



The Queer Foundation Scholar

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In this issue

2015 Publication Awards



Skailer Rei Qvistgaard, a first-year law student at Suffolk University and a QF Scholar since 2012-13, is the recipient of a \$1,000 2015 QF Publication Award scholarship. His two award-winning pieces, “On the Edge: Falling for my Antoinette” and “My Second Coming Out” can be found on pp. 2-4 of this issue.

The works of three other 2015 Publication Award recipients will be featured in the January and April 2016 issues of *The Queer Foundation Scholar*.

Special Mention. 2015 English Essay Contest for High School Seniors (continued from July issue; p. 4 and p. 11).

The Contemporary Queer Writers Series.

We continue our Contemporary Queer Writers Series with an excerpt from *Chulito*, the award-winning novel by Charles Rice-González (pp. 5-7).

In Memory (1 Dec. 1976 - 12 Oct. 1998).

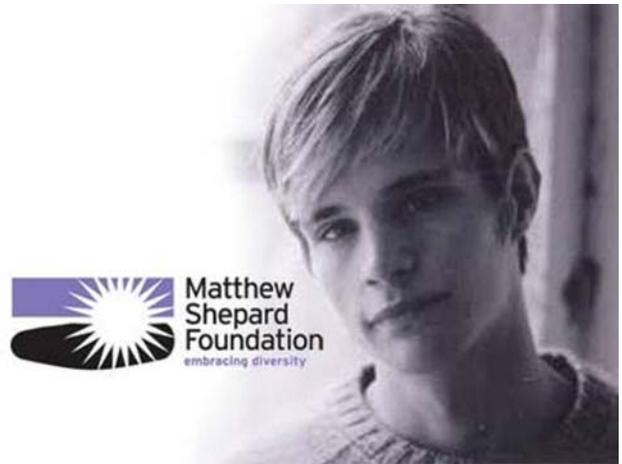


Image by Quist. Courtesy of Quist, the free LGBTQ history app: www.quistapp.com

From the Director’s Desk (p. 8).

As One: A Transgender Opera (p. 9)

On the Edge: Falling for my Antoinette

By **Skailer Rei Qvistgaard**
Suffolk University

The sand is grainy between my toes, but the cold waves chill my feet and cause the ground to slip out from under my assured steps. My hands grip my sneakers tightly because I had taken them off ages ago. I want to feel the world under my feet. I never realized before but each piece of sand is important to the beach and carries its own history with it. I like to pretend that certain grains have felt the feet of dinosaurs against their small crystal edges, and that others have been battered by the waves for millennia, but are still here, holding their own.

Her hands would always brush against mine covertly in the hallways of the high school. Antoinette would run into me in the girls' bathroom and we would steal a kiss. We would own these small moments together in bliss. However in the sea of "that's so gay" and harassment my face felt like it was well acquainted with the lockers and my knees were old friends with concrete steps. It was all because I looked like a lesbian. Antoinette wasn't my girlfriend though, just to clarify. Whenever I asked about it she always would say "We are just us." I contented myself with the few moments we had where time stretched out like taffy, sweetly and smoothly.

She wanted to go to the beach together, but she also didn't want to be seen with me in public. In lieu of a real beach we decided to make our own. Propped up against my bedroom wall with our orange sodas and a tattered palm tree beach towel we set the picturesque scene. I believed Antoinette when she told me it was more beautiful than any real beach could ever be.

I'm sixteen, but I feel like I could easily be sixty, or even eighty. I am just so tired. Waves break roughly against this portion of the coast and the rocks are littered with pieces of broken glass as I climb up towards the bridge's entrance. Pieces crunch and crack under the

weight of my steps as they puncture my feet and start to embed slivers of themselves in me. I look at the glittering path in front of me. There is no point in removing the glass if I am only going to step on more of it in a moment. This is only momentary. It gets better.

The bed shifted under her body as we finally lay together for the first time. This moment was ours to savor and share. The kisses were no longer stolen, but freely given. The moonlight through my window shades made her skin shimmer like gossamer silks. My lips catch hers and we responded to each other like two pianists playing a duet that has been rehearsed for a lifetime.

