

QUEER LOVE STORIES

a zine cultivated by
e wentzel

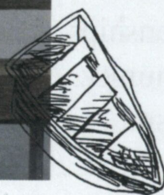


“when i think about the audience that
this will be shared with, i just have
nothing but so much joy and love,
because i know that this world is not
always nurturing of these identities, but
they are so precious.” - jess

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"i think there's a huge piece of education that needs to be done in terms of how allowing people to have the desires or non-desires that they have, and accepting people when they say who they are." - beau



"it took me a long time to accept my identity as a queer person. in the time of college applications, ticket tearing lines, and hesitating before taking the seat next to the pretty girl in class, i think i was waiting for it to accept me back—for an 'in' to the community, a 'go ahead,' or some smile of acknowledgment that I was in the right place.

i understand now that this identity does not exist for others' validation, but it is what i relied on at the time. every time i presented this new piece of myself and it was met with an insincere nod or follow-up question, i felt it begin to chip away." - skylar

Maize



"i don't like the idea of passing because i wish the world was a little different. sometimes language comes after the experience."

"the biggest thing for me is *am i going to be now identifying as a black man in america if i start taking t[estosterone]*? so it was also a fear thing too, which made me angry as well, because i shouldn't have to be afraid of how i look and who i am, or be put into a stereotype or statistic or a box by doing what i want to do. nothing's gonna stop me. ultimately, if i'm going to do something, i'm going to do it. but this i took more to heart and did a lot of feeling, and it felt very joyful to break that mold, because it felt like the world was breaking at the time. it still is. and i was like, *fuck that i'm not gonna delay this any longer.*" - maize

"one thing that never left me was something is wrong—every day i'd wake up with that. people don't normally wake up and say, 'i don't think i'm who i'm supposed to be.' but we put on this oscar-winning performances. nobody had a clue, and i wouldn't let anybody near me. you could like me, but i'd never let you get close to me. everything that happened, i thought, *well, getting married is going to cure this. having a kid is going to cure this. if i just change jobs, i know things will change*, and yet they didn't. and as we get older, i think we get more desperate, because you're like, *this is getting more and more complicated. and it's getting harder and harder to suppress*. i'd had another breakdown, another attempted suicide. and i finally found a therapist who said, 'let me ask you a question. you had three brothers, you went to an all-boys catholic boarding school, you worked in the maritime industry your whole life. don't you think, at 53, that you would have got the message by now that you're supposed to be a man? this doesn't happen normally.' she said, 'there're two things that are going to happen here: you're going to commit suicide, or you can transition. that's the only two alternatives right now.' so i started this journey to become susan, and i've been living now as susan since 2010. i can't believe what it's done for me. no one knows why we think like we do, or why suddenly, at three or four years old, we say 'i'm in the wrong body.' but the minute i started on estrogen, it was like the war was over with my brain. i really believe that my brain wasn't supposed to have testosterone. the minute testosterone got lowered, i was at peace, and the war was over. i've just progressed from there." - susan



susan pictured middle, "before i knew i was supposed to be male"



"growing up in port townsend, i always felt like a bit of an outsider. i moved here when i was eight, from sequim. it felt like coming into a tight knit community where most people knew each other, cliques were formed and even as a kid, i sensed that like, 'okay, i'm different.' when i shared with people that i was quileute, that i was native, they asked me if my family lived in a teepee. that was a common assumption with my peers. as a result of living with and confronting those types of narratives everyday, i learned to protect myself and navigate spaces in a way that i could protect my core.

reflecting back on that, i wish there had more space for the nuances of my experiences as a mixed native and queer kid. it's impossible not to make the connection that i moved into an institutional space where stereotypes about native peoples were encouraged and uplifted as central to school pride." - ruby



husbands david & jason smiling in middle

"before i came out, i was so filled with shame that i couldn't look anyone directly in the eye. the stonewall rebellion began on june 28, 1969—i was in new haven at the time—and i came out with a bang in the spring of 1970. this huge weight lifted. i founded the new haven gay liberation front, and virtually ran everywhere shouting, "i'm gay, i'm gay. get used to it!" then i moved to nyc to work with glf, live collectively with other gay men, and take a crash course in homosexuality.

as i see it, we are all going through a process of embracing fully the god-selves that we truly are. that's what glf [gay liberation front] was like for me. what's especially interesting was when i discovered that some of my actions on a personal level contradicted the things i believed in. i needed to take responsibility for my actions, make some radical changes, and move on. if only the rest of the u.s. populace would do the same." - jason

