

Zooming Between Communities in the Quarantine World

By Nancy Marcus

Before I began confining myself to home to hide from COVID-19 forty-five days ago, I didn't even know what Zoom was. These days, Zoom is my primary social outlet.

As I write this at the end of April 2020, I am one of the fortunate few who are still receiving a paycheck to work safely from home, although I have received a painful pay cut because of the pandemic's effect on my profession. As the chaos of the pandemic is finally starting to feel like a "new normal," I have been moderately successful in re-infusing my normal work hours and routines into this dramatically new setting of carrying on a stressful workload from my home, isolated physically from others.

But I haven't been completely isolated. Like many others, I am maintaining contact with the outside world through text, phone, and lots and lots and lots of video chat. And since the pandemic grounded me, I've also put up a new profile on a dating website, for which I've clicked "both men and women" as my target audience, but which only men have responded to so far.

And so, once I close the lid on my work laptop at 5 P.M. every workday and open up my personal MacBook, my virtual social life connections await and re-energize me.

But now that my various community connections are laid out in front of me in clear black-and-white text, and in clearly titled

Zoom chats, it is harder for me to deny that I live in a virtual world of bouncing back and forth among distinct communities.

My primary social community online has been an extension of my "real life" bi community. Since moving to Los Angeles, I have been fortunate to be surrounded by a wonderfully diverse and vibrant bi community with thousands of members, including a "core" group of around a hundred of us that get together for various events in person throughout the year. Until, you know, March of this year. Now we have transitioned to virtual video events to connect. We aren't always on the same page about exactly how we want any given video event to go, but it's a large enough community that there are more than one bi-themed Zoom group to connect with. Not only that, we expanded way beyond L.A. by opening our online events open to people around the world (look for AmBi's meetup page to connect).

So that's my primary social community, which includes some of my closest local friends, whose hugs I am missing something awful right now. And I won't lie, it also includes a couple of people that maybe I might possibly have crushes on.

Yet, I'm always hesitant to come "out" about my crushes in my friend community. It feels safer to flirt with strangers, where I don't risk endangering friendships or bringing tension to my

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Covid-19 and (Dis)connection

By R. Bacchetta

As a transgender woman and an undergraduate student at a southern U.S. university, I have learned to dig underground for connections, underneath the layers of transphobia and biphobia and nationalism that percolate into many aspects of my daily campus life. My community is one of careful selections. It is comprised of friendships with other transgender students, bisexual students, and queer students, as well as those who are multiethnic and disabled, like myself. In the LGBTQ+ resource center on my campus, as well as across other, peripheral spaces, I am thankful to have found friends, both queer and not, who support and love me as me. These connections are what have made my college experience, and these connections are what I miss the most, having returned home to self-isolate with my family in Georgia.

When the announcement came over email that we had five days to move out, many of us queer students panicked. There were those of us who would be returning to unsupportive and/or underprivileged households. There were those of us who had no place to return to. On campus, we had learned to survive via the connections we built with one another, and returning home would mean

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Editors' Note

Dear Community,

We had originally planned to focus on the theme of Finding Sex/Finding Love in this issue, but the jarring changes taking place globally and in all of our day-to-day lives seemed an invitation to reflect, more broadly, on how we create community and connection in this moment. How do we support one another through grief, uncertainty, and disruption, and create the sense of connectedness that we all need now, more than ever?

We thank the many contributors to this issue for responding to this invitation and sharing the thoughtfulness, creativity, and compassion you are drawing on to respond to this crisis. The essays, poems, and artwork in this issue capture the loss that results when the warmth of a hug, the electricity of an unexpected glance, the simple comfort of being together, are reduced to text and 2-D faces trapped in boxes on screens. At the same time, they bring to light the opportunities we have to come together when unconstrained by geography and other barriers. Many of us are connecting with others in distant places; finding ourselves able to attend events we could not attend in person due to inaccessible meeting places or the constraints of busy schedules; finding time to reconnect with those with whom we've lost touch; becoming present in a new way with those with whom we share living space. Many of this issue's contributors also remind us that in order to create and sustain connection with others we must care for ourselves as individuals, and this moment creates space for stillness, quiet, vulnerability.

Editor's note, continued on next page

Upcoming in Bi Women Quarterly Call for submissions

Fall 2020:

Out at Work (or Not), 2

It's time to come back to the question of being out (or not) at work! What have been your experiences at work? Are you out? Partially out? Not out? Why/not? What challenges/opportunities have you found? What has been your experience (if any) in LGBTQ+ employee resource groups? If you're just entering the workforce, what are your hopes/fears/strategies? Submissions are due by August 1.

Winter 2021:

Finding Sex/Finding Love

How do you seek and find romantic and/or sexual connection? Do you use technology such as dating apps? Why or why not? Have you intentionally sought these connections, or stumbled upon them? We want to hear about your experiences, whether delightful, discouraging, amusing, or absurd! Submissions are due by November 1.

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenboston.org.

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

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

HONOR ROLL

*Thank you for
volunteering:*

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

Kat reads BWQ. Send a picture of yourself reading BWQ to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

Be creative!



We are an all-volunteer organization. Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help out with our 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).

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN) 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; and 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, full acceptance of bisexuality, and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

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We acknowledge that the impacts of this crisis follow the well-worn patterns of the inequalities entrenched in our society. We are all impacted differently, depending upon our health status, age, and ability: whether we have the privilege to continue to make a living comfortably from home, or are dealing with job loss or working in hazardous conditions; whether we find ourselves in the crosshairs of the deepening racism and xenophobia exposed by this moment; whether we have access to the technologies needed to maintain connection without physical contact;

whether we are exposed to misunderstanding of our identities, abuse, or violence within our homes. Building community and connection requires all of us to be aware of these differences and to work for meaningful social changes that get to the root of these injustices.

Thank you for helping to build bi+ community and connection and a better world through contributing your voices, energy, and resources to these pages, and reading and sharing *BWQ*.

~Katelynn and Robyn

AROUND THE WORLD: In Search of Freedom

By María Rodríguez, Cuban reporter and blogger, residing in the U.S.

Until a year ago, I loved shows and movies about prisons: *Oz*, *Prison Break*, *Vis a Vis*, *Papillon*, *The Green Mile*, *Orange is the New Black*, etc. Now I avoid them; I know the pain of wearing handcuffs and an orange suit while being innocent. My name is María Rodríguez, I am Cuban, and I want to share my experience and that of other immigrant bi women detained in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

I was raised in a Christian home that believed in the premise of being good and just. My family had for years suffered and been mistreated by the Revolutionary Government (Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz Canel) because of our ideology and religion. My cousin Zoe and her husband—for wanting to leave the country—and my cousin Alberto—for being homosexual—were taken to the Military Production Support Units (UMAP) in 1966. There, in those concentration camps where the Regime locked up those who did not conform to “good socialist morals,” my family knew human horror and evil.

I decided to study journalism; I would try to get justice for my family and so many others by raising my voice and denouncing the situation in Cuba. Upon graduating from university, I found myself forced to work for a state newspaper for three years as part of the obligatory Social Service and Training, the means by which the government charges us for our supposedly “free” education.

Topics related to LGBTQ+ persons could only be written about in newspapers during the week leading up to the International Day Against Homophobia, the 10th to the 17th of May, and on December 1, World AIDS Day. I was barely allowed to write news about those. I had strong testimonials and interviews with people whose lives were directly impacted; I wanted to publish them. The Chief of Information told me that no one was interested in “fags,” that the few news items we did run were only published because they were associated with the name of Mariela Castro. The Chief of Information and other colleagues bullied me, laughed at me, called me names, and did not give me important assignments.

Thus, I understood that we were still following the path of UMAP, except that homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and the hatred of



María, at the Progreso International Bridge in Tamaulipas

María, continued on next page

difference were now hidden under the illusion of an acceptance of LGBTQ people. The National Center for Sexual Education and its network are no more than an illusory political campaign designed to make the world believe that LGBTQ+ people are accepted in Cuba. Just look at the derogatory way that Mariela Castro recently referred to those who conduct activism outside of state institutions as “trinkets and ticks,” promoting once again discrimination and political persecution.

I started a blog, and in an act of freedom I started to write about Cuba and the stories that you can only read in alternative media and the pages of independent journalism. The government’s reaction was swift: I was fired from my job, my university degree was invalidated, I was detained and threatened. The situation became so hostile and insecure that I found myself forced to emigrate.

“*God does not promise an easy crossing but assures a safe landing,*” I read in an old almanac; I entrusted my steps to the Lord and escaped my island prison. I flew to Mexico in May 2019. I headed to the northern border with the U.S. and lived for two months on the Progreso International Bridge in Tamaulipas, with 104 other people waiting our turn in line to be admitted to the U.S. The wait was difficult. We were in the open under sun and rain. My skin burned so badly that I thought the damage would be irreparable. We only ate thanks to churches and good Samaritans, and we feared being kidnapped by Mexican cartels that controlled the area. At the same time, President Trump’s constant changes in immigration policy generated anxiety and concern.

On July 9, it was my turn, and I felt I was the most blessed person on earth. I had done it, I was here, I was finally free. No Castros, no Cuban Communist Party, no persecution, no state socialism, no “voluntary” required work, no unfair salaries. I filed for Political Asylum and Protection by the Government of the United States, and I was taken to El Valle Correctional Facility, an immigrant detention center in Texas.

Cubans had described the detention centers like summer camps, agreeable places where I would have to be secluded for 45 days while ICE verified my identity and an Asylum Officer organized my interview. Reality hit me hard. I was in prison. The treatment, the enormous spiked barbed wire fences, and the uniform shouted criminal, not immigrant. The first night, I hardly slept, new fears awoke, and I was afraid of not surviving the imprisonment.

We discover our true strength in the most extreme situations. I adapted to the environment, made a group of friends, and learned that it is possible to find freedom behind bars. I was transferred

to the South LA ICE Processing Center, where I learned to fill out I-589 forms, to cook rice with Maruchan ramen, and the true meaning of the word endurance. In Louisiana, I met Claudia and a beautiful friendship was born.

Claudia flew on a March afternoon from Havana to Panama. In the airport in Panama she met the coyote who gave only this advice: *be discrete, my girl, don’t attract attention.* That was when she knew that hers would be a solo voyage.

She crossed the Darien forest with all of its dangers. In less than three weeks, she made it through Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and México to arrive in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, on the Northern border with the U.S. There, early one morning, she crossed the Río Bravo near McAllen, Texas. On the far shore, American territory, a U.S. border patrol officer detained her.

In the Customs Border Patrol (CBP) office, Claudia was interviewed and had to share the reasons for her voyage. Since adolescence, she knew that she felt different from those around her. For years she loved Walter; after the breakup with him, she met Isel, and the passion was instantaneous. But it was a passion that her parents, her friends, and her society did not understand. That society knows little about love, less about diversity. She faced discrimination, biphobia, and homophobia.

Claudia developed her rebel character, opposed to all dogma and injustice. She learned to call out problems and fight them from a dissident group, becoming a leading activist in protests, social media, and poster campaigns denouncing the Revolutionary Government. Of course, she paid a price: Claudia was detained and threatened several times by the police; all her movements were tracked by followers of the regime; she was denied access to work or school, treated like a parasite, trash, shit. To her title of dissident, they added lost, stray, crazy, player for both sides, switch hitter. The State-sponsored violence against her increased, and she had no option but to emigrate.

Now here she was, asking for asylum and protection from a foreign government for her membership in a persecuted social group: the LGBTQ+ community. From the Border Patrol office, she was moved to an immigration detention center in Louisiana.

In custody, Claudia met Natasha, born in Georgia to a Nicaraguan father, whose green eyes reminded her of the Varadero beach for which she yearned. Between racism and xenophobia, in the midst of unjust immigration policy, love blossomed. Holding hands, they walked in the yard, they showered together, they publicly displayed their affection. Their relationship did not appear to



Cuban women in detention in Louisiana, with María at right

María, continued from previous page

both the GEO wardens. In general, their fellow detainees respected them; a few of us even became close with them. I never saw any of the other detainees react negatively to them. In jail, many people learn to reserve judgment.

For the first time in her life, Claudia did not experience discrimination, biphobia or homophobia; she was able to recognize herself as bisexual. Two months later, both women were granted conditional freedom on bail, and now they live together as an official couple.

