



Disabled Writers

**DISABILITY PRIDE 2023
EDITION**

Disabled people can be anything. For Disability Pride Month DIYabled has made this zine that features 12 writers. Some are published some art not. These people write about disability, love, history, and more. Please support these writers however you can. Donate, buy their book, read their writing, and tell them you support them.

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We Are All Disabled

Priya Ray

We hear a lot about the equality of people of color, women, and people that identify as LGBTQ, and there is indeed a lack of equality for these minorities. But you rarely hear about the lack of equity for disabled people. Right now in America, some disabled people do not have access to education, employment, healthcare, housing, and so much more. Still, here we are in disability pride month, and barely anyone knows about it.

Maybe it's because we consider being disabled or becoming disabled is the worst thing that can happen to a person, except for dying.

When I created the open call for a Disability Pride art show, people asked me if I'd consider them disabled.

That's when I realized I needed to ask myself: how do we define what a disability is? When you have an impairment and cannot do something, you are disabled. This could mean you are physically impaired, like me, from an accident, an illness, or a degenerative disease and need to use a wheelchair. While being physically disabled tends to be more visible, other disabilities are not always acknowledged because they are invisible such as being deaf, neurodivergent, chronically, or terminally ill. Impairments such as ADHD, depression, bipolar disorder, autism, and schizophrenia, or ailments like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, or cancer are not immediately apparent. When combined, disability becomes the largest minority.

As a species, humans are essentially disabled. We lack many of the abilities other beings have, but we desire: we cannot fly; we do not run incredibly fast; we are not small enough to enter and occupy tiny spaces; we cannot breathe underwater indefinitely; we cannot communicate for miles through the air or the soil. In addition, modern humans cannot exist on this planet as it is and as it changes: we cannot survive extreme heat or cold; we are unable to walk barefoot on all terrains; most can no longer forage, hunt, or grow our own food. When humans desired to overcome these impairments, people created an infrastructure, machines, and technology to accommodate ourselves in a world that did not seemingly accommodate humans enough: planes, trains, automobiles, streets, sidewalks, cameras, microscopes, breathing machines, phones, computers, sunscreen, polar fleece, shoes for every surface of the earth, tractors, mills, factory farming, and industrial slaughterhouses. But we stopped before these accommodations included everyone. This is not our greatest sin. Perhaps, as humans, we did not have a vision of what was possible, of what, and who was yet to come.

Throughout history, when the disabled community spoke out and said they wanted to go to school and work, society's response was you can't. The desires of this particular minority of humans were left unmet. The reasoning was often that providing the assistance needed to accomplish this was too expensive and complicated. However, when a pandemic came, we watched how fast they moved and how much money they spent to ensure they overcame these exact complications to benefit the entire society. When it is said within the disabled community that we want to get married, we want to have children and a family; society is quick to say NO! You mustn't! Then, all of a sudden, abortion is not such a bad idea when the community fears the thought of creating a world with disabled people.

As I mentioned before, disabled people are the largest minority in the world. Although 33 years ago, a law was passed, in America, to protect our human rights, those rights are violated every second of the day. I know; the world seems pretty dire right now. We are left with the quintessential question: how can we change what is happening? But then I think of change in terms of long-time, how it was only three years before I was born that my race would be allowed to vote; how I was only six years old when women were given the right to choose what I'd eventually want to do with my body as I became a woman; how I was 22 years old when I was granted rights as a disabled person. This is evidence that we can create change, but it takes time, work, and dedication. I realize it will never be something that is given to me. I have been privileged to live in a time where I've been given access to rights that would not have been available to me at a different time. I want to ensure that those privileges and these rights are available to others in the coming days. If we can create a world to accommodate humans to do so much outside our limited capabilities, we can continue to forge a world that supports and accommodates all beings. In honor of our human ancestors who gave their bodies and lives so we could enjoy what they have given us, we must continue what they started and fight for what has been taken away.

