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springplay!

**Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
Community Seasonal • Spring 2016**
free copy

Part 1 of 4

**the
YOUTH
Issue
the
journey
begins**

Peak inside for your **Spring Fling**, get the scoop on **Emerging Creators Unit, Black Queer Youth**, and **Rise Against Bullying**.
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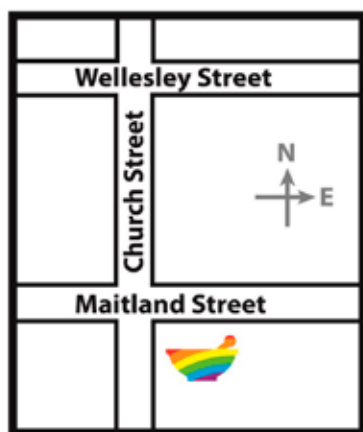


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From the **Publisher**



Antoine, far right, with some of his family

When I was a youth I wanted to be a Superhero. I wanted to save the world. I used to dawn a cape and jump off any high place I found at our house, and quite frequently scrape my knees pretty badly.

When I was a youth I was also all Disney stuff. I wanted to live in weird and magical worlds. Everything Disney was really cool, and that part hasn't really changed much for me. I LOVE Disney!

When I was a youth I was also fascinated with escaping. We had a good average home life, but for some reason I thought escaping would be really great. Run away. Live somewhere in a tent away from it all. Being a youth is scary, and confusing. I even contemplated suicide a couple of times, just because it would have been easier than all the angst, and all the thinking of what my parents would do, if and when I came out to them.

I knew since I was a little kid that I was different. I made the realization that I was gay at the age of 11, by reading a book I found in a library at school that described what a homosexual is:

someone attracted to the same sex. Some of you who are regular readers of PinkPlayMags may remember that I shared before that I was born in Kuwait, to Lebanese and Italian parents, church going Catholic, with all the attached guilt and condemnation of being gay.

I was lucky though. I have good parents who turned out to be very accepting, understanding, and loving.

To the youth who are reading this issue I say it does get better. You have the power to make it better.

To the parents who are reading this issue I say love your kids and watch them closely and lovingly when they are in that stage of life, somewhere between being a child and being an adult. We all know how challenging that could be.

Welcome to PinkPlayMags' year of "the stages of being LGBTQ". We are very excited about the theme for this year. We are going to take you on journey of what it is to be a youth, adult, mid years, and twilight years of our life.

Each issue will dive into one stage of life, we are going to look at what is good, what is bad, what is challenging, and what is exciting. Being LGBTQ is being like everyone else, however there is no denying that there are a different set of challenges, so let's discover and talk about them together over this and the next three editions of PinkPlayMags.

This issue is also our Spring issue, so now I wish a Happy Spring. Enjoy the read.

Antoine Elhashem
publisher@pinkplaymags.com

springplay!

**Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
Community Seasonal from PinkPlayMags
Free • Spring 2016**

Publisher/Creative Director: Antoine Elhashem

Editor-in-Chief: Bryen Dunn

Art Direction and Production: Mychol Scully

Contributors

Writers: Meghan Hutton, Taylor K. Gesner, Zack Rosen,
Bryen Dunn, Nikolii Attai, Caitlyn Holroyd, Cheryl
Costello, Julie Antoinette, Justin Preston



Cover Our Youth

Concept & Direction Antoine Elhashem

Cover Photography Meredith Laver

Models Monica Garrido, Chase Lo, Joshua Middleton

Photography on location

Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

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President..... Antoine Elhashem

General Manager..... Kim Dobie

Advertising Consultants..... Carolyn Burtch, Michael Wile,
Sami Boudjenane

Counsel..... Lai-King Hum, Hum Law Firm

Mailing address

205-1691 Pickering Parkway, Pickering, ON L1V 5L9

To contact us

416.926.9588 Toronto 905.231.9722 G.T.A.

Websites

www.inspiredmediainc.com

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www.pinkplaymags.com

www.thebuzzmag.ca

We'd love to hear from you. Please send comments, questions or
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For advertising inquiries

advertising@thepinkpagesdirectory.com

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Editor-in-Training

Happy springtime, readers. It's time to shed the winter layers, and emerge from hibernation. Here in Canada we're able to experience all four beautiful seasons of the year. Seasons change, as does life. Spring is like the beginning of life, and with this issue of *PinkPlayMags* I'm excited to bring you the first in our "Journey of Life" series.

The four quarterly issues begin with Part One - Youth, and will continue onward to Young Adult, Midlife, and Twilight.

I'm also quite excited to introduce three new feature writers to our roster. Megan Hutton brings us a fascinating flashback look at her youth growing up as a teenager on her own during the 1960's, with her memoir piece, "I Wish I Knew Then What I Know Now". On the opposite end of the spectrum, Taylor K. Gesner looks at current youth and pop culture with his article titled, "Kids Today". Then for something seasonal and sensual, Zack Rosen brings us "Spring Fling", exploring that itch that so many people get around this time of year.

Our travel article looks at our own home city of Toronto, and nearby Niagara. "The 6 and The 905" spotlights family-friendly attractions worth checking out this year. In "Fiction", we look at two recently published LGBT children's books, "The Green Meeting Room" and "A Peacock Among Pigeons", as well as a poem written by young aspiring writer, Sid MacIssac.

With our "Hot Artist" feature, we've included four young talents from the Emerging Creators Unit at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. The group also appears on our cover this issue. The "Community Cornerstone" spotlight is on Black Queer Youth, part of the Supporting Our Youth organization. Cheryl Costello's "From The Heart" column takes an intimate and joyful perspective on her childhood years, while Justin Preston, the person behind the online campaign called *Rise Against Bullying*, tells us how things have changed for him.

As always, our events guru Caitlyn Holroyd tells us all where to go, in a nice way of course, with her "Spring in the City" event listings, and Julie Antoinette looks into our future with "Spring Horoscopes". Design and layout by the wonderful Mychol Scully.

I hope you enjoy this first in our four-part "Journey of Life" series.

Bryen Dunn
Editor-in-Chief

editor@pinkplaymags.com

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I WISH I KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW

By Megan Hutton

// I wish I knew then what I know now." An old adage that I've discovered, holds as much water as a leaky bucket.

What we can comprehend at the moment we are in, is what is available to us. It's a given that there is more wisdom floating around in the universe than we can absorb at one time and we can't grasp it until we are ready. That leads to another adage, "You'll never get more than you can handle." I discovered that wasn't true as I barely entered my teens. At fourteen, I hit the road on my own, maybe with more confidence than sensibility.

It was the sixties, a time long past we will never see the likes of again. All of the replications have fallen short of what life was really like in that decade. My traditional Irish, Scottish parents offered little in the way of emotional

support, or stability for an introspective young girl who also harboured a dark secret. All the innuendo's confirming my future, a husband and marriage, were not even on my radar. I knew I was different. We are all unique, however some of us are always awkward, trying to find a place to fit, and that was me. I wasn't much more than three when I remember my attraction to girls and women. It was an overwhelming feeling, and how it could come about was a mystery to me, even at a young age. My early creative play did involve me "mothering", but there was never a husband and certainly not a thought about marriage. I'm still not convinced that marriage is a necessity, but that's a personal opinion. Gender roles were clearly defined for me, and along with that, there were expectations to conform. That was difficult for me, a born non-conformist.

I learned early how to adapt for survival and when I knew that there was nothing more for me to learn at home, I left. The sixties were a fantastic time to be on my own, young, fearless,

and ready to experience the world on my own terms. I had never been conventional so this was just another step in my life's journey. By the time I reached puberty I had been secretly in love with a number of girls or women. Growing up with parents who were emotionally absent, I craved that connection, and wanted to be cared for, and to be important to someone. All of these feelings were undisclosed because my fear of rejection was very real, and kept me from reaching out. While other girls my age were learning about relationships with one another, I concentrated on getting to know myself. Perspective is everything at that age, and every person who came into my life, and every new experience taught me something.

