

First Person Queer

Who we are (so far)

edited by Richard Labonté and Lawrence Schimel



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FIRST PERSON QUEER

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INTRODUCTION

We're All in Here, Somewhere

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The call for submissions for this collection of first-person narratives was specifically non-specific: we weren't seeking merely memoir, though life stories were a part of what we wanted; we weren't seeking dogmatic queer theory, though challenging analysis was anticipated; and we weren't seeking just coming-out accounts, though the "click" of self-awareness suffuses many of the submissions—as it should, since what each contributor has in common with the others is the satisfaction of a realized sexual self.

While this anthology starts with our contributors sharing their individual, intimate stories, it is grounded in the concept of a collective identity—in the reality of a polymorphous, multidimensional, self-exploratory, celebratory, and sometimes even fractious community—and the relationship each of us has with its diverse herstories, hirstories, histories—with its stories. We can't claim that the grouping of voices we've selected is definitive—these are voices from the community, but they are not *the* voice of the community. At the same time, we wanted as inclusive a representation across the gender and chronological spectrum as possible.

And we got what we wanted: wisdom and introspection and sorrow, wit and passion and intimacy. There's welcome diversity, too—and not just among the self-definition markers (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transsexual, queer, ambivalent, questioning, none of the above, all of the above, exultantly genderqueer) of the contributors.

There is a healthy diversity of cultural disagreements and differing perceptions:

Joy Parks doesn't want any of her queer peers to wed; Daniel Gawthrop is one queer who is happy to be married. Andy Quan finds more pleasure in his garden than at one more damn Mardi Gras, already; Sky Gilbert hopes to be a gay old man who never gardens. Bonnie J. Morris revels in her proud dyke life; Chong-suk Han shuns being defined solely by his homosexuality. Jeffrey Rotin is very old-school when it comes to online cruising; Mette Bach cruises Myspace for new women to "friend." Being queer is easy for R. Gay; Nalo Hopkinson really does want a write-in option for "sexual orientation." Karen Taylor fuses her lesbian S&M energy with an adherence to Judaism; David Hatfield Sparks finds that fundamentalist zealots stole his daughter's affection.

And we have a splendid diversity of shared experiences:

Jane Van Ingen, hearing impaired, Gregory Woods, after prostate surgery, and Sandra Lambert, bearing scars, have relearned how to inhabit their bodies. Shawn Syms and Christopher DiRaddo have become comfortable with their respective hefty and hairy gay boy bodies, while Sharon Bridgforth exults in the mannish womanhood of her physique. Transgender elders Kate Bornstein and Gayle Roberts have negotiated the transition from a body that once was seen as "man" and now is lived as "woman," while young 'un S. Bear Bergman went in the opposite direction; all three meet in a settled middle ground.

And to illustrate the wondrous diversity of how words and ideas matter:

Joshua Dalton, still in his teens, Arden Eli Hill, in his twenties, and D. Travers Scott, midway through his thirties, write about how they have coped with the hate-filled epithets of intolerance hurled at them. Katherine V. Forrest, lesbian author, Tim Miller, gay performance artist, and Mary M. Davies, queer femme wordsmith, chart their queer lives through the words they write and the words they perform. Josh Kilmer-Purcell and Jason Timermanis acquire wisdom

from the lives of the old aunties and queer ducks and gay heroes who are their forebears. Therese Szymanski liberates herself from constrictive labels like nerd and geek by finding others like herself.

There is also a delicious *mélange* of sexual experiences:

Stan Persky reflects on his sexual initiation, decades ago, as a horny sailor; Blaine Marchand also remembers his sexual initiation, also decades ago, with other eight-year-olds, and, at twelve, with the family priest. Simon Sheppard recalls the sexual haunts of San Francisco that link his past to his present; Achy Obejas comes upon correspondence that conjures up lost passion; and Robin Metcalfe's lust for classic chairs stirs up memories of young passion. Kirk Read is a fierce hooker when the door is slammed in his face, and David C. Findlay cherishes sex in public places. More exotically, as well as erotically, Stacey May Fowles tells why she's content to be the straight girl at the gay party, and George K. Ilesley weaves a fable about birds and sex.

And to complete the collection, Ivan E. Coyote, in "The Future of Francis," finds a hint of who we all have been, are, and will be, in the spirit of her young nephew.

No book exists in a vacuum, nor does a community. And just as our personal histories inform our present, our collective histories likewise have shaped and continue to shape us. We learn about our past, our traditions, through the stories we share with one another, no matter how we choose to tell each tale: spoken, written, in images, etc. It is crucial for us all to craft documents of our lives, both as individuals and as communities; it's our hope that *First Person Queer* serves as one such cultural document: a panoramic snapshot of queerness today.

This anthology of first-person experiences can't possibly encompass all of us, but it contains many stories in each story, myriad lives reflected in every life. We're all in here, somewhere....