



The Scroll

## DIVORCING THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

I thought I'd found a warm and supportive home, but being Jewish made that difficult

By [Gretchen Rachel Hammond](#)

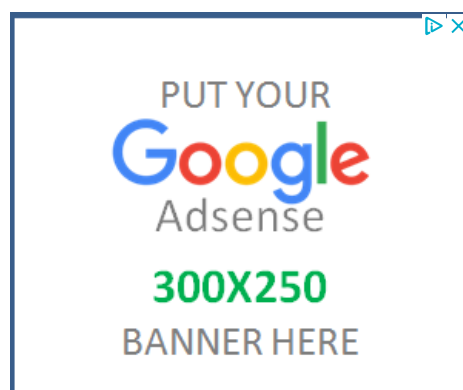
March 13, 2018 • 11:00 AM



“You’re a fucking kike!”

It was not a single thought expelled in one, rapid sentence, and the tone was so much more than mere hatred. It was maniacal rage that curled around each word and threw it down the speaker of my phone before pausing to pick up another. The last sharpened piece of flint was aimed directly at my head with relish.

I’m usually very good at come-backs. I am a movie fanatic. Rather than the occasional piece of annoyingly catchy music which shows up like a mosquito on a summer evening to persistently circle around one’s ear, my days tend to recall random pieces of screenplay that match how I’m feeling. Thus, I have a library of borrowed quotes for every occasion.



The caller did not immediately hang up. They were waiting for a response. Maybe something from Eric Bogosian?

“Tell me something. I’m curious. How do you dial a phone with a straitjacket on?”

Or Bob Clark?

“You aren’t even smart enough to be a good bigot!”

Either would have done. Anything would have done. Instead of just sitting there in thunder-stuck, ineffectual silence.

It was June 28, 2017, and I was an adult, but I might as well have been my 11-year-old, effeminate, half-Indian school-kid self again, reliving the day in 1981 when at least a half-dozen of my classmates at North Cestrian Grammar School in Manchester, England telegraphed their latest attack with “Paki Puff!”

It was their invitation for me to run. They liked it when I ran because it marked the beginning of the hunt and I was always the easiest prey to catch.

That morning, I didn't manage to get out of my chair fast enough. So, they picked me up and sandwiched me between the wall and the heavy wooden classroom door. With their collective weight, they pressed against it until I could not move and then could not breathe. I grew increasingly more faint; unaware of the blood streaming from my nose which bore the brunt of the first assault. If their look-out hadn't suddenly yelled the name of an oncoming teacher, they would have killed me.

You would think, in 36 years, I might have learned something about fighting back.

But as I gripped the phone, my breath stopped in my throat. Any physical or mental defenses were useless.

I recognized the voice of my attacker—a transgender person who participated in a transgender liberation rally in Chicago that I had covered earlier in the year in my capacity as a reporter for the city's LGBTQ newspaper.

Members of the transgender community filled the frozen streets of the Chicago loop that night to demand their civil rights and fight back against society's bullies; something that had become a life goal since my school-days.

Now that I was the focus of their rancor, 'paki' had become 'kike.' The boys behind the door were members of my own community, and I didn't know what the hell to do or feel about it.

For four years, I had watched the transgender community eat its own to the point where becoming dinner was accepted as an inherent risk of belonging to it. As the call continued, I didn't feel like dinner so much as the scraps thrown down the garbage disposal.

"What did you say?" I finally whispered.

The invitation was accepted for the door to be pressed harder.

"Oh, you fuckin' heard me. Your story was a lie and your bitch ass is finished as a reporter."

"Why are you doing this?" I was beginning to shake. "It wasn't a lie....and I know you...I...."

The voice was gone.

A half-hour later, the phone rang again. The Caller-ID said "Unknown"

I should have known better than to answer it and invite the second round of an evening barrage from supporters of the Chicago Dyke March which, four days earlier, had ejected three Jewish women from their event.

It was a small, local story, which no one expected to be repeated outside of Chicago, least of all the Dyke March Collective.

After the news of the discrimination against the Jewish participants in the march went global, the Collective scrambled to put together at least three wildly different excuses including a Jewish Pride flag making Palestinian attendees uncomfortable, the three women somehow disrupting a march of over a thousand people, and, ultimately, a massive conspiracy cooked up between the Jewish LGBT advocacy organization A Wider Bridge and the media.

When the condemnations kept coming, they turned on the easier target: the messenger.

That had been made clear during a more civilized on-the-record interview with one of the organizers who told me she felt that I and, consequently, my newspaper had "failed in its journalistic mission."

As if on cue, the calls I received on the evening the interview was published were each variations on a theme and soaked in the same venom directed towards those who murdered or enabled murder or injustice against transgender people.

They went on until I disconnected the phone from the outlet and sat on my living room couch without moving a muscle; just staring at the wall in front of me on which hung a transgender-pride flag I had picked up during my first Transgender Day of Remembrance.

A cocktail of disbelief and heartbreak forbade any chance of sleep.

"I'm in a very, very bad place right now," I wrote just before dawn. "I am regretting my transition. There is just so much hate. It literally twists your insides and you start to doubt your own moral compass. They make you feel so bad for being who you are. I can't stop crying. I can't. But I'm not allowed to cry white tears! I'm half-Indian but they sure as fuck don't believe me!"

