In my 20’s, I frequented a Lesbian bar in Denver where I grew up. It was in the seedy part of town and was called the “3 Sisters”. The gay community lovingly called it “6 Tits”. But when we were in conversation with each other, we referred to it simply as “The Tits”.

“We are going to the Tits after the softball games, meet you there”, or “I am going to the Tits on Saturday night, are you going?”

That section of town was so bad that there was no sign out front announcing this bar. The parking lot was pitch black at night and no street lights in that neighborhood. No one could see us arrive and enter this small tavern. It took all my courage some nights to wander in alone, but the laughter, music and women were all worth taking the risk of life and death.

The police found us, though, and would stop in to harass the women about once a month. The owners had a system we all knew. If the cops walked in, the bartender would flash a light on the dance floor. We would all quit dancing, go sit down at our tables and wait until they left.

One time a friend of mine was feeling more than annoyed at this and stood smack in front of two fierce looking officers and screamed out to the crowd, “Who called a cab?” And she was arrested. A couple of women went down to the station with the collection of more than enough money, we had all chipped in, and bailed her out and paid her fine.

There were three women who owned the bar (thus, the 3 Sisters). One was the cranky Jan who didn’t put up with much rowdiness. She was a retired gym teacher and coach. She thought of us as her unruly students that she needed to keep in line, no matter how old we were.

Then there was the adorable and sweet Jesse who was Jan’s partner and we all felt sorry for her. Jesse was big, jolly and drank way too much nightly. But she was always good for a free drink and big bear hug.

The other “sister” was a silent partner who couldn’t be “out” because of her career but once in a while she would come in to talk with Jan and Jesse. She was a closeted professional with perfect blond hair, short skirts, tight V-neck sweaters and a hot car. When she showed up – we all noticed.

It was crowded on weekends and I worked as a waitress for a few years and I dated the bouncer. It was a place to gather with friends, meet women, and play pool until 8 when the pool table was covered as the crowd got too large. We needed the extra top for women to put their drinks on and another place to sit.
Jan and Jesse would have events throughout the year: holidays, drag shows, sport's celebrations. It was our home with our community. In fact, it was the only place in town for the lesbian community to gather at that time.

I was an artist and sold my paintings on the wall of the Three Sisters. As people drank, my landscapes seemed to look better and better, I suppose, because I sold a lot of art out of that bar.

During this time, I thought it a good idea to have women's night at the men's bathhouse in nearby Boulder. I wanted equal opportunity for all women. I approached the owner, he agreed, and I managed the Wednesday Lesbian night. It was a big hit for a few months, walking through the sex maze, seeing and enjoying the various themed rooms and playing in the pool. But the novelty wore off and women, as women do, partnered up after hooking up and it faded into herstory.

After much fun and frolicking, I had to face reality and got sober. I didn't frequent the Three Sisters much anymore, my interests changed and I began to be a regular at a quaint, local women's independent bookstore called the Book Garden. Kasha was the owner. The Book Garden was a hot bed of intellectual/feminist/lesbian discussion groups and sold all sorts of traditional and underground lesbian and womyn's literature. I bought many a lesbian romance novel and womyn written books from Kasha. I was one of her best customers.

Kasha would have classes after hours to educate us on feminism, activism and our own bodies. She had a workshop where we would look at our vagina's with little hand mirrors and get to know our womyn parts - and everyone else's in the group too. It was amazing how different and alike we all were in so many ways. I miss those days.

The Book Garden was just down the street from my high-rise apartment that was also walking distance from the queer park named, Cheeseman, and the grocery store the community nicknamed “Queen Supers”, which was actually King Supers. That area was teeming with queer activity.

I had a shy, brave friend who would approach womyn in the produce department at Queen Supers as they picked out their veggies. Being so shy, she would instantly blush as she explained that she was so sorry to bother them but knew if she didn’t introduce herself or say something, she would regret it for the rest of her life. Then she would proceed to ask them out for coffee. She got more dates than the gay boys out of that grocery store. Shy baby as she was.

Denver in the 70's was a fun time until the 80's hit with the AIDs crisis. Then the community rallied and focused on helping men with HIV and teaching us all about safer sex. I volunteered to be on safer sex panels for gay women. I would teach them how to use dental dams, putting condoms on dildos and negotiating safer sex talk with their lovers. I learned much about gay male sex those years and it scared us all close to celibacy until the research revealed exactly how HIV was passed from person to person.

I was also a student clergy at the LBGTQ church, Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies. At first, the memorial services were elaborate and standing room only, but as this disease devastated our community, the services were hourly and attended by a few family members and friends. They would wait outside the church for one service to end before theirs began. It was exhausting and heartbreaking as our talented and beautiful brothers, and some sisters, died a slow and painful death before our eyes.
We were angry and loud about it. We had marches, Act Up men were screaming at politicians, disrupting legislature. We were threatened by fundamentalists, many were beat up as we fought for equality and our lives.

Then one day, a little nun from India named Mother Teresa came to town and announced to a stadium full of Christians, that she was in Denver to open a Sister’s of Charity Hospice solely devoted to AIDS. To the shock and embarrassment of the religious hierarchy and the people there, the Great Mother Teresa scolded them from that stadium platform, as only a humble Catholic nun can, for not stepping up to their mission and helping us. Her highly publicized visit help change the attitude of the city.

Finally, medical breakthroughs discovered a cocktail of meds that, even though, it did not cure AIDs, it prolonged life. We gave a national sigh of relief.

I was so active in the Denver community those years by being the waitress at the lesbian bar, haunting the Book Garden, advocating for safer sex and then at MCC of the Rockies, that some circles of lesbians began to have a code phrase for discreetly asking someone if they were “family”. They would ask, “Do you know Kermie?” I was always so shocked and embarrassed, but secretly proud to know that I was well known enough to be a code phrase like “Are you a friend of Dorothy?”

A few years ago, a woman from Denver was talking to me as she was passing through Tucson. She told me that her adult daughter, who lives in Denver and I hadn’t met, was at a work function and she thought she recognized another woman from long ago. She approached the woman and said, “Do you know Kermie?” and the women’s eyes brightened in disbelief and said with a big smile “Yes!” As they talked and laughed, they realized that they knew each other from a “Children of Gay Parents” group when they were both young. Neither one of them knew me personally, so, I guess it is still going on.

I haven’t been in Denver for many years now, the Three Sisters is closed, Jan and Jesse have passed to the big Lesbo Bar in the sky and the Book Garden is now a yarn shop. The Mile High City is different, but still thriving with PRIDE.

