

Braided *By Nomi Siegelman*



I spent my adolescence in an Orthodox Jewish community. During those same years, I realized I was bisexual. Though I accepted my sexual orientation privately, I remained closeted because heterosexuality is required in Orthodox Judaism. As a woman, I was expected to marry a man. Whenever I experienced attraction to someone other than a cisgender man, I was terrified I would accidentally say or do something to reveal my true self. Orthodox Judaism dictates what is right and what is wrong, and bisexuality is officially wrong. The same belief system that classifies my sexual orientation as forbidden also dictates precisely how to perform daily obligatory traditions. To me, these mandatory traditions came to stand for the community that would reject me if it knew who I really was.

When I went to college, I broke away from Judaism entirely and joyfully came out as bisexual. I knew there were other branches of Judaism, such as Reform Judaism, that were inclusive of all sexual orientations, but the oppression that engulfed me during my time in the Orthodox community made it impossible for me to connect to any Jewish traditions. I could not face anything even remotely related to the community that had wounded me so deeply. It did not matter if the traditions were versions created by inclusive branches of Judaism. I pushed it all away. The emotional part of my being felt as if all of Judaism had rejected me. I felt like my entire religion, my very source, my very people, had crushed my heart. I felt that if I clung to even the tiniest scrap of my Jewish identity I would never heal, would never find full comfort in my bisexual skin.

It was many years after college that I realized I missed certain Jewish traditions. I knew I could never again be part of an Orthodox Jewish community, but I started to have interest in

exploring other ways to connect to my Jewish heritage. I began occasionally observing Reform versions of Jewish traditions that spoke to me, or that made me feel a warm connection to my childhood. I did not take on regular observance of traditions or become part of a Jewish community of any kind; the taste of the past remained in my mouth, though I could feel it being gradually washed away by the passage of time.

It is only now, as a woman in my thirties, that I am beginning to feel a desire to join a Reform Jewish community and to regularly perform Reform versions of certain Jewish traditions. It is only after all this time that the idea of being part of a Jewish community is beginning to feel safe. My pull to explore, to seek out a Reform Jewish community of my own, grows stronger the farther away I get from the community that would not allow me to be who I am. The wound left by the oppression of my teen years is finally healing, and it turns out I feel Jewish after all.

Now that I am recovering at last from Orthodox Judaism's rejection of my bisexual identity, so many Jewish traditions lie before me, waiting to be rediscovered. I can now experiment with the observance of Jewish traditions, and I can begin to seek out a Jewish community that permits me to openly be who I am. It is no longer all or nothing. It is no longer Orthodox Judaism or

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Ahhhh, Tradition!

By Riley Quinn

I must have been about three when I heard the electrifying, resonating, deep sound of the actor Topol singing "Tradition" in *Fiddler on the Roof*. One of my earliest memories. Of course, I had no idea what the song meant at that age, but for a kid from the bush (far west Queensland), there were plenty of traditions around me. Family photo traditions—naked on a sheepskin rug as a baby, roustabout in the shearing sheds by the time I was six, and a hot Christmas dinner for the entire extended family.

I bucked the trend, the tradition, early. No naked photo of me at six months old. The family had to wait until I was five. I chose my own outfit and got brand new shoes as a gift and only then, were photos allowed. The one thing I knew, watching my Mum and aunts almost expire in the kitchen preparing a full four-course hot dinner with pudding in 45-degree Celsius (113-degree Fahrenheit) Australian summer heat, was that maybe not all traditions should be sacred.

Through the visceral voice of Topol singing on top of a roof

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Boston-area women:
Join our Google
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Editor's Note

Dear Community,

Tradition is just peer pressure...
from dead people

I had the above bumper sticker printed up last year after hearing this expression. It really resonated with me as our nation grappled with the racial injustice that has been rippling through the country for hundreds of years. There is the tradition of white supremacy as well as the tradition of resistance and uprising, and we live within the confluence of both, still.

Within this issue, you'll find a lot of different perspectives on how traditions shape our lives, whether by giving meaning to us or by reacting against them, or simply by creating our own. The writers and poets examine the pressures of family, religious, or societal traditions and the joys of finding deeper meaning from them.

And what about queer traditions? Jen Bonardi examines what has happened and what may happen to Boston Pride. Lisa Martin shares a new tradition set by the Pennsylvania governor officially recognizing Bisexual Pride Day, and she encourages other states to follow suit. And I write about BBWN's own book swap brunch tradition that's been going on for over 20 years. You'll also find two reviews of bi books, some news briefs, and a celebration of the 5th Bi+ Arts Festival in Toronto.

Ellyn Ruthstrom

Kat reads BWQ.
Send a picture of
yourself reading
BWQ to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.
Be creative!



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

Spring 2022: Bi+ Health

Research shows that women who identify as bi+ engage in risk behaviors at a higher rate and have poorer health than do heterosexuals or even lesbians. What's going on here? What special challenges do bi+ women face? How do you find a bi-affirming therapist? Is it enough to find one who specializes in LGBTQ+ issues? Are support groups helpful? What has been your experience? Essays, poems, artwork, and short stories are welcome. Submissions due by **February 1, 2022.**

Fall 2022: Pop Culture, Take 2

What are your experiences with bi+ representation in popular culture? What has disappointed, disgusted, validated, or inspired you? Have you seen changes take place over time? Share your thoughts, critiques, and recommendations about TV, films, music, and beyond. Submissions due by **May 1, 2022.**

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenquarterly.com. Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to **biwomeneditor@gmail.com.**

Note: If you do not want your full name published, or wish to use a pseudonym, just let us know.

We are an all-volunteer organization (though we do pay our interns!). Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help us with social media, fundraising, our Etsy shop, or our website? If you're a student, consider an internship. If you're interested in helping out, please contact Robyn (biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

Bi Women Quarterly has been in continuous publication since 1983. It began as a project of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN), a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women and nonbinary folks together for support and validation. Through support, education, social groups, and the production of *Bi Women Quarterly*, we seek for bisexuals and those with other non-binary sexualities full acceptance within LGBTQ+ communities and in society generally. More broadly, we seek the liberation of people of ALL genders, ALL sexual orientations, and ALL racial and ethnic identities.

AROUND THE WORLD: *umut erdem, Istanbul, Turkey*

Interview by Robyn Ochs

Please tell us about yourself.

I was born in 1991 in Edirne, a small city of historical importance in Turkey. I later moved to Istanbul to study in the university. I'm still working in İstanbul. I like writing, and it allows me to express my thoughts and feelings. So far, I have written articles for various platforms about bi+, feminism, and animal rights politics/veganism, memory, literature, and cinema from a queer and feminist point of view. I've been engaged with bi+ politics since 2015, and I've created and translated content—including a podcast—in Turkish. Lastly, I've created a bi+ digital universe called Bitopya.

How did you come to identify as bi?

I began questioning my orientation in my early twenties. I was dating a man, but wondering whether I was attracted to women as well. Once, on the ferry with my boyfriend, I found myself staring at someone I perceived to be a woman, but I told myself I was heterosexual. Monosexist societal norms and compulsory heterosexuality blocked me from my own reality. I was raised by a family that restricted sexuality. Therefore, it took many years for me to construct my identity. I occasionally questioned, but ultimately accepted, what was expected of me. Moreover, I denied that I was bowing to expectations. But then I began to think about sexuality more. I became involved with lesbian and bisexual feminists in 2015, and I came out as bisexual. I previously identified as pansexual for a very short time, but I am comfortable with identifying myself as bisexual/bi+. Specifically, I am seldom attracted to cis men.

While engaging in activism, I was very comfortable being out in my social and political environment, but it was difficult being out with my mother. She was very attached to social norms, which resulted in her being disgusted with me. We had disputes and conflicts, which fatigued me. Therefore, nowadays we don't talk about it, but it doesn't prevent me from being active in politics. Also, in the LGBTI+ community, I encountered biphobic attitudes and reactions while I was questioning my identity. For example, although I didn't identify myself as heterosexual but mentioned that I had only dated cis men so far, an LGBTI+ person who introduced themselves as a rainbow child labeled me heterosexual. When they later saw me in a "lesbian" bar kissing someone, they asked me if I was bisexual. They needed behavioral proof to believe me. I also came across a lot of bi+-antagonistic tweets on social media. The longer I have been involved with LGBTI+ community, the more I notice everyone is expected to be monosexual, and the myths and misconceptions about bisexuality prevail. But they stimulate me to passionately struggle further for my existence.

What is the legal and cultural situation for LGBTQ+ people in Turkey?

The Turkish state is dominated by Sunni Muslims. The state tries to ban LGBTI+ people and uses religion to justify violating LGBTI+ rights, even though Sunni Muslim LGBTI+ people also exist. Although an LGBTI+ pride march is a basic right, the state prevents it from taking priority over Ramadan. This year, it didn't coincide with Ramadan and Eid or any religious days, but the state still didn't allow the march. Moreover, an on-air pride activity was banned for the first time, and LGBTI+ people were assaulted while we gathered for a vegan picnic. Ali Erbaş, President of Religious Affairs, in a Friday sermon¹, said, "Islam accepts adultery as one of the greatest harms. It curses the people of Lot, the homosexuals. What is the wisdom of this? The wisdom here is that it brings diseases and degenerates the generation." In Boğazici University, students and teachers resist violations of the state against the democratic and free right to education. In an exhibition as an act of resistance, an artwork that was displayed became an excuse for the rectorate and state to close BÜLGBTI+, Bogazici University's LGBTI+ Studies Candidate Club. In the name of religion, the state provokes societal conflicts and justifies the violations it commits in every area of our lives. A second hearing was held in the trial of seven students who are facing charges because the image of the *Kaaba* and LGBTI+ flags were used together in an artwork and the related work was "laid on the ground" in the exhibition held at the South Campus of Boğaziçi University. The trial continued at the Istanbul Courthouse in Caglayan on the 5th of July. In the trial, the image was said to be unholy in Islam. The hearing

¹ <https://bianet.org/english/religion/246610-izmir-bar-under-investigation-for-criticizing-religious-affairs-head-s-lgbti-phobic-remarks>

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How *Pretty Little Liars* Helped Me Leave the Catholic Church

By Em L.

I've never really understood the distinction between traditions and habits. Throughout my childhood, going to Mass was a tradition, in that we did it every year with our extended family on holidays like Easter and Christmas. It was also a habit, in that we did it every Sunday, though none of us could really tell you why. Once a week, we would stumble through the too-heavy double doors, bleary-eyed and half-awake, because, well, that's just what we did.

I'm a creature of habit. For this reason, I had always enjoyed the monotony of going to Mass—hearing the same man recite the same scriptures, in the same building, with the same people inside of it, year after year. It gave me time to be in my own head, which was and is one of my favorite places to be. Somewhere along the way, though, the church began to feel less like a home and more like a prison. Those same people in the surrounding pews, who I had seen every Sunday since I was a child, were no longer guaranteed allies, but rather potential enemies. If they knew who I really was, they wouldn't be smiling at me like that. They wouldn't be taking my hand for the sign of peace. Maybe they wouldn't even let me inside this place at all.

By the time Easter 2012 rolled around, I was a 13-year-old time bomb. I had been waging a silent war on myself since I realized I was attracted to girls, feeling at odds with the church I had grown up in. My family, much like the church, had traditions to go along with the Easter holiday—namely, an Easter egg hunt around the house, which ended with a basket full of goodies from the bunny himself. This particular holiday, my basket contained one very special gift—season two of *Pretty Little Liars* on DVD, nestled in-between candy, a not-so-subtle pack of razors, and shaving cream. Needless to say, I was thrilled.

As I held the DVD case in my hands, watching my parents and cousins scrambling for their jackets and shoes, I had one singular thought in my mind: “I don't want to go to Easter Mass. I want to binge-watch *Pretty Little Liars*.” It hadn't felt like an option back when I thought I was going to hell for all eternity, but now it was so clear: I could just... *not* go to Mass.

All it took was the promise of watching a season of a TV show that wouldn't be on streaming services for another six months for the realization to happen. Strange, sure, but there it was. “Mom,” I said, feeling braver than I had in years. “I don't want to go to Mass today.” And that was that. Sure, my parents weren't thrilled, but in the end,

I got the house to myself (plus Aria, Spencer, Emily, and Hanna, of course).

