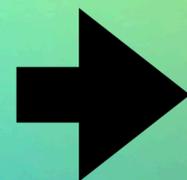


THE NEW Q DESIRE

ANTHOLOGY OF INTERSECTIONAL WRITING BY LGBTQ+ FAITH LEADERS



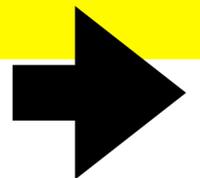
DIGITAL ZINE, PUBLISHED 2020

BY THE CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE JUSTICE

WWW.LYNDALEUCC.ORG/JUSTICE

DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF LYNN YOUNG

“CHI MEGWETCH”



THE NEW Q DESIRE

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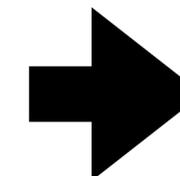
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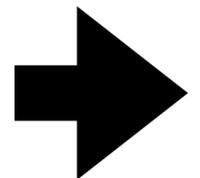
PROLOGUE

“THE PROCESS OF CRAFT IN SHARING VOICES AND MAKING CHANGE”

Colleagues asked the two of us in 2015, “What’s next for the movement?” Knowing us to be ordained ministers of the church identifying as queer and white and activist, they thought we might answer in terms of a single issue - a single issue beyond legal marriage equality.

Instead, our answer is intersectional and relational, made of the fabric of racial, economic, and de-colonizing justice, with stitches of embodied and ecological peace-making. It is the answer that queer community has been seeking all along, to which Spirit calls us.

If you are reading this, you are reading a digital zine. We thank each contributor for their words and for their work. We hope the compilation holds strong together like a quilt made for warmth and life, whether each piece began as writing or oral tradition, visual art or quotable meme, and whether it reaches you tattered or vivid, raw or whole. So are we all.



“All creatures who walk, crawl, or swim on the earth are creatures made by God. Every human being was created by God and cared for by God. There are no exceptions. God provides for us and cares for us out of the pure love God has for us all. God is the one who determines who you are as a human being, not the way human beings interpret the law.”

– Nicole Garcia

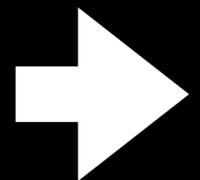


RIVER RHYTHMS:

There has been much progress made in the queer community in recent months and years, quite honestly more than I ever imagined I would see in my lifetime. Marriage equality being the law of the land feels almost surreal. I am glad it happened, it needed to happen. Throughout the struggle for marriage equality, as well as today, I maintain that I want so much more.

Marriage equality is awesome; my spouse and I are now legally married, we were married in Massachusetts when it was not legal in our home state, but now our married status must be acknowledged, which is super awesome.

A STORY OF LEADERSHIP THROUGH LIFE'S JOURNEY



However, the future of the LGBTQI movement must address many of the life-threatening inequities that our queer siblings face:

Disproportionate rates of incarceration for queer people of color

Inadequate or unavailable healthcare for transpeople

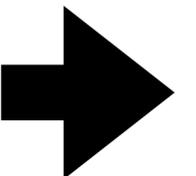
Recognition of the relationships that do not mirror heteronormative relationships, and seeing these as good, healthy and life-giving to the folks who live them

Poverty and homelessness of queerfolk that stems from their marginalization for having the nerve to be queer

Unemployment of underemployment in the queer community

Vilification of queer people who work in the sex industry, participate in BDSM or other forms of kink

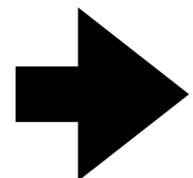
The horrific crisis of hate crime against transgender people, and particularly trans people of color who lose their lives to hate based violence in the US and around the world in staggering numbers



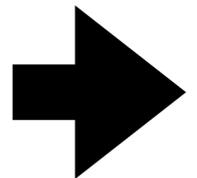
These and many other life and death issues need the same kind of coming together of resources across lines of identity as we saw in the work towards marriage equality. People, passion, money, and influence came together in an unrelenting push until the goal was achieved.

To participate effectively in these huge social reforms, I believe that a person must do some of their own hard personal work.

It is hard to effectively advocate for others with any authenticity, if we do not really know our own story.



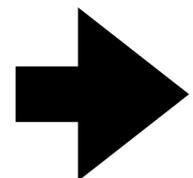
**To really tell my story, I need to go way back into my own childhood,
where so much went so wrong.**



Growing up in a casually United Methodist home, under the thumb of an abusive and extremely bigoted father, was a struggle in many ways. I went to church when I was told to, sat, stood, and said the creeds in the appropriate places, but these actions did not hold meaning for me. The whole idea of going to church was laden with conflict.

I am an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse; the person who abused me was a deacon in the church.

That person was also my father.

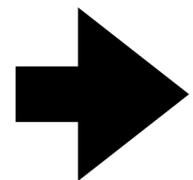


When I reached the age of refusal where church was concerned, I quit attending. I did not receive much push back from my parents, as they were probably quite weary of arguing with me on Sunday mornings.

Church never felt spiritual to me, it was just something I did, because it was required on occasion.

I did have an active spiritual life from a very young age. My first memory of anything spiritual was when I was about six years old. I was sitting on a huge slab of rock, with my feet in an icy river in Minnesota, and I felt so plugged in, so connected to something much larger than myself that was worthy of awe and praise, and something for which I would not have words until much later in life. The woods, the water, and other wild places, those have been my sanctuaries for as long as I can remember.

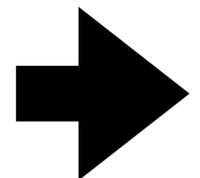
This worked well with my inward facing self, the nature world never expected anything of me, but met me where I was, and I found comfort.



I have understood myself as a sexual being attracted to girls from about the age of twelve. The messaging I heard throughout my childhood was that same sex attraction was unacceptable; a sure-fire way of going straight to hell, and nothing that would be tolerated.

My father's bigotry was expressed by a continuous stream of horrible words about anyone who was not a white heterosexual working class Christian male. We heard hate speech on a daily basis in our home.

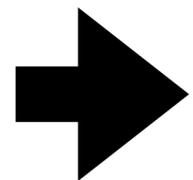
The way other people were talked about was not consistent with my core beliefs. Expressing views in opposition to the dominant view in the house would not only bring criticism, but also physical harm. I had anger boiling inside me about the racism, sexism, and heterosexism in my father's rhetoric. Occasionally it boiled over and I would have a verbal outburst, which always ended with me restricted to my room, nursing bruises, and folding inward some more.



My adolescent years - the time where normally identity is explored, claimed, and reflected upon - was a tumultuous time. I did not know what “normal” was, much less where I did or did not fit into that concept.

I was eight years old when sexual abuse became part of my life, and it had a great impact on how I saw myself. The messaging my abuser used was intended to blast away at my self-concept. I was told I was not smart, pretty, talented, or remarkable in any way. I could be made special by “our special love.” I recoiled and resisted, as much as an eight year old is able against a grown adult, but the abuse continued with ever more twisted particulars.

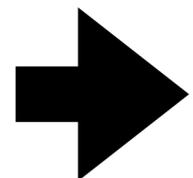
Increasingly complex threats were voiced, and my silence was maintained by being told the consequences that would occur if I told anyone. Many of these threats involved bad things happening to my younger sister, and my mother. Mom worked nights, which left the house under my father’s control – there was no help for me there.



I could not risk the threatened harms to the people I loved so fiercely, so I held my silence, and the abuse continued until my father died suddenly, when I was fifteen.

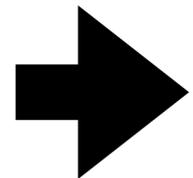
Almost immediately upon my father's death, tectonic shifts commenced inside of me. Feelings of shame and guilt, feelings of tremendous relief at his passing that I could not understand, perceptions of being permanently tainted, soiled, and undeserving of a life lived according to my own design, all grew in the fertile ground of my shattered spirit.

Simultaneously my psyche as a means of self-preservation folded the details and memories of the abuse into little packages and put them behind a locked door deep in the recesses of my mind. That door held for over twenty years.



Instead of coming out of my shell once the code of silence no longer mattered, I turned inward even more, and attempted to become invisible. When my inner turmoil rose to an intolerable level, I used cutting as a means to control my pain. This behaviour led me to hide any signs that it was happening, so the folding inward continued. Fewer facets of my essence, my *Is-ness* were accessible to me.

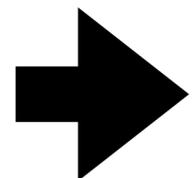
I still believed that my being attracted to women was abhorrent, and just nothing I could pursue – regardless of what my inner self whispered to me in the wee hours when there was no sleep to be found.



I was born and raised to age fifteen in Chicagoland. Shortly after my father's death the family relocated to Northern Indiana. I dated a guy or two off and on, because that was what female bodied people were supposed to do. At the age of twenty I became pregnant. I married a person that I never liked very much, my first consensual sex partner. I really and truly thought that the love expounded upon in Hallmark cards, was something that other people – the lucky ones - sometimes found.

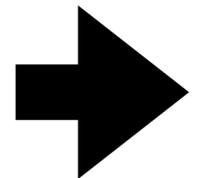
I believed that this mess I found myself in was as good as it got for the likes of me.

I was damaged goods, undeserving of anything remotely resembling fairytale bliss.



During the course of my marriage of eighteen years, I had three children who were my world, who were the reason I did not end it all when my turmoil and misery felt too much to bear. I told myself that when my youngest graduated high school, I was out of there.

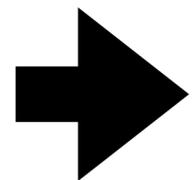
My children quite literally saved my life.



I knew I was a lesbian, but it really was more of a theoretical thing. I had never met a person who ignited within me the spark of promise for an authentic life. I was working as a schoolteacher, and took a summer job at a local supermarket. When I took that job, my life changed. My internal theoretical lesbian woke up when I met the woman with whom I have now been in relationship for 19 years.

When I met Jen, I understood who I was, what my life **COULD be, and I did the scariest thing I had ever done. I told my husband I wanted a divorce.**

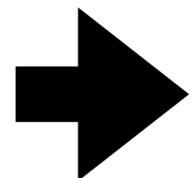
That scary first step began my journey of self-discovery.



Stepping into my identity as a lesbian was the first stage of an ever-evolving process of becoming. I learned to begin to love myself, and to trust another person with all that I am.

It was in this fertile soil of love and trust that the door in the recesses of my mind swung open, and a host of little folded packages spilled out. I believe that my psyche held the door, until it knew that I had the support I would need to deal with what lay behind it. As time passed, with Jen on one side and a skilled and fierce therapist on the other, I have done the excruciating personal work of liberating my authentic self by unpacking the closet, unfolding, and processing one nasty package after another.

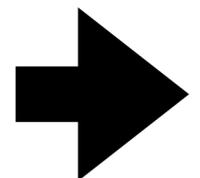
This process of perpetual unfolding also liberated my spirit. My inner being, my *Is-ness* began to relax and unfold. I have come to understand that the things that happened to me, do not define me, and that I am a beloved child of a benevolent Creator.



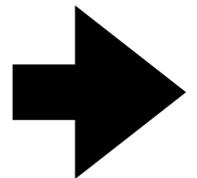
Shortly after entering into relationship with Jen I discovered my Native American heritage and connected with a local group of indigenous folk who gathered for community building, ceremonies, and teachings.

While my emotional self was struggling to find wholeness again in therapy and through self-discovery, my spiritual side was set ablaze by Native American traditional spirituality.

I began including earth-based rituals into my daily life. I learned at the side of several amazing elders, respectfully learning all that I could about practices, customs, and teachings. I gained knowledge that had been lost to my mother who was of Native descent, but had been adopted by a white family.

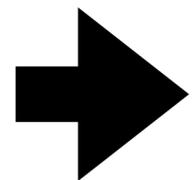


As I journeyed with this community I regained, bit-by-bit, pieces of what had been lost through the cultural devastation of Mom's adoption.



It was not enough for me to learn the rituals and ceremonies; I needed to know the teachings that informed these things. Over the years I have learned much and have learned the traditional art of drum making.

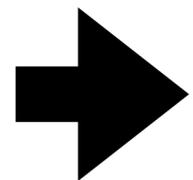
As a keeper of this tradition, I have had the opportunity to teach others, including elders of various tribes in our area. As a tradition keeper it is my responsibility to move the knowledge forward into the younger generations. Today I engage with others helping them discover ways to craft meaningful rituals for their lives, grounded in their authentic beliefs and contexts.



I include rituals in my daily life, but even a faithful practitioner can become overwhelmed.

When I am spiritually devastated, I seek out settings where wild water can be found, wild streams wandering rhythmically along their rocky beds, or the vast energy, and rhythmic wave patterns of “big water” such as Lake Michigan.

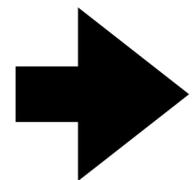
I am a being of the water; its rhythms and energy calibrate my spirit when nothing else can.



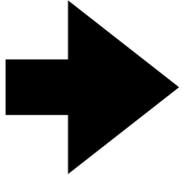
I use drumming and rhythm as spiritual tools for both for my own embodied self, and when I am working with others. Using drumming and rhythm as spiritual tools for healing and wholeness is work I am called to do, with the help and like-mind of my dear friend and co-facilitator we have witnessed amazing transformations when drums and rhythm instruments open channels of communication and expression previously inaccessible to the youth and adults we work with.

I have been blessed with many opportunities to teach and facilitate on building authentic spiritual practice in a variety of ways. Through this work I have been recognized as a leader both in queer contexts and faith contexts.

It has taken some time to adjust to the idea that I am not an accessory or helper to the “real people” doing the work, I AM doing the work, and I am competent and capable in some very unique ways. This is a humbling realization.



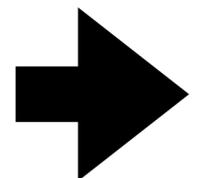
Perhaps the most life-changing part of my journey of becoming is along the lines of gender.



When I first entered into relationship with Jen, I identified as female, expressed my gender in more or less feminine ways. I have always known that parts of me were far from femme, but I did not have the slightest notion how to articulate that. I identified myself by the body parts I had, and expressed as society expects a person of that body to express.

I was sitting in kind of a murky middle ground expressing feminine but feeling that was not the whole story, when I received an unexpected invitation from a new acquaintance to attend the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. The conference was free and we were going to make a grand road trip of it, so I said “sure!”

That trip changed me in ways I will attempt to articulate. The first day at the conference, I found myself sitting at a table with a diverse cadre of queer and trans faith leaders. I was in the company of queer and trans pastors, rabbis, seminarians, rabbinical students, yogis, Buddhists and more.

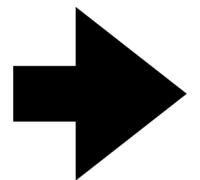


I had no idea that there so many queerfolk of faith.

I also met countless fabulous people who lived in the borderlands of gender, folks who identified as non-binary, genderqueer, and other gendered. Meeting these people and seeing the ways that each lived into their full authenticity was inspiring.

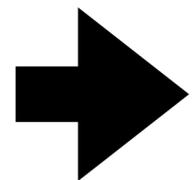
My inner self really unfolded in this pace, to the point that I felt something deep within me crack wide open. These wonderful encounters opened the doors, allowing me access to my own cultural heritage as I explored ancient traditional indigenous understandings of gender. My journey of self discovery, which tried to begin in my teens and suffered numerous stalls and re-starts was rather like being in a hall of mirrors, which distort, and none of them reflected you the way you see yourself.

When I encountered the “mirror” labeled Two Spirit – I was seeing myself, really seeing the full complexity of my multifaceted self, staring back at me!



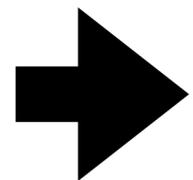
This first queer conference experience plugged me in to a vast network of folks who identified from diverse points in the sex and gender spectrums. As I interacted with folks over time I began my own journey of gender discovery. This journey has been a wonderful one, I have met myself, and the person I know myself to be does not fit into binary gender norms. As I explored ancient Indigenous gender constructs I found someone I recognized to not be either male or female, but a person whose gender is both/and.

Two Spirit is my gender. My Two Spirit identity informs how I interact with other Indigenous folks in a variety of contexts, guides how I engage with the world at large, and most importantly it influences how I experience, and am in relationship, with myself.



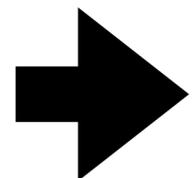
Two Spirit is my gender; an ancient non-binary gender identity uniquely and wholly Indigenous. Different people experience their Two Spiritedness, differently. I can only speak to the way my Two Spirit identity manifests in me.

There is an innately female spirit within me, an innately male spirit within me, and a spirit that is a blend of many genders. They coexist. They are a team. They work in consort to inform what I do, how I walk in the world, and how I breathe from moment to moment. But, in the place where they all come together deep in the core of my *Is-ness*, they have grown together; they are woven and twisted around each other in an entirely beautiful way to form one solidly rooted core.



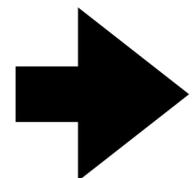
For some indigenous people, the process of going about one's identity path as a Two Spirit person is not a process of coming out, so much as a process of coming in.

- **Coming in to our cultural and ancestral home**
- **Coming in, to a deep understanding of the ancient histories and traditions associated with our Indigenous gender identity**
- **Coming in, to the warmth of our cultural fires and finding nourishment there, finding home.**



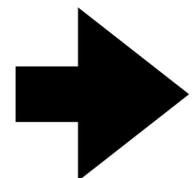
The nourishment that I have found in the warmth of my cultural fire has empowered me to step into the circle with other Two Spirit leaders, and join in the work of restoring Two Spirit roles and functions that were erased from our cultural memory by colonization. It has also given me the knowledge of self, necessary to heed the call to serve that the Divine has placed on me.

This self-awareness and comfort within my own skin has equipped me to step into national activism circles and do important work for the queer community, particularly queer people of faith. Until I unfolded, and cracked wide open, none of this would have been possible.



My personal journey of discovery has been life giving and life saving. I feel that there was a reason for my journey that transcends my own authentic life.

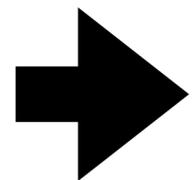
I believe that part of this has been about readying myself for the level of engagement in the queer movement I now find myself, ways that make a real difference to queer youth, queer elders, queer people of color, and queer people of faith. Any niche you might identify in the queer community has needs. Our work as activists is to join in conversation and relationship with them and find out what needs they might articulate. It is not our business to assume we know the needs of others, and what addressing those needs looks like in a specific context.



I would not be equipped to do this work that I am called to, this work that I love, had I not done the heavy lifting of dealing with my own shit, sorting through it piece by piece, owning what was mine, and discarding that which had been thrust upon me by others.

Throughout my life's journey, I have lived in many places, places of fear, abuse, oppression and denial, places of secrecy and hunkering down until the badness passed, and places where I was able to unfold and crack wide open to reveal my full authentic self.

Having been to so many of those places I have arrived at a place where living authentically is now the only place I can live.

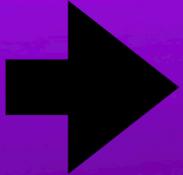


Rev. Lynn Young died of Covid-19 in November of 2020.

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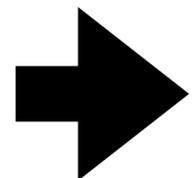




BETWEEN EMPIRE AND *BLINGISTAN*

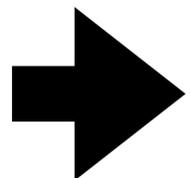
FINDING HOME IN THE LIMINAL SPACE

I grew up in Karachi. My memories of childhood and teenage years are happily intertwined with spending long hours by the sea; the salt laden evening air off the Arabian sea heady with the sweet fragrance of *raat ki raani* that helped us get some reprieve from the humidity; the mango season that brought with it the tantalizing mango themed parties; dragging *abu* all over Karachi to try to get my hands adorned with *mehnidi* on the magical night of *chaand raat*, the eve of the *Eid* holiday and a very strict schooling at an all girls' school.



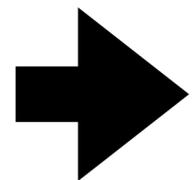
It was the girls' school that made me fall in love with British literature and Victorian England. We studied O'levels, a British system of education and I was proud to sit for exams that were administered by the University of Cambridge. Clearly colonization still ran deep in my post colonial world.

But I also grew up during one of the harshest military regimes in Pakistan, that of general Zia-Ul-Haq. In his push to "islamsize" the country and to create a stronger nation state, he threw women's rights under the bus in the name of Islam. Around the same time I started coming into my teenage years and became uncomfortably aware of the cultural notions of "womanhood" that surrounded me and expected me to uphold the illusive honor of my family, as well as that of a yet undetermined family I was supposed to get married into, my "real" family (as I was only a guest in my family of origin) a burden that I started to cave under. I didn't understand how no one else around me was noticing the oppression projected so intensely from the state as well as from my familial and cultural surroundings.



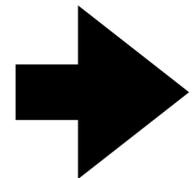
In the absence of any language or analysis to understand what I was going through, I started shutting down, I talked less and less, I lost the vibrancy and love for life I once had, I stopped wearing accessories and colorful clothes. Aunties berated *ammi* for letting me attend *shaadis* without the reasonably expected amount of bling and even my best friend started commenting on my lack luster clothing that had an over abundance of white, typically reserved for mourning.

I suppose I was in mourning for the loss of a life that I knew I wouldn't get to have, it was just a dream but so powerful was my desire to live an independent life where I got to make decisions about my body, my sexuality, my career that the loss of hope for it ever materializing produced a visceral reaction.



As I was having this internal crisis and as I sat for my O'level exams at the age of 16 in Karachi and wondered about my future, my family found out that we had become eligible to immigrate to the US through the sponsorship of my uncle who lived in the Chicago suburbs. It all happened very quickly, the decision to leave and within two months we were saying goodbyes, selling our home and suddenly I was on my first plane ride from Karachi to Chicago.

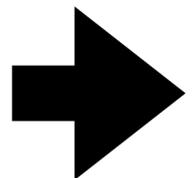
I came to the U.S broken and disillusioned and thought that this is my new beginning and I can now start a new life away from Pakistan and away from Islam, that now I can find happiness and pursue a life I had always wanted.



But of course it was not as easy as that...

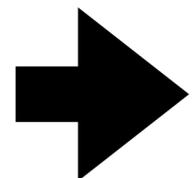
The more I tried to assimilate in suburban Chicago, tried to forget where I came from, the more depressed I became. Of course it didn't help being asked questions like "Do you have cars in Pakistan?" by my fellow high school students and "Is it ok if I call you Paki?" by a teacher who had difficulty pronouncing my name while the entire class laughed.

A few years later while I was attending a large public university in rural Illinois and enrolled in the not so surprising bio-pre-med major, I stumbled into a women's studies class. Even though the class was pre-dominantly white, (later on in my campus organizing I learnt about white feminism's difficulty acknowledging racism and holding to the idea of "universal womanhood" which I realized was an extremely problematic construct) for the time being it gave me a language and community that I had been craving for a long time.



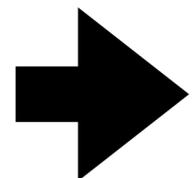
Before I knew it, I had come out as queer and was proudly wandering around campus in a distinctly queer look, for rural Midwest anyways: short bleached (sometimes dyed pink) hair, doc martins, flannel shirts and a rainbow necklace. It was important for me to be read as queer and in a predominantly white space, it seemed that this look would perhaps give me that coveted nod from a white dyke passing me by. I guess colonization still ran deep despite my academic theorizing to dismantle the colonizers' effect within me.

But coming out also made me acutely aware of my place in the U.S as a person of color, realizing that the issues I faced were different from the white LGBTQ community. I started organizing on my college campus and getting more involved with LGBTQ people of color specific work.



However, as I was busy organizing on campus I knew that something was still missing, this part of me that connected me to my family, to Pakistan, to Islam, this part that I had put so far away in the recesses of my mind as never ever being compatible with the life I had started to build for myself...

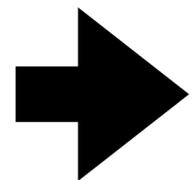
And then I met Faisal Alam in 1999. Faisal is a dear friend and the founder of the Al-Fatiha Foundation, one of the first organizations of its kind to put LGBTQ Muslims on the map, to make us visible and to start the ground breaking work of connecting us to each other, to end the kind of isolation that leads to thoughts like “I must be the only gay Muslim out there!” or “I can’t be both gay and Muslim, I have to choose one of those identities” or “How would I ever come out to my family, we don’t even have a word in my language to describe the LGBTQ community.”



