



RESILIENT

& RESISTING

FREE ZINE

AT ARCOLA THEATRE

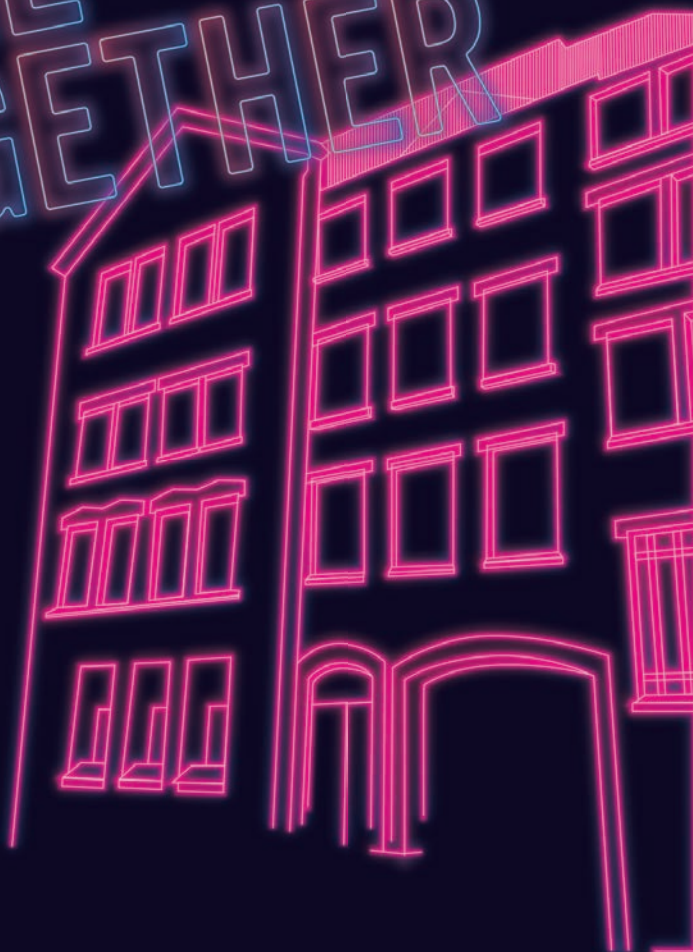
COME TOGETHER

Sexy intimate stories of becoming, persistence and survival. Critiquing work, asking questions about HOW and WHY. Elder histories, lion taming, transnational travels, migration stories. All Cats Are Beautiful. How we get by! Who gets to be respectable? Pride and prejudice. Tickets to the straight world, transactions along the way. Stretching the rubber band of gender.

Being who we ARE.

COMING TOGETHER.

an extravaganza of resistance...





ABOUT RESILIENT & RESISTING

Resilient & Resisting is a collaboration between groups and individuals, with artist/activist Jet Moon, produced with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arcola Participation. Fierce, intimate oral histories, collaborative stories, D.I.Y. research and interviews from people at the intersection of several kinds of marginalisation.

Find us online at resilientandresisting.org

Arcola Participation is Arcola's community, talent development, youth and programme. We are committed to challenging assumptions around who theatre belongs to and who has a right to speak, while providing opportunities to learn, train and perform under the guidance of world-class artists. We aim to deliver high quality productions that resonate both locally and globally, whilst maintaining Arcola's welcoming and inclusive ethos.

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Produced
with support
from Arcola
Participation

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This event is a collaboration between
a variety of groups and Resilient and Resisting.

COME TOGETHER

AN EXTRAVAGANZA OF RESISTANCE

Resilient and Resisting's day long take over at Arcola theatre.

Featuring contributions from radical history archives, the voices of direct action groups, and of course our own stories of fighting stigma and creating social change. Starting at:

- 12pm with The Travelling Archive
- 2pm Direct Action Groups panel discussion
- 4pm food
- 6pm Grand Performance

Travelling archive: Bishopsgate Institute and MayDay Rooms bring the archive to you. Peruse and discuss artefacts and articles of radical history, Workshop on DIY documentation.

Panel discussion: Direct action, fighting stigma and making social change, featuring speakers from: The Renters Union, Xtalk, English Collective of Prostitutes, Trans Liberation Assembly, Disabled People Against Cuts, Mental Health Resistance Network.

Intermission/food: Because we have to keep our strength up!

Evening performance/reading - stories of Resilience and resistance!

With swoosh, glitter and song. Sexy intimate stories of becoming, persistence and survival. Critiquing work, asking questions about HOW and why. Elder histories, lion taming, transnational travels, migration stories. All Cats Are Beautiful. How we get by! Who gets to be respectable? Pride and prejudice. Tickets to the straight world, transactions along the way. Stretching the rubber band of gender, being who we ARE. Coming together. Performance will be captioned.

DECRIM - PROTEST SONG

It's time to Decriminalise...
Sex Work!

It's time to Decriminalise...
Sex Work!

We're fighting for our lives
It's time to Decriminalise
It's time to Decriminalise...
Sex Work!

Our work is not a crime
Decriminalise
Sex work is not a crime
Decriminalise

The right to organise
The right to advertise
It's time to decriminalise...
Sex Work!

Safe to work together or alone
To share workspaces or at home
On the streets and in the brothels
Online or in hotel
We are fighting for our rights!
Decriminalise!

(to the tune of
'She'll be coming around the
mountain when she comes')



IN THE CIRCUS

There's a documented history of EDS*, you can see it, trace it through photographs of the old sideshow traditions of the circus, all of those people who lived in freak-shows or made their living as contortionists. You know those pictures of people 'The elastic man' where they can stretch their skin right out from their neck, that's type one EDS. (*EDS: Ehlers-Danlos syndrome)

Or you see a particular type of back bend and think, a person without EDS couldn't do that.

Those entire contortionist families who are part of a circus: that's EDS. So there's a whole invisible, yet visible history of peoples survival, it's there if you know what you are looking for.

There's a common thread of EDS in my family, as it's hereditary. I can see who has passed it down, tho it's not talked about.

