QUEER COMPASSION IN 15 COMICS

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QUEER COMPASSION IN 15 COMICS
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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments and Funding Statement .......................... ix
Introduction ................................................................. xi
About the Cover Image ................................................... xv

1. *The First Parade* by Kayleigh Fine ............................... 1
2. *Remember* by David Winters ....................................... 13
3. *Effeminared: Under the Lucky Star* by Anwesh Sahoo ......... 27
4. *Open Wounds* by Jay Pahre ........................................ 43
5. *Mayor Glitter Saves the Day* by Fabien Lutz-Barabé ......... 55
6. *The Support Group* by Magnus van der Marel ................. 63
7. *Dads* by Michelle Parker and Jey Pawlik ....................... 73
8. *Closer To . . .* by Kielamel “Kiela” Sibal ....................... 83
9. *Restless Spirits* by Elijah Forbes .................................. 95
10. *Neighborhood Rhapsody* by Joe Phillips ....................... 107
11. *The Roommate* by Emma Galloway ............................. 119
12. *Need* by David Winters ............................................. 125
13. *Entropy (Will Tear Us Apart)* by Jalex Noel .................. 137
14. *Night Parade of a Hundred Ghosts* by 1ore ................... 151

About the Artists ................................................................. 175
About the Editors ............................................................... 183
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
AND FUNDING
STATEMENT

We would like to thank all the people who have shared their stories with us and all the artists who have brought those stories to life. We would also like to thank our family and friends for their support—including Wallace and Sizzle.

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INTRODUCTION

From ancient Buddhist traditions to modern psychological understandings, the concept of compassion has sparked the human imagination as a way to spiritual enlightenment and insight into the human condition, to improve health and well-being, and to create connections between us. Compassion can be all these things, but at the heart of it, it is the awareness of the suffering of others (or oneself) and the desire to move past suffering that results from illness, death, pain, hurt, and our attempts to hold on to the things we see as stable and secure. Life is change, and change often involves suffering. But compassion is not passive. There is a “doing” to being compassionate—doing actions that help beyond our suffering.

Compassionate acts can be transformative for people and society. Compassion can be witnessed in being with another, seeing people for who they are, sitting with uncomfortable feelings, and understanding the universality of human suffering. Compassion can also be witnessed in political activism and acts that disrupt social norms of gender and sexuality. Life is filled with acts of compassion.

The assumption of compassion is that we share a common humanity, that we all experience love, loss, pain, and suffering, universal threads that connect us all together in the intricacies of life. However, we must recognize that compassion is messier and much more complex. Compassion is also socially created, and our beliefs, values, and knowledge of the world shape not only the way compassion is practiced and enacted but also who is able to receive compassion. We
cannot ignore how cisheteronormativity, racism, and settler colonialism influence the way compassion is understood and practiced.

Our world feels a little bit too much right now, especially as a queer person. Despite increasing social and legal advancements in many nations, being queer can still be hard. Just the word queer itself reflects the complexity of our experiences. Queer is a word that for many of us has been used against us—to hurt and to isolate us—but it also has been reclaimed by many to show our strength and our connections to each other.

This was where Andrew, Megan, and I (Phillip) started—in a world that often seems to be lacking compassion for queer folks. Growing up gay in rural Nova Scotia, Andrew and I know all too well that queer people still face many struggles, and all three of us see it over and over again in our research. In all parts of the world, queer people experience daily acts of violence, anti-LGBTQ bills and laws, conversion therapies, families disowning us, and death simply for being who we are and loving who we love. Even within our own queer communities, many of us face discrimination, racism, colonialism, and a multitude of phobias—fatphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

To some people it may seem trite, superficial, or even cliché to say, but we believe compassion is the answer to many of these issues. Compassion is reflected time and again in the stories of queer people who we’ve learned from in our capacity as researchers working with queer communities and reflecting on our own lived experiences. By cultivating compassion, we can make the world a little bit better and build stronger connections with others. Compassion and its transformative power are the reasons for this collection.

We wanted to bring stories about queer compassion to life through the art of comics and through comics’ abilities to imagine in new, beautiful ways the personal experiences of queer people. In this collection, we bring together fifteen queer comic artists from Canada, the United States, Greece, India, and Scotland to help us
tell stories of queer compassion. These stories often touch upon real experiences of queer trauma, informed by our research with queer communities and our own experiences and the experiences of our artists, that cannot be ignored. Compassion and suffering are intimately intertwined, fundamental to the human experience; they unite all of us together and create understanding between people—the seed for transformative moments that, like the lotus flower, can blossom into new possibilities.

We hope you will also feel the joy of being queer in these comics—the joy of taking pride in yourself, the joy of finding community, the joy of neighbors and music, the joy of being kind to ourselves, and the joy of exploring new ways of being. We believe each comic has many meanings and that you will find your own understandings of queer compassion.

As Jewish gay activist Adam Eli said in his book, *The New Queer Conscience*, “Queer people anywhere are responsible for queer people everywhere.” This is what we hope for this collection, that it will uplift queer voices, illustrate queer strength, and capture queer resolve to make life more compassionate for ourselves and for others.
ABOUT THE COVER IMAGE

The cover image (by Kayleigh Fine) is special for us. It shows our characters, Alejo and Leif, from the comic *The First Parade*, enjoying a twilight evening together in peace. Fine has incorporated elements of Buddhism into the artwork with the use of lotus flowers in different pride colors in full bloom and floating in the pond. The Buddha holding the lotus flower symbolizes wisdom and compassion, and the lotus flower itself symbolizes transition, which we believe can be a metaphor for queer rights, trans journeys, and the transformative nature of compassion within society. As Stella Kramrisch noted in her book, *Exploring India’s Sacred Art*, the lotus flower begins with its roots in the mud and journeys through the depths of the murky water to the surface, where its leaves and its flowers are opened to the heavens and the light. The mud and murky water symbolize the struggles faced by queer people in daily life. Each flower, once it reaches the surface, is beautiful and unique and transcends the difficulties faced on its journey to the surface.
THE FIRST PARADE

BY

KAYLEIGH FINE
ALEJO, YOU REALLY SHOULD HAVE WORN THE TAIL. IT'S SO MUCH FUN.

I MEAN, YOU ARE ROCKIN' THAT TAIL BUT THINK I'M FINE WITH JUST THE HORN.
There's Dara and their parents.

It looks like they are ready for their first Pride Parade.

Alejo, where is your sexy tail?

Ohh Leif, it's so nice to meet you and Alejo.

We've heard so much about you boys and how you've taken our little baby under your wings.
I love parades, we should have more of them! Like why isn’t there a straight pride?

Oh my god! Every day is straight pride mom, every day.

We’re just excited Dara to be able to share this day with you and your friends, but we don’t know much about pride.

Well, if you want to know more about pride...

Alejo here is the man to talk to. He’s been helping out with pride stuff since I’ve known him.

Pride is how we get change. It’s how we push for things to get better.

Pride creates space for learning, which I think is a cornerstone to compassion and changing things.
Drag queens, with their charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent, were the ones to dig their heels in and start a revolution. And for years at pride they’ve continued it ever since.

Many of the groups here have been leading marches since the Stonewall Riots.

But there are also other groups who refuse to conform to mainstream society about gender and love who march to have their voices heard.
YOU SEE CERTAIN MOVEMENTS THAT ARE KIND OF BUILT UPON COMPASSION.
LIKE BLACK LIVES MATTER.

WE FIGHT TO MAKE SURE WE'RE TREATED FAIRLY.

THERE'S A POWER IN HAVING A SPACE THAT'S MEANT FOR YOU
WHERE YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT ON A FAÇADE.
I’m so happy to be able to walk with you.

Look Leif, it’s our garden. Let’s take a break. I wanna get you alone in there.

Ohh, just the two of us? How naughty.
THIS IS NICE. I HOPE IT WAS A GOOD DAY FOR DARA AND THEIR PARENTS.

IT SEEMS LIKE THEY WERE REALLY ENJOYING THEIR FIRST PRIDE.

OH BABE, I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT. HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

YEAH, DARA IS PRETTY LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH LOVING AND COMPASSIONATE PARENTS.

I GUESS THE WHOLE DAY JUST MAKES YOU THINK ABOUT STUFF.

MY MOM COMPLETELY REJECTED ME, THROWING ME OUT LIKE GARBAGE. COMING OUT AS A GAY PERSON IN COLOMBIA... WELL IT’S DIFFERENT THERE.

WHEN I CAME HERE I WAS ALONE, I FELT VERY ISOLATED AND VERY LONELY.

FINDING MY WAY AND BEING INVOLVED WITH PRIDE IT MADE ME FEEL PART OF A COMMUNITY AND MADE ME FEEL LOVE AND VALUED, LIKE I REALLY MATTERED. WHEN PEOPLE CAN SEE OUR SHARED HUMANITY, THERE’S MORE SPACE FOR COMPASSION.
I’m sorry you had to go through all that.

It’s ok. Things are better now. I can feel a lot safer and more generous with my heart when I know that I belong somewhere.

You belong here with me and in this parade.

Should we get back?

In a bit, let’s just be here a little bit longer.
WHAT A WONDERFUL DAY. I HEARD SO MANY PEOPLE’S STORIES AND LEARNED A LOT.

THAT’S WHAT PRIDE IS FOR.

IT CONNECTS US.

YEAH, YOU KNOW THE WORLD CAN BE A BIT COLD AND HARSH SOMETIMES, SO WE NEED TO FIND WARMTH IN EACH OTHER.
FROM THE EDITORS

This comic was developed by us (editors Phillip, Andrew, and Megan) and the artist. We had a lot of fun first creating the script. Stories and powerful words from research participants were plentiful, and this enabled us to develop two amazing main characters who, along with other characters, brought to life the realities for many queer people. So many compassionate messages were woven throughout the parade scene through the characters’ words. We could begin to visualize how the complex emotions of compassion between partners, friends, parents, and strangers would be presented in both loud public spaces and an intimate garden escape. Once the script was written, we then passed it on to our amazing comic artist Kayleigh Fine. The images that Kayleigh sent back to us were perfect, and very quickly, the story and meaning of compassion were told through beautiful images and color. We could feel the variety of emotions that were told through pictures and words and trust that readers will also connect emotionally to this comic.
REMEMBER

BY

DAVID WINTERS
THE 80'S

PLEASE BE CAREFUL. I WORRY

YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT, I KNOW IT'S SCARY BUT WE KNOW THAT IT'S NOT SPREAD SO EASILY. THESE PEOPLE NEED HELP

I KNOW, I'M SORRY. I LUV YA BABE

5:45PM DOWNTOWN

I KNOW YOU DO AND I LOVE YOU TOO! I'LL BE OK, JUST KEEP OUR LITTLE ONE SAFE WHILE I'M OUT AT WORK

AT THIS SOLUTION! LET THE HOMOS EM...
HOMO
SEX IS A
SIN!!!
IN HELL!

