



Journeys of Belonging

Queer Armenian Stories

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TOO GAY TO BE GAY

Kelly Hovhannisyan

*Born amongst bullies, in a land of fear,
Safe haven elusive, community unclear.
Emotions unexpressed floating in the sea,
Yellow waves crash, yearning to be free.*

*In a world divided, colors defined,
I'm neither blue nor pink, a hue entwined.
Yellow is my heart, nuanced yet sublime,
Expectations clash, yet I bloom in time.*

*Survival's masquerade in a place called home,
Masculinity performed, a facade to disown.
A miserable act, a scripted role,
Longing for freedom that would make me
whole.*

*Kelly, my refuge, a name self-bestowed,
In its colorful echoes, my identity flowed.
Persistent deadnaming whispers still resist,
A painful reminder of a past dismissed.*

*With every colorful outfit that I wear,
With every utterance of Kelly in the air,
I declare my humanity, a vivid decree,
A human experience for those who can see.*

*Romantic hurdles, bruising my heart,
"Too feminine for my liking", that's when I
depart,
Labeled "too gay" by the gays themselves,
Community unclear, we divide ourselves*

*A storm within me, raging sea untamed,
Longing for haven with no colors shamed.
Yellow is my heart, nuanced yet sublime,
Expectations clash, yet I bloom in time.*

Scientists argue a lot whether people are born gay or they turn gay (get yassified) along the way. Let them argue. I know my story. I control my narrative.

"Mom, this teddy bear is my husband"

- 3 years old Kelly

Hi, I am Kelly, a 21 years old boy who happens to be having a very human experience.

I just realized that I actually came out to my mom at the age of three. I also remember putting on things that would resemble hair and perform for our guests. I was born gay. Isn't it funny that everyone already has their own version of me in their head? Perhaps you already have met me. Maybe you have no idea who I am but you saw my picture on the previous page which has led to some expectations about who I could potentially be. Well, expectations are soon-to-be disappointments.

Since the moment I was conceived in my mother's womb, there were expectations forced upon my form of being. You probably

can relate. My parents had already formed some expectations about what kind of baby boy I would be. They had bought some blue clothing, selected a male name, and probably already had some ideas about my upbringing.

Of course, growing up I didn't understand the concept of being gay neither had the vocabulary to describe it, meaning I grew up feeling like there was something wrong with me. The first examples of queer people I came across on TV were distorted, stereotypically interpreted caricatures of gay men. The only conversations my parents had about queer people left me loathing myself. Was I the mentally unstable sick person they were referring to? Was I the demonized, the dehumanized person who needed to be burned alive in the center of Yerevan? I was.

At a very young age, I lost the sense of safety permanently. I didn't feel safe at home with my parents nor anywhere else. They were the people, the 6 years old me expected to be my haven, my safe space, my protectors. My expectations clashed with their expectations. Safe haven elusive, community unclear.

At school, they knew I was gay before I knew what the term gay meant. I was bullied.

I went to school every day like I was going to the battleground. Meanwhile at home, I was trying hard to conform to their expectations of me. Survival's masquerade, a facade, a miserable act, a scripted role that made me feel like I had to be someone else do be loved. My authentic self was a looming threat to me being loved; if I wanted to be loved, I had no choice but to conform to their expectations. I started harming myself physically, I survived.

When I was 11, I saw Conchita Wurst on TV. They won. It was the first time ever I saw a queer person succeeding. They were authentically themselves and they won for that... Is this an option? Maybe I can be myself too? After that I found some queer people on the internet. I saw them happy, authentically themselves. I finally had the courage and the knowledge to come in terms with my sexual orientation. I was born.

At this time, I knew that the name my parents had given me had nothing to do with who I was. You cannot call a swan an ugly duckling and expect it to live like that forever. I decided to make a name that would represent who I was. Kelly was born. I was born. Later, I found out that Kelly is an actual name that is unisex; for all genders. I felt home.

When I said it out loud, in its colorful echoes my identity flowed.

After graduating from high school and enrolling in a university in Yerevan, I began to meet many queer individuals in person also started volunteering with local LGBTQI+ NGOs, hoping to find a supportive community where I could be loved for who I am and find a haven at last. Well, expectations are soon-to-be disappointments. Soon, I found out that the gays, I came across, also think there's something wrong with me. My voice is too feminine, my manners are too feminine, my clothes are too feminine, my walk is too feminine, my intonation is too feminine. They told me I was too gay. I realized that even in the queer community there are still expectations forced upon my form of being. If I wanted to be accepted in the community that seeks acceptance, I needed to keep performing the masculinity I had to perform at home. This was probably harder to accept than accepting my homosexual identity

At the age of 17, I had my first romantic relationship. It was the first time I learned that I was too feminine to be liked sexually. I ended that relationship, and a year later entered into a new one, I learned that I was too feminine to be liked sexually, again.

Nevertheless, at this point I drew my boundaries. I decided I would not enter into a relationship with someone who didn't accept me for who I was. A year later, at the age of 19, I met someone.

He told me that he sees me for who I was. He told me that I could even wear make-up and he would still be attracted to me. Finally, I was accepted, I found the haven I was looking for. I could be myself and succeed. I could express myself without any facade and be loved. The battle was over. A few months into the relationship, he told me "You're too feminine for my liking.

Safe haven elusive, community unclear,
heart bruised, too feminine, too gay to be
gay, drowning in the sea of expectations -
having a human experience.

A day before my 20th birthday, I decided to be become a safe haven for myself, to find my community, to heal my heart, to allow myself to be as feminine and as gay as I wanted. I allowed myself to be. I allowed myself to bloom.

I am still on a journey, which has had its ups and downs.

At the age of 20, I travelled to 3 European countries, I dyed my hair, I did drag, I scored 20 out of 20 all the university exams, I started working out and redefining the feminine and the masculine for me, I participated in ILGA-Europe Annual LGBTQI+ conference, I explored my sexuality, I became a Board member at a global foundation, I got a B2

DeLE certificate of Spanish, I found a lot of friends for life, and connections that made me feel seen, loved, attractive, successful, sexy, unstoppable and KELLY.

I AM KELLY - a human experience liberating myself of gender expectations, redefining queer joy, queer success, fighting for queer liberation and shining my yellow light, and taking control of my narrative.

Kellyciously yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final "y".



Austrian Airlines
Austrian Airlines logo

Boarding Pass

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WHEN DO I GET TO BE HOME?

Raf Danielyan

(CHAPTER: 8 hours of Vienna)

It's 7:12 AM. The 4th of January, Vienna, Schwechat. Gate F, yes, yes, the very last one. In the middle of the roads between Armenia and Germany. We have just arrived to the capital of Austria, and guess what? I never knew Vienna was this beautiful...okay! This is hilarious, and THIS is where the story begins. My first ever visit to Europe. The most unexpected but highly anticipated trip to Berlin, one of the queerest cities in the world.

A long-awaited journey, I've been preparing for, was just about to become a brief check point in my imaginary diary, which, probably, I should have started journaling before getting myself into this.

Thanks, Timmy! Thanks for the best ever picked tickets for our connecting flight to Berlin. And, also, this wouldn't have happened without you, Lana, and me, people who chose to use the bathroom in the most inconvenient moment. We are stuck here and I don't think this is the right time for me to panic, neither to put the blame on people around. As for me, at this point of my life I only want to take things easy and focus on appreciating the experience because opportunities like this don't happen this often to me, sadly.

From now on the story has to evolve around six queer people who were longing for this trip to Berlin to take part in a youth exchange about drag art form (although I will stay the main character and lead the story from my point of view).

The trip we will always remember with no doubts. But what I remember now is the time of our next flight and the faces of the employees of that airport.

We managed to deal with them somehow.

Nevertheless, we paid for our new tickets and now have to wait until 1pm for our flight to Berlin, our last destination.

Minutes pass just as people do, and here we are in Vienna, the sarcasm of it all.

We neither can say we have visited Vienna nor we can deny the fact that we have been there.

As someone who does not smoke, I was already considering to do so, though the smell of every cigarette in the smoking area where we'd go with Keon and Valentina used to remind me of the quantity of people waiting for their time to come.

Well, I would always go there with the thought of making the best of my time in the airport by meeting beautiful strangers and asking for a cigarette to start the chat because here is where people cross their paths. Aesthetics, one should call it.

Speaking of which, it brings me back to all those duty-free shops with lots of cosmetics and alcohol as if that is the only thing people do need in times like this.

You may not know, but using the roller conveyors instead of walking was the next milestone of boredom. The rollers for passengers, just to make this clear.

And at some point, in between the gates F35 and F33, we found ourselves delighted even just to be there, even if we'd have to go back to Yerevan and never make it to our youth exchange for what we'd crossed the sea. This kind of state of mind didn't quite feel right as it was not easy and was not a short process to have the chance traveling to Europe, to get the Schengen visa, to see Europe, to get a bite of that fresh air, that sense of freedom and "open-mindedness" of people, that people notice you and they don't attack you for how you look or for who you look at. Would be such a pity to do all this and get back to Yerevan, just because we were late for few minutes. But yet we were like children, the kind of children who get a little gift on Christmas from those parents who cannot afford more and still, the kids are grateful and satisfied to have what they have.

In times like this, we remember all the possible circumstances and cases where people need to move to Europe for a better life, for the sake of their own safety, and the safety of their loved ones.

But there's the border, there's the visa, there's the money, there's the people who will eventually look at you and tell you to go back to where you belong. Whoever chooses where each person belongs to?

And of how many times I've faced this kind of reality when I used to live and study in Russia. If I got money for every single time I was called out for being Armenian, queer, different from the majority, I would probably be rich and depressed now. My experience of living abroad in Russia was not the best. And yet I take it as my own. Maybe a little bit traumatic, which makes me doubt whether I will ever plan moving to another country In search of a better life, a safer space, and kinder people.

We are more than halfway through this waiting, there's an hour left before the flight. And these are my thoughts when every time I think of my future in such a country like Armenia: Where do I go next from here? Where do I feel safe? When and where my rights are going to exist, am I going to become the part of society that accepts me as I am and not the way they want me to be? What to do and where to go as a queer person? Be heard and visible but not targeted, to speak up but not being called extremist.

I can finally see the plane that will take us further away from home.

It's almost 1 PM and we are boarding, we are just about not to miss another flight, flight to the land of acceptance and openness, the land of safe space and visibility. And now sitting here next to the window with all those thoughts, and lost in my feelings, I stare directly at the Sun, I feel the inconvenience, I feel the heartache that the world brings every day with its indifference, rules and hierarchy as if that's the only way for a person to live and why people seek home in other places.

And while we are taking off after hearing all the instructions given by the crew, I wonder whether I will ever be able to be free, feel free, free to live as it is in this so-called land of equality named Europe, whether I will ever be able to make it here in Armenia and never look at the neighbors' grass, because it has never been greener on their side, too.

This was my story and the journey I had.

Later what happened in Berlin, will stay in Berlin, in my mind, in my heart and with me.

A year later, having this story in hindsight, I can tell how vitally it changed me and my vision of living abroad in Europe and in Armenia, where people still discriminate others for being different, queer, for having their own beliefs, languages and cultural backgrounds.