It's hidden in plain sight. I can also see that there's a hidden history of sex work in my family, people doing this kind of work to get by. My great grandma, we were all told that she was an opera singer back in the days of music hall. Except there are no records of an opera singer by that name, in those days theatrical terms were used to describe another type of work: 'an opera singer', 'a dancer', 'an entertainer', 'an actress'.

Sex work. What I would say about that now is different from what I would have said ten years ago when I started out.

I used to be very into telling that story where sex work is all about my agency, an expression of who I am and my sexuality. It's just getting by isn't it, that's what it is for me. I'm just so bored with it. I can't be bothered to go through all of the palaver of finding new clients, all the vetting and screening and putting up with dick heads and wankers. I wish I could just go back to brothel work, finding somewhere where I can just go and work for one day of the week and walk away with a wad of cash. It's a head fuck working with these well off clients anyway, all their delicate sensibilities.

With a brothel all I have to do is go there and fuck who ever walks through the door. In those places mostly it's just ordinary guys, brickie's, labourers, taxi drivers, workers. Usually there is a way to get on with most of

them. That skill of watching some one walk through the door, having to assess in a matter of seconds flat what they were looking for: who I could be to them. At the end of the night I would feel like a champion, I felt invincible, I felt like *Rarrr*! like I had just wrestled 20 lions and won.

**Middle class work,
mostly it's a lot of
sitting and standing
still for long periods of
time. I can do that for
about two or three days
before it starts to make
me unwell.**

Before muscles and internal organs begin to twist in ways they shouldn't or there is the chance of a dislocated joint or an injury from the sheer un-naturalness of those demands. I need to move.

**I get a lot of freedom
through my work. I
might not always make
a lot of money, but
I have TIME.**

Time to focus, time to think, time to rest when I need to, time to spend with the people I care about and to go where I want to. Time to take care of my health, time to prepare a special diet that helps me to stay well, that takes a lot of time. I can't do those things if I am always occupied with working these shitty 'respectable' jobs. What is it that people are actually doing anyway? Sitting in an office, moving around scraps of digital paper, filling up the world with more bullshit.

It's ditch digging for white collar workers.

With my Anarchist crew. I love doing naughty things and I love running away from the police, it's a right laugh. The real giggle is that with all this uproar about Brexit and Corbyn, all of the struggle and chaos of in fighting. It's those naughty Anarchists with their jokey pranksterish, badly behaved ways that has managed to raise the profile of some of the really serious issues. The infamous paint bombings of hipster cafes in Brick lane, The stuff around the 'Ripper Museum' in Whitechapel and also the noise parades in Soho and Whitechapel, we've got these issues up and out there to the point where people are seeing and reading about them, seeing what the effects of gentrification and beating down the poor are. Every demonstration I go to lately, there's statements from the organisers saying they don't support any kind of violent direct action. As far as I know no-one was even considering that anyway. But what the fuck is that about? We are in a system that IS doing violence to us everyday.

There's a thing about pain and memory, there are the times when you are in pain, when it's impossible to forget. Then there is the time after that when you are not in pain, when it's very hard to remember exactly what that pain felt like. Somehow within us we have a mechanism for forgetting. I can't remember having a time before illness, this wasn't something I 'got' or something that happened to me, it's always been there in my earliest memories. My body moves and behaves differently because of this, that also forms how I think and how I experience the world.

All of us in my crew we went to an art gallery together, in a building where a lot of us used to squat. One of our mates was doing his cabaret show there. This place which used to be ours, is now full of hipster wankers being 'edgy'. All through the show our mate was taking the piss out of them but the audience didn't quite know what to make of it. It's satire and he is sending himself up as much as the audience, so I don't think the audience were sure if they were really being insulted or not. We were all up at the front cheering him on, and at the end of the show he sang the song 'You're all a bunch of cunts'. We all joined in. At that point it became obvious, we really did hate them.

*EDS: Ehlers-Danlos syndromes

INTIMATE PLEASURE

I wish i could just go home but I'm not ready to go home yet.

Oh, but London! This city takes so much more than it gives!

With going home it's complicated, I don't know how to be around my family anymore. If I try to talk about what happened, then it is me making a problem.

I suppose I can go home when my grandparents are dead, maybe that sounds like a harsh thing to say but that's when I will feel that it is all over, that I am finally free. My house I have there, I bought it before the crash. I will be paying that mortgage until I am 65! But back then I was able to get a mortgage to buy a house without any deposit or savings. That house, it was the first time I ever had a place to myself, where I didn't have to do anything for anyone else.

I laughed a lot and I think that is in the energy of the house, I want to be able to share that with others. In the last ten years if I counted, I've had more than 40 jobs. All of them casual, and a lot of those I got fired from for being unreliable. It's not so easy to be reliable for these jobs where you don't know from one day to the next if there will be work, or where it will be.

Regular work, I tell you one thing, with my clients' they are not always nice, often they can be disgusting or difficult, but I can deal with that. But they don't yell at me.

In my straight jobs, those situations where I was the 'free' worker, I never had a situation where they didn't yell at me.

This was the price of having a job, that they are actually allowed to yell at me, to bully me and tell me what to do. I am supposed to act as if I am grateful for the job and the opportunity for them to treat me like shit.

Really the only thing I like about sex work is being able to organise my own time.

That I don't have to go and spend 8 hours a day five days a week in some job. At least with sex work I can decide to go somewhere else or decide not to go, as long as I have the money for the rent that is. Housing, it's so expensive just to have a roof to live under, how can it fucking cost so much? Most of my life, that is once I left my family home, I lived in collectively with others.

Apart from the money I believe in the politics of that. Except it's not always like that, there is the work of it. Because in living together there is always the division of chores, of cooking, cleaning, organising the buying food, of peace keeping, of cleaning up other

peoples mess. And if you are for some reason not able to do that work, then you are seen as somehow less part of the group, less contributing to the house.

Living alone, sometimes people just need to be alone, to have a space for themselves. Sometimes it is necessary to find your own space just to be able to think and figure things out!

