



the



enderiZine
of Massachusetts

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Dear Reader,

Wazzup?

Hopefully, you're excited! ... cuz we certainly are.

The mission of The GenderiZine of Massachusetts is to promote awareness and openness. Through the distribution of this publication, it strives to offer a forum for intelligent and thoughtful discussion on issues of gender and sexual orientation in the state of Massachusetts, as well as the national public at large. The GenderiZine of Massachusetts does not necessarily endorse the views or opinions expressed in this publication. We do realize that material included in this publication may be offensive to some readers, so please use your own judgment when reading this zine. If you have any issues that you would like to discuss with the editors of this publication, please feel free to contact us at editors@genderizine.com or through the website www.genderizine.com. This is the first issue of the publication so we're sure there are a few kinks to be worked out. We are open to hearing how we can work to make the GenderiZine even better next time.

But legal disclaimers aside, what we really want to say is Thank You to everyone. Thank you to those who have written, drawn, sung, etc. for provoking our thoughts as well as our experiential pleasure. Without you, we would literally be nothing but a bunch of college students with a dead-end idea. We would love to receive more fantastic material - send your stuff in for the next issue. (See last page of zine for submission/order forms.) Thank you to those who have doled out the dough to read this zine, helping us to cover the publication's costs and hopefully put together a next issue. And finally, a big Thank You to all the staff who worked on this project. Ricky, you put together a beautiful website. Looking at the final product, we all agree that the long hours hunched over our keyboards were worth it.

So without further ado, please enjoy the Issue Number One of The GenderiZine of Massachusetts, the first in a line of many (hopefully ... :-D)!

Liana Austin Dewi Harjanto Ruth Hunter

The Editors of The GenderiZine

GREEN D E R



Chromosomal Despair: a Haiku

***Deck of fifty three-
useless for any purpose.***

-- anonymous

Two cards are jokers.

-- anonymous

Changing Minds

He asked what it was like to be a 22 year old girl-boy, and I asked what it was like to be a 63 year old history teacher. He said he liked it because after you turn 61 you get to go to state college for free. He's working on his second masters. I told him about being chased down highway 80 in central Pennsylvania for being dumb enough to get gas with my breasts and buzzed head, baseball cap and rainbow sticker. He didn't want to believe me, but he did. He told me about historiography, and the biases that he was learning were in the so-called truths we tell, and how it feels to know he's taught too many children the wrong reality. I told him about manifestos that exclude you from your blood, and emails that remind you that they haven't forgotten that you haven't responded yet. I give him a history book about transies and he leans over and says to me, "You know beck... um, evan, there ain't no shame in just hitting delete before you ever read things like that, son. There ain't no shame in that."

-- Evan Hempel



Gender Queer Expression
-- E.M.M. Howe, Simmons College

"I speak without reservation from what I know and who I am. Should any part of my music offend you, please do not close your ears to it. Just take what you can use and go on."

-- Ani DiFranco

truths

The truths I wish I knew

Anger is wrong.

are the ones

Silence is fairness.

they could never tell.

You're a girl.

The truths about where you end and I begin

You tell lies, make things up.

about faith and how long you can

You never change, do you?

hold your breath under water.

You know I love you, right?

Sometimes the truth isn't

You're a boy, not a man.

so concrete as time in seconds

You're the smartest one.

and liquid in ounces and

You are safe.

the measured length of you or me.

You wear people out.

Sometime lengths overlap and

You make me need to do this.

pressure on the water makes

You were born that way.

time shorter.

You will always be a freak.

Truths are only truths

How could you be so stupid?

in the moment they are spoken,

I would never do that.

then are gone.

I made a mistake.

Gone into another truth you can't

We depend on you.

recognize if you set up for the

You are useless.

last one to stay;

Forgive me.

-- Evan Hempel

SILENCE

silence listens
to beautiful songs
not sung

silence searches
for a map
to the promised land

silence finds
transcendence
in love

silence speaks
of the real world
and room for improvement

-- Sarah Leavitt,

Olin College

About the Author Evan Hempel

Evan R Hempel is a writer from Boston, MA. He is a transgender activist, who works in cancer healthcare. A writer since the he gained conscious control of a pencil, he grew up outside of Boston and spent five years in Ohio before returning home. His work promises to make you smile, pack a punch, and send you home thinking. He has been published in Pinned Down by Pronouns (Amato and Davies, ed. Conviction Books. Jamaica Plain, MA. 2003), and featured on www.butchdykeboy.com.

REDEFINING ORIENTATION

I've got a theory that I truly believe will revolutionize the gay rights movement. By simply redefining what "orientation" means, we will change the way gays are perceived in society as a whole. Perhaps a better way to put that would be to say that we'll correct a misconception about being gay, just as we did when being gay was no longer considered an indication of a mental illness. But correcting the misconceptions of society is never an easy task.

Society for the most part assumes that everyone is straight. For example, a couple months ago, I was contacted by a company putting together a directory for the high school I attended. When I told the representative that I wanted my name listed differently, he congratulated me and asked me how long my husband and I had been married. He was quite apologetic when I explained that I was gay and my partner was another woman. Just the other day, I filled out an online survey and it asked my "marital status". I checked the "living with partner" option and on the next page, I was asked the occupation of both the male and female heads of household. (And this survey was conducted on a site that specializes in getting the opinions of the GLBT community!)

This assumption that everyone is straight means that for heterosexuals, the issue of orientation is rarely thought about until one encounters someone who is openly gay. If someone asked 100 people what their orientation was, then asked those same 100 people what they thought his/her orientation was and why, the vast majority would probably say that the questioner was gay for the simple reason that s/he asked the question in the first place. The general unspoken consensus is that orientation is an issue only to gays, so anyone who asks about it must be gay. Because of this, most heterosexuals probably don't think of the term "orientation" with respect to themselves or their relationships. I can't recall one time when I've ever heard someone say, "My son/sister/friend is in a straight relationship" yet I can't count how many times I've heard, "My daughter/brother/friend is in a gay relationship." Most Americans—gay and straight alike—unconsciously associate the word "orientation" with being gay. The two have almost become interchangeable, which makes the task of correcting society's misconception all that more difficult.

The first step in the process is to drop the use of the word "sexual" when referring to orientation because it

is misleading. Orientation has nothing to do with who you have sex with. Yes, you read that right. Orientation has nothing to do with who you have sex with.¹ Orientation is more appropriately defined by who you can fall in love with.

- **Heterosexuals are men and women who are only able to fall in love with someone of the opposite gender.**
- **Gay men are only able to fall in love with other men.**
- **Lesbians are only able to fall in love with other women.**
- **Bisexuals are able to fall in love with either gender.**

(There's another misconception that bisexuals have to have a lover of each gender at the same time, but I'm not going into that any further in this article. Suffice it to say that many bisexuals are monogamous.)

Saying that orientation has nothing to do with who you have sex with is where most protest, saying something like, "How can who you have sex with not affect orientation?" It's relatively easy since there are so many situations where the current definitions of heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual don't work. Let's look at a few examples.

Jenny feels "different" growing up. While all her friends are talking about the latest male hunk on television or the latest boy band, Jenny's checking out the female lifeguards at the pool or the latest supermodels in magazines. But her family is fiercely anti-gay; her faith considers being gay a sin; her gay uncle was ostracized from the family and no one ever talks to him or about him. So Jenny goes off to college, finds a boyfriend and settles down. She has two kids, a house in the suburbs and she's a regular PTA mom—until Jenny meets the new school nurse and finds herself head over heels in love. Jenny suddenly remembers feeling "different" as a child and eventually realizes she is a lesbian. She knows in her heart that she's always been a lesbian but she's just been too frightened to say anything about it. She's lived in denial up until now. Jenny realizes that she never loved her husband like she loves the school nurse. That she never felt for any man what she feels for this woman. She knows in her heart of hearts that she is not bisexual—that she is a lesbian. Does that mean that she was straight when she was married and she "turned into" a lesbian?

John and Marilyn, both heterosexuals, decide to indulge in a fantasy wherein he watches her have sex with another woman and then both women have sex with him. Does that mean that Marilyn is now a bisexual simply because she had sex with another woman one time?

Frank goes to a bar, gets into a fight with his boyfriend, Gene. Gene leaves and Frank is there alone. He keeps drinking until he's really drunk. A lady comes into the bar. Gail's lonely, Frank's drunk, they end up going home together and having sex. Does that mean he's now bisexual since he had sex with Gail?

Jack is in prison. While serving out his 20-year sentence, he has sex with several different men, but when he gets out, he never has sex with another man again. Does this mean he was gay while in prison and straight before and after his incarceration?

The most controversial examples of the inaccuracy and inadequacy of current definitions are pedophiles. There is already a widely held yet incorrect belief that gays are more likely to be pedophiles. There is no proof for this. In fact, statistics show the opposite. Yet groups like the Boy Scouts of America continue to deny membership to gays because of this outdated, prejudicial and incorrect view that gays are more of a danger to children than straights. The latest major institution to continue to perpetuate this incorrect belief is the Catholic Church, which seems to think that this child sex abuse scandal is a "gay issue" because male priests were molesting young boys. The "logic" being used is that since it was a male having sex with a male, that automatically makes the priest gay. WRONG!!!! Most of these abusive priests are not gay— they're pedophiles. To a pedophile, the gender of the child doesn't matter— it's their age that is important. Most pedophiles are white, heterosexual males— that's statistics, not an attempt to slam white, heterosexual males.

None of the above situations change the orientation of the individual in question. Yet according to the current definitions of the various orientations, it should because the current definitions (or at least as they're commonly interpreted by the general public) are defined by who you have sex with. Ask the average man/woman on the street what they'd consider a man who had voluntary sex with another man and they'd probably tell you he was either gay or bisexual. It would never cross his/her mind that a straight man could have sex with another man and remain straight.

This brings us to another reason to stop using the term "sexual" when speaking of orientation. Barring rape/molestation, we do always have a choice with respect to who we have sex with. Therefore the term "sexual orientation" carries with it the almost subliminal implication that orientation itself is a choice. Since many subconsciously see "sexual orientation" and "being gay"

as synonymous, the "logical" conclusion is that being gay is a choice. Society's refusal to grant equal rights to gays is therefore justified because they're seen not as equal rights but as special rights. To make laws that guarantee gays equal rights would be the equivalent of saying we should make laws that guarantee that artists don't starve— after all, both are choices in the minds of most heterosexuals.

But perhaps the most important reason for changing the definitions of the various orientations is that current definitions debase the true nature of every committed relationship, especially gay ones. A committed relationship— whether straight or gay— is not simply a sexual relationship. In the context of a committed relationship, sex is one of many forms of expression of the love between the two individuals. But with the current line of thinking which defines orientation based on who you have sex with, the subtle implication is that orientation is solely about sex, has nothing to do with love and therefore involves no commitment. Since most people associate the term "orientation" with being gay and use of the term "sexual orientation" implies choice, the subconscious arrives at the "logical" conclusion that a gay relationship is merely a sexual preference that involves no commitment. Again, if it's merely a preference, why should society create laws that guarantee equal rights? Such laws would be special rights if it were truly just a preference. It would be like creating laws that guarantee equal rights for people who prefer dating blondes over redheads. A preference is something you can control. Something you can change. A conscious choice.

The fact is it's not just a "preference"— for gays or for straights. A preference involves having a choice: "Which would you prefer?" is meaningless if you only have one option. Orientation is not about who you have sex with. It's about who you are capable of falling in love with. A straight woman can no more choose to fall in love with another woman than a lesbian can choose to fall in love with a man. Even if that love doesn't come with the first person you have sex with. Or even the tenth. A lesbian is still a lesbian even if she doesn't find love until she's fifty because she is only capable of falling in love with another woman. A gay man is still gay even if he experiments with having sex with women because he is only capable of falling love with other men. A straight man is still straight even if he experiments with having sex with another man because he can only fall in love with women.

The sexual aspect of any committed relationship is

merely an expression of the love within the relationship and you can't choose who you fall in love with. When people finally understand that orientation is about who you fall in love with not who you have sex with, they'll realize it's not a choice. They'll finally understand that gays only want the same rights that straights already enjoy: to have that protection of the law that forbids anyone from discriminating against you based on who you love.

The gay rights movement is slowly plodding ahead—in fact, just recently in Pennsylvania, gays won the right to adopt the biological/adopted child of their partner, which leaves only 29 other states whose laws have to change. For the first time, gays in Massachusetts have the right to legally marry. But those fighting for gay rights are being hindered by subconscious associations that are reinforced every time we use the term “sexual orientation” and by the current definitions of homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual which are based on who you have sex with. Simply by dropping the use of the word “sexual” from in front of “orientation” and by informing others that being gay is not about who you have sex with but who you can fall in love with, we can change many of those subconscious associations. This will make the task of acquiring equal rights for gays that much easier as those in power—those who write the laws (who are, for the most part, heterosexual)—realize that gays aren't really asking for special rights. They simply want justice and equality.

I An interesting side note I'd like to mention. When discussing this idea about orientation having nothing to do with who you have sex with, most women will say something like, “You're right!” Most men on the other hand will say, “No way! It has everything to do with who you have sex with.” This, I believe, comes from the fact that, in general, men and woman hold almost polar opposite views of love and sex.

Men need sex to feel loved.
Women need to feel loved to want sex.

In general, men view love and sex as basically the same thing while women see the two as separate with sex being but one expression of love. Therefore, in general, men are unable to understand how who you have sex with does not define one's orientation.

-- Reverend Shelley Strauss Rollison

The Bar Room

*I see her through the clouds
Of the smoke filled bar room
Not a hair out of place
Dressed in leather and lace
Our eyes meet
My body moves towards her
As if in a trance
She greets me with a smile
And asks me to dance
She takes my hand
And leads me to the dance floor
With slow moves and in step
With the music we move together
Our bodies perfectly fit
When the music stops
She fades into the crowd and
Out of sight
I look around and see her
Standing by the light
She winks and waves goodnight.*

-- anonymous

About the Author Rev. Shelly Strauss Rollison

Rev. Shelly Strauss Rollison is the resident visionary at OneSpiritProject.com and author of a monthly syndicated column called “The View From Here”. She's also authored more than 20 books (still seeking publishers) and a staunch gay rights and religious freedom advocate and speaker. In 2004, she started the Purple Hat Project in support of GLBT's coming out on National Coming Out Day (which occurs every October 11.) She lives in Pennsylvania with her wife of seven years and two sons (from a previous marriage) as well as six fur kids.

[Untitled]

It took him three words to make me—I love you. And it took him three words to break me—I am gay.

We sit together at the number 79 bus stop on a muggy California evening. In the distance I can hear the honking and screeching of rush hour. We drown in silence. I stare at the passing cars, each upsetting a whirl of dust as it whizzes by. I draw in a quivering breath and let it out slowly into the clammy night air. Uneasiness lingers in the air in wisps of hot steam.

"Do you hate me now?" he asks. I do not answer immediately. I am unemotional, unwilling to give in and let my heart lead my head. But I look down at his trembling hand and my heart lurches; I grip his hand in mine. I open my mouth but close it again in hesitation. I am confronting everything my upbringing has taught me all my life. I watch the silhouette of him against the shadowy night sky. I see a lost and confused boy. Hardly.

I pause; "Of course not," I answer. It takes me three words to challenge beliefs I thought I had held so steadfastly to.

"I don't want you to think of me differently," he tells me. I begin to ponder exactly how I do think of him. What unites us in this relationship? Why am I in this relationship—why did I fall for someone gay? I'm straight. Society delineates that we do not mix. But we do. I am in this relationship for something else, then. But I don't know where to find the answer to that; I simply let the silence between us drown out my thoughts.