"personally, i think that we always have to be reaching out to allies and to folks in the queer community who have not been on board with trans folks. i always think there's an opportunity for education.

i always think there's an opportunity for care. a huge piece of transphobia is the loss of humanity, the loss of understanding someone's experience. literally every person i have come out to has come around eventually, and i know that is kind of unique, but i don't think it's unique in terms of the capacity for humanity.

i really believe in the ability of people to change, and that it does take a lot of personal conversation and a lot of vulnerability. i don't think that's everybody's responsibility; some people need to remain closeted because of safety or their own sanity. i think if you're able to come out, and you're willing to have tough conversations with people, it really makes a lot of difference. there are many, many people in my life that would still be very transphobic if i had not talked to them personally, saying 'you know me and this is what it means to me and this is why i felt compelled to transition.' they genuinely all come around." - beau





TERESA SHIRAIISHI

"we can't choose what families we were born into, and some of us are lucky to have folks that are supportive of our identities and families that don't harm them. a lot of us don't have those experiences. so some hopeful words are that, *if you don't have it in your adolescence, soon you will have more control over your life.* it's hard, but i think there's so much potential for when that day comes. until then, surround yourself with as many people that will be supportive of who you are, outside of whatever household is there, whether that's friends or supportive other adults. finding the right people is the most important thing." - teresa

"i remember a bunch of cultural homophobia. i knew i was queer since i can remember and it was just really brutal. anytime i would like to think about it or have feelings about somebody that wasn't a male, i would just like become so overwhelmed and just shove it down.

we were mini golfing one time when i was 12, and ahead of me and my family was this gay couple being super cute and loving and just like playing mini golf. i probably was just staring at them, like a little fascinated kid would. and i remember, we got in the car and we watched them go into their car. my mom just looked at me and was like, 'that's disgusting.' all these moments like this just kind of pushed who i was, so deep, deep, deep buried. i had a lot of really hard things in the developmental years of my life, and i feel that being who i was, thinking that i was disgusting—and still, i can feel it in my body now when i'm talking about it—it's something that i probably, for the rest of my life, will be trying to undo.

i think a milestone was leaving that place. i fell in love with someone when i was a junior or senior that was also queer. and it was this huge secret and so intense and couldn't really be because of where we were living. i think leaving was the biggest moment where i was like, okay, maybe i can be myself now or at least explore what that might look like." - lex



"let yourself change. we decide what is going on with us. choose your friendships and family, the people who will also let you change. sometimes your friends and your family are the ones who don't want you to change, but the people who really love you will want you to do that." - kass

"my mother was 89 years old, my father had passed away. but i went over to england, and sat with her. and the next year, she flew over from england, she flew from heathrow to boston, boston to baltimore, and went to the courthouse with me to change my name. she walked in and said 'i made a mistake 54 years ago, and i'm here to fix it.' i just couldn't believe that she was that supportive. because of her, everyone in my family just fell into line because my mother supported it. as many people as you can get in on the journey with you, the easier it becomes." - susan



"dear future junos and zions, i hope the world that you live in has figured out how to be more accepting of each other and care for the earth around us. my wish is that you have always felt loved and supported by your family. i hope you become more yourself every day; whatever that is, we are here to celebrate your successes and wrap you in a big hug when things don't work out the way you wanted. i hope we have instilled a compassion for your fellow humans that you will always feel pulled to be kind and understanding to the people around you.
love, mama and baba" (kerri & kai)

"i'm in this place right now of feeling so grateful for all this healing work that i've done throughout my adulthood. and really, really particularly grateful for the healing work that i've been able to do in this relationship specifically." - sam

"it's funny, because we started dating in the pandemic. we've been dating for almost two years now, and we've never gone to a movie together, we've never gone to a restaurant together; there's all these things that we've never done. so honestly, i'm looking forward to the mundane little things, traditionally, couples do together that we haven't had a chance to do." - jess



sam & jess, pictured at irondale beach, where they had their first date



“part of our relationship is really based on growth and commitment to working on ourselves. we’re both really committed to the process of becoming better people through our relationships. she broke my heart open basically. - lindsey

