

FREE PRESS

The homecoming issue



Hey, you!

Thanks for picking up the homecoming issue. If this is your first time reading Free Press, we're glad you're finally here.

We picked this theme to capture the beauty of transition, whether that be coming out, returning home, or getting comfortable in your own skin. As you flip through this magazine, you'll find stories, poems, and art that make each of us feel a little less alone.

Thank you to the writers and creators who let us into their worlds. Every piece of this magazine has your identity running through it, and we couldn't have done any of this without you.

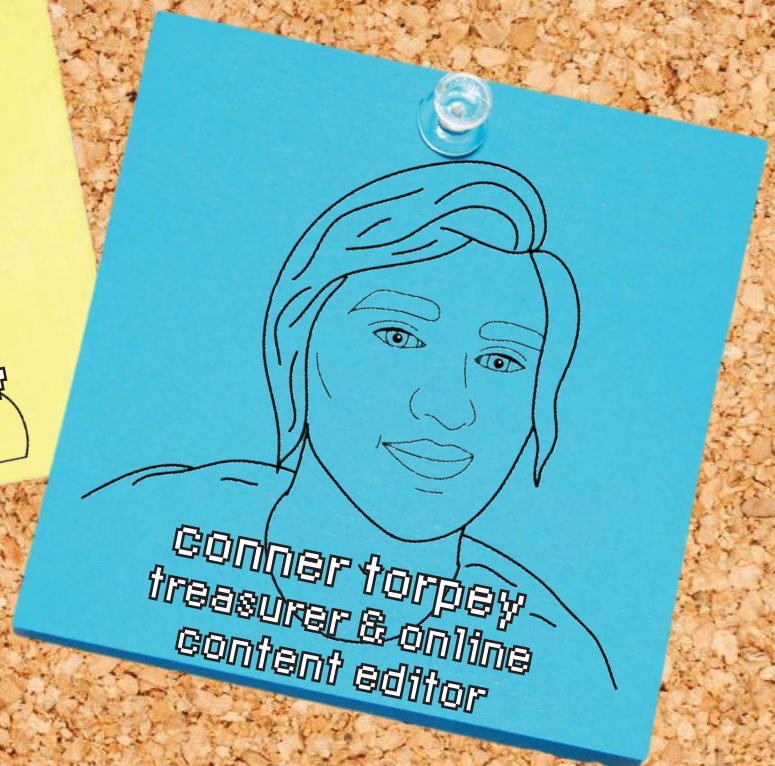
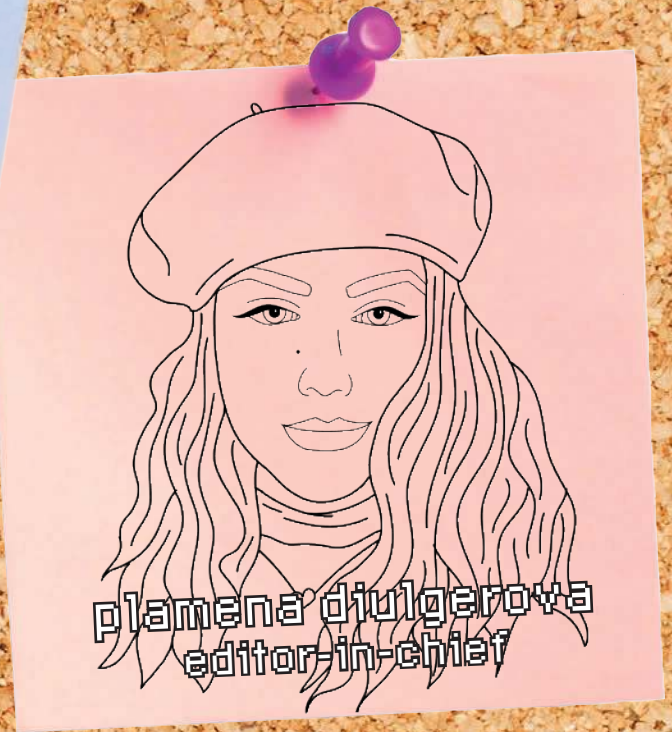
Also, thank you to our wonderful E-board. From the illustrations, to the layout, to the shit posting on Twitter, you made the whole process as fun as the finished product.

So we hope that you find a little bit of yourself in this magazine, and we hope that you can leave a little behind for the next person.

And hey - welcome home.

XOXO, Julia and Plamena

meet the e-board





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Sharp Objects & Tethal Ladies

by Elizabeth Short

Trigger warning for mentions of self-harm, violence, and alcoholism


HBO's adaptation of Gillian Flynn's novel *Sharp Objects* was one of the most dark, shocking, and suspense-filled shows I've seen in a long time, and I was on the edge of my seat for all eight episodes. The show centers around Camille Preaker, a reporter who is sent back to her hometown to report on the brutal murder of a young girl and the disappearance of another. As the second girl is found murdered with her teeth pulled — a replica of the first murder — Camille is forced to confront the darkness lurking within her small hometown. Simultaneously, she must deal with her personal trauma, centered around the death of her younger sister, Marian, during their childhood. The characters in *Wind Gap* conceal a lot behind their polished appearances, and the three main characters — Camille, her mother Adora, and her half-sister Amma — are the ones with the most to hide.

Adora, the matriarch of the family, is prim, polished, and perfect in what appears to be every sense of the word. But her flawless facade hides a unique kind of mystery. Flynn uses Adora, in particular, to explore some qualities we often regard as feminine: vanity, beauty, and deception. Adora is frequently seen as heartless, and she's never hiding her disdain for Camille. At first her behavior seems to stem from shallowness, but her tendencies slowly turn into something darker and more erratic as the series closes. Adora isn't just vain—she's a narcissist, with the worst of it affecting her family.

Camille is the lens through which we see the hidden side of these women. She herself has a deeply troubled past, scarred by trauma and self-harm. However, these plot points are not something to be fixed; they are a part of the story. She's not a poor damsel-in-distress that is waiting for an unseen man, or her mother's love, to magically fix her. While Camille no longer hurts herself physically, she's not exactly coping healthily. She struggles with a deep longing for familial love, coming to terms with her past, and being a true investigative journalist — even if it's her family that needs to be investigated.

