

# YOU ARE HERE



A  
collection  
of survivor  
writing  
2024



# Publishing Info

**You Are Here, a collection of survivor writing.**

Published by Jet Moon 2024  
jetmoon.org

Cover Artwork:  
Anka Dabrowska

Publication layout design:  
Ola Podgorska, [www.fiercelovedesign.com](http://www.fiercelovedesign.com)

Printed by Ex Why Zed Print  
London

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For information, address the publisher [jetmoon@gmail.com](mailto:jetmoon@gmail.com).

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# You Are Here

Peer to Peer  
Survivor Writing

# An Introduction

*You Are Here* – peer to peer survivor writing – is my second survivor writer’s platform; building on the first: *Playing With Fire* which took place in 2021. *You Are Here* offers an expanded series of workshops, a survivor writer’s group, via Spread The Word, and a series interviews for the Wellcome Collection archives. Alongside this I had time to write and finished my novel *Artists Are Demons*, with Olumide Popoola as my mentor.

In addition to one-off survivor writer’s workshops, which provided a structured space where survivor writers could come together to explore common issues in writing as survivors. I decided to create a survivors writing group, because I wanted a share a more ongoing space with peers. The group was aimed at writer’s developing an ongoing body of work; and offered an opportunity to meet regularly, to exchange and support each other in our creative work.

The writer’s group met every two weeks: five online sessions on Saturday mornings, spaced across October to December. Over the course of the zoom sessions writer’s shared new work – read pieces out loud, discussed common themes, brought current problems to the group; gave and received input.

Between our zoom sessions we communicated via Slack message board: posting new work, having conversations, sharing our writing struggles and triumphs. The group provided impetus, encouragement, identification and a place to try things out. By its nature it was an intense space where people brought their full powerful and vulnerable selves, it was also a place of camaraderie, listening deeply to each other and cheering each other on.

This publication and it’s online counterpart are intended as a showcase of the Survivor Writers group. To highlight survivor writing and feature commissioned pieces from the group. This content also will be published online via the Spread the Word website, and added to the You Are Here Survivor Writers archive at Wellcome Collection.

YAH uses an open definition of survivorship including but not limited to survival of sexual violence. There are many things people survive, homophobia, racism and transphobia, I wanted people who identified with the need to share space with other survivors to feel welcome. All writing forms were included: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, blogs, monologues, performance texts, critical writing, writing which incorporated graphics; in workshops and the writer’s group there was no instruction to write specifically about survivorship.

It has been my experience that while as survivor writers we may come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have different experiences of survivorship; we often share similar resonant effects of our experiences.

The interviews which are part of YAH were conducted with writers in my personal network, some of them Playing With Fire alumni. Survivor writers who spoke at length about their development, process, cultural surrounds, struggles and determination as writers. Playwrights, film makers, novelists, poets, academics, researchers, editors, organisers and activists; sharing their outlook on how and why they write.

The zine and online showcase feature short quotes from the interviews; the interviews in full can be accessed via the Wellcome Collection in both audio and transcript form.

The more I have space to listen and share with my peers, the more I believe in our shared wisdom. It's from my peers that I've learned to clearly recognise my own experience and to believe in something other than the shallow narratives written 'about us'. Peer to peer spaces have shown me new possibilities – for envisioning who I am or what I can be – they have given me strength. I hope that this collection of writings and interviews can bring a sense of solidarity and support to other survivors and writers.

Jet Moon – May 2024

*“Find your cheerleaders, find the people who are going to support you in having a voice... This Survivor Writers Group: it's just such an amazing thing to be celebrated by other people. I think that is incredibly important to find those spaces where your most tremulous voice can have its beginnings. To do it alone is one thing; to do it with other people – giving you that swell of listening approval – is something else. So find your cheerleaders, find your little group of people that you can be together with.”*

# A Conversation

## Jet Moon and Olumide Popoola

Olumide Popoola and Jet Moon in conversation: on peer knowledge, mentoring, and the action of writing.

### Jet Moon

So I'm really interested in this peer knowledge, obviously, I think, because I've had to be interested in it, and how we find ourselves reflected or make sense of things and have a sense of empowerment through that recognition. And there's this baffling at times thing of what's invisible, what's dismissed, what's denied. And it can be so glaringly obvious when you're around your peers and yet other people don't see these things that feel very integral to your life. And you mentioned this idea about how you said something, and I don't know whether it was meant to be significant or not, but I took it as such, you're like, oh, yeah, you know, I can really place people according to what they know. And so I am, I'm interested in that idea of like knowledge in terms of communities, but also survivors' writing and how we find our voice or our audience.

### Olumide Popoola

I thought about peer knowledge and I thought, what is it that I, I seek out, and I'm at my best when I have very intimate intellectual friendships, or creative friendships. And that's a way where, you know, I don't know how else to say that. So I don't always have them. But when I have them, I can really share where I'm at with my creative mind

.....

So that's what I thought of when I looked at this idea from peer knowledge, as I'm interested. There's people I love in my life to challenge me on my journey, but I have...for that to work really well, it works best when I have this sort of quite intimate relationship with them, quite close relationship with them so that trust is there.

Jet Moon

Absolutely,.....

And when I said this thing about knowledge, I think it was probably in the first meeting that we had, it might have even been before I sent you the manuscript of the book. And I think that we were probably talking about, like, ideas of knowledge around navigating institutions, navigating publishing, navigating writing, you know, or the arts or things like this, where sometimes I feel I don't particularly have a lot of knowledge about how to do it. I don't have that...it's not...it hasn't come from somewhere, you know, like some kind of line of education or whatever. And I felt that you were speaking about something like this.

Olumide Popoola

I have a little bit of knowledge, but only a little bit, I still, I think I have some knowledge of it in a sort of outsider-ish sort of way. So what I mean by that is, you know, I have an independent, small publisher, so you're always still left out of how it really works, you know, in the mainstream area. But also, I work a lot on that. (...) not just debunk some but give people access to at least what I know. So what is the idea?

How does it work, like, to get on board of publishing? What are the steps involved?(...)What money is involved? How can you make money? And nobody talks about that...as this, so you know, romantic notion of the writer and toiling away and all that and, yeah, and how do you survive y'know?

Jet Moon

Just going to hold with that peer stuff first because...also, like we're talking about, on the one level, you know, like this kind of institutional knowledge, and then...so in the writer's groups, what I found, had people come from very different experiences and yet, I was really pleased that they were somehow in solidarity with each other. And it was amazing, you know, and it gave me a lot of hope about small organising, .....

....So the experiences where, you know, if you're battling to get health care, you're dealing with mental health provision (or a lack of), dealing with experience of different kinds of discrimination, and being alone with that, it can feel very invisible. And it can also feel, you know, like people are being pushed down. But then suddenly, when you...when people were speaking together in the group, and that isolation is suddenly just like, blown away, it becomes something where it's not an individual experience anymore. Other people know it, there's a real recognition: "Yeah, we know exactly what you're talking about" and it gains another context.



And I just think of things like say, for example, when I was young, I had never...I didn't know what patriarchy was (laughs) and I had no idea of rape culture... and so I didn't have a way to acknowledge or know my own story...

### Olumide Popoola

.....and maybe that's what I meant with 'what people know': is to have a space where you don't feel like you're...you're grappling with these things alone, but also that you're an outsider, all the things are available to you that are not.

So when I am, for instance, in white publishing spaces, even though I am published... a certain trajectory is not available to me in the same way because of the reality of institutional racist society...so then to sit with people where that is...that is knowledge, they know this in their own bodies and their own experience, and we are doing two things: we're acknowledging that, we're there for each other, but we're also stepping out of that because we're creating...I'm not going to call it safe space, but we're creating a different space...because that's important to me, also trying to find the spaces where we can create outside of these...what's the word, you know, constraints, oppressive structures, lack of structures (in terms of supportive structures etc). So what can we create, at least in that moment, or in the duration of a course, or peer group, even in a friendship, etc.

### Jet Moon

.....thinking about like, inclusion, whatever that...who's named who isn't. You know, because I always feel that even if there is this language that gets used in inclusivity, I'm really aware of when I've been in spaces, in spaces where some of my needs are not counted. And so I'm always trying to think of what is not seen? What are the things that are peripheral, in terms of our knowledge of what people are having in their lives, so it's not like: "*Oh, \*this\* is inclusivity, \*this\* is it.*" You know, like, it's a different way.

### Olumide Popoola

...what is not seen and what cannot be imagined, because you cannot imagine for another person. So in a way, actually, we have to maybe start in a moment of, yeah, acknowledgement, you have to start from this, 'I do not know'.

So this inclusivity as a tickbox is 'oh well if you need this, then I have this'. That isn't, you know, that can't really...that's not an inclusive starting point, because that assumes that everybody knows - both sides - because until you arrive somewhere, you might also not know what you need in that moment, (.....)

...So the building of, I think, building of structures that are different, and that

model something different, which I assume you have done in your writers group, on your survivors writers group. ....

**Jet Moon**

So I was gonna, like, talk about this concept of mentoring of practice, you know, you've used the word 'generosity' when we've spoken together in the past, and for me, it's been so helpful, and I feel that I've experienced that generosity from you as a practice, .....

**Olumide Popoola**

What I think about mentoring is that it can be so different,....

...for me, the most interesting part is that yeah...is making...is that moment of the encounter, what is the actual encounter? And I always think we change the world by changing these encounters and making ourselves available. So I think that's my overall project in life.

**Jet Moon**

...I see a lot how much others can struggle to have a voice and that what has helped me is to be encouraged, like not to like scrunch up what I want to say and try and stuff it into a form, but that encouragement to be told that my voice is needed, you know? ...We don't have enough of the other voices.

**Olumide Popoola**

I'm really interested in small gestures and encounters, as well as a site where change takes place. So, I don't believe there is writing that is not political, there's maybe writing that doesn't speak to...political meaning, maybe, thinking about change. I think there's writing that you know, maybe it doesn't speak particularly to current issues etc. But so for me, um these small encounters...I'm a novelist, these small encounters is what you will find throughout my work; really tiny moments you could overlook, but where I think there are models for society or models for community, living models for healing, models for transformation, and that's what I mean with this 'in-between' and also a lot of marginalised, or characters, or people who are not considered, with voices that are not heard. Who don't feature. We are in the shadows often and things happen there and that's also what I'm interested in, what happens.

