

## Our Stories Connect Us

By Jamie Bergeron-Beamon

"I've written 14 pages already and haven't even gotten to the good stuff!" exclaimed Nina, my grandmother, in a recent phone conversation. A few months ago we decided to begin exchanging stories with one another. Nina, who turned 76 this year, writes me letters recounting every detail of her travels, and I call her on my train rides home. We talk a lot about our personal relationships, LGBTQ friends and family and women. Nina discovered that she loved women as an adult, but I knew my whole life that I was not straight. Although I ask a lot of questions, she always asks me twice as many. Since we both feel very connected to our queer communities, our stories often center on sharing our generational differences.

When I was growing up my grandmother's sexuality both was and was not a topic of conversation in our house. She and her longtime partner, Chrissy, were pretty typical grandmothers. Going to their house was a special treat for me as I loved looking at the beautiful artwork they had collected and the countless kitchen gadgets that lined the shelves. They enjoyed trying new Thai and Chinese restaurants in town so I always volunteered to join them for lunch. We often talked about Nina's kitchen secrets for hours; she has a knack for combining flavors and inventing recipes. Other times we talked about the gay clubs in Rochester, New York



Jamie, 2nd from left, with her mother, wife and grandmother.

(where they both lived most of their lives), lesbian picnics in the '80s, and how to tell "family" from afar. To this day, Nina and I still debate the existence of a special "strut" that she swears can be spotted from blocks away.

I've always felt a special connection to Nina, one that transcends our age difference and sexual identity. Our letter-writing and storytelling project is a part of my effort to deepen that connection. We appreciate the 40+ years between us. "Grandma, you're getting old now," I jokingly told her on her birthday this year. "Yeah, so? I have done a lot of things and I have a lot of things left to do, *so there!*" she snapped back. As I grow older I am acutely aware of the richness that lives in our little queer family. In fact, Nina has raised quite a few queer people. She raised my mother – a lesbian – along with a bisexual aunt. My aunt has two bisexual sons, and then there's me, a queer woman. I love

Jamie, continues on page 14

## Bi and Empowered: Celebrating Who We Are

By Vanessa Brown, MA, MFTI

As I write this, I am preparing to celebrate my forty-third birthday in May. At this developmental stage of my life, I have been reflecting on what I have done both professionally and personally through the years. Of course, while doing this, questions come up: What kind of impact have I made? Have I helped others? Have I done my best?

I also think about how being an open bisexual woman has affected my life. I was late to discover my true sexual identity: I came out at 29, having just terminated a ten-year relationship. Prior to that, I self-identified as heterosexual. I am very lucky to have supportive friends and family members now; however, when I was going through my coming out process, it was a different situation altogether. I learned a great deal about the people in my life at the time and the dynamics of some of my relationships had to change as a result.

When I think about what I could tell a woman in her teens and twenties about moving through the world as an openly-bisexual woman, the first thing I would say is: *Know yourself.* Looking back on my coming out process and my experiences with people of all backgrounds, I saw a common thread in my interactions. I was challenged over and over again for identifying as bisexual. In many situations, the first questions were: "Why? Why not just be gay or straight?" "What does bisexual actually mean?" And sometimes, there weren't any questions. Instead there were disparaging statements such as: "Bisexuality isn't a real sexual orientation!" "You're just confused and you need to be serious!" Some of the most disappointing times were when these statements were made by people with whom I was romantically involved.

When your sexual identity is challenged repeatedly, as I have seen in many cases, it can lead to self-doubt, shame

Vanessa, continues on page 11

## HONOR ROLL

Benae Bergeron-Beamon  
Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Gail Zacharias  
Jamie Bergeron-Beamon  
Julie M.  
Justin Adkins  
Love Lee (*rosykunoichi*.  
*deviantart.com*)  
Mitsy Chanel-Blot  
Robyn Ochs  
Peg Preble  
Sarah E. Rowley

## STAFF

### Editor

Robyn Ochs

### Assistant Editor

Catherine Rock

### News Editor

Robyn Ochs

### Calendar Editor

Kate Estrop

### Proofreaders

Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Kate Estrop  
Katelynn Bishop  
Laurie Wolfe  
Lynne Levine

All articles and art appearing in the *Bi Women Quarterly* are copyrighted by the authors and artists.

**Boston-area women: Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: [biwomen-boston-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:biwomen-boston-subscribe@yahoo.com)**

## From Your Editor

The first in a series on intersectionality, the theme of this issue is "Intersection: Age." Readers were given the following prompt: "We don't exist in a vacuum. Age is one of the intersections of identity that shapes how we experience our sexual orientations. Let's have an intergenerational dialogue." We received a record number of submissions; in fact, we received so many high-quality pieces that we're going to run two issues on this theme: one now and another in Spring 2015.

This issue includes prose and poetry by Jamie Bergeron-Beamon, Vanessa Brown, Theresa Tyree, Jessica Johnson, Colleen McTigue, Gwendolyn, Sue Katz, Jodi S. Rosenfeld, Jane Barnes, Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato, F. Withe and Apphia K. There is no formal "Around the World" feature; instead, one writer is Indian and currently living in the U.S. and another is from the U.S. and currently living in China. There's also Ask Tiggy, News Briefs, Reader Feedback and a calendar of events.

Also, we have something to ask of you, our readers: this publication includes a broad range of voices but there is always room for improvement. So here's a challenge: if you don't see *your* experience represented, please consider writing. Also, artists: we are always looking for artwork, so please send in yours. And finally, please spread the word about this publication far and wide and please consider supporting our work with a donation (see the donation page at [biwomenboston.org](http://biwomenboston.org)).

*Robyn*

**Tracy reads *Bi Women*. Send us a picture of YOU reading *Bi Women*. Be creative!**



## Next in

### *Bi Women Quarterly*

The theme for the next issue:

## Intersection: Geography

Tell us: How has your geographic location (where you are from, where you have lived and/or where you live now) affected your experience of your sexual orientation? We want to hear from you. Essays, poems, artwork and short stories are welcome.

**Submissions for the next issue must be received by August 1st. Submission guidelines are at:**

<http://biwomenboston.org/newsletter/submission-guidelines/>

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

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

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

BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Want to host one of our monthly brunches, be the woman who coordinates the brunches, help out with our website (we use WordPress)? Or, if you're a student, consider an internship. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Robyn ([biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com)).

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

# Blindsided

By Theresa Tyree

“Hey, are you still there?”

It was the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, the day before my birthday and the midpoint of my spring break, and Jordan and I were on Facebook again. She was half a world away in Croatia, touring the country with our university choir and I was trapped at home with a family turned dysfunctional by grief. Needless to say, between her homesickness and my escapism, we were talking a lot. But our conversations didn't usually lull unless Jordan or I had to go – and she hadn't mentioned needing to go anywhere.

Finally she responded.

“I'm so sorry! A friend just confessed feelings for me, and I'm not sure how I feel, because I think I might like someone else.”

My initial thoughts after I read Jordan's message were, “That's *right* you have feelings for someone else! It's me, right? Please tell me it's me.”

My follow-up thought was, “Wait, I'm in love with a woman?”

Until the day when I wished for Jordan to tell me she had feelings for me, I had identified as a heterosexual female. My dating history was made up of men, and only men. The closest thing I'd ever had to a homosexual impulse was wanting to hug and kiss a close friend when she was going through a rough break-up. I'd never considered the idea that I might one day end up attracted to another woman.

So then what did having feelings for Jordan mean for me and my sexual identity? Did this make me a lesbian? Did my attraction to one person of the same gender mean I was suddenly gay?

I didn't have the answers to those questions when I was first entering into these uncharted waters. All I had were the questions and a few more messages from Jordan.

“I'm so sorry to do this over Facebook, but I think I might like you as more than a friend, and I feel so stupid, because these feelings completely blindsided me, and I promise I'll completely drop this after we chat if you don't feel the same; I just don't want our friendship to be ruined...”

My response was immediate and fluid. My fingers moved before I could really process what I had typed.

“I actually think I might like you as more than a friend too.”

But by then, Jordan was too worked up to read my messages and continued to apologize for another minute before she realized what I had said.

“Really?” she asked, once she had processed that I wasn't rejecting her.

That felt like the moment of truth. I hadn't hesitated when Jordan had told me she had feelings for me. I had openly told her that I thought I might have feelings for her too. It was new. Very new. I wasn't sure I was ready to convince someone else of a realization I had just had myself. I didn't think it was a lie, but I didn't know what it meant for me, or for Jordan, or for us. So, instead of trying to make those decisions, I decided to be honest with her.

