Dear reader,
Welcome to the August issue of the Queer Youth Assemble monthly zine! This month we decided not to have a particular theme, instead having everyone work on something they're interested in or passionate about. Inside, you will find beautiful pieces of art, writing, 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. In this and future QYA zines, a list of specific triggers can be found at the top of each page, and any potentially triggering themes can be found at the beginning of each zine. Potentially triggering themes in this issue include rape, suicide, and police brutality. 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

August Doherty 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.
This August, from the 7th to the 13th, many will be celebrating and honoring all the best pups who assist those with disabilities. International Assistance Dog Week is recognized in many places and is often a time to bring awareness to the amazing abilities of the dogs that assist so many. Assistance dogs, also called service dogs, help their handlers in many different ways. Although laws vary country to country, in the United States, the law pertaining to service dogs reads, “Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.” These tasks include, guiding blind and sighted folk, alerting to various scents, alerting to noises, picking up items or opening and closing doors, and responding to medical events such as panic attacks. Of course, this list is not exhaustive and there are dozens of other tasks that these dogs perform.

It is important to remember that assistance dogs and emotional support animals are not in the same category. While service dogs do provide emotional support for their handlers, it is not considered a task by ADA law. Emotional support animals do not have the same public access rights as service dogs. For the most part, with the exception of some hospital areas, zoo enclosures, and even some national parks, service dogs are allowed anywhere their humans are. In addition, there is no law stating that service dogs must be one type of dog. However, the most commonly used are golden retrievers and labrador retrievers due to their biddable, kind nature. Not all dogs are meant to be service dogs— in fact, almost 50% of those being trained will eventually fail out of service work. It is imperative that these dogs not only enjoy their work but also have the stamina to keep up with all that is asked of them. It can take up to two years for a service dog to be fully trained which provides plenty of time for their trainer or handler to decide if they are best fit for a pet life instead.
The purpose of International Assistance Dog Week (IADW) is to honor the hardworking dogs, the resilient trainers, and to educate the public on working dogs. Most training organizations will have puppy raisers, the family who teaches the puppy how to behave nicely, as well as professional trainers who then teach them task work. Guide Dogs of America is a prominent guide dog school who follows this protocol. It is still legal and commendable to be an owner-trainer, a person who raises and trains their own service dog. Public education on assistance dogs is unfortunately not widespread. Despite the “do not pet” signs, or even verbal communication that the dog is working, much of the public is not aware that these dogs need to keep their focus. Even a momentary lag in focus could endanger the handler. Whether it be guiding someone through a busy street, alerting them to a seizure, or responding to a panic attack, their jobs are equally important and they need to be ready to respond at a moment’s notice. While it is an extreme privilege to own and work alongside a service dog, it is also often a hassle. Whether the working animal is labeled as such or not, it is always best to ask before interacting in order to lessen the stress on the handler.

As a service dog handler myself, it is my pride and joy to experience the success of my service dog every day. Handlers get praise for having adorable dogs and teaching them to behave so well frequently. In honor of IADW, I would encourage the enthusiasm for praise also be put towards education and understanding. Ask those willing to share about their service dogs, research about the wonderful things organizations do and always make sure to respect the human standing by the dog—it can be incredibly disheartening to see folks speak to the animal as if the person does not exist. Working dogs love to work, it is our responsibility to ensure they can do so with ease and courage. In addition, it is always good to remember that service dogs do get to experience life as happy, non-working animals as well. Work-fun balance is what keeps them going!

For those interested in reading more about this topic, there are links below that will bring you to more information. An additional reminder that “handler” in the context of this article refers to any disabled service dog handler. You must be legally disabled to obtain and work with a service animal.

https://www.guidedogs.com
https://www.assistancedogweek.org
https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm
https://www.theatomichound.com/gigantic-list-of-the-top-150-service-dog-tasks/
Cora's service dog, August, doing his very important job.

Image Description: A medium sized black dog with floppy ears stands facing the camera. He is holding a dark leash in his mouth. Behind him is a foggy sky, dark ocean and a protective gate attached on the cement he is standing on.

August, off-duty, enjoying his favorite activity, swimming.

