



this zine is about hope.

it's about how i hope i have made something better.

it's entirely about true stories of sexual and domestic violence.

*second edition, 2015
published by Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness
www.tangledwilderness.org*

ACRe Accountability Statement

(revised April 4, 2007)

ACRe would like to create a space in our physical location and in the work we do to make ourselves open to all our volunteers. We will not perpetuate systems of institutionalized dominance such as gender oppression, nationalism, racism, economic oppression, and rugged individualism, among others. We will resolve our problems within our own community without turning to agents of the state, such as the Raleigh police.

The ACRe Council will work to make the space physically accessible, alcohol-free, Spanish accessible, and affordable or as free as possible. The ACRe Council will also work to resolve any problems and/or complaints that come to their attention.

We expect people who sponsor events to keep in mind these stated goals as they plan their activities and events. Event organizers are responsible for making sure the space stays alcohol-free, relatively clean, and inviting to all people. When planning, organizers should consider if their event is alienating to marginalized groups and how this might negatively affect the work of ACRe.

We ask our volunteers and participants to respect each other and hold each other accountable. Violence and threats of violence are discouraged and considered a final option as a means of self-defense. Sexual violence of any kind will not be tolerated. In order to prevent these problems from happening, we must check each other on our language and attitudes. Macho, misogynistic, homophobic, white supremacist, xenophobic, condescending and disrespectful language can make already marginalized persons feel threatened and may prevent people from feeling safe at ACRe. Also, we expect our volunteers to treat our community space and resources with respect.

Anyone who has felt threatened, violated, and/or made uncomfortable by the actions of any person at the space should contact the ACRe Council. Two council members will work with the injured person to address their complaints against the perpetrator in order to achieve a satisfactory resolution. The ACRe Council will then enforce the final decision of the committee.

i. 23

on my birthday, the love of my life snuck me in to a building at his university to watch dirty dancing on a classroom projector. we held hands, giggled. i think it was raining. we chose a classroom on the second floor, two doors down the hall. someone left a poorly-written report on a desk. maybe english wasn't their first language. my baby gave a brief lecture on anarchism while i sat attentively as his student, volunteering to answer a question about consensus or black blocs or something. we turned the lights out and danced chest to chest while the opening credits rolled, mouthing the lyrics to "be my baby" centimeters from each others' faces. we kissed. we touched arms and held each other tight despite the discomfort of the desks. we kept kissing. we made out in the downstairs bathroom after the movie, and at his house, he put on records and we danced some more. he said i was good, but he's the one who spun me and held me over his head. the swazyze would have been proud. i haven't have many memories that have stayed so pure. it was utopic, which isn't a word, but it should be.

i was living at my dad's after my lease ran up in asheville. even when i was in high school, i had only stayed there once a week. it never felt like home, and after living in punk houses for years, the sterility was overbearing. at one point, i had friends over for brunch and my parents locked their bedroom door. they were unwelcoming at best, though we never fought. i spent my time at work, or trying to find a job after quitting the other two, and at my partner's house. on thursdays, i led a support group for teenagers going through domestic violence situations in their families. i smoked a lot of weed.

being in raleigh did me good, though. by february, i was beating the depression that had been bogging me down from a bad breakup six months prior. i was steady on a cocktail of name-brand drugs that cost me a quarter of my monthly income. i was enamored with this boy—an incredible one who never stopped smiling when i was around. and i had friends who made me happy. somehow, asheville didn't have shit on this place. surprises, surprises.

i think this past birthday was the best one i've had. the whole week went my way—laser tag, pizza, vegan cake, my ex visiting, fancy dinners, a pie auction, making out in a park, being totally in love. i wasn't sad! but i was worried that i would be. i asked all my friends where they were in life when they turned 23. one said he was working the graveyard shift at rosetta's and wasting away after a fucked up relationship. some

others were living in miami doing who knows what, working? another was attempting suicide. i think my brother was living with me and my mom. this age either wasn't noteworthy or was straight up miserable for everyone else. so far, i've been fine. but i reflect a lot. where is my life going? where did yours go?

you were so fucked up at my age.

i had birthday pizza at the same place i ate when i turned 16. my dad threw me a surprise party, but only knew my marching band friends. i was humiliated because some of my *real* friends worked there in the kitchen, and they saw me with a table of ten dweebazoids. i don't think they were your friends, but we ate there when i was 16, too. your sister and i were both vegan.

when i was 16, she was 17. her hair was bright red, and it would be months until i was allowed to dye mine. (it would be a form of redefinition for me after you broke my heart.) i loved her and i loved you, too. i was grateful you were my friends.

we met doing food not bombs when i was 15. i drove downtown with my best friend from school in his minivan every weekend to help cook. the hell did i know about cooking? but your sister was a culinary genius. she worked wonders while i chopped garlic and made shitty mashed potatoes. we shot the shit and joked, hailing anarchy and folk punk, becoming best friends. we were young and careless, even though you were seven years older.

i was jailbait.

i had a boyfriend and he and i lost our virginity that march. when he broke up with me, i flipped out. i remember yelling at him and sobbing on the back porch in the middle of the night. but then i was 16 and back on the scene.

when did i go to new york with you? you had a friend visiting from england that you met doing a study abroad. who the hell remembers where you went to college. you wanted to take him to the city. we stayed at your grandma's in new jersey and he grabbed my ass in the bathroom. but you had done that already when we stopped in philly on the way up, when we were the last ones awake at six in the morning, drunk and laying under a blanket on the floor next to your sister. in jersey, we made out on the couch and you fingered me. i thought it was funny that there was a nun sleeping in the room above us. i guess i still do.

