

## The Methodist Book of Discipline Propelled Me from My Closet

By Kara Ammon

The Methodist *Book of Discipline* propelled me from my 46-year closet like nothing else could.

I grew up in a Presbyterian church where my Dad was the minister, my Mom was a Sunday school teacher, and I was a wiseass. Pastors' kids are known for that – you can Google it. Youth leaders, seeing my name on the incoming class list, thought about resigning their posts.

My parents supported the gay youth in our church, and I am pretty sure that my Dad talked more than one family off the ledge when their child came out of the closet. In spite of this, I was not ready to admit to myself (or anyone else) that I was anything other than straight.

I attended a conservative Christian college that now has the dubious distinction of being ranked No. 1 by the *Princeton Review* as the least-LGBTQ friendly campus for 2013-2014. It probably goes without saying but I did not explore my not-so-straight sexuality there.

Looking back, when I'm feeling charitable I wonder if I was not very self-aware, but more likely I was just a coward. Either way it wasn't until

*Kara, continues on page 10*



## My Evolution of Spirituality and Sexuality

By Sharon Gonzalves

Spirituality and religion have been very fluid in my life. So has my sexuality. The two have intersected at several points.

I was raised Jewish by parents who were not of the same faith. Dad was raised Catholic and as an adult called himself a humanist. Mom was raised without religious training by Jews who had escaped persecution in Europe and immigrated to the US from Russia and Poland. Mom went to adult ed Hebrew school to learn how to observe Jewish holidays at home. I had a bat mitzvah at age 13 and was declared an adult in the reform temple. I promptly stopped attending services. At about this time I became sexually active and considered myself heterosexual. I didn't know I could be anything else.

My next religion was feminism, more specifically lesbian separatist feminism, and I was a devout practitioner for about four years in my early 20s. I considered this a religion, or at least a replacement for organized religion which I thought held nothing for me. Patriarchy was the enemy

and organized religion was inherently patriarchal. My feminist philosophy colored my entire life and worldview. I was mostly angry with men over sexual abuse, and feminism was saving my life. The tenderness of women's arms was a welcome relief from my pain.

As I healed over time, I came out as bisexual, which opened the door to meaningful, consensual, caring explorations with men while maintaining my feminist beliefs and strong connections to women. The Boston bi community was at the center of my social life and my identity. I liked having models for relating that were different from traditional marriage and family scenarios. I liked the freedom to relate to whomever I was attracted to. I liked the discourse and political activism, and I especially liked the sense of community.

Next came a move to Hawaii, and with it a profound spiritual awakening. I was introduced to Kashmir Shaivism, a chanting and meditation practice that offered me a female lineage head – Gurumayi Chidvilasananda. Many lesbians were seekers on this path, most notably Meg Christian,

*Sharon, continues on page 10*

## HONOR ROLL

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## From Your Editor

We are focusing this time on Spirituality/Religion. Readers were given the following prompt: "Tell us: How has your religious upbringing and or current spiritual understanding/practice affected your experience/expression of your sexual orientation? If you practice within a religious tradition, what is that tradition's perspective on sexual orientation and how do you interact with this?"

As has been happening lately, we received more high-quality submissions than could fit. We were able to squeeze in powerful writings by Kara Ammon, Jane Barnes, the Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato, Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Colleen, Sharon Gonsalves, Elizabeth M. Mechem, Rosemary Van Deuren, J.D. Walker, Isabel Williams and Laurie Wolfe.

*Bi Women Around the World* features an interview with Lourdes M. Zorilla from Puerto Rico/South Florida. There's also Ask Tiggy, News Briefs and a calendar of events.

Here's a challenge to you, our readers: if you don't see experiences similar to yours represented in these pages, please consider submitting *your* writing or artwork.

And finally, please spread the word about this publication far and wide. Anyone interested can subscribe at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org). You can also make a donation to support our work. Remember: to my knowledge, the *Bi Women Quarterly* is the only ongoing publication of its kind. Help us amplify our voice.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

*Robyn*

**Loren reads the *Bi Women Quarterly*.  
Send us a picture of  
YOU reading *BWQ*.  
Be creative!**



## Next in

### *Bi Women Quarterly*

The themes for the next 2 issues:

### Spring: Intersection: Geography, Part 2

We received so much excellent material for the last Geography issue (Fall 2014) that we split the material in two and promised to run a second issue on the theme. There may be space for one or two additional pieces. Here's the call: How has your geographic location (where you are from, where you have lived and/or where you live now) affected your experience of your sexual orientation? **Submissions for the this issue must be received by February 1st.**

### Summer: Toy Stories

After several serious topics in a row, we're lightening up with the theme "Toy Stories." Yes, we're talking sex toys. What was your first? How do you talk to your lovers about them? What do sex-positive bi women need to know about to keep their sexual selves happy? And more! Personal stories (humor encouraged), poetry, artwork, and short examples of resources to keep our playtime exciting, safe and FUN! **Submissions for this issue due by May 1st.**

Submission guidelines are online at [www.biwomenboston.org](http://www.biwomenboston.org).

Send submissions and suggestions for future topics to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

***Bi Women Quarterly* is online  
at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org).**

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

# BI WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD:

## Lourdes M. Zorrilla, Puerto Rico & South Florida

*Interview by Robyn Ochs*

**Lourdes, please tell us about yourself.** I am 34 years old, a business owner, attorney, mother of two young kids, running enthusiast, woman, bisexual and married 10 years to my loving husband. I am passionate about my national immigration practice serving LGBT immigrants. I am also deeply committed to social justice issues and strive to work, in solidarity, to empower communities that have historically been marginalized: women, Latinos, immigrants and our own LGBT community. My goal is to be a complete and liberated woman and an example for my kids so that they can learn to be who they are, without apologies.

I was born, raised, attended college and law school and married in Puerto Rico. There was a downturn in the Puerto Rican economy, so a year ago I decided to move to Miami and continue my business in Florida.

**Where in Puerto Rico did you grow up? How did you come to identify as bi?** I was born and raised in Dorado, Puerto Rico, a small coastal town 20 minutes away from the capital San Juan. I grew up in a middle class, catholic household with my mother, father and brother. My upbringing was very religious, patriarchal and socially conservative, and homophobic and sexist remarks were the norm.

The first time I realized I was bisexual I was 17 years old and still in high school, when I fell in love with a girl. It was a very confusing time because I was very religious, and I still liked boys – a lot. I didn't know what bisexual was. In Puerto Rico you knew only gay or lesbian. I knew I wasn't a lesbian but thought I had to identify myself as one, being in a relationship with another girl. When I met and fell in love with my husband during law school, I went back to thinking I was straight.

Two years ago, at 32, I finally realized that I was definitely bisexual. I went through a process of self-discovery and self-acceptance. It was freeing and scary at the same time. I had considered myself straight my whole life, with a "phase" in the middle during my high school and college years, and now suddenly I was not who I thought I was. My identity had changed, how I saw the world changed, how I saw my past, present and future changed. For such a long time I was trying so hard to be one and not the other, that it took over my life. Forcing myself not to be fully me, repressing who I really was, took a huge emotional toll and affected my happiness and my self-esteem.

Thinking back, I can remember feeling attraction to other girls since I was very young, not knowing what it was.

When I was in high school, I was inadvertently outed. My mother found a letter I had written to my girlfriend. She left

me a note saying, "I hope to someday understand why God is punishing me this way," and never talked about it again. I felt so scared and alone!

**You were raised Catholic in a deeply religious family. What impact did this have on your coming out? Are you still religious?** My family was very religious, especially my mom. After my father died when I was

14, I started to associate with a very religious catholic youth organization. During my relationship with my girlfriend, I felt like I was doing something wrong, a very terrible sin and I was going to hell. In my mind at the time, that was a very real consequence to what I was doing. But at the same time, I was in love and couldn't deny my feelings, even though I really tried to. I knew I couldn't tell anyone around me about my relationship because they wouldn't understand and would judge me. So I never came out to anyone.

Years later, after coming out to myself, and my husband, I decided to become an activist for the LGBT community of Puerto Rico. I got involved in advocating for LGBT rights, namely equal domestic violence protection for same-sex couples and equal employment discrimination protection for LGBT workers and employees. During that time, the religious majority in PR convened a 250,000-person march on the capital to protest against civil rights for LGBT individuals. I helped organize a counter march, and a few hundred of us marched the same day on the capital to protest against discrimination and to uphold equal rights. That day, I gave a speech about the legal importance and consequences of the laws being considered and about being a bisexual woman, mom and wife. Afterwards, the national Puerto Rican news, astonished and confused by me, asked me if I could be interviewed. And that was how I came out to all my family and friends on primetime news. They could not understand why I was there if I had a husband and a family. I was asked why I was marching, and I calmly said, "I am marching here because I am bisexual and I am a member of the LGBT community."