"Rosario..." My name was a soft whisper rolling off her tongue and it felt as if I was hearing it, maybe even learning it, for the first time. But the moment vanished as a harsh hand burst out of the abyss.

"Is this what you do while I work?" My mother screeched. "This hell bound girl!"

"I can explain! Mom! Plea—don't!"

"Get out of my house!"

Antoinette begins to speak to me on the stoop of her house.

"Listen Rosario...I'm not a lesbian...this. Well... whatever this was. This can't keep going. I have a chance at being normal." Her back was to me and I saw her shoulders heaving. "I can't Rosario. This was just us being friends." Tears rolled down my cheeks with the silent force of underwater rip tides. We were not girlfriends. This wasn't a break up.

"I love you." I whispered truly hoping that despite everything she would turn and cling to me. I hoped for a lot. But she simply slipped into her house and all I saw was the slow closing of the door.

Flakes of rust come off on my hands as I climb over the chain link fence that is supposed to separate the shore from the bridge. I try to pull some of the glass out of the soles of my feet, but it is desperately clinging to me. Maybe the glass is lonely. I understand the sentiment.

The bridge is solid and strong under my torn feet and it feels like it is supporting my decision. The thick wires bear so much weight every single day yet they don't ever break. I know I wasn't designed like this bridge. I am brittle, but the first bridges took time to get right. I just don't have the time to work on it though. There is not a headlight in sight, and the city lights look far away like a distant dream. There are no souls moving. No life except for me. But to be honest I don't think I count as being alive anymore, not really. I have no home. No family. No power.

~

I bumped into her in the hallway after I left my English class. I had always seen her around, but I never had the courage to actually talk to her. She was so different from anyone I had ever known. Ethereal almost.

"Hi. I think I have seen you around a lot lately. I'm Antoinette. You are?"

In love.

~

I am almost too short to get over the bridge guard railing, almost. Looking downward at the ocean I just want to be held and the dark waters below look so warm. The wind is whipping around me whispering sweet nothings in my ears. It tells me it is okay to let go. The cool steel slides through my fingers like a ring that is too big simply slipping off my little finger. I am in free fall with the forces of nature bringing me home. From the first time I saw Antoinette in the hallway, to the last time with her door closing on me for good she made me feel like I was falling. Some falls bring pain, but this fall makes me feel like my worries are evaporating into a soothing ocean mist. God, I hope there is a place in your heaven for people like me, but if I must fall, and this is what the fall to hell feels like, let me fall forever. Forgive me.

My Second Coming Out

By **Skailer Rei Qvistgaard**
Suffolk University

In 2011 I came out as a transgender man. I was awake late at night crying because I believed I would die. I thought I would die because I had never seen a transgender adult. I didn't know you could be an adult and transgender. I interpreted my identity as a death sentence, but I knew I couldn't ignore who I was. When I came out and told everyone I was transgender I truly thought that was the end of my coming out process. On August 16th, 2012 I started hormone replacement therapy and over time I finally looked like the boy I always knew I was. I went away to college and all of a sudden no one knew that I was transgender. I was living my life as a boy and that was what I had always wanted. But this experience was bittersweet. I was trying to erase my past, but those experiences had created me. Suddenly my life became more complicated and nuanced than simply living. This started my second coming out period, which is still going on to this day.

It happened during my second year of college when I was leaving a women and gender studies class with one of my study partners. She was talking about how she never liked to wear high heels, but her mother made her wear them on several occasions. I thought back to when I was still presenting as a woman before my transition. I loved high heels. I thought they were beautiful and they were my favorite kind of shoe. When I was talking with my friend though I couldn't just come out and start talking about my past with my heels, not without telling her I was transgender. So I did. "Back when I was a woman I wore high heels all the time. I had always wanted to be taller." I said with a laugh. It was seemingly simple. She stopped dead in her tracks and I turned to look at her. She was confused and asked me if she had heard me correctly. I explained that I was transgender and she was very open and supportive.

