



Hearts On A Wire

Issue 5 Winter 2012



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♥ support incarcerated and detained trans and gender variant people ♥
♥ build community through bars ♥
♥ organize for justice ♥

Hearts On A Wire

We are trans and gender variant people building a movement for gender self-determination, racial and economic justice, and an end to policing and imprisoning our communities.

We meet in Philadelphia at
21 South 12th Street, 10th
Floor

Thursdays at 4pm

tokens provided
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ID: My Hard-Earned Lessons

by Najee Gibson, Translated by J-Lo @ SCI Forest

This is a translation of an article that was originally published in issue 1 about Najee's Philadelphia reentry. If you missed the English original article and would like a copy, let us know and we can mail you a back issue.

Yo sali de S.C.I. Houtzdel en 9 Abril, 2009. Me fui para mi casa en Philly. Todo lo que tenía por tarjeta de identificación era la del D.O.C.

“Departamento de Corrección.” He conseguido la información en este artículo por un proceso frustrante de ensayo y error.



Tarjeta De Seguro Social

- Yo fui al 1234 Market Street, al piso 20.
- Llené los papeles correspondientes para reemplazar mi tarjeta de seguro social.
- Le enseñé mi I.D. del D.O.C. y los papeles que me dieron cuando sali de la cárcel.
- Me enviaron la tarjeta unas semanas después por el correo.
- Me dieron un recibo que se me olvido, tuve que volver por otro. El recibo era un tipo de identificación para el Welfare y no para licencia de Conducir.

DPW Tarjeta Access

- Te dan una tarjeta Access si te aprueban los beneficios. El D.O.C. me dio una aplicación cuando sali de la cárcel.
- En DPW fue el unico lugar donde aceptaron mi tarjeta del D.O.C. como identificación.
- Querían ver el recibo que me dieron en el seguro social para que supieron que estoy esperando por la tarjeta de identificación del estado.
- Me dieron beneficios temporarios hasta que yo trajera mi identificación.

Tarjeta De Registro Para Votar

- En PA las personas que han estado encarcelados tienen el beneficio para votar.
- Para registrarse llenan el formulario y lo envían por el correo.
- Tienen formularios en la oficina del DPW y en todas las librerías gratis, y en otros lugares.



- Tu tarjeta oficial viene por el correo unas semanas después.
- Yo me registré como demócrata porque gana el alternativo.

Certificado De Nacimiento

- El lunes a las 4:00pm un caballero con un bocadillo (“con delicadeza si tienes apetito”) en frente de la libreria de la Philadelphia donde en el Parkway dan un cheque. El no te hace el cheque a tí, pero a la agencia que te da una identificación.
- Me dieron un cheque “estadístico vital” que use para comprar el certificado de nacimiento. Los certificados de nacimiento ya no están en el condominio del estado en Spring Garden. Cuando yo fui ahí me miraban como si yo fuera de Marte.
- El certificado de nacimiento se saca ahora en 110 North 8th Street Suite 108.
- Yo llené el formulario y lo entregué con el cheque.
- Me dieron un recibo para certificar al DPW.
- El certificado me llegó una semana después por el correo.



DMV Identificación Del Estado

- Fui donde el mismo caballero en el Parkway, (“era bonito para ser un gringo, como un pastel de manzana”), me escribió un cheque para el DMV.
- Yo tenía una identificación normal del estado de PA y como estaba en el sistema fui y apliqué para otra.
- No tuve que hacer mucho para que me devan la tarjeta. Si tu nunca has tenido una tarjeta del estado de PA te pedirán bastantes pruebas para probar si eres quien dices que eres.
- Yo les di mi cheque y el formulario para la nueva identificación.
- Yo les enseñé mi certificado de nacimiento, y mi recibo de seguro social y mi tarjeta access.
- También querían prueba de mi dirección, yo use el estado de cuenta de mi celular, pero tu puedes usar tu tarjeta de votar si tienes una, o algo de tu residencia que pruebe que vives ahí como un lease, o cualquier correspondencia oficial.
- Me tiraron una foto y salí con mi nueva tarjeta en la mano.
- Si tu no tienes suficientes pruebas a veces te dan una identificación temporal hasta que tengan pruebas suficientes.

Cambio de Nombre

- Yo planeaba en cambiar mi nombre en Mazzoni Legal Services cuando yo pudiera.
- Si tu has tenido un crimen puedes cambiar tu nombre en dos años después de completar tu sentencia (incluyendo parole si no has hecho el máximo de tu sentencia). Para algunos crímenes tu tienes que tener un perdón antes de que legalmente puedas hacer este proceso.



