

# GENDER QUEER

A MEMOIR

MAIA KOBABE



# **GENDER QUEER**

**A MEMOIR BY  
MAIA KOBABE  
COLORS BY PHOEBE KOBABE**



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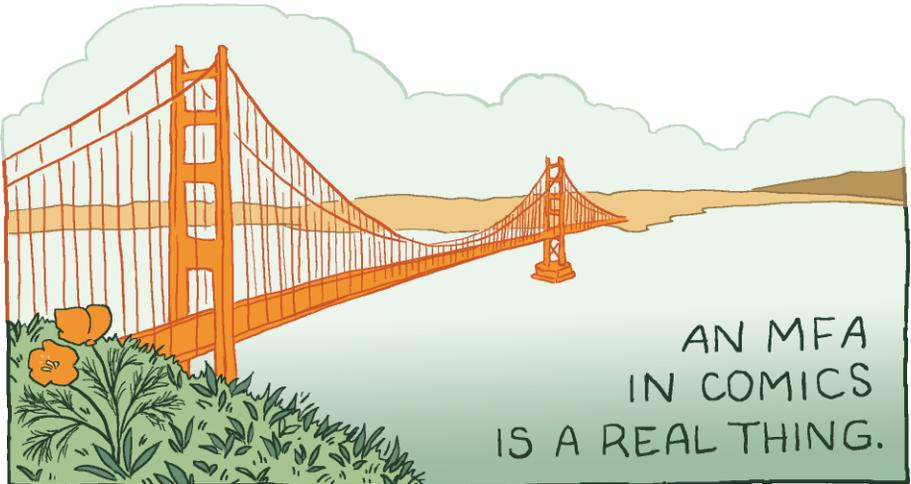


IN 2013, WHEN I WAS 24

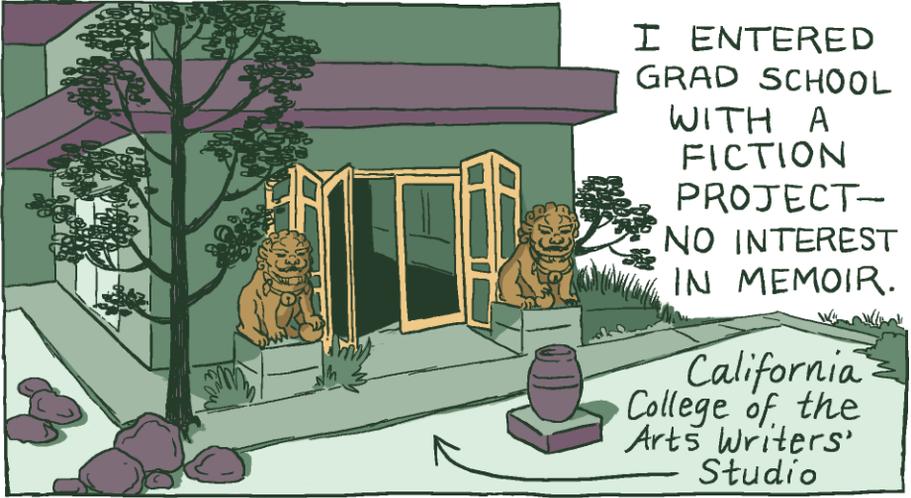


I HEADED TO SAN FRANCISCO  
TO BEGIN MY MASTER'S  
DEGREE IN COMICS.

I'D SPENT  
THE LAST SEVERAL  
MONTHS ASSURING  
PEOPLE THAT, YES,

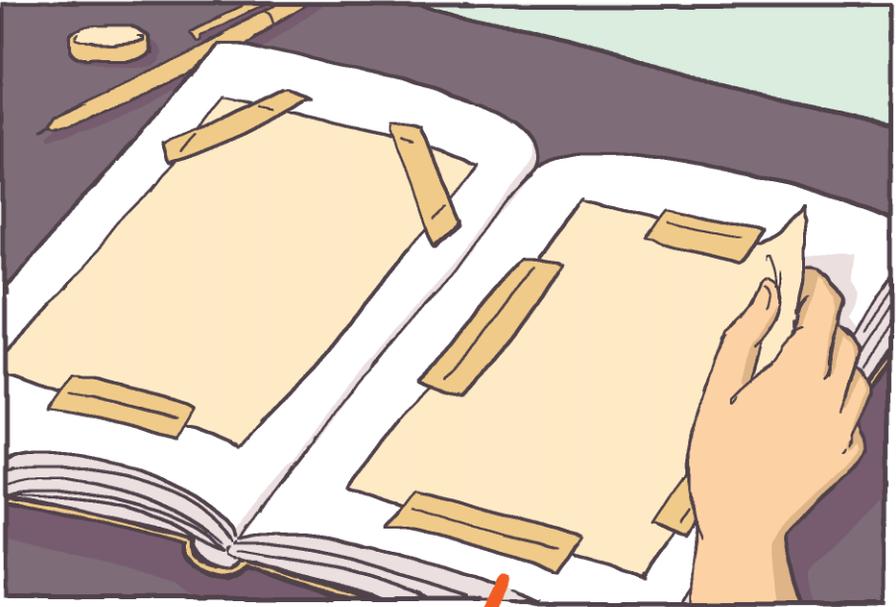


AN MFA  
IN COMICS  
IS A REAL THING.



# I STRUGGLED IN THIS CLASS.







GENDER  
QUEER

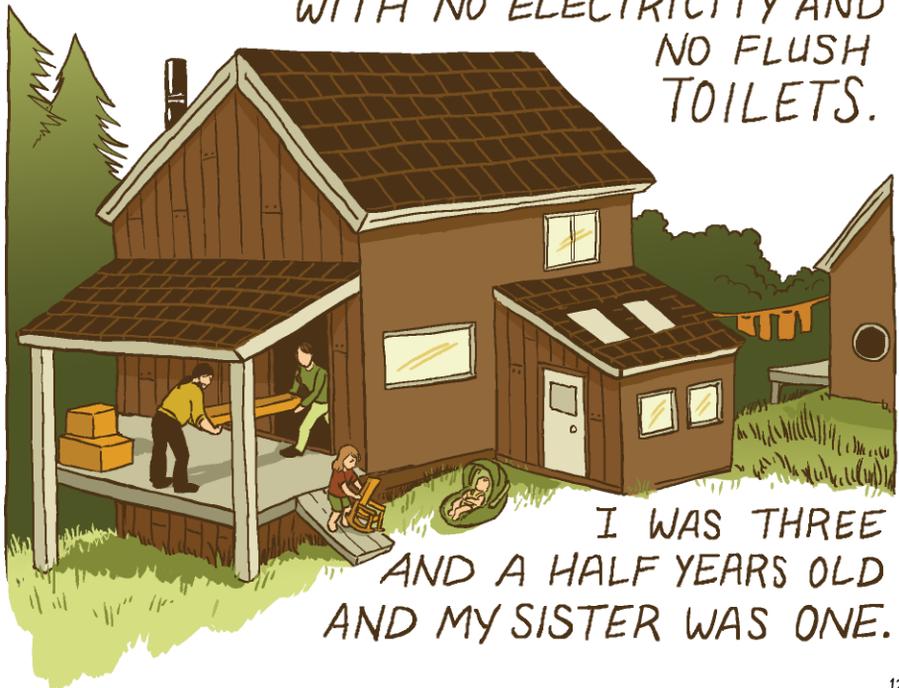
*a memoir*

BY MAIA KOBABE



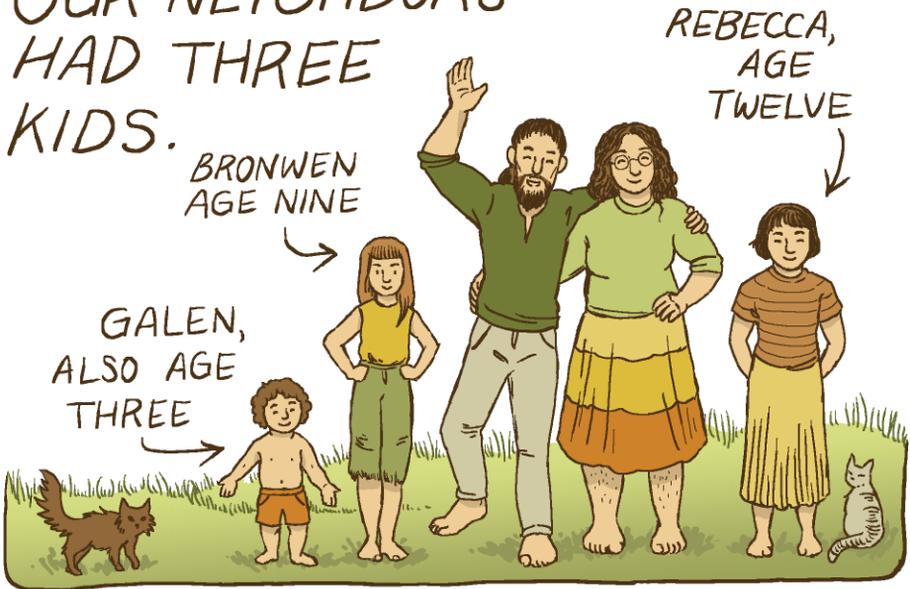


IN OCTOBER  
1992, MY FAMILY  
MOVED INTO ONE OF TWO HOUSES ON A 120-  
ACRE PROPERTY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA  
WITH NO ELECTRICITY AND  
NO FLUSH  
TOILETS.



I WAS THREE  
AND A HALF YEARS OLD  
AND MY SISTER WAS ONE.

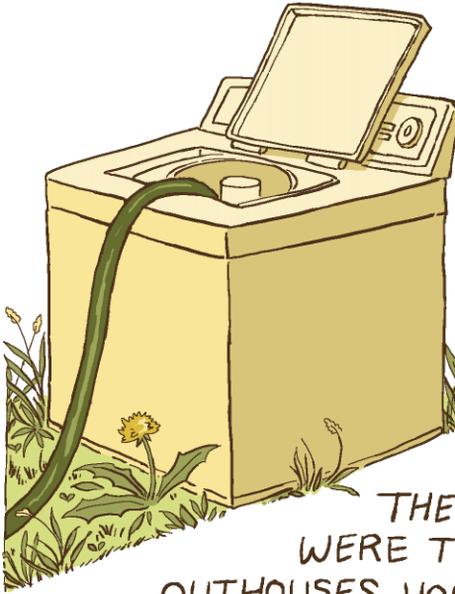
OUR NEIGHBORS  
HAD THREE  
KIDS.



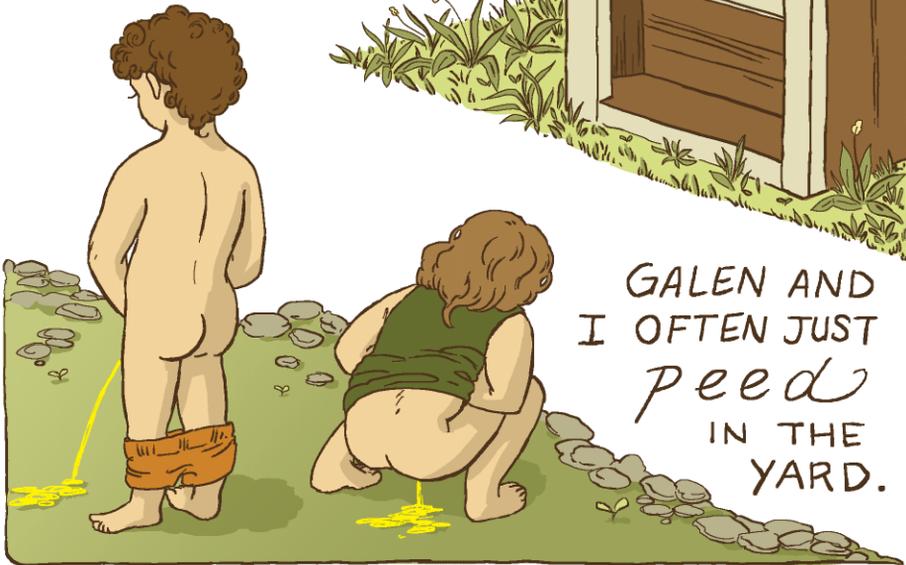
PERHAPS MY EARLIEST GENDER-RELATED MEMORY...



THE PROPERTY WAS POWERED BY A MIX OF SOLAR, HYDROELECTRIC, AND GENERATORS. WE HAD A BATHTUB BUT NO SHOWER. WE FILLED OUR OUTDOOR WASHING MACHINE WITH THE GARDEN HOSE.

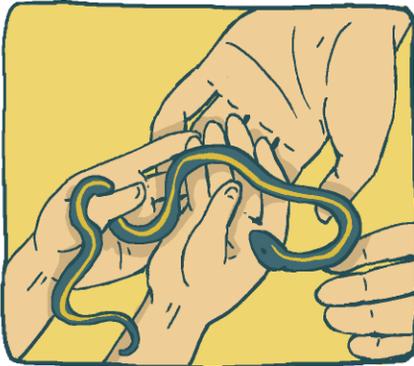


THERE WERE TWO OUTHOUSES, HOME TO MANY SPIDERS.

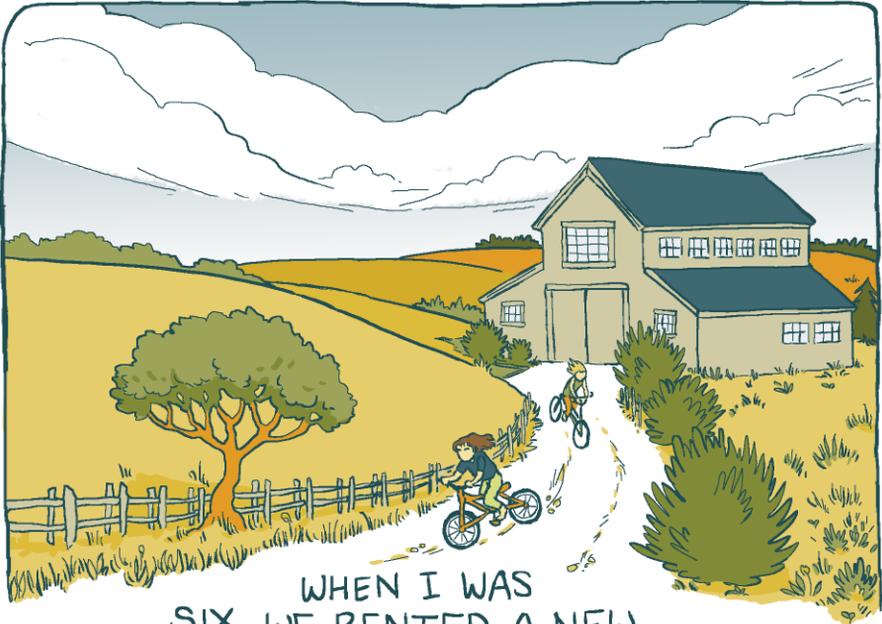


GALEN AND I OFTEN JUST *peed* IN THE YARD.

ONE DAY WHEN I WAS WALKING WITH GALEN'S MOM...



FOR MANY BIRTHDAYS AFTER I REQUESTED SNAKE-THEMED GIFTS:



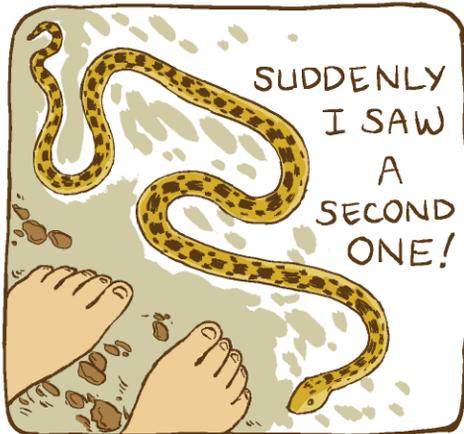
WHEN I WAS SIX, WE RENTED A NEW HOUSE AT THE END OF A MILE-LONG DRIVEWAY, SURROUNDED BY COW PASTURES.



ONE TIME I  
CAUGHT A BIG  
GOPHER  
SNAKE,  
MORE THAN  
3 FEET  
LONG.



HOLDING IT  
CAREFULLY,  
I RAN  
TO SHOW  
MY  
SISTER



SUDDENLY  
I SAW  
A  
SECOND  
ONE!



ALAS, HAVING  
ONLY TWO HANDS  
TO CATCH  
SNAKES!

NEITHER GALEN NOR I ATTENDED A PRESCHOOL OR A KINDERGARTEN. THE FIRST DAY OF FIRST GRADE WAS OUR FIRST TIME MIXING WITH OTHER KIDS OUR AGE.

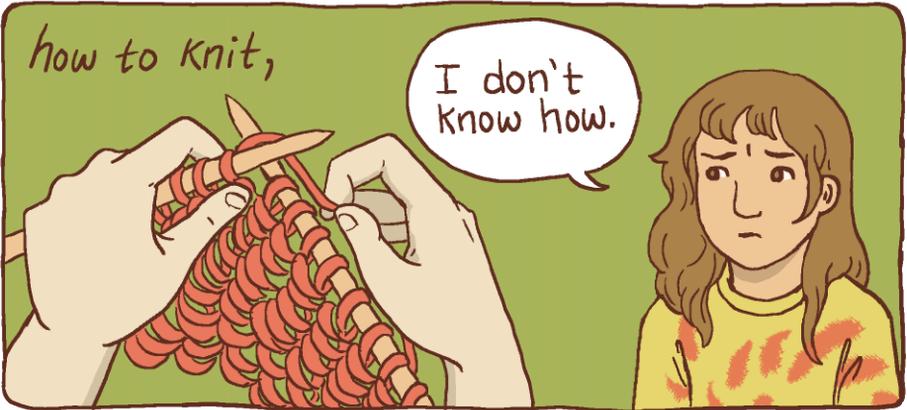


THERE WERE SO MANY THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW.

My classmates knew how to paint with watercolors on wet paper,



how to knit,



a select few could even read.

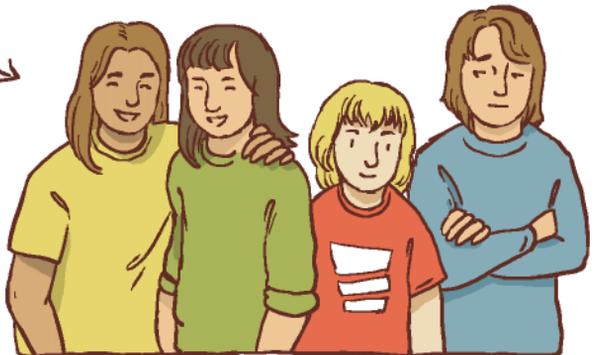


MY TEACHERS WERE VERY PATIENT.

# AT MY WALDORF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



IT WASN'T UNUSUAL FOR BOYS TO HAVE LONG HAIR → IN MY CLASS OF 18 STUDENTS FOUR BOYS HAD HAIR THAT BRUSHED THEIR SHOULDERS.



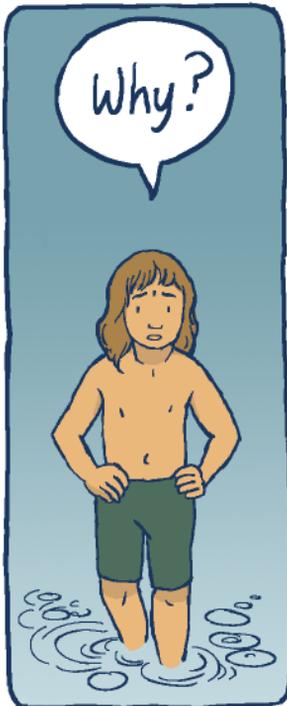
# I REMEMBER A FIELD TRIP I TOOK WITH MY CLASS IN THIRD GRADE



SOME OF MY CLASSMATES NOTICED.



MY TEACHER INTERVENED.



I walked back to put my shirt on again. But I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong.



It was everyone else being silly,  
**NOT ME.**

NEITHER OF MY PARENTS WERE INTERESTED  
IN ENFORCING GENDER ROLES

Weaver, sewer,  
knitter, broom-maker,  
preschool & handwork  
teacher

Has never, to my  
knowledge, worn  
makeup

Very  
athletic,  
loves hiking,  
swimming,  
used to run  
& row

Gardener  
with a  
green  
thumb

Vegetarian



Degree  
in botany

Loves camping

MY MOM

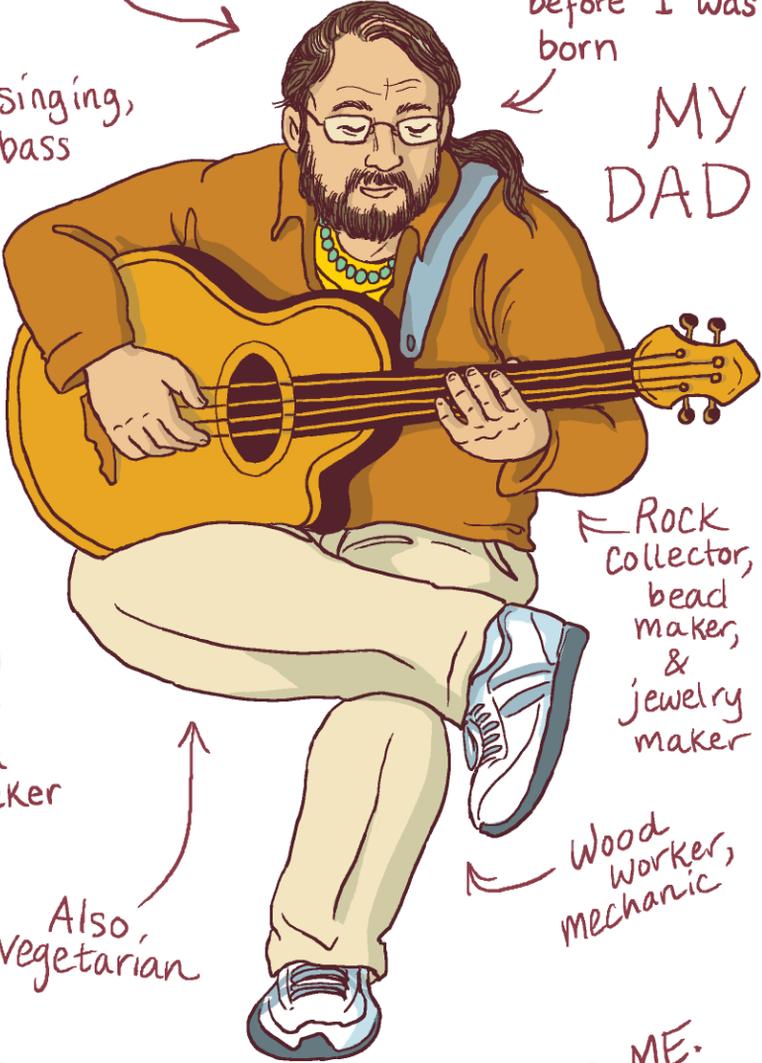
Waldorf elementary school teacher

Degree in physics

Has had long hair since before I was born

Loves singing, plays bass & flute

MY DAD



Was a Boy Scout and a backpacker

Rock collector, bead maker, & jewelry maker

Also, vegetarian

Wood worker, mechanic

EITHER ON THEMSELVES OR ME.

IN FIFTH GRADE I WENT TO A BIRTHDAY PARTY AT A HOUSE WITH A HOT TUB

This was the last year during which I would voluntarily wear a swimsuit around peers.

me  
↳



The most feminine and most confident girl at the party raised her leg out of the water. Droplets rolled off her skin.



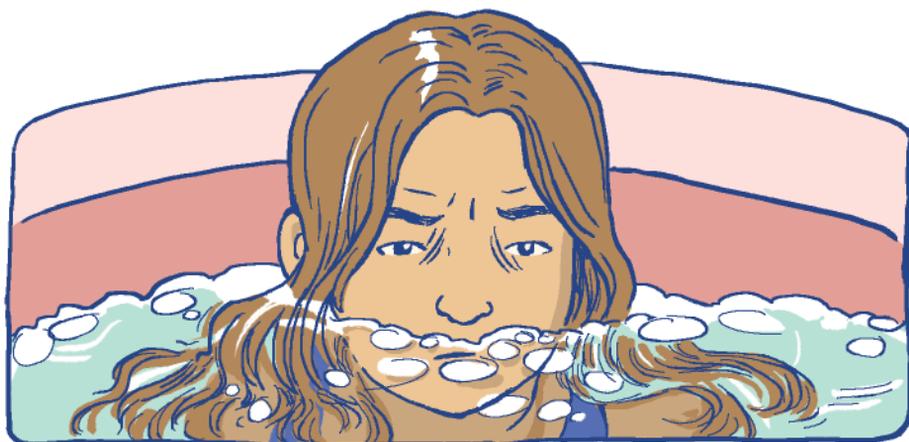
I raised my leg out of the water in imitation of her.



INSTEAD OF ROLLING SMOOTHLY AWAY THE WATER BEADED IN MY GROWING LEG HAIR.



I WAS GRUMPY AND EMBARRASSED TO ENCOUNTER YET ANOTHER THING I WAS APPARENTLY SUPPOSED TO KNOW BUT DIDN'T.



EVERYONE AROUND ME— BUT ESPECIALLY GIRLS— SEEMED TO HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION I LACKED.



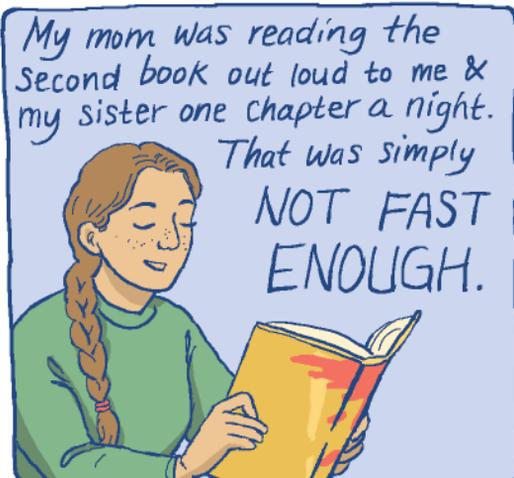
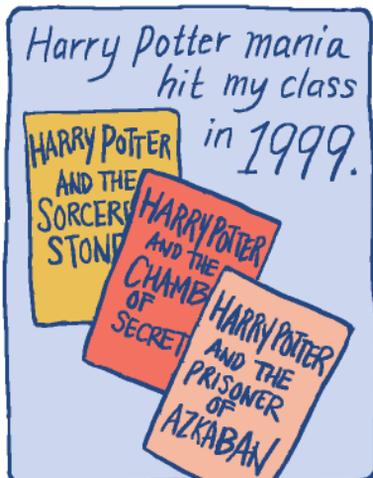
This was both emotionally and literally true. AT 11 YEARS OLD I HAD NOT YET LEARNED TO READ.



I STARTED AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING BUT MY PROGRESS WAS FRUSTRATINGLY SLOW. I HAD TWO CONSOLATIONS:



FINALLY, IN THE SUMMER BETWEEN FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE, I HAD A BREAKTHROUGH



ONE NIGHT I SNUCK THE BOOK & A FLASHLIGHT INTO MY BED. I VOWED NOT TO SLEEP UNTIL I FIGURED OUT WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.



BY MORNING SOMETHING MAGICAL HAD HAPPENED. I HAD BECOME

A READER.

A MUCH LESS WELCOME CHANGE  
WAS JUST AROUND THE CORNER.



My favorite fictional character at this time was ALANNA THE LIONESSE — a short, stubborn girl who disguised herself as a boy to train as a knight.

I listened to the audiobooks by

TAMORA  
PIERCE  
and  
read  
by

TRINI  
ALVARADO  
over and over  
throughout my  
childhood.



Alanna's first question on starting her period was "How long do I have to put up with this?"

"I didn't ask to be born a girl."

It's not fair."



BECAUSE OF THE ALANNA BOOKS I KNEW:

Periods  
involved  
bleeding  
every month,



were  
related  
to the  
ability  
to become  
pregnant,



and  
were a  
totally  
normal and  
natural  
thing to  
happen  
to young  
teen girls.



But I  
**NEVER**  
thought it  
would  
happen  
**TO ME.**

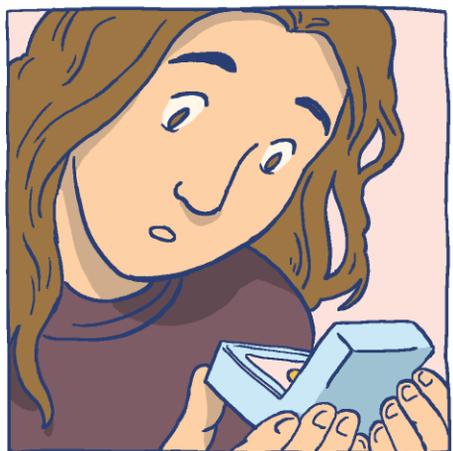


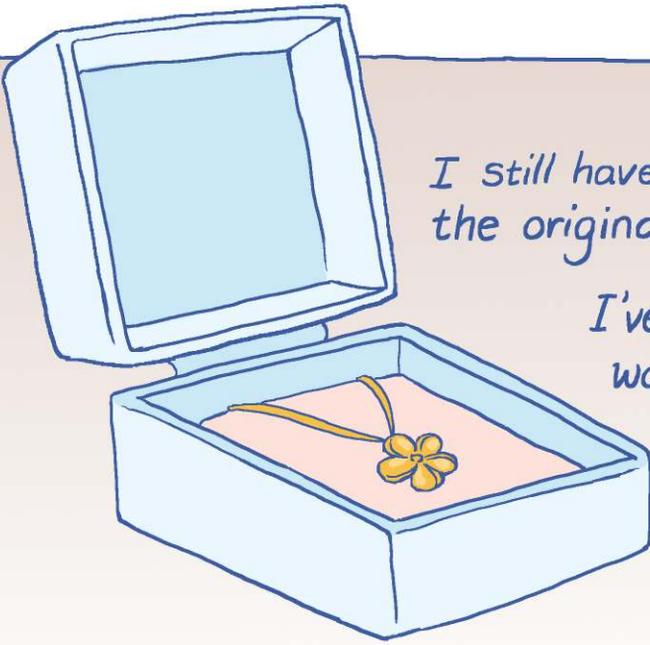
I TRIED TO HIDE IT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.





## THE NEXT DAY

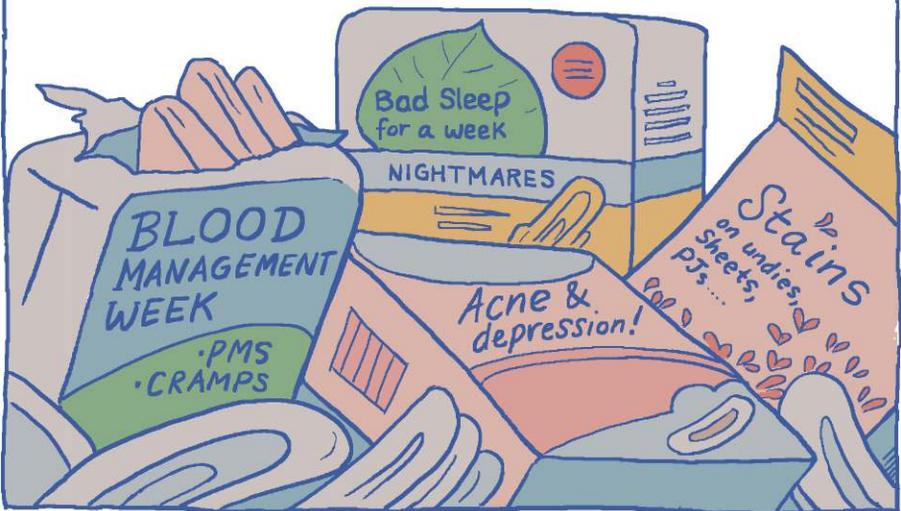




*I still have it in  
the original box.*

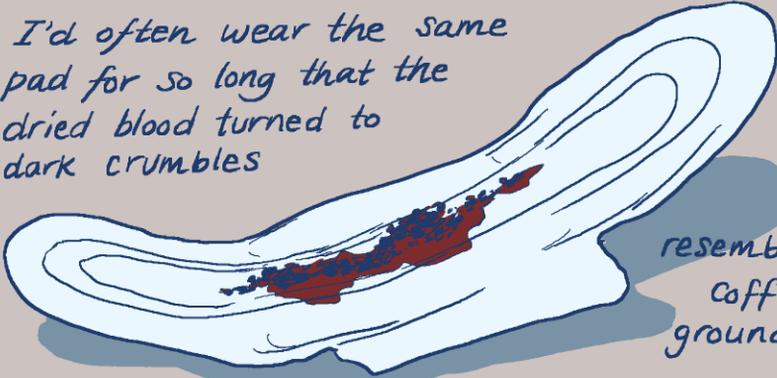
*I've never  
worn it.*

*I couldn't see this new development  
as a reason to celebrate.*



HIDING MY PERIOD BECAME EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO ME. FOR TWO ENTIRE SCHOOL YEARS I SUCCESSFULLY AVOIDED EVER USING A SCHOOL BATHROOM.