I hear him sniffing. A teardrop tumbles its way onto the pavement. At this moment, the bustle of rush hour and frenzy of people doing last minute grocery shopping seem miles away. The 79 bus pulls up to the stop. Hot air rushes out from the exhaust pipes. This is my ride home—this is my time—to let go. I release his hand and hug him goodbye.

I stare at the window and look past the reflection of the whizzing headlights and street signs. I watch him and I finally understand. I can see inside of him—and I find that he is the same boy I always saw him as. We go together not because I am straight and he is gay. We go together because we are friends. Simple as that.

This is me—I am a conservative Christian; and my ex boyfriend and best friend is gay. And I love him.

-- anonymous

[Chinese character for Love- Ai]

WITHOUT MY PERMISSION

An anti-athletic senior in high school, I found myself unexpectedly at my first basketball game one night. I was a little annoyed at my friend who had forced me to go, and I expected the game to be incredibly dull. But as I sat in the bleachers among the roaring crowd, I became very interested. As time passed though, I noticed myself paying attention not to the progress of the game, but more to a certain player on the team. I sat there gazing dreamily at this amazing player, certain I had fallen in love at first sight. I was terrified. The basketball player was a girl.

"What's wrong with me!?" I screamed at myself inside my head. "She's a girl. I don't like girls that way! I mean there's nothing wrong with people like that," I reasoned with myself, "but that kind of thing just isn't for me."

I didn't want to have feelings like that; I wanted to be "normal." So continuing on with my "normal" life, I decided to forget about the crazy night that I contemplated liking a girl. As much as I tried to suppress my feelings for her though, I couldn't seem to forget her.

"There must be something wrong with me," I told myself. "I just can't get her off my mind! Oh my God, what if I am bisexual, or even worse, a lesbian?" I never thought there was anything wrong with people being bisexual, or gay, or lesbian, or anything, but for me to be one of these things was just different somehow, unthinkable.

She was an amazing basketball player, so I thought maybe I just looked up to her as a sports figure. And she was such a nice person. Maybe I had mixed up my feelings for her with those of a romantic nature, when, in fact, I was just fond of her in a friendly way. Her friends were so lucky that they knew her. I wanted so badly to be her friend too...

Soon, a mutual friend introduced us, and we got to hang out for the first time. We were instant friends. By constantly

talking online, we got to know each other a little better. Before long, we even started to pass notes back and forth throughout the day in school. She is such a sweet person, and would do anything to help someone out. She's smart, she's funny, and her optimism allowed me to see my life differently. We became good friends really quickly, but I was always jealous of her best and closest friends. I wanted to be her best friend.

Dear Diary,

Me and "you know who" are actually really good friends. It's crazy that we became so close so fast. I love being her friend. I don't know why I still feel the need for more though. I guess it's just because she is such an awesome friend...nothing more than that...I think...

Months went by, and we began to spend excessive amounts of time together. Every moment we both had free, we were together. I only wanted to hang out with my other friends if she couldn't hang out at that time. The guilt would often build up in my mind. But why should I force myself to be with my other friends when I really wanted to be with her? She was so much fun to be around. I was addicted to her.

"She makes me so happy. Is that a bad thing? Is it bad that I want to spend so much time with her, just because she's a girl? No, of course not," I debated with myself. "But is it bad because I might have feelings for her? I'm so confused. I wish someone had answers for me. I wish I could understand myself."

Once I began to think of the idea of liking her as more than a friend, the realization hit me: even if I did like her, it wouldn't have mattered because there was no chance she could possibly like me that way too. I felt so stupid; I just wasted a lot of time on confused and pointless feelings. I figured that I had to eliminate all of my feelings for this girl since I had no chance anyway. Once again I was back to convincing myself that I could not possibly be bisexual.

I forced myself to look at her as just a friend, and not think about being anything more than that. This proved to be much more difficult than I had expected. Every time I saw her, I became lost in a state of utter happiness and the thought of actually being with her surfaced itself in my mind, clearly without my permission. It became a nuisance, always pushing the possibility of being bisexual out of my mind. I found that I actually didn't want to suppress the thought. I liked the way she made me feel...and I didn't care that she was a girl. Denying my true feelings proved to be depressing and quite impossible anyway.

This struggle with my personal identity was eating me up inside, and I had to talk to someone about it. I had no idea who to talk to though. It would have been way too hard to bring up such a topic with my family, even though we are very close. I didn't want to tell my best friend because I feared her reaction. I didn't want her to think I was weird or to be afraid of me. So I turned to a friend who I met online two years ago. A very open and honest person, I felt comfortable telling him almost anything. He had helped me out with some problems before, and if he decided to hate me because of this, it wouldn't be like losing my best friend. Plus, it was so much easier to bring up this delicate topic over the internet, instead of face to face.

"Hey, can I ask you a question?"

"Anything"

I entered "do you think it's bad to be bisexual or gay?" into his AIM window, and paused just a moment to rethink what I was about to do. Ultimately I decided it was for the best. Enter.

"No, of course not," he replied.

"Well...would it be bad if I were bisexual?"

"Not at all! Personally, I don't think anybody is anything. We're all just searching for someone we want to spend

our lives with.”

With my friend’s words in mind, I began to think about myself and my sexual identity without blindly dismissing the idea of being something other than “straight.” I figured that I couldn’t be a lesbian though, since I was still attracted to some guys. But, I began to think about being bisexual, without automatically thinking it was impossible.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a very open-minded society, and so I was pushed into denying who I was. Walking down the hall, or sitting in class, it was common to hear the word “gay,” or a vulgar synonym used to insult someone. In our small school, if someone found out about my “secret”, everyone in every grade would know about it in a few periods. Everyone would look at me differently: like I was a monster, someone to be scared of, or like I was something disgusting, someone to look down on.

Although I couldn’t tell many people my “secret,” I had to at least be true to myself. Thinking about the past months, and even into my distant past, I finally acknowledged many previous thoughts about being bisexual. I was no longer afraid of being myself. I didn’t want the whole world to know, but it was liberating finally to just accept myself.

Dear Diary,

I am bisexual. I’m in love with a girl. I can say it and be okay with it! It is such a great feeling. Yay for self discovery!

These thoughts no longer made me nervous and scared. It is a great feeling to know who you are and to be happy with yourself. Although I still didn’t want to share my new self discovery with everyone, I wanted to tell my best friend. It was such a hard task to spit out such a small sentence. It literally took me hours before I got up the courage to tell her. Finally I just took a deep breath, let go of my anxiety, and told her the truth.

“Marry, I think I’m bisexual.”

“Oh, that’s it? That’s not a big deal at all. I was so afraid you had something bad to tell me! Don’t worry, you are still my best friend and this doesn’t change

anything.”

It was such a relief knowing that my best friend accepted me for who I am and supported me no matter what. After I told her, I couldn’t believe I hadn’t gone to her for advice before. With this new sense of acceptance, I was gradually able to share my “secret” with other close friends. They all had similar reactions to Mary’s. Everyone accepted me for who I am and they know that I am still the same person, no matter if I want to date a guy or a girl.

My brother and my mom had noticed that there was something bothering me and previously I wouldn’t tell them what it was, but after receiving such support from my friends, I was even able to share my thoughts with them. “You’ll always be my daughter, and I’ll always love you no matter what,” my mother reassured me. Both my mother and my older brother accepted me and supported me one hundred percent. I am lucky because I grew up in a very close-knit and open-minded family. I love having the freedom to be myself completely and not hide anything from my family, or myself.

The people that I am close to understand me and respect me, no matter what my personal choices in life, but there are many people who would not have the same understanding and respect. It’s not always a very friendly place to live if you are anything different from most other people. In my high school, where people who stand out in any way are negatively labeled and constantly taunted, careful precautions must be taken to keep dissimilarities safely hidden. Sexual orientation is not something that you get to choose, and when people put you down for something you cannot control, it really hurts. It’s hard to come to terms with yourself if you are different, because the world is always telling you to be like everyone else.

Being gay or bisexual doesn’t make someone bad or immoral. And keeping two people apart doesn’t make them change their feelings. My girlfriend’s

parents found out about our relationship and commanded her to break it off. They had no other reason for this order than my being female. I can’t understand why they would rather their daughter be “normal” than be herself, and be happy. Is it right for me and my girlfriend to hide our relationship just because her parents don’t want her to be gay?

It’s extremely disheartening when the President of your country is trying to ban gay marriage, when you may want to marry someone of the same sex. According to President Bush, “it’s very important that we protect marriage as an institution between a man and a woman” (Cloud 40). Marriage is the union of two people who love each other; it shouldn’t matter if they are both male or both female.

There’s something really wrong with our country when people cannot feel comfortable being themselves. What is the right of marriage, if people can’t choose who they marry? In *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, “the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that a prohibition on same-sex marriage violates the Massachusetts constitution” (Sunstein). The state of Massachusetts, and some other states could see that banning same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, why couldn’t the President see that too? I don’t think I should be punished and not allowed to marry the person I love, just because she is a girl. You don’t get to choose who you fall in love with, and you shouldn’t be punished for something you cannot control.

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-- Christina Peterson, MIT

Necessary Losses

When She called
 i just stood there
 in my towel
 damp from my shower
 exhausted from working
 all along as me
 all day.

I stood there
 and stared
 dumbstruck
 by the heat and weight
 of her words

do not contact
 do not
 contact
 my five children
but i helped raise them

again.
i love them

Do Not Contact My children

(my heart fell out)
 an anchor dropped
 like lead
 the weight
 of her words
 froze me
 naked
 i
 fought back
 the shame
 of living in
 a body
 that five minutes earlier felt like my own.

Repeating
 the words

"I'm becoming beautiful,
 and it's so much harder than I thought."

resisting
 falter



Against

Beaten

Shores

It came in waves, tumultuous
 and crashing against the shores
 beating against jagged rocks until
 they were made smooth.

It came in waves
 salty and smelling of their journey
 from open sea to sandy beach
 carrying gifts of mercy
 offering of peace.

Pale peach deposits of forgiveness
 soft white shards of understanding
 and at my ears I can hear its mournful cry.

It came in waves
 warm from penetrating sunshine
 and settled on brown and white grains.

It brought 5 pronged friends
 that always grow back
 so as to never know loneliness.

It came in waves
 so as to disguise itself
 to hide what it really was.

Cloaked in beauty it came
 hammering at the coast.

with destruction it came
 without warning it came

In ferocious waves it came
 with scales of torment
 with sharpened teeth
 for tearing youthful flesh.

It came in waves
 too strong to be reckoned with
 too fast to be outrun.

It came in waves
 that flooded already open wounds
 and drowned an already weakened heart.

It came in waves
 and swept me out to sea
 and even mermaids with perfect fins
 and ivory skin could not survive.

And I did not stand a chance.

So I sit upon a once jagged rock
 now beaten smooth
 amidst the waters and the waves
 surrounded on all sides
 bracing for the onslaught.

Because it comes in waves
 when least suspected
 it comes in waves
 monstrous and intense
 and soaks me to the bone
 until I am too waterlogged to move
 too downtrodden to fight against the current
 too weak to stand alone.

-- Sarah Oliver and
 Anne Marie Rynning,
 Olin College

-- Evan Hempel

-- anonymous

Field
of
Flowers
-- anonymous

Let me lay with you in fields of wildflowers
 I want to watch the sunlight as it glows in your hair
 I will pluck the midnight stars from your eyes
 and warm your body with my touch
 I want to feel your heart beat when I hold you close
 and keep you captivated with my love
 I will take you by the hand
 and lead you to the waters of life
 and there as the wind blows
 I will lay you down
 and while the waters run free over our bodies

Wouldn't it be easier
 If you were that way
 Since you spend so much time with guys?
 Wouldn't life be simpler
 If you became that way?

**They have no idea
 What it's like, how hard it is
 To know that you could be discriminated against
 At any time, any place—
 To be constantly on your guard,
 To always have to watch your back.**

You're an actor, right?
 An author and a dancer.
 Aren't a lot of them that way?
 You seem so close-minded.
 Couldn't you be prejudiced?
 I think you're prejudiced.
 You are only, you are simply
 A product of society.
 Why don't you just think
 On your own?

**I can't stand my "kind."
 It's such a clique, a façade
 Where nothing's real, it's all for show.
 How impossible to find
 Someone who thinks like me,
 Who acts like themselves,
 As opposed to the mold that society's created for them.
 The mold that singles them out as different,
 Peculiar, odd, unlike "them"—wrong.
 Can't you just be you,
 Like me?**

I know you're smart,
 But I also know your background,
 How you came from a backwater place
 Devoid of diversity
 Bereft of benevolence
 And not forward thinking.
 These are not assumptions;
 I know you.

**Like my babe,
 She's so unique, so special
 To me.**

**I love her, but not that way.
 I wish I could, but I cannot.**

**I want him,
 He wants her,
 She wants me.**

The irony kills me.

**I can't help it. I relate to her so closely.
 I'd treat her so well.**

**I love her, but not that way.
 But I wish I could.**

**You like him.
 Admit it.**

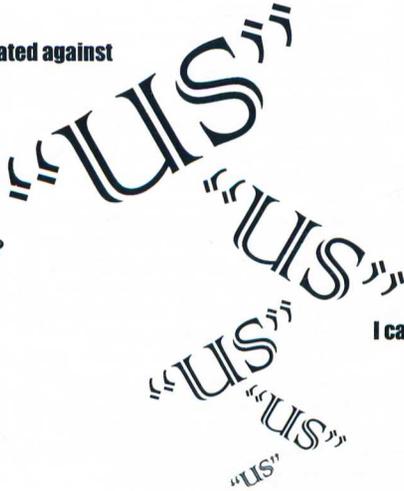
**You touch him all the time.
 Why not act on your feelings?
 Why not let me convince you
 You want him?**

**My soul is on a search
 For him.**

**Why is it that way? Who knows.
 Who's to blame? Why is it blame?**

**I mean, I know I like it—
 His tender touch, his warm embrace.
 Yes, I do know him, quite well, actually.**

**Now all I have left
 Is to find him.**



The Great Race

The straggler arrived at the bus stop. He was flushed, sweating despite the pre-dawn cold. The morning had caught him as unprepared as had the last one. And the one before that. It had been another mad struggle against blind drowsiness—stumbling mindlessly, crunching furiously on little rings of sugar-coated fortified cardboard while, somewhere off to his left, the parent knowingly smiled and prepared a bag lunch to speed the process. Drowsiness was the routine of the week—if anyone felt the need to ask he'd mumble something vague about homework and deadlines, glossing over the truth. *Nothing to see here—just a self-polluting eighth-grader, par for the course. Move along.*

When the girl saw him, she looked at him with the same wholesome grin as ever. He wondered if she ever had unclean thoughts, or if development in that direction was utterly checked by religion. So much the better: once you ate from the tree you couldn't go back. And for him, the apple had had a sour aftertaste.

"You don't *have* to stare at the ground, do you?"

In the midst of his philosophical musings he was struck by the uncomfortable thought of her eyes bearing down intently on him. Why was she breaking the routine—twisting their normal two minutes of silence before the bus arrived into an unexpected form that would resist his carefully honed talent for compressing long, awkward moments into something tolerably short?

Resisting a strange urge to bolt, he planted his feet and lifted his gaze to meet hers. Wild yellow eyes cut a swift vertical arc from the particularly interesting pattern of cracks in asphalt that had so often drawn them, upward, barely registering tennis shoes, skinny legs, and the body of a pre-teen girl dressed for modified league soccer. Her scrawny neck and thin, smooth face were the lightest of brown. At last he settled on her mild and rather nonplussed stare—eyes that were chestnut-brown by day. Impossible to tell in this light. They were wide and earnest whenever she spoke:

"What is it you think about, that takes such concentration?"

