



Artwork by Ginn Arias Bello

Dear You: lose

By Nicole Miyashiro

Lose people/ who were never
there, lose/ the lies, illusions,
truth-fearing/ friends?/ lose the one
you don't need/ to be
anymore/ lose/ the voice
distorting/ what to believe,
believe/ your loss/ the you, lost
in who others/ want
you/ to be, be without
her to be/ be free

Nicole Miyashiro is a bi and married mama living in central Pennsylvania, US. Her work appears in CALYX, The Hudson Review, Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse (Lost Horse Press), and elsewhere.

Ginn Arias Bello is a graphic designer, art mediator, and writer based in Mexico City, Mexico. Her artwork explores memories, the cracks they leave in the body, everyday experiences, and displacements.

Disney Channel Presents: Bisexual Awakenings

By Felicia Fitzpatrick

Dear 11-year-old Felicia,

You need to write a thank-you note to Disney. They have gifted you several bisexual awakenings, even though you don't realize it at the moment.

Like, you have a crush on Alyson Stoner. Yes, you just had a dream that you kissed her on-air brother, Mike, from *Mike's Super Short Show*, but you also have a crush on *her*. That's because you're bisexual. Welcome! Here is your complimentary leather jacket. Trust me, you'll need it.

Mike, with his cute, spiky blonde hair, seems like the obvious crush choice because he looks like the boys you go to school with in the very white Pacific Northwest. Plus, Alyson is kind of annoying, right? I know how you roll your eyes at her. It's because you're intimidated by, jealous of, and attracted to her. You're intimidated by the fact that she's a good dancer (dancing has always

been your thing, and you can be a bit competitive). You're jealous that she got to be in Missy Elliot's "Work It" music video. And you're attracted to her tomboy style, especially in *Cheaper by the Dozen*, and I understand how that can feel overwhelming to you.

This really shouldn't come as a surprise since tomboy girls on the Disney Channel are kinda your thing. Your obsession with the Disney Channel Original Movie *Motocrossed?* Let's just say it's *not* because you think it would be fun to ride dirt bikes. (You'll try riding an ATV years later because of the movie, and you won't be great at it.) You know how you look forward to the scene where Andrea's new look of short hair and a backwards baseball hat is



Credit: Michael Kushner

Felicia, continued on p. 31

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stay tuned!

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Editor's Note

This issue's theme is "Letters to Myself." The prompt was: "Have you ever wished you could go back in time and give your younger self some much needed advice? Or perhaps you want to write to your future self about the moment you're currently living in, so you don't forget any part of it, or to provide some advice? What if you were asked to write to your present self—what would you say?"

Responses were thoughtful, numerous, and global. This issue includes content from Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, France, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Serbia, the U.K., the U.S., and Zimbabwe from writers and artists ages 15 to 86.

As Editor, I am very excited about the directions in which *Bi Women Quarterly* is growing. In addition to the amazing and growing array of contributors, we are expanding our volunteer base as well.

Karen and Eliza have joined the editorial team.

Kass has launched us on Reddit, and Hunniya on TikTok. In addition, interns Lejla and Vincy are maintaining our presence on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Threads. Please follow us!

Would you like to be part of this project? Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Donate at BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate
- Volunteer to help with our GiveOutDay fundraising campaign, which takes place during the entire month of May. Email biwomeneditor@gmail.com.
- We are hiring an Assistant Editor. Find details at BiWomenBoston.org/Positions.
- Spread the word about our existence.

-Robyn

*Jordyn, Grace, & Maggie
read BWQ. Send a picture of
yourself reading BWQ to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com.
Be creative!*



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for submissions

Summer 2024: More than One Letter

"B" isn't the only identity in our yummy alphabet soup. To those of you who identify as bi+ and *also* as asexual, trans, intersex, or anything else under the rainbow: tell us what it's like to be you! We want to hear about how your identities intersect, what challenges you've faced, or what opportunities you've been given. And most importantly, we want to know what it would take or has taken to be able to bring your whole self comfortably and proudly into these bi+ spaces. **Submit by May 1, 2024.**

Fall 2024: Child Free

In this very complex world we live in, there are so many reasons one might decide not to procreate. Would you like to share yours? Motherhood and womanhood are too often conflated, and choosing not to parent can carry stigma, no matter your gender. How has this decision affected the way you see your gender, your sexuality, yourself? **Submit by August 1,**

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. View our submission guidelines at biwomenquarterly.com.

Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to biwomeneditor@gmail.com. You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

If you want us to keep on producing this resource...

Please support our work with a tax-deductible donation. Visit:
www.BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate.

Bi Women Quarterly (ISSN 2834-5096) 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 the production of *Bi Women Quarterly* and related activities, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other nonbinary sexualities. More broadly, we work through an intersectional lens and seek the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and racial and ethnic identities.

AROUND THE WORLD: Diana Martínez, Jalisco, Mexico

Interview by Robyn Ochs

Diana Martínez (shelher/ella) is a software engineer and leader of the Pride Employee Resource Group (ERG) at Intel in Mexico. I met Diana in 2022 at the [Out & Equal Workplace Summit](#) in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she co-facilitated a session titled “Gaslighted: Imposter Syndrome and Erasure in the Bi+ Community” with fellow Mexican bi+ advocate Rodrigo Castro Flores. In addition to being drawn to Diana’s warm and welcoming presence, I was impressed by the quality of her session and by her commitment to being out and proud at work.



Robyn: Diana, please tell us about yourself.

Diana: Born and raised in the small town of Colima, Mexico, I traded beaches for a city landscape in 2019, seeking better engineering opportunities. Living alone has its challenges, but at 27 years old my sanity is (sometimes) saved by my friends, partner, video game escapes, and mountains of great books. Add in a passion for ballet, anime, and several kinds of activism, and you’ve got me. It’s these passions that keep me grounded, remind me to laugh, and give me strength to continue moving forward and fighting for the things I believe in.

R: How did you come to identify as bi?

D: I don’t know the exact date, but I remember the feelings. It felt like a sudden epiphany after a slow unraveling of events. It dawned on me, not with joy, but with a mix of fear, uncertainty, and loneliness.

For my entire life, I have always felt *something* for girls (and non-men in general, though those identities were not a common thing in my small town). But I always felt certain about guys too, and exploring those feelings was safe, validated by my family and society around me.

In kindergarten, I only had girlfriends. Being friends with boys meant I liked them “romantically,” whatever that meant to me at five. Family members would gush, “Aw, you look so cute together. Is Pablo your boyfriend?”, which wasn’t fun, just confusing. Back then, romance seemed like a mandatory part of being a girl, a puzzle piece I wasn’t sure I wanted to fit.

Junior high was brutal. My self-esteem plummeted, especially during the later years. I think part of the reason for my not realizing my bisexuality earlier was that whenever I noticed a girl who I thought was pretty, my brain would shut down. Instead of enjoying her beauty, I’d feel threatened, envious, like she was prettier than I could ever be. Back then, and even today, girls’ worth seems tied to their appearance, or how much boys like them. So, I chased validation from boys, and whenever I got it, I held onto it. Trying to find myself while performing what society expected wasn’t easy.

High school was when my first non-men crush happened (not that I realized this at the time). Andrea was so charming, and

smart, and she was so cool, and I wanted her to think I was cool too. I wanted to hang around, learn her secrets, make her smile. But my little “heterosexual” brain said, “Of course you want to hang with cool people, and noticing girls are pretty is normal too—we all have eyes.” It was so confusing, but I thought nothing of my feelings and tried to stay friends, but not too close.

Growing up in Mexico, much of my understanding of LGBTQ+ people was shaped by TV. Every portrayal of gay men revolved around exaggerated femininity, flamboyant mannerisms, and jokes that made them look bad and annoying. It was a caricature, not a reflection of reality, yet it became the sole image I had. In a world where “gay” meant undesirable, and I liked boys, the equation seemed simple: I must be straight. The absence of any other option, any positive or diverse representation, left me feeling that liking girls was somehow part of being straight too.

College brought my feelings into focus, but I didn’t process them. Girls were suddenly more than just “pretty”—they were captivating. I could picture kissing them, but it felt like straight-girl fantasies. My shyness made exploring any of it impossible, and guys being interested in me just muddied the waters. I was a mess of wanting, confusion, and uncertainty.

I think there were a couple things that had to happen for me to come out, and they happened in this order:

1. My LGBTQ+ understanding grew, and I got to know other terms and concepts. My sister, a fierce advocate for women and LGBTQ+ rights, often was sharing posts and stories about queer women, or talking to me about what she had read/learned. The idea of bisexuality resonated, but it didn’t click instantly. My feelings were buried, categorized as “straight-girl stuff,” but I think I planted a seed I was going to start watering.
2. I kissed my (girl) friend. She of course did it as a joke, or not thinking too much about it, but I liked it, and I then realized I was always looking for ways to get her to do it again.
3. I realized my feelings were probably not the norm for straight girls. I saw a Facebook video of a dancing girl, and she was captivating, to say the least. Then I read the comments of the girl that had posted it and her friends, and

they were mostly talking about how much they wish they were her, or how they'd love to dance like that. I still have those thoughts sometimes of course, but I felt maybe a little surprise. It made me wonder, "Are they not experiencing any attraction? Or are they just not commenting on it? Is feeling mesmerized the "straight-girl" experience?"

4. I saw an image of different pie charts with combinations of "men, women, nonbinary" with different percentages that said: "All valid, all bisexual." Wait, bisexuality could be... unique? Not a fixed formula, but a broad spectrum? Maybe all along, my desires had whispered "bisexual," even if in a different shade than others. I started questioning my feelings more, and considering the possibility of what I might be, what I might have been all along.
5. A girl at work. She was stunning, cool, totally out of my league. Once I almost ran into her, and she smiled so brightly and said, "Sorry," and I wanted to cry because I really wanted to kiss her and hold her hand, and brush her hair out of her face and, holy cow, I think, these thoughts aren't "straight." I *do* like girls for real. What do I do?

Reddit became my late-night refuge. Scrolling through endless threads, I finally saw reflections of myself—stories of bisexuality that defied the binary, that were discovered late, that had been masked as straight for too long. I wasn't alone. But "bisexual"? It felt big, scary. Could I actually say it? Was it really me?

I am proud and thankful for all the bi people that are brave and strong and share their stories so people like me can find ourselves. I have not yet settled. Every day is a new discovery, but I'm more excited than scared of what I feel and what awaits me.



Diana with Robyn and Rodrigo Castro Flores at the Out & Equal Workplace Summit, Las Vegas, Nevada, October, 2022

R: What, if any, is your religious background, and what impact did this have on your coming out? Did it make it harder or easier? In what ways?

D: Catholicism ruled my childhood, just like it did for most kids in Mexico. You could always hear whispers at the dinner table, aunts and uncles critiquing Susana for "abandoning" her family for another woman, which painted a stark picture of what "normal" looked like. I don't think I actively judged queer people, or felt being queer was wrong, but those whispers seeped into me, leaving a residue of doubt about anything outside the heteronormative script. Every *telenovela* (soap opera) reinforced the message that love meant a man and a woman, forever and ever. And that really set some expectations in my brain. I had left church way before I came out, because I stopped believing what the church preached and because I felt uncomfortable about their alienation of different minority groups. And I think doing that set me free to fully accept myself once I realized I wasn't straight.

R: What is your city's sexual minority community like? Are bi+ folks well-integrated into this community?

D: I don't hang out much in my city's LGBTQIA+ scene, mostly doing activism within my company and closer circles. However, when I do, biphobia still bites. Being in a long-term relationship with a cis man means I am always questioned or confronted about the validity of my identity. Not fitting their bisexual expectations, I am always assumed to be straight, which hurts. One of my friend's best friends also attacked him about his sexual encounters because he was convinced my friend was gay and not bi. This biphobia makes it tough for us to find each other and feel truly welcome.

R: What is the legal and cultural situation for LGBTQ+ people in Mexico and in the area where you live?

D: Same-sex marriage has not been legal for long in the state in which I live, even if it's recognized as the state with the most openly queer people in Mexico. Different from Mexico City, where it was legalized in 2010, Jalisco approved it in 2016 and in April 2022 finally it was law in the whole country.

In 2022, Jalisco banned conversion therapies and recognized trans people's identities, which is very late considering when it happened in other states (e.g., 2014 in Mexico City)—finally, some legal protection for a community so often ostracized. Yet gaps remain. Non-binary identities, for example, still navigate a legal and social limbo. Homophobia and transphobia remain pervasive, evidenced by the constant stream of hate crimes across the country. Amidst the challenges, though, glimmers of hope appear. Recently, an openly trans woman captivated the nation by winning one of our most popular reality shows. Her grace, humor, and genuine connection with TV viewers broke down barriers, humanizing the "trans" label for millions. This might just be the start of a shift in national consciousness, showing the country that queer people deserve not just tolerance, but love and respect.

R: What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi, or non-heterosexual people in your country? How do people who experience their gender as non-binary engage with pronouns?