This is a reality that I don't want to accept, but it is the reality that I want to change for myself and for everyone else. And the question remains: When do I get to be home?





Ունեն՞ ՞ր եւս Լեզու Կրթականները

Յանձնարան տրամադրել կամ կին, ով՝



1. Կամուրու է մտածել
2. Ինչը կրթաց, ունի ցիտեւ, ու ժառոյ
3. Կրթաց պիտի է ուսուցողի քանակաւորութեան
4. Եւսաց, ունի արժեքաւոր եւ կրթաց իսկ կրթաց և
5. Մին համաձայնեալում պիտի հանձնել Խոստատարան կրթացի ժամանակակից ցիտեւ անապատարան ցիտեւներում, ինչպէս ու
6. Մին համաձայնեալում պիտի հանձնել իսկապի րաւարդանն և քանակաւորի ինչպէս քանակ:



Այս ԲՆԵՂ
 Փիլիսոփա, գրող
 Օպերային-գիւղ
 Փիլիսոփայութեան
 Ինձնաւորի



«Լեզու Կրթականներ»
 Կրթական & Կրթական
 Ապրանքաւոր Կրթական

Կրթական Կրթական
 Կրթական Կրթական
 Կրթական Կրթական

FROM DARKNESS/RADICALISM TO LIGHT/REASON

Sevak (Lusaber) Kirakosyan

When a kid of around 12 copies hitler, maybe there's something wrong with the society?

Note: whenever I'm writing a proper noun with a small letter, I'm thus expressing my attitude towards that person, group or phenomenon.

Instances of domestic in-family violence make an inseparable part of my childhood memories. Say, when the patriarch of the family, daddy, would beat me, my mom and the other members of the family. Two of my 'brightest' memories are:

When Santa used to hide gifts and we'd seek and find 'em and when I discovered that Santa was actually my mom. This chain of memories is kind of bittersweet. It's about joy and disappointment. But that disappointment has led to the realization of truth. And thus it was an enlightening disappointment. When during yet another episode of row my dad told my mom: "Tell your brother to come and take you back to your father's home, did you hear that?" I was in an adjacent room at that moment. Then I heard the sound of shattering glass, the helpless sobbing of my mom.

And of course I started to cry, too. He pushed her. And the glass was broken by her body falling on that glass, I assume, based on her cry before the sound of shattering glass...

The radical within me was born along with the destructive "miasum" nationalistic movement in Armenia. That word means "unification", i.e. the "unification" of Nagorno Karabakh with Armenia. Makes me think of hitler's "Anschluss". That word, too, means "joining". All the different episodes of in-family violence when I would get beaten, when I'd witness the beating of other family members by the father of the family have developed in me feelings of pain, defencelessness, wrath, and guilt.

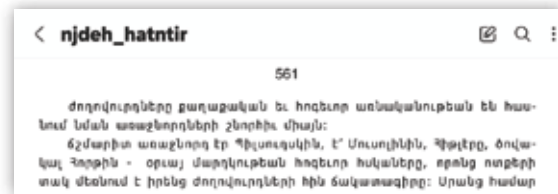
I had this female history teacher at the school number 125 named after Smbat Byurat, comrade Avetisyan - yes, we called our teachers "comrade" even in 90s. She'd speak of Turks with an immense sense of hatred and loathing. When she uttered the word "Turk", it'd feel like she was spitting that word, as an insult. The "textbooks" produced by dashnaks and republicans (two ultra right-wing political parties and a similar radical, militaristic movement) and the infamous karabakh committee (a nationalistic movement with expansionist claims over the territories of neighboring Azerbaijan),

along with the heinous instruction coming from comrade Avetisyan, would zombify us, they would instill in us a culture and strong feeling of hatred. We, Armenians, were the holiest of all nations, the most ancient ones, the first and the top, the infallible ones, like the Pope. Everything on this planet was against us because we were righteous, pious, Armenian Christians. Everything belonged to us, and thus will have been taken back by us: Van (a lake and a city in modern-day Turkey), Urmia (a lake in modern-day Iran), Javakhk (Javakheti, a region in modern-day Georgia), Baku (the capital of Azerbaijan). And if we want to be the worthy heirs of our top hero, Tigranes by the nickname “the Great”, we must also think about “getting back” Syria and Jerusalem...

I consider myself the victim of the cursed karabakh committee. I am a victim of Armenian radicalism and nationalism. Let me explain: if Armenia hadn't chosen the disastrous path of “getting back the lands of our forefathers”, if the corrupt concept of a “might makes right” hadn't been adopted as a state ideology, then violence and the erroneous idea of “solving” problems through physical force wouldn't have been turned into a social, political and cultural norm in Armenia. And even with instances of domestic violence in one single family, the police or neighbors would have come and defend the victims of

domestic violence if the society and state were civilized enough. The phenomenon of seemingly “solving” issues through violence has remained a legitimate tool both in political, as well as in family life. You don't like my rules, son? Then I'll beat you!

THE FORMATION OF THE RADICAL



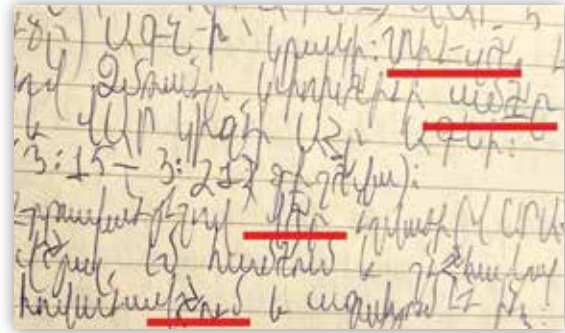
What racism and xenophobia I was indoctrinated with at school got reinforced at the university. What an exotic experience I had at the Faculty (Chair) of Culture at Armenian State Pedagogical University! The professor of World Literature, whose last name I forgot, gave me a private assignment to translate “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” from Western Armenian to Eastern Armenian. I, whose granny was a Jew that lived in Ukraine and had to run away from Hitler and fascists, was translating an antisemitic and fake “document” apropos how the Jews were going to, allegedly, take over the world and enslave mankind. Talk about immorality and decadence!

On one occasion that “professor” took all the diligent students, among whom I was the only male person, to a meeting with some “arian”, ultra right-wing political party. And the professor of World History once shared the “scientific” thesis of his colleague according to which Taiwan was established by... Armenians of Van (a city in modern-day Turkey). In Armenian “Tai” (թայ) means “a pair of”. So, tai + Van = Taiwan, a “twin” to Van And our professor was like “yes, yes, that is (presented) as a scientific thesis” The professor of Library Science would share with us her dreams during the lectures. For instance, she once saw in her dream that the fruit eaten by Adam was an apricot. And thus everything originated from Armenians, because apricot is an Armenian fruit, according to her. And Adam’s “real” name is Aram which is, surely, an Armenian name.

I consider myself to be the victim of the cursed karabakh committee. I have survived through the “educational” system conceived by dashnaks, republicans and, in general, by karabakh freaking committee. They turned me into a creature with the consciousness of a goblin, an orc, a right-wing radical. It was in my university years that I started to read the schizophrenic “mein kampf” of hitler. I wasn’t just reading, I was also taking notes from that “well of wisdom”, in awe.

Only the criminal, the slave or the ignorant can admire a criminal. The quote from the “selected works” of njdeh, the father of Armenian radicalism, says a lot about that collaborationist and his followers, the damned karabakh committee.

THE ULTRA-RIGHT RADICAL’S DIARY



I started creating my own symbols when I used to write down notes from the lectures at Armenian State Pedagogical University so that I would write faster. I was already brain-washed and admired ultra-right radicalism. I would read paris herouni (a pseudoscientific “historian” that says every great thing on our planet originated from Armenians) and would shit in my pants out of pride that the Sphinx and Acropolis were built by Armenians.

Even Pachacamac, an Inca god, was forged by Armenians, because his name comes from two Armenian words: pachel (to kiss) and camac or kamak (ass). Hence, the basis for my new writing symbols was the swastika for most “auspicious” syllables such as “ar” and “ass”.

THE SECRET OF THE RADICAL

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

~ *Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 12*

Paul’s writing about “thorn in [his] flesh” gave way to various interpretations, including a theory that says the thorn that bothered him was his homosexuality or bisexuality which he denied either completely or partly.

As an Armenian (in this case that is equal to being a supremacist) I was noble, I had advantages over other nations. But, in order for me not to become too snobby - or “not to lose my hole” as we say in Armenian - I was given “a thorn in my flesh”, I was sent a messenger of satan, as citizen Paul put it.

Yes, I was an Armenian, a patriot, Armenia-lover, Armenia-worshiper, Armenia-dedicated, Armenia... I thought of bringing back the lands of my forefathers from all the neighboring states of Armenia. I was racking my brains around the Armenian nation.

I was against sodomy (i.e. homosexuality), as I wrote in my diary. Because we needed soldiers. Factories for soldier production (i.e. humans that would multiply with the sole purpose of giving the state armies of soldiers, sacrificial animals, as Ayn Rand would put it). But I was a “sodomite” myself, as I wrote in my diary in ca 2008

Armenian Apostolic Church condemned my homosexuality, my radical “brothers” and the whole radical ecosystem condemned it.

First I started to read the bible. I was sure that some of the passages were written differently in the original language, and they were mistranslated. I even started to read the Old testament in Hebrew. My assumptions were in part correct. Some of the passages were indeed being misinterpreted or mistranslated. However, reading the Bible has turned me into a self-confident, educated and well-informed atheist.

THE DEATH OF THE RADICAL

I traveled to Estonia in 2008 in the scope of a pan-European exchange and youth mobility programme, Erasmus Mundus. It turned out that the same trees grew in Estonia which also grew in Armenia, and the same sky was above the soil of Estonia just as that of Armenia, and even there were people similar to those of Armenia. It was just a little colder than in Armenia.

I, as a matter of fact, was not superior to anyone only because I was Armenian. And the forests that grew in Armenia were not superior to those of Estonia only by mere fact that they grew in Armenia. I felt at home also in Estonia. The boundaries of my awareness expanded and the radical within me took deadly and final blows, and passed away slowly thanks to my introspection, self-exploration, self-education and exposure to the greater world.

PUTLER'S VISIT

Putler (a.k.a. Vladimir Putin) visited Armenia in 2014. I participated in the protest against his visit. I didn't like the following:

First putler went to Gyumri in order to visit his military garrison, and the town of Gyumri was named "Alexandropol" in Russian media

(i.e. allegedly established by one of Russian tsars). This meant that the dictator, imagining himself to be a tsar on his own, was behaving himself as if he came to visit one of the regions of his empire. Visiting the capital of the country first and meeting with the government officials was less important than visiting his garrison. By that time putler was already persecuting LGBT individuals. A part of Ukraine, Crimea, was already "reunified" by the criminal and he was "getting back the lands of forefathers" for a long-dead rotten empire

One of my acquaintances, Lala, brought a big LGBT flag with her on that day. Armenian nationalist thugs attacked her and stole the flag from her. I took back the flag pole from one thief, and then we got the flag returned from the thieves, too. It was the first time ever when an LGBT flag was waving under the sky of the Republic of Armenia.