“I've never actually seriously considered a woman as a romantic partner,” I confessed. “But that's not because I think I couldn't. I think that's because I never found the right person.”

Finding the right person had been pretty tricky over the last couple years. I had been single since I had started attending university three years previously. You could say my last relationship left me with high standards; I felt it had just left me with standards, and a really good sense of what I was looking for in a partner.

That list didn't include a gender, but it did assume one.

By my senior year, what I was looking for was “not love.” My last relationship had ended because my boyfriend and I had chosen to go to separate universities. So close to another graduation date, I was worried dating would just lead to a repeat experience, and so I actively avoided romantic attachments.

But with Jordan it was different. I hadn't expected to form any romantic feelings for anyone who wasn't male. I thought that I was either gay or straight, and didn't actually take time to consider the middle ground of “bisexuality.” I knew I was attracted to men, and so that must mean that I wasn't attracted to women. Or so I thought; but the way I had spent my drive home from school convinced me that I wasn't just playing along with Jordan's love confession.

The drive from Bellingham, Washington, to Boring, Oregon, usually takes five or six hours. I spent the majority of that time listening to the same song on repeat (a song that, coincidentally, reminded me of Jordan) and intermittently crying.

The turmoil that my family had been going through had left me with a very small supply of energy at the beginning of the year and I had taken to conserving that small amount to get me through my days. This meant I was spending a lot of time in my room reading and generally not interacting with people. But then I met Jordan, and we started eating together: first on campus, then off

Theresa, continues on next page



# the young adult instruction manual

By Jessica Johnson

first step: embarrassment.  
comb through your life for clues. find them.  
feel oblivious.

repeat the word over and over  
“bisexual I’m bi I am bisexual”  
obsess about it, whisper it to yourself  
while you shower, while you stand in line at the grocery  
store scrutinizing your selections as if they’ll tell strangers  
your secret.  
tease the idea of it  
it’s a revelation, a curiosity, a proclamation, a confusion.  
let the words intoxicate you.  
your skin alternately fits so well and chafes.

pine for the girls you loved before you realized you could  
love them.

carry your secret around like a new friend – conspiratori-  
ally.  
say the words to your reflection. consider saying them to  
someone else.  
sometimes your sexuality feels like a grenade that could  
detonate your life.  
(you’re a phoenix, though. you’ll burn and rebuild over  
and over if you have to.)

next step: doubt.  
ask yourself if you’re lying, painfully examine every  
minutiae of your attraction, hyperaware of any signs of  
monosexuality.  
this uncertainty sneaks up, blindsides and trips you and  
then you’re an imposter and a liar, a fake, and—  
this happens to you more than you want to admit.

you come out the first time with a heart like a sledgeham-  
mer.

stomp on the foot of any straight man who asks for a  
threesome,  
and smile at well-meaning liberal friends who spout no-  
label rhetoric and same love and isn’t everyone a little bi?  
all to strip you of your newfound self.

you are at the age where bi girls are barsexual or bi-het or  
any number of invalidating and fetishizing things:  
you’re too young to know for sure.  
it’s a phase.  
everyone is until graduation.  
you’re practically straight.

(you hear that one the most)  
do your best to tune out the biphobia, although some-  
times it teams with your impostor syndrome and steals  
your breath.

find your queer friends. find your new family.  
create a bisexual collective, if you can, until your life  
drips with bi positivity.  
remember that you are still bisexual even if you some-  
times use other words to make life easier.

stumble over the uneven cracks in your existence and  
smooth them over as you go.

build yourself duplicitous, block upon block of you  
made to pass through worlds,  
remake your every joint until your identity is an armor.  
become all that they say you are and revel in it, or  
reject it all—  
it’s your right.

adulthood stretches before you with no blueprints  
no instructions for assembly, not like your straight  
peers who have a pattern to follow: marriage, kids,  
grandkids, even if it’s just a vague outline.  
in conceptualizing your future, you doubt that’s where  
you end.

so gather the courage to cobble something new.

*Jessica Johnson is a 24-year-old fighting the good fight  
in a small Midwest town. By day she works for a per-  
forming arts venue and by night she patrols the Internet  
as a bisexual wannabe superhero.*



*In the UK, this sign indicates a change in direction, for  
example, a one-way street becoming two-way.*

# From Baby Butch to Curmudgeon

By Sue Katz

Hi Queers under 40,

I was a baby butch in the days when being caught with my high school girlfriend led to threats of incarceration and electroshock. In fact, she nearly succeeded in killing herself and I was forced to undergo therapy with a pig who wanted to know, over and over, what I did to her and what she did to me. She and I were separated, forbidden to meet. It was 1964.

I was a baby butch when the law required that you wear at least three pieces of clothing suitable to your own sex, so our motorcycle jackets and ties and cuff links were all threats to our very freedom.

I was a baby butch decades before there was an internet, when we often met our lovers by flirting with the other women standing in the line to the bathroom at the bar.

I knew women who passed by binding their breasts and lowering their voices, because they needed the higher-paying jobs from which women were excluded in order to support themselves and perhaps their girlfriends. There were lots of children involved in those days too, for many gay people straight-married and built nuclear families before they found out why they felt the way they felt. Or found someone else to feel it with.

I was a lesbian in the days when my mother felt free to tell me that I had caused my father's heart disease because of the stress of having a perverted daughter. I remember too well how upset my sisters in my first women's liberation collective were to find out that there were a couple of lesbians among us. I was fired for being a dyke (well, um, for bringing my girlfriend to the office to play boss/secretary while my actual boss was away).

I'll never forget the exhilaration of the first time, when sleeping with a woman, that I could name it, say it aloud, be it – lesbian, dyke, queer, butch, gay. I can

almost feel today how it felt back then when the word “lesbian” journeyed from my heart to my lips to the world. I remember my first article, “Smash Phallic Imperialism,” in our first gay liberation newspaper *Lavender Vision*. And I will never forget our working class lesbian posse, *Stick-It-In-The-Wall-Motherfucker Collective*.

So forgive me if I have been puzzled by more recent USA LGBTQ politics. Gay politics has gone from revolutionary to assimilationist. We seem to have forgone our *Lavender Vision* in exchange for a place in the institutions that do such harm. First there was an excess of energy invested in glorifying the American military as the rightful and right place of employment for LGBTQ people. This is the military whose wars (from Viet Nam to Iraq) we spent so many years opposing. Of course Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a disgusting piece of discrimination, but our “leaders” could have picked any number of vile discriminatory situations. I remember one group of people who felt the same way and who marched in Pride with fabulous hats and signs saying “Gays to the Millinery.”

I feel like a curmudgeon, for I find it hard to unconditionally celebrate what pass for victories today. I simply cannot stomach, for example, the degree of resources invested in the battle for marriage equality. Two basic foundations of early feminist theory were that marriage was founded on the need to protect male property and to document paternity, and that the nuclear family was a dangerous place for women and children. In women's liberation we envisioned an end to civil marriage (obviously people are free to do what they want within their religions) and an end to a range of privileges accruing to people (then just straight people) just because they have a partner. Are single people mere chopped liver?

Instead of being able to share your health insurance with only that person deemed by the government to be significant (ie, your spouse), we should be fighting for Medicare-for-all, like they have in almost every other developed and some developing nations. Marriage is predicated on the anti-social ideas that “It's you and me against the world, baby,” and “One doesn't wash dirty family laundry in public.” So when terrible things are happening, the family is more important than truth or safety. Plus, capitalism loves the nuclear family, because then they can sell each one an individual fridge and washing machine and car. Communes and collectives and co-ops might actually share.

The idea that queers are shoring up an institution that has failed so utterly for heterosexuals is disheartening, to use a polite word. Half of all marriages end in legal divorce: can you imagine how many just chug along in misery or separation?

When we were sexual outlaws, we saw “equality” as an undesirable and unambitious goal. We wanted liberation through changing the world, not engagement rings. Instead, we have achieved well-paid “leaders,” mostly middle-class white men, who are jockeying for future jobs with the Democrats and the policy wonks. Meanwhile, our communities are facing major economic issues. Our young people make up a disproportionate number of the homeless youth living on the streets in impossible conditions – mainly because of dangerous or rejecting family homes. Where are the voices of the LGBTQ leaders? Wealth disparity is hitting queers of



Sue, continues on next page

Sue, continued from previous page

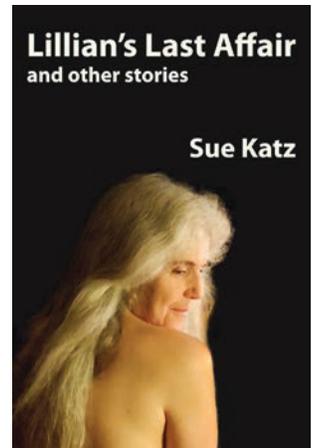
color and women where it hurts. We need to fight against discrimination in jobs, housing, and schooling, instead of giving such prominent visibility to ensuring that rich queers can inherit from their partners without paying stranger taxes.