Feeling ready to go into past trauma, to fall apart, sometimes it takes years to be ready, and then there is the question of how to function, how to survive when that is happening. I realised I was telling the same fragments of stories over and over again to friends, and I was aware that there were gaps, things I was not telling or where I didn't even know what happened. I wanted to know my own story and to try to make sense of that.

Except to have this space, to live alone, I have to work so much and have clients in my house all of the time. They are always asking questions, so many questions, they want to know all about you, that you should tell them all of your secrets, so they can know you. They ask if you are ill, are you on drugs, what happened in your past that brought you to doing this for a job?

They want their own perfect picture of the 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl'. If you were really sick they wouldn't notice it.

That's the thing with sex work, it's isolating. If you are not part of that visible sex workers community, then how do you find other sex workers?

Activism in this sex worker scene, OMG. I'm afraid I can't even go into those spaces anymore, because there is so much policing of what other people say. I have enough anxiety as it is without wondering if I will accidentally do or say the wrong thing. I

wonder about that. How is it that in these open political spaces, which are suppose to be inclusive, that so many times it is someone with a university degree telling others how to speak? Or always those with English as a first language picking over every single word that is said? Where is the space to make mistakes and learn? Where is the room to actually find out what we need to know? I'm sick of it!

I try to offer myself to go past isolation, to be there to support. I got approached by a couple of women back home who want to start some sort of sex workers project, because right now there isn't anything.

It's been such a long time since I had sex in my own language, to fuck in the language that is my mother tongue, to hear the words of what we will do with each other or to say the names of parts of the body, I almost forgot how it feels. It's been years.

Now in my life on all levels, I can't deal with peoples stupid questions and bigotry anymore, I got too tired for that. I won't tolerate that anymore.

**Freedom? What is that?
I have never been free.
What does that even look like? I have always had to make money, to do what I am told, to find the ways to have basic things.**

That is not freedom. Everyone one has the right to housing, to have food, shelter, health care, because that is what it takes to live!

And everybody has the right to live!

LIVERISH

I've taken a lot of drugs in my time, truck loads, shed loads. Drugs I didn't even know the names of, great drugs, shit drugs. That was a long time ago, I've been in recovery for decades now.

I guess that makes me one of the 'good' addicts, one of the acceptable ones, but I'm not interested in telling that kind of story.

I never paid for any of the drugs I took, I fucked a lot of people and I scammed a lot of doctors. Like they say, sometimes the free things are the most expensive. My past has meant I have a complex relationship with the medical establishment.

The town I lived in 70% of IV drug users were infected with HCV, that's the Hepatitis C virus, this was in a time before needle exchanged existed.

The Philippines are killing their Junkies, execution squads in the streets. Australia are trying to bring in drug testing for people on benefits. Are they going to test for street drugs? Or for the ones legally prescribed, and that the government profit from? Exhaustion, those times when I can't get out of bed. I hate resting. Then there are the times when I think I am well. I forget I'm ill.

Sometimes that feeling can last for weeks! I run around doing things, making up for lost time. I start to feel guilty for daring to say I was disabled. What the fuck was I thinking? Was I trying to make people feel sorry for me? Then the crash comes. Sometimes it is so subtle, like feeling the snapping of a hair, but the good times are over.

People say 'You're so lucky, I'd love to spend the day in bed'. They don't understand. Motherfuckers. It's not possible to explain fatigue to people who never had it. They think you're 'a bit tired'. No, I can't get up.

What I want, desperately, more than anything else, is to be up and about. There is so much that needs to be done! Instead I lay here, reminding myself to breath, because my chest feels so heavy.

I hate asking for help, I feel ashamed.

They say the liver is the seat of anger in the body.

Yes, I'm angry, I'm angry about a lot of things. I am RAGING at the injustice of this world. All the times I've dreamed about 'What I would do if I was well'. The fact is, I still did a lot! Precarious work, the extreme sport of our times. I didn't 'decide' to become a sex worker, I got fired, I needed a job. I thought maybe I had some transferable skills.

In reality I knew nothing about the sex industry, but sex work gave me a way to survive when I was ill.

Most of the time I could still manage to sit up, put on some make up and a slutty outfit, get to the end of my bed and turn on my cam. With lot of make up and good lighting, there you have it: Hey presto! Instant wellness! On my side of the screen I perform being well, being sexy, being straight, pretending to be a woman.

On the other side of the screen my clients want to talk about their crossdressing fantasies, being forced into homosexuality, transgressing the traditional masculinity they feel trapped by.

How much they want to be my Whore. It's a funny old world. Sex work meant I was able to pay the rent, eat, make my bills, I was even able to support a partner for a while. But I was very isolated, most people don't get how isolating sex work can be. Sex work has been good to me, tho I could do without the legal bullshit and how I often lie about what

I do for a living. Doctors told me so many lies about my health. The biggest lie of all was pretending that they even KNEW what the fuck they were talking about. I got turned down for treatment on the NHS, they said I wasn't sick enough, what that means is, I wasn't dying from end stage liver disease.

The liver consultants at the hospital would laugh at me when I complained of fatigue, like I was a fucking princess who didn't I know what being really sick was all about. When I begged for treatment the doctors told me 'What ever it is that is wrong with you, it's not Hepatitis C.' The first available treatments for Hep C were poisonous and grim: injecting yourself everyday, for six months with shitty drugs that made you sick as a dog, and still might not cure you. When the new treatments started to appear I was very excited. Except Big Pharma are making a massive profit out of illness. It costs \$80,000 for a 12 week treatment in the U.S. £35,000 in the UK. That's about £400 a pill, this shit better be good right?

The buyers clubs, they bring in and distribute the cheaper generic drugs from India or Pakistan, to those who need them. Buying Hep C treatment was the most expensive drug deal I've ever done. I joined a group on the internet to find out more information. A stranger messaged me, saying me he could get the new drugs to me within ten days. I'm used to talking to strange dudes on the internet but usually they pay by the minute. I was suspicious, it had to be a scam. We talked for a while and he turned out to be for real. That was my big drug deal on the internet, pressing a button, sending £950 to a stranger, crossing my fingers and hoping.