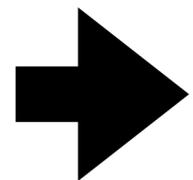
I remember the excitement I felt when I attended my first Al-Fatiha conference in San Francisco in 2001 coordinated around San Francisco pride and where LGBTQ Muslims for the first time marched in a pride parade under a banner that visibly claimed both our LGBTQ and Muslim identities announcing to the world that we are here, we are queer, we are trans and we are Muslim.

But even after meeting Faisal and even after getting involved with LGBTQ Muslim organizing, I used to think about how someone who is not a practicing Muslim can be part of this community. Am I really the “right” Muslim to represent the community in mainstream spaces is a question I grappled with constantly.

And then it all changed on September 11.



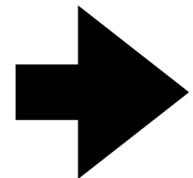
The morning of September 11, I was on my way to Miami and it's only after I reached Miami that I found out about the horrible events that had taken place, I was desperate to reach *ammi*, to make sure that she knew I was OK. When I finally managed to reach her, she told me that the day care center where she worked, the management there had asked her "why her people are doing this to the U.S and why she doesn't go back to her country." And all she can think about was if I was ok.



As the climate in this country started to shift and the Islamophobia that before had hid under the surface came out in full force and justified such draconian actions as the Patriot Act here in the U.S and the War on Terror abroad, I had no doubts any more about who I was.

I was Muslim, non-practicing yes, but Muslim, period.

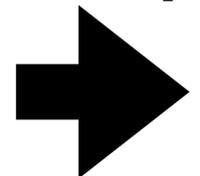
All of my work leading up to that day that September 11 happened now in retrospect feels like just a preparation for what was to come. We more than ever were entrenched within the Empire whose lust for war and blood had found a new enemy both within its own borders and abroad. Conveniently couched around “defending our freedom” and “defending the rights of women” (read: saving brown Muslim women from brown Muslim men) I observed in horror when mainstream feminist organizations condoned the war on terror to supposedly “liberate” the women in Afghanistan and Al-Fatiha being called the “most popular group at the Al-Qaeda conference” while marching in the DC pride parade. All Muslims were and still are simultaneously viewed as terrorists or in the other extreme - especially when it comes to LGBTQ Muslims and women - as those to be “saved.”



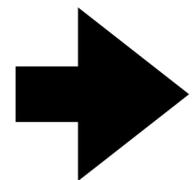
Post September 11, there was no doubt left in my mind about the work I was called to do and so I have spent the last several years being involved with LGBTQ Muslim organizing and I am so proud of all the work we have done to bring people together who like me, felt isolated and alone.

We have built retreat spaces that bring together LGBTQ Muslims to discuss spiritual life, religious texts, anti-oppression, and yes, we even have speed dating events at the LGBTQ Muslim retreat because nothing is hotter than some Muslim on Muslim love. These spaces that started fifteen years ago by a meeting of four people have now grown and expanded to fulfill the needs of our beautiful community.

We have provided countless workshops on the intersection of islamophobia and homophobia/transphobia, marched in pride parades to show our visibility, helped folks get asylum, provided spiritual counseling, developed and advocated for scholarship that looks at Islam in the context of LGBTQ issues. We have also worked with mainstream Muslim organizations like the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute to connect with Muslim leadership in the U.S and discuss ways to open up their spaces to LGBTQ Muslims as we believe that ultimately this work can transform lives and end the deep sense of isolation and rejection that our community experiences.

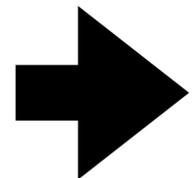


But most importantly we have changed the discourse. The discourse that looks at LGBTQ Muslims as only non-religious, somehow outside the realm of mainstream Muslim life, somehow not impacted by Islamophobia, somehow not quite able to be both LGBTQ and Muslim. And as we continue to change the discourse, I am heartened by how much our community has grown in sophisticated ways that pushes and propels us forward and truly reflects the diversity of our community: From cultural/secular Muslims to religious Muslims; from an aesthetic of blingy hijabs to that of shaved heads; Shias, Sunnis and ismailis; converts and those born into Islam; we are leading the change from within to create a just world that simultaneously creates loving spaces for LGBTQ Muslims as well as pushes back on neo-colonialism and imperialism.



I have recently started going back to Pakistan on a regular basis and after twenty plus years of living in the U.S and not being engaged with Pakistan in a meaningful way, I was finally able to find my Pakistan that I lovingly call *Blingistan*. I was lucky to connect with many LGBTQ folks there and started to understand that the love I carry for my beautiful community here in the U.S has given me the courage to find my community there.

I realized that the Pakistan I knew during the draconian days of Zia-ul-Haq has changed, and that by focusing on only the negative aspects of what's happening in Pakistan (many times fueled by the western media) I had neglected to see that there has also been amazing progress. From transgender communities getting ID cards that recognize third gender and getting an opportunity to run in the elections for the first time to the vibrant lawyers' movement that eventually toppled the last military dictator's regime, Pakistan has been on its own journey and I just needed the courage to see the Pakistan that I had always dreamt about.



Perhaps my favorite memory from my most recent visit to Pakistan was becoming an impromptu designated driver at two in the morning after a friend had had too much to drink at a party overwhelmingly attended by queer and trans folks. And so here I was driving a car full of *Khwaja siras* and a passed out gay guy and his boyfriend and when stopped by the military checkpoints to my disbelief I was not stopped, questioned or interrogated.

This is just an example of a life in The Islamic Republic of Pakistan that is full of contradictions and spaces pushed and carved by the LGBTQ community that allow imagining and living complex lives. I found myself ecstatically driving through the eerily empty streets of Lahore reminding myself to stay on the left side of the street and that I am lucky to live in this liminal space that has become my home.

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INQUISITOR:

WE DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR SOUL.
WE WANT YOUR BODY
IN THE FIELDS AND IN THE FACTORIES
IN THE BARRIOS AND GHETTOS
ON THE RESERVATION
CLINGING TO LIFE IN THE INNER CITY
WORKING AS SLAVE LABOR
SO WE GET RICH.

WE WANT YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT WHO OWNS AND SELLS YOU.
WE WANT YOUR SILENCE IN THE FACE OF TYRANNY.
WE WANT YOU TO CONFORM TO THE POLITICAL REALITY THAT KEEPS US IN CONTROL.

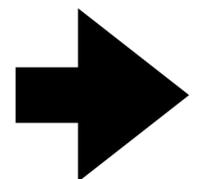
- FRAN BOGLE, THE JUST PEACE PLAYERS



SIX THINGS

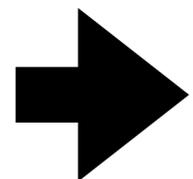
PEOPLE WITH ECONOMIC PRIVILEGE NEVER HAVE TO THINK ABOUT

I have the privilege of walking in between two worlds: one of dire lack and one where disposable income is a regularity. When I talk to my friends of means, and tell them about how I grew up, they are shocked at how resourceful and creative one must be in order to beat the odds and overcome adversity. Likewise, when I visit with friends and family who can't imagine being able to afford to send their kids to daycare or summer camp, they dream of a world where such possibilities are accessible. No matter where I go in life, I will never forget where I come from and *who* I come from. I know that a lot of blood, sweat, prayers, and tears make up the fabric of my existence; and I know that no matter how easy or difficult life may seem, I have the privilege of being alive to tell this story.



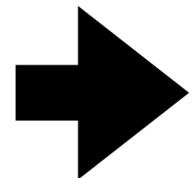
I am a queer-identified, African American transgender man. I'm the oldest of three. My grandparents migrated to the Midwest from the share-cropping farms that my ancestors were enslaved upon seeking a life that was better than the Jim Crow south had to offer them.

None of my grandparents went to college—one of my grandmothers tried but she didn't graduate because she failed math too many times and dropped out. Their lack of education qualified my grandparents to work in manufacturing, food service, truck driving, customer service, and hospitality. When my parents became of age, they were groomed to follow in these lines of work.



Privilege isn't just a class, gender or race issue. Privilege encompasses the ability to live freely in a world where it takes little or no effort to exist and achieve your dreams. Unfortunately, because of certain systemic inequities that exist, many people are disadvantaged and live in ways that are restrictive and that do not allow them to thrive without resistance.

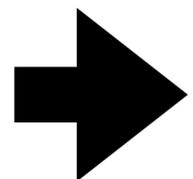
When you are a person of privilege, it can be hard to imagine that the playing field isn't leveled; but when you are a woman, or a person of color, or a transgender person, or a person from a lower socioeconomic bracket, you are familiar with the ways in which having privilege colors your reality. For those of you who may not be as familiar with the ways in which privilege impacts those who don't have it or who have very little, here are 6 things that people with economic privilege never have to worry about.



1. Food.

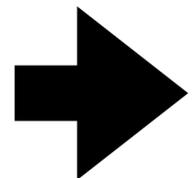
When you are a person of privilege and reasonable means, you can afford to be picky with the types of foods you eat or don't eat; but for as long as I can remember, food has always been a precious commodity. My college educated mother could only find work in fast food restaurants and retail stores, and even working 2 and 3 jobs did not give her a livable wage. When we weren't sifting through the end of the day's garbage to salvage what was edible, my cousins and I would dumpster-dive and bring home our bounty that included anything that was unopened and not expired. Food stamps, when we could get them, never provided enough food to last for the entire month. When we could get rides to the food shelf, we were treated like filthy criminals and judged for needing to eat.

As a poor child, you learn early on that when you are presented with food, any kind of food, you graciously accept it and eat it because it may be a while before you eat again.



2. Clothing.

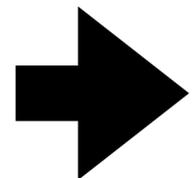
Name brands don't mean much to me but I understand that there are those for whom certain labels communicate specific taste and a certain level of social value. I am the oldest of 3, and when I lived with my mother, even second-hand clothing was hard to come by. My clothes were always either too big or too small. Thankfully, my feet grew quickly and I was able to wear my mother's shoes by the time I was in 3rd grade. When we went to live with my grandmother shortly thereafter, we had other cousins living with us too--which was helpful because we at least had more clothes to choose from. By the time I was in the 4th grade, my grandmother met a friend who let us use her credit card to buy school clothes and supplies, and allowed my grandmother to pay her \$20 each week until the \$300 limit was paid off. I got my first job working at a daycare center when I was 12 making \$2.50 an hour and it was so wonderful because I was finally able to afford to buy myself clothes. Even as an adult, I only buy clothes when it is absolutely necessary and select items based on need not greed or allegiance to a particular brand.



3. Shelter.

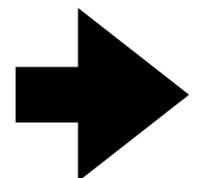
There are many people who will always know the privilege of having a place to live, be grateful for this. At one point, there was 11 of us living in a 1-bedroom. Between underemployment and being hired as contractors--aka your pay is never guaranteed, having a place to live simply meant having a roof over our head--whether that roof was a car, an apartment, a porch, or a garage.

I vowed that when I became an adult, I would always have a place to live. What I didn't factor into the equation was the impact that race, class and gender had on whether people hired me, paid me a livable wage, or approved me for loans or rental applications. In many places, you have to have 5-10 years of rental history and several months of paid rent upfront before being approved for an apartment. If you can't rent an apartment because you have insufficient rental history, or you don't make enough money, you end up homeless. And if you're transgender, even the homeless shelters turn you away because beds are separated by gender and you become a threat (or threatened) when your gender doesn't fit into a nice, neat box.



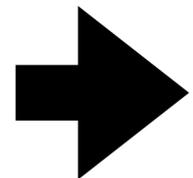
4. Education.

Growing up, my family valued education because we realized that there was a time when our ancestors weren't allowed to go to school. There was always an understanding that getting an education was the ticket out of poverty. Both my parents are dead, but even when they were alive, they could not afford to send me to school so I got loans to pay for school and I worked in a series of customer service positions and did freelance work to pay bills. The terrible thing about student loans is that, unless you step into a career that is paying above a living wage, there is no way to reduce your debt. In high school, we are told that going to college will ensure a job...and well, many people are paying for degrees that they aren't using. It is a luxury to go to college, and I am happy to have been the first person in my family to earn a Master's degree, but unless I am actually able to pay for the degree, it will continue to remain a negative mark on my credit report that scores us on the amount of debt we have in relation to how much money we actually earn. The desire to further my education is squelched every time I consider how much more debt I will accumulate if I go back.

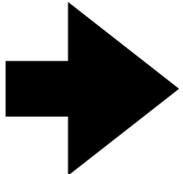


5. Work.

There is a huge difference between having a job and having a career. For those fortunate enough to be groomed for a career, internships and summer work makes for an impressive resume. For the rest of us who simply need jobs to survive, experience is needed to get a job... but a job is what gives you experience. This catch-22 is what keeps many people locked into the rat-race of underemployment. Thankfully, I learned my work ethic from my mother and grandmother who always had several jobs and were both not afraid of hard work. When you have privilege, you get to be picky about where you work and for how long, but when you are of the working poor, you take any and every job that you can get. My mother went to college and still could not find a job that paid above \$9 an hour. Before her death, she began suffering from a multitude of physical and mental illnesses and, as a result, Walmart was the only place that hired her and she didn't qualify for disability because her conditions weren't severe enough so she panhandled to make ends meet.



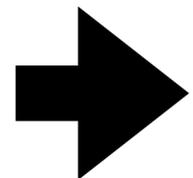
6. A future.



When you are a person with privilege, the world is your oyster and you can take up as much space as you see fit. However, when you spend your life working several jobs, unsure of where your food and money and housing will come from, and you fight everyday battles that include illness, discrimination and stress, your future seems pretty dim. My father was diagnosed with lupus at 34 and suffered from alcoholism, depression, and being caught in the wheels of oppression. He ended his own life at 40. He said time and time again — after being turned down for full-time work or discovering that his pay check was short — “this world is not made for people like us.”

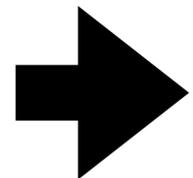
Similarly, my mother, after spending years working tirelessly, battling abusive relationships, addictions and illness, dropped dead at 45. Her heart just stopped one day. What kind of future do you have when your basic necessities are always in question and even your parents are ill-equipped to dream? It’s hard to dream about the future when the present isn’t secure.

If someone fears my dark skin when I walk down the street, if a police officer pulls me over and I fit the description of a person they’re looking for, if someone I encounter is disgusted by my effeminate qualities — every day that I leave home, I know that at any moment I can lose my life, my livelihood, or my freedom.



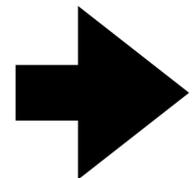
"IT IS MY FAITH THAT KEEPS ME STRONG..."

I come from a long line of faithful people who believed in God and community, and they used their beliefs as fuel to keep them moving forward in spite of the hardships they faced. It is their stories that I keep with me. My great, great grandparents who were slaves in the south. My great grandparents and grandparents who were sharecroppers, manufacturers, hospitality workers, and customer service workers. My parents who died with unrealized dreams. They give me hope. And it is God who gives me a vision for the future. I dream of a world where all people have the ability to not just survive, but also thrive.



The same God who guided **Joseph from the pit to the palace; the same God who elevated **Esther**; the same God who took a little **shepherd boy** and made him king... this is the same God that shows me a future with possibility.**

A future where my labor is not in vain and one where all people who come to the table hungry will walk away filled. A future where no one is homeless and where people who want to work, who have the skills, will not be denied access to such opportunities because of their race, class, age, or gender. I am thankful to God for connecting me to community because the people who surround me with their love, resources and hope make me believe every day that as long as I keep working and dreaming and building and connecting, that I will always have everything I need.



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“In breaking down rigid categories of gender and sexuality, we open the doors for acknowledging wholeness within transition, or perhaps more comprehensively, that all beings are in transition, never to arrive.

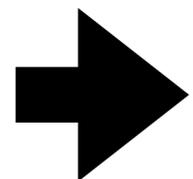
Just as Queer theory challenges all notions of fixed identity, children by their very transitory nature challenge our reliance on fixed identity, and invite us to see them as fully whole in exactly the moment they embody.”

– Cate Desjardins



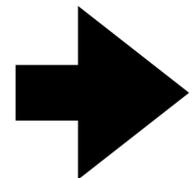
I was hired as an Interfaith Organizer by California Faith for Equality during the summer of 2008 when the Prop 8 campaign (a state constitutional amendment that would limit marriage between one man and one woman) was beginning to heat up. Luckily (insert sarcasm emoticon here), I was assigned to Orange County, California (not what one might describe as a bastion of liberalism politically or religiously). In fact, “The O.C.” had as many fundamentalist mega-churches as fake blondes and that translated into the largest concentration in the country.

Yes, we already knew the anti-marriage folks made up 40% of Californians who were staunchly and adamantly against granting any rights for LGBTIQ people. Period. You’d have to pry the traditional definition out of their cold, dead hands. If they could’ve passed a law that would restrict the flow of oxygen for queer folks, they would have done it a long time ago!



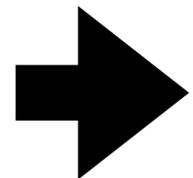
On the other hand, we also knew 40% were just as strongly in favor of equality for LGBTIQ people. These were the as-seen-on-TV hippy live-and-let-live types who have somehow found their way to the San Francisco Bay Area and they couldn't for the life of them figure out what the heck was wrong with those people down South. They needed no further convincing, thank you very much. Save your breath for the next social issues war.

The rest of the 20% were moveable, squishy, undecided and genuinely torn. Some of them even went to conservative Protestant Evangelical churches! Indeed, what we found was that Millennials could care less about this issue. Truly, some of their best friends were queer. But their pastors had something else to say from the pulpit and that was where the conflict came in. Consequently, some of these Millennials have left the conservative churches of their childhood and joined the ranks of the “nones”—spiritual but not religious because they were fed up with the church's homophobia and hypocrisy. They would rather check “none of the above” when asked to do so on a form in terms of religious affiliation.

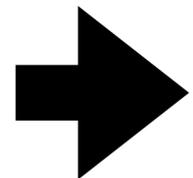


My mission then, was to find places of worship behind the Orange Curtain where I could find meaningful theological discussions and help transform someone's heart and mind who were part of that 20%.

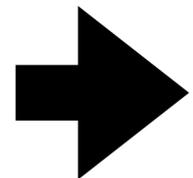
That's when I met a White pastor of a mega-church in Orange County who wasn't the head honcho, but was responsible for the Spanish-speaking ministry (which was still in the thousands). You may be asking why a White guy headed up the Spanish-speaking ministry and the answer was because he grew up as a missionary's kid in Latin America and spoke Spanish fluently. When we met, he recalled that formative experience as one where he found out what it meant to be part of a "minority" group and decided from a young age that the Kingdom of God could not possibly be so pre-occupied with the color of our skin, but more to do with how we did "Kingdom work." His experience as an outsider shaped his theology. The seed of inclusion was planted in South America and grew to be a strong tree in North America, whose leaves provided shade for all kinds of different people.



This pastor didn't just practice a radically welcoming theology when it came to race/ethnicity, he also proceeded to tell me how sad it was that Muslims were being picked on in our country and profiled as "terrorists." He decided to do something about this unfair practice by putting together a joint picnic inviting the Muslim community to attend. This event led to a joint service project with Habitat for Humanity where side by side, members of his Southern Baptist church built a home for someone who needed shelter and they did so by crossing racial and religious lines.

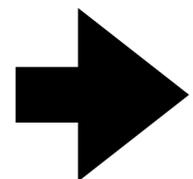


As I was listening to his story, I was pinching myself in disbelief that he was truly a straight, white, middle-aged Conservative Christian pastor. If I closed my eyes, he could pass as a progressive Unitarian Universalist! Yet, his theology may have been even more progressive because it challenged an institution that has lost sight of its original mission. You see, by following in the footsteps of Jesus, he was able to journey to places he may not have been comfortable with, but they were places that allowed him to question his own beliefs and assumptions about other people and their place in God's Realm. This included LGBTIQ members of his own church community. He cared about queer folks because he experienced first hand what it was like to be picked on and discriminated against. That was reason enough to love your neighbor as yourself.

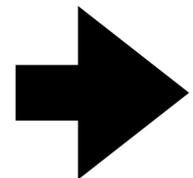


While wanting to do more to live out his faith in his current context, the risk of being defrocked by the Southern Baptist Convention and being fired by the Senior Pastor loomed over his head like a dark cloud. Unfortunately, when his congregation faced a budget crisis one year, his position became vulnerable and he was eventually “let go.”

To this day, I don't know whether the real reason was because he began pushing the envelope a bit more than what management was comfortable with or whether it was all purely financial. But it made me think about what the cost of discipleship truly was. Or what it meant to follow Jesus even to the cross.

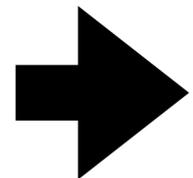


Another story of struggle took place with an Asian American pastor of a resource (corporate)-sized, predominantly Asian American church. When a long-time lay leader came out as an openly gay man, the congregation quickly became divided. Some labeled him a “sinner” and wanted him out right away while others took a more courageous stance by welcoming him with open arms. An open forum was then held, asking members from both sides of this issue to practice convicted civility. While one may have held deeply held beliefs about LGBTIQ issues, the goal was to engage in these conversations with as much compassion as possible.



When I asked why this pastor cared for a small minority within his congregation, his response was indeed a pastoral one. He not only wanted to make sure all in his flock were cared for and loved, he also knew the handwriting was on the wall. He did not want the church to go the way of the dinosaurs and become extinct, but rather, to be relevant and provide spiritual meaning for every person in every generation.

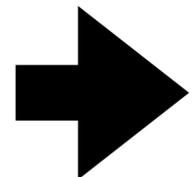
The numbers did dwindle a little bit, which made his wife really nervous, but since then, they have weathered that storm rather well and a thriving LGBTIQ affirming group (composed mostly of straight allies) arose as a result.



These were two of many stories of the ups and downs of a campaign fraught with tears of joy and sorrow.

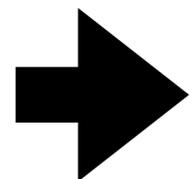
We may have lost marriage equality in 2008, but we lost it forward by learning some hard lessons about who to include in our conversations or suffer the consequences of becoming irrelevant as an LGBTIQ movement. In my opinion, the biggest mistake the 'No on Prop 8' Campaign made was failing to hear the cries of people of color and people of faith. Too little attention was paid, too little money spent, and too much lip service without action until the very last minute. This was the wrong strategy in a state that in 2010 became a "minority-majority" state.

Thanks to the hard work of grassroots organizations, Prop 8 was thankfully reversed in 2013 and marriage equality became the law of the land in 2015.



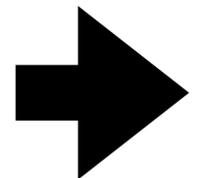
The question still remains of what next for the LGBTIQ movement and I'm hoping these two stories will provide a window in terms of articulating a coherent theology of intersectionality.

In an interconnected world, suffering and oppression can only be overcome when we work together as diverse communities to eliminate the collective sin of individualism that becomes the root cause of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism. In such a context, any religious community is defined not by creeds, commandments, or other exclusionary measures but by a covenant (sacred promise) to work toward the common good. Building a house for the unhoused, feeding the hungry, dismantling the school to prison pipeline—this is what modern day prophets would admonish us to do.



There is also a role for priests in this system—they're the ones that can build healthy institutions that will sustain the work by providing pastoral care on a weekly and daily basis to anyone who is hurting and feeling hopeless.

To be honest, I'm all for bigger membership numbers and more money because the work of the common good requires radical generosity with all hands on deck! The more human power and financial resources we have, the bigger our impact will be as we engage in the democratic process by electing public officials who will work for us and as we vote for values that will promote the collective "we." There is a place for faith-based community organizing institutions in our movement.



These two courageous ministers cared because their faith told them to love their neighbors. Period. There's no fine print to that love. There's no category of people excluded from that love. Love is the only thing that can transform our world.

I must admit, there's a bit of selfishness in my motives for doing the work of justice. I initially sought to transform other people's hearts and minds but found the biggest transformation took place in me. I realized I could never be free until my evangelical siblings are free. I care because my liberation is tied to the world's liberation.

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“LET US START WITH THE BASICS: 'WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE AND TO LOVE KINDNESS AND TO WALK HUMBLLY WITH YOUR GOD?' (MICAH 6:8).”

– LIZETTE MERCHÁN PINILLA

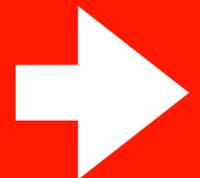


THE DAY AFTER

*"ALL I ASK OF YOU
IS FOREVER TO
REMEMBER ME
AS LOVING YOU.
ALL I ASK OF YOU
IS FOREVER TO
REMEMBER ME
AS LOVING YOU."*

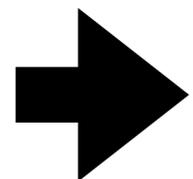
BY ALBA ONOFRIO

WE TAKE TO THE STREETS

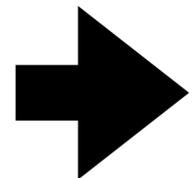


I still sing that song to my little child almost every night. But especially those first months, over and over and over again, I would hold this new life at my breast and pray over them, and sing the love of G-d and my love into them and into the world to be able to hold this tiny precious being.

