

# THE SPACE BETWEEN THE STARS

AN ORAL HISTORY  
RECORD AND HOW-TO

title paraphrased from Rodney Davis

*“It’s good to know how far we’ve come, it’s good to know the work that has been done to get to the place you are now, it is good to know how we got there so then you can maybe use those things to better things that we not have thought of right now. I think that’s what this can be, that’s what this can be.*

*And that history is important.*

*And when again, queerness is not such a thing that you’re born into, you’re not passed down like these things, this archive can be the elder that you go to.”*

*— Selene Means*





## AUTHORS' NOTE

*This zine is the collaborative effort, rooted in the work of the Providence Public Library's Queer Archive and created as a final project by the students of Queering Oral Histories, an American Studies seminar taught by Professor Virginia Thomas at Brown University.*

*Oral traditions have long been used to pass knowledge and experience between generations, and have of late been harnessed by academia to create historical records and fill gaps in the academic canon. But this work should not and does not just belong to academics—at their roots, oral histories are deeply entangled in community relationships, and can be created not only for but by communities themselves.*

*Inside, we've included a step-by-step guide on how to conduct your own oral histories, which we've created based off of our class discussions, as well as our experience learning to conduct oral histories ourselves. Alongside this, you will find excerpts from the oral history interviews with several members of the Providence LGBTQ+ community. It has been an honor to help carry out the work of the Providence Public Library and their growing Queer Archive—to be able to listen to the incredible stories of community members and learn about their experience of queerness in RI. One of our narrators, Rodney Davis, wisely told me that, in order to truly appreciate the night sky, you have to acknowledge "the space in between the stars." We hope that this zine illuminates not just individual bright spots in the Providence LGBTQ+ community, but helps you explore the ties and relationships between them.*

*Much love.*



## doing an oral history considerations

### what are the roots of oral history?

Despite distinctions made by modern academics, Western oral history practices are inextricably tied to and influenced by indigenous oral historical practices.

“Like those of many other indigenous thinkers, my interpretation rejects the idea that our oral histories must conform to the form and meanings popularized by non-indigenous academics, who tend to separate oral history and tradition as if they were two distinctly different fields.”

— Dr. Nepia Mahuika, author of *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition*

### who's the “narrator?”

Throughout this zine, you'll often see the word *narrator*. The narrator is the person that you conduct an interview with. In some oral history materials, the narrator might be called the interviewee or the interview subject.

Any term chosen reflects assumptions about the role of the interviewer in relation to the community they're working with. We've chosen to call the people we work with in oral history projects *narrators* because the word indicates the collaborative nature of oral history and refers back to the oral traditions that oral history draws from.

## community and demographics

It's important to keep in mind your position in relation to the community you're learning from!

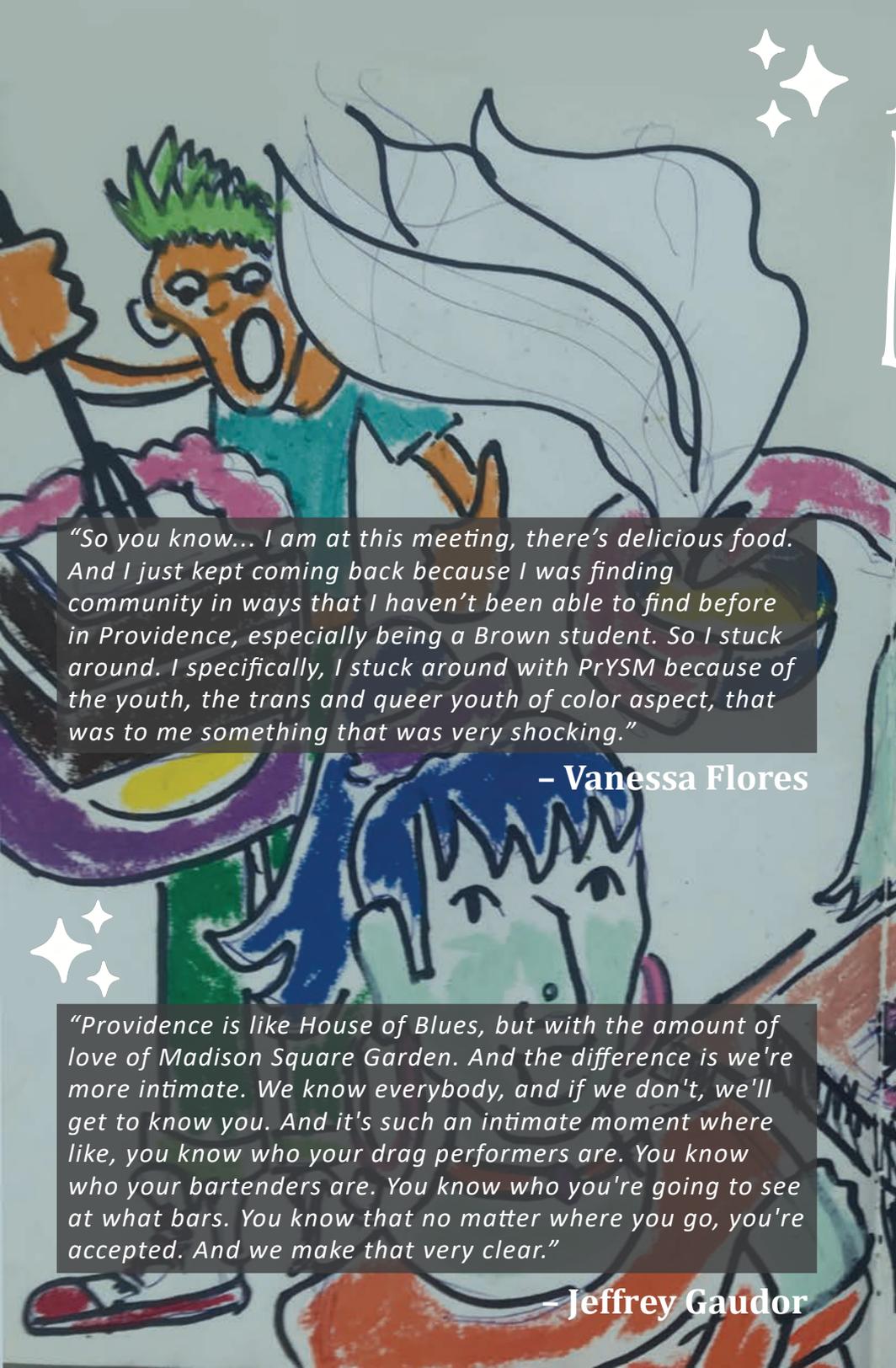
Take into consideration your race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and family background, as well as those of your narrators.

Noting differences and similarities between your lived experience and your narrators' will help you in identifying power dynamics, which must inform your approach to oral historical interviewing.

Ask yourself: are you the right person to be mediating the stories of this community? Why, or why not?

