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Fiction by Gary Edward Allen, Event Listings, From The Heart, Horoscopes,
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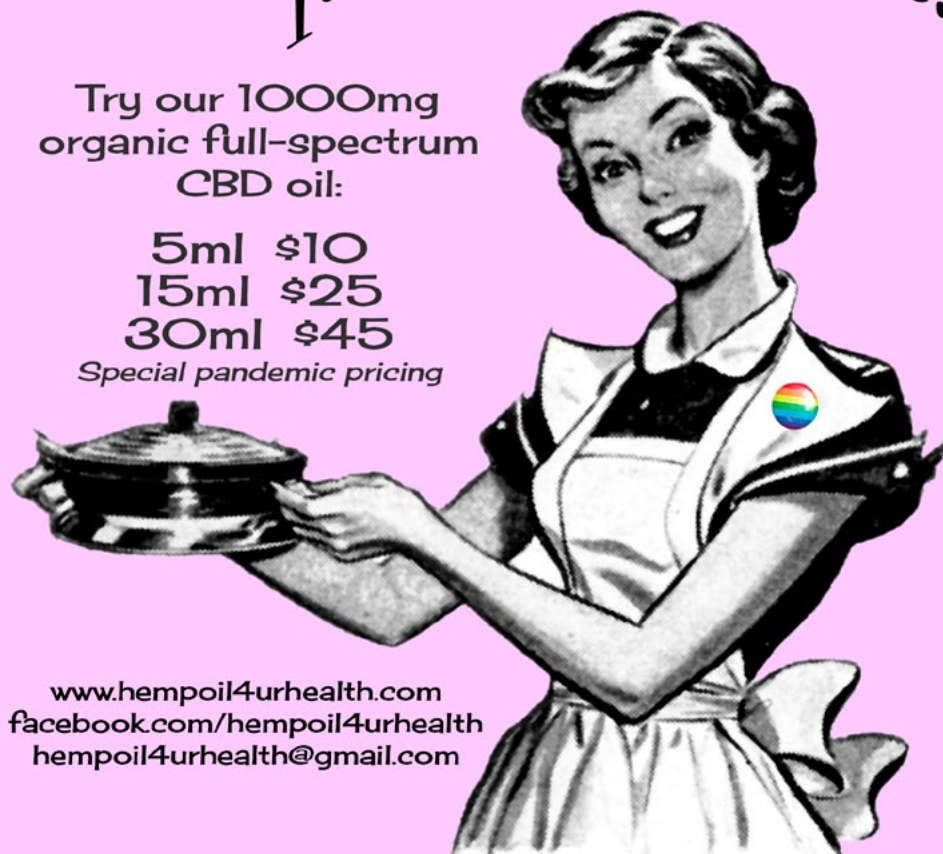
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From the **Publisher**



We continue our journey with the 2020 theme of “Being...,” where we feature a full spectrum of individuals on our covers and within the magazine itself. We have members of our community representing and talking about their true identity of being gay, lesbian, trans, 2-Spirit, non-conforming, non-binary, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual. With our second issue, we look specifically at, being... trans and 2-Spirit.

Prejudices in our community exist, let us not lie to ourselves. But if we take the time to listen and understand the challenges, lived experiences, and passions, of the different subgroups

that make up our community, and our world really, we have started the work to make sure that everyone feels heard, understood, and welcomed. Isn't that how you want everyone to feel? There is no group that shouldn't feel included, as it is an awful feeling.

So go ahead and dive into a good read in the pages that follow. We promise that you will enjoy what we have put together, and perhaps discover something that you didn't know. Maybe we will understand one another better.

In closing, I also have some news to share with our readers. PinkPlayMags is getting a slight makeover with the layout of our content and columns. Keep an eye out for our upcoming autumn issue to see all the exciting updates. Change is always good. As we prepare to enter our 13th year of publishing, we reflect back on what one reader described as, “the magazine that is small enough to fit in your pocket or purse, but big enough to show the world what we are all about.”

Antoine Elhashem
Publisher
publisher@pinkplaymags.com

summerplay!

Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
Community Seasonal from PinkPlayMags
Free • Summer 2020

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Cover BEING... Trans / 2-Spirit
Concept & Creative Direction Antoine Elhashem
Photography Shawn McGowan-Leaver
Representing our community
In the middle:
Jeanette Jabier AKA Jeanette Dupree - *Transsexual*
Mary Sue Robinet - *2-Spirit*
Rest of the group from left to right:
Amy Vaughan-Dolson - *Asexual*
Robyn DeCradle - *Non-Binary*
Alia Carrerra - *Bisexual*
Marisa Cimadamore - *Pansexual*
Marisa Rosa Grant - *Lesbian*
Ryan Bince - *Gay*
Dan Bowen aka Brad Puddin aka Maya Naise
- *Non-conforming*

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From the Editor

Welcome to our summer issue,
the second in our themed series
simply titled, "Being..." where
we continue our look at the various
complexities of genders and sexualities
that make up our wonderful community
of rainbow colours.

We're putting the spotlight on Trans and 2-Spirit,
to gather an understanding of the complexities
and challenges, along with the advancements
and achievements of these individuals. Our fall
issue will look at Non Binary, Gender Non-
Conforming, Gender Queer, Asexual, and our
winter issue will cover Bisexual and Pansexual.

We split our first feature into two separate sections
to have individual perspectives. one focused on
Being...Intersex, and the other focused on Being...
Trans. **Davina Hader** gives us a personal account
of growing up Intersex, acknowledging being a
woman, and being a strong advocate for the entire
LGBT community **Boyd Kodak** reflects back on
growing up Trans in a community that initially
was more inclusive to the L&G community. Boyd
recounts the early days of marches and inclusion
within Pride Toronto.

Our second feature is written by **Emmanuel
Munyarukumbuzi**, who offers a personal insight
into what it's like to be Trans in Africa. He gets
candid interviews with individuals who are living
and surviving in an often harsh atmosphere of
prejudice and misunderstanding, yet they are able
to secure a somewhat happy existence despite
the many challenges. We also hear from local
organizations who are helping with the fight for
equality for all.

Finally, our third feature is written by famed
burlesque performer and sex-positive vixen, **Tanya**



Cheex. She works in an industry that is still often
shunned upon and misunderstood, yet she tells
us inside stories about how important her work
is for many individuals who seek out comfort,
solstice, and sex from individuals like her who can
provide those services. She specifically spotlights
her clients with various (dis)abilities, disorders,
and kinks whom may otherwise not have an
opportunity to experience these aspects of life.

For our travel feature, we look at opportunities
for getaways that are safe, and close to home, with
our **#TravelOntario** rundown of activities to do,
places to go, and how to get there. Writer **Jon
Pressick** chatted with artist **Robin Pronovost**,
and our *Community Cornerstone* feature is on
Friends of Ruby. Our Fiction feature is by **Gary
Edward Allen**, an indigenous gay writer living in
Nanaimo, British Columbia, who offers us some
of this personal poetry pieces.

The events listings are still primarily online and
include an extensive list of virtual happenings,
including several Pride related, compiled courtesy
of our Events Editor, **Sherry Sylvain**. We're also
including our annual **Pride Guide**, that has even
more online listings to get you through this year of
virtual Pride. As always, we give you our quarterly
horoscopes, the reflective *From The Heart* piece
written by **Mychol Scully**, and our *Looking Back*
column, this time written by guest contributor
Bella King-Reynolds.

Enjoy the read!

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“Being... Trans”

By Boyd Kodak

Being...Trans in 2020 is very different than it was when I transitioned in the 1990s. Back then, trans was not a common word, as the community was mostly referred to as the L&G community. There were no trans services, or organizations like we have today.

Like many trans people, I knew I was a boy when I was a child, but didn't have a name for it. The first time I heard the word transsexual was in the early 1970s, when I watched *The Pierre Berton Show*, and he was interviewing **Christine Jorgensen**.

The news proclaimed Jorgensen as “Ex- GI becomes Blonde Beauty,” announcing that she was the recipient of the first sex change operation with hormone therapy. I instantly knew in my heart that I identified with her, and that was the path I wanted to take, but it took a while for my head to follow.