Having traveled to many cities since that time, I seek out our community wherever I go. I am home under the Rainbow flag and always thrilled and honored to be in queer presence. You lift me up, offer mutual understanding, and make me love you all over again.

Thank you for coming out and being who you were meant to be in all your Glory and Glitter. You are my tribe and no matter where we go, we will always, ALWAYS be family.
How I’m Learning to Love Myself

Author: Colleen M. Skiles

During my early childhood I believed I was a mistake because my father left us when I was 10 days old... that it was my fault he left. My mother never told me any differently. So most of my life I hated myself.

During my childhood I experienced abuse and neglect which led to low/no self-esteem. I felt like I was a piece of shit and proceeded to treat myself accordingly. Thus began my path of self-destruction. I began drinking alcohol at a very young age and continued until I turned 35 years of age. I began using prescription drugs of my mother’s and they really didn’t work for me so eventually I went out and explored illegal drugs...such as psychedelic drugs, speed, cocaine and anything else that would get me away from myself.

I didn't act like a responsible person for most of my adult life...until I was forced to. My family let me get away with a lot. I did take care of myself when I was far away from them...but always to return when the going got tough.

Relationships for me were referred to as serial-monogamy. One at a time...many. I didn't have good role models for relationships so my relationships never lasted. By the time I became an adult I was well on my way to my path of self-destruction. I literally plowed through the people, places and things in my way.

I drank and used through people, I drank and used through all the cities I moved to and I tried every alcoholic beverage and illegal drug possible to escape the nightmares of my life.

I lived homeless in 3 different cities and none of those beautiful cities were beautiful anymore. The last city I lived in was San Diego, California. I was homeless there for 2 years before my life changed. I was very close to death by that time. I remember my last day homeless like it was yesterday. The night before...I went to my “connection’s” house to get the 1/4 gram of crystal-methamphetamine he owed me...he didn't answer his door... so I proceeded to kick his door in...he wasn't home so I went home to the alley where I parked my chaise lounge...and waited. The next morning as I was on my way to meet with a fellow drunk...my dealer and I missed each other by moments and inches which is a good thing because my dealer was going to shoot me for kicking his door in...I had something powerful looking over me and it wasn't me! My fellow drunk wouldn’t buy me a $1.00 burrito but he would drive me 40 miles to my mother’s house...so off we went. I had him drop me off down the road so he wouldn't know where my mother lived. My mother took one look at me and said she would be right back. I didn't know what that meant! When she came back she said I could stay with her on one condition...if I would get help. Well I didn't have a problem, so what was she talking about? She said I needed to figure out what she meant and then go to the VA and be seen by them.
And so my journey of recovery began. My sobriety date is December 17th, 1986. I will say this...it was not easy to admit I have a problem...it was not easy to admit I’m an alcoholic...it was not easy to admit I’m an addict. It was, however, one hell of a relief!

I was told I qualified for the VA Alcohol Treatment Program...and that I would first have to prove I was serious about getting sober by attending the Outpatient Day Program. I told them I would do anything. I showed up every day even though I was going to prove to them I was the exception to the rule...not an alcoholic. Much to my surprise I realized that in spite of myself...I’m an alcoholic. So I actually started on my journey in recovery.

I went to the 30 day program and I must admit it was quite challenging...first thing I did was to beat the best pool player so the 39 men would know who would be in charge...it was me and 39 of them... then I showed the Counselors how codependent I am by helping a young woman who got kicked out of the program take her luggage downstairs instead of going to my group... and then, how self-centered I am...because it’s ALL about me. I thought I was gonna have fun there...I wasn’t having any fun at all!

After treatment I went to a recovery home to learn how to live with other humans. My third day there I had my bags in the driveway and was ready to get the hell out of there...the roommate I had was mean to me and I was leaving so don’t try to talk me out of it! I had nowhere to go...but I was leaving! One person was able to talk me out of it...so I stayed. What I didn’t know, was they knew I had never unpacked when I first moved in. After a couple of months there...a group of us went to Outward Bound at Joshua Tree National Park for a 4 day outing...when we arrived there I decided I didn’t want to be there...that they needed to take me home. Well, guess what happened about that! I spent the next 4 days camping with the gang... I refused to eat so I wouldn’t have to use the bathroom...didn’t want to have to dig that very necessary hole...I was told I would have to go whether I ate or not...so I ate. I resisted the activities as much as I could. Well, I did a trust fall after several minutes of absolute fear...you see...I didn’t trust anyone so don’t tell me to trust these people now! I finally took a risk and did the trust fall...it was incredible! I faced away from them and fell back and when they caught me it felt like I fell into a giant pillow! A special place was chosen for me, where I slept that night under the stars...we did rock climbing the next day and I chose the most muscular gay man to be my bole...still having those trust issues! That night we wrote a letter to ourselves we would receive 6 months after Outward Bound. The hardest thing I had to do the day we were going home was to reach into the circle full of outward bound pins acknowledging our completion of the activities of the 4 days and when it was my turn to take mine I didn’t believe I deserved a pin so they asked me if I completed each of the activities and I said yes crying...then I reached in the circle and took my outward bound pin. When I received my letter and I began reading the letter...I cried. Because the letter I wrote involved me forgiving myself for the abuse I inflicted on myself while I was out there committing suicide on the installment plan.

This is the point in my life where I realized the nicest thing I could do is give myself permission to have this recovery...and a second chance at life...
A Nourishing Space for Women

Author: Lavina E. Tomer

A double rainbow was the deciding symbol to purchase the 165 acre Cave Canyon Ranch in Vail, AZ. The buyer? 55 year old visionary Katherine (Kittu) Riddle whose plan was to establish “A Nourishing Space for Women,” a safe, women run place to live, camp, and visit in this desert setting. Her dissertation, “The Nourishment of Living Systems,” was the blueprint for designing a place where women could nourish themselves spiritually and emotionally while building community. Women from all walks of life would nourish ourselves so that we could rejuvenate, regenerate, grow and find new strength as we lived in and changed a patriarchal society.

In June 1975 Kittu and I became the first residents. Our new home was rich with desert flora and fauna that neither of us were all that familiar with. It was dusk as I opened the door to leave the A-frame. Immediately I was facing a javelina. Our eyes met for an instant with extreme shock. I quickly ran back into the house slamming the door and that young javelina took off on its stiff legs running for its life. That night I slept under a huge mesquite on the bank of the wash. The land needed to be cleaned and the 3 houses needed maintenance. I learned how to get the swamp coolers repaired and working. Self-sufficiency was a priority for women everywhere. That meant learning new skills and making the decisions that would influence our lives.

In August, Kittu went off to teach in State College, PA and I stayed on as the first caretaker of the land. I would reside there alone for months until women arrived to live and work at Nourishing Space.