### ? other questions you should be asking yourself! ?

- \* How can you build a relationship of trust and intimacy with this community?
- \* How will your project help / give back to this community? Who is benefitting?
- \* How will you house this oral history? Who will have access?



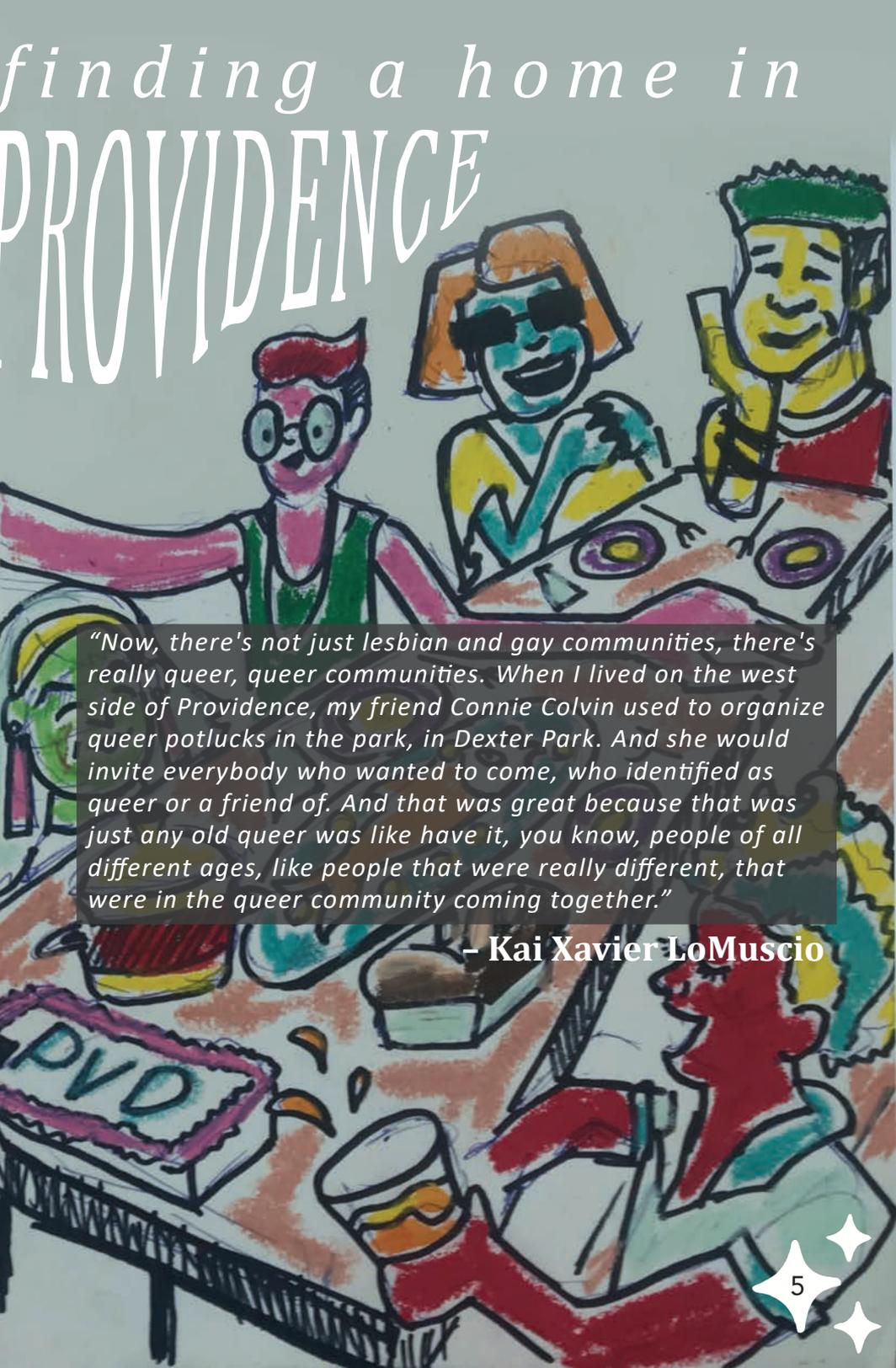
*"So you know... I am at this meeting, there's delicious food. And I just kept coming back because I was finding community in ways that I haven't been able to find before in Providence, especially being a Brown student. So I stuck around. I specifically, I stuck around with PrYSM because of the youth, the trans and queer youth of color aspect, that was to me something that was very shocking."*

**- Vanessa Flores**

*"Providence is like House of Blues, but with the amount of love of Madison Square Garden. And the difference is we're more intimate. We know everybody, and if we don't, we'll get to know you. And it's such an intimate moment where like, you know who your drag performers are. You know who your bartenders are. You know who you're going to see at what bars. You know that no matter where you go, you're accepted. And we make that very clear."*

**- Jeffrey Gaudor**

# finding a home in PROVIDENCE



*"Now, there's not just lesbian and gay communities, there's really queer, queer communities. When I lived on the west side of Providence, my friend Connie Colvin used to organize queer potlucks in the park, in Dexter Park. And she would invite everybody who wanted to come, who identified as queer or a friend of. And that was great because that was just any old queer was like have it, you know, people of all different ages, like people that were really different, that were in the queer community coming together."*

**– Kai Xavier LoMuscio**

## starting the interview process

*paperwork, equipment, and reaching out*

### consent forms

You should get a consent form, a signed agreement from your narrator stating that they:

- \* Give their consent to have their interview recorded.
- \* Give their permission for this recording to be housed and accessed publicly.

This may vary, depending on the scope of your project!

### using a phone vs. a recording device

If you have the resources to get a hold of a formal recording device, that's great! If not, that's also okay — many oral histories have been recorded simply using the interviewer's phone.

Whatever device you choose, just make sure that there's enough storage space on it for the interview, and be sure to test the audio that it records once you've set up in the interview space.

## contacting your narrator

Reach out to your narrator, preferably through some medium that doesn't put them on the spot and allows them to process and answer your request at their own pace — email, text, or letter, for example, rather than a phone call. This message should do the following:

- \* Briefly describe the project you're working on, and why you thought of the narrator in question as a participant.
- \* Discuss any other relevant information, such as compensation or lack thereof.
- \* Emphasize the fact that the narrator's participation in the project is entirely up to them!

If the narrator is interested in participating, proceed to send them the consent form (see the opposite page), as well as schedule a time to have a preliminary call, which is outlined on the next page.

# SOLIDARITY

*I came in with this very like sp  
and I thought that meant like s  
I learned quickly that there's so  
effort to take— to be a part of th*



*So what drew me to PrYSM was the fact that there was a specific space for queer trans youth of color. A specific space for us to come and talk about 'yes, your experiences are real, the harassment, the criminalization, the racism, the homophobia of this space, is all real and it's all valid. And you have a way to fighting back.' And that was something for me that I had not felt that empowered to be like 'Yeah, fuck the police!' VANESSA FLORES-MALDONADO*



*pecific mindset of what activism means,  
shouting on the streets and stuff... but as  
o much more to that and it takes some  
hat. SELENE MEANS*



“SAY IT LOUD, I'M GAY AND I'M PROUD!”

