

A newspaper for B.C.'s 2SLGBTQIA+ community



To learn more about the relaunch and Angles' history, read Richard Banner's article on page 11. You can read previous issues of Angles and other publications at the City of Vancouver Archives (which houses the BC Gay and Lesbian Archives), the University of British Columbia Library, the Simon Fraser University Library, and the Vancouver Public Library.



CONTENTS

OPEN FORUM

The Mennonite to trans woman Pipeline	Hanna Hildebrandt	3
Advocacy, family, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ caregiving experience	Ian Stewart	4

NEWS & POLITICS

B.C. community asked for “neutrality” on civic decor	Morgan Powell	5
News shorts	Richard Banner	6
Queer angles	Wilbur Turner	7
The scholarly sub	Kartik Arora	8
ACT UP spits back	Dan Guinan	10

FEATURES & COLUMNS

Angles: A legacy of community and collaboration	Richard Banner	11
Oh, FUCK! with Kori and Jess	Jess DeVries & Kori Doty	11

COMMUNITY

Gina's: a queer Latina-owned restaurant bringing vegan Mexican food to Vancouver	Olivia Scholes	13
A Tribute	Mela Brown	14
Between two worlds: being queer, Korean, and an immigrant in Canada	Seungjong (Owen)	14
June & July Prides in B.C.	What's On Queer B.C.	15

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

march 14th, 2025	jaye simpson	16
THE NIGHT OUT	Rio Miller	17
The year of weird Barbie	Véronique Emma Houxbois	18
the whole flower	Emmett MacMillen	19
sweet sicily	Emmett MacMillen	20

REVIEWS

VIỆT AND NAM and the queering of consciousness	Khang-“Ninh” Đặng	21
This is How it Always Is: A masterclass in trans representation	Sunny Zatzick	22
Elsa: I Come With My Songs	Lea Krusemeyer	23
The Peoples Joker (2022)	Andie Angelis	23

QMUNITY

BC'S QUEER, TRANS, AND TWO-SPIRIT RESOURCE CENTRE

Angles was originally published monthly by the Vancouver Gay & Lesbian Community Centre Society in furtherance of its objectives during the 1980s and 1990s.

Angles is now published by QMUNITY, B.C.'s queer, trans and Two-Spirit resource centre, formerly known as the Vancouver Gay & Lesbian Community Centre Society.

QMUNITY is a non-profit organization based in Vancouver, B.C., that works to improve queer, trans and Two-Spirit lives. We provide a safer space for 2SLGBTQIA+ people and their allies to fully self-express while feeling welcome and included.

All opinions in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy of QMUNITY.

We welcome submissions for future publications. Please contact Olivia at angles@qmunity.ca to submit a piece.

Deadline for submissions for the next issue is:

May 5, 2025

If you are interested in being on the editorial or design team, please reach out to Olivia at angles@qmunity.ca.

Thank you to the editorial team for their work on this issue:

A.M. Kirsch (Managing Editor and Copy Editor), Lauren Deborah (Open Forum Editor), Lea Krusemeyer (Reviews Editor), Mya Garrido Diaz (Designer), Olivia Scholes (Editor-in-Chief), Richard Banner (News & Politics Editor and Copy Editor), Rusty Skirda (Arts & Entertainment Editor), Sunny Zatzick (Community Editor).

QMUNITY and Angles acknowledge that our office and locations in which we work are on the occupied unceded ancestral territories of xʷməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

OPEN FORUM

The Mennonite to trans woman pipeline

by Hanna Hildebrandt  
(she/her)

Hanna is a queer game developer and writer based in Vancouver, Canada.

I grew up in a small, deeply Mennonite, prairie town. If you picked up any Miriam Toews novel and squinted, you could see my house a mile up the road.

I was in my 20s before I would admit to anyone that I was Mennonite. It was how I grew up, the faith of my parents and grandparents, the culture that raised me and the friends I surrounded myself with. But don't worry! I was normal. I was just someone who knew a ton about Mennonites, observed them in their natural habitat, and got mistaken for one a lot, usually because of my Mennonite last name. There was a certain appeal to having a background that sounded kind of mystical or old-world to anyone who asked, but I always presented it as this thing that I was in, but not of.

Did you know that in the 90s, public schools could have daily Bible readings? At least, my school certainly did. Don't worry, though: the single person who had the audacity to be an atheist (despite all the evidence) was allowed to wait in the hallway. It wasn't his fault. He was raised that way, and I was sure that God would get him in the end.

As I got older, I learned to embrace my heritage, even if it centred around a religion and ideals that I ended up rejecting. Most people seem to understand that, as an adult, you're more than just the congealed remains of your childhood.

Yes, the things that we were taught as kids can play a huge role in who we become. But the things we reject, the things that didn't stick, or produced an almost allergic reaction, even at the time — the things we carried with us, shrouded in ignorance, until someone came along and knocked them out of our hands — those are the operators, the additions and subtractions and multiplications and di-



Graphic by Olivia Scholes

visions that turned us into the people we became.

When I came out as an atheist, I remember being asked when I had stopped believing in God. Later, I'd get a similar question, which would turn out to have the same answer:

When did I know I was trans?

It's always the first question, right? People want to know when. But it's so incredibly loaded. What they actually want to know is: Was I a weird kid? Did I always know? Were there clear signs? And, leaning in close, as though they know this is the wrong thing to ask but dammit they need to know: Was there some sort of inciting incident that made me this way?

But they'll find the answer disappointing. I grew up with the regular amount of trauma. Nothing happened that directly influenced my particular outcome.

So when did I know?

The short answer is that I didn't know, until I did, and then I always had.

Discovering I was trans was a weirdly identical experience to discovering I was an atheist.

Church never sat well with me. I was terrible at “sword drills” — a panic-inducing game designed to cleanly divide the Good Christians from the ones who hadn't memorized the order of all 66 books. But

more concerning was the irrational anger I'd feel after every other sentence that left our pastor's mouth. Every Sunday morning, I would jot questions all over the church bulletin or little quotes from the sermon that

*Those are the operators, the additions and subtractions and multiplications and divisions that turned us into the people we became.*

just weren't sitting right. My friends didn't like this. The consensus was that I was being both extremely rude and looking for reasons to be upset.

But I needed my religion — and by extension, my culture — to work. I was trying to make sense of the things that were being taught. I spread the Word of God on

mission trips ranging from a murder scene in Duluth to a Mexican prison, where I delivered my testimony about how great God was to me, a middle-class Canadian. I surrounded myself with God-fearing friends. I spent 13 years meandering

through post-secondary Christian education (not all at once, and atheism struck halfway through, but it's still an impressive stat to pull out in certain circles).

My point being: I tried. I tried so hard. And I really, honestly thought that I was fine, that my faith was a rock, and poking it with a stick would only make it stronger, more evidence-based, utterly fool-proof. Until the day I knew I was an atheist.

There was no event that triggered this, no trace of any of the reasons I was told someone might willingly walk backwards into hell. It wasn't even that I stopped believing in God. I just realized that I never had, but I had never been willing, or able, or ready, to let that particular thought surface.

The courage it took to admit that I didn't believe in the god of our Lord and Savior Menno Simons laid the groundwork for questioning and challenging some of my other core beliefs.

You can't kill a belief without defining it first. It's like flipping over a puzzle you'd been working on face-down your whole life and going “Oh shit,” because the picture wasn't what you were told it was going to be. And you can't unsee it. You can't go back to pretending that you don't know what's on the other side or go on filling in the pieces as though nothing's changed. You could



tell yourself that maybe, if you'd been paying attention to what was happening,

*But I needed my religion – and by extension, my culture – to work.*

you could have stopped yourself from peeking, and things could have been so much easier. Because now, it's so very, very hard. But you know that isn't true. You

were always going to peek when you were ready.

The moment I asked the question of whether or not I was trans, the moment I let myself even think about my own identity, I saw the other side of the puzzle. And I knew how it was going to go because I'd done it before. At first, it was upsetting, a complication I didn't expect or ask for. I had tried so hard to be a boy, and it didn't work. But the revelation also gave me context that had been missing from my entire life, a variable that

completed or complimented every equation. It felt warm, it felt right, it felt like me, in a way things never had.

The trans community has a term for all this because being faced with this "inability to unseen" is a very common experience. We call it "cracking the egg." (Funny story: My very first job was collecting eggs in a chicken barn. I broke a lot of them. It's kind of been a running theme.)

I don't know if I'm done. Challenging everything about my religion in my

20s became a blueprint for grappling with my identity in my 30s. For all I know, this has laid the groundwork for yet another existence-shattering revelation. My 40s have been pretty calm so far. God help me, I probably won't even see it coming.

## Advocacy, family and the 2SLGBTQIA+ caregiving experience

Kari Barrett, (she/her)

Kari Barrett (she/her) is a writer and communications professional

Ian Stewart is a jack of all trades and a master of many. Well-spoken and worldly, he is a writer, a leader and an advocate. He's also a caregiver.

Raised in Gold River and Gibsons, Ian spent time in Burnaby and Ottawa before moving to the UK in 1996. To bridge the distance from his family, he had regular phone calls with his father, Alex, in Gibsons and spoke weekly with his mother, Jean, in Surrey. Over time, he noticed changes in his father's personality and behaviours. It wasn't long before he started to see similar concerns with his mother. Shortly after his father was diagnosed with dementia, Ian left the life he loved abroad and moved back to B.C. in 2011.

Ian is part of a large but often under-looked community: 2SLGBTQIA+ caregivers. After moving home to help care for his parents, he found there were more expectations put upon him than his brothers, who both had grown-up families and were in heteronormative relationships.

"It felt like my experience was devalued," Ian says. "Like what I have going on is less important."

While living in England, Ian had attended a free, public training series aimed specifically at sustaining gay family caregivers. He wasted no time finding that

expertise upon his return to B.C., calling the First Link Dementia Helpline to see what was available.

"When things are out of control and you've got someone in distress, it's hugely helpful to call and get somebody on the line who knows what to do," Ian says.

After listening to Ian's needs, Helpline staff connected Ian with their Rainbow Support Group, which provides a safe space for 2SLGBTQIA+ community members to exchange information, build resilience, cultivate insight and create friendships with other care partners. Having access to a support group that understood his specific situation as a gay man made it easier to participate and feel reciprocal appreciation.

"Whether Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer – whatever a group member's situation — I draw great encouragement hearing from other people whose loved ones are living with dementia, and learning what strategies work for them," Ian says.

Years after requiring placement in long-term care, Ian's father died in 2018. It had become clear by then that his mother also needed assistance, and Ian decided to move in with her.

Although at retirement age, Ian's schedule is as busy as ever, keeping track of his mom's daily activities, including a senior's day program and Minds in Motion, the social and exercise program offered by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.



Open Forum is that part of Angles where readers get their say. In it we want to stimulate discussion about the issues that concern people in British Columbia's 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

We will publish articles up to 500 words long, and more if we have the space. They will be edited for clarity, legality, and if necessary, for brevity and taste.

All articles must be accompanied by the author's name. Articles will be printed under a pseudonym only on request.

All opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or opinions of QMUNITY or Angles.

He also takes his mom to medical appointments. While she has not received a formal diagnosis, progressive impairment has been confirmed. Despite changes to her cognitive abilities, Jean is living life to the fullest.

"She has a normal life. She has a friend in the building who will call her up to go on walks," Ian says. "When she attends the day program, she gets herself ready and catches the HandyDART. She has agency."

Although Jean's activities allow Ian some time to himself, a large part of it is dedicated to errands and housework. While he does get the occasional walk in, his life in B.C. is noticeably different from his time in the U.K.

"I'm Secretary General for Literature to the International Lesbian and Gay Cultural Network," Ian says. "On accepting in August from Stockholm their Thor's Hammer commendation, I had to cite how inadequate I felt, when nowadays I contribute so little."

Ian is honest about the weight of caregiving. While the daily routine with his mom is relatively rigid, every day ends up being different.

He does his best to adapt.

Like many others on the dementia journey, Ian tries to involve others, to build a community of care around these responsibilities.

"I have not had the opportunity to wrap up the novel that my UK colleagues are so eager to get into print, but caring for my mother brings unexpectedly and unpredictably its own rewards," Ian says.

Ian Stewart is being honoured at this year's IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's, presented by Go Auto. To learn more about the event, visit [walkforalzheimers.ca](http://walkforalzheimers.ca).



## NEWS & POLITICS

# B.C. community asked for "neutrality" on civic decor

by Morgan Powell  
(she/her/they/them)

Morgan Powell is a queer media artist living in Wet'suwet'en territory.

In February 2024, Westlock, Alberta, adopted a "Neutral Space Bylaw" that prohibits public spaces from bearing any decor representative of social, religious or political movements, or promoting commercial entities. When the proposition was first brought forward through a petition to council, it was proposed that the rainbow crosswalk be replaced with two parallel white lines.

Westlock's council passed the motion to adopt the bylaw, which was replicated in Barrhead, Alberta, a few months later. After a similar petition was brought forward, the Town of Barrhead agreed to remove its rainbow crosswalk, as well as a disability advocacy crosswalk.

About a year after Westlock adopted the bylaw, an alt-right group in B.C. tried to implement a similar bylaw in our neighbouring province. On Feb. 11, 2025, the alt-right group appeared at a District of 100 Mile House Committee of the Whole to propose the district adopt the "Neutral Space Bylaw." The Canadian Anti-Hate Network considers the group to be a hate group.