I'd often wear the same pad for so long that the dried blood turned to dark crumbles



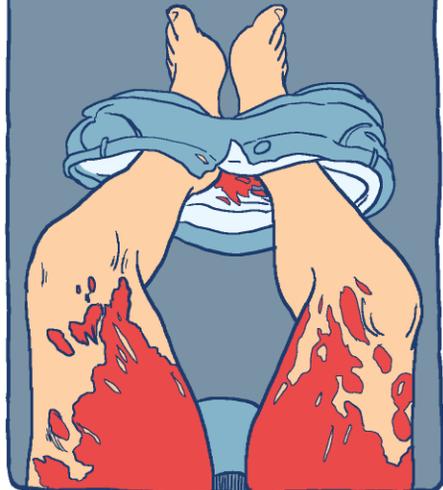
resembling coffee grounds.

TO THIS DAY A HUGE NUMBER OF MY NIGHTMARES INVOLVE MENSTRUAL BLOOD.

I'll feel the familiar sensation of hot blood gushing from my body-



When I make it to the bathroom I'll find my legs smeared with blood from waist to knees.



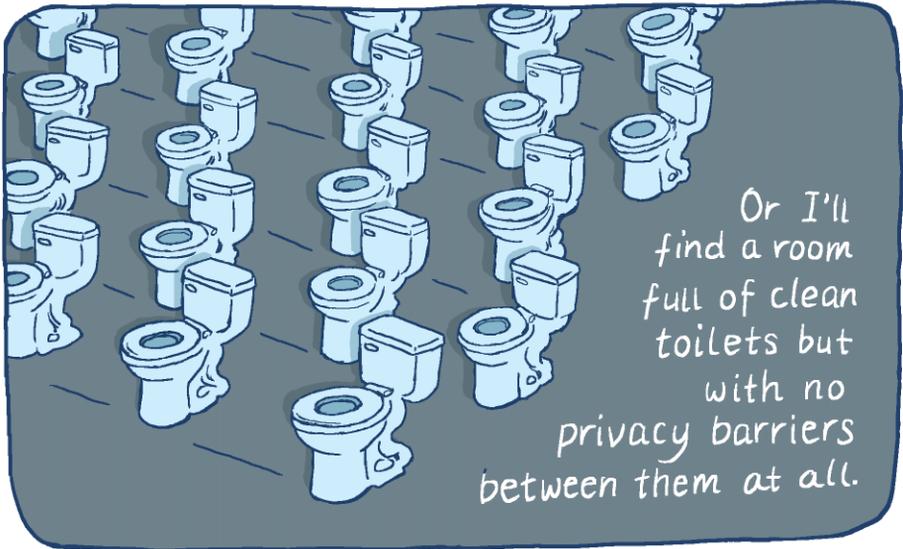
OF COURSE I NEVER HAVE A PAD OR CLEAN CLOTHES.



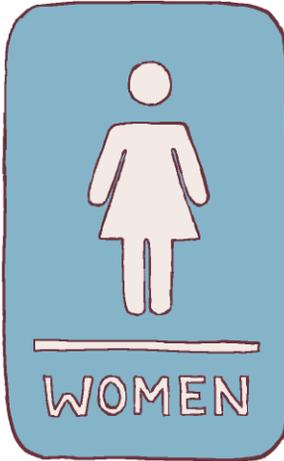
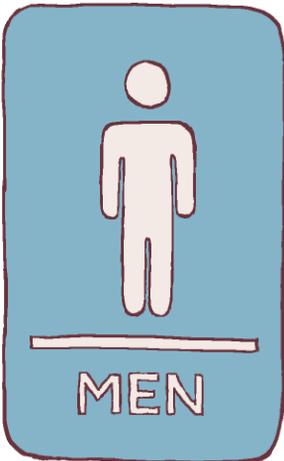
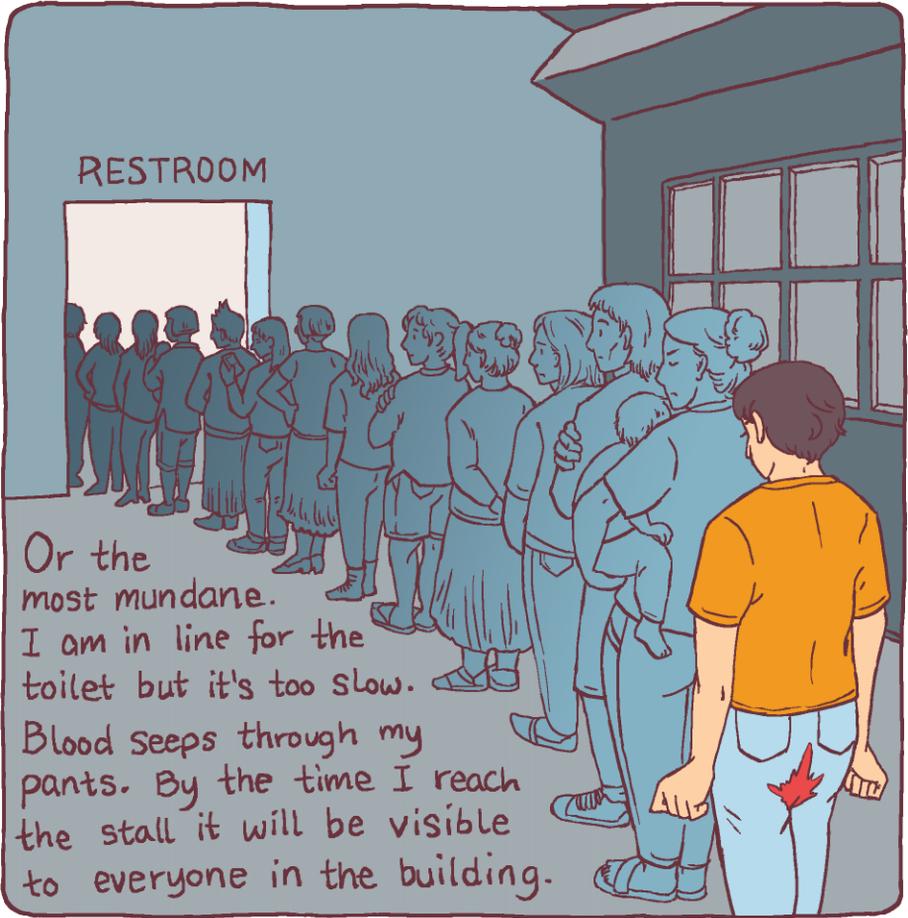
Often  
I'm in a  
bathroom  
with no  
stall doors.



Or the only  
available toilet  
is overflowing  
with a soup of  
blood and shit.



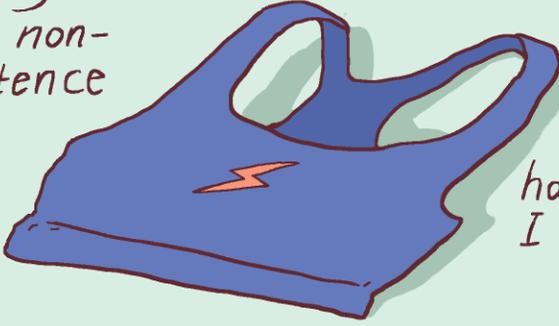
Or I'll  
find a room  
full of clean  
toilets but  
with no  
privacy barriers  
between them at all.



IT'S  
AMAZING  
I NEVER  
DEVELOPED  
A URINARY  
TRACT  
INFECTION.

IN SEVENTH GRADE MY MOM BOUGHT ME  
MY FIRST BRA.

I liked that it flattened  
my tiny boobs  
into non-  
existence



but I  
hated that  
I needed it  
at all.

I STARTED DAYDREAMING ABOUT GETTING  
BREAST CANCER THINKING IT WOULD  
GIVE ME THE PERFECT EXCUSE  
TO HAVE MY BREASTS REMOVED.

Since then there have been  
several cases of cancer in  
my family, so I know  
how terrible that  
sounds.



I'd like to say I  
never think about that  
anymore... but that  
would not be true.



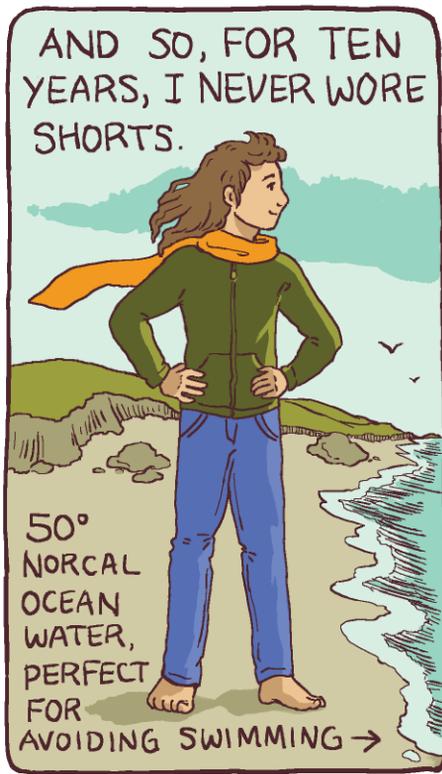
THE BOYS AROUND ME SEEMED AS YET UNRAVAGED BY  
PUBERTY. I WISHED I WAS ONE OF THEM.

# WHEN MY MOM WAS 13 HER MOM TOLD HER



# WHEN I WAS 13 ONE OF MY AUNTS TOLD ME





# I REMEMBER WHEN MY MOM TOLD ME



BUT I COULDN'T GET ANY OF THEM TO STICK.

My first crush was on my neighbor GALEN.



His sisters thought it was cute when we kissed.

Adorable!

Do it again!



SO WE DID.

Smooch!  
♡



My second crush was on a tomboy girl in my elementary school class.



I ASKED HER :

Can we kiss?

I'd rather not.



My third crush was on a cocky boy three years older than me.



I was so embarrassed around him I could hardly speak...



My fourth crush, in 8th grade, was on a girl who had a Lord of the Rings nickname.



It was around this time that I looked up "gay" and "lesbian" in the dictionary.

What am I?



ONE WEEK BEFORE I STARTED HIGH SCHOOL, I TOLD A FRIEND ABOUT THESE CRUSHES.

My mom said girls getting crushes on girls is pretty normal.

And it's probably just a phase.

Maybe



BUT  
I SOON  
DEVELOPED MY  
WORST CRUSH YET  
ON A GIRL IN  
MY NEW  
CLASS.

PUNK →  
BUTCH ↘

USED  
A BOY'S  
NAME ↙



MY FRIEND DID NOT APPROVE OF THIS CRUSH  
AND TRIED TO SABOTAGE IT BY TELLING ME  
BAD STUFF ABOUT HER.

MEAN COMMENTS

STUPID GOSSIP

RUMORS



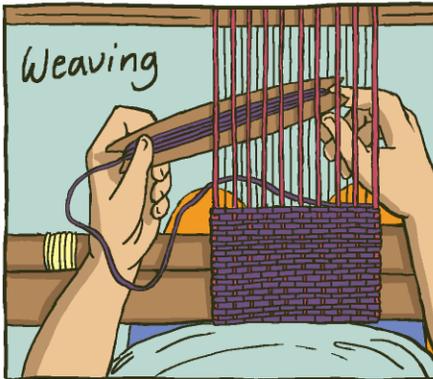
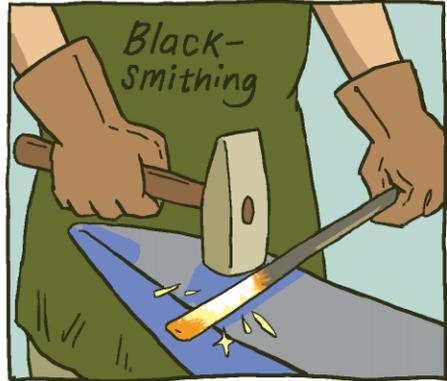
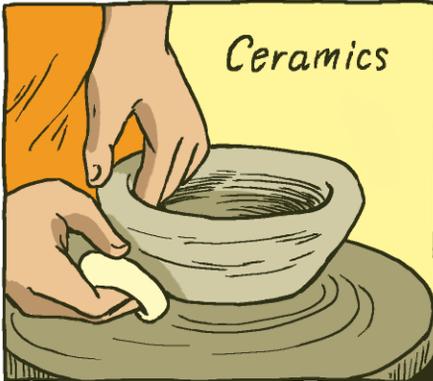
TWICE OVER THE NEXT YEAR THIS FRIEND  
ASKED ME:

Are you still  
FREAKING OUT  
about being a Lesbian?

No.

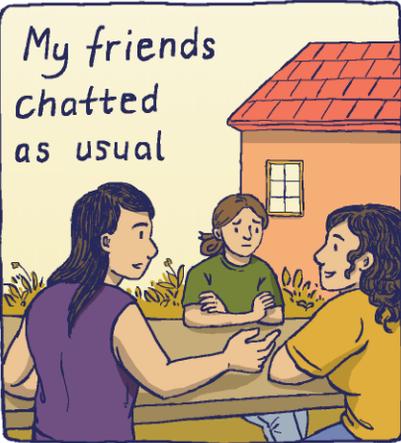


AFTER SPENDING EIGHTH GRADE IN A HOMESCHOOLING PROGRAM, I WENT BACK TO WALDORF FOR HIGH SCHOOL. REQUIRED CLASSES INCLUDED:



# A MONTH AND A HALF INTO MY FRESHMAN YEAR





FINALLY I GOT UP THE COURAGE TO SAY:





The QSA meeting was full of familiar faces. Over half the members were girls from my own class.

Come sit with us!

OK, thanks!

Are they all gay???



LATER I WOULD LEARN THAT THREE OF THEM CAME FROM FAMILIES WITH LESBIAN MOMS; THEY AND THEIR FRIENDS CAME AS ALLIES.

I brought two articles I was thinking we could discuss for our first meeting.



Massachusetts JUST declared that they will start allowing gay marriage beginning in May of next year!



And The Central park Zoo gave an egg to a pair of gay penguins and they raised a chick together named Tango.

Aww!!! Gay penguins!



I left the meeting wondering why I'd been so nervous to enter it.

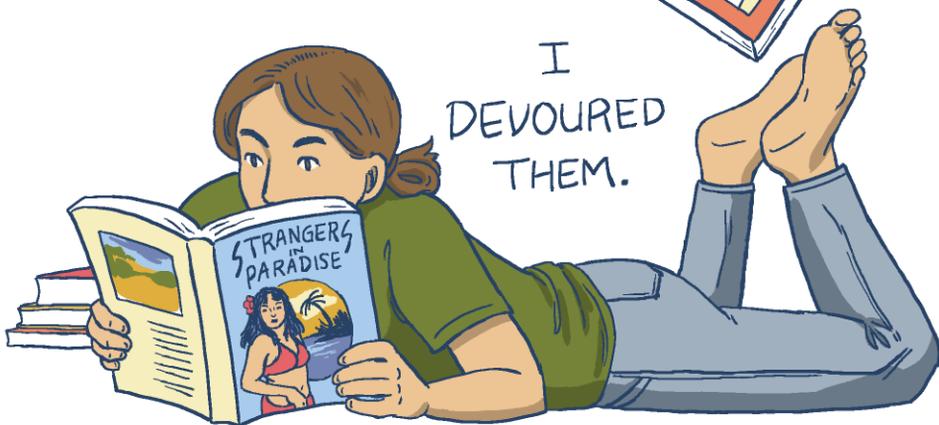
That was so cool!



A friend from QSA lent me the Strangers in Paradise series by Terry Moore.



I DEVOURED THEM.



One day my  
best friend gave  
me a note:

DON'T READ ANY  
MORE GAY ROMANCES  
YOU GET ABSOLUTELY  
UNBEARABLE FOR  
DAYS AFTER.

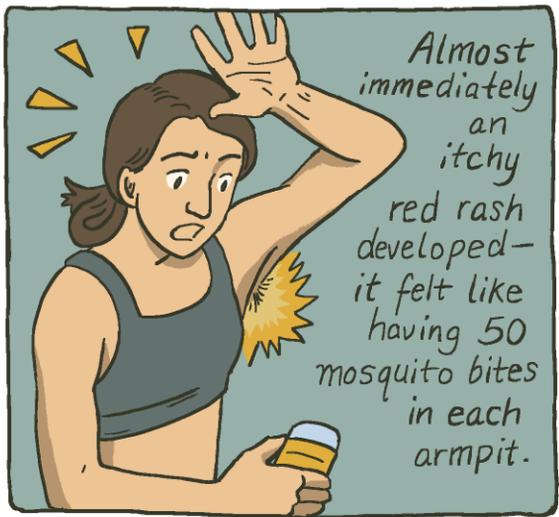
But  
by the end  
of the year she had started  
coming to QSA meetings with me.  
This group morphed  
into an LOTR fan club,



with meetings devolving into hours  
of discussion about which of the  
Lord of the Rings actors were  
MOST LIKELY TO BE GAY.

# ONE DAY THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR CALLED ME INTO HER OFFICE

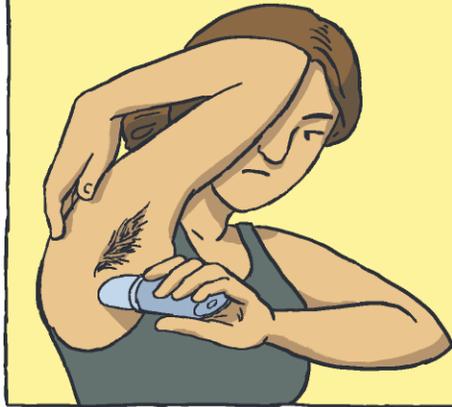




Eventually my mom found a deodorant my skin could handle.



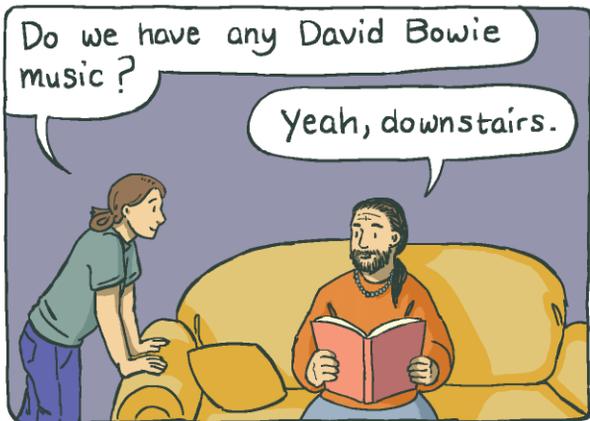
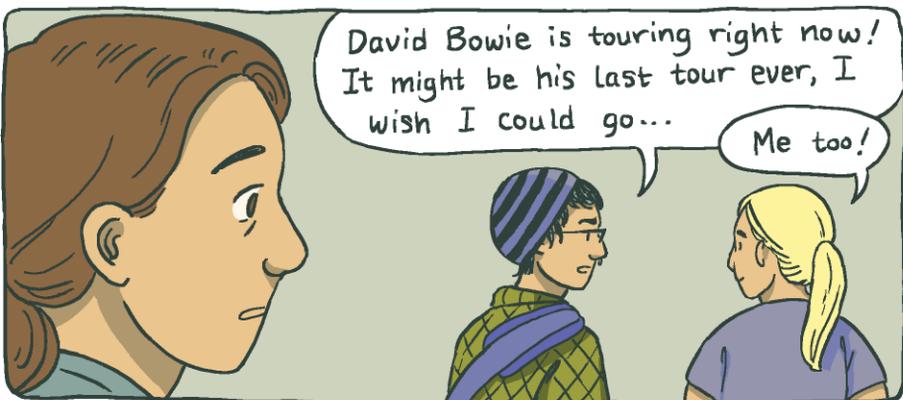
I never learned who had reported my B.O. It didn't occur to me to ask.

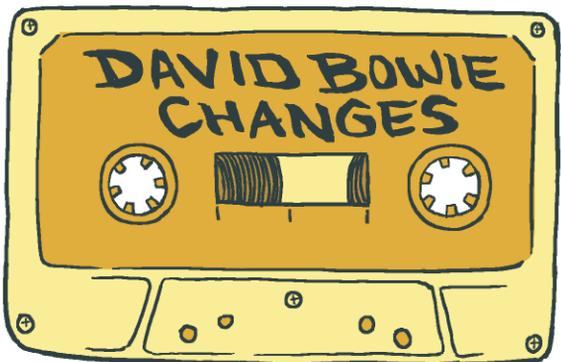
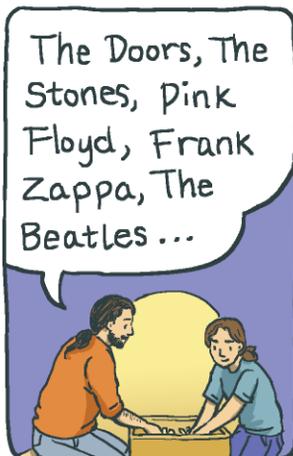


Probably because I didn't blame whoever it was. This was simply another example of my constant ignorance.



# I SPENT A LOT OF TIME IN NINTH GRADE EAVESDROPPING ON MY CRUSH







IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I COULD  
EVER REMEMBER HEARING QUEER  
REFERENCES IN SONG LYRICS:



I ONLY LET MYSELF LISTEN TO THE  
TAPE ONCE THROUGH PER DAY



AFRAID THAT I WOULD WEAR IT OUT.



Bowie's music  
was the first  
that felt like



MINE.

My  
love of  
Bowie  
has long  
outlasted  
the crush  
that started  
it.

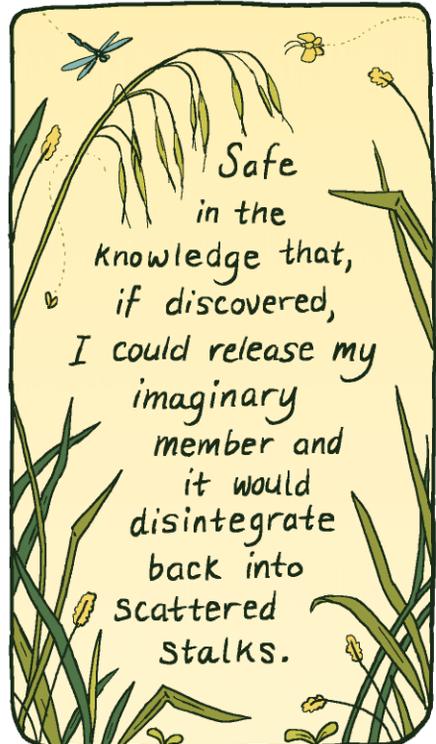
I WAS 11 OR 12 YEARS OLD THE FIRST TIME I CAN REMEMBER FANTASIZING ABOUT HAVING A PENIS.



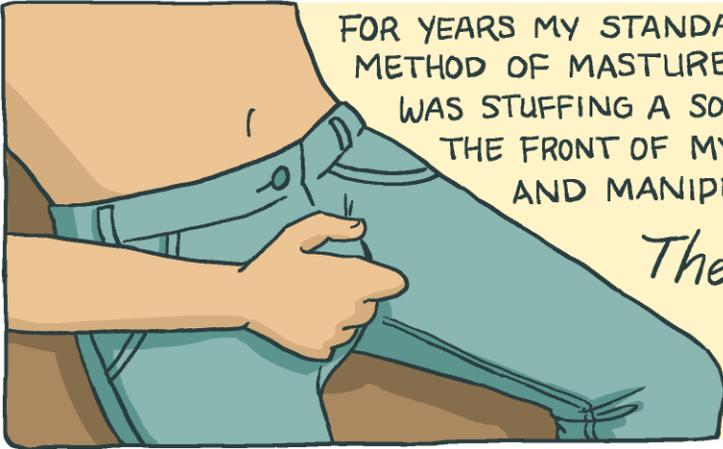
I WAS LYING, FULLY CLOTHED, ON A HILLSIDE UNDER AN OPEN SKY.



I HELD A FOLDED HANDFUL OF GRASS BETWEEN MY LEGS.



Safe  
in the  
knowledge that,  
if discovered,  
I could release my  
imaginary  
member and  
it would  
disintegrate  
back into  
scattered  
stalks.



FOR YEARS MY STANDARD METHOD OF MASTURBATION WAS STUFFING A SOCK INTO THE FRONT OF MY PANTS AND MANIPULATING

*The Bulge.*

THIS WOULD EVOLVE INTO *HIP-THRUSTING* WHILE THINKING OF MY LASTEST GAY SHIP ...



MEMORABLY, I GOT OFF ONCE WHILE DRIVING JUST BY RUBBING THE FRONT OF MY JEANS AND IMAGINING GETTING A

*Blow JOB.\**

\* I PROMISE I'M A REALLY SAFE DRIVER.

WHEN I FINALLY GOT OLD ENOUGH TO NOT BE EMBARRASSED TALKING ABOUT THIS STUFF WITH MY SISTER:

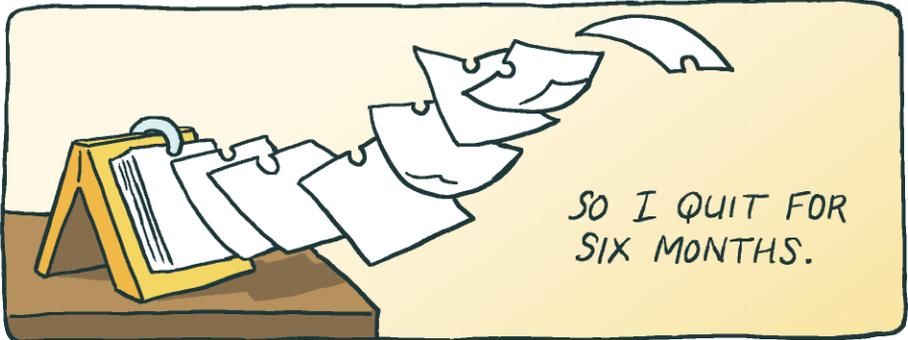
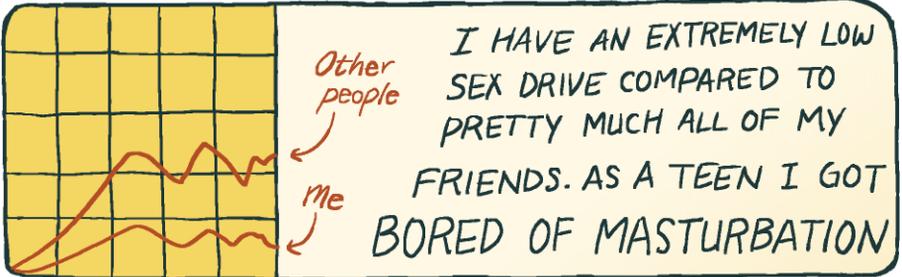


AND SO:





NOPE! CAN'T DO IT!  
I REFUSE!



THE MAIN TRAIT I'VE ALWAYS BEEN  
ATTRACTED TO IS

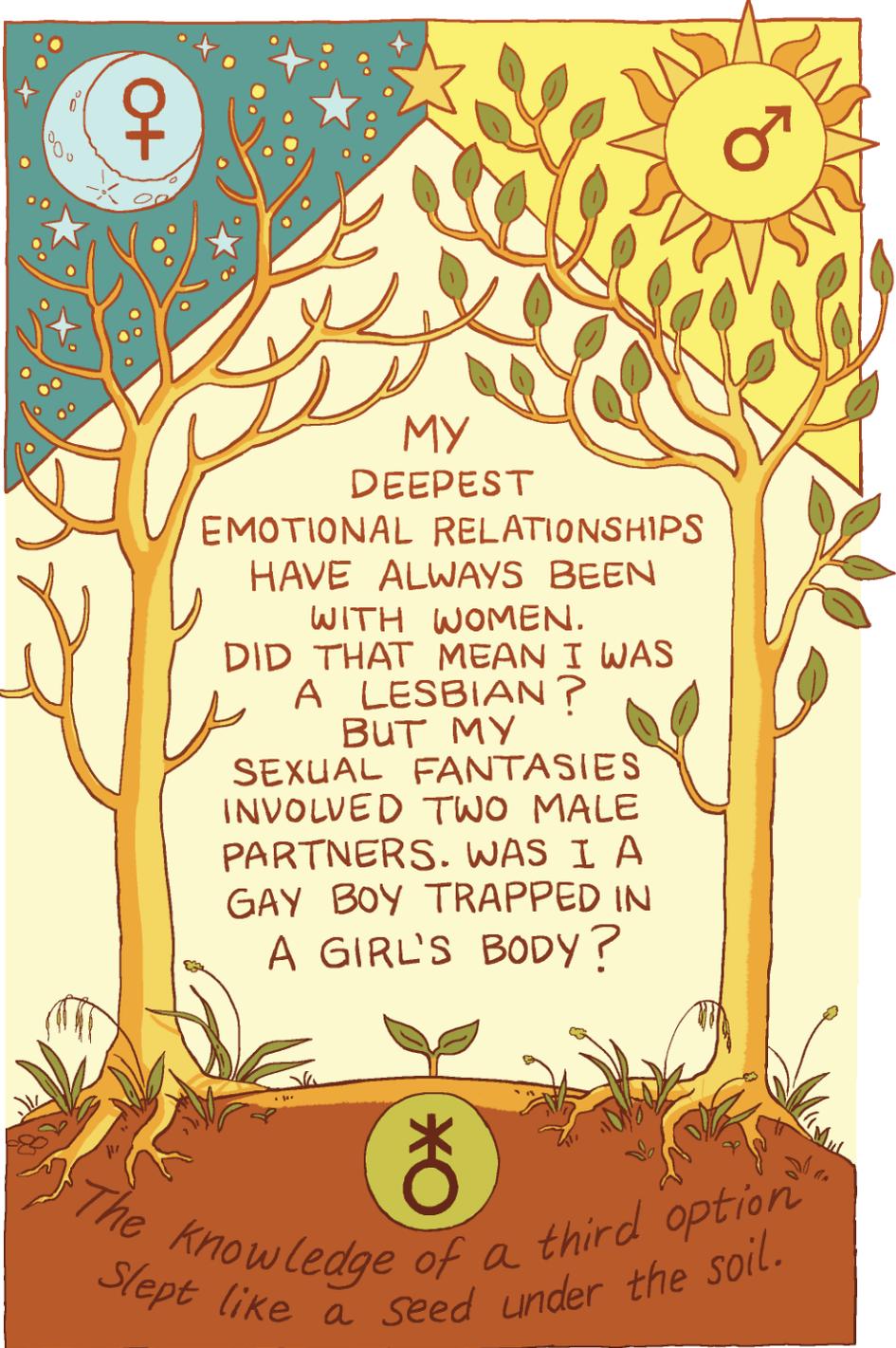
★ ANDROGYNY ★

• DID THE  
GIRL WITH  
A BUZZ CUT  
CATCH MY EYE  
BECAUSE SHE  
WAS A GIRL  
OR BECAUSE SHE  
WAS DRESSED  
AS A BOY? ★

WHICH MADE  
CATEGORIZING  
MY SEXUALITY  
DIFFICULT

• WAS IT HIS SEEMINGLY  
"FEMININE" OR "MASCULINE"  
QUALITIES THAT DREW ME  
TO THE LONG-HAIRED  
• BOY IN CHOIR?