With that my coming out began again. Whenever people would ask about my past, if it was relevant, I would include that I was

transgender. This led many people to ask me “why do you tell people you are transgender?” or “you are living as a man, so why tell people you used to be a woman?” These questions about what I call my second coming out period are always hard to answer. When I tell people I am transgender some of them start to accidentally use the wrong pronouns for me, even when they never knew me as a woman. When I tell people I am transgender some of them tell me “it doesn’t matter that you are trans.” When I tell people I am transgender some of them ask me about my body and about surgeries and my medical history. So with all these reactions maybe it would be better to not tell people I am transgender. I would just get to live in peace, but once again it is never that simple.

I am who I am today because I am transgender. The experiences I have had throughout my emotional, social, and medical transition have shaped me in a multitude of different ways. I always out myself as transgender because it is important for transgender people to be visible. By coming out to people as transgender, even when they say I don’t “look transgender,” I am subverting their idea of gender. Being transgender is a part of my identity as much as being a man is a part of my identity. Both of those parts inform each other and interact with each other in my identity. Many of my transgender friends describe their processes of second coming outs as creating visibility and I agree with them. The second coming out process is important. When I was going through my first coming out period I didn’t even know transgender adults existed. So my second coming out is providing something for youth that I never had the privilege of witnessing; seeing a real, live transgender adult.

2015 Special Mention

English Essay Contest for High School Seniors

Nathan Kade Leach



Nathan is a freshman at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, majoring in political science with a pre-law concentration. He is also interested in theater, journalism, international studies, and public relations.

In high school he was involved in student council, speech, chorus, and a local community health organization. He was active in his school’s Gender/Sexuality Alliance and did some volunteer work for the ACLU. He also testified before a Nebraska legislative committee on behalf of marriage equality.

His current long-range goals: to work as a lobbyist, bill writer, or legislative aid.



Charles Rice-González' debut novel, *Chulito*, received awards and recognition from the American Library Association and the National Book Critics Circle. He co-edited *From Macho to Mariposa: New Gay Latino Fiction* and his award-winning play *I Just Love Andy Gibb* will be published in *Blacktino Queer Performances: A Critical Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2016). His short stories and essays have appeared in nearly a dozen publications with the most recent one in *Untangling the Knot* (Ooligan Press/Portland State University, 2015). He's the co-founder of BAAD!, the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance and is a Distinguished Lecturer at Hostos Community College–CUNY. Charles was born in Puerto Rico and reared in the Bronx and serves as chair of the board for The Bronx Council on the Arts and NALAC- The National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures.

The following excerpt from *Chulito* (New York: Magnus Books, 2011, pp. 1-6) is reprinted with permission of Magnus Books.

Chulito awoke with a hard-on as usual. He looked down his smooth, brown chest past the black strands sprouting around his navel to see the head of his dick poking up at him through his bed sheet. He greeted it with a firm gentle squeeze. "Hola, papito."

The old window shade in his tiny room cast a Creamsicle glow from the sun rays that shot off a big metallic sign from one of the many auto glass shops that lined the street across from his building.

The sounds of trucks revving and barreling along Garrison Avenue mixed with the cries of "auto glass! auto glass! auto glass!" from the guys who competed with each other to lure cars with broken windshields, cracked mirrors or busted headlights into their respective shops.

Chulito stood naked in front of the full length mirror on the back of his door. That spring, with just some push-ups and sit-ups, smooth hard muscles came out of nowhere and he looked like a Latino, hip hop version of Michaelangelo's David. He crossed his arms over his chest, fingers underneath each armpit and thumbs pointing up to the ceiling. He shifted his weight onto his right

hip, tilted his head, tucked his chin into his neck, and contorted his pretty boy face into a mean gangsta snarl.

He then popped a CD into his system and mouthed out the words along with Big Pun. When the percussion popped into the song, he bopped his head and challenged his own image in the mirror.

As Chulito slipped into the bathroom across the hall from his room, his nostrils filled with the comforting smell of freshly brewed Cafe Bustelo. He heard his mother, Carmen, talking in the kitchen with Maria from upstairs about her son Carlos, who was coming home from his first year at college. All week he'd heard Maria's slippers make sounds like sandpaper scratching on the bare wood floor as she prepared Carlos' room, which was right above his.

