

# Blue Deep Sea

An anthology of writings  
by lesbian, gay and bisexual young people  
from Allsorts Youth Project

Edited by the Tornado Collective

Published by Allsorts Youth Project

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If I am not for myself, then who shall be for me?  
If I am only for myself, then what am I?

(Jewish saying)



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# Introduction

All the young people who have contributed their writings and drawings to this anthology are members of Allsorts Youth Project in Brighton.

Allsorts was set up in 1999 and provides support for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or are unsure of their sexuality. About twenty-five young people attend the drop-in sessions each week.

Our members are extremely diverse in their life experience and background - one thing they share with each other is a common experience of living as young people in a society which is dominated by homophobic prejudice and heterosexist assumptions. These invade and dominate all areas of experience: within the family, schools, friendship networks, colleges, on the streets, in the work-place, emergency services, armed forces, welfare agencies, psychiatric services, social care and health agencies, the legislative and judicial system - the list is endless.

Sometimes the experience of emerging into a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity has been supported by parents/carers, school, friends or colleagues. More often it has not. The consequences of homophobia and the internalisation of self-negativity that it creates are appalling. It has been estimated that two-thirds of lesbian, gay or bisexual young people experience bullying, harassment and violence as a result of their sexual identity and lifestyle, and that one in four of these young people attempt suicide [see [www.outproud.org/survey](http://www.outproud.org/survey)].

Hearing the stories our members tell of their traumatic experiences, it is not hard to see why some are led to injure themselves or take their lives. Yet out of the struggle to overcome the hardships and injustice that society imposes, these young writers also express an extraordinary potential for compassion and a creative energy for change.

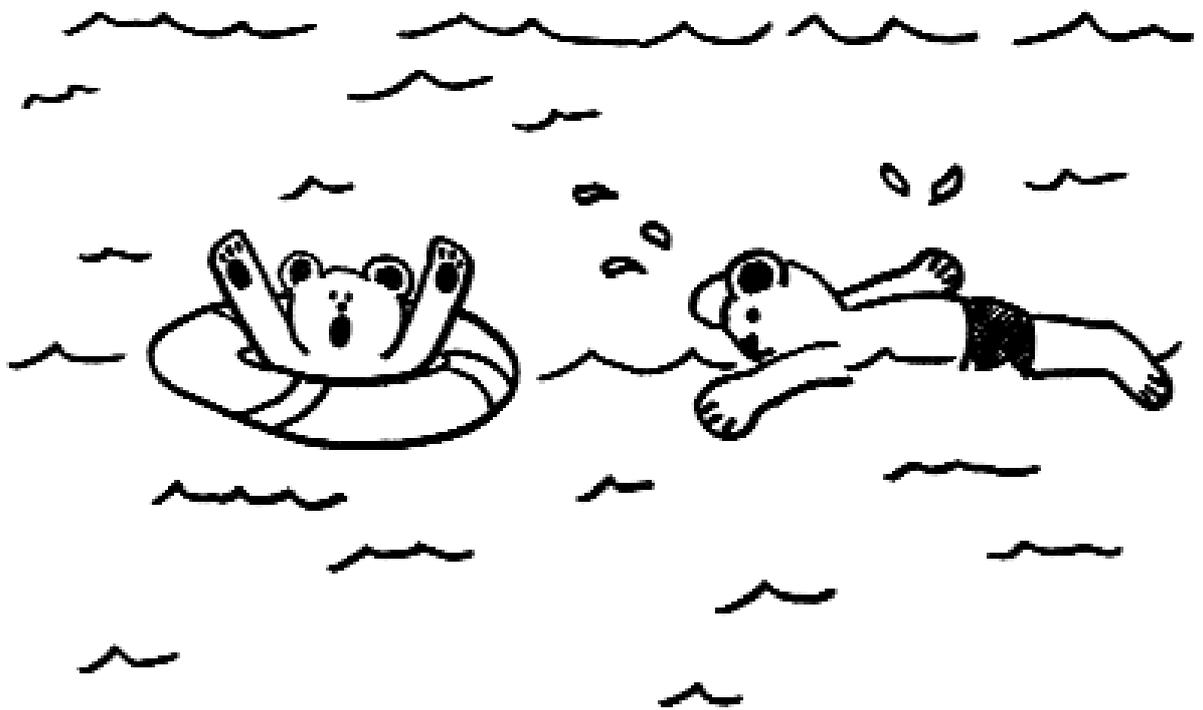
Each piece is a snapshot of the lived experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people. All of the contributors have strong and distinctive voices, and as far as possible we have left the language of each contributor in its original form. We did not feel it was safe for young people to give their full names, which is why all the contributors appear either as 'anon' or by their first name only.

We would like to say a big thank you to Sandra, Debz, Ceri and Peter who have helped so much in the production of this anthology, and to those who have financed it - the Diana Memorial Fund, Diversity Alliance, East Sussex Brighton and Hove Health Authority and Pride in Brighton and Hove.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this anthology to all the young people who have so generously and bravely shared their life stories in this unique collection.

*The Tornado Collective, Allsorts Youth Project, Brighton,  
November 2001*

Sinking  
Or  
Swimming



## Yes no!

Can I tell this person? I will sit them down, spark up a fag, calm my nerves. I begin to talk, tell them, no, I can't tell them, no I won't. She smiles at me and talks about the graffiti on the wall. Woman, don't you know what I'm going to tell you! Let it out, you feel the words come to your mouth, what will she do if I tell her. Will she shriek and run away, will she go silent and have nothing to say, will she fall about laughing, and call me a liar, will she listen and support me. Go on tell her, tell her, you can tell her, go on. I need to tell you something - I'm gay!!

anon

When I first came out I was not sure whether people would accept me for the way I am.

Now I really don't care what people think.

I simply am what I simply am.

anon

I am a lesbian, homosexual, gay, whatever you would like to refer to me as, although my biological name is Carole.

From about the age of 12 I knew I liked women, I didn't really understand, have the knowledge or was even aware that having a sexuality was possible. I just thought I was different, I was referred to as abnormal, amongst other names.

For at least 3-4 years I have known that I am gay, on various occasions I will kiss boys but it's not as good, if you know what

I mean! Although it was only recently I came out of the closet.

I have told my Mum who said "I understand" I have not told my dad, sisters or my brother, as my dad doesn't believe in being gay; a bit like Queen Victoria really. My sisters because I don't really want to add another problem to their lives because that's what it is - a problem, for them anyway! I haven't told my brother because he is homophobic and has previously said in conversation that if he found out I was gay he would kill me, so I guess I'll wait. I think I'll be waiting a long time though!

I was bullied about my sexuality at school and have even lost friends that I have known for years, whether it is the fact they thought they knew me or lack of knowledge is beyond me.

People's perspective of me has changed since I've been more open about my sexuality.

I have heard lots of things from friends about bullying and violence, which has resulted on various occasions, in their attempted suicide because of discrimination about their sexuality.

Discrimination is always there, whether it's your race, sexuality, gender, age or because you have a disability. Homophobia is always there and always will be. I really wish that there was more information in schools about sexuality, so that the world could be a better place, but in order for that to happen, people's perceptions will have to **change!!**

by Carole

When I was 7 I had feelings towards girls that I didn't have towards boys, I never really found boys attractive even when I grew older near the teens. I was too afraid to tell my parents so I kept quiet until I turned 17, then I came out to my parents, then slowly to friends, none that were in my age group as they were all older than myself. I had no-one of my age group to tell.

Now I am living in a hostel with four other women who are straight because they like me and we get on fine because I'm the eldest and I have nothing really to do with them except for one because we're very close which is great.

anon

## **Alone**

I don't want your comfort,  
I don't want your pity.  
In fact I don't want you  
I want to be on my own  
To communicate only with myself,  
To smell only my smells,  
And to see no one but me  
You think a hug will take all my troubles away  
But it won't and nor will you  
So go away  
Leave me alone  
Yes, alone!  
I don't want anyone else,  
Just me.  
I want to be alone  
All alone.

by Sarah

I left home and school at around 16 and a half. I soon lost an office job, so I headed for Brighton with not a lot of money, no real friends and nowhere proper to live. I survived posing for erotic photographs and videos. My career as a model, it didn't last long, so I turned to prostitution. At first I thought I could cope with this but after two years I quit and just carried on living with sugar daddies and in a way still do. I don't encourage or discourage my way of life, I just get on with it. So I leave people to make their own decisions and judgements on working in the sex industry.

by Adam

## **When will this change?**

From about age 10 I realised that I was Gay, I fancied other boys and I knew that there was something different about me. I knew that I was gay but didn't know what this meant. I thought that I was the only person in the world or at least my area who felt this way. I had no idea where to turn to for real support.

At secondary school I thought that I would escape previous bullying but this turned out not to be true. Because of my feelings inside I felt so alone and isolated, I was keeping this dark secret to myself, how could I tell anyone without being rejected, this in turn led to me isolating myself even more. This caused more problems.

The gay taunts started after a year and even though they may have just been used as a way of slagging people off, because I was gay, they hit home hard. The name-calling continued. There was no where to turn to at school for help, the school didn't mention much positive about homosexuality in any Sex Ed classes and always strongly pushed the Family Values

message across. This was no help to me and I grew to think of my self as without value, second class and abnormal without realising it.

The effects of the bullying, and lack of information and support were wide ranging. I had nowhere to turn to except the local and London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard who I would phone as often as I could, but they were just a voice on the end of the phone. The pressure of keeping it secret was overwhelming, the fear of rejection was terrifying. How could I value myself if I kept being told that gays are dirty, perverts, sick. The list of slanders and insults goes on.

Suicide was a constant thought and depression was part of everyday life. I was only saved from suicide because of the support of the local gay helpline.

Later in life, after I came out, I still kept seeing myself as second class and different, I knew about safer sex through training and outreach work I had done myself with the local HIV prevention agency. But I didn't feel I was always worth it. What if my sexual partner rejected me? Who was I to refuse them the sex they wanted?

The feelings of low self esteem, low self value, lack of self-respect and low self- confidence that had been built into me in my school years were always in the back of my mind without realising it. This led to myself taking risks just to feel accepted and I ended up becoming HIV+.

Some might say the link between myself contracting HIV and bullying is very weak. But knowing about safer sex is just not enough! You must have the self-confidence and self-value, self-respect and belief that you are worth it, to put safer sex

knowledge to use in the many testing and pressured situations that can arise during gay life.

Bullying, especially homophobic remarks and homophobic attitudes by staff as well as other pupils, and the total lack of support both emotional and practical in many schools in dealing with issues around sexuality and bullying, destroys self-confidence, self-value, self-worth, self-respect and the person. Young peoples' lives are being put at great risk through people not taking the issue of homophobia seriously enough. And young gay, lesbian and bisexual people's lives are difficult to rebuild and impossible to replace.

My source of strength came only from the mainly un-funded gay community projects, such places as the local and national switchboard, the local gay lesbian youth group and of course Allsorts Youth Project. All of which at least try to reverse some of the damage caused by homophobia encountered in everyday life.

*When will this change??*

*When can young gay people feel safe and supported at school?*

by Gavin



## Coming clean

Remember the day I came clean?  
Honesty revealed  
Shocking yet strangely expected  
I stood before you  
Feeling like a criminal  
With my soul on the line  
Looking for acceptance  
And the promise of love to come  
Your response was muted  
Emotions yet again concealed  
Disappointment instead of love  
I was now flawed  
Not the child you grew  
Nourished and protected  
Nothing would be good enough  
I was stained and not of your stock  
Damned and not innocent born  
A failure to all concerned  
Another secret under this roof  
I saw the hurt in your eyes  
The tears you cried  
Did you see that in me?  
I kept it all inside  
Appearing not to change  
But the whole world had distorted  
Looked frightening and lonely  
And you could not help  
You would not listen  
But I had not the words to speak  
The invisible barrier extended  
And you cursed the day I came clean

by Kirsty

## **My account of homophobia within school**

I remember at the age of eleven being told by my parents that 'school years are the best years of your life', well, that is easy for them to say, they did not have the fear, worry, anxiety of what I was going to face for the next five years or so.

Along with the standard lessons like English and Maths etc., the regular taunts, teasing, harassment by fellow peers seemed to be on the timetable as well. In the eleven years I was at school I felt different, I put it down to being dyslexic until I went to high school where I found myself being isolated even more, as I was becoming more aware that I was attracted to men.

I had no real friends, I was a loner, everyone around me was talking about girlfriends, I felt sick, I had grown up seeing girls as purely friends. My home life was not at all helpful. I was living with mum who cared more about a younger sibling. I was never encouraged to do well by my mum, I felt desperate and low, there was a teacher I told about five times in my last year how I felt and how the simple solution, or so I thought, was to end my life, but never about my fear that I was going to be just like Julian Clary or Boy George, as these people I had been compared to.

This teacher helped and talked me out of it and still I did badly at school, my grades were evidence of this apart from one subject which was PSHE, where I got an A+. The main bit of coursework was to make a presentation on health promotion covering aspects of smoking, drinking, drugs misuse and how to promote safe 'heterosexual' sex. The safe sex piece was my strongest element in the presentation, even though it made me

feel quite ill and I remember thinking this is not about me. No one really knew about my torment least of all at school, which also happened to be an all boys one.

Since leaving school I have a good circle of friends who are helpful, as well as supportive, and one of the main jokes between us is me being in touch with my feminine side, where they say I grope it. Anyway I consider myself to be quite a happy homosexual now very out and proud, but I cannot stress enough how education is the key for teachers and pupils alike. Teaching on how its ok to be queer and how there are no set norms, and it takes Allsorts to make up this world etc. and teaching well rounded sex education, as well as teachers learning what to do if a pupil is or is not sure of their orientation. I also believe parents need to be helped and educated on this issue.

Thank you.

by James



Dear Sally,

I feel so different from people that I like  
Because I think that I am a dyke  
I haven't told any one, though I wish that I had  
Because keeping it cooped up is driving me mad  
I want to tell someone, but I don't know who  
That is why I'm telling you  
I'm frustrated and depressed a lot of the time  
Though my selection of friends is totally fine  
They are the best in every way  
But I don't think I could tell them that I'm gay  
You were the only one I thought I could tell  
But writing this, is like being in hell  
Give me some advice because you've been through it all  
As I have a mountain of troubles that is ever so tall.  
That's why I was depressed when I saw you the other day  
I wanted to be like you, out as a gay  
But I know that's not possible 'coz I'm afraid of what people  
will think  
and if I lost all my friends my life would just sink  
It probably wouldn't happen, I'm exaggerating I know  
But if it did, I would know which way to go  
It makes me sick that I care what people say  
Most people don't think I'm weak in this way  
But I am. I care a lot what people think of me  
I'm not as strong as I pretend to be  
Thanks for listening you've been a real friend  
And on you I knew that I could depend  
But I would be grateful if no one else knew  
With my deepest secret, I'm trusting you!!!

