, as I was, in the 1970's, although he was working for change far earlier in that decade than I was. Most of us in Quirk-e, experienced homophobia and transphobia surrounding us, our families, our work and basically, our lives. Here, Greg talks about how he and his friends worked to change it. I'm grateful to him because I came out in Winnipeg in 1977, and his work surely helped make that easier than I had ever expected.

PRESENT AT THE CREATION: PART 1

Gregory Bourgeois

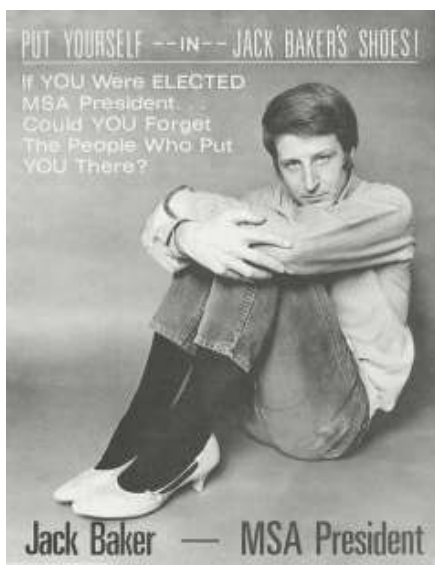
In this case I am talking about the founding of the first gay liberation group in Winnipeg in the 1970's.

It was 1971 and I was a very green first year student at the university, AND I was seeing a psychologist to cure my homosexuality. Still I was intrigued, to put it mildly, when I read in the local paper that a small group of students right on campus were holding their first gay liberation meetings. I didn't dare attend, but a few months later they surprised me by actually importing a gay liberation speaker to give a talk on the

campus. He was Jack Baker, an openly gay man who had been elected president of the Minnesota Student Association at the University of Minnesota.

There was no way that I was going to miss his talk. Evidently, the other students felt that way too because, when I got to the student union building, the place was jam packed. Jack was going to deliver his lecture in a large interior courtyard, but all the seats were taken, standing room only. There was a second floor balcony, filled to overflowing, and I half expected to see bodies cascading over the railing. The grand staircase behind the podium was being used as bleachers, and people were standing on chairs in the coffee shop to get a look at him. There also must have been some students in hidden crannies somewhere, because I kept hearing these disembodied voices chanting, "Fairy, we're going to see a fairy!" To me, it looked like the building was going to explode from the pressure of all the bodies crammed inside. Or more to the point, from the pressure of all the psychic energy emanating from the crowd. Everyone was pink faced and puffy cheeked, because they fully expected Jack to mince out in a pink suit, waving a lace hanky and lisping that he "demanded his wibewation."

Anyhow Jack came out looking and sounding as much like a straight man as anyone could wish for, so



the crowd was unnaturally silent for close to ten minutes. And then he said, "One of the arguments against homosexuality is that Man is attracted to Woman, so that they can have babies and continue the human race. Well if we start to run out of babies, I will step in and do my bit. Well the audience absolutely exploded at that, like it was the funniest joke they had ever heard. As for me, I thought, I can't believe it, they're not laughing at him, they're laughing with him. Has he won them over just like that? The atmosphere in that huge space remained friendly for the rest of the hour. I realize now that there had to be a number of silent homophobes in attendance, but they were bewildered, intimidated and outnumbered.

At the end of the speech a group of students gathered around the podium with questions and comments, and I joined them, because I just had to ask him what he thought about my going to see a therapist. After a short while I started squirming inside, because I wanted to talk to him

without an audience. I wanted to shout "go away damn you!" Anyhow, I just gave up waiting and just blurted my question out. I can't believe I'm talking about my dirty secret in front of total strangers, I thought. I think a couple of them were a little surprised, too. Anyhow, Jack answered my question thus: "That's a pretty standard approach, you tell a counsellor that you're gay, and he tells you that you're intimidated by women, and you just need to find an approachable one, and date her for a while, and the sexual feelings will come. That just doesn't work."

I got an emotional boost that day, even though my conscience told me not to give up on heterosexuality just yet. I sneaked off to a few of their meetings without telling my counsellor, feeling guilty, but I just couldn't stay away. There were quite a few people there, but otherwise it was a strange and frustrating experience. Typically, someone would make a statement and then withdraw it saying, "Never mind what do I know anyway?" Or if you tried to keep the conversation going you were answered with semi sarcastic quips or a shrug of the shoulders. I don't think anything productive came out of those evenings.

At the beginning of my second year, I gave up my feeble attempt at becoming a heterosexual and started to attend the gay liberation meetings. And we kick-started the group by saying enough with the hemming and hawing, let's pick a project, work on it and see how it goes. So some people started writing a brochure. The Jack Baker experience was on my mind, and so I said that we could go to psychology classes and give talks about gay liberation again. Right off the bat, I found a professor who was willing to have a few of us come to one of his classes. So there I was, a nineteen year old man of the world and authority on

the gay life ready to explain what it was all about. It's not as funny as it sounds, because I had been obsessing about the subject since I was sixteen, and studying it in everything from mainstream magazines to the gay bits in trashy novels and foreign films.

So, on the agreed upon date three of us were greeted by the prof saying "something is a little bit odd here Normally there's twenty to twenty-five people in this class, but today every seat is taken. I don't know where these extra 20 people came from." As I walked into the classroom, I started to shake uncontrollably and stared down at my shoes in fear. But I said to myself, "This is it and you gotta look 'em in the eye." So, I slowly forced up my chin and faced a group of sympathetic smilers. The rest went really well, and I made them laugh like Jack did.

I gave quite a few of these classroom talks over the next few years, and most of them were great fun. A few of us (Bill, Susan and myself) had become the quasi official, campus gays. Everywhere you went there was someone in the classroom or the hallway who had listened to your talk about what it was like to be gay. They were always coming up to you and saying, "I listened to you guys and your talk the other day, and it was so interesting that we spent the whole next class talking about it."

Personally I didn't understand what they were trying to tell me. Fifty years later, I guess they were reflecting on what it was like to live in isolation and secrecy. And, I suppose that some of them were guarding frightening secrets of their own. But at the time, I was just a young dumb guy with one good idea: Gay Liberation.

PRESENT AT THE CREATION, PART 2: GETTING THE WORD OUT.

Gregory Bourgeois

Our meetings at the University were entertaining and optimistic, and we basked in the relatively friendly atmosphere on campus. The students considered us just another group like Vietnam War protesters, environmentalists, socialists and feminists. Campus Radio interviewed our speakers, and the student paper printed our articles. In the mass media, there were hopeful signs as well. For instance, Esquire magazine published an article on the New Homosexual in December 1969! In television sitcomland, each show had an episode where the new straight acting male neighbor (or coworker or whatever) turned out to be gay. Surprise! And there was a weepy TV movie of the week or two. Don't remember any lesbians though.

However, I was particularly interested in two men who were married in a Montreal nightclub in 1972. (I can't resist adding a humorous detail here: the ceremony was held in a nightclub with a delightfully campy name: Chez ZouZou.) A national magazine, The Canadian, had covered the event, and The Canadian was delivered to the house free on Saturdays with our regular paper. So Saturday rolls around, and the article isn't there! It seems that at the head office in Toronto, they became concerned that it might be too racy for some markets, so they gave the editors in each city the option of including it or not including it. Winnipeg was one of the cities which opted out, and it was neatly done. It wasn't mentioned on the cover or in the index, so it was as if it never existed. That described the state of the local media at the time: we were never mentioned as if we just didn't exist.

Even some little incidents made me just a touch paranoid. The university library added some gay liberation books to their collection, but they mysteriously disappeared rather quickly. Were they stolen by lonely gays who wanted to read them, but did not want the librarian to see them checking out one of "those" kind of books? Or were they trashed by bigots? Around the same time, I heard that another



national magazine had printed a gay positive article. I decided to just walk to my local library to read it. Unfortunately, someone had removed the article, and it had been so neatly done again. The page wasn't raggedy from being torn out like the way they do in the patient's waiting room. It had been meticulously removed by someone with a ruler and an exacto knife. Someone like a conscientious librarian perhaps?

Regardless, I thought that just having a couple little cozy chats with the Winnipeg papers might break through the wall of silence. So I made an appointment with one of these newspapers, and I went there and more or less said that we have this really interesting gay group on campus and don't you want to write a story about us? I was sitting across from two very straight looking males when I said this, and I fully expected the same reception that I was used to at the university. Something on the order of, "Oh how



fascinating! You kids are just going to change the world! How brave and you!" Instead I was bluntly told, "No, we are not interested, period." All the while they were staring at me with expressions of utter disgust on their faces. Maybe they weren't disgusted, maybe they just thought that I was a dopey little kid. Since I kept hearing about student radicalism, I thought that I should rise to the occasion and shout something like "you're just a couple of male chauvinists!" Or "Down with the capitalist press!" Instead I just crawled out of there with my tail between my legs.

And it got worse. We also attempted to place a classified ad in the downtown papers around the same time. It would say something to the effect that we are a gay liberation group, and we hold meetings at the university on Monday nights, so why don't you come down and check it out? The classifieds departments told us that they wouldn't print it, and that they didn't have to print it. I think that realization hit all of us with a thud. We just had no access to mass media.

Our next attempt seemed a little kooky, but we decided to give it a chance. It was our version of Dial A Prayer. You would dial this number, and you could listen to a short talk describing the gay liberation movement and details about where our meetings were being held. This was a lot of information to cram in a couple of little minutes, so the fellow who recorded it babbled away at breakneck speed. He sounded like he was doing a late night infomercial for a new kitchen gadget. ("it slices! It dices! It juliennes! And the next ten callers will be able to take advantage of an exclusive bonus offer!")

The gay line as it came to be called, required a huge answering machine and its own dedicated extension. My friend Bill volunteered to have it installed in his apartment in a spare closet. None of us noted the irony at the time. The day after Bill went to the phone company to arrange for the service, he told us that he had the suspicion that the staff at their headquarters were lingering in hallways and common areas just to get a peak at him. Well, Bill must have been right because the instant the installer plugged the phone into the jack it rang. And rang and rang. Bill insisted that it went on constantly, day and night for weeks. He was able to pick up the receiver and eavesdrop on the calls, and what he heard was a lot of laughter. Evidently, the employees at the phone company had decided that the whole idea of a gay line was hilariously funny, and they distributed our number amongst their friends before we even got it hooked up. We were the party gag of the year in Winnipeg in 1973.

In 1974 a couple of our members, Richard North and Chris Vogel, decided to get married and issue a press release. It was the marriage thing again. This wasn't a publicity stunt as their union endured for decades, and I think they're still together. Behind their backs, we were a bit snide about the whole thing as we were sophisticates and believed that marriage was an obsolete institution. Still, we all went to the ceremony, and I experienced the novelty of being cruised in a church (Unitarian). The next day, the story was in all the papers and even received national coverage. Richard and Chris seemed to be on the radio all the time as well as all three of our television stations.

