

We Are the Sign Makers

By Carla Imperial and Kai Imperial-Jewett

I think the question on every parent's mind is, "Am I doing this right?"

I know that my parents did the best they could with what they had to work with. Right before my dad passed away, he confided in me that he had never heard his father tell him that he loved him. And that once, when he was a boy during WWII, he walked with his father for over ten miles in the jungle to get to a place where they could get supplies, and his dad didn't say a word to him the entire time. It's no wonder that I never heard my dad tell me that he loved me until the day my mom died. From that point on, he ended our phone conversations with, "Love you, darling."

In our household, saying, "I love you," is as common as saying, "Thank you!" and "How you doin'?" When we're out and about, I hear our 14-year-old daughter, Kai, say, "Thank you so much," without fail, or "You okay?" when she hears a loud crash from the other room (typically me, walking into something), or I see her run to open the door for a disabled person, and I think, "Check. Done that right."

But there are so many things that we, as parents, don't have a roadmap for. There are challenges we never saw coming with



our kids, and suddenly, we find ourselves lost and terrified that we might get it completely wrong and wreck our kids for life. Fortunately, during those times, I lean on values instilled from my parents to act as my compass: having faith, trusting my intuition, knowing that mistakes and imperfection are okay, remembering forgiveness (to others and myself), and doing the best that we can. And so far, with those "tools" in our back pockets, my wife, Megan, and I have managed to work through every hard spell with our kid. And she, Kai, continues to blow us away with her perseverance and heart.

Like most people from my generation, the law of the land when it came to coming out was, "Don't." Period. "Just don't." The

Carla & Kai, continued on p. 20

Beyond Heteronormative Reproduction and Building a Multi-Species Future

By Josephine Raye Kelly

I wonder what it would be like to build a future that doesn't cast humanity as the protagonist of the earth. What kind of future could we build that centers the needs and survival of non-human living things? I'm starting to feel my call to motherhood is about being a cross-species parent. Maybe I'm meant to continue a long queer tradition of caregiving in non-heteronormative ways. Because isn't that what queerness is about: denying the scripts that were written for us and creating our own blueprint for life?

Most women are conditioned to envision their future on a specific track. The track is centered around marriage and sex-act based reproduction. I thought becoming a mom was a destiny I couldn't refuse. I viewed childbirth as an inevitable rite of passage, but I've become suspicious of that assumption. The more I embrace my queerness and gender fluidity, the less I value the goal of a nuclear family. It's not completely possible to untether our socialization

from our inherent instincts, but if I can learn to listen and trust my desires then I can build a life I'm proud of.

I planned most of my twenties with the unquestioned assumption that I would have children by thirty. I didn't even consider a future without children. But now when I weigh how much I value my independence and pursuit of spontaneity with the financial, physical, and emotional challenges of raising children, I realize that they might not fit with my ideal future. It's also not an exaggeration to say that I think about the irreversible damage of colonization and climate apocalypse most days. I don't know how to justify bringing a child into a world that might become inhospitable in their lifetime. However, once I've reined in my anxiety, this view actually helps me find meaning beyond individualism. As a white person, I inherited a violent legacy of ecological destruction for the sake of industrial development. This is something I am working to unlearn so that I can be accountable, interconnected, and in right relationship with all living things.

Josephine, continued on p. 27

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Boston-area women:

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

The theme of this issue is “Parenting While Bi+” Writers were asked to tell us about their experiences with parenting and/or their journey toward parenting. How has their bi+ identity shaped these experiences? What challenges and hopes do they have, and how have bi+ communities mattered in this part of their lives? We also invited people to reflect on their decision *not* to be a parent, and on creative and nontraditional ways to “parent.”

The #bihive came through! With essays, fiction, and poetry, we cover a wide array of subjects and experiences. We received an avalanche of submissions—these are just some of the high-quality submissions that came in.

On a separate note, we wish to thank the 67 donors who made our first-ever Give OUT Day fundraising campaign a success. We are grateful to our new intern Josephine Kelly, who coordinated the entire campaign single-handedly. Josephine is the reason we exceeded our \$5000 fundraising goal.

And finally, if you look at the bottom of this (and every) page, you will see that this issue is Volume 40, Number 4. This means that we are completing our 40th year of publication! I’ve been involved with the Boston Bisexual Network (which hosted BWQ for its first 38+ years) since it began in 1983. We’ve adapted and survived and thrived on a miniscule budget, and we have been a lifeline to many. I am proud to have been part of this project for the past 40 years, and I look forward to our future.

If you are interested in sending us a birthday gift, you can do so at BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate.

Enjoy the read!

~Robyn

Apphia reads BWQ.

**Send a picture of
yourself reading**

BWQ to

biwomeneditor

@gmail.com.

Be creative!



Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly*

Call for submissions

Winter 2023: Bodily Autonomy, Privacy, & Feminism

With the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, and the devastating loss of constitutional rights to bodily autonomy and privacy, we invite you to share your reflections both specifically and tangentially connected to this event. What has *Roe v. Wade* meant to you? What are your thoughts as an international observer? And what role does feminism play in your life as a bi+ person? Share your anger, sadness, hope for the future, or anything else coming up for you. Submit by **November 1, 2022**.

Spring 2023: Bi+ History

What do you know about the history of the bi movement, as distinct from the LGBTQ+ movement? What are the significant historic achievements that we should remember? What about your own bi history? Share the first bi pride activity you participated in, the significant bi person in history whose life you’ve admired. Interview a bi elder. Review books or other media that reflect bi lives through the years. Plus, share your photos, artwork, or poetry that capture those important bi moments in your or our community history. Submit by **February 1, 2023**.

Submission guidelines are online at biwomenquarterly.com. Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to **biwomeneditor@gmail.com**.

Note: If you wish to use a pseudonym, just let us know.

We are an all-volunteer organization (though we do pay our interns!). Want to proofread, edit submissions, host one of our monthly brunches, help us with social media, fundraising, our Etsy shop (BiProducts.Etsy.com), or our website? If you’re a student, consider an internship. If you’d like to help out, please send an email to Robyn at biwomeneditor@gmail.com.

Bi Women Quarterly has been in continuous publication since 1983. It began as a project of the Boston Bisexual Women’s Network (BBWN), a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women and nonbinary folks together for support and validation. Through the production of *Bi Women Quarterly* and related activities, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other non binary sexualities. More broadly, we work through an intersectional lens and seek the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and racial and ethnic identities.

Around the World: Anonymous, from East Africa

By *Anonymous*

Note: this article contains references to violence.

I am a bisexual woman from an East African country. I was born and raised by a religious family in the capital city. I lived with both my father and mother under the same roof throughout my childhood. We were a middle-income family and had the basic needs of life. Growing up, we were a family of 12 children, all from one birth mum. Our parents were hard-working, and we were a little more privileged in comparison to other large families around us. Growing up and being the firstborn, I believe I was my parents' favorite and they nurtured me into being a responsible child. Whenever they were not around, I would be the "deputy" parent at home. This was coupled with being responsible at school, earning various roles such as "school prefect." My discipline was reflected in my academic performance.

At the age of eight years, one sad memory I have is the loss of the sister who followed me. She was seven and this depressed my family to a large extent because it happened so suddenly. And I was left with no playmate, and instead had to be a mature girl because the next younger child was just four years old. The most interesting event of my childhood before age 10 was when one day at school the head teacher was talking to us during the school assembly. The pupils around me were talking and I raised my voice to them to keep quiet and—boom—the headteacher noticed and I was immediately given a junior prefect role. That was a major turning point for me.

Growing up, I imagined the best thing about being an adult would be to be able to have the final word on everything in the home. I grew up thinking adults talk to God and he opens up future things to them and they practically know everything that would happen in the present and future. Professionally, I wanted to be an engineer.

What is interesting about me is that I can speak up when I want, and I can also keep my opinions to myself. I am a very friendly person, and I am funny. I come from a very conservative background about certain issues especially sexuality and gender identity. I like to uplift others and I will always give others my best self no matter what, but don't get in my bad books—all that will vanish!

Searching online for resources and LGBTQ+ groups in the United States, I came across a church and emailed their pastor. I wrote to her about what I was going through, and she told me what they could offer at an LGBT asylum organization. She linked me up with two East African lesbians who were in the task force at the time and later to the ministry head, and I kept in contact with him until I arrived here.

I had a long-time girlfriend who was a lesbian and we stayed together in the same house. I had met her during high school at a single-sex school. We went to school together at University. We had both been disowned by our families due to our sexual

orientation and had really gone through ups and downs together as is life's journey. We graduated from University and started working at different companies. A few years ago, I was invited as a keynote speaker in Europe. There I met people who were outspoken about their gender and sexual identities—something I had never seen before. I went back home and told her about it but we both knew the rules of the country and we knew what the consequences could be. That same year there was an international music festival. We went to it since most of our queer friends were attending and that's where trouble began: one news outlet reported that the festival was for LGBTQ+ people and that was enough to trigger turmoil for most of us, especially those who were known for frequenting the festival. That left us shifting from one place to another, one part of the country to another, leaving our jobs and being constantly on the run for fear of being taken into custody because that would mean decades years in cold cells for engaging in queer behavior.

One evening, when we were in an apartment that we had just moved into in a neighborhood we thought was safe, we were ambushed by police sirens, taken into custody, and spent two hours being interrogated. We were put into the same police station but different interrogation rooms. During my interrogation I kept denying having an affair with a fellow female as we had agreed with each other for safety. Later, at around 9:00 the following morning, I was set free and went directly home covered in a hood and with a blanket over my face to avoid media cameras. When I arrived home, my partner was not yet there. I tried calling her phone and when she picked up, she said, "It's high time we broke up," adding, "after all, you are even interested in men, and you denied our relationship in front of the police officer." I explained to her that was the deal we had made, but it all fell on deaf ears. I tried getting her to meet with me and she became adamant.

After the lockdown in 2020, I got involved with a male partner who had been vibing me for some time. He persuaded me to move in with him. Two months down the road I got pregnant and that's when hell broke loose. He claimed he didn't want to have a child born by someone who is "confused" (I had told him about myself at the start of the relationship). I suggested that we separate and that I have an abortion. He called me a murderer and I asked him, "What do you want?"

He started locking me up into the house, abusing and beating me for no reason, taking away my phones, and leaving me with what I can refer to as a home prison. He resorted to raping me whenever he wanted, even though I was carrying his child. One time I even bled, which led me to think that the child was coming

out. He didn't allow me to go to the hospital. I contemplated suicide and he later commanded me to give him the child after its birth. He said, "Give it to me and I will leave you alone, or else I will take you to the police." I knew he could because his family has strong political control, so I knew he had the power to make me vanish.

When I went into labor, I experienced severe back pain. I had never given birth before, and I didn't realize I was in labor because I thought it would involve stomach pain. I showed up at the hospital well-guarded by his people. I failed to deliver, and it turned into a c-section. Four days later I was discharged from the hospital. At the gate of the hospital, he took the baby away from me and drove away.

I became depressed, even heartbroken because I had started bonding with my child. I started having panic attacks. I was stranded with nowhere to go and very afraid. One of the nurses at the hospital found me in despair and crying and she asked, "What's wrong?" I explained to her what had happened. She said, "You need to get on your feet and also work with a lawyer."

I was moving around like a headless chicken. I called a gay friend on a public pay phone and he picked me up and took me to his gay group place but the fact is that even the gay community treats me as not equal to them: they think I am just in transition from gay to straight and that I might even go back to being straight.

Fast forward three weeks: through a lawyer, I filed a complaint with the police, attempting to get my child back. I feared going to the police because I knew that would mean my whole story would come out and I would be incarcerated for my sexual orientation would be out there. After several meetings, the police

sided with my ex, and I lost custody of my child. After getting this bombshell news, I decided to walk home and, on the way, a motorcycle taxi offered me a ride back home, but he ended up dumping me in a den of other men and I ended up being raped just three months after giving birth, on the same day I lost custody of my baby.

I just wanted not to see any other day after that and that's when I decided to re-contact the pastor in the U.S. to ask if I could come and find a safe place anywhere in the world. I already had a U.S. visa I had gotten in 2020 for a conference.

The pastor linked me up with the LGBT asylum ministry head but I had to work on COVID vaccinations and figure out how to get an air ticket. I sold off my assets and arrived in the U.S. early in the morning, though I ended up missing two flights beforehand. I found the ministry head waiting for me in the cold night, and he ushered me to the LGBT asylum organization.

As a bi person I have not been accepted by gay or straight societies. You feel like you are not a part of them and are seen as polygamous even though you can be bi and monogamous.

Sincerely, the LGBT asylum organization has helped with accommodation and a monthly stipend of \$500, and the rest I am still trying to figure out. I'm excited that a bi women's group might be helpful. I will need help in transitioning into this new like-minded society.