Since 2017, thousands of Cubans have come to the U.S. border seeking political asylum, among them many bisexual and lesbian women who have found their dreams under attack. Asylum is a form of protection that allows the seeker to remain in the United States rather than being deported to a country in which they have a reasonable fear of persecution. Persecution primarily means a violation of human rights in the form of threats of or direct acts of physical, psychological, or sexual violence, but it can also mean the accumulation of discriminations that deny access to work, education, medical care, and the like. In considering cases of asylum on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the circumstances and conditions of the country of origin are analyzed.

In 2018, the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) observed that change in Cuban leadership (with the installation of President Miguel Díaz Canel) and the constitutional reform brought serious violations of human rights, including arbitrary restrictions on the right to gather, denial of political association, and refusal to accept political proposals coming from dissident groups. As an example, Decree-law 370 “On the computerization of society in Cuba” established as illegal *the distribution, through social media, of information contrary to social interest, morals, good manners, and personal integrity*. The decree clearly represents a threat to the freedom of expression.

Likewise, various civil organizations have gathered, in recent years, multiple testimonies from Cubans who have suffered arbitrary police detention, torture, beating, extortion, illegal searches, illegal surveillance, seizure of communication equipment, the inspection of personal correspondence, the blocking of internet accounts and

access, firing, and expulsion from schools. These actions continue to systematically limit the rights and the lives of Cuban social and political leaders, independent journalists, and LGBTQ+ persons identified as dissidents or members of the opposition.

Sadly, more than a thousand Cuban asylum seekers were deported from the United States back to the island in 2019. To win an asylum case is extremely difficult while you are under ICE custody. Claudia and I could have been deported; instead of a happy ending, we would be prisoners of an oppressive political system and a society where—for most people—bisexuality garners extreme fear and prejudice due to the false belief that bisexuals do not know what they want, are incomplete, undefined.

In an ideal world there would be no dictators, forced immigration, biphobia or homophobia, but the reality is such as we know it, and all we can do is try to make change. Let us fight so that no more women will be forced to emigrate in order to find freedom.

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Translated by Keja Valens

Editors’s note: When I think about Cuba, I experience cognitive dissonance. I spent two weeks in Cuba in 2014, as part of an LGBTQ+ delegation. It was during this visit that I first met and interviewed María, and we shared conversations and a meal. During that trip, and since, I have struggled to make meaning of what I experienced.

There is a dynamic and visible LGBTQ+ community in Cuba’s largest cities and—as in the U.S.—a far more conservative and challenging climate in rural areas. Our delegation participated in pride events (parades, performances, and two conferences) in Havana, Santa Clara, and Bayamo, and we had a meeting with Mariela Castro, who—whether for reasons pure, nefarious, or complex—was clearly advocating for LGBTQ+ Cubans. Our delegation also had a few side conversations in which we were made aware that activists who were not government-endorsed were experiencing governmental repression. As outsiders, it was hard to understand what was real, and what was performance. What I do know: Cuba is complex and multi-layered. I know I do not and cannot fully understand its complexity. And I am grateful to María for sharing her story. ~Robyn

Relationship and Reciprocity in a Time of Great Confusion

By Iris Carufel

Community has always been important to me; to be in relation with one another has been important since time immemorial.

Today, the whole world is sick, but perhaps she has always been sick. It's so easy to forget our survival is rooted in reciprocity and respect for life. Whether human or not, no life is worth more than another. Change is inevitable, but community sustains me.

Sometimes I reflect on the life I have lived so far and how many amazing people surrounded me throughout every season. From grade school friends to some of the best colleagues, I have always been supported and encouraged by my circle. Social media has further extended our circle of friends. I think of my social media siblings that encourage me with body positivity and a healthy, growing mindset. My favorite pages challenge colonial structures and the effect they have had on all of us. I am further encouraged to look deep into myself and see how my choices impact my neighbor. We are all here, living in relation to one another, and we need to take care of ourselves and each other.

Amidst the great sadness that has covered the world today, there has been a resurgence in caring for one another. I see the way the communities most at risk are fundraising to give to other communities most at risk. Friends are working in hotspots and ensuring care is given. In community there is strength. In community there is healing. In community there is life. Community is necessary and is crucial to our survival, especially now. I am encouraged to do better and send love where I can. And I know well that sometimes it's okay to not be okay. I am not grieving alone. I am always in relation: to you, to the earth, and to myself.

The sun sets on all of us; give back if you can.

Be well, my relatives.



Reciprocity

I give you my love and you give me love back.

You need a smile today?

Here, have mine.

I breathe out what she needs

And my tree gives back to me

We are tied together

Sustained relationships

Reciprocity.

Iris Carufel is Ojibwe, Santee Dakota, and HoChunk which centers her identity as "Indigiqueer"—or in other words, bi+. She aspires to be a well-known writer and friend to all.

Making Friends with Dust Bunnies

By Elizabeth Mechem

When our governor first issued the directive to shelter in place, limiting our movements to home and essential travel only, I thought not much was changing for me. I've been at home for two years in various states of employment/unemployment, as well as being an at-home mom to my teens. Being home was not new to me. If anyone could handle it, I could. I was made for this. It was relatively easy when nobody else was home. I had a schedule and very few distractions. But having everyone at home and my travel limited has disrupted my flow in unexpected ways.

First, as always, there are the children. They were on Spring Break when the order came, and they have continued that laid-back attitude. The kids have online classes, and two of them have adapted very well to the new format. The middle kid attends but refuses to do any work. The school told them that grades counted until April 10th. After that, grades would only be counted if they improved between April 10th and May 23rd. Since the middle child received A's in all the classes, she has written off the rest of the year, despite being expected to take two Advanced Placement tests. It's been a real struggle trying to explain how we are not sending her to school to get grades, but to get an education. She has also taken to trying to stay up too late and convincing me to hang out until 2 A.M.

Secondly, my husband is now working from home. He teaches at the local university and does much of that online. Now instead of doing whatever I need to do and not worrying about how loudly I'm doing it, I have to be quiet at certain times, disrupting my normal schedule. It really is difficult for me to change gears in an instant. It took a few months to get a schedule going, after quitting my outside job, in the first place.

Lastly, I had way more outside connections than I realized. I miss them. Among other connections, my dog Minnie and I would go to the dog park and meet friends on at least a weekly basis. There was a local Scrabble club that I attended that can't meet. Unfortunately, neither the dog park friends nor the Scrabble friends use social media. That really puts a kink in the works.

Over the past month, all this has left me feeling pretty down. I had to do something to improve my situation. So, I've decided to adjust a bit to the new reality, and let go of the old one. Letting go of many expectations has been extremely helpful.

I've let go of the educational expectations with that middle child. She is a junior in high school, and her educational responsibility is not all on our shoulders. She should be expected to bear that responsibility, as well as suffer the consequences of not studying. Her teachers don't call home every night to nag her to do her work. It's not my job to do so, either. Anyway, it turns out that she is quite prepared for the AP tests, except Calculus. Her dad can help with Calculus if needed. It's not like I was going to be

any help there. My math skills are atrocious, at best.

I've let the housework go. Except for crucial sanitation, if these people want to live like this, fine by me. I'll pick up after myself, do the laundry, and make sure nothing gets too gross so we don't get sick. Who cares if we live in a dust-bunny kingdom? It's not as if we'll be receiving any visitors, so it's no big deal. (As it turns out, dust-bunnies are great listeners, keep secrets, and don't pass judgment. They are some of the best friends I've ever had.)

I've let go of the idea that I have to be constantly doing something constructive. I noticed that my self-criticism was at an all-time high. I was really being a jerk to myself. I realized that everyone else in the world who could, was taking this time to relax, sleep in, stay up late, and go easy on themselves. Heck, I'm one of the few people I know not wearing sweatpants all day, every day. There is so much awful out there, why be awful to myself?

So I relaxed. Relaxing a bit is something we all need to do to cope with the stress of the COVID-19 situation, anyhow. I started letting the kiddo keep me up until 2 A.M., then sleeping in, and stopped worrying so much. Nobody is grading me, and my teen actually needs the comfort of sitting with me. She has a lot of anxiety about current events herself, and actually needs me to hang out with her.

Letting go of some things helped, but getting out and seeing people was another matter. So I've called my parents more often, reconnected with my younger sister via texting, as well as with old and new friends. Facebook, for as much criticism as it receives, is extremely valuable there. I spend more than my share of time on Facebook, but it's because it provides those valuable connections to people and the outside world. It's not perfect, and I sometimes overuse it, but it is an extremely critical connection tool when isolated.

I also have a podcast that I run with other bi folks. Since we do everything online,



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it's been very easy to keep that going. However tempting it is to slack off, I'm glad we've been able to keep that going without missing a beat. It has provided a sense of the old normal for all of us and maintained that connection to one another and the bi+ community we all value so much.

Where the dog and I are concerned, we have begun exercising regularly. While we don't go to the dog park, we have begun walking around the neighborhood. What was once a weekly walk has now expanded to three or more walks a week, each at least a mile in length.

That's how I've adjusted to sheltering in place; learning to let go, learning new ways of connecting, and keeping myself mentally

and physically healthy. I know that I am lucky to have the options I have. It's hard to appreciate how much we have, sometimes. There is so much negativity in the world, it is so easy to get sucked into it. However, realizing what I have and working within that structure makes a huge difference. Sometimes you have to just stop the inner critic, look around, and work with what you have to adjust to a difficult situation.

Elizabeth Mechem lives in Lawrence, KS, with her three children, husband, dog, and three cats. She is the producer of the podcast bi+plus, providing content for the bi+ community.

Crow

By Andrea Miotto

The crow out my upper window
Swaying on his slender, brave branch,
as I sat thinking spiritual thoughts
Invaded my eyes and my heart.

So close I could look deep into the pool of iridescence on its
many-colored wings.
Black wings without bottom,
Flaming in the sun.

Crows, I had thought:
Cawing, communal, curious, crafty.
Vicious.

Courageous, this stern-faced watcher humbled me,
And, humbled, I learned.
It was free.
Lonely.
Lovely.

The bough, uptilted, struggled gallantly to bear up its guest,
Its budding green a striking contrast to the Crow's dazzling black,
The dandy, he knew it and was proud.

The Crow gave me this gift:
He let me drink him in
Obsidian beak to fanned tail, carefully displayed.
I didn't know I thirsted.

The crow brought nature to me;
I so rarely go to it.



Photo by Phillip Capon

That nature with the security of its own spirit
The tyranny of its own rules
The wildness of its own unexpected, ungraspable harmony.

With a still small voice in the midst of the storm,
The agonizing beauty of tiny moments
suspended, pinned in time
Never static, sometimes still.

Beautiful because so true
Agony because so sudden and so short.

Whispering,
Cease thinking.
Listen!

Andrea Miotto is a Baltimore-based freelance writer, editor, and tutor. She blogs at www.coronacompassion.net.

Things I Do On Screens

By Robin Renée

Rectangular miracles
make ritual
charoset and horseradish
hand washing and wine
We count ten plagues plus one,
a celebration of freedom
in solitude.
Invocations of air, fire, water, the greening earth
We welcome spring, then Beltane's Maypole dance,
idealized in mind.
The church of sweat, glitter, 1 am grind
now simultaneous sign-on to Spotify playlist
new wave bedroom dress-up, 7 pm.
BYO coffee to the poly chat:
"How to find partners when no one is meeting?"
"Picnic date six feet apart?"
"Do you tell your children?"
Connection/immersion in deep details
fandom
recall Elvis Costello at The Spectrum, then The Tower,
Steve Nieve gorgeous piano improv from Paris, daily, 1pm
EDT
Yacht Rock DJ on Discord at 10,
plan for DEVotional, red energy domes in Cleveland,
buy Church of the SubGenius face masks, praise "Bob."
Check the xxx fun of those adventurers sheltering together
and willing to share.
New desires with an old friend emerge. Perfect timing.
No need to celebrate Masturbation Month entirely alone.
Online concerts, Facebook Live, nervous merging old and
new
must do
I show up, cloaked in Impostor Syndrome and serene smile
ready with guitar and voice and poems.
Irony: less travel equals more music to play, more to hear.
Late night tragicomics, from their homes, save the day.
I dream the grand lovers' reunion
when not only our hearts, but bodies are free
to dive right in.