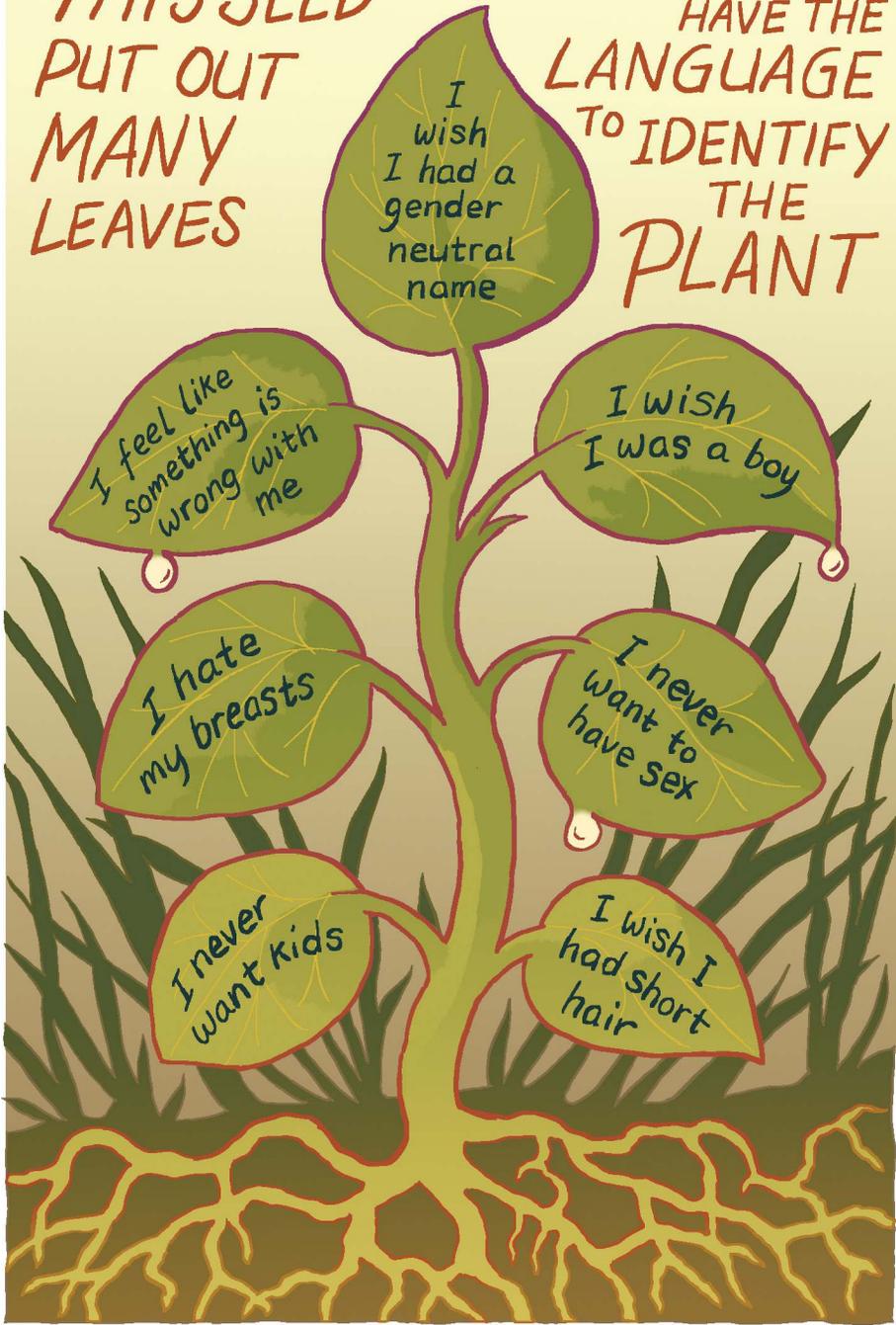


MY  
DEEPEST  
EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS  
HAVE ALWAYS BEEN  
WITH WOMEN.  
DID THAT MEAN I WAS  
A LESBIAN?  
BUT MY  
SEXUAL FANTASIES  
INVOLVED TWO MALE  
PARTNERS. WAS I A  
GAY BOY TRAPPED IN  
A GIRL'S BODY?

The knowledge of a third option  
slept like a seed under the soil.

THIS SEED  
PUT OUT  
MANY  
LEAVES

BUT I DIDN'T  
HAVE THE  
LANGUAGE  
TO IDENTIFY  
THE  
PLANT



I wish  
I had a  
gender  
neutral  
name

I feel like  
something is  
wrong with  
me

I wish  
I was a boy

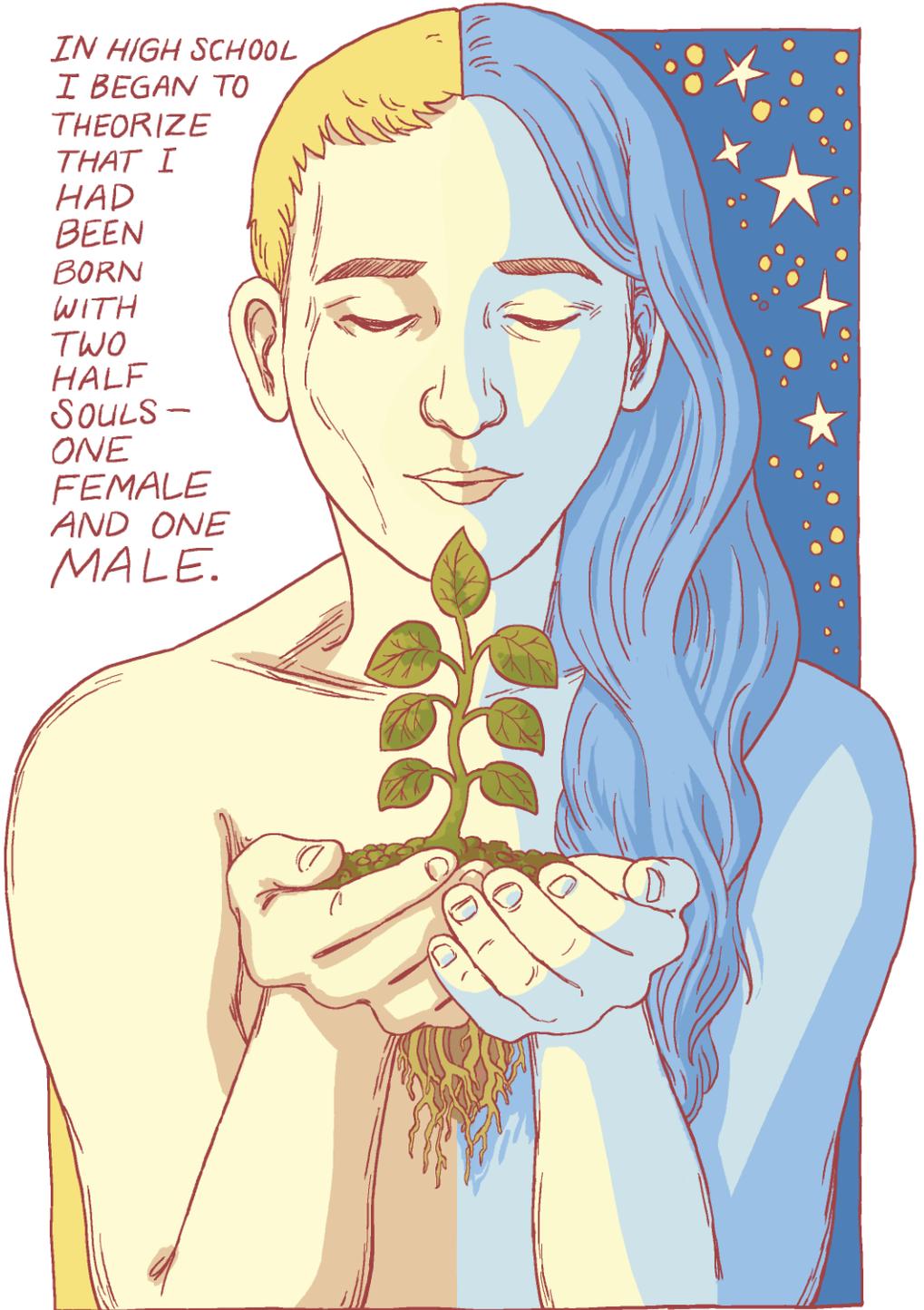
I hate  
my breasts

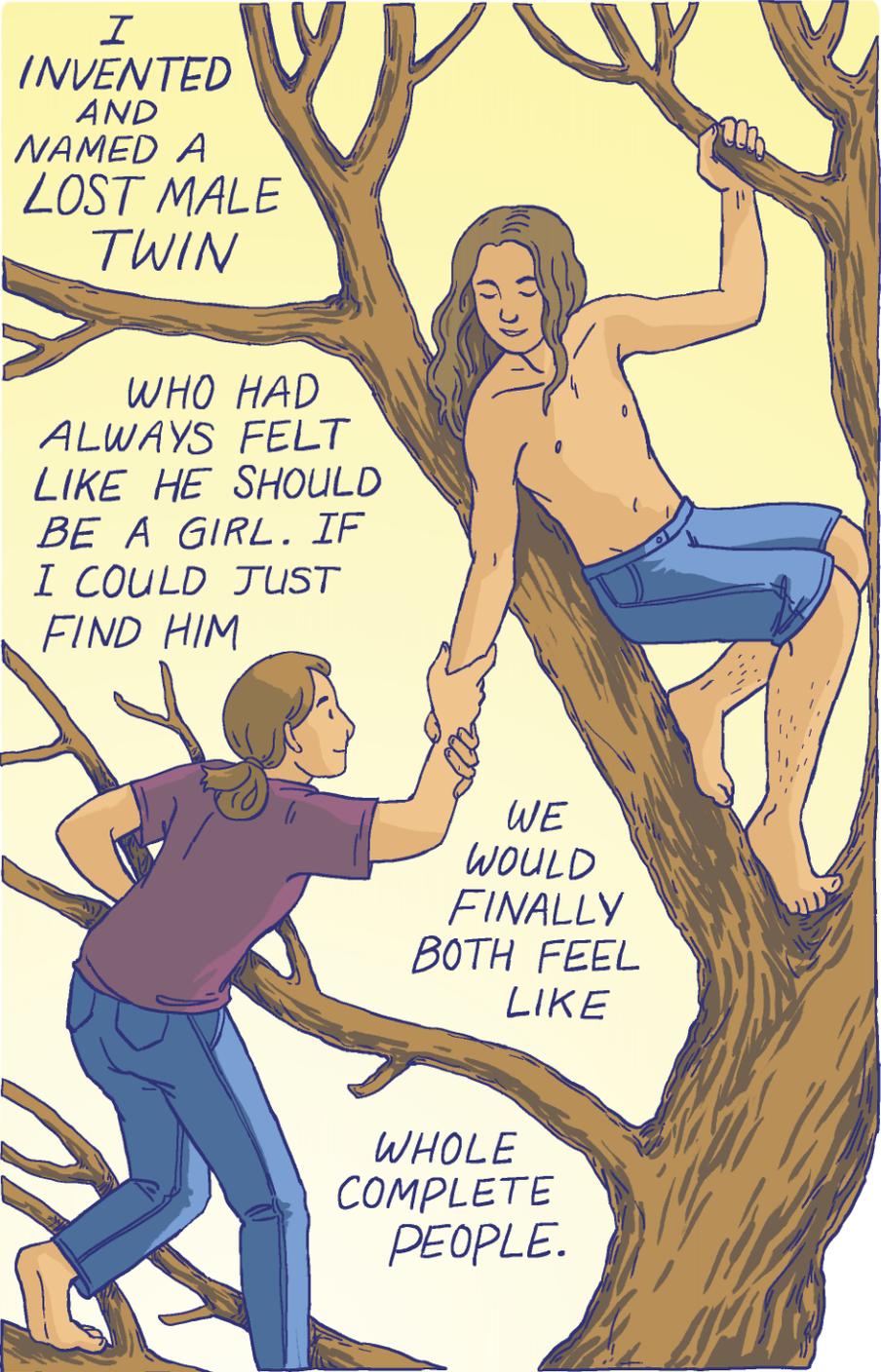
I never  
want to  
have sex

I never  
want kids

I wish I  
had short  
hair

IN HIGH SCHOOL  
I BEGAN TO  
THEORIZE  
THAT I  
HAD  
BEEN  
BORN  
WITH  
TWO  
HALF  
SOULS -  
ONE  
FEMALE  
AND ONE  
MALE.





I  
INVENTED  
AND  
NAMED A  
LOST MALE  
TWIN

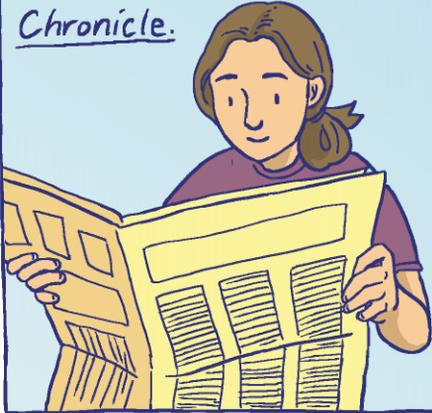
WHO HAD  
ALWAYS FELT  
LIKE HE SHOULD  
BE A GIRL. IF  
I COULD JUST  
FIND HIM

WE  
WOULD  
FINALLY  
BOTH FEEL  
LIKE

WHOLE  
COMPLETE  
PEOPLE.

# THE WORD "TRANSGENDER" ENTERED MY VOCABULARY IN THE SUMMER BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL.

I noted in a journal entry on June 9, 2003 that there had been a lot of articles on gay issues in the San Francisco Chronicle.



Including a profile of a lesbian whose partner was taking testosterone and had switched to male pronouns.



Over the next year, I also found articles on transgender magic in my mom's pagan magazines and gender rants in a pile of feminist zines given to me by a friend.

But where do I fit into all of this?





If I was trans, wouldn't I be saying, "I am a boy" not "I wish I was a boy"?

Wouldn't I be more SURE?

And if I am trans...

Am I a gay boy

Or a straight boy

Or a bisexual boy

Except I'm not if I ever want to have sex...

But I don't FEEL like a girl!

What am I?

If I'm asexual does my gender even matter?

Does that mean I'm asexual?

I can't be a trans girl!

I DIDN'T SHARE THESE QUESTIONS, EVEN WITH MY FRIENDS FROM QSA. INSTEAD I POURED MY CONFUSION INTO JOURNAL AFTER JOURNAL.



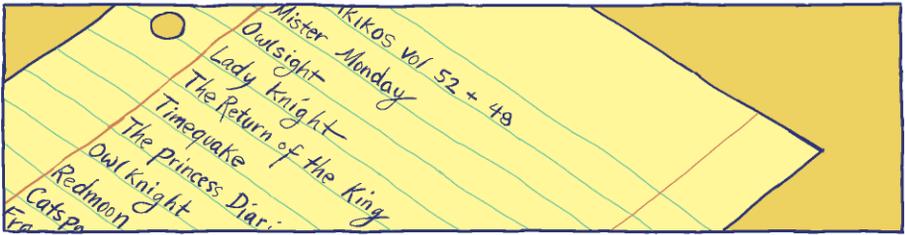
14 NOTEBOOKS, 2001-2014



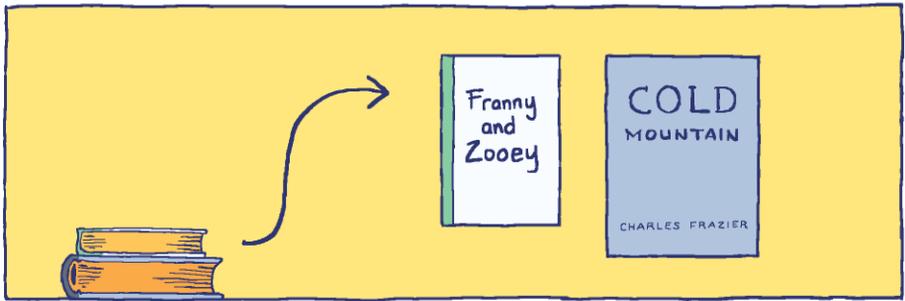
QUOTE FROM AN ENTRY I WROTE IN 2004, WHEN I WAS 15:

I don't want to be a girl. I don't want to be a boy either. I just want to be myself.

AFTER NINTH GRADE I DECIDED TO KEEP A LIST OF ALL THE BOOKS I READ OVER THE SUMMER.



I INCLUDED THE TWO BOOKS I READ FOR SCHOOL



& ALL THE ONES I READ JUST FOR MYSELF.



BY THE END OF THE SUMMER, MY LIST HAD 68 TITLES, READ IN 82 DAYS.



MY PARENTS WERE DULY IMPRESSED



AND MY FRIENDS ROLLED THEIR EYES.

I was so pleased I decided to maintain the list INDEFINITELY.



AT  
THE



LIBRARY



I BEGAN TO DISCOVER  
MORE  
AND  
MORE



QUEER BOOKS.

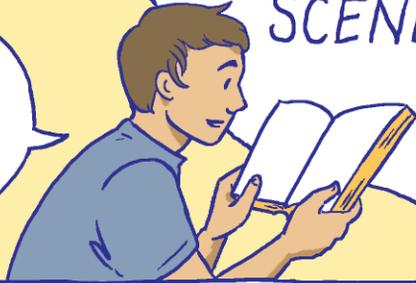


INCLUDING THE FAKE  
SERIES BY SANAMI MATOH  
& THE LAST  
HERALD MAGE  
TRILOGY  
BY  
MERCEDES  
LACKEY

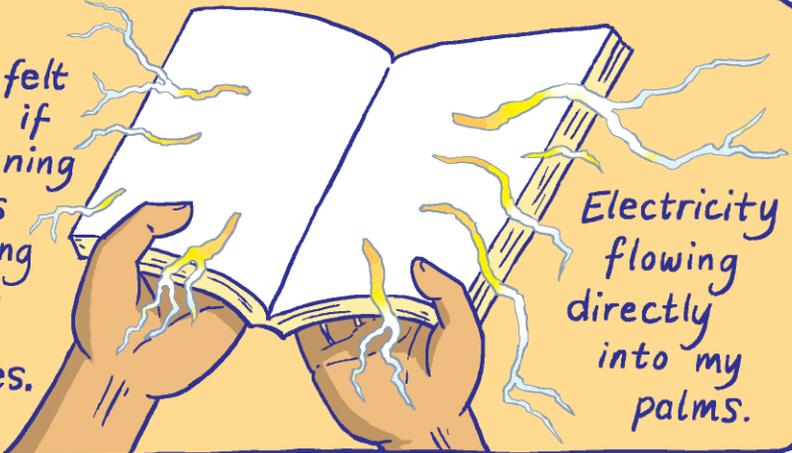


BOTH OF WHICH INCLUDE  
VERY TAME GAY SEX  
SCENES.

I can still  
recall a specific  
physical sensation I  
got from reading  
these scenes—

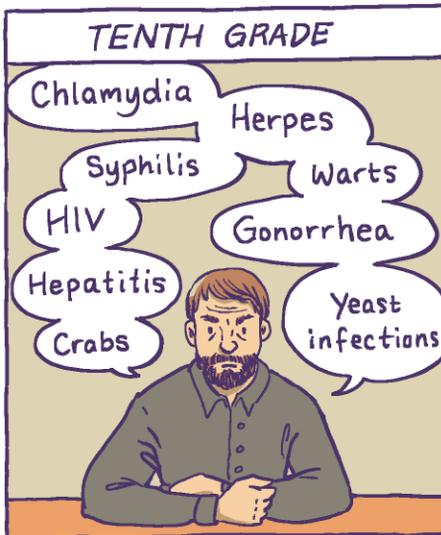
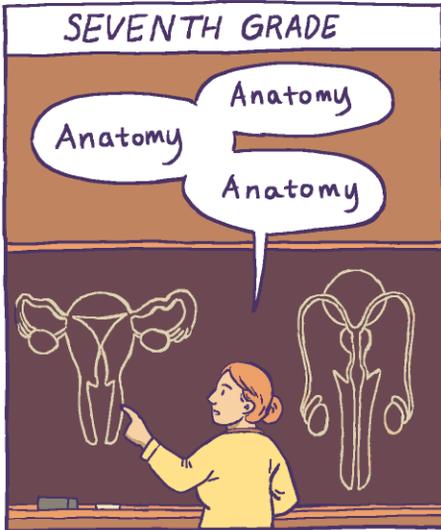


It felt  
as if  
lightning  
was  
coming  
from  
the  
pages.



Electricity  
flowing  
directly  
into my  
palms.

THE MAIN KIND OF SEX DISCUSSED IN MY FOUR DIFFERENT SEX ED CLASSES WAS SEX INVOLVING A PENIS AND A VAGINA.



THAT KIND OF SEX SOUNDED RISKY & UNAPPEALING.

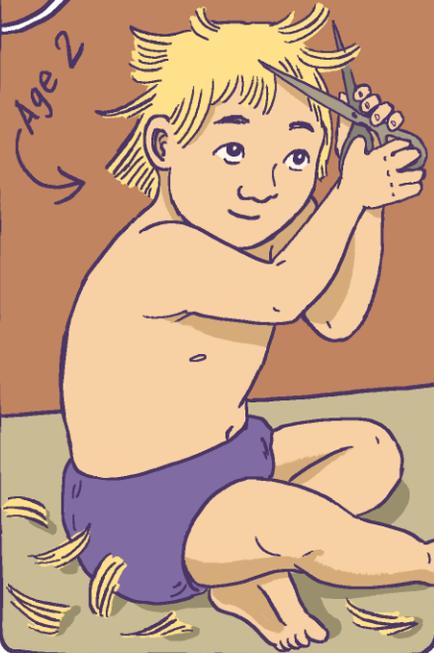
DURING MY ENTIRE  
CHILDHOOD  
MY MOM  
DID ALL  
OF OUR  
FAMILY'S  
HAIRCUTS.

Just trim the  
ends please.



(ASIDE FROM THE TWO MEMORABLE  
OCCASIONS MY SISTER CUT HER OWN.)

Phoebe!! NO!



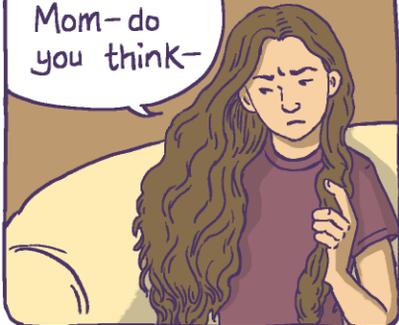
Not again!!



BY MY 16<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY, MY HAIR WAS DOWN TO MY WAIST. I'D WANTED IT SHORT FOR YEARS, BUT (UNLIKE PHOEBE) I HAD A HARD TIME WORKING UP THE NERVE.



Um-hey- Mom-do you think-



For my birthday, could I get my hair cut at a salon?



Alright.

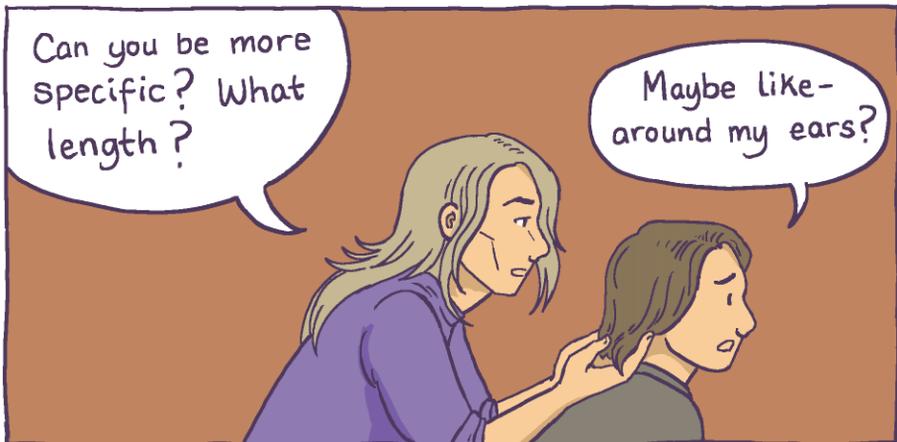
WHEN THE DAY CAME I WAS SO NERVOUS.

I'd never had my hair cut professionally before.



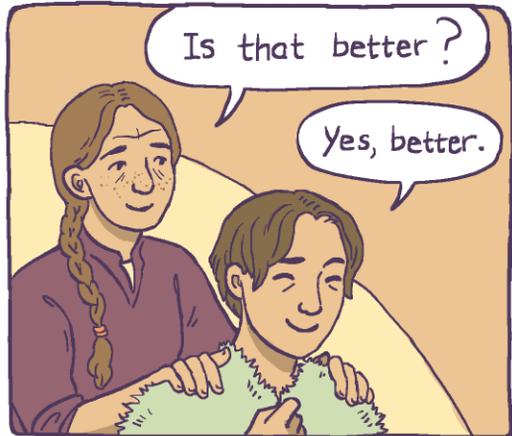
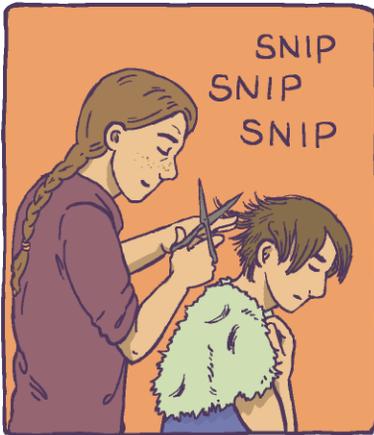
So, what are we doing today?





SHE GAVE ME A BASIC A-LINE BOB. I HATED IT INSTANTLY.





TWICE OVER THE FOLLOWING SUMMER, I GOT ASKED:



I LOVED IT.

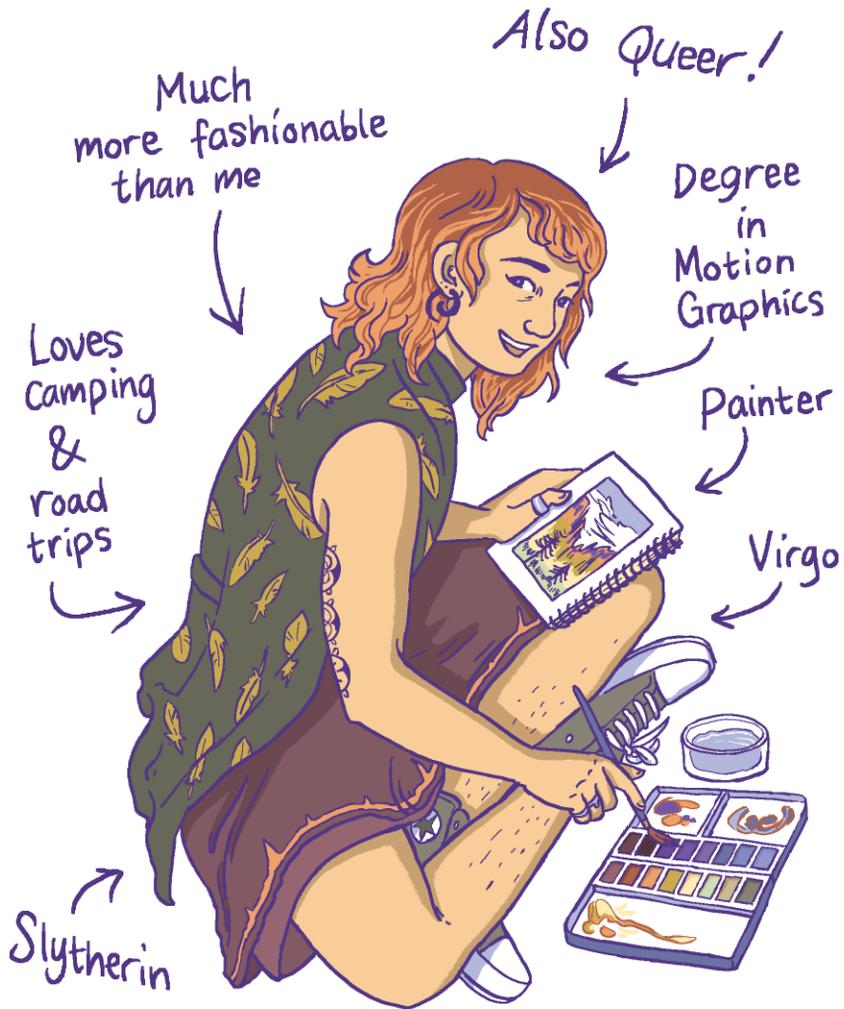
WITH PUBERTY I HAD DEVELOPED  
AN INTENSE DISLIKE OF BEING  
PHOTOGRAPHED.  
THIS FADED AFTER  
I CUT MY HAIR.



I WANTED TO  
KEEP IT SHORT  
BUT NO LONGER  
TRUSTED SALONS.  
MY SISTER  
BECAME MY REGULAR  
HAIRDRESSER.

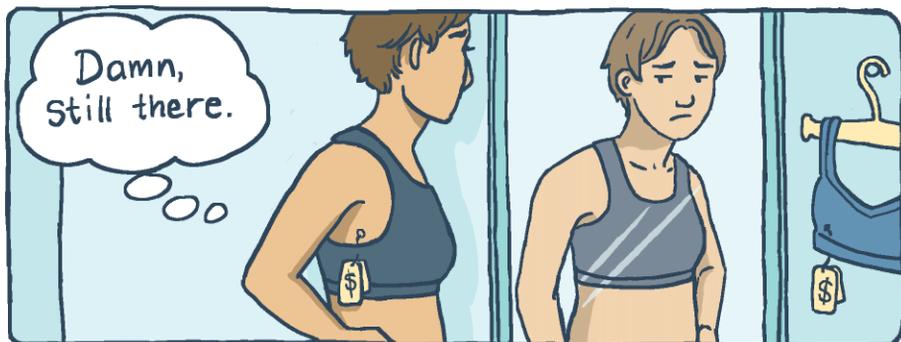
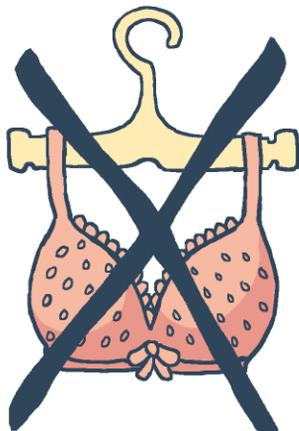


# MY SISTER CIRCA 2018



I LUCKED OUT SO HARD IN THE SIBLING LOTTERY ♡ ♡ ♡

SHE HAS PROVIDED YEARS OF MORAL SUPPORT DURING MY LEAST FAVORITE KIND OF SHOPPING.



WHEN I WAS CAST IN A MINOR ROLE  
IN A CLASS PLAY IN TENTH GRADE,  
PHOEBE ASKED ME:



SHE KNEW BEFORE I DID.

DURING THE FOLLOWING YEAR, AN AMBITIOUS NEW DRAMA TEACHER DECIDED TO DIRECT OUR SCHOOL'S FIRST EVER MUSICAL.

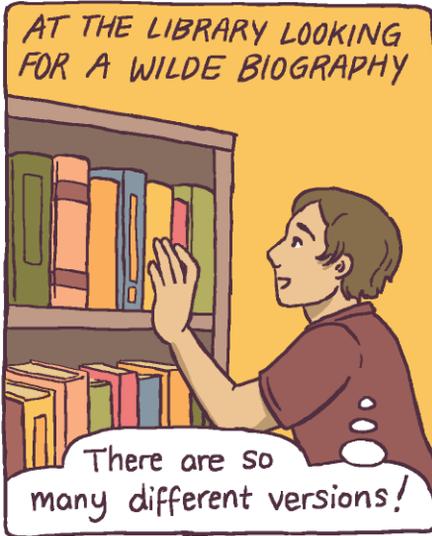


I JOINED THE BACKSTAGE CREW AND FULFILLED A STEREOTYPE BY FALLING IN LOVE WITH THEATER.

ON A THEATER TRIP I GOT TO SEE  
The Importance of  
Being Earnest



KICK-  
STARTING MY  
LIFELONG LOVE OF  
OSCAR WILDE.



SHORTLY  
AFTER MY  
JUNIOR YEAR,  
I GOT A  
CALL FROM  
A FRIEND  
WHO'D HAD A  
CRUSH ON  
ME FOR AT  
LEAST TWO  
YEARS.

Would you go  
on a date-  
just one date-  
with me before  
I leave for  
college?



THE  
LAST TIME  
HE HAD  
ASKED ME  
OUT, I'D  
SAID NO.

It would  
just be one  
date.



Then he's  
leaving for  
a year.



It would  
make him  
really  
happy...