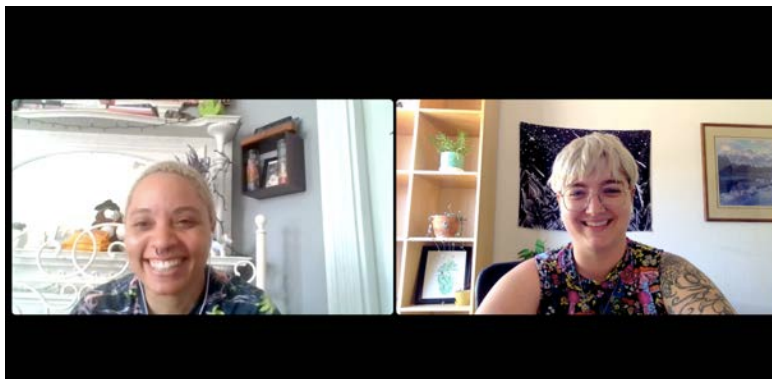


A Warm Welcome to Our Interns

Thanks to a successful Give OUT Day fundraising campaign and a grant from the Visibility Impact Fund, we are delighted to report that we currently have not one but TWO interns helping us out.

Mika Jackson

(left) is a bi-coastal lesbian nomad currently based in Queens. She is passionate about LGBTQ+ issues, women's rights, and agriculture. You can find her interests are often where those subjects intersect.



Josephine Raye Kelly

(right) is a bi/queer writer and multi-media artist living among the redwoods on the Pacific Coast. They are passionate about exploring the intersections of creativity, embodiment, and collective liberation.

Coming Out in a Myriad of Ways

By Beth Smyers Innis

I've come out to my children several times. It takes a lot of emotional effort each time. I try to be happy they don't see me any differently after, and as a result they forget, and sometimes I am frustrated because it feels like yet another thing my tween and teen don't hear that I'm desperately trying to communicate.

The first time I came out to them, my mom questioned, "Why do they need to know? They are so young!" My gut instinct was: They need to know that I could have chosen a man or a woman, that I happened to choose their dad, but I could have just as easily married a woman. This didn't help my mom understand, but it did ground me in the need to share who I am.

The second time I came out to them, I could see their friends starting to fly their flags in all sorts of ways and I felt strongly that the kids in my life would only benefit from seeing different expressions of healthy sexuality. How many times had I looked around me as a youth and observed expressions of so many things, different from myself and my parents, that led to greater choices for myself? Also, how often do I have to wear this "MIGHTY BI" shirt for you two yahoos to get the picture?

The third time was more of a reminder. "Yes, remember, I am the B in LGBT." "Right, yes!" they said and carried on with their days. It was more of a cool factor than a "Wait, what? Explain!" and that time was easier.

So, I thought we were all set.

When their friend came out as pan, I congratulated them and wrote them a letter. *Go, me!* I thought. I'm there. I've arrived. Definitely a grown-up, now!

Both my kids are theatre kids. I love watching all these kids in action as they try different identities on and land somewhere I didn't expect. At one event, I donned my "Protect Queer Kids" sweatshirt. I had no idea what an impact that would make.

I thought, *Hey, great, I'm super friendly! I'm a bi mom supporting all the queer kids!* Many of the kids gave me some unexpected eye contact as they said with emphasis, "I like your shirt!" and both my kids made mention of how cool the kids thought it was.

At the next theatre event, my older daughter, then fourteen, said, "So do you think you'll wear your MIGHTY BI t-shirt to this show?" I practically choked on my "Well, sure, honey, I'd be happy to!"

It turned out there was a huge difference between wearing a shirt and embracing queer kids and outing myself as a bi parent. It turned out it made my palms sweat and my desire to pull my cardigan over my t-shirt almost unsurmountable.

And then I pictured this:

Little Beth who didn't really think too much about her thoughts of *I guess I'll wait to date girls until college and then I'll figure it out.* And then she met the person of her dreams who happened to be a man and then it took another fifteen years to figure it out.

Little Unknown Theatre Kid who would one day be bi/pan/other and now had one more example of something that was just fine to land on.

Both of my children seem solidly cis and straight ...but how many of my friends hadn't told their parents at that age? How many kids know enough people who didn't fall into those categories at that age, including myself?

This time, I had to out myself to the kids (not a problem) and all the grown-ups (more of a challenge).

I had to stand up and essentially proclaim:

"For your kids, I will be my authentic self and shout my bi from the rooftops.

"For your kids, I will answer the questions you have about why it matters that I am bi if I am married to a man.

"For your kids, I will deflect your questions regarding my detailed sexual history with grace.

"For your kids, I will be open so that if they have questions, they will know that I am a safe grown-up to field those questions.

"For your kids, I will be a bi parent of two daughters, married to a man—a man who has two moms and one dad.

"For your kids, I will be a grounded, rooted tree on which they can lean for as long as they need until they find the words to describe what feels right to them."

Beth is a bisexual woman married to man, with two daughters, two dogs, two cats, and four guinea pigs. She is a veterinarian and small business owner in the Boston area.



Am I Doing It right? How Normalizing Queerness Helped Me Build Connection with My Child—and Turn a Mirror on Myself

By DC Malaya

When my pregnancy became outwardly visible to others, I learned that parenting in a mostly white, middle-class suburb of Los Angeles had dropped me into the middle of an arena surrounded by armchair quarterbacks.

“What’s your birth plan?” *What the hell is a birth plan*, I thought. *Don’t you just show up at the hospital when it’s time and they take the baby out?*

“Are you getting an epidural?” *Of course. Haven’t I suffered enough?*

“I hope that’s decaf in your cup.” *Nope.*

“Are you planning to breastfeed exclusively?” *Um ...we’ll see how it goes?*

And then, nine months into the pregnancy, my dad died. A few weeks later, I gave birth, followed by a life-threatening medical complication and a year-long bout of postpartum depression.

A week or so after my re-hospitalization and near-death experience, the other questions began:

“When are you gonna give her a sibling?” *Never.*

“Why not? She’ll be so lonely as an only child.” *I’d rather be alive with one kid than dead with two.* “Oh my God, you put her in daycare already? She’s only two months old! Poor thing!”

Of course, nobody questioned my husband for returning to work after four weeks. And I wondered why it was hard for me to make friends here. Me, I had chosen to go back to work as soon as my C-section healed, as a coping mechanism for the depression. Those were the days before I’d started going to therapy. Based on this experience, I began to realize that no matter how my partner and I chose to parent our child we would be judged, so we might as well choose what felt right to us. And so we did.

Fast forward six years later; I was staring out the passenger side window of our Honda Civic, watching the Mexican bush sage swaying in the wind. I imagined running my fingers along the velvety leaves, inhaling the sweet, peppery fragrance of their purple blooms, when my daughter brought me back to the present.

“Mama?”

“Yes, anak?” I turned to look over my shoulder, addressing her as *my child* in Tagalog. She held my gaze with her shining brown eyes.

“I think I wanna marry a girl when I get older.”

A smile formed in my spirit, reaching my lips and eyes. “That’s wonderful, lovey. I hope you find someone who treats you well and is a good partner for you,” I said.

I turned back around, glancing at my husband, a supportive,

down-for-whatever, cishet Asian guy who fits both of those criteria. Without saying a word, he nodded his head in affirmation, checked his blind spot, and switched lanes.

I thought about what it meant that my child shared her heart so freely with us. At this early point in her life, I hesitated to put a label on her, instead celebrating her openness to think beyond compulsory heterosexuality. When the time comes, she can decide her identities for herself. Meanwhile, I thought of all the ways we normalize queerness in our home: hanging out with queer friends, stocking her bookshelf with queer picture books, watching *The Bravest Knight* on Hulu featuring Nia and her two dads, hanging sapphic art by @Pandesaii in our guest bathroom, participating in community Pride events hosted by fellow queer women of color. I thought of the arguments I’d picked with her preschool for telling the girls they could only choose from princess dresses, while the boys had to select from superhero costumes, of the exhausted conversations I’d had with my sister about resisting our community’s insistence on distinguishing “girl toys” from “boy toys.”

For a moment, I patted myself on the back for doing the emotional labor to create a safe haven for her, which, after six years of trudging uphill through quicksand and questioning whether I was doing too much, finally seemed to be paying off. Now, maybe I could lie down and rest for a moment. And then, with a twinge of envy, I started to wonder where the safe haven was for myself.

By this point, I wasn’t out yet. I was 38 years old.

Growing up in a strictly Catholic, Filipino household, any mention of sexuality was unheard of, let alone queerness. It was only over the past year that I’d started to acknowledge my attraction to certain women and nonbinary people, snippets of knowledge floating aimlessly in my consciousness since my early twenties but quickly suppressed. Although the vocabulary already existed and I’d watched with admiration as various friends came out over the years, it hadn’t occurred to me to try it on myself—until this conversation happened.

And sometimes our kids have that effect on us. They motivate us to be better—to work on ourselves so that they can inherit more of our healing and less of our trauma.

A Google search led me to Robyn Ochs’ definition of bisexuality:

I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted romantically and/or sexually to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree. For me, the bi in #bisexual refers to the potential for attraction to people with genders similar to and different from my own.

My eyes widened and my pulse quickened. *I've never met this person before; how does she know me?* I thought. And then I realized that she wasn't just talking about me—she was referring to a whole community of people. A community that I'd been searching for.

Another hour down the rabbit hole led me through bisexual memes about lemon bars and sitting in weird positions, eventually landing me in some affirmations:

You are queer enough.

You don't owe anybody receipts of who you've dated.

You can be in a monogamous relationship with a person of any gender. Still Bi+.

It took me about a week to gather the courage to come out to my husband. He glanced up from the virtual Scrabble game on his phone, patted my thigh reassuringly, and said, "You be you, babe."

A few weeks later, as I affixed a striped, heart-shaped sticker to my laptop, my daughter asked what it was. I explained, "It's a bisexual pride flag. Bisexual means we might like boys, or girls, or nonbinary people. I'm bisexual." And she smiled and asked if she could have one too.

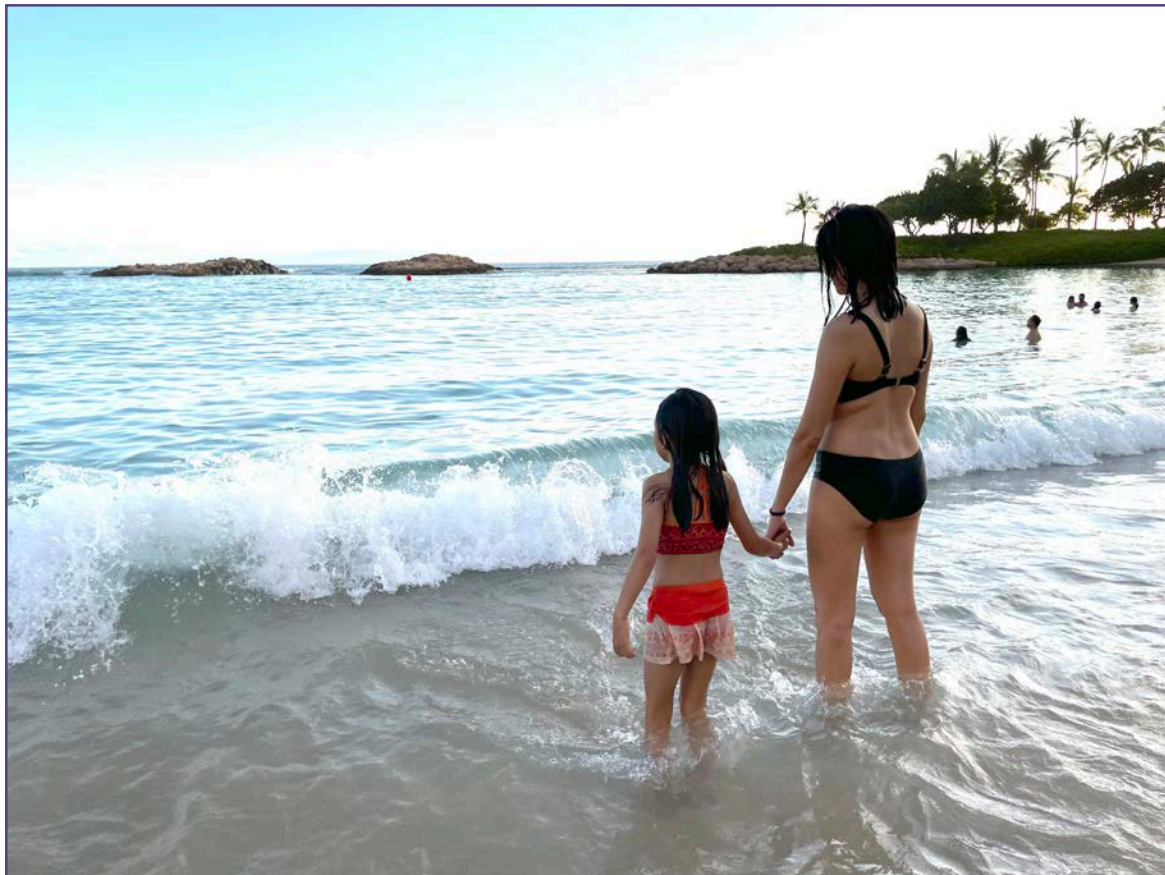
For everyone else, save for a couple of trusted friends I'd confided in sooner, I put up an Instagram post. In the video of myself getting ready in front of the mirror and attaching a bisexual flag

pin to my sweater, I added the caption, "I'm dreaming of a future in which our children and grandchildren will have no need to 'come out,' because we will no longer assume that straight and cisgender are the default, and they will be safe to show up as their whole selves in all corners of the world. Until then, this bisexual bitch will wear her badge with pride."