Good question. What's the topic of the day, sex or set theory? Or Great Expectations? Or how about sex? Am I trying not to imagine what a heartbreaker you'll be when your sheltered mind begins to notice boys? Am I wondering if you'd take interest in me, if only I were anything approaching normal? Could I, for one brief moment, have forgotten you and the rest of humankind to

simply admire what nature has inscribed on the canvas of our "finished" works?

He shrugged. The words croaked their way out of him: "It's no one thing. My mind wanders when I don't get enough sleep." His sunken eyes with their drifting gaze sold the statement, calling her attention away from a rising anxious thrill that made hairs stand on end and his flesh crawl with tiny points of sweat.

"Well, what keeps you awake?"

He broke eye contact, turned his attention elsewhere, and hoped for the conversation to die.

She persisted. "You answer me. You never got like this around me back when I was a nudist. What's your problem—that I went and changed on you?"

"Yes," he said loudly.

"Well, you changed on me too, Cody. I'm mightily disappointed."

Deflect them all. Wait for silence. Exercise self-control, always. Except the nights... At nights, the explosion of pent-up frustrated adolescence. Then weariness, sleep, the crazy morning, the medications...

"Cody."

Two long years of that persistent voice seemed merely the continuation of that fateful morning's conversation. He heard it on the bus, on the phone—it had even skipped a grade to join him at the high school this year. A slender hand reached over the back of the seat and came to rest on his left shoulder. His shoulder jerked, and the hand retreated. After a deep marshaling breath, he spoke to her, in a voice that cracked and rumbled much as it had on the day she began untangling the web he'd spent so many years weaving about himself.

"I'm okay, Mer, honest. It was just..."

"Just what? How can you justify looking half-dead all the time? You know as much as I do that those nights locked in your room don't do any good." Her attack was soft-spoken, just for his ears. She was leaning over the seat back.

"Don't ask questions, Mercedes, I do not want to discuss it."

"When have I ever failed to ask questions?"

"Never. But, there are things you shouldn't have to get about me."

"You're right," she said, and she reached out and grabbed his long, shaggy bangs and pulled hard. He found himself pressed against the seat with his head tilted back, looking up her nostrils, noticing how she'd retained that cute little knob of a nose as she turned into some-

one boy coveted. And he thought of the new boyfriend—who seemed harmless enough, but his God help him if he ever so much as smiled too broadly to the guys after a date with Mercedes.

Cody sat motionless, his spidery lashes occasionally fluttering, and waited to be told what he'd done wrong this time. "After all, I'm just a girl—right?"

"Look, I can't discuss my habits without bringing up details I know you don't want to hear about. Is that reason enough for you?"

"No. Go on," she said tersely after a moment.

As long as we kept our distance, you were invulnerable to my baser thoughts. *Now I have to fight to keep you out of them—and you resist me every f*cking step of the way.*

But what he said was, "So... I finish, and I don't feel satisfied. I feel... worse. Empty. And the only solution is more." It came out in a sorry whisper.

"But have you tried reading a book? Do you call me on the phone? Or come chat with me, since you're so close to the damn keyboard anyway..." mortified, she crossed herself. She began to apologize, but he cut her off.

"Suppose you're even still awake. What am I going to say? 'Hi Mer, I just washed away ten million progeny and yet I still feel incomplete as a person.'"

"Cody," she cooed as she stroked the dandruff-ridden hair of which he was so self-conscious—"you are just the biggest drama queen I ever met. You're not giving us any credit..."

"Leave it alone!" he growled, when his anger at the intimacy of the gesture cut through its soothing effect. "Just let me sleep."

The door of the bus snapped shut on the last stop of the morning route. Trees and houses began to crawl away behind him, and then slowly picked up speed until they were dashing by in a great blur. As the baritone hum of the engine rose, Cody sank back into himself. Life was all climax and dull interlude. Sooner or later, Mercedes would recognize the underlying pattern as he did. And in the ensuing revelations, there he would be, unicellular and naked under the microscope, begging her to turn off the harsh lights.

"Last one, boys. Go!" The entire junior squad leapt forward at the coach's command, synchronized not out of habit or eagerness to

comply but because they were excited that practice was nearly over. The chill air of the season bit at Cody's arms and thighs, but just below the skin his muscles were hot with activity. He'd only gone a short distance when his thoughts started to drift away from technique. The coach yelled out, "Fix that posture, Sleepy! You can't stay in JV forever. You plan on warming the varsity bench as a senior?" But falling asleep at the wheel was inevitable. Cody's mind kept returning to the rumors of trouble between Mer and Eddie, and to the letter he'd just received from what seemed more likely to be a hoax than a real college.

"What is this," he said happily as he climbed the bleachers to meet Mercedes halfway. She had been perched there for at least a half-hour, waiting, he assumed, for the chance to bug him about a paper for world history or chemistry or biology or something. He thought it must be maddening to watch the cross-country team run this routine in particular—endless repetitions of one lap at a hard run, one at a steady jog, then walking in place waiting for the pulse to come down before starting over again. It would look as if they were winding down for the day, and then—off again at a hard run. It certainly wore him out doing it.

"You and I are walking home," she said. This was generally very bad news. Not that it wasn't pleasant, once in a while, to take the long, leaf-strewn trail that led down by the river instead of riding the bus down the interstate; but by the tone of her voice, he knew there was something big on her mind, and that she needed the privacy of the nature walk in which to interrogate him. He steeled himself for the verbal assault while he gathered his thoughts.

Three long years I've been standing here, watching you as you turn into a beauty. Trying not to mentally undress you even as you struggle to undress me. You always have been utterly comfortable in your skin—though you showed it a bit differently as a toddler, the naked terror of the neighborhood. Did I trust you better then? Could be. After all, a naked person has no place to hide anything.

It began about ten minutes into their trek, as light glinting off the crests of little wavelets began to show through the trees. "There was another big party up on Matthias street this weekend," she said evenly. Immediately he understood.

"I know; I was there. Practicing being sociable, like you wanted. It was no small effort covering my ass on a Saturday night, either."

"And you met Kathy there, my best friend from middle school, right?"

He nodded. "We'd said a few words in passing at the high school, but it was the first time I really had the chance to talk with her. You were absolutely right, I can see the resemblance, except..."

"Except that *she* took you down the creek to their favorite smoking spot and..." The fire in her eyes was inescapable. No downplaying this. He sighed.

"And yeah, things happened," standing still, waiting for the outburst.

"Things? Cody, I was shocked to learn what happened."

"To be fair, it wasn't all my idea. Not my f*cking idea just because I'm the male. You *know* of the two of us she's the one with the experience."

"She was high as a kite!" And she stormed off toward the river, with Cody running after.

"And you think I was sober?" he demanded. "Hit for hit, she had me on another damn planet. I was just going with it. She led."

"Can you be so dumb? What have I always said?"

"I know you think you have to protect her, but I am *not* the devil."

"She's like a twin sister to me!"

"Exactly," he barked, before he'd quite grasped the ramifications. He stopped dead a second time.

"What do you mean, *exactly*? Uh, Cody?"

His knees felt weak. Something hard and heavy began to weigh on Cody's stomach. He stepped off the path and leaned his back against a peeling birch.

"I'm a freaking idiot," he said. "I can't believe it."

"Cody? How many fingers?"

"For the love of God, can we please not rub it in!"

"I meant how many fingers am I holding up."

"I'm not sick, Mer. I just feel f*cking lame. How does she feel about all this?"

"Kathy? Yeah, she's fine. She says you looked kind of small for her tastes, had it come to that, but not to worry, most women apparently aren't as picky."

"You accosted me over nothing?"

"Cody, you know what this is about."

"Like you wouldn't believe," he said, finally seeing it for what it was. *And that tactless woman! Honesty to a friend is one thing, but to apply such gory detail to the night we let ourselves be seen together—and Mercedes the girlfriend of the vice president of the Christian club.* Granted, Mercedes was above spreading such stories; but her position in the social hierarchy stood directly in front of the school's moral loudspeaker, who would hold nothing back. Thus, she was meant to see and hear no evil.

"You, I thought I told you to take care of details like these before I come over. Just look at this hair!" Mercedes pointed accusingly at his reflection in the mirror, using the hand that wasn't preoccupied with trying to untangle and flatten out a wild cusp of hair on the top of Cody's head.

"I did. Honestly, I took a shower at four-thirty and I fixed it."

"So what happened between four-thirty, and the time that I showed up at your door to see you looking like this?"

"I... guess I got nervous and I un-fixed it in my nervousness."

"On tonight of all nights!" She pulled so hard he shouted, and the gnarl of hair unwound itself.

"Don't get so upset, Mer. It wouldn't be your last Ice Prom that I was spoiling."

"It wouldn't be yours either, Cody... would it?" He watched in the mirror as understanding began to grow and spread across her face.

"You should see my high school record. It begins three years before I entered high school. Special bussing, distance learning courses, exemptions—and that summer class at the Worcester Pl. I have absolutely no reason to be here next fall..."

"Getting out while the getting's good, eh?" Her smile was transparent.

"...Except, of course, that I'd miss you and Kat and those few others who've made this place interesting. You, especially."

"But where would you go? Where can you expect to find what you've been missing here?"

He closed his eyes and leaned toward the toilet, nearly tipping over the rickety stool onto the bathroom floor in the process. From a basket perched there he pulled several laminated college pamphlets and extracted the second from the top. He gave it to Mercedes and said, "This will at least partially answer your question."

He watched as, rapt with attention, she thumbed through page after page of what he remembered so well: mounds of statistics, sample student and faculty vignettes, answers to student questionnaires and cleverly worded propaganda. "Yeah," she said as she slowly set down the pamphlet, "it's a pretty special place alright. But—it's in the middle of nowhere."

"In the middle of the California desert, to be more exact." When he saw that this wasn't helping her unease, he added, "I'm not accepted there yet. But I'm on their watch-list,

so to speak."

"You mentioned Kathy," she said. Changing the subject. "So nice of her to step aside and let me be your date to your first and last Ice Prom."

"She turned me down, Mer."

"She told me otherwise!"

"She changed her mind, Mercedes." Under his breath he added, "We were both unhappy with the arrangement. You finished?"

She shook her head. "Let me get out my make-up kit!"

"Why do I need that?" He started to get up, but she put a firm hand on his shoulder.

"The same reason I do, stupid. To cover up blemishes and the bags under your eyes. Just count yourself lucky that you're so generously endowed with eyelashes, they show up fine without any mascara." She snapped the case shut.

"And if I wasn't?"

"Hold still." With an artist's touch she began conservatively applying the lightest-colored foundation she had in her kit.

"Listen," Cody said softly, careful not to move any more than was necessary, "I never intended to bring anyone other than you to this dance. But I felt like I couldn't, as long as you were with Eddie. The guy's a head taller than me, and I didn't feel like pissing him off."

Mercedes restrained a laugh. "Okay, first of all, Eddie is *not* that kind of guy—he's a gentle giant—and secondly, what harm was there in taking me to the Ice Prom as a friend? It's upperclassmen and their dates; it's not like he can go."

"I once said a few things to Eddie that weren't very fair. It was about you and, in retrospect, considering that he's vice president of the Christian club, it was pretty outrageous. But you'd seemed better off without him."

"I *am* better off without him. Don't be fooled by that high-and-mighty title of his; Eddie's mind is filled with politics. When Eddie looks at me, he thinks the same exact thoughts that you do. He applies all the same labels." She took a step back, musing to herself while she examined her work.

"I *highly* doubt that's true," Cody said.

"And, he was prepared to act on those thoughts of his," she said, her voice suddenly loud, as she resumed filling in and blending in the foundation.

Cody took a deep breath. "As I would be," he said.

She stopped her work. "What did you say?"

"Just finish my face. We can talk in the cab."

"This," he said—and he gestured around the spacious U-shaped passenger compartment of the luxury "cab" his family had graciously

rented—"is not the setting I had in mind, but then knowing me I could find a reason to reject any choice of venue. But I realized that if I do nothing, the feelings in my chest will affect my every decision until they burst free like an alien chest-burster."

"How poetic." She smiled warmly. "Is this how you usually work your charm on women?"

"I'll accept your criticism *later*. You need to understand some things; first of all, I *have* been messing around with Kathy for some time. It's been a great comfort, and I saw nothing wrong with it until the day you cornered me. Then you made me see what I was actually doing, and I felt ill."

"Cody." She leaned over and put a hand on his shoulder. "It's okay to think of me that way. You won't go blind from it, and to be

honest, I'm flattered. Even though you and I can't just casually act on our feelings, I would rather you tell me how you feel than keep it bottled up inside."

"Nothing that's going on here is casual. I love you."

Mercedes was clearly stunned. She was a minute collecting herself; after that, she was a blur of motion, straightening his tie, brushing off his suit jacket; she seemed, of all things, *fidgety*. "Cody," she said unsteadily, "you sound way too sure of yourself. I mean, in most relationships, telling a girl you love her before asking her out is kind of sudden..."

"Not sudden!" She was taken aback by the strength of his voice. He removed her jittery hands from around his waist and resumed talking. "We've... been doing this runabout for what, three years? All that time you were acting to expose me with your sly prodding and grooming and mothering. Congratulations; now stop being naïve." Mercedes buried her face in her hands.

"I did what I did out of love for a friend."

He smiled. "And I don't resent you for it. We had a great race, but I'm tired of running away. I am facing my fear. I need to try this the other way... Please, before I'm gone." He extended his arm. She brushed it aside.

"It's impossible. You're asking me to jump off the deep end with you."

"No! I'm not asking you to love me. You just have to show me where it begins. Deep end, shallow end, I don't care. It needs a chance to start."

She looked up slowly. A single tear had smeared the mascara down the left side of her face. "How do I look?"

He beamed. "Fantastic. Nothing my mom's

emergency kit won't fix. She'll be waiting out front to take pictures."

Twenty minutes later, they were nearing the front of the line to be announced before the promenade. His palms, which had dried a bit while comforting Mercedes in the minutes prior to their arrival, were once again wet. His ears again were engorged with blood. None of his garments felt like it was on quite right. When he mentioned this to Mercedes, she laughed.

"I keep wanting to fix my bra," she said. "In comparison, that suit doesn't look so bad. At least your mom *helped* me fix the mascara. She's a sweet old *mujer*, I hope you know. Do you know what she said to me, when I told her what you'd said in the limo?"

"You told her!" he said, noticing they were on deck.

"She said, 'I know it, girl. I can feel it in everything he says. If you have a heart, marry the boy. He'll never love anyone else that way.'"

"You're an anomaly in my life, Mer. I still don't know how to act around you most of the time, there's too many sides to you. But what I said is absolutely true for all of them. There's no doubt left in my mind that..."

But the announcer had cut him off. "Cody Alexander Hutton of the class of 2003, escorted by Mercedes Alvarez." On cue, they walked arm in arm, Cody focusing as much effort as possible on the paradoxically effortless-looking stride Mercedes had tried to teach him. His shoulders sagged when he noticed the way some kids gaped at him and his escort. An incredible heat surged over his temples and forehead—what could it be? Were his zits showing through horribly? Were they amazed by the caliber of the woman beside him? Or was it simply that he'd asked to be announced as class of '03 without first telling his classmates?

The awe of the crowd seemed to deepen when they reached center stage; he had just enough time to register this before he realized that his lips were suddenly locked to those of his escort. The prolonged kiss that followed drew cheers from the student body and flashes from cameras throughout the crowd. He was already doubting the accuracy of his memory in the split-second between the parting of their lips and the removal of her fingertips from his shoulders. *All I know for sure is that I'm grinning like an idiot in front of all these people. And she is smiling as if she knows what a fool she just made of me.*

She whispered in his ear, "Tag. You're it."

-- DJ. Gallagher, Olin College

I'm obsessed with categories – the making of boxes and binaries [and their expansion into a million little pieces] – the compulsion people have to categorize and oversimplify things into one dimension.

Boxes.