Perspectives on Faith

I Wonder Why

Juicy Woods

I wonder why
my life has gone upside
down

I wonder why
people turn their back
on me

I wonder why
my troubles never left
me alone

I wonder why

I wonder why
I grew up so fast

I wonder why
I was abused by people
I knew

I wonder why
I hurt so bad

I wonder why

I wonder why
you up and left me
alone

I wonder why
you wasn't there for me
when I needed you the
most

I wonder why
you stand by my side

I wonder why
you gave up on me so
much
without giving me a try

I wonder why
you stop believing in me

I wonder why
you didn't love me like I
love you

I wonder why
you played me like a
fool

I wonder why

In Issue 4, we asked you for articles about gender and religion/spirituality in the hopes of showing a number of perspectives side by side. It is obvious from your responses that this topic is important, for some as a source of confusion and pain, for others as a source of strength and validation.

Heath Mackenzie Reynolds

I have always been a religious person. It's looked like a lot of different things throughout the years, and God knows it hasn't been easy, but my belief in God has always been there. What hasn't always been there is a community around me that also believes in God.

It makes sense, you know? We as queers and as trans people have weird, and sometimes upsetting, relationships with our religious traditions. I have been around the block, so to speak, with my religious practice. Born in a non-religious family, I found Christianity when my family failed to provide me the support and care that I needed as a teenager. The adults in my congregation made sure that I was ok, that I was getting support and love (and sometimes food and clothing, too), when I wasn't getting these things consistently at home. I grew up in a town that hasn't really progressed that much. No one came out in my high school; I knew no queer or trans people in my hometown. While my pastor was active in supporting women and LGBT people, she was the only one I knew in my hometown who would speak on these issues. I followed her lead and started my queer activism through my church, but I read queer fiction in secret, under my bedcovers. I hid the books under my bed and made my librarians promise that my mother would never find out what I was checking out. I was too terrified to even admit the truth to myself: I wouldn't come out until I had left my hometown and went to college, across the state from my hometown. But when I came out, I had already started an ordination process. I wanted to be a pastor in the United Methodist Church – a church that still to this day doesn't ordain out queer people.

Somehow in the midst of all of this, though, the main lessons about being queer that I received in my church was that it

was not only ok, but that it is demanded and holy that we are our best selves. I left the church, and Christianity, in 2001, when it became clear that my church would never accept my whole self – then a queer, gender non-conforming person. The



lesson I had learned, though, was not that I was evil because of these facts about myself. The lesson I learned was that if the church cannot catch up and accept our whole, and holy, selves, that's on them, not on us.

2001 was a long time ago, though. And many things have happened since then. I came out as a transgender man in 2003, while I was in graduate theological school studying alongside people who were training to be ministers and pastors. During that time I also started a path that eventually led to my conversion to Judaism this past November. And in between then and now, I also have transitioned again, from transgender man to gender queer again. I've been known to call my gender a "hot mess" because of how many different times I've come out as a different kind of trans* person. The reality is, I don't feel like that much of a mess, only that we are called to only one thing: to be our whole and most authentic selves. For me, that means that I have transitioned a whole bunch of times to get to a place where I am comfortable in my skin. It's been a lot of work to avoid the religious messages that tell me that this is unacceptable. But it's also been my attachment to my own spirituality that has helped me do this. Through my spirituality, I've been able to really focus on two important ideas: (1) the idea that God created the world and everything in it, and called it good (Genesis 1.31—"God then surveyed all that [God] had made, and look—it was very good!") and (2) the idea that, in creating the world, God contracted God's self into vessels of light, which shattered and became sparks of divine light trapped within the material of creation. This idea is from Isaac Luria, a Jewish rabbi who lived from 1534 -1572 who was very important in developing Kabbalah, the mystical tradition within Judaism. I am not at all schooled enough in this teaching to know much about how it works, but I do know this: the idea that something deep within me is a part of God is all the strength I need to face the many moments every day that I am faced with the transphobic and homophobic ideas that are such a loud part of the world that we live in. If there is a spark of divinity within me and within everything else in this world, and if the world that God created is good, then there is no way that my transgender body is flawed or wrong or evil. It is not possible. God created the world, and saw what God had created, and called it good – very good!

One last thing: Many of our religious traditions have way more space for creatively understanding human experiences than our religious organizations give them space for. In the Mishnah, a Jewish religious text, for example, there is this:

An androgynos he is a created being of her own, but the sages could not decide if the androgynos is a man or a woman. But this is not true of a tumtum who is sometimes a man and sometimes a woman.