Currently, I am not religious at all. I consider myself deeply spiritual and I am raising my kids this way. I want them to have a wide and expansive view of the religions and spiritual beliefs that exist in the world and at the same time I want



*Lourdes, continues on next page*

Lourdes, *continued from previous page*

them to be critical and independent thinkers. I want them to choose their belief system and decide for themselves if they want to belong to an organized religion.

***What can you tell us about the experience of being bisexual – or more generally LGBT – in Puerto Rico, and specifically in the area of the country where you lived?*** Puerto Rico is a very religious country, mainly catholic and evangelical. Growing up, I perceived a lot of hostility towards gays and lesbians. They were outcasts. I felt I was going to be rejected by my family, friends, church, and school as well as from society. LGBT kids were shunned in school, ridiculed and banished from social circles. The most popular TV shows promulgate and caricature homophobic stereotypes.

Although still seen as negative, presently there is a broader consciousness now about LGBT rights. In terms of the law, some legislation has been enacted but it still leaves much to be desired. There is still very little knowledge about bi and trans issues, even within the LGBT community.

As was evidenced by the huge rally on the capital, there is a huge evangelical movement on the island with a lot of influence in the government. Some places in the capital are more accepting, but outside of the metropolitan area there is much more narrow-mindedness and discrimination. There is practically no acceptance for bisexuals. Many of the biphobic stereotypes still dominate the LGBT community as well as the mainstream. At the LGBT center recently, where I was speaking, I was introduced as an ally, not as a bisexual and member of the community.

It was very important for me to be seen at the rally where I came out, so everyone, including LGBT members, in their homes could see what one example of a bisexual woman looks like and that bisexuals exist, so if a bisexual person were watching they would know they were not alone.

I also participated in several activities celebrating LGBT Awareness Month, women's rights and others. At each, I was the only visible bisexual. People would ask me what my flag represented; they had never seen it before. A special moment for me was when a girl came up to me and told me she too was bisexual and was so happy to see a bisexual flag and another bisexual person. I told her that she was not alone, that we are many, and that we just have to be seen.

***You have since moved to South Florida and are in the process of starting up a bi group there. What inspired you to do this, and what has been your experience so far?*** When I got here I decided to start a bi group for many reasons. First of all, I was looking to have a community. I wanted to be around people who understood and shared similar experiences with me. I tried joining LGBT groups or lesbian groups around the area but I always felt out of place and judged as soon as I mentioned I was married to a man. Also, I wanted to form a safe network of support and empowerment. I thought about

what I needed when I came out and how I longed to talk to other people who identified as I did, and who had similar experiences, and I wanted to provide that to others. Finally, I wanted to create awareness about bisexual issues and create a safe space for us to exist freely. South Florida did not have much to offer me in terms of support groups and community building, so I started my own space.

My experience so far has been amazing. I am overjoyed when, after a meeting, someone comes up to me and thanks me, saying how accepted and understood they felt. There is always some hesitation when starting something new. I am still finding my voice, growing and accepting, but there is nothing better than freedom and pride.

***Are you keeping up with LGBT activism in Puerto Rico? Are you finding a different environment for LGBT people – or specifically for bi folks – in South Florida?*** Yes, I am. Right now, in Puerto Rico they are debating on whether to allow same-sex couples to adopt, and there is a case on the Supreme Court for marriage equality. But the religious leaders are still making a hard case against it. We will have to see if legislators will continue to give in to their pressure, or stand up to them like some have started to do.

In South Florida, there is much more awareness and support. Even though there are areas that still have strong religious currents, there are more areas that are very inclusive and accepting. I think this is because in this area there is much more diversity of people from different parts of the world, with different belief systems and people have come to accept each other and appreciate these differences. Also the geographic area is much larger than in Puerto Rico.

The LGBT community here is more out in the open than in Puerto Rico. There are many LGBT business groups, social groups, meet-ups, festivals and gatherings, which are refreshing coming from a place where there were only a handful of these groups. On the other hand, unfortunately, bisexuals have little to no representation in Florida. But I do find that there is some awareness and some willingness to understand and learn. People don't like to identify as bisexuals in these groups, and I can understand why. It can be really intimidating when everyone around you claims to be gay or lesbian and there is no mention or any recognition of bisexuals.

***Any last words?*** Growing up in a strict catholic environment, it was quite a climb for me to reach my independence. I had to deal with the biblical teachings that preached for my ruination, a culture that ridiculed and shunned people like me, and a family that did not understand or accept me. This was something that I struggled with all my life. But all of these experiences have taught me that no one can define me but myself. This applies to all of us. We cannot cede this power to anyone: church, family or friends, even the communities we wish we belonged to. We must look within ourselves to find ourselves. Then we can truly know where we need to be.

# The Middle Way

## No extremes Non Bi-Nary

By Gwendolyn Fougy Henry

*Au milieu  
Désir et être*

The Haitian Seventh Day Adventist religion didn't offer me the space to be free  
it encouraged restriction and pretense  
restraint in emotional expression, intellectual curiosity,  
and gender and sexual identity  
masking of abuse, assault, and neglect

it uplifted and celebrated the richness of Haitian culture,  
history, language and racial identity  
passion and zeal in the ability to be different from other  
faiths  
enmeshed with an impervious circle

joy, happiness, anger, fear, frustration  
tempered like chocolate to maintain a state of visual and  
palatable perfection  
A state exposed to other elements such as moisture and  
air  
led to a muted unpolished appearance

spirituality and fellowship in affirming spaces offer me a  
deep tissue connection to a Higher Presence  
freedom to express bliss and ecstasy  
body, mind, spirit, community  
unrestrained to feel sorrow, melancholy, or blue

space to ache and recover  
liberation and emancipation to exercise compassion,  
empathy, kindness, radical acceptance  
a soul safe home embracing all my identities

*Gwendolyn Fougy Henry, Ed.M., MSLIS is a writer, librarian, archivist, mental health advocate, and vegan personal chef. She is the founder of Bisexual Women of Color (BIWOC), an online and in-person support and discussion group based in Boston, MA.*



Attendees at our  
September brunch  
were greeted by  
this inviting sign:



## The Stone

By Jane Barnes

For me

your idea of God is very plaid Bermuda shorts  
I think Michelangelo and da Vinci are the

dudes you report to and shit-faced it's  
very hard to go down in the quarry and pick

out the stone to roll away from the door  
of your tomb you are a little slice of God

I am too God is the rain or the flesh or the  
right shade of burnt ochre you're too late

you been praying all this long time and  
you even have a Jesus look going (tee

hee to you about that) and don't  
get me wrong I'm no Christian if anything

buddhist spirit means there are quicker  
ways to do things than just hauling ass

you got a gift just let it drag you around  
your brain is handy but not like just

splashing the paint and the pain all  
around belief can pay for a second home

*Jane Barnes has finished a poetry manuscript covering 25 years in 250 poems called "The Inbetween: Poems 1982-2007." A short story of Jane's, "too big to hug," is carved on a granite pillar at Copley Square in Back Bay, Boston.*

# Navigating Improbable Intersections

By Colleen

My name is Colleen, and I am a lesbian-identified, bisexual, polyamorous, transsexual, practicing Roman Catholic. Despite the fact that such sentences are usually spoken at 12-step recovery meetings, I am not a “recovering catholic” (Cathoholic?), nor a lapsed Catholic, nor an ex-Catholic. I play guitar for the church choir, a service I have performed for most of my life, beginning in my teen years. For me, it is a form of worship, as well as hopefully inspiring to others in their worship. I am fully formed in my faith, it is part of who I am, and I would be bereft if what I see as my ministry were to be taken away from me. However, I am fully aware that I live with the possibility of just such an eventuality. Most of the parish, including the clergy, don’t know my gender history, nor my sexual orientation, although my car has a rainbow sticker on the rear bumper, as well as a marriage equality sticker, and I have a rainbow lei hanging from the rear-view mirror. I lead the local trans\* peer-support group and write articles occasionally for the local newspaper, so it is probably just a matter of time until the local clergy becomes aware of at least portions of my situation. The Catholic Church does not currently have a formal policy about transsexuality; however, early indications are not promising.