*my physical body is too small to contain how i feel.
my surroundings are too finite to contain me.
all of my context is too small to fit the sorrow i feel when i think about the state of the world
and the joy i feel at all of the little beautiful things i see around me.*

*all of these constructed boxes i am defined by,
by others
and myself because it is what i know,
they confine me and cannot hold me
no matter how i make them as jewel-tone and interweaving,
i make them in all different sizes and decorate them inside and out,
they are not enough.*

Imagine bisecting a line, or snipping a ribbon, again and again.... in theory you can keep cutting that ribbon in half indefinitely until you make more and more little pieces of ribbon - just think if the infinite possibilities for more categories, limited only by the sharpness of your blade.

*the location of the point
of an individual existence
can be described in some sort of cosmic coordinate system,
which, if we could conceive of enough dimensions,
we could convert to a more familiar Cartesian system
of x and y and z....
[if only we knew the conversion....]*

The beauty of calculus is that whenever you break something up into discrete pieces to create infinitely close points on a line [or little pieces of ribbon scattered all over the room], you end up really describing a continuum.

*[and if you walk far enough along any ribbon,
you may travel great distances through this n-dimensional, ever-changing space,
but you will end up where you were in the beginning]*

Or maybe creating identity is really like going from a line in one dimension to a circle - from R to $[\pi]R^2$ to $4/3[\pi]R^3$ and so forth...the space describing the continuum of an individual never really ends, nor is it circumscribed by any other line...

-- anonymous

gender certainly could have tried harder to be recognized as female I guess. I never wore make-up or skirts or wore my hair down. I didn't even really wear my "girl" clothes all that often come to think of it. I guess I just tried to wear them at times when I thought I would be meeting new people who didn't know I was a girl already (like the first day of school, field trips, etc.) so it was just depressing when my efforts didn't work.

I'm not really sure when I started to feel like being mistaken for a guy was a bad thing. I have this really vivid memory of what must have been the first day of 1st grade. I remember the teacher asking us all to tell her whether we were boys or girls because she said she couldn't tell for some of us either by our names or our appearance. Looking back, I know this must have been because of me (I was the only child that didn't have the traditional long hair + pink=girls thing going on) but at the time I had no idea she was singling me out without singling me out. I don't know, maybe I had some vague notion even then or else why would I remember it but as far as my memory goes, I was blissfully ignorant.

As an aside: You know, it really sucks that this stuff has to start at such an early age. I mean little kids aren't equipped to deal with that kind of bullshit you know? I mean I can barely handle it now sometimes (or maybe all the time...I'm starting to cry again) but at least I'm better able to deal with it then when I was then. *sigh* Whatever, back to my life story.

So there was also some point in between my being ignorant of my gender difference and being embarrassed by it where I would actively try to act like I was a boy. This must have been like 3rd - 5th grades. I used to go by my father's name sometimes (my name

was based on his as he died before I was born) and if people asked me whether I was a boy or a girl (which they did very often because of my in-between-ness) I would sometimes tell them I was boy. I honestly don't think that I did this because I wanted to be a boy; I just wanted to be something that people recognized and accepted as normal. Like, I couldn't just be a girl who did boyish things because that was weird but for the brief moments or hours before they found out I was really a girl (which they always did), I was accepted for who I was and that was nice.

You know something that's funny? I was never ugly when I was a boy, only when I was girl. I actually remember being mistaken for a guy once or twice by girls when I was younger and told that I was cute. Heh, if they only knew. Yeah, ugly. I need to address this because that's where a lot of the pain comes from because looking like a boy when you are a girl=ugly. I can feel my shoulders and stomach start to tighten as I'm writing this. *sigh* Here goes I guess.

I was generally understood to be ugly pretty much my whole life. I've literally had strangers (mostly teenagers) come up to me and tell me that I was ugly out of the blue with no prompting whatsoever. Like, I'm sitting on the fricken bus reading a book and some kid taps me on the shoulder and says: "You're really ugly, you know that right?" or "Hey, my friend over there wants to hook up with you" followed by fits of laughter. This isn't even counting my experiences at school, just me out in the world minding my own business. Come to think of it, honestly, at school I didn't get teased a whole lot. Like I certainly was made fun of, don't get me wrong, but for the most part I managed to stake out this sort of tenuous truce with everyone around me. Like, I had "friends" and all that crap and I would mostly just hang around them. Like, I was still the ugly one I suppose. Like if we were talking about boys or something like that, no one would ever try to match me up with anyone or anything like that because of course no boy would want to go out with me. I guess that's why I use the term

"generally understood to be ugly" because I was. I knew it, they knew it, everyone knew it. They didn't make fun of me constantly for it because it was generally understood. Only new people would make fun of me or confuse me for a guy. To this day I have this apprehension of meeting new people because it's like you have to go through the whole crap of like explaining yourself (unspoken of course) and getting them to like you so they won't make fun of you.

The sad thing is, when you are ugly, you've got to have some redeeming features. My features were definitely my sense of humor and my intelligence. Like it's really sad to think of it this way but looking back I feel like the "cool people" just tolerated having me around and didn't make fun of me because I was funny. It makes me angry to think about it now. Like I wish I could have just been like: "F* you, I'm not telling any f*ing jokes!" I wish I didn't care so much what they thought. I wish I didn't hold my tongue because I was afraid if I spoke out against someone they would make fun of me and we would no longer have our "truce". But f* that truce. What kind of a truce is that? "I won't make fun of you as long as you continue to amuse me." F* you.

Never again. Or is that just a lie? Am I doing that now? Are my friends really my friends? If I was 100% of who I am all the time would anyone ever want to be around me? I'm too scared to find out I think. I don't think I'm strong enough to live alone in this world. I don't want to live alone though. I don't want to have to be strong all the time. I want at least some people to like being around me or find me attractive or want to be with me or think I'm cool. I could do it if I had that. Survive I mean. I think I do have that or at least some of that. I don't know though and it's too scary to find out, the stakes are too high. Sometimes I feel like I act like an ass just so I can prove to myself that people won't leave me. That they won't start to call me ugly or shun me if we get in an argument (wow, I'm really bawling now).

I don't think I can write anymore right now and I better submit this now or I never will. I hope somebody got something out of it. I know I did.

-- anonymous

Ladybugs

It bugs me when you drink all of the water at the water fountain at recess.

It bugs me when you take my swing at lunch.

We made ladybugs out of

Red and black

Colored paper in Second Grade.

We took our little scissors

In those innocent, white hands

Meticulously cut out

Tiny

Black circles to put on our ladybugs' back

Small black pipe cleaners for antennae

And tiny black eyes of washable marker

Inside we wrote

It bugs me when

Here is my ladybug.

It bugs me when you don't listen

To me

To yourself

And you follow

A book

A parent

Or the media

Who doesn't know what it is like to be

homosexual

It bugs me when you fail to see the difficulty in being

who I am.

If it were a choice, I would not have chosen

To live in fear

Or being dragged behind a car

Until I am ripped apart

By solid asphalt

To hide in the cracks of society

Or to have to watch what I say and do

It bugs me when you judge me

Tell me to call you when I get

AIDS



Or when I cut my hair short
Or when I speak with a lisp
Or when I have anonymous sex with prostitutes
In public bathrooms
Or simply when you say

"That's so gay"
Where do you think that came from?

It bugs me when you call me Faggot
Lezzie
Homo
And dyke
You're not a Nigger. Chink, Jap, or Wop
In fact
Names
Cannot define you.

It bugs me when you don't tell me you love me.
When you tell me you hate me Or when you don't say
anything at all.

Because of something I did not choose.
And if I did choose it, why must you persecute me?
I don't agree with all of your choices.
But I don't have.

It bugs me that you do not see that

I

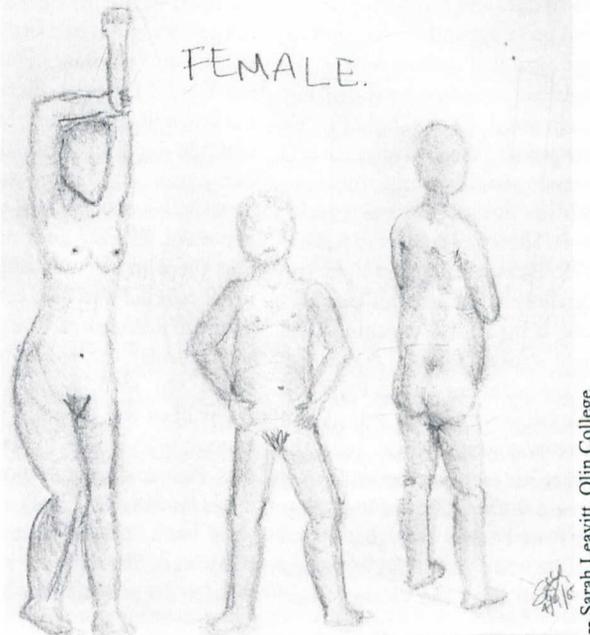
He

She

They

Are simply humans
People who search for Love.
Happiness and comfort.
Things which we all
Would like to have

I wish I only wanted that swing at lunch.
Popsicle you had.
Or water you drank
But it's not that easy anymore
Can't you see?
Do something about it.
--anonymous



Sarah Leavitt, Olin College

In Hues of Flesh

My Picasso paints in the passions of red but often prefers the melancholy of blue. Picasso is not mad but brilliant in her insanity. She does not paint with brushes of boars hair or in the finest oils but with tortured lips and unbridled tongue. She paints in the abundant hues of fear and lust and uses love sparingly. She paints the way I feel; in fleeting bursts. I am sometimes Picasso's canvas. My skin raised in anticipation, a textured palette. My open chest easily accessed for flaming shades of obsession. My heart is Picasso's inspiration. Her haunting eyes now my reason for living. She paints us perfectly in our flaws. Each other the medium for creative hands. She paints more freely than she loves my Picasso does and I construct poetry and prose around the hardness of her gaze that softens only at the sound of my voice. I write of only I can see. I do not show Picasso my words, she is a painter and cannot see this world, this love, this life in metaphors and adjectives. She is not subject to participles. Picasso hangs her hopes on carefully stretched out canvases and brings forth meaning with light strokes. My skin crawls and burns hot at her glance. Paint and ink fall away. I know fear as I sit here watching Picasso pace the room her empty suitcase flopped across the bed. Fear of loss. Funny how I never thought to care before. You hold tighter when you can hear the closing door.

Picasso must go now and I understand. Without words without sound, truth makes itself known and hangs reminders of neglect in the air like ugly mobiles I want to tear down. It couldn't last Picasso says opening the door. We do not know freedom. I hear the door slam as I knew it would one day but sooner than I believed. And I am knelt here beside Picasso's easel holding a splintered brush.

I saw Picasso yesterday paint and easel under arm. I saw her brilliant in the glow of the moon. I remembered that she likes to paint at night. She says to paint in the night is full of pleasure without restriction. I saw Picasso, no longer mine, yesterday but she did not see me. She did not see the longing in my eyes or hear the pounding of my heart within my ears. She could not see the splintered brush in my pocket, my constant reminder of our lack of freedom. Picasso does not know that I have lost my words with the slamming of the door. She does not know that my participles have fled leaving blank pages in her wake. Picasso does not know that there in the moonlight I let my cheeks fall wet. I am careful not to make a sound as Picasso takes a seat under the willow we once called our own. I am ashamed. It has been too long but not long enough to let her go. In these shadows, Picasso does not know that it is her face I see as I walk along the river bank, her reflection in the still waters. She does not know her sweater sleeps beside me her scent

the only comfort I have known. Picasso, no longer my own, is ignorant of these facts. She pauses for a moment and my heart flutters half in fear half in hope. I wonder if Picasso no longer my own can sense me here, can sense my still burning love? I wish for her to open me up with artistic hands to paint in the hues of my flesh once again. I wish for her to paint me in the silence that once screamed out our love. But I know that Picasso has moved on to canvases other than mine, to colors brighter than mine, to flesh softer than mine. I know this but as I walk away slow in my steps, it occurs to me that Picasso, no longer my own, has not brought a brush. Her canvas lays bare and though my feet still move slowly they are shod with hope. On my journey back to the flat we once called home, now just a place to house my skin, I think of Picasso. I wrap our memories around my shoulders to fight the sudden chill. Picasso no longer my own has brought a smile to my face, lip edges curling at the exit of her name and I sense a stirring in my belly and realize that the words are finding their way.

That night I dream of Picasso and I sleep soundly. I dream of love filled nights and haze filled days of splendor lost in the look of each other. I feel Picasso's familiar hands soft on my lips, a gesture I have known these many years. When I wake I find my cheeks flushed pink the color of passion faded and renewed.

-- anonymous

Of A Father's Love

We walked along the route of the Boston Pride Parade as a family - my father and mother, my partner and myself. This was our first trip back to Massachusetts since Jen and I got married last summer. A lot has changed over the course of this year.

As a Minister of the Reformed Church in America, my father legally officiated at our wedding. Yet, within a few months, an uproar developed over his loving act of fatherly kindness. Our small, intimate wedding quickly became the source of outrage for many within our denomination. Almost immediately, people began to demand his resignation as President of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the oldest seminary in the nation, and his removal as a professor of theology. Some even preached that he should be excommunicated for having performed the wedding.

In January, the Board of Trustees of the seminary decided not to renew his contract. Though at first they claimed the wedding had nothing to do with it, their spokesman Larry Williams later admitted that the board feared division among the school's various constituencies. "It could have hurt the school if it divided people in our student body, if it divided our faculty, if it divided other people who support us."

After almost forty years of faithful service to the church, my father's leadership was no longer wanted. His understanding of the Bible, his theological beliefs and his pastoral practices had crossed the line.

But, this summer, as we marched through the streets of Boston, I came to realize how much his kind of leadership is needed. Just before the parade, my Dad had been presented with the Pride Interfaith Coalition Award for 2005. In part, the plaque reads: "You

have donned the mantle of a prophet, courageously risking your career to promote equal marriage." All along the parade route we heard the grateful applause of thousands of people responding to the placards identifying what my Dad had done.

One man came up to me and said, "your dad is filling in where so many of our fathers haven't. He did what we all wish all our dads could do for us. He put his life on the line for you and in doing so he put his life on the line for people like me, too." Like this man, countless numbers of gay and lesbian people have been abandoned by their families and by their churches. I'm honored that my father might stand in for the many fathers who withhold their love from their lesbian and gay children.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "If you try to save your life, you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will surely find it." My dad didn't set out to be on a crusade. He was just doing what he thought was the right thing to do. He gave his life up, not just for his daughter, or for his family. He did it so that all people might feel welcomed by God. He did it so that God might be real and the church have integrity- not just those who fit into narrowly defined, socially acceptable patterns of living, but for everyone.

In June, a group of ministers and elders alleged my father's action of officiating at my marriage was contrary to RCA beliefs, contradicted his ordination vows and violated the promise he made when installed into the office of Professor of Theology. The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) voted by a 2-1 margin to find my father guilty of these charges at an ecclesiastical trial. His punishment included being dismissed from the Office of Professor and being suspended as a Minister of Word and

Sacrament. Suspension means that he is no longer a minister, but he can become one again should he change his views to fall in line with the stated position of the denomination.

For the first time in his life, my brother is no longer the "son of a preacher man." I cannot imagine what life will be like without hearing my father's familiar cadence as he reads the communion liturgy. Our family's entire life has been devoted to the church. It colors everything we talk about, think about, pray about.

My parents have returned to moving boxes and early retirement. They also return to a new life. They have taken on the role of speaking out for all families. Their new adventure has already taken them to some unlikely places like pride parades, distant churches, and lonely restaurants to have coffee with parents who wish they could accept their gay kids.