In the proposal, 100 Mile House citizens Coleen Welton and Marty Blazina said that banning pride paraphernalia would "protect the mayor and council from unwanted conflict by making governing decisions easier to implement, allowing our elected officials to remain neutral and avoid division in our community."

Maureen Pickney, mayor of 100 Mile House, told Angles that adopting a Neutral Space Bylaw was not something council had ever previously discussed.

"We have, every year, allowed the Pride society to have a parade and it's very highly participated in."

She explained this proposal was initially brought to her attention during open office hours that she hosts

for citizens of 100 Mile House. As mayor, it was at Pickney's discretion how to address the proposal.

"We sit around council to support everyone in our community," explained Pickney. "We look at ... how can we support our community and all of its members."

It's different from the process in the Alberta towns, which are governed by the Municipal Government Act. In Westlock and Barrhead, these issues were brought forward to council through a "valid petition" that had at least 10 per cent of the community's support, obligating council to address the proposal as if it were causing a decent percentage of the community serious affliction.

*The "Neutral Space Bylaw," which bans rainbow crosswalks and other pride paraphernalia, has already been adopted by two towns in Alberta.*

Pickney said the discourse around the proposal "exploded," so she decided to bring the proposal to a Committee of the Whole meeting. A Committee of the Whole meeting does not decide issues, but rather consists of a discussion, possibly about potential proposals.

Word spreads fast in a small town — misinformation in the community worried 2SLGBTQIA+ residents that a formal decision had already been made, or that council had proposed the bylaw themselves.

The District of 100 Mile House's council immediately shot down the idea of even considering adopting the bylaw.

"When it actually came before council in the meeting, nobody had the appetite to even discuss this as an option," said Pickney.

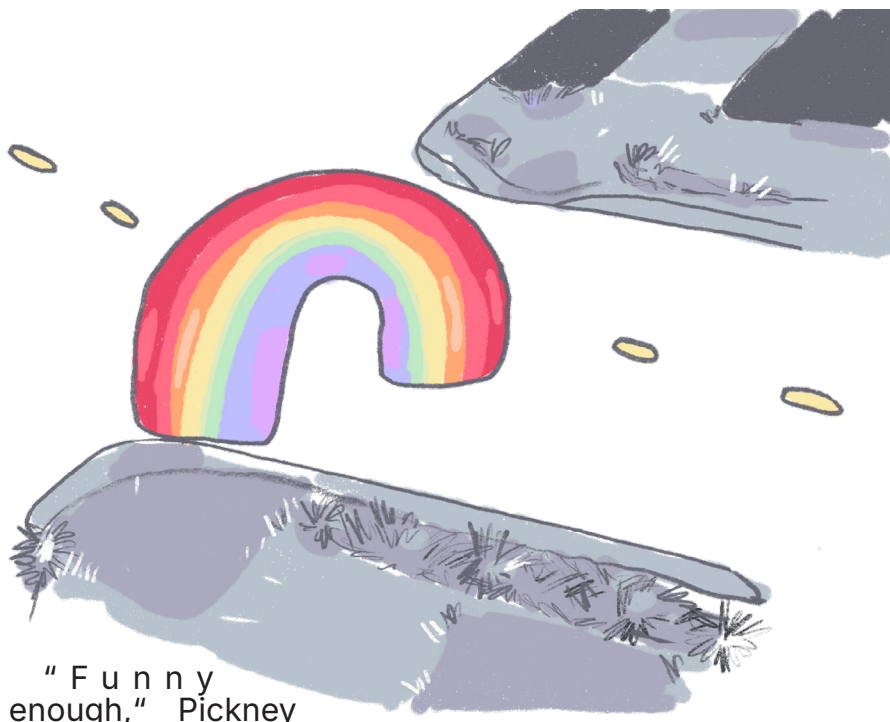
Councillors brought up arguments such as in-

fringements on freedom of speech and the lack of beautification having the potential to cause a dulling effect. A similar discourse has stirred Alberta ever since the bylaws were adopted; a veteran named Ed Mortimer wrote to the editor of the Barrhead Leader as the town now forbids flying the Legion flag or the United Nations flag, as the bylaw only allows flying the national, provincial or municipal flag. Angles invited the alt-right group to comment, but they did not reply.

a top priority. The society encourages people to help by speaking to the media, reaching out to political representatives, checking in on your queer friends, and purchasing a membership with the Society.

"We also feel our fire burn stronger. We are driven to advocate for human rights and this is a sign that our work is far from over," said the 100 Mile House Pride Society.

Art by Jodi Dueck



"Funny enough," Pickney said, "the same day of that meeting, the banners arrived in our office to go up on our signposts for the Pride group."

The alt-right group has been active in the community since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's very challenging for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to be under these types of attacks," explained the 100 Mile House Pride Society. In an email to Angles, they said that the community discourse from the Committee of the Whole meeting has escalated hate online.

"It's normal for things like this to cause emotional exhaustion and burnout, and it's especially heartbreaking to see how it affects the youth."

The 100 Mile House Pride Society will continue to have their annual Pride festival this year, with the safety of protecting 2SLGBTQIA+ folks always being

### Neurodivergent Community Perspectives: Skills and Self-Advocacy



This free course is QMUNITY's self-guided educational module for individuals looking to both introduce themselves to Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence, as well as learn about how it intersects with 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.







# News shorts

Drawing strength and inspiration from around the world

curated by Richard Banner (he/him)

## International action against gender crimes

THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS — The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is seeking the arrest of two senior Afghan figures for the persecution of LGBTQ+ people. The court applied for warrants to arrest Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, alleging both “bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds.” The application follows action by Canada, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands to take Afghanistan to the International Court of Justice for gender discrimination. A researcher at Human Rights Watch said, “It is vitally important for other countries to register their support for this action and for them to involve Afghan women as the process moves forward.”

— Pink News

## New funding aims to combat hate

OTTAWA, CA — Canada’s Department for Women and Gender Equality and Youth announced up to \$41.5 million for 106 projects to advance equality for 2SLGBTQI+ communities across Canada and to address the rise in hate. Funding includes ten projects building resilience against hate and discrimination. The funding focuses on empowering communities, supporting victims and survivors, and building community trust. Funds will also support 36 projects targeting community-informed initiatives that address barriers, such as projects that promote systemic change and develop knowledge, tools and support for communities.

— Women and Gender Equality Canada

## Egale discussions lead fight for inclusion

OTTAWA, CA — Egale Canada will lead a series of discussions about the changing political climate for 2SLGBTQI communities. Egale’s former executive director Helen Kennedy will help challenge the increasing hate and misinformation that threatens the rights of trans and queer communities. She guided the national organization through challenging periods for inclusion in Canada and around the world. Kennedy’s new work will help counter rising opposition to human rights and the growing wave of hate targeting marginalized groups and will help organizations build truly inclusive spaces.

— Egale Canada

## US advocates stage die-in against AIDS cuts

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Fired advocates for people with HIV at USAid, the United States International Development Agency, staged a die-in in Washington, D.C. They warned that Donald Trump’s drive to dismantle the agency threatens the fight against the AIDS virus. Wearing white T-shirts that read “Aids funding cuts kill” and chanting “Congress has blood on its hands, unfreeze aid now,” around three dozen protesters dramatically fell to the ground. Police said they arrested about 20 demonstrators who refused to leave. The USA supported a program that provides antiviral medication to 20 million people worldwide. President Trump placed most agency workers on leave and stopped payments to providers working with the program worldwide.

—The Guardian

## Over 25,000 sign to preserve trans history

NEW YORK, N.Y. — More than 25,000 people have signed an online Care2 petition demanding that the Trump administration stop erasing trans history from the Stonewall uprising website in New York City. Despite the fact that trans women of colour led the historic riots in 1969, staff at the monument changed references from “LGBTQ+” to “LGB” and removed use of the word “queer.” Texts now mention only lesbian, gay and bisexual people in describing what happened when police raided the Stonewall Inn. The petition is near to its goal of 30,000 people demanding that transgender people’s history be preserved for future generations.

— Pink News

## Muslim communities grieve death of queer leader

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA — Muslims in the worldwide LBMTQ+ communities are mourning the death of Muhsin Hendricks, considered the world’s “first openly gay imam.” Hendricks was shot near the city of Gqeberhain, South Africa. The imam ran a mosque intended as a safe haven for gay and other marginalized Muslims. The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association called on authorities “to thoroughly investigate what we fear may be a hate crime.” Hendricks was the subject of a 2022 documentary called The Radical. He had been advised to hire bodyguards but said he never feared attacks and insisted that “the need to be authentic” was “greater than the fear to die.”

— The Guardian

## Steps toward international equality

Queer communities celebrated a variety of small steps toward equality for 2SLGBT+ people in countries around the world in 2024.

- **Greenland**, an autonomous country that forms part of Denmark, banned

discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and gender characteristics. As in Denmark, same-sex sexual activity was legalized in 1933, and Greenland recognized equal marriage in 2015.

- **Estonia** adopted same-sex marriage and permitted same-sex adoption on January 1, 2024. It became the first former Soviet state to recognize equal family rights for same-sex couples.
- **Latvia** allowed same-sex couples to register for civil unions, although without the right to marriage. However, civil unions guarantee tax and social security benefits as well as visiting rights in hospitals.
- After violent attacks on human rights activists and asylum defenders in **Greece**, the nation passed new laws banning discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and legalizing same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption.
- **Dominica**, the island nation in the Caribbean near the French departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe, legalized gay sex when the country’s court overturned a colonial ban on same-sex activity. The former French and British colony achieved independence in 1978.
- **Lesotho**, a sovereign state within South Africa, revised its labour code to ban discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. The new code also outlaws violence, harassment and sexual harassment based on gender identity.
- The southern African nation of **Namibia** allowed consensual same-sex activity after court rulings found that laws against sexual activity were unconstitutional and invalid.
- **Mexico** banned conversion therapy, the use of emotional, psychological and physical treatments to change someone’s sexual orientation. Offenders can face between two and six years in prison as well as fines.

— Pink News and other sources



Wilbur Turner is a Kelowna-based writer, queer community advocate and founder of Advocacy Canada

## The new assimilationists: Anti-trans and anti-pride factions in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community

The fight for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights has never been a seamless march of solidarity. From the earliest days of activism, a dividing line has separated those who sought visibility and liberation from those who favoured quiet assimilation.

Today, a once-muted faction within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has loudly re-emerged, echoing the assimilationists of the 1950s and 1960s. They argue that modern Pride movements have gone “too far,” that transgender rights are a step too extreme, and that the increasing visibility of queer identities has triggered a backlash that could have been avoided if only the community had stayed in the shadows.

Just as individuals in the past tried to distance themselves from the queer liberation movement, some today have been actively campaigning against SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) resources in schools. They have adopted the same rhetoric as far-right groups that claim gender identity education is harmful to children.

This sentiment is found not just in social media comments but in organized efforts against trans rights and queer visibility from within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community itself. One gay man and his supporters from Vancouver Island campaigned to shut down drag events and align themselves with extreme-right political ideologies that aim to dismantle hard-won protections for queer people. He claims that gender affirmation is “a political and/or faith-based belief system.”

He also campaigned heavily to support an an-

# The velvet thread

Weaving queer stories & perspectives

by Wilbur Turner (he/him)

ti-SOGI and aggressively anti-trans candidate for a school trustee byelection in Castlegar in 2024. On March 1, 2025, he was photographed at the BC Conservative general meeting with former Chilliwack school trustee Barry Neufeld, who is the defendant in a current case before the BC Human Rights Tribunal.

Another activist, a Lower Mainland lesbian grandmother who runs a website dedicated to pushing extreme-right rhetoric, has built a following primarily consisting of cisgender, heterosexual conservatives. Her attacks on inclusive education reveal just how deeply entrenched she is in their worldview. She recently wrote regarding a February 2025 school trustee byelection in Chilliwack, B.C., in reference to SOGI:

“[Nine] years, our kids have been subject to this ideological cultural corruption. We were told it was going to be anti bullying. It never quite turned out like that though. My friends in Chilliwack, I hope we do our research, and really understand what and who we vote for in the 2026 municipal elections, which includes voting for a completely new sd33 board. [sic]”

This rhetoric is not just alarmist; it is dangerous. It reinforces the idea that

queer and trans-inclusive education is a form of corruption rather than an essential tool in fostering safe and accepting communities. It shows that her primary audience is not other 2SLGBTQIA+ people but rather the same right-wing voters who seek to erase queer identities from public life.

This pattern is repeated across British Columbia and beyond, where so-called “gay and lesbian influencers” champion anti-trans policies while finding themselves embraced not by the queer community but by reactionary political forces.

Before the Stonewall Riots that kicked off more radical queer activism in 1969, many within the gay and lesbian community sought acceptance through conformity. Organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis encouraged queer people to dress and behave in ways that would not attract attention. They hoped that by blending in they would demonstrate that they weren’t a threat, and thus would be granted equal rights. But history proved them wrong.

Stonewall, led by trans women of colour, drag queens and other marginalized queer people, shattered the illusion that quiet acceptance could lead to true equality. Only direct action and unapologetic visibility made real progress. The emergence of Pride parades, the demand for legal protections and the expansion of rights for queer people all stem from the belief that visibility is not the enemy—oppression is.

A former Kelowna Pride board member recently told



me, “Pride has become too political.” Many gay and lesbian individuals online argue that the modern Pride movement has brought about its own backlash by demanding too much, too fast. They claim that trans activism, drag events and intersectionality have pushed society to a breaking point and that this is why the queer community is facing intense political attacks.