# LATER, TALKING TO MY BEST FRIEND



# TWO DREAMS I HAD IN HIGH SCHOOL

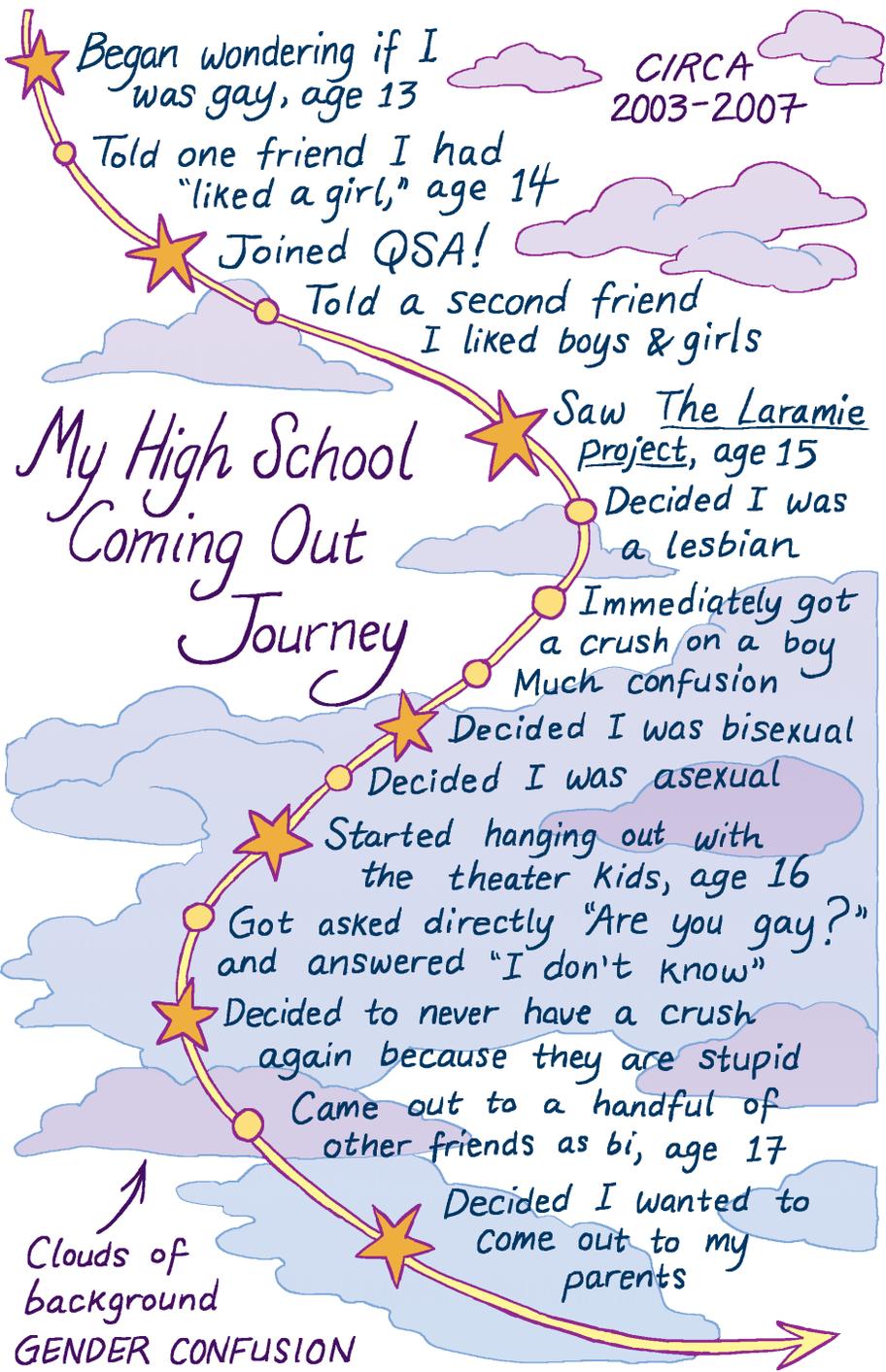


IN THE MORNING



BUT  
WHEN  
I  
LOOKED  
CLOSER—





Began wondering if I was gay, age 13

CIRCA 2003-2007

Told one friend I had "liked a girl," age 14

★ Joined QSA!

Told a second friend I liked boys & girls

# My High School Coming Out Journey

★ Saw The Laramie Project, age 15

Decided I was a lesbian

Immediately got a crush on a boy  
Much confusion

★ Decided I was bisexual

Decided I was asexual

★ Started hanging out with the theater kids, age 16

Got asked directly "Are you gay?" and answered "I don't know"

★ Decided to never have a crush again because they are stupid

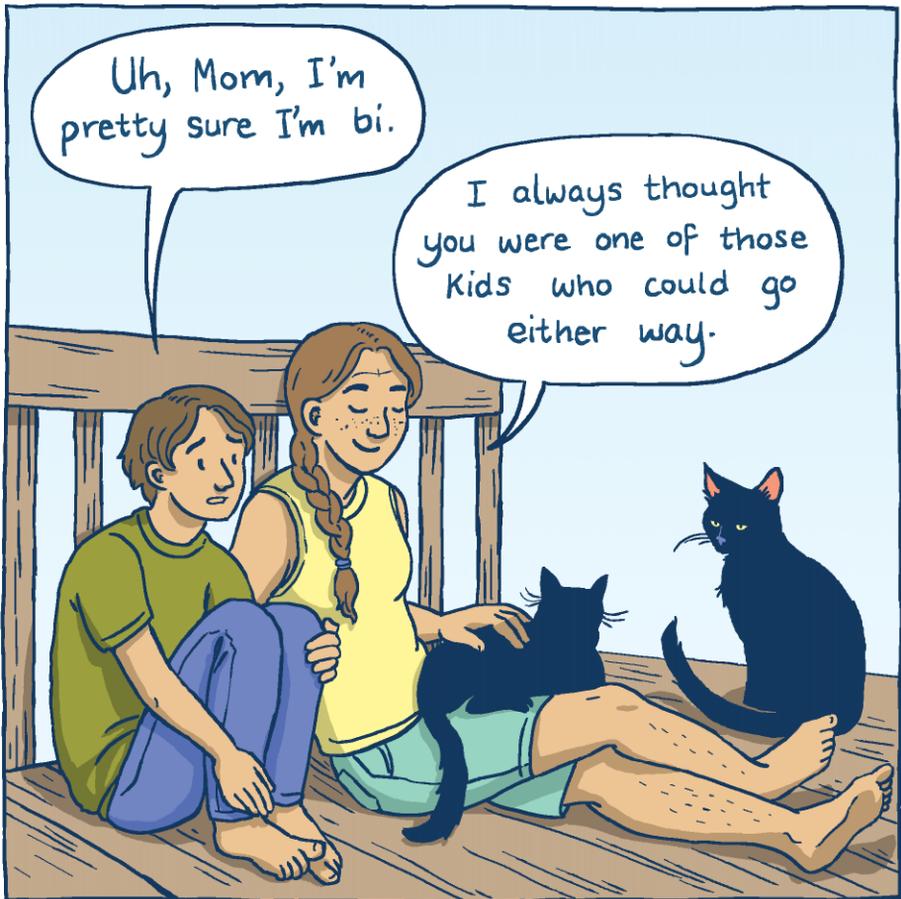
Came out to a handful of other friends as bi, age 17

★ Decided I wanted to come out to my parents

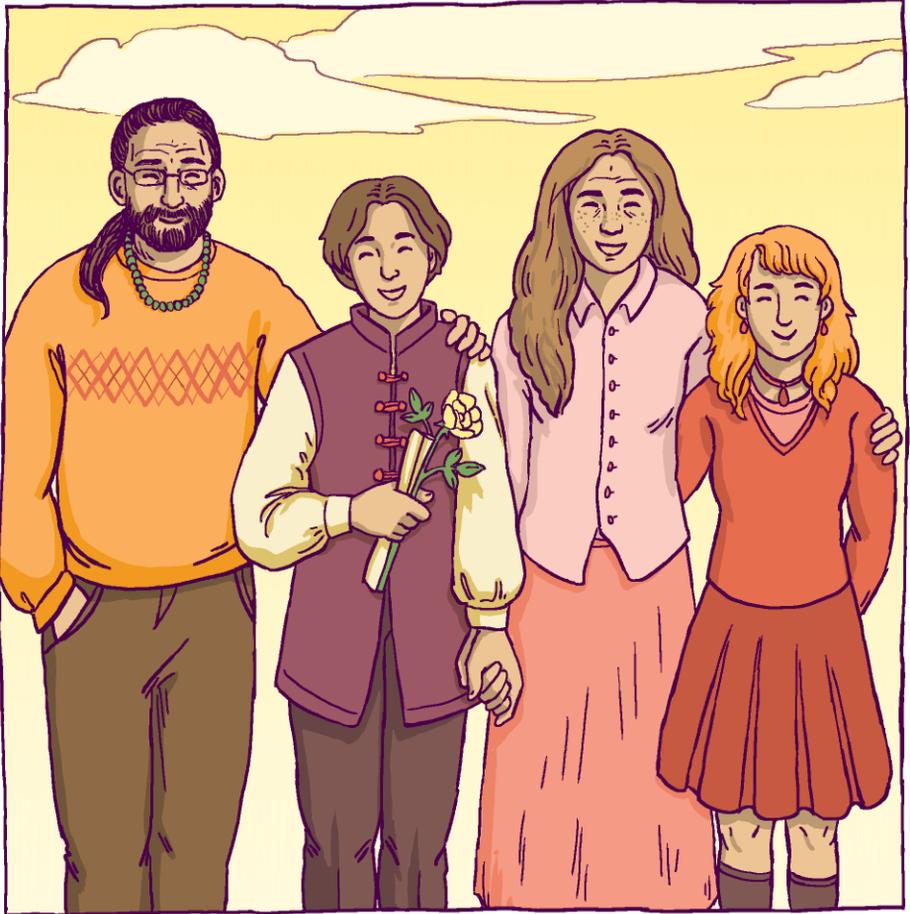
Clouds of background GENDER CONFUSION

March 3, 2007

... And I talked to my mom. On Friday. We were on the deck. I was nervous, but I needn't have been. I felt much better having told her, though.



AT MY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION IN 2007, I WAS THE ONLY A.F.A.B. (ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH) GRADUATE WHO WORE PANTS.

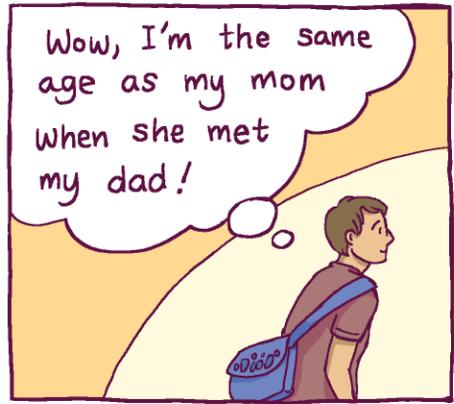
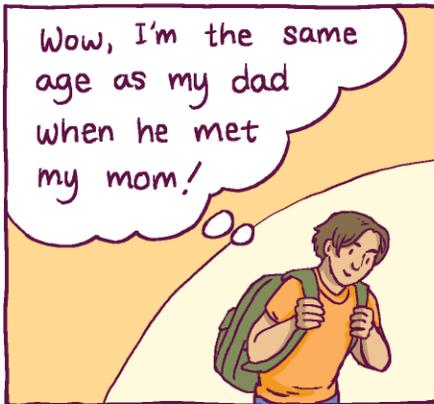


SOMETHING I LOST WHEN I CUT MY HAIR: VISUAL UNITY WITH MY LONG-HAIRED FAMILY. THINGS I GAINED: CONFIDENCE, HAPPINESS.

# MY PARENTS MET WHEN THEY WERE IN COLLEGE



WHEN I REACHED EACH OF THESE RESPECTIVE AGES, I REMEMBER THINKING:



NOW I FIND MYSELF THINKING:



# Meet the ART STUDENT meme!

AGE: 18

GENDER: ?

ZODIAC: Taurus

YEAR OF: Snake

HOUSE: Ravenclaw

MYERS-BRIGGS: ISTJ

STRENGTHS:

Drawing, Reading, Writing

WEAKNESSES:

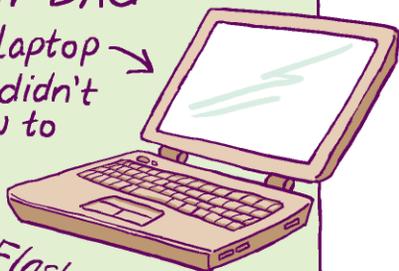
Math, Technology, Pop culture

I just discovered Deviant Art!



## IN MY BAG:

My first Laptop  
(But I didn't know how to type)



Flash drive I didn't know how to use



Dorm Key, I was afraid of losing - (at home in the country we didn't lock our doors)



Biography of Andy Warhol

DURING MY FIRST FEW WEEKS OF COLLEGE,  
EVERYONE AROUND ME SEEMED TO GLOW WITH



I REMEMBER  
THINKING...

The person I spend the  
rest of my life with might  
be here, in this cafeteria.



BUT SLOWLY



THE GLOW



FADED.

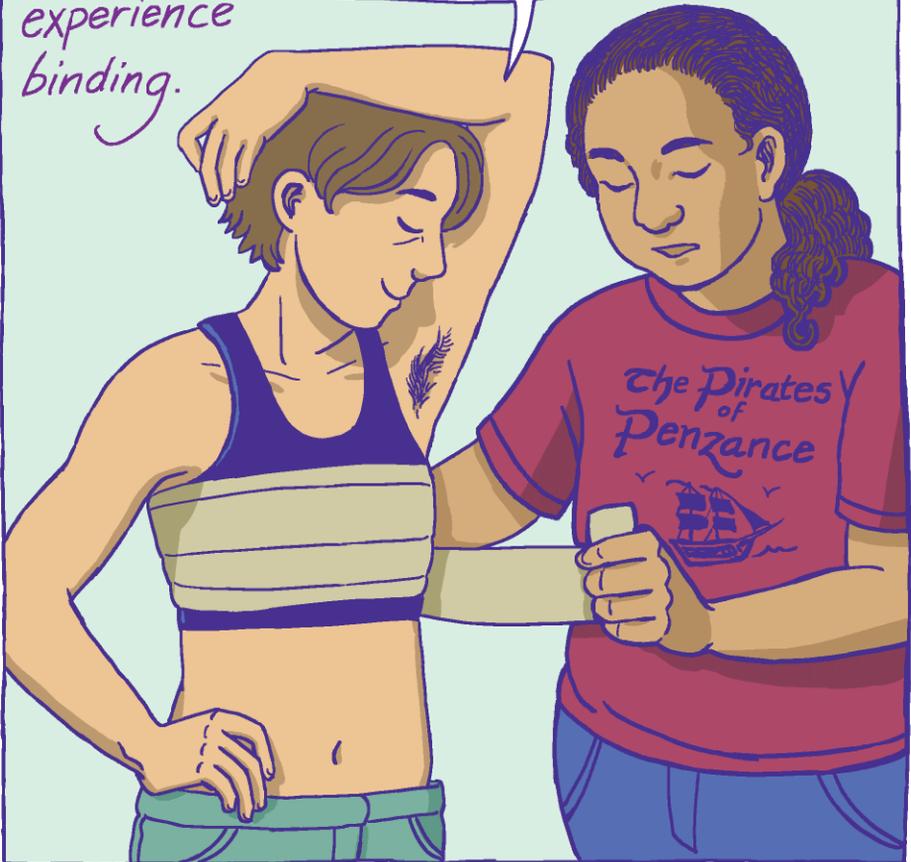


I JOINED THE DRAMA CLUB BUT WAS DISAPPOINTED TO FIND IT SMALLER THAN THE ONE AT MY HIGH SCHOOL.

However, this lack of resources led to me getting cast in a male role—and my first experience binding.

No, it's good.

How does that feel? Too tight?

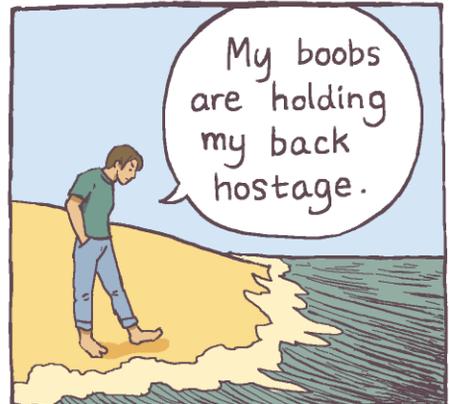
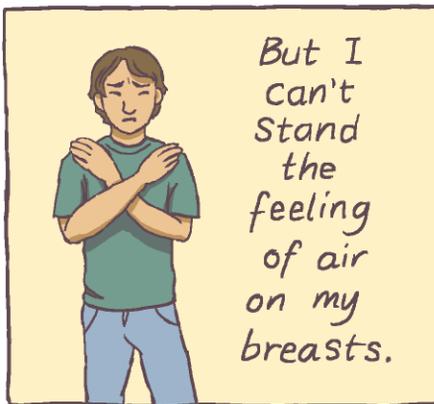
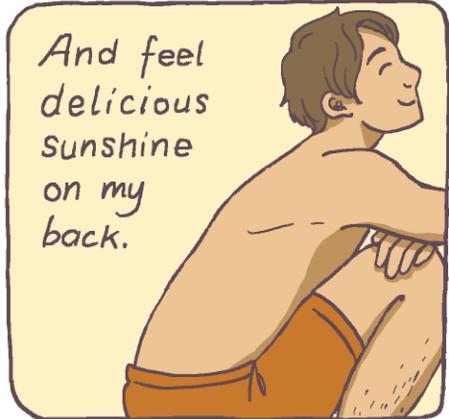
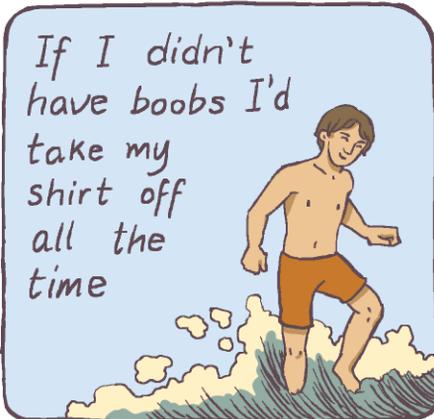


AT THE TIME I DIDN'T  
KNOW THE DANGERS OF  
ACE BANDAGE  
BINDING—  
IT CAN LEAD TO  
CRACKED  
RIBS.



A few weeks after the show ended, I went to a formal school event wearing the ACE bandage and a too-long tie. What had felt liberating onstage felt embarrassing in public. I put the bandage away and never wore it again.

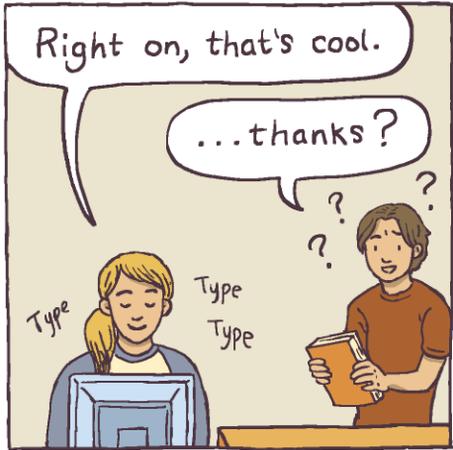




A BINDER WOULD HAVE HELPED BUT IN COLLEGE I DIDN'T YET KNOW THEY EXISTED.

# I GOT A WORK-STUDY JOB AT THE LIBRARY.





Well, she's the first person I've come out to at work! I wonder if she will tell anyone? Kind of weird, but I'm glad I said it.

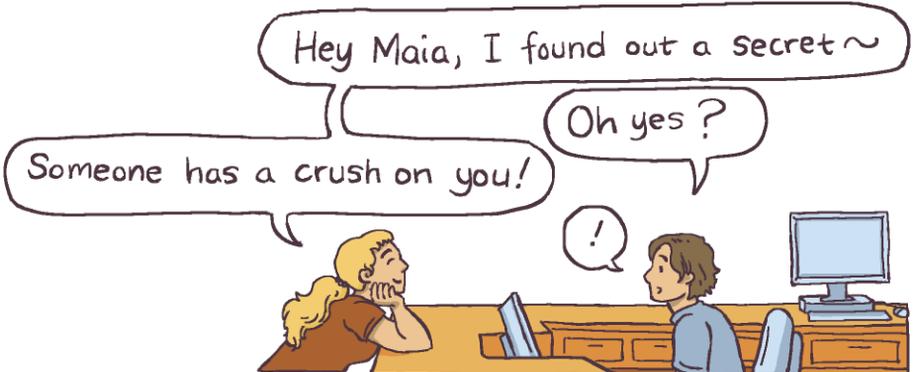


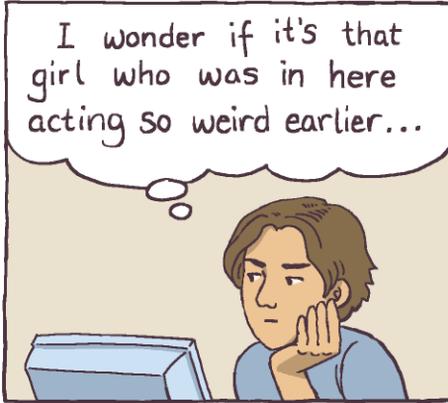
AT  
WORK,  
A FEW  
DAYS  
LATER



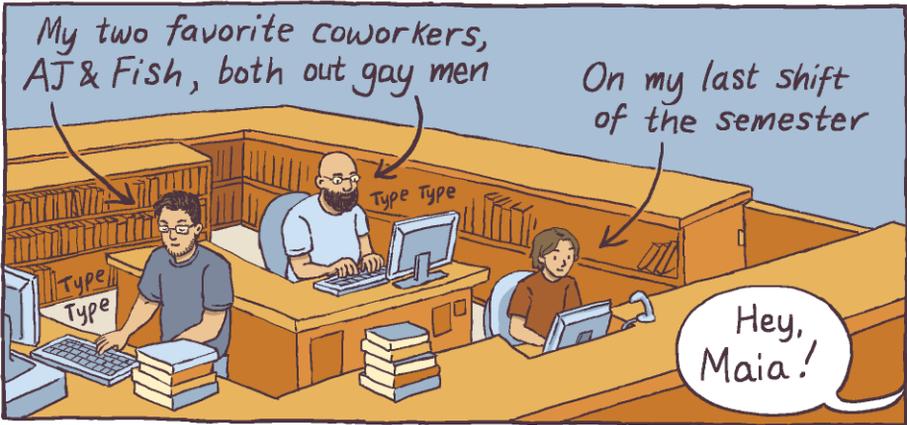


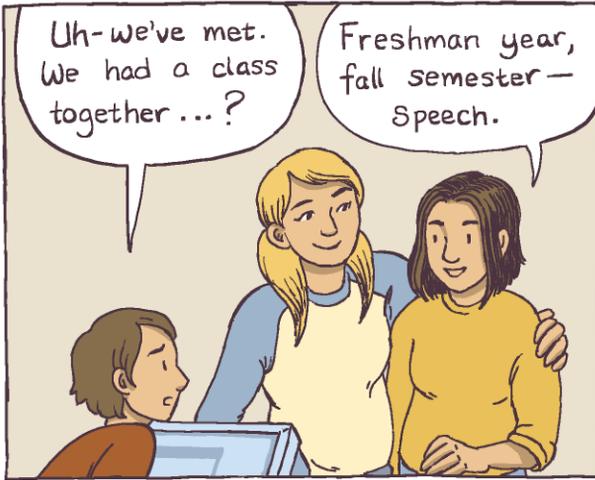
A FEW MINUTES LATER I SAW THEM LEAVE

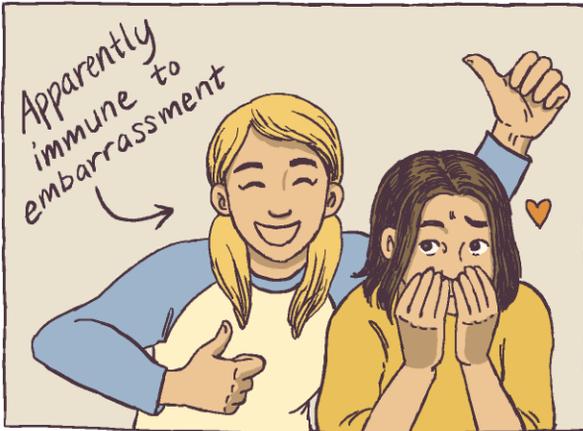




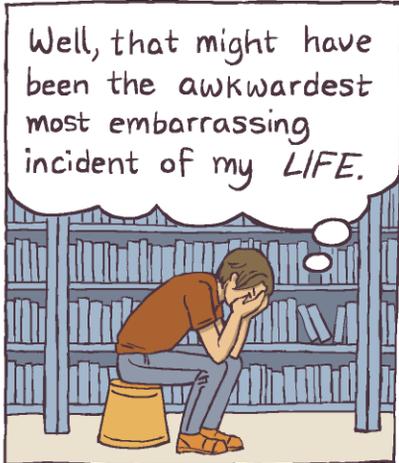
## THE LAST DAY BEFORE WINTER BREAK







HIDING UPSTAIRS IN THE LIBRARY STACKS



I DECIDED TO SEND HER A FACEBOOK REQUEST WITH A NOTE:



SHE ACCEPTED AND WROTE BACK:

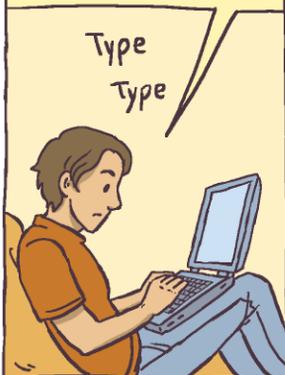
I was going to thank her, actually, for finally getting me to talk to you.



I'm kind of shy... it's hard to start conversations with people like you.



What do you mean, people like me?



People I think are cute.



I don't know how to respond!





I TOLD MY DAD ABOUT THE SITUATION.

I got hit on by a few guys when I was in college. At first I thought it was a little weird.



But if you aren't interested, you can always say "No."



I found the concepts of dating & relationships DEEPLY confusing.



What, exactly, did people get out of them?

I ENDED UP CALLING HER ON THE PHONE.



I've never even been on a date. Have you...dated very much?



I've never dated a girl, but I had a boyfriend for three years.



We broke up because of you, actually.

WHAT?



He read my diary. He found an entry I'd written about you.

WHOA



We had a huge fight, and then we broke up.

That's crazy, I'm sorry.



Yeah. Well, maybe it's for the best.

I guess?



You are the first girl I've let myself have feelings for. I really want to try being with you.



Will you give me a chance?

Umm



This girl has been on a year-long emotional journey entirely based on just the idea of me.

She doesn't even know who I am. Honestly— this isn't about me at all.



Ummm... what does "relationship" mean to you?



Companionship. Texting when you are apart, holding hands when you are together.



Having each other's back.

This all sounds like friendship to me...



Plus that magical knowledge that you are the most special person to your partner.



And maybe being physically intimate.

Right. Sex. Gross.



All of the parts of a relationship that sound good I have already with my best friend.



And all of the other parts... I don't want.



I'm - I'm sorry. I guess I'm just not interested in a relationship right now...



AFTER  
THE  
CALL  
ENDED



INTEREST IN EROTIC GAY FICTION HAS BEEN SO PREVALENT IN MY FRIENDSHIPS, ONE COULD MISTAKE IT FOR A PREREQUISITE.



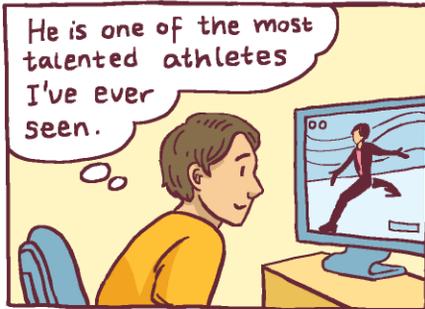
IN FACT, I'M SHOCKED WHEN A FRIEND SAYS:



LATER SHE DESCRIBED HERSELF AS HETERO-FLEXIBLE AND TRIED TO EXPLAIN WHY SHE LIKED LESBIAN PORN MORE THAN GAY PORN.



DURING THE 2010 WINTER GAMES, ALL OF MY ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON:



AND SO :





I WENT ALL OUT FOR MY COSTUME.

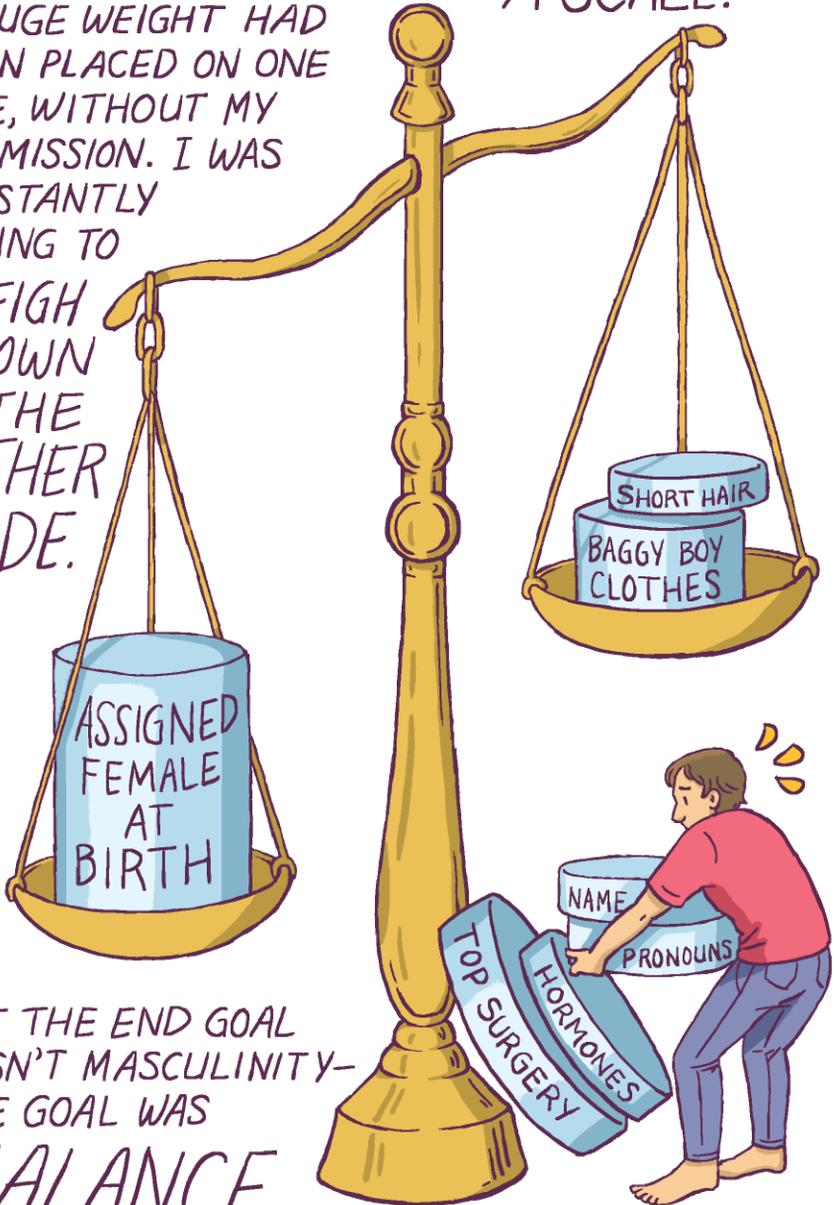


# THE CLEAREST METAPHOR

I HAD FOR MY OWN GENDER IDENTITY  
IN COLLEGE WAS THE IMAGE OF A SCALE.

A HUGE WEIGHT HAD  
BEEN PLACED ON ONE  
SIDE, WITHOUT MY  
PERMISSION. I WAS  
CONSTANTLY  
TRYING TO

WEIGH  
DOWN  
THE  
OTHER  
SIDE.



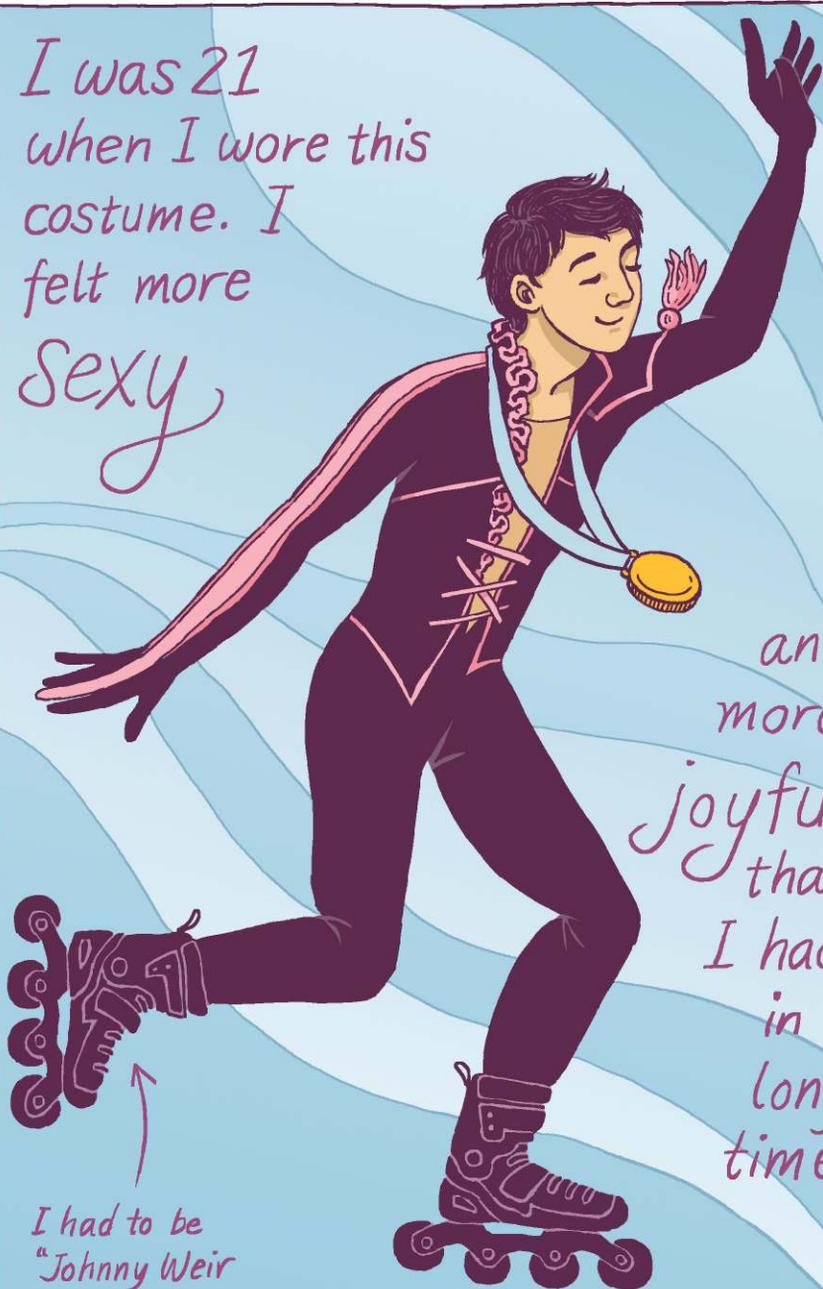
BUT THE END GOAL  
WASN'T MASCULINITY—  
THE GOAL WAS

**BALANCE.**

DRESSING UP AS A MALE CHARACTER LET ME PLAY WITH THE IDEA OF HOW I WOULD CHOOSE TO PRESENT MYSELF IF THE WEIGHT OF ASSIGNED SEX HAD BEEN PLACED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SCALE.