Amma is the most difficult character to decipher. It's easy to tell something about her is off, but the exact details remain buried beneath her surface. She is a seemingly perfect, well-behaved, yet manipulative girl in front of Adora, but pops pills, parties, and skates the streets of *Wind Gap* at night. While she loves Adora, she quickly attaches herself to Camille, which instantly causes a rift within the family.

Flynn's female characters are beyond our usual scope of typical villains, each with their own problems and attributes. They aren't over-the-top, cartoon-like villains. They're all beautiful women who could have you fooled in a heartbeat, all while using those "feminine attributes" that are easily dismissed. Adora's southern hospitality and smile give her the perfect opportunity to slip poison in your tea. Camille, on the other hand, will take you for a drink at a seedy bar to thoroughly study your every move. And Amma can charm your will with a smile, all while she and her friends steal the drugs from your medicine cabinet. We all have darker natures, these ladies are just the best at utilizing it.



this is my BOYHOOD:

a piping-hot take on
coming-of-age films

by deirdre delasho

Richard Linklater's 2014 film *Boyhood* is a classic coming of age film that tells the story of a boy's childhood and adolescence, from age 6 to 18, as the actors themselves actually age.

Such an ambitious, twelve-year project must have won many, many Academy Awards, right? Well, wrong! *Boyhood* is actually really, really boring, and not that great! In fact, when I first watched it, this was the review I wrote: "Why did I have to sit through 2 hours and 45 minutes of this kid's boyhood? I'm literally living my own boyhood every day. And mine is actually better because it doesn't take place in Texas."

In contrast, here's my review after I saw *Lady Bird* for the first time: "I feel so warm and happy after watching this. I also went to Catholic school and hated it, I also have awful taste in men, etc."

Comparing my feelings about these two films made me ask myself, what do I look for in a coming of age film? The concept for the genre is simple: that we watch a character grow up, and maybe become an adult in the end. Here are some of my favorite coming of age films:

THE VIRGIN SUICIDES

CLUELESS RAW

MOONLIGHT

THE FRANCES
400 Blows HA

Lady Bird

JENNIFER'S
BODY

This made me wonder: does a coming of age film have to be relatable to be enjoyable?

Lady Bird is one of my favorite films ever. I see so much of myself in her character and throughout the film. But I also love *Moonlight*, which is about a gay black man's coming of age. While I can't relate to the exact experience of the characters in *Moonlight*, I can relate to their feelings throughout the film.

This also falls into the filmmaker's hands. *Lady Bird* and *Moonlight* are each very different experiences for me, yet I love and enjoy both equally. Any coming of age film can make a very specific experience feel universal, yet still intimate. Not everyone has gone to Catholic school and broken their arm by jumping out of a moving car, but the way that Gerwig presents *Lady Bird*'s emotional responses to these experiences is our way in — it's how we connect to something that we've never actually been through. Barry Jenkins does the same with Chiron in *Moonlight*, and it is truly what makes these films stand out in the genre.

The way that filmmakers immerse us into a character's emotions and rationale is, to me, what makes a GOOD coming of age film. It doesn't have to depict the so-called "universal" (read: white, cis, hetero, middle-class) experience in order to be well-received by a wide audience.

This is why *Boyhood* just doesn't work. The story it tells feels bland and faceless, as if you could have placed any other characters in the script and it would have been the same movie. Because it relies too heavily on a gimmick, characterization suffers, and at the end of the day, a coming of age film is only as strong as its characters.

MUSIC TO WAKE YOU UP

by sarah morea

8am classes are rough. At best, you're awake enough to question all the life choices that brought you to this point. At worst, you're a coffee-guzzling zombie who can barely remember how you got to class let alone what's being taught. My solution? Some kickass music that's bound to get you out of bed!

"Bury Me Face Down" by Grandson

We all need the kind of dark, Don't Fuck With Me™ energy that this song exudes from the very first beat.

"Burn the House Down" by AJR

Done with people's shit? This upbeat song is for you! You can't deny the sudden surge of energy you feel when someone hits those crisp trumpet notes, amiright?

"High Hopes" by Panic! At the Disco

What's more inspirational than a world-famous musician singing about his start as a kid with a dream? Answer: nothing. So get your daily dose of the American dream in the morning and listen to this.

"I Don't Give A..." by Missio

Let's face it, if you woke up before 8am for class you're definitely not in a good mood. You didn't get enough sleep, you haven't eaten breakfast (coffee doesn't count), and no matter how good your professor is, you're still gonna blame them for having class at such an ungodly hour. Channel that pissed-off energy through this

"Raise Hell" by Dorothy

I found this while scrolling through Spotify's "Southern Gothic" playlist. I have no idea what that means, but by god this is it. You'll realize you're walking to the beat of this song halfway through and instantly feel as if you're in your own music video.

"R.I.P. 2 My Youth" by The Neighbourhood

Here's a chill one for those rainy, gray mornings that are perfect for anything other than going to class. So plug in and lament for your youth as you steel yourself for the day ahead.

"No Glory (feat. M.I.M.E & Drama B)" by Skan & Krale

You know what badass people do? They go to class. Even if it's a torrential downpour outside and you forgot an umbrella, or your body is crying to go back to bed. Guess what? Sleep is for the weak, and you are anything but weak. So turn the volume up and get to class like the legend you are.

"Warrior" by SATE

Honestly if this song doesn't get your blood pumping, I don't know how to help you. You're a lost cause, just go back to sleep.

"I'm Gonna Do My Thing" by Royal Deluxe

This is the ultimate screw-you-I'm-awesome song, and a playlist to get you in the headspace to get shit done would be incomplete without it.

"do re mi" by Blackbear

This song will be stuck in your head all day, sorry-not-sorry. Imagine you're singing it to those professors that have even less of their shit together than you. It's cathartic, believe me.