But silence is not safety. The attacks on trans rights are not isolated—they are part of a broader effort to roll back 2SLGBTQIA+ protections as a whole. We see this reality unfolding in real time in the U.S. Book bans target queer authors. Legal protections for trans individuals are erased. New policies explicitly cast 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals as security threats. The notion that those who separate themselves from trans advocacy will be spared is not just naïve—it is dangerous.

Even as some right-wing gay and lesbian activists work against trans rights, they are often rejected by the very groups they seek to align with. Last fall, members of a right-wing gay anti-trans organization attempted to join an-



Photos by Olivia Scholes





ti-SOGI demonstrations in Abbotsford, B.C. carrying rainbow flags adorned with their group's logo. But organizers of the demonstration wanted nothing to do with the rainbow symbol and forced them out. This is the grim reality: no matter how much they distance themselves from the broader queer community, the far-right movements will never support them.

Queer organizations, particularly Pride committees and advocacy groups, must take a proactive role in educating people within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community about the dangers of sacrificing one part of our community in exchange for a false sense of protection. Those who seek to assimilate at the expense of others will find that silence will not guarantee their safety.

Instead, Pride must continue to be a force for unity, visibility and acti-

vism. We must push back against the idea that trans rights and queer visibility are responsible for political backlash. The truth is that those who hate us will find other excuses to attack our rights, regardless of how "respectable" or "quiet" we tried to be.

Pride has always been political. It must remain political. And it must remain a space where we fight for all members of the community—trans, nonbinary, drag performers, and everyone else under the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella. Because if we allow the erosion of rights for one segment of our community, we are only paving the way for the loss of rights for us all.



# The scholarly sub

Research reports on healthy sexuality

by Kartik Arora (he/him)

Kartik Arora (he/him) has been working in queer men's health and research for four years. Kartik is a team lead at HIM, and a graduate student at the University of British Columbia.

## Vancouver: City of bottoms, sex parties and bareback sex?

Is Vancouver a city of bottoms with too few tops? Just what are the do's and don'ts of private sex parties? In the era of biomed-

cal innovation, are condoms truly just a relic of the past?

### Versatility unveiled: Labels and desires

You're sitting at a bar on Davie Street, and you open the Grindr grid to find the night's hottest hook-up. Only to find yourself struggling to find someone with a compatible sex position! In a city filled with scenic landscapes, waterfront views and a rich queer history, you can't help but wonder: Is versatility truly a myth? Are vers and vers-bottom just code for bottom only? If so, then why do we still choose a



label that holds no value? Is the label just a mask covering our true intentions?

A 2019 study takes a look at anal sex versatility in Vancouver with a group of queer men (including trans men). Your versatility is key health data linked to HIV/STI transmission, and it's an important part of your self-identity that can change over time.

Through the study period, 644 queer men participated in a total of 7,036 sexual events. Of these sexual events, 2,984 events were receptive, 2,773 events were insertive, and 1,279 sexual events were completely versatile (both insertive and receptive within the same encounter).

The numbers don't lie! More than 50 per cent of this study's sample engaged in receptive anal sex.

The study found that there is a strong correspondence between preferred anal sex roles and actual

behaviours — people really take the sex roles they say they prefer. But anal sex roles are not fixed. There's much more variation than previously thought! You could go from being a vers-top in Prada to a sub-bottom in Dolce & Gabbana. At the end of the day, the label doesn't define you — you do.

### Sex Party RSVP: The hostess sets the mostest

Vancouver might be "no-fun" city to some, but perhaps you're just not living it right. There's an underground scene filled with pulsating beats, hypnotic tunes and exclusive sex parties fulfilling your deepest and darkest sexual desires. If you're wondering, "Where was my invite? Lost in the mail?" then rest assured. Keep looking.

Group sex parties are not a novel concept, nor are they specific to queer communities. You might think they only happen in movies and that only James Bond would stumble upon a secret sex party while running away from a group of armed vigilantes. But hey, for queer people, sex parties are part of the culture, embedded within the circuit party scene. Surveys show that up to 25 per cent of queer men met their recent sexual partners at a sex party.

A 2021 study peeps into the private group sex party scene from a group of Canadian queer men living in urban areas. It looks at how sex party hosts help minimize HIV and STI transmission and supply appropriate harm reduction supplies. Here's what hosts and participants say about private sex parties that are more than a threesome, not commercially funded and not in a public sex venue.

Hosts performed three main roles (and no, inviting you was not one of them). Selecting a party theme was the first role. This allowed guests to understand what specific sexual behaviours and or sub-



stances would be featured. One Vancouver man says, "The [host] will say he's looking for tops ... or the [host] will say it's a jack-off party."

Party rules and STI screening was the second role. Hosts in the study emphasized rules about safer-sex parties or condomless parties. One Vancouver man says, "If you don't sort of follow them [the rules], you just don't get invited back."

The last role was to be a good host, enforce party rules and provide harm-reduction materials. One Vancouver host says, "Probably make sure that we have drugs available ... have lube there; condoms available if people want to use them."

Sex party hosts initiate and maintain risk management strategies. Now that could be the future of queer sex education.

Gloves Off: Navigating pleasure and protection

They say "No Glove - No Love", but here in Vancouver, the gloves are coming off! Alongside fossils, video rental stores and Cher's discography, it seems as if condoms are becoming a sign of the dis-

tant past. In British Columbia, rates of HIV transmission have declined, but queer men are still one of the biggest groups affected by HIV.

Smart strategies like Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) help to prevent transmission of HIV. PrEP is available at no cost for queer men in B.C. using their Care Card. So what does this do to the way HIV-negative men in Vancouver think about condoms and how they use them?

A 2019 study asked 19 queer men (including trans men) about condoms, HIV-prevention strategies, and how these strategies have shifted their thinking about sexual safety and well-being. Overall, participants expressed a range of perspectives on condom use from total rejection to a stamp of approval. Some participants said that condoms inhibited physical pleasure, and others said that eroticism was better without a condom.

One study participant said, "It's hard to get used to ... wear[ing] condoms when ... the physical pleasure is so much more with not having a condom." While another said, "I would have a condom ... the stress of not knowing whether I've contracted something."

HIV is still a concern, but today a variety of tools and strategies can help prevent HIV. While many people associate decreased condom use with more intimacy and pleasure, many participants believed that PrEP was a safe and effective solution to HIV-prevention.

One noted that "Condoms are ... like public transit. It's something you want everyone else to take ..."

Condoms are great at helping prevent STIs and HIV, while PrEP only helps to prevent HIV. It's important to know what's best for our bodies, and what we can do to best protect ourselves and our contacts. Expanding options for sexual health strategies and tools in B.C.'s queer communities lets our communities continue to live long, healthy and safe lives — whether we're backpacking on our next Vancouver hike, or bareback watching the sunset in Stanley Park.

To learn more about sexual health services in B.C., visit Health Initiative for Men (HIM) at [checkhimout.ca](http://checkhimout.ca).

For any questions about this article, contact Kartik at [kartik@checkhimout.ca](mailto:kartik@checkhimout.ca)



No matter if it's housing, healthcare, the economy, or anything in between, every election issue affects 2SLGBTQI communities. That's why it's essential for 2SLGBTQI experiences to be understood in elections at every level.

Egale Canada has launched Vote with Pride, ahead of the upcoming federal election. Vote with Pride aims to increase awareness about the ways in which election issues are 2SLGBTQI issues.

Through the Vote with Pride pledge, educational resources, and accessible voter information, Vote with Pride fosters meaningful civic engagement, builds a more inclusive political future – and with hope – ensures that all voters feel empowered to step forward and truly Vote with Pride.

Head to the polls with a deeper understanding of how election issues affect 2SLGBTQI communities. Join us in ensuring we can all come together and vote with pride.

## Free Webinar:

Thursday, April 24, 2025  
12pm ET

In this webinar, participants will learn about the 2SLGBTQI experiences of common campaign issues such as employment and labour, housing, healthcare, youth, the economy and more.





# ACT UP spits back

Socred government spits on People With AIDS

By Dan Guinan (he/him)

Four supporters of what Premier Bill Vander Zalm called a "crazy irresponsible nasty bunch" were thrown into paddy wagons and detained for several hours on the night of August 24, 1990. The crime: disturbing the peace.

The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) made a splash in the media and a mess of several hairdos. Although there was no indication that anybody was about to bite a Socred, the police were apparently called in to teach the protesters to be more polite.

The melee started when a large gray-haired man of apparent infamy, seeing the big cheese in trouble, blew his cool and bucked like a stallion. Mr. Big managed to topple the people that Lillian tripped over. That's when the blonde in the "Vanna" white dress turned around and caught a protester's knee with her stiletto heel. The crowds chanted "shame" at the Socreds and followed them into the lobby of the Queen Elizabeth Theater.

A few cops arrived and had trouble dampening the situation until their backup arrived. Many of the protesters had been fairly enraged by the Socred violence. The police response to their acting up was swift and decisive.

One man was dragged from the theatre and then two women were plucked from the crowd who approached the paddy wagons. Three-quarters of an hour later a lone protester was surrounded by four officers as he walked away from the dwindling ACT UP group. He was picked up and loaded into a third paddy wagon.

The four targeted members of that "nasty bunch" sat in the wagons for a couple of hours. They were released later that night after a trip to the police station. Meanwhile, dozens of police officers stayed to guard the barricade though the rainbow flag was no longer evident, a fate it had in common with the red banner on the stage inside.

Les Misérables is a tale of struggle and devotion set in the increasing oppression of early capitalism in France. The red flag of the Paris commune marks the short-lived debut of applied revolutionary Marxism. The good guy dies at the end after years of loving sacrifice for the hope of the future.

The irony of their choice of entertainment apparently escaped the Socreds or was naïvely ignored by the owners of the quarter-of-a-mil-

lion-dollar party fundraiser. They also goofed by having their much toasted and roasted leader lead the troops with misguided arrogance. As ACT UP's Christine Cumming noted, "Through its lack of action, Vander Zalm's government has been spitting on PWA's since the onset of the HIV crisis. A little bit of our saliva on his tuxedo cannot hurt him, but his policies are killing us."

The mood was genuinely riotous for only a minute. Many will judge this an inappropriate place or time for such a gesture, but a great deal of anger and frustration was manifest in the actions of the hundred or so present.

Our lives may not be as miserable as the slavery and starvation of Les Misérables Paris, but they are the only ones we've got. Few would deny that the current state of our collective health, safety and security begs some serious attention. I salute those who put their politeness into the closet to fight the power, to unleash our power, to speak the truth and to save lives.

Graphic by Mya Garrido Diaz



## CONTEXT

The Social Credit Party (known as the Socreds) governed British Columbia under Premier Bill Vander Zalm from 1986 to 1991 on a socially conservative platform. Vander Zalm's government introduced a bill to allow locking up people with AIDS and they refused to fund medical coverage for abortions. Groups like ACT UP, the Vancouver Lesbian Connection and the Vancouver Persons With AIDS Coalition organized to defeat the bill and the government.

(Vander Zalm and his wife Lillian retired to a rebuilt

Fantasy Gardens castle in Richmond after he resigned in a conflict of interest scandal in 1991. Voters tossed out the Socred government later the same year.)

Activists took to the streets, the media and the lobbies of the legislature to oppose the repressive policies and build a better B.C. Some activists met members of the Social Credit government at a special performance of Les Misérables, held to raise funds for the party. Some were unruly. Spittle flew in the direction of the premier. This, in the eyes of the law, constituted assault.

(Apologies to those of Irish descent who object to the demeaning reference to "paddy wagons.")

The unruly protests against Vander Zalm's government highlight the way that 2SLGBTQ+ folks in the 1980s and '90s had to fight for equal rights. The attacks on equal rights today across North America (and Europe and elsewhere), the attempts to erase the existence of trans people, ongoing efforts to block Pride celebrations and push queer knowledge out of schools and libraries — these are well-organized and well-funded move-

ments that aim to reverse the gains that our communities have won in the past decades.

The B.C. Conservative Party and the Conservative Party of Canada are the mainstream voices of this movement. Today's activists will have to work together and with allies fighting for dignity in other areas to protect what we have won and to prevent the chaos, cutbacks and destruction that is happening in the United States from taking hold in Canada.

— Richard Banner (he/him)

## FEATURES & COLUMNS

# Angles: A legacy of community and collaboration

By Richard Banner (he/him)

Richard worked on Angles from its earliest days to the "last" issue in May 1998.

Angles magazine was more than just a printed publication; it was a collective effort that brought together the voices from B.C.'s 2SLGBTQI+ community. The original magazine arose when the VGCC newsletter committee decided to take the publication away from the gay and lesbian community centre and turn it into an independent tabloid. A mostly friendly negotiation resulted in a new publisher, the West Coast Angles Publishing Society and the later Lavender Publishing Society, putting out Angles as a monthly paper from 1983 to 1998.

The Angles volunteers insisted that the paper should be a consensus-based collective. If it was to offer a voice and a mirror to B.C.'s queer communities, it couldn't have an outside executive deciding who should be in it and how they were heard. That mainly left gay men working together with lesbians, people of colour, diverse genders and more than a few political conservatives.

Several hundred volunteers including Eastside artists, international students, professional writers, medical professionals, waiters, skaters, business people, retirees and many others chose to work past their differences to help the community see itself in its diversity.

Oddly, it worked because everyone felt that the objective was the community. Things were more together before digital algorithms allowed people to choose their own media and narrow their vision.