THE LORD IS

HOSPICE CARE
HI BETTE, I’LL DO MY ROUNDS AFTER I FINISH LOGGING IN

HI JENNIFER!

HOWS THAT ROOMATE OF YOURS? SHE MUST BE DUE ANY DAY NOW EH? CAN’T IMAGINE YOU WANT TO HAVE A SCREAMING BABY AT HOME AFTER SPENDING ALL NIGHT HERE

IT’S NOT ALL BAD, BESIDES BABIES CAN BE CUTE AND ALL THAT!

6:06PM

HIV HOSPICE COMPASSION CARE
FUCK off. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

CMON, OUT WITH IT! I DON'T HAVE ALL DAY, OH WAIT I DO! WELL AT LEAST TILL I'M DEAD AND OUT OF HERE, WHICH AT THE RATE I'M FALLING APART. WON'T BE VERY MUCH LONGER
YOU'RE FRIGHTENED

I DON'T NEED YOUR PITTY

PLEASE DON'T CONFUSE PITY WITH CARING

YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A SCARY THING NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH. IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT, NO MATTER WHAT THOSE OUTSIDE THESE WALLS MIGHT HAVE YOU THINK.

YOU DESERVE BETTER, YOU DESERVE LOVE. I'M SORRY YOU FEEL SO ANGRY BUT I'M NOT HERE TO BE YOUR PUNCHING BAG OR BE YELLED AT. WHAT I CAN BE IS SOMEONE WHO CARES AND IF YOU WANT SOMEONE WHO WILL LISTEN, THAT IS AFTER YOU TAKE YOUR MEDS.
NOW, NOW. THAT'S ALL OK. SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE A LOT YOUR HOLDING ON TO HERE. FEEL LIKE MAYBE LETTING IT OUT?
MY PARENTS LOVED ME. THEY SAID I WAS THEIR "GIFT FROM GOD". THEN AS I GOT OLDER IT WAS PRETTY OBVIOUS I WASN'T WHAT THEY EXPECTED OF THEIR SON.

WHEN I CAME OUT, ACTUALLY WHEN I WAS FOUND OUT I WAS KICKED OUT, I WAS HOMELESS AND ALONE. NO ONE WOULD HELP ME. I WENT FROM A BIG HOUSE TO THE STREETS.

MY FIRST BREAK CAME WHEN A SHELTER TOOK ME IN AND I EVENTUALLY GOT A PART TIME JOB AT THE DOLLAR STORE WHERE I MET PETE.

PETE WAS AMAZING. HE WAS JUST A LITTLE OLDER THAN ME BUT HAD A PLACE OF HIS OWN, AND EVEN AN ADORABLE DOG NAMED ANDREW.

WE STARTED DATING AND WE MOVED PRETTY QUICK.

WE WERE TOGETHER FOR THREE YEARS UNTIL HE GOT SICK, THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN HE WAS GONE. IT WAS SO FAST.

HE JUST WASTED AWAY. HIS FAMILY WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM.

I BURIED HIM WITH WHAT FRIENDS WE HAD LEFT, THEN RIGHT AFTER I STARTED TO GET SICK.

I LOST OUR APARTMENT. GAVE ANDREW AWAY TO MY NEIGHBOR AND ENDED UP HERE.
I CALLED MY MOM. SHE HUNG UP ON ME, WHO HANGS UP ON THEIR SON WHEN THEY CALL FROM THEIR DEATH BED!

A PRETTY CRAPPY MOM I WOULD SAY

BUT RIGHT NOW YOU'RE NOT ALONE. REMEMBER THAT

NOW.

SO MUCH HAS CHANGED, SOME FOR THE WORSE, BUT OVERALL SO MUCH FOR THE BETTER.

THE YOUNG HAVE A CHANCE THESE DAYS. I WISH MY BOYS HAD BEEN GIVEN THIS CHANCE, THEY'RE GONE NOW.

ALMOST AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF LIFE.

GONE.

WHAT A WASTE.
I'M A MOTHER NOW, A GRANDMOTHER EVEN.

LIFE HAS BEEN GOOD.

THERE'S BEEN DARK TIMES BUT WE GOT THROUGH IT.

WELL SOME OF US DID.

LOOK GRANDMA!!!

OH I SEE YOU DEAR!
IN THE END I COULDN'T DO MUCH, BUT THE PROUDEST THING I CAN SAY I DID FOR THEM WAS LISTEN. AND I REMEMBER.

I REMEMBER ALL MY BOYS.
FROM THE ARTIST

The topic of HIV and caring for those struggling with it reminded me of stories I had heard about (mostly) lesbians working at hospice facilities in the ’80s/’90s that took horrible abuse from people who were scared and left to die alone. These women continued to show up and be there for these people, showing empathy and compassion to them when no one else would.
EFFEMINARED:
UNDER THE
LUCKY STAR
BY
ANWESH SAHOO
Effeminared
Under the lucky star!

ANWESH SAHOO
“AYE ANAY! ANURUP SAYS ANAY TOH CLASS KA SABSE BADA CHAKKA HAI! (ANURUP SAYS, ANAY IS OUR CLASSROOM’S GREATEST CHAKKA!),” SAID AALIN AND THE ENTIRE CLASS BURST OUT IN LAUGHTER.

ANAY WAS DUMBFOUNDED! HE WAS MORE SO IN A STATE OF SHOCK BECAUSE HE BELIEVED AALIN WAS HIS GOOD FRIEND. THINGS HAD CHANGED SINCE ANURUP MOVED INTO THE CITY, HE WAS THE NEW BOY IN THE CLASSROOM, AND SUDDENLY THE BOYS WERE NO MORE BOYS, THEY WERE GROWING UP TO BE LITTLE MEN. TEARS ROLLED DOWN ANAY’S EYES, AND IT ALMOST SEEMED LIKE THE BEGINNING OF THE END.
ANAY WAS REMINDED OF THE TIME WITH HIS UNCLE WHEN HE LEARNED ABOUT BEING A ‘CHAKKA’ - A DEROGATORY TERM USED TO REFER TO THE TRANS COMMUNITY IN INDIA. THE TERM ALSO REFERS TO THE THIRD GENDER, BEING CONSIDERED NEITHER COMPLETELY MALE NOR FEMALE. POPULAR MEDIA IN INDIA HAS FURTHER POPULARIZED THIS IDEA OF ‘THE THIRD GENDER’ BEING INCOMPLETE INDIVIDUALS OR BEING CONFUSED ABOUT THEIR GENDER IDENTITY.

BEING A CHAKKA IS A CURSE, ANAY!
THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN TO SOMEONE!
EVERYTHING CHANGED THAT DAY. IT DIDN’T MATTER HOW WELL ANAY WAS DOING IN CLASS ANYMORE, OR HOW MANY AWARDS HE WAS WINNING! HE WAS NOW THE ‘CHAKKA’ OF THE CLASS. ANAY GREW UP IN A SIMPLE CONSERVATIVE INDIAN FAMILY, AND WAS OFTEN LOOKED DOWN UPON FOR TALKING LIKE A GIRL’, AS SANIDHYA’S MOTHER WOULD SAY. NONE OF IT EVER MADE ANY SENSE TO ANAY. ANAY WAS TALKING LIKE ANAY, ANAY WAS RUNNING LIKE ANAY, ANAY WAS THINKING LIKE ANAY. AND WHY WAS TALKING LIKE A GIRL A BAD THING ANYWAY? ANAY WAS AN ARTSY KID. HE LOVED TO PAINT, TO DANCE, TO SING, WINNING AWARDS LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTRE. ANAY WAS HIS PARENT’S CHAMPION, BUT SOMEHOW NEVER ENOUGH FOR THE WORLD.
The next month Anay and his classmates were to head to Nainital for a school trip. It was awkward from the get go. Anay had suddenly become a kid that no one wanted to be around, except for a few girlfriends he had. They were the only silver lining, really. Their class coordinator decided to take charge of the seating, and requested for Anay and Anurup to sit together. Anurup wouldn’t stop verbally abusing Anay the entire time. Anay was sitting right there, dumbfounded again, nothing to say, nowhere to go, he was devastated.

This one’s definitely going viral!!

I don’t understand why professor would make me sit next to this guy! Anay is obviously gay, so fucking gross!
Anay felt like a shard just pierced through him, he was already dying a little everyday. He was starting to fall into the rabbit hole. All Anay asked for was a little bit of kindness, a little bit of compassion, because aren’t we all misfits in some way? How is it then that we cannot appreciate our uniqueness? Perhaps it was too much to ask. It was 11 PM, and Anay made a wish!

Maybe it is my fault! Why would he call me gay? Just because I’m femme? Why is being effeminate a bad thing anyway?

If there was a force above us, I hope I could go off to sleep, and never wake up again!
HE DID WAKE UP HOWEVER. HIS EYES WIDE OPEN, HE FOUND AN ICY BLUE UNICORN RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM. THE UNICORN IN FACT STARTED TALKING TO HIM! ANAY, COMPLETELY PERPLEXED, WAS CONVINCED HE WAS INDEED IN HEAVEN. THE UNICORN HAD GORGEOUS PASTEL BLUE FEATHERS, AND HIS FACE ADORNED WITH GOLDEN JEWELS AND PEARLS; TAIL SO LONG AND LUSCIOUS, HE’D GIVE RAPUNZEL A RUN FOR HER MONEY!

HEY ANAY! I’M TUKTUKI, PLEASED TO MEET YOU, KID. IT’S TIME FOR A CHANGE! HOP ON!