In spite of my confidence and maturity, I was still young with real human needs, a connection. I experienced a spiritual search in my early teens that led me to church. The rituals provided me with a comfort and stability I'd never known. I explored organized religion and was even baptized in a river. Church was the first place I fell deeply in love. Ruth was a couple of years older than I was and I loved everything about her. She was kind, caring and sensitive, also very religious and heterosexual. I didn't care, I loved her anyway. I don't think she was aware of my true feelings for her and I didn't have language for them. Looking back, I searched for someone like her for many years after. There were also some dark days when the solitude and uncertainty were overwhelming. Only once I felt a sense of hopelessness. One night I waded out into the cold waves of the Pacific Ocean. As hot tears ran down my face and the water made my body numb, I went out until the water rose up to my neck and was jolted to my senses. There was no one to listen to my cry for help. With my usual self-determination I made a promise to myself that I would always be able to find my way.

Vancouver was a happening place in the sixties. There was a vibration that included an air of exhilaration, mixed with a fear of the unknown. While Woodstock represented a free for all,





the Vietnam War shook my foundations and brought about more uncertainty. One of the first friends I made, Ian Bradley, came across the border to avoid the draft. He was a Folkie, an amazing banjo player from Kentucky. His father was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan and Ian was also running from him. We spent hours sitting on the beach, Ian playing his banjo while I wrote poetry about the afterlife. When he told me he was in love with me, I said the words out loud I had kept inside for so long. "I love you too but I am only interested in relationships with girls." That was the first time I said those words to anyone.

There was no reason to "come out" during that time. I don't remember that anyone passed judgement. If a relationship was what you were looking for, there was no limit and no one judged. From the perspective of a teenage girl in the middle of it, there was the war which we were on the periphery of, then there was the excitement of this seemingly new free world. The beaches were alive at night with musicians, and other strangers who soon became friends. They jammed into the night while bonfires on the beach blazed. Girls from all corners of the world came through Vancouver. I had crushes on girls from Australia, the United Kingdom and Denmark. Crushes, but no relationships.

I didn't try to form intimate relationships, as the free spirit I was wasn't sure what that would look like, and I was accustomed to being alone.

Writing poetry sustained me during those years, and the timing was perfect to be a poet. There were coffee houses springing up filled with musicians, but not many young female poets. I was very young, confident and always had a performing spot. I found a large rock at English Bay where I wrote most of my poetry. I would wade out at low tide, climb onto my rock with my pen and paper, and write and dream until the waves began to splash, signalling the time to get back to shore. The Bunkhouse Coffee House was a popular stopping spot for many musicians. Blues duo Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee came from New York, where they played Broadway and Carnegie Hall, and also recorded an album there. We would all hang out in the green room together, Jose Feliciano, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGee, David Wiffiin, and Ann Mortifee, who later in life married the legendary flautist, Paul Horn, and me a teenage poet.

I met my next close friend one day at English Bay. She was sitting alone holding a clarinet. I introduced myself and she took me home with her for the next two years. Carol's parents



owned an estate two blocks from the beach. They barely noticed I'd moved in and we rarely saw anyone but the housekeeper who cleaned our room and cooked our meals. I was about seventeen then and in my third year since leaving home. Carol played her clarinet and I wrote. We spent countless hours singing to Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Carol was quiet and introspective, so we spent ample time in silence with one another. Although I was alone most of those years between fourteen and nineteen, I never felt lonely. I think, as a teenager on my own there was no expectation from others. It wasn't until I experienced an intimate relationship that I really understood what loneliness felt like, as with a relationship came expectations. Sometimes, as a writer too much introspection ignites the feeling of loneliness.

As I moved through those years, I found life to be a great teacher. I watched and I listened to the rhythm of life that was going on all around me. Those years formed the basis of how I would view the world. I realized that not fitting in was also a possible way to survive. My writing rock at English Bay is still there. It juts out of the water about twenty feet from the shore, appearing to rise as the tide recedes. My longing for the unknown, a connection to something I couldn't reach, began there. Something beyond my understanding in a

universe that was about to unfold, and was yet to come. Being alone taught me an awareness I would never have known. After this idyllic period of self-discovery, I fell straight into convention, a state of being so foreign to the essence of who I'd become. As a wise friend reminds me, "It is what it is."

While the sixties were a time of growth and reflection, the next couple of decades were an uphill battle for many of us. Today it's a stark contrast to "coming out" than it was then, however when interviewing two lesbians in their twenties, I discovered that struggles still do remain. Be sure to read my follow up article in the Summerplay issue.

In the early 1960's Megan spent five of her teenage years on her own. Through the solitude of those years she found life to be a great teacher. Today she is a Poet/Playwright/Short Story writer, and has published numerous articles on relationships. She read from the Anthology "Dykewords" at Toronto's first "Word on the Street", and she's currently working on a poetry collection and a short film.



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KIDS TODAY

By Taylor K. Gesner

Anyone who's been coming to the Village neighborhood in Toronto for more than a few years can see how the community has transformed. In the superlative words of the GTA's own diva, Deborah Cox, "things just ain't the same".

Walking down Church Street one can't help but notice the area that was, ten or fifteen years ago, filled with queer social spaces. Today, those pubs, restaurants, dance clubs and coffee houses have dwindled to a mere handful, intermingling with franchised fast-food and retail brands. There are other areas in the city that queer and trans folks call home, such as Queer West, Cabbagetown, Riverdale and other areas springing up all over the place.

Yet it's the Church-Wellesley Village area that is adorned with rainbow signage and crosswalks, and home to Pride celebrations and many LGBTQ community service providers. Queer women, for example, have no dedicated space on Church Street since the demise of Slack Alice in

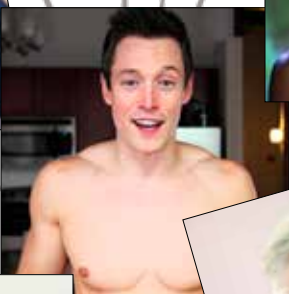
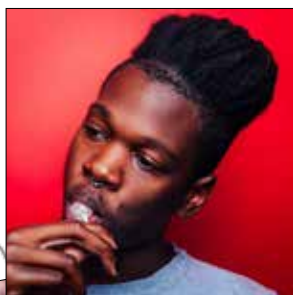
2014. Parliament Street, once home to The Rose, Pope Joan, The Women's Common and more recently the Flying Beaver Pubaret, has no dyke-centred spaces left.

It was only a generation ago that young homos had to hit the road, head to the nearest city and discover the neighbourhoods that served as the points of entry into the queer subculture. In Toronto, that would mean a pilgrimage to Church Street at some point in one's queer or trans existence. Maybe those were perfect spaces for you, maybe they weren't. Everyone found themselves in the gaybourhood at some point, just the same.

Moving to Toronto as a young person and finding myself in the world of queer theatre, leather queens, drag shows and dance club culture of 90's Toronto, I discovered all manner of wonderful weirdness. I understood completely all at once why we needed the complex spectrum of the rainbow to represent our wonderful shades of gay. All of this was introduced to me through the words and deeds of my queer elders, who were so easy to connect with at the time, and there didn't seem to be the chasm between the generations we see now. Our elders were available to us, ranting about our history, sharing their favourite songs and artists, gossiping and giving us advice (both useful and not-so-useful), and lifting our spirits when our first homo-affections broke our hearts.

Following the exploits of internet-famous Davey Wavey on his YouTube channel, one notices right away that the climate has indeed changed for our queer elders. Kudos to him for recently imploring

and they certainly aren't. Like most young folks, innovative young queer and trans DIY producers of music, video, spoken word, dance, visual arts, and any other form you'd care to list, share their



gay millennials to interact with their elder counterparts. His videos typically feature him shirtless, showing off his perfectly sculpted upper body, speaking to equally beautiful youthful porn stars, so let's hope he backs up his words with action.

In 2016, armed with internet access, a few search terms, or an app, queer and trans youth are never more than a few taps or swipes away from discovering they're not alone in the world,

stories around the world 24-7 via social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, blogs and in forums.

These shared stories are clearly resonating with their audiences, as these young culture creators have become mainstream personalities. Tyler Oakley is practically a household name for pop-culture aficionados, and Todrick Hall now has a show on MTV. They're producing a body of work that is out, gay, proud, and popular. But is it truly queer? And does "queer" matter, anyway?