“TWO, FOUR, SIX, EIGHT, HOW DO YOU KNOW YOUR WIFE IS STRAIGHT?”

576 PUBLIC NOTICE 576  
PROCLAIM LIBERTY  
THROUGHOUT  
ALL THE LAND  
A CONGRESS OF  
PEOPLE WITH  
GAY CONCERNS  
JUNE 26 '76 - 10: AM  
576 OLD 576  
STATE HOUSE  
TH MAIN STREET  
PROVIDENCE



I want to  
people  
of who  
you're a  
cop, or  
you're a  
factory  
know, it

**BILL**

**“ONE, THREE, SEVEN, NINE,  
LESBIANS ARE MIGHTY FINE!”**

**“HEY HEY, HO HO,  
HOMOPHOBIA HAS GOT TO  
GO!”**

*o be there, not just for myself, but for other  
on the sidelines, to say, you know, be proud  
you are. You know, it doesn't matter whether  
a bank-- work at a bank, or whether you're a  
whether you're a fire person, or whether  
a school teacher, you know, whether you're a  
worker, you know, or a college student, you  
doesn't matter, you know.*

**Y MENCER ACKERLY**

## preparing for the interview

### research, the preliminary call, and questions

#### research

It's important to ask informed questions, out of respect for your narrator's time and energy.

- \* Don't be afraid to start with Google, and visit your local library. \*

*If you can learn something from a Google search, use this as a jumping-off point to ask something deeper.*

#### the preliminary call / talk

The preliminary call is a separate conversation from the interview proper. It should not be recorded.

Use this space to get to know your narrator and establish a rapport, as well as to describe what the full process of your interviewing process will look like.

In addition, give the narrator space to ask any questions about the project, the interview, or you, the interviewer, that they feel necessary to make them comfortable.

#### topics to touch on

- \* Ethos of project & how their interview will be used
- \* Any topics that the narrator doesn't want to discuss on the record
- \* Any topics that the narrator feels should be included in the arc of the interview

## draft questions

Depending on how focused your interview and project are, what these will look like will vary. Some interviews may include a holistic view of the narrator's life and childhood, while others may be focused on a particular facet of their work or identity.

Consider the goal of your project and the research you've conducted on your narrator, as well as any information that came up in your preliminary call, as you determine the scope of your questions.



### tips for writing questions



- \* Don't be afraid to do more research based on what you talked about during your pre-interview.
- \* Avoid asking questions that prompt yes-or-no answers. (Make sure your questions are open-ended.)
- \* Think about writing questions in two sentences. In the first sentence, briefly provide context. In the second sentence, ask the question.

### **example!**

*Your website mentions that you've helped plan the City Arts Festival for the last three years. Can you trace the path you took to this work?*



**DTPOG**  
**PVD**  
**Providence's First Annual**  
**POC Dyke & Trans March**  
Fri, June 14, 2019 Rally/Gathering at 5:30  
Burnside Providence RI  
We welcome Dyke and trans people to gather and march  
For more info facebook

# ANCHA SANTANA

We were wanted like, wanted And we for it POCs, color. there get it were, the ma kind o needed made t people - we w

I think they just wanted t like, Queer and Trans Marc were like no. 'It needs to and Dyke March centered ar no no, it needs to be Quee Trans POC Dyke March. Like needs to be the way that i And I remember that people really uncomfortable, and cracked me up. She's like, what! I'm making the logo! the logo.

**Amplify POC**  
**LGBTQ+Voices**

When designing an image, we wanted something that would be militant and powerful so we went with the fist, you know. We were really really pushing to be centered and about queer and trans folk of color. Like we understand that this isn't a white Dyke March, we know that, but that's not what we were looking for, that is not what we were on the market for. And so we had to really push with that. That it was to be that and like, we designed the image and made some people uncomfortable, and we just moved on from there.



to call it  
h. And we  
be Queer  
ground...' No  
r and  
that  
t goes.  
were  
Ayako  
guess  
It's on



## the interview itself

### *logistics and doing the interview*

#### logistics considerations

- \* Choose a venue that doesn't have much ambient noise, or where external parties won't interrupt your recording.
- \* Also consider your narrator's comfort — it may be best to perform the interview in a space that is comfortable and familiar to them.
- \* Try not to mess with your recorder after setting it up and checking levels, to decrease the chance disturbances in the recording.
- \* If there is a disturbance that might make some of your recording difficult to hear or process, feel free to ask your narrator to go back and repeat what they've said.



## interacting with your narrator



Ask your narrator something simple and conversational as you check the levels of your mic. This gives them time to acclimate to the recording device and to answering your questions, and may put them at ease.

Treat the interview like a conversation! Let curiosity lead you, and don't be afraid to stray from your list of questions. Let what seems important to the narrator guide the course of the interview.

Try not to ask multiple questions in a row, as this makes it difficult for the narrator to address all of them.

Try not to interrupt your narrator. If they bring up something that you want to flesh out more, it may help to write it down in your notes and wait until they're finished speaking to loop back and inquire further.

Although you may be tempted to react vocally to your narrator's responses, try not to clutter the audio of your recording. Show that you're engaged in active listening using body language.

Don't be afraid of silence. Give your narrator time to process your questions and their thoughts at their own pace. A moment of quiet can foster more fruitful insights.

If the narrator begins to show discomfort at a certain topic, let them know that it's okay to move on, or to stop the recording and take a break. The narrator's comfort should be your priority.

*"I grew up in an undocumented community that was very religious, very Christian, so of course, there wasn't any space for me to be queer... and also to be you know a youth, and be going through high school and all these things in life that come part of my identity."*

*–Vanessa Flores*

# RELIGION

*"We agreed that we were practicing Catholic abstinent same-sex life partners, for my parents. And that felt really icky, for Anthony especially, at first, but for me I'm like I love drag, and I love pretending, and I love theatre and I love performance and like I just want my parents to die like believing their fantasy that we're like all gonna be like in heaven together.... so like I--we've kind of embraced the like--we're just playfully like, instead of feeling painful about it, we're just playfully Catholic, and we're playfully willing to go to church, and we're playfully you know maybe like eat an edible and go to midnight mass, like we can picture those things in the future um and so we're just sitting in that place where we're giving our parents--my parents anyway, that fantasy."*

*–Matthew Garza*

*"He said to me, 'Would you like to go to church in the morning?' And I says, 'Church!' And I couldn't imagine that there'd be a church for people like me. ...We went up to the second floor, and he knocked on the door, and all of a sudden, this minister opened up the door and his, and he had all these vestments on, and he had a long beard and he had glasses and he had a big smile and he said, 'Welcome to Metropolitan Community Church of Providence, Rhode Island!' I couldn't believe it, you know. So I went inside, and there was always, there was probably like 35 people in there. And I started meeting people, and singing, and it was just wonderful, you know, I couldn't believe that there was a place like that. And I was so excited about it."*