Of course people should have the right to equally participate in all public institutions no matter whom they love. Equality of opportunity is fundamental to our society as it is. But let's go further.

The generations after us pioneers have had the luxury of reading the books and seeing the films we produced, of calling the helplines we established, and of living LGBTQ lives without being categorized as mentally ill. Now we, the aging founders, are engaged in getting the institutions that service seniors to recognize our own particular needs. While we are busy with that, I trust that younger queers will be preparing to fight like hell to change the world in ways I cannot even imagine at this point. I trust that they will conceive and execute their very own Lavender Vision.

In curmudgeonly solidarity,  
Sue Katz

*Sue Katz is a wordsmith and rebel, whose unique book about the love-lives of older people, Lillian's Last Affair: and other stories, has just been published. She has been a writer and activist on the three continents where she has lived. Check out her edgy blog Consenting Adult at [www.suekatz.typepad.com](http://www.suekatz.typepad.com) and reach her at [consentingadultpress@hotmail.com](mailto:consentingadultpress@hotmail.com).*



## Queer Also Looks Like This

By Jodi S. Rosenfeld

When I was in my 20s, being a visible bisexual woman was easy. Even if I were dating a man at the time, I always had my backpack with its buttons. So many buttons screaming “This is who I am!” My favorites were “VisiBllity” and the one with the pink triangle that said, “CHOICE” across it. I wore Pride t-shirts and Freedom Rings, and was flanked by my gay friends in Davis Square. It didn't matter with whom I was in a relationship at that particular moment. I was queer. I was defined.

And then I married a man and moved to a suburb of another city. I built my career. I had babies. I didn't think so much about my sexual identity in my 30s. I was consumed with the stuff of young motherhood – buying a home, finding the right preschool, worrying about stranger danger and Lyme disease. I was always out to friends – being sure that if I were building a new friendship with someone that she or he knew the important things about me: that I was Jewish, that I grew up on a farm, that I was not straight. Others saw what they saw – a young woman with a diamond ring and wedding band, a toddler holding her hand and a baby on her hip. I told myself that was okay. I was too busy to care about things like identity politics anyway.

And then I turned 40, and I woke up one morning not to the wrinkles in my mirror or the ache in my shoulder, but to the fact that half of me was missing. I felt invisible, like I had left a part of myself in Boston 20 years ago and she'd

been riding the Amtrak train up and down the Northeast Corridor ever since, looking for the rest of herself. I blamed my husband for being male. I blamed my kids and my suburban house and the soccer team and the PTA. But mostly, I blamed myself for choosing privilege, for passing, for letting myself disappear.

And then some amazing things happened. I put a Human Rights Campaign equal sign on the bumper of my car. I came out to my kids. The four of us started going to marriage equality rallies together. On our family vacation to California last summer we spent an afternoon in the Castro and loaded up at the HRC store on buttons and stickers and t-shirts. We all started watching *The Fosters*.

In my 40s, being a bisexual woman isn't as easy as it was in my 20s. I have to make a conscious effort to be fully seen, and to feel a part of the community I love. Many people don't know what the equal sign on my SUV means, and they see what they see – a woman who is married to a man, with two kids, in the suburbs, dropping off snacks for the school holiday party.

But the thing is, queer also looks like this.

*Jodi S. Rosenfeld is a 41-year-old psychologist living in the Philadelphia area. She studied with Robyn Ochs while an undergraduate at Tufts University in 1993, and is writing her first novel about a 20-something bisexual woman in 1990's Boston.*

# Age is How You Feel

By Colleen McTigue

My name is Colleen, and I turned 58 this year. In the past few years I've gone through an amazing period of self-discovery and self-definition, and many things about my life have changed radically. I would say that the biggest thing that changed for me in the past few years is that I was finally able to understand and accept who I truly am, and to realize that I am worthy and lovable, just as I am. This realization has allowed me the freedom to reveal my true self to others in my life, and to open myself to new possibilities. This change did not happen all at once; it was not a sudden epiphany, but it involved hard work over a long period of time, and the love of my family, friends and lovers.

Of course, from this realization flowed a multitude of changes, some of which were very difficult, some painful, others wonderful and even miraculous. One of the most interesting changes I've experienced has been a change in my understanding of my sexuality. I say, "change in my understanding," because if I'm honest, I'm pretty sure I've been bisexual all along, but I spent most of my life thinking of myself as strictly heterosexual. Maybe I'm just more relaxed now that I'm older. As a young man, I knew I was very strongly attracted to women, but from time to time, I would interact sexually with other men. My inner self-identification was female, and in my sexual fantasies, I would envision myself as the woman I knew myself to be, and my partners were almost always men. I thought of myself as a heterosexual male, however. It was only recently, as I went through my gender transition, that I began to allow myself to identify as bisexual.

My gender transition was, I think, the catalyst that opened my mind to other possibilities. If I could challenge something as basic as gender, I thought (perhaps semi-subconsciously), what other aspects of identity might be similarly challenged? As I underwent hormone therapy and my body began to change, I noticed a change in how I looked at men and women. Men began to appear more attractive to me, and I began to actively think of them as potential sexual and romantic partners. Before long, I began to act on those thoughts. However, my attraction to women remained as strong as ever.

There were a few "bumps in the road" I had to endure because of my particular history. I had, unfortunately, built up a lot of internalized gender-and-sexuality phobias over the years, which is hardly surprising since my life had been lived in a veritable "Russian nesting doll" assortment of closets constructed from homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. I had spent my life hating myself and my body, and it all came to a head in mid-transition when I came to believe that my potential dating pool consisted entirely of "tranny-chasers,"

who would only want me as a fetish object. I despaired of finding anyone to actually love me.

Fortunately, life has a way of surprising us. I met Sam (not his real name) about three months before my gender-confirming surgery, although at the time I didn't yet know when the surgery would be. There was an instant and very electric attraction for both of us, which didn't take long to turn into love. He cared for me after my surgery, we spent long afternoons cuddling together, and we grew incredibly close during that time. He's been with me almost two years now. About six months after my surgery, I met Aileen (not her real name), and she and I recently celebrated our first anniversary. Ours is a long-distance relationship, which is not easy, but technology helps us fill in the gaps, and we Skype almost every night in addition to emails and text messages so we feel very connected with each other. We are very much in love. So not only have I found love, I've found it twice, I'm having more sex than I've ever had in my life, and it's far, far better than any sex I've ever had before.

So what has this to do with age and sexuality? Well, Sam is 10 years younger than me, and Aileen is eight years older than me, but to me it feels like we're all about the same age. They are each, in his or her own way, very compatible with me and I with them. They both enjoy me, and I enjoy both of them. And this all came about, I believe, because all of us were open to whatever possibilities might present themselves. I had previously been in a monogamous heterosexual marriage for over 30 years and when that ended I decided I would not seek a similar union, but I would wait and see what life might offer. I was very honest and open with both Sam and Aileen, letting them know I was not willing to make an exclusive commitment to one person, and we were able to find a balance that suits us all.

One thing I have come to firmly believe is that nothing in our lives is ever wasted. Everything we experience in life leads us to the person we eventually become. I am very proud and happy about who I am and how I live my life, and I would not trade any part of it for a different path. It has all been worthwhile.

Age is just a number. Your true age is how you feel. Aileen and I recently attended a day-long workshop for womyn, and as the day went on, we came to realize that we were easily the oldest womyn there, but we never felt out of place, and in fact the other participants appreciated the experiences we shared. When I'm out in public with Sam, I never feel old, and in fact I feel younger now than I did five years ago (and I look younger, too). Never be afraid of age. Take care of yourself, be kind to yourself, and you will have a long and enjoyable life.