I guess that all goes to show you that we needed an idea like a gay wedding to capture the public's imagination. I thought that gay liberation (as we called it at the time) was exciting enough to merit a story, but evidently not. Green kids like myself couldn't comprehend the mindset of ultra conventional (hack?) journalists. People slowly trickled into our group after that, but I didn't have the brains to ask them just how they managed to find us. However, I at least know that the wedding sure punched a big hole in the wall of silence. The Unitarians told me that for years afterward people said to them, "Unitarians Huh? Never heard of you. Oh wait a minute, aren't you the church where those two gay guys . . ."

1. Photos supplied by Greg Bourgeois



ITALIAN SPEAKING

Cyndia Cole



It's October 1992. After spending long years at two universities and four different colleges, I am getting a far more practical education in everyday life in my work in home support at a non-profit in Vancouver. I have acquired sociological theories, a feminist framework and analysis but nothing enlivens them like the real people I meet in my work. My co-workers were first classified as "homemakers," then "home support workers," now "community health workers." All these labels are to make it clear that we are not nurses. We are health care workers at bottom of the pyramid and there are thousands more of us than there are of all the doctors, nurses, EMTs, OTs and PTs in the province put together.

Like all those supporting the upper layers of the pyramid we are almost entirely women, poorly paid and from marginalized groups. Many are immigrants from the Philippines, China, Viet Nam, India, Africa, Eastern Europe or Indigenous women. My privilege as an immigrant from the USA with white skin and English as a first language, plus education has won me a job as a supervisor. But this is only after more than five years on the front line where I landed due to my marginalization as previously disabled and also a Lesbian. Unlike the women of colour, I have the privilege of keeping these hidden – more or less.

For my safety, after becoming a supervisor, I choose Bill for my work partner. Bill is an older gay man who has a bit more trouble hiding due to his intense kindness. I choose to work with him on a much more difficult team to get away from Georgia, who was my supervisor before she became my work team partner. Georgia is the one who told our lunchroom that she had never met anyone who was gay. There were five of us of queers in the room, but no one contradicted her. That was the reality of homophobia and job insecurity in 1992. Nonetheless, the work world desperately needed us queers because we were the ones who weren't afraid of the rapidly increasing numbers of clients with AIDS. Even so, we kept our queerness on the down low except with each other.



To serve our elderly clients of every different background we made free use of workers from similar backgrounds who spoke their languages. Even on the Chinese team, no one was paid extra for their language skills. But their languages did help them in getting assigned extra visits.

Georgia was always looking for workers who were Italian speaking because her northeast Vancouver team served lots of elders from Italy who had never studied English. One day she came bursting into Bill's and my cubbyhole gloating that she had finally found and hired a Level 2 Italian speaker. Level 2 workers had college training that was out of reach for those who couldn't afford it. The three Italian workers on

Georgia's team were stuck at Level 1. In the few days between Georgia's triumphant announcement and today, I have heard Georgia's excitement. She is anticipating better communication and service with the Italian elders needing Level 2 personal care that this new worker, Angie, will make possible.

I have formed a clear mental image of Angie before I meet her. She is young and a bit better educated than the older Italian workers. They are middle-aged, speak with strong accents, and are excellent at Level 1 work. In my mind Angie is short and well spoken with dark eyes and curly black hair. In quite a rare move, on the day of Angie's orientation, Georgia parades her around the office introducing her to the supervisors of the teams she won't be on. It's as though Georgia regards her as a trophy.

My desk faces the window with my back to the door. When Georgia calls me to meet Angie, I have to swivel around, stand up and walk a few feet trying not to bump into Bill at his desk to get to the door of my cubbyhole. I see Angie for the first time. She is not short. She is noticeably taller than I am with a substantial frame. She exudes self confidence and composure, and seems to speak English as a first language. There's no dark curly hair. She's blonde with long straight hair held back in a neat thick braid. Her



eyes are sparkling blue. To top it all off, she is wearing a lavender bandana across her forehead as a headband. As I shake Angie's warm, firm hand I say, "Welcome to GVCSS, I'm Cyndia." What I don't say but am yelling in delighted surprise in my head is, "Angie's not Italian! She's a Lesbian!"

Of course, there are many women named Angie who are both Italian and Lesbian but certainly not here at our home support agency. Angie speaks Italian because she studied it along with French, and Yiddish and a little German. But I don't find out about her many other talents until

we move in together a year later. I do not speak Italian, but Angie's been speaking my language for over thirty years now.

1. Photos provided by Cyndia Cole

Card Art by Cyndia Cole and Angie Joyce



Trigger warning: the following poem is a courageous real and vivid description of sexual assault, and so many of us have experienced that in one way or another that this may form a trigger. Keep in mind that counselling is available to us these days, and it can make a real difference to what we carry with us through our days.

ASSAULT!**Lorri Rudland***They drove a green Austin and we met at a teen dance in Tsawwassen in 1963. We were 16.*

Out of the car, on the hood.
 Open your mouth, bitch.
 He pulls my hair into his fist with his right hand
 My mouth impaled upon him
 He smashes his left fist into my eye
 I can't breathe
 Both our hearts are pounding
 This isn't love
 From the backseat, I hear Amy crying as the second guy attacks her

My blood feels cold, my body tense
 I smolder inside, but I am still afraid
 Did they lie about the glamour of dying
 Time isn't flashing inside my skull
 Freeze-frame images on a big screen
 Time isn't standing still.
 Time is a sadist., that crawls in slow-motion

My head aches from the blood rush
 Heartbeats roar and hammer in my ears
 Choking on his swollen flesh
 What happens when he comes?
 Will I drown?
 My arms flail, my legs kick,
 I'm rockin' to the beat of the dead
 How long will it take?
 Another fist to the head.
 Stop moving bitch.

I am a blackboard. He is the screeching chalk.
 My mouth's spread wide in a silent scream.
 I drink blood from the corners of my lips
 Where he had ripped me
 Ripped my suit of skin.
 Ah, I will die, like dead astronauts
 Exploding from the eyes and ears
 Sucking air, I stumble backwards
 Spitting semen, from my throat
 Dripping down my face and blouse
 Retching, gulping for air,
 Leaning on one knee

A sudden thought, ridiculous
 "went down the wrong way"
 He looks at me and laughs
 He pumps his thing,

More semen arcs and drips
On barren ground, on me

Both our bras were ripped apart.
We buried them in the back yard.
“Don’t call the police, we’ll come for you”, he said.
Like girls and women everywhere,
We knew enough to keep our mouths shut.
We never saw each other again.

Lorri was date-raped when she was nineteen and raped by a history professor when she was twenty-eight. Since both rapes would both end up in a "he-said, she said" face-off, she never proceeded with legal action.



THE RECEPTIONIST

Garth McIver



The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included three important parts: the Desegregation of Public Accommodations, the Desegregation of Public property and the Desegregation of Public Schools and Colleges. Democrats and Republicans of the Southern States opposed the bill and led an unsuccessful sixty day filibuster. But in the end, the Civil Rights Bill was to change the demographics and social structure of many cities – especially in the South, including New

Orleans.

Resistance to the Civil Rights Act was still abundantly evident decades later when I arrived and lived in New Orleans during the 80’s and 90s. Until 1964, the once beautiful City Park, where Blacks were only allowed to observe from the surrounding sidewalk, was now largely untended and overgrown with few picnickers on a Sunday anymore. In a city known for its brutal hot and humid summers, the many public swimming pools which once were segregated had all been closed – you see no white was going to bathe in the same water with a black, and perhaps in some cases the opposite was also true. The desegregated public school system was now poorly funded, and those that did graduate were often ill-equipped to further their education, lacking rudimentary reading and writing skills. It was now common for white mothers to work, so they could fund their children’s education in the many flourishing private Catholic schools.

After 1964, there was an exodus of whites from Orleans Parish leaving its tax base suffering, evident in the littered streets filled with potholes. Middle class neighbourhoods began to slowly decay and, combined with the poorly maintained ghetto housing called “the projects,” social fabric began to unwind and New Orleans became the crime capital of the South. The whites had fled to the suburbs; Metairie, Kenner, Slidell were the unabashed new white enclaves. The Metairie suburb which borders Orleans Parish was the stomping ground of David Duke, the Ku Klux Klan grand wizard, white supremacist and anti-Semitic politician and the Republican member of the Louisiana House of representatives as late as 1992.

For the average Afro-American living in New Orleans at this time, opportunity was limited. You had to be exceptional to escape the revolving door of poverty. It seemed as if no one was going to give you a

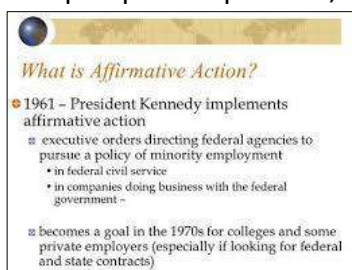
helping hand. Yes, of course, there were a few success stories – if you could play the trumpet, excel at singing the Blues or play football. Unfortunately, there are only a limited number of Louis Armstrongs, Mahalia Jacksons and major league football teams. So for most, poverty combined with a substandard education meant menial jobs, the military or the street gang.

In 1990, I was working in a well respected private psychiatric hospital in the New Orleans' white suburb of Kenner. At the time it was \$1000/day just to enter the facility, and all tests, labs and consultations were of course an added expense. Despite the fees, it had some specialized care models that had acquired a national reputation and attracted well-heeled patients from far and wide. The hospital offered avant-garde modules for eating disorders, sexual trauma, sexual compulsivity and chemical dependency treatment as well as adult and pediatric mental health care. Of course, the swank hospital also had a swimming pool, tennis courts and full-time activities director to add to the attraction. It was a busy, thriving money-making factory. It was also very “white.” With my left wing social medicine leanings, how I ended up there is a story for another time.

Although there was a Presidential Executive Order as early as 1961 for Equal Employment, it did not translate to real results until much later. The South knows how to drag its heels on most progressive thinking. But Affirmative Action was becoming a requirement for corporations receiving federal funding. Affirmative Action was aimed at increasing workplace and educational opportunities for people who were under represented in various areas of society. In Louisiana that meant Afro-Americans.

I could count on one hand the number of Black employees, and they were working in either the kitchen or in housekeeping. There were no Black doctors, and I can only recall one black nurse. I could also count on one hand the number of Black patients I encountered – a couple of professional football players on the Chemical Dependency module come to mind.