Image Description: A black dog with floppy ears is looking up, face close to the camera. His tongue is out and his fur appears slick from water. He is standing on a beach of sand with a log and river water shown behind him.
hello! my name is blayr, i am 17 years old.
i am going into my senior year of highschool this upcoming fall.

usually i'd write a poem for the zine as poetry is one of my special interests,
but this month i have decided to do something a bit different.

when i was 18 months old i began stimming. at first, my parents were unsure
what it was.

starting when i was 22 months old, i began going to boston children's hospital.
there, i was diagnosed with stereotypic movement disorder.

now that i'm older, i can better communicate. i go back in october for another
evaluation. this time to try and get an official autism diagnosis.

now that i've introduced myself, let me actually get to what i wanted to write
about.

this morning, when i was getting some breakfast. i went to grab the peanut
butter when i noticed a small image in the corner with some writing
underneath. the text read, "supporting people with special abilities".

as someone who's working hard to get an autism diagnosis, i personally do
not like this phrase when used to describe myself and know others who feel
the same way.

while i do understand this company as well as others do not intend to use this
phrase in a negative way, using this choice of words over other (in my opinion,
better) options can be hurtful to the disabled community.

disabled people are not superheroes. we are not helpless either.
'Our Flag Means Death' Review by Noah (they/he)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>TV Series</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>Avg. 30 min./10 ep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasons</td>
<td>Season 2 expected 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>TV MA (check TWs!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where to watch</td>
<td>HBOMax ($10/month)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Adventure/Mockumentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Premiere date</td>
<td>March 3, 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rotten Tomatoes</td>
<td>92-94% enjoyed</td>
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<td>My Rating</td>
<td>★★★★★☆</td>
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*Our Flag Means Death* (OFMD) stars Stede Bonnet, a man who is tired of his current day-to-day life and strives for more adventure—then finds this adventure through starting a life of piracy. Stede leaves his old life (and family) behind and joins a misfit crew, sailing the seas and getting up to antics as the Gentleman Pirate. After a few run-ins with various European navies, the team meets Spanish Jackie and Blackbeard—characters who hold greater significance later in the show. Stede learns what it means to be a true pirate after years of living a comfortable life on land, while Blackbeard learns kindness and compassion after years of being seen as “the villain.”

The show has a great soundtrack, with original songs coupled with classics like "The Chain" by Fleetwood Mac and Erik Satie’s "Gymnopédies." I think the revival in popularity for these songs can be attributed to their presence in the show. All of the characters are charming in their own right (except those viewers love-to-hate), and the world of OFMD was very immersive.
If you are a history buff, keep in mind that season 1 isn’t totally historically accurate—and season 2 is expected to diverge even more from historical accounts. Anachronisms are sprinkled throughout the show, which only adds to its enjoyment.

Overall, the show is incredibly diverse. About half of the main characters are played by BIPOC actors, and race/racism is tackled throughout the course of the show. There is a canonically nonbinary pirate who uses he/they pronouns and transitions during the show, and is portrayed by nonbinary Latinx actor Vico Ortiz (they/elle). Most of the main cast of characters are openly queer and there are three queer onscreen romances, although more pre-canon relationships are hinted at. Characters who are considered a “dandy” (well-dressed man) are also seen as strong leaders, and traditionally masculine characters cry onscreen and have tender moments. The main character, Stede, is shown to be in an arranged lavender marriage. His wife, Mary, supports him when he comes out and lives an independent life as a business owner; I was pleasantly surprised to see how much screen time she gets outside of Stede’s presence.

I may be biased, but I give OFMD a solid 4.5/5—maybe 5/5, if I’m generous. The main reason why a 0.5 was tacked off from my score is because the ending is pretty abrupt and filled with cliffhangers, but that only makes me even more excited for season 2. I strongly recommend reading the trigger warnings below, and then giving the show a shot!

Trigger Warnings:
Throughout the show, there are lots of scenes with blood/violence/gore/death/intense situations—I personally found these scenarios to be exaggerated/a bit unrealistic, but if this does make you queasy, keep in mind that this is prevalent in every episode. There are also multiple sexual jokes/implied sexual activities throughout the series, plus swears/foul language. The other main trigger warnings include trauma, addiction, abuse, racism, and homophobia; a more detailed list of warnings can be found in this document.
Over the Rainbow
by Rixitup (they/them)

Image Description: A white furred dog with a rainbow bandana lays down in the grass at a pride event.