There are probably many who would tell me I am still deeply in denial, that my Church has worked tirelessly for repression of the LGBT community, as well as being guilty of grave sins against vulnerable children entrusted to its care; however for me, the Church is about the Word of God, and my personal relationship with Him, and I hold separate the acts of evil men in Her (the Church’s) name.

Perhaps it’s like others’ views of bisexuality. They would say, “You can’t have it both ways.” Well, I DO have it both ways, at least sexually, and I

worship in my way and provide service to the Church in which I’ve found a great deal of meaning and relevance.

That’s not to say I don’t struggle. Sometimes the sermon seems to single me out, to tell me my life is based on lies, and I won’t deny that I bore a significant amount of internalized homophobia, biphobia and sex-phobia due to Church teachings. However, I know that my life as it stands right now is based on Truth, whereas the life I led before was one big lie. I know that my sexuality is not a “lifestyle choice,” but comes to me from God; it is how He made me, just as He made me transsexual, just as he set before me the journey of my life. He gave me the gift of Free Will, which allows me the freedom to react to this journey in a way that’s meaningful for me. I could have chosen not to transition, but I feel certain that would not have been in alignment with His purpose for me. I choose to have multiple lovers, but I also accept the full responsibility to do so in an ethical and loving way, not to sneak around behind anyone’s back.

I recently visited my parents, and in the course of several conversations with my mother, I’ve begun to develop a way of thinking about the proper relationship between sexuality and religion. I was once severely homophobic, and held the belief that sexuality was a matter of choice, which clearly made it a matter of morality. However, my transsexual journey has taught me that sexuality, like gender, is inborn, not chosen: the choice is in how to express it. There-



fore, if one is behaving in alignment with one’s God-given sexuality, how can it be a matter of morality, unless one is subverting it? So for me, the error is in thinking of sexuality as a matter of religious morality, rather than as an inborn trait. Morality, to me, asks, “Would your actions, if known to everyone, hurt anyone?” My honest answer to that currently is “No.” If I ever answer “Yes” to that question, I’ll know I have a moral/ethical problem to solve. The Bible, after all, says (in Genesis): “And God created man in His own image... Male and Female He created them.” Now, this can be read in a number of different ways, but to me, it says that God is infinitely diverse, and created mankind in our diversity so we might be closer to Him - so we might understand Him better. So far, we haven’t done so well with that, but maybe we’ll do better in the future.

I’m painfully aware that my Mother Church is widely seen as homophobic, hegemonic, misogynistic and patriarchal. I’ve met many practicing Catholics who struggle to reconcile their faith with their sexuality. I live with the knowledge that if my sexuality and life choices become known to the clergy with whom I work I could be separated from the Church I’ve loved all my life. I hope that my long service to the Church would help to shield me from such an eventuality; however, I know that others have not been so lucky. I have high hopes that Pope Francis may find a way to move this dialog forward, and I pray for the day when I can bring my whole self to church, just as I bring my whole self to work.

*Colleen is a freelance writer, poet, musician and spiritual person, doing her best to live her truth as authentically as she can and contemplating her place in the universe.*

# Bivocational, Biritual and Bisexual

By Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato

Many years ago, when I was first discerning the call to ordained ministry, an older clergywoman mentor introduced me to the word “bivocational.” It was immediately clear to me that the term was just as good a fit for me as “bisexual.” While my call was 100% genuine, it was not all of who I was (and is still not all of who I am) vocationally. Yes, I am “The Reverend,” but I am also still a dancer and dance teacher (okay, so sort of trivocational, though I choose to huddle my dancing and dance teaching under a single umbrella). Then, when you examine the specific type of “Reverend” I am, you’ll find another “bi word.” That word is “Biritual.” That means that I am dually ordained. My first ordination is as an Interfaith Minister. My second is as a priest in the Progressive Episcopal Church. I can (and do) serve in both capacities, wearing my “priest stole” when I celebrate Eucharist for my congregation, and wearing my “Interfaith Minister stole” when officiating weddings, and also when leading children’s worship service at the Unitarian Universalist church where I am now employed (as Director of Religious Education/Children’s Minister.) Are you starting to sense a pattern?

I suspect that there’s something about us bisexuals which makes it really difficult to stuff us into boxes of any sort. I am married to a woman and I love her and plan to spend the rest of my life with her, but I have also been with men (including one to whom I was married for 14 years) and am still capable of being attracted to men. I am a passionate, aspiring follower of Jesus, but I am also a person of Jewish heritage on my mother’s side, and I find inspiration in Jewish teachings and practice as well (celebrating Jewish as well as Christian holidays, reading Jewish books, etc.). This dual heritage and allegiance is why I became an Interfaith Minister first. I love being a clergyperson, and having the joy of sharing people’s spiritual

journeys, from Sunday services to weddings, to baptisms, to funerals. And I love dancing and sharing the joy of physical grace (which, to me, is also a form of spiritual grace) with others, whether they are spectators or my students. All of these elements are of my essence, and none can be dispensed with. I truly believe that I will be all of these things until I die (and perhaps beyond, though that raises other spiritual questions).

Recently, I have felt a strong sense of calling to the public ministry of “representing,” as an out bisexual clergywoman in the wider LGBT community. In June of 2014, I marched with the New York Area Bisexual Network on Pride Sunday, wearing my clergy shirt with the white tab collar, and lots of jewelry in the Bi Pride colors. I did that because it was an image that had not often been seen before, and I wanted to let people know that not only do bisexuals most definitely exist, bisexual Christians (and ordained clergy) exist, too.

Responses to my presence on the march were interesting. Blessedly, none were hostile, but there were a few people who seemed confused by what I represented. One asked, “Are you a nun?” (There are still people who aren’t aware that ordained women wear collars.) Another asked, “Don’t you have to be celibate?” Someone else said, “So...you’re an ally.” To which I replied (politely), “I’m not a nun; I’m a priest. Priests in my denomination can be women and we don’t have to be celibate. I have a wife. And I’m not an ally; I’m part of this community. I’m bisexual.”

Though a somewhat tiring experience, the march was something that I was glad to have done (particularly in the way that I did it, in clergy clothes instead of my “civilian” garb) because it was an opportunity to educate and inspire others. There were some who told me that my visibly Christian and ordained presence gave them hope for



Francesca, proudly wearing her new bi pride scarf.

the future of the churches, and for bisexual youth who might be seeking welcoming spiritual homes. Bisexuals, like most of the early followers of Jesus, are people who have been marginalized, stigmatized, disbelieved and disregarded, but we are just as much made in God’s image as any of God’s other beautiful, blessed children. I want to live my life as an example of that truth and a beacon for those who have been told that their orientation makes them, somehow, less holy than humans of monosexual identity. If any bisexual person, because of something I’ve written, said or done, is able to believe in God’s love for him or her, and embrace a spiritual life, then I will be a minister and a priest indeed, and a dancer with Divine love, as that Divine love is still and always calling me to be.

*The Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her wife Lynn and their feline employers, Alice and Gracie.*

# The Big Bee-in at Schul

By Laurie Wolfe

There is an old Jewish saying that I just made up: if you deny someone who they are, and they follow suit (yes! from Jews playing Canasta, Gin Rummy and other card games; they are big on cards.) (*May* make things up). Where was I? Oh yes, the saying. If you aren't who you say you are, G'd won't come and visit cause G'd won't recognize you and will pass you by. So just be yourself. Which sounds great in Yiddish, if I can write it in Yiddish over here in my loose-leaf notebook (I took my first class in Yiddish today so this may take some time)(!).

Now why did I start with the moral? Anyhoo, once upon a time not very long ago, a very young person who was likely a little boy had parents who were not religious at all. Yes, they were Jewish. That's very typical in NYC. Now their neighbors the Smiths (not the band; just shh and read) who were orthodox (very unlikely the band is composed of orthodox Jews; you gotta trust me sometimes) took him (-) to the Schul. I think they figured it was time to give him (-) a dose of what being Jewish was about from the religious POV. Which is also a very fine show on PBS.

So they took the little boyishe child to Schul and they dumped him on a seat among a bunch of bearded smelly old strange men who were mumbling in some unknown language. It could've been English cause it was so well mumbled, but there were no familiar words mumbled at all. It sounded like buzzing to the kid. They were all saying the same thing at different speeds at different times one from the other. You could have gotten a headache it was such a drone!