what a stupid trip to new york. we just walked around manhattan. bo-ring. what came of it though, was that my sleepovers with your sister

became sleepovers with you. (you were out of college and living with your parents, too.)

i remember you dating some girl from your work when you and i started making out. we were all at your house once and you kept grabbing my ass even though she was there. she wore big pearl earrings and straightened her hair so i was extra jealous because she seemed awful. i hope you didn't treat her like she was. i also knew you had dated another friend from the collective, and that it went bad. i didn't know how, but if i asked her at that point, i doubt i'd have believed what she would have said.

i don't recall the full trajectory of everything that happened next.

i remember august 26th. i was wearing this shirt i stole from pacsun that made my tits look incredible, and these ripped up jeans that i thought were the coolest. one of my friends (not yours) had a party at his house while his parents were gone. we brought a bunch of alcohol. your sister got so drunk that she broke a picture frame with his senior picture in it. i got so drunk that i went to bed with you.

i would have done it anyways.

we made out and fell asleep upstairs, naked in my friend's sister's bed. i guess it was a scandal to everyone downstairs. we didn't have condoms, but you didn't care. i did, a lot. i woke up the next morning with you inside me. it sucked.

i bragged to my friend afterwards about having sex with you, because what the hell else did you expect me to do? i was boggled by what had happened.

i had told you that night that i loved you. i said "i," you said "love," i said "you," then we switched. i think i definitely loved you. i think you definitely did not love me.

that morning we probably ate mangos.

you were 23 then, too.

i don't want to have anything in common with you, or who you were to me and always will be. (i don't care to find out who you've become.) i dreaded this birthday because i dread relating to you. i dreaded becoming you. and i've dreaded dating anyone like you again—heterosexuality isn't easy now, and neither is activism. all i wanted was for you to own your shit. i wanted to make our community a better place. but instead of accountability, there was this:

An open letter to the ACRé community and friends:
In an attempt to create a safer activist environment,

the Action for Community in Raleigh (ACRe) Council wishes to inform members of ACRe and partner communities and organizations of the recent developments with ACRe's Accountability process.

At the beginning of January 2007, it was brought to the attention of a member of the ACRe council that a member of our community, Tom Leventhall, had raped other community members. Using the ACRe Accountability statement, which serves to govern our community, a three-person Accountability Team was formed, comprised of ACRe council members, to respond to the situation.

The response was guided by and made in accordance with the wishes of the survivors. After the Accountability Team met with the survivors, it then met with Tom. During this initial meeting, the following points were discussed with him:

- his use of alcohol as a form of coercion,
- his perceived role model status to younger members of the community,
- his use of sexist language,
- his lack of understanding around consent, and
- his abuse of the power and control that his privilege and status afford him.

The wishes of the survivors were then explained to Tom:

- to read anti-sexual-violence and anti-sexist literature,
- to receive counseling from a trusted and experienced member of the community, and
- to attend workshops and events that addressed sexual violence, consent, and ending rape culture.

At this point, Tom agreed to fulfill these conditions, which were required in order for him to stay involved with the ACRe community.

During the period of time he was given to fulfill these conditions, Tom did not make a full-faith effort to do so, yet felt entitled to regularly participate in ACRe events.

He was given an ultimatum in April that if he did not fulfill these conditions, he would no longer be a part of the ACRE community. Tom briefly worked towards meeting the conditions, but ultimately did not.

Conversations between survivors, ACRE council members, and the counselor have resulted in the opinion that this accountability process has focused too much on dealing with the perpetrator, instead of helping make our space safer for survivors.

The Accountability Team and the survivors feel that Tom has not taken personal responsibility for his actions, which is indicated by his lack of initiative to seek counseling and by his constant shifting of blame onto the survivors. Tom's misogynistic behaviors and condescending attitudes have continued to disturb many within the community and have caused them to feel unwelcome and unsafe. At this point, the survivors and the Accountability Team have decided that Tom is not allowed at the ACRE space or ACRE-related events.

This process has been difficult for many of those involved. It has been trying for the survivors, council members, and the community alike. We are still in the process of formulating a working community justice model that can better address everyone's needs.

Some within the community have seen this case as "getting in the middle of personal drama." However, sexual assault is not a personal problem; it is a community problem and a form of systematic oppression. Because we have all been raised within a rape culture, it is inevitable that our community will be permeated by sexism and sexual violence. This is not an issue of a few people's actions; it is an issue of our community being introspective and eradicating oppression. We hope that the community sees the importance of holding people accountable and works with us to see that survivors are supported and justice is carried out.

Please forward this letter on to communities that may need to know this information. Also, please respect the privacy of the survivors and keep their identities anonymous.

i could feminist theorize all fucking day, psychoanalyzing you now like i psychoanalyzed you then. but now i'm 23, and i don't need to wonder. i know how i turned out, and i know how you could have. these are the differences between you and i.

ii. brittany

i'm enraged.

i just met a 14-year-old girl. she's black. bipolar. 95lbs. queer. she's a prisoner in a juvenile detention facility and she's cuffed to a hospital bed.

she was sexually assaulted by two prison guards—three, if you're as discriminate as me. one held her from behind, one physically assaulted her, and one permitted them to do so. a guard grabbed her from behind the next day and she punched him, triggered by her trauma from that night. they sent her to the county jail. 14 years old and alone in a cell.

that's where she told a female guard what happened, and they brought her to the hospital. i met her there, getting a physical before a rape kit. she was so thin that i swear she could have shaken the shackles over her ankles and the cuffs off her fragile wrists. i'm sure she had tried. still, what i noticed first was her eyes, so sunken that it looked like she had never slept in her life—i'm sure it had at least been days. she glared at everyone, pissed off that we were there and pissed off that she was anywhere with us. i understood so much that i wanted to leave, but thought my understanding may be useful to offer.