**Jet Moon**

Absolutely. I mean, I can get really overwhelmed by "How do I deal with the world? There's so much going on", or "How do I deal with my day? Oh, I've got so much, you know, a million pieces of health care... or "How am I surviving with money?" And, for me, it is these small moments that make it possible to

survive, to feel supported, feel love from other people. And I think...like I had said this thing to you about with the writers' group, the things that happened within the group and how people were together gave me a lot of hope.

**Olumide Popoola**  
(affirmative noise)

**Jet Moon**

...To witness and be part of it...somehow gave me...not the way, not to set aside what's happening in the outside world, but to think it matters, this small stuff.

**Olumide Popoola**

Yeah, yeah, I can relate to that very strongly and...very, very strongly. And I don't think they are small things, .....

.....which comes back to those small moments, right? It's small encounters or gestures. I was...years ago, I became...was very obsessed with gestures and gestures in daily life, a gesture you make to somebody else and, not physical gestures, not this, but a gesture...of care, you know, of care or doing something differently of... there's so much potential in these. ....

**Jet Moon**

...But I still feel that, for me, there is always a gap. And I see for other people, there's a gap between...it might all very well be what we do, and what we're doing with our groups of people but there's a gap in terms of wider visibility, there's a gap in terms of like, the over-culture. ....

**Olumide Popoola**

...so what I'm hearing about the writers group, and then some voices maybe not getting recognition in the mainstream. Because yeah, I would agree - is that the goal? What is the goal?

...I think with the mainstream and writing is a lot about gatekeeping - who gets in, who gets lauded. ...But I think by doing schemes, by creating...I remember when you were talking I almost thought it's a bit like a clearing, right? Making a bit of space, somewhere that you can gather, create together and hold each other. And that enables you to put something out and then it enables somebody to read that and the interest to grow. And in a way we have to believe in that, that that's valuable enough.

**Jet Moon**

the last thing you said ...was a super good point to end.

## **Olumide Popoola**

Olumide Popoola is a London-based Nigerian German writer and speaker who presents internationally.

Her novella *this is not about sadness* was published by Unrast Verlag in 2010. Her play *Also by Mail* was published in 2013 by Witnessed (edition assemblage) and the short story collection *breach*, which she co-authored with Annie Holmes, in 2016 by Peirene Press. Her first full-length novel *When we Speak of Nothing* was published in the UK and Nigeria in 2017 and in 2018 in the US (Cassava Republic Press).

Her publications also include critical essays, narrative essays, creative non-fiction, hybrid pieces and poetry.

In 2004 she won the May Ajim Award in the category Poetry. Olumide holds a PhD in Creative Writing, a MA in Creative Writing and a BSc in Ayurvedic Medicine. She has lectured in creative writing at various universities and regularly gives workshops and masterclasses.

Her novel, *Like Water Like Sea*, will be published by Cassava Republic Press May 2024.

# The ritual for it goes like this

**Ren Erickson**

Content warnings: death, loss of consciousness, asphyxiation, mentioned child abuse, homophobic language, implied sexual assault and transphobia.

The ritual for it goes like this.

Sit on the floor. This one is nicer than most, plush rug and polished wood beneath it. Wiggle toes to ground the body. Rub on the balm. Pulse points of the wrists and temples. Tincture of old lush shampoo bar melted down with fresh, real olive oil from auntie, with oregano from Petros' struggling supermarket plant, with lavender from the park.

The smell lingers in your skin, in your nose, in your throat. It should. It's there to tether you.

Limber up the hands, the neck. Remember the writing on your left hand that says 'wake up.'

Close eyes. Breathe deep. The air and space of this room. The planes of her face, the girl from the photo. Ignore the energy around you. Search the darkness of your eyelids. Past the thrum of your blood. Past light patterns. Into the nothing there.

Feel that dip in the middle of your head. That pulling feeling. Your head will slump.

You'll feel the weight of something weightless, formless, pull across you like slipping underwater.

Your heart will beat slower if you have done this correctly. Moving your body will be difficult if you can still control it.

Scan for the irritation, the sorrow, the grief. The rage.

By casting your light on what you find, you offer yourself up as a listener. As a projector.

"Hello," Peace thinks. "I speak your language, if anyone wants to talk." There's probably nothing. It's been so long, after all.

The other side of this house looks more or less the same. Same layout, no immediate inhabitants. Just Peace and his usual company.

"She's not telling you the whole truth," his guide offers, like he's being so helpful. His eyes glint in the darkness. It's almost a relief he's here. Peace had figured as much. "Is there even anyone still here?"

“Damn, kid, you’re not even going to try and do this one yourself?” He’s as flippant as ever, but his presence is a comforting one. He’s sharp angles and stark contrasts, crisper whites and blacks than the space around him.

The shadow man sits on the floor, mirroring Peace, but he rests his head on one hand like a child would. The skin around his eyes, his mouth, crinkle in a way that’s so familiar.

“You’re not taking care of yourself, sweetpea. You’re all skin and bone again,” he fusses, and his hand in Peace’s hair, mussing it affectionately, feels solid and warm.

Anyone else who dropped a cutesy nickname would get cussed out. This is different. This is someone he trusts.

This is someone he absolutely should not trust.

“There’s a girl –”

“Oh, the girlfriend? Did it work out okay?”

“I don’t want to talk about that,” he mumbles.

“How’s work?”

“I know you watch me,”

Peace mumbles. “You don’t need to preten–”

The atmosphere shifts. The stable architecture of the room, the living room, gone. Replacing the grand fireplace, there’s a kaleidoscopic explosion of colour and energy, enough to hurt his eyes– but his eyes are closed, he can’t forget, he’s not here, he’s–

Those stretching, warping beams of light look like hands. That faint whistling, steam from a kettle, screams of a thousand anguished souls, those voices are asking for his help. Respite.

Peace.

The un-shape, untethered, un-dimensioned impossibly formed fury edges closer, and Peace swears he can see a mouth in it. A maw opening in the bright-light pitch-black.

It’s trying to talk to him. “No, we’re not opening that door,” his guide says, and from his tone it’s clear this isn’t a normal occupant of this plane.

“Hey. So what the fuck is that?” Peace asks, ready to pinch the sharpie writing on his hand. To get the fuck out of here.

Christina. It knows her name. How does it know her name? One of those un-hands, the claws made of everything and nothing, reaches out to Peace and—dad slumped limp on the carpet  
a good hard smack for taking food out of the fridge  
be nice and quiet, it'll be our secret

"I'd just feel more comfortable if the dyke wasn't using the changing rooms"  
another faceless whoever on top telling him he's "pretty for a boy"  
can't rule out mechanical brain injury, given his cognitive problems  
It's too much. It hurts too much. It knows him. It's always known him.

He's struggling to stay up. Things aren't making sense. The edges of things are too soft, blurred, hard to grasp. It's all going diagonal, lurching seasickness. His eyes feel sticky. His airways are clogged, as he gasps in bursts of air to calm himself. How long has he been under?

It doesn't usually affect him like this, this suffocating, this deafening.

"You need to lay down. Here, sweetpea."

"No, I don't, I'll—"

Those hands, strong and hard, on his shoulders pin him and press down.  
And Peace falls.

Falls into tar, into syrup, into wax.

Falls into clinging threads of burning sugar, strangling, claustrophobic as they drape across him.

He opens his mouth to fight for air and what fills his lungs feels like dust ground out of scabs. It's a mistake. He can't breathe here. Not anymore. That man's eyes pierce into him, even through the film of it, through the cloying canopy of melted plastic. He can't push through it, can't move a muscle, can't inhale.

Peace can feel his heart pounding so hard, all the way through him, until all of a sudden it isn't.



## **Ren Erickson**

Ren Erickson is an autistic and gay trans person who grew up in Camden Market. His work focuses on – hang on, this is a bit formal. I really enjoy dark or regressive themes, and surrealism. I find these areas of fiction most useful for exploring my own experiences. My biggest literary influences are Chuck Palahniuk, Terry Pratchett and Allen Ginsberg. The writer’s group gave me the opportunity to develop my upcoming queer horror book, and encouraged me to utilise my own disability as a framework for my protagonist Peace’s urban magic.

I have a neurological disability and I’m ferociously political in the way that most disabled people have to be these days. I feed my neighbourhood foxes and crows, and you can find me at my local queer-owned coffee shop writing something atrocious for the next open mic night.

# Large Fleshy Leaves

**Amiot Hills**

Content warnings: suicide, homophobia,gunshots

The following is intended to be performed live by the writer, with them dressed as a giant potted plant. The song 'Noble Experiment' is to play before and after the speech.

My grandfather had a deathly fear of large, fleshy leaves. Anything from about an iceberg lettuce size upwards and he would break out in cold sweats. He would have to walk through botanical gardens with his eyes closed holding my dad's hand.

We think it's because he fell in stinging nettles as a child. But his brain got the pain all mixed up, and started blaming it on the doc leaves instead. After my grandma died, we found pictures in her attic of granddad wearing women's blouses. Pictures of him staring at a man. Mr Drummond. Mr Drummond is not his real name. My dad can't remember his real name, he was too young.

I think to myself whether Mr Drummond liked plants. If he tended to them while my grandfather watched. If granddad fell in love with how he could make the leaves grow, gently and slowly.

He tried exposure therapy, did Grandad. The doctor gave him a small potted plant, and had him care for it. Water it every day until the leaves grew. He loved that plant, my dad always said he did.

He visited Mr Drummond from time to time after they both got married. Even took the kids. My dad remembers Mr Drummond as a quiet man. All furled up. And so the little plant grew. And he doted on it. Until one morning, grandma heard a scream from the living room. 'GET IT OUUUUUUUT'. And a smash. And grandad, my grandad, the man who was so gentle, had thrown the little plant clean out the window.

Mr Drummond shot himself in the head when my dad was about ten. The glass and terracotta scattered on the driveway.

He blew his brains out.

My grandfather sobbing by the settee.

In case the metaphors are becoming a bit mixed: there are parts of myself I would very much like to throw out of the window. Or rather, parts I am scared I will throw out if they get too big.

And I want to tell him: it's not the doc leaves, grandad. I know, I know, it's hard to understand, but they were nothing to be scared of.

Wherever Mr Drummond has gone, I hope there is a greenhouse. That it is full to the brim with the biggest leaves you ever saw. Flesh filled and alive.

And I ask him if he thinks granddad would throw me out the window, if he saw me like this. If I would smash on the driveway like the terracotta plant pot.

And he smiles to himself, and laughs while tending to a stem. He doesn't look up. But quietly tells me 'He was kind, little plant.'