*Colleen is currently studying adult education with a view to becoming a diversity educator. She is also working on a semi-autobiographical novel, and enjoying life to the fullest.*

# Letter to My Younger Bisexual Sisters

By Gwendolyn

Dear Bi Sisters Who Are in Their Twenties and Thirties,

In a few months I'll be 40 years old. In the past 20 years, I have grown more knowledgeable about myself. I faced my fears and anxieties about being rejected by friends and relatives by being an out bisexual. I became more confident about needs: having people in my inner circle who have the skills to be fully engaging and emotionally expressive and who can celebrate my authentic self.

When I was 22, during my first semester at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, my Soul Sister committed suicide; she was 19. I was devastated, emotionally isolated, felt unheard, and grieved alone. During the first few months of my grief, I adopted a lifestyle of healing. I made a promise to myself that I would ask for help when I need it, comfort and soothe myself; create and initiate support systems; and be my own cheerleader.

In keeping with the customs of my Haitian elders, I will give you some unsolicited advice; however, the advice I will share with you is the same advice that I practice myself.

Practice radical self-acceptance. Accept who you are at this moment. Accept that you can and will change your internalized biphobia or self-doubt once you decide to accept yourself as you are, and connect with others who can support you.

Be vulnerable. It has always been part of my personality to express my intellect and feelings. I express my authentic self, show my humanity and vulnerabilities, regardless of whether other people feel uncomfortable about this part of my personality. [[www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)]



Develop your emotional support system. Having a community of people who truly get me becomes even more important to me as the years pass by. My need for emotional support and consistent sisterhood has increased. I found out who my true supportive ride-or-die friends are [[www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Ride-or-Die-Chick](http://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Ride-or-Die-Chick)] when I hit a major life challenge, i.e., gave birth, or experienced a death in my family, financial instability, or illness. Some friends will vanish and return when you feel better and others will step up and have your back during the whole tumultuous journey.

Be your own cheerleader. During the times I felt alone, isolated with deep despair, and had suicidal thoughts, I have used this mantra to help me keep breathing: "My ancestors have been through worse; I feel this way because I can't cope anymore with all this hurt and pain, but I do want to live. I need to find new ways to cope with life and I will ask a professional for help." That gets me through another day. [[www.wingsfortheheart.com/self-esteem-being-your-own-cheerleader.htm](http://www.wingsfortheheart.com/self-esteem-being-your-own-cheerleader.htm) and 1-800-273-8255, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline]

Save your emotional energy – stress causes physical pain. There have been many times when I felt I was emotionally safer when I was in the closet because then I didn't have to deal with the anxiety and frustration of receiving the silent, staring, or deer-in-headlights treatment or be exposed to ignorant biphobic questions after saying the word bisexual. I learned that I don't have to explain and re-explain my culture, race, or sexual identity to anyone. It's not my job to repeatedly educate, coach, or mentor others to understand me. People are responsible to do their own work. One article geared towards doing work on white privilege but also applicable to heterosexism is Maggie Potapchuck's "Doing the Work: Unearthing Our Own White Privilege" [[www.mpassociates.us/pdf/DTW.pdf](http://www.mpassociates.us/pdf/DTW.pdf)].

Don't give up on romance. You get wiser about growing your romantic garden as an out bisexual. Throughout the past 20 years I learned more about what type of relationships I needed and what type were toxic to me. I got better at clearly defining what I wanted in various types of relationships. Here are some weeding tips that have helped me throughout the years.

Make a list of what you want in a relationship and what qualities and emotional skills you desire in a partner. Mentally check off whether that person fits your needs.

Don't force yourself on people. Look for others who are engaging and are equally interested in wanting to be with you.

Gwendolyn, *continues on page 11*

# I, The Septuagenarian: 70 Years

By Jane Barnes

I turned seventy on the twenty-ninth of December. I was born in the Brooklyn Navy Yard hospital at 5:30 AM. After I'd learned in a poetry workshop that you were SUPPOSED to infuse your writing with emotion, I found myself writing a poem about being born, about the cold, damp air, and the abruptness with which I'd been awakened (born). Where did that come from? Why have I never liked being wet, even when it was the dead of winter, and the shower was hot? I don't know.

That was my beginning. Have I come to the end? I've managed to escape death quite a few times: two suicide attempts, alcohol abuse, untreated diabetes, a week-long coma following taking myself off my bipolar medicine, four blood clots (one in each lung and each leg), a breakdown and depression, laced with anxiety, that landed me for a month in a psych ward until my meds could be fine-tuned. I had a melanoma removed at thirty, my emergency gallbladder surgery, and you can see that I've been very lucky.

I also came out as lesbian in the mid-seventies. It wasn't easy, though I had support from lesbian friends. About ten years later, I came out as bi. A few of my New York friends are too, and that helped. Writing about this revelation has helped not a little. I sometimes wonder why it matters, but I'm still a sexual self, I still get crushes and perceive a bit of flirtation with men and women. But seventy is still an age to die in.

I confess that I now read the *Times* obituaries – both to see who famous is no longer with us, or for the stories they tell, and (most importantly) to see WHEN people die. I used to be one of those thirty-somethings who considered sixty a long life, and life after seventy, nonexistent. But I want to live until 85 and calculated that that meant I would still be holding on in 2028 – a number as foreign as my birth date 1943 – at which time the Warsaw Uprising occurred with the murder of an entire over-packed Jewish community; a year or so later in World War II my father was on an aircraft carrier near the Philippines.

What will 2028 be like? Our garments will transmit all kinds of communications, diabetes will be no more, more of our bodies will be “harvested” or made from a kind of substance better than plastic. The U.S. will ration its air and water, and a Latina woman will be President. Children will attend schools that look like playgrounds. Justin Bieber will be either dead or an inspirational speaker at 28, having been in rehab several times. I will be 85.

Now, in looking at the obits, I can see that while some die between 50 and 60, it's usually considered “before their time,” whereas some of the wording states that (s/he) died

at 62 of “natural causes.” Why not die at 72 of “natural causes”? No, that's too young. Even my mother, with serious bronchial disease, went at 78. Still, for me, too young. And what about my father who went at 72, even worse. Don't let's forget accidents, tragedies, unfortunate timing, daredevil acts, suicide and alcohol poisoning. What about heartbreak, drowning, born with a bad heart? And what about smoking, car wrecks and cancer? And HIV?

The real oldsters to me are in their eighties and nineties, and the number six appeals to me, so I'm going to put in for 86, but I've got lots of work to do on the medical front, and on the artistic. I have a blood disorder (in which I sway from bleeding-out danger to clogged veins), and a day at a time I don't drink anymore. Saving myself from whole milk and carbs is what I propose to do next, but I fall down on that goal. Let's not speak of the horrors of “complications from diabetes,” such as having your whole leg cut off. Your fingers. Both arms.

So I guess I should get cracking. I've done some good things: most of my friends are in their thirties and forties, and most are mature, and if not, have found at least a healthy track. But one other goal emerges, and that's me and my art: I have begun at least twenty manuscripts. To cover my writing life from when I was seven to now as I'm seventy. I've accomplished the great benefit of artistic friends, who are hell-bent on shaping their destinies, and who may think of me as wise, as I sometimes think them foolish, but I don't bother to say so, and they don't, in the main, care to know.

The fact of the matter is that they jump over snow drifts, and then run back and help me through the slush. They drive cars, and they have their own apartments, cars and more or less good jobs, and some of them have discovered what comprises a good marriage or relationship. They can sit on the floor, run up hills, and work their iPhones. I think of that gesture of holding the phone up to one's ear, with that expanse of the fingers, pointing finger stretched away from turning thumb. The distant look in their eyes. Your reward? To know that they've just bought tickets to a show at a discount, looked up a map of the place, found out what's playing, read the reviews, and then get a call interrupt (a new call on top of the old call) that their normal big sister has just had her third son.

But don't get me talking about children. I raised five of them – one was my talented cellist mother who favored housecoats into the afternoon – and this drudgery was like the best kind of birth control. My teen girlfriends all got pregnant, but I had a family to flee, and can see a story in

Jane, continued on next page

Jane, continued from previous page

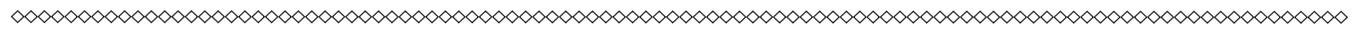
there somewhere. No babies for me, not even any close calls. A BIG THANK YOU. To someone, maybe God, or whoever takes pity on us up there. And speaking of up there, being 70 makes me think of my higher power. She's brought me this far; maybe she'll give me another 50 years.

