

**The livestream:** <http://bit.ly/upliftoutloud>

**MARIGRACE:** We are live at Uplift Out Loud. We are waiting for people to show up, but we're just gonna get started. Because we would rather have people coming into a talking room as opposed to just us staring at each other. Hello! I am Marigrace Angelo. I am the co-coordinator of Uplift Out Loud.

**Tori:** I am Tori. I'm part of the Uplift Out Loud squad.

**JENNIFER:** Squad. I like that. I'm Jennifer Dorsey and I'm communications director for Uplift.

**MG:** Well, thank you one viewer for coming to Uplift Out Loud. Uhm, today is our -- Today we stand together in hopes we can create safe spaces free from sexual and emotional abuse. And we're here online in the community that we love standing up for safe spaces. So right off the bat I just want to start off with a moment of silence. And so during this moment of silence let us remember those who have lost their lives to sexual violence and also honor those who have lived to tell their experiences. Uh so yeah.

**MG:** And then also, you know, today's events are very serious. They might be triggering for people, so if at any point you need to talk to somebody, RaINN has a really wonderful hotline number and chat. You can check it out in our description box. And they have people there 24/7 if you wanna chat and/or talk via the phone, so

**TORI:** Uhm, we also want to let everyone know that we do have a team live captioning the event because it's really important to us that this is accessible to all members of our community including the deaf and hard of hearing. Uh, and the link to that live transcription can be found in the description of the livestream.

**MG:** Yeah, and if you're tweeting or doing any kind of social, you can tweet with the hashtag #UpliftOutLoud. And if you at any point would like any resources to learn more about the topics that we cover today, you can go to [uplifttogether.org/resources](http://uplifttogether.org/resources). Awesome, so we're gonna talk a little bit right now about -- what is digital abuse? Because Uplift was founded in reaction to allegations of sexual abuse within our online communities, so digital abuse is a topic that's very close to our organization's heart. And so of course there's many different types of digital abuse, and they're all difficult to experience. And each type of abuse is serious, and no one deserves to experience any form of it. And digital abuse of course is using technology -- like texting and social networking and online communities -- to bully, harrass, stalk, or intimidate a partner. IF you're in a healthy relationship all communication is respectful whether in person or online or by phone and it's never okay for anyone to say or do anything that makes you feel bad, lowers your self esteem, or manipulates you. So digital abuse is characterized by some of the following things:

- If your partner tells you who you can or can't be friends with on Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. Any other social media.
- If they send you negative or insulting emails, Facebook messages, or tweets, DM's, or Tumblr anon messages
- And if they are using sites like Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, uhm Yelp, anything with geolocation to keep tabs on you.

- If they make fun of you or put you down in their status updates on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram
- If they send you unwanted photos or if they demand that you should be sending digital photos of yourself
- If they steal your password or if they demand that you give them your passwords
- If they're constantly trying to text you and make you feel like you can't be separated from your phone
- Or if they look through your phone history and check up on your photos and texts and phone calls

And so nobody ever ever deserves that. You never deserve to be mistreated online or offline. So like we said, if you're experiencing this type of abuse, RAINN has a really wonderful advocate program. And just remember that partners should respect your relationship boundaries. It's okay to turn off your phone. You don't have to text any photos to anyone. And you don't have to share any passwords and keep all of your privacy settings private. So that's a little bit about -- about digital abuse. And Tori, did you want to talk about avoiding pressure from sexual violence?

**TORI:** Yeah! So this is information from RAINN, which is the Rape Abuse Incest National Network. And it connects to sort of the talk about digital abuse because pressure can manifest in lots of different ways. It can manifest in IRL spaces and it can also manifest in digital spaces. So you know it's important to acknowledge that abusers use coercive tactics like guilt and intimidation, and like, other ways of pressuring you just to get you to do what it is that they want you to do. And that can be really really hard to go through -- upsetting, frightening, uncomfortable. And it is never your fault if someone is pressuring you or coercing you in any way. So a few things that RAINN sort of has to say on the subject is that, you know, as much as you can, remind yourself that it's not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong, and the responsibility is on the person who's pressuring you or trying to coerce you or manipulating you. Uhm, also as much as you can you should trust your own gut. And you should not feel obligated to anything you do not want to do regardless of why you don't want to do something. It's enough that you're not interested and you don't want to do it. You have a right over your own body and your agency. RAINN also suggests that you have a codeword, that you develop it with those in your support network -- so friends, family -- and this codeword could be anything anything under the sun, a random word or a phrase. It could mean, like I'm uncomfortable or I need help. RAINN has examples of like, 311 or phrases you say out loud like "I wish we took more vacations." Like, something really innocuous. But this way you can communicate with your support network that you do need help, and it's a way that without alerting whoever it is that's pressuring you. It's also important to remember that it's okay to lie to the person who is pressuring you or coercing you. And it may feel wrong, but you are never obligated ever, ever to stay in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, scared, or threatened. So some excuses that you could use are like needing to take care of a friend or family member and that you have to leave, or you're not feeling well, or you have to be somewhere else. You have other plans. Or even, like, saying that you have to go to the bathroom, because that can create an opportunity to get away or to get help or to text/call someone. Whatever you need to say to stay safe or to make yourself feel safe even briefly is okay even if it's -- even if it feels embarrassing at the time. And then the last good tip that rain has is that if you think of an escape route, so in the -- in

a hypothetical situation you had to leave the situation really quickly, how would you do it? What are your means of escape? So like windows, doors, stuff like that. Or like, are there people around you who you could reach out to for help? How could you get their attention? And then if/when you leave, where would you go? So y'know according to RAINN and us, if you have to find a way out of a situation where someone is pressuring you, or if something happens that you did not consent to, it is not your fault. And you are not alone. And we at Uplift stand with you.

**MG:** One hundred percent. So Uplift was founded because of improper fan/creator relationships that were exposed from previous years, so we're actually going to show you a video from our Engage series about fan/creator relationships. It's a really wonderful video, and the series is really fantastic. So if you'd like to check out other episodes you totally can, but I feel like defining what the fan/creator relationship is before this event is something that's very important. So that we know what we're standing for and what we're working towards.