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Priya Ray-DIYabled

If I had you
By Tylia L. Flores

I know this may seem a little scary,

It makes us feel query,

If I had you, I would make the days merry ,

So, you don't have to worry ,

Just take me by the hand ,

And grasp on to my chair tight ,

Cause we're in for a beautiful ride,

That involves butterflies and knots ,

And a wheelchair to start our journey together,

If I had you, I'll make it an everyday duty ,

To make sure, you know that you're my pride and joy ,

If I had you, I would make sure you knew even on my days of frustration when my body feels weak and my mind goes meek that you're one of a kind ,

If I had you I'll love you until the very end . .

Author Bio Tylia L. Flores is a twenty-eight -year-old born with Spastic Cerebral Palsy. Despite her condition that affects her mobility, she does not allow it to affect her will and determination to make a difference in the world. Through her many life challenges and obstacles, she discovered her passion for writing. Tylia's goal in life is to share her stories with the world. In doing so, she hopes to help others with disabilities realize that they, too, have the potential to make their dreams come true. Tylia is not only an author. She's a radio show personality and disability activist.

Nils Skudra

"Not Running on Empty" (with apologies to Jackson Browne)

I have mild hypotonic-ataxic cerebral palsy and was told by a physician, whilst I was still a teen: "people with your condition don't run." It took months to tease out the implications of that overarching and devastating pronouncement. I wanted to run for my physical betterment, for the idea of engaging in exercise and to do this looking good in expensive running shoes and shorts, poised and polished as I easily whipped by observing sedentary folks sitting on a nearby park bench. Instead I worried about how my physical disability would inhibit a graceful show of running behavior and whether I could do it with the pomp and circumstance that running periodicals advanced. I gave up the idea rather peremptorily of running at all. If I couldn't do it right, I wouldn't do it at all. In the end, years later, in a magazine I ran across the words "clear your mind of can't" by Samuel Johnson. As they say in the vernacular, those words hit me upside the head with a powerful impact. That is exactly when I formed the intent to run, irrespective of how I might appear to the onlookers and whether I could run with an acceptable speed, alacrity and confidence. Both the disapproving physician and the sage writer ultimately spurred me into what began as the work of running. In the beginning, it felt like labor, particularly in light of the issues I had with balance. I could fall down and/or be laughed at and ridiculed. I had resolve and inclination but this was going to be an uphill fight.. In my mid-20's I put on the gloves and entered the ring. I turned my back on the doctor's advice and bought a pair of Nike shoes and Target pants. Neither purchase broke the bank or was geared to instill admiration in a potential onlooker but I had my own credo in mind: "good enough for me."

I still have a physical disability but the hesitations and doubts about running have evaporated. In my gratitude journal, I write constantly about how running has improved my life. It took time to reach the decision to run, helped by a saying I saw in a Southern journal: "the best time to plant a fruit tree is 30 years ago. The second best time is now." I don't run for the glory of God like the Scottish minister said in "Chariots of Fire" but I am running for a whole host of reasons that feel personally holy to me. When I run, I feel the power of overcoming my physical disability and this is when I do the work which is most important to me: putting together articles about history. I write and publish in the field of Civil War and Revolutionary War history and am always grateful when it finds its way in print as it so often does. As I run I think about why things are historically important, prominent historical figures, wars which savaged our country and the residual effects of those battles. When I run it is always a solitary gesture so I can do my best cerebral work. I choose to run in areas rich with history: Guilford Courthouse National Military Park (where the armies of General Greene and General Cornwallis came to terms), Guilford College (of the Underground Railroad fame), cemeteries where military veterans are interred. I don't run on my block or in city parks - I need a sense of history to infuse me and be draped in that meaning. I am writing my articles and forming my literary intents. I read somewhere that a runner named Lorraine Moller made a comment that "Running is my meditation, mind flush, cosmic telephone, mood elevator and spiritual communion." I understand her precisely because as I run, not prettily, not enviably, I am happily awash in the movements of my imagination.

There are numerous articles I have penned, whose seminal work was begun as I ran on a Civil War battlefield. Sometimes I would stop, caught in the moment of a sudden fatigue or feeling that my joints would succumb and collapse. Thoughts and ruminations about a piece I was writing about whether Confederate Stonewall Jackson might have had Asperger's Syndrome are cut short momentarily until I can regain my equi-pose and running composure and make my feet do what I will. I catch myself

thinking about a comment I saw, by somebody named Christopher McDougall, who remarked "The Hopis consider running a form of prayer; they offer every step as a sacrifice to a loved one, and in return ask the Great Spirit to match their strength with some of his own." I silently ask for a spiritual assist here by the Man Upstairs: please let my legs carry me -- a little more."