When most people think of disco, our imagination is often limited to the style immortalized in tacky costumes at Party City and the funky music gracing the lipsync stage of RuPaul's Drag Race. Sequin bell-bottom jumpsuits and 8-inch platform shoes are just some of the images that have been burned into our collective cultural brain. But it's important that we look back on what was one of the most progressive and inclusive scenes in the 20th century, a movement that empowered queer people and people of color — especially women.

The time before disco was ripe with political tension and revolutionary uprising. The 60s were brimming with counterculture iconography — flower-power hippies and reefer-mad beatniks — that generally supported the civil rights movements going on at the time, but also often represented the white, straight, and male parts of society. People of color were still fighting for basic human rights, gay bars were illegal, and women were generally treated like shit.

Queer people of color had to create their own place in society, and the community began to flourish in the nightclubs of Greenwich Village. What started as a creative outlet for the LGBTQ community and people of color morphed into the bat-shit-crazy dance culture we know today. Disco came barreling through the pop culture of the 70s and into extravagant clubs like Studio 54, an infamous venue where celebrities and artists alike (think Andy Warhol and Grace Jones) threw opulent parties with the wealthy fashionistas of New York. Quaaludes and cocaine, garbage cans full of glitter, an entire fucking sex dungeon and overall blissful debauchery blossomed under the dazzling strobe lights in a hive of scum and villainy.

Simultaneously, disco was thriving in the rugged streets of downtown Manhattan, and clubs like Paradise Garage hosted a fabulosity that was grittier than their upper class Studio 54-esque rivals. Their grit was crucial in uniting those with no other place in society, allowing them to find their place in the mainstream social scene. Parrots flew around the dance floor and gay people of color freely danced together to ear-splitting funky beats.

All of that sounds great to us, but it definitely didn't sit well with the white dudes who were tired of their favorite rock 'n roll radio stations getting overrun by black men in sparkly pants. The disco revolution sparked outrage and caught a lot of negative attention, forming a grudge that's still around in pop culture today.

The aftershocks of the disco movement have affected modern music, dance, and fashion in more ways than people think. The groovy beats that revolu-

THE DISCO DAYS

BY ALLISON MUSANTE



"What started as a creative outlet for the LGBTQ community and people of color morphed into the bat-shit-crazy dance culture we know today."

tionized this era carried on into early and modern hip-hop, R&B, and neo-soul. Some would even argue that without disco, modern music wouldn't sound anything like it does at the moment, influencing the most vibrant bubblegum pop to white Soundcloud rappers' desperate mix-tapes. The music industry itself changed drastically because of this era, with Billboard's Top 100 switching its platform to include the most played club hits instead of radio hits.

Most importantly, this movement made a statement that LGBTQ people of color had a place on the stage, and deserved platforms in all areas. Even though the 80s came by and seemingly took many steps back in terms of progress (Reaganomics, the War On Drugs, and the violently homophobic and transphobic response to the AIDS crisis), the underprivileged communities at the heart of disco continued to create art and survive in hostile environments with their strength.

So here's a playlist of both classic disco hits and modern tunes that are clearly influenced by the movement that came before them:

1. Diana Ross: The Boss
2. Sister Sledge: He's the Greatest Dancer
3. Migos & Earth, Wind & Fire Remix: Bad n Groovy
4. Sylvester: You Make Me Feel
5. Scissor Sisters: I Don't Feel Like Dancing
6. Donna Summer: Hot Stuff
7. Janelle Monae: We Were Rock & Roll



by marina **out of place**
stern

"Wait, what are you?"

"I would've guessed you were..."

"Woah, really? You don't look it."

I am half white and half Taiwanese. On paper it seems simple enough. But without the distinct features that mark Asian heritage, or the skin that allows me the golden ticket of white privilege, I'm lost in no man's land. With a foot on each side of the border, I never truly belong to either world.

Sometimes I'm seen as both, but more often I'm seen as neither. I'm incomplete. I'm not really Asian, but I'm not really white either. I'm too dark to be white, and too wide eyed to be Asian. More often I'm Hispanic, Indian, Hawaiian, and so many other guesses. I'm questioned so often that the voice in my head sometimes whispers if only I was, it'd be so much easier to play the part.

But my identity is not something to guess at and question like a game. Curiosity is not harmful but assumptions add up like mosquito bites; one or two are an annoyance, but together they become unbearable. Enough bites become a collective discomfort that you try to scratch at, but no level of scratching will ever alleviate the frustration.

Assumptions create expectations. It's led me, at times, to avoid groups that celebrate my heritage. The constant questioning of who I am creates a sense that I'm lesser — that I don't belong. Simply walking around with one of my parents can feel unnatural. Confused individuals have walked up to me, shooting rapid fire Spanish my way, asking for directions or for some sort of help. But they're answered with a blank stare and confusion. Embarrassed and flustered, I redirect them elsewhere. I'm forced to feel guilty, as if I've produced some sort of false advertising. Like a con artist, I trick these people into thinking I'm alike, then I'm left feeling as if I've lost something once I've been found out.

So what's the solution? There's no right answer. And that's ok.

People will always be curious, and this curiosity can oftentimes come across negatively. No one can ever truly understand, but they can try. The best you can do is surround yourself with open mindedness. Find people who try to appreciate you and celebrate who you are as an individual, and through their acceptance you may just find it in you to accept yourself.

It's ok to be part of both worlds. It's not a choice that anyone can make for you, and it's not a choice you have to make for yourself. You don't owe anyone an explanation. It takes courage and a whole lot of effort to put aside ethnic and societal expectations. But, it's alright to be a part of everything at the level that you choose, not the level that others expect of you.

We each have our own experiences and define our own identities, and no amount of questioning or assumptions can change that.

my biracial identity

by danielle rosenkilde

My mom and I unload the cart of groceries onto the conveyor belt. My favorite juice, strawberries, pasta, sausage, and then a 20lb bag of basmati rice, curry powder, and tomato paste. The cashier, in his habitual manner, takes a divider from his side of the conveyor belt and places it directly in front of my mother's place on line, dividing her from me.

This divider — though it's just a simple piece of plastic — was a physical reminder that to the outside world we are viewed as separate. The cashier saw a small brown woman with a different accent, and a light skinned "white talking" girl. My identity was compartmentalized like a pile of groceries.