So, my primary relationship was with the land.

Ah, the land, with mountain sides, a canyon with acres of desert shrubs and cactus, a wide, dry wash, a shady mesquite bosque, a cave, houses: the A-Frame, Cedar House and Tree House, a well, running water and electricity. It was ideal.

There is so much to tell you about. Let me begin with the silence. It wrapped around me like a soft cocoon, keeping me safe while I transformed. It surrounded me and permeated my pores so that we became one. It caressed me with a strength that brought peace and anxiety, wonderment and uneasiness. That silence was a close companion that accompanied me throughout the days and nights taking me places I had never been before. Out of the silence and stillness of the desert I observed much: while I sat quietly on an aged log in my front yard, a coyote walked down the wash, free spirited, on the way from here to there, unaware that it was being watched. I felt delighted and honored to share the moment with its wily presence.
My little hut known as the Tree House, was a former tool shed, and animal coop built around a sturdy mesquite. I claimed it as my own right way. My friend Joan Pepper helped me upgrade the structure by screening the windows that had no glass, putting down a raised wooden floor found at the junk yard, creating a bed that was on a workbench and covered with mosquito netting, and cleaning the place up. We did not put a door on right away. Our neighbors at Colossal Cave told me that there was a report of a mountain lion in the area. I noted the information and went on with the day. After a sound sleep I woke up and right outside where the door should have been were huge paw prints. I had had a visitor. I managed to put that door on immediately! Night time had its adventures as well.

I still cannot believe that I ever slept while alone on the desert, in the darkness. For awhile I would wake up and hear this scraping across the table. I laid very still until it was over, then went back to sleep. I figured out that a packrat was coming in and stealing away with shiny things like forks, spoons, and jewelry that I had left out on the table. I was amused and laughed out loud to myself as I came up with a plan. It was easy. I no longer left anything out that would be desirable for my little friend to take back to its nest. It worked! Another memorable night I woke up to a monster thunder and lightning storm. I was looking out as the lightning flashed and was terrified that I would see a person standing there. I rolled over and said, “I am really scared.” It was amazing. Acknowledging that I was afraid calmed me down and I fell into a deep sleep. Day time and nighttime I was alone.

There were days when I talked with no one or with a few people on the phone. Well, I talked to myself constantly. In an insightful conversation with myself I stated that I needed to learn to play alone like I used to as a child. So, I would dance and sing in the wash, walk all over the property with an acute curiosity, sleep in all three structures as I wanted, talk to and hug the trees, and name the loud flock of mourning doves hanging out in the Saguaros, “The Rowdy Bunch.” It wasn’t exactly play but I loved staying busy by taking junk and garbage to the dumpsters in the neighboring campground, organizing tools, maintaining the houses, and learning to identify the desert plants in my 165 acre yard. I worked with a Tucson woman to mail a newsletter and to create an engaging brochure about Nourishing Space with lovely pictures, inspiring information and a poem that I wrote while sitting on a hillside.

Women trickled in. A small group of us gathered to watch a full eclipse of the moon. I had never seen an eclipse before. The darkness of the night there was incomparable. The ink black sky was the backdrop to the bright, bright moon as it was slowly covered by the earth. Eventually we were consumed by the darkness and waited for the light to return. The night sky out there was unbelievable with the Milky Way, planets and constellations on display.

Late summer we had to get 130 feet of new water pipe laid from the A-Frame to the well. I rented a ditch witch and had it delivered, bought the pvc pipe and couplings from a young lesbian at a plumbing warehouse, and put the call out for help. Help streamed in from Phoenix and Tucson. A plumber, Jodi, was advising us and providing her tools. A dozen women spent several days digging, laying the pipes, waiting for the glue to dry and shoveling the dirt back into the ditches. What a project, what an accomplishment for all of us.

That November we had a Thanksgiving potluck. Women arrived from Tucson with delicious food, and appreciation for this new gathering place. I was ecstatic to have company and to see women roaming the land. After their departure I was alone again but filled with the laughter and warmth of their sweet presence.
I opted to set up my bedroom in a loft that I accessed by a ladder. I did not sleep well. I couldn’t see the front door. I felt a cutting vulnerability, a terror really. One night I dreamt that I heard the toilet flush and I got up to look down to the first floor. There was a scrawny, ugly, green man climbing the ladder. I put my hand on his shoulder and yelled, “Stop, you can't come up here.” He disappeared. The dream ended.

Needless to say, the next morning I moved my bedroom out of the loft to a downstairs room. Living alone at Nourishing Space was remarkable. The land, the relationships, the responsibilities molded me forever. All of that loneliness, isolation, and terror that had been traveling with me for years were revealed in that silence and beauty.

As winter approached more women started to visit. It was as if they appeared from outer space. They would let me know they were on their way but then suddenly appear at the gate as if they had teleported from another location.

In December and January women arrived who wanted to live and work at Nourishing Space. Suddenly, I was part of a collective. The tables had turned! Several women were inspired to change their names after they arrived.

I had already lived with Dandelion and Morningwaters now I was living with Jasper, Saguaro, Cholla, Shyannie, Karobi and Ka. As a collective we improved the land, built new structures, and supported each other. We were safe and free-spirited walking bare-breasted and bare-assed around the property. “A Nourishing Space for Women” would welcome and influence hundreds of women until 1978.

That double rainbow still lives within so many of us.
I slammed the receiver down!

Dammit, I’d just made a promise I didn’t want to keep. Couldn’t Rita see I had too much to do? When did she think I’d find the time to even write an ad, let alone answer anyone who responded? I had too much to do, grading for my high school classes, lesson plans for the upcoming weekend intensive, a house falling down around my ears!

I fumed around a little longer, whacking my palm against the wall, cursing, trying to calm down enough to begin grading. Finally, anger abating somewhat, I picked up a pile of papers

Impossible! I couldn’t quit thinking about that forced promise.

Ahah!

I knew what I’d do! I’d write an ad so offensive no one would respond. I’d show Rita!

After all, I didn’t want to meet anyone. I had been single long enough to enjoy the freedom. I didn’t want to share my space, my time, myself.

And who in their right mind would want to date a 59-year-old woman with two, sometimes three, jobs, part-time custody of two cats, a mortgage, and a body rapidly deteriorating towards disability?

As I struggled with the right words for the ad, I remembered years ago when I had been a member of the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism). In that group, each member created a persona who might have lived during the Renaissance, appropriate garb for their persona, and a coat of arms with a motto.

Light bulb!

My motto from that time would be the perfect opening for my ad. There couldn’t be too many people who could translate Latin anymore, and sneakily, I wouldn’t either. So...