Queer culture by definition is an alternative culture. It's about fierceness, leather, lipstick, bathhouses, hustlers, camp, porn stars, butches, heels, wigs, binders, dildoes, blow-jobs, carpet munchers, jockstraps, femmes, ballroom, pageants, fuckbuddies, PReP, fisting, fashion, show queens, lipstick lesbians, butt-plugs, poppers, hook-ups, craftivism, PVC, top, bottom, versatile, fairies, disco balls, homocore, vogue, homohop, PnP, bounce, and just about anything else that the religious right might file under "perversion" (some things really don't change, do they).

Creations framed in queerness challenge gender norms and heteronormativity, and they become expressions of our everyday truths that celebrate and challenge our complex identities. Look at the body of work created by hip-hop artist Le1f, Big Freedia, and Toronto's own Above Top Secret, for example.

Mainstream media, while offering all-important visibility for our communities, at the same time reduces our cultural complexities into easily digestible tropes, a reduction that is not exclusive to queer and trans folks for sure. Our stories are all too often told to us by writers, directors, actors and others who do not identify with one of the communities in the queer and trans spectrum. Our heritage becomes muddled and diluted; our challenges over-simplified as they are filtered through the lens of a creator who does not possess lived queer/trans experiences.

Mainstream media continues to be overwhelmingly white- and cis-centred; and the newest wave of LGBTQ youth icons is mostly, but not exclusively, attractive white dudes with a particular normative aesthetic. This simply doesn't reflect the reality of the majority of queer

and trans youth, who are seeking conversations and representations of gender, class, body size and ability.

Youth expression in the arts is key to understanding how our intersecting identities will inform our communities' development. Queer and trans cultural incubators like the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre Emerging Creators Unit, and community art engagements found at Supporting Our Youth, Black Queer Youth, Queer Asian Youth, SKETCH, Delisle Youth Services, and the Griffin Centre are nurturing the next generation of LGBTQ community leaders. These are spaces created for young folks to share and generate ideas and information about their work, sparking conversations, building alliances, and learning to hold space and to celebrate each other.

Queer culture generated and shared by our most marginalized community members remains the most important cultural expression for youth seeking connection with their queer identity. The questions become: how do we re-connect our queer and trans youth with our community elders, what's happening to traditional queer social geography, and do queer and trans youth even need a gaybourhood any longer? Yet the facts remain the same – we're queer, and we're still here!

Taylor K. Gesner wants to live in a world filled with innovative music and art, and where there is a perfect balance between keeping it real and getting funky. He's a Toronto based arts professional specializing in live music event production



and festival programming. When not working on or attending a concert, he can be found composing tracks for pyrotechnic shows and short film projects. He is engaged in an ongoing battle against cat hair completely engulfing his wardrobe.

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Return of The Fling

What is it about spring that makes people so love-crazy?

By Zack Rosen

// In the spring, a young queer's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of... butts?"

While that isn't the exact quote from Lord Tennyson's "Locksley Hall," the old Romantic hit upon a dependable inevitability: When the winter dies down, the people get frisky. Call it Spring Fever or April Arousal, but the urge to pair up when the sun comes back is as old as humanity itself.

"You can think of it from an evolutionary psychology perspective — winter is about survival as an individual, but nature wants us to survive as a species," says Laura Cavanagh, professor and coordinator of the behavioral science at Seneca University in Toronto. "When it gets warm enough nature wants us to use that window to reproduce and pass along our genes. We're really still animals and ... these things are hard-wired to our neurology."

Spring's inspiration to get off the couch and get on a stranger comes from heat, as mentioned

above, and light. While this author has no need to unpack the old associations between sex and the former, the latter plays a big part too. While the heat may get our engines revving, it's the triumphant return of the sun that kicks up our search for Vitamins D and V.

"We're in the dark for so long, then the days get longer really quickly and we get more energy," says Cavanagh. "In the winter we're like, 'I can't be bothered to put on my nice shoes and go dancing,' but in the spring it seems like, 'Now I can stay out till three and I'm not feeling tired.' "In Iceland tourists have a hard time sleeping at all, as they feel this wild energy because it never gets dark at certain times of the year."

This is not the only change in the cosmos that triggers spring fever. Astrologically, March 21st marks both the spring equinox — when the night and day are equal length — and the sun's move into the rowdy sign of Aries. Each sign of the zodiac corresponds to particular universal energies and Aries, the ram, activates the reckless part of us that just goes for it, regardless of the consequences. The spring-heralding constellation,



like its dark cousin Scorpio, has an old reputation as a sex sign.

“The sign Aries is a powerful phallic symbol — not related to gender, but to a kind of fulminating force for men and women,” says Frederick Woodruff, Seattle-based proprietor of Astroinquiry.com. “Aries is impulsive, one-pointed and instinctively vibrant, the kind of chutzpah that makes putting yourself out into the mating scene much easier than at other times of year. The itch is there and it’s gotta get scratched”, Woodruff says.

Woodruff also says that our desire for companionship this spring will be further influenced by 2016’s relational angle between Saturn, the great organizer, and Neptune, the great obfuscator. The combined influence of the new planets will have people looking beyond their existing or habitual social structures for a dreamy new lover.

“We’re willing to meet and mingle with people we’d ordinarily shun or shy away from. So this presents a great opportunity for maturing by enlarging our pool of social contacts, to move beyond cliques and stereotypes”, Woodruff explains.

Seeds planted at a full moon are reaped six months later at the corresponding sign’s new moon, and vice versa. It’s the way the cycles work. Similarly, couples that meet in the height of spring fever could theoretically know in about six months from their meeting or first hookup, whether the fling will last.

Nothing here is set in stone — Woodruff is quick to point out that Astrology is “humankind’s way of tracking cycles” and not a definitive predictor of one’s future — which is what makes the spring fling so special and so fragile.

Poets also work in the medium of metered time and human emotions, which is perhaps why unpacking the mysterious pull of spring is such a popular theme in verse. Poets like E.E. Cummings and Tracy K. Smith have created their own kind of science to explain the April itch.

“I would say poets understand nature’s cycles in a unique way, perhaps from being intimate with the patterns of a poem,” says D. Gilson, Poet, Essayist, and Author of “I Will Say This Exactly One Time”

“In a sonnet we have the volta, the “turn of thought or argument” about three quarters of the way through. The volta is like the spring in that it points to some promise, some rebirth, some hope, even if that pointing is beyond the knowable.”

That sense of the unknown is perhaps what most causes the spring explosion - moving from the dark certainties of winter into a bright warm world where anything can happen and anyone could be the next love of your life. Or maybe, as Gilson also posits, “Spring is all about ‘moist’ and moist makes us literally and metaphorically wet.”

Zack Rosen was the editor-in-chief and co-founder of the now defunct queer cultures website TheNewGay.net, and has written for *Out*, *The Advocate*, *Huffington Post*, *Nylon.com* and many other quality outlets. He is currently studying Art and Design at George Brown College.





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Everybody in.

EXPLORING THE 6 AND THE 905

by Bryen Dunn

Today, there are many variations of what a family can be comprised of, and the LGBT community is very much a part of this new rainbow of diversity. With that in mind, here's a list of family-friendly places to put on the vacation radar for those with children, and those still young at heart.

Sometimes it's worth looking at what's available within driving distance that can make for a short or extended getaway, that's easy to get to and easier on the bank account as well. For those in the Greater Toronto Area, there are plenty of places within the city, and several within a couple hour's drive.

Toronto – The 6

Our city seems to be all hot and trendy at the moment. The T-Dot has also now become known as The 6, in reference to the city's 416 and 647 area codes, thanks to hometown hero and rapper Drake. His videos often depict images of Toronto, and his lyrics include many references to the city, especially heard on his latest album, "Views From The 6".

He even brought in his gal-pal Rhianna to film her latest video "Work" at The Real Jerk on Gerrard Street East. He also set the Twitter-sphere on fire when stopped by Toronto's favourite queer haunt, Thhe e Beaver, to catch one of his buddies spinning tunes one evening. His latest venture is his partnership with Lee Susur and family, at Fring's Restaurant at 455 King West.

