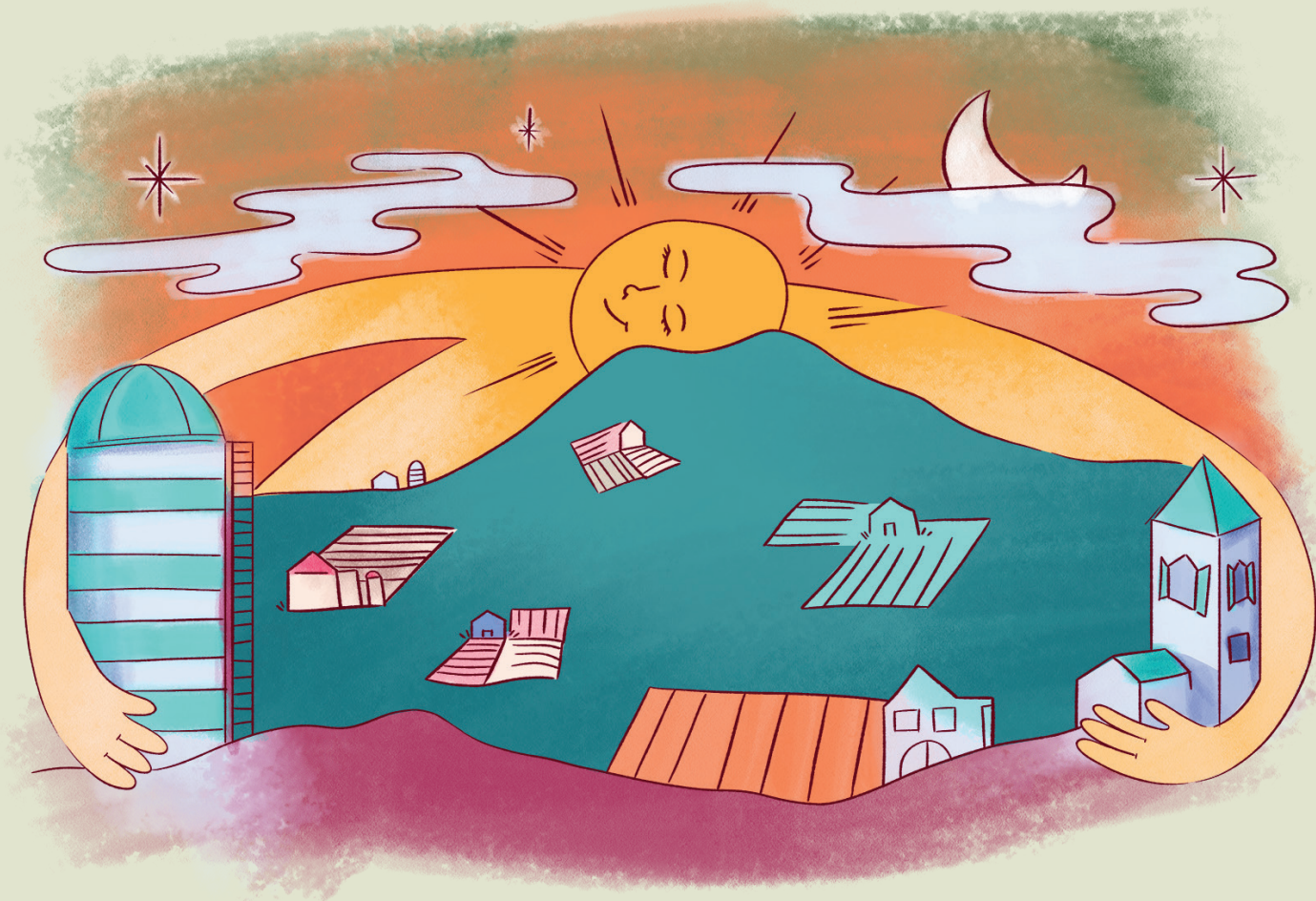


# Alberta 2S/LGBTQ+

## Connections

A Zine by and for Rural Folks





# Alberta 2S/LGBTQ+ Connections Zine

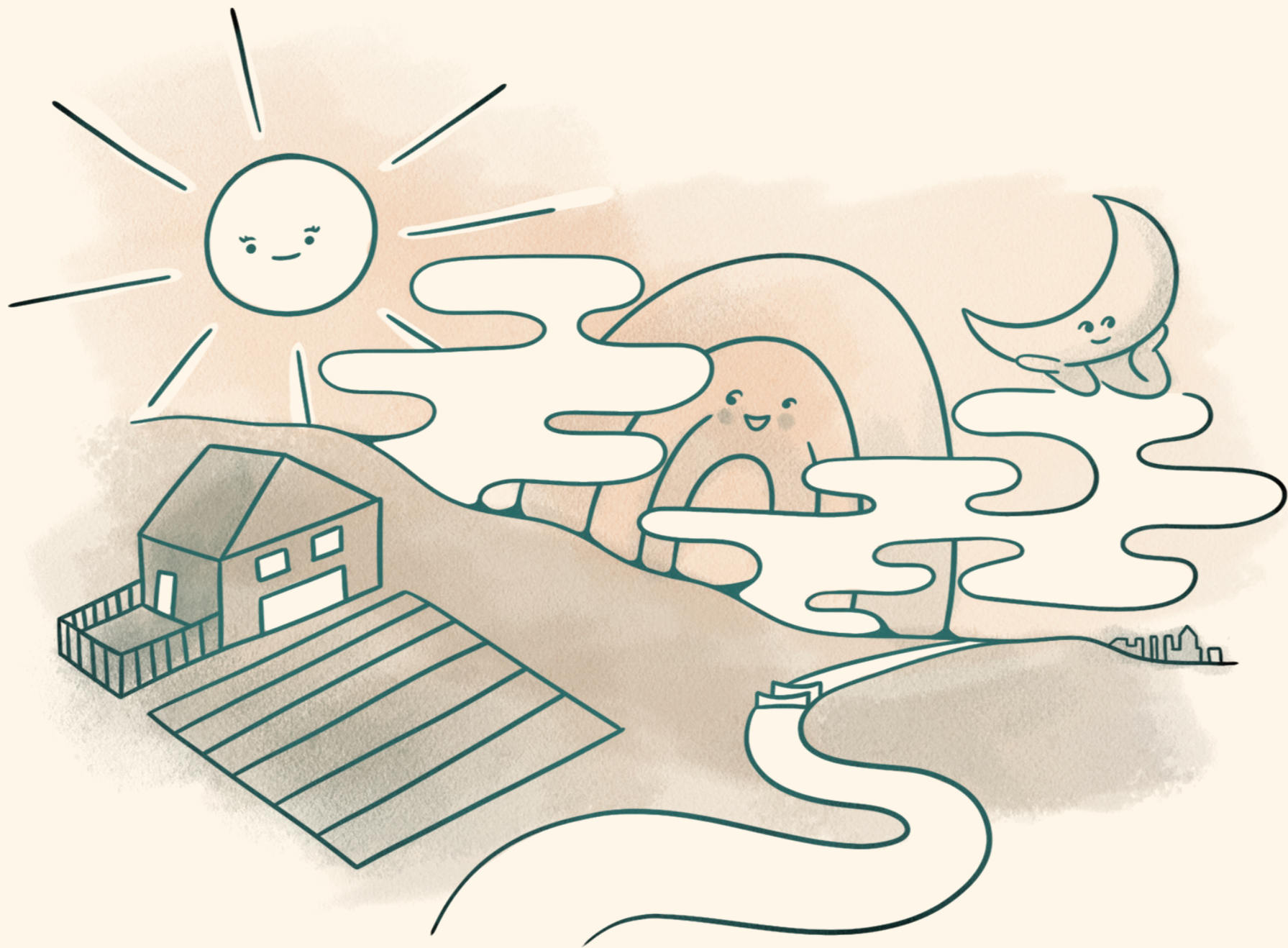
The idea for this zine arose from participants in the Queer & Trans Health Collective's (QTHC) 2021-2022 'Do You Mind?' mental health leadership program. Recognizing that rural places lack mental health and community resources for 2S/LGBTQ+ folks, the participants organized a series of workshops created by and for 2S/LGBTQ+ folks with rural backgrounds. Delivered in January of 2022, these workshops centred questions about what it means to survive and thrive as queer folks who have lived, or continue to live, outside of major urban centres.