“Illus Sustaines Suscipientes” announced that fateful ad. Nicely arrogant, I thought. Every time I thought of a positive quality of mine, I tried to find a three, four, or five syllable word or phrase to summarize it, words and phrases like “multiple degrees,” “loquacious,” “sesquipedalian,” and “Equestrienne,” just for the “snob effect”

The rest of those words aren’t important now, but I ended the ad with “no responses from more than fifty miles away.” I didn’t even say “please.”

There, that should do it. I fired off the ad, along with the requisite fee, to the Advocate personals site. I quickly called Rita, the most persistent of my many friends nagging me toward this preposterous action.

“I’ve done it. I sent an ad to the Advocate. Can I get back to work now?” I challenged.

“Oh, Donna,” she gushed. “I’m so excited for you! Oh, I know you’ll get tons of responses. Let me know what they say.”
"I can't promise that Rita, but I'm getting back to work, now. You remember, I have to leave next Thursday for Minneapolis to teach that weekend intensive, and I'm not quite prepared yet."

"Oh, sure," she replied contritely. “Sorry. Good luck with that."

We disconnected. The days sped by. I finished my grading and put the final touches on my intensive plans.

And yes, I received a few responses to my ad. They were clearly from people who either hadn't read or understood what I had written. I simply replied “No Thanks” to them and packed my bags for Minneapolis.

The morning of Thursday June 24th, 2004, I checked my email one last time before leaving home. I had another response to my ad.

Would these people never give up?

Grudgingly, I logged in to the site.

From: Nyvenn
Oslo, Norway

To: DjY

Subject: Please translate your subject line ;-)

Hello DjY,
I thought I knew enough latin to translate your subject line, but alas I don't. Will you be kind enough to give me the translation? I am so curious, also out of linguistic reasons.

Yeees, I do live a little longer away than 500 miles, but still not in the Antarktis...
You sound to be a great outdoor person with a good sende of humor. Should we try to exchange a few lines?

Greeting from Oslo

* * * * *

Inexplicable joy flooded my mind!
Breath escaped me!
My senses reeled -
all from a mere ninety words.

* * * * *

My eyes drifted to the clock.
Oh, no! I was half an hour late leaving for my trip! I quit my program, gathered my laptop, rushed to my little Jeep Liberty, and roared off into the late morning, promising myself - and all the powers that be - I would NOT think about that response until I was safely ensconced in my Minneapolis motel room!

In spite of my promise to all the powers that be, I drove those 438 miles on auto-pilot, my mind drifting...

Nyvenn - - - was that a name? Or was it a word in Norwegian?
Norwegian? “Greeting from Oslo” Oslo, the capitol of Norway.
Oh.
My.
God.
What was I thinking? More to the point, what was I feeling?
I wanted, no I needed, to reply to that gracious and tantalizing response to my email.

After a loooong and exhausting six-and-a-half hours on the road, I FINALLY arrived at my motel. Once in my room, I plugged in my computer and logged onto the internet as fast as I could. I wrote a reply rapidly, or so it seemed. I never realised how long my letter became.

Formally, I explained my teaching schedule during the weekend and that I might not be able to write more until I returned home late Monday afternoon. Then I described the history of my Latin phrase and its translation:

“Keep ‘em guessing.”

I also agreed to “exchange a few lines” and sent the missive off before I lost my courage.

There, done and dusted. I had given information, and replied to the question asked of me, but I hadn’t revealed anything personal. I could go to sleep, get up early and concentrate fully on my teaching assignment.

Strangely, Friday morning I couldn’t think about anything, not even breakfast, until I sneaked a peek at my inbox. And there it was:

From: Nyvenn
Oslo, Norway
Could be all yours

To: DjY

Subject: RE: “Keep ‘em guessing”

Oh hello, many thanks for your prompt reply!
It would be delightful to hear more from you.

Hopefully you will have an interesting time teaching, with lots of difficult questions from the students...

I do not know why, but I sort of feel so confident towards you that I’ll give you my e-mail address: guri@refsnes.com (which is also my name). But please do feel free to go on communicating through this personals site if you prefer to do so.

Yours sincerely,
Guri R.

PS: ehm, that latin sentence, I sort of feel like it might also be able to sound: Illos sustaines suspicientes...

Stunned once more, I read and re-read the message.

Warmth suffused my body.
My mind floated somewhere.
What was happening here?

The phone rang!
In a daze I picked up the receiver.
It was my local host, confirming our appointment to let me into the facility where I would be teaching. I dragged myself back to reality.
Yes, I must concentrate! I needed to live in the real world, not some fantasy generated by two small emails. But...it would be only polite to send a quick acknowledgement of Guri's request to use regular email, wouldn't it? Of course...

* * * * *

And so it began. That weekend I couldn't concentrate. Something stupendous was happening, but I didn't know what. I gave the class everything I had to give, but there was a large part of me that was somewhere out there, in the ether, starving for more connection with that mysterious email writer.

How little I knew that over the next 25 days Guri and I would be frantically emailing, phoning, snail-mailing and getting acquainted. Even less did I suspect that I would board a plane on July 18th, 2004, for my first-ever trip across the Atlantic to meet Guri face to face. And I had no idea that two days after my arrival, Guri would propose to me.

AND I WOULD ACCEPT!
Later in Life

Author: Gary Gardner

I had my first homosexual experience at seventeen. I had my second at sixty-three. In the forty-six years in-between I was married twice, had a live-in girlfriend, helped raise my two children, and had a good career; all as a privileged straight white male.

A few months later I had my third experience. Hey, I thought to myself, I’m just curious. No big deal. Then the fourth, fifth and sixth. Hey, I’m just experimenting. No big deal. Then suddenly I’m like a kid in a candy store, going wild with Craigslist, Grindr, and arcades. I didn’t think about it. I just did it. A lot.

A year passed and then one day it hit me. Wait a minute. I’m straight. What the hell am I doing? Who am I?
So I got a therapist.

“Gary”, she told me “At a minimum you are a bi-sexual male. That’s obvious by definition. You’re having sex with men. Straight men wouldn’t do that. They couldn’t.”
“No”, I said. “I’m not attracted to men. I’m attracted to women. I’ve been with women my whole life.”
“So why aren’t you having sex with women then?” She asked.

So it began. Over many months we worked together to help me understand and begin to accept my sexuality. It started with admitting to myself that, yes, I might, technically, be bi-sexual. But I’m not gay, am I? I can’t be gay. That would invalidate my whole life. I loved the women I married. I still do. Those relationships were real.