In the 1990s I started working with an L&G broadcast show called *10%*, that consisted of a group of segment producers. The community could fax in their ideas or requests for coverage, and we would discuss who wanted to take which story. There was a trans group that said they had sent in a request for coverage multiple times, but hadn't heard back. I jumped on the opportunity, and went to meet the dozen members of Toronto's first trans activist organization, the *Toronto Trans Action Committee (TTAC)*.

Within a short time, I was fully involved with the trans community. *TTAC* are noted as having the first trans representation at *Pride Toronto*, with their booth in 1997. It was also the first year that the *Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee*, became

the *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Transgender Pride Committee Toronto*.

I also met and became friends with the incredible activist **Mirha Soliel Ross**. I was privileged to be involved with many of Mirha's initiatives, like the *Counting Past 2 Festival*, the *Meal-Trans* program, and the first vigil we held in Toronto, preceding *Trans Day of Remembrance*, as we know it today.

One of the things that Mirha stressed was the importance of acknowledging the difference of being transsexual or not. Back then, if you had surgery, took hormones and always represented in your chosen gender, you were transsexual. If not, you were intersex, transvestite or gender queer (first coined in 1995). Transgender was an umbrella term that encompassed all of the community.

As a transsexual, Mirha experienced the loss in privilege, and discrimination faced by those that give up every aspect of their former lives, often including employment, home, family and friends.

She felt it was important that in being trans, that the difference between being transsexual or otherwise be acknowledged. It was important to be sure that the transsexual voice and experience was not to be appropriated by others under the transgender umbrella. Many individuals do not give up any aspect of their former lives or privilege, and do not experience the same type of loss, discrimination or violence as transsexuals, depending on how, and how often they choose to represent.

Mirha had a large following that mostly was made up of gender queer folks that respected the difference back then. It wasn't easy to be transsexual. Prior to 1998, any surgeries or hormone prescriptions in Ontario had to be approved by the *Clarke Institute*. They subjected

us to some uncomfortable, offensive, physical, and psychological tests, and the guidelines were very stringent. In order to be considered, you had to live in your chosen sex everyday for two years, without any medical intervention. They would approve about 12 people a year for surgery. Even then, only some surgeries had coverage or partial coverage. Some, like breast surgery for transsexual women wasn't covered at all.

In 1998, Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) became delisted; no coverage for anything. In June 2008, after a decade of relentless activism, SRS became relisted. The guidelines were eventually changed, and *"The Clarke"* was no longer in the picture.

When I transitioned there was no coverage. Top surgery for MTF transsexuals cost \$12,000-\$20,000 out of pocket. Now, after coverage, it costs around \$2,000 out of pocket. Also, as I mentioned, as transsexuals we often lost privilege, jobs, homes, friends and family.

In the late 1990s we began the hard push for our place in the community, and to have our voices heard. We wanted our share of community resources, and inclusion of the greater community in the names of many organizations that only used the L&G acronym.

Even the places that did have some trans content, that content was being chosen by non-trans people. For example the *Inside Out Film Festival* had a trans program, but it was curated by a non-trans person. The films being shown were about us, not by us. Made by non-trans people, and often quite insulting. One program was described as "Bearded Ladies, Chicks with Dicks, and other Sexual Anomalies."

Inside Out were among the first to recognize and change. In the late 90s they began including trans representation in programming, and allowed us to screen films made by trans people.

Trans people were finally having their voices recognized. We were being given some recognition, and a share of funding. Very quickly the trans community grew. Partially because we felt included and somewhat safer coming out, and partially because "being trans" became trendy and eligible for a whole new area of funding.

Non-binary became a popular term and identity in the mid- to late-2000s, and it seems to be a growing trend. Many now choose not to choose. While far from perfect, the world is much more accepting.

Today the lines within the community have become blurred, and almost everything is referred to under the one umbrella term of trans. Being trans can be as easy as wearing blue lipstick on occasion. Not to say that's bad. Everyone should have the freedom to identify however they choose. However, it's important to respect and acknowledge the differences among us, and the challenges of our lived experience.

Sadly over the last few years there has been a resurgence of non-trans people using their power to make decisions that impact our community, without including us in the conversation. There are organizations that have put some trans people on the payroll, but they must tow the company line, or fear losing their jobs.

The trans community has seen much growth, and the *Toronto Trans Alliance* now has over 2,000 members. We've come a long way, but the goal that we still must continue to work for, is the right to have our community voices heard without restriction. Every chance we get to talk to the press and reach the uninformed, is an opportunity to gain understanding and acceptance. We must remember to appreciate those that have come before, and all the work that was done to get where we are today. We should be sure that while acknowledgement and respect is given to the differences among us, we stand united in our efforts to move forward as a strong and vibrant community.

Boyd Kodak is an award-winning trans activist, musician, writer, filmmaker, curator, and festival/entertainment director.



"Being... Intersex"

By Davina Hader

Imagine that when you were born, you were blessed with a birthmark. It wasn't just a normal birthmark; it had an odd shape that spiralled meticulously around much of your body. Fortunately, as luck would have it, the birthmark was so subtle and covered such a large amount of you, that all it seemed to do was give you a unique shine. As mom always put it, 'your own special glow'.

It didn't take you long to realize as a child starting to make friends, that your unique difference was something you would soon learn to hide. It was a time of conformity, a time when difference was seen as a hindrance, even a disgrace. You were young, wanted friends and wanted to be liked.

You were taught how to dress, what to wear, how to behave, what games to play, all the things a child needed to know and do to fit in... a normal child. But you were normal, no one would ever see your birthmark, your unique glow under your clothes, they never had to know. You could easily hide it, and be the same as everyone else.

It wasn't that easy though; there were many things you were not good at, or really did not like, and many things you did like, you couldn't do, had to hide, or be made fun of; the strange dreams and inner feelings that made you feel alone in a raging sea. But still, you wanted to fit in as best you could. Even though many others already thought of you as different, somehow you still managed to continue to be normal.

As you grew older you became very good at being normal, you knew what things you could do and what things not to do. There were still plenty of things you liked, that could keep you looking normal. This was how you lived; it was 'your normal'.

As time persisted you began to be more aware of your birthmark, you weren't sure why, but every time you looked in the mirror it would seem a little different. It felt as though it was once again glowing, trying to shine through. The feelings grew stronger as the days passed. The things you did to be 'your normal' began to blur. You started letting your birthmark shine brighter, it felt so good; all those years of repressing it had built up, you had to allow some of it back into your life. You could let the birthmark shine and still have 'your normal' life, no one would know; or so you thought.

But 'your normal' had blurred,... your perception of what was happening was distorted. You were actually allowing your true self to shine; there was no denying it now, you had started to become the person you were hiding for so many years... you were a woman.

By now you had been told that you were born with an intersex condition. Your difference was normal!

Times had changed and keeping the truth hidden away was no longer an option you could endure.

The real you may have seemed a revelation to some, but for you, it was just coming to understand the unique person and glow that had always been so much a part of your intersex self, your true normal self.

Something so profound and unique should never have to be kept secret. My birthmark was my intersex condition that I struggled through

childhood with, experiencing bodily changes at puberty that were different than the person I was told I had to be, always feeling and knowing that my burgeoning physical femininity was my true self.

Coming to terms with my intersexuality, embracing my womanhood, and eventually having surgery to correct my differences and better align my identity as a woman completely, became something very beautiful and fulfilling for me.

While that was a long time ago, it was for that reason I became very active in the queer community advocating for LGBTQ rights.

So what does it mean to be intersex? It is a congenital biological sex condition, meaning intersex individuals are born intersex, and physical attributes can vary widely, often far greater than what a doctor sees at birth.

Still, the doctor will then choose one of the 'male' or 'female' binary gender labels that they feel most suits the infant, even sometimes surgically altering the infant's genitalia to better align with the doctor's given choice. Although this kind of infant surgery is more frowned upon today, nonetheless a choice of gender is still made.

Intersex conditions go well beyond physical appearance and can include a wide variance of genetic and other biological differences that greatly vary the gender spectrum, because of this, binary gender labels are often wrongly assigned. Only within the last couple of years have some governments allowed for an 'X' gender to be used on birth certificates, allowing the child to decide on their gender as they grow older.