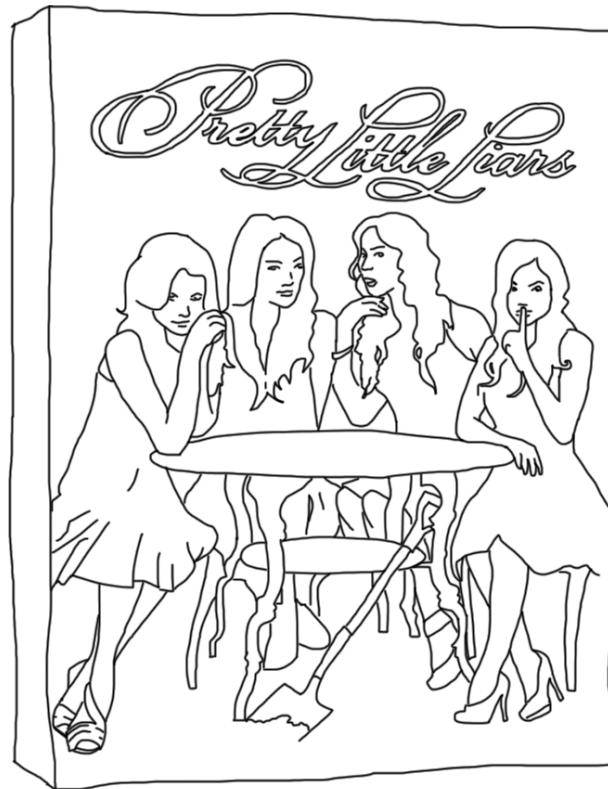
Once I'd broken the pattern, it was like the spell had worn off. If I didn't have to go to Easter Mass, maybe I didn't need to go to Mass *at all*. Maybe I didn't need to go through with my Confirmation, either (a decision that would cause quite the stir a few years later, mind you). As I settled into the couch, I felt freer than I had in years. For the first time in my life, I felt like I could be whoever I wanted to be—and who I wanted to be was someone watching a teen soap about lives that were nothing like my own.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if things had been just a bit different back then. If I had been born cisgender and heterosexual, perhaps I would have stayed in the church—perhaps I would still be a devout Catholic now, citing scriptures in my Instagram captions and wearing a cross around my neck. Perhaps, if the church had been more accepting, I would have avoided all that heartache and self-loathing. Perhaps I would never have left at all. In a way, I feel robbed—after all, if I'd been able to keep my faith, maybe I would have had better tools to deal with the things life was going to throw at me in the years that followed.

Mostly, though, I feel grateful. I feel free.

I'm 23 years old now, working a full-time job that I love and living with two of my best friends in the world. It's been almost ten years since I first got that DVD, and yet it feels like no time has passed at all. Recently, I decided to re-watch *Pretty Little Liars* in its entirety. I found that, even a decade later, the show continues to bring me comfort. Even with all its ridiculous twists and plot holes, all of its not-so-healthy relationships and problematic portrayals of serious issues, *Pretty Little Liars*

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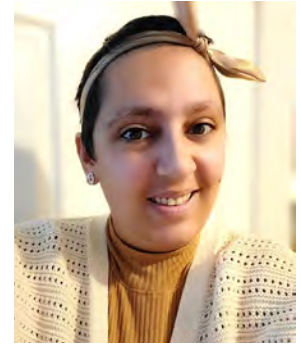


Drawing by Em L.

Traditions

By Kristin Turner

Growing up, raised as an only child...
Holidays mostly spent with family in New York...
Born in Boston, MA...
Favorite New York relative my TaTa...
My Vito...
My Step Grandfather...
Every trip down to my Grandma's Coop, he would surprise me, showing up unexpectedly...
Building memories, I will cherish for my entire life...
My Ta Ta, My Vito, My Step Grandfather...
Made me feel like a princess...
He always took me for ice cream, the biggest size you could order...with endless toppings...the same local ice cream parlor each time...
My Ta Ta, My Vito, My Step Grandfather...
Would take me to eat at this cool old school restaurant...
Which served kids' meals in cardboard pink Cadillac-shaped box...
Which convinced me that I want to own a pink Cadillac one day...
My Ta Ta, My Vito, My Step Grandfather...
Always held my hand as we walked down the streets of Port Washington...big smiles on both our faces...
My Ta Ta, My Vito, My Step Grandfather...
Always pushing me as high as possible on the swing...as he pushed he would hum a tune...
My Ta Ta, My Vito, My Step Grandfather...
Taught me to make the most of every moment, to smile and spread kindness wherever life leads you...



Kristin Turner is 30, bisexual, and a single stay-at-home mom to a wonderful 11-year-old daughter. For fun she loves to draw, paint, and write poetry about her life experiences.

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managed to catch me all over again hook, line, and sinker. It reeled me in, and I went willingly.

In a way, this has become a tradition of mine—re-watching TV shows that brought me comfort in my teenage years and seeing them from a different perspective as an adult. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to call it a habit—something I do because I've done it before and will likely be doing again in a few years' time, just because. Regardless of what you call it—habit, tradition, or perhaps just cringe behavior—re-watching these shows has provided me with that same sense of calm I used to experience on Sunday mornings, with sunlight pouring through the stained-glass windows and projecting color onto everything in its path. The hymns sound a bit different these days, and the scriptures aren't the same, but the *feeling* is there. I am safe.

I guess what I'm trying to say is thank you, *Pretty Little Liars*, for helping me to escape my home-turned-prison. Thank you for teaching me that religion is simply one way to comfort yourself—not the *only* way. Thank you for helping me see what works for me, even if that means watching the same characters

do the same things for the same reasons, time after time. Perhaps it is a bit unorthodox, but then again, so am I.



Em L. is an artist who enjoys drinking chai lattes, spending time with animals, and watching (and eventually re-watching) teen dramas from the early 2010s.

"Tradition is a guide and not a jailer."

M. Somerset Maugham

Making My Own Traditions

By Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti

Content Warning: Talk of Suicide.

When I learned that the theme of this issue of *BWQ* was “Traditions,” I have to admit that I pushed back a bit. That’s because I couldn’t think of any traditions that I personally held. Besides, most traditions center around family. My parents passed away years ago, and I’m not particularly close to any of my siblings, who live in different cities. So, what’s in it for me?

Maybe I’m misunderstanding what traditions really are, I thought, so I Googled the word “tradition” to see if I could gain insight. Here’s what I learned:

Wikipedia: “A tradition is a belief or behavior (folk custom) passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past.”

Preemptive Love – The Difference Between Culture and Tradition: “**Culture** is the collective term to identify certain ideas, customs, and social behaviors. **Traditions** are ideas and beliefs passed down from one generation to the next.”

As I dug deeper, I learned that the purpose of certain traditions is to honor people. For example, *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) “combines the European Catholic traditions of All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day with Aztec rituals of honoring the deceased.”

I thought, finally, I’m getting somewhere! Reading about *Día de los Muertos* reminded me of a tradition I hold where I honor my deceased younger brother, Kevin. In this excerpt from my upcoming memoir, *A Different Drum: A Black, Autistic, Polyamorous, Mentally Ill, Former Fundamentalist Christian/ Cult Member and Breast Cancer Survivor WHO JUST WANTS TO FIT IN*, I give the following account of when I learned, on October 2, 2012, that Kevin had taken his life the day before:

...This is how I live my life. I trust total strangers more than my own family. That’s because I trust my instinct—most of the time, anyway. And I find that when I don’t listen to my instinct, I get into trouble, because MY INSTINCT IS ALWAYS RIGHT. Always. No exceptions. I’ve had way too many times in my life where, when I didn’t listen to my instinct, I regretted it immediately.

*Here’s an example. On October 2, 2012, I was at a clay studio in Seattle where I had been scheduled to model for a portrait sculpture class. I had gotten there a bit early, so I just hung out in the office and had planned to wait around until it was time for class. Then, about 15 minutes before class, my phone rang, and I could tell by the Caller ID that it was Angela (my older sister). My instinct told me NOT to answer the phone, but I decided not to listen to my instinct this time, and instead, answered the phone anyway. **Boy, did I ever live to regret that.** It turned out that the reason Angela called was to tell me that my baby brother died the day before.*

I said, “Oh no, is it because of the seizures he had been having lately?” She said, “No, he took his life.”

We talked a little bit more and we agreed that we would talk later, since I told her I was taking a break and needed to get back to work.

I can’t believe it was a portrait sculpture class that I was about to model for, where everyone would be focusing on my face. I had to somehow function as if everything was okay, like it was business as usual, even though I had just learned that my baby brother, the one who had been born on my seventh birthday, was dead, by his own hands.

In the early 1980s, after I had left the church and learned (among other things) that I was bisexual, I temporarily moved back home to live with my parents and younger siblings. My bedroom was right next to Kevin’s, and I would frequently hear him playing one of Ozzy Osbourne’s live albums. The song that seemed to be on repeat was “Crazy Train.” Sometimes, I would hear Kevin playing along with his electric guitar. And so, I created a tradition where every year on October 1st, I play and listen to the song, “Crazy Train,” by Ozzy Osbourne. By doing that, I feel that I’m honoring my baby brother, Kevin.

On January 3, 2021, I was the very last presenter at “LOVE IS POLYTICAL: Online Conference for Ethical & Intersectional Polyamory/Non-Monogamy,” based in Berlin, Delaware. The name of my presentation, which I was presenting for the very first time, was “We Do Not Live Single-Issue Lives” (from the popular Audre Lorde quote, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives”). When I had been chosen as a presenter, I decided that since the conference and my presentation had to do with intersectionality, I would write a poem on the same topic and end my presentation with it. Since then, I’ve kept my personal tradition of ending “We Do Not Live Single-Issue Lives” with my poem called, “Intersectionality,” of which I’m going to share just the first two stanzas:

Black

What I lack

Get back

I feel attacked

I can’t turn back

Panic attack

Bisexuality

Invisible Disability

Abuse was my Reality

I hold a bachelor’s degree

Raised in Poverty

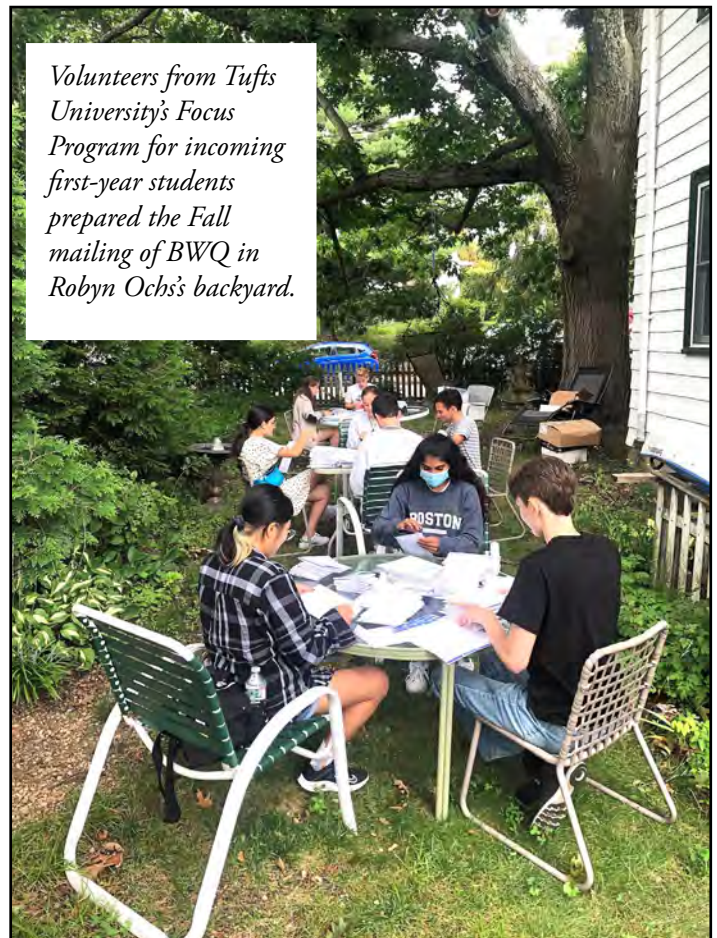
Since completing this essay, I noticed that my attitude switched from, “How can I write about traditions if I don’t have any,” to “I’m so grateful to be reminded of the traditions I’ve created, and I can’t wait to keep creating more!”



Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti (shelher/hers) is a workshop leader, panelist, keynote speaker, and frequent podcast guest, who is in the process of completing her memoir titled, A Different Drum. She lives in Seattle where she continues to create traditions.

“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”

Karl Marx



A New Bisexual Tradition?

By Lisa Martin

This year (2021) something extraordinary was done, which could (and hopefully will) be the start of a new tradition associated with bisexuality. Namely, Governor Tom Wolf of Pennsylvania became the first American governor to issue a statement recognizing Bisexual Pride Day.

Bisexual Pride Day, also known as Bi Visibility Day, Celebrate Bisexuality Day (CBD), Bisexual Pride, and Bisexuality+ Day, has been celebrated annually every September 23rd since 1999. It was created by three American bisexual rights activists: Wendy Curry, Gigi Raven Wilbur, and Michael Page.

I hope this statement by Governor Tom Wolf will be the start of a new tradition of more governors issuing statements and proclamations recognizing Bisexual Pride Day, because the bisexual community still needs visibility, and it's easier than you might think to request a statement or proclamation from the governor of the state where you live—just email them.

