

My SuperSHero

By Carla Imperial

I'm dropping off our newly-minted teenager at her friend Romi's house. I say, "Ask her if she's up for hanging out with you outside while I do some errands. I can pick you up in a half-hour."

"Them, Mama."

"Damn it. Them. Ask them. Sorry."

Romi used to have a different name. They have been my daughter's friend since second grade when we moved to the Valley. Kai shared with us a few months back that they were transitioning, very matter-of-factly. I hadn't seen Romi, their long hair now a short, shaggy cut, until this morning. They had spent many a day at our home before their transition, and I needed to do a quick shift to catch up. Kai had made the switch, effortlessly, without blinking. In fact, two other friends of hers had also confided in her about their grappling with their identity. While Kai put 'straight ally' on a self-assessment poster, she's more fluid in her ideas of identity in her thirteen years than I have ever been. And I have had the opportunity to work on myself for 58 years...

I have had many role models in my lifetime. However, none have made me want to work harder to be my best self than my daughter. She is, hands down, one of my greatest SHEros, and it's been most evident during this past year



Megan, Kai, and Carla

Carla, continues on page 24

A Connection through Time and Space

By Franziska

In the summer of 2018, three friends and I made a trip through four different countries in Europe by train to celebrate graduating from university. When we arrived in Budapest, our third stop, we left our dingy ten-bed hostel room again immediately to see the city at night and eat by the water. Across the lake we sat by, we could see the Museum of Fine Arts advertising its current exhibition of Frida Kahlo's works. I had never considered that seeing her original paintings was something I would be able to do; to me, she was simply too big, a larger-than-life icon of unconventional femininity, art, and Mexican culture. As soon as I saw the posters, I informed my friends that we had to go see Frida, since this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I felt elated as we entered the museum with numerous other tourists the next day, and although the rooms were packed, I was still gripped by the experience. The moment I remember most vividly from this day—and maybe the entire trip—was standing in front of one of Frida's self-portraits. It's called *A Broken Column*, and it depicts her naked, her entire body split in two, revealing the broken column as her spine. She is strapped together by clinical-looking, white leather belts, nails impaling her whole body,

and tears spilling from her eyes. As I stood there among other sweaty tourists, looking up at her, she looked back at me: pained but unwavering. I started crying right there, among all this art she left behind as her legacy. Nobody noticed, which I was thankful for, because I could not have explained my reaction. I am not an art person—I like to look at it, but never before in my life had I felt like crying because of a painting. Still, the tears kept coming as I continued through the exhibition. I joined one of my friends again to look at nude sketches of women, all labelled as Frida's "close friends." I knew she had had relationships with both men and women, and when I mentioned it to my friends we laughed, speculating that there might have been more than "close friendship" at play. I have always been bisexual, but at this point in my life, I did not know this about me because I would not let myself. But I saw Frida, who had let herself live it, and she looked back at me.

A year later, I had settled into a new university and temporarily moved in with my parents again when a friend asked me to come

Franziska, continues on page 25

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Editor's Note

Dear Community,

The theme of this issue is "Role Models," and it was a joy to put together. With every submission we received, we were reminded, generally and specifically, how many amazing people are in our community. We were also reminded that role models come in many forms: public and historic figures, community organizers, friends, family members, and even ourselves.

Also in this issue: an "Around the World" focus on Voces Fieras, a spoken-word poetry group in Costa Rica; information about three books: Katie Hill's *She Will Rise*, Rosalie Knecht's *Who Is Vera Kelly?*, and Jodi Rosenfeld's *Closer to Fine*; and beautiful artwork from Cheryl Williams, Jo-Anne Carlson, and Carol E Moses.

Other news to report to you: our journey toward 501(c)3 nonprofit status is almost complete and—once approved—will be retroactive to late December 2020. Thus, donations to *BWQ* are tax deductible. (Yes, this is a hint to consider becoming a one-time donor or a monthly sustainer. We're biwomenboston@gmail.com on Paypal)

A reminder to all that we are hosting monthly "digital brunches" and you are invited, no matter your geographic location. See page 28 for dates.

As we await a time when a vaccine is widely available around the world, it is our hope that you will experience *Bi Women Quarterly* as a place of joy, a shelter in the storm. Remember that you are part of a worldwide bi+ community and you are not alone.

-Robyn

Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

Summer 2021:

Never Have I Ever

Let's have some fun with a game of "Never Have I Ever." Tell us about something you have never done. Is it something you hope to do, or something you hope to keep avoiding? If you hope to do it, what has stopped you, and do you think you will one day? Submissions are due by May 1.

Fall 2021:

Bodies

Let's return to the topic of bodies—our own bodies and our embodied connections. Body image; gendered bodies, health and (dis)ability. Socially distanced bodies, virtual bodies. Changing bodies. Bodies, attraction, and sexuality. Share your reflections on embodied experiences through personal stories, poetry, artwork, or opinion pieces. Submissions are due by August 1.

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenboston.org.

Send your submissions and suggestions for future topics to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

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

HONOR ROLL

*Thank you for
volunteering:*

Alana Martin
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Keja Valens

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Boston-area women: Join our our Google group: <https://tinyurl.com/Join-BBWN>

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



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

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

AROUND THE WORLD: *Voces Fieras, Costa Rica*

Voces Fieras (Fierce Voices) is a spoken word poetry group formed by sexual and gender dissident folk. As a group, Voces Fieras facilitates creative workshops and organizes artistic events. All of these spaces are means to work on healing the wounds of gender and sexual dissident women and non-binary people. Voces Fieras also holds workshops to create a digital online feminist magazine called *La Rebelde (The Rebel)*, and is always looking to create networks and collaborate with other folk in the region. You can find Voces Fieras on Instagram and Facebook @vocesfieras. We share here two poems by members of this group:



Left to right: Jimena, Ang, Shar

They tell me "Your body is a temple."

By Jimena Cascante

And I wonder, what kind of temple does an atheist go to?
They tell me "Your body is a temple"
And I see the temples I went to as a child
Where I couldn't be me
Where I wasn't accepted
I grew up around temples full of hate
Temples that scared off my grandma
Temples full of lies and scary stories
Where my trans brothers and sisters were not accepted
Where I would be nothing but a sinner
Where Punishment was for most but forgiveness just for some

They tell me your body is a temple
But I'd rather be a graffiti-filled wall
I don't want to die a blank canvas.
Every tattoo in my body tells my story
I will not be shamed

You tell me my body is a temple
I'd rather be an abandoned building,
Occupied by the revolution

They tell me "Your body is a temple"
My body is no temple
I don't want to be ivory white
I would rather be art
And not high art
I don't want to be hung on a museum wall

I'd rather be
A bad poem written in broken english,
A painting filled with bodoquitos by a ten-year-old.

You tell me my body is a temple

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Do you mean cold and sacred?
I'd rather be flawed,
Approachable,
Warm,
Loving,
Caring,
I'd rather be Human.

Walking: yesterday I dreamed I was traveling

By Sharling Hernández

We think we are on the right side of history
What is the guarantee?
Is there an impartial judgment?

Her pain was real
Her insecurities,
And mine

Sadly, they came bigger
Than the beautiful story we shared

This cycle has ended
And yesterday when I dreamed I was traveling
I remember that I travelled mostly with you

In my dream you were not there
As if I knew, no matter how much I loved you,
You were not to be in my future
We wanted different things
But you wanted yours
And you suffocated me
And were uncomfortable when I did my own thing

Voces Fieras, continued on next page

To feel this,
Your discomfort
When I had a world beyond you
With others
Chills me
But it is certainly
A clear memory
Several.

It's been exactly a year since I went out with her for the first time.

That story, of the one I could buy a coffee
Who I liked to talk with so much,
Who I like to see so much,
The love in that space was beautiful,
Sincere,
With everything and her occasional bad ways to do things,
For which she afterwards apologized
I reminded her of what is effective responsibility
And she was not willing after a while to have it
It could happen
With honesty and clarity it is appreciated.
I do it.

It's been a year
Since this story started
That in spite of everything and the anxiety it triggered
It was beautiful when we found ourselves in each other's arms
I had so much love for you
I still do
But it's different
I still like you,
I still remember as my favorite the moment
That embrace after many orgasms,
All the way till the midnight
That greeted my birthday

Those embraces
Would be wonderful to repeat
But not the orgasms,
With you, I don't need them.
They were delicious,
I am grateful,
And I know that is not where I want to find them again

I return to you dear lovers
How many times have I gone back?
How many times have you?

Yesterday I dreamed that I was traveling,
But I don't want to do it with you,
Walking, I still remember the possibilities I once felt,
I once wanted

But what is certain is that I want to take myself on a walk
To go
To scream and to whisper to myself
As before a mirror
That reveals something obvious in your face
In your manner
In your glassy eyes
In your wet/soaked/dripping nose

I want to walk
With white teeth
With a throat clear
Of words
I want to take myself on a walk
Tour myself
As I toured you
Right here
Never distant
Always loving
Not coward
Brave.

I want to take myself on a walk
I want to travel myself
I want to start cycles
To embrace myself
To fill myself with orgasms
That may be of cake and peanut butter
That may be of dances
Of the pauses in a rainstorm
Of the deep breaths before I rise

I want to take myself on a walk
To walk the paths
Being
Without reproaches
Without so many anxieties
Without unnecessary and distant silences

I want to take myself on a walk
With warm loves near
But with my own
Glowing
Alive
Irreplaceable
And to recognize the sadness
Of having abandoned myself
And have a coffee with her
And thank her
And stop together
And welcome midnight
Embraced
Calmly

Voces Fieras, continued from previous page

With nothing more but myself
And the light through the blinds
That weighs nothing
That lets everything pass
Because life is short
And I want to be slow
As my sadness wants me to love her
To love me
To know ourselves
Complete
Perfect
Full
Empty
Ebbing
Growing
Full

*Note: this poem was translated from the Spanish by Keja Valens.
Find the original at @vocesfieras.*

Voces Fieras' organizers are:

Jimena Cascante (she/her), 30 years old, works as a consultant, studied chemistry, gender, and sustainable development, and holds a M.Sc. in Transnational, Cultural, and Community Studies.

Sharling Hernández (she/her), 30 years old, works as a community psychologist, specializing in working with women and sexually diverse people.

Ang Azofeifa (they/them), works as a content writer, theater director, actress and performer. They hold a B.A. in Dramatic Arts and are currently working on their Master's thesis in English literature.



Jess

By Jenna Teacake

Every afternoon, I go to the commons where Jess hangs out after school. I *don't* go there to see Jess. I go there to buy blue Gatorade and white cheddar Cheez-Its from the vending machines before cheer practice.

But Jess is always there. She's always sitting casually at the table by the window. Always sipping a bottle of water. Always wearing those baggy jeans with the chains on the side.

When I show up today with my quarters jingling in my purse, she smirks and says, "Sup."

I chuckle and reply, "Sup to you too."

This is how our fifteen minutes of playful banter begins. It's our afternoon ritual, as predictable to me as the plot of *Grease*: my favorite movie of all time.

Jess is a freshman like me, which is surprising because she has the aura of someone much older and more confident. It's something about the way she talks. She'll make these snarky comments about my cheer outfits, and if *anyone else* were to sarcastically call my massive white hairbow "adorable," I'd probably want to punch them in the face. However, the way Jess says it in her

low, raspy voice...with her twisted little grin...well, it's kind of exciting.

I guess it's just nice to go back and forth with someone. I don't have witty repartees with any of the cheerleaders, after all. They don't talk to me much.

That's why it's so weird when our team captain, Megan, approaches me when I join the rest of the girls at our practice space in the hallway.

"Hey," I mutter, setting my purse against the wall.

"Hey..." Megan looks me up and down and smiles, her eyes wide. It makes me uneasy.

"Um. What?"

"Are you friends with that Jess girl?" she blurts.

I'm not sure where this question is coming from. "Not really. Kind of. I don't know."