I wasn't talking about right-wingers, but my own community.

Their response was to accuse me of making myself into the victim.

I should have been stronger. Smashed behind a door, I should have pushed back.

I was sent on an immediate sabbatical and removed from my job within the week—a job which had not just been a badly needed paycheck but an emotional investment in defending my community. I had been so very proud to play a small role in raising their individual voices.

Suddenly, I was left scrambling to find both a future and a meaning to the past and what seemed like so much wasted time. My employer had warned me not to say a word about my removal from the editorial department; not even to friends.

Then, on July 11, I saw a tweet from the Dyke March Collective which referenced my termination and declared themselves to be God.

I hunger for criticism. I believe it to be an essential component in a job that demands constant education, I wasn't expecting racism from a community which has aligned itself with those who want to stamp it out and I certainly did not think that community would target the one thing transgender individuals universally struggle the most at attaining and keeping: employment.

Not only that, but they were bragging about their success. I prayed, took a deep breath, and broke my silence.

But, in truth, just as I had nurtured for those school bullies for so many years, a hatred for the community boiled in the pit of my stomach. It reheated every time the contracted term “trans” showed up on my social media feed or in yet another “things not to do/say/feel/think /gesture when meeting/dating/talking with a trans” BuzzFeed-type article.

Such feelings demanded that I divorce myself from any association with the transgender identity and the community that went along with it.

Given the length of the relationship, I didn't know if it was a healthy decision or even possible since, as far as Google and society is concerned, I am considered transgender whether I like it or not.

When you get a divorce, questions inevitably consort with visceral images of the past all in the single confrontation of a murky future without a life-long partner.

## Dating and Marriage

*“They met...great! They agreed on that. But, the way I saw it, the poor bastards never had a chance.”*

In 2006, The Edge was a small bar on the corner of a main road in the South Chicago suburb of Blue Island. Its darkened windows and small neon sign gave it the look of a dingy, small town Texas hangout where you could be assured of a nightly fist fight especially if you walked in looking unmistakably like a man wearing a dress better suited for someone ten years younger and plastered in amateurishly applied make up which did nothing to conceal the obvious fear of someone who just did not belong.

But that's how I arrived at The Edge one Wednesday evening shortly after a therapist had confirmed my gender dysphoria. I was looking for people who might understand who I was even as I was still trying to figure that out. Hell, I hadn't even made a permanent decision on a name. Resources and information were scarce but, like so many people at the start of a transition, I wasn't just hungry for any available of A-to-B-to-M-to-F roadmap but a welcome refuge from a surrounding forest in which you were constantly hunted by laughter, derision, rejection and the threat of violence.

I spent my entire life on the run from that until I first walked out in public and so turned to confront the reason for endless pain, failed marriages and lost friends; this woman who refused to depart my every waking moment until she was freed to exist outside of my soul. In those private moments when she was allowed out, usually in locked bedrooms, she reciprocated with total peace.

I found The Edge on one of very few Chicago transgender-resource webpages advertising a group called “The Island Girls.” The bright neon pink-bordered photographs of ecstatic faces raising their glasses, as if they were figures in a contemporary version of a post-Prohibition celebratory booze-up, not only promised a similar liberation but belonging.

That first night, it had taken me three-hours before I felt I was ready to set foot outside of my Westside apartment. All the way to the car, I kept my head lowered, damned sure someone was going to see me. When it came to unwanted attention, Junior High School girls were invariably the worst. They would point and laugh hysterically with cries of “Holy shit! That's a man!” If they'd owned a billboard, they would have thrown a rope around my neck and hauled me to the top of it so that more people could enjoy the sight of me kicking helplessly just to escape.

I am surprised I lived through the 45-minute journey to Blue Island. Between critiquing my face in the rear-view mirror and referencing the Mapquest print-out, I didn't have much time to look at the road. When I eventually found The Edge, I drove around it in circles wondering if it was the right place and debating whether or not to just go home.

But there could be no more hiding. I parked as close as I could, walked to the door as if I was a trench-coated Benny Hill

stereotype walking into a sex-shop and, with one last look at my reflection in the darkened glass, I stepped inside.

My mouth dropped open.

It looked to me as if The Island Girls were comprised of the entire female transgender population of Chicago. They were made up of people from all walks of life, adult ages, races, religions and income levels. Some were fifty-something cross-dressers who had raided Forever 21 and didn't quite know how to sit in a mini-skirt. Others, like me, were at the start of a longer more permanent journey and were still indulging in the sparkly pink phase we never got in our tweens. Then there were those had already reached their particular gender destination and could have drawn the envy of Audrey Hepburn at her most elegant.

After using the basement or the woman's bathroom to remove the clothed shackles demanded by American society, those Island Girls who were still part-timers emerged as themselves; as if the soulless people standing in lines to receive another body-snatching pod had suddenly been healed. The result was vivid, sometimes exaggerated colors depending on abilities with make-up, which helped illuminate the darkened lounge with five hours of freedom so unashamed that it begged for karaoke.