**TORI:** Fingers crossed the video plays!

**MG:** I know! I'm trying to -- where's the...

**TORI:** This is our first annual event, everybody, so technological difficulties may pop up. And we appreciate you guys just rolling with it. (laughs) And sending supportive things in the comments. Let's cheer Marigrace on as she tries to figure out how to share this really awesome, really fantastic video series that we did. Okay, is it working? You guys let us know if you can see a video. While Marigrace is doing that, I just wanna talk a little bit more about -- oh okay, not seeing anything yet -- the Engage by Uplift series. I think we have over twenty videos in the series, and they cover a really wide range of topics that all go back to abuse in digital spaces. There are some really great ones that we did with, I think Kat Blaque did a video or two, and they are, like, fantastic. Like, super super great. I think if -- we do have some great speakers coming up! (laughs) I have like one eye in the chat and one eye in the video. Let's see, just as a quick preview of some of the speakers we have coming on later. We have Rhiannon McGavin, she's a third of the really amazing poet squad the Poet Puff Girls. I think they've gone viral a few times -- you may have heard of her or them. They were on with, like, Oprah? They were on something really big. I'm blanking on the name of that specific show, but they performed that Somewhere In America poem, and it was like fantastic. Ooh! I see a video! I see a video! You ready? Okay! Let's try and watch the video.

**TORI:** Oh no! Okay. Paige, thanks for the heads up. Can you hear -- I hope you can hear me now. We were hoping that the video would work out. But I don't think -- Paige is saying that they're not getting a different video. Just a video of us, with no sound.

**MG:** Oh no!

**TORI:** Ohhh, okay so I think what we're gonna do maybe is put a link to the video in the description of the livestream.

**MG:** That sounds like a plan. I'm very sorry, guys, I thought that you could hear it the whole time.

**TORI:** It's a great video! We just really want you guys to see it!

**MG:** Anyway, basically this video talks about the fan/creator dynamic, and how when you have a sizeable following and you are in a position of power it's very important that you are aware of your interactions with people and that that you are not taking advantage of people's admiration

for your work. And on the same token, it talks about how fans can often be unnecessarily cruel to creators. They can doxx their information and leak all sorts of personal information and also mob people at conventions. And ultimately if you are -- if you are engaging in sexual activity with a minor, whether you're a creator or a fan, that's completely illegal. And talking about how, basically how the fan/creator dynamic is delicate and we should tread with caution. And so the link to this video is going to be in the description, you guys, of this livestream. You guys can check it out on your own time. Thanks for bearing with these technical difficulties.

**TORI:** Again, this is our first ever livestream as an organization, so there will be technological problems are gonna happen. We appreciate you guys rolling with it and being flexible. Uh yeah, so we're gonna put the link in the livestream description. You might have to refresh the page to see it once it's been updated. But uhm, yeah it's really great. I just, I think that -- sorry, that's my friend Rachel. (laughs) I think that it's really important that we talk about both sides of the fan/creator dynamic personally, because it's important to keep both sides relevant, and thinking about who has agency and who has power, and uhm sort of the division of responsibility among the involved parties. And not pointing fingers and taling about sort of the importance of balance.

**TORI:** So I think what we're gonna do now is share some poetry from survivors that have been published online. I'm gonna bring that up really fast. Let's see, so these poems that we're gonna read first are from Vera House. Let's see, it's loading. And Vera House, which you can visit at [verahouse.org](http://verahouse.org) -- their mission is to end all domestic and sexual violence, to assist families in crisis, to support those affected by domestic and sexual violence, to empower women, and to promote a culture of equality and respect in all relationships, so like, a pretty great mission. (laughs)

**MG:** Yeah! (laughs)

**TORI:** That, that's a fantastic mission. So these are poems that have been submitted to Vera House, and they're all anonymously published. So I think Marigrace and I are gonna trade off on reading poems. So this one is called "I'm Waiting" and it's by someone with the initials Z.T.

### ***I'm Waiting***

They say with time it gets better  
33 years and I'm still waiting  
I fight, I cry, I scream  
I'm waiting

I wake up afraid to open my eyes  
Afraid to start my day  
Afraid who or what will trigger it  
Afraid every minute  
I'm waiting

I'm afraid to walk out the door  
Afraid of who is out there  
Afraid of what will happen  
Afraid that I can't escape  
I'm waiting

I'm afraid to close my eyes  
Afraid of what I will see, hear  
Afraid of what I will dream  
Afraid of screaming  
Afraid I won't wake up in time  
I'm waiting

I'm afraid to start a new day  
I'm waiting

**MG:** So, that's a really powerful piece. I'm going to read another one by Z.T. It's called A Battle.

### ***A Battle***

Each day is a battle  
A battle to forget  
A battle to forgive  
A battle to fight the nightmares  
A battle to fight the invisible ghost  
A battle to fight to survive  
A battle to be happy  
A battle to be normal  
The battle never ends, it's a constant war within my head

**TORI:** Uhm, I'm gonna read another one now. It's called "Respect Is A Word" and it's by someone named Perri E. Hogan.

### ***Respect is a Word***

Respect is an essential word.  
People need to respect themselves, others,  
their possessions and the natural world.  
Building a healthy respect for yourself  
makes you feel good about who you are,  
what you're capable of doing,  
and enhances your value as a human being.

Self-respect creates a set of personal guidelines that help you to make solid decisions, conduct yourself honorably, and present yourself with poise and confidence. Having respect for other people is also essential. It enables you to keep an open mind to alternate ideas and opinions. It reminds you to interact with others as you want them to interact with you. It opens the door to acceptance and camaraderie, and it fosters reciprocal respect. By respecting one's possessions, people learn to appreciate their belongings. Clothing and homes and vehicles last longer and offer years of comfort and security when they are properly taken care of. Special acquisitions provide decades of enjoyment when cared for in a respectful way, adding to their value and reverence for future generations. And finally, practicing respect for the natural world is essential for the continuance of life on Earth. Natural resources must be used conscientiously. The purity of the air, the land and the waters must be sustained. Living creatures should be allowed to live free or cared for in sanctuaries or other appropriate settings. The bounty of the land should be treasured and shared. Respect is a universally beneficial word to practice, to hold onto and to give away. Respect is a word meant to enrich the quality of life.

**MG:** I'm gonna read one called "These Are My Pieces" by Heather Cutler-Young

### ***These are My Pieces***

These are my pieces, but not my whole.  
I am more than this flesh and blood.  
My skin does not portray who/what lies beneath.  
My smile does not really show how I feel  
and my eyes do not allow you to see my depth.  
I am no longer an object of someone else's will,  
but a prisoner to my own body.