At first, putting out a paper was a slog — typing copy on an IBM Selectric typewriter, pasting columns of type, graphics and ads onto printed layout sheets, and driving the layouts to the printers before the sun rose in the morning.

The first computer was a loaner, a cute little first-generation Apple Macintosh. When the owner took it back, volunteers learned Windows word processing and graphics programs. They printed out pages on a 40-pound laser printer and still pasted up stories and ads for the press. The age of the internet was just opening up when the paper closed.

This issue and October's pilot issue reprint some articles from the past. Some issues remain memorable: the lesbian sex issue, thrown out of gay bars and libraries for being too sexy, and the follow-up issue with a centrespread filled with letters to the editor, both supportive and against; the Celebration '90 issue with a thick supplement of arts and fiction marking the Gay Games' first appearance in Vancouver; many feature issues exploring communities of colour, women's history, the sports community, sex workers, pornography, health and the joy of being together.

Why try to re-create that? Does a printed paper (with an online presence at the QMUNITY website) offer anything of value to a world of digital media? We think it can — a tactile, analog link to our past that can be held, shared and revisited; a bridge to stories and people that have contributed to the foundations of our current community; a showcase for contemporary writers and artists that does not disappear into the digital ether.

Please read and share the magazine. If you want to comment on what you read, or offer your own news, opinion piece or creative submission, contact us at angles@qmunity.ca.

## Help Us Piece Together the Angles Puzzle

If you have copies of Angles magazine gathering dust on your shelves, bring them out of the closet! The QMUNITY collection is missing issues, especially the early years (pre-1984) and the late years (after 1990).

Whether it's a single issue or a stack, every issue could fill a gap and keep the spirit of Angles alive!

Send us a message at angles@qmunity.ca. Help make our collection whole again!



In the tradition of Sue Johanson, Dan Savage, and even Dear Abby, we wish to introduce ourselves as your sex and relationship advice columnists here at Angles. We want to offer our professional insight and support to readers with questions about gender, sex, bodies, relationships and everything else that can get tangled in with all those juicy things. We both work in the field as educators and sex coaches and met while training at the Institute of Somatic Sex Education. More details of our extensive personal experiences will likely come out in our answers to your questions but trust that we are no strangers to things like questioning gender, social and medical transition, coming out, recovery from religious trauma and people-pleasing patterns, polyamory, kink, neurodivergence, disability, pregnancy, parenting, long-distance relationships and more. We opened the channels and got some questions for us to start this column off with. We want to thank the folks who trusted us and shared these vulnerable questions with us.

You can find us and more of our work by looking us up online, Jess DeVries (she/her) / Beloved Coaching www.belovedcoaching.net and Kori Doty (they/them) / Soft Touch Bodies www.koridoty.com

## What can I do when my libido doesn't easily line up with my sexual ethics?

Thanks for this excellent question to get us started! We want to start off by clarifying some terms. "Libido" may refer to our drive, interest or desire to be sexual and "sexual ethics" is a way to refer to a set of guiding beliefs we have about our erotic selves and how we connect with others.

This question could mean so many different things, depending on what someone's personal ethics are, but we can imagine it might include things like having casual sex when you know that you feel better having sex within a relationship, exploring sex outside of the agreements of your relationship, having sex that you aren't really into, or feeling like your drive is showing up in a way that feels pressuring of your partner(s). These choices involve others and could impact our relationships with very concrete risks, like harming ourselves or others with disregard for STIs or broken trust. Any of these possibilities can potentially stir that sense of discord with one's values, and can also come with a big heap of shame.

One angle to bring in here is questioning the "sexual ethics" mentioned in the question. Are they your ethics? Let's say, for the sake of answering your



question, that you have deconstructed your ethics and values and feel clear on that, but your sex drive is leading you in directions that feel outside alignment.

One of our go-to suggestions here is to become a really good lay to your own self. Getting to know your body and what is pleasurable for you is really foundational in building sexual wellness, whether you are exploring sexuality alone, with a partner or a heap of strangers or somewhere in between. And when we know how to fuck ourselves well, it brings the power of having our desires met into our own hands. If this is new to you, we suggest setting regular time aside for what our field calls "Mindful Erotic Practice." This ritual practice involves having 30-45 minutes of intentional time to follow pleasure in your body. It begins with setting an intention that supports the ritual. An intention can be something like remembering to breathe while building erotic energy, playing with rope to see what you notice, or trying out a new sex toy. While in the practice, let pleasure be your guide, and ask yourself the question, "What could make this more pleasurable?"

As the ritual time comes to an end, take some time and space to savour or integrate things that you noticed. Returning to this practice regularly can be a way of doing self-care, but can also give an extraordinary amount of information about your body and what feels good to you.

If you are having trouble making choices that feel safe for yourself or your partners, we recommend seeking some help, as there may be some other pieces of trauma, self-sabotage, or other mental wellness things that could use more personalized support.

I used to be a gay guy in an open relationship, but now that I'm an enby and taking estrogen I'm way less interested in hookups and way more in connected play-

mates. The problem is that going from open to poly is a big adjustment for my partner of many years. Any advice to stick the landing on this kind of transition, or adjusting if it's not something my partner can do?

Well, first off, asking for advice is a great start. It's normal to need help "sticking the landing" in a situation like yours where there are a lot of moving pieces.

We would suggest starting with getting clear about current expectations because your relationship is changing shape along with your body and gender.

It may mean re-establishing the terms or agreements of your relationship again, after years of being together. Making sure you are on the same page may involve (re)defining your terms: It's important to get clear about what you both mean when you talk about sex, play, partnership, etc. As neurodivergent sex educators, we love specifics and specifics are helpful to make sure you are communicating about the same thing. For example, when you say you are more interested in connected playmates we get curious about what that means.

Questions to ask yourselves: What is included (fucking, domestic life, family) in your relationship? What are you seeking in connections outside your relationship? What are the things you both still value about your connection regardless of what form it's in? What comes with the style/shape/version of open/polyamory that feels best for each of you? It makes me think of this chart:

So to start, we will admit that this was the first time we came across the label "sides," and want to take a moment to define it for others who may also have missed the memo on this relatively new sexual identity term. When we looked it up we found an article the

If it turns out that what you and your partner each want and need doesn't seem to be a shape of "staying together" through the landing, then being real about that sooner rather than later is a gift to both of you. Trying to stay together when it's clear that a relationship has run its course can often include a lot of unnecessary heartache. Some folks find that they can stay friends with past partners, which often takes a bit of time and some emotional work on everyone's part.

It's a very common experience that starting HRT can change your relationship with your body, sex, desire and how you want to be in a relationship. I (Kori) have been on and off HRT for 15 years and have watched my orientation and desire go through some really drastic changes. I have seen similar rollercoasters for folks on every side and direction of transition. You and your partner may find value in connecting with peers who are experiencing similar changes. The peer support networks of trans communities have been pivotal to how we have navigated these things for a very long time; with the internet, that may be in your pocket already, or you may find that hitting up an in-person group like the ones at QMUNITY offer you space for some of these vulnerable hard pieces to find witness, reflection and solidarity.

**Kris (he/him): Top, bottom, vers, sides. How do you figure this out when dating without it being weird? The apps designed for straight people don't accommodate for this, and I don't wanna be like, "Hey are you a bottom? Oh, you're not? Bye!"**

top seeking bottom for impact and humiliation," or "Hi, I'm Kris. I love playing with \_\_\_ and am looking for a bottom or bottoms for regular fucks and Thai food." This is where you get to practice asking for what you want and seeing who is interested in your particular hanky. What is important to move toward is being able to ask for what you truly want, which can take time and experimentation to figure out. There is a lot of power in voicing our

Guardian published in 2022 that gave some credit to Dr. Joe Kort for popularizing the term, which refers to guys who are primarily interested in sex other than anal penetration. While the term may be relatively new, or niche, the practice, which some might call "outercourse" is neither. Non-penetrative sex is something that folks of all genders and orientations can get into, onto, under or beside.

The apps designed for cruising and hookups follow a long-standing tradition to speed communication. Similar to the hanky code, which way you are facing on a bed in the bathhouse, or which side your keys hang on, these are all ways that queers looking to hook up have used a non-verbal tool to communicate the tops and bottoms distinction. The cruising apps have further added tools that can allow us to identify as vers or side or a whole passel of other coded signifiers that give our potential hookups information that takes the place of a verbal conversation. Apps that are more about facilitating 'dating relationships' (some of them are more straight, and others are inclusive) leave this information out, as they are not as rooted in the "fewer words, more fucking" tradition of cruising.

It sounds like you are looking for a bottom and maybe asking for what you want feels uncomfortable or unsettling for you. What if we think about it as flagging with words? An example could be, "Playful

bottom for impact and humiliation," or "Hi, I'm Kris. I love playing with \_\_\_ and am looking for a bottom or bottoms for regular fucks and Thai food." This is where you get to practice asking for what you want and seeing who is interested in your particular hanky. What is important to move toward is being able to ask for what you truly want, which can take time and experimentation to figure out. There is a lot of power in voicing our

desires and when we can do that as clearly as possible, we are more likely to receive what we are asking for or find a sweet middle ground that's pleasurable to all parties involved. The corresponding piece to that is about how we show up for another's ask fully, with our whole honest self; what activities or dynamics do you feel honestly down for? Good sex is what happens when we respect ourselves

and our partners enough to get to be in integrity with our desires. On and beyond what we post to our dating app profiles, the more practice we get, the easier it can become.

Another angle to look at this may also braid into some of the advice we gave in the last question. What is "dating" for you? Are you

seeking a long-term relationship? Is monogamy a part of how that looks to you? If so, prioritizing sexual compatibility might make sense. If dating is about having a diverse collection of relationships that span the spectrum of friends to lovers, then you may miss out on some fun connections if

you pay too much attention to who wants to stick what where. As you come across folks that for whatever reason are not a match for what you are looking for, a simple, "It's been nice chatting with you, but I am looking for something different," is a kind way to say no thanks.

## COMMUNITY

### Gina's: A queer Latina-owned restaurant bringing vegan Mexican food to Vancouver

By Olivia Scholes (she/her)

Queer sapphic spaces are rare — both in Vancouver and beyond. With many 2SLGBTQIA+ venues catering primarily to cis gay men, finding spaces designed for sapphic and trans folks can be difficult. That's what makes Gina's, a new queer-owned restaurant in Vancouver's Chinatown, so special. We sat down with Valeria Velazquez (she/her), the owner of Gina's, to talk about how her experience as a queer Latina immigrant inspired her to create a space that fosters connection, community and of course, delicious vegan Mexican food.

#### What inspired you to open this space?

Growing up in Mexico, I was surrounded by strong matriarchs who ran their own restaurants. Food and hospitality have always been part of who I am. As a queer Latina immigrant, I wanted to create a place that celebrates my roots while offering a space where people can feel connected and at home, especially for those who often feel isolated.

#### What kind of atmosphere are you hoping to create?

Gina's is about authenticity and comfort. We want to create a space where people can come as they are — relaxed, celebrated and seen. Whether it's for a meal or just to hang out, we want everyone to feel like they belong.

#### Why did you choose this location?

Chinatown is a vibrant, diverse part of the city that's easy to access, with great public transit nearby. It's also part of East Van, which has a strong queer community, making it the ideal location for our space.

#### How does being queer-owned shape your approach?

Our experiences as queer people shape everything we do — how we design the space, train our staff and connect with customers. Gina's is about creating a sense of safety

and inclusivity that only comes from truly understanding each other's needs.

#### Will you be hosting events, drag shows or community nights?

Absolutely! Once we're settled, we plan to host a variety of events, from drag shows and open mics to workshops on things like financial literacy and creative arts. We also have board games available for casual hangouts.

#### How do you plan to ensure the space remains inclusive?

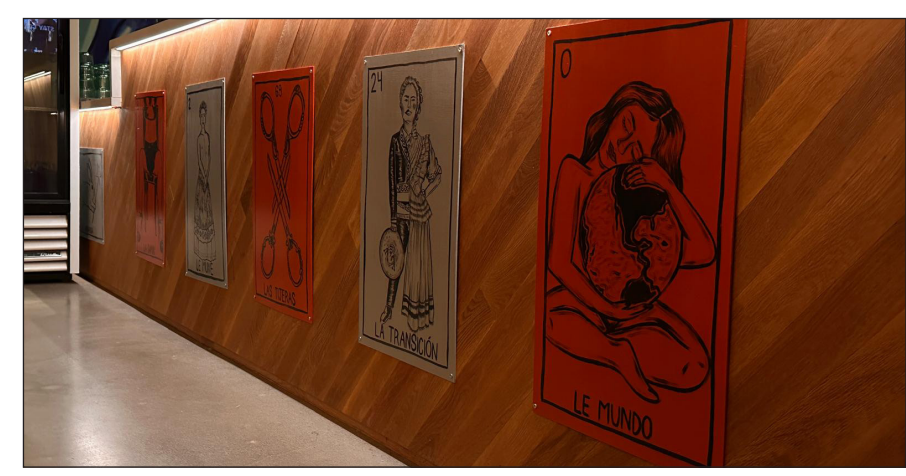
We've posted clear house rules and have protocols to ensure the space is safe for everyone. We're committed to creating an environment where all members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community feel welcome and respected.

#### What challenges have you faced in opening a queer-owned business?

One challenge is the misconception that queer-focused spaces are "niche." It's also tough constantly coming out to landlords, suppliers, and others in the business world, never knowing how they'll react. But we push forward because we know how necessary this space is for the community.