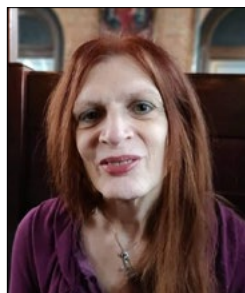
For many people, the terms "gender" and "sex" are used interchangeably, and thus incorrectly. Our society, especially our western culture, has always linked 'gender' with 'sex' when we are born, and for many this has been, and still is acceptable. However biological sex and gender are very different; gender is based on many complexities and is not exclusively connected to one's external physical anatomy. Restricting gender to basic biology fails to encompass the wide variation that exists in the gender spectrum.

This is the case for many individuals who identify as trans. Trans is an umbrella term referring to people with diverse gender identities and expressions that differ from stereotypical gender norms. It includes, but is not limited to people who identify as transgender, trans woman (male-to-female), trans man (female-to-male), two-spirit, transsexual, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender variant or gender queer. Some cross-dressers, drag queens/kings, and intersex individuals can also identify as trans, however many do not. A trans identity is self-determined and not dependent upon medical procedures or hormones, although some individuals will take those steps.

The trans community is vast and includes much diversity within itself. Because of this, it often gets blamed for the struggle with identity politics, political correctness, and even accusations for the destruction of gender distinctions by many radical groups. All the while trans people are just individuals trying to live with unique differences that exist beyond the traditional binary dichotomy.

It is these differences that bring us together as Queers, and by standing collectively and celebrating these unique characteristics as a community we are pushing the envelope on public awareness, acceptance and finally change!

Davina Hader is a graduate of OCADU, an award winning queer female cinematographer, and activist who has extensively advocated for social change and human rights. In 2012 she was awarded The Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal by the Honorable Glen Murray, MPP Toronto Centre, for her extensive work in the LGBTQ community.



"Being... 2-Spirit"

By Bella King Reynolds

Anhee. My Name is Bella King Reynolds, and I come from a small village named Waverley just outside of Midland, Ontario.

I have two sisters and two brothers. Growing up in the country was a rough time for me. I was sexually abused by nine men, and to this day I don't live my life without the pain or thoughts of those who did it me.

My teenage years were hard at school, with people calling me faggot, queer and other names because of my Anishnawbe culture. I dropped out of school, moved to the city, and lived on the streets for a short time, before becoming a sex worker. I worked Boystown for a bit, and then I became trans. I was always more femme than masculine.

Back in the 80s I didn't realize what effect people were having on me - the stigma, mental health issues, genocide, decolonisation, reconciliation, violence, and being treated as if I had no values in life or I wasn't worth anything at all. Sex work and addiction was my way of life for many years. In 1999 I put myself into detox and I have since overcome my addiction. I'm still trying to figure out what's my purpose in life.

The positive ways of who I am today is a real miracle to me, I have been clean of crack cocaine for 20 years. In 2013, I returned to school at *Near North District School Board* in northern Ontario to achieve my OSSD — Grade 12, and I was also working a full-time job while doing my homework at night. In 2015, I moved back to the city of Toronto, which has always been my home. I feel more like the person that I should be, and not the person I shouldn't be.

In 2017, I was Trans Grand Marshall for the Trans March at *Pride Toronto*, and also Knowledge



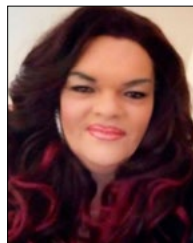


Keeper for various other Trans events that I get asked to do. The support that I have today can be overwhelming in many positive ways. I learned to speak in a good way and speak only the TRUTH. I struggle at times with my gender, as living with two genders and being gender fluid sure has it ups and downs.

I have overcome so many obstacles in the past five years. I've taken a variety of training to improve my skills, to get a part-time job or to volunteer at food banks in the downtown area. Today I am a Trauma Support Trans Peer Worker at *Native Women's Resource Centre* in Toronto. I get to interact with the 2-Spirit / Trans community through ceremonies such as Sacred Fire, Sunrise Ceremony, Trans Day of Remembrance, Sister in Spirit Vigil, and Strawberry Ceremony, along with other events hosted by NWRCT. I also did Land Acknowledgements for the *INSPIRE Awards* for their 8th anniversary.

I'm changing my way of living to make my life a better place for me in my Heart, Soul, Body, and Mind. I have support from many great niiji (friends). I'm happy to be a part of the 2SLGBT community today, and it feels good to be a part of such a loving and supportive community.

I am a 2-Spirit / Trans Kwe. My pronouns are She, Her, They, Them. and Me. I come from the territory of Moose Deer Point First Nation on the Northern Shores of Georgian Bay, Ontario, and my Spirit name is *Thunderbird of the South*. Last year I was gifted a Spirit name for the Spirit world, *Walks with Medicine*. I am from the Eagle Clan and my Spirit Help is the Bear.



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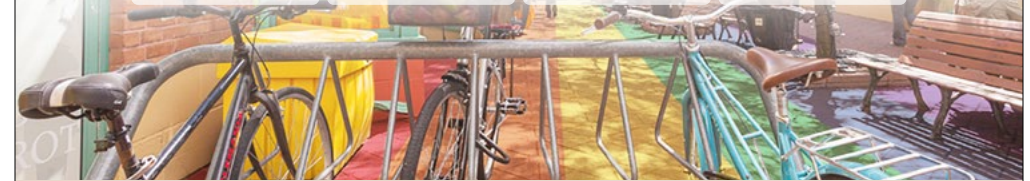
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Being Transgender in Africa

By Emmannuel Munyarukumbuzi

Being transgender anywhere in the world has never been easy, and due to various socio-economic realities it is even harder in sub-Saharan Africa.

This article meets **Anna Xwexx Morena** living in Uganda and **Farisai Gamariel** living in Mozambique. Both women share what it's like to be transgender in their respective countries, starting from when they discovered they were transgender, coming out to family and friends, HIV and AIDS, employment challenges, dating prospects, and their plans for the future.

Morena is a sex worker and activist with *Anna Foundation Uganda*, while Gamariel works for *ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)* in Beira, Mozambique. While their lives are different in many respects, the discovery of their transgender identity was not straightforward for either of them, even though they were each aware they were different from a very young age.

"I thought I was just a boy who behaved like a girl, or maybe I was gay. Growing up, having access to that kind of information was not easy," said Morena. "I was effeminate for as long as I can remember, but after the sensitizations of an organization called *LAMBDA* I knew the word transgender and it made sense to me then. I was about 30 years old," said Gamariel.

During puberty, Gamariel developed breasts, and her mother felt the need to do something about it. "I remember my mother and cousins pinning me

down to squeeze them. It was very nasty and so painful that I tried to resist in vain."

Morena was thrown out of the family home when she began transitioning, and ended up joining a friend of hers who was also transgender. "She explained to me that the only way that I could survive was by becoming a sex worker. I was young and a school drop out, and not only did I not have the skills, but no one would employ an underage person who behaved like a woman," Morena explained.

Both women say it's not easy to present as women in their everyday lives. Morena says, "When people realize you are transgender, they start calling you names. At times I feel like some of my body parts are not appropriate, and they pull me away from being the woman I want to become."

Misconceptions and dangers that can often lead to threats on their lives are very common. People stare and utter insults on a daily basis. "In our African societies people don't understand, because they want you to behave like other men. I used to do that, and it's only recently that I started wearing heeled shoes, doing my hair, applying make up, etc," Gamariel explains.

"Being provoked, beaten, imprisoned, evicted from the house, and being accused wrongfully are all common occurrences," Gamariel adds, "I'm worried that someone could stab me because they do not want to see me. Although in Mozambique homosexuality has been decriminalized since 2015, people are still not aware of our rights."

Morena is well aware of these dangers as well. She even devised a way of protecting herself as



being sociable, and being able to talk about issues helps me to cope.”

Transgender people very often lose their families as they embrace their identity, which is hard in collectivistic African societies. Although Gamariel has been able to reconcile with her mother, her whole family has not reached acceptance yet. “My younger brother said I would rot in jail. Yet this is the child I helped send to school and to whom I gave everything. I am in pain, to hear all these harsh words from him. I don’t care what other members of the extended family are saying.”