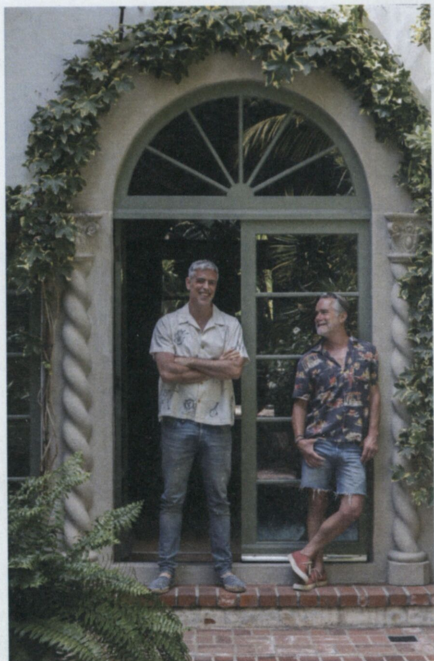
“find someone who values who you truly are at the end of the day. when all is said and done, do they value that quietest part of you?” - lex



"half of my queerness got sorted out pretty fast after i met my first girlfriend the summer before senior year. it was one of those moments when you realize the answer has been right in front of you the whole damn time; i realized i hadn't felt what a crush felt like all my teenage years, and at 17, i was a 7-year-old all over again—with all the butterflies, blushing and cliché newness. i didn't know what i disliked, i just knew what i liked; and that was girls. they made me happy, and they inspired me; they were funny and witty, sometimes mean and definitely imperfect, but in a way that made them whole instead of something i no longer wanted to deal with". - ave



"i think that i fall in love with people, and the gender is the second question a lot of the time." - julia



anthony & peter, together for 26 years and counting

"for me, it's a lot about communication. it's a lot about being willing to listen, being willing to show up, being willing to take risks and be honest with each other. try to be understanding and loving and be able to navigate the hurdles." - peter



a painting by anthony



"it wasn't until recently that i looked around and found the community i have is a queer community: the community i formed before the search for validation, the community i didn't realize i was part of because i didn't have to ask for their permission.

it wasn't until recently that i decided to go on a walk with my best friend—the one who knowingly laughed when i told them about my first kiss with a boy, who placed the rainbow sticker on my shirt outside our first concert, and that day smudged their white eyeliner pencil in the inner corners of my eyes cause i liked it and we wanted to get ready till the end of the song. that day, i looked up to find an old friend i first got to know at the ticket tearing booth, asking me to be a part of their project on the queer community in port townsend. i went home that night and spoke more openly about my sexuality to some people in my life, and so came the uncertain nod and follow-up questions, but the fact remained.

the community i have found over the past few years is greater than i knew. it is a steady space without the need for conditions, a space that exists in the hands which adorn you with stickers and paint, the sincere smile within an old friend's camera, and the white-liner smudged eyes in the mirror." - skylar

"the world wants to crush us down all the time, so it's power in numbers, but, also, camaraderie when you're with people who have lived aspects of your psyche. even if your stories are really different, there's a common denominator aspect.

it's a nuanced language element that can also bridge gaps for people that who come from really different places and have different stories.

you have this thing that is shared: how you love. it's like what people build so much of their lives out of, and our culture is very strongly driven towards getting married, having babies. it's the signposts in every movie and show. it's more inclusive now, but that's the vast majority. so it's not a subtle thing to have this commonality; you notice it all the time." - anthony



"i feel like my queerness was not something that i was able to step into, or unravel or address really, until i found a home here in tacoma and found community, among a bunch of queerdoes who just showed me that it really is okay to explore your identity in different ways and be more open about who you are. in the past, there was little representation when i was young and where i grew up. i can't remember very many at all, less than a handful probably of queer folks that i could look to as guides or as mentors, or just even to know that those lifestyles and that sort of unabashed celebration of who you are could exist.

suddenly i had queer elders, people i could bounce ideas off of, and i had queer friends and i was able to connect with bipoc [black, indigenous, people of color] authors at the bookstore, who have these manuscripts that weren't being published yet. i could really see that there was this beautiful, blossoming landscape of queer and bipoc authors and i felt like, when i was here in tacoma, i really got a chance to explore my own identities on a deeper level that i hadn't had the courage to or didn't see a pathway to do that before." - christina

Christina Vega*

“my friends that i grew up with also later came out as transgender or non binary too. it was kind of like we connected in that way before we even had a word for it. we already were very similar in that way, but we didn't know it yet.

there wasn't really a place that youth could go in person and find and talk to other queer youth in the community, and that's really vital and important to growing up. i thought, if we had a place where people could meet and get support and do fun things, that could really benefit the mental health of the lgbtq youth.

i collaborated with [olympic pride] to do some of their events, trying to work together with them to see what we can do: not just in our school, but in the whole community of jefferson county.