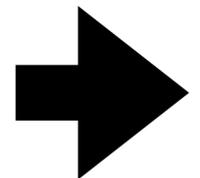
That was back in 2010. And that was during those same months that we were fighting SB 1070.



For those who don't recall, SB1070 was a law that passed in Arizona that legalized racial profiling and made it legal for the police to stop anyone, anywhere, at any time who look like they could possibly be an “illegal alien” and made it a crime for me or any other “reasonably suspicious” (read non-native English speaking, visibly working-class, or any other Person of Color) to exist in Arizona without and ID on my body at all times proving that I deserve the status of human being as conferred by the official government of what is now known as these United States (formerly known as Mexico).



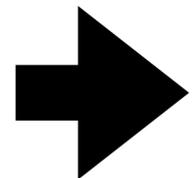
But what that law also did was make it illegal to shelter, transport, move, conceal, harbor, or shield another human being who is undocumented, so that included picking up people in the desert and giving them rides into town, but it also included ministers taking folks on church retreats, and neighbors taking children to school or driving a friend to work, or even to the emergency room for that matter.



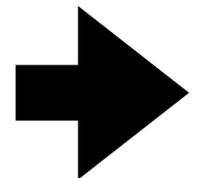
It is illegal. It is illegal to shelter someone, to harbor them, to shield them. And me, with this little tiny human, I was thinking “HOW CAN IT BE ILLEGAL?!” I mean, that is exactly what we do, isn't it? As mothers, as parents, as caregivers for those we love....

**We carry around these little ones on our hips,
we hold them in our own bodies and feed them from the flesh our breasts
and harbor them from the storms, from the cold, we keep them close
and try to shield them from whatever kind of harm we can.**

That is what we do. Right?



That's what I do for my child- I wrap them up when it's cold, and tell them not to talk to strangers, and worry every time they go out into the world... even if it's with their own father, or grandparents... even if it's just to the park... it doesn't matter, I just want them to be careful, and stay safe, and come back to me well and whole and as soon as they can. (And I feel that way knowing that the world would be horrified if any harm befell my beautiful, peach-skinned, blue-eyed child. Sometimes they want to protect my child from me, thinking I'm the brown-skinned nanny rather than Mama.)



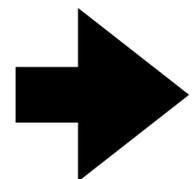
But that's what we all want for our children, right? For them to be loved and cared for and happy and safe — That's what Lesley McSpadden wanted for her child, Michael Brown, right?

or what Samaria Rice hoped for Tamir, sweet 12-yr-old boy?

what Sybrina Fulton tried to do for Travon?

or Wanda Johnson wished for her son Oscar Grant on the way home from a New Year's Party with his friends on the BART. Right?

What Kadiatou Diallo wanted for Amadou, Right? Yeah, we haven't forgotten...

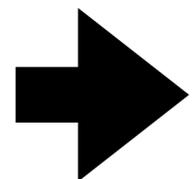


And we can go on and on about state-sponsored murders of marginalized Black and Brown bodies... all the way back through history, all the way to Jochebed and her precious son Moses..

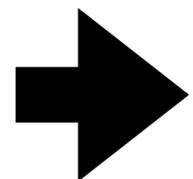
But yet, it just keeps on happening, doesn't it? The senseless deaths of our babies... so many bodies, so much death at the hands of a racist Empire.

And you know, sometimes I feel helpless; we feel helpless... like now... I mean,

What do you do the day AFTER the protests?

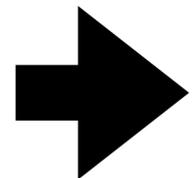


What do you do the day after—when you have to go back to work and you have a family and a life that requires attention and care in the midst of incredible pain and oppression that is just bearing down and becomes almost unbearable for so many of us? What do you do when you see the system and know that you are complicit with it and also don't know what exactly what to do to make it different? How do we show that Black Lives Matter? What does that mean in the course of our daily life? What does that mean the day after people are in the streets protesting yet another child being the victim of a racist state?



I've been working on this research project about Our Lady of Guadalupe and thinking about her showing up at Tepeyacac in central Mexico in 1531, this brown madonna figure, and trying to put that moment in conversation with this moment that we are experiencing now. Because the connection feels significant. She shows up in the midst of conquest and colonization.

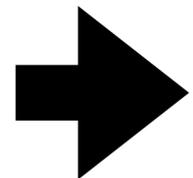
Just to give you a sense of the moment, in 1519 when Cortez arrives in central Mexico the population of that part of Mesoamerica is about 25 million indigenous people and within 80 years, by 1600, almost 95% of those people are dead—so from 25 million human beings down to just over 1 million human beings in 80 years. All of those Brown bodies torn apart by state-sponsored violence.



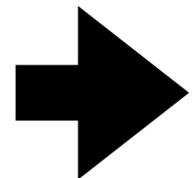
And so I think about Guadalupe who shows up in the midst of that and can do nothing to stop the Empire, to stop the state-sponsored murder, rape, and enslavement of her people. She can do nothing but stay close and remind them who they are. And she says, "I AM the MOTHER of the CREATOR of LIFE,

**I AM THE MOTHER OF THE GREAT GOD OF TRUTH...
and YOU ARE MY CHILDREN."**

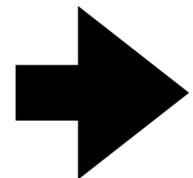
So I think about that moment when I am searching for what to do in the face of hopelessness



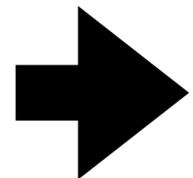
and I go back to Mary standing at Golgotha with her child, another young Brown man, at the foot of the cross of Jesus — NOT running away to keep herself safe, NOT looking away from the horror as the state executed her first-born son. I imagine her thinking to herself, "I can do nothing. I can do nothing... but stay ...but witness ...but remind you who you are... you are my child, God's child." A confession we Christians continue to make thousands of years later. We say with Mary: "Jesus, you are the Light of the World; You, Jesus, are the Son of God."



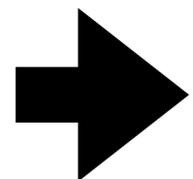
...and NOT that John 3:16 God, that "for God so loved the world that HE gave HIS precious SON as a sacrifice. NO. NO! We do not sacrifice our priceless children! We DO NOT offer them up for state-sponsored violence! Hell NO! We do not feed them, and cloth them, love their bodies, and care for their souls so that they can be shot in streets, or in the park, or in the vestibule of their own home- NO! No, that's not the G-d I know. Not the G-d I love. G-d doesn't sacrifice her children for anyone.



And sometimes I think G-d feels a little helpless like us. And when we feel like we can do nothing to change the system — like the day after the prayer vigil, or the day after people take down the artistic rendering of the young man's face as their profile pic on Facebook. When the "moment" is over, and the movement is silent. When we ask, What do we do the next time? And what do we do that moment right before that...

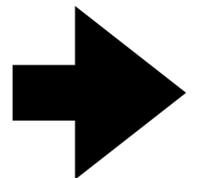


I want to tell you just one more story... about Sylvia Fernandez, she lives in Durham, North Carolina where my people are, and her son is missing, and it's late, and maybe he's just out with his friends, maybe he's run away. But he's 17 years old, and he's her son and she's worried and so she calls the police. Well, she doesn't speak much English, so gets her daughter, Evelin, to call the Durham police about her brother, Jesús, that would be Jesus in English — y'all don't name your children that in English, but in Spanish, we name our babies Jesus and Immanuel all over the place.

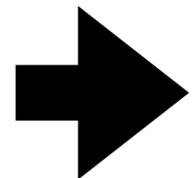


The police did find Jesús Huerta on that night last November. But instead of getting him back home safely, he wound up dead — handcuffed behind his back, in the back of police cruiser, shot in the head.

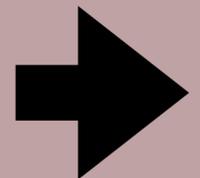
And the days after the prayer vigils and public protests where the police showed up in my city with riot gear and tear gassed our friends, our babies in strollers, beating our queer and trans folks on bicycles, and in wheelchairs (you know the drill with that). But the day after that, what the hell do I do?



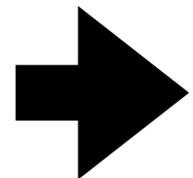
It is in these times, when I feel overwhelmed and helpless, when the fury is so deep it can't be swallowed anymore, when there is no one blame or no personified enemy to take on... It is in these times that I think about the Mother of G-d, who did NOT do nothing, but did the only thing we can do sometimes, the thing we can ALWAYS do and perhaps is the most important thing that any of us can do — the thing that all of us should do for our children and ourselves every day.



I remember what the Mother of G-d does, what our Mother G-d does: holding us close, and reminding us who we are. "YOU are THE LIGHT of the WORLD. You are the light of the world, and you are MY precious child.



And maybe Sylvia and those other Latinas are onto something naming their children, Jesús. Maybe we should start naming all our little Black boys Jesus. and our Brown boys, Jesus. and our little girl babies and intersex babies, Jesus. and our queer bodies and trans bodies, Jesus. and our undocumented bodies, Jesus. our old bodies and undesirable bodies and differently-abled bodies... Jesus. Perhaps we should call ALL our babies Jesus. Maybe then, just maybe, we could all see who they really are; who we really are... the light of the world... the children of G-d.



May we know it in our bones. May we all know it. May we all hear the love of G-d holding us close and singing into us

***“ALL I ASK OF YOU - IS FOREVER TO
REMEMBER ME - AS LOVING YOU.”***

Amen.

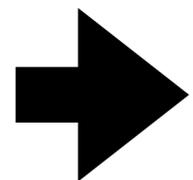


HEAR ME, WHAT I SAY

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS DOGMA, DIFFERENCE, AND DISADVANTAGE

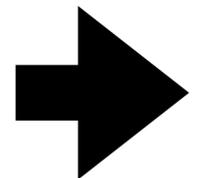
BY DEWAYNE L. DAVIS

For those who live and exist in spaces on the margins, speaking openly and honestly from those places is fraught with risk, failure, and uncertainty.



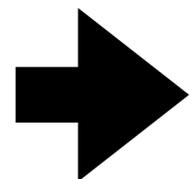
The floors of homes and churches are littered with the ruins of broken relationships, shattered expectations, wrecked nerves, and wounded emotions because queer people have dared to find their voice, speak their truth, and assert their right to live freely. Misunderstandings and feelings of betrayal abound where people of color dared to challenge the power and privilege of whiteness only to find themselves dismissed as “angry” and “difficult.”

As a same-gender loving black man, I have learned to navigate the intersections of my life by talking as much as I possibly can about my needs and experiences, my dreams and my expectations. Failed conversations and unresolved conflict have taught me that if I have any hope of building relationships across dogma, difference, and disadvantage, I will have to figure out how to be heard.



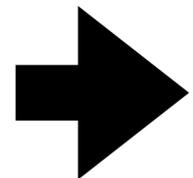
As a child of the black Pentecostal tradition, I am aware of how disheartening it can be to know that your very being is both a shame and a problem for your family and church. I was born and raised in the poorest county in Mississippi, in a town where black and white communities were separated geographically by a railroad track. I learned and experienced early how the unequal distribution of power and resources left the black population in poverty and deprivation.

Even when we can manage honest conversation about what it means to be sexually different or racially other, we are rarely assured of an unqualified positive outcome.



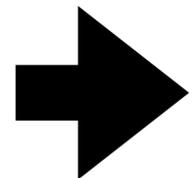
I walked away from the black church when I was eighteen years old. At the time, I told myself it was all about opening myself to the college experience, embracing the freedom to raise questions and challenge received religious wisdom in ways not allowed in my parents' home and in my upbringing in the Church of God in Christ.

I was unprepared to entertain the other reason I left the church: I was a same-gender loving man who had become separated from a loving, liberating, inclusive gospel that embraced and celebrated me just as I was. While others stayed and fought, I did not have a voice. I felt I could not make the case for my place in the black church or in any church. In the church, I was a sexualized other who had no credibility to speak about God or faith.



I walked into politics when I was eighteen years old. At the time, I told myself that it was all about preparing myself for public service, developing the experience and the contacts for a political career following in the line of my political heroes at the time, including Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Barbara Jordan.

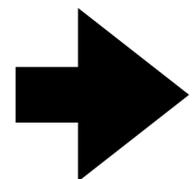
I was unwilling to admit the other reason that I embraced politics: I was a black man who had started to become aware that the world was not entirely fair to black people. I had to navigate and rise above a substandard educational system to achieve but was discounted and underestimated by the larger world because of the color of my skin. In America, I was a racialized other who had fewer opportunities than most of my white peers.



As I began to grow into consciousness about being a sexualized and racialized other, I had to face the uncomfortable truth that, in political and religious spaces, I was viewed as a problem to be solved, ignored, or denied.

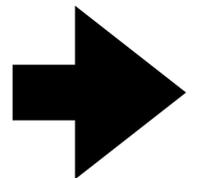
Being perceived as problem separated me from my most authentic voice and the fullest expression of my life. But I knew that I would never be content being a problem or an afterthought.

I would never be satisfied being a cautionary tale in black religious spaces or an unspoken tragic figure in white political spaces, or, at best, an anecdote shared at a cocktail party by liberal, urbane liberals, defined and spoken of but never allowed to be front and center with my own story, my own needs, and my own experience.



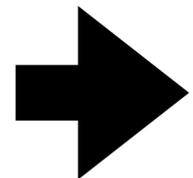
If I had any hope of having a chance in this world to be and do anything, I would have to find *my voice*, to make space for myself as a black, same-gender loving man with a life that is free, proud, alive, and generative.

I had to accept that, despite the pain and suffering that accompanies the courage to live *out loud*, every advance we have made in securing more rights and more acceptance came because we stood up, *spoke up*, and made our case to our friends, families, churches, and communities.



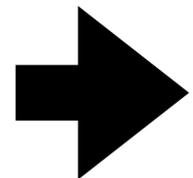
I left the church, but God did not leave me. God's companionship remained with me despite my fear that my sexuality made me unworthy of God's grace and love. While I could not see a way back to the church of my youth, I could not resist the call to faith that appeared to grow stronger as I became more comfortable with my sexuality and grew closer to my partner. I decided to return to church. After making an exhaustive list of affirming churches to visit, I chose to attend the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, DC first. I believed that choice was ordained because, upon worshiping there, I was brought back to the place I was called as a teenager.

I was reclaiming an identity as a liberated child of God — a prodigal reclaiming a birthright that almost slipped away. No more separation from God or my faith. I was home.

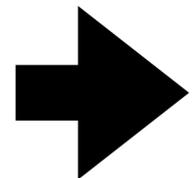


Even as I found a theological language to affirm me fully as a same-gender loving person, I would soon learn that queer religious spaces are not immune to the dilemma of racial strife and ignorance and white privilege and supremacy.

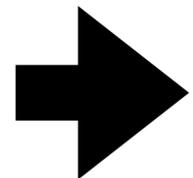
I saw it in the two services held each Sunday, which were ostensibly different to make room for both a liturgical and contemporary style of worship. What could be defended as a simple attempt to accommodate the preferences of equal portions of the congregation revealed a divide between white members of the congregation, a majority of whom attended the earlier liturgical service, and black members, a majority of whom attended the later contemporary (gospel) service. This accommodation belied the underlying arcane divisions within the congregation.



When I became a member of the Board of Directors, I would soon hear complaints about the contemporary service becoming too black. I encountered a cultural conditioning and assumed privilege that found the gospel music and the presence of large numbers of black attendees to be a problem. Discussions about solving “the problem” all led to calls for the Minister of Music to tone down the gospel music. But this was a just a shallow conflict that masked a deeper strain of resistance and insensitivity hiding just beneath the service. It came to the fore at a celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. during a Sunday worship celebration over the MLK Holiday weekend.

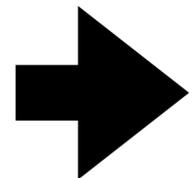


Every year I attended that church, the worship team included as part of worship some particular element that honored MLK, including music, speeches, and short skits. On this particular Sunday, one participant gave an extended recitation of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and invited the congregation to stand, interlock their arms like the civil rights activists, and sing “We Shall Overcome.” When the participant began the recitation, a well-known white member of the congregation turned prominently in his seat and picked up and opened a hymnal to read it, making a show of not paying attention to the speaker. When the reciter invited the congregation to stand and sing, this member remained in his seat and then yelled at his teenage son (who had stood up to interlock his arms and join in the singing) to sit down, saying, “We’re not doing that!”



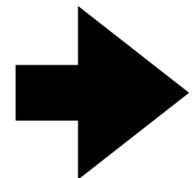
It was a shocking and embarrassing display. Several members of the congregation approached the Assistant Pastor and members of the Board of Directors, including me, expressing offense and concern at this obviously blatant display of bigotry and intolerance.

Black members of the congregation pointed out that only on MLK Day and Black History Month is there even an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of African-Americans and found this resistance particularly insulting and divisive. They worried that a failure to respond to this breach would send the message that further programming honoring and celebrating communities of color would not be welcomed. It was clear that we had come to crossroad in the life of the church on the issue of race and we needed to show leadership.

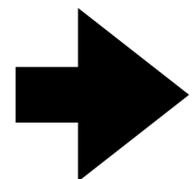


Several of us on the Board knew that this was an opportunity to begin dialogue on race and privilege. However, the resistance from some white clergy and board members was swift and shocking.

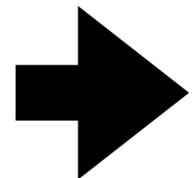
Those of us who wanted to respond had no intention of singling out the member who had behave so disrespectfully. For the sake of unity and progress and to avoid a repeat of such behavior, we wanted to create an opportunity for raising awareness about white privilege and the marginalization of communities of color. Defenders of the white congregant sought to portray his behavior as a matter of personal preference and thought any larger response would be divisive and provocative and create more problems. They argued that he had a right to not participate in honoring MLK, that nobody should be forced to participate in anything, and that he had not shown any insensitivity to black people before. They discounted the disruptiveness of the audible and visible protest against the observance in the middle of worship. They failed to see how offensive it was to those participating in the program to witness someone so blatant in his disrespect for their tribute.



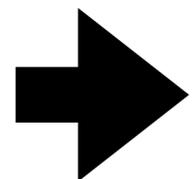
I was stunned when every avenue for constructive dialogue about the incident and for an intentional program of learning about power and privilege were forestalled. The willingness to move on without taking stock and figuring out how to move toward healing and reconciliation meant that the voice of people of color was considered disruptive and inconvenient. We were a problem in this queer white religious space, an issue better ignored to keep the peace, and the reason that it is so difficult for blacks and whites to simply get along.



While I was never able to convince the congregation to engage in a broader conversation about race and privilege, I learned a valuable lesson. I had assumed that a queer religious space would be a generative, liberative, and hospitable environment for the needs, concerns, and interests of the black body. I learned, however, that the white religious space would assert itself to maintain its status quo of power and privilege. I was no longer unprepared for the resistances and prerogatives of a white religious space that was determined to isolate itself from the kind of conversations that would lead to more equally shared space, expression, and leadership.

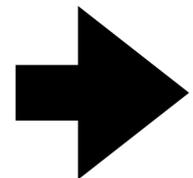


This incident, however, did not return void. The effort to create programming on racial issues attracted many white allies who agreed that the church needed an intentional, pro-active response to the incident. They worried that the incident revealed an underlying racial divide which had the potential to disrupt the church's larger mission and ministry. I developed a good relationship with them, enlisting their help and support for influencing ministries and leadership to engage communities of color in more intentional and constructive ways. These allies became conversation partners, ministry collaborators, and personal friends.

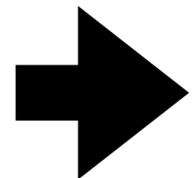


I had also assumed that since I had found a queer religious space that embraced me fully as a same-gender loving man that I had no further use for black religious spaces. I had left the church of my youth and my parents and felt no need to return or to justify myself to the black church and what I felt was its uncompromising approach to my sexuality. However, I discovered that love is never silent or fearful or closeted. I discovered that I didn't need to ignore the black religious spaces that were historically hostile to me. I found my voice and was determined to share my story and celebrate my truth without regard for audience.

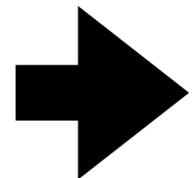
Living so freely and so openly caught the attention of others who were challenging the homophobia and conservatism in black religious spaces.



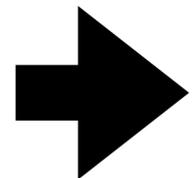
I was invited by CASCADE (Coalition of Activist Students Celebrating the Acceptance of Diversity and Equality), Howard University's LGBTQ organization, to speak at a roundtable on faith and sexuality during a week of activities for homecoming. As a Howard graduate, I was honored and thrilled to be a part of the discussion, even more so when I learned that I would be sharing the space with a transgender woman I worked with as part of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries and a straight female Episcopalian priest I had met at earlier meetings of CASCADE.



The roundtable was held in the historic Founders Library on the main campus of Howard University. I thought it was the perfect location for a civilized conversation about an issue that was verboten during my undergraduate years. Equipped with new language and new theories and a broader theological perspective on race and sexuality, I was ready to make the case for a more liberating and inclusive approach to God within black religious space and within the larger black community. I was ready to bear witness to not only how mainline denominations were opening their spaces to LGBTQ clergy and people of faith but also to how I was finding an opportunity in queer religious spaces to affirm my own faith and ministry.

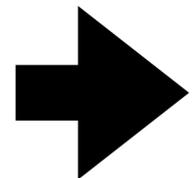


All of the presentations were well received, and I was pleased with my contribution, if a little disappointed that I did not have time to get to all of the things that I wanted to say. I was also glad that none of the panelists felt any pressure to defend themselves by proof-texting the Bible. If we did not bring up the Bible, maybe there wouldn't be an interpretive battle in which the sacred text would be wielded like a weapon to score political points and harden positions without any progress toward understanding.

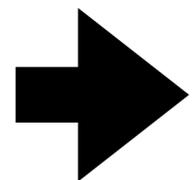


But during the Q &A, a black male student immediately raised his hand and was recognized. His first question was to me.

I don't remember his exact words, but it was a question I have heard many times before: how can you call yourself a minister of the gospel when it says in the Bible that homosexuality is a sin? Having had to answer some form of this question ever since I came out and started attending seminary, I was prepared with a rather pointed yet dismissive quip. I responded that the Bible does not address homosexuality at all; the discussion of same-sex sexual activity in the context of the ancient world was limited to pre-scientific knowledge of sexuality and psychology; there was no word for homosexuality in Hebrew and Greek; etc. I had hoped this response would re-direct the conversation in a more fruitful direction about theology and spiritual experience and liberation of those on the margins.

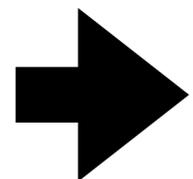


However, because he was not prepared to counter my response, he grew angry and began heatedly and hurriedly accessing all the negative and degrading anti-gay religious language he had heard before and loudly challenged me to affirm the literal meaning of scripture. He starting referencing the familiar clobber passages used to condemn homosexuality, getting some of them right and paraphrasing others. He offered a rather shallow interpretation of those passages, and it became obvious he was recalling what he'd heard a preacher say in the past. He evinced no familiarity with the particular books in which the passages were found or even a knowledge of the context in which the scriptures would have been written.



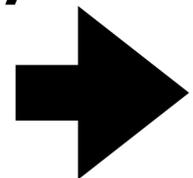
When he allowed me to speak, I begin to introduce ways of interpreting the clobber passages, deconstructing the passages, using historical criticism to reinterpret for him, and doing some word analysis to prove that certain biblical words used in the ancient world may have no relation to the same words used in modern language. The young man angrily responded with the familiar fall back that I was reading scripture selectively to justify my sin. The facilitator decided rightly to cut off the exchange as it could have gone on like this for a while.

I told the young man that I would be happy to talk to him further after the roundtable. However, instead of accepting my invitation for more conversation after the roundtable, I could see that he had in mind to settle this in a different way. He responded, “Let’s take it outside now and talk. We can finish this right now.” He was abundantly clear that he was not talking about having a conversation.

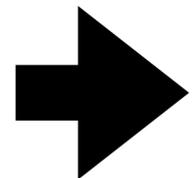


He realized he had gone too far when there was a chorus of protests from the audience that he should calm down and that he needn't feel the need to respond in a violent way. The young man left angry and confused.