I hadn't been at The Edge for more than twenty minutes before a woman named Lana wrapped me in a pair of considerable arms and handed me an Island Girls badge. She had a white-collar job during the day and, while one would imagine that alone would have made her self-conscious, she was always one of the first onto the karaoke stage brightly lit enough that habitual concealment from the rest of the world was impossible.

Lana was just fearless and, under her example, my own apprehension evaporated.

Then there was Roxy— a Latina who spoke with a thick Brooklyn brogue and was so magnificently brash with it that, if anyone ever told her to “find Jesus” she would shrug and reply “Yeah? When did he go missing?”

I was both awed by her self-confidence and enamored of her ability to make me laugh especially when she patiently indulged my constant requests for every single one of Marisa Tomei's lines in *My Cousin Vinny*.

Roxy's replication of Tomei's “Cute, doe-eyed little deer!” speech was just uncanny.

June was one of the leaders; a born-activist with a love for her community that was unbridled. She was an encyclopedia on all things both transgender and Jewish, always spoke her mind and never couched anything in diplomacy. Thus, she engendered almost instant trust. She invited me to my first protest outside a downtown Chicago hotel where a transphobic minister was speaking at a Human Rights Campaign event. There were only about a dozen of us, but with June practically going hoarse on a bullhorn, we made ourselves heard. Her energy was limitless. Yet, as the years went on, it seemed tempered by sadness, sometimes anger— a sense of betrayal that, at the time, I didn't understand.

Even The Edge bartender, a teddy bear of an Italian named Bruno who could make innumerable different cocktails at one time and always ended up shirtless and perspiring by the end of the night, became a life-long friend.

The transgender community courted me through The Island Girls. They helped instill such a firm belief in who I always was that, even though I could no more hold a tune than a chain-smoking Screech-Owl, I eventually jumped onto the stage without a second thought to anyone's ears. No matter how much I massacred poor Billy Idol or Howard Jones, the applause from my fellow Island Girls was still resounding.

The helpless, half-Indian child was consumed and, I thought, had utterly vanished. I had never felt such joy nor laughed so freely. The sheer willingness of the transgender community to embrace me after years of rejection led to a love for them which was akin to that of a small, insulated family besieged by the hatred of society but, at least two Wednesdays-per-month, totally immune to it.

No one at *Time* magazine was saying we were at a tipping point, former Olympic athletes didn't think it was the right time to make a gender identity proclamation on ABC and it wasn't considered trendy at schools or companies to join a transgender and allies social group. There was always some jealousy directed towards those who could look effortlessly beautiful, but it never manifested itself in demands that they acknowledge their “passing privilege” or get out of the bar. This was long before terms like privilege, and intersectionality began to infect and divide the cells of the community.

After I finished the last of my confirmation surgeries, I started to pull away from The Island Girls. Since the prefix “trans” was used in the act of crossing from one to the other—transatlantic, transcontinental—I reasoned that I no longer needed it. I simply wanted to disappear into society as a woman.

Trying to find a job in 2013 precluded that hope. I had a healthy resume but, during interview close-ups, my face still gave me away. Such often uncomfortable meetings, during which I would be recipient of what I came to call “the look” (very much the attitude of the Junior High girls without the pointing) were inevitably followed by a form letter or silence.

It was through sheer luck and the faith of its publisher that an LGBTQ paper took me in and made me a journalist.

As I wrote, I gained a deeper understanding about the experiences of so many transgender people many of which carried a common through-line particularly among transgender individuals of color —rejection at all levels of society, joblessness, poverty, imprisonment, suicidal ideation, physical attacks, often horrific murders un or misreported by the media.

Like The Island Girls, even if dignity was all they could call their own in the world, it was held high as if they possessed unimaginable wealth.

Eisha Love was a walking example of that. She had been arrested in 2012 after an attack by a local gang-member who threatened to kill her. Compelled by a mix of both rage and fear, she side-swiped him with her car. Charged with Attempted Murder in the First Degree, by the time I was tipped off about her story, she had already been in the maximum-security division of the Cook County Jail, housed with the men and often kept in solitary, for well over a year.

After her story was published, I felt compelled to keep seeing her. I will never forget the smile on her face whenever she walked into our cramped visiting room, an orange-jump suit doing it's best to imprison her identity. You would have thought she had just emerged from a day-outing at a beauty salon rather than the depths of one of Chicago's most infamous dungeons.

We found a strength in each other and, with the help of a committed group of transgender activists and the generosity of one of the finest defense lawyers in the city, after four years without a trial Eisha was freed one chilly December night in 2015. I drove with her mother and sister to pick her up. The moment when, after so many visits separated by a thick sheet of grimy plexiglass, Eisha and I finally hugged is burned into my heart.

Eisha and so many like her, helped me rediscover my love and commitment to the community. I began to lecture at local universities where, to groups of cisgender social studies and psychology students, I shared my story, Eisha's and so many of those about which I considered it my honor to write.

When I was introduced as a "transgender journalist" it seemed like a perfectly healthy and honest marriage of titles.

After the emergence of people like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock onto the national scene, it was impossible to ignore that our small family was exponentially growing in both numbers and outward confidence that was not limited to social media pages. *Time* magazine took note and, in acknowledging the floodgates, Steinmetz's 2014 article opened them even wider.