Looking back, I wonder if some of my nesting habits from years ago—the intentional curation of queer art and media, the connection with queer friends and community members—may have been a reflection of what my spirit already knew to be true before my brain caught up. These were behaviors not of an enthusiastic ally, but of someone who already belonged to the queer community.

As someone who's newly out, I have yet to find my people within the bi+ community, but I appreciate the concept of our expansiveness. In a world where people demand that you pick a side—Black or white (neither), gay or straight (also neither), Filipino or American (both)—I appreciate that bisexuality is inclusive so that, at least in this identity, I don't have to place one foot in each world. I can just be here.

DC Malaya (she/her) lives in Los Angeles County with her partner, child, and two dogs. She works as a nonprofit executive and is currently working on her debut novel featuring a bisexual Filipina-American protagonist.



DC Malaya with her daughter

At the Center of It All

By Amy Andre

“She was telling the other kids that you used to be married to a woman.”

“Ha! Okay. I guess they were having a conversation about their parents?”

“Well, that’s not okay. You need to tell her she can’t talk about that stuff. The kids don’t know what that is.”

“Huh?”

“It’s just not appropriate at our Center.”

Picking up my children from their afterschool center one day this past March, I was greeted by the owner of the Center taking me aside to tell me that my six-year-old is apparently not allowed to out me to her peers.

I hustled my kids into the car and asked them, nonchalantly, about their day. I wanted to see if this conversation about people’s parents’ marriages even registered on their radar as one that warranted a mention. Both children like to tell me about their afterschool adventures in great detail: who said what about which homework assignment; which kid’s parents finally let them dye their hair purple; what happened on the playground next to the center, where the monkey bars were a spot of prime real estate.

The minutiae of their day spilled out of their mouths and into my ears on that car ride home, without even a mention of this conversation in which it was revealed that I was anything other than heterosexual.

Next, I waited for the texts. The owner of the Center may not have been aware, but I am friends with a few of the moms, and our friendships are such that, if any of their kids said that my daughter told them this “scandalous” piece of information, I’m sure they would have mentioned it. Not in a biphobic way,



but just to say that it was mentioned and led to a teachable moment. But—and probably because those teachable moments have already happened and the fact that the gender of my previous spouse is neither here nor there—not a single text came through.

After that, I did what many bi moms would do: I called my own mom! She used to run a childcare

center herself before I was born. I hadn’t said a word to my kids, despite the owner’s instruction that I tell them to not talk about my relationship history, because forget that! But I did want to hear what my mother thought I should do next. Pull them from the Center? File a complaint with some government agency somewhere? Or just let it go, because ultimately, my children still had no clue that anything had happened and none of the other children, to my knowledge, had had any reaction to my daughter’s casual conversation?

Complicating matters was that the owner of the Center is a Catholic immigrant woman of color running a precarious business in the midst of a global pandemic. One whole side of my family is comprised of Catholic immigrants of color. Whether I agree with it or not, I understand the cultural and religious dynamic at play. And I believe in supporting woman- and POC- and immigrant-owned businesses. Her words annoyed me, but they did not reach my children’s ears. She hadn’t said anything to them in the moment, and she was extremely discreet in taking me aside and talking to me. She also hadn’t said anything to any of the other moms (I’m sure if she had, it would have gotten back to me). Maybe she mentioned it to her staff—but maybe she didn’t. No one treated me any differently after that, and I never felt any side-eye. Did I really want to cause trouble for her? Was there reason to believe that she would expose the children to her LGBT-phobia directly?

“She was telling the other kids that you used to be married to a woman.”

I *was* married to a woman at one point. Before that, for a while, I was married to a man. I’m a twice-divorced, bisexual, single mom by choice to a couple of rambunctious, amazing, resilient donor-conceived elementary school kids. Before I had them, I used to write a lot, mostly about bi topics. Since my oldest was born, the luxury of having time and energy to write mostly disappeared into the ether. But what replaced that luxury was one of having time and energy to grow two whole humans from that same ether. I am out to them—and now, apparently, to their afterschool friends as well! There is no “in.” There is no closet. They get to know my life, and they get to share it. And even tell their peers about it.

“Let it go,” said my mom. “They’re fine.”

And she was right.

Amy Andre is a co-author of Bisexual Health: An Introduction (published by the National LGBTQ Task Force) and has been featured in multiple media outlets ranging from CNN to PBS. Amy holds a master’s degree in Sexuality Studies, and, as a Point Foundation Scholar, earned an MBA from the University of California, Berkeley.

Pride and Joy

By Skylar Camp

I sit down on the grass under a big shady tree by the playground. Vivi, my almost-five-year-old, runs to the slide. Edwin, my seven-year-old, lays on his belly on a swing, spinning and spinning and spinning.

We're at Goodale Park for the Columbus Pride celebration. Beautiful people are all around us. It is rainbows and smiles, music and queer joy.

When we walked into the park, Edwin said, "Why am I smiling so much? I just started smiling when we got here, and I can't stop." I told him it's because there's so much love here.

Vivi comes over to the tree, wisps of hair falling out of her ponytail. She snuggles up to me and says she wants a balloon animal. I have no idea where to find the balloon animals in the maze of vendors nearby. As grateful as I am for Pride, the rainbow capitalism is annoying as fuck. I do not care if T-Mobile has rainbow phone cases for sale at their booth, and I'm not willing to walk through dozens of booths to find the one making balloon dogs that will undoubtedly pop before the end of the day.

Edwin walks toward us and says he's a little dizzy from the spinning. I suggest we get french fries, mostly to distract Vivi from the balloon animals. She sprints towards a path lined with food trucks. We get two big buckets of fries. Edwin's is plain and Vivi's is smothered in ketchup. I sample from both. I notice that Vivi is staring at someone nearby. They have orange and yellow hair, and their makeup is colorful and intricate.

"Vivi, what's up?"

"I love her hair. She's so pretty." Vivi doesn't take her eyes off of them.

"Would you like to go tell them that?"

She nods. "Will you come with me?"

I hold her hand and we walk over to the colorful person.

"I like your hair," Vivi says. "And your makeup."

"Thank you!" They beam at Vivi. "You're so sweet and beautiful!"

Vivi smiles, and her little hands cover her mouth in pure delight. We say goodbye and go back to our french fries. She keeps staring at the person until they leave, absolutely infatuated. I smile to myself because it's maybe the first time I've seen one of my kids totally smitten. It's cute and sweet and lovely.

Part of me is still surprised that I'm here, at Pride with my kids. I'm thirty-one years old, a divorced mother of two. I was raised to believe that it's a sin to be anything other than straight, that one's sexuality is a "choice." I practiced abstinence and married my high school boyfriend. I endured an abusive marriage for years before I finally gathered the courage to end it. The faith

I was raised in taught me that I was worthless, and my ex-husband confirmed that. I've fought like hell to heal from that trauma and create a joyful, abundant life for myself. I'm openly bi and polyamorous. I have three wonderful partners. I have created a family that loves and supports me and my kids. I am safe, happy, and healing.

I don't speak to my parents anymore. I told them I couldn't be in contact with them unless they could tell me they don't believe I'm going to hell for being bi. They said it isn't fair to ask that of them because I'm the one who changed. But I don't think it's fair to expect me to be around people who believe who I am is sinful and wrong. If your child tells you your beliefs hurt them and endanger their very existence, why *wouldn't* you change?

I look down at my babies. Vivi is sad that her pretty friend is gone; Edwin obliviously talks about whale sharks. I wonder how I could *ever* choose shitty, bigoted beliefs over them. They are beautiful and precious and perfect. They will never hear that they are unworthy of love. Not if I can help it.

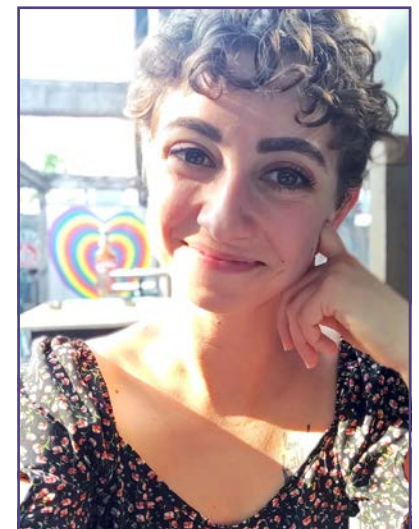
"Can we take a picture?" I ask.

Vivi is all for it. Edwin groans but smiles anyway. Someone close by sees me struggling with selfie mode and offers to take the picture. "Cheeeeeese!" we all say.

"Let me see; let me see!" Vivi says. I show her the picture. We're all in our Pride shirts. Theirs say, "Everyone Welcome" in rainbow colors. Mine says, "Greedy Bisexual," because I might as well own it. I have boob sweat—it's toasty and I refuse to wear a bra. Vivi and Edwin's smiles are bright and genuine. "Let's go back to the playground!" they say.

Edwin holds my hand as we walk. "Are you having a good time?" he says. "I am!"

I tell him that I am, and that I'm so happy to be here with him and Vivi. "It's healing," I say. My voice catches and tears fill my eyes. The kids get concerned but then realize it's just Mama being Mama. They hug me, then run back to the swing and the slide. I watch as they squeal and laugh, and I think about how lucky we are to have each other and how far we've come. Pride, indeed.



Skylar Camp lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her two young kids, her partner, and their fuzzy kitty. She writes creative nonfiction that focuses on deconverting from Evangelical Christianity, trauma, divorce, polyamory, parenting, and more.

The Verb: To Parent

By Riley Quinn

I am a parent of a kind.

I am bisexual+.

I am pansexual.

I am nonbinary.

I live with D.I.D.

I have two alters who are children under 10 and one who is a petulant teenager, and I am definitely a parent to them.

Sadly, I have had three miscarriages, Mardi, Connor, and James. I will always be their parent.

I parent my nephews and niece at times, and they don't or haven't always liked me for the boundaries I support and uphold.

I have cared for, loved, and parented the children of friends and lovers.

My heart has broken at their pain and overflowed with joy at their triumphs.

I've explained sex, attraction, sexuality, death, grief, gender identity, society, relationships, eating well, drinking behavior, and recreational drug use, and had many discussions on what love actually is.

I've ensured safety travelling home and being out, and asserted the proper behavior and respect to expect from another human.

I have parented younger queers, mentored, listened, counselled, sometimes quarreled, in the majority comforted and wiped tears away of sadness, frustration, grief, love, and joy.

Is a parent only one who has the care and responsibility for a human for the entirety of their life? Who is their biological kin? Who is their legal kin? No, my belief is that a parent can take many forms.

A parent is a person who cares for, loves, guides, mentors, supports boundaries, exalts in triumphs of all sizes, consoles, encourages and is in the life for a time, of a younger human.

Millions of us are non-traditional parents. We are all parents of a kind.

I am and always will be, the verb—Parent—To be or act as a parent to another.

Riley Quinn is pansexual/bisexual+, non-binary, neurodiverse, and living with D.I.D. Loving being the Vice President of Sydney Bi+ Network, Founder and Director of BOLDER, writer, mental health awareness speaker, LGBTIQ+ advocate, activist, and speaker. Working to give Multi Gender Attracted people of older generations their platform, visibility, voice, and community.



Hell in a Handbasket

By Jaime M. Grant

I had my first baby in my late 30s, and my last in my mid-40s. The first one seemed an impossible mountain to climb—my mother was dead, her brutal homophobia finally put to rest. My dad had disowned me when she was barely in the ground, after having cared for her together through three grueling years of ovarian cancer, side by side, one horrific treatment after the next. I had to leave a fence-sitting lover who wanted but wasn't-yet-ready-for children. I had to strike out on my orphaned, onliest own.

And then the second one was the opposite. An insane love flared up between me and a piney, unattainable crush. He proposed parenthood on the second date, and we were sitting in a world-class fertility practice four months later, going over the costly choreography of his egg, my womb, and our gay donor's sperm. Despite the intricacies and statistical ridiculousness of baby number two—37-year-old egg, 46-year-old womb, 50-year-old sperm—the second pregnancy came together in short order and the birth, unlike her brother's harrowing, failure-to-breathe arrival, was mercifully simple. She emerged eyes-open, screaming, and latched like we were made for each other.