Chulito was excited, too. Carlos used to be his boy. They were real tight from the day Carlos and Maria moved into the building. Carlos was five, almost a year older than Chulito, and would come home from kindergarten and teach Chulito the songs he'd learned. Growing up, they played together all the time snowball fights,

trick-or-treating on Halloween, going to Joe's for ices, or sneaking into El Coche Strip Club and laughing real hard when they got chased out by the old Irish owner.

But that was before all the shit came down.

It started when they went to different schools. Chulito went to Stevenson High School, the local school that everyone in Hunts Point attended, but Carlos got accepted into the Bronx High School of Science in the North Bronx, a school for the gifted and intelligent. Maria threw him a party when he got accepted and took a second job to buy him a new laptop. Then Carlos started dressing differently, like one of those white boys in the J. Crew catalogs. Chulito didn't care, at first; he thought Carlos looked cool and sophisticated. They still spent time together. Carlos helped him with homework and they rode the number six train to Parkchester to see movies on the weekends. They were always together. Then people in the neighborhood started calling Carlos a pato.

"We should kick his faggot ass to show him a lesson," said Looney Tunes, one of the fellas who hung out on the corner and lived in Chulito's building. Looney Tunes earned his name because as a kid he ran home from school to watch cartoons. He even watched them on videotape, sang the songs and imitated the noises and sound effects. He grew out of it, but the name stuck.

Chulito stared Looney Tunes down. "Yo, Carlos is my boy and he from the 'hood, so cut that shit."

"Protecting your boyfriend?" Looney Tunes teased. Chulito responded with a punch that knocked Looney Tunes on his ass and required three stitches on the inside of his mouth. So everybody left Carlos alone including Chulito. It was just what he had to do to be correct with the fellas. Carlos tried to stay connected, but he was placed in pato exile--no one looked at him or talked to him.

Chulito hated treating Carlos as if he were invisible whenever he ran into him in the Bella Vista Pizza Shop or saw him walking up the block. Chulito got heated when the fellas made "faggot this" and "faggot that" comments when Carlos passed the corner, but he kept it in check. He'd successfully avoided Carlos until one day,

while coming out of the bodega, he collided with him. The fellas were on the corner right outside the door watching. Carlos looked surprised at first, then the corners of his mouth curled into a smile. Chulito wanted to say "sorry" or "excuse me" but instead said, "Watch where you're fucking walking." The fellas laughed. The hurt in Carlos' eyes haunted him for the next week.

He finally went to meet Carlos at his school, which was safely a world away from Hunts Point. He was worried that things with the fellas could get out of hand. He wanted to protect Carlos, so he told him to get correct and stop fagging out.

Carlos looked down at his fitted yellow Polo shirt, straight-legged jeans and red Adidas sneakers with the white stripes and held out his slim arms. "There's nothing wrong with me, Chulito. There's nothing wrong with not wearing drooping pants and Timberlands all the time. Look around, people dress all different kinds of ways. And I'm still the same Carlos. It's the neighborhood that's fucked up."

Chulito checked out Carlos' friends waiting nearby with their mohawks, dread locks and fuschia dyed hair. He looked back at Carlos. He wanted to confess that he missed him, he missed the movies and the walks near the empty industrial streets of the Hunts Point Food Market, the laughs, and the long telephone conversations where Carlos told him the storylines of the books he was reading, but instead said, "I'm just trying to look out, 'cause the fellas be getting worked up." Chulito shoved his hands deeper into his pockets and looked at the ground.

"Thanks for looking out for me, Chulito. I know you're not like the rest of those assholes." Carlos touched his shoulder. Chulito's heart quickened.

On Carlos' graduation night, Chulito was hanging out on the corner with the fellas when Looney Tunes said, "Oh shit! Look, Carlos is holding hands with a dude." One of the auto glass guys sarcastically called out, "Oh, qué cute," which opened a flood gate of catcalls. When Chulito saw Carlos holding hands with his date a rush of anger swept over him. Is he messing with that dude? It was the same guy with the long blond dreads from his visit to Carlos' school. As the pair crossed the street, the auto glass guys and

some of the fellas on the corner blew kisses at them. Looney Tunes walked around with a limp wrist and called out Carlos' name in falsetto.

"That's right." Papo, one of the other fellas on the corner shouted, "You better walk fast before we fuck ya ass up, Carlos."