They're working hard now to fill the painful gaps left by and felt within the hearts of a lot of parents. I know that am blessed to have my parents as my own. But I am also blessed to be a part of a community which recognizes how special parents like mine are. They cheered along the parade route in Boston, not because they had to, but because they wanted to say "thank you." And, so I say "thank you" along side all the others in Boston and in countless other places. Thank you for raising me with a love of God and of neighbor. Thank you for instructing me in the importance of relationships and commitments and marriage. Thank you for doing the right thing, for giving up your life on behalf of my partner, Jen, and myself and all others who wish to be married to the one they love. Thank you for risking your job, your reputation and your welfare so that others may experience equality.

-- Ann Kansfield

Frozen Ice

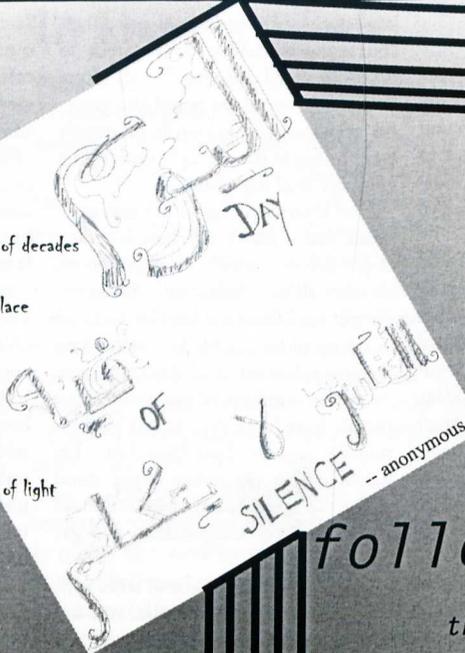
movement slowly across a lake
frozen slowly by fingers of ice
across the night
through the day
slowly creeping,
deadly over the water slowing the movement of decades
slowing the power of waves
crushing altering of the very stones of this place
it altered the very path
these slow moving tentacles of ice

and now a figure moves across the waves
slowly gliding across the frozen lake
demonstrating the power, awesome, in a wisp of light
that drifts from her figure
to my waiting eye...
and my lips move in a smile as I watch

knowing I will never hold her
will never be again allowed into her waiting arms
for she will never want me,
she cannot want me, as I so dearly need
and so I smile instead into the icy air

and I continue to watch through the spring
as the years pass and hair changes to gray
And when the light no longer brings the color or movement of her child,
Just as delicate as her mother before her,
I will still smile-
at her movement over the ice

-- anonymous



Michelle Kellaway

following

*Crawling through
the vast dark tunnel
on our bellies.
Is the lower income
middle class.*

*Will we ever
glimpse a sliver of daylight
emanating from the other end?
Or will we eternally
creep at a snail's pace,
over the marriage tax,
Nike gym shoes
and private school tuition?*

*United
we can make a difference
but there are countless
who wish to disappear
in the shadows,
never making a sound
just following others
through the endless
darkness.*

-- anonymous



gestating

I'm sitting
on a quiet rage
an egg.

ready to hatch
at any moment

no innocent
chirping of
infant birds
but

the explosion
of a landmine,

just waiting.

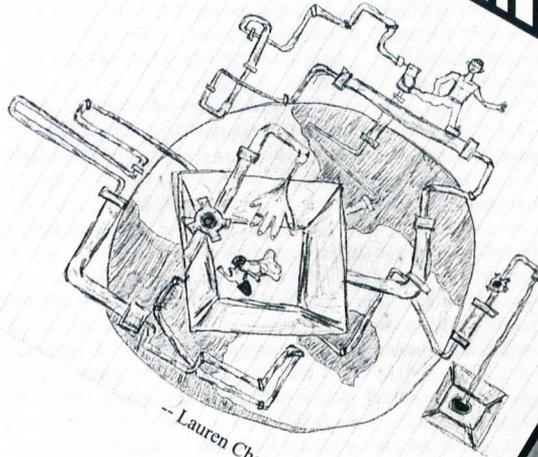
not even
sure
where it all comes
from, but

(every miss,
every diminutive,
every she,
every time
they don't
understand,
every time
they don't
get it,
it rattles; it cracks a little)

i am broken
and silent

but **agitated**,
slightly, constantly
and my **Rage** is hatching.

-- Evan Hempel



-- Lauren Choi Steinberg, Mills College

pretty sure.

spring

*The crinkle in his tone was enough to melt her bones
But not enough to soothe or smooth
Down her ragged breath
It was the grossest crime he committed, that king of thievery
That theft of spring*

*The blue of the sky, paid for by the glistening of her eye
The pink of the rose, by her shattered pose
The endless green, by this pain foreseen
What a mockery, this spring
This verdant joy. This odious thing*

*she despised it all
Wanted to darken it all with her shadows
And him too
A winter that overstayed its welcome
Only to blacken a glorious spring*

-- anonymous

Baker - 124

"Baker-124?"

Officer Matt Westboard reached for the mike. "Go ahead."

"Respond to 905 N. Monroe at the Denton Apartments on a welfare check." The dispatcher's voice droned. "Complainant is calling from Tacoma and is concerned about her five year old niece living in Apartment 3C. Complainant claims there is an unsafe environment. 905 N. Monroe, Apartment 3C."

"Copy," Westboard said. "Is she planning on coming over here to pick up the child?"

"Negative. She is requesting a CPS placement."

Westboard copied the transmission and drove to the Denton Apartments. He wondered for a moment why they were taking this complaint, but he knew the answer. It was all about liability. The call was probably bogus.

Then again, he thought, it could be valid. The Denton Apartments were a dive.

He drove at a leisurely pace across Division Street, the east/west divider for River City, and headed toward Monroe. A short time later, he pulled up outside the apartments and exited his patrol car. He walked up three cracked, concrete steps to the front door of the apartment building. It was locked with a combination key, but Westboard knew the combination. He punched in 9-0-5 and turned the handle. It opened up and he went inside. So much for top flight security.

Breathing through his mouth to avoid the smells of body odor, dog shit, spilled urine and liquor, Westboard headed for the stairs. For some reason, he found 3C on the second floor instead of the third. He stood outside the door and listened for a while, but could only hear the low murmur of a television. Down the hall, a stereo blared. He could smell someone cooking hamburger. That odor mixed uncomfortably with the lingering stench in the hallway.

Westboard knocked on the door. It jiggled under the weight of his fist and he recognized it as an interior door rather than a secure front door.

After a few moments, there was a rustle inside and the knob turned. A little girl about five years old swung the door open and stared up at him with a guileless smile. Her face was streaked with dirt and her long hair was tweaked from at least one night's sleep. A dirty, white men's T-shirt hung off of her little body and past her knees.

"Hi," she said softly. There was no fear in her eyes.

Westboard squatted down to her level, making his leather gear creak. "Hello, there. My name is Officer Matt. What's your name?"

"Zoey. Are you a policeman?"

Westboard nodded. "I sure am. Is your mommy or daddy home?"

"Uh-huh. They're sleeping."

Westboard smiled at her. "Shouldn't you be sleeping, too?"

Zoey shrugged. "I'm not tired. I'm five."

"I see." Westboard's eyes swept over the girl. He didn't see any bruises. She didn't look unhealthy or overly thin. "What did you have for dinner tonight, Zoey?"

"Mac 'n cheese," the little girl said. "And I watched Wheels of the Fortune with Mommy."

"Did you?"

"Uh-huh. And they had the pretty woman turning all the letters and she had a shiny dress and Mommy said she was bee-yoo-tiful."

"A shiny dress, huh? What color was it?"

"Shiny color," Zoey said. She pointed at his badge. "Like that color. Shiny."

"I see. Zoey, can you wake up your Mommy or your Daddy so that I can talk to them?"

"Sure. Can you come in? You can sit in Daddy's chair, if you want. He's in bed."

"That's all right," Westboard said. "I'll wait here."

"Okay," Zoey said and started to move away. Suddenly, she reversed her direction and flung herself at Westboard, wrapping her small arms around his neck and hugging him tightly. Surprised, he almost fell over backward, but recovered and returned the little girl's embrace. After a few moments, she broke away and scampered back inside the apartment, leaving Westboard

breathless.

He remained squatted down for a long while. The girl's unabashed affection left him shaken. He was alone in River City, having left his family back in Minnesota. He was an only child and estranged from his father. The tenderness of Zoey's embrace, its purity, took a few long moments to sink in.

When it finally did sink in, a terrible sadness came with it. He knew, or believed he knew, what he would find inside. He just hoped it would give him sufficient cause to make an emergency placement of Zoey with CPS. Otherwise, he would have to leave her here to her fate.

Her fate. Westboard stood slowly and sighed. He knew what that would be, too. Screwed for life.

There was some more rustling inside the apartment and a tiny woman with messy brown hair appeared in the doorway. "Yes, sir?" she said, her voice groggy.

"Everything all right, tonight, ma'am?" Westboard asked.

She gave him a confused nod. "Fine. I fell asleep watching TV, but other than that..."

"What's your name, ma'am?"

"Paula."

"Do you have a sister in Tacoma?"

"Yeah. Peggy. Why?"

"She called," he told her. "She was concerned."

Paula snorted. "Yeah, she's real concerned."

"She called," Westboard repeated.

Paula stifled a yawn. "About what?"

"Can I come in and talk with you, ma'am?"

She stepped aside and motioned for Westboard to enter.

He walked in and found exactly what he expected. A small couch and mismatched easy chair, both torn in several places and leaking stuffing. The tiny television sat on top of a folding table against the wall. Slight static obscured the picture. The thin carpet was in desperate need of a vacuuming, but there weren't any animals in the house, so at least it was clear of feces and urine. In fact, Westboard noticed, the

smell inside the apartment was considerably better than in the hallway.

Westboard asked for her last name and date of birth and ran her on the data channel.

"What's this about, officer?" Paula asked. "Should I wake up my husband?"

Zoey ran to him and wrapped her arms around his leg and squeezed before he could answer.

Paula smiled. "She likes cops."

Westboard patted her on the head gently. She continued to hug his leg. Her eyes were squeezed shut and a huge smile was on her face.

When it was obvious that Zoey was into her hug for the long term, Westboard looked at Paula. He could see some of the same features in her face as Zoey's, but Paula's seemed to be just slightly off-center of beautiful. Her daughter's elfin features, he was already convinced, would grow and mature into stunning beauty.

For all the good it'll do her, Westboard thought darkly.

"I'm not sure of the details," he told Paula, "but your sister called with some concerns. Has anything out of the ordinary happened in the last few days in your family?"

"No. Not here, anyway. I don't know about over there with the rest of them."

The dispatcher came back with Paula's name. She was clear of any wants.

Westboard copied the transmission. Then he asked Paula, "Do you suppose she might be concerned about just the day-to-day situation with Zoey here?"

Paula scowled. "That could be. My sister gets high and mighty sometimes. Ever since she married a plumber, she thinks she's something special."

"I see."

Zoey pried herself away from Westboard's leg. "Your pants smell good."

"Fresh today," he told her.

"My daddy's not a plumber," she said.

"No? What does he do?"

"He's my daddy," Zoey told him with a grin.

"We're on public assistance," Paula said.

Westboard glanced around the small apartment. He could see into the kitchen, where a small pile of dishes sat in the sink. Beyond the kitchen, he saw another room, which was dark.

Paula followed his eyes. "That's the bedroom."

"Yours or Zoey's?"

"We have to share," she said. "She has her own cushion."

Westboard looked at the wall near the door and felt a moment of disorientation when it appeared to be moving. He leaned closer and saw that it was thick with cockroaches climbing up and down the wall. There were large ones as big as a cigarette butt walking over the top of smaller ones the size of a small fly. He felt his skin crawl.

"S'posed to fumigate tomorrow," Paula said, her voice tinged with irritation. "Has to get done every month or two."

The other walls had sporadic pockets of the insects, but the majority seemed to be near the front door.

"They don't bite," Zoey said. "They tickle."

Westboard forced himself to smile at her. "Do they ever get on you?"

"Only a little."

He looked at Paula. "I just need to check around a little, ma'am."

"Check for what?"

"Just to make sure things are safe for Zoey here."

"Because Peggy called?"

"Yeah," Westboard admitted.

"So she can just call anytime and have the cops come and—"

"No, ma'am," Westboard said. "If I check things out today and everything's fine, she's going to have to have a specific reason for us to check in the future."

Paula paused, considering. Then she sighed. "All right."

"Do you want to show me around, please?" Westboard asked, trying to preserve her dignity as much as he could.

"You're looking at the whole place," she said.

He wandered around the small living room for a moment, then motioned for her to lead the way. Paula turned and walked into the tiny kitchen and he followed. The compact stove had some grease and a few pieces of macaroni on it next to a burner. The yellow cheese-paste was congealed.

"I haven't really cleaned up yet," Paula said and reached for a sponge.

Westboard watched as she put the dry

sponge under the faucet and turned on the water. It took three tries before the water pressure seemed to catch and then flow out of the faucet.

"You don't have to do that on my account," he told her.

"It has to be done."

He watched her silently until she'd wiped off the stove and small counter space next to the sink.

"Ma'am?"

She looked over at him.

"I have to take a look in the cupboards and the refrigerator."

The hurt on her face was apparent, but she stepped aside without a word.

Westboard opened the cupboard. He saw several boxes of macaroni and cheese, two cans of chili and a box of Hamburger Helper.

"I have to go shopping tomorrow," Paula said in a soft voice.

Westboard nodded quietly and closed the cupboard. He caught Zoey's eye.

"Do you like mac 'n cheese?" she asked.

"It's my favorite," he said, the words sticking in his throat.

"Me, too!"

Paula opened the refrigerator for him. A single can of beer stood next to a half-empty jug of milk: A Styrofoam tray containing a dark brown wedge of hamburger was directly beneath the milk.

"Tomorrow's dinner," she explained.

"What's tomorrow's dinner, Mommy?"

"Hamburger Helper."

"That's my favorite!" Zoey said.

Westboard pointed to the dark room beyond. "Bedroom and bathroom?"

Paula looked at him strangely. "It's the bedroom. You wanna see?"

He shook his head. "If your husband's sleeping—"

"It's okay. He'll sleep through anything."

She reached through the open doorway and flicked on the light. Then she stepped aside for Westboard to enter.

Inside, he saw a mattress wedged into the corner on the floor. Westboard saw portions of a short, hairy, chubby body poked out from various places in the twisted set of blankets.

"That's my daddy," Zoey whispered. "He snores."

Westboard spotted a smaller cushion near the foot of the mattress. The light blue blanket was folded up as neatly as he figured a five year old could manage and sat on top of the cushion.

Something nagged at him, but it took a few moments for him to realize what it was. Once he realized it, though, it became painfully obvious. There were no toys in the entire apartment. Not in the living room and not in the bedroom. Not a single toy that he could see.

He turned off the light and walked back into the living room. Paula and Zoey followed.

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked her.

"Down the hall," Paula answered.

Westboard understood. A community bathroom. He'd forgotten that was the case at the Denton Apartments.

He knew he should leave now. There wasn't enough cause to place Zoey with CPS, so he should just clear the call and take the next one that the dispatcher was waiting to lay on him.

But he couldn't bring himself to leave. He avoided Paula's shame-filled eyes and looked instead at Zoey's. They were full of innocence and love and hope.

He wondered how long it would be before she realized how poor she was. He wondered how long it would be before the edge was taken off of her natural beauty by the dirt and grime. Who would be the first person to drive home her shame and make her choke on it? And when she grew into a teenager, who would be the first boy to use her body and break her heart? How long until she became her mother?

Westboard cleared his throat and reached for his radio. "Baker-124?"

"Baker-124, go ahead."

"Can you send a sergeant to my location?"

"Copy. L-123, are you available?"

Sergeant Shen's voice came on the radio immediately. "That's affirm. I'm from Indiana and Monroe."

Paula watched him curiously.