That day we (I, Lala and Arevik) got attacked first by some nationalist gangs.

Then we went through a VIP arrest by the regime-serving cops: 3 activists, approximately 12 cops and a covered truck for the three of us. We were dangerous for putler cause we had the LGBT flag and that of Ukraine with us.

The footage of our arrest is at the beginning of my documentary:



THE BIRTH OF SOPHIA



In 2017 I was participating in an exchange project for 10 months in France.

A group of students and the director have created a crisis situation for me.

Goddess Athena was born in Zeus' head. The indicator or symptom of the pregnancy was the strong headache of Zeus. Hephaestus, by the guidance of Hermes, broke the head of Zeus in two and Athena Pallas came out. My Sophia got born from a similar crisis situation: I was deprived of my accommodation and volunteer project in a foreign country.

Sophia Shanti Ommm
Sophia - wisdom in Greek
Shanti - peace in Sanskrit
Ommm - the vibrations of the creation in Sanskrit

Sophia or Sophie is a cynical travesti character who speaks of serious topics apart from producing very sexualized stuff: politics, radicalism, nationalism, hatred, ignorance. The sense of humor of Sophia would be described by some as “cringey” and as unique by others.

When vazgen manukyans and other crappy “saviors” were stirring the pot and were making public calls of violence, coup d'état and blood-spilling (in the aftermath of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict where Armenia lost the war), Sophia was also covering these topics and mocking those ultra-right and radical elements.

A TRANS IN KINDERGARTEN!!!

We went to a borderline village in Armenia in 2014 in the scope of a peacebuilding project for “Tekali Process”, a unique regional peacebuilding initiative. We went there to preach our experience in peacebuilding and creating bridges between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I took a picture in the kindergarten of the village where we went by the suggestion of the village’s head in order to invite the staff of the kindergarten to our event. The photo was on Facebook for 5 years.

In 2019 the photo was taken by pro-kocharian (a tyrant that ruled Armenia in 2000’s), conservative bullies (‘activists’, ‘politicians’, ‘advocates’ among them). They were gambling on a swift coup d’état or yet another “revolution”. “Nikol (the current Prime Minister of Armenia) will be gone in 100 days, we’ll be back soon”, they were spreading their agenda, disinformation and lies under this motto. And they needed sociopolitical targets for their dirty games in order to present democracy and the velvet revolution of 2018 as something bad and dangerous.

As the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan didn’t yet occur, they (i.e. the revanchists) had less topics to maneuver and lie around. And of course, based on kremlin-generated manuals, LGBT-related themes were pretty easy to

passionately manipulate around. They started spreading my photo from the kindergarten on their “armpatriot-am.ru” web garbages hoping to achieve the following effect:

Look at this famous and out gay!

This gay is also a paedophile!

This gay paedophile is also supporting Nikol and democracy!

Save your children from these pro-Pashinyan gay pedophiles by giving the power back to us.

One individual who got fooled by these revanchist thugs told in his interview to Civilnet in 2019 that homophobia was institutionalized and used for achieving their revanchist and anti-democratic wet dreams.

The QR code to a video where I explain this all and show proof is here:



Of course Armenian rotten patriots were verbally hanging me, the director of that kindergarten and Nikol. Hate speech was generated in an orchestrated manner on the web garbage (websites, Facebook pages and groups) on resources belonging to the former presidents serzhik sargsyan and rob kocharian and their supporters.

Homophobia got institutionalized in the newest history of the third Republic of Armenia since 90s, and it was done by the ruling 'elite'. A military figure under the nickname "sparapet" was pretty vocal about his intolerance towards homosexuality... despite some talks regarding his appetite for violence and rape not only towards women, but also towards young soldiers... The given citizen would associate himself with the state, and his vision was that of the state. Those who disagreed were punished. Classical dictatorship. The same or similar vision is now being carried out and propagated by conservative "heroes", "liberators" and "saviors" since then and since 2018.

THE BIRTH OF THE NEW INTELLECTUAL

I came up with an initiative called "Hedonistic-Stoic Party" on December 9, 2020. Then I discovered that long before I tried to merge the two philosophies together, someone else has elegantly done more than that. Ayn Rand called her philosophy Objectivism. After the birth of my Sophie in 2017, the most important and more operative and practical identity that was born in me and into which I was reborn is that of an Objectivist. It is a secular, rational philosophy that defends the free mind, body and wallet of the individual.

New Intellectuals Educational and Positive Impact Center is already operating in Yerevan de facto. I am also planning to operate New Intellectuals Hostel and a clothes brand. The Hostel will feature a learning corner or hall named after Georgi Vanyan. All of these will promote peace, reason, democratization of Armenia and the region, as well as liberty. This will most probably become the first business in damned karabakh committee Armenia to feature writings in all the three South Caucasus main languages, Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani. The flags of all the South Caucasus Republics and Turkey will also be featured inside the building. The mission of the hostel is: to develop the ability and will of reasoning and rational thinking among individuals, to form a community of New Intellectuals in the effort to bring positive changes to the community itself and to the region through reason, cooperation and lifelong learning.

Today's Armenia is pretty similar to Germany of the 1920s. It is our choice to either move towards Germany of 1933 full of revanchism, revenge, and nationalism and meet our 1945 or, if possible, to avoid that and move towards Germany of 1990s: secular, democratic, open for all the neighbors of all ethnicities and sexualities. I personally choose to contribute to the coming of the second scenario. Join me.



TALKS

Anna Evoyan

Every time I read an article or listen to the news, where there is the term sexual minority, I get a little shock, because in my environment, among the people my age, among my friends at least 60-70 present are queer people. Some people think that everybody is bisexual, but life is short, and many don't have the chance or opportunity to explore their sexuality entirely. But it is not the important, the important things are life and conversations, that I am having with these 60-70 present every day, the chats and calls, long and short, at different hours of the day, which form this story. I took all these parts, and I wrote down things I remember from years ago, parts of the conversations that somehow portray for me the experiences and joy of these people. From all these parts, I create a new conversation for the reader so they can have that friend too.

- I want to tell my story.
- Will you want this story to be known by the gays in your town who dislike you?

- Yes.

- If I lived in old age, I think homophobia would not be aggravated, there were no stereotypes at that time.

- I would open an NGO. And I would declare myself an LGBTIQ icon.

- Well, there would be problems, they wouldn't just be aggravated. It is like the history of those Armenians that they don't go to the doctor until the knife reaches the bone.

Monday, September 25. I came to work in the same clothes that I wore on Friday. You can imagine my weekend, right?

I went out to buy something for lunch, cars were standing on the road, and one of them had a sticker stuck on it: baby in the car, I thought if I had a car I would stick such a sticker too, but there wouldn't be any children in the car, it's me who is the baby in the car.

I remember my first time kissing a girl, by that time I had already had a couple of boyfriends and had a sexual life, but always thought that being with a girl would be a very different experience, something so different from what I have done so far. And then one day during a sleepover at one of

my friend's house, she approached me and kissed me and how I was amazed that lips are lips no matter whom they belong, it was the same kiss, I liked it equally.

My school life passed by bitings and bitings.

This is better than being normal, isn't it?

When a new and pleasant person appears in my life, I think how sad I will be if they leave the country, if their life fails, if they get sick, if they have financial problems, if I see how they get old, if they are upset, if I know that they will not manage to eat normally, etc., and I am powerless.

First I was annoyed. Then the boys came from the other direction. The teacher comes to class, makes me stand up, says there is no such thing as love at this age, throws everything in the trash, and sits in class.

Of course, my mother beat me a lot.

When I kept it to myself, I felt very alone.

A girl kissing a girl is witchcraft, I have always said that.

During the class, I was sitting in, the teacher said, "Where are our boys?"

You should have said, girl, look at your shoes!

I'm already over thirty, and I've realized that if I haven't told my family all this time, I won't. The sharpest feeling was telling my friends, I had three friends, at that time I was in the army, and they were in the city. I had undergone surgery, and when I was at the hospital, they came to see me. At that moment I had missed them a lot and I was emotional and I thought it was the right time to come out, I talked with each one of them separately in the patient room. I was happy that everyone accepted that fact easily and happily, at that time there were no gays in our general circle, among our friends. Only one friend of mine misunderstood and thought that if I told him, it meant that I was in love with him, and now he has to respond somehow.

- Interestingly, morality and sexuality have always been connected.

- It's not logical.

- For example, I don't have a sexual life but I am amoral.

I would go home emotional, with tears.

I would run and tell my mother.

- But don't you know that crying is normal?



It's a story about my brother, but don't tell anyone. He is twelve years older than me, and I have been working since I was 14 years old, I gave him half of my money because he was blackmailing me to tell my mother that I am gay.

Darling, we are very sexy. We need to remember that.

Why do people notice and understand everything earlier than we do?

- And that story caused something like this in me, how can I say it...
- Aggression?
- No.

In our class, now that I look, only 4 or 5 people are heterosexual, but at that time they were fighting with each other, everyone was insulting, beating, and bullying each other.

The boys were fighting, and the girls were whispering among themselves.

- Focal hair loss in the beard area due to stress.
- Hair always grows and falls out in the wrong places.
- Better words have never been uttered.

I'm mad at my father, very very very angry.

I went to Poland last year, and it was the first time I was traveling alone, when I arrived at the airport, I suddenly noticed that several boys were looking at me and talking and laughing. I was surprised and thought, turns out, they are doing this here too, but when I got closer, they did not understand that I am Armenian from my appearance, I heard that they were speaking Armenian, and they were saying insulting things. And I approached them, greeted them, and said:

- Is this your first time in Europe?

And so on and so forth, the talks and conversations go on and on, people create the relationships, relationships create the ideas and ideas create the world. I am optimistic because my friends create the kind of relationships that create the kind of ideas that can only result in a marvelous future.

Протокол
изъятия вещей и документов

г. Москва

24 июня 2017 г.

В соответствии со статьей 27.10 КоАП РФ, составлен настоящий протокол об изъятии вещей, являющихся орудиями совершения или предметами административного правонарушения, и документов, имеющих значение доказательств по делу об административном правонарушении и обнаруженных на месте совершения административного правонарушения либо при осуществлении личного досмотра, досмотра вещей, находящихся при физическом лице, и досмотре транспортного средства, при осуществлении осмотра принадлежащих юридическому лицу территорий, помещений и находящихся у него товаров, транспортных средств и иного имущества, а также соответствующих документов.

Сведения о лице - собственнике изъятых вещей и документов:

Наименование организации: Саммит-1

Саммит-1

ИМН

предпринимателя:

Место нахождения организации (место
физического лица:

ул. Рабочая 100

Дата рождения:

Сторона 1 из 2

Имя: Александр Александрович
Фамилия: Самойлов
Пол: муж
Дата рождения: 24.06.1988

Место рождения: г. Москва
Место жительства: г. Москва
Место пребывания: г. Москва
Место работы: г. Москва
Место учебы: г. Москва
Место досмотра: г. Москва

Имя: Александр Александрович
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Место работы: г. Москва
Место учебы: г. Москва
Место досмотра: г. Москва

Сведения о вещах и документах с указанием их стоимости:

изъято: 1 шт. карманная
на кармане ВЛСД неправомерно
находящаяся
в кармане ЗАБРАННО
НАШЕЙ СЛУЖБЫ.

