Friends of Ruby Zine

SUMMER 2023

“Amplifying Queer Voices”
Theme: Identity

Within these pages, the collection of art and written pieces dives deep into the intricate landscape of 2SLGBTQIA+ identity and its complex interplay with the world. This zine explores the ideals and values that mold and define 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, as individuals navigate the delicate process of becoming and unbecoming their past selves. We invite our readers to find solace and kinship in the shared experiences and perspectives within these narratives, realizing that they are never alone in their journey of self-discovery and acceptance. It is through the lens of others' stories that we hope to illuminate the path to understanding and embracing one's own identity.
Welcome to the vibrant world of The Friends of Ruby Zine, where we shine a spotlight on the rich tapestry of 2SLGBTQIA+ narratives. Our zine is a jubilant ode to the ever-evolving spectrum of queerness, paying homage to its historical roots, embracing its current diversity, and envisioning the limitless possibilities of its future.

Within these pages, you’ll discover an array of submissions that delve into the heart of 2SLGBTQIA+ culture, history, identity, and self-expression. Whether it’s a heartfelt personal essay recounting the journey of coming out, a captivating photo series dedicated to the thriving 2SLGBTQIA+ scene in Toronto, or the lyrical beauty of a poem detailing those unforgettable first experiences with love – our zine is a canvas for the multifaceted voices within our community.

Friends of Ruby conceived this publication as a megaphone for queer voices, a celebration of intersectionality, and a reflection of the kaleidoscope of identities and experiences that define our community. Join us in this exhilarating journey of discovery, understanding, and, above all, celebration. Welcome to The Friends of Ruby Zine.

Keep reading this zine to explore 2SLGBTQIA+ community...

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Art
"Mirrored"

By Diana Barrientos-Irigoyen

Acrylic on Wood (12x16inch)

This piece is a reflection of self and soul. The on-going relationship with understanding your being to the body you present to the world. It follows the idea of becoming and unbecoming of your past to your future self. Though it may seem like a clear destination, the inner battles may create a sense of urgency. Regardless, the overall concept of becoming must come with patience; patience for the part of you that is healing and still learning. Because even our hardest times deserves to have compassion.
“Queer As F***!”

By Sam Paboudjian

This piece was donated to the Friends of Ruby Drop-In Centre.
“Home”
By Nikki Pangbourne Jara

“HOME” IS A
[a person who loves]
[a person to grow with]
[a person who’s a soulmate]

“HOME” IS A
[places where I feel aligned]
[places I call home]
[places that aren’t just places]

PLACE

“FEELING”
[a feeling of care]
[a feeling of comfort]
“Mothers Love Reimagined”

By Bansari Koshti
Through the Witching Hour, 
deep into twilight, 
the moon wanes in reflective glass... 
as the sky consumes, in blue, 
the starlight of the dead. 
If you value the the serenity, 
then where is the evergreen? 
Does it linger in the forest we've yet to walk through? 
I guess we shall wander 
with the night, 
until the sun reprises for the dawn... 
a brand new day.

@carsonbohdi

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“A threat?”
By Ezra Goldberg

a threat?
my words comfort

my hands embrace

my actions delicately untie a series
of knots made to confine

my voice patiently teaches my
elders basic respect

my soul forgives

I threaten the laws you cling to,
your norm

I don't threaten you
you threaten me
visibility
on Trans day of visibility

I feel too visible
a spectacle,
perceived but not seen
spoken about, not spoken to
mentioned in media only to declare my distance
to be othered, to be ridiculed
to make you feel better about fitting in the box you were prescribed
“Not Girl Summer Party”  
By Noga Shachak

I brought glitter for everyone’s eyes,  
hoping to match  
your femininity to mine.  
But found myself alone in my  
overblown  
uncanny valley womanhood.

I sat on your couch, feeling out of place  
in a dress that showed too much breast  
while you talked about the boys you’d  
fucked, or wished you had.

Any other girl would’ve killed to learn  
your dance,  
but I hoped you’d laugh at my moves.  
Maybe you bought the performance but  
deep down  
I knew I was a joke.
I could never map myself onto anywhere
so I kept finding myself lost.
On the drive back from your house, I felt lonesome
worrying the residues of girlhood between my teeth
over and over and
appropriating the words of Lady Macbeth
as I pleaded with spirits to be unsexed.