The receptionist at the entrance to the hospital held a very visible presence. She was the first person that prospective patients, family and visitors would encounter, the all important first impression of our very



expensive facility and services. The current very white and presentable receptionist, Janet, had given notice that she and her husband had bought a bed and breakfast in Arkansas and planned to relocate shortly. Head office had determined that in order to keep federal accreditation and licensing, our hospital had to make a shift and hire ethnically diverse workers. It was decreed that our new receptionist should be Black. I should mention here that our hospital was part of a large national chain and Head office was in Pennsylvania, not Louisiana. Damn Northerners dictating again! As I write this story, I hope that I can be excused for using any language or descriptions which are less than charitable. I am writing of a time some thirty odd years ago. It is how I remember it.

The new hire was to be mentored by Janet during her last weeks on the job. Might I add that Janet was an angel and treated everyone with respect and kindness. Her job was not easy. Often patients were anxious, frightened and even hostile, and visitors were often not much better. Answering the phone, giving directions and doing a patient intake required skill and patience. My office was directly behind Janet's desk, and when things were quiet she would often slip in for a coffee and a chat. We were friends.

I remember my secretary (and yes, I know they are called professional assistants now) coming into my office early Monday morning and saying “get a load of the new receptionist – good grief, she won't last”. Curious I went to the door and peered out. There was Janet sitting side-by-side with a decidedly Black receptionist. Jasmine was a beautiful black women of maybe 25. But she looked decidedly out of place at the receptionist desk. Her hair was in tight curls and glistened with topical oils. She obviously delighted in makeup, and I wasn't sure that those inch long nails would be much use on the type writer or phone. She had a very good figure which was squeezed into a bright multicoloured dress showing a bit too much leg and cleavage, although the jewelry around her neck covered most of it, not to mention the large hoop earrings. It looked like she was ready for a night on the town. Her voice was loud and she spoke in the

colourful syntax of the local Naw’lins Black that I still had trouble understanding even after living there for seven years.

At coffee, Janet confided that she didn’t know how the new recruit would work out. She seemed nice enough and intelligent enough, but had come through the Orleans public school system, had gone to a black community college secretarial program and then worked as the receptionist and assistant at a black beauty parlour. The beauty parlour stint made sense looking at her dress, makeup and accessories. But Jasmine had wanted more, and this job paid almost double with healthcare included, and she was a single Mom. We decided that Janet should be brutally direct and honest about what the job required and the clients and hospital expected. And Janet did exactly that.

After two weeks you would have thought a new receptionist had replaced Jasmine. The transformation was remarkable. Her hair was now stylish, and I think what’s called a Peter Pan cut. Her makeup was subtle, and she dressed like she was going to a boardroom meeting. Her telephone voice was warm and welcoming, as was her smile when people approached her desk.

You see, Jasmine, like so many of our world’s disadvantaged, had never been given a helping hand. She had never been mentored. She had all the grace and talent to be an exceptional employee and asset if given the chance. After Janet had left, and when things got quiet, Jasmine would slip into my office for a coffee and a chat. I learned so much from her, and she enriched my understanding and appreciation of diversity. She was my “diamond in the rough” example, a person of good character, qualities and potential. Given opportunity, people thrive. They flourish. What a waste of human potential when we strive to suppress and bridle our fellow human beings.

MY CAREER IN THE THEATRE

Lorri Rudland

When I entered my third year at the University of BC, I decided to take an acting class. This seemed like a fun way to get educational credits. Or so I thought. My co-star Dan and I were assigned a play that had been translated into English, possibly from Austrian, and we were supposed to be a young courting couple at the turn of the last century. The class had about ten students and one professor, with its own small stage and a seating area for an audience of about fifteen.

When the play began, Dan and I stepped onto the stage, and he started the play with a few lines. I was ready. I had memorized my part carefully, but as I looked out at the small audience of eight students and a professor something happened. My brain shorted out. No words came at all. Nothing. But it wasn’t only the lines I couldn’t remember. I didn’t know my name, who I was, or why I was standing in the center of the stage. I was frozen. From the sidelines, someone was speaking -- was he speaking to me? He was repeating a few phrases over and over. They were meaningless. What was I doing there?



Slowly, at what felt like a glacial pace, the audience came into focus – they were students in my acting class. I seemed to be standing on the stage, and one of the students was standing beside me. Oh, my God. I was in a play. I had stage fright, and the tiny audience of nine had frozen me on the spot. I don’t know how long it took me to come to my senses, but eventually I remembered a line.

Ignoring the prompter, I threw that line to Dan, my co-star, who was standing beside me with a look of expectation. Poor Dan, the line was from the middle of the play. He looked at me in horror, but he

answered. My response to him came slowly, and I croaked a reply. Then my valiant costar, still looking aghast and not at all like a happy young suitor, tried taking us back to the beginning, so we could fill in the half of the play which I had omitted. I heard Dan's cue and gamely followed. Wherever he led, I tried to follow. At the start of the acting course, Dan had told me that he had taken the course for fun. I wondered how much fun he was having, because I wasn't having much. My brain was running at half-speed, and my body was moving stiffly, like the unoiled tin man from the Wizard of Oz. Gradually, despite our struggles, we got through the play. As for my performance, god only knows. We did two more plays that year. I have absolutely no memory of them. After such a dismal start, I was given a good mark at year end. That was unbelievable. I wanted to question the professor, only he might have dropped my mark lower. Putting discretion before valor, I decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

The stage fright experience had a profound effect on me. Speaking to groups from a prepared script or speaking free form without a script was no problem for me, it was only that pesky memorization. Over the years friends would ask me if I wanted a bit part in various small productions. I always recoiled in horror. The same feeling went for the part of an extra. Even with no lines, you still had to hit your mark. I could envision a play in which all the extras moved to another side of the stage while I was frozen in place. I didn't want to take even the smallest chance of upsetting someone's production because I was standing in the wrong spot.

I love live theatre and enjoy watching actors who love performing, but that isn't me. My short career in the theatre ended on the final day of the third year course, and I was happy to leave it there.

And now we have a piece from one of Quirk-e's writer friends . . .

AND THEY FORGOT SHE WAS A LESBIAN

Debbie Louise

I once said, "Old people sure go to a lot of funerals." And here I am today going to another Celebration of Life. Some days I have to choose between which one I will attend. As an old person, I find I am far more interested in reading obituaries than I was when in my youth. In fact, I would scoff at old people who would only read the obituary section of the newspaper, the part that mattered. I wonder if Facebook has taken over that section of the news. It seems to be the current source of information sharing. This year, through Facebook, I learned of two friends passing. The obituaries were only posted on Facebook. Maybe because it is free on Facebook, and a newspaper advertisement can be more than one hundred dollars. Falling back on my life-long philosophy regarding social change, follow the money.

This last funeral was a little different. The family was well aware their mother had many lovers, some women and some men. It was uplifting to see her being so truthfully honoured. I thanked her family for not erasing the forty years she lived as a loud and proud lesbian. She was a single woman and did not have someone to advocate for her lesbian life. Her children would have wished she was just their mom, without all that sexuality stuff. Tragic as it is, the end of life it's not who you are, but what your next of kin decides is important. The obituaries are written for the public to read, and are not personal journal entries that give us the essence of the person. A few years ago, a dear friend passed away after more than 10 years of living in a care facility struggling with dementia. Once again, the family erased her lesbian life. I asked the daughter why and she replied, "I forgot she was a lesbian".

FATIGUE

Annie Newman



I'm wearing my usual gardening clothes, blue jeans, a colourful pink and green t-shirt, and earrings to match. And of course, my gardening gloves. I should be wearing my army fatigues though. If I am truly honest about how I really feel: tired. FA-TIGUED, overwhelmingly, down to the marrow, exhausted. As if I've been doing hard mental work for hours. One hand in front of the other.

I feel really sad about having such little energy while being in our garden, amidst all the brilliant red and yellow gloriosa daisies and intensely purple butterfly bushes. All I've managed so far, is to get rid of a few weeds, and I am already to drop the hoe, curl in a ball on the grass, and sleep for a long, long time.

I've been enjoying myself so much for these precious last few minutes. I turned up the soil, saw the fresh dirt, and highlighted the beautiful colours of the flowers and bushes. The extra foliage of dandelions and ivy that curled around them, are now cleared away. But heaviness has snuck in, over my entire body, like some injection of sleep potion that had taken over my entire body from scalp to toe. Collapsed! I have to sit on the grass, joy all gone. I cry, silent tears, bite my lips, try to hold in my sadness. "Don't feel sorry for yourself Annie," that harsh voice sternly orders.

The emotions squeeze through anyway. I do feel sorrow for myself. I was so happy, just a few moments ago! Was so full of mirth just a breath ago! I was good with the earth, just a turn of the garden spade ago! All gone, all gone! So much SAD! So, so much MAD! So much SCARED! I didn't ask for cancer and the tiredness that comes with the treatment. I didn't ask for nightmares about dying.

I am supposed to be relieved that they got it all. I usually am, until I get pooped like this. I feel the joy drained out of me. But then I hear that inner horrid voice, issuing big, booming and attacking pronouncements at me. Oddly though, I think that inner yelling tries to keep away my MAD, SCARED, SAD feelings in a nasty, oppressive way. I want it to stop working. I realize that it's better to experience these tough rumblings of the heart -- anger, fear and sorrow -- rather than to shrink and hide in the destructive part of myself.

Another part of me, who is really who I am, lets me know that this fatigue will pass. Tells me to be gentle with myself, to just notice how I am fatigued, to keep breathing through it. I breathe, then I hold my breath; I feel all the hard feelings again and just keep trying to notice, including all my self-criticisms, without pushing these reactions away. Eventually, I feel a little less fatigue and some relief, fatigued again, up and down, up and down.

Hard to change old habits, I kindly remind myself. My mind is about awareness; my heart is about accepting.

1. Photo provided by Annie Newman

It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little.

... Sydney Smith

Many of us, each doing a little, can make a huge difference.

DEANNA

Garth McIver

During the 1980's I worked at a private hospital in New Orleans. I was the medical doctor for the institution as well as being the director for the Chemical Dependency unit. This is where I met Deanna. Deanna was a dual diagnosis patient having both a psychiatric diagnosis and a drug addiction. Deanna was schizophrenic, and her drug of choice was marijuana – not a good combination. She was a handful. She had been introduced to drugs as a young teenager, but her schizophrenia had not been evident until much later in her last year of college, and she was not able to finish her liberal Arts degree. Now in her mid twenties and three years later, her circumstances had spiralled to a very low level, and she was living in shelters or in the rough. The trauma that this young woman had been subjected to had left her no room for trust. She had become an angry, vocal and sometimes physically threatening presence. She stood a solid six feet, with a severe brush cut and amateur tattoos on both arms. Her wardrobe consisted of a plaid shirt, faded blue jeans and work boots. She was the stereotypical tough dyke, and her manner and appearance seemed to dare anyone to come near.