I was 21  
when I wore this  
costume. I  
felt more  
sexy,

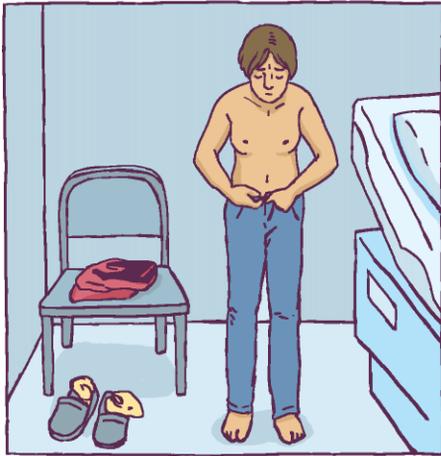


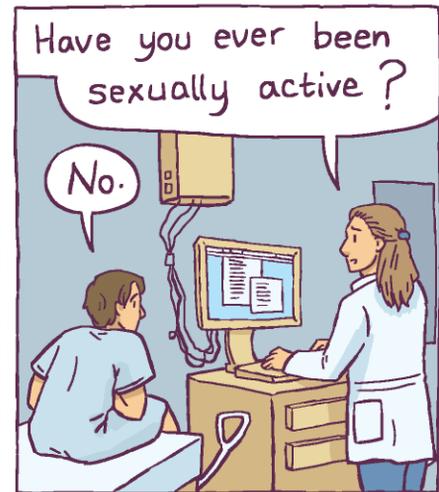
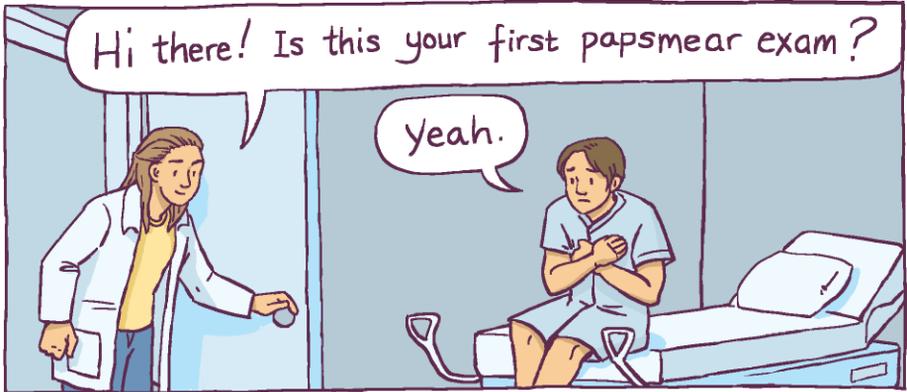
and  
more  
joyful  
than  
I had  
in a  
long  
time.

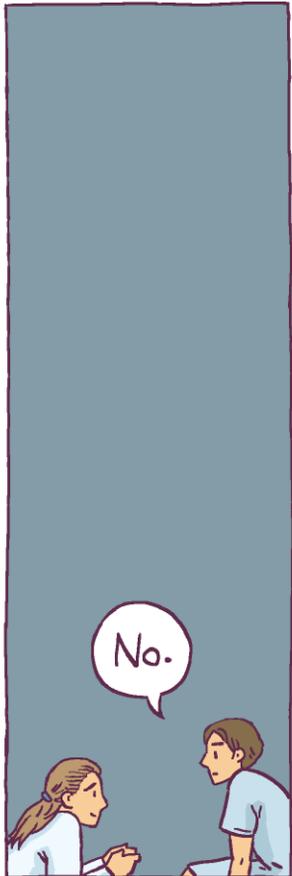
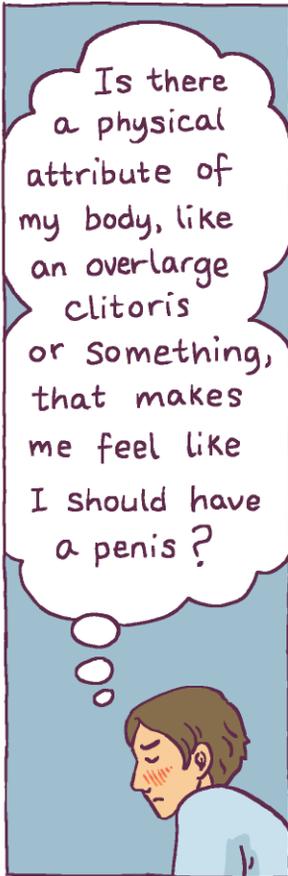
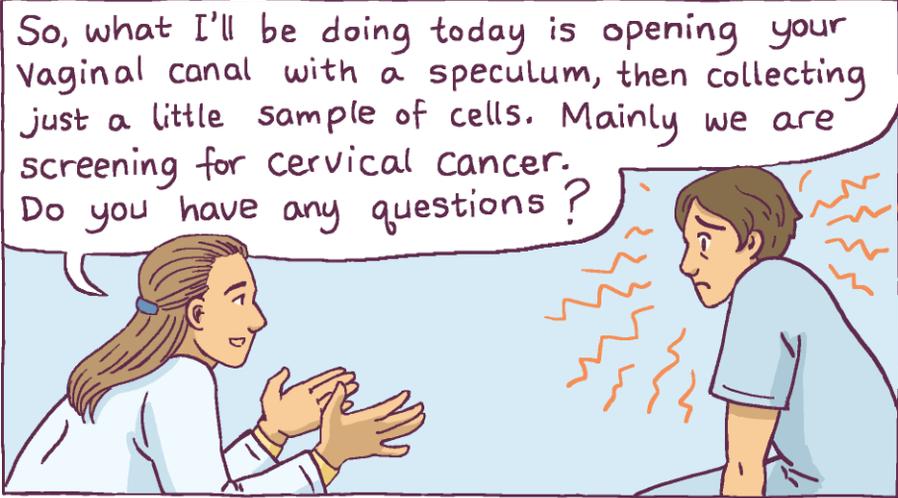
I had to be  
"Johnny Weir  
on Wheels"  
because I cannot ice skate to save my life.

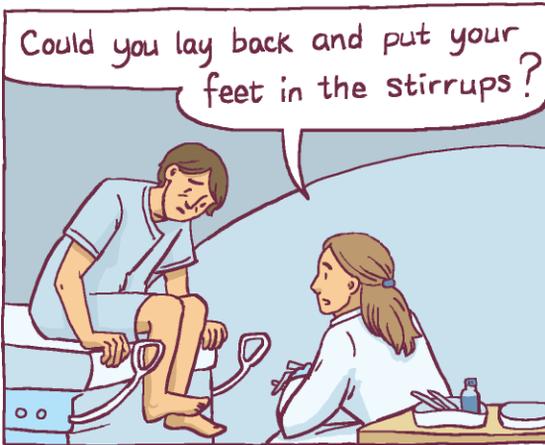
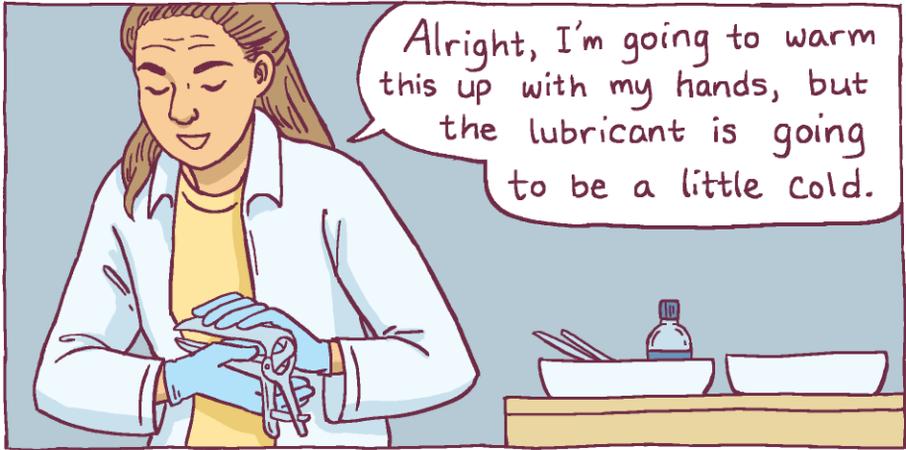
# REALITY REINSERTED ITSELF.



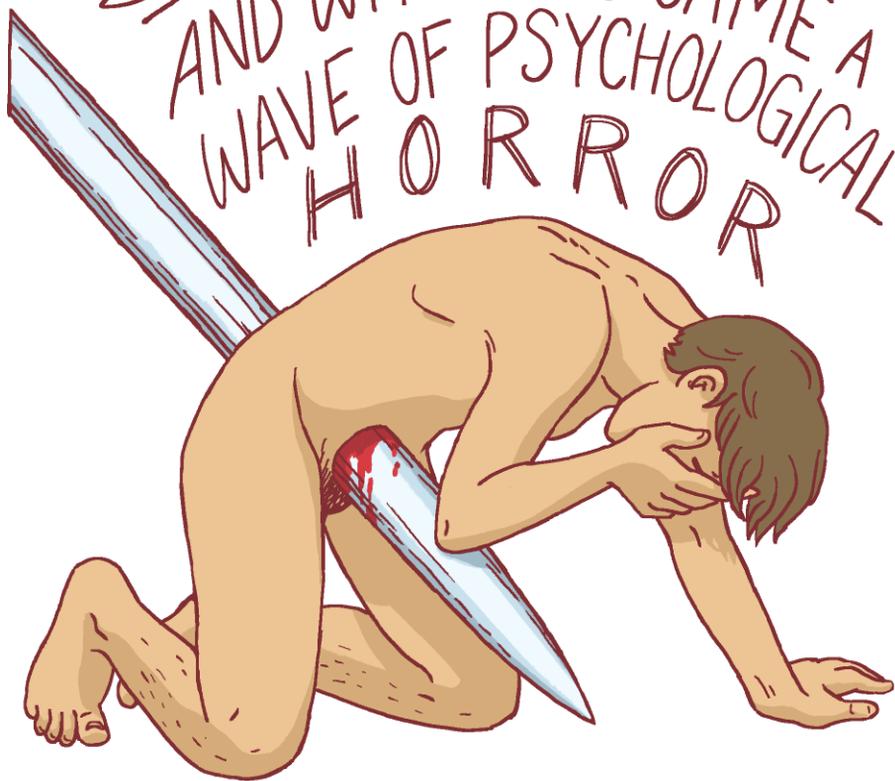








AS IF I FELT  
BEEN STABBED  
THROUGH MY  
ENTIRE  
BODY  
AND WITH THIS CAME A  
WAVE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL  
HORROR



AT THE REALIZATION THAT THINGS CAN  
GO INSIDE MY BODY

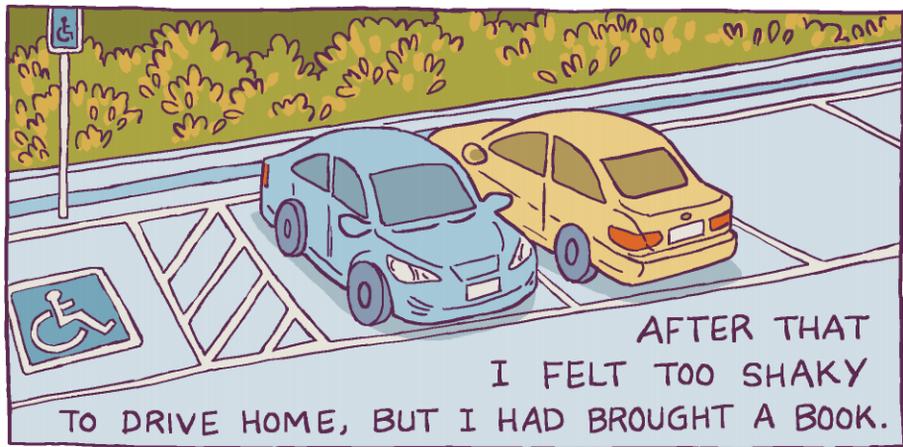
OF COURSE I ALREADY  
KNEW THIS FACT INTELLECTUALLY;

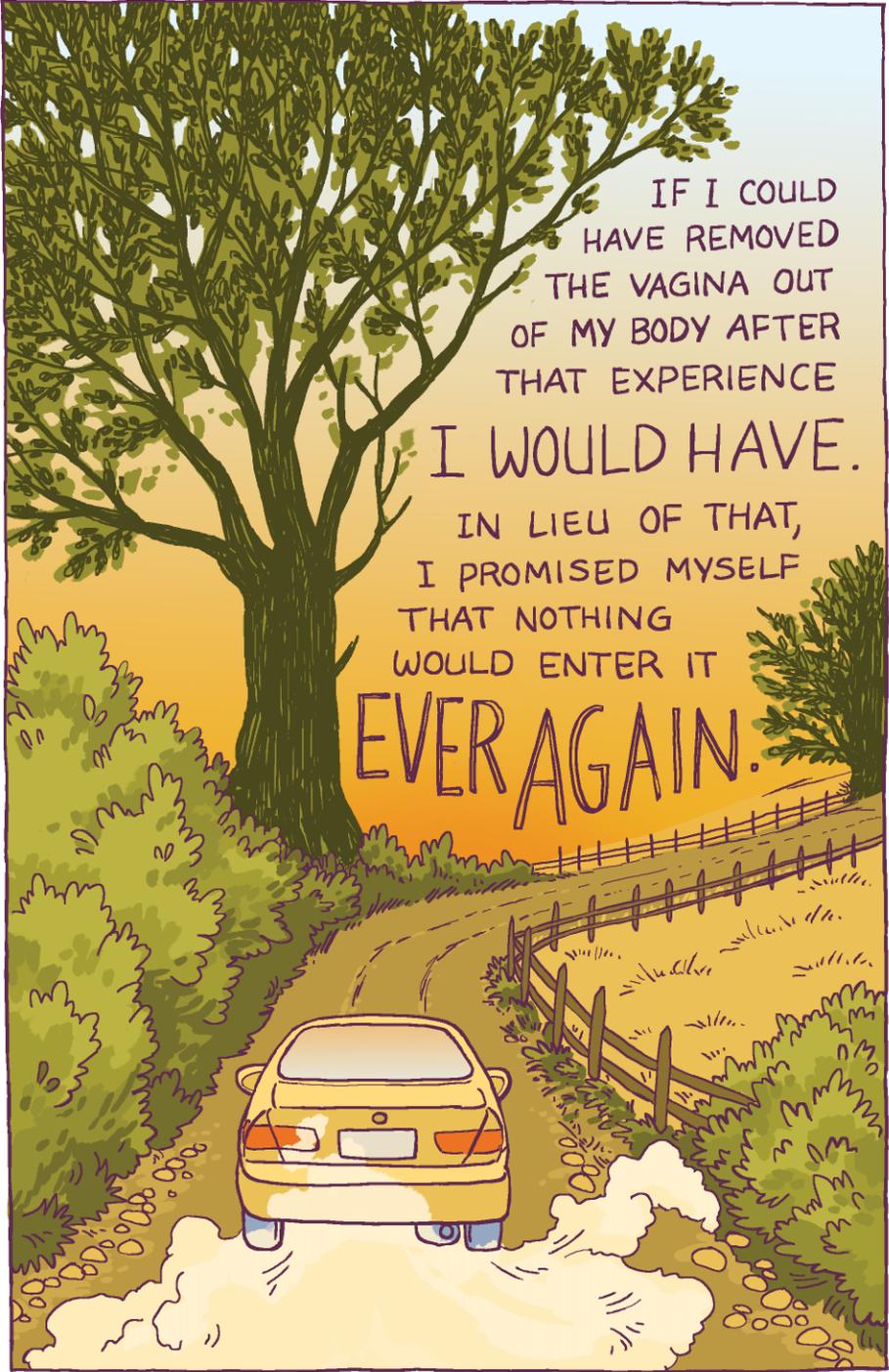
*embodied*

KNOWLEDGE IS  
AN ENTIRELY  
DIFFERENT  
MATTER.



WHAT MY BODY  
TOLD ME WAS THAT THIS  
INTRUSION OF THE OUTSIDE  
WORLD INTO MY INTERNAL PHYSICAL  
BEING WAS WRONG ON A LEVEL  
TOO DEEP FOR WORDS.





IF I COULD  
HAVE REMOVED  
THE VAGINA OUT  
OF MY BODY AFTER  
THAT EXPERIENCE  
I WOULD HAVE.

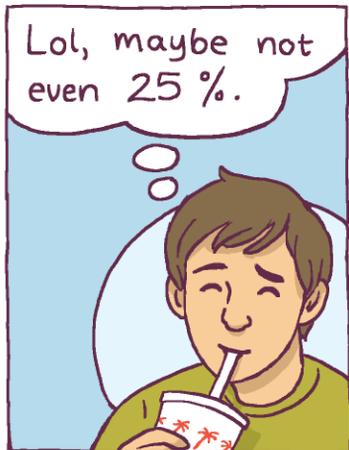
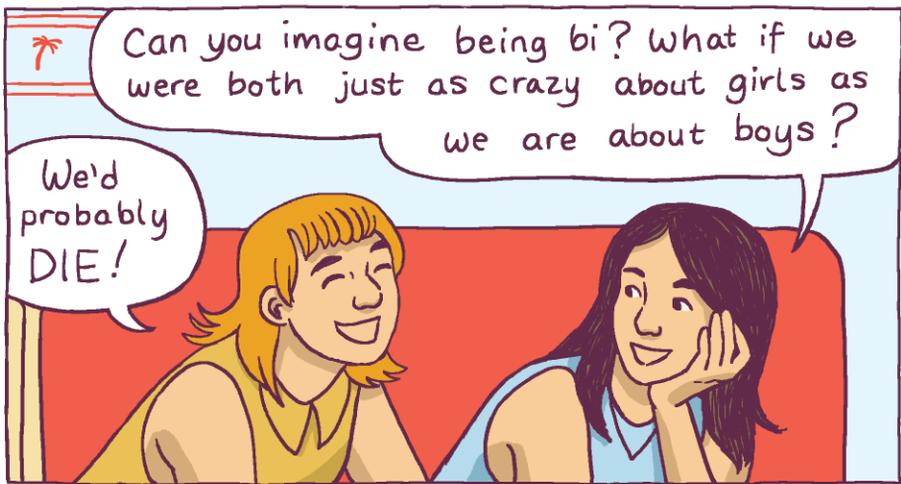
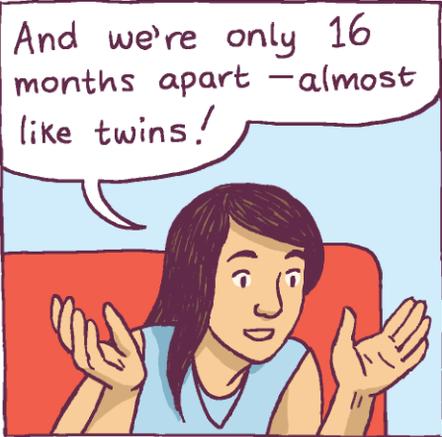
IN LIEU OF THAT,  
I PROMISED MYSELF  
THAT NOTHING  
WOULD ENTER IT  
EVER AGAIN.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM COLLEGE, I TRIED TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH SOME OF MY FELLOW ART MAJORS BY GETTING TOGETHER WITH THEM ONCE A MONTH.



I WAS SURPRISED BECAUSE I THOUGHT I'D BEEN OUT IN COLLEGE. I'D MADE A POINT OF POSTING ABOUT IT ON FACEBOOK EVERY YEAR ON NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY, AND I WENT TO PRIDE IN THE CITY. I GUESS SOME PEOPLE MISSED THE MEMO.

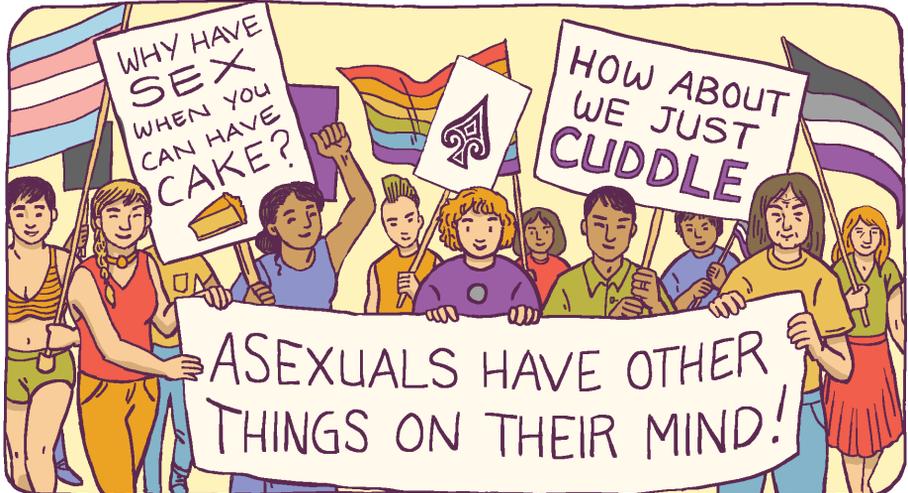




WHEN I WAS 14 OR SO I TOLD A CLOSE FRIEND



I REMEMBER MY FIRST YEAR AT S.F. PRIDE THINKING THAT THE ASEXUAL GROUP HAD THE BEST SIGNS.



ALISON BECHDEL WRITES IN FUN HOME ABOUT DISCOVERING MASTURBATION SOON AFTER HER FIRST PERIOD (PAGE 170).



I DIDN'T KNOW THEN THAT THERE WAS A WORD FOR THE ODDLY GRATIFYING MOTION OF ROCKING BACK AND FORTH IN MY CHAIR AS I DREW AT MY DESK.

I DISCOVERED IT AT AROUND THE SAME AGE, FOLLOWED BY THE FURTHER REALIZATION THAT MY ABILITY TO BECOME AROUSED WAS GOVERNED BY A STRICT LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS.



An elaborate fantasy based on Plato's Symposium.

THE MORE I HAD TO INTERACT WITH MY GENITALS THE LESS LIKELY I WAS TO REACH A POINT OF ANY SATISFACTION. THE BEST FANTASY WAS ONE THAT DIDN'T REQUIRE ANY PHYSICAL TOUCH AT ALL.

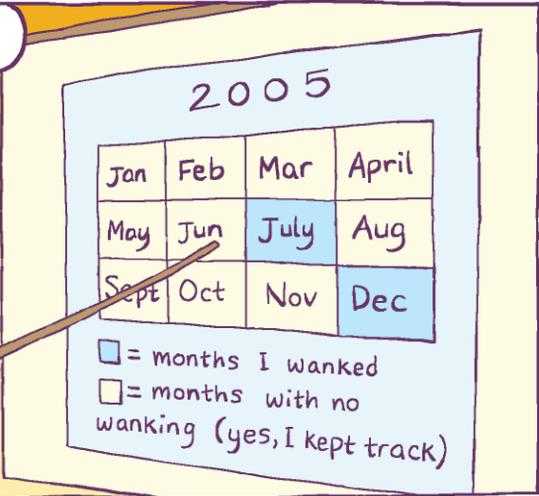
I've always thought I had a fairly vivid imagination-



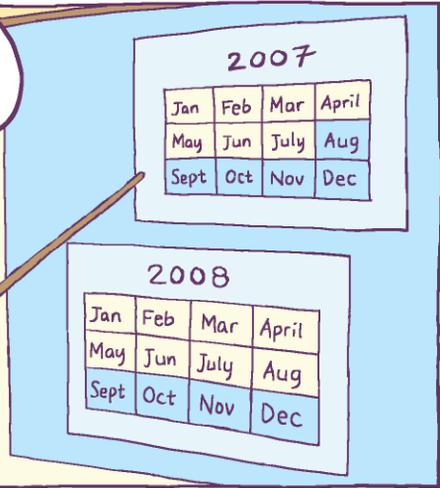
But around age 16 I felt like I'd run through literally every sexual fantasy. I'd used up all of my material.

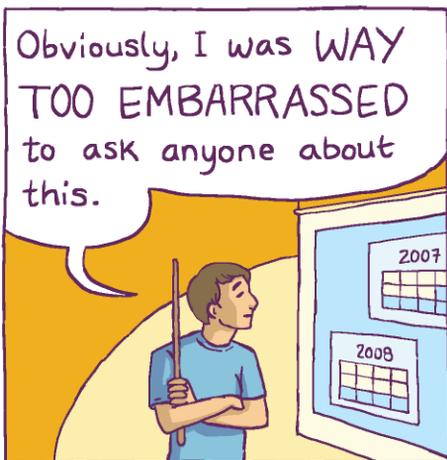
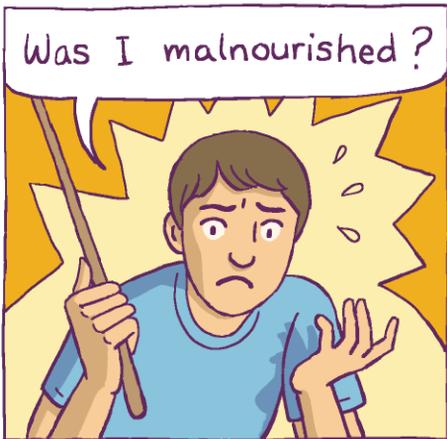
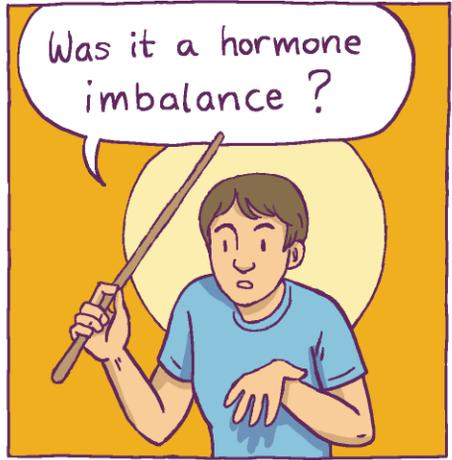


This led to the first time I gave up wanking.



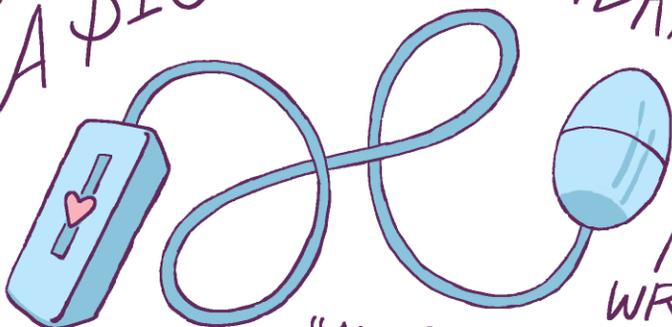
In 2005, this hiatus was intentional. But (next slide please) I had two more unintentional hiatuses in college.





IN 2013, I DISCOVERED ERIKA MOEN'S WEBCOMIC OH JOY SEX TOY. IN A COMIC FROM NOVEMBER OF THAT YEAR SHE TALKS ABOUT THE FIRST SEX TOY SHE EVER PURCHASED

★ A \$10 BULLET VIBRATOR ★



MOEN WRITES:

"My first orgasm is still one of my most vivid, lovely experiences. It was the first time I ever loved my body."





A  
FEW  
WEEKS  
LATER  
I  
BOUGHT  
ONE.



I remember leaning in  
my bedroom doorway,  
imagining how good this  
vibrator was going to  
make me feel.

*I GOT  
OFF*

by pressing  
the front  
of my  
jeans,  
the  
unopened  
box in  
my  
hand.



BUT WHEN  
THE TIME  
CAME TO  
ACTUALLY  
TURN IT  
ON ...

I'll try the lowest  
setting? That's  
what Erika used  
in the comic...

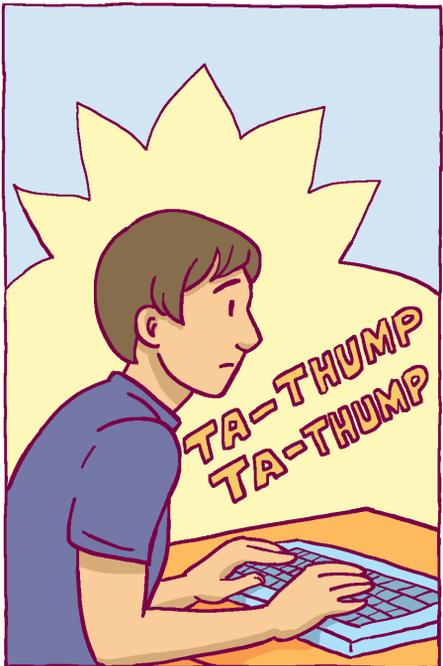
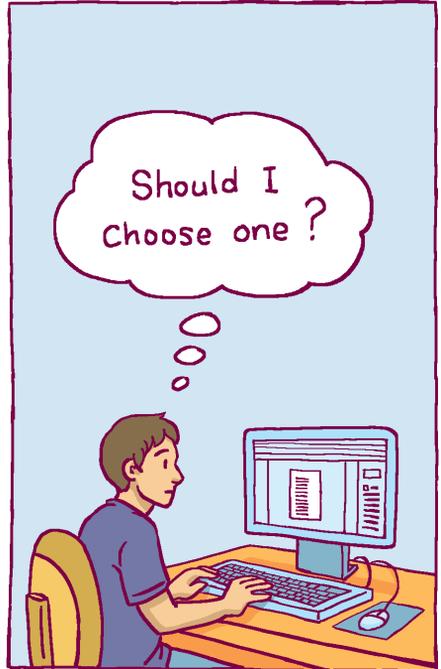
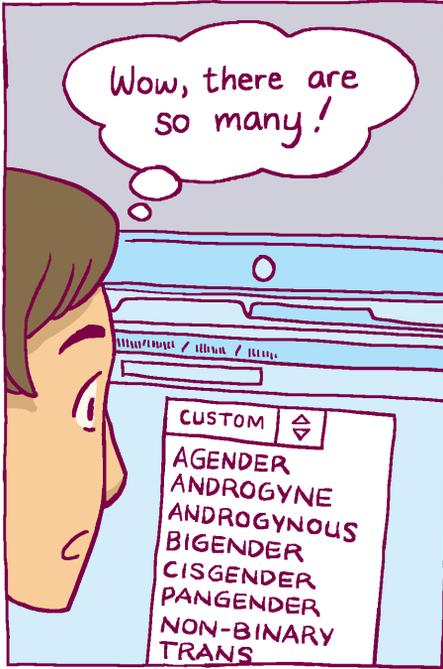




# A LITTLE WHILE LATER



BACK WHEN FB FIRST ADDED MORE GENDER OPTIONS

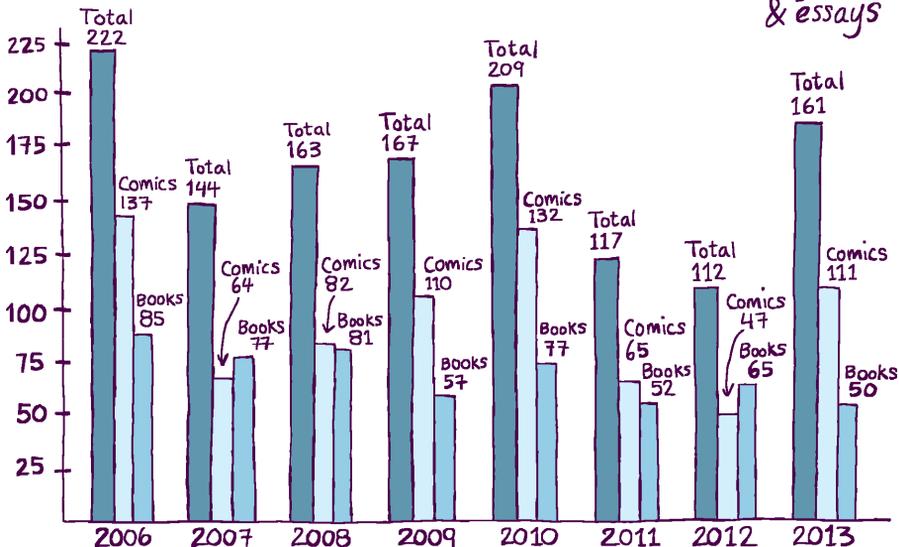
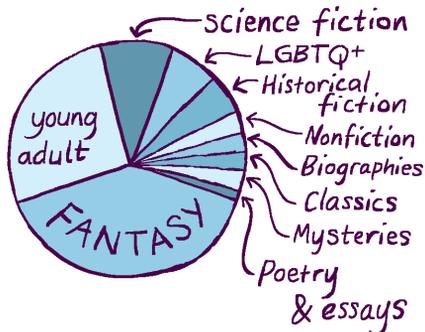
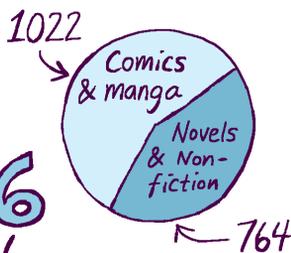


IN JUNE 2014, I CELEBRATED TEN YEARS OF KEEPING MY BOOK LIST BY DRAWING A SHORT COMIC ABOUT IT.