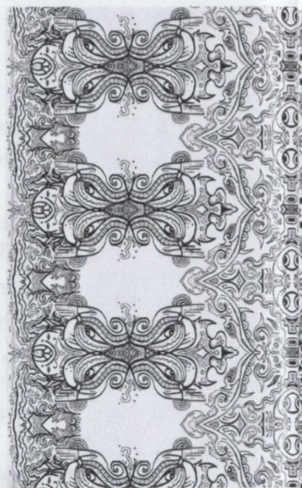


i definitely want to have [spectrum alliance] continue.

i know that it's been here before and then it kind of just disappears after the person leading leaves. so i want to make sure i have strong leadership when i leave, and that it will continue for years and years and never go away. i don't want any lgbtq freshmen who are coming here feeling intimidated. i want them to be accepted, to feel welcomed and included in this school and not like they're afraid to be who they are." - moe

“teaching in texas, we always made a point to say “i’ll see you at home” to be that representation of successful relationships to students, for another generation of kids from fragile, broken backgrounds.”
- thea & tenna





"there's a lot of work to do untangling the knots of our misconceptions about indigeneity in this community. it's our responsibility to confront this legacy. that

confrontation will look different for each person given their positionality and access to privilege, of course. for me, that looks like embracing the multiple truths about my identity. it can mean challenging heteronormativity, which is deeply connected to the ways in which colonialism as a strategy to erase native people from the landscape was weaponized by white settlers back in the day but also how it's currently upheld as a super structure, informing all relationships and institutions today.

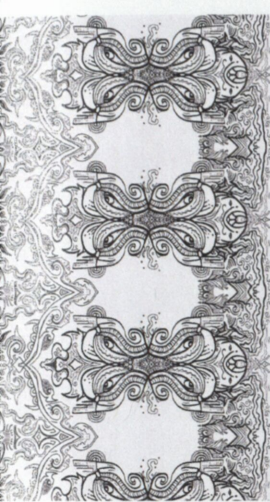
our brains are hardwired to seek answers and to categorize as a means of survival, but in the context of gender and the settler colonial project of america, it has led to intense policing of each other and of ourselves. if people, for whatever reason, aren't adding up to some standards or aren't fitting into the binaries, we have an inclination to judge and punish.



ruby mae stacey

our generations need to grapple with and untangle that insidious inclination and look for that pattern elsewhere too. ocean vuong, a queer vietnamese american artist, talks about masculinity as barbed cage that inhibits self expression and growth. i've been sitting with that and wondering about the freedoms we give up when we create cages for each other. who and what does that serve?

on the flip side and equally if not more important is just being and making space for queer indigenous joy everyday. some might even say it's revolutionary. whatever it is, it gives me life. i look forward to port townsend stepping up to the plate and stepping into responsibility too; this requires reflection and accountability but we can get there. we must get there." - ruby



maize's art

"there's always something beautiful, even in the middle of this storm of craziness, to look out for and to fight for. and that's worth it: to put yourself out there, to protect your friends and stand up for people who need help or support or even growing food for people is a radical act, especially when it comes to land access. it's a varied subject of heaviness and joyfulness at the same time. it's been 15 years of doing stuff. the fire never goes out. it's just a matter of redirecting it, because it's a marathon." - maize



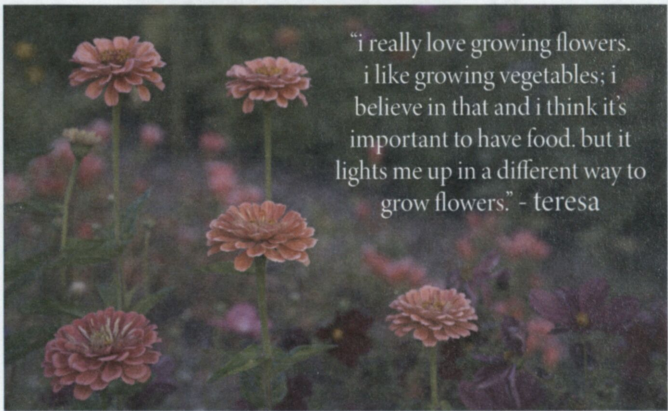
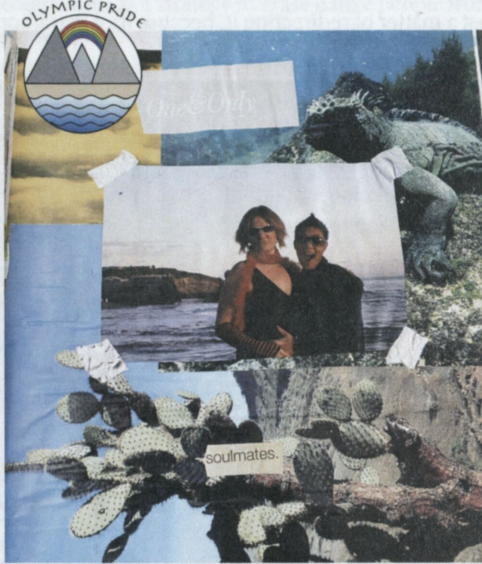
the production of a publication for christina's blue cactus press