And we are not the things that stung him.  
After all, he always fell in love with how the plants grew'

## **Amiot Hills**

Amiot (they/he) is a non-binary transmasculine writer, performer and theatre maker currently producing work centred on queer archival, grief and ecology.

Throughout the writers group they developed their show 'I Am Going to Build a Chapel in the Woods for Every Dead Queer That History has Forgotten and I Need Your Help' – a play/poem performance and a real time making with the audience every show of a monument to a different dead queer person.

The show is debuting at Brighton's Femfest in March 2024 with hopes to develop it into a multi-media regenerative project of queer, community led archival.

# Dollar

Jet Moon

Content warnings: Mentions of homophobia, transphobia, sexual harassment, environmental damage, political assassinations, police violence.

Riding to the demo on the train we are getting some unfriendly stares from commuters. Myself, Vex and Princess Brendan blink back at them.

'At least we've made an effort with our appearance.' Sneers Princess Brendan. All three of us tricked out in big poufy princess dresses, smeary doll makeup, and wigs that took a lot of hairspray and back-combing to get this close to heaven.

'Aww man, you look wild' I say to Vex  
He nods and grins, glitter sparkling in his beard.  
'You too, buddy. You too.'

Men in button-down suits – commuters off to their daily bump and grind – propping up late-stage capitalism and creaming off the rewards, riding this 8.15 am train into the Central Business District are treating us to their best homophobic (or is it transphobic? Or is it pure Freak Hate?)

Stares.

'These guys look HUNGRY,' I say to Princess Brendan  
'Gagging for it.' he says. Staring back at one of the suits sitting nearest who is eyeing Princess Brendan up and down, up and down.  
'Like he'd like to lick you like an ice-cream,' laughs Vex.  
'Lick, lick, lick.' Princess Brendan purrs with silky allure.  
The suit quickly looks away.

Some of the more hostile stares could be to do with how much room we are taking up. Crammed into the crowded train carriage in our big frocks, carefully defending the giant cardboard dollar signs we are carrying – each as big and unwieldy as a cello.

We spent a lot of time building these signs from dumpstered cartons and they need to make the ride intact. I stare another suit down and tussle for a bit of extra space. At Central Station we tumble out onto the platform, our giant dollar signs bundled under our arms and set off towards the Central Business District. Heading to join an early morning protest against big business war profiteers.

The banks, the stock traders, the big players; go on and do the maths, all of them are interwoven in a shitty web. Selling rights to things that shouldn't be sold, fighting lawsuits against people they can afford to take, and making money, money, money. Out of war, oil, deforestation, land grabs, and murder-like when the Colombian, paramilitary bumped off several inconvenient union leaders from the local Coca-Cola bottling plant – and so it continues, water-

rights privatised, big chunks of the Amazonian rain forest cut down to make room for beef cattle, mining and building dams.

As we approach the banking district there's a small demo in progress. A barricade built out of twinkly toy warheads dangling together on string. A group of fierce looking women in bloodied latex nurse outfits are dancing - paramedic sluts from hell - jiggling their titties and arses lewdly in the name of peace and justice.

Like always, there's one of those Trotskyist types trying to give you, me, anyone who will take it, one of their boring newspapers. The dry innards of which are supposed to inspire all of us to take up with the Trots and join the glorious workers' revolution. When Mr Revolution approaches me, I smile and willingly accept the proffered newspaper, 'Can I have an extra one for my friend?' I ask.

The guy looks chuffed and gives me two newspapers which I carry off, waving to the others. Vex chuckles maniacally when he sees what I have. The three of us act in union. Vex and I quickly tear the papers into sheets, Princess Brendan stabilising everything, as we crumple the papers up and use them as kindling to set between our propped together cardboard dollar signs.

Vex flicks his lighter, 'Skrick, skrick' the tiny flame appears and licks the papers. We stand back to watch our artwork blossom. I clap my hands applauding Vex's fire-lighting skills and crow 'What a happy morning!'

Flames are leaping high and fast. Our giant dollar signs burning brightly in the sunshine as we dance around them. Princess Brendan red-lipstick laughing wide and grinning. That is, until a killjoy TSG grunt-cop in blue khakis runs forward and douses the fire with an extinguisher.

'Aw, what?' Vex complains.

'Always overcompensating,' says Princess Brendan.

'Jeez, everyone wants to be an artist,' I sneer at the cop.

Toecutter is spinning music from the back of a little pick-up truck, sitting parked on a traffic island. He's playing a weird mash-up of polka tunes and bright pop beats. Police on horseback move in to kettle us, rounding people up and pushing us tight against each other, encircling us so we can't get out. We stand on the traffic island, a collection of strangely dressed figures, apocalypse drag-dolls, fake-blood-streaked zombie nurses, a couple of extra-keen junior anarchists types; dressed all in black, masked-up and looking like they came to the wrong party.

Toecutter, unphased as ever, unfazed-as-ever finds the perfect tune for the occasion. A soft trumpet sounds, then Louis Armstrong sings 'It's a Wonderful World' old record crackliness audible through the speakers.

The songs refrain repeating and repeating as police horses canter - whirling about us - like fairground ponies on a carnival ride.

## Jet Moon

Jet Moon is a multi-disciplinary artist who writes, performs and collaborates on fierce work for radical social change. Collaborating for many years with the LGBTIQ, kink, sex worker, disability and survivor communities they belong to, dedicated to creating intimate spaces of sharing, visibility and resistance.

In 2021 Jet launched their peer - to - peer survivor writers project 'Playing With Fire' and completed 'Peachy,' a novella based on Jet's teen experiences. 'You Are Here' expands Jet's survivor writer's platform; including interviews and a collaboration with Wellcome Collection. Jet has recently completed their first full length novel 'Artists Are Demons': based on Jet's time in Sydney Australia as part of the Anarchist left in the early 2000s.

It explores the collapse of idealism and what happens next. A glittering time capsule of a queer city. Dealing with themes of friendship, collectivism, grief, displacement and migration.

Jet lives in London.

**Website:** [jetmoon.org](http://jetmoon.org)



## Dr. Nat Raha

Dr. Nat Raha is a poet and activist-scholar, and Lecturer in Fine Art Critical Studies at the Glasgow School of Art. Her work is of an experimental queer lyric, attending to the everyday of marginalised lives, histories of struggle and resistance to racial capitalism, of humans and the more-than-human. She works through de/re/materialising sound, form and syntax, on the page and in performance.

*“I regularly get asked around my use of a ‘we’ in my poetry, that I primarily write with the first-person plural, more than a first person singular. And I often say that it’s an invitation to join that ‘we,’ if you see yourself within it.*

*But obviously, I always have a sense of that so... am I thinking about, like, brown and black feminist diaspora? Or am I thinking about queer and trans community, worlding, life? Or some combination there of all of this. So maybe there’s a promise of collectivity that, and again, this is creative, right?*

*I don’t write representative work, per se. It’s... the writing is trying to make something exist or trying to show something that has existed. So maybe there is always this imagined space for the reader or the listener to be in the text in that way as well.”*

## Dr. Nat Raha

*"...one thing I want to say, upfront, because I feel like it's... advice to other survivor writers almost on this question of the toll, of trying to speak what has previously not been said in this way is... big.*

*And I don't want to say it's like 'toll,' as in just the cost. But I don't think this is necessarily just about writing creatively as well. I have this with academic writing and other critical writing too.*

*To work on things that are challenging, difficult, personal, that your body has been through. I want to say that either as your body as we exist now, in this moment, or maybe your body as you understand it ancestrally...*

*...I think to work through that is also... that's where the power comes from.*

*And there was some elements when I was performing this, especially the second performance [in Galway], where I just kind of felt this flow of like...there's something about the embodied...my embodied presence in the performance and trying to literally just have a flow that's a bit more playful,...*

*...it's like an embodied language.*

*It's like a...an expressiveness that does feel kind of like animated and playful and a bit lighter, coming from the.. as like a way of trying to release the weight of the heaviness of thinking about these historical traumas.*

*Yeah, so that's... that's maybe the performance and liveness thinking about it there. And that's part of how to respond to that, I think trying to respond to these weights."*

## Debbie Mcnamara

Debbie McNamara is the Events Coordinator for Survivors' Poetry, a registered charity which creates safe spaces for fellow Survivors of mental distress to meet and share our poetry. In March 2020 we moved online, hosting monthly Performance Parties, which are still ongoing. In May 2024 we resumed public in-person spoken word events in London.

Debbie is a writer and poet, and has been involved with the mental health Survivor movement for many years, working with numerous peer-led groups such as Mad Pride, Hackney Patients' Council and the Mental Health Resistance Network. She was the first paid coordinator / fundraiser for Survivors' Poetry, has worked as a TEFL teacher, an actor for 'Word and Action' theatre company, is a qualified Co-counselling trainer and was Bibi the Door Whore for a dominatrix called Mistress Melissa. She has a son, Rich, who is the light of her life.

**Email:** survivorspoetry@hotmail.com

*(Speaking about Survivors Poetry)*

*"I think it's so vital, because you're sharing work with people who, you know, you don't have to put a filter, you don't have to play down any of these experiences, some of them are quite extreme.*

*And also because I think with psychiatry, and I think any practitioner, any so-called mental health professional would absolutely agree, that it's a dehumanising experience. You know, you can just feel obliterated, reduced to a diagnosis, and a set of prescriptions for drugs.....*

*But I think, you know, with survivors there's this huge warmth, it's about the person first."*

# Debbie Mcnamara

*“Survivor writing, there’s a whole kind of magic to it. Even though some experiences are really difficult and traumatic. It’s not just for the writer being able to kind of exorcise some of these demons and make your own load lighter, literally just by putting the words on a page, you know, that page is very heavy and it’s a heaviness that has come from you. And it’s not just about creating something durable about the transience of life as well.*

*But it’s really about taking people into a realm where there are stronger forces at play than you might get in your kind of day-to-day life. It just takes you into a realm where you know that there’s....it has a mythic kind of proportionality to it, things that are charged in a way that they are not in daily life and to be able to touch into that power by writing about it and then sharing that power with other people, it’s a fantastic thing, it’s an enlightening thing.”*

## Julie Mcnamara (Julie Mac)

Julie Mac is an award-winning theatre and filmmaker, exploring unheard voices from the political periphery. Co-founder and former Artistic Director of Vital Xposure, one of UK's leading disability-led touring theatre companies, her work has been widely produced on international stages.