My body does not feel like it belongs to me.  
For so long it was not given a say  
and was forcibly maneuvered by another.  
Even my mind seems to be dictated  
by my own body's sensations.  
A simple touch of my arm can trigger a memory.  
My hand hesitates to make contact  
with even ones I love.  
All of these pieces while built together, feel disjointed.  
My lips long for a long compassionate kiss,  
but my hand will freely push it away.  
My arms cry out to be wrapped in another's,  
but my body quickly tightens  
responding to a perceived attack.  
My body while flaunted is self-conscious  
of how it will be judged.  
It is a vessel of unknown.  
Each touch is a switch  
that triggers a new or old memory.  
A personal home theater of years past,  
many showing reruns that had long been forgotten  
or simply waiting for the right time.  
My home movies are nightmares  
that give understanding to my body's reactions.  
Unlike nightmares, I can not wake up  
and say it was just a dream.  
I have tried to rationalize  
with both my mind and body, but it yields to the past.  
They are a great puzzle  
that I am slowly piecing together.  
The picture of who I am  
becomes clearer with each piece,  
and like most children's toys, the result is often  
not as spectacular as you had hoped.  
Can I see who I am becoming  
without finishing the puzzle?  
The pieces have slowly come together  
to create a gruesome picture of who I was.  
The pieces cannot be reconfigured  
to change the ultimate image;  
my picture of my past will always be the same.  
The only difference now lies  
in how I choose to view it in the future.

**TORI:** I think we have time for maybe one or two more. So I'm gonna read a poem by Leslie Root called "The Kindness of Strangers."

### ***The Kindness of Strangers***

Bloodied and broken she rises  
Hands clenched, her face pointed up toward the sky;  
Tears sting her eyes but she wills them away,  
Resolving once more he will not see her cry.  
She looks in the eyes of her children,  
Knowing her pain has become part of them,  
With soft words to offer them comfort,  
She gives of herself as she's dying within.  
Swiftly she puts things in order,  
Washes the blood and gets on with her day.  
At least this time not much has been broken,  
A small piece of her soul is all she throws away.  
But each time is worse than the last time,  
And it's getting much harder to mask how she feels;  
Some make-up will fix up the outside,  
But inside it seems like the wound never heals.  
I promise you that she is frightened.  
I swear to you she never asked for this pain.  
Sometimes when you get dragged down too far,  
It just gets so hard to get back up again.  
Let us show her the kindness of strangers;  
As strangers so often turn out to be friends,  
Then, as friends we can guide her to freedom;  
And rejoice in the person she becomes –  
when the pain finally ends.

**MG:** Alright, so the last one I'll read is called "Taking my Power Back"

### ***Taking My Power Back***

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
he stripped me of my dignity  
he denied me of my first kiss  
he stole my trust in others  
he took away my voice  
But



I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
i said no but he demanded yes  
he made me a statistic  
he turned me into a victim  
he left me to rot like a piece of trash

But

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
the police told me I was wrong  
they said I provoked him  
they implied that I wanted it  
they said that I lied

But

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
i let him keep me in his grasp for years  
i used to cower and hide  
i jumped at my own shadow  
i double-checked the locks

But

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
i learned to hate the world  
i learned to like being alone  
i put up a wall around me  
i became a soldier of one

But

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
i am a woman, proud and strong  
i refuse to remain a victim  
i will not be silent anymore

For

I am holding my head high  
And I am taking my power back  
i am becoming a butterfly  
emerging from a cocoon  
i am ready to spread my wings  
i have found my voice again

FOR

I AM HOLDING MY HEAD HIGH  
AND I AM TAKING MY POWER BACK!

**MG:** So those are just some poems that you can find at VeraHouse.org. They have a lot of wonderful resources that you can check out as well in addition to the survivors' poetry. So I would definitely encourage you guys to visit their website.

**TORI:** So I think now we're gonna just sort of share some statistics about the unfortunate widespread epidemic of abuse and assault. Uhm and before we move forward we wanna remind everyone again that we have linked to a -- an online chat with RAINN. And that if you need to step away for any reason, we really encourage you to do that. Take care of yourself. This stuff is heavy, and your mental well-being needs to come first. We also have a number of resources available at [UpliftTogether.org/resources](http://UpliftTogether.org/resources). So feel free to reach out through any of those venues, whatever your comfort level, if you need to.

**TORI:** So uh, there are a lot of statistics about the horrible widespread nature of assault. So for example RAINN has a lot of statistics and they cite a lot of their sources -- all of their sources, like a good nonprofit organization.

1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime

17.7 million American women have been victims of attempted or completed rape

Lifetime rate of rape /attempted rape for women by race:

- All women: 17.6%
- American Indian/Alaskan women: 34.1%
- Mixed race women: 24.4%
- Black women: 18.8%
- White women: 17.7%
- Asian Pacific Islander women: 6.8%

So it's important to acknowledge that sexual assault can be a racialized thing, and we should acknowledge that reality.

**MG:** Yes. And it's not just women who are victims of rape. About 3% of American men — or 1 in 33 — have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. From 1995-2010, 9% of rape and sexual assault victims were male. 2.78 million men in the U.S. have been victims of sexual assault or rape

**TORI:** Yeah. And also even though we don't want to reinforce the binary -- there are a lot of nonbinary folks, gender nonconforming people who have also experienced high rates of sexual assault -- the queer community in general faces sort of very specific, unique and unfortunate rates of assault. So for example this is from the Human Rights Campaign. 44 percent of lesbians and 61 percent of bisexual women experience rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, compared to 35 percent of heterosexual women. 26 percent of gay men and 37 percent of bisexual men experience the same. 46 percent of bisexual women have been raped. 22 percent of bisexual women have been raped by an intimate partner. Among transgender racial minorities, 24 percent of transgender American Indians, 18 percent of

transgender people who identified as multiracial, 17 percent of transgender Asians, and 15 percent of Black transgender respondents experienced sexual assault in K-12 education settings – and this is much higher rates than students of other races. And trans women, it's really important to acknowledge that trans women experience sexual assault at a very high, very high rate.

**MG:** Yep, so now I'm gonna share with you a story from a member of the community who is a nonbinary individual. And so their story is -- it's quite long and it might be triggering for some people. So just letting you guys know that if at any moment you guys need to step out, uhm, take care of yourselves. So this is from Bek Brucker and their story is called "I Talk About It All The Time, But Nobody Speaks The Language".

### **I TALK ABOUT IT ALL THE TIME BUT NOBODY SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE**

October 2012. Nighttime.

There's a cold bite to the air when I step out of the building and head down the stairs. My car is parked across the street and I rush over to it, hurry hurry hurry unlock the doors, sketchy part of town, close to midnight. Breath coming out in puffs of fog. Turn the key, engine go, warm heat hurry hurry hurry. Music. I need something to take the screaming noise out of my head. I'm shaking violently but I can't really figure out if it's from the cold or if it's because I'm in shock from what just happened. Even in the car, my breath is still visible. I grip the steering wheel and will for the car to defrost faster, thoughts gathering in my head. A terrified laugh escapes past my lips: I think I was just molested?

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October 2015

The thing that I always think is that I can never talk about it.

