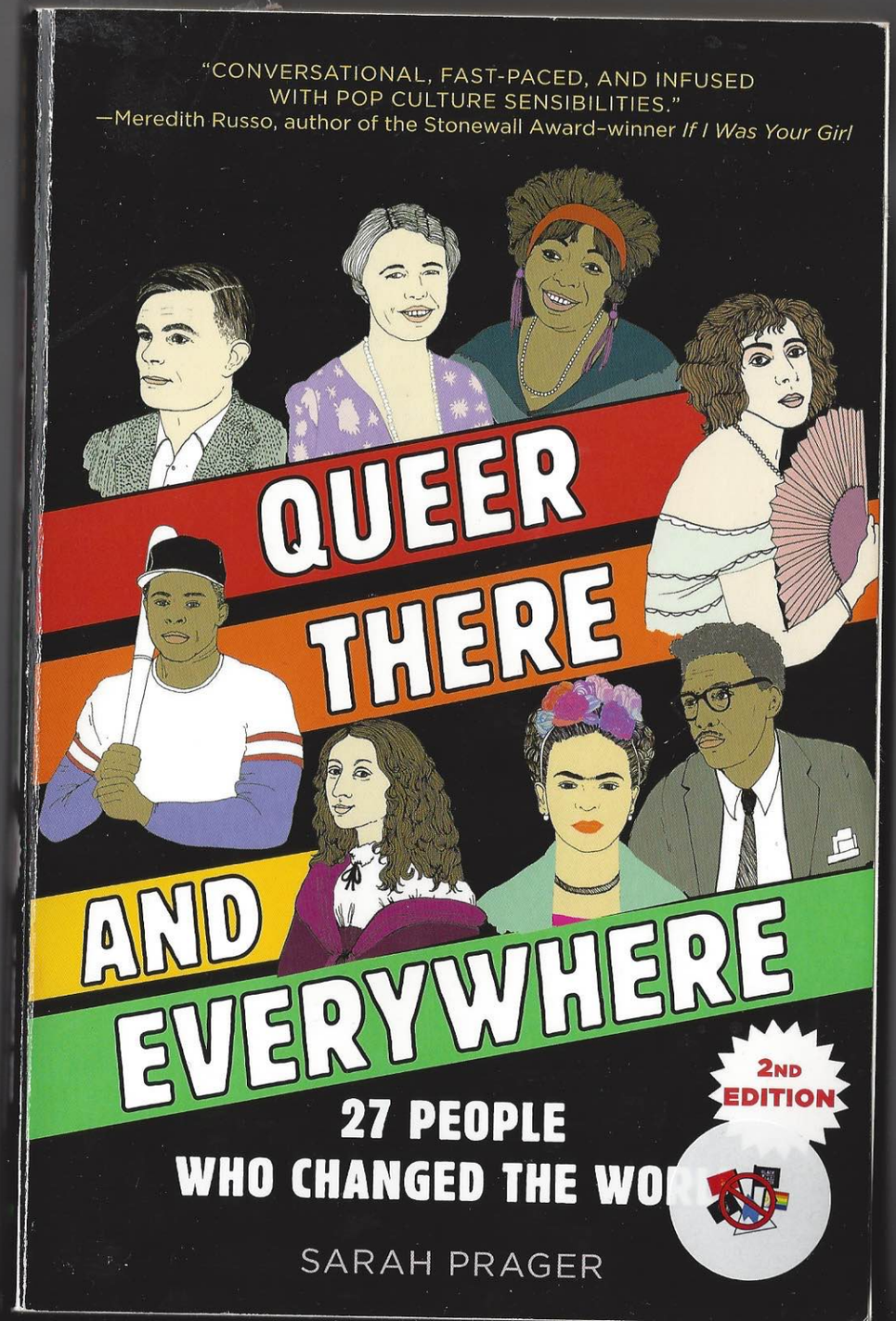

"CONVERSATIONAL, FAST-PACED, AND INFUSED WITH POP CULTURE SENSIBILITIES."
—Meredith Russo, author of the Stonewall Award–winner *If I Was Your Girl*
QUEER
THERE
AND
EVERYWHERE
2ND EDITION
27 PEOPLE
WHO CHANGED THE WO
SARAH PRAGER

people have been part of history throughout every era, on every continent. Being queer isn't new; queer people have existed for as long as *people* have existed! And acknowledging that fact does something major: it reminds those who identify as queer that they have proud queer ancestors who fought for their rights, that they have cultural grandparents who took a stand. No one is alone in being queer, and shedding light on past queer identities can help us dig for the whole story on any number of historical figures. Recognizing the world's rich history of queerness helps reduce anti-queer bias, and helps welcome queer identities to the mainstream with love and acceptance. That's important, not only for queer people but for anyone who feels left out of or incapable of relating to the popular version of history most of us know.