*Performing songwriter
Robin Renée's recordings
include In Progress, All
Six Senses, Live Devotion,
spirit.rocks.sexy, and This.
She is a co-host of The
Leftscape Podcast and is the
winner of the 2019 Brenda
Howard Memorial Award
for bisexual visibility and
activism.*



what's connection?

By Laura-Marie River Victor Peace

love for the other ecstatic
dancers. women love, radical
mental health love, comrade
love. love for the people
I'm serving food to. "is that
good? you're welcome."

community love. bus driver
love. riding a certain route,
getting to like certain bus
drivers, loving bus drivers
who never knew I loved
them. pen pal love long term
and short term, therapist love, love for strangers.

love for the people driving by who read my Peace is Possible
sign. love for someone I met once in a zoom room and never
saw again. love for myself. twelve-year journey together love.
love for the ex as my memories fade.

detached love, involved love, love suffused with lust, buddy
love. body love. bad idea love. pragmatic love.

love for someone who died. love for my mom on the other
side. love for my sweet swami and ishta deva. love for the ex
I tried so hard with and can't talk to anymore.

love for a friend. love for a friend's baby who smiles at me.
love for a friend's grandchildren I never met but know all the
names of and see pictures of. love for someone who helped
me.

love for a facebook friend I met on myspace. love for people
in my previous town. love for people who left the community
I live in, but the love feels the same.

love for an imagined pet lizard I feed the courtyard cheese-
weed leaves—I named her Spike. love for a houseguest as she
sings.

love for Ming as he does the dishes. love for an enemy I went
through a lot with. love for the family I have today, the peo-
ple I check in with every day, lately.

*Laura-Marie is a queer trike-riding zinester who lives in the
desert, enjoying life and doing radical mental health.*



Around

By Lila Hartelius

This morning, while I was sitting in my yard reading John R. Stilgoe's foreword to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, the soft, insistent coo of a chicken made me turn my head. A reddish hen was descending the tree-sheltered slope of a neighbor's chicken enclosure. "Hello," I cooed back, probably sounding more like I was talking to a baby than to a bird.

A few minutes later, a neighboring tabby cat came slinking along the fence opposite the enclosure. It picked its way over dirt clods, casting frequent glances down into a forest-y undergrowth area I'd seen it trot away from a few days earlier, clutching a tiny rodent in its mouth. When I finally said, "hello," with similarly whimsical enthusiasm, it whipped its head around to stare at me with wide, matte green eyes before looking away and continuing its watch.

By the time another neighbor's dog pranced into view a few moments later in its front-yard universe, playing with anything it could pretend to animate with a paw stroke, it had become clear to me: the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in my area had marked the beginning of a period of greatly reduced contact with other humans, yet I was definitely not alone.

This was not the first time I'd felt a sense of warm company in the presence of the fauna and flora of a place. The night I arrived at the little apartment that would be my shelter during my first visit to a forest in Central America, I stepped out onto the back patio and found myself shrouded in a living, singing amalgam of twisting tree arms reaching down toward me with dusty leaf-hands twice the size of my own, emerging from the thick of a night infused with the chanting of a million cicadas.

Knowing this habitat was rife with animals and bugs—many of which I suspected I was yet to encounter—I expected to feel the forest closing in on me with a thousand spine-tingling eyes I couldn't see to distinguish friend from foe. Instead, I sensed my surroundings yelping a celebratory "hi!" like a wide-eyed child beaming with joy and curiosity in an era that comes before it learns to fear other humans.

I remember that era. A perfect stranger, in the right circumstances, could become a conversation partner for the space of a meandering exchange about whatever happened to come to mind. Looking back on that time now makes me both retrospectively fearful for my child-self and wishful I had that boldness now to accompany the adult wisdom I've since acquired.

For most of my life, I've been "sauvage." This French word literally translates to "wild" as in "untamed" but is also understood to refer to someone who is particularly shy or who avoids social contact more than most humans. The technical term for what I experience in this regard would probably be "social anxiety," but



it's more pleasing to imagine myself as a sometimes-tameable wild animal that tends to keep its social distance from most humans. The fauna and flora of this planet have kept me company for as long as I can remember. They've been there since before the anxiety crystallized in me, and they're a sustaining force that's carried me through my days and nights ever since I began to learn to feel apprehensive toward humans.

Unfortunately humans have taught me to fear "nature" too, as if life, instead of being something I'm a part of, were something precious and singular I must hold onto in the face of unpredictable forces "out there." This has undoubtedly contributed subconsciously to me staying indoors excessively. This resistance to going outside often simply feels like plain overwhelm, as if I were expecting all flora to spot me and say, "Come look at my flower! Come touch my leaf! Come wade in our swaying sea of green!" This wouldn't be so bad if it weren't followed by a second wave of berating thought-reflexes tugging at my mind just as the flora's imploring enthusiasm tugs at my heart: *Be careful where you walk—there are nettles out here . . . No way—last time you laid down in the grass you got bed bugs . . . What if a tick falls on you from these trees?* Whatever the reasoning for staying indoors, it seems fueled by an underlying feeling that the outside world—both human and non-human—is teeming with risks.

So, it was with difficulty at the end of a long day yesterday that I parted with the tempting idea of curling up in my reading nook with my chosen book of the evening and, instead, took my hardcover companion outside with me to read in what disappointing light was left in the dusk that remained after I'd procrastinated through sunset. Though the air had cooled, I set my bare feet on the ground, breathing in deeply the freshness that always makes stepping outside worth it. Regularly getting barefoot contact with the earth does wonders for calming my mind and helping me feel I actually have a physical body—both of which have been otherwise hard for me to achieve to any significant extent.

So, there I was with my feet in the grass this morning, reading Stilgoe's foreword as I waited for my mind to gather itself and

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my body to show up on my mind's register as an inhabitant on this planet. "To imagine living in a seashell," I read, "to live withdrawn into one's shell, is to accept solitude" (Stilgoe viii). The choice of the word "accept" struck me as an expression of resignation, filling the word "solitude" with a hollow sadness the color of waning crepuscular gray seeping from the inside of an empty amphora.

Yet it was the word "withdrawn" that had first captured my attention. The relief I experienced when reading it was akin to what I'd felt the previous evening while entertaining the idea of diving into my reading nook. It was in stark contrast to the lonely amphora feeling I had. The moment of welcome retreat I denied myself yesterday for the sake of getting regular fresh air during this long period of confinement was, I realized, a microcosm reflection of the relief I've been feeling at not having to venture out into the social world.

"To imagine living in a seashell," I read again, "to live withdrawn into one's shell, is to accept solitude—and to embrace," I read on, "even if momentarily, the whole concept and tradition of miniature, of shrinking enough to be contained in something as tiny as a seashell, a dollhouse, an enchanted cottage" (Stilgoe viii-ix). "Yes! Yes!" my soul cried as it leapt in my chest: to be contained, to let myself collapse back down to human size after months—years—of trying to expand beyond my own limits to be part of this human world with its sometimes strange social customs, from which I try desperately to extract a few drops of the nectar of meaningful human connection – all the while dancing right around it to avoid stepping on anyone's toes. "Me-size" looked and felt welcomingly miniature in a world in which, I realized, I'd been trying to be larger than life.

While it has more often been with fauna and flora that I've felt—as I did in my yard this morning and in the forest that night in Central America—a sense of meaningful connection that might be called community or being part of a larger whole, there have also been moments when I've felt this in relation to humans (after all, as humans, we, too, are fauna). One such instance happened, paradoxically, at the start of the lockdown.

Walking down a street near my house for some exercise as day calmed into dusk, I saw lights in windows of houses and people preparing dinner. Well aware they might be griping about new restrictions on their movement, I, by contrast, felt a peculiar comforting warmth in my chest. I didn't know who lived in those houses, and the people in them might have been home that evening anyway even if there weren't a lockdown. But the idea that, for a period of time, all of us would be around, here in this neighborhood, filled the place with a sense of presence and cocooned me in a quiet feeling of belonging.

For the rest of that walk, my little corner of the world felt truly inhabited, interconnected by simple activities of human life even

as structural walls separated those individuals or households partaking in those activities. Individualistic interests and commuter imperatives had suddenly been put on hold. In that moment, the houses up and down the street became, in my mind, not just boxes for their inhabitants to sleep and eat in but metaphorical hearths where those inhabitants might re-collect a sense of deeper connection to a whole comprising fellow humans, other fauna, and flora—a whole that might be called "home."

Lila Hartelius, BA (lilahartelius.wordpress.com) is a bilingual (English/French), published writer who has served as editorial assistant for the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Her work has been published in Bi Women Quarterly, Weird Sisters West and Tendrel (Naropa University's diversity journal). She has been a workshop leader at EuroBiCon and has contributed to the efforts of Bennington College's Queer Student Union, Naropa University's GLBTQ student group, and Boulder Pride.

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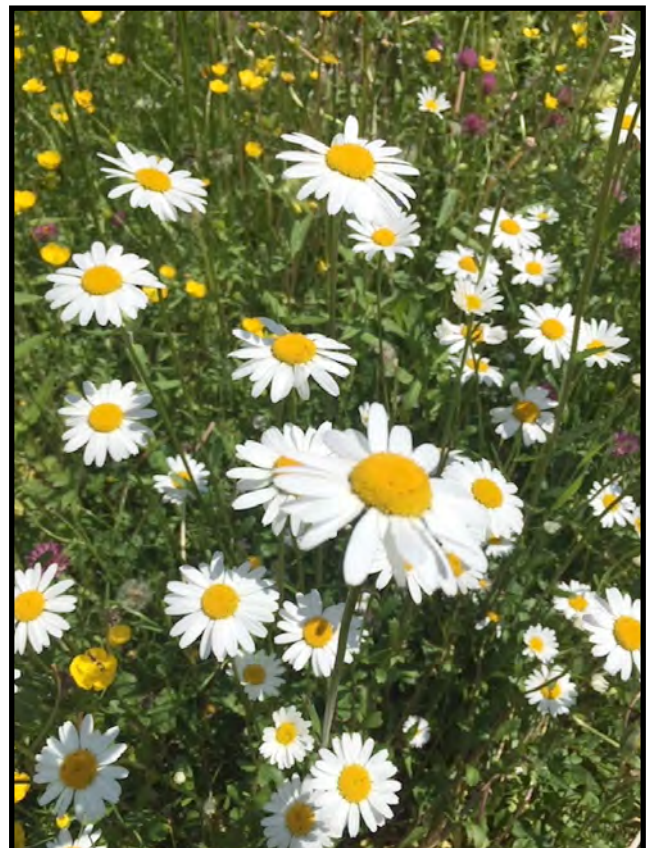


Photo: Casey Lawrence

Beautiful Humans

By Neen Chapman

Connection is a strange word. It has multiple uses, from inanimate objects like Lego, connecting to build a Star Wars model fighter; comforting connections with animals, such as cuddles with my four kitty cats; physical chemistry between humans that can range from a fleeting spark to a decades-long burning desire; and then there's spiritual fulfilment with a person, a location, or a memory.

As I know it, connection between humans also has multiple depths and meanings. I've always had varying depths or levels of connections throughout my life. I've just turned 50 (no celebration, yet, thanks, COVID-19) and in, let's say, 30 years of memory and experience, I can honestly say I've been lucky to have two deep, emotional, life, laughter, love connections. They were complex relationships, filled with honesty, absolute joy, maddening frustration, intense love, grief, and tragic loss. Mardi and Wayne will forever be the loves of my life.

Along the way, I've also had and have intellectual connections, likeminded connections, community connections, supportive connections, lost connections, kink connections, artistic connections, fleeting connections, and connections that return over and over just when I think they have seen their day.

Connection with other humans, some say, is essential. I'm a bit iffy on that one. I'm comfortable on my own and in my own company. I'm never bored—I can either entertain myself or relax and switch mostly off and be in a good space. I love long drives in my Mini Cooper up to the mountains, to the bush, to the beach, listening to music or just being still and in the quiet of the moment. I have what I call "lite" connection with some work colleagues, acquaintances, community friends, bi+ friends, and some of my family. I know they're there, and some check in from time to time, but I don't rely on others to buoy my headspace and wellbeing. I've had years of practice. I've lived with DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) for over 23 years, and that kind of disorder has trained me to rely on myself for so many reasons: sometimes it's just easier, sometimes I keep myself private and on my own as a way of self-care, and with my flavour of DID I'm never actually alone—25 alter personalities.