The creations in this zine are from both workshop attendants and individuals who responded to our general callout for submissions. The writers and artists who contributed come from diverse gender, sexual, racial, class, and geographic backgrounds. As such, their submissions highlight the exuberant diversity of queer life in this province. At the same time, their reflections are united by similar themes and experiences.

On one hand, tensions with family, community, gendered expectations, and spirituality portray the difficulty of inhabiting both rural and queer identities. On the other hand, experiences of coming into oneself and finding others express the liberatory possibilities of queer love and joy. Against these overarching narratives, rural and urban landscapes appear as sites of exploration, reflection, and realization.

This zine is a labour of love and an articulation of what it means to discover one's identity in unexpected places. It emerges through the collaborative work of 2S/LGBTQ+ community members, 'Do You Mind?' participants, and staff from the Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC) and the QTHC. We hope that you find in its pages, as we did, sparks of connection, spaces of refuge, and wellsprings of sustenance.





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**JK**

ALIENATED BY THE PEOPLE...



CONNECTED TO THE LAND

# Anonymous

Growing up queer and neurodivergent in rural Alberta always felt like searching for the answers everyone else already knew. I felt like I was learning to be human with no direction, with only media, peer groups, and backward, conservative mindsets to rely on. To be honest, I don't remember all that much from my childhood and adolescence. But I can easily recall my first experience with catcalling, the first time I was shamed for my body hair, and the first time the word "dyke" was spit at me.

However, I also remember the first time a friend shared that she had same-sex attraction (that person is now trans and happy!). I remember how my friends' crushes on each other never ended well, and how the changeroom always felt like a battleground. We never used the words, but my friend and I WERE queer. The labels were just terrifying to me then. On the family side, I remember my redneck father raising me as his dream son, only to then ask why I had become a lesbian (and he would ask many times). I would have never admitted to anyone that I too held attraction to girls, that I liked to stare at them a little too long, that my first TRUE crush was on a butch girl who looked like Justin Bieber, and how, in that moment, it felt like my heart blossomed for the first time.

In the chaos of youth and queerness and dichotomy, I realized it was safest to play my role - of woman, of homemaker, of straight and cis and proper. But I failed, in childhood and now. Instead of hating that failed, innocent "girl" like I did all those years ago, I hold her. I hold her, and the children I meet who shake with fear just like she did, who fear their little gay heart, just like I did. In fact, being queer is not the ugliest thing you can grow up to be. It may just be the most expansive kind of love this world has to offer.



# Charlie

i slip on ice, sink  
into deep snow  
side, head, other side  
try to come up  
with an answer to unasked questions  
i flounder

too used to being drowned out to speak  
up, too used to the erasure and then the denial  
and lack of effort to recognize  
it for what it is, to recognize  
myself

sink further, a sky of 40  
below, frost glowing  
on eyelashes  
i think about the straight  
boys who only find me attractive  
for the parts i want to remove, the parts  
i wish were never there to start with  
can't tell him my secret dream  
of being Billie Joe Armstrong, of looking  
like Robbie Sheehan

i think about the assumption  
of she/her — never being simply  
asked, the telling that sticks  
to your throat

snow filling my ears, i think of our grandmothers  
telling me that whoever  
or whatever i am is an illness,  
that she prefers  
my dead name, that i make it hard  
on him by wearing an item of clothing  
that doesn't have any sex  
organs, that i don't care  
if they fuck up my pronouns  
carelessly, consistently

i know mental illness  
this is not it  
and i know that a little piece  
of me, and my  
sister, and my ex-boyfriend  
dies every time  
you use the wrong  
pronouns, use a name we'd rather forget  
consistently and without care

a sore spot, pressure  
on the bruise, sealing my lips  
from blurting out exactly who, and why  
you ask me to breathe  
out, sending my experiences out  
with it, come out  
of a closet i haven't lived in  
for six years but being  
here, in your arms makes me feel like a baby  
gay again, not ready  
to discuss topics such as  
queer sex positivity or  
microaggressions in daily life  
this is the double-edged sword

don't button up your coat, rub  
snow where it hurts you  
the shock will fade, i will  
unfold like country violets and green chrysanthemums





# Duncan

I knew, I knew it in my heart.