Самойлов А.А.

A STORY OF MY PICKET

Tegran Hovhannisyan

Have you ever been captured in the mid of the night by thinking about the Philosophy of the State? Imagine, everyone is already sleeping, and you have an opportunity to have your own time, but you can't help but lie in bed in your outside clothes and think. Even desirable urges like having a snack or watching another episode of a comfy reality show are blocked by strict blind guards from entering your selfisolation room, until you have processed a numerous amount of witty and complicated, or moot concepts, fatifuing your brain. Unfortunately, you are not Socrates, but simply a nineteen years old marketing student, so this exalted paralysis can't help you to find the solution for the problem you had. I hope you were able to imagine the difficult situation into which my inquisitive, but not the most productive brain sometimes leads me. For two years now, I've been living in the gruelling embrace of Moscow, Her Cold Highness, far away from my parents. Moscow is a tiring taskmaster, and she has set the pace of my life at a gallop, keeping up with the demands of the capital city, balancing studies at the University, work and personal life. I've been lucky.

The people that engulf my life are, supportive and aware, so I feel like I am gradually growing. As I mature, I couldn't help but see the injustices happening around me.

Since the very young age, having queer and second-generation immigrant experiences, I have been struggling from the various Herculean trials put forth by the world: namely the narrow-minded nature of other people. This personal experience, to my happiness, shaped a cohesive system of values, and an independent life simply fine-tuned my political optics. So, it is mid-July. Some people are analyzing scattered reports on COVID-19 to somehow build their summer trips, but I am staying in the hot city, preparing intangible materials for a new moral court that was about to take over my soul. For the last week I was keeping up with political shenanigans. In all the headlines, they only wrote about amendments to the Constitution of Russia. For those out of the loop, these amendments alter about 60% of articles, especially points connected to redistribution of power, nullifying the previous terms served by the presidents, allowing Putin to run again. To divert attention of voters from these crucial changes, they added populist points, the old favourites, like defining marriage as a "union between a man and a woman". Disregarding the obvious pernicious and purely asinine points, let's focus for a moment on the central victims of these amendments: the LGBTQIAP+ community. I felt the dread by being a direct target of these proposed amendments. It was scary, almost impossible, to imagine where this would lead when the amendments come into force.

Realistically, I was agonisingly aware that I can't change anything by voting, due to the deep rot that corrupts the whole system, so I tried to speak up both online and in personal communications and spread the awareness about our problems, but something in me demanded more solid actions. I was thinking of doing a traditional for modern day Russia protest action, a solo picket. It is a form of public protest carried out by one participant and does not require prior approval from the authorities.

The protester often comes out with a sign or other symbols of his statement.

I was motivated to spread the word among apathetic people, threatened by the police state. I also least wanted to interact with the cops, since they don't have the best reputation, but what can you do against the persistent voice of the cricket of conscience?

Such thoughts and ideas have been filling my head for the last week or so, and even now, during a delightful summer city stroll with my boyfriend. I remember explaining my plans to my companion. It wasn't an easy task, since we often had different opinions on important topics. Within his beliefs I often saw a lot of conformism, similar to millions of our imaginary fellow citizens.

I believed that if I can't convince a close person, I can't convince anyone, and built a better society. As one said, in convincing the majority, it's important to show people around you that you can be different and still live peacefully.

Fully inspired, I told my boyfriend about my plans for the day, and he, as expected, tried to dissuade me, telling me that it would be unreasonable and harmful for my future.

Luckily for this story, I wasn't scared for my life, so I tried to explain the hazards of these amendments to both of us. He quickly realized he couldn't persuade me and gave up and promised to help me with my action. Rejoicing at the smaller success, I led us to the nearest garbage can to find cardboard for my poster. Anticipation began to fill me, as I found one perfect clean piece and stood over it with a marker. No first draft fear: the right words for the slogan came from my mind naturally. "Idiots are taking away our rights". I couldn't get enough of the simplicity and clarity of this statement. A reflection of the classical dystopian plot, but The Evil Leaders are not led by ideology or cunning strategies, but simply suffer from the lack of intelligence. By the time I walked to the picket spot, a monument to Pushkin, I was already fully inspired. I quickly assessed the situation: a lot of desirable passers-by and two patrol officers, wandering at the far end of the square. I briefly refreshed the memo from lawyers about interactions with policemen and made sure my boyfriend was filming from a distance, just in case.

A moment of hesitation, and I finally lifted the poster. The patrol officers saw me and immediately headed across the square, giving me some time to scrutinize them.

They were two tall, sturdy, shaven-headed slavic men in their thirties, both wearing identical black police uniforms, and hiding their faces with fabric masks. As they approached, one of them addressed me. "I wish you well. Duty officer Skvortsov. Please provide your documents." I knew I had to show them my passport because, otherwise, they could take me to the station. Well, at least they won't be able to do anything else after that procedure, I reminded myself. I took out my passport and carefully handed it to them. While these two were reading, two more officers, exactly like the first two, appeared out of nowhere. Because of their similar uniforms, masks and physique, it became impossible to distinguish one from another. Only the position of the stars on the shoulder straps could tell me something, but I was never strong in astrology. These faceless, sturdy men merged in my frustrated mind into one multi-headed fractal duty officer Skvortsov. After a small exchange of pleasantries, one of them said they would take me to the police station. "And what am I being detained for, exactly?" I asked in surprise. I knew the law and brought its action in accordance with it. I knew that the police officer can't simply detain someone without explaining the reason. At the end of the day, I didn't want to give up so quickly and decided not to move. Little I knew that they simply would not care about such a formality as the law.

"Let's go, don't delay," one of the cops replied irritably, as if I was wasting their time with stupid questions, while two of other captors stood on either side of me, pulling my elbows further away from the monument, and off we went. It's surprising how little strength it took to stun me.

As we walked through the square and park, I couldn't help but remind myself my first interaction with the cops, when I was a high school graduate, celebrating with classmates passing off one of the exams. We gathered outside, had some beer and laughed, until two cops showed up at our party. They nobly let all the girls go and took me and another guy to the station. I remember trying to convince our captives to let us go too, convincing them in ineffectiveness of the fining system, but they just laughed, mockingly calling us then humanities students. I remember how they openly commented on our appearance and sexuality, calling us sissies. They issued a fine and took our mugshots and fingerprints, as if we were criminals, and even threatened us with arrest if we argued back. The memories of that day were still fresh in me, so I least wanted to go through this tedious process again for old time's sake. But my escort continued to lead me forward. They took me a hundred meters away from the monument, and I saw three large police vans, called avtozaks, and lots of cops, hiding in the tress and just waiting for another poor, hopefully not dead, souls like me.

One of them stood out to take a picture of me with the poster, and for some reason, I froze, as if posing for the better shot. Shortly after they handcuffed me, rapidly locked me in the van, and drove me to the station through the picturesque sunset-lit city:

the roads were clear, prison chansons played from the stereo, and I was the only passenger in this strange taxi with bars. The police station is an ugly, liminal space with concrete fences, barbed wire, intercoms, iron bars, checkpoints and grilles. Luckily, after arriving, things didn't unfold dramatically for me. Either the advice from human rights defenders helped me not to incriminate myself, or the cops decided they were done with me, nullifying any desire for future protests. No one knows. Hours of protocols, testimonies, and explanations, and I was released. They only confiscated the instrument of the offense, the cardboard with a dangerous slogan. Many details of this story still elude my memory due to anxiety or time, and finding a recording of the live broadcast from that day helped me to fill in the gaps and write this story. I became able to see scenes and details I couldn't witness on my own. For example, as I was being driven away in an unknown direction, my boyfriend had a remarkable dialogue with one of the cops.

– Hello, Comrade Junior Colonel [unlike me, he knew how to read those stars and lines.] Where is this van with the detainee going?

– Are you close relatives?

– We? Ow! I'm a brother... a cousin. — [My boyfriend answered hesitantly.]

It doesn't surprise me now that he delicately hid our relationship, given the brutal context, but it again makes me think about the invisibility of queer people around the world.

For the system, we, queer people, do not exist. If any of us find them in a dire situation, we are forced to lie and make things up. We quickly get used to it and then easily shut the doors of our closets at work, during study, at family gatherings. I am filled with quiet sorrow with this forced cloak of invisibility, hung on us by states, societies, even us ourselves.

What can we do, to feel like ourselves out of the mirages of the safer spaces? What would have happened if back then my boyfriend said to that cop that we were a couple? Would he have been detained too? Would I have had more problems at the station? As one said, in convincing the majority, it's important to show people around you that you can be different and still live peacefully, and nobody will beat you in the face. And, gladly, nobody did.

The current situation with human rights in the country, my story comes from, unpredictable then, but clear for many of us now, is the result of systematic and smaller attacks on various freedoms. From the discriminatory laws, political assassinations and police violence, to populist wars: all we fear, as modern people are possible anywhere anytime.

All the problems I was willing to highlight are flying now in the air and they are highly contagious, a spectre is indeed haunting the world. It's been a year since I was forced to flee my first home and move to my ancestral home, Armenia. The Land of Hayk, sometimes more like the Land of Hate, is also not the friendliest place towards my community. Here, lives of queer people are filled with various danger, from problems at work, in the family, of with the officials, to live threats and street violence. Being fully aware of it, am either delusional or angry enough to correct complete strangers on my pronouns, or wear makeup in public, even though bearded people like me are not welcomed to do it. I had to fight a couple of times here, had countless verbal altercations, and when I felt the terror building, I remembered who I am and what I stand for.

Recently, I even had here the situation with unwanted attention from the police. I stood at a new rally, here in Yerevan, wrapped in a rainbow flag. when a patrol officer started poking at me and asking me, irritably, why I was wearing it. I pushed his hand away and responded that it was none of his business. I don't want little lies and idiots to take my rights again. Even though it's becoming harder and harder to stay strong each time, I try to remind myself, that love wins, and it gets better.

One political scientist said that, in convincing the majority, it's important to show people around you that you can be different and still live peacefully, and nobody will beat to your face, and the end of the day, there are things more important than one's face.





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Լուս 14:

NEW TESTAMENT

Egi Efes

The Beginning

The alarm sounded: it was an early morning; the weak sun of the cold winter illuminated the golden curls of the sleeping hero with its gentle rays. He tried with all his strength to wake up. That day was very important, he had planned to spend the whole day with his friends, walking and wandering the long-forgotten streets.

A moment passed, and he was already standing on his tiptoes, trying to reach the mirror to straighten his curls. He was a thin, rather tall young man with delicate features and long curly hair.

“Pity. . .” I thought and continued the action that was so unpleasant for me...