It was then that I began to notice that those transgender people who started to speak out as an activist, journalist, celebrity, organizer, commentator or even via a social media post were coming under attack, not just from the usual crowd of Evangelical Conservative hysterics, but increasingly and unnervingly from their own community.

### **Disillusionment and Decay**

*"What about the others? Nest of scheming bastards. They couldnae agree on the color o' shite!"*

By 2014, a number of transgender women commentators were writing op-eds in online magazines. That was all well and good except when they started going after each other over various infractions of a set of unestablished, continually evolving rules whether concerning terminology or who was or was not to be considered part of the transgender umbrella.

Those unceremoniously deemed unworthy were subject to expulsions which became both perpetual and public. Social media was the courtroom. Transgender people were judge and jury over their own. The crimes for which their fellow community members were tried and excommunicated centered around opinion, labels, politics, level of transition or otherwise and, eventually, race.

The word "privilege" started to show up and was applied to those transgender people who could pass as cisgender in society or were not of color. Commentators decried individuals who did not recognize such privilege although what sort of penance had to be exacted and at which village stockade was comparatively nebulous.

Nevertheless, attacks between transgender people escalated using language that even the American Family Association would have called "unnecessarily cruel."

It was around 2015 that I first heard the word "intersectionality" during an event at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). The moderator used it at least two dozen times during a 30-minute speech and, at every utterance, seemed to draw out each syllable as if she was feasting on her own delicious intellect.

"Now there's a new go-to word to put on grant applications," I thought and briefly mourned the demise of "underserved" while not acknowledging that intersectionality had been added to an identity politics arsenal which turned words into, at best, barriers and, at worst, bludgeons.

With devilish speed, intersectionality showed up at every single transgender or LGBTQ rabble-rouser, fundraiser and panel I

attended. It was repeated ad-nauseum to the point where it transitioned from a quotable bit of celebration to the utterly meaningless and downright annoying.

Similarly, when Gender Nonconforming and transgender kids started to leave university Gay Straight Alliances and march under the transgender umbrella, they brought with them a list of forbidden “isms” such as Colonialism and Imperialism. Alongside “normativities” such as Heteronormativity and Cisnormativity, all were inducted into a community lexicon that had become progressively Orwellian. Those guilty of embracing normativity or not acknowledging an ism became an unperson and, inside Room 101, was a damning oped, social media scourging or the ultimate punishment: blocking.

As a pre-internet child, I never understood why blocking was taken so personally. But, since Facebook had reduced the bonds and trust of friendship to a number, the inevitable afterbirth was a form of subtraction to be used as a weapon of defense or a “so there!” axe.

When Caitlyn Jenner came out in 2015, blocking people was the Howitzer in what amounted to an online transgender civil war.

The opposing sides were divided between those who despised the fact that Jenner was a Republican who did not acknowledge her privilege and used her reality show for personal gain rather than to help the transgender community versus those who thought that her ABC interview and subsequent platform was helping the transgender community gain larger societal acceptance.

Either way, she made good copy and kept journalists busy producing share-bait in an endless stream of Jenner stories and commentaries on Jenner stories that became so pervasive, every time I saw one I sarcastically remarked “Caitylin who?”

I had allowed myself to be sucked into the whole “get Jenner” scrummage. We clearly faced bigger problems than whatever she’d eaten for lunch that day but, whenever I jumped on my own soap box begging for unity, I felt hypocritical.

Self-loathing and doubt reemerged from deep within me after nearly a decade of contentment.

Jenner wasn’t the only transgender celebrity who was targeted by her own community. Never comfortable giving public speeches, such appearances by filmmaker Lana Wachowski were rare. After she misspoke during a 2015 event celebrating transgender people, she was practically booed off the stage and the subsequent online savaging she received was merciless. I haven’t heard her speak publicly since.

Transgender activist Kristin Beck once wrote to me that she too had been attacked and added “I feel sadness towards this community as it tears itself apart.”

Wachowski and Beck were some of our best and brightest and they were essentially being forced back into silence by their own community.

By 2016, only ten years had passed since my first Island Girls visit but they might as well have been post-apocalyptic centuries during which my family vanished into a wasteland populated by competing factions engaged in an endless brawl with each other while the violence against and murders of transgender people continued to reach new highs.

I didn’t recognize the transgender community and I was beginning not to recognize myself as part of it.

Then the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce’s annual gathering of LGBTQ activists came to town.

Creating Change manifested online internal hatred and exclusion into physical form that made for three days which, at their best, were downright depressing and, at their worst, utterly revolting

I’ll never forget the first transgender break-out session I covered at Creating Change. I was sat at the front snapping pictures when one of the moderators told me to go and sit in the back as part of a recognition of my “white privilege.”

I gaped at her.

“But I’m half-Indian,” I replied with some shock.

“You look white to me,” the moderator replied and repeated her demand that I should either move to the back or get out.

When I was 12, I took some of my mother’s light-foundation and slapped it over my face hoping to convince my tormentors that I was white. Now, after years of denying it, here I was defending my Indian heritage because I was being lambasted by members of my own community for not being dark enough.