— Mishna Bikkurim 4: 1,

It is fascinating! Here is a *religious* text that makes it clear that the rabbis who wrote this believed that there are **more** than two genders: there are men, women, the *androgynos*, and *tumtum*. A person might have doubts about their gender (*tumtum*) and on the other, they might make themselves over on their own terms (*androgynos*). This is hugely liberating! It is also one example of how our religious traditions might have more ability than we know to understand transgender lives and experiences. It doesn't make them perfect, and it doesn't mean that *everyone* in the tradition holds the bigger view. But it *does* mean that we are not alone. The religious voices that so loudly

Resources:

Heath researched and created a long list of internet-based resources on trans and gender variant inclusion in various communities of faith for this edition of *Hearts on a Wire*. We know most of you do not have access to the internet, so we did not include it. However if you want it, please just let us know, we would be thrilled to send you her list.

speak against us are not the *only* voices, and they are certainly not necessarily the *correct* voices.

My spiritual practice has, for a long time, been the thing that's helped me get through my life. It reminds me who I am, reminds me that I am here in the world to do good, to be good, and to help others do the same. There are so many religious voices that would hold that I am wrong in this – we all know that. But those voices are just that. They are other people's voices, struggling on their own with their own spirituality, and their own understanding of God. The best I can do is to hold tight to the light, and goodness within me, be true to myself, and find the goodness, the light, the sparks of divinity, in the world around me. In the hardest days of being a transgender person in this world, it's knowing that there is some God all around and in me that gets me through.

Shine

Resource:

Metropolitan Community Church

Reverend Jeffery Jordan is the faith leader at the Metropolitan Community Church, a gay and trans affirming congregation in Philadelphia. MCC welcomes gay and trans people reentering from prison and seeking a community of faith. Reverend Jordan welcomes letters from incarcerated gay and trans Christians seeking guidance and support in their faith.

Attn: Rev. Jordan
Metropolitan Community Church
3637 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19134

I feel that, yes, God does not approve of homosexuality nor lesbianism, transsexuals and the like. Why? Because it goes against God's natural design for sexual relations, that was supposed to be exclusively reserved for marriage between husband and wife to procreate et cetera. But, on the other hand, I was born with an inherited, inborn **sinful nature** that was passed to me from a couple named: Adam & Eve for something that they did to offend God and I had no part in that whatsoever. But yet here it is I was born bearing an inherited curse? I don't feel that that is fair to me and everyone else, wouldn't you agree? Am I gay? Yes. Do I accept, believe that Jesus the Christ died in my place and rose from the grave to conquer sin and death, and open the way to eternal salvation? Yes. But yet I feel that by me going against nature, I willfully disrespect God. My conscience convicts me each day. Yet this is who I am. I fell in love with another man. Is that sin

any worse than a murderer? I feel that there should be no conditions on love? For example: It two women fall in love, and two men fall in love, is there a crime in that? I'm confused. That's my view on the topic.

Sacha

The pain of being transsexual didn't really hit me until I was about 12. I went from being a "gifted" student to failing, was repeatedly attacked by my peers, ran away from home, attempted suicide, and was first incarcerated in the adolescent unit of a psychiatric facility. I was incarcerated in mental wards many times as a teenager, and once or twice juvenile hall. Some weren't that terrible, but in others I was tied up and beaten, had my personal objects broken in front of me, or was forced to act in gendered ways. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I knew I was meant to be a different gender. It was a very painful and confusing time.

My family was Catholic, but not particularly religious. We went to Mass on holidays. My mother read the Bible to herself and played kids Bible songs on a cassette for me. My grandma still prayed in Scots Gaelic. Her favorite Saint was St. Jude, the patron Saint of lost causes. When I moved at age 6, she sent me religious poems and Saints cards every month in the mail. I was depressed and these made me feel

better. My family had a strong belief in God, and I was taught about God, but I went to public school and they were not strict Catholics. I was believed to have a special relationship with St. Anthony, who my godmother's brother was named after, because he died of AIDS right before I was born. St. Anthony is the patron Saint of the lost: of missing persons and all lost things. And as a teenager, I was most certainly lost.