HOW ARE YOU TALKING?! AND YOU’VE GOT WINGS, AND YOU’RE BLUE!!! OKAY, I’M CONVINCED I AM INDEED IN HEAVEN.
THEY FLEW ALL THE WAY TO A CANDY COLORED FANTASY LAND. THE GATES READ “HIJRA HABBA”.

TUKTUKI EXPLAINED TO ANAY HOW HIJRA HABBA WAS A CELEBRATION OF LIFE. A REMINDER THAT HE BELONGED. ANAY ENTERED THE GATE WHERE HE WAS GREETED BY SARITA TAYI. ANAY RECOGNISED HER INSTANTLY, AND SHARED HOW INSPIRING SHE WAS TO HIM.

SARITA TAYI TOOK KIDS OF SEX WORKERS ALL ACROSS INDIA WHO LOST THEIR MOTHERS, UNDER HER WINGS. SHE WAS A QUEER ICON, BUSTLING WITH ENERGY!

SARITA TAYI! I KNOW YOU! YOU WERE ON TV. YOU’RE SO INSPIRING!

HAHAHA! WHO WOULD’VE THOUGHT A HIJRA WOMAN COULD BE AN INSPIRATION, BUT HERE WE ARE!
HIJRA HABBA WAS TRULY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WORLD EVER! TRANS WOMEN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE CAME TOGETHER, ADORNED IN BEAUTIFUL SAREES, DANCED TOGETHER, SANG TOGETHER, SHARED STORIES TOGETHER, AND ABOVE ALL CREATED A SAFE SPACE FOR QUEER KIDS LIKE ANAY. HE WAS OVERJOYED WITH EXCITEMENT AND GRATITUDE, HE COULDN’T BELIEVE HE WAS FINALLY IN A PLACE WHERE HE FELT SAFE, WHERE HE WASN’T JUDGED. HE MET QUEER KIDS LIKE HIM FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE THERE, AND HE HAD SO MUCH TO SHARE. HE ALMOST FORGOT HOW MOMENTS AGO, HE DIDN’T WANT TO LIVE ANYMORE, IN FACT HE WASN’T EVEN SURE IF THIS WAS REAL, AND HONESTLY IT DIDN’T MATTER.
Anay was simply enamoured with this world. When he found a mirror in the middle of a lotus swamp, he walked right through the lotuses and stood in front of his reflection. When his reflection looked into his eyes and said, "Hey Anay! Remember that all that you see here is valid. Your dreams are valid, you are valid! Never let anyone make you feel any lesser. This life is a gift, value it, cherish it. His reflection peeped out of the mirror, held Anay's face and gave him a kiss.

Anay had tears of joy. For the first time ever, he felt beautiful!
HE WAS OVERWHELMED WITH HOPE AND LOVE AND EXTENDED HIS ARMS OUT TO EMBRACE HIS REFLECTION, WHEN THE FLOOR BENEATH HIM SLID THROUGH, INTO A FREE FALL, AND A BIG THUMP!
His eyes wide open, looking to his left, to his right. Anay was back in his room, on his bed, eyes still wet. He wiped his tears off, rolled to his side, embraced his stuffed unicorn toy, shut his eyes down and went back to sleep.
When life gives you lemons, you’ve got to make a lovely pink lemonade, no?
FROM THE ARTIST

This comic is loosely inspired by some of my own experiences and shows how the queer Indian world helped me understand queerness under the local Indian context and the trans women who changed my perspective of the outer world and taught me to respect myself first. Growing up as a complete misfit, I wondered what a utopian world would look like, and my longing led me to the world of Effeminare, a Latin word that traditionally associates itself with femininity and effeminacy, and I had this desire to take away the stigma from the one thing that was used to pull me down. Effeminared is a reminder that a little bit of compassion, a little bit of love, and a little bit of acceptance are all one needs to find belonging and happiness and that sometimes that little bit of love and self-belief could begin with you.
OPEN WOUNDS
BY
JAY PAHRE
There's this place in the middle of a hundred miles of corn in any direction, and from up above, it looks like a blight, or a wound.

One of a series of pockmarks on the ground.

A mark in this swath of waving stalks of sweetcorn.

That place is my hometown.

It's the kind of place where you're just as likely to see an Amish horse-and-buggy clopping down the road as you are to see a packed drag show on a Friday night.

Except each time, the charred wood and brick left a black, sooty mark.

Another blight, another mark, of a community hurting.

I never heard if the investigations went anywhere, but each time the bar got rebuilt.

Once or twice it was arson.

Another time they weren't sure.

Each time the community gathered, mourned, and built back the space again.

the gay bar burned down three times in the time I lived there.
Hearing about that building getting burned down and rebuilt again and again was the only connection to the queer and trans community I had for a long time.

Growing up there, realizing I was trans and queer, it took some doing.

Surrounded by guys driving big farm equipment and playing football there hadn’t been a masculinity I felt I could explore, that was for me.

Seeing it in the paper, the way things are siloed in my hometown, you don’t think about those things as connecting to you until it hits you in the face.

I worked at the horse farms, sketched, and liked to hide in the hayloft with kittens on my lap in the wintertime.

It felt like a gap, a big yawning wound, between a masc-ness I was leaning towards and the masc-ness I was seeing in my peers.

But you feel this pull, in that gap within you, pulling from that wound.

You shoot, again and again, in a direction that might make things right.

That might make things easier and each shot takes a piece of you out instead.

It felt like a wound that I was opening up and trying to mend again and again.
Left like it is, those places, leaving that open wound, it festered.

You put a bandaid on it, or you try something else.

The wound still festered.

It becomes poisonous, filled with pus, infected, rots, and that corrodes at the healthy flesh around it until it feels like there's nothing unwounded left.

But, there is this thing with wounds.

It's a breach of the skin.

Our skin is a porous membrane.

It's this organ that surrounds our body, that mediates how we respond to the world.

It responds to temperature, to the weather, to other bodies.

It notices when we're close to another person, when we're sharing space with someone— or something— else.

Sometimes before our brains do.
At some point, I realized I was trans, and queer, but looking at my body, I still felt that gap.

I bundled up, wore too-big old plaid flannel, sometimes as many as six layers of shirts.

One of those days, wearing four shirts and on the verge of starting college, I mustered up the guts to go to the LGBT Center on campus for the first time.

Until I finally found this small room at the end of a long hallway.

The walls were covered in flags and there was a huge library full of more books by queer and trans authors than I'd ever seen before in my life.

When she heard me arrive, the director came out, greeted me, and told me about the space.

Most of the students hadn't come back from summer yet, so the place was quieter than normal.

Usually the small room would be full of five, ten, twenty people at once.

It turns out the resource center used to be a utility closet, so there were a lot of running closet jokes about the space.

But here was another place, a corner dug out by some incredible people, for community to gather.
As the semester started, people started coming to the center more and more.

I was the only trans person there at the time, but that didn’t matter.

We were all there because something had happened.

Some had been disowned, or run away.

Some weren’t out yet.

Some were struggling with alcohol, or with drugs.

Some were lonely, or had learned something about themselves late in life and were feeling like they were making up for lost time.

But we were all finding those hurts, or those gaps, in ourselves, and realizing, maybe, just maybe, they weren’t just wounds at all.
We'd be sitting with that raw feeling, deep in our heart, that rotten feeling settled in our gut, and somehow, something would change.

There'd be one day where someone was spilling their guts out over such-and-such that had happened, and suddenly there'd be more people in the space.

More people listening, bearing witness to that hurt.

And reaching out too.

With offerings of their own, from that same spot inside them.

It was a shared vulnerability.

An acknowledgment that though those wounds were each different, it was a place where connection could happen, too.
Many people weren’t from in town either.

Lots of people came in from the smaller towns further out.

where there’s just a Casey’s gas for a grocer and two houses at an intersection.

So this little closet, tucked in the corner of this building, in this wound-city in the middle of the cornfields, for so many people, it was a lifeline.

I remember I was still working at the farm, and I’d picked up a second job in graphic design at the university to help save for top surgery.

When I came out as trans, the barn owner told me to piss in the horse stalls instead of the toilet ‘cause they don’t make toilets for your types when you’re working at the farm.

I was already out as trans at my design job.

But I finally worked up the courage to use the men’s bathroom there the first time instead of holding it in all day.

I got called into human resources and fired for it.

I walked to the resource center, sat down, and bawled my guts out.

It felt so hopeless.

Top surgery would be life-changing, but saving up the thousands of dollars for it, out of pocket?

It felt insurmountable.
But someone sat down next to me then, listened, and shared their experience.

This was their first time in town.

They thought they might be non-binary, but had grown up in a small town and didn’t feel like they could explore their gender safely there.

Another person came over, someone I’d seen in the space for a while.

She said she thought she might be a trans woman, not just bisexual.

We sat and chatted for hours.

We talked about how there weren’t enough gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.

How frustrating it was that insurance didn’t cover HRT or gender affirming surgeries.

The next semester, the first trans student organization on campus formed.
From doing a single-stall bathroom audit of the campus to getting trans-inclusive healthcare on the student plan and bringing in more trans speakers, the student organization’s actions felt urgent, timely, and like they were for the community.

We caught a lot of friction, a lot of setbacks, but over the years, gradually, things got better.

We got medical care. We got gender inclusive restrooms. We could exist in public openly, as who we were.

To raise funds for the community, we worked with a few local drag queens and other organizations to do a trans community fundraiser drag show at the queer bar in town—but the place had burned down again.
It was this moment of realizing, that though things were changing, and spaces were feeling better, or safer- there was still work to be done.

There will always be work still to be done.

Sometimes those reminders of the work to be done are real tragedies.

Sometimes they’re moments of sadness or isolation.

But each of those reminders it strikes something inside you hits in the ground next to what you thought you were aiming for.

It’s a hurt, but it’s also a connection, and a shift in perspective.

Sometimes burned down ruins are just burned down ruins.

Sometimes a closet is just a closet.

Sometimes a cut in your chest is just a cut in your chest.