He loves the city so much that he has tattoos of the CN Tower and the numbers 416 inked on his body. He's an avid Toronto Raptor fan, and recently he received the prestigious "Key-To-The-City" honour from Mayor John Tory. Overall he's a great ambassador for tourism, providing international publicity that no

marketing campaign could ever imagine achieving.

With that in mind, here are a few Toronto family-friendly attractions to hang out at in The 6.

Toronto Zoo – if you haven't heard yet, there's been a few new additions to the family. There's a Polar Bear, Giant Panda, White Lion, and even an Indian Rhinoceros. If it's been a while since you've gone to the zoo, this should be the year to make the trek. It's easily accessible by public transit, and family day-passes are available. Be sure to also check out Xie Shou Giant Panda Experience, the 10-acre Tundra Trek, Gorilla Rainforest, Great Barrier Reef and Kids Discovery Zone.

Canada's Wonderland - two new rides are being introduced for thrill-seekers this year, offering a chance to take flight in an interactive flying experience. Skyhawk is the first ride of its kind in North America, where riders take

control of their own cockpit, showcasing their flying abilities as they maneuver through 360 degree turns and challenge themselves to engage in multiple inversions at 135 feet (41m) in the air. Flying Eagles is geared more toward the younger set, as these two-person planes glide 28 feet (8.5m) above the ground and allow each rider to control their flight and ride experience. Note that Gay Day is June 18.

Ontario Science Centre – originally opened in 1969, this fun and interactive attraction is always adding new exhibitions to entertain and educate. Mammoths and Mastodons: Titans of the Ice Age runs until April 24 and looks at how scientific analyses of tusks, skin and hair provide clues to how these magnificent creatures lived and why they disappeared. The Science of Ripley's Believe It or Not! opens in May and showcases the science that underlies Robert Ripley's legendary compendium of oddities, anomalies and fantastic feats. A



Beautiful Planet screens at the IMAX Theatre, providing a unique perspective of Earth as captured by astronauts aboard the International Space Station.

Ripley's Aquarium – one of Toronto's newest attractions, where you can explore the Waters of the World with 16,000 animals, 100 interactive displays and three touch exhibits featuring sharks, stingrays and horseshoe crabs. Check out North America's longest underwater viewing tunnel, stare in amazement at the extensive jellyfish collection and soak in a live dive show.



CN Tower – still the most iconic structure in the city, this is more than just a fast elevator ride to the clouds. Once at the top, there's the glass floor, outdoor observation deck, and a revolving restaurant offering 360 degree panoramic views. Check out the Sky Pod for an even higher experience, and for those more daring there's Edge Walk where guests can actually walk around the outside of the tower! This experience is listed in the Guinness World Record Book as the "Highest External Walk on a Building".

Famous People's Theatre – one of Toronto's best kept secrets is this family-run Glow in the Dark Dine & Dream Dinner Theatre located in an industrial strip out in South Etobicoke.

The black light performance was discovered by Liberacé, and they were his opening act in Las Vegas for 10 years. All programming is family-friendly and it has to be seen to be believed. Their Educational Programs offer a unique experience that teaches kids of all ages to push beyond any limitations they may perceive having.

Toronto City Pass – one way to enjoy much of what Toronto has to offer is by purchasing a City Pass. This coupon booklet offers admission to several of the city's top attractions at considerably reduced rates.

Niagara Region – The 905

Considered one of the must-see attractions in the world, Torontonians often neglect to visit what's right in their own backyard. Niagara Falls is less than two hours away, and can also be reached by both GO Transit and VIA Rail.



Niagara Falls

Beyond the spectacular views of the Falls, visitors can also get closer to the water by taking a boat cruise, rafting, or jetboating on the Niagara River, or take a Journey Behind the Falls. Nearby there's also Bird Kingdom, Niagara Park's Butterfly Conservatory, Safari Niagara, and Marineland. Of course, no visit is complete without a stroll along Clifton Hill,

with its amusement like atmosphere of rides, museums, and haunted houses.



Casino Niagara

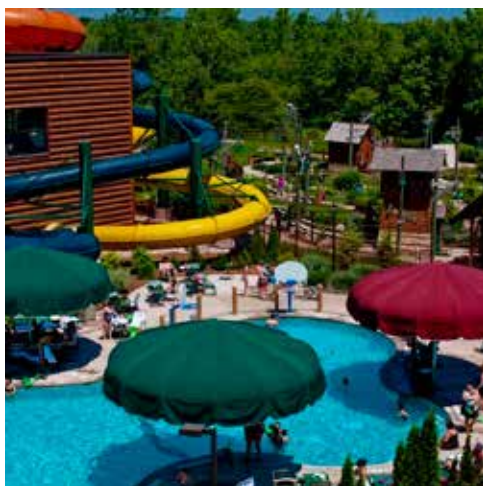
More than just gambling, this entertainment complex has the state of the art Avalon Theatre with a continuous roster of big name acts, a multitude of dining options, high-end retail shopping, and a four-diamond resort hotel and spa, with treatment services, indoor pool, and sauna/steam room.

Niagara-on-the-Lake

Adjacent to Niagara Falls, and less than a 15-minute drive away, is beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake. This quaint town is world-renown for its top notch theatre productions, which includes the annual Shaw Festival performances, abundance of wineries that produce unique ice wines, and the wonderful boutique style accommodations.

Great Wolfe Lodge

This place can only be described as fun, fun, fun! It's basically a resort-like waterpark property filled with massive slides and thrilling rides throughout. Attractions include the Fort Mackenzie water fort tree house and water falls, the Niagara Rapids Run which is basically a rollercoaster on water, the Canada Vortex that drops 40-feet, surfing on Rainbow Lake,



water basketball on Otter Lake, whirlpool hot spas and lazy river rafting. There's also plenty of land based entertainment as well, such as laser games, bowling, arcade, geo-caching, mini-golf, a fitness centre, and even an ice-cream themed spa specifically for kids.

There's so much to do that it's best to book one of the overnight accommodation packages, where most of these attractions are included in the price. There are a variety of options to choose from, like Kid Cabins and Wolf Dens all located within a wilderness-like atmosphere. Of course with all this activity, there's a need to fill the hungry tummies, and there's no shortage of dining options onsite. Check out Antler Shanty, Camp Critter, Bear Claw Café, Crazy Loon, and Grizzly Rob's Bar. Pack your PJ's and this is one adventure you won't forget.

Let's make Twenty-6-Teen, the year of family fun in The 6 and beyond!

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities.



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Emerging Creators Unit is an artist-driven, mentor-supported creative program at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre that supports a wide definition of “performance”, and is open to a variety of themes, form or content presented by queer youth.

Marina Moreira is a theatre artist based out of Toronto, Ontario. She is still learning what, exactly, that entails. FRIDA KAHLO GOOGLES HERSELF is a product of this exploration.

Chase Lo is an interdisciplinary performing artist in dance/theatre.

Monica Garrido is a Mexican performer, filmmaker, writer, producer and dance battle champion. THE CUNNING LINGUIST chronicles her life journey from Mexico to Toronto.

Joshua Middleton is a 21 year-old bisexual artist currently studying Illustration at OCADU, as well as performing in my first play debuting at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre for the Rhubarb Festival in Toronto!

Chase – What kind of social impact would you like to see your art make?

Marina - I can only hope that the art I create inspires others to do something. I see something that inspires me to create, and then what I create inspires someone else, and so on. I guess the simple way of saying this is that I hope the social impact that my art makes is a reaction to make more art, and to start a conversation. I hope what I make contributes to more making.

Hot Artist

Marina - How do you incorporate your many influences (dance, storytelling, etc) to the theatre you create?

Chase - It's all quite exploratory for me. When I'm present with what moves me, whether that involves the voice, acting or movement, I just need to listen to those instincts and run with it. It also depends on the kind of story I want to tell. With *Al/Lex* I wanted the piece to be grounded in text based theatre that used movement and voice to build character and scenes. My creative choices

tend to be determined by what challenges I want to give myself artistically, so I can continue to grow as an artist and performer.