I did not feel victorious. I failed because what transpired was not an exchange to bring understanding or to bear witness to an unfamiliar experience but an exercise in mutual justification. In dismissing him so viscerally, I was being just as defensive as he was. And I used the power and privilege of a theological education to do it, to make myself feel superior and to put him in his place. It occurred to me that I should have been a little more careful to give him an opportunity, not to reinforce bad theology or to promote a destructive religious power over others, but to have his say in a way that made him feel heard and to walk away feeling respected. Even if his arguments were not very well made or thought out, even if they made me or those gathered uncomfortable, I should not have made him feel disrespected. Rather, I should have tried harder to get him to re-think and reconsider some of his received wisdom. The exchange should have been an invitation to each of us to walk away with more questions and a challenge to be more thoughtful.

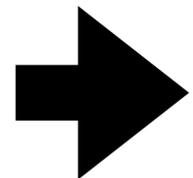


I learned that being defensive about my faith and ministry within black religious spaces can be just as destructive to creating understanding as being rigidly dogmatic toward same-gender loving people. That black religious space itself is already challenged with the issue of power and privilege of white religious hegemony, a situation that is made even more salient in light of the black church's origins and tradition of being a place of refuge, safety, and liberation for African-Americans since slavery. I came to understand that my task as a minister and advocate should not be to tear down that institution. Rather, it's to remind those who lead and inhabit black religious spaces that the black church has always been a place open to the testimony of spiritual experience of all those on the margins. The black church has always challenged systems of domination to provide a place of refuge, safety, and liberation, and I want her to be that place for those LGBTQ people on the margins now.

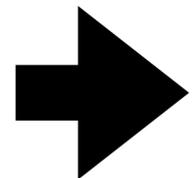


This lesson has stayed with me. I have committed to forceful, yet respectful, conversation within black religious spaces about the experience of being a same-gender loving man of faith and a preacher of the gospel. I seek to bear witness to my ministry rather than using any power and privilege to beat others into submission or to feel superior.

The black religious space is peopled with a diverse population, including those with diverse sexual orientations and gender expressions, and it needs to hear the testimonies of those members of the family. That conversation does not have to be defensive or adversarial; everyone should come away from the exchange, not always in complete agreement, but with at least a better understanding of the place and situation of the other.

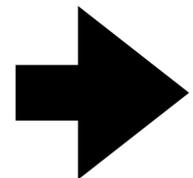


In these experiences of reckoning with the people and institutions that have sought to relegate me to the margins and deprive me of *my voice* because of sexual and racial difference, I have realized that building relationships across dogma, difference, and disadvantage will mean confronting anger and resistance with courage and persistence. It has required speaking when nobody is listening and even if you stand and speak alone. It has meant understanding that change is not possible if I do not challenge the assumption that my race and sexuality are problems to be solved or crises to overcome.



More recently, these intersectional complexities and ambiguities have come together in a rather profound way for me in my support, observance, and encouragement of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

I have seen and sensed within their agitation a real coming to the fore of an intersectional approach to protest and advocacy. I have been emboldened by their audacity and persistence and have found myself pushing a little harder to be heard and to matter. In the aftermath of the shooting of an unarmed young black man in my neighborhood of North Minneapolis, I joined almost daily in the protest and occupation of the 4th Police Precinct, finding in the experience an opportunity to hear and be heard even without uttering an expression other than “Black Lives Matter!”



As I claimed *my voice*, I found that building relationships across dogma, difference, and disadvantage can only occur when we root ourselves in the complexity and ambiguity of intersectional identities. My life as a black man cannot and should not be viewed solely in terms of assumptions about a monolithic black race; my life as a gay man cannot and should not be viewed solely in terms of assumptions about a monolithic queer sexuality. For there to be any chance of growth, understanding, and liberation for those who live in marginal spaces, all those who are in the places of power and privilege in which we find ourselves and to which we have been invited must *hear me, what I say*.

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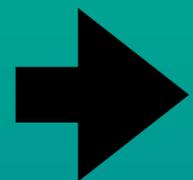
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We sometimes talk about “intersectional identities.” By this we mean that our sexual orientation and gender identities are impacted by what race we are, what class we are, whether or not we are temporarily able-bodied or not, what language we speak, how much formal education we’ve received, whether or not we have an income. How any individual is treated in the world doesn’t rely only on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

These other identities matter.

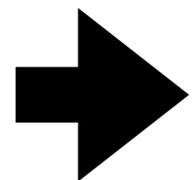
- The Open and Affirming Coalition



STORIES OF US

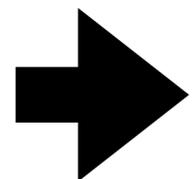
PRACTICING INTERSECTIONALITY THROUGH STORY OF SELF, STORY OF US, STORY OF NOW

The theme of this book is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a big word that has gotten a lot of use and currency in current progressive social movement circles. We use it to describe a number of things including actions, locations, strategies, and sometimes even our own identities. However, as evidenced by the number of times I've been in settings in which someone has had the courage to ask the question, usually tentatively, "hmm, can you tell me what you mean by intersectionality?" I am convinced that it is a term, like the term "diversity," that we are still in the process of defining. And, like the term "diversity" we sometime use the term well to forward our understanding and our organizing, and sometime we use it as jargon or code to cover our continuation of business as usual. Exploring a deeper understanding of the term can help us figure out how we want to *practice* intersectionality and towards what end we engage in intersectional organizing.

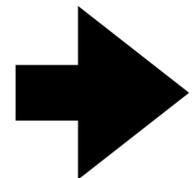


Intersectionality is a concept that comes from the work Kimberly Crenshaw, a civil rights activist and law professor, who build an analysis based on the work of 1970's Black feminists. Intersectionality starts from the premise that people live multiple, layered identities. As a result, people are often members of more than one community at a time, and they can simultaneously experience both oppression and privilege depending on the context. This is the most common use of the term of intersectionality that is often used interchangeably with our understanding living with multiple, complex identities.

However, when used in an organizing context, intersectionality is not just a way of describing multiple identities that compromise our unified self. It is also an essential organizing tool to us determine how to “cut” issues in a way that will build a broad reaching progressive movement for social change.



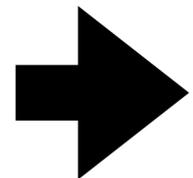
Utilizing an intersectional lens exposes different types of discrimination and disadvantages (or resiliency factors) that occur as a consequence of the *combination* of identities. This approach helps us to understand the impact of these converging identities on the access to rights and opportunities and how laws, policies, programs, and services that might impact one aspect of our lives are inextricably linked to other potential impacts - intentional or not. Given the complexity of intersecting identities, and their interactions with current and historic economic, social political, and cultural conditions, utilizing an intersectional analysis as a baseline for organizing for institutional or structural change is essential to make sure the social changes we seek are indeed geared towards creating equity.



An intersectional analysis starts with the core questions:

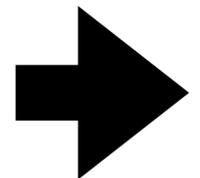
- **How do we imagine the *WE*?**
- **What social changes will support equity for *US*?**

How do we discover, negotiate, or create the social change agenda that leaves none of our *selves* or *our* concerns behind?



To begin to explore these questions, and to link the personal with the political, I am going to utilize Marshall Ganz' practice of story of self, story of us, and story of now to structure the story(ies) below.

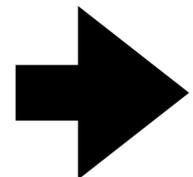
Marshall Ganz from this "Telling Your Public Story" worksheet <http://www.wholecommunities.org/pdf/Public%20Story%20Worksheet07Ganz.pdf>



STORY OF SELF: WHAT I HAVE BEEN CALLED TO

According to Ganz, story-telling is one of most powerful tools we have as organizers and movement builders. Good stories engage both our hearts and our heads by elevating and proclaiming our core values in a way that mobilizes others to act on behalf of these shared values.

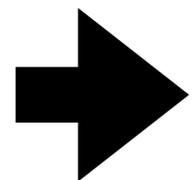
But how do we tell our stories and which values do we elevate? How do we construct our complicated identities in our stories to be understood and reconstructed by others?





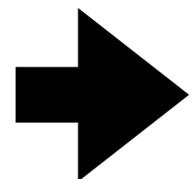
Concept by Deborah Johnson Rolon

We all have multiple, intersectional identities - some derived from our race, gender, class, ability status, religious background, etc. and others derived from the roles we inhabit as parent, lover, child, etc. In identity-based movements, we often construct our conception of community based on our perceived commonalities stemming from these shared identities. One way to visualize this conception of community is like an M&M cookie. The dough that supposedly holds us together is our assumption of which identity is core to us that impacts or modifies all of our other experiences. For LGBTQ people, this commonalty has been the presumed similarity of our sexual orientation and gender identities. We then conceptualize ourselves as a coherent community, with some diversity of experience within that community.



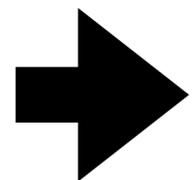
This conception of community assumes that the most important aspect of our identity is our identification as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. While our sexual orientation may be the central organizing identity for some of us some of the time, how we tend to identify is often dependent upon which of our multiple identities we associate with at any given moment. Our sense of identification often shifts based on which of our multiple identities is under most stress at any given moment and the identity from which derive the most strength. Many factors, including societal oppression and our context, impact our experience of stress and our patterns of identification.

In short, the model above assumes the primacy of LGBTQ identity, which gets modified by other factors. This conception produces identity proclamations such as "I am a Black Gay Man, a Latina Lesbian, or an Asian-American Bisexual."



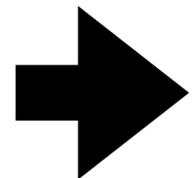
During my formative years my own identity questions centered around this nexus. I struggled with am I a “Jewish Lesbian” or am I “Lesbian Jew?”

This question was not just semantic. Without an intersectional analysis, which identity modified the other in this question defined how I saw myself, the “dough” in which I would place myself, my affiliations, and how I imagined my future.



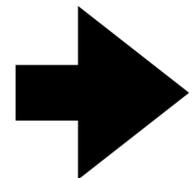
I was born in New York in 1959 into a first generation immigrant Jewish family. My grandparents' families on my father's side were immigrants, most likely from the Pale of Settlement. My grandparents on my mother's side were refugees. Both of these families had stories of harrowing escapes from Russian pogroms and Cossacks (grandmother) and from advancing armies during the Russia revolution (grandfather.)

One side of my family also experienced the nativist immigration quotas of the early 20th century that codified racist entry requirements into U.S. immigration policy in an attempt to lower the status of certain immigrant groups who, at the time, were considered not quite white and contrary to U.S. culture. The racial concern of the anti-immigration movement was closely linked to the eugenics movement that was popular in the U.S. during this period and in Europe was coalescing as the basis for Hitler's "Final Solution" of the Holocaust. These policies sent my grandfather as a teenager, originally bound for Ellis Island, to Argentina until, years later, he was finally able to enter the U.S.



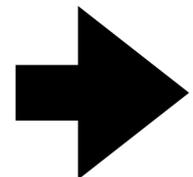
Once in the U.S., my grandparents lived as many immigrant families do – in a neighborhood with others of their cultural background, who spoke the same language, where they could find the familiar foods they could and liked to eat, close to their place of worship, where they could find work with their limited English language skills, and where there were the mutual support resources to slowly make their way into their new environment.

One of the stories of this time passed down to me is how my great-grandfather supported his newly arrived family by selling bananas from a push-cart on 125th Street in Harlem, blocks from where grandmother grew up. I remember this great-grandfather who died when he was 94 and I was 13. By the time I came around, he was only speaking Yiddish and could never remember my name. I was always “Sheila’s kinder” (my mother, Sheila’s, child).



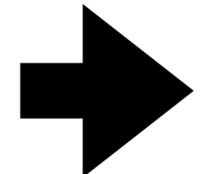
My grandparents on the other side of the family belonged to a “landsman” association. These were benevolent organizations formed by ex-residents of the same region of the “old country” to provide a social network for mutual assistance. I like to think of these as the early 20th century immigrant version of the “ sharing economy.” For example, my family’s burial-plot in the Jewish cemetery in Queens, NY is still in the area purchased by my grandparents landsmans’ association. Some my earliest childhood memories are of the annual picnics our landsmans’ association, the “Loomis club,” held on a beach on Long Island.

Like many first-generation newly defined “white ethnic” immigrant families during the economic boom of the 1950’s, my parents left the old inner city neighborhoods where they grew up in relatively homogeneous immigrant cultural enclaves to move to the newly developing suburbs. Of course this was happening just as African American and newer immigrant groups from South America and Puerto Rico where moving in.



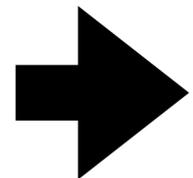
I grew up in one of these spreading suburbs in place that looked like the picture of white middle class America, with a twist. My neighborhood was almost completely populated with families like mine – first generation immigrants with young second generation kids who were trying to figure out how much of the “old country” and how much of the new country was going to shape our lives.

Collectively, my neighbors were approximately 70% Jews. Almost everyone who wasn't Jewish was Italian or Greek with a smattering of Irish families thrown in. Everyone's grandmother was short, dark, round, and spoke with an accent. Everyone's house smell like frying onions, with a different spice overlay. And, the neighbor families' immigration stories were not that different then mine. In this environment, I didn't realize that the Yiddish and Italian slang I integrated as a child wasn't regularly used language. I also didn't realize I knew almost no white Protestants until I went college.



I began coming out during the late 1970's. It was a struggle. Less than a decade after Stonewall, the resources, role models, and positive narratives about how my life might turn out were hard to find. Despite this challenge, however, the biggest struggle for me was about how to integrate my identity as a second-generation Jewish immigrant with my lesbian identity. I believed coming out would ostracize me from my family, my culture, my community, and from my own history. Further, as a first generation post-Holocaust Jew, I felt like I was betraying my community by not getting married to a nice Jewish boy, having children, and re-populating the Jewish people.*

***In my Hebrew School (that I attended 3 days a week in addition to secular public school) we started watching Nazi propaganda films, such as *Triumph of the Will* and *The Eternal Jew*, when we were around 10 years old. One of the overt/covert messages we received was that it was our generation's task to make sure that Hitler didn't win by staying Jewish (i.e. not assimilating) and raising Jewish children to ensure the survival of the Jewish people.**

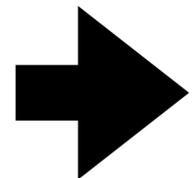


I spent much of my college years attempting to resolve this struggle by trying to figure out if, and how I could be a Jew, if indeed I lost the rich family and community connection that had grounded me. I did this in part by going back and forth to Israel. Honestly, this strategy was as much a running away from the woman with whom I had fallen in love as a running towards a search for Jewish identity.

The Israel I ran to, less than ten years after the 1967 “Six Day War,” and ten years before the first Intifada, still seemed like a place where I would find my lost American Jewish soul and reunite it with my queer body.

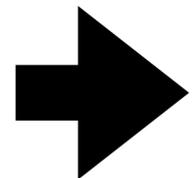
I’ve got to say that this strategy did work for me regarding the integration of my Jewish and lesbian identities. In addition, living in a setting in which my previously marginalized identity as a Jew was now dominant, I also got a vital lesson in recognizing privilege.

“Six Day War” (the war that codified Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai, and the Golan)

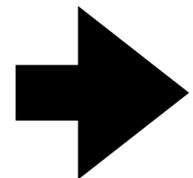


“Intifada” (an Arabic word literally meaning, as a noun, "tremor", "shivering", "shuddering. In contemporary Arabic usage it refers to a legitimate uprising against oppression.)

This lesson is still one I struggle to lean into today. How do I recognize the complicated dynamics of my own shifting identification from oppressed to oppressor? How do I hold responsibility and accountability for my own actions and what is done in my name? How does my story of self exploration and definition link me to a story outside myself, outside my own history? How does it tie me to a story of us?



As someone who has worked in and behalf of the LGBTQ community for over 30 years, I've numerous opportunities to tell my coming out/identity development story. Obviously, there are other parts of my story, but for now, this is the story I am choosing to tell. Each time I tell it, I am aware of elevating different parts of my story depending on the audience and my educational and political purpose.

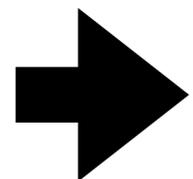


So how does this construction of my identity in the story I am telling here impact how I see myself today, my whiteness, my sexuality, my connection with my Judaism, my dissonance with Israel, and my politics?

How does this telling impact how you see me and how you situate me in your political landscape?

And, does situating myself as a lesbian Jew instead of a Jewish lesbian impact this story at all?

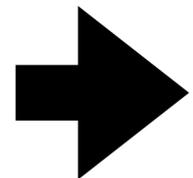
How do I live at the intersections of all of this and remain whole?



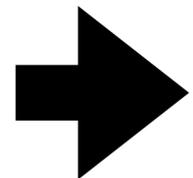
STORY OF US: WHAT “WE” HAVE BEEN CALLED TO: OUR SHARED PURPOSES, GOALS, VISION.

Stories are powerful because they describe, prescribe, and create our realities. The story of self is a personal story. They are the stories we create ourselves, and those that are created about us. We also have narratives and stories that are central to the power of social movements and social change.

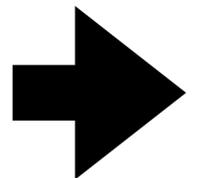
Many of us experienced the power of telling our stories of love and commitment in our campaigns for marriage equality. We witnessed how these stories changed hearts and minds, and in turn, our political reality. We have organizational stories, congregational stories, and community stories. We have stories of survival, and we have collective stories of resistance. Some of our stories are larger and capture other essential truths. These are the “stories of us.”



One of the challenges in creating a “story of us” is defining who we perceive the “us” to be. If we define the “us” using a primary identity model as described above (that assumes the “dough” that connects us to each other), it leads us to presume connections and how we define “community.” It also leads us to define the issues we think are important and the policy outcomes we go after in our campaign organizing in particular ways.



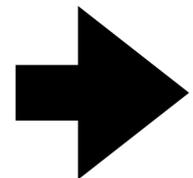
Another way to conceptualize our connection to each other is to acknowledge that the shifting nature of our identification means that our point of connection is limited to that area where our multiple identities and interests overlap. One way to visualize this conception is the diagram below:



This conception assumes that identities other than LGBTQ may sometimes be our primary identification. (e.g. one could be a Gay Black Man, Lesbian Jew, or a Bisexual Asian-American.

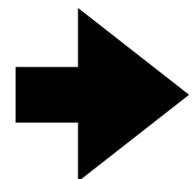
The implication of this model is that we can't assume commonalty of worldview, experience, aspiration, or the issues we think are most important for our organizing agenda. Conceptualizing our connection to each other this way also necessitates the acknowledgment that we are almost always communicating across differences. Therefore, rather than functioning as a community, we actually are almost always a coalition.

Commonalties in a multicultural coalition can't be presumed. They must be *discovered, negotiated, or created*.

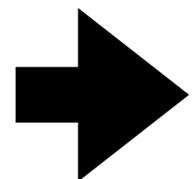


For example, in defining marriage equality as our movement goal, the presumed “we” were members of the LGBTQ community who were denied family recognition and access to a bucket of social benefits to support our families. While I am very much in support of LGBTQ families who benefit from legal marriage and celebrate our victory, I continue to believe that our policy goal was too narrowly defined because we did not use an intersectional analysis.

As noted above, the concept of intersectionality is not only useful as a way of describing our multiple identities. It is also an essential organizing tool that we can use to determine what matters to us and then select issues in a way that will build a broad reaching progressive movement for social change.



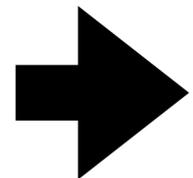
Given this, what might an intersectional analysis in this case have looked like? For starters, rather than presuming the “us” that we were going to construct our movement story around where only LGBTQ couples, we would begin our process by asking “who is the “us” we are fighting for?”



In other words before determining our policy objective of marriage equality for same-sex couples, what if we asked “Who else could benefit from family recognition and access to a legal benefits?”

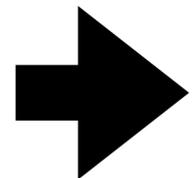
The answer to this question would have yielded a much broader sense of “we” as it likely would have included senior citizens living and caring for each other (i.e. the “Golden Girls”), adult children living with and caring for their parents, grandparents and other family members raising children, extended families (especially in immigrant communities), and various configurations of families of choice.

I suggest that if we had begun our “story of us” with this question, an intersectional analysis of the issues facing diverse family forms would have followed that would have lead us to demand much broader policy initiatives and potentially more extensive social changes.



Indeed, if we had practiced intersectionality in our organizing and movement building, we might have actually done what the Right was so worried we might do – that is, fundamentally redefine the notion of family. Instead, we just gained an entry card for some family forms, particularly that most closely resemble existing heteronormativity.

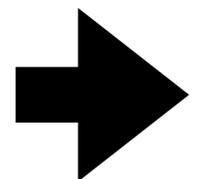
In this critique I want to be clear that I honor and support marriage for those for whom it is useful and meaningful. For a more complete analysis of these issues, see the “Beyond Marriage” statement <http://www.beyondmarriage.org/>



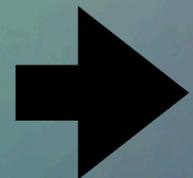
So where does our Story of Us go from here?

One thing I know about movements is that they move. What direction are we moving?

How do we carry the lessons of the past into a new vision of our future?

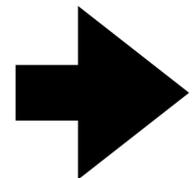


At the height of the AIDS epidemic, in the midst of institutional silence, neglect, and mounting deaths, sadly we knew that no one was going to care about our lives. In fact no one did until we fought to claim a space for ourselves by taking care of each other, by creating a community, and by building a movement to affirm the multiple identities of the people impacted by HIV. Living through this period, and having lost my twin brother and many friends to HIV, the Story of Us that emerged for me centered on the urgency of collective struggle that was based in deep caring for each other as we build power to change the conditions of our lives, even the midst of great loss and pain.



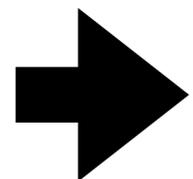
The ethos that drove a LGBTQ response to the AIDS crisis now seems distant to many of us the white middle class LGBTQ movement.

However, as we live into our next Story of Us, I suggest we remember that as much as we win access to the Rights everyone has, this does not make us like everyone else. Nor do I think this should ever be our goal. As soon as we try just to be like everyone else, we lose access to one of the most powerful gifts I believe that we as a community have to share with the world.



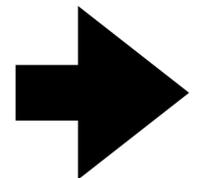
As LGBTQ people with complex identities, I think that we know, as evidenced by the choices we've made for our lives and how we've cared for each other during our darkest times, the transformational power of love. For any of us who've gone through the process of coming out, we potentially risked everything we had – homes, jobs, relationships, our safety etc. —in order to live a life filled with passion, desire, and authentic connection. We know how powerful it is to really believe that we deserve and can live a life centered in dignity, loving connection and desire.

That's our gift - as LGBTQ people and as part of an intersectional movement. Imagine what it would be like if we were able to have all of our politics centered in the transformational power of love, rather than fear and hatred.



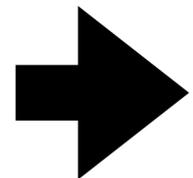
Times are critical. We are in a moment when the forces of fear, hate and polarization have louder and louder voices. They aren't necessarily growing in power. They are just getting more frantic and shrill and then more brazen in their violence.

Our challenge in the face of all of this is how do we continue to love and support each other. How do we move our movement to *center* a commitment to build a world in which we never have to leave *any* of ourselves behind - where all of who we are (including our magnificent gender, racial, religious and sexual diversities are embraced), and where all of who we love, and all the *ways we love* are affirmed and celebrated.



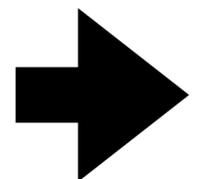
STORY OF NOW: THE CHALLENGE WE FACE; THE CHOICES WE MUST MAKE, AND THE HOPE TO WHICH WE CAN ASPIRE.

Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, Charleston, Minneapolis, Colorado. Syria, Iraq, Europe, all of the Middle East, and most of Africa. Is there any place I could leave off this list where the violence of racism, colonization, poverty, and intolerance is not rampant? I don't think so. Sadly, I also think it would be too simplistic to call this our "Story of Now" because unfortunately, while some of the locations might change, this has been the "story of always."



Given the magnitude, the persistence, and the urgency of the violence, what are some current choices we can make that can respond to this challenge? I believe there are many potential useful strategies to address this question. For the construction of this Story of Now today, I can offer just one.