Governor Tom Wolf's statement appears to the right.



A Traditional Rollercoaster

By Dani Banani

I used to be the person who loathed tradition. The idea was too ancient in nature—repeating the exact same activity for the sake of other people having done so for, like, a really long time? Has no one even heard of innovation, expansion, or enhancements in life? Tradition felt like clinging to the past in an unhealthy way, and there was no chance I felt willing to partake in such. I did enough of that as it was with personal traumas. Perhaps it allowed me comfort and a level of self-control in conquering repetition.

A story I stumbled across solidified my stance in traditions. In summary, the story stated that a traditional family recipe for a baked ham called to cut off the ends of the ham. A man asked his wife why she cut off the ends, and she replied that every woman before her had done so and she needed to follow the recipe. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the original recipe required this removal of meat to fit the meal in the oven, as the oven was too small for a larger ham at the time. The tradition turned out to have been carried on for a wasteful purpose.

The ham story became my crutch in explaining my distaste for family traditions. For years, no one questioned my feelings on the matter, just chuckled at my defiance. “Dani’s always been that way. She has to defy things.”

Defiance of traditions concluded in the form of falling in love. Not just getting into a relationship, but *really* falling in love. I fell in love so completely I still can’t believe my heart knows how to feel this way.

Meeting my partner changed my perspective on how I viewed the world. The dullness of repetitive society had a new shine to it; strongly formed opinions were challenged to new levels of thinking. I was introduced to philosophical, critical thinking in ways that made my brain flip-flop on everything I ever thought I knew. This, in turn, ended up applying to my stance on traditions, and it happened by complete accident.

Our first Halloween, he was lamenting over the days in his past when he had the time, resources, and ability to create haunted houses and extensive yard attractions for his favorite holiday (which, coincidentally, is my favorite as well). In short, he was bummed out to the max, and my heart was heavy for his distress. To cheer him up, I wrote him a Halloween poem.

It worked! The poem helped lift his mood.

Some days later, I was completely surprised by artwork to accompany the poem I wrote for him. He’s an artist, and he said that reading my words inspired artwork to highlight how he felt about it.

The next year, I asked him to do it again because I had so much fun the year before. A writer and her artist partner pairing up for a word and image combo that’s personal to our affections for Halloween? That was the coolest thing I had ever done in a relationship. ‘Lo and behold, by year three, I was forced to confess: we had a couples’ tradition, and I loved it.

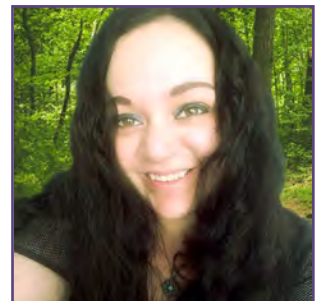


I faced the reality that my mind was changed, and I did my best not to feel like a giant hypocrite. Upon further reflection, I began to understand what my problem with traditions actually was, with this as my ultimate and comfortable conclusion: I was so stuck on one definition of the word “tradition” I didn’t realize its potential for being something more than mindless repetition.

A tradition doesn’t have to be something that was done for years before. Traditions can be whatever you want, last however long you want, and compose themselves of any elements you see fit. Traditions can be altered to accompany changes in life and remain traditions. They can be something that brings you more love, more happiness, and more comfort. *Consistency* is a nicer way to think about it than calling it repetitive.

Interestingly enough, this translates into coming to terms with ourselves as bi+ women as well—most of us have been stuck feeling like we may be greedy, indecisive, or attention seekers because others have defined us as such, but that definition of who we are doesn’t have to apply (not like it’s even a correct definition anyway, but we all know how people can be). Bi+ women **and** traditions don’t have to have negative tones to their definitions. All you need is love to change that perspective.

Dani Banani (Danielle) is a Hoosier-raised woman living in colorful Colorado with her partner and their four children. She has a passion for the Scarlet Witch, Skyrim, and spends most of her time writing.



At the Funeral

By Karen Schnurstein

Her childhood church
was exactly
as she remembered:

flooded in red carpet,
dark, glossy wooden pews
holding everything
in order.

On the ceiling,
high as the sky—
the many mighty
phoenix symbols
(white and black,
on red and blue tiles).

Before she was born,
a fire—started
in the bell tower
from a lit cigarette butt
carried by a bird
to its nest there.
(A story more believable
when she was
a child.)

Her father's body
strangely missing
from his funeral,
already donated
to the medical school.

The shock of the sight
of the large packed sanctuary:
so many lives
touched by a supposedly
magnificent man
who had barely touched
her own, and when
he had, the result
was once
frightening.

The family filed in
from the chapel
somberly and took
their first-row place
among the fervent audience.

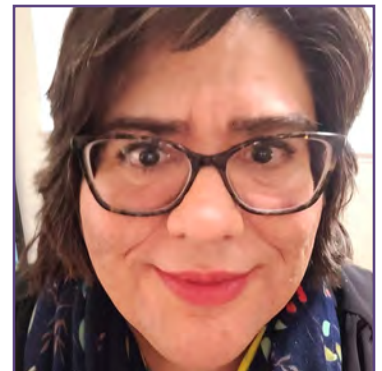
Funny, the only pain
she remembers
were her too-narrow
high heels and the fact
that her exacting brother
had taken charge
of the whole thing
and was making
a passionate speech.

Once, her father
had told her
of a time
when he had spat
on another man's shoe
in an elevator
to express his extreme
disapproval.
To this day, no one
believes this story.

Much like they won't
believe
if she tells about
the time her father
came to her bed
when she was too young
to understand
and planted a death
upon her—
a death
she would carry
until the age
of 42 before seeing
clearly.

"The Church
of the Phoenix,"
she meditates.
"Thank you, God,
for that."

*Karen Schnurstein holds a
B.A. in Creative Writing
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Gordon, and Mark Halli-
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Bi Women Quarterly, and
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Unrequited Traditions

By Lila Hartelius

Preschool: My best friend's friend (MBFF): "Why do you *always* sit by A?" Me: "Because she's my friend." I don't remember what words MBFF replied with, but she made it clear that my best friend A didn't like me sitting next to her every day in school. For the rest of the year, I gauged how often I sat next to A, changing up the rhythm and pattern to avoid any predictability or criticism.

First grade: T, the brown-haired girl one grade ahead of me, sat next to me every day. The teacher had positioned our desks like that. We hardly ever spoke. One day, my pencil rolled off my desk before I could catch it. I leaned down to pick it up. So did T. I don't remember who got it that time, but it kept happening. One time, we bumped heads. The teacher chuckled as we each rubbed our own heads, smiling. The next time, I hesitated, let her go first. Despite her admonishment on at least one occasion, telling me I should try to stop my pencil before it rolled off my desk, at a certain point I had developed a habit of waiting immobile in my chair every time my pencil dropped to the floor. While loving the attention and interaction, I felt guilty accepting T's help; it was hard navigating all those metal desk and chair legs. But trying to beat her to it meant risking banging my head into hers again and missing this exciting moment. One day, my pencil rolled off my desk and I found myself waiting upright in my chair, tense with anticipation, while T hadn't even looked away from her schoolbook. Embarrassed to realize how presumptive I'd become and how much our wordless ritual meant to me, I sheepishly picked up my pencil, wondering whether she just hadn't seen it fall or was simply tired of doing my job. After that, her pencil picking up was no longer consistent, and I quickly trained myself to hide my crushed anticipation in calm, jump-to-it retrieval of the wooden tool.

Ninth grade: Stroking the silky surface of the fimo earrings with my fingertips, I retraced their entwining colors in a trance as my dad's car hummed along through the scrubby pine-covered hills that had peopled my childhood. Sky- and midnight-blue crescents for my friend C, fiery orbs of light and heat for me. Still palpable to me was not only the pride of my handiwork now official with silver- and gold-colored earwires but also the pleasure of having picked out as much of my red-orange-yellow- and blue-hued clothing as I could fit into two outfits. C and I had spent hours drawing and brainstorming our costumes, just like each of the three years prior. C knew I was coming over but was hard to reach by phone that day. At first, she seemed on board, if not a bit less enthusiastic, for what we'd planned. But when I called later, she was at a friend's house. My heart sank—this was supposed to be *our* evening. Upset, my dad, seeing this as yet another flaky response on C's part contrasted with my dedicated investment

in the friendship, talked me out of going to her friend's house and trying to convince her to put on the moon costume and go trick-or-treating with me in my sun costume. By that time, we'd passed the Adventist school I'd graduated from just five months earlier. That time felt like another world to me now. At my high school, people said swear words and nobody batted an eye. Light and movement came from the meager schoolhouse's windows. I said to my dad it must be the harvest party—a clever diversion from the festivities most would be partaking in that evening but which were prohibited at the school. Having nowhere to go, I decided to crash the party and see my old friends. Without my moon, it made no sense for me to be the sun. The mere idea of holding up my end of the agreement alone gave me an empty feeling. That night, for the first time I can remember, I spent Halloween dressed up as myself. The emptiness never fully went away that evening, but it made room for a relief that brought to light the contrasting pressure of needing this once-a-year evening to have meaning, of needing to shine, to be seen for something other than me, other than invisible, other than ordinary.

These moments, and similar ones, have woven down together into a mesh of redeeming forgetfulness, a lulling fabric of fear, a fibrous textile of indifference—a persisting that quickly and silently has given way to a desisting. Even though I've always understood myself to be bi+, none of my relationships have been with women. For years, I thought this might be due to a non-preference for women on my part. Now I think my lack of relationships with women is due in part to a learned fear of rejection from women—in combination with societal homophobia and lack of visibility of queer women. When you want to feel close to somebody through shared experiences that you hope become cherished traditions in *their* heart, too, and you keep meeting annoyance, lukewarm reciprocation, or finally being ignored, then joyful anticipation can give way to hurt, which can itself give way to resignation when hurting takes too much energy.

My classmate T may understandably have simply gotten tired of picking up my pencil every time it rolled off my desk. Unfortunately for me, my seven-year-old self didn't yet know how to take that possibility at face value. And my preschool friend A, whom I considered my best friend, might not have thought of *me* as *her* best friend and might simply not have wanted me sitting next to her all the time. And by the time my moon-costume friend C told me she was at a friend's house, my heart was already too rejection-conditioned to not sink into the assumption that our yearly tradition, and our friendship which it symbolized for me, wasn't as important to her as it was to me—whether or not that's how she actually felt.

Yet that night at my old school, dressed as myself, despite the sad emptiness I felt, there was a certain magic, a certain quiet power, in the freedom I'd discovered. Liberated from the need

for that once-in-a-year moment to be special, I could let go and take the moment simply as it was. Not looking to be admired or adored, I felt myself a free-wheeling outsider, an observer of a frenzy of young humans caught in a rat-race game of vying for attention.

Born of a desire to create pathways back to feelings that hold meaning, traditions have an inherent vulnerability: because they have been created, they can also be broken, and forgetting this simple fact can mean hearts are broken with them. Shared traditions—and, even more so, traditions that are *presumed* to be shared—are the most vulnerable, because in some cases one person alone can break them. Yet, just as a shattered vase can reveal inner surfaces never before seen, the breaking of a tradition can allow for new experiences that make room for different feelings about life.

I recognize a certain aliveness in my younger self's anticipation of requited traditions with female friends and classmates. Witnessing the breaking of those traditions, with the realization that they may not have been so requited as I'd thought, has led me to unrealistically anticipate rejection from women, and some of that aliveness has been dampened by feigning indifference toward women, even in my own mind and heart. Yet, the distance this self-protective behavior has afforded me has allowed me to step outside the vicious circle of anticipation and disappointment, see it for what it is, and contact something deeper within myself. It has helped me realize I had depended on feeling accepted by women to feel emotionally safe accepting my capacity to love women. Now I know I can love this capacity in myself regardless of how anyone else feels about it or about me. Even if a tradition is unrequited, there's still a feeling that inspired it, and that feeling can be cherished, even if only in one's own heart.



Lila Hartelius is a neurodiverse, bilingual (English & French), multidisciplinary queer artist and writer who is honored to have had the opportunity to be a EuroBiCon workshop leader. She loves cats, creative and expressive arts, ecological intelligence, and brain-friendly approaches to anything from folding laundry to becoming an Olympic ice skater.

A Transition Tradition

By Laurie Wolfe

Repeating your name

Repeating your name
to yourself 'til it's second nature
'til when you talk to yourself in your head
it's your name
the one
given by spirit
instead of the one you heard since birth.

Repeating your name
is a tradition
of transition

Repeating your name
to everyone else 'til they use it
rather than calling you
the name from when you were fractured
from before you made peace
with your
Self

my name is sacred
my dead name
a dead tradition

Repeating my name
is a tradition
of transition

and changing my name
from a fractured life
to one more whole

another tradition
of transition

Laurie Wolfe is a writer, performer, and humorist. She understands the future is approaching with a cat, but not fast enough most days.