This is the same attitude adopted by Morena. “I tried to see if I could speak to them and welcome them back into my life. I feel I need family because it is important, but it failed. I was depressed and suffered from anxiety. Now, I let them be, and I live and appreciate my life.”

Dating has been a rather painful experience for both Morena and Gamariel. “Some people just want to spend time with you, and some are bisexual with wives. I just want someone to love me, but people do not want to date someone who is out. I tried many relationships, they do not work. People are interested in what you have: money or taking them out. When I travel I find it hard to approach people, as a woman from my culture, I expect them to make the first move,” says Gamariel.

Morena is no stranger to the same bitter experience. “At times we become caretakers of men. In a sense you buy their love because you are so desperate to have a man in your life. This is really hurtful to see that men see us as sex toys, and refuse to see us for who we really are. We are hard working, we want to be good mothers and good wives, and we want to bring about change in our communities by becoming independent. Men have decided not to see us in that way. They just want sex and then do not want anything else to do with us. At this point I’ve decided to live my life without a man.”

For many, dating goes hand-in-hand with starting a family. Despite difficulties, Gamariel keeps hope alive and takes parenting seriously. “I will give it a try even though it is difficult. I plan to adopt a child or two if all the conditions are in place. I am



still constructing a house and I need a permanent relationship. As a parent you need to provide the best for your children,” said Gamariel. Morena also has high hopes: “I am also looking forward to becoming a mother soon. At least I will have a house with kids calling me mama.”

The desire of a feminine appearance is shared by both Morena and Gamariel, although they approach it differently. “The fact that we do not have gender affirmative systems stops us from being able to proceed with a legal name change. I hear there are doctors who could potentially perform gender reassignment surgery in Uganda, but it is super expensive. With regards to hormones, they are available but the cost of ten tablets is equal to one third of my monthly income. To achieve the look I need, I turn to birth control pills that contain oestrogen. It is very dangerous I do it as I have no other choice,” Morena explains. Dalton confirms this, stating “access to hormones and gender reassignment is a far off dream for many transgender people in Africa due to it being illegal, or simply inaccessible due to cost.”

Gamariel opted for minimal changes. “I never tried hormones or other pills. They are not common here, they are too expensive, and people prefer spending money differently. My appearance tells people that this is a woman trapped in a man’s body.”

Despite all the difficulties, Morena and Gamariel are resilient and have projects for the future. “I want to continue working and contribute to making this community even stronger. I want to help people in the community to go to school and have the education they deserve. Constructing a secondary school and giving priority to the community is my dream,” states Gamariel. This need for education is echoed by Morena, a drop out who wants “to complete education and become a lawyer.”

Despite this optimism, “A poorly funded LGBTQ+ sector does not help address the most pressing issues as their resources are stretched, run entirely by volunteers, and are vulnerable to police raids, especially in Uganda. These issues include healthcare and access to gender reassignment (if needed), access to HIV treatment, fair employment legislation, police training, and simply being able to feel safe within their own communities,” Dalton concludes.

While things may not be where they should be at for members of the transgender community in Africa today, progress is being made by way of the advocacy work of individuals like, Anna Xwexx Morena and Farisai Gamariel, as well as the support from organizations like *Anna Foundation Uganda*, *ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)*, *LAMBDA*, *ReportOUT*, and the recently launched, *African Trans Network*.

www.annafoundation.com, www.icrc.org, www.facebook.com/LambdaMoz, www.reportout.org, www.eathan.org/african-trans-network-atn-statement

Emmanuel Munyarukumbuzi is an academic, content producer, communications consultant and researcher based in Rwanda. He is interested in issues of sustainability, human rights, and social justice. His research interests are in the areas of communication for development, media literacy, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and the deployment of ICTs in communication.





Photo: Tanya Cheex

Right now in the middle of a global pandemic, we're living daily life without the possibility of touching another human for an uncertain future. Everyone feels disconnected to everything, except to perhaps the media.

I work in a downtown massage parlour that I also co-operate. These types of massage parlours are commonly called *Rub-n-Tugs*. As with most businesses, we had to close our doors and move things online. It's not easy for most of us to meet people out there to have sex with, Tinder or not. Some prefer to pay for it especially if it's a non-judgmental environment.

I've been doing sex work all of my adult life. One of the most valuable gifts it has taught me is acceptance. Although the client may be seeking out a conventionally attractive attendant, I am somewhat indifferent to appearances. This is however, learned behaviour. I look for clients that have good hygiene, politeness, and of course good tippers. Unfortunately we sometimes grow up thinking different is wrong or inadequate.

What if you had a visible disability? What if your disability wasn't so visible, but prevented you from having sexual relationships in some way? Would you seek out a professional? Many people with disabilities have long and fulfilling relationships, just as many without cannot. I do not have any apparent disability, so I am only at privilege to speak of my experiences, as well as those of my fellow colleagues. If a client has a physical or mental disability, it's important to normalize their experience. If you feel uncomfortable, they will know.

Alex has high functioning autism, and does a lot of volunteer work for autism awareness. Alex is also admittedly addicted to porn, and is a chronic masturbator. Something he's learned is to curb his OCD urges in public spaces. He is 25 years old and a virgin. His therapist recommended my massage parlour to him, and he's been coming monthly for the past five years ever since.

Alex has boundary issues exacerbated by his autism, however he's very open about his disability. He asks a lot of questions, some maybe too personal, like wanting to know about other's first sexual experiences. He requires a lot of patience that not everyone on staff can tolerate. He sometimes calls just to chat without

an appointment. It's been a learning curve for both Alex and myself. If I am firm and keep his thoughts on track, we can have an enjoyable session. He feels looking forward to his session here teaches him self-control, and says he has been keeping his impulses under control.

I would also like to mention the importance of communication with those that have autism. Some suffer from sensory overload, so it's very important to check in. Let the client know verbally what you're about to do to them. Ask them if they like to be touched in a particular way. Sexual touch can be very stimulating obviously, but sometimes it can also be overwhelming.

Some clients are very open about what makes them different, and want to talk to you about it. Like the middle-aged man whose whole entire back is a series of tight, thick ridges of scar tissue. He fell into a campfire. He says his back's nerve endings are much different than before the accident, and he views the scars as the new flesh, which we both agreed had a very Cronenberg ring to it!

Brandon is in his 30s and contracted a polio-like illness in childhood, meaning his legs are much more arrested in development than his broad shoulders and muscular arms. He never speaks of it. I typically leave the client to talk about issues, unless it's something completely necessary to the session, be it a sensual aspect or a safety aspect.

Janice is a virgin in her 30's, and she's in a wheelchair. Janice decided she would lose her virginity to a female sex worker. Through a few emails it was decided that one of my staff was the best fit to please Janice, and was strong enough to help lift her up onto the table. My staff member knew this was an important moment in Janice's life so she decked out the room with extra candles and carefully chosen music. Janice arrived with a bouquet of roses for the attendant, and the attendant made her feel desired and importantly visible. She is now a repeat client.

Another Dominatrix colleague of mine came in contact with a client in his mid-forties, who was a self-stated virgin. He had a moderately severe penis malformation that made him quite shy about meeting woman. That, along with his

submissive nature. He could maintain an erection and ejaculate, but the shape of it made him worry he couldn't satisfy a woman properly. He sought out medical attention but came away with no diagnostic and no treatments.

My colleague recognized it as Hypospadias — a fairly common "condition", and wrote it down on a piece of paper for him so he could speak to a doctor about it. He broke down crying. She assured him that there's no such thing as "normal" genitals — everyone's penis looks different. He found an educated doctor with this new knowledge and now he's happily engaged to an understanding and non-judgmental woman. So much fear and shame could have been avoided with just one skilled medical practitioner!

I don't want you to think we are some kind of miracle workers; we just possess basic empathy through our experiences. I even had to get over some of my own fears. We are brought up to not stare or make fun of what's different, but what if the client requests exactly that?