*–Billy Mencer Ackerly*

*"Like there's people of all different colors that practice this kind of Buddhism, which is traditionally like an upper middle-class sort of religion, upper white, like in the United States. And so it's a little bit more diverse, or a lot more diverse, I guess, in terms of like, age and sexuality and, you know, different different colors of people and but they have an LGBTQ conference that I go to that at first, I was very, I was like, I don't need a conference to make me feel comfortable being gay, I'm already comfortable. And then I went to the conference and I was like, this is amazing. They're Buddhist and they're queer. Like, this is my home. But, you know, so so, uh, you know, I stay connected to people from that conference, but I also connected with a Buddhist group in Providence and yeah."*

*–Kai Xavier LoMuscio*

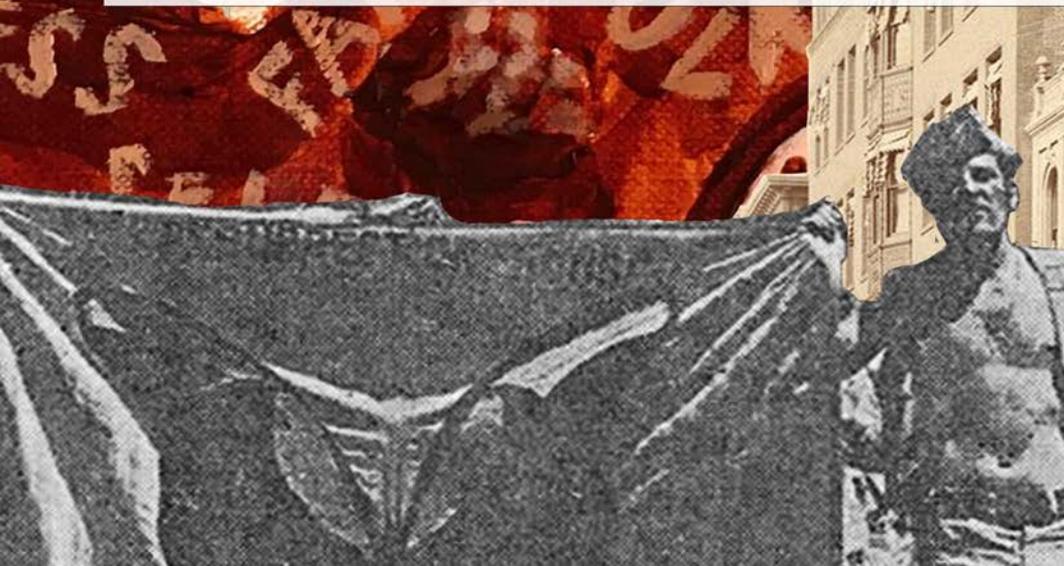
*and so I could begin to use that training and that talent and that joy of singing to become spiritually connected to people. And that, my ministry might have ended with Jehovah's Witnesses, but the ministry never really stopped."*

*–Rodney Davis*

# RODNEY

*"It's only under intense pressure a coal becomes diamonds. Under tremendous heat does iron become steel; under the same heat and pressure, words with me everywhere I go, because, under the same heat, sifting and heat and pressure to create the diamond."*

*"When I talk about Pride, and the work with the LGBTQ community, it was a work all based on love—who we loved, and how we loved them. The first fruit of the spirit in Galatians that's listed is love. Love is the most powerful thing. And so if you're basing your work, your belief, your practice on love, in my opinion, you're being, really being spiritual."*



# Y DAVIS

*becomes a diamond, and under a  
you will change.' ...I carried those  
we go through this testing and  
the world in which we live"*

*the Alliance, that  
and why we loved.  
ted is love. Because  
base that—if  
tices, on love, in  
."*

## after the interview

### *follow-up and transcription*

#### follow-up and thanks

Immediately following your interview, send your narrator a message thanking them for their time and contributions. Providing an oral history can be as much work as conducting one, and their participation in your project is a huge favor!

In the event that the interview covered some heavier or more emotional material, this may also be a good moment to check in with your narrator and see how they're doing. Let them know that they have your support if needed.

In addition, it may be useful to remind the narrator that you will be in contact with them to review the transcript.

#### ? what is a poetic transcript? ?

Poetic transcripts attempt to present the text of a transcript such that it mirrors the emotional or tonal spirit of the interview. Often this means an artistic use of punctuation, spacing, and capitalization.

There is no official, standardized method for poetically transcribing a piece of dialogue, but in some cases, it may be helpful to your reader to include a key of how your poetic choices might be translated.