So what was going on? The kid had no clue. Maybe the Smiths had left him there and the buzzing would go on for days and he would starve. Or it would end and he would be left with bearded men who did not speak a word of English. He would never, ever find his way back home or see his Mom and Dad, or eat. Or, they were foreigners and when they stopped buzzing they would kidnap him. The thing was he was frightened. He probably was too young for all this. But what do I know? It kind of makes sense to be afraid of people who are so different and only speak mad bee.

Anyhoo, at one point the men all got up, and they bowed. This caught the kid's attention. Probably cause it was the first thing they did together, which is good news when you're in a room full of bearded foreign bee-men. And, Synchronization! But then, they gathered themselves, and put their energy into a ball and tried to send it to something above them. Now this was fantastic. They were connecting with something bigger, up there. The child could see and feel this, and boy was he impressed. There was something really Big up there and a connection! Something above grownups! Above his parents even! This was huge. You coulda pushed the kid over with a light puff of air: pu.

Then they wrap it up and the Smiths come back to the kid, and the kid goes home; Hooray! And the kid is all excited. But the parents don't care for any of it; they don't buy it, they don't want to know nothing. So the kid grows up wanting to connect in the worst way, but at first it's gotta be outside of Jewish cause the parents are big stiff in that department. And then later in life, he converts to She! Why yes, many hints. The child was, in fact, a girl. No, shmeckels are not the final determinant of your gender. Cause no one told us. Math: err = human!

So I hope you learned from our little fable. You want G'd to find you, you gotta be you. And you gotta love who you love. Of course! G'd said it was good, all creation! Here: And it was good. See? Nope, those guys go too far. B'tselem Elohim. We were created in G'ds image. I know! Especially my profile...see? You too! We all do.

*Laurie Wolfe is a writer, performer, poet and healer. She's appeared in Bilicious Boston, Body Verse and Off Limits (both part of the Boundless Series at Fenway Health) and Light Up The Night, a fundraiser for the Mass Transgender Political Coalition. She also does speaking gigs on trans and/or bi themes.*





# My Island, Religion and Me

By J.D. Walker

*“Boom bye bye inna batty bwoy head.”* A reference to killing homosexuals, the lyrics by Buju Banton were a part of my childhood. I grew up with religion, homophobia, machismo and “a woman’s place” as a part of my mental landscape. But then, I moved to the US and, over time, was able to break free of my upbringing on the “no problem, man” island, find my own belief system and acknowledge my bisexuality.

My journey toward self-knowledge and acceptance began when, after moving to Atlanta in 1996, I made a new friend. He was gay, and it didn’t even occur to me at the time (or after), that according to what I’d been taught as a child, he was “the devil.” To this day I wonder why that was. According to my background, I should have been disgusted, but I wasn’t. My friends, up to this point, had all been church-related. Through his kindness and friendship (and sense of humor), my mind was awakened to the idea that being gay was just simply being who you were. Our friendship never faltered.

Another breakthrough came when I removed established religion from my life. I realized that I had attended church for the sake of others, not my sanity. My belief system had closed my mind to the realities and possibilities of the human condition, as defined by the self and soul-searching, not someone else’s opinion.

Then, I went a step further. You see, as a member of a conservative Christian church, I had been taught that marriage and intimate relationships were between a man and a woman, and all else was blasphemy.

But, I started to wonder: if God *is* love, why should that love be conditional based upon *who* you love? Was it, then, based upon your interpretation of the Bible? And did it really matter? I discovered that for me, it mattered.

Funny thing, after I got married, it was my husband who finally broke through the remaining barriers to my self-realization by asking, “Hon, have you ever considered that you might be attracted to women?” Well, I was stunned, to say the least. He had obviously seen something that I was still blind to. It hadn’t occurred to me there was another layer to explore.

How could that be? As I worked through my thoughts, I came to the conclusion that my upbringing had been so ingrained that, unless someone pointed it out to me, it would never have even crossed my mind that I could be attracted to the same gender. The suppression and repression was that deep. I was 33 when I finally admitted to being attracted to women, as well as men.

The years following that question were filled with trying to understand what it meant to be attracted to the same sex, with odd questions such as, “Does that mean I’m more in

touch with my masculine side?” Or, “Is there such a thing *as* a masculine side? Should I be married to a man? Does that make me a hypocrite?”

The answers I sought were filled with missteps and assumptions – some amusing, some not. I decided to buy a pair of Doc Martens thinking that, if I wore clothing or shoes which, in my mind, put me closer to my sexual identity, then great! Well, all I got from that phase was sore feet and a bruise on my forehead when I tripped and fell, hitting one of the stone steps on a staircase. Brilliant!

Then I tried hanging out at a lesbian bar, attempting to make new friends; not much success there either, since I didn’t have a wide frame of reference.

My husband and I went to an Atlanta Gay Pride parade, and I also marched beside one of the floats one year – satisfying, but still not where I wanted to be. (Of course, in true Atlanta fashion, it rained and stormed, and I was soaked to the bone, along with my gay-themed T-shirt *and* my new convictions.)

The best thing I did, actually, was to join a running and walking group that was LGBT-friendly. Though consisting of mostly men, I made friends with others in the rainbow universe, found a forum to be myself and traded in my Doc Martens for sneakers! My toes were grateful.

I decided to “build it and (s)he will come” and left the worry about being too straight or too gay behind me. I left myself open to new and unexpected experiences. My experiences as an artist, writer and musician were also helpful as I explored my new rainbow world through these mediums.

A few years ago, I performed an original song I wrote called “Hell” at a Women’s festival that took place in the Georgia Mountains. It was surprisingly well received. It told of my struggle to define my sexual identity. Some of the lyrics were as follows: “Devil found me searching/For my heart’s desire/When I saw her smiling/My desire turned to fire/Oh, take me home, Oh take me home/ Then the devil took my hand/And we sang our song/Into the depths of hell/I was feeling strong/On the way down, on the way down/I’m in hell, I’m in hell.”

Many women in attendance told me that they loved the song and what it meant. I also got similar reactions from audiences at other venues, and gained many new friends as a result.

The last step was family. My late brother didn’t care. His response was “Okay,” then he went back to the game on TV. As for my parents, it took the suicide of my youngest sibling in 2010 for me to come out to my mother, but she didn’t really hear me in her grief. When I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and had surgery in 2013, then lost my

J.D., *continues on page 11*

*Kara, continued from page 1*

three years ago that I started to come to terms with my bottled up bi-ness. I was 46-year-old, married, a mother of three and Coordinator of Education for the local Methodist Church. Up to this point I had experienced my faith community as a loving, albeit somewhat dysfunctional, extended family.

Methodists follow a rulebook called the *Book of Discipline (BOD)*. The average Methodist has no idea what is in it and neither did I until my church began discussing the issue of LGBTQ inclusion. Someone in the crowd cited a section of the *BOD* that states: “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” This means that if you are queer, you cannot be ordained as a minister or be married in the church to your same-gender partner.

I'd been chafing at the confines of the church since my youth, but when a handful of people defended this archaic stance, I thought my head was going to explode. After a couple orbits around the ceiling I decided to do some solid research so I could respond, in an educated way, to this nonsense. I began reading theological arguments, medical opinions, case studies and personal stories. All of these were helpful, but it was the personal stories that haunted me. They were essays of coming out, of growing up queer and struggling without role models. I was seeing myself again and again as I read, each story an indictment of my own cowardice, which had me pinned down for the better part of 46 years.

In a very real sense the *Book of Discipline* propelled me from my closet like nothing else could. I came out to my husband, then some friends, the rest of my family, and my children, the burden getting lighter with each confession. It is funny how you don't feel the mountain on your shoulders until it is lifted off. Today I am an out bisexual member of the Reconciling Ministries Network working for LGBTQ inclusion/acceptance in my local church. It is our ultimate goal to change the *Book of Discipline*, which is voted on every four years, but in the meantime, work continues in local congregations and real progress is being made.

*Kara Ammon lives in New Hampshire and is a commuting member of the Boston bisexual community.*

*Sharon, continued from page 1*

a well-known women's music artist. Siddha Yoga opened my heart and mind to other worlds I could never have imagined on my own. I found absolute bliss and more inner peace than I knew was possible. Halleluyah! Jai Gurumayi! Same sex coupling wasn't exactly condoned on this path, but it didn't matter to me. As a bhakti yogini I just loved everyone, and sex had nothing to do with it. I became an embodiment of love itself – pure unadulterated love. I also broadened my perspective of life on earth in a body, and came to believe in one soul having many lifetimes with karmic consequences. My soul had been both male and female, had lived in many places, cultures, and centuries and kept repeating lessons over and over with the same other souls until we resolved our earthly issues and graduated to eternity.