DID doesn't mean that I hold special connections at bay, but they are few, and I'm discerning. I have exceptionally beautiful friendships within the bi+ community, here in Sydney and all over the world. I have a wonderful, hilarious, comforting, intellectual, worldly, incredible friend who lives just up the road, and we speak every night. We talk about everything. Always have. I met her at the bus stop that takes us to work. She has incredible hair, beautiful dreadlocks, and I have out there, cool and interesting shoes. That's how we met. I complimented her on her hair, she on my shoes and, over three years later, here we are, being each other's COVID-19 girlfriend (carefully caring



at a distance for each other while in isolation—if the cops ever asked). We have such an honest connection in friendship and life's hardships, and it all started with dreadlocks and patent leather shoes.

I have an erstwhile lover who, over the years, has returned to my life from time to time and, right now, he is a clear and calming influence on my, at times, chaotic mind. He reminds me that my own isolation is acceptable—but not to remain too long in it—and that whatever I'm experiencing, feeling, thinking he accepts 100% as me. He is a breathtakingly beautiful Scottish man whom I met when we were much younger. The intense young man having an intense affair with a woman 10 years older. He has his own demons, his own trials, and we sort of speak about them, perhaps not as much as we should. Even so, I count him as someone who knows me intimately in the most vulnerable way—my true nature. This is the most mystifying and intense connection I have and suspect I will ever have.

Then there is my big brother. A person whom I adore and admire, look up to, and am equal with. He's been an unwavering support, friend, counsel, fellow car enthusiast, ethical, and intellectual conversationalist and just the best big brother for the past 50 years. He's struggling right now, and when we get to talk, it's with care and love and empathy for the difficulty he is in with a young family, some health concerns, and uncertainty of work and income all thanks to COVID-19. The main thing is when he can, we do talk. We listen carefully to each other and our concern and familiar connection is the most loving and heartening of all my family relationships.

The thing is, as I said, I don't rely on people for "connection," to feel grounded, to be in the world or of the moment. Maybe that

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makes me fortunate right now as we all face this crisis. That said, I'm immensely grateful for good conversation, sharing laughter and comforting counsel. My Beautiful Humans. I chose these people and reveal all that I am with them. My strongest human connections, these days, and always, have been these.

How has COVID-19 changed my connection—well, long drives with music blaring and quiet barefoot walks on the sand or in the forest are a no-no at the moment. Experiencing the moment that I'm in. Breathing in the vastness of the universe, knowing my very small place in it, and accepting that I rely on myself for calm, for care, for self-management and for the health of my mind. I hold my connection to the earth in as high esteem as I hold my chosen Beautiful Humans.

What COVID-19 has done is to focus my efforts and clarify my mind on exactly who/what I invest in. I love our bi+ community here in Australia and abroad. Beautiful cups of tea with likeminded people with whom I never need to explain myself to and have ease to talk and listen. Mostly one-on-one, occasionally with several of us online, playing a game or telling stories. In many cases it's the same as it has been without COVID-19, as I am, as they say, a loner, but I do miss our picnics and lunches. I miss our meetings and conversations with our wonderful diverse humans and the stories of their lives.

What I have done on purpose is turn Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and news feeds off. The bombardment of hundreds of posts and updates—even positive ones—got too much for me. That's working for me. My dear friends let me know anything pertinent. The quiet is blissful. Real conversation and listening, accepting my busy mind and allowing it to rest are my tools for facing COVID-19. Making the effort with loved ones whoever

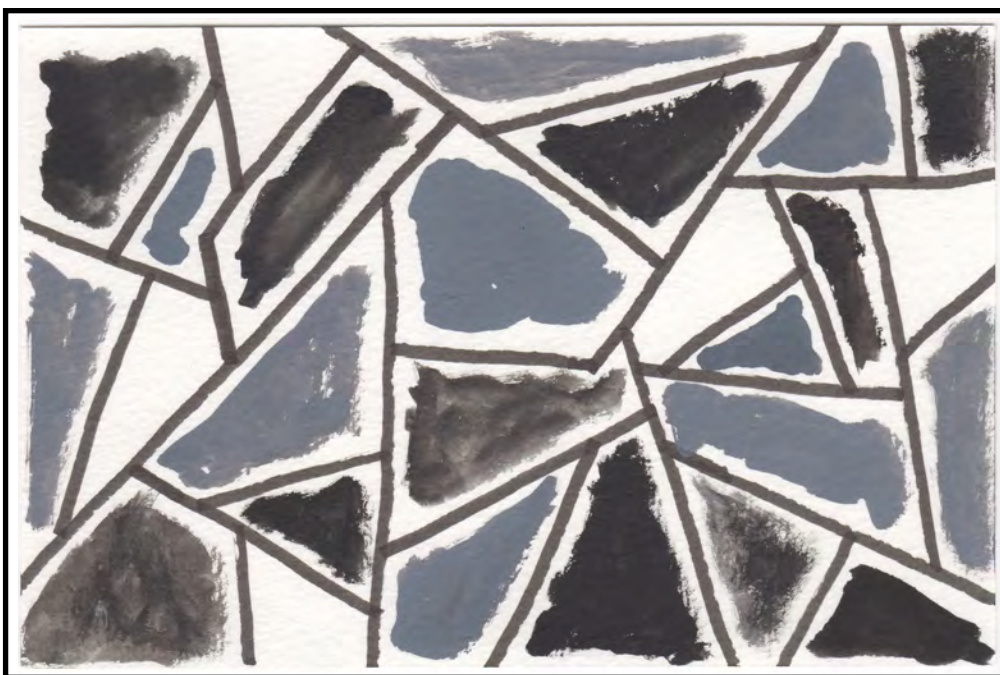
they are and finding conversation other than the woes of the world are keeping me from being too introverted.

So are playing trivia on Zoom, reading poetry to a friend, creating bi+ art, painting bi+ t-shirt/jacket patches, recycling old world fabrics to make alternative fashion; these are the ways I stay sane, engaged, and active outside of working from home.

COVID-19 is a virus that has physically separated us from the beautiful humans in our lives. And it's a shite way to spend 2020—no question about it—but maintaining or starting up conversations, perhaps with more focused listening, reflection and empathy is what we all can do. Use the internet wisely, make phone calls, write letters—be old-fashioned in the 20th century kind of way, arrange a footpath conversation, meet for a distanced walk in the park or a coffee.

Connection doesn't have to be with many, and the ones you do have, and the ones you care for are exactly enough. You don't have to stay busy; you have permission to do nothing or permission to breathe deeply and face the virus in whichever way helps you. Your community is there. Will always be there. Have a cup of tea over a video chat or a phone call; if allowed, get a coffee and go for a walk in the sun with someone you can listen to, call in to your bi+ and pan+ networks as I'm certain they're organizing ways for you all to see each other, listen to each other, and remain connected to the real loved ones, the Beautiful Humans in your beautiful bi+ life.

Neen Chapman is bi+ pan and out in all aspects of life and work, recently 50 (how did that happen), silver haired-and loving being the Vice President of Sydney Bi+ Network, housemaid to four lovely, crazy kitty cats and deeply into history, reading, geology, documentaries, art, painting, poetry, equality, bi+ activism, politics, and kink.



We are pleased to debut in this issue artwork by Carol E. Moses, an active member of our community.

This piece, ink and watercolor on paper, 4" x 6", is titled:

this place

this time

this now

Carol E Moses is a visual artist living in Massachusetts. Moses does painting, drawing, and portrait photography/ interview series. Currently in production is an upcoming blog of art and artists in the pandemic time: artinthetimeofcoronavirus.com

Bicuspid

By Zoë

About two months into my first year of college, I was hanging out with some friends in the college's queer resource center. We were young and I suppose carefree, listening to music and painting. A third-year student came in and struck up a conversation with us. They asked if we'd heard anything about the status of the Bi/Pan/Fluid Alliance. We answered that no we had not but that we were excited by the idea as four of the six people there identified as bi or pan at the time.

A year and a half later, there was still no group for bi+ people. From conversations in person and on social media as well as looking at statistics, I knew that bi+ people comprised a significant percentage of the student body and that we were a group with opinions and interests and issues specific to us that we wanted to have a space to discuss. My college is apparently 40% LGBTQ+, and since bi+ people make up about 51% of the community, that means there's a chance we're one of the single biggest demographics on campus. But bi people are notoriously difficult to organize, and after the person who volunteered to help me restart the group transferred schools and I went abroad for a semester, it had suddenly been another year. This semester, though, after finally making contact with a bi+ adult who worked for the college, I decided to just start holding meetings. We gathered on Thursday nights, starting out with an icebreaker and a topic (dating, stereotypes, representation in media, intersections with other identities) and quickly devolving into a discussion about language, children's cartoons, or socialist organizing.



At our very first meeting, we decided that the Bi/Pan/Fluid Alliance, while a functional official name, was not interesting enough for us. After twenty minutes of throwing around random acronyms, initialisms, and words that started with bi-, we settled on BiCUsPid, which stands for, you guessed it, Bi Club: Us Pan Fluid. Solidarity and puns are much more important than a strictly accurate name, and we liked the word bicuspid, which means “having two cusps or points” or “a tooth with two cusps, especially a human premolar tooth.”

Since the pandemic struck, we've been separated, three people staying in our college town, the rest of us scattering across the country to homes with varying levels of safety in this or any other time. We've stayed connected through a group chat, which is just as chaotic as you might expect from our name and includes more rants about politics and pedantic discussions of music than it does anything to do with sexuality.

When I asked the BiCUsPid group chat how they felt about the prospect of my writing something about us for *Bi Women Quarterly*, everyone was excited, but someone did bring up the issue of gender. It was relevant, they said, that this group is comprised entirely of non-men. We're some mixture of women, cis and trans, and nonbinary people with all the variety expected when you get a group of queer college students together. But where are all the bi men? We know they exist. We're friends with them. Some of us might even be dating some of them. Might be roommates. But only two of them ever showed up to our in-person meetings while we were still able to have them.

In some ways, all of us appreciated the man-free space. Was this not what we wanted? A space where women and nonbinary people could express ourselves, free from the messes that come from interactions with cis men in particular? Well, sure, but I for one can't forget society's constant erasure of bi+ men and feel uncomfortable at the thought that I might in any way be contributing to that.

This is just one space though, and currently an online one, at that, which, as I noted, is not currently particularly focused on discussions of sexuality. While I think we need to talk about gender in bi+ spaces, at this moment I'm just glad I have an official bi+ network at all. It's always nice to have a group chat you can turn to when you need to ask if memes about bi people being attracted to “all women, most nonbinary people, and three men” are damaging. Or if you just want to have a late-night *Cats* watch party.

Zoë is a college student currently writing English papers from her grandfather's house in a small town and eating more Nutella than is good for her.

Bi Community Commotion Brings New Energy to Connect and Support Each Other

By Ellyn Ruthstrom

It feels very sad that during a time of much suffering and sacrifice from the COVID-19 lockdowns, the bi+ community also had to deal with a very public and very painful situation that was prompted by the president of BiNet USA, Faith Cheltenham. For those who did not see this unfold on social media, I'll provide a short description.

On April 28th, Faith Cheltenham, using BiNet's social media account, started tweeting that they were the official owners of the bisexual pride flag, and they threatened organizations such as the Bisexual Resource Center (BRC), companies such as Target, and individuals such as JayneBShea with cease and desist orders. These entities were told to remove images of the flag and the sales of such items from their websites, etc., under the threat of legal action. The online bi+ community erupted as "BiNet" purported that the organization owned the trademark of the flag and would insist that others must pay them for the privilege of using it. A day after the initial explosion, "BiNet" removed their Twitter account and on May 1st released a public statement that distorted what their original intention was and directed the attention onto the use of a tri-colored confederate flag on cafepress.com. Not all of the seven board members listed on BiNet's website were actually still on the Board. Of the five (this includes Faith) who were actually on the board at that time, at least three had not been consulted about the initial Twitter statements and resigned over the next few days. If you want more details, you can do a quick online search and find more information.