All the activism I've done, blockades I've been part of, immigration detention centres I've camped outside or visited inside, people I've campaigned for, demonstrations I've walked on, fields I've stood in, police horses I've been trampled by, cops I've fought with.

When I found I wasn't able to go on demonstrations any more, when I didn't have the energy to be out in public, some people would ask: 'What does it feel like not to be an activist anymore?' because that is the picture of activism most people are familiar with.

Who knew that 'Fighting the power' would include fighting for my own medical treatment?

CHANT

When will you pay me?
Say the bells at Old Bailey.

When I grow rich,
Say the bells at Shoreditch.

When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.

I do not know,
Says the great bell at Bow.

Sick Fuck
Sick
Sick Fuck
FUCKS Sick
Sick Fuck
Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
SICK
Sick Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
Fucks Sick
FUCKS Sick

[illegible]

TRIBE

I grew up in a small town outside of London, the town itself is quite well off, posh, very conservative. On the edge of that town are a couple of estates, set apart from the town, that's where I come from.

The estates have their own rules and ways of being, everyone knows everyone else. It's very working class, there's a lot of organised crime. There weren't any visible gay people.

Growing up with my mates, I never felt different. I was aware of my sexuality very early on, from the age of four. I didn't have a word for it, but I knew I liked girls and I liked boys. I must have had pretty good self esteem, I didn't feel anything was wrong with me, I thought everyone felt the same but that it was the rules, you just didn't do it.

I never spoke about fancying men. Among my mates there was a lot of homophobic talk. It was clear that being gay was one of the worst things that you could be.

That it was unnatural and sick and not to be stood for, specifically gay males. You had to be disgusted and repulsed by that and seen to be doing so.

I never understood why.

We were all part of this hyper masculine world. There was a lot of ingrained misogyny and I was a part of that, how I behaved, how I was in my relationships with women.

Being a man was all about being physically strong, not showing emotions, being hard, and fighting. Fighting was a big part of it. It was an inflated school playground idea of masculinity.

I always had female partners, one after the other without any gaps. I pushed other thoughts and fantasies away thinking I was 'just a little bit gay'. From the time I was a teenager I always wanted to move to London. The atmosphere was different, I wouldn't even have known what the word liberal meant then, but I felt diversity. I wanted to get away from that small town mentality, I moved to London when I was 19. We were punks and that, I was involved in a lot of underground subcultures, difference was really accepted but gay people were still kind of separate. When my relationship at the time ended I decided to take some time to think.

One day I had a fantasy about a man that was so intense, that I knew this was something I had to act on. I realised I hadn't done anything before out of fear. It took me a long time to find what I wanted. What I was interested in was a craggy, older, rough looking, cocky kind of man. At the time that wasn't easy to find, or I might come across some one who looked like that and then when they spoke they would be 'Oh hello, darling', very camp. I suppose I was prejudiced. I've done a lot of work on my attitudes over the years. Anyway I found what I was looking for and it was amazing. I realised my gayness was way more than %10, it was more like 50/50 and that was subject to change.

There were times when I felt really gay, times when I was interested in women.

Sometimes that whole cycle could take place over years.

The Hoist, I'm so sad that place is gone. The space was incredible, the whole way it was set up, all of it was around men having sex with other men. I remember driving past seeing builders carrying in plasterboard to redo the interior, it broke my heart. We had a few mixed nights, but mostly full on hard gay male sex. Naked night: 400 naked gay men going at it full on. Fisting nights. Mares and Stallions, men being lead around with bags over their heads, down a line of men inspecting them. It was a totally free space, taking away all the rules of polite society. I heard about different places out in the suburbs closing down, now in the centre of London we've lost our spaces too.

My involvement with the traveller scene and the free party movement, was before I came out. The traveller scene was quite closed, it was people who had been born in that life, who grew up in it. Travelling from festival to festival, people who lived in horse drawn communities and all that. When Rave music started then it changed things, people in the traveller communities were holding these parties outside of the towns and other people were turning up. When 'E's' started happening, that and the music, people

could go to these places and party for days. Huge crowds were turning up and the traveller people were realising that they were changing something, that something was happening. It was completely revolutionary, it was rebel music. It also meant that a lot of people from outside were joining what were previously closed communities. I didn't have an experience with Homophobia in that scene, the ethos was about how we were all coming together. Spiral tribe became quite a big thing, known by the media and the powers that be were frightened of us.

The fact that people were stepping outside of their normal programming, that people were realising the world is fucked.

That there's a load of Toff's trying to tell us what to do, the money is going up and we're just the suckers on the plantation. Everything became very clear. The authorities decided to stop it. Mid party you'd be surrounded by cops, unmarked paramilitary support units, they would beat us, batter us and they would take everything. Every flyer, every bit of art work, which had a lot of symbolism and meaning, all our musical instruments, all our history if you like. They would take all of it. So we would go back to a bit of squatted land and build it back up again, and then the police would come and take it away again. With the ravers, we would just say there's a five pound donation, so we can pay for the replacing the rig. You'd have the money right away cos the ravers wanted us. But it became so barbaric on the part of the police, nothing was in the news about what was happening.

We were arrested and went to court, it cost millions but because of the fact that we got off, they changed the law. The repetitive beats law was a way of making rave music illegal. What had been a utopian vibe about a new tomorrow, where everyone can come together was corrupted. We became hardened, the whole scene became harder, the music changed to reflect that and a lot of people couldn't come anymore. That arbitrary law used in a discriminatory fashion, it put a fizzle on the sizzle.

BOUDICA

**Gender Queer Femme,
what is that? I get
confused, I don't know
what to say, because now
people say non-binary.**

Back when I started thinking about this stuff, that term didn't exist, so I said 'Gender Queer'. More people are coming out and the idea that there are other kinds of gender has become much more well known. I constantly question my gender, or if I'm using the right words. I feel kind of invisible, isolated, as if I've gone out of date. Before that I was still invisible but in a different way, because I'm Femme. But at the end of the day, no matter how many times I ask myself, I'm not 'one or the other'.