Most of the patients at our private hospital had good insurance or money. But private hospitals in Louisiana were obligated to care for a small number of charity patients each year. The number of charity patients and the total length of stay depended on the hospital's total bed count. Deanna was a charity case. She was also an involuntary admission – court ordered stemming from an assault charge. She was admitted to my unit.

My first encounter was on admission and in the exam room, where she matter-of-factly told me that “no man was ever going to touch her,” and I could just “fudge off”. It was a standoff. Deanna won the day.

Deanna's drug screen was impressive. I had rarely seen a cannabis level as high. Cannabis lingers in the body's fat, and even mild exercise can release substantial amounts for as long as three weeks. Cannabis is a psychoactive drug and can in itself cause psychosis. Combining it with a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia was like adding gasoline to the fire.



Deanna claimed that cannabis was the only thing that calmed her nerves and slowed the voices, but meanwhile she would rant that these fucking voices in my head never stop. She sat in group with arms folded, legs outstretched and glared at the other patients and facilitator. Her colourful street language directed several of our staff to what they could do and where they could go with their advice and counsel. She would require a lot of the treatment team time. This was going to be a long rehab.

With the help of the psychiatric staff, Deanna eventually got on a medication regime that seemed to help somewhat. The cannabis washed out over the next few weeks, and the voices diminished and weren't so distressful. Deanna began to recognize intrusive thoughts from reality. She started to take some care in her appearance; her hair got a trim from one of our staff and although she insisted on jeans, shirts and boots, some acceptable new ones were donated by the hospital auxiliary.

Slowly Deanna began to engage in group work and with her assigned counsellor. One day in group Deanna smiled. Everyone was astonished, a moment of silence then everyone began to clap. Deanna was coming back. Finally there was some joy to replace those terrible years of abuse, fear and loneliness that had been her lot. Despite her tough exterior, the vulnerability and ray of hope was there too.

Deanna's commitment was for twenty-eight days but she stayed a full two months and was then discharged to our longterm aftercare program. During our family week, Deanna had reconnected with her family who had all but given up hope. Although cautious, they were happy to have their daughter back. She was able to move back home with her parents and get a job in a bakery making cookies. A year later, she

went back to university and completed her degree. She started to work in a half-way house. I saw Deanna periodically. She was part of our volunteer alumni and co-lead in our aftercare addictions group. It was hard to reconcile the new Deanna. She was still the loud in-your-face and imposing Deanna, but there was also in her a confident caring woman with a passion for helping others. I was now her primary care doctor. One day she told me that she was dating, had a girlfriend and wanted to take it to the next level. Deanna, the woman who wouldn't let a man touch her, asked me for her first gynaecological testing and exam.

The last time I saw Deanna a good five years had passed. She was excited. She had a new job interview. Something she really wanted. She was still dressing in her plaid shirts and weathered jeans, so we had a little talk about interviewing strategy. I asked if she would let me buy her an interview dress. I'm not sure how comfortable she was wearing that dress, but the dress or something worked. She phoned to thank me. She got the job. She would be moving to Baton Rouge. She would be a state employee. Deanna was to be Louisiana's new patient advocate for mental health and addiction.

HONESTLY -- IS IT REALLY FEAR OF BODILY HARM?

Gregory Bourgeois

I have always been fearful of being physically assaulted for being a gay man. I suppose the foundation for this fear was laid down in my childhood. I was pushed around a few times, no serious harm, but enough to make me permanently nervous. Smaller, weaker boys grow up that way. I didn't have it anywhere near as bad as my friend Doug who had to go to school in a taxi, but still.

When I reached twenty and started going to gay bars I learned about queer bashers. At the same time I learned about gay lib, and I just loved giving talks about it to straight university students. I was also getting my BA there, and one day I realized that, along with my friends Bill and Susan, we were the official campus gays. I couldn't go anywhere without someone saying to himself (or herself): "Oh look, there's Greg. He's one of the gay libbers." And I was also talking to myself and saying, "Gee maybe this isn't such a good idea. Will I be surrounded in the parking lot one day and have the shit kicked out of me?" It wasn't the possibility of physical harm which worried me as much as the psychological. Would I be able to pick myself up and just say, "Shit happens, so what!" Or would I feel so traumatized that I would quit the gay liberation group altogether? I just didn't know.

Well, I was never assaulted, although that happened to a lot of other people I heard about. And it happened to my closest friend, Bill, but he told me that he just didn't want to talk about it, subject closed! For me there was just the occasional verbal harassment. Every once in a while, I would be walking down the street when someone would shout something like, "How ya doing faggot!" This tapered off when I reached my early forties. However, there was one more particularly ugly incident about ten years ago.

I was taking the Skytrain to the Gay Senior's Book Club when a smallish man got on, sat kitty corner from me, and said "Oh, you're one of those!" I barely glanced up and muttered "whatever." But he kept making offensive comments, and the thought occurred to me that I should just change seats. In the past, I had irritated my friends with my foolhardy behaviour: you shouldn't have gone walking there -- you shouldn't have said anything- you shouldn't have made one of your dumb jokes -- you shouldn't have done that right out in the open where everybody could see -- etc.



On the train, Greg Bourgeois

So instead of just sitting there and ignoring him, like I usually do in these situations, I changed seats, and he followed me! So there he was, sitting across from me again, saying foul things. And I began to get nervous. Looking at the situation one way, I was being a little bit silly. He wasn't going to assault me in broad daylight in a crowded Skytrain car. And he wasn't even a very big man. But I was feeling threatened anyhow.

Thinking back on the situation later, I wasn't really afraid of physical harm. I think the other passengers would have peeled him off of me if it came to that, and some of them were cute looking young guys. I was really just afraid of embarrassing myself. A real man can take care of himself in a fight, you know. Me, I couldn't even make a proper fist. Years ago I tried to beat up my boyfriend, and when I told my best friend about it he said, "You must have looked pretty funny, throwing a bunch of wild, overhand punches like a little windmill!" And it did strike me as funny, because I did look like a windmill. What would I do if this time if it became physical? I had no idea. Try to punch him? Scratch him? Beg! Whatever it would be, it would look pathetic.

Anyhow I made a smart move finally — I went and pressed the emergency buzzer. At that point, one of those attractive young men looked at me quizzically and asked me "Oh do you have an emergency?" I answered, making a huge effort to sound nonchalant, "Yeah, something like that." Lots of pairs of eyes were focused on me by this time. I certainly felt like a spectacle. A voice came through the intercom and asked me what the problem was? Was it my imagination, or did the voice on the intercom sound annoyed? Anyhow, I said "I'm being threatened." He mumbled something that I didn't quite catch, so I repeated myself "I am being threatened." And "I heard ya the first time," he drawled. "Just get off at the next stop, and I'll meet you there."

Well he was true to his word. He was waiting for me at the next station, and right at my exit door too. I guess they have a monitor which showed exactly where I was pressing the emergency switch. And he was really huge, well over six feet tall and almost as wide, but with an aggrieved air. "There's 250 pounds of pure apathy," I said to myself.

Now this is where it gets funny for a minute. My tormentor stepped off the train and said "I don't know why he thinks I'm following him." So my bored protector says, "Then get back on the train." About twenty seconds later, he says, "He's gone now and you can just get on the next train. So what was he saying to you anyway?"

I said, "He said that he was going to follow me off of the Skytrain, and he was going to make me suck his cock, and I was going to like it." Well, that sure shocked him out of his apathy. I wish I'd had the wit to ask, "What do you think these people say -- I disagree with your choice of lifestyle"?

1. Photo provided by Greg Bourgeois

LISTS

Janie Cawley

In the summer of 1954, our family moved into our new home in North Vancouver. The construction of the house was complete, but there was no landscaping. The yard consisted of dirt, rocks, weeds, and a wooden fence that separated the backyard from the forest watershed, a line above which no more houses could be built. Although Mom had wanted to move into our new house, she made it very clear that this was going to be our last move, something about "over my dead body." I was very glad to hear this. My new school would be the fourth school in as many years, and I was only going into Grade Four.

Today was Wednesday. I always looked forward to Wednesdays because I would be home alone. Dad would leave early to take the bus to work because Mom needed the car to do the grocery shopping.

Mom would leave around eleven. After finishing the shopping, she always stopped in to see her long-time friend Kay and usually got home around three. My brother, Martin, was supposed to stay home, but he would leave as soon as Mom's car went down Bonita and turned onto Mount Royal. He would always ask me if it was ok if he left, even though he knew I would be perfectly happy on my own.

As usual, as soon as Mom left, Martin asked if it was ok to leave. "Sure," I said. "Can I read your new Hardy Boys book?" His response was quick: "If you mean the *Hooded Hawk Mystery*, no you can't," he said. "I haven't finished it, and if you read it first, you always want to tell me how it ends. You can read any of the old ones." There was no need to discuss any further which of his books I could read. I had just asked in case I ran out of things to do, and that wasn't likely. I already had a list of three things to do, and one of them I needed to get done soon.

The first thing on my list was finishing *Jane of Lantern Hill*. My grandmother had given me the book a week ago. It was now officially my favourite book ever. Next, I would put my plan to meet the girl across the street into effect. Finally, I would do some work on a chore Dad had set for Martin and me. I put finishing *Jane* first on my list not only because I was totally absorbed in the story, but also because it was easier reading when Mom wasn't home. If Mom were home, she would be telling me to do anything but read. "You read too much," she'd say. "It's bad for your eyes. You should go outside and get some fresh air. No wonder you don't have any friends with your nose in a book all the time."



I picked up *Jane*, threw myself on my bed, sat back on a pillow, and read the last three chapters. A happy ending! I was sorry when I finished. I thought about starting the book over again, but then remembered the second thing on my list, finding a friend to walk to school with. This was really what I was most anxious about. It was almost the end of July, and only a little over a month to go until school started. For the first time since I started school, Martin and I would not be going to the same school. This presented a major problem because I had a bad sense of direction. Well, almost no sense of direction at all.

The first school I went to when I started Grade One was only four blocks away from our house, and I got lost the first time I tried to walk home by myself. After that, Mom told Martin, who was in Grade Three, that he had to walk me to and from school until I could find my own way. Although my brother said he had better things to do, he did show me landmarks that I could use to make my own way home, such as a fire hydrant, odd-coloured houses and roofs, and a store. He also drew me a map of these landmarks. It only took me two days to be able to make my own way home.