But I couldn't say the word, I couldn't think the word.

I knew what it would do; change life, change love, change the world

For both myself and all that I knew and loved

I knew that to be safe, to keep my family safe,

I could hide it, bury myself in books, in work, in flowers.

I knew that I could be free, after graduating, after leaving the town,

Stuck a decade behind the world

I knew I was free, in the city, pursuing dreams

that had only crossed my mind while I slept in that sleepy town

And then I said it, that three letter word

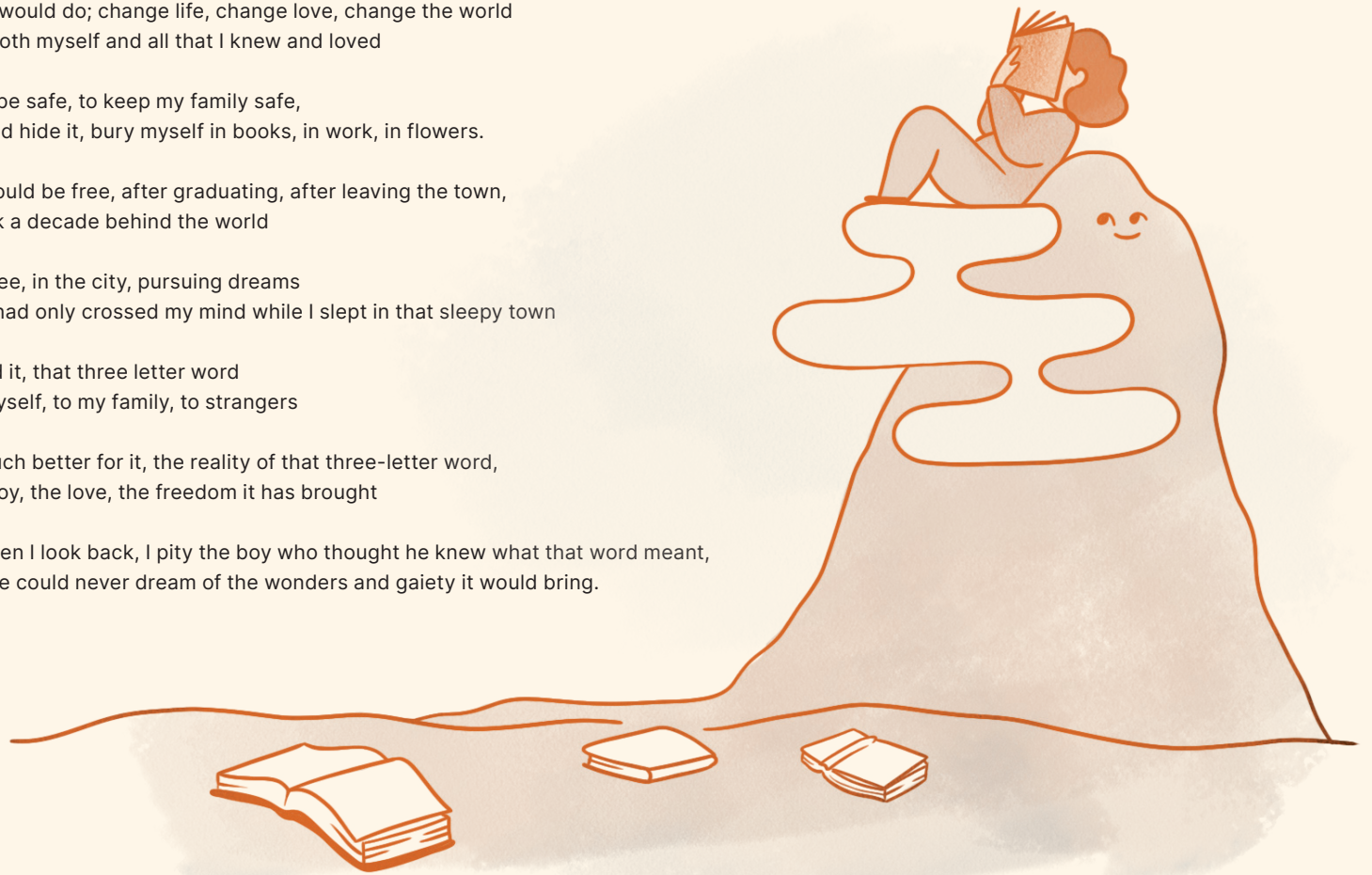
To myself, to my family, to strangers

I know I am much better for it, the reality of that three-letter word,

The joy, the love, the freedom it has brought

I know that when I look back, I pity the boy who thought he knew what that word meant,

For he could never dream of the wonders and gaiety it would bring.



# KCM

Walking around in Edmonton today,  
Rainbow flags adorn many a door,  
Seems like a safe place to be gay,  
Rainbow stickers on every store,

But a loud voice breaks through the atmosphere,  
Cutting through the air so loud,  
Telling me it's a sin to be queer,  
Condemning me for being proud,

On his soapbox with bible held high,  
A whirlwind of rainbow dances around,  
Hatred and love do each other belie,  
Trying to drown each other's sound,

Walking away and a disquiet settles in,  
Uneasy glances cast at passers-by,  
Some think it ok; some think it sin,  
Enemies and allies all in disguise.

---

Having left the farm in rural Northern Alberta for the Big City, I thought I had shed the uncertainty, the bated breath that had plagued me since I was young. The terrible suspense I felt of walking the cliffs edge, desperately trying with every step, word, and mannerism, to not seem "gay." Yet it followed me, clung to me, a gnawing anxiety persisting even in the most progressive postal code in the prairie provinces. Don't get me wrong, things are better here, queerer here, and there are allies here. But when bigotry does cross my path, I find myself glancing over my shoulder, breath withheld and muscles tensed, shrinking back into the scared queer kid on the farm in Northern Alberta.



