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From the **Publisher**



Once again your much-loved LGBTQ community magazine, and one that has been called “*the community’s most original and highly creative magazine in history*”, embarks on a new editorial theme that will highlight our unwavering commitment to diversity, and will showcase and contribute to the understanding of the rich make-up of the gay community.

For 2020, we embark on a new editorial theme of “Being...” and with that our covers and content will be featuring many members of our community representing and talking about their true identity, being gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, 2-Spirit, gender non-conforming, non-binary, pansexual, and asexual.

We’re also featuring an expert and academic look at gender and sexuality. This is how the world forward needs to be and should be; one where we all feel heard, represented, and included.

The first edition of the year is about being gay and lesbian. I can’t tell you what it means to be a lesbian, and I can’t even tell you what it

means to be gay. Because one person’s gay is not another’s.

For me, my identity is in layers; I am a human, I am a man, I am gay, I am thoughtful, I am caring, I am accepting, I am open-minded... you get the point. It is not just one thing that makes me who I am. However, being gay does play a big part in guiding the other pieces that make me. I can say that I have always known I was gay, as far back as when I was a couple of years old. I had a relatively easy experience coming out, both to myself, and to others.

PinkPlayMags is now in its 12th year of publishing. Holy batman how time flies! This little magazine that could has been hailed by the City of Toronto as, “one of the most praised lifestyle magazines written from an LGBTQ perspective,” and by Queen’s Park, “PinkPlayMags has become a staple in our community”.

Our promise to you is that we will continue leading the future of LGBTQ media and continue presenting editorial content and visuals that inspire, celebrate, and reveal our fabulous, rich, complex, and exciting community. That’s what makes us part of INspired Media’s “FEEL GOOD media” line of publications.

**Antoine Elhashem**  
**Publisher**  
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Joie Lamar



**Cover** BEING... Gay & Lesbian

**Concept & Creative Direction** Antoine Elhashem

**Photography** Shawn McGowan-Leaver

**Representing our community**

**In the middle:**

Marisa Rosa Grant – *Lesbian*

Ryan Bince – *Gay*

Rest of the group from left to right:

Amy Vaughan-Dolson – *Asexual*

Dan Bowen aka Brad Puddin aka Maya Naise

– *Non-conforming*

Alia Carrerra – *Bisexual*

Mary Sue Robinet – *2Spirit*

Marisa Cimdamore – *Pansexual*

Jeanette Jabier AKA Jeanette Dupree – *Transsexual*

Robyn DeCradle – *Non-Binary*

## Published by

**INspired Media Inc.**

Operating INspiredcreative ([www.inspiredcreative.ca](http://www.inspiredcreative.ca)), and  
publishers of The Pink Pages Directory, PinkPlayMags, theBUZZ, and  
The Local Biz Magazine.

President ..... Antoine Elhashem

General Manager ..... Kim Dobie

Advertising Consultants ..... Carolyn Burch, Darren Stehle

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## From the **Editor**

**G**reetings readers, and welcome to our new four-part series, simply titled, "Being...", where we will be taking a look at the various complexities of genders and sexualities that make up our wonderful community of rainbow colours.

In this first issue, we begin with "Gay & Lesbian", highlighting what defines individuals as being part of this demographic. Additional issues will take a look at Trans/2Spirit, Bisexual/Poly, Gender-Non-Conforming, and beyond. We hope you enjoy this first issue.

Our first feature is written by **Nick Mulé**, PhD, who provides a detailed analysis and history of homosexuality, from the earliest references as being taboo, to today's society of being much more accepting toward this lifestyle. Nick is a coordinator of the *Sexuality Studies Program at York University*, which we also profile in our Community Cornerstone spotlight, when Kelly Wilk discovers more about this unique educational course offering.

Our second feature is written by Raymond Helkio, who spoke with two prominent local activists to learn more about their struggles and triumphs growing up identifying as gay/lesbian. **Kevin Robertson, Bishop Anglican Diocese of Toronto**, discusses the challenges he and his husband have had with the church to become a more welcoming space, particularly for LGBTQ people. **Sofie Lasiuk, Toronto Firefighter and Captain**, who struggled with accepting who she was, but finally came out as trans to her loving partner Denise. The two remain together, and Sofie eventually came out at work, and is now a strong advocate for trans rights. Finally, our third



article is written by **Joey Viola**, and takes a look at the perks and perils of the multitude of online dating applications that now flood the web.

For our travel feature, we take a look at two western Ontario destinations, Stratford and Niagara-on-the-Lake, that operate huge theatre companies, **Stratford Festival** and **Shaw Festival**, respectively. We not only learn about what productions are ahead this year, but also the multitude of other experiences that can be had at each location, from wineries and breweries, to great dining and accommodations options, celebrity affiliations, and a community filled with pride. Writer **Jon Pressick** chatted with artist **Emily Lawrence**, who creates works of art that incorporate all human senses in amazing sculptural and photographic installations. Our Fiction feature is on **ReQueered Tales**, a group of individuals who are bringing back long lost works of fiction to offer them to a whole new generation of readers. We offer a short excerpt from *In The Game*, written by **Nikki Baker**, the first African-American author in the lesbian mystery genre.

Finally, as always we offer a fabulous selection of events from both here in Toronto and beyond, compiled by Events Editor, Sherry Sylvain, our quarterly horoscopes, the reflective From The Heart written by Mychol Scully, and our Looking Back column, this time penned by author **Joie Lamar**.

Enjoy the read!

**Bryen Dunn**  
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# “Being... Gay/Lesbian”

*By Nick Mulé, Ph.D*

**The concept of ‘Being’ is an incredibly deep notion, that when followed by an ellipsis (...) in this feature is more about what is and what could be, than what is being omitted.**

Therefore, ‘Being ...’ captures not only our living existences, but also how we go about it toward developing a sense of self, and how we interact with our environs.

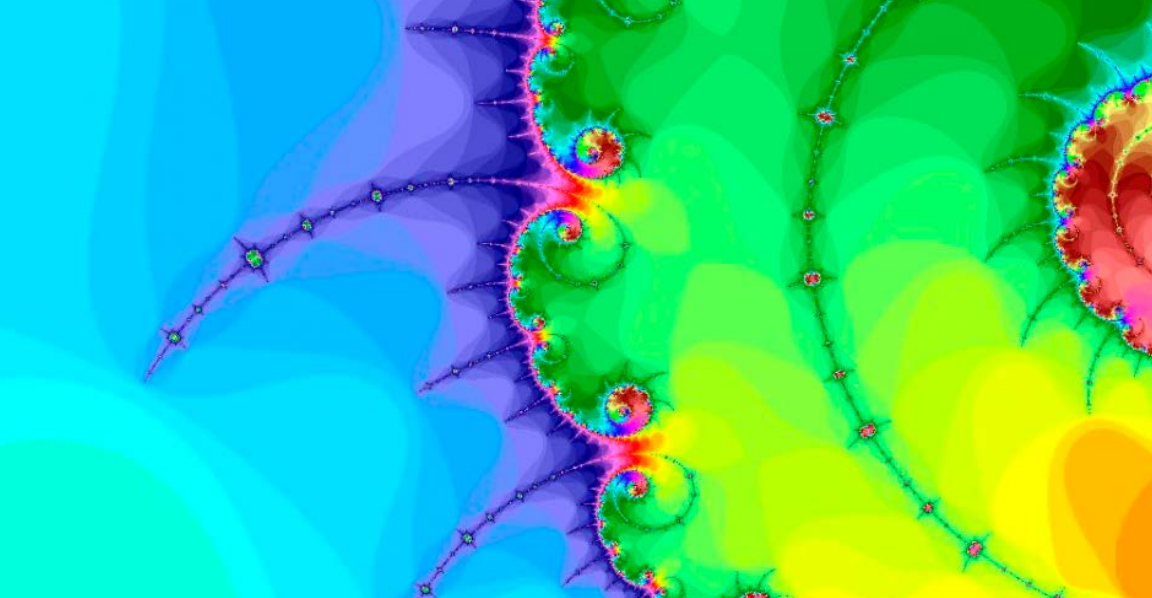
Below I take up many of these issues in deconstructing and examining “Being ...Gay and Lesbian.”

## **History of Language**

Although we know that same-sex desires existed throughout history, for much of that history there was no language to describe, define and ultimately name it. The word homosexuality was first coined by **Karl-Maria Kertbeny** of Prussia in 1868, by way of private letters to the first known gay activist **Karl Heinrich Ulrichs**. Later published anonymously in an 1869 pamphlet calling for

the repeal of Prussia’s sodomy laws, homosexual was further popularized by psychiatrist **Richard von Kraft-Ebbing**. At first, these contrary sexual feelings were seen as an interesting phenomenon, given their perceived rarity among the general public. The role of religion, moral codes, and legal regulation of social relations and sexual pleasure, enmeshed and created a public world view of same-sex desires as being deemed sick (mental illness), sinful (immoral), and perverted (illegal).