In our new home I wouldn't have Martin to help me figure out the route to school. The mid-1950s was a post-war baby boom that created a big increase in the number of school-aged children. There were not enough schools to accommodate them. New schools were being built at a furious pace, and some schools even had to set up double shifts. The usual division of schools into elementary (Grades One to Seven or sometimes Kindergarten to Grade Seven), junior high (Grades Eight to Ten) and high school (Grades Eleven and Twelve) no longer held. My brother was going into Grade Six at Hamilton Junior High, which went from Grades Six to Nine. I was going to Canyon Heights, which went from Grades One to Seven. I had pointed out to Dad that Canyon Heights had Grade Six. "Why can't Martin go to Grade Six at Canyon Heights?" I asked. "Canyon Heights doesn't have room for any more students in Grade Six or Grade Seven for that matter," Dad had said. "Hamilton is the next nearest school with room."



Drawing by Zed

Canyon Heights was very far away from Hamilton and not even in the same direction. I wouldn't have Martin to help me figure out the route to my new school. I needed to find a friend. I had noticed that two Wednesdays in a row, the girl across the street, who looked about my age, watched workers unload garbage bins into the back of a huge garbage truck. She always wore a red toque, which I thought was a little strange as it was July and quite hot. Nevertheless, I put my plan into action. Today was Wednesday.

The garbage truck usually came just after noon. I had timed it the way I timed everything, by counting the

number of cuckoos the clock in the dining room made. I had just heard 12 cuckoos. The garbage truck would come any minute.

I went through the dining room and out onto the balcony that overlooked the road. Just as I heard the rumble of the garbage truck coming up Bonita, I saw the girl in the red toque come out of the gate and stand on the side of the street. I ran into the house, out the front door, and down our driveway to the curb. I watched the garbage truck from my side of the street. The garbage truck came and went. The girl and I stood and looked at each other. She spoke first. "Hi. My name is Kathy." She smiled. "I'm Janie," I said. "We just moved in a few weeks ago."

"My mom's out right now, but she should be back soon," Kathy said. "Why don't you come over later?"

"Ok," I said. "Oh," she added. She pointed at the clothesline that travelled from the back porch and along a hedge towards the side gate. "I almost forgot. If there's a red flag hanging on the line, it means we can't have visitors. So don't come then." Strange, but . . . oh well. "Umm, ok." I said. Well, that seemed a good start to building a friendship. I wasn't too sure about the red flag, but sometimes moms were weird. I should know.

Now to the third thing on my list. In the back yard was a huge boulder that Mom wanted removed so that, at some time in the future, we might be able to put a pool in the back yard. Dad had been spending a lot of time building fires in the crevices of the boulder. When he was satisfied the boulder was hot enough, he would pound it with a sledgehammer until sparks flew off. Usually, a large chunk would break loose. Sometimes a smaller piece. The bigger pieces were, according to Dad, just the right size for the retaining walls he wanted to build in the front yard. The smaller ones he would use to fill in gaps.

Martin and I were Dad's assistants in this project. Dad had rigged up two large roasting pans with long, looped ropes tied to the handles. Once I filled my roasting pan with as many rocks as I could pull, I would step into the loop, put it around my waist, and drag the load from the back yard to the front yard close to where Dad was building the wall. Martin did the same. As an incentive, Dad paid us 10 cents a load. I dragged four loads of rocks through the dirt and around to the front of the house. I stacked the rocks into separate piles so that Dad would see I had done four loads and pay me 40 cents. Tired of dragging rocks, I decided to go over to Kathy's house, but when I looked over at her house, I saw the red flag on the clothesline. I wondered how long it would be there.



As I stood staring across the street, Martin showed up. His face was red, and he was out of breath, as though he had been running hard. Clearly, he was excited about something. He grabbed my arm. "Do you want to make a Molotov cocktail?" he shouted. I had no idea what a Molotov cocktail was. The only cocktail I knew about was a shrimp cocktail, something we had when company came to dinner. Mom served each guest a small glass bowl with red sauce and shrimp dangling from the rim.



Whatever a Molotov cocktail was, I figured it would be more fun than dragging rocks, and by the time Martin and I finished making the Molotov cocktail, maybe the red flag would be off Kathy's clothesline. "Sure!" I said. "What is it?"

"You get an empty glass bottle, and I'll get the rest. It's easier to show you what it is than try and explain it," Martin said. "Ok," I said.

I found an almost empty glass ginger ale bottle in the fridge. I gulped down the ginger ale and took the bottle outside to give to Martin, who had already collected the lawn mower gas can, a funnel, and one of Mom's dust rags. Clearly this was not the cocktail I was familiar with. Martin put the funnel into the ginger ale bottle and poured in some gas. He tried to stuff the rag down the neck of the bottle into the gas. There was too much rag. He took the rag out and tore it in half and tried again. This time he managed to get the rag down into the gas, then he shook the bottle. He looked me right in the eye. "This is important. You have to make sure the rag is totally soaked in the gas," he said.



I was getting a little nervous about what he was about to do. I was also wondering where he had learned about Molotov cocktails. I knew he had learned about landmarks in Cubs, and landmarks had been very helpful when he needed to teach me how to get to and from school. I also knew he had moved up to Scouts before we left Oregon and would be starting Scouts here when school started.

Mom always enrolled Martin in Scouts whenever we moved. He liked Scouts. They were always doing something new, he made a lot of friends, and he said he learned interesting things like how to build a campfire. Martin was especially interested in the way Dad was using fire to break up the boulder. Sometimes he gave helpful hints to Dad about how he should make sure the fire was out before he was finished for the day. However, I couldn't think of why a Scout would need to know about Molotov cocktails. Scouts were all about being helpful and learning useful skills. From what I could see so far, Molotov cocktails did not seem helpful or useful. Probably some of Martin's new friends — and Martin had a lot of new friends — had shown him how to make a Molotov cocktail.

The first thing Martin had done when we arrived in our new home was to ask Dad to show him where his new school was. Martin took his baseball glove, and Dad dropped him off at the school. By the end of our first week in North Van, Martin had a bunch of friends, and four or five of them lived quite close to us. In our neighbourhood here was certainly no end of empty lots, places where building hadn't yet begun, where Martin and his friends might have tried making a Molotov cocktail. Martin now wanted to try making one himself. This would explain why he was home early.



Drawing by Zed

The combination of rags and a bottle filled with gasoline had me well on my way to thinking that making a Molotov cocktail was not a good idea. When Martin told me to get matches from the fireplace wood box in the living room, I felt positive that this was not a good idea. "Is this dangerous?" I asked. "Not very," Martin said. Not reassuring, I thought. I did not, however, want to be left out, so I went and got the matches.

When I returned, Martin had moved a bit closer to the boulder. I asked him what he was going to do now. "I'm going to light the rag and then throw the bottle against Dad's rock," he said. "The bottle will break! All the gas will spill out and catch fire! And there might be an explosion! But don't worry. I've moved closer to make sure I hit near the bottom. All the dirt around the boulder will keep the fire from spreading."

I suddenly thought that being left out wouldn't be such a bad thing. It occurred to me that now would be a good time to go and see if the red flag was off Kathy's clothesline. However, before I could even move, Martin lit the rag and threw the bottle. The bottle smashed to pieces as it hit the bottom of the boulder. There was a loud explosion. Fire shot up around the boulder. I started screaming "Fire!" and ran for the garden hose at the corner of the house. Martin disappeared into the carport. I turned on the hose full blast. As soon as the water hit the gas that had spilled from the broken bottle, the fire started hopping from place to place. Then it started hopping straight for me. Water was clearly not a good idea.

Just as I was about to give up and run for . . . just about anywhere, Martin came out of the carport with a huge thick blanket that the movers had left behind. He yelled at me to turn off the water, and then he started beating at the fire with the blanket. I was incredibly happy to see that this had some effect in slowing the spread. Then Martin told me to get a shovel out of the tool shed and throw dirt on the fire. I ran to the tool shed in the carport and grabbed a shovel. I threw dirt as fast as I could. It was the first time I was glad the back yard was mostly dirt. After about ten minutes, the fire was out, but the smell of gas was strong, and weeds were still giving off puffs of smoke.

"I thought you said the dirt would keep the fire from spreading!" I shouted. "Yeah, well, I was wrong," he said. "I'm sorry, but at least none of the neighbours are home. We need to clean up this mess



Drawing by Zed

before anyone does get home. You know how nosy the neighbours are.” I hadn’t even thought about the neighbours. I was mostly thinking what Mom and Dad would say if they figured out what we had done. Martin stayed focused on the cleanup. “Let’s collect all the bits of glass and throw anything that looks like it’s been in a fire over the fence,” he said. “But first, let’s make sure nothing is still burning.” Now that was for sure his Scouting experience coming out, I thought.

When we had collected all the glass, Martin said he was going to put it in the garbage bin. I told him the garbage truck had already collected the garbage and Mom would for sure notice broken glass in the bottom. Martin then went into his bedroom and got his marble bag, which he had emptied of marbles. “Put the glass in this bag,” he said. “I’ll empty it the next time I take the garbage out.” I frowned. “What, sometime in the next year?” I said. I was still feeling cranky and scared about the whole Molotov cocktail thing. Martin often found excuses to avoid this chore, and I had to do it instead. “I take the garbage out sometimes,” Martin protested. I replied “Never voluntarily.” So Martin added, “Don’t worry. I’ll get rid of it.”

We threw the singed weeds and any other singed thing over the fence. The odour of gas and smoke was clearing. Martin looked at the piles of rocks in the front yard. “I have a great idea,” he said. “Not another one,” I said. “No, really, this is a good idea. We should pull some more loads of rocks around and make sure we trample down the ground real good.” For the next hour or so, we moved rocks and trampled ground. Finally, we looked over the back yard and decided that it looked ok. Or at least not like someone had thrown a Molotov cocktail.



I was just heading around to the front of the house to check the red flag situation at Kathy’s when I heard three cuckoos. Mom would be home any minute! I looked down Bonita to Mount Royal and sure enough Mom had just turned the corner onto Bonita. I didn’t have time to go around the back to tell Martin. When Mom drove up the driveway, I rushed to meet her in the carport. I didn’t want her going around to the back just in case her keen sense of smell detected some remaining smoke or burn odours that neither Martin nor I had noticed. Before I could say anything, Mom looked at me and frowned.

“Have you been rolling in the dirt?” she asked. I looked down at my clothes and then at my arms and hands. It did look like I had been rolling in the dirt. “No.” I said, “Martin and I have been hauling rocks for Dad. There is a lot of charcoal out there from the boulder fires. It kind of sticks to you.” I then started telling her about meeting the girl across the street. I knew Mom would be pleased about this, and she was. But not so pleased that she overlooked that fact that I was not, as she would say, “presentable.” She said, “Clean yourself up. Then go and ask Kathy to come over and play.” I grimaced, “Well,” I said, “that’s a good idea, but I have to wait until the red flag isn’t on the clothesline.” Before Mom could ask about the red flag, I rushed on. “Kathy’s mom puts a red flag on the line when she doesn’t want visitors.”