Minutes later, I am moving but this time I am thinking about a bachelor friend who is afraid of making a permanent commitment to his lady. This time I write a short poem for him as I run:

Marry, marry - do not tarry,
Ere the flower lose its bloom
Stop the stalling - love is calling
Indecision makes for doom.
Hurry, hurry - do not worry
Passion likes no empty room.

When I take another short break, I write the poem down on a Walmart receipt and put it in my pocket. Minutes later, I am running and it is beginning to rain, first a drizzle and then with urgency. I am thinking about the Civil War Battle of Droop Mountain in West Virginia and how I will put the finishing touches on the article which has been promised to a magazine in that State. In some ways it feels like I am running for my life -- it is my creative fount and it powers the intellectual work I must do to live and thrive. Running is the salve that I put on an old wound, physical and emotional, and its presence in my life is nothing less than a sacred and personally profound ritual. I'm a little bit like the Gingerbread Man, always trying to keep a bit of the humor in the run and avoid the spectacle of "overcome."

Katrina Smith

The Grass on the Opposite Side isn't Always Greener

Sometimes it looks like weeks' worth of dog sh!t.

Thought I was keeping my emotions to myself, but both yours and mine were found out. We discovered that we shared sentiments, and I debated whether to express them or keep them to myself.

I felt in my heart that as we talked more, we would come to know one another. Of all, you cannot get to know someone with just one chat.

I'm not going to sugarcoat this event because you want me to keep it secret; it's genuine. You and I have both disclosed some information. After a year, it has unexpectedly ended, as we have been waiting anxiously to meet with each other to make things official.

Your impatience and persistent insistence that we meet together with each other were the main causes. Yes, we share the same anxiety. You are aware of my condition, and even if you weren't, I have made my living status known to you. But, you remain persistent.

As I maintain respect throughout our relationship, this is the calm before the storm.

Our last laugh with non-relative friends was the night before church. I'm repeating what was stated in this case to make sure I understood what was said. I did until I got the message the day after worship on Sunday.

We resolved the issue, and you assert that you comprehended what I said. Because I was not available to answer your call when you called, the storm struck suddenly.

You've been waiting for things to happen on your schedule for the entire time, paying no attention to me or what I needed to get done for myself. Until we learn more about one another, we ought to be best friends, you leave me with. I wasn't paying attention or wasn't aware that you were flashing a warning sign in my direction the entire time.

I was able to maintain my composure while speaking with you because I am sensitive to energy both close and far. I surely told you about it as soon as I sensed it was about to happen. We ended up having a typical talk, or so I thought. Don't tell your pals about this. Through the computer, you can still talk on the phone and have video chats.

I don't mind having buddies. But I felt really uncomfortable hearing your voice, not speaking, and hearing what other people were saying about me. I was faithful throughout our whole relationship—or so-called relationship—holding back my emotions until I finally let them gently flow out. I won't keep quiet, and I'm hoping that by doing so, others will learn never to fall prey to manipulation. What I have learned will be a very important lesson. There is someone out there who will treat me with respect and kindness. Value your partner's time as well as your own if you want them to value yours. And be honest with yourself about what you know and don't know.

Haben Girma
Excerpt from the book Haben
Permission was given by Hachette publishing

The voice coming through my earbuds sounds scratchy. The earbuds connect to an FM receiver, part of an assistive listening device. Harvard Law School hired American Sign Language interpreters with voice transliteration skills to provide access to audio and visual information in my classes. Celia Michau and Erin Foley sit in the back of the classroom whispering into a microphone, which has a wireless connection with the receiver, so I can sit anywhere in the classroom. I prefer to sit in the back, though, just in case I need to communicate with the interpreters.

"[Mumble, mumble, static crackle.] How about now?" the voice asks. I shrug, then shake my head no.