Imagine a man in a dress, that's the closest I can come to describing myself, usually most people don't see it, they don't get that I'm trans. When I first started to think about dressing in overtly feminine clothing, I didn't know how to do it. This body, it doesn't quite fit, what I have here doesn't match with how I see myself in my head, but I've thought about all the options, taking testosterone or having surgery, and that doesn't fit either.

If I did those things I'd still be me, just in another kind of body that doesn't fit. Over time I've given up on giving a shit about how other people see me or what they think of me. This is me, take it or leave it.

How I imagine my body is different from what's visible. There's times laying in bed that I can feel I have a nice fat cock laying there against my thigh. It's all in my head, I can do and be anything. It's like being in this (motorised) chair, this is a part of my body, this helps me do things I couldn't so otherwise.

Fuck this chair has meant so much, for the first time in years I started to go out. The chair has changed so much about what I'm able to do and how I see myself.

**When I fight against my
body that's when I'm
fucked, when I surrender
that's when things
become manageable.**

When I listen and respect my limits, when I use the tools that I have available to me, when I use my chair, use my stick, use my P.A., that's when things get better for me.

Which is the exact opposite of all the things that the government and people who aren't even sick keep telling us: The endless urging from non-crip people to fight harder, try harder, that actually makes things worse.

Yes there's a difference between what my body can do and what I want to be able to do. Illness makes limits.

Yeah, there are times I'm frustrated, but I don't want to complain too much about this casing, this body. I'm pretty grateful for all it has carried me through. It's a good casing really, it does a lot of the stuff that its supposed to do.

Going out on the BDSM scene for the first time I was nervous. I remember the first time I ever went into a play space, of course hardly any of them are accessible, but I found one. The minute I entered that space a male sub fell to his knees in front of me and asked if he could kiss my toes. I thought 'Well, Hello!'.

I was wearing an amazing pair of silver stiletto platform shoes but I also wondered if he was just a 'Devotee'. You know, those people who exist on the crip scene, who treat us like a fetish - a chaser - I didn't want that.

But it seemed like he was for real, I'm up for that, I like meeting new people. Like I said there are hardly any spaces which are accessible, so I don't go out much.

There is one particular venue I like where they have a huge Roisey rack where you can position the person you are playing laid out horizontally and then get up on the rig yourself, there are all sorts of ropes and supports you can hold onto.

People say to me 'You've got a really interesting playing style', but that's just how I can do it, otherwise I wouldn't be able to stay standing up! Activism is everything to me, that's how I describe myself, I'm an activist, that's what I do.

I don't see myself so much as an entertainer or a performer, that's just the delivery method. 'Not Dead Yet', that's been a really huge part of my campaigning and DAN: the Disability Action Network, especially fighting against this Assisted Dying bill in Parliament. For fucks sake, we don't want assisted dying, we want assisted living!! I'm out there on the streets, as long as they can wheel me out there, I will be there.

The chair can be useful in a street protest, I can manoeuvre myself between more able, bodies and the cops. So I make sure to use that technique when I can, the chair is a pretty good barricade. When my daughter was born she was really ill, the doctors assumed the problem was developmental, they didn't even do any tests to see if it was an infection. They just left her. When the Doctors thought they knew what was wrong with her, they acted all sad, like she was already dead. That's when I began to wake up as an activist, to realise that it's really difficult for disabled people to come into this world and survive.

Even if you manage to get here alive, there's no place for us, we are not even supposed to survive.

I was supposed to start grieving because she was being left to die, because it was probably better if she did.

With a little baby that small, if they have an infection it doesn't take long before there can be lasting effects, but they weren't doing anything. Her belly button was green! I asked the nurse 'Is it supposed to be like that, look, she is green!'. Then they took notice, the nurse realised what was wrong, they gave my daughter medicine and she is still here with us 20 years later. That was the beginning for me, thank you my darling daughter for waking me up and showing me the way. That was how I became a disability rights activist, long before I got ill, long before anything happened to my body, because my daughter showed me how hard you have to fight to even be allowed to stay here.

A LIONESS

My earliest memories? My earliest memory is of my beautiful mother who I adore and the colour violet all around, violet everywhere, surrounding me. Another is age three, putting on a dress and running out the door. I was missing for hours. Everyone was out in the streets looking for me, searching for a little boy. They couldn't find me anywhere, then an old woman said, 'Oh, but there was a little girl, I saw a little girl go that way.'

The beginning of my difference, my quirkiness, or even my pain if you like began at age 5. At the age of 5 I was closer to my older sister than my brothers, I was the youngest. I didn't like to play football, I didn't like to climb trees. My sister always wanted a younger sister, she used to tell me 'Pray to God to become a girl, so we can be Sisters.'

We played with our dolls. I had my Barbie or was is Cindy? The one with the fringe. And I loved Wonder Woman and The Bionic Woman.

I loved all those strong powerful woman, with beautiful make up.

I used to tie t-shirts on my head so it was like a long hair, and another around my shoulders like a cape, then jump from the living room table shouting 'Wonder woman'.

Then somebody said to me 'Take that thing off your head, stop behaving like that, stop walking like that. Boys don't do that. Stop being like a girl!' That's the first time I remember feeling humiliated. I felt shame. I had a very fortunate upbringing in the beginning, I was born in Paris and raised in Italy. We had a big household, with lot of people to help us, integrated into the household like an extended family.

When the war in East Africa happened we had to leave Italy and go to Egypt. We went from living in a large home to all of us fitting into a two bedroom flat. This was not the Egypt that tourists know, it was the real Egypt. That was also the first time I was molested. This guy took me, I didn't want to go with him. He kissed me and put his tongue in my mouth, that was the most disgusting thing. I remember washing my face over and over again, trying to get rid of that feeling. Eventually we went to the South of France as refugees. Starting school there, I fought countless times. Going out in the world I had to fight like a Lioness.

I would fight like a cat. I would bite scratch, I didn't care, that was how I defended myself. Fear, pride, adrenaline, I did what I did. Again it was all to do with my colour. I would get so angry.