Love  
Sarah

I have always felt I was gay although I didn't recognise this word until I was 12 which gave me something I could relate myself to. However it was never easy to tell my family as I knew they would have a problem with my sexuality which I feared would isolate me even further than I already was. In the end my family appeared not to have a problem initially because they believed it was a phase and I later found out the comments they had made behind my back. My aunt even considered me a fashion accessory until she became bored and then became spiteful even watching my every move with my cousins.

anon

Friends at school queried why I didn't fancy boys/male pop stars - I worked out why but never linked it to being gay as I just didn't go there. I had a platonic relationship with someone who turned out to be gay too - great cover for all their 18th birthday parties, and the sniggering stopped - only to start again at university.

anon

I have finally come to realise that the world isn't on back to front each time I walk out of my front door and that in fact I'm just front to back with myself.

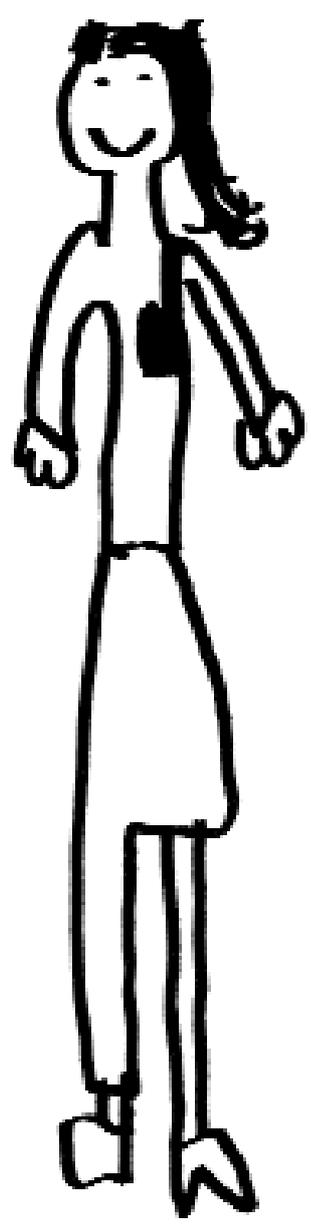
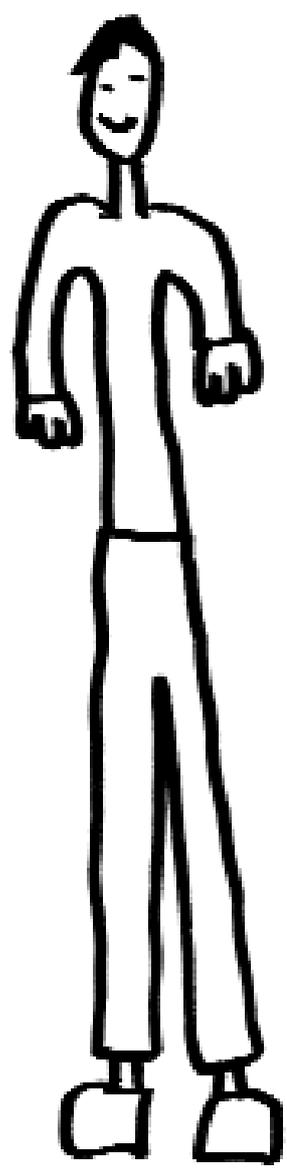
Before I figured out I was a lesbian I felt that there were very few avenues in my life worth exploring. I was having nightmarish visions of life boring me to death.

I have very little idea of what to do next. I have been living in a very straight world where most people I know would rather faint than hear the word "lesbian" and I would like to get away from it as soon as possible (please). Any suggestions besides being beamed up to the heavens?

by Precious



ME, MYSELF, I



## **Fucking lesbian**

“Excuse me are you a...?  
I mean, how did you know you were a...?  
Do your parents know that you are a...?  
It must be hard being a...?  
You don’t look like a...?  
It wouldn’t bother me if you were a...?  
My best friend’s a...?  
Did you go on that march for..?  
How do you have sex if you are a...?  
I don’t mean to pry, but are you a...?  
A, urm, you know...a gay lady?”  
“NO, I’M A FUCKING LESBIAN!!”

by Sarah

## **Me myself I**

I’m feeling low  
What am I to do?  
I want to break free  
But can’t

Listening to others helps  
Talking does the same  
But what will help me release the truth

It’s like being interrogated  
There is one big difference  
I’m doing the interrogating  
What am I to do?

Being gay and leading two lives  
Why does no one else do the same  
Looking around you can't see yourself  
No one is like you

This is where my answer lies  
I'm not a stereotype  
I'm an individual  
I'm not gay

I know what I am to do  
Be myself

Why should your sexuality, being such a small part of you, all  
of a sudden be all of you!

by Keran

ME,



## **This life (condensed and foil-packed for freshness)**

This is my life, my story. But the condensed version. I am now 25 and nearing the end of my official youth but growing up is something I have always thought over rated and so I am not going to do it. The biggest event of my life so far happened when I was 21, just out of my teens but not yet grown up. I was just starting my life then in the December of 1997 I found out that I was HIV+. Dun Dun Duuuuuuuunnnnnnn!

This is my story of living, dealing with and growing up HIV+. It covers my life before and after. Names have been changed to protect the innocent and guilty! But I hope this will give you courage if you are living with HIV and make you think again about HIV and those living with it; but mainly I hope you enjoy it.

### **Me...(the background)**

My name is Gavin, I am now 25 years old or young it doesn't really matter. Now I live in Brighton which is a city by the sea, not that big compared to others but a wonderful place, everyone seems to find a little place for themselves where they fit into Brighton. The city expects nothing of you but is accepting. Oh I forgot to say; it's gay. Well, gay friendly as least. That's one reason I am here. The others well you'll find out later. I was born in the West Midlands. About 20 miles from Birmingham so I think it safe to call me a "City Boy". I came from a good family background, Mom, Dad, two older sisters and a dog.

I am also Gay. I sort of realised this very early on. I, like your average kid didn't have an interest in girls at that age. But I had more of an interest in boys, it went beyond friendship and was sexual. I fooled around with other boys from the age of 9

onwards and really liked it. I slowly came to realise that I was different... I suspected I was gay from the very little that was on TV about it and got a great deal of support from London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard. I used to run home from school every lunch time to phone them. They were wonderful and convinced me that I wasn't bad or evil. I was only 10 at the time but they didn't pressure me in anyway. They just gave me the information.

Nearing the age of 16 I decided that I couldn't face leading a double life anymore and came out at 16. I moved out for a week to allow my folks to get over the shock and allow myself to calm down. But things went well and after the week I moved back home. I got onto the gay scene, had loads of sex. I had a few boyfriends lasting from one night to two and a half years. I made a great group of friends and was having the time of my life. Safe sex was not important to me even though I did voluntary work for the local HIV group.

I went to college to study science and at the same time through a friend met my (2.5 yr.) boyfriend. Lets call him..... Josh. After college I went to Uni. But this was a BIG mistake. At the same time Josh moved in with me and we were living in a tiny room at university halls. We had loads of verbal fights and I threw him out a few times. My course work suffered but it was way too hard for me anyway. Who cares about the 39 ish stages sugar goes through in the body. I am sure its important but at the time not to me. I left Uni and lived with him whilst I worked at Legoland. Legoland is a fab place to be; but selling ice cream in the rain can take the fun out of it!

But we broke up, I went back to my folks heart-broken and depressed. Got a job and planned for university again.

### **The story...**

This is written from memory and a diary that I kept for a while after the test. This means that it can be confusing as I jump between past and present tenses.

Well, as you know I have been gay for as long as I can remember. I moved to Brighton at the end of September 1997, to come to Brighton University. But also like many people who move to Brighton, to get away from my past and make a completely fresh start after failing university once before, and to find a new love after my last relationship ended.

As part of this I decided to have a full check-up at the local G.U.M clinic, not because I thought anything was wrong but just to check that I hadn't brought anything nasty with me to Brighton. But I had always played safe, condoms etc. I had always continued sleeping with my ex, Josh, we still enjoyed each other and he promised that he was having safer sex with his new boyfriends and since we had never used protection since we got together... And we had both tested negative when we were together.

I had tested negative for HIV about a year ago and only slept with him once or twice so I thought that there was no chance on earth that anything could be wrong. But just as part of my plan, I went along anyway, you know fresh start and all that theatrical stuff. I made my appointment and had all the usual swabs, not the nicest thing but I thought I'd tag an HIV test on to the appointment. I was given the usual pre-test counselling about how the test would affect life insurance etc if I declared it and ask how I would cope with a positive result. Now this, when you think about it, is a stupid question. How can you say how you would cope?

It's an impossible thing to answer. Because usually you react very differently to how you think you will. What would you do if you knew the world would end in 2 hours? Panic, not give a dam, eat, watch that really good episode of "Star Trek"?! You can't say, because you never think that you will be faced with that situation. So I give the answer I thought the health adviser would want to hear, and to get out of the clinic as soon as possible, " Well, I just have to cope with it won't I?" I said. Because I knew, well I thought that there was no chance in a million years that I could be positive. I had slept around lots before and after I came out as gay and never used protection and always tested negative, it was only after myself and Josh finished that I started using rubbers. And I knew I was negative at that time. So I went back to Uni and forgot about it.

A few weeks passed and I forgot about the follow up appointment to get my results, I was too busy and I knew nothing could be wrong. Then the letter arrived from the clinic. Shit oh shit oh shit. I knew from past clinics that they only sent a letter asking for you to go back if there is something wrong. (I didn't know that Brighton sends letters out anyway if you don't go back.) Now I knew that I didn't have any symptoms of an STD (sexually transmitted disease) infection and the brief test results on the day showed nothing unusual to say that I had an STD. So I started to get real, real suspicious. Could it really be the HIV test that there was a problem with? What else could it be? I showed the letter to one of my friends. She didn't know what to say.

I phoned to book an appointment to find out, this was on a Thursday but the only appointment they had was on a Monday. The next few days were crap. Everyone else in university halls had gone home for Christmas but I had to stay an extra week. I

was now pretty convinced that I was HIV+. I even tried dowsing (a weight on a string that gives yes or no answers to questions). I know that dowsing is not that reliable and most people don't believe in it: but it always came back as YES. I started to shit myself, I was panicking.

Monday came. Monday 16th December 1997. I walked in. Now this bit was strange. The first waiting room where you see the receptionist was really full. But when I booked in they sent me straight through to the male waiting room. It was completely empty. I started to think more and more that the shit was about to hit the fan. I was shown into a room by the health adviser. The room looked like it had never been used, it was so clean and sterile. I sat down. He looked at me and placed his hand on my file;

“ I am afraid it's bad news” he said.

The world suddenly slowed down and stopped with a jerk.

“The test came back positive.” He continued.

I still cannot and never will be able to describe how I felt, I'm not sure if I even know even now how I felt. In those few seconds and few words my world changed completely.

“What? So you mean that I have HIV? I am HIV+” I stuttered.

“Yes.” He replied.

“I KNEW IT! I FUCKING KNEW IT!” it felt like I was shouting.

My mind gave up on me and I went into auto-pilot. I remember one thought really clearly; I really wanted a fag. He said something about that I could walk out and not come back if I wanted to, that there would be follow ups if I wanted and that sort of stuff. I just said I needed a fag break.

Outside I lit up. I was shaking. The emotions were becoming too strong and I was completely fucked up. So I decided to deal with them later and get the practical side of what happens next dealt with first. I could cry later. I smoked my last fag, what a bummer. How could I run out of fags at a time like this? But hey, it's good to know that sods law is still working. I went back in. It felt like everyone was staring at me. I felt everyone knew what had happened, that they knew I was positive. I felt that I should cry, or at least do something dramatic like you see in the films. But it's not like that. It's just a numbness. We talked a bit more. I wasn't really paying attention but picked up that they wanted me to go back for a re-test and to have various blood tests to see how my system was coping with HIV. I walked out of the clinic on a cushion of air. Everything drifted past me with no noise. I bought fags and chocolate. Thank god for chocolate! When the world kicks you hard between the legs, you know that you will always have chocolate!

I sat on the beach, it was empty and freezing. I stared out to sea watching the waves break. Hoped that if I wished hard enough that they would wash me clean. The HIV, the problems, my thoughts. If I wished hard enough then the sea would wash them away; and I would be left there, clean, just me, no HIV, no negative thought, just me shining so brightly I would almost be blinding to look at. It didn't happen. I remember clearly being approached by a pigeon who only had one leg. There was no one else on the beach, not even other birds. It came so close to me. Almost knowing what had happened. It sounds so stupid now looking back. But I thought, we are both heading for death before we should. I knew that a one legged pigeon won't last long.

I tried thinking, but couldn't. Nothing would focus in my head. Every thought would stay just for a moment and then shoot off. I gave up thinking and went shopping. Retail therapy the best thing. For some reason I bought an electric toothbrush. I bought booze as well. But an electric toothbrush, I think it was something I always wanted to buy, but I did get £15 worth of reward points on it! And who could refuse a bargain like that! When I got back I phoned the clinic again. Just to check that I had heard it right. Was I really HIV+?...I was. I hadn't made a mistake. I phoned my best mate in London, he came straight down for a week.

The next week was bizarre, I drank loads yet never once got drunk. I thought a lot about what to do next? Who to tell? Who gave it me? Matt my best mate was wonderful, he was always there next to me. I must have repeated my self over and over again. But he always listened like it was the first time I said it. Without him I have no idea how I would have coped. On the second appointment I had so many questions, the main one being "how long would I live?". This is one that no one can ever answer. I had blood taken so they could retest me and do viral load (amount of virus floating around per ml of blood. The higher the number the more damage can be done. High=bad) and CD4s (the good cells that fight infection, the average is 600-1200 in non-HIV person, so the more of these you have the better. High=good), and various other blood tests. Most of my questions only the doctor could answer and because I was going home for Christmas I would have to wait until January for the results. But I was still in too much of a dream world to care.

*Diary entry December 1997*

*36 hours after result.*

*I am confused, scared very scared and pissed off I DO NOT BELIEVE IT. I played safe, always used rubbers, so how could I be positive. The finger was pointed at Josh my ex. I don't hate him I just wanted to know if it was him. My life has been shattered and now I must pick up the pieces that are important to me and relevant to me. But which ones? Everything is a dream. I was just getting my life sorted out, over Josh. Brand new interesting Uni course. New good friends and a bright future ahead of me. Now I don't know what.*

*It has really knocked me for six. I have been sick. Drank a bottle of archers, 50 fags in 36 hours. Maybe more?*

*I have coughed up blood, headaches, tooth aches, dizziness. I have even thought about my funeral.*

*You can be watching a film and really enjoying it but then it pops into the back of your mind.*

*I don't know if I will ever accept it. I don't want to tell my parents it would break their hearts. A child should never die before their parents.*

*I am in deep shit over my head.*

*DAY 3*

*I slept without dreams. I needed that. It was wonderful. I woke about 7:30 and looked out of the kitchen window and the world was covered in snow, deep snow. It was great.*

*I feel fine today. I can talk about it without too much pain.*

*So today 17/12/97 I feel fine. I am still having problems believing it but given time. I was meant to meet the health adviser at 12:15 but the roads are chaos. So instead I went to find out about HIV support services. After having a snow ball fight with Matt at the train station. Even with what I have been through he still showed no mercy when throwing massive balls of snow at me!! I got him back though!*

The worst part was going home for Christmas. There was no way that I could tell my parents as I hadn't dealt with it myself yet. I called by to see Josh in London. He had guessed from the phone call I had made to him that I was positive. But later he told me he had tested negative. So I didn't get it from him.