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov and the founder of Hasidism, brought new energy to Eastern European Judaism in part by revived storytelling. One of the ways he, and the rebbes that followed him, attracted people to the new movement by storytelling. There's even a "mini-theology" of storytelling, just like there is a theology of prayer. The Hasidism vigorously encouraged storytelling, moving it from the periphery to the center of Jewish practice. Rebbes praised it as a mitzvah, a spiritual practice; they reflected on it deeply and taught about its significance. According to Hasidic teaching, storytelling is a holy activity equal to prayer or to studying Torah. Not only did rebbes tell stories, they instructed their followers do likewise. So telling and listening to stories became popular as never before. This storytelling helped build a movement that has lasted over 400 years.



With this in mind, here is a story in Hasidic tradition, “Stuffed Derma” by Yossi Gordon. It goes like this:

The Kaiser of Austria came to visit the Czar of Russia. A state dinner with all the trimmings was being served. One of the items on the menu was kishke, otherwise known as stuffed derma, or kishka. Real kishke is nothing like the "kishke" that is available at your local delicatessen. Real kishke is actually the intestines of the animal stuffed with flour and oil and all sorts of spices.

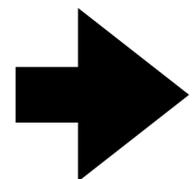
The kishke was served and the Kaiser loved it. He asked the Czar to send his cooks the recipe. The Czar graciously promised to do so. After the Kaiser's departure the Russian (Jewish) cooks wrote down the recipe and sent it via diplomatic mail to the Kaiser's chefs.

The day finally came when the Kaiser was informed that he would be served kishke. He sat down hungrily. Out came a tray. Phew! Did it stink! The Kaiser took off the cover from his plate and took a bite. He immediately spat out the piece and ordered the tray removed and the kishke thrown away.

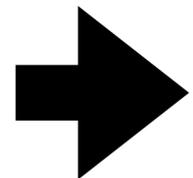
A letter of official protest was immediately dispatched to the Czar. How dare he send a recipe for such a vile concoction! The Czar received the protest letter and summoned his cooking staff and demanded an explanation.

Initially, the imperial kitchen staff was perplexed & scared. They did not want to incur the Czar's wrath. They went over the recipe and could not find the problem. After quite some time and in a moment of inspiration, one of the staff exclaimed incredulously, "Of course! We told him how to stuff and spice the kishke, but we never realized that we needed to tell him to clean it out before he stuffs it!"

Yossi Gordon http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/562656/jewish/Stuffed-Derma.htm

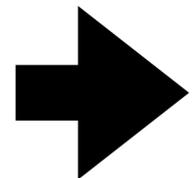


This story is a parable for teshuvah, the repentance, turning, and returning which is key to cleaning oneself out in order to move into a new way of being. The story also highlights while good intentions are important, they are not sufficient. Do I care about racism and systemic injustice? Yes. Do I want to do something to create a world with a different Story of Now written upon different values? Of course I do. However, living out our intentions necessitates being aware of our assumptions, taking responsibility and being accountable for the consequences of our actions (or inactions). Otherwise, as Rabbi Gordon points out, even with all of the spices (good intentions) in the world, we may remain a stinking kishke.



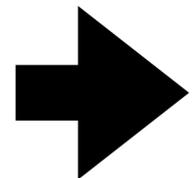
Cleaning out as kishke is not an easy task – particularly for those of us who are (at least in some of our identities) part of the dominant culture, have good intentions, and been through our own journeys of oppression.

Submerged in our story, we often assume that our journey gives us special insight and natural affiliation with others who are systemically marginalized. However, we all grow up in a culture that teaches us schemas about race, gender, class, sexuality and power that shape how we interpret what happens around us. We are not even aware of how these schemas order what we see into a picture that validates our pre-existing stories. And the catch is that if we are not constantly working to be aware of our schema, and how they bend and distort what we experience, we believe the stories our schemas' create, even when the facts differ.

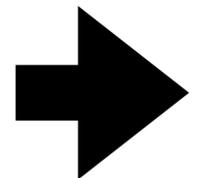


Take for example one of the most watched instances of police misconduct this year – the video of Officer Brian Encinia arresting Sandra Bland. Sandra Bland was an African American female motorist who had an encounter with a police officer in Texas after failing to signal a lane change. The portion of the video that was shown on the news was the few minutes in which the officer escalates and Sandra Bland is then arrested. Ms. Bland was found dead in her cell three days later.

As Ty Burr points out, what is startling about the rest of the video, about 15 minutes in, is how Officer Encinia starts reconstructing the story that all he was doing was trying to de-escalate Ms. Bland to protect himself from her violence. He so believes his own version of the story that at one point he even says that he is grateful that all of what happened was on tape.



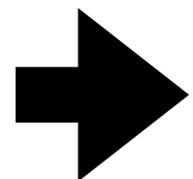
Amazing. Yet, how different is this reconstructed narrative from what I do when confronted with events that call into question my good imagine of myself and the stories I tell about myself about my good intentions and my positive impact on the world?



One of the first things I can do, as John Metta suggests, is get over myself and deal with the privilege of having my own feelings and perspective of myself be so primary to my well-being in the world.

So what if I was uncomfortable? What if I have to dig deep to clean out all of the places my sense of entitlement constructs my schemas before I have the chutzpah to think I could do the work to impact the systemic conditions that effect someone else's life? What if I stopped thinking of myself as such a good "ally" and instead deeply owned that principled solidarity work can never be about doing for others?

Rather it needs to be about identifying and advancing a common agenda with those most negatively affected.



FROM UNCONSCIOUSNESS TO CONSCIOUSNESS

FROM SELF-DECEPTION TO INSIGHT

FROM SELF-HATRED TO SELF-FORGIVENESS

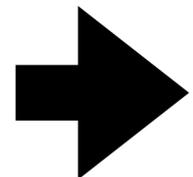
Identifying with others, including their pain, the depth of oppression they experience, and their sense of hope and aspiration for their lives means I have to crack my heart open to move from:

FROM ANGER TO HEALING

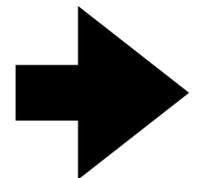
FROM HARD HEARTEDNESS, TO BROKEN HEARTEDNESS, TO OPEN HEARTEDNESS

FROM ISOLATION TO A SENSE OF INTIMATE CONNECTION TO ALL BEING

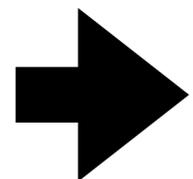
FROM INTENTION TO ACTION



What would it take for me/us to fully live into these Stories of Us and Now? How do we do the spiritual work with each other, not just to stuff our kishkes with new ideas? How do we closely examine who are, what we need to embrace, and what we need to clean out as we move into a new collective future?



Change, growth, transformation are risky. We have our own journeys of self-discovery to make our own complex multiple identities integrated and whole. We also have a lot of cleaning up to do inside ourselves and with each other. Our journey together to live into a new story will likely take faith, love, and the courage to have authentic connection.



I mean the kind of connection that will allow us to look deeply into each other's eyes to welcome each other to come to our intersectional movement with *all* our stories - not just our stories that we are welcome to bring, but also those we are expected to keep in our back pockets, safely out of sight, so that we don't risk making anyone else uncomfortable. By living these messy stories of pain and joy with each other, we can then begin to practice intentional intersectional movement building constructed upon principled solidarity and grounded in personal responsibility and institutional accountability.

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Intersectionality is rooted in the idea that racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc. are connected and can't be overcome individually. To create change we all need to be working together to combat different types of oppression.

- The Open and Affirming Coalition



2015

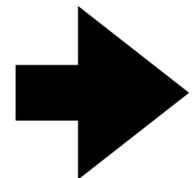
TIMELINE - ONE SUMMMER

TIMELINE:

Shooting at Emanuel AME Church

June 19 .

Woke with a mix of love and tears. I am still here. No small miracle in a country that seems to want me dead. So, I'll celebrate my resilience and the miracle of my being with a cup of coffee and a prayer.

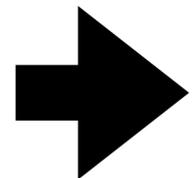


June 19 .

I know that there are many of you who care deeply for me and who are also white. I know you don't really know what to say and that you want to say something to let me know you care. I know my sadness, rage and terror frighten you and make you uncomfortable.

Right now, I need to leave you to deal with that without my acknowledgement of how hard all of this is for you. I need to wrap myself up in my own skin and texture, to gather my kin close and then even closer.

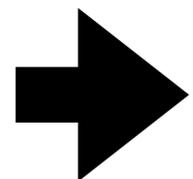
I know you're not used to feeling shut out of my often visible process, but I can't worry about that or you right now.



Please know that I'll be as safe as I can be in the embraces of my people, yes even those with whom I fight for parts of my existence.

While I'm doing this healing work, take this opportunity to talk to other white people about why this is hard and what y'all can do to make it safer for me and others that you love. Hold them close and speak truth to them. Say a prayer and then get up and do something more to undo that which benefits you, but is killing me. I know you didn't ask for it, but here it is and wishing it weren't so doesn't make it go away.

I don't care for you less because I need this time to love me more. It is my hope that we can sit and share something other than trauma and responses to it in the future.



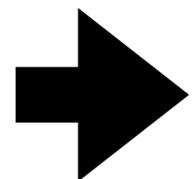
June 19 .

I needed to repost this to remind myself (and maybe you?)

Countless micro-aggressions, unending loss and grief, unmet need and needs, guilt and shame for dropping the balls that my tired hands didn't juggle well, painful and plentiful intra-community strife, tears that burn but will not fall, a body that no longer responds the ways it used to...corrosives that melt this anchor, little by little.

And still I find reasons to be in joy and gratitude, to find gems buried under volcanic mountains of crap, to celebrate my and our here-ness, to thank the All for family, inherited and carefully chosen, for a sobriety that sometimes feels weighty and cumbersome, for the many gifts that are all around me.

I pray for a strengthening of these broad shoulders, more tenderness and safe sweetness, solvency and safety, a time and place to reflect, repair, replenish, reboot and renew... for me and for all of us who lead while in need



Some things that I've been told that people don't believe in...

same gender loving

inter-racial marriage

trans-people

your "lifestyle"

non-monogamy

white/light skin privilege

intra trans community privilege

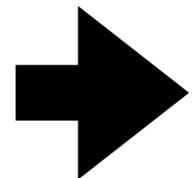
trans-masculine misogyny

non-binary gender identity

bisexuals

*** this is a partial list.**

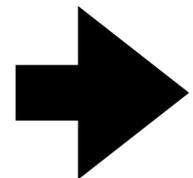
June 23 ·



June 25 ·

I watched the dash-cam of the Roof arrest and wept. Not because he should have been abused by the arresting officers, but because it is clear that they know better (we all knew this), that it is not about fear of the suspect or their capability of violence, and that it is motivated out of a deep disgust and "birth of a nation" view of black people - not just black men. Deeming us unworthy of the least amount of respect, comfort, compassion or justice.

I confess to sometimes bewildered faces that when I see a cop in my rearview it spikes my pulse and blood pressure and causes me great anxiety and panic - not because I've done something wrong, but because I live in a country where my existence is deemed wrong.

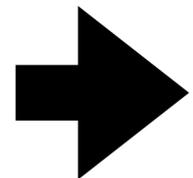


TIMELINE:

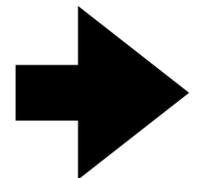
Supreme Court rules on legal marriage recognition for gay and lesbian couples

June 26 ·

I know many of you will celebrate the marriage decision and congrats! Have a hug and a sip of champagne... then either get back to work on equality or get out of our way!! If your celebration lasts too long, I'll cite you for obstruction of a movement (there are many who would argue that you've already obstructed, co-opted and/or stolen it..ijs)!

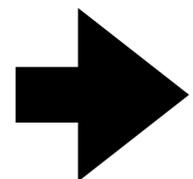


JUNE 27.
PRIDE - BROUGHT TO YOU
BY PEOPLE WITH
NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE,
NOT JUST SO PEOPLE
WITH LOTS COULD HAVE
A LITTLE MORE.



June 27.

To be clear, yesterday's court ruling was great, but did not do enough to affirm or support the rights of all bisexual, queer or trans people who aren't same gender loving or viewed as such by documentation that doesn't affirm their truest identities, people who are opposed to benefits being conferred by marital status or those negatively impacted by unresolved custodial and/or citizenship concerns.

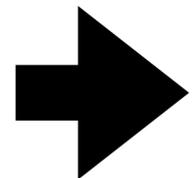


July 13

If a cis-woman/cis-man is the pinnacle and prize, what are you?

It's so past time for us to look at our internalized transphobia (and our binary and heteronormative biases and our bi and queer phobia). We can't move forward when we're chained to the same rock that is being used to kill us.

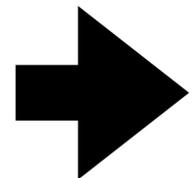
This isn't about personal preferences or disclosure status, this is about respect and inclusion. How do we love ourselves and each other if we don't ever get to be the pinnacle and prize?



July 15.

Please, please, please stop saying LGBT when you mean lesbian and gay! Just stop. And don't just toss the B in there when discussing "gay, inc", bi-phobia is real and rampant.

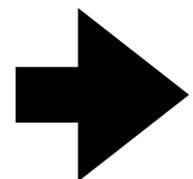
Is it too much to ask you to stop collapsing people's identities out of convenience, laziness and/or a desire to feel like the "success" of some is success for all?



July 15 •

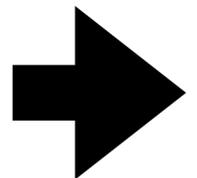
Don't wait, appreciate!

I was thinking of and remembering those who have crossed over and want to encourage each of us to take a few minutes each day to reach out, say hi, share a word of encouragement with someone whose presence brightens your life, who encourages you, who stands in the places you can't or can't yet.



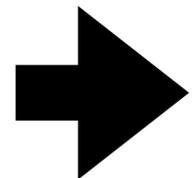
July 16 ·

Each day is a blend of deep sadness that I live in a world where people can be so cruel to each other and soaring joy that I live in a world where such extraordinary love is present in my life.



July 16

I stupidly got into an impromptu discussion on race, immigration, violence, right to carry with 4 folks in the parking lot of a restaurant. One an "I see no color" mom who blamed racism on black history month teaching her sons about black people... "people are just people, why bring color into it." One a Glenn Beck fan, who quoted his statistics and adamantly felt that he was as American as native folks because he was born here and they came from somewhere at some point too. He was in his early 20's.

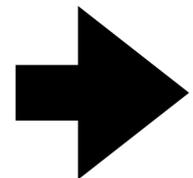


July 21.

I'm not sure why I feel weepy and tender right now... there are many reasons why I might, but none of them stand out. In this very moment, I'm feeling the loneliness and desperation, anger, pain and nearly fatal futility of those I've grown to care for (a few of them very close, others I've only met a few times and some I've only met online).

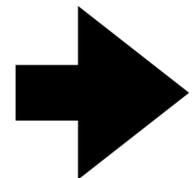
I'm praying for mercy and grace in their lives. I'm praying for a mighty Pentecostal wind of change for them. They need not believe as I believe. They are worthy and precious.

If this sounds like you, then it probably is. I don't have money, a job or shelter to offer you. I don't know who that special one or ones are or when they'll declare their love for you. I can and am offering my fervent and heartfelt prayers and thoughts. I'm holding you and holding on with you. Please stay just a little while longer. Don't let go. We need you more than you know and more than we tell you. One Love.

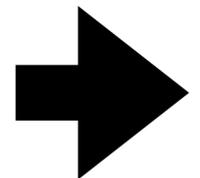


July 23 ·

**Each day begins the dance.
The swell of deep gratitude:
For the waking, the shelter, the food,
The indoor plumbing and access,
The mobility, the love of family and friends,
The journey survived and
Undone tasks ahead,
The calls and the meetings,
Purpose and usefulness.**



**The teary acknowledgement:
Of the ways we hate and harm,
Of judgment sans justice,
Of fear wrapped in malice,
Of loss, sadness and grief,
Of the need and needs that so many
Carry in shamed silence,
Of the scars that grew up to be
Our lenses.**



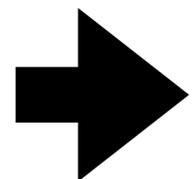
I breathe in the newness and familiarity

Of the day

With each inhale and exhale.

I rejoice in grace and gratitude

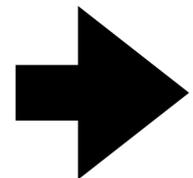
For Divine presence, in and around me.



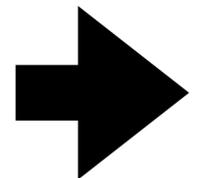
July 23 ·

Perhaps the dead feel no fear, no longing, no indignity, no shame, no hunger for food or human touch. Perhaps the dead feel no regret or obligation to grow or challenge inequity.

Don't behave like the dead - acknowledge your feelings and yearnings, grow and challenge while there's yet life in you!

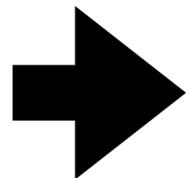


JULY 25 •
ARE YOU SO INVESTED IN
PROJECTING YOUR IMAGE
OF GODLINESS THAT YOU'VE
LOST INTEREST IN SERVING
LIKE JESUS?

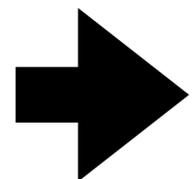


July 26 ·

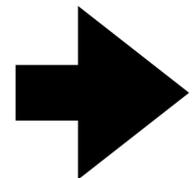
I greet this morning, sitting on my weather scarred porch, worried about the leak dripping in my living room that woke me long after my alarm failed, reading the concerns of folks on fb, remembering the issues and problems of folks I chatted with yesterday and praying for us all.



Hope sometimes feels so elusive, yet somehow faith feels close. How is that possible? It feels like the tension of human-ness with a spirit core. I think of my friend who may wake this morning and may not. I imagine her hope of making it to church and/or seeing her family one more day and her fears that maybe she won't ever leave that hospice bed. I also imagine and believe her faith that whether or not she lives through the day that her haven is in the bosom and embrace of her God. I pray for her and for those of us wrestling with what to say when words seem so tiny and tinny compared to the enormity of our feelings.

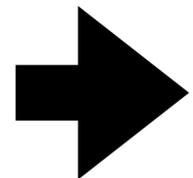


I'll tidy my messy house, shower, shave, dress and go share worship with people I've grown to love, visit with family and come home to rest. And in the midst of all of my hopes for a good day and my faith that the circumstances of my life can't dim the Light, I'll pray... for myself, my family and loved ones, strangers, institutions and situations and I'll pray that hope kisses faith today.



July 26 •

Barely made my bus, but made it. Didn't finish my cleaning, but cleaned some. Didn't have any answers, but had time to listen and share. Don't have all I need to take care of my house, but my daily bread is assured. Haven't done all that I need/want to do, but I'm still breathing. [#moregratefulthangrumpy](#)

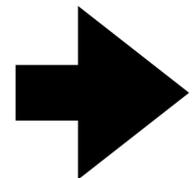


TIMELINE:

Local church event organized for Trans health and Trans people of color

July 29 .

Spent the night falling in love with Nina Simone all over again. Watched "What Happened, Miss Simone?" on Netflix and felt so deeply the complexities of her life, her relationships with her family and the world. Saw the patented Grace Jones shake and stare in an old performance of Nina Simone's. Witnessed what a lifetime of being denied, being controlled, having to collapse love with abuse, amazing talent, dangerous tenderness, the power of the ancestors, righteous rage and wrestling with fiscal responsibility looked like. Such an extraordinary and beautiful woman. Grateful for her in my lifetime.



TIMELINE

Hearing on Sandra Bland case in Texas.

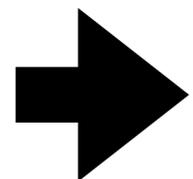
Ohio officer-involved shooting; family prosecutes; BLM demonstrates

July 30 .

The fear defense, the panic defense, the twinkie defense... smdh. So, I understand fear...and you're a trained officer, who has options other than critically shooting someone.

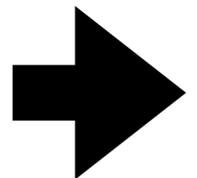
Why are you panicking now? Because you have feelings? Murdering her won't kill your feelings, ijs.

No amount of sugar justifies wrapping your narcissistic fears of privilege loss around a hail of bullets.



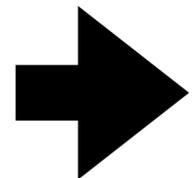
July 30

**Seriously, I'm not upset when y'all aren't brutalized by police encounters.
I'm upset when you refuse to see what a privilege that is.**



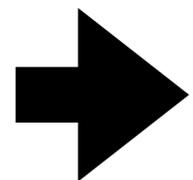
August 3 ·

Good morning, all. I'm so grateful to have greeted this day. I'm grateful to have slept, however poorly, in the comfort of my home. I'm grateful for my pets that irritated me awake. I'm grateful to still be sober. I'm grateful for the body I have and the ways that it operates. I'm grateful for my church family and the ways we feed each other. I'm grateful for my family, by blood and by loving choice. I'm grateful for my gifts and opportunities to use them to serve. I'm grateful for my shortcomings and the desire to learn, change and grow. I'm grateful for my relationship with my God, who lives in and around me and you. I pray that I remember, especially when things are hard, to look for the Divine in all of us.



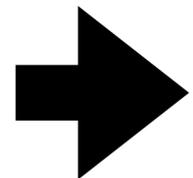
August 4

Deeply in prayer for friends who have shared really hard things that they're facing and dealing with - I won't share their names or situations, please join your prayers with mine for extraordinary healing, peace, improbable answers, new treatments and windows of peace, calm, pain-free time for their spirits to breathe and repair.



August 5 ·

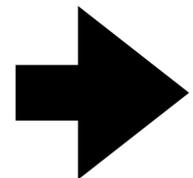
I may not know what you're going through and I may not share all of my struggles with you. I may not get where you're coming from or why. I may not know that today is a day that your will to keep going barely edged out your desire to give up. But, I'll stand with you, if you'll let me. We can disagree, not have the same points of view or even be actively in a situation where we work best apart. Even so, I wish you well. I wish you joy, peace, love, fulfillment.



TIMELINE: Release of Stonewall movie

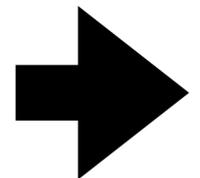
August 5 .

History becomes whitewashed and the lies become the truth when those who know the truth die with their stories hidden or untold. It is how many of us have been erased from our creations, ideas, actions and miraculous deeds! Even in the story that became "Boys Don't Cry" the black friend was erased from the movie. There is an effort by some to always make it seem that Transfolk and/or folks of color are carpetbaggers on "their" movement, but while many of you were hiding out, wearing purple and hankies to signal each other my predecessors were laying it all on the line because they had nothing to lose. Their lives were their own - one more beating, one more arrest wouldn't defeat them. Honor our history - stop being dishonest and parasitic.



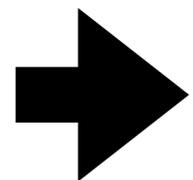
AUGUST 6.

**ANOTHER DAY TO EXPLORE,
LEARN, WRESTLE, DREAM,
LOVE, FORGIVE, STRETCH,
GROW, GIGGLE, CRY,
REMEMBER...GRATEFUL!**



August 6 .

That time when you're at a program that primarily serves poor, black transfolk and the majority of folks in planning, management, decision making ain't none of those...#nontransferable #getoutoftheway

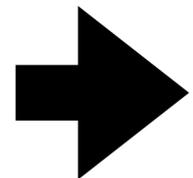


TIMELINE:

Target ends gender-based toy aisle labeling

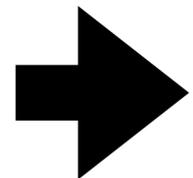
August 12 .

I will not stop posting. Stay uncomfortable, get busy!



August 14 at 10:23am

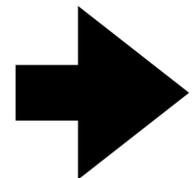
Some things I've learned: you don't need hands to hold a heart, feet to accompany someone with love, hearing to listen deeply, sight to view a world of beauty and cruelty, mobility to lead a movement. Our differences in body and mind need not be a valley that our passions fall into, lost and unsought. Not when the building of bridges is our shared goal and passion.



TIMELINE: Louis' birthday

August 15 ·

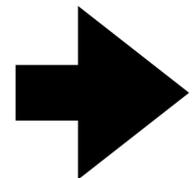
I may sound like a broken record to you. I'm good with that. The broken, shattered and stolen lives of my trans-sisters is more important than whether I'm a bumner on your otherwise beautiful day. What are you doing? What are you willing to do? Please do something! Talk about it! Cry about it! Support orgs you trust to do something! Support individuals doing the work! Pray, fast, march, and agitate! Please!



August 15

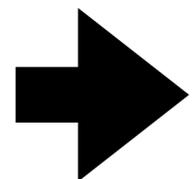
Thank you all for the outpouring of love, well wishes and kind words.

If you would pray, chant, send light, healing, resilience and care to all women and especially transwomen of color. Hold them in the front of your minds and hearts. Disturb with/for them. Fight with/for them.



