

UVic Diversity Writing Contest 2009, Winning Work of Non-Fiction

By Amanda Jardine

Queer Soup

I was born with a labia, it's true. But it's longer on one side. My lopsided labia would not pass medical inspection, but I'm not INTERSEX.

I've been told I'm female, but not from birth. You see, my parents let me pee standing up and they practiced pitching with me in the backyard. They nicknamed me Man because it was quicker to say than Amanda. Occasionally, when people died, my parents asked if I would mind wearing a dress. I chose the pink one because it came with a jacket (even if it did have flowers).

I'm considered pretty too, which is a whole other mess. When I got to school, I heard lots of people call me the 'f' word and when I filled out forms I had to check that box: FEMALE. When I was seven, I accepted my new identity but I never left the field or grew out my nails or made friendship bracelets.

In grade six, I found sticks of makeup and a different way to perform. One-inch thick, onyx eyeliner, strategically shooting from the corners of your lids, can say 'fuck off' better than any middle finger. I was a bitch in high school, but still there was nothing clearly FEMME about my constant costume: a grey hooded sweatshirt and unisex jeans.

During my undergrad, I chopped off all my hair and called myself BISEXUAL so I could suck on my best friend's tequila lips without questions and fall in love with a professor. At the end of my second year of university, I realized that I didn't like dick altogether, unless it was interested in other dick or not BIOLOGICAL.

I came out to my family one at a time starting with Mom. On Christmas Eve, amidst coffee and floating halos flying off our matching cigarette tips, I felt my stomach sink into the cushy grey carpet where we sat in my old basement bedroom.

"Mom, there's something I got to tell ya."

"Let me guess. You're gay?"

"How did you know?"

“You told me when you were five. We were watching the *Smurfs*. You said: ‘Mom, I’m a lesbian.’ And I said: ‘Do you know what that means?’ And you said: ‘Yep, it means I’m a GIRL who likes girls.’ Ever since that day, I’ve just been waiting.”

Mom hugged me and told me to tell my father. Another time. Alone.

I told Dad, over the phone, when my best friend asked me to pack up my crap and get out. She didn’t need a mountaintop love or live-in girlfriend anymore. During this delivery, my mind snowed all over our bedroom, falling like party confetti. I told Dad he needed to come and collect the shards of my sense off the floor. Like always, just hearing his voice gave me the strength to stuff boxes and start over.

I got a job spinning bottles as a star flair bartender at the local QUEER club. Every Friday and Saturday I fastened up my corset (usually red or black) and pulled on a skirt (always absurdly short). My muscular legs made fantastic prisoners to fishnet stockings and four inch platforms gave me a world to explore. With the sidewalk sun on my skin, I danced up the main street of Fredericton. Almost naked. I was a chance burlesque performance for children and adults and friends of all ages. My secret talent was that I could smell their fear. Mostly the MEN. No whistles all bells. My confidence pushed their heads down. I’m not a LIPSTICK LESBIAN, but I played one on weekends.

I’m chesty and I didn’t bother taping down ‘my girls.’ Except for when I did drag at pride celebrations and local shows. I only queered myself up this way twice a year so I can’t call myself a TRANSVESTITE even if I do look like a hotter Johnny Depp.

Most times I stick to the plastic plan, but sometimes my invisible penis slides into my girlfriend. It goes back into my abdomen when she’s done getting off on cosmic consciousness. Usually, there’s an orb of light where my genitals should be. I wish I could call myself TWO SPIRITED, but I’m some-kind-of-white.

I thought for awhile that my strong jaw would get me in with the BUTCH LESBIANS, but I couldn’t stomach beer and they often scoffed when I talked about Dante. I liked skinny jeans and lash flash mascara which usually didn’t fly. Plus, there was a rule about hair; the ruler said mine was five inches too long. My surprising upper body strength didn’t matter.

Next, I moved to the WILDERNESS LESBIANS. Minus the dreads, I looked almost the same. I could buy some extra sweaters, I thought, and try on tights for a change. But I liked eating chickens and I could never remember which berries were poisonous. Not to

mention, I killed my trial fern and didn't dance to Mother Nature like a dandelion dream. Plus, my need to curse was usually an issue.

I took a chance, at last, and settled for the fact that I didn't have a home and might have to create my own space. I wanted to trace my shadow outside of these binaries.

With a female face and ANDROGYNOUS clothes, I looked like an angry seventeen-year-old who listened to Avril Lavigne and got kicked out of school. Hung Up. Held Over. Removed.

I'm a suspender. A word bender. I'm whatever YOU want I to ME. Been quiet? Break rules and make room for anyone's someone and no one. We're all at the same table.

suspender-freedom means I can travel through all of these imaginary places and stay for bit without pitching a tent or starting a file. There's no paperwork, no standards to fit, no trial. I don't need one strict community. I wade in all different kinds, from time to time, when diversity gets lonely. I find community in misfits. If you want to be a suspender with me, I'll take you in. We will start a commune and live away from that chatter. We will ban words that split hairs. We will roll our lives out, against the grain, and make plain decisions based on the way the fog moves or by how much coffee we have left.

Our world tells us to pick an identity and to make it political. Our ambiguity is power. I like the fact that I'm a gap in knowledge. What you see is never what you get. I'm a Lesbian Harry Potter.