This wasn't the first or last time my identity was called out in the public eye. On the walk home from the subway one night, I was catcalled for "carrying yourself like a beautiful woman of color." The fetishization of mixed-race people, and even mixed-race children, is something I've seen far too often as a biracial girl. I've overheard my peers planning out which race they're looking to eventually marry, in hopes of creating the perfect "blend" of a child, like humans can be reduced to chocolate and vanilla swirls of soft serve.

When I talk to others about my ethnicity, it's most usually followed by, "What a beautiful mix!" or, "That's unusual, I've never heard of that mix before!" as though my parents consciously decided, "Hey! Let's bring a child into this world with the sole purpose of making her a spectacle no

one has seen before." But the reality is that mixed-race people usually don't match the fetishized image that society has forced us to live within. Most of us don't have perfect curls of light brown hair, or rich caramel skin, or colored eyes, or freckles. So if you didn't know, we don't all look like Zendaya.

Most of us don't fit into stereotypes. I happen to skew to one side, and look a little more like one of parent than the other. I grew up with white peers who decorated their faces with Bindis at Coachella and wore distressed t-shirts from Urban Outfitters with sacred images of Ganesh on it. Simultaneously, these same peers made fun of accents they heard on the street and made jokes about deli workers smelling like curry. Even though I ate curry every night for dinner, and grew up with a shrine to the Hindu Gods and Goddess in my house, I felt obligated to smile when these people complimented my tan skin and thick hair.

As I've grown, I've learned more about my own two identities. Being half Guyanese helps me relate to an even broader spectrum of people - West Indian, Caribbean, and Desi people to name just a few. I'm proud to teach my friends to do henna and sing Bollywood songs in an appreciative way. The pride I have has grown as I've learned more about my mixed identity, and I've become self-appreciative being fully immersed in a mix of my heritage.



stomaching my brown-ness

by nikita narsingh

Have you ever anxiously looked down at your food because you didn't know how to explain it to other people?

It's not a common struggle, but I got acquainted with it early on in my life. Being a West-Indian girl in a primarily white neighborhood, eating ethnic food became weird for me once I was assigned my first food journal project in the first grade. I came into class all excited because my mom had made my favorite, duck curry and roti, but I soon realized that my dinner was incredibly different than everyone else's. When "duck curry and roti" rolled off my tongue, I was left with a bad taste in my mouth. I was bombarded with questions and saw question marks practically drawn on my peers' faces. Frantically, I started dumbing down the concept of eating roti, which, thinking about now, leaves me feeling incredulous. What a concept that is—my own dinner had just become foreign in a matter of seconds because other people didn't understand it.

My teacher explained that roti is "kind of like pita bread" (roti is nothing like pita bread, by the way), trying to relate it to her experience so that everyone else would understand. I sat and nodded along, feeling extremely uncomfortable and defeated. I spent my childhood making my own culture palatable for other people instead of learning more about it and letting it shine. I still constantly find myself laboring to make my culture easier to understand for everyone else.

I'm not saying everyone needs to understand all the obscure terms that come with my brown-ness. Growing up in Mount Sinai, NY, I know it's unfair to expect that. But I shouldn't have had to make my existence palatable at such a young age for other people to stomach it. By the time I reached middle school — a phase that sucks anyway — I walked around feeling ashamed and out of place because my culture didn't resonate with everyone else's. I couldn't feel comfortable in my own skin because I was reminded every day that I was different through minuscule moments — like eating rice for lunch while my friends had peanut butter and jelly. These small cultural nuances made me feel like I stuck out like a sore thumb.

Something as minor as the food journal incident caused an internal struggle with my identity that persisted until my first full month at Binghamton University.

I faced an uphill battle every day attempting to be comfortable with my culture and myself, until I had a super cheesy revelation that college really is all about learning who you want to be as a person. It's about building your ultimate self and defining your own parameters of identity. I realized I couldn't be the best version of myself if I wasn't comfortable with every part of me. Was I really going to spend the next four years hiding the fact that my mom sends me foods that fill rooms with strong aromas of spices? Was I going to keep pretending that I didn't have a middle name because I was too embarrassed to explain the real pronunciation?

My metamorphosis into my peak brown self began when I met the Gujarati boy who lived across the hall from me freshman year. The first thing he said to me was that he knew I was "brown like him" because he read my last name on the door tag. The rest was history. He introduced me to an Indian friend of his and the three of us instantly bonded over how we were raised, how similar our family dynamics were, and over Bollywood movies and music that we loved but never talked about with anyone besides our families.

My culture finally resonated with others and I felt understood on a different level.

It was strange listening to an old Bollywood track with my friends and hearing them talk about how their grandparents used to play that on repeat back home, but it was a good sort of strange. The other day I sat in their room and ate dhal that was sent up by their parents, and realized how crazy it was to have that experience with friends, and not relatives, for the first time. I now find myself using vernacular that my parents use on a daily basis and bopping out to Bollywood soundtracks on full blast in the shower.

So, you could say I'm at the peak of my brown-ness. It's refreshing to finally not be "the other" — I just exist as me. College let me surround myself with people who understand some of the most important parts of me, which allows me to grow alongside them and feel unashamed. Stumbling across the right people allowed me to change how I view myself and my culture and helped me realize that a physical transition into a new environment catalyzed an emotional one. Learn to appreciate yourself, find people who help you grow, and understand that what makes you stand out can also help you feel included.

"I spent my childhood making my own culture palatable for other people..."



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it doesn't have to by ellie casterline be a horror story

My name is Ellie. I want to share my story because it isn't a horror story.

As a baby gay, I had only heard the terrifying tales of coming out to parents and being disowned, or sent away, or kicked out. These are the stories that shut me up; not the Catholic sermons, or the the Christians who stan Leviticus. It was everyone else, my fellow LGBTQ+ members, that specifically preached about how being gay was hard, and I even heard from a few of them that sometimes it isn't worth coming out. Despite not being from a religious family, I was scared because everyone told me I should be. But times are changing, and nothing is cooler than being gay.