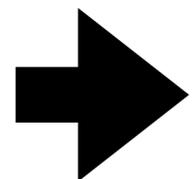
It is beyond time for us to do so. It is time that we stop protecting perpetrators of violence. It is a painful and necessary task to stop shielding people from justice, even when we know the injustice in our justice system. The war on black men's lives cannot be paid for with the lives of black women. This is true in every demographic, but I will stay focused in this moment on my community.

I am sad and angry. I am disgusted by the men with whom I share community who are predators. I will stand with you against oppression but I will not shield you when you are the oppressor.



Because of us, our women have no safe quarter, no haven from the law or the lawless. We cannot shore up our battered manhood's by brutalizing them. We must heal our brokenness and stand with honor by their sides. We are under siege, fighting our way from under the heavy boot of systemic racism, often with our sisters on the front lines. Yet, we treat them not with honor and respect, but with disdain, like disposable play things.

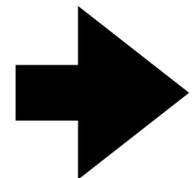
If black lives truly matter, then every life is precious and every threat to that life is an enemy of the movement. So whose side are you really on?



August 18

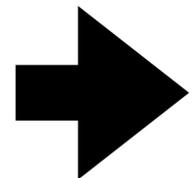
Dedicated in love to those whose lives have been stolen and to those who live in courage, truth and integrity.

Brother, in your ancestor mind, can you remember when she was taken from you? Taken from beside you, from her childhood bed, from the nest of innocence? Can you remember when she was ravaged with no voice, in the darkness of a life that offered no safe haven on this side of the river and only cruel labor and hidden racism on the other side? Can you remember that she had no worth unless she was bred as livestock, served as maid, mistress or whore? Can you remember her lifeless body tossed out with scraps of yesterday's meals?



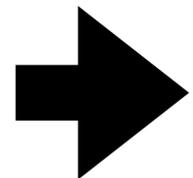
How then, can you be the one to do this to one of our sisters? How can you woo her with your need and lust and be too ashamed to see her in the light of day? How can you hide while we grieve? How can you shout "protect me! Black lives matter!" while you cower with blood on your hands and cowardice in the truth of your own desires?

She walked in her truth and the knowledge of her story. She came to you in integrity, answering your call to love. She came to you knowing that her journey was uncommon and special. She admitted her fears and you told her to trust you. She believed you when you offered tenderness and touch. She brought her whole self to you, often on your terms - making room for you to grow at the expense of her comfort. And when you felt your heart reach for her, your fears of what "we" would think conspired with your fragile manhood to commit murder. She deserved better than you. She deserved life and joy. Could you not muster the courage to walk away without extinguishing that which you couldn't create or meet in love?



The story that you were surprised/ambushed is a lie. You knew then and you know now - you seek her again and again. Your mind, body and heart know what fulfills you. Your lack of courage to stand with her condemns you and, sadly, also condemns her to death.

Brothers, I know/believe that there are still some among us who will stand in courage. We, who are descended of warriors and kings, will not take on the master's tools or habits. We will not stand by and offer cover to those that would damage and destroy our sisters, cousins, aunts, mothers, daughters, friends, comrades and leaders.



TIMELINE: Black Trans Liberation Day

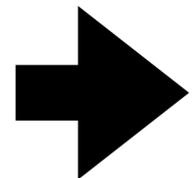
August 25 .

I spent time today talking with healthcare professionals at Providence Hospital about the many ways to treat us/treat us better.

I lifted up the names of our slain and challenged them to see the ways that their actions are complicit in these losses of precious life.

I asked them to commit to us, to honor our wisdom and stories; to budget for and pay us for our expertise; to offer us time and space at least as often as our well intended "allies"; to get undistracted by the celebrity of who we are and get to know the totality of us; to not let the rhetoric of dogma stand in the way of their oaths to do no harm.

I stood in my skin and in my fullness, naming my gender, binary, blending and religious privilege and dared them to prove to me and to you that [#blacktranslivesmatter](#)



TIMELINE:

60 years from the day Emmett Till was murdered

August 26

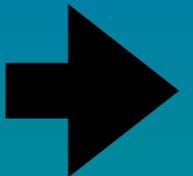
Though I wanted to head out an hour ago, I forced myself to sit and have silent meditative time.

I'm trusting that this practice, while disruptive to my idea of a schedule, will reap benefits in effectiveness and peace.

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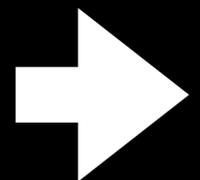


BETWEEN US:

“How did you end up in Cleveland?” Major asks me on the phone, as we arrange to meet for the first time in a long time.

She knows much of my story already, ever since I was a pre-transitioning white young trans man from a rural part of Colorado – someone looking toward Christian ministry as a pastor.

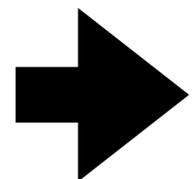
**AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
MAJOR
GRIFFIN-
GRACY**



Out queer ordained ministers were less-than-employable in churches, I found out, even one who was racially normative (white), binary-ish (passing), formally-educated, able-bodied, married, young and parental, a studious and introverted man like me. With whom Major liked to flirt.

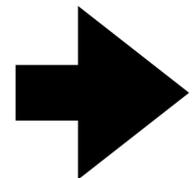
I might as well clarify for the reader that Major inherits the sex-positivity of early survivors in the U.S. queer movement. This is a contrast but not a contest between us. Whereas I can give gender identity workshops all day long and fail to mention the act of sex, I appreciate people who have actual skills with health and embodiment, grounded resilience, and forthright communication. Unabashed eros makes this possible. Nobody makes as good a health-presenter or AIDS-preventer as Major!

To answer her question, I say I eventually came to Cleveland for a job with my denomination.



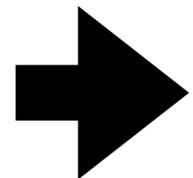
Major had shown me undeserved kindness over the years, keeping up with me and my family, calling on Thanksgiving and other holidays. She said yes to this interview when I described the book project, a book that I hoped would build bridges for people in the church who have been involved with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender *inclusion*, to move toward the deeper agenda of anti-poverty and racial equity work. That's what *social justice* ought to mean.

Without people of color, the LGBT movement wouldn't even be a thing. And yet, perhaps because it is harder to make money off addressing racism than adopting gay-friendly policies in the U.S., most campaigns for *acceptance* bracket those underlying racial and economic *issues* as separate.



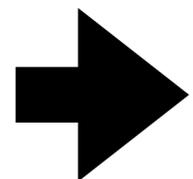
Pride month is one thing; racial oppression is another, they say.

Except it is not, not in real people's real lives. And the real movement is the movement by real people with real bodies. Major Griffin-Gracy lives at the intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, age, gender and ability. Major gets upset when people forget who was really there at Stonewall: people of color, a community of individuals who had no income except for rent parties, and nowhere to be except gay bars. New narratives about white celebrity transgender people risk abandoning that reality all over again.



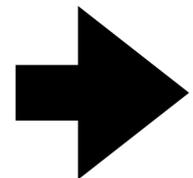
On this occasion when we meet up, Major and I could not look more contrasting. At 73 years old, using a mobility scooter, large, Black, pink sequins on her hat (covering no wig for the moment), fancy fingernail polish, somewhere creative on the gender spectrum, she is unafraid to greet me with a hug and a kiss and use lingo somewhere beyond social acceptability. Surrounded by those she introduces as her “girls,” her “queens” from the Oakland-area Transgender, Gender-Variant and Intersex Justice Project, she joins me in the hotel lobby.

I introduce my lemonade-drinking twin 7-year-old children.



Major is in Cleveland for the 2015 Movement for Black Lives convening, a national moment of growing organizers and activists from everywhere, who are working against forms of oppression from a racist state, including police violence against women, queers, men, and boys.

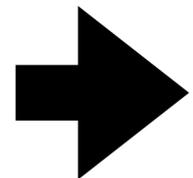
One of those boys – Tamir Rice, 12 years old – was murdered near my house, where I live. His ghost was my constant neighbor, and I had to deal with the fact that I was no neighbor to him. Gut-wrenching grief prompted me to take up more rigorously the work to undermine white supremacy. Building the platform of people engaged in the work of anti-racism, is part of this.



We sit together on day two of the Movement for Black Lives Convening: me with my little notebook, and Major with her stories and her deep faith and her spirit.

She speaks without “isms.” Her words address health and survival. So of course she is seen as political.

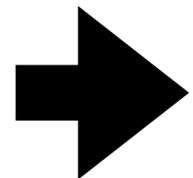
(See Wikipedia for a long list of documentaries, textbook chapters, and university addresses that Major has delivered worldwide, as a living link from Stonewall to now.)



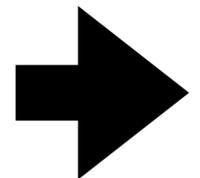
I begin. “What do you want to say to people who are just being introduced to transgender as a topic, who hear of it through Caitlyn Jenner?”

I knew she had opinions. A month ago on the phone she had said, “This thing with Caitlyn Jenner has me angry! What about the girls who suck dick to survive and live under a bridge and never make it to age 56?”

Today Major looks patient. She has since explained this disparity countless times. Disproportionate publicity and the hyper-visibility of the rich might seem to mock the work she has been doing for decades, working in low-budget movement-building and non-profit organizations with and on behalf of people of color, struggling against industries like incarceration which profit off of the poor and make life more difficult for those experiencing violence at every level.

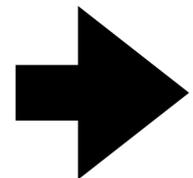


“First of all, for any of us to get to express our true selves is great. But you know Caitlyn Jenner is not the first transgender woman. She’s not a part of typical transgender culture, and what she has, is just one of the avenues that exist. She hasn’t had to hook to survive, she hasn’t had to turn tricks to pay rent, or sleep under a bridge. She’s always been in a position to maintain white privilege, and doesn’t have as much to go through as my Black and Brown community does. My girls don’t know a thing about that. They’ve never been comfortable. Self-affirming, yes, but not comfortable.”



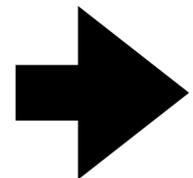
My next question. “What are the top issues you have worked on, as part of serving trans* and transgender people?” Major doesn’t hesitate. She names a list.

“Negotiating through society safely. Handling the merry-go-round in and out of prison. Dealing with mental health issues – their own and the men in their lives. Safety from imminent harm and danger. Coping with the loss of family and friends. The realization of the fact of who we are, how we want to present – as people, not an object.”



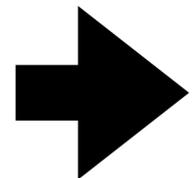
“BUT YOUR WORK WASN’T REALLY IN THE ROLE OF A SERVICE PROVIDER, WAS IT?”

“IT PASSED THAT A LONG TIME AGO. THEY’RE FAMILY TO ME, LIKE AN INTIMATE PART OF EXISTENCE, I SHARE IN THEIR LIVES.”

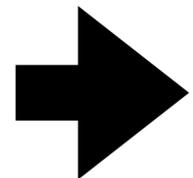


“So you are here together for the Movement for Black Lives Convening. What steered you toward the movement to begin with?”

“To begin with? Well in New York City, girls were getting beat up, and the police were not concerned, they were like, ‘That’s what you get – you deserve this.’ Then the police also did cruel things. In prison, I met the men who got the Attica riots going. I gained a larger political picture. There was way more going on than just in my life. This oppression was going on everywhere.”



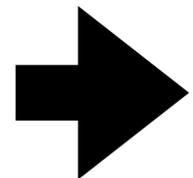
She continued: “If you were outside the box they made sure you stayed there. But in the trans community, we identify who we are. So you meet somebody, you look at their skills and abilities. They’re not just a tramp! They’re not just a tramp. They have skills and abilities. Who you are is how you feel inside, or when you put lotion on your body, and *you touch you.*”



“How do you name your own identity?” I asked.

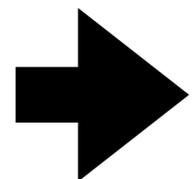
“I’m a good-looking older mother-fucker,” Major said at some length, sorting through lots of possible answers.

“My community? It’s like roulette. It’s like spinning a top. You don’t know, when you land there. Enjoy that spot because you’re not going to be there for long.”



Retrospective autobiographical summary is something Major has already given on many occasions. She laughed off efforts to categorically explain “who I sleep with.” Bypassing the chapters she called “gay guy with kids” and “drag queen” and “woman” and “transgender woman” and “just one of the girls,” she moved to the present-day.

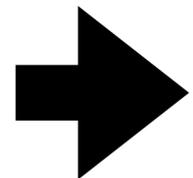
Now, she is tired. She didn’t rest well in the hotel mattress, and she has travelled many miles to be here.



“At 73 years old, I ask myself, why am I still here, and my friends are gone? What made the difference between us?”

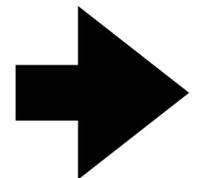
From AIDS and HIV and life purpose, her topic moves toward how to raise children. She raised six children without the legal benefits of marriage and parenting rights.

“What I say is, open their minds up to what exists in the world, not geared toward hate, misuse, mistrust, anger,” she tells me. And she gives a mini-lecture based on Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. “People think the beauty was her. The beauty was *him!*” Deconstructing rapidly the artificial binary, she pronounces the main point: “In bed when your eyes are closed, you don’t see the outside anyway.”



She talks about her children, her sons grown now. I ask her what it is like to meet my children: two white elementary school kids, one with a glam dress covering a swimsuit, and the other wearing dust and sweat from baseball practice, basically fitting someone's stereotype of childhood in the Midwest.

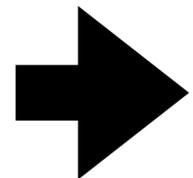
Major got all mushy and warm, speaking of a connection that we share. I am far from thinking this is a connection she has uniquely with me. When I sit with Major, I feel connected to everyone everywhere. Still, Major is nothing if not intimately personal: "I'm proud of you and your lady," she says, "to hang in there through all of this." She recommends a Calgon bath.



Next question. “So what is it like to be at the Movement for Black Lives Convening?”

“Yesterday floored me. I didn’t think these people knew a thing about me. But they stood up when I went in there! Like they knew me, knew of me. It was amazing to be in a room filled with nothing but Black people, and have no fear of stoning or shooting. Those fears are so constant. So it was so nice to be somewhere that fear got completely and utterly erased.”

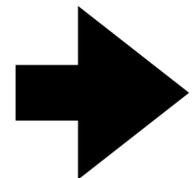
“ALL Black Lives Matter,” she says. “All the bodies of the past, hung from trees, of the 60s, beaten and hosed, recently, those that white people walk on by, the young men going to prison, and the future Black leaders raised by hard-working single moms working to keep them clothed and in school. ALL Black lives matter.”



Intersectionality. In the face of harm. The whole point is embodied, not abstract. To recognize the woman whose hands were cuffed when she went to pee in a public bathroom stall, to feel the cold and crumbling school buildings kids learn in, to sit with the mother who pushes her kids and baby strollers onto several buses each day. We must begin to decode the signals all around us that some lives *do not* matter.

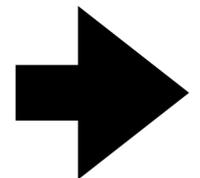
For instance, the downtown historic cemetery I passed on the way to Major's hotel, a resting place for privileged white-only bodies, its old and rather ornate headstones implicitly proclaiming from centuries of wealth: "Some lives matter."

For instance, the premature deaths and recent verdicts, when a Black body in Cleveland was riddled with 137 bullets, and no one was held guilty. Judges did not hold police accountable for public lynchings. Pastors kept quiet about police accountability. These lynchings continue amidst a broader culture of violence and devaluation.



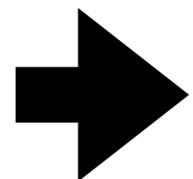
The fact was that Major wasn't invited to the civil rights sit-ins of the 60s. Intersectionality was not the buzzword then that it is today.

"But things are getting ready to change," Major turns. "I'm on the cover of San Francisco Weekly, and on a Lambda Legal webpage, and I have an article in a book, *The Correction of History*, where I say that if it wasn't for the T there wouldn't have been a GLB. And to be in that auditorium, with over 1200 people, was simply a blessing! A pit level and three tiers of an auditorium. I've never talked to so many people at one time! And Black people! Usually it's just white academia. Black Lives Matter has changed my focus, altered the things I've felt I'm here to do."



She seems re-energized, perceiving all that Black Lives Matter is, and can be, led by queer people and women and young people who stand with queer people, including some who helped make a scene at a bar yesterday. During the convening one local establishment refused a trans man access to the restroom, and they would not have it.

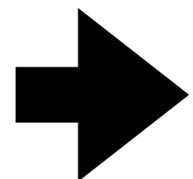
“Yesterday helped me know when I pass away, my greatest contribution won’t be remembered for what I’ve done, but for what I’m doing now. This movement will make it better for my community, and on top of that, the rest of the world.”



Bars and bathrooms and billy clubs, so familiar from Stonewall to last night, are quite different from the sanitized temperature of recent Boy Scout and Supreme Court LGBT campaigns. I almost felt bad asking my next questions. Marriage? Church?

“We don’t have marriage; *they* have marriage. Transgender people, we need respect for our abilities, honing of our skills, to be able to pursue the position we want, a career not a job, we need to live comfortably. We need to know that if we leave our apartment we can get back home! ...

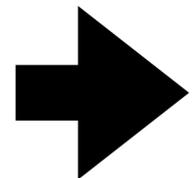
... How about some of that \$700 million, put that aside for programs for trans and gay students being bullied? Having accomplished marriage, yay. Ok, now lets’ get down to the real issues here. Taking care of the people coming behind us. And taking care of the people who paved the way before us.”



Major speaks several layers of intersectionality. Generations before, and generations ahead.

If everyone had an apartment, if everybody could get back to their apartment safely, that would mean we as a society had dealt with the following: wages, jobs and economics; housing and homelessness; community re-investment, safety and education; transphobia; homophobia; sexist violence; and a host of issues connected with “race.”

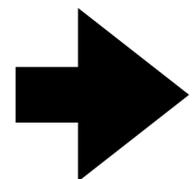
Everybody’s body has multiple identifiers. But Major’s intersectional demand is not esoteric. It has in it a certain embodied proof and a plan: if everyone has a place, and everyone can get home without being assaulted, then there is your metric of success.



Major continues, “I’m afraid of looking for a Frigidaire box at my age. Nowhere gonna accept me. Social Security laughed and threw me out!”

Pause.

A future living on cardboard slabs in the Bay Area is not one she wants. But she has no retirement. Major’s employment through adulthood was most of all in the illicit economy. Rarely could she obtain the type of job with a paycheck and SSN contributions. There are no safety net programs for someone who society said could never legitimately work.

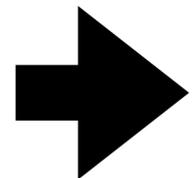


What will be a fitting later chapter of their lives, I wonder, for street workers who lived by selling sex? More abuse and marginalization? For that matter, what will provide income for all uncompensated parental or other care-givers, in the later chapters of their lives?

Major's answer: "What about some recompense and appreciation for age? Like in other cultures, why not learn from elders' experiences about what is valuable and what matters?"

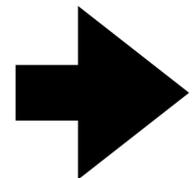
Human beings are more than their production. A Stonewall trail-blazer, from her vantage point, can see this clearly.

Jesus, from his vantage point, could see this too. Human beings are more than their production. Practicing this ethic with a preferential option for the most vulnerable would make a difference not just for some - but for everybody.



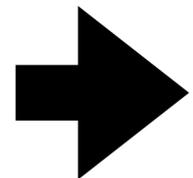
This is a point to make about social change and spirituality, not the acceptability of religion.

If you crack the door open just enough for a Malcolm, then just people like Malcolm will slip through. If you spring the door wide enough for a Major, then a whole bunch of bodies will be able to get through.



Major retires in a couple of months. Retires, that is, from her still-mostly-voluntary work as spokesperson with a non-profit organization serving those in and coming out of prison.

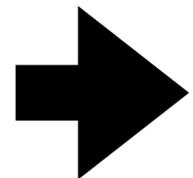
“I don’t mind sharing so younger girls don’t have to live through what I lived through,” she says. “Walk in my mile in my shoes? Please! Walk a mile in my *hair!*”



Major's sound-bytes have made her beloved of many fans. People tweet her remarks, and wear t-shirts with her quotes. Wit and winsomeness have gotten her out of some awkward situations, including in restrooms worldwide. She has traveled for UN appearances, and even to the White House, where once she in her scooter wandered off and got lost.

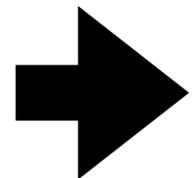
Rather than disclose her identity as an insert-label-here Black gay transgender gender-fluid nonconforming woman with a penis, she retells her choice: "They can see I'm tall. I just say, '*child, I played basketball!*'"

Major birthed the #I'mstillfuckinghere hashtag for transwomen to share their strength in the face of violence, discrimination, and mistreatment.



The same adaptive and protective charm Major uses to survive on the streets has proven less than endearing in other sectors. “I do as much as I can for the churches,” she says. “They still have lots of issues. Especially with me. I’ve gotten awards from the churches that say they are self-affirming; then I cuss them out. I say, ‘I don’t know what took you mother-fuckers so long to get your goddamn heads out of your asses, to appreciate people! Eunuchs are transgender people, you stupid asses. *Some are chosen, some choose. You know.’ ”*

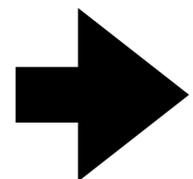
I do know. That last part is in the Bible. Jesus said it – eunuchs being the best kind of disciples. Right up there with children. And no such thing as marriage in heaven, either. Family not defined by gender norms. I haven’t had much more luck than Major in saying it, even though I’ve said it without expletives.



Major gives mixed advice on working with churches. “I do work with Bishop Yvette Flunder, because I believe in her as a person. City of Refuge [church] is the closest we will have to general acceptance, even though girls still get glares there. I know there are limits.”

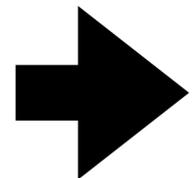
She speaks to internalized phobia. “I can’t do all this shit because someone *else* has a problem with me.” We need to avoid engaging other people’s prejudice out of any need for acceptance rooted in self-loathing.

Rather, Major spreads affirmation, and invites others to get onboard. To church young people, she would advise, “Take everything with a grain of salt. Remember God made every single one of us. Nothing about us is wrong! You’ve got to accept you. See a psychologist, sort out how you feel. That will let you know what’s going on.”



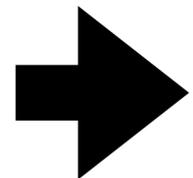
Repeating her support for Black Lives Matter, Major announces that going back home she is going to use her time on a new direction to take this experience. “I have more influence than I thought I did,” she says.

“I agree,” I say! I remember Major’s immense influence on my own life, from age 22 to now. I pose one last unscripted question – what does she remember about our first meeting?



That meeting also was in Cleveland, fifteen years ago, through the United Church of Christ. On that occasion Bill Johnson brought together some trans people to kick off an education project. The project became a film, bearing my name and my face as the white protagonist, in a documentary feature that also included Major.

I was chosen for the film quite obviously because many church people would see me and relate to my story – the similarities not the differences, the privilege not the poverty. Yet the whole reason Bill conceived the project was because of Major. He often told me, “If Major can’t be in the film, I’m not doing it!”

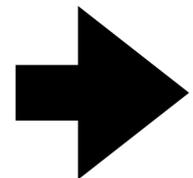


My overwhelming memory was leaving that 2001 event with far more sense of power and hope and freedom, because I had met someone bold like Major.

She said her memory of the meeting was that everyone went in their own direction.

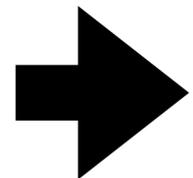
Pause.

I ponder again. Trans women who were older, trans men who were older, some who were younger, all met up for a few days and then went their separate ways. It was hard to talk about difference and privilege across race and class. The agenda we shared out of that meeting named only one thing in common: the need to decrease isolation. Isolation increases risk factors and leads to far too many suicides.

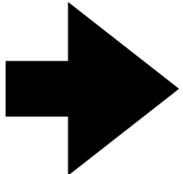


Putting my little notebook away, I shared some of my wonderings aloud. How radical a church person can be, and wouldn't it be nice to be a professor somewhere someday. She said she had the same daydream as well.

Then she laughed. "Tenure this queen? Shit, no, I can't do that. But you can," she said, looking at me wearing my Cleveland ballcap and a beard.



“Because of you, Major,” I returned. “Because of you.”