I know one thing: I don't want to die while drinking. I already "died" when I faced the fact that I was losing a real life; maybe this woman will get that same wake-up call. OK. It's clear. Keep me sober, make me write, make me look for challenges, and if my aged friend never gets free of her own problem, I still will stand. But I could die today, and if so, at least I've just written uninterrupted for four hours, in my room in a residence of assisted living.

And I've got assisted writing – I live on social security, enough for an ice cream now and then, and without laundry, meals, housekeeping, bed changing, and help with meds

taking. I have all day to write. Why spoil it by getting an apartment in Manhattan's Upper West Side without a roommate (mine is as silent as a statue), with all that trudging out for groceries and clean clothes? I may have died and gone to heaven but out in the real world there are "chores." And this could be the last thing I'll ever write. I want to go out loving my friends, and giving whoever wants them, my words. And later, I hope, my octogenarian and a half final words on the subject of me. And P.S.: Suddenly I realize why I like the number 86; that's how old my dear grandmother was when she eloped with herself and arrived elegantly into the ether.

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



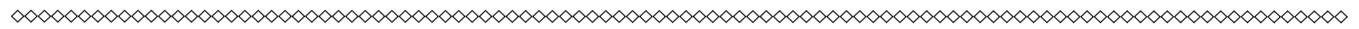
Gwendolyn, continued from page 9

When a person says, "I'm busy," on a regular basis, take that as a sign that they may not make time for you, their time management skills are lacking, and they just don't have the skills to make you a priority.

If you are romantically or sexually interested in someone, let them know. Tell them: I really like you, I'd like to spend more time with you and get to know you better. Over time, ask them open-ended questions. Ask: Are you dating anyone else right now, are you married or in a committed relationship? How do you feel about bisexuals? How do you feel about public displays of affection? How do you

feel about dating cross culturally? How do you feel about our age difference? What are you like when you feel angry or frustrated? How do you release your stress? How do you practice safe sex? Yes, some of these questions sound corny and you might feel awkward asking them, but hey, you said them and now they're out there. You just have to sit back and listen to their responses.

*Gwendolyn is the founder of Boston's BIWOC, Bisexual Woman of Color, an online and in-person support and discussion group. She is also a writer, librarian, mental health advocate, and vegan personal chef. For more information: <https://www.facebook.com/BIWOC.Community> or [biwocinfo@gmail.com](mailto:biwocinfo@gmail.com)*



Vanessa, continued from page 1

and internalized biphobia. That is why it is imperative to be confident in who you are and how you identify, not just as a bisexual woman, but in all of your other identities as well (race, ethnicity, spirituality, gender identity, etc.). How do we achieve this confidence? For me, I was able to develop confidence in my bisexual identity by getting support from other bisexual and bi-friendly folks. I joined the bisexual support group at my local LGBT community center and volunteered at LGBT agencies to meet other people and develop a sense of community. I researched and read everything I could about bisexuality and the history of the bi movement to get a sense of culture and perspective. In addition, I attended bisexual conferences and have participated in queer forums and workshops on bi issues, educating others in the process.

Unfortunately, you will encounter people who challenge and attempt to invalidate your sexuality throughout your life. Our declaration that gender is not binary rattles many people, and sometimes human beings fear what they do not understand. I have learned that educating and having sincere discussions has been very successful in not only challenging biphobia, but in empowering myself to embrace and appreciate my sexuality.

Celebrate who you are!

*Vanessa is an openly bisexual marriage and family therapist intern currently living in San Francisco. She has been working with the LGBT community for the past 13 years.*

# One Word: Bisexual Coming of Age in the Late 1970s-Early 1980s

By Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato

We had one word: bisexual. In those days, some people still spelled it with a hyphen: bi-sexual. It was and was not cool to be bisexual in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I was coming of age. It was cool because there were hot, out bisexual celebrities, like David Bowie and Debbie Harry. It was uncool because, if you were a bisexual woman, you could be pretty sure that almost all lesbians would hate you (and they'd know you were bisexual because you had dared to show your face in a women's bar but you didn't "look like a lesbian." All lesbians were expected to look like butches back then.) So, if you wanted a girlfriend, you'd probably have to find another bisexual woman. Lesbians might secretly be attracted to you but they wouldn't trust you and would be embarrassed to be seen in public with you, if you had long hair or wore a skirt...

But it was also cool to be bisexual during those years because AIDS had not yet been discovered, and people were very unafraid of sex. So it was, in a general way, a very good time to be young and starting one's sexually active life. If you had a social circle like the one I found (*Rocky Horror Picture Show* fans in Greenwich Village) there were likely to be a lot of bisexual people in it because, even if bisexuality did have connotations of promiscuity (in the minds of the ignorant) promiscuity wasn't considered a bad thing. In some ways, it was easier to be out at that time than it is now, because we have actually become a somewhat more sexually repressed society in the post-AIDS years.

In my group of friends, there were a lot of bisexuals. I had bisexual girlfriends and bisexual boyfriends (short-term serial monogamy, which was pretty common during my youth.) Being bisexual was so accepted in that crowd

that one guy came up with a saying, which we would all repeat: "If you're not bi, you're biased." Then there was the popular joke: "I'm trisexual; I'll try anything once." Experimentation was considered adventurous and cool; not stupid or shallow, as it tends to be thought of now.

Because I had more male than female partners over the years, I eventually found that I was usually perceived as straight. I made a point of outing myself to close friends because I didn't want to lose my bisexual identity, but it was hard to maintain. I couldn't (or didn't think I could) out myself at work. So, I got married (three times – all of them to men who knew I was bisexual) and let myself look straight because staying out took too much energy and besides, if casual acquaintances knew I was bisexual they'd probably think I was looking for girlfriends...

Then I divorced my last husband and married a woman. Now I have to out myself in the other direction because



I'm presumed lesbian. That's true even though I still have long hair and wear skirts and makeup. One thing that's changed since my young adulthood is that lesbians don't have a strict uniform anymore. You can look like either Ellen or Portia (if you're skinny and white.) Or...you can pretty much look like anything, and people will believe you're a lesbian if you say that you are. But then they'll also believe you're a lesbian if you don't say that you are, so long as you're romantically involved with a woman.

My wife is supportive of my being out (as bisexual) in a way that my former husbands were not. None of the guys in my life ever told me to stay closeted (I wouldn't have listened if they had), but it was clear that all three of them were somewhat embarrassed when I told mutual friends that I was bi; worried that I'd be perceived as non-monogamous. My wife, on the other hand, knows that I'm faithful to her and is secure enough in her own identity that she isn't threatened by mine. So, it's pretty easy to be out as queer these days, though I do have to keep outing myself as bisexual.

I perceive a lot of pressure from younger non-monosexuals to give up the label bisexual, and call myself pansexual, omnisexual or something else. Sorry, folks. I'm not going to do that. There was one word and it formed my sense of self. It's what/who I am. As bisexual at 51 as I was at 21. Still here, still queer and still in the conversation.

*The Rev. Francesca Bongiorno Fortunato is a minister, writer/poet, performing artist and Extreme Cat Person. She lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her wife Lynn and their feline employers, Alice and Gracie.*

# To My Young Sisters

By F. Withe

We live in an amazing time; one where following your own path to sexual awareness is not limited by social stigma. Well, okay, it still can be, but it is way more permissive than when I was a girl finding out about me. Today you can and should explore to find out what works for you. Some may have known all your life that you weren't like the other girls around you that swooned at the latest male teen idol. Or, like me, you may have liked the female teen idols just as much as the male teen idols. You are able to explore what makes your heart sing; my life didn't always offer me the same options. I grew up, married and had a child because that is what society said you were to do if you were a girl. Never mind that I felt that something was missing in my life. Life was only gray with no splashes of color until I met her.

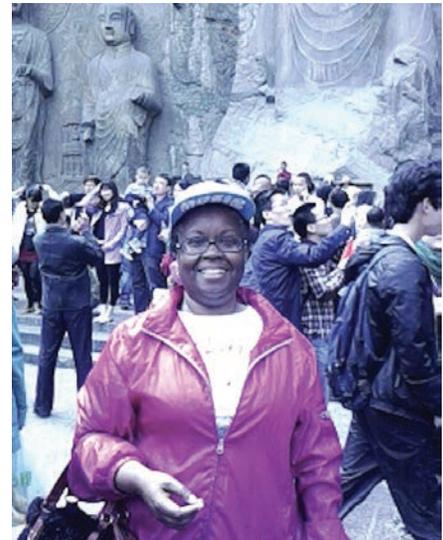
I came to realize my sexual orientation later in life. I'm almost 50 and just discovered that I am bi. What I want to touch on is how important it is to know who you are and be very happy in your own skin.