Megan glances to the side. When I follow her gaze, I see that she is looking at Jess. Jess is heading for the school's exit, chains clinking, cello case in hand.

"You know that she's... *gay*... right?" Megan whispers the word "gay" and giggles. It reminds me of how I used to say cuss words when I was in seventh grade.

Jess, continued on next page

Jess catches my eye then and gives me a quick wave. Something twitches in my chest. I make myself look away.

“Yeah,” I try to say lightly. “I know.”

A knowing smirk tugs at the corners of Megan’s mouth. I must be blinking too much—I always do that when I get nervous. I sit on the tile floor and begin to stretch, touching my toes so I can hide my face in my knees. I hope that Megan will leave me alone.

Unfortunately, she plops down next to me.

For a while, there is a restless sort of silence.

“So...” she finally starts.

I sigh. “So what?”

“Are *you* gay then?”

My pulse quickens. “Uh, no.”

She peers at me quizzically. “Are you sure?”

“I can’t be. I have a boyfriend.”

And it’s true. I adore Michael. We’ve been together for over a year now. He’s tall and dynamic with dark curly hair and a fiery kiss that I’ve written poems about at three o’clock in the morning.

And yet, my heart feels heavy.

“Oh, right! Sorry,” she says, looking flustered. Or relieved, perhaps.

I shrug.

“You guys are...cute together.”

She doesn’t mean this. She probably doesn’t even know who Michael is.

“Thanks.” I force a smile.

At last, Megan goes to talk to somebody else. I take a deep breath, unsure how to process what just happened.

No one has ever thought I could be gay like Jess. I should probably feel offended that someone would lump me together with her.

But when I think about Jess—her buzzcut, big boots, and blue eyes—I don’t feel offended by the comparison at all.

Jess is the only gay person I’ve ever met in real life. Before her, I thought gay people only existed in the fanfiction I sometimes stumbled upon in the dark corners of LiveJournal. Now that I know Jess—a girl who openly talks about pride parades and ex-girlfriends, a badass who cuts her hair short and takes up space—I’ve definitely learned more about the world. Maybe that’s why I like to talk to her so much. She expands my mind.

Sometimes I wonder what it’s like to discover that you’re gay. Obviously, I’ll never know, since I’m attracted to boys. Maybe

I should ask Jess how she found out. It would be interesting to learn about, anyway.

My thoughts are interrupted when our coach announces that it’s time to start the warm-up, which involves running laps throughout the school’s halls. I reluctantly oblige, standing up and starting to jog toward the social studies wing.

After a few seconds, I’m bored, so I create a movie scene in my mind.

I picture Jess walking through the hall in slow motion, holding another girl’s hand. I imagine that the girl holding her hand is a cheerleader, and she has long hair in a ponytail, like me. The two girls look so bizarre together because they’re total opposites, but somehow it just works. They’re just like Danny and Sandy from *Grease*... you know, in a universe where Danny is a brash, black-clothed girl, and Sandy never abandons her preppy attire for a catsuit. As they walk by, other students stare at them, but Jess and her nameless, faceless lover do not care. They just smile and keep holding hands.

I don’t know why, but that image makes me happy.

Jenna Teacake is a bi educator and influencer. They are passionate about spreading bi positivity, reading, drawing, doing makeup, and snuggling with cats.



Jenna

To Be Like June

By Carlina Green

“She is among the bravest of us, the most outraged. She feels for all. She is the universal poet.” This is how Alice Walker described poet, teacher, and activist June Jordan, my #bicon and role model.¹

Active in the civil rights, anti-war, feminist, and queer liberation movements, Jordan used her poetry as a spotlight, as a magnifying glass amplifying injustice and marginalization. And just as a magnifying glass can harness the power of the sun to start a fire, Jordan’s words set aflame the veneer of American exceptionalism and liberty by calling attention to the centuries of oppression the nation has wrought. She once commented, “Poetry is a political act because it involves telling the truth.”²

In her truth-telling practice, she tackled topics like police brutality, sexual assault, colonialism, and oil spills, but she also celebrated the wonder of nature, the vibrancy of Black love, and bisexuality. As Adrienne Rich commented, “Keeping vibrations of hope on the pulse through dispiriting times was part of the task she set herself. She wanted her readers, listeners, students to feel their own latent power—of the word, the deed, of their own beauty and intrinsic value; she wanted each of us to understand how isolation can leave us defenseless and paralyzed.”³

Part of the way she lived out her mission of empowerment was by founding a poetry program for Black and Puerto Rican youth in Brooklyn called “The Voice of the Children” and later one at Berkeley called “Poetry for the People!” Her creation of these programs reflected her belief that poetry belongs to everyone, despite the elitism of the white Western canon. In fact, Jordan often wrote in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and defended it fiercely.⁴ Amidst the voices dismissing and disparaging sexual fluidity, Jordan proudly claimed her identity



June Jordan

as a bisexual woman. “If you are free,” she said, “you are not predictable and you are not controllable. To my mind, that is the keenly positive politicizing significance of bisexual affirmation.... to insist upon the equal validity of all the components of social/sexual complexity.”⁵

Jordan was everything I aspire to be: a pursuer of equity and liberation and a beacon of hope who is confident in herself but finds fulfillment in communion with others. Above all, Jordan reminded the world of the saving power of community. Solidarity and connection as a means of survival and advancement were a constant theme in her work. As Jordan wrote, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.”⁶

Carlina Green (shelthey) is a bisexual abolitionist and immigration paralegal based outside of Chicago. In her free time she studies Portuguese, rides her bike, writes letters, and proofreads BWQ!

¹Walker, Alice. Author endorsement for June Jordan, *His Own Where*, Feminist Press, 2010.

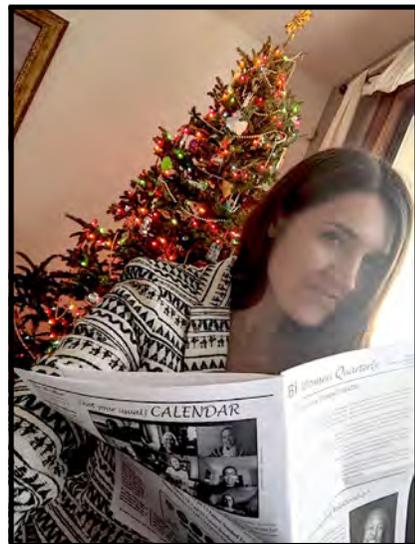
²Quiroz-Martinez, Julie, and June Jordan. “Poetry Is a Political Act.” *Colorlines*, 18 Apr. 2015, www.colorlines.com/articles/poetry-political-act.

³Rich, Adrienne. Foreword, June Jordan, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*, Copper Canyon Press, 15 Aug. 2006, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68633/directed-by-desire>.

⁴Jordan, June. “For the Sake of People’s Poetry,” in *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays*, Basic Civitas Books, Perseus Books Group, 15 Aug 2006.

⁵Jordan, June. “A New Politics of Sexuality.” 29 Apr. 1991, Stanford, CA, Stanford University.

⁶Jordan, June. “Poem for South African Women.” In *Passion: Poems for South African Women*. Beacon Press, October 1980.



Carlina Green

Socializing Under Doress

By Jen Bonardi

The COVID-19 pandemic robbed us of many small businesses that we hoped would thrive well beyond 2020—cafes, bars, theatres, all struggling and finally collapsing under the weight of a stalled economy. Events management in the time of social distancing grew anemic and, as the winter solstice approached, only the heartiest of Bostonians continued to suffer at outdoor venues. Still, I was surprised to receive the email on a November morning announcing that The List, a queer institution, was converting to a Facebook page and shifting all operational duties to its 20+ sponsors. “End of an era,” I muttered, and shook my head.

Until recently, The List: Boston’s Queer Agenda was an online newsletter of upcoming events, housing opportunities, and classified advertisements for LGBTQ people across Massachusetts. With 25 years of operation and over 10,000 subscribers, it is an unqualified success in its original mission to connect queer women to each other. This belies its inauspicious beginnings as a simple list of events compiled by Hannah Doress in a push to revive the queer women’s scene in Boston that had virtually collapsed by 1995.

“There was almost nothing to do,” Doress explained on our call. “There was no regular publication of events. It was so damn boring. It was terrible.” Doress began aggressively researching opportunities for queer women to get together because they wanted to find community, friendship, and (especially) love. “One of the tragedies that you’d have to deal with repeatedly is

meeting someone really cool one night...and never seeing them again,” she said. “It was not at all like today, with so many ways to connect. We had such limited tools when we started. The List was born at a time when it was a lifeline.”

At some point in her description of those times, I interjected, “I should tell you that I went to Tufts undergrad and I’m turning 44 this weekend.” She knew what that meant: from 1994-1998, I was in college just outside of Boston. I knew well the days of yore, when that eager dude in my college queer club would always bring a list of events geared entirely toward white, gay men. When we girls would try to bum a ride to Western Mass so we could troll the women’s colleges there. When someone suggested we follow the BDOC (Big Dyke on Campus) around the Jamaica Plain neighborhood (chockablock with lesbians) in order to find dates, and it seemed like a solid idea. Our only idea.

We needed a hero, and Doress practically came equipped with a cape. She grew up in Boston in the 1980s, an activist with a political organizing perspective and fundraising skills. She had a broad perspective and lots of resources, including a library job at Harvard’s School of Public Health. And perhaps most importantly, Doress was, in her own words, “insanely extroverted, completely off the charts social” and keyed into happenings in different parts of the city.

Doress had just started using technology to meet people. She bought an early personal database organizer, programmed it with questions, and surveyed women she met at queer events while recording their email addresses for The List. Doress was especially committed to letting people know about LGBTQ institutions and artists that did not get the attention they deserved.

Through her events production companies like Hanarchy Now, she created Accidental Fundraisers. Their invitations on The List would say, “Come to this party and bring \$5,” and the money went to, for instance, fighting an anti-LGBTQ initiative in Maine. This level of activism is pretty commonplace now, but was not at all common then. Doress’s perspective at the time was that the older guard did not like the pro-sex message of the younger generation. She concedes that it was a totally different political battle for older folks but still felt that they were not moving toward inclusivity. For her, The List presented an opportunity to create a more expansive, representative queer community.

Before she created The List, Doress felt excluded from queer circles. In fact, most List volunteers were not necessarily comfortable attending a typical lesbian event. Her keen eye toward including the more marginalized folks within our community is likely why The List boasted a regular cohort of trans volunteers. Doress remembers visiting a trans support group in Waltham early on to invite the members to List events. When trans woman Rita Hester was murdered in 1998, Doress successfully used The



Hannah Doress

Jen, continued on next page

List to assemble queer people for a public response. That same year, Hanarchy Now produced “The Art of Transformation: A Coming Out Party for FTMs” at Mass College of Art; most of the organizers were lesbians from The List.

It’s clear that Doress put much effort into finding and supporting vulnerable groups in queerness, like Black and South Asian people. Growing up white in Boston with parents active in the civil rights movement, she was acutely aware of and pained by Boston’s racial segregation. Naturally, she was looking for ways to enact multi-racial collaboration. Pride parties in Boston at the time were expensive, brightly lit, in the lobby of City Hall, and very white. Doress recognized that “you have to engage with leadership of color to build towards a transformative result” and is grateful to have worked with fabulous organizers like Amatul Hannan and Imani Henry.

Here is where the interview gets surprising. I had no plans to ask questions about what role bisexuals played in The List, even as we were discussing her ardent support for vulnerable groups within the larger queer community. Sure, I was writing this article for a bi+ publication, but I didn’t expect any specific interest there. I had already registered deep disappointment in seeing zero bisexual organizations among the 23 that will edit The List beginning in 2021. (I discovered later that The List had invited the Bisexual Resource Center to join their editing team. The BRC declined for the time being due to capacity issues.)