#### How do you see your space contributing to the broader queer scene in Vancouver?

We want Gina's to fill a gap in Vancouver's queer sce-



Photos provided by Gina's



## A Tribute\*

by Mela Brown

Mela writes plays, poetry, short stories and over the years worked as a technical writer and journalist. You can find her most recent work at [paganda.ca](http://paganda.ca).

(\*Real names and some details are changed to protect privacy)

I click the "Join meeting" button.

"Hi! How are you!"

Tom comes into focus in a t-shirt with sun streaming into the room behind him. He's always somewhere new. I think we've met on at least three continents to talk about this website. He's a dedicated volunteer.

"Good, thanks! You?"

As usual, I'm at my desk in my kitchen when we meet. It's pouring rain on the wet coast. I haven't seen the sun in days.

"I'm good! Tired. We got in late. It's a nice place — the ocean is just out there," Tom grins his boyish grin and points his thumb toward the sliding glass door open beside him.

Then Jeanine pops onto the screen. "Hi, Tom. Hi, Mela." I glimpse one of her dogs in her office doorway. The frame is ornate with early twentieth-century wood moulding typical in the houses of her East Van neighbourhood.

"Hi, Jeanine!" Tom and I cancel out each other's audio as we speak at the same time.

\*\*\*

In late fall 2020, a couple years before I met Tom and Jeanine, I left Vancouver Island for the Lower Mainland. I lived alone and didn't have much family, and the pandemic had been hard on my mental health. I needed more land around me, more possibilities, more time with my old Vancouver friends. Little did I know one of them would be dead in a few months.

My dear friend Leon, who had offered to be my brother when my father passed away, died early in the summer of 2021 from a stroke. He was the fourth to die in a year when I lost six friends. That was hard year after hard year.

In 2022 I slid around on my hardwood floors in my socks making nostalgic

playlists on Spotify and writing a blog about something I invented called de-preciousing. It's a gentle and cathartic process for removing sentiment and nostalgia from keepsakes so you can thrift or recycle them. My goal was to open up a little space for connecting with living people.

\*\*\*

Living people....Some of the new, living people in my life are in this Zoom meeting. We're a small team and we have successfully launched a website to showcase work by a group of queer elders called QUIRK-E. Today we're working through the process of adding new posts to the site. We are going to publish members' current and past writing, art and videos. I used to be a technical writer so I'm making us a user guide.

\*\*\*

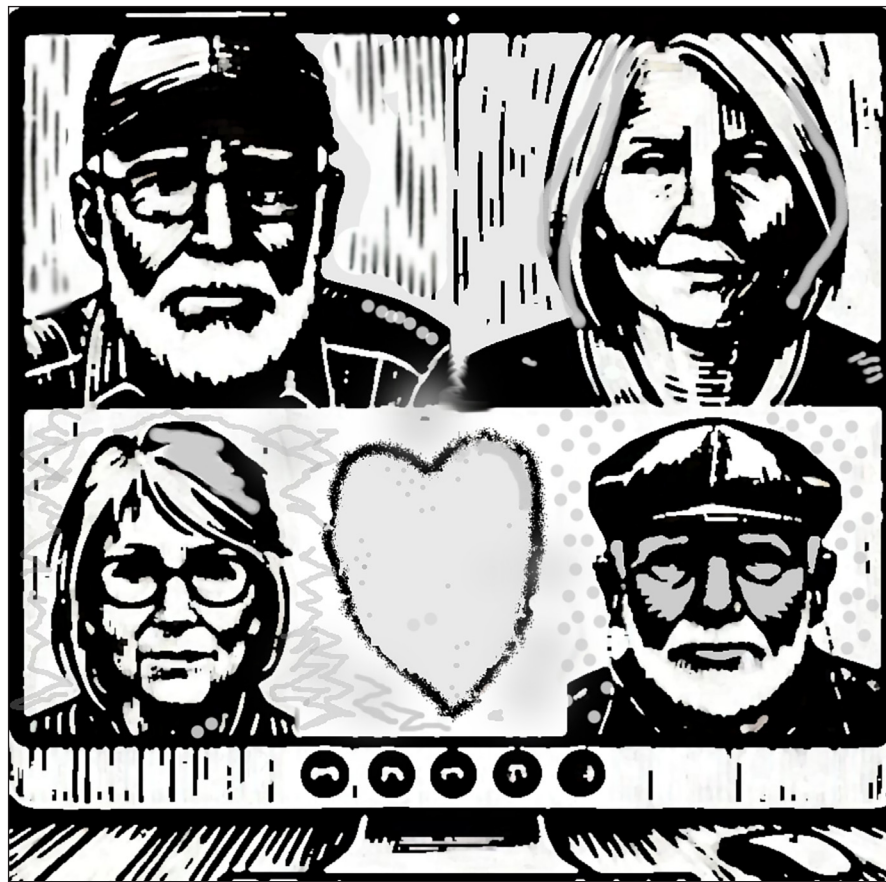
The steps to accomplish something are not always clear but we all know if you want to meet people you have to "get out there." It was early in 2023 on a dark, wet Friday night when I girded myself for an RFS (room full of strangers) and headed out to a 55+ event hosted by QMUNITY: a free Latin dance class. I cannot dance, like, at all ... but I told myself it would be fun. About ten people showed up and five of them all seemed to know each other. As we chatted before the class began, I asked, "How do you all know each other?"

"We're quirky," said one of them and they all chuckled. I smiled uncertainly.

"We're part of a group called QUIRK-E" explained my future fellow web team member, Jeanine. "Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive for Elders. Writing with an 'R,'" she clarified. "Collective with a 'K.'" Later that weekend I submitted an application to join their group. To my delight, it was accepted a few weeks later.

I found my place in the Kollektive on the web team. QUIRK-ES are part of a unique and important cohort of queers whose legacies are our civil rights today. After launching the new site we started publishing the work of members.

Born mostly in the 1940s, they are lifelong activists, veterans of social change that saw LGBTQIA+ people overcome being designated as crazy, illegal, and ineligible for marriage, to being



Artwork by Mela Brown

protected under the human rights code. One of them is even an Officer of the Order of Canada! She received this honour after leading a constitutional challenge that resulted in Canada changing its immigration laws to include same-sex partners as members of family. A few of these wisened heroes are my new friends, too. I feel lucky to know them, humbled by their accomplishments and proud to help share their stories with the world.

*I feel lucky to know them, humbled by their accomplishments and proud to help share their stories with the world.*

\*\*\*

Next on the agenda for the QUIRK-E web team is to discuss submissions. We have received two celebrating the lives of loved ones who have passed away.

"There are already a lot of posts in the 'Mémor' category," observes Jeanine. "Maybe we should make a new category called 'Tributes?'" Tom and I agree and I add "make Tribute category" to my website to-do list. Then, we start discussing what to do about all the annoying spam we get from the website contact form.

\*\*\*

After becoming part of the QUIRK-E web team, I also joined our memoir writing group. The first piece I wrote came out of me like a scream. It was about grief. In a handful of years, I lost nine friends and family to random mortalities. I had professional support but the opportunity to creatively express my response to so much loss helped me heal by being seen. Two members of the Memoir group took the time to provide deeply thoughtful feedback on my first draft. Those conversations were creatively supportive and emotionally intimate as they shared their own experiences with loss. Once my piece was published, several people wrote me kind emails. QUIRK-E has taught me we should never let anyone grieve alone.

\*\*\*

"Well thanks, everyone," says Tom. He wants to get in a swim before lunch.

"Be sure to check out that café," Jeanine reminds me. We meet there sometimes when she is in my neighbourhood for errands. "The new owners are amazing!" I tell her I will. We wave and end the meeting. Before I forget, I log into the website and make the new Tribute category.

## Between two worlds: Being queer, Korean, and an immigrant in Canada

By Seungjong (Owen) (he/him)



Seungjong (Owen) (he/him) is a Korean-born pharmacist living in Canada. His writing explores identity, belonging and the intersection of queerness and immigration.

### Growing up invisible

In Korea, being LGBTQ+ wasn't something people openly hated — it was something they refused to acknowledge. It wasn't just frowned upon; it simply didn't exist. Even my closest friends, people I had known for years, never questioned my sexuality. Not because I hid it well, but because it never even crossed their minds as a possibility.

In grade six, in the late '90s, I started feeling different, but I had no words for it. My heart raced when I was around my classmate — was it admiration? Idolization? What else was there?

In middle school, those feelings took shape when I fell in love with my best friend. It was confusing, exhilarating and terrifying all at once. But I had nowhere to turn for answers. When I tried searching for "homosexuality" online, the screen went blank: "forbidden word." It wasn't just that I wasn't accepted — I wasn't even allowed to ask questions.

Later, in high school, I fell in love again — this time with a classmate. The emotions were just as intense, lingering for two years. But in a culture where queerness was invisible, where there were no LGBTQ+ role models, no safe spaces, my love could only exist in silence.

Meanwhile, people around me laughed at homophobic jokes. Some of my Christian classmates called it a sin and said gay people were going to hell. Others believed it was a mental illness, something that could or should be 'fixed.'

And someone I trusted, someone close to me, outright said:

"They should be stabbed to death."

I sat next to them, silent. Expressionless. Nodding along.

What else could I do?

So I trained myself not to feel. I became emotionless, unreadable, untouchable. Not because I wanted to — but because that was the only way to survive.

For over a decade, I carried the weight of self-hatred, internalized homophobia and guilt. Even in a crowded room, I felt like a ghost — watching life happen around me. I became smaller, quieter, easier to overlook. My voice, my expressions, my emotions — all of it faded behind the mask I wore.

I wasn't living. I was hiding in plain sight.

*I could walk down the street without worrying about being seen. I could exist without lying. I could work without fearing discrimination.*

### A window to another life

Years later, my world expanded when I met my first serious boyfriend. Through him, I entered a new social circle — straight, native English-speaking teachers from the U.S., Canada and the U.K. For the first time, I didn't feel like I had to explain myself. These people weren't queer, but they didn't need me to pretend. They just let me be. At the

same time, I was watching shows like Glee, seeing queer people not just struggling, but living — finding love, happiness, community. That's when I knew: If I stayed in Korea, I would never be free.

### Expectations vs. reality

After years of perseverance, I moved to Canada in late 2018. I was already over 30, and believed everything would change overnight. I thought I would finally be free — free to be open, to date without fear, to belong.

And in many ways, I was. I could walk down the street without worrying about being seen. I could exist without lying. I could work without fearing discrimination. In Korea, queerness was whispered about, hidden. Here, it was everywhere. Couples held hands without hesitation, laughing and loving without shame — something I had never seen before. No one flinched at the sight of queer joy. It wasn't whispered about — it was lived, out in the open. To those around me, it was normal. To me, it still felt unreal.

I had imagined that moving to a more accepting country would erase years of self-censorship, and that I would naturally fit into the LGBTQ+ community. Although the LGBTQ+ community welcomed me, it was not the same as connection. Conversations moved fast, filled with pop culture references I didn't always understand. At times, I felt more foreign than in Korea, being seen as Asian first, and queer second.

I had escaped invisibility in one way, only to encounter it in another.

Vancouver is known for its beauty, its diversity — and its loneliness. Plans fell apart easily, and even in social settings, it was easy to feel disconnected. Like everyone else, I was searching for real friendships.

After years of working so hard to get here, I found myself wondering: Now what?

That's when J became a meaningful part of my life.

He is someone who has helped me feel more connected, experience more joy, and remind me that life is meant to be lived. I deserve that. I appreciate him for what he brings into

my life, even if our relationship isn't always simple.

Even after leaving Korea, I was still searching for my place. I was free, but I wasn't fully seen.

It wasn't the environment that needed to change — it was how I saw myself.

### Understanding my identity

People often think coming out is a single event, but for me, it has been a slow process.

I told my sister I was gay in 2015, after the U.S. legalized same-sex marriage.

*Couples held hands without hesitation, laughing and loving without shame — something I had never seen before. No one flinched at the sight of queer joy.*

Watching an entire country change overnight felt like the world was shifting, like a door had opened. For the first time, I wasn't just wishing for change — I was ready to be part of it.

My mother struggled to understand — at first, she thought I had erectile dysfunction. She still doesn't fully get it, but I know she loves me in her own way.

Even now, I still haven't come out to my father. But maybe, one day, I can let him read this.

For years, I thought that leaving Korea would mean erasing the parts of me that didn't belong. But identity isn't about choosing one culture over another — it's about embracing all the pieces of who I am.

### Breaking the silence

In Korea, I learned that survival wasn't just about hiding — it was about finding others like me, even in silence. Being gay in a society that refused to acknowledge us taught me the importance of solidarity. When you have no protection, you only survive by standing together.



But when I moved to Canada, I realized something else: those in power don't just ignore us — they divide us. They turn us against each other, keeping us focused on our differences so we never look up and see who's really in control.

The isolation I felt in Korea wasn't just about my sexuality. The struggle to belong in Canada wasn't just about being an immigrant. The barriers, the fear, the constant feeling of not being enough — these weren't just personal struggles. They were systemic. And I wasn't the only one facing them.

I still imagine sometimes — if I had grown up in a world that accepted me, if Korea had been more open when I was young, confused and fragile — would I have been happier? Would I have thrived instead of just surviving?

Korea wasn't always kind to me, but I still hope it will change, that the next generation will live better than I did.

But change doesn't happen on its own. It happens when people refuse to stay silent.