Being an English teacher in China has certainly been an interesting time to discover my sexuality. Living life as a non-heterosexual in China is often a challenge. The country doesn't prohibit a gay lifestyle – not now, at least – but finding others who share my lifestyle is difficult at best. For me, coming out of the closet happened when another teacher let me know she was bi and she found me attractive. I was curious and wanted to see if having sex with a woman would appeal to me. While growing up I didn't explore, and I thought this was the perfect opportunity to do so. Many of my friends and co-workers have come out to me and I wondered if there was something that I was unconsciously putting out, like pheromones, to attract women to me and reveal my true sexuality. The lovely lady I met told me she didn't think there was a foolproof way to

find other bi or lesbian women, but others have said there is. Who knows if there is? Have I been repressing my sexuality and this ability? That doesn't really matter here. I loved being with my lady friend and I look forward to more encounters with other women.

What I would like for all girls and women to be able to do is to explore what makes them happiest. A teacher from college once said to me that sometimes we try relationships with women and men to find out what we like. This is normal and natural but I thought she was crazy: remember, I was taught a woman has to be with a man. No exploration of any other way was allowed. I've felt for years that men didn't always understand me or fulfill me, and while I enjoyed sex with my boyfriend and then with my husband, I really enjoy being with other women. As women we have a shared bond; even if we grow up in totally different places, we go through similar types of things and that commonality is a very strong bond. I feel like I can be more authentic with women. I wonder what my life would have been like had I known this years ago. The only problem is that my child would not be who he is if my life were different. I probably would not be writing from China if my life were different, so I don't wish I'd known before. I'm glad I've lived my life as I have lived it and look forward to this new chapter as it adds more color to my life, another layer to me.

*Please* take advantage of the world we live in today and find out what you like. I was just on a trip with my family. Our Chinese tour guides, two girls from a local university, were very obviously more than just classmates and best friends. I'm sure they were lovers; they couldn't keep their hands off one another as we rode the bus around town. They would pat and rub and hug and it made me jealous; they are young and free to explore their feelings for one another. I was also missing



my lady friend and wishing I could be with her exploring a new city and then sharing the night.

For me, my location here in China and my age are challenges. Other women from the U.S. who are my age were taught similar things I was taught: that a girl grows up to get married to a man. Women from other parts of the world may be more open sexually. That is the gift of living here in China. I can meet women from all over the world. I am eager to see where this new layer of myself takes me and what I can learn. For you young ladies, explore in this new world that embraces change and see what makes you happiest and where your heart leads you.

I am even more fortunate in that I am married to a man who not only knows I'm bi but he accepts it and has even encouraged me to find what makes me happy. My wish for you is to have people in your life that will allow you to explore as you need to: people who will support your choices and help you to grow.

*F. Withe is a 49-year-old mom and wife. She is also bisexual, a classical pianist, writer and a teacher of English in China.*

learning what Nina thinks about all of us. My interest in her reflections feels almost like searching for treasure. *What will she tell me next? What can she teach me? What can we learn together?* Each new conversation uncovers a new dimension in our relationship. Her life lessons and resolutions let me see a new side of her history and the intricacies of her relationships, and my stories introduce her to the ideas of a Dot Com generation and tend to bring out romantic memories of past loves.

In our last phone call, I asked Nina for her thoughts about my parents' decisions to have two kids via donor insemination (DI). "I never would have imagined it, not in a million years," she explained, "We didn't know about that kind of thing back then. There were all kinds of families, which got together through this or that, but yours is something really special." When I was growing up, I did not know any other families created through DI, and I felt it was special too. My parents taught us from a young age that our family was intentional and that they wanted to love us more than anything. However, this was not something Nina and I discussed much when I was a kid. It was a simple fact of life, and rarely came up.

Despite our mutual love of storytelling, we have different understandings of gender, sexuality, and family. Our generations have shaped our queer experiences very distinctly. I cannot relate to Nina's experience of being a single, gender-non-conforming parent with four kids in the 1960s. Instead I had an open and affirming community of gender-bending and queer family friends that allowed me to live and explore without question. However, I learned to navigate my own challenges growing up, such as being asked to justify my parents' sex life to kids in school, or trying to explain an eighth-grade genealogy project with information provided on a sperm bank reference form. Nina and I compare these challenges together in our letters, phone calls, and visits.

In some conversations, I get to ask Nina more about her early relationships. I've learned about her ten-year marriage to my grandfather, and how she found other lesbian/bisexual women after she was divorced. "We just found each other," she said, "Sometimes you took a chance letting a woman know you had a feeling about her, which was a very brave thing to do. No one talked about it, but if you did, it was very private. But when you felt *that feeling* with another woman, you were rarely wrong about it."

Nina loves to talk about the bar scene with me. She reminisces that there were more gay bars in Rochester in the 1970s than there are today. Going to the bar was always something we liked to do together after a day of running errands. We would grab a quick drink and play a few songs on the jukebox. I remember one afternoon when I was about 16 years old, we stopped by her favorite bar because she saw a friend's car parked outside. As we took a seat, I

watched her kiss the bartender's cheek and slip him a \$20 bill, saying, "The usual for me and a double for her," with a wink. Nina and the bartender chatted about the upcoming AIDS Walk and he asked about Chrissy, her partner, whose two gay brothers passed away from AIDS in the '90s. She told us about how she used to give rides to people heading to AIDS rallies and events, so they didn't have to park far away. Through stories like these, I became inspired to join the local AIDS Walk in my hometown, and gave a short speech during the youth portion of the rally that year. I can vividly remember doing my best to honor Nina and Chrissy during that speech about 15 years ago, and Nina says she wishes she could have been there to see it.

Recently I was curious about Nina's thoughts on my coming out. I was a private kid growing up, and did not share much about my personal life with my parents or grandparents. When I did, about age 14, the conversation lasted around 30 seconds. As Nina's stories and memories are being cataloged in my mind, I am most intrigued about Nina's intuition. I asked, "Did you always have a *feeling* about me? Did you know I was going to come out?"

"No, yes, well maybe. You did have that funny walk," she said.

"So what did you think when I came out to you?"

She replied, "Well, I was delighted and scared to death. But no matter what, I'm *always* in your corner."

*Jamie is a social justice educator and activist living in Boston with her partner, Benaë.*

### Something to think about:

BBWN, home of the *Bi Women Quarterly* is a not-for-profit organization with no organizational hierarchy operating entirely on volunteer power. All of our work is funded entirely from pin sales and from your donations. If you are interested in getting involved and sharing your time and/or your dollars, please contact Robyn at [bi-womeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:bi-womeneditor@gmail.com). Remember: "WE" are "YOU."

We're looking for:

- A calendar diva to pull together our quarterly calendar of events
- A brunch diva to schedule our monthly potluck brunches
- A web diva to keep our website fresh
- Proofreaders to read each issue of BWQ before it goes to press
- Designers to help create some nice outreach materials
- Folks to show up at volunteer events
- STUDENT? Consider becoming an intern.

# For She Who Missed the Revolution

By Apphia K.

To my mother,

From my tiny apartment, halfway across the world from you, I write this with a heavy heart. I miss you with an ache that does not grow weaker as days pass, and I'm happy that I still feel this way about you – as if that is proof enough that I love you, just as much as I did the day I was born.

As I cease being stubbornly rebellious about your ways and begin to embrace being your daughter, I am learning what it means to love unconditionally. For reasons I do not care to over-analyze or dissect, I know that I have always loved you this way. As a young adult, curious about our origins, I asked for stories of your childhood and what made you the woman you are and for stories of your mother. Upon learning that she wasn't kind to you, I feel protective—to imagine that anyone should hurt you makes me fierce. I want you to know that you are perfect exactly the way you are. You can be sure of this.

As I come into my own as a woman, as my body changes I realize how subtle messages about my beauty or the lack of it, according to popular media, have affected my self-perception. I have also noticed how you perceive yourself and how you're missing out on your own beauty. Beauty is the color of our dark, marked skin. It is in our wispy curls, our calloused hands; it is in our cracked heels and unpainted nails. I find beauty in your smile, in the warmth of your hands and in your voice (yes, even when you're shouting at me). I miss that too.

As I embrace my bisexuality, I understand the origins of your misconceptions and naivety about sex and sexuality. I realize that while I started out with a bare minimum of information to satisfy my curiosity, you had no access to anything of the sort. Some days, when you disagree with my choice to be out about who I am, I remind myself that it is difficult for you to see things from my perspective, because you have been conditioned to believe that not being heterosexual is an abnormality and that scares you. In your heart, I know that you want me to be happy and not be alone forever. I want to reassure you that this is possible in some parts of the world today, and it is in pursuit of this that I left your home.