QUEER . . .

What do we mean when we say "queer"? The word means so many different things to different people, and its definition is changing all the time. For some, it's still a painful and derogatory term; for others, it's been reclaimed as a proud identity label. For the purpose of this book, "queer" means anyone not totally straight or not totally cisgender—*anyone* outside society's gender and sexuality norms. "Queer" in this book does not only equal gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (terms often lumped together in the abbreviation LGBT or GLBT). Those four words refer to specific modern identity labels, and only a few of them at that. "Queer" also includes labels like nonbinary, panromantic, and asexual, as well as identities of people who showed characteristics of queerness (like gender nonconforming or same-sex loving) before we had any labels for them. A lot of these words and constructions didn't even exist a couple hundred years ago. Seriously: the words "heterosexual" and "homosexual" weren't invented until 1869. But of course people of the same sex were into each other, dated, had sex with each other, and loved each other before the 1860s. They have done those things since forever. But putting present labels on past actions is tricky, which is why you need to choose your words wisely. (For more information about different queer terms, check out the glossary in the back of the book.)

So: the language we bring to the exploration of queer history is obviously as complex as the history itself. We're leaving out hundreds, if not thousands, of terms for different kinds of queerness just by focusing on the words we have in the English language. (For instance, around the globe there have been and are entire minilanguages used exclusively by queer people, like Polari in Britain and Gayle in South Africa.) In English, all language related to queerness was initially more focused on actual sex acts than on a sense of self. One early example is the word "sodomite," which means "a person who

commits the crime of sodomy." "Sodomy" comes from the Bible, specifically the town of Sodom, which was synonymous with violence and cruelty, including, in one story, an instance of attempted same-sex rape. "Sodomy" was used to describe men having sex with men and then used to outlaw men having sex with men. Since self-identifying as "gay" wasn't yet a thing, it was *doing the sex act itself* rather than being homosexual that was illegal.

When a new sense of personal identity began to form around same-sex sexual attractions, language expanded accordingly. "Uranian" was used in 1800s Europe to mean "men with female spirits," and the word "bisexual" was also coined around the same time. (Previously, no English word had existed to describe a person sexually attracted to more than one gender!) Then, through most of the 1900s in Europe and North America, people with any kind of same-sex attraction were labeled "homosexual," without any room for identity complexity. Fast-forward to 1950s and 1960s North America, where there was a popular movement to adopt the term "homophiles" instead of "homosexuals," placing the emphasis on same-sex *love* instead of sex. Obviously, that didn't stick.

As for the ladies, we currently use "lesbian" to describe women attracted to other women. The term means "from Lesbos," the Greek island where the poet Sappho wrote about loving other women in the 600s BCE, though the word took

on its current connotation centuries later. (Fun fact: The citizens of Lesbos, the original "Lesbians," unsuccessfully sued the Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece in 2008 for people to stop using that word to mean gay women.) "Tribade" (referring to "tribadism," an old word for scissoring) and "sapphist" (there's Sappho again) were used before "lesbian" was popularized.

And for the trans and gender nonconforming folks out there, Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term "transvestite" in 1910 (more on Magnus later). "Cross-dresser" was also common back then and was used more broadly than it is today. In the 1970s a bunch of words like transgenderal, transgenderous, and transgenderist were tried out before "transgender" was generally settled upon. One of the earliest words used to describe intersex people, "hermaphrodite" (now a slur but once the preferred term), came from the god Hermaphroditos, who in mythology blended with a nymph to become one being of two genders.

The language we use to describe people's identities matters; these words have a great deal of power. There are literally hundreds of ways to describe queerness in English alone—and it's important to respect the exact terms a person uses to self-identify. For gender pronouns in the chapters to come, we've made case-by-case decisions in an effort to respect how individuals described themselves.