she warmed up to me. i bought her a slice of pizza and cheesecake from the cafeteria, and requested that she get a room with a tv. the female guard that came with the others sat in the room with us. the girl flipped through the channels and found that adam sandler movie about a prison football league. it was funny in a macabre way to laugh at these

prison jokes with a prisoner and a guard, but she seemed happy, or at least relieved. we started to talk.

the social worker told me she was having behavioral problems. i'm sure that's what they fucking called it when she punched the guard who grabbed her. aside from that, what the social worker told me was that she had trouble expressing her anger. i'd be fucking angry too if i was trapped in the prison and psychiatric systems since age 12. she told me that the girl missed her grandmother and mom. oh fucking really? she did not tell me the girl had been tazed at her last court appearance. i found that out later on google (though it's out of protocol to look up clients' names on the internet—woops.)

the girl begged me to call her grandmother and tell her what happened. i couldn't though, because prisoners' families cannot be notified if they're taken to a public hospital until after they're back behind bars. she lived with her grandmother and told me how upset that she would be when she found out what happened. i said we'd call her first thing in the morning. i didn't have the courage to do it myself—a staff person did—but i wish with my whole heart that i'd made the call.

brittany asked me what to do about her anger. she said she was mad all of the time and didn't know how to control it. i didn't hesitate. i looked her in the eyes and said she was right to be mad. i told her that what happened to her was fucked up, that it was wrong that she was incarcerated, it was wrong that she wasn't with her grandmother, and it was wrong that we lived in a world where that was acceptable. i held her hand and cried. i wanted to tell her to break herself from the bed and run, that i'd take down the male guard while she dodged past him and if she took the A elevator to the visitor parking she'd see a gold buick that she could wait at until i found her. instead, we talked about writing, maybe, or talking to her grandma when she could, or exercising. bullshit that i repeat to all of my clients, but at least she told me that she likes to write. i didn't know what else to say. i just kept telling her that the most important thing to know was that she wasn't wrong. the most important things were that people believe her and that she didn't deserve any of the horrible things in her life.

i hugged her goodbye the next morning and she couldn't hug back, her frail arms weighed down with heavy chains. i don't know if she got justice or if she ever will. i don't know if she'll ever get out of the system.

i'm furious. i wept. fuck, i still cry. can you imagine? 14 years old. can you believe it? i still can't.

i can't even believe me. still.

iii. a perzine

i haven't wanted to write a perzine since i was a teenager. i made my first one when i was 15. it was called "side effects may vary," same as the website i had since i was 12. my favorite thing in there was a page about how i used to step on the cracks and actually broke my mama's back because now she has multiple sclerosis. there was something about how dove's real beauty campaign is a capitalist scheme, too. truly precious.

what i have actually wanted is something worth writing about—preferably something biting, like a really critical deconstruction of some social shit that's incidentally fucked up, or a relevant analysis of some political current from an insurrectionish perspective. i don't have the skill set to write about much besides gender, though, and i'm even rusty at that. i just want someone else's brain because mine consistently disappoints.

i've been on this mood stabilizer lamictal for three years, including my final three semesters of college. let me tell you what i remember from college about contemporary feminist theory:

i'm not sure whether i really learned nothing or whether i really forgot it all. i'm going with the latter. i noticed every time i started going on a higher dose of lamictal, my short- and long-term memory got worse. it's not common enough to warrant a warning on the label, but other people on internet support groups say it caused memory problems for them, too. my mood got so much better, though. i haven't been able to decide if i benefit from this trade off. every time i see my psychiatrist, i tell myself that today is the day i get a new prescription, that today's the day i get my memory back. i do this every three months and i chicken out every three months. i'm too afraid to stop taking it. i wish i could trade brains, or find the reset button on mine to fix all the fucked up chemistry and emotional scars.

i hate to feel this way because i know it's only peer pressure that makes me value writing theory over writing the personal. there's no reason that people cannot synthesize elements of both into their writing. something i *do* remember from college is that i spent my last two semesters in college writing about being a young woman diagnosed as bipolar, as a way to cope with the side effects of lamictal and the stigma against taking prescription drugs. i wrote a fucking novel for my capstone thesis that was supposed to be a feminist praxis for sad pretty girls. i typed it in a manic furor, hunched over my computer like a gargoye, and that's

the last time i was excited about writing. it was fun to put citations in the same paragraphs as my childhood stories. i felt smart and important and it felt worth writing about, even though it was hard and i need to make it better. this is starting to feel worth writing, too.

i got pretty into the concept of standpoint theory in college. the idea is that we have to approach the production of knowledge from where we stand in society. one of the points in my undergrad thesis was that writings about troubled young women are relegated to lesser genres, becoming young adult fiction, chick lit, or “confessionals” rather than memoir. this makes it hard for anyone to learn to respect young women’s stories, let alone their autobiographical writing. by discounting the worthiness of what i have to write, i’m no better than anyone else who would shit on prozac nation. so really, intellectually, i do believe that i’m worth writing about. still, i wish i had more to say, and i wish the pills that keep me alive didn’t hamper that.

