

finding
parts of
ourselves in
each other

A rambly zine about growing
up gay, labels, finding queer
family, and belonging

I was in York yesterday and
picked up a book by Ivan
Coyote.

Rebent Sinner.

It's a medium sized paperback
with a black-and-white photo
cover and a hot pink title.

It's somewhere between a
memoir and an instruction
manual. All the best memoirs
are. Partly for the cis
straight people who read it
and need to understand us
better, and partly for us. We
who want to learn how to be
ourselves.

People like me.

Reading how Ivan felt when reading Stone Butch Blues and realising that's exactly how I felt when reading it. A queer lesbian in the UK relating to how a trans person from Canada felt reading a book about an American butch in the 1950s.

Because there's still a shared experience there. Of being born and labelled F by the world and figuring out how to reconcile that with how you actually feel. Whether that's gender non-conforming or butch or trans or any of the other soft edge semi-permeable boxes we find ourselves making a home in.

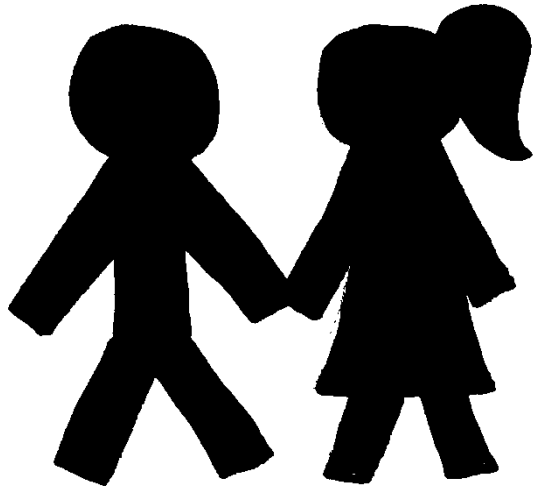
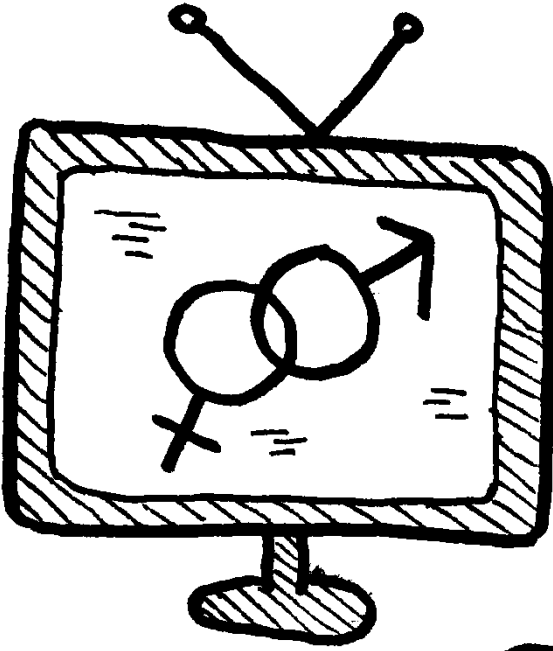
There's a part where Ivan talks about the idea of queer elders, and about all the other gay and trans folks they've known over the years.

It got me thinking about the people who've influenced me, and who (in some ways) I've influenced in turn. It's still recent for me but I don't want to forget. Because it still feels lonely sometimes and I might need a record like this some day. I won't use names - this will get personal enough as it is.

I didn't grow up around any other queer people, elders or otherwise.

I've always been a little bit jealous of those children who had gay uncles or cousins (never aunts, always uncles) because at least they grew up knowing that non-straightness was an option. I don't even really have those memories of seeing gay people on TV or in movies - that all important representation that everyone talks about.

Maybe that's why I hunt for it so desperately now. To make up for lost time.



I was 14 the first time I came out, so I suppose this record starts then.

The first people I knew to come out in my school were two bisexual boys in year 8. One of them I would call my boyfriend the next year - until I figured things out.

They dealt with that first wave of homophobia and disgust and judgement which would soften the blow for the rest of us that came after.

The rugby coach asked if they would use the same changing room as the other boys. Other members of the team had the same question.

Years 8 and 9 were spent on the internet. Tumblr pages and Google searches trying to learn this new language of gender and sexuality in an attempt to understand.

But there is no filter, no direction on the internet. You just consume all of it and try to make your own order from the blinking, advertised mess of it all.

Shiny new words that I tried to break in like shoes, because even though they may have rubbed and caused blisters it was better than having wet feet.