Carlos looked over his shoulder at Chulito, then kissed his date on the cheek. Chulito had trouble breathing and the neighborhood became a blur.

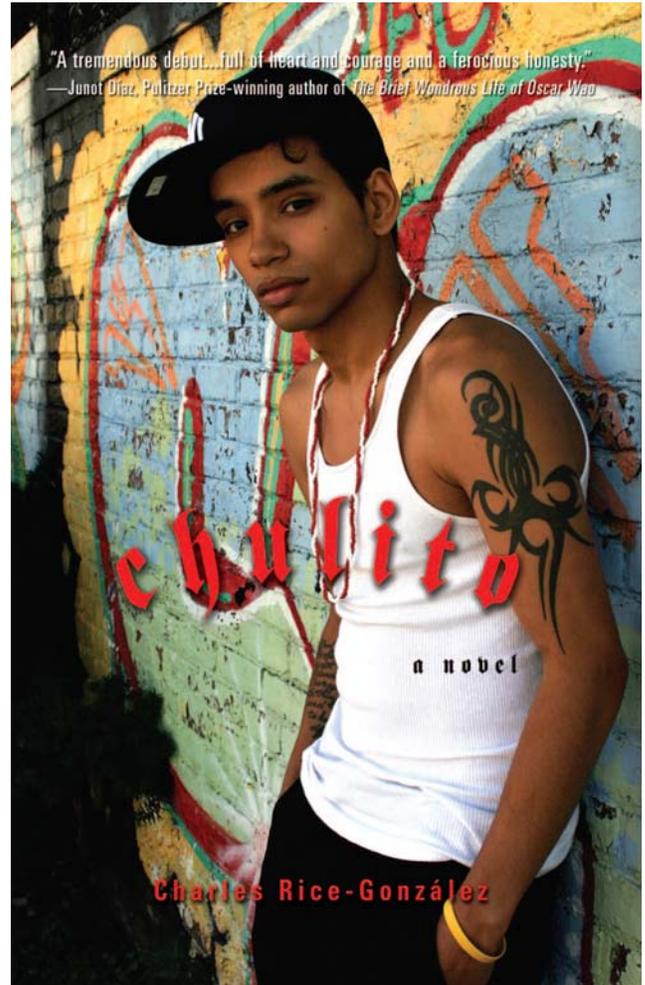
"Who the fuck does he think he is doing that shit over here?" Papo asked. "This ain't the Village." He picked up a bottle and hurled it. Carlos and the blond guy jumped as it shattered a few feet behind them. The auto glass guys and the fellas laughed. "You see that, Chulito? You stick your neck out for him and this is what he does. He's a fucking faggot. A dirty pato." Then Papo handed Chulito a bottle and gestured with his head to throw it. "Throw it!" one of the auto glass guys yelled. Then someone else said, "Throw it, Chulito." From all around Chulito the "throw its" shot like arrows. Carlos turned to see what was happening and noticed Chulito holding the bottle. They made eye contact. "Throw it, Chulito!" Papo urged. Chulito wished Carlos had done this when he wasn't around, then ran three steps forward and hurled the bottle into the lavender sky. As the bottle left his hands he wanted to fly with it and stop it mid-air. The bottle hit the blond guy on the shoulder, bounced off and crashed on the ground. The hecklers erupted into laughter, hissed and doubled over. "Bull's eye." Papo winked at Chulito.

The guy turned to confront the crowd. "What? Looks like that faggot wants a showdown. Let's get 'im fellas." Papo charged into the street. Chulito followed. He wanted to hurt that guy. He wanted to show him who's top dawg. Carlos tugged his date's arm and the two ran down Hunts Point Avenue. Papo laughed and stopped, along with the other fellas, in the middle of the street. "You betta run, faggots."

Chulito continued to sprint after Carlos and his date as they crossed under the Bruckner Expressway and dashed down the steps to the train station. The honking from the oncoming traffic under the highway made him stop. He stood on the median gasping and coughing. His

lungs burned and his body tingled, then he pressed his eyes to keep back the tears. He thought, How could Carlos disrespect the neighborhood like that? But he felt personally betrayed.

Chulito didn't talk to him again, and later that summer Carlos left for school on Long Island.