The alarm rang again, but now was time to go out, I had a long and cold journey ahead of me. I covered my feminine clothes with my jacket and quickly left the house before my mother could have noticed. Here I was passing through the pushing streets of a small town, where every passer-by looked at me with pitiful gaze as if I had committed an unacceptable sin: burning or slaughtering, but no less. Finally, I found my seat on the bus and headed to Yerevan. All this was very depressing, but I had missed my boyfriend too much.

When I arrived and got off, the first thing I heard was Hippy’s sweet voice.

“Egee!” screamed Hippy running to hug me but accidentally hit my leg with her ankle and we hugged the asphalt together, it was painful and funny at the same time, I didn’t know whether to cry or scream. Laughing and crying, we stood up and began to gossip about one of our unloved acquaintances. After a few hours we said goodbye to each other and went our separate ways. I met my boyfriend according to my plans. He hugged me so hard that I almost choked. As it was still very early before the start of the event, we sat down and started talking, more precisely he sat down, and I sat down on his lap.

At 8:40 a whole town had gathered at the square, everyone were happily discussing the songs of the participants and their candidates, and the police was checking things before letting to enter the square.

When it was my turn, they didn’t check my stuff and just let me pass because my hair was blond and I didn’t look like an Armenian, but my boyfriend had quite plump skin so he was checked, every pocket and nook.

I waited for him for a long time and finally he passed, held my hand tightly and led me to the Christmas tree. That’s when the event began. The participants performed in turn, after which the Christmas tree lighting ceremony began.

When the fireworks started, my boyfriend suddenly kissed me, this was my first kiss, I thought that everyone was looking at us and now something would happen, but the only thing I heard was that 2 girls screaming from behind:

“God, how cute they are!”

I did not think that I would be able to see something like this in Armenia. One of them approached us and said that wanted to know us. Her name was Anna, a nice tall person with black hair. We started talking, but the noise was disturbing, that’s why I offered to exchange with social networks, it was already late, and I was in a hurry to go home.

To home 21:35 11.12.2022

I took the bus after saying goodbye to my boyfriend, everything seemed fine.

I turned on the song “Another love” and tried to turn off my brain, but it didn’t work, I don’t know why tears were rolling from my eyes.

I was sad and did not understand how I fell asleep.

Verdict 23:22 11.12.2022

“Dmm... Dmm...” I was knocking on the door, and in a blink of an eye I was already at home, tired, as if emotionally exhausted after a happy day, that’s why I quickly locked myself in the room.

- Egi wake up ...Egi!

My mother shouted, combining insults and manipulations one after the other.

I was in terror, my mother had opened the password of my phone with my fingerprint and had found the photo of the kiss, read all the messages, found out everything. I read disgust, loathing in my mother’s eyes, as if I was the shame and mistake of her life. I myself signed my verdict today.

New conditions 13.12.2022

The day continued under arrest. She took my bank card and all my money. She burned my things that seemed “GAYISH” in her eyes, the next condition of the arrest was to read the Bible and ask for salvation for my sin, to which over time, participation in witches’ ceremonies, bathing with salt, and attempts to change me and become a new person were added. When I tried to resist, my mother threatened that she would tell my father everything and throw me out.

Escape and punishment 03.01.2023

After the New Year, my father left for Berlin. I decided to try to see my boyfriend, but since I couldn’t leave the house, I had to pretend that the principal had called from the college and had to go to Yerevan. I was walking with my boyfriend when my mother called me and said she was in college, she shouted at me and threatened that if I didn’t go home, she would create problems for me and kill my boyfriend. My boyfriend quickly sent me home by the nearest taxi, even though I didn’t want to and was afraid.

I was alone at home, when my mother came and started the traditional process of humiliating and insulting me, I sat and listened and could hardly hold back my tears. I decided that I should sleep so that the day would pass sooner, but this thought was very wrong.

Pain 04.01.2024

Something was happening, my face was muttering, but I couldn't wake up, the pain got stronger, so I couldn't sleep, I woke up and ran from the dark room to the bathroom, turned on the light, I was shocked when I saw my red face, what - something was smeared on my face. I tried to wash my face, but my skin was torn off, I was screaming and crying from the pain. My mother woke up from the noises, came and looked into my eyes and said:

- This is so that the boys don't pay attention to you, you won't understand anything now, but one day you will thank me.

I quickly fell asleep and ran to the hospital, my friend bought me the prescribed medicines to treat my face.

Disappointment 12.01.2023

I was passing the main checks at the military commissariat, was called to the general's room, they asked me a few questions about my orientation and opened the booklet and said:

"Child, you have bigger problems than being gay," he said and gave me the test results, where it was written that I have 2 brain cysts,

which are quite large and require an urgent treatment.

"You can't serve in the military like this, if you don't get treated, you won't have much time to live."

These words changed something in me, as if everything was lost, as if my hope, all meaning died. I got out of there, patted my burnt face, and passed through unpleasant looks to the river.

"Hello hello Mat?" I called my boyfriend crying. I wanted to feel needed and loved at least, but he said that he can't come, that the road is too unpleasant for him, that he doesn't want me to rely on him pointlessly, that I'm alone in this world. That day I decided that I should put an end to everything, nice and quiet.

Rebirth 00:00 13.01.2023

When my mother fell asleep, I went to the balcony, turned on music and leaned on the railing, watching the people passing by below, opened the bottle of wine and for the first time in my life tried to drink so that I could do everything I planned, it seemed to me that I was alone. My life would not be long, there was no point in suffering.

I set down on the railing, hung my legs out, said goodbye to them all and closed my eyes to jump. Everything seemed to have stopped except the sound of my heart, suddenly the door to the balcony opens, and with a shout someone tries to pull me back, but I jumped.

He managed to grab my clothes and started pulling me back, even though I was begging him to let me go. He was my neighbor Hakob, who saw everything and ran to our house. He took me out, washed my teary face, slapped me while yelling for me to come to my senses and left. I was sitting on the floor in the bathroom and crying for a long time. Something changed in me that day, I decided that I was already dead, which means I can no longer feel sorry for anything and not be afraid.

Complaint 26.04.2023

Several months had already passed, my mother argued with me every day and tried to hit me, but I had already started my protest. I would wake up, shave, put on makeup, dress as I wanted and leave the house returning late. Soon my father would return to Armenia and real hell was waiting for me, that's why I decided to rent a house and leave the house, my boyfriend and I were saving money so we would rent an apartment.

Breath and flight 05.06.2023

Today my father left for Armenia, and I packed my bags and left home. It was morning, already summer, I got into a taxi and started my way to the new one. I was afraid if everything would work out, I remember that at that time I was trying to find a job so that I wouldn't be a burden for my boyfriend, but it didn't work out. One day he said that I couldn't find one, but I just wanted to stay at home to look for him. This was so painful and traumatic for me that

I decided not to go home until I found a job. I stayed out until late at night, but one place accepted me as a waiter's assistant. It was hard to run around from morning to 2 every day, I couldn't feel my legs anymore, but I was happy to have a job. One day scandals just started with my boyfriend, he seemed to be constantly drinking and arguing with me, all this led to the fact that one day we had a very bad fight, and I kicked him out, packed my things and went back to my parents for a few days. It was the beginning of the end; we said goodbye to each other for the next 2 months. During that time, my parents started arguing and beating again, they forbade me to leave the house again, one day they beat me and locked me in the house, when my ex and my close friends found out about it, they contacted my parents, the police, and after long talks they managed to free me from there. It was 4 am when I left the house with a suitcase and got into the car. Now I really feel complete, I am surrounded by dear people, I love work, every step I take is full of small happiness. Although my story is very mixed and complicated, looking back, it seems to me that the main lesson is that you should never depend on people, time, circumstances. You should not hope for the future, you should live in the present. We always think that everything will change tomorrow, but tomorrow never comes, you wake up every morning and it's already today. Tomorrow just doesn't exist, so hoping for tomorrow doesn't change anything in your life, you have to hope now, you have to start now.

ծածոնկ մարդը մեղով ոգու՝ անապառազ գրասոր կազած՝ ինչքն և նա ծեք ունի Աստծու աչքում:

5 Եսակիմում այն սուրբ կանայք, ովքեր իրենց հույսը Աստծու վրա էին դրել, այդպես էին զարդարում իրենց անմահիւններին, **6** ինչպես Սառան էր հնազանդվում Աբրահամին՝ նրան «տեր» կոչելով: Եվ դուք Սառայի դուստրերը կիյնեք, եթե շարունակեք բարին գործել և չվահեճաւ ոչ մի բանից, ինչքն կարող է արարածից նկն ձեզ՝:

7 Դուք, ամուսիններ, նույն ձևով վարվեք՝ նրանց հետ՝ ձգտելով հասկանալ նրանց՝, և պատիվ տվեք՝ կանանց որպես այնի փխրուն անոթի, քանի որ նրանց հետ դուք էլ եք կյանքի պարզի ժառանգներ. այդ դեպքում ձեր աղոթքների դեմ արգելքներ չեն լինի:

8 Վերջապես, բոլորը մեկ մտքի եղեք՝, ցամախից, եղբայրաներ, խորապես կարեկցող՝, խոնարհամիտ՝, **9** չարի փոխարեն չարով մի՛ հառուցեք, ոչ էլ չարախոսության վնասներն չարախոսությանը՝, ընդհակառակը՝ օրհնեք՝, որովհետև դուք դեպի այս ուղին եք կանչվել, որպեսզի օրհնություն ծառայեք:

10 «Ով ուզում է սիրել կյանքը և լավ օրեր տեսնել՝, թող իր լեզուն հետ պահի՝ չարիքից և ջուրթերը՝ ստան խոսելուց» **11** և թող հեռանա չարից՝ ու բարին գործի, թող խաղաղություն փնտրի ու հեռանալ լինի դրա: **12** որովհետև Եհովա-

- Ք 1Պ 4:30
- Ք ԳԼ 18:17
- Ք Դ 3:30
- Խ Ամ 3:20
- Ք Գ 1:28
- Ք 1Պ 2:21
- Ք 1Պ 7:3
- Է ԵՊ 3:20
- Ք Դ 3:29
- Ք Դ 3:44
- Խ 1Պ 1:30
- Ք Գ 2:8
- 1 Ը 12:10
- Ն 3:12
- Խ Ը 15:3
- Ք Ը 12:17
- 1Պ 5:16
- Խ Ը 2:23
- Խ Ը 12:14
- 1Պ 4:15
- Խ Ա 3:12
- Ք Գ 5:5
- Ք Լ 24:23
- 1Պ 3:11
- Ք Ա 5:13
- 1 Ը 34:14
- 1Պ 5:13
- Ք Ը 3:7
- Ք Գ 11

դուք բարին գործեք՝ եթե համոն պատիվը չարվեք էլ, եղբայրացի կան մի՛ վախեցեք այն բանից, ինչից նրանք են վախեցնում, ոչ էլ անհավատացեք: **15** Այլ ձեր արևոլում Քրիստոսին սրբացրեք՝ որպես Տիրոջ, և միշտ պատրաստ եղեք պատասխան տալու՝ ամեն մարդու, ով ձեզանից բացատրություն կպահանջի ձեր մեջ եղած հույսի համար: Մահպն դա արեք մեղսությունք՝ ու խոր հարգանքով:

16 Մարդը խիղճ ունեցեք՝, որպեսզի ինչ բանում որ ձեր դեմ խոսում են, անթող մերևան՝ նրանք, ովքեր արհամարհանում են խոսում ձեր քրիստոնեական լավ վարքի մասին: **17** քանի որ այնի լավ է չարչարելու բարիք գործելու համար՝, եթե դա է Աստծու կամքը, քան թե չարիք գործելու: **18** Քրիստոսն էլ մեղքերը միշտ մահացավ մեղքերի համար՝ արդարը անարդարների համար, որպեսզի ձեզ դեպի Աստծու անուշությունը՝, նա, ով մահվան մատուցեց մարմնով, բայց կենդանացավ՝ ռզով: **19** Ե՛տո նա գնաց ու քարոզեց քանոսում՝ գտնվող ոգիներին, **20** ովքեր մի ժամանակ անհնազանդ էին, երբ Աստված

- Մրճակ 8
- Խ 1Պ 3:22
- Ք Ա 34:15
- Ք Ե 34:16
- Ք Դ 6:5
- Ք Ե 13:5
- Խ Դ 7:12
- Ք Դ 9:11
- 1Պ 2:10
- Ք Դ 6:12
- Խ Դ 10:28
- Խ 1Պ 1:2
- Ք Ա 48
- Ք Ա 15:1
- 1Ջ 6:11
- Ք Բ 2:7
- Ք Բ 3:2
- Ք Գ 23:1
- Ք Լ 24:16
- 1Ջ 1:5
- 1Ջ 1:10
- 1Ջ 6:9
- 1 Տր 2:5
- Ք Ը 12:21
- 1Պ 2:12
- Ք 2Պ 1:7
- Ք 1Պ 1:24
- 1Պ 4:12
- Ք Գ 23:1
- 1Պ 4:15
- Խ Դ 58:6
- 1Ջ 2:28
- Ք Ը 5:6
- Ք 2Պ 5:13
- Ք 1Պ 17:50
- Ն 1:22

Եթե ... աստված էլ նրա բարեկամն էր, որպեսզի զարմացնի ձեր սուրբ քաղաքից, ապա որոնց մասին գրված էր:

20 Եւ, ով վկայուների մասին, ասում էր՝ աստված չէր գալիս եմ ասելու: «Անե՛ւ Ե՛հ, Տե՛ր Ըրիստոս»:

21 Թող Տեր Հիսուսի անգուգալանքը քաղաքների հետ լինի:

22:15 Քառացի քրիստոնեականությունը:

- Մրճակ 2
- Ք 2Պ 4:2
- 2Պ 12:32
- Ամ 30:6
- Գ 20:30
- 2Պ 11:4
- Չ 1:8
- 1Պ 4:8



ART TRANSMISSIO / concept and design by ispeaktoflowers / photography Elena Gerber.

INTERVIEW WITH MISCHA

Narek Arushanyan

I met Mischa 3 years ago around a discussion about nudity and sexuality.

Talking publicly about our sexuality is tabooed in our society and few people are allowed to explore their sexuality. I think that Mischa's experience and background can speak to many young people, who face similar social challenges, they can relate and invoke a feeling of identification and empowerment.

His experience allows you to gain enthusiasm and a feeling that you are not alone and there are people with you.

The interview creates a relationship with modern progressive values and their opposites. It is fundamental that we are all fighting against fascism, but what is interesting is that we can also see discrimination and xenophobia in that fight. I often have constructive debates with Misha, because he works in such a public organization, lives in Europe, which creates an image of ideal freedom for many, but is it so?

Misha Badasyan is a Russian-born Armenian performance artist and activist who lived in Berlin, now in Zurich. He firmly believes in the power of art's impact on society and its contribution, questioning social structures and raising a number of social issues.



FUTURE LOVERS / art installation by Mischa Badasyan / photography by Sergey Yengoyan

“How can we talk about freedom when we trust the master?”

Narek - Tell us a little about yourself, your story, how did you come to activism?

Mischa - Since an early age I felt an urge to help people around me.

First, I started just being active in my school and in the neighborhood. Then at the age of 14-15 I got involved in the human rights movement, at 17 I became a vegetarian. I always felt different, and I had this inner feeling of being a changer and a creator. I wanted to create a better place around me and find people and communities. Also, I have been working as volunteer with children with autism for 3 years. I have been in touch with several charity foundations and NGOs. I was doing workshops and lectures at my university when I started studying political science. We had many problems with police and FSB (Russian security agency) because we were attending demonstrations and protests. People with different opinion were never welcome in Russia. They would control us and prosecute for any actions. It has been exciting times and dangerous one too growing up in Russia. At the age of 20 I got accepted for a volunteer exchange program in Germany and left my home alone.

- Have you had any cases of homophobia and violations of your rights?

- The “silent” homophobia was always there when you could hear jokes about gay people in the school or at the University or even at home. It’s also a “silent” homophobia when you are always scared and can’t express yourself. In the school I have been called a faggot a lot and I had to play a role of a straight dude.

But since I just came out in Europe and after doing public events and art projects and speaking up openly, I got also homophobic messages online on social media etc. Physical violence connected to homophobia I experienced in Kiev at the gay pride and in Berlin while holding my partner hand in hand in the city center or on the bus. During the gay pride I was beaten up with a good friend of mine by 5 Neonazis and in Berlin a guy spitted on us at the main public square and another guy shouted at us once he saw us kissing.

- How did you decide to move to Europe?

- Even though I wanted to change many things in Russia and in my hometown Rostov on Don, I had a great need to discover the world. In the school I studied German (I couldn’t speak any English once I moved to Germany) and so my focus was only Germany. Also, while volunteering in Rostov I met German people and I have been hearing a lot about exchange programs in Germany. I was very excited about it and spent 2 years on preparing myself and searching for a program. Finally, I got invited to an interview in Moscow and I got accepted for the ASF (Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste) program and went to Dresden to work in the NGO against racism and right wing extremism and helping elderly people in the Jewish community. After one year of volunteering I received a scholarship and studied social work.

- Can you express your opinion on the importance of coming out for the sake of human rights?

- Coming out is a long process. It is a statement and a powerful message. At the first place for yourself. Speaking up is a tool to create your own identity, to accept the status quo who you're now. Secondly, it is a very strong message to the people around you and a society. Once you are out you are becoming a voice which is echoing loud and telling your story.

Each of us has a story and those stories make a big and beautiful book of love and acceptance. Coming out creates a visibility of LGBTIQ people in the society and it's very important for keeping communities alive.

- What do you think best influences the flourishing of human rights in Armenia?

- Armenia is still in the transformation modus. You can see many changes and some progress. The number of NGOs is rising each year. People travel around and living abroad and coming back with their experiences. Another important aspect of stepping forward is an exchange and co-existence with people coming to Armenia and so mixing up with a mono-nation of Armenia. The crucial and most significant is education. We should invest everything in the educational programs and teach young

generation from the childhood about human rights and democracy and modern society.

- I know that you worked in Berlin in an organization that helped queer refugees, are there any stories that you would like to tell, for example, about internal homophobia/transphobia?

- Apart of being an artist and an animal rights activist, I must earn some money.

My main job is social work. I have been working as a social worker in the last 9 years with refugees. Usually, I worked in the shelters. One of them was a shelter only for queer / LGBTIQ refugees. I spent there 3 years and have been working with people from very different countries. In the beginning I was very happy to be part of this project and support directly LGBTIQ people in need. But soon I realized that bringing people from different part of queer communities is not always great and can lead to many conflicts. We saw so much violence and abuse towards each other at that place.

It was really surprising for me. When trans women abuse another trans women, when gay people hate women in general and how lesbians reject all trans people. I was shocked by the numbers of those cases, and I didn't know how to react and how to reflect this all.

I was very disappointed and a bit overwhelmed by this experience. This shelter was supposed to be a safe space and we did all possible to

make people feel safe and loved but it didn't work out all the time as we wanted.

The example in the last answer is very disheartening, it forces us to reconsider our relationship with the "power" ideas and everything we believe in and trust.

I'm confident that only artistic practices can change something in our life and our story.

The question is not that something needs to be changed, but that it needs to be noticed.

We have to unite, we have to be together but why we cannot have any point of solidarity in our contemporary world? Only illusions. because of ... etc.



LOVE ME?

Anya Yeganyan

I crawled under the bed and watched as my mother leaned over and shouted to me: come out. She shouts this because she is not done beating and humiliating me. I close my eyes and imagine myself as an adult, strong, smart, someone who can fight back.

Today I am 34 years old. My name is Anya, and I can't protect my little self, but I can tell you my story so that you can protect yourself and not be afraid to open up to the world.

When I first opened up to the world, I was three or four years old, and that's where my first memories come from. I liked playing with dolls, looking at the large bricks of Moscow's houses and comparing them with cookies, and in the summer I admired Vanadzor's mountains while visiting my grandparents.

I loved my life, people and animals very much.

I still love my life, people and animals. A lot. I look into the eyes of cats and my heart is filled with happiness. I see in them the most valuable thing they have - life. Joy of life, spontaneity, sincerity, almost childish gullibility.

I also trusted the world when one day the yard boys of Vanadzor called me to brag about what

they had done and showed me the corpse of a cat that had been maimed and burned alive. Her eyes were closed, and her face still smiled in a very catish way.

They bragged about how the knife broke when they cut open her stomach. I looked into the cat's face and something died inside me.

I went home and didn't go outside for three days. Little Anya sat on the ottoman and didn't talk to anyone, but no one asked her anything. Since then, I always approach sad people and ask: is everything okay? Even if we don't know each other, even if we are on bad terms. There is something more important than personal grievances - solidarity.

Solidarity that I always lacked as a child. The feeling when a person did not defend someone, but silently went into another room, seeing how a mother beats a child. Me. I have always been alone, facing the impossible. I couldn't defend myself when my mother poured half-eaten soup over my head, locked me in a dark bathroom and threatened to send me to an orphanage.

I then learned to believe in miracles. I believed that there is good in everyone, they are just mistaken. And my faith saved me.

Twenty years ago, at fourteen, I told myself: no one promised that it would be easy.

I used to leave the apartment where I lived with my mother out into a snowy Moscow and went into a warm school to hear again and again what a “fat churka” I was.

I’ve always been curvy, but I didn’t always understand that this could cause envy, because being pansexual, I fall in love not with bodies, but with souls. It has always been unclear to me why they didn’t like me so much? But I told myself: all is well in this best of all worlds, as I returned to the house I never knew, to the mother I never had.

Ironically, my queer friends, who have given me more warmth and love than anyone before, say that I would be a good mother because I have a lot of motherly energy.

I don’t know where it came from, but I know that sometimes, seeing the suffering of my loved ones, I think quite like a mother would: my little one, how can I make sure that your soul doesn’t hurt? And I stroke the bearded cheek of a friend, twice my height, who for me is much more than a friend, or girlfriend, or friends. He is my motherland.

My actual motherland is Krasnodar, Russia, where I was born a very healthy and large baby. It seems to me that I was born believing in miracles.