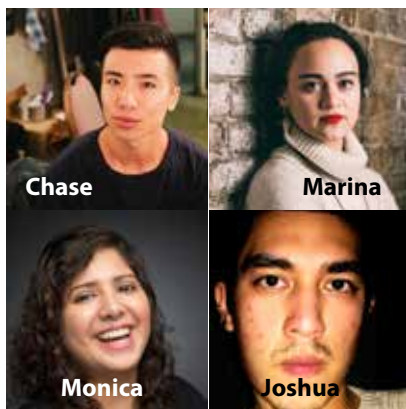
Monica - How do we develop an autobiographical work without being emotionally invested?

Joshua - I think that it's difficult to not be emotionally separated from an autobiographical work. However, I think it certainly

depends on where you are presenting your work, and its context. For example, I'm presenting a queer work for Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, which is highly respected for the aforementioned theme of work.

Joshua - What ideas and concepts can we challenge further in theatre? (Ex. Oppression, Sexual identity, racial diversity, etc.)

Monica – I think any idea or concept can be challenged further in theatre. I think when you start developing a show and continue to work on it with different audiences, spaces, and within time as an artist, you will then start to challenge the concept you started with. It just takes time to start challenging ideas and concepts to their fullest.





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In this issue we focus on fiction for children, spotlighting two recently released books, and also a piece written by an aspiring young writer.



As LGBT parents, friends and allies, how do we teach our kids to be supportive of same sex relationships? Sometimes the best way to teach a kid, is to not teach them anything at all. Homophobia is not something kids are born with, it's a behaviour that's taught. **The Green Meeting Room** is a LGBT-friendly kids book about two boys who search the world for understanding, but discover something better. It's an allegory for our time and a potent reminder that what we seek from the world is already within us.

The book is a way to include different types of relationships in your child's library without alluding to it as something different from the norm. Kids have a natural capacity for love. Homophobia is not a characteristic that kids are born with, so it's a behaviour that gets emulated from the adults around them. The Great Meeting Room allows gay characters in your child's reading material without having to create a point of difference for the characters.

Excerpt from **The Great Meeting Room**

...Unknown to the group, two small boys were approaching The Great Meeting Room.

Fiction

They had been traveling the world, searching for a more understanding place in the world. They knew many things about how the world could be a better place.

They had to tell the grown-ups.

They walked up to The Great Meeting Room and knocked as hard as they could.

The door was locked. Tight.

The smallest of the boys stood on his toes and peeked through the keyhole

They saw lots of grown-ups – shouting at one another. Something was wrong.

So they waited.

And knocked.

And waited.

And waited.

After several hours they grew tired of waiting.

And fonder of one another.

They picked up their belongings, clasped hands and marched towards the horizon.

With The Great Meeting Room barely in sight, the oldest of the boys turned for a final look...

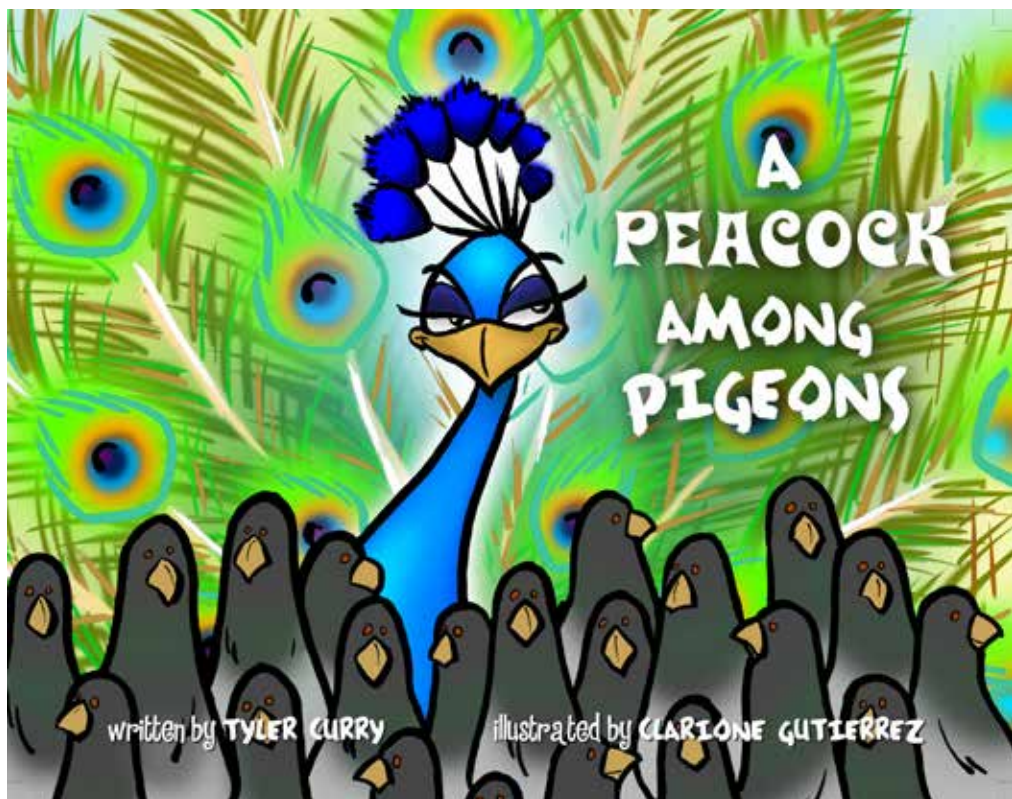
Raymond Helkio is a writer, director and graduate of the Ontario College of Art & Design. He's an active LGBT human rights activist, founder of The Reading Salon and a Canadian ambassador for the Moral Courage Project. He has produced several zines and publications, and this is his first children's book. Toronto is his home, but he currently lives in New York City.

www.RaymondHelkio.com

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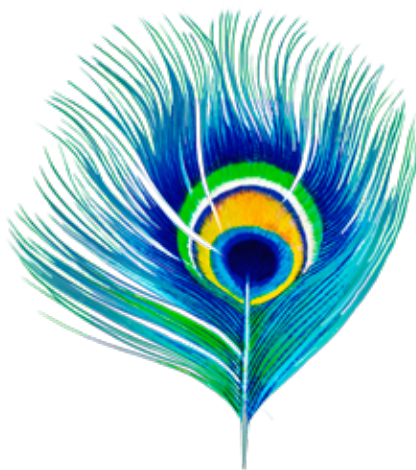


A Peacock Among Pigeons is an LGBT-themed hardback children's book that tells the tale of learning how to stand out when you can't fit in. This children's story teaches the importance of celebrating our differences and learning to love the feathers you live in.

Peter the peacock doesn't know how it happened, but he found himself growing up in a flock of pigeons. Surrounded by a world of grey, he found himself feeling less than his peers and embarrassed by the feathers. After he fails to blend in, he decides that it's time to learn to fly on his own. Along the way, he meets new bird friends from all different flocks that teach him a lesson he will never forget

Written by Tyler Curry and Illustrated by Clarione Gutierrez.

www.apecockamongpigeons.com



Where's The Other Button?

Sid MacIsaac
is a spoken
w o r d
poet and
artist from
Oshawa, ON.

They have been active in the LGBT+ community for the past few years, and integrate themes of sexuality and identity into their writing. They are active in the Toronto poetry scene, and look to become even more involved in the future.



So I'm browsing some used book sites the other day trying to find a place where I can get a mediocre deal on some Dostoevsky, maybe a pinch of Plath or a smidgeon of Cohen, and I end up finding this site that's got good quality products for three and four bucks a pop, and you know I'mma hit that up immediately. So I go to make an account for the site and I'm adding my emails and passwords, mother's maiden name, all that associated jazz, and I get to a drop-down box labeled "Gender". Thinkin' nothing of it, right? Totally normal to ask somebody when making an account,

good for demographics and analysis of an audience.

So I click the box, as one is apt to do, and plummeting to the bottom of my monitor for about a second and a half are two choices: male, and female. I don't know why this is the site that struck me- why, of all the websites I've ever made an account on to do whatsoever it is that I pleased, this is the site that stuck out.

This site in particular had a Frequently Asked Questions page, so I checked it out. Believe it or not, nothing really pertaining to what I was looking for. I looked through every single question, and not one asked, "Where's the "Other" button?"