"The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth."

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Something New...

By Chelsea Bock

812 days. That's how long my husband and I waited to be married after he initially proposed in July 2019. During these 812 days we navigated the lockdown, the loneliest fall and winter without friends and family, the mad scramble to postpone, and, at long last, the medical breakthrough that would enable us to have the vaccine-passport wedding of our 2021 dreams. As progressive thirtysomethings with our respective career goals, we also navigated our vision of who we would be as a married couple and how these choices would be signified on our wedding day. Wedding planning for us meant creating our own traditions (a civil ceremony performed by a friend; both parents walking me down the aisle) while sidestepping questions like, "Why didn't you ask her father's permission?" and "How does your fiancé feel about you keeping your name?"

And something else strange and unforeseen happened during those 812 days: A married friend approached me one night at a bonfire and asked if she could confess something. "I'm bi," she said, sparkling with her secret. "My husband knows and is so supportive. I haven't really told anyone else but, wow, does it feel *good* to say out loud." A few weeks later, another married female friend came out to me as bisexual. And another. And then another as biromantic. As we saw each other more infrequently in 2020, my female friendships had certainly become more conversation-driven than before. But I never expected the floodgates to open with women who needed to talk to someone safe, someone who understood, about their truest selves.

"What are you, the bi whisperer?" my husband joked, gesturing to the pink, purple, and blue pride flag on my bookshelf. I had put it in direct line of my web camera because representation matters. I wanted the students I was teaching online—especially my self-identified LGBTQ students—to see a visibly queer professor at their institution. I wanted them to see that it feels good to be yourself. After all, I have been living this way for most of my adult life: open to trusted friends and partners about my sexual orientation, publicly critical of biphobia and bisexual erasure, and vehemently opposed to the Trump-Pence administration that supported—among other

things—LGBTQ employee discrimination and erasure from the census. But it took me a long time to get there, especially having grown up in conservative western Maryland. After these women reached out to me, I reflected on the assumption that every opposite-sex marriage is heterosexual and the more complicated truths that lie underneath. What traditions do we reveal and conceal? Which are just for ourselves?

Concealing is a matter of safety and security, as the LGBTQ community knows all too well. For bisexuals, it is also a matter of being taken seriously given the pervasive stereotypes of bisexuality as "a phase" or not a legitimate way of existing in the world. People generally like categories that are consistent and easy to digest, and identifying as something other than gay or straight complicates these absolutes. I've watched friends furrow their brows and scramble to re-classify me after I tell them that I'm seeing a woman, and watched them breathe

sighs of relief when my next partner is a man. I've been told by a past partner that my previous relationship with a woman was effectively void because I was now dating him; I was his "straight girlfriend," and he would not accept anything else. My married friends who privately disclosed their queerness to me live on the line between appearances and reality, and when your reality is frequently challenged by



people committed to misunderstanding or dismissing you, taking the path of least resistance is often less stressful. Appearances are comforting; appearances do not require our loved ones to reexamine their ideas or beliefs. Reality can be far messier.

And revealing that reality? Revealing is still one of the scariest things I've ever done, but with the biggest payoff. Because of our attraction to more than one gender, bisexuals must reveal ourselves over and over again, and these revelations look very different depending on the situation. Revealing myself in high school meant learning who would love me unconditionally and defend me against bullying. Revealing myself in college meant meeting other people like me for the very first time. Telling a male date, "I'm not straight," meant bracing myself for comments about experimentation or male viewing pleasure. Telling a female date, "I'm not gay," meant worrying about whether she would think I'd just leave her for a man someday.

Thankfully, when it comes to the people in life who really matter, the reveal is a time of growth, not of shrinking. In 2017, on a work trip to Los Angeles, I was lucky enough to reconnect

with an ex-girlfriend from many years ago. We spent the day after my conference shopping on Melrose, sipping drinks at a cantina, and exploring the Santa Monica Pier. Over a shared 36 oz. “mega” margarita, she asked me how things were going since my last breakup.

“I’ve been talking to this girl who’s a writer like me,” I began. “We finally went out to dinner and it was fantastic. But I also met this guy at a Young Democrats happy hour, and we had our first date last week. He’s messaged me a few times since I’ve been in L.A and has been so sweet.” I smiled and shrugged. “I have a good feeling about it all.”

My ex tapped her fingertips together with delight. “Ooooh, the plot thickens! So, you’ve met a really cool girl and a really cool guy. This is the moment of truth: when you finally decide which side to pick!” she laughed, herself a lesbian, knowing how bisexual women are treated as an ever-unfolding mystery. Of course, having only been on first dates with these new interests, I hadn’t yet revealed my sexual orientation to either of them. Instead of stressing over the delicate balancing act of not telling a partner too soon but also not waiting too long, I decided to enjoy the margarita and let the chips fall where they may.

Some time later, when the girl had become a casual friend and the guy had become the love of my life, I told the latter. A miraculous thing happened. He didn’t invalidate my sexuality or make inappropriate comments about my involvement with women. He listened. He has kept on listening and made it

a priority to learn more about issues facing the LGBTQ community and bisexuals specifically. He has encouraged me to nurture my relationships with queer friends and helped me get ready for Pride events. Some of my female friends who opened up to me about their own sexuality shared similar stories of supportive husbands; others wondered how they might broach the subject. Either way, my advice was the same. When you share an intimate part of yourself with someone who loves you unconditionally, it makes you stronger individually *and* together. You’ll cement honesty, self-knowledge, and growth as traditions in your marriage.

My wedding gown was ivory, not pink, purple, and blue, and our tables were topped with driftwood sailboats, not little Pride flag centerpieces. Given the appearances, you would think that this was a standard heterosexual wedding. But my bisexual identity lives in our partnership and daily lives: in my writing, dancing, advocacy work, and now in my husband’s advocacy work as well. If there’s one thing I’ve learned in 34 years, it’s that loving yourself and being authentically yourself to those you trust are the traditions most worth keeping.

Chelsea Bock works in enrollment services and is an adjunct professor of communications at Anne Arundel Community College. She has recently published scholarship in political rhetoric and memory studies. She lives with her husband and their cat, Lucy, in Annapolis, Maryland.

Pool Party

By Caitlin E. Price

fourteen was puberty pores, fuzzy pits,
oily pimples, and homeroom chimera

lathering loutish limbs in SPF 50
and sunbathing under living room flush lights

playing as if I were poolside tanning
becoming buzzed by *Capri Sun* sugar.

tongue bubbling in *Pop Rocks*
I was no longer a closet case creep

no longer the pool pervert
to be feared like a theatrical shark

no longer something deserving the accompaniment of a John Williams’ theme
or even a four-film summer horror franchise

with my eyes closed I felt sun in my childhood apartment
and imagined splashing waters along with the soundtrack of
Now That’s What I Call Music!

imagined the arm’s length distance between me and the other girls
long before social distancing was recommended by the CDC

imagined the word *dyke* being passed around the pool
like an inflatable rainbow beach ball

imagined boys’ hands down my swim top
as they fought like Gladiators to be the one to turn me.

Eyes opened now and I didn’t need pool water to feel dirty
as I already swam in a school of chlorine and piss.

Caitlin Price is an undergraduate at Indianapolis University-Purdue University Indianapolis, receiving a double major in Creative Writing and English Literature. She aspires to write and publish queer literary fiction and young adult novels.



The Rebirth of Boston Pride

By Jen Bonardi

You might assume that queer folks in Boston were shocked when our most celebrated tradition imploded last July. Boston Pride, the non-profit organization that manages all of Boston's Pride Week events including the parade, chose to close its doors amid complaints of excluding black, brown, and trans peoples. It's not as if the Pride parade had become unsuccessful, at least in terms of finances and attendance. But its ever-growing list of corporate sponsors had started to feel like a failure of sorts for a tradition sparked by a police riot.

The media only took notice of this tension when the queer community balked at Boston Pride's refusal to support Black Lives Matter. In reality, this was part of an ongoing pattern of disrespect toward LGBTQ+ people of color. A group of such organizers peacefully protested this treatment by holding up the parade for the last several years. When it was evident that little progress would ever be made, they offered (in vain) to take over Boston Pride.

What I wish the media had explained is that Boston Pride has a small and finite number of members, according to its bylaws—created, of course, by the organization itself. These members had no term limits; at least one of the board members was there for over 20 years. On the odd occasion that a space on the board opened up, the members often issued unnecessarily narrow and elitist qualifications for it (e.g., must have a bachelor's degree in marketing).

Furthermore, some former board members publicly stated that the latest board had zero interest in racial diversity or inclusion. Their alleged lack of devotion toward the full queer and trans community seemed verified when, rather than handing the reins to the protesting organizers, they shut down the entire operation.

While the number of parade attendees had grown to an impressive 750,000 by 2019, Boston Pride itself had morphed into... well, a profiteering, white supremacist monster. Many consider its demise a net gain, but it left our fine city with a queer tradition vacuum. A casual poll among my friends yielded excellent ideas for the type of phoenix that might rise from these ashes:

- Take best practices from Prides in other cities
- Cap corporate participation in the parade
- Offer lower rates for nonprofit parade floats
- Accept that the parade, if no other Pride event, is kid-friendly
- Do not divide the social events by gender

- Hold more intersectional events
- Schedule more Pride events during the day or early evening

Ceremonies and celebrations geared less toward the partying crowd and more toward building community might help us focus on what really matters in this new era of LGBTQ+ celebration. Plus, there is a lot of interest in using this year's incredibly moving BIPOC-led Trans Resistance Vigil and March as a tentpole for the week.

But difficult questions remain now that the official Boston Pride organization has dissolved: What will happen to the money in Boston Pride's Community Fund, 10% of which is granted to small, local queer and trans groups? Who now owns the rights to the Pride Week events that were under Boston Pride's purview, like Black/Latinx/Youth Prides? If we limit corporate sponsorship, will that limit the size and scope of future Boston Prides? And will Pride events geared more toward organizing, education, and daytime fun draw anywhere near as much interest as night clubs?

Pride Week should be a time for everyone in the LGBTQ+ community to feel like we're sharing in our history

and cementing our values for the future. And yet, I can relate to the protests: as a bi+ person, I've never really felt welcome in gay and lesbian circles. I have to confess, I'm a little tired of begging to stand with them as one. I don't trust for a moment that bi+ people will be at all included in the rebirth of Boston Pride, despite our numerical majority.

To be honest, I would rather put my energy into building new traditions with the middle sexualities. We could use the time to reflect on the things that really matter to us, remember the strong people who brought us here, and recharge our spirits as we begin to fulfill our vision for a new era. Wouldn't it be refreshing to spend Pride with people who know—and care—who Brenda Howard is? (Editor's Note: Don't know? Google her.)

One bi+ friend suggested that bi+ people start a tradition of hosting tea parties during Pride. I think it would be fitting if the rituals there revolved around bees, which the Bisexual Resource Center have made popular as a mascot for the Bs in LGBTQ+. In America, farmers have historically performed a ritual called "Tell the Bees" in which they first whisper news of big events like weddings and funerals to hives. During our bi+ tea parties, one person could announce the people who have come out, leaders who have died and the lessons they taught us, and other major events among bi+ folks in the past year.

Hitting a key against a shovel is another farm ritual that we might adopt (...and, uh, modify slightly so no one brings a shovel to a tea party). This custom used to announce that in

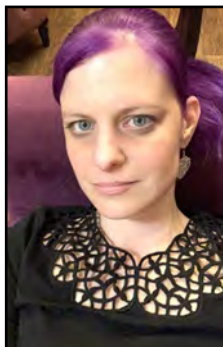


pursuing your runaway swarm of bees, you will be crossing property boundaries. At bi+ tea parties, this might be expressed by all at the table clinking keys against their teacups, signifying that we support those pursuing the expression of their sexuality without requirements to be out, have a label, or be attracted to all genders in the same manner.

Our parties would also avail honey for the tea, as honey is known for its healing properties and can stand for soothing the pains our community has experienced during the year. Finally, we can add a “hum-along”—to a musical film, a chorus, a song from Spotify, or while caroling—to our festivities, just as bees hum together as a group. And as is tradition in Boston, the end of the tea party should culminate in throwing any remaining tea off the nearest boat!

But we can't make the same mistakes as Boston Pride did; the planners need to come from every corner of the bi+ community from the very start. The rituals I'm suggesting are largely from Europe but surely others will bring fitting ideas from their own cultures. In fact, if these bi+ tea parties catch on, please spread the word that the idea originated from a black bi+ man! (He's English. Of course.) Audre Lorde famously said, “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” The fall of Boston Pride as we know it is a blessing in that it allows us to start over from scratch—this time, with *all* facets of our community participating.