And sometimes, they’re something else entirely.
FROM THE ARTIST

For this project, I was given the theme of Open Wounds, which considers how areas of hurt, while painful, can also be areas of connection or affirmation for 2SLGBTQ+ people. I wanted to follow the idea of a wound as something both literal, such as top surgery scars, and abstract, such as the experience of losing friends, family, or a career when coming out. This comic seemed like a wonderful opportunity to recognize and honor the ways that the 2SLGBTQ+ community in my hometown lifted itself up despite ongoing resistance and how community spaces were—and continue to be—places of care, compassion, and support. These places by and for community, where you can share vulnerabilities, come together, and reimagine what it might mean to be queer or trans, are places of radical potential. In making this comic, I was interested in the way in which the panels themselves might reference wounds and pores on one’s skin, areas where one body is breached and touches another, as a way of thinking about the literal points of connection these stories, places, and people could have with one another.
MAYOR GLITTER SAVES THE DAY
BY
FABIEN LUTZ-BARABÉ
Mayor Glitter Saves the Day
By: Fabien Barabé

Since moving to this town I've seen a lot of homophobic stickers on cars so I'm nervous about putting up my rainbow flag.

Maybe I need to be less gay here?

Later that afternoon at city hall

Craig, it's so nice to meet you! Welcome to the town, my name is Greg but lots of folk just call me Mayor Glitter. My husband and I host a BBQ every Saturday. Why don't you come and I can introduce you around?

Thank you, that's very kind of you.
THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY AT MAYOR GLITTER’S HOME.

THERE’S NOT A HUGE QUEER REPRESENTATION HERE SO WE NEED TO LIFT EACH OTHER UP AND EMPOWER EACH OTHER WITH THE SKILLS TO TAKE ON THE WORLD.

IF YOU EVER FEEL UNSAFE, I CAN HELP. I’M NOT JUST THE MAYOR, I’M ALSO AN ADVOCATE FOR THE COMMUNITY.

CRAIG, THIS IS MY HUSBAND KENT.

HI CRAIG, NICE TO MEET YOU. WHAT DO YOU DO FOR WORK?

I’M AN ARTIST.

WE’D LOVE TO SEE YOUR WORK SOMETIME. WHY DON’T YOU COME TO DINNER TOMORROW EVENING AND BRING YOUR ART PORTFOLIO?

THANK YOU, I LOOK FORWARD TO IT.
THE NEXT EVENING AT MAYOR GLITTER’S HOUSE

WOW, THESE ARE INCREDIBLE CRAIG!

AMAZING!

CRAIG, OUR TOWN IS IN NEED OF SOME REVITALIZATION AND I’D LIKE TO COMMISSION YOU FOR A MURAL FOR THE TOWN HALL BUILDING. PERHAPS SOMETHING TO SHOW OFF OUR RAINBOW COLOURS?

GEE, I DON’T KNOW.

THIS WOULD BE GREAT FOR THE TOWN, IT WOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT WE ARE A MORE PROGRESSIVE SMALL TOWN. LET’S DO THIS TOGETHER!

WELL, SINCE YOU PUT IT THAT WAY, I AM HONoured AND LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING STARTED!

EXCELLENT!
WOW, HE’S SO TALENTED!

AMAZING!

LOVE IS LOVE!

“I’M FINISHED!”

I DON’T WANT THIS FRUITY STUFF IN MY TOWN!

NOT TOO BAD, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF!
Craig, the community has rallied and we’re here to support you. Now let’s love bomb that hate speech!

It was our community showing compassion!

So within the queer community I think having those role models, having allies in your life is very helpful. The mayor really showed me compassion by taking me under his wing and mentoring me. There was recognition and connection through that.

The End
FROM THE ARTIST

When I was approached for this comic, I had to look back on myself when I was starting out as an artist. I knew full well, growing up in a small town, that acceptance of being “different” is not always looked upon favorably. Working on the brief outline for the six-page comic, I made sure that each moment of my character would show his anxiety about trying to fit in to the point of trying to conceal his “gayness.” With the help of the mayor and his husband along with the support of the community, Craig is made to feel welcome, which so many of us don’t often get.
THE SUPPORT GROUP

BY

MAGNUS VAN DER MAREL
As Trans persons you can feel super isolated.

Maybe I could go.

I would have to go out...

It’s close by!

But people would stare...

I think it could help!
I don’t know if I can do this...

Just breathe....

Everyone’s looking at me...

Almost there...

Just another block...

Trans + Support Group
5-7pm all ages :)
That’s so many people!

Hey! Nice to meet you!

Welcome everyone! I’m Otto, my pronouns are he/they and I’m the coordinator for this group!

Phew they didn’t call on me!
They all seem really nice!

It's not just me!

This support group's been so helpful for me.

It's my first time at a meeting! I've just moved to this country.

They're just like me!
It was the first time I had ever been around so many other trans people,

I was so nervous and had so many questions.

You should join the online group too!

Everyone was so helpful and patient with all my questions.

Oh! I didn’t know!

That was so nice!

I can’t wait for the next meeting!
So much of the support out there is from other trans people who’re passing on what they’ve learned.

Handing information off to the next generation of people figuring themselves out.

I found that immensely rewarding, to be a mentor to these young trans kiddos.

Making sure they knew they had at least one ally on their side.

Or even just being someone they could look up to.
Reach out.

It’s hard.

But we are here.
You can grow more when you have community around you.

It is important for us as humans to keep growing.
FROM THE ARTIST

This comic is really about overcoming the feeling of isolation a lot of trans people feel and the big supportive network of people out there. The trans community is built on a lot of peer support and acts of compassion for people going through the same struggles, and I wanted to showcase that, especially as that was so important for me when I was starting out.
Okay, let’s start our “It’s been two years and I’m nervous about visiting my family again” unofficial therapy/gripe session!
I feel bad because I miss my parents, but my holidays were so much less stressful last year when I couldn't see them.

But like, my mom was surprisingly supportive when I broke up with Stacey.

Staceeeey!

Boo!

 Booool Staceey.

Yeah. She let me vent to her and even came to hang out with me a few times. She helped me figure out that what Stacey was doing was abusive.

But it's still not always easy to be around her.

And my dad.
His big support was “don’t tell my sisters or they’ll make fun of you” when I said I was dating a woman.

Like, that was as good as it gets with him.

That’s so hard.

My dad came out when I was ten so I had like this built-in exposure to the community.
Seeing that in him, his recognition of who he was and who he wanted to love, helped me get to that space of recognition too.

Not that everyone is lucky enough to be gay and then have a gay dad.

But we're going to Herman's parent's for the long weekend and he's really frustrated with his dad. He talks about how he dealt with all this discrimination for being Jewish and then turns around and starts being really racist and homophobic.
Mom, my dad was the same way, he just couldn't process me dating a woman.

He blamed Danielle for me being gay.

He didn't talk to her, he didn't want to see her.

He kind of blamed her for me coming out to him.

This is the first year I've gone home since he died.

But towards the end, before he died, he had this epiphany. He opened up and realized that Danielle was someone's daughter. He apologized and was sad that he never got to know her. He even wanted to apologize to Danielle's mother!
You know, Herman's dad is sort of doing that too. He used to be really awful about immigrants, but he's been needing some extra care at home so we got him a few personal support workers. One's from the Philippines and one's from Sudan, and now he's really close friends with them.

He's really started to see people as people, instead of just discriminating against them as an entire group.
My Dad is like that—he was so caring and compassionate to people he knew, but then would say all these horrible racist and homophobic things.

It was so different from the person he was most of the time. I was like, who is this man?

It was difficult recognizing him as my father. But now his Alzheimers is so bad, he doesn’t recognize me. I’m the only one allowed into the home right now and all I can do to look after him is to bring him chocolate fudge, and make sure he has music.

No matter what, he’s still my Dad and I want to make sure he’s happy. The only thing he gets any enjoyment from is chocolate fudge and music, so I’m making sure he has an unlimited supply.
I need more coffee.

Yup.

Me too!

Same.
FROM THE ARTISTS

Working from research interviews was a very different starting point than how we typically create comics, and we really wanted to make sure that we stayed true to the stories that were passed on to us. Having a theme of compassion and seeing the interview responses connected with something that both of us experienced as queer people were helpful. Though it is certainly and thankfully not the case for everyone, a common theme in the interviews was the way queer people try to connect with their homophobic parents. When we consider parent/child relationships, a lot of time is spent on the parent’s unconditional love for their child, but a recurring theme in the stories of queer people is the continued desire to reconnect and love parents who are dismissive or antagonistic to their child’s sexuality or gender. We hope that this comic expresses to the reader how much queer people love their parents and the compassion queer people have when they try to connect however they can, even when those relationships hurt.
CLOSER TO . . .

BY

KIELAMEL “KIELA” SIBAL
OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US, LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. AMEN.

I rack my head on how to tell this story to whoever you are.

I pray my prayers, I long for women. I'm a Catholic and a lesbian at the same time.

Would you listen? Do you want to hear that story?

But maybe it's best to confide to you as a friend.

Before you turn the pages, you should know what I am.

closer to...

HAIL, MARY, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD IS WITH THEE. BLESSED ART THOU AMONGST WOMEN AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB, JESUS.

HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, PRAY FOR US SINNERS, NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH. AMEN.

by kielamel sibal
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

I'm as cradle Catholic as they come. Baptized in St. Dolores Church in San Fernando.

I had my first communion there, and my catechism too.

I attended private Catholic school.

On Fridays, we had after-school clubs and mandatory masses in the gymnasium.

Special occasions mean attendance in bigger parishes, sometimes including the extended family.

After immigrating from the Philippines to Canada, my family settled on a humble parish which we attend on all occasions.

We've been going there for the last thirteen years.
HAIL MARY, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD IS WITH THEE. BLESSED ART THOU AMONGST WOMEN AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB, JESUS.

HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, PRAY FOR US SINNERS, NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH. AMEN.

In these days I'm less involved, but I attended some Sunday school in this parish.

So what does this history have anything to do with me being gay?

I also became an altar server and a lector.

If you want to be religious, bury your extraordinary gender or sexuality. If you want to be queer, bury your religious faith.

There seems to be prevailing belief that you must either be one or the other.

The former based on bigotry, however ignorant, and the latter on theistic trauma, which is fair.

I'm very gay, but it helps to have the understanding in the background when you're like navigating the church community.