# Max

I have many memories of sitting on the hill behind my grandparent's house on long summer nights, staring into the bay as the sun set slowly over the water. Sometimes I would sit with my brother, my mom, my grandfather. Sometimes I would sit alone.

From my perch, I could see the illuminated kitchen, and watched family and neighbours come and go, leaving behind community gossip with my grandmother who would share it at the post office the next day. I often found myself wondering if I was ever the subject of that gossip. Deep down, I wondered WHEN I would be the subject of the gossip.

The knowledge that everyone knew everything about everyone made it so that I couldn't let it slip that I felt different. And yet, I suspect many people already knew. Despite this, I built a perception that I could only be myself when I went to the city, where I could be anonymously queer.

Although I feel safe moving through Edmonton as my queer self, there's an absence that comes with the anonymity of the city. Sure, many of the people here quietly mind their own business, but this acceptance feels hollow. Now that I live in the city, what I once thought was a harsh line between where I can and can't "be myself" has blurred.

When I am home in the rural depths, things are complicated. People ask my grandmother why her granddaughter hasn't come back. People dance around my pronouns. They often fumble their way from the affectionate term of "girl" to "buddy." But it feels whole. I see people maneuver to see and acknowledge me in one way or another, whether I choose to be in the kitchen or up on the hill, observing. For me the messy and complex ways of being seen as queer are much more satisfying than the cold anonymity of city life.



# Jo

I always had questions that could not be asked in the post office or corner store,  
Questions that could not be answered by calloused hands and closed off hearts.

Journals I kept of a younger me all have the same thread woven through:  
Begging God for company I could understand and turn to.  
I searched through hopeful eyes for empathy,  
From the limited population around me.

All these people I searched through told me who God was and what my life was to look like,  
Who I was supposed to be.  
And it was these people who forgot to make a place for me.