Richard is a middle-aged little person. He stands about 3'5" tall. His session involves me in my Domme role chasing him around and throwing pies in his face! The important factor in this fantasy is for him to hear my squeals of girlish laughter. This harks back to his childhood when the neighbourhood girls would point and laugh at him. It's deeply rooted in trauma, but he is able to transcend this with an understanding professional. The laughter is now a shared experience.

I'm looking forward to leaving my *Only Fans* online experiences and returning to my person-to-person experience, whenever that may be. The landscape will change in the face of the new normal but normal was not what got me into this business in the first place. Stay safe, stay weird.

Tanya Cheex is the Owner and Founder at Sailors and Sluts- Printing, and Stripper/Heartbreaker at Skin Tight Outta Sight! Rebel Burlesque

www.skintightouttasight.com



Photo: David Hawke



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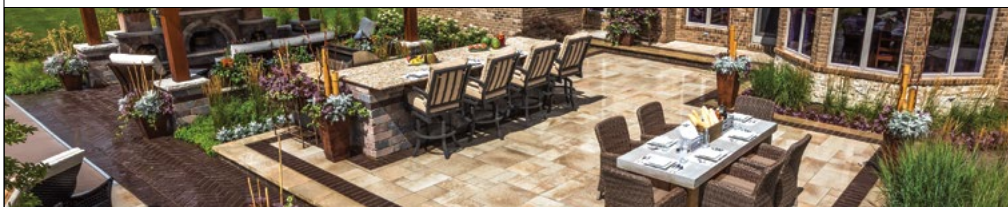
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#DiscoverOntario



#TravelLocal

by Bryen Dunn

Here we are, Summer 2020! It has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Twenty-Twenty. It will certainly be one to easily remember for more ways than one. Summer is typically a time for those much longed for vacations that we dream about all winter long. Jump on a plane and jet off somewhere exotic.

Well, that's not happening this year as a result of the current COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic still being a real concern.

However, that doesn't mean we can't still get a little R&R time away from home. We just need

to get creative this summer, and discover our own backyard...literally. It's time to #DiscoverOntario and #TravelLocal. For those lucky enough to have a backyard, there's plenty of opportunity for BBQ's and social distant gatherings with family members and a few close friends, adhering to the current government and health regulations of course. For those who want to take the backyard experience to a whole new level, why not pitch a tent and sleep in the wild...with the convenience of all your household amenities just a few steps away!

For those who actually do want to venture out into the real world, there are plenty of opportunities that await. With the economy reopening, it provides for even more destination-based travel. Depending on where you live, there are likely limitless possibilities for day trips by car, or bike. This allows you to discover places nearby that you might never have considered visiting before. Smaller villages where entrepreneurs and independent business owners would gladly welcome your support. Pick up some lunch or snacks, a souvenir, or anything else that might help generate some much needed income for those who have struggled with their business over the past several months.

Many parks have reopened for day use, and several for overnight camping as well. Be sure to check

[Ontario Parks](#) and various [private campgrounds](#) in advance for availability and their updated safety protocol. There are also a few LGBT specific campground to check out as well. Try [Cedars](#), [Rainbow Ridge](#), or [The Point](#) as they are closest to Toronto. Further out, there's [Riverside](#), and [Stella's](#) for female campers only. Even if you don't have camping gear, most offer some sort of rental accommodation options.

With many people having more free time on their hands, there's been a significant increase in cycling, which makes for a great day out, or even a weekend getaway for the more adventurous. Novice riders should plan to stick to designated trails to avoid vehicular traffic. These can be found throughout Ontario's vast cycling network. Check out the [Ontario Tourism cycling page](#) or [Ontario By Bike](#). There's likely something nearby where you live, or if you choose to venture a bit further than your neighbourhood there's a great network of public transit options that allow for bikes to be transported. Be sure to check out these [safety recommendations](#) before hoping on those two wheels.

Another great summer activity that's relatively easy to organize is a day of visiting wineries, cideries, and/or distilleries. Ontario is lucky enough to have two well-known wine regions,

[Niagara-on-the-Lake](#) and [Prince Edward County](#). Beyond these two areas, there are plenty of other wineries to be found. Check [Wine Country Ontario](#) or the [Ontario Wineries Guide](#) for a complete listing.

If beer is more your thing, there's definitely no shortage of micro-breweries out there. It's safe to say that pretty much every region of the province has a couple micro-brewery or brewhouse options these days. A good place to start planning your itinerary is by taking a look at the [Ontario Craft Brewers](#) website. Many breweries offer tastings and tours, while all of them will allow you to purchase product to go. It's a great way to sample several different beers, many of which might not be available at the Beer Store or LCBO. [Here's a great map and app](#) to help you navigate your way around as well.

Finally, the latest trend in the micro-alcohol business is cider and the distilling of spirits, and both are expanding at a rapid pace since provincial regulations were relaxed a few years back. Check out the [Ontario Craft Cider](#) website and download a copy of this handy map to get things rolling. Ontario Tourism put together a handy [blog article](#) that lists many of the newer distilleries out there. Typically they offer more of the clear than the dark, as it's required by law that a whisky





must be distilled for a minimum of three years before it can be classified as such.

Whatever route you choose, be sure to call ahead to make sure they're open, and be responsible by having a designated driver if travelling by vehicle. Also, if you're planning to do one of these boozier options, it's definitely recommended to grab some grub along the way. Be sure to peruse through the [Ontario Culinary](#) website for an extensive list of markets, farm-to-table options, restaurants, and more.

If you're planning something longer than a day trip, there are plenty of overnight options available, such as cottages, cabins, and yurts, as well as RV's where you take your accommodations wherever you want to go. There are many options available, but it's definitely advisable to book in advance and book early. Try [Ontario Cottage Rentals](#) or [Cottage Vacations](#) for a wide variety of cottage rentals across the province. If you're looking for something a bit different, out of the way, and perhaps more rustic, try booking one of the many [roofed accommodation](#) options that Ontario Parks offers throughout their network.

There's everything from back-country cabins and lodges, to soft sided shelters and yurts.

This year it seems many are making the move to RVs for the first time, as these vehicles aren't just your transportation, but your dining and sleeping headquarters as well. Most come with the necessary equipment to prepare meals and such, and typically some sort of washroom facilities, which makes travelling and overnight options a lot more flexible. Just pack your personal belongings and sleeping gear, and off you go. Check out [Go RVing Canada](#) or [RV Ezy](#) for a wide selection of options. Many hotels and motels are starting to reopen as well, if that's more suited to you.

Here's something new and different to experience this year. The [Muskoka Beer Spa](#) was recently opened by the owners of [Clear Lake Brewing](#). Each three bedroom cabin comes complete with everything you need, including the use of canoes, kayaks, and SUPs, as well as in room beer taps, and complimentary snacks. Located right on the lake, there's also the option to have local food offerings delivered right to your door, or maybe

you'll just settle on preparing a meal on your open campfire.

Finally, one other unique vacation getaway is house-boating, and it's easier to do than you think. [Le Boat](#) offers multi-day excursions along the Rideau Canal up near Ottawa. These privately chartered boats can accommodate anywhere from 2 to 12 individuals, making it the perfect option for a close circle of friends to easily isolate themselves out on the water. There's no experience necessary for navigating the boat through the canals either. Instructions and training are provided upon arrival.

Le Boat offers a luxury and modern houseboat staycation with no set itinerary. Cruise as much or as little as you like, stop wherever and whenever, and spend a day kayaking, biking, swimming, stand-up paddle boarding, or on a hike on one of the many trails along the UNESCO World Heritage Rideau Canal. Each boat comes with a fully equipped kitchen, top deck "fun-deck" with BBQ, and each cabin has its own private bathroom with a private shower. Imagine getting away from the city and cruising on wide-open

lakes and winding rivers, away from the stress of everything.

Be sure to check out the [Ontario Tourism](#) website for even more fun getaways, and whatever you end up doing this summer, be respectful of others. Everyone is at different stages of emotions as we all navigate our way through these changing times. Safe travels everyone!

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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Hot Artist



Robin Pronovost

A pen, a pencil, a crayon, a stylus. Put any of these instruments of creativity in a person's hand and there is opportunity for magic. Illustration offers the opportunity to colour and shape our current world into something entirely different by exploring bold fantasy or gritty reality.