“Well, that’s odd, isn’t it?” said Mom. I agreed with Mom, but I didn’t want her to think Kathy’s mom was weird. I had heard a baby’s crying coming from Kathy’s house when I was talking with her after the garbage truck left. “They have a new baby over there,” I said. “Probably her mom puts the flag out to make sure nobody disturbs the baby if it’s sleeping.” With a smile, “Well, that makes sense,” Mom said. “You certainly want all the peace and quiet you can get with a new baby.”

I helped Mom take the groceries up the side stairs to the kitchen. Then I went out on the balcony to check on the red flag. It was down! I went back into the kitchen and told Mom I was going to visit Kathy. I rushed into the bathroom, wet a washcloth, and scrubbed quickly at my face, arms, and legs. Then I went to my bedroom and grabbed some clean clothes. While I was there, I opened my window and told Martin that Mom was home. I also said I had told Mom my clothes were dirty from pulling rocks around for Dad.

“I’m going to Kathy’s,” I shouted as I ran downstairs and out the front door. “Be sure you’re home for dinner,” Mom responded. I walked down our driveway, crossed the street, and went through the side

gate and along the path to Kathy's side porch. I climbed the stairs and knocked on the door. Kathy opened the door, looked at me, and started talking right away. "I'll meet you at the front door. My sister and I need to look after the baby. We're taking her down to the back garden." Kathy talked fast and hardly stopped between sentences. I thought her way of talking was very efficient. I hated it when people dawdled over telling me something. Mom called it hemming and hawing.

I went down the stairs and around to the front door. On the small front porch, I found a baby buggy and a girl who looked to be six or seven rocking it. Very loud howls were coming from the buggy. Kathy rushed out the front door with her red toque still

firmly on her head. She talked in a very loud voice, to be heard over the howling, and pointed at the girl. "That's Carole. The baby's name is Maggie. She has colic. She cries all the time. It's driving Mom nuts. If we go down to the bottom of the garden, Mom can't hear her that much."

"What's colic?" I asked. "Don't know," Kathy responded. "The doctors don't know either. It just happens to some babies. Mom says it will go away in a few months." Kathy stopped to take a breath. I moved on to a much more pressing question. "Why are you wearing a red toque when it's so hot out?" "I have really curly hair. It's hard to comb or brush. Mom insists that I look presentable when I go out, so I just put my toque on. Before the baby that wouldn't have been ok, but Mom is too tired to care right now. At least something good has come from the baby's colic."

Kathy pushed the buggy down two stairs along the front sidewalk, down the driveway, through the carport, and then down a path to the back garden. The garden sure didn't look like my grandmother's garden. The flowers were either dead or wilting, and there were more weeds than vegetables in the vegetable garden. Kathy pointed to a boy who looked three or four years old. "That's Frank," she said. "Don't let him shake the baby buggy. Mom says he's too enthusiastic. He almost bounced Maggie right out of the buggy the last time we let him have a turn."

Frank was busy building a fort from various bits of debris, old cardboard boxes, and dead tree limbs from the forest right beside their house. Kathy, Carole, and I took turns shaking the baby buggy. We tried to carry on a conversation for about an hour, but the baby's crying just about drowned out any other sound. I thought I should be getting home. As exciting as it was to be making a new friend, the constant screaming of the baby was making my head ache, and my stomach feel queasy. I also knew that Dad would be home anytime, and I was nervous that either Mom or Dad would figure out that something wasn't quite right about our back yard.

Before I went home, I needed to know for sure that Kathy would be going to Canyon Heights. As soon as it was Carole's turn to shake Maggie's buggy, I moved as close to Kathy as I could. "Will you be going to Canyon Heights in September?" I shouted. "No," she shouted back. I couldn't believe my ears. "But Canyon Heights is the closest school," I shouted again. "I know," Kathy said, "but it's a new school with new teachers. Mom wants Carole and me to keep going to Highland. Mom knows all the teachers, and she likes things to stay the same. Besides, Frank will be starting kindergarten in a few years. Mom wants Carole and me to be there to keep an eye on him."

I was stunned. I thought for sure I had solved both my making-a-friend problem and my how-to-get-to-school problem. Instead, I now had two new problems. Would Mom and Dad figure out what happened in the back yard? And would Kathy be my friend if we weren't going to the same school? I felt glum as I trudged home.

I went to the kitchen. I could see that Martin had also washed and changed his clothes. He was keeping Mom engaged in conversation about how much work the two of us had been doing while she was out. When Dad got home, he was too tired to think about breaking up more rock. He also told Mom he would be working late on Thursday and Friday. "I'll get back at the boulder on the weekend," he said at dinner. "Well, not on Saturday," Mom said. "We're playing bridge with Kay and Bob." He looked at her, "On



Sunday then,” Dad said. Then he looked across the table at Martin and me. “I see you two have been hauling a lot of rock. It looks like I had better keep up with you.”

Martin and I looked at each other. A reprieve! We had three more days to make sure there was no evidence of glass or singed weeds in the back yard. By Saturday we had moved most of the rocks Dad had piled up. At the same time we scoured the ground for any evidence of fire. Fortunately, there were already hunks of charcoal in the yard from the wood that Dad used to make his fires. Martin and I had crushed a lot of blackened debris from our fire by dragging our roasting pans full of rocks over it. We thought we had done a pretty good job.



Zrocks

On Sunday Dad started early breaking up the boulder. Martin and I also made an early appearance. We had just hauled the first load of rocks that Dad had chipped when Mom came out of the basement and through the carport to the back yard. She held the blanket that Martin had used to put out the fire. “I knew it, I just knew it!” Mom shouted. Martin, who was very blond and fair-skinned, always had a lot of colour in his face. His colour would go from slightly pink to bright red if he got embarrassed. When I looked at him this time, his face had lost all colour. I thought he was going to be sick. I started rearranging the few rocks in my pan. I thought I might be sick too.

“What did you just know?” Dad asked. “I knew those movers were smoking in the back of that truck, and this proves it,” Mom said, unfolding the blanket to reveal a large burn and several scorch marks. “It’s a wonder all our furniture wasn’t burnt to a crisp.” Dad looked at Martin and then looked at me. “Well, I guess we won’t be using those movers again,” he said. Mom crossed her arms and made a loud tut sound, a sure indication that she was not happy. She said, “Of course, we won’t. I have already told you that we won’t be moving again.” Martin’s face started getting colour back. I continued to rearrange the rocks. I still felt sick to my stomach. Dad started chipping at the rock again. Mom went back into the house muttering about phoning the moving company and giving them a piece of her mind.

Martin and I never did figure out if Dad knew that we had something to do with the burned blanket. Dad’s sister, our Aunt Marjorie, who was the youngest of Dad’s three siblings, had told us lots of stories about the things that Dad and his two brothers had got up to when they were kids. Maybe Dad thought that as nothing terrible had in fact happened this time, he should, as he often said, let sleeping dogs lie.

And I suppose things were looking up for me. I now only had two problems. Would Kathy be my friend? I was already working on that. How would I find my way to school? After what we had just been through, I felt pretty sure I could convince Martin to help me solve that one. I started a new list.

1. The drawings and the photographs of them are by Zed Bastedo.
2. Book cover photograph provided by Zed Bastedo
3. Baby pram <https://kidsofthe50sand60s.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/image-6.png>

NO MATTER WHAT THE CHALLENGES WE FACE, WE CAN ALWAYS RESPOND WITH LOVE.

Wab Kinew

Nov 4th 2024, on the death of Murray Sinclair

And our next story by Marsha Ablowitz is science fiction (although who knows, it could be our future). Lots of challenges here and a triumph: survival.

THE SQUAT
Marsha Ablowitz

Kark woke early. He squinted, struggling to open his painfully dry eyes. A ray of dusty red light shone through the cladding of their squat almost blinding him. Asshole Zack was supposed to fill in that crack days ago. Stupid cry baby brother. Was he dead? Kark rolled over peering through his cracked face shield to see if Zack was still breathing. Damn it, this morning his brother's suit monitor showed strong life signs. "Shit, he fought off that virus," thought Kark. His throat felt like sandpaper. He sucked hard on his suit recycler. A few measly drops of liquid wet his throat but did little to quench his thirst. He would kill for a coke. He staggered to the solar still and checked the fluid level, barely a cup. Would Zack notice if he drained it? Zack was a wimp, but he could shoot straight. Even in his sleep, Zack clutched their only loaded sidearm. Would Zack kill him, if he drank all their water? Perhaps. Then Zack would be the one to retrieve his dead brother's fluids and protein.

Kark stared down at Zack who groaned and lay still. Kark snorted in disgust as he watched his brother's regular breathing. He'd really thought that the virus leak would kill him. Kark kept a careful eye on Zack as he opened the valve straw and sucked up three quarters of their shared water. He would tell Zack the solar still was leaking. This was no lie. Everything was leaking: their damn squat, their still, their survival suits. They needed to scavenge or kill soon. Kark peed, squeezing every drop of his urine into the stinking retrieval funnel on their crappy still. Then he kicked Zack's leg. Zack jerked up blinking, clutching his sidearm. He sucked his recycled fluids and groped for the straw valve in the still.

"What the Hell Kark. Only a third?"

"That crummy still must have a leak."

"Liar. You guzzled more than your half." Zack pointed his sidearm at Kark. "Asshole. It would be so easy to kill you!"

"Come on Little Bro. Cool down. We watch each other's backs. We're brothers forever."

"Yah, sure." Kark said. "How're yuh doing bro? Over that virus?" Kark put warm tones into his voice and Zack lowered the gun. "Yes Kar, thanks for asking."

"Yu Gotta be careful out there little bro."

Kark patted Zack's arm and smirked. He knew how to handle people. He knew Zack was too soft to ever shoot his beloved big brother. Zack sighed as he sheathed his sidearm and half smiled at Kark. Kark wished he had not dropped his own power weapon in their last street fight. He hated to see Zack's tight control of their only remaining functional power weapon. He should have stolen it while Zack was sick. But he thought he just had to wait. He was sure Zack would die with that high fever and no water. Zack stared into Kark's dark eyes as if reading his thoughts. Kark turned. "If you're O.K. let's move it bro. We have to find water and food."

"I'm good. Fever's gone. I'll watch your back," said Zack. "Keep close," said Kark. Hey, remember that Red ganger we shot last week? Before he died, he screamed for Mole?" Zack's heart clenched. "Yah."

"Did you ever know that Asshole Mole back at school?"

"Can't remember," Zack was relieved his bro couldn't see his face.