D: Words for LGBTQIA+ people in Spanish are very much the same as in English: lesbianx, gay, bisexual, intersex, trans (*transgénero*), queer, asexual, *arrománticx*. We have slang too, often coming from former slurs, but they're less widely used. The gendered part of our language is where it gets tricky. You may have noticed I used the X like you do when writing Latinx, which basically works like a placeholder (or variable) that you can substitute for the letter of your preference: A, E, O. Words in Spanish have either female or male pronouns—there is no neutral. *La silla* (the chair), *el baño* (the bathroom), *la casa* (the house), *el pan* (the bread). Then there is also the generic masculine, which uses the masculine version of words in plural to refer to mixed groups of people:

Friends, regardless of gender: *amigos*

Friends, only male: *amigos*

Friends, only women: *amigas*

Friends, only nonbinary: n/a (no word exists yet)

Imagine facing daily microaggressions simply because language doesn't recognize your existence. We basically had to invent new words and add the “-e” termination to gendered terms, so your non-binary friend is not your *amigo* or *amiga*, it's your *amigue*. While resistance lingers, with arguments like, “It's not in the dictionary,” a hopeful shift is brewing. People tend to use it in written communications more and more, though unless actively talking to a person who uses they/them pronouns, speaking has not changed as fast. Platforms like Netflix now use these terms in their subtitles, and younger generations readily embrace these new terms. This growing awareness sparks optimism that official linguistic bodies will eventually recognize and endorse these changes, paving the way for a more inclusive Spanish that reflects the vibrant spectrum of identities it serves.

R: How did you end up getting involved in LGBTQ+ workplace advocacy? What is going on at Intel, the company where you work?

D: I have been involved in my company's LGBTQ+ group for four years now. I started as an ally and then, inside, I found a community that gave me the comfort I needed to safely come out. Being at Intel, a US company, we have access to support from groups abroad, but there are also the unique local context and cultural aspects to consider in Mexico. The pandemic nearly killed the group: we were down to three members out of 1300+ employees, and that basically forced me to take the lead. I couldn't fathom the idea of LGBTQ+ employees not having a safe space, so I stepped up. Saying it was hard is an understatement, but we somehow managed to survive and grow a bit these past couple years. We are currently working on a strategy to get more people involved, sensitize all employees, and provide them with education and an understanding of



February 2023, celebrating Intel Mexico getting the “Mejores lugares para trabajar LGBTQ+” (Best places to work for LGBTQ+ equality Certification from the Human Rights Campaign,

the world around them, while ensuring Intel in Mexico is up to date with politics and actions that protect and empower queer employees.

R: Where would a person living in Mexico find bi+ support or resources, inside or outside your country? Are there Spanish-language LGBTQ+ websites inside or outside of Mexico that you have found useful? What about publications?

D: Discovering bisexual resources or support in a world that often overlooks us is no easy feat. I did however manage to find some women with a group called [Bisexuales México](#). Their vibrant website overflows with resources, and their book, *Vivencias Bisexuales*, became a cherished map of shared experiences. I have found a large number of media recommendations to explore, organizations in different states and countries, terms, and bibliographies that really helped me find a place and to overall feel less alone.

Robyn Ochs is a speaker, bi+ and LGBTQ+ advocate, and co-editor of BWQ and two anthologies, Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World and RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men.

Letter To Myself

By *strega claire manning*

dear you,

right now you are too familiar with the lavender carpet in your bedroom closet—what once was your sister’s space, now yours—as you plug your ears to the sound of your parents fighting. right now, your world exists exclusively in theirs—a small bubble of tension and regret. but know that in a few short years, your life will expand. just like your lungs when you breathe in the lemon-scented lysol after scrubbing down your first apartment. you will stand on top of torc mountain as ireland blooms beneath you, an expanse of lush green and deep blues.

for years you searched for spaces that felt like home, dissociating at family dinners, and asking yourself if you were adopted. it wasn’t until you learned that your great aunt in new mexico was queer,—despite only meeting her a few times, that you felt like something in you made sense. to this day, you wear her turquoise ring on your finger, slightly tarnished and a reminder that you belong wherever you go.

you will get your heart broken a few times, but most memorably in college, after falling in love with your best friend and resenting yourself for feeling like a cliché. you will play tegan and sara’s “boy-friend” on repeat way too many times. she’ll read your journal, and things will never feel the same between you again. you’ll lose her, the cigarette habit, and the budding alcoholism. you’ll gain, years later, a husband just as bi as you. he will wear a full-purple suit at your wedding, and you will both insist the dj play lady gaga during the reception. instead of waking up every day with regret, you’ll wake up in his embrace of who you are entirely.

and you’ll find that getting married doesn’t make you immune to rejection. your grandmother will tell you that your freshly dyed red hair doesn’t look good, your mother will hate your shoulder tattoo, and a friend will insist that you don’t look gay. but you will love your hair, wear tank tops to show off your chrysanthemum, and feel pride that, for once, your insides match your outsides. you will make your coffee on a quiet monday morning in the office, amazed at how normal life finally feels.

for all the days spent inside of that closet, gasping for air and clutching your wrists, you will make your happiness out of your own two hands. this joy will be molded from the pain of the past, and the resilience of the person who knew that there would be something better ahead.

i loved you then, and i love you now.

strega

strega claire manning is a poet based in baltimore, maryland. she loves spending time with her cats and her partner, taking walks, and overthinking. find her on substack: stingingsentences.substack.com.

You Should Know

By *Syd Shaw*

To be careful. I could tell you not to date that man at 20, not to kiss that girl at 16, at least not where your parents will see. I can tell you that their opinions won’t matter, not forever at least. I could give you a new name—new pronouns, even. I could tell you what to change your major to, when to move, and when to stay put, whom to keep writing letters to even when they don’t respond for a while.

I could lay out your life like a delicate spider web or a map of invading armies. Try to choreograph and plan for you: speak at this moment; don’t cry after this one. I could scare you like they do in the DARE programs.

But how do I untangle the *was* from the *could be*? That’s the problem with time travel: you never know who you are when you get back. Which strand, brushed out of your face, would cause the whole thing to unravel. So I let the fates weave their web. With equal parts heartbreak and hope, I watch my younger self in silence.

Syd Shaw writes about love, witchcraft, and body horror. She is Assistant Poetry Editor and Workshop Coordinator at Passengers Journal, and a typewriter poet with West Hollywood’s Pride Poets group. She has a degree in Creative Writing from Northwestern University.



You Are a Gift to The World

By Anna Kochetkova

I often want to hug my younger self and promise that I will keep her safe. The truth is, I couldn't keep the promise. Not back when she—I mean, I—was burning the pages of my journals, notes, and stories. I used to yell into my diaries, because I couldn't actually scream. My voice was bottled up by the trauma of growing up in a dysfunctional family and in a country under dictatorship, crime, and political unrest. My unrequited queer love seemed so irresponsible, childish, and frivolous, especially when its objects were people on the posters on my walls or magazine cutouts in my diaries. While I used to fall in love with all my older brother's male friends, I was torn by the desire to kiss every female character in all the animations, films, books, and stories. The heat of desire, confusion, and fear was stirring up and boiling my teenage hormones to the point of no return. Life felt so unbearable so often.

When I finally left Russia and eventually found an aligned somatic therapist as a young adult, she helped me see my younger self as a courageous survivor whose nervous system did well, given the extraordinary events I had experienced. Shame turned to pride. And many of my words found homes in books and online.

Today, I have a photo of my younger self on the fridge. Every time I pass her, I thank her.

That is how this letter to myself came to be.

My beloved little Anna,

I know right now there is little sense in being alive and yet you are terrified of dying. You feel like you are dying all the time. Kissing your summer friend's sister complicated everything for you, especially since you thought you were in love with your brother's friend. But it's simple—you are bisexual.

And I love you for keeping yourself safe all throughout those years of not understanding your feelings and suffering from the experiences. I am sorry that she rejected you and that he tried to abuse you—sometimes people you love do weird and unfair things. This was not your fault.

Nothing was your fault. You are a gift to the world. Your love is so huge and magical it can heal others, and your sensitivity is so deep you can swallow Earth. The world needs you.

I know right now you hate it all and you wish you could be a psychopath (I know you read a lot about them) so you can feel as little as possible. I know you think you want to fit in and be cruel and ruthless (feeling-less, really). You are trying to protect your squishy parts, like your heart. Growing a hard shell around it won't make others love you.

But I love you. It may not feel like it right now but, I promise you, you will feel it very soon. You see, right now, as the adult I am, you are living your best life—all your soft parts are in the open and yet no one can hurt them. And that's because of you! Sure, we both are a little bruised. But we've healed. And we continue healing. You will have mind-bending bisexual orgies, deep and meaningful conversations that make you cry with joy, divine connections with nature (you will even live in the forest!), and a meaning of life no one and nothing can shake. The world will continue burning all around you, and yet being alive will make so much sense to you. Your life will beacon light to those on the edge of theirs. Your squishy queer self is the most powerful thing on Earth. Please keep going. I need you. And I promise to hold you tight so that you can fall apart, rest, and put yourself back together again and again and again.

Anna Kochetkova is a Russian-born Australian author and poetess, and a passionate bi+ activist based in the Yaegl Country, Northern NSW, Australia. Anna is the author of Bi & Prejudice, and the creator of the @biandprejudice Instagram space and of @sydbiclub for Sydney community-led events and gatherings for multisexual and queer humans.



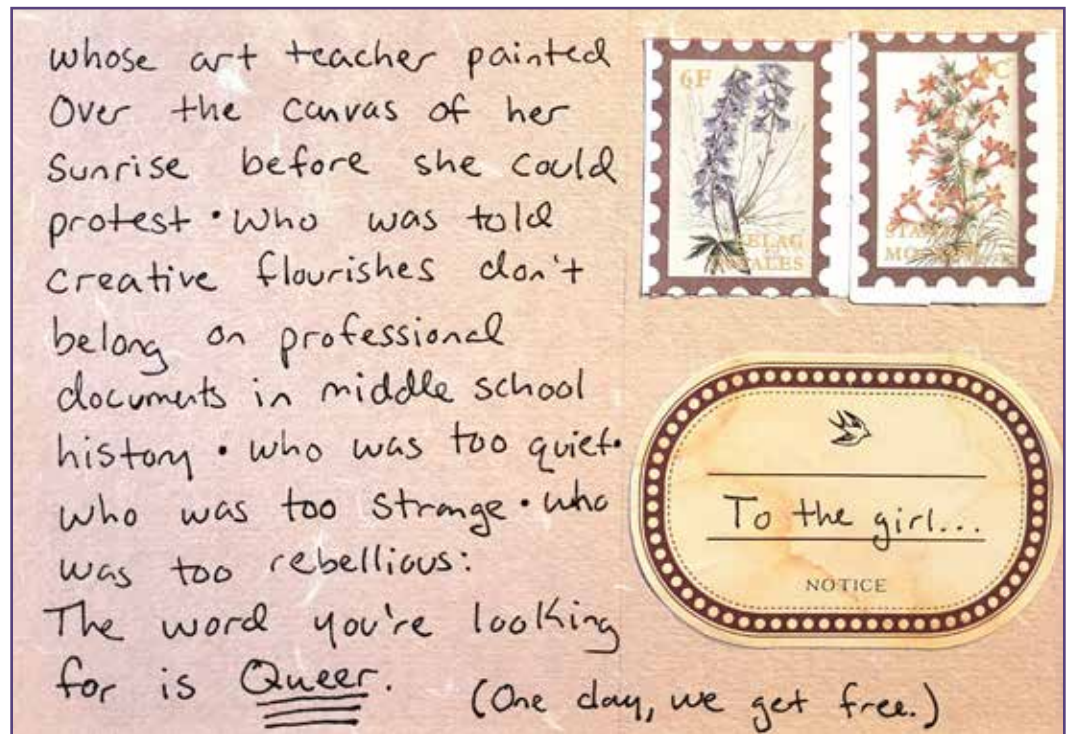
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Seriously, we need you. You are the fuel that keeps us going, and we are always looking for volunteers. Areas of need include: fundraising, marketing, and outreach—we are trying to increase our readership and our base of content contributors GLOBALLY. We also welcome fuel in the form of donations: BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate. Contact Robyn at BiWomenEditor@gmail.com for more info.

To the girl...

By Audrey T. Carroll

Audrey T. Carroll is the author of *What Blooms in the Dark*, *Parts of Speech: A Disabled Dictionary*, and *In My Next Queer Life, I Want to Be*. She can be found at: AudreyTCarrollWrites.weebly.com.



A Letter to My Younger Self

By Zar

I have always known, felt, something within myself that was different; I could not pinpoint what, but with growing up and new experiences, I realized I was queer. What a word! Strange, peculiar? That was how I was feeling at first when the doom of that realization hit me.

At the age of 15, I had only known about heterosexual relationships, and homosexual couples were a topic not to be mentioned.