I went over it again and again. I might be gay. I don’t want to be gay. I talked with my therapist. I read books. I went back and forth, back and forth in my mind. I am attracted to women. I can’t be gay, I would say to myself. And then, I have lost interest in women. I am very interested in men. My therapist explained about the spectrum and the Kinsey scale. “It doesn’t have to be an either or question”, she said. “And the answer can change”.

“Real gay people know they’re gay”, I answered. “They know it very early. Real gay people HAVE to be gay, they can’t be anything else.”
“Look at this website”, she said.

I did. There was a forum called “LGBT Later in Life”. On it I connected with people, both men and women, married and single, who were exactly like me: They were unsure, scared, and trying to deal with their sexuality in their 40’s, 50’s and 60’s. I was not alone.
My therapist had me go back through my life, looking at and writing about my feelings and attractions to men. To my surprise there were quite a lot of them. Starting in Junior High and lasting throughout my life there were thoughts, feelings, and aborted attempts. I had just blocked them out.

As a straight guy, I had always considered myself to be an ally of the LGBT community in a very passive, “some of my best friends are gay” kind of way. But the thought that I might actually be gay was very difficult to accept. The thought filled me with shame and guilt. When I thought of myself as gay, all the negative things I learned growing up in the 50’s and 60’s hit me very viscerally. Gay equals Fag, Fairy, Queer, Pervert. Gay means shame. Gay is effeminate. Gay is bad. Acceptance is hard.

But eventually acceptance came. Being gay made my life make sense in a way that it didn’t before. It explained my alienation, depression, and self-destructive behaviors. It felt right. What I didn’t expect was that I would have to come back to this acceptance again and again. The denial keeps coming back and I have to work through the whole process all over again. Each time it gets a little easier, but it is still going on.

I feel like an idiot for taking so long to recognize my sexuality. How could I have buried those thoughts and feelings so successfully for so many years? Not think about all the times friends and family asked me if I was gay? Not remember all the fantasies and aborted attempts with men? Instead I built an identity as a straight guy, a husband and father, a provider with a successful career. It was a safe place to be, but I drank a lot. That identity is very strong, built and reinforced over many, many years. It is easy to fall back into. It's comfortable and safe. It’s comfortable and sad. I don’t have a comfortable gay identity yet. That, I suspect, will be the work of the rest of my life.

When I am around others in the community I still feel like a fraud and an imposter. I lived through Stonewall, AIDS, and gay rights. But I lived through them from the outside. I haven’t had a serious gay relationship. I never faced discrimination and danger for who I loved. No one close to me died of AIDS. I chose a life of safety, privilege and denial. Because of my age, LGBT people assume that I understand what experiencing these things is like. I don’t.

Now I can sometimes look back on my life with regret and wonder what if. What would my life have been like if I had accepted my sexuality earlier? What if I had accepted that pass from my college friend Steve? What would have happened if I had been able to ask out Marvin, the Vietnam vet with the sad, sweet eyes? What if I hadn't chickened out the four or five times I did accept passes from men? What would have my life been like? It could have been better. Or I could have died from AIDS. I'll never know.

My therapist introduced me to the concept of authenticity early in our sessions. I really didn't understand the concept then. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to present themselves in the world as they really are. I spent my whole life hiding what I was, even to myself. I am beginning to understand it now. I feel freer somehow as I begin to shed the straight persona I created for myself and let a truer me start coming out.

I am a little more than three years into this journey. I have made progress but still have a long way to go. I have come out to myself. I have come out in the community. I have not come out to the other people in my life. Yet.
The First Move
Author: Claire Ellington

By the time you are 65 like me, there are an overwhelming number of stories to tell. Certain stories stand out as so special and so lovely that reminiscing is a pleasure. This is one of them.

There I was in Charlotte North Carolina, a tomboy who would much rather have been outside playing kick the can and army than inside with my boring, repressed parents whose marriage was withering. The 1970’s south was not a place where divorce was common. I wish it had been. But 1970 was a time of real change for Charlotte and for me. My athletic inclinations (my tomboyism) translated right into playing varsity sports in my sophomore year at South Mecklenburg High school. Not that that was any real deal, the games were played in the afternoon and we were lucky to get a t-shirt. It was like intramurals. The gym teachers were older, unmarried and probably gay. I do fondly remember being invited to one gym teachers home with others. She was nice to me and I expect she saw my future. Charlotte began implementing a school desegregation plan. Yes! in 1970. My school district lines changed and I was transferred from South Meck to Olympic high school.

A side note here: the Olympic had been an all-white school but now had black students bussed in. There was some tension but very little if any violence or problems. Olympic was different from South. South was the white middle class high, Olympic was in the white working class high school. It seemed a freer place. And big difference was the gym teacher.

Olympics gym teacher was pretty, blond, young, obviously heterosexual (married), an ex-cheerleader and in charge of the cheer leaders. Field hockey was very popular with the girls and even with the cheer leaders which was a shift for me. I was intimidated and lucky to earn a position as full back. And the team was so spirited with cheer leader energy and so good, I rarely had to do anything but watch the onslaught of the other team. Of course there are two full backs in field hockey. My fellow fullback was this spectacularly pretty long haired elegant JV cheerleader named Clinton. Mini skirted and knee high booted, Clinton was a member of almost every club and running for school of-fice and who knows what. I was anti-social flannel shirted tomboy hippy.

But we had something in common. I had fairly recently discovered an escape from the emptiness of my family. Marijuana. And apparently so had Clinton. What a cheerleader who smoked pot? This was good, this was very good. We began to meet. I would come out to her house on the west side. We would go walking on her family’s property which included a lake. Clinton’s family was comfortably middle class, if not wealthy. My family lived in a modest city suburb and only my dad worked so money was not plentiful. This just added to the fun for me. We quickly moved on to using lightweight hallucinogenic drugs like MDA, psilocybin. This was often Clinton’s idea. We would sit at dusk and watch the car headlights stream by in long wiggly lines and giggle about it. This went on for a while and one day, Clinton invited me do a sleepover. Hey, we’ll do acid! LSD.
I was only willing to do a quarter hit; I was too scared of the power of the drug. ed. Clinton's mom came in about 3 am. We laughed about that. This was a new experience for me, this delight in someone's company. Stirrings in my body. I had avoided the boy question my entire life. I assumed I was weird, frigid; clueless about orgasms. Boys had always scared me. My crushes were always about the girls. So is this sexual? Wow. A major conversation with Clinton would have to happen.

We met up a few days later, doing one of our walks in a graveyard, a favorite choice of Clinton's and I turned to her and said, and I believe these are my actual words: I am sexually attracted to you and if you do not want to act on it, I will find someone who will! Years of inadequacy and confusion pouring out in desire. I wanted sexuality now!!! Thank goodness I was normal. What are relief!!!