I would fight tooth and nail, I would battle with those who tried to put me down, I was not taking it.

Oh I would fly into such rages. There was so much anger inside me. The people left me alone after a while because I was a Lioness. I started to have my first experiences with sex at 14, it was the same as before, I felt disgusted, but it became a routine. I would run away from home and sleep with older guys. I think I've always been looking for that Daddy figure. But also there has been always that thing where I felt sex wasn't about me, I felt a lot of shame and pain and anger. Because I felt there was something shameful about me, I started to keep secrets. Not being honest was a way of protecting myself. I didn't want to reveal things about myself in case it was considered shameful. I didn't want to bring shame into my family. I found the gay scene, it was like I arrived. I completely blanked my family for a whole year, even leaving that close bond with my mum that none of my other siblings had. Prostitution, I started at the age of 20, a guy I was dating he pimped me out. He said 'Oh, you can go to Porte Dauphine, you can work there.' I went there with another guy, I had my first few clients and I thought, 'This is fantastic'. I was going there for a whole summer and I loved it. I tell you why I loved it: it was outside, it was in a beautiful place, it was the cars, the people, the transsexuals, the prostitutes, the gigolos, the dealers. All of these people, I was drawn to them. I didn't have any embarrassment around them, they made me feel at home, they embraced me.

That summer was amazing. I met many many people and some nights we would talk, talk talk, till the sun came up. Those deep encounters, they shaped me and made me love life more, those beautiful people made me feel there was a way out.

Those prostitutes were poets, nurses, mothers, all kinds of people.

It was very dangerous as well, I'm lucky that I haven't been killed, some times people were disappearing. You know, 'Where is Jon Francois?' 'Oh he went into the woods and we haven't found him since.' But I wasn't scared, I was excited. I wasn't excited because of the danger, I was excited because there was something else, a kind of life I could relate to. Struggles with mental health, gender, sexuality. Experiences of violence, fear, sexual abuse. Prostitution, rejection from society, family, the LGBT community, the black community, the Muslim community, gay Community, trans community. Racism, homophobia, being disowned, being an outcast. I subscribe to all of the above.

All of the things we take inside that turn to anger. It must come out, no matter what, it has to come out, it must find a way out. Or otherwise all that shit is going to be in there and it will destroy you. Once I started to be me, that's when the anger subsided. Being me with my clothing, with my not specified gender, I feel more relaxed. It doesn't mean I don't get scared. Sometimes I do get scared, when I get looks on the underground or whatever, but I've got nothing to hide, I expose who I am, I'm stronger for it. Sometimes I take my bravery as irrelevant, I had to be brave all my life, that's just the way it is. My bravery is so inbuilt, I almost forget about it. I don't see it.

Perhaps I should honour it more. I'm one of those people who think you just have to get on with it. I learned a lot through my mistakes, I'm less defensive, less with a chip on my shoulder. I don't believe in being constantly chronically angry, but I do believe that when you have had enough you have the right to expose your anger, without hurting people. My anger comes when I feel cheated, ostracised, less than or less of a human, when I think people think they are better than me. I want every one to feel love. I searched for joy for all my life.

All the things that bring me JOY are all the things I used to feel ashamed of. Everything that could bring me happiness was in front of me the whole time. I don't feel shame anymore.

(there is no) WHY?

It started after watching some porn and I had just cum like a train. Then afterwards, I started to not like myself, to spiral into feeling absolute horror and shame. To thinking maybe I'm really not ok. Maybe there is something genuinely wrong with me, that I find the fucked up shit that I just watched sexy. What does that say about me as a person?

All of those questions, trying to find the justification for an orgasm. You know what, I've thought about this A LOT and I've come to a very important conclusion. I just like a lot of fucked up shit.

I'm into the ugly side of BDSM, the grotesque. The scary fucked up shit, that is uncomfortable and hard to look at. That pushes all my buttons, that literally takes my breath away and leaves me shaking and crying on the floor. Apparently, that's a cause for concern. A lot of the time it's hard to talk about the stuff I am into even in kink circles. I see that look on my friends faces, bless them. Shock or revulsion.

They worry that maybe everything I do is because of TRAUMA. They feel they have to ask 'But are you really ok?' Lot's of people when I have explained BDSM to them in the past have said 'Oh yes, it makes so much sense. If you've had your control taken away from you by some one else, of course finding a way to be in control feels safe, and that's a really positive way to access your sexuality.'

And of course everyone would choose to be in control, right?

In their minds when they picture what I do, I'm wearing a leather catsuit, the whole 'Mistress Whiplash' super cliché. Don't get me wrong, I would ROCK that leather catsuit. If you want to get together and buy me one, go right ahead.

They imagine me as this really austere woman walking into a room and going 'You will PAY for the sins that were done to me!' Spanking people on the bottom for half an hour, and therefore I'm never going to be sad about being raped anymore.

OMG, fucking SERIOUSLY. 'Please let me heal your trauma by taking a spanking' There's an idea that deserves to have the shit monetised out of it, maybe I should go ahead and set up that website!

This idea that everything is related to trauma. How my personality formed, where my behaviours come from, how I react to situations, who I'm attracted to, what I am into sexually. That everything I like, everything I can ever be, will always be tied to 'The Things That Happened A Long Time Ago'.

I cannot let what people did a long time, be the sum of my existence, everything about me, all my motivations.

It can't be. I won't allow that. I WON'T LET THAT BE all that I am. Also I refuse to let my sapphic inclinations be reduced to a safe option, women are delicious. There's a thing about being labelled as mad, once that single fact about you is known, then it defines everything a person thinks about you from then on.

When I go to the Drs and sit down in front of my GP, I see that look on their face as the warning pops up on their screen. A warning about me. 'This patient has a history of psychosis and hospitalisation.' They look at me as if an alarm has just gone off, as if a siren is sounding. 'Danger, danger, MAD person in the building.' It's been 8 years since I was last hospitalised.