Only when I realized that I was attracted to women, too, did the ever-changing process of self-acceptance begin. The first stage, naturally, was denial and then going in between labels or questioning until finally landing on something most closely described as bisexuality.

To my younger self, questioning relentlessly and denying the painfully obvious, I would say that it is okay, it was okay, and it most definitely will be okay.

It's okay to question yourself and switch between labels until you are finally content with one, two, or maybe not even a specific one! That is nothing to feel guilty about.

It's okay to mourn the person society made you play and the traditional wedding your parents may have imagined. Your queerness will never be a disappointment, and whoever tells you so should question their own values and beliefs.

It's okay to not be ready to come out to someone; your sexuality is yours and yours only, and not everyone should be privileged

to know the deepest parts of yourself.

It's okay to take time to understand yourself and to accept yourself; you shouldn't feel guilty for not knowing enough or not having experience.

Just because you are unfamiliar with something, does not mean that it's bad for you. We tend to push away new and "scary" discoveries, especially related to ourselves, and put them in the back of our mind until we forget them, thinking it will somehow help. Perhaps we only gradually start looking for the light switch in the dark and, little by little, we eventually find it, and light pours in and washes over us.

I hope everyone's self-acceptance process feels like a beam of light in the darkness of everyday life.

Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community and finally coming to terms with my bisexuality has been one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. No matter how frustrating, confusing, and unfamiliar it has been, I couldn't be happier to have undertaken this journey.

I have learned so many things, met so many wonderful, strong, and empowering people, and I have realized that I am part of an incredible community. I would never change this part of myself, and I couldn't be prouder.

Zar is an 18-year-old girl from Serbia, studying Philological Sciences and writing.

Twenty Years Gone

By Chelsea Bock

*And though the course may change
sometimes
Rivers always reach the sea
—Led Zeppelin, “Ten Years Gone”*

Dear Chelsea (16),

The other day I was talking to my therapist (you have a therapist in the future; isn't that wonderful?) and she asked me to think about you. “What would you say to your teenage self?” she asked. “What would you do to comfort her?”

I would tell you—I *will* tell you—that in life there are lots of things you *must* do, especially if you want certain outcomes. You know this now. If you want to pass your classes, you do your homework. If you want to become a better musician, you go to clarinet lessons. But there are also certain things that you must do because the world is frequently inhospitable to anyone who isn't straight or cisgender. If that feels unfair, well, it is.

But I will also tell you that you won't have to do these things forever.

You won't have to hide.

You hide a lot in 2004. You talk about that girl in band who makes you blush and stammer only with your best friend—who has his own same-gender crushes—in the privacy of his basement. You hide from the football player who is very angry about your female prom date. When you officially have a girlfriend, you wear the purple beaded bracelet she made for you but dodge questions about its origin.

I'll be honest. The hiding continues for a while. High school graduation means more freedom, of course, and in college you'll meet other queer people and seek out campus clubs like the GSA. But you'll have to get a job soon, and thanks to a recession (you'll learn what that is in a few years), opportunities will be limited. You will take a job at a private evangelical Christian school and learn quickly to go along to get along. You don't go to church anymore, so you'll have to pretend that you're still in the process of looking for a new one. You're not engaged or married, so you'll have to pretend that you're very interested in men and *only* men.

You will find more queer people in your area, more than you thought existed, including girls who reciprocate your interest! It's all so exciting, but your job security is fragile. It's okay. You won't have this job forever. On the other side there are employers committed to non-discriminatory hiring practices. Some of them even have LGBTQ+ staff organizations, which you will join. Oh, and don't worry if you don't know what that acronym means yet. Naming ourselves is just one way that we refuse to hide anymore.

You won't have to choose.

In 2004, when you think you've figured out your sexual orientation, something shifts under your feet. I know that right now, at 16, you're chastising yourself for not being able to check a box with absolute certainty. You tried on the words “gay” and “lesbian,” but they didn't quite fit, and in a fit of frustration you left them balled up in the fitting room.

This is where you and I take a deep breath together. Be gentle with yourself. Nobody has it all figured out at 16, even if they think they do. You will go on to have jobs, relationships, experiences that you never imagined. Did you ever think you'd go to Europe? Get married? Become a published author? Surprise! You will.

Please understand that your feelings of doubt and hesitation are all part of the process. Compulsory heterosexuality is a cruel mistress, and if by chance you do see queer representation on TV or at the movies, characters are almost always described as “gay” or “lesbian.” No wonder you tried on these words first! It's what you know.

Keep in mind that life doesn't deal in absolutes. Right now, for example, you really like coffee. But you'll also develop a taste for tea. Some people like only coffee, and it's what they faithfully drink every morning. Others are strictly tea drinkers. Eventually, you will find that your enjoyment of coffee doesn't negate your enjoyment of tea, and vice versa. And even though you may not know it now, a lot of other people feel the same way you do. Do you see where I'm going with this?

So, when you develop crushes on boys and the crushes on girls don't go away, and when your friend grows his hair out and you look at him differently than you used to, don't think of these feelings as hurdles. They are not interrupting the development of your identity. They are moving it forward. Soon you'll try on words like “queer” and “bisexual” and admire yourself in them. And when others try to put different words on you (this will happen for the rest of your life), the only thing you'll choose is your truth, every time.

You won't be unsupported.

Right now, your head is buzzing with insensitive, even queer-phobic things people have said to you and said to others in your chosen family. That's right—as you get older, you will strengthen the relationships with the very first friends you trusted. It will be beautiful.

Some of the most painful things you hear have been, and will be, from people you love very much. They are often trying to say the right thing, but in 2004, this can be hard. I'll let you in on a secret: it's hard in 2024 too. What matters most is that they *are* trying, and that they love and respect you enough to commit to improving.

You've already dated a few people at this point. You will date so many more, and they'll be as varied as the rainbow you belong to. As you become more secure in your identity, practice coming

out to them. Don't get tangled up in the guessing game of when and how to do it, the fear that they'll stereotype you, and the impulse to lie for convenience. It's all background noise. And when you tell others about your love life, when you feel safe to do so, resist using vague references to gender. Others' discomfort is not your problem. End your preoccupation with kicking up the least amount of fuss. One day you will realize that the way you love is not a fuss at all.

When you are older you will make friends who are straight and who won't interrogate you about your sexuality or insist they know it better than you do. You will have dinner with one of them, 20 years your senior, and she will say, "You can be partnered with a man and also be queer. Both things are true." Bask in the affirmation of those sentences. Carry them home with you. Lay them out for tomorrow. With all the hate and misunderstanding in the world, you deserve a joyful mantra.

Among these friends, you will meet your spouse. A person who is *your* person. Watch how he doesn't flinch when, after a few cocktails, you spill who you are during the Super Bowl postgame show. Notice that he doesn't argue, malign, or tease. He supports and loves. Can you do the same for him? For yourself?

I know you can.

I love you.

—Chelsea (36)

Chelsea Bock is a community college educator currently working on her Ed.D. at Rockhurst University. She lives with her husband and their cat, Lucy, in Annapolis, Maryland.



The Visiting House (To My Little Self and My Little Brother)

By Maggie Young

I love you with syrup in your hair
and gum on the bottoms of your shoes.
Don't forget how it felt,
hard plastic shoes on the cold hard linoleum.
Three steps to your parent's bedroom, two seconds to your
brother's door.
There's a swing set out back and light in your brother's eyes,
enlarged by thick-rimmed glasses he got at only eight months
old.
He wears contacts now, and the click of my heels on the floor
makes my stomach twist.
With guilt?
With grief?
Is it still "mourning" if he's only 67 miles away?
I'm home in the visiting house and I'm here, I say.
I'm here and I'm here and now I'm screaming
You are the one who taught him how to ride a bike.
It sinks in how much time he spends alone now.
He lurks in corners and drifts in and out of rooms at parties.
You are the one who taught him how to whisper.
I hug him goodbye and for the first time he feels heavy.
I need you to understand
just because he grew up doesn't mean you failed.
I love you with skinned knees and sparkly headbands and
bitten-off nails. I love you from 67 miles away.

Maggie is a 21-year-old senior psychology and studio art student at the College of Wooster. She is from Pataskala, Ohio, and discovered BWQ through the [Creating Change Conference](#).

Three Biku

By Martine Mussies



to my younger self

Embrace love's vast hues,
Don't fret over fixed boxes,
Be you, all is well.

to my current self

Bi pride blooms in hearts,
Online, offline, joys unite,
Communities thrive.

to my future self

Hope paints the world kind,
Bi acceptance, no erasure,
Love and tolerance reign.



Martine Mussies is an artistic researcher and autistic academic in the Netherlands. Through text, music, and visual work, Martine uses her art to explore new worlds and ideas. www.martinemussies.nl.

The True Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys as Wormhole

By LHB

I'm speaking to you in a specific moment: You're sitting on the floor of your high school's music practice room, contriving reasons to spend time with the girl you're hopelessly crushing on. She mentions she'd bought a comic book you wanted to read; you ask to borrow it, but she'd only bought it on Kindle. That week (that year) was a complete mess for you—constantly losing control of your body, your mind, your heart, your time.

I've just now finished that book, six years later, and I am reminded of you. Funnily enough, you finally found it in a bookstore while visiting the same girl—to this day one of your dearest friends. Of course, you bought it immediately.

It's less that I want to tell you about the book (it was fine), and more that I wish that you, in that moment of wanting, could have a flash of what it is like to be you now. In this moment, we are the same person, connected by the conduit of this one tiny thing that you wanted to do, and that you (I, we) did.

I can clearly see you, tightly wound, fit to snap, and desperate for so many different kinds of love and care and safety. I wish

you could see this moment: your community of compassionate and queer friends are moving to the same big city that you've managed to make it to. Your loving long-term partner sleeps over as often as possible in your cozy, sunny apartment, where you look forward to eating, and you value caring for your body instead of pushing it away. Your hair is buzzed, and you wear earrings that you bought while traveling abroad—one of the many things that you now have the autonomy and resource access to do. You are healthy. You are happy. You have control over your place in the world and relationships. And you are content.

At the time that you finally manage to read this book, this is how far you've made it.

Would you believe me if I told you that everything, shockingly, is okay?

I know without asking that you will do whatever it takes to get here. And it does take almost all the time between your now and mine. But you make it out. You make it to love. You make it to care. You make it to safety.

LHB loves to read and has the good fortune to work at a book publishing company. She is from Tennessee, though she no longer lives there.

Voice Note to My Younger Self

By *Lila Hertelius*

1

The sun has just set, and the full moon is rising. You know, it's funny. The moon is often associated with the night—in literature, in conversation, in metaphorical allusions—and what a lot of people often might not think about is that the moon is out in the daytime, too! We just don't see it as easily, because there's less contrast between the sky and the moon. And people also may not be *looking* for the moon in the daytime or expecting it to be visible. It's kind of like bisexuality in that way. People tend to only notice it when it looks noticeably different from societal norms. And so they might think that's all bisexuality is. But bisexuality is *so* many things! And it exists whether anyone recognizes it or not, and whether anyone is expecting it to be present or not. So if you ever come out to someone and they say they had no idea because you don't *look* not-straight, just remember that many people may often forget that the moon is not only out at night.

2

It's already noon, and the waxing half-moon is only just now rising. Some people might think that means it's late to the game; but actually, the waxing half-moon routinely rises around noon. You may not have heard it yet, but there's this term "late bloomer." It tends to get a bad rap, because there's this idea that you should have yourself all figured out by a certain age. And what I want to say is: one, that sounds boring—we can keep discovering ourselves for as long as we live—and two, it takes each person the time that it takes them to understand each thing they come to understand about themselves—and there doesn't need to be shame in that. And just because you've understood yourself to be bisexual doesn't mean that's all there is to know about you. It also doesn't mean you have to fit yourself into some preconceived idea of what it means to be bisexual just because that label reflects certain aspects of who you feel yourself to be. *You* get to decide who you are—and you get to do that on your own timeline.

3

I'm up late—it's almost midnight—and the waning half-moon is about to rise. A lot of people might not get to see it much unless they're up in the wee hours of the morning and they happen to be outside. It makes me think about how, just because you might feel glimmers of something in yourself in rare and precious moments—maybe something you're not used to thinking of as part of yourself—that doesn't mean what's glimmering is tiny or insignificant. Maybe it just hasn't had the time or attention or love it needs to feel safe enough to reveal itself to you more fully. I mean, that's not to say that I think you should stay up late every night. But maybe the reason it's been so hard for you to put yourself to bed is because there's something calling to you

in that quieter, less seen time of the night. And maybe you need to listen to that. And maybe you don't need to keep it sequestered to the night. Maybe you can let it out in the daytime, too. Maybe you can dare to let yourself connect with it, and feel it, when you're out walking in the world, with people around. Maybe you don't need to keep those moments of connection with that something-in-yourself only for when you're hidden away from the world. Maybe you can find pockets of safety and comfort in broad daylight, with others who are on a similar journey.