When I was a young queer, in love in rural Pennsylvania in the early 80s, I said to my lover: *I wish I could carry your baby.* And we smiled wistfully at each other. Louise Brown was just a few years out of her miraculous petri dish, and lesbians were barred access to sperm banks. The life and the world we longed for seemed out of reach.

Now here I am in my 60s with two kids, a crazy-quilt family of my own making, a life I love. So, everyone will have to excuse me if I don't see the world as ending, just yet. Even as my own children decry the warming of the planet and the inexorable march of state violence, on the daily. I look into their once improbable faces and I understand fully the power of resistance—all the hopelessness it can shatter, all the joy it can bring.

Jaime M. Grant is a sober queer feminist writer/activist. She lives, loves, and makes trouble from her home base of Washington, D.C.



From Passing to Passing on Lessons

By Erika Grumet

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in June 1980-something, I was helping my mother change the sheets on her bed. I was in my early teens. The local news was covering the NYC Pride Parade, and my mother turned to me, made a limp-wrist gesture, and said: “Why do they need to flaunt it? I don’t go around flaunting that I’m straight all the time. Why do they have to show off that they’re ‘like that?’”

I didn’t say anything. My insides were melting. I was angry and sad and hurt and confused. I didn’t know whether to yell or cry or walk away angrily or do something else. What I did know is that I might not have had the words to say it yet, but I was pretty sure that *I* was “like that.”

I can remember the moment I was pretty sure I was “like that.” One day about six months before, lunchtime conversation had turned to cute boys.

Boys.

Boys confused me. I didn’t dislike boys. They were reasonably interesting. I’d kissed a few, and I’d liked it. I was even interested in doing more of it. There was no confusion there. Where the confusion arose was that I was *also* interested in kissing girls the same way. Even though I knew I wasn’t *supposed* to want that. I was definitely not supposed to *do* it. Most of all I was not supposed to *talk* about it or about any of those feelings. So, under no circumstances ever would I tell anyone about how I felt about girls. Because it was wrong. Very, very wrong.

And yet, sitting with those girls eating lunch, when asked which boy I thought was cutest I realized that, although there *were* boys I found cute, at that moment, I was much more interested in one of the girls. When I looked at her, I felt all of the same things I’d felt for cute boys, and a few other things. I wanted to kiss her more than any of the boys we’d been talking about. Definitely more than the boy whose name escaped my mouth when asked directly about which boy I liked best.

Was I broken? Could I be fixed? What if someone found out? My stomach was perpetually tied in knots of fear and confusion. I was about twelve.

Wasn’t there someone I could have talked to? I already knew how my mom felt about people who were “like that.” And I didn’t know any queer adults. Except that’s not really true. I didn’t *know that I knew* queer adults. But they were there.

There was Ray, the caretaker at my grandparents’ home.

There were my dad’s friends, L & L. I didn’t realize they were a couple until many years later.

There were others, I’m sure, too: coaches, teachers, music instructors, all of the usual people a teenager would be around. But no one talked about it.

And I needed them to talk about it. I needed them to talk about it so that I could know I wasn’t sick and so that I could know I had a safe place to ask questions.

I needed role models. Just like my straight peers did. I needed to see happy, healthy, functioning queer adults. I needed to see queer relationships that worked and I needed to see people do all of the things that adults do—work, play, create relationships, build families, and just exist.

But back in that bedroom with my mother, I wasn’t seeing any of that. “That’s so gay” was a way of objecting to someone. “I pledge allegiance to the flag, Michael Jackson is a fag,” was the beginning of a popular playground rhyme when I was in elementary school. TV was no help, either. If I saw gay people on TV or in movies, it was “Bury your gays” or any of the other queer TV tropes that promised only misery when you felt “the love that dare not speak its name.” Sex outside of marriage meant death or terrible consequences for basically everyone, but the swiftest and most terrible were reserved for the queerest of the queer.

There were always rumors that a teacher was queer. Just like there were rumors about which teachers were screwing their students and which kids were sneaking off to the bathroom to masturbate with a hot dog. Queerness, pedophilia, and sexual perversion were always grouped together. So, we knew. But spreading rumors is not the same as talking. We also didn’t talk about the teacher who died. Of “pneumonia.” In August. In 1992.

Not talking about it didn’t make the questions go away. It meant I didn’t have anyone to whom to ask questions. I couldn’t talk about how much it hurt to know that people were talking about me behind my back. Perhaps the most long-lasting impact, the deepest pain, comes from the fact that I had no one to reassure me that it was normal to have questions, to feel uncertain. And no one to tell me that I was okay, no matter what I discovered the answer to be.

Now obviously some of this has changed with the marriage equality rulings. “Mrs.” might indicate a marriage between two same-sex partners. But all that means is that we need to talk about it more, not less. Every day there’s another story about a kid who is terrorized for being (or being perceived as) queer. We need to make it clear to them that they’re loved, supported, and safe.

And side note: we need to push back against people who tell us that talking about “gay stuff” is “sexualizing kids” or “grooming kids.” It’s not. And the fact that someone is suggesting it says a whole lot. About the people doing the suggesting.

Saying: “Some people are gay and that means that they fall in love with people of the same gender. And some people are not

and they fall in love with people whose gender is different. And some people can fall in love with a person no matter whether their genders are similar or not” isn’t talking about sex. It’s talking about the emotional connection that creates loving, supportive, and caring relationships between people. Loving relationships that are about so much more than sex. Like who does the dishes.

These days, I see tentative signs things are getting better. In a lot of ways things are worse. But there are still signs, possibilities of optimism. I see queer kids around me and yes, they still have to struggle with the homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in society, but many of them get to do it without the degree of internalized homophobia I carried through my own process. They get to do it in a world where they can see adults around them having lives. Not lifestyles. Just lives.

I know how it feels to grow into a queer adult without queer role models. How unsafe it feels during the time when you’re trying to figure yourself out and maybe even take some steps towards sharing that part of yourself with others. When I had kids of my own, I made two decisions:

My kids, if they ever needed to come out, would know that I was a safe person to come out to.

If any of their classmates needed to come out, they would know that my kids would be safe people to come out to.

So how did this work? It started early. At six months old, my firstborn attended their first marriage equality rally in a little onesie that said: “My Family Values Love.” We’ve attended drag brunches and drag story-hours, Pride events... We read books and stories on queer themes. We talk about the hard questions.

My mother used to say: “when you grow up and get married.” I don’t use language that definite, and I wouldn’t assume they would marry someone of a particular gender. It’s work. And the work has paid off.

In second grade, my younger kid chose Coy Mathis, a trans activist kid, as the subject of their biography project. My kids have become involved with GSA at school. Kids have come out to my kids and to me. Because we’ve done the work to make it safe.

One of the refrains you hear is: “How do I explain this to my kids?” Well. One of my kids once asked me a stumper: “If Mark has two moms, how do they know which one he’s calling for?” It’s a perfectly innocent kid-question. Any kid who learned about a family different from their own might have asked about it. And as a queer kid who became a queer parent when I grew up, I made sure it was safe to ask the question and to find the answer. “Mark’s family has Mom and Mama. And his parents love him just like we love you.”

Erika Grumet (shelthey) was born in New York, but currently lives outside of Orlando. She has two kids and two cats. Erika’s essays and poetry can be found on the website 2RulesOfWriting.com, which she co-founded with Adam Katz.



A version of this article was published on the website 2RulesOfWriting.com under the title “[Why we Need to Flaunt It.](#)”

It’s Written in the Stars...

By Jlo

I’m a Libra with Gemini as antecedent. Also, I’m not into astrology. But this double duality has marked my life and I cannot escape it. And, after finally acknowledging my bisexuality two years ago, I appreciate the irony of my zodiac signs.

Since forever, my mum’s words echoed in my head. “You never know what you want, you cannot make up your mind, you cannot choose—you’re such a typical Libra!” She told me this when I was a pre-teen, not able to decide which sweater I wanted her to buy me in the store. But I took it as being applicable to my entire personality.

Over the course of my life, I realized that this was incorrect—I know very well what I want, and I make it happen, too! From choosing what to study to deciding to move abroad and learn a new language to perfection, from getting my dream job to playing music at a high level, from marrying my long-time

love to having children. Once I set my mind to something, my determination knows little to no bounds.

Then it became clear to me that the issue is not that I cannot choose, it’s that I don’t *want* to choose. And yes, this also applies to Love. I want to love the man *and* the woman that are very dear to me—just in different ways. With *him* I lead my family life with all the heteronormative privileges and bi-erasure that come with it. *She* is the reason I needed to address my bi-ness.

The thing is, I’m not out. The only time I came out was with my therapist when I realized I’m the B on the rainbow spectrum. Ever since, I have been crunching these new findings in my head, trying to make sense of it all while journaling, wanting to discuss it with friends and my loves, always chickening out in the end. Coming out feels risky.

And I don’t have to. Right? I came out to myself, which was already a huge revelation and a relief—sparking joy, a sense of freedom, and dread all at the same time. I could consider “invit-

ing people in,” as my favorite bi influencers (or “Binfluencers”) on Instagram puts it. But I don’t *have* to.

The other thing is, I have children. Two of them. Two boys. And I want them to grow up, knowing that they can be themselves, unapologetically, as long as they don’t hurt anyone. I want them to feel free to love and have the courage to build a life with their love(s). I want them to learn that from me and so I want to be honest with them.

When I grew up, my parents told me about the birds and the bees in a straightforward way, but only the heterosexual version of it. They told me they didn’t mind if I’d come home with a boy or a girlfriend, safely remaining in the realm of monosexism. I learned about sex, but not sexuality. I think I heard the term “bisexual” as a teen, but never contemplated it as relevant for me. I worried about being lesbian, happily dismissing this when I head-over-heels fell in love with my now-husband.

I want to do better with my kids and invite them in. But for that I need to step out of my comfort zone and be their example. I need to unpack what it means to be bisexual in a long-term hetero-passing relationship. I need to do so without hurting anyone or damaging my marriage. It is scary, but I’m also certain that I will again experience a sense of liberation when I do this. It will allow me to come even closer to myself and live in my own truth.

After all, that’s what I want to pass on to my sons—the determination to work towards what they want and live in honesty towards themselves. I’ll also tell them their zodiac signs may be dropping not-so-subtle hints at them. Just in case.

Forever juggling contradictions, Jlo loves music, nature, and her family.

A Statement from a Parentified Bisexual Queer Daughter

By Mikey Vibal

I am not a parent in the traditional sense. I became a parent in the year 2000, then again in the year 2005. These were the years my siblings were born. My two hard-working immigrant parents gave me my own kids; the first when I was seven years old. I know they would have been around if they could, but the reality is, they could not.

Our parents were not present in the house, which meant for my siblings, I needed to become their home.

I thought this would end when my parents became financially stable, but their own mental instability from their unaddressed trauma became another barrier. I never considered them unfit parents, but what hurt me was that even when I was a child they saw me as someone who could suffice. As if oldest daughters instantly become mothers by simply being born first. I did not think their intention was to have a daughter, but instead to have a built-in babysitter for the children they actually did want.

Was I truly a daughter or a parental substitute?

My identity as a parentified child always came first. I love my siblings but having a now-18-year-old brother who is not pressured or shamed into learning household skills confuses me as to why I had to spend my own childhood doing those things. Having a sister who confides in me more than to our birth mom confuses me as to why I spent my own childhood pushing through things or being the strong-minded one. I am confused about why, despite being the eldest, I am still a loud Brown girl who talks back to other family adults who shared parental status with me.

First-born is correct, but I put myself second every moment

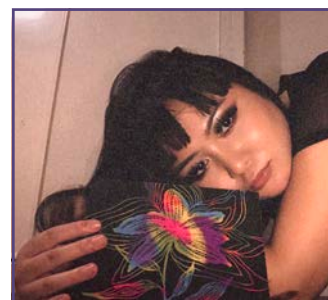
after that.

I had to be the first one to either get everything right or to fuck up. I needed to find the healthy blend of being a go-getter and an experiment. This especially happened when it came to hiding my queerness. My dreams of boys, girls, and everyone in between as sexual and lovable had to be addressed as an afterthought. My bisexuality was instantly invalidated by my typical femme behavior of being a caregiver, a home maker, and a motherly character. I found myself, but much later than I wished.

The good news is that I am selfish.

Today, my partner and I heal the little girl within me. I am an artist and a writer, and I have healthy boundaries with the children I work with in my life. I have time every morning to put on makeup, enjoy solo coffee dates, decorate my home, and eat food that brings me joy. I have a partner who is very self-sufficient, spoils me, and is content with us being each other’s own little family. The idea of living my childhood now used to sadden me, but the freedom I have found through creating my own life and seeing children I have cared for all grown up brings me joy.

