

## October 5, 1999—on turning 56

*Actual remarks made during my birthday celebration week:*

By Lani Ka'ahumanu

*"Oh, but you don't look 56! I would have never guessed. Lucky you."*

As if looking 56 [whatever that means] is a negative.

*"You're so young, no one would ever have to know."*

As if people knowing I am 56 is not a positive.

*"Don't worry about it, I thought you were 40!"*

As if I should be worried!

*"Oh god, you can't be 56, how depressing. Don't you feel old? What are you going to do?"*

As if there is something to do!

*"Why do you tell people how old you are? Just stretch the truth a little, no one will know."*

As if lying is appropriate! As if people knowing is bad!

*"Why are you so proud of being 56?"*

As if I should be ashamed!

When people say, "OMG, you're as old as my mom!"

Responding "Perfect—is she single?" brings a loud shriek and laughter—fun.



*Lani Ka'ahumanu's business card lists - poet, author, educator, artist, bisexual historian, agitator - not much has changed in 40 years. Watch for her Bi+OLD Blog on [www.lanikaahumanu.org](http://www.lanikaahumanu.org), relaunching December, 2019.*

---

## Climbing (Sort of) into the 21st Century

By Jane Barnes

I got my first cellphone around the turn of the century: a silver shell phone, which I snapped shut with a flourish on the 14<sup>th</sup>-street bus. At first, I hung it from a homemade lanyard (a red satin ribbon, half-inch), but when I got used to it, I just carried it in my pocket like everyone else. I still kept my landline and my business number. My old letterhead shows me as residing in a commercial mailbox on Sixth Avenue, where I got my mail and packages.

I moved apartments about every nine months, so it made sense to have a *locus operandi*—if that's even a thing. Deserting the shell phone, I went cell-less (and internet-less) for some time in the early oughts, though I used the shell to tell my Newark employers that I had escaped 9/11 (I was nearby in the No. 6 train), and to tell program friends of icky "actions" I was about to take: like getting my bank balance, or telling my landlady I'd be a few days late. First, I lived in Spanish Harlem in an actual office, which had—for me—no internet or TV. I was big on the

radio and it wasn't until '04 that I got a TV—it came with my SRO [single-room occupancy]—and therefore never saw much video of the tragedy. Seeing it in living color was a horror. In this same SRO, I had the internet and emailed dozens and dozens of folks. And because I type 99 WPM I probably told them TMI every hour or so.

Housing Court didn't like my illegal sublet there and kicked me out. I gradually wound up on the street once my friends gave out. In the shelter we had 24/7 computers and the internet, so I wrote a hundred poems about being homeless and reconnected with my iPhone-waving pal, Gordon. After that I went to a woman's shelter in Noho—immaculate, welcoming, and fairly pleasant. Did I have a phone? I got my whole social security check and food stamps, and managed to save up for a MacBook Pro, which cost me \$1200. I got a case and was back in business. I got wifi at a chic little internet coffeehouse, tapped away like a

*Jane, continues on page 20*

**Editor**  
Robyn Ochs

**Assistant Editor**  
Katelynn Bishop

**Calendar Editor**  
Charlotte Alger

**Summer Intern**  
Em LaLiberte

**Proofreaders**  
Andrea Miotto  
Apphia Kumar  
Casey Lawrence  
Ellyn Ruthstrom  
Annora Borden

## Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

The theme of this issue is "Growing Older." Folks were asked: "What are the challenges/opportunities of being an older bi+ person? How has aging transformed you—in mind, body, spirit, or sexuality? How have you stayed the same? What have been the most significant moments or transitions in your life?"

We present to you the writing of women & non-binary folks from a wide range of experience.

In addition, I am delighted to feature the writings of three Jamaican women in our "Around the World" feature. And, of course, there's our calendar of events and our advice column.

I've been wanting for some time to shine some light on the behind-the-scenes volunteer energy that makes *BWQ* possible. Thanks to Gail Zacharias who has maintained our print mailing list for decades; to Alana Martin who puts significant effort into keeping our websites in good shape; and to Charlotte Alger who keeps our calendar and schedules our brunches. This is not a complete list—I'll thank others in future issues.

And finally, it has been a pleasure to finally have the capacity to hire—and pay—student interns. You can read about our two most recent interns on page 23. If you appreciate *BWQ*, please keep those donations coming. Your support makes a difference.

Always,

Robyn

## Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

### Winter 2020: "Women's Space"

At *BWQ* we are committed to creating radically inclusionary women's space. What does it mean for *BWQ* to be a "women's" publication in a non-binary world? What are your experiences with women's space? What is the importance of women's space to you? How can we all work together to create more inclusive, affirming, and welcoming spaces? Submissions are due by November 1.

### Spring 2020: Being an Activist

Do you consider yourself an LGBTQ+ activist? A bi+ activist? What does your activism mean to you? How does your LGBTQ+ activism intersect with other activist issues? Share your successes, frustrations, hopes, and what others can do to help support your activism. What books/films have inspired your own activism? Share personal essays, poetry, artwork, and photographs from your activist life. Submissions are due by February 1.

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

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

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

### HONOR ROLL

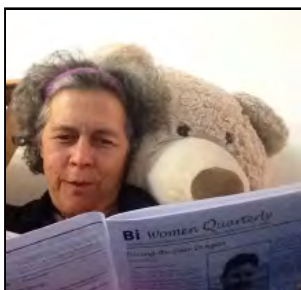
Thanks for  
volunteering:

Alana Martin  
Alexandra Sash  
Alicia Ortiz  
Charlotte Alger  
Elise Shulman-Reed  
Gail Zacharias  
Jade Dutcher  
Rachel Abbott

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

**Boston-area women:**  
Join our our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/bi-womenboston>

**Moria reads  
*BWQ*. Send a  
picture of your-  
self reading  
*BWQ* to [biwomeneditor@gmail.com](mailto:biwomeneditor@gmail.com).  
Be creative!**



BBWN is an all-volunteer organization. Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help out with our new Etsy store, or with our WordPress website? 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. We strive to create 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.

# AROUND THE WORLD: Voices from Jamaica

By Robyn Ochs

At the Creating Change Conference in January 2017, I had the pleasure of meeting Mark Clifford and Chris Leslie from PRIDE in Action, a Jamaican queer-focused non-governmental organization that serves students and other youth through SPECTRUM, the LGBTQIA+ resource center on the Mona campus of The University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. I expressed interest in featuring someone from Jamaica in a future issue of *BWQ*. Mark promised to recommend someone to me.

More than two years later, the following poems and essays appeared in *BWQ*'s inbox, along with a lovely message from Mark. He wrote: "We enjoy the publication when it comes out and we've printed and made the last couple years' editions available in our library. For the last edition, Chris and I (both cis gay men) selected our favorite entries and posted copies on the wall of the lounge room as our selected picks. We'll probably do the same again for the new issue, as it gets folks reading! Thanks again for sharing it with us!"

I am delighted to feature, as part of our Around the World series, writing from members of SPECTRUM. For safety issues, we are sharing photos from the Center rather than photos of the authors.

---

## Safety

By Miranda

I used to feel like I was cheating the LGBTQ+ community by being bisexual. You tend to hear a lot of, "It's just a phase," "You're just being greedy," "You're not really queer—you're just experimenting," etc. I felt like an outcast; I didn't even belong where I was supposed to be able to belong. It took a very good friend of mine to help me come to grips with the fact that being bisexual wasn't this horrible cheat that allowed me to live in both worlds without committing to either, but it was a part of who I am, and I should accept that. With her help, I was able to be more confident in myself and my sexuality. Music played a huge part in me not wanting to accept my bisexuality. There are a lot of verbal attacks aimed at homosexuals in Jamaican music and because of this, I tried to suppress the part of me that was attracted to the same sex. My thinking was that if I could be "straight," then why not just do that and ignore my homosexuality? Thus, that became my life. I was walking around trying my best not to look too hard at someone I found attractive just because they happened to have the same genitals as I do. This was very hard for me.

Growing up bisexual in Jamaica is a challenge. There are constant attacks on queers of all shapes and sizes. I never wanted to be a target of these attacks, so I tried my best to stick to dating the opposite sex. That was safest, and I do find both males and females attractive, so no one was getting hurt, right? That's what I thought, but I was hurting myself. I was denying an entire part of my being. It was crushing my soul and I didn't even realize it. A friend of mine had to sit me down and force me to face it. That was, up until that point, the hardest conversation I had ever been a part of. She made me realize that denying an entire half of our species even though I was

obviously drawn to them was not only stupid, but dishonest and ultimately driven by fear. I may not have wanted to hear that, but I certainly needed to. She ultimately helped me to come out to my best friend, who surprisingly took it a lot better than I expected. I then became more comfortable in my skin and stopped hiding my true self. It was this choice that led me to meet the person that would introduce me to SPECTRUM, a resource center for queer people like me.

SPECTRUM is the first safe space I've ever been in.

Except for roughly five of my friends, no one knows I'm bisexual, so it is hard for me to be around a large group of my friends because I can never really be myself with them. All that discomfort fades away the moment I step through SPECTRUM's doors. The people there are so amazingly queer, I feel like I am enveloped in safety as soon as I arrive, and I can finally be the me that I truly am, safe from judgment and prejudice. I am very grateful for that space to just be me. I long for a day where I can tell all my friends and family without fear, but until then, the family I have gained at SPECTRUM keeps me going.



*Jamaica, continued on next page*



## To be SEEN

*By Vicky*

It often feels as though I carry the weight of stares around my neck. I feel propped up, pampered, and posed to be craved and gawked at for being so fabulously “other.” I am light-skinned, bald, and pretentiously artistic. Oh, and I am bisexual, the perfect mix of lesbian erotica and hetero-normative comfort to send men cuckoo for cocoa puffs. While I was very grateful for the (mostly) well-intentioned acclamation, over time it has proven bittersweet.

The journey to accepting my bisexuality has been turbulent, to say the least. At first, being seen as “exotic” was intoxicating. I nonchalantly brought up my sexuality often as I had quite the liberal social group. As my sexual life became more “enriched,” I attracted many spectators. I enjoyed being seen. I enjoyed being accepted. It all felt so very good. Even those opposed to homosexuality found me intriguing. Because I had not “completely crossed over,” my opinions and expressions were somehow more agreeable than those of my lesbian and gay peers. Earlier on in my journey, I had presumed that I was welcomed because of growing liberalism in our previously ultra-conservative Jamaican society—which wasn’t entirely wrong. Admittedly, Jamaican society has evolved greatly since Buju Banton released his infamously homophobic song “Boom Bye Bye” in 1993. But experience and careful observation proved that my bisexuality was nothing more than a fetish for the hetero-male seeking to feed his inner freak. I had become a showpiece for “queerdom,” palatable enough for straight folk.