But suddenly, Doress urged me to speak to the other folks who edited and managed The List and especially encouraged me to ask them if they identified as bi. I had just assumed they identified as lesbian. As it turns out, many bisexuals have served among the cadre of List volunteers and leaders over the years. Then, Doress asked that I relay a message to Robyn Ochs (editor of this publication) on how she has always greatly admired her. Doress came out into the bi community and has steadfastly loved and supported us. She confessed that she has always considered bisexuals to be “the ideal people.” No one ever says that, either.

When she told me that she fought for bi inclusion at Wesleyan, I realized that that was years before my college queer group’s annual meeting on bisexuality stopped devolving into near-fist fights (not joking). In the late ‘90s, she remembers calling bi organizations before the Action Pride Party for Women of Color and saying, “We want to make it clear that bi people are *very* welcome to this event.” The List’s inclusion included *us*, and that was revolutionary.

Nevertheless, obstacles persist. Most queer organizations today are still biphobic, and unabashedly so. Boston continues to be aggressively racist on a social level. Indeed, the entire United States has regressed in racial equality under Trump—or, really, we were always this terrible. Doress laments how hard it was to find spaces for events in the old days; nothing different there either. The incredible advances in social technology have not

erased the challenges of maintaining a venture like The List. “It’s a lot of work. It’s not automated. It takes a *lot* of management,” says Doress.

I was heartened to hear that the first of her recommendations for leadership was *rejoicing*. “For 25 years, we’ve had this resource that’s made such a difference. Let’s celebrate and thank people for carrying this for 25 years! They carried my baby!” says Doress. She believes deeply in the need for both joy and communication with each other. “We need to ask ourselves: How are we going to be there for each other in these pressured times? Be ready to help your friends.”

She goes on to counsel that if you love something, you need to invest in it. “We’re in economic freefall. We have delusional politicians. Everything you love is threatened. There’s violent racism, income inequality, and a disastrous political system. Focus on the political and economic needs in our community and invest in them—through a business, a newsletter, anything.” Step one, says Doress, is conceptualizing and projecting a utopia. This allows us to frame a culture and community, such as celebrating trans people.

From where I stand, Doress’s greatest power as a role model is her passion for lifting others up. She is most animated when talking, for example, about Eve Alpern’s amazing set work for an event with a fashion show and a butch stripper, or how Amatul Hannan got Chinese lion dancers to perform outside Mass College of Art. Hannah Doress started with a list of events and email addresses gathered via paper and pen. As subscribers began sending in submissions and editors established deadlines, she stuck to what she was good at: being a catalyst.

Her last bit of wisdom is that “Nothing lasts forever. We have stunning, bad-ass talent. They’re doing a lot of things. They will need to move on.” Although she moved on from The List long ago, she uses what she learned there in her current work on climate change. Doress leaves behind a legacy of unprecedented unity among queer women in the Boston area. For bisexual women, she used The List to love us when no one else did.

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



Jen Bonardi

My Bi Bestie

By Jini Z.

Jessica and I met when we were 12 years old in the lunch line. She complimented the shirt I was wearing and, naturally, we have been best friends ever since. Jessica is funny, blunt, brilliant, slightly hedonistic, and one of the most loyal people I know. I'm significantly more of a people-pleaser, generally more social, unhealthily addicted to change, and easily swayed by obligation. Despite our differences in personality, our values are the same and our differences work well together. We appreciate and learn from each other, and the fact that we aren't the same is a large part of the reason I have grown so much from her presence in my life. I'm thankful for her every day.

The bond Jessica and I share spans almost 18 years and encompasses falling for the same people at least twice, making out on stage at a burlesque show *impressively* platonically, both of us facing significant crises in our long-term relationships, her bridesmaid-ship in both of my weddings, and a devotion to each other's happiness that has continuously proven itself unconditional. Against all odds, our closeness has never devolved into anything romantic, which honestly makes our relationship even more special to me. I don't have a biological sister, let alone an older one, but Jessica is as close to one as I could ever ask for, and I can easily recall at least four major moments where her

assumption of that role in my life truly impacted my journey as both a bisexual and decent human being.

The first instance occurred in seventh grade. Although the details of most of the trip are hazy now, I remember us attending a school overnight camp with an obstacle course and zipline. Jessica was *not* into that life (although I was) and instead of trying to squeeze in a second time through the course, Jessica and I stepped away to talk. During our conversation, she ended up sharing with me that she had started getting her period. As someone who had not experienced that yet and was frightened of what to expect, I was grateful for her patience in answering my many follow-up questions and beyond thankful to have someone I felt comfortable enough to ask them.

In ninth grade, Jessica told me she had made out with Candace. *Candace*. Ooofdah. That was rough for me. Not because I was homophobic or upset about her 'coming out,' but because (unbeknownst to me at the time) I was *also* very, very, confusingly and completely in love with Candace myself. I'll spare you all the details of the drama that followed (even though, yes, it *was* juicy) and just say that everyone should be super impressed that Jessica and I are still best friends. Throughout the whole ordeal—romantic feelings and the rest of the situation aside—I was constantly comforted and impressed by the fact that Jessica never seemed to doubt herself, her feelings, or her identity as a bisexual. Her assuredness was, in every respect, pivotal for me as I moved forward with my own "coming out."

In tenth grade, Jessica confessed to me that she had lost her virginity. She had started dating the man she'll actually be marrying as soon as COVID chills out, and the two of them had decided that was something they both wanted. I remember being in the cafeteria and letting my face and words ask calm and collected questions while, internally, personal judgments and opinions warred. I'm a little ashamed to admit that, honestly, but I think she would understand. I hadn't been exposed to the idea that people could have sex responsibly *and* for fun *and* not be scumbags so, in my mind, the only outcomes I could imagine were ones laden with regret, and I didn't want that for her. Of course, now, I can look back and laugh (or cringe) at my ignorance, but at the time it was a pretty shocking revelation for me, and it took me a little bit to process.

The fourth major time Jessica nudged me in the direction of some much-needed personal growth was after I started college. I had begun to find myself much more engaged in politics and political discussions than ever before. In one such conversation, after asserting my (obvious) support for LGBTQ rights to marriage and protection from discrimination, Jessica slipped in an idea that mentally stopped me in my tracks. It was the notion that people who are in polyamorous relationships should also get



Jini

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to marry whoever they want and that marriages to multiple partners should be recognized. It wasn't something I had considered before and, since it wasn't something I had personally experienced, tendrils of judgment snuck their way in and tainted my feelings on the topic. I think I remember myself responding unenthusiastically to the concept and rationalizing my response with some bullsh** concern about how that would work with couples filing their taxes, instead of just recognizing and admitting my own shortcoming in empathy. Once again, despite my deep desire to be a completely loving and accepting person, I had found myself snagged against judgments I didn't even realize I had until Jessica, with her natural open-mindedness and fierce sense of justice, brought them to the surface for me to meet and challenge.

Last year, Jessica told me that she had been working through some thoughts and feelings about her gender identity and realized that she didn't feel exclusively "female." (By the way, I did check, and Jessica is still comfortable with 'she/her' pronoun). As she expressed this self-discovery to me, I realized that, even though what she was sharing with me was not something I could identify with personally, there was not even a hint of judgment or assumptions floating around in my mind. There was only curiosity and a genuine desire to support her in whatever way would make her feel validated and seen. Some of that could easily be attributed to our relationship, but the bigger truth is simply that Jessica has changed me. By being in my life, Jessica has provoked enough true personal growth that I am now genuinely able to hear and listen to people without letting my own experiences and identities influence how I feel about what they are saying.

In helping me realize, accept, and understand my own bisexual identity to affirming anyone else's personal experience, Jessica has been an incredible role model and friend. I will never adequately be able to express how wonderful she is and how much she means to me, but sharing it here is a great start.

Love you, Jessica <3

Jini is the proud mother of a two-year-old cutie-pants-kiddo who gives her hope for humanity on the daily. For the last two years, Jini has lived and worked in Japan as a flute player in the United States Army Japan Band, but will be returning to America next year to resume her passion as a music educator and band director in public schools. In her spare time, she co-creates content and blogs on her shared website, www.mymillennialism.com, discussing issues of equity, race, and social justice.

Real Life Role Models

By Emily Metcalfe

When people ask me who my bi+ role models are, my mind automatically goes to out celebrities: Alan Cumming, Janelle Monáe, Drew Barrymore. But although I passionately believe bi+ representation is important and my heart does a happy little skip every time a celeb comes out, I don't really look to these people for inspiration. A lot of celebrities, even those who are bi+, don't have a good understanding of the issues faced by a large portion of our community or don't use language recognizing gender diversity.

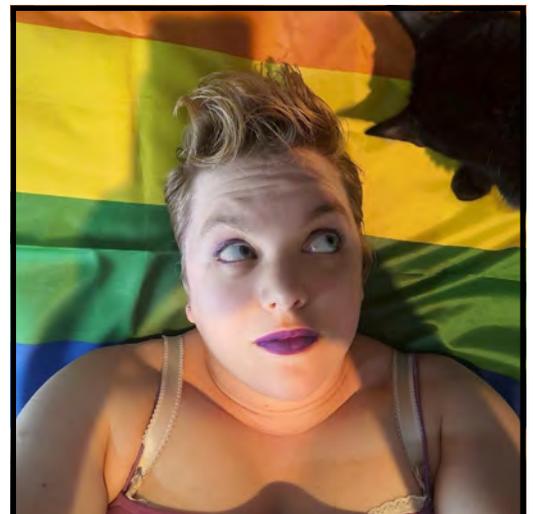
Then I consider historical figures and activists. Brenda Howard, the Mother of Pride. She's such an important person in LGBTQ+ history, but I don't feel a deep personal connection with her. She did amazing things that must not be forgotten, but I know so little about her or her views and beliefs.

When I think of my true bi+ role models, I think of those who have inspired me to learn more, to do more for the community around me, and to become an activist and—hopefully—a role model, myself. Jen Yockney, who has been running a bi group in Manchester (UK) for over 20 years, was one of the first of these. Around seven years ago I read one of her articles in *Bi Community News* and realised I had the power to stop complaining about there being no visible bi+ community around me, and do something about it.

I love seeing Marcus Morgan's passion for activism at a BiCon workshop, in their online resource The Bisexual Index, and in their amazing drag persona, Prospero Acronym. Reading Robyn Ochs's definition of bisexuality again and again in different resources shows me how one person's use of inclusive language can spread like wildfire.

We have so many amazing bi+ activists alive today, still fighting for our community. These are my true role models: those who inspire me to stand up and fight with them, to raise awareness and visibility and to work to make inclusive spaces for other bi+ people.

Emily Metcalfe is a bi+ activist from Leeds, UK. For over six years she has served as chair of Leeds Bi Group, and more recently founded and runs Leeds LGBT+ Literature Festival.



Emily Metcalfe

Before There Were Heroes

By Rev. Kimberley Debus

As a young queer cis woman in the '70s and '80s, I was already the beneficiary of those who came before. In my teens, I was introduced to the music of Chris Williamson, Meg Christian, and Holly Near. I discovered Rita Mae Brown's novel *Rubyfruit Jungle* and the poetry of Adrienne Rich. As the '80s became the '90s, I cheered when Ellen came out on national television, and when Melissa Etheridge and k.d. lang came out through their music and concerts.

These were my heroes. Women a half generation before me, showing me that it was possible to be queer. I wore my lesbian identity proudly, being part of a Lesbian Avengers group, belonging to a lesbian chorus, organizing pride marches and events for women-only spaces. I had dozens of older sisters, cheering me on, grateful for my youth and energy.

And something was still missing.

I suppose I always knew I was bisexual; my crushes and early sexual experiences were with both boys and girls (we still thought gender was binary then). But after some disastrous relationships with men, I fell in love with a woman, and decided that was it. I was a lesbian. And the impulse to lean into the sisterhood was strong, and comforting, and helped me forge an identity and a place I thought I could call home.

Yet the crushes on men continued, and I kept them like a dirty secret. I remember telling the first partner I thought I could trust with this, and while Trish accepted it joyfully, she issued a stern warning: "Do not tell anyone about this."