I looked through
every single
question, and
not one asked,
"Where's the
'Other' button?"

Now that's "Other" with a big O, other as in different than that of man and woman. Someone who doesn't identify or align with the construct of a gender binary, where what you're packing when you're born determines who you are and how you're raised. Not everybody is boy or girl, some are neither and some are in between, some are every possible gender you

can consider and some are absolutely none of them.

We go to school like everybody else, and sit in class, and joke around, and look out the

windows at the sky that stretches over New York and Beijing and Melbourne and Scarborough, thinking about the world around us, acting as the epitomes of angst, we're just the same as everybody else.

Only we're not the same as everybody else—we're not entirely comfortable in our own skin. Some of us haven't got the right equipment, some of us flow between different genders

And yeah, it
gets confusing,
because
everybody is
different

depending on the time of day, some of us feel like one thing more than another thing, but still both things, and some of us are something completely unique to us.

And yeah, it gets confusing, because everybody is different, we're all individuals, but it's these used book websites that only have two gender options, that are separating us individuals from the collective. Separating and segregating us, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, we're the minority to a world-wide majority.

And yeah, there are some of us that are able to break through that humongous, ancient gray wall, they get to be public, they get to express themselves how they see fit, and they're incredible for it, but for the vast majority of our minority, we hide and we cry and we lurk in the shadows, we wrap ourselves in society's

perception of perfect by walking along a tight rope with no net underneath, hateful youth are transmogrified into stomping elephants, stampeding towards us from the big top circus tent of discriminatory conditioning, quickly, quickly now, wash off that clown makeup and get a razor for the bearded ladies, we've been practicing for this performance for our entire lives, we're the greatest show on Earth but you'd never ever know, gotta hide under the ring toss game, else we'll be going down on a Tilt-A-Whirl to the pavement, just try to imagine how it feels to be told you're a freak even when you're putting on the best performance of your life.

It reiterates the fact that there are five tonne weights hanging onto our hearts, and when there's no "Other" button, the lever is pulled, the light bulbs burn out, and the weights rip apart our integrity. Our concept of self is torn in two by the ignorance of a web developer who was raised to think of gender as man and woman.

A web developer that used to say in high school that if a transboy and a bio-boy are dating, that they're technically heterosexual because one of them has the wrong equipment, a web developer who went to college and met a girl at a party and took her back to his dorm, only to find out that Monique was born Maurice, kicking her ass to the curb to go back inside and watch Maury, well sorry, Mr. Programmer-of-a-future-used-book-website, but that beautiful woman that you weren't able to appreciate is gonna become one of the most prolific writers of all time, and that teenage boy in Canada who tried to buy some used books who's still trying to figure out who he is as an individual is gonna grow up to make sure that no other kid ever has to smash apart their dignity when they want to read on the cheap.

So I ask you, used book websites: where's the "Other" button?

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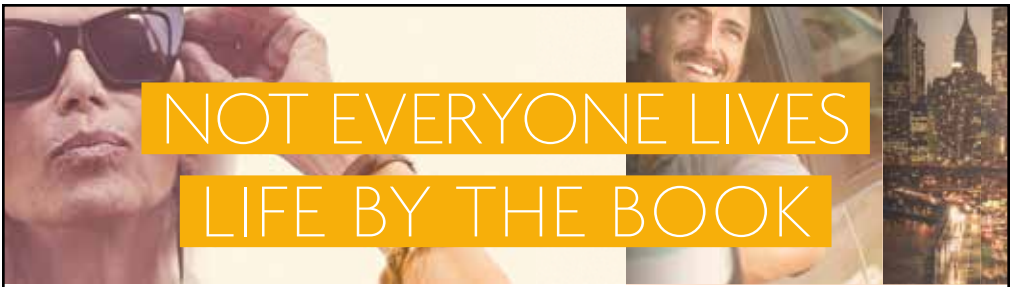



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Imagine this: you're greeted by friendly staff at the Sherbourne Health Centre as you make your way to the second floor for the weekly Wednesday evening meetings with Black Queer Youth (BQY), who engage in dynamic discussion and activities throughout the year.



The BQY initiative is one of the many programs offered by Supporting Our Youth (SOY), which caters to Toronto's youth who identify as LGBTTIQQ2SA and are in need of essential services and activities at the times in their life when they feel most vulnerable and isolated.

BQY has existed for 15 years and is the City's only group to provide a safe, social and open space for Black, Multiracial, African and Caribbean youth between 14 and 29 years old, who seek a community of like-minded peers to explore their racial, cultural, sexual and gendered identities. On any given Wednesday night, project coordinators King and Adam Benn work closely with participants to prepare hot meals, and host informative and exciting sessions that include: workshops, chat sessions and the popular "chill nights".

Community Cornerstone

Over the years BQY has partnered with many organizations, activists and community organizers to provide a wide range of activities for participants. For example, Social Work interns and other volunteers join to assist with running sessions. Guest facilitators also stop by to host workshops on various themes. Between 2013 and 2015, BQY coordinated the Black Youth Stage at Toronto's annual Pride celebrations, to showcase their talent and creativity to the wider queer Toronto communities.

Here, everyone has a voice! Youth speak freely about the things that concern them in a supportive environment. The staple "check-in" segment brings everyone together while enjoying dinner and chatting about current issues. BQY encourages an atmosphere of black consciousness, to help youth overcome their struggles. They acknowledge that many black, queer youth in Toronto are doubly-displaced—they are black and queer in a society that is not always friendly to them. The groups foster a supportive atmosphere in order to collectively discover viable solutions to problems of racism, violence, and all the phobias that impact the ways black queer youth live in Toronto.

New participants are welcomed year-round. So, if you or someone you know identifies as Black / Multiracial and queer, feel free to come chill, learn how to take up space, go on outings, create zines, attend workshops, and just socialize with other youth!

Black Queer Youth-Sherbourne Heath Centre at 333 Sherbourne Street (Just south of Carlton St.) on Wednesdays from 6:30-8:30pm.

Visit www.soytoronto.org for more info. Contact King by phone (416) 324-5083 or email bqy@sherbourne.on.ca

Nikolii Attai is a volunteer at Black Queer Youth.





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SPRING IN THE CITY

by Caitlyn Holroyd

Spring has sprung, which means it's time to get off that couch and get outside. Toronto is a fun place to be all year round, but it's in the warmer months that you really get a sense of what makes it so great. With that in mind, I've rounded up a wide range of events to showcase how vibrant a city Toronto is.

OUTDOORS

High Park Cherry Blossom Watch

Late April to early May

High Park, 1873 Bloor Street West

FREE

There are few sights more beautiful in Toronto than the cherry blossoms of High Park. Every Spring, visitors flock to the park to celebrate the centuries old Japanese tradition of Sakura Hanami, which roughly translates to "cherry blossom flower viewing." Peak bloom varies year by year (harsher winters mean later blooms, mild winters mean earlier blooms) and only lasts for about a week to a week and a half.

TIP: Afternoons and weekends are the most popular times to see the cherry blossoms, so if you want to avoid the large crowds, try going in the mornings or during the week. Centre Island also has cherry blossoms and is a quieter alternative.



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ROM Friday Night Live

Friday nights from April 29 to June 24

Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park

www.fnl.rom.on.ca

TICKETS: \$15

Friday Night Live is one of the city's most unique social destinations, offering visitors a chance to dance, drink, and eat their way through the ROM's many rooms of artifacts. Each week has a different theme and features a wide variety of DJs, live music, and delicious eats. Their Spring season kicks off April 29 with #ROMInk, which will provide a sneak preview of the museum's Tattoos exhibition.

TIP: Friday Night Live almost always sells out, so early bird tickets are recommended. They can be purchased online or at the door starting at 7 p.m., and guarantee you entry before 8 p.m.

Canadian Music Week

May 2 to 8

Various locations

www.cmw.net

TICKETS: \$75 for 7-day wristbands, individual tickets also available

There's a lot of great music coming out of Canada these days, both in the mainstream and underground realms. If you're eager to broaden your musical landscape, Canadian Music Week is the perfect place to do it. The seven-day music festival features over 800 artists, including Collective Soul, Janelle Monae, Shad, Yukon Blonde, Mother Mother, and many more.

