

## PROLOGUE

Coming out is hard for everyone. Sometimes there is no way of knowing how homophobic or transphobic your parents or family will be: sometimes we are unpleasantly surprised. Below are two separate yet similar stories, at once unique and not unique, that may give you a felt sense of the myriad of LGBTQ2S youth experiences. We ask you to consider these stories as an entry point to this book.

### **All We Want is To Be Heard**

Bentley Burdick

When I was on the streets, a lot of ‘adults’ gave me advice. Really, they all just thought they knew more than me, that they understood my life better than I did. I was young, small and wide-eyed enough that they didn’t question those beliefs in themselves. As an adult who has now, more or less, overcome that struggle without any substantial help from those same adults—because, when push came to shove, their advice crumbled and all I was left with was the vague memory of some random, bad advice—I can say that at the end of the day, no one could tell me how to fix my life.

No one had a secret answer to getting off the streets. The whole “if you do this, then—bam!—everything is better!” approach worked about as well as any get-rich-quick scheme would. And yet, if you ask anyone who has never starved, never experienced housing instability, never been kicked out by their families, most of them will have an ‘answer.’ A better solution. My soon-to-be mother-in-law is a great example of this. One of the first times I met her, I told her a bit about my life—the struggles I’ve faced and the situations I was forced into when I was just a kid, how I had to grow up under that pressure to become the person I am today. At the time, she was open to hearing my story, but later? Later came the small barbs of comment. One day, in the car with my fiancé, we drove past a man holding a sign by the side of the road, asking anyone for help. The first words out of my future mother-in-law’s mouth? “Oh, I hate paying them. I want to help people, but most get themselves into a position like that.”

Maybe she didn’t mean to be hurtful. She’s an all-round very kind and considerate woman. But it shows that even the sweetest of people can be tainted by the judgement of those experiencing homelessness that has spread throughout our culture. Everyone should be

kinder, more understanding, and help each other—but in helping each other, especially young adults struggling with housing instability because of their identities or sexualities, know that sometimes the best thing you can provide for them is to not provide advice that judges them. In fact, the best way to help is by just listening, because nine times out of ten, we'll figure it out ourselves with support along the way. All we want is to be heard.

## **Welcome To My Time in The Shelter System**

Teal-Rose Jaques

You walk through the doors; no idea what awaits you on the other side. It is a nice place, lovely woodwork, big open spaces and hardwood floors. You get only a moment to take that in, though, because you are instantly blasted by noise, so much noise. Residents, staff, phones, dominoes slamming on tables, a fight or two. It is sensory overload: the space completely contradicts its appearance. You are lost, and not a goddamn person in that room wants to help you. You won't meet someone who does for another day or two, and you will cling to them as a lifeline. It is cold out, and you are hungry, scared and alone.

No one cares about you anymore: your friends have abandoned you, your parents have rejected you, and your pet, the best friend you ever had growing up, will likely live the rest of his life never seeing you again. Employers have learned shelter's addresses: they don't want you. You don't matter anymore. You have dropped below a line in society that makes you invisible to 99% of positive interactions, but you have become a glowing neon sign for hate, as if you weren't already, being a queer, trans, fat and neuro-atypical person.

You decide to stick to your guns, be exactly who you are, fuck everyone else. If you don't matter anymore, you get to be you! But staff and resident alike make sure to beat that out of you. To staff, you will be compliant and subservient or suffer the consequences: they hold your housing, belongings, everything at their fingertips. To residents, you will become an asshole, who feels nothing and will fight everyone, or else you are weak, pathetic, the thing that is wrong with the world. Even among people society rejects, you are a reject. They threaten people like you, jump them in the shower and beat them, cut your door with knives, and staff do nothing: maybe they agree, or didn't sign on for that much work, or are held back by management, which is tying their hands until they can't take it and quit. You decide to fight back, make changes: you have nothing to lose anymore! No one wants you, no one fucking sees you, so you will do this and die. You

expect to die, by their hand or your own. It will happen, so use up every bit of energy you have, go super nova! Take the punishments: lose housing at places that will later congratulate you for making them change, but will never apologize for punishing you for it; that will commend you on your strength, where once they threatened you for it; that will pat you on the same back they once lashed with their actions. Now that people read your words, you matter, and they need to look good. They don't want to be the bad guy in your story, but you were never meant to have a story: you were meant to be nothing and KNOW that, accept that, live that.

Welcome to my time in the shelter system. Enjoy your stay.

## **About the Authors**

### ***Bentley Burdick***

An advocate native to Montana, Bentley works within the homeless youth and LGBTQ populations, ultimately spreading acceptance and knowledge through the outlet of writing with plans to one day take the world by storm with the carefully crafted form of his words. [www.caughtunderglass.com](http://www.caughtunderglass.com)

### ***Teal-Rose Jaques***

During five years navigating and fighting the shelter system of Toronto, Teal-Rose Jaques decided to help fix the system she saw herself and others struggling against in a more official capacity, enrolling in George Brown College's Community Work program and graduating with a diploma in Community Work. Her story has been featured on a number of different media and she has been integral in reshaping the LGBTQ2S policy for a number of Toronto shelters.