They carefully checked each other's survival suit seals and crept out through the layers of plastic and canvas that protected their tiny squat sealed in the far corner of Costco. They set the guard sensors on kill and looked around. No trace of intruders. No heat signatures. This was not surprising. Few warm life forms remained anywhere in Vancouver. Just toxic air and black water. Now to scavenge or to kill. But Kark needed a weapon. "Give me the sidearm Zack."

"I'm not an idiot."

"I'm a better shot."

"Yes and I'm the closest target."

"Very funny."

They headed to the beach to try and glean a bucket of black sea water for their solar still. There was so much water out there. Stinky, poisonous but it worked in their still. Gleaning was risky. The fucking Red Gang ruled the whole damn waterfront and controlled all precious water sources. But the brothers were desperate. With leaky survival suits and no water, they would soon die. They crept quietly along the edges of ruined skyscrapers towards the shore. They could see the black water moving below them. It was so tempting. They were so thirsty. Kark unfolded his bucket and was pulling out his hose when he jerked back. A drone whirred above as they ducked a rain of bullets. They had breached the defenses of the Red gang. Zack ran for shelter, crouched against a wall behind a metal crate. The drone was circling in for its kill. Zack turned, seeing a dark crack in the wall of the building behind them. It was just wide enough for them to squeeze through.

They peered around temporarily safe off the street, in the barricaded entrance hall of an ancient highrise. This street level was too exposed. The drone would swoop down. It could sense their heat and smell their leaky suits. They anxiously searched the walls. They had to move fast. Zack found the stairs to the basement and they switched on their head lights. They smelled dampness. The dead high rise was close to the ancient yacht harbor. Maybe there would be water leaking in. They were so deep inside Red gang territory they had never explored this place. It was possible Red Gang had missed this wall crack and not salvaged everything. They switched on their headlamps and slowly climbed down the broken stairs to the basement levels hoping to find safety and evade Red Gang drones. They were desperate for anything to eat or drink. At the bottom of the stairs the air was murky but they could see a lower level door propped open by a chunk of broken concrete. Kark paused, who left the door like that? He checked his scanner. There were no life signs. He gestured to Zack to enter first. "You have the sidearm, go ahead."

"O.K. Watch my back."

"Always bro." Zack walked slowly into the darkness. It must have been a carpark. He shone his headlight on ancient Teslas and Hondas lined in rows. All were stripped, with smashed windshields. Some of the cars were burned. There was black mold but no food or water. Kark followed Zack searching along the dark wall until Zack suddenly stopped by a pile of rubble. "What the hell? Why'd you stop?"

"Look down here. There's something under this rubble." Zack bent and tugged at a piece of steel but it clanked down. Kark noticed a glint of shiny metal. Zack was struggling with the rusty slab. Kark grunted in exasperation. "Shove over wimp. It's not heavy." Zack stepped back and Kark easily shifted the steel plate. They gasped as they saw a shiny lock and the traces of a trap door. Good salvage. Together they managed to smash the lock and tug up the door on its rusty hinges. It creaked open revealing a staircase that descended into the gloom. They ducked back. "You have the gun. You go first," said Kark.

Zack stepped slowly past his brother, raised his sidearm and crept down peering into the gloom. Kark noticed Zack's arm was shaking. What a fairy. Zack reached the bottom of the stairs. He stopped and shone his light around the small room. He cried out in shock. "This is amazing. Get down here." Kark rushed down and elbowed his brother aside. His mouth gaped open as he stared at the survival room. Its walls were covered with shelves. And each shelf was stacked with food and gear: cans of meat, fruit, beans and towering packages of dried dinners. A wall of six packs, cases of coke, undamaged full water canisters, pristine survival suits, a brand new solar still fresh in its packaging. Kark stared at the shelves. His heart raced as he searched for weapons. There in the far corner he spotted a sidearm. It was on a high shelf. The tiny dial shone bright with charged energy. If he could just grab it before Zack noticed. Then he could easily shoot his asshole brother. Get rid of the jerk once and for all. With all this treasure, Kark would be king, set for years. He certainly wouldn't need Zack's help. No further reason to share anything with the pathetic wimp. Zack turned to examine the solar still. Kark sidled towards the shelf with the gun.



Kark was so focused on sneaking over to snatch the sidearm that he didn't notice that Zack had stopped examining the solar still, and was now silently creeping back up the stairs. Kark reached the shelf and grabbed the sidearm. It felt heavy, but it slid through his fingers. Damn gloves. His heart was pounding as he grabbed the gun again, it was like grabbing smoke. "Damn it Zack. What's going on here?" There was no reply.

He heard scrambling on the stairs and a thud, He turned to swear at his brother but Zack was gone. Kark looked back to the stairs. Dust rained down as the trap door slammed shut. Zack was gone. Kark stared back at the beautiful sidearm as it faded. The treasure laden holograph shelves disappeared leaving a grey empty cell. Kurk stared in shock, then he rushed up the stairs. He pounded at the locked trap door. Dirt fell on the faceplate of his helmet. "Zack! Zack! Let me out. This is a stupid joke. Zack!" There was no answer. Zack must be standing above laughing at him. He would kill him with his bare hands, pound his head in. Kark swore and smashed the trap door until his hands bled. There was no answer.

Zack blinked as he exited into the bright street. He paused for just a moment then sprinted down the street. He had to get away from the sounds of pounding. He must report to the Red Gang chief, Mole. Zack felt twinges of guilt imagining Kark in the trap. How close they had been. When he was little Kark hugged him. Kark once pulled bullies off him at school. At the beginning when they still had Mom, she smiled as she made Kark share that last piece of chocolate. Zack had worshiped his big strong bro. But that was a long time ago. Mom was long dead. Today, he hoped that he could finally prove himself to Red Gang leader. Zack could never shoot his older brother, but he sure couldn't hang around waiting to be shot or have his throat cut in his sleep. What other choice did he have?

As he slowed down and walked deliberately towards the Red Gang hideout, he felt his heart pounding. Would they give him water? He remembered the afternoon, years before the disaster, hiding in the basement of King George School, when he had caressed his schoolmate Mole's soft dark skin and kissed his warm dark lips.

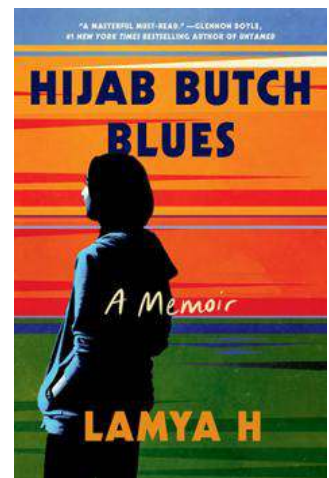
HIJAB BUTCH BLUES: A MEMOIR BOOK REVIEW

Annie Newman

This moving and intimate memoir, in essays which range from the author's childhood to their residency in the United States for university in New York City, shares their quest for personal freedom. I felt particularly drawn to this memoir, *Hijab Butch Blues*, by writer Lamya H. It was our link of being queers and struggling to come out, yet having very different experiences, which attracted me to the book.

Lamya's awakening to their internalized racism, stimulated by the Islamophobia they grew up with, was a striking aspect of their story. They came to this realization when attending graduate school in the United States—how their self-hatred was based on the hate constantly directed toward them. The distinctions between Lamya and me are multiple. I am a white settler of English heritage, raised by Anglican parents, having lived in Western Canada all my life. My pronouns are she/her. Lamya H. is non-binary, they/them, Muslim, and a Desi child (Desi means a person of South Asian descent living abroad). Lamya's family moved to an unnamed Middle East country so they could attend school. And spiritually, instead of being taught the biblical teachings, like myself, Lamya was raised on the Quran.

The book title is named to honour Leslie Feinberg's acclaimed 1993 novel *Stone Butch Blues*. Lamya H., in an interview with Sabir Sultan at PEN America on February 9, 2023, said that *Stone Butch Blues* has



been a pivotal work that greatly influenced their writing: “*Stone Butch Blues* is one of my favorite queer books because of how effortlessly intersectional it is, and how unapologetically political it is. I love the ways in which it connects struggles around class, labour, gender, sexuality, and race—among other things. Reading it years ago taught me that it’s possible to write a book as intimate as a memoir that is able to zoom out and comment on the world. I titled my book *Hijab Butch Blues* to pay homage to the legacy of Leslie Feinberg’s foundational text, and to the younger me, learning that a different world was worth fighting for.”

Lamya H’s *Hijab Butch Blues*, does just this. It expresses intimate memoir but also social and political realities. Early in the book Lamya expresses suicidal thoughts as a 14-year-old in school, feeling “acutely ashamed” for attractions to women. It is noteworthy that the author courageously had a readiness to address suicidal experiences in this memoir. Suicide is traditionally viewed as a sin in Islam.

Lamya speaks of feeling so deeply alone and wanting to die when experiencing these feelings of attraction to women. But then discovers, in Quran texts during class, the woman Maryam—the Arabic name for Mary, mother of Jesus. Lamya’s classmates read aloud about Maryam during childbirth, where Maryam says that she wished she had died. In that moment, Lamya feels understood in a way that they weren’t before. With a lively curiosity, Lamya wonders if Maryam could have been queer, because Maryam consistently insists that “no man has touched her.” A teenage Lamya earnestly asks their teacher: “Did Maryam say that no man has touched her because she didn’t like men?”

They also recount the colourism in the Desi community, in which Lamya was treated very differently from her younger brother who was their mother’s favourite. Lamya recalls being pressured to wear makeup to make their skin three shades lighter than it actually was. Lamya talks about various aspects of being “othered.” Colourism is definitely an emotionally grueling experience. Lamya speaks of how, as a child, they felt so isolated by being othered, they used to think they were a “jinn” or spirit, (believed in Islam to be unseen by humans), simply because of the colour of their skin. They describe feeling invisible, but also being “this scary, disgusting creature” to white people and light-skinned Arabs.

When Lamya eventually moved to United States to complete their graduate studies, it was their friend Rashid, who confronted them about their attitude of assuming white and light-skinned people were better than them. Rashid and Lamya compare their upbringings. Rashid as a Black Muslim in America who was raised on stories about Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. Lamya’s family, on the other hand, reminisced “fondly about being colonized by the British.” It’s at this point in their friendship with Rashid, that Lamya comes to the realization about being racist against one’s self. They realized they needed to stop hating themselves. This, to me as the reader, is a seminal turning point in their life. A crucial, vital, healing one.

Throughout the book, the author adeptly weaves Islamic stories from the Quran for the reader to contemplate, while showing how they have considered them very deeply to carve a new path for their new identity. And at the end of the book, Lamya reflects on the story of the whale in both the Bible and the Quran, which is an analogy to compassion and mercy for Jonah and Yunus:

. . . This better world—that is the world I’m fighting for from inside the whale, this world I want to be birthed into. A world that is kinder, more generous, more just. A world that takes care of the marginalized, the poor, the sick . . . But I’ve found a few smaller versions of this world—in the ground rules Liv and I set on the bus en route to meeting my family; in the grace Cara showed me when I came out to her; in the patience with which Zu mentored me.