I fell in love with a girl, she fell in love with me.

After we made our feelings official, we contemplated for months what to do. We wanted to be normal but we knew that in a such a small conservative town, that wasn't an option. All I knew was that I loved her and I wanted to be with her.

One day, I saw that my doctor was wearing a ring. I complimented it and she said that her girlfriend gave it to her. After my appointment I was in the car with my mom.

"Want to know something funny?"

I said to break a lull.

"Yeah, sure."

"My counselor has a girlfriend."

"Oh, that's cool," my mom said, calmly looking at me in the rear view mirror, presumably wondering if I was going to tell her what she knew was coming.

"And so do I," I said, feeling my body relax from releasing a huge secret.

My mom was so proud of me. She grinned at me because she already knew, but wanted to wait for me to tell her. I had her tell my dad because I was scared, and after he found out he told me to never be scared to tell anyone, especially him. He told me that he loved me, and he was proud, too.

I told my older brother in the front seat of his pickup truck a couple months later and he said "yeah, I know." He said that it's obvious when two people like each other, so it wasn't too much of a surprise. He was also really excited that he could make gay jokes now and follow up with "it's fine, my sister's a lesbian" (it's okay, he was kidding).

I love my story, and it makes me smile thinking about how lucky I am. I worry that these types of things aren't said because people don't want to brag about how much their parents accept them, but it's not bragging — it's just sharing your story, and everyone has one. Horror stories do happen — they are still happening — but they don't define your present, your future or your happy ending.

When you share your story, you can be free. Now is the time to come out and be celebrated. Come out to anyone who makes you feel comfortable — your Binghamton family, your real family, or anyone who loves you. Be gay and feel it in your bones. Try to love your story and accept the setbacks because feeling comfortable with yourself isn't a natural state; it's a goal.

*"I fell in love
with a girl,
she fell in love
with me."*

Finding my peace of mind

by anna mello

After graduating from high school, one of my friends cut off ten inches of her hair, while another got a tiger themed tattoo sleeve. For them, these moments of reinvention felt refreshing and optimistic. But watching everyone else transform made me apprehensive about becoming a college student. This period of self-discovery seemed daunting to me as my senior year of high school came to an end. As someone who has Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), this idea of a blank slate seemed impossible. How do I reinvent myself when I am too afraid to?

It wasn't all bad — I felt liberated after getting rid of the uniform I wore for the past four years at the all-girls Catholic school I attended. I viewed it as a symbol of claiming my new identity as a college student and leaving my high school self in the past. But over the summer, as I was scouring the Target website for dorm room items, I felt time stop, and I froze.

I realized that I was truly about to be living on my own. The routine that I had grown accustomed to for the past four years was out the window. I no longer needed to wear a green plaid skirt every day or wake up at 5:45 every morning. It was about to be my first time away from my family, my close friends, and my therapist for an extended period of time.

My mind ran at a million miles per minute. How would I figure out my future career path, pursue new passions, make new friends, and find my place in the world when all I could think about were the unfamiliar

people I would have to associate with and the long list of responsibilities coming my way? How could I do all of this while trying to maintain mental wellness?

I figured that I could find solace in a simple Google search: “how to deal with anxiety as a college student.” Most of the search results consisted of blog posts about time management and tools you can implement to prevent homework from piling up.

But anxiety disorders are far more complex than the stress related to studying. The constant feeling I had — one of losing control — could not be pinpointed to one specific reason, which has been the case for most of my teenage years.

Although it can feel intimidating to reach out and seek help, it is the best advice that I can give to anybody. College is a high-stress environment and it is important to not spread yourself thin. Dealing with GAD hasn't been an easy journey, but it has been easier for me to handle it with someone by my side. After talking to a member of the Mental Health Outreach Peer Educators while they were tabling, I was able to find comfort in knowing that there are resources on campus that could help make my college transition easier. Though it's easier said than done, the best decision I've made has been to stop attaching anxiety to myself. With help and support, I've learned that it is completely normal to be uncomfortable in new places. More importantly, I've recognized the importance of coping with my anxiety rather than dismissing it.

How Catholicism By Elizabeth Short made me lose my faith

To say I've had a complicated relationship with both God and the Catholic Church is an understatement. I've always presented myself as someone who believes in a higher power, but not necessarily the way they teach you in Sunday school. My mother and father, despite being raised by some of the most religious people you could meet, aren't particularly faith-filled. But I was still baptized, and I went on to Sunday school to receive Holy Communion. This might be part of the reason why the one word I continually associate with Catholicism is hypocrisy.

My grandmother on my mom's side was a devoutly religious woman, but she harshly abused my mother from a very young age. It's hard to source blame in that instance, as my grandmother survived the concentration camps in WWII. It's hard to adjust my perspective; to go from seeing her as this kooky, friendly grandmother who let me count the pierogis she would make for Christmas, to seeing the way she treated my mother. This shift forced me to take a look at my family's personal history with trauma. My father's mother was a bit more traditionally "holier than thou." It wasn't until she briefly lived with us that I understood the extent of both her alcoholism and narcissism. Memories of what that side of the family was like

began to resurface for my father, my sister, and I. My father remembered what it felt like to be not-so-subtly reminded that he was the least favorite of 11 children. I remember being the only grandchild my age who came to grandma's for Christmas and didn't get a Christmas present.

I thought it would take a long hard look on my part to see through the veil of some of my family members; it didn't. Over 30 cousins, and there's very few I still speak to. It hurt to see friends have aunts pick them up from school, or to watch friends have their cousins over to play. Nonetheless, my small family unit was made all the better for it. We may put the "fun" in "dysfunctional," but I'd like to think we're still pretty cool.

Due to the less than satisfactory public school system in my area, I transferred to Catholic grammar school after the 4th grade. I was uneasy around the Catholic school parents. Even then I felt like an outsider: public school, lower-middle class white trash. None of this was ever said directly to my face, but then again, with Catholicism, it never really is.