Mikey Vibal is a queer bisexual artist and writer residing in Los Angeles, California. She works toward decolonized narratives through her written and illustrated works that uplift her sexual, gender, and cultural identity.



A Quick Lesson from My Daughter about Queer Parenting

By Meredith Worthen

My daughter is almost ten years old, and I have made efforts throughout her life to practice queer parenting. In my view, queer parenting is an approach to raising young humans that engages with their own unique selves in ways that cultivate their natural skillsets and support their growth. I also see queer parenting as centered around understanding our own social locations with privilege and oppression and in turn, encouraging empathy and calls for activism/social change.

A lot of this approach comes from my parents who raised me using a liberal mindset (but I doubt they would use “queer parenting” to describe their approach, because I am nearly 40 years old and I grew up before the “queer as social activism” movement started). My parents always answered all my questions in depth (and this was no small feat considering we didn’t have the Internet back then), we conversed using “big words” (my mom was an English teacher), and I generally felt respected and valued as a small child (all of which are also hallmarks of my definition of queer parenting).

My partner and I co-parent with one central goal: respect. We meet new challenges every day just like all parents do, but respect for our daughter and for each other is always at the heart of our approach to queer parenting and marriage for that matter.

By far, one of the most amazing things that I have learned in the past decade is that the parent is *not* always the teacher, and sometimes it is quite the opposite.

Let me tell a little story to illustrate:

It was my birthday, and we all were out to dinner for this special occasion at a “fancy” restaurant. My daughter has a rather sophisticated palate for an almost-ten-year-old and she always orders two scallops (a la carte) as her meal (plus a Caesar salad, of course, with calamari to start). On this particular occasion, I took the opportunity to point out something I thought would be helpful information. I said something along the lines of this to her:

“You know, when you grow up and go on dates, you might not want to order expensive things like scallops and you might not want to pick such a fancy restaurant like this one either because it can just be too expensive and you don’t want your date to feel like they have to spend a ton of money.”

Already YOU can probably spot my error in this hypothetical “date” example, but honestly, I didn’t. But my daughter did. Her quick response was something like this:

“Well then I will just be the one to take my date out and I will be the one to pay for my scallops.”

My response: PALM TO FOREHEAD.



Self portrait by G, age 5

And just like that the student became teacher and the teacher looked like an idiot. Well, not really. I was actually so very proud in that moment. I messed up by making my hypothetical date scenario incredibly heteronormative and she fixed it by pointing out that she could pay for her own date. She “queer parented” me. How cool is that?

This little moment with my daughter reminded me not only that the student can become the teacher, but also, that we can learn a lot from our kids. Circling back, this moment also feels like firm evidence of queer parenting because I felt my daughter recognizing her own social location with both privilege and oppression and then making a clear statement that she can be in charge of her own dating dynamics (when the time comes, of course), whether they be heteronormative or not.

Meredith G. F. Worthen (shelher/hers) is a Professor of Sociology and Sexualities/LGBTQ Studies scholar with key interests in stigma, prejudice, and crime. She is a social justice activist for the LGBTQ community, especially through her creation of [The Welcoming Project](#), and an advocate for survivors of sexual assault through her work as [#MeTooMeredith](#). As a researcher, teacher, and activist, she dissects multiple dimensions of prejudice in efforts to cultivate understanding, empathy, and social change.



Honest to Goodness

By Lara Zielinsky

At first, I wondered what I might have to say about parenting while bi, because while I was actively parenting, I felt completely lost a lot of the time, and was just swinging for a base hit any time the issue of sexuality, love, and romance (the inevitable breakups) came up.

But now that my son is an adult on his own, and we've had chances to talk about his perspectives on these things, he's assured me that a lot of the things I modeled as well as said helped form the healthy relationship perspectives he has today.

As a bi woman married now 30 years to the same man, I struggled at first with whether I was "bi enough" when I sought friendships and relationships in LGBTQ spaces. But I was always honest and open whenever I was talking with a prospective partner. They knew I had a husband and a son at home. They'd know I was not "unicorn hunting," that I was genuinely interested in a relationship with them unique to my other relationships, and that we practice "kitchen table polyamory." When I brought people home for dinner or group activities (even the occasional weekend getaway vacation) with my husband and son, I was never less affectionate with my partner(s) or my husband in front of my son. When my son asked questions—as he did frequently—I answered honestly and age-appropriately, and I encouraged my partners to interact with him as well. He's been around some breakups, too.

My son, now 29, and I began the "sex" talk when he was in middle school. He and his father continued it. We shared our perspectives, listened to his, and were aware of the first time he had sex and knew his partner at the time well.

Our conversations around sex and polyamory came to an interesting intersection last year when my son, unbeknownst to us, arrived at a poly social event we were also attending. His girlfriend at the time was bisexual (we knew this) and poly (we learned that night). My son had been involved with her for a couple weeks, and also another woman. We smiled, shook hands in the same social whirl as meeting others at the poly event. The only thing we all discussed that night after the event was—um, could you please use the family shared calendar next time? LOL

Since then, he's met with other adult children of poly parents discussing how to negotiate "running in the same circles." His partners, whom we've hosted at dinner parties and gone out on double dates with, have told us that our son has this "relationship thing" figured out and he's a great guy, someone they love and trust to be responsible, honest, and caring with them.

It's kind of weird at first when your polycule intersects with your kid's. (Turns out one of my husband's metamours is a partner to one of my son's partners.)

But it's an amazing gift to realize that you raised a child to be open-minded and honest, and a respectful partner, all because of your own openness and honesty about attraction, sex, and relationships, while raising them.



Lara Zielinsky lives in Orlando, Florida where she works full-time as a freelance fiction editor and writes her own stories for publication.

O Children

By Jane Barnes

O children I forgot to have you
Didn't want to be a bad parent
Like they who always said they'd

Get their revenge when I had you
But I fooled them, didn't I? O
Children we would have had some

Fun your mommy took 65 years to
Grow up she's almost ready to start
To write O children go back. The

Genetic terrain is rather steep
And I've raised you others up
Fine without bodies and when you

Sang I set you here some left
Made their fortunes but you were
Dying to live in the house of a book

Jane Barnes is a New York City poet and novelist who has had work in 60 magazines and nine anthologies, lesbian and (finally) bi. Poems about Emily Dickinson are forthcoming in Wrongdoing Magazine, and Gay and Lesbian Review. She should be working on her Paris novel set in 1927.



Note: A **polycule** is a connected network of people in non-monogamous relationships. A **metamour** is one's partner's partner, with whom one is not directly involved.

As a Bi+ Parent, Where Do I Belong?

By Alison Shea

My whole life I have been a combination of decisive and unable to choose. People often insist there must be one: one thing, one view, one style, one favorite, one right choice.

You want my favorite song? I am going to give you a list by genre, mood, year, etc. Always there have been categories that my thoughts and opinions would latch on to and become definitionally intertwined.

For me, this gets at the very root of who I am, and that is connected deeply to where and when and with whom. Sometimes the definition of who I am is foisted upon me by others who see what they want to see when they look at me. Sometimes I get to define myself for others. All of these definitions connect to where I belong in the world.

What does it mean to belong in the bi+ world?

I love what Maya Angelou said about belonging: “You only are free when you realize you belong no place—you belong every place—no place at all. The price is high. The reward is great.”

For years I struggled with both my invisibility and visibility in not only the LGBTQIA world but also in the world of motherhood.

I came out both early and a long time ago. The t-shirt I bought at my first March on Washington demanded “GLB Rights”. The G was first. The B a recent addition. All the other letters were not yet included in the marketing. I also became a mother early. After finding out at 18 with my first surgery, that if I wanted to have a child in the traditional fashion, time was ticking and if I didn’t prioritize it, I would likely not be able to.

I did everything at warp speed back then. I graduated from college when I was 20, having started while in high school. I had my son when I was 23. He was my ninth pregnancy and the first one to go full term. The process of becoming a mother almost broke me.



Alison with her first born and the last born. There are 25 years between these two pictures.

What’s the definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. A little-known fact: that is also the definition of optimism. Maybe this time it will happen

There I was, a fertility patient in the infertility support groups with women, some of whom could have been old enough to be my mother, and the thing that bound us together was the absence of something.

Sometimes you belong because of what you don’t have . . . but sometimes you don’t

One of my friends from the group said to me, “At least you can get pregnant, it’s not like you have infertility.” As I suffered my seventh miscarriage. A lesbian couple I knew who were trying said, “At least your sperm is free.” Today, I understand what they meant: you can still be luckier than someone else who endures a similar pain. Having to undergo IVF to “try again,” or to hope another vial from the same donor is available and that you can pull together thousands of dollars for a chance to spin the wheel once more, can feel like adding insult to injury. Back then, I was married to a man. He was a straight man and the very definition of an ally. He marched with me for gay rights, pride, drove around with a rainbow triangle sticker on his car in the early ’90s. Sometimes he was presumed to be gay, and he never minded that. He knew who he was. I was often presumed to be straight, and I hated it! The only thing worse than being invisible in the straight community, was being invisible or turned out by the gay community. Having a child made that more frequent. No one looked at me and thought I was not straight. When people would see my babyface with my baby, they would often think I was a teenage mother or the nanny. No one looked at me and thought, “I bet she struggled with infertility for years before becoming a parent.” Not all our battle scars are on the surface and not all our identities live there either.

Two years ago, my wife gave birth to our daughter. My son is older than I was when I had him. I have two other daughters as well. Four children.

Now when people see me with my kids, they see a mother, but they don’t necessarily understand that each one of my children are miracles of modern science and optimistic insanity. My struggles to become a mother and to belong in motherhood sit there with me in the back of my mind like the sarcastic friend, whispering judgment of others and snide comments during all those awkward years of feeling like an outsider. For so many years, if I saw a woman with four children, the voice would say, “What is she trying to do, repopulate the earth!?”

I never felt “done” with having kids until one day . . . I did. That bitter jealous voice has faded as I am more comfortable knowing that I am of both worlds. Belonging in both and nowhere at all.

I have been a woman who at 16 came out as bisexual, married a

man as bisexual, was single as bisexual, then married a woman as bisexual. All around me, the words changed, the world changed, the loves changed, and I did too, but one thing that never changed is that I see the world as a place where the possible and impossible are intertwined. The labels don't have to be fixed, and they certainly don't have to fully define us. Sometimes the labels we give ourselves are not the front-of-the-can label, but merely one of the many ingredients on the back of the can. And sometimes the labels are just jumping off points. My kids are amazing humans. So different and similar to each other in ways that give proximity, biology, and genetics a run for their money. I have told them their whole lives that the only thing that matters about who they love is that that person treats them well and loves them deeply with dignity and respect. For true belonging, we must belong to ourselves and so the most important thing is that first, we must love ourselves the same way.

Alison Shea heads up Global Learning and Development for a tech start-up. Previously she worked in the Financial Industry focusing on organizational transformation, learning and talent development, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. She started her career in product development and consulting.

Musings on Parenting While Bi

By Julie Ellen

What does it mean to be a bi parent? I think part of being bi in general, especially if you're partnered with someone who makes you look like you're in a "straight couple" when you walk down the street, is never feeling bi enough. So maybe that's why I swell with pride when I overhear my seven-year-old talking about Harvey Milk. Or when she tells her dad about her friend who uses "they" pronouns like this is the most common thing in the world (and it is, but when I was her age it sure wasn't). I even appreciated that my daughter asked me, "Is it OK if I only like boys? Does that make me a bad person?" and I reassured her no, straight is great too, and all sexualities are awesome. As a bi parent, I post pictures of our attendance at Pride events on social media, but I know most people look at those posts and see allies—I'm invisible as a bi mom. So how exactly do I parent while bi? Or be bi while parenting? I don't really know the answer, even though I earned a Ph.D. researching bisexual identity! One thing I do, of course, is come out. Over, and over, and over . . . honestly, I'm getting a little sick of coming out. It was fun and exciting and daring when I was in my 20s. I'm now solidly middle-aged and exhausted. And I know it's totally a privilege that coming out is optional for me. I'm married to a cisgender, straight man. We have a child who looks like both of us, so no one questions her status as our biological offspring. Basically, we're 1.5 kids, a dog, and a picket fence away from looking like those idealized images of (white) American families promoted in the 1950s. So, I know

coming out is a choice for me. If I feel like my child's playdate is going to suddenly end if I out myself, I can keep that on the downlow. I didn't wave my bi pride flag when I was a parent council member at my daughter's Catholic school, and I will have a choice to make as I navigate her new (public) school in the coming year.

Many of my fellow bi folks, as well as gay, lesbian, and transgender folks, don't always have so many options when it comes to disclosing this information. Having that option means that sometimes I question why I need to be out. My relationship is monogamous, so I'm not looking for new sexual partners at this point in my life, so no one needs to know I might be into them. And how much do people I meet need to know about my past relationships, current fantasies, or possible future relationships if my spouse dies/divorces, or whatever anyway? And my seven-year-old doesn't need to know about any of these things (ew, mom, gross!). So, why be an out bisexual parent?