Trish's words reinforced the secret, even as we worked tirelessly under the LGBT banner. We were so proud to have fought for the inclusion of a trans woman into our midst. We professed, "It doesn't matter who you love, love is love." Yet for all of our rhetoric, it was clear that this community did not believe the B. I grew to understand the B as meaning "not really gay" or "can't make up their minds" or "horndog" or "we want a threesome."

After Trish died in 1998, I found comfort not from my gay and lesbian friends, but from my straight male friends. They seemed to hear the pain in my heart—especially one friend, Mark. Mark's comfort was inviting, and my relationship with him did turn romantic for a while. And that was fine. My mistake was telling my lesbian friends, who branded me a traitor to the sisterhood, who called me a "hasbian," and then proceeded to ostracize me from the community I had loved and served in for years.

There was nowhere to turn. No heroes to look toward for inspiration or comfort. I had no community left and decided that since I was not attracted to women at the moment, my lesbian days were over. I was...well, I didn't know what I was. When I started dating again, I dated men, some of whom thought my past relationships with women were a turn-on, and some of

whom tried to convince me that I was straight now.

And something was still missing.

What was missing, it turns out, was not a hero to look up to, or a community to define me, but a simple way to define myself. It was the simple definition from Robyn Ochs, in her 2014 essay "Bisexuality 101":

"Bisexuals are people who acknowledge in themselves the potential to be attracted—romantically and/or sexually—to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree."

I was bisexual all along and didn't know I could claim the B. I didn't know, because there were no heroes for me as a young bisexual person. I didn't know because the community drew the circles too tightly. I didn't know because there were no out bisexuals in the media to look to.

I am now an out, loud, and proud bisexual. I am bi in my relationships, bi in my attitude, bi in the pulpit.

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said that life is lived forward but understood backward. Here in my mid-50s, I look back on this journey and see that, in fact, I was the hero I had long sought. I blazed my own path, held my own romantic and often wounded heart, and affirmed to myself and the world that there will be better days when we embrace our truths.

Rev. Kimberley Debus (she/her) is a Unitarian Universalist consulting minister based in Saratoga Springs, NY, inspiring an artful and art-filled faith. Her work as a consultant and a performing artist affirms her commitment to liberation and radical welcome.



Rev. Kimberley Debus

A Girl Named Masiel

By Maria Rodriguez Puzo

I do not know Masiel personally. I have never smelled her or touched her hands; however, something about her reminds me that I am alive. I don't know Masiel; I just follow her profile on Facebook. I follow the girl who writes her name backward and appears to everyone as Lesiam Rubio.

Masiel or Lesiam is Cuban and bisexual, resides outside of Cuba, and faces the dictatorship of my country through social networks and alternative media.

When I read or see Masiel, I have a role model in front of me. I imagine her as a girl—barely 10 years old—reciting poetry on school mornings, where children are forced to shout the slogans “Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che” and “Socialism or death.” And when she gets home, she finds a true democracy, a home with smart, crazy, and well-traveled parents and kind and dignified grandparents.

I can imagine her growing up in Jaruco, a town with horrible winters. She wears stockings that someone gave her and her older brother's old coat. She becomes a teenager amid the difficulties of the 1990s, marked by an economic crisis and a famine that still persists. Her grandmother is there for her; her grandmother is her sunshine. Her grandmother teaches her to give, even the things she does not have.

Since she was little, Masiel has known that something is wrong in Cuba; things are not how they should be. She does not feel comfortable in the stands. She does not accept her school's political positions. She is a brilliant student: she quotes the Apostle José Martí; she reads Virgilio Piñera; she devours every book that falls into her hands; but she does not join the Revolution, she refuses to be part of the farce.

The young woman learns to stand up for herself under duress. She enters the José Martí Art Instructors Brigade and stands out as the best in her class. She also stands out in that she owns her sexual orientation without shame.

Her rebellion distinguishes her. She is irreverent in the face of dogma and leftist policies. Nobody has to tell her how to think, live, breathe. They call her crazy and she laughs, though in her own words she admits, “I have my hobbies and I have never been very sane. I meditate and cry. I drink coffee even though I have to cut back because of my heart, I dance like the best and, despite being constantly pissed off about everything, I love, and I love so much, I think that's why I run on all cylinders.”

She begins to meet her own people: the marginalized, the dissidents, the silenced intellectuals, those who protest against the regime, the perverts, the lost. She begins to manifest herself and discovers that her internal force is unstoppable.

The economy hits her; her family needs her sacrifice; and she leaves the country. She abandons her grandmother. She leaves Cuba with a suitcase loaded with nostalgia, a bronze bust of José Martí, and his complete works.

Masiel has been outside of Cuba for three years. She lives in Spain, but Cuba is still there. Her large eyes light up when she talks about her land; her throat knots, and her chest trembles—the country beats in that chest. Her comrades in struggle, “the new pines,”¹ are tortured and violated in San Isidro.² There is a struggle in Cuba, and she is not on the streets of Havana defending her flag.

From Europe, Masiel fights. On November 25, 2020, Masiel and activist Yanelys Núñez³ shaved their heads in front of the Spanish Congress of Deputies. They surrendered their hair as an act of protest, calling the world's attention to the human rights violations that are increasing in Cuba today. It was Masiel who was in charge of publishing the statement, “I Am From a Country,” a text that describes the abuses and outrages that the Cuban people and the opponents of the Revolution are experiencing.

For Masiel, things have not been easy. I think that's so for almost everyone who finds themselves odd in a world of pairs. And this girl gives life her best smile and, though afraid, she faces her fears. Born in 1985, this actress, playwright, teacher, editor, proofreader, female, Latinx, and bisexual, is there to tell us that we can give more.

Maria Rodriguez Puzo is a Cuban journalist with a Master's in Cultural Community Development, who now resides in the United States.

Note: Keja Valens provided translation consultation for this essay.

¹A reference to the title of a speech José Martí gave about students who had sacrificed themselves for freedom: Speech “Con todos y para el bien de todos.”

²Links about Movimiento San Isidro in Havana, Cuba: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2020/12/cuba-san-isidro-movement-allies-under-frightening-levels-surveillance/> and <https://cnn.espanol.cnn.com/video/que-es-movimiento-san-isidro-cuba-pkg-ana-maria-mejia-cnnee/>

³https://diariodecuba.com/derechos-humanos/1606331914_26745.html



#BiCONS

Compiled by Robyn Ochs

I posted the following question on social media: “Question for the #BiHive: Who are your bi+ role models, and why?” Here, with permission of the authors, are some of the many responses I received:

Margaret Robinson (Toronto, ON, Canada):

When I first joined Bisexual Women of Toronto around 1999, it was mostly run by Karol Steinhouse, who died suddenly in 2000. We could have easily folded without her, but **DANA SHAW** stepped in, facilitated meetings filled with grieving women, taught women how to facilitate, and organized us to do so. BIWOT met at a queer community center, but the space was borrowed and never felt like our own. Dana began hosting regular social events at her apartment, booking the party room or the hot tub, and the friendships we had in the group deepened as a result. We started going out for food, seeing movies together, and we made an outing to a nude beach that made the local papers. Suddenly we were a community instead of strangers who met once a month. Dana organized educational events and helped us oppose biphobia in our community. Eventually we hosted the Ninth International Bi Conference and attracted 200 people. I was absolutely inspired by her ability to create a welcoming community with almost no resources beyond her outgoing personality, her innate ability to connect with others, and a spot to host us. She’s my template for community-building activism. She didn’t do it all alone—she’s not a glory hog—rather, she empowered us in ways I’m still discovering. The fact that BIWOT is still a group is testimony to the power of Dana’s love for bi community.

Sarah Ann Mikhail, Charlotte, NC, U.S.:

HERON GREENESMITH. They make so much space for us to be any kind of bi person we want to be and hold community so well.

Holly Lynn Danyliw, Norwich, CT, U.S.:

Two out bisexual political figures: **GOVERNOR KATE BROWN** in Oregon, and **EVELYN MANTILLA**, who was a state representative in Connecticut. I worked on Mantilla’s campaign for State Representative in Hartford in the 1990s. She was so inspiring and was a success story. I was very proud to be part of her history. It is, in my opinion, super hard to be out in any public arena involving any governmental office but it is so needed.

Yvonne Armbruster, Bingen, Germany:

For me it’s **ANNA PAQUIN**! She says about herself that she’s “proud to be a happily married bisexual mother.” And so am I. It’s not easy to come out as bi when you’re a mum....Even when your husband is totally fine with it, other people often tend to react in some strange way....

Erika Wyse, Charlotte, NC, U.S.:

My friend **STACY KELLY**! I met Stacy through another person in our Employee Resource Group, who met her at the Out and Equal Workplace Summit. I was really having a hard time finding people in my organization who identify as bi/pan and were out at work. When Stacy and I first met, it was amazing because we have so much in common in our personal lives. It really felt great to know someone else who identified the same way as I did, and Stacy went even further by introducing me to others in my company who were out at work as bi/pan. Stacy also really was there for me, and for the first time in my life (at age 40), I finally felt comfortable being my full self, both at work and on social media. I don’t feel like I have to hold back or apologize about my sexuality anymore, and that is really due to the support and friendship that I have with Stacy. She is so in touch with who she is; it really gave me the confidence to be unapologetically myself, which is really an amazing feeling.

Leslie Apperson, Minneapolis, MN, U.S.:

DESIREE AKHAVAN and **JANELLE MONÁE** because they both create such beautiful and powerful art that explores the bisexual experience, and they themselves are such powerful women. They are the image of strength to me!

Stina Flink, Uppsala, Sweden.:

BIRGITTA STENBERG, a Swedish author who was unapologetically herself. She travelled around Europe in her twenties and wrote books about her queer life half a century ago. She later lived as a fisher on the west coast of Sweden, and I could go on... It is also fantastic to have an older out bi person as a role model.

Christine P., Germany:

LADY GAGA for many reasons. She helped me explore my own bisexuality—she’s always been open about hers—and allowed me a safe space in the LGBTQ+ community growing up before I even knew I was a part of it.

Katie, Pennsylvania, U.S.:

@GABYROAD (Gaby Dunn). I love that they are a bisexual stereotype and not afraid to own it! I’m a bisexual stereotype, too, and I used to

Sara Youngs, Glendale Heights IL, U.S.:

It is 100% you, **ROBYN OCHS**. I met you way back in 2007/2008 at a small college in western Illinois, and it was during a very difficult time for me of trying to accept my sexuality. You gave me a name to use, a definition that felt like me, and a feeling of validity. I felt seen. I felt real and normal. Meeting you and listening to you helped me find and accept a part of myself that I am not sure I would have otherwise.

Loraine Hutchins, Washington, DC, U.S.:

LANI KA'AHUMANU, with whom I co-edited *Bi Any Other Name*, is a visionary who honors her grassroots and is always loyal to that truth. Lani and I worked so well together because we are an interesting combo. I know people who don't know us well confused us, but anyone who knows us knows how different we are: California cool and DC savvy, matched. I love to do research; she loves to make connections between people. It's been a glorious co-conspiracy!!

Cammie Pavesic, Sacramento, CA, U.S.:

My union organizing mentor, **LYNN HOFFARD**! She is an amazing union organizer. I was working at the Rainbow Room in NYC. After we won that campaign, we organized the United Nations workers in 1990. We used to go to Chinatown on Friday nights for double dates with the men we were seeing, massages, and Karaoke. I moved to the West Coast and started dating a woman. She told me she was also dating a woman. We met up in San Francisco and stayed at a Lesbian B&B and then camped in the Muir woods. One of my favorite life experiences and the first time I felt happy and free rather than having to hide in shame.

Loraine Hutchins, Washington, DC, U.S.:

LOU HOFFMAN is a role model to me because she is in it for the LONG haul. She has a lot of patience and a sense of humor. She carries the history of what works and what doesn't, and why, and she teaches that to a wide variety of people. She is humble. She will work yet another literature table at yet another state fair or park, and she doesn't care if it's boring. She delights in the "people connection." She is also a model to me of someone who struggles with health issues and with family problems and keeps on going, no matter what!! Lou Hoffman makes a difference because she cares and makes that clear.