All those moments when I tried to be like you left me
destitute
but now I chase my plentitude.
I want to step out of the valley and into the sun
instead of yearning to call your moonlight home or
to take up space where I always felt out of place
but sometimes the darkness feels familiar and I
hesitate
at the threshold,
confronted by those searing rays.
She smells of lavender and cloves, carrying the sweetness of the sacred into her everyday, while I am campfire smoke. She says she loves to breathe me in, but her eyes water and at the end of the night she hurries to wash away my scent.

I am the lemon-scented dish soap my mother likes: neon yellow bargain brand slipping through your fingers. You are made of sandalwood and earth. When you hold me, I am solid reborn an oak.

Darling, would you lie atop my chest and unravel my breaths? Would you reach between my ribs and pry them open, creating a space for us?
I know sadness
I could fill oceans with my tears
It’s truly none of your business
The way I live my life
All the same,
I could kill a man with my pain
I wonder, am I tired or have I cried
No one noticed my red rimmed eyes
I can’t tell how I feel
When my senses overwhelm me
I want to taste the sunsets
I want to drink the wind
But life drags me screaming and crying
And I worry that others are lying
When they tell me they are supportive
But those lies could be my doom
So I stay inside my room
Where my surroundings are controlled and constant
Where no life lives
I don’t want to be a statistic
I don’t want to be a percentage on a graph
I don’t want to be a scare tactic
Forcing grown men to care
I just want to live my life
I wish it was just and fair
Because I
I love people
It’s confusing and difficult
And different and complicated
And queer
I paint
And draw
And read
And write
And think
I exist and live no matter what they say
And here am I to stay
Dear Me,

I'm still learning to love myself.
I'm learning to love my smile, my face, my personality, and my body.
I love that my smile is not perfect and that I wish it will stay that way.
I love that my face has its own story to tell with its scars.
I love that I'm creative, friendly, kind, funny, and curious.
I'm still learning how to love my body.
I want to change some features,
I want to add art,
I want to express myself using many things.
I hope you will be happy and finally love yourself.

Love,
Me
That first date in the open
was the first time I’d felt alive in years.
We didn’t hold hands
(It was too dangerous, even in so
progressive a city)
But we found other ways to be
Near each other
Ways that said, “I belong to you”-
But everything ends,
As you told me.
Sooner or later, one of us
Has got to leave
Back home, where we pretend.
Trying not to balk when our parents call
us “friends”
The bus is coming in five minutes,
You tell me. It isn’t enough
It never is.
I wish I’d risked our safety to kiss you,
Despite already having lingered on you
   After our goodbye hug.
People are staring, past the common
   Curiosity of passersby.
   My farewell dies in my throat
   But you don’t judge me for that.
Instead, you climb the steps to the bus
   And are lost to me in that weary
   Procession of souls
   Making their way through the city.
Possessed by some frenzy of grief,
   I run after the bus and you.
I chase you as far as I can humanly go.
   Look at me! Look at me!
   I’ll die if you look. Don’t look.
   (please, please look at me.)
But you learned from Orpheus,
   And you don’t look back.
“Home” is an arbitrary concept that I have been struggling to grasp since I was a kid. Ever since I can remember I have been moving from house to house, country to country, continent to continent. Through all of this, I constantly found myself sobbing in my own room and screaming about how much I wanted to go home. These are the exact instances where I found myself grappling with this concept. I’m in my own home… my own room… yet I want to go home? Aren’t I home?

That’s when I realized that to me home isn’t where I live but rather where I experience the most joy and can be myself freely. To other people, home is where they live because that’s where they have had these things and feelings since they were kids, unfortunately that’s not my case. Since moving out on my own, and to Toronto, I have created my home. I found a city that while cold, a concrete jungle, at times too fast, and honestly kind of garbage, it was a city that I magically felt aligned in. Maybe it’s because I can also at times be cold, too fast, and kind of garbage, or maybe it was where I was meant to end up. Toronto to me is where I have been able to experience the things that build a home.

I also realized that my home is my best friends, obviously corny, everyone loves their friends, but they’re the people who raise us beyond childhood and our teenage years, yet they’re also the ones you raise and help almost mould each other into the adults we become. I have never felt more comfortable or happy than I do when I’m with these people. I’ve had some of the biggest fights and hardships with my friends than with anyone else, and I’m sure they’ve wanted to kick me to the curb as much as I have, but it’s the coming back together that makes it beautiful. These people are the reason I keep living the wonderful and loving life I am.