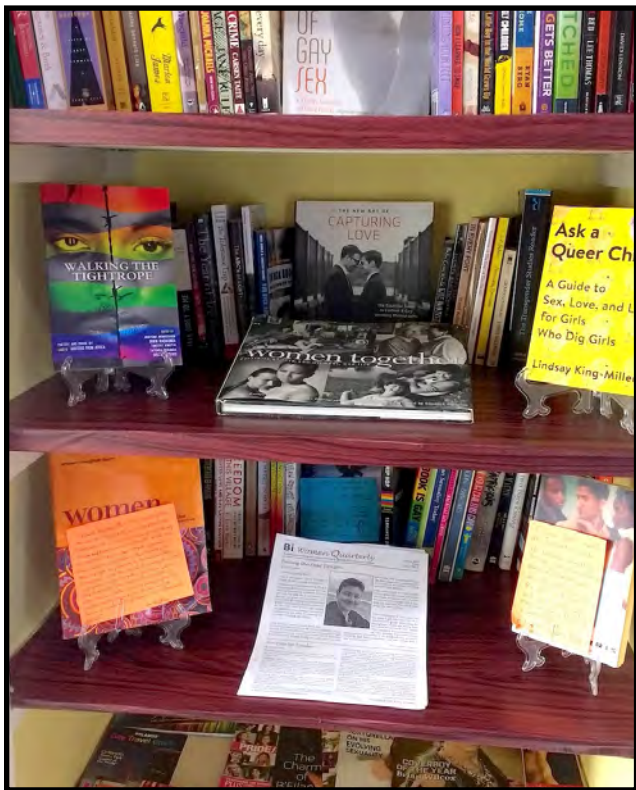
The more my indigence of genuine love showed, the more my “rainbow coat” began to itch.

As my one-dimensional outlook took on flesh and bones, I shed pompous appearances, humbled my tongue, and stayed close to the ground. I took to the internet and searched desperately for others who, like me, wanted love but actually found it. My spiritual life began to flourish, and my identity expanded beyond my gender, sex, and sexual expression. I stumbled into SPECTRUM at the University of the West Indies, an LGBTQIA+ resource center organized by PRIDE in Action—which was honestly God-sent. Being around LGBTQIA+ peers helped me realize that our differences in expressions of gender, sex, and sexuality were not our only noteworthy features. In fact, it was those who used their sexuality as agents of love that received my attention, admiration, and trust.

Then it hit me: society had put so much weight on the fact that I am not hetero-normative that my fight to be accepted often became a fight for my sexuality to be accepted. While helping others to understand and respect sexual expressions different from their own is indeed important, the bigger picture is for me to help my community respect and love people like me for who we are as whole, multidimensional human beings. Furthermore, my pride is no longer grounded in my ‘exoticism’ but in my ability to LOVE, without remorse, men and women. I do want to be seen. I do want to be accepted, not only for my sexuality but for the entirety of who I am.



*Jamaica, continued on next page*



## Untitled

By Vicky

The want to be understood  
 like paint dried on canvas  
 Asphyxiated like  
 Incongruent to frame  
 Simple  
 Strange  
 on 10-foot wall in a gallery,  
 question sign in mind,  
 wanderers wonder why? What? Art?

I am a painter  
 vomiting my emotions 2 years prior on canvas,  
 with soul, with all,  
 asphyxiated like,  
 with message in eyes  
 with eyes on canvas  
 dreaming to be seen  
 And to be understood

But wanderers pass by at the discomfort of confusion,  
 draw righteousness over eyes,  
 plug ignorance into ears and walk right by.

That is true pain.  
 To want and not be given  
 That is true pain.  
 To be under spotlight before an audience wearing shades  
 ready to immortalize me for what I am not.

## Religion & People

By Deborah Palmer

Sometimes I feel lost in the world;  
 like I don't belong;  
 like if I tell them who I really am,  
 show them who I really am,  
 they'll reject me and I'll become the black sheep of the world.

They don't understand that not everyone is going to agree with their ways,  
 agree with their teachings.  
 They continue to force their thoughts and beliefs down my throat,  
 hoping I'll just take it and run;  
 hoping I'll believe and be devoted as they are.  
 they don't know we have a mind of our own,  
 I have a mind of my own.

Then there's the matter of people  
 They say they are with you,  
 they say they'll never leave you;  
 but the truth is the moment you show them who you are,  
 they take advantage of you,  
 they leave because they claim you're tainted.

They don't realize that you're still the same person you were months ago.  
 They don't know that I'm still the same person even though they know my secret.





# Letters to Myself

By Joy Muhammad

## **Letter from 15-year-old me to seven-year-old me:**

Dear Me,

I know you feel a bit rubbish. A bit awkward in corduroy trousers and consequently having to pretend to be a little dad in that awful playground game “Mummies and Daddies.” You would rather play She Ra, like on the telly, than the other alternative, which is football, because the boys would think you fancy them if you went near them. Yuck.

Mum and Dad say you’re ready to fast for Ramadan. You think it’s exciting because it means you’re growing up. I will tell you now, despite being really skinny you will not like fasting and will struggle with praying five times a day because you’re either reading, skipping, sleeping, or daydreaming. You will wonder why it takes so much work to follow a religion, Mum and Dad will try to make you understand. You’ll ask your gran, years later, in the middle of her teaching you the Qur’an, what a hernia is. She’ll tell you straightaway and will continue teaching. Gran’s kickass like that.

It’s not your fault. You read too much Garfield the Cat. He was complaining about hernias.

## **Letter from 18-year-old me to 16-year-old me:**

Dear Me,

It’s only been two years that I’m writing to you but quite a bit has changed. You’ve got some weird attitude to sexuality right now. You started off by thinking “I’m not gay, I’m just a supporter” like some pink scarf-wielding football fan. Then you think, “I’m not gay, I’m bisexual,” but there’s nothing about bisexuality for you

to turn to. So then you say, “I’m not bisexual, I’m a lesbian.” You’re poring over every lesbian-related article and book you can find in the library and reaching for help from different counselors and pen pals. The lesbian counselor finds your teenage angst boring. Your Muslim counselors are a mixed bunch; the older ones expressing concern that



you’re going through a tough time, and the younger ones going through a flap about your “homosexual tendencies.” Your pen pal shares the most embarrassing teen crushes with you and you do the same, sharing agony aunt columns with advice about growing pains. She cuts you off suddenly, signing off in her last letter that she is now dreaming of being married to a boyband member. You have a feeling her mum has read your letters.

Right now you’re lusting over the neighborhood androgynous tomboy and wishing she could whisk you away in her four-wheel-drive jeep. You’re drooling over queer lesbian celebs except for k.d. lang who just doesn’t rock your world. You bat away any feelings you have for guys because you consider yourself to be a lesbian.

You attend your first Pride march and your parents scream that you are going straight to hell when they see you on TV. Being gay is not accepted in Islam. Still, you look far and wide for support. There are Christian gay groups but there are none for Muslims. Your best friend’s family find out that you’re attracted to women and ban her from seeing you. You tune into a post-midnight gay radio show to give you some hope, as the DJ himself is Jewish.

Although you feel numb you can never get used to the pain of being alone.

## **Letter from 21-year-old me to 18-year-old me:**

Dear Me,

You now have your first girlfriend. I am telling you now: hold her dear all you want, but she is so much better left in the past as well as the next one. And the next. And yeah, maybe the following one too. You’re still keeping your feelings for men at bay.

You have moved to a Muslim country of late, and you have managed to reconcile both your faith and sexuality, which you still keep under wraps. Perhaps it’s the strong queer network you have now become a part of, which is prevalent in Muslim countries. Strangely, no one screams “lezzie” or “faggot” at or harasses the camp gay man or butch tomboy, not even in the rural villages. Sometimes, there’s the odd account of trying to ‘cure’ homosexuals, but overall you and your friends, including your girlfriend, don’t seem worried. Even the teenage girls in sixth form at the local secondary schools have girlfriends.

But love isn’t all it’s mapped out to be. Your first girlfriend, who isn’t Muslim, is Islamophobic, always encouraging you to drink alcohol at social events, as you’re a sinner for being a lesbian anyway. She makes snide comments about the Azaan and other Muslims, and as she’s your first girlfriend you don’t dare say anything back even though you refuse the alcohol. She and the rest of your mutual friends are not too fond of bisexuals. You attend a short college course in an Islamic university that your dearest parents have fought tooth and nail to secure for you. In the opening ceremony, you’re looking forward to regaining some

*Joy, continued on next page*

spirituality until the sermon covers—for no apparent reason—the sins of homosexuality in the West.

***Letter from 35-year-old me to 21-year-old me:***

Dear Me,

You're in a very dark place after managing to split up with your current girlfriend, who practically handed you the keys to her flat on the second date. Well, some things need to be kept traditional, don't they? The relationship is a turbulent one, bringing out the worst in the both of you. I can tell you now, your taste in women doesn't change for a very long time, and you will always be waiting for some butch to sweep you off your feet. To get over it, you don some ultrafeminine clothes and makeup and decide to give men a whirl. Turns out you actually like being with them, too.

Your family are happy that you've changed your image to a more conventionally feminine one. They bypass the attraction you are gaining from men, relieved that you have seemingly gotten over your tomboy phase.

You tell your lesbian friends to shove it when they start going on their biphobic spiel again. You attend your first Pride in the country, which is a concert on the top of a high-class shopping mall. You bump into your ex-girlfriend. Not good.

Your best friend is a trans woman who went to the same Islamic college you did and has done exceptionally well for herself as a corporate executive. You pray together in the Muslim women's prayer rooms and no one has any issue. You begin to read the Qur'an, appreciate what certain passages mean and become prouder of your religion. Other Muslims either tease or look at you in curiosity—you don't wear the headscarf or "look" Muslim. This makes you even more determined to study the Good Book and you finish both the translation and Arabic script, though of course no one believes that you did.

***From 40-year-old me to 35-year-old me:***

Dear Me,

Back home in England again!

Sorry, it's been a while but what can I say? We've been really busy, haven't we?

You went through a straight-ish sort of phase, despite acknowledging you were bisexual. It worked for a while, even when you moved countries, because the lads back in the West like a bit of exotic Asian flesh. Additionally, if they were Muslim they thought you'd make an interesting wife before the first date. Some relationships worked out, most didn't, but that was fine because you were in no rush. Sadly, there wasn't much success elsewhere, but you did manage to get yourself a nice sugar mummy plus a

high-flying professional enby [non-binary] partner for a while.

The suburbs suck, don't they? You fall in love with some of your boyfriends, ready to hit the life of living in semi-detached houses with plain manicured lawns, pebble-dashed drives and furnished with cheap plastic chairs and tables. There's only one little gay pub down the road from where you live, and most lesbians ignore you for being too straight looking in your heels and long hair. You try and fit in with the straight crowd. But they can tell you're putting on a mask, and you still feel that you don't fit anywhere. You stumble across a few bisexual socials and, finally, a Gay Muslim group during Pride. You attend their meetings. It's like coming home and learning about some wonderful long-lost relatives over a cup of chai and vegan cookies. The environment in both groups is very diverse.