But one day this faith failed me. When I fell in love for the first time in my life, it was a non-reciprocal love. For some reason, I refused to realize the actual situation, and instead tried to persuade myself that they felt the same way. I loved, believed and was becoming heartbroken so stubbornly that my psyche passed off what I wanted as real.

Then all at once, something broke and I went crazy. A few days later I tried to commit suicide. I was taken to a psychiatric clinic, where I spent a month. For the first three days, my heart physically hurt, and then, when I began to gradually return to reality, I felt terribly ashamed that I was now “sick.” My diagnosis: bipolar disorder.

Later, my mother and grandmother would strongly recommend hiding the fact that I was “sick,” as if they were ashamed of me. And sometimes my mother, in a fit of anger, would blame me for minor mistakes, or manipulate my “sickness” to blame me for everything and get what she wanted.

These experiences will leave an imprint on my already crippled psyche for many years, leading to a refusal to accept my condition, difficulties in finding doctors, and the development of numerous hormonal imbalances coupled with an eating disorder.

I denied myself, wanted to be a different person and hated myself, envied people who had friends. Sometimes I stayed at homes of people I didn't know well, so as not to return home to the loneliness and be alone with my unbearable self and an abusive mother.

But my faith in miracles was unshakable. I remember saying to myself: if I die now, what if life will get interesting later and I won't find out?

And so, without knowing it, I saved not only myself but also my friends, whom I am now happy to help, whom I accept and love, remembering that there are no perfect people. Loving people is not easy, a sometimes ungrateful task, but it is worth it, because the biggest miracles are created by the hands of the living.

And how many times have I fallen in love with hands, voices, looks, souls - only the ancient Gods know. I always fell in love with their energy and personality. And sometimes I didn't realize that I fell in love with a girl and not a guy. Back then, the prohibition of the surrounding world on accepting love as it was - free, diverse, rainbow-colored - was still too strong. Until I was 32, I couldn't allow myself to realize I was pansexual and that I fell in love with girls, not because they had masculine energy, but because what was primary to me was the person and their soul or the body in which they lived.

As often happens, people around me noticed that I was unconventional and different from everyone before me. They asked me if I was a lesbian, back when I didn't even understand who I was, back when I believed that I was just an ally. And I denied myself. I was afraid that they would no longer accept me - the person who was already sick and ugly- because of one more difference.

Perhaps that's why I forced myself to have my first sexual experience with a man.

Yes, of course, I liked him, but I keep asking myself, what would have happened if I wasn't afraid of being judged? Would I sleep with Anya from Ukraine, with whom I was in love? Or with the girl I was attracted to back in school? Or would I also choose this guy who sexually assaulted me and then afterwards asked me to have more sex because he would soon be leaving me for the one he was in love with?

Falling in love is my pain and a vital necessity. I can fall in love with anyone, but I have never had anyone reciprocate my feelings. What does this mean for me? Honestly, I don't know. Do I continue to believe that love will happen to me? I don't know either. I talked a lot about this topic with psychologists, gradually appropriating my broken parts, realizing that I also deserved love. I turned my crippled manifestations into signs of distinction and uniqueness.

I am unyielding and persistent, I know how to get my way. And success is my way.

Although I have been unsuccessful in getting my parents and relatives to like me for who I was, I was able to become liked by myself and my friends. Perhaps because our views and values coincide, because no one of them will judge me either for smoking weed or having sex before marriage.

Acceptance heals. For a long time I fought against the wall of rejection from my family, breaking myself and exhausting my mental strength in attempts to prove that the main thing is not how often you spread your legs and in front of whom, but how much you love and whom. To my conservative Armenian relatives in Russia, I remained a whore and a drug addict.

They did not want to hear, understand and accept me. And ironically, only after moving to my historical homeland - Armenia, was I able to be heard and recognized. And I was heard by free people like me. No, I'm not saying that it's easy for us to vibe with each other, but we accept each other and our complexity, conflictedness and imperfections.

And, having matured in acceptance, having been healed in a chosen family, we have learned to accept: to accept ourselves and,

after accepting ourselves, to choose each other. Or not to choose. We are free people.

And only in freedom can a person grow, develop and become their true self. The best version of themselves. And they also say that the ways of God are mysterious and those who walk can master the road. The main thing is to believe in yourself and in the power of miracles, and then, as I told myself once at 16, you will definitely win, because there is no other way.

I am Anya, I am 34 years old and I am a journalist and activist. I am strong, I am smart, and I am beautiful - and out of what is easy and what is right, I will always choose the second.



ROCK'N'ROLL

Shin

- Satanist! – A woman yelled.
- Pervert! – Another one yelled.
- Lesbian! – Joined the third turning my life into an absurd theatre.

Rock was pouring out from my headphones into the bus, into the narrow and deformed-skulls of people, it couldn't fit in some, just like the cursing and cursed passengers who gathered at one another's heads and squishing one another's feet.

Rock was the style of my life, the rebellion against the society, a struggle in the name of breaking the stereotypes, justice, equality.

The struggle against the windmills, uneventful, vain, an empty duel without winners just like life, solely full of losers, losses and disappointments. I reached the college, opened the door under the rhythm of the drums, as if it was a scene from an unfortunate movie. A step forward, a step back. One step forward, two steps back. An auditorium, students, an unbearable bluster that would make even the deaf wince. Armenian history, an extremist lecturer, genocide, the same song again spinning like a spoilt cassette.

- I would kill the enemy's family, I wouldn't care if it is a child or a woman, I'd torture everyone. - the fool's eyes lit up with admiration at the scenes he depicted.

- Too violent, don't you think?
- Weren't you a Yid?
- A Jew.
- Yid, get out of the auditorium.
- With which right?
- The one that you're a mixture of a Yid and a Russian and you sit in Armenians' lesson.
- I am Armenian.
- What part of you? With your first name or last name? Maybe with your blond hair and the freckled skin as white as the wall's plaster?
- You have no right.
- I have a right to everything in my country unlike you, get out of the auditorium, and it would be better for you if you leave the country too.

She left, I stayed, but I felt like I mentally left the room with my classmate, who was banished a little earlier, alienated, not assimilated with her motherland after all. She was surely listening to rock.

An interval, a commotion, a clamor. Madding crowds were marching toward the sun. I was quoting Charents surveilling the human masses, who were crossing the hall in military march.

Right, left, right, left, left... left... Reverse. Unchewed food inside of their mouths they were uttering half-chewed words.

I wasn't listening, I pretended to be deaf.

- So, if your friend told you that he was a gay, what'd you do?

- Oh, you started it again, well what to do?
Nothing as long as he didn't touch me.
- How, wouldn't you hurt him?
- I would.
- Bro, I'd dig a hole in the square, burn, and
throw him there.
- Sure.
- Or hang him in the square, but after beating
him up thoroughly.

I wince.

- Are you an animal? – I interfered like a
tailless spoon.
- What did you say?
“Was I the deaf here, or was it you?”
- I said: are you an animal?
- Could it be you're one of those?
- Could it be you too?
- Repeat.
- Clean your ears once in a while!
- Are you messing around, yeah?

I left.

I got tired from the boring zoo where there
only was a monkey cell.

“I study with animals, folks” Publish the quote!
I'm screwed

A call, a message, a threat. I got scared, I
listened to rock scared.

“You will regret it” “We'll destroy you”
“You're dead”

Us and them...

And after all we're only ordinary men...

Pink Floyd, a trolleybus, a din, a self-crossing
granny.

A traffic jam, a swearing, a tardiness, “Open
the doors for me to get down, uncle”, “Hand
over this fifty.”

A morning, Tuesday, a loath sickened coil of
pus rolling from one bus to another. The stop.

- Satanist!

- Pervert!

- Lesbian, what have you spoken about us?!

- The truth.

- Ask for forgiveness!

- I'm sorry for calling the things by their
proper names.

- Now you'll see!

A unanimous referral to the director, a call to
deduction, “We don't want to study with people
like her!”

“You are deducted!”, I was waiting for those
words for several days in a row.

“You have no right!”, I was having an imagi-
nary dialogue.

“I have a right for anything in my college!”

- Do you know, she's not a virgin?

- Come on.

- Rumors say she's a lesbian.

- I heard she doesn't believe in God either.

- She doesn't want to kill a Turk.

- Holly shit.

Up and Down

And in the end, it's only round and round
and round...

- Hello, I know you're being talked from
behind.

- Hi, and?

- I listen to rock too.

P. S. Despite all the negativity, I acquainted
with my close friend, who I know for six years
already. Sometimes darkness takes you for a
relative.



MEMORIES

Henry

Despite the blustery weather and the cold outside, it was an unforgettable beautiful white evening, with large flakes of snow on the ground. It is indescribable the beautiful white veil that fell on Yerevan at night. It's surprising, but it's not cold outside - exclaimed Narek, and pulling Danny's hand took him outside. It's not cold, - said Danny kissed Narek's lips, took out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, and gave it to Narek. Maybe they didn't care about the winter, the cold, the snow because the fire of love was burning inside them or the large amount of alcohol was warming them, but they felt happy. After smoking, they went back inside hugging each other, and started skating again. Everyone's eyes were focused on them: everyone thought that the young men were not Armenians, because both of them had beards, white skin, prominent features, light brown hair, were athletically built, were wearing jewelry, and looked very Scandinavian, but they started singing loudly in Armenian at one place while skating and forced the audience to leave the rink. And the management and staff of the skating rink carefully followed what was happening, because everyone there knew them and their parents. The staff was irritated by the fact that they were different from everyone else, and were not afraid to do what they wanted and did not hide their feelings.

Danny and Narek ironically have families who have lived criminal lives in the past. Neither of the young boys knows about the other's family, but this evening turns into an evening of fatal frankness thanks to Narek's ambitious "getting drunk" plan. Even though it is strictly forbidden to bring food, especially alcohol, into the skating rink, it did not stop Henry from bringing in several bottles of alcohol and food, because he had a rebellious and unruly character and naturally went against everyone: parents, teachers, classmates, the system, to the laws, and, according to many, even to the universe. Since the management of the skating rink knew them, they allowed them to spend the night there on the condition that they would not break anything. The director was somewhat relaxed because the area was being videotaped. Danny and Narek begin their "dinner party". After midnight, both of them were already too drunk and they just couldn't even stand up, but that didn't stop them from getting up from their seats and entering the rink. Entering the rink and embracing the ice in a warm embrace happened in one second. The only option left for them was to hug each other and start talking about their childhood.

The memories took Narek into deep childhood.

Narek - when I was a child, my grandmother was shown on TV as one of the politicians who gave up her mandate,

she and my cousin participated in demonstrations in front of the National Assembly in support of the first president of Armenia. I remember that because of all that was happening in the country, we were moved to a "safe area". My mother was reading the Children's Bible to my sister and me when shots were heard, I ran to the window and witnessed a scene that I will never forget: armored cars and even tanks, the armed forces of the republic, including military personnel transferred from Artsakh to the RA, stood in front of the demonstrators like a barrier and tried to disperse the demonstration by shooting in the air, but seeing that the demonstrators were not intimidated, they just moved on the people with armored vehicles. At that moment my mother pulls me back and takes me with my sister to another room so that we neither hear the sounds nor see all that. My grandmother returns home and we also go back home. She was one of the few who was not arrested because she was very influential. But the police knocked on our door in the morning, they needed my father and uncle. My grandmother told them that they were not at home and she did not know where they were. The police want to enter the house by force, but my grandmother, being a "Strong woman", does not allow it, she closes the door and immediately enters our storeroom, takes three five-kilogram cans of canned goods, and throws them directly at the police car from the tenth floor, shouting, "No one will give you a boy." ...