THERE . . .

There has been no time in human history when queer genders and sexualities didn't exist. From aboriginal Australia to Japanese folk culture to American slave plantations, people of all faiths, races, heritages, and cultures have been queer—every color of the rainbow and then some. Some of the individuals featured in the chapters ahead illustrate a few of the many different ways people have transgressed gender and sexuality norms throughout time. Others are historymakers you've heard of, but who you might not have realized had a queer side. And still others are the activists who shaped the queer rights movement that's ongoing today. Each one of them is a part of the story.

But before you get the lowdown on these twenty-seven incredible individuals, it's important to have all the context. What was going on around the world, and in their local communities, while each of them was alive? What strides had the queer rights movement already made? Global cultures have demonstrated various levels of queer acceptance—and intolerance—throughout history. For those cultures that did embrace diversity, tolerance became a lot harder when Christian European colonists conquered almost every corner of the globe in the fifteenth to twentieth centuries. Suddenly there was exactly one correct way to do gender and sex almost

everywhere. While Indigenous people today still have queer identities that have existed for centuries, the world overall has far fewer rainbow colors than in precolonial times. A rise in the persecution of queer people can be linked to the rise of Christianity, though Christianity is certainly not the only religion to question the morality of queer identities and sexualities. The story of worldwide queerness is being written and rewritten across the globe every day, as mainstream attitudes change and understanding grows.

Europe

In ancient Greece and Rome, marriage between men and women was more about partnership and child-rearing than attraction or romantic love. It was normal for husbands to go outside their marriage to indulge their sexuality.

Queerness was also out in full view in the leaders of Al-Andalus, as Spain was called under Muslim rule in the 700s to 1000s. One of the male caliphs of Córdoba kept a male harem, and he had his wife dress as a boy and use the male name Djafar so that she could *ahem* excite him in the bedroom and ensure the continuation of the family line.

In the Middle Ages, "sodomites" were a popular scapegoat. If there was an earthquake or a plague or some other punishment thought to have been sent by God, one way to

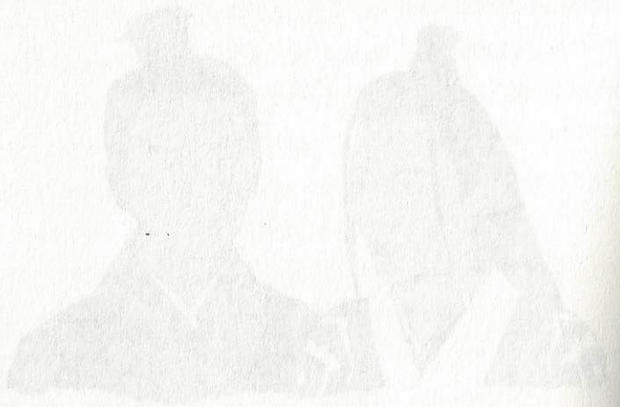
purge the town of evil was to round up some men who could be accused of having sex with other men and execute them. (Unfortunately, this scapegoating continues around the world today.) The Spanish Inquisition similarly targeted queer folk. European colonists exported homophobia everywhere they went, a legacy that still has a stronghold in many parts of the world. Most of the countries that outlaw homosexuality today do so because of prohibitions dating back to when they were British colonies, centuries before the UK became one of the world's most queer-accepting countries. Why homosexuals were one of the colonists' most popular scapegoats remains unclear. It wasn't just a bad interpretation of the Bible, since colonial states didn't outlaw greediness or other things Christianity forbids. Simply seeing homosexuality as "unnatural" likely played a major role; the colonists didn't recognize how ordinary it had always been in many cultures.

Queer Europeans didn't start formally organizing for their rights as a community until the very late 1800s, when queer advocacy first emerged in Germany. That's when they started thinking of themselves as queer people, instead of people who did queer things (like wearing clothes that didn't match the sex they were assigned at birth). Remember Magnus Hirschfeld? Well, he was a Jewish German doctor who founded the first queer rights group, pioneered gender affirming surgeries, and led the first studies on same-sex attraction and gender

nonconformance. But all that progress was pretty quickly undone when the Nazis came to power in the 1930s. Nazis arrested about a hundred thousand men for being homosexuals, sending many to their deaths in concentration camps. They also burned Magnus's Institute of Sexual Research to the ground. His foundation was resurrected later in the century, when Western European countries began making huge strides with queer-forward legislation. The Netherlands became the first country ever to legalize marriage equality in 2001.