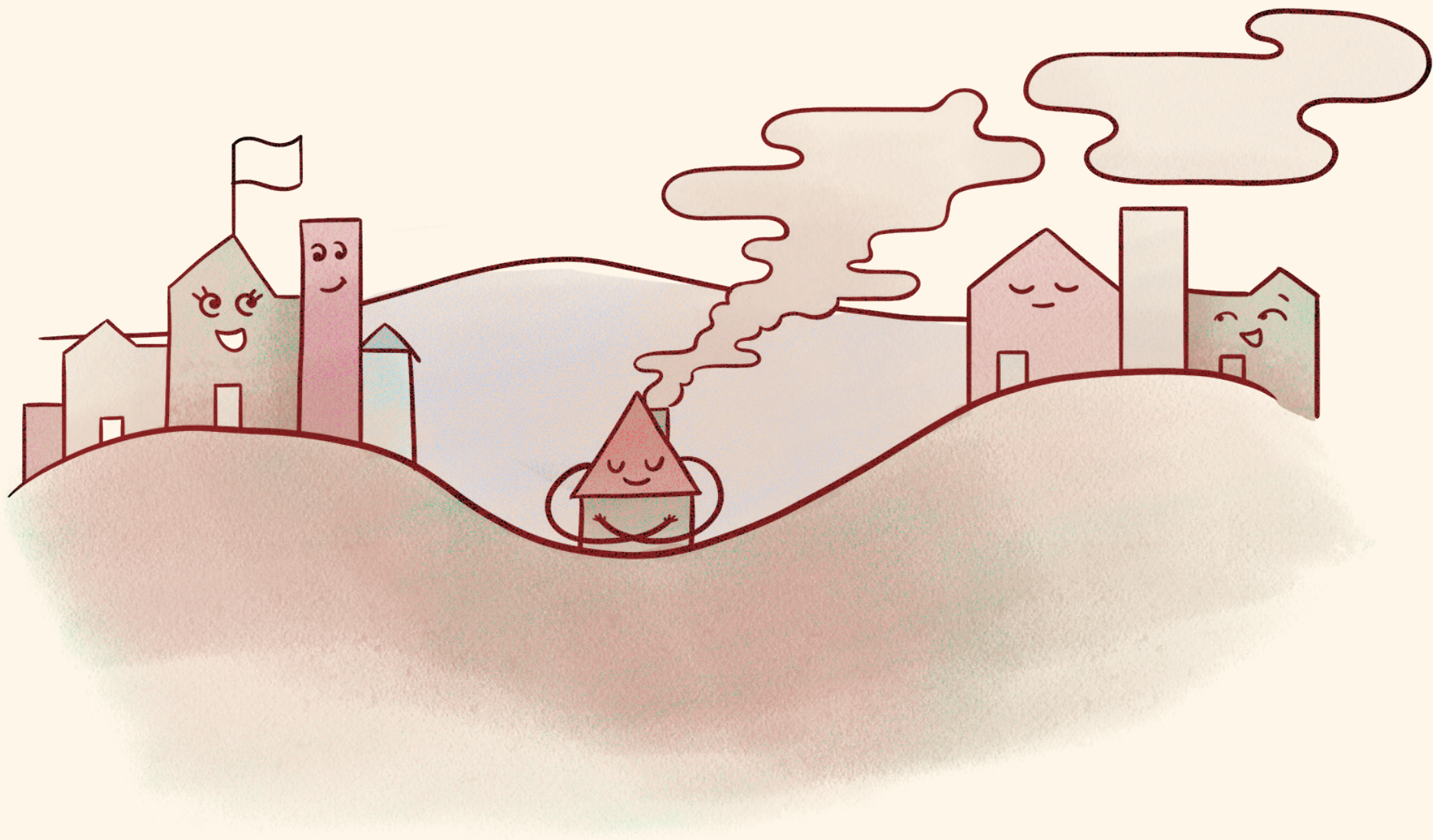
My questions of life—of love—remained unanswered,  
Unless the answers were spoken in small town whispers or grocery queues  
That my little ears were tuned to,  
Telling me to stay in line.  
Telling me to stay in silence.