For me, as a long-time leader within the bi+ community, it is more important to take this moment of upheaval and redirect the energy

into positive community rebuilding and collaboration. Many individuals and organizations have stepped forward during this time to assure community members that our bi pride flag is safe and that there are many other sources of connection and support they can turn to. #bipride and #ourbiflag were hashtags that folks were sharing on Twitter to find each other and to bolster our spirits together. That experience of love and support will be what I take away from this moment.

If BiNet was the only organization you knew about on the national level, you'll be pleased to know that the Bisexual Resource Center, the Bisexual Organizing Project (producers of the BECAUSE conference), the American Institute of Bisexuality, and #StillBisexual all do work that is nationally focused. And there are many other local and regional groups you can connect with as well, including the Los Angeles Bi Task Force (@LA_Bi_TaskForce), BQA Chicago (@BqaChicago), Bay Area Bisexual Network (BABN), Polysexual Alliance for Visibility, Education & Support (@PAVESnonprofit) out of Denver, and—of course—several groups in and around Boston. If you experienced the online debacle, I hope you won't get disheartened and step away from bi+ community. We need you, your ideas, your creativity and your energy to keep this beautiful tri-colored-flag-waving family moving forward.

Ellyn Ruthstrom was the president of the Bisexual Resource Center for ten years and co-organized the first White House Roundtable on Bisexual Issues in 2013. She was the editor of Bi Women (previous title of this publication) for nine years.



Bisexual Haiku (#biku)

By Tania Israel

Pink, blue, and purple
The bi flag flies free, for all
Indeed, so do we

Tania Israel is a Professor of Counseling Psychology at UCSB who embraces bisexuality in her research, community service, public speaking, creative work (#biku), teaching, and fashion.
taniaisrael.com



Tania & Robyn in Santa Barbara, March 5, 2020

Branches Gone Digital

By Kaytee F.

In the wake of the pandemic, my local brunches have gone online. I took initiative after my friend called me out of the blue to see how I was. It felt so nice to hear from someone, I wondered how I could do something similar. Since I do a lot of friendly heckling to make the in-person brunches happen in normal times, I guess it was inevitable that I'd look into virtual brunches. There is a lot that I've learned about this new format, not least of which is how important community is. I will share some tips and food for thought at the end of this article, in case you want to host your own brunches.

The first online brunch was early on in the stay-at-home advisory, and people were hungry for connection. With only a few days' notice, 15 friends tuned in. For some of us, it was the first remote meeting of any kind that we had participated in since the pandemic started. There was a lot of discussion about COVID: our fears and uncertainties, how our lives were affected, and ways we were coping.

By the second brunch three weeks later, most of us had come to terms with the situation a little bit more. While I steered the ship in terms of the platform, another community member did a lovely job hosting the discussion. For our go-around question (an optional question we ask attendees at each brunch), she chose to ask about the positive aspects of being bi+. A common theme was how accepting our community is and how many smart and interesting people we have in our ranks. You can see a list of some of the reasons why being bi+ is awesome elsewhere within these pages. I was reminded how important it is for identity to be seen, affirmed, and valued.

The third brunch will take place in May after this article has been written. I plan to implement some of the lessons I've learned, like the ones below.

Length: The biggest difference between virtual and in-person brunches is the length. Our in-person brunches are typically three hours. We have planned our virtual brunches to be one hour, with the expectation that they may last up to 1 hour and 30 minutes. At in-person gatherings, it's easy to ebb and flow in the conversation as one wishes, move about the space, and have side conversations. In an online format, there is not much "ebb and flow"—in a certain way, it requires more sustained attention, and hence, more energy. In other virtual meetings, I've also seen the first hour or so devoted to a moderated discussion with the second hour being a free-form conversation. Which brings me to my second point.

Format: Will this be a moderated discussion, free-form conversation, or a mix of both? It may be helpful to let attendees know what format the meeting will take and a rough timeline of when the format will change. Regardless of what format you choose, give folks a little time to introduce themselves, their pronouns, and how they're doing (if they choose).

Moderation: Especially if there is a discussion around a certain topic, moderating is an important component. In this way, virtual meetings are much like in-person meetings. Giving each participant a certain amount of time to respond (to make sure introverts and extroverts have equitable time to share), asking folks to raise their hand (by typing **o/** in the chat or using a platform feature) are two tools to do this. Affirming comments and finding ways to discuss heated topics gingerly (or sidestep) are other important skills.

Hosting Roles: It can be helpful to have people play different roles in the hosting. Since I am borrowing a virtual conferencing platform account, I do all the technical hosting, including helping people troubleshoot. This prevents the account information from being overshared. It may be helpful to have another person moderate the discussion, and an experienced community member to be a backup moderator (formally or informally). Taking on roles is also a way for folks to feel like they are giving back (much like in normal times).

Accessibility: One thing virtual brunches have encouraged me to think about more deeply is accessibility. Time, transportation, and physical accessibility of the brunch location can all be barriers to participation for in-person brunches. Virtual brunches can enable some community members to join for the first time in a while. Another component of accessibility is technology. Not everyone has access to computers or a steady internet connection, so having a platform where folks can call in is helpful. Setting aside some time before the meeting to help members troubleshoot issues is another way to make sure everyone is included. I start the virtual meeting a half hour before the official start time and let people know I am available to help during this period. In the meeting invitation, let people know they can approach you so you can help them with any particular needs they have. Finally, some virtual conferencing platforms (such as Zoom), allow for live captioning of the discussion.

Platform: Choosing a platform to accommodate your needs is important. Zoom requires a paid account to host meetings with more than three attendees for more than 40 minutes. For our brunches, I use a Google Meet account. Google gives free accounts to nonprofits, so if you have nonprofit status or are affiliated with a nonprofit, this is a great option to look into. Google Meet allows for call-in by phone, doesn't require having a Google account, and doesn't require anyone to download special software. Be choosy about who has access to the login and password for hosting.

This experience has taught me many things, and I hope to have occasional virtual brunches even after quarantine is over, as it is a unique experience and enables more—and different—people to join in.

Kaytee works in technology and plays out-of-tune piano. She has two entitled cats and a growing plant collection.

'Tis a Gift to Be Bi+

By Marya T. Mtshali (with help from brunch participants)

At the April 19th Bi+ Women's Digital Brunch, I posed a question: What are the positive aspects or gifts of bi+ sexuality? At first, this question seemed to stump some of us. So often, by those of us in our community and by people outside of it, non-binary sexual orientations are often cast in a negative light. After I came out as an adult, one of the first things I did—like many millennials—is look to the Internet for information. More specifically, I wanted to read the words of bi+ people about their experiences, and what I found was enough to put some people back into the closet. Pages of my screen would be filled primarily with discussions about biphobia, bi-erasure, and lack of acceptance. There's no doubt that those issues are a part of the bi+ experience—but it is so much more than that as well. During our meeting, a lovely discussion unfurled where we began to highlight the gifts of bi+ sexuality, and I have shared some of them below:

All are welcome: In our experience, the bi+ community tends to be one of the most inclusive and accepting communities we've found when it comes to sexual orientation and identity.

Interesting people: One person remarked on "... how cool, interesting, and intelligent everyone in the community is. We are active and engaged in the world in many meaningful ways."

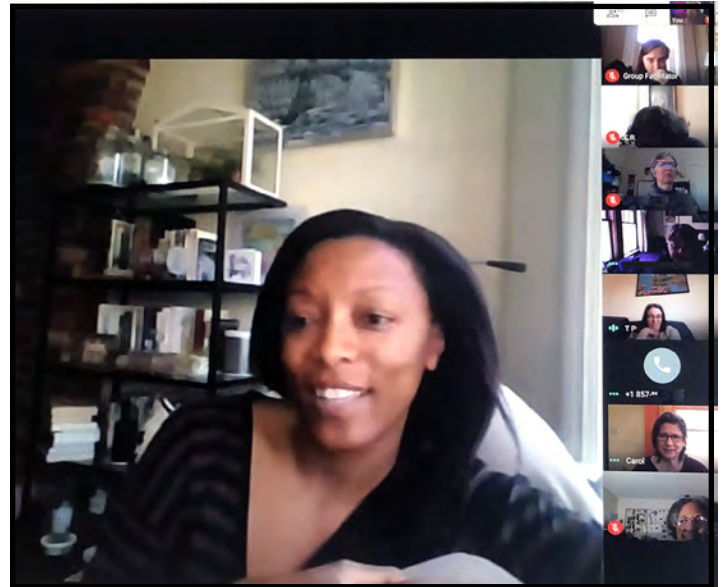
Understanding sexual fluidity: Having a non-binary sexual orientation allows you to have an embodied understanding of the realities of the fluidity of human sexuality in a way that our society often finds confusing or attempts to render invisible. Furthermore, this empowers us to critique and reject other aspects of our society's rigid, binary thinking.

Wider connection: We share the gift of being able to form romantic and/or sexual connections with a wide range of people and, therefore, potentially have a deeper connection to the breadth and depth of humanity.

Experience and perspective: For those of us who have had (or have) partners of different genders, our experience provides us with a unique opportunity to observe cultural dynamics and relationship patterns.

Being part of a world-wide community. We are able to travel (remember travel?) and possibly make connections with people around the world via a local organization. This world-wide community is also available on the internet.

Marya Mtshali is a lecturer at Harvard University and spends her free time reading, tending to her indoor garden, cooking, traveling (12 countries and counting), and spending time with her lovely dog, Tesla. A South Carolina-native with South African and African-American roots, she currently resides in Boston, MA.



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Connecting with my Past, Embracing my Future

By Annie B.

I had the perfect summer planned. I'm from a small, conservative town in Maryland and go to Emerson College. After applying to over fifty jobs, I had found a way to stay in Boston this summer with my girlfriend and two of my best friends. Then a pandemic happened, so I'm back in the Mid-Atlantic with my mom and grandparents, feeling more alone than I have in a while.

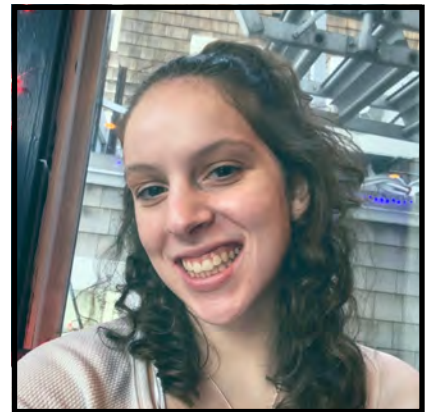
Like many bisexual teenagers, high school was hard for me. I mean *really* hard. When I arrived in my dorm room overlooking the Boston Common, everything changed. I was accepted, made lasting friendships, studied subjects I cared about, and fell in love for the first time. To be abruptly taken away from all of that and thrust back into the hick suburb that has been the source of my traumas has been jarring, to say the least.

Emerson is known for its LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Suburban Maryland is not. So, how do I find a community of support during this time? In my opinion, while the situation is unprecedented, the solutions are not. In hard times, you rely on those you love and those who love you. I reach out to the people in my life that I look forward to seeing again, as well as engaging with people I haven't had the time to talk to in a while. I am especially making sure to communicate with the queer people in my life, if for nothing more than maintaining our sanity.

Lately, I've reconnected with people at home who are kind and loving. When I went to college, I was so determined to get out of suburbia that I intentionally cut myself off from my roots. This quarantine has forced me to confront where I came from. By doing so, I am becoming a more self-aware and appreciative person.

Furthermore, I also have taken the time to invest in my future. I applied to fifty more jobs. Yes, it was as gruesome as it sounds. But I am someone who loves control, and this gave me

a semblance of power in a powerless situation. Luckily, I found a remote internship for this summer with the It Gets Better Project. By working, I am connecting with the LGBTQ+ community in a way that gives me a façade of normalcy.



While of course video chat is helpful for bonding with others, it is the deeper ability to share emotions with your loved ones that is crucial, even if it is more than you would usually share. Now is the time. So, yes, we unite with others. However, I am also using this summer to connect with myself, cheesy as it may sound. When I (hopefully) return to Boston in the fall, I will have a clear understanding of who has my back and how to communicate well with those people. Therefore, I guess my advice is this: if you are in a situation that is bringing up trauma or mental strain, focus on strengthening only the relationships for which you feel inclined to do so. But above all, make sure that one of those is with yourself.

