Dear reader,

Welcome to the eighth issue of the Queer Youth Assemble monthly zine! Since May is Mental Health Awareness Month, this issue we are focusing on mental health of queer youth. With all the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being passed and debated, it's especially important that we have outlets for our feelings. Inside, you will find beautiful pieces of art and poetry created by Queer Youth Assemble members. We acknowledge the intersecting elements found within the content of this zine, and encourage you to read with both compassion and understanding.

Due to our strong belief in uncensored creativity, we decided to not put content limits on our creators for this publication. However, we understand that some of the content within this zine may be triggering to some readers. Potentially triggering themes in this issue include depression, self harm, suicide, disordered eating, death, and disturbing imagery (pg. 11). Necessary trigger warnings will be listed at the top of the page. If you find yourself struggling after reading, we encourage you to reach out for support.

We hope you enjoy this publication, and are inspired to create whatever your heart desires.

With love and care,

Esmée Silverman (she/her)
Queer Youth Assemble Co-Founder

Alice Mead (they/them)
Queer Youth Assemble Writing Team Lead
WHAT IS QYA?

Queer Youth Assemble is a non-profit youth-led organization dedicated to serving queer youth across the United States and its territories. We are committed to nurturing the joy, interests, and talents of queer youth, and giving queer youth the resources and support to create positive change within their communities. We envision a day where all queer youth are happy, supported, and able to reach their fullest potential.
maybe one day you are in college and rooming with your best friend, same major, homework strewn across the floor. maybe you lean into the same computer screen, feel their laughter fill the room, feel lightheaded with their joy. maybe you do the wash on sundays, clean sheets, clean air, clean soap bubble heart.

maybe one day you are in a different city in a tiny apartment filled with plants. same skin, same lungs, same people to hold on to. maybe you come home to that apartment, not too expensive, pets allowed, their shoes on your shoe rack, their coats hung neat near the door. maybe you bake together, middle of the night, 2010s music floating through the doors.

maybe one day you fill the seats around a table with every person you've told a secret to; they want to be here because they care. maybe you don't hurt on purpose, you just hurt when hurt's meant to be felt, cry from happiness, send packages of pressed flowers and letters and letters of everything you've ever thought. maybe you slice fruit for your friends and there is nothing softer than their eyes.
Image description: Six drawings of the same flower as it goes through the stages of its life. It starts as a bud with a bright green leaf, then it begins to bloom, then it is in full bloom. In the next row, the flower begins to wilt; the leaf is brown and some leaves and petals are now on the ground. Then the flower is barely alive, three petals remain and the stem is brown and bent, but it still faces the sun. In the final drawing the flower is supported by a stake in the ground, the color returns, new leaves begin to grow, and grass grows in the soil around it.
LITTLE MOON OF MINE
by anonymous
TW: depression, referenced self-harm

I only find peace in the light of the moon
The whole world is sleeping and I feel at home
Must enjoy these few hours for the world will wake soon
And the fears and the stressors will rise soon to roam

The night is my haven when the world wants me dead
Just me and the owls and the moon and the stars
Finally allows peace to enter my head
Neither friends nor family, or the roaring of cars

Purple starts forming, and soon the sky turns to pink
Again my grip on reality will vanish
Into unconsciousness I start to sink
My head, once more, is home only to anguish

The days all seem endless and all hope is gone
The brightness is relentless and I cannot belong
Soul bleeding bloody with the colors of the dawn
Out of reach is the piece and all has gone wrong

All I can do is wait for the night
See the moon peeking through, through the afternoon sky
When all happiness is hidden, I know I must fight
For my night will return, and then I shall fly

Dear little moon of mine, I swear I will not die
Piece by piece, the ivory haze clouding the field dissipates. Before me, a single flower effortlessly protrudes from the soil. Every curious blade of grass spirals around the tulip’s elegant stem, sliding dew to the dampened ground, breathing life to its leaves. The petals lay arched to the sky, collecting nutrients from the beams of light peeking through holes in the cloudy weather. My hand is met with soft fuzz as the tulip sways in the delicate breeze. I sit beside this gift of life, and watch the clouds make their way home. As more fog parts, another man appears from the distance. Be it dazed by mediocrity, or lulled by the taste, the man sways gently with a bottle in his hand. The bottle is cold, and the glass shimmers in the light.

Growing closer to a flower of his own, his head falls back, making way for amber death. After a gulp, the remains from his chin drip one by one, falling to the flower. Each drop weighs decades. The rose coughs, a beautiful red begins to fade to a muted maroon. Swaying ever faster, the man looks down at his rose. He thinks it's wrong, it's all wrong. The colors, the shape, the tears. This isn’t how it was supposed to be. Another one back. His tears fall harder than the pints. He peers down at the color of amber death. Surely, surely it will mix with the muted maroon to make a dazzling red. Another one back. Poured directly on now, the rose begins to wilt. Another one back. Too far in now, he pours and he pours more and more to fix that muted maroon and tilt the wilt to his favor, oh how he longs for the amber to be his savior. Another one back. The rose lay dying and slouching, all light from its eyes receding. The rose’s red now red with blood, giving way to effortless amber. Another one back. Soft on the ground, the rose lay still and silent. Broken glass surrounds a battered man. His rose lay flat in his arms, brown as the earth it came from, drenched in amber death. He falls, tears still streaming, to the embrace of the welcoming grass.
I lost a childhood best friend to suicide recently. She was the first person I came out to, and then my first girlfriend. Since then, I’ve been able to meet more people who have been close to her and impacted by her. It’s so nice to be around all that love. It reminded me of how important it is that we always tell people how much we love them. There are so many people who admire, appreciate, and love you more than you realize.
Finding Joy in the Little Things

by Hop (they/ fae)