In 2017 after the inauguration of a certain president, Major moved to Little Rock, Arkansas to continue the work for which she was famous in Oakland, California.

To support the House of GG: Griffin-Gracy Educational Retreat and Historical Center, resourcing trans/gender non-conforming people in the South, please see: <https://houseofgg.org>.

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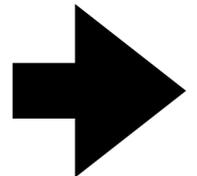
Art by Evangeline Weiss



“WE WOULD SEE JESUS”

SERMON **(JOHN 12:12-32)**

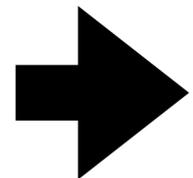
In August of 2015, Bishop Yvette Flunder was invited as a guest preacher to Montreat Retreat Center, where she delivered a Christian message related to the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King’s “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” address. The theme of the event was “Dr. King’s Unfinished Agenda: A Teach-In for Rededicating Ourselves to The Dream.”



Just before the story about the Greeks coming to town there is another story, which tells us what we don't know. It's a story that really belongs to Palm Sunday. In John 12:12, Jesus had just come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and the crowds have welcomed him shouting:

"Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel."

The Pharisees who watched this unseemly exuberance were disgusted with the crowd and with those who turned out for the parade. The Pharisees, seeing that they were losing the battle for the hearts and minds of their own people said, "Look at these fools. You can't do anything with them. The whole world has gone after him."



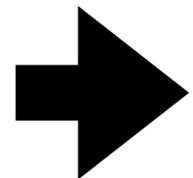
They were also planning to kill Lazarus the once dead and now living brother of Mary and Martha, because his miracle was on everyone's tongue.

And under the masterful editorial hand of the writer of John, what is the next thing that happens? The world goes after Jesus:

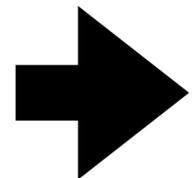
His own, "the Jews" to praise Him in hopes that he is the Promised One.

The priests to kill Him, because he is a threat.

And the Greeks come looking for him, to understand the locus of His power... Is he Hermes, Apollo or Zeus?



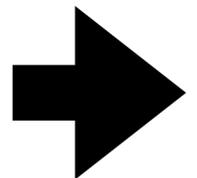
It's the coming of those Greeks, the Hellenists, that swiftly sets things in motion, according to the writer of John. It's the wider world seeking after him that lights the fuse that will soon explode, the last straw that will lead to his arrest and crucifixion. The leaders declared, the whole world has gone after him!



"Sir, we would like to see Jesus," the Greeks said to Philip.

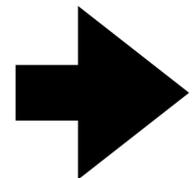
And of course wouldn't we all like to see this great prophet, Rabbi and miracle worker?

"Gentlemen, take us to see Jesus!"



Where has He been since that episode in the temple at Jerusalem when he was a boy? We have very little record until John's baptism. Laying low, working in small towns, trying not to stir up too much dust, getting stronger and stronger glimpses of His Purpose. His call. And, The Price...

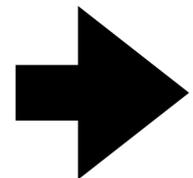
Jesus' coming in to Jerusalem was much like Martin on the Pettus Bridge. "We are out here now"! "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. This is the ultimate coming out parade... the time to put it all on the line... The I've been to the Mountain Top sermon... *I have seen the promise, and I may not get there with you!*



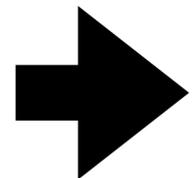
They wanted, we want to see Jesus! They wanted his popularity...they did not understand his purpose. What does Jesus look like?

How will we know when He has been revealed to us?

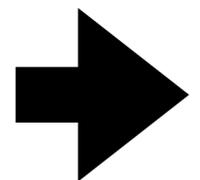
What is our expectation? How do we envision Him?



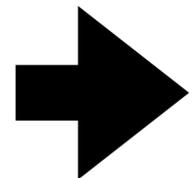
I have many pictures of myself across the years of my life... so many that I cannot recall where I was and what I was doing in many of the photos. I have changed clothing styles, hairstyles and color, sizes, locations, company and tasks. The pictures told stories of when, where, with whom I spent time, what I believed at the time, my theology, my social location. BUT the clearest visible shift came with discovering purpose.



Jesus and Martin have a message for us...it is this...You have to find and stay with your purpose, on purpose. The lovers and the haters can move you from purpose, if you are not clear. Life moves from hosanna to crucifixion and back over and over again.

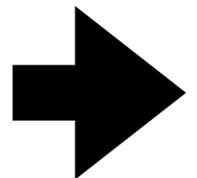


When they ask to see Jesus, they wanted to see the Hosanna Jesus, not the suffering Jesus. These visitors from the Greek Diaspora wanted to see Jesus, wanted to know him and what made him different from others. They wanted to know how it was that he taught “as one with authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees,” as Mark and Luke tell us he did. They really wanted to know how He got Lazarus up from the grave, so they could package and replicate that ability. This stuff here is marketable!

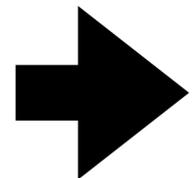


Certain Jews wanted to see the Royal, Priestly, Warrior Jesus, come to displace the usurper, not the Jesus with a mission and purpose.

The Sitting Priesthood just wanted him to be dead, and to stay dead...



Garry Wills in his new book, *What Jesus Meant*, describes the complexity of this God-man: “According to the gospels, he preferred the company of the lowly, and despised that of the rich and powerful. He crossed lines of ritual purity to deal with the unclean – with lepers, the possessed, the insane, with prostitutes and adulterers and collaborators with Rome. He was called a bastard (Jn 8:41) and was rejected by his own brothers (Jn 7:3-5) and the rest of his family (Mk 3:21). He was an outcast among outcasts, sharing the lot of the destitute, the defiled, the despised... He had a lower class upbringing, as a cabinetmaker’s son. That was a trade usually marginal and itinerant in his time. He chose his followers from among the lower class, from fishermen... or from a despised trade (tax collection for the Romans). There were no Scribes or scholars of the Law in his following. [He] not only favored the homeless. He was himself homeless, born homeless and living homeless during his public life... He depended on others to shelter him. He especially depended on women, who were ‘second class citizens’ in his culture. He was not a philosopher. He wrote nothing for his followers in a later age. He depended on his uneducated followers to express what he meant... His very presence was subversive.”

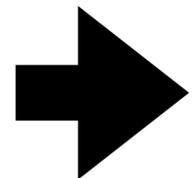


Now, Do we really want to know Him? You can be guilty by association!

Do you want to know Jesus?

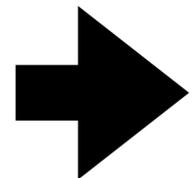
I think that Martin's memory should invoke that question, because time turns a heretic into a prophet! Remember when he had no holiday, not schools and streets named after him, no real support from the faith community?

Then know this: like Jesus, He was in it for purpose, not for popularity.

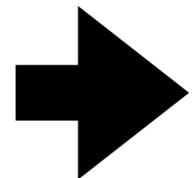


Sir, we wish to see Jesus. And if you would see him, you must see him not only as the winsome, handsome young man of Galilee, the kind and gentle Jesus who gathered the children in his arms and gave sight to the blind, but also as the Jesus who confronted the scribes and Pharisees, the one who had no form or comeliness that we should desire him, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. You have to see him walking by the Sea of Galilee calling disciples, yes, but also as the broken man nailed in agony to a cross taking upon him the suffering of the world.

Want to see him now?

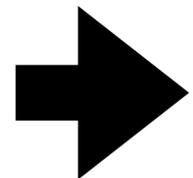


I was naked and you clothed me, he said. I was sick and you cared for me. Alone and you came to me. Imprisoned and you visited me. Hungry and you gave me food. Thirsty, and you gave me drink. And if that's the measure of it, every one of us has seen Him with his nose pressed to the restaurant window, dozing on the BART car, on the front page of the paper and on the evening news, a soldier far from home unsure of what it is he fights for anymore, the grieving Syrian child whose parents have been beheaded by a ISIS guerilla, crying out "Why?" When we see this, and hear of this, we see His embodied purpose. We see the concerned heart of Jesus



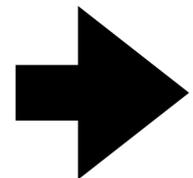
What does Jesus look like?

He looks like eight faithful Bible study students and their pastor, who decided to have Bible study anyway, even on a night when so many other parishioners were involved in other activities. People who extended a warm and generous welcome to a stranger, and whose families wept and still weep, while saying to that stranger, we forgive you... we forgive you... they knew their purpose.



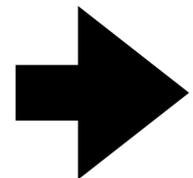
What does Jesus look like?

A President who has withstood the perpetual disrespect of powerful politicians and scions of wealthy families, all the while believing that justice can run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream. This half white man who chooses to be called a Black man, took it with swag, and his presidency has been heralded as the most influential justice presidency in history. Affordable healthcare, equal marriage, a woman's right to choose (in Texas), securing the vote, ending the embargo with Cuba, ending don't-ask-don't-tell, ending a recession, allowing PLWA to cross our borders, seeking a peaceful resolution with Iran, taking action against unjust immigration laws, all of this while enduring political crucifixion. He is man with purpose.



What does Jesus look like?

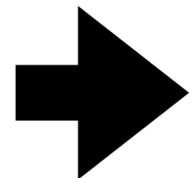
One of our TFAM leaders, Bishop Joseph Tolton, goes to the continent of Africa, in response to the hatred and vitriol spewed at the LGBT community there and the realities of female genital mutilation. He has partnered us with affirming churches and faith-based organizations in Rwanda, Uganda and several other countries, where people are killed. Their families imprisoned and women endure corrective rape if they are thought to be homosexual. He and his team go often, but every time they go, they place their lives on the line. We consecrated him a Bishop a few days ago, not to play dress-up but to honor the apostolic courage of this man of purpose!



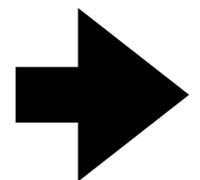
The Greeks came looking for a Rock Star...

Jesus' response was: It is time for me to tell you what my true purpose here is. I am going to die, and through my death God will be glorified in ways that would not be possible without my death.

"I have withheld this information for some time, as I had to come to grips with the cost of my call. It has troubled my soul...but now I realize that this is what I was born to do and be. Now, God have your way... Glorify your own name! And God said, It is Glorified, and **SHALL BE GLORIFIED AGAIN!"**

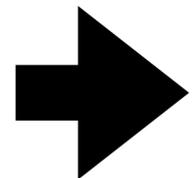


God's Glory came in Jesus' "yes" to God's intent and purpose for His life! His purpose was to take power from the ruler of this world! His purpose... To free us from the inherited consequence of sin, and assure us of our right standing with God. To heal, to lift, to speak truth to power, while being labeled seditious and heretical.



Jesus said, here is my purpose:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."



Martin's response was:

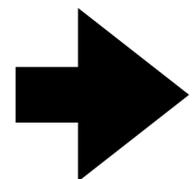
“We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

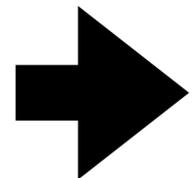
Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.”



What did it cost Him? Everything!

He said:

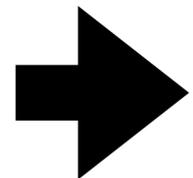
“Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live - a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the [Promised Land](#). I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”



**Here is what we who continue this work must determine...What is our purpose?
Why do we gather? What is our call?**

The question is not, who do men say we are, but rather by what Purpose are we defined? Are we prepared to pay the cost?

Success in the cause of Christ is not determined by the standards of fame and popularity, but rather our faithfulness to our purpose.



Can we accomplish it without fear... fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of people's opinions...?

Probably not, but accomplish it we must!

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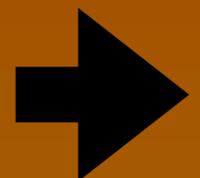
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Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.

... Intersectionality can get used as a blanket term to mean, "Well, it's complicated." Sometimes, "It's complicated" is an excuse not to do anything. ... We want to move beyond that idea.

We use art and other projects to show how people are experiencing intersectional harms, such as mothers of women killed by the police, or young girls expelled from school. We work directly with advocates and communities to develop ways they can better see these problems and better intervene in advocacy.

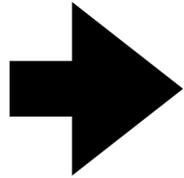
- Kimberly Crenshaw, Co-Founder African-American Policy Forum, 2017





A POEM
ABOUT FINDING A CHURCH

BY WENDY HARBOUR



My Family

Is looking for a Family

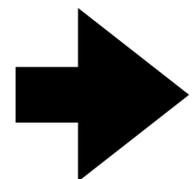
A Church Family

A Place and People where we can Be in faith and hope and sorrow and love

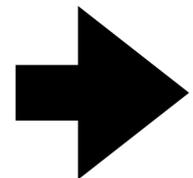
In Birth and Death, In Marriage and Togetherness and Singleness, In Faith and in Questioning

In Eating and Cleaning and Volunteering and Teaching and Shushing Babies in the Nursery

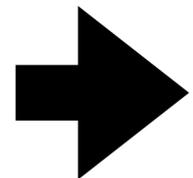
In Singing and Reading and Preaching and Communion and Praying and Sharing Peace



**My family is multiracial and
We sat in pews and my son asked why can't Black people do anything in the service
And there were prayers for healing and wholeness that broke our hearts with their racism
And there were songs about souls black with sin washed lily white
And we knew that these Christians were family
But they couldn't be our Family
Where Black people are preaching and singing and giving glory and shouting Amen!
from the spirit moving all of them as one body of many bodies
And hats are big and dresses have flowers and men wear ties while the rest of them
become untied moving like reeds dancing in the River Jordan**



And people wave paper fans in a multitude of colors to keep things cool while the Word of God heats them up
And everyone knows that sometimes the devil is white and salvation is black like the night that shelters so many slaves trying to reach all kinds of freedom even today
And We Shall Overcome and anyone of any color can march with us if they are willing to sing and work and pray with us
As Family
And we looked
And we finally found that Family but they wouldn't let two women walk with them as wives.



My family is LGBTQ and

We sat in pews and my son asked why doesn't this church have a rainbow flag somewhere

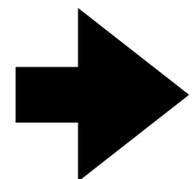
And there were prayers asking for blessings on people and places that hated us

And there were songs where everyone knew that family meant a man and woman born that way and not making choices to sin lest a loving forgiving God sends them to hell

And we knew that these Christians were family

But they couldn't be our Family

Where God is trans and ze is both male and female and greater in glory and grace than labels of gender



And the Body of Christ is living with AIDS

And marriage means any combination of love because God is love in infinite forms

And sometimes men wear pearls and women wear suits and the Drag Queen choir sings

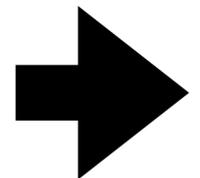
Praise to Jesus with a bisexual organist while we all glorify each others' fabulousness and pride

And the rainbow flag flies as hope and promises after a flood of hate and straight people are just a color of that many colored rainbow praying and loving

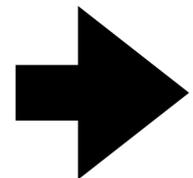
As Family

And we looked

And we finally found that Family but couldn't access them because we are disabled.



**My family is culturally Deaf and disabled and
We sat in pews and my son asked why is there no wheelchair ramp to get in here
And there were prayers that asked for healing from the disabilities that make us who we are
And there were songs that were only spoken, without ASL interpretation, autistic hands
flapping in time, or iPads programmed with Hallelujahs for those whose voice is a digital one
And we knew these Christians were family
But they weren't our Family
Where everyone knows Heaven has power doors and Angels sing to show the depth of their
depression and mania**



And the Word of God is written in Braille

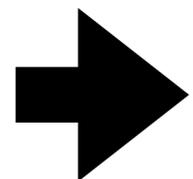
And people have communion with gluten-free bread and individual cups respecting those whose immune systems keep them from sharing a common one

And the preaching is from an accessible podium because God speaks through little people and tall people and diverse bodies that experience pain and suffering and joy and identity and community

As Family

And we looked

And we found that Family but everyone was White.

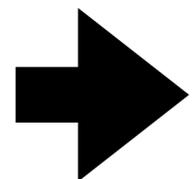


**So my Family is still looking
for a Family.**

And then we meet other Families:

**Poor Families. Spanish-speaking Families. Foster Families. Homeless Families. Military
Families. Alcoholic or addict Families. Families of one. Families who are breaking apart.
Families finding their way to come together.**

**And we know these Christians are Family
With no Church Family**



And then we meet other Families:

Jews. Muslims. Hindus. Wiccans. Buddhists. Sikhs. Pagans.

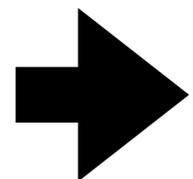
Those who follow Baha'i, Confucianism, Jainism, Shinto, Tao, and Zoroastrianism.

As diverse as the Christian Families we know so well

And we see them as Cousins, Sisters, Brothers, Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents

And are grieved to see that many have no spiritual Family.

Just like us.



**So we love our Families
and Pray
for the
Family of God.
Family of Faiths.
Family of Us.**

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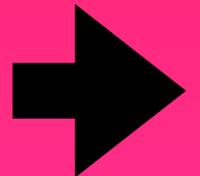
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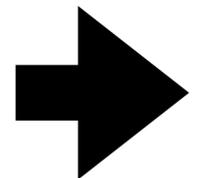
Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza

<http://www.lyndaleucc.org/q/>

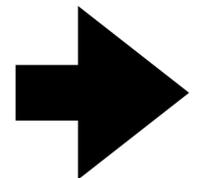


CALLING ALL QUEER CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTION FIGURES!!!

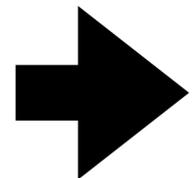
As a comic storyteller who takes on deadly serious issues, I draw inspiration from queer history. Through studying the fierce and fearless actions of my queer ancestors who faced relentless opposition and oppression throughout the 20th Century, I found strength to face the destructive power of conversion therapy and a church system that attempted to queer bash me into submission. Beyond our ancestors' ability to stand up to the bullies though, their quest for a better world for all, a beautiful, just, and caring society, gave me a reason to live. Once again I look to our ancestors to provide hope and direction in the face of a growing threat, one that requires the deft touch of LGBTQ activists and leaders.



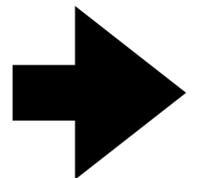
During the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s our queer ancestors could not ignore the times they were in. They Acted Up. They demanded the government listen and respond. They educated themselves. They became caregivers to each other. They changed government policy and public attitudes. Most importantly they understood that *Silence Equals Death*, so they used every means possible to break the collective silence—art, film, fashion, sit-ins, and at times they literally paraded dead bodies in the streets.



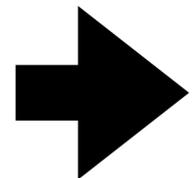
We now face global climate disruption. Just like with the HIV/AIDS Crisis, not everyone sees it or recognizes it. Not everyone is immediately touched by it. Everyone is not affected equally. But just like with those HIV/AIDS refugees who flooded into hospitals and places of worship and funeral parlors and onto the evening news, we are beginning to see the suffering that has begun in the world because of global climate change. We also see that many people are afraid to face the reality of a changing planet. They are paralyzed to act. They need help. They need us.



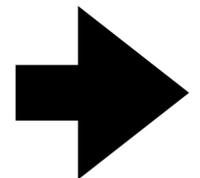
But climate change is not simply about *those people over there*; it directly affects LGBTQ people globally and in North America.



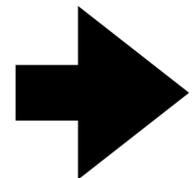
Right now there are many homeless people on the streets. Up to 40% of all homeless youth in most cities in North America are LGBTQ. So many transgender women of color are homeless. These are folks who avoid most shelters because they are not safe for LGBTQ people. Shelters are typically highly gendered spaces that do not welcome transgender, gender queer, and gender non-conforming people. What happens then when extreme weather hits a city and a region? Where do these queer people without homes go? Where did they go during Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy? Do our queer community centers and LGBTQ friendly places of worship have a plan to reach out to homeless queer people during these extreme weather events? Queer homelessness is a climate issue.



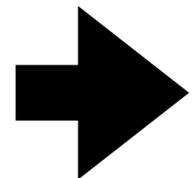
Over the next thirty years we are projected to face stronger and more frequent storms, heatwaves, and flooding. These events disrupt all of our lives, but especially those most vulnerable with the least amount of resources. I think of elderly LGBTQ people who may not have family checking in when a severe storm blows through. During extreme heatwaves older citizens cannot afford to run air conditioning; they suffer and die from respiratory ailments. Do we know where are queer seniors live? Do LGBTQ community centers and queer places of worship maintain a list of seniors and check in with them before, during, and after extreme weather events? Connecting with our LGBTQ seniors is a climate issue.



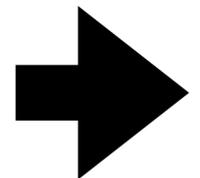
I marvel at the many intersections that exist with climate change and the most pressing issues of our day. Many of us LGBTQ folks are engaged in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement demanding robust policing of the police and deep changes in law enforcement policy so that people of color experience justice when confronted with the criminal justice system. During times of extreme weather cities and towns turn into militarized zones, like we saw in 2005 in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. A natural disaster became a manmade catastrophe leading to human rights abuses predominately against people of color perpetuated by law enforcement and national guard soldiers trained to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. The aims and goals of #BlackLivesMatter are vitally important during extreme weather events when political leaders declare states of emergency and the normal rules do not apply. #BlackLivesMatter is a climate issue.



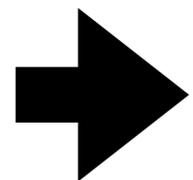
We see more and more migrants and refugees displaced from their homes seeking a better life in Europe and North America. Millions of people are already on the move and many more are projected to seek refuge over the next 30 years. Among the many immigrants and refugees coming to our countries, there are of course LGBTQ people fleeing persecution for being queer along with all of the other conditions that drive people from their homes. The United Nations and the World Bank continually point out that climate change magnifies existing political tensions in regions around the world—poverty, starvation, oppression, homophobia and other forms of violence ramp up as the weather becomes more and more extreme and unpredictable. LGBTQ people in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Central and South America already experience the increased pressures brought on by climate change. Immigration is a climate change issue.



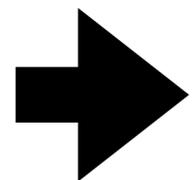
While some queer folks are developing creative and justice-minded approaches to the climate crisis, many LGBTQ people seem to live on another planet, one that is not rapidly warming. Perhaps they figure we have more pressing issues to address.



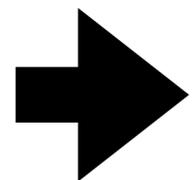
“To some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic,” Gayle Rubin wrote in 1984, “a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality.”



I wonder if as LGBTQ people we have been experiencing the reverse of what Rubin wrote about. For many of us sexuality is a very important topic; we rightfully focus on sexuality and gender justice with a laser-like intensity, bringing our needs and concerns to the public consciousness. We have been relentless in highlighting the importance of sexuality and gender issues. But within our various LGBTQ rainbow collectives, organizations, and affirming churches, and in our own minds is climate change the unimportant, overlooked topic? Are we dangerously silent about it and unengaged?



Perhaps like many non-LGBTQ people we feel overwhelmed by the scale and scope of climate change, so we mostly ignore it and put our efforts elsewhere. While I understand the temptation to detach from the climate crisis that is upon us, I urge my fellow LGBTQ activists and faith leaders to stop this trend and instead embrace climate change as a queer issue, one that affects everything we hold dear—be it as simple as the pleasure of a cup of coffee to as profound of an issue as overhauling the criminal justice system. While many of us may not have offspring (although more and more queer people are parents), we do have skin in the game. The things that are most precious to us are affected by climate change, and we need to educate ourselves, break the collective silence around the issue, and work towards solutions that have justice and human rights in the center of them.



As I look at the massive tasks before us, and I think of LGBTQ people in towns and cities all over the world, I feel hope. What an honor to be the people to face this crisis, find paths forward, and weather the storms together. What a rich history and store of knowledge we have to offer the world at this moment.

Calling all queers: It is time to *come out* as a people willing to engage in climate action.

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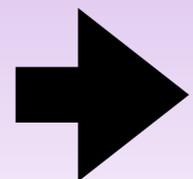
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“THAT'S WHY I WANT TO SPEAK TO YOU NOW.