I think the hardest thing about this coronavirus is that no one knows when it will end. I am trying to focus on the aspects of my life that I have control over, and home is one of them. Of course, now we must learn to have serendipity over letting control slip away in other aspects, which is just as challenging as it sounds. I do believe that with dedication it is doable.

Annie is nineteen years old and is currently studying journalism, social justice, and comedy.

Choosing Connection

By Dani Feyn

Understanding my bisexuality has meant living in the spaces in which I'm most uncomfortable: the grey areas. All my life, I've felt different: for most of my life, I tried to overcome any difference by fitting into what I believed would be an acceptable category. Each time I attempted to connect with someone, it was through the veil of what I thought they might want me to be. Now I know that that wasn't true connection, although at the time, it felt safe.

The grey areas scare me. If I don't carefully classify myself, what if it turns out that the people I care about think I'm too much, or not enough? Too queer; not queer enough? Too smart; not smart enough? Too creative; not creative enough? Isn't it better,

I thought for years, that the person I show to my friends and family is a persona deliberately crafted for them? I chose to show the parts of myself I thought people could love and hid the rest away.

That way of life could only be sustained for so long. I felt lonely. I felt misunderstood. Well, naturally: I wasn't giving enough of myself to anyone to *be* understood. I became trapped between the black and white categories I had assigned to myself, and fluctuated between wanting to hide and wanting to be known. There are a number of reasons that hiding felt safer—not just shame about my bisexual identity, but also trauma from my childhood and overwhelming feelings of anxiety and depression. More often than not, I chose hiding. I withdrew. I forgot what it was like to connect altogether.

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Overcoming my need to hide took years, medication, and therapists who urged me to dip my toe in the waters of what made me the most uncomfortable. Progress is not linear—I think anyone who has struggled knows that. But over time, I was able to find small ways to connect with people honestly. I went out to lunch with co-workers. I played songs I had written for the person who is now my partner. I started to tell certain friends more about myself, or at least tried to. And over time, with practice, these connections became less scary. With the help of a therapist, I was able to start telling some people about my bisexual identity. After I discovered that this part of myself could be met with love and encouragement, I felt more comfortable sharing other parts that didn't fit neatly into categories, like my gender expression. By slowly opening up to myself and others, I started to feel accepted, which is what I had wanted, desperately, all along.

Sharing certain parts of myself with others still feels daring. I'm out to only a handful of people, and some of the things in my life that are the most precious to me—writing, and music—are cards I keep close to my chest. But the age of coronavirus has given me the chance to work even more at connecting with people. Recently, I stayed up all night watching videos of concerts with my co-worker, something I never would have done before social distancing. I let my partner and my friend read a writing project I've been working on for years. I've started meditating,



which I hope will help me to feel more comfortable in my body and more open to connection. And when my anxiety prompts me to clean obsessively, to do everything perfectly, to hide away if I make a mistake, I try to remember the lesson I've learned over and over: the gray areas are who I am. I don't want to be afraid of them anymore.

Dani Feyn lives in Queens, NY, with her partner and many books. By day, she works in fundraising for a national environmental conservation non-profit; by night she writes, practices yoga, and listens to many podcasts.

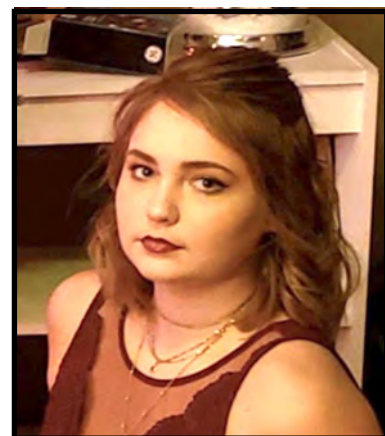
I Am a Woman

By Iliana Grace

He says,
“You seem very nice,
But you don't have that spice,
That extra little jive
That makes others feel more alive”
He says,
“Stop trying to be funny,
Please keep your voice down, honey,
You have a nice face,
Just take up less space”
He says,
“Your chest is too flat,
You eat too much fat,
Why are you always crying?
With all your dramatic sighing”
He says,
“You're pretty, not smart,
You have a good heart,
You aren't meant for men's work,
Pull your ass out and twerk”
He says,
“Keep it cool,
Stay collected,

You're a fool,
Go to bed”
But she doesn't.
She says,
“You can't keep me down,
You don't have that power,
You keep on your rants every day, every hour,
But you're wrong,
I am marvelous, stunning, magnificent, brilliant,
My brain is just right, and so are my tits,
The authority to say so is mine and mine alone,
For I am a woman
And I don't need you.”

Iliana Grace was born in Abilene, Texas, and took an interest in writing when she was about eight. She never had a shocking realization, so much as a gradual discovery about her sexuality, in the form of admiring women on the screen and kissing some of her female friends in her youth.



Virtual Shoulders to Lean On

By Kristen G.

Just like Ryan Seacrest said on the radio this morning, never have I spent so much time at home. Homebody is definitely not a word I can use to describe myself. Since I got my first apartment 20 years ago during college, hand-me-down furniture has been a cheap way to fill space within the walls as I live outside them. What's the point if I am never there? That being said, COVID-19 is likely challenging all of us, even the homebodies of the world.

Suddenly, this extroverted non-homebody is finding comfort and curiosity in the birds and wildlife outside her window. The song of the Cardinal and the delightful Massachusetts State Bird, the black-capped chickadee keep me company during this bizarre time of lockdown. The gray coo of the Mourning Dove is soothing and so utterly relevant.

When this started a little over six weeks ago, I took on all the Zoom calls I could, stockpiling connection like it was toilet paper. Zoom call after Zoom call, I tried to hold onto some semblance of my seemingly dying social life. And then I opened it to more! LGBT Dance lessons in Jamaica Plain where I'd typically have to drive an hour during rush hour, struggle to find parking and then risk getting a parking ticket for an expired meter? Heck yeah!

However, I quickly realized that there is something about trying to connect over a screen that is so exhausting; not sure what. Is it the odd feeling that I'm hosting a group of people in my living room without offering them tea? Or maybe the fear that I've been found out when I realize I wore that same sweater for the past three calls. Perhaps it's staring at my own face for hours on end for the first time ever (awkward). Or maybe only looking at people's faces in tiny boxes, all the while trying to dodge the discussion of COVID-19 because it's all everyone ever talks about, because man, this thing is huge and we need to talk about it. But doesn't all that talking of the looming virus keep you up at night?

I was listening to a Zoom call yesterday—surprised? It was a webinar about how to effectively work remotely with Zoom, Slack, and Microsoft Teams. A Zoom call about Zoom, ha! I dialed in really to just learn about Slack, because aren't we all Zoom experts by now? Fact: the number of Zoom accounts have increased 2,000% due to COVID-19. Zoom fatigue is real. You don't say?

The funny thing about these Zoom calls is that we can hang out with whomever we want, whenever we want, regardless of where we might be in this great big world. In these unique times, we wipe away all the extraneous material for a typical get-together: the actual location and event, what we are doing and where we are doing it. No hanging out at the bar now! There left in front of us are those we have in our life. Suddenly, we have a lot of choice of whom we might want to include in our day to day. Who is it

that we go to for comfort? Who is it that really matters to you?

As much as I want to hear from those college friends I haven't talked to in forever, or that really nice outgoing lesbian couple from the meetup, I have had to pare back to only those Zoom calls that really give back to me. Not to single out Zoom here, but let's just say it's like calling every soda Coke – Skype, Google Hangouts, whatever your flavor. All these Zoom calls are messing with our heads, too; nothing can replace “IRL” even if we tried. So how does one evade isolation in the age of COVID-19 when you live alone and are single? Nope, not by quickly finding that perfect fling for this new extended version of cuffing season.* Luckily, God prepared me for this day with a six-month training beforehand. Or maybe just my therapist did—either way, I'll take it.

Let's rewind to September 2019. I just had a large renovation finished at my condo after recently moving back in post-breakup with my ex. During those few years prior with my ex, I had my own sort of personal renovation. Not only was I coming into my new outward lesbian identity as a bisexual who appeared straight before, but I was also finally facing the harsh reality that my family has lacked in providing that critical emotional support I've needed to feel safe and loved in my life. The two themes are likely tied—doesn't it help to feel safe to come out? In addition, through observing and better understanding my ex's abuse of alcohol to cope with gender issues (she transitioned to be a woman while we were together), I came out of denial about my father's own alcoholism. All these years, I just thought my parents were party animals and my father had a high tolerance. Not quite! There was a lot of learning on how to set boundaries with family while I sorted it all out.

So, like I said, I'm single and back at my condo, and I felt like a very different person than I was when I started dating my ex back in 2015. Now I hang out with mostly lesbians, and all of those friends do not live near me. It felt like I was just moving to this sleepy suburban town all over again. I desperately needed to find all those hidden lesbians—they have to be somewhere around here! I joked with my therapist that I was going to hang out on the street with a sign reading “ISO lesbian friends”. Wanting some local hangouts, I reentered the local straight social groups that I was already familiar with and worked my “out” muscle amidst old and new acquaintances. Sure, there were a lot of questions about my new public identity. I looked at it as a way for me to bridge the straight/LGBT gap still prevalent in my age group. With the exception of a couple dudes, all went better than I expected.

*usually considered fall or winter when people pair up for comfort before the holidays

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I can tell my therapist is proud about helping me be more comfortable with uncovering my authentic self so that I can better explore my sexual identity. I know it's her job, but I'm probably a tough nut to crack, and I am ever so grateful for having her. Sometimes I feel like she is the mother cat holding onto my little kitten neck with her mouth, dragging me out of all the wrong places I am heading for. A big part of that is also navigating me into the right places, and by that, I mean healthy relationships. She kept reminding me to pick up the phone and call a friend when I felt alone, not just text them. She emphasized spending time with people one-to-one and it's really helped. As an extrovert, I love feeling the energy when a group of people gather. However, I now realize deep connections only come when you are open and vulnerable with each other, and that is so much easier to do when you are not in a group setting (at least it is for me!). Sure, several years of therapy have also helped me to be more open and in touch with my feelings. We tend to be more guarded in my family, and I still have some work to do. As I grow, I also learn to pick people who are better for me and my emotional needs, not just my interests.

As I look back on those six months leading up to the COVID-19 outbreak when I could get settled into my place after moving back in after a few years and ease my feelings of isolation, I know I have angels (and my therapist) looking out for me. I rely on those close friendships to get through this time more than anything else, and I know my friends also rely on me. Virtual shoulders to lean on. I feel soothed by their voice, virtual presence and whenever possible, their physical presence even if six feet away.

Kristen G. lives in the Boston area and is looking forward to soaking up the sun with lots of reading, kayaking, gardening, bicycling, and socially-distanc picnics this summer.



Skirt Club

By Topanga Turk

During these times of solitude and isolation, it's been difficult to stay true to my bisexual self. Without the connections of living in a majorly queer city like San Francisco, going to events and having the whole dating world at my fingertips with apps, it's been hard to remember and sit in my queer identity, while sitting at my parents' house, in the suburbs of Philadelphia, during quarantine.

What has been getting me through physical distancing has been the thriving online community my Skirt team has ramped up in the last two months. Skirt Club is an international women's-only community, which invites bi-curious, bisexual (and more) femme women to enjoy each other's company in a safe space to explore their sexuality. Before COVID-19, we held monthly events around the world for women to meet and get to know each other mentally, and physically. Since all our physical events are canceled and I'm no longer traveling to SF, LA or NYC to support the team in running events, my Community Manager colleagues have pivoted—like so many others—to an online space.

Each Wednesday at 8 P.M., we hold Zoom "In Chastity" Chats. These online talks center around our blog posts and can be about anything from what you're using to masturbate to your first time with a woman. During the chats, I hear stories from fellow members that can be vastly different from or completely alike my own journey or circumstance at the moment.

What I have been taking such pride in from hosting the USA online events is the sense of togetherness the members and myself get out of it. These two hours every Wednesday, I find my bisexuality again. I see my Skirt Sisters dressed in lingerie, sipping a drink and sharing their stories openly. I see my bisexuality in them. Being able to save this sacred space for vastly different women reminds me that I am a part of a whole. My voice and stories support other women along their bisexual journey to their own queerness.