What I've come to realize is that I actually talk about it all the time, but it is not in words. This is a realization that I came to the other night when I found a photo of myself that was taken just a few days after it happened. The picture is of me, sitting at my desk at work, and I'm wearing a thick sweater. I have my eyes closed and my mouth covered with one hand as I'm laughing. There is shiny teal nail polish on my fingers.

Here's the translated version of the photo though.

The sweater: I had been shaking for three days straight, almost literally the entire three days, and even though I knew it was nerves, I would still bundle up to keep warm.

The laugh: I had to force myself to smile and laugh for the picture by thinking of something funny because I could not get a genuine expression on my face.

The nail polish: Painted the day after it happened, because I woke up trembling and listening to an argument between my parents downstairs. I did it to distract myself. The color was my silent plea to the world, my way of saying "Something happened to me and I need to tell somebody".

Teal is the color you'll find on ribbons and other awareness things for sexual assault.

Teal itself is becoming my favorite color, I guess. It is a blend of blue and green, very soothing, and it's one color that is creeping it's way into every aspect of my life. I have other shades of teal in my nail polish collection. Teal is present on many of my articles of clothing now. I found bedsheets in the perfect shade and bought them on clearance. Headphones. Jewelry. Socks. It is a color that comes up a lot in my artwork, varying in shades from cyan to emerald.

What I ask myself every day is this: do I surround myself with this color because I like it, or because I'm trying to ask for someone to listen to me? Nobody questions where my interest in teal has come from. There were hints of it coming through when I was in high school and dealing with sexual harassment, sure, but over the last couple years it's been an takeover.

When it comes time to when you sleep surrounded by the colors you've symbolically taken on to represent your assault, then maybe it's a sign that you're trying to say something to the world. (The sheets are soft and warm. There's that too. But they could've been any color, and I chose teal.)

Just recently my mom purchased an adult coloring book. I found a mandala pattern inside and started to color it with shades of teal, and then shades of red and orange and yellow. I wanted fire in there to represent pain intermingled with the cause. Nobody sees the pain in-between the lines. All they will see is bursts of color.

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The people who need to know it happened know about it. My partner knows, and after telling them the whole story, they validated that The Friend had abused me in many different ways. It's still hard to imagine that they were abusive, because I can still remember all the creative times. There were fun moments. There were also many moments had at my expense and humiliation. I told the whole story to a different friend a while back, trying to claim it as my own, and they helped me view things in a new way and discover why things I didn't immediately process as wrong still felt wrong. I thought the validation from other people would be the way I could finally claim this story as mine, but it's impossible.

It feels like my brain can't process that it actually happened to me.

So like, I had a friend, right? We did lots of cool things together because we had many shared interests, and their family is pretty nice, but they were also an asshole to me sometimes. And they were inappropriate sometimes. And they were abusive sometimes. But I don't think they really meant to be abusive, and if they were reading this right now I don't know how they would react to being called abusive and that's what scares me. I feel like there should have been some intent to harm me there for it to count, because they didn't do it to other people and it seems like if they had no idea that it would be harmful then they would have done it to others. They couldn't

have molested me because it was supposed to be a joke, right? They know what actual sexual abuse is because they've researched it. They know what it is, so they would have to know that what they did to me is assault and not do it. But they did do it. Therefore, somehow, it does not count.

(Legally, what they did could be sexual assault. Sexual battery. Whatever. Molestation is the word that sends my stomach churning in that deeply-violated, deep-pain, deep-wound way.) My brain cannot hold this information. I try and try again, telling myself the story over and over, thinking about it every single day, but I just can't hold onto it. One night in October, something happened to me, and it sure sucked, but like... what if it didn't happen to me? I'm aware that it happened. I remember it. There were people present in the room when it happened, who made commentary on how I looked and laughed at how defensive/scared I seemed. There is a Livejournal entry hidden on my now unused blog that details everything. There is artwork on my bedroom wall that has been hanging there since the night it happened, that I drew because it happened and could not use the words to say that it did.

But it couldn't have happened. It could not have happened to me. It does not fit into the web of my life.

Denial eventually gives over to shame. Guilt. I guess maybe when I remember that yes Self, this is a thing that happened, I decide immediately that I can't talk about it because... duh! It shouldn't have happened and it had to have been in my power to stop it, but I didn't, so there we go! I remember, in this thing that totally did happen, there was a moment when I thought to myself that I had bought a pocket knife to defend myself and that it was in my pocket at that very moment (while they were trying to grab my wrists in one hand, using their other hand to keep tickling me and touching me all over), and that this would be a moment to use if they were not a friend.

But they were my friend. I bought a pocket knife to defend myself, and when I needed defending, I didn't use it. I couldn't even hit them. What a fucking joke.

Part of what happened was that they were trying to tickle me. Something that makes me feel awful now is remembering survivor stories where survivors speak of the abuser using tickling as the guise for carrying out the abuse. How their abuse started that night was the outright sexual battery part, and how it carried on was with all this touching. They kept grabbing for my torso and legs, poking me and prodding at me and wagging their fingers and touching and with me scooting away from them, their laughing, me laughing laughing laughing and saying "No", and saying "Stop, stop", and "Nope", and scooting farther away from them and falling over, them on top of me and still touching me, and is it still sexual assault if it started off that way and was touching on the legs and other places? I laughed my way through it, because it tickled, but in my

head I clearly remember thinking “Why isn’t [friend] stopping?” I couldn’t ask that. The words could not come out. Instead, I just laughed.

(Who the fuck laughs while being abused? It’s because of this that I believe this could not, should not have happened to me.)

We scooted all the way around the couch and at one point they were using their strength against mine, grabbing my arms out of the way so they had better access to my body, and one of our mutual friends said “Wow, you look so defensive right now”. Because I was curling up into a ball, see, trying to protect myself from them.

Legally, I know that this is considered assault. Legally, there were things they did that are considered sexual assault (Places they touched, not by accident). I know these things.

Emotionally, most of the time when I think about this, I feel numb. Mentally, I feel like I’m pushing against a very large boulder in my head and I’m always fighting the truth, because legally I know what to call it but mentally/emotionally/spiritually I am not ready to give in to this truth yet. My academic brain, telling me “What happened to you is sexual assault and these are the places you can go to for help” is drowned out by the emotional brain screaming one long, constant, wail. Being sexually assaulted does not fit into the picture of our friendship and it does not fit into the portrait I draw of myself in my head. And yet, it is there in the background.

And then also I say that maybe it didn’t happen because it wasn’t all privatetouching all the time. Sure, they were touching me all over and I didn’t want them to and they were actively trying to thwart my (feeble, pathetic) attempts to get them to stop, but since the touching wasn’t isolated just to private no-touch areas then obviously it doesn’t matter! But this is the part I feel violated about the most. I guess this is where the shame comes from. They did grab me places that really should not have been grabbed, completely off-limits except to my partner, and completely unwanted, but that detail doesn’t count in the larger picture of my story. That’s more of a footnote. Therefore, obviously none of this ever happened.