And that's where you have been for the past few years. It hasn't been easy going on a journey to accept yourself. There are still things you could do better. Your faith is still unshakeable as you pore over scriptures and Islamic history from time to time, enthralled at how lots of details of your religion apply to a progressive society, including kick-ass female role models and looking after marginalized folk. You're still not the best at prayers. You still get hangry during Ramadan. Sometimes you even speak out of turn, throwing your toys out of the pram when God doesn't let you get your own way, after being ever so close to you after all these years. You hear reports of rising homophobic hate crimes in Muslim countries with members of their public saying that LGBTQI communities never existed in a Muslim society. They don't represent you. Online you're shown pictures of fifteen-year-olds being thrown off a roof by Daesh. The poor young victims have not one name to be remembered by. The people posting such pictures are usually queer and constantly label your faith as dangerous to women and queers. Again, they don't represent you.

People assume that you're trapped in the faith of your parents and that you are too scared to change your religion. You are told you can choose only one—either a queer life or a Muslim one. How strange is it that some can possess such a two-dimensional attitude. You also find out that biphobia exists in the form of people telling you that you don't exist and that it's impossible for you to remain monogamous. Funny that, you're not keen on sharing or threesomes. Did you miss the memo somewhere? A large portion of your straight friends don't attend your birthday parties or events, as they think you're going to trap them into a masked orgy with flying dildos and line-dancing gimps. And yes, even in the West, lesbians don't like bisexuals. Not to worry, though, because you found your way and gender was never relevant. Eventually you give up caring and kick back. Too Asian, too Muslim, too Western, too gay, too straight, too feminine, too masculine, whatever. Tooodle pip, I couldn't give a shit.

*Joy Muhammad is a queer mixed Asian feminist of faith based in UK.*

# I'll Take A Side of Dementia With That

By Loraine Hutchins

*Editor's Note: Last year, Loraine Hutchins turned 70. Her health is declining. She is having a hard time walking without her walker or cane, and she doesn't want to be alone. She has no kids or partner, so she opted to move to Friends House, a CCRC (continuing care retirement community, which includes independent living residences, assisted living, and a nursing home) on the edge of Washington, DC in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Friends House was founded by progressive Quakers fifty years ago as a low-income housing alternative. There are also market-rate cottages and lodges and the administration has engaged in a training project with SAGE (Seniors Advocating for a Gay Environment) to make Friends House an LGBTQ-inclusive facility. Sandy Spring has long been a Quaker enclave. It was one of Harriet Tubman's underground railroad stops and there is a local black community there with descendants from some of the first freed black people before/after the civil war. This essay is Loraine's reflection on her experience living there.*

How do we hold council on a foundation of mutual respect?

Last weekend, one of my neighbors voiced worry about whether someone on the hall can cope with her current medical emergency. The staff person who would try to handle that situation left her job, and we don't yet have a full-time replacement. Aware of lack of staff, residents often keep their mouths shut and don't ask for help or voice their needs. A helpless/hopeless attitude contributes to isolation, depression, physical/mental decline, something this community and [Aging Well With Friends](#)<sup>1</sup> was intentionally designed not to do.

I've asked elders to explain the values that are important here, the history. I've also asked, "What are the models for conflict resolution?" and "How do we get our needs met for more community change when we don't see an available vehicle?" Most people tell me to find others and to form a committee to work on a project or make change.

Others respond in bafflement or silence with at least a side order of dementia.

The silence, and the side order, speak loudly about how we, this community, deal with conflict. Conflict is not easily addressed; is often suppressed, managed, manipulated. Residents are humored, reassured that "things will get better soon, after construction," and asked to volunteer more<sup>2</sup> to help activities go on during all the transition and chaos. I am grateful that people respond and connect.

What I most want to talk about is what interferes with deeper community building and ties between people, stretching toward that "foundation based on mutual respect." What gets in the way?

In interactions I notice my mind constantly assessing *which* people are totally *here*, which ones are on cruise-control, with their own personalized touch of dementia, dizzy spells, memory lapses, not-finding-the-words that come and go. Some people I

thought were fully here, aren't anymore. Some I thought were really disoriented share moments of lucidity and insight that I didn't expect.

What does all this mean to an intentional community designed to do decision-making and community-maintenance together, when one is never quite sure whom one can count on or how much of oneself is remembered or known?

The deep silence I hear, living-close-together is something very private and almost shameful, we refrain from talking about: personal decision-making around our health, finances, and end-of-life planning (or lack thereof)—all that stress. Even when we share bits and pieces, we keep the scary parts to ourselves.

Someone is afraid people will realize she needs more assistance, will kidnap her and tell her what to do.

Someone books a trip to France to study ancient cave art; another registers for a summer writing retreat in the mountains.

Someone is afraid of retiring and facing her chronic health challenges.

Someone can only afford to eat one meal a day, and worries about paying for his funeral; another doles out their insulin so they can pay bills for the month.

Someone wants to die, can't ask for help, drinks all day to dull the pain instead.

Someone lives in a creek-side cottage, delighting in gardening, human contact, artistic expression.

Someone is hearing too much of the construction noise. The dust surrounds them; they keep falling down in the mud.

Someone worries her mom in assisted living is neglected, doesn't know how to use the staff and resources to advocate for her mom.

Someone was just diagnosed with dementia and is scared to talk about it.

Someone just fell in the bathroom and can't get up.

Someone sits in the sun by the pond writing a poem for their own funeral.

*Loraine, continues on next page*

1 A grant program at Friends House, supported by Friends Services on Aging.

2 Residents protested cessation of Free Food Program. Staff response: Let the residents run it themselves.



Lorraine, continued from previous page

Someone serves her dinner guest homemade pear chutney her deceased husband made back when he was alive, seven years ago; the piquant end of it trickles out of the jar, savored like a sacrament.

Some of the hidden underground springs are rising. Some of the ghosts haunting the hallway may be ancestors leaving cautionary messages.

Lorraine Hutchins co-edited *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*. She co-founded *BiNet USA*, served on its first board of directors and helped organize *AMBi*, the *Alliance of Multicultural Bisexuals*, in Washington, DC. Her graduate studies focused on queer feminist sacred sexualities. She serves as book review editor for the *Journal of Bisexuality* and taught interdisciplinary sexuality courses at her local community college for a dozen years.



Lorraine, right, with Robyn at Creating Change Conference 2018

## Life is What Happens

By Robyn Walters

Both the 'Bi' and the 'Plus' were late and totally unexpected. The Plus came first, with the advent of the internet and my youngest daughter heading off to college. An empty nest and, even with a demanding job, more free time.

Yahoo search engine. How neat. It seemed that the world was at my fingertips. So much to explore. C-R-O-S-S-D-R-E-S-S-E-R. A new world opened up to me, my marriage crumbled, and I began a long-delayed voyage of discovery. I knew that I didn't fit well in the world of men—not a macho bone in my body.

A year and some later, my wife of 24 years and I split, and I moved to the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. I found some sort of fashion sense at age 60 and even had my ears pierced. Heady times and an increased sense of freedom and of being right. Gender counseling began to unravel the mystery and drove my recognition back to age nine. Then came the bombshell: "Robyn, you're not a crossdresser; you're transsexual. What are you going to do about it?"

Gone was any hope of reconciliation or accommodation with my estranged wife. On came the beginnings of cross-gender hormone replacement therapy. With estrogen came the bi part. There was a sudden recognition one day, while driving to an electrolysis appointment, that the young fellow walking down the road with no shirt was attractive, exciting. I almost lost control of the car in disbelief. I was 61 years old and never gay. Women were still my main attraction. Surely, I would find a soulmate who could accept my gender transformation.

Not long after I scheduled my gender confirmation surgery, it happened, but not at all the way I expected. Of course not. Life is what happens while we're making other plans.

Emery and I had met in an online transgender group for older transgender people. We had a lot in common, it seemed. Similar interests, similar parents, a compatible world view, and I went to meet him. Ended up meeting his family. They seemed okay that their mother had this new transgender friend. Yes, their mother. Emery is a female-to-male transsexual. Sort of a bi relationship in the beginning, except for physical differences.

A year later, after an amicable divorce from my wife, Emery and I married: man and wife. Months later, I had my surgery: a lesbian marriage before it was legal. The state didn't care; the Feds didn't care.

After another year, Emery had his surgery: now wife and man. Changing all the paperwork was the hardest part.

We have been married for over nineteen years, a traditional marriage with no cheating, no extra partners. He has a thing for gay guys. I have a thing for both men and women. So we each have our fantasies, but, at 82 years old, I am satisfied with being a non-practicing member of the bi-plus community. There's always the next life.

*Robyn Walters was AMAB (assigned male at birth), but it never fit right. She tried, but, late in life, the woman won. She is glad to have these years with matching mind, body, and spirit.*



# Copper Bird's Bottle Chapel

By Kate Griffin

A tribute to [Virginia Wright-Frierson](#) and Minnie Evans (1892 -1987)

A versatile and prolific artist, Virginia Wright-Frierson was a painter, sculptor, muralist, illustrator, printmaker, and author. She designed and installed the gift of a mural on the atrium ceiling at Columbine High School, in the year following the shootings there in 1999.

In 2003, she won a competition to create a memorial in the once private Airlie Gardens in Wilmington, N.C., to honor the outsider artist Minnie Evans. She then selected and managed a team of seven artists each of whom created a sculpture. Wright-Frierson's creation was a stunning chapel made of various colored bottles, set in mortar over rebar and treated wood posts, to form a seven-sided chapel measuring 17 feet high and 17 feet across in all directions. The chapel is lit at night giving the effect of huge stained-glass windows. This work, outside in all kinds of weather, took one year.



Copper Bird's Bottle Chapel

When Airlie Gardens was purchased by W.A. Corbett in 1948, Minnie Evans—an African American woman—was hired as the gatekeeper. She sat in a small house at the gate until 1974 and sold admission tickets to the garden. She began to have visions, mostly religious, which became pieces of art which she hung on the front gate of the gardens and sold for 50 cents each. Then, in 1962, Nina Howell Starr became fascinated by her work and began acting as her agent. She publicized Minnie's work, and never took a commission, for the next 25 years. She arranged numerous exhibits including a major exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1975.

Now I tell you, that Ginny woman  
Done a marvelous job building me a temple  
She got my vibes, she loved colors  
Same as I did.  
But the bottles she used didn't have  
A thousand colors like my paints did.  
An ya know, she didn't put a roof  
On it! First look I thought  
That was bad wrong  
But now I like it.  
The sky's the limit!  
And that Artist Woman was not  
Your ordinary "Southern Lady"  
All caught up in makin' quilts  
And cooking dinners and so on...  
She had some kind of connection  
To—what? God maybe.  
You see, as she was finishin' up  
She built this little altar in it.  
And I made my spirit into  
A copper colored bird that  
Did'n belong in North Carolina.  
But my family was there!  
You see, a copper tree with copper birds  
Was sticking up out of the house!  
Sometimes I sat with my family there.  
An when the gardens slowly grew quiet  
I'd hop down on the altar and  
Just preach and praise the beauty!  
One day I was hanging out  
On the tree, and she herself  
Came up quietly and stopped

A few feet back from me!  
I just stayed still and quiet.  
No preachin'; no praisin'  
Another woman walked up  
And spoke to Miz Ginny.  
She told her that the Bottle Chapel  
Was the closest thing she'd seen  
To the beauty of Chartres Cathedral—  
Way over in that country France—  
With all them stained glass windows.  
Then she saw me an' said  
"What an unusual bird, but beautiful."  
An Ginny said "Yes, it does not belong  
In this region, and I think it's the  
Spirit of Minnie Evans!  
I find it sitting on the altar  
Many times when I come to work."  
And so she knew.  
Like I tole you, she had a  
Connection to something  
That give her more than her  
Joy and talent so often  
Making others amazed and joyful.