Panromantic

Asexual

Genderfluid

Neutrois

Transmasculine

They were good words.
They just weren't *my* words.
I can't exactly pinpoint
what made me shift from
those 'micro-labels' to
these older words with
more baggage. I was 16 then,
I think.

gay

lesbian

butch

stone

queer

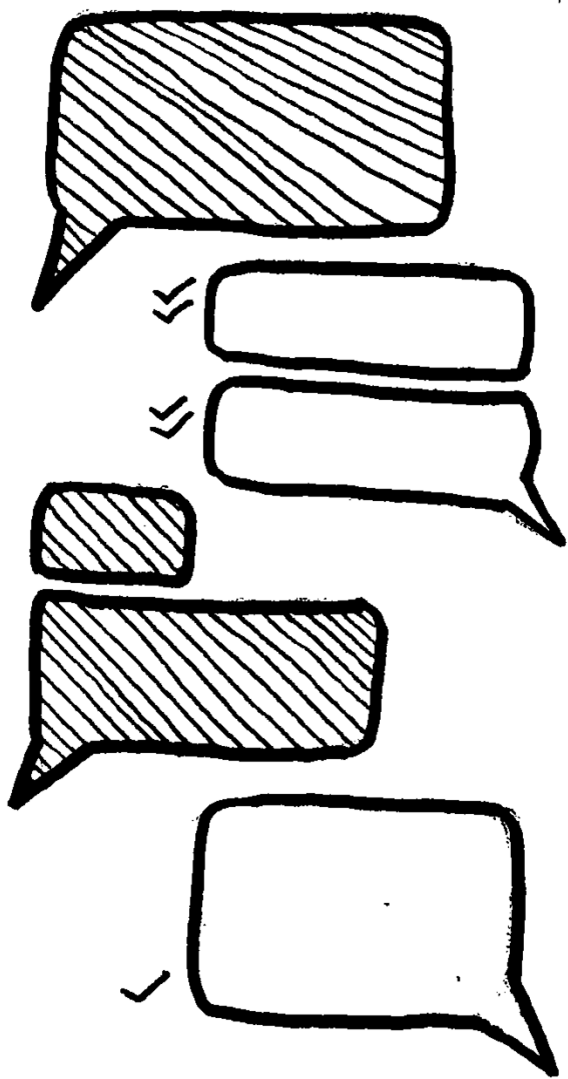
And I knew some other
LGBT people by then.

My two closest friends
in those chaotic last
years of secondary
school, when everyone's
trying to be an adult
but they've only skim
read the terms and
conditions;

the asexual girl who
dressed like an anime
character and wanted to
build robots, and the
bisexual girl in
platform boots who
deserved so much better
than the straight boys
who chased her.

And of course the girl (who wasn't identifying as that at the time) from Italy who I was talking to every day online.

But she'll show up more later.



In my last year there I tried to set up a club, inspired by the GSAs I'd heard about in America.

I told the student support teacher for my House that it would be for LGBT students. She didn't know what the acronym stood for.

They told me it would have to be in the drama studio because it was the only room without windows.

Because it would be dangerous if people could see which kids were inside.

The club did run in the end, the first meeting in the September after I left.

Led by one of my over-enthusiastic ally friends but still checking in with me. I don't know anyone at that school now, but last I heard that club is still running.

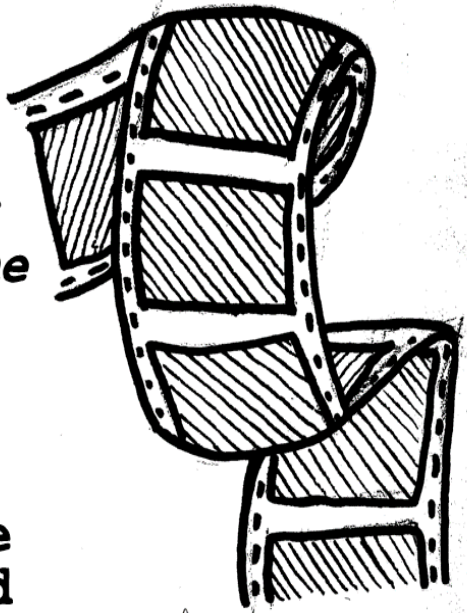
I think it's one of the things I am most proud of.

I ended up at the
queerest sixth form.

Because people who
choose interesting
alternative college
programs tend to also be
interesting and
alternative in other
ways.

(Or they're just
pretentious and boring.
I'd like to hope I'm the
former.)