The police car is completely turned into a scrap, the policemen come out of the porch and, seeing that scene, they want to go back up and arrest my grandmother, but we lived in one of the most criminal districts of Yerevan, the people watching our neighborhood and those who know our family simply force the policemen to leave us with knives and guns. My father fought with my uncles, because of which someone shot one of my uncles several times and took him to the hospital. We had been back home for a day, but we had to go again. My mother decided that we should go to her father's house. We lived in my maternal grandfather's house for almost a year, it was one of the happiest periods of my childhood, we lived carefree, played, and enjoyed our childhood. A month after we moved, my father came and started living with us. My father says after some time that he does not want to live such a life anymore because of him or his brothers, the family lives in hiding, is afraid to leave the house, we do not have our own house, and he does not have a job. His decision changes our life by 180 degrees, he gets a job in the traffic police and starts to take care of the family, we go to our house and everything seems to be perfect until the moment when his relatives and cousin's sons say that their brothers can't "Let him be a policeman". "Either get out of business or forget us". He thinks for a long time and makes a fatal mistake.

He is leaving work. However, one of my uncles had lost a lot of money in the casino and my father decided to sell our house to pay off his brother's debts, otherwise, he threatened to harm his family. We moved to my paternal grandfather's house, where my two uncles lived too, one of whom had a wife and a son, and the other already had a serious problem, the name of which was "drugs". We didn't have a house anymore, but we had cars that were sold to get uncles out of jail, but one of them started using drugs again and my other uncle got into fights again and went back to jail. We lost everything. Our house was in one of the most criminal neighborhoods of Kentron community called "Krivo". My mother has a very calm character, she never fought and never had a conflict with anyone, but she constantly scolded the neighbors when they started poking their noses into our family, saying "Look at your dysfunctional families that do not benefit humanity and get your nose out of my family, otherwise it will be cut off."

Moving again. Other, house - other, place - other, environment. I immediately start getting to know the children in the yard and one of those acquaintances becomes the beginning of my first relationship. I was walking over the gas pipes and I noticed a girl coming from behind and holding out the candy bars to me saying: - I am Mary. I turn towards her and almost fall on the construction debris flowing down the pipes like a waterfall and that would

have been the end of my story. That meeting became what seemed to me to be eternal love at the time, and I was 13 years old. Our contact before becoming a relationship starts with going for a run at 05:30 in the morning, and then after spending the whole day together, we meet each other's families a month later.

Are you doing well at school - Dan asks Narek.

Narek - I adored the History of the Armenian Church subject and I cannot describe my love for my teacher teaching that subject in words, but one day everything changed because of a mistake she made and I ended up in the principal's office. One day, before starting the lesson, the teacher addressed the class and said, "We once treated two such girls and we will treat you too." She meant me and the boy who became the first boy I fell in love with. Everyone at school thought I was gay and emo. Something didn't match. I am bisexual. I start insulting and scolding him for calling a person who is different or has different beliefs sick and I throw the book at my teacher shouting:

-For your sick imagination and stupidity doctors have found a solution and its name is "Psychiatric Hospital" I will accompany you there and see that you are treated.

I forgot to say that I went to the school "Patani Yerkhapah"

and registered, after I passed the military exams of the "Youth Voluntary Union" and got the title of Senior. I thought that I would get a military education and go to the service. I accidentally learned about the Right Side, when I went to one of their meetings, after which they offered me to participate in their camp as a volunteer. After participating in the camp and performing well, I received an offer to work in the organization. I came to work and met my savior who was the psychologist of the organization. I started to get rid of the trauma caused by my family. Every morning to go to work, I fought at home to be allowed to leave the house, I constantly fought for my clothes, and I was beaten a lot because of the way I dressed. My father used to beat me because I didn't wear a "sports uniform" and didn't go down to hang out like an Armenian guy. My cousin once attacked me with a knife because I was wearing ripped jeans. All my life I have been in fights for my appearance, my looks, my friends, and my surroundings. Only my mother was with me. To make it clear, I will tell a story. I was going to the store in the evening while crossing the street the driver was driving the street at high speed while talking on his phone, and he hit me and threw me a few meters, I went home covered in blood and instead of helping, my father and my cousin started beating me, telling me that I "got under the car".

Narek yawns, tears appear in his half-opened eyes as if he wants to finish his stories, and says:

- In my life, I have been discriminated against and subjected to violence by my family and relatives, I have seen many bad things and I would not want anyone to live the life I lived. I thank fate and my psychologist that now I can speak freely about myself and not be afraid that I will be discriminated against.

- In the morning, accompanied by the director, their parents went inside and just stood without making a sound and looked at the boys who were a little red and a little cold, but with happy expressions on their faces, hugging each other tightly, they hugged each other as tightly as if they had just met and were forced to separate. They woke up and stood on the rock holding hands and said to each other:

- End?



BEST FRIENDS

Max Gasparyan

This story dates back to my early childhood. From a young age, I did not conform to the expectations of being a proper Armenian boy. I used not to talk to other kids due to the differences in our mentalities. I had no friends until the age of eighteen. At the age of twelve, I was already aware of my sexual orientation, I also knew that it was wrong for my country, since Armenia is not accepting, at all, of the LGBTQI+ community. That was the reason I did not have any kind of friends.

I was trying hard to conform to what was expected of me as an Armenian boy, because I was afraid that if anyone learned about my sexual orientation, they could possibly out me to my mom.

That would cost me a lot. I could not let it happen. My mom is the dearest person that I have in this world. Our relationship was not typical of that between a mother and a son; I have always felt as though we were friends. It pains me to say, that if my mom found out that I was not a traditional Armenian boy, she would not accept me.

The sole bright aspect of my childhood was my mom, and losing her would equate to losing the very meaning of my life. For those six years, I existed as an actor,

with the script of my life dictating my every move. Fully aware of the societal norms in my country, I lived by memorizing certain phrases: “act like a boy,” “don’t have too many female friends to avoid being labeled effeminate.” Countless sentences like these were tattooed into my mind. I paid attention to every single word that I said, in fear that I would inadvertently reveal my true identity.

My mom and I were always together, and we shared everything with each other. However, I harbored a huge secret that consumed me from within, preventing me from living my life to the fullest.

Aged eighteen, I decided to move to Russia in hopes of living my life authentically and not having to conceal my true self. Alas, nothing changed. Things got even worse. Since I was living in my maternal uncle’s house, I was under more pressure. Although there was relatively more freedom to be yourself, I could only be the one watching others be themselves. I still had to conform to the expectations of being a traditional Armenian boy.

My sister, my uncle’s daughter, to be more exact, knew about my sexual orientation. She was accepting of it and had made a promise of not telling anyone else. Although I had the option of talking to her about my feelings and thoughts, I still couldn’t bring myself to do it. I wasn’t feeling understood by her completely.

Sooner or later, I came to the realization that no matter how much you try to escape from your problem, they always find their way back to you and demand to a solution. For the sake of my own sanity, and to escape from all the self-destructive thoughts, I, at last, found the strength within me to come out to my mother. I told her who I really was.

I texted her trying not to be very direct and gradually come to what needed to be said. Since it was really hard for her to live without me in Armenia, first I wanted to understand in what mental state she was at the moment, so that I wouldn't make everything worse. After discussing other topics for a while, I noticed that she was in good spirits, which gave me the opportunity to bring up the topic. Despite being filled with doubts, I couldn't suppress it any longer.

“Mom, you know how much I love you. You're the only one in life who has always understood and supported me. I need to tell you that, aside from girls, I also like boys. I know that it is wrong and hard to understand, but there's nothing I can do to change.”

One minute, two minutes, three minutes - no answer. I was really scared and decided to call her. She picked up the phone in tears. I was relieved to find out she was alright. We talked. I also started crying.

She told me she didn't know the reason she was crying, whether she just had missed me or because I could not fulfill her expectations.

I told her that I still don't know which gender I will eventually choose as my partner, which calmed her down. She confessed that she had a feeling about my sexual orientation. She mentioned that she had noticed it when I was a child, especially when I would dress in her clothes and play with dolls. I didn't remember all of that. After some reflection, I realized that she could have forbidden me from doing those things, but instead, she allowed me to be happy.

I returned to Armenia and everything changed. I didn't have to conceal my authentic self anymore, at least not to her.

Now, we're more than just a mother and son; we're also more than best friends.

I LOVE YOU MOM.



THE END WHERE I BEGIN

Lilit Atabekyan

“My name is Lilit, and I call Lori region in Armenia my home. I’m a transgender woman, and my journey began when I was just 14 years old. That’s when I started to embrace my identity fully, becoming the woman I am today. During those early years, I spent most of my time with my four closest girlfriends. Those were truly blissful days, filled with love. I cherished every moment with them. Despite not wearing makeup or any artificial enhancements, I felt beautiful. It was a time of innocence and self-discovery. I still remember meeting my first boyfriend and falling head over heels in love. We spent countless hours together, and for a while, everyone around us saw me as the woman I felt I was. We even lived together for a couple of weeks, and during that time, I felt a profound sense of happiness. But as time passed, I felt compelled to alter my appearance. I started experimenting with makeup, wearing more brave outfits, all in an effort to enhance my femininity. It was a gradual transformation, and with it came a shift in my life.

At 15, I began working and earning my own money. I started meeting different people, exploring new relationships, and immersing myself in the vibrant energy of the city.

It was during this period that I began engaging in relationships with men for money. Although I presented myself as a woman, hiding my

transgender identity, I didn’t want them to know, I was always curious about what a man-woman relationship was like, and I lied about being a woman. Life as a transgender woman in Lori region seemed relatively smooth at first. However, things took a dark turn when people started to discover my true identity. Suddenly, I became a target for abuse and discrimination. The very same streets where I once felt safe now filled me with fear, especially after dark. Now, I go out and then think that I won’t come back, that this will be my last day.

I recall a terrifying encounter in Yerevan, where I escaped from a client who attempted to harm me. When seeking help from the police, I was met with ridicule and indifference. It was a wake-up call to the harsh realities of being transgender in Armenia.

Despite all the risks that surround me, I won’t let fear dictate my life. Instead, I embrace who I am with all my heart, finding happiness in the simple acts of putting on makeup and choosing my outfits. I’ve taken the time to learn about my rights, and now I won’t allow anyone to take them away from me.

Despite the challenges of living in a tough neighborhood, I’ve managed to become someone people recognize and trust, and that means the world to me.

I've found purpose in advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in Lori region. It's a calling that fills me with determination to fight against discrimination and ensure that every person, no matter their gender identity, is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. Because at the end of the day, we're all just human beings, craving love and acceptance in this world.