Once you have a serious mental health diagnosis you are told, you no longer know what is best for yourself, or what your limits are. You are no longer a reliable source of information. I've been sectioned 4 times, or is it five? It's hard to get over the idea that, I am not trustworthy, I am not safe. To learn to trust my autonomy and my own mind. Being able to consent, that's what it is, isn't it? To be trustworthy and safe. It was only through doing peer work that I realised how trustworthy I was, how much agency and value I had.

After being very unwell for many years, I started volunteering in peer service delivery, and once I was trained, I trained other people.

Being kicked off DLA and ESA meant that I lost %70 of my income, in an interview that lasted ten minutes. I went from from barely having worked in ten years, to suddenly needing to get a full time job. I didn't want to but if I didn't, I was going to lose my house. I went from a small voluntary role, to being a full time manager.

I worked managing highly skilled volunteers who know the waiting lists are too long for people to get care otherwise. Services have been cut back so severely, local authorities and government dump the load on volunteers, and there is a machiavellian level of exploitation in that.

Peer support, my experience of that was real love and real community, strangers coming together and building these relationships of caring. But to do that work, without pay, without any surrounding care to refer to. It has a cost, we lose people, people die. I lasted four months before I had a break down.

I'm working less these days, it helps. I have time to do things for myself, to slow down, to hang out with my friends. I'm busy anyway, but if I can spend less time working a job, then I cope better.

The things I like to do in my spare time: rape play, Incest play, chem sex, forced drowning, hanging, deep humiliation, ultra violence. Those dangerous visceral things that I find so compelling. Other people find it hard to understand. They don't see the level of connection, the hotness and intimacy.

I could have spent my whole life trying to move into the beige, trying to move into the pretty. What I know is that when I have a date in a hotel room, I get really excited, because hotel rooms have baths and baths mean drowning. It also means I can do piss play and it gives my house mates a break from the screaming. Being under water, being held down, being soaked in piss, being slapped till I cry. I want to fight, to struggle, to feel utterly shit scared.

Because it's wonderful.

PERFECTLY CONTAINED

From early on I was a freak, this was back in Sixty Six, we were all growing our hair long and saying 'We're going to make a new world.' Alcohol wasn't very much part of that, though other things were.

Our social spaces were peoples kitchens. In each others houses, sitting around the kitchen table, cooking, entertaining. In those days you didn't ring the front door bell, you just went around the back and came into the kitchen. As more of us had kids, there were more prams, but we were still freaks, talking whatever jollity, cynical talk of governments and whatever else. Once I moved to London things were different. There weren't so many casual knocks on the kitchen door, but there were some spectacular squat locations, the Bank of Scotland for one.

I was presenting as a girly man in those days, in a relationship with a strong woman, that was my little micro society. I was isolated from groups of queer people.

As artists we were proud freaks, there was active alienation on our part. People would say to us, 'You're strange' and we would reply 'Yes we are.' We didn't see any problem with that.

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Sex has always been important to me, from a very early age when I first realised I could have those feelings. Sexuality was the engine that drove my self understanding and experience. Romantic love was the pinnacle of all that. When I'm not in a relationship I go from lonely to solitary, when I'm solitary I'm ok. I've always been an artist, that's how I work things out, I draw or paint or write or take pictures. My focus was doing my own thing, that's the identity of a solitary person.

I came to community organising late, it started off with befriending people in chat rooms, some more and some less sexual, all of them subject to trolls.

We would just bore the trolls to death, all of us banding together. People started recommending others to me who needed to be introduced to real life networks. That was my first introduction to making connections socially for people.

Each thing that made other people feel better was a reward in itself.

With training to be a counsellor, I came out as trans to my tutor at the interview. I was taking a bit of a risk, but it was also a situation where I thought, 'Well if they don't want me, then I don't want them'. Everyone training knew how you were supposed to behave as a counsellor. With my being trans they would all be 'Oh of course it's perfectly fine'. It was clear that it wasn't.

To graduate you have to do a certain number of volunteer hours, I kept going to placement interviews and I kept getting turned down.

Eventually we found out the problem. People interviewing for the volunteer places couldn't see anything else apart from my trans-ness. They thought people who came for counselling, wouldn't be able to focus on their problems, because I was trans. That the only thing there would be space for in the room was me being trans.

These days I work counselling transpeople and it is an honour to do so. Having said that transpeople are as varied as cis people.

Sexuality is not longer the force that drives my engine, it's not what gets me up in the morning (laughs), excuse the pun. There's a lot more energy to be part of my community and to be organising.

Setting up the Trans social group, it's lovely to see people come into the group and gain succour. Whatever speaker or discussion or set activity we have for that time, it's afterwards when we socialise. That's when you see people sitting and chatting, and that they truly are among friends, accepted in a way that they aren't outside.

It's so disappointing to see how the mainstream media have behaved in the last couple of years. It's no surprise that the Red Top newspapers behave as they do, shit is the only thing they know how to shovel. But the other papers, where you expect something a bit different, it's like being hit by a friend.

It feels a lot like when there was a movement to repeal section 28, and the papers were doing stories like 'Gay teachers are pedophiles' it's that ignorant. It's just a phase the media is going through... *laughs* that's what one says about one's children, isn't it.

My neighbours, the community where I live, I came out decades ago. I'm just here. I'm completely accepted.

My local news agent, the guy in the corner shop, he used to try making a few remarks, but we've worked it out over time. I might go in there and see a copy of The Times with a transphobic headline, but I don't get that from the guy behind the counter.

My neighbour, my great friend who lived across the road, an angry, feisty, shouty woman. We used to have great multicultural dinner parties, her and all of her upstairs neighbours, partners and friends. We would gather and cook and eat and drink together. She was so bossy, always telling me I was cutting the vegetables too small or something. Gosh I miss her now she has moved away. Yes, there can always be disagreements within communities.

Some people say there's a right and wrong way to be trans. There isn't a right and wrong way, to be anything, as long as that doesn't interfere with anyone else.

Things don't affect me as they once did when I was younger. I've been a child all my life, as are all artists. In my third age it feels as if I've come to some kind of maturity.