But it did.

—

I gave myself a few nights to sit with this story. With my writing. I finally processed stuff.

Here is what I realized.

It happened. During that weekend, I was having acute little-t trauma symptoms from it and I was being triggered from arguments happening at home. I couldn’t process what happened while my brain was in overdrive, so the compartmentalization process began and I split the experience up into tiny pieces. My mind did not want to deal with the event so all the pieces were scattered into different places. They were buried under guilt and shame and self-blame.

What I get ashamed of is that it was a little-T. I don’t want to think that I was re-traumatized (Having already been through a major non-sexual trauma in 2011), but I think a step in this

process is accepting that this was mildly traumatizing. Having it split into pieces made it easier for me to dissociate from my emotions surrounding it, and it's only when these pieces come together when I can feel the horror. Most of the time I can only deal with one shard at a time though, but it makes it hard because once I hold onto one shard, the others will cut me and it rips it open again.

I'm ashamed that it was mildly traumatizing. I guess.

When I start the unburying process and find all the little pieces, then the pain comes to life. The self-blaming begins. Piece A tells me "Nothing actually happened". Piece B shouts "Okay well it happened but it's not a big deal", drowned out by Piece C saying "You should have fought harder". And so on. I'm being led by breadcrumbs straight into the witch's house, and the truth is going to burn me alive. Once I conquer the denial, then the invalidation steps in. When I conquer the invalidation, then the self-blame pops up. I buried these pieces and I wish they could stay buried.

The self-invalidation is a tough monster to fight. In lists of ways to cope with self-invalidation, one thing I see is to imagine having this conversation with your best friend who just went through what you went through. Would you want to blame them? I wouldn't, except I am not my own best friend. There are times when I fucking hate myself, and I am my own worst enemy. I'm kind to you until you're unkind to me, and I support all my friends who have been sexually molested. Myself? I can sit down, shut up, and never talk about this again as far as I'm concerned.

I banish it into the fictional world. I created a whole new character to deal with what happened: a non-binary individual with a history of sexual violence from their first marriage. It had to be a person that this character had known and trusted previously, not just a stranger. While my character's story evolved into something in it's own, something beyond my own experiences, I thought maybe I could use all the writing and the artwork as a vehicle for saying what happened to me. It comes up in illustrations all the time. My fictional life is filled with sprawling feelings about being molested and my character—literally and figuratively—fighting the truth about it. Keeping it at arm's distance in fiction helped me compartmentalize it further.

The character was already starting to take shape a few months before, but after that night in October, their backstory bloomed. It (could not did not, oh but it did) happened to me in 2012. Instead, it was just some fictional person in the late 1890s. Perfect.

—

I started to notice my own avoidance. When I go to work now, at my different job, I wonder if I will see them by chance. Seeing them face-to-face again would destroy the carefully constructed ways I've buried the experience and it will fall apart and spill everywhere.

I can't avoid work, but I can avoid other places.

It started off avoiding our mutual friends. Yes, they saw what happened. I guess that's bad. They should be avoided at all costs, because when they're there then The Abuser is there and I can't have that.

When I contemplated going back to college, I realized that every inch of that campus is touched by memories of them. I can't go there. I can't do this. They were here, there, everywhere. It was when I started to wonder if I could transfer my credits to the other community college just so I could have a fresh start when I realized I was having a problem.

My archives amongst social media was filled with memories and moments that now I had to avoid. Even my internet life was tainted.

My Facebook history is tainted. The college is tainted. My own spaces online, spaces in my room where artwork still hangs, all tainted. What if I'm tainted?

That's a dangerous trap to fall into. The avoidance has begun, and the self-blame crawls into my head to take the wheels. If those places are tainted, then what if I'm tainted, and then what does that mean?

And this is why it should not, could not have happened. I cannot be tainted from this. My favorite places cannot be ruined forever, and I do not want to be bound to this truth. And yet it is mine. I sleep in the teal sheets every night and I wake up every day facing my artwork from pain, and I walk with this ghost each step of my life, and I hold it at arm's length. They touched me, and they touched my life, and I wish very dearly to wrench every last bit of them from my memory and from my places and things, but... it's not going to happen.

So I talk about it all the time in my quiet language. I sleep in the story (sheets), I block the world out with my story (headphones), hold it at the edge of my hands (fingernails), and talk endlessly about it (cyan, emerald, teal, endless fiction and character exploration). I do not accept it, but it is everywhere. I've been waiting for somebody to listen, to notice the same color happening over and over in my life—sheets, headphones, nails, art, drowning in blue-green from head to toe as my actual silence on the matter eats me alive, see me, hear me, constantly wailing, the story bursting out from my brain until the dissociation pushes it back— and find the code to understand. I could not speak the words sexual assault, molestation, and washed my life over in color instead. This is my language. This is how I talk about it. I just need somebody to listen.

**MG:** And that's it!

**TORI:** Wow, that's a tough one.

**MG:** So, yeah. So that was really tough. That was really tough for -- to even, to even read. And so this story really highlights the fact that for many people, they know their abuser. There's this perception of sexual assault as being committed by some stranger in a dark alley, and while that does happen, most people know their abuser, which is why the large majority of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported. Because people think, "This person is such an asset in my life, I



can't -- I can't fathom why they would do this to me. They have to be a good person." The fact of the matter is that it's important to tell people, even if it's somebody that you know. And even if people think that they are the best person, because you don't know what the other person has done. You don't know if what you say might cause a ripple effect and might cause other people who have been afraid to come out of the woodwork to stand up and tell their story as well.

**TORI:** Yeah. I don't have much to add.

(MG laughs)

**TORI:** I think when we say that, it's also really important to acknowledge the ways in which, like, that is hard. Especially if you and the other person have friends in common. Like, that can be a very difficult conversation to have, to ask a friend, to say, "Listen, this thing happened to me, and it's really important to me that you stand with me on this." Uhm, like disclosing is hard in general, and when you have mutual friends in common with an abusive person, I think it can be even harder. And y'know, we wanna recognize that that's difficult work. And it's necessary for a lot of people, but definitely very hard.

**MG:** So uh, this story was really really tough, so I think that this would be a good time to practice some group self care. So I am just gonna take a deep breath. You guys can join in with me.

Wow. And I'm also going to drink some water, because hydration is important in self care.

**TORI:** And if you need to, you know, take some steps away from your computer, maybe even like go outside if the weather's nice where you are, we'll still be here for a few more hours, so feel free to sort of leave if you need to and come back. Go get a snack if you want, like healthy food. Or not healthy foods. Y'know, whatever you're in the mood for.