Currently co-authoring a celebratory work with Debra Keenahan (Little Big Woman Productions), *All Ways A Pleasure* confronts audiences with taboos around Sex and Disability. She's recently collaborated with Hassan Mahamdallie on *Quiet Rebels*, based on stories from white working-class women who fell in love with and created families with Black men and men of colour from the Windrush Years onwards. Previous work includes directing sell-out UK and international tours of *The Butch Monologues* by Libro Levi Bridgeman; and *Let Me Stay* – a poignant love letter to Shirley McNamara, created with her Mother – celebrating a life lived well with Alzheimer's.

*"Sometimes I get weary, you know, I'm kind of tired of hearing the word resilience, or 'you're so resilient'.*

*And I think actually, sometimes it's really tough, really tough to keep going. But what's the other option? Do you know what I mean? This is my life's blood.*

*This is the breath that keeps my heart pulsing, you know, my artwork, the creative theatre making, filmmaking whenever I'm making (I've been involved in a visual arts exhibition recently). But whatever it is, it keeps me alive.*

*And it's the only way I can actually talk truth to power."*

*“Because what I miss most is hearts beating in the same room, exchanging stories that literally, we feel in effect, we feel moved by, our bodies change; you know, the hairs on the back of our neck or the freeze in our guts, or the tension in our bodies when we’re listening to aspects of somebody else’s story.*

*That leap of surprise, when we recognise somebody else is on the same path, or, wow, we’ve got crossovers. Do you know what I mean? Those connections really, really excite me. And I think it’s the essence of being human.*

*One of the reasons I’ve made theatre more often than I’ve made film, is because for me, theatre is about the process of becoming human together. So I might start off with an idea of a story, or a script, I might even have the bones of a script, which I call the rehearsal draft. It’s like a map that we take together in the rehearsal space, whether it’s a room or I don’t know, it could be outside in the field of a care home, which has happened before now. Collaboration is essential, because it’s about our connection.*

*As human beings, what we do together is dependent on the skills that we feel we have, we can contribute to the team. And it may be that I’ve decided, I really want a visually impaired consultant, but somebody who really loves sound-scape and is happy to experiment with binaural sound, you know, from four directions, 360 degrees. I want to work with a choreographer who can actually excite me about where we can get those voices to dance in space, when they become intimate when they move away.*

*What does that do to our bodies, when we hear those sounds choreographed, close, further away, moving as they speak, or run or whatever, you know, and all of those people that bring the different ingredients of dramaturgy, or what I call the “aesthetics of access”, are essential to me. And so collaboration is about building teams in unexpected ways in unexpected places, and what I love and probably really pisses some people off, is that I love experimenting and testing. I’m not traditional in the modes of access I use or the way I use them at all.*

*And I’ve sat in rooms where I’ve had a whole team of people who are probably expert witnesses in the spaces and places they’ve worked in the sector. And I’ll sit there and go, “But that’s great. But I want to try something new”.*

# A Wednesday

**Lisa Davies**

I can't take that it's not on a pallet.  
You have to take that. I've paid £80 for you to take that.  
It didn't arrive on a pallet. I don't have a pallet. I can't put it on pallet.  
I need you to take this powerchair back to Ripley.  
I cannot drive.  
I cannot drive a powerchair to Derby.  
I need to get a refund.  
Now. Stood here. On my doorstep.  
Having driven to an incorrect address.  
Is not the time to be awkward.  
He takes it, eventually.  
But only after my aunty, present at the time, and a woman from the mobility  
shop, via my phone, intervene and advocate for its collection.  
My personhood undermined, again.  
I spend the rest of the day in frustration.  
Trying to reduce my own anxiety.  
Insomnia.

# Orgasm

**Lisa Davies**

I have waited almost two months for this moment.  
You burst in through my front door not even stopping to tell me your name(s).  
Spend the first few minutes debating out loud whether you have the correct  
screwdriver for the job. My heart sinks.  
You leave the room to fetch the 'other' toolbox.  
Success. You have the right shaped tool.

And with that,  
you peel back my covering, pull out my wires, remove me from my inlet,  
replace me with another of identical visage and form.  
Next, you reattach my wires, replace my covering,  
reinsert your tool and tighten me up.  
Then you place a sticker on me to indicate I have been tampered with.

At the key moment, you turn me on. Pressing all my buttons one by one.  
Fiddling with my joystick. Click. Click. Click.  
I emit a steady, satisfied whirring noise, and burst into motion.

To be energised again after all that time spent against the wall,  
static, is a release.



# Reticence

**Lisa Davies**

There's a lot that I want to say, but when I try to speak honestly and openly about what I think or how it is for me, you hold up your hand and tell me to stop. Or you say, "you're being too negative"

When I try to talk about death, loss, or grief, you say I've been traumatised and represent both myself and my experiences as pathology.

I mean, yes, I have been on earth a fair while, and yes, some of my life has been traumatic, but I don't see why my discussion of death, grief, or loss is less valid than yours, or why mine is subject to diagnoses, and yours is straightforwardly regarded as common an aspect of adulthood as getting a badge for swimming is when you are a child.

And when I do have the energy and find the courage to speak about anything, really, somehow my words are never the correct ones.

I could wrap them in metaphor, soften the meaning with imagery of well worn, overdone treads of love, but to do so risks straying too far from the compass of my meaning.

To speak is to be deliberately misinterpreted, my own words are a cravat used to strangle me.

When I speak, the words I utter are not regarded as knowledge because I neglected to bring with me a seventy-five-page dossier of support, of course, so did everyone else, but I am quickly dismissed.

So, you will have to excuse me if I am not the first to open my mouth, if I pause to think before speaking, or my responses aren't quick or concise enough for you, or fail to match your expectations.

I am probably weighing up the many permutations. Debating the time, to energy, to desired outcome ratio.

I have been muted too many times.

Of course, none of this matters when you're buying a loaf, does it?

Content Warnings: Discussion of Exclusion, Inaccessibility,  
Spatial Apartheid, Profanity.

# F\*\*\*\*\* Hill(s)

**Lisa Davies**

Mylie said it was the climb, but the adverts for lightweight power-chairs commonly depict the users' wheeling on beautifully flat terrain with no friction, and well-trimmed lawns, or in environments where drop kerbs and tactile pavements are abundant, and every door encountered is automatic, and parts like the Red Sea.

Were the occupants grin like emoticons and pain is a myth.

Where the weather is permanently sunny, and rain is a work of fiction only imaginable in a nightmare.

Where any degree of gradient has been air brushed from the pavement like dog excrement or those of no fixed abode.

Where the hills are not so much alive with The Sound of Music, as they are taboo, forbidden, invisible.

Powerchair users need power-chairs that can function in environments they actually encounter, spaces with hills, cracked and broken pavement slabs, no drop kerbs, holes in the road, spaces where equal access is an afterthought because that's how the world is.

## **Lisa Davies**

I am a power-chair user with Cerebral Palsy. I identify as disabled with a preference for social model understandings of disability. I write from and about my lived experience, I write about the everyday, the mundane, and my identity as a disabled person commonly influences the content, form and direction of my writing.

I joined the Survivor Writers' Group on the basis of my experience of discrimination and disablism. I aimed to support others, and was looking to connect with people who better understood my work. I enjoy writing comic poetry and like to feature humour in my writing.

I have returned to writing poetry having completed an autoethnographic doctorate in December 2022, entitled: An Autoethnographic Study of Disablism in England 2015 to 2018.

I am currently writing my own poetry collection using my lived experience as a creative catalyst for my work. I have previously had work published in Nerve magazine and The Great British Write Off.

# The Guilt I Hold of What I Couldn't Communicate

**Elinor Rowlands**

Content warnings: I don't know if this is a Content warning: but I could see how people might get frustrated at the sense of my longing for someone who clearly wasn't interested in me as a disabled person so I don't know if it's disablism or ableism, fear of surviving, access barriers.

Outside the world stops  
and breaks up the sky.

((when I become anxious, I feel all the colour drain from my face, I feel all my limbs go cold right away, my heart starts to race so hard it hurts, and I begin to shake.))

The world is stormy  
Hurling out of me, my voice  
It creeps.

Because of words, bones and conversations faulty

I tell someone I'm autistic until I'm blue in the face  
I do one thing destructive that I cannot control  
Because of the spiralling, exhaustion,  
And then they're gone. Vanished.  
I was suffering  
From so many things that lived in my head.  
I am a house and I am haunted.

During my third year at Aber,  
Struggling with my mental health, severe pain  
becoming more irritable.

incredibly stressed.

Struggling with conversations  
Keeping up the pretence

that I was fine.  
In China, I could no longer lie.

((You'll remember that time in Paris when I had a panic attack  
from just eating some food,  
the texture in my mouth made me gag,  
I didn't know what was wrong with me. ))

I went to a retreat thinking it would help my pain  
Juicing helped my Dad's cancer.

The next day, eating lunch with your family,  
your mother asked me how the retreat was,

I went into autistic overshare detailing the minute details  
of the philosophy  
and your sister asked me directly  
“Then why are you eating a chocolate pot?”

I felt so put on the spot - ashamed

You never came to my rescue.  
I was so embarrassed.  
I had wanted to get up and leave  
but I couldn't drive,

I remember making light of the situation  
but inside I was mortified.

There are memories where I felt very/extremely  
alone and like you weren't interested at all in  
how I felt about things. Like when Bongo would make fun of  
the way I spoke. You never stuck up for me.

I needed you to speak up for me but you never did.  
I couldn't express to you the stress  
I felt it in my head.

I felt so wrong for feeling these feelings and  
whenever I went into autistic meltdown or shutdown  
you told me you couldn't handle these emotions and  
I felt really wrong for having them, and so I felt ever so alone.

You always collaborated with my friends,  
but not me,  
and it reminded me of school,  
where I was always a secret friend.

I felt so sad, that we would never  
collaborate on projects together,

I so desperately wanted to live with you  
and not in a shared house again  
You'd said no, not yet.

I never showed you my tears, but I spent  
a lot of time crying alone.

I felt you didn't understand how much these experiences hurt me.

How could I move in with your family  
if I couldn't get a job in a shop, cafe or restaurant,  
if I couldn't stand?  
How could I stay in Aber with Teena  
if the boy who scared me  
kept coming over because he was friends with people in our shared house.