this conflicting perception of worth is hard to reconcile—that is, knowing that i’m a special snowflake versus feeling like a dummy. why would i wish that i could write dense theory when i believe so strongly in the value of intimate voices? even when i try to assert my perspective, i only half convince myself that it matters. but it’s not just that my self-esteem is low; i’m having to battle ingrained cultural views that *anything* a young woman has to say is irrelevant, especially if she’s crazy. it’s a hard fight, but i have to give myself credit for trying. that’s what i was doing when i stood up for myself through the accountability process, even though i felt crazy and unimportant. i think that’s why i’m writing this zine, too. especially as i’m dealing with the cognitive effects of my medications, i need to remember that my perspective is significant. this zine is an exercise in asserting myself.

everything i’m writing feels important to share, even if it’s not abstract intellectual runoff. this is the basis of my personal praxis—the epistemology of my social and political actions. optimistically, i could call this zine an insurrection against the concept of objective omniscience. to retrospectively write a chronological report about the accountability process i started would be a farce. i can’t untangle it from how it’s influenced the life i live now, or how i’ve come to look at it differently over time. it’s fine that this is a perzine. what the fuck else could it be?

in terms of writing, then, i guess i’m fine with the brain i have, but i could go for one that gave me less emotional turmoil. this is what i have to work with, and that’s fine. my viewpoint is the most truthful thing i

could express. maybe someone will read this and identify with me, learn something, or believe me despite every cultural reason not to. all i can do it share what i think, and side effects may vary.

iv. the day of truthtelling

Date: April 28, 2007 6:55:34 AM EDT

To: "ACRe Calendar" <acre-events@lists.riseup.net>

Subject: [acre-events] a letter to our entire community

The following is a letter from one of the survivors of sexual assault in our community. They have been involved in a community response to sexual assault as outlined in our accountability statement. Sharing this letter is part of our attempt at community justice, healing, and stopping the violence.

To those involved with Action for Community in Raleigh, Raleigh Food Not Bombs, 1304 Bikes, the Raleigh chapter of Fight-Imperialism-Stand Together, The Mayview Collective, all Triangle-area activists and whomever else it may concern:

I was raped in August.

I was raped in August by a so-called revolutionary. A proclaimed feminist. An anarchist. A friend. Someone who spends his free time feeding the homeless and rallying for protests. I was raped by a social rights activist. I was raped by a man who should have known better.

It wasn't violent. It wasn't spiteful. But I'm damn sure that it wasn't a mistake. The night it happened, I did my part to say "NO" a few times throughout the evening, but because of alcohol or because of societal habits he didn't compute my protests. He stopped when I

told him to stop, but the fact that I had asserted myself and told him multiple times that I did not want to have sex qualified his actions as rape.

This experience has altered my life like no other. I don't want to tell a sob story, but the effect this situation has had on me is overwhelming. I want to let you know what I have been going through. I can't imagine how drastically different this entire school year could have been had I not been raped during the first week of school. My grades dropped, and are dropping. I became depressed, and am still in a cycle of ups and severe downs. Most of my friendships were destroyed, and only recently have I begun to make entirely new friends. I'm less cheerful than I was, by far. I can't remember at all what it's like to be able to talk about ex-boyfriends nonchalantly, to be able to laugh at ironically sexist jokes, to understand my own thoughts and emotions.

I stayed with him for months afterwards, and it took me nearly half a year to admit I had been raped. It was in the back of my mind since it happened, but so was my unwillingness to admit that somebody whom I was completely infatuated in had hurt me. Having been in such a sexually abusive relationship had completely perverted my mind. Being raped makes one feel insignificant, worthless. I held tight to the things that gave me security; unfortunately, this included my relationship with him and my denial. Instead of caring for my own welfare, I cared more about whether he would break up with me if I complained.

To keep myself distracted, I tried to hang on to the good things that I had my friends, my art, and the ACRé community but the depression and pessimism that engulfed me after I shared my experiences with others kept everything enjoyable out of my reach. On top of my own inability to distract myself, my friends had, and still have, difficulty interacting with me. They would say that I'm no fun to be around, that I'm always depressed, that I'm difficult to deal with and that I take everything too seriously. While I am extremely sorry to have made any of them feel burdened by my depression, it's becoming more difficult for me to forgive their lack of support for my struggle.

To many who haven't been victims of sexual assault, it's impossible to understand why I stayed with him, or why it took me five months to speak out. Some people never speak out. It's typical for rape victims to distrust all who are around them, and to feel shame,

guilt and denial. They may also detach themselves from activities, places and people that remind them of the assailant. In the months after I was raped, these characteristics flourished within me; however, I never felt that I couldn't trust my friends. Not until I became vocal with issues of sexual assault or sexism did people begin to feel uncomfortable with me talking about having been sexually assaulted.

In fact, since I initially spoke out, I have found almost no support from many involved with ACRe that I could consider friends. I realize now that if I had been more clear when telling others what I was experiencing, and less emotional, they may have approached the situation more seriously. But to expect one who has been through an emotionally traumatizing event not to be emotional is entirely unsympathetic. Taking rape lightly is never acceptable, and "overreacting" to a traumatizing event is absolutely appropriate. Through the past ten months, I have needed community support more than ever, but instead I was criticized by my friends for reacting naturally to trauma.

I was held back by my friends' apathy. I let others make me want to give up; and now, I'm taking back this situation and trying to regain the lives of others in the process. I do expect all of your help.

Throughout the past ten months, I have found that many people assume that instances of sexual violence are rare within the radical community. Not only that, but when encouraging others to learn about consent or sexual dynamics, they consider themselves above society's instilled sexism. Many don't feel that reading about gender-related issues is important because they think they know everything there is to know from the basic idea that "everyone is equal."