**MG:** Yes. Uhm, and so here's just some tips for some self care. A little self care cheat sheet. Get some rest. Take care of yourself. Take naps. Get good nights' sleep. Fuel your body with snacks or comfort food or water. Move your body a little bit, you know it's really helpful, not even just exercise. Just dance it out. Jump on a trampoline, go for a walk, you don't have to go to a gym. Just like, keeping your body active will help a lot for self care. And then being still. Just taking like ten minutes to breathe. Get quiet, maybe listen to some calming music. And then when you're centered, talking to somebody who you know and trust about, like, the things that are going wrong, y'know, any doubts that you might have. Just the things that are causing you stress and anxiety. It's really important, like Tori said, to have a good support network. And then just enjoy yourself. Go see a movie. Take a painting class. Go outside, go camping. Whatever you love, just go out and do it. Just don't be afraid to take the time for yourself, because you only have one body. They're not expendable, so you need to take care of it.

**TORI:** Yeah, uhm. Sorry, I'm looking at this comment from Sally. We are in total support of you sleeping at 4 am.

(both laugh)

**TORI:** Like, definitely go do that important self care work of sleeping. Sleeping is like one of my favorite self care methods.

**MG:** Yes! It's so important, because when you're sleeping your body is like healing. And it's like reenergizing. There's this really awesome metaphor that I was taught where -- say you have a backpack, and in your backpack you have eight bricks. And at the end of the night you get to, for however many hours of sleep you get, you get to take those eight bricks out and then you put them back again the next morning. But if you don't get eight hours of sleep, or seven hours

-- however much your body needs, then, you know. Say you only get five hours of sleep. Then you can only take out five bricks, and you still have two bricks left over. And then the next morning seven more bricks come into your backpack, and soon you're just laden down with this backpack full of bricks that your body just cannot handle. It's gonna shut down until it can get rid of all those bricks.

**TORI:** I've never heard that metaphor. I love it. I'm a camper.

**MG:** So when you have too many bricks in your backpack, that's when you gotta take a nap.

**TORI:** Yeah, yeah and I think the great thing about like, sleep and naps is just like you get to turn your brain off for a little bit. Like, cause I think that like, we can get so busy, and especially when we're dealing with trauma all the normal adult, like just living stuff can get really hard. So just like being able to, just be like, no okay, I'm gonna take this time for myself. I'm gonna let my brain and my body rest. Like that is so important.

**MG:** Super important. Hoo! Okay. Alright so uhm. Now we're gonna do a little, a little bit of a vigil. So if you have a candle nearby then feel free to grab it. If you don't, you can use your iPhone, you can just, you know, be there in solidarity. But if you have a candle nearby, go ahead and light it.

**TORI:** I'm gonna run out and get matches. Which we're not supposed to have in a dorm room, but we do anyway. I'll be right back!

**MG:** Oh nooo! Alright well I'll wait for Tori to come back. So this candle that I have is actually -- it's winter at Hogwarts scent. And it's also self care, in the vein of self care, candles are a great way to like, infuse the room with calming vibes.

**MG:** Ooh! I like that match, that real match sound. (laughs) Alright! So if you have a candle please join in lighting your flame, and if you have another light source, shine it. As we reflect on this light, let us remember those who have lost their lives to sexual violence with a moment of silence. And let us also honor those who have lived to tell their experiences and to friends, family and coworkers who have also lost part of their lives as they continue to fight and recover and lead full lives. Let our candles also be a sign of hope that we can move forward to create a violence free community both online and off.

In 2014, over 70 young women in the Youtube community came forward with accusations of sexual and emotional abuse against many creators. The accused Youtubers were people who had been deeply trusted, many with large audiences. And the communities that surrounded these Youtubers were reeling in the wake of these accusations. There was a clear need for resources, support, and education specifically tailored to the communities fostered through the internet. Uplift was designed to provide that service, bringing together members of the community with the common goal of creating a safe space for survivors, resources for everyone, and a way to decrease instances of online abuse. We believe that the internet can be an incredible tool for good. We believe that everyone has the right to feel free from sexual harassment. We believe that everyone should have the freedom to use the internet safely. Today we stand together in hope that we can create safe spaces free from sexual and emotional abuse. And before we extinguish our candles, remember that you carry light inside yourself.

Stories are light, and light is precious in a world so dark. So begin at the beginning, tell a story, and make some light.

**MG:** You don't have to share your story if you don't want to, that's a completely personal choice. Minors should be very cautious - reporting laws vary from state to state, but in some cases, if a minor posts personally identifying information in regards to sexual abuse, the reader may have an obligation to report since it's a crime. So read up about the laws in your state, if you're a minor if you want to share your story. We don't want to put you out of your comfort zone. If you're sharing your story - know that somebody may have to report it. And know that some people don't use social media for good. There are millions of trolls out there who may engage with survivors via bullying or annoying messages that belittle your character or expose details of your life that aren't meant to be shared, doxxing - that way that people use social media can leave survivors feeling uncomfortable and scared, and if you are ever feeling uncomfortable and scared, you can chat online at [rainn.org/online](https://rainn.org/online) like we said earlier and in the description. RAINN is a really awesome way to chat with advocates if you need to talk about your experience or some triggering events that have happened.

Oh! We have people in the stream now.

**T:** Yeah so surprise we have guests who really graciously agreed to speak and share - um - I'm not sure who wants to go first - neither of them are live, so I guess to the audience right now it's a total surprise.

**MG:** Let's go with Olivia.

**All:** Hi!

**T:** So Olivia Dolphin, just for those of you who don't know her - oh sorry, preferred pronouns -

**O:** First of all I want everyone to know that I have this little cutie [holds up cat]

**All:** Oh! Aw!

**T:** That's what we needed for the self-care buffer! We needed animals!

**All:** [General agreement]

**T:** So you said she, her, hers pronouns? Olivia Dolphin is a dolphin, writer, blogger, oversharer, fanfic writer, and resume editor. She's the Senior Volunteer Coordinator for the Mischief

Management events GeekyCon and LeakyCon, which I'm sure we're all familiar with. Recently, she founded and successfully kickstarted Wizards in Space Literary Magazine, a space for wizard writers--aimed at providing a place for original work in spaces that already have platforms for fan works. And Olivia if you want to share your social media links, sort of maybe any links to that magazine which wounds hella cool.

**O:** Yeah, you can send submissions to [wizardsinspacemag@gmail.com](mailto:wizardsinspacemag@gmail.com), and we're gonna get a website up and running, but we really aim to create a space for original works - we've come so far in appreciating and loving and caring for the tradition of fanworks, and as a writer that does more original works than fanworks, although I do write a lot of Jurassic World fanfiction, I want to make space in our community for original works. So people that want to tell their stories that is appropriate and helpful and healing can do that if they want to. We're hoping to have it published by July and submission deadline is May 18th. We're super excited! I couldn't have done it without the support of the community, and I am so thankful. It's been a really amazing ride so far.