God was not a restful presence,  
Willing me to unwind.  
His character was seen through circus mirrors,  
Where truth and bias and shifting surfaces combined,  
And painted a specific picture in my mind.  
His opinions were conveyed through communities who told me  
I had no place,  
no power,  
And no reason to be.  
While they said the divine was the essence of love,  
I learned His presence was something to be afraid of.  
God was a judge, gracious as a violent sea.  
And God was the judge of me.

They said God wanted us to live in the light, and yet,  
I was trapped within empty fields and walls of trees,  
Praying for a community.

But beyond the boundary of those trees,  
Were city lights and pride flags,  
And cafes full of caffeine and questions where  
my voice was not only heard but requested.

I now live in the light, with bread, wine, and warmth,  
Knowing beyond knowing,  
I have found what I prayed for.



# J

*Content Warning:  
this piece includes mentions of sexual violence.*

My parents immigrated to Canada with a dream of starting a beekeeping business. I grew up on a farm with a low-income background where my parents both struggled with addiction. The closest town was a 15-minute drive away, so the isolation was extremely difficult for me as a child.

My parents worked hard to provide for us. Although they tried their best, it always felt as if there was something broken and missing. Drinking often led to violent fights. My parents missed their families and homes while they wrestled with their own traumas.

School, unfortunately, was another stressor where I was bullied for my unwashed hair and size. Because of my heart condition, I was much smaller than the other children my age. Although my family was not religious, I was around a lot of Christian fundamentalist influences. I had trouble understanding social rules, but I did my best to fit in. I was sexually abused in middle school. At this point, I had deeply internalized the messages about sin and felt ashamed about the sexual violence I experienced and my queerness.

Throughout my childhood and especially during stressful times, I always found refuge in nature and art. I found comfort in the changing prairie skies where I felt hugged from all sides. I spent a lot of time in nature, collecting rocks and flowers, and I was always creating art of some kind. Now, after years of healing, I reclaim and embrace disability and queerness in my art. I live my life as a gentle dyke who still loves to visit nature with chosen family. My cats and my partner add so much queer joy to my life.



# Sleepy

As a rural LGBT+ person, it can be very difficult to find your “people”, or a group of friends, let alone other LGBT+ people. If you’re living at home, it can be extremely difficult to live every day with an unaccepting and suffocating family. This is something we all know well. I understand how hard it can be to keep going but I want to tell you, hold onto hope as tight as you can. I promise you, somewhere out there, there are people that can’t wait to meet and love you for who you are. Whether you feel like you have no one, a few people, or many, there will be many more who will come along in your long and beautiful life who will lift you up and support you unconditionally in whatever you’re facing. I promise you: they will be worth the wait.

I know it’s easy to lose hope and confidence, especially when we live where we do. However, it’s important to remember not to listen to the negativity, internally or externally, and have pride in who you are. Even if that simply means looking at yourself in the mirror and smiling, or proudly wearing your pride pins. Do those things that make a difference for you, and those around you. Who knows, maybe even those small things will help you find your people.



# R. Reist

I grew up in a town famous for residing next to a dump. In the shadow of the dump, I learned that the worst thing you could do was to become gay. Here, there were thieves, domestic violence perpetrators, and child abusers, but homosexuals were the most feared. A debilitating sense of shame guided by toxic religious morality kept everyone heterosexual, regardless of if they were or not.

Being queer wasn't even a possibility. Compulsory heterosexuality was the norm. And unbeknownst to me, I found myself playing into the righteous ideal of the heterosexual. I learned to fantasize about which boy I would marry, what "Mrs. X" I would become. However, deep down, I felt nothing towards the opposite sex, but I kept this secret in fear of what it might mean. When I confided to my friends, they assured me that I "had just not found the right one." When people asked what boy I liked, I picked the most popular one, figuring I wouldn't get questioned. I believed that one day I would eventually become heterosexual. These views played a large role in me not coming out until my mid-twenties.

As an adult living in the city, I reflected on my childhood, and realized that there were signs of my queerness. I remember the strong desire to hug the smartest girl in class and admiring how another's t-shirt accentuated her curves in high school. I didn't think much about these incidents growing up, but now, I see that they indicate a longing for something that I did not have the words for as an adolescent.