Because if people insist on a black and white presumption, what room does that leave for people like me?
I came out as gay when I was sixteen years old.

I was a sophomore in high school.

And when it all wound down, they simply wanted to love and protect me.

After all, the way I see it, if God sculpted all these amazing, differently-coloured birds with funny beaks, big or small...

...why can’t my Catholic parents love their lesbian daughter?

My little sister was cool about it. My God-committed parents didn’t take it well.

But you know, my parents, they were God-loving, they weren’t following God’s path just for show.

There was denial and you probably wouldn’t want to wear my shoes in those moments. It would break your heart.

I think in that very moment, when my mother and my father insisted that they’d love me no matter what, and that I was a blessing they’d never turn away.

It was at that point my Faith in God was solidified.
Because let’s be real, I certainly was not some wise, evangelical kid who understood the Church wholly. Yes, I attended weekly mass, I served the altar, and I read scripture.

But behind all that, I got cranky with having to wake up early to do these things. I struggle with not falling asleep during sermons. I disagreed (and still do) with some of the teachings and beliefs of the Church.

I can be impatient when it comes to dedicating time to my Faith. Really, I just wanted to get back to playing video games!

I guess, all I’m saying is that in some way, I didn’t really get the fuss with the whole religion thing...

...until my parents showed their support for me on such a ‘contentious’ part of my identity.

Through God’s actions and guidance, I understand that the conflict inside myself should not eat away at my soul. I realized I am deserving of love.

The more I contemplated, the more I saw how He works in all those little things.
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Okay, nice.

My parents had some friends, acquaintances, and coworkers who were gay. This led them to deeper reflections about accepting me.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

Amen.

My sister’s immediate acceptance of me reflects how society is changing and becoming compassionate.

Back in 2015, when my sister and I showed our support for same-sex marriage legislation happening in the US, our priest told my mom that our hearts were in the right place.

He still affirmed that such marriages can’t happen in the Catholic Church, but he knew we weren’t being led astray, and that it was simply a sign that we genuinely cared about others.

That was a year before I came out.

I was shocked when my mom told me about it.

And of course, there’s Pope Francis.
My experience with the Church I could say, might be different from others.

Often the teachings and homilies surround your betterment in being a vessel to carry the mission of the Lord.

I've never heard an outright sermon condemning gay and trans people in the Catholic masses I've attended in Canada, even the virtual ones broadcast in the Philippines.

Really, there's no mention of us at all. I'd take not being mentioned much over loveless condemnation.

But it is reassuring in these days, that outside the masses, we at least have the knowledge that the Pope has love and support for us.

I think some people have started to listen more compassionately, but some haven't.

I don't know but I think once people realize our shared humanity it begins to mean something.

The reluctance to redefine marriage remains, but if I could at least get my committed relationship recognized under the eyes of God, that's enough for me.

At least things are changing, and I don't need to feel ashamed of being who I am.
HAIL MARY, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD IS WITH THEE. BLESSED ART THOU AMONGST WOMEN AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF THY WOMB, JESUS.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

My mom told me that it’s important that a relationship between two people should always center God.

I hope that when the time comes, I’ll find a woman who doesn’t belittle me for believing these things. I don’t think I’m wrong to want that. I know these relationships exist.

For me, I see that as prioritizing love, compassion, faith, and spirituality in the commitment.

It’s hard to relate to a world that sees lesbianism as this backwards alien machination, as it defies the societal standards of love and womanhood.

I usually cope with this knowledge and loneliness by drawing and writing women in love and posting it on the internet for other queer people to see.

It can be quite lonely to be a lesbian.

It is a sort of loneliness and isolation that is unique to the experience, and it can be compounded with other aspects of your identity.

Apart from that, I also find solace in my culture.

The language...

...and the stories I want to tell...

...and well wouldn’t you know it: religion.

I don’t make friends easily. From middle school onward, in place of actual peers, I simply built my Foundation of my cultural identity.
You cannot divorce religion from Filipino culture. It is a complicated tangle vastly rooted in animism and later Spanish colonialism.

Today, most of us are Christian and specifically Catholic. The culture of Catholicism varies by place.

The place I’m from, in Pampanga, we are devoutly Catholic but we acknowledge the presence of spirits and work of traditional folk shamans.

Those beliefs live on and they deserve respect and reverence.

It doesn’t have to be one or the other. In the Filipino islands, our traditional spirituality is interwoven with Roman Catholicism. I see myself in the same way, weaving together who I am with my religion. I am proud to be a lesbian Catholic.

To me, religion is an offer of compassion to others. And what is compassion? It’s an offer of closeness and solidarity.

Compassion is the opposite of deprivation. It makes you feel less alone, even with physical distance. It makes you strong when others try to push you down.

It is thanks to people in my life, who were devoted to both religious faith and acceptance, that I saw no point in shedding away my spiritual connections.
The rituals, the songs, the traditions, novenas, and the vigils teach me to accept and to share this compassion. When I recite and observe them, I feel peace and clarity with my understanding of the world.

The outcome of being confidently queer makes it seem like an inevitability to distance yourself from your religion, by choice or by the force of religious doctrines.

As the years pass and I develop greater comfort in being a lesbian, it only draws me closer to my faith, to be Catholic.

Whether you’re a devoutly religious parent with a kid who’s LGBT, whether you’re not religious at all and want to learn about other kinds of people, whether you’re just like me,

I just wanted you to know I exist, there are other people like me who are in peace and want you to be, too.

And I simply wanted to share my story with you, we have to listen to these stories and understand them.

Amen.
FROM THE ARTIST

Ever since I came out, I’ve been contemplating my relationship with my sexuality and Catholicism. These two things have never proved incompatible to me; they just coexisted with a fair share of disagreements and harmony. I have much to learn about my Catholic faith, but Closer To . . . gave me a starting point in sharing my feelings on being religious and gay. I wanted to express the compassion I felt in its truest form, free of judgment and filled with love and connection. For me, that is the ultimate ethos of God. Such values can be complicated when aligned with religion because often people of the faith have ulterior motives or are very ignorant of the marginalized. I love adopting different art styles depending on the story I want to tell. For this comic, I adopted a Mike Mignola–esque direction that embodied a fantastical, ambiguous dread and enduring kindness: a good representation of how I feel about my spirituality.
RESTLESS SPIRITS

BY

ELIJAH FORBES
Restless Spirits
Elijah Forbes
"So traditionally two spirit people were highly regarded and respected..."

"Colonization has negatively impacted indigenous communities, peoples, and families in many ways."
“One thing we don’t really think about as much is how colonization disrupted spiritual traditions and the way of life of two spirit people.”
“So really homophobic and transphobic beliefs are the legacies of colonialism...

I don't want to speak on behalf of the whole Two Spirit community, but I know that is something that is still an ongoing struggle.”
“It’s not super safe to be an outwardly two spirit, visibly indigenous person in many cities.”
“Not only are you facing discrimination as an indigenous person living in the city.

but now you’re experiencing discrimination and safety issues because of your queer two spirit identity.”
“Before we can even... have truth and reconciliation...

before we can even begin as a society to move towards compassion...

I think there’s still a lot of work that needs to be done.”
“I’ve struggled a lot to find role models in my life...

that I feel safe around...

so for me, I actually connect a lot with ancestors or other kinds of guides.”
I want to leave something for my kids. My great-granddaughter and my great-grandsons. I want them to know what I was about, what I was made of, what I stood for.
We are storytellers. That is our gift. And if they share their real stuff, what really happened in the past, the kids will learn from it.

-Ma-Nee Chacaby
FROM THE ARTIST

It sounds incredibly cheesy to say, but to me, the strongest force in the world is compassion. Our Two Spirit communities across the world know that we must care for and be there for one another. During this pandemic, that compassion has been clearer than ever. When all we have is each other, we must be ready to feed one another on the physical and spiritual levels. I hope that in this work, you can see that line from ancestors to elders to every one of our relations: the fact that if we care for one another, we have everything we need.
NEIGHBORHOOD RHAPSODY

BY

JOE PHILLIPS
SUMMER TIME IN THE BURBS IS A BUSY TIME FOR VACATIONS, BARBECUES AND POOL PARTIES, BUT BEFORE ANY OF THAT IT IS A TIME FOR CLEARING OUT THE OLD, AND SPRUCING UP THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

EVERYONE TRYING TO OUTDO THEIR NEIGHBOR WITH THEIR GREEN THUMBS

AN UNSPoken FRIENDLY RIVALRY TO ADD A LITTLE FUN TO OTHERWISE LABORSOME CHORES AND MAINTENANCE.
MORNING AVI, LOOKS LIKE THE WHOLE STREET HAS CAUGHT THE GARDENING BUG!

WELL, I GOTTA DO MY PART TO KEEP MY PROPERTY VALUE UP!

THE WHOLE BLOCK IS GOING TO LOOK BEAUTIFUL EXCEPT FOR THE OLD JOHNSON PLACE. THAT YARD LOOKS LIKE IT’S NOT BEEN TENDED TO FOR YEARS.

I DON’T THINK HE HAS A WIFE OR KIDS. I’VE NEVER SEEN ANYONE EVEN VISIT HIM!

IT’S A NICE HOUSE... A SHAME THE YARD MAKES IT LOOK SO RUNDOWN.

DO YOU KNOW THE JOHNSONS?

NO, NOT REALLY. I SEE OLD MAN JOHNSON EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE WHEN HE COMES OUT FOR HIS MAIL.

I WONDER IF HE’S OKAY.

I TEND TO LEAVE PEOPLE ALONE, IF THEY NEED HELP I FIGURE THEY’LL ASK.
Hello, Mr. Johnson?

Yes? Can I help you with something? I'll warn you now if you are trying to sell me something you can go away!

Oh no, I'm Jacob Green, one of your neighbors. I wanted to say hi and see if you needed any help.

I was out cutting my lawn and I noticed your yard has gotten a little eco system going on and I wondered if you needed any help to tame it.

Well aren't you a bold one to ask a total stranger to cut his lawn? I'm on a fixed income and can't pay to have yard work done.

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude. I was offering to cut your lawn no charge.

No charge? Well knock yourself out.

It'll be no trouble at all. My mom always said to help a neighbor is how to spread kindness.