I tried to laugh off how bizarre it all was with a colleague of mine who, similarly, had spent the entire day having to acknowledge his privilege.

“They could save a lot of time if they had a Privilege Check instead of a Coat Check next year,” I said shaking my head. “But I’m sure that’ll lead to more problems when you hand in your ticket at the end of the day: ‘Umm excuse me, but you’ve given me the wrong privilege. Mine is purple with leather patches on the elbows.’”

The joke gave us about ten minutes of relieved mileage from all the hatred that dripped from the walls of Creating Change and soaked into the carpet. But by the end of that first Friday night no one was laughing, especially if you were Jewish.

I had been to Israel the previous summer at what was the beginning of my conversion journey. Like my transition, it had taken years before I finally found and embraced a religious home. I was enamored with Israel less than 24 hours after I stepped off the plane.

There, I took part in the Tel Aviv Pride Parade. Along its route, a group of transgender people held aloft a massive transgender Pride flag—each taking turns to make sure it never touched the ground.

I was a foreigner but, nevertheless, welcomed by them to join in that honor. I wasn’t the only one. For the entirety of the march, people of all ages, races, both cisgender or at different stages of transition, would run up and grab a portion of the flag without protest or exclusion by anyone else.

The Israeli transgender community were pissed off at the Netanyahu government for a litany of reasons, and job discrimination was right at the top. As they marched, their songs were defiant and similar only in their unity of purpose. I was back in Blue Island again and, if this was pink-washing, then I wanted to drown in it.

Creating Change was the first time I noticed that hating Israel had become en-vogue with a transgender community which now declared intersectionality with the Palestinians. While in Tel Aviv, I spoke with LGBTQ Palestinian kids who, in fear of their lives, had fled their families and lived on the streets of the city. Their means of survival was not so different from those employed by homeless transgender people on the streets of Chicago. So, there was a connection despite the fact that, if any American transgender activist set one foot in the West Bank to demand Mahmoud Abbas acknowledge his cisgender, male privilege, they probably wouldn’t live long enough to block him on Facebook.

Having divided up who was to cover what during the rest of the conference, I left my colleague shortly before the infamous Creating Change Friday night Shabbat dinner was to take place. It turned out that he’d drawn the short straw.

That evening, I watched the videos and listened to his description in numbed horror.

Transgender people attacking transgender people for “pink-washing Israeli Apartheid.” I felt sick to my stomach and tried to wrap my head around a minority mobbing a minority in images that mirrored the precursors to some of the worst atrocities in history.

Inevitably, a new privilege delineation was added to those who supported Israel and to wear it was to be immediately ostracized. The ensuing debate and, of course, all-out assaults between the anti and pro-Israel factions of the transgender community continued online for months after Creating Change had mercifully left the city.

Extremism is the great destroyer of anything good. Donald Trump’s election was both caused by and became the fuel for extremism. The walls around the transgender community’s myriad of declared safe-spaces seemed to serve the same function as the one on which Trump ran.

My news feed filled with social media posts from transgender people stating: “You had better check your privilege right fucking now or get out of this community” and “If you voted for Trump, you are an enemy to the community and no friend of mine. You are aligning yourself with people who hate us.”

The community had radicalized and divisions had widened. If you didn’t acknowledge your white privilege you were a racist, if you didn’t acknowledge your passing privilege you were part of the transphobic problem, if you didn’t decry an ism or engaged in a normativity, you were a willing member of a system of oppression.

There is a CPD officer who, every morning, parks his car on the beach next to my apartment to watch the sunrise over Lake Michigan. Given the job he does, I’m hardly surprised he wants to start his day with something beautiful. One morning, I passed his car as I was walking my dogs. He rolled down his window to say hello to them.

I kept on walking.

As far as the transgender community was concerned, the man was an enemy. If anyone had found out I smiled or engaged in a conversation with him, they probably would have lobbied for the end of my job long before the summer of 2017. My community similarly demanded that I loathe Conservatives and wholeheartedly subscribe to a belief that were capable only of outright hatred; that all they wanted out of life was to see people like me either dead or in a padded cell.

Worse, I had to choose between my religion, a belief in Israel and my identity.

To me there was no argument. by the end of 2016, my immersion in the mikveh was not just an act of committed love but outright defiance.

With a belly-full of identity politics giving me indigestion, I authored my own social media confession to the transgender community.

*"I was born in Britain to an Indian father (oppressors of Muslims) and an English mother (Imperialist oppressors of most of the world).*

*While acknowledging and learning from history, I proudly identify as both.*

*Similarly, I freely converted to Judaism in 2016.*

*A decade earlier, I became an American citizen (by default endorsement of Colonialism, Capitalism, racism, war mongering, systems of oppression, industrial complexes, mass murder, political corruption, fascist states, watery beer, crappy daytime television, violent consumer-driven culture, foul-tasting chocolate, Newt Gingrich and White Castle).*

*When I was a kid and the IRA blew up half of Manchester I was angry at them (intolerance).*

*I read Enid Blyton's The Faraway Tree when I was five and adored it. The story included a man shaped like a moon (body shaming), an angry old lady who used to throw her soapy water at people climbing the tree (ageism), a sweet natured fairy named Silky (Hetero/Woodland Spritenormativity) and enchanted squirrels (animal exploitation).*