Africa

Africa can be considered the world's most diverse continent in terms of race, culture, and language—and the diversity of queerness is just as impressive. Sex and marriage between males was common for the twentieth-century Zande of central Africa; people assigned male at birth took on female appearances and roles in the Mossi courts of Burkina Faso; women could become soldiers and take wives among the Dahomey (now in Benin); and the Ndongo (in today's Angola) had a leader, assigned female at birth, who ruled dressed as a man and had a harem of men who dressed as women, known as the leader's wives. Most of our sources documenting this precolonial African queer culture are from Europeans who wrote down their descriptions of these peoples when they first encountered them in the 1600s



Ai didn't want to get up. Why couldn't he just lie here spooning Dong Xian a little longer? Shouldn't emperors get to make the rules?

Ai looked at Dong Xian, sleeping so peacefully. He looked like an angel. But how to get that darn arm out from under Dong Xian without waking him? The one bad thing about spooning!

The problem was really more the long sleeve on his imperial robe than the arm inside it. Dong Xian was lying completely on top of it, and there was no way Ai was getting out of there without disturbing his sweetie.

Then it hit him. With his free hand he reached over and fixed the problem. The next minute, he was standing and Dong Xian was still beautifully blissfully sleeping, Ai's cut-off sleeve still underneath him. The emperor walked out lopsidedly, with only one long sleeve, to take care of whatever better be so important that he couldn't stay cuddling.

The Passion of the Cut Sleeve

This moment became legend in ancient China, and the phrase "the passion of the cut sleeve" became a Chinese euphemism for two men loving each other that is still sometimes used two thousand years later. Ai's courtiers each cut off one of their own tunics' sleeves as well in tribute to the love of their emperor and Dong Xian. Two dudes together was actually

she was equally intent on living as the woman she was on the inside—even though she had been raised as a boy. (While Elagabalus was not referred to with female pronouns in her time, we've decided to use them here because of evidence of her gender identity, such as calling herself a lady.) Despite her feminine dress and affectations, no one else saw Elagabalus as a woman, just a very eccentric, strange young man. Which was one of the main things the Roman government and public didn't respect about her. A man dressing as a woman? The male *emperor* dressing as a woman? Not. Acceptable.

It was bad enough that Elagabalus was a foreigner with strange traditions and gods, but it was even worse that she wasn't willing to conform to traditional Roman ways or beliefs. Her advisers had told her all along that it would be best to wear the typical male attire of a toga so she wouldn't shock her new subjects. Nope! Instead, before even arriving from Syria, Elagabalus had sent a huge portrait of herself in gaudy robes to hang in the senate so the public could get used to how she was going to dress. Her tastes were her tastes: while Roman clothing was made of plain wool, Elagabalus wore only the finest silk. Purple and gold robes accented by necklaces and bangles and nothing less than a glittering tiara on her head were her style.

It's no surprise that the new emperor soon had a reputation for extravagance. She hosted elaborate banquets, serving

delicacies like camel heels, peacock tongues, and flamingo brains. Even the dogs got goose livers. She had urinals made of onyx, canals filled with wine, and a gold statue of herself erected. The Romans had never seen an emperor like this before.

Real Housewife of Rome

Elagabalus married five women and two men (including Zoticus) during her almost four years as emperor. You read that right: *seven people in less than four years*. And that doesn't even begin to account for the number of affairs and hookups she had. And she was, if you forgot, a teenager while all this was happening.

Even though Elagabalus recognized herself as a woman, her marriages to men were considered same-sex. Rome had seen same-sex marriage before, even with former emperors, but it was far from common. And males sleeping with males and loving males was accepted, though by Elagabalus's time the practice was falling out of favor. But soon Christianity would rise as the dominant ideology, completely reversing Rome's tolerant stance on bisexuality.