Homes are often unpredictable, harmful, loving, caring, treacherous, and ever-growing, and I find that a great similarity in the places/people/feelings/things/whatevers that I call home. Sure it’s not the one house in the one neighbourhood where I had my first steps, or my first kiss, or my first failure, but it’s done the same amount of growth and for that I will forever be thankful to my home(s).
“That time, Five years ago”

By Pujitha Avuthu

TW: Self-harm, homophobia

That time, five years ago, you came to see me. They say that love is blind but maybe sometimes it’s all we need in this world, it’s sometimes peaceful to just ignore all the problems in the world and just be. In love, holding each other, Kissing, అప్పుడు ఎసెస్ శరీరం అంటూ ఒక గిరిచేరి అంర్థం శాః లేదు trans: Living life, thinking of how many minutes are there in a second. It was perfect to be blinded by love.

I remember the first time I saw you, when you came to see me, five years ago. My heart was racing, excited, calm. You were everything I needed to fall in love again. The tender touches, the traces of our love in the beach, in our home, in our hearts. The sneaky kisses on the road when we say goodbye. I significantly remember you bringing my favorite momos home on a bad day and I felt cherished, important, loved. It’s only been a month we knew each other, but felt like we knew each other forever, maybe that’s what love is.
Love is also when your heart race when you realize maybe you don't know each other, maybe there is more than just the little things. We hold a lot of trauma. As Queers, living here we are not valid. Love also means advocating for yourself and your loved ones. Mental illness is so hard to live with. like any other illness in our lives. but the thing about Mental illness is it’s not seen. People around you don't understand why you are the way you are. why you cut yourself on the same day we had a memorable time at the concert, at the park, at the cinema, at the beach, at our home.

That time, three years ago, we were forced to go back into the closet. It was exhausting to pretend to be someone else. It was an uncertain time to be, it was unsettling to be us. We were surviving and we survived. There is a silver lining in growing apart, we grew. Now we are building our lives again, to find ourselves again. Knowing that we could survive anything.

Five years ago, Love was strange. Now we know, Love is unconditional. Love is Powerful. Love is comfort. Love is reclaiming what you deserve
I should have known she was a vampire. I'd encountered plenty of monsters over the years. Jekyll and Hyde. The Invisible Woman. And, of course, more than a few ghosts. I even have two little scars on my neck from a past vampire bite (and definitely not from a mishap with the hair straightener).

Besides, all the signs were there. The Eastern European roots. The decades-old pop culture references. The insistence on only meeting at night. If I'd taken a moment to think it through, I would have realized what she was.

But thinking was never my strong suit around her. From our earliest messages, I was smitten. She had a zest for life (or afterlife) that was palpable even in the usually vapid exchanges of online dating. The conversation didn't slow or stale, but expanded and flowed, encompassing our interests, experiences, and desires. Our short texts quickly gave way to lengthy, thoughtful messages, and my smile grew wider with each new notification – which, for the first time in months,
She showed interest in my work as a writer, and exhibited an equal passion for her own field. Our differences in education, though intimidating to me at first, proved no obstacle in the face of our mutual love of tea, dad jokes, and Lord of the Rings. Moreover, we shared a genuine curiosity and interest in one another that fueled our conversations into the wee hours of the morning. Though she had been transparent that she was leaving soon for a distant land (truly, Polidori is rolling in his grave), I knew I had to meet her. I had come into the pandemic still hurting from the abrupt end of my last situationship, my first significant connection since escaping a deeply toxic relationship earlier that year. In the two years since, I’d had a couple of pandemic dalliances, but nothing that made it beyond the dreaded Zoom date. To meet someone who stirred such genuine excitement in me was an anomaly, to say the least. I couldn’t remember feeling this way at all in the last two years. Maybe even before.
Unfortunately, with the plummeting temperatures and rising case count, a dreaded Zoom date was our only option for an initial meeting. Purists, of course, will insist that vampires don’t show up on camera, to which I say: they do on digital – and COVID consciousness is hot. But even the hellscape of video calls couldn’t stand in our way. We talked for hours, the conversation spanning everything from music to travel to the politics of family group chats. She showed me around her home, and introduced me to her cat. She even drank her tea from a mug punning on one of our shared favorite books – and made sure I noticed.

Neither of us wanted to say good night, and it took us over an hour to finally do so. But not before making plans to meet in person.