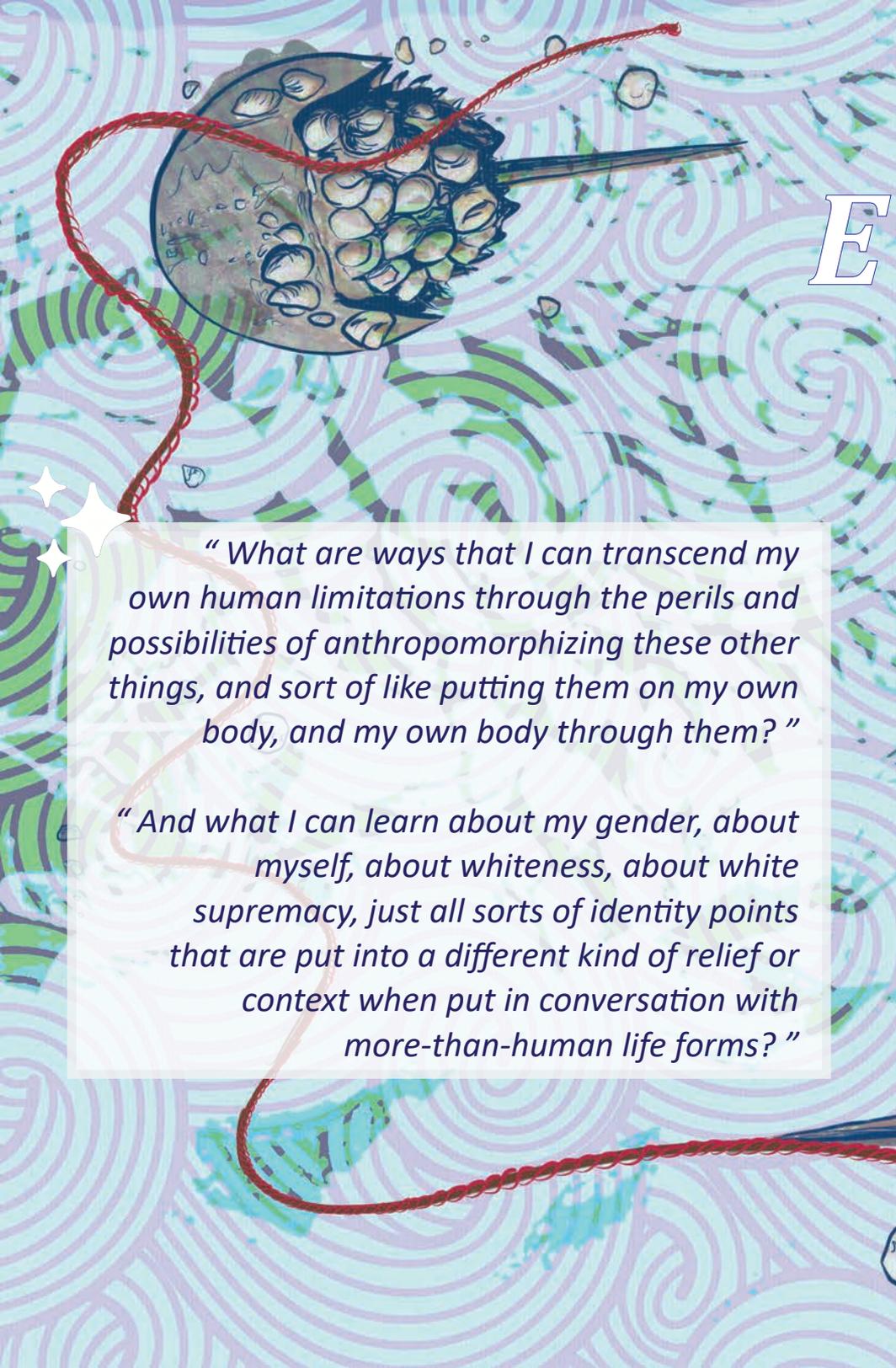
## (poetic) transcription

Don't wait too long after the interview to begin processing and transcribing it. If you can't remember the interview itself, it may be more difficult to parse out unclear sections of the recording.

Transcribing can be quite a **time-consuming** task, and it's often helpful to use software to help process the recording. Here are some resources and websites that may help:

- \* oTranscribe.com allows you to slow down your audio, as well as giving you quick keystrokes for pausing and rewinding it, which will keep you from having to toggle between windows.
- \* Otter.ai automatically transcribes your audio and lets you make manual corrections and identify speakers, then export it as plain text.
- \* Temi automatically transcribes your audio and allows you to edit the resulting transcript in the browser window with the audio.

*Note that some of these might ask you to pay for premium features. With some creativity, you can get around them! Break up the audio before uploading, use multiple email addresses, and don't be afraid to Google!*



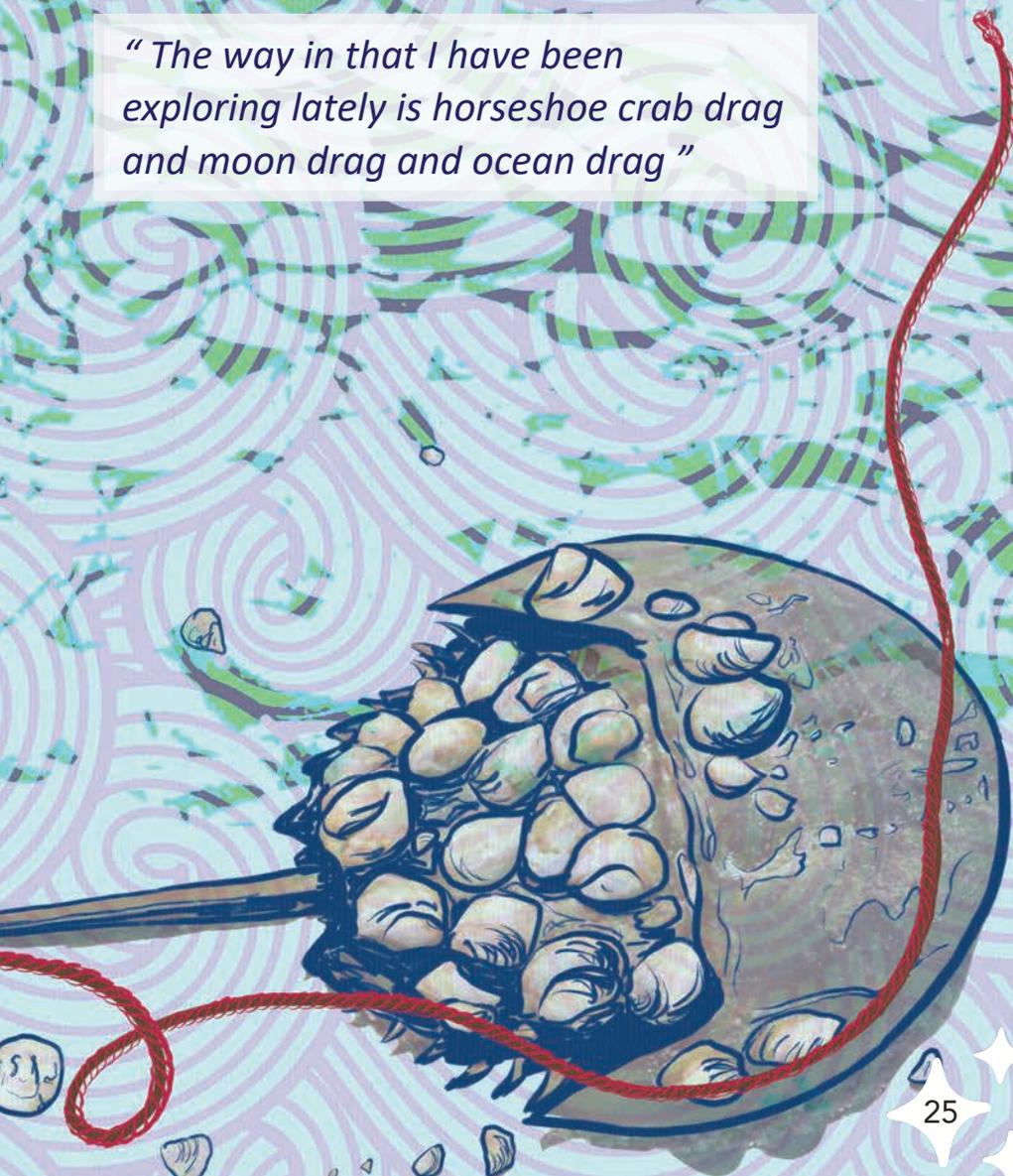
E

“ What are ways that I can transcend my own human limitations through the perils and possibilities of anthropomorphizing these other things, and sort of like putting them on my own body, and my own body through them? ”

“ And what I can learn about my gender, about myself, about whiteness, about white supremacy, just all sorts of identity points that are put into a different kind of relief or context when put in conversation with more-than-human life forms? ”

# LINIXON

*“The way in that I have been exploring lately is horseshoe crab drag and moon drag and ocean drag”*



**before you publish**  
*sharing the transcript with the narrator*

pre-publication: omission and clarification

Once your transcripts are completed, you should send a copy of each to your narrator, along with the recording. Kindly ask them to read over the transcripts, and tell them that they are free to omit any section of the transcript from the finalized oral history.