For me, the importance of being out and visible as a bi parent lies with being authentic and having the real, wonderful me seen and validated by others, as well as being a role model for my child to "always be yourself." It's nice to have that glimmer of joy I feel when someone else validates my identity and doesn't question if I'm "really" bi or bi "enough" now that my life looks so darn heteronormative, and that's a connection I seek that only comes when I disclose who I am. However, as a parent, we so often sacrifice for our children, and so, sometimes, I forego the chance to allow others to see my authentic self, to come out and have them say "awesome" or "me too!" because I don't want my daughter to be excluded because of who I am. Exclude me all you want, but don't hurt my kid. I think that's something all parents, not just bi parents, can relate to. So, while I'm certainly far from "closeted," I might not wear my bi-pride gear to every playdate. At the same time, being a parent, of any stripe (or spots), means being a role model for our children, and there are things my daughter won't see me do. I don't ever want her to witness me let a homophobic or transphobic comment go unanswered, even if it means I'm kicked out of the Parent Teacher Organization. She'll learn ways to call people out—and in—when it's warranted. If she's not invited to a playdate because of who I am, she'll know that it's not because of who she is—and that it's not really because of who I am either, it's because of who the other person (or their parent) is. As she gets older, my daughter will know that should her "I only like boys" feelings change, I'm here for her, and for any of her friends who might need a bi mom in their corner. This is what being a bi parent means for me—or at least what it means so far, seven years into the journey. It means always being authentically, unapologetically, me, so that my daughter can be just as authentically, unapologetically herself as well.

Julie is a sociologist who teaches at a community college in Illinois. She is a parent, spouse, educator, researcher, gardener, runner, and terrible ukulele player.

Parenthood: A Journey of One's Own

By Ellen

Looking back at it, my journey to parenthood began with my personal essay to get into grad school. I wrote about how my bisexual orientation led to the disassembling and reassembling of my life goals. In elementary school, I was attracted to girls. By middle school, I'd fallen for my best friend, a boy. Post-college, dating women turned into long-term relationships and suddenly, in my mind's eye, those things that symbolized "heteronormative values" started to disappear: a husband, a family, a white-picket fence. By the conclusion of my essay, I realized that I wasn't losing any of it. If I had a theoretical same-sex life partner, which in the 1990s was still frowned upon, nothing could prevent me from my goals. In my mind's eye, the white picket fence and the family suddenly reappeared.

That grad school essay was an exercise in deconstruction. I realized that I would never have to follow the traditional "menu" that heteronormality prescribed, and that feeling was very freeing. In my 30s, I decided to freeze my eggs in anticipation of having future children. My straight women friends were oohing and aahing at how avant-garde I was, but many of them were stuck on "the menu." They had to find a boyfriend, get married, have children. In that order. Meanwhile, I felt free to form a family however I wanted. My next experiment was to create a support group which I named "Co-parenting for Gays & Lesbians" and every month, I entertained a meeting for men and women who were LGBTQ, had no interest in being romantically involved with each other, but wanted to biologically have a child together.

My own quest was to find the right father to co-parent with. I met several candidates. I was also dating a woman with whom

I'd been in a relationship for six months. She'd hang out with me while I pursued my quest for the right "dad" partner. In the end, I never met the right man, but my girlfriend was open to a family. Worried about my fertility, I wanted to freeze another round of eggs, but in the end, my wiser fertility doctor told me that I wasn't getting any younger, and to go for a live IVF procedure. I got pregnant...with twins! My story is much like J Lo's movie, "The Backup Plan" with a slightly different ending. My girlfriend and I made a valiant attempt to parent twins for two years, but alas, the stress of being a new couple raising babies got to us. We broke up. We are still co-parenting very well, and my kids are thriving.

How does my bisexuality affect my parenting? Well, my journey has informed what I tell my kids. I'm not only bisexual, but bi-cultural, bi-lingual and fairly bipartisan. I think a super-power that I've gained from being so very "bi" is that I navigate the "in-between" on every topic pretty well. I can see things beyond a binary choice. And I tell my kids to think with nuance and know that sometimes those things that everyone assumes, aren't always what they seem.

I never lost sight of my white picket fence—I just built it my own way, and the rest followed.

Ellen is a mom of identical twin boys living in Southern California. She has worked as an advocate for diversity and LGBTQ inclusion in the non-profit and private sectors. Her story was featured in a documentary project called Love Comes First about LGBTQ family-building. You can see it here: [Ellen's Story \(lovescomesfirst.com\)](http://lovescomesfirst.com)





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A Very Boxy Brunch

By Tobi S.

At the end of a BWQ Digital Brunch we were talking about labels and boxes, checking boxes, coming out to healthcare providers, etc., and somebody said, “I think we should all just treat our boxes the way cats do.”

My first thought was, You mean like litter boxes? But I didn’t want to say that. Then someone said, “You mean, the way they just get in and out of them?”

The original person agreed, and we went on to talk about some other box-related things, such as how many of us love checking the bisexual box when filling out forms for health care providers and other services. We’re glad that it’s there so we don’t have to leave it blank, check “other,” or fill in a blank. Someone else mentioned that some lists now include pan, and omni—more boxes!

This led to a discussion of how bisexuality used to be outside-the-box thinking, and now we can check a box. But is bisexuality actually a third box, or is it an identity the busts all the boxes? Bi+ identity is like the Tardis: little on the outside, big on the inside!! It’s an umbrella identity that includes so much more than anyone sees at first glance.

Finally, I got the confidence to say, “I was actually thinking of litter boxes, at first. And that we should just, you know, shit in them.”

Then someone else said that we really should do with boxes what cats do with things: swipe at them. They went on to explain that this is about everything, not just sexuality,

“We can get really defined by many things: our jobs, etc. Screw all the boxes and turn them all into litter boxes!” Because, honestly, they’re other people’s boxes, and we can just shit in them and let everybody else deal with the mess we’ve left by checking boxes when we don’t fit into them. Because, in reality, no one is a box. Each one of us is a free human.

So then, another thought was that if a box doesn’t fit anymore, you can just recycle it. Repurpose it as something else or regift it to someone who can use it. What a fabulous idea!

To go back to treating boxes like cats do—try ’em out. Put your head in, see if it fits. Put your butt in, see if it fits. Curl up for a while. Climb back out again if it doesn’t fit. Climb back in

again, if you want to, because it felt good to be in the box. Boxes are there to be played with. They are there to have fun with: bat them, chew on them, jump in and out, try getting in and then get back out again.

Other boxy ideas that got tossed around in our conversation:

- Trying to fit into other people’s boxes is like trying to put together IKEA furniture, the box ends up all cattywampus.
- It’s okay to cut and paste, reshape, and add patches.
- “My box is Pandora’s box.”
- It’s frustrating when people say, “You can choose any box you want, but here are the definitions—you have to fit the definition.” People want the freedom to be able to play with boxes and labels.

For example, the current definitions for the gay and lesbian boxes are so restrictive they won’t let me in. This is why it took me until I was 34 to even identify as a part of the LTBTQIAP+ community. (I heard recently from another source that the word “lesbian” used to mean any woman/non-binary person who loves other women, regardless of who else they may love. I want to do more research into this. I’m super curious now. It helps me feel like maybe I *can* join groups that claim to be for lesbians and not have to constantly clarify that I’m actually bi+.)

- I don’t want to be confined by other people’s definitions. But I love boxes, I love containers, I love categorizing things.
- Box is sometimes used as a slang term for the vagina or vulva.

There needs to be a monogamous/non-monogamous box because poly people have different physical and mental health care needs.

- We need to normalize STI testing so requesting it doesn’t put you in a box.

This summary is based on my memory, experience, and notes from our conversation and not meant to represent the views or opinions of anyone specific or of the Bi+ community as a whole.

Tobi S. (she/her) is a musician, singer-songwriter, dancer, writer, basketball player, friend, daughter, cousin, niece, and teacher. She identifies as a Bi+ Queer Womxn on the autism spectrum who loves order and categories, but hates it when others box her in.

think I was pan, I didn't fight the idea. I wasn't stuck on a fixed idea of my sexuality, and it made it so much easier!

Between when I first came out and now I have definitely experienced discrimination and homophobia. But overall, I know if I tell someone I'm pan, they'll most likely respect it and won't think of me any differently. Overall, I'm free to be me.

I know it hasn't always been this way, though. My parents and other amazing mentors have taught me about the long struggle for queer acceptance. From the Stonewall Riots and the first Pride march, to the ACT UP AIDS fight, to when same-sex marriage was finally legalized in 2014 (of which my moms were on the frontlines, and were one of the first same-sex couples in the nation to be legally wed!)—I'm inspired by and grateful for all the brave folk who fought to get us here. I do my best to say their names and continue their work.

But we must remember progress is not linear. For the young trans community, things aren't getting better. They're getting worse. Anti-trans laws are suppressing kids' rights to basic self-expression and bodily autonomy. Along with limiting trans students' athletic participation and trying to make teachers only use students' legal names, these laws criminalize providing trans-affirming medical care to minors. They force kids to go through puberty that will only increase the gender dysphoria between their bodies and their minds. And if their parents support them and help them get treatment, they risk being investigated for child abuse and having their kids taken away.

Let that sink in. Supportive parents being investigated for child abuse. Just looking at the trans kids in my school I can see how much having parents that support you reduces the likelihood of depression, anxiety, and self-harm when transitioning. Taking that away would be catastrophic for their mental health. More than that, these laws are going after trans kids' lives. Attempted suicide rates for trans people are already more than 40%, compared to the general population's 5%. These laws target gender-affirming healthcare and an accepting home—things that are scientifically proven to bring rates down. Quoting an article by my cousin Em, a teenager, trans woman, and activist: "Attempts to limit these supports will not result in fewer trans kids; they will only result in fewer living trans kids."

These laws may only be in the south, but the transphobic attitudes ripple across the country, to tragic effects. In our school, trans kids have been harassed in hallways, misgendered, dead-named, and called slurs. In Ludlow, two families are suing the middle school for basically supporting their trans kids at school who weren't out to them yet. And last March, a trans student at Smith Vocational committed suicide.

All of these things have shaken my trans friends' mental health, leaving them exhausted, depressed, angry, and terrified. Because these aren't "don't say gay" bills from 10 states away—these are

chilling reminders that hatred is happening right here too. In our own state, our own town, our own school.

Being surrounded by all this discrimination and intolerance, this Pride Month is bittersweet. Even though I am pan, I understand that being cis and living in a place where I can speak my truth gives me privilege in the LGBTQ+ community. And I need to use my privilege and my voice now more than ever. I need to speak up, stand up, and show up for the queer and trans community. I need to acknowledge how far we've come while continuing to pave the way for the next generation. I need to celebrate my freedom while fighting for theirs, and never stop fighting until we are all free to be.

Kai Imperial-Jewett, June 2022

I hadn't heard Kai's speech until she delivered it to the congregation. There are moments in a parent's life when it's clear as day that we're doing something right. That was one of them.

Carla Imperial is a writer, playwright, and musician, living in the Pioneer Valley with her amazing wife of 23 years+, Megan Jewett, and their badass daughter, Kai.

Kai Imperial-Jewett is a soon-to-be high schooler, dancer, musician, writer, activist, and sponge for knowledge.



A banner Carla made to hang in their church sanctuary.

They Meant Us Harm

By Jen Companik

At first the women only bumped into us on the dance floor. At first. And, at first, we paid them no attention.

We were just a couple of long-haired Latinas dancing to the salsa music in our heads while Def Leppard leaped from the speakers of Club Xenophobia. Latinas with husbands, mortgages, and four small children between us. Latinas who'd left big cities to have kids in a more affordable place. Latinas who soothed each other's crippling homesickness by donning party dresses once a month and going dancing.

(Did I have a strong bisexual crush on Yelena? Yes. Did she reciprocate? No. Did this stop us from grinding on the dance floor of whatever nightclub we'd picked that month? Hell no!)

Holding Yelena around the waist, dancing cheek-to-cheek, and spanking her butt if that one particular Ludacris song came on made me ecstatically happy. Being out after dark without any children around trying to suck milk out of her body made Yelena ecstatically happy.

We usually danced in the city. At Rumba. It helped the homesickness and augmented the sense of escape.

But Club Xenophobia was only ten miles away—with free parking—and Yelena had to be up early the next day. We resolved to make it as liberating as possible, given that we were still in the suburbs.

Xeno was no Rumba. Rumba's dance floor featured the tight swirl of stylish Latin couples. Xeno's dance floor featured unpartnered¹ white women clogging around in premature pot-valiance, oozing the pizzazz of low-end major appliances.