By the age of 16, I knew I was a transsexual, though had no idea how or when I could do anything about it. When I tried to tell a counselor at school, my psychiatrist, or someone I trusted from church, they didn't believe me. My mother became a reborn Christian and began going to church every week. At this point, after surviving some hellish years living as a street kid in and out of psychiatric incarceration, with no one who would even believe I was trans, but rather crazy, I was hopeless. However I did become more spiritual. Once in a psych ward there was a music class, and they played "Let it be", by The Beatles. This really spoke to me. I wake up to the sound of music/ Mother Mary comforts me/There will be an answer/Let it Be...And in my darkest hour/There is still a light that shines on me/Shine until tomorrow/Let it be. Yet I also had doubts about God because I felt it was not fair that God was always considered masculine and that churches were not accepting of gay or trans people. How could Jesus, who sacrificed himself, a God of love and redemption, feel that way? Although I believed in Jesus, I also practiced magic and herbalism. Both the Saints of my childhood, and the ancient, pre-Christian rites of my Celtic ancestors influenced my prayers and rituals. The woods nearby was the only place I found comfort and I would ditch school to wander them for hours. I became interested in natural theology. Many renaissance writers, such as Michel Montaigne, connected to God through nature, so I read them. I went to Bible study and got into heated debates with the pastor. Although he always told me that God loved me, I needed a deeper, more specific reassurance. I wanted to know that God loved me for who I really was: trans, gender-variant, and unwilling to foreswear my powerful inheritance of Gaelic myth and magic.



It wasn't a preacher who could give me this reassurance, but only God himself. If my powerful ancestors who found magic in nature came to accept Jesus, why shouldn't I? The Bible said that Jesus was with me and shared my pain. I imagined him beside me, an invisible, compassionate presence I hadn't noticed when I was raped, beaten, incarcerated, abused. He was with me. He loved me. He loved me. And so, as a 17-year-old transsexual, I began a personal relationship with God. I was re-baptized. I began attending church. I read the scriptures. I met a preacher who used to be a Hell's Angel. He still looked like one, and rode a Harley. He told me that Jesus would have been a biker. That Jesus was a rebel who challenged the beliefs of his time. That Jesus had always protected and traveled with those society rejected: the poor, the sick, the misunderstood, the sex-workers and criminals. That Jesus loved me no matter what, and was with me no matter what. That everyone sinned, and no sin was worse than any other, and that all Jesus required was that I accept and believe in him. I began to go to the woods to speak with God every day. Dear Jesus, I can't live like this. My very existence is so much pain to me. I don't think I can avoid suicide without transitioning someday. Thank you for loving me and understanding me. Please answer my prayers. I can't believe you don't accept me. I need this to be myself, to relieve my soul of pain, and to be a good person and closer to you. I don't know why but I need this to live a meaningful life where I can be useful to others and to the world. Because the idea of

transitioning was something never encountered in my life, but rather something I read about once in an old book, it seemed like an impossible feat. If God made it possible to happen for me, to any extent, it would be proof that he loved and accepted me. I would doubt no further, and I would commit to a spiritual life.

Life went on. I managed to graduate high school. I made friends at Goth clubs where I was more accepted for being different. Because of a new social life, I went to God and to the woods less and less often for comfort. Ten years ago, I was able to physically transition to the extent I wanted to, and live my life the way I wanted. My mother, once she got over it, gave me a beautiful bible in celebration. I became an advocate for HIV prevention in my community, and when my godmother heard she smiled and whispered that Anthony was with me. But I'd forgotten about Jesus. I was more interested in life, now that I felt I could fully live it. I still worked with some saints and gave them honors. I held a 3 day fast, lighting candles and praying for intercession from St. Jude on my knees when it seemed I couldn't get a passport. The next day I was waived through the line and given one. I believed.

Recently I picked up the Bible and saw the dedication page from my mother. I remembered my desperate prayer as an adolescent, my promise to God. I realized with horror that my prayers had been answered, and I had not even noticed. And I fell to my knees and began crying with gratitude and praise for a miracle.

In Leviticus, there are laws against homosexual sex. I met a man with a degree in Theology named Jose. He did his thesis on the laws in Leviticus. He believed they were included to stop disease from spreading. The laws include many laws about sex, about females not leaving the house when they menstruate, and about the preparation of meat. He said he found historical evidence these laws were local laws made to protect people from an outbreak of viruses that can travel through blood. That though the Bible is inspired by God, it includes many ancient customs that were shared by local religions due to public health reasons and are not directly from Christianity.



Limpets can change their sex

There are many examples in nature of animals that mate with the same sex. Homosexual mating is popular among geese. Bonobo chimpanzees are often bisexual and use sex to form relationships and end conflicts, not just to reproduce. Earthworms are hermaphrodites, and some ocean creatures such as limpets change sex. Female hyenas have genitals that look like penises. A female hammerhead shark can reproduce without a male. In human cultures before Christianity, tribes all over the world had gender-variant people in their communities who they saw as being closer to the spiritual life, and who people saw as having gifts of healing and transformation. There are also gender-variant figures in many ancient myths.