During this time I was involved in monogamous relationships with women. I lived in a rural area with no bi community, ran a women-centered business and was assumed to be a lesbian. I didn't say much about my sexual orientation one way or another. I was much more focused on my spiritual awakening than on my sexual identity.

My next path was hula as a spiritual practice. This had many similarities to Kashmir Shaivism in that I gave permission for a teacher to guide me on my path through participation in group practices. The dancing brought me back into my body after so much meditation. During this time I began dating men again. Some people who saw me as a lesbian may have been confused by this. I was not. I had been serially monogamous with women for seven years. Now I was interested in exploring the male-female dynamic.

After three years on the hula path I moved on to other spiritual dance practices – the Mandala Dance of the 21 Praises of Tara and the Dances of Universal Peace (aka Sufi dancing). Through the Tibetan Buddhist based Tara practice, I transformed myself into the goddess of wisdom and compassion herself along with my many sisters. The Dances of Universal Peace fed my desire to be an embodiment of love as the sufi path is the mystical home of lovers of “the oneness.” During this time I continued dating men while maintaining strong connections to women. However, spirituality trumped sexual orientation and political activism. I wondered if I might be heterosexual after doing so much healing work on myself. Without a bi community it was hard to tell.

All of my spiritual training prepared me well for the task of caring for my dying father and returning to the mainland to participate once again with my family of origin. Now that I'm back among my bisexual friends, I know that feels like home.

*Sharon, continues on next page*



Sharon, *continued from previous page*

Through my many twists and turns of spiritual and religious participation and beliefs, here's where the rubber meets the road, where my bisexuality and spirituality intersect. I do believe that my soul has had many lifetimes, and that I've joined in love with other souls in different configurations. For example, a woman I partnered with for five years in this lifetime, I also was heterosexually married to in a frontier lifetime here in the US. How do I know? I can see it. She was familiar to me when I met her and I used a regression technique to discover our earlier connections. It just feels true to me that we've returned to each other to revisit and try to resolve some earlier issues. Same with my father, who I believe I was partnered with in one lifetime, his daughter again in another lifetime and his mother in yet another.

Because of the fluidity of my soul's gender from lifetime to lifetime, and because I'm attracted to the same souls over and over again are also gender fluid, bisexuality just makes sense. I love another soul, not their body or their gender.

At this point in time, I hope I've evolved into just being love, a compassionate, loving being. I don't feel a real need or desire to couple sexually in my current post-menopausal

"wise woman" state. I feel somehow beyond all that, all the drama and manipulations of relationship dynamics whereby we twist and turn ourselves into an image of what we think our partner wants in order to be loved. I'd rather just love everyone and be loved in return with my clothes, and my head, on. I realize I'm only 55 years old, and all of this could change in the blink of an eye. Ah, fluidity.

And then there's lovemaking as a vehicle to bring us closer to our own divinity. I wish I could say I had lots of experience with this, but so far it's been reading and hearing other people's stories. I believe that through our attunement to the flow of energy through the chakras we can bring ourselves and our partners to an experience of oneness with all that is. Certainly our ability to create new human beings with our bodies is pretty heady stuff – about as close to God as one can get. But that's an article for someone else to write.

*Sharon Gonsalves used to be a raging feminist, but now she's just an aging feminist struggling with whether or not to dye her hair.*

J.D., *continued from page 9*

voice for a year, I decided it was time to come clean – for real, this time. Life was *way* too short.

I told my parents about my bisexuality, and whether or not they really understood or accepted me was beside the point. It was enough for me that I finally told them. A weight had been lifted.

So, now I say thank you to my first gay friend, and thank you to my husband, whose unconditional love, acceptance and patience is more valuable to me than gold. I am thankful for all my experiences. I wouldn't be where I am today without them.

I lay no claim to anything religious. I prefer to experience life and humanity from day to day and learn from it all. Sexuality is just one layer. We are all one.

*J.D. Walker is an author of LGBT erotic romance, as well as an artist and musician. Check out her website for upcoming books, artwork, music videos and a quirky blog: [www.expressionsbyjo.com](http://www.expressionsbyjo.com), or send her an email at [josexpressions@yahoo.com](mailto:josexpressions@yahoo.com).*



*Abstract-16 (cropped), by J.D. Carlson*

# From Fear to Reconciliation

By Elizabeth M. Mechem

How my spirituality and sexuality relate to one another is often in the forefront of my mind. I'm an extremely active member of my church. My job as the office secretary, combined with my regular volunteer duties, has me in the church at least six days each week. As far as I'm aware, I am the only bisexual church member out on any level. My pastor, most of my co-workers, and a few others, including some members on the Congregational Council, know that I am bisexual. Still, this only amounts to fewer than a dozen people out of the entire congregation.

The greater church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is relatively liberal when it comes to LGBT issues. The ELCA allows individual congregations to make decisions on LGBT inclusion, and since 2009 has allowed pastors in same-gender relationships to be ordained. The ELCA also allows pastors to perform same-gender marriages, if they so choose. Open and affirming congregations in the ELCA are known as "Reconciling in Christ" congregations. My church is now looking into becoming one of these congregations.

In light of this, and after much deliberation, I have made the decision to become more visible in my church. When discussing this with others, I have received questions from Christians both inside and outside of the LGBT community: Why should any church be specifically welcoming to LGBT people? Why do I feel the need to bother coming out at all? Why the term "Reconciling"? How do Christians so at odds with one another approach reconciliation? As part of my decision making process to become more visible, I have also sought answers to these same questions.

Why do we need to explicitly welcome the LGBT community? As many of us know all too intimately, persecution of our community continues. While we have seen the climate change towards full inclusion of LGBT people over the past few years, there is still much work to do. Full inclusion is about more than marriage. People are still being excommunicated from their churches, disowned by their own families, and experiencing terrible violence and hatred all in the name of God. LGBT people of all denominations are leaving religion behind because they have been taught, and truly believe,



that God hates who they are. For bisexuals who are continually marginalized by both the heterosexual and homosexual communities, the situation is even worse. For bisexuals, the rates of poverty, partner violence, and suicide are significantly higher than those of lesbians or gay men.

Motivated by my own bad experiences, I once thought it was best to remain out only to a select few at church. I am married with children, which changes the presumption from "possibly lesbian," to "definitely straight." I could easily remain silent and live out my life. Nobody else would ever know. Hiding a huge part of my identity, however, has been slowly suffocating me. Being closeted deeply conflicts with everything I want for myself. I want to be honest and open about who I am, and to do so without ridicule, abuse, and rejection. I want to be accepted for who I am, not mistaken for something I am not.

Remaining closeted implies that I feel shameful about who I am. I am not ashamed of being bisexual. I'm a complete human being, created with a beautiful spirit by a loving God. I did not choose my sexuality. Sexuality is a gift to us from God. God created me with a unique purpose, gracing me with many gifts. How can I become who God desires me to be if I can't embrace any one of my God-given gifts, including my sexuality?

Like most bisexual women, this is far from my first coming out experience. Because people identify us by our relationships, we continually have to assert our bisexual identity. I know what I'll be facing when I do it at this church. Some in my church family might be afraid of what this will mean, afraid of me, and of what I might represent. They fear that they will be responsible for my words and actions. They fear that I will spread my perceived "disease." They may even fear for my eternal soul and possibly their own.

I'm afraid, too. I'm afraid of being ostracized, outcast, ignored, discounted, erased, utterly rejected. I fear for my family, my loving husband and my children, that they will become targets of the rejection, hate, and derision I have known so intimately. When I come out, they come out with me.

Not every bisexual person is ready to be visible. It can take many years, a lot of strength, and a certain level of safety not afforded to everyone. At one time, these were legitimate concerns of my own. However, right now I am loved. My marriage is safe. My town is safe. My church is, as I'm discovering, becoming safe and my pastor is supportive.

I'm beginning to see that my fear is merely a relic of years spent in rejection, intolerance, abuse and shame. Fear has consequences. Letting fear guide me, instead of God's loving Grace, I wrongfully presumed my church family would react in hate. I have not given them any chance to show me

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love and acceptance, and instead have unfairly judged many of them as bigots. I have denied myself the love and support of those closest to me. I have isolated myself, and am partly to blame for the terrible loneliness I often feel. Even worse, by hiding myself, I have not been there to support others like me in our congregation, contributing to their isolation as well.