Robin Pronovost's artistic offerings capture both. On one hand, they create fun, cute and whimsical cartoon characters and even have a darling mascot—an eponymous masc robin. At the same time, Robin also produces a raw visual journal that touches on deeply personal thoughts and experiences with depression, anxiety, gender, and more.

Falling into art has played a significant role as Robin has explored gender identity. When they were younger, Robin explored their own gender through a dragon character in an online role-playing game. "They started out as a gender shifting creature, but I felt more comfortable portraying the character and, hence, myself as masculine." This allowed Robin space to self-discover and process complex feelings. "I was not out and was ashamed by this, and had no idea what it meant."

In the past decade, Robin has continued to explore their own gender expression, including creating art that considers their gender identity and "sense of self." Robin has long had a personal avatar, a fox, who appears frequently in their work. They've evolved that character to be more gender neutral, with a body shape that reflects them. "As I change," they share, "I become more comfortable with my physical shape and I have started celebrating this instead of hiding it."

As their reputation grew, Robin found themselves creating a lot for kids. They've drawn for the Star Wars franchise, produced science materials for kids,

and volunteered with kids. While their current work has shifted to a more mature audience, "I will always have a soft space in my heart for the kiddos who have influenced my art as much as my art has influenced them."

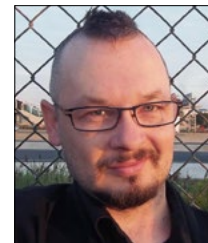
That more mature audience has embraced and appreciated Robin's visual journal, *Depression Lies*. The random comic strips capture Robin's thoughts and feelings as they deal with different aspects of their life. "It started," Robin reveals, "when I was in a very deep and horrific downward spiral that I only finally managed to get myself out of in the latter part of 2019. I've been battling depression and anxiety since my teens, but back in the day it wasn't dealt with. We didn't have people to talk to, really, the same way we do now. I felt alone."

Originally posted on *Twitter*, Robin touches on issues many people deal with, including gender, social justice, mental health, and more. Because of this, *Depression Lies* grew an audience who found catharsis in the comics. "I got messages from people saying they had felt alone, but now they don't. Sharing the art became as much therapy as drawing it."

Currently, Robin feels they're in a bit of a holding pattern when it comes to art projects—with very good reason. "I work in the healthcare field which is extremely challenging right now," Robin reveals. "Other than drawing ridiculous chickens and gay bacteria (and some thirsty art I post under an alias), I'm focusing on keeping my head above water." One future project Robin does have in mind is more science colouring books. "Immunology is next on the list, and from the way things are right now it's probably a good subject to start to tackle."

Follow Robin on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/artyeuwok) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/artyeuwok) @artyeuwok and their site www.flyingarmadillo.com

Jon Pressick is a writer who focuses on sex and sexuality. View his work at sexinwords.ca



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Pride Toronto Listings

Friday June 26 @ 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Trans Pride

Toronto's Trans Rally and March being one of the largest, Pride events in the world – for all the trans, non-binary, friends of, and allies who rally and march together in solidarity; as well as anyone who is lucky enough to witness the landmark event. Trans women of colour and people with different abilities are encouraged to lead the March. This year, due to Covid-19, they are bringing the rally into a virtual space for an hour of speakers and performers followed by an hour of community engagement.

The 2020 theme of “Kinder and Stronger together” expresses the importance of community and celebrates the resiliency of Toronto's trans community.

June 26 @ 3:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Youth Programming – Bloom

Youth 16 to 29: Featuring a festival of queer excellence and creative expression in a variety of artistic art forms: Poetry, Music, Performance Art, Burlesque, Drag and more!

Hosted by Bom Bae. Presented by Maple Leaf Foods.

June 26 @ 5:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Alterna-Queer

Alterna-Queer presents an episodic fever dream of drag and live acts. You have been

cooped up at home for months. Meet up in the seediest chat room you can and get it all out. Alterna-Queer presents an episodic fever dream of drag and live acts. Through the power of the world's number one teleconferencing software for businesses and corporations, Pride will bring you the best alt-queer and artistically questionable performances that the city has to offer.

June 26 @ 9:00 PM - 11:59 PM

Yes Yes Y'all

Canada's Baddest Queer Bashment with a heavy emphasis on hip-hop, R&B, dancehall and SOCA. YYY connects communities within the city through music and dance. Canada's baddest queer bashment YYY returns to Virtual Pride with their annual block party energy

June 27 @ 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Dyke Rally [March]

A dyke and lesbian centred space that honours Toronto's dyke community. This year, Pride Toronto's annual Dyke Rally is also going virtual, with a theme of “We're Still Here” to celebrate the history and strength of Toronto's dynamic Dyke community

June 27 @ 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

Catalyst

Indigenous and Two-Spirit programming.

June 27 @ 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

ASL Programming

A segment of ASL programming highlighting different art forms.



A line up of virtual programming is set to stream off Pride's main channels and embedded into their website. The **Virtual Pride Festival Weekend** programming serves as a representation of what would have taken place on the physical footprint of Pride Festival Weekend in Toronto.

Event ZOOM codes will be posted prior to the events online.

Watch & Enjoy Online at pridetoronto.com/virtualpride

June 27 @ 3:30 PM - 7:00 PM

Rangeela

Toronto's only queer South Asian dance party graces our stream with over three hours of Bollywood-inspired performances and dancing!

June 27 @ 7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Drag Ball with Brooke Lynn Hytes

A showcase of Canadian drag artists with the BIGGEST drag surprise. Nothing can stop Toronto's drag community. Not even evil Miss Rona. Drag queens and kings have stepped up their game during the Quarantine and have been giving of some pretty amazing shows from home. This year's all-local Drag ball will include a Drag hour every Saturday for the month of June, and a non-stop drag-marathon on Pride Saturday with shows from our city's fiercest.

June 27 @ 9:30 PM - 11:59 PM

Lavender

Lavender is a two-year-old staple in Toronto for LGBT2Q+ women, trans, and nonbinary folks!

June 28 @ 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

BQC - Black Queer Collective

The mission of the Black Queer Collective is to highlight and prioritize the stories and experiences of the Black Queer & Trans community in Toronto. BQC is a community response to lack of presentation in our LGBTQIAP youth community. We are a group of Black Queer youth curating a stage for our fellow Black Queer & Trans youth in Toronto to showcase their art. Our voices are important and our spaces are essential. Black Queer and Trans youth telling our stories, our own way. We are black and on track!

June 28 @ 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Online Pride Parade

The Virtual Pride Parade will stay true to its political roots, honouring it's courageous past while celebrating how far it has come. A presentation of community highlights will be followed by a virtual parade dance party. Tune in, you never know who might pop by for a surprise performance

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Virtual Pride Events

Pride Live – Stonewall Day

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NYC Pride

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www.nycpride.org/events

Seattle Pride

June 26 – June 28, 2020

www.seattlepride.org

Global Pride 2020

June 27, 2020

www.globalpride2020.org

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June 27- 28, 2020

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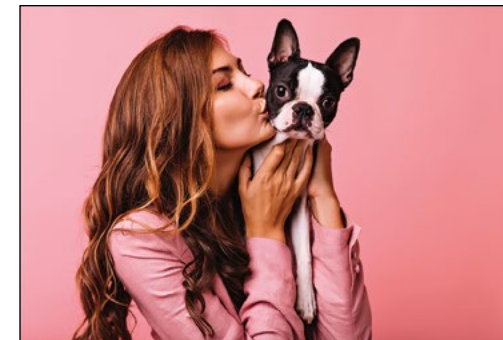
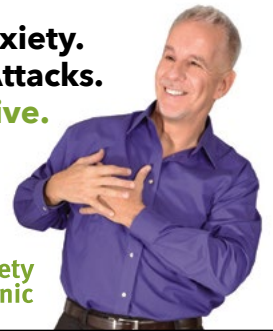
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Gary Edward Allen