"Well, you're responding, so you can kind of hear us, right?" Somewhere in front of me, the professor lectures us on contracts. Around him, seventy students sit in rows of desks facing

Turning to the back of the room, I lift my hands, then pause. To communicate through signs, I need to distill my ideas into my limited sign language vocabulary, or other spell out all the words. I sign, "C-O-M-P-L-1-C-A-T-E-D.

"It's complicated? So you can hear us but it's hard to hear us?"

I sign, "Right.

"Okay. What can we do to help?"

"I don't know," I sign.

"The professor just looked at us. I think he was wondering if you raised your hand"

My face grows hot. I make a mental note to keep my signing as low as possible.

"Do you want us to continue with class?" Nodding, I turn my chair to face th

"Okay, back to class. The defendant's [mumble mumble!."

The lecture continues, and I strain to catch the words. Every way I listen, the words are gobbledygook, It's not the volume - it's turned to a high setting. It's my hearing. My ever-decreasing, diminishing, disappointing hearing.

I'm twenty-two years old, and every year my hearing and vision have dimmed. The changes are gradual, until all of the sudden my old coping strategies no longer work. Since I wore sleep shades during blindness training adjusting to my ongoing vision loss has been straightforward - I already have all the blindness skills. Adjusting to hearing loss feels more challenging. The inaccessibility of the hearing world constantly threatens to isolate me.

Frances Bukovsky

Other vs Self

We view illness as other, yet often illness is of us, born from our cells, our genetic makeup, the delicate and infinitely complex interplay between the microorganisms in our bodies, our cells, and the world beyond what we define as an individual person. To view illness as other than coming from self we redefine the edges of the body, perceived discrepancies in our self-identity become personified. When we use conflict language in the context of illness are we fighting our disease, or are we fighting ourselves?

I was born in a bendy, sick body, and the diagnoses I have collected point to a structural elasticity, an overactive immune system, chronic cycles of inflammation, and predisposed genes handed down through generations. To be engaged in battle with my illnesses would mean being in constant conflict with self, with the selves that came before me, and with the body that I not only exist in, but the body that I am.

However, when does the illness become the identity? Is it a slippery slope to acknowledge that my migraine disorder is as inherently a part of my current body as my thumb? Both could change; I could lose both, and then they would no longer be a part of me.

There is a pressure to distance oneself from illness. Pharmaceutical companies love to use the phrase "I don't let [insert often incurable and debilitating impairment here] define me," in advertisements as if dishing out the money which you may or may not have, or convincing the insurance company you may or may not have to pay for their product will completely eradicate the effects of an impairment.

Even in the doctor's office, patients are encouraged not to identify with their conditions, because to identify with them would be to never overcome them, or so the belief goes. Yet, I find as I move closer and closer to an acceptance of my body as-is, with the potential for fluctuating health, all in all recognizing my body as profoundly human and complex as opposed to a machine that can be dialed in for maximum productivity, my specific diagnoses become less of an identity and more a physical facet of my ongoing experience as a living creature. My identity as a chronically ill person is a description of a context my life exists within, and a way for me to connect with others who have had similar experiences.

When I was younger, doctors would often paint me as attention seeking, or anxious. I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in the third grade and went to therapy because of panic attacks (that I now have some curiosity about, now having been diagnosed with autonomic dysfunction. Was the tachycardia truly from anxiety, or was it a central nervous system issue?) which exacerbated this view by doctors. From a very young age my own experience of my body was viewed through a veil of doubt. Any symptom that couldn't be directly observed on a x-ray became, in their eyes, a manifestation of anxiety.

This led to years where I was torn between the conflict of not being sick enough for the medical system to say "you are sick," yet not being well enough to perform to able-bodied expectations. Even as I knew there was certainly something going on within my body, some part of me acquiesced to the expertise of others who said "not sick," so I continued doing harm to myself in the name of pretending to be well. The distance between my idea of self and my physical body grew to the point that it snapped.

Curiosity brought me back into my body. I have always had an immense curiosity about the workings of my own body and the bodies of others, a curiosity that others sometimes find teetering on odd. In a recent conversation with an acquaintance, I was talking animatedly about my experience of migraine aura, something that I find exceptionally fascinating even within the disruption it poses to my life, only to realize the slight horror on that person's face as I described a way of perceiving reality that is wholly bizarre.