Minnie Evans' artwork



*Kate Griffin has had many different careers including diplomat in two African countries and Director of the Berlin School of Languages in Versailles, France. Returning to the states in 1989, she taught for several years at Tuskegee University and then entered the private sector.*



# A Complicated Relationship with Aging

By Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti

## What are the challenges of being an older bi+ person?

I hate to start on a negative note, but I would have to say that my biggest challenge is the resentment that I sometimes feel when I think of what I had to go through when I first came out. Let me explain.

I first came out as bisexual in the early 1980s after I left fundamentalist Christianity. I was living in Portland, Oregon, at the time, and you were either gay/lesbian or straight. Identifying as bisexual opened me up to all kinds of assumptions and derision from people in the gay/lesbian community, who would frequently say things like, “Oh, you’ll have to excuse Gloria. She can’t make up her mind.” Or they would tell me that I had an inability to choose. It wasn’t until the mid to late 1980s that bisexual groups started popping up in my area. Finally! I had found my people. I didn’t have to explain who I was. They “got” me.

I will also sometimes feel envy when I think of today’s young people who are coming out as bi+. They just seem to have it easier than I did “when I was their age.” (And I never thought I would ever say that!) They just seem more confident about their sexual orientation, much more than I was when I first came out. Now, I’m certainly not saying that their lives are a bed of roses. But society—actually, the world—seems to have become more aware. We’re seeing marriage equality in our lifetime. It’s becoming more and more common for people to list their pronouns in their email signature lines or social media profiles. And just a couple of years ago, I was on an LGBTQ panel as part of a “Freedom Day” at a local high school, where I got to talk to the students about bisexuality! I can’t imagine that ever happening at *my* high school, from which I graduated 45 years ago.

We’re definitely living in a different time, one where I cannot imagine anyone saying to a young Bi+ person, “Make up your mind! Pick a side!”

## How has aging transformed you—in mind, body, spirit, or sexuality?

Art modeling (which I’ve done since the mid-1980s) has really helped me to feel comfortable with my body. I’ve toyed with the idea of retiring from modeling, since posing isn’t as easy for me as it used to be due to pain from osteoarthritis in my knees and hips. But then again, I enjoy modeling too much to quit.

My body shape and abilities have definitely changed over the years. Actually, it’s been a combination of aging *and* having breast cancer that transformed my body. In 2009, I had weight loss surgery (the lap band). I lost a lot of weight, but that didn’t come without complications from the lap band. I had it removed in 2017 (the day after I presented at the BECAUSE conference in St. Paul, MN!), which caused me to regain most of the weight. It bothers me some, but at least I’m able to eat normally again.

I’m guessing this would’ve bothered me more if I were younger, and a little bit vainer. But now, I’m much more philosophical about my body. Besides, the artists for whom I model don’t seem to mind, and neither do my loves.

## What have been the most significant moments or transitions in your life?

In December 2013, I was diagnosed with Stage 0 (zero) breast cancer. Thankfully, they caught it early. But the diagnosis ended up being a blessing for me. It showed me just how short life is. And as a result, I stopped caring what others thought of me. This was the catalyst in my coming out as bisexual, polyamorous, and sex-positive. This also made it possible for me to begin, in 2017, presenting a class I developed, called “Transcending Shame.” I’ve presented it all over the U.S., as well as in Vancouver, British Columbia. This has been especially significant because I’ve been able to use a great deal of my life experiences as illustrative examples and cautionary tales. Most significant of all is the knowledge that people are receiving benefit from this class.

So sure, there are times I wish I were able to experience bisexuality as a young person. But when I think of the gifts I’ve received from my life experiences and the benefits that people are receiving as a result, I wouldn’t change a thing.

*Gloria Jackson-Nefertiti is a public speaker, workshop leader, panelist, and artist’s model. She lives in Seattle, Washington.*





# A Decade Goes Bi

By Mari Wrobi

I'm 22 years old and I've identified as bisexual since I was 12 years old—which means that I've been identifying as bisexual for a decade now. A *decade*. For someone who's identified as bisexual for so long, it might seem like I've always been sure of myself, but the truth is that I *haven't* always felt so sure. The first time that I claimed a bisexual identity, I did so because it was simply easier than explaining to people that, hey, I'm *pretty* sure, but not *completely* sure and sometimes I think I'm a lesbian and other times I feel attraction to men and I *definitely* feel queer but I don't know if it's queer *enough* and I'm so young so I don't think I should know everything but right now it's the only thing that makes sense and I just don't quite know—

Bisexual, to me, encompassed all of the simultaneous feelings of uncertainty yet certainty that *something* under the umbrella fit. And as I held onto the identity out of ease, I began to grow more and more comfortable with the label. "Bisexual" started to feel less like a mask put on for the sake of others and more like a sweater that you melt into and feel at home in. As I've gotten older, my relationship with my bisexuality has evolved from *I don't know* to *maybe* to *probably* and finally, now, to *definitely*.

The older I've gotten, too, the more my bisexuality reflects me internally rather than any single external factor. I used to think that my bisexuality was to be defined and determined by my dating history, or the gender of my partner(s), or the identity that my partner(s) wanted me to take on, or the pressures of society and of the LGBTQ+ community too. But now, being bisexual means so much more to me than that. It means that it's okay to be a little unsure. It means that my attraction to different genders can fluctuate and change over time (and that it probably will). It means that my relationship status and my partner's gender don't define my identity no matter what anyone else might think. It means that my bisexuality is, and always will be, mine.



It's only been a decade, though. I'm only 22 and I have a whole lifetime ahead of me. So, what does the future hold for a still quite young, but definitely sure, bisexual like me? I like to imagine that the future holds more growth, more comfort with my identity, more love for the people around me, more understanding that my bisexuality really is mine and mine alone. Sometimes the intensity of my attractions to different genders comes and goes, and I see the future holding these changes with the understanding that my bisexuality is still stable. I see the future holding my long-term commitment to my partner, and my partner's gender not validating or invalidating my identity for better or for worse. I see a label and a community that are okay with exploration and "figuring things out" and the understanding that if things change, *that's okay too*. I see pride. I see myself finally confronting my family's belief that my history with men means that I'm straight, or that my history with women means that I'm gay—that these two experiences of mine are a whole of me, not a part of me. I see myself continuing to advocate for our community, to challenge stereotypes, to accept those in our community who might "fit stereotypes" because that doesn't change the validity of anyone's identity. I see perseverance in the face of discrimination and prejudice, and celebration despite the bigotry. I see continuing to exist in the LGBTQ+ community and continuing to make it a better place for the future generations of bisexual people after me like those bisexual people before me have done the same.

But on the topic of not being quite so sure—I don't *know* exactly what the future holds. Regardless, I'm excited to see the next decade, and the decade after that, and the decade after that, go bi.

*Mari Wrobi is a queer, trans, and intersex advocate from Sacramento, California—constantly challenging binaries, boxes, and bigots.*

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

# The Perils of Aging

By A.M.

I realized the other day that I might be a good mentor to young people. Or at least have some good advice to give. It was a startling thought.

It came to me when I was busily procrastinating on writing this essay and several other risky tasks that held the danger of boosting my self-esteem and making me look good. I'm almost 50 and I'm in a business I can't seem to get out of, no matter how much counseling and how many 12-step groups I attend: the business of cutting myself down to size and keeping myself there. I work mostly with young people at the moment. I'm serving in a yearlong, full-time volunteer program that I chose at a moment of personal and professional transition. I did the same thing just after graduating college years ago and it seemed like a good thing to return to, after a year of health-related and other crises. My colleagues in this program are mostly recent graduates. I well remember that feeling of being at a loose end after graduation and seeing only murk ahead, and the feeling of wanting to give back after a relatively privileged education. My cohort of fellow volunteers comprises mostly people in their 20s, who are where I was all those years ago. I just happened to have come around to the same crossroads a second time.

When I came out as bi nearly 10 years ago, I didn't imagine I'd still be alone. It was a wonderful though scary time and I knew I'd soon find a relationship. Now that I knew my true nature, everything made sense and all parts of my life would come together, blossom, and harmonize. I also didn't imagine that the so-called LGBT community (more like LGT) in that small town would reject me because I wasn't lesbian enough. Or that by the time I moved to a more diverse urban area I'd reckon myself too depressed and too fat to date, figuring no one would really want this body or this mind.

That's where I am—where I thought I was—but recently I went to a conference introducing the new volunteers to the program. Because I've been through the whole onboarding process before, and because I've had to tap into the welfare system due to my health, I had a lot of suggestions to offer on how to make a service lifestyle work. I talked about what supports are available from our sponsoring organization, how to apply for benefits, how to make it on a small stipend, and how to juggle a second job to make rent. In fact, I seemed to know more than the people whose job was to present on these topics at the conference. I noticed that people were actually listening to me when I contributed and even thanked me. It was an unusual feeling to be seen as an "expert" on something.

Strangely, no matter how hard I work at it, procrastination never seems to get anything done. My goals remained unmet over the following week. But in the midst of my procrastination project, I had two trains of thought. One ran on the well-worn track of

anxiety, ugliness, and self-disgust (because I was procrastinating). The other train was sneaky at first but eventually I couldn't avoid it: young people, including my housemates, nieces and nephews, tutoring clients, even fellow patients in the hospital, seemed to enjoy hearing about my life experiences and to find something helpful in them. Sometimes they even sought me out to talk to me. That train brought a dawning truth I couldn't get away from: I have personal and professional skills that are needed, wanted, and valuable. I have accomplishments that others lack and—it seems—it's okay to acknowledge that. I make people laugh, I can laugh at myself, and when I talk, people sometimes want to listen. Even my struggles—in fact, even some of my poor decisions and fumbling failures—have the potential to save others trouble, or at least make a good story.

The next step in this unwanted train of thought became this: maybe, then, if I'm a useful and worthwhile aunt, roomie, and co-worker, maybe I'd be a pleasant and even loveable and loving life partner. Maybe my fat and my mental illness won't and don't permanently cancel me out of companionship and love forever. If I can see past these things, maybe there are others who can too.

Aging, in fact, and even health problems, seem to be bringing me closer to the precondition of confidence: facing the fact of my own value.

It's a terrifying thought. Because I'm comfortable where I am, down here in the dumps. I know this routine; I've got the business down pat. I know when to take inventory, who my suppliers are, how to make sure I've got a full complement of self-snark on hand.