I promise you that my sexual orientation was not your fault. It is not because you wanted a boy when you were pregnant with me. I wish that there were some way I could prove this to you, so that you would believe me instead of clueless people who have never met me. Embracing my masculinity means that I am comfortable in my skin being exactly who I am, not that there is something wrong with me. Everyone has a little masculinity and femininity in them, at different levels. Being genderqueer is not a bad thing. I know you expected me to be shy and quiet, but I'm my father's daughter too.

As I look for the person who is destined to be the love of my life, I remember your list of must haves and mustn't haves. They might not check every box on that lengthy list, but I hope that you will someday accept them as my partner and the other parent to my children. I know that once you meet this person, you will love them too. Please be patient: you've taught me to choose wisely and I promise you that I will.

As I spend more time out in the world, in the company of strangers, I understand your desire to protect me from them and from the things with which you are unfamiliar. Thank you for letting me learn life's lessons on my own. Trust that you have equipped me with the skills I need to survive out here. I have been hurt emotionally and mentally by people to whom I gave the benefit of the doubt, and every day I learn to heal my wounds. Things have changed, and it's okay to talk about being raped and protest against it in public. I even write poetry in rage against it. Maybe someday you'll watch me perform it and be proud that I've overcome my past and choose to give rape survivors a voice.

As I come into my own as a feminist, I notice that although the revolution passed you by, you in your own way have embraced your independence as a woman. Against all odds you made sure I got a good education and that we always had a home and food on the table. I realize that you never had the opportunity to realize your own dreams, but I hope that someday I can open up those possibilities for you too. I hear you empowering the women around you and it inspires me a great deal. I want to read to you, stories from the *Laxmi Purana* and of Izumo no Okuni, Tarabai Shinde and Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah. And I really want to play you the YouTube video of Malala Yousafzai teaching the leaders of the world about courage, determination and change. She made me cry and be proud to be a girl who will not give up.

I encourage you to accept the opportunities of leadership that come your way. You will find that you are entirely capable of being a pillar of strength and an inspiration to the women who are drawn to you because they believe that you can empower them, too. Discover your own power, embrace your greatness and don't underestimate either. It's never too late.

Every day, I know the strength of your love for me too. I have heard what your heart sounds like from the inside and it continues to resonate with my heartbeat.

I love you, forever.

Your Daughter, Apphia

*Apphia K. is a bisexual activist from India, currently in New York City. She is passionate about bisexual visibility and youth activism, manages the portal [www.bi-inspired.com](http://www.bi-inspired.com) and is currently volunteering with *The BiCast*.*

# News Briefs

By Robyn Ochs



Tune into [www.thebicast.org](http://www.thebicast.org), a new monthly podcast providing a voice for the bisexual community. Just getting started, *The BiCast* has already featured interviews with Ellyn Ruthstrom, Faith Cheltenham and Shiri Eisner.

Wisconsin 521, a statewide bi group for folks in – you guessed it! – Wisconsin held their first successful training of Speaker’s Bureau volunteers, at UW-Oshkosh in April and are looking forward to working with the Bisexual Organizing Project in PFund’s QReach effort, connecting LGBTQ organizations in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota. Lastly, they’ve having monthly brunches in Madison, WI and are planning to be a presence at pride marches throughout the state.

A *New York Times* article, “[The Scientific Quest to Prove Bisexuality Exists](#)” was published on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, with strong reaction from the bisexual community. My favorite response was penned (keystroked?) by Amy Andre and was entitled “[The Scientific Quest to Prove that the New York Times Exists.](#)” While the article focused largely on men, bi women advocates Denise Penn, Ellyn Ruthstrom and myself were among those quoted in the original article.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> actor Alan Cumming gave an NPR interview in which he clearly defined his bisexuality:

I used to be married to a woman. Before that I had had a relationship with a man. I then had another relationship with a woman, and I since then have had relationships with men. I still would define myself as bisexual partly because that’s how I feel but also because I think it’s important to — I think sexuality in this country especially is seen as a very black and white thing, and I think we should encourage the gray. You know?

I don’t go around in my life thinking, “Oh, my God, I’m going to have to have sex with a woman soon because I said I was bisexual!” ... It’s like saying you’re straight or you’re gay — it’s just what you are, and whatever you’re doing in your life it runs obviously parallel, but it’s kind of secondary to how you are inside. That’s how I’ve always felt, and I still do, even though I’m very happily married to a really amazing man and wish to be so for the rest of my life.”

(Source: [tinyurl.com/NPRAlanCumming](http://tinyurl.com/NPRAlanCumming))

Ten years ago, on May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to legally and irrevocably marry same-sex couples. A number of BBWN members were among the very first couples married in the United States, including Carla Imperial and Megan Jewett (likely the second couple married in Cambridge) and Peg Preble and myself (the first couple married in Brookline). In commemoration of this anniversary, photographer Joel Benjamin photographed several of the couples married in these first days. Below is his beautiful shot of Carla, Megan and their daughter, Kai. This photography exhibit is free and open to the public through June at the BCAE, 122 Arlington Street, Boston.

And speaking of progress: since the last issue of the *Bi Women Quarterly* was published, several states, including Oregon and Pennsylvania, have had anti-gay marriage bans struck down. In 2004, federal judges in 10 states as well as a state judge in Arkansas have struck down bans on same-sex marriage, and Maryland became the 18th U.S. state to protect its citizens from discrimination based upon gender identity and expression.

There’s a whole lot left to be done but we’re moving forward!



Credit: Joel Benjamin

# Reader Feedback

Dear Robyn,

I'm writing to thank you for the recurring delight of the *Bi Women Quarterly*. Each issue is like a party full of people I want to know better: reflective, funny, honest, compassionate, fired-up, diverse bisexual women. I don't know any other forum that's so affirming to the whole spectrum of bi experience. Thank you for your years of work bringing us all together!

*Laura Berol, Falls Church, VA*

Dear *Bi Women Quarterly*,

I spent a good hour reading your current issue and looking at all your archives last week, and I just want you to know how really wonderful I think your publication is as well as the whole bi women's network [Boston Bisexual Women's Network] in general. I also love all your little "look who is reading" photos and your "news briefs." It's these little whimsical things along with the substance that just make it so great. You should get a Lambda Literary Award!

*Leah M. Fygetakis, Ph.D.*

*Director of LGBTQ Programs and Services, Wellesley College*

Dear *Bi Women Quarterly*,

I stumbled upon your Spring issue at an event I attended. It was tacked to the wall and I almost walked by it. But the title of Mariah Cruz's story "Split Down the Middle" caught my eye. I read it. Then I re-read it. Then I took a picture of the article and re-read it in my car. Although I have known I am bisexual for at least 8 years, that is the first time I've ever felt understood. I am married to a man but have recently fallen for a woman, and I'm working through that situation right now. I sent the article to my best friend, who is straight and trying to help me but can't quite sympathize. When she read it she said, "Wow, that sounds so...lost...and lonely," and at that point I broke down crying. For the first time, through someone else's well-written and deeply personal words, I was able to convey how truly hard these past few months have been.

As a 26-year old, there aren't many stories like mine out there, mostly it's older women who figure it out after years of marriage and kids. While I'm thankful I'm going through this process now, before any children are around to get hurt, I have felt very alone, even with friends and a therapist to help me. So, in short, I wanted to say thank you for publishing the newsletter, and thank you to Mariah for putting your story out there. You're not alone. I get you. I don't have an answer, but you're not alone.

*N. G.*

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Write to us at:**

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



Twenty women – including several first-timers and two who drove quite a long distance to attend – enjoyed the May brunch at Robyn's on May 4th. We talked, we ate, we laughed, and enjoyed being in a safe, welcoming and affirming space. Women: consider joining us next time!

**Would YOU  
like to host one  
of our monthly bi  
women's potluck  
brunches?**

*If so, please contact Kate:  
[thewriterkate@gmail.com](mailto:thewriterkate@gmail.com).*

## New E-Book Version of *Getting Bi* Available Now!

*Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World* is the definitive anthology of international voices about bisexuality. Co-edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah Rowley, *Getting Bi* includes over 220 different narratives from 42 countries. A compelling look at contemporary bisexual, pansexual and fluid experience, *Getting Bi* shares perspectives of teens, parents, elders and everyone in between.