4

I know you can't see it, but the new moon is rising with the sun right now. And what I want to say is: labels are for others. What matters most is knowing who you are—what you like, what you want, what you need, and what you will and won't accept. And if you also find a label that makes you do a happy dance when you call yourself by it, even just when you're looking in the mirror, that's great, too. And if not, you still exist—just like the new moon exists even if we can't see where it ends and the sky begins. And just like the new moon, your self-concept can renew itself whenever your self-understanding shifts. And whether or not anyone says that means a previous self-concept was a phase, keep in mind that life itself is a phase—and enjoy it while it's here, and do what you can to make sure it's long, healthy, and happy, for yourself and for others. And also remember that the moon has phases—and nobody bats an eye at that.

Lila is a neurodivergent, bilingual (English and French), queer, multidisciplinary artist and writer living in France who practices neurodiversity coaching with Neurodiverging Coaching: neurodiverging.com/about-neurodiverging. Some of her passions are chronobiology (including menstrual cycle syncing), cats and cat behavior, process optimization, and systems thinking.



To My Present and Future Self

By Eris Zion Venia

Dear Eris,

Ten years ago, you wrote a letter to your future daughter. Today, you're sitting next to your child who is three and a half months old, watching *Sesame Street* as you write this. Wow. What a testament of patience. I know you had your doubts about whether this particular dream would come true. It has!

So now I ask you, "What are we going to dream up next?" Zora Neale Hurston said, "There are years that ask questions and years that answer." What questions can we conjure in service of what we want to become? How do you want to love? How do you want to explore the world? How do you want to serve your community? What passions do you want to make figural? What doubts do you want to leave behind?

I am so proud of you. I'm proud of how you've handled every obstacle. I'm thrilled at the ways you've explored. How you've healed yourself, how you've given room for others to heal themselves. You've trusted your truth. You've been unabashedly out of the closet as bisexual, and then you trusted your village enough to identify as non-binary. And now, after surviving COVID three times and living with long COVID, you're not afraid to say that you're disabled. Nothing has stopped you. You've traveled, you've created art, you've loved. You also have experienced divorce, immense heartbreak, loss, and grief.

Through it all, you've remained. You've thrived.

Always remember, you are your own dream come true.

Love,
Eris



Eris Zion Venia (she/they) is a Black, bisexual, nonbinary and disabled consultant, advocate, artist, and writer from Cleveland, Ohio. They are the proud parent of Yahsiin Zora Venia.

Fractured Advice

By Mary Jane Blank

To create is to love. Not a singular love absorbed into one subject, but the all-encompassing love for everything. Everything exists and you interpret. You recreate love with your style and perspective into an entertaining grotesque parody. The simulation of life as a protection from life itself. Never lose your connection to the ephemeral.

Appreciate debauchery. Embrace ecstasy. Destroy the moment.

The love divine is that which you can feel yet not understand: the rift between reality and fantasy. Stand in between them, one foot in both. Embrace the real, the physical, the tactile. Embrace the imagined, the beautiful, the phantasmagorical. Seek friendship and believe. Trust and you can be trustworthy. Love and you will be loved.

Mary Jane Blank is a bisexual transgender screenwriter from Los Angeles, California.



The Letter I Needed the Year Everything Broke Apart

By Alison Shea

Hi there. It has been a tough couple of days, huh?

You have had expectations of your older kids, and they have had expectations of you that have not quite aligned and have caused you all stress and hurt feelings.

The ex has been really awful again and is making it really hard to feel relaxed.

You have been having trouble sleeping, and the fatigue makes it all harder, not easier.

You are used to over-functioning, and when you can't, it can sometimes feel like you are not good enough. But you don't have to always do 120%.

...65% is passing, you know. Sometimes teenage daughters say mean things, and it doesn't mean they are true. You used to call your mom the name of that dictator from *Time* magazine. That wasn't true, even if it made you feel better when you were a teenager.

They sometimes reserve their worst for the ones they trust the most, a truly crappy irony, for sure!

You are trying so hard to "get it right."

Peace, baby cakes, just stop,

smell the roses,

watch the shit show,

eat the donuts and repeat after me: THERE IS NO "RIGHT" to get to. "RIGHT" is merely an illusion.

There is only right now, and "everything" does not fit on the tip of right now.

Honey,

you will falter,

you will fail,

you will survive failure,

you will rise again,

you will live through all of it,

and one day...

you may even get over the illusion that you could ever control any of it.

Love yourself harder, hug your babies, hug yourself, cut yourself some slack, Jack.

You will be okay, because you already are.

You don't have to be happy all the time.

That doesn't mean that you are depressed; it doesn't mean that you aren't. But when things are particularly crappy, and you observe that and feel down about that observable fact,

it is a sign that you are living in reality, not struggling with it.

Remember the words of Banksy: Learn to rest, not to quit.

Remember the words of me, your alter ego,

Learn to rest, not to judge yourself to shreds.

Remember the words of your favorite uncle:

"That 30 pounds of crap you got there, honey, is never gonna fit in this 10-pound bag,

and if you keep ignoring that fact, you're going to wind up covered in 20 pounds of crap, and how's that going to smell?"

Either find some other bags or stop trying to make physics become magic.

I love you, and you will be okay.

Alison Shea is an experienced Learning and Talent Development executive and mother of four humans and one dog west of Boston, Massachusetts. She is insatiably curious, dependably optimistic, and believes it will all be okay in the end. And if it is not okay, it's not the end.



Dear Young, Sweet, Confused Girl

By Taylor Raucher

You're not broken. I think we need to establish that right out of the gate. You are NOT broken. There is nothing wrong with what you feel, what you desire, or what you *don't* desire. I know it feels like you're supposed to be and want all of these things. You're getting these messages from outside of yourself, but you need to trust what's inside. Try not to listen to the voices that are infiltrating your mind. Don't buy into the stereotypes that are broadcasted at you, the notions of what it "means" to love and what that looks like.

You're feeling conflicted. You're feeling things that you don't quite know how to explain. You're noticing people, all people, in a way that is exciting but strange. You know that it's okay to be gay, but you don't think you are. It's a little confusing: you like boys, but you are realizing you also like girls. You feel the same sort of ache and longing, that pit in your stomach and tingle in your extremities for all genders, and that's scary. No one has ever explained this to you, that it's okay and valid and real to be attracted to more than one gender—and that's a societal failing, not your failing.

You're going to hide that part of yourself—the part that just wants to love—for a long time. And that's okay. You don't have the words yet, and it's hard to make sense of the world without language. You're going to stumble through young relationships with boys and learn what you do and don't like, make mistakes, and get hurt. There's going to be a lot of hurt. I wish we could make different choices and avoid the pain but, unfortunately, we have to fall to learn how to stand.

There's going to be darkness. There's going to be a time when you think that it's over, that it's all come to a crescendo, and that it's going to end in a spectacular BOOM. But you are going to survive that night. You'll rediscover yourself and all that makes you special and wonderful, all that makes you want to live and thrive. You're going to be open to new experiences. And you're going to find the words.

You'll finally allow yourself to love freely and openly. You'll meet a girl, and she will awaken something long dormant in you. And you will finally realize that it's all going to be okay and that what you feel and have felt is okay. You will understand the whole of yourself for the first time. And it will be remarkable. Breathtaking. Affirming.

Over time, you will realize that you also love a little differently. You will find that "bi" feels good and fits like a well-worn coat, but there will be a piece that is missing—the piece that always felt awkward and shameful and ugly. And once you embrace the word "ace," it will all come into clarity. It will take some adjusting and finding out how to wear it because it is new

and different and so taboo. But it doesn't make the love you experience any less real.

And you will feel broken sometimes. A little worse for wear, a little lost. But you're on the right path, finding yourself and your own way. You just need to remember that you are a full and complete and beautiful piece of art, a mosaic of the life you've led thus far.

Taylor Raucher is a queer writer who lives in Easthampton, Massachusetts with her two cats. Her work has been featured in The DG Sentinel, Historic Northampton's COVID-19 Stories, and in Dialogue at the Bar with Drinking Partner (Free Spirit).

Letter To Myself

By Alicia Vane

Alicia,

I want to be tender with you, but I know how that makes your skin crawl. So instead, let me grip your arm firmly and say:

Your intensity is not a bad thing. You are not too much. Do not minimize yourself.

Your sensitivity is not a weakness. You are not too soft. Do not calcify yourself.

Your queerness is not a phase. You are not too fickle. Do not restrain yourself.

One day you will come to love and protect these things fiercely. But, of course, that will take time. Perhaps too much time. Which is why I want to be tender with you and say:

Be gentle with yourself.

Love,

Alicia

Alicia Vane (she/her) works with books, writes books, consumes books, lives in books. Or rather, she lives in England, where she is writing a novel about a cult of strong women with dark secrets.

Little Gay Girl

By Rachel M.C. Finney

Why are you tracing screenshots
of Disney princesses, little gay girl—
following the anti-gravity flow
of a mermaid's hair
or the scalloped lines of petticoat
under a gold silk skirt?

Why did you want to talk
to the new girl all day, little gay girl?
What was it about her freckles,
her thick hair, her eyes,
perfectly dark and deep,
her toothy, fifth-grader smile,
the way that everything
about her was tinted warm
like honey? Really,
what was it about you?

When are you gonna wake up,
little gay girl? I am thinking back
on us, wondering how
I never understood my own
obsession with pretty girls.
I had to rewrite so many memories
when I realized what they were.

Open up your eyes,
little gay girl, and really look at hers.
Know enough to write
these memories correctly.
Know enough to love her
while you look at her.
Little gay girl—
let me know myself
a little sooner.

Rachel M. C. Finney is a poet from Springfield, Massachusetts. Her work is in the forthcoming book, Central Avenue Poetry Prize 2024, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, and others.



Abstract 4

By Jo-Anne Carlson



Acrylic art on stretched canvas

Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician who believes that who you love, how you love, and how many you love shouldn't matter.

Queerness

By Erica Galera



Born and raised in the province of Negros Oriental, Philippines, Erica Galera is a passionate individual with a deep love for creativity and self-expression. She is an emerging creative and works in a variety of mediums.

Dear Younger Me

By Robyn Walters

Dear Younger Me.

Surprised? Communications are much improved since your high school days.

I thought it might be helpful for you to know a few things of the life you are to live. We've made it to 86, at least. Hoping for a good many more happy, healthy years.

I recently thought of you while operating my amateur radio from a small laptop computer. I remembered that you passed your first radio test when you were 16, and I've continued that hobby for the past 70 years.

Some other things have changed, though, some of which began to surface in those teen years before you attended the U.S. Naval Academy and began a long Navy career. The lingerie fetish that is becoming a well-developed part of you continued for decades. You will find there's more to it than the attraction to women's clothes, though. You can't imagine it yet, but at age 58, I admitted to being a cross-dresser. Five years later, I surgically became Robyn. Now I'm just known as a very active elderly woman with bisexual leanings who once was male. My husband of 23 years and I live in a small condominium on the island of Maui. As Robyn, I have realized an attraction to both men and women. Maybe I will explore that duality more in my/our next life.

So don't worry, youngster. Sit back and enjoy the ride. Take notes; you might want to write about it, someday. I can recommend a good magazine.

Love,
An older, changed version of you

Robyn Walters is a married, non-practicing bisexual transgender woman, who is a BWQ proofreader and occasional content contributor.



To My Childhood Self

By Amelia Díaz Ettinger

Querida Niña,

That mystifying anger that erupts without warning, that leaves broken shards of dolls' severed heads, of new guitars fragmented, —is justified.

The words you need to heal are locked in hermetic vaults of fear. Their fears.

You don't know this yet, those adults who take care of your daily water and fancy clothing, of all the things they think you need—

all of them tremble with guilt from a lurid act —your abduction.

Yes, niña, you were stolen from your mother's humble nest. She didn't give you away. Something you'll learn

in time.

For now, hold hands with your anger, but don't walk under her shade. Feed your anger with compassion, after all, your anger

will keep you safe.

Amelia Díaz Ettinger is a BIPOC writer and poet. She met her Mexican mother at age 30 after she was abducted from Mexico to Puerto Rico.



Letter to My Younger Self

By Meghan Hansen

My dear 17-year-old Meghan:

I know you are confused. I know that you think you have a secret. I know that you think you must not burden others with it, and that you must figure it out on your own. But this secret does not belong to just you.

It is the year 2000 and you do not know what “bi” is. You have never heard of anyone who is bi; you have never seen a movie nor read a book with a single bi character. No wonder you are confused. But you won’t always be. Twenty years from now, a therapist will ask you: “Do you consider yourself bisexual?” You will be caught off guard, flush red, meet her eyes nervously, and stammer through something about a spectrum of sexuality and not being quite on the straight edge. This is true, but that is not all of it.

You have always been bi, since you have been idolizing beautiful strong girls and chasing cute funny boys. You are not simply off the straight edge of something; you are something unique and whole and beautiful.