It featured statistics about my decade of reading:

IN TEN YEARS I READ **1786** BOOKS!



## MOST READ WESTERN AUTHORS\*

Neil Gaiman, 37 books read	* These numbers include re-reads
Terry Pratchett, 36 books	
Tamora Pierce, 28	
Lois McMaster Bujold, 26	
Mercedes Lackey, 18	
J.K. Rowling, 17	
Holly Black, 16	
J.R.R. Tolkien, 14	
Roger Zelazny, 13	
U.K. Le Guin, 12	

Between 2004-2014 I read most of the Harry Potter series twice & books 6 & 7 four times each

The Hobbit & the LOTR Trilogy read three times each

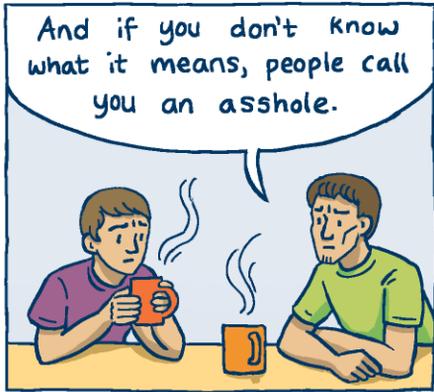
## MOST READ MANGA & MANHWA AUTHORS

CLAMP (a collective of four people) - 77 books
Kosuke Fujishima, 24 - Oh My Goddess!
Rumiko Takahashi, 22 - Ranma 1/2, Inuyasha
Masashi Kishimoto 15 - Naruto
Hiromu Arakawa 14 - Fullmetal Alchemist
Emura 14 - W. Juliet
Maki Murakami 12 - Gravitation
Higuchi Tachibana 12 - Gakuen Alice
Choi Kyung-Ah 12 - Snow Drop
Kiyohiko Azuma 12 - Yotsuba&!, Azumanga Daioh

THIS COMIC WAS VERY WARMLY RECEIVED BY BOOK LOVERS, TEACHERS, AND LIBRARIANS, BUT I REMEMBER THINKING:



NOT LONG AFTER THIS, I HAD A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE WORD "CISGENDER" WITH A CIS, STRAIGHT, MALE FRIEND FROM HIGH SCHOOL.



IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I HAD SAID THAT OUT LOUD.



NATURALLY, I RELAYED THIS WHOLE EXCHANGE TO ANOTHER (QUEER, FEMALE) FRIEND.

... and then I guess I ended up coming out to him, completely by accident! I just said it.

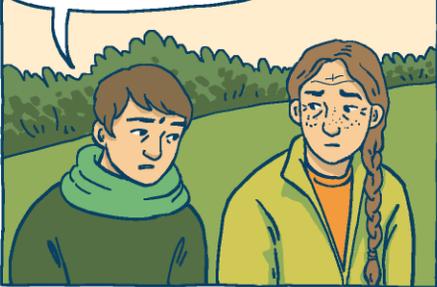


# I DECIDED TO TALK TO MY MOM ABOUT IT.

I know I told you ages ago that I am bi, but I think now that I'm probably genderqueer too?



Well - I'm still sorting out what it means and how to explain it.



But - like I've never felt female, or identified with being female.



Specifically things like - having breasts or having a period ...



No one likes having their period.



But I feel it goes deeper than that for me? My whole life I've wished for a magical way to switch between genders.



So that you could be male sometimes?

Sort of, but not exactly. It's more about NOT being female than BEING male.



You don't have to be super-feminine to be a woman - I'm not.



I know.

But like... you don't hate having a vagina, do you?



No, of course not. I hope you don't hate your body!



No, I don't hate my body. I don't have chronic pain or any of the other health issues so many of my friends deal with.



The majority of my body is great. There are just ... a few bits I don't like.



For example, if I could just remove my entire reproductive system, that would be ideal.



But what about having kids?

Uhhg, I've told you A HUNDRED TIMES, I am NEVER having children!



I wish you wouldn't say that. You'd be such a good mom.



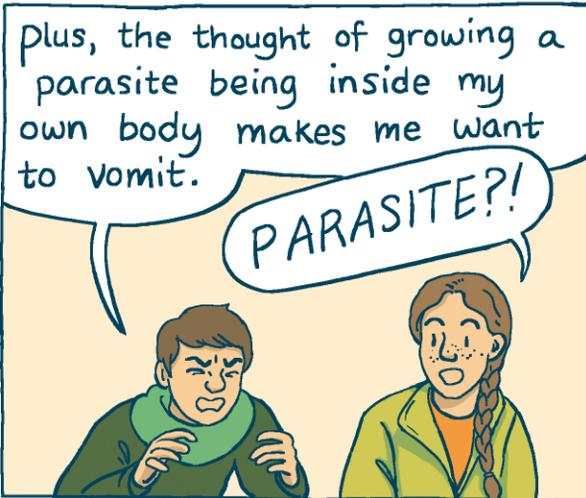
No I wouldn't! I'd be constantly resenting the kid for taking up all of my time!

I'm **WAY** too selfish for parenting!



plus, the thought of growing a parasite being inside my own body makes me want to vomit.

PARASITE?!



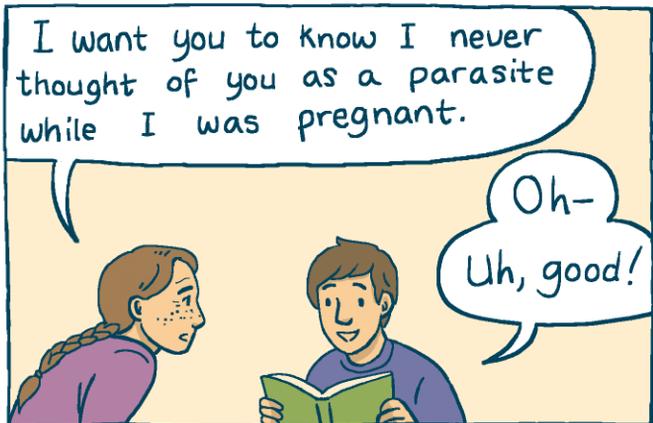
Hahaha —  
What? Haha



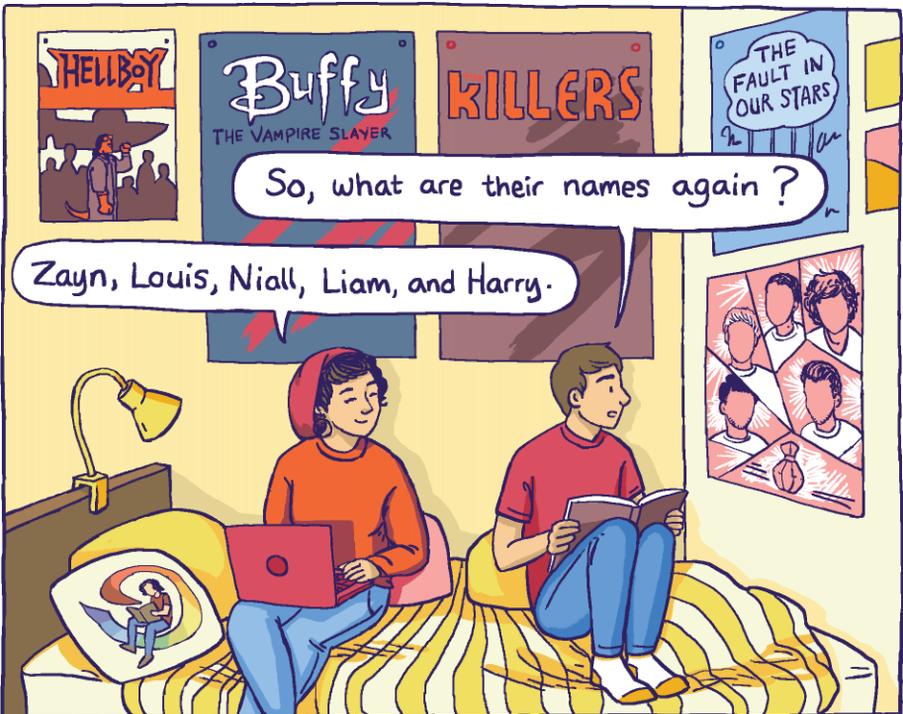
ABOUT  
24  
HOURS  
LATER

I want you to know I never thought of you as a parasite while I was pregnant.

Oh—  
Uh, good!



A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE START OF OUR SECOND YEAR OF GRAD SCHOOL (JULY 2014), ASHLEY R. GUILLORY CALLED WITH AN IMPORTANT QUESTION:



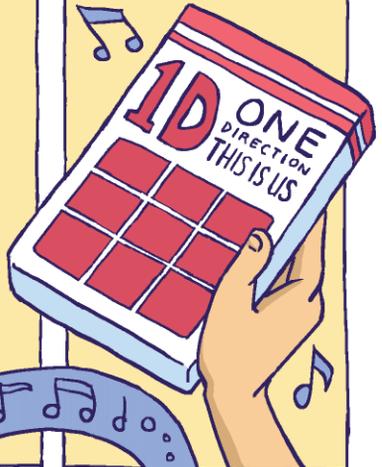
The music started to infuse our work sessions...



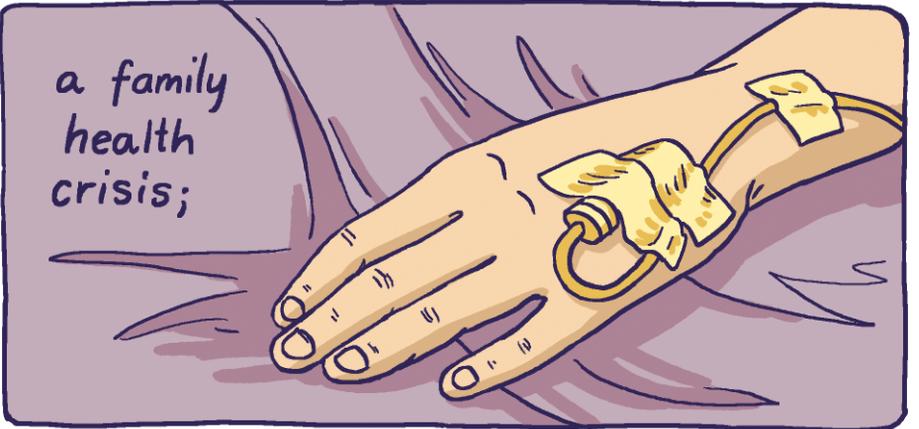
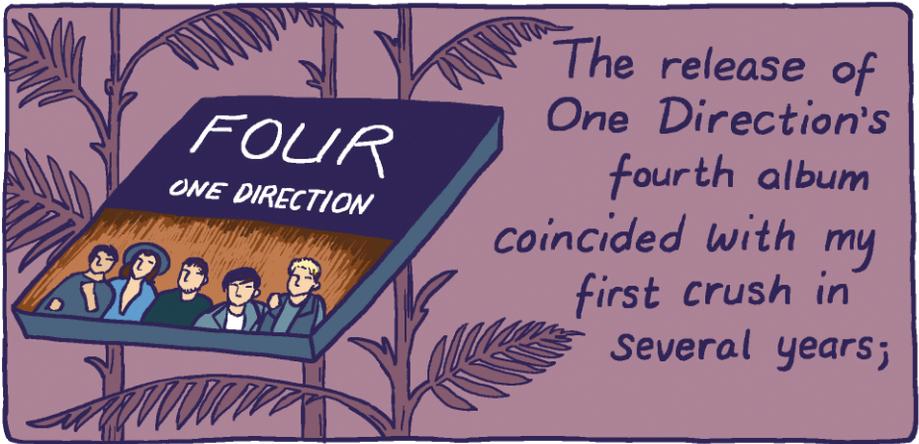
I started to be able to recognize the boys in tumblr posts...



Then we watched the documentary.



BEFORE I KNEW IT, I HAD BEEN SUCKED INTO THE FANDOM.



the slow, painful ending of my oldest and dearest friendship;



LIKE MANY BEFORE ME, I Poured ALL OF MY FEELINGS INTO WRITING

*fanfiction.*

In my story all of the 1D boys are lusting after each other and it is DESTROYING THEIR FRIENDSHIP.



OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS I PRODUCED NEARLY 100,000 WORDS.

BUT WHEN THE TIME CAME TO GIVE MY ANGSTY CHARACTERS A BREAK, AND FINALLY LET THEM MAKE OUT, I RAN INTO A SMALL PROBLEM...



Dude. Just upgrade your phone. I'm sure it's been more than two years.



I have ... never upgraded.



You are still using your first phone? How old is it, five years?



It's only four!



NOTE:

*I didn't get my first phone or my driver's license until I was 21 and a senior in undergrad.*

I am taking you to the Verizon store tomorrow.



Yay! Will you also help me set up a Tinder profile?



I need to make out with someone soon, for the fanfiction.

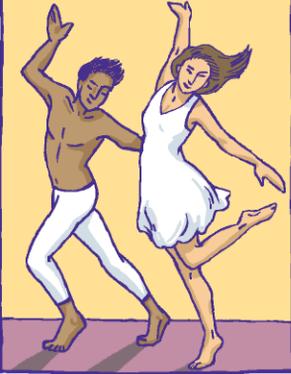


Omg. Yes!



# TO PUT THIS COMMITMENT TO RESEARCH INTO PERSPECTIVE— OTHER THINGS I DID IN SERVICE OF MY FIC INCLUDE:

Watched 10 hours of live college modern dance performances.



Toured the SF Armory, which at the time housed the filming studios of KINK.com.



I ALSO SCROLLED THROUGH MANY "YES/NO/MAYBE" LISTS ONLINE, TRYING TO DECIDE IF MY SHIPS WERE SEXUALLY COMPATIBLE (AS YOU DO). ONE DAY I FOUND THIS KINK DEFINED ON WIKIPEDIA:

## AUTOANDROPHILIA:

Refers to a person assigned female at birth who is sexually aroused at the thought or image of having male genitalia or being a man.

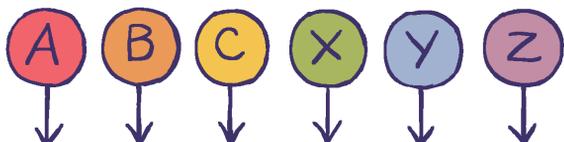
Wow. I never knew there was a word for that.

For me.

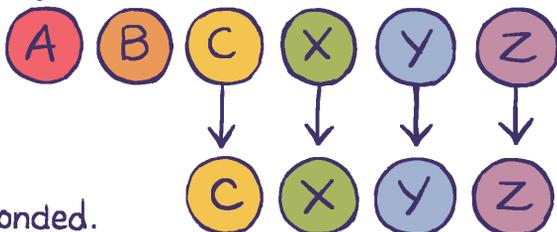


# My Very Brief Tinder JOURNEY

I matched with  
Six women.

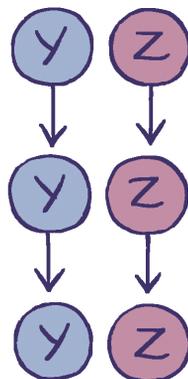


I sent all of  
them a first  
message.



Four of them responded.

Two of those responses  
developed into conversations.



I asked if they wanted to meet in  
person, and they both said yes!

SO I PICKED A TIME TO MEET  
CANDIDATE Y.

*She had come off as shy in our messages. I tried to get a sense of her hobbies, interests, and aspirations but she seemed hesitant to reveal them.*



Candidate Y arrived 30 minutes late.

I waited because it was my first ever date.

It soon became clear that every activity in her life revolved around alcohol.

Her dream was to get her bartending license.

Her hobby was drinking to blackout multiple times per week.

The reason she was late was that she had totalled her car the night before.

And so, had to walk to the coffee shop.

Within 45 minutes it seemed clear that we had NOTHING IN COMMON.

Which didn't stop her from asking if I wanted to go back to her place.

Maybe she just wanted a ride back to her apartment.

But I said no.

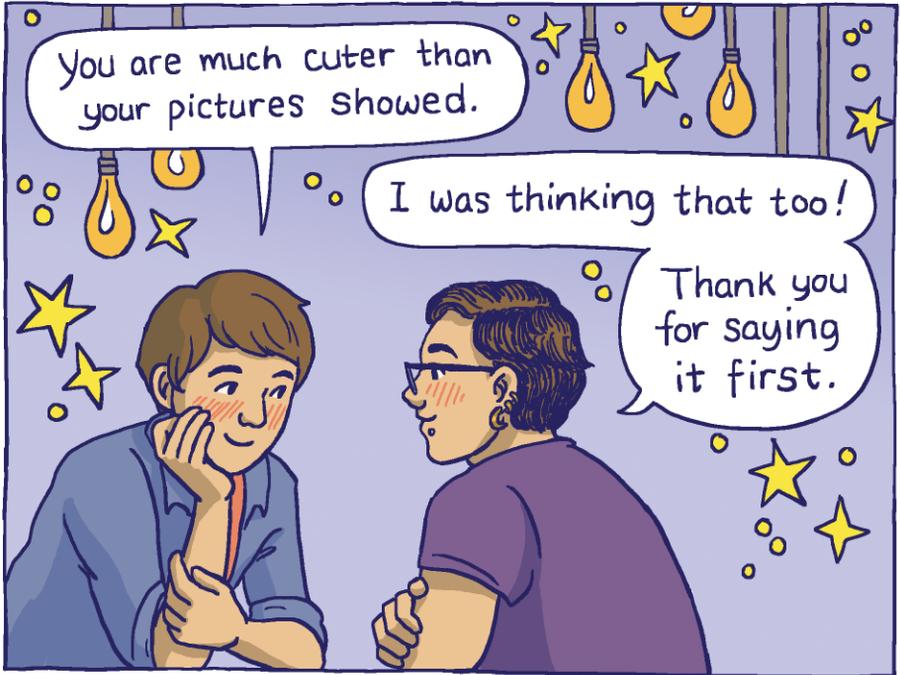


SINCE THAT DATE CONSTITUTED 100% OF MY DATING EXPERIENCE, I WAS MORE THAN A LITTLE NERVOUS FOR MY MEETING WITH *Candidate Z.*



I NEEDN'T  
HAVE BEEN.  
SHE WAS  
*AMAZING.*





AS I DROVE HOME I REMEMBER THINKING:



We planned a second date.

In the interest of transparency,  
you should know I'm 25 years old  
and I've never had sex.

I haven't kissed anyone  
since elementary school.

My main kink is  
autoandrophilia.

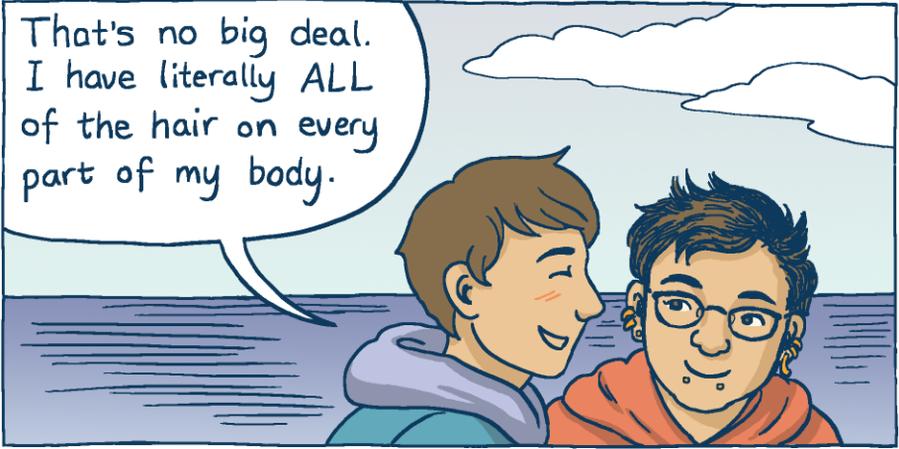
Penetration is a **HARD NO** for me.

And I'm weirdly  
grossed out by some bodily  
fluids, so, unfortunately,  
I probably wouldn't feel  
comfortable going  
down on you...









FAST-FORWARD: WE'VE BEEN DATING FOR TWO MONTHS. WE'VE MADE OUT, WE'VE HAD SEX, WE'VE MOVED ON TO SEXTING AT WORK.





Everything we did today  
was a good experience.

But now that I've had sex a few times,  
I'm not sure I really need any more?  
Trying to get off in front of  
someone is kind of weird.



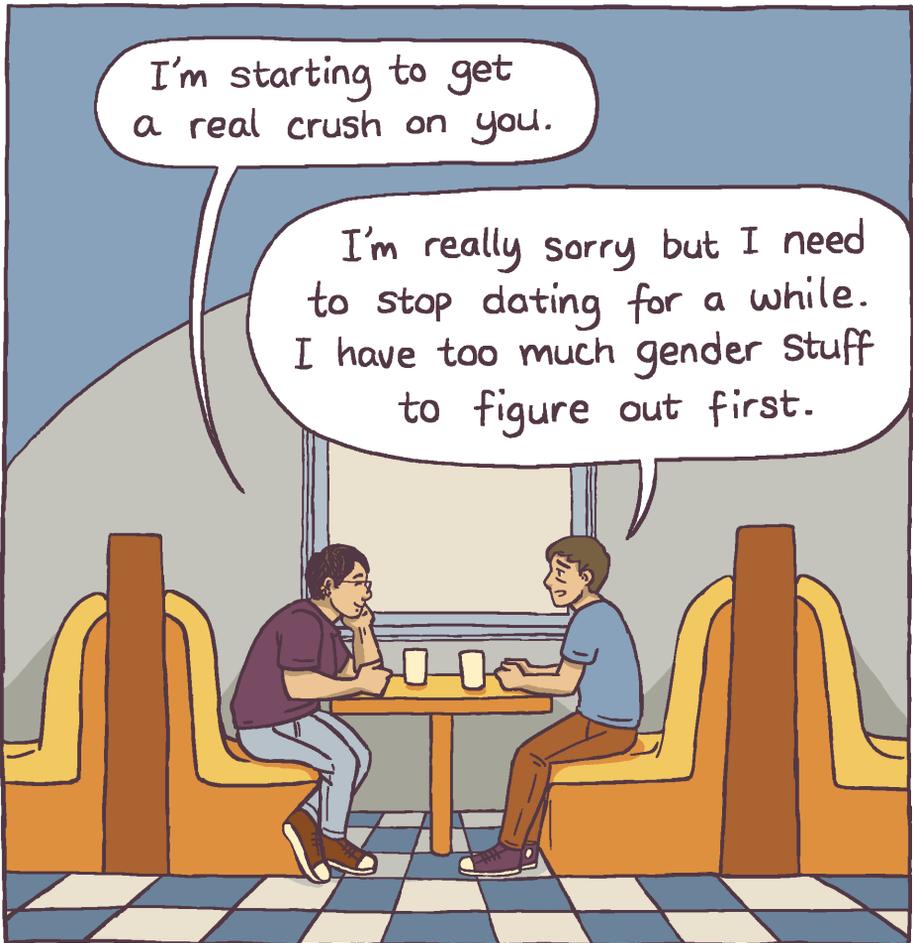
I think when I  
do orgasm, it's not  
because of my body  
but in spite of it.

# A FEW DAYS LATER





SO WHEN SHE TOLD ME:



I CAN'T REMEMBER  
WHEN I FIRST  
STARTED SEEING  
PRONOUNS LISTED  
ON PEOPLE'S  
PROFILES ON  
TUMBLR—  
2015?  
EARLIER?

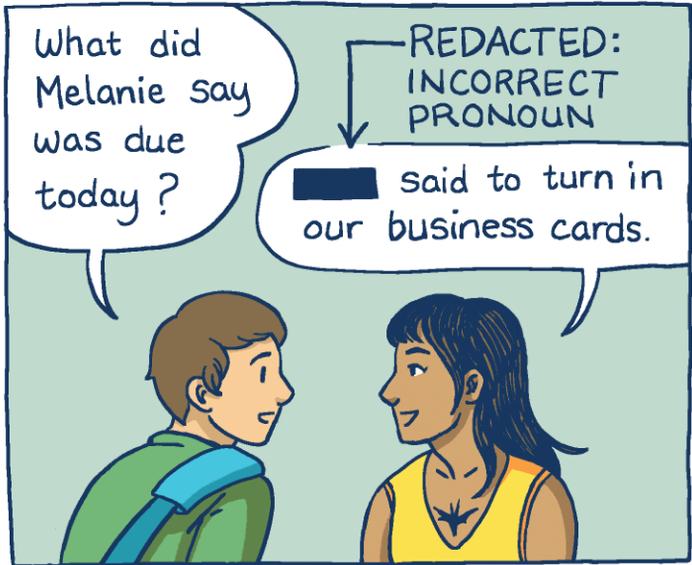


BUT THE FIRST PERSON I REMEMBER  
GETTING TO KNOW WHO USES THEY/THEM  
PRONOUNS WAS ONE OF MY CCA TEACHERS.



MY CLASSMATES AND I WERE DETERMINED  
NOT TO MISGENDER THEM BUT WE MADE  
FREQUENT MISTAKES.

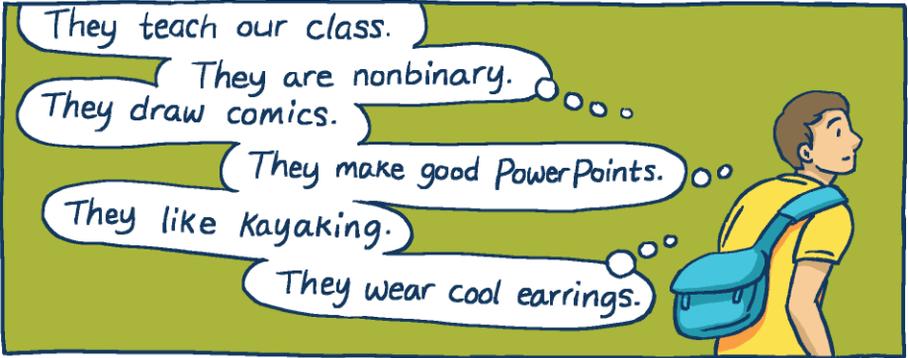
I  
WOULD  
CORRECT  
PEOPLE



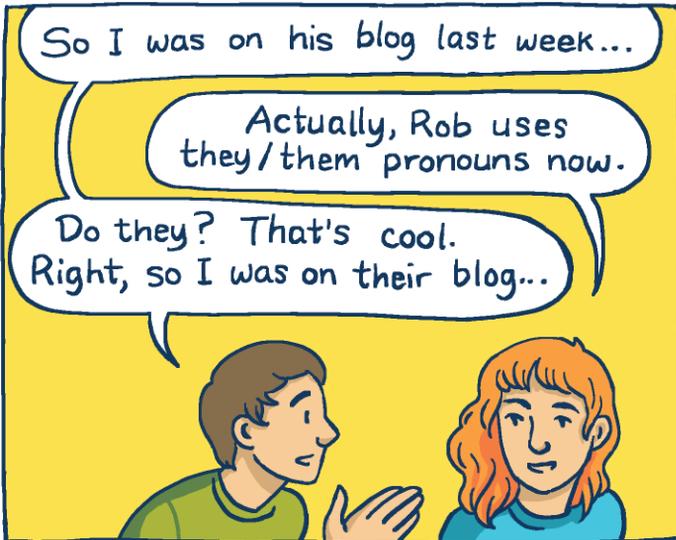
ONLY TO TURN AROUND AND MAKE THE EXACT SAME MISTAKE 30 SECONDS LATER.



LEARNING TO USE NEW WORDS IS HARD AT FIRST. BUT I PRACTICED ALL SEMESTER.

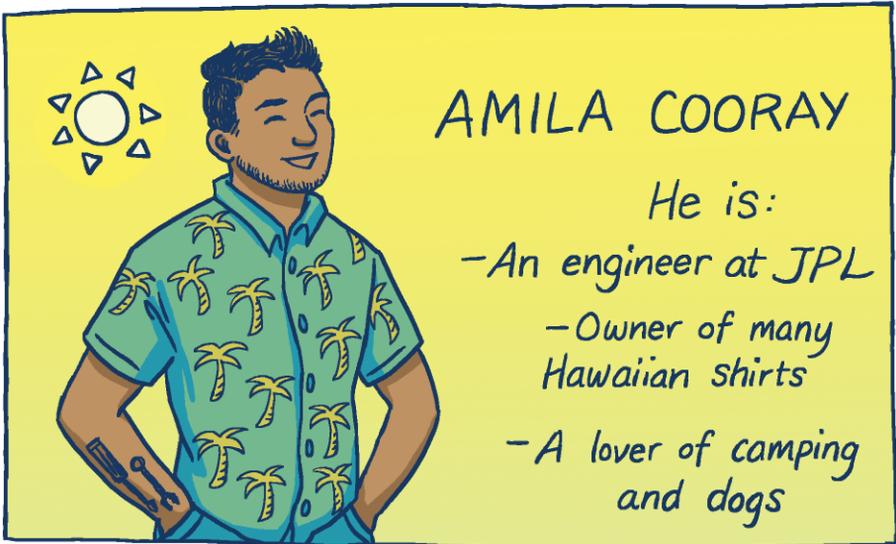


SOME-  
WHERE  
ALONG  
THE  
WAY  
IT  
CLICKED.



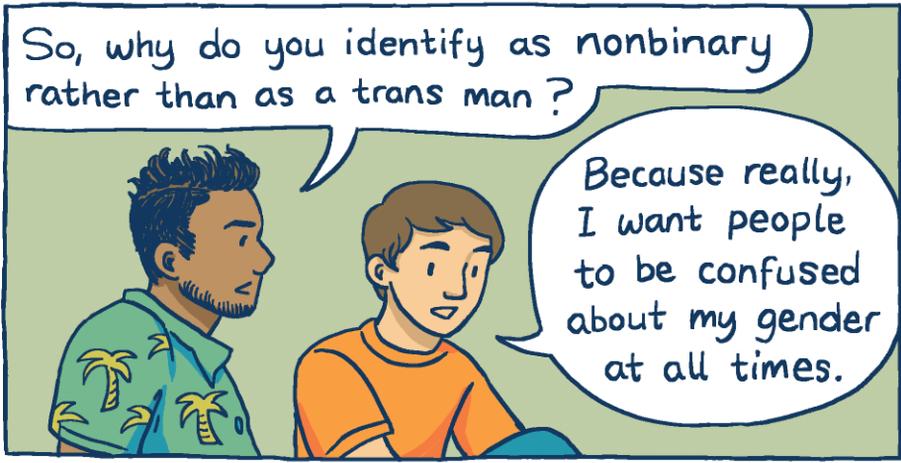
AND IT  
BECAME  
EASY.

AT THANKSGIVING IN 2015, MY SISTER BROUGHT HER NEW BOYFRIEND TO STAY WITH ME AND MY PARENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME.