I don't know if anyone reading this is a Narnia book freak like me. Yeah, the later ones have some racist elements, and there's a fair amount of sexism, but I can't throw out the whole series and what I learned from it. In *The Magician's Nephew* (in my opinion, the best of the bunch), the godlike Aslan says, "Oh Adam's sons, how cleverly you defend yourselves against all that might do you good!" He's talking about a character who simply *will not* hear the joy and new life available to him in a certain situation. He's too afraid that it's all a con and that his past bad deeds make him unacceptable among other creatures. This character armors himself against the potential benefits of his situation by telling himself it's all nonsense and willing himself to be afraid of Aslan, the bearer of the good news.

Well, I can surely relate. I've prided myself on my own cleverness and my ability to sniff out bullshit. I tell myself that I'm astute enough not to be deceived by most people. "A good judge of character," I call myself. But what if the one person I've allowed myself to be fooled by is...me? Maybe I've been duped by my own lines—every grifter has them. You know those lines. You've heard them. "You're worth nothing." "You're a failure." "Don't feel good about something you've done—that's snobbery, vanity,

A.M., continued on page 15

# THE SECRET, in eight parts (if possible, please read aloud)

By Jennifer Glenister

## Part 1 =====

I wish I'd known, but I didn't. I didn't have a clue. For years and years, decades really, there it was, right in front of me. All around me. Bright as day. But I didn't see it, didn't unwrap it, although every day I lived it. From some time around my tenth birthday, there it was, and for the next 70 years of my life. And here it is now, because not long ago the time came to call it by name. It's here. Now I know it. It's bright and triumphal and magical.

## Part 2 =====

One day, a year or two ago, I watched a video on Netflix called *Nanette*, an extraordinary one-woman show by Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby. She's responsible for me uncovering The Secret I had kept so well buried for most of my life. Hannah, it's your fault, and I will never be able to thank you enough.

How did this happen? Towards the end of *Nanette*, Hannah tells the truth of events in her life, where she had shared only the funny bits in the first part of the show. She now tells the parts where she was bashed and raped and vilified because she was gay. But it's clear that the bastards did not diminish her.

As I watched this part of her story, the audience in the Sydney Opera House was transfixed, absolutely silent, absorbed by this courageous woman sharing her deepest hurts, the truths of her life. At the end, the audience stood, roared and clapped and clapped as Hannah left the stage. And while watching her on my TV, I wept.

Her "this is my story" was a model for me to do the same. I thought it was a pretty interesting idea—to go back and see what there was to see. Hannah, you should have warned me—well, you did, really.

## Part 3 =====

As I wandered through my early life, I looked for patterns, repetition, and puzzles in the ins and outs of my days and years. Anything interesting?

Much of my early life is misty and grey. I remember when I was in grade one, at elementary school, the photographer came to take the class photograph. There we were, little girls in our blue-checked school uniforms, and navy sweaters. "Take your sweaters off for the photo," the teacher said. Everybody did, except me. "Come on, Jennifer, you too." I said, "No! My Mum said not to take my sweater off at school, so I won't." I remember the photo well—only one little girl had a sweater on.

Apart from that episode, that's it. Nothing much deep and meaningful comes to mind, only a kid with a mind of her own. Still got it!

Still searching. Odd flashes. Sneaking off with a rope to halter a milk-cart horse and ride it in the paddock. Nobody ever caught

me. Climbing the plum tree at my aunt's house, not being able to get down, and getting into real trouble for doing something so risky. Having a job on Saturdays, with the ponies at a nearby animal park. I always did like horses.

Kid stuff.

Pretty boring, all that, really. Nothing a diagnostician would say, "Aha!" over.

## Part 4 =====

Puberty. Horses and Janet. We rode together and afterwards played about in her mother's double bed snuggling, hugging and kissing. Lots of times. Silly teen stuff, we thought. Janet was more adept at the snuggle-play than I was, but that didn't seem to matter. Just play. ... Just play?

## Part 5 =====

It was a while before I fell in love, really fell in love. Mind and body consuming. It was my very anxious secret. She was an adult and I was a senior in high school. She probably never knew. I baby-sat her kids since she lived across the road in our middle-class Federation brick suburb. She belonged to a neighborhood repertory theatre group. I thought she was ever so wonderfully theatrical. How pubescent-teen was that? It was overwhelming. Teen crush? Possibly. Definitely intense and all-pervading. Did it last long? Can't remember.

Then there were others, and feelings surged and faded. Not many, but just as compelling, intense, anguishing, and distant. And I was older. I believed that my feelings for other women were wrong. I shouldn't have them. I thought I must never speak of them. Never tell a soul. Never let *them* know, either.

It felt terribly wrong to have such feelings. It was not permitted.

No longing to touch, no longing to be close, very close. Forbidden to hug, to kiss, to do who knows what, together. Skin to skin was a fantasy, never to be made known, and absolutely never indulged in. Silent, secret passion. Delighting and heartbreaking.

## Part 6 =====

To love and not touch, to love and not speak, to love and not even to look shrivels the soul.

## Part 7 =====

You know, when you grow up in a very straight, Protestant household, even though it's not churchy, there are things that are unacceptable to discuss, or even know about. In my young years I learned from my father that a certain group of men deserved to be eradicated from the face of the planet. "Homos," he called them. Gay men. I didn't understand what all his ranting was about. I did know that some men were doing something he detested, and

*Jennifer, continued on next page*



*Jennifer, continued from previous page*

that he was pleased when there were news reports of them being bashed, even killed. I learned you never talked about it. The subject was taboo.

He never talked about women in the same way that he talked about these men, so I figured out that whatever the men were doing that got him so upset, women weren't doing. Still, it was a mystery to me. The silence rule stuck with me for a long, long time.

**Part 8** =====

For over fifty years I had a secret life of love, passion, delight, and misery that involved women. I never did anything about my feelings towards any of them, never spoke to them, never told any one of them. Some had partners, some didn't. I just burned inside, ached, wept alone. Yearned alone. Nurtured an inner fantasy life—alone. Obeyed the taboo.

I did not know that my solitary journey actually had a name. That came later. I had no way to make sense of the scrambled feelings of half a century. I remembered that bewilderment as I wrote this for the first time.

Something stopped my search for meaning after the first few remembered Loves. Suddenly for the first time I realized what the pattern of secrets meant. There was an explosion of light, of awareness, of recognition! Joy flooded my whole being. It was a physical amazement, an invitation to what I hadn't known.

But almost right away I knew it for what it is. It's truth! It's MY truth! I'm gay! I've always been gay! That's what my secret has been all along—a secret to me, and a secret to everyone else. It's the door out of all the secrecy that crushed me for most of my life. I own it!! I'm gay!

I was flooded with an overwhelming sense of relief, joy, and excitement that hasn't left me. A dark mystery has melted away, and my floundering search for intimacy and love makes sense now. I guess I was looking and never finding because I was lost before I started.

Now something unimagined is beginning. An unfolding of a new way of being.

I think perhaps it's time to welcome me home.

**The End** =====

*Jennifer Glenister, aged 82, is a retired neuropsychologist who lives in Aged Care in Chelsea, Victoria, Australia. She reads and writes a lot, and participates in local LGBTI community activities.*

*A.M., continued from previous page*

and self-centeredness.” “Don't fool yourself—she's better/prettier/smarter.” “You're ugly. Look down, just keep walking, don't bother doing a good job because it's not like anyone's going to notice if you work hard.”

What if I've been conned all along? What if what I have to offer isn't cleverness but wisdom? What if I have not only intelligence, but good judgment, insight, and understanding?

What if I'm not only sharp, but also deep?

I read a quote somewhere that what we often call a fear of failure is really a fear of success. Deep down, the idea of realizing and using our power terrorizes people—well, it terrorizes me. We're taught to think it's wrong, selfish, and vain. The idea of being a success and all the attendant responsibilities, expectations, and consequences—mostly our expectations of ourselves—serves to keep us doing our mediocre best to remain stuck. It's safer that way.

Aging is scary for me, yes. As I age, I have experienced greater physical problems and the fear of being alone for good. But at the same time, I'm realizing that one consequence of having struggled and overcome and stumbled and risen up again is that I can be funny, inspiring, and empathetic. I have counsel to offer and recommendations to make, and I have the humility and compassion to do this without patronizing anyone or demanding anything.

The struggle continues. I wrestle with and against moments of self-love, acceptance, and confidence. I guess I might as well get used to it. It seems reasonable to foresee that as I continue to age, it might only get worse. Or better, depending on how you look at it.

*A.M. is a writer, editor, writing tutor, and researcher in Baltimore. A veteran of the healthcare, nonprofit, and journalism industries, she also has expertise in mental health, body image, and the English language. Contact her at [sulphurcrestedcockatoo1@gmail.com](mailto:sulphurcrestedcockatoo1@gmail.com).*



# Phases

By Teek Spectrum

For the first few years of my sexually active life, lovely long-haired hippy girls like myself showed me my bisexual nature, offering their curiosity as a secret gift. I settled for flirtations and shy kisses. They would always go home to their boyfriends. I didn't want to stop seeing men either, so I understood. I just wanted more fire and commitment in my relationships with women. In the early 70s, I rarely heard the word "bisexual," though we played together in our communal households somewhat freely. While my ability to respond sexually to anyone I liked was obvious, I didn't really know there was a word for it yet.

In 1974, the year I turned 23, I happily met my first dykes. I fell in love, and the lesbian world embraced me and engulfed me. We went dancing at The Other Side and camping in Provincetown. We voted for Elaine Noble, the first openly gay person to be elected to statewide office in America. She represented Boston's Back Bay, where I lived at the time. We were all jubilant. That day, we walked down the street as if we owned it, ignoring the stares and fearful epithets hurled by passers-by. Later that year, I remember working on our truck by the curb in front of our apartment, preparing for the long drive to California. It became an exercise in quiet seething, as a crowd of straight men gathered around us, some to jeer, some to intrude with decidedly unsolicited advice. Women who did auto repair were an anomaly then. My lover was one of only two women who drove cab in the whole city, and they both endured a lot of harassment. Pioneers sometimes need a machete to get through the resistant jungle of old ways, but we were only being ourselves.

