

# Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

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# To Our Queer and Non Gender-Conforming Siblings

by Greg Pronovost-Carlson

As the door slammed shut, my world ended. I could still hear them screaming in outrage as I slowly walked down the block trying to figure out what to do. My hands subconsciously went to my hair and scratched my scalp, hard, picking almost. I stopped, my hands dropping to my sides as I thought of the limited amount of friends I had and decided that I wasn't worth their time. My head pounded, as if someone was drilling into my skull. I couldn't use my phone anyway; it had been turned off earlier that week when I told them. The frustration and misery collided with my chest creating a concave hole. Why did I tell them? What was the point? I felt like I could melt into a gooey puddle on the sidewalk to be forgotten like that wad of gum nobody pays mind to. I continued down the street until I saw a crumbling brick building that I decided I could sleep by for the night. It wouldn't have been the first time and it wouldn't be the last. Not by a long shot. As I dozed off, I tried to forget where I was; as if I was laying in my bed with my parents two rooms down to the left, sleeping, just like me.

Waking up, the hard ground scraped my arms and the gravel dug into my palms as I pushed myself up. I blinked slowly and dusted my hands off on my pants, the dust and rocks softly crumbling to the ground as I tried to think of what I could do. I still had to go to school, but it was at least seven miles away and I had no way of telling them what had happened. I flipped my phone over on the cement and pressed the power button, hoping for a miracle. The screen lit up and the time read 8:45. If I was quick I could probably make it by lunch. I got up and started walking in what I hoped would be the way to the only safe haven I would get. The further I walked the more doubtful I got. There was no way that I could be walking in the right direction. By then, the sun had come directly to the middle of the sky. It was nowhere near as bright as in the summer and if I was being honest, it was cold. Goosebumps ran up my arms like little ballerinas tickling their way up to my shoulders, wispily dancing on their toes, making my hairs stand up and my face feel even more frosted than it had just a second ago.

Just as I was about to give up and find a place to stay, I saw the building: simple white trimmed windows and sickly gray cobblestone leading to the main entrance. I sped up, unintentionally running to the office to try and explain why I had been so late, but then I breathed in and realized what would happen if I told them. I wasn't about to go into foster care over this shit, so I forced my feet to slow and strolled into the office as if I had all the time in the world. Like I wasn't already falling apart, as if my head wasn't pounding, my throat wasn't dry, and surely, my stomach wasn't squeezing and rolling, begging me to feed it. If I played my cards right, I could just sign in and go to lunch. I entered the office and gave my most

charming smile to Miss Teresa, our wonderful office lady. I wandered to her desk and before I could say anything she simply handed me a bright orange slip with the time and date printed on it, gesturing for me to move out of the office. My smile dropped as I turned around and I swallowed thickly, wandering down the hall to the cafeteria. I felt like a man made of thick dripping mud. Slugging around creating a mess, slow and desperate. My emotions frenzied and consequently swallowing me whole. As I walked out of the office the bell rang telling me I had missed my one chance at eating for the day. Holding my breath, I turned around to go to my next class, the halls flooding with shouts and swarming bodies. It felt like an angry ocean tearing at my body. As my shoulder got clipped again I walked up to the stairs, and took my first step.

My teachers noticed right away that I didn't have my bag. Nor my assignments. Each time I sat at my desk, my sense of dread and self-loathing washed over me like twenty tons of ice-cold water. It drenched me down to my bones and strangled my soul just a bit more each time, squeezing like a rope tied tight around a slug. When the final bell rang, I sprang out of my seat, head finally coming up from my arms to observe the world again. I walked out of the door to the library, where I would spend the next two hours till closing to sleep. Hoping that if I slept here, no one would bother me.