She turned and looked at me and said: “Okay, but I want to make the first move.”

She said yes!! Holy cow this was going to happen! First move, last move, middle move, I didn't care. The beautiful cheerleader was going to make the first move. We had a sleep over at my house. My twin sister was relegated to my younger sister's bedroom. And Clinton made the first move. Two ignorant kids fumbling and bumbling but it was young love and attraction and it was glorious.

Clinton and I went on to have a couple year affair, on and off due to Clinton's need for control but my delight in her attractions for me was all I needed. I was very tolerant. She later apologized for how she treated me but long after I cared. There was something else that Clinton did, something else besides the first move. She went to a gay bar and met some women and told me about it. So I visited this lesbian household and knew instantly: Why this is where all the tomboys go!!! Here it was. A network of tomboys and “different” women living in houses together, going to secret bars. Like the spider webbing of city lights from an airplane spreading out before you.

The world had suddenly become a bigger, better place. Because there was a place for me. But this was definitely a secret place. And I was fine with that. My parents relied on conventionality to mask their silent, unhappy marriage so I was passionately unconventional. Sex with a woman pretty much rang the top of that bell. No more mystery. It was all about women. It was not being a coward with men. I did not have one single problem with the fact that Clinton was female. I was honored. It was coming home. It was right. I did not care what anyone thought but who needs to know anyway?

So I started to become a human being, a lesbian human being. A deliverance. And it all began when I made that first move.
Coming out is sometimes as whole as imagination and as pointed as a pronoun.

As other girls focused in on boys I was an odd-one-out. I liked doing things with my friends. A few guys looked good to me. But the relationships that I watched girls in and out of didn’t look attractive. They lost themselves in worrying about what they looked like, disappeared into crushes. Or maybe, when my friends “caught” a boy, we girl friends were the ones who were disappeared by hetero-priorities. Later, when the girl-who-had-the-boy came back to us, what she poured out was so very laced with disappointment.

That version of relationships became even less interesting to me as I entered the adult world and saw bright interesting women marry, and fall into home maintaining, support for his career/his future, and child rearing.

It’s not that I didn’t ever want to partner or parent. But I imagined a bigger life. I had people to meet. I had places to go. I had chicken-buses to ride – You know, the kind you find in most countries in this world, where the woman behind you is carrying a chicken who might just lay an egg before you get to the end of the road.

Those buses took me by border towns beaded along the edge of Honduras and El Salvador. We stopped for Pedro to patch a tire again. We stopped at check points where the soldiers let the women stay on the bus, but took the men off… and sometimes away. We stopped near where refugees crossed the frontera, the border between all-out-war and a space of militarized threat. And I got off the bus because there my outsider witnessing presence was, sometimes, useful to those who were looking for a safer place.

Those buses, they were full of dust and sweat. For months I watched men “generously” give up their seat and climb out, up to ride on top. What would that be like up there?

Sunny. Precarious. And, ah, the wide view of steeply sloping corn fields, creek beds, even a waterfall! The movement of the bus itself created a bit of a breeze.

Once it was just me and Pedro up there, out of the dust, mostly. We got close. That led to some kissing: which lit me on fire and made me want more, and that sent me exploring the pages of Our Bodies, Our Selves and the stranger of my own body. A nice side interest to the struggle for human rights and to learning how to make tortillas on the clay comal over the fire.
Back in the United States, I had protests to organize, whole wars to stop. Once, I went to a “young adult” church group. I thought I might meet some friends to do things with. A guy and I were talking. He seemed nice, looked like he might like me, you know, you can tell when people's eyes like you. So I decided to go ahead and tell him a little bit about where I'd been living and what I'd been doing. The change in his eyes and posture was not subtle. It's not that he disagreed with my politics, but I think that my world was too big for him to imagine himself a part of it.

So, I told myself, “If a love is in my future, I'll find him doing those things that I am interested in.” Not bad self-advice, really. But, “him” is an interesting pronoun, evidence of a hole in the expansive fabric of my imagination.

Other options had not occurred to me... for me... yet. I knew that women sometimes loved women. Liz and Christy were good friends of mine in college, and I knew that they were... as we said, “more than” friends.

My activism included advocating and agitating for “their” civil rights, for “their” place in the Church. Distancing pronouns widening the splits hetero norms had torn.

A bit later I was on a week-long working interview in rural Philippines. They placed me out in a village with Fe. Oh, she was so good. So brave. So passionate. (sigh) Fe.

Only much later did I learn that Fe had been quite irritated at the prospect of having to “babysit an American.” So the rest of the team figured that if I won her over, I might just be a good fit for the work of radical rural church-based community organizing.

I did it. I won Fe over. I jumped into everything. I ate the food. I sang the songs, that I didn't yet understand. I learned more of Fe's language in a week, than some of the foreign priests who'd been there for years. And I showed my heart, my love for people, my longing for justice.

And Fe and I, liked each other... very much, really. It actually wasn't until months later that I realized, “That was a crush!” And like a sharp and threaded needle, that realization made it possible to stitch back together my memories of other passionate likings, and to patch up some of those holes in my imagination into the future.

So when talking about the LGBTQ2IFPP?etc community, the community that is everything but heterosexual and cis gendered, I eventually learned to say, “we.” Because, in me, attraction really has very little to do with gender... It's about commonality of interest, caring about the earth and people, learning new things and passion about change that is yet possible. And, yes, yes, sometimes, in that context, also that mysterious spark of connection lights a fire that is deeply in our, in my own body as well.
I’m Not... I’m Not...
I’m Not... Yes I Am

Author: Lena Rothman

1) “Oh, she’ll outgrow it!” The toy rubber knife, the cowboy gun, climbing down the hill to run the railroad tracks, wrestling with the boys and fantasizing being Tony Curtis flying through the air in the movie called “Trapeze” because I was in love with the female lead actress Gina Lollabrigida.

With 2 older sisters I learned about bleeding every month and more horrified when they told me I had to shave my legs, shave my underarms to be a “reaalll” girl. I had to pluck my eyebrows, my face crinkling up in pain I could only imagine. I wasn’t supposed to have any body hair.

But then I would lose my identity as the dark skinny kid called Spider. I wasn’t liking this at all. It wasn’t fun. It wasn’t romantic. It wasn’t even interesting! It wasn’t like 2) going to Lynn Kornfield’s bedroom with Lenore, Gracie and Lynn to copy the movie kissing scenes. I got to make out with Gracie. Yep, I liked that. I was 8.