When I make a statement like "I am in intractable pain 100% of the time," it is perceived as inherently negative, because pain is considered negative, therefore I am painting a picture of an undesirable experience. Yet, to me, it is merely an observation of a state in which I exist. Pain is neurological information, and my body generates a ton of it. Ignoring it, or telling myself I am not in pain doesn't make it go away. Fighting it does nothing but exhaust me, so I tuck it to the side of me, a gentle acknowledgement that yes, there is pain there, and it just is.

The acceptance of my symptoms is something that has led to doctors looking at me sideways. There is a certain incomprehension; how can someone be in pain and not want to cure it? For me, it comes down to repeated experience of the medical system simply being unable to provide any sort of meaningful relief. I've also come to a place within myself where I've realized that there is no normal to return to, that I have been changed so thoroughly, so continuously, by my experience of acute and chronic illness, that I will never be able to claw back to a "normal life." There is too much lived through, too much accumulated.

The truth of it is, my life is here in this body, in the way my ribs pop against my spine on rainy mornings, how my joints jiggle in their sockets as a reminder to do my physical therapy. It is in the kaleidoscope of my vision and the way my tongue sometimes cannot form a phrase my mind has forgotten the language to, the way my heart's rhythm spirals and sputters, the frequent respiratory illnesses and infections and immune system flares. There is no normal body for me to crawl back to, only this human body which exists within a system obsessed with the performance of perfection. I am a being of mud and rock and blood and earth that carries histories within my bones.

Rebekah Taussig

Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body

As you probably have guessed, the marriage didn't go well. Out of desperation to get out, I found myself boldly unafraid of solitude, independence, or even being undesirable to potential love interests. What I found in this fearlessness was delicious: Nights alone drinking red wine and chomping down whole bowls of popcorn with Angela Lansbury on *Murder, She Wrote*. Sleeping in late with purring orange cats circling the top of my head. Reading every Jane Austen novel with hot drinks clumsily concocted from my sputtering, thrifted espresso maker. I leaned heavily into this sacred solitude for years.

I finally started an online dating account because 1. my roommate got a serious boyfriend, and the pair of them seemed very invested in getting me a boyfriend of my own, and 2. I was curious. At the empowering age of 28, I wanted to see: Would a wheelchair really be a giant obstacle for people? Would I put all this thought into my online profile and hear crickets in response? Or worse, would men be cruel? Would they laugh at me? Would they fetishize me? I was prepared for some uncomfortable dates that would make for great stories I could later recount for the entertainment of my best pals. I was even prepared for getting hurt. I wouldn't let myself hope for much more than that.

I'm pretty sure I put more time and energy into curating my profile than any other online dating citizen. I agonized over which pictures to use, trying to find just the right number that included my disability, but to just the right proportion. What handful of images could convey that disability was a part of me without eclipsing all of me? How could I emphasize that I loved my nieces and nephews and eating take-out on porches and my own funky style without pretending that my paralyzed body wasn't a part of all of it? How could I invite people to really see me without scaring them off?

Excerpts from *Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body*

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Amanda Harrinuth
Joy in Autism”

There is a joy in having Autism that you cannot deny.

It's a huge surprise, a talent that is provided, filled with wonder and amazement.

It might be music or a mathematical ability.

We will just wait and see, how that little boy or girl, becomes a blessing in our society.

Gone are the days where we hear, “ What is the matter with him or her?”

Instead, we walk into the light with our heads held high.

We will greet all with a big smile.

We are no longer denied our rights to exist in the population.

There is joy, in having Autism. We will keep marching strong and show you the light.

Emily Ladau
Excerpt from
Demystifying Disability

Here's some food for thought: Disability is the only identity that anyone can suddenly take on at any time. Don't worry, though! That's not a threat. Disabled people are actually pretty cool, in my humble opinion. Disability is deeply personal and means different things to different people. Some people consider disability to be an identity. Some consider it part of who they are, but not an identity. And some who technically have disabilities choose not to identify as disabled at all. This choice is based on any number of factors and is totally up to each individual person.