I have a more open view of gender. Transition for me wasn't like a big jump from very male presenting to very female presenting. I realise that's different from many people's experience. I managed to get through most of the eighties dressing in an ambiguous way, wearing leggings instead of trousers, and long jumpers. The jumpers would get longer and longer, more and more like a dress. When I transitioned it was as if I had been stretching a rubber band out of maleness, into femaleness, for a long time. Edging further and further out one little step at a time. So when I cut the rubber band, I was standing in exactly the same place but much more relaxed. I was still standing here, but without all the pressure of stretching that idea of gender anymore.

I was just here, being me.

THIRD SECTOR

When I was coming out in the 80's that was the same time as a lot of public health campaigns about AIDS, that did a lot to shape my identity as a gay man. In some ways it was great, because there were posters everywhere featuring gay men,

I never saw images of gay men put up openly in public before so that was really something. Except the men on these advertisements: were always very cleanly middle class, white and muscly like they had been to the gym a lot, depicted walking on a tropical beach somewhere holding hands, and that wasn't what I looked like.

The other thing was of course that these billboards were all about safer sex or getting tested, so at the end of the day the message was that if you were a gay man and you had sex, you were going to die!

A government can be completely conservative, but when something becomes a public health issue, for example in the case of HIV, then they have to do something and that's how things become included in policy.

The relationship between activism and how things get included at a government level is real, but there's also a process of co-option where the power gets taken out of people hands.

So on the one hand you have all of these glossy posters, the public health response to HIV, then on the other you have the grassroots activists like Act Up organising demos against pharmaceutical companies, lobbying for treatment, doing die ins and kiss in, and a bunch of anarchist punks running around graffiti-ing advertising billboards, all those 'happy hetero-couple' toothpaste advertisements and the like.

In London in the 80's there was a very active squatting movement, in Stoke Newington and Stamford hill there were there were entire estate blocks of squats and people were very organised. A lot of anarchists and every one was involved in different campaigns. Hackney council brought in a housing advisor Brindley Heaven to try and clear up the 'squatting problem'. We plastered the whole of Hackney with posters, every lamp post and wall had one of those posters that read 'Brindley Heaven, go to hell', and we even managed to occupy Hackney town Hall and issue our demands.

There was a massive push back against squatters and activism from the powers that be, Hackney council spent 3 million pounds evicting the Stamford Hill Estate squat, with a siege that lasted for three days.

How did I become a Social worker? Well I was in a seaside town and I met this guy in a public toilet. We messed about a bit and then we started talking. Then this guy gave me his card! It turned out that he was a Social Worker, doing sex education outreach! Seems he took his job quite literally.

He told me that I should get an education so I could make something of myself. After that I started to think, 'Well, if he can be a Social Worker, then why can't I?'. I did enrol at university, of course in those days you could go for free, so I could have an education.

Working in the third sector wasn't really about a political motivation, it was about having a meal ticket and paying the rent, while I plotted the revolution. A lot of people from different backgrounds work in the third sector, because they can. Those are the work places where they are protected against discrimination. That's why you see a very diverse workforce in the public sector, at least at the front line, because at the management level it is still mostly white men.

Coming out to my parents as having HIV was in a lot of ways easier than when I came out to them a couple of decades earlier as being gay. God, I remember telling my mum I was gay back in the 80's. They were pretty calm about the news that I was HIV +, It was me that had the big reaction!

My response was to go around telling absolutely everyone I knew, most of those people were part of the straight left activist community, many them would freak out and have huge reactions when I told them. Maybe that was a way of having control, being the educator. In social work there was a particular way that we would all work together.

You've got all these people in an office and it's natural that people talk to those around them, that they compare notes, swap contacts and give each other ideas for how to deal with situations. That also is a way to process the intensity of the work. When the government started to take apart the public sector, they sent in 'experts' to redesign the system.

Some management bod who had no idea would come and impose a structure that was supposed to make us more 'efficient'. Management destroyed the organic working culture we had. Let's face it social work is pretty intense, but it just became impossible.

When I got a job lecturing in a university I was amazed. Social work had become so pressured, so impossible. I felt guilty for leaving my colleagues, but in another way I thought I had it made. Me, lecturing in a

university! I could hardly believe it. It turned out to be an absolute nightmare, ridiculous work structures, psychopathic managers, and a completely capitalist model of squeezing its workers harder and harder.

The university feels like a money making machine, that is all it is, it's nothing to do with students or learning or people.

Work, what does that even mean? There are so many artificial separations in our lives between what is counted as work and what isn't work, all that really means is what is paid and unpaid.

The economy runs on unpaid and underpaid labour. If it wasn't for all the unpaid physical and emotional care work being done, no one would ever make in to their paid jobs in the first place.

If I didn't have to work for money? Wow, if I had that, well I then suppose then I would spend my time.... ha!... working.

I'd spend my time doing things that need to be done and that I have the skills for, I just want it to mean something. I've nothing against working, I've been an activist most of my life.

TYGERS OF WRATH GROUP CHORUS

'The tygers of wrath are wiser
than the horses of instruction.'
passionate, hungry and driven:
I was not easy to be around

to work with other people
you need forgiveness
In that pressure cooker,
we saw the worst of each other
and we continued,
friendship, mostly liking,
even loving each other

for the rest of my life that has given
me faith in human possibilities
an anchor and inspiration
for everything I've done since

Don't follow leaders.
Work for equality between people
in a group as well as the
world at large
Personal change is important
but hard

We are all full of contradictions and
difficulties encourage the best in
each other, not condemn the worst.

Political work calls for skills of
co-operation that have been trained
out of us with your heart set on
freedom and happiness
re-learn those skills

TEXT ADAPTED FROM THE SOURCE:

Online archive of East London Big Flame
[www.eastlondonbigflame.org.uk/
our-stories/tygers-wrath](http://www.eastlondonbigflame.org.uk/our-stories/tygers-wrath)

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- Xtalk
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- Trans Liberation Assembly
- Disabled People Against Cuts
- Mental Health Resistance Network

And everyone who shared their stories & energy with us.

Resilient and Resisting , *an oral history and collaborative story telling project.*