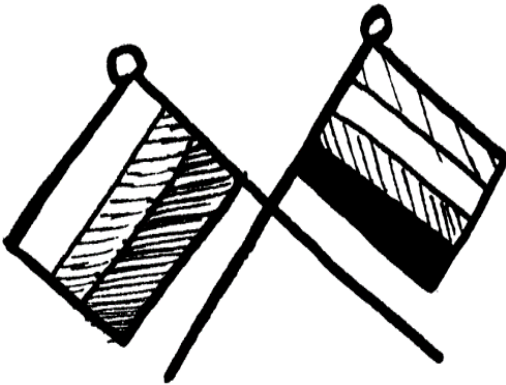
The bisexual boy
who had read *Stone
Butch Blues* and
got me to watch
*Brokeback
Mountain*, who
would sit with me
and put the world
to rights



The other queer girls
who would make out
with each other when
they were drunk but it
didn't matter. I was so
envious of their
confidence

The trans man in
the year above us
with his slick-back
hair and silver
stud

The person who was
closeted until they saw
the rest of us, and now
proudly hangs their bi
and nonbinary flags
side by side



My English literature
teacher was bi, too.
Twenty-something
straight out of
university but
teaching us about Greek
mythology and
narrative voice and
speculative fiction.

She would always put in
words of caution about
relationships and safe
sex and all those things
17 year olds are
fumbling through.

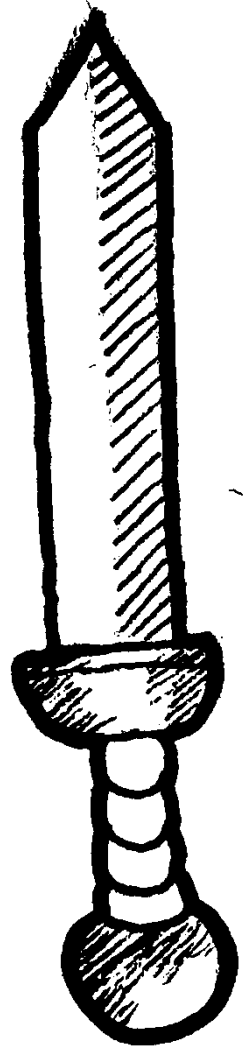
She probably did help
a few of us, although
we'd never admit it.

And then there was my
Latin teacher whose
butch partner with
their androgynous name
used to drive her home
after the lesson. They
had forged a bronze
sword together on a
couple's trip and used to
quiz each other on
Ancient Greek grammar.

I wish I had talked to
them more.

I think they were the
first couple I ever saw
that looked like the
kind of relationship I
wanted.

(and not just the sword.)



That girl from Italy is
my girlfriend now.

After years of 'platonic'
cuddles and missed
opportunities we had
finally talked about it.

And I was more secure in
my not-so-blistered
words than ever before.

Now I'm at university, in a
big city with a whole
district celebrated for its
gay culture.

Worlds away from a village
secondary school where even
the term LGBT is
misunderstood.

I know more queer people now
too.

None quite like me, still,
but we find parts of
ourselves in each other.

A guy in my sociolinguistics class in a faded denim jacket asks a question to the lecturer, who is striding across the theatre in jet-black platform heels. She is trans, like him.

I'm at the back of the room sharing a row with four others. They have led different lives and had their own experiences but they have all found belonging in the same word.

So I get to be the token lesbian in a friend group of bisexuals – it gets kinda funny sometimes.

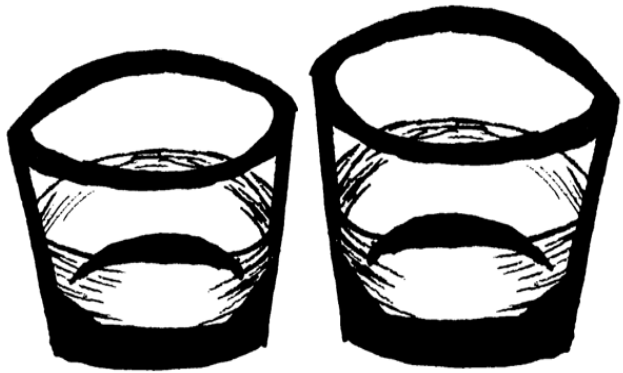
A guy with the same
black Doc Martens as me
who's trying to quit
smoking, the same month
he said he was going to
go vegetarian



a woman with her
broad Northern
accent who calls me
'kid' and laughs at
the way I say 'cup'

an 18 year-old fresher
like me who has a crush
on that lecturer and
sketches in the margins
of her notes

and the guy at the end who
hasn't said anything all
morning but I'll be up with
him until past midnight
splitting a bottle of vodka
over stupid stories.



Five different queer
experiences just in one row of
a lecture theatre

So I meet new people
when I can, I read,

I look at our
histories and our
fictions and the
records other people
have made.

We're here,
we're queer,
and there are so many
more of us than I ever
thought.