Back home in Birmingham I went for a test again. I told them what had happened and they did a same day test for me. It came back positive. No great surprise there. It was weird, because of my work with HIV prevention agencies I knew what I should do. I was doing everything practical. In Brighton I had already found out about every HIV charity and got loads and loads of leaflets. And in Brum I went back to the charity I used to do work for. The bloke there was a great help to me and sat me down and talked through what I should do next and what to expect from my doctors. I also arranged for him to chat to my parents when the time came to tell them. By this time I knew exactly what to do on the practical side of being HIV+ like blood tests, the illnesses you can get, what services there are for you in Brighton. But I was still treating it like it was someone else who had HIV and not me.

I told my parents about a week after Christmas. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. Telling them that you are going to get ill and stand a high chance of dying before you would have normally done. I gave them a bunch of leaflets to read. And told them that I had made an appointment for them to chat to someone. I explained to them as best as I could that it would be best to chat to them rather than me as I was still dealing with it myself and couldn't really help them. I waited outside the room whilst they chatted to the bloke. I heard my mom crying. But since then they have been very supportive. I told two of my closer friends as well, none of them knew what to say. Both were lost for words. But what are you supposed to

say to people when they tell you they have HIV? But both were fine about it.

One who was an ex was quite upset but didn't really show it. He told me that I was the first person he knew personally that was HIV+ or at least the only one who had told him. I used to always fear rejection or the many questions that people ask when I tell them my status. It was almost like coming out all over again. But now, in my mind the more people who know a person with HIV then the more people will realise that people with HIV are still people and not these diseased AIDS victims that the media portrays. I am first Gavin, it just happens that I have HIV and I am gay. Both make me what I am but both are only a small part of me and my life. I think a lot of people miss that point. I have had people telling me when I have been chatting on the internet that they are so sorry. I don't need or want pity from strangers. I have HIV and I have to live with it. What else can I do? I am no hero.

Once back in Brighton I went to the drop-ins and other support groups to get to know other people with HIV and get support and advice. These were great and you pick up a lot of information about the best doctors, which drugs they are on, side effects etc. Basically at the drop-ins you just sit around and chat, drink coffee. Because HIV makes it difficult or impossible for people to work, these places really stop the boredom. I was also introduced to the mental health team, just to make sure I was coping ok and I was put back on Prozac. People knock Prozac but for me it helped me rise above the stress and shock and plan how to cope.

My first appointment at the hospital could have gone better. I found out that my CD4 were 292 (low-ish) and a viral load of 125,000 (high). This was a big blow for me as it meant that I

would have to consider starting treatment straight away. I also found that I had thrush in my mouth, this meant that my immune system had already suffered damage. I was knocked back ever more as I had hoped that the HIV wouldn't have done much damage yet and that I may never get ill. This can happen with some people but not a lot. Treatment with combination therapy was an option that was pushed my way. (Basically there are 3 different classes of drugs and a few drugs in each class. All the drugs can have side effects, some very nasty. And must be taken exactly on time otherwise they stop working and you need to change drugs). I held off till the next appointment 3 months later and the results had improved a lot but I was told it would be good to start early and hit the virus hard. I waited. At the same time I decided to quit university and repeat the year next year. I was able to stay in university halls and the Uni were great to me and told me to come back when I felt ready.

### **From then (1998) till now (2001)**

Well, lots has happened, the detail is not really that important and it has taken me longer then expected to tell the first part of my story, so I will condense it again. I have been on combination therapy 3 times. I had to start the first time as I was getting ill with mouth infections every few weeks and losing weight. I tried it and hated it straight away. The combination can contain up to 20/30 tablets a day. Sometimes a lot less, some times more. I found the tablets made me feel sick. You couldn't eat for 4 hours before or 1 hour after one of the drugs and you had to dissolve it in apple juice and it tasted foul. The other was dissolved in coke which formed a mess that was undrinkable. I couldn't keep to the times and made a balls up of it. I put up A4 posters everywhere around the house to remind me about tablets and times and everywhere I went my tablet had to go with me. I soon got pissed off with it.

Later I tried again but ran into the same problems and in a final attempt I was put on an experimental drug which made me completely paranoid and crazy to the point where I was crying all the time and convinced all my house mates hated me. The drug has been compared to E or LSD and can in some cases give you the worst trip of your life. But for some people it works without any problems and keeps them well. After that, I decided that I wouldn't take combo ever again as all the drugs are toxic, they are all rushed through tests and people with HIV are used as lab rats to try them on. But if you are facing death and a drug may give you your life back then what choice do you have but to take it and try to live a few more months/years.

I went back to Uni again but dropped out to start combo the second time. You may wonder how I got HIV, to be honest I can't be sure, it wasn't my ex, he said he was negative. Maybe a split condom that I didn't notice, maybe oral sex when I had bad gums. I don't know and don't care. I don't feel any hate to the person who gave it to me. Why waste my energy on something I can't change.

### **Getting ill**

I have been in and out of hospital a few times. Mostly with mouth infections that have stopped me eating and drinking as well as talking. The hospital is really nice and you get your own room with bathroom, T.V / video etc and the nurses are great. The HIV wards do tend to be different from others as they are more friendly. Maybe because they know that this is part of your life. But it can be boring, very boring. Even when you are ill, it's still a pain in the arse having to go to hospital. But you get used to it and accept it as part of life. It pops up at the back of my mind that one day I will go into hospital and not come out. That's just a fact of living with HIV but if you think of all the things that can go wrong you'd never do anything.

The biggest illness I had was after my dad died about a year ago. With the upset and because I was always with him for the two weeks before he passed, but mainly because of the grief, I got ill with PCP which is a bad chest infection. This did scare me. The big thing about it is that it means you have AIDS, which is sort of the next stage of HIV (when your CD4 drop below 200 or you get one of a certain number of illnesses you are classified as having AIDS). Luckily it didn't affect my health too much and my health recovered quickly after a few weeks' treatment. Losing my dad was painful and to be honest I never expected to outlive him so I never thought that he could or would die before me. His death was another key moment in my life, one I will always wish wasn't there. I will always miss him since he was always there for me and never rejected me when I came out, became HIV+ and made a lot of other mistakes.

I have lost friends to HIV, not close friends but faces you see about. And then you find they are not there anymore. There's some really nice people I have known and they have died. This really pisses me off. It also scares me because I know that's going to happen to me one day. And I do find myself keeping my distance emotionally from people mainly for fear of losing them.

I am not afraid of death, I believe in my version of the afterlife. I don't let the thought of what's going to happen stop me living now. The death part is very easy (anyone can do it!) it's how I get there that is scary. HIV doesn't kill you by itself. It weakens the immune system so other strange diseases that you would normally fight off without even knowing they were there get you. The illness part scares me. The illnesses before dying aren't nice. And every time you get a illness you can panic, and every time I get blood results I always wonder whether it is going to be good or bad. But you live with it. I just carry on.

## Outlook

I try to keep the same outlook on life as before and not worry about things too much. If it's going to happen then it will, so why worry. Of course I have to take steps to keep healthy and stuff. But my lifestyle hasn't changed all that much. HIV has put certain limits on me, due to tiredness I can't work. I can only do so much in any day and if I do too much and run myself down then I can get ill. But I try not to let HIV stop me doing things completely. I went back to college to study carpentry, I do voluntary work. I am involved in Allsorts Youth Project.

It's been said that some people on finding out that they are HIV+ stop living and prepare and wait for death, and give up on life. Death has been said to come quickly to those people. I would say that HIV has given me a fresh outlook on life. Although it's caused problems it has also given me a lot. I can't work so I get enough to live on through benefits. Although my energy is limited, time is mine to do what I want with. I have no responsibility (except to pay the bills and stuff). I have my own flat, I have met so many interesting and wonderful people through the various organisations that I have used or been involved in. If I wasn't positive I would have had to leave Brighton after I dropped out of university (which may have happened anyway) and I wouldn't have got a flat. And I have many wonderful friends who I have met through being in Brighton.

I accept that living with HIV is not easy. It is always there and no matter how far you run you'll never escape it. I know my life is limited, I will never grow old with a partner. See my nieces or nephew grow old. Then there are the bad days, throwing up in the morning, being shattered for no reason, weight loss and keep going to hospital too often. The worst is losing friends to it. Something that no one will ever get used to.

Fine the drugs can keep you healthy for a while but they are toxic, they can (but not always) make you ill and cause some nasty side effects or may cause more damage than the HIV would have. But it is up to everyone to read the facts about them and make their own choice. And HIV drugs do save people's lives. But at the moment they are not for me. You have good days and bad days, but so what. You can either live with it and get on with your life as best you can with support of friends and the services that are offered, or give up and die.

I thank my friends for always being there when I have needed them and helping me out when I have been down. And also to all my family for being there, always. Without friends (and in some cases family) we would be a lot worse off.

The advice that was given to me by someone on finding out I was positive was:

*"Life is short enough yours is now shorter. Don't be friends with people you don't want as friends and don't do anything you don't want to do. It's just wasting time."*

I think more people should live by this. Of course you can't take it word for word but we do waste so much time in our lives. I try to live the best I can and cope the best I can. I don't plan too far ahead but take life as it comes and look forward to each new challenge. I have planned to travel around Asia, this is something I would never have done if I was negative. I would have put it off till next month, next year. Never?

Make the best of life. You only get one go.

My advice to those who are negative, stay that way! The problems that it causes for you aren't worth it just for one condom-free fuck. They really are not worth it.

My advice to those who are positive or become positive, it's not the end of the world just a small set back. Life goes on and so will you. Make your own informed choices and be happy. Me, I'll go on. I'm happy like the rest of you, I get sad like the rest of you. But I am alive and I will live like I am alive.

by Gavin



I love dykey looking women - I think they're great/attractive - but I am very self-conscious about looking dykey myself, especially when I do dress up overtly lesbian stereotype, but I also love the feeling when I do, of sticking two fingers up at all the homophobes and saying 'I am who I am'. I am usually more self-conscious about it than is justified by straight responses.

anon

Being a lesbian to me is the best thing that's happened in my whole life and it feels GREAT!!

anon

I leave home and find my first girlfriend who two times me, who was kind and patient - but not equal to take over caring for an abuse survivor - fuck that relationship up...

anon

## **My own personal definition of what it means to me to be a lesbian:**

Lots of sex (more than usual)  
Different (special different)  
Exotic  
Sexy  
Heartbroken  
Mind games  
Men's clothes and trainers  
Gorgeous  
Clubbing  
Socialising  
Depressing (sometimes)  
Lonely (sometimes)  
Goddess

anon

## **Untitled**

It has always been in my brain  
You put me through so much pain  
It's something I'll never forget and I bet you ain't got a single  
regret  
You took me upstairs  
I thought you were nice  
You played with me like I was some sort of mice  
I was a little girl  
But you didn't care  
I dreamt of speaking  
But not once did I dare  
I always seemed to think

That no-one would care  
Well now I'm old  
I'm here to say  
I live for the day  
To come face to face  
With you, the man who fed my tears  
The man who I've hated for so many years

anon

## **Shit christmas**

I had the worst Christmas of my life this year. I arrived at home on the eve and there was nothing but fighting and arguments between siblings and oneself. I had the monthly visitor on the day and I knew what shit things I had off so I called loved ones. I left the very next day and had a party for a friend's birthday. I lost my senses and passed out, unable to make love. I was made love to, so ok. Soon after I came down with the flu and had it all over new year's and am just getting over it. SO.... Arguments, flu and no money plus few other things make this the worst Christmas and new year's ever. And it's the millennium. Even though I was surrounded by people I have never felt so alone in my life apart from when I am alone. And that sounds incredibly ungrateful but that's how I felt. Being stuck in bed through two special occasions is depressing.

anon

## Her

Here she sits,  
Sixteen years old  
Alone,  
Though she knows many.  
Isolated,  
Though she is supposedly free.  
Trapped,  
Though she is not being held.  
Why?  
Why does she feel like this?  
She has parents who love her,  
Friends who care.  
But yet her life is nothing  
She is nothing  
It has to end..  
Or does it?  
Sixteen!!  
The best years of her life,  
Meaning what?  
It will get worse?  
Can it get worse?  
It has to end...  
Or does it?  
But it can't end  
Because she can't end it.  
So she carries on...  
Why?

by Sarah

MYSELF



## Two Poems by Mari

### Untitled

Some women are born with penises  
they're known as fucking trannies  
Sickos, Perverts, Chicks with dicks,  
Male-to-female transsexuals,  
'Men who think they're women',  
they're accused of raping women of  
their identities  
their femininity, a fraud, a cognitive  
delusion,  
they are regarded as mentally ill  
Thank you society  
Glad to fucking meet you.

### Untitled

Got an ology?  
You're a scientist  
Got a dick?  
You're a man  
Not quite as simple as that sweetheart  
Oh pardon me -  
I'm not allowed to speak  
After all,  
I'm mentally ill  
Humour me please  
I'm sick.

## Them, it, me

One person, One thing, ten minutes,  
And it was all gone.  
I had it all,  
But it was taken away  
I had no warning,  
So sudden.  
I hated them,  
I hated it,  
And now I hate me.  
How could it all collapse  
So suddenly and so complete.

One person, one thing, ten minutes  
And it was all gone.  
I had it all,  
And now I hate it all.  
I had it all,  
He took it away.  
Now I have nothing,  
Now I am nothing.

by Sarah

## Mask

There she goes,  
The joker of the pack.  
Always walks with a smile,  
Always laughing.  
Life's so good to her,  
Not a trouble in the world.

Here I go,  
The joker of the pack.  
Always walking with a smile,  
Always laughing.  
Life's so good to me,  
Not a trouble in the world.

Fuck you,  
You haven't got a clue!

by Sarah

I



## The story when I came to Brighton

When I first came to Brighton it was for the reason that the life for me in Hertfordshire was not working out. There were arguments with my parents, boyfriend's financial problems, and much more. I can remember the day so well I got the train from Luton with a bag and clothes. I had a pair of trousers and a T-shirt a small coat and about £20 pounds in cash. In my bag I had a copy of the gay times, which I had got from WH Smiths in Luton, some lunch that consisted of a bag of crisps a sandwich and a bottle of mineral water. I guess I chose Brighton as it had a big gay scene, and the 2 times that I had visited Brighton it seemed to offer so much for young gay life.

The shops, pubs and clubs gave me no reasoning in my head not to get here and start a new life leaving everything behind me. I had no clue of what to do when I got here, all I wanted to do was be here. I arrived early afternoon and looked for a gay pub to get a drink. The first pub I went to was the Bulldog and I chose this as it was recommended by people in Hertfordshire and in the Gay Times. The drinks were cheep [cheap] and this was my first impression of a gay scene with cheep [cheap] drink - fab.

I stayed in for a few drinks in a number of gay pubs feeling a tiny tad isolated as no one was making me welcome. It was now getting dark and I still had nowhere to stay for the night. So I looked around for any place that would be able to help me. I couldn't afford a B & B for the night so I walked up Queens Street and saw the Community Base and went in. The lady at the desk looked as if she had had a busy day and didn't seem too helpful. I told her that I was gay and that I would be worried for my welfare to be placed in certain places.