Being bi means that you can connect with humans, regardless of their gender, in deep and profound ways. You will be drawn to people and their hearts for who they are, for what they do, for how they make you feel. Something in you sees that it is another person’s soul, their spark, their energy—not their body parts—that light you up in that deepest and most profound way.

As I engage in the fantasy of alerting you to all of this, I am tempted to say that I wish things would be different for you. That I wish we were born now instead of then, when marriage equality is a given and grade schools have gay-straight-alliance clubs, like the one your future son will join in third grade (which

he will tell you is not because he is bi, but because “third grade is all about joining clubs”). That I wish you did not grow up in a time where “liberal” parents said they would accept it if their child was gay but that, given the choice, they would choose straight, because “life is hard enough.”

What I most long for you to know is this: the part of you that likes boys is not worthier, more acceptable, or more valuable than the part of you that likes girls, or the whole of you that likes both.

I know you want everyone to think well of you. You do not want to cause a scene or be a problem. But you are not the problem. Your parents will still love you. You will still go to law school and have the career you want. You will still get married. You will still be a mom. You will be you, and you will be all the things that you are.

Some day you will realize all of this, and you will mourn and grieve the queer youth that you did not have. You will be angry thinking back about the high school counselor who rebuffed you when you tried to find these words. Sitting on the couch in her office, missing class to meet with her, bravely squeaking out that you are confused about your sexuality, nervously laughing as you stare at your sweaty hands and feel like you are floating. When she tells you that you’ll need your parents’ permission to keep talking to her, your stomach turns inside out. *This must be a really serious problem*, you think, *I better be sure before I cause a big fuss*. You are not the problem. You are not a fuss. You are perfect just as you are.

Love,
Your 40-year-old future self

Meaghan Hansen is a mom, a yogi, and a lawyer. She lives in the suburbs of Chicago with her family.



ice cream drippings

By Ayla Rose Miller



when courtney coulter exclaims that making out with curtis feels like ice cream melting down her cone into a warm pool of panty fudge you’ll want to agree, to belong to this pack of lollipop lickers, even though mario’s mouth made you feel like crawling back inside your own panties and hibernating

until the next freeze. release the need to appease the expectation of every

man you come across whose popsicle stands tall for the shape of your sundae snack for there will be a woman and then many women whose ice cream treat will make your entire body melt until you are but the mere ice cream drippings courtney once described.

Ayla Rose Miller is an enthusiastic new poet from northern New Jersey breaking into the writing scene.

Letter To Self

By Alyx Marsh

Alyx, I think you are finally beginning to realize just how far you've come in life, especially these last few years. The last 12 months have been a doozy, eh?

What do I have to say to you? I know you want to feel better. I know you need to know if it was easy, or hard, or messy, or a combination of all these things. I know you want the details, the step-by-step on how to come out and how to make everything work and how to not hurt anyone. I know how much you hate confrontation and just how much you've shoved down through your whole life, just so you don't make waves for those around you. But you feel so ill now, so unhappy, so dissatisfied with life.

I know you can't be yourself right now and that living authentically feels out of reach. No wonder you don't have a voice. No wonder you can't even begin to find your voice. It's been silenced so many times in so many ways. Death by a thousand gags.

Right now, life isn't what you wanted or what you thought you wanted. You want adventure and newness and interesting people and engaging conversations. You want kindness and positivity and non-judgmental space. You want community and connection and friends. You want to be part of something bigger and have something to show for your time here. So much is important to you, and you want to find something to contribute to and to help improve other people's lives. You don't want them to feel alone, like you do now.

Loneliness—you know that feeling so well. It's one thing to be alone, but the kind of loneliness felt while in a crowd of people is the worst feeling. The shame of loneliness bites hard.

But right now, you're doing the work. You're finding the people. You've not quite reached out yet and found that real-life community which I know is so important to you. But you're on the cusp of it—you can taste it. You just need to take that leap. And yes, your wings will catch you. Did you know you have wings? They're big and beautiful with pink, purple, and blue stripes, and while they're not thoroughly tested yet, they will not fail you, because they innately know how to work.

Deep down, you know your sexuality. You know who you are attracted to, and you don't have to prove yourself to anyone. But on the outside, it's different, isn't it? People want proof, and you feel obligated to give it to them. But you don't have to. No one is entitled to you.

I know you want to know what happens before it happens; we all do, but you can't because there's no growth in that. Life is meant to be a journey that means wrong turns, U-turns, and unexpected destinations. Breakdowns too. All that is part of your journey. And remember, wrong turns can sometimes send you to the most wonderful places.

I won't tell you everything—you're not meant to know. You're meant to trust yourself, and you learn to trust yourself by experimenting and doing and practicing and falling down and getting back up again and repeating the process.

The path is not easy; it's not meant to be because this is where wisdom grows. But it's not an ordeal either. The path will test you, but it will also strengthen you. It is there for you to experience, so when it's time, you can show others the way and help them on their journey, let them know that they're not the only ones and that they're not alone.

Your craving for community, for like-minded people and friends, is intense and totally valid. We all need that. You are quite the lone wolf, but you don't always have to be. You don't have to go this alone. It doesn't always have to feel this hard, this uncomfortable, this messy and painful.

You will find your people, and you will find your purpose.

You must speak up, though. You must reveal what's going on with you. Slowly, little by little. Not everything at once. And you don't have to tell everyone. Be judicious in what you say and to whom.

You can do this. You will do this. It is the only way.

I love you in every way for all that you are. You are stronger than you think.

A.

Alyx is a 50+ late-in-life, nonbinary bi/omnisexual person using writing as a creative outlet to discover who they really are. Happy to age but not get old, Alyx is a born and bred Australian living in Sydney who loves being outdoors and adding to their tattoo count.

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Dear Me: You Won't Feel Alone Much Longer

By AJ Dolman

This might seem impossible from where you're sitting, young, shy, lonely me, but try to picture it anyway:

It's the fall of 2018, 24 years from where you are in 1994. We're telling a story to a bookstore full of people. That part's actually far from new for us. Some writers don't like reading in front of an audience, but I do. Except for the rare bout of nerves, I usually enjoy being up here. I love the visceral connection of sharing something I wrote without the barriers of time and distance between me and an audience.

This kind of connection seems unimaginable at your age, I know. You've only recently started writing in earnest. But I promise I've never felt more connected to a group of strangers than I do at this event.

It's the [Toronto Bi+ Arts Festival](#), second edition. Living five hours to the north, in Ottawa, I missed their opening year. But I'm lucky to be part of this second year's Authors Showcase. I'm sharing the bill with a roster of very talented bi+ Canadian writers working with a range of genres, styles, and backgrounds.

This afternoon's event is at Toronto's Glad Day Books, now described as the oldest still operating queer bookshop in the world. It's a great space, and one I've been in before, but I was nervous when I got here today. Who knew there could be so many people at a daytime reading? Seriously, how did they fit so many chairs into one small shop? There's an actual ticket-taker by the door. The dozens of attendees who couldn't nab a seat are leaning along the bar or standing by the windows. Where did this many bi+ people and allies even come from?

Like anyone who has come out, I've had to do it a lot, at different times, in different contexts, to different people, and to wildly different receptions. I don't believe it gets easier for most of us, I'm sorry to tell you. I think most of us always brace for it to go badly, even if we're almost certain it will be fine this time, with this person, in this space, probably.

Now in your early 20s, you've only just started coming out to select friends, and you're doing it as lesbian. You could feel when you first called us that, that it wasn't our complete truth. But it was a lot truer than pretending we were straight. And it's easier to explain, isn't it, both to straight people and fellow queers? By the mid-'90s you're living in, most North Americans know what gay and lesbian mean, and accept that those are real identities—things people actually are, even if they don't accept the people themselves.

"Bisexuality" as a description, though, still feels nebulous to you, I know—both too many different things and nothing at all. Instead of being a valid, tangible identity, coming out as bi seems to you like a great way to start an argument about whether or not you know who you are, and leaves you open to yet more

judgment and outside analysis.

Decades from your time, studies will show the B makes up more than 50% of the LGBTQ+ population. I would love for you to have known that. But, instead, like many of our fellow bi+ folk, you feel like an anomaly inside an anomaly, your secret letter tacked onto the end of the campus rainbow group, not really meant to be said out loud or show up to meetings.

I can show you how it gets better, though.

I look around Glad Day to focus on some tangible details to ground myself before I'm called up to read. Amid the dazzle of fabulous outfits and stacks of bi+ books, I realize two important things: everyone here, from the many organizers, staff, and writers, to audience members I've never met, already knows I'm bi. So, I'll never have to come out to them. And, everyone here either is also bi+, or actively supporting the bi+ people in their lives.

That sinks in more as I'm introduced and move to the front. It produces a strange mix of euphoria and relief, set against a lifetime of memories of being asked if I was "actually queer" at gay bars, being called a "tourist," feeling on the outside in both straight and queer society. Of having people, both queer and straight, assume an endless list of things about me based on what I've said my orientation is and on the gender of my partner. Of watching the same things happen to other bi+ folks.

Surrounded by bi+ community, I suddenly feel ridiculously fortunate to have reached this moment within my lifetime. It's not something I ever even thought to hope for. To be in a room full of people who know my orientation, and be certain not one of them resents it, disbelieves it, judges it, or assumes that it will change or, based on my partner's gender, that it already has.

Then, I start to read a bi+ story to a bi+ audience for the first time in my life. It goes great. But, when I'm done, I know someone is missing.

So, I tell the room about our mam, Ietje Dolman. She died the previous year, just a few years after I finally came out to her. Yes, we dreaded that coming out for plenty of reasons, but the surprise is it will now always be our favorite.

Because, sweetheart, get this: she answers us with "Me, too." Born in 1932 and married to our dad most of her life, she, as far as I know, never defined herself as bisexual out loud to anyone else. She stayed otherwise closeted to the end. But she showed me pictures of her secret girlfriends from before she met Dad, told me all about them, and about keeping herself a secret.

And in this bookstore, in Toronto, 24 years from where you are, I get to tell festival-goers a little bit about her story, and, in that way, bring her there with us for a moment. I get to show her all these amazing people. And they applaud her.

The walk back to our seat is a little blurry.

I think Mam would love that the Bi+ Arts Festival, and other Bi+ Pride events, exist now. She would have loved all the books and the craft fair and the art shows. I certainly know you will.

Like us, Mam would, above all, have loved knowing how much she wasn't alone. Because that is the amazing thing you have yet to discover: you are absolutely not alone in this. You are about to realize you never have been. And, I can promise, you never will be.

Editor, poet, and fiction writer AJ Dolman (shelthey) is the author of Lost Enough: A collection of short stories and three poetry chapbooks. They co-edited Motherhood in Precarious Times and a full-length poetry collection, Crazy/Mad (Gordon Hill Press). Day of Pink speaker and founder of Ottawa's Crafty Bi Nature, Dolman is a bi+ rights advocate living on unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin territory in what is currently known as Canada.



November Meditation (Letter to Myself)

By Mārta Ziemelis

If your own mind is too loud to bear,
if the world feels like it's shattering
faster than you can comprehend,
try letting the woods talk to you.
The woods at dusk speak their own language.
Listening becomes easier
if you let the rhythm of walking
silence your thoughts.
Let the deep, gnarled roots,
the feather-soft needles of pine trees
hold your anxiety.
Step slowly.
Let the soil, the leaf-mulch scented like spices
carry you when your feet are unsteady.
Let the bright pink streaks in the sky,
fading to amethyst gray,
gently embrace your loneliness.
Let the curling, papery bark of leafless birches
brush your cheek as you breathe.
This communion
may not mend the world's great wounds,
but it will sing softly to you,
endless small hope-notes
of life and spirit renewing.



Mārta Ziemelis is a Tkaronto (Toronto)-based emerging poet and established literary translator.

Thank You, Little Me

By Anisa Pračić-Šehić

To be a free woman with dignity and a high level of self-care is hard. To be a pansexual woman in a patriarchal society such as Bosnia is very challenging.

What does it mean to be a woman? What is the beauty of being a woman? I would say it's like being a superhero. You have enormous power to see things differently, with the ability to understand from different points of view.

Being a pansexual woman gives me pleasure and energy, and I feel that I'm outside of a patriarchal cage. Since I came out, I've trusted myself more and recognized many possibilities to express myself. It doesn't matter if it's about how I dress, walk, or talk; it gives me wings to fly. It gives me the strength to fight all the fights that life and society have presented me with. Being a pansexual woman shows me that there's no place that I can't be and position I can't take and be the best I can be. Recognizing myself and meeting myself as a human being with infinite capacity opens the door to healthier and more independent relationships without being limited by gender rules. Being pansexual helps me to love myself more and appreciate myself more so I can freely, without fear or pressure, share myself and my values with others. I can be more of a daughter, colleague, friend, and partner in my relationships. I can be a better citizen in my country and help other straight, lesbian, bi+, transgender, and queer women on their way to self-realization.