These assumptions are dangerous. Knowing that many men in my life, and even some women, deny that sexism exists to any degree within our community terrifies me. My sudden awareness of such a disappointing and common assumption has been enough to keep me from attempting to become active with ACRe again. The community should be welcoming and supportive of all, and the amount of people unwilling to do so have made the ACRe space a distressing environment for me and various others.

Perhaps, though, one of the main reasons people are hesitant to offer personal support for any type of victim, or that people struggle with how to react to serious issues, is plainly ignorance of

the situation. When a friend loses somebody dear, people often do not know how to comfort him or her due to inexperience with death. The same can be said for some friends of victims of sexual assault. While it's understandable that people should find confrontation with rape uncomfortable, the responsible reaction to it would be to inform oneself on both the issue and the effects it could have on those involved. We all have a responsibility to support one another—victims of sexual abuse, depression, disease, and everybody else, including abusers—if we expect to overcome any oppressive behaviors. Most of all, we must accept and recognize that we each have a responsibility to do all that we can to help each other. We must admit that we are not perfect.

Sexual abuse is real. Sexual abuse is hurting people every day, outside and within the radical community. Being separated from the mainstream does not make one above society's influence, and recognition of this fact is essential to overcome societal ills. My life has been forever altered because of those who ignore problems instead of correcting them, and my burden is not at all unique. It is depressing to think of those who destroy themselves or disintegrate into nothing because they have no support system when they need it. I cannot find words powerful enough to emphasize how helpful simplistic support can be to someone who is hurting. This is my feeble attempt at a call to arms. Be conscious of your every action, constantly strive to be as informed as possible, and help others understand why they should do the same.

As bitter as I sound, I still love all of you more than should be rational. I miss being a part of such an amazing community, and I miss being close to so many incredible people. But it has been the desire to help others grow, although frustrating, that has kept me hopeful, and I hope that this letter only helps to motivate our community to end sexism and sexual assault. Please keep me in your thoughts, as well as the innumerable others who have experienced this pain. I speak for many, and we need your help to keep our number from increasing. Thank you for any positive action that you have taken or will take in the future.

In solidarity,
we.are.everybody@gmail.com

i was 17 when i wrote this. i was too apologetic. a lot of it is naive. some of it is just wrong.

“in solidarity.”

were we? hell no.

i knew what i was saying though. it was reverse psychology. i wanted anyone who reached the end of that letter without agreeing that yeah, totally, we're in solidarity, to get thrown off. i knew a lot of people who would. most of my “friends” were two-faced liars, talking shit when i'm not there but acting concerned when i was around. solidarity, totally. they could show you how it's done.

i was nervous about sending this letter and i'm nervous sharing it now. my hopefulness and idealism about anarchist communities embarrass me. but you weren't afraid to talk about it, evidently, since three years after this i had to explain why a friend's group shouldn't work with you on some unionizing the garbage workers project or something. he said you told him “your side of the story.” he suggested that we all just sit down together and talk about it. he'll read this, because he's still my friend, and i hope he doesn't feel like a total fool. (you've come a long way. keep up the good work.) he thought he could fix this “misunderstanding,” like a dozen people hadn't tried before.

if this wasn't about you, but someone else that we knew, you would have eaten this email up. “in solidarity with you, from me.” you may have been all yeah, totally, we're in solidarity. but fuck you. you were a two-faced liar, too.

i don't know everyone who had my back behind my back. but aside from people who lived at ACRe or who were involved with the accountability process, there *were* other people who supported me. a lot of them were new friends, or people i became closer with because they reached out when i spoke out. i remember two people in particular and i'm still in touch with both of them. one lives in oakland now, and i see him when he visits north carolina. aside from that we don't talk. he stands out in my memory because he was so straightforward about believing me even though we weren't close before. his visit last summer was one of the highlights of my final months in asheville. the other was my high school best friend, the one that i started going to food not bombs with in the first place. i think there were a few straight years where we didn't go two days without hanging out. he was the first one i told that i thought i'd been raped. he helped make me feel really supported by our punk friends, which was nice because they had no connection to you at all, so they held no biases against me. he said something between songs at a show he was playing about sexual assault in our communities, and i was so happy that i cried. he's still in bands and has a recording studio/

show space a few cities over, but we aren't very close anymore.

i hoped that the letter i wrote would make other people come around, or be a step in their lifelong processes of being less fucked up. i understood/stand that it may have meant fuck all to anyone, but god damn, i was (and am) so hopeful.

i don't often talk about the accountability process, and i'm surprised whenever anyone remembers it. one of my lost best friends got in touch with me a few years ago, totally out of nowhere, and apologized for not believing my whole story. i cried because i was so happy that someone brought it up.

in fact, that's the reason i still have this email at all. i was drinking with another best friend, an old housemate, and she confessed that she just found it going through old saved emails. i told her i hadn't saved it, that i hadn't read it in years, and she forwarded it to me. we cried.

at the top of my saved version is her email signature. this is what it reads:

*when the world is sick, can't no one be well, but i dreamt
we was all beautiful and strong.*

i've always had such lofty dreams. i thought i could change the world. i hoped anarchism could do everything. i tried to make that happen.

v. sarah

my fourth session as a volunteer with the support group for youth experiencing domestic violence at home, there were finally some "alternative"-type teens in the group. on the first day, there was a girl who

totally tried to impress me with her musical tastes. she was into that weird post-screamo-whateverthefuck-numetal-etc shit that hot topic and warped tour peddle these days. actually, when i asked what people were looking forward to on their summer break, she put on her cool kid face and said, “goin’ to warped.” i told her that my boyfriend used to tour with warped tour and table zines and she was fucking floored. she thought i was the shit! i looked up the band that she had on her shirt called of mice and men. jesus, they’re terrible.

