WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN

i remember the day when
i was told to wear a bright pink dress,
to be presentable. i did this, without
saying a word. i never said a word,
but what i heard mattered
and influenced my life,
and allowed me to think.

as a lesbian without a voice,
i heard the ideas of musicians,
and activists, and writers and more.
when i was too scared to use my own
voice, i used the voices of
others to find myself.
the words that i was too scared to say
became the ones that guided me
in life and in my journey
of self-discovery.
when i was thirteen, i was not ready to
be seen.
but through the help of these
voices and the words that they said,
i would grow close to what i’d heard and
be able to grow,
learn, and
finally say them as well.
“I believe that every person should be free to express what is truly in their heart and mind, whether male, female, or in the middle.” Kumu Hina, māhū Hawaiian teacher
As a woman, I was expected to act as one. I was taught what this word is supposed to mean, and was shown what it was not. As a woman, I was to be feminine. I was to be feminine in the ways that the women around me were feminine. I was to socialize as they did, dress as they did, and to not feel annoyed when asked to act ladylike. I was to receive a look of unsureness, when shopping in the men's section. I was to be reminded of my facial hair which I would otherwise pay no attention to. I was reminded to be a woman in all of the ways that I was not. Ultimately, as a woman, I decided to be myself.
“i love it when we play 1950
It's so cold that your stare's 'bout to kill me
I'm surprised when you kiss me.” King Princess, “1950”
i was able to say that i had my first kiss. this was not true, but to speak the truth would mean to be open with myself, and at fifteen, i was not ready to do so. my first kiss happened five years earlier, when a girl who i thought had hated me asked to kiss me. i had forgotten about this for five years, because i could not understand how it made me feel, what she felt, why it happened and what it meant. looking back now i see how these kind of questions, these kind of feeling have not been mine alone. hearing these words let me confess to myself that i had kissed a girl, and that it was messy, and hidden, and confusing. it taught me that queer love could feel messy, and hidden, and confusing. but it was still my love.
“who knew about homosexual? um, even lesbian, we didn’t know those terms. um, so here you are feeling this, whatever it is, but you don’t know even how to define it.” Del Martin, Daughters of Bilits
i wrote my first love letter to a formerly close friend.
i would ask my boyfriend if she would ever come back.
and why with him it felt like my heart wasn’t working,
and why with her it felt like my heart would never stop working.
one night at three in the morning, my body woke itself from sleep.
i wrote a letter to my friend and by the end, i knew that i had loved her.
by the morning, i believed that i was bisexual.
and for years that term felt right, but then it didn’t.
a year later, i would say that i was a lesbian.
i had found the word, i had learned what i felt, i was able to move on.
“our very strength as lesbians lies in the fact that we are outside of patriarchy; our existence challenges its life.”
Charlotte Bunch, women’s rights activist
i found that i began caring more about being a woman.
the idea of constructs that had brought me so much stress were the same things that empowered me.
i began to care about people, about womanhood, in a broader way and in a personal way.
being called a woman was finally personal to me, as being a lesbian and owning this truth, made me feel more like a woman than i had ever been before.
i cared that i was a woman.
i cared about what it meant to be a woman in this world.

WHEN I DISCOVERED THAT I WAS A LESBIAN
“in this town, he thought, The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name almost never shuts up.”
Armistead Maupin,
Tales of the City author
When I went to Korea, I was on the opposite side of the globe, yet I felt more at home than ever before. I explored my identity in a place where I felt safe, among the street names I couldn’t say, and people I’d never met. Despite being confused by language, I finally understood what it meant to have community, and support, and comfort in expressing identity, exploring identity, and being around others who were doing the exact same.
“burst down those closet doors once and for all, and stand up and start to fight.”
Harvey Milk, politician
by the time that i was ready to go home, i understood the sense of freedom that came from expressing myself. i wanted to not hide. i wanted to come out. but i was still so scared.
“aren’t you tired yet?”
Will And Grace, S2 EP7
when i had returned home, i had decided to stay in the closet. i did not know what would happen if i decided to speak my mind.

one night, when finding comfort in front of the television, i heard Will Truman say that what motivated his coming out was being asked the question “are you tired yet?” and he said “and i was tired.”

and in that moment, i knew that i was tired, too. i was tired of not being able to be myself for the fear that my voice did not matter. i had let the words of others inspire and comfort me, and i was also ready to have my words be heard. one month later, i came out of the closet.