The message that resonates with me and that I constantly tell our members is this: your bisexuality is YOUR journey. How you show up and share in this space is YOUR choice. Even when you are physically distancing, whom you choose to spend your virtual time with is YOURS. For me using my time in a way that fulfills me and connects with my chosen bisexual community has been my way to continue connecting to own my queerness through quarantine.

Topanga Turk is the U.S. Community Director for [Skirt Club](#), and a former elementary teacher and teacher coach working to help others bask in the glow of their sexuality.

Letters on paper / I shall write you every day / Beloveds of mine

By *Martine Mussies*

Dear readers of BWQ,

When was the last time you hand-wrote a letter? It may be decades ago when you jotted a letter to your penpal, or back in university when you wrote a letter to your parents, but do you remember how it felt? I do, because I regularly engage in the quaint, almost vintage, activity of snail mail. I am not a prepper at all (which explains why I am out of toilet paper for weeks, already), but when our Prime Minister announced the so-called “intelligent lock-down,” I did buy myself some stuff to survive: nice postcards, some beautiful pens, funny stickers, and beautiful stationery. New times require new habits, and while we are physically distancing, I want to remain socially close. My way to do so is by the time-honored tradition of sending letters. Not just e-mailing, chatting and apping, but also by good old-fashioned letter writing. And as sending and receiving snail mail turned out to have immense psychological, emotional and physical benefits for me, with this “open letter,” I hope to inspire you to give it a try as well.

Our brains are wired to connect to the extent that there is even a neural overlap between social and physical pain. Therefore, sending a letter can help both you and the recipient. Writing and crafting the special gift of a loving letter can increase your happiness, as activities that revolve around love, friendships, and other social connections tend to activate the parts of the brain that are responsible for emotion, motivation, memory, and even attention. Writing and crafting are therapeutic and change how you perceive time and space. No more staring to your WhatsApp screen—a letter might or might not arrive in your mailbox today or somewhere in the future. And when it does, somebody miles away can suddenly feel very close to you. By connecting through letters, you can also strengthen your sense of self. As we cannot attend any “pink” events at the moment, corresponding with others within the bi+ community helps to address that part of our shared group identities.

Handwritten letters can spread love. The secret about writing is that it gives you an opportunity to express exactly what you want to say, to focus on what matters most. Not only that, you are able to communicate it in a way that will make your situation or relationship better, as a letter allows you to reflect and use the most suitable words and/or images. Writing a thoughtful letter will often make you feel happier, and satisfied, and this might help in decreasing any feelings of sadness, depression, shame, anxiety, loneliness and stress. Therefore, any time you write a love letter, friendship letter, gratitude letter, compassionate letter, or forgiveness letter, you're not only making the other person feel happy and appreciated, but also uplifting your own spirit. Whether you like to say, “Thank you,” “I'm sorry,” or just “Hi there,” doing it by letter feels more classy.

Through “gift wrapping” your words, you can make your letters as artistic as you want. You can make collages from old magazines and bright up your letters (and the envelopes) with stickers, drawings, potato stamps, and “washi” masking tape. But you do not have to. Snail mail is already unique, and you can just start small with some nice postcards. Or type a letter on your computer to print and send. Keep it simple, write as you would talk, and do not worry about any of your skills; it is not about being perfect, it is about being present. Creating a piece of snail mail boosts your self-esteem and increases your optimism and happiness. Being in the moment by focusing on beautifying my letter decreases my anxiety about the unpredictable nature of the future. By writing about the things I am grateful for, I feel more grounded. Writing also allows me to express negative feelings on paper, to get unwanted thoughts and emotions off the chest, to reflect, thus I am able to gain new insights and move on. And when you feel like it, do write about your dreams and goals for the future, to create super strong and magnetic roots for yourself, as notes in longhand are much easier to retain than typed memos. Writing about your purpose and meaning increases your resilience. And because of the psychological processes it activates, letter writing also has many physical benefits, including lowering blood pressure and improving sleep quality.

Of course, we no longer need the Pony Express as a communication link, but just like in those times, we can make sure that the mail delivery becomes one of the highlights of our days. In contrast to typing an email, that can end up in “spam” and/or getting accidentally deleted, writing by hand is slow, and your recipient will appreciate your effort and keep your letter, cherish it for emotional value, re-read it and remember it. There's a good chance that your post is going to make someone's day—and isn't that a wonderful feeling?

Take care, you all. Stay home, stay healthy, stay safe.

Yours, Martine

Martine Mussies is a Ph.D. candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, and a professional musician. Her other interests include autism, (neuro)psychology, Japanese martial arts, video games, King Alfred and science fiction. More: martinemussies.nl.



To connect while keeping distance

By MagdaFromHell

I won't lie. These are hard times. For all of us, and especially for a community that needs to stick together to fight for a better today and an even better tomorrow. When this year started, I had a lot of plans. Now it's May, and I have barely left my apartment since March 16th. Normally, I'm a person who eagerly reads the newspaper with a first cup of coffee and watches the news regularly. But for the past few weeks, I have been unable to maintain this connection with reality because it scares me, it makes me feel hopeless, and it's become an act of self-care to reduce my daily dose of information. Instead, I try to connect as much as possible with people online or even with the cashier at the local grocery store or other customers as we dance the "ballet of polite social distancing" with our shopping carts. Sometimes we make eye contact and share a laugh. It lifts the heaviness of the situation a bit. But I miss real personal contact like being able to hug my friends. The last person I hugged (except for members of my household) is my friend Steffi with whom I spent a weekend before I started to self-quarantine. I like to joke that as soon as this mess allows us to return to a rather normal life, I'll jump at random strangers to hug them. Normally I'm not that much of a touchy-feely person, but I crave human contact and interaction.

What really pains me is the loss of the possibility of travel, not just for my own amusement but to connect with different cultures, different people, strangers who will become friends. And I miss seeing family and friends who live in different parts of the world. Some of my friends and family members live in the U.S., and I haven't seen them since 2016. I was looking forward to seeing them again in September after four years, and it hurts a great deal to think about the possibility of not seeing and hugging them. I haven't canceled my travel plans yet because that would mean giving up the last piece of hope I have of seeing them.

I dearly miss the random connections I made during several events throughout spring and early summer which are all now canceled. What also hurts is that the Pride activities in my hometown originally planned for the end of August have also been canceled. I had been looking forward to participating in another Speakers' Corner, and our whole LGBTQIA+ community is feeling the impact of having one of their most significant visibility events canceled.

Because I'm not able to hug my family, friends, and beloved peer group members at the moment, I have had to find different ways of bonding. I've been phoning and video chatting with friends nearby and abroad. I've increased my



activity on Twitter, and since the beginning of the year, I have come across amazing bi activists from all over the world with whom I talk daily on topics ranging from bi issues to how to tackle our fears during this crisis. I feel that there is a lot of support inside our wonderful bi+ community: looking out for each other, supporting fundraisers, sharing articles and blogs, and even organizing a wonderful "Virtual Bi Pride" on April 25th. Although online interaction cannot replace in-person connection, I am so grateful that, no matter what's going on, my community is there to listen and to offer a virtual hug.

Times like these could easily be used to divide us from each other, and it is in our best interest to maintain connection. We're lucky to live in a day and age which offers us plenty of technological possibilities to do this. Personally, I will try to make this planned Speakers' Corner happen as a virtual panel. We can stay connected by organizing small conferences and gatherings online. And there is a chance that virtual events will attract people who hadn't shown up before because they are uncomfortable in large crowds. As stressful and challenging these weeks and months are now, they hold the potential to help our community grow closer and maybe even increase our visibility. This modest hope keeps me going. I am grateful to the wonderful bi community I get to be a part of.

MagdaFromHell [Melanie] currently lives with her recent partner in Bremen, Germany, where she works as a secretary. She identifies as bisexual and that's enough to be valid. For her, activism begins with the simple act of being visible.

Nancy, continued from page 1

“friend” community if things don’t work out with my crush.

And so for my flirting and crushing (and hopefully, when the pandemic lifts, real-life dating) needs, I have been jumping back and forth between the lesbian Zoom chat world and the dating site where the (primarily cis het) men are the ones responding to my profile and flirting with me.

It’s a bit dizzying, and I start to feel imposter syndrome with it all, bouncing around between the bi community, the lesbian community, and a mostly-straight-cis dating community.

The bi community is, obviously, the safest-feeling virtual space for being myself as an out bisexual. But it is also the least safe-feeling space for flirting, since, as I said, it is my precious real-life community of friends as well, and I don’t want to threaten that with a crush or flirtation gone bad, you know?

So my primary flirting is either with members of these virtual Zoom chat groups of lesbians who probably assume I am one of them (even though as I befriend them individually, I do my best to come out as bi sooner than later to stay true to myself) or with men who respond to my profile on a dating site (although my profile is clear that I don’t want to hear from people who don’t take safe distancing seriously, who vote for Trump, or who are anti-LGBTQ... and again, I come out as bi within the first or second conversation with the men who hit me up).

It is disconcerting sometimes, feeling myself bifurcated, or trifurcated, bouncing (or Zooming) back and forth between different online social communities to make connections, whether they are romantic or just general social connections and friendships.

But this is only true if I look at it the wrong way. If I’m perpetually waiting for the other shoe to drop, to be judged for my bisexuality (or to have to explain it, or push back against stereotypes), by the lesbians or (generally straight cis) men in those different online communities, then, yeah, it feels unsettling and uncomfortable.



The truth is, however, the other shoe hasn’t dropped at all through any of this. Among the lesbians and cis men I’ve interacted with, even flirted with, since I began this dance swinging back and forth between virtual pandemic-era communities, not one has given me any kind of negative feedback when I’ve come out as bi. Not one. Not one lesbian has sneered at me that I’m not really one of them, and not one man has reacted with the assumption that I exist to provide him with a threesome.

Why? Because, in truth, and especially perhaps in game-changing historic moments like this when we are all more vulnerable and more aware of each other, I have done a good job connecting with communities of people of all stripes who are just, at the core, good people. Those I am drawn to are, like me, looking to connect not just because of similarities, but because of diversity as well. I am not a stereotype, and don’t want to be treated as one. But as a very wise (bi) friend recently reminded me, by the same token, I need to not make assumptions about others as well—including the assumption that lesbians will judge me, straight men will objectify me, or that those in “other” demographic groups beyond the bi community will not fully welcome me or accept who I am.

If I resist the defensive and unfair inclination to approach each group as a monolith of exclusionary narrow-minded sheep, but instead approach each community with open mind and heart, willing to view each individual person in each respective community as their own distinct person as capable of warmth and acceptance as my bi friends, life just feels so much more peaceful.

And it feels more honest. Because, ultimately, we’re all different, but we’re also all in this together. I pick my communities, my friends, and my crushes by who they are at the core, not by their sexual orientation, and not by their gender identity.

Of all the self-growth I am focused on during this world-turned-upside-down pandemic, among the most important is my work on approaching my various social communities not as opposite worlds in tension with each other, but rather each as beautiful landscapes of unique individuals. And each of those landscapes may be framed differently by differently titled communities, but in the end are each as lovely in their diversity and openness toward me as long as I am also open toward and with them.

As the saying goes: we all have much more in common with each other, after all, than we have differences. From common humanity to community, I am consciously endeavoring to bridge my connections smoothly, viewing each not as an isolated island, but rather an archipelago chain of communities, each one a precious part of this beautiful, fragile, wounded but wondrous world we all share.

Nancy Marcus is a lawyer in Southern California who has been proudly out as bi for three decades. She is the co-founder of BiLaw, a national organization of bisexual lawyers, and the author of a series of “Legally Bi” articles on bi.org.

leaving that security blanket behind. That evening when the email arrived, some of us met up on campus to discuss our thoughts and feelings. We weren't in search of any answers, just community. It was an unexpected transition and, although each of us had had our fair share of experience with transitions, this one was different. Nobody knew what would come next.