Over the past century and a half, slang terminology developed within the mainstream to separate itself from those with same-sex desires. Terms such as fag, dyke, flamer, sissy, butch, and queer just to name a few. These are derogatory terms used to denigrate and publicly humiliate those with same-sex desires, labelling this demographic as abnormal, weird, and less than those in the majority who maintain opposite-sex desires. History has shown language to be incredibly powerful. Not only did these terms serve to separate us out from mainstream society, but to also marginalize and oppress us for falling outside the norm. The taking up of such concepts through language in powerful sectors such as law, medicine, and education, in turn

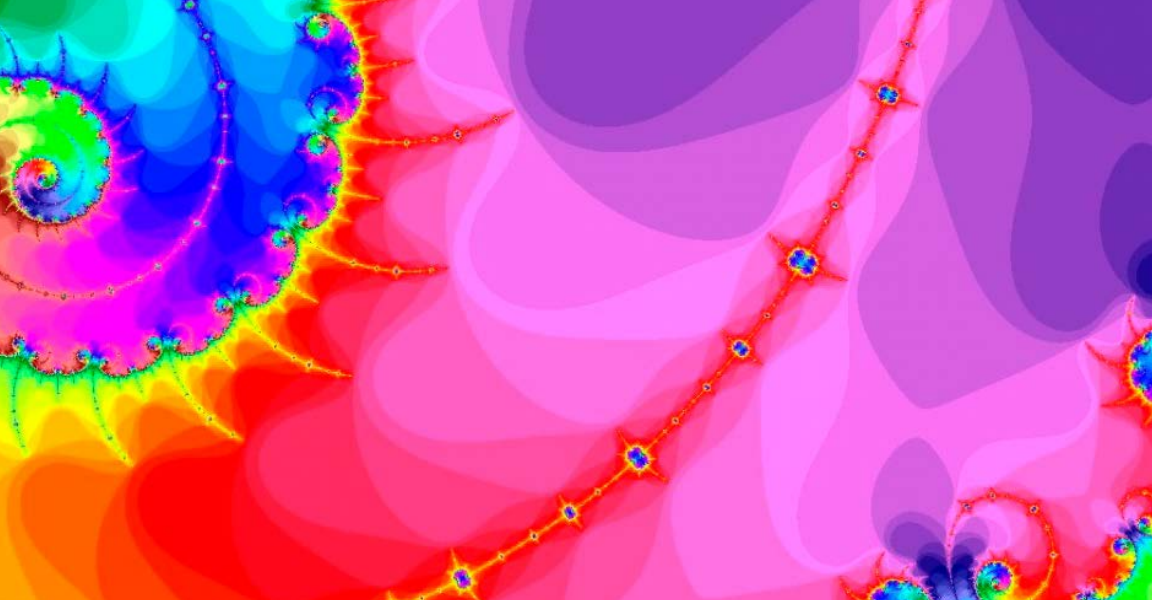


created oppressive environments that sanctioned discrimination against homosexuals explicitly (firings, evictions, refusal of services), or implicitly (lack of human rights protections). In such environments, “Being ... Gay/Lesbian” in most instances required being in the closet, living a double life or compartmentalizing one’s same-sex desires with great caution in order to survive.

The effects of such oppression differed for lesbians than they did for gay men. In a male-dominated society, women have been less suspect due to the imbalance of power between the sexes. Other than the sexist assumption that women are there to support the needs of men, women’s assumed lower sex drive and sexual assertiveness, fell below straight men’s radar. Lesbians who did assert themselves as such, were seen as a threat to straight men, for these were women who expressed no sexual desire for men, nor a need to meet men’s needs in general. The threat gay men posed to straight men was in undermining the latter’s notion of masculinity. The notion that men would sexually get it on with each other and not pursue women, challenged straight men’s understanding of sexual relations. The interplay between gender and sexuality is intertwined, and the existence of homosexuals (in this case encompassing gay men and lesbians) was a direct confrontation to society’s patriarchal world views.

## Naming Identity

What transformed society’s understanding of same-sex desires took place via organized social movements in the 20th century. Initially known as the gay liberation movement, the terms was later expanded in nomenclature to explicitly name lesbians and eventually bisexuals. A major objective of this movement was to change society’s concept of homosexuality as a sick, immoral, perverted, and shameful existence. Instead, courageous members of the *Gay Liberation Front* stood up to such derogatory characterizations and redefined themselves as having differentiated sexual desires that were natural to them, true to their authentic feelings, and expressed with pride. Such liberationist views were adopted from the *Women’s Liberation* movement, and the *Black Liberation* movement, along with philosophical concepts drawn from the peace movement. At their peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s, gay liberationists presented a direct challenge to society’s patriarchal and heterosexist views. In place of the term homosexual, they proudly declared themselves as gay, and demanded recognition as having legitimate sexual desires that went beyond the heteronormative notion of opposite-sex desires.



## Gay Liberation

The Gay Liberation movement was very much about defining itself as it chose to, as opposed to being defined by society. In defining itself, with terminology such as gay, lesbian and eventually bisexual, in place of the medically disordered homosexual, Gay Liberationists staked out an assertive, sex-positive stance. For the first time, an organized social movement formed, that burst open the closet doors and publicly celebrated its differences without shame, and instead with pride. Yet, gay liberation was not focused solely on liberating gays and lesbians, but rather on liberating everyone from the binary notions of gender and sexuality. It challenged patriarchal and sexist notions of our male-dominated society and heterosexist notions of opposite-sex desires being the norm. It called for everyone to be freed from the rigid binary notions associated with gender roles and sexual orientations. Such views were so progressive at the time, that they proved to be a challenge not only to mainstream society, but within gay and lesbian communities themselves. It must be noted that Gay Liberationists represented a small segment of the broader gay and lesbian communities. Many in the latter were reluctant to fully embrace the principles, values and ideals of Gay Liberationists, partly due to fear of coming out and the potential repercussions, and also the reticence due to their heavy socialization (i.e. sexist gay men). Sustaining such a counter cultural

movement proved insurmountable, as many of the Gay and Lesbian Liberationist organizations of the time had imploded by the mid-to-late 1970s.

## Strategic Activism

Nevertheless, there is no denying that the gay liberation movement had succeeded in shifting the public discourse on gender and sexuality. The *homosexual* could no longer be easily cast off as someone to be institutionalized by the medical establishment, demonized by religious institutions, or incarcerated by law. Gay Liberationists through their activism stood up to each of these powerful institutions and challenged them on their biased, moralistic and unscientific notions. During and beyond the gay liberation movement's heydays, its ideology was used to get homosexuality dropped from the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, have sexual orientation added to human rights legislation at all levels of government, and influence many religious institutions to embrace their lesbian and gay congregants. Via this redefinition, the gay liberation movement established sexual identities that were then utilized to advocate for both social and legal reform. Through increased recognition and societal sensitization of same-sex desires, 'Being ... Gay/Lesbian' has over time become less fraught and increasingly accepted, if not fully understood or respected. At least in the Western Hemisphere.

## Queer Theory

By the early 1990s the concept of identity increasingly became questioned. In particular, queer theory emerged from Foucault's postmodernist philosophy, with the former arguing against identity formations due to their restrictive and essentialist positioning in line with the latter's nod to relativism. An important contribution queer theory offers for thought, is its recognition of the fluidity of gender and sexuality, and the value of resisting categorizing people into social locations that are not fixed. Although this addresses concerns of fluidity, it does not address those for whom their sexuality and/or gender identity/expression is salient. In distinguishing and establishing itself, queer theory took aim at the Gay Liberation movement for being overly dependent on socially constructed identities and for going down the rights-claims path of equality with status quo outcomes. Yet, it completely overlooks Gay Liberation's call for gender and sexual freedom for all, which was not tied to identity. Gay Liberation activists were always clear that pursuing rights was a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

## Complexities and Intersectionality

### "Being ... Ourselves"

Even if we identify as being outside of the gender binary or heterosexuality, our gender identity, expression and/or sexuality does not exist in isolation. Each of us possess varying social locations. These include our abilities/(dis)abilities, age, class, education level, ethnicity, political affiliation, race, religion, etc. Crenshaw introduced the concept of Intersectionality in 1989 with the initial focus on lower class Black women. Intersectionality theory has since expanded exponentially to include multiple social markers to help us understand how these can intersect to further marginalize certain individuals. An example of this within the LGBTQ communities was demonstrated by *Black Lives Matter*, when in 2016 as Honoured Group in the *Toronto Pride Parade*, they halted the procession until a set of demands were acknowledged, indicating that the so-called progress made in

the LGBTQ+ communities has benefited some more than others. We may have achieved a level of recognition as 2-LGBTQ+ people, but for those who are older, very young, of lower class, (dis)abled, ethnicized, racialized, etc., life is materially experienced very differently.

I conclude this feature by sharing some insights from one of my research studies in which I theorize what I am terming, *Queer Liberation*. The aforementioned concepts of liberating freedom that was espoused during the gay liberation era touched deeply on the concept of 'Being ...', for it imagined a different future, one not constricted by the patriarchal and heteronormative expectations of society. It pointed to the shortcomings of society's impositions and how they drove people's true selves into hiding. Yet, such liberationist ideations require a major discursive shift. A shift we have not fully achieved, yet continues to be in process. The progressive, radical, sex positive notions of queer that goes far beyond equality towards a freedom that includes spaces for self-defined identities and fluidities can make for a meaningful connection to liberation.

'Being ... Ourselves,' free of society's improbable expectations, acknowledging our varying social locations, resisting that which we find inauthentic, and embracing our diversity, is 'Being ... true to Ourselves.' As in the words of the liberationists "living our lives as we choose," is queer in its identity and liberationist in its action, and it is this combination that I am currently theorizing as a means forward.

---

Nick J. Mulé, PhD is an associate professor in the School of Social Work and seconded to the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, where he is the Coordinator of the Sexuality Studies Program at York University. A queer activist for many years, Nick is the founder, past chairperson and current secretary of Queer Ontario. In addition, he is a psychotherapist in private practice serving LGBTQ people in Toronto.





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# A Tale of Two Activists

In Canada, the LGBTQ human rights movement has made a lot of progress yet these rights have not been fully realized across the board. Institutionalized homophobia, transphobia, and the fear of coming out still dominate much of our discourse about LGBTQ rights. So how do we as LGBTQ people change the very systems and organizations we work within?

As in Kevin Robertson and Sofie Lasiuk both attest to, living one's truth in the public eye requires an enormous amount of self-reflection, and the willingness to be patient with those that may not appear to be on our side. Yet despite their struggles for acceptance, the journey has left a rich and meaningful imprint on their lives, as well as their families, friends and community.