Emily A. Fisher, Bakersfield, CA, U.S.:

REBECCA SUGAR. The world they created in *Steven Universe* is a breath of fresh air. Where you can love who you want and express any gender. I've facilitated multiple bi/pan+ workshops where several people said they just started crying when watching the show, because they experienced what an accepting world could be like.

Robyn Ochs, Boston, MA, U.S.:

MARCIA DEIHL (1950-2015), one of the founders of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network, because she embraced her quirky self and didn't waste a lot of time self-censoring in anticipation or fear of judgment or criticism. Marcia helped me learn how to be unapologetically myself. (I'm still working on this.)

Evan S. Peterson, Chico, CA, U.S.:

ANY OUT BI+ CELEBRITY because they're often/likely the first people young bi folks will see; they may be the first to help them feel good about themselves as bisexuals. Specifically, **EVAN RACHEL WOOD** and **AMBER HEARD** for being outspoken about domestic violence.

Amy Luetzgen, Wauwatosa, WI, U.S.:

My role models are **EVERYDAY FOLKS** I know and those I meet who proudly own their bisexuality or see me with my bi bling and acknowledge that we are kin! They uplift me as I live my openly bi life.

Additional #bicons and role models mentioned include: **Scott Bartell**, **Lauren Beach**, **Charles Blow**, **David Bowie**, **Bill Bureson**, **Marge Charmoli**, **Julie D'Aubigny (La Maupin)**, **Marlene Dietrich**, **Asia Kate Dillon**, **Dr. Ibrahim Abdurrahman Farajajé**, **Cory Flanders-Foster**, **Lucy Friedland**, **Roxane Gay**, **Farley Granger**, **Dr. Herukhuti**, **Billie Holiday**, **Loraine Hutchins**, **Jameela Jamil**, **Frida Kahlo**, **Bobbi Keppel**, **Dr. Fritz Klein**, **Debra R. Kolodny**, **Apphia Kumar**, **Denarii Monroe**, **Natalie Morales**, **Alanis Morissette**, **Niecy Nash**, **J. Christopher Neal**, **Gary North**, **Aubrey Plaza**, **Carol Queen**, **Michelle Rodriguez**, **Ellyn Ruthstrom**, **Sara Ramirez**, **Victor Raymond**, **Lori Ross**, **Edna St. Vincent Millay**, **Dana Shaw**, **Willow Smith**, **Karol Steinhouse**, and **Hilde Vossen**.

It takes a tremendous amount of courage and integrity to come out as bisexual. I have so much admiration for each person who has the courage to be themselves. You are my #bicons.

Robyn Ochs is editor of Bi Women Quarterly.

Mardi and Wayne

By Neen Chapman

I don't really have role models. By definition, a "role model" is a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated. Throughout my 50 years living, I've always had to find my own way in the world.

Though, yes, I do admit, there was a time in the '80s when I did try the Madonna look, oh, and a goth look for a short time, then Tank Girl, steam punk, Pretty in Pink girlie girl. In the '90's there was Biker girl, corsets, Marlene Dietrich suited and styled, Lipstick Lesbian. Oh dear. In the 2000s, I was mashing all different looks and styles: Betty Boop, tailored suits, more corsets, jeans and check shirts, feminine suits, masculine suits, 50s rockabilly and teeny cardis, and more. In the 2010s I wore an absolute mish-mash of style, of life, of clothing, of thinking. Eventually this wound its way into the always comfy, sharp-styled, great-haired, mostly body-proud, tattooed, curvy, gender fluid human I am today.

I've worn so many roles, personas, identities, and characters over the years just to fit in my own skin. To discover who I am. To test the waters of living with dissociative identity disorder and being genderfluid, bisexual+/pansexual in a world which values boy/girl, man/woman heteronormative bloody everything.

Now, I know that role models aren't necessarily about clothes and looks, but you gotta admit the outside visual often reflects the inside thinking.

I don't go for celebrities as in, "Wow, I wanna be like you." I don't even go for bisexual and pansexual, LGBTIQ activists and writers. Every single human has their own road, and their own life to traverse with all the minutiae of their life experience and their circumstance which molds them into the human they are. I can't be them. I'm me.

The beautiful humans whom I have looked to for support, strength,

and inspiration are the beautiful humans I have loved. They saw me, heard me, and were and are with me for as long as they were/are in my life. I say were because two of those beautiful humans who have influenced, loved, supported me are no longer living. I think of Mardi and Wayne every day.

Mardi Blee: we met in a shop in 1991. We worked together. We

were THE tightest of friends, Girlfriends, Kismets, Soul 2 Soul (1990s band and song). We would finish each other's sentences. Mardi knew who I was. I knew who she was. At the tiny age of 21, we saw each other and fell instantly and forever in love. Caring for each other with bonds that remain to this day, 30 years later. Well, for me anyway.

The cruelty of time. Twenty-two months, that is all we had. Mardi healed some excruciating scars and wounds, kept me laughing, was her true self with me, and I was my true self with her. We cradled each other through every day's highs and lows and terrors and joy. You might be thinking, "What, actually, really happens in a 21/22-year-old's life?" A lot and nothing, just life, just suddenly becoming an adult. We did it all together. We faced the world together. The self-confidence and strength Mardi Blee gave me one of the purest and most stunning gifts another human being can give.

The truth—even for everything Mardi and I had—was that she also loved a wonderful boy, and I thought I loved and ended up marrying, as it turned out, a not-so-lovely man. On the day of my wedding (yes, Mardi was my bridesmaid) on the way back from the hairdressers, I fled the car, crossed a busy four-lane highway, and sat on a park bench. My veil lightly caught the breeze, my gorgeous (fake) deep red hair was in a stunning chignon, perfect in every way. Mardi raced after me. Sat on the bench, grabbed my hands and said, "You don't have to do this. You. Do. Not. Have. To. Do. This. We can go on the honeymoon together."

That's the stuff movies are made of these days in 2021.

No, we didn't go on my honeymoon. Yes, I did get married. Thirteen weeks later on December 3rd, 1992, Mardi died of leukemia. Seven weeks from go to woe. Diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia six weeks after the wedding. The chemotherapy ravaged her beautiful body until she just closed her eyes and didn't wake up.

I have few regrets at 50, but not going on my honeymoon with Mardi is number one. I stopped speaking for over six months. "Complex grief" it would be called today. Heartbroken is what I called it then and still call it.

How are the tissues going out there?...and everyone, breathe... .Every day since then, when I'm good, when I'm sad, when I'm stressed, when I'm chilled, I think of that 22 months and attempt to live as well, as truly and as beautifully as I can, for me and for Mardi Blee.

Fast forward to 2001, yes, to Betty Boop, tailored suits, more corsets, jeans and check shirts, feminine suits, masculine suits, 50's rockabilly and teeny cardis. Post diagnosis for Disassociative Identity Disorder, midway through seven years of therapy, at University and really needing to sort my career out. I started a new job with a computer solutions company as their state facilities and real estate manager. I'm being shown around the office, as one does, and within an hour I meet a striking man. Well dressed, a bum you could bounce a 20-cent piece off, a smile that is both seductive and cheeky. Wayne Kenny. He was walking in the door to the office; I was walking out.

Neen, continued on next page



Neen, continued from previous page

Later in the day we were introduced. He said something about restyling his desk, and I said something like, "Sure silk curtains and cushions, my #1 priority." Flashed a smile, flipped my black Betty Boop hair and, from that moment on, Wayne Kenny and I were joined at the hip.

I have never met anyone like Wayne. Arrogant, sophisticated, cheeky, gentle, soft, flawed, funny, full of pain, full of depth, full of life, and full of hope. We matched. Perfectly. Inseparable. At work, after work, socially. Wherever I went, he went; wherever he went, I went. Wayne introduced me to the LGBTIQ scene in Brisbane, Sydney, and all over the world. We had the most magnificent life. We loved each other fiercely. We protected each other; we inspired each other; we challenged each other; we supported each other; and we left each other.

Thirteen magnificent, incredible years. Some of which we were *a* together—in a loving relationship. Other years we were with other people and in other relationships as well as our own. It was tough on other people because we came as a pair. Wayne and I experienced and experimented with our lives together, tried recreational drugs together, introduced each other to polyamorous relationships, widened our kink together, talked about every aspect of feelings, thoughts, lives, decisions. Everything.

We were safe together. We loved each other. We supported, inspired, and taught each other. F*&k, how he taught me. He's responsible for my move to Sydney. On the 27th of April 2004, he bought my ticket to Sydney and I've been here ever since. No matter where we were in the world, we were together.

Until we weren't.

A shocking period of depression for me followed, my world falling apart, a period when Wayne was more in his own world than in ours. I was dying inside, and my everything partner was nowhere to be found. For three years I went it alone. On my own. It was good. It was evolving. Every day though, I felt like a part of me was missing. Another part of me.

We sent birthday cards, wrote notes, sent flowers. Pretended we'd be okay again. In 2017, I was told Wayne was ill. HIV. From August of that year I called; I wrote; I sent flowers...in the end I waited across the road from his apartment. (Stalker much?) We looked at each other as he drove out of the garage. I raised a hand. Tears ran down my face. He blew me a kiss and drove away.

That was nine months before my beautiful, exceptional, troubled, intense other half took his own life. We had talked on the phone, over text, in the odd card, and with flowers. Blue irises for him and tulips for me. We were to have dinner the weekend he acted on his depression. We talked the day before, arranging a time and place for the next Saturday.

And then he was gone.

Wayne and I talked openly, for all those years, about suicide, depression, our pain, our tools, and our lives. We were exactly ourselves with each other. The exceptional, the good, the bad, the ugly, the

tears, the joys, the mania, the hangovers, the Eccy Tuesdays, the trauma, our families. Amongst it all was trust and love.

He is the beautiful human who taught me how to love and how to trust. Two years and five months from that life-altering, shattering moment when I learned of his decision, I have our model for living. It wasn't perfect but by everything that I, we, hold sacred, it was bloody good.

Big "role models," hey? Well, except the dying bit. Lives are too short. Inspiring because of that? I'm unsure. I try not to focus on the dying but on our living. Grief is my constant companion. Has been for 28 years, and even more so now, but that is, in its way, ok.

I do more. I am more. I am me. All for having those two beautiful humans, Mardi and Wayne, in my life.

Neen Chapman is Bi+ Pan and out in all aspects of life and work, 50 (how did that happen?), silver-haired, and loving being the Vice President of Sydney Bi+ Network, Founder of BOLDER, mental health awareness speaker, activist, maid to lovely kitty cats, and deeply into history, reading, geology, documentaries, art, painting, poetry, music, equality, Bi+ activism, politics, and kink.



This is my mask! I made it using acrylic pens and iridescent medium. Its dimensions are 7" x 4" x 7." The way I would describe the mask is that it has a dramatic androgynous neutral affect, and the forehead may imply a tired look.



Cheryl Williams is a bisexual artist & songwriter from Boston! She has been doing her art off and on for years.

Bi Example

By S.

Me: “Could we speak, please?”

Z: “Sure.”

I had never met Z before. I attended a workplace conference and heard Z speak. This beautiful radiant woman spoke at length with a lovely warm smile. As I was listening to her speak, I felt this sudden urge—I must speak with her.

What would I say? About what? “No clue” was what my head was filled with.

But, I did go on and make the request—online, given the wonderful pandemic situation. The pandemic has also brought with it, for me especially, beautiful opportunities such as this. Z was halfway across the globe as I made the request to meet.

And voila! Z accepted.

Soon Z was on full screen with her glowing face and the same bright wide smile I noticed during her session. I asked, “Z, how do you...I mean, how does one *say* one is bi?”

What a stupid question, I thought, so I had to explain.

Me: “Z, I have always been with men. And I am with a man even now, but I have been in relationships with women before. So—how can I say I’m bi?”