Cover photo courtesy of Magnus Books.

Ricardo Muñiz took the picture for the cover of *Chulito* (<https://about.me/RicardoMuniz>). The model/dancer, Noel Rodríguez, has danced at BAAD! (The Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, where Rice-González is the Executive Director). There is a Youtube video of Rice-González reading *Chulito* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsGrHgeesjw>.

From the Director's Desk

Immigration, Globalism, Collaboration, and the 11th Annual High School Seniors English Essay Contest

I delighted, when teaching school, to see collaborations between pairs of students, one of whose first language was other than English. They inevitably brought to mind the extraordinary relationship between author and editor or author and translator. The products of their collaborations were extraordinary as well.

Now, as thousands of immigrants and visitors arrive in their new schools—whether in the United States, elsewhere in the Americas, or in Africa, Asia, or Europe—I like to picture a warm welcome especially for those newcomers who bring with them their experiences of what it is to be queer in a different part of the globe and who now are eager, or perhaps anxious, to learn what it is to be queer in their new community.

I hope you will join me in extending a warm invitation to the new immigrants and visitors, and to their friends, to participate in the Queer Foundation's 11th Annual English Essay Contest. Participants may be of any nationality and need not be U.S. residents. All are eligible who have not yet graduated from high school. Top essayists will be awarded \$1,000 scholarships to help cover tuition and fees at a U.S. college or university during 2016-17.

I hope to see, among this year's entries, many essays that describe author-editor or author-translator collaborations, or that are the product of such collaborations among LGBTQ students and their friends, like those that delighted me so as a classroom teacher.

Joseph Dial, Ph.D.
Executive Director

From the editor's desk

Well, the October issue almost made it out in October. What was to have been laparoscopic surgery at the end of August turned out to be major surgery that lasted five hours. Four days later a viral infection in both lungs led to total pulmonary failure. Apparently, they did manage to get my lungs functioning again, but I did not come to until some four hours later, back in the ICU. An anticipated five-day stay in hospital turned into ten, plus another five in a Specialized Nursing Facility.

Anyway, my recovery has been slower than anticipated, and that has put me far behind in my volunteer work for the QF. I still haven't contacted a number of students who received Special Mention in

the High School Senior English Essay Contest. If you're a 2015 Special Mention student who I've not yet contacted, you can help me by emailing me at rverzasconi@msn.com. I really would like to feature all of you in an issue of our e-newsletter so all of our readers get an idea of how diverse and also how promising QF scholars are.

For now, I will forego my editorial comments and links to sites of potential interest. I hope to be back in the January issue.