Let's think of disability identity as a pizza. The crust is the foundation of who you are - your actual being. While every pizza has a crust, it's the toppings that make each individual pizza what it is. There can be infinite combinations of toppings. And even though millions of pizzas are made with the same toppings, no two slices are exactly alike. Having or not having a disability might seem like the most straightforward of the factors that influence what disability means to a person, but it's actually not quite that simple. Not only does everything on the following list influence what "disability" means to someone, but each factor also determines whether a person chooses to identify as having a disability - or reveals their disability at all. What toppings might be on a person's metaphorical pizza?

Nothing About Us Without Us

Many in the disability community use the slogan Nothing About Us Without us as a bold reminder of the fact that we're the ones who must be in charge of every aspect of our lives. All too often, people with disabilities are relegated to the sideline about issues that directly affect us - everything from individual circumstance to major policy decisions. I'd say this is due to an assumption that we can't communicate and advocate for ourselves, but it often goes beyond that. In far too many situations, it doesn't seem to occur to nondisabled people that disabled people can and do have our own thoughts, viewpoints and opinions. Journalists interview parents and "specialists" about us instead of coming directly to us. Doctors and teachers talk to caregivers about us instead of talking to us. Policymakers consult nondisabled "experts" instead of consulting us. You get the idea. But, as always, disabled people are the experts on our own lives. So please, don't speak for us, about us, or over us. Speak to us and with us.

In the same vein, many nondisabled people deem themselves advocates "for" the disability community. Believe me, I'm all about the power of advocacy, but it's absolutely crucial to make sure that people with disabilities are leading the charge in any and all efforts. Advocate alongside us, rather than on our behalf. Stand (or sit!) in solidarity with us, rather than moving ahead of us.

Maxwell Leigh

Many of us have lost our ability to see the other realms that are all around us. Our spirits are no longer in alignment with the movement of nature but rather we leach off her like a parasite. We believe the fantastical is only in escapist tales of fantasy, while we ignore the complexity of the organisms beneath our feet. Try for a moment to find your reconnection. Lead your mind down a hidden trail of a forgotten forest and listen to the whispers in the trees. What stories they must tell, what things they have seen. Find the fallen bumblebee on the ground and cradle it in your hands as you thank it for the life it gave to so many flowers, and subsequently the life it gave you. What a small creature but such a powerful link in the chain. Without you, life would continue, without bees' life would cease. Let it lovingly humble you as you move on and let the moss tickle your fingertips. Find the crystals where the earth is birthing glorious new life, look how she shines. See the ground as the grassy carpet gives way to weightless pumice stone. How the earth roars and spits fire with expansion. Even the earth has growing pains but look what her courage creates. Stand and watch as the magma rolls and the heat pores over your body, threatening to consume you. She bathes herself in rebirth like a phoenix bursting into flames, she beckons you to do the same. Follow her as she leads you to the sea. Let the waves, like siren hands, pull you in. Don't worry, don't panic. See your new reflection in the sparkling waters. Let it pull you in, pull you under and then at the last moment breathe. Because you can. You are home. Listen. Do you hear them now?

Kirsten Joan

Unexpected: A tale about redefining friendship

It was a strange scent, yet familiar.
A mixture of rotten leaves, damp soil, and the musky hint of sweat.
Sniffing the air once more, her heart fluttered in her chest.
Lifting herself to sit upright, she leaned her head back.
It had been a long time.

Since their goodbye, many moons had come and gone.
Shaking her body, the skin under her fur rippled and aligned to her bones as she awoke.
She hated mornings.
Rolling to her side, she pushed her body upward and stood to allow her three legs to support all her weight.

Sucking in her stomach so it would not scrape along the rocks on the den floor, she relaxed.
There was no need to hold in her stomach.
She was thinner.

She moved toward a thin line of sunlight which marked the entrance to the place she'd called home for as long as she could remember.
Once outside, she stopped hobbling.
The crisp morning air rejuvenated her.
She needed to eat.
And then, she saw it.
A pile by the creek.
Her mind raced back to a time that she had been so much younger.
Younger and stronger.
Joy, play, and loyalty.
Hunting with the other wolves in her pack.
A pack who followed its leader, her father.
Together.
And he was her only true friend.
It was a time before she walked across a flat black surface.
A human made road and fast machine.
Smashing and almost destroying her.
Her hinderance in mobility, drove him away from her.