Well, I'll be. I don't know what this kid's angle is but I'm not going to join his church or buy magazine subscriptions.
OK, this was a lot more work than I imagined, no good deed goes unpunished.

I don’t know why that boy wanted to mow my yard, but it would be ungrateful not to be hospitable and offer him a refreshment.

Oh crap! Stupid rug!

Ouch!

What happened? Are you ok, Mr. Johnson?

Stupid rug slipped and I dropped the lemonade.

Don’t worry about that, I’m concerned you may have been hurt.

Well aren’t you a thoughtful young man.
You have a rest here and I'll clean up the mess.

Should I get you an aspirin or something?

Well I'll sit a spell, but it'll take more than a little fall to break this old man.

Stop fretting I'm fine just a little tweak.

WOW. You've got some collection.

Coleman Hawkins, Art Tatum, Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Lena Horne!

These are some great shots, loads of them I've never seen before.

You must have really been into jazz, you even have... wait a minite, Johnson, red bone? Are you Red Bone Johnson?

Guilty as charged, I'm surprised you've even heard of me!

Are you kidding me, you are one of the unsung greats in jazz? Do you still play?
LET'S SEE IF YOU KNOW ANY OF THIS!

CLASSIC.

THIS REMINDS ME OF LISTENING TO A JAZZ STATION WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE.

WELL, LIVE JAZZ IS A LIVING THING. IT'S LIKE AN ELUSIVE LOVER AND RIVAL AND BEST FRIEND ALL SPEAKING AT THE SAME TIME.

YOU CAN RECORD IT, BUT THAT VERSION CAN NEVER BE PLAYED EXACTLY THE SAME. A STRESSED NOTE HERE OR A NEW RIFF THERE, IT'S AS MUCH OF A CONVERSATION WITH THE MUSICIANS THAN JUST THE COMPOSER.

I CAN IMAGINE YOU BACK IN THE DAY.

BOY, IF YOU ONLY KNEW...
AND THERE I WAS, NOT JUST SOME PRETENTIOUS COLLEGE FRESHMAN TRYING TO SEEM COOL BY BEING INTO JAZZ, BUT TRANSPORTED TO AN OUT OF THE WAY LITTLE CLUB BY A MASTER OF THE ART, I COULD IMAGINE SARAH VAUGHAN SINGING HER HEART OUT WITH ROY HARRIDAY ON BASS AND LOUIS ARMSTRONG ON THE HORN AND NONE OTHER THAN RED BONE JOHNSON ON THE KEYS.

WHO COULD HAVE KNOWN A CHILDHOOD HERO COULD BE MY NEIGHBOR AND BE PLAYING LIVE FOR ME?
I ain’t dead yet but I guess I can’t complain. Never got married or had any kids I know of.

Told him I didn’t have a wife or kids either but mainly because I was gay. He smiled and put his hand on my shoulder, “Oh I’ve known a lot of folks like you, back in the day, they had to be on the downlow but you can’t have that many creative folks without a few who play on the other team.”

From then on I would drop by his house to check up on him. I’d take him shopping. We’d go get lunch in town.

Or I’d take him to his medical appointments.

We talked about how music changed and his friends disappearing over the years. “After awhile you get used to being alone cause you don’t have a way to make new friends.”

Without even thinking about it I had added him to my circle of friends, and once he opened up to it, he would play...

And magic would happen.
RED QUICKLY BECAME EVERYONE'S FAVORITE GUEST,

HE EVEN HELPED MY FRIEND MS. CANDIE HAMS WITH HER TORCH SONG LESSONS.

AND EVEN PLAYED LIVE ACCOMPANIST FOR HER JAZZ MAMA DRAG BRUNCH!

"IS you Le, or IS you ain't my baby? OR has my baby found somebody new?"

ONCE HE GOT IN FRONT OF THOSE 88 KEYS, ALL THE ACHE'S AND PAINS OF HIS YEARS SEEMED TO JUST MELT AWAY.

IT'S BEEN NEARLY A YEAR SINCE I OFFERED ARROGANTLY TO CUT HIS GRASS, THINKING I WAS HELPING OUT A LONESOME OLD MAN.
THANKS FOR LETTING ME BE YOUR FRIEND.

DITTO KID, DITTO!

HAPPY TO SAY OUR STREET IS ONE OF THE NICEST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. WE ALL TALK TO EACH OTHER AND WHEN NEW FOLKS MOVE IN RED IS ON THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE. I USED TO THINK "NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED", BUT NOW I KNOW BETTER.
FROM THE EDITORS

Many ideas were discussed between Joe Phillips and us when we first started creating this comic. One of the major themes from our research was that compassion was about connecting with other people in some way. I suppose you could say that the topic of connecting with others began a symphony of ideas—each one a distinct note in the music of compassion. But one of the ideas that we kept coming back to was about compassion and connection across generations, and this comic is the result.
THE ROOMMATE

BY

EMMA GALLOWAY
I had a super homophobic roommate.

Like I just remember the bad roommate being,

I just don't know how to be best friends with a lesbian.

We've been friends like my entire life.

How is this any different?
Moving out of the house I had my friend rally a bunch of people.

Some who I knew.

And some who knew of me, but weren’t my closest friends.

They showed up and loaded my shit into their cars.

‘Cause I was in a crappy situation and just needed to move.
AND THEY’D RALLIED SOME OF THEIR FRIENDS.

IT WAS LIKE WE’RE COMING TOGETHER FOR QUEER FAMILY.

SOME PEOPLE I HAD NEVER EVEN MET BEFORE.

IN THAT MOMENT IT WAS OVERWHELMING LIKE THERE WAS THIS SENSE OF BELONGING.

EVERYONE COMING TOGETHER TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN.
I think for some they could relate to it.

Or wished someone had been there for them.

For others it was just like okay, the community is rallying I guess I'm going.

It is my responsibility to help you out because you are part of my community.

I don't know you, but here's my contribution.
FROM THE ARTIST

Working on this comic was really a reminder of how, as someone who didn't have many connections with the gay community until adulthood, I'm incredibly lucky to now surround myself with people who understand and accept who I am. I've had difficult conversations like this in the past, and the small moments of kindness and support I've received from friends and fellow members of the community in the aftermath have not only kept me going but given me the strength to help others in return. I tried to impart some of the warmth and empathy that I experienced during those times into this comic. Despite many of the 2SLGBTQ+ community having either faced or feared rejection based on who they are, I think the fact that there are others who have similar lived experiences that can create understanding and empathy across generations, borders, and cultures is really something incredible.
NEED
BY
DAVID WINTERS
FOOD IS NOT A PRIVILEGE OR A LUXURY. IT IS A NECESSITY.

ONE THAT IS NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR MANY.

ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE IN MARGINALIZED GROUPS SUCH AS QUEER YOUTH OR THOSE FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY.
THANK YOU!

YOU'RE WELCOME!

LET'S GO

THEN OFF WE GO!
HOW DID YOU GET INTO THIS?

WELL WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I HAD A TOUGH TIME GETTING FOOD, I WAS A YOUNG LESBIAN ON MY OWN AND ME AND MY FRIENDS SCRAPED TO GET BY.

I VOWED WHEN I WAS IN A PLACE TO GIVE BACK I WOULD, WHICH LED ME TO VOLUNTEER HERE

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
Knock... Knock... Knock...

Thank you.
FOODS HERE!

FOOD DELIVERY

...
FROM THE ARTIST

With the topic of food security and compassion, I was reminded of getting a Christmas dinner and gifts from a local charity group when I was young. While their hearts were in the right place, I was asked/made to greet the people who organized it and dropped off the items. It felt like having to put on a show for your food. With my comic, when I told the story about food and compassion, there is one part specifically that shows a mother getting a food parcel, and it’s not a big deal. The kids don’t have to meet the characters delivering it, and they just assume their mother got it for them. Doing something compassionate for the sake of being kind was something I wanted to show.
ENTROPY
(WILL TEAR US APART)
BY
JALEX NOEL
I WANT WHAT YOU'RE HAVING!

THE HIGHEST STATE OF DISORDER?

THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK!

HOMOGENEITY.
ARE WE SEPARATING OURSELVES FROM UNIFORMITY?

WHAT IS WRONG WITH BELONGING EVERYWHERE?

AREN'T ALL FEELINGS THE SAME?

WHY CAN'T WE EXPERIENCE EVERYTHING?

FOR MY SAKE...

...FOR MY MORTALITY...

...LET US BE ONE...
...ONE IN THIS VAST NONNESS...

...ALIGN...

...COLLIDE...

...MERGE...

...GRAVITY WILL HOLD US...

...OUR FORMS...

...OUR SHAPES...

...TRAPPED AND SCATTERED...

...NEVER LETTING GO...

YOU ARE...

...A FADED MEMORY OF YOU.

...BENDING LIGHT AND THOUGHTS.

SPIN TOO MUCH AND YOU’LL LOSE YOURSELF.
A FLEETING IDEA OF FORCED EMOTIONS...

JADEN!

HEY!

JADEN!

...AND FLESH.

HEY! CAN WE TAKE A BREAK? SMOKE A JOINT AND CHILL?

YEAH, COOL. BUT IT'S YOUR TURN.

I'LL OPEN UP THE WINDOW.

MARK?

WHO ARE YOU?

YES?

HAHAHA! WELL, THAT'S A QUESTION, ISN'T IT?

HAHA! FUCK OFF!

HAVE FAITH!

WELL, MY NAME IS MARK. I'M 29. MY SIGN IS CANCER.

EW!

I STUDIED PHYSICS, ALWAYS INTRIGUED BY THE CHAOTIC ORDER OF THE UNKNOWN. LATER, I'VE STARTED TAKING PICTURES, AND IT MADE ME...

...IT MADE ME REALISE THAT I CAN TRANSLATE THE DISORDER AS A VISUAL LANGUAGE.

NEVER LOOKED BACK! PERSONALLY?... I DON'T KNOW. GOT HIV FROM AN EX BUT ALL MY FRIENDS WERE REALLY SUPPORTIVE!
AND IF YOU DON'T COUNT YOURSELF AS WORTHY...

NOW...

...TAKE THE JOINT OF TRUTH!

WINK

HAHA!

JADEN?