In light of the recent scandals, in which hundreds of children in Pennsylvania were both physically and sexually abused by priests, I've been reminded of the darker nature of this faith. It seems like just

when I find some footing with God, it's knocked out from under me. While these are horrific events were mercilessly covered up at the expense of protecting these victims, I know that it's also the little things that make people and institutions the way they are. In my school, outspoken girls like my friends and I were the talk among the parents, while the actions of their sons never entered their minds. In 5th grade, a classmate said something vaguely threatening to me because he didn't like that I argued directly with him to get his shit off my desk, and my mother was the only parent who cared. In retrospect, the threat wasn't exactly vague: he said he wanted to hit me with a baseball bat. I wasn't perfect either — I played too rough, I talked a lot, and often too loud, but for some reason, I was the first to get in trouble. As a smart girl, I was always expected to behave better, and for some reason my intellect and femininity meant that I had to be more mature, less combative, and keep my mouth shut more often. When the boys snapped my bra straps in gym class, I wasn't supposed to yell at them. Because I couldn't openly fight back, I made sure to play a bit rougher during games to make sure they knew I wouldn't let them off the hook so easy.

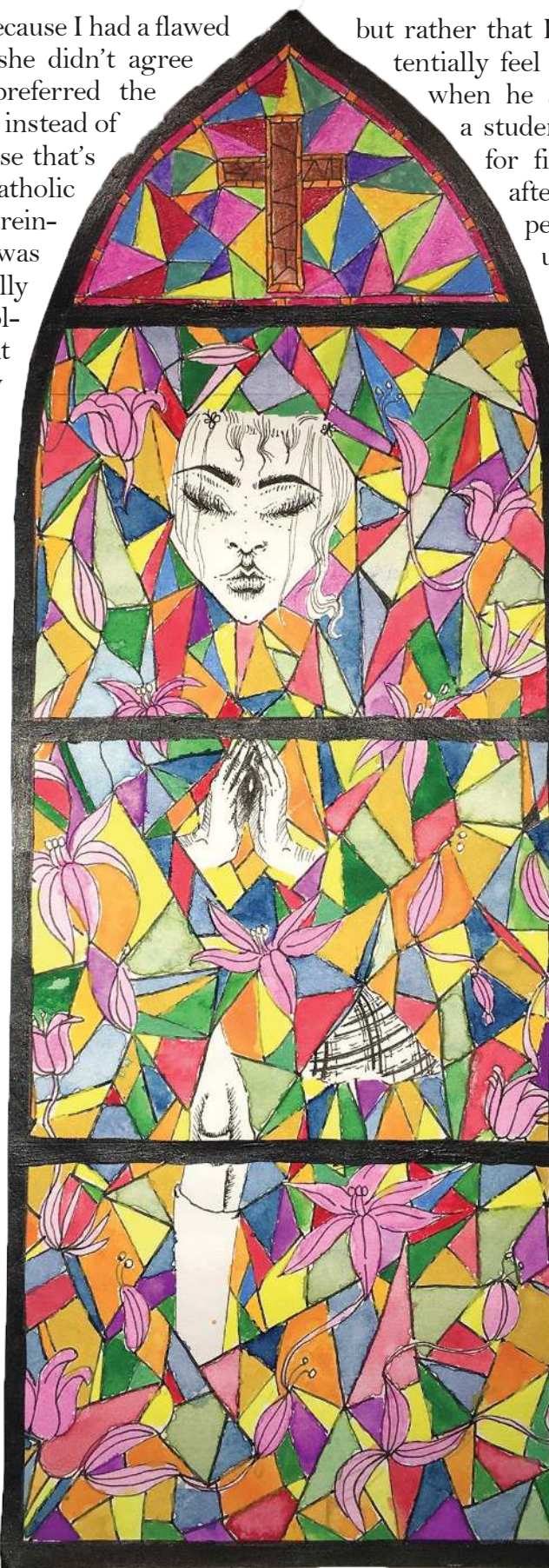
I remember when a teacher in high school even took

points off an essay, not because I had a flawed argument, but because she didn't agree with my stance. She preferred the term "Merry Christmas" instead of "Happy Holidays," because that's the real issue that the Catholic church is facing. This reinforced a message that was broadcast subliminally throughout my schooling: God is love, but that love is conditional. By the end of high school, I had learned to pick my battles: I didn't feel like defending gay marriage to a teacher who didn't care, and I wasn't in the mood to try to explain some semblance of feminism to male classmates who tuned me out the second I opened my mouth. God and I grew further apart from each other. At this point, our relationship is more of an awkward nod to someone you once knew on the street — assuming He still wants to acknowledge me. Maybe I prefer the ideas of God and spirituality, just not the execution of them in person.

I suppose it's worth saying that I have had positive experiences with Catholicism and its members. The priest from my middle school was a nice guy. He was young, friendly, and managed to make me feel like I wasn't a sinful burden,

but rather that I was smart, and could potentially feel close to God. I remember when he and our principal allowed a student who had left the school for financial reasons to return after her mother passed unexpectedly, forgoing her tuition until her family could pay for it. The faculty and clergy at my sister's Catholic grammar school did the same for her when my father had a cerebral aneurysm nearly a decade before I was born, and that was more help than my family got from most. I am eternally grateful for these positive experiences, but they seem more like outliers to me than the norm. I still can't shake the hypocrisy that lurks in the back of my mind. God is supposed to love all his children, but the most devout Catholics were some of the most racist, sexist, and homophobic people I'd ever known.

Right now, I mostly feel sad for the little girl in her plaid jumper and knee highs who once prayed so fervently for a sign that God was listening, who silently cried out for comfort in this faith, who is now left in dismay. If it is the God of Abraham, Mohammed, and Jesus who walks with me when I depart, I will only say one thing in defense of myself for His judgement: I tried.



buzzcut season

by *belena ojarowsky*
& *faith medina*

Q: Why did you cut your hair?

Faith: Being bisexual, I still fall under the unfortunate social umbrella of people who strive to be conventionally attractive for men. Since middle school, I have been in a cycle of short and long hair. Each time I grow my hair out, I feel that I'll align with society's expectations of the feminine presentation and that people will generally like me more. However, I inevitably become impulsive once again and cut it all off. This time, I went from shoulder length, bright red hair to the shortest I've ever gone — basically a seven-year-old boy cut to put it bluntly. After NYC Pride, I realized I was tired of pretending to love long hair and tired of forcing myself to be 'presentable' for an opinion I didn't even really care about — the cis male opinion. I couldn't feel like 'me' until I cut it all off again. There are small moments where I long to have my hair back, solely for the the security of it.