The church has a long history of sacred figures who were gender-variant or expressed sexuality. In some versions of the Old Testament, Dinah was conceived as a male, but her mother prayed for a daughter so God had her born as a girl. Some sources say Mary Magdalene was a both a sex-worker and a beloved disciple of Jesus. St. Thecla was a disciple of the apostle Paul, and she dressed and cut her hair as a man and traveled with him. St. Margaret of Antioch ran away from home dressed as a boy and joined a monastery as "Brother Pelagius". Brother Pelagius disclosed his T in a note found on his deathbed. He never told anyone while alive that his body was female, not even when he was once accused of impregnating a nun! St. Uncumber desired



Saint Uncumber

a solitary life among women, but her father betrothed her. She prayed to God and miraculously grew a beard the next day so her fiancé would call off the wedding. St. Julian of Norwich took a male name and emphasized the femininity of God, calling the first person of the Trinity “Holy Mother-Father” and the Holy Spirit “she”. St. Joan of Arc heard God since she was young and ran away from home at 17 to become a knight, prophet, and crusader. When captured, she refused to give up men’s clothing despite being offered plea deals if she did, because she believed it was part of Gods plan. St.

Sergius and St. Bacchus, both born with male bodies, said that God had dressed them in women’s gowns and joined them together. There was even a pope who lived as a man but was discovered to have a female body when he gave birth!

In the cases above, the saints were only revered after they had lived, as their cultures did not accept them. They were all violently killed by members of their own communities. So was Jesus Christ, who was also misunderstood. To be trans, we also had to have a strong faith in who and what we know we really are, similar to the faith Jesus had in who he was.



Saints Sergius and Bacchus

Jesus, the Saints, and Celtic myth and ritual were all important to my transition, as well as my recovery from incarceration and physical and sexual abuse. I still pray and practice religious and ancestral ritual as a form of Faith. I know in my soul that God loves me. I know God loves you. And I believe, with my strong faith, that being trans or gay does not make us any less beautiful, lovable, or worthy in the eyes of God. I believe that being trans is a spiritual gift that teaches us how to be healers and transformers, teaches us to bridge the gap between men’s and women’s cultures, teaches us how to have unwavering faith. In Catholicism a Mystery is something that does not make rational sense but that we know to be true. The central Mystery of Catholicism is how during Communion, the wafer and wine become the body and blood of Christ. For me, being Trans is also a Mystery. A Mystery, in the religious sense, can never be understood. It can only be accepted.

Miss Juicy

I’m 25 years old and I been going to church all my life. My grandfather was a bishop before he died and I love him with

Face

Pretty Boy

dedicated to Face who passed away on 10.28.11
Before you go I have some things to tell you that are true and kind

All this is so sudden and it’s blowing my mind

You taught me to live and love again

As my world and my best Friend

I for one didn’t see this coming

It’s like my soul is numbing

All I wanted was forever with you

Hear you say those two words “I do”

A lot of people were against what we have

But you never let it bother you cause together were bad

Why did you have to go so soon

Your smile lit up any room

You made me laugh and you made me cry

In my heart you will never die

Now you feel no hurt or pain

You can spread your wings and dance in the rain

It’s hard baby, to move on

Cause for you I mourn

So grieve I will because grieve I must

But eventually my grief will turn to trust

Please watch over me as I will you

And When were together again it’ll be a dream come true

Goodbye for now, Peace and I love you

all my heart, but I heard stories about homosexuality being a sin and the church should love us and pray for us and I heard that all the time until I came to SCI ____, where one of the Reverends said you are supposed to hate a homosexual and love a child molester and that's nowhere in the bible because Romans says we all fallen short of the glory of God and we are all sinners no matter what. We should be treated with the same respect and a true church ain't going to judge you, they're going to pray for you and help lead you to Christ when you're ready. See I know a lot about the bible and no Christian is supposed to judge his brother or sister cause we're all the same in God's eye and I'm not going to let them get the best of me. I know I can't do it all by myself and God says if you don't share the gospel their sin is upon you too, so how you going to judge me if you're not perfect at all and you talk about me but you're sinning like me? One minute you're lifting up the name of Jesus and the next you're cursing or living a lie. And God watches everything even when you don't think he's looking and if a lot of churches stop pointing the finger and try to be a true church, they'll have more people in the congregation.. Since when do you have to say you're not practicing homosexual activities to join the choir - that's judging someone, that's not what church is all about cause God died for **all** of our sins.