Most people see politics as distant and irrelevant — something that doesn't touch them. But I've seen what happens when people look away. I've lived the cost of silence, and that's why I want to help. No one — LGBTQ+ people, minorities, anyone struggling — should have to go through this alone. I know what it's like to feel invisible.

I am Korean, and I am queer. I am an immigrant, but that is not all I am — I am still writing my own story.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

march 14th, 2025

by jaye simpson (she/they)

jaye simpson (she/they) is an Indigiqueer/Two-Spirit artist living in Vancouver.

i saw two park rangers at grandview park today. i was walking with my friend, matcha tea in hand and a bouquet of flowers. the rangers were watching a man dismantle his tent and pack up his belongings. before i can stop myself it begins, my tirade: "hey bozos! why don't you get a real job and provide something

meaningful to the community instead of wearing the ugliest green i've ever seen to humankind, maybe show some humanity and unpick that wedgie so far up your —" and then my friend stops me with a cackle. a head thrown back howl and we begin to point at them and laugh. this city can be the most beautiful thing one could ever see in their life while also being marred by the insistent colonial cruelty available. the police budget far superseding the one for public transit, libraries and housing, you know pockets are deeper in city hall than ever before. "get a real

job bozos!" my friend hollers too, chiding me at the fact that she hasn't heard that word in forever. "i was raised by folks many generations older than my own. i like insults that hurt them, like calling them posers." i smirk, the smile feels good on my face as we watch the rangers retreat to their car. on commercial drive, anything can happen. i mean anything. when the sun sets and the white neighbours flee to their owned homes, we come out. my friends watch the full moon lunar eclipse and admire the moon's captivating beauty while giving folks cigarettes.

a rally can march down the drive any day, any time, the place can hold the variety of the human experience. all the grief! all the grace! a great & terrible beauty all in one place wrapped up in an italian flag bow, but many of us know commercial drive isn't little italy, it's the collision of coalescing, the many handed and many faced beauties that take it in stride, tight lipped and piling sweaters, sizzling meat and cacophonous noise and every so often you'll hear some queers at grandview park calling a couple of park rangers bozos.



### June & July Prides in B.C.

by What's On Queer B.C.

Many in B.C.'s Lower Mainland don't think about Pride until July and August, when Vancouver's Pride Festival, Dyke March, and Trans Pride March take center stage. But across the province, celebrations begin much earlier. Many communities, especially in the Interior and North, now hold Pride in June, aligning with International Pride Month and the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots on June 28, 1969.

While some groups, like choirs and advocacy organizations, have long marked June with events, others have shifted their festivals earlier due to wildfire smoke and extreme heat making late-summer gatherings difficult. Smaller communities often organize Pride around local needs, balancing tradition with the realities of weather and resources. Some events feature lively parades and street festivals, while others focus on community picnics, drag performances, and storytelling nights. No matter the format, these gatherings are a vital way to uplift 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and celebrate resilience, joy and activism.

Check out the calendar of events to the right for a full list of June and July Pride events, or visit [whatsonqueerbc.com](http://whatsonqueerbc.com) for updated event details.

June 2025

- 1

Kelowna Pride

Sunshine Coast Pride

Ladysmith Pride
- 7

Bowen Island Pride
- 8

Vernon Pride

Nanaimo Pride
- 14

Maple Ridge Pride in the Park

Sidney Pride

Out in Harmony Choir Performance

- 15

Kamloops Pride

Rainbow Chorus of New Westminster Performance
- 22

Duncan Pride
- 28

Surrey Pride

Eastside Pride

North Island Pride

July 2025

- 6

Victoria Pride

Northern BC Queer Connection Society Pride in the Park
- 12

Prince George Pride
- 18

Tri-Cities Pride
- 19

Fraser Valley Pride
- 26

100 Mile Pride in the Park

The Night Out (Parts 1-3)

by Rio Miller (they/them)

Rio Miller (they/them) is a queer multidisciplinary artist based in Vancouver. A lover of all things strange and unusual, they seek new ways of creating like an alley cat looking for their next meal.





The year of weird Barbie

Véronique Emma Houxbois (she/fae)

Véronique Emma Houxbois (she/fae) is a trans woman cartoonist and board member for Vancouver Dyke March.

To anyone looking past the media circus of “Emilia Pérez,” 2024 was a breakout year for a new generation of indie trans filmmakers. “I Saw The TV Glow,” “The People’s Joker,” and self-described Mexican Emilia Pérez parody “Johanne Sacreblu” gave us wildly idiosyncratic visions of how trans people find ourselves in mass media that rarely acknowledge us, let alone seek to tap into our imaginations.

To me, that unholy trinity of unconventional trans film is the vindication of a subtle discourse on queer and trans representation in Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie.” In the decade plus that I’ve spent covering trans representation in comics, film, and television, one thing I can say for certain is that there has never, and may never, be enough visual media to represent all the various ways that trans women want to be reflected. This is largely true of just about any demographic, but the ratio of supply to demand in the mainstream feels particularly acute for us.



But “Barbie,” to me, opened up a discourse about the twin poles, or perhaps parallel tracks of desire for trans representation in art between Hari Nef’s role as Doctor/DJ Barbie and Kate McKinnon’s Weird Barbie. On the one hand, both Nef’s career and character represent an aspiration to be seen and recognized within the canon, to feel a sense of inclusion, recognition,



and prestige without our transness being exploited as a spectacle. To wit, Nef recently announced that she wrote the screenplay for the “Candy Darling” biopic she’s set to star in.

McKinnon’s Weird Barbie, on the other hand, functions as a representation of the desire to manipulate and abject the canon. While not explicitly presented as trans, Weird Barbie represents a composite of all the dolls that were played with too hard. McKinnon, herself a lesbian, commenting on how the children who play with her always seem to want to put her in the splits, was saying the quiet part loud: that the off-label use for a “Barbie” is to act as a canvas for a child’s notions of sex and gender. Once you get a “Barbie” out of the box, Mattel can’t tell you want to do with it, and the past year in indie trans filmmaking has given us a fresh set of filmmakers who want to bring that ethos to the entire pop canon.

“I Saw The TV Glow’s” writer-director Jane Schoenbrun is the most modest of the three in that motif, as if modesty came anywhere near the movies under discussion. Perhaps best described as Weird Al Yankovic’s UHF reimagined as a quintessential Clive Barker journey of obsession into dark epiphany, Schoenbrun accesses the pop canon as fragments, an after-image of something barely remembered. Schoenbrun laces the mysterious channel at the heart of the movie with typefaces and visual cues that are just short of the mainstays of 1990s culture to trigger latent memories in the audience to reconfigure nostalgia into something sinister and unsettling, instead of comforting.

It’s a motif that seems like it should be almost mandatory for millennial filmmakers, given how astonishing it is that the late 1990s and early 2000s have become a site of significant nostalgia for Gen Z and Alpha. There was never any sense of permanence or posterity in the pop culture of my youth. Even at the time, there was a broad recognition that precious little of what we were consuming would stand any test of time, let alone achieve the glossy reverence for the ‘60s and ‘70s that simultaneously entranced our parents in “Forrest Gump,” “Almost Famous,” or “Oliver Stone’s The Doors.”

Instead, Fred Durst represents the face of millennial nostalgia in both “Y2K” and “I Saw The TV Glow.” Of course, the turn of the millennium was also bisected by 1999, arguably the greatest year in film history and inarguably the single year that shaped an entire generation of queer film with “The Matrix,” “Fight Club,” “But I’m a Cheerleader,” “Cruel Intentions,” “American Beauty,” “Girl, Interrupted,” “The Talented Mr. Ripley,” “Boys Don’t Cry,” and “Being John Malkovich.” So it wasn’t all Woodstock 2000, but it was very that.

As unexpected as it is to see pop stars like Charli XCX, Troye Sivan, Billie Eilish and Chappell Roan dress like the teenagers we were and wax nostalgic about the years between Columbine and 9/11, there’s an entirely different dimension to trans millennials because those aren’t the teenagers we were. Nostalgia is a site of horror and deep psychic scarring for Schoenbrun the way that the Trinity test was for Christopher Nolan in “Oppenheimer” and David Lynch in “Twin Peaks.” The Return on an intimate scale. Coming of age in the years between Columbine and 9/11 defines millennials in North America as a generation marked by mass trauma, and so it seems correct that the truest and most urgent films from our generation will come from trans filmmakers uniquely adept at accessing the low hum of mass trauma that marked our teen years.

Vera Drew, director, star, and co-writer of “The People’s Joker” played so loosely with the canon that it was withdrawn from the

Toronto Film Festival in late 2023 over legal threats from Warner Brothers for copyright infringement, which is probably the most millennial thing to ever happen to a filmmaker. We are, after all, the Napster generation as much as anything else.



“I Saw The TV Glow” leans back into the dying days of the analog world, but both filmmakers are marked by the dawn of the ubiquity of access to media, or at least until our parents got letters from their ISPs threatening to cut off service.

In that sense, “The People’s Joker” was probably an inevitable millennial tipping point in film. Pastiche, parody, plagiarism and detournement have existed in film for decades but there’s a very particular way in which it manifested for us. We grew up on “The Simpsons” riding the line between parody and plagiarism with episodes that simply restaged Cape Fear or came off as a smash cut of “The Fugitive,” “Twin Peaks,” and “Dallas.” Of course, we weren’t just pirating movies and music at the turn of the millennium and into the 2000s, we were getting our paws on professional software like Adobe Photoshop and Premiere Pro to hack up and reassemble any digital media that came our way, usually by cutting “Dragon Ball Z” battle montages into Linkin Park music videos.

As such, Drew is the most immediately legible Weird “Barbie” filmmaker, not just for playing the same post-modern tricks of portraying multiple iterations of “The Joker” in conversation with each other, but eschewing any distance from the intellectual property itself. “The Joker is Drew’s” “Barbie” and she will put him in the splits as much as she wants.

Meanwhile, “Johanne Screblu,” the self-described parody of “Emilia Pérez,” may in fact get a theatrical run of its own. Originally funded through a GoFundMe campaign inspired by co-director Camila Aurora’s criticism of “Emilia Pérez” on TikTok and debuted on YouTube in January, “Johanne Sacreblu” had its first theatrical screening in Mexico on Valentine’s Day. While it bills itself as a parody, the actual plot of “Johanne Sacreblu” has next to nothing to do with “Emilia Pérez.” Instead, it’s a screwball comedy riff on “Romeo and Juliet” starring a trans man and a trans woman as the heirs of France’s two biggest bread-producing families: The Croissants and the Baguettes, who fall in love despite the intentions of their families.

Instead of a direct parody, “Johanne Sacreblu” is a cultural broadside against the totalizing stereotypes of how Hollywood as an institution reduces Mexico down to a sepia canvas for

extreme violence. The genius of “Johanne Sacreblu” is how the satire emerges in ways that transcend any language barrier. Some of the best jokes in the film, like a yellow paint shortage sending up the sepia filter that became ubiquitous for any Hollywood film portraying Mexico after Traffic, do require some fluency in Spanish. However, much of its charm lies in things like stuffed rats multiplying and moving around characters between shots without being acknowledged, or mimes getting into scuffles in the background, so there’s no reason to be sitting around waiting for English subtitles.

“Johanne Sacreblu” is razor sharp in its disdain for “Emilia Pérez” with touches like a musical number portraying its director Jacques Audiard as a man made of garbage in a landfill, but it isn’t beholden to what it’s skewering. It has a life and a meaning of its own. There’s something incredibly striking about the fact

that a 30 minute goof shot in a few days still manages to portray a novel T4T romance of the kind that just does not exist in the mainstream. If there’s a particular lesson about representation in “Johanne Sacreblu,” it’s that however we position ourselves relative to the mainstream, we have agency in how we respond to it. No one has better access or better knowledge on how to make great stories about trans lives than we do. A crowdfunded short uploaded to YouTube can, and more often than not, resonate more deeply with our actual lives and orientation towards the world than a glossy feature completely attenuated from its subject matter.

What’s truly great about film and the various ways that it can be made and presented now, is that it can accommodate just about any vision if you don’t limit yourself to the multiplex and the scrolling boxes of a major streaming service. Hari Nef’s “Candy Darling”



biopic is going to be a generational achievement with the weight of the world on its shoulders, but it will exist in the same world with the same access as “I Saw The TV Glow,” “The People’s Joker,” “Johanne Sacreblu,” and whatever other Weird Barbie comes next. At the end of the day Doctor Barbie and Weird Barbie are both Barbies. We don’t have to put the weight of our aspirations on one or the other. Because what matters most is the dolls.

the whole flower

by Emmett MacMillen (they/them)

Emmett MacMillen (they/them) is a queer, trans nonbinary writer, performer, and producer living in Victoria, B.C.

it’s not easy to grow a beard. I would know — I spent months counting every hair, counting every dark tally on my face, marking down another day closer until I wouldn’t be afraid in the men’s washroom. we count down the days until we aren’t afraid anymore, but we have a wall of tallies now. a full face of beard hair and I still feel caged and trapped in a stall.

there will always be something — someone, to be afraid of and I’m tired of shaping the person I am around the templates that other people give me. the garden growing inside of me is mine. I planted every seed and watered every budding leaf. wrapped the clematis vines around sticks of dried bamboo and dug my fingers into the dirt just to feel something.

I want to sink my roots into the ground so that the seed pods that drop down bloom into a trans kid less afraid than I am. I plant myself in every iris bulb, into wet soil, so that when their soft petals unfurl with my name etched in them, you know I was here and will bloom year after year.

