

michelle
trager

OUT

PROVD

HEARD

SEEN

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 thiteen, 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.



A stylized, low-poly illustration of a person's head and shoulders. The person has dark hair pulled back, and their eyes are closed. The face is a solid brownish-orange color. The background is white. In the top right corner, there is a black-bordered box containing a quote. The name 'KUMU HINA' is written in large, bold, black letters, following the curve of the person's neck and shoulder.

“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

KUMU

HINA



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 when 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.



KING

PRINCESSES

“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”

WHEN

I

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 felt, 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.

WAS FIFTEEN



PHYLLIS

DEL

“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



WHEN
I
WAS
EIGHTEEN

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.

A stylized, low-poly illustration of a woman with short, light brown hair, wearing red-rimmed glasses and a red top. The name 'CHARLOTTE BUNCH' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, arched over the top of her head.

CHARLOTTE BUNCH

“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



WHEN I DISCOVERED THAT I WAS A LESBIAN

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.



ARMISTEAD

MAUPIN

“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

WENT

TO

KOREA

i
was
on the
opposite
side of the
globe, yet
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
comort in expressing identity,
exploring identity, and being around
others who were doing the exact same.

A stylized, low-poly illustration of Harvey Milk's face and upper torso. He has brown hair, thick brown eyebrows, and is wearing a blue suit jacket, a light blue shirt, and a yellow tie. The background is white. The name 'MILK' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, slanted upwards, in the top right corner. The name 'HARVEY' is written in the same font, slanted downwards, in the bottom left corner. A white rectangular box with a black border is positioned in the upper left, containing a quote and the name 'Harvey Milk, politician'.

“burst down those closet doors
once and for all, and stand up
and start to fight.”

Harvey Milk, politician

MILK

HARVEY

WHEN I
WAS

20

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.

JACK MCFARLAND

“aren’t you tired yet?”
Will And Grace, S2 EP7

N

O

W

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.

SEEN

HEARD

PROVD

OUT