"it's really important to me that the folks that i am in community with and the folks that i see around me, that our books in our catalogs and our workshop leaders and our stories reflect our walks of life and who we see. i want to tip the scales towards having a more representative publishing landscape.

there's an incredible quote by alok veid-menon, who wrote *beyond the gender binary*. they said something like, 'you can't fight for me,' speaking in respect to their gender being their own journey, 'i don't expect you to fight for me, you can't stand up for me, because you're not done fighting for yourself. and i very much feel that. i'm still fighting internally. i don't know if fighting is the word but i'm still finding my voice, my own identity. so i want to be an activist, but i have so much work to do.' - christina

“queer identity, and the whole rainbow, is just so cool. you won the lottery, and that’s so special and exciting. i know that it doesn’t always feel that way, and the world doesn’t always treat it that way. but that’s what i know to be true. as people come into their queer identity and become more comfortable in their skin, life does become very special when you get to express your authentic self. just love yourself. because you’re worth it.” - jess

KERRI AND KAI KITAJI



“i really love growing flowers.
i like growing vegetables; i believe in that and i think it’s important to have food. but it lights me up in a different way to grow flowers.” - teresa

“i want to embrace queer ways of loving and relating to myself, to others, to people and place as a practice. for me this is about rejecting the idea of scarcity in love. rejecting insecurity and shame too. and asking: *how can we have more room for sovereignty of self? where can we create more space for transformation and joy?*” - ruby



dee & cheryl taking their dog ethyl for a beach walk

"i think the work that dove house does is really relevant and important. it has touched me personally in my life and my family's life, and so being able to be a part of somebody's journey to healing is powerful. we are a bridge between the trauma and the healing, playing that role and lifting people up and supporting them and empowering folks to have a better life for themselves." - cheryl

*dove house advocacy services: dovehousejc.org
for their 24-hr crisis line, call 360 385 5291*

"i met beau when i was in seventh grade; he was the first transgender person i'd met. he's been a really big influence on me since then, because i was really lost and like, *i need to talk to someone about this. i don't know who to go to.* so i emailed the jefferson county transgender support group and then we met up for coffee. he let me ask him all these questions. it was really good to know that there was someone older who's gone through all these things that i could talk to. so he's been with me all along." - moe

*transjeffco.weebly.com
email transjeffco@gmail.com for support*

the trevor project: thetrevorproject.org/get-help/

thank you to everyone who's been involved in this project. i've been so lucky to have felt nothing but support from the incredible interviewees, my mentor conner bouchard-roberts, candace mangold at corvus crafts, and olympic pride (shout-out to kerri for all of the instagram dms to check in on me). a special thanks to mama and the two hopes, noni and hopee, that stayed up to odd hours of the night, helping me organize quotes on the kitchen counter and supplying ice cream when needed.

as i began this project in september, i had no idea what to expect. after 18 years of living in port townsend, i had come across small pockets of queerness amongst classmates and a few community members, but longed for more connection. over these past months, i've been amazed by the individuals i got the chance to speak with. i've learned how diverse life as a queer person can be, and truly believe in hopeful futures for myself and my generation.

i hope that this project is just the beginning. the outpouring of excitement that i received is evidence enough that featuring queer voices in media is as crucial as ever, and there will always be more work to do. if you're interested in becoming involved or would like to connect with me, feel free to reach out to 3wentzel@gmail.com.

love, elio



a snapshot in time: interviews conducted
oct 2021 - mar 2022 in the pacific northwest.
for anyone figuring out who they are
or simply sharing in the joy
of queer love & life.