Both being professed workaholics, we weren’t able to meet until the following weekend. Yet I found my days increasingly filled with her presence. I told her of my newfound obsession with the game Wordle, and she greeted me every morning with her score. She invited me to go ice skating, the most romantic of winter dates, and offered to bring elbow and knee pads for when my childhood muscle memory inevitably failed me – or, as she put it, my “Bambi on ice display.” I wondered if she knew she made me feel more like Flower.
Friends knew about her before I told them. I’d been hesitant to bring her up, embarrassed at how quickly I’d developed a monster crush on someone I hardly knew, someone who wouldn’t even be around that long. But there was simply no masking the smile she left at my lips. For so long now, I had been burning the candle at both ends, convinced it was the only thing keeping me warm. But suddenly there was a new light in my eyes, one close friends picked up on even at a social distance. They encouraged me to embrace the feeling, to simply allow myself to enjoy it and not reflect on it too much. Not hard when the person doesn’t have a reflection.

We settled on a mobile coffee date, a caffeinated nighttime stroll through Riverdale Park.

We chose Riverdale because it was lit and she was unable to meet during the day due to other commitments. I thought nothing of it and assured her that existing obligations took precedence over a walk in the park with some Internet hooligan.

She promptly declared that my new nickname. Even in the dark and buried beneath layers of winter clothes, I recognized her immediately. She bounded across the street to meet me, giving my natural shyness no chance to take hold. She threw her arms around me as if we’d known each other all our lives, and pulled me into the park as the last rays of sunlight disappeared over the Don River.
It’s never truly quiet that close to the DVP, yet the night felt still beneath the stars as we made our way through the park. She gave me homemade allergy-friendly blueberry scones (no eggs, no strawberries, and of course, no garlic), and I offered her the steaming cup of her favourite tea, the first thing we’d ever talked about, that I’d brought to keep her warm. “My hero,” she smiled, and I wondered if she could hear my heart skip a beat.

Soon, we found ourselves alone in the darkness, the sledders and snowball fighters having retreated to the warmth of their homes. We wandered into the woods at the north end of the park, and she joked that it probably looked as though she’d brought me there to murder me (may my mother never read this essay). Not once did I feel unsafe in her presence; rather, for the first time in who knows how long, I felt at home.

We spent hours exploring nearly every inch of the snow-laden park, and yet I saw nothing but her. She was inhumanly gorgeous, in the way that only a radiating inner beauty can betray. She spoke of her family and friends with a tenderness almost foreign to my own guarded heart, and saw right through the grouchy, sarcastic exterior I use to protect it. When I feared I had acted too grumpy around her, she winked and said, “Curmudgeonly is a cute look on you.”
Eventually, the winter weather got the better of us, and I walked her back to her car. She told me she wanted to see me again, and insisted on staying with me while I waited for my unusually far Uber. Still unaware of her vampiric nature, I began to worry she was getting cold, and told her she didn’t have to let herself freeze just for me. She looked up at me with those beautiful brown eyes and said, “I am. It’s okay,” and of the very few regrets I have in this life, one of my greatest is that I was too nervous to kiss her.

I worried that I’d blown it, but she texted me not an hour later to check that I’d gotten home safe and reiterate her desire to see me again. I knew then what I’d known all along: that no matter how much time we had together, this was a person I simply needed to know. But even vampires can be haunted.

Knew something was off before she told me. The morning Wordle texts stopped. Her messages grew few and far between. Our next date lay in unscheduled limbo. I tried not to read too much into it, telling myself I knew how busy she was and that I needed to let her words speak for themselves. But I couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.
Eventually, she put her cards on the table. An old love she’d thought passed had returned from the dead, and she didn’t feel it fair to start something new until she laid that relationship to rest. That, coupled with her upcoming move, meant that it wasn’t the right time for us to be, well, us.

I was crushed. I feared that I had somehow disappointed her in person. I combed through my memory of our last date for any way I may have mis-stepped, and, finding none (and having approximately zero chill), I straight up asked if I had done something wrong. Social cues aren’t always my strong suit. But she assured me that it had nothing to do with me. It was simply bad timing, and she had been so upfront with me in every other respect (save, understandably, her vampirism) that I had no reason to question her. All I had was the memory of the last few weeks, and the reality of what had always felt a little too good to be true...
It’s a strange and lonely experience to realize that a connection meant more to you than it did the other person. While I’d had my head in the clouds, she had been on the ground fighting battles I knew nothing about. I was ready to be someone’s rock when all she needed was a stepping stone, a reminder that love and life go on even when we believe our hearts no longer beat.

Once again, I was hesitant to reach out to friends. The pandemic meant we were still, mostly, careless in allowing myself to develop feelings for someone so quickly. As if I’d had any choice in the matter.