Then time came with so much pressure to fit in, shaving legs, tight skirts, girls weren’t allowed to wear pants to school then. I did it. I did it all. I resented every minute of it. This was in Brooklyn NY in the 1950’s, early 60’s.

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When I was 14 in 1962, Lee moved into the apartment across the hall from me with her 1/2 Japanese 1/2 American white Jewish baby Tristan. She was in her early 20’s and a Beatnik. Do y’all know what a Beatnik was?

They were artists, poets, radicals that hung out in Greenwich Village in “the city.” They snapped their fingers to show appreciation just like today 2019 in young political 3) circles. Wonder where the Beatniks got it from?

Lee was stunning. She had long, curly Black hair, white, white skin, big brown almost black eyes and full lipstick red lips. She modeled for her photographer friends. I was in awe. She dazzled me. I was spellbound. I was in love! I couldn’t wait to get home from school and have those dark luscious eyes look at me and be concerned about how I was feeling. I just wanted to be with her. I wanted to rub my cheek on her cheek and hold her. But it was enough to sit across the table from her and out of nowhere Lee would be standing across the table from me and grab her breast and squirt me (long range mind you) with her mother’s milk. She was nursing Tristan. I laughed and 4) laughed and laughed and felt loved.
Lee turned me onto pot. I passed on the Tuinals and Seconals. I hated how Lee acted when she was high on those. We talked about Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, my brutal father, her welfare case workers. Yep, it was true that they would do surprise home visits and look for men’s shoes under her bed. Lee hustled her male case worker for an extra block of American cheese. She hustled her old cab driving so-called “uncle” Seb, for clothes. I don’t think she ever slept with him but he was in love with her. We sat at her kitchen table every day after school drinking tea, smoking cigarettes and weed.

My father was very strict. I wasn’t allowed to go to Lee’s house. I went every day. One time we had smoked and we fell asleep (on separate beds) and my father knocked on the door looking for me. He knew where I’d be. I was 16 by then. I opened the door all red and glassy eyed. In the long dark hazy hall behind me a whiff of weed came seeping through. My father said “what’s that smell.” And “why are your eyes so red??!” Fast on my feet I replied “We ordered some pizza (thinking the smell of oregano on pizza would cover for the pungent smell of weed) and I continued “then I got tired and fell asleep.” He had to know I was lying but it was so good he just said “go home.”

The day I recognized that I was in love with Lee we had smoked and we were on her antique couch in the living room and we were both kneeling on our knees next to each other looking out the window at the flashing neon pink, red, green, blue lights over the Jewish deli. I wanted so badly to kiss her. I had such longing and desire for her. I wanted to turn my body 1/2 way, put my arms around her and kiss her. Deep and long.

I didn’t. I was too scared. Instead I went home. I screamed at myself “you’re not one of them. You’re not! You’re not!” I started dating boys/men to prove to myself I wasn’t “one of them.” I met Richie in 1968, and married him in 1970. I had started to separate from Lee as she got deeper and deeper into drugs and into heroin. Richie was dealing pot and cocaine and one night I drove into the city from Brooklyn to deliver some coke to his friend Steve and two wimin were there visiting. Diana and one of her girlfriends.

When I looked at Diana for the first time, the earth opened up, fire blazed in my soul and I never wanted to leave her presence from that moment on. The moment I met her, I knew that I knew her from another time and place. I had never thought about or knew about reincarnation at that time. When I looked at her for the first time, her green sparkling eyes, her curly hair and gap tooth grin made my mouth drop open. My breathe caught and I could barely breathe. I took a slight inhale.

I left Richie three months later. He knew about her. He had the marriage annulled which was fine with me. He said it was for “religious differences.” He was a non- practicing, non-believing, atheist, but for me it was 8)”whatever”. I could care less. I left with a backpack, my red fiat car and $300. Diana and I became lovers for a time, non-monogamous lovers for a couple of years. We are now nearly 50 years later still the best of friends.
1978 was the year and San Francisco was the place where I came out the first time. I worked in the rag trade otherwise known as the garment center south of Market Street. A beautiful woman who came to work there ----decided to flirt with me as often as possible until I accepted her invitations to coffee, drinks, dinners, weekend getaways and eventually ----- having the same address.

We lived together for 6 months and then……… she disappeared. At the time, I was devastated but fortunately---- I had women friends who helped me get politically involved that year. There was lots of work to be done ------ both Anita Bryant and John Birch were pushing anti-gay legislation. At the end of that year --- right before the holidays ----Harvey Milk and George Moscone were assassinated.

I still remember ------ walking SLOWLY down Market Street ------our candle wax dripping like tears.

That year and that decade ------- ended with a deep dark cloud over that beautiful city.

The 80’s arrived with the AIDS crisis. I moved to New York City in 1985, with the hope of continuing and expanding my clothing design business that I had started 3 years earlier in San Francisco. The financial reality of continuing that business came clearly into focus in New York. I closed the business that first year and started working in costume design for theatre, film and dance. I LOVED the eccentricities of the people I worked with. The shops were messy with fabrics – the pressure was high – the pay was low --- I was at HOME there.


I sought out different forms of emotional healing work, until I finally found one that spoke to me. This work was vital to me. It helped me grow. Unfortunately, there were NO lesbian women doing this work – so, I decided to introduce it to my partners ---- It rarely worked.

My last job in New York was in 1995. My boss decided to paint the floors of the costume shop one cold winter weekend. EVERYONE got sick that following week. Not ME ------ I kept working.

THEN ---- I got sick. REALLY sick. T cell count of 4 -------sick. Too much stress for too many years had taken its toll. That was my wake up call to leave New York.
I moved to Denver in 1996 to get my health back. My sister lived there and she was a great support for me. Even though I missed the high of New York, my primary focus became my health – both physical and emotional. Almost all of my friends were now people from my healing group. One of them was an artist – a man – who I eventually became involved with. When we first started seeing each other, he asked me if I considered myself bisexual. I said – no – I consider myself Gay or Lesbian. He said “My nieces are biracial but they don’t think of themselves as either black or white.” And that was the last time, we talked about that topic.

I moved to Portland to live with him in 1999. I told myself, with our emotional work, we could work things out – over time. Except for the discrimination we received as a biracial couple – I enjoyed - somewhat nervously ---- the entitlements that come with a straight relationship – immediate familial acceptance – no explanations. And for 11 years, it seemed as if all my worlds were coming together.

In 2009, I woke up one morning to a very vivid dream. Women – Women - Women – Sexual --- Sensual – water --- lots of water. When I opened my eyes, there was his face -- next to me in the bed…..

Every night after that, the dreams continued.
They expanded into day dreams.
They moved from daydreams to daily obsessions.