WHO ARE YOU?

...IS IT NOT OK TO DRIFT AWAY?

DADDY!

HAHA!

WELL, I'M JADEN AND I'M 33.

MUSIC IS THE ONLY LOVE THAT LOVES ME BACK.

HOW COME?

WELL, MY FAMILY THREW ME AWAY WHEN I CAME OUT.

CAN THIS LOSS OF ENERGY BE FILLED WITH A LOSS OF SELF?

I WAS 15. I GREW UP ON LGBT SHELTERS.

FROM THERE, DRUGS, SOME TATS, BUT MUSIC WAS THE ONLY WAY TO BEFRIEND MYSELF.

FEW FRIENDS, BUT REALLY CLOSE TO ME. THEY ARE MY FAMILY.

I'M SORRY MAN, ARE YOU OK?

CAN WE UNBOUND THIS FATE?

OR HIDE FROM IT...
...WITH LIES?

YEAH...

...I'M FINE.

JADEN.

MAKE SOME ROOM FOR ME.

QUANTITY OVER QUALITY.

A CONSTANT GIVING WITH NO EXCEPTIONS.

CONSCIOUSNESS IS A REACTION TO ENTROPY.

BABE, YOU ARE SHIVERING.

YOU ON THE OTHER HAND...

MEMORIES HOLD THE INFORMATIONS WE CALL PAST.

YEAH, THAT'S WHY I TOOK THE BLANKET.

WELL, LET ME WARM YOU.

WHY HAVEN'T WElearnt YET?
Our skins, dead cells wrapping our bodies...

...a messy ball of string that begs for unknitting.

His gaze is lost.

He had a bit more than he can handle.

He had enough.
I WONDER...

TIME TO REST.

...IS OUR LIFE A MERE TRIP OF DECAY?

ARE WE GIVING UP FRACTURES OF OUR FUTURE?

WHAT IS SACRED IN HISTORY IF WE ALWAYS REPEAT IT?

HERE IS THE PLAN.

I'M TIRED AND HUNGRY! LET'S JUST CHILL, MAKE SOMETHING TO EAT, I CAN COOK. ALRIGHT?

ARE WE RESISTING ENTROPY?

I'M DOWN! BUT CAN WE STAY LIKE THIS FOR A BIT?

OR DO WE SURRENDER?

PRETTY PLEASE?

DEAL! LET ME CLOSE THE WINDOW FIRST.

IF HE GETS WORSE, I'LL CALL A TAXI AND HEAD TO THE ER.
IS THE STATE HIGHER?...

...OR LOWER?

CALLING FOR HELP MIGHT CAUSE MORE PROBLEMS.

IS OUR UNIQUENESS A REMINDER OF ORDER?

OR AN EVERCHANGING FACTOR OPPOSED TO IT?

NO NEED FOR THAT, MY BOY!

I'M NOT HERE TO HURT YOU.

SEE?

I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S THE LEAST I CAN OFFER.

NOW SHARE WITH EVERYONE.

I DON'T WANT TO KNOW...
FROM THE ARTIST

I have been in and out of sobriety. Chemsex, also known as party and play (PnP), was my gateway to not think after the first year I was diagnosed with HIV. Drugs are easy, mudding perceptions of reality, relieving anxiety for some, or reducing a negative social aspect. My approach to PnP was always to trust one person only to do chemsex with. Always to have one person that you could say, “I don't feel well,” and they will care. During my days of chemsex, I met a few good people but also lots of self-centered men. I also learned about people dying from overdose. What felt really out of touch was people saying, “We are adults doing drugs; each person is responsible for themselves only.” In my mind, the constant reminder that, at some point, a person couldn't give any approval or consent before he passed out just turned me away from chems with strangers. The lack of compassion and awareness. I'm not opposed to drugs; I grew up doing puffs and lines. I'm opposed to the lack of consent.

When this volume’s coeditor Phillip came to me, I was sure that I wanted to talk about PnP. And I know, it is a very “do and do not tell” thing. Denying that such a thing isn't happening is out of touch. Drugs are an easy getaway. As a minority that is constantly
bombarded by the ideas of others, from porn to social success stories, from body images to binarism, it is the easiest, cheapest short-term tool that some use. Addiction makes it long term and expensive.

The comic follows Jaden and Mark, who after clubbing hard have tons of sex. I wanted to present both sides of the coin, one who does drugs for recreational purposes and the other that does drugs because drugs are an easily available getaway for a parentless person. “Illegality creates illegal activities.” Both are valid. Both are tripping. One just drifts away. And at this moment, ephemerality can be prolonged with caring. Moments can become nowness, and that is how I approached this situation. Maybe I’m a bit of a hopeless romantic. But I wanted to create a visual moment of understanding. A proximity language of familiarity between strangers. And a new “page to the gay agenda,” always be caring (ABC). Through the narration of Mark, who wonders about the law of entropy and tackles the philosophical matter of consciousness, I combined the factual truth: that we matter as long as we allow ourselves to matter. Because in the end, matter is all we have (pun intended). Compassion is not a personality trait but a moral compass, a general take on life, like honesty.

This comic is dedicated to my late dog, Rena.
NIGHT PARADE OF A HUNDRED GHOSTS
BY
1ORE
Hey

We haven't talked in a while but...

I heard you quit? Or just stopped showing up to work? Did something happen? I mean they didn't try to...

I didn't get you in trouble did I?
NAI

THE LAST THING YOU WANT TO DO RIGHT NOW IS TALK TO ME

I KNOW THAT

IM JUST IM WORRIED

IM COMING OVER

OK?

CLICK
DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP.

BUT HOW CAN WE CALL OURSELVES GOOD ANCESTORS?

WE CAN'T EVEN GET HER TO LEAVE THE HOUSE!

SHH! SHE'S WAKING UP...
WH-\textemdash you can see us? But you’re still alive!

That means you’ve spent so long acting like a ghost...
...AT THIS RATE, YOU'RE GOING TO BECOME ONE!

WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!!!
TAKE A BATH!!

GET DRESSED!

TEXT YOUR EX NO
WHAP

THAT’S ENOUGH.

OUT.

BUT YOU HAVEN’T EATEN YET!
EVERYTHING’S WORSE ON AN EMPTY STOMACH.

...YOU DO KNOW WE LOVE YOU, RIGHT, NAI?

WE ONLY WANT TO HELP!

GET OUT.
IM COMING OVER
OK?
OKAY.

NAOMI?
FROM THE ARTIST

There are some difficult feelings in the comic about estrangement, belonging, and cultural longing. The story didn't quite click for me, though, until I started reading the stories of others in the community from the research. There's a lot of beauty in there, but there's also a lot of hurt. I wanted to squeeze everyone's hands and somehow find the perfect words of comfort—and isn't that all that anyone wants to do when they see family going through it? So I started thinking of it as a call-and-response between you, at your lowest point, and the ghosts of your ancestors. If they could talk to you, what would they say? “Look—you're safe and fed.” “You're alive.” “How magnificent!” “You can cry, but wouldn't it feel better if you did it in the shower?” “Now hold my hand and walk with me.” “Take care of yourself.” “Brush your teeth.” “Text her back.” “We love you.”
THE JOURNEY

BY

DANIEL “DAPPER” MCLAREN
WE START AS SOMEONE’S
VOICE AND IDEAS...

...PROJECTIONS OF WHAT
WE SHOULD BECOME...

I CAN’T WAIT TO MEET
MY LITTLE BOY!

LOOKS LIKE YOUR SON
HAS HIMSELF A LITTLE
GIRL FRIEND THERE.

MAYBE THEY WILL GET
MARRIED ONE DAY, HA HA.

...BEING TOLD TO BE
MORE FEMININE OR
MASCULINE. TOLD TO
BUTCH UP AND BE A
MAN, TO ACT MORE
LADY LIKE.

COME ON HONEY, YOU DON’T
WANT PEOPLE THINKING YOU
ARE A GIRL DO YOU?
WELL!! WE DON’T WANT IT ON OUR TEAM!

"I WAS ALWAYS THE LAST PERSON PICKED... AND THEN THEY WOULD TRY TO HIT ME WITH THE BALL."

THAT QUEER AIN’T SITTING WITH US.

STOP LOOKING AT ME FAG.

"WHEN YOU’RE SAYING QUEER AND FAG AND DYKE AND THE TEACHER IS DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT, THAT’S NOT OK. WE NEED TO START STANDING UP AND TALKING ABOUT IT."

...AT SCHOOL I WAS BULLIED TERRIBLY BECAUSE I’M NON-BINARY AND WHEN I WAS LITTLE, IT WAS SO OBVIOUS AND KIDS WOULD CALL ME IT AND I WAS TOTALLY OSTRACIZED..."
Why don't you try ignoring them?

I'm sure it isn't that bad.

Boys will be boys.

So are you a girl or a boy?

You run like a girl!

Get back here!

"So we didn't have the words for it, but yeah, I was non-binary and the kids knew it."
YOU'RE GONNA GET IT!

TRAUMA CAN COME IN MANY SHAPES AND IT IS A DARK PLACE THAT FORMS...

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE BECOME LIKE RAZOR SHARP TEETH THAT ATTACK DEEP.
...AND AT TIMES IT MIGHT...

...IT'S SOMETHING THAT CAN FEEL LIKE IT IS CONSUMING YOU...
...it might find you in ways you didn't think it ever would...

...it's the little things...

...it can come in the form of school bullies, or adults turning a blind eye, in other hurtful voices in our own communities, in media and in current events... also a negative voice that comes from ourselves...

Fugly bitch.

I hate her!!

I wouldn't be caught dead in that!

...but, there is also the good...

You're gonna get it!

...a light.
*Self compassion implies being gentler with oneself. Many of us are hard on ourselves. We denigrate ourselves and we ridicule ourselves. Self compassion to me implies you know, trying to forgive oneself.*
“YOU NEED TO LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF...”

“...PRETEND YOU'RE SOMEONE ELSE AND PRETEND YOU'RE SOMEONE YOU LOVE...”

“I AM SO PROUD OF YOU!”

“I AM SO PROUD OF YOU!”

“...AND THEN DO NICE THINGS FOR YOURSELF LIKE YOU WOULD DO WITH SOMEBODY THAT YOU LOVE...”