***“Don’t be afraid to be yourself even if the perception is that people won’t accept you.”***

*Kevin Robertson,  
Bishop Anglican Diocese of Toronto*

LGBTQ activists are rarely born that way. It's a role that more often than not people are presented with in response to organizational or institutional homophobia. Such is the case with Kevin who grew up in the Anglican Church, which is why he holds a vested interest in ensuring his church be welcoming to all people, including his partner Mohan.

Kevin's first date with his now-husband Mohan was on a rainy Friday night in August. They met for drinks at The Comrade on Queen Street East, and as far as dates go it went really well. However, Mohan had to leave the next morning

on a month-long trip to India. During their time apart Kevin had been thinking a lot about that initial date, but after a few weeks of not hearing anything from Mohan, Kevin assumed the connection wasn't mutual.

As Kevin explains though, that thought would be short-lived. “I didn't know exactly when he was coming back so I was surprised when I came home from work one day and there was a business card in my door from Mohan. An attached note stated that he had lost his cellphone and all his contacts, but he had remembered me telling him where I lived.”

That was just the beginning of a real-life fairy tale that saw them married in December 2018 at the Diocese's Cathedral Church of St. James, and then embarking on a co-parenting journey with two beautiful children who both turn eight this April. Through all of this, Kevin has been challenging his church to become a more welcoming space, particularly for LGBTQ people.

No stranger to controversy, Kevin is the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada, which opens him up to fear and rejection. Yet his experience of how the members within his 55 parishes have responded to him being married to another man has been heart-warming. “I have been amazed and moved by the fact that Anglicans who have immigrated to Canada and found homes in our parishes, whether they are from Jamaica, Barbados, India, or Sri Lanka, have come to say that they didn't know what to make of this, but we've come to love you.” So while Kevin's choice



to be out within the church has created a more welcoming space for many people, his work is far from over. Enter the Lambeth Conference.

The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of bishops from the Anglican Communion that is overseen by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The first such conference took place in 1867, and it's hugely significant because it only happens once every ten years. This is why Kevin and Mohan were so disheartened when they learned same-sex partners would not be invited to attend.

Kevin had met the Archbishop of Canterbury about a year prior in London, at a conference for new bishops in the Anglican communion. At the Archbishop's invitation, Kevin and Mohan flew over to see him, along with about thirty others. Shortly after arriving Kevin and Mohan were invited to Lambeth Palace, on the south side of the Thames River, just across the river from parliament. "Are you bishop Kevin Robertson?" a voice called out to Kevin. "Can you come with me?" the man says, leading them out of the room and down several long hallways until they finally reached the office where the Archbishop was waiting.

After a quick introduction, Kevin and Mohan, in no uncertain terms, were told that although spouses were invited to the conference, this would not apply to people in same-sex marriages. Nevertheless, Mohan is planning on going to the conference, and possibly host auxiliary events, as a way of drawing attention to the injustice that the Archbishop had tried to

publicly excuse as an effort to appease Bishops from more conservative countries.

A common narrative is that issues of sexuality and gender identity are Western white privilege issues. Kevin pushes back on this, "When I was in Canterbury a year ago, a Kenyan bishop came up to me and said, you know Kevin, I have two priests in my diocese who have come to me and told me that they are gay. They could never tell their parishes or their communities, as they would totally be driven out of town, but they told me. Sexual identity is not an issue for the privileged. That's such a homophobic attitude, as it has nothing to do with privilege. It has to do with humanity. There are people who are wrestling with issues of identity and sexuality in places like Tanzania just as they are here."

***"I want to be a role model by showing people who are terrified to come out that you can be successful and be who you are"***

*Sofie Lasiuk,  
Firefighter and Captain, Toronto*

Sofie and Denise have known each other since 1980, having met in high school, eventually moving in together and getting married. In many ways, this was the perfect relationship, as at the time Sofie had been living as man. A disconnect between how she felt inside and what the world around her expected. Coming out for many LGBTQ people is terrifying, because there's a very real possibility of losing



the people you love, but as Sofie found out, there was a lot more to gain, for everyone.

Sofie has no trouble recalling the day she told her wife Denise that she was trans. “I knew I owed it to her to tell her the truth, and it was shocking to her, but I figured that by telling her the truth we’d be able to work through it.” Coming out as trans to your partner is rarely easy, however, Denise turned into her biggest advocate, ultimately encouraging her to come out at work. For Sofie, the process involved working with a therapist over several months, as she began presenting as her true self in more and more situations. Yet despite her new found freedoms, Sofie still wasn’t ready to come out at work.

In December 2017 all that changed. “My wife and I went to the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. I was already presenting as female in many areas of my life, but going to that conference as my true self was an experience from which there was no turning back,” she explains. The experience of being accepted by like-minded people can be as transformative as being surrounded by role models who all want the best for you. With her confidence growing and Denise firmly at her side, Sofie went into work in April of 2018 and came out to 3,500 coworkers. “I gathered my immediate staff together with senior management and told them my truth, and I was accepted beyond my wildest dreams. Originally I was thinking the worst, planning for early retirement, but



instead I was accepted and allowed to continue contributing to my job in meaningful ways.”

Living one’s truth can and does create push back yet it’s often how we respond that determines how quickly, or painstakingly slow, our progress will ultimately be. The endgame may be for complete acceptance, but while we wait there’s plenty of beauty that can be found in people whose opinions have shifted away from intolerance, and into a genuine curiosity and love for their fellow human. As Sofie’s life demonstrates, advocating for LGBTQ rights doesn’t have to be a battle fought with anger. but rather it takes a willingness to take a stand for who you are, and the moral courage to stick with it despite how things may first appear. “I’m a realist and I know I wouldn’t be able to do what I did back then without all that support. So my advice to an earlier me would be, don’t wait. I would have been quicker to come out had there been role models, but there just weren’t any back then.”

But there are now, thank you Kevin and Sofie!

---

Raymond Helkio is an author, director filmmaker, and graduate of Ontario College of Art & Design. He currently lives in both Toronto and New York. His most recent play, LEDUC, is now available in paperback. [www.raymondhelkio.com](http://www.raymondhelkio.com)



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# THE REALITY OF CYBER CONNECTIONS

**Back in the early 2000s, when computers were still big grey cubes and cell phones were tiny devices used for actually making calls, sending texts, or playing Snake, online dating was still very taboo...especially in the gay dating world. And to think we had to wait for a dial-up connection from a landline! If you don't know what a landline is, you're probably too young to even be on a dating app, but I digress.**

Twenty years ago, people who wanted to talk (and possibly meet) other like-minded people were required to log onto these things called chat rooms on the World Wide Web. Their popularity grew overnight and society has been changed by them ever since. Back then there were dating telephone services, as well, but websites like MSN and Yahoo allowed for singles to share photos and connect in real-time, for free! Other sex-driven sites followed suit, like Gay.com and the personals on Craigslist, which were convenient but also risky at times for the LGBTQ+ community. However,

none of them compared to the endless selection of online dating services available today.

A study conducted in 2005 at the Pew Research Centre in Washington, D.C., reported 44% of participants believed online dating to be an effective way to meet people. By 2015, this percentage had skyrocketed to 59% (and continues to increase). Whether you're looking for straight-up sex, platonic friendship, moral support, or you're just bored and want to chat — finding a suitor online is not just the current norm, it's a multi-million dollar business. Millennials were indefinitely at the helm of the normalization of online dating, and it's since become a phenomenon. Millions of people of all ages, genders, and sexualities from all over the globe are logging onto dating apps and sites, and they're unafraid to do and/or say so! It's a far cry from the controversy it stirred in the Year 2K.

For argument's sake, let's take a look at online dating from a single person's perspective. You're home alone on a Saturday night and you've been staring at the blank canvas that makes up your social calendar, for what seems like an hour. As you scroll through a paradoxically full (but never available) contact list, you realize you're absolutely spending this entire Saturday night alone watching



# SCRUFF

Netflix. Not what you had in mind? So why not open a dating app and put yourself out there without ever having to actually...go...out...there?

As episode two of whatever you're watching on Netflix begins to play in the background and the app of your choosing asks you to create a profile, think about what you're looking for. Is it a one-time hookup you're after? Do you want some new friends to connect with? Who and what you seek will determine which app/website you should invest your time in. Take some time to research, and read some user reviews, even. Live a little!

An important thing to remember: dating apps and websites act as a social game. You yourself make decisions by way of conversation, and (generally) that's in hopes of 'scoring big' or 'making it to the next round' - a 'home run,' if you will. And whether that's satisfying a sexual, emotional or social urge, the whole reason you're logged on to begin with is that you're in search of something. Find it, and you "win." At least, temporarily.

Instead, you might have a non-committal idea in mind, so you keep your expectations low (which is a good idea in general). Is it any wonder that you are vulnerable to committing some social blunders in the quest for a new love or connection? In fact, online dating allows for a sense of community that in the heteronormative world - particularly for sexual minorities living in rural areas - would otherwise be perceived as non-existent.

This gives sexual minorities space from which to connect more readily and willingly, bypassing the whole heteronormative courtship processes.

Even with all this newfound acceptance of online dating, it's a shame that for one in every ten minorities, the dating market tends to favour particular races, classes, ages, genders, and sexual orientations. The "community" itself takes on a multitude of meanings and is constructed online by the one-in-ten people who identify as Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Bisexual, Gay and/or Lesbian.

As queer people, we see so many of our friends, (both single and in relationships) constantly refreshing their *Grindr* or checking in to see who they've matched with on *Tinder*. At this point there's an app/website for everyone! We got *Scruff*, *Growlr*, *Bumble*, *Match.com*, *eHarmony*, *Christian Mingle*, *PinkCupid*, *Elite Singles*... The list goes on and on and on!