I will hold the hands of other men like me and it will feel like something sacred, like pressed petals between the pages of a story we are still writing. “Love as I love my own life” Achilles said to Patroclus. my lover leaves roses in a jar in front our house labeled ‘free’ because that garden is a little bit of him and me.

these are the days I want to spend counting, the days where my skin feels like mine and the sun is shining because I woke up today. I want to cover my walls in tallies marking every moment I fell in love and had a nap and ate meals made with friends. I want to cover my walls in tallies until they are darker and fuller and thicker than the beard on my chin.

the only thing outnumbering them is the long life of lovers and friends and more than friends and more than lovers stretching out before me in a history I still have yet to live. and maybe I will always be afraid in the men’s bathroom,

but they cannot take away that garden growing inside of me. they can’t take away that the next time you see an iris in full bloom you’ll remember the pressed petals between pages with my name on them. your garden is growing too and there’s nothing to do except cup the whole flower in your hands and read every name written on those petals. make a tally mark on the wall every time you read yours and soon it will be covered.



tastes like liquorice when you pluck the stalk and peel it. fresh and crunchy, a soft wet green. I ate some and thought of how many times you took a bite. It's so green here it's no wonder you painted the living room that colour. Brush strokes you left behind; greens, blues, and pinks. I think about repainting when we move out, but I hope that we don't. The planter boxes you painted are too full of kale and borage. The rose bush is growing taller every summer. I think of you when my lover puts a jar on the curb full of blooms labeled free. I think of you when a passerby's face lights up at being given permission to take a beautiful thing. You were always offering; your space, your time, your food. Meals would tumble out of the fridge and onto plates fully formed — the cooking seemed like an afterthought.

You grew up in Kaslo, and we're waiting at the ferry to go over to Crawford Bay. How many times did you do this exact wait? It feels like I could look over and you'd be sitting in the car next to us. Standing on the ferry deck with the wind pulling your hair up. I'm drinking cheap coffee from the ferry coffee shop, and I've never felt more like I'm seeing a ghost. Tendrils of tattoos crawling from under your sleeves, the twists of sweet sicily leaves imprinted on your skin. Did you ever photograph your tattoos? The photos are all that's left, bits and pieces scattered in photo albums and cellphone SIM cards. A photo of you laughing, surrounded by cherry blossoms, waits to go up on the fridge you had covered in friends and collages and notes and stickers.

The flat of oat milk you bought from Costco is still in the cupboard, feeding our friends through crepes and coffee well into the next fall. Some of those things are still in the back of cupboards and the bottoms of drawers—pieces of you we could never get rid of. You're still in the nooks and crannies, the glue holding these walls together when we're laughing and drinking tea on the couch. You would love the rainbow bouquet of garden flowers in the glass jug on the coffee table, the new art prints on the walls, the ceramic compost bin covered in slugs and a large frog. We put your pottery wheel on the side of the road and hoped whoever took it would craft lopsided mugs like you.

We still have an unfired ceramic plaque you made of the Sator Square- a Latin palindrome I later discovered. Sator Arepo Tenet Opera Rotas. The sower holds the wheel with care. I want to put it up on the wall to remember it's always important to care, backwards and forwards. About the friends and plants you left behind, about the strangers you didn't get to meet. We pulled the borage out of the garden, mulched the boulevard to plant anew in spring. Sea blush painting the dirt with fresh blossoms. There will be another jar of roses on the corner this summer and another summer with your picture on the fridge. More weeks where you're just a picture, on just the fridge. The living room is still green, though. We hold your memory with care, like a stalk of sweet sicily. A taste of liquorice, fresh and crunchy.

Crossword Puzzle

Down

- 1. Vancouver is a city of \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Your favorite artist's favorite artist
- 4. "I'm on \_\_\_\_"
- 6. Obtuse, acute, or just right?
- 8. Annual festival for 2SLG-BTQIA+ visibility
- 11. Very \_\_\_\_\_. Very Mindful.

Across

- 2. Trans folks dating other trans folks
- 5. Art of gender performance
- 7. Striped pedestrian zone
- 9. Religious community who follows Menno Simmons
- 10. AKA "outercourse"
- 12. Rush" singer, actor, You-tuber
- 13. Umbrella term for 2SLG-BTQIA+ identities

REVIEWS

Việt and Nam and the queering of consciousness

Khang-"Ninh" Đàng (he/they)

Khang-"Ninh" Đàng (he/they) - or Đàng Khang Ninh - is a queer Saigonese in progress. Primarily practising poetry, they also write about queer social justice, gender disparities and critiques of the political economy.

Trương Minh Quý's "Việt and Nam" (2024), which can be watched on Daily-motion, concludes with a gloomy scene, where the two titular characters are slowly suffocated in a large trailer during an attempt to be smuggled into England as unregistered workers. The dark interior of the trailer, where Việt and Nam sit with their bodies dirtied, recalls their life underground as miners in northern Vietnam — a humid, unlit scenario that, despite the physical distance, mirrors the same impoverished, humiliated life that appears to be inescapable.

Throughout the movie, "Việt and Nam" remain so strikingly similar that we cannot tell one from the other. They wear similar clothes. They have similar haircuts. Even when their dialects differ, we cannot pinpoint exactly who is Việt and who is Nam. The credits never clearly distinguish who plays whom. Việt and Nam, as both a movie and as characters, plays on that mythological fear of — and longing for — the othered kin. The film never accepts a conventional self-other discourse: one moment, you can be a heroic veteran searching for the remains of your close comrade; the next, you can be the pathetic person desperately hiding the guilt of accidentally pulling the trigger that killed your friend.

The uncanny strangeness of seeing the worst within ourselves is representative of the post-war Vietnamese psyche. Despite our best efforts, multitudes of worlds — socialism and capitalism, liberalism and conservatism, First World and Third World — simultaneously exist. The quest for a "true" past, metaphorically told through the journey to find the remains of Việt and Nam's father, is meaningless — for the past is dead. The father cannot speak for himself; he is forever frozen in the gaze of the present-day us, without a chance to say more.



Illustration of Việt and Nam by Trần Minh Hiếu (@newwiewie)

Việt and Nam is one of those films that, through its insistence on alternative lived experiences, helps illuminate society's margins. Trương Minh Quý's project has a daring vision: the Vietnamese public is still relatively conservative about queer representation, and the film's unconventional exploration of war and impoverishment directly challenges nationalistic, "meritocratic" propaganda. As a result, it should come as no surprise when the government decides not to "endorse" or "distribute" the movie — effectively re-

voking its Vietnamese "citizenship." In effect, the film itself becomes the Other to its kin's self — so similar yet so different, so familiar yet so alien(ated).

However, this is only a facticity on which Việt and Nam transcend. Their intimacy is embodied yet almost alienated from the gloomy context — a time in which homosexuality is still banned by the government, in a place of impoverished, forgotten lives. They have sex on the cold mountain of black coal. They lick the blood from sexual intercourse. They even eat each other's earwax. How can one enjoy such a degree of freedom and love when everything seems to work against basic human decency? Queer joy and love, specifically in racialized bodies, is Trương Minh Quý's solution. It is in the interac-

tions between impossible bodies — bodies that transcend our borders — that we take one step closer to justice. To honour our war-torn past, love — difficult, challenging, queering love that defies categories — is the most viable answer.

Trương Minh Quý's work, despite its mournful end (inspired by a true event), stubbornly holds on to joy, love and freedom as a means to liberate ourselves from the chains of the past. Queering love, then, holds the ultimate possibility not only for the Vietnamese people but also for racialized, impoverished communities worldwide.



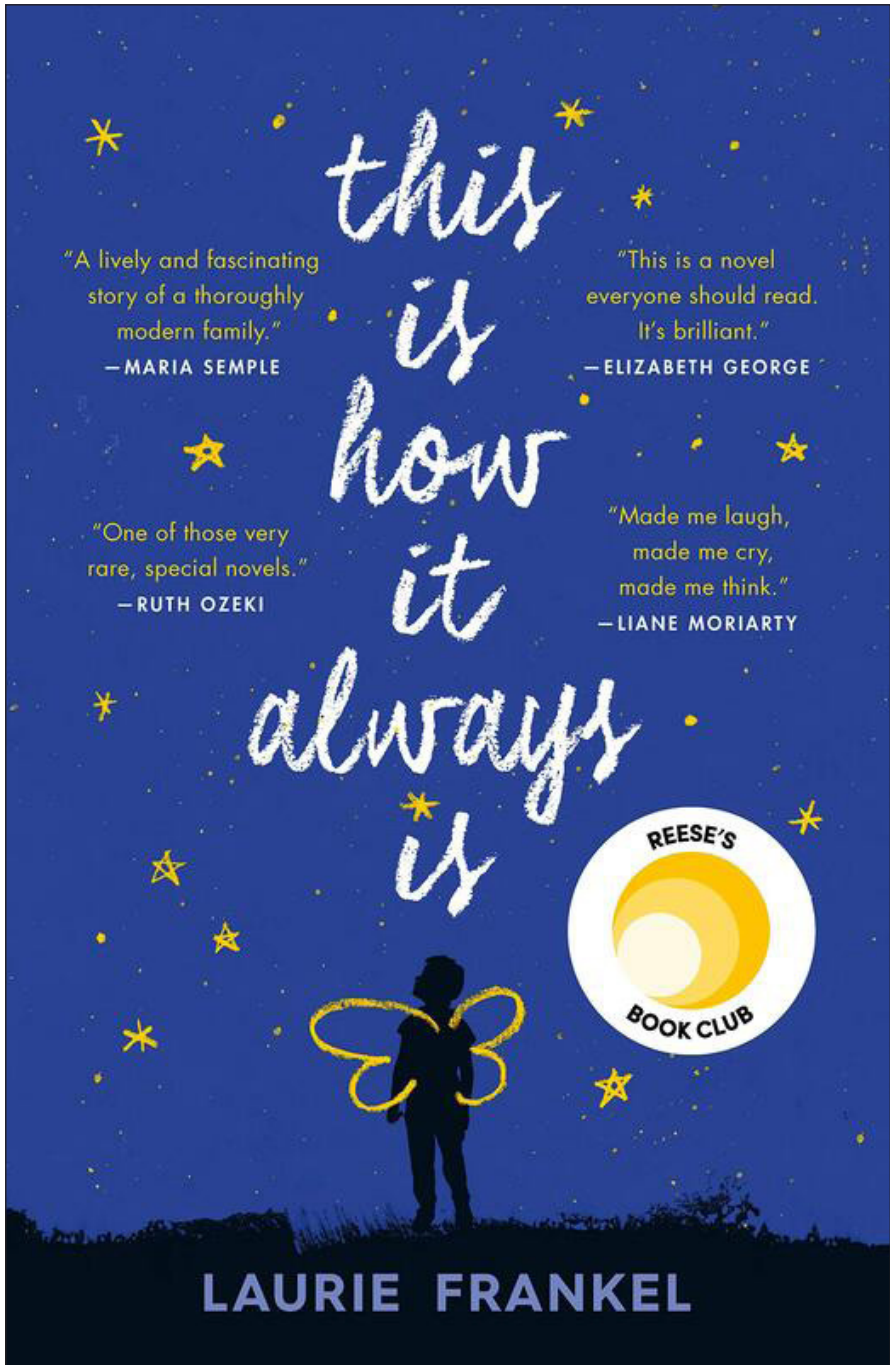
"This is How it Always Is": A masterclass in trans representation

Sunny Zatzick (he/him)

Sunny is a trans writer and aspiring journalist who is passionate about engaging in activism through writing and art.

Laurie Frankel's "This Is How It Always Is" is a novel that should be read by everyone. A heart-wrenching story about a trans child's journey, this novel consistently flies under the radar in conversations about queer literature. Although published in 2017 and receiving multiple awards — including The New York Times bestseller, Book of the Year (from People, Amazon and more), and the Washington State Book Award — this phenomenal novel remains widely unknown to both the queer community and book lovers in general. It is a story told with care and intent, sure to leave a lasting impression on all those who read it. Set primarily in Seattle, "This Is How It Always Is" centres around Rosie, the intelligent, spirited mother of five boys. The plot follows how Rosie's family's world is turned upside down when her youngest child, Claude — who the reader will soon get to know as Poppy — begins to explore her gender identity and discover what it means to be a trans girl. "This Is How It Always Is" portrays the depth of one's identity and how to handle a secret that is both so important yet irrelevant at once. The story magnifies how all aspects of one's life are impacted by identity, from issues at school and within friendships to family dynamics and geographical safety. Frankel portrays the unique truth that being a trans child — and person — is simultaneously unique and special but also no more abnormal than all children and all people we love and care for. The novel examines the complexity of parenting and the necessity of loudly supporting trans people, particularly children, with love and loyalty — a message that is relevant now more than ever. "This Is How It Always Is" is a life-changing book for parents of trans children, delving into murky waters of taboo topics such

as gender-affirming care for children and whether one's trans identity should be "kept a secret." Frankel discusses these topics with care and nuance, bringing her experience as a mother of a trans daughter into a discussion that is often heated and hurtful. However, such is the mark of any truly great story — the novel's impact reaches beyond those immediately connected to the storyline. Regardless of one's relation to Frankel's story, all parents will see themselves in Rosie, from her struggles to her delights. The family Frankel builds evokes nostalgia in the reader. Rosie's husband, Penn, is a charismatic and gentle father, whose career as an author becomes beautifully intertwined with his family's experiences. Throughout the novel, Rosie and Penn's five children undergo the vibrant experiences of childhood, with impressive weaving of all their complex storylines. Frankel's storytelling displays a shockingly rare type of representation that is raw and honest while still full to the brim with beauty and love. Frankel's message is only as meaningful as her writing. Her story is enriching and cohesive — easy to follow yet, at times, full of thrilling suspense. Frankel establishes patterns in her writing and dialogue subtly, yet the impact is essential: smooth writing and transitions, with an intentional flow of plot and character development. However, it is perhaps Frankel's humour that shines through most of all. Rosie's narration is brimming with comedy that is both wry and casual, bringing life to every character's decisions. Frankel's intelligence and wit accompany the characters through moments as world-bending as being outed to everyone in your life or a trip across the world to Thailand. "This Is How It Always Is" can touch the reader with the exact right mix of devastation, hope and knowledge due to Frankel's superb ability to build her characters and storyline. "This Is How It Always Is" deserves a much greater spotlight in the queer literature circle than it currently



Cover design of This Is How It Always Is by Patrick Insole

has. Although Laurie Frankel does have a daughter who is trans, in her author's note she writes, "...This isn't her story...She's a real person, so she's the only one who can tell her story." In another note to rea-

ders, Frankel writes about her daughter, saying, "She is why sharing this story, although fiction, requires some bravery. She is also why I've done it anyway."