I didn't have the words,  
to be heard, by either of you,  
that I was scared of that boy, that I couldn't get a job, and I felt your sister,  
especially after Halloween and Easter,  
where she'd not been that nice to me,  
I felt she didn't like me and  
now your Dad, not sure about me,  
I felt I couldn't move into your family's home.

I felt I couldn't ask my parents for money,  
so we could get a home of our own.

I loved you but I could see you couldn't cope  
with anything "challenging" you wanted simples.

When you stopped communicating with me,  
it was like I'd lost a limb. You were my home.

I thought you loved me and that  
you'd know I loved you but I was struggling,

I loved your mother, she was so kind to me.  
I loved you so much, but I struggled to tell you  
what was wrong

because I didn't have the words. I didn't want to  
have these intrusive thoughts or to be so sensitive  
or experience fatigue all the time.

I felt as friends I could share with you so much more  
than when we were dating because I wanted to talk to you honestly  
about my pain/fatigue/struggles/stress  
and not always this need to be happy.

I thought as friends you'd want to collaborate with me,  
that we could be equals, that you'd see me  
as someone worthy

but the invitation never came, instead you became more distant,  
once in a while an email that said you'd hoped we  
were still friends, and the hope I'd feel in my heart, that you still cared.

I wanted to be different for you.  
I'd even asked if you could  
come to China with me when we were in London,  
and you'd said  
you'd gotten onto the teaching course  
And didn't want to change your plans.  
When I asked you about her  
you assured me nothing was going on and  
it would be the same as the year before,  
we'd be in close contact, that you'd contact me weekly,  
well we know the rest,  
Within a month you were in a committed  
relationship.

I feel you've had a wrong version  
of me for many years,  
I picked up on this when Jonathan wasn't very nice  
to me in the pub, with you,  
I didn't know what I had done  
to either of you,

I was there because  
I was excited for you,  
I wanted to support your practice,  
By buying some of your books,  
I have always treasured your words.

and I thought we were friends,  
even though

I was incredibly naive,  
I'm so sorry for anything or everything that I did.



## **Elinor Rowlands**

Elinor Rowlands is a London-based transdisciplinary poet and artist.

She creates audio-video performances, and performs live art with art texts and soundscapes to engage audiences. Her practice is moved by feelings of “otherness” offered through the prism of ritual and magic. Using repetitive and rhythmic gestures (“stimming”), her autistic/ADHD/synaesthesia filter explores texture, text, voice, recorded media and live performance.

Autism exists in her work intentionally, without being overtly placed at its centre. Her work has a phantasmagorical feel, overwhelming and immersive, secretive, yet particularly revealing to diverse audiences.

It has been compared to a Leonora Carrington psychological landscape - at one level displaying a consciousness echoing an ancient sensibility, at another expressing something intensely contemporary.

### **Recent work:**

Biodivergent Sites & Sounds (2023) - an autistic-led immersive and accessible interactive experience funded by Arts Council England. Creating “stim”scape trails around the canal to encourage interaction digitally, physically and community-led narratives.

### **Website:**

[elinorowlands.github.io/bss/index.html](https://elinorowlands.github.io/bss/index.html)

**Instagram:** @elinorowlandsart

**Facebook:** /elinorowlandsartist

I make no apology  
for my words

Lucille Power

Content warnings: mentions of chronic illness, death, allusion to suicide,  
medicine, mental anguish.

I make no apology for my words.

To live sick, is to live with suffering without end. We are told to listen to our bodies, but what if our bodies answer back with symptoms so vile and strange that it is scarcely believable? "knowledge of how to live with suffering and limitation it cannot cure remains on the margins of medicine."<sup>1</sup> When we aren't believed by those we care about, by the world, and by medicine, what then?

I need you to listen.

Western medicine is failing those of us living with chronic illness. We fall outside the path of diagnostic testing and well-established and available treatment pathways. We do not gain credibility for insisting that we are ill, that we deserve treatments, and that we are living an intolerable life of suffering and pain. "When time travel [of cure] doesn't work or simply isn't possible, we need a thousand ways to process the grief".<sup>2</sup>

Living sick is finding ways to get through time, unwell. It is being forced to develop resourcefulness in the face of prejudice on every level. It is to live with the admin of the sick, the begging bowl of not being believed by the state, the trauma of not being believed, time and time again by the medical profession. It is to learn to live in the isolation reserved for those too ill to work, socialise, or be in the world in the ways others take for granted. "I have spent too many days in a place beyond living, watching hours of reality TV... I am too sick to have employment, attend any school, or live independently without treatment or cure".<sup>3</sup>

When I applied to *You Are Here*, it was not as a writer, but as someone who had been an artist/performer for three decades, no longer able to work in this way due to ill health. My concerns were that my writing might constitute a diary splurge of my life. I knew that I wasn't interested in only writing my story. I wanted to see what my creative practice might be now, when I can no longer work as a performer. I saw it as an opportunity to ask 'what now?' My work as a performer was about meaningful connections, was always fleeting, reflecting my limited energy. Dipping into the world to make work, and dipping out again, to rest, but not to fully recover. Like a momentary breaking of the waves, to then sink below the water again, a return to living sick. For those of us living with M.E./CFS there is no finite recovery.

So what now, now that I live doubly sick, with Long Covid in addition to M.E.?  
What now, when even a fleeting performance practice is out of reach?

1. Wendell, Susan. *The Rejected Body*. 1996 (P137).  
2. Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection*, 2017. (P57-58).  
3. Munson, Peggy. *The Invisible Panelist*. 2022. [disabilityhistory.org](http://disabilityhistory.org)

This is a beginning of sorts.

Here, for now, this writing is my creative practice. My words, written and spoken. In Peer Support training to support others with Long-Covid. In writing about my experiences living sick. In reading the words of others living sick. My work has sited itself in meetings, around provision for Long Covid, asking 'How do we use Long Covid to change how the world sees chronic illness?'

I've spoken of my decades living with ME, the isolation, the lack of support. I've spoken about the effects of stigma, and of not being believed.

So here is my work, now. In all of these words. This really matters.

In creative approaches to adjusting my life. In this process, I have begun to ask 'is there a way I can be more present in the world, be able to embrace what I'd like to do' or 'can I find new ways of doing things?'. My practice is requesting breaks in meetings, being practical about pacing, and beginning to learn what adjustments I might need in order to exist outside of my bedroom. My practice is in positively embracing 'crip time' in my life. "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds."<sup>4</sup>

Why does it matter so much? Why do I come back to this, again and again? Because M.E. /CFS has a difficult and deeply troubling history, in medicine, and in society. One riven with gender, race, and class bias. One that has caused suffering, one that has caused death.

It matters because it has taken me thirty years to get to this point. It has taken me this time to be able to separate out the stigma, shame, and pain, in order to be able to write about my experiences, to begin to uncover what I need to say. Why, when we are suffering, and when we are at our most vulnerable, is there no care?

Knowing that this matters helps. Sometimes I imagine a world where the illnesses I live with have proper treatments. Where we retain our expectation that we will be listened to, we will be heard, and we will be believed. That we will have proper healthcare. That we will be statistics that are fully formed, rather than just part of a partial number of recorded diagnoses that few are interested in, and that doesn't reflect the people who never got a diagnosis.

So I wonder, how do we live sick, how do we learn to live with the grief, the

4. Kafer, Alison. *Feminist Queer Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.

loss, the pain and stigma, to inhabit a space of radical acceptance? Maybe 'Crip Time'<sup>6</sup> offers us that possibility. Perhaps there is a space of being where we can harness the skills we have developed, of resourcefulness, survival and endurance, to create a space outside of normative time.

"How might we celebrate Crip Time as a resistant orientation, one that causes us to reimagine what can and should happen in time, how then, do we celebrate it, whilst allowing ourselves to feel its pain, its melancholy, its brokenness?"<sup>5</sup>

5. Samuels, Ellen. Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time. 2017

6. Crip Time: Alison Kafer first coined the term "Crip time" in her book, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*  
"Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires re-imagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." - A.Kafer 'Feminist, Queer, Crip' 2013

## Lucille Power

**Lucille Power** is a queer non-binary performer, writer and activist, working to change how the world views chronic illness. They have lived with M.E./CFS for the past 30 years. They also live with Long Covid.

They have been making performance, facilitating workshops, and producing their own projects for 3 decades. They use a collaborative approach to making, and their work has been described as multi-layered and complex. They create non-hierarchical, non-judgemental and fluid learning spaces, challenging heteronormativity, that value artist co-collaborators and audience members alike.

Their 'crip' art practice is concerned with questioning ableist assumptions, and hierarchies of productivity. They work to enact change through writing and talking about their lived experience of illness, and the systemic changes urgently needed in how ill people are treated, by society, the medical profession, and the state.

# Ghiwa Sayegh

Ghiwa Sayegh is an anarcha-queer writer, independent publisher, and archivist. They are the founding editor of Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research. They have an MA in gender studies from Université Paris 8 Vincennes – Saint-Denis.

“Well, being in the publishing world, I would say that I see how many challenges and obstacles there are institutionally when it comes to publishing. And I think that a lot of authors kind of get stuck, because of how many challenges there are from the moment of writing to the moment of publishing.

...but that is not the only way. I can give Kohl as an example: we don't print anything, we exist online and we have a really big readership. We are taught at universities and sometimes I'm like, *'I have (not had) no idea how we did this'*, because we're completely bypassing everything that's known to publication.

So it's not impossible, there are so many ways to just put work out there, maybe not in the way that we imagined it. But everything's possible. And I would say that rather than let (the publishing world) hinder a process of community, like for it to actually foster community, because when we turn to other writers, to other communities of writers, what we're doing is thinking about how the writing itself can become a political tool and not the end product.”

# Ghiwa Sayegh

"I think that when we're faced with things like genocide...when we're faced with something that big, and that incomprehensible, I think the first impulse is to say let's put creativity on the side. Like, that's really the first impulse I feel. That's in the first days, it feels so daunting, because it's like there's no place for words almost. There's no words to describe the enormity of what it is that we're going through, the horror, and also the horror of realising that, you know, how banal it is, to some.. (again going back to the ideological war.). And so it feels like writing is in suspension, a suspension at that point, because we want to bring a truth out desperately...except what words do you use for that? ....

.....But I definitely felt this moment where we stop and say: do we even have words? And I think recovering language is then the process of dealing with the trauma, as well."