Lamya is finding their way, of being able to find a trusted few to come out to, to make peace in the world. And in closing, Lamya touched me deeply, when they finished the book by saying: “This is the world fourteen-year-old me couldn’t even begin to imagine. I’m already here.”



MY CHALLENGE

Val Innes



I take the concept of challenges and triumphs very seriously. After all, I was one of the many who marched, wrote, went to court and protested in the face of Canada's deeply homophobic and transphobic civil and legal systems, and believe me, that was a challenge. And we won that one! From the time I came out, with no legal rights at all in the seventies, to the time we gained civil rights in the nineties and the right to marry in 2004, we had won the fight in less than twenty-six years. Now, that was a triumph!

However, there are other challenges that affect our lives deeply. One of the major challenges in my lifetime is the recent rise of the Right across the world, and principally affecting me, here in North America. Coupled with that is the solid scientific and actual evidence of climate change and its probable impact on humanity, something the Right is happy to ignore. These days, I celebrate the fact that the NDP government has hung on to a majority government against the Conservative party's sweeping re-emergence here, led by a man, Rustad, who refuses to believe climate change is real or caused by human activity. It's a bare majority for Eby's New Democratic Party, 47 seats, but it's a triumph. And a further triumph is that we have gender parity in the Legislative Assembly. Currently I'm hanging on to that BC triumph. I can enjoy that even as I cringe in dismay and fear at the thought of a Poilievre Canada and a Trump America.

What I can't enjoy is my fear of those Americans willing to vote for a convicted felon, rapist, racist, cheat and liar, who disputes climate change and its impact, and is a wanna-be dictator who has promised to be a dictator on day one of his presidency. His promise to his MAGA supporters is that they will never have to vote again, as if that is some kind of bonus. With Trump as President, America will never be the same; it will very likely cease to be a democracy. That he has succeeded in becoming the President of the USA, is an indictment of that country, as much as BC's granting Rustad 44 seats, is an indictment of BC. It is also almost certain, according to the polls, that Poilievre's Conservatives will form the next federal government of Canada. In the face of climate change, that is terrifying to me.



I read Kamala Harris' book, *The Truths We Hold*, which I highly recommend, by the way. In it, I met a woman who is truthful, kind, intelligent and who cares deeply about people and social justice. Her vision of America is one built on shared purpose, shared values and shared work to achieve that social justice throughout America. And yet, a significant portion of America voted for a man who cares little for anything or anybody but himself, and who has boasted that he can hurt women and get off with it. I have never been so disheartened, through a lifetime of watching US politics as I am watching this. It wasn't a landslide or even historic, but well over seventy-five million people in the USA voted for Trump and support, as Inae Oh put it, "the deeply racist, misogynistic, lying, cruel politics of MAGA." As Oh continued, the sooner we accept that, "the sooner those opposed to this ugly vision can turn the tide."¹

I was hoping for Harris's vision to rule in the States. My challenge now will be, as a left-leaning woman who is a lesbian and a firm supporter of social justice, with Trump in control in the US, and if Poilievre wins in Canada, how do I live with and through that in a North America ravaged by climate change and unchecked individual and corporate greed? Well, I will aim at working to turn the tide whenever and wherever I can, by resisting the right and working for equality, progress and hope with those who also care, with deliberation, fairness, connection, love and kindness. I invite you to do the same. Stand with me.

1. Inae Oh. Mother Jones Daily, November 6, 2024

DEFIANT OLD LADY

River Glen



So the USA election was on Tuesday, and I spent Tuesday night and Wednesday feeling devastated. I am so glad Surrey Pride's Senior Program had an event planned for Thursday. I hopped a bus and was soon seated with a couple of dozen women with similar sympathies. The guest artist, Lyn VerraLay, had art supplies set out on tables ready to go. We were invited to collect various materials and make a collage. For some reason, probably my subconscious needing to make physical some of my roiling feelings, I immediately knew I wanted to express concern for rights and progress, hard and long fought for, now under threat.

I found tissue paper, magazine pictures some material and a tag and set to it. As we worked, we chatted about the things going on in our lives and the larger political reality. My piece was a statement of womanly defiance. Old woman defiance. The fire trying to engulf is surrounded by the water, representing resistance that can hold its own. The little girl silhouette is looking up to us to do something and the butterfly hovering above is the promise that we will. I focused on women's rights, but the rights of queers, migrants, the poor and the racialized are equally my concern.

Four years is too long to spend in handwringing, and there is no time to waste. In Canada and abroad there is the retro right gaining power. So the pity party is over, sleeves are rolled up, and I am ready to be part of the resistance. Oh yes, a delicious brunch was then served.

1. Art work by River Glen





Rainbow
REFUGEE 🇨🇦

RAINBOW REFUGEE is a Vancouver organization founded in 2000 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. Rainbow Refugee provides support, information, and system navigation to refugees and refugee claimants seeking refugee status in Canada. Rainbow Refugee works in partnership with Immigration, Refugees Citizenship Canada



RAINBOW BRIDGE is a Circle of Hope, created within Rainbow Refugee, and we're currently sponsoring a large refugee family that includes children to settle in British Columbia. They have actively protested the Taliban regime, and their lives were in danger. Six of the family have escaped Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have arrived safely in British Columbia as Permanent Residents and are settling in Abbotsford, learning English and pursuing education and work, and building their lives here. We're working on bringing one more family member in to Canada.

Our Mission: We have raised over \$120,000 to get the family safely here and into a house in Abbotsford. We are responsible for the expenses of the family and the welfare of all of them for the first year to see them settled into school, training or a job, including language training and, importantly, trauma counselling, so as to be able to thrive in their surroundings. So we need to continue to fundraise for them.

How you can help:

- Can you hold even a small fundraiser? This could be as simple as a small dinner party where you invite donations, or even an email to your friends inviting donations.
- Can you make even a small donation? Just use the QR code at the bottom of this post, and remember that every dollar counts. You will get a tax receipt instantly.
- Can you donate goods that we can raffle or auction to raise money?

DONATE

Support people who risked their lives to make a difference



Use your phone camera to scan the QR code to make your donation.



Qmunity is a non-profit LGBT2S+ 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. The new building under construction 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, 604-5307 ext. 100
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>

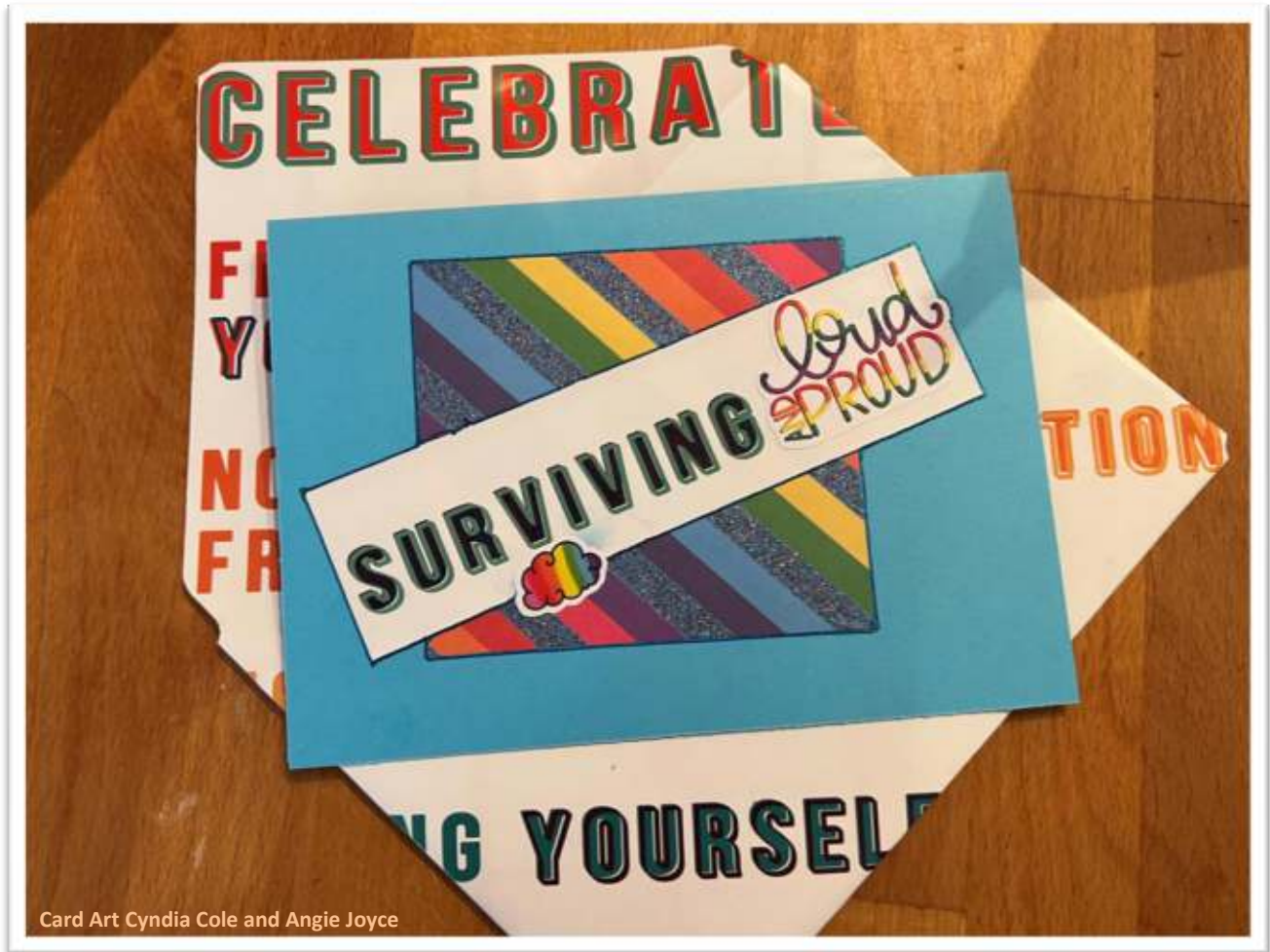
Collected by River Glen

A site River Glen thought you might be interested in is **Good News from LGBTQ Nation** [<newsletter@lgbtqnation.com>](mailto:newsletter@lgbtqnation.com) As the site says:

Good things are happening to LGBTQ people. It's easy to overlook the positive stories in the daily mix of news, so every other week we highlight moments you may have missed.

Like it? [Share it with a friend](#). Everyone could use a little good news.

EMBRACE CHALLENGES



... AND TRIUMPH!