I had begun to get so scared by now as there wasn't any light at the end of the tunnel and the streets might be the place that I was to stay. In the end the lady at the desk sent me to the Lesbian and Gay Community Centre door, so that's where I went, they were unable to do anything for the night as it was a Friday so my first day in Brighton was poor to say the least. So the streets were where I would have to stay.

After a few weeks of sleeping rough and having to scrounge for money and help of a few friends I had made I was invited to stay with a friend, luck had started to shine on me. He said that I would be welcome to stay with him till I can get somewhere of my own and to get a job. This was fab, things were looking up. I started getting jobseekers allowance so I had a small income with which I could pay my way at my friend's.

I started to go to a few groups aimed at young gay people, Brash, Allsorts and Youth. I started making friends and had a sense of meaning again. I started going to pubs and clubs and got to know more about Brighton from the groups that I went to, and friends. I didn't give up on the aims of getting somewhere of my own with a good job, but with the low paid jobs and the high price of properties I was in a losing battle but I never gave up.

I had come to the conclusion that I would look for shared accommodation, as this would be cheaper than a solo flat and was advised to go to YAC [Youth Advice Centre, Hove]. I did and they were so helpful with the situation and sent me to view a room, which was advertised in the paper in a gay friendly house. After Allsorts I would go and view. It is really hard to talk about what happened that night, but the owner was not gay, and it turned from looking for a room into an assault. He'd already let the room to another young gay man, he started to

tell me some old porkie pies, showed me his room. This still affects me now, the man who owned the flat asked me to live there with him for free.

As long as I slept with him. He didn't ask for sex but he wanted me to hug him like a dad. Act like his son. I would have run, but his friend was in the next room, and this was beginning to scare the fuck out of me. The man gave me gifts and tried to make me stay there for the night, as he didn't want me to go home. He would not let me go as every comment and suggestion that I said I needed to go home was counter balanced with why I shouldn't. The evening seemed to go on forever with the feeling that I was to never get out. In the end the compromise was that he would give me a lift home and I would see him the next day. He made me hug him.

I eventually got home, I told my friend who immediately took me to the police station. They said that they could do nothing. The police officer even said that I should go back to Hertfordshire, he gave me no support but made me feel like I was a piece [piece] of paperwork that he would have to fill in. This seemed to be the end of the world and he sure made me feel for that work that he had to do, even when my friend had left to use the loo. He stood there and said that more and more of this would happen. I was unable to sleep that night with the farts [thoughts] that were running round my head, the one that did roll over and over in my head was that of the police officer. That even though I was not welcome in Hertfordshire that that's where the best place would be for me.

I chose from then on that I would not go for shared accommodation, as this was something that would scare me from going to strange houses again. I was in limbo to choose where to go but this period soon wore off with the opportunity

to work for ASDA. I had got a job at ASDA and everything seemed to be going very well on my first day, I was accepted in a good work team but by the end of the evening I found that it was not the place for me. Not because I couldn't be bothered to work as work was everything for me. I have been working since I turned 15 and never been out of a job longer than a month so I was confused by what was wrong, which would be revealed later on.

I started to have problems where I was living, in the terms that the man that I was living with seemed to be taking advantage of me. He was an older gay man about 45 years of age, and he owned the flat, and it was his name on the tenancy agreement. He didn't approve of the gay scene. He loved me etc, maybe obsessed. So he could kick me out at a click of his fingers. He had told me that he loved me many a time and I had told him that I did not feel the same way, and was just happy being his friend. He started to get controlling over me.

I needed help! I spoke to a worker at Allsorts who helped me get in touch with the council, saying that the position that I was in was very dangerous. The relationship looked as if it was just at the tip of the iceberg, and the trouble was going to get worse the more I stayed there. So the worker wrote a letter to the council, which I took by hand to the housing department and informed them of my position. They helped me into temporary accommodation for 14 days. I accepted this as this was the only way to get out of there, this is where everything started to go wrong.

After moving my belongings in, I went to the pub with my friends. We had a good time and a few of my mates walked me home. When I got back and entered my room all of my belongings had been taken. I looked around for help, there was

no one on the desk. I had to sit on the front door step for an hour till someone arrived. He told me that he had my belongings and that I was being moved to another room. I settled into my new room and tried to go to sleep but to no avail, the only thing that was running through my head was, is this the level that I am going to stay at?, and I cried myself to sleep.

Hostel for men and woman of all ages, the room had large windows, holes the size of golf balls, bed mouldy, floor crookedy, it was like going mountaineering, electrics not safe, kitchen in the same room, disgusting, dirty.

The following day I went to the doctors, I asked for counselling, as I was not coping with the dramatic changes in my life. She said that she would put me on antidepressants, and gave me a prescription. She then sent me on my way. This wasn't what I wanted and didn't help me. What I had gone in there for was concealing [counselling], and without listening to me she had sent me off with some antidepressants. This made me worse as there was no-one listening to me. That night, from ways that I cannot explain, I took an overdose of the antidepressants and ended up in A&E.

After staying in the hostel for two weeks I moved in to the YMCA, which helped me so much. I was able to get into the YMCA with the referral of the Lesbian and Gay Centre. This is where I have stayed for the last few months, and I have made the decision that I am going to move back to Luton to start again. This has taken a lot of fort [thought]. I will not be moving back in with my parents but with a friend, as he wants to see me get back to the happy-go-lucky lad that I used to be. It seems that all I have been fighting for is going to waste again and now I am taking another big leap, not knowing where I am jumping to now.

### **The conclusion!**

The conclusion that I have come to is that Brighton needs to look into its state of homeless people. Just because a person is not an alcoholic or a drug user, doesn't mean that they don't need help. Being a young gay man in Brighton is hard, there are a lot of groups to help you, but their services are limited in this town. They can't give the support, as there are a lot of people who are in the same situation as me. They try their best, and this can't be denied as the groups that I went to there were a lot of people that were in the same situation as me. It's not like we don't want to get on with our lives or we want to be on benefits all our life. We want to get on and up.

To Brighton we are a hidden people, something that the town wouldn't like to look at. I have learnt a lot since I have been in Brighton, a lot that would make me very bitter. This is something that I will never let happen to me because of the strength of my character, but there are others that are out there that have crumbled to lower positions than me. There is a lot that I have not been able to put in this letter, some because they heart [hurt] too much to think about. Also that I could be here all year, yes you might even think well he's going home now so he's ok. That's what the others should do as well.

Now as this town has a good gay community and the best way to make it work is to help the people in these situations as they may just run from danger to danger. Never finding a place where they feel accepted for their sexuality. This situation will not go away it will only get worse, till you do something to help the situation. If I didn't care I wouldn't have written this so this is the voice of the problem and we are screaming for help so half the battle is already won.

Thank you, Keran

## Followed by a shadow of the past

The sound of his voice as he breathes heavily over my naked  
flesh,  
Once I was clean pure and fresh, his pleasure in exchange for  
my pain  
What did he think he could achieve or obtain  
The tears that I cry, roll down my face then just die  
Unlike the memory of that day which will never go away  
Anxiety keeps me awake  
I wouldn't give, so he took and took and took.

anon

## Help

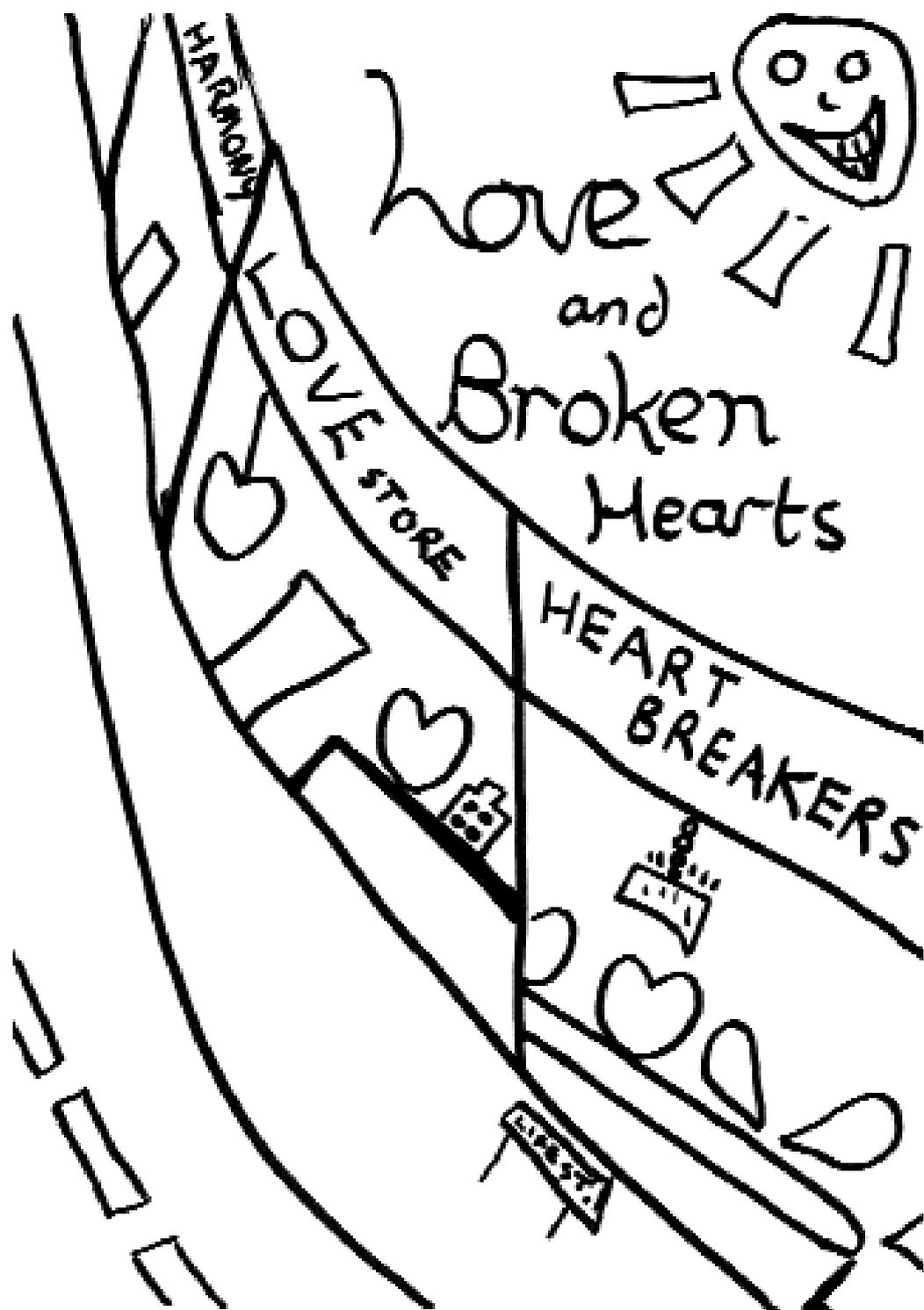
I'm loud and IN YOUR FACE  
I can say what I feel  
The one that stands out from the crowd  
Act like fuck  
Talk my way out of shit  
Oh isn't he good  
Fab lad can look after himself

Now everyone has their weak points  
My weak points  
My front  
I can't scream for help

I'm loud and strong enough to look after myself  
One thing  
Please help  
I can't do everything

anon





## **I wonder**

I wonder,  
Do you love me?  
Do you miss me?  
You said you would  
Did you lie?  
You said you wouldn't  
Did you lie about that too?

I wonder,  
Do you think about me?  
Do you talk about me?  
You said you would  
Did you lie?  
You said you wouldn't  
Did you lie about that too?

I wonder,  
Are you happy?  
Are you glad?  
You said you wouldn't be  
Did you lie?  
You said you wouldn't  
Did you lie about that too?

I wonder,  
I often wonder,  
If you know just how much,  
I wonder about you!

by Sarah

## My nan

So now you're gone, to a place I don't know  
Whereabouts are you, did you really have to go,  
Why did you have to leave, do you know the pain I'm feeling.  
Now I'm alone, no warning that you were leaving  
I'm sorry I haven't seen you for a while, I wish I knew.  
Without you I stand, please take hold of my hand,  
Come back to me and take me too.  
I need you with me to share your wisdom, but now you have  
gone  
Into god's kingdom.  
I miss your smile and your orange hair,  
I hope you know or still do how much I care.  
Can you hear me calling to you. I think of the rain  
I know you loved it, god's water, can he feel my pain.  
It's not fair I'm being selfish.  
I want you back, I need you back.  
I will think of you always,  
What was it like entering the doorway.  
You're not forgotten, you are missed by us all  
I'll never stop loving you  
MY NAN.

by Foxy Chick

## Time for change

I pour the drink into my glass not one two three or four, yet more.

Stumbling bit by bit across this floor. No inhibitions left just war.

I'm a sealed bottle now deep inside. I'm ready now to face the world.

I see the place, the place of dread, the place of fear this place so near.

Is this why I am so loud just to fit in with the crowd?

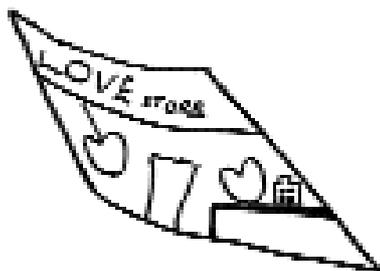
I like the drinks my only solace.

Isn't it great no hurt or sorrow just no thoughts of tomorrow!

Now like the mighty lion standing tall yet a little lamb standing small, being hunted by the beast.

Our bodies now meet, isn't it great, isn't it what I'm supposed to do. I feel alive; I feel like the light will never go out walking hand in hand down the park. Now we arrive at his house! Why am I here?

by Lee



## Sorrow

You take my hand,  
Smiling.  
All my cares melt away.  
You stroke my hair,  
Gentle.  
You are all I desire.  
Then you hold me.  
Kiss me.  
My life is complete.

Where are you, oh vision of beauty?  
Why do you elude me still?  
Sorrow.

We walk together.  
The dawn.  
The sun smiles on our embrace.  
Our days together  
Joyful.  
We are inseparable.  
Our nights together  
Tranquil.  
Your head resting in my arms.

Where are you, my gentle lover?  
Why are my nights still lonesome?  
Sorrow.

by Andrew

## The way I feel

I've been rejected once now twice do you know the feeling?  
It ain't nice unhappy once now twice  
How many times will I be rejected?  
6 line a dice  
I thought yes this is the place for me  
Can it be? It's a mystery  
My life is shit, I've just gotta face it  
I want to stay here, I just can't show my feelings, it ain't a word  
it's a meaning  
I know that I'm the one to blame  
Help me please I'm in so much pain!

anon

## I see her

I see her but she does not hear me  
I seek her, but she does not follow  
Oh why do you not hear the wailing  
Of my heart  
A heart that burns for all to see,  
Your caresses, your touch,  
how I yearn for your body.  
Where do I go from here,  
What do I give of myself next  
that you scorn.  
I too have passions, desire and  
Love,  
I have craved for your touch,  
your kisses  
Oh how sweet these kisses are  
2 me

I cannot compare,  
The sweetest wine has no  
comparison,  
the moon and the stars bring no  
comfort.  
On the laborious nights,  
Nights that never seem to end,

They seem as vast as the oceans,  
As infinite as the galaxies

Your love I crave,  
The love of yesterday  
Oh Lord I pray that you hear my  
babbling so that you know of my  
Love, Is my love forbidden,  
if it is so,  
then why does it feel so right,  
Do you not see my tears,  
Oh why do you not see them.