The only people who knew about my thoughts at that time, were the owners of the Video store in my neighborhood. They saw me twice weekly, renting new episodes of The L Word.

I didn't even LIKE the L Word. I thought the writing was awful and I HATED both Shane and Jenny. But I DESPERATELY needed some connection to the Lesbian World.

I tried talking with my partner ----suggesting we see a mediator.

His idea was that we take more walks or join a gym together. I didn't have the heart to tell him that this was going to involve more than a few extra walks or a trip to the gym.

My emotional healing community, My family, my coparented Kitty, my backyard to grow food….all of it was going away.

I was coming apart from the inside out. My little congruent world was falling to pieces and all I could find for myself was self-blame. When I finally found the courage to tell him I needed to end the relationship, he didn’t ask why. We continued to live together for another very uncomfortable 3 months, until I could find an affordable rental.

I did get my own place – a basement studio apt – which in Portland – is redundant. But it gave me the privacy that I desperately needed. I started going to Lesbian meet ups and dances. I felt like a FRAUD. I was afraid I would NEVER be accepted.

I had been a part of the queer community for 20 years and then in a COMPLETELY different world for 11 years. I didn't fit in ANYWHERE now. So much had changed. I had changed. I went to a late awakenings group. I cried a lot in my car. It rained a lot in Portland. I felt like I was drowning in despair.
I wanted so BADLY to connect deeply with a woman ------ both physically and emotionally. I missed that fierce love that I had experienced with women.

So-------- I put myself online.

I met women easily and got involved easily…probably TOO easily. 6 relationships in 6 years was not my original plan. My heart doesn’t heal as quickly as it used to, or maybe it NEVER did.

Before I started writing this story, I wanted to hold on to the myth ------that there were times------ in my life when it felt like ---------everything came together.

When it felt like ------ my insides matched my outsides.

The truth is --- those times have been fleeting. It’s ALWAYS been messy.

My world hasn’t gotten bigger --over the years ------but it has gotten deeper, much deeper------ and THAT’S where it’s hard to straighten up the messy.

But MAYBE the messy shows me who I REALLY am.

And maybe it’s in the MESSY ------ that I learn to have compassion for myself.
The Rabbit
Author: Matthew Cokor

It's nice to see all your faces here today, ready to be informed and entertained by the story I'm going to share with you.

My dad was a school teacher; some have said they are just under paid actors I could not agree more. My dad taught math but with very little prompting from his students he would tell tall tales of living through the depression of the 1930's. I think this was nothing but a diversion from math and algebra. I think some of those story telling abilities rubbed off on me but were not utilized until I was in my 30's.

When I reached the ripe old age of 39 I met a coordinator of a speaker's bureau, Forrest Dunaetz. He was the someone who would become my lover and boss.

I agreed to be one of his speakers, I put together a 15-minute story of my life and how I live with AIDS. I repeated the same story often enough to have it imbedded in my brain. He demanded that I not deviate from the agreed upon story.

Forrest had a roommate, Ricky, who was well known throughout the Nevada AIDS community, an advocate who used his voice for everyone's benefit. In 1995 Ricky passed away, something that profoundly affected me. Two weeks after Ricky's death there was an AIDS conference in the small town of Pahrump.

All the big wigs from the state AIDS programs and community service programs were there. The Frontline speaker's bureau was represented by a panel of seven speakers, each ready to tell a condensed 10-minute story. I was to be the last to present.

The time arrived and we were all seated on a stage with a hundred and fifty pairs of eyes staring in rapt attention. I sat listening to Forrest start the story telling and I began to feel more and more anxious about being the seventh tale of woe. Natalie was the second and as she began recounting her story I panicked and decided to go totally off script. I wanted to tell a story not my own.

As the speakers each stood and told the stories that spoke to bad judgement and poor choices, I tried my best to think of a voice that needed to be heard besides my own. That's when it hit me, I would speak about Ricky, but how do I introduce his ongoing story?
I decided to talk about a dream that had invaded my sleep shortly after his death. As the fourth speaker began, I was developing exactly how to proceed. I knew Forrest was going to be really mad. By the fifth speaker I was in the midst of putting the words together trying to complete the dialogue of the dream that so disturbed me. I had the vision clear in my mind, all I needed was the courage to speak for another.

Then it was my turn to stare into those one hundred and fifty pairs of eyes and share my story. This is how it went down. I stood up and the crowd seemed to just disappear and I became more relaxed. I was committed.

“My name is Matthew Cokor and I’m here to tell a story of a dream I had.”
“It started with a white rabbit approaching me, he had long ears that laid back against his body, a pink nose and blue eyes. His fur was long and he must have weighed 10 pounds. He hopped up on a rock, stand on his hind legs. I knelt down to speak to him.” “Who are you?” I asked
“I’m Ricky, I wanted you to know that I’m OK and not to worry.” He said in a high pitched voice. My mind was spinning as I began to weave the story to be told.
“There must be something more you want to tell me?”
“I’m hoping that my friends haven’t forgotten me, that I appreciate all the work they have had put forth to make my life a little easier. My hope is that they keep their commitment to the people living with this disease, it is important.”

I stuttered my reply promising to be his voice. With that he scampered off, disappearing into the surrounding mist. The story was complete, the crowd reappeared and I was back on stage with a hundred and fifty pairs of eyes looking at me. I could see some had been crying. I knew then that I had connected and I had found the inner strength and courage needed to be a true story teller. My father would be proud. Forrest came up to me as we filed off the stage because he saw the affect, he was only mildly upset which was such a relief.

As we waded into the crowd people thanked me for my story and the words from Ricky. This experience would be the imputes for my other attempts at providing a voice for those who cannot be heard.
They Said

Author: Matthew Cokor

I sat at a table for six
conversation was sparse to begin
Introductions were made
John, David, Doug, Bruce and George
Atlanta, San Francisco, New York, Tucson
All the facts fixed

I asked a question
How are you connected?
Friends and partners They said

To partners David and John
How long have you been together?
2 years
They said

To David and John
How long have you lived together?
6 months
They said

To David and John
When is your anniversary?
November 23 said John, November 24 said David
They exchanged a knowing look
The rest unsaid

To David and John Who
cooks the best?
We're equal
They said

To David and John
Are you to marry?
Again a knowing glance
Talk of friends thinking

Much more was said
Bruce, Doug and George contributed
Housing, Dreams, Dogs and Cats
They said

A meal I wished would never end
With all that was said
Emblazoned in my mind
The stories to be retold
The verbal history of gay men
So they will say

A spark
From old to young, young to old
A sense of the past
To the faith in the future
So they will say

Thank You!