there was also this one girl whose mom was always the last to pick her up. sarah was the oldest in the group—almost 17. she was home-schooled since sixth grade. i suspect that there was some unfortunate reason, like a learning disability or mental illness, or maybe that she stayed home to take care of her sisters. one time i asked her what she does all day, and she told me she wakes up, makes breakfast for her sisters, cleans, watches a movie, makes lunch for her sisters, cleans, watches a movie, makes dinner for her sisters, cleans, watches a movie. she also told me that she reads at a fifth grade reading level, and that she wants to stay in california for a few months with a friend who can help her cheat through everything she needs to graduate high school.

we talked about rape and sexual assault one day, then made everyone write a question and put it in an anonymous question box for us to read out loud and discuss as a class. they all picked different colored crayons, so i knew whose question was whose. sarah’s question was something about how to resist sexual pressure, so we talked about how to be assertive and how to talk about consent, etc. we talked about bullying too, and peer pressure. a few of the more talkative kids kept volunteering stories from boyfriends and girlfriends they’d had. one kid had a story about getting in a fight with his girlfriend at mcdonald’s because he wanted her to order off the dollar menu. another girl told us how her mom criticized everything about her boyfriend, and yelled at her one day when she saw him walking to the corner store instead of riding a bike. i don’t know how to make these stories as hilarious as the teens did.

when group was over and sarah was the only one left in the room, my co-facilitator and i asked her what she thought about the group that night. she said it was weird hearing middle schoolers talk about all the relationships they had when she had never even kissed anybody. she took relationships very seriously, she said. she wants the first person she kisses to be the person that she marries.

whoa.

if i married the first person i kissed, i'd be married to a pedophile, in prison since 18 for fucking middle school girls. i didn't tell her this. i told her that everyone's desires are different, and that it's okay to not have the same attitude towards sex as everybody else. what i wanted to say was very different. i wanted to tell her about all the times i've been infatuated, when i mistook shallow love for eternal devotion. all of the times i'd screamed, sobbed and numbed myself with pills after someone broke up with me, or lied to me, or forgot to call me back—self-destruction that persists to this day. all of the men and women responsible for my paranoia, including me. i wanted to tell her that she should count on making mistakes and on being a casualty of other people.

she should have known that though, goddamn, first hand, from seeing what happened to her mother. maybe she thought she and her mom deserved the abuse from her dad, or maybe she thought that she would know better than to get into an abusive relationship. maybe she wanted to hope that something could eventually be perfect. that's the promise of "true love" and the idea of soulmates. she wants that lie despite knowing reality. it's a normal way to cope. looking the devil in his face strengthened her desire to reach heaven. there have been times when i could relate.

at the party we have on the last meeting of each session, she brought me and my co-facilitator a notebook that she was asking important people in her life to write in, to put in a time capsule. i think she was having an identity crisis. we both wrote out a full page. mine went something like this:

when i was 16 i was raped. it was awful. he was my boyfriend. he was 23, and i'm 23 now. i think a lot about what the difference is between us at this age. i think one important thing is my capacity for respect. he didn't respect me or any other women that he dated. i try to have respect for everyone that i meet. most people don't respect one another. remember what we talked about in this class: power and control. be vigilantly skeptical of anyone who tries to have power over you, and always question the motives of people in authority. there's this quote from the book the perks of being a wallflower that two of my friends have tattooed on their bodies: "we accept the love we think we deserve." you deserve respect, sarah, and you deserve to be loved. don't take any bullshit. stay strong. <3 heather, 2013.

i underline a lot when i handwrite, for emphasis, and i thought she'd think it was edgy of me to say "bullshit." she had blue hair, and when i was younger i loved adults who cussed.

i'm glad that she liked me and i hope she keeps that notebook forever. i hope i left her life better than i found it. i hope her first kiss does the same.

vi. my partner

my partner was an abuser. before we started dating, i'd heard a little about him. i knew that he had been called out years ago for abuse, and that he'd actually gone through with an accountability process. this was alarming to hear, but he intrigued me. i had such a fatalistic stance on accountability that he was basically too good to be true, and plus, he's really cute. (what a fucked up reason to be interested in an abuser.) so, i wanted to investigate. i was shocked when i found out that his housemates lived with an abuser, and i thought that to have been called out and to still be friends with people i respected, he must have done something right. but i didn't know how that could be possible. i needed to understand.

to be clear, i was crushing on him, hard. we both remember the first night we saw each other, even though we didn't speak directly for months. i was at his house for a friends' birthday party, and we were picking out punk songs to play about kids and youth and never growing up. god, he was so cute and funny. the next memory i have of him, we were at a propaghandi show around halloween, and he came wearing this dorky viking hat. i was sitting on a pool table watching incredible card tricks, and he came over and sat next to me. we probably said

something about how cool the card tricks were. we finally talked on new years eve. i tried dancing with him at this party, and every time i moved closer he moved further away. he says he was severely intimidated by me and thought that i only dated women. he felt guilty for thinking i was attractive because of that, so he tried not let me catch him staring. but that night, one of our friends invited me to watch muppets in space with them after the party, and i pulled some trickery to make sure that he sat next to me on the couch. he made some shitty bet with me and lost, so he owed me a burrito. we got pizza instead and then bam. head over heels.

he called me after that first date and said that he needed to talk. i told him i knew what he wanted to tell me, and i was glad he brought it up before i had to. he told me that he was abusive and had done accountability work, and that he wanted to send me the email he wrote to disclose his abusive behavior. it was terrible to read. he had been physically abusive to his ex, emotionally manipulative, and made her fear for her life. he hurt himself in front of her and made her feel responsible for his emotions. he hit her and pushed her down stairs. he took over a year to comply with accountability demands, continuing to invade her space in their community and to not disclose his abusive history with friends and people he started relationships with.