I stand before you, Alone,  
Hoping you feel me.

by Foxy Chick

## Gone

You say your troubles will all be ended  
But what about me?  
You say all your problems will all be mended  
What about me?

You say all you do is moan  
But what about me?  
I don't want to be alone  
What about me?

You think it's fine to just give up  
But what about me?  
I'll still have to pick the pieces up  
What about me?

I don't want to be on my own  
What about me?  
I beg you please don't leave me on my own  
What about me?

She's gone now, she died.  
She said she'd think of me...  
She lied!

by Sarah

## **For eternity**

I look up into the stars, you are bright  
You are my guiding star you are my light  
I am my mother in my own special way  
She created me that's why I'm here today  
Why did she leave and die?  
Why did she live a lie?  
Why did she get into drugs?  
Why did she mix with thugs?  
I have never been in this situation  
She now only remains in my imagination

anon

## **Hidden**

Nobody knows I hide it inside  
You're always searching but can't find  
I do want to stay but every time you come close, I move away,  
I'm not used to being treated like this, I don't know whether to  
give it a miss, I've been hurt so many times before, I'm really  
tempted to open the door, you speak to my heart but I'm just  
afraid you'll tear it apart.

by Carole

## My woman

I love my woman. But I wonder if she loves me, does she? How do I know, she says she loves me but you don't know. Why would she lie. For a false sense of security. To make me feel better in some way. Just for the sake of it. Does she like licking my pussy? No not at all. But she will to please me. She is kind, funny, sociable and good at love making, making my juices flow. And I think she's great in all ways and not one way. But that's why I love my woman and I desire other women.

anon

## The cloud

I see it through the window. White and fluffy like a furry rabbit. Imagine walking on it. Feet through the white puff puff. Would you be able to feel it. The air between your toes. Will it revive you. Making you feel like forever. Isn't it just polluted air turned into a fluffy beauty. But they bring rain. The cloud is one of god and satan's.

anon



## The orgasm

Fuck me. Slowly open your fingers press harder breathe hard into my ear. I quiver. I'm turned on. Put them inside me be part of me. Fuck me fuck me hard and fast, lust, slowly, gently but passionately. Up and down sliding. You taste me with your tongue. I'm so fuckin horny. Put your head between my legs. Lick hard and cover my minge. Slowly lick. Push hard into my darkness. Liquids flow I scream after 5 minutes. I'm ready again. I give you a sweet.

anon

## Power over me

You have a power over me,  
Can't you see?  
I can argue, fight, scream and shout.  
It doesn't matter, I can't get out  
I'm trapped in a room being torn to shreds  
Do you know what's going on inside of my head?  
I'm so confused, I don't know what to think  
But I know without you, my life would just sink  
You fuck up my brains, you fuck up my head  
But I couldn't live without you (as I just said)  
I feel so useless when I'm with you,  
But what can I do/ I can't stop loving you!  
I feel love and hate all at the same time.  
How come I'm yours and you're not mine?  
How come I'm so sad when I love you so much?

And why when I'm alone, do I still long for your touch?  
I can tell you the answer it's easy to see  
It's because you have a power over me.

by Sarah

## **My lover was lost**

My lover was lost, lost in her past, not lost but stuck, unable to  
free herself she is lost in the present.  
But my lover I make happy, I shower her with gifts and kisses of  
love.  
Each kiss from my lips to hers has more affection than the last.  
I love touching, caressing, kissing and feeling her resting  
against me.  
I nurture her like a growing child  
I make her happy for she is my life and I wish to be happy too.  
She is happy, so am I.

by Foxy Chick





"THE  
WORLD  
WE LIVE IN..."

## Being gay, ha! what fun

Is it right, or wrong?

Good or bad?

It seems like these days its a matter of opinion

“Ewww... you fucking queer bastard, you take it up the arse don't you?”

These are the clever ones, stating the obvious

The ones with the complicated minds

The ones who are so clever they pick the subject about us which must be so difficult to use in a fight

I mean what is there you can say to a gay man that would be offensive?

Hmmm....I wonder.....

“Gay” what is it about that word?

Makes you tense

Feel unwanted amongst the public

Makes you feel bad sometimes, being gay

In today's patronising society you can't just announce it

“Homophobic” that's a funny word

One would think,

Aracnaphobia, fear of spiders

They see a spider, get scared, and run off, because of fear

Autophobia

FEAR of oneself

Chaetophobia

FEAR of hair

Homophobia

FEAR? of homosexuals

If a "Homophobe" knew you were gay, they don't run away

They confront you

Which is strange

Confronting their fear, but still being a "homophobe" after they have

But where is this fear now? Not in the "homophobe"? But why?

He's "homophobic" after all

"You're fucking sick, how can you suck another guy's dick?"

Now who has the fear here, the "homophobe" or the homosexual?

That one needs some thinking.

I mean it's hardly a decision

You don't have two options at the beginning of life do you now.

"Hmmmmmmm.....I think I'll be gay, yeah that'll be an easy option to live with"

anon

## **Saturday night/sunday morning**

Trying to get a taxi at 3am...

People also looking for a taxi....

I was leaning on Nick and then they said "oh no there is another couple of poofs" - they kept saying "fucking poofs" etc and trying to attract our attention, I wanted to go and shout/fight but managed to ignore.

## Angry/aggressive

I am Afraid

I am Unsafe

by Johnathan

## Child-like

Children's dreams are 100% loving and for good, never bad. A child can dream of having lots of money, an adult will dream of where he or she must get that money from. See, the child just gets pleasure from that dream, the adult puts obstacles in the way and this will spoil the dream. Adults split up and squabble for years, children will fight but this will normally only last a day.

Children become antagonistic to other children because their parents have grudges with them. Adults fill children's minds with prejudice and steal their child-like innocence. A child that has parents say things like, "oh look at his clothes. He looks like a tramp." This is where a child will get their corrupt ways. It will never go away, but parents can try to control the ignorance. Let the child make his mind up over other people, you'll find that the child's conclusion will be a lot better than the parent's will.

anon

## My experience

I think I've been quite lucky in having few experiences of direct abuse or whatever maybe that's partly because I haven't been out very long and when I have it's been in Brighton.

All I've had really is the odd occasion of someone shouting something like one time when I'd just started going out with someone and we were both rather drunk after going clubbing and were holding hands and stuff coming out of a club and some people in a taxi shouted out queers. It didn't really upset me though cos I didn't feel threatened.

What I really do hate though and absolutely resent is the feeling that you can't do certain things because you would be abused for it. I hate it when you're with someone and can't show your affection when straight couples are shagging @ every corner and I think it makes things more complicated in relationships when you can't be yourself.

I wasn't out @ school so I wasn't directly abused but I was @ a boys' school so I had the whole experience of being called gay as the standard insult. I remember once I'd had a red tint in my hair and someone actually walked up to me and said "you have gay in your hair" which was ridiculous. I don't actually feel threatened by this stuff now that I'm in Brighton and I feel more confident with myself and friends but I think that whole background of gay people/things being slagged off when I was younger didn't help me feel comfortable with myself.

Impact of stuff @ school made me feel I couldn't relate properly to people/be myself.

by Richard

## **Richard writes about Section 28**

**[written before the General Election 2001]**

Section 28 hit the headlines last year as the Labour government have attempted to throw out the legislation only to be defeated twice in the House of Lords by Tory peers, led by Baroness Young. For those who don't know, Section 28 basically prevents Local Government Authorities from doing anything that could be interpreted as "promoting" homosexuality. The debate has centred on the effect of Section 28 in schools, where the legislation makes it difficult for teachers to confront homophobic bullying or to usefully address sex education.

Unfortunately the debate has become fiercely party political and after two heavy defeats in the House of Lords, the Government have sidelined the issue until after the next election. At a debate in Brighton Town Hall last year, the issue was taken up by Brighton Council when a motion was passed confirming their commitment to repealing Section 28 thus putting more pressure on the government to press on with repeal.

The motion was only passed however, after a stormy debate, when predictably enough, Tory councillors tried to throw a spanner in the works. The motion praised "the determination of the Labour Government to repeal Section 28", declaring that it's "oppressive legislation has made teachers and others who work with young people afraid to give open, even-handed advice and support on matters of relationships, sexuality and lifestyle", and that Section 28 "represents a barrier to tackling incidents of homophobia in schools effectively". The motion was proposed by Labour's Councillor John, who argued that

repeal was necessary to “protect young people from cultural fear and repression” and seconded by Labour’s Councillor Hawkes, who denounced the House Of Lord’s decision as “an absolute disgrace” explaining that education was the key to changing people’s attitudes, and that Section 28 prohibited this.

The debate that followed focused on the impact that Section 28 has had in schools, and on the lives of young people. Councillor Elgood described Section 28 as “the one most hateful piece of legislation from the Thatcher years” and argued that on issues of sexuality, it was essential to enable “an informed choice for young people”, difficult when the Tories have outlawed the information needed to make that choice.

Labour’s Lead Councillor for Youth, Catherine Shelley, made an impassioned and powerful case for repeal. She highlighted the issue that LGBT discrimination is often seen as no longer being a problem, and that many people opposing repeal even feel that LGBT lobbying is too powerful. Cases such as the attack on James Sarington, she argued, show that this is not the case, even in a town like Brighton. “Attacks and physical attacks are only the tip of the iceberg” she argued, highlighting the extensive damage caused by “homophobia in the form of directed verbal abuse and taunting”.

She explained that this enables homophobia to flourish, leading to abuse in and out of schools and to “huge levels of self doubt, lack of self worth and even self hatred amongst LGBT young people”. This in turn leads to everything from poor school attendance to self abuse, she explained, citing the recent estimate that 1/3 of youth suicide is linked to crises over sexuality. “Section 28 undoubtedly fetters schools’ freedom to

tackle homophobia” she concluded, quoting a recent report by Diversity Alliance which found that while 70% of schools recognise that homophobic bullying is a problem in their schools, only 6% have policies to deal with it. Then, in what Councillor Duncan derided as “a display of desperate and cowardly wriggling with a retreat into ridiculous technicalities”, the Tories were quick to explain that they couldn’t possibly support the motion.

This was obviously not to do with any of them being bigots or anything, but purely and simply because as Councillor Langston put it, she “cannot support a motion that praises the government’s determination, because the government have not been committed to repeal.” To much heckling, she continued to explain that if the government had introduced the repeal as a one page bill, then they could have invoked the Parliament Act and bypassed the Lords. This is actually a valid point, but conveniently ignores the fact that if it wasn’t for the actions of the Tory peers, Section 28 would long have been consigned to the history books. And while they bleated on about the use of the word “determination”, the Tories failed to even mention what they thought about the real issue: repeal of Section 28.

Fortunately, Councillor Duncan came up with a compromise, proposing an amendment to replace the word “determination” with the phrase “parliamentary efforts”, which was passed, albeit reluctantly on the Tory benches. Stripped of their excuse, the Tories were then forced to support the motion, which was passed 56 to 2 in a recorded vote, with 7 abstentions. The debate about Section 28 has in many ways become a symbol of the struggle for equality for lesbians and gays. In the House of Lords, Tory peers have used the excuse of family values and protection of children to air their often bigoted views.

This has allowed people like Baroness Young to declare that there is “no moral equivalence between heterosexual and homosexual relationships”, whilst not accepting that such views are prejudiced and unacceptable in a modern tolerant society. While the motion passed by Brighton Council will not change the law in Brighton or in any other place in the country it adds to the pressure on the government to press on with repeal.

by Richard



Hate  
Loneliness  
Contempt  
Shock  
Offended  
Threatened

I am not out but it is something I wish to do, but my friends quite often refer to gay and lesbians as poof or queer which in the manor [manner] and context used could be described as homophobic, and does offend me.

anon

I have not had any homophobic abuse directed at me as far as I can remember. However throughout school, while I was trying to come to terms with my sexuality, the majority of my classmates were very homophobic. Some of their favourite derogatory terms were "poof" and "queer" This created an atmosphere in which it would be impossible to be open about your sexuality without being ridiculed and made an outsider. The people who used homophobic language did not know any gay people and didn't know what they were afraid of.

by Tom

## Common experiences . . .

Unfortunately I feel that I am safer staying totally in the gay scene as an incident happened to me where I was attacked not just for being gay but I believe also for being white. For a long time I feared going out and I have never really felt comfortable in the straight world which has been worsened by this.



The only important people that say negative things are my work colleagues because it's mostly a male dominated occupation. They make comments mostly about gay men and it's hard to talk back because I'm not out at work it makes it even more difficult because I enjoy my job.

I was already out to people who care b 4 I started the job  
Yes I do think people's negative attitudes affect how we feel, because I can't b myself in front of them even though I want to I feel threatened when I'm with them.  
I can't feel my feelings,  
I can't show my feelings.



When I hold my girlfriend's hand I get yelled at "Dyke! Dyke! Dyke!"

"Well there" I say "thanks for telling me, I didn't notice"

It's supposed to be an insult but it isn't, but it does annoy me, why should I be singled out because I have a girlfriend?

Why people's attention on me?

But I don't care they just have nothing better to do.



My sister used to call me "sissy" this was the start. "Nancy boy"  
Then secondary school I became constantly abused by other pupils about my name which then led to isolation.

My dad sent me out the room once as two men in bed were on tv and of course didn't want me to see this.

This had a very large affect on me for the rest of my life.

People's negative attitudes have always and still do affect me in my life.

I blank out a lot,

I feel numb.



My uncle never takes my sexuality seriously eg. "Are you still gay?" "It's only a phase"

My dad never likes me to mention that I am gay.

The way my ex treated me, eg. abuse, verbal and physical.

Treated me like I was not good enough to be gay.



I am a little afraid that something could happen in the street, I don't feel completely safe. It was always an insult to call someone gay at school even before I knew what it meant. When I started to feel like it applied to me, it was hard to realise what I felt about being gay because it felt so unlike the insults and stereotypes.

Later it made me feel less confident than I should have been about the way I look and the way I relate to people etc. I think I didn't take as much care of myself as I should have.



People have said things to me, my Dad used to, and before my Mum and me argued, she'd always say "Oh how's the latest girlfriend now then?". But we're friends now.

It did affect me cos my Dad made bad comments - he still don't know!

I think it does affect me in some ways but at the moment I think "Fuck it", it's their narrow minds.

## Matthew Shepard, 1976-1998

I first heard about Matthew Shepard through a song by Melissa Etheridge I had which was dedicated to his memory. All that I knew was that he was a young university student murdered in America because he was openly gay. The lyrics of this song are particularly poignant and stress the horrific nature of his murder. It has remained with me and led me to wonder why this had happened to him. However, it was not until I scanned the Internet that I realised just how brutal his death was. It reduced me to tears and made me reconsider society's views towards homosexuality. Being gay myself, I had been told, and wanted to believe that society was increasingly tolerant of 'alternative lifestyles'. Obviously, one could not but be aware of the homophobia and prejudice so unfortunately ingrained in our society, but it had always appeared to be latent and of a verbal nature only. I had assumed that 'gay bashing' did not really happen, and this is why I found it so shocking. Matthew's story was almost beyond my comprehension and reminiscent of the lynching of black men in America. The events of his death should invoke an emotional and angry response in us all as to how and why this happened, and who should be held responsible for such ignorance and cruelty.