My fellow rural 2S/LGBTQ+ community members, the shame we live with as queer people is socially constructed. Do not be afraid to think beyond what is expected of you, and when you feel ready, embrace who you are. Know that sometimes as queer people, we are our own rescuers.





# Michelle

To my family, I'm a girl.  
Sit like a girl.  
Dress like a girl.  
Eat like a girl.  
Be more like a girl.

To my close friends, I am who I am.  
They ask me about my pronouns. How do you want to be called?  
They compliment my button-up shirts.  
My short hair.  
My glued-on moustache.  
My bolo tie and glitter brows.  
"You look like you're feelin' yourself."  
And I couldn't agree more.

To strangers, I'm a girl.  
Is it my face, covered by my mask?  
What do you see?  
My eyebrows? Are they too thin?  
My voice? Is it too high?  
My name? I never liked it anyway.

It's minus 40 here and I'm wearing many layers of clothing.  
But somehow  
Everyone still labels me  
As if the shape of my body  
That you can't even see  
Gives it away.  
At work, I'm a girl. At the restaurant where I bartend in a tourist town

I get misgendered every day.  
I don't want to explain my existence  
To every table that is sat.  
But they're paying me to act a certain way,  
So I give them what they want.

"I have the BEST costumes," says a man at the bar.  
"What was your last costume?" I ask.  
"I was Caitlyn Jenner and wore a sash that said, 'call me Caitlyn!'"  
I think to myself, "how is being transgender a costume?"  
Instead I say, "maybe I'm not the right crowd for that."  
I'm paid to be a people pleaser,  
So I give them what they want.

But you see  
Even with all this inconsistency  
What the strangers don't know  
Is that underneath my mask  
Is a glitter moustache.



# Young

Growing up in rural Alberta for the first 17 years of my life felt like I was always existing between worlds, doing a balancing act, and engaging in a performance. I don't think I was even aware that the landscape was beautiful: tall grasses, small canals carving out the land, pretty yellow blooms from the commercial canola, weeds on the side of the highways, open prairies, and endless skies surrounding the town on all sides. Yet, it felt more stifling than free.

In one world, I felt trapped in my home with my dysfunctional parents. We only spoke Korean and yet so many things were left unsaid: gendered expectations, marriage and having kids, the taboo of sexuality. An oppressive air...loving...but tense and anxious. Being rural meant my parents were isolated from any Korean community. We were a tiny island that didn't belong.

In the other world, surrounding the island, I felt ashamed and confused by the queerphobia and racism in the white rural town and school. For my peers, gay could only mean bad. I felt the shift from acceptance in childhood to ostracization in my teen years as I drifted from gender-conforming to not. I visibly didn't fit and tried to force myself into the tiny crevasses of those expectations...the norms...the idealized...the unachievable.

Too much time wasted, honestly, and too much cruelty in denying myself, myself. The only saving grace were my friends, and funnily enough, most of them later came out as queer too. We flock. I think maybe queer love saved me...

What can I do in the aftermath of surviving, somehow, the unnecessary brutality of it all? I suppose I can carve my own way through the landscape, simply going as I should, seeing the blooms along the way.



# Resources

**The QTHC maintains an updated list of rural 2S/LGBTQ+ resources in Alberta.  
Visit [ourhealthyeg.ca/rural-resources](http://ourhealthyeg.ca/rural-resources) to check it out.**

Below are some 2SLGBTQ+ friendly mental health resources you can access:

## **Trans Lifeline**

Telephone (24/7): 1-877-330-6366  
[www.translifeline.org](http://www.translifeline.org)

## **Brite Line**

Telephone (24/7): 1-844-702-7483  
[www.briteline.ca](http://www.briteline.ca)

## **Kids Help Phone**

Telephone (24/7): 1-800-668-6868  
Text "CONNECT" to 686868  
[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

## **Canadian Mental Health Association**

Edmonton Region 24/7 Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)  
Rural Distress Line: 1-800-232-7288

QT  
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