God Let Us Lead - Aaron Scott

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on the way home was sitting in their chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the eunuch reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," the eunuch said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So they invited Philip to come up and sit with them.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told them the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And the eunuch gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized them.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on their way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- Acts 8:26-40

Maybe you've heard this Bible story before, maybe not. If this is your first time reading about the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts, you may be saying to yourself, "WHAT! Why haven't I heard this preached in church before? And how is it that so many people can waste their breath hating on trans* folks for being 'wrong' and 'sinful' with this story right smack in the middle of the New Testament?" And those would be good questions. God only knows why haters have to hate so loud and so often.

But I'll try not to talk about haters here, because they take up enough of our time already. Let's talk about this unnamed saint of Africa instead.

First, a little background. There are many stories about eunuchs in the Bible and throughout history. Looking back, we now know eunuchs were a diverse group of people. Sometimes the word "eunuch" referred to the type of body a person had, sometimes it was about how they dressed and what type of work they did in society, sometimes it was about who they had sex with (and how).

We also know that under the laws of the Roman empire (which ruled the road to Jerusalem, where this story takes place), eunuchs had no legal rights. At best, they were considered someone else's valuable property. At worst, their labor and their bodies were abused freely by Roman citizens (who were almost always men with money). So we can imagine that the Ethiopian eunuch here is someone who has known suffering, struggle, and isolation.

Even though this eunuch isn't from Rome, they are traveling through a Roman territory in this story, and we can imagine that was a terrifying journey to be taking—probably not a journey they'd choose of their own free will. The scripture doesn't mention it here, but temple at Jerusalem wasn't just a place to go worship. It was also the main marketplace where all community business happened, so there are plenty of reasons why the queen would send her treasurer there. We know today, too, that just as Roman laws kept eunuchs unsafe, temple laws kept eunuchs shut out of religious and community life. Eunuchs — like sex workers, the poor, the sick, and people with disabilities — were considered sinners too unfit and unclean to pray alongside the rich and powerful. Temple law kept them at the back of the crowd, far from the holy texts and sacred objects. So we know this Ethiopian eunuch is taking a bold step just by picking up Isaiah's words and reading them in private. Despite the hardship happening in their life, this eunuch is a person who has the sense to know that they are worthy enough to try and understand God's mysteries, even though the rest of society tells them otherwise.

In the Bible, what Jesus tells us about eunuchs is simply this: "There are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are those who choose to make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who can accept this should accept it" (Matthew 19:12). So out of the mouth of the Son of God himself, we hear that people who don't conform to the usual standards of "real men" and "real women" are, in fact, holy. And it doesn't seem to matter to Jesus if we are "born this way" or if we make a conscious choice about how to live our lives. "Anyone who can accept this should accept it." To me this sounds like Jesus saying, "Haters, GET OVER IT."

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch is also the first big story about conversion we find in the New Testament. That's right: THE FIRST. That means that any church or preacher or so-called Christian who wants to treat you bad because you are trans* needs to go back and read Acts 8 again until it sinks in. Gender non-conforming folks have been getting baptized before Saul ever changed his name to Paul and we are pretty damn important to the history of this faith. But what I love most in this story



Rembrandt's classic painting of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch.

isn't just about who gets to play the starring role. I also love what this story tells us about *how* God calls us into a life of faith. Does Phillip force the Ethiopian eunuch to convert? No way. Does Phillip threaten, abuse or shame the Ethiopian eunuch for being from a different culture and place, or for being a gender non-conforming person? Does Phillip try to turn the eunuch into something they're not? Not at all. Instead, we see in this story that the Ethiopian eunuch is always free to make the first move toward God. God is present, but doesn't dominate anyone here. When it comes to God, this scripture tells us we are free to make our own choices on our own terms. That freedom may have been a new experience in the eunuch's life. After years of being used by the rich and powerful, journeying through dangerous territories, worshipping at temple in a land where they were considered less than human-- to be suddenly surprised by this tender invitation and freedom to know God more deeply must have been incredible. And yet, this is just how God rolls. Still today. Still with us.

God lets us lead. There is no forcing us into faith. In Acts 8, God is quietly hanging out in the background saying, "Check me out-- read this stuff in Isaiah and see if it speaks to you. Discuss it with someone, and then decide for yourself." At the end of the story, Phillip doesn't even make the first move to baptize-- the Ethiopian eunuch just decides on their own. "I'm ready. This is what I want." After the baptism, Phillip melts away and the Ethiopian hits the road again rejoicing. And that's how we know God was present-- because there was a new sense of joy. No force, no shame, no violence, no guilt, no fear. Just soul-deep joy. And the freedom to choose it.