I woke up to the librarian gently shaking my shoulder. She whispered that I have to go but that I was welcome back tomorrow. I'm scared that I won't live to see her tomorrow; the streets are scary and cold no matter where you go or who you're with. It's like the darkness taunts you, sliding its slimy fingers over your body and when you least expect it to, it digs its claws deep into your skin while bathing in your cries for help. But I'll be ok, I slept so I'll be able to stay up for a while. I walked aimlessly around a park that I found trying to keep myself awake. I envision the sun coming up any minute and wish I could go home, but I know I can't. He threatened me well enough that I know it's better to just stay out here and hope they come to find me or file a missing persons report. It seems like a sweet dream to be able to see the cops pull up to me like they have before, rolling down their windows and yelling softly to get in the backseat. The first time it happened, I was terrified. I had been sleeping by the cafeteria at school so that I could eat in the morning and I thought that I was gonna get arrested for loitering like a creep. I felt like a creep...so after that, anytime I got kicked out I stayed away from the school even if it made me feel like I was lost forever in a never-ending maze, designed just to screw with my life. I yawned, getting more and more tired. I decided that sleeping a little wouldn't hurt me and that I was close enough to the school to get there in time. The next day, I would be able to talk about college admissions and I felt a little excitement flutter around in my chest. It warmed me just a little bit. Thinking of the bright future I would have.

I woke up to pain lacerating my body. At first it felt like it was only stings but then everything was pounding and I heard the wet crunch of a boot connecting with my side. I cried out, trying to sit up only to be slammed back down, the Earth welcoming my head with a solid embrace. I yelled out, tears streaming down my face as I hunched myself into a little halo,

hoping that it would be enough to stop the hurt. My head twisted and suddenly I was looking up at the dark starry sky, flat on my back with a brown boot crushing into my stomach. I convulsed, throwing up a little to the side. As the bile rolled down my cheek I heard a male voice saying something. It felt so far away but I knew it was right in front of me and I instantly knew who it was. The kicks and punches kept raining down and at that point I had given up; I knew no one was coming to save me if he was here doing this. If he came looking for me smelling like booze in the middle of the night there was no escape for me. And as I lay there, looking at the stars as the kicks reverberated through my body and my face swelled more by the second I thought to myself, maybe this is it, maybe it's finally over.

A faint humming and a steady set of beats from a heart monitor came to my ears as I slowly woke up. I hated the sound that was piercing through my head. It smelt like bleach and piss, overly cleanliness trying to cover up the real stench that was there before it. My leg moved, a scratchy white blanket itching my leg. As I tried to sit up a slap rang on the right side of my face. It stung and I winced, my face feeling bruised from last night. I just hoped I could go to school; I knew it was useless and that I definitely wouldn't be going, but I could hope right? I laughed bitterly, turning my head to look at my mother through swollen eyes, my jaw throbbled and I just wanted it to be over. I could have jumped off a burning skyscraper and felt more at peace than this. Anxiety bit at my stomach, bristling around like a hard toothbrush scratching to get out. I already knew that as soon as she was able to, she was going to leave me on the streets again. *Nothing ever really changes.* Her lip curled in disgust and she spat on my face while leaving. I imagined the wind whipping around my body, the cool breeze freezing time, if but for a second. When the door clicked shut, I sobbed heavily, wishing I could die right there. I imagined the cement finally hitting my body, I bounced a little bit and then I got peace. Nothing but black encompassing darkness, so sweet I could almost taste it. My body tingled, but then the anger hit me and I swatted the spit and tears off my face, hobbling out of bed to the bathroom connected to my room. Sticky patches coming off my chest, taking what little hair was there with it. I faintly heard the heart monitor flat line and I couldn't care less, my head already felt light and disconnected from my body. I just wanted to go to the bathroom to wash my hands and face. It hurt so much and as I turned the faucet on and slipped my hands under the water, the door burst open and I startled, hitting my head on the sink. It must have taken me a few seconds to come back because by that point, there were a few nurses in the tiny bathroom. The lights blared in my eyes, tears still streamed and a nurse supporting me from behind tried to talk to me. Their voices whooshing in like tiny feathers but it wasn't enough to catch my attention. My head felt like it was swimming and my body felt so weak. My side panged, hopelessness washing over me and I gave up, my eyes falling painfully shut, never to be opened again.