Ray Verzasconi, Ph.D., Editor

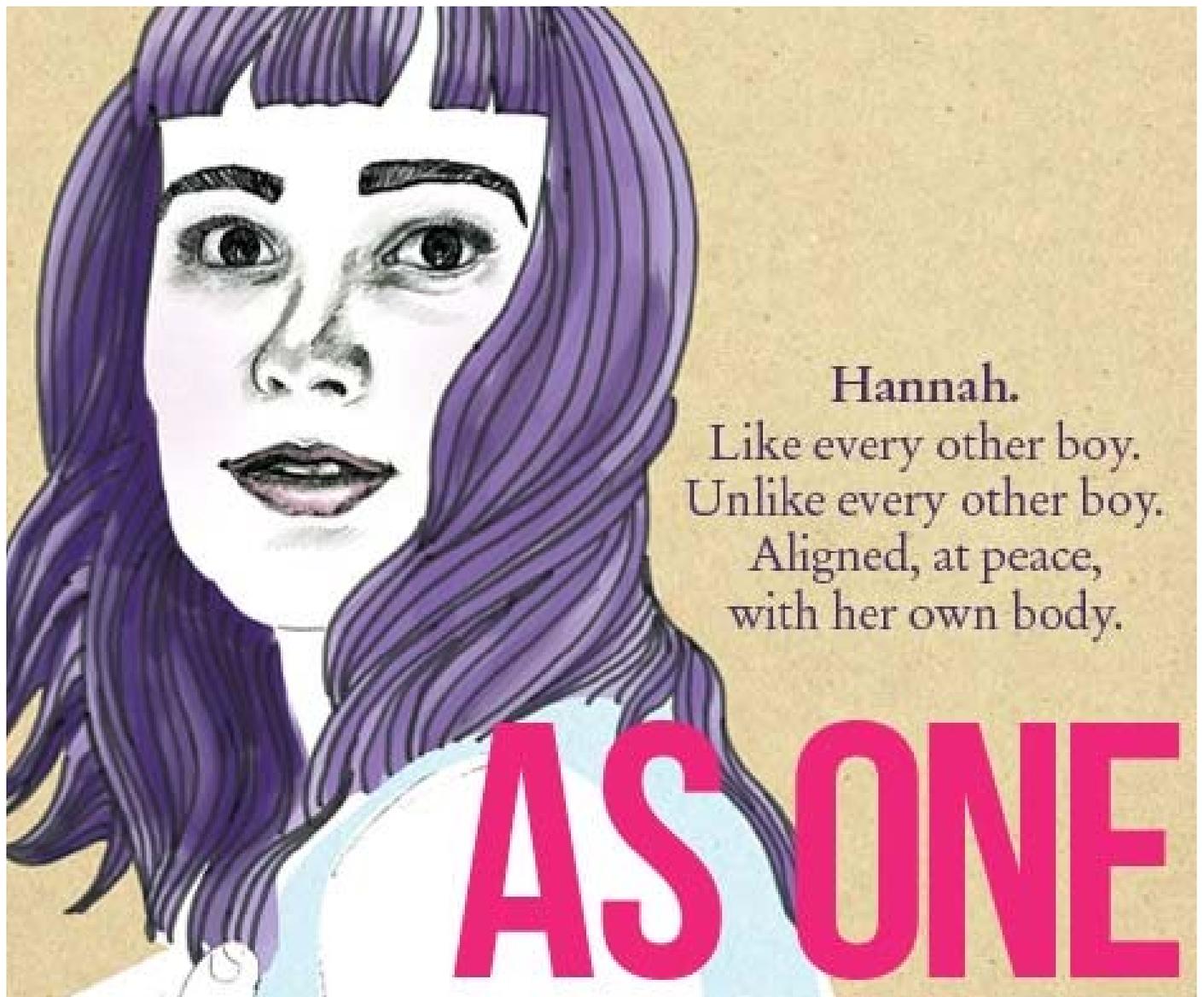


Image by LMO Advertising. Courtesy of UrbanArias, Arlington VA. <http://www.urbanarias.org/>

The weekend began with my running out of Suffolk University Law School at two in the afternoon to meet my partner, Zachary, at work, hop in my jeep, and begin the drive down to Washington D.C. from Boston to watch an opera. The music was blasting as we sped down the highway, and we were fortunate that there was very little traffic in Massachusetts. However, once we hit Connecticut it was like everyone and their entire family was trying to leave the state. This eight hour road trip soon morphed into eleven. This drive down included my discovery

that I did not understand how “not pumping your own gas” worked. Zachary and I were in New Jersey about 2/3 of the way into the road adventure and the discovery that I was legally not allowed to pump my own gas made me beg Zachary to pass on the gas and wait until the next state where I could just do it myself. He answered with a laugh and a “no” the first time I asked, but the second and third times I asked his responses got more colorful. Besides that interesting experience, let’s get on with the show.

We checked into our hotel around two miles from the Atlas Performing Arts Center and excitedly talked about the show. My partner and I are both transgender activists and are incredibly interested in seeing an increase of transgender representation in the arts, so when Ray Verzasconi asked if we wanted to go watch an opera being put on by Urban Arias, called “As One,” about a transgender woman, we jumped at the chance. The day of the performance we walked to a restaurant next to the theatre and the two miles going there really gave our calves a work out, seeing as most of it was uphill. Luckily for us that would be the most challenging part of the night. After dinner and a drink we sat in the theatre and waited for the performance to start.

Zachary and I had done some research before the opera about the performers and I have to admit, we were nervous. There were two performers, one cisgender man and one cisgender woman, both playing the part of a transgender woman. Whenever cisgender people play transgender characters my partner and I get nervous, because many times performers don’t do their research, or there wasn’t any input from the transgender community about how transgender people are being portrayed. In this case our fears were entirely unfounded.