Z: “I have been married to a woman for more than 20 years now. I have been and I still am with a woman, but that does not make me any less bi.”

Me: “How can I say that? I’m with a man....”

Z: “Yes, but, that does not make you any less you.” She smiled. “Whether you choose to share this information with the world or not is completely your choice.”

Me (gulping): “Okay.”

I guess what had been troubling me was all the conversation about “coming out” and “claiming oneself.” What could one say? How could one say it—say it out loud to others?

I knew who I was or who I am—that does not trouble me. I have very much been at ease—have always been. But not coming out while supporting others to do so—wasn’t that making me two-faced?

Then why did I not say it loud?

Probably because of fear. What would people say? What would my friends say? How would my partner feel about it? I’m sure he would not be okay with my making a public declaration.

So should I? Should I not? I don’t know.

These, I guess, are some common quandaries that many of us find ourselves in. But is it really necessary to place ourselves in

boxes? Do we have to label ourselves and say, “I’m this”? Just wondering out loud. I do like the concept of sexual fluidity. So, can we just be fluid? Don’t know.

But what I do know is that I *can* now say how I really feel. Whatever it may be: bi, pan, fluid. *And I have*—to a small group of peers. A small group, but I have said it out loud.

I guess by now most of you regular readers have guessed who Z is. Yes, she is none other than Robyn herself.

Robyn, you have influenced me a great deal. Not that you said anything that struck lightning in my head, but something... something made sense after I spoke with you. Our conversation turned some switch in me. Your kind, patient self, responding to my seemingly stupid questions with such warmth, filled me with a lot of strength.

You, Robyn, are my role model.

Thank you so much for being you. I love you.

Love & Regards,

S.

S. works as a speaker and consultant on workplace diversity in India.

Fear and compassion

By Carol E Moses



Carol E Moses is a visual artist living in Massachusetts. Moses does painting, drawing, and portrait photography/interview series. Her current project is “Image & Interview: Meeting with Bulgaria,” in the WorldsofCo residency. Upcoming is a blog of art and artists in the pandemic time: artinthetimeofcoronavirus.com. Other work is exhibited at Studio 213 in Boston’s SoWa neighborhood.

Parul

By Darcy Isla

I am supposed to be writing a poem
about Mileva Marić

but with you homed in the top-right corner of my screen
brown skin glowing in the incidental triangles of morning light

your face of concerned concentration directed at the screen

long hair free

asymmetrical slack-neck black top—professional, but tired

human, intimate

face reacting to the screen

staring up for inspiration

how am I supposed to write anything but you

Darcy Isla (she/they) is a queer, bisexual actor-writer of mixed British and Asian heritage, based in North Yorkshire, UK. As well as poetry, she writes short stories, fiction, memoir, and scripts for stage and screen.

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On-screen Bi-versity

By Martine Mussies (*Cyborg Mermaid*)

To be honest, I had to think long and hard about the theme of this issue. Growing up, I did not even know bisexuality existed, let alone know anyone who was bisexual. Yet as a child I had a lot of imagination, an exciting inner life, a universe in my mind. Leafing back through my childhood notebooks, my bisexuality is undeniable. I may not have known what it was, but it must have been clear to me even then. Through my crushes on characters like Pocahontas (which I now sadly see as deeply problematic), but also through my imaginary role models. I say “imaginary,” for the first openly bisexual role model I encountered in real life was bicon Robyn Ochs—the almost three decades before that, my examples were scarce. Therefore, in this essay I will share two examples from my youth, and provide some background information on the concept and importance of role models to explain the problematic lack of bisexual female representation.

What exactly is a role model? The term “role model” is credited to sociologist Robert K. Merton (1945) and describes a person whose behavior, example, or success is or can be emulated by others. In other words, a role model is a person from whom we want to learn something, or after whom we want to model ourselves. As such, the idea of the role model is closely related to that of the (s)hero. The research of psychologist Scott T. Allison, an expert on heroes, demonstrates that heroes provide important social and emotional benefits, including showing us how to transform our lives and become heroes ourselves.

While new media provides us with plenty of new heroes and idols, finding a suitable role model can be difficult for people in minority groups, such as bisexual women. This is a problem, because role models are important in an emancipation process. I see that now as an expert on autistic experiences—by coming out of the closet, people like me create a more nuanced image of autism and increase the chance of participation by other people with invisible disabilities such as autism. It is not difficult to draw parallels with the bisexual movement, where people also regularly encounter prejudice and rejection. Thus, a role model can be a great help and inspiration.

We do not necessarily need to have (direct) contact with our role models, and role models can be fictional characters rather than “real” humans, which helped me find role models growing up. As a child, my role models included Pippi Longstocking, Ariel the Little Mermaid, and the main character from *Home Alone*—because I thought he was a girl. Some of these youth idols already hinted at my romantic desires. Take, for example, *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), set in the mythical fantasy world “Xenaverse” and featuring the robber princess Xena and her partner in crime, Gabrielle. I used to devour the series and analyze it to the bone, along with many others, via snail mail and

online mailing lists. It was mainly about the subtext: if you pay attention, you can read a lesbian storyline in between the lines. From word play, to sensual touching, habits similar to those of a married couple, bathing together, or even a kiss—oh, my heart jumped for joy and my belly for arousal!—but all this was set in a heterosexual context. The makers did not dare to make it an explicit lesbian relationship on American prime time TV in the 1990s, but many lesbians watched the series because of the subtext. Funnily enough, I recently heard one of my favorite lesbian writers—Hanna Bervoets—on TV talking about exactly this shared childhood trope: the intimate, close, self-evident, “natural” love between Xena and Gabrielle. To this day, *Xena: Warrior Princess* is a fruitful source for (academic) essays and fan fiction: self-invented fiction in the universe of an existing story.

My prepubescent feelings for Xena likely were a tad erotic, although I mainly remember them as romantic. But when I was a few years older, and I thought of my role models, the sexuality dripped off of them. I mainly fantasized about my favorite cartoon heroine: Yoko Tsuno. Looking back, I think that was my first bisexual role model, as others, like Xena, I perceived as merely lesbian. Although Yoko’s bisexuality is not made explicit anywhere in the series, the comics do provide space and hints for this interpretation. One of the things I admired in Yoko was the ease with which she could form close relationships with both men and women (from all kinds of contexts—including the future and the past). In my bedroom, I had a whole collection of notebooks in which I wrote and drew, among other things, new stories about Yoko Tsuno, oftentimes with more explicit and adult content. Without knowing it, I created fan art and fanfiction, in the genre that nowadays would be labeled slash fiction or femmeslash—fan-created works that focus on romantic or sexual relationships between fictional characters of the same sex. Although I have not yet encountered a category for “bi-slash” specifically, this rewriting of the canon characters and reading others’ rewritings as well continues to be a major source of fun and inspiration for me.

Still, it always feels a bit “secretive”... my favorite pairing at the moment—Lagertha and Æthelflæd—is just as virtual and hidden (in the dark caverns of the internet and in intimate personal writings) as the romantic storylines between Xena and Gabrielle, and the sexy scenes of Yoko Tsuno and her friends were twenty years ago. It is not much better on television shows. In the rare case a bisexual character plays a part in a film or series, it is hardly by chance; most of the time, the bisexuality is necessary for the development of the story. Don’t get me wrong, I can intensely enjoy the budding bisexuality of fearless Casey (Brigette Lundy-Paine) in *Atypical*, but wouldn’t it be nice to see a “normal,” mature bisexual character for once, someone whose problems are not limited to their sexuality, for a change? I plead for more “bi-versity” on screen, and my hope is now on video games.

Video games have long been dominated by male characters,

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and the female characters that do exist are generally portrayed with a stereotypical and sexualized appearance and in the role of subordinate characters or victims. But there is hope because studies also show that dominant, tough female characters are on the rise (Mikula, 2003; Jansz & Martis, 2007). These studies are only about women in general, not even about bisexual women as avatars. But in recent years there have been some interesting bisexual men and women in video games, such as in *Life is Strange*, *Skyrim*, *Fallout 4* and *Fable 2*. I also modestly contributed to this trend, with my own homebrew game, *The Queer Mermaid*.

Browsing through my childhood notebooks, the first thing that struck me was my “misfitting” of both neurotype and romantic orientations. By now, I have come to terms with those. To paraphrase popular lesbian YouTuber Jessica Kellgren-Fozard, the fact that I am autistic and the fact that I am bisexual have not stopped me from living a wonderful, fun, and very fulfilling life. But I do wish for a less bumpy road for future generations. And

I have hope, for slowly but surely the world is evolving, from diary scribbles and hidden cues in mainstream series to bisexual characters in series and games. There is still a lot of work to do, but I see an upward trend of more and more positive representation of bisexual women in the media. I can only hope that this trend continues, so that the generations after me grow up with open role models, and bisexuality is allowed to be what it is: a healthy part of the regular world.

Martine Mussies is a Ph.D. candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. More at www.martinemussies.nl

Hell

By Jo-Anne Carlson

Devil found me searching
For my heart's desire
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

CHORUS:

I'm in hell, I'm in hell

She led me through the fire
Brimstone all around
Hot was her desire
And then I fell down
Into the fire, into the fire

We sat side by side
Lovers we became
Together we aspire
My heart's all aflame
We are the same, we are the same

CHORUS:

I'm in hell, I'm in hell

BRIDGE:

My skin is burning
My heart is learning
I can't stop yearning
My fate is turning

Her kingdom she does reign
I knew I was blessed
To have her love
To be so possessed
I am obsessed, I am obsessed

CHORUS:

I'm in hell, I'm in hell
(repeat to fade)

These song lyrics were written and sung by Just Jo (Jo-Anne Carlson). It's a bisexual “coming out” song.

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. Hearing from friends is a joyous occasion, so please drop her a line at josexpressions@yahoo.com.



Jo-Anne Carlson

Frida Kahlo & Me

By Sheela Lambert

When I think of bi+ role models and bicons, the person who most comes to mind is Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo was a famous Mexican artist who was married to the famous Mexican muralist and painter, Diego Rivera. When they married, he was a titan, but although he is still famous, Frida has the heart of Mexico and of people from all over the world. I'm not sure why I connect with her so strongly, more than any other bicon, but I have her images, books, and paintings all over my house. I've read the main biography about Kahlo by Hayden Herrera 10 times, seen the movie version (starring Salma Hayek) at least six times, and have already read the latest biography about her, *Frida in America* by Celia Stahr, published in 2020, from front to back.

Kahlo's art was very personal and, due to health problems that often kept her confined to her house or to bed (a lifestyle I recognize as my own), she frequently had to be her own model. It is remarkable how mesmerizing her self-portraits are. Each one grabs your attention, whether through the depth and intensity of her stare, her unibrow (which in many self-portraits looks like a bird winging away), or the exotic menagerie of animals on her shoulders. Unlike most women, she didn't pluck her eyebrows

or shave her mustache to feminize herself: she exaggerated her masculine features. At 18, she showed up to the annual family portrait dressed in a man's three-piece suit, with her hair slicked back. She later reprised this look in a painting, after she discovered that Diego was having an affair with her sister and best friend, Cristina. In *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, she is once again dressed in a men's suit, locks of her hair surrounding her on the ground—looking like pieces of twisted roots. She sits on a wooden chair, holding the scissors that did the deed: a message to her husband who loved her long hair, and a symbol of grief that both he and her sister betrayed her.

Frida was not afraid to portray herself looking butch, which may have been a beacon to bisexual and lesbian women, that she could be open to their overtures or make some of her own. One of her lovers was Chavela Vargas, a Mexican resident and butch lesbian who toured the world as a singer. She sang many ranchera songs, traditionally sung by men, but didn't change the pronouns, so she was often singing love songs to women. She also slowed down the pace of the songs, which made them more moving. Vargas appeared in the *Frida* movie as an old woman wrapped in a shawl, signaled to be a ghost, sitting in a dark corner of Frida's local bar. She pulls back the shawl, revealing her craggy, masculine face and very short hair, then begins to sing a slow, poignant song.