Matthew Shepard died on 12 October 1998, aged only 21, after a brutal beating and torture at the hands of two youths in Laramie, Wyoming. Matthew was pistol-whipped in the head, burnt, beaten, and tied to a fence in a position that was said to resemble a scarecrow. He was left for dead, tied up in near-freezing temperatures for nearly eighteen hours; his blood-drenched body neglected. Reports said that his head was completely covered in blood, apart from where he had been

crying, as his tears had washed the blood down his cheeks. He did not die here, but passed away in hospital from hypothermia and his severe head injuries.

It is believed that these men had pretended to be gay in order to gain Matthew's attention. When Matthew flirted with them they were so angered that they decided to teach him a lesson. It was claimed at the time that this was a mugging, and not a 'gay bashing' at all. However, Matthew only had \$20 in his wallet. This they took, along with his shoes. This does not, however, justify the violence committed in pure hate. They also taunted him with anti-gay abuse while they beat and burnt him. What is so distressing is that Matthew begged these men not to take his life away as they were beating him.

Matthew's death evoked a strong emotional response from the American public, who were rightfully appalled. But this needs to be backed up with political action. Statistics released in America reveal worrying results for they show that the so-called 'gay bashing' is on the increase at a time when the overall crime rate in the country is declining. The huge rise in hate crimes against minority groups shows that the murder of Matthew Shepard was not an isolated case. Who should be held responsible for such horrific action? Should this be the young men who committed the crime, or society at large? It almost seems that discrimination against gay men and lesbians is acceptable in our society.

One reason for this alarming increase could be that the Fundamentalist and Evangelical preachers in America have become increasingly vocal in their campaigns against homosexuality. In America it appears that one cannot pick up a newspaper or watch TV without hearing extremely negative

views pronounced. For example, there have even been special shows on homosexuality by such religious preachers as James Dobson, Pat Robertson and the Rev. D. James Kennedy. This would obviously have a very worrying effect on those young people watching who were questioning their sexuality, for the use of the media leads indirectly to violence, depression and suicide as this homophobia is internalised.

These groups use the Bible to 'prove' that homosexuality is evil and also assume that homosexuals are in need of being cured. A quick scan on the Internet soon produced some shocking results. One religious website arguing against homosexuality even said: 'God has not prescribed that homosexuals should merely be spoken against, rejected, discriminated against, or banished from the nations, but He requires that they be put to death by every government under which they reside (Leviticus 20:13) and no sorrow should be had for them'. It also emphasised that: 'Hatred for homosexuality is right and good'.

This could indeed be an extreme example, but is it any wonder Matthew's killers did what they did when there is material like this saturating the Internet and the media in USA? This is not to excuse them, but to show the influence that the right wing religious community is having on the young, both straight and gay. A Kansas pastor even picketed at Matthew's funeral with banners reading such things as 'no tears for queers' and 'no fags in Heaven'. The Church seems to back up the homophobic attitudes so prevalent in today's society, and justify its bigotry and oppression. It is obvious that the spirit of intolerance remains strong within some quarters of the church.

It does not matter whether you are straight or gay, but the result is still the same: Matthew was killed because of his sexuality. He was denied a defence at the hands of his killers and was not allowed the right to love. His body may have been drained of spirit, blood and tears on that lonely fence, but it has only filled the gay community with the promise to end hate crimes of all descriptions. I cannot begin to imagine the pain and loneliness that Matthew must have felt that cold evening, but I know that his life was not a waste. It is clear from the messages left from those who knew him that he had given a lot of love and was not ashamed of the person he was. I can maybe forgive what happened, but no one should forget.

I will carry these terrible images in my head and remember that this kind of homophobic violence must come to an end. I am certainly pleased that I do not live in the Bible-belt of America, because if I did I do not think I could have been as brave as Matthew in being open about my sexuality. However, we all need to recognise that society is not as open and tolerant as we would like to believe and that there is still a long way to go to achieve equality for all minority groups. It is essential to realise that to remain silent and embrace indifference is the same as supporting the status quo. Wrongs made against homosexuals, and other minority groups, can only be made right when people have the courage to stand up, challenge discrimination and vocalise the hopes and fears of those without a political voice.

The excluded and marginalized must deserve to have an equal place in society and enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population. It is important not to remain silent and to actively engage in the struggle against homophobia and the many forms it takes. Matthew's story shows how wrong society must be if it

can produce people who would murder because they find someone else's sexual preference so threatening. Homosexuality is viewed as a major social problem, but it appears to me that the real problem is homophobia. It is these irrational feelings and acts of violence that need to be cured.

*A letter left at a memorial for Matthew simply said: 'Dear Lord, take care of our Matt, our dear one who has passed, and please take care of us'. Surely that says enough.*

by Kirsty



**“Spiritus Orbi In Homo-(Erectus) est”  
(Chapter I)**

\*\*\* | \*\*\*

Midnight thunder, dusk, soon shall not be; no rain there yet is  
to see.

On the way to comfort and apparent peace,  
contemplating the memories of events short gone.

Approached by evil, he shall neither retreat nor hide as for  
what he believes.

The one who dares to invade and tries to demolish the peace of  
the one or many  
shall not be spared the power of retaliation.

He who resists shall not be broken.

He who dares to be the aggressor might break the body but  
not the mind or belief(s) of the one who shall need to defend.

Some shall be there in short to embrace their power and  
protect, the weak and innocent with conviction and particular  
lifestyle, from the weak- and narrow-minded.

When confronted, the hate shall rise and shall be returned  
with even greater hate. Until one shall be hurt and shall  
be too weak to defend, the horror shall last and even  
beyond. Then the ones who embrace to protect shall  
offer help to the abused and shall show the evil out  
of the realms of liberty.

Thunder followed by lightening and rain now presented in the sky and on earth.

Now, the harmed shall announce his rights and suffer greatly for time unpredicted.

It shall be forgotten quickly by the majority and only rarely remembered by the minority.

Only the one was tortured remembers forever and shall realize the change in regularity and existence all too soon.

*...Memories Of An Homophobic Attack...*

Sebastian, Brighton, 2001AD



The World

INSIDE

## What is it like

A lot of people talk as if being lesbian or gay is not okay.  
We hear this kind of thing every single day.  
It hits our ears.  
It gets inside our heads.  
It begins to hurt and build up our fears.  
What they say and what they do  
It really affects me and I see  
It's really hurt you.  
Sometimes I take it in.  
And then being me feels like a sin.  
This is so wrong  
And I spit it out  
Because you and me  
We're fine as we are  
And together we'll be  
Each other's bright star.

anon



## Internalised homophobia - how it makes us feel

My friends were the most important people in my life as my parents weren't really around when I was a child. When I started to realise I was gay I found it really hard to admit it to myself. I denied it and slept with lots of men just to prove to myself. At the age of 14 I moved to Leeds after finding my true father. I had my first girlfriend, we didn't tell anybody about our sexuality, when our relationship broke up, she told me some really nasty things about me saying I tried to rape her. For the next year I had abuse thrown at me "Oh look at Sam the fucking lesbian" I stopped going to school, I had no friends, too scared to go out, I got to the point where I tried to commit suicide, in the end I moved back to my Mother's and back to my friends, I had to change schools. At the age of 15, I had tried to commit suicide, lost my friends, changed schools, changed towns, put into care and worst of all denied myself. I had depression for two years until I managed to get a group of friends together that I could trust.



I blank out feelings - I just rationalise and avoid relationships where I may have to feel - I take a vow of celibacy (and fuck up everything I've just spent years working for), to help the escape.



Now I'm glad I'm gay - I'm proud of it even - and glad I'm getting my career back, but still I hate myself, and self-abuse (through work, food, exercise).

Hated NOT just the internalised homophobia but ALSO the after-effects of being sexually abused, constantly told I am stupid/horrid as a kid.



Cheap  
Different  
Angry  
Depressed  
Misanthropy  
Disgust



When I said I was homophobic to myself I was so upset.  
When I realised I was a lesbian I had anorexia and bullying as a result.

Don't say anything, just use it.



## Untitled

Loneliness is a void,  
A dark and hollow feeling  
Silent to all others  
Yet loud within.  
The screams echo in my head  
But no-one hears my cries  
Save me from myself.

The emptiness is painful  
And a constant reminder  
Of missed chances  
And love lost.

Hopelessness surrounds  
And shuts out all joy.  
My shell shields me from the world  
But won't allow love to enter.  
Destroy my fears  
Calm my angry tears  
And save me from myself.

by Kirsty

## Untitled

My love is bound in others fears  
Restricted and denied.  
Freedom is a longing  
A desire for release.  
How the ignorant gibe  
And are quick to criticise;  
But there will come a day  
When we can declare our love  
With envious pride

by Kirsty

## The numb place

The place I've been so many times  
It's nothing  
It's not hot or cold  
Never wet or dry  
Solid or gas  
Nothing

It's a place that scares me  
A place to let go  
You can't take your mind there  
It won't know which way to go  
When I'm there I turn to dust

There's one word that's here  
I hear it over and over  
I don't care anymore  
I don't care anymore

Luckily I've come back  
It's the mind thinking  
Got to go to work tomorrow  
Can't let them down  
Go to pay that bill  
Father's gonna get stressed  
Told Peter I would meet him in town  
Don't want to leave him standing  
This is what brings me back

When I return there next  
Most certainly I will  
Will I make it back?  
Will you see me in room 92?  
Strapped to my bed saying  
I don't care anymore  
I don't care  
The numbness will have won

I don't want to let go  
I'm too scared

Love Keran

## Continuing existence

A young life, taking their own life  
So mindless, so senseless  
We are compelled to ask the question  
'Why?'

And yet...  
The answer is found too easily  
The reason too quickly discovered

Imagine...  
A shadow of a life  
A stunted existence  
Hidden happiness...unspoken sadness.  
A life which breeds fear and frustration -  
A life which stenches of guilt and  
Exclusion.

Indeed...  
It is for a half-life  
That an existence can be willingly cut short

It is for this we need not ask 'why?'  
For there are no answers for us here.  
Rather, we must fight to  
Dismantle  
Abolish  
Extinguish...  
The continuing existence of 'why?'

This is our plight

by Kate

## Sometimes I . . .

I heard that lesbians were two headed monsters when I was very young & somewhere in me still carries that fear that I might be a monster.



I'm watchful about where and when I show affection to a partner because I know I may be attacked (physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually) in other words, a part of me is always looking over my shoulder.



I have a lot of internalised shame about being gay - I respond by being proud and angry, which can sometimes be exhausting.



Sometimes I wonder if my life would be easier if I was straight.



When I'm around homophobia I sometimes feel myself getting into a rage and part of me wants to lash out and destroy those who make me suffer.



I'm proud of my gayness and smug that I belong to a "family"



Sometimes if I'm the only openly gay person in a group I feel pressured (or I am pressured) to explain myself, that if I don't speak out I'm letting other gay people down.



Some people (academics, counsellors etc) believe that gay people haven't crossed the bridge, that is, we haven't matured in our sexuality - deep down no matter how strong and real I feel about who I am, there is some doubt that eats away at me.



Some days it feels painful to be gay, most days it's a joy.



I feel I can't be myself all the time  
I find it difficult to get close to people, because I don't know if I  
can trust them  
I like to get out of my head because then I can escape from  
reality  
I'm in pain, sometimes that feels unbearable  
I get quite depressed



Many times my father and mother, friends, family, colleagues  
have all at some time found both my sexuality and other gay  
peoples' sexuality a problem, even in some cases leading to a  
violent episode.



I am scared of being too camp etc. in public due to homophobic attacks. Before coming out, my family members were very against gays.



My family didn't address sex/relationships at all. Nor did school, when they did, sex was "ugly" "reared it's ugly head", no question of gay relationships being mentioned - when they were it was always negative - add Catholicism and atheist Puritanism and you get a lot of internalised hate/fear- add sexual abuse and you get confirmation that sex is ugly.



I am a fighter. I always have been.  
This time I run  
I run to be Happy  
I run to be free  
But mostly I run to be me  
They picked at me bit by bit  
They swore they cursed  
Then they started bringing it on  
I lost my pride, I lost my courage  
I'm left a nervous wreck  
Is this man one, is he gonna land me one  
I can't live on, I've lost my life and all because I wanted a wife.

by H.

I feel bad about how I am - I do  
I feel I can't be myself - What is myself, very unsure  
I feel I have to conform - I used to when I realised  
I am v hard on me - A lot  
I find it difficult to get close to people - Cos I've been fucked  
around sideways lots  
I blank out a lot, I feel numb - Yes  
I can't feel my feelings - I don't always know them  
I can't show my feelings - Sometimes  
I like to get outa my head - Yes  
Sometimes I feel like hurting myself - Don't think about it  
I'm in pain, sometimes unbearable - Yep  
I don't bother to eat - I do that  
I eat too much - Sometimes  
I get quite depressed - A lot  
I work too hard, I'm a perfectionist - Sometimes  
I can't work cos I'm not well - I hate going to work

I hate taking responsibility - When I'm not well otherwise I do  
I have to be in control - Sometimes when I know what I'm on  
about

anon

## Letter to God

Dear God

Do you love me, or am I as bad as they say? Will you forgive  
this love that has been proclaimed unnatural, or are they  
speaking the truth of my fate? Aren't I allowed to love and live  
at peace with myself? This guilt is tormenting and the tears  
won't cease. Please calm my fears, and this emptiness and  
protect me from hostilities. I am not a bad person, or I  
wouldn't feel such pain. My love may be different from what  
you intended, but believe me when I say I mean no harm. I've  
tried to change, but it is hopeless. If this is who I am supposed  
to be, then what have I done to deserve your punishment? I see  
you as the very embodiment of love - so why is this form  
despised? I only asked to be allowed to love without fear and  
hope that you will love me the same,

Amen

by Kirsty



# Guided by the Stars



## **We all have the need to feel special**

Everyone needs to feel special. The ones who complain the most in life are the ones that never had it hard. You can see the ones that have. Their glow is so worn, these are the people that have seen it hard. They have no time to complain they are too busy helping others. They know what's it's like to have it hard, so they try to help others who are going through what they did. So next time you want to scream, you feel hard done by, think of the others in pain. Look at what you have got, the people around you. It won't seem all that bad, and if you think about it hard, you are special.

anon

## **Coming to Brighton**

When I was asked for my opinions on coming out I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to tell you about my experiences about Brighton and making that brave move.

Coming out is difficult for most people and I never expected it to be easy by any stretch of the imagination, but nothing prepared me for the reality and the reactions I received when I said those immortal words.

Coming from a working class background in Hull, East Yorkshire I have always been very aware that I was very different from my family and friends. But could never understand why? This itself caused me many problems.

Some people when they reach a certain stage of their life and personal development EXPLODE and are proud to tell the world. Proud of who they really are with me it was little more than a fizzle.