Fortunately, Elagabalus didn't hold back an ounce of her fabulousness just because it wasn't popular. As Roman leaders, soldiers, and common people freaked out over her feminine ways, she kept on keepin' on as a normal Roman woman

would: She plucked her facial hair, wore makeup, spoke in a high voice, wore women's clothing, and spun wool. She danced everywhere (while walking, while giving speeches, while performing animal sacrifices), not caring that dancing was frowned upon by the Roman elite. It's safe to say Elagabalus didn't really give a flying discus about pleasing the elite—or anyone else, for that matter.

The Bachelorette: Emperor Edition

The day Zoticus arrived at court, Elagabalus's lover at the time, Hierocles, found himself very jealous. So he slipped a drug into Zoticus's drink that rendered him *ahem *ahem* unable to perform. Useless to Elagabalus in this state, Zoticus was stripped of his new honors almost as fast as they were given to him, and then he was thrown out of the palace. But the exile didn't last: eventually Elagabalus and Zoticus would marry in a public ceremony. Never mind that Elagabalus already called herself the wife of Hierocles, too!

Married or not, Elagabalus freely pursued the physical pleasure she wanted. She enjoyed setting up the palace to look like a brothel and playing the part of a concubine. She'd stand naked by the door, soliciting anyone who walked by. Some men who worked at the palace were instructed to take the bait and follow her into the bedroom as customers. As

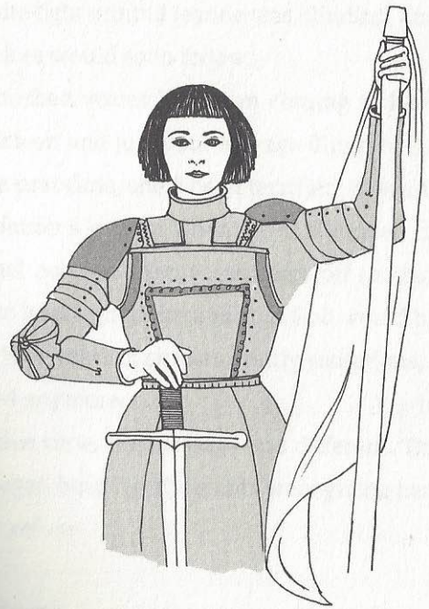
such, men were promoted within the court often based solely on their, um, *size*.

Elagabalus wanted to go a step further: she also offered a huge financial reward to any doctor who would give her surgery to create her own vagina. The Romans already thought it was weird she was circumcised, and rumors about other possible surgeries flew wildly—though she never actually had them. No doctor ever came forward with the solution she sought.

Plot Twist

Three years and nine months after Elagabalus had taken power at the age of fourteen, her own guards couldn't stand for all this scandal any longer. They turned on Elagabalus and killed her and those loyal to her, including Hierocles. The bodies of Elagabalus and her mother were dumped in a sewer that flowed to the Tiber River. A dazzling flame had been snuffed out for shining too brightly.

Elagabalus's short rule has largely been forgotten, in part because she hardly spent any time on actual politics and didn't have a legacy of long-lasting reforms. But there's more to a life than that: Elagabalus showed the Romans how fierce a queerness could really be in the final years before Christianity took hold around the world. That's the queer spirit: live your life full out as *yourself*, no matter what others think.

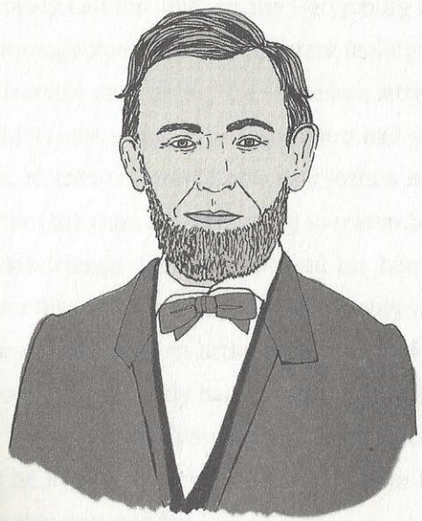


JEANNE D'ARC

AKA JOAN OF ARC

1412–1431

A cross-dressing teenager listens to the voices in her head . . . and liberates France



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

1809–1865

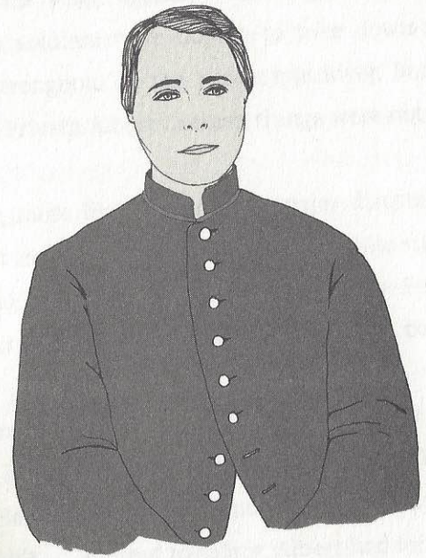
A whole other side to the Great Emancipator

But no one ever compared to Joshua.