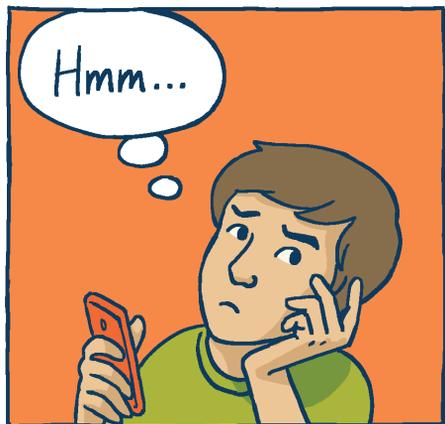
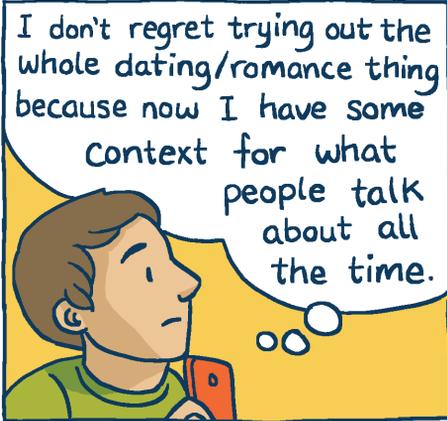


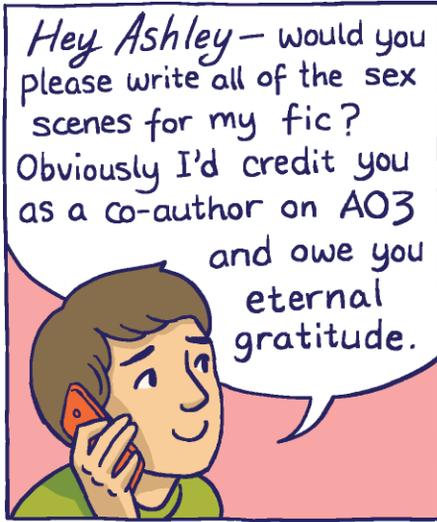
AMILA IS THE FIRST PERSON I'VE WATCHED TAKE TESTOSTERONE.





A FEW MONTHS AFTER BREAKING UP WITH Z, I PONDERED REOPENING TINDER.





I REMEMBER  
WHEN I FIRST  
REALIZED  
I NEVER  
HAD TO HAVE  
CHILDREN.

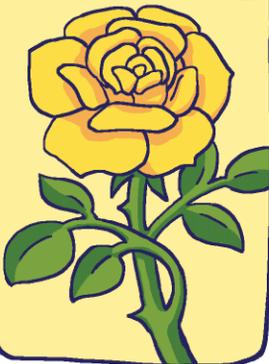


It  
was  
like  
walking out of  
a narrow alley

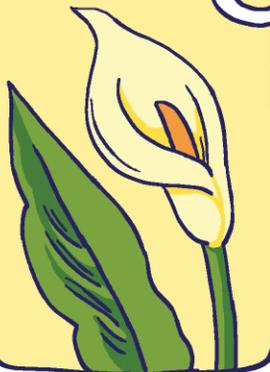
into a wide open field.



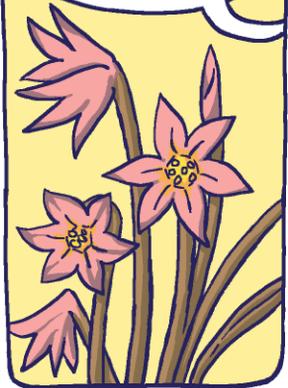
I never  
have to get  
married.



I never have  
to date  
anyone.



I don't even  
have to care  
about sex.

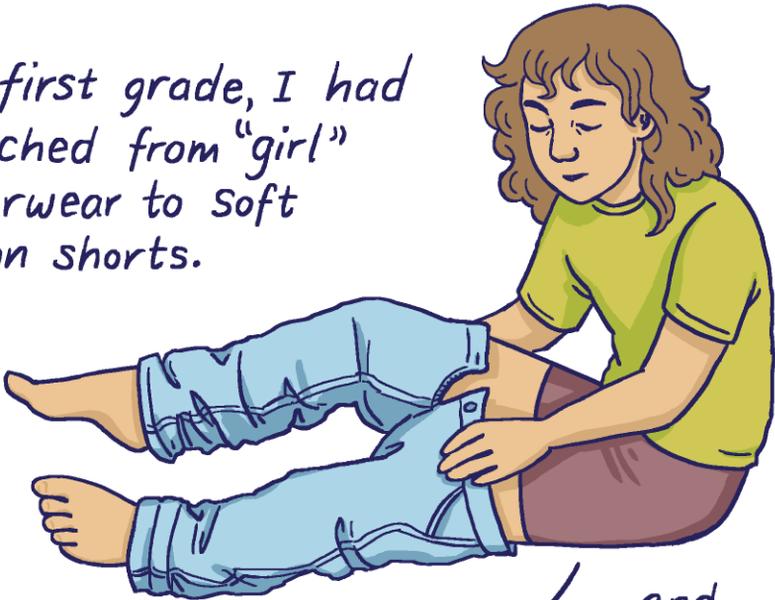


THESE REALIZATIONS WERE LIKE GIFTS  
THAT I GAVE TO MYSELF.



There is a photo of me at about age four posing with a kitten - unaware or uncaring that my mermaid undies are also on display.

By first grade, I had switched from "girl" underwear to soft cotton shorts.



My mom called these "bike shorts"

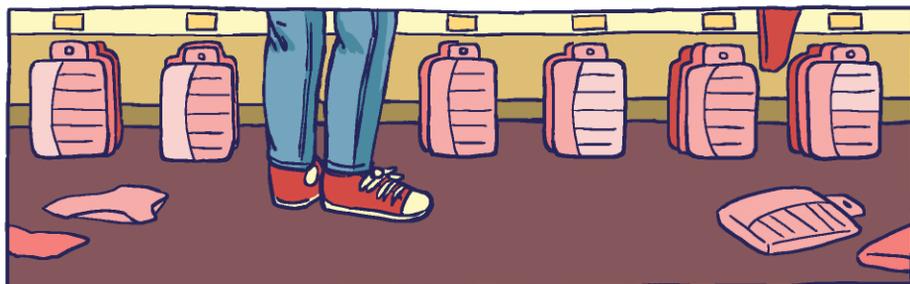


and bought them for me without comment.

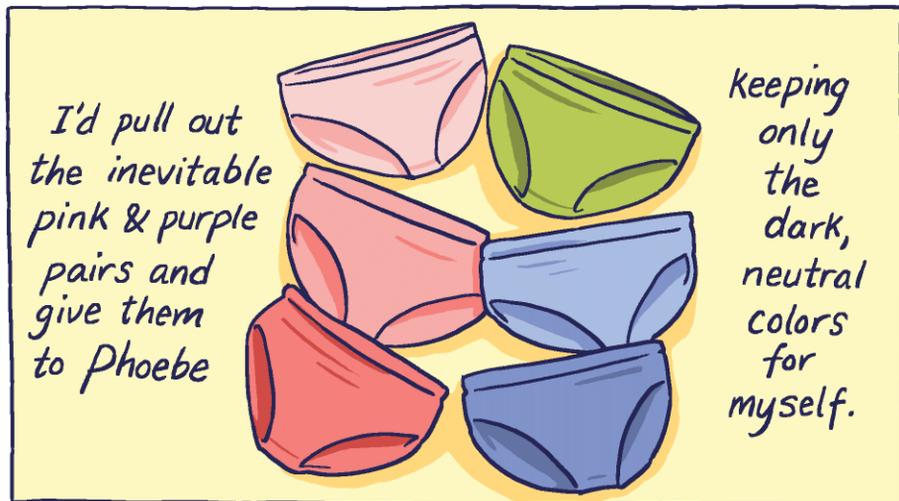
WHEN I STARTED MY PERIOD, I QUICKLY  
REALIZED THAT PADS AND SHORTS WERE  
NOT COMPATIBLE.

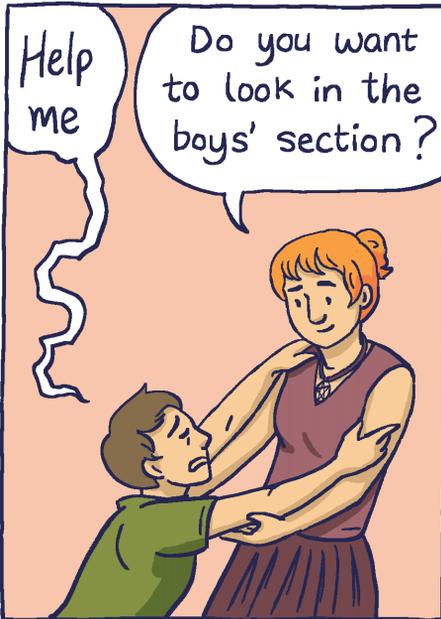


VERY RELUCTANTLY I RETURNED TO  
THE "GIRLS' SECTION."

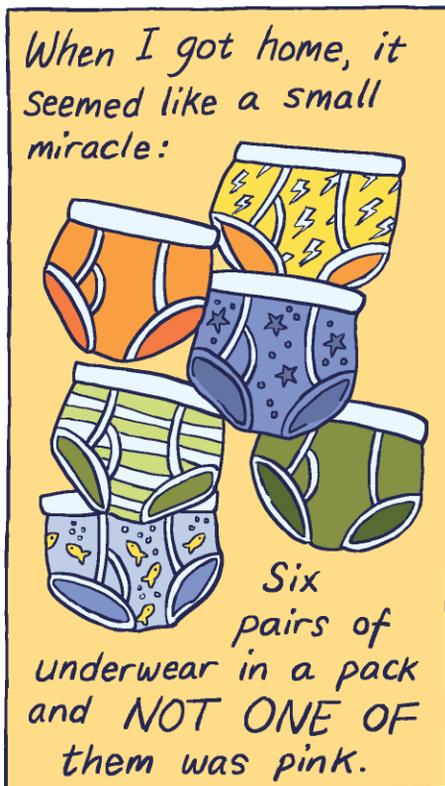
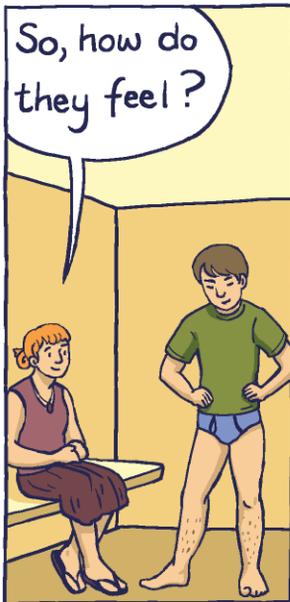


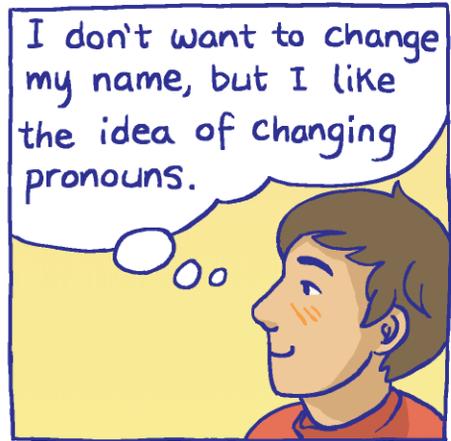
# I BOUGHT ESSENTIALLY THE EXACT SAME ONES FOR 15 YEARS.













I FIRST MET JAINA BEE AT GALEN'S FAMILY'S ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY IN 2003 WHEN I WAS 14.



## JAINA BEE

E is:

- A writer & zine maker, a collector of ephemera
- Owner of an art house in SF, "Granny's University of the Imagination"
- The first person I ever met who'd won NaNoWriMo



What is NaNoWriMo?

National Novel Writing Month! You try to write a whole 50,000 word book in just 30 days.



WHAAAT? You've done that?

More than once!



50,000 WORDS IN ONE MONTH!!

MY MIND REELED

JAINA AND I LOST TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER AND ONLY RECONNECTED AT THE NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY IN 2015.



I've been thinking about switching to they/them pronouns but for some reason that doesn't feel quite right.

What pronouns do you use?

I use the Spivak pronouns e, em, eir, as in "Ask em what e wants in eir tea."

E, em, eir?

I LOVE those pronouns! I just got the biggest tingle down my spine.

That was my reaction too!



AS I PONDERED A PRONOUN CHANGE,  
I BEGAN TO THINK OF GENDER LESS AS  
A SCALE AND MORE AS A LANDSCAPE.

Some people are born in the mountains,  
while others are born by the sea. Some  
people are happy to live in the place they  
were born, while others must make a  
journey to reach the climate  
in which they can  
flourish and grow.



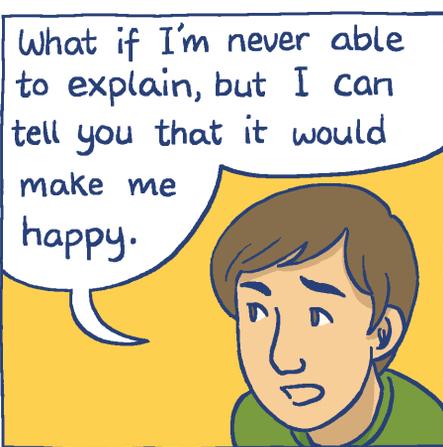
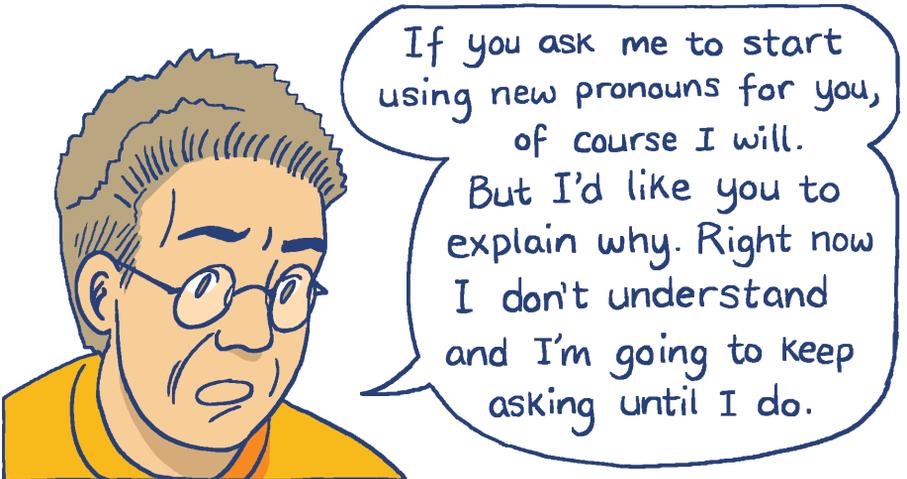
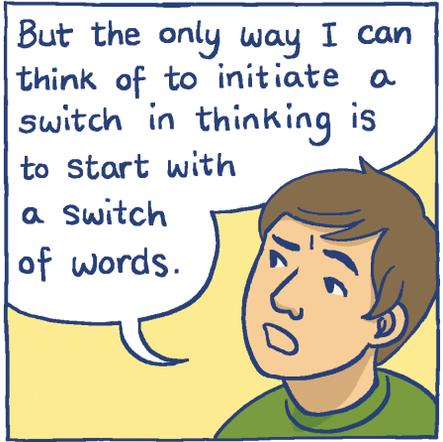
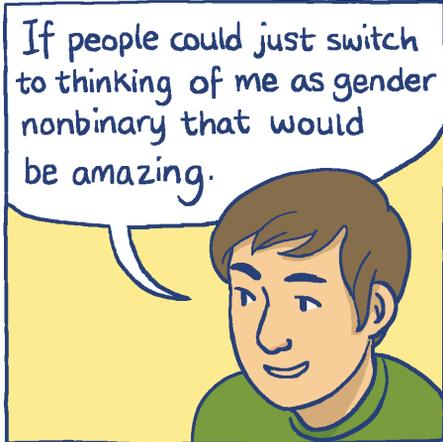
Between the ocean  
and the mountains  
is a wild  
forest.

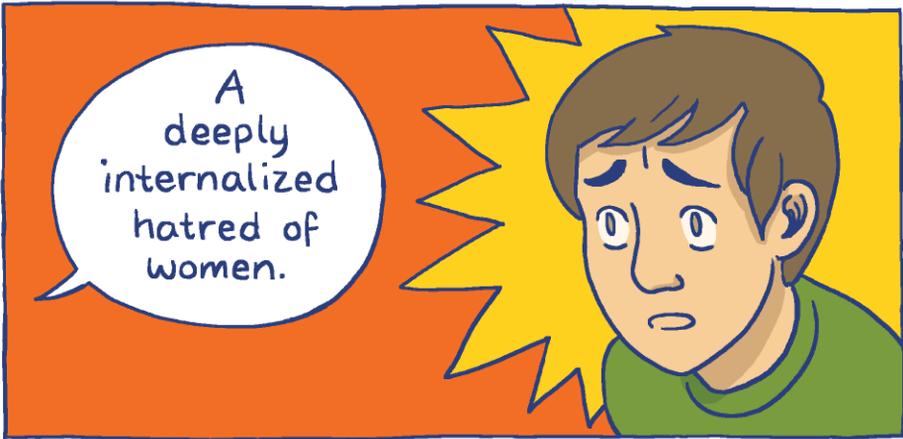
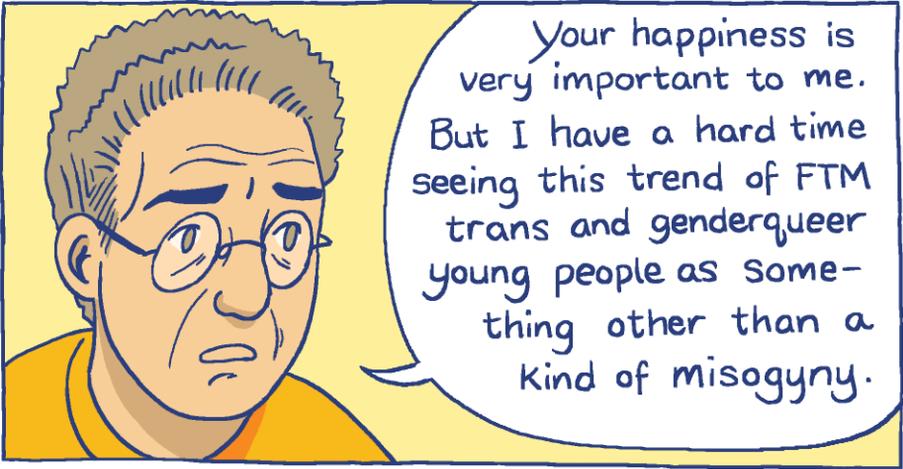
That is where I  
want to make  
my home.











# THIS CONVERSATION LASTED UNTIL PAST 1AM. WHEN I WAS FINALLY GETTING READY TO GO



## AS I DROVE HOME



AT HOME I TOSSED AND TURNED OVER SHARI'S MISOGYNY COMMENT.



What if she's RIGHT?



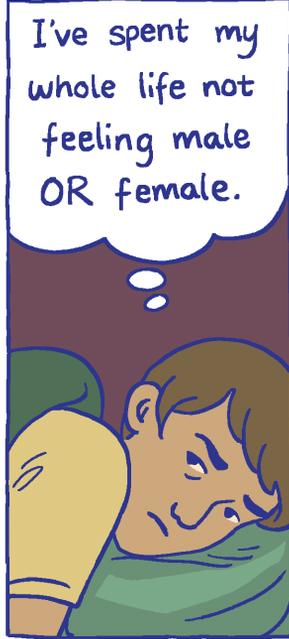
Our society's treatment of women is SO TOXIC.



Have I just been brain-washed into hating parts of myself?



BUT NO, I know that isn't true!



I've spent my whole life not feeling male OR female.



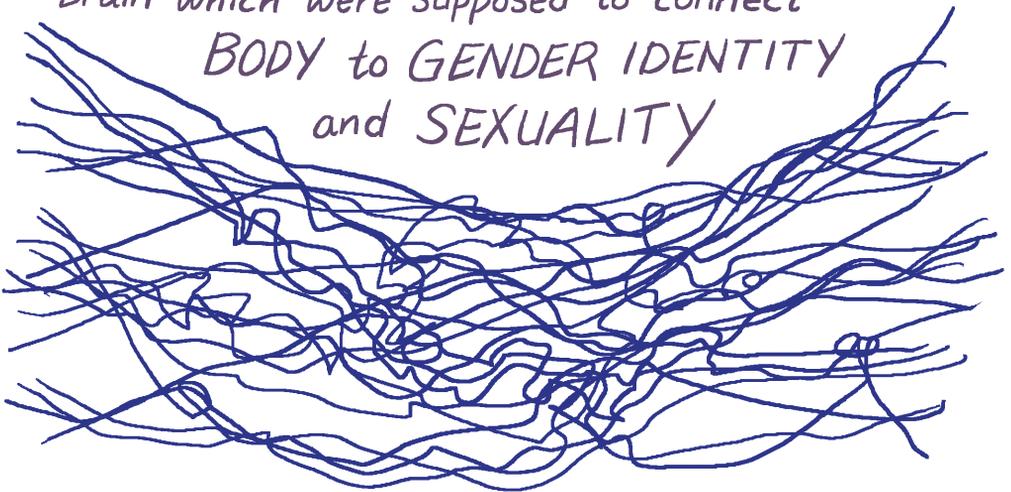
I've always wanted a third option.

BUT WHY AM I LIKE THIS ???  
SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE MY SEXUALITY  
IS BROKEN  
AND MY GENDER  
IS BROKEN.



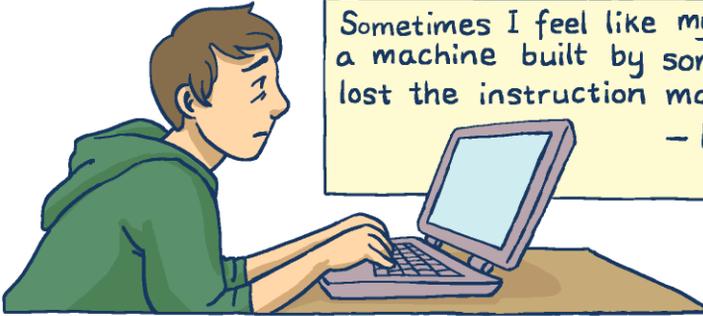
I feel like there are all these wires in my  
brain which were supposed to connect

BODY to GENDER IDENTITY  
and SEXUALITY



But they've all been twisted into a  
HUGE SNARLED MESS.

# I CONFIDED THESE FEELINGS TO A LONG-DISTANCE FRIEND.



Sometimes I feel like my brain is a machine built by someone who lost the instruction manual.  
— Maia



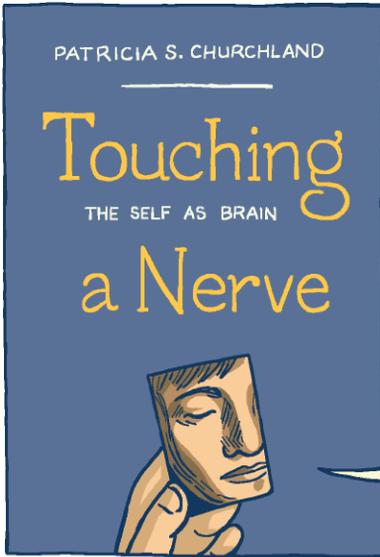
I feel that way sometimes too. You should check out a book that my aunt wrote, called Touching a Nerve: Self as Brain. When I read it I was fascinated and weirdly relieved—hope you will be too.  
—Marian

## PATRICIA CHURCHLAND, Ph.B.

IS AN ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHER NOTED FOR HER INVENTION OF NEUROPHILOSOPHY. HER CREDENTIALS INCLUDE:

- PROFESSOR EMERITUS AT UC SAN DIEGO
- ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT SALK INSTITUTE OF BIOLOGICAL STUDIES
- RECIPIENT OF A MACARTHUR FELLOWSHIP
- FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES





IN 2013 SHE PUBLISHED  
TOUCHING A NERVE

WHICH EXPLORES THE  
QUESTIONS:

Where in the physical structures of the brain are morality, empathy, aggression, free will and identity based?

READING CHURCHLAND IS LIKE LISTENING TO AN ENGAGING UNIVERSITY LECTURE.

Normally, when a sperm fertilizes an egg, the resulting human conceptus has 23 pairs of chromosomes [...] either XX (genetic female) or XY (genetic male).

CHURCHLAND, pg. 132

HOWEVER:

- 1 in 650 born with XXY (Klinefelter syndrome)
- 1 in 1,000 born with XYY
- 1 in 5,000 born with solo X (Turner syndrome)
- 1 in 20,000 born with XXYY

Churchland pg. 138 and  
U.S. National Library of  
Medicine, Genetics  
Home Reference

In the early stages of development, the sex organs (gonads) of the fetus are neutral, but during the second month of fetal development, genes on the Y chromosome produce proteins that transform the neutral gonads into male testes. Absent this action, the gonads grow into ovaries. [...] Testosterone produced by the fetal testes is released into the bloodstream and enters the growing brain.

CHURCHLAND, 132



Small but important correction: once it passes from the blood into the brain, some testosterone is transformed by an enzyme into a more potent androgen, dihydrotestosterone. And some of that is changed into estradiol, which goes on to masculinize the brain.

CHURCHLAND,  
134



Paradoxical though it may seem, estradiol, a female hormone, is crucial to the masculinizing development.

Biology is funny that way.

CHURCHLAND,  
134



Finally, the masculinizing of the gonads (making testes, penis, and prostate) occurs before the masculinizing of the brain.

CHURCHLAND, 136



Sometimes the masculinizing of the brain does not follow the typical path and may be incomplete in various ways. You could have male genitalia and a female brain.

CHURCHLAND, 137



Once we know something about the many factors, genetic and otherwise, that can alter the degree to which a brain is masculinized, it is a little easier to grasp a biological explanation for how a person might feel a disconnect between his or her gonads and his or her gender identity.

CHURCHLAND, 140



A huge part of who I am is due to the suite of hormones and neurochemicals present in the womb as my cells developed.



So Lady Gaga was right - I was born this way.



What a **RELIEF.**



IN THE SUMMER OF 2016, I TABLED AT THE QUEER COMICS EXPO IN SAN FRANCISCO.



LATER, I FOUND SCOUT TRAN'S PRONOUN PATCHES AT THE DEGENERETTE BOOTH.



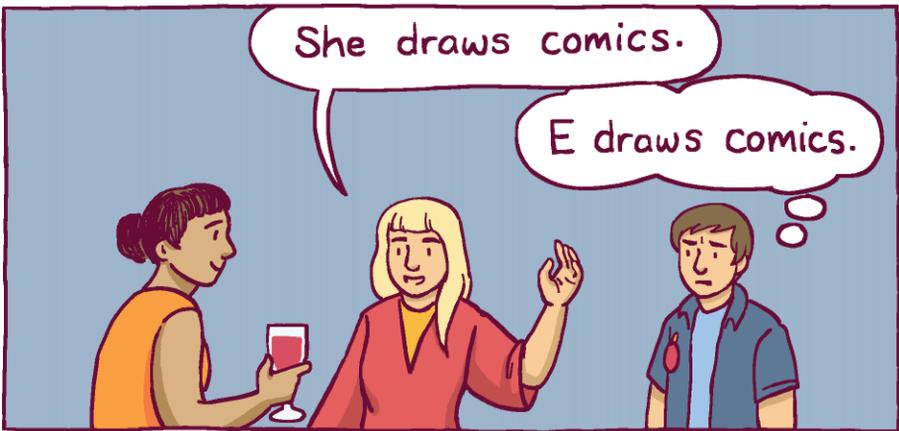
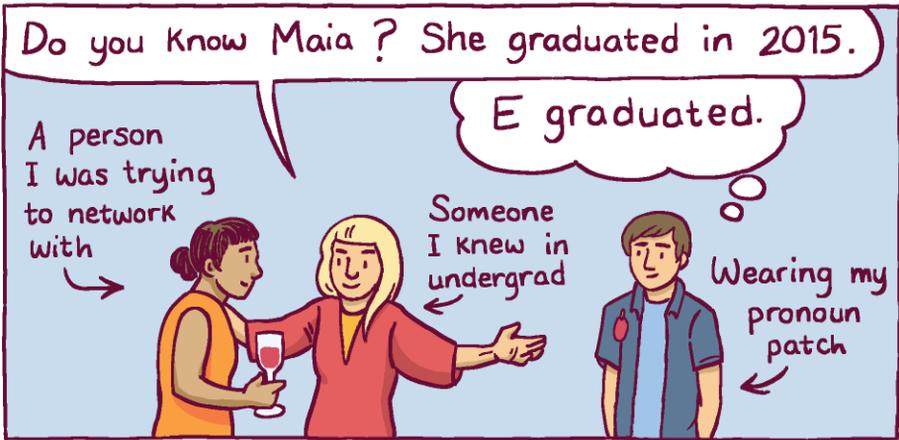
I HAD TO SIT WITH THE PATCH IN MY HAND FOR 20 MINUTES BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO PUT IT ON.



LATER, WHILE WEARING IT:



# SHORTLY AFTER, AT AN ART OPENING:



I FOUND MYSELF TURNING TO METAPHORS OF MILD PHYSICAL PAIN AS I TRIED TO ARTICULATE WHY I WANTED NEW PRONOUNNS.

Female pronouns didn't bother me when I was younger, but now they do. I know switching isn't easy, but please try.



Getting called "she" feels like discovering a rock stuck in my shoe.



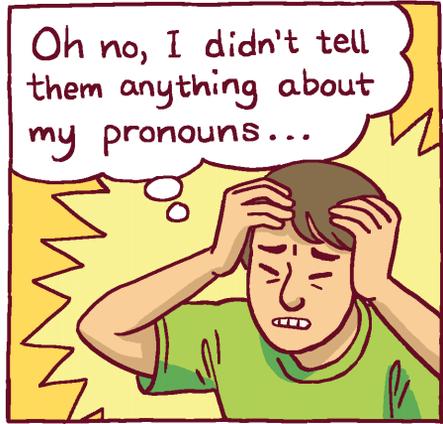
Or getting scratched by the tag at the back of my shirt.



A SMALL SPIKE OF SOLVABLE DISCOMFORT.



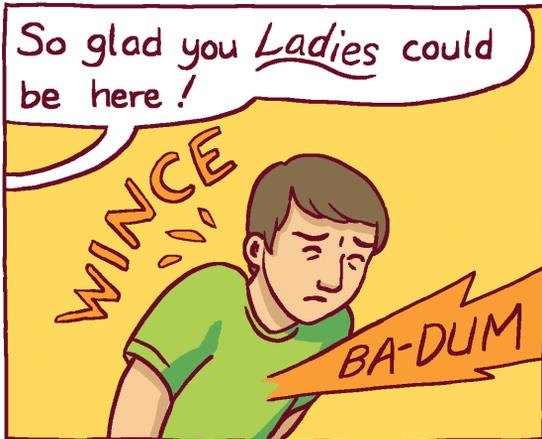
ALSO IN 2016, ASHLEY AND I WERE INVITED TO SIGN AT A PUBLISHER'S BOOTH AT COMIC CON FOR THE FIRST TIME.