What Frida and I have most in common are bisexuality, chronic illness, and turning to the arts when disability hit—she because of polio and the results of a fateful bus and trolley accident; me because of Crohn's disease, IBS, chronic fatigue syndrome, neuropathy, back problems, and edema. When Crohn's started, it reactivated and/or sprouted the others. Frida's painting of *The Wounded Deer*, showing a deer alone in a forest with the androgyny of Frida's female face but male deer antlers, her body bristling with bloody arrows, makes visual the physical and emotional pain she feels. Kahlo's choice to represent herself as a deer was not a random one. She had a pet deer, Granizo, whom she adopted as a tiny fawn, so the choice of a deer to represent herself was a personal one, and to make the Frida deer appear androgynous, an even more personal one. The legacy of her accident and childhood polio meant lifelong pain, surgeries, body-casts, and foot and leg problems which immobilized her at worst and made walking difficult and painful at best: she could only walk a few blocks on a good day and one on a bad day. I'm the same way due to neuropathy and chronic fatigue. For years, the pain of Crohn's disease felt like a large kitchen knife that no one else could see, stabbing me in the stomach, so the Frida deer, stabbed with nine arrows, really resonates with me. She is making visible her invisible pain. That was my life for years. Just substitute the Frida face from the deer with my own. Invisible disabilities can be just as painful as visible ones,

Sheela, continued on next page



One of Sheela's displays

Sheela, continued on next page

as her painting makes clear. She has several other paintings that speak to the physical suffering and pain she endured, such as *The Broken Column* and *Henry Ford Hospital*.

Frida was also fairly open about her bisexuality, and several of her paintings reflect that, such as *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*,” mentioned before. *The Two Fridas* is another. It is a large painting showing a double image of two Fridas sitting side by side, but dressed in different outfits, thus appearing to be two different women. The Frida on the left wears a white Victorian dress with a high lace collar and two rows of red floral embroidery around the ruffle of the skirt, while the Frida on the right wears a traditional Tehuana costume with a blue and yellow cap-sleeve colorblock blouse and bronze skirt with a white lace ruffle. The two Fridas are holding hands. Both Fridas have exposed hearts that are connected by a thin artery. Victorian Frida holds the end of the artery with a surgical clamp, but blood is leaking out and blooming onto her white skirt, resembling the red floral embroidery already there. The bisexual aspect of the painting is represented by two beautiful women, sitting close together on a bench, long skirts touching, while holding hands, their hearts exposed to each other. It’s one of my favorites. I bought a wall clock from the museum store at New York City’s El Museo del Barrio with that image on its face. The clock has never worked but it’s a beautiful art piece on my living room wall. The two Fridas are encircled with red sequins (reminiscent of the blood and red flower embroidery) which is itself encircled with decorative bottlecaps: the hourly numbers matching the bold blue and yellow colors of Frida’s Tehuana blouse, alternating with

various images of Frida herself. It reigns above a bookcase full of books from the Bisexual Book Awards, and decorated with photos of bicons, including Frida Kahlo, Josephine Baker, and Bessie Smith.

There are many bicons out there: I have two double stacked shelves of bi+ memoirs and biographies and I really enjoyed reading about them, but Frida is still the one who resonates with me the most.

Sheela Lambert is director of the Bisexual Book Awards and the Bi Writers Association. She is editor of Best Bi Short Stories, her groundbreaking anthology of bisexual fiction in multiple genres from Circlet Press. She has chapters in Bisexuality in Education: Erasure, Exclusion and the Absence of Intersectionality, edited by Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and published by Routledge, and in LGBTQ America Today Encyclopedia. She is currently editing a new project, the Anthology of Bisexual Poetry.



Sheela Lambert

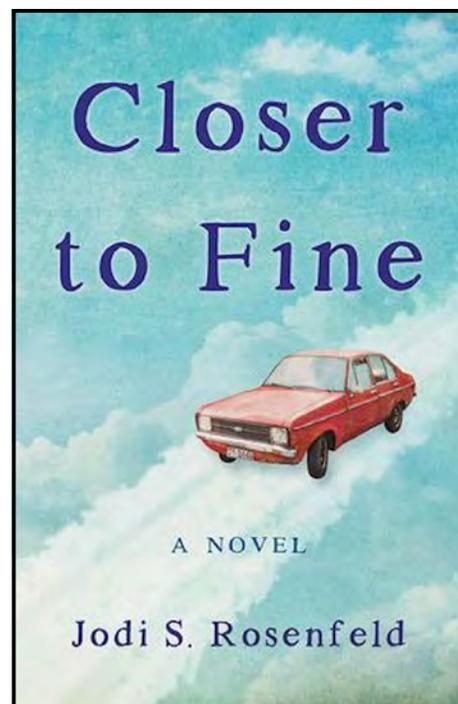
Closer to Fine,

Hello, bi sisters!

My name is Jodi Rosenfeld and I’m writing from my home outside of Philadelphia. I was one of the lucky students at Tufts University in the early 90s who had the privilege of taking a course on bisexuality with our one and only Robyn Ochs. What a highlight of my college experience! I wanted to let you all know about a novel I have coming out on May 25th. It’s called *Closer to Fine*, and it’s about a young woman living in Somerville, Massachusetts in the mid-1990s. She is bisexual, and the book deals with a lot of common bi themes—being labeled as a fence-sitter, not being understood by lesbian friends, and coming out to family. And there’s a good romance too! I’d love for you to read it and let me know what you think. You can learn more, including how to order and how to sign up for my email list (I’ll let you know about any readings that might be coming up), by checking out my website at: <https://jodirosefeld.com/author>.

Thanks in advance.

- Jodi



of sharing our work/school/family space, 24-7, isolated in our patch of COVID-free woods. There hasn't been a day that I haven't been struck by awe, witnessing her persevere, adapt, and even embrace the challenges thrown at her. While I acknowledge all of the heroes of this pandemic, including all of the other kids who have had to figure out new ways of learning and coping at a young age, I'd like to share how my daughter has changed me.

It was nineteen years ago that my mom (my other SHEro) passed away from a brain tumor. At the time, I could not begin to comprehend having a child of my own without my mother in my life. I was not at all confident that I could be a good parent. Fortunately for me, my wife (yet another SHEro of mine) had a vision and belief that our lives would be changed for the good, and I took a leap of faith with her. I thank God every day for her vision. Every step of the way, watching Kai grow up has been a lesson of profound love for me. While I haven't finished the novel, written the musical, or continued my travelling obsession, I've been forever changed for the better.

It wasn't easy for me, growing up, coming to terms with my own identity in a binary world. And now, thanks to the hard work of brave souls that came before her, Kai and her friends seem to effortlessly straddle the lines of identity, free to become whomever they want to be, especially with so many supportive progressive parents in our community. But even with that, peer pressure is a lurking beast that is present no matter what century or environment, and it takes a strong, confident mind to stay the course, no matter who or what might try to sway you. My daughter, so far, seems to take it all in stride.

As parents, it's been easy for us to project every struggle or pain that our kid might be feeling. During this pandemic, like other parents, we've been worried how this isolation might be affecting her. While many of her friends are returning to a hybrid school model this month, Kai is remaining remote (for many reasons), and we worry about her feeling left out. She expresses disappointment, but then she moves on. Me—I have been known to dwell on my disappointments. She reminds me to accept what I can't change and focus on what I can change, as if she authored the *Serenity Prayer* herself. She is self-motivated and disciplined like I've never known. She has come up with countless creative ways to expand her mind and stay fit indoors during this COVID time. Completely on her own, she decided to learn Spanish and French using Duolingo. She practices piano, sax, and guitar daily without being prompted. She rides our exercycle during her remote classes, does JustDance videos, and



Rosie The Riveter statue, and Kai

is learning Pilates and HipHop dancing on her own. She has checklists in her head and has never needed us to remind her to do her homework. Meanwhile, I've been scattered as all heck, especially during this pandemic. Even with all this time at home, I can't seem to finish a thought or task. She reminds me that she's doing okay, that I can let go and focus on me.

It hasn't always come easy to her. As a kid, Kai had extreme anxiety, and I've witnessed how she's managed to find a way to bridle that and turn it into impressive productiveness. She shows me how to turn disabilities into superpowers. She is my SuperSHEro.

I'm a big ol' sap. I've been known to cry at McDonalds commercials and

the like. Kai doesn't shed a tear, even during the saddest scene of a movie. I tease her. "I'm going to break you yet. Just wait 'til you watch *The Champ* with me." But the other night, I heard her cry to herself in bed, after I expressed disappointment with her about something that was, in hindsight, trivial. It nearly broke my heart. I realized then that I don't need her to be like me, a big ol' sap. She's strong, but she's got heart. She doesn't complain much, but she's nursing some intense growing pains. As her parent, I want to take away all of her pain. But I believe that my job as her parent isn't to protect her from everything, but to show her the tools to adapt, overcome, and find ways to find joy in the most challenging situations. Though this pandemic has been an extremely difficult time for everyone, I believe that our children will come out of this with so much more resilience. *Nevertheless, they persisted.*

Gratitude has always been my healing balm. I got that from my mother. When I'm broken in spirit, I try to find my way back to my blessings, of which I have many. After experiencing sustaining injuries and great loss in my life, there is one significant force that keeps me going strong, hopeful, and full of awe, profound love, and gratitude. She, my kind, impish, brave, resilient daughter, is my SHEro.

Carla Imperial is a writer, musician, budding woodworker, and reluctant techie living in Northampton, MA, with her wife, Megan, and their daughter, Kai. She and Megan were active members of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network during their 30 years in Cambridge and Jamaica Plain before moving out to the "Valley," and actually first met holding the BBWN banner during the 1994 Pride Parade.

to the museum with her. She wanted to go to the Käthe Kollwitz Museum in the city we grew up in, and since I had never been, I decided to join her. Käthe Kollwitz is a famous German artist, known for both her sculptures and her paintings. Her art had never clicked with me. I found it depressing, especially the framed print of one of her paintings in my parents' living room that had been there as long as I could remember. The museum was empty when we arrived, and as we worked our way through the exhibition, I enjoyed the art and history of it more than I expected. I was impressed by the artist's firm anti-war stance and her passion for workers' rights. My friend and I ended up drifting to different parts of the exhibition, so I was completely alone when I came across one of her self-portraits from 1910. I stood and stared, and Käthe Kollwitz stared back at me resolutely, one side of her face in darkness and the other one in light, a hand at her temple. There is nothing a person could hide from that stare, and it went right through me. I felt that my eyes were wet and was reminded of Frida's portrait. I couldn't help but laugh quietly to myself. There I was again, crying in an art gallery for no reason. At least this one was empty. I bought a postcard of the painting on my way out.

As I remembered my first art-related emotional outburst in Budapest, later that day I reflected on the year that had passed since then. During this time, I had come out as bisexual both to myself and some of my friends. It had taken a lot. A lot of back and forth, of bargaining with myself and others, of tears, and finally an understanding that all of that wasn't worth it. I could not change this fact about me, and I did not want to deny it anymore. Instead, I now had questions: Who is a bisexual person? What are they like? *Where* are they? I did not know anybody else who was bi. I felt disconnected from this newly accepted facet of my identity. I remembered Frida Kahlo. I had seen her paintings. I knew what she had done in her life, and I admired her. By accident, I also came across one of Käthe Kollwitz's lesser-known quotes: "I believe that bisexuality is almost a needed requirement for creating art."¹ I couldn't believe my eyes. I checked and double-checked, but it was a real quote. Käthe Kollwitz had fallen in love with people of different genders in her life, and I had never known. She had even used the word "bisexuality" in 1923, almost a hundred years ago. All the years I had been asking myself, "Who is a bisexual person?" her painting hung on my parents' wall. The fact that it had been there all along makes me smile to this day because somehow, it makes me feel seen in a very private way that is infinitely reassuring. We've been here, where you least expect us, and we will be here for decades to come.