This in and of itself is as progressive as it can be problematic - from consenting couples seeking arrangements to cheating spouses on *Ashley Madison* — online dating is a "slippery when wet" kind of slope. Just be sure to watch your step.

Joey Viola is the Co-Founder of MoJo Toronto and an LGBTQ community leader who utilizes his passion and flair for the art of writing by bringing a fresh perspective in reviewing entertainment and advocating for equality, tolerance, and social/political justice.



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# Stratford vs Shaw

## A Tale of Two Cities



by Bryen Dunn

**Here in Toronto, we're lucky to have so many opportunities to catch some top-notch theatre presentations, along with a vast array of independent, and more fringe alternative productions – Beyond Mirvish, shall we say.**

However, there are some really great things happening just a couple hours outside the city limits, in two different, yet similar smaller town centres with big aspirations.

Both are located west of the city, with Niagara-on-the-Lake paying homage to the late, great George Bernard Shaw, and Stratford standing up for the almighty William Shakespeare. While many venture out to catch the latest classic tale being retold, or perhaps something from the more emerging artist offerings, there's plenty ad beyond theatre as well. With exclusive shuttle bus transportation offered from Toronto, there's no reason not to make your way west to discover all that these two places have to offer.

### Niagara On The Lake

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a renowned wine, culinary, and theatre destination that attracts visitors from around the world. Founded in 1962, the Shaw Festival is the second largest repertory theatre company in North America. Originally programmed to reflect works written within George Bernard Shaw's life span (1856–1950), then expanded to include plays set within this time frame, the mandate now is to celebrate his life and spirit by creating theatre that is as entertaining and provocative as Shaw himself.

The Shaw Festival is comprised of three separate theatres, each unique in and of itself – the flagship Festival Theatre, the historic vaudevillian Royal George Theatre, and the intimate Jackie Maxwell Studio Theatre. This year, the Shaw classic, *The Devil's Disciple* is being presented, which is described as a comedy, an adventure, and a love story set at the height of the American Revolution; a perfect complement to *The History of Niagara*. This was Shaw's first major hit, and has some of his best scenes and his sharpest comedy.

Toronto based actor and playwright, Damien Atkins, is looking forward to quite a season at Shaw this year. He not only gets to play the leading role of Sherlock, in *Sherlock Holmes and the Raven's Curse*, but he also has adapted for the stage the C.S. Lewis fantasy children's novel, *Prince Caspian*. This world premiere production will be accompanied by pre-show workshops in which audience members will be made ready to take part in the performance.



There's also several opportunities to take backstage tours, attend workshops and talks, and participate in some more unconventional type theatre offerings. For instance, *Flush*, is a one-act staging based on the novella by Virginia Woolf that takes place midday during lunch time. The *Beyond The Stage* programming allows theatre goers to get a better understanding of the theatre industry, with seminars and symposiums that provide in depth details on how the festival operates to a week-long acting course and even a program based around *The Art of Burlesque*. Yes, please!

Of course, there's no way you can visit the region without stopping by some of the nearly 30 wineries that draw in as many, if not more, tourists than the theatres do. Each winery typically offers tours and tastings, that can be done on one's own or via one of several tour companies that offer group tours.

For celebrity chasers, there are two prominent Canadian icons who have established themselves in the wine business here. *Wayne Gretzky Estates* is a 23,000-square-foot facility that includes a winery, distillery, tasting areas, retail and hospitality spaces, and a barrel cellar. The facility also features an exclusive collection of Wayne Gretzky memorabilia, housed in a building that was inspired by the Gretzky farmhouse in Canning, Ont. Be sure to try his wine-barrel aged whisky!

As well, Dan Akroyd branded wines have been produced since he developed a partnership with *Diamond Estates* in 2005. While filming *Blues Brothers*, Dan was exposed to a wide variety of wines and was inspired to create a line of wines suited to his personal taste palate. His exclusive line of red and white offers are produced in small quantity by Lakeview Wine Company, the retail and tasting centre for Diamond Estates.

A great time to plan a visit is during one of the many wine events that happen throughout the year. *Dig Our Roots* is a weekend-long celebration

that takes place in April, where several wineries open their doors and offer one-of-a-kind and unique experiences that showcase their wines, winemakers, and terroir. *Sip and Sizzle* takes places on weekends in May, allowing guests to experience a unique grilled food item perfectly paired with a local wine, adhering to the "what grows together, goes together" adage. Finally, *Taste The Season* happens in November, and celebrates the holiday season with exceptional VQA's and holiday-inspired food pairings.

Be sure to try one of the infamous regional ice wines, the elixir that is created when grapes that have naturally frozen on the vine are hand-picked and pressed to gently release a single drop of thick, rich, yellow-gold liquid, highly concentrated in natural sugars and acidity. Recently there have been several craft brewery start ups, a couple distilleries, and even a cidery added to the region. Cheers to that!

Other events of interest to watch out for are the *Bravo Niagara Festival of the Arts*, *Music Niagara Festival*, and the *Niagara Jazz Festival*. As well, *Pride Niagara* is a great opportunity to meet locals from within the LGBTQ community. This year, festivities take place May 29 to June 6, 2020 with details on the website. More local information can also be found on the *Out in Niagara* website.

Plan to stay overnight and enjoy some of the great dining offered, and sample some of those wine purchases you made earlier in the day. Vintage Hotels has a few heritage properties in the town, *Prince of Wales*, *Queen's Landing*, *Pillar and Post*, and the *Moffat Inn*. There's also *The Oban Inn* that has an on-site spa for those wanting the ultimate pampering package.



## Stratford

With its name being affiliated with England's Stratford-Upon-Avon, the birthplace of William Shakespeare, local journalist Tom Patterson decided to offer local residents a glimpse into some of the great writer's wonderful works. He developed what was the beginning of the *Stratford Festival* in 1952, and the following year staged the first production, and the rest is history as they say. Today, the Festival is going stronger than ever, with four theatres operating simultaneously offering several different productions each year, from Shakespeare to the more avant-garde.

The Festival was one of the first arts festivals in the country, and continues to be one of its most prominent, with four separate theatres - *Festival Theatre*, *the Avon Theatre*, *the Studio Theatre*, and the newly built *Tom Patterson Theatre*. The opening and official dedication of the new theatre will be held on June 11, the 100th anniversary of his birth. Actor Colm Feore will deliver the first words on the stage as he assumes the leading role in Shakespeare's *Richard III* in a nod to the festival's inaugural play in 1953.

Other classics honouring the festival's Shakespearean roots include, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Hamlet*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. For those seeking something a bit different, patrons may want to check out *Hamlet-911*, which is set to recast the tragedy of the Danish prince to touch on issues of today. As well, *An Undiscovered Shakespeare* offers 30 unique performances in which improvisers dramatize an audience member's love story in iambic pentameter, a poetic rhythm used by Shakespeare.

Beyond Shakespeare, the Festival has been venturing out well beyond conventional theatre, with productions like 2018's *Rocky Horror Show* setting the record for the longest running show in Festival history. This year continues the tradition of outside-the-box programming, with the debut of a new musical about the highs and lows of a

rock duo, called *Here's What It Takes*, from former Barenaked Ladies singer Steven Page, playwright Daniel MacIvor, and director Donna Feore. With an original score by Steven Page and book by Daniel MacIvor, this brand new musical charts the journey of fictional rock duo *Walker and Rhodes*, from their start as children's entertainers through their reign as pop stars of the nineties, to their eventual decline and breakup.

Other musical offerings include mountings of Broadway hits *Monty Python's Spamalot*, and *Chicago*, which is the first major production outside of Broadway and London's West End in more than 30 years.

Additional highlights this season include, *Frankenstein Revived*, a new work from playwright and composer David Coulter, a staging of Tomson Highway's, *The Rez Sisters*, and Edward Albee's, *Three Tall Women*. Those wanting to perhaps learn a bit more about our Prime Minister, you may want to book at seat to Margaret Trudeau's new one-woman show, *Certain Woman of an Age*.

True theatre aficionados can go behind the curtain with exclusive backstage tours, be entertained at a *Drag Brunch*, listen to *Rambles of Creative Women*, or take in a late-night of comedy on Fridays. For something more fringe in nature, check out *SpringWorks*, an indie theatre and arts festival, *Stratford Writers Festival*, and the *Appetite for Words Festival*, held in October, that focuses on the literary and culinary arts, letting participants "taste the words they're hearing" as chefs create menus inspired by popular books. Just a short drive from town there's the *Blyth Festival*, which presents contemporary Canadian plays during summer.

Pop fans should definitely stop by the *Stratford Perth Museum* for a glimpse into hometown hero Justin Bieber's life. The *Steps to Stardom* exhibition includes memorabilia from his childhood to his recent wedding to Hailey Baldwin. For those wanting more, there's a Bieber map that can be



followed that highlights several points of interest from the Beibs life, or pick up a copy of *Justin Bieber: Steps to Stardom* book. Complete your pilgrimage by taking a selfie with his bronze star in front of the *Avon Theatre*, where he busked hoping to raise enough money to take his mother to Disney World.

Other celebrities with an affiliation here include, Duke Ellington, who dedicated "Sweet Thunder" to Stratford, Oscar Peterson's career-making concerts were recorded here, Glenn Gould summered here for many years, and Margaret Atwood has been spotted many times, often grabbing a cup of her Atwood Blend at *Balzac's Coffee Roasters*. A great java fix can also be found at either *Revel*, or *The Red Rabbit*.