*When I was a teenager, I listened to New Order (heteronormativity) and Frankie Goes to Hollywood (heteronormativity/divisiveness).*

*I had a great time at and supported Live Aid (Colonialism/white tears).*

*I cried when John Lennon was shot (half-Indian tears).*

*I stayed up to find out who shot J.R. (endorsement of racist television, Capitalism and violent, consumer driven culture).*

*It was Kristen Shepard (Spoilerist).*

*I had a crush on Christopher Lee in the role of Dracula (Imperialist vampirism).*

*When I was an actor, I played Hamlet, John Proctor, the Marquis de Sade, Heathcliff Earnshaw, Phillip II of France, Horace Vandergelder, Johnny Casino, Shylock and Cassius (Imperialism, Colonialism, mansplaining, white tears, Danish systems of oppression, French systems of oppression, Yorkshire systems of oppression, Roman systems of oppression, Yonkers systems of oppression, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, mysogyny, racism, sexual harassment, sadism, murderous obsessionitivism, Zionism, micro and macro aggressions, ableism, ageism and regressive nostalgia.)*

*I once played Halo 2 with my son (Colonialism, militarism, intolerance of alien cultures).*

*I enjoy Cherry Garcia ice cream (privilege), I frequent Chinese restaurants (Imperialist Colonialist Communism) and cook my own Indian food (endorsement of curries eaten by Muslim oppressors.)*

*One of my favorite movies is Life of Brian (Zionist, Roman systems of oppression). I cheered when Sigourney Weaver confronted the Alien Queen with "get away from her you bitch!" (Intolerance of other cultures/Colonialism) and I cried at the end of E.T. (half-Indian tears).*

*In the Star Wars prequel trilogy, I rooted for the Separatists (de facto Imperialism).*

*I wanted Rick and Ilsa to get together at the end of Casablanca (support of American systems of and Norwegian systems of oppression/half-Indian tears)*

*I prefer dogs over cats because I'm allergic to the latter. I love my dogs. (Caninism).*

*If any of the above triggers anyone then feel free to make your haughty, online statement of self-empowerment. I wish you all the luck but if my being a British/Indian Jew who enjoyed Aliens and eats curry and Cherry Garcia ice cream is so offensive to you and makes you feel unsafe then you can take your 'tolerance', your intersectionality, your spaces, your finger snaps, your emojis and your cans of Millennial-flavored La Croix holy water and fuck off!"*

The end of my marriage to the transgender community was inevitable even without the intervention of the Dyke March Collective.

After the news broke of my termination as a reporter, it was a majority of Conservative voices who came to my defense with the full knowledge that I was transgender.



Indoctrination was turned on its head.

My mortal enemies turned out to be people. As far as they were concerned, a violation of the First Amendment was an injustice no matter who it affected.

With a few individual exceptions, the transgender community which had continually railed against inequity, particularly in employment, was silent even while the Dyke March celebrated their victory over a fellow transgender person losing her job.

I began to wonder how they and the Conservatives they despised stacked up against each other morally.

### Counseling

*“A relationship, I think, is like a shark. You know? It has to constantly move forward or it dies. I think what we got on our hands is a dead shark.”*

I was no longer writing about transgender issues. For months after the Dyke March, outside of Eisha, I didn't talk to a single transgender soul. Yet, a part of me tried to hold on to whatever the transgender community had become. After over a decade in its company, I was afraid to live without it.

Dr. Erica Anderson, Ph.D. is a transgender woman who is affiliated with the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Child and Adolescent Gender Center Clinic specializing in behavioral pediatrics.

But, in asking about my own alienation from the transgender community, I sought her opinion as someone who has practiced psychology for over three decades.

I figured there had to be an underlying and logical reason which explained why the transgender community assaulted its own membership with such alarming regularity. I wanted to know whether I was just bitter over a relationship that had changed for the worse. I wondered if my yearning for the days and feeling of The Island Girls was totally unrealistic.

Like me, over the years, Anderson watched the transgender community change in both population figures, the breadth of its membership and the depth of divisions that seemed synonymous with its growth.

“We used to think that the numbers of transgender people were very small,” she said. “Many of the people who fit the male-to-female or female-to-male types either were advised or aspired to become so passable that they could blend into society in their identified gender. There was very little obvious activism. We've come to realize that gender is a spectrum; that there is a range and people have self-consciously rejected the idea that they have to pass or blend in. In the last five years, we've started to see a further elaboration where people are wholeheartedly rejecting binary constructions of gender and embracing and proudly claiming idiosyncratic or individualized versions of gender. In some cases, they are asserting themselves in an almost militant way. So now we have different ideas of what it means to be trans and we have people all along the spectrum. They take notice of each other but differentiate themselves. This is where some of the challenges come in creating unity among those who are trans or on the gender spectrum.”

I rubbed my aching temples and asked her if the transgender community was unique in the way that it ate its own.

“I think it is,” she replied. “I think the trans community is entirely splintered and there are factions. Some people vigorously defend their identity within a certain place on the continuum. Some take exception to those who self-label as cross-dressers, some are confused by non-binary people, some non-binary people take the position that conventionally trans people are out of touch—that they've bought into the binary and are too rigid. The critique from one group to another is very strong. People take a position on gender issues and they feel like theirs is on the highest order and, if somebody has a difference, they feel that person is not fully enlightened or evolved enough yet.”