Moreover, I struggled to put into words exactly what I was feeling. After all, hadn’t it only been a coffee date? Something I’d done countless times before? We don’t cry over spilled milk – who was I to grieve a cup of tea grown cold?

It was only by granting myself time and space to process that I came to realize I wasn’t really grieving her at all. When we fall for someone we barely know, they become not so much a person but a phantom, a fictional character no real person could ever hope to measure up to. A monster of our own making. A vampire.
Some time later, when the temperature had warmed about as much as I had to the thought of dating again, I found myself back at Riverdale Park. Not my idea, but my own neighbourhood didn’t boast a suitable green space for a walk and talk, and I didn’t know how to tell this perfectly nice and most likely human woman that I’d been on an oddly significant date with a mythical creature there only a few weeks prior. So we went to the park.

After I walked my date home, I made my way back to a bench overlooking the park. Not because I expected to see the vampire – Riverdale wasn’t local for either of us, and for all I knew, she had already left the country. I suppose I was looking for something. Not closure; it’s not closure when you’re still hoping someone will open the door. But I hadn’t returned to the park since that night, and I hoped it would provide, if nothing else, some clarity.

I sat on the bench in the dark, alone with my thoughts. I already knew I didn’t want a second date with the woman I’d just met. I wondered if I was being too rash. Was it because she wasn’t a vampire? That’s hardly fair: she had a master’s degree in Victorian lit, after all. But deep down, I knew that wasn’t it. Because it wasn’t about her at all. It was about the way she had made me feel. Or rather, the way she hadn’t.
To paraphrase Elizabeth Barrett Browning: we fall for people not only because of who they are, but the person they cause us to become. The vampire had awoken something in me: a feeling, or an ability to feel, that I had forgotten, perhaps not even known I possessed. She could have drained what was left of me; instead, she breathed life back into me. And now that I knew I could feel that way – not only about another person, but about myself – I couldn’t forget it. And more importantly, I didn’t want to.

These days, the vampire still occasionally crosses my mind. A song or pun or movie reference will bring her back to my thoughts, and I’ll find myself wondering if I’ll ever see her again. If our eyes will meet across some airport or restaurant or that bookstore we both love, and she’ll walk over to ask me how I’ve been and whether I watched the new Lord of the Rings series on Amazon. And I’ll offer to tell her over a mug of her favourite tea, since I technically still owe her a cup, and she’ll smile that heart-stopping smile and say she can’t believe I remember that. And as we make our way to a quiet café where I can finally get to know the real woman behind the fangs, I’ll shyly meet her gaze and tell her, of course I remember._

But it won’t happen. I know it won’t happen. Because this isn’t a script. I can’t just write a new ending. If she wanted to see me again, all she’d need to do is Google my name. And when all is said and done, she might not even remember that.
Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land Friends of Ruby is on today has been the traditional territories of many sovereign nations and peoples, including the Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We understand that Tkaronto (often referred to as Toronto) is subject to the Dish with One Spoon treaty and that we as people occupying this land are living within this treaty. We acknowledge that we all have our own unique journeys which brought us to this land, and we invite you to reflect on your own personal journey that brought you to this land. We acknowledge that those of us who are settlers are here on this land today as we continue to benefit from the injustices of our past. We recognize that Tkaronto continues to be home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful for the chance to live and work on this land. As an organization dedicated specifically to the well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth we must also acknowledge all the Two-Spirit and Indigequeer folks who have come before us and paved the way for this kind of work, as well as those who continue to live and work on this land.

About Friends of Ruby

Friends of Ruby is dedicated to the progressive well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth (aged 16-29) through mental health services, social services and housing. Our approach is comprehensive, involving mind, body and community – wherever you are on your personal journey.

Our vision – a world where all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and two-spirit young people feel validated, involved and feel empowered to lead healthier lives.

Mental Health Services
https://www.friendsofruby.ca/programs-and-services/mental-health-and-wellness-support/

Social Services
https://www.friendsofruby.ca/programs-and-services/drop-in-services-and-programming/

Housing
https://www.friendsofruby.ca/transitional-housing/
Friends of Ruby Zine
SUMMER 2023

Elevating the voices of underrepresented communities is a vital endeavor, providing a platform for their thoughts and emotions to be heard. Within these pages, we proudly showcase the exceptional talents of 2SLGBTQIA+ artists and writers. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for joining us in exploring the pages of the 2023 Friends of Ruby Summer Zine.

“Amplifying Queer Voices”