Surprisingly, it was the Civil War that eventually brought the two back together. Joshua was a slave owner and had disagreed politically with the president on this issue for a long time. But after years of chilly silence between them, Joshua dropped everything and hightailed it from Kentucky to Washington to assist the North's cause, even though he was against the abolition of slavery. He helped General Sherman secure resources for the Union directly from the White House—putting him in Abraham's path once again. The president's secretaries commented that "Speed and Lincoln poured their souls out to each other" throughout the war.

Another Kind of Love

Joshua and David both lived on with their wives after President Lincoln's assassination. Abraham had never done much to hide who he spent his time with, either because he didn't care or because people didn't suspect there was anything going on between him and these men—or because intimate male friendships were just accepted back then. It really was a whole different world when it came to same-sex relationships just a couple hundred years ago; sex between men was more hated and outlawed, but a certain shared intimacy was just fine—even for the president.



ALBERT CASHIER

1843–1915

A soldier keeps his identity a secret throughout the Civil War

with him for months through the United States as he painted murals, even though she hated "Gringolandia" and sorely missed her beloved Mexico.

Halfway through their twenty-five years together, they divorced for one year. But eventually they were drawn back to the marriage, to each other. Frida and Diego were opposing magnets that always ended up passionately joined no matter the force of the resistance.

Her Own Mistresses

Frida's affairs with men made Diego wildly jealous, but he didn't seem to mind her liaisons with women. Her life's motto was "Make love, take a bath, make love again." Everything from lying still to having sex brought more pain, but Frida wanted pleasure too, and she didn't stop pursuing it.

Frida reportedly bedded prominent artists like American painter Georgia O'Keeffe, Mexican actress Dolores del Río, French-American performer Josephine Baker, Hungarian photographer Nickolas Muray, Mexican singer Chavela Vargas, French painter Jacqueline Lamba, and American artist Isamu Noguchi. She even slept with the American actress Paulette Goddard—after Paulette had had an affair with Diego.

And through it all she painted. She painted the pain of her body and of her marriage to the elephant. The public began to

see her as the painter Frida Kahlo instead of the wife of Diego Rivera. The surrealists of Paris thought she was one of them, but she insisted that she painted her reality—her world was just surreal to outside observers.

Twenty-nine years after the bus accident, Frida's health began fading more rapidly. She had lost a leg and a few toes in some of the thirty-six surgeries she'd endured, and she was once again bed bound. Her marriage with Diego was as calm and happy as it had ever been, and this time he took care of her instead of the other way around.

Though her work already hung in the Louvre, Frida was particularly determined to attend the first exhibition of her own paintings in her home country of Mexico. Her doctor had ordered her to stay in bed, but Frida had never been one for following rules. She decided to bend them instead of breaking them this time: she had herself delivered in her four-poster canopy bed to the gallery as a piece of performance art. It was the final show of her life.

were so starved and weak, every day several would collapse midway up the hill. Their wheelbarrows would roll back and crush them, then careen into the others below—giving the death pit its name.

Intent on making it out alive, Josef found a way to get extra food rations to help him survive: a *kapo*—a fellow prisoner given authority over other prisoners—propositioned Josef about exchanging preferential treatment for sexual favors. The prevailing attitude of those in power at the camps was that a man might be in need of an "emergency outlet" because no women were available; it was okay as long as that man wasn't queer outside of this situation. If love had been involved, these acts would have been magically transformed into the filthy sin of homosexuality. Josef was disgusted by the idea of performing sex acts on anyone under these conditions, but he did what he had to do to survive.