And now this bi **must-have** is available as an e-book for only \$9.99. Visit Amazon.com today and order yours.



Published by the Bisexual Resource Center, profits from print and e-book sales of *Getting Bi* go towards the BRC's work raising awareness and providing support to the bi community.  
[www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net)

---

## Ask Tiggy

Dear Tiggy,

Starting in my adolescent years, I experienced only “heterosexual” feelings. When I was older, I began to feel attracted to other females as well. I have only been in a handful of relationships, all with males, but I’ve had a few sexual encounters with females and would like to have a same-sex relationship.

I was wondering how common it is to not realize one’s bisexuality until later in life. I have gotten skeptical looks when explaining my sexuality to my friends, both gay and straight, because they feel if I truly am bisexual I should have had these feelings earlier on in life.

-Nim

Dear Nim,

In the early 1970s, an academic coined the term “microaggression” to describe the subtle hostility against minorities found in personal interactions. Later, “microinequities” and “microaffirmations” were added to the lexicon. I believe it’s time to throw another into the pot: “microbrainwashing.” I’ll define it as the process by which a member of the majority community says something to convince a minority that the former’s philosophy trumps the latter’s experience, resulting in the minority disbelieving their own experience.

I’ve witnessed this more than you would expect.

No one is sure how common it is to realize one’s bisexuality later in life because so many who experience this dare not admit it. They have been microbrainwashed into thinking they are wrong and either must have always known they were queer or they aren’t queer at all.

If you are of a certain age (and American), you’ll remember the Anita Hill episode as Clarence Thomas was in the process of ascending to the Supreme Court. The Bi Community Activities MeetUp in Boston recently assembled to see her documentary and even the woman herself (!). It reminded me of the I Believe You, Anita bumper stickers from the early ’90s. How those must have heartened Hill during a time when the powerful elite was bent on portraying her as “a little bit nutty and a little bit slutty.”

I believe you, Nim. I believe that your experience is the same as many, many people in the world. I appreciate that you’ve shared it with us. And I believe that anyone else who “disagrees” with your experience has but one choice: to change their own mind.

-Tiggy



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

## The "Bi Office"

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

## Ongoing Events

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

### 2nd Mondays:

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

### 2nd Mondays:

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

### 1st Wednesdays

**BLiSS: Bisexual Social & Support Group.** All genders welcome. 7pm. Info: bliss@biresource.net

### 2nd Thursdays:

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

### 3rd Saturdays:

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

### Metro-Boston women:

Keep up with local events. Sign up for our email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoo.com.



# CALENDAR

## June

**1 (Sunday): AIDS Walk Boston.** The 6.2-mile AIDS Walk starts at the Hatch Shell at 7:30am in Boston's Back Bay. The Walk raises money and awareness for essential HIV prevention, advocacy and services. Info: www.aac.org.

### 3 (Tuesday) 6-8pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts.

A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Meets first Tuesday of each month. Info: appleday621@yahoo.com.

### 4 (Wednesday) 7-8:45pm: Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).

Meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Info/RSVP: bliss@biresource.net.

### 6 (Friday) 6-8pm: Bi Women of Color Coffee and Chat.

This will be a safe and supportive space for bi women of color to talk about a wide variety of issues. Meets at Flour Bakery, 131 Clarendon St, Boston, first

Fridays. Info/RSVP: Gwen at negrese.kreyol@yahoo.com.

### 9 (Monday) 7-9pm: Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting.

Meets once a month to go over the business of the organization and plan upcoming events and programs. All bi and bi-friendly community members are welcome. Info: brc@biresource.net. Meets at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston (Back Bay station on the Orange Line).

### 9 (Monday) 7:00pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.

A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. Info/RSVP: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Meets on second Mondays.

### 12 (Thursday) 7-9pm: Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).

If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) and identify somewhere along the lines of bisexual/omni/pan/fluid or questioning, please join us for a few hours of socializing and support. We meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month at Diesel Cafe, Davis Sq., Somerville, on the Red Line. All genders welcome! Info/RSVP to Kate: youngblissboston@gmail.com.

### 12 (Thursday) 7pm-2am: Pride Queeraoke.

Kick off the big Pride weekend with karaoke and dancing at the Midway in JP. \$10 cover is a donation to Boston Pride.

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

## Bi Women Quarterly wants you!!!



SUBSCRIPTION RATE  
for Bi Women Quarterly (sliding scale)

\_\_\_\$0-20: Pay what you can

\_\_\_\$20-39: Supporter

\_\_\_\$30-\$99: Sustainer

\_\_\_\$100 on up: Goddess

\_\_\_\_\_ Renewal      \_\_\_\_\_ New Subscriber

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Please send my **Bi Women** \_\_\_by email; \_\_\_by postal mail; \_\_\_both ways

BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain,, MA 02130 or online [www.biwomenboston.org](http://www.biwomenboston.org)

## Calendar, *continued from previous page*

**13 (Friday) 7pm: Boston's Dyke March.** Gather at the Boston Common Gazebo for a night of frolicking and marching with the queerest women in town.

**14 (Saturday): Pride Day in Boston.** The theme this year is *Be Yourself, Change the World*. Kicking off from Copley Square at 11am, the parade route winds through the South End, through the Common, up Beacon Street and down the other side of Beacon Hill into Government Center. Get your bi pride on and march with the BRC contingent. Info posted on [www.biresource.net](http://www.biresource.net) and the BRC Facebook page the day before.

**15 (Sunday) 12-7pm: Pride Block Party: JP Edition.** Keep on dancing at the hottest women's block party the day after Pride. Info: [www.bostonpride.org/jp/](http://www.bostonpride.org/jp/).

**21 (Saturday) 11:30am: Bi Brunch.** This mixed gender bi group is now always the 3rd Saturday of the month at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. The Davis stop on the Red Line is just across the street.

**21 (Saturday): Rhode Island Pride.** Rhode Island has the unique distinction of having their parade at night, after a day-long festival along the river. Info: [www.priderider.com](http://www.priderider.com).

**25 (Wednesday) 7pm: Bi Book Club.** Time for another edition of Bi Book Club! This time the book is David Leavitt's *The Two Hotel Francforts*, a fiction finalist for the Bi Book Awards. (Oh yes, we have book awards.) The meetup will be at Brandon's house in Porter Square, Somerville. It is within a 5 minute walk of the Red Line.

**28 (Saturday) 5pm: Bi Dinner for under \$10.** *Everyone* is welcome to join us for dinner at Veggie Galaxy at 450 Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge! Let's enjoy some delicious food, have great conversation and laughter! The menu has great selections for under \$10. Menu: [www.veggiegala.com/menus-vegan-restaurant-boston-vegetarian-diner.html](http://www.veggiegala.com/menus-vegan-restaurant-boston-vegetarian-diner.html).

## July

**1 (Tuesday), 6-8pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts.** (See June 3rd)

**2 (Wednesday) 7pm: Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See June 4th)

**14 (Monday), 7pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See June 9th)

**17 (Thursday) 7-9pm: Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See June 14th)

**19 (Saturday) 11:30am: Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See June 21st)

**27 (Sunday) 27, noon: BBWN Potluck Brunch at Beth's in Belmont.** Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. RSVP/Directions: [bethinnis@gmail.com](mailto:bethinnis@gmail.com)

## August

**1 (Friday) 6-8pm: Bi Women of Color Coffee and Chat.** (See June 6th)

**5 (Tuesday) 6-8pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning Western Massachusetts.** (See June 3rd)

**6 (Wednesday) 7pm: Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See June 4th)

**11 (Monday) 7pm: Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See June 9th)

**14 (Thursday) 7-9pm: Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLiSS).** (See June 14th)

**16 (Saturday) 11:30am: Saturday Bi Brunch.** (See June 15th)

**17 (Sunday) noon: BBWN Potluck Brunch at Kate's in Somerville.** Please bring a potluck dish and/or drinks to share. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area. RSVP/Directions: [thewriterkate@gmail.com](mailto:thewriterkate@gmail.com).

**22-26: Carnival Week in Provincetown.** A week of festive activities including Drag Bingo, the absolutely fabulous Carnival Parade on Thursday, and much more. Bring your beads, bathing suit, and sunscreen! Info: [www.ptown.org/Carnival.asp](http://www.ptown.org/Carnival.asp).

## DATES TO WATCH OUT FOR:

**September 23rd is Celebrate Bisexuality Day!** Plan an event in your community to celebrate our rich and vibrant culture.



*At the May brunch*