TIP: There's more to Canadian Music Week than just musical performances. The CMW Film Fest takes place at The Royal Cinema from May 5 to 7 and boasts a diverse mix of exclusive Canadian premieres and limited engagements.

Classic Albums Live: The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars

May 28, 8 p.m.

Massey Hall, 178 Victoria Street

www.classicalbumslive.com

TICKETS: \$29.50-49.50

The tributes continue for David Bowie, who passed away in January at the age of 69 after losing his battle with cancer. One of Bowie's greatest masterpieces was his 1972 album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, and Classic Albums Live will be performing it in its entirety at the legendary Massey Hall. If you're a Bowie fan, you won't want to miss this.

TIP: For an idea of what you can expect, check out some past Classic Album Live performances on their YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/ClassicAlbumsLive.

NXNE

June 15 to 19

Various locations

www.nxne.com

TICKETS: Stay tuned to the NXNE website for wristband and ticket pricing info

Founded in 1995, NXNE is an annual five-day music festival and conference taking over the city every June with showcases, screenings, panels, parties, installations, and more. From free shows at Yonge-Dundas Square to intimate venues and extended last call parties, NXNE is a premier destination for bands, filmmakers, innovators, funny people, artists, and, of course, fans of the above!

TIP: It can be tough to navigate through NXNE's long list of parties and performers, but the M for Montreal showcase, Bruise Cruise, and 159 Manning house party are always a good time.

Lego + Lagers

Every Tuesday, 5 p.m. to close

Gladstone Hotel Melody Bar, 1214 Queen Street West

www.gladstonehotel.com

FREE

Who says LEGO is just for kids? Let the Gladstone Hotel take you back to a much simpler time, when your biggest problem was trying to convince your parents to let you stay up past 9 p.m. They provide the beer and boxes of LEGO to get creative with, so all you have to do is bring your imagination.

TIP: If colouring is more your thing, the Gladstone also hosts an Adult Colouring-In every Wednesday from 5 p.m. to close.



MARKETS & FAIRS



Midnight MRKT

April 8, 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

2nd Floor Events, 461 King Street West

www.facebook.com/MidnightMRKT

ADMISSION: \$5

Branded as Toronto's sexiest night market, Midnight MRKT takes over 2nd Floor Events every few months with some of the best local retailers, craft cocktails, and DJs the city has to offer. You'll find vintage clothing, candles, jewelry, artwork, and lots more — just make sure you bring cash for the goods.

TIP: *Feeling peckish? Each Midnight MRKT features small plate dishes from big food talents like Steambox Dumplings, Lola's Cloud Organic Cotton Candy, and Soul 2 Go.*

First Star Psychic Fair

April 22 to 24

Exhibition Place (Queen Elizabeth Building), 100 Princes' Boulevard

www.fspsychicfairs.com

TICKETS: \$15, kids 12 and under free with adult

The First Star Psychic Fair gathers palm and tarot readers, mediums, clairvoyants, and healers for a weekend of extrasensory demonstrations. Over 3,000 people showed up to last year's Psychic Fair, seeking answers about their love lives, deceased family members, careers, and futures. You don't have to be a believer to attend though. Skeptics are welcome too!

TIP: *If you're interested in learning more about the psychic world, check out one of the 40 lectures happening throughout the weekend.*

Junction Flea

May 21

Echo Beach, 909 Lake Shore Boulevard West

www.junctionflea.com

FREE

The Junction Flea got its start in a dusty parking lot near Dundas and Keele, and has since popped up all over the city. They'll only be hosting one market this year, making this a must-attend event. With 200 vendors on hand, you're bound to leave with something.

TIP: *Head down to the waterfront at Echo Beach for some scenic views of the Toronto skyline.*

PARTIES

Puppy Love

Second Friday of the month

The Beaver, 1192 Queen Street West

COVER: \$5

Puppy Love is a laid-back, sex-positive dance party for everyone, regardless of gender, race, relationship status or sexual preferences (think of it more of a peck on the cheek than a full-on make-out). DJ Dang Kids provides the tunes and there are usually games to keep you occupied.

TIP: *When you need a break from the dance floor, check out The Beaver's backyard patio! It's small, but charming.*

Business Woman's Special

Second Saturday of the month

Round, 152-A Augusta Avenue

COVER: \$6

One of Toronto's premier LGBTQ parties, Business Woman's Special was started in 2009 by friends April Wozny and Mike Yerxa and takes its name from a joke in the '90s rom-com Romy and Michele's High School Reunion. There are drag performances, a photo booth, and a dance floor to let loose and look fabulous on.

TIP: *Make sure you join the Business Woman's Special Facebook group to stay updated on future parties and their themes.*

Caitlyn Holroyd is a news editor at the Toronto-based sports app theScore and a contributor at SheDoesTheCity.com, where she compiles the hottest parties and events for the weekly Toronto Hit List. When she isn't writing, she enjoys travelling, attending concerts, and hanging out with her two cats.

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SHOT ON LOCATION AT EROTICO IN THE HEART OF THE VILLAGE

I lay in the slowly brightening room, the sound of the furnace pushing heat through the house, a quiet song guiding me awake. It's my birthday as I write this and at twenty-nine, I'm thinking of the things to come while spending time thinking about how much has changed and how much stayed the same.

We were getting ready to put on another show and I was about ten years old; There was no real way for us to know that we weren't The Spice Girls and we performed like we didn't know the difference. We were getting together with the family to celebrate some occasion and there was a kitchen with an elevated level, separating the dining room from the living room. It acted as a stage for us to dance across and it was the first time I truly fell in love with performing, even though I was a little timid at first; I've been performing in some way ever since. The way I felt while dancing to their music was my first brush with joy, though at the time all I had to say about it was, "I'm really happy," as I collapsed in a heap, a smile plastered across my face with my cousins on the bed in the room where everyone left the coats. It was the same year my parents announced they were getting divorced and through all of it, that memory stands out stronger than the both of them telling my brother and I that Dad was moving out.

The covers felt soft as I turned to face the window, a small breeze letting in some Winter



wind because when I sleep I become like a furnace whose heat could fill the entire house. I looked up through sleep-filled eyes and heard children running along the back pathway on their way to school, their laughter filtering into the room alongside the morning light. I smiled into the pillow with thoughts of previous birthdays running through my mind. Last year I took an entire week to celebrate myself in ways I hadn't done before; Each day that week, something amazing happened that was either unexpected or that totally made my day. I remember my roommate doing my hair and another friend coming over that week and doing a photoshoot. It was mostly selfies with a few full shots but it made me feel like a million bucks because I never saw myself the way those pictures turned out. I was looking at the woman I had worked so hard to become and I felt so proud to see in a photograph, She who I longed to be. I remember eating my weight in sushi, even having it twice in one day. What I remember the least about that time was the nasty breakup that got the week started; It was there, but those details aren't as clear as the good.

My feet hit the ground and I slowly stood, stretching the sleep out of my bones, in anticipation of the coffee that awaited me. I looked over and saw my partner sleeping quietly beside me and I smiled, knowing that more than the past few weeks of doctor's appointments and healing from a few medical

issues, I would remember how it felt to know that I was being given a second chance at living my life to the fullest. I thought too, about how exciting it is to know that this is the year I'm finishing my book and making my first EP and there is also the Vagina Monologues that I'm performing in; Then there are the Spring workshops, lectures, and photo shoots for work. More than being sick, I'll remember what it felt like to laugh with my friends at our first archery lesson. The quiet house provided the perfect backdrop for the soundtrack floating through my mind, made of all the reasons I had to be absolutely ecstatic about what's already



come and gone and what lay ahead.

The one thread connecting each year to another and another after that is joy. Joy at the present moment and joy at the peaks and valleys- it's all worthwhile. We yearn for the constant things, those people, feelings or places that anchor us to certainty in a world filled with anything but. Our lives are all filled with tragedies and traumas of some sort and those threads in this tapestry of our experience are the thick threads that stand out from far away. If however, all we saw were those, we miss the beauty of the work of art in front of us. True, there will be many big threads, as I know from my own life and we should never ignore their presence, but the one thing about each age and stage of life is that we're able to choose how much we build around them and because of them.