The word “Reconciling,” in “Reconciling in Christ,” is important because it means “coming together.” God desires us to be reconciled with one another, calling us out of our fear into communion with God and each other, sharing our lives, our hopes, and our struggles. Flawed and unforgiving, however, we continue to wallow in our own pride and stubbornness. We insist on remaining separated.

Christ came for the whole world, not just some, to bring all people together as one, in love. This is the Good News! God’s love crosses all human boundaries. Our human divisions simply do not exist in the true light of God. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

How do we get over our selfish tendencies and reconcile? Many of the conversations we’ve had in the past haven’t brought us together, but have only further divided us. We are skilled at using scripture as a weapon. We twist the

meaning of scripture resulting in exclusion, misunderstanding, shame, hate and, ultimately, our enslavement in fear.

To truly reconcile, we begin as Christ commands us; we begin by loving one another. We engage scripture in a way that unites us instead of dividing us. We pray for one another; for guidance, healing, and for mutual understanding. We have honest conversations about the subject of full inclusion with hearts full of love. Instead of talking about one another, we listen to one another, putting our fears aside. We hear everybody out, no matter how uncomfortable it makes us or how we feel about what is said.

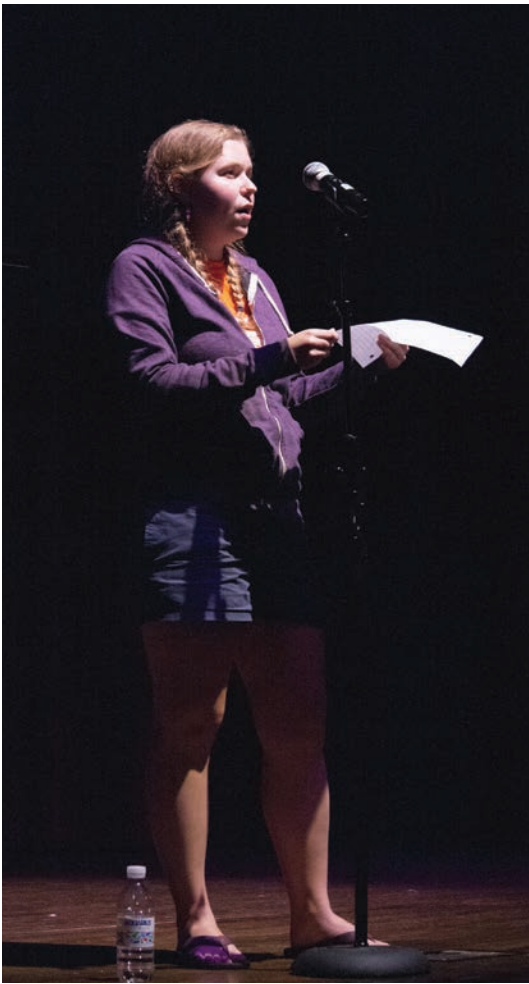
It is possible to build a church of love, where we proudly welcome all of God’s children without exception. It is possible for us all to move out of our slavery to fear and into reconciliation with one another. We can do this only if we face down our fears and are willing to believe that God can change hearts and minds. We don’t have to do it alone. God never expects us to do it alone. God walks with us, always, especially as we work towards truly living the lives we are called to live as one human family, baptized in the Body of Christ together.

*Elizabeth currently lives in Lawrence, KS, with her family. She spends her mornings as a church office secretary, and her afternoons running her three daughters around town.*



*August brunch, hosted by Loren*

Photo: Katie Simmons-Barth



## Bisexual Blessings

By Isabel Williams

Belief: boundless human beauty  
Beatitudes, the “blessed are-s”, bursting with  
Bigness. Billions bustling under love’s umbrella.  
Benediction, the “go and be-s”, brimming  
with a brave new boost.

Bronzed Brahmins, in the blinding binds  
of rebirth, Break the bicycle-spoke, moksha: Bliss  
Unbound, unbeknownst  
to most – but those who boldly begin to Be.  
One in Brahman: beyond

The pale  
The blue  
The black and white  
The barriers.

Belonging: singing bilingual songs  
“Besando su boca en el bosque  
Beholding your body en la biblioteca  
Baliando my baby bella

by la bahía”  
Embarking by boat  
from bigoted boxes  
embracing brains and bosoms

with ambidextrous hands  
and beauteous beating breasts.

### Notes on “Bisexual Blessing”

The Beatitudes appear in the Bible in Matthew and Luke and are a listing of those who are blessed by God because of their pain of low position

A Benediction refers to the blessing of the congregation by a pastor or priest in many Christian communities or is used in popular speech as a blessing

*Brahmin*: the highest caste in Hindu doctrine from the holy text the Vedas

“Bicycle-spoke” In Hinduism the cycle of life, death and rebirth is called *Samsara* and is often depicted as a wheel from the holy text the Upanishads

*Moksha*: pure bliss, relief from *Samsara* in Hinduism from the holy text the Upanishads

*Brahman*: in Hinduism this is the essence of all things, during *moksha* or awakening one realizes that all things are the same from the holy text the Upanishads

“*Besando su boca en el bosque*”: kissing your mouth in the forest. Spanish

*En la Biblioteca* : in the library

*Baliando, bella*,: dancing, beautiful,

“*la bahia*”: the bay

*Isabel Williams, 21, is a proud bisexual woman from Charlotte, NC. She is the president of the Gay-Straight Alliance and the SafeZone Student Coordinator at the College of Charleston where she is a senior. She dedicates this poem to her amazing PFLAG parents Cheri and Gary and to all spiritual leaders striving for justice for LGBTQ people.*

# Over Vitebsk

By Rosemary Van Deuren

My great-grandmother was an Irish Catholic woman who married a Jewish man – my great-grandfather – something that was not always done a hundred years ago, even though it was called the Progressive Era. Kit O'Brien died as a young woman in a Chicago hospital of what was recorded as "bowel obstruction." She left behind three children, aged five, six, and seven, and one man, suddenly a single parent. Bernard Winsberg, a traveling salesman who either did not feel fit to care for his children, or did not want to, eventually opted to send the children to Catholic boarding schools for girls and boys. Bernard had not been practicing Judaism since before his first marriage, but it was never clear whether he chose Catholic institutions at the urging of his new wife, out of convenience, or out of loyalty to the children's mother.

When I was five years old, I saw Harry Lachman's spectacular 1935 Dante's *Inferno* on cable television at my Grandpa's house. I was young enough to liken all people to myself, and assumed everyone in this hellbent world to be of integrity, and innocent. When I saw their bodies crawling up a rock-wall edifice and tumbling into pits of fire, I imagined they were just adult versions of me, writhing before my eyes, ready to suffer the torments of disembowelment and more. I told my mother I was afraid I was going to hell.

At eight years old I sat bent over on the hard pew in church, with my head between my knees. I always struggled with the Via Crucis – the Stations of the Cross – because the mass was too long and the incense was far too strong. Year after year that gray circle that began around the edges of my vision crept in as I began to feel woozy. My teacher didn't want me to drop over in the middle of the Stations, so she told me it was ok to sit and recuperate. The worry that I would pass out was replaced by the concern that God would be mad at me because I couldn't stay on my feet until Jesus was laid in the tomb.

By the time I became a teenager, I could hardly keep from falling asleep during weekly mass at all, at times staying awake only through the fabrication of very un-church-like thoughts. The sermons were increasingly inconsistent with the person I was becoming, and I wasn't getting enough sleep at night. I was always anxious for communion because I never got up early enough to eat breakfast anymore, and I was so, so hungry. Hungry for food. Hungry for solace. Hungry for attention. I was sprouting up quickly and I had breasts, both because I wanted them and because fate is cruel, and I was often mistaken for older than I was. I didn't wonder whether God was angry at me anymore, because I didn't care. I knew I wasn't going to hell, because I knew, then, that not everyone was like me, for there were people in this hell-bent world far more sinful than I was.

I didn't even believe in hell anymore.

When I was seventeen, I was back in Catholic school again for a semester – private school, in Milwaukee. My religion class went on a field trip to the local synagogue, where my classmates were skeptical that the kindly and white-haired rabbi really didn't believe Jesus was the son of God. They were prepared with the rhetoric that was their truth, and made arguments which were beyond preposterous for this scenario. I was stunned by how disrespectful it seemed to me – as we were guests in a place of worship – and also, so incredibly naive. Did these teenagers, children in the eyes of an educated Talmudist, actually believe they could convert a sixty-five-year-old rabbi to Catholicism? As though they could make any argument he had not already considered or been confronted with. I couldn't understand why they were so antagonistic at the prospect of someone finding consolation and resonance with something other than what they found familiar. I did not ascribe to either faith and never would again, but was nothing if not respectful.