"Standard procedure," he lied to her. "I have to clear it with my sergeant that everything's okay here. That way, we won't bother you again."

She nodded slowly and he wasn't sure if she believed him or not.

"I want to show you something!" Zoey said in an excited, hushed voice and ran into the dark bedroom.

Paula watched her go. "She likes cops," she said.

"Yeah? You said that before."

Paula turned back to him. "They've always been nice to her. And I told her that if she was ever in any trouble, all she had to do was find an officer and he would help her."

A stab of guilt struck Westboard in his gut. At the same time, a lump rose in his throat. He tried to convince himself that what he was planning to do was the best thing for little Zoey.

The room was silent except for the creak of his leather when he shifted and the hiss of static from the TV. Occasionally, a burst of intelligible dialogue would come through the speakers. The effect was disorienting, but Westboard heard enough to guess that it was one of the second-tier late shows that was playing.

The swift patter of feet came from the bedroom and Zoey re-appeared with a small, purple teddy bear. She held it up proudly for Westboard to see.

"His name's Roscoe!" she said.

Westboard took the bear from her and forced himself to smile while he did so. The bear was cheaply made, stuffed with light material. He could see where the stitching was coming loose at the foot.

"Very nice," he told her, handing it back.

"Is that your favorite toy?"

The look of genuine confusion on the little girl's face made his chest ache.

Paula cleared her throat. "She...uh, she's got a lot of imagination. Sometimes, she'll pull out my soup pan and a spoon and she'll pretend she's in a band. Lots of imagination."

"L-123, on scene," crackled Westboard's radio.

"I've got to go let my sergeant in the building," he told Paula.

"Doesn't know the code, huh?"

"No."

"Everyone else does," she muttered.

"I'll be right back," he told her and turned to go. The generations of cockroaches near the door frame made his skin crawl anew.

The walk toward the building entrance was quick. He ran into Shen on the stairs

coming up to the second floor.

"Hey, Matt," the sergeant said.

"Hey, Sarge." Westboard wasn't surprised he'd known the code to the building. Not much got passed the diminutive sergeant.

"What do you have here?"

Westboard sighed. "I...I'd like to place this girl with CPS."

"You'd like to?"

"Yeah. But it's a little tricky."

"How so?"

"Well, I just don't know if there's enough. I mean, she's living in a dive. There's a colony of cockroaches sharing the place. Her face is dirty, she's wearing nothing but her dad's T-shirt—"

"Is there food in the place?"

Westboard nodded grudgingly.

"Any signs of abuse?"

"No. She's a happy kid."

"Neglect?"

He wanted to say yes. He wanted to say that anyone who didn't tuck their child into bed before falling asleep on the couch was guilty of neglect. Anyone who didn't wash her face first, anyone who didn't have clothes for her, anyone who didn't have any goddamn toys but let her play with pots and pans was guilty of neglect. But he knew the law.

"No," he said.

Sergeant Shen eyed him carefully. "Is there any reason to place her?"

"There's a thousand reasons, Sarge. The problem is just that the same reasons apply to every kid in this shithole apartment building."

Shen nodded, still watching him. "Why'd you call for me, then?"

Westboard shrugged. "I was hoping you'd see a way I was missing. I just...I just want this little girl to have half a chance. She sure as hell isn't going to get it here."

"You're probably right," Shen said. He watched Westboard for a moment longer, then clapped him on the shoulder. "Let me take a look. I'll see what I can do."

Westboard nodded his head, but without any hope. The two men walked back up to the second floor. Westboard knocked and Paula let them both in. She gave Shen the same tour she had given Westboard. Meanwhile, he knelt down to talk with Zoey.

"Who's that?" she asked him in a whisper.

"My boss," he whispered back.

"Do you like him?"

"Yeah. He's nice."

She accepted that, then added, "He's kinda short."

Westboard smiled and he and Zoey watched Shen for a while. The sergeant's lips pressed together when he saw the cockroaches, but otherwise he remained stoic. When he returned to the living room with Paula, he gave Westboard a short shake of his head. Westboard's heart sank, even though he knew that would be the outcome. Just like he believed he knew what Zoey's outcome would be.

He cleared his throat. "Paula, thanks for cooperating tonight. I...I don't think we'll be bothering you again."

"If my sister has anything to do with it, I'm sure you'll be back."

Zoey held up her bear to Sergeant Shen. "He's Roscoe," she explained.

Shen gave the bear a pat. "Very nice bear. Did Santa Claus bring him to you?"

"No," Zoey said, "one of you did."

Shen's eyebrows raised and he looked over at Paula.

"An officer gave her the bear last year," she explained.

The ache in Westboard's chest almost became a scream.

They thanked her again and turned to leave. Zoey wrapped herself around Westboard's leg and squeezed tightly. Then she ran to Shen and did the same. "You're my two bestest friends!"

They left.

The two men remained silent as they walked slowly down the stairs and out the front entrance to the building. Westboard welcomed the fresh air, even if it was a little cool.

"Sorry, Matt," Shen said.

"Thanks for coming, anyway," Westboard said. "Thanks for trying."

"Okay." Shen turned away and walked to his car.

Westboard started his patrol car and pulled onto Monroe. He had driven less than two blocks before he pulled into a parking lot behind a used book store. The ache in his chest wouldn't subside and a strangled sob forced its way out of his throat. Hot tears spilled out and dripped onto his uniform. The same thought bounced around in his head, demanding an answer.

What the hell good was it being a cop if you couldn't help a little girl like her?

He didn't have an answer. He could only weep.

A few minutes passed and his tears showed no sign of giving up, nor did the pain in his chest die down. A flash of headlights flared across his car and he saw a patrol vehicle approaching his.

Embarrassed, he reached into the glove compartment for some tissue. All he could find was a napkin from a Zip's restaurant. He used it.

Sergeant Shen rolled up next to him, his driver's side window coming to a halt right next to Westboard's. He rolled his window down and Westboard did the same.

"Rough call," he said.

Westboard nodded. "Yeah."

"Been to a few like that."

"Me, too," Westboard said. "I'm sorry I acted like a rookie, Sarge. I shouldn't have bothered to call when I knew—"

"Don't worry about it. It was worth a try."

Westboard was silent for a few seconds. Then tears welled up in his eyes again and he said, "I just wish I could have done something for her."

"I know. But you can't save them all. And like you said, if we were to pull her out of there, then by that standard, every kid in that entire apartment complex would have to get placed. CPS would have a fit."

"And just give the kids back the next day, anyway."

"Probably."

"It sucks. The system completely sucks."

Shen agreed. "It does. All you can do is the best you can do, Matt. And then take great care of your own kids."

"Don't have any."

"You will."

Westboard snorted. "Fat chance, Sarge."

"You will, Matt. You'll meet the right woman and—"

"Sarge, that isn't going to happen."

"Have a little faith."

Westboard shook his head. "You don't understand."

"Understand what?"

Westboard remembered telling his father and how afraid he'd been to say anything. How his fear had been realized and that had been the last time the two of them had

spoken. He took a short breath and let it out. "I'm gay, Sarge."

"What's that?"

"I'm gay," he repeated.

Shen didn't reply right away. When he did, his voice remained the same as it had been. "I didn't know."

"I don't think hardly anyone does." Westboard wondered briefly if he should've said anything, but it was too late now. Besides, at this point, he didn't really care.

"Well," Shen said, "I don't suppose that matters a whole lot. There's adoption, right?"

Westboard laughed in spite of his tears, in spite of his aching chest. "Yeah, right, Sarge. The adoption agencies are just dying to give kids to gay guys."

"I'm sure that'll change."

"I doubt it."

Shen shrugged. "They used to say the same thing about women on the police department. And short Asians, for that matter."

Westboard didn't argue. He was right about that, but he still thought the sergeant was wrong about the adoption thing. Gay was different than Asian or short or female. And that wasn't likely to change for a few generations at least, if ever.

"You're a good cop, Matt," Shen told him.

"But you can only do what you can do.

You can't save everyone. You can't even save most of them. You just have to make the ones you can save count."

"I know," Westboard whispered.

"I know you do," Shen said and dropped his car into gear.

"Thanks, Sarge."

"You need me, you call," Shen told him.

"For anything."

"Thanks."

Shen nodded and drove away.

Westboard closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the headrest. He tried to force the images of Zoey from his mind. He tried to forget her delicate features and her teddy bear. But he knew that would be impossible. She would be with him forever.

He opened his eyes and reached for his mike. He made sure to clear his throat before he pressed the transmit button.

"Baker-124, I'm clear."

-- Frank Zafiro

Study of Male Features



-- Ricky Harjanto

Of a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door."
 -- Harvey Milk, Nov. 18, 1978 - 9 days prior to his murder

**Why do I need these things?
 I'm supposed to be
 Why are they external?
 Is it so hard, he says
 To just find comfort in yourself?**
 -- Brendan Doms, Olin College

**I find one outside myself
 To fill the holes
 Now I'm looking back
 Re-examining my life
 And looking for the pieces
 Said then done
 A white butterfly some inches from me
 Could this be the one thing
 That I've been looking for
 It flies away
 And I understand the only way is to
 Find security in yourself, I say
 Well that's easier said than done
 Said then done
 So I look to the sun
 Staring back at me
 Sense of self
 Something else
 Asking me if I could be someone else**

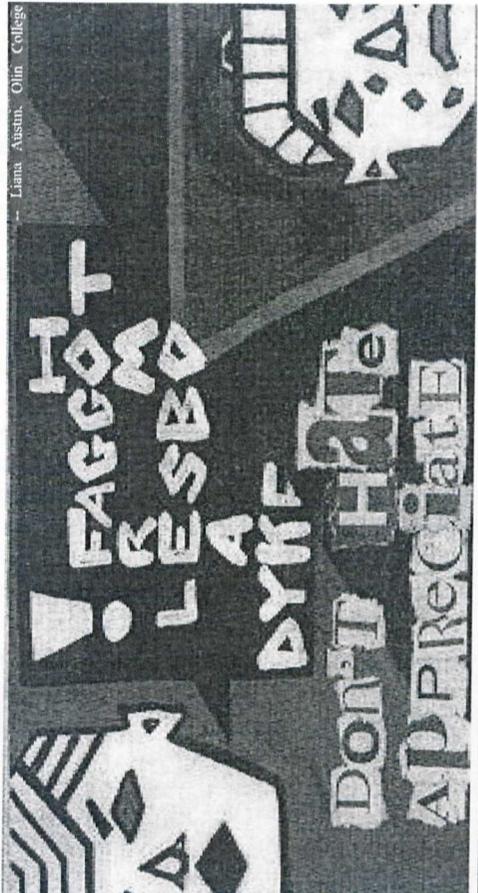
In Yourself
 Find comfort in yourself, he says
 Well that's easier said than done
 Said then done
 Now I'm looking back
 Re-examining my life
 And looking for the pieces
 To fill the holes

...hat makes me a woman? I do identify as a woman, but I'd like to be the physical - yeah, I have breasts and a vagina, I have chromosomes, but that's a pathetic description of what a woman is. It is the fact that I look forward to being pregnant and raising children, or the fact that I'm really like a woman. So I'm attracted to men? But what if I'm also attracted to women? What if I didn't shaved my head?
 -- anonymous

I just don't like the word "lesbian." It sounds disreputable, creepy, unpleasant. The aesthetics of the word are bad, like "gesticulate." We need a good word like gay. Short and sweet. I remember in high school, we made a poster for the Gay Straight Alliance that the principal wouldn't let us post, because it contained the word "lesbian," which was too explicit. I still bristle at that, but I have to admit, the word does sound like something you might not want your kids exposed to. Or if we can't have a short word like "gay," could we have a more interesting word? I personally like "tortillera," which is the term of choice in much of Latin America. A tortillera is a tortilla maker. It's important to know that tortilla makers are always female, and tortilla is a euphemism for female genitalia. What did you do last night? "Hicimos tortillas." "Tengo hambre-- necesito una tortilla." "Haces tortillas muy bien..." Or maybe it's just the allure of using a foreign language. But the word "lesbian" just isn't doing it for me.

The welts across my back ring loud
 they are ribbons of brown
 flesh puckered scarlet
 raised like eager hands
 with answers to unknown questions
 tender at the touch they are
 and so I shrink away
 as I have grown accustomed to do
 even without tattered layers
 My stripes are not badges of honor
 but of punishment
 they are haughty reminders
 looking in the reflective glass
 still they are hidden from sight
 but rest heavily upon me
 as I wince with each breath
 These welts across my back
 have swollen and manifest from the inside
 I feel them push against my lungs
 and creep slowly up my throat
 crimson liquid slithers from my lips
 and slides down my chin
 leaving stains of shame across my face
 and upon my hands as I race
 to wipe it away
 I know these welts will fade with time
 heal and slink away
 scarlet ribbons will return to brown
 covering over your mark
 Flogging whips made of sheep bone and metal
 will return to properly placed hooks
 my spirit caked on the ends
 until the time for them returns

anonymous
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Lianna Austin, Olin College

I've always been a big fan of the color orange Bright, vibrant, nondescript. You see a baby in an orange jumper and you make no assumptions. There is no pink for girls, there is no blue for boys, there is only orange for a happy little baby. And then they grow up. And then I grew up.

And suddenly, your friends won't play with you anymore because girls have cooties.

And suddenly, there are tits and hips and blood and misery.

And suddenly, you can't be friends with guys unless you're a slut.

And suddenly, you can't play sports without being a dyke.

And suddenly you hate your gender and you pray for acceptance and you're scared to be noticed.

You try to act like a girl. You wear makeup and skirts and you talk about the things you should, think about the things you should, crush yourself into the mold you should. You're labeled a bitch, a prude, "the ice queen of homeroom 213." You continue until another girl attacks your reputation for talking to her boyfriend.

You act like you are. You're the only girl on the team. You ignore the false friends you once tried to emulate. You finally feel happy. And the rumors start all over again. You're a lesbian; you slept with a cheerleader's boyfriend; you worship Satan; you f'ed your professor; you smoke pot in the bathroom; you're on heavy antipsychotics. The misery returns. You cry at night. You consider death.

And then you find your orange. Your mentor. Your sign that it's all okay. The girls' rumors are their jealousy. The boys' teases are their admiration. You have done what they can't, or what they won't you've defined your own freedom. And none of them matter anymore.

-- anonymous

Newton South High School Learns a Valuable Lesson on Acceptance and Diversity

Saturday night's performance of *The Laramie Project* was sold out a week in advance. Word had traveled quickly—Newton South High School was now home to a major controversy and everyone wanted to catch a glimpse.

It all centered around the play. Looking for a challenge, the NSHS Theater Department selected a very emotionally-charged work: Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*. It takes place in Laramie, Wyoming, hometown of gay college student Matthew Shepard. Seven years ago, Shepard was brutally murdered in one of the nation's most highly publicized hate crimes. The gay community took his death as a call to action and increased their fight for equal rights. The play focuses on the small town and its varied response to his murder.

The week before the NSHS performance was a tense one for students. All throughout the halls one could hear snatches of conversation, solely revolving around one topic: Reverend Fred Phelps' extremist anti-gay group, the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC), was planning to picket that weekend's performance of *The Laramie Project*. The first to learn the news was the Theater Department who then spread it through the on-line NSHS community. Before long, it was on the entire school's minds and lips.

Instantly, the news sparked heated debate. What should the NSHS community do in response to a protest? The WBC, if they even showed up, would be looking for a confrontation. They would be holding signs and yelling inflammatory statements such as "Matt [Shepard] In Hell" and "God Hates Newton South." They would be looking for outraged high school students to yell back. Once started, a confrontation could easily escalate to threats and violence. And that is exactly what the WBC wants—any opportunity to sue legally uninformed counter-protestors. As offensive as their signs and speeches are, they have the Constitu-

tional right to free speech, so long as they aren't directly threatening individuals. But once any sort of threat is leveled personally at them, they will not hesitate to take legal action.