¹ From Kollwitz, K. (1999). *Die Tagebücher 1908-1943* (ed.) J. Bohnke-Kollwitz (Munich 2012), 435, 725., my translation



Käthe Kollwitz with self-portrait, Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Köln

I see what Frida and Käthe have given me by just existing and being remembered, and I want to preserve that gift. I also want to take it and multiply it with the strength they have given me to carry on with my own path. They make me want to add on to that legacy, and every time I ask myself what kind of person I have to become to do this, it feels easier to make hard choices, to take chances, and to care for myself in order to preserve my energy to carry on. Their legacy also makes it easier to reach out to people who might share my experience. I am thankful to everybody who has felt the same way about them that I do, and preserved and added to the history of Frida, Käthe, and all our other bisexual, pansexual, plurisexual, and queer role models. Your existence makes me feel a connection through time and space. I would be honored to follow in your footsteps.

Franziska (shelher), a queer history nerd, cries frequently and likes to look at art she doesn't understand. Sometimes she combines all three.

SUBMIT
your
WORK

#ShareYourVoice

Are you a **Bi+** writer, poet, or visual artist?
Consider submitting your work to be included in
future issues of *Bi Women Quarterly!*
Info at biwomenboston.org

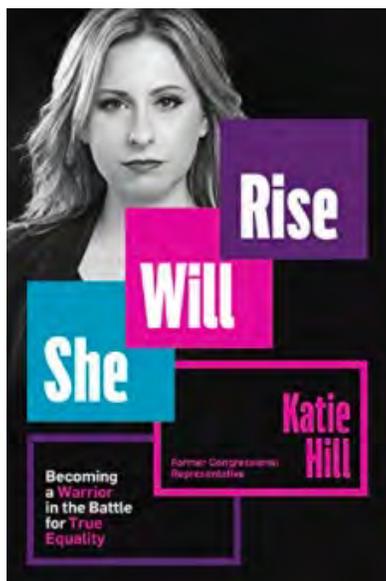
She Will Rise: Becoming a Warrior in the Battle for True Equality, By Katie Hill

Reviewed by Ellyn Ruthstrom

In November 2018, 31-year-old Katie Hill was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, along with a wave of diverse new political leaders who ushered in a Democratic majority, with Nancy Pelosi at the helm. Hill became the first out bisexual congressperson and first LGBTQ woman to represent a California House district when she won the long-held Republican seat. Hill gained a post in the Democratic leadership and appeared to be heading for a very promising and long career in politics. However, less than a year later, she quickly resigned after her ex-husband released sexual photos and videos of her (many taken without her consent) and revealed that they had been in a throuple together with a female staffer from her office.

Many of you probably have heard of Katie Hill already and know this brief synopsis of what happened to her. Now's your chance to find out the full story of what Hill went through by reading her 2020 memoir, *She Will Rise: Becoming a Warrior in the Battle for True Equality*. Hill details not only the end of her time in office, but also what had inspired her to become a community organizer and to work on issues of homelessness within California before running for office. She fills in the horrible details of what happened within her marriage as her husband exerted power over her and how, when she finally broke away from him, he sought his revenge by ruining her political career.

One of the things that Hill is very clear about is that she doesn't want women to get scared off of running for office after witnessing what happened to her. She writes, "Instead, I hope to use what happened to me to drive women, young women especially, to question the roadblocks we face, and to tear them all down and rebuild a future in which we no longer have to imagine what it would look like to have full equality and representation."



The subtitle of the book—*Becoming a Warrior in the Battle for True Equality*—uses an important metaphor, the warrior, which is deeply personal for Hill. She describes her connection to the fictional characters of Sir Alanna of Trebond and Xena: Warrior Princess, and how her grandfather helped to instill

a fire in her belly to battle for the things that were important to her. He helped her believe she could do anything.

Beyond her personal story of political success and then personal scandal, Hill sets out a guide in her book for young feminist warriors ready for battle. The five key battles she lays out are to be focused on money, the workplace, our bodies, our safety, and the home. If you would like a refresher on these significant feminist issues of the day and a bit of history about each of them, you will enjoy the mid-section of the book. If you are already aware of these issues, you might not find much new here.

Hill weaves detailed stories of women in her own family—her mother and grandmother—into several of the chapters to illustrate the larger social experiences of women, including sexual harassment, women's economic dependence, lack of reproductive rights, and bodily integrity. It's an effective way to give depth to the issues and to get insights into Hill's own personal story. For example, the grandfather who boosted her self-confidence was also abusive to her grandmother, who divorced him the first chance she got. Real life is complicated, and Hill shares a lot of family history to make that clear.

Within the chapter focused on the home, Hill goes into a lot of detail about coercive control which expands the understanding of partner abuse beyond just physical violence. Coercive control includes isolation of the partner, constant monitoring, financial control, sexual violence, intimidation, and emotional abuse. This is the one spot where she highlights how her ex-husband used her bisexuality to control her. Once she had come out to him, he only allowed her to see other women if he was involved with them as well. And then he used the polyamory they both agreed to as part of the threat of revealing their sex life to the public. I appreciated her sharing this part of her story because I think a lot of bi women will relate to that form of power struggle and abuse.

Which leads to my biggest criticism of the book. For all the interesting feminist history and personal stories Hill shares, she does not include a queer lens within the bulk of her analysis. This was a huge missed opportunity as a visible bisexual political leader to highlight the data available about bi women's experience. Where is the mention of the high incidence of sexual harassment of bisexuals in the workplace? What about the high rate of poverty for bisexual women? And the worst gap for me was not mentioning the glaringly high rate of sexual violence that bi women experience. I was very disappointed that Hill did not use her platform to educate more about bi women's lives, nor about lesbian or queer lives generally.

The last two chapters of the book are her "Battle Cry," to call women to run for office and "The Mission," which details why

Review, continued on next page

Review, continued from previous page

she founded her political action committee, HER Time, to support young women candidates. She includes a list of ten feminist political demands she believes we should be focusing on right now. And she asserts very strongly that we need to vote for women because they are women. No more dilly-dallying, we need more women leaders now.

I finished the book with a deeper understanding of Hill's background and her commitment to the feminist movement. It's incredibly sad that this young leader was taken down by revenge porn after suffering through an abusive relationship. I can only

hope that the work she continues to do will help other women to step forward to run for office, and that, perhaps in the future, she may again be able to contribute her warrior spirit in a more visible way.

Ellyn Ruthstrom is the Executive Director of SpeakOUT Boston, an LGBTQ+ speakers bureau based in Boston. She most admires women warriors who don't wear corseted breastplates while fighting the good fight. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Vera Kelly Has No Role Models: A review of Who Is Vera Kelly?

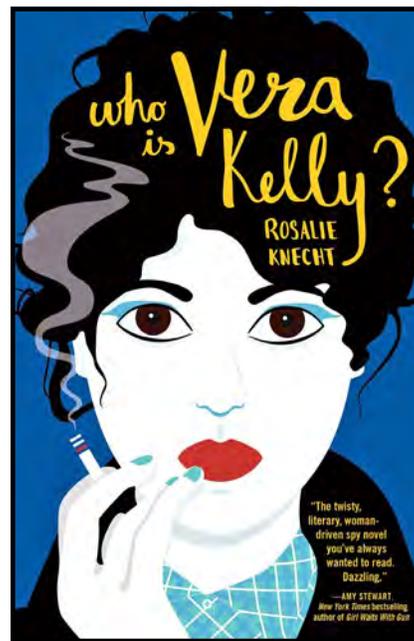
By Ally Muterspan

Cold War spy stories infrequently center on a woman protagonist, let alone a bisexual woman. In spy novels, the protagonist's intimate memories are rarely a critical plot driver. Rosalie Knecht's *Who Is Vera Kelly?* is a unique exception to the typical story arc. Knecht begins her novel in 1957 Maryland, where a teenage Vera overdoses on pills and has pent-up love for her friend Joanne. Vera lives with her abusive single mother and feels little support at home. After leaving Maryland, Vera moves to New York City and grapples with her queerness while exploring the Greenwich Village bar scene. Knecht's novel's viewpoint alternates between Vera during her young adulthood and adult Vera on an espionage job in 1966 Buenos Aires.

In her past and present, Vera Kelly has no role models. She has no stable support system through blood relations or chosen family and experiences continuous displacement. Vera's lack of intimate connections and her professional skills cause her to be a targeted recruit for the CIA. Vera is caught in a bind: she, like many single queer women in the 1960s, is financially insecure and is coerced into subtly navigating her personal life. Knecht reflects on the parallels of living an underground life and the secrecy needed to do espionage work. Vera's coming-out arc and personal life are central to her character but are not a tragic focal

point. Her queerness is one layer of the vulnerable life she lives and this is a rare story where female sexuality isn't fetishized in the espionage canon. *Who Is Vera Kelly?* is a character driven novel that is exciting for both regular and infrequent readers of the genre and is a refreshing take on a typically masculine story.

Ally Muterspan, she/her, is a librarian living with her roommate and their cats in Indianapolis. She is currently on a crossword puzzle kick and has been watching teen dramas. She is a member of Queery, a radical queer book club run through Irvington Vinyl and Books in Indianapolis.



We maintain a list of folks interested in submitting writing or artwork to BWQ, another of folks interested in proofreading, and a third list of folks interested in volunteering in other ways. If you'd like to be added to one or more of these [private] lists, email biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

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

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Brunch. 11:30am.

3rd Sundays, alternate months:

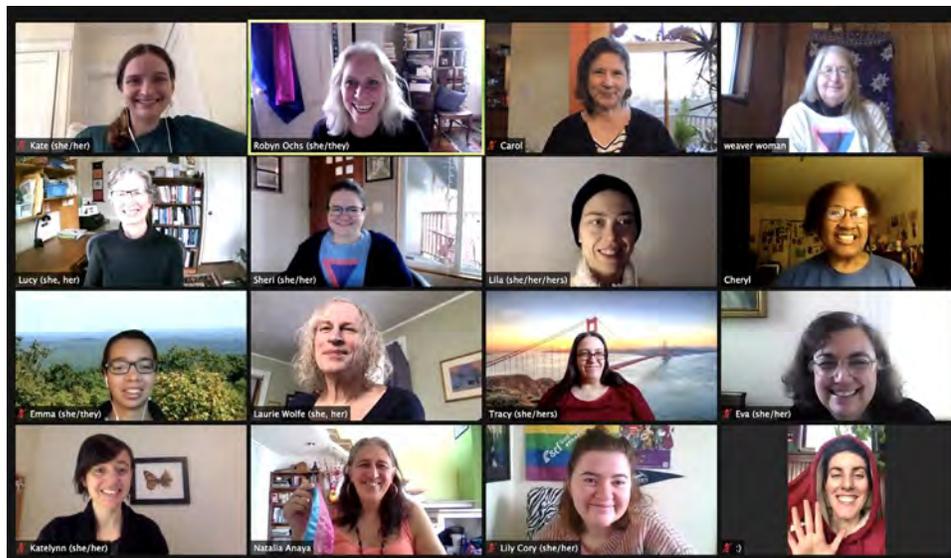
Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men. 7pm. Info: Debbie at debbsma@gmail.com.

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

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

We offer FREE digital subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at biwomenboston.org.

[not your usual] CALENDAR



January's digital brunch!

Did you know? You can find all kinds of bi+ virtual events at [meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities](https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities). Please note, some of these events are gender-specific, and some welcome all genders. You can also find great bi+ virtual events on our own calendar at <http://biwomenboston.org/calendar>. Don't hesitate to connect at any of these events—even if you're not in the Boston area.

We would like to issue a special invitation to our readers who are not located in the Boston area: please consider joining us at one (or all) of our online brunches—just be aware times listed are US Eastern Time. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make friends across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some brunch while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. You can find more details below!

Saturday, March 6, 1 pm US Eastern Time

Sunday, April 4, 1 pm US Eastern Time

Saturday, May 8, 1pm US Eastern Time

To R.S.V.P, email: BWQevents@gmail.com



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