I have known about my sexuality from a fairly young age. I would say about 12 years old. Because of the environment in which I was raised I thought that these feelings were bad and certainly abnormal a thought that still haunts me today. Being raised in a family that is far from open about their feelings I bottled all my troubles up for many years, using violence and rage to vent my frustrations often emotionally hurting the people I love in an effort to distance people.

The turning point was the discovery of the internet, an enormous escape from everyday reality. After I had learnt how to use the internet I started to discover that there really were others like myself suffering from the same problems. The internet provided me with the ideal medium to discover my true feelings, I could talk openly about who I fancied and my opinions. Being able to ask people about their experiences was both beneficial and comforting.

After long consideration I decided I could not carry on living a lie, but rather than telling people the truth I decided to leave my family and friends behind and move to the only gay friendly place I knew, Brighton. After very little consideration I applied for a good job within a bank and four weeks later found myself in Brighton bemused and scared. A major breakthrough for me personally was walking into Borders and purchasing a copy of The Gay Times, saying that I still purchased a copy of FHM just for the comfort factor. The feeling as I walked home that night was amazing I for the first time didn't feel ashamed of myself.

After a couple of weeks I decided I had to tell at least one of my friends. So after careful consideration I decided to tell a good friend. I decided to tell my friend Nikki, I had known Nikki for many years and although she had moved away down to London I still remained good friends. I can remember the night I decided to tell her, it had been a great night down at the pub with her housemates and we both sat alone in the kitchen after everybody had disappeared to their rooms.

I had been rehearsing this speech for many years after reading about other peoples coming out experiences. So there I was sat drinking a cup of tea chatting about boy bands and Steps (Arhhh I know that's sad) when I just dropped in the conversation that Lee was very attractive... a short silence followed that seemed like years. Nikki replied "I know, he is pretty fit" that evening it really felt like I had the weight of the world lifted off my shoulders. Nikki treats me no different as before and has remained truthful and a tower of strength.

Once I had moved to Brighton I promised myself that I would be open and truthful about myself. The reality is very different, I still find myself talking about shagging girls down the pub with my workmates. My main problem is I don't fit into any of the boxes people love to place you in. I'm not camp yet not butch, I like car mechanics but also love boy bands. As you can appreciate I often feel like I don't belong.

Now that I've been in Brighton for 4 months now and feel much more enthusiastic about the future thanks to the Allsorts Youth Project, and the many friends that I have made from the group. I now understand that these feelings I have are not unique and that I myself can share in the joy of being young, gay and single.

Please excuse the poor grammar and spelling as I have just typed this as it came into my head, in a way to catch my true feelings at this moment in time.

I hope that this has been an interesting insight into my feelings, I know that this isn't exactly what you were looking for about coming out stories but I do feel much better for writing this.

by Chris



## Discrimination?

I first realised I was gay when I was about twelve, I had this infatuation with the female gender, I felt more secure and more appreciated and could relate to them in a way that I couldn't with men, although I have this tendency to relate to gay men as they are more understanding in their own little way. It's not that I was never satisfied in the bedroom department with men as the sex was great, but I still found myself attracted to women and was curious of how women had sex. When I first slept with a woman I felt good and realised that it is so different but in a good way.

I do know my sexuality although finding myself was the hardest thing ever, I used to undervalue myself as I felt as if I was the only one who was confused. The way I found out who I was, was to see...

I used to sleep with men to try and stop being attracted to women as it was said to be 'wrong, abnormal and disgusting'. I couldn't help the way I felt and to be honest I have grown up and now accept myself for who I am!

I'm no different from you, I am just attracted to the same sex as myself, I am still human you know, being a lesbian isn't a form of disease, you can't catch it if I breathe on you, or if I touch you.

The world would be a better place if there was more knowledge about sexuality, disability and racism. There are a lot of people in this world who are discriminated against, whether you're gay, lesbian, bisexual, black, have a disability, less fortunate than others, or even if you don't have the latest fashionable clothes.

I didn't have anyone I trusted enough to share this dark secret with, I had to figure out why I was feeling the way I was, is it genetic? Why do I feel the way I feel? Trying to understand my feelings - analysing everything!

In a way I haven't had it as hard as some of the people I know that have told their parents or friends about their sexuality, and have been alienated/isolated and labelled amongst other things. There is one place where I feel that I can be myself and be noticed for me not as 'the lesbian', full stop, capital letter.

Hopefully in time people's perception will change, just as quick as technology is being upgraded.

You never know, maybe one day we will all be equal....

Yeah, maybe one day!

by Carole

## **Final lament of a star**

I am old.  
The blankets around me that kept me warm,  
They smother me now.  
Already my light grows dim.  
Once I was mighty.  
Billions would look on me from afar,  
I would guide their futures,  
Inspire their creations,  
Give them something to aspire to.  
Now my inner fire is almost out.  
Soon I will surrender to the pressure.

But no!  
I will not go quietly into the void.  
Lord of many worlds,  
I will not surrender!  
My final hour will be lived  
In a final blaze of glory.  
I will be remembered for aeons to come.  
My light will be seen once more,  
Brighter than ever before.  
So what if it destroys me!  
I am already dying.  
No-one will remember  
The cold, barren remains I leave behind.

by Andrew



## **We are angry**

We as a group are angry. But what is wrong with being angry? It is just another emotion - an outward expression of pain and sadness. Anger suppressed can cause the internalisation and isolation of the self; yet anger expressed causes distress to others if this anger is not resolved. Which is better: to bottle up pain and the feelings of injustice and prejudice, or to shout and scream and reveal our fears at the risk of hurting others and setting ourselves apart?

One will result in Prozac and psychologist's reports into the patient's withdrawal and depression and the other could ultimately lead to drug or alcohol abuse as means of escape. Either way we are doomed to be labelled and judged unfairly by a system that is ultimately loaded to our disadvantage. How can the unfeeling and bureaucratic people that make up our country's institutions possibly begin to understand our pain and deep longing for freedom and equality? I am just the same as you. Surely I deserve the capacity to be allowed to love as much as you do? Love is the foundation of all things but why should ours be restricted and denied, because we are different from the majority?

I am just as worthy as you and should not have to hide my love. Laws made by the ignorant and narrow-minded should not discredit our love. I am not a bad person and certain people in society are not going to make me feel as though I am. You have tried extremely hard, but will not succeed. We are not going to cower in fear and deny ourselves any longer. Repression breeds the desire for solidarity and the need to educate those unwilling to listen and accept alternative values and lifestyles. People will come out and snap at your heels and force you to gradually face the realisation of our existence. It may be gradual, yet it will come.

Fear it not. Do not listen to the propaganda; listen to the facts. We are not ill and cannot be converted. We do not force or “promote” our lifestyle upon others. We are especially not a danger or bad influence to children. It is only our sexuality that sets us apart. In every other way we are the same as you. It is not an issue for us, so why do you have to make it one? We are simply not the threat that some perceive us to be.

We simply want to be allowed the freedom to express our love without fear of personal and institutional homophobia. Separatism is not the way forward in the long term as it allows stereotypes to flourish. The only way to end discrimination is to hit society face on. Only this way will change be fully possible. We permeate all layers of society and are far more numerous than you would like to believe or hope for. For example, we are your teachers, your doctors, your police force, your carers and your factory workers. More importantly, we are your sisters and brothers and children. Do not dare to assume that I am like you.

Allow us to love or we will remain angry. Accept us for who we are, but please do not label or stereotype. People are multi-faceted and that is the same for us too. Minority groups should not be treated differently or looked down upon just because we do not fit the mainstream of society, whatever that is. Our anger and hurt can no longer be suppressed. We will prove our worth and value to society. History will dictate this. Maybe then the powers that be will allow complete equality. Only when we are all equal will real democracy triumph.

This was written when I had just started to be honest to people about my sexual orientation. The response of many encouraged and sometimes surprised me, but the reaction of those closest to me were negative in the extreme. Now it is just

not talked about in any constructive or worthwhile way. I had felt extremely relieved and proud of myself for being truthful and asking difficult questions about myself that others do not attempt to do.

However, I had not prepared myself for the repercussions of my “coming out” and the deeply rooted homophobia I myself possessed, from my parents’ influence, but had thus far refused to acknowledge. I thought that I had done the hardest part and that life would get easier without all the questioning and lies, but in some ways the hardest was yet to come. I no longer felt in control and the words of those I loved hurt. I tried to be objective and see things from their point of view, but somehow I just wanted desperately to be loved and accepted for who I was.

It confirmed my feelings in many ways as I was angered by what I heard, but bottled up my emotions. Being honest about your sexuality will always be a difficult process, but honesty is the only option. I achieve acceptance, if not from others then at least within myself, which at the end of the day, is the most important. By being true to my feelings I have acknowledged by anger the prejudice unfortunately still in our society against all minority groups, but I have also shown that I want to be counted and valued as a complete person with a lot of love to give.

*Dare to be different*  
*Dare to be yourself*  
*Dare to love*

by Kirsty

## The search

I used to take a slow walk  
Down to the sea-front  
Though I walked slow I couldn't  
Wait to get there to see the beauty  
Of the stars and the night sky.

I sat on the pebbles and always  
Stared straight ahead  
I could feel it. But I never knew  
What it was  
I could smell it, see it and slightly hear it.

The feeling inside brought me to wonder  
Wonder of what could be out there  
What would another be doing right now  
Would they be feeling, seeing, smelling  
And bearing what I was still  
Unable to understand,  
Maybe it isn't meant to be understood  
Maybe in my own way it is understood by me.

Sometimes I weren't there to think about my  
Life and what was happening to me, but  
Sometimes I just ended up staring and  
Thinking of nothing only taking in the  
Feeling of what I felt that had brought it to me

I savoured it, it was special to me, it made  
Me feel special thinking that only I had  
It. I felt part of it, I wanted to be.

by Foxy Chick

## How I created a gay and lesbian support group at my high school

I had just turned 17 when I met my first boyfriend A. I was at a high school football game (American football. I'm from California) where my drum instructor introduced us. He was teaching at A.'s school as well. The two of us hit it off very well and even though I wasn't sure about my sexuality at the time, I couldn't deny that there was some sort of attraction towards him. We started dating about a month after we met and as much as I would like to tell you that we lived happily ever after, I can't. Unfortunately, A. was much more in love with drugs than he was with me and we didn't even last a month, however within those few weeks, I learned so many things about myself and the world around me than I ever knew existed.

During our time together, I visited a gay and lesbian youth group at his school. I couldn't believe that he was lucky enough to go to a high school that had a gay and lesbian club! His school was about 25-30 miles from mine in San Marcos and there is a big difference in the degree of homophobia. Even though there was a little more tolerance where he lived, I never knew this kind of thing was allowed. I was inspired by this and determined to create my own group at my school.

Let me just tell you a little bit about my city before I continue with my story. Although California is mostly Democratic, or Left Wing, there are quite a lot of Republican cities within the state as well (think George Bush Jr.). I live in a little city called Escondido, which just happens to be one of them. If I had to guess, I would have to say that Escondido is comprised of approximately 20% hicks (that's slang for cowboys, and they are very right wing), 55% gang members, and the other 25%

just normal people. About 95% of the population are Christian. Don't ask me how gang members can be Christian because your guess is as good as mine. I just know they are probably more extreme than anyone else. My side of town wasn't totally ghetto. As far as I know, there were never any drive by shootings on my street or any of the neighbouring ones, however, you can often hear gunshots in the distance, and to give you a better picture, my parents have 3 guns in their closet. Now you know what I was getting myself into, but for some reason, I didn't care. I was going through an activist stage.

I started out by writing a letter to my school principal. This letter described the hardships that gay and lesbian kids go through. It stated facts about greater suicide rates in gay and lesbian teens than in heterosexual teens as well as greater substance abuse, lower grades, and fear of attending school. After stating these facts I proposed that a support group should be started to help kids who were having sexual identity crises' or knew someone who was. I figured that a support group would be easier accepted than a club. The letter also stated that the support group would be run by a teacher or a school counsellor and included many ways to keep the members anonymous. I ended the letter stating that I was extremely concerned with the issue and wished to meet her and discuss the options we had. The next day I was called in to see a school counsellor.

Mrs M., the counsellor, wanted to know if I was having "problems". She told me that the principal read my letter and was concerned. I told the Mrs M. that I wasn't personally having problems with my sexuality anymore, but I wanted to create a support group to make sure that other teens didn't have to go through the things that I did, or at least not alone. She told me that she would pass on my concerns to the princi-

pal.

I asked her if I could speak to the principal personally because I had already explained everything in the letter. That is when I was told that the principal doesn't speak to students personally. They have to go through a "middle-man". I wasn't happy with this so I wrote another letter asking for a one on one meeting with her. In fact, I decided to write a letter every week.

Summer break soon came and nothing was accomplished. I was extremely upset but continued to write my weekly letters. When the next school year began, I was called into my counsellor's office again. I was even passed on to another counsellor. Finally things began to look brighter when they told me that if I found a room and a teacher to run the support group, they would consider it. I was so happy. The next stage was hard. I had no idea who to ask about running the group. There was this one teacher who was rumoured to be a lesbian so I decided to ask her. That was a bad mistake and I got an immediate, stern "no". At this time I had a couple of friends supporting my idea. One of my friends, S., told me that she was positive that her English teacher would run the group.

When we approached her, Mrs D. told us that she thought we were extremely brave and although she would love to help us run the group, she couldn't. She had only been at the school for 1 year and was not yet on a ten-year contract. Teachers have to prove themselves by teaching for 3 years before they go on a ten-year contract. During the first 3 years, their contract is renewed yearly based on their performance. Mrs D. couldn't help run the group because she was afraid that she would lose her job, but wanted to help as much as she could. She said that we could use her classroom once a week to hold meetings during lunchtime. This was fantastic news. The only thing left was to find someone to help run it.

After approaching about 5 other teachers, my psychology teacher from the year before agreed to help. I went right back to Mrs M. and told her that I had a room and a teacher to run the support group. She told me that she would tell the principal and get back to me. About 2 weeks went by with no reply. My weekly letters continued to flow into the principal's office. I got sick of waiting and not getting anything accomplished. I was 18 and in my final year of high school. I knew that if I didn't get anything started soon, it might never happen at all. I went to my psychology teacher for help. He told me that many people have tried to create gay support groups at our school in the past but no one was ever able to do it. He advised me that if I really wanted it, I should go to the school board.

The Escondido school board holds monthly meetings that parents can attend to find out what new things are happening at the different schools in the city. The committee has about 10 members. If parents wish, they can address the school board committee about their concerns. I went to the school board so I could tell them about my concerns. A friend of mine named B. went with me for support, however in the end, I was so nervous that B. went up and did my speech for me. What can I say? I have stage fright. Each person is only allowed three minutes to express his or her concerns. B. talked about the high suicide rate, the lower grades and all of the other statistics about the problems that gay teens face. He finished off by explaining how we could create a support group to help students with these issues. B.'s speech was followed by a moment of silence. Then a member of the school board shouted "Next!"

We felt awful after the speech. The meeting was soon over and we had finally calmed ourselves down. We were so nervous because we were bringing up very controversial issues before

the public, parents of kids from the whole city. We had a great boost of confidence when a woman approached us and told us that she had the utmost respect for us and not to let anything stand in our way. This put a smile on our faces and because of the negative silence that we received, I became even more determined. My mother always told me that I was the most stubborn person she ever met.

