



Zenobia Fröst

Humans of Our Community

Zenobia is an incredible Brisbane based poet with a love of pop-culture. Zenobia shared with us her journey of coming out, the evolving pop-culture landscape, and the importance of listening when someone opens a dialogue about their identity.

Zenobia is an awesome name! Where are you from?

Thank you! I have my Mum to thank for that. Originally, I'm from New Zealand, but I spent some time living in Cambridge in the UK and eventually landed in Brisbane. This is absolutely my favourite place to live.

Where do you belong in the LGBTIQ+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy community?

I identify as queer. I'm in a relationship with a wonderful woman, and I've had previous relationships with cis-gendered men and non-binary people. I've never had great experiences with either side of the community when I identify as bisexual, so I go with queer.

How has the Queer Culture changed in Brisbane over time?

There has been a lot of change over the years. Right now, in my world (the writing and poetry scene especially), we have a lot of queer women and trans poets coming up who form close communities. It cuts through a lot of the white cis-gendered male domination. To be honest, it's been a long time since I've attended any real Pride events because I feel a lot of our festivals are — like the wider world — still pretty cis-dude focused. So, in some areas I think the queer culture in Brisbane is going well, but in other areas I wish there was more going on.

Talk to me about coming out

I don't think you truly stop coming out, rather your sexual orientation and identity is continually unfolding. When I look back over my coming out processes, from the age of maybe 14–29, I tried coming out as bi, lesbian, queer, genderqueer, cis-ish, polyamorous, monogamous —and it occurs to me now that all these moments were attempts to connect to family, friends, partners, peers, readers.

The first time I came out was quite different, as a large group of us came out simultaneously. I went to a fairly conservative school — one day a teacher tried to impart on us her homophobic views and then, in one glorious moment, a bunch of us just stood up and said

"I'm gay, how about that?" I should acknowledge though that I had the privilege of knowing that no physical harm would come to me, and I appreciate that in some schools today this safety cannot be assured.

I'm extra lucky because, as a little kid, my parents' best friends and most frequent babysitters were a lesbian couple, basically godmother-type roles. Having that influence on my life is very precious. While Mum has always been supportive, she was initially dismissive of my relationships with girls, and framed my relationships with men as legitimate. For instance, she asked me "how my first time" was only once I'd started seeing a man. When I was 14 or 15, she ferried the news that I'd come out to her as bi along to my dad, who only said he was "disappointed", which is all she reported to me. I remember at some point trying to explain the word queer to him and he just shut down the conversation. Once I started hanging out with fellow queers, they also dismissed my bisexuality as impossible until I'd physically tried on all possible options. One of my high-school best pals, a lesbian, frequently told me to "*pick a side*" and joked that she was more highly evolved than the bi-identifying rest of us. I think by the time I started dating as a young adult, I was really feeling the pressures of heteronormativity or "picking a side"; in addition, I was sexually assaulted and emotionally manipulated by cis men in a number of encounters and relationships, and I think really internalised those power dynamics.

How did you get into poetry?

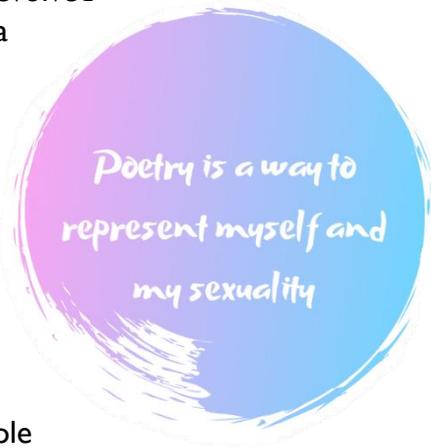
I got into poetry at a pretty young age. I was a voracious reader and was lucky that my family really encouraged me to be creative as a young person. I had one teacher at school who also encouraged me to enter teen poetry competitions. In general, poets know that most people who buy poetry are other poets; that community holds itself together, and makes for a good place to try new things. I went along that track of showing up at poetry events, writing and reading, and I actually just launched my second book!

Do you feel that your creativity is related to your sexuality?

I think there is a connection between my poetry and my sexuality. As a young person it was really a way to represent myself. There was no Google on my Tamagochi, so I was reading a lot of different things to try and workout what I was feeling. I also grew up watching shows like Buffy the Vampire Slayer. A lot of my creativity revolved around pop-culture and it still greatly influences me today. My partner and I even wrote a show about an all-female version of the Bachelorette!

How has the pop culture landscape changed over the years?

So much! I realised recently in terms of Netflix and streaming services, we have so much queer stuff to watch. So much to watch that you don't even know where to begin. Steven Universe is one show that has been important to me over the last few years. It was made by a non-binary person named Rebecca Sugar and it's about a little magic guy who has three magic mums - it's so subtly queer and sending so many lovely messages to kids. I can't even imagine something like that being on the TV when I was a kid. All I had was 'The L-Word', which was ... limited, if a landmark we still haven't surpassed. We have a long way to go



Poetry is a way to
represent myself and
my sexuality

though. Whenever I see a movie that has queer women or non-binary characters, I find that I'm one of 3 people in the cinema — a way to be an ally is to show up for a more diverse film industry!

You attended Open Doors when you were younger – how important was it to you then and how has the organisation grown since you've been involved?

It's been about 15 years since I attended a session at Open Doors. It was great when I was younger because I knew that I could go to access information and I could direct other people to their services. I think Open Doors has really grown to address the needs of transgender and non-binary people, something which 15 years ago wasn't discussed in the same way it is now.

What advice do you have for young people questioning their identity and the parents of these children?

Be OK with your labels being flexible. As a young person I felt that once I had picked one thing, I had to stay there. That made exploring my sexuality and gender hard. I found having a diary helped keep track of my thoughts. Also, make art! If you aren't good at creative things, channel that passion into other things that make you feel happy.

My advice to parents of young people: even if you're supportive/tolerant, think about what messages you're giving your kids when they try and talk to you about their sexuality, gender, and young social/romantic life. Danny Ortberg put it this way on his Dear Prudie podcast, and I'm paraphrasing here: *"When your kid/nibling comes out to you, they're giving you a chance to know them! They want to open a conversation—a series of conversations! —and they want connection and safety"*. I got the safety aspect—I was never in danger of being kicked out of home, and I had heaps of freedoms and access to queer resources—but one thing I would've loved was to feel like my parents wanted to have more curious, happier conversations with me about what queerness meant to me so that I felt affirmed rather than just tolerated, and so that maybe I'd had better tools for dealing with biphobia at school, with peers, and with older peers as well. Ultimately, when kids open a conversation with you, ask questions and listen.



Make space for yourself
to not feel rushed to
figure it all out

Interview conducted and written By James Fowler.

BONUS: Zenobia's recommendations for queer TV shows and poets to check out!

TV: Steven Universe, Gentleman Jack, Trinkets, Everything Sucks, Schitt's Creek, Vida

Poets: Rae White, Rebecca Jessen, Keri Glastonbury, Alison Whittaker, Michelle Dicinoski