To many, the logical recourse was to pass right by the WBC protestors and go inside to enjoy the show. This would effectively send them the message that all their hate doesn't affect people who want to see a phenomenal production. But others felt compelled to fight back, and certainly had the right to do so. However, nothing could be accomplished through playing into the WBC's hands by yelling back and being equally offensive, or—even worse—by getting arrested and sued. Drawing inspiration from similar counter-protests, many within the NSHS community decided to stage a silent counter-protest.

The Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) took the lead in organizing the counter-protest. The first (and most important) step was to get word out that the protest should be orderly, unified, and, above all, SILENT. Looking to a scene in *The Laramie Project* in which people wore yellow armbands to counter-protest Phelps' presence at Shepard's funeral, GSA members made yellow armbands by the hundreds to hand out each night the show ran. In addition, the GSA set out information about Matthew Shepard and buttons that read "Hate Is Not A Family Value." Outside the school hung enormous blue-and-yellow signs boldly displaying the equality symbol and phrase "Grace Happens." If all went well, the counter-protestors would stand in a line before the WBC group—each with a bright yellow band upon their arm, linked hand-in-hand, and with their backs turned—creating a barrier between the hateful shouting and the unsuspecting show-goers.

The day before the show, NSHS principal Brenda Keegan made an announcement to the entire school, urging all students to not engage with the

WBC protestors. Moreover, she asked everyone to arrive an hour early and wait in the school's cafeteria, where refreshments would be served. That way, there would be no chance of any confrontation and those who felt unsafe could have somewhere to go.

Saturday dusk fell on rainy skies and silent school grounds. Arriving at 6:30, an hour before The Laramie Project's closing performance, theater-goers stole curious glances across the street at two temporary fences erected by local police. One was to hold the WBC protestors and the other to hold any counter-protestors. In the end, however, none of it was necessary. Reverend Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church did not make their scheduled appearance, much to the satisfaction and relief of school officials and local authorities (though to the chagrin of the media, who eagerly anticipated a more news-worthy outcome).

However, the turnout for the play was astounding. Though all seats were long sold, many people arrived just to show support. The lobby was crowded with people from the larger community—not just Newton North High School, but other schools as well, including Lexington, Brookline, and Concord-Carlisle. Everyone proudly wore a yellow armband and celebrated the coming-together of so many people, all in the name of acceptance and diversity.

The performance ran without a hitch and triumphantly ended with a standing ovation. Laramie actors and show-goers alike left the theater with the knowledge that they had won. The WBC group had accomplished just the opposite of their intentions—they had made the play more popular than ever and had brought the community together to support it—and had not even shown up to witness their downfall. Newton South High School gained an unforgettable experience, while the anti-gay extremists gained nothing.

-- Michelle Kellaway

DECEMBER 27, 2001

MOM RENTED NOTTING HILL TODAY. I HAD NOTHING BETTER TO DO SO I SAT WITH HER AND WATCHED IT. IT'S ONE OF THOSE HORRIBLY SAPPY HETEROSEXUAL ROMANCE MOVIES THAT MAKES PEOPLE START SAWLING THEIR EYES OUT. AND AT THE END OF THE MOVIE HUGE GRANT AND JULIA ROBERTS ARE JUST IN ABSOLUTE BLISS, EVERYTHING'S IN PERFECT HARMONY.

SO AFTER THIS TOUR DE FORCE OF SENTIMENTALISM, I WAS STANDING IN THE SHOWER FEELING THE WATER COME DOWN MY BACK AND JUST WONDERING WHY EVERYTHING COULDN'T BE AS HAPPY AS THAT. EVERYTHING SO SIMPLE.

I MEAN, I'M FIFTEEN. EVERYONE SAYS STUDY, GO TO COLLEGE, GET A GOOD JOB, GET MARRIED, BE HAPPY. BUT IS IT THAT SIMPLE? I CERTAINLY CAN'T DO THAT. I'M GAY. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO? WILL I FLOUNDER AROUND AIMLESSLY NOT KNOWING WHAT I WANT? WE'VE BEEN PROMISED EVER SINCE WE WERE LITTLE THAT MARRIAGE WOULD MAKE OUR LIVES MEAN SOMETHING. NOT HAVING THAT LEAVES THIS VOID THAT I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO FILL.

I CAN'T SEE BEYOND COLLEGE. WHAT IS OUT THERE FOR ME? I FEEL LIKE THERE'S THIS IMPENETRABLE MASS OF FOG IN MY WAY AND I HAVE TO SOMEHOW MAKE MY OWN PATH THROUGH ALL THIS DARK CLAMMY MESS. THERE'S NO PATH... NO FLASHLIGHT... JUST ME. AND ONCE I GET THROUGH THAT FOG, WHERE AM I GOING TO BE? PROBABLY HIGH ON COCAINE AND SADDLED WITH SOME NASTY STDs. OR JUST SINGLE, HOMOSEXUAL, AND LONELY. THAT'S PROBABLY WORSE.

SIGH. SOMETIMES I WISH I WERE BACK IN MIDDLE SCHOOL. BACK THEN, THINGS WERE MUCH LESS COMPLICATED. I WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO BREAK WHERE WE'D RIP ACROSS THE LAWN WITH OUR GARGANTUAN BACKPACKS IN TOW, OBLIVIOUS TO THE WORRIES OF THE WORLD. EVERYTHING CAME SO EASILY. IGNORANCE IS BLISS I GUESS. PUBERTY RUINED EVERYTHING. LOL.

I GUESS ALL I WANT RIGHT NOW IS SOMEONE TO GIVE ME A HUG AND TELL ME THAT EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE OK.

GOODNIGHT.

A FORMER HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMAN

-- anonymous



-- Liana Austin, Olin College

M

y dad and I had a discussion yesterday.

We have a good relationship and we're both rational, logical people. I'm glad that we have discussions rather than arguments or lectures.

So we talked about homosexuality and gay marriage. For 3 hours.

We touched on a lot of sub-topics. What is marriage. What is its purpose. What are the benefits. Why would one want to get married.

Fears of possible results. Effects on future generations. Detriment, or lack thereof, to society.

Benefits to society. Effects on children. Religion.

Accident, natural, disorder We didn't talk about the issue of choice.

We both seem to recognize that it is not a choice.

Though I suppose you can disagree with me on that one. And we didn't talk about love.

In the end, he couldn't provide anything based on logic.

At one point he scared me when he said that "why not?" is not a relevant response and that he didn't need to explain himself. It was reminiscent of my emotional, non-logical mother.

Dad concluded by saying that he believed homosexuals and said relationships are different and invalid. And that his fundamental belief could not be changed.

Or, I thought that was his conclusion.

But then he went on to talk about how homosexuality is a disorder than can be caused by adverse events and a bad home life in childhood.

And how my mom told him to talk to me about this, because anything bad in my childhood was obviously his fault.

I laughed.
So did he.

The conclusion was actually that he and my mom want me to think about what in my childhood could have caused my same sex attraction.

Nevermind that there are flaws in logic here.

In his, and in mine. We are educated, but we're not particularly informed.

We never came to a consensus. It ended well, peacefully, with a hug and a God Bless You. I don't feel any weaker than before. I don't know about him.

It does not seem that my dad can understand where I am coming from. I don't believe that he wants to relate. But he wants to understand me. Because I am his child.

But the fact is, my father thinks there is something wrong with me. That I need to be fixed.

My sexuality is irrelevant. I'm not sure that it really matters if it's biological, genetic, or social. I'm not trying to make a political or religious point here.

The fact is I am happy. I like, even love, myself.

And I have decided that I will not be unhappy.

I will not deprive myself. And I will not wake up every morning and look in the mirror to tell myself that I am wrong, disordered, depraved and that I do not deserve as much as anyone else.

I refuse.

-- Simone Siqueira

A year following Matthew Shepard's brutal murder at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Pastor Phelps, who yelled "God hates fags!" at the funeral, pushed to put a six foot granite slab denouncing homosexuality on public display near Shepard's home town. The rock reads, "Matthew Shepard Entered Hell October 12, 1998, at Age 21 In Defiance of God's Warning: 'Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination.' Leviticus 18:22."

Starting...

My parents immigrated from a culture whose foundation is rooted in fear, a society of people who are steeped in anti-Semitism, homophobia, and strict, binding rules. As I grew up, I was terrified of anything homosexual. My woman, a lopsided woman who pitied homosexuals, introduced our family to them by pointing a finger and casting a curious, lampooning glance. I could feel myself squirming in my seat. Why were these men she was indicating holding hands and casting such loving looks at each other? It was unnatural.

At my high school, it's easy to immerse myself in the kind community. The lovely surface of the iceberg is characterized by familial friends, caring teachers, and shining individuals. Beneath the surface are the faults and cracks that slowly debilitate its very foundation. These issues perhaps have been oppressed in ages past, but my high school seems to be penetrated with homophobia.

I admit I myself was once homophobic, but had never encountered homophobia's consequences. Recently, GSA did an Amnesty Project sending letters to an Egyptian man imprisoned for homosexuality. I approached my peers with these concerns for the first time, their answers petrified me. These supposedly intelligent individuals had a deep-seated homophobia. Some would not sign the cards, others shrugged the matter off with a laugh, and some would even raise an eyebrow. How can I respect someone who's willing to deny other people their rights due to sexual orientation? Homophobia reaches to the very heart of fear and prejudice, our sex-obsessed, television overridden society fears anything that does not fit perfectly into a heterosexual, black and white, paint by numbers existence. In America, we have overcome skin color and gender but are pinned on sexual orientation. Is it because we see only heterosexual films? Confining us to only heterosexual love?

You don't have to see homosexuals daily, and grow up in a society to understand. You don't have to be homosexual, or know someone who is. Homosexuality has nothing to do with it. It's about being a person. A human being should not be judged by their skin color, status, gender, or who they would have sex with, but by their content. Homosexuality should neither be tolerated, nor mocked, but realized as a fundamental part of human existence.

My high school's beautiful surface shields a community of fear, with hate on the horizon. Using the words "gay" and "fag" are just the beginning, the troubles are deeper. You cannot appreciate or understand what you cannot even tolerate. Our delicate infrastructure needs mending, for ignorance and intolerance build slowly and will dwell much too comfortably. The simple stardust that evolved into the sparks within us is ubiquitous, but we are too consumed with fear to feel it. These battles with homophobia are a start, and we all have to start somewhere.

Untitled

-- anonymous

The summer after our junior year in high school, my friend Jason came out to a few of us. He was so deliriously happy and not at all like he'd been before. He started dating Travis and they adored each other. They hadn't gotten past hand-holding before Jason's parents read one of Travis's emails. Jason stopped answering phone calls and didn't go online. We all had this image of Jason being imprisoned in a tower by his parents, and in the slow days of summer, we imagined that we might need to rescue him. We didn't consciously create drama, but we did create it. Christina and I drove over to Jason's house one night and I knocked on the door. A man answered the door and said that he was Jason's youth pastor. I asked if I could talk to Jason. I said he wasn't sure, and closed the door. After several minutes, Jason opened the door. His eyes were teary and I didn't know what to say. I asked if he was okay. He said he couldn't talk to us for a while. A long while. "Don't call me, I'll call you."

In September, Jason wasn't at school. I don't know where he was. We didn't see him again until January. He asked me if we could go for lunch and he would explain things. I was nervous and not sure who I was talking to, but I said yes. At Arby's, he explained to me that he wasn't gay and had never been gay. He was just confused. He wouldn't make eye contact with me. I told him okay, if he says it's true, then I have to believe him. I asked him if he was happy. He said yes, but he never smiled.

We never talked again after that, although I sent him a birthday card. I don't know how I feel about Jason. Is he happy? Will he be happy? I don't believe that people can change their sexuality at will, but how can I claim to know Jason better than he knows himself? Maybe he'll be a nice, happy, straight man for the rest of his life. Maybe I should have shaken him and told him that when he's older, he'll regret suppressing this part of his identity. Maybe I should have kept sending him cards or letters, letting him know that I wouldn't forget about him. Anyway, I don't know what happened to Jason.

-- anonymous

GENDESIGN

Disclaimer: I realize and intend to generalize/categorize throughout this piece. This is the way we have packaged ourselves, in boxes. Recognizing these boxes is the only way out. Obviously individuals can not be categorized solely by "male"/"female" behaviors. However, it is necessary to identify behavioral trends if we are ever to understand the power/privilege structure under which we live obliviously.

Throughout high school, I ignored gender differences as they pertained to me, sorta weird considering senior year I was a vocal member in both GSA and my Race, Class, and Gender seminar. Why should I acknowledge I was any different than them? I was equal. But now I've been slapped across the face too many times to ignore. They think differently. They communicate differently. They work differently. They value different things.

Traditional: This is the male-dominated world. Practical. Functional. Destination-Oriented. Ends justify means.

Society has been male dominated for most of history in most places. It's worked alright most of the time, I guess. Things have gotten done, but have they been done right? And whose "right" should we value? When I'm on a male-dominated team, I see the emphasis put on getting things done - and done now, regardless of whether there are looming team issues or we are headed off a cliff, designing a nuclear detonator. The end product comes first. The process is merely a means to get there.

Furthermore, when "male" personalities do pay attention to problems, it's usually only after things have broken, and then they sweep the pieces under the couch or do a botched up job gluing them back together and painting over the ugly parts, pretending nothing ever happened. They fail to realize that had they put some consistent [insert expletive here] time into the process all along, it never would have gotten to that point. I look at it like this: why spend the process uncomfortable, limiting your potential by ignoring pressing team and design issues. It does take time to work through the problems, but I believe it's the only way to really harness the true potential of a team, to make sure each individual is appreciated and valued. If we are only going to listen to the person who displays the [male] societal values, the "norm" - speaking the loudest, interrupting to insure their ideas are heard, and acting the most competent/confident, what's the point of everyone else on the team except manual labor?

I used to be this [male] persona: loud, forceful, sure, always "right," the "leader." Only now am I beginning to grasp the stupidity of my buying into such a system: one modeled after those in power [men] yet perpetuated by all not actively struggling against it. How many people did I ignore, assuming they had nothing to say because they communicated in a style that did not fit the accepted [male] "norm"? How many people did I allow to feel incompetent, juxtaposed against my domineering [male] personality? It's difficult to change. I am on a moving sidewalk, trying my best to walk against it yet failing many times, only to end up back where I started. But I can no longer ignore what I have done because it's happening to me - sad how that's what it takes, and I am getting tired of "boys being boys." This happens in project teams and individual relationships. Once in a while, you see a brief spark of light, and things work well. I wish they'd just snap out of it permanently, but I can't control them - if and when it happens; most of the time none of this is even in their peripheral vision. It took me nearly twenty years to see the system, and I am being abused by it. How will they ever see it if they don't want to? And why would they ever want to? Unless ... and then come the words: *empathy, faith, patience.*

It seems like all they want to do is play with their toys - alone or with others, it doesn't really matter. They'll share - they learned that in Kindergarten, but it won't really be about the people they're sharing with, and thus being on a long term collaborative team with them is not very rewarding. When the yogurt hits the fan and things break, enjoyment of the activity you are doing only goes so far. I have been on amazing teams before where it was truly the team for which you worked. When the deliverable deadline rolls around and you feel like crap and all you can see are the obstacles towering above you, you want to give up, to whisper to yourself that it was impossible all along. It is without a doubt the team that keeps you going, not the thing you do. I can enjoy doing things, but enjoyment only goes so far; I can love the team, and then possibilities are endless.