he sounded like a monster.

after he sent it to me, i sent him the emails that went on the ACR e listserv about the accountability process with tom. i made clear to him that his history was especially significant to me because i've been on the other side of an accountability process. i didn't want to take what we were getting into lightly.

what i'm about to write is incredibly honest. i want to explain to you why i started dating him. i don't want to trigger anyone who has harsh feelings towards him or who believes he should not be dating or should not be loved. i worry that my compassion towards him may be hurtful.

this feels fucked up to admit, but i was disturbingly unfazed by his letter at first. it only really sunk in after we started dating. sometimes it disgusts me to think about how little it upset me and i don't think i've ever told anyone. it bothered me, yeah, but what really worried me was that it didn't worry me enough. maybe i'm desensitized from my work around sexual assault and intimate partner violence, or maybe i was blinded by my crush. either way, it made me feel guilty for liking him. i wondered what his ex would think about me because i was dating him. i thought i should be in solidarity with her as someone else who had

gone through a shitty accountability process, and that i should refuse to date him on principle. but i was seriously into him, and respected his honesty and his insistence to leave me alone while i thought about everything. i felt like i was at odds with myself.

(as an aside: i think it's common for people who know their partners have an abusive past to feel this way, and for people *in* abusive relationships to convince themselves that what they experience isn't that bad. "it could never happen to me" syndrome. i can't say whether or not that's what i was experiencing. i don't want anyone to read this and have my confidence in him convince them that an abuser in their situation has or will "recover" from having abusive behaviors, and i'm not making the same assertion of my partner, either.)

what i took to heart from his letter and our talk was his rapport with our friends and the work he told me he had done to be accountable. he had been in therapy for four or five years and had been part of two non-profit-type programs for abusive men. he began to make disclosure a priority in his relationships. he gave me space and time to think about whether i wanted to continue building a relationship with him at all. this all astonished the fuck out of me. i had never met anyone so conscious of taking responsibility for their actions. once, i gave an ex the book "the will to change" by bell hooks and he never even finished reading it. that my current partner admitted he was abusive at all was monumental to me. still, too good to be true.

the guilt i felt for liking him was debilitating, so i asked a lot of friends for advice. i dug up this skype conversation i had with an old friend about it, after my first few dates with my partner. it stands out as the conversation that helped me process things the most.

1/24/13 10:58 PM

me:

so like five years ago he was called out for being an abuser and he went through an accountability thing

her:

yeah

me:

and two like nonprofi programs for abusers

her:

wow. yeah.

do you wanna talk about this over skype/phone?

i mean face2face skype

me:

hehehehehe maybe in 10 mins i'm watching the mindy project ^-^

her:

hahaha okay.

i just meant if it would be easier for you to hash out.

i think for him to have gone through an accountability process (with community members i guess?) and two programs & tell you about it is great. obviously it isn't great that it happened. but he did tell you.

me:

but i can't help kind of feeling like a bad person

like i should have eternal solidarity with his ex

her:

hmm. do you know his ex?

me:

no

her:

not that that should determine how you feel completely, i'm just curious.

i guess i personally feel that accountability processes, programs for abusers, healing processes, etc., exist for a reason. if it was impossible or improbable for a person to reflect on their actions and decide to make a marked difference in their lives and the way they treat others, what is the point of accountability in communities?

me:

that's a really helpful way to think about it

like what is the point of anything i care about if i can't give him a chance

her:

i definitely don't blame you for feeling hesitant, bc i think it's common to feel like abuse/cheating/assault is a 1-strike-you're-out thing in radical and progressive communities

but accountability is still a part of those communities, therefore perhaps reform is, too. people fuck up. they can fuck up bad. but if you think [he] is mindful and contentious of these things, i don't think you're a bad person or anarchist or feminist for giving him a shot.

creepy how skype saves everything you say.

i talked to one of his housemates about the same anxiety and they said something similar. they said that continuing to hold him accountable through our relationship could be one way of showing solidarity. it makes sense to me now. i remember knowing this woman who dated you after you were kicked out of ACR and wondering what you had told her, what she thought about it, how she felt about me. she was friendly enough, so maybe he hadn't said anything, or maybe she didn't know who i was. maybe she stood up to you, told you that you were fucked up, but that she liked you and wanted to see you deal with your shit. to me, that would have been the ideal, and part of what my partner's ex wanted was his disclosure to future partners. so going into our relationship, i felt purposeful, not wary. and mostly, i was excited to see what he had learned from all of his accountability work. seeing someone emerge a better person after being called out was a dream. i wonder if i didn't fetishize him for it. it takes courage to admit abusive behaviors, and although he was fucked up about it for a long time, he then put years of effort into being publicly accountable for his actions and he continues to inform people he is close to and who he organizes with.

when he reads this, he won't like it, because he doesn't want to be held up as a model or example. i don't want to do that to him, either, but this is the only side of him i've seen. he has never touched me with hatred. sometimes i still feel guilty for thinking it's cool, like i shouldn't be patting an abuser on the back, but i think he deserves it from me. he treats me so well. nothing can make up for what he did in the past, but he has the power to ensure it will never happen again. i'm proud of how i've seen him try to do so, and i trust him because of it. i usually have trouble trusting my partners.