The word "queer" was often shouted at us in the street, almost as a warning. "Faggot" was not reserved only for gay men back then, but for anyone who looked as if they might value authentic expression over societal convention. The lesbians I lived with,

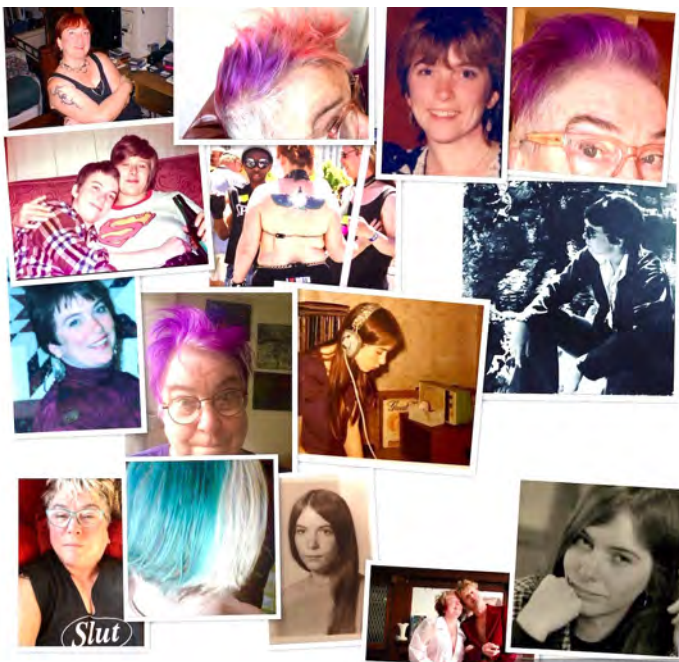
worked with, and slept with were my comfort and solace from that hostile world. But if I mentioned my previous relationships with men, someone would always assure me that those relationships didn't count and were mistakes to be forgotten, now that I had come out. I felt silenced; significant loves of my life dismissed. Snide comments about bisexuals, suggesting they were all either closet dykes or poseurs, would pepper casual conversation among us, and I'd laugh along, trying to make myself believe I belonged.

For a time, I thought I could live in that closet. After all, it was better than the straight world outside. I didn't want to lose my warm, safe place in the lesbian community. But eventually I had to face myself. I was still attracted to men and to deny that part of myself was to swim inside a tunnel wave that would eventually crash down on me.

Coming out as a lesbian had been a piece of cake. I had simply let my friends know that I was in love with a woman. I came out to my parents by introducing them to my first lover, whose demeanor and personal style left no doubt as to her preferences and identity. They said nothing, I didn't care, and that was that. I had my community to welcome me into the fold. But when I came out as bisexual, it was to a cold, friendless world fraught with sexist men and monosexuals who laughed at my "confusion." When I started seeing my first male lover in six years, all my roommates moved out and most of my friendships quickly faded.

Here I was, in possibly the queerest world there has ever been—the Castro in the mid to late 70s—with no friends except some gay men who assumed I was straight and told me so, apparently unable to imagine why I'd want women if I could have men. I had no clue as to how to find other bisexuals, and pretty sure no lesbians would date me. I tried a bisexual chat room but was greeted with wary silence; they were probably trying to protect themselves from intrusive straight men. Dating sites were filled with creepy guys who wanted threesomes. I was shy about going to the dyke bars now, feeling like a fraud and fearing they'd all hate me or ridicule me if they knew I was bi. I'd heard too much mean and derogatory talk about bisexuals from dykes to think otherwise. Yes, it occurred to me that some of the women in a dyke bar might be bisexual, but in those days, it would have been too risky to ask.

I felt cast out of the queer community, and ended up dating straight men for a long, conflicted time. I knew I was bisexual and stated it at every opportunity to people I knew, regardless of the derision and doubt I got from everyone, gay and straight alike. They would go so far as to question my "credentials"—"When was the last time you were with a woman?" they'd ask, as if my bold assertion about my sexuality gave them a right to know. I would pursue a straight woman from time to time, but that was just courting trouble and disappointment.



Teek, continued on next page



My luck turned when I was introduced to a bi man, someone at last who could know me as I really was, with no need for explanations. One day he showed me a copy of a magazine expressly for bisexuals. I was intrigued, to say the least. Then he said the magic words. "You should subscribe to this. You should support your community." Community. Could it be true? Could I have found a whole group of us at last? I celebrated by buying my second Wilson motorcycle jacket to replace my first one, a gift from an ex-girlfriend, that had been stolen years earlier. I felt powerful in it, a symbol of finding what had been lost to me, and fully alive for the first time in years. Soon after, I decided to volunteer at the magazine, and I became actively engaged with my community. I organized the only bi contingent in San Francisco Pride two years in a row, proofread articles, wrote my first published article, produced benefit dances, and recruited volunteers. There were play parties, meetings, new kinks to explore, snogging, dating. Our lives were our best activism. I was home.

The word "phase" is often used to erase us, but for me, it describes a journey through multiple transitions, mistakes, and discoveries. This is a journey that we all take, each in our own unique way. The more changes and adjustments we make as we respond to the world, the more fortunate we are.

Lately I've begun yet another new phase. I'm now retired, living alone, and have a treasured handful of queer friends of different ages. I cherish the older ones, and I've found so much value in knowing and learning from the younger ones. In my youth, the gender binary had yet to be challenged; it was taken as a given. I began to interrogate my own gender identity as I learned from

my young teachers, and, at nearly 68, I've adopted they/them pronouns. I've learned new words for my and other people's experience, like "cis" and "pansexual." I've stuck with "bisexual," because I have fought and struggled for that identity for so long. Six years ago, I chose a new name for myself. My first name was suggested by a dream; my last name refers to how I see the world, an infinite spectrum of creative expression.

These days I paint abstracts and periodically color my hair in crayon colors, a practice I adopted in the 1980s. In the housing for retired seniors where I live, my fellow residents don't concern themselves with my hair color. Us older folks know by now not to waste any of our remaining time worrying about what others do or what others may think of us. I still know I'm bisexual, with or without partners and playmates, and feel no need to prove it or entertain questions about it anymore. I do wish this residence were full of other queers, but I hear senior apartments for queers are now being built. I'm sure they'll be more commonly available for future generations. It can be lonely being a pioneer, or being among the first to do anything, but there's no real loneliness once we learn how to love our own company. From that center, one simply stays open to whatever comes next. I may look like I've slowed down, but I promise that I'm still on the move and will never stop.

*Teek Spectrum has lived in the Bay Area since 1975. They wrote "In Remembrance Of The Dead," published in Anything That Moves in 1999, and wrote a few poems and stories in Fnord. They are working on a memoir in the form of a series of short stories and have not had the nerve to submit any of their writing in a decade.*



**If you are in the Boston area, please join us at one of our events. See our calendar on page 24.**





# Older Than What? Being a Bi Woman at 57

By Francesca Maria Fortunato

I used to be an actress, and I can remember reading casting notices seeking “older” women. I always used to wonder: “Older than what?” The word “older” in this sort of writing has always been code, but its significance depends on context. I figured out, after a while, that in the show-biz world, “older” was most often code for “too old to be the romantic lead.” She’s the mother of adult children. The grandmother. The veteran teacher or the matronly nurse. In other words: not sexy.

I gave up acting about 20 years ago, because I was tired of the stress of selling myself, as a product, to “the industry.” As a woman whose beauty was considered “quirky” rather than high-fashion flawless, it was never easy to find a type that described me, and casting directors tended to be very impatient with anyone who they couldn’t easily type-cast. Of course, I was used to that sort of impatience, frustration, and misunderstanding on the parts of others, because, as an out bisexual woman, I had never fit neatly into anyone’s boxes. Men who found me attractive felt insecure when they found out that I liked women, too. Most of the lesbians I met made it clear that they had “no bi women” policies (as a result, the women I dated in my youth were all also bi).

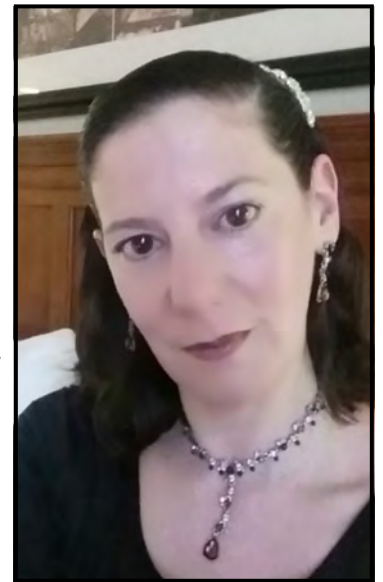
What has changed in my experience of my bi self, at 57 (compared to 37) is that I no longer feel so objectified and fetishized for being bi, as I did when I was still too young looking for those “older woman” roles. Not being the straight frat boy’s idea of a “girl-on-girl” porn fantasy is nice. I feel less threatened by the violence that underlies such objectification, now that I’m not youthful enough to be a head-turner. On the other hand, I now have to contend with ageism (especially when looking for work) along with biphobia.

I have to admit, too, that, while I am still 100% bi in my sexual and romantic orientations, being post-menopausal has made me

feel both less sexy and less sexual than I once was. And that, in turn, makes me sometimes question how much I truly belong in bi+ community, when I’m just this same-sex-married Grandma (my wife is lesbian) with a rather tame and routine domestic life. I go to Pride and see all of these hot young women in skimpy clothes, with their bi pride and rainbow adornments, and I feel a bit invisible (which is depressing, since Pride—especially bi+ pride—is all about visibility).

Probably the most essential difference between being bi in my 50s is a strong sense of obligation to fight for the next generation—especially for the next generation to have access to the support and community that I lacked as a young bi woman who experienced mostly rejection from the lesbian and gay world. I hope and pray that the day will come when it’s just as easy for bi+ women to come out and stay out (especially in the workplace) as it is for lesbians. I intend to stay out and involved in bi community, so that I can be one who provides that safe space and emotional support for younger bi women. I want to be the person I needed when I was young.

*The Reverend Francesca Maria Fortunato is a minister and dance teacher in New York City. She lives with her wife, Lynn, and their cats, Gracie, Daphne, and George.*



## An Aging Bi Feminist

By Sharon Gonsalves

I used to be a raging feminist  
but now I’m just an aging feminist  
struggling with whether or not to dye my hair.  
I traveled and had my career  
No children did I rear  
And growing old alone is hard to bear.

I wrote that poem at age 53. I just turned 60, and I find it’s really not so hard at all being on my own. I’ve put an emphasis on friendships and staying involved in community activities. I’ve found it very rewarding to volunteer as a public speaker for an LGBTQ+ organization. Sharing my story with younger

people to help make things easier for them feels like a good use of my time and wisdom. I’ve lived through a lot of our history, and have seen lots of progress and change as a direct result of my/our activism and efforts at being visible as bisexuals.

I had a Croning Ceremony at age 50 when I stopped menstruating. This was a big turning point in my life, and I wanted to mark it in a significant way. The shift from being in our ‘child-bearing’ years to our wisdom years is an important one. During my ceremony, I invited several women who were also becoming crones to join me around a bonfire with several other women who were already in their crone years. We talked about what we felt we were losing (beauty, sexual fire) and they told us what we had to look forward to (less caring what other people

Sharon, continued on next page ➔

# 40+ and Still Bi+

By Elizabeth Mechem

There should be a warning on the side of each fortieth birthday cake.

**Warning:** *Enjoy the cake because your forties are going to suck!*

Yes. My forties have sucked. As I near the end of my forties, I have acquired multiple invisible disabilities and am facing down menopause. Just when I thought I got the hang of parenting, my children have grown into teens with a whole new set of demands. Meanwhile, my own parents face challenges that make me worry. Even the way people view my intelligence has changed. Oddly, people who are not all that younger than I am treat me like I have no sense.

Then there is aging into a bisexual elder.