Jen Bonardi served on the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC) board for five years and created bisexual character extraordinaire, Tiggy Upland.



2021 BBWN Book Swap List

Here is this year's listing of suggested books from the September Book Swap Brunch. Everyone who attended the brunch (see photo on page 28) contributed to this listing, which varies from mysteries, young adult, self-help, memoir, fiction and more!

The Maisie Dobbs Detective Series, by Jacqueline Winspear

Leaving Isn't the Hardest Thing, by Lauren Hough

That Summer, by Jennifer Weiner

Tiny Beautiful Things, by Cheryl Strayed

Succulent Wild Woman and other books, by SARK

Fingersmith, by Sara Waters

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, Body, and the Healing of Trauma, by Bessel van der Kolk

Not Otherwise Specified, by Hannah Moskowitz

Leah on the Offbeat, by Becky Albertalli

Untamed, by Glennon Doyle

The Lightbringer Fantasy Series, by Brent Weeks

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight, by Alexandra Fuller

40 Rules of Love, by Elif Shafak

Black Boy/White School, by Brian Walker

What You Really, Really Want, by Jaclyn Friedman

Mujeres del Alma Mia (The Soul of a Woman), by Isabel Allende

Keeping a Nature Journal, by Clare Walker Leslie

BBWN's Book Swapping Tradition *By Ellyn Ruthstrom*



In 2000, I hosted one of the monthly Boston Bisexual Women's Network brunches and christened the first BBWN Book Swap Brunch at my apartment in Somerville, Massachusetts. (See the photo at left from one of the early swaps and the plethora of books!) And, for the last 21 years, I have hosted or co-hosted a Book Swap Brunch in late summer or early fall so that members can gather together, share book tips, exchange books from their own shelves, and take home new reads. And at the same time, share some delicious food! (Noting that the tradition of a monthly brunch has been a part of BBWN community for far longer, so the swap is a tradition nestled within a tradition.)

After we held an online Book Swap during 2020—we just HAD to do something—we were able to return to an in-person brunch this past September (photo on page 28) and it felt wonderful to sit in our traditional circle in my backyard and chat about a wide range of books we had been absorbing throughout the pandemic. Then we fulfilled the swap traditions. The group spent time looking over the array and then, at a designated moment, each person chose one book. Once that choice was confirmed, it was a free-for-all and people took as many books as they wanted. The 2021 Book Swap was on the smaller side of attendance (some book swaps attract up to 25 people), but it was just what each of us book lovers needed!

Rituals of an Urban Monk

By Martine Mussies

As your typical Aspergirl, fixed patterns and structures are important to me. That is why I am so attached to rituals. They bring peace to my mind and give me something to hold on to when I am sad or confused. Whereas some other people with autism try to create predictability by doing things whose effects are foreseeable—turning the lights on and off, rolling marbles in the marble track for hours, asking questions you already know the answer to, etc.—I have my more traditional and hidden routines to offer me comfort in an overly difficult society. My personal rituals throughout the day are quite simple, and I only realize that they are rituals because it gets difficult when I cannot perform them. For example: like so many people, when I get up in the morning, I make and drink a cup of coffee. That seems trivial, but if for whatever reason my coffee cannot be there, my head short-circuits. Friends have often teased me about this presumed “caffeine addiction” and, while there might be some truth in there, there is more to it than that, namely, my ritual.

My love of rituals finds its place in two seemingly contradictory contexts: the church and the dojo. But regardless of the specific variety of social rituals these two places offer (and their diversity in time and space), they have more in common than they differ. All rituals we perform are characterized by an emphasis on form (the exact performance of an act is important), repetition (it is only a ritual if it is performed several times), and symbolism (ritual acts have symbolic meaning). Reduced to their essence, the existence of such ritual practices seems to be universal. At pivotal points in our life—the important moments that we cannot control like birth and death—rituals help us to be more aware and stay close to ourselves. Apparently, these practices are not as specifically autistic as the autism literature sometimes seems to suggest, and non-autistic people also derive and perform parts of their identity via rituals.

If rituals help shape and express identity, do they also have a place in sexual identity? Certainly, the use of make-up is such a symbol, and for budding sexuality there is a pop culture full of ritual songs and dances. That world seems far removed from the rituals in my church and in my dojo. Yet, in my view, sexuality and spirituality are connected to each other. In both experiences, you can reach a form of ecstasy. Christian mystics use erotic terms like ‘merging’ and ‘becoming one’ to describe their religiosity. Women’s magazines write about ‘mindful sex’ with tips and tricks that can be directly traced back to Zen Buddhism. For, as the Buddha apparently has said, “sex is the strongest impulse in man” and should therefore be practiced gently and with great attention. Rituals could help with that.

For me, not the sexual act itself, but writing about it is the ritual that shapes my sexual identity. An important pivotal moment for this ritual is, of course, Coming Out Day. A day to show that you feel safe enough to be vulnerable. That is easy for me

to say: I live in the Netherlands and LGBT+ people have a relatively high amount of freedom in our country. You can have a relationship and marry someone of the same sex. In many other countries, of course, this is not the case. That’s why I use my writing as a ritual to keep focusing on this inequality, for which I need more than a day a year.

Although my church does have the ritual of the Gay Sing In, which I love, my ritual writing is usually not expressed in church or dojo. With candles and incense, I do Japanese calligraphy of words to meditate on, and computerized writing in three different virtual spaces: pre-written letters through Amnesty International, musings like this one for *BWQ*, and stories about my own sexual journey. Recently, a fourth form has been added, from an unexpected source. Inspired by a friend from my cantorate, I now regularly translate little poems. And sometimes they too contribute to my sexual experience, as in these short verses by the fifteenth century Zen master Ikkyu Sojun:

Vagina

*She has the primal mouth, but does not speak a word;
She is hidden in a magnificent forest of hair.
All living things lose their way in this forest,
But the countless Buddhas see the light there.*

For me, this beautiful little poem resonates with the biblical texts of the Song of Songs, as I think that both are about expressing gratitude and celebrating life. My sexuality is a crucial part of my identity—and thus of my life. By reflecting on it through my writing rituals, with an attention similar to the way we meditate in church and in the dojo, I can further explore and celebrate my own sexuality, and hopefully also mean something to others. I hope that our rituals can contribute to sexual empowerment, as through reading and writing, we acquire knowledge—from the West and the East—about sexuality.

Our sexuality is an essential part of who we are. Deeply personal and intimate, as well as thoroughly embedded in our culture. Unfortunately, sexuality is still surrounded by taboos, stigma and shame—especially anything that is not hetero-normative. It often seems to me that there are no greater misunderstandings and crazy ideas about anything than sex. That makes me sad, for a good relationship with your sexuality improves everything: your love life, your self-love, your happiness level, your mood. You become a nicer person, a more attentive friend, a kinder partner. Through our writing rituals, like all these expressed in *BWQ*, we can give our sexual identities the attention they deserve and ultimately make the world a little better.

Martine Mussies is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University, writing about the Cyborg Mermaid. Besides her research, Martine is a professional musician. Her other interests include autism, (neuro)psychology, martial arts, languages, King Alfred, and science fiction. More: martinemussies.nl.

両性愛

Ritual Japanese calligraphy of the word “bisexuality”

The Double Edge of Traditions

By Ellyn Ruthstrom

When I came up with the topic of Traditions for this issue, I was eager to explore its different dimensions. It's a complex subject, and it's very hard to have just one attitude towards tradition, which seems an appropriate topic to explore for bisexuals.

Also true is that feelings about traditions can evolve over time. As a rebellious teenager I had no reverence for some aspects of societal traditions that my parents or grandparents expected me to adhere to, but if you try to convince me now to have a Thanksgiving dinner without certain customary dishes, I will fight you for it. And I am now the family member that brings peanut butter stuffed dates that are rolled in confectionary sugar to Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings, just as my grandmother and great-grandmother did before me.

So, are traditions alright when we feel a meaningful connection, and otherwise they are awful and inhibiting? There are so many traditions that may have been initiated with good intent (emphasis on the *may*), but then it feels like some of them get weighted down by the simple demand for repetition and not in the continuation of the meaning behind it. What if the meaning has changed, what if the society has changed? Can a tradition change and still be a tradition?

As a college student on a small midwestern campus, I had no interest in joining one of the many sororities on offer. We free-wheelers were called GDIs: God Damned Independents. Each year, I observed this weeks-long pledging process where those already in the group treated those who wanted to join the group as horribly as possible. The men's process was much more physically demanding (lots of drinking, running, and something to do with a cow's balls); the women's pledging had a lot of shaming and psychological components to it, though both men and women had elements of each. One of the silliest things I've ever seen is a grown woman having to repeat aloud "I'm sorry green carpet for walking on you" while she walked across a room because her sorority's colors were yellow and green.

Greek pledging, to this outsider, is all about doing unto others what has already been done to me, because if I can withstand it, so can you. Every year there are fraternity/sorority pledging deaths across this country. Many of them are alcohol related, some result from physical abuse. These are dangerous traditions that kill people, but so many organizations hold on to their rituals of abuse and refuse to change. Some go underground in order to keep doing them instead of finding new ways of achieving the same feelings of connection and trust.

I currently live in a town in Massachusetts whose high school mascot, the Red Raiders, used to be illustrated by a caricature of a Native American. Unfortunately, this is still fairly common, even in the liberal bastion of Massachusetts. Over time, the school removed the caricature and then the dreamcatcher image that took its place, and now the principal is determined to change the name completely to remove all associations with it. This is a predominantly white town, and this issue has split the community along political lines similar to everything else in the U.S. right now. Many progressive individuals are eager to make the change and find a new name and mascot, while the more traditional "townies" are determined not to see the harm of the representation. A seemingly innocuous team mascot debate can highlight the much deeper problems of white cultural intransigence, a tradition all its own.

Within my own home, the issue of traditions has come up a lot lately, as my partner and I recently moved in together. I have lived on my own for over a decade and have created my own traditions of meaning. My partner built a family with three children and is trying to maintain their family traditions, if for nothing else than to give her kids a sense of continuity through the tumult of divorce. How can we combine all of those expectations into a blended household and not lose our own histories or touchstones?

Within my own growing up, our family wasn't one that was particularly bound by a lot of traditions. One reason is because my mother died when I was 13. In most cultures, the responsibility for the continuation of and adherence to traditions is solidly placed upon mothers. On the other side of the equation, my father was the kind of parent who wanted to inspire his children—two daughters and a son—to be as independent as possible and so didn't constrict us with expectations or generational guilt. We didn't feel like we had to do the same thing the same way over and over. Ways of doing things could shapeshift depending on the needs of family members and circumstances.

An important tradition for me in any home I have lived in has been to have a "wall of women." I create a display of black and white postcards of women I admire. From Audre Lorde and Gloria Steinem to Margaret Atwood and Miriam Makeba. I combine the usual postcards with a framed first day cover of a Rosa Parks stamp and a color photo of Amanda Gorman that did not fit the black and white criterion. And that is the glory of creating your own traditions, you get to adapt when you want to.

Ellyn, continued on page 26



Sappho is dead

By Samantha Pious

he said to a seminarful of nodding heads

"I know you feel strongly"
(he lowered his eyes sympathetically toward my chest)
"about her fragments, but you need to face
the reality that we have no way of knowing
authorial intent
in this or any other case"

Shakespeare's bones lie mouldering under the Stratford church
but I don't hear you singing his threnody

yes I too have read
the seminal work of Barthes deconstructing the Author
& Foucault frankensteining him back together again

I am here to tell the theorists to speak for themselves

while it may be true for you
that linguistic signs are arbitrary conventions
that authors are cultural constructs, figments of our collective imagination
and that categories such as "woman" and "lesbian"
(not that it would ever occur to you to mention
bisexual) are not only fictional but exclusionary and unwelcoming
while all this may be factually accurate
according to the Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism

I would argue

even if there were no causal relationships between morphemes and phonemes
the task of the Poet is to create them
does not *onomatopoeia* have an entry of its own
in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics

even though the mind of the Poet is always unknown to the literary scholar
no body can deny there is
a hand that writes a mouth that speaks
poets often live hand to mouth
we are not yet brains
in jars artificial intelligence too must be stored in physical form

* * * * *

I tell you, the second coming of Sappho may yet be at hand

one fine day
an assistant archivist might very well unearth
a box of previously undiscovered papyrus scrolls
in excellent condition
almost perfectly preserved
containing a few hundred lyric poems in Aeolic Greek
together with musical notation
dating from ca. the early to mid-sixth century BCE



Drawing by Samantha Pious

"When men are
oppressed, it's a
tragedy. When women
are oppressed, it's
tradition."