In addition, if you encountered any points that lacked clarity in your transcription process, this is the time to ask your narrator to provide more information. This may require you to set up another interview with your narrator.

Once you have redacted all the sections that the narrator has specified from the transcript and the recording and transcribed any additional, clarifying interview materials, you should send this new transcript to your narrator and ask them to review it once again.

This step should be repeated until the narrator is fully satisfied with the transcript, and feels that it is an accurate depiction of their thoughts and story.

## the fully finished oral history

Once the oral history is fully finished — the recording and the transcripts — send them to your narrator. This oral history is a product of your collaboration, and it is as much theirs as it is yours!

Thank your narrator once again for their time and for their willingness to share their narrative with you.

The fact that the oral history is done does not necessarily mean that your relationship to your narrator must end. Maintaining a relationship to your narrator to the extent that both of you want and with which you're both comfortable is perfectly fine, and can be a way to affirm that the oral history process is not extractive.



**remember!**

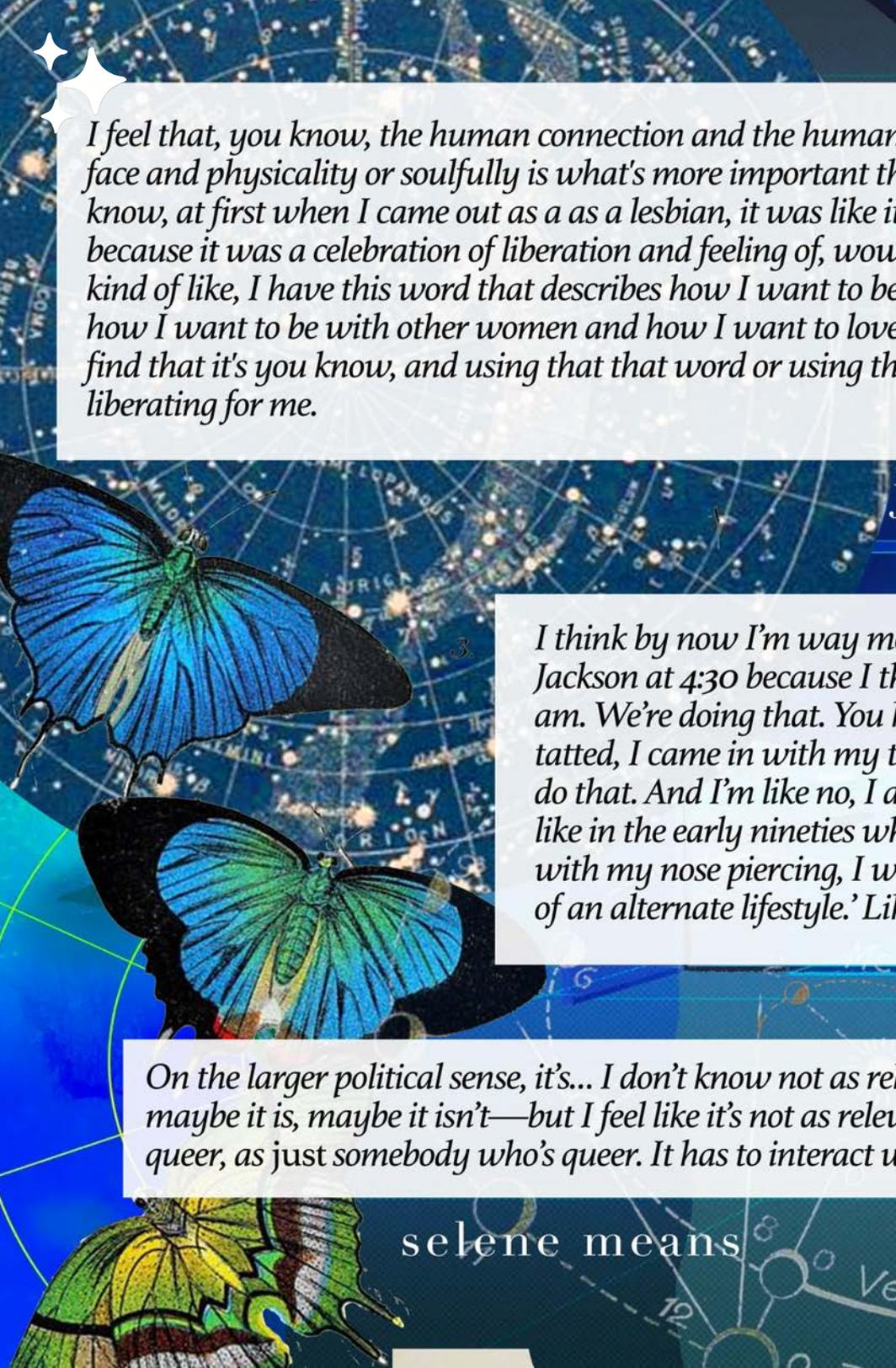


*"I guess I'm not the most reputable narrator because I'm in the thick of it, but from what I've witnessed, there's been a lot of changes."*



— Eli Nixon, interviewed by Finch Collins

When you tell people that you're doing an oral history project, they might be confused about why you're asking them to participate. After all, history is often presented as something vast and untouchable. Oral history is based on communities and people and should be used to elevate the voices left out of mainstream histories. Your narrator is qualified to tell their own story.



*I feel that, you know, the human connection and the human face and physicality or soulfully is what's more important than I know, at first when I came out as a as a lesbian, it was like it because it was a celebration of liberation and feeling of, wow kind of like, I have this word that describes how I want to be how I want to be with other women and how I want to love find that it's you know, and using that that word or using that liberating for me.*

*I think by now I'm way more Jackson at 4:30 because I think am. We're doing that. You i tatted, I came in with my t do that. And I'm like no, I a like in the early nineties wh with my nose piercing, I w of an alternate lifestyle.' Lil*

*On the larger political sense, it's... I don't know not as relevant maybe it is, maybe it isn't—but I feel like it's not as relevant queer, as just somebody who's queer. It has to interact u*