There are so many reasons to look at the past through eyes of the bad things that happened but there are just as many great things, too. I thought about it while the smell of my coffee drifted through the kitchen like a song.

How many ordinary mornings will I have in my twenty-ninth year? How many let downs? How many of them will I remember? More importantly though, how many will turn out to be something so much more beautiful? My life has certain privileges that I cannot deny, afford me the ability to ask these questions beyond mere survival and though they whisper of negative forces at work in this world, they also give me an opportunity to help others and keep doors open where they were once closed; Even then, I can choose and I choose open doors.

This is our power and what we're quick to forget when caught up in the milieu of the everyday: we are more powerful than we know because in every moment, we get to choose. This birthday I'm making the words of Maya Angelou, the song that carries me through the next twenty nine years, "Life is pure adventure, and the sooner we realize that, the quicker we will be able to treat life as art."

Here's to all the art you've made and all of that which you've yet to make and to the joy that rises like the sun over every day we have here. Love, light and miracles.



Feel free to reach out to talk books, well-being, spirituality, gratitude and making the world a better place on Instagram @cherylalisoncostello and Twitter @cherylacostello. Cheryl can be found writing online at www.thelovinginstant.com and sharing beauty at www.capturingtheinfinite.com.



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Spring Horoscopes

by Julie Antoinette

Aries (March 21st – April 20th)

Time to clean out your closet, Aries! Your theme is Spring Cleaning. Getting rid of old clothes and objects that are no longer useful will free up stagnant energy. Once you do, watch new opportunities flow into your life effortlessly. Not to mention how much lighter you'll feel. Remember: The state of your place is the state of your mind.

Taurus (April 21st – May 21st)

Do your life experiences reflect in your expression, Taurus? Bad times will come and go. There is no need to carry them with you permanently. These were pivotal learnings toward your character formation. Take the rich lessons and leave the rest. Spring asks you to start afresh. New emotional experiences await, but only if you are willing to leave the past in the past. Travel lightly and you'll go far.

Gemini (May 22nd – June 21st)

What are you craving Gemini? The planets are piquing your appetite for intellectual stimulation. You'll encounter new people randomly or by joining like-minded groups. This will satisfy your desire to stretch your mind beyond its limits. A wonderful intellectual adventure awaits you. Stretch your neurons and enjoy the journey!

Cancer (June 22nd – July 22nd)

That dream, that thing you really want to do, that passion that nudges you in your quiet moments - is calling. Are you waiting for permission Cancer? The stars declare the only permission you need is your own. Your loved ones will support your dreams, but you must take the lead. You are the one you've been waiting for.

Leo (July 23rd – August 22nd)

Someone from the past misses you and wants back into your life. You must decide whether to let them in based on your inner wisdom. Your heart will tell you if they are being honest or lying. There is a risk of repeating an old pattern, so exercise your right to "Just say NO!" Nancy Regan would approve. Careful, old habits die hard.

Virgo (August 23rd – September 23rd)

You have turned down far too many exciting offers Virgo. It's time to acquaint with the idea of "YES". You have mastered the art of self-sacrifice and delay gratification. You understand the concept of long-term benefit vs. short-term gain. That's wonderful. Put it on your resume. You're older now and wouldn't mind feeling meaning and happiness in life. Prescription: Watch the movie YES MAN with Jim Carrey. Enjoy with popcorn. And butter.

Libra (September 24th – October 23rd)

Spring marks the opposite season of your birth. Being the zodiac sign representing zero-point balance, Spring's message for you is simple: Spring Break. Be honest; you're exhausted. You've been multitasking like a juggler with 87 pins since Christmas. Immediately following reading this horoscope, get on the phone or internet and book your vacation. Somewhere warm near saltwater — you need the vitamins and minerals that only the sun and sea can offer.

Scorpio (October 24th – November 22nd)

It's time to dig deep, even for you, brooding Scorpio. Something has been bothering you but you're not quite sure what it is. This nagging feeling is hovering beneath the surface of your conscious mind, begging to be known. It is a part of you that will reveal a lot about who you really are. Until you uncover this secret about yourself, you'll be quite confused about your own unusual behavior. Prescription: Journal. The things that bother you the most are key.

Sagittarius (November 23rd - December 21st)

Time for new inspirations Sagittarius! Your job will require fresh new ideas this season. You may source this from the rich emotions that will wash over you. Notice them and put them to use rather than letting them pass you by neglected and forgotten. Capture them in art, writing or music. Big ideas are wanting to take form and are choosing YOU as their vehicle. Buckle up

Capricorn (December 22nd – January 19th)

Your analytical skills will take center stage as you shine in dealing with difficult people this season, wise old Capricorn. You have a firm and fair approach that always achieves sound resolution. You are also using your intuition in business to sniff out new inspiring opportunities. Good for you!

Aquarius (January 20th – February 19th)

Your right and left brain collaborate this Spring. A link between finances and numbers, creativity and the arts takes place. Maybe you'll be creative financially in the way you handle your investments or perhaps there is money to be made in the arts and entertainment. Whatever your combination, these two worlds colliding will definitely prove a lucrative hit!

Pisces (February 20th – March 20th)

Family time is the focus for this season. You are asked to strike a balance in the way you spend time with loved ones. No longer allow them to take a back seat to your professional pursuits. Focus on spending time together. Decorating project or home improvements worked on together add value to your home, but also adds quality and richness to your relationships. It's bonding time!

Julie is a Sociology and Psychology graduate, a Psychotherapy Intern and a lifelong student of the psyche. In her free time, she is a crochet adventurer and musical muse. In this horoscope, she seeks to relay intuitive messages of guidance from the collective astrological archetypes. As above, so below.



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Looking Back

I started an online campaign called “Rise Against Bullying” in 2012, not knowing it would turn into a global movement. From my actions of turning a negative situation into a positive, I never expected to inspire many children, teens and even adults.



It really clicked for me when I realized I was helping to save peoples lives, and I started receiving letters, and parents would stop me on the streets, or pull up in their cars to remind me of my actions that have inspired their child to stay strong and keep going in school. It was then I knew I had some special super powers!

I started because I never wanted anyone to feel alone as I once did. I came out at the age of 13 and was the talk of my town for years, and was subjected to bullying, torment, being led-on by my friends, and dealing with a lot of cyber-bullying.

I remember I walked inside this beautiful garden on the grounds of the University of Toronto to attend the INSPIRE Awards as a nominee for “LGBTQ Youth Of The Year”, and still not really believing in myself. I have been dedicating my life to lifting others up for years, and felt what I was doing wasn't that

important in other people's eyes. I was more excited knowing my mother was able to be by my side, as this was her first public appearance supporting me at an LGBTQ event.

Countless people started approaching me, shaking my hand and congratulating me for being nominated. People I have not had the chance to meet were already following my movement and loved what I was doing. It was those words I needed to hear, that somebody appreciated what I've been doing with reminding others to stay strong, and that it DOES get BETTER. It was hearing stories of other people who were bullied, and how horrible it was for the LGBTQ community back in the day that made me realize the LGBTQ isn't just a community, we're a family.

On stage I reminded everyone the reason why I had started making a difference was the suicide of Jamie Hubley, a gay youth in Ottawa who couldn't bare to deal with anymore bullying. His story reminded me so much of myself that I knew I had to be a voice for the voiceless. Still replaying all the horrible things that were said to me in my younger years, I started to cry and break down. I went outside and just hugged my mother and friends knowing this was the moment, I was being recognized, and I never thought I would have received an award for my actions.

As the night was coming to the end, many people came up to congratulate me ,and I truly left feeling so empowered and inspired to keep on doing more, and to show the world I was not going to stop making a difference for anyone. The INSPIRE Awards has inspired me to keep on going.

Justin Preston is a past recipient of the “LGBTQ Youth Of The Year” Award. The 2016 INSPIRE Awards take place on May 27th, 2016 at Hart House, University of Toronto www.inspireawards.ca



Check out Justin's website www.riseagainstabullying.org

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