Depressive episodes are hard, so I wanted to share three of the little things I find joy in when I’m having a bad time!

1.) Cats - Cats are wonderful animals, and I have two of them! I love their little toe beans, their purrs, and how fuzzy/fluffy they are. I love the way they meow for attention, and the way they’ll shove their faces into me to show their affection.

2.) Crafting - One of my biggest passions is crafting. During a bad depressive episode, I may not have the energy to create a giant sculpture or to do an elaborate painting, but even a small drawing can make me feel better. If I truly have no spoons, then sometimes I find that even just looking at old finished pieces or short videos of others’ creations on social media and then thinking about what I’m going to do next can be uplifting!

3.) Reading - One of the activities I do a lot of, especially when I’m low on spoons for any reason, is to read! My favorite genre is fantasy, closely followed by sci-fi and other fiction. However, grabbing a physical copy of a book from somewhere or trying to access an e-book can be frustrating, so my solution to that is usually fanfiction! Fanfiction is real literature, and with fanfiction, you can narrow down your search and just look for light-hearted stories of your favorite characters!

Hopefully, this can help you start your own list of little things you find joy in!
With you I was a potted plant
Even if you remembered to water me
and placed me where I could see the sun
I still couldn’t grow
past those terracotta walls
16 // you tell your friends everything about yourself because you don't know what else there is to offer.

13 // it gets worse with every picture of split open skin you see: "it's not bad enough" someone says about themselves as you look at their bones. you become the helpline.

16 // your therapist says that it was trauma, but it doesn't feel bad enough. you think of your probably dead old friends and their bones and cry.

14 // it gets worse with every calorie saved: one day you stop without warning. this isn't the last of it.

16 // you promise yourself to go outside tomorrow and smell the air. springtime feels like healing.

15 // it gets worse with every time you click send.

16 // it's getting better.
MANY THINGS

by spoupysoupy (fae/faer, ve/vir)

TW: disturbing imagery including eyes, derealization

Image description: A being with many eyes and a colorful red-purple swirl in place of a head stands in a grey suit and tie. The swirl stems from the neck of the being and creates an abnormal shape.
"I'm scared of you"
Sometimes I'm scared of me too.
Everywhere I turn it's always the same.
"So you're just crazy?"
"You must be faking."
"This can't be real."
I pass by a mirror, pausing for moment.
This isn't my body.
I don't look like myself.
I'm not alone in this body.
So why do I feel so far away from everyone else?
No matter what I do,
What I say,
It just never seems to make sense.
They never seem to understand.
Why can't someone understand?
We're not crazy.
We're not violent.
We're not broken.
We're still people.
I look for something I can turn to,
Anything that I can find,
But it's all wrong.
The media makes us out to be the bad guys.
I'm no bad guy.
All I am is a human.
Just like everyone else.
Though I may live with dissociative identity disorder,
I'm no different than anyone else.
I'm just a kid, after all.
Unpretty

by Talyn (anything but she/he)

TW: graphic descriptions of self harm

I stare at the razor as I shower.
‘I don’t want this,’ I tell myself.
‘I promised him I wouldn’t.’
‘Everyones gonna be disappointed in you.’
Yet I pick it up.
The razor drags over my skin.
I watch the blood drip down.
I realize that I’m addicted to this.
I was told this would help but it’s created more problems.
I realize that the internet has been showing me all the pretty sides;
The scars healing, the release of negative energy.
They hadn’t shown how addicting it is.
They hadn’t shown how scary it is not being in control.
I’m no longer in control of my body.
I’ve fallen addicted to the slice.
Thighs, arms, stomach, ankles, sides.
Anywhere I know I can hide it.
Self harm isn’t pretty. It’s an addiction.
Yes, the scars heal, but that doesn’t matter if you’re still cutting.
This isn’t pretty.
I hide my body from everyone,
My partners, my friends, my family.
I hide myself away so they don’t know anything’s wrong.
For Mental Health Awareness Month, we had Queer Youth Assemble members create flowers in whatever color, style, or medium of their choosing. They would come together in a beautiful field of wildflowers (see cover). These flowers represent the different experiences of those who live with mental health issues, how growth and recovery are non-linear, and the benefits of coming together as a community.

Cover art background by Savanah Keating (they/them)

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THANK YOU!
Stay tuned for next month's edition & QYA Zine announcements!
Visit us at:
Website: queeryouthassemble.org
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Artwork by Grey (they/them)