*selenite means*

*a experience from face to  
an a title. Um, so, you  
t was a celebration  
, I have this word that  
e in this in this world like  
e other women and how I  
at title at that time was*

joann ayuso

# on identity

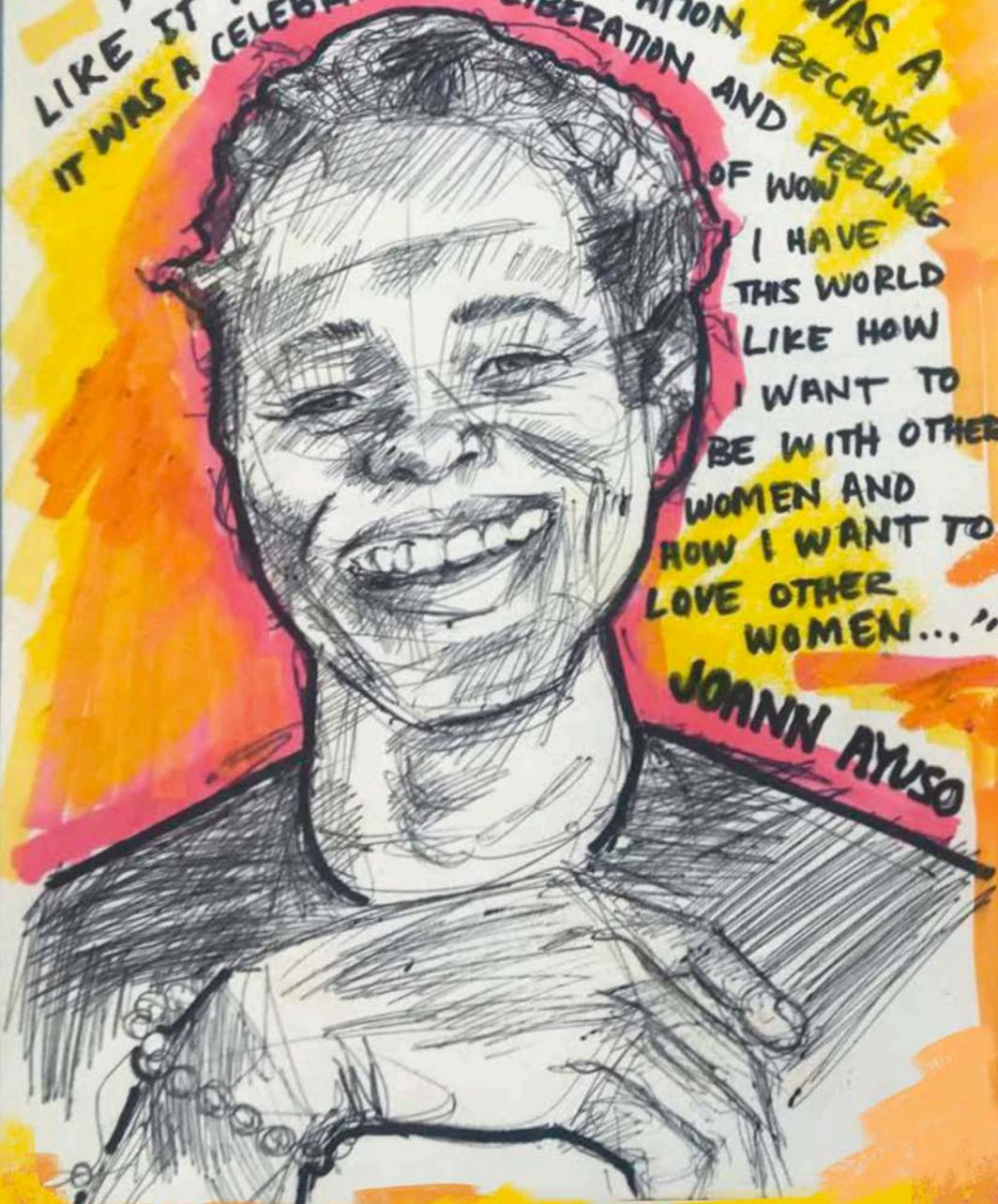
*ore comfortable in like, like I'm okay blasting Michael  
hink it's time for us to dance in the office. And really, I  
know, like I walked into my interviews, my arms are  
tattoos showing and people were like oh, you shouldn't  
um not going to be something that I'm not. Like it was  
hen the piercings were a thing and I went to my first job  
as told I needed to take it off because it was 'indicative  
ke no. So, it's hard to not be you.*

ancha santana

*levant—not sure  
want on its own, as just  
with other identities.*

"I CAME OUT AS A LESBIAN, IT WAS A CELEBRATION AND BECAUSE OF HOW I FEEL ABOUT THIS WORLD LIKE HOW I WANT TO BE WITH OTHER WOMEN AND HOW I WANT TO LOVE OTHER WOMEN..."