So, if I were to write a letter to myself, I would say a big thank you and remind myself to never give up. Never give up because of yourself, because of the little girl inside you and because of all the women around you. You're doing great. Continue to grow, swim through the waters of freedom, and never relinquish your determination. Stay proud, for your resilience is a force that paves the way for a brighter, more inclusive tomorrow.

Anisa Pračić-Šehić is an activist for LGBTIQ+ rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Here Goes...

By Valerie Tendai Chatindo

Val, I saw this call, this whole *letter to myself* thing.

I didn't want to do it, if I'm being honest, because I wondered what I'd tell you. Whether I'd feel obligated to tell you what I know you want to hear. I don't want to give you a false sense of optimism, one which blinds you from living in the present moment. The kind of optimism that has you grasping desperately onto the hope of something better in a far-off future at the expense of the present moment. I don't want to be deceitful.

Yet... I don't want to hurt you with the truth.

This moment feels intrusive, leaving me feeling like a stranger intent on disassembling the façade which has sustained a herd of hopefuls in the form of humanity. I am a wandering and unwelcome time traveler existing in a matrix where I should not be, telling you things you may not be prepared to hear. I feel like a villain, yet I find I am exactly the voice you need. The villain you need.

Will you forgive me?

You may choose to burn this letter right now, but should you be brave (or mad) enough to continue, then here goes:

Life is an endless struggle, Val, but not in the ways you think. Materialism is just part of the condition of being human. To live is to do so in a state of constant dissatisfaction. You want so much, and you will have it. But even then, you will still want more. At one point you will want for money and, just when you have accumulated it, you will long for a lack of it. You want a high-paying job, in a misguided attempt to gain the approval of family. Impressed they will be. But afterwards you'll realize all you want is the struggle that comes with pursuing your dreams. To write and to thrive in a simplistic life where you are your own priority.

Trust your heart a little more. Deep down you know what you really want. Yet fear paralyzes you. Fear and hope. The hope that your parents will look at you someday with something other than disapproval in their eyes. You've done everything right, and even so, that has never been enough. It's okay to accept that maybe your story is different. That not all families have happy endings. That someone has to be that black sheep and maybe that's your role in this incarnation. A soul has to experience all aspects of humanity before it graduates to a greater existential realm. It has to record the lessons that are presented through its many walks through life. Suffering, villainy, tyranny, love, kindness, wickedness, and helplessness. You have to record it all.

It's okay to walk away from the expectations of those who will live in unwavering disappointment in you. Love them.

Love them from a distance—your happiness and peace are limited resources. Nonetheless, you will soon come to realize that they are more important than you have ever thought.

Faith is a beautiful thing, but while you're waiting on your desires to materialize, help yourself as best you can. Don't needlessly suffer, then blame God and the universe for your woes. Religion, especially the way it is taught in Africa (an attempt to pacify our people, which has worked) can delude you into fetishizing pain and suffering so much that you concede and accept them. Life can suck, Booboo, but even then, don't let it drag you down without a fight. Life can drag you to hell and back. You are also allowed to kick and scream and slap it in the face while it tries. You are Jacob. Everything you have you have fought for, even God himself.

Sexuality, spirituality, love, ambition. I could give you a lot of advice on these matters, Valerie, but you're smart. You'll figure it out.

I guess all that's left to say is that, hey, you're going to doubt yourself, and this doubt will be compounded by the discouragement and cynicism of the people around you. You have larger-than-life dreams. Dreams to write and publish books, to open research centers, and to qualify as a sexologist. You want to live! It's true what they say: that everyone has dreams, but not everyone who dreams lives to see those dreams come to fruition. Sure, everyone can dream, but not everyone is willing to fully pursue those dreams. Dreams hurt, and not everyone is willing to suffer for them. I wish I could say confidently that everything will work. I know no better than you do. What I do know is that life is a better experience when you live it chasing that itch. That *what if*.

Chase it!

Val, please don't lose your hope.

Valerie Tendai Chatindo is a biochemistry graduate from the University of Zimbabwe, a writer, and a sexual health and awareness educator. Her work has appeared in The Kalahari Review, #Enthuse, Bhizimusi, Creepy podcast, Pink Disco, Agbowó, and Literary Yard. *The 28-year-old resides in Harare, Zimbabwe with her cat, Muffins, where she has begun her own literary platform, Shumba Literary Magazine, and blogs on her personal platform, valeriechatindo.wordpress.com.*



You Have Never Been a Ghost

By Alice Edgar

To my 18-year-old self:

You have never been drunk. I am looking through your old Pinterest account and you have a “pin” that says something about greeting death drunk and in love. You have never been in love. However, you have greeted death—many times.

Let me introduce myself. I am you, at age 31. I am writing from the future. I am someone who has literally *been you*. I have seen through your eyes. I have been in your body and mind. I am going to try to warn you of a few things.

Buckle up, buttercup.

In one year, at age 19, you will wish you were dead.

In two years, at age 20, you will wish you were more dead. That is the year that, on your birthday, you will realize you have hit another decade and that your depression has no end in sight. You will work at a fast-food restaurant for two weeks before you quit, because you couldn't flip hamburgers fast enough. You will drive miles around Connecticut and western Massachusetts that summer in search of love in the dark. You will see a therapist and almost walk out on her and will be told to not come back if you do so. You will return to your seat and listen to her words.

You will get better.

You will get better because you meet a wonderful woman. This is the summer you turn 20. Your mother is a ghost in the house you must reside in. She will haunt you, and you will break. You will go to live with the wonderful woman for two weeks that summer. She will save you.

In three years, you are 21. You have your first drink. You get drunk for the first time—but you're not getting drunk to erase the pain, not yet. The woman who saved you the previous summer commits suicide, and you are left alone to consider that. The woman who saved you the previous summer commits suicide, and it is a beautiful August day, blazing in its heat.

You will do research later. You will learn that people who have bipolar disorder on average live 13 years fewer than those in the general population. You will do a quick calculation and discover that this woman died 50 years too soon. You will learn about the suicide attempts, the suicide rates of bipolar disorder. Later, you, too, will be diagnosed with bipolar disorder. You will get a tattoo in honor of the woman—the exact same one she had. It will serve as a reminder that you are not a statistic. It will serve as a reminder that depression cannot win, that you have made a permanent promise to live.

In five years, you will meet a horrible man whom you date for three years. This is your 20s, and this was supposed to be your years to grow into yourself—but you were robbed of that. I want you to understand that men can be horrible and that you can be at the epicenter of that horror. They are worse than ghosts. They are worse than ghosts because they are very much alive, and they are very much out for blood.

In 10 years, there will be a pandemic. You will be unemployed, alone, and drunk most of the time. The drinking is to erase the pain of being alone. This will be your life's work: finding a way to not feel so alone. During the pandemic, you will also turn to writing. You will start to make a name for yourself. You will become someone who writes, and will be somewhat known, and that will be enough.

Right now, you are in a mental hospital. Your ghost mother refuses to visit you. Your uncle, her brother, visits you. He presents you with three classic works of literature that you will never forget. He says, “These are for the boredom.” For some reason, he gets it. He will be dead in five years. You need to appreciate him, now.

In the mental hospital, you feel like a phantom. You have let down your entire family. You have no friends—you haven't yet met the woman who will save you. You walk the hallways and feel like a disease. I want you to know that you are not a disease—you are not *your* disease. You are just who you are, and that is enough. It must be.

Perhaps there is a lot of death in your future. I need you to know that your death is not one of those deaths. You, at age 31, are still very much alive. You are not a ghost. You are not a phantom, or a disease, or a statistic.

In 13 years, you will be married, enjoying a day by the ocean in San Francisco, eating oysters with your husband, and you will be pleasantly drunk, but not too much so. It will be a good day. You will still be someone who suffers, but not all the time, and those are my parting words.

Much love from the future,

Alice

Alice Edgar received her BA in English from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She has previously been published in three publications. She resides in Northern California with her husband and their corgi, Ernest Hemingway.

A Love Letter to the Worst Version of Myself

By Isabel Maurer

To My Younger Self,

I know what you're going through, and I'm sorry. You'd say the same to me, I think.

Don't listen to your mother. I know you know that already. You think you don't listen to her, but she's still getting in your head. While you're at it, don't listen to your dad either, because he's wrong about a lot of stuff too.

Actually, scratch that last part, because listening to your dad about some things will mean that gradually over time, the stuff he listens to you about will change his mind. I mean, it will take him hearing it from people other than you—you know, people he actually respects and didn't change the nappies of—but he'll change his mind, and he'll remember that you were the first person to tell him he was wrong. Maybe. He'll remember that eventually, at least, and he'll tell his friends that they're wrong as well.

Your sister is annoying and frustrating—believe me, in hindsight, you'll realize you were just as bad. But in a few years, they're going to tell you that they're not your sister, they're your sibling, and you two are going to have each other's backs about a lot of stuff, and it's going to make you closer than ever. They're better than you think they are—or at the very least, they're on their own journey, and they'll get there. And sometimes you're going to call each other to chat about something random, and you'll talk for an hour, and you'll realize that they might be the person you love most in the world and who loves you most in the world. Apart from your parents, that is, who, despite their flaws, definitely do love you—if they didn't, they wouldn't be so sad to say goodbye every time you leave.

You think this is hard, what you're going through now? Well, it probably is. It's been a few years for me. I still remember what it felt like to get a diagnosis, the specific pain after physical therapy, a few fleeting memories of the frustration and the loneliness, but I can't remember what it felt like to be years into it with no idea if the end was in sight, never mind when that end would be. I can't remember how I felt every hour of every day, because they all blur and blend together. I have some of my writing from then, from you, and I remember disagreeing with it months after I put it to paper. It talks about how most days I was fine, and I remember thinking that it was more accurate to say that I was only fine some days, because at one point the bad days really outweighed the good. I don't remember when that balance shifted back, but I know it did, because I've had a lot of good days and not too many bad ones recently.

I can't tell you that your struggle is worse than what's coming, what's with me now, because I really don't know. You're going

to come out on the other side stronger, though. I know that sounds like a platitude. But I'm almost convinced it's the truth. Who knows who I would be now if I had gotten to be a normal teenager? Probably insufferable.

The things that are true about you now won't be true forever. You're going to find new passions, and they're going to help you get out of bed in the morning. I know it feels like nothing could do that right now, but that feeling is wrong. I won't tell you how to find them because you will manage just fine on your own. Promise.

When you were a child, you figured out that your parents were fallible—that they weren't right about everything, and it was okay to disagree with them and form your own opinions. Yes, you're going to get better at doing that, not just parroting the most recent thing you read. It's still a challenge—I think it might be a lifelong one. We're working on it. Anyway, sometime soon, you're going to find out that your parents are fallible in other ways—they've never been young, not as long as you've known them, but they've never been old, either. That's going to change. And you're going to get better, so much better. There's going to be about one family holiday where everyone's healthy before the shoe ends up on the other foot. That's not going to feel fair. It isn't. I'll let you live through that one yourself, but I thought it might be easier with more warning.

The best year of my life so far was the worst for my family, and you've got that to look forward to. Work harder than I did at not regretting a minute. Love yourself and stop trying to convince yourself that everyone else needs to do it for you. There are so many cool people in the world that you haven't met yet. You're going to love them, and they're going to love you. Run towards your future with open arms, and meet me here. Be exactly who you are, because I didn't love being you, but I love being me, and I wouldn't be who I am today without being you first.

I love you for that. I know you'd love me too.

Yours, with sincerity,

Your older self

Isabel Maurer is a freelance writer of comedy and short stories from Lincoln, England. Her work has appeared in Document 1 and The Hard Times.

Doubting Myself. Finding Myself. Freeing Myself.

By Eleanor Twine

I am now 15.
Some still say,
“It could be a phase”

She'll grow out of it
“Are you sure?”
Too young to know better
“You're still growing”
She'll grow out of it

No one
No one
No one
Says that
If you say
“I'm het”
You don't
Even need
To say it
They just assume
Of course...
They all assume
It's only "normal"

After all...
I didn't
Even know
That bisexual
There is only:
Heterosexual
& (maybe)
Homosexual
Was really
An actual thing,
Something
We didn't
erase bi...
That
People
People other than me
People like me
It, you,
just don't exist
Identified as
Then when
I found it
The right label
I still
Didn't truly
Know

You are alone
I had all this
Information
Support
Community
You don't know what is good for you!
But I didn't
Trust myself
So
I didn't look
I didn't search
I didn't even try
I just sat
And stayed

It's not too late...
And waited
And listened
Be careful!
Til random comments
You can still be "straight,"
“I mainly prefer...”
“70/30 girls more than boys”
“My attraction is random”
“It isn't always equal”
“It's more about personality”
“I'm queer”
Just be normal!
“Me too.”

All cobbled together
Into knowledge
Finally gave me
Enough
Pay attention!