Society might not offer you freedom. The church might not offer you freedom. Your family might not offer you freedom. But freedom is *always* what God wants for us, and God has sanctified our right to fight for it. Because the love that comes from God never forces itself. It is a gift with no strings attached and it is something that we are free to choose for ourselves if and when the time is right. When we choose to accept that gift, we are choosing to accept that God loves us completely-- our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our souls-- just as we are. We are choosing to try and love ourselves as hard as God loves us. We are choosing to fight for life and freedom in the recognition that they are holy because God gave them to us. We know that God's fierce love and tender acceptance of us are a package deal, because God didn't make a mistake in softly calling out to the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road. And God didn't make any mistakes in making us.

*For this is what the LORD says:
"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me
and hold fast to my covenant—
to them I will give within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that will endure forever.*

-Isaiah 56:4-5

Thelema, My Religion and Gender - Saror Nipha

I'm Tranz. I'm a Thelemite. But it's not really that simple. Thelema is a modern "religion" balancing both the first phase (or Aeon) of religion—which was focused on female divinity, Goddess worship—and the second Aeon, which was focused on masculine divinity, God worship. We consider the modern Aeon to be the Aeon of

the child, the hermaphrodite that contains the male principle of the father and the female principle of the mother. Both sexes contained in one. This is mainly understood in terms of mind, spirit and emotions. I want to make that clear that not all Thelemites are Tranz, or even bi or gay, but we firmly embrace all genders and sexualities. Our prophet was a bisexual "bottom!!" I'm not a Thelemite because I'm Tranz, and I'm not Tranz because I'm a Thelemite. The point I'm making is my Gender and Religion embrace each other beautifully.

The most beautiful image I know is an illustration by Eliphas Levi of one of our deities, the androgynous Baphomet, who is depicted basically as a pre-op MTF! It fascinated me long before I came to understand my gender, and it helped me to understand and love myself and my gender/sexuality.



Eliphas Levi's Baphomet

I know these ideas are pretty much outside the box for many people who will read this, and might have confused you. My space is limited and it's a complicated subject. In fact I'm doing my own zine, *Goetia Gurl*, where I focus on my Gender & Religion, since there's so much to say about it! It's coming out soon and will be free to inmates. If you have questions or would like to learn more, you can contact me (Miss Nipha) & my zine @ **Goetia Gurl**
Editor Jacqueline de Molay
104 Adam Ct.
Shohola, PA 15450

The call for submissions on this topic asked some questions; let me try to answer them simply. Yes I have a "religious" community, and I LOVE it to death because my gender and sexuality is celebrated, not scorned. I've had nothing but positive experiences with my religion...but plenty of negative ones from people who attack because Thelema is not something they are comfortable with and their fear of the unknown makes them lash out. Sometimes ignorance makes me an "evil mason" or a "devil worshipper." I laugh that type of stuff off. I love

myself and the religion that loves me. Love is the law, love under will.

Spiritual Journey - Black Diamond

For a long time I was filled with anger and resentment. I had a chip on my shoulder and took my feelings out on everybody especially those who tried to love me. I was a young man forced by the hand I was dealt to play gangster drug dealer to take care of me and my two little sisters. I began losing myself more and more. Religion and God was instilled in me from my Grandmother. I remember praying and asking God to deliver me from my torment and save me from the path of destruction, but it became clear that God could not and would not save me from this world. The world I created and accepted as my reality. I would not be saved until I learned submission to something greater and more powerful than me, myself and I.

I arrived at SCI Frackville in the fall of '97 after doing two years in the Feds. 17 years and 6 prisons later I was finally ready to submit. The good in me was fighting to come out and shine like a diamond. I was tired of being a tough guy, there was no love, loyalty or future in it. I wanted to be somebody respected for the right things and not the wrongs.

I called on God to come into my life and release me from my bondage, now it didn't happen over night and I'm still a work in progress, but at this point I'm able to forgive and accept my past as the will of God to strengthen me for the future. God has set me free from my fear and insecurity, then reshaped my fragmented life and gave me the glorious privilege to be whole. For those who are reading this God is the best of designers and is perfect in his creation. We are not a mistake and his love is unconditional.



From the Mail:

Bebe

J. Lo @ SCI Forest

Mi rey uno y unico amor, feliz cumpleaños numero 27. Si soy tu princesa J.