Hobbling forward along the shore of the creek, she saw that the pile was new.
Nudging the pile with her nose, she opened her mouth.
Raw and bloody after a fresh kill.
An unexpected gift.
Licking her lips, she sniffed the air once again.
Placing all three paws into the creek water, she soon floated.
Looking back, she admired the oak tree whose crown shielded the entrance to her den within the hill.
She was surprised that she had not heard any movement outside her den this morning.
Taking a long gulp of the cool clear stream water, she swallowed.

As she emerged from the water walking toward her den, her ears caught a low sound.
Her heart leapt.
Several pieces of meat fell from the grasp between her lips.
She saw a shadow, turned, and blinked.
Shivering slightly, she took a step forward.
She heard his breathing.

He had come back to her.

The Way We Rely on Each Other

Hannah Soyer

In the future, the future that (please understand) is now, I have gotten used to this weird liminal space, this in between—I'm going back to Kansas in the future that is now, and I am carrying with me the things which keep me alive: medical equipment, obviously; books, no doubt; the computer; the paint and the canvases; my cat.

The grasslands, prairie, the hills of what was once called the Midwest have turned to sand. The heat is too much for most people, "most" being subjective. It is still not safe for me to kiss the girl I am in love with, and I no longer know if she is real or a ghost.

In a reality that lives smushed up against this one, I've arrived in Mary Byrd Land, unclaimed territory in Antarctica, a home for the outcast. This isn't the first time we've tried building a community here. We're trying again. I let myself sink into this new definition of home.

Here, I can love who I love. Here, I can kiss and caress without fear of infection—my god, I find myself thinking, how chillingly resonant this pandemic feels of the HIV crisis. Certain lives disposable, certain lives not. I want to imagine this to be a good place, this land where Crips, queers, BIPOC, and others have gathered—an unclaimed territory, we must maintain a lack of ownership over the earth so as to maintain a sense of ownership over ourselves. An illusion, really.

We cannot stay in isolation, any more so than plants can exist without other life, other ecosystems blooming around them. Like our foremother Octavia Butler, we plant seeds and stories, learning to live off the earth. Those with medical training—not just Western practices—take care of ailments. Teachers teach. We all parent. But the metal of our wheelchairs, our crutches, our prosthetics—this challenges us, and it is for this metal and these parts that we must break isolation.

Eventually, the girl I am in love with must leave, breaking quarantine for a bionic limb repair. She will, I know, find someone else, someone with less compromised lungs, when she leaves.

Sometime in the past, maybe in this reality, we discussed resiliency in a class on Feminist Theory I was taking in Kansas, and the problem with being expected to get up, and get up, and then get up again. I know this is true, just as I know this is how I survive. I am not immortal, my body is not infallible, if I get the virus I will likely die. But I have found a way to keep going, a way to know that there is no reclaiming the flowers she would give me—right up until she broke my heart—because the flowers never belonged to her, never belonged to any of us, in the first place.

In this community we have built, I keep waking up each morning, and I keep thanking our gods for kinship we have fostered. When she left, I longed to stay in bed for days, not drinking, not eating, a fast road to death when you have no muscle for your body to draw on for nutrients: organ failure, I've seen it happen. But we rely on each other here, I mean really truly rely on each other—and when the woman next door came to get me out of bed that morning, she wouldn't let me go hungry. She wouldn't let my body give in.

Now, each morning, I thank the powers that be for community, and for the woman who gets me up, who lifts my body into my wheelchair, who throws my windows open so I can see the land soaking up a rare (but not extinct) rain.

Sand, rain, and snow mix together—a portent, perhaps, for the end of the world. But when I go outside and feel the heavy heat against my skin one moment, and a blast of icy air the next, I miraculously do not go into shock. I am asked what my Crip magic is, and I say, being alive.

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**DISABLED
PEOPLE
ARE
PEOPLE!**

DIYABLED zines

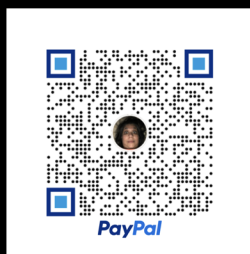
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