Enough to
What's wrong with you?
Trust myself
Trust what I
Had known
Before I even
Acknowledged it
Within myself.
Enough to
Finally
Free myself

If I could share
Anything with
My younger self
Who at the
Terrifying
And wonderfully
Turbulent age
Of thirteen
Started discovering
New parts
Of her being
It would be this:
You are not alone
You are not wrong
You do not need
To be anyone
Or anything
Other than you
And you have the ability
The ability to learn
To grow
To find yourself
To find your people
Your community
Do not be afraid
To try
To live
To break
GO!
Relinquish the fear
That kept you immobile

Now get out there
Trust yourself
Be proud
And explore

*Eleanor Twine is a student in central
Australia.*

To My Thirty-Year-Old Self

By Diana Dickey

There are many chapters between this letter and where you are now. I know you well enough to know that you are not likely to believe some of what I'm about to tell you, so I am going to skip ahead and let you know that someday you are going to fucking love yourself. (I also understand that my use of the "F" word may be a bit shocking to you!)

You are trying so hard to do the right thing, but you are making yourself miserable in the process. Your world is so very small right now, and the spaces you are trying to fit into and the people you call your people are not your spaces or your people. When you start speaking up and calling out injustice, you will quickly learn that they were never your people. In your 50s, you will be on a quest to find new people. That is going to be challenging, but it will be okay. You are going to deal with some trauma. You will learn firsthand that family is not necessarily defined by DNA. You will find an amazing therapist who will help you unpack all of this and build your life back. Speaking of DNA, one day you will take a DNA test, meet some amazing relatives you never knew you had, and learn that your heritage is so much broader and more beautiful and diverse than anyone ever told you.

One of the things that you are doing well—and that you need to continue to do—is to have an open mind and always learn. Even though you're in a place now that doesn't appreciate independent or critical thinking, you're doing it. Keep it up! You are going to learn so much about yourself and slowly understand who you truly are. Right now, you keep a lot buried deep down while also trying to stand for something that isn't you—not just yet. Hold on, though, because that day is coming, and when it does, you will finally start to experience inner peace and freedom and find your passion. You're going to learn new terms and new ways of understanding yourself and others (bi? pan? demi? ace?). Then, some of those people who were never your people will tell you how wrong you are for advocating for the LGBTQA+ community. (Remember, they were never your people!) Also, on a lighter note, as a former English teacher, you will silently delight in the fact that the whole world now knows what a pronoun is.

I'm not going to give you any advice since you probably won't listen, but trust me, one day you are going to wake up and fucking love yourself!

Diana Dickey lives in the Pacific Northwest of the United States and when not working at her day job, she loves to work on LGBTQA+ causes and to travel.

Letter to Myself

By Jacq Valencia

Beneath the sea
noises are muffled
movements, restrained
while you've floated below, treading water in wait
the pull has always been felt

up

your bones knew which way to rise
your eyes knew which way the light shines
your soul knew where it wanted to be

at once, you let go, gave
in to the natural step, allowed
the pull to take over and bring you in a single second

open air

You were not too loud, to let out the roar you'd held back.
You were not too bold, to say your name from your bare chest.
You are not too much, you are yourself.

Known to you
the people that will be lost were never yours
grief
too will make itself known, from below, belching
the release will startle

you turn away, the wave comes from underneath to lift you
sky will fill your gaze
you'll find your breath, the air's
crispness felt in your belly,
sun warming skin

revel in the breeze
rebel in the day
grief blooming to relief

And while the hands of The Bitter grasp at you
like the kelp
below,

you'll be out of reach, out of the depths, out.

Jacq Valencia is a poet, creative, and mother living in Boston, Massachusetts.

Letter To Myself

By Violette Rose-Jones

we are all collections of ourselves, blood and shadows, pooling on our deep bedrock, imprinted on our concrete, as it is in Hiroshima, half black and certain, half ghostly inference... remember this.

"...flash-bulb memory is most associated with traumatic events but in reality, only requires a large emotional response as a trigger. An event so small as to go unnoticed by others, may, in the right circumstances, cause an impression to linger for decades in the memory, a bright, loud spot in our timelines..." (Michelline & Cabot, 1996, p.6)

...we are stalled on those town hall steps, still waiting for him to catch us up, grow up, marry, divorce, develop wrinkles that are not laugh lines, knowing he is not even in his grave grates. we found the records, said no remains present. did his mother make a place for what remained of him in her new world before she died? we stumbled downhill to his cross that winter day reminding me of the May morning that may never have even happened the way we thought exactly when she told me about the ambulances? what happened to his neck? we do not, will not, know not then or now, but no mourning here, just a tiny corner of our life grayed out... we remember...

"Over time, the nature of some causal events can instigate an obsessive revisitation, especially if questions linger or there are unresolved emotions involved [...] These fragments of unnaturally sharp recall can become a marshaling point for anxieties that arise in other areas of the subject's life." (Michelline & Cabot, 1996, p.10)

...from the river we remember him, swinging, over my head, a flash of scrotum...we blushed...he was ordinary not awful, not our type but so nice, too old, our friend liked him, plain but nice as he was, brown eyes, just a little too wet. we went to the river that day just to swim not pivot our life...remember this?

"The modern world mandates heroic victims. As is frequently lamented on social media, no murder victim is ever a mean-spirited drunk; violent death saints them all, sanitizes them out of their humanity. Perfection seems to be a prerequisite for one to deserve to be mourned in the public gaze." (Bellingham, 2020, p.252)

that night in the tent, in the woods with these things, we lit a candle, tried to remember the dead, but the we of then is only a shell, a vacated mess that echoes, that left an impression on ourself once but, that now, we can barely recall. were we funny? did we bite? we try to trace the outline of ourself and fail... our mind's eye never renders him right either... gets the smell, misses the voice, recalls the meaning but loses the words. the we then is not more correct than the memory of that young man that's been dead decades... remember that.

"After a significant neurological insult, retrograde amnesia may develop. This typically covers the time immediately preceding the trauma and for an arbitrary length of time into the past. Typically it returns in full or part over time. The likelihood of a memory being regained



has a direct relationship to the duration between formation and the event that caused the insult; incidents immediately beforehand and the details of the event itself are the least likely to return." (Margo, Fells & Kentland, 1986, p.10)

so many versions of us have come and gone these decades passed but those pebbles that stowed away in our pockets grew into boulders over time... remember.

Violette Rose-Jones is a disabled, bisexual poet and visual artist from the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. She has been widely published in haiga, tanka, and haiku forms.

Bellingham, M., 2020. "True Crimes: The Internet, Murder and Finding the Guilty," *Journal of Speculative Criminology*, Is.5, Vol.2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27163721>.

Margo, M., Fells, B., & Kentland X.A. 1986. *Memory and Identity*, Caswell & Lincoln, Boston, Massachusetts.

Michelline, M & Cabot B.B, 1996. "Flashbulb Memory: Does It Help Establish and Maintain Trauma in Survivors of Abuse?" *Journal of Trauma Psychology*, Autumn 1996:6-10.

[NOTE: All quotes and citations used are fictional.]

Letter to My Younger Selves

By Anonymous

This one's hard. You will live. You will survive. I know you think you won't, but you do. You will be shaped by the absolute hideousness of humanity, but you will survive; and in surviving you will affect so many lives, with courage, with freedom, and with truth—and you won't ever know how many or who.

To my very young self: Breathe. Try to stay calm. Try to talk to your brother more; try to listen to him more. Pay more attention to all the music he listens to and plays. Try to talk to your big sister more; learn how to sew from her. Laugh more with your dad. Follow him and your big brother around more. Learn as much as you can from them. Hug your mum more. Be kinder to your sisters.

Try not to listen to everyone's gender bias. Don't wear that awful hot-pink-and-white, frilled, polka-dotted and striped outfit you got for your ninth birthday—it will scare you off wearing pink for decades.

Don't eavesdrop so much. You don't need to hear those strange, quiet muffled conversations about this adult or that adult. You don't need to absorb that ignorance. No one will lock you up and throw away the key. No one will send you to the looney bin or to an asylum hospital. No one will section you. Stay quiet, but don't absorb that ignorant rubbish.

Don't listen to your ballet teacher—you do have grace, and you will be enough. Keep doing ballet. Remember how much you love it. Be careful of your knees—wear the knee guards and do more strength work. That will save you from blowing your cartilage. Play more soccer. Remember how much you love the game. Even when the boys tease you, keep playing.

Sing more, little one. You have a beautiful voice. You don't stutter when you sing. Really read and feel the music. Do more drama at school. You love those musicals and plays. You love Shakespeare's sonnets. You love being onstage. It is frightening, but you do love it. Learn everything about the stage, about direction, about production. You never know where that may lead you.

Pick up your classical guitar again, young one. It wasn't your fault, or your talent or skill, or the music or the guitar that hurt you. Find somewhere to play; find another teacher (and take your brother with you this time). Keep playing.

Don't listen to your crabby art teacher, the one who doesn't understand your abstract and your vision. Don't let her or the other girls in that awful racist homophobic school rob you of your joy in art: in the abstract, in the bigger perspective, in sculpting, in engineering, and in design. Don't let anyone stop that.

Do listen to Annette about your artistic talent. Go to art school. Don't be so stubborn about not being brainwashed by more people telling you what you can and cannot do in your art. It's your art, not theirs. But do go to art school.

Pay more attention to Paul Jarvis, the best teacher you will ever meet. Listen better, ask more questions, write better essays, read more books. He is offering you a way to criticize and learn to live in the world in the smartest way. History, argument, logic, human nature, and psychology. He really wants you to flourish and follow your righteous passion.

Don't fight with your dad so much. Breathe and understand he is from a different generation and lived through deprivation and hardship at the hands of others and the war. Don't judge him on what you think you know. Don't fight with him. It takes a long time for you both to come back from it. And you don't have the time.

Tell Connor you love him, just one more time. Your heartbreak will be inconsolable, but you will survive. It will be one of the hardest years you will ever live, but you will get through it.

Watch the drinking, Kiddo. I know why you are doing it. You know why you are doing it. But if I could ask you to do just one thing, watch it. Don't binge. Be responsible.

Let Andrew down easier when he asks you out. He is a kind and sweet young man, so let him down easier. I know you will try, but he will still be hurt. Don't talk to Chris. He's just a fool with a great car. Talk about the car but don't talk to Chris that much. Do go on dates with Bella, with Christine, with Emma. I know it's scary but trust me, you will find out more about yourself.

DO NOT go on that late-night date with Jon. He is a bad person, and you know it. Katrina is warning you, so don't go. Don't sneak out of Mum and Dad's house for that late-night fish and chips. It ends very, very badly, and you won't even talk about it for another 12 years. Don't trust him, and just don't go.

Do buy that Holden HD station wagon and get your brother to check it over with you. Travel around Australia—you will love it. Be careful walking through parks at night and buy a better camera to take those photos of the aurora australis.

Don't marry John. Oh god, DO NOT marry John. Escape with Mardi on the houseboat. DO NOT marry John. Listen to Mardi when she crosses six lanes of highway traffic just like you do in your jeans and denim shirt, wedding hair done, veil on, to sit in that park in the middle of Ipswich. Listen to Mardi when she says you do not have to marry him.

Obligation gets you four years, six months and three days of physical and psychological violence and harm. Do not marry John.

Make sure you see Mardi more in the hospital. Make sure she knows how much you love her. How she made you the best person you could be, how she gave you strength and truth. The next few years are going to feel like they are killing you, and in a way they are. You are going to be strong enough to survive, Kiddo. And I am so sorry you must lose her so soon.

Therapy is going to be very good for you. Don't feel ashamed—none of it was your fault. None of it. Take your time. Listen to Christian. Trust him. He's a good one. You will survive past 30, and that's going to fuck with your head for a long time (every year, in fact), but I promise it's a good thing.

Apologize to Belinda and to Sher. You will miss them for the rest of your life. Just talk it through with them. And tell them how much you value and love them, too. And stop bloody drinking so much. Just stop. The self-medicating isn't helping.

Spend more time with Wayne. Spend more time in your world together. Travel more with him. Listen to him more and have him listen to you. Laugh more and cry more together. Don't be so stubborn. Make up properly. Make up sooner. Go over to his place that Saturday. You'll know the one. Don't accept him changing plans. Just don't. Tell him you love him and make certain he listens. Don't leave him alone that Saturday.

Put more money away when you earn it. You're going to need it, Kiddo. It'll seem like it will go on forever, but honestly, rough times are coming, and you will need all your savings.

Remember to breathe. The next few years are going to be incredibly hard. Harder than your 20s, harder than your 30s. So hard you will think you won't survive. You are going to doubt everything and everyone. You are going to doubt yourself, and you are going to want to stop all the pain and heartache and grief. You are going to want to run away; you're going to want to end it. But don't, because you are going to find people who love you for exactly who you are. You are going to find your voice and you are going to find out exactly how amazing you are. What you have survived, and what you have turned that pain into. And your Beautiful Humans are going to love you for it.

You will live. You will survive. You will be shaped by the absolute hideousness of humanity. But you will survive, and in surviving you will affect so many lives, with courage, with freedom and with truth, and you don't need to know how many or who.

Remember to breathe.