We could've gone dancing in Elgin—been less conspicuous—but I wasn't enamored by Mexican music or the gun battles between gangbanger *mocosos* that broke out in parking lots around midnight in those places. I wanted Yelena to feel safe with me. Xeno was boring, maybe, but I figured we'd make our own fun and nobody would have to call 911.

We ventured onto the floor. At first we danced with two stewed white dudes but the stewed white dudes were duds as dancers. We danced with each other instead. Popular rock songs from the 80s and 90s blared. Yelena and I turned and dipped; moving to the salsa beat only we could hear.

I tipped the DJ to play Prince. Everyone liked Prince, right? When he finally played a song by Prince, Yelena and I pretend-kissed at the end of "Kiss."

The women knocked into me first. Then Yelena. Then the two of us together. At first, it seemed accidental and the women said,

¹ Unpartnered because men in this outer outpost of suburbia did not dance until they were blackout drunk. The night had not progressed that far. So they watched the dance floor from behind their Miller Genuine Drafts; slowly etherizing their white, Midwestern fears that only gay men dance.

"Sorry."

"Let's dance over there." I said in Yelena's ear, feeling yet another bump.

The club was full now. It was nearly impossible for us to leave the major appliances department.

"Ouch!" Yelena said, after a refrigerator stepped on her foot.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." She winced a little but kept dancing.

I pulled her closer, thinking I'd never danced with anyone as graceful as Yelena. With her silky hair and dimples, she reminded me of the first girl I'd kissed. I didn't talk about that, though, especially with the few female friends I'd made since the move. It was hard enough making friends out here without discussing my bisexuality. Besides, Yelena was straight. Married. With three kids. Girls' night out was her small share of freedom. And we were Latin. Latin women could dance close without it being sexual.

I succeeded in elbowing us to the far side of the dance floor—the music practically attacking us from a nearby speaker.

We moved in perspiring synchronicity; the small of Yelena's back under my hand, her chest against mine, her cottony, lemon-blossom smell in my nose.

One of Yelena's big hoop earrings caught in my hair and we laughed, disentangling ourselves. We laughed for a minute together until someone bumped us, her drink a-slosh on my arm. Yelena and I almost fell into the speaker.

I had worked in a strip club for a year in college. I knew what a bar fight looked like before it happened—and this was it.

"We should get out of here," I told Yelena. "Hey," said the deep freezer who'd bumped us this last time, "you girls ever see the movie *Broken Back Mountain*?"

Yelena shook her head "no."

Yelena had three little kids. The only movies she saw starred talking animals. I had not seen *Brokeback Mountain*, but I'd read Annie Proulx's story—and knew it ended with the hate-crime death of a gay character. My inner English teacher wanted to correct the woman about the title, but the heat of her threat had spread throughout my body.

I pulled Yelena through the crowd to the front door.

"Would you mind making sure we get to our car safely?" I asked one of the doormen, pointing to my car.

"No problem." He walked us to the car.

As soon as we got in the car, I locked the doors and felt safer.

I pointed the car towards my house; where Yelena had left her minivan with its baby seats and floor full of toys, (the rolling tomb of an adolescence cut short by getting pregnant her sophomore and senior years of high school—for though, at twenty-seven, I was two years older and had only one child—Yele had been

married just as long, and her oldest child was nine years older than my infant son).

The red pickup parked beside us left at the same time.

“It was those women,” Yelena said, “the ones who kept bumping into us.” She sighed. “I was having fun. Why couldn’t we just ignore them?”

“They thought we were lesbians.”

“So?”

“They meant us harm.”

She flipped through my CDs. “You think?”

I didn’t know how she could be so oblivious to danger.

Yelena had grown up in gang territory in Chicago. She’d carried brass knuckles and mace to school and had almost been kidnapped as a girl—yet she wouldn’t notice danger out here if it stomped on her foot.

It was tempting to let down one’s guard in the ’burbs.

We were halfway to my house.

My heart had resumed a normal beat.

I made the third-to-last turn towards my house, onto Red Barn Road.

It was 1:00 a.m.

Red Barn Road was a side road. Nobody turned there unless they lived in the neighborhood.

The pickup behind us had turned onto Red Barn Road.

What were the odds?

I turned left instead of right.

“Your house is the other way,” Yelena said.

“I just want to see if the pickup behind us is following us.”

The pickup made the same turn.

I made another turn away from my house, this time onto a smaller street.

The pickup made the same turn.

I slowed the car to ten miles an hour—a speed that would make any normal driver behind me honk with rage or at least pass me.

The other car slowed down, too.

I pretended to park.

The pickup parked a few feet behind us.

I cut the lights and drove onto a bigger road.

The truck cut its lights and followed.

I stopped signaling turns and sped up, hoping one of the squad cars that usually staked out this road for speeders would stop me.

No police in sight.

“Where are we going?” Yelena asked, her face gone pale.

“Call the police, Yele. Tell them someone is following us and that we’re going to the police station.”

Yelena did as I asked. She spoke with a female officer who instructed us to lean on the horn when we got to the station.

The pickup followed us three more miles. All the way to the station. When whoever was in the pickup saw it was a police station, they drove away.

I leaned on the horn.

A female officer emerged from the station. She asked for a description of the truck.

It was dark and neither Yelena nor I had gotten a good look at it.

“It was a big red pickup truck,” I said. “It turned right on Hamish.”

The officer looked at me in my too-short party dress, then down at her pad. “We’ll do our best, ladies,” she said, “but there’s a lot of big red pickup trucks around here.”

We stayed in the police station parking lot for a few minutes after she left.

“How scary.”

“We’re all right,” I said.

“I wouldn’t have noticed we were being followed.”

“We’re all right.” I feigned calm.

She was still pale. Would she ever go dancing with me again?

“Next time,” Yelena said, her smile back up, “let’s go dancing in the city.”

I reached over and squeezed her arm.

“Yes.”

Jen Companik holds an M.A. from Northwestern University and is a fiction editor at TriQuarterly. Her debut collection, Check Engine and Other Stories, was included on CLMP’s “Reading List for National Hispanic Heritage Month 2021.”

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Musings on *Bi: The Hidden Culture, History, and Science of Bisexuality* by Dr. Julia Shaw (Folio, June, 2022)

By Jane Barnes

At twelve I fell in love with Judy. We enjoyed caresses so natural that we didn't think to hide or brandish ourselves. In 1957, two years later, I fell for a boy with the same dark looks and tenderness—though too literal for me. In my twenties I enjoyed threesomes, swinging and the rare sex party, and read Colette and Woolf—my brilliant bisexual heroines. At 31 and still bi-identified, in an open relationship with a smart bi man, I was happy; it worked.

Until I tried to turn a straight woman, and decided I must be a lesbian, and found a *bona fide* lesbian love, and left the lovely bi man. Oh, no. I was then invisible to myself. To everybody. After a few years I took a sexual sabbatical, dated a straight male and then married a lesbian for nine years, uneasy with my bisexuality. When that ended, I moved to New York and dated two brilliant straight men. Sequentially.

But who “read” me as bi? I wrote a poem “The Bisexual Headscarf” thinking of maybe sewing a blue batik kerchief, tied sixties-style feminist in the back, but I didn't make one. And if I had, wouldn't I be seen as insatiable, indecisive, greedy, confused, or really gay or straight? And being 78.5 years old? Do we elders still even *have* a sexual nature? Way back in 1976 I wrote two poems, one about scary dykes and femmy dykes. They were popular, but unless you're holding hands with a man and a woman, you don't look bi. Even in poetry.

Never mind that you've got 45 years incognito in the lesbian community and—by just leaving the house—a whole life in the straight one. The default is lesbian or heterosexual.

Enter stage left Dr. Julia Shaw, whose photo shows a pretty, made-up (no pun), blond-haired woman. Great. When I accidentally opened her book to “I was in a lesbian bar...” I was thrilled to find an out bi with academic creds who was *kinda* looking bi too. After trying various combos of butch and femme, Shaw arrived at outfits of leather and lace, a tough jacket, a mini and heels. People finally got the message.

After running usefully through chapters on important early sex researchers, Shaw lists many organizations today where we bis can find our sisters—if in no actual bi bars. Her bi TV and



movie mentions will help you find what to watch, including superheroes. She explores bis as erotic targets for het men (in a bad way), and triads as an outlet for het couples who want to open their relationships a crack (in a good way).

Where she's really *au courant* is in her discussion of open relationships, threesomes, and combinations thereof. Since studies show 25% of all het couples have non-consensual affairs, why not follow some bis out of the monogamy straightjacket and think in broader terms? Why should “faithful” hets be the default?

Blind are the government and lawmakers when it comes to civil rights, immigration, etc. No law mentions us. Yes, Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) identifies as bi. Christy Holstege is the new mayor of Palm Springs, California, making her the first out bisexual mayor in the U.S. The rest are hidden in the alphabet of LGBTQ+. Meanwhile, this very summer bi men *are* visible, unfortunately, grappling with monkeypox.

Like Lady Gaga, we. were. born. like that. I love dark boys and blonde girls, talk-ish and bright, as bright as can be. Come on in, says Julia Shaw, The water's great. Then what would we see in a photo or video of two men, two women, or a man and a woman in a café sipping lattes? Would we say “Ah, bis. Us! And what about me? I'm wearing a crossbody black canvas bag, into which is tucked a Revlon Super Lustrous lipstick in Dusty Rose, with thick black Birkenstocks on my feet below a fluttering, pink flowered dress. Oh, yeah, and some days, waving from my red walker.

Jane Barnes is a New York City poet and novelist who has had work in 60 magazines and nine anthologies, lesbian and (finally) bi. Poems about Emily Dickinson are forthcoming in Wrongdoing Magazine, and Gay and Lesbian Review. She should be working on her Paris novel set in 1927.

The Bi+ Parents Aren't Alright

By Jessamyn Bowling, PhD, MPH

My five-year-old kid does not remember a Pride parade. It has been so long since we were able to be in a space in which our relatively cishet-normative downtown is flooded with rainbows (albeit some of them with corporate logos attached). So we read books with different queer narratives. We talk about how I used to date men before I met mommy. And I try to hang out with other parents to normalize my experiences (is it normal for him to scream in that way?). But the chance to be around other bi+¹ folk remains a unicorn of a dream. In the context of the pandemic, the health and wellbeing of bi+ parents may be ragged.

Bi+ parents make up the largest proportion of sexual minority parents, at about 64% (Bartelt et al., 2017; Goldberg et al., 2014). Bi+ women are four times as likely to be caregivers of minors compared to lesbian women (Mirza, 2018). So there are a lot of us. But we actually don't know all that much about bi+ parents experiences in general, as research focused on this group is only trickling in. Studies on the experiences of bi+ parents in the COVID-19 pandemic are even more scant—and not only in the academic literature. A google search on bisexual parent brings up resources about how people are talking to their kids (many published in the last five years), but nothing related to the pandemic. This is especially true for those who aren't cisgender women and identify as bi+.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, parenthood carries additional challenges. Many bi+ parents are taking care of children who may be in and out of school or childcare, affecting their employment (Alon et al., 2020). This is especially true for women with younger children (Feyman et al., 2021). This isn't unique to bi+ parents; many people with caretaking responsibilities in the pandemic are staggering. However, if you add in the context that many bi+ individuals face, or that people in their network who are also bi+ are facing, it looks a bit more stark.

A quick nod to the rundown of rough stuff happening in bi+ parents' lives based on the statistics: bi+ parents are more likely than gay/lesbian parents to report emotional and mental health difficulties, likely due to stigma (Calzo et al., 2019). This follows trends of bi+ individuals generally experiencing higher levels of psychosocial symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, suicidality (Dodge & Sandfort, 2007). It is worth noting that bi+ individuals face stigma in relation to custody and adoption along their parenting journey (Marcus, 2015). Bi+ parents, like other bi+ adults, also face additional hardship such as

unemployment or financial hardship (Mirza, 2018).

In the "beforetimes," bi+ folk already felt on the outskirts of some queer communities. Research has documented that bi+ individuals are more likely to be isolated from LGBTQ community (Callis, 2013; Friedman et al., 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004) or not feeling a part of LGBTQ communities (Bartelt et al., 2017). However, bi+ parents are also working around these barriers. One study points to previous LGBTQ+ marginalization and isolation as enhancing resilience during the pandemic by way of previously established online support communities (Gonzalez et al., 2021). However, older bi+ parents may not feel as connected through virtual communities, so other mechanisms may be additionally needed.

I also acknowledge the changing nature of the pandemic—things are now different. The isolation may have been more acute in the early phases of the pandemic because of quarantine. For those in polyamorous relationships, their relationships outside of a primary partner may have been limited (Montanaro et al., in press). And bi+ parents may also be in a state of further exhaustion, especially salient for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) parents. Another layer for bi+ BIPOC parents may include high rates of distrust of the medical community (Cahill, 2021).