Even within our own bi+ community, ageism is very palpable. Once LGBTQ+ folk hit 40, we are marginalized within our own community. As consumers of mass media, we have been conditioned to think of an LGBTQ+ person as male, gay, white, and 25 (probably totally ripped, tan, and wearing only briefs). Logically, we know that isn't true, especially as bi+ people. However, ageism still happens and we've likely played a part in it, knowingly or not.

We are all familiar with coming out to someone as bi+ and then being met with a blank stare, followed by a quick change in subject. Sometimes we experience outright dismissiveness. Some of that dismissiveness is definitely due to my monogamous relationship. However, it seems to have increased in the past few years. There is a feeling that, since I'm over forty, my sexuality is becoming irrelevant. We sometimes internalize ageism. Some of us may not even come out until after fifty, sixty, or later. We may feel as if our time has passed.

The truth is that we still have so much to offer. There is no age limit to being bisexual, coming out, or being an activist. We are here and just as queer as anyone else. We need the same

things as everyone else: support, community, and understanding.

Our bi+ community needs our experience and history. Some of today's bi+ elders were at Stonewall standing up for queer liberation. Bi+ elders were there in the 1970s, trying to carve a space in the "Gay Liberation Movement" for what is now a huge, global bi+ community. Some of us were there in the days when *Anything that Moves* was the only bi+ magazine at the corner newsstand (in the days when newsstands thrived). Bi+ volunteers wrote, published and distributed that magazine, sending it out all over the country so that other bi+ people could read it and feel validated and whole.

Movements grow and change. It is important that we, as bi+ elders, recognize these changes and be willing to adapt. We are capable of learning and, yes, changing with the times. Many of us elders are still working hard to keep our community thriving. We work better together, combining our wisdom and experience with fresh ideas and new ways of doing things. We are happy to be elders, recognizing the gifts that youth brings into the movement. We need to be included and not pushed aside. When we are dismissed, the whole community misses out.

We are still proudly bisexual (#stillbisexual).

*Elizabeth Mechem lives in Lawrence, Kansas with her husband, children, cat, and loving dog. She is currently the producer of the BiCast, and involves herself in other forms of LGBT+ activism. She enjoys spending time with family, the fiber arts, and riding her motorcycle.*



*Sharon, continued from previous page*

think and more being true to ourselves). Many questions were answered, and we shared some good laughs. The following day we invited friends and family to witness our transition to wise women by declaring what we saw as our contribution to the community, going forward.

I highly recommend incorporating Crone Ceremonies into the fabric of our lives. I feel much freer now that I'm no longer at the mercy of my hormones. I've been celibate for the past five years and I find it very relaxing. While I still identify as bisexual, for now growing older unpartnered seems like just the right thing for me. Having a strong circle of friends and a place in several communities feels like the right way forward.

I imagine the future holds many precious moments, love and laughter, friends and family, good food, a sense of peace and no regrets.

*Sharon Gonsalves is looking forward to retirement. She shares her wisdom through SpeakOUT Boston, an LGBTQ+ speakers bureau.*



*Jane, continued from page 1*

From there I moved to the Bronx, got Netflix (the movies came in the mail), and emailed up a storm. A slight interruption by a week-long coma, and after three nursing homes, with and without computers, I moved to a psych ward and thence to an assisted living rez [residence] on, of all rural places, Staten Island. My friend Kathy gave me a TV, a printer, chocolates from Ghiradelli in San Francisco (she lived in Oakland, across the bay) and somehow I signed up for a cellphone, the size of a graham cracker, which did not flip. It was a black little thing, and I never could get online. It took calls and sent them, and that was it. There was a calendar and a list feature, which I used for a while.

Meanwhile, all my friends had iPhones. They held up their shiny phones (pink or gold or black) and talked into the end of that glossy flat piece of jewelry. They lightly touched here and there, and things happened. One of the things was photos. Photos of nephews and nieces, the grandparents, the trip in Florida, their new boyfriend or girlfriend. I was fond of this phone, though it never showed me where I or anyone else lived. It could not tell me how soon the bus would arrive. I looked up phone numbers in an outdated phone book that was the size of a young adult novel. I didn't know locations, and I had no Siri to give me answers to questions like "give me a list of bisexual literary magazines." Or: "Are microwaves bad for you?" For these complex answers I turned to ... reference books. I had almanacs, a thesaurus, how-to books, fact books, and all kinds of books that in the 21st century most people have never seen.

I paid \$6 for not enough minutes, so I got charged a fee and eventually it came out of my debit card, and some months went as high as \$25. Finally, they put me on a reasonable plan of \$18 a month and while my cohorts paid \$40 or \$50 per line, I had low rate and low function combined. How 20th century. I've had my new phone for a week now. I've taken 20 photos of my apartment: it's as pretty as it is to my actual eye. I've taken selfies, the first one by mistake at 2 AM when I was makeup-less and weary and oh, my God, I don't know that old lady. Ten more selfies followed today. My lipliner was inexact, another one cut off my head, and none of them made me look 52.

I still haven't done the thing that gives you apps. And I forget how to message people. The first night my right hand (I hold

it with my dominant left hand) felt like a vulture's claw, until I realized that my fingers are round, and the tap must come from the middle of the curve. Before each key struck a loud squeak; now it's a little rustle of "paper," and some features require a lustier tap while others don't respond (sounds like sex) unless I am gentle.

I hold my phone up like a graham cracker and talk into the end. The little button on the right turns the whole thing off. The ones on the other side are louder and softer. At the bottom is a socket for the charger or to hook it up to the computer (for I don't know what yet). And the one button at the bottom is the home button, and a throat-clearer between actions. Siri sends me things from the web: microwaves are basically safe, Colette wrote 40 books all in French, and if I double my income this 21st century year, it will be because I've got a phone like everyone else and am ready for business. For romance too. That has to do with Facetime, I guess, in which I will be thoroughly made up or I won't intentionally turn it on.

I suppose there are various technological and electronic ways to flirt, connect, and even disengage. My friends say, "He texted me, so I texted back, and then he left but came back, and he'd sent some pictures of his new car." I thought the man or woman who would date me wouldn't know of my murky cell phone past, and would think I was just another boring woman with an iPhone 7 in a pink case, with a seagull calling for me to answer, and me hitting the little symbol that means let-it-go-to-voicemail.

Oh, wait: is that your cell's Wagnerian waltz ringtone or mine? I'm dying for a certain call, and I just found out where they live and ordered a pretty Prime sweater in case I see them at the library. Not at a mall. (I never go to malls.) He's on Facebook, unlike me, since I don't want the Russians to try and get me to catch the measles. I *had* them back in 1947 when phones were black, and if you didn't answer, they eventually just hung up.

P.S. Just checked my usage of my iPhone 7 and I'm six hours over the average. Just made my 110th "friend"—some of them are famous and don't know me—checked the "likes" on my page, where I'm putting poems (though how do you put poems already input somewhere into that space automatically? Siri answered but I didn't get it. Better call Gordon [generation X, etc.] who'll know.) Have a grocery list, a color-coded schedule, a place to dump links I want, but don't know where to put. And I check my Gmails, weed the dumb ones out, hear a honk on my cell—my car is outside waiting. A friend is having a hard day. I give her a resounding text, and she sends back red valentines. Now check my bank, and a novelists' group I've joined. 12 people have great advice for me. I give some to the others. Being blocked, needing a secondary character (I offer me—75, bi, poet, NYC). . . . It goes on and on. Wait. What's on TV at this very hour? Do I want to watch MSNBC live on my phone—when it's right on

*Jane, continues on next page* ➔





# Older and Younger

By Annie Bliss

Older and younger—that's how I think of my ages—my chronological age and the age of my bi identity.

Why older? Well, for one thing, I'll be 74 by the time this piece is published, although I prefer to think of myself as late middle age. I was about to say "mature," but maturity is an elusive concept in my life, which is dominated by ongoing change. In fact, I sometimes claim change as my identity.

Why younger? Well, first of all, I didn't begin to claim my bi identity for myself until I came out as bi and trans to my wife, when I was 58. Later, when I was 63, I fully claimed my bi identity by coming out as bi and trans to my 88-year-old Mom. She amazed me with her acceptance, and our conversation included this interchange.

*Mom:* So, do you have a partner now?

*Me:* Gosh, Mom, my wife is my partner, we've been married since 1966!

*Mom:* Well, shouldn't you be with a man now that you're a woman?

*Me:* No, Mom, my wife and I love one another. We're committed to one another.

*Mom:* Oh my! Does that mean that you're a lesbian?

*Me:* Oh no, Mom. I'm not a lesbian. Actually, I'm bisexual. That means that gender doesn't determine whom I'm attracted to.

*Mom:* [long pause while pondering this revelation] Well, that's good. We should love people for who they are.

That conversation with my Mom freed me from the chains of fear and doubt that held me back and caused so much grief throughout my life. I discovered that it's never too late to claim your identity! I discovered that you can be loved and accepted for who you are, not for whom someone else wants you to be. I've never discarded the experiences and lessons that I learned throughout my life. My life has been filled with many blessings and many struggles. All of my history is part of who I am. Acceptance and recognition of my female identity and bisexuality has brought peace and a new happiness into my life. My life now is full of more colors than I could ever imagine, ever-changing patterns of color, much like living out the visions that I saw as a youngster when I would look through my kaleidoscopes.

A huge challenge remains. My wife and I have known one another since we were 12 years old and will have been married for 53 years this November. That's a lot of history, filled with wonderful times, sprinkled with rough patches, and supported by a loving family of origin including our own adult children and grandchildren. She and I both love one another deeply. That's why we've stayed together following my gender transition and my coming out as bisexual. My gender transition has ended our sexual life together because she is not attracted to me as a woman, and cannot bring herself to be "with me" in a sexual way. She is heterosexual and I am bi.

So how do we live out our intimate lives? Because I cannot remain celibate the remainder of my life, we have chosen to open our relationship. Opening our committed relationship and allowing sexual relationships with others has been difficult. The fundamental principle that allows it to work is complete honesty between us. We are in very different places in our new relationship. I am at long last able to fully explore my sexuality as a woman and to act on the sexual dimension of my bi identity, while she has chosen not to explore sex with other partners.

As a bi woman, I can be emotionally, romantically, and sexually attracted to women, but my attractions to men are only sexual. My partner understands this, and because she and I are together forever, I choose to explore my bisexual identity in places where romantic and emotional attraction are unlikely, but where sexual attraction can be readily acted upon. This means that I move in circles where groups of like-minded folks find pleasure. I straddle two worlds: the vanilla world with my partner and the world of kink and FetLife with friends. This latter world allows opportunities for my bi identity to evolve and for new sexual experiences, without romantic and emotional entanglements. Sex work is another such option, but that's a story for another time and is one of the remaining areas of human sexuality that is so difficult for others to understand and accept.

*Annie Bliss identifies as a queer, bisexual radical femme transwoman. She does advocacy work for the bi+ and trans+ communities under her given name. Annie claims her safe space as an out bi woman in the world of kink and fetlife where she is not out as trans, nor is she recognized as such.*

---

*Jane, continued from previous page*

my crib-bed-sized smart TV? I have a tone that wakes me up; refuse to keep it next to my bed. Wrote to a possible publisher of my books. Friended more fancy writers and 20 publishers. Here I am not even in the room but on my MacBook Pro, watching the smart TV, turned the ringer off (Ha! I got you), and then there's the other four pages of apps, that do everything but change my lingerie.