I argued that the injection of politics into the transgender community had caused increasing isolation.

“We have been subject to the general forces in society with the resurgence of tribalism,” Anderson said. “We carry around our trauma and we're scared. I think we have to fight against this fear and realize that all of us have the potential to be different than who we are. We should embrace the idea that there is fluidity; that everyone has their own developmental pathway. We can't predict where we're going to be ourselves let alone where anyone else is going to be so let's just be charitable with each other. We're all on this journey and all struggling to be ourselves. We have more in common than we ever acknowledge and we have more at stake in working together than we realize to fight common demons both within ourselves and society.”

Uniting under our commonalities rather than dividing under our differences. I'd tried that argument until my white-privileged, half-Indian face had turned blue.

“It hasn't worked so far,” I grunted. “Do you honestly think you're being realistic?”

“I do,” Anderson asserted. “I think there are enough of us who see how deleterious it is to be divided this way; to be critical of

each other if not attacking each other. We worry that this is not good for anybody. But there's a current of jealousy that runs through our community. I sometimes worry that I'm going to get my share of grief. I have a lot of people on Facebook who communicate with me and I'm always conscious of the fact that there's the potential on any given day that somebody will say 'Oh you said that wrong, or you used that word.' We're subject to misunderstanding all the time. None of us want to be isolated or cut apart. Even though we might have differences, we're all better served by having empathy for the other."

"Not my community anymore," I thought with contempt and then wondered aloud if wanting out from the identity was even possible.

Anderson's reply was blunt.

"No, I don't think so," she said.

"I think it is possible to remove oneself from active engagement on trans issues and to live stealth but these are controversies I see all the time; that to somehow take the position that we shouldn't say that we're proud trans-women is making it harder for everyone else. I think you had a particular set of circumstances and had to act in the way you did. I respect that. I'm of two minds because I'm self-consciously an activist and I'm seeking to educate the world and certainly health professionals. I don't think I will ever resign from being who I am or having done what I've done. I use my own life as information to share and as an educational tool. Those who do that let people know that it is possible to transition and be happy, productive and accepted."

Anderson's insight and candor were refreshing enough to give me pause. Given how her opinions would probably be received by the transgender community and the kind of onslaught she was inviting, I was reminded that, despite its many challenges self-inflicted and otherwise, the community was nothing if not courageous.

That evening, my Facebook newsfeed contained a post from a transgender person who, before a line of tear emojis, wrote "If another trans person insults the way I look, I'm going to just go away forever."

The pause had been brief.

## Divorce

*"Fredo, you're nothing to me now. You're not a brother, you're not a friend. I don't want to know you or what you do."*

Since my divorce from the community, life has been uncommonly placid. I no longer have arguments on social media. If a transgender person defriends me, I neither notice nor care.

I still see social media posts regarding various transgender issues, but I don't invest any more time in reading them than I do the latest BuzzFeed OpEd with "trans" in the headline.

There is just no point.

The cop who watches the sunrise by the lake is called Mike and he now knows my dog's names. Given the hours he keeps, he has none of his own. He once brought them some treats and, in return, one cold morning I brought him a Danish and a thermos full of fresh coffee. I didn't feel guilty about it. Just as I don't when I thank a member of the military for her/his service, or because I have Republican friends or decide to watch *The Breakfast Club* one night or when I took down the transgender pride flag from my living room wall and replaced it with an Israeli one.

In any rational world, I shouldn't have had to in the first place.

In as much as *The Island Girls* gave me the freedom to be myself, now I am no longer tied to the transgender community, I have that freedom back.

They stopped meeting years ago, but I wanted to make one more visit. Closure is an important part of divorce. With closure, you can begin to heal.

While she sorts out some health problems, June is not as active as she was. However, it is refreshing to know some things haven't changed and she has retained her unapologetic candor. Lana remains part-time. After *The Island Girls* broke up, she started a new meet-up. However, attendance is not what it was.

"Like you, *Island Girls* was the first place I really started any associations," Lana said. "When I started back in 2003, it just grew to the point where we could have 40 or 50 girls. When we had an anniversary party, we had 110 girls. Reason was, we had no other place to go. Times have changed. Today, you can go to a straight bar or a restaurant or shopping, so people just stopped coming."

"*The Island Girls* never had a purpose of being political," June remembered. "From the very beginning, we were a social organization and a place where someone could express themselves in terms of how they felt. One of the things that was

responsible for our group identity was the society around us. If you think back to what things were like back when you and I met, it was just plain dangerous to have a different gender expression. Then you had an evolution of the world around the group. This is a very broad social observation but, when that happens, it allows for individuals within a group to express a variety of opinions; just like other marginalized groups in society.”

“Has that been a good thing though?” I asked. “I mean, let’s just say we still met. I can bet that we’d all be up there singing karaoke, having a great time and a bunch of gender nonconforming kids from UIC would probably charge in, commandeer the stage, accuse us of ‘embracing cisnormativity’ and shut us down!”