Heading out after the theatre, there are several pub/club establishments in town, including *The Hub*, *Molly Blooms*, *Black Swan*, *Boar's Head*, *Bar 151*, and *Revival House*. Check out, *Start*, Stratford's arts and culture magazine for all the latest happenings. There's no shortage of places to grab a bite either. *The Common* offers an eclectic mix of traditional comfort food and contemporary world blends, while lesbian-owned *Planet Diner* is the perfect spot to jump back to a 1950's themed diner. Fine dining enthusiasts should definitely book a table at *The Prune Restaurant*, offering set menu meals, and a beautiful backyard terrace. *Pollo Morta* opens their doors this spring serving up tasty fried chicken delicacies, spearheaded from the group of worker-owned restaurants that include, *The Red Rabbit*, *Okazu 85 Downie* and *Old Man & Son*.

Stratford Tourism offers a couple of fun scavenger-like self-guided tours, where visitors can choose to do either the *Bacon and Ale Trail* or *Chocolate Trail*, or better yet, both. A great way to do this is by bike, easily rented from, *Totally Spoke'D*. While

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out wheeling around, why not stop by *Junction 56 Distillery*, for their wide variety of small batch spirits, or one of the two local craft-breweries, *Shakespeare Brewing Company*, and *Black Swan Brewing*, brewers of the *Paul Bellini Peach Wheat Ale*.

With so much to do, a weekend stay is definitely worthwhile, and a fun time to visit would be during, *Infinite Pride Stratford*, taking place May 30 to June 7, 2020. For accommodations, there's the gay-owned *Edison's Café and Inn*, and the soon to be opened *Perth County Inn*, from the same owners just down the block. *Edison's* pays tribute to Thomas Edison, who was a resident of the Inn in 1863, while *Perth County* playfully honours Stratford's history, where guests can grab a cocktail at the on site *Ulysses* lounge. The owners also operate, *Stratford Road Trips*, a great source of information for things to do.

*The Welly Lofts* are another great option, offering fully-furnished self-contained living quarters right in the centre of town.

Getting to either location is easy, as both destinations offer their Express bus shuttles from Toronto, starting at just \$25 return with the purchase of a theatre ticket. See you stage right!

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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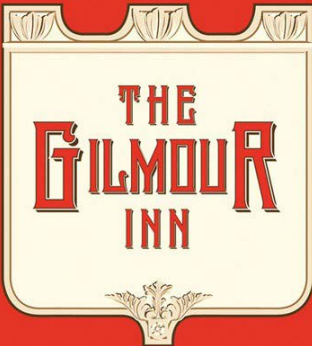
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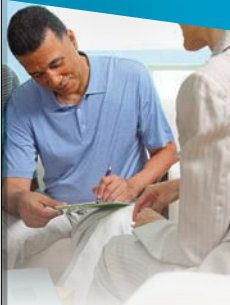
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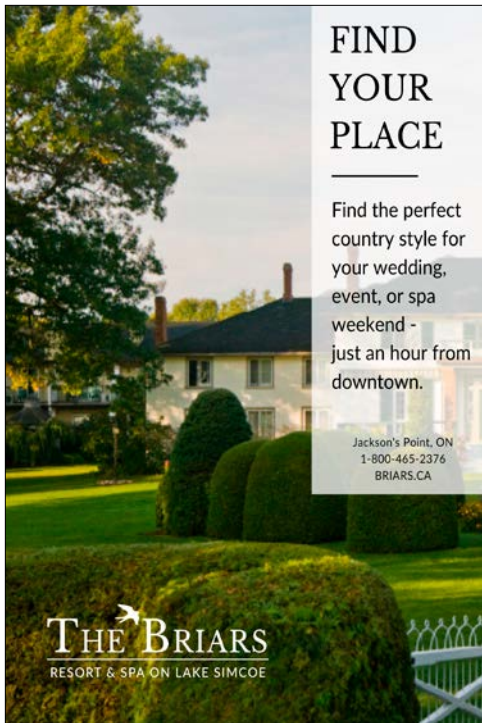
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## Hot Artist



Emily Lawrence

### There is no more sensual place than the kitchen—particularly when artist Emily Lawrence gets to cooking up a new creation.

In recent years, Lawrence has been whipping up sensational servings that demand the attention of all five of our senses. Whether she's dazzling with bright, bold colours and textures (Hodgepodge), memory scenting photographs (Scratch and Sniff Menu), or imbuing sexual pleasure in everyday objects (Mouthfeel), she continues to manifest our distinct sensual feelings in amazing sculptural and photographic installations.

Looking over her exhibition and creative history is a true feast for the senses, and will make you wish you'd been there to experience them in person. The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design graduate has featured works that are bold and bright, lush and textured, challenging and subversive. Cooking, and an overall sensual connection to food, are as fundamental to her art creation as her education and practice are.

"I'm in a bit of down time with my art practice, so I'm taking a break between projects," she notes. "To keep my creative juices flowing without feeling like I'm still working on my work, I'll just throw myself into the kitchen." After having recently spent much time exploring scent, she's currently ruminating on the sense of taste for her collection of scratch and sniff photography, *For Ruth*, and *Scratch and Sniff Menu*. These works are connected photos of food with olfactory sensation, based on the recollections of those with Alzheimer's, beginning with her own grandmother, Ruth.

For some artists, their work is a hub of personal feelings, desires and dreams. Their media becomes projections of themselves, through subtle or explicit means. Emily takes a different tact. "I don't really portray much of myself, my sexuality, or my relationships in my art practice, as much as I do sexuality in general," she reveals. "I find the combination of food and suggestions of sexuality a really playful way to bring in an audience." Emily chooses the subtle route when infusing sexuality into her works, through puns, visual references, and other tools of humour.

In much the same way, you'd be tempted to think she lives in a pronounced, pastel playground. Colour and kaboom play such a significant role in her artistic presentation. "I've always been attracted to bright colours and bold colour ways, so it's always a part of my vision for a project. It's what first attracts me to an idea, what keeps me excited about it during my process, and what stays with me as my favourite elements of my work." Curiously though, that does not permeate into her personal space. "I try to keep my studio, my home, and my clothing pretty neutral and free of bright colours, though actually. I like a clean slate. My aesthetic preferences in my art practice are very different from my personal style and taste."

We're eagerly anticipating Emily's next project, but we will have to wait a little bit to sate that hunger. Currently in a downtime between projects, she does have a plan for her next work that sounds fantastic. "I'm getting ready to start a photographic series that translates dream meals and desserts of children. I'll be working on this project throughout 2020 and aim to create quite a big series based on dozens of interviews."

[www.emilylawrence.art](http://www.emilylawrence.art)

Jon Pressick is a writer who focuses on sex and sexuality. View his work at [sexinwords.ca](http://sexinwords.ca)



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**ReQueered Tales** re-publishes award-winning, post-Stonewall, pre-2000 gay and lesbian fiction, focusing primarily on mystery, horror and mainstream/literary genres. Perhaps forty years of gay fiction—and notably gay and lesbian mystery, detective and suspense fiction—has been teetering on the brink of obscurity. Orphaned works, orphaned authors, many living and some having passed away—with no one to make the case for their creations to be returned to print (and e-print!).

It's a chance for those who lived through this period to reflect back on these classic novels, and for a new generation of readers, these tales are full of insights into the gay world of the 1960s, '70s, '80s and '90s. Below is just one of the many titles now available.

### ***In The Game by Nikki Baker***

When businesswoman Virginia Kelly meets her old college chum Bev Johnson for drinks late one night, Bev confides that her lover, Kelsey, is seeing another woman. Ginny had picked up that gossip months ago, but she is shocked when the next morning's papers report that Kelsey was found murdered behind the very bar where Ginny and Bev had met. Worried that her friend could be implicated, Ginny decides to track down Kelsey's killer and contacts a lawyer, Susan Coogan. Susan takes an immediate, intense liking to Ginny, complicating Ginny's relationship with her live-in lover. Meanwhile Ginny's inquiries heat up when she learns the Feds suspected Kelsey of embezzling from her employer.

**Nikki Baker** is the first African-American author in the lesbian mystery genre and her protagonist, Virginia Kelly is the first African-American lesbian detective in the genre. Interwoven into

the narrative are observations on the intersectionality of being a woman, an African-American, and a lesbian in a “man’s” world of finance and life in general.

*First published to acclaim in 1991, this new edition features a 2020 foreword by the author.*

## **Excerpt**

Her apartment was dark and sad, large and claustrophobic at the same time because so little light came in from outside. The windows were small and only along one wall. The developer had spent his money on things like skylights for the upstairs place. Bev’s apartment was rental property, an afterthought to the owner’s unit, but she had fixed it up really nice. It was homey with stuff from her old place when she lived alone, and I had liked it there.

“I’m sorry, Bev,” I said, and tried unsuccessfully to laugh. “I should be comforting you, not the other way around.”

She shook her head. “Oh, honey, I’m all cried out. That’s all,” she said. “After Kelsey told me about that woman, things don’t seem real anymore.”

I blew my nose and nodded. She was right. Things didn’t seem real at all. My life was starting to feel like a movie with me standing outside watching, and not a good movie either, not one with a happy ending. Just like in the movies, I couldn’t help asking Bev what exactly had happened with her and Kelsey. The subject had all the fascination of a traffic fatality on the freeway when you know not to look but at the last minute cannot help yourself.

Bev looked as if I’d balled up my fist and hit her in the face. “Are you saying you think I killed Kelsey?” She poured the leftover water from the tea down the sink and let the kettle smack on the counter when she put it down.

I wasn't saying that at all. "No. I was just wondering what happened, that's all."

"A friend wouldn't need to ask me that," said Bev, and I didn't like the implication. But she told me that she and Kelsey had had a fight before she called me for a drink. She swore the fight hadn't been at Gloria's, though. They had fought over the card in Kelsey's apartment after dinner. Kelsey had left to go she didn't know where and Bev had sat downstairs by herself in the dark until she called me to meet her. The police had taken a statement, but they hadn't asked if she and Kelsey were lovers and Bev hadn't volunteered it. She was angry and hurt and I couldn't blame her.