## SJ Lyon

SJ Lyon is a London-based queer writer of fiction, narrative non-fiction and memoir. They were shortlisted for Spread the Word's Life Writing prize for 'People that Might Be Us' and their personal essay 'Did you know you can swim in the morning' was published in Hinterland. '

They were selected for the London Writers Awards in 2022 to develop their first long-form memoir. Their short fiction appears in Water: A Collection of Stories (<https://www.writingmaps.com/products/water>) They are also a charity worker, visual artist and gardener

"...I feel like that has actually helped me a lot. Talking and thinking in terms of publishing and marketing. I do wonder if it changes things slightly, when you address the question "Is there a market for this?" with "Is there a community for this? Are there people that need this story?" And "Is it the story that it wants to be?"...

## SJ Lyon

“There’s a question about whether drawing any kind of equivalence (between survivor experiences) is useful, whether it’s a true or a false one. I feel like it’s really hard for any one person to say, but I think the intent is important.

So with the case of the pandemic, it’s quite easy to say well, we’ve had other pandemics in the past that have had a very different response.

If we talk about the HIV AIDS pandemic of the 80s. It was very different. And there’s a lot of reasons why it might have been very different. So we can talk still about the commonalities without necessarily eclipsing the past.

I don’t think it should be done to cover up somebody else’s experience, to step on somebody or to talk over somebody, I think it should be used as a way of relating to other people. And yeah, and doing something useful.

It’s something that’s constantly being negotiated and navigated. I don’t know if I’ve been lucky, but I think a lot of my experiences with other writers has been that people are quite open to... to sharing space with each other and to hearing other people’s perspectives.

I think it can be empowering as well, to take a step and experiment with with drawing some level of equivalence, it doesn’t mean, you’re saying your experience is identical to somebody else’s, because it can never be.

But respecting somebody else’s story means you have the capacity to give yourself that same respect. And that same validation, and I think, I genuinely believe that’s the most loving thing that we can do.”

# Francesca Dolor

Francesca Dolor is a visual artist and writer who lives in London. Their work is concerned with areas of extremity to form a type of psychic self-surgery. Their paintings and drawings are formed of self-automated internal subject matter, which explore internal landscapes and architecture, ideas of subversion, as well as the subconscious.

“I think the most important thing for me personally, today is the importance of private writing. Private writing for me is very much important to my survival, and how I deal with things on a daily basis. I think we’re dealing with powerful things, you know, the word ‘survival’ is not to be taken lightly. People who consider themselves to be survivors in whatever context that is...you’ve had to overcome something that was very dangerous, or multiple things that were very dangerous to your wellbeing in your life. And I think that carries a long legacy for a lot of people for different reasons. And I think that is why the private writing practice is so important, because it allows me to live with those experiences. And I think that is the most vital thing...it’s not about importance, it’s about a need, isn’t it? Like for me, I need to do that, because I need to carry on. Need to find a way to live, basically.

The thing with sort of more public facing (writing) is that, who knows how that will manifest.. but I do think that humans are creative. I think that’s part of a human desire to be creative, and that that can manifest in lots of different ways. It’s not necessarily an artistic thing, always. But I think that creating something or making something or producing, they’re very important to the survival of humans in general, aren’t they? you have to make stuff do stuff, otherwise, you can’t get your basic needs met. And I think that that’s why often creative stuff, it does have a sort of defiance to it and such a powerful transformative mode, because it’s doing the opposite of what some adverse experiences would want, which is to destroy you. You know, so it’s like, do it, I suppose. It’s doing the opposite of what...of what you think is being asked of you.”

# Music

Arran Mara

Content warnings:  
reference to mild hoarding, general trauma memory themes

I was a teenager in the 2000s, and just like your average teen girl in the noughties I was really into etymology and mid 20th century American subcultures. These interests collided when I learned of the supposed origins of the term groovy. I say supposed because now I'm more of an advanced nerd I think it seems like it might be more of a folk etymology, because the origins of slang terms never have such a direct path as people really want them to. It's a very human thing to create neat narratives for things that are inconveniently messy in reality.

Having said that, just because I know fact checking exists now doesn't mean I can be bothered to do it. It doesn't matter anyway, what is truth in the face of belief? I remember reading that groovy started with those hep cats in Greenwich village who smoked reefer while listening to jazz records. Vinyl records have these physical grooves in the material that act as the information for the needle to read and then turn into emotion. I knew this because when I entered my hipster not-like-other girls era, my mother let me raid her old record collection that had been largely untouched for years. All those records up til then in my childhood home had been just yet more old stuff gathering dust, things upon things that functioned as little more than the matte painting backdrop to my life until that point. There was a whole world of undiscovered mysteries amongst The Stuff I'd long since learned to just navigate around by then.

Most of the records were classical or what might be lumped under the label of world music now, but I managed to find a Joan Baez concert recording and "best of" compilations of Simon and Garfunkel and Janis Joplin, and I quickly became obsessed. But with some songs more than others. I soon cottoned on that the pattern of rings on the disc corresponded to the beginning and end of tracks so I could pick up the needle and drop it straight to a favourite. Or just pick the needle up to drop it back to the beginning of a favourite when it ended. Again and again and again.

And that's apparently what groovy referred to: to get into the grooves of the track. To feel the music like a tangible thing. I always pictured it like the music was big and you were so small you could fall into its grooves like falling into a giant mountain crevasse or something. You can only submit to its all-engulfing powers. You are returned to something greater than yourself, just as your physical body will return to the earth and feed new life until it dies to feed another life ad infinitum until you are forgotten and the world continues as though you never existed.

Apparently if you play the same song over and over enough on a vinyl record you can damage it, even though the needle seems to barely glide over the

surface there's still friction occurring. And over time that incremental friction damage can dig even deeper grooves with the needle and end up ruining the physical imprint of the music until it can't play properly any more. I never got bad enough to find out if that's true for myself, but I've played some songs so many times during certain times in my life it's like they've left a physical groove in my brain. Now when I play them it's like a needle dropping into place into my head, it's fitting into place and treading its well-worn path. The satisfying feeling of slipping a tape into a deck, something slotting just right into a space that was made for it. But a cigarette after a shag is satisfying too, doesn't mean it's good for me to indulge in.

I read recently that the more you revisit a memory the more it will warp over time, a memory you don't think of often will stay more true to what actually occurred. It's like your brain making a little game of telephone with itself, something little changing each time it's brought back. Like the needle on the stylus imperceptibly damaging the record every time it's played until it's too warped to play right. I don't want to look up if this is true or not, it seems plausible but I don't think I'd be able to cope if I ever had it confirmed to me. I already can't stand feeling like I don't know what was real or not. I can't stand thinking about how I'll never know for sure.

## **Arran Mara**

I am a queer changeling on wheels, charging full-speed into self-exploration through the lens of Madness, gender, disability, history, mythology and the intangible. Growing up in an environment where I knew what I said didn't matter, and that talking wouldn't help; I relied on writing diaries. Writing was a way to cope with the intense isolation of being housebound, out of mainstream education, and in an abusive and neglectful household throughout my adolescence. My writing is an honouring and an evolution of my teenage diary-writing years, a way for me to chronicle my life and to remake connections; lost from years of chronic dissociation.

The writer's group held up a mirror for me to see I had a unique voice and a talent worth pursuing. I'm currently working on a collection of short prose pieces that weave together the absurd and tragic; as naturally as they intertwine in life.

# A Photo & Fossil

**Ennis Welbourne**

Content warnings:  
Implied pedophilic abuse, child neglect, dissociation.

A Photo-

Daddy dearest sees me, baggy eyed, scraggly haired.  
I have a face always breaking to cry. Tearing down my-  
Over his-

After the shower, he pulls back the misted pane of glass.  
Pats me down with a scratchy hotel towel,

I totter through the steam  
Escaping to the next room.

I curl up on the bed.

Daddy takes out his camera,  
He kneels in his black jeans.  
I know he's taking my photo  
So I present my face, serene

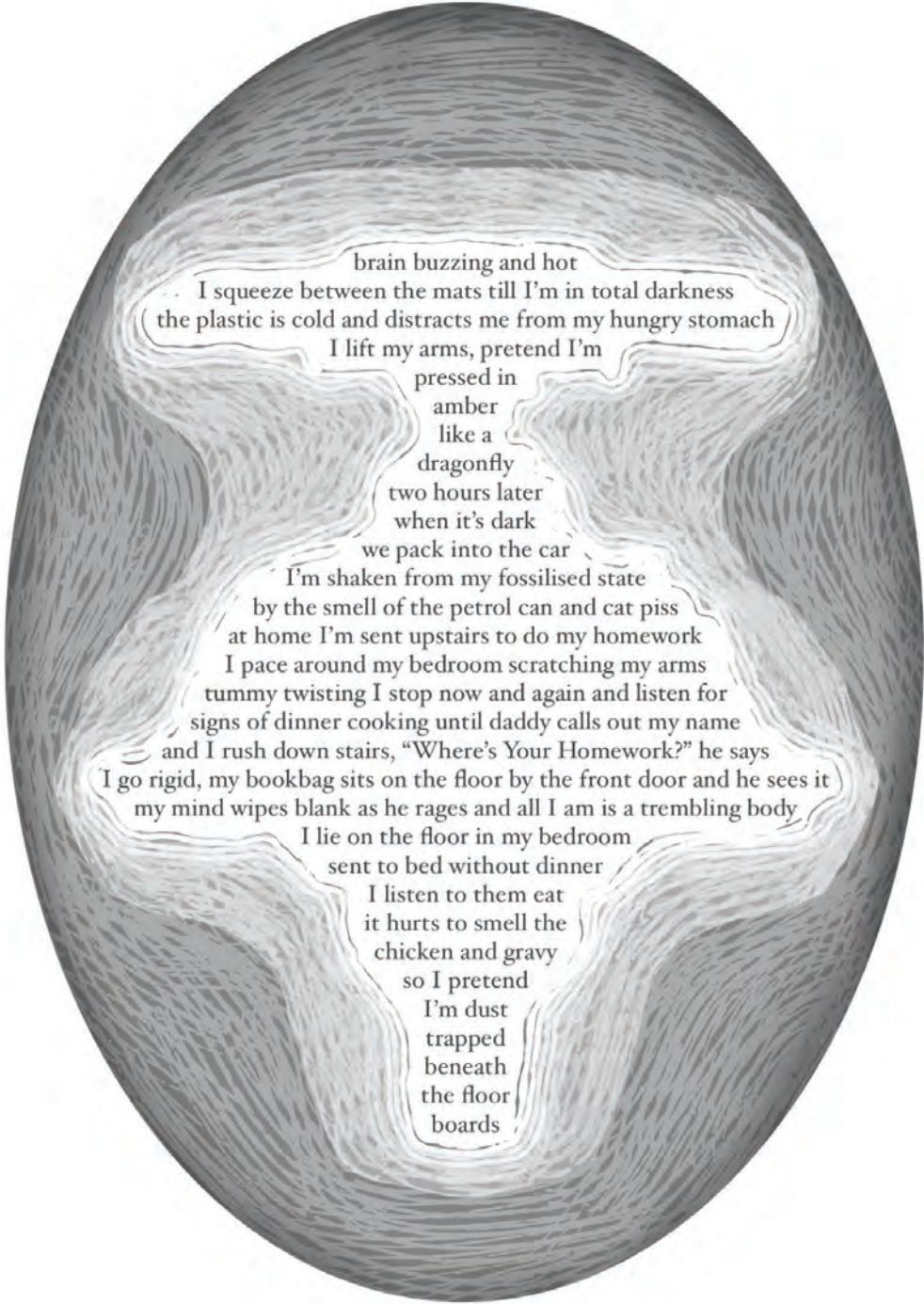
To be captured:

(thin skin, blue rising veins  
damp sticking hair  
pink peaks on my chest  
dark giddy blushing lips  
bruises like charcoal on paper)

I touch the screen  
My face like glass

Should I remember this?





brain buzzing and hot  
I squeeze between the mats till I'm in total darkness  
the plastic is cold and distracts me from my hungry stomach  
I lift my arms, pretend I'm  
pressed in  
amber  
like a  
dragonfly  
two hours later  
when it's dark  
we pack into the car  
I'm shaken from my fossilised state  
by the smell of the petrol can and cat piss  
at home I'm sent upstairs to do my homework  
I pace around my bedroom scratching my arms  
tummy twisting I stop now and again and listen for  
signs of dinner cooking until daddy calls out my name  
and I rush down stairs, "Where's Your Homework?" he says  
I go rigid, my bookbag sits on the floor by the front door and he sees it  
my mind wipes blank as he rages and all I am is a trembling body  
I lie on the floor in my bedroom  
sent to bed without dinner  
I listen to them eat  
it hurts to smell the  
chicken and gravy  
so I pretend  
I'm dust  
trapped  
beneath  
the floor  
boards

## **Ennis Welbourne**

Ennis Welbourne (they/them) is a marginalised writer developing online spaces for writers under the banner **Access Narrative**. They use their lived experience to design accessible community for those who are neurodivergent, disabled, poor and who have experienced trauma.

Ennis is drawn to experimental storytelling in both fiction and nonfiction. You can find more of their illustrated memoir **Problem Behaviour** on **Substack**.

They are a Bath Spa creative writing graduate and work part-time for London Lit Lab as Assistant Editor.

# Totems, Tokens and Abstractions

Francine Hajlou

## Content warnings:

Grief, a brief account of visiting a body in a morgue, unpleasant descriptions of the remains of a dead seagull, mention of climate emergency, climate grief, allusion to depression, use of the word 'mad' (not my words) in the notes and mention of undiagnosed mental health issues. ( I don't know if I am using incorrect terms, and I won't speculate about the causes of the episodes when he experienced distress and his struggles with his mental health).

On my kitchen shelf, next to the bowls is an altar, of sorts. It's made from a small pinkish shell, an old sprig of wild oregano, and a skeletonised leaf. Picking up the remnants of the leaf, I hold it to the light from the kitchen window to admire it. I could have left it on Holywell Fen where I found it and it would have given up its frail lacework of cellulose and lignin to the microbiome of the fen from which it grew. Instead, it's on a different path desiccating amongst coffee grounds, breadcrumbs, and other detritus from my life. I am a habitual collector of objects from the natural world, the lifeless body of a fat bumble bee, or a pine cone that sheds its winged seed pods when I nudge it aside to clean the window sill beneath it. The ritual of finding and living with these objects tethers me to the natural world and its rhythms – its cycles of life, death, and rebirth. I haven't always thought of them as altars but I believe they always have been.

A few years ago, my good friend Anita, invited me to join the reading group she was running, its focus was African Spiritual Traditions. Curious about the cultural and spiritual beliefs of my ancestral heritage, (growing up on the fringes of my Jamaican family I had gleaned a little knowledge of Jamaican customs and beliefs: Nine-Nights, duppies, the pouring of libations at a funeral) I joined the group. While reading a book about Santería, a Caribbean syncretic religion with Yoruba roots, certain aspects of the religion surrounding nature, and the ritual of making altars for worship and protection resonated with me. I started thinking about my rituals in a new way and I tentatively began calling the feathers, stones, skulls, and herbs I'd gathered and brought into my home altars. And although they are not devoted to a religious deity they are still potent and meaningful on a personal level. I also now see them as an intentional move towards reclaiming and embedding elements of my ancestral cultural heritage in my life.

I don't only make altars though. I also keep lucky talismans. During a particularly anxious period of my life (I had just completed a Master's degree in creative writing and had no idea what to do next; the COVID-19 pandemic had hit; and the value of the lives of Black people was once again up for global public debate) I began keeping with me at all times a small black, triangular stone. It was about the size of a £2 coin and had a minuscule, white fossilised sea urchin in its centre. I couldn't believe my luck when I spotted it among the millions of pebbles and stones on Mermaid Beach near my home in Folkestone.

And the joy of it. At the time, I remember feeling like it had found me, or that we had found each other; either way, I was certain Fate had gifted me something beautiful and precious at the time I most needed it. Just the weight of it in my hand or having it in a coat pocket where I could touch its

familiar ridges and smooth surfaces would put me at ease as I got on with my day. Looking back, I've been transforming objects into totems for a long time.

Some finds are not for keeping. Twenty-six years and six months ago as I was walking home from the mortuary at Kent and Canterbury Hospital I found a severed seagull wing in a gutter next to the pavement. I had been saying goodbye to the man who, over the years, I'd fallen out of love with. We had children and we'd been trying to work things out when he died. I'd visited his body daily for almost two weeks – perhaps because it had been a deeply problematic relationship with too much left unsaid or perhaps because, no matter what, it takes time to come to terms with an unexpected, avoidable death.

When I arrived that day, a nurse told me it would be the last time I could see him. She also told me not to touch him because it was no longer hygienic. His body had become host to microbial lifeforms that belong only to the dead. Seeing that wing at the side of the road, torn and bloodied where it should have been attached to a body, was too significant, too profound to ignore. I gathered it up and carried it home in my hands, just crying and crying. I left the wing in my garden overnight and the next day it was gone. There are stages of grief and we all have to do what we can to move through them.

I place the leaf back on the shelf and inhale deeply, meditatively. I bring my awareness back to the rhythms and cycles of the fen. It's one of my favourite places to walk and think. I love how, after heavy rainfall, ephemeral pools spring up all over it, and how its sodden ground, weeps, sucks and belches when I walk on it. I love the fen in the summer when it becomes a meadow of long grasses and daisies and I love the high-pitched calls of swifts as they dart about high above me feasting on insects. I love its ancientness. There is something about being in a place that is over one hundred million years old that puts everything in proportion and even forever doesn't seem so daunting. In physics the law of conservation of energy states that energy can't be created nor destroyed, only converted from one form to another.

And there it is like the sun on my back. Acceptance.  
I hope it stays with me for a while.

## Francine Hajilou

Francine is currently developing a memoir written in hybrid form. Its working title is *Lacuna: Notes from Nowhere*. For this project, Francine is experimenting with using poetry, autoethnography, nature writing, speculative memoir writing, and personal essays to communicate the complexities of her lived experiences of childhood sexual assault, generational trauma cycles, domestic violence, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism.

In this memoir, Francine focuses on her body as a site of joy, pain, trespass, and freedom. She is interested in using experimental, fragmented forms of writing to reflect the physical and psychological landscapes of trauma. Questions central to this work are what it means to thrive as a survivor, notions surrounding recovery, and cycles of silencing and shame.

*Tokens, Totems, and Abstractions* is part of her enquiry into using nature writing and personal essays to explore embodied knowledge and connection to Place as an act of reclamation, reinvention, and resistance.

# All My Friends Are Lonely Too

Orla Price

Content warnings:  
Medications, suicidal ideation.

## Scene One

Aisling (20) lying on her bed staring at the ceiling. There is a phone face up in one of her palms. There is a pile of books beside the bed and a chest. On the chest is a glass of water and blisters of pills and pill bottles. Besides Aisling's other palm is a medication leaflet. Her phone buzzes, she lifts it and answers.

**Voice on phone – MAGDA**

Where are you?

**ASH (short for Aisling)**

Uhhhhh, it's a difficult question, could I have 50:50 or phone a friend?

**MAGDA**

Not funny, also you would NEVER phone a friend.

**ASH**

Have you tapped my phone? Maybe I phone many friends that are not you.

**MAGDA**

*Scoffs*

oooooohhhh, right back to business – get out of your room!

**ASH**

No, I'm actually very busy

**MAGDA**

Doing what? Nothing?!?

**ASH**

Nothing as a concept as has been debated for millennia, there is no objective evidence to suggest it exist...

**MAGDA**

Ash, shut up

**ASH**

... no objective reality, there is no nothing...

**MAGDA**

seriously!!



ASH

You could say nothing is in fact... nothing

MAGDA

Come out now

ASH

What so I can talk about nothing, and you can tell me to shut up??

MAGDA

I'm not going to do that

ASH

It is just what you have been doing

MAGDA

Nothing is an impossibility as you have said, so you will talk about something

ASH

Wow you listened to me, sort of-

MAGDA

-Ash

ASH

So I'll talk about something then and you'll tell me to shut up??

MAGDA

Right, I don't deserve this.

ASH

Deserve what?

MAGDA

This absolute shite when I am trying to help  
*Silence, Aisling rubs her temples.*

ASH

I'll be down soon, cycling

MAGDA

Yer da can't give you a lift?

ASH

Out

MAGDA

You'll cycle after drinking?

ASH

There is no other way I fear, I put my life in danger for your company

MAGDA

*Laughs*

One day we'll live somewhere with a bus stop.

ASH

Such ambition, I can't believe that they worry about you in career guidance.

MAGDA

Ok well we'll see you soon to court drunken cycling danger, I love you-

ASH

-I...

*Dial tone sounds. Aislings figure moves off the bed and into the background  
A man enters the stage in a suit beaming*

GAME SHOW HOST

Hi there everyone, welcome to the socialising shooow.