Anonymous, from Sydney, Australia, is a pansexual and nonbinary community leader, writer, and painter, grateful to still be here.



In Memory of Dr. Beth Firestein

On Jan 21st we lost a bi+ leader, Dr. Beth Firestein, bisexual psychologist, and author. She died at age 66 from pancreatic cancer—far too young, and she was passionate about LGBTQ+ and women's issues. For those outside of the field of psychology, she wrote two important books: *Bisexuality: The Psychology and Politics of an Invisible Minority* and *Becoming Visible: Counseling Bisexuals Across the Lifespan*. Her last major publication was *Women Sharing Wisdom: A Facilitator's Guide to Starting a Wise Women Group*. I used *Becoming Visible* as the required textbook for my one-day "Bi+ Affirmative Psychotherapy" course at Antioch University Los Angeles from 2012-2020.

I had the privilege of meeting her at a speaking engagement many years ago where she spoke about her clinical work. I remember being starstruck and calling her a role model, and she humbly played it off. Two years ago, I emailed Dr. Firestein to invite her to speak on a bi+ mental health experts panel for our LA Bi+ Task Force Bi-alogue series, but I was not able to reach her. I had been hoping to get the chance to interview her as one of my sheroes and geek out with her about bi-affirmative therapy. Now I understand she was already battling cancer at the time.

She lived in Loveland, Colorado with her life partner, Gene Arts.

May her legacy carry on.

Submitted by Dr. Mimi Hoang, a psychologist, life coach, author, and grassroots activist specializing in the LGBTQ+ and Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and a bi+ leader since the 1990s.

RESEARCH CORNER: Gen Z Is the Queerest—and Most Bisexual—Generation

By Robyn Ochs

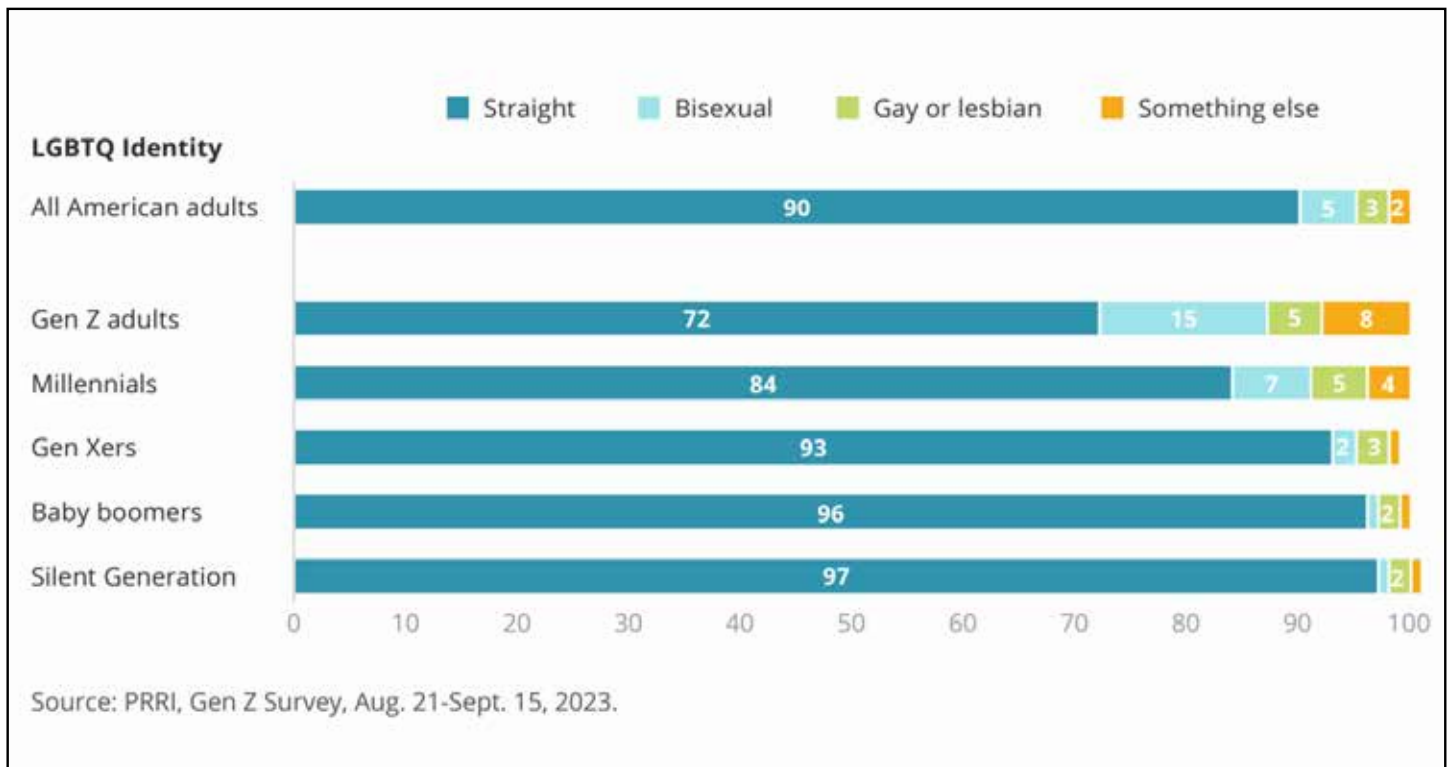
The numbers are clear: Gen Z is the queerest—and the most bisexual—generation.

In January 2024, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) released a new survey that included data on sexual orientation identity. PRRI is a “nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to research at the intersection of religion, values, and public life.” The research described below is part of a larger study titled “A Political and Cultural Glimpse into America’s Future.”

The survey found that 28% of those in Gen Z who are 18 or older identify as LGBT+, making Gen Z by far the queerest generation. These findings are similar to those of Gallup polls, which found similar generational dissimilarities, though the percentages they found were lower than those of PRRI: Gallup’s most recent survey found 19.7% of Gen Z self-identifying as LGBT+.

PRRI researchers surveyed more than 6,600 people ages 13-65+, with oversamples of Gen Z adults and teens, between August 21 and September 15, 2023.

The generational differences are dramatic, with each successive generation more LGBTQ+ than the one preceding it. In “The Silent Generation” (people born between 1928 and 1945), 97% identify as straight. In Gen Z the percentage identifying as straight is only 72%.



The survey found that 15% of Gen Z identifies as bisexual, 5% as gay or lesbian, and 8% as “something else,” making bisexual by far the most common LGBTQ+ identity. Looking across generations, bisexuality is also the fastest-growing identity. Interestingly, in the Silent Generation, Boomers, and Gen X populations, more people report a lesbian or gay identity than a bisexual one. For Millennials and Gen Z, the reverse is true.

For both the Gen Silent and Boomer generations, the percentage of respondents self-reporting as bisexual is less than 1%. For Gen X, it’s 2%. For Millennials, it’s 7%. And for Gen Z, it’s 15%.

Another area that is growing significantly is what PRRI lists on its chart as “other.” It has gone from a fraction of 1% for the Silent Generation, Boomers, and Gen Xers, to 4% for Millennials and 8% for Gen Z. I hope PRRI will release more information about this group. I suspect that much of it will fall under the bi+ umbrella, making our percentages even larger.

Why is this happening? That would be an excellent subject for future research. My own take (and that of participants in my own programs when asked this question) is that factors include reduced social stigma, dramatically increased access to information, more role models and representation, and less rigid categories of identity which are easier to opt into.

Robyn Ochs is a speaker, bi+ and LGBTQ+ advocate, and editor of BWQ and two anthologies, Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World and RECOGNIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men.

Felicia, continued from p. 1

revealed? Or how her flirty montage with Dean (played by the dreamy, vocal fry king, Riley Smith) gives you butterflies? That’s because you’re bisexual. Again, welcome!

Or how about Gabriella (played by Christina Vidal) in the DCOM *Brink!*? She is the essence of cool, right? Her impressive skating skills! Her Cali chill vibes! Her overalls! Her scenes make your eyes light up because—say it with me: You’re bisexual! It’s like you want to be her, but you also want to be with her. Don’t worry; it’s a thing for a lot of queer people.

Your epiphany that you’re bisexual will come in college during a theater history course, when you learn about the Genderbread Person. You’ll realize that you’re attracted to traditionally masculine gender expression, but that you’re open to all gender identities. You’ll be attracted to people of all gender identities and expressions as you come out and come of age, which, as you find what feels most comfortable to you, will over the years lead to you identifying as both pansexual and bisexual. Just like Disney’s tomboy girl characters, people who blend masculine and feminine, who exist in the in-between, are the ones you feel a strong connection to—it’s no wonder your pop culture crushes are now Janelle Monáe and Betty Who. Your girlfriend (yes, believe it!) exists there, and she has so much tomboy girl swag, she’s basically a Disney Channel crush dream come true.

That’s because you live in the in-between.

Being biracial, you’re used to feeling the duality. You’re used to feeling split. You’re used to feeling like you’re not enough for either of the racial groups you belong to—Black and White. You’ll feel embarrassed when you don’t know pop culture references from the iconic 1990s Black rom-coms. You’ll chase Hilary Duff-inspired hairstyles that your natural curls can’t easily be configured into. And please, just skip the whole phase of trying to fit into Hollister jeans in high school—they are meant for girls without curves. The dressing rooms are too damn dark for you to be hopping around trying to pull them up over your hips and butt.

You’re used to pulling out your ruler to see how you measure up to your own identities. In a way, it honestly makes sense that you would identify as bisexual too. It’s another identity in which you overlap two groups and feel obligated to try and bridge the gap.

You’ll feel guilty when your queer friends talk about their queer romantic firsts, and you think about how you got to enjoy romantic firsts twice-over. You’ll feel like an intruding visitor when you go to bars that cater to gay men with your gay male friends, since you read as straight. It’s a privilege that you acknowledge, knowing how much homophobic violence there is in the world, but still you can’t help but feel isolated even when fully immersed in a room of people who are supposed to be your community.

The balancing act of both of these identities will feel harder some days than others. Though our identities are ours to define, I totally get that it feels like they are at the mercy of others’ perceptions. It’s something you’re still working on, even 20 years from now. The days you feel secure in your identity will be amazing—you’ll feel whole, complete, and abundant. On the worst days, you’ll feel like a body of contradictions. The best advice I can give is to surround yourself with people who love you for all of the identities you inhabit, because they’ll be beside you on your good and bad days.

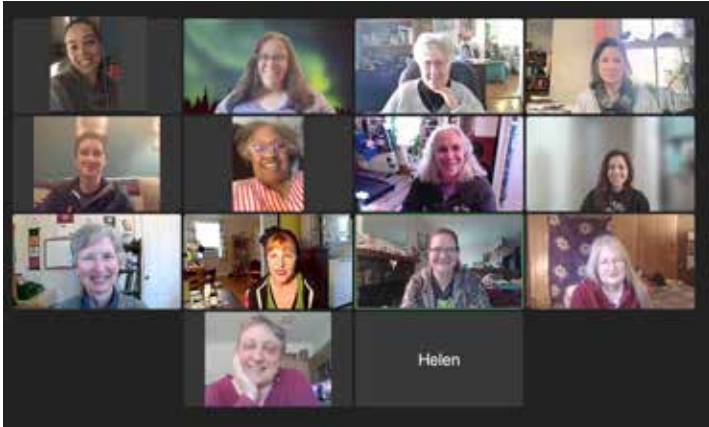
As I look back on our bisexual journey, even with the ups and downs, the liberation and joy we’ve felt since coming out has been so worth it. So, throw on that leather jacket, kiss your girlfriend, grab a piece of paper, and write that thank-you note to Disney.

Love,

32-year-old Felicia

Felicia Fitzpatrick (shelher) is a NYC-based writer and content creator. When she’s not writing, you can find her taking dance classes at Alvin Ailey, rewatching Gilmore Girls, or wishing for The Cheesecake Factory to open in Manhattan.

CALENDAR



February 2024 Digital Brunch

A special invitation to our readers **EVERYWHERE:**

Please join the Boston Bisexual Women's Network at one (or all) of our digital brunches. 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.

Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1 p.m. EST:

Sat., March 2

Sun., April 7

Sat., May 4

Sat., June 1

Please join us! Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

(Note: Dates are subject to change. Check BiWomenBoston.org to confirm date.)

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 calls for writing on page 2.)

Bi+ World Meetup May 24

Join us at the 12th Bi+ World Meetup! Meetup will be May 24, 4 p.m. EST/ 10 p.m. CEST. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to us on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to join each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is facilitated by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required.

Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

Metro-Boston Bi+ Women and Nonbinary folks: Keep up with local events. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/g/biwomenboston>

Check out BiWomenBoston.org for info about upcoming **in-person** events for women with bi+ (bi, pan, fluid, and other nonbinary) sexualities sponsored by the Boston Bisexual Women's Network.

Show your pride!



Our pride earrings, flags, and pins are beautiful, affirming, affordable, and -- on top of all this -- support Bi Women Quarterly!

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