“...FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT... SO THAT'S WHAT I DID, AND IT WORKED.”
“Start with yourself.”

“It’s about loving yourself first, treating yourself to good things because no one will love you if you don’t love yourself…”

“…being proud of yourself, caring for yourself, taking time for yourself…”

“Hi mom!”

“Hi dad!”

“They, them.

“…so don’t wait for someone else to do it for you…”

“Treat yourself with kindness, and find time for yourself. To reflect, journal, breathe and above all be there for you!…”
...AND TREAT THOSE AROUND YOU THE SAME...

...IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS.

STORY AND ART BY: DANIEL 'DAPPER' MCLAREN
FROM THE ARTIST

Self-compassion for me has been a long and personal journey, and I wanted to illustrate that with my piece. *The Journey*. Finding a healing process and learning to find value in yourself. But most importantly, learning to love yourself. Finding a way to balance the good and the bad and teaching yourself how to search out the good and healthy things that can start to help you heal. People can be hurtful to each other. Whether from the fear of our differences or from our own pain, we can lash out and inflict pain on others. This idea of hurting each other struck a chord with me, and I visualized childhood trauma as a wolf. Hurtful words, name-calling, bullying, threats of violence, physical and mental abuse, or other forms of trauma can feel like sharp and aggressive teeth, eating away at you slowly. For me art was a great healer, a form of therapy, and a cathartic release of negative thoughts and memories, and the white wolf depicts that. The white wolf represents something you can grow with, something that introduces a needed levity in your life, and something that allows a healing process for yourself.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

1ore
She/Her

1ORE is a butch lesbian and wannabe body of water who is currently studying environmental science in the Sonoran Desert.

Her work is all about loving deserts, loving rivers, and loving people. And also, the interior worlds of greasy, calamitous women.

Kayleigh Fine
She/Her/They/Them

KAYLEIGH FINE is an illustrator from Florida who loves painting backgrounds and soft moments.

As an LGBT artist, she enjoys painting queer couples and slices of life. Kayleigh was interested in taking on this project because she felt it would be a good way to share her passion for the community and bring light to how important pride is.
Elijah Forbes
He/Him

ELIJAH FORBES is an Indigenous Two Spirit creative that focuses on bringing Odawa storytelling and transgender joy into the world through his work.

His work primarily focuses on 2SLGBT and Indigenous representation in illustration and children’s literature. Elijah is represented by Nicole Geiger of Full Circle Literary, who can be contacted at nicole@fullcircelleliterary.com.

Emma Galloway
She/Her/They/Them

EMMA GALLOWAY is a queer comic artist currently living in Scotland. She likes to draw comics about cute girls, family and the power of love, and connections in the face of adversity.

Emma is probably getting distracted by her dog instead of working on her sapphic magical romance webcomic right now.
Fabien Lutz-Barabé
He/Him

FABIEN BARABÉ and his husband moved to Nova Scotia in 1997, and it was then that he started to paint with watercolors and then moved on to acrylics. As a member of the Peggy’s Cove Area Festival of the Arts for the last eleven years, his love of Nova Scotia and its surroundings is the source of many of his inspired works. His imagination shows no bounds when it comes to the materials he uses to create unique pieces.

He had his first published cartoon strip, *The Spice of Life*, in two Montreal papers from 1994 to 1996. He is a cancer survivor, and art became his form of therapy. He returned to his first love of cartooning with a spin-off to *The Spice of Life* entitled *The Secret Life of a Naturist*. He currently has a comic book available on Amazon entitled *Matias*. 
Jalex Noel
They/Them

JALEX is a queer enby (nonbinary) artist from Greece who really hates the sun. Jalex has studied applied mathematics, but art was always the go-to language.

Their previous works include curating and participating in art exhibitions and creating illustrations for PhD postdoc articles, children's books, poetry books, and comic anthologies. They currently work as an illustrator for Fårö Creative Learning.

When they don't work, they try to create replicates of the universe with glitter.

Follow @jlx_nl on Instagram or email them at jalexwave@live.com.

Daniel “Dapper” McLaren
He/Him

DANIEL “DAPPER” MCLAREN is a queer artist who is based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He creates weird, galactic, witchy-sexy-spooky-surreal, and cosmic comic art. His solo work consists of the indie comic QUEST, which follows an all-inclusive, queer, and multicultural group of sci-fi brats on a mysterious journey.

He also creates bright and colorful illustrations with a strong focus on the supernatural, the superhuman, the superstrange, and horror.

Follow @dapperdansays on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Etsy and at www.dapperdanielmclaren.com.
Jay Pahre
He/Him

JAY PAHRE is a queer and trans settler artist, writer, and cultural worker currently based on the unceded territories of the x̱wə̱ləsq̱’əy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. Weaving together drawing, sculpture, and writing, his work queries trans and queer nonhuman ecologies as they intersect with the human.

Originally from the midwestern US, Pahre has turned his work back toward the shifting ecologies of the Great Lakes and Great Plains regions. He received his BFA in painting and BA in East Asian studies in 2014 and his MA in East Asian studies from the University of Illinois in 2017. He went on to complete his MFA in visual arts at the University of British Columbia in 2020. His work has been exhibited across the US and Canada, and in 2020, he was selected for the Transgender Studies Chair Fellowship at the University of Victoria.

Michelle Parker and Jey Pawlik
Michelle Parker (xey/xem);
Jey Pawlik (they/them)

JEY and MICHELLE are a comic-creating duo who have been working together since 2013 under the name Topaz Comics.

They have several short comic and anthology stories under their belts as well as the completed webcomic Dead City.

Jey has also written the autobiographical webcomic Gender Slices and is a regular contributor for the website Oh Joy Sex Toy. Their work focuses on queer characters and the small moments of joy and heartbreak.

Find their work at topazcomics.com.
Joe Phillips
He/Him

JOE PHILLIPS’s career spans professionally over thirty-five years as an illustrator, comic book artist, animator, and writer. He began his career drawing comics of Speed Racer and painting scenes from Interview with the Vampire. He has worked for DC, Marvel, Dark Horse, WildStorm, and IDW comics on nearly every major character. He has created hundreds of trading cards for Marvel Masterpiece and DC Comics along with game companies.

Joe Phillips has created the independent comic The Heretic as well as his signature Joe Boys for calendars and coffee-table picture books. Some of his career highlights include national campaigns for Bud Light and illustrating the third edition of The Joy of Gay Sex. His work has been used for product trading and advertisements as well as covers for novels and magazines both domestically and worldwide.

He has also created a new brand of pagan-inspired prints and T-shirts called the Witch Boys. Artistically, he enjoys many different styles, techniques, and genres. He enjoys the challenges of creating what different projects call for more than putting his style to them. He is equally at home with anything from realism to wild cartoon designs.

Currently, Joe Phillips has a new release of his very own tarot deck called the Divine Diversity deck, specializing in representing racial and sexual diversity in most typical tarot decks. His current projects include a new novel entitled Spellbreaker and a graphic novel called Snow White: A Horror Tale.
Anwesh Sahoo
He/Him

ANWESH is a visual designer, a technical and NFT artist, the first Indian recipient of the Troy Perry Medal of Pride for Compassionate Activism, the youngest winner of Mr. Gay World India, and the creator of the Effeminare.

With features in Vogue, Rolling Stone, and the Hindu as a breakthrough queer artist, he has taken on the stage of TEDx as a speaker asserting the need to celebrate gender as a spectrum. He blogs and draws in the Effeminare, a parallel universe where he gets to illustrate the utopian world he wants to be a part of.

He looks at life as a thrilling mystery novel written by God, and since his novel has only started, he’d go with “I am still evolving!”

Kielamel “Kiela” Sibal
She/Her

KIELAMEL “KIELA” SIBAL is a Filipino Canadian storyteller whose fields of sparkling artistic wizardry include but are not limited to being a cartoonist, a comic letterer, a writer, a graphic designer, and an illustrator.

In her free time, Kiela enjoys reading category romance novels that she shamelessly converts into her own fictional lesbian fantasies. Born in Pampanga, Philippines, Kielamel currently dwells in the honey-dill-soaked pits of Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she studied graphic design and plopped out with a diploma from Red River College Polytech.
Magnus van der Marel
He/Him/They/Them

MAGNUS is a trans illustrator and comic artist living in Vancouver with their cats. Most of his work revolves around themes of love, vulnerability, transformation, and LGBTQ+ identity, sometimes with a side of fantasy, folk tales, and the supernatural.

David Winters
He/Him

DAVID has been working as an illustrator for over eighteen years. Located in Toronto, he enjoys working with themes and styles related to horror, pop art, and of course, queer content. You can follow him at WintersINK.com or on Instagram at www.instagram.com/WintersINK.
ABOUT THE EDITORS

Megan Aston
She/Her

DR. ASTON teaches qualitative health research and family and community health nursing in the School of Nursing at Dalhousie University. Her program of research focuses on maternal, child, and newborn health as well as children with intellectual disabilities, their families, and the health-care professionals who care for them. She uses feminist poststructuralism informed by discourse analysis to examine how health-care professionals and clients negotiate beliefs, values, and practices regarding health care that have been socially and institutionally constructed through relations of power.
ANDREW is currently pursuing a master of arts in counseling psychology and working as a research assistant at Mount Saint Vincent University and Dalhousie University. He cofacilitates a support group for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals engaged in sexualized substance use called “PNP Hangouts,” and he is an active community educator on harm reduction and sexual health. He was formerly the Peer N Peer program coordinator, a sexual health and harm reduction program run through the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia.

PHILIP JOY teaches client care in the Applied Human Nutrition Department at Mount Saint Vincent University. He also does qualitative research that is often framed within poststructural and social constructivism frameworks. He uses arts-based methodologies, such as photo-voice, cellphilming, and comics. Such methodologies can disrupt the foundations of nutrition and health research by involving the emotions, the senses, the creativity, and the bodies of participants. Art can challenge and subvert social norms and contribute to social transformation through the expression of new perspectives. His main areas of research include LGBTQ+ nutrition; body image and health; community advocacy and social disruption; and pedagogy, curriculum, and training. He is a member of the queer community. You can learn more about his work at https://phillipjoy.ca/index.html.