A Beautiful Tomorrow

Will it come a beautiful tomorrow
Blow away the ashes of sorrow

It will be the dawning of a new day
And in my heart you'll forever stay

Lonely church bells continually chime
Warning we are living in dangerous times

Disease come to our towns and city streets
Try to sleep and dream between your sheets

May the four winds bring seeds of change
The foreboding hands of fate rearranged

Let us once again sit by the ocean of blue
With you holding me and me holding you

Have those carefree days of summer sun
But my fear is this curse has just begun

I want to take you upon a fiery steed
Take you far from the lands of need

Take you to a land of love and peace
Innocence is not being killed by disease

Maybe the answers lie in the starlit sky
Leave us no longer asking the question why

By Gary Edward Allen 2020

We'll Love Again

We will surely live and love again
Though I can't say where or when

Tides will wash all of the hurt away
Sun will dawn on a brand new day

The telling stars will shine in the sky
Imagine we had a pair of wings to fly

Peace will reign dawning of tomorrow
will come to an end to rivers of sorrow

Together both arm in arm love will reign
Placing miles of distance between us and pain

Love will again come cascading from the sky
And we can't let a precious moment pass us by

For you are my truth and love my only one
Want to fall into your arms when the day is done

The rain will come and wash away tears of sorrow
A rainbow will guide us to a brilliant tomorrow

On a ship of dreams our hopes will set sail
There's no way the Heaven's will let love fail

Hand in hand we will face the dawn together
And finally kiss goodbye the storms forever

For I love you and I'd have it no other way
From now on we'll make the most of everyday

My Ashes

When my ashes are silently laid to rest
Would like to know that I tried my best

And when the owl finally calls my name
Want to lay in rest without guilt or shame

When I am at last returned to Mother Earth
For the all of answers I will no longer search

Give me a new home in the painted sky
Up beyond where the sacred eagle flies

For my lonely soul I hope that you will pray
Upon the dawning of each brand new day

For there were many I was happy just to know
And just like a tree I hope you continue to grow

In your memory I hope that I will always stay
And I thank you for all our joyous yesterdays

You have given me so much to be grateful for
And in a friend I could not have asked for more

Forever Life goes on like the earth and the sea
And now God has set my restless spirit free

Gary Edward Allen is a gay Métis writer with a disability. He writes poetry, verse, and short stories, and has three books published. He is inspired to write by nature, love, relationships, and friendship. He currently resides in Nanaimo, British Columbia on Vancouver Island.



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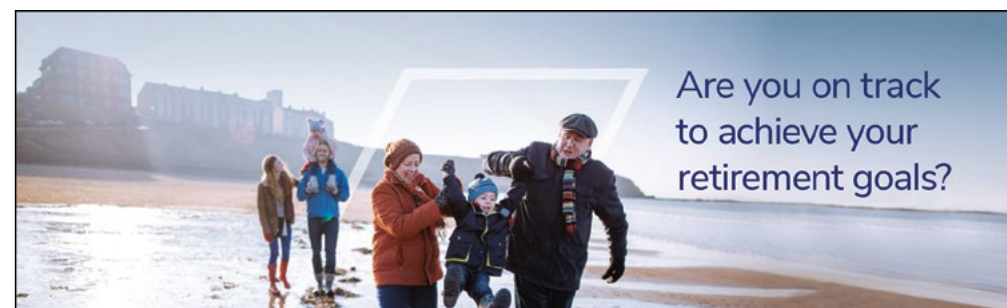
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Leticia Ferreira, Manager of Strategic Initiatives & Social Enterprise at *Friends of Ruby* (formerly *Egale Youth Services*), told me about how they are meeting needs of at risk LGBTQI2S youth in Toronto.

"As a queer newcomer to Toronto, one of my biggest wishes was to bring my experience with social impact and strategy to an LGBTQI2S focused charity. Growing up in a heteronormative bubble in my country of origin made coming out a painfully slow process to me" says Ferreira. "If I had something like *Friends of Ruby* around when I was younger, what a difference it would have made. So, for me, this role is a way to keep connected to and support my community, especially the most vulnerable ones."

To understand the impact that community programs can have she took me through what a youth would experience upon walking through the doors at *Friends of Ruby*.

"A new youth is greeted at our reception by one of our front-line team members. If the youth needs immediate assistance the team provides them with the support needed, or directs them to a counsellor. They are asked to fill out a quick registration form to assess their initial needs/interests. They can join activities immediately (e.g. drop-in, meals, and psycho-social groups, such as *Art for Change*, and *Gaming*)."

Of course this is just the beginning, as it takes time for at risk youth to get comfortable and learn to trust new people and situations. Slowly however, the organization can assist them with mental health issues, with what Ferreira considers, "the most important focus of risk assessment and support."

"Those who are more vulnerable, experiencing homelessness, living precariously or in fear for their safety, also come to find meals, a welcoming space and

by Kelly Wilk

Community Cornerstone



a community. If required, the staff would suggest an appointment with our Case Manager for more extensive intake."

This support could include up to 20 counselling sessions, a therapeutic group, assistance filling out documents, or connecting the youth with other specific supports in our network of partners. *Friends of Ruby* has been able to support more than 850 youth. This has prevented 470 mental health crises and visits that could have ended up in hospital emergency rooms, thanks to support groups, barrier-free one-on-one counselling, and support with gender-identity or transition. As 1-in-3 transgender individuals are rejected from shelters, there is a vital need for this space.

One youth commented, "The tone and non-judgmental approach made such a huge impact on me that, for the first time in years, I have not engaged in self-harming activities in weeks."

Friends of Ruby has been instrumental in saving many vulnerable members of the queer community, and in the future I am sure they will preserve many more. They are looking forward to a new programming centre with safe, transitional housing for up to 33 LGBTQI2S youth, located at 257 Dundas St E. Toronto.

More information can be found, and donations made via their website, www.friendsofruby.ca

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.



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by Sherry Sylvain

In response to COVID-19 and the closure of venues due to restrictions on social gatherings, events, festivals, and other group activities have either been cancelled or postponed for the immediate future.

In the meantime there have been several creative virtual events taking place online. Check out **page 36** in this issue for a list of Virtual Pride Events, with links to their online locations.

Our regular events print section will return as soon as venues start reopening.

Let's all stay safely connected.

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For a regularly updated list of
online and streaming events, visit
our sister publication at
theBUZZmag.ca/events.

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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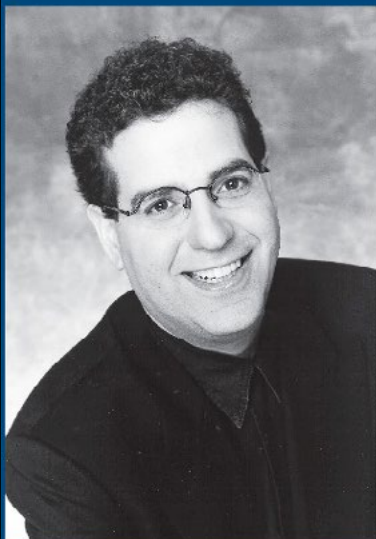
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By Mychol Scully

During times of social and cultural upheaval, one's identity can be called into question. So much of how we define ourselves is shaped by comparing and contrasting our constructed identity against social and cultural norms.

Stable norms help us sustain our identities in the face of challenges both moral and operational. So much of how we identify is shaped by the notion that "people like us believe/choose/do things like this." When the contours of what "people like us" means changes in response to larger social and cultural changes, we often find ourselves questioning who we are and what we believe.

The COVID-19 pandemic, renewed attention to Canadian issues of racism provoked by the social chaos playing out with our southern neighbours, and the economic insecurity triggered by those issues have left many of us adrift. What is the appropriate response to these issues during these times? How are we to maintain certainty in our identities when the world is so much in flux around us?

I would suggest that now might be a good time to step away from the reactionary methods that have shaped our identities for a very long time

and cultivate a little stillness in the midst of this maelstrom.

Now might be a good time to turn inward, test our assumptions and feel our way forward toward more solid ground. Our attitudes toward moral and cultural issues are learned behaviours... and what can be learned can be un-learned.