**T:** So speaking of original work, you have a poem to share?

**O:** Yeah, it's a spoken-word-thing, it's called 7 Potters, and I want everybody to know going into this that is about a creator and fan dynamic, so if that's difficult for you, take care of yourself, or obviously do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. It's not graphic in any way, it just deals with what the Harry Potter community went through with having creators being outed as abusers. So everybody should be aware of that. And this is a personal story.

So this is called "7 Potters".

1. I was seven days from seventeen when we first met. Your age didn't seem to matter. Like a stained green-marker white-board math class lesson. Numbers faded, yet there. Erased, yet permanent. Distracting, yet ignored. Seen, yet unseen.

At my first convention, I was told. "Don't become a fandom slut. Don't be like those other girls."

I was seven days from seventeen.

2. Every time you looked at me, I felt better. Not better in the way where it made me happier, or settled my stomach, or soothed whatever part of me needing soothing. When you looked at me, it made me feel better than everyone else in the room. When you walked by me at shows and touched my hip as you went by, I soaked in the jealous glare of every single person that noticed.

I felt better.

3. That changed. Some where, some year, some con. "Don't you have a girlfriend." I texted you one night after you failed to lure me to your room. I sat in the elevator and I rode to each and every floor. The doors opened and closed and I was too tired to move, yet too stubborn to give up on the night. So the elevator started again the bottom and I stared at my friend as your answers rolled in. It took 5 floors before I realized how good you were at denial. And it took 9 floors before I realized how good you were at manipulation. You told me I misunderstood, that I was wrong. How dare I.

You set your guitar on fire during your set that night. I whispered "set yourself on fire next time."

I had no idea you were already burning.

4. It was silence after that. I had been let go, forgotten. Spared. But I thought we were friends, and I thought our conversations meant something to you, and I thought this was going to go somewhere, and I thought this community mattered to you. I thought I mattered to you. It was 2010. I was twenty years old.
5. You placed your hands on each of my shoulders and displaced me from your path. "I don't have time for you right now," you said.

Later that night, your chords played into the crowd. I thought. "I want everyone to know what you're really like." Yet there were people in that same crowd, who did know. Who knew worse than me. But silence was the way then. Being popular was the way then. Letting him be loved and liked in return for our compliance was the way then. Our community skated on surface level positivity because surely it was better than breaking the ice.

7. Years later, I sat on that rooftop in London and you called me your friend. It was the first time you spoke to me in six years and I laughed.. "We are not friends." I said.

You were finally seeing what I could have been all along. That the 16 year old girl you gave a back rub to in a toronto hotel room turned into a writer, a leader, a speaker, a musician. That she had turned into all the things you called yourself. That I had figured out how to harness the power that you betrayed. That the people you hurt the most learned to harness the power of love, and friendship, and honesty and humble creativity.

The worst thing is, what you did to me wasn't even the worst you had in store. But now, together, even if you disguised yourself within 7 Potters. We would know who the imposter was. You can't don the lightning bolt scar and call yourself a hero. Call yourself a marauder, or try and claim that you're a martyr. Not anymore. We won't let you. Time's up.

Your polyjuice potion's run out.

Thank you!

**T:** Internet snaps!

**MG:** I was clapping and I realized I was muted. That was so amazing. If you guys would like to listen to that piece again, you have a recorded version of that on your YouTube channel?

**O:** Yes, there is a YouTube video when I performed it - so I've only performed it twice, and I tend to read it, it's never been posted anywhere, so it's on my YouTube channel, so you can check that out, for sure.

**MG:** Thank you for sharing that, I think it's a really important piece of the events that unfolded in our community.

**O:** Thank you for having me! And please share my social media, my inbox is always open to talk, or talk writing, or Wizards in Space, or whatever.

All: Bye!

MG: Our next guest is going to be Cheryl, correct?

All: Hi!

T: Oh, Cheryl, you're muted! Oh no, can't hear you. We can see you, so that's something!

MG: Cheryl, if you try refreshing your browser, we can have Rhiannon go? Yeah, Okay so please stand by - in the mean time, let's hear from Rhiannon! Who is muted.

T: Yeah, you're muted Rhiannon!

R: Is it on now?

T: Perfect!

R: Hi! I'm Rhiannon McGavin, I'm a writer from Los Angeles - wait, I sent you a bio, right?

T: You can introduce yourself! Or I could do the very official -

MG: Rhiannon, what are your pronouns?

R: I am a girl, so it would be she, her hers - I'm an English major, so I know words.

T: I'll go ahead and give you the VIP treatment that Olivia got, so I'll read your bio. So in case everyone doesn't know the amazingness that is Rhiannon McGavin, she is a young writer from

Los Angeles who first started drafting poems to attract the attention of a cute boy in her children's Shakespeare group, which I think is a story that resonates with a lot of people. While she never won his affection, she has performed original poetry on Grace Cavalieri's "Poet and the Poem" podcast, NPR, and at venues from the Troubadour to the Lincoln Center. In her free time, she enjoys yelling about skincare and books at [youtube.com/thegeekyblonde](https://www.youtube.com/thegeekyblonde). And I think we're going to try to link to that in our social media. I know we've been talking about self care a lot, and Rhiannon does amazing videos on self care routines and everyday ways to take care of yourself.

R: Thank you! Honestly, I'm so excited for it to be May, because since April is Sexual Assault Awareness month and National Poetry month I've just been doing things and in May I'm just gonna talk about conditioner and face masks and it's gonna be so nice!

So, sexual assault awareness month. Next week is Denim Day, on the 27th of April, I'm going to be doing a lot of stuff with Peace Over Violence, which is the largest crisis center in Los Angeles, and I'm going to be bringing down some more materials to VidCon this year for the Uplift booth, like I did last year. So they had me write a couple poems for Denim Day, so I have 2, if we have time for that. So the story of Denim Day - basically, this horrific sexual assault case that came out of Italy in the 90s, and it's one where because the girl was wearing tight jeans, it had to be consensual sex, because she would've had to help take the jeans off, which is so - okay, sure, that's logical. You went to law school. It's amazing you came up with that. So to show solidarity, everyone wears jeans on Denim Day. And so much that's in the communities - Harry Potter, and YouTube, and from my own life - it helps to have a group of girls I can talk to, and can talk to me, because so many terrible things happen to teenage girls where we feel isolated and alone, and that's when people in general are most vulnerable when you are alone. So this piece is "Things that could happen to a Girl wearing Jeans", which is about my group of friends and how much I love them.