Lo. Te he seguido el rastro, no te he olvidado ni quiero, no se que te paso pero perdonó y olvidó. Nada nuevo ha pasado en mi vida porque esta marcada por tu amor y deseo. Yo te deseo lo mejor y con amor y respecto no sabes cuanto deseo verte y cuidarte y aceptar cual sea tu decisión. Te amo y siempre te amaré porque as sido lo mejor que yo he tenido en mi vida mi verdadero amor. A pesar de la distancia *no me he entregado a otros brazos porque el amor que siento por tí ha vencido toda tentación. Portate bien y que nuestro señor te acompañe y te de fuerzas para sobre pasar esta odisea.*

Disclaimer:

We get a lot of mail, and cannot publish every letter we get. If you write to us responding to something you read, please let us know (1) if we can print an excerpt from your letter and (2) how you would like to be credited.

Partner Violence (Issue 4)

Partner Violence: My Experience had experience what I am going through now, and the sharing is helping me very much, in fact it helped save me and helped me to maintain a peace of mind when there was no one to talk to on this level, this article was my savior, thanks.

On domestic violence that I have experienced in the past I had always took the blame and felt that it was my fault, I was deep in love with those parasites, Now I read this article over and over to help me thru... That article saved me a lot of pain, it's so helpful to know I'm not going thru this by myself, and to know there was someone there in the exact predicament I'm in and shared how they came thru it, is so much of a blessing I cry of relief, then I feel joy, I can't thank you enough.

- Ceci

Hearts on a Wire obtained permission to send a copy of the above letter to Anonymous @ SCI Dallas. Anonymous informed us that no one at Dallas had received Issue 4 because of the mailroom censors. Receiving the mail from Ceci was the moment Anonymous learned that the article had been printed. (Hey folks at Dallas—let us know if you get this one) Anonymous responded from the Hole:

I was at my wits end & got my bed sheet ready to hang up inside my cell, I asked God for a sign. It didn't take more than 10 minutes & Ceci's letter arrived. I wasn't expecting it, I opened it & still sobbing & I see a letter about how profoundly I had helped her. Ceci saved my life that very moment, she kept me from taking the bed sheet & doing myself in. So to Miss Ceci, I'm glad you're okay & thank you so very much for saving my life.

- Anonymous @ SCI Dallas

Boyfriends (Issue 4)

I like [this article], I thought it was cute. But now, today I tell those guys at the door, if you act crazy or controlling then I'm done, gone. When I get home I'm going to have the guys for pleasure, and Love my Dog.

- Ceci

For Anyone Going Through Something (Issue 4)

Great job on the newsletter! That doodling by Ceci cheered me up

- Miley

Perspectives on the Z-Code System (Issue 2)

I have been requesting for a Z-Code because of my celly always asking me for sexual favors and I get denied one every time and I done all I can do. For people that have one enjoy it and enjoy the peace and the to time to yourself too.

- Charlie Courteau @ SCI Cresson

Condoms

by Ms. Georgia @ PICC

I think we should be allowed to have condoms in the DOC or be able to buy them in commissary. Philadelphia Prison System has the same policy that inmates are not allowed to have sex of any kind same as the DOC. They have the same policy, well Philadelphia Prison System gives out free condoms, why can't the DOC give them out for free to us too?

"They tell you to hang in there. But the real deal is to hang in there to yourself. Cuz' yourself is all you have in the long run. And your Higher Power if you believe that you have one."

-Najee



- Artwork by Brakie

trans/gender variant imprisonment in PA



Experiences of Trans and Gender Variant People in Pennsylvania's Prison Systems

A Report by the Hearts on a Wire Collective

Remember the survey some of us participated in a few years ago? Last summer we finally finished the report of the results!

We have FREE paper copies of the report available for people who are currently locked up in Pennsylvania. Please let us know if you want a copy!!!

The report is also available online at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/56677078/This-is-a-Prison-Glitter-is-Not-Allowed>

We want to hear from you!

This newsletter depends on your submissions for content.

We welcome your:

- Responses to this edition
- Artwork (black and white)
- Articles
- Contribuciones en español son muy muy bienvenidos!
- We are looking for additional help translating articles into Spanish. If you are bilingual and would like to help with this project, please write to us!
- We are looking for a second legal correspondent on the inside. We would send you research for you to write articles. Interested? Please write to us so we can get you started!
- Poetry
- Ideas
- Commissary recipes

If you contribute something, make sure you tell us:

1. Exactly how you want to be credited [anonymous, your legal name & ID number, the name you use, a nickname, etc.]
2. Whether it's OK to say the facility you are/were in

Send to:

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Philadelphia, PA 19107

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