Letty Cottin Pogrebin

on that day
a team of archaeologists
will exhume the fragments of a tortoise shell
and seven shriveled strands of catgut
at Mytilene

a battle for the soul of scholarship will rage
how many pages bright with fresh red stains! what internecine
strife
and treachery! such promising careers cut off so young

(publishers will plan for the long war)

in this year of plague and fire
and the implosion of the academic job market
truly, I tell you, the second coming of Sappho is at hand

* * * * *

for even as we speak
a small dark woman in a linen bed-sheet
walks with her harp along the Brooklyn Bridge

she circles the police and city halls
and passes by the two construction sites
near Forty Wall Street and the Stock Exchange
then pays the ferryman

Liberty may be closed to the public
but will that stop her?
like a quince-apple ripening atop the golden torch
is she singing a folk song?
chanting a manifesto?

though the words are unclear
it is Sappho's voice that unmistakably resounds
through the ocean air

hundreds of thousands of bi and lesbian women take up her
chords
from Broadway-star sopranos
to those who never thought we could carry a tune
we thrill, we throb, we thrum
her music *sweeter than honey* on our tongues

Sappho has come again
and with her we come
again and again and again

* * * * *

someday
when you are as dead as Shakespeare
someone (*fem. pl.*)
will remember us

*Samantha Pious is a translator, poet, editor, and medievalist with
a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Penn-
sylvania.*

The Blair Bistro *By Maura Albert*



For almost 20 years, Linda and I have made use of a card table with various tablecloths (mostly from our travels) to have a special meal in our living room in front of our fireplace. Linda has dubbed this space the "Blair Bistro." No matter what part of the day, these meals almost always involve foods we prepare ourselves as well as champagne! This was

the "Blue Brunch" to celebrate the inauguration of Joe Biden. We can celebrate almost anything anytime—and we do!

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Bi+ Arts Festival Turns Five

By Catherine Jones



Since 2017, Toronto's Bi+ Arts Festival has been creating and facilitating spaces for bisexual+ creativity. The Festival looks a little different from year to year; we've run art exhibits, author readings, studio tours, burlesque nights, a cabaret, zines, crafting afternoons, storytelling, film screenings, potlucks, a postcard swap, speed friending, the Big Bi Nibble (a community cookbook), and so much more.

As the founder of this Festival, and as an artist, a storyteller, and an activist, I believe deeply in the magic of stories. As a child, my grandmother would send my sister and I handwritten letters with tales of a magical bee, Bartholomew, who lived in her garden. These letters were medicine—connecting us in imagination across many miles and across several generations.

Later, as a baby queer, I fell across these lines in a poem by Muriel Rukeyser: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." Rukeyser (a bi woman) wrote them in 1968, in a poem about German artist and sculptor Kathe Kollwitz (also bisexual). When I first read the poem, I did not know either woman was bisexual, but these lines felt like a lightning bolt. They have stayed with me over the years.

Last year, I saw the wonderful documentary film *No Ordinary Man* about jazz musician and trans icon Billy Tipton. The film asks us to reconsider how we talk about trans history. It suggests that although we might know with certainty, in our hearts at least, that trans people have always existed (in every culture and at every point in time), they are a community that almost never sees itself represented. I nodded when I heard that because it feels true for bisexual people, too. Many of us travel through this world alone, at least in the beginning of our journey as bi+ people, without stories, traditions, or histories to turn to.

So the Bi+ Arts Festival has become a place where we come together to

build new histories and traditions. The Festival is a place for bisexual, pansexual and two-spirit artists to take risks, to try out new work, and to connect with each other and with bi+ audiences. In 2021, Syd Lazarus read new, heartbreaking work to us, on their relationship with their father, his illness, and his recent death. Mugabi Byenkya raged against experiences of racial profiling while walking in a Toronto subdivision. Jasmine Noseworthy Persaud showed a new film about disabled body wisdom, nonbinary femme adornment, and survivor's intuition. San Alland meditated on water and political art (and who gets to make it). Toronto storyteller EC Marcon brought us an updated story of capybaras in love, and on the run. In past years, artists and writers have explored queer desire, beauty, and joy. We've watched films about coming out, about living with depression, about navigating the world in an unreliable body. We've traveled to future worlds, explored life beyond or in-between genders, and been witness to work on the devastating legacies of anti-Black racism, and colonization.



There is no single or monolithic bisexual+ narrative, nor should there be. I've been saying for years, to anyone who will listen, that our gift to the world as bisexual and pansexual people is fluidity. As bisexual+ people we have many stories to tell, and many ways of telling them through the arts. And when Walt Whitman (another bi poet) wrote that we contain multitudes I think he is speaking not only to the ways we are all intersectional beings, but also to our many voices. Stories ground us, they tell us who we are, and can give clues to where we have been. They also let us create and imagine possible futures—for ourselves, and for our beautiful bisexual+ community.

Catherine Jones (she/her) is a Toronto-based collage artist whose work explores life as a bisexual femme, madness & chronic pain. She creates work at the intersections of digital image-making, animation, collage and photography. She is the founder of the Bi+ Arts Festival.



Desiree Lets it Out

By Jane Barnes

Desiree was sick and non-het at the same time. She fell ill and went to the hospital and then to rehab for two months, where she began to learn how to walk again. Bi and 78, she made her sexuality clear to people in the rehab, though to most it was a moot detail because aged ladies didn't have a sexuality, did they?

Her nurses took it calmly because they were supposed to take everything calmly, even sepsis. She supposed that they weren't very interested, especially the straight ones. At least, no one showed any interest, but maybe that's because of her age, which perhaps made it irrelevant. Anyway, she was bi-ing some people and nobody was bi-ing her. So, she made her usual revelation by way of saying casually, My ex-wife. And they would say, Your what?

And so, Desiree in particular, would say, My wife. I've had two ex-wives, and three husbands. And if you've got a couple of hours, Nicole, I can explain it all to you. Oh, that's okay, she said, not really listening. Desiree said, So my ex-wife this or that. And Nicole corrected her. You mean your husband. No, Desiree said, I mean my wife. Nicole said, tidying up her blankets, Oh, you were married to a woman?

Desiree said, No, not exactly, but what do you call living together for nine years? Isn't that kind of a marriage? Nicole said Well, I don't know. Maybe Nicole was indifferent because she herself was wearing a thick gold wedding ring. And had a new last name, and God knows what else.

Nicole asked, Do you have a ring? Nope, said Desiree. Don't wear rings. I'm happy I'm alive, actually. and I have a charming physical therapist who's a third of my age, and quite amusing and sharp and good looking, actually. Desiree was facing weeks—maybe months in a walker.

Devin you mean? Nicole said. Yes, said Desiree, I call him my flaming heterosexual. My metrosexual buddy. Nicole managed a smile. Oh, yes, Desiree said Then you know how he's loved by everybody. And loves everybody. *Hello, Johnny how's that leg or Mary, how is your back doing?* He knows everybody. He said to me, *See that man over there? He was in traction for six months and then I got him walking in six weeks.*

Desiree thought of other back stories as she'd pushed her metal walker along the hall which was so polished it hurt her eyes. And everybody was wearing masks, because of Covid. Nicole might have said to herself, now closing the blinds: What does that have to do with being That Way? Um hmm, said Nicole, out loud.

Desiree kept talking. And then he would say, let's throw ball. To tell you the truth, I'm not much for physical movement. So having a physical therapist is a strange thing, but of course I

can hardly walk at all. See, my mind would talk to my muscles and they wouldn't answer back. They wouldn't move. But it's not like I'm paralyzed or anything. The nurse glanced down at her watch. Time for her break. She thought of the brownie in her lunch bag. You're learning—well, what walking is about. Desiree said, I practice and I practice. I go up fake stairs and get to the top where there's nothing but a wall and so I turn around and come back down again. I can do it four times in a row.

Nicole's eyes blinked yes above her mask. Um hmm she said, thinking again of the brownie in her lunch bag. A cocoa brownie with not too much sugar in it. And walnuts. Desiree, Nicole said, Turn out the light? And then came the predictable question they all posed: So which do you like better, men or women?

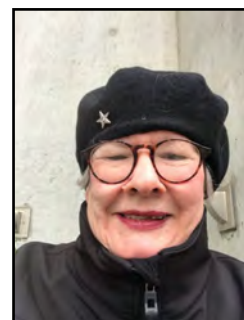
Desiree said The smart ones, which I guess makes me a sapiosexual. That's what they call us. I like Italians and Geminis and people who are partly Irish because they also have the gift of gab which I am said to have also. And a bit of humor. As soon as they get away from the Catholic Church. (But there Desiree was: convalescing at a Catholic rehab, with statues in alcoves and nurses who wore gold crosses glistening against their necks.)

Desiree said, Now, I was rather witty myself, some said. Nicole thought to herself, How many people would say that about themselves? She said, so how long were you with this person—"person" like a dead bird held up for inspection by hunters. Desiree said Nine years. And imagined she heard a little "ouch" in Nicole's lack of response. She said, Laura and I were so happy and then we broke up.

Oh, I see, Nicole said, Too bad. Then she asked Did you say, Three women and two men? No, said Desiree, three men and two women. Nicole wanted a clearer picture: So were you married five times? No, said Desiree, I was only married to the first man and he was the worst of all. Nicole said, I see. Do you want anything else? Desiree laughed. A husband. Or maybe a wife. I don't care. As long as they're smart. I like dark men and blonde women, dark, dark short men.

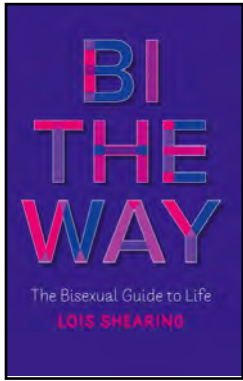
Desiree thought, But perhaps you're straight, and have to go home and make dinner, or you're a lesbian and have to go home and make dinner. Either way, you're not bi, by the way, but thanks for listening. Nicole walked to the door and said You're welcome. The door closed with a satisfying click. She said to herself, George ate the last brownie. It must be the lemon cake.

Jane Barnes is a long-time New Yorker, currently living on Staten Island.



Bi the Way: The Bisexual Guide to Life, by Lois Shearing

Reviewed by Ellyn Ruthstrom



Do you want to read about the major questions that come up in bi+ life and want a way to pull all the answers together in an accessible and interesting book? Of course you do, and Lois Shearing's book, *Bi the Way*, is a wonderful place to start. Grab a cuppa and cuddle into your favorite chair this winter for a few hours, and you will get a mixture of bi history, bi issues, and bi strategies. You'll also get a sprinkling of diverse bi voices throughout, as

Shearing weaves others' experiences and opinions throughout the chapters.

If you are a part of the bi+ community for long enough, you end up living through a media wave of "the new sexuality" or "everyone is suddenly bi." Every ten years or so, bisexuality is rediscovered by some major magazine and everyone gets enlightened all over again. But just like Columbus and his "discovery," we were already here, thank you very much, and we've been breaking down barriers for decades. *Bi the Way* gives you a good sense of where the early organized movement started and points out some of the ground-breaking bicons like Brenda Howard, Donny the Punk, ABilly Jones, and Lani Ka'ahumanu who organized significant events and organizations in the early days of the movement. (Though I do need to point out that the book incorrectly identifies BiNet USA as being the oldest bi organization in the world. The Bisexual Resource Center, originally the East Coast Bisexual Network (ECBN) was founded in 1985, before BiNet USA in 1990.)

There are some great chapters on coming out, biphobia and bi erasure, and the ever-popular one on dating while bi. These are areas that are essential to understanding the bi life, and Shearing does a great job with dissecting the issues and providing some personal advice as well as the experiences of many others to serve as a support system to make it through the sometimes bumpy journey of a modern bi. Her analysis of bi erasure in the media is spot-on and will make your blood boil.

Something I really appreciated in the book was the acknowledgement of the way bi+ folks refuse to be pinned down, and while it can be what is frustrating about our community (as a bi+ community organizer, I can attest to this) it is also an essential part of the bi+ worldview. Bi+ folks accept that life is fluid, identity is fluid, human beings are fluid. Shearing notes that this has long been part of the movement's ethos, citing Paula Rust's work in 1995, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*, "Thus, bisexuality and bisexuals resist being co-opted into categorical thinking and in doing so, remain a challenge to dichotomous sexuality."

Chapter 9 is essential reading for anyone who has asked the question "What issues do bi people face?" Shearing shares the research and experiences of the bi+ community with physical and mental health disparities, addiction, poverty, homelessness, employment discrimination, asylum seeking, and intimate partner violence. The organized bi+ community has been building a case for attention to our community needs over the last ten years with the research that Shearing includes here. Keep this chapter at the ready as testimony for the urgent needs of our community!