			9	8		7	4	5
9								8
6		8		3	5	2		
				7				3
		9					2	4
5	2			1		9	6	7
2	9							6
				6			7	9
	6	7		9			1	2

Sudoku

Elsa: I Come With My Songs

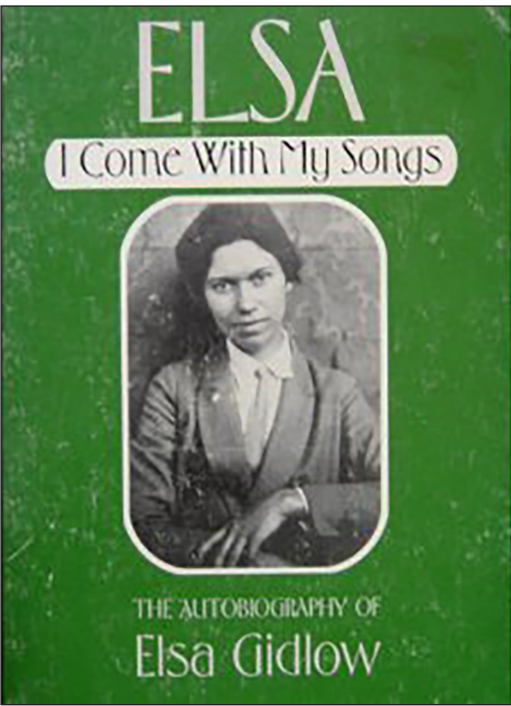
Lea Krusemeyer (she/her)

Lea is a lesbian writer and journalist living in Vancouver who dedicates her writing to highlighting queer life; especially queer life of the past, which is too often overlooked or forgotten.

There is something empowering about reading the memoirs of a woman who — in the early 20th century — lived an openly lesbian life without apology or shame. A woman who, nowadays, is almost forgotten in queer discourse, yet lived a life that should be a roadmap for lesbians who also want to be unapologetically themselves. "Elsa: I Come With My Songs" was published in 1986, but the experiences author Elsa Gidlow shares could be taken from the lives of modern-day lesbians just as well. Gidlow's book might not be a new release, but it is a comfort for lesbian women who finally see themselves represented in literature, and I pray that by sharing this book with you — the reader — her story will never be forgotten. Elsa Gidlow wasn't just a poet; she was a force, a trailblazer, and, in many ways, one of the earliest

lesbian writers in North America. Long before queer liberation became a movement, she was out there in the world, writing about love between women, existing loudly in a world that wanted her and her kind to be quiet. Reading "Elsa: I Come With My Songs" feels like more than learning her story. It is a preservation of queer history that, in the 20th century, often had no place to be preserved. Gidlow wrote, in detail, about the lives of herself and her queer circle, and by doing so, she created an archive of a mostly unwritten North American lesbian history. Born in England and raised in Canada, she later moved to the United States, where she found herself at the centre of aspiring radical artistic and intellectual circles. In 1923, she published On a Grey Thread, widely considered the first openly lesbian book of poetry in North America (read that too if you have the chance). At a time when queerness was hidden in subtext and euphemism, she was putting it on the pages in plain sight. That alone should be enough for

Gidlow's legacy to never be forgotten. But her impact went far beyond literature; she built queer spaces, nurtured community, and created a life that, even now, feels aspirational. What makes Gidlow's autobiography so powerful is how unapologetically honest it is. She writes about love and desire without shame, something that still feels radical even today. She shares stories of the women she loved — the reader gets to know Isabel Grenfell Quallo, Marie Lenoir, Kiki Wood and others as full, three-dimensional people whom Gidlow shared her heart with. Their relationships are not — like often in mainstream media — reduced to sex and drama, but instead highlight the real joys and challenges of lesbian living. Her language is poetic but never distant — it's the kind of writing that makes you feel like you're sitting across from her, listening to stories over a cup of coffee. It's personal, intimate and filled with the kind of reflections that make you stop and reread sentences just to let them sink in. Most im-



portantly, it makes you feel a little less alone. Reading her memoir now, almost 40 years after it was first published, it's hard not to feel grateful for the path she carved with her actions and her words. So much of what she wrote about — the search for belonging, the fight to live authentically, the importance of chosen family — still matters to queer life today. Gidlow's work reminds us that being a lesbian, a writer or a poet, isn't just about being visible; it's about creating something lasting, something that tells the next generation: You were never alone.

The Peoples Joker (2022)

Andie Angelis (they/them)

Andie is a writer and pop culture nerd, born and raised in the Greater Vancouver Area. They enjoy dissecting queer media and writing sci-fi/fantasy stories that challenge cis-heteropatriarchal norms.

Many films are advertised with the promise of a wild ride, but few deliver with as much tenacity as "The People's Joker" (2022), which can be rented or bought on Apple TV or YouTube. Filled to the brim with jokes and references spanning the "Batman" comics, films and cartoon franchises, this film is unapologetic queer cinema in all its remixed and multimedia glory. There are copyright infringements, and this film does not care, haphazardly tossing in and blending together all manner of su-

perheroes and villains from the DC universe by name in this charming and hilarious romp. The protagonist begins her journey to find herself and pursue comedy, departing her small Midwestern town of Smallville for the East Coast metropolis of Gotham City — a city described by her mother as a den of "neon biker gangs, leather freaks and cross-dressers." The only problem is that comedy is illegal outside of the televised sketch comedy show "UCB Live", a highly gender-segregated program. On "UCB Live", the cast is separated into Jokermen, who are allowed to perform sketch comedy, and Harleyquin Dancers, who serve as provocative eye candy for viewers at home. Our hero — or dare I say, villainess — Joker the Harleyquin de-

cides to take matters into her own hands and start an underground anti-comedy club for herself and her fellow villains. Here, she meets her Mr. J, and in true Joker and Harley Quinn fashion, he both helps her realize she'd like to "go Joker to Harlequin" while also engaging her in a toxic relationship that perpetuates a cycle of abuse. What follows is an exploration of dismantling the illegality of comedy while also breaking out of the abuse perpetuated through Gotham's hero-to-villain pipeline — all while maintaining the consistent dark humour one would expect from a parody of the Joker character. The aesthetic and editing style of "The People's Joker" unabashedly embraces and pushes its chaotic, Adult Swim-esque visual concept to the edge,



with scenes that at times feel like a phantasmagoria of "Batman" references and dark visual gags. The textures that come across from the layers of images on the green screen, which mark every single scene in



the film, transport viewers into a world of rust and grime. The city of Gotham is so consistently collaged together that its deliberateness overrides any other detriment it could have on the viewing experience.

The DIY nature of this film is on full display — completed thanks to extensive crowdsourcing — but it only adds to its charm and

world-building thanks to the writing and directing of Vera Drew, who also stars as Joker the Harlequin.

The film's use of a popular copyrighted franchise skirted some controversy, causing it to be pulled from some film festivals, including the Toronto International Film Festival. However, marginalized people have historically been pioneers

of making art with the materials available to them, such as the use of samples in hip-hop music. As such, "The People's Joker" persists in bringing its tale of queer parody to the world. Whether you enjoy the idea of digging into the inherent queerness of Batman's archnemesis, "Folie à Deux" wasn't to your expectations, or you just want the cathar-

sis of removing the Joker character from far-right indoctrinated edgelords for a day, I can't recommend enough that you buckle in and let Vera Drew's Joker-mobile take you for a ride.

Correction: In our previous issue, we misspelled Jackie Haywood's name in the Reviews section. We regret the error and apologize for the mistake.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORY

### Salal

Salal offers free-of-charge anti-oppressive, decolonizing, intersectional feminist support to survivors of sexualized violence. Our services are open to women, trans, Two-Spirit, nonbinary and gender diverse people.

Website: [salalsvsc.ca](http://salalsvsc.ca)  
Crisis Line: [604-255-6344](tel:604-255-6344)  
[@salalsvsc](https://www.instagram.com/salalsvsc)

### Health Initiative for Men

With five health centres throughout the Lower Mainland, Health Initiative for Men is a non-profit society that aims to strengthen the health and well-being of gay men.

Website: [checkhimout.ca](http://checkhimout.ca)  
[@instahim](https://www.instagram.com/instahim)

### QMUNITY

Improving queer and trans lives through services, connection and leadership. We offer: information and referrals; diversity training and consulting services; all ages events and drop-in programming; free and low-cost counselling and social support groups; volunteer and practicum opportunities; community meeting space.

Website: [qmunity.ca](http://qmunity.ca)  
[@qmunity](https://www.instagram.com/qmunity)

### UNYA's 2-Spirit Collective

Support, resources and programming for Indigenous youth, ages 15 to 30, who identify as 2-spirit or LGBTQ+, and for those who are questioning their sexual or gender identities.

Website: [unya.bc.ca/programs/2-spirit-collective](http://unya.bc.ca/programs/2-spirit-collective)  
[@unyayouth](https://www.instagram.com/unyayouth)

### Ribbon Community (Formerly AIDS Vancouver)

Canada's first HIV/AIDS service organization began in 1983 in response to the growing AIDS epidemic at the time. The Ribbon Community provides a wide range of services and programs that include an HIV Help Line, a Supplemental Grocery Program, Financial Assistance Fund and more.

Website: [ribboncommunity.org](http://ribboncommunity.org)  
[@ribbon.community](https://www.instagram.com/ribbon.community)

### Rainbow Refugee Committee (RRC)

A community group that supports people seeking refugee protection because of persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status.

Website: [rainbowrefugee.ca](http://rainbowrefugee.ca)  
[@rainbowrefugeecanada](https://www.instagram.com/rainbowrefugeecanada)

### Sher Vancouver

Sher Vancouver is a non-profit society for LGBTQ+ South Asians and their friends, families and allies in Metro-Vancouver, B.C.

Website: [shervancouver.com](http://shervancouver.com)  
[@shervancouver](https://www.instagram.com/shervancouver)

### Foundry BC

Foundry is a province-wide network of integrated health and wellness services for young people ages 12 to 24.

Website: [foundrybc.ca](http://foundrybc.ca)  
[@foundry\\_bc](https://www.instagram.com/foundry_bc)

### 2 Spirits of BC

BC Indigenous 2SLGBTIQ+ Wellness Program.  
Website: [2spiritsbc.com](http://2spiritsbc.com)

### Dignity Seniors

Dignity Seniors is led by 2SLGTBQI+ seniors, and we work towards increasing supports for 2SLGTBQI+ Seniors throughout B.C. through research, advocacy and community partnerships.

Website: [dignityseniors.org](http://dignityseniors.org)  
[@dignityseniors](https://www.instagram.com/dignityseniors)

### McLaren Housing Society of B.C.

Founded in 1987, McLaren Housing was the first HIV/AIDS housing provider in Canada. We work with low-income individuals and families who are living with HIV/AIDS and are homeless or inadequately housed.

Website: [mclarenhousing.com](http://mclarenhousing.com)  
[@mclarenhousing](https://www.instagram.com/mclarenhousing)

### Friends For Life

The Vancouver Friends for Life Society provides holistic and wellness programs for people and their families living with life-challenging illnesses, including HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and cancer.

Website: [vancouverfriendsforlife.ca](http://vancouverfriendsforlife.ca)  
[@vanffl](https://www.instagram.com/vanffl)

### Trans Lifeline

Trans Lifeline's Hotline is a peer support phone service run by trans people for our trans and questioning peers. Call us if you need someone trans to talk to, even if you're not in a crisis or if you're not sure you're trans.

Website: [translifeline.org](http://translifeline.org)  
Canadian Hotline: [877-330-6366](tel:877-330-6366)

### Trans Care BC

Trans Care BC connects trans people, their loved ones and clinicians with information, education, training and support.

Website: [transcarebc.ca](http://transcarebc.ca)  
Canadian Hotline: [1-866-999-1514](tel:1-866-999-1514)

### PACE Society

PACE provides confidential, non-judgmental services for sex workers, including occupational health and safety education, support, advocacy, outreach and drop-in services from a harm reduction and rights-based model.

Website: [pace-society.org](http://pace-society.org)  
Canadian Hotline: [604-872-7651](tel:604-872-7651)  
[@pacesociety](https://www.instagram.com/pacesociety)