Some bi+ parents are considering ways to be "seen" as bi+ by their kids. Many bi+ parents are interested in their children's awareness, and, ideally, acceptance of their bi+ identity (Bartelt et al., 2017). Pride events were one tactic to maintain an ongoing dialogue with children about these identities (Bartelt et al., 2017). Bi+ parents may be navigating new ways to share their sexual identity with their children in the virtual realm.

As we continue to evolve socially in these later stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuilding ourselves and our communities, I am hopeful of what may come for bi+ folk. I hope we document the pandemic hardships we faced, and the resilience and creativity we have used to navigate it, especially as bi+ parents. If you have kids and identify as bi+, and you think some days, "I'm not all right," you aren't alone. My wish for us is that the hardship be just a phase (unlike our identities).

Jessamyn Bowling is an Assistant Professor in Public Health Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research focuses on sexual health and resilience among marginalized populations.

1 I use bi+ to refer to those attracted sexually and/or romantically to more than one gender, including bisexual, pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, and questioning (Davila et al., 2019).

Find this article online at [BiWomenQuarterly.com](https://www.biwomenquarterly.com) for references.

“Mummy Likes Men and Women”: Telling Your Children You Are Bi+

By Ellen Davenport-Pleasance

Coming out as bi+ can be difficult—especially when managing biphobia—or the cultural lack of understanding of bisexual identity. Adults—both heterosexual and queer—often fail to understand our bi+ identities, and the burden often falls to us, as bi+ people, to educate them. I often find myself trying to convince people that my own bi identity is valid by explaining, “I am not confused,” or “I am not straight now that I am dating a man,” and “No, I was not a lesbian when I was dating a woman.” Arguing for the legitimacy of bisexuality, or countering invisibility, is exhausting. And what about when one becomes a parent? How does one come out to the children or explain it to them as they age?

Now, full disclosure, I am not yet a mum: I am a bisexual woman, in my twenties, with two dogs. I do plan on having children in the future. I have begun to wonder how I will explain my bi+ identity to them. When adults have a hard time getting their head around my attraction to multiple genders, how am I supposed to explain bisexuality to a child? And when is the right time? As an academic, I turned to the research to try to find answers, but found little on bi+ parenthood.

Because I could not find the answers I was looking for in the existing literature, I decided to interview bi+ mothers about their experiences for my master’s degree thesis research. The interview topics ranged from mental health to media consumption, as well as how they came out to their children. The mums lived in various countries across Europe and North America, used a range of labels to describe their non-monosexual identities (bi, pan, queer), and became parents, and parented, in a wide array of family structures. Mums had taken different routes to parenthood, with some conceiving through unassisted reproduction with a current or ex-partner, and others conceiving through assisted reproduction using donor sperm. Mothers who conceived with donor sperm did so for various reasons, including being in a same-sex relationship, choosing to become a parent alone, or having a trans-male partner. Like other family types, it appeared that many of the families had undergone transitions, such as separation or divorce, and many bi+ mums were now parenting in new relationships. Some bi+ mothers were in monogamous heterosexual-passing relationships, others in monogamous same-gender relationships, some had non-binary partners, and some were in polyamorous constellations.

After analyzing the data from interviews with 29 mums, I was able to draw several conclusions. Like me, it seemed that most bi+ mothers wanted their children to know that they were bi+. They pointed out that their children are some of the most important people in their lives, so they wanted to be honest with them, explaining that it “feels good to live authentically.”

I was surprised to find that, contrary to my expectations, most mums told their children about their bi+ identity through conversations over time, rather than a formal, sit-down, ‘coming-out’ statement, so often depicted in movies. Mums also discussed how they needed to tell their children multiple times, because their children would forget. They would begin the conversation when their children were young, and then continue it over time, adding complexity as their children grew older. The exception to this was when mothers had realized they were bi+ once their children were teenagers. In this case, bi+ mothers did have a more formal conversation where they ‘came out’ to their children.

Like me, bi+ mums pondered when the ‘right time’ was to begin the conversation. Some bi+ mums felt that it was best to tell their children from a young age, or from birth, saying that “if [children] get it from a young enough age, they’re like ‘this is just part of who you are.’” Bi+ mums also discussed their children’s teenage years as a time which lends itself to having conversations about bisexuality+. This is a time when conversations about sex and relationships tend to arise naturally. Some bi+ mums incorporated discussions of their own identity into conversations with their teenagers, in addition to using inclusive sex-ed books. Other mums emphasized that they would wait for their children to ask questions, because they felt that “children will ask the questions when they’re ready to hear the answers.” For others, specific events led to the discussion. For example, one mum explained that their child had come home from school and asked, “Mum, is lesbian a bad word?” The explanations of bisexuality that mothers crafted for their young children generally fell into two camps. Some bi+ mothers opted to talk about attraction, explaining to their children that “mummy likes men and women,” or saying, “I could be attracted to... people of all different genders.” Other mothers explained their bisexuality by talking about their own past or current dating. For instance, one mum explained to their children that “mummy might want a girlfriend, or mummy might want a boyfriend,” in order to signify that they might date people of different genders.

Some mums used children’s books and resources to help explain to their children that they were bi+. Mums discussed the lack of representation of bisexuality+ in children’s books and their ability to use the books creatively. For instance, one mum explained that she pointed out bisexual feminists in a book she read to her toddler to spark conversations about bi+ identity. She said, “We have these little feminist board books and if there’s somebody in them like there’s a page with Josephine Baker and I will say, ‘Oh, Josephine Baker was bisexual, just like mama.’”

In terms of preparing their children for discrimination, bi+ mums, often in visibly queer relationships, explained to

their children that they might face negative reactions rooted in biphobia and homophobia. Those in heterosexual-passing relationships tried to shield their children from biphobia and homophobia, by asking their children not to talk about them being bi+ in front of certain homophobic family members. For instance, one mum explained, “One of the things that we would tell [our child] [was] we don’t talk about [my orientation] in front of [Grandad].”

On a more positive note, lots of mums celebrated LGBTQ identities with their children: taking them to pride events, or celebrating at home as a family, or recognizing international celebrations such as Bi Visibility Day. Some children carried banners at pride marches or help to decorate the house with Bi Visibility Day flags. Mothers felt that celebrations were one way they could encourage their children to celebrate diversity, along with educational conversations and books.

Talking to these mothers has given me hope for the future. It

seems that there are a multitude of ways to explain bi+ identity to children, and that “coming out” to them can take the form of subtle, ongoing conversations from a young age, rather than a singular, formal coming-out conversation. Such conversations are evidently working, as evidenced by children’s normalization of bisexuality+. In fact, one mother explained that their son “accepts it the same as having baked beans for dinner!”

I am so grateful to the mums for sharing their experiences with me and I look forward to interviewing more families for my dissertation, which will be based on interviews with children and teenagers on their perspective of having a bi+ mother within their family.

Ellen Davenport-Pleasance is a Ph.D. student at University College London, whose research focuses on bi+ mothers and their families.

Josephine, continued from p. 1

As a dog and plant mama, I follow in the footsteps of many other queer folks who have contributed to caregiving apart from biological reproduction. I won’t belittle my contribution just because it doesn’t fit in with the cultural narrative of success and fulfillment. As a queer and nonbinary femme, it’s up to me to write my own narrative. As poet and activist Alok reminds us: “There are so many ways to create life and that actually, when we just make the creation of life about conception and pregnancy, we are losing the dynamism and the artistry of what it means to be alive and to be in community with one another.” When I first heard these words, I paused and felt affirmed in a surprising and indescribable way. Along the way of becoming an adult, I’d forgotten how satisfied I am without children. Survival and reproduction are not one specific thing; they are limitless resources of skills and contributions.

Not only is reproduction more than sex, but our survival as a species relies on our ability to decenter humans and steward this planet in alignment with traditional Indigenous ways of being. Pinar Sinopoulos-Lloyd of Queer Nature has helped me envision a future for humanity beyond colonization and human supremacy. Pinar explains, “There are so many other multi-species futures we must also fight for... these are our relatives, our lifelines, our kin. Anti-racist and multi-species futures exist and we are just one species dreaming into them. Let our other-than-human kin dream, too.” Tending to plants and gardens, as well as caregiving for animals, contributes to a vision of a multi-species future where the self-involved thinking of humans doesn’t overpower the needs of a biodiverse ecosystem. While it’s different from having human children, we can parent plants and animals as a way to make a family. Tess, my tiny pug-chihuahua mutt, gives me love and fulfillment that only an animal can. She teaches me the importance of nonverbal communication, how to take up space, and how to tune into the joys of the present moment

by spending ample leisure time in the rays of the sun. Not everyone understands the special bond of animals and humans, but I cherish every moment with her. I reject the hierarchy of human-only families being the only legitimate way to parent.

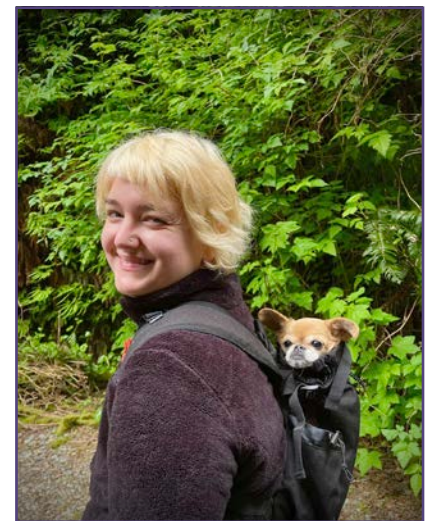
Parenting of any kind is a manifestation of hope, an investment in the belief that we can build a better world, with less violence and more joy. A world that authentically celebrates difference. Parenting is an invitation for transformation, a prayer for the future. Humans need biodiversity like the rest of the planet. Queer reproduction of all kinds will help usher in our multi-species future.

References

Wild Podcast Interview with Alok: <https://forthewild.world/podcast-transcripts/alok-on-unruly-beauty-245>

Pinar Sinopoulos-Lloyd of Queer Nature: <https://www.instagram.com/queerquechua>

Josephine Raye Kelly is a writer and multidisciplinary artist smitten by the redwoods. They co-founded Ouch! Collective, a queer art collective based in the San Francisco Bay Area.



CALENDAR

BBWN Annual Book Swap in Melrose, MA

Sunday, October 2, 12-3pm: The book swap has become one of the highlights of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network brunch circuit where women come to socialize and take home a few good books. Along with bringing a dish/drink to share, feel free to bring books that you'd like to pass along and to discuss your faves. Kara & Ellyn are hosting this event in their home. There's a cat, so medicate accordingly, but we'll probably be outside if there is good weather. Adults only, please. RSVP to Ellyn at elruthstrom@gmail.com by September 28.

Metro-Boston women & non-binary folks:

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

We offer FREE digital subscriptions to this publication to people of all genders and all orientations. Subscribe at BiWomenQuarterly.com.

Here's a special invitation to our readers EVERYWHERE:

Please consider joining the Boston Bisexual Women's Network at one (or all) of our digital brunches—just be aware times listed are US Eastern Time. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make connections across the country (and globe). Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi+ issues and other fun topics.

Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1pm EST:

Sat Sept 10

Sun Oct 9

Sat Nov 5

Sun Dec 11

Sat Jan 7

Sun Feb 5

Sat Mar 4

Sun April 2

Sat May 6

Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com.

(Note: Dates are subject to change.

Check BiWomenBoston.org to confirm date.)

Please join us!

FREE Bi+ Global Event

Join us at the 7th & 8th World Bi+ Meetups! To accommodate people in various time zones, we will have TWO meetups each time: Meetup #8 will be October 28, 4 p.m. EDT/10 p.m. CEST & October 29, 4 a.m. EDT/10 a.m. CEST. Bi+ people everywhere are invited to join either or both meetups on Zoom. We'll be using breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to meet each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English & is organized by Barbara Oud (Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required. Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

C.L., of Bisexual Women of Australia, wrote:

I'm still on a high from attending the last Bi+ world meet up. I have attended three or four now. The amazing hosts Robyn Ochs and Barbara Oud make us feel welcome and at home.

When I started the Facebook group Bisexual Women of Australia, I didn't know where it would take me. I'm so pleased to have met and continue to meet so many inspiring bi+ folks not only in Australia but worldwide. Being bisexual is so much more than the "sexual" part. I must say bi+ people are pretty amazing!

Having a place to share our stories and wisdom is so important to me. Joining community has allowed me to learn so much about myself and others. Being open and vulnerable is not always an easy thing for some to do. Me included. The power of telling our stories is all part of our evolution.

Even bi+ people that are not "out" to their nearest and dearest/workplace are out there advocating doing amazing things to create community. This space is here for you to find and/or be with community and friends, whether it be online, face to face support group, dance parties, or women only events—there is so much out there these days.

Get out there and find your community, The next Bi+ World Meetups are October 28 and 29. Perhaps I'll see you there!

Bisexual Women of Australia is on Facebook, at facebook.com/groups/443567742925311

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