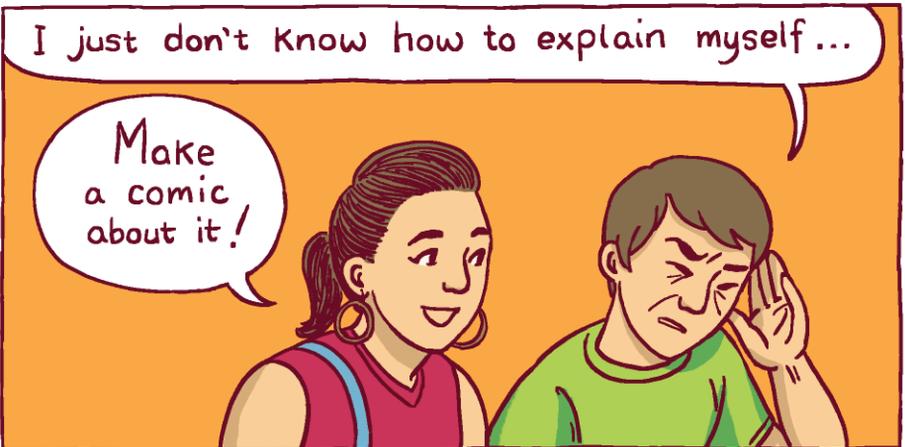


# IT HAPPENED AGAIN.

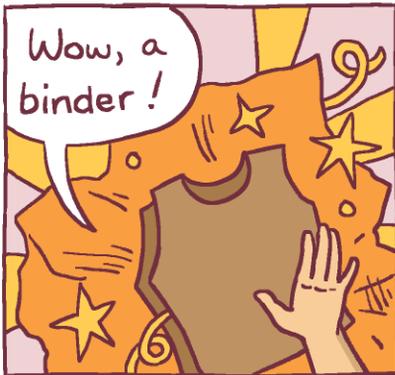


# IT HAPPENED A THIRD TIME.





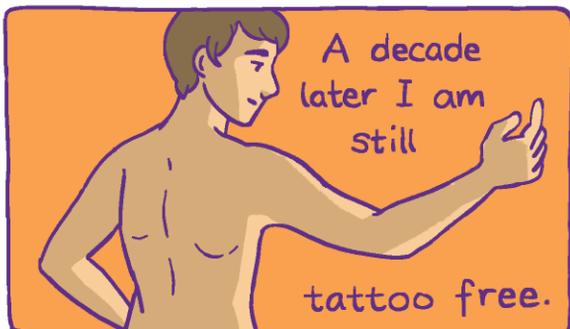
# PHOEBE & AMILA CAME TO STAY IN WINTER 2016. ON CHRISTMAS EVE:



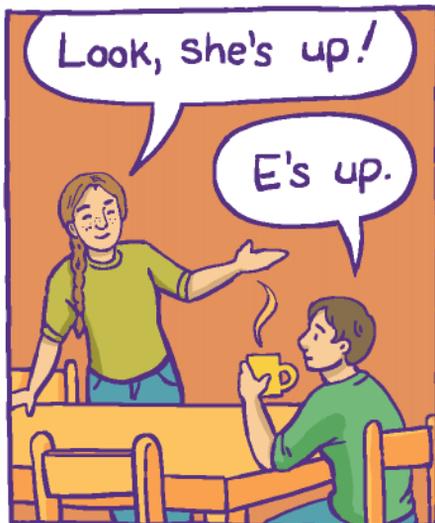
# IN JANUARY, I WORE A BINDER TO WORK FOR THE FIRST TIME



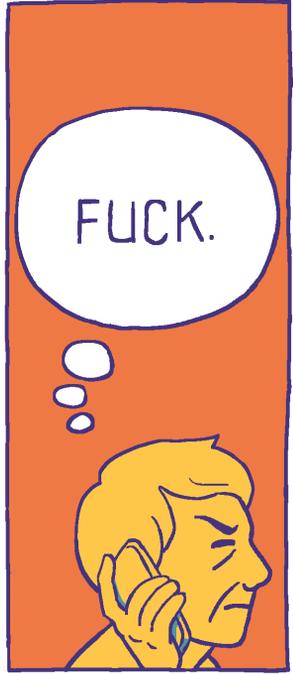
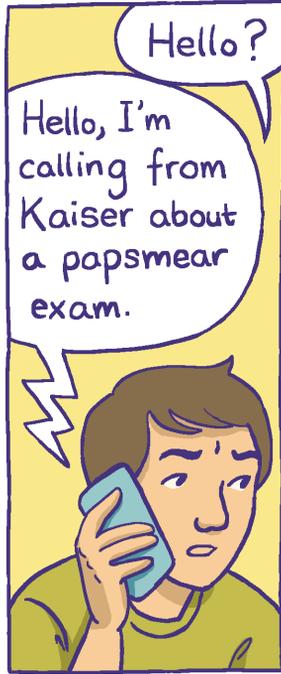
AS SENIORS IN HIGH SCHOOL, I REMEMBER ALL OF MY CLASSMATES PLANNING WHAT TATTOOS THEY WANTED AS SOON AS THEY TURNED 18.

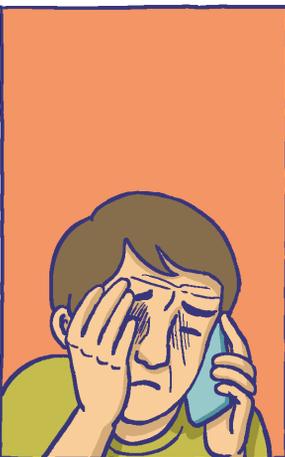


# MY PARENTS ARE GETTING A LITTLE BETTER WITH MY PRONOUNS BUT THEY STILL SLIP UP



# THE FIRST TIME I SAW MYSELF REFERRED TO AS "E" IN A WORK EMAIL



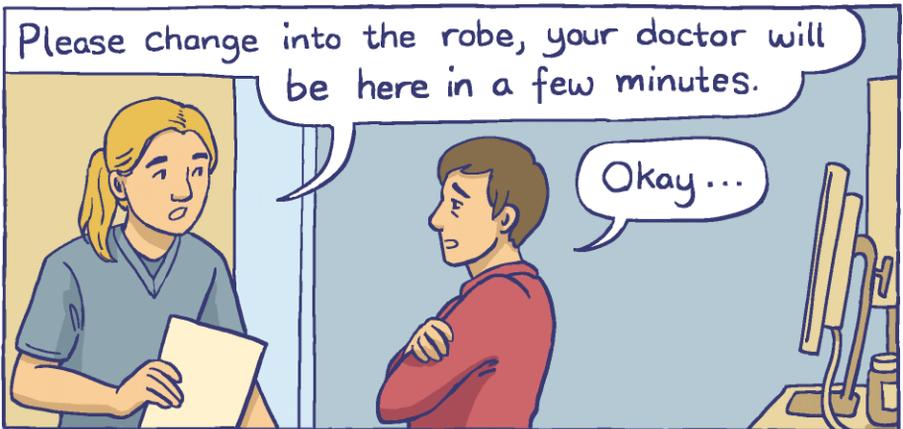




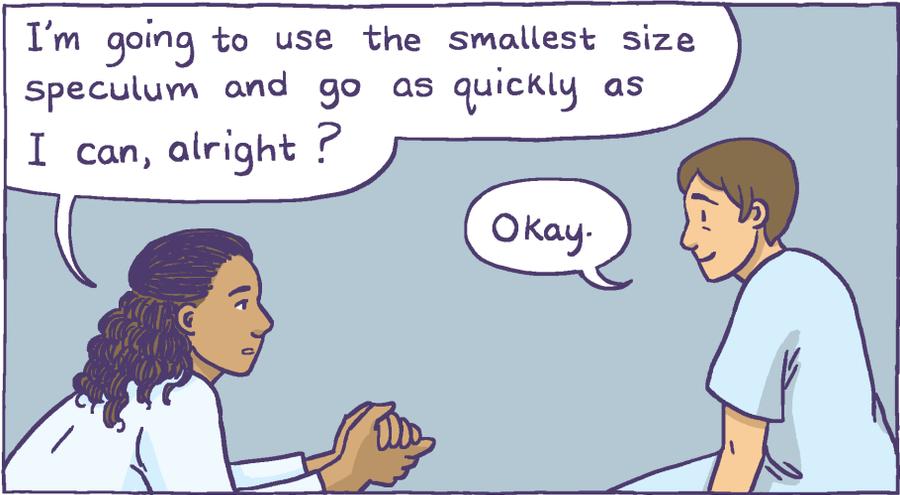
I DRESSED VERY CAREFULLY THE DAY OF MY EXAM EVEN THOUGH I KNEW I WOULD SHORTLY BE REMOVING ALL MY CLOTHES.



SPOILER : IT WAS WORSE.

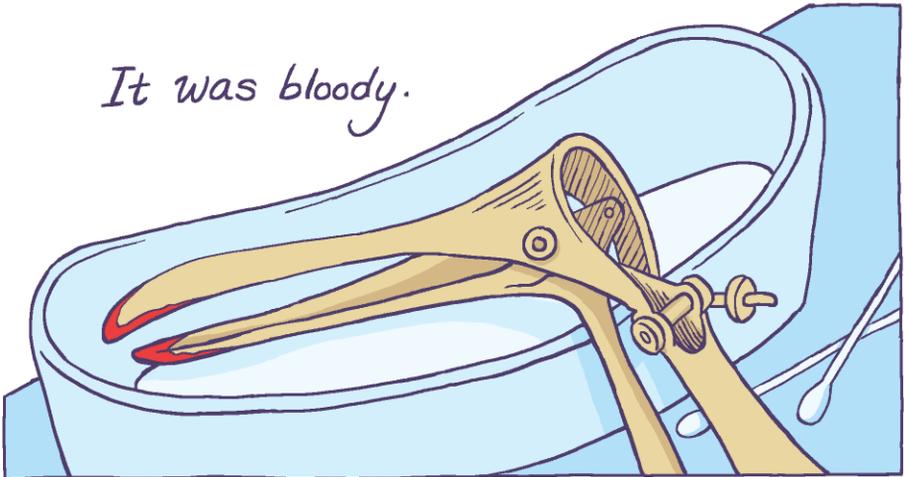






The speculum entering my body felt like a knife being shoved into my vagina. I screamed and immediately started sobbing. The doctor quickly withdrew.



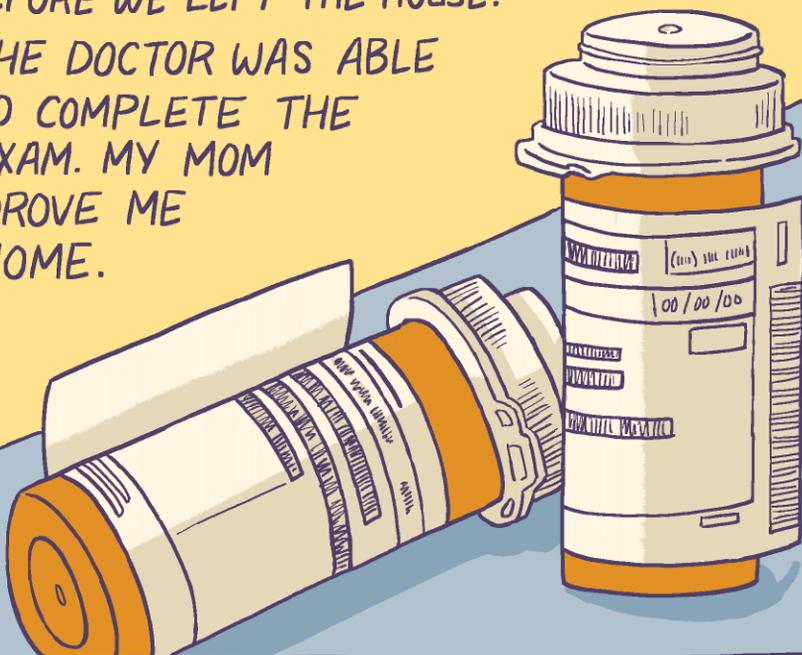


AT THE PHARMACY I RECEIVED 5MG OF OXYCODONE AND 1MG OF LORAZEPAM. THEN I WENT HOME.



MY MEMORIES OF THE SECOND APPOINTMENT ARE HAZY. I TOOK THE PILLS ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE WE LEFT THE HOUSE.

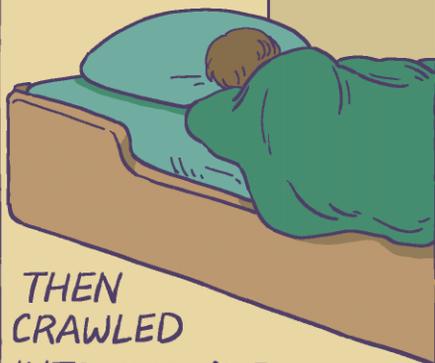
THE DOCTOR WAS ABLE TO COMPLETE THE EXAM. MY MOM DROVE ME HOME.



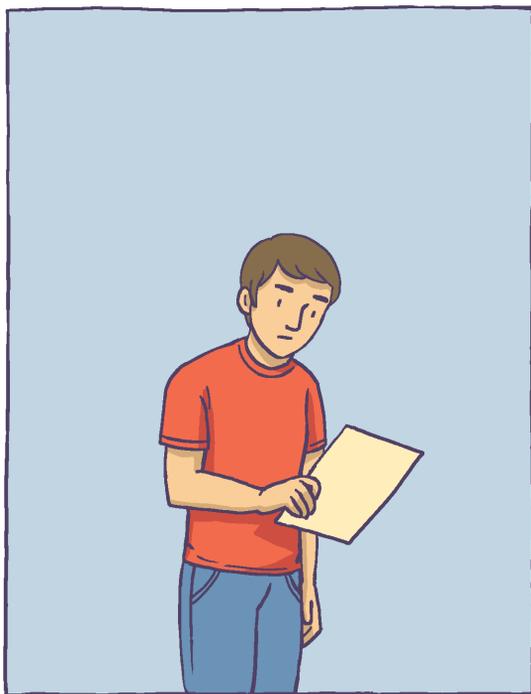
I THREW UP IN THE BATHROOM



THEN CRAWLED INTO BED AND SLEPT FOR FIVE OR SIX HOURS.



A FEW WEEKS LATER  
I RECEIVED A VERY SHORT LETTER  
FROM MY DOCTOR: THE RESULTS OF  
MY EXAMINATION WERE NORMAL.  
NOTHING TO REPORT.

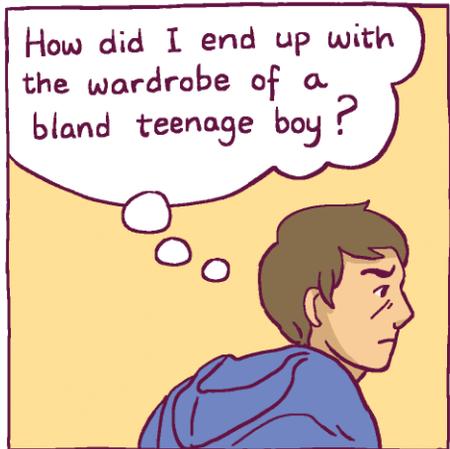
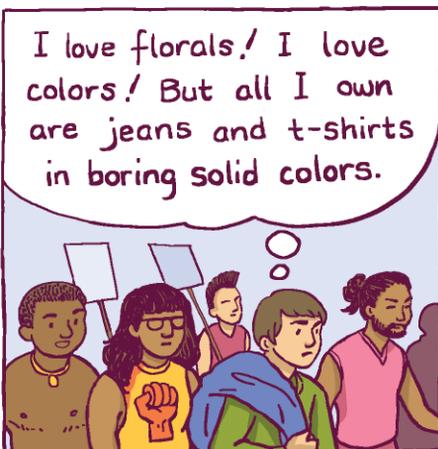


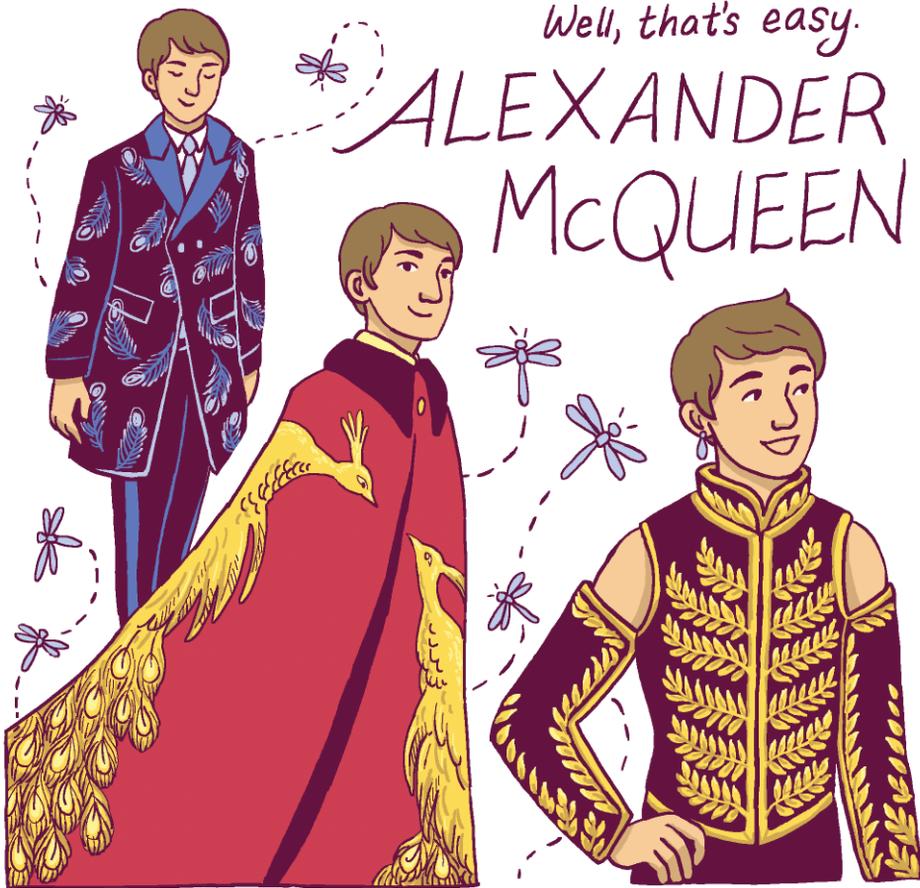
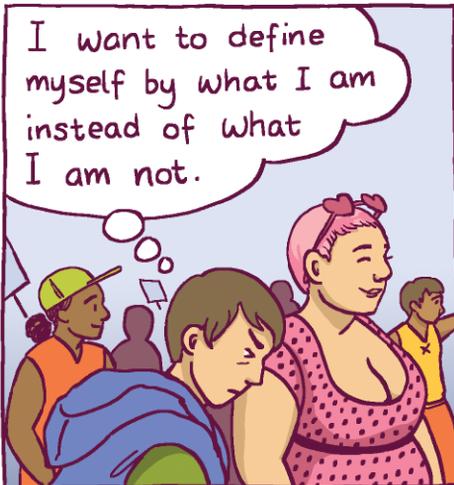
IN SPRING 2017, I ATTENDED A MARCH FOR TRANS RIGHTS IN MY MIDDLE-SIZED LIBERAL HOMETOWN.



WHEN I ARRIVED IT SEEMED LIKE EVERYONE HAD DRESSED UP EXCEPT ME.







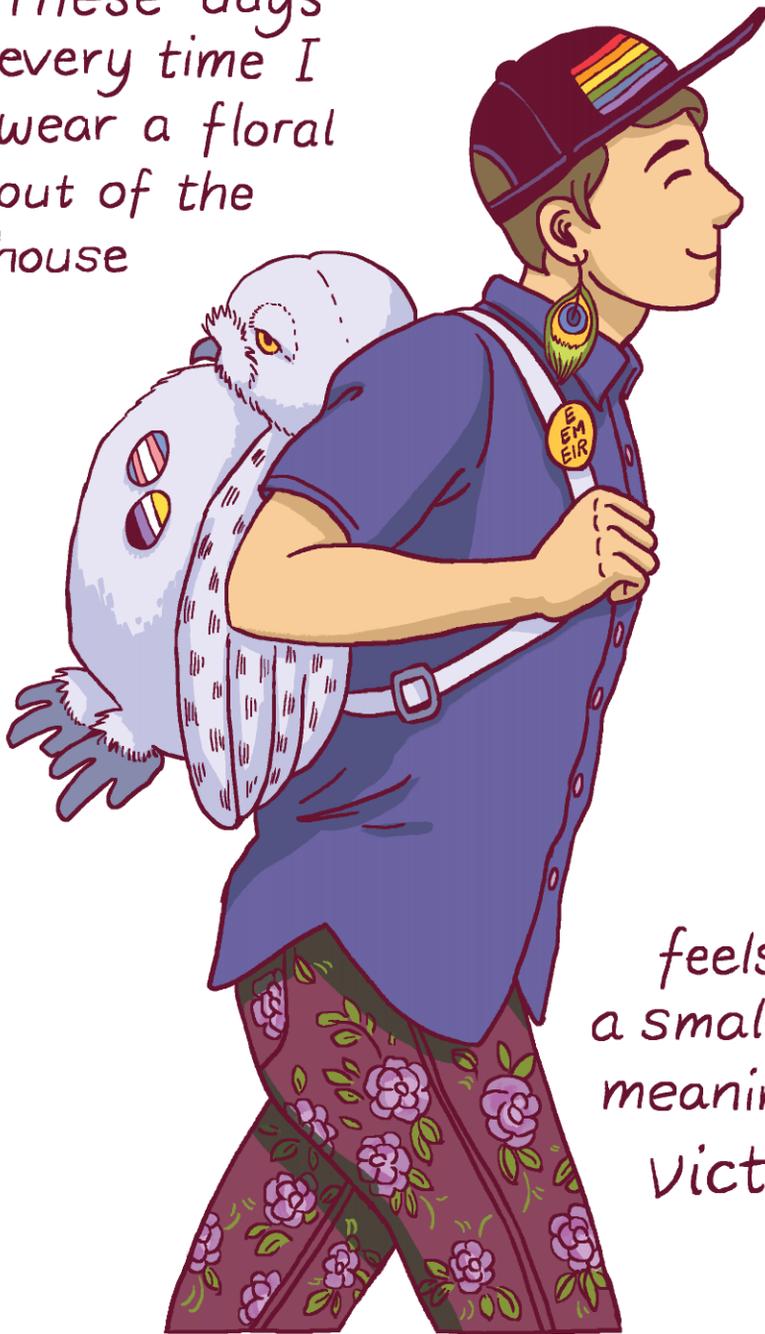
IN AN EFFORT TO ACHIEVE THE HIGH-FANTASY-GAY-WIZARD-PRINCE LOOK OF MY DREAMS, I BEGAN GIVING MYSELF STRICT SHOPPING GUIDELINES.



SLOWLY I BEGAN TO COLLECT  
THINGS THAT FELT QUEER & MAGICAL



These days  
every time I  
wear a floral  
out of the  
house



it  
feels like  
a small but  
meaningful  
victory.

# MY FAMILY RECENTLY WELCOMED THE FIRST BABY IN OUR NEW GENERATION.

I can't get over how small he is!

Wow!

My cousin, Josh  
His wife, Faith



We were wondering what he should call you once he grows up?



I don't know a good gender-neutral term for "aunt."

Can I be his Librarian? Or cartoonist?



Maybe by the time he learns to talk we will have invented some new words!



Thank you so much for the email about your pronouns.



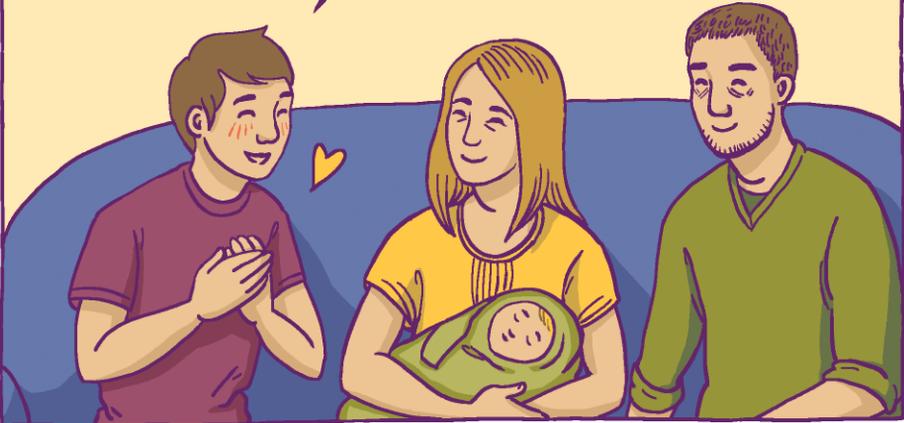
I am proud to be part of your family.



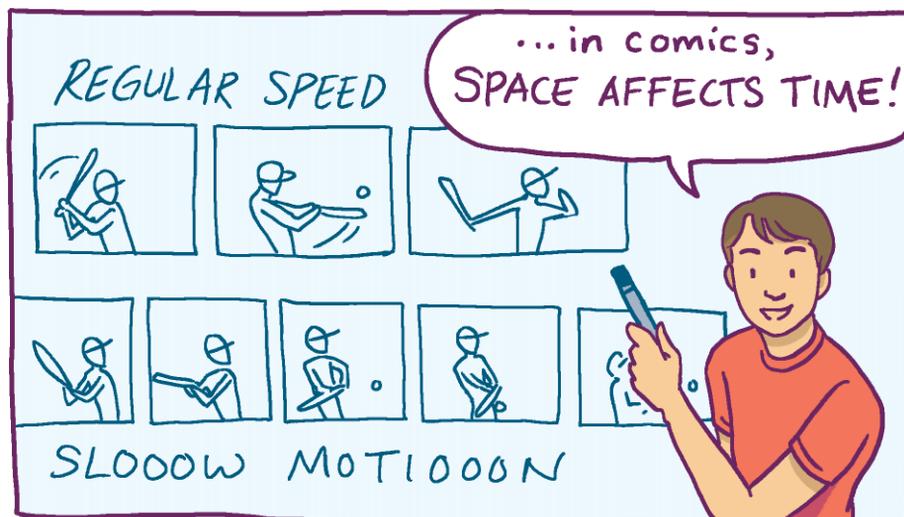
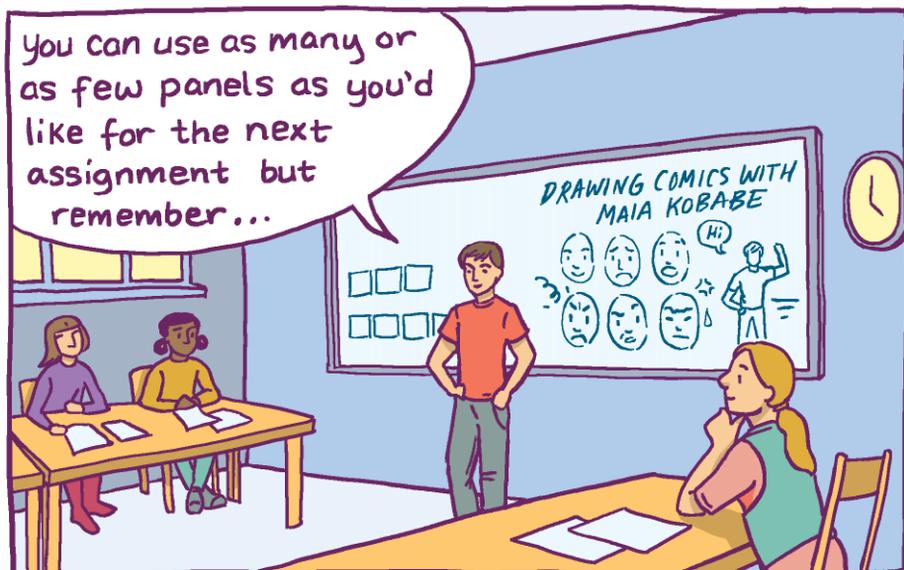
And I'm grateful that he will grow up knowing you!



That means the world to me.

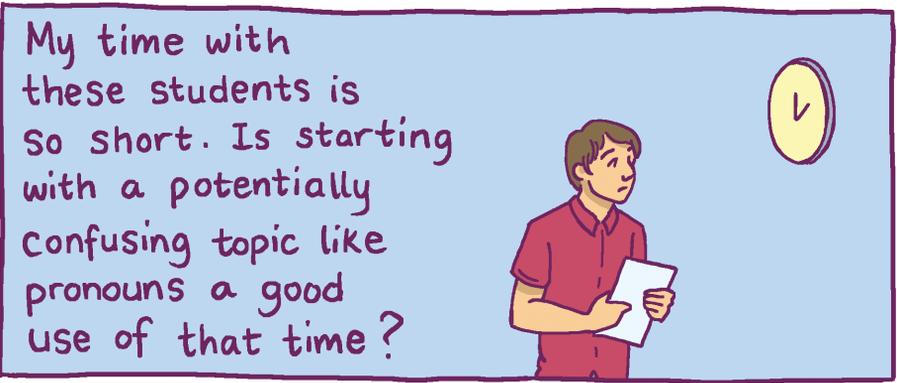


IN FALL 2017 I STARTED TEACHING SINGLE-DAY COMICS WORKSHOPS TO JUNIOR HIGH KIDS AT LOCAL LIBRARIES.

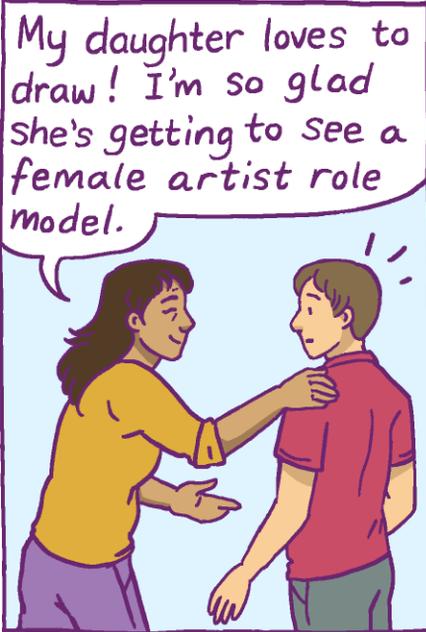


I HAVE EACH GROUP FOR JUST 3 HOURS. I PACK IN AS MUCH AS I CAN.

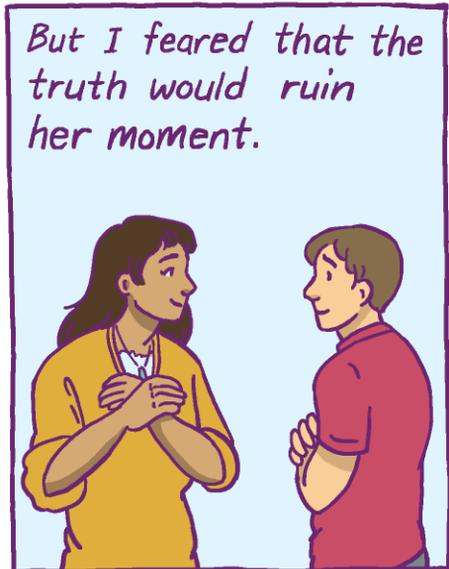
EVERY TIME I GET READY TO MEET A NEW GROUP OF STUDENTS, I WONDER:



DURING THE SNACK BREAK OF A RECENT CLASS A MOM CAME UP TO ME:



I WANTED TO SAY:

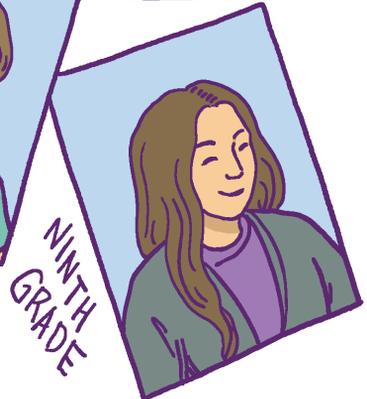


I KEPT QUIET.

THE KIDS I TEACH ARE PRIMARILY A.F.A.B.  
AND THEY RANGE IN AGE FROM 11 TO 14.



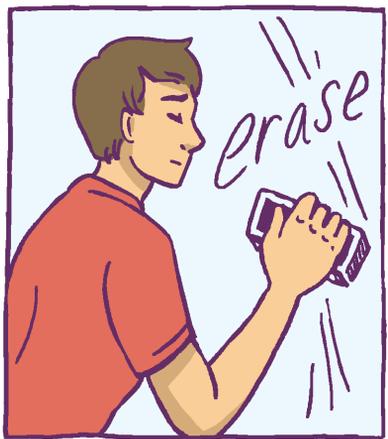
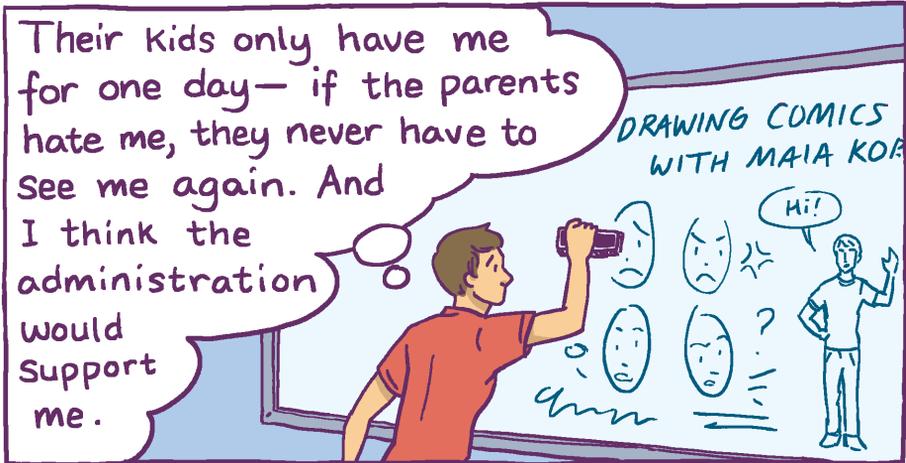
Those were my  
first big years  
of gender  
confusion,  
but I doubt  
anyone would  
have guessed  
just by  
LOOKING  
AT ME.



# LOOKING AROUND MY CLASS TODAY:









*A note to my parents:  
Though I have struggled with being your daughter,  
I am so, so glad that I am your child.*

*-MK*