That same year, I returned to public school. My weekends were spent as they had been before, in night spots and beater cars, and out in the country where no one held you accountable for whatever kind of entertainment you could wrestle up. When I came home at night, dirty and reeking of myriad kinds of smoke as I bumped into chairs in the dark, I thought I had balls as true as a man's – fearless – until I had to dodge one indistinct but pervasive menace: the Fritz Eichenberg woodcut print. The *Follies of the Monks* from Eichenberg's "In Praise of Folly" portfolio hung in the slate-floor room that connected the piano room and the kitchen, which I had to pass to reach the staircase, and my bed. In daylight hours I had looked at the piece many times, and it was compelling in its grotesqueness – starving peasants putting coins in the mug of a well-fed monk, a rumped and faceless woman squeezed onto a friar's lap, and a suspect-looking confessional, where the monk inside is ready to accost the woman relaying her sins. Bosch-esque animalized figures oversee it all, along with Henry VIII, and Jesus' crucifixion is illuminated at the top, contextualizing the satire in all its debaucherous glory. The piece wasn't my mother's; she preferred Chagall – *The Green Violinist* and *Over Vitebsk*, with soft-edged, dreamlike palettes and salt-of-the-earth imagery. The Eichenberg print was disturbing, and I liked that – during the day. At night, I refused to look at it; I could not. But even while averting my eyes I already knew intimately the appearance of the twisted faces and robes that had been carved into the wood block from which it was printed. And the Christ figure's gaunt misery at seeing the antithesis of what he presumably hoped his martyrdom would achieve. It was not the religious aspect of the artwork that frightened me, but the flip-side of religion that it represented. If everything in the world that was meant to enhance existence was, in reality, just futility spiraling out into despair, that meant effort was worse than meaningless: it was an insult, a trick – an Ouroboros feasting on the

Rosemary, continues on next page

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naivete of the population, feeding itself for all eternity. The interpretation presents Jesus as less of a Christ figure and more of a man, forced to acknowledge in his dying moments that all he'd worked for in life was a farce. Coming home from a night of clubbing under strobe lights, I would run past Eichenberg's depiction of the crucifixion without looking at it, like Perseus fleeing Medusa or a frightened child rushing away from a dark bedroom closet.

You think that if you can memorize the clutch of someone against you, you'll be in some way connected to whatever static permanence life might have had, even when it's over. It can help you pretend you're outside of the realm of mortal culpability, as if time has stopped. Youth requires less cajoling to make things feel permanent. As we grow older, that perception of what is lasting grows more indistinct. You become obsessively homed-in to the things that make you feel linked to a sense of longer time and higher meaning: Walking outdoors. Seeing a deer wading through a river up to its stomach. Eating food that's meant to be consumed unaltered, in its original form, like an apple. Giving pleasure. In exerting complete control over someone else's body, you fill their awareness with nothing but what you have to offer their

physicality, their euphoria. That is the kind of immortality that can only be achieved by functioning in service to another person to the point that, in that moment, they can't imagine anything outside their world but what you are capable of doing to them.

Everything in life becomes a distraction to fill the years before your imminent departure; a pursuit to best realize your existence before you submit to the unknowable void. If by some incredible feat you do meet every one of your mortal goals and make all the progress you can, will you still be satisfied with the time contained within your lifetime? In the end, will you attribute meaning to what you've accomplished by how you feel about yourself, or by how you are viewed by those around you? You wonder if you'll be able to charm your way into a better-quality afterlife using the manipulation skills you've learned on this mortal coil. With family extending back generations, setting the tone for what is to come and creating the stage for what you'll withstand, how much control do you actually have over how your life plays out? Is it less than you think?

*Rosemary Van Deuren is a novelist, essayist, and arts interviewer. She is author of the adventure fantasy novel Basajaun.*



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**We support  
a bisexual secretariat for ILGA**

*See next page for details about this successful advocacy campaign.*



# News Briefs

By Robyn Ochs



## Preserving Our Bi-story

The GLBT Historical Society & The GLBT History Museum in San Francisco debuted an exhibit this past June of four decades of the Bay Area's bisexual political history. The exhibit was curated by local bi activists, including Lani Ka'ahumanu, founder of the political advocacy organization BiPol and co-editor of *Bi Any Other Name*; and Bay Area bi superstars Emily Drennen, Lindasusan Ulrich and Martin Rawlings-Fein. The exhibit is now part of the museum's permanent collection.



## Bi Around the World

Bisexual activists involved with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association [ILGA] have sought for several years to establish a Bisexual Secretariat (seat on ILGA's governing board). This initiative involved bi activists from several countries and was led by Manodiversa, a Bolivian organization. The position was finally approved at ILGA's World Conference in Mexico City from October 27-31. The Secretariat will start its duties in 2016 in the next world conference in Thailand. Thanks to all those who were involved in this process. Learn more about ILGA at [ilga.org](http://ilga.org).

## Bi on the Boob Tube

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) issued their 19th annual report, "Where We Are on TV" tracking LGBT representation on the idiot box. They found that bisexual women make up 20 percent of LGBT characters on cable and bisexual men make up 10 percent compared to 15 percent for women and 6 percent for men last year. Overall, 3.9 percent of series regulars are LGBT, down from a peak of 4.4 percent in 2012. Shows with bi characters include *Mom* (Chef Rudy); *Jane the Virgin* (Luisa); *Parenthood* (Haddie); *Witches of East End* (Joanna and Alex); *Masters of Sex* (Betty); *Black Sails* (Eleanor and Max); *Backstrom* (Gregory); *Gotham* (Barbara); *Orange is*

*the New Black* (Piper and others); *Scream* (Amy and Aubrey); *Crossbones* (Rose); *Lost Girl* (Bo Dennis); and *House of Cards* (Frank).

## 30 Under 30 Awards

Back in June, Windy City Times presented its 15th "30 Under 30 Awards." The event was co-sponsored by the Center at Halstead, Center, Chicago House and AIDS Foundation of Chicago. The 30, between 16 and 30 years old, represent a wide diversity of interests, backgrounds and identities. Among those were at least a few who identified in the middle sexualities. Here are profiles of two of these:

**Em Vanderlinden**, 23, identifies as "queer, within the bi spectrum," and worked at Chicago's Center on Halsted in Community and Cultural Programs. Xe now attends Northeastern University School of Law. Em wrote, "Gender nonconformity is such a wide field, with so much room for exploration and possibility. The gender binary is a divisive tool that is prescriptive and ultimately harmful. It is definitely harmful to anyone exhibiting gender variance, but I also think it is harmful to those who unquestioningly sit on either side of the constructed seesaw. ... While trans people are getting more recognition, non-binary identities are still relatively new concepts. ... My identity means that I identify with neither, and furthermore see the classification of genders and sexes as problematic. By living outside of the gender binary, I reject the limitations of biological determinism and societal gendered norms. In my work as a future attorney, I want to both represent and be representative of the trans community."

**Anna Rose**, 29, hails from Houston, TX. She fell in love with Chicago while attending the National High School Institute Cherub program at Northwestern and soon after attended DePaul Theater School and Columbia College Chicago, where she received her BFA in Acting with a minor in Directing. She has directed, performed or produced over 20 new plays with Nothing Without a Company, where she is a founding member and the Artistic Director. Anna Rose is also a Licensed Massage Therapist (LMT) focusing on energy work and body awareness. Anna Rose started identifying as bisexual at the age of 22. At the age of 23 she identified as lesbian for about six months. She continued to identify as bisexual until the age of 29, when she came out as an omnisexual woman who happened to be married to a lesbian woman.

## And about marriage...

In the past three months the number of US states with marriage equality has jumped to 33, plus the District of Columbia.



At the October brunch at Steph's

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## Ask Tiggy

Dear Tiggy,

I realized I was bisexual during my sophomore year of high school but I never told anyone. I didn't want people to assume it was just a phase so I promised myself I would wait until I found a girl who was worth coming out for.

I am now a senior in high school and I did find that girl. Her name is April. I don't know how to tell my Catholic and conservative parents. I don't want them to think this is a phase or to get angry and prevent me from seeing her. I can't keep quietly hiding her, though.