But I said: "Why didn't you tell me you'd had a fight when we talked at the Penguin last night?"

Bev looked me square in the face. "Last night you were drunk," she said. "How much good would your advice have been?"

I told her I wasn't saying she had killed Kelsey, but that Naomi was afraid the police would think so. I tried to explain how bad that would be if she got arrested, but it sounded mostly like I was worried about myself even to me. The more I talked the worse it sounded. When I offered her the defense lawyer's number, she handed the paper right back to me without looking at it.

"I think you'd better leave now, Ginny," she said, and it seemed to me there was no use fighting.

I picked up my briefcase and walked out. Bev closed the door as soon as I was over the threshold. I heard the deadbolt turn behind me and I felt like shit.

---

Alexander Inqlis is the Canadian founding partner of ReQueered Tales, based in Toronto. [www.requeeredtales.com](http://www.requeeredtales.com)





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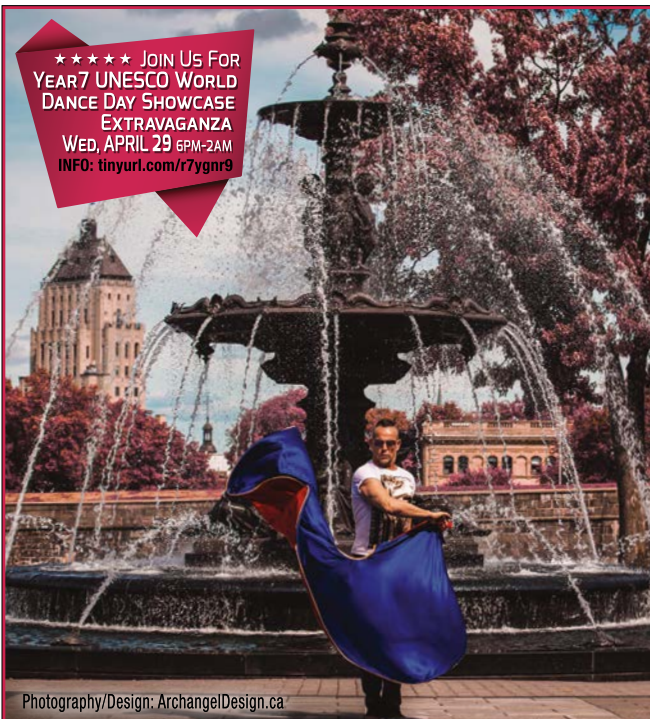
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## Community Cornerstone

by Kelly Wilk

that lens there is a real effect on all our lives, regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, but in particular, those of us who identify as queer or trans,” Mulé explains.

Starting university for the first time is a tremendous mental, emotional, and psychological shift, and especially for queer students if they didn’t grow up in queer positive families. Students hail from all over, and Mulé tells me that this is a challenge for instructors, particularly in this program where they have to be sensitive to queer students and their level of comfort with the issues of sexuality and gender.

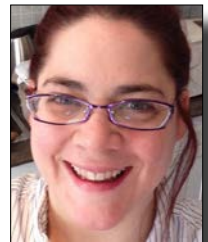
“One of the wonderful things is witnessing students reading literature for the first time that deals with sexuality and gender issues. Their minds expand and they soar with it. They have the chance to read and learn about it, and they are going through their own personal growth at the same time,” he continues.

Field placement has also come up in conversation in hopes of creating opportunities for community outreach. One of the values that York maintains is importance on experiential education. “It is a means of making a connection between our program and the community,” Mulé concludes.

One thing is clear, the students in this program have a bright personal and professional future ahead of them and we as a community can only benefit from their expertise.

[futurestudents.yorku.ca/program/sexuality-studies/laps](http://futurestudents.yorku.ca/program/sexuality-studies/laps)  
[liberal-arts.yorku.ca/program/sexuality-studies/](http://liberal-arts.yorku.ca/program/sexuality-studies/)

Kelly Wilk is a freelance writer and single mom to a six-year-old, red-headed, Irish, Aries boy who is growing up way too fast. Follow “The Ginger Gent” on PinkPlayMags blog page, and Brave. Creative. Me at [www.kellywilk.ca](http://www.kellywilk.ca).



### Sexual Studies Program York University

I had the opportunity to sit down with Nick Mulé, Ph.D. the coordinator of the undergrad *Sexual Studies Program at York University*, which began in 2004. Faculty from various programs had been working to make this program a reality, and when Mulé arrived, a professor rooted in social work and research, he was given the reigns.

This interdisciplinary program comes at the subject of sex, sexuality and gender from multiple ways in what Mulé calls, “a broad and sweeping approach.” Not looking at sexuality in isolation, but how it functions in society. The many courses in the curriculum address how sexuality impacts the social, artistic, geographic, historical, literary, psychological, cultural, and political perspectives studied.

The students start placement straight out of high school, with perhaps social upbringings that may not have sufficiently addressed sexuality or gender. It is especially relevant for LGBTQ+ youth who may be in the dark about their relationship with these topics. The curriculum allows all students personal freedom to add to the academic freedom, and be able to dig into these topics.

Mulé says, “we try to take them beyond a limited view of sexual desires and sexual activities.”

The program also creates an opportunity to ground them in core subjects before moving onto specialized areas. The *Sexual Studies Program* is housed in the larger *School of Gender, Sexuality & Women’s Studies*. The courses look at sexism in the gay community, women’s issues in society, and gender identity and expression, including the choice not to identify with a gender at all.

“Students often don’t get the link between sexuality or gender issues with the economy, or with the environment, or with national issues and politics. When you are wearing



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# SPRING IN THE CITY

by Sherry Sylvain

## All the Little Animals I Have Eaten

March 24 - April 12; various show times

Nightwood Theatre, 306 - 15 Case Goods Lane, Toronto

Set in the extraordinarily modern bistro of an all-women's condominium, "All The Little Animals I Have Eaten" follows a tender-hearted young server on the most harrowing shift of her life. With a stellar cast of comedic performers embodying a wild spectrum of characters, this play examines the commodification of feminism, neo-liberalism, and the increasingly unattainable dream of snatching a piece of the real estate pie.

[www.nightwoodtheatre.net](http://www.nightwoodtheatre.net)

**TIP:** *I can't be sure, but perhaps this is not oriented to the committed vegan; or, ironically, maybe it is.*

## The Spring Cottage Life Show

March 26 to 29; various times each day

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

Meet 600 exhibitors showcasing boats, docks, builders, contractors, innovative building products, green solutions, decor and style, arts and crafts, food and entertaining, water toys and more.

[www.shows.cottagelife.com](http://www.shows.cottagelife.com)

**TIP:** *Get those comfy shoes ready; there will be a lot of walking to see all the good stuff that will get you in the state of mind for the forthcoming warmth.*

## Rainbow Ski Weekend

March 27 to 29

Blue Mountain Village, 156 Jozo Weider Blvd, The Blue Mountains

Free Pride-themed celebration of diversity on and off the slopes, with entertainment, family-friendly activities, parties and après-ski fun all weekend long. There is also a 90's themed party on Saturday that requires separate tickets.

[www.bluemountainvillage.ca/rainbowski](http://www.bluemountainvillage.ca/rainbowski)

**TIP:** *Pack all your best ski-bunny attire, along with your dancing shoes, and maybe a copy of your extended health insurance information.*

## National Geographic Live: Kakani Katija, Bioengineer

March 29 to 31; various show times

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

As a child, Kakani Katija dreamed of being an astronaut. She trained as an aerospace engineer, but eventually became captivated by an even less explored environment than space: our Earth's oceans. As a bioengineer, instead of searching space for signs of life, she studies the waters that are teeming with it. Katija hopes to illuminate the twilight zones of the oceans, and its little explored midwaters, with technology inspired by the creatures who live in it.

[www.roythomsonhall.com](http://www.roythomsonhall.com)

**TIP:** *With four show times over three days, there should be ample opportunity to immerse yourself in this educational entertainment.*

## Roommate Mixer for LGBTQ+ Folks

April 1; May 6; June 3 – 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The 519 Community Centre, 519 Church St., Toronto

Looking for a roommate? Drop in, and meet and connect with other LGBTQ+ individuals who are looking for housing. First Wednesday of every month (subject to change).

[www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)

**TIP:** *Be prepared. Have any pertinent paperwork for an existing or proposed apartment, income information, references, and an idea of the really important characteristics of a potential roommate.*



## Kitten Kaboodle's April Fools Follies

April 1; 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Woody's & Sailor, 467 Church St., Toronto

A curated drag show fundraiser hosted by the current and past Queen Mums - Kitten Kaboodle and Endora St. Moorehead. With fabulous raffle prizes and a possible open stage if time allows.

[www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com](http://www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com)

**TIP:** *I like to hit the bank and get a fistful of \$1US bills so I can tip every performer, supporting the charity and showing appreciation for the efforts of every performer donating their time.*

## Flamingo Market - Spring Has Sprung Edition

April 5; May 23 - 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St., Toronto  
Toronto's only independent, bi-monthly market for LGBTQ+ business owners and makers. Featuring, promoting, and fostering the diverse small business and artisan talent that the community has to offer. Flamingo Market is an all inclusive, child friendly environment. All are welcome to attend. Have a gay of' time supporting local talent. Free admission.

[www.buddiesinbadtimes.com](http://www.buddiesinbadtimes.com)

**TIP:** *This is an accessible space. Bring your reusable shopping bags to fill with all the fabulous finds. Carry some cash.*

## Living in Colour: Open Stage

April 9; May 14; June 11 - 9:00 p.m.