I am thankful to be out to my immediate family and to have them behind me, supporting me. I am not out to my extended family as bisexual or transgender, as they are immigrants who hold cultural values and preconceptions that do not make it safe for me to come out to them. That being said, I am quite privileged to have been able to return home to a loving family. Although my family holds conservative political views, and although we definitely do not see eye to eye on many things, they try their best, and whenever I have needed any kind of support, they have been there for me. Many of my friends on campus do not have that privilege.

My partner identifies as pansexual, and she is not out to her family. For many students like her, returning home meant refamiliarizing oneself with all the ways it is appropriate and inappropriate to allow their identities to show. It meant reentering a space with religious, cultural, or political walls. It meant returning to finding solace in subreddits and Twitter feeds from the comfortable privacy of one's phone or laptop, to finding acknowledgment and love through iMessage and Facebook groups and Instagram DMs. My partner and I chat on Facetime every day. Face-to-face connection is vital for both of us, as transitioning from seeing one another every day to not seeing one another for nearly two months has been extremely difficult.

Likewise, remaining plugged into my community, although virtually, has been vital for my well-being and mental health. Each Friday I facilitate an affinity group for my fellow transgender, genderqueer, and questioning students. Our weekly meetings are one hour long, and for the past two months we have been meeting on Zoom. It's a different feeling, not being in the resource center around one another, not caring what someone should say as that was *our* space. I appreciate that technology allows us to connect now, but the faces on my screen are different. They talk in hushed voices. Their eyes dart around, focused on their bedroom doors, the sounds coming from the kitchen, the people walking up and down the sidewalk in front of their park bench. Some members choose to use the chat box instead of speaking live. Most don't stay past fifteen or twenty minutes. Luckily, social media apps have helped us. Because of the privacy they can afford, they have been a crucial resource in allowing us to connect more discreetly.

While my connections with my family, my partner, and my friends have been of the utmost importance to me, so too has disconnection. I have taken up yoga as well as meditation to detach my mind from the images on television and on my phone. Taking to my mother's yoga mat allows me to minimize,

if temporarily, my stressors and anxiety. As I learn new moves and poses, I disconnect to further find myself amidst this crisis, to seek better autonomy over my body and mind. As I inhale and exhale deeply, I forget for a moment about being misgendered, about gender dysphoria, about the rising copays for hormones at my pharmacy. I forget for a moment about being laid off from my job, my looming final exams, my fear for the future. I breathe and exist in my body, loving it as it is, recognizing it where it is.

This crisis will pass, but in the meantime, I try to acknowledge my boundaries between connection and disconnection, this liminal space that is my life. While simultaneously medically transitioning and coming into my own as a bisexual woman, I have been pressured by society to categorize myself. I must be easily discernible as either a *man* or a *woman*. I must be attracted totally to either *men* or *women*. Neither of these things are true for me, and, although I call myself a bisexual transgender woman, I see both my gender identity and sexuality as fluid. I am still learning about myself, and while I use these labels, I am so much more than categories. I am so much more than one or the other. Being quarantined has allowed me to work on charting an individualized path for myself, one that centers my needs, but also one that allows me to connect and exchange support with others. Both aspects are essential.

During this age of isolation, prioritize yourself as well as your communities and connections. You are a multifaceted individual with unique needs, desires, and comforts. Take some time to allow your mind and body to rest and reset, to remember that you are human. That all of us are. And while it is important to connect, it is just as important to disconnect!

R. Bacchetta is a proud bisexual trans woman living in Atlanta, Georgia. She loves writing, cooking, and, well, being queer.



Deadly Women, Dangerous Romance

By MB Austin

The Storm Fronts series explores the perilous lives, heart-pounding adventures, and complicated love story of two women in a future world complete with space travel, Talents (empaths, precognition, telekinesis, etc.), and mercenaries seeking to create super-soldiers. Vick Corren provides a living test case, becoming VC1 after an accident requires various parts of her body, including sixty-three percent of her brain, be replaced with sophisticated biotech. Only empath Kelly, hired by the corporation to help VC1 regulate her emotions, treats Vick as a human equal, a friend and colleague. Anything more endangers them both.

Q&A with author Elle E. Ire

Q: I love your tag line, “Deadly Women, Dangerous Romance.” It certainly fits the Storm Fronts series! How did you come up with it? Does it reflect all your work as well?

A: I’m so glad you like it! Honestly, it just came to me. I had noticed a few other authors with tag lines and I liked the concept. This one seemed to encompass pretty much

everything that I write; so yes, it does reflect all of my work. I always feature powerful female characters who are capable of killing to survive, even if they’re reluctant to do so. This trait makes having any kind of romance with them a very dangerous prospect indeed. And it creates lots of action, tension, and angst between the romantic leads, all of which I love to write. I love protagonists who are heroes with a dark side, who question their morals and ethics, who do what must be done but suffer from having to do it. And exploring the women who can love them despite all this also fascinates me. Their relationships are never easy and yet they keep fighting for those relationships; I think that’s what makes the pairings work to hold a reader’s interest.

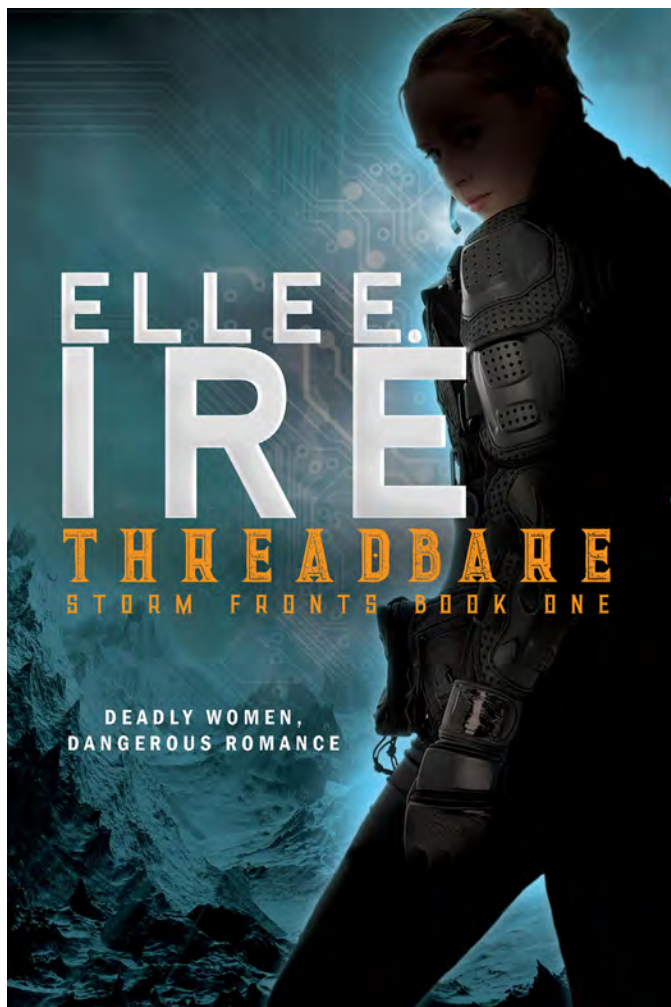
Q: Vick’s experience of losing memories, her sense of self, and the ability to regulate emotion so accurately reflects the visceral experience of many trauma survivors, particularly those with brain injuries. How did you achieve such verisimilitude?

A: The quick answer is that I love this type of character—the tormented soul, the one who has been dropped into hell and fought her way back but doesn’t quite know if she made it out.

I am drawn to books, TV series, and films that feature this character type, so I have consumed tons of media featuring these sorts of survivors and I tend to soak up the details and then incorporate them in my own way with my own characters.

The longer answer is that I began writing the character of Vick Corren when I was still in college. To give you some perspective, I am fifty years old, so it has been a long time since I first imagined her. She has been through multiple incarnations, been part of fanfiction that no one will ever see, had an entire novel written about her that was eventually scrapped. I have worked, reworked, and worked again with this one character for about thirty years. In my head, I have put her through every type of trauma and disaster, then worked through her actions, reactions, and even dialogue to play with how she would view herself and how she would react to each scenario. When I wrote the Storm Fronts series, I had thirty years of material to draw from. Vick is, without a doubt, the most complicated and complex character I have ever worked with. I think having amassed so much background knowledge about her, most of which never makes it into a book, adds to the realism of her overall persona in the series.

Q: My favorite science fiction makes me examine what it means to be human. Vick struggles to share Kelly’s faith that she is still human, while being treated as if she is a machine by others. Although her gender and sexuality are not an issue in this future society, her experience of being othered and her heroic effort to form and hold onto a healthy sense of self feels



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so relevant to this real world, in many times and cultures. Did you plan for the story to resonate with readers who are queer, non-binary, or trans, or perhaps have an intersectional identity that their families/peers/strangers don't readily understand and accept?

A: Well, to begin with, Vick Corren was originally straight. Remember that novel I first wrote about her [above]? Yeah, she was entirely straight and had no love interests at all. This was, in no small part, due to the fact that I had not come to terms with my own sexuality (I am bisexual), and therefore could not bring myself to make Vick bisexual as well even though my internal author voice was telling me that Vick was not only bisexual but needed a female romantic interest to help balance her emotionally. Her potential romantic interests came out in my head when I was imagining her, but they never made it to the page.

When that first novel failed to sell, and Vick continued to invade my thoughts on a regular basis, I finally decided she needed to be the person she was truly meant to be. By that point, I had already written and sold one novel featuring a bisexual protagonist (*Vicious Circle* in 2015), and I had gotten a lot more comfortable with myself, so I wrote *Threadbare*.

I did not start out to make Vick's search for her own humanity and sense of self a metaphor for those being "othered" (to use your term) in today's world, but I realized after writing the first

few chapters that this was where my subconscious mind had taken me. Once I figured that out, then I worked to expand and extend that metaphor wherever I saw an opportunity to do so in the book. It became intentional very quickly; I did hope that readers who felt "othered" themselves would connect to her struggles.

Q: Now that I've read books one (*Threadbare*) and two (*Patchwork*—just released in April), I'm suffering some withdrawal having to wait for the conclusion. And I can't tell anyone too many specifics, because spoilers would ruin the great twists and turns. Where can I find people to geek out about the books with? I have so many moments to relive, and that incredible cliffhanger to speculate about....

A: Well, my Elle E. Ire Facebook page might be a good place to find others who have finished at least *Threadbare*. And I'm always happy to talk to readers about my books on Facebook and Twitter. I especially love hearing which scenes really worked for readers and why, or whether they are primarily Team Vick or Team Kelly. And yeah, that cliffhanger at the end of *Patchwork* is a doozy. I thought one of my editors was going to strangle me for that one.

MB Austin is the creator of the Maji Rios series (Badass women in love and danger. Because saving the world is sexy.) Find out more at www.mbaustin.me.



Trees

*Photograph by
Jo-Anne Carlson*



Jo-Anne Carlson is a writer, artist, and musician who believes that who you love, how you love, and how many you love, shouldn't matter. Hearing from friends is a joyous occasion, so please drop her a line at josexpressions@yahoo.com.

The "Bi Office"

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

Ongoing Events

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

2nd Mondays:

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

Tea with Bi Women Partnered with Men. 7pm. Info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com

1st Wednesdays:

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

2nd Thursdays:

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

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Brunch. 11:30am

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

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

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

[not your usual] CALENDAR

Hello friends! This is Chas, your Calendar Editor. Even in this unusual time, you can still find community with many online events, which you can find at biresource.org/calendar and [meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities](https://www.meetup.com/Bi-Community-Activities). In fact, I would like to make a special invitation to our readers who are not located in the Boston area: please consider joining us at one (or all) of our online brunches this summer! This is a great group of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks and we would love to make friends across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some brunch while we chat about bi issues and other fun topics. You can find more details below!

June 13 (Saturday) from 1 - 2 pm US Eastern Time, theme: Happy Pride!

July 19 (Sunday) from 1 - 2 pm US Eastern Time

August 15 (Saturday) from 1 - 2 pm US Eastern Time

Brunches will be held via Zoom (you can also call in). If you would like to attend, please email Chas at avon.alger@gmail.com.

A link to the brunch will be sent to you via email 1 hour before the brunch starts (be sure to check your spam folder). Chas will be available to help with any issues connecting from 12 to 1 pm. We will also send a phone number if you are calling in by phone.

Hope to see you there!

-Chas, Brunch Coordinator and Calendar Editor



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.)