Image Description: An individual stands overlooking another person's phone while holding a rainbow pride flag over their shoulder. They are adorned in a rainbow bandana.
Image Description: A drag king with a floral button-down, plaid yellow pants, and bright purple hair, performs the "Truffle Shuffle" dance on stage.

"Pride Fest: Over the Rainbow!"
Veterans Park, Holyoke, MA, 2022

Image Description: A drag queen in a sparkly rainbow leotard, long pink wig, and a fuzzy green mustache, dances while the crowd looks on.
For Some
by Talyn (they/she)
TW: mentions of rape, suicide, police brutality

I pledge allegiance
To the flag
Of the United States of America
And to the republic for which it stands
One nation under God
With liberty and justice for some.

97% of women have been raped or assaulted
Men tell them "it's not all men" and they’re expected to feel safe
Women do not have justice.

Every 45 seconds in the USA a queer teen attempts to kill themself
They are told that they’re lucky to live somewhere so progressive
Queer people do not have justice.

164 Black people were killed by police from January 1 to August 31, 2020
People say "all lives matter" in response to those who protest
Black people do not have justice.

As the list goes on you’ll realize that there is justice for very few
I refuse to pledge my allegiance
To the flag
Of the United States of America
Or to the republic for which it stands
One nation under a singular god
With liberty and justice for
white, cisgender, heterosexual, rich, Christian, mentally well men.
I still won’t forget the day I discovered my namesake. I was scrolling through the internet, as one does, exploring one of my favorite game series, Danganronpa. I came across a fangame called Super Danganronpa Another 2, and out of curiosity, I decided to dig deep into the game. I didn’t expect myself to get attached to any of the characters, considering this was a fangame, until I encountered a certain journalist by the name of Nikei Yomiuri. Suddenly, I found myself relating to this character and seeing multiple similarities between me and him. Our personalities, the way we rely on our right hand, the issues we face, our distrust towards that one person whom we felt ruined our lives. To be frank, I had never felt like I related to a character more than I related to Nikei Yomiuri, and it was almost as if I had become one with him. So naturally, I thought, “Hey, what if I stole his name?”

This was during my gender crisis back during the beginning of the pandemic, when I wasn’t sure if my identity was truly my identity or if my name was truly my name. I didn’t entirely agree with my classification as a cisgender female, but I wasn’t too sure what else I could be dubbed as. I had a strong hatred for my name to begin with, but it became worse when the gender crisis kicked off. The worst part was that I didn’t know what I wanted to be called instead, so I went by Iro, an online alias, for the time being to escape the self that I had to endure in real life. The only place where I felt like I could be myself was online, when I interacted with my very few friends on Discord. Being with people who truly understood me and accepted the personality I adopted online surrounded me with hope that I’d figure out who I really am soon enough.

In late 2020, I discovered that I was actually genderfluid, but it wasn’t until a few weeks later that I found out my true name and eventually came out to my parents. The moment I realized my name is Nikei was the moment my life began. Although my parents were still insistent on addressing me by the name of my old self, I didn’t care, considering I would always be Nikei from this moment on no matter what anyone called me. I didn’t feel any remorse for the departure of my old self, not one bit. I thought that because of the birth of my new self, I won’t be able to go back and relive the memories of back then. For the record, I was wrong, and the memories harbored by my old self still haunt me to this day, but I still consider myself more capable of combating anything that could cause me future trauma. So, in a way, I feel as if I’m better off than back then.

Do I miss my old self at all? Nope. Do I regret becoming the person I am today? Quite the opposite. In fact, I’m quite content with the version of myself I have become. If I had some bug fixes I’d be a little happier, but that’s besides the point. The point is, I’m very happy I discovered that character who changed my life and perspective. Because I know a little bit more about who I actually am, things might get better for me in the future.
Cover art by August Doherty Mead (they/them)

Image Description: A photograph, with the focus being a frog. The frog, dark green, is sitting on and surrounded by green lily pads floating on a pond. The tree branches above can be seen in the reflection of the still, dark water. Two white and yellow water lilies sit on lily pads in the top right.
LET TRANS ATHLETES PLAY

August 7th, 10-4 PM, St Peters Field
Danehy Park, Cambridge MA
Thank you!
Stay tuned for next month's edition & QYA Zine announcements!
Visit us at:
Website: queeryouthassemble.org
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Page decorations by Jesse/Finch (he/they)