Helena: In high school my haircut was some sort of lesbian alert. Everyone assumed I was the presiding gay at my #catholicschool. I grew my hair out because I felt pressured by what everyone around me looked like. Years later, after living with long blonde hair for several months, I felt the itch to buzz — a feeling that can only be remedied by buzzing! This time I was very conscious that my sexuality could be assumed, but as someone who had come to terms with her bisexuality, I was more comfortable and even excited to see this new aspect of myself.

Q: How have you adapted to this change?

Helena: Going to a mainstream, relatively large public university certainly affects how I see myself. I think there is a narrative that short-haired women are less feminine, and therefore less sexually attractive or deemed gay by straight men. I understand preference but I think this stereotype is harmful because it feeds into gender presentation stereotypes. I have had friends tell me they don't like women with short hair (well, I don't like close-mindedness, so) and I'm not sure what to do with that information. Hair is confusing. I love my long, curly, thick hair but I also love and feel great in my tight buzz. Hair emphatically is a part of my identity but also becomes a cue of categorization for others. But only I can decide how to wear my hair, no matter the comments and societal judgments.

Faith: I see others with hair just as short as mine — or even shorter — and they pull it off so well, but sometimes I feel like I can't. This is mostly due to the disconnect between my fashion sense and hair. With longer hair, I would wear more revealing clothing and lots of makeup, but now it feels out of place. I can look in the mirror and see beauty in my appearance, but when it comes to other people perceiving me the same way, I find myself unable to believe it. I may have lost the mental ability to wear my old outfits, but I've gained the confidence to be comfortable. I've also learned how to care less about what others think of me. We should feel like our true selves in our appearance, not a false image that society deems beautiful.

a beginner's guide to: crystals

by helena ojarovsky

What's that? A bird? A plane?
Actually, it's a crystal.

In the last few years, the rise of crystals has grown hot and heavy, shifting from the alternative to the mainstream. Coming out of the hippie woodwork, crystals have grabbed the attention of those seeking forms of emotional and mental relief. Crystals are believed to hold unique powers and properties that help with physical, mental and emotional healing. I'm gonna list some crystals and their qualities. Get ready.



sodalite

Nicknamed the "the harmony stone" after Harmony Korine. Its energies are self-esteem, acceptance, and trust. It helps establish the connection between the higher mind and body, allowing tensions go. With this stone, you can look inward to your strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve your goals.

blue lace agate

The truth serum! Rub it on your friends when you want their real opinion on your outfit. This can help clear your throat chakra and it can promote insightful, authentic and articulate dialogue. That public speaking fear you have? Use this to banish it.



cornelian

Nicknamed the Creative Inner Child! That creepy little kid inside of you who tells you to eat a crayon. This stone is creative and confident which motivates you to bring out your inner star. It can give you a boost of power when you are in a creativity block. Just what this article needs.

yellow jasper

This stone carries the energy of the sun! It radiates positive vibes and connects you with the earth while promoting happiness. This might be the hippest crystal; it wears elephant pants and drinks from mason jars. Its strong energies help replace anxious and depressed feelings with ones of joy and positivity.



rose quartz

The Love Magnet! The most popular and aesthetically pleasing crystal! This stone promotes all kind of love; romantic love, platonic love, self-love, and Twitter retweets. This stone will restore faith, compassion, harmony, and balance in all matters of the heart. Fuck off Tinder.

amethyst

Called the Intuitive Eye by friends (or "that purple stone" by acquaintances), this stone holds relaxing energy perfect for the end of a long day filled with long Jazzman's lines and loud coughers in lecture. It is also connected to your third eye (often shielded by a monocle), so it promotes intuition. It also encourages sound sleep, so watch out tooth fairy - your pillow is being commandeered.



aventurine

Nicknamed the Odds are in Your Favor, which seems to really be pushing it. It is said to be the luckiest crystal, gracing the spirits with a sense of optimism that makes jumping out of your comfort zone less scary. But if you take this stone bungee jumping it will probably fall out of your pocket.



Gemini

Like a prism, you re-
fract the light. Though
it may leave you feeling
scatterbrained, each facet
of your mind has merely been
casting old thoughts into new
shapes. Allow the light to reframe
the unremarkable, and know that
people will look if you show them.

Get a coleus and place it in the
window that gets the most direct
light. Drink pineapple juice and
watch the sun rise. Remember
you can't see the luminosity
if it's radiating from
within you.



Cancer

The patterns in
the sand may seem
arbitrary, but you still
believe that there is a
rhythm to each wave. It may
scare you that each grain seems
to disappear when it leaves the
collective, but you know that you
are more than a mere speck. Nothing
could ever be smaller or larger
than the world is when you recreate
it in your mind.

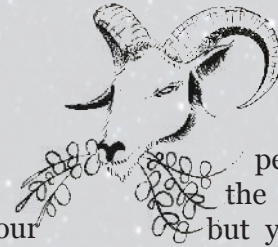
Tuck lavender into the crevices
of your bedroom. Drink aloe
juice under the light of the
full moon. Find comfort
and strength in
being alone.



Taurus

It's
good to be
grounded, but your
roots do not need to stay
in one place. Propagate your
ideas and allow others to take
you into their homes and gardens
— the right seeds will germinate
when they are ready.

Hang a spider plant for your kitchen.
Brew fresh coffee and feel the
sun rays when they cut through
the crisp air to sit on your skin.
Growth can manifest in the
strangest places when you
generate your own
warmth.



Aries

You've found
peace sitting above
the rushing water,
but you cannot wallow in
stagnation. Solitude helped
you recharge and it's finally
time to take the plunge. It may
be strikingly cold when you hit the
water. Jump anyway.