JOANN AYUSO

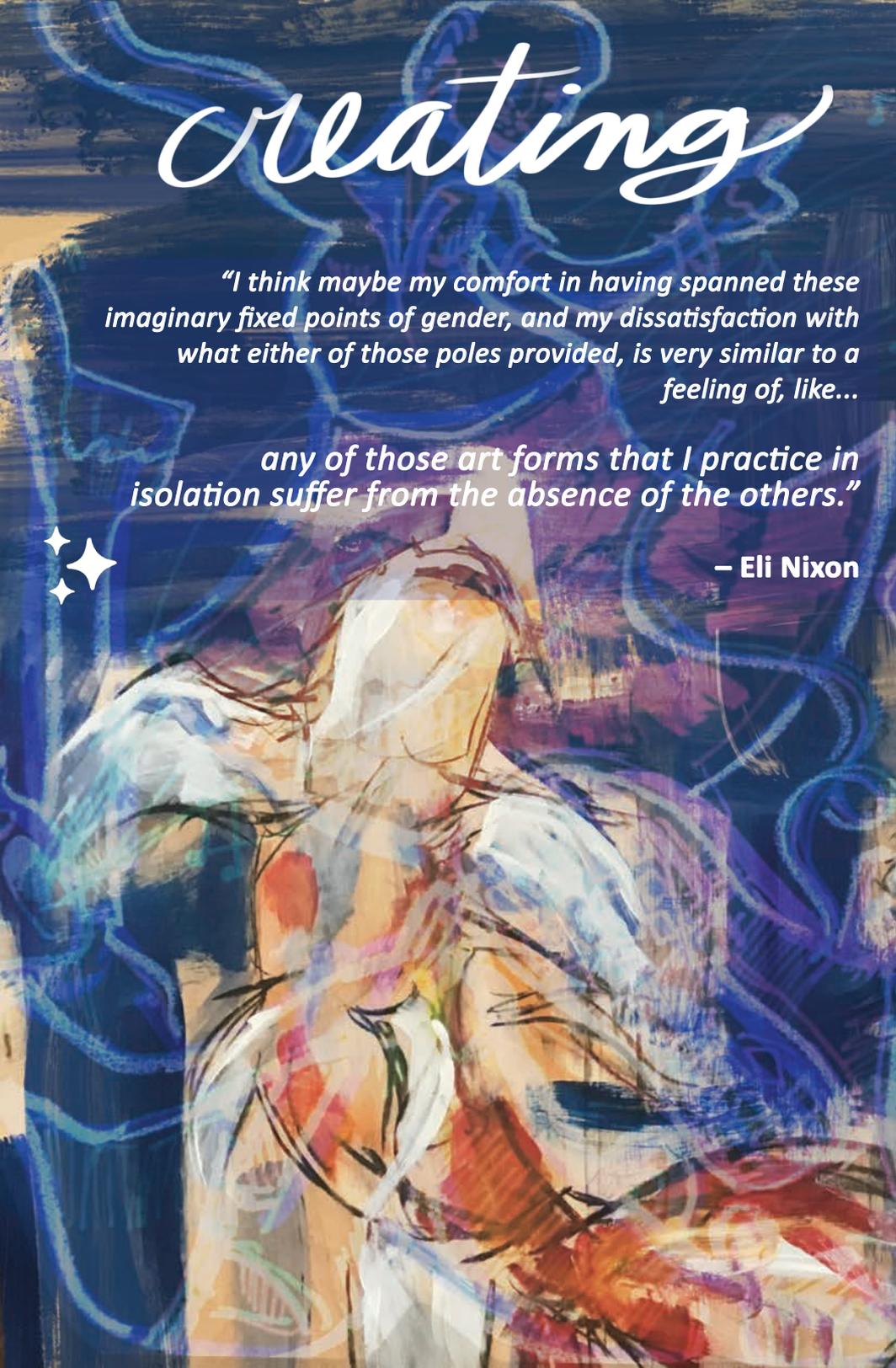


"AND HOW I FIND THAT  
IT'S, YOU KNOW  
AND USING THAT

WORD OR USING THAT  
TITLE AT

THE TIME WAS

LIBERATING  
FOR ME."



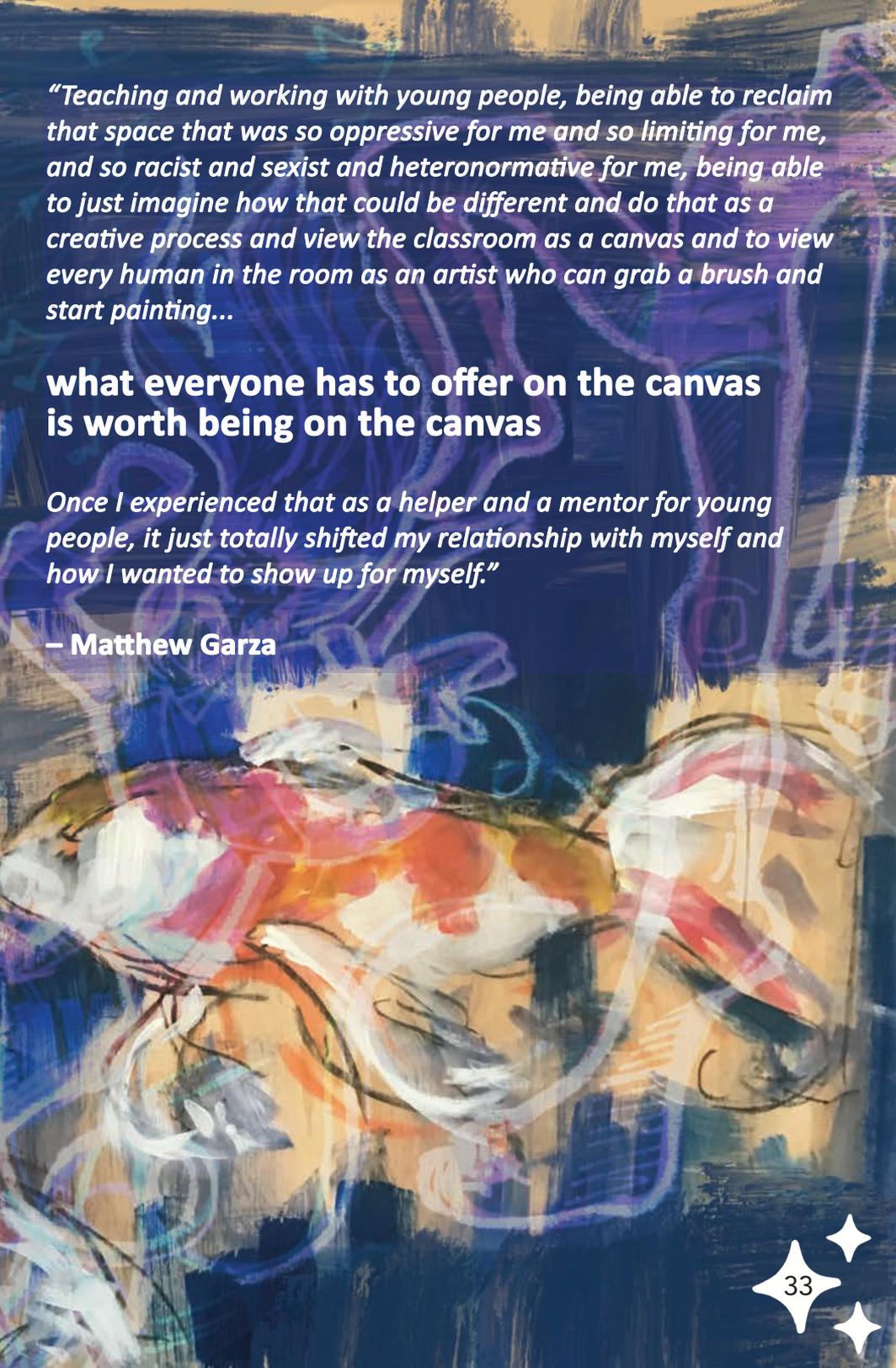
# creating

*"I think maybe my comfort in having spanned these imaginary fixed points of gender, and my dissatisfaction with what either of those poles provided, is very similar to a feeling of, like...*

*any of those art forms that I practice in isolation suffer from the absence of the others."*

— Eli Nixon



An abstract painting with a dark blue background. It features vibrant, expressive brushstrokes in shades of purple, pink, orange, and white. The composition is layered and textured, with some areas appearing more defined than others, creating a sense of depth and movement.

*“Teaching and working with young people, being able to reclaim that space that was so oppressive for me and so limiting for me, and so racist and sexist and heteronormative for me, being able to just imagine how that could be different and do that as a creative process and view the classroom as a canvas and to view every human in the room as an artist who can grab a brush and start painting...”*

**what everyone has to offer on the canvas  
is worth being on the canvas**

*Once I experienced that as a helper and a mentor for young people, it just totally shifted my relationship with myself and how I wanted to show up for myself.”*

**– Matthew Garza**



*this zine features quotes from*

*Ancha Santana*

*Anthony Maselli*

*Billy Mencer Ackerly*

*Eli Nixon*

*Jeff Gaudor/Kira Stone*

*Joann Ayuso*

*Kai Xavier LoMuscio*

*Kohei Ishihara*

*Matthew Rolando Garza*

*Michelle Veras*

*Rodney Davis*

*Selene Means*

*Vanessa Flores*

*and was assembled by*

*Billie McKelvie*

*Caitlin Malimban*

*Finch Collins*

*Jessica Jiang*

*Madeline Montgomery*

*May 2020*