The opera itself focused on the internal realizations of Hannah, the lead transgender protagonist, as she realized that she was assigned male at birth, but identified as a woman. Both performers were on stage the entire time interacting as one entity, which was refreshing. They avoided the pitfall of portraying transwoman as someone clearly “man-identified” who is then suddenly embodied by a perfect “woman-identified” physical body. Instead both pieces of Hannah, both performers, were necessary and served a purpose in Hannah’s internal identity. Through dancing together, singing together, and having impact on each other’s movements the performers embodied what is seen by others, one’s body, and how one feels inside, one’s identity.

The performance brought me to tears and it felt incredibly reflective. “As One” showed me

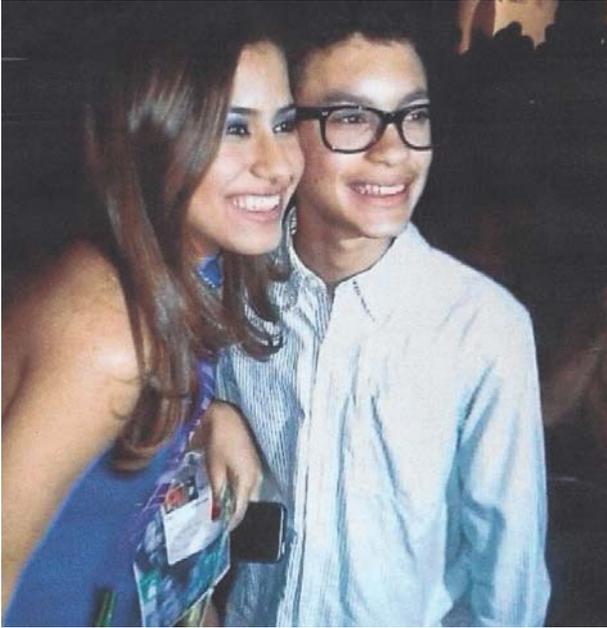
something beautiful that isn’t commonly found in mainstream media; a story about a transgender person that truly speaks to transgender people. However, there was one more fear that needed to be addressed in the post-show talk back with the performers and directors, “were any transgender people involved in the creation of this piece?” Urban Arias didn’t disappoint in that regard either. The show was co-written, inspired by, and overseen by a transgender woman and both the performers spoke to transgender people about these individuals’ transitions and what being transgender meant to them. One performer was even still in contact with the people she talked to and was updating them on how the show was doing. The director provided the audience with transgender resources and actually began to cry when discussing the violence transgender people face every day and encouraged everyone, transgender or not, to participate in the Transgender Day of Remembrance. They honored transgender people who had recently died by actually saying their names, instead of just numbers or statistics. “As One” was a transgender story told correctly. This opera demonstrated the attentiveness, care, and true passion needed to tell a story not just about transgender people, but for an audience of transgender people and truly move us with a beautiful reflection of what many of our lives look like.

Skailer Rei Qvistgaard
Suffolk University Law School
Boston, Massachusetts
October 31, 2015

2015 Special Mention

English Essay Contest for High School Seniors

Stephanie V. Duno



Stephanie Duno became an LGBTQ ally when her then 12-year-old brother (he's a bit older in the photo above) came home from school with an "accidental" black eye. The more she learned about the extent of bullying in schools and its devastating emotional and physical impact on victims, the future veterinary founded "Pawssible," a non-profit organization that matches abused or abandoned small animals and bullied children and youth in an effort to teach them both that they are loved.

A graduate of Ronald Reagan Doral Sr. High School in Florida, Ms. Duno was active in many student and community organizations. Among others, she was a member of the National Honor Society, the National Spanish Honor Society, Rho Kappa Social Studies National Honor Society, Miami Ambassador to Huellas de Amor non-profit organization, and captain of Junior Varsity volleyball, and the recipient of even more numerous awards. She is currently a freshman at the University of Florida, majoring in

Animal Biology. She plans to become a veterinary, focusing on small animals.

[As yet I have not been able to find Ms. Duno a mentor. Interested? Please contact me. The editor. rverzasconi@msn.com]