As is true with most meditation practices, a key element is developing the ability to allow thoughts and feelings to simply "flow" without attachment to any particular moment. By dispassionately observing our thoughts and feelings while removing attachments to any specific idea or feeling, we make space for the possibility of freeing ourselves to reconfigure our understanding and beliefs... to achieve fresh perspectives and create new clarity.

"You are not a human being having a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being having a human experience."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 1881-1955

This is perhaps one of the most essential perspectives we might hope to cultivate. Once we posit that we are, first and foremost, spiritual beings, we begin to occupy a vantage point toward our human experiences that liberates us from the demands that an obsessive focus on our experiences demands of us. Adopting a "bigger picture" attitude toward our life experiences helps

us manage our ego responses and offers us a more universal perspective that encourages us to see each other as "fellow spiritual beings" or, perhaps, parts of a singular spiritual reality, rather than competitive apes, beating our chests and trying always to gain or maintain the upper hand in our interactions with others.

The social and cultural challenges we are currently dealing with may pave the way for a new unification of the spirit.

Rather than combating the manifestations of separation attached to our external identities, we may come to realize that all of our current challenges stem from a single source. Our current suffering due to the amount of melanin in our skin, the shape of our genitalia, the histories of our cultures, and other differentiators are mere illusions masking an essential truth. *We are one.*

It's interesting to note that near-death experiences, periods of severe, life-threatening illness and other dire conditions of the flesh have, time and again, triggered transformative spiritual experiences in even the most recalcitrant, committed materialist. This awareness is available to all of us, when we intentionally or by force of circumstance are presented with that bigger picture. When the obsessive, ego-centric responses of our human experience are pushed aside by failing health or imminent demise, in that harrowing moment we

come face-to-face with the central reality of the truth of our spiritual nature.

When our thoughts are stilled, and we are completely in the "now," we begin to recognize our true spiritual nature. This is the source of transformation. We step off the hamster wheel of our external lives and bask in the knowing that our being proceeds from this spiritual truth. Everything else... EVERYTHING ELSE is distraction, the falsehood of separation from others, and the childish demands of the ego.

Many will pride themselves when they dismiss all of this "woo woo" talk as baseless and useless in dealing with "real" life. I would challenge those individuals to momentarily suspend their disbelief and openly and honestly pursue even the most rudimentary mindfulness practice. If there's nothing in what I'm proposing here, you've lost nothing but a bit of time. But if I'm right, you may gain access to something truly sublime... communion with your true being.

Mychol Scully is Senior Art Director for INspired Media Inc. publications PinkPlayMags, theBUZZ, The Local Biz Magazine, and The Pink Pages Directory. Mychol is available for thoughtful conversation or lascivious teasing any time at mychol@mychol.com.





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JULY 2020 to SEPTEMBER 2020

by Julie Antoinette

Aries (March 21 – April 20)

Time to put your ongoing activities on the back burner and put everything on pause - a mental pause. You must evaluate where your mental energy is being spent. Too much is wasted on worry which you mistakenly believe is productive. Hopefully you will have re-evaluated your mental expenditures and made some budgetary adjustments. Only then will you feel truly productive.

Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

Even in the most civilized societies, there is savagery and barbarism. In your recent free time and from the comfort of your living room, you've watched a story based on true events of the rarest circumstance. Do not make light of the plight of these brave lives lived to deliver this to you. Now go live your life with this broadened perspective.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

An old crush that never became more comes to mind. This causes you to think back and consider why events transpired as they did (or didn't)? Were you not brave enough to have chosen to act differently? Maya Angelou says, "When you know better, you do better." Are you better yet?

Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

Do you feel particularly exhausted lately? All you want to do is hibernate until this feeling passes. If you can, just let yourself do so, as you probably need it. It would be unwise to consider yourself unproductive for doing so. In fact, on the contrary, there is sometimes great value and productivity resulting from rest and inactivity. It is said (in very ancient texts) that even God rested on the 7th day.

Leo (July 23 – August 22)

You are faced with a situation to trust one of two individuals. Only one of them is trustworthy. There is much evidence to consider. You must choose correctly. Here is some wisdom to assist you. The mind operates based on principles of duality, logic, fact and data, but not truth. Therefore, it cannot tell the difference between fact and fiction if both are presented logically. The heart operates on a principle of unity and truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Use your tools appropriately.

Virgo (August 23 – September 23)

Someone needs peace and calm. Fear and worry have entered their mind and they are unable to release themselves from it. If you choose to crawl into that person's dark place with them you must be confident you can pull both of you out. Otherwise, you must keep your vibes high and leave it to them to find a way to entrain to you.

Libra (September 24 – October 23)

You never thought you'd be presented with this dilemma. However, you now must choose between love and money. Weigh your options carefully and try to imagine your future paths in each direction. No one is judging you. This is a matter of reckoning with the survival instinct within us all. Only you know what you can live with - and live without. Each choice has its own reward and its own sacrifice, pleasures and pains. To not decide is to decide. Don't give your power away.

Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

You are having trouble managing your emotions surrounding an issue of great importance regarding your future and the future of those you love. You must navigate this situation with caution, wisdom and calm or many will turn away from you. Cooler heads prevail.

Sagittarius (November 23 – December 21)

An old friend makes a cameo appearance back into your life. This friend represents a specific time that reflects an old aspect of your personality. You are no longer the person you were when you travelled in their circles. You must manage this dissonance as it will be jarring. Not to worry. Sometimes life reverts us to an old chapter to show us we've grown.

Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Something has taken place in an arena of your life that has made you feel left out or forgotten. This is hurtful but you must not react. Instead, wait the situation out. It will turn out to your benefit in the long run and you'll be thankful not to have been included.

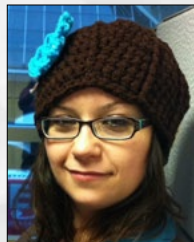
Aquarius (January 20 – February 19)

A manipulator is taking advantage of your good nature. You know and feel it but you allow it and are confused. Do you feel indebted or afraid to hurt this person? Have they presented themselves as a victim? All manipulation is emotional manipulation. If you feel confused, that's a sign that your emotions are being toyed with. No more games. Cut it off like a gangrenous limb.

Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

You are presented with a daunting task and must find an approach to ease the magnitude of it. You must break it down into components arranged in a logical order and methodically proceed through each. Before you know it, the task will be completed without too much suffering or discomfort. Time for a martini.

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.



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Looking Back

TwoSpirit is not gay, nor is it transgender. But it can be. It IS included within the rainbow of the LGBTQ+ but what is it really? There are many definitions of TwoSpirit. But, as stated by Lakota author Lynn Young, TwoSpirit is..."not male or female, but an ancient non-binary gender uniquely and wholly indigenous."

So that means what, exactly? It is firstly to be indigenous, connected to culture and deeply rooted in our indigenous history. Being TwoSpirit places an individual within the Indigenous world view, and it differs greatly from the Colonial views surrounding us. The Indigenous world view is one inclusive of gender expression and identity, not just sexual orientation. It is a fundamental faith at the core of your being in the true fluidity of gender expression as a beautiful gift from Creator. The ability to see the world from the eyes of both male and female is seen as a blessing and sacred to Indigenous culture.

I didn't grow up knowing these things, I grew up feeling like a weirdo. I didn't understand why men who did housework or cared for children were soft, or why female mechanics or tradespeople were butch. I thought it was normal, like sharing the burden of life. I never got the whole gender role thing.

TwoSpirit individuals embody the balance between male and female. Not necessarily gay, or transgendered. But also not out of the question. There are no hard and fast rules other than to say that TwoSpirit are not defined by assigned gender, but choose to appreciate and celebrate both the masculine and feminine energies (spirits) within us, and recognize the sacredness of each.



They are very real and guide my path through this world. I can call to my masculine for strength when needed, to my feminine when requiring patience. Sometimes requiring simultaneous action, they are there for me always

And that is me. I love and cherish motherhood and all that it entails. But I also love power tools, fast cars and building things. I embrace it all and feel infinitely blessed.

Aanishnabe Kwe,
Red Road Traveller

Mary Sue Robinet is married, and mother of four children. She has lived in Barrie, Ontario for 23 years. She is the Founding Chairperson of Fierste Simcoe Pride, a social advocate and a spiritual warrior.



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