Shearing points out in several parts of the book that, despite these multiple indicators, that bi+ individuals experience the challenges mentioned at a higher rate than gay and lesbian individuals, there is a lack of funding and therefore lack of attention to the bisexual community by the LGBTQ+ mothership. So often an individual or a small group of people start a bi+ group and just keep it going by sheer will and potlucks. It's a space for these bi+ folks to feel free to be themselves and to be validated and seen. Imagine if the larger LGBTQ+ organizations actually took it upon themselves to welcome those groups and help them access resources and thrive?

One of the things you hear the most when you get bi+ folks together is the ongoing need for community connections, so I'm sure the most helpful reference section for a lot of people will be the last chapter on bi community. Though I would have appreciated URLs or Facebook groups to be noted so you know where to look for the larger groups online. (The resources are more focused on European organizations as it was published in England, so I would always point folks toward BiResource.org for those based in the U.S.)

Shearing's experience within the London bi+ community has given her an inside view of what bi organizers are up against, and she is not accepting second-class citizenship for herself or our community. She writes, "Bi people have been part of the struggle for sexual equality since the beginning. Bi people's experiences and issues deserve space and attention. What anyone thinks of that beyond 'how can we work together to achieve our collective liberation' is no concern of mine. Our existence has been debated too much for too long for any other stance to be possible. I wish the energy upon you, too, dearest reader."

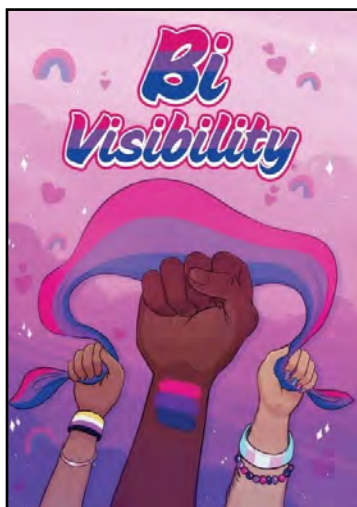
Amen! Our community is continually forced to prove ourselves worthy of attention and worthy of inclusion within the larger LGBTQ+ movement. I love Shearing's attitude to boost our self-worth, self-confidence, and pride in our identity and in the work our community has accomplished.

Ellyn Ruthstrom has been living the bi life for several decades and believes herding cats is easier than organizing bisexuals.

Bi Visibility in the Comic

Reviewed by Miles Joyner

While in my last year of high school and throughout my entirety as a college student, I worked in a bookstore. During the first years of this six-year venture, I spent a lot of time organizing, reorganizing, and finding ways to make our graphic novel and comic section better. This went on for the entirety of the time I worked at the store, so much so that I had a memorized catalogue of all the comic books and graphic novels we sold (though I often used this knowledge just to know which ones went on sale so I could buy them myself). In summary, I discovered I had a love for comics and graphic novels.



I remember the joy I felt when I saw the LGBTQ+ anthology *Love is Love*, published after the Pulse Massacre, and the collective excitement shared between all of the LGBTQ+ staff as we took turns buying copies that slowly trickled in over the next few months. Kathryn Calamia and every single artist, writer, designer, and anyone else who had a hand in the making of the *Bi Visibility* anthology, have all reignited that moment of joy.

All comics featured in this anthology offer a different look into bisexuality and bisexual stories—from the emotion of coming out to an aging grandparent, to the classic struggle of clinging to your bisexuality while appearing “hetero.” This latest project of Calamia’s truly has something for bisexuals of a variety of backgrounds tucked into bite-sized pieces of comedy, drama, and autobiography. It’s hard to pick a favorite, even for Calamia herself

who, when asked, said “I love every story in this book for different reasons [...] I really love the range we were able to collect from differing experiences and genres.”

The diversity of the stories is perfectly matched by the diversity of art styles found in each comic. Each story has illustrations as unique as the writing, pairing perfectly with each other to emphasize the emotion of the text and the energy of the characters within them.



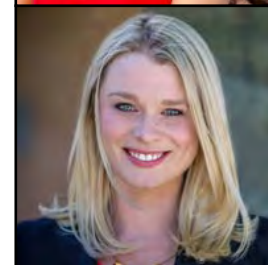
Bi Visibility is an anthology that provides representation I have never seen before; it represents the bisexual community in a way that truly highlights the diversity within it. Kathryn Calamia and those working alongside her have earned a permanent place on my bookshelf with this graphic novel (maybe not too permanent as I’m sure I’ll be lending my copy out very frequently) alongside *Love is Love* and *Queer, A Graphic Novel*.

Thank you to Kathryn Calamia for permission to reproduce images from Bi Visibility.

NEWSBRIEFS

Catching up on a couple of 2020 election results, two openly bisexual women were elected mayors of their respective cities in California. Sasha Renée Pérez (see photo at right, top) was elected in Alhambra, California as the youngest mayor (28 at the time) and the first person elected who was a renter in the city, not a homeowner. Christy Gilbert Holstege, 34, (see photo at right, bottom) was elected to the City Council of Palm Springs, California in 2017 and then became the mayor in 2020. Holstege has announced she is running for state assembly next year.

Late-breaking news from the LGBTQ Victory Fund indicates that there were at least 237 LGBTQ+ candidates on ballots across the country for November 2021 and that there will be at least 1000 LGBTQ+



Over 500 people from around the world attended the online International Bisexuality Research Conference in September. With an array of interdisciplinary sessions on bi history, theory, identity, relationships, wellbeing and more, this online gathering was a wonderful way to celebrate Bisexual Awareness Week. You can find all recorded sessions on YouTube by searching for International Bisexuality Research Conference.

has been adjourned.²

In September, the students who held LGBTI+ and Bi+ flags at the graduation ceremony of Dokuz Eylül University (DEU) based in İzmir were attacked by private security officers. In October, Süleyman Soylu, the Minister of Interior of Turkey, declared that they had banned LGBTI+ people to prevent them from undoing the structure of the family and leading their children to adultery and amorality, adding “We are a Muslim state.” The State’s hostility encourages assaults and hate crimes against LGBTI+ people. Because of the state’s position, perpetrators sense that they will likely not be held accountable for their actions.

LGBTI+ pride marches have been banned since 2015, and the restrictions and violence committed by the state against LGBTI+ people has gradually been increasing. Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, said that Turkey would withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, which was created thanks to Turkey’s feminist movement. Turkey was the first country to sign and (if it goes into effect) protect women and LGBTI+ people from male and hate violence. Both misogyny and LGBTI+ antagonism led him to make this decision. He couldn’t stand the fact that LGBTI+ people are mentioned in the convention and, therefore, LGBTI+ people’s rights are protected. He denied the existence of LGBTI+ people and asserted that LGBTI+ people don’t obey “Turkey’s local and national values.” We are thus very vulnerable to violence. Especially on social media, we see many reports of assaults against LGBTI+ people. Aggressors are encouraged and they know that they can get away with it.

Trans women, especially, are displaced, assaulted, and killed, and we often hear reports of trans people committing suicide. This year, we have experienced police violence and trans women’s houses in Küçük Bayram Sokak, Beyoğlu were sealed. Thanks to the intervention and struggle of LGBTI+ activists and lawyers, the seals were removed. But LGBTI+ people are always under threat and seen as having no right to live. The state excludes LGBTI+ people from society. In society, misconceptions and myths prevail and people generally intend to regard LGBTI+ people as “colorful” or “different.” On the

other hand, LGBTI+ people in Turkey are strongly united and organized, and gradually are becoming stronger and more creative, which makes the state and fascists very afraid. So, the state escalates the oppression. The pandemic is used as an excuse to ban music after midnight, creating a ban for nightlife through which many LGBTI+ people make a living. On social media, we frequently encounter trans exclusionary, biphobic, and HIV-phobic tweets. But fortunately, both independent and NGO’s solidarity networks are created and run to empower LGBTI+ people and make us resilient and counter our feelings of hopelessness.

What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi, or non-heterosexual people in Turkey? Are these words equivalent to their English counterparts, or do they have a different meaning?



In Turkish, we say *lezbiyen* for lesbian, *gay* for gay, *biseksüel* for bisexual. We use LGBTI+. They’re equivalent in meaning. We also reclaim some slang used in society to belittle LGBTI+ people. For example, as LGBTI+ people, we can say *sevici* for lesbian, *ibne* for gay or bisexual, *dönme* for trans. LGBTI+ movement and community call queers/LGBTI+ people as *lubunya*. Moreover, especially trans sex workers have created a language called *lubunca* for security and to provide safe communication amongst themselves.

I confess I don’t know anything about the Turkish language. Is your language gendered? And if so, how do people

who experience their gender as non-binary engage with pronouns?

It doesn’t resemble English or French in terms of gendered pronouns or gendered objects in language. For example, as pronouns, we only already use “O” for third person. It’s ungendered/nonbinary. But since having learnt and adopted a gender binary mindset, people generally use gendered terms for addressing someone. For example: hanım/bayan (lady) or beyefendi (sir), X Hanım (Ms. X), Y Bey (Mr. Y). In fact, they can say X (Dear X) or they can just address someone by their name. Addressing someone just by their name is commonplace, but it is considered rude. I don’t think it is ruder than assigning gender.

You are involved with Bitopya which appears to be quite active. Please tell us about it.

Bitopya is the first, and for now, only website which creates content about bisexuality and bi+ politics in Turkish. I

² <https://bianet.org/english/law/246807-bogazici-exhibition-case-witness-the-work-was-unholy-in-islam>

imagine it as a digital universe where we'll go by getting in our spacecraft. The content consists of bi+ politics, bisexual health, and bisexual history, as well as video content. Through translations, writings, and videos to be released, Bitopya aims to become a significant source of information about bisexuality and bi+ politics for readers who speak and understand Turkish. Bitopya has become a platform for bi+ people, which has been my dream. Bitopya actively engages with its followers on social media, especially Instagram. Bitopya aims to raise the awareness of LGBTI+ community in Turkey on bisexuality and lead the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey because I regard bi+ politics as revolutionary. Since I consider translation a political act, I publish articles with feminist and queer intersectional perspectives and the potential to start discussions in the LGBTI+ community. Since Bitopya has, unfortunately, no funding, translators and editors volunteer their time.

As the founder of Bitopya, I talked about monosexual privileges that Shiri Eisner has asserted and were translated for Bitopya on Genç LGBTI+'s Youtube channel for BI+ Forum that the association organizes annually. We talked about Bi+ Health with Boysan'ın Evi (Boysan's Home) which is now a memory website after Boysan Yakar died from a car accident. We discussed biphobia and monosexism with their effects on health issues with Pamukkale and 19th of May Medical Students' Union as well as I was interviewed with Lavender LGBTI+. For Pride Week this year, *Ent Magazine* interviewed me on Instagram Live. I was also a guest for two podcasts, *QueerTroublemakers* and *Mental Klitoris* in Turkish, talking about bi+ politics and bisexuality and promoting Bitopya.

Are bi folks well-integrated into Turkey's sexual minority community?

The more we struggle, the more we are able to integrate. But the LGBTI+ community in Turkey still has a monosexual mindset. It discusses cissexism and the gender binary, but it fails to make a connection between monosexism and cissexism. It doesn't address biphobia enough because it is underestimated. I encounter internalized biphobia but I think Bitopya can break this chain. In Izmir, we've seen bi+ flags in Pride marches for some time, but in Istanbul, until this year, we never ever saw bi+ flags. I saw a few bisexual flags in this year's Pride march as well as a bisexual flag having been flown on the July 1st demonstration for the Istanbul convention³, which made me very excited. Last year Aydin held a protest for Bi Visibility Day, and a bisexual flag was flown this year in Aydin's first LGBTI+ Pride March, which was banned and evolved into a public statement. As far as I'm concerned, being bi+ and bisexuality still aren't considered to have enough political importance to deal with. But as I've observed, the work we have done for bi visibility and the existence of Bitopya has begun to undermine norms.

3 <https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/what-is-the-istanbul-convention/>

As an activist/advocate, what is an accomplishment of which you are particularly proud?

The existence of Bitopya; also I'm proud I'm *lubunya* (queer).

Are there other bi groups in Turkey besides Bitopya? If not, are you able to provide support to bi+ folks in other parts of Turkey? Are you connected with Turkish people living abroad?

Bitopya isn't technically a bi+ group. I don't stipulate that people who would like to make any contribution to Bitopya be bi+. I don't even ask. People offer to translate materials and we are working together. Certainly, there are bi+ people I know among them. But I think Bitopya is a crucial space for bi+ people. Genç LGBTI+ Association based in Izmir has done many things for bi visibility, one of which is to organize an annual Bi+ Forum. Since quarantine, *Queertroublemakers*, a podcast in Turkish, has prepared Bi+ Files, to which I was invited, and we made a podcast together about the bi+ movement. LambdaIstanbul, an LGBTI+ association based in Istanbul, has organized online bi+ meetings for which we are planning to organize a workshop on biphobia. In 2018, I and Gözde Demirbilek from Kaos GL, another LGBTI+ association based in Ankara, prepared a booklet called *Bi+seksüeller Burada*. It was the first resource on bisexuality in Turkish before Bitopya.