I am not seeking their approval or acceptance. I just cannot keep living a lie about who I am.

-Mary

Mary, congratulations on finding someone you like a lot! And good for you for refusing to live a double life.

Here's what you do: pick a day this week (yes, this week, you need to get this over with) when you're alone with your parents – perhaps dinner time – and say the following to them: "I've been keeping something from you two and I'm really sorry about that. But actually, it's something that makes me very happy, so I want to share it with you. I'm dating someone. Her name is April."

They will have questions. One of your answers might be: "I know now that I'm bisexual. That means that when

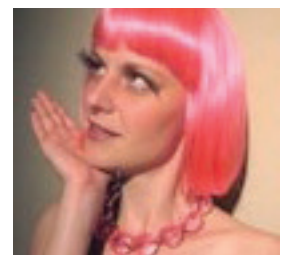
I date, I'm open to dating either boys or girls." If their questions revolve around your faith, you can direct them to [www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org), particularly the FAQs. Dignity, a resource organization for LGBT Catholics, provides a listserv specifically for bisexual issues; it may be helpful for you to subscribe.

Try your best to discourage your parents from "escalating" behaviors during the conversation, like raising voices, talking quickly, or standing up. That will keep the conversation calm. If they say it's a phase, do not argue – remember, you don't need their approval. Just agree to disagree and don't get into it. When it seems that you've answered most of their questions, you might want to conclude the conversation and give them time to process.

Let your support network (e.g. April, any friends to whom you're out, supportive adults) know in advance that you're doing this so you have a soft place to land after The Conversation. If at any point you feel unsafe around your parents, leave and go directly to a pre-designated friend's house.

Mary, I can tell you have the courage and integrity to get through this. If you listen closely, you'll hear millions of fellow bisexuals around the world cheering you on.

-Tiggy



***Are you a bi lady in need of some good advice? Write to Tiggy Upland at [tiggyupland@gmail.com](mailto:tiggyupland@gmail.com). This advice column is for entertainment purposes only. The columnist reserves the right to edit the letters for any reason. Find more Ask Tiggy on [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net).***

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## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street in Boston, behind Club Cafe. Call 617-424-9595.

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### Ongoing Events

**Come to our monthly bi brunch! All women are welcome! See calendar for dates.**

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#### 2nd Mondays:

**Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.** 7-9pm at the Bi Office. All are welcome.

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#### 2nd Mondays:

**Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** 7pm. Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com).

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#### 1st Wednesdays:

**BLiSS: Bisexual Social & Support Group.** All genders welcome. 7pm. Info: [bliss@biresource.net](mailto:bliss@biresource.net)

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#### 2nd Thursdays:

**Younger Bi Group.** For bi folks 20-29. 7pm. Info: Kate at [youngblissboston@gmail.com](mailto:youngblissboston@gmail.com).

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#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Bi Brunch.** 11:30am at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

#### *Metro-Boston women:*

*Keep up with local events. Sign up for our email list! Send an email to: [biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com).*



# CALENDAR

## December

**8 (Monday) 7 pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Mondays. Info/RSVP: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com).

**11 (Thursday) 6:30pm, BLiSS and Young BLiSS Community Holiday Dinner.** We will celebrate a year of support and socializing with a community social outing at Bertucci's in Alewife. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders, orientations, and ages are welcome to attend. Join us at 6:30 at the bar area for a drink, or at 7pm for dinner. Info/RSVP: [bliss@biresource.net](mailto:bliss@biresource.net).

**13 (Saturday) 1-4pm, BIWOC Holiday Gathering.** Join us for lunch at Wagamama in the Prudential Shopping Center and celebrate the holidays! After lunch we can stroll around the mall and do some window shopping together. This event is open to self-identified bi trans and cis women of color of Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Biracial/Multiracial, Latina/Hispanic, and African descent. To RSVP/for info, email Gwen at [biwocinfo@gmail.com](mailto:biwocinfo@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/217339782/>

**19 (Friday) 6-8pm, Coffee and Chat for Bi People of Color.** A safe and supportive space for bi people of color to discuss a variety of topics, meeting at Flour Bakery on Clarendon Street in the Back Bay. Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays. Info/RSVP: Gwen at [biwocinfo@gmail.com](mailto:biwocinfo@gmail.com).

**20 (Saturday) 11:30 am, Bi Brunch.** This mixed gender bi group brunches at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville across from the Davis stop on the Red Line. Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays.

## January

**7 (Wednesday) 7-9 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** All bi and

bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays. Info/RSVP: [bliss@biresource.net](mailto:bliss@biresource.net).

**8 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid (or are questioning in that direction), please join us on the second Thursdays for a few hours of laughter, discussion, activities, and/or the eating and drinking of delicious things! Activities and locations will vary, so please contact Kate at [youngblissboston@gmail.com](mailto:youngblissboston@gmail.com) for info/to RSVP.

**9 (Friday) 6:30-8:30pm, Bi Women of Color (BIWOC) Coffee and Chat.** A safe and supportive space for bi women of color to discuss a variety of topics, meeting at Dado Tea in Harvard Square. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Fridays. To RSVP/for info, email Gwen at [biwocinfo@gmail.com](mailto:biwocinfo@gmail.com). For online discussions please visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BostonBIWOC/>

**12 (Monday) 7pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See December 8<sup>th</sup>)

**16 (Friday) 6-8pm, Coffee and Chat for Bi People of Color.** (See December 19<sup>th</sup>)

**17 (Saturday) 11:30am, Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See December 20<sup>th</sup>)

**18 (Sunday), 12pm, BBWN Potluck Brunch at Frances's in Roslindale.** Bring a potluck dish to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Info/RSVP to [frances@gardenofwords.com](mailto:frances@gardenofwords.com)

**22 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition.** Join us for our brand spankin' new other-side-of-the-river discussion group! This group will meet 4th Thursdays. It will be more discussion-based than our usual monthly meetings, so come prepared for some excellent relevant conversation! Meets at Flour Bakery on Clarendon, near Copley. Info/RSVP: contact Gabby at [gmlonder@gmail.com](mailto:gmlonder@gmail.com).

**Calendar,** *continues on next page*

## Calendar, *continued from previous page*

(date TBD) **Bisexual Women Partnered with Straight Men Group.** This will be a peer-led support Meetup hosted by BIWOC and the BRC. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction and sexuality in a supportive safe space for only trans and cisgender women. Open only to women currently in long term partnerships with straight trans or cisgender men. Check <http://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities> for the date and details of January's meeting.

## February

**4 (Wednesday) 7-9 pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See January 7th)

**4-8 (Wednesday-Sunday) Creating Change Conference** in Denver, Colorado. The annual LGBTQ activist conference led by the National LGBTQ Task Force is a one-of-a-kind gathering to share experiences, learn new skills, and network with people from across the country. Visit [www.creatingchange.org](http://www.creatingchange.org) for more details.

**6 (Friday) 6-8pm, Bi Women of Color (BIWOC) Coffee and Chat.** (See January 9th.)

### **Bi Women Quarterly** wants you!!!



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**9 (Monday) 7 pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Mondays. Info/RSVP: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com).

**12 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See January 8th.)

**14 (Saturday) 11:30 am, Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See December 20<sup>th</sup>)

**15 (Sunday) 12pm, President's Day BBWN Potluck Brunch.** This is Jen's annual Presidents' Day brunch: a great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. Please bring food and/or drinks to share. Space is limited to about ten brunchers, so RSVP to [jbonardi@hotmail.com](mailto:jbonardi@hotmail.com) to reserve your space!

**19 (Thursday) 6:30-8pm, Young BLiSS Bi-Weekly, Discussion Edition.** (See January 22<sup>nd</sup>.)

**20 (Friday) 6-8pm, Coffee and Chat for Bi People of Color.** (See December 19<sup>th</sup>)

### HOLD THE DATE:

**April 17-19 (Friday-Sunday), in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN. The BECAUSE Conference and BiReConUSA 2015.** Updates and information will be posted at [www.bisexualorganizingproject.org/](http://www.bisexualorganizingproject.org/).

**June 13 (Saturday), Boston's Pride March.**

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

We are looking for folks with graphic design skills to create some gorgeous graphic images for this publication, to help us improve our look, and to design the pins that we sell as a fundraising tool to support our work. We'll also be hiring a summer intern.

Interested: Contact Robyn at [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).

## Reader Feedback

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Write to us at:

[biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)