*Gestures hand as if to raise some applause.*

We have three contestants tonight performing for our audience, yes all you lovely people. If you're not familiar with the game show and its rules, this is a game-show based on performance. You lovely audience will be judging the performances. Don't worry I'll introduce every round, any known rules and the best criteria to judge by as we go along. My name is FEAR and I will be your host tonight, good evening.

*Bows dramatically and resumes.*

*Drags the next words out*

laaaydees aaand geeentlemen -

That's right you have to choose a side, that's the first part of the performance, round 1 is what we call 'The costume round'. Some good criteria to judge this round by is the ability to conform visually to 'a side' but a huge element of performing this round well is to give the appearance of looking 'well'. Someone who appears well is usually someone we do not worry about. The other contestants feeling concern for you based on your costume or behaviours will plummet your score and it will also make the contestant in question feel guilty, glances behind – You don't want to feel *guilty* do you?–

*Aisling is in the background in shadow looking in a wardrobe mirror, she is muttering to herself and now becomes louder*

### ASH

– Why do I feel so guilty about wanting to say something? I want to tell them, that there's a name a label for this. That I'm not just weird and miserable and awkward, that I can't help it sometimes. But it seems like a cop-out, it seems like an excuse, it seems like asking forgiveness for my personality. When they referred me to the hospital, I was crying–I was in floods and then they handed me that prescription. The little piece of paper –looked like a ticket, I could go somewhere else in my mind, like I could get out of all this, this confusion, this darkness and overwhelm like something in the middle could exist, like I could just swallow this thing and be more like everyone else, be normal, win higher scores in the popularity game. Well, I have been swallowing these things for a while now and it's not that I have become normal, it's that I have become someone who doesn't care. That sounds liberating, doesn't it? Except it's not because the thing is now, I don't care about anything, I don't care about art, about music about ... I don't care about caring. The pain is gone, and that edge is gone, that sharp edge is gone but everything is an effort now, everything is an effort now and if it wasn't for other people worrying I might just lie down forever... as it is the show goes ooonn –

### GAMESHOW HOST

– Well thank you for the interlude but I am not sure it will contribute to your score in this first performance. All your friends are ladies as such, gals, girls, huns, etcetera and perform so well as such it's like they're not even performing at all...

*Aisling has walked out and emerges in a hoodie and cap.*

Ah we have chosen 'don't look at me' again, we might need to expand and diversify to please the audience of judges, they're a tough crowd tonight, the audience of judges are counting their scores, a repeat performance of 'don't

look at me' has not grabbed their attention, they're consulting now ...

*Squints into the audience as if to read*

*Actor will need to improvise here depending on the numbers of the most visible score-cards the audience holds up*

A lot of decimal points and zeros here, I do believe that's a grand total of one across all the score cards, ooofff, well let's see how our player performs in round 2....

## **Orla Price**

I am an Irish writer, artist, and trainee art psychotherapist living in London. I support young disabled and/or neurodivergent people, developing and running wellbeing groups. I am neurodivergent myself and passionate about furthering understanding of neurodivergency, mental health and the benefits of creativity and play.

I am working on my first play 'All My Friends Are Lonely Too'. In the play 3 friends go to their local pub with a lot on their minds, however they are prevented from talking properly when all their interactions have been split into 'rounds' by an eccentric host and judged by an audience with score-cards. The play explores themes like masking, straight passing and the ways and reasons people might perform socially. An extract of the play featured in the 'Pinch of Vault festival'.

**Pronouns:** she/they

**Instagram:** @orlas\_art\_insta

**Website:** [www.orlaprice.crevado.com](http://www.orlaprice.crevado.com)

## Jason Barker

Jason Barker is a filmmaker, writer, occasional actor and sometimes stand-up comedian based in the West Country. He is currently developing a feature film called Mister Uterus with BFI Film Fund, Delaval Films and Tigerlily Productions. He was selected for the BBC Writers Voices 2023 and the Bafta X BFI Flare mentoring scheme 2022.

“You know the daft thing about this, I know I sound like I’m ‘finally’ learning things, but I sometimes get this about the writing that I’m doing now is I think...like occasionally I get like this internal critic voice saying, “Who do you think you are? You’re too old, how dare you call yourself an emerging writer, at your age? Surely you should have emerged now? How could you possibly be new? What do you have to say when you’re so old?”

Or all of these things that are really mean, mean thoughts and then I think about it, and I think well, you know, but why not? I just have to really unpick all of those thoughts.

When I was younger, I definitely would believe all of that, I would apply it to me, I’d be like “if I can’t see a person like me doing any of the things that I want to do, then that is an impossibility and cannot be done”, rather than thinking “Oh, okay, I’ll be that person”...”

# Jason Barker

"I really wanted to tell a story about that time, because that time marked to me a kind of a change, .. So it was the Gender Recognition act of 2004.

...So we all took the piss out of it but now, it's like "I don't want it taken away" and it's become this symbol. But also, I think there was a change in how we saw ourselves as a community, how we thought about being trans. And so I'm kind of writing about that through a character...

...who starts out wishing he wasn't trans, and ends up being really glad that he's trans, who starts out thinking that trans is a curse, and ends up thinking that being trans is a blessing.

... so it's an interesting time for that, in that I think that there was a shift in...a shift in how we thought about ourselves and the kind of knock-on effects to where we've got now.

...as a community, we were changing. We were changing how we thought about ourselves, just a sort of different sense of, dare I say the word "pride", you know, that walking on pride, being part of the trans group on Pride and feeling like "yeah, I can stand with this. And this is a word that I'll use about myself".

# Christine Bylund

Christine Bylund is a queer crip-femme researcher, writer and performer. Her work centres around disability, power, sexuality and everyday life. In 2022 she defended her thesis in ethnology at Umeå universitet (Umeå University), exploring the material and existential effects of the changeable support politics of the Swedish welfare state. Her work is represented in the Swedish queer sound archive Arkivet för rosa brus (The Archive of Pink Noises), and as a performer, she most recently worked at The Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm.

Christine is currently a postdoc at Umeå University in the department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies. Her PhD was on family life and family building for people with dis/abilities and the relation to the welfare state. (Formal title: Anachronistic living conditions : dis/ability, possibility and desire in the changeable Swedish welfare state).

“...there’s this discourse of how it’s all possible if you put your mind to it, and other types of absolute bullshit. So I actively seek to step out of that kind of representation, and then how other people speak about me, I can’t control; I’m sure they talk about me in different senses. But to also show that even if I have achieved all these things that perhaps not even non-disabled people would achieve, my everyday life is very much in fact, impacted by the fact that I live in a society that’s rooted very deeply in an ableist understanding, and that this oppression is so all encompassing.

So I try to kind of position myself in a way that shows that the oppression doesn’t disappear, because I become a researcher. And often it intensifies, if you try and move out of the ascribed social position for you. I think about it as an active stance against that kind of narrative.”

# Christine Bylund

“One thing that is also connected to survivorship for me and maybe as a researcher as well, is this notion of “would I be a happier, more content person if I didn’t know all these things very intricately?” If I didn’t know how the welfare state distributes safety and unsafety, and if I didn’t have words for all these kinds of cultural messages that come at me as a disabled person.

And then when I think about that, I also think that if I didn’t know what this was, it would just affect me and I wouldn’t have words. It would just be this state of wading through these undescribable or unknowledgeable experiences, that would just happen to me and that would, I think, feed into this notion of internalisation: that, then it’s me. If all these things keep happening to me, then it’s me. And I think that that’s what’s so freeing for me about this politicised or oppression driven understanding of what disability is, and also freeing about the survivorship identity in that sense.

I wouldn’t say that I use (survivor)...I don’t use it often to describe myself, in general; but when...when you asked me about how I feel, it ties into my being and the work that I do.”



# Dior Clarke

Dior Clarke is a British born Jamaican. He grew up in North London. After graduating from secondary school he trained at, The London School of Dramatic Arts, The National Youth Theatre and finally The Academy of Live Recorded Arts.

His desire to be a vessel for under-represented black, gay and working class voices propelled him to craft a successful career in the arts world as an actor, writer and director.

In 2018 Dior wrote, directed and acted the lead in, Batty Boy a Sky Arts production. His spark to continue putting such stories on mainstream platforms lead him to his most recent stage play, Passion Fruit which debuted at the New Diorama Theatre in 2022. A semi-autobiographical coming-of-age comedy-drama. A sold out five star review run gaining five Black British Award Nominations as well as others. Passion Fruit will be returning to a renowned theatre venue in 2024.

“Please, please don’t sit there and be disheartened or be upset. Write it; come together and create it because you can’t expect your story to be told...you just have to tell it and people might see this as a bit controversial – but you can’t expect people to tell your story that’s not their story to be told.

Yes, we do need more people in the power positions, so that when we do write our stories, they then can put it on. But you know what, you’re not...you’re nowhere close unless you wrote it yet. When you’ve written it and you’re ready to tell it and you know, reach out to people like myself, reach out to people like you know, that similar and form, find your people that support you, find your people that triumph you. When you get to that stage, then you can start the battle, but write it.”

# Dior Clarke

"I fell into writing, because writing was never my thing. I only said I was going to write because once I got into the acting industry, I was in this industry that embraces me, but at the same time, I'm not seeing people...

I'm not seeing my story being told, I'm not seeing people like me in the theatre and I'm still not seeing people like me on TV. And when I do see people like me on TV, I'm seeing Top Boys, what else is there...the Kidulthoods. I used to think but I'm from that area and I have a story and I want to see myself in those stories. So you know, I'm gonna write a story. And that's when I wrote my first ever thing called Batty Boy. And the journey has continued. But that's how it sparked in me, surviving in my world and making sure I survive in my career because I deserve to have a voice and I deserve to be seen. And I think it's something I'm still currently going through now, even with my successes that I've had.

I think that one thing Short Flicks taught me was: don't tell the story that you think the world wants to hear, tell the story that's important to you because that's what's going to be good. And I think so much depends on what you've been through in life, the knockbacks, especially if the story or part of the story that you're telling is from so long in the past and insecurity or something that you wasn't confident about, you do get into this thing of "who's going to care about me?" And you think of all the negatives but for some reason, there was something in me that just knew that it was a good story."

## Acknowledgements

This project is Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

In collaboration with Spread The Word and Wellcome Collection.

Huge thanks and connection to all the survivor writers who took part. Also everyone who supported with access and helped to make things happen.



Supported using public funding by  
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