Are you in contact with bi activists in other countries? How did you connect with bi+ activists, bi+ books, bi+ websites, etc. outside Turkey? Do you see a value in transnational activism?

I have met Hilde Vossen (Netherlands), and Iranians Soudeh Rad and Zeynab Peyghamberzadeh; in fact, we organized Bi+ Pride Istanbul in 2019 with Zeynab. Bi+ Pride Istanbul consisted of a bi+ meeting and a bi+ workshop. It was the first and for now only independent pride week bi+ activity series. Through Soudeh Rad, I wrote a blog for ILGA Europe for bi visibility month in 2018. For Lesbian Bisexual Feminists, I began to translate #stillbisexual videos, therefore I had a chance to meet Nicole Kristal. I also used to create content about bi+ people for Kaos GL. In that time, I encountered Shiri Eisner and their outstanding blog. I would like to introduce them to LGBTI+ community in Turkey through Kaos GL. I also translated one of Miles Joyner's blog posts on Kaos GL. The more I encountered these posts and articles, the more I needed to have a digital space to collect and include them, essentially a bi+ space, which means that Bitopya owes its existence to transnational bi+ activism. Through translating their articles, I continue to know and meet amazing bi+ activists beyond our borders.

Robyn Ochs is editor of Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World, RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men, and Bi Women Quarterly.

no Judaism at all. Time taught my heart that, for me personally, there is a happy medium to be found.

Something I have already learned during my project of rebuilding my Jewish identity is that my observance must feel personal. I need to feel a connection to each tradition I perform, not just go through the motions of the traditions out of an obligation I am told I was born into. When I was in the Orthodox Jewish community, there was no choice. I had to observe each tradition, even if it stirred no emotion. In that world, one must do what one must do, but that is not my world anymore and I will make my own choices. I will be Jewish in the way I choose to be Jewish.

What each tradition means to me, as well as the specifics of how I perform it, must also be my choice. A past full of being told what each tradition does and does not mean and precisely how it must be observed has created the need to tailor my observance to fit my own individual brand of spirituality. Giving myself the right to customize my Jewish observance is a crucial aspect of the new relationship I am building with my Judaism. Each tradition will be studied anew, then embraced or set aside, sorted by the hand of my heart. Those I keep will be molded to fit the unique shape of my particular soul.

What moves me about each tradition can even change from day to day. For me, each Jewish tradition holds multiple meanings, and a different meaning may speak to me each time. If a tradition means one thing to me during one observance, and another thing to me during another, those interpretations do not contradict one another in my mind. The fluidity of that truth is part of the beauty I find in my own personal observance of Jewish traditions. It is part of the joy I am learning to take in my Judaism.

One of my favorite Jewish traditions has always been *Havdalah*. *Havdalah* is the service performed on Saturday night when *Shabbat*, the sabbath, has officially ended. *Havdalah* marks the beginning of the new week. As part of the service, a special braided candle is lit. Each individual strand of the braid will often be made of two narrow candles pressed together, with the braid of double candles totaling six candle wicks. Six wicks to hold six flames that flow into one another from the power of their nearness.

To me, today, here is what the *Havdalah* candle means:

The two candles that make up each strand of the braid represent the good and the bad that are part of each aspect of existence. Both qualities need to come together to form reality, just as both candles need to come together to form a single strand of the braid.

The first of the three strands of the *Havdalah* candle represents my past, which I honor by observing the tradition. One candle of this strand represents the negative parts of my past relationship with Judaism, but the other represents the positive aspects. It represents the fond memories I have of my late mother taking

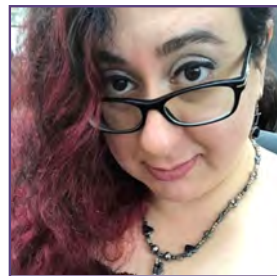
joy in Jewish traditions. It represents the moments when I felt comforted by the familiarity of the traditions, by the structure of observance. It represents the times when having a community, being part of something greater than myself, made me feel less alone.

The second strand represents my present, which is a time of spiritual self-exploration. Just as with my past, there is good and bad to be acknowledged; there are two candles in the strand. I must have awareness of both, just as I now have an active awareness of both my bisexuality and my Judaism. I cannot pretend I am someone I am not, nor do I wish to push away a part of who I am when I feel a call to hold onto it. I am bisexual, and I am Jewish. I am both.

The third strand of the *Havdalah* candle represents my future. This strand is made of two candles as well because, no matter what, there is both joy and sorrow ahead. Amidst hope and fear, the third strand is waiting to blaze with the light and life and love still to come. It does not yet know who it is, but it fulfills its purpose all the same.

The flame created when the braided candle is lit represents the connection between these three parts of myself; I am my past, I am my present, I am my future, and most of all, I am that woman who is birthed from the entwinement of the three. I am that flaring flame at the end of that three-stranded candle. I am bright and full of motion as I face whatever comes next, as I step into a fresh week.

Shavua tov, as we wish each other at the end of *Havdalah*; in English, good week.



Nomi is a writer, artist, and crafter in her late 30s. She lives in Worcester, Massachusetts with her cat Lucy. She collects crystals and stuffies, and she loves animals, nature, imagination, and bingeing media with queer representation.

Ellyn, continued from page 17

But even this personal tradition has been shaped by a past generation in my family. My grandfather was a reporter, back in the day when you could be one without a college degree. His office on the second floor of my grandparents house was a magical place where he would sit at his typewriter and create his column for the city paper. Besides the shelves that lined one wall, almost all of the rest of the wall space (including the slanted ceiling) was covered with photographs. Some were framed, but most of them were black and white photographs of him meeting famous people, or he and my grandmother on one of their trips around the world. When I rebuild my wall of women in a new home, a vague ancestral itch is scratched and it feels like home.

Riley, continued from page 1

and the words of that song, as much as I love it, I came to understand I could carry on traditions, I could leave traditions by the wayside, and I could form new traditions.

Traditions. They are comforting, reliable, enduring, to be endured, odd, benign, admirable, lovable, strange and, for me, the traditions I have remaining are tethers to the most memorable and beautiful elements of my life.

I've had many traditions over the years. Some inherited from family, some from lovers and loved friends, some from countries I've lived in and countries I've only had a fleeting glimpse of. The list has been long. I think the one that has been most enduring is what I do with shoes. Yes, new shoes, old shoes, favorite shoes, leather shoes, high, flat, pvc shoes, suede, fluffy and everything else in between. I have always had a deep love of patent leather. The smell, their gloss, their style. Everything about them. Precious little, mmm, well, not so little now, but precious little gifts for my lovely little feet. When I get a new pair home, they are taken from their box, polished over with a soft cloth and placed in colour and style order in my shoe closet, awaiting the cherished moment that I place them on my feet and wear them into the big wide world.

Some may argue that this is just my silly habit, just a bit of OCD, just routine, but isn't that exactly what a tradition is? Traditions are an act, a repeatable action, a custom, a belief passed down, passed through families, friends, and lovers, to remember. To remember something, someone, our history, our lore, a convention, a practice, an observance, or a sacred ritual. The thing about shoes for me is that I remember my very first pair of patent leather Mary Jane shoes. I remember they were special. I remember feeling special because I was given them. I remember being very careful with them. Looking after them for as long as I could. I never put shoes on a table. I never leave them to languish at the bottom of a dank closet. Maybe taking care is my tradition.

I have family traditions that I have carried on. A beautifully cooked ham with clove, ginger ale, and orange juice glaze was my Mum's recipe for Christmas Day lunch. A few of the most delicate tree ornaments from my childhood and travels, that don't exactly make it to the tree these day (I own cats and I value these little trinkets more than my heart) and the exact pour of a perfect shandy, the way my Dad taught me. Yellow daffodils every 3rd of December for my girlfriend Mardi. Irises and pink tulips 5th of July for Wayne. A new tattoo every August. Certain clothes that I wear with specific jewelry and badges that shout to the world who I am. Movies—*The Sound of Music*, *The Fifth Element*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*—movies I watch at exactly the same time every year. Some of these actions, rituals, tethers I've had for 40 years and some for just a few years. They're still my traditions.

And then there are my music traditions. These are strong traditions. Practiced daily, monthly, seasonally, yearly. Cello

every morning, operas every Sunday, Ministry of Sound Anthems 2000 to 2009 every other Saturday night and disco every other Saturday after that. Road trips have special playlists and food that are the joyful celebrations of being free and driving the glorious long open roads of this continent. And once a year, I put the soundtrack to *Love Actually* on, sip champagne, dance around the living room, stare up into the immense, stunning night sky and remember how amazing, flawed, beautiful, funny, cheeky, alive, chaotic, crazy, wonderful and loved my life has been and is with Wayne, Mardi, Donal, Monique, Belinda, Sher, Lilly, Mischa, Alexa, Adam, Amber, Elly, Deanna, Georgie, Dylan, Rosie, Hannah, Rod, Aylan, Rick, Todd, Max, Gaby, Lance, Penny, Swa, Len, Joelle, Jason, Maze, Becca, James, Rebecca, Sally, Robyn, Peg, Letitia, Kylie, Jean, Joe, Wade, Robert, Paul, Janine, Lara, Roshie, Maud, Andrew, Christy, Bridget, Anna, Ash, Deb, Masha, Drew, Milla, Jeremy, Sofia, Tina, Don, Aisling, Stephen and Charlotte.

Wow, I am so very fortunate.

Traditions are like your favourite jumper, your favourite piece of art, your most loved human in your life. They can make you want to sing at the top of your lungs, they can bring tears and they can keep you in the splendid moment of exactly where you are and exactly who you should be. That's how I now see traditions. They are precious.

Ahhhh, Tradition.

Riley Quinn is bi+ pan and out in all aspects of life and work, 51ish, silver haired and loving being the Vice President of Sydney Bi+ Network, Founder of BOLDER, member of Bi+ Collective Australia, mental health awareness speaker, activist and speaker, maid to lovely kitty cats and deeply into history, reading, geology, documentaries, art, painting, poetry, music, equality, Bi+ activism, politics and kink.



"Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as...a fiddler on the roof!"

Tevye, Fiddler on the Roof

The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston. Address listed at biresource.org.

Ongoing Events

During COVID-19, check the bi community calendar (right), or MeetUp, or check with the listed contact person to find out if an event is happening online.

2nd Mondays:

Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. 7pm. Info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com

1st Wednesdays:

BLiSS (Bisexual Social and Support Group). 7pm. Info: bliss@biresource.org

2nd Thursdays:

Young BLiSS Group. (20s & 30s) 7pm. For bi folks 20-29. Info: Gabby at youngblissboston@gmail.com

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Brunch. 11:30am.

3rd Sundays, alternate months:

Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men. 7pm. Info: Debbie at debbsma@gmail.com.

More about Boston-area groups at biresource.org/boston-groups.

Metro-Boston women: Keep up with local events by subscribing to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/bi-womenboston>

We offer FREE digital subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at BiWomenQuarterly.com.

[not your usual] CALENDAR



Thanks to the wonderful women who attended the in-person 2021 BBWN Book Swap Brunch in September! Great company and interesting books! See page 15 to find out about this yearly BBWN tradition.

Did you know? Boston-area folks can find all kinds of bi+ virtual events at [meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities](https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities). Some of these events are gender-specific, and some welcome all genders. You can also find great bi+ virtual events on our own calendar at <http://biwomenboston.org/calendar>.

Here's a special invitation to our readers EVERYWHERE:

Please consider joining us at one (or all) of our digital brunches—just be aware times listed are US Eastern Time. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make connections across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

Brunches are from 1-2:30pm Eastern Standard Time, on the following dates:

FREE BI+ GLOBAL EVENT

Join us at the 5th World Bi+ Meetup! To accommodate people in various time zones, we will have TWO meetups this time: Friday, January 21st at 9pm CET (3pm EST) and Saturday, January 22nd at 9am CET (3am EST). Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join either or both meetups on Zoom. We'll be using breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to meet each other in a friendly & free setting. The meeting is in English & is organized by Barbara Oud (Netherlands) & Robyn Ochs (U.S.) Pre-registration is required. Register at these links:

9pm CET (3PM EST): [TinyUrl.com/BiplusMeetup51](https://tinyurl.com/BiplusMeetup51)

9am CET (3AM EST): [TinyUrl.com/BiplusMeetup52](https://tinyurl.com/BiplusMeetup52).

4 December (Sun.)

8 January (Sat.)

6 February (Sun.)

5 March (Sat.)

3 April (Sun.)

Consider this: If you rarely (or never) see people like yourself represented in print, your voice is especially important. When you lift your voice, someone, somewhere will FINALLY see their own experiences reflected, perhaps for the first time. (See our call for writing on page 2.)