Ari wears her jeans with the cuffs rolled up

like in a French film at the midnight cinema, where we sneak malt milkshakes

she's in a punk band, and all the holes in her clothes are girlmade

I wear my jean jacket to her shows, with pins older than me, from my mother's days of denim.

(in the 70s, they wore flared pants and learned to stoke the fires in their stomachs-  
how to burn so bright, they could walk home safe past sunset: holding hands, linking flames)

I like the way fabric bears history, with ultramarine cresting to frayed white. We are still

paint chips and copper chloride in every kind of blue;

with vigilante charms in my house, watching us from the door frame, echoed by the

blue eyeshadow I streak to feel brave, the forgetmenots on my street corner at 6:40 in the morning-

Julie writes notes on her pants so she doesn't forget the exact shade of dawn from her rooftop, the day

after it rains

this way, when she's alone on the subway, she can look at her legs and feel genesis, while

Flour and powdered sugar cover Nina's jean skirt, skipping past her apron. She always smells like vanilla

and cinnamon. Once, me and Eva waited 3 hours at Nina's apartment for her to come back and make us

grilled cheese

Our mouths stained with popsicles, an unnatural bliss of corn syrup and artificial raspberries. Eva walks

with square shoulders, one hand in her pocket, holding a guitar pick like an amulet

we are all each other's patches

and there is nothing so good

as getting your hair brushed and braided

by someone who loves you

Julie shares lipstick with Ari,

who dyed Eva's hair purple

Eva does my liner

I smudge Nina's mascara

and she sprays rosewater on Julie

we split perfume and popcorn every Friday night



I like my body best when I am dancing with my best friends

and someone spills their milkshake on me

and whipped cream joins the nail polish, hot sauce, candle wax

those darling smears I accumulate from living

I carry my heart like a pin cushion

because I know that if I dance long enough, these will not be the pants that I wore the night all  
my pretty

words were not enough

when the decades choked

my hands, cold as supreme court marble

no-

these are the jeans that I hiked ten miles in, just to pick wildflowers.

Thank you! Was I on? Did it work?

MG: Yes, that was so awesome!

R: Thanks!

MG: I love it. You say you have another one for us, as well?

R: I do! So what we do a lot with Peace Over Violence is we do a lot of outreach to men and  
rehabilitation, so one of our projects is the engaging men project, so this is something I think  
about constantly - oh God, I have to get my charger!

T: I have to say, while Rhiannon gets her charger, is that it is so good and amazing and powerful  
to talk about female friendships! Because girls are strong as hell.

MG: Females are strong as hell!

T: And I am so all for to support and validate young girls and friendships and support networks because society has done enough to trivialize girls in general and like - screw that. I think female friendships can be so redemptive and healing and nourishing.

R: Yeah! Okay okay yeah.

T: She's back!

R: Okay, cool! Um. So something I think about constantly is - we all get very tired of dealing with boys sometimes, but we have to - sorry, I have to close my door. So how to educate boys and men without emotionally straining ourselves. Because I'm like, "Yes, let's do this! Come from a place of love!" and then I look at a news headline and I'm like, "No, all of you have to be shot into the sun!" So figuring out how to engage boys in a healthy way for all of us. So this is my piece about taking care of my younger cousin, whose name is Optimus, because stupid names run in my family.

I teach my cousin magic tricks in the spring.

It is splendid, how water, sunlight, and carbon dioxide can melt into leaves.

He is four. I cup his hands around the shovel's handle to dig a hole just deep enough, the way the bed in

our spare room is too small for his bad dreams to sneak in.

then we put seeds in the dirt

then we cover the seeds with a baby blanket of earth and pat it down gentle, gentle

and water the whole garden when we're done, the hose loud as a fairy tale.

We wash our feet in the kitchen sink, next to a pot of clover that revives itself every year

he doesn't think the tomato sprouts could ever be big enough to spread through their wire frames

I tell him, growing up is about patience.

He eats green strawberries, too excited to wait for their blush in the summer.

In the summer, he rides on the handlebars of my bicycle, wearing my helmet while my hair goes loose.

We share sunburns and popsicles at the pan pacific pool. The tips of our ears are cherry ice cream pink.

He tries to splash up towards the deep end, but his toes barely reach the bottom of the shallow side. His

wet hair shines like salmon scales.

Back home, he watches me slice aloe vera, with my little blue knife. this is how we make our healing.

I teach my cousin how to eat the wild yellow oxalis: gather bunches of stems, crunch them with your

canines, slurp the sour juice, then spit out the pulp.

I do not want his baby teeth to sharpen.

By fall, he can read the words on his kindergarten assignments to me: skull, rib, spine.

He spends 2 hours with childsafe scissors, cutting body parts out of paper. They hang on the window.

My cousin stares at their shadow on the floor, and he pokes his chest to find his lungs

I don't ever want his bones to harden.

I tell him that the strongest muscle is in his jaw but it can only be exercised when he speaks up for

someone else.

We have spaghetti with homemade sauce, with fresh tomatoes and he brings me handfuls of basil leaves. I

unwind the nasturtium vines from around each other so the whole garden has space to sleep.

It's winter.

I pale with the fog. My cousin sleeps, under a white feather comforter.

He doesn't know why I cry so much,

why ilcross and uncross my legs, why we always hold hands on the bus

because I do not tell him about all the weeds, crabgrass and thistle, that I had to tear out before he came

here

because I will not let him breathe that air

a sickly, secondhand dust of pollen and ash-

it's hard to raise boys in the city, to keep the billboards and alleyways from growing them crooked-

when we walked to the store for pasta, a grown man screamed at me, dragging the mucus out from his

throat, and I can only guess that he's never felt comfortable being smaller than the youngest redwood in

the forest

he pounded his fists against a brick wall until they were too proud to lift someone else up

and none of us are born knowing how to hold children

but now it is spring,

and my baby cousin is planting daffodils

Thank you!

MG: Oh my gosh, that was amazing! That was so wonderful. Rhiannon, where would people go to read your poetry?

R: Well, it's Shakespeare 452nd birthday, and because I'm a sentimental, superstitious little chicken, my etsy shop is launching today, so if you go to [etsy.com/rhiannonmcgavin](https://www.etsy.com/rhiannonmcgavin), that's where you can get my homemade booklets.

MG: I have one! I can see it right now.

T: Well, your poems are always so beautiful, and not just relevant, but relevant and poignant.

R: Thank you so much! I'm really glad that I was able to read.

MG: We're so glad you were able to make it!

R: Okay, I have to go fulfill a bunch of deadlines. But it was great to see you guys!

MG: Yes, awesome, thanks so much!

All: Bye!