Without this environment, we are stuck with a bunch of people working as individuals on a potentially awesome collaborative project, each thinking how they each can be awesome, instead of how we can be awesome. Then we lose sight of the design process, the momentum, the team spirit, the energy, and we become like all other teams: traditional, un-feeling, functional on a "get shit done" level, dysfunctional on a "get shit done on an innovative, f"ing awesome" level. We become the stereotypical "engineer," the one who sits in the cubical ignoring the outside world. We lose sight of the design process, which to me is what's beautiful. Here's an analogy: if you refuse to look outside yourself, you become the stereotypical "engineer"; if you use yourself as tool unto the rest of the world, you become the designers and engineer that can solve problems, *well.* It's easier to just be the "engineer," but I have little faith in its effectiveness.

I want to give up, but the better part of me says that's not who I want to be. I want to curl up in a corner and do what millions of girls have probably done before when confronted with working with men: let them be, and shut up because they aren't interested in what you have to say. I notice myself doing this more and more recently. I become quiet, reserved, and slide off into my own world where the sun is shining and people actually matter. When they act as if I'm wrong or stupid because I do things differently or want different things, I get angry; I don't want to be angry. The following reaction is to hide in the corner again because they obviously don't want to hear me, I'm tired of being mad, and my head hurts from trying to knock down the wall. There are so many of them; so obviously, this is my problem to deal with. This in turn makes me angry again ... and so I spiral on. It's not fair they always get things their way, being able to ignore how they affect the world, being able to ignore how they affect me ... seeing the world as their playground, and I'm in the way. Now there's friction because I'm no longer playing by their rules, and I'm calling their fouls.

"Evil girl," they smirk. "Don't stand in the way of our world. We don't want stop playing to eat/make our beds/etc., so you should leave us alone and go away!" But if she does, they realize they miss the work she put into everything, making sure it was fun and on track and no one was fighting, and they realize her ideas weren't so stupid after all. And they ask her to come back. But when she does, they'll just ignore her again: they'll only show her she's appreciated when *they feel like it* or when she turns around to walk away ... which doesn't make her feel like staying.

I want to generate discussion, but what I don't want to hear is "boys will be boys" because I have been hearing this all my life, and I am tired of willingly accepting it, of letting them "be boys." There is a humongous flaw with this reasoning; the statement basically says: They can do whatever the heck they want, and it's your problem, girl; you deal with it. This mentality is what allows them to continue to "be boys" and do as they choose while I take the back seat to their wishes.

When I accept they can do whatever the f they want, I am accepting the box they paint me into. Society's acceptance of gender roles allows them to proceed. I am tired of it. I hate being painted into boxes with locks to which they hold the keys. I want out, and I don't want them to be the ones who have the power to let me out. It's funny how it takes the longest to see the boxes you have been trapped inside all your life.*

I stop.

Drop my pen.

Take a deep breath.

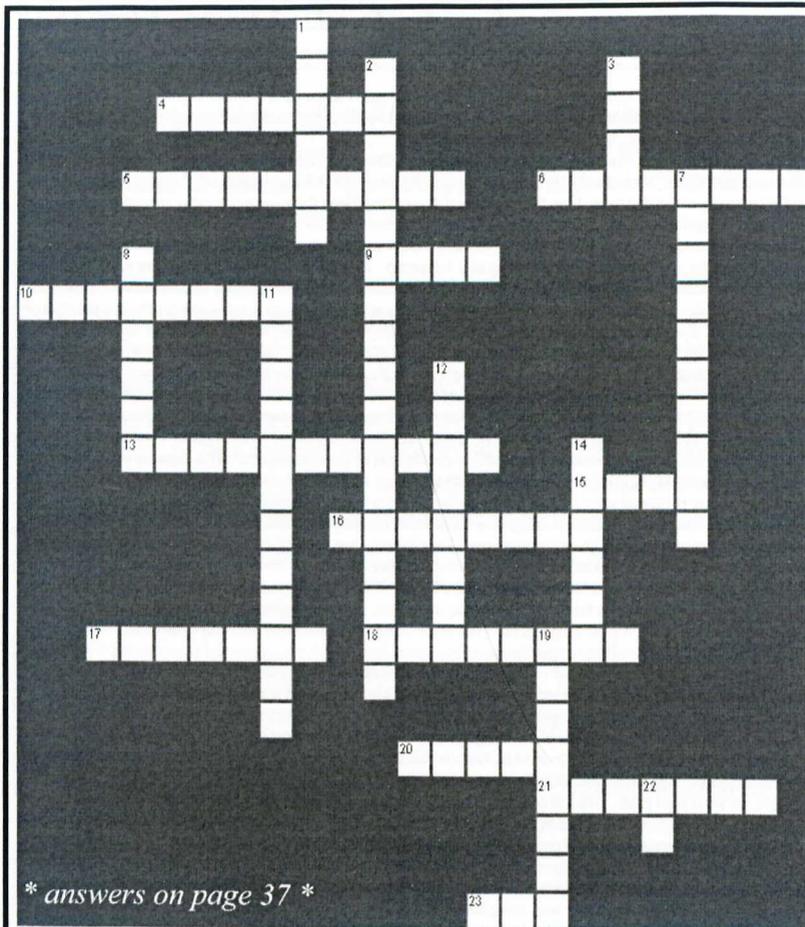
Let my shoulder blades relax from the attack mode they've become accustomed to lately.

I have let it out, most of it. And again the words creep into my head: *empathy, faith, patience.* They leave me confused, frustrated. How do I give what they lack? And then it hits me. These are my keys out, and I cannot wait for them to be given to me.

I will not play by your rules anymore. I am walking away from your game, knowing that you will follow.

-- anonymous

Gendered.



** answers on page 37 **

Across

- 4: Golden, deafening
- 5: A person who has undergone sex reassignment surgery
- 6: A humorous movie; Nathan Lane is fabulous
- 9: All you need is...
- 10: The line that scientists can't draw
- 13: A person who identifies as a gender opposite of their biological sex
- 15: Man! I love Latin roots!
- 16: More than 1000 rights
- 17: The town in which Matthew Shepard was murdered
- 20: Sponsoring club + Scotland lake monster
- 21: Stereotypes: masculine, feminist, man-hater, sporty, hippie
- 23: The "G" in GLBT

Down

- 1: Internal identity; often mistakenly interchanged with biological sex
- 2: Self-identified label for attraction to the opposite, same or both sexes
- 3: Fought with education
- 7: Like sugar but not as sweet; not a substitute
- 8: Derogatory term for a gay man
- 11: Person who dresses as a member of the opposite gender
- 12: Does the straight guy really need this?
- 14: "God hates fags!"
- 19: For everyone!; Goal of Human Rights Coalition
- 22: Equal opportunity

DID YOU KNOW?

Approximately 10% of the population is gay or lesbian (Kinsey Report, 1972)

97% of students in public high schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from peers

53% of students in public high schools report hearing homophobic remarks made by school staff

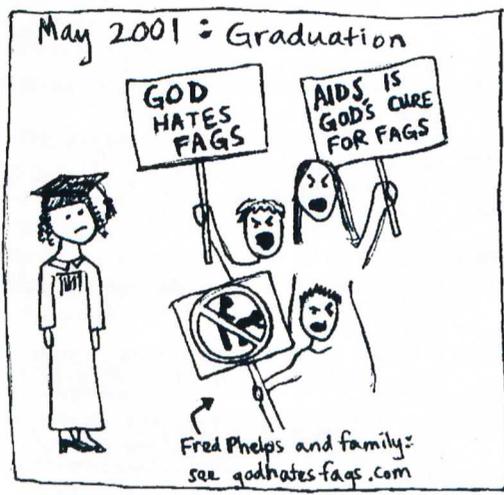
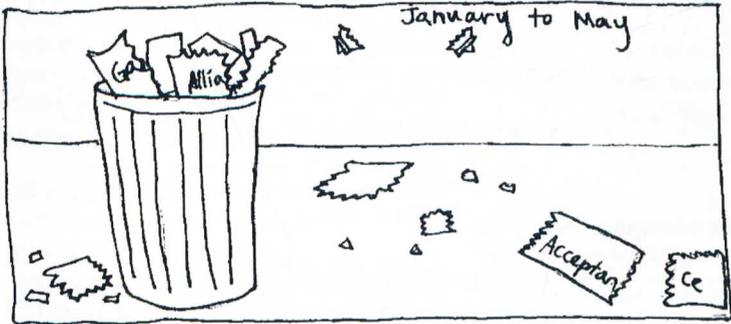
80% of gay/lesbian youth report severe social isolation

(Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Report of Mass. Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993)

**W
CROSS
R
D**

Why I ♥ Fred Phelps: a true story

By Sarah Oliver



-- Sarah Oliver, Olin College

<http://students.olin.edu/2008/laustin/TheGenderIZineOfMassachusetts/Issue1/Music%20Files.zip>

Go to the link above to download mp3 music files.

The Closet Side

MUSIC CORNER

Jenny

INTRO: Girls are hotter lovers ...

VERSE:

I've got a friend, Jenny, drivin' me insane.

The way she makes me feel, I never can explain.

But when she stares into my eyes... line.

(ooh Jenny)

It's only then I realize... (ooh Jenny)

Love will make you much more bold than wise.

CHORUS:

Jenny thinks girls are hotter lovers.

Does anything to give me a sign.

Jenny thinks I won't blow her cover.

Does anything to keep me on the line.

VERSE:

Anywhere we go, Jenny, she's got lots of guys.

Each time she chooses me, it takes me by surprise.

When we're lying on her bed... (ooh Jenny)

Though I know nothin' was said... (ooh Jenny)

Just can't get this girl out of my head.

CHORUS

Jenny thinks girls are hotter lovers.

Does anything to give me a sign.

Jenny thinks I won't blow her cover.

Does anything to keep me on the line.

BRIDGE:

Is that her boyfriend on the phone? (ooh Jenny)

Does he think that she's alone? (ooh Jenny)

Does he know I want her for my own?

CHORUS:

Jenny thinks girls are hotter lovers.

Does anything to give me a sign.

Jenny thinks I won't blow her cover.

Does anything to keep me on the line.

VERSE:

I've got a friend, Jenny, and we're in my room.

I've gotta make my move, 'cause she'll be, leavin' soon.

Slidin' my hand across her back... (ooh Jenny)

Waitin' to see how she'll react... (ooh Jenny)

It isn't always opposites that attract.

CHORUS:

Jenny thinks girls are hotter lovers.

Does anything to give me a sign.

Jenny thinks I won't blow her cover.

Does anything to keep me on the line.

VERSE:

Jenny says, her boyfriend has discovered and,

I guess, this might be the end.

Half dressed, we're sculpted by her covers when,

Jenny says, Can we still be friends?

CHORUS:

Jenny thinks, Jenny says,

Girls are hotter lovers.

Jenny thinks, Jenny says,

I wish that girl...

Jenny thinks, Jenny says,

I won't blow her cover.

Jenny thinks, Jenny says,

I wish that girl was mine.

- Lynn Julian

I don't wanna give up everything that I've created - just for the small chance that I might find myself. I'd rather be touching her than touching you, and I'd rather stay with you than to face my past alone. It's really not fair how someone's always had their hands on me, so long I swear this is the only way I know.

Chorus

Could you just hold me tonight? And could you please sleep on the closet side?

I've got so much that I need to hide to keep myself from ever finding myself.

She's the last thing that I should be thinking of. Hers are shores I should've left undiscovered. But, I can't stop wanting that she's wanting for me and I can't help but pray she's the one who'll set me free. No! Don't come too close, but please don't go away. I want you here beside me, then to push you back when I say...

I just can't be held tonight. And could you please sleep on the closet side? I've got so much that I need to hide to keep myself from ever finding myself.

I can't jump away from you every time I see him coming. I can't hide my fear every time I go home. We both know that this can go nowhere, but I still know that I won't leave until you tell me so. Cause for the first time the other night, lying in your arms, I could finally get some sleep.

Could you just hold me tonight? And could you please sleep on the closet side?

I've got so much that I need to hide to keep myself from ever finding myself.

Will I find myself tonight? And, would you please sleep on the closet side?

-- Jessica Yoakum (www.jessyoakum.com)

MUSIC CORNER

Don't You Understand

Our gay eyes they are a'cryin'
From the words used as weapons of hate
Our gay minds they are a'reelin'
From the tone of the public debate
To have and to hold 'til death do us part
Hey what part of justice for all don't you understand
I said what part of justice for all don't you understand

We are a gentle angry people
We're workin' on this issue every day
To those of you who would deny us
Simply because we're gay
I want to know what part of justice for all don't you understand
Hey what part of justice for all don't you understand

To have and to hold 'til death do us part
It's about rights, our civil rights
Civil marriage, civil rights
It's not about hey it's not about religion, no
And it's not about your political games
It's about rights, civil rights
Civil marriage, civil rights
Don't you understand
Why don't you understand

Our gay eyes they are a'cryin'
From the words used as weapons of hate
Our gay minds they are a'reelin'
From the tone of the public debate
Hey what part of justice for all don't you understand
I want to know what part of justice for all don't you understand

-- Diane "Linq" Lincoln 2004
www.linqmusic.com
Hear it on JOURNEY, released on 7/23/2004
or: <http://www.linqmusic.com/songlink/music/Don'tYouUnderstand.mp3>

Blood on My Hands

Pink or blue for the baby,
do you know what it'll be?
Buy some yellow if it's maybe,
cause boys in pink just don't agree.

And we wonder why this came
about,
we are so unequal can we figure out
why these gender roles exist?

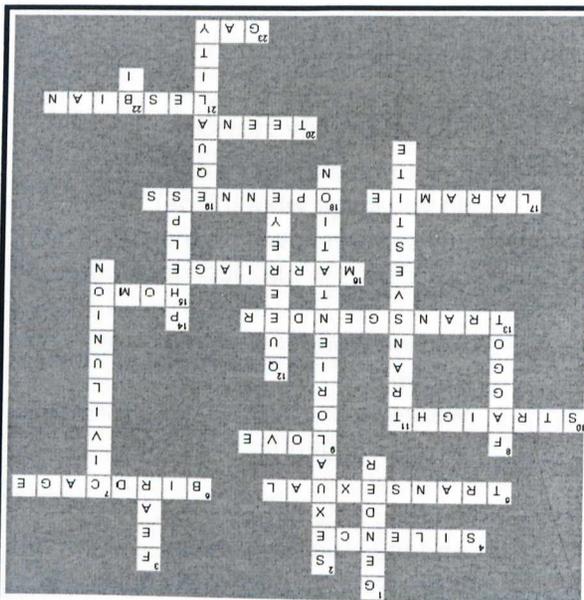
Buy the little girl a barbie,
and the little boy a car.
If he want's to play with barbies,
then they think there's something
wrong.

And we wonder why this came
about,
we are so unequal can we figure out
why these gender roles exist?

I'm not one to point a finger,
and I'm not one to place blame
either.
But if I don't take a stand,
then I've got blood on my hands.

But if I don't take a stand,
then I've got blood on my hands.
Oh if I don't take a stand,
I've got blood on my hands,
I've got blood on my hands.

-- Adrienne Nightingale



The GenderZine of Massachusetts

The Spirit of America

ZINE SUBMISSION FORM

*** Deadline: November 18, 2005 ***

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The publication staff is currently in the process of collecting submission materials for this zine on the topics of gender and sexual orientation. The aim of the publication is accurate representation of the diverse views of people of Massachusetts, and especially the voices of junior high, high school, and college/university students, on these topics, as well as to promote awareness of a diverse range of genders, sexual orientations, and lifestyles. The submission deadline for this publication is November 18, 2005, with a promotional deadline of November 4, 2005 where submitters who submit their material prior to this date will receive a free eZine (electronic copy), even if their work is not selected to be used in the publication. All submitters whose work is selected to be used in the zine will receive a free eZine as well. The goal for completion of this publication is November 21, 2005.

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The GenderiZine of Massachusetts

The Spirit of America

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