Glad Day Bookshop, 499 Church St., Toronto

\$5 COVER or pay more if you can. Bring out your friends and support up-and-coming local QPOC talent each month. Show them love with cover and tips, all of which will be divided between the performers.

[www.gladdaybookshop.com](http://www.gladdaybookshop.com)

**TIP:** *Arrive early to get a good seat for what promises to be a vibrant and entertaining show.*

## Spring Canadian Pet Expo

April 10 to 12; 10:00 a.m.

The International Centre, 6900 Airport Rd., Mississauga

A pet friendly event. All families are invited to bring their four legged, feathered, or scaled companions to take part in the festivities. As well, take in some of the exciting new products and services being offered from the vendors in the marketplace. For families who are considering adding a pet to their daily lives, this show is the place to learn from breeders, veterinarians, and experts in specific fields.

[www.canadianpetexpo.ca](http://www.canadianpetexpo.ca)

**TIP:** *Make sure any children for whom you are responsible are educated on how to behave with animals they don't know. And, maybe pack some tissues and antihistamine.*

## Back Room Comedy

April 15; May 20; June 17 - 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

WAYLA, 996 Queen St. E., Toronto

Robert Watson hosts Leslieville's Queer Comedy Showcase. You never know who his guests will be, but they will make you laugh.

[www.waylabar.ca](http://www.waylabar.ca)

**TIP:** *It's all about timing; don't take a drink of your cocktail just before a punchline or the person in front of you might be wearing it.*

## TICOT Sunday Brunch

April 12, 19; May 10, 17; June 14, 21: 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Church Street Garage, 477 Church St., Toronto

Twice a month (2nd and 3rd Sunday) The Imperial Court of Toronto brings you a Variety Show featuring all kinds of entertainers. Drag Queens, Drag Kings, Live Singers, Musicians and so much more. Proceeds from the show go to support Reign 33's Charities of Choice. These shows are Open Stage format.

[www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com](http://www.theimperialcourtoftoronto.com)

**TIP:** *Tip. Tip, tip - these performers are out at the crack of noon to entertain you and raise funds for charity, all while you enjoy a delicious brunch.*

## The Great Divide

April 25 to May 10; various show times

Meridian Arts Centre, 5040 Yonge St., Toronto

On Saturday, March 25, 1911, at 4:45 pm, a fire broke out on the 8th floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on the lower east side of Manhattan. Within 10 minutes, 146 workers, most of them young women and recent immigrants, lay dead, either on the floor of the sweatshop, or on the street eight stories below. The Great Divide provides an insight into the immigrant and refugee experience of the early 20th Century, and those who paid the ultimate price for seeking opportunity and a new life across the ocean.

[www.meridianartscentre.com](http://www.meridianartscentre.com)

**TIP:** *If you aren't already familiar with this historically significant event, do a little bit of light research in advance of attending. Your appreciation of this production will only be enhanced.*

## Considering Matthew Shepard - Pax Christi Chorale

April 26; 3:00 p.m.

Meridian Arts Centre, 5040 Yonge St., Toronto

Over twenty years since Matthew Shepard was killed for being gay, Pax Christi Chorale presents the Toronto premiere of, *Considering Matthew Shepard*. Combining a variety of musical styles with text that includes passages from Matt's personal journal, interviews and writings from his parents, newspaper reports, and poetic writings.

[www.meridianartscentre.com](http://www.meridianartscentre.com)

**TIP:** *Bring tissues and wear waterproof eye makeup.*

## Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock & Roll

May 3; 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Aga Khan Museum, 77 Wynford Dr., Toronto

Revel in the sounds of rediscovered artists in this moving film about Cambodia's unique rock and roll music scene which was nearly lost forever. During the 1960s and 70s, with war threatening the country's borders, a thrilling new sound emerged, blending traditional melodies and rhythms with western rock and roll. Though the music became the soul of the nation, it was soon brutally repressed by the Khmer Rouge regime's genocidal effort to wipe out all traces of Western influence.

[www.agakhanmuseum.org](http://www.agakhanmuseum.org)

**TIP:** *This documentary, though a few years old, is very enlightening – both musically and socially.*

## Star Wars: The Force Awakens—In Concert

May 7 to 9; various show times

Roy Thomson Hall, 60 Simcoe St., Toronto

In "Star Wars: The Force Awakens", a scavenger and a renegade storm trooper enlist the help of legendary smugglers/freedom fighters, Han Solo and Chewbacca, to transport a droid carrying information regarding the whereabouts of long lost Jedi Master, Luke Skywalker, to General Leia Organa of the Resistance, before it falls into the hands of Kylo Ren and the First Order. Film is accompanied by live symphonic sounds.

[www.tso.ca](http://www.tso.ca)

**TIP:** *Do NOT greet anyone at this concert with "Live long and prosper".*

## Fellowship of Creatures

May 8 to 10; various show times

Trinity St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W., Toronto

Celebrate the creatures of the earth, sea, and sky with an all-new collaborative multimedia experience. Exploring the sights and sounds of the animal kingdom, this season's finale features the musical traditions of singer/drummers, Shirley Hay and Marilyn George, and English, French and Italian Renaissance vocal and instrumental works by composers, Janequin, Purcell, Gibbons, and Ravenscroft.

[www.torontoconsort.org](http://www.torontoconsort.org)

**TIP:** *Put on your classical spring bonnet and your favourite animal prints.*



## IFWTO 2020 > fashion, craft and textile festival

May 28 to 31

Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay W., Toronto

The second biennial Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto (IFWTO) includes a runway with performances, marketplace, art exhibition, hands-on workshops, panels, and networking events.

[www.harbourfrontcentre.com](http://www.harbourfrontcentre.com)

**TIP:** *An opportunity to support and appreciate just a small segment of the beautiful and impressive Indigenous-produced artistry decorating this land.*

## Lavender x Pride Kick-Off

June 6; 10:30 p.m.

Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St., Toronto

Lavender is a party for lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer women, non-binary folks and trans people - everyone welcome. Hosted by Anasimone George.

[www.buddiesinbadtimes.com](http://www.buddiesinbadtimes.com)

**TIP:** *Leave the stereotypes, gender norms, and hangups behind for an evening of fun.*

## Bi+ Pride Social

June 12; 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Tranzac Club, 292 Brunswick Ave., Toronto

An art and photography slideshow, plus potluck style dinner in the Tiki room. Bring a dish to share, or a small donation towards food will be gratefully accepted. Meet local bisexual, pansexual and 2spirit artists. Free! All welcome. Presented by the Bi Arts Festival. Food & nibbles from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., slideshow of awesome art, with music from 7:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

[www.biartsfestival.com](http://www.biartsfestival.com)

**TIP:** The best thing about being open-minded is it increases your options for a date on Saturday night. Why restrict yourself?

## Pride in Business

June 21, 2020

SAVE the DATE, and get excited about the 3rd annual day of shopping, networking, business education, and celebrating our pride, at Pride in Business. Presented by INspired Media and Ontario Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and supported by Canadian LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce and Canadian Women Chamber of Commerce. This event that has become an annual tradition of Pride celebrations is growing bigger, and this year moving to Sunday.

Keep checking [www.prideinbusiness.lgbt](http://www.prideinbusiness.lgbt) for details.

**TIP:** *Bring your dancing shoes!*

Sherry Sylvain is a transgender woman who has been working in the LGBTQ community for too many years to count (or admit to).





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## From The Heart

By Mychol Scully



**F**rom my early teens I was acutely aware that I was “not like the other boys.” In those early years, the ways in which I was not like the other boys remained unclear, but I knew in my gut that this was true.

Through most of my teenage years I convinced myself that I was an extraterrestrial... an engaging fantasy that connected to my obsessive interest in Science Fiction. Even today I am occasionally side-swiped by an internal monologue that echoes those escapist, defensive fantasies about my “other than earthling” predilections.

To be clear, that sense of being... *other*, was a construct requiring a sometimes exhausting effort to “double-think” my identity. The basic human need for connection and a sense of belonging was constantly at odds with my self-perception of being an iconoclast; a self-imposed exile from those who would be (could be... should be) my peers.

In puberty, this sense of “otherness” developed some focus. It became painfully clear that other boys had reactions to “boobs” that I did not. So also, the testosterone fuelled, socially expected levels of aggression and competitiveness that are now sometimes described as toxic masculinity were uncomfortably absent from my psyche.

Modern notions of “being” weren’t on the agenda back then. Either you were “normal” or you weren’t... and society made no allowances for any variations from the perceived norm.

In my later teens and early twenties, I became quite interested in Eastern and Western mysticism and various spiritual pursuits. These explorations provided a whole new vocabulary, both linguistic and conceptual, to think about being and identity. Ideas about the nature and desirability of “being in the moment,” “at one with the Universe,” and other tropes fuelled a renewed sense of belonging, if not to my peers then at least so *something* greater than myself.

Perhaps this is a clue to the importance of the concept of “being.” We don’t exist in a social vacuum. Our identities, and hence our “being,” are inextricably tied up with our relationships to “the other.” In a similar way to the dependence that light and darkness have to define each other, our sense of being is often, if not always, reliant on how we define our relationships... to other people, to our environments and to our vision of the present and future.

For many people, this level of self-exploration and self-awareness can be uncomfortable or impossible to pursue. We are living in a noisy, media-distracted time that constantly assaults our perceptions, often drowning out our internal voices, distracting us from the quiet conversations we might otherwise have with ourselves about the nature of our identities and our place in the

world. The problem is compounded by the very materialistic, consumer-focused society we live in, that separates us from our inherent spiritual natures. Little wonder, then, that Western societies in particular are plagued with depression, anxiety and other mental health issues. The disassociation between our internal, authentic selves and the semi-theatrical role-playing game that is our public persona creates a pressure on our being that twists and distorts our experience and expression of our reality.