After just a few weeks of his arrangement with the *kapo*, Josef was transferred to another camp as part of the routine reshuffling of prisoners. Whatever safety Josef had managed to carve out for himself could be totally obliterated by the move.

Flossenbürg

Josef spent the next five years at Flossenbürg, where he witnessed unspeakable horrors. The Nazis experimented with

different "cures" for homosexuality, including forced trips to a brothel of imprisoned Jewish and Romany girls.

Here, too, Josef managed to find someone to look out for him in exchange for sex. An SS sergeant approached Josef on his first day in the camp, simply asking, "You want to come with me?" Josef said yes right away, knowing exactly what he meant. The sergeant protected Josef from beatings and got him extra food and safer work details. In a world where hard labor could be as deadly as the gas chambers, that last "perk" may have been the biggest.

During his time at Flossenbürg, the handsome Josef had multiple *kapos* fight over him. A Hungarian Romany *kapo* even paid off his rivals to have Josef all to himself. Josef later wrote that he came to care for some of these men—almost—because they saved him from torture. His life in the camp was still brutally hard, dangerous, and miserable, but Josef knew others had it far worse.

Getting Out

While at Flossenbürg, Josef accomplished something few 175ers ever did: he became a *kapo* himself. He was put in charge of a work detail making Nazi airplanes for the war. Josef had a couple of dozen prisoners under his command during the day, mostly young men who had the same *arrangement*



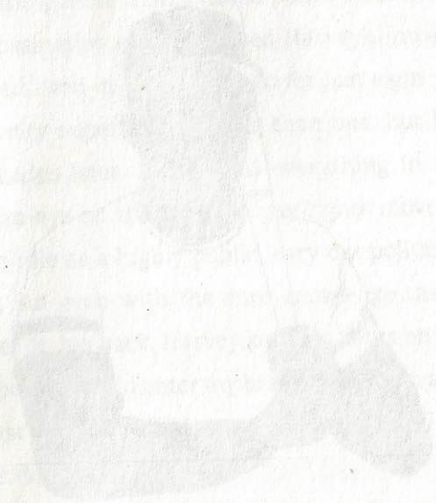
A six-year-old boy stood in his bedroom doorway, still as stone. He was listening for any movement in the house, making sure no one was around to catch him. With the coast clear, he scurried down the hallway to his sister's room. Hands shaking, he took a skirt, blouse, shoes, stockings, garter belt, panties, and hat from her drawers and dashed to the bathroom.

Heart racing, he changed into the girls' clothes.

That first moment when he saw his reflection in the mirror, he noticed that the clothes were too big and that he didn't look as pretty as he would have liked. But the child noticed something else, too: he felt so much calmer in these clothes than in his own. So much . . . *better.* As he quickly changed and put the clothes back, the serenity that had come over him disappeared, replaced with guilt. The six-year-old felt he'd been very wrong to do what he'd done . . . but he was also already looking forward to the next time he could do it again.

The "Correct" Life Path

A quick terminology note: Renée would later look on her time before transitioning as time spent as a boy and man, so we've used he/him pronouns for that time because Renée does in her self-description. Note that, unless otherwise preferred, using the originally assigned pronouns to describe a trans person pretransition is incorrect and disrespectful.



It was spring training in 1980, and Glenn was excited for Billy Martin to start as the new manager of his team, the Oakland A's. The feeling wasn't remotely mutual—in Billy's eyes, Glenn was batting for the wrong team.

Spring training brought with it all the usual growing pains as players batted, pitched, and fielded away the relative laziness of the off-season. But while the A's were getting back on their game, Glenn was thrown off his. One day in the locker room he overheard Billy say:

"No faggot's going to ever play in my ball club."

A Love of the Game

Raised in Oakland, Glenn was a devout Christian who couldn't get enough of sports. He could have easily gone for a career in basketball instead of baseball (and he later said his only regret was that he should have done just that). Sex wasn't at all a part of Glenn's early life, and he got all his energy out through athletics.

Three years before joining the A's, when Glenn was twenty-three, he had a revelation. He realized there must be a reason why he didn't feel about girls the way other guys seemed to. The only similar feeling he could think of was the crush he'd had on Mr. Mendler, his middle school's glee-club and drama teacher. When the reality of his sexual orientation

hit home, Glenn drove to his old school, found Mr. Mendler, and confessed his feelings. That led to Glenn's first sexual experience; he cried for hours afterward, consumed by the relief of finally understanding himself for the first time. Over the years, Glenn and Mr. Mendler ended up becoming casual friends with benefits.