The very next school day I was called into Mrs M.'s office again. What a surprise. It turns out that my principal had attended the school board meeting and thought that my choice of actions was inappropriate. She thought that things were finally getting resolved. I explained to her that I had been trying to get things sorted out for a very long time and was sick of being passed on from counsellor to counsellor and never being able to speak to the principal herself. She explained to me again that this was not possible and once again, nothing was accomplished. My weekly letters continued.

Bad things started happening to me around this time. "Eric sucks dicks" was spray painted on the walls. A tile on the ceiling of one of the classrooms was painted purple and had my name on it along with the names of a few of my friends. Just next to the tile were the words "Fag Tile". I had all kinds of things thrown at me including wadded paper, rocks, and food. I reported these incidents to the vice principal but nothing happened as a result of my complaints. I made a point to never walk around campus alone. Things were getting harder and harder for me and I would not have been able to get through this time in my life if I didn't have such wonderful friends supporting me. I felt awful that my friends were being included in the taunting just for being my friend, but our friendship grew stronger because of the fact that we stuck together.

Another month rolled by and I asked B. if he would come with me again to the next school board meeting, but he had prior engagements. I was still afraid to go on my own so I invited another one of my friends named K. (at this time, I had about 5 friends who supported me and continued to be my friends after I came out). This time I built up enough courage to give the speech myself, but just like last time, it was followed by a moment of silence until someone shouted "Next!" When I went back to sit next to K. again, my heart was still pounding. I was so scared. After about 5-10 minutes, I had calmed down. Frustration was beginning to build up inside me because no one seemed to listen to me. I was determined to go to every school board meeting if that's what it took, but then just as the meeting had finished, something big happened.

A man approached K. and I and said that he was surprised at what we had done. K. and I smiled and thanked him. Then he told us that he was from the local newspaper and wanted to know if we would let him run a story on us! I immediately said yes. If the school board wouldn't listen, then I would take an even bigger step and let everyone know. After taking a few notes, a meeting was arranged to come to my high school and take a few pictures with some of my friends. I was only able to convince 4 of my friends to be in the picture with me. S. was afraid that her parents would see it. I was upset that she didn't join in, but I couldn't blame her. Even though I was out to my parents, they were furious that I was going to be in the newspaper. Mom said that I was putting the family in danger, especially if there was going to be a picture. She was afraid that people would come to our house or even pick on my little brother while he was at school. He was only 10 at the time. I knew that these were all important things to take into consideration, but I was determined to change things. What about all those kids who get kicked out of their homes when

their parents find out that they are gay? What about all the kids who commit suicide or turn to drugs? This is the reason that I was doing it.

After the pictures were taken, I checked the newspaper every day. I couldn't believe it when I found out that my story had made it on the front page of the Sunday newspaper and was 9 columns long! I was so excited! Then it hit me. There was a story about a student trying to create a support group at their high school on the front page of the local paper and it had my picture on it! What was I going to do when I went to school the next day?

When my mom dropped me off at school the next day I was so scared. Students were pointing at me and whispering to each other. I heard things like "He's trying to start a gay pride club here and they want to have a pride parade on campus." Where the hell did they get that? Could they not read? First of all, the paper mentioned nothing about parades and second of all, it was a support group, not a club. These rumours from close-minded illiterate people were not going to help. I met my friends at school and we laughed at how stupid people were on our way to Economics class. About 15 minutes into my first period class, the teacher told me that the principal wanted to see me in the back room immediately. The whole classroom turned to look at me and made oooohhh noises informing me that I was in trouble. I almost wet myself.

What was all this about not meeting with students? It had been more than a year with not even a peep from her to me. I slowly stood up when S. who was sitting next to me, grabbed my arm, "I want you to tell me everything when you come back". I sat in the back room and waited at the big empty table. My heart pounded away as I thought of all the things I could finally say

to her when she walked in. So many things crossed my mind. I heard the door open but before I could finish turning my head, the newspaper slammed down in front of me. "I would like to know what is going on at my school before it hits front page of the news!" she shouted. Oh and boy did she shout.

I shouted back telling her that I wrote to her every week for over a year and that this whole situation could have been avoided if she just would have listened. She told me that she was trying to get things accomplished by introducing me to different counsellors even though she completely ignored the little part at the end of the letter where I asked to speak to her one on one. Our voices slowly quieted down and ended with her telling me that I could have my "stupid club". The one condition was that it had to remain underground and that she had to have detailed monthly reports of everything that happened to date. There also had to be at least one teacher and 2 peer counsellors at every meeting. I agreed and she left the room in frustration.

I took a moment to collect myself before I re-entered my classroom. When I walked through the door, the teacher gave everyone a 15 minute break. He knew what the talk was about and maybe even heard through the walls, I don't know. He came up to me and told me that if I wanted him to help run the group that he would be more than happy to help. I was so shocked because I had always thought that he would be one of those people who were very homophobic. I guess you can't judge a book by it's cover. I thanked him and told him that I already had someone who was going to run it but if he wanted to help I could find something for him to do. For the rest of the break I told S. about what had happened. Then we immediately started planning things.

There were only 2 more weeks before Christmas vacation. We decided to hold the first meeting on the first day back to school. That way it would be held in the first week of the new year. It would be symbolic for a new beginning and a fresh start. Well, the support group quickly grew by word of mouth and by the end of the year had about 30 members. I never expected such a big outcome. The year quickly came to an end and the funny thing is that the name calling slowly did as well. The paint on the walls was finally painted over and so was the ceiling. I even got the courage to walk around by myself again, although I never did this if I had to walk very far. Things kept getting better.

A member of the support group agreed to run the group next year and make sure it continued, but unfortunately most of the members were in their final year as well and it died as soon as we left. Although I am very sad that it was not continued, I know that I put down the first stepping stone and made it that much easier for someone else to create a group again if wanted. A little hard work and perseverance does pay off and I have the utmost respect for anyone who is willing to take a stand, fight for their rights, and accomplish their dreams.

by Eric



## Coffee

Nobody understands your pain,  
You can't help anybody else's pain.  
You feel so helpless as they begin to tell you their problem,  
You can't reach over and tell them you know how they feel.  
Drink up another sip of coffee,  
Talk some more, and loosen your shoulders,  
The world has been moved.  
Your burdens passed on to the dummy in the corner of the  
room.  
You feel your chest unleash,  
Air fills your lungs.  
You don't have to worry,  
The pain is there,  
But you have just covered it with a coffee,  
A friend in the middle of a shopping mall.

anon

## **Brighton: the change for me**

When I came to Brighton I was very alone and confused about myself. The change came about when I started going to groups for lesbian and gay young people. I came to groups the same way that I went to clubs and pubs that are gay. I came to them for the chance of finding someone. I became obsessed with trying to find a man in Hertfordshire.

I had just split up with a man who meant the world to me. It has been the one relationship in my life where it has been meaningful. The problem was that he really messed me up. He used me and was extremely violent towards me. I always said that I would never take my own life but while I was going out with him I tried taking my life from sheer desperation. That

soon passed and then he began beating me up when he could not get his own way.

The first time it happened it was outside a gay pub in Luton. I found him in the toilet with another man and when he chased after me outside the pub, I told him to leave me alone. I called him a cheating bastard, he began hitting me and left me unconscious on the road. The next day we were going back out with each other I told myself if I forgot about what he had done I would be alright because if I didn't then I would lose him. To this day I still don't know whether I would say no to him if he asked me out as I really miss the security of a man.

So now I am in Brighton, I have this insecurity about me and needed to find how to get over it. The thing I found is that it's not trying to get over it but to learn to live with it. The groups were somewhere for me to find that new relationship. I tried and dated a lot of men from the groups. I found that they didn't match anything that I had or was looking for. The best thing was that there were a lot of workers at the groups that were there for me and slowly I started to change my mind.

The distance between me and my ex-boyfriend was an advantage. I slowly began to understand that I was looking too hard and a relationship is something that wasn't for me. Now from the groups that I go to I go there to have fun, nothing else. If a relationship is to come along and I felt comfortable, then it would be something that I would not have to try too hard to get. It will come at its own pace. I feel that when I go out now that its because I am looking for a good time not a wedding ring. Moving to Brighton was the best thing that I could have ever done. The advice I'd give to other people is that don't look too hard and start at home with your self before trying to deal with anyone else. And your friends will always listen.

by Keran

## Dear Member of Parliament

I am writing this letter to you to say how angry I am about homophobia. I want to know what the government are doing to help people like me and other gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and unsure young people.

On the estate where I live, there is a lot of homophobic abuse. I think that if children and teenagers were more informed this would happen less. I am threatened with violence and people I know are beaten up just for being gay. I would like schools to provide information for all children and to give information and support to those who are in the same situation as me. There should be public information videos, talks in assembly and leaflets with contact numbers for support groups openly available in schools.

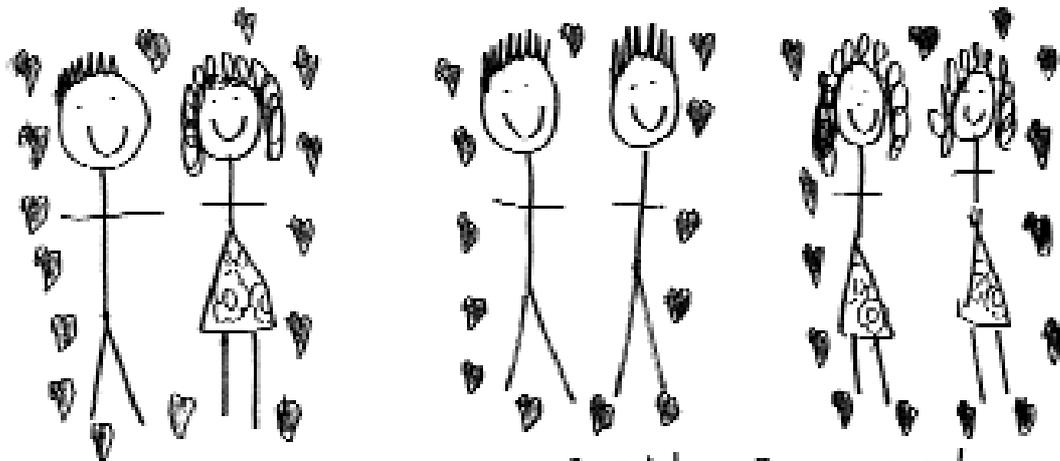
There is not enough information at the moment to tell teenagers about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and unsure people, and this leads to violence through fear. Some teenagers I know think that all gay men or women will come on to them.

People like me should be able to hold our partner's hand and should have been able to come out at school without being abused by everyone. I also get verbal abuse from adults in the street just for being gay.

I would like to see something done about this. I would like to see the media and news programmes challenging homophobia. Finally I would like to see more openly gay MPs representing the different views of the gay population.

Yours sincerely

Sonia



WE RESPECT EACH OTHER!

and demand the right to live how we wish  
without the fear of prejudice.

This would be the ideal  
community to live in.

## **We demand**

We demand the right to live safely without fear or prejudice.

We demand the right to walk down the street without fear of verbal abuse or violence.

We demand the right to go to school or college or work without fear of harassment, verbal or physical abuse, bullying or discrimination on the grounds of homophobia and prejudice.

We demand not to have to tolerate abusive comments from teachers.

We demand the right to have gay and lesbian people who have made a difference recognised, valued and respected through history.

We demand the right to have safe gay and lesbian spaces.

We demand the repeal of Section 28.

We demand the right to learn about gender and transgender inequalities.

We demand the right to be protected by the full extent of the law against all forms of discrimination and abuse.

We demand the freedom to define our own identity and live our chosen lifestyle without fear or discrimination.

We demand the right to have our relationships recognised on an equal footing with heterosexual young people.

We demand the right to be judged on who we are and not on our sexuality.

We demand the right to be honest, happy and proud of our sexuality.

We demand the right to be free of guilt and shame.

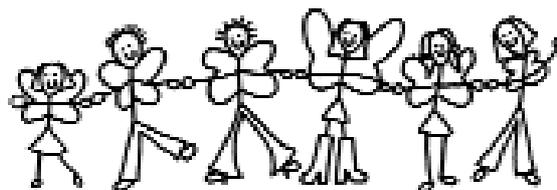
We demand the right for our lives to be valued so young lesbian and gay people no longer commit suicide because of homophobia and heterosexism.

We demand the right for our lesbian and gay families to be valued and respected.

We demand the right to decide if our sexuality or lifestyle becomes the topic of family dinner discussions.

We demand the right to be equal in difference.

by members of Allsorts Youth Project



## Allsorts theme song

*(To the tune of "I will survive" by Gloria Gaynor)*

At first I was afraid, I was petrified  
Thinking there would be no one else like me  
By my side  
But then I took a trip down to Allsorts and even more  
Than before I am having...sexual thoughts.  
They helped me out  
Gave me their time  
Listened to all my thoughts about me looking so fine  
If only I knew that the support was there  
All along  
Because now I feel so good and so very strong  
Free condoms and lube  
Sexual health advice  
You might get laid but you won't fade out  
Of our sight  
It's so gay, there are no fights  
So on Tuesday, I know just where I can go  
To sort it out, I have no doubt  
That Allsorts helped me to love myself  
And all the friendly people there  
Will help you love yourself too  
Be one of us  
So cum along  
7-9 on Tuesday and we'll feel so strong  
Gay, lesbian, bi, transgender, unsure  
Call us on 721211  
They all see us  
Looking happy  
Because of Allsorts, we can chill out  
Be ourselves

Have a cup of tea, they're all staring at  
Me thinking I'm strange or if I'm deranged  
They all like me  
Allsorts is free  
Thought no one understood  
I did not really think I could be me  
I'm young and free  
Under 26, gay and happy.

by Foxy Chick



THE END

## Further resources

### Books

- Girl to Girl by Ed. N. Rashid and Jane Hoy (Millivers)
- Young, Gay and Proud by Ed. D. Romesbury (Aly Cat Books)
- In Your Face: Stories from the lives of Queer Youth by M.L. Gray (Harrington Park Press)
- Pieces of My Heart by Makeda Silvera (Sister Vision)
- There must be fifty ways to tell your mother by Lynn Sutcliffe (Cassell)
- Resist: Essays against a homophobic culture by Ed. Mona Oikawa, Dionne Falconer and Ann Decter (Women's Press)
- Stir Fry by Emma Donoghue (Penguin)

### Websites

- [www.outproud.org](http://www.outproud.org)
- [www.cryptos.co.uk](http://www.cryptos.co.uk)
- [www.outyouth.org/qanda.html](http://www.outyouth.org/qanda.html)
- Channel 4 guide to coming out:  
[www.channel4.com/nextstep/out](http://www.channel4.com/nextstep/out)
- [www.rainbowtv.co.uk](http://www.rainbowtv.co.uk)
- [www.uk.gay.com/youth](http://www.uk.gay.com/youth)
- [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)
- [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

- [www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)
- [www.allsortsyouth.org.uk](http://www.allsortsyouth.org.uk)

## Useful telephone numbers

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: 020 7837 7324

Brighton Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: 01273 204050

Allsorts Youth Project 01273 721211

## Magazines

Gay Times - monthly magazine for gay men

Diva - monthly magazine for lesbians