## *As Winnie the Pooh might have said, “What to do... what to do?”*

There are no magic bullets to end this disassociation. In spite of what the pharmaceutical industry might have us believe, there is no magic pill to make us “be” our authentic selves. A pill might help you feel calm or collected, but the underlying uncertainty of being is an existential condition that requires reflection, contemplation and a healthy dose of compassion for our selves, in order to create a safe space for us to reconnect with our truth. Only then can we say we are really “being” who we are.

So “what to do... what to do?” There can be no universal recipe that will work for everyone, but there are a few things we can try, to start building that safe space for our internal re-connection efforts.

Any or all of these suggestions can support steps in the right direction, to develop a healthier, supportive sense of being authentic.

### • **Make a schedule**

Repetition is a key tool to develop new, healthier habits. Commit to exercising some of the other suggestions below on a regular schedule, whether first thing in the morning, every Wednesday at lunch time, or winding down before bed.

### • **Turn off your phone.**

Our ubiquitous smartphones are one of the things that chains us to distraction from our inner conversations. Practice “phone breaks” where you actually turn off your phone for a specified amount of time (as little as 30 minutes) on a

regular schedule. I did say “turn it off,” and not just mute notifications or turn off the ringer. The act of physically shutting off your phone sends a strong message to your subconscious that something “other” is happening.

### • **Get outside.**

No, I’m not telling you to jog, run a marathon or climb a mountain. The simple act of stepping outside and wandering without a destination is also a powerful message to your subconscious that something “other” is happening. In our goal driven society, the idea that one might deliberately wander outside without a list of errands to be completed or goals to be achieved is both liberating and therapeutic.

### • **Be still.**

This may be the most challenging suggestion on this list! While the health benefits (both physical and mental) of meditation are widely touted, you don’t need to become a yogi to practice stillness. In the same way that wandering around outside without a destination is therapeutic, so too is deliberately scheduling some time to sit in stillness and let your thoughts and feelings wander without direction or objective. In fact, this may be a defining characteristic of “being” in its essence... a level of comfort with one’s identity that makes no demands, insists on no particular purpose and frees us to simply “be” who we are.

None of these suggestions will, in and of themselves, make over your life or generate a cathartic revelation of your essence of being. What they will do is help you build a place in your head where you can get better acquainted with your authentic self... the first step toward living your authentic life and enjoying “being.”

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# Spring Horoscopes

APRIL 2020 to JUNE 2020

by Julie Antoinette

## Aries (March 21 – April 20)

You are looking back, evaluating past decisions with a clear mind. There are many things you said 'yes' to where a 'no' would have suited you better. Decisions made from emotions could have waited for a calmer frame of mind. Situations avoided could have been better handled with strategic attention. Hindsight is 20/20. Moving forward, remind yourself that you are not starting from scratch, but from experience.

## Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

You find yourself in a power struggle. Someone is insistent on micromanaging your every move. You find it suffocating. Realize that this person seeks to create an external sense of power to balance an internal lack of control. They're working this conflict out by good old Freudian projection. The most compassionate thing would be to mirror them. Reflect and re-direct. Don't struggle alone.

## Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

You find yourself at a fork in the road. Remember when Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz came to a fork in the road on her way to the Emerald City? It was here that she encountered the Straw Man who was stuck because he didn't have a brain. Dorothy asks him, "Well how can you talk if you don't have a brain?" He replied, "I don't know, but some people without brains do an awful lot of talking!" This is your key. Get silent in your mind. The answer will be revealed and the direction to take will be clear.

## Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

Tensions on the home front have been rising for months. A culmination point has been reached, releasing undercurrents that have been brewing like a volcano. You may find the atmosphere raw with devastation. In a way, the Universe has hit the "reset" button for you. You must now build toward a new foundation as your days of coping are over.

## Leo (July 23 – August 22)

That special someone you've had your attention on is also thinking of you. They have started to view you in a different light ever since you hinted at something more recently. You desperately fear rejection but, do not believe your fears for one second. They are afraid too, but not of the same things you are. A heart-to-heart chat over drinks will put you both on the same page. Together, you'll write toward the final chapter in a happily ever after.

## Virgo (August 23 – September 23)

We know how devoted you are, Virgo. But life is showing you to be more selective where you direct your devotion. Not everyone is worthy of your generosity and availing service. Be careful of casting your pearls before swine. There are plenty others who would genuinely appreciate you and your gifts and never dream of taking you for granted. Find your tribe.

## Libra (September 24 – October 23)

Feelings of nostalgia wash over you as you reminisce privately about times passed. If you are honest, you miss the person you were. The world you used to live in was far less complicated. You thrived in the environment of simplicity and ease. Life is showing you a lost part of yourself that you long to have back. Send the invitation and prep your space.

## Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

Time to cool your jets, Scorpio. Your engines have revved on end and your vehicle is near exhaustion. You finally had the release you needed to neutralize your tensions. Let's hope when the dust settles and the smoke clears, that when you turn that key to start again, all will run smoothly.

## Sagittarius (November 23 - December 21)

Have you developed a particular craving for comfort food recently? You may be experiencing a bout of "emotional eating". If it's comfort you're seeking, ask yourself what needs to be comforted? Take it from there, either straight to a trusted friend, poured out into a journal or to a therapist if necessary.

## Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Remember that piece of advice your mother would repeat ad nauseum? Well, now is the time to use it. The situation you find yourself in right now could use a little timeless wisdom from mom. Once all is said and done and put to right, send a little thanks her way for having your back yet again.

## Aquarius (January 20 – February 19)

You've acquired a taste for simplicity and elimination of sensory pollution. The pace of life has left you in a state of near-burnout. While once stimulating, you're craving the other end of the spectrum where life trots at a more leisurely pace. A regular long drive in the country will reset your equilibrium.

## Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

A childhood wound keeps knocking at your door. You may think that phase is over, or that time heals all wounds, but you're mistaken. If you examine your present issues, you'll find that old familiar feeling is ever-present. You're the adult now and can set things to right. Sometimes, we have to parent ourselves.

Julie is a Sociology and Psychology graduate, a Psychotherapy Intern and a lifelong student of the psyche. She seeks to relay intuitive messages of guidance from the collective astrological archetypes. As above, so below.





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## Looking Back

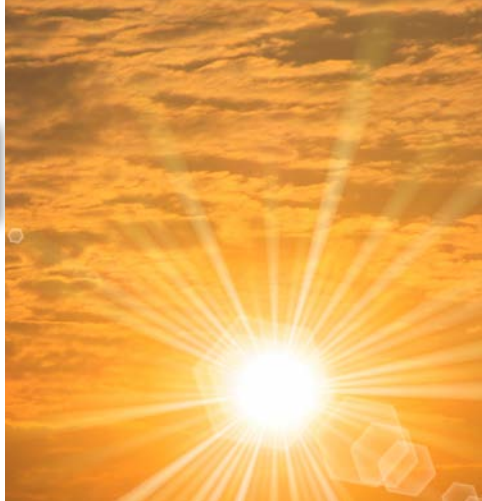
by Joie Lamar

### **I officially came out to my family when I was 19 years old. Ironically, I did so shortly after entering into a relationship with a man and having my son.**

No one was surprised at my announcement. I was a proud lesbian, turns out one of many in my family. They had long discussed amongst themselves that my straight period was merely a phase. For many years, before and after my coming out day, I searched for a reason for my existence as a gay woman. There was no representation at the time. Without it, I felt alone, but not sad. Instead, I saw myself as unique, rare, like my dear grandmother would describe the Coqui of our homeland. The Coqui is a species of frog endemic to Puerto Rico. It is unique, not only for its nightly serenade, but because, unlike many frogs, the Coqui doesn't have webbed feet.

Still, I could not shake the guilt. A parting gift bestowed upon me after a lifetime of attending Catholic school, straight through to grade 12. It was an indoctrination back then and much like military service, if you think about it. The uniforms, the standing at attention, a plethora of archaic bible driven rules, the beatings, and the incessant reinforcement of gospel passages. My only point of reference was what I was taught was sin, by this secret society, where even forgiveness or amends were scheduled. Confession was on Tuesdays and Saturdays, so I scheduled my coming out to the church.

I remember that the priest behind the mesh seemed disinterested. I had not slept for almost 48 hours when I knelt down in his booth. My 10-month-old baby was teething at the very moment that I was studying for my midterm exams at university. Amidst all of that, I went back to search the bible for debate points, should the priest engage in any rebuttal, during my much rehearsed admission.



I purposely did not say “Forgive me Father for I have sinned,” because rebellious me was not going to do his work for him. Instead, I said, “Thank you Father for taking the time to listen to me”. After that it was a regurgitation of the feelings and scientific data that I had prepared for our meeting. I can no longer remember my words verbatim, but only that they moved the priest to look at me directly. To this day, I believe I saw tears in his eyes, when we made contact. Did he cry for me, the me that was no longer Catholic, or guilt ridden, or for himself? Looking back, I recognize this as a pivotal moment for my authentic self. The dark booth of shame, as I used to call it, suddenly filled with light, love and the beautiful song of the Coqui frog.

Today, I choose to live immersed in that gift. Although I did, technically pay for it all, by reciting 10 Hail Marys’ and five Our Fathers before I left the church.

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Joie Lamar is an Engineer, Best Selling Author, Public Speaker and Podcast host. She is most proud of her two-part memoir titled *Mambo Lips & Salsa Hips*. Her portfolio also includes a poetry book titled *Sapphoetry*, and a beautiful coffee table book dedicated to the Orlando Pulse massacre victims, called *Cuarenta Y Nueve*, which she spearheaded and collaborated with 48 other artists. Her latest novel, *G*, is an LGBTQ+ crime thriller, and she is currently working on three major projects; a sci-fi novel, a film based on her memoirs called *Las Alas*, and her new podcast, *Positively Joieful*.



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