Get eucalyptus for your bathroom
and place it above the toilet.
Drink mint tea while sitting
on a windy porch. Maybe
the overcast sky is just
processing. Maybe
you are, too.



Leo

You
are covered
in blossoms but im-
patience will not help
them bloom. You may feel
restless, but you know nothing
as beautiful as you will ever be
created overnight. It's okay to shed
distractions if they're weighing you
down, and it's okay to change direc-
tions if that means the light will hit
you where you need it most.

Buy some marigolds for your
kitchen table. Make margar-
itas with a friend. Dance
and dance and dance —
motion can incite
growth.



Virgo

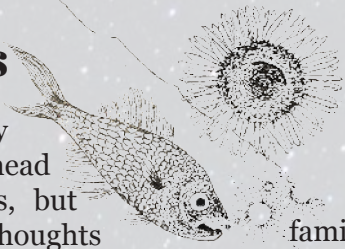
The
wind only
hurts if you try to
face it head-on. You
don't know which way
it's blowing, but you know
enough to know that you
truly don't know anything. Let
the world carry you to where you
need to be.

Pick a handful of dandelions and
let them disappear as you walk
home. Drink chamomile tea.
Remember that drifting
can be productive if
you let your mind
wander.

Pisces

People say that your head is in the clouds, but sometimes your thoughts are in a different dimension. As storms come and go try to watch the clouds change shape. Sift through your thoughts and watch the ashes spiral beneath the surface.

Put sunflowers on your counter. Drink mango nectar and bask in the twilight. The ground will absorb your energy whenever you're ready to share it.



Aquarius

You thrive in familiar places, but something within you is always craving a sonic change. Give into your impulses and take a few risks. If you set a new pulse, the world will dance on your beat.

Hang ivy from your bed frame. Pour champagne and watch the bubbles overflow. Beautiful things will happen when you let your mind spiral into uncharted spaces.



Capricorn

The universe seems to be spinning out of control, but that's only natural. You are a constant, and that should always be enough. Just remember that the stars cannot align if you're trying to put them in place.

Put chrysanthemums in your living room. Drink hot chocolate and curl up in a large armchair. You are the reason that there can be chaos within peace and peace within chaos.



Horoscopes

by julia carmel



The skies have opened up and you are ready to take your spotlight. Though friends and lovers can offer support, leave time and space for your own growth. Don't let external attention distract you from your healing.

Buy yourself a bouquet of roses. Drink a glass of wine and nestle under a fuzzy blanket. You have earned the right to stand alone, and you deserve to feel completely whole.



It can be difficult to feel everything so genuinely and so deeply, but deep pain comes with deep introspection. You understand how to address complex emotions in others and it's time to turn that expertise inwards. The rain may fall in sheets but the universe will never wash you away.

Rip a peony apart. Drink mead and let your thoughts linger in the honey. Healing doesn't come without a little hurt, but love will always be sticky and sweet.

Sagittarius

You try to cut through the fog, but what are you missing that lingers in the mist? Allow yourself to bask in one space and try to marinate in your thoughts. Clarity can manifest in the haziest places.

Fill a vase with dried hydrangeas. Drink a thermos of mulled cider and listen to the world at dusk. You have the force to make everything move, but you are also the glue that holds the ether in place.



on aging

by jason russo

I wonder if life is like a window.

*At dawn, I can see everything outside.
The wind blows and animals run the length of the
picture window.
One in particular seems to know my gaze is upon
him
As he keeps within the parameters of My view.
The dew glistens on the grass and the sun's rays
glare into my eyes
so that I must squint in order to keep seeing.
I am grateful for the tinting that helps keep the
harshness at bay.*

*Noon moves in and I am more confident in the view
outside.
I claim to be able to name all of the life outside the
window.
If I were to smash the glass and climb through,
I could survive just like the animals before me.
I mimic their movements to make mine seem more
fluid, natural.
I would never—could never--smash the glass.*

*A snake has just slithered his way through the grass
And chased away all of my animal friends.
I dance with him from behind the glass,
watching him glare inward at me.
His teeth and scales, with their flash and flare,
are appealing to me
But before long, he has moved on, and I try
and stay satisfied with the original scene.
It is still beautiful, still permanent, still loving.
Still there.
I shed a tear of gratitude and swear to never be
fooled again.*

*It is mid-afternoon when I first see
the effects of the day.
My bones ache from sitting in the chair,
My eyes tire from peering out the window.
But there is so much more to see.
So many more things to appreciate, to enjoy
Perhaps different things than I had in the morning.
Life is everywhere.*



*But soon dusk approaches and the animals settle
down
The trees seem to whisper tired sighs as they lower
their branches for the night.
The lights must be turned on in my house in order
to see a foot in front of me.
I see less and less outside the glass.
I wonder if what I saw before is still there.
Can they all exist in that impermeable blackness?
Still, I leave the glass intact despite
the hammer in my hand
That screams to break free.*

*I notice a figure in the window
who wasn't there before
Perhaps only noticeable because of the reflection in
the glass from the lights inside.
From what I can make of his outline, he is hunched
over, wrinkled.
He wears glasses and his hair is thinner than it
perhaps once was.
He holds the edges of his chair as if they were a
lifeline, a buoy for survival.*

*The light from outside is gone.
All that remains is my reflection in the glass as the
lights in my house begin to dim
Before I shakily stand, approach the window, and
shut the blinds.*

my hands (and yours)

by nikita narsingh

my heart
is in my hands
is trying to breathe
is waiting for a momentary break
is throwing itself into oncoming traffic
is debating quitting altogether
is laughing at me when i ask it to want less

my heart
is sitting and waiting
is stuck between wanting
and needing even more
is sick of being too much of one thing
and not enough of the other

my heart
is in my hands
is sitting in the passenger seat of your car after i leave
is willing to be stuffed into your back pocket
just to be close to you
is constantly idling for your voice
is always waiting for your embrace

my heart
is in my hands
is always in my hands, as it should be
even when my hands get rough
because they do
God they do

my heart
learns that patience really is a virtue
wins some days
loses others
tries to grasp that the wins are more important

my heart
is battling everyday to trust my hands
is learning to trust yours, too.