Bring up that Grammerly app, and it will correct everything amusing about your fabulous diction. OK, enough out of me. Click shut. Move that little button to red. Shut up, world! [*emoji of a face frowning*].

*Jane Barnes is in NYC finishing a third poetry collection, "Deceptive Cadence: Poems 2007-2017," and hanging on MSNBC Rachel Maddow's every word.*

## Advice from A. Rose Bi



*A. Rose Bi lives in New England with her cats who love to sleep on her lap while she spends most of her time watching TV and playing video games while her partner cooks amazing food. In addition to being an out and proud bi+ woman, A. has a degree in Cognitive Science, has completed trainings for LGBTQIA+ and sexual assault survivor advocacy, and has experience answering calls for an anonymous LGBTQIA+ help line. She is passionate about feminism, the bi+ community, LGBTQIA+ and female representation in the media, and helping others. Her pronouns are shelher and they/them.*

*Have questions of your own for A. Rose Bi? Email [arosebi.questions@gmail.com](mailto:arosebi.questions@gmail.com).*

Dear A. Rose Bi,

As I've gotten older, I've felt more comfortable using the terms bisexual and queer to describe myself. Previously, I thought I was straight. However, a guy friend of mine who identifies as bisexual as well said that growing up he thought he was gay. I've actually heard multiple stories from women who had a journey similar to mine and men who had journeys similar to my friend. Do you see the same trend? And if you do, do you have any insight into why?

Sincerely,

A Bisexual Previously Known as Straight

Dear A Bisexual Previously Known as Straight,

I've actually heard this myself—although I have no idea if it's a reported trend (now I want to do some research!). I've had a lot of conversations about this and here is my theory:

Growing up as a girl (specifically a cis-girl), I quickly found that other girls around me, from middle school through col-

lege, would talk about how pretty other girls were. We could discuss—without it being seen as odd or weird—how physically attractive other girls or women were, how great their outfits and hair were, how good their makeup looked. From a young age, I found other girls and women attractive, but I assumed based on these discussions that all girls did. So, I concluded: much like you, I must be straight just like all these other girls, right? After all, I still liked boys.

However, boys and young men (again, specifically cis-boys), deal with an entirely different set of social norms and rules. Young boys who experience attraction to other boys unfortunately often quickly learn that sharing such thoughts is unacceptable. The amount of ingrained misogyny and homophobia in our society teaches boys from the very beginning that showing interest in other boys isn't okay. Boys don't compliment other boys' appearances; they don't talk to each other about how good another boy looks that day. Almost instantly, this behavior is called out as deviant and wrong. Of course, a young boy experiencing attraction to other boys and realizing this isn't a universal feeling, would make the assumption that he was different from the straight boys surrounding him and that he is gay.

At the core of the differences in these gendered experiences is homophobia, misogyny, and of course, bi-erasure. Many of us, especially those who grew up in an earlier time period or in more conservative towns or cities, likely didn't encounter the terms bisexual, pansexual, or queer in a healthy way or maybe at all. With no terms to fit us and our feelings, we default to whether or not we're the same or different from the presumed straight people who surround us.

We have lots of work to do, as we can't forget how the intersectionality of gender fits into our bi/pan/queer identities and journeys, just as do race, ethnicity, disabilities, and more.

Thank you for sharing your experience and opening up a larger discussion about these intersectional identities and experiences!

Lots of love,  
A. Rose Bi

**Save the Date!**  
**SFBiCON**  
10.11-12.2019, SF LGBT Center  
San Francisco, CA

**What is SFBiCON:**  
An exploratory & eclectic conference celebrating all who are attracted to more than one gender.  
Help everyone attend SFBiCON! Please support scholarships by donating through our website.

**Who We Are:**  
We are a group of local activists in the bi+ & queer communities who invite YOU to propose a panel, discussion, presentation, performance or workshop on anything you find exciting, we'll probably find it exciting too. Share your stories, knowledge, or experience.

**SFBiCON.COM**

# LETTERS

To the editor,

I know and hope you probably receive thanks from many of your readers, but I just want to say thank you for the work you do. I saw you (Robyn) speak at my college six years ago, and you helped me solidify my identification as an out bisexual cis-woman. Expanding our definitions of attraction is so important, for us and the world, and you helped me realize this. Understanding attraction in a more in-depth manner has also helped me to develop stronger platonic friendships, and seek out romantic relationships that are more fulfilling. This publication is one of the few things that never goes to the “junk” folder in my email inbox (sometimes it’s #betterthantherapy—though therapy is important too).

The Summer 2019 Issue included a response from A. Rose Bi about the criticized or perceived “transphobic” nature of a bisexual identity. This is something I’ve experienced recently

with some of my “progressive” friends, a criticism of my bi-identity as they perceive it to be limited to two genders and not appreciative of the “all-gendered” pansexuality. I can be confident and know that my identity as a bisexual person is valid for me, but to also know other people have experienced the same criticisms makes me feel less alone. I had also never considered that the identity or label you first found and felt comfortable with is a valid label to continue identifying with, even if pansexual or another identity might theoretically make better sense (i.e., I, similar to Rose Bi, found mine on a college campus where bisexuality was a more prevalent identity than pansexuality). For me, some of the history behind bisexual advocacy and identity, as well as continued bi-erasure, makes me cling to my bisexual identity even more strongly.

In any case, I wanted to just say thank you for your wise words, community, and continued work.

A fellow bisexual community member,  
Sonja S.  
Duluth, Minnesota

## What your generosity has wrought:

Thanks to you, our donors, we have been able to hire interns.

This past spring semester Kalea Young-Gibson (she/her), a senior at Winthrop University helped with social media and set up BiProducts, an etsy shop which exists to support *Bi Women Quarterly*.

And Em LaLiberte (she/her), a rising senior at Connecticut College, just completed a summer internship. Em has been responsible for running our new Instagram account (@biwomenquarterly), as well as archiving past issues of *BWQ* online, making pins, helping with our Etsy store, and more. Here’s what Em has to say about her internship:

*“Working with BWQ this summer has been amazing! I am so happy to be a part of something that has a positive impact on peoples’ lives. BWQ is an essential resource, and I’m so glad to have had a small part in its continued existence. Thank you, Robyn, for being #biconic and making this great work possible!”*



Em



Kalea

## Visit Our New ETSY Store!



### PINS. Amazing pins.

Also, bisexual, pansexual & Philadelphia pride flags (rainbow flag with black & brown stripes).

And bi, trans, and rainbow earrings.

That’s one of the ways we raise funds to cover the production, printing, and mailing costs of this publication. There are 49 amazing bi, pan, lgbtq+, anti-racist, and other social justice pins on our new ETSY page. Please take a look. Favorite. Order. Then write a review. Spread the word!

[www.etsy.com/shop/BiProducts](http://www.etsy.com/shop/BiProducts).



---

## The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center. Check [www.biresource.org](http://www.biresource.org) for address.

---

### Ongoing Events

**Come to our monthly bi+ women's brunch! See calendar for dates.**

---

#### 2nd Mondays:

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

**Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men.** 7pm. Info: [kate.e.flynn@gmail.com](mailto:kate.e.flynn@gmail.com).

---

#### 1st Wednesdays:

**BLISS (Bisexual Social and Support Group).** 7pm at The Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. Info: [bliss@](mailto:bliss@)

---

#### 2nd Thursdays:

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

---

#### 3rd Saturdays:

**Biversity Brunch.** 11:30am at The Burren, 247 Elm Street, Davis Square, Somerville.

More about Boston-area groups [biresource.org/boston-groups/](http://biresource.org/boston-groups/)

---

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

**We offer FREE electronic subscriptions to this publication. Sign up at [www.biwomenboston.org](http://www.biwomenboston.org).**

# CALENDAR

## September

**4 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS).** All bi & bi-friendly people of all genders & orientations welcome to attend. Meetings are peer-facilitated discussions, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays. Info: [bliss@biresource.org](mailto:bliss@biresource.org).

**8 (Sunday) 12-3pm, Women's Book Swap Brunch at Steph's in Arlington.** It's time for the annual BBWN Book Swap! Along with our delicious potluck, please bring books you'd like to pass along and take home some new reads. You can still attend without bringing books, and you can take books home if you don't bring any. Co-hosted with Ellyn. RSVP: [smiserlis@gmail.com](mailto:smiserlis@gmail.com).

**12 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social & Support Group (Young BLISS).** If you are in your 20s or mid-30s (or thereabouts) & identify somewhere along the lines of bi/omni/pan/fluid (or questioning), please join us 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursdays for a few hours of discussion, support, and/or the eating & drinking of delicious things. Info/RSVP: [youngblissboston@gmail.com](mailto:youngblissboston@gmail.com).

**15 (Sunday), 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM).** A peer-led support meetup co-hosted by BiWOC & the BRC. We will discuss a wide range of issues related to attraction, sexuality, & gender in a supportive safe space for only trans & cis women and non-binary folks of all races & ethnic backgrounds. RSVP: <https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities/events/259707070/>.

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

**21 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** This mixed gender bi group brunches at Foundry on Elm St. in Davis Sq., Somerville. Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays. Info: <http://www.biversity.org>.

**23 (Monday) Celebrate Bisexuality Day.** Happy holiday!

**27 (Friday) 7-9pm, Celebrate Bisexuality Day** with the Boston bi+ community at Lir Pub <https://www.lironboylston.com/> from 7-9pm Friday Sept 27th

## October

**2 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS).** (See Sept. 4th)

**10 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social & Support Group (Young BLISS).** (See Sept. 12th)

**11 (Friday) National Coming Out Day**

**11-12 San Francisco BiCon.** (see ad p. 22)

**14 (Monday), 7-9pm, Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See Sept. 16th)

**19 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** (See Sept. 21st)

## November

**2 (Saturday) Women's Brunch at Liana's in Ashmont-Mattapan**

Please bring a potluck dish to share. A great way to meet Bi+ and bi-friendly women in the area. Welcomes all women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folx of any orientation, who are supportive and affirming of Bi+ identities. RSVP/directions: Liana at [ell.posto@gmail.com](mailto:ell.posto@gmail.com). Notes: 10 steps to enter house. The 24/27 bus stops 2 blocks away & the 26 and 21 buses stop 8 blocks away. Ample on-street parking for drivers. 2 cats in this home.

**6 (Wednesday) 7-9pm, Bisexual Social and Support Group (BLISS).** (See Sept. 4th)

**11 (Monday) 7-9pm. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning.** (See Sept. 16th)

**14 (Thursday) 7-9pm, Young Bisexual Social and Support Group (Young BLISS).** (See Sept. 12th)

**16 (Saturday) 11:30am, Biversity Brunch.** (See Sept. 21st)

**17 (Sunday) 2-4pm, Tea with Bisexual Women Partnered with Men (BWPM).** (See Sept. 15th)