Glenn was already in the minor leagues when he had his encounter with Mr. Mendler and immediately knew he would have to stay closeted or risk committing "baseball suicide." He moved out of his apartment and into the YMCA so his roommates wouldn't discover his secret if he brought home a guy. Despite all the precautions he took, Glenn knew he would have to be an above-and-beyond ball player as a kind of insurance. If he was the best player on the roster, maybe he'd still have a career even should his secret be discovered.

The Big Leagues

Glenn was called up to the Major Leagues a year later, in 1976. His first team was the Dodgers, famous for racially integrating the team with the first Black pro baseball player, Jackie Robinson, twenty-nine years earlier. Glenn, also a Black man, couldn't know he was about to test the team's tolerance for diversity once again.

Glenn's future was bright and several baseball insiders

commented on his limitless potential. He performed well for the Dodgers and got along with his teammates, but there was a problem. Tommy Lasorda, one of the team's managers, didn't like the relationship between his son and Glenn. Spunky Lasorda was openly gay, though his father denied it. Glenn and Spunky were superclose despite appearing to be opposites: Glenn was a six-foot macho muscleman nicknamed King Kong, and Spunky was a rail-thin bleached blond obsessed with his tan. They spent their time going out in the Castro in San Francisco and commiserating about Tommy's homophobia. Both men had a great sense of humor; one time, they planned to show up at Tommy's for dinner wearing pigtails. They canceled their prank at the last minute because Glenn was sure "Tommy first would have shot us both in the head. Then he would have had a heart attack and died."

Whether Glenn and Spunky were ever more than bar-hopping buddies, Glenn never revealed. But their relationship ended abruptly when the Dodgers paid Spunky to never see Glenn again. Glenn was pissed off that Spunky accepted the buyout, and the two never reconciled.

Despite the drama off the field, Glenn was a solid player for the team, with average batting and fielding stats. So when he was called into a meeting with Al Campanis, the team's general manager, Glenn assumed it was to discuss his contract for 1978 and beyond. He was excited to be offered a great deal,

Omnisexual

Father Mike once told a friend that maybe he was omnisexual, drawn to all of God's adult human creations. Gay people who spent time with him thought he was gay, and straight people who spent time with him thought he was straight. Throughout the 1990s, he had a close relationship with Al Alvarado, a nurse from the Philippines. Father Mike was clear with Al from the beginning that he was a groom of Christ, so their relationship would never progress physically. Even emotionally, Father Mike made sure to keep a certain distance from Al so his focus was always on those he served. Al couldn't bring himself to walk away from the relationship, even though he knew he would never be the number one love of Father Mike's life. He once commented that "my rival was God."

The relationship between queer people and the Catholic church was . . . um, *strained* during Father Mike's life, to say the least. The church's view was that homosexuals were sinners and that was the end of it. In the aftermath of the Stonewall Riot in the 1970s, Father Mike joined the effort to create Dignity, a national group of queer Catholics focused on prayer and advocacy. He ministered to queer people at a time when many priests wouldn't. But his calling was also to the general public, and he especially served the homeless faithfully.

In 1986, the Vatican issued a statement calling homosexuality "an intrinsic moral evil" and the strain got worse. Dignity groups were no longer allowed to meet in churches. Father Mike once comforted a fellow gay priest who had tried to stand up for gay rights in the church and was being ostracized, reminding him, "They did the same to Jesus."

"Gay-Related Immune Deficiency"

In the 1980s, Father Mike was led into service of another marginalized group. When the HIV/AIDS epidemic struck the United States, the lack of information led to hysteria. Nurses wouldn't bring HIV/AIDS patients meals into their hospital rooms for fear of catching it. And almost anywhere that would have performed services for the deceased refused to prepare the bodies of or officiate at funerals for those who had succumbed to the disease. Father Mike started the Saint Francis AIDS ministry on Thirty-First Street and mobilized those willing to help. He physically touched HIV/AIDS patients and talked with them when few others would. Once word got around that he was not only willing but very skilled at leading memorial services for those who had died of HIV/AIDS, he traveled across state lines more than once to answer every request.