TO SAY: NO PERSON, TRYING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HER OR HIS IDENTITY, SHOULD HAVE TO BE SO ALONE. THERE MUST BE THOSE AMONG WHOM WE CAN SIT DOWN AND WEEP, AND STILL BE COUNTED AS WARRIORS...

I THINK YOU THOUGHT THERE WAS NO SUCH PLACE FOR YOU, AND PERHAPS THERE WAS NONE THEN, AND PERHAPS THERE IS NONE NOW; BUT WE WILL HAVE TO MAKE IT, WE WHO WANT AN END TO SUFFERING, WHO WANT TO CHANGE THE LAWS OF HISTORY, IF WE ARE NOT TO GIVE OURSELVES AWAY.”

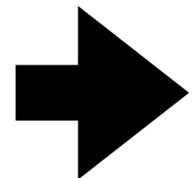
ADRIENNE RICH, SOURCES



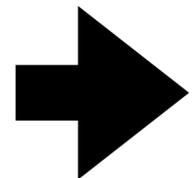
WHAT HISTORY LIVES IN YOUR BODY

SCOTTISH REFLECTIONS ON SOVEREIGNTY, CULTURAL RECLAMATION, AND DAPL

I first visited the Oceti Sakowin camp in early September at the invitation of Rev. Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo, pastor of All Nations Indian Church and the Director of the Council on American Indian Ministries in the United Church of Christ to be a “witness and interpreter” (as she called it) in support of the Water Protectors. The Water Protectors had started the Sacred Fire on April 1st of 2016 just outside Cannon Ball, North Dakota which is just outside the boundaries of the Standing Rock Reservation, in order to stop the illegal Dakota Access Pipeline. The impact to the Missouri River when a spill happens from the pipeline, will be catastrophic.

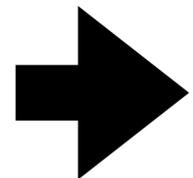


The first question we were asked was “where are you coming from?” After I answered Minneapolis a couple of times, a Native colleague said, “you know when you are asked that question, folks aren’t asking for where you live, they are asking who your people are.”

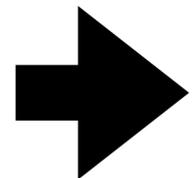


One of the things that Rev. Helgemo required of folks that came to Oceti Sakowin (which, in English means the Seven Council Fires), and stayed in her camp-within-a-camp, was that we stayed for at least three days. She didn't want theological tourists.

My first three-day visit was literally life-changing.

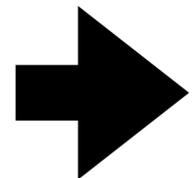


Our first stop in camp was at the Sacred Fire which was very close to the entrance gate. It was a space in which a microphone had been set up and elders of the Standing Rock nation were receiving delegations from indigenous nations across the world. When we walked up to the circle, a delegations of Mayans from Guatemala presented themselves and asked to be allowed into camp. When the Standing Rock elders welcomed them, they were given a Mayan flag that was then hung along the entrance road.



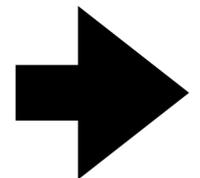
After their flag had been accepted a Lakota elder from a different reservation took the microphone and invited anyone who knew it, to join her in song. She explained to those who didn't know Lakota the words they were about to sing were:

“We are alive.... We are alive.... We are alive.”

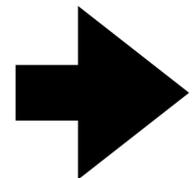


As the song was picked up by people all around me, I realized the other, equally important reason I had come — to stand in solidarity with Native leaders.

The song “We are Alive” brought me to tears. In the face of over 500 years of attempted genocide, broken treaties, concentration camps, forced marches, boarding schools, cultural genocide — most of it perpetrated by my fellow Christians — this was a gathering that said that Native Lives Matter. It was a camp of shared food, shared clothing, shared school supplies and it was filled with music and ceremony and prayer.



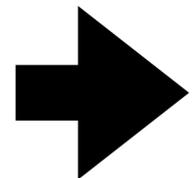
At one point, we were all invited down to the riverside to welcome representatives of several Pacific Coast nations who had brought their boats from as far away as Alaska and then paddled across Lake Oahe (which was created by flooding the Missouri River at the Standing Rock reservation). These nations were coming up the Cannon Ball River, a tributary of the Missouri to bless the water and stand in solidarity with Standing Rock. As they paddled past us, people shouted out blessings and one child in particular greeted each new canoe with “Water is sacred. Water is life.” *Lalalalalala* “Water is sacred. Water is Life.”



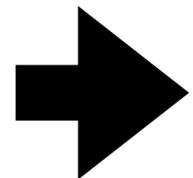
As the evening closed, we were invited to a pipe ceremony. The invitation alone was an act of deep honoring. I knew that as a white, non-Native person, that was sacred space that is not mine. And I couldn't help praying as the pipe came to rest in my left hand, that I would do justice to the honor bestowed upon me as a witness and interpreter of this sacred, revolutionary space.

As I returned to Minneapolis and de-briefed with trusted friends and colleagues, I kept hearing the first question asked of me, "Where are you coming from?"

I began to understand the message underneath the question: that we must know who we are as we purport to do the work of justice in the world.

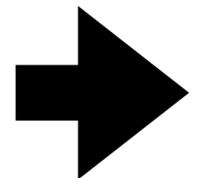


A second underlying message in the question came to me explicitly from a Native colleague in Minneapolis. As he and I were preparing for a presentation he was going to give to the United Church of Christ in Minnesota, he said, “You know one of the primary differences between Western or European understandings and Native understandings is you believe that time is linear. There is a past, a present and a future and they happen one after another. For Native peoples, time and history are embodied in place. The past, the present and the future are in the land and they live in our bodies.”

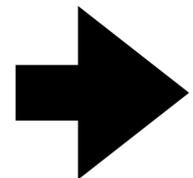


And I kept hearing the question, where are you coming from? Who are you, Rebecca Mary MacKenzie Voelkel? What history lives in your body?

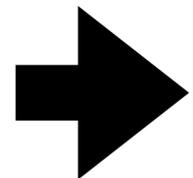
I realized that, for me, my solidarity with Standing Rock needed an answer to this question.



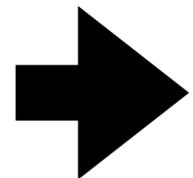
I grew up as an only child. My mom is an only child of Scottish immigrant parents. My grammie, my mom's mom, was the only one of her siblings to have children. And her mother was the only one of her siblings to have children. Because of this reality and the fact that my grammie took care of me as a child and I spent a lot of time with her, I was raised to know my Scottish heritage.



Grammie was born in Inverness, Scotland in 1905. In her many stories, she often told me that her father's first language was Gaelic and that his English wasn't that good. She loved to recount the story of going to visit her father's family in Applecross, a tiny village on the side of the mountain on the West Coast of Scotland.

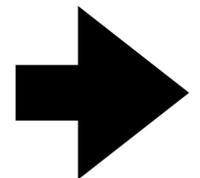


On one particular evening, she was taking a walk with her uncle Murdo who spent most of his time dressed in tartan and hiking in the mountains since his job was to be the hunter for the wealthy land owner. As the darkness fell, Uncle Murdo turned to Grammie and said, “Would you like to talk with Robbie Burns?”



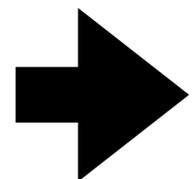
Now, Robbie Burns was one of my Grammie's favorite poets. She had memorized dozens and dozens of his pieces—many of them in Gaelic. As he was known as the Scottish national poet, you can imagine that my grammie would have been thrilled to talk with him.

But she responded to Uncle Murdo's request with deep fear, "Uncle Murdo, Robbie Burns has been dead for over a hundred years." To which Uncle Murdo replied, "Ay, Lassie, a spirit like that never dies."

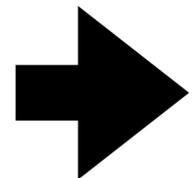


I'd heard that story many, many times. But as I grappled with where was I coming from, I started to do some reading.

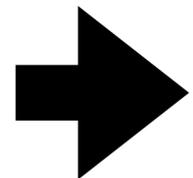
There's a bit more to the story of Uncle Murdo and my great-grandfather. As I said, they had grown up in Applecross, on the West Coast of Scotland. But our family had originally lived in the Western Islands.



The story of how they got to Applecross is rooted in a century of brutality known as the Highland Clearances. In the mid-eighteenth century, as punishment for participating in the Scottish Clan uprising against English colonization, the Scottish wealthy class began clearing people, including my MacKenzie relatives, from the communal lands in the Highlands and the Western Islands. Then, those same lands were given to wealthy people to develop large-scale sheep farming.

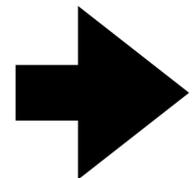


The Clearances were marked by violence and brutality and often removed whole villages off their land on short notice. People were often left homeless, without any source of income or food. And, if they stole food to feed their families, many were arrested and sent to penal colonies in places like Australia. Additionally, wearing tartan was outlawed and punishable with arrest and deportation. And speaking Gaelic was discouraged and suffered greatly.

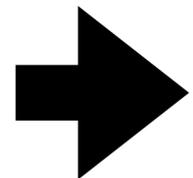


This use of forced displacement and cultural destruction as punishment for liberation struggles, coupled with rewarding the wealthy who are already aligned with the colonizer, are old, old tactics.

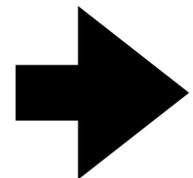
Robbie Burns, by the way, wrote much of his poetry during the Highland Clearances, in Gaelic. And his voice was one of resistance and resilience and cultural reclamation. These, too, are old, old tactics.



So, in September and October, the answer to the question of where are you coming from was that I was the great, great granddaughter of those who'd been cleared from their land, whose language had been outlawed, whose traditions and clothing had been outlawed but who'd resisted. I was Grammie's granddaughter but also Uncle Murdo's great, great niece. And my presence at Standing Rock was another act of resistance and support.

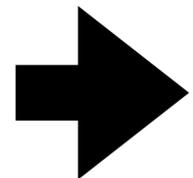


But then I was asked to go back to Standing Rock on November 2nd and 3rd for a Clergy Call, this time by Father John Floberg, priest on Standing Rock. He prayed he'd get at least 100 people and over 525 came. Our purpose was to stand in solidarity as religious and spiritual leaders. But before we could stand in solidarity, Father Floberg knew that particularly the Christians needed to do some spiritual work. Before we marched, we were being asked to ceremonially repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

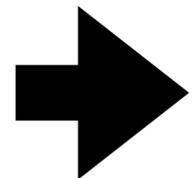


For those of you not familiar with the Doctrine of Discovery, it was a series of pronouncements by the Pope starting in 1452 which stated that it was the right of any Christian who encountered a non-Christian to take their land and kill, enslave or otherwise dominate them. Many also call the Doctrine of Discovery the “Doctrine of Christian Domination.” It was first issued to encourage the Portugese to colonize West Africa and enslave folks. And it literally baptized the expedition of Christopher Columbus and subsequent explorers. And the Doctrine of Discovery was cited as early as 1823 by US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall and has been woven into US law — continuing to be cited in case law as recently as 2014.

There is a lot more to say about the Doctrine of Discovery but I hope that gives you some idea if it is an unfamiliar term.

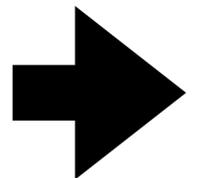


Given the genocidal impact of the Doctrine of Discovery, our Clergy Call needed to start with it. And so, on a cold November morning, we arrived at Oceti Sakowin and gathered around the sacred fire before a council of elders. And then, one by one, leaders of the various Christian denominations who'd done work within their own traditions to repudiate the Doctrine—the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America were three—came forward and read the official statements of repudiation. And then they handed a ceremonial copy of the Doctrine of Discovery to the Standing Rock elders who then took coals from the sacred fire and burned it.

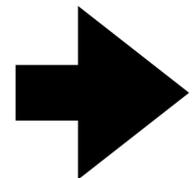


This ceremonial act acknowledged that given over 500 years of physical and cultural genocide, forced clearing from the land, boarding schools, and environmental degradation — all done in the name of Christian domination — we needed to begin with confession and repentance. And out of confession and repentance can come acts of repair. And perhaps, then, some kind of reconciliation might be possible.

Our being there as religious leaders was an act of solidarity — a small act of repair — but we needed to start with confession and repentance and the ceremonial repudiating of the Doctrine of Discovery was that.

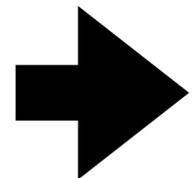


And then we marched from the camp to the bridge on Highway 1806 just south of where the pipeline would go under the road and then under Lake Oahe. But by this time, the Morton County Sheriffs Department had become a militarized force and we were standing on the road in plain sight of armored vehicles with aircraft flying overhead on a regular basis. It was an eerie and palpable sign of the Doctrine of Christian Dominance.



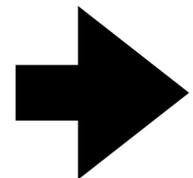
I only had less than a week before I returned a third time to Oceti Sakowin as a guest of two Standing Rock tribal Council members. I knew I would be asked where I was coming from and this time this answer to who I was and what history lived in my body was even more complex.

I am the granddaughter of Mary Doyle MacKenzie Unwin whose people survived the Highland Clearances but resisted. But I am also a Christian pastor and heir to all that was done in my name and in the name of the Doctrine of Discovery. (As I was doing some research in preparation for being here, I was looking at photos of the massacre at Wounded Knee, which is often said marked the end of the US Indian Wars, and of the grave site there. And I was looking at photos of the grave site at Culloden Moor, where the Scottish uprising was put down for the last time. It is eery to see some of the similarities. But more painful for me was that twenty soldiers were given medals of honor for their killing spree done under the command of Col. James Forsythe. It was a Scotsman who led the massacre.)



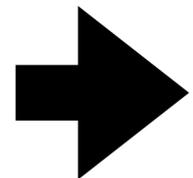
Where are you coming from? I come from the survivors of the Highland Clearances, those who resisted. I come from those who survived the Highland Clearances and then came to this country or to Australia to turn around and perpetrate genocide on others. I come from a Christian tradition of a gospel of liberation—rooted in one whose whole ministry was to resist Roman Imperial occupation. I come from a Christian tradition that has been colonized by Empire and used to perpetrate unspeakable Holocaust and Slavery and pogrom and domination all over these lands.

What, then, am I supposed to do with all of this history that literally lives in my own body? And why do I share it with you?

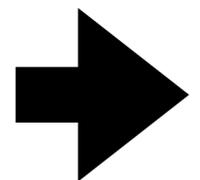


You might recall that Rev. Marlene Whiterabbit Helgemo asked that we come to Standing Rock in the first place to be witnesses and interpreters but not to do so from a perspective of being a theological tourist. She has since asked that we go and “get our people” to tell the story.

This ask is a complicated one because it entails several layers of thinking and acting.



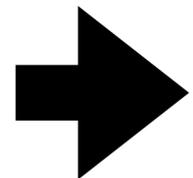
Because the Doctrine of Discovery and the Highland Clearances both live in me, my telling the story of Standing Rock has to be both the story of Empire Christianity and how Christian Domination is a distortion of the liberative story that is the core of Christianity.



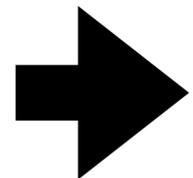
(I haven't even talked about my being queer and how a big piece of the rationale for Christian Domination was that indigenous understandings of sexuality and gender were more expansive than Empire Christianity's and were a critical part of what the Doctrine of Discovery sought to crush. As Pedro Font, an early Franciscan conquistador in the America's wrote in his diaries:

*"Among the women I saw some men dressed like women, with whom they go about regularly, never joining the men... From this I inferred they must be hermaphrodites, but from what I learned later I understood that they were sodomites, dedicated to nefarious practices. From all the foregoing I conclude that in this matter of incontinence there will be much to do when the Holy Faith and the Christian religion are established among them."**

**Pedro Font, Font's Complete Diary of the Second Anza Expedition*



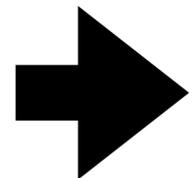
So, being a witness and interpreter of Standing Rock is also the story of being in solidarity in a way that is honest with the complexity of the power and vulnerability I hold in my own body. And for me, that is balancing being a follower — listening to the voices of indigenous leaders and doing what I'm asked to do — with being a leader in the context that it makes sense for me to lead.



The very good news is that although Oceti Sakowin and Oceti Oyate are no longer camps, the movement that has sprung from Standing Rock is only growing.

As I close, I would ask you, where are you coming from when you do your justice work?

Whose struggle do you hold in your body?



“Whose History Lives In Your Body” was originally delivered at Earlham College, March 27, 2017.

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THE NEW Q DESIRE

ANTHOLOGY OF INTERSECTIONAL WRITING BY LGBTQ+ FAITH LEADERS

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Urooj Arshad is the Associate director, International Youth Health and Rights at Advocates for Youth, where she manages a project of the International Division that builds the capacity of youth-driven organizations in the global south. She is a steering committee member of the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD), which addresses the intersectional impact of Islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. Urooj has been a member of the Center for American Progress' Women's Health Leadership Network and its Faith and Reproductive Justice Institute. She is currently on the Kalamazoo College Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership Global Advisory Board and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice Board. Urooj was selected to serve on the U.S delegation to the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Urooj grew up in Karachi, Pakistan and immigrated to the U.S at sixteen. She came out as queer at nineteen. She has gone back to Pakistan which she affectionately calls *Blingistan* five times in the last four years and has found a queer and trans* Pakistan beyond her dreams. She can't wait to go back!

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Bio (2017)

Rev. DeWayne L. Davis, Senior Pastor of All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church, is a cleric ordained in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) with expertise in social justice analysis, advocacy, and organizing. He serves on the MCC Global Justice Institute's Public Policy Team, representing the denomination's public policy advocacy initiatives at the state and federal level. He previously served as Assistant Project Manager of MCC's 25th General Conference worship team in 2013 and as the Program Coordinator for MCC's 2011 People of African Descent (PAD) Conference, designing and organizing workshops and continuing education opportunities for lay and clergy. Rev. Davis previously served as the Domestic Policy Analyst in The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations. Rev. Davis holds a B.A. in Economics and Philosophy from Howard University and an M.A. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland at College Park. Rev. Davis received his Master of Divinity degree with honors from the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He has more recently been appointed to serve on the Advisory Committee of the Kaleo Center at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and on the Board of Directors of Clare Housing. Rev. Davis currently lives in Minneapolis with his husband of twenty-four years, Kareem.

Bio (2017)

The Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder founded the City of Refuge United Church of Christ in 1991 in order to unite a gospel ministry with a social ministry. City of Refuge is a thriving inner-city congregation that celebrates the radically inclusive love of Jesus Christ. Preaching a message of action, the church has experienced steady numerical and spiritual growth.

Flunder is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ and a graduate of the Ministry Studies and Master of Arts programs at the Pacific School of Religion. She received her DMin degree from San Francisco Theological Seminary. Flunder is a trustee and adjunct professor at Pacific School of Religion and she is a board member of the National Sexuality Resource Center, an active voice for the Religion Council of the Human Rights Campaign and co-chair of the Religious Advisory Committee of the National Black Justice Coalition. She also serves on the UCC Unified Governance Working Group as representative of the United Church of Christ Seminaries.

A much sought after preacher, educator, conference speaker, and singer, Flunder has been a lecturer, adjunct professor, and speaker at numerous seminaries including Lancaster, Duke, Drew, Eden, Yale, and New York Theological. She is the author of *Where the Edge Gathers: A Theology and Homiletic of Radical Inclusion*.

Bio (2017)

Wendy Harbour is a parent and a poet who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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Bio (2017)

Rev. Malcolm Himschoot is a trans man and the subject of the United Church of Christ-produced documentary film *Call Me Malcolm*. With Major Griffin-Gracy and others he co-founded the UCC GenderFold Action Alliance.

He writes, teaches, and organizes in the community, and ministers in and on behalf of the church.

Bio (2017)

The Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kūpono Kwong is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister who has served in parish, community, and institutional settings. Born and raised in the Philippines (but of Chinese descent), Jonipher speaks 6 languages. His religious upbringing is just as pluralistic—from Evangelical to United Methodist, Episcopalian to Calvary Chapel. He was christened at a Gospel church and baptized as a Chinese Mennonite. In Hawai'i, Jonipher practiced with the Honolulu Mindfulness Community, a sangha influenced by Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn. Some of the labels he proudly wears include: cisgender male, gay, class straddler (working to middle class), temporarily able-bodied, and highly educated.

Bio - Louis Mitchell (2017)

Louis lives in Springfield, MA and is blessed to be surrounded and supported by amazing family, both traditional and chosen.

Louis serves as an Assistant Minister at South Congregational Church and is the Community Engagement Coordinator for TransFaith. He is a founding member and Co-Chair of the Trans People of Color Coalition and a founding member of The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries' Trans-Saints.

Recently named as a recipient of the Transgender Law Center's Vanguard Award, Louis was also named as one of the ten leading Black Religious leaders Advancing LGBTQ Justice by BelieveOutLoud, was honored by BodyImage4Justice, the Trans Faith and Action Network and the Trans 100 (2014), received a foundation award, named the Louis J. Mitchell Empowerment Award from the Black Trans Advocacy Conference (2013), was selected to be the Keynote Speaker for the inaugural Black Trans Advocacy Conference and the Philadelphia Trans Health conference (2012), and was awarded the Haystack Award from the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ for his work in social justice and social ministry (2011). He was also featured in the award winning documentary, *Still Black: A Portrait of Black Transmen*.

Bio (2017)

alba onofrio

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affiliations:

Director of Spiritual and Financial Development, Soulforce

Founding Member, Sexual Liberators Collective

Graduate, Vanderbilt Divinity School

Bio (2017): Lawrence Richardson

Rev. Lawrence T. Richardson is a United Church of Christ pastor, writer, and digital evangelist. He uses multiple online platforms to advocate for social justice, express relevant content, and communicate inspired information. When he is not online blogging and ministering, Lawrence spends his time enjoying nature, writing creative non-fiction and poetry, practicing yoga, and being an active presence in both the Transgender and Progressive Christian communities.

Website: LTRichardson.com

Twitter: @Larry2_0

See also: The Salt Collective <http://thesaltcollective.org/author/lawrence-richardson/>

Bio (2017)

Peterson Toscano is a theatrical performance activist using comedy and storytelling to address social justice concerns. He spent 17 years and over \$30,000 on three continents attempting (and failing) to change his same-sex orientation. He is the author of one-person comedies including, *Queer 101--Now I Know My gAy,B,C's* and *Doin' Time in the Homo No Mo Halfway House*, which chronicles his two years in "gay rehab" in Memphis, TN. As a Bible scholar, he explored gender non-conforming Bible characters in his performance lecture, *Transfigurations--Transgressing Gender in the Bible* Peterson is the host of the Climate Stew podcast, the leader of the Sunbury, PA chapter of the Citizens Climate Lobby, and speaks regularly about climate change as queer, faith, and human rights issues. His newest play *Does This Apocalypse Make Me Look Fat?* is a comedy about broken bodies large and small.

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Twitter and YouTube: p2son

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Bio (2017)

Rev. Rebecca Voelkel is a second-generation minister in the United Church of Christ, and an activist whose thought and writings guided the creation of the Center for Sustainable Justice. She parents and sometimes pastors in Minneapolis, MN. She is an alumna of Earlham College, Yale Divinity School, and the United Theological School of the Twin Cities.

Website: <http://www.lyndaleucc.org/justice/>

Bio (2017): Lynn Young

Lynn Young is a Two Spirit person of Lakota heritage who identifies spiritually as a Native American Traditionalist / Christian. Ze finds engagement and fulfillment in many traditions - including Christian, Buddhist, and Earth-Based traditions. Lynn is pursuing a Masters of Divinity at Chicago Theological Seminary with a focus in LGBTQ studies. Lynn is passionate about social change, justice and mercy, Earth connectedness, and the spirituality of drumming. Ze is energized by spiritually infused social justice work; work at the intersections of culture, identity, spirituality, and active engagement. Lynn is a national trainer for the United Church of Christ (UCC) Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing (Justice LED) program, which offers training, leadership skills and support to local churches and UCC members who seek tangible ways to move our world towards justice. Lynn maintains spiritual balance through meditation, ritual and worship, and through the blessed connection with other embodied spirits, and by drumming whenever possible.

- **Pronouns: Ze / Zir / Zirs**

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Bio (2017)

Beth Zemsky leads a consulting practice for inter-cultural organizational development. She begins many slide presentations with the catchphrase: “Change is inevitable. Transformation is optional.”

bethzemsky.com

Podcast: The Beth Zemsky Podcast

THE NEW Q DESIRE

ANTHOLOGY OF INTERSECTIONAL WRITING BY LGBTQ+ FAITH LEADERS

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