“Part of your recollection of the unity of the Island Girls, I think is fallacious,” June countered. “There were individual views back then. But the walls around us were tighter.”

“There has been a change, especially in the last eight years,” Lana said. “There’s a lot of drama and it seems like people get pissed off at each other, sooner. ‘If you don’t like this then I don’t like you’. I’ve seen some girls out other girls to a wife, a job, friends, neighbors. You’re always going to get somebody that’s not happy about something.”

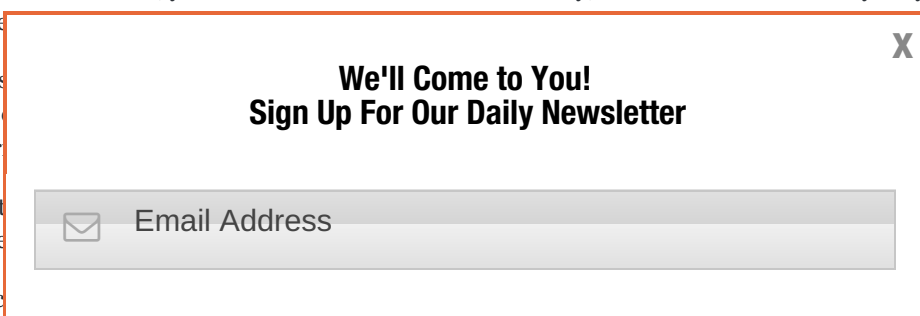
“But we all just want to be accepted,” I argued. “No matter who we identify as, we all just want to sing our own song without worrying about unemployment, rejection, imprisonment or violence, so, what’s the problem?”

“If you look at Facebook, you see what it does to our community,” Lana said. “Where everybody can write something and people are

My stories  
demands  
said, I can

Granted, t  
part of me

My divorce  
disappear into society’s gender binary. While doing so may not be progressive, at least it makes sense.



ing a Jew superseded the  
chance on me, like Anderson

me is unimaginable. Yet, the  
keep a much lower profile.

differently as I completely

It’s going to take some surgical work on my face. Far from The Edge, such a procedure has taken on a new urgency. This is an uncertain profession and I realize that, if the time ever comes that I have to look for a job again, if my face does not out me, one search of Google by an employer will and so bring my past crashing back down upon my future.

Naturally, that frightens the hell out of me and, outside of this article, I am doing everything I can to make that part of my life totally invisible.

“I don’t think that surgeries negate or eliminate the perception,” June warned me. “If you are transgender, I don’t think you ever stop being transgender regardless of what surgeries you have. I guess you could mentally think of yourself as separating from it, but my view is, if you identify as transgender, you’re the community regardless of how you feel about the other people in the community or how they feel about you.”

Is there really no escape?

I’ve made no secret of my desire to, one day, make Aliyah. If and when that happens, maybe I can look at a transgender identity with fresh eyes and a renewed sense of purpose. At the very least, I won’t be forced to choose between love for my religion and a history of self. At least I won’t have to defend that history no matter what color people see me as.

As for what I leave behind, I don’t know if this one last story that I will ever write on transgender issues will make one iota of difference outside of fodder for a snide “don’t let the door hit your ass” retort by [insert name of transgender columnist] on [insert name of liberal publication].

I sure as hell won’t be reading it and I’m far above a back-and-forth op-ed catfight.

I just hope that Anderson is right and, even if it is only for a fraction of a social media moment, the transgender community will, one day, wonder if the infighting was ever worth it.

It has not changed a law or stopped another transgender person from being murdered. It has not forced any blowhard conservative commentator to look at the transgender community with sympathetic eyes. It is not doing anything to make sure that, legally or socially, a transgender person’s right to sing their own song is respected.

Maybe, after they are through boiling in indignation at someone who was one of their own pointing out that the community has a problem, they will learn something.

No. Probably not.

Either way, it's none of my business.

"Don't forget where you came from," Lana urged me. "If I had some good friends and they just said 'I want nothing to do with you anymore', I'd be kind of hurt."

I haven't forgotten where I came from and that's the problem.

I called an interview subject last week. At the open of our conversation, she asked "Were you that transgender reporter who was involved in that whole Dyke March thing?"

"No," I replied. "No. Absolutely not. I'm just a reporter."

I do not believe that to be a lie.

*"The last two words of every story ever written is what's going on: the fucking end."*

*Gretchen Rachel Hammond is an award-winning journalist and a full-time writer for Tablet Magazine.*



[EMAIL](#)

MORE IN: CHICAGO DYKE MARCH TRANSGENDER

# Tablet

## ARTS & CULTURE

Books  
Fiction  
Film  
The Internet  
Music  
Television  
Theater & Dance  
Visual Art & Design

## NEWS & POLITICS

United States  
Middle East  
World  
Sports

## LIFE & RELIGION

Observance  
Food  
Family  
Personal History  
Notebook

## THE SCROLL

UNORTHODOX  
ABOUT US  
CONTACT  
NEXTBOOK PRESS

Tablet Magazine is a project of Nextbook Inc.

Copyright © 2018 Nextbook Inc. All rights reserved. | [Terms of Service & Privacy Policy](#) | Site by [Superfame](#)