i don't worry about him becoming abusive, but i think about it a lot. i wonder about what i'd say to his ex if we ever met. i don't know why

we would, so i haven't formulated a speech in my mind, but sometimes i put myself in her place. rarely but occasionally, when his hands are on my body, i think about the pain they inflicted on her. i've cried because i like him so much that i don't want it to be true. i don't want him to have stolen years of someone's life, and i don't want to imagine becoming her.

these feelings are so abstract that they've never affected how i interact with him. my love for him is stronger than my anxieties about his past. i feel guilty about this, but i want to be truthful because being able to trust someone is a momentous change in my life. despite his past, i feel safe with him and assured that he loves me. he's been brutally honest with me, more than any cis-man i've been friends with before. i really admire who he's become.

i think about what i would say if someone ever confronts me about dating an abuser. i'd say that i understand why they would have a problem with him. i would welcome anybody who wants to tell me about how they were personally affected by his abuse. if we're ever at a show or in a space and he was asked to leave, i wouldn't let anyone apologize to me if i left too. i never want to minimize the severity of what he did. by writing this, i just want to share what it's meant to me to know and love someone who fucked up so bad.

i never thought that i'd even be friends with someone with a history of abuse. while doing support work for sexual assault and domestic violence survivors, i have never wanted to work with abusers. i have never wanted to understand them or feel bad for them. despite this, my interest in my partner has never felt totally unreasonable. i think i sympathize with him because we have a shared though antithetical experiences. he's like the alternate ending to my own past, proof positive that i wasn't naive to think an accountability process would fix my problems. he gives me hope. this may be why i liked him from the start. i always wished that someone like who he is now would be in my life. with my history and my begrudgingly optimistic view of individuals, i might be perfectly suited to love him. i think he's all that i've wanted since i was 16. i'm not ashamed of it anymore.

i know accountability isn't what every survivor wants. i know some people don't give a shit whether the fucker that hurt them ever changes—they just want that person out of their life, or to experience the same pain and torment that they inflicted. i don't want to evaluate the efficacy of accountability processes. at the end of it all, i think the "perpetrator" is the only one who can make a change in themselves, no

matter how much peer pressure is put on them. fuck no, i don't want to be responsible for "fixing" my partner, and i don't have a savior complex about him. my feelings about him aren't based on that, but on my belief that he's trying to do it himself. he doesn't use me as a crutch.

it's not my place to say whether accountability "worked" for him, especially because i wasn't involved in calling him out. i know he doesn't abuse me, though, and that he's diligent about watching for abusive tendencies. that's what everyone should do anyways. it shouldn't be so much to expect, but in my life, this sort of effort has been difficult to find. too many of us don't challenge our relationship dynamics. all i've ever wanted is somebody who tries.

vii. shelter

i was hired about a month ago for a position at the domestic violence shelter in raleigh and tonight is my first night. i'm shadowing another woman for the weekend. everyone here is about my mom's age.

it's an overnight position, 9 pm to 7 am friday, saturday, and sunday. i work during the week too, taking care of two separate kids from 8 to 5. on top of that, i have an internship and a stint with a screen printing shop. in all, i have 5 jobs right now. i'm hyper-employed.

i've been awake since 6:45 friday morning and it's 1:56 am saturday right now. i'm running on a 5-hour energy shot and some naked juice. i brought a ritalin, but i want to see if i can manage to stay awake for twenty seven hours without it. right now i'm yawning like crazy. i've never pulled a complete all-nighter before, even in college, so i'm trying to look at this as an adventure rather than a physical impossibility. (euphemizing shit as being a "life experience" helps me to push through sometimes, just for the sake of having a good story to tell. in this case,

it's just for the sake of having a strong resume and some professional references.)

my position, officially, is to handle calls from three local police departments when they respond to domestic violence situations and evaluate them as having a high risk of lethality. more accurately, my position is to be the only one awake at the shelter aside from security. we have to handle any crisis call that comes through and any emergency situations that arise. i'm happy to be shadowing this wonderful mom-woman this weekend, because the next shifts i work will be ten hours of solitude—just me and the hum of the fucking copy machine. i hate not being able to talk. i can't stand being alone.

the alternative to solitude in this situation sucks, though. in fact, the more socialization i get in one shift, the shittier it will make me feel. it's a boring but good night if there are no crisis calls. when i did this in asheville, i was called to the hospital to see people who were assaulted more often than i received calls on the crisis line. here, though, i'm expecting the phones to be off the hook. people call here from all over north carolina, especially on weekends. it's 2:30 am now though and we've only had one call since i got here at 9. i'm stressed about having to take the next call. it's been a year and a half since i've done this.

it's funny to me that, with a gender studies degree, i'm going to continue working in caregiving jobs for the rest of my life. i graduated college and became a domestic worker and now i'm applying to grad schools for social work, one of the most historically female professional positions. i feel like an amalgamation of stereotypes.

but there's something about helping people.

(it's 4:30 and i want to die.)

now it's 6:15 and my partner is on his way to pick me up from the main office because i have problems falling asleep while driving.

i smiled the whole way to the car, intoxicated from sleep deprivation and adoration. we both slept until 5:30 pm. it's sunday, 1:44 am now. i spent half an hour playing with a 4-year-old staying in the shelter and that's been the highlight of the night so far. i've gotten one crisis line call—a stalking situation—and i was barely helpful because i'm not schooled on the ins-and-outs of filing protective orders. i think she was satisfied enough when i asked her to call back monday and talk to someone who knew fuck all, though.

i've always had someone to call, and i'm unfathomably lucky for that. what are the chances that at 16 i would have a bunch of radical twenty-somethings able to support me after a fucked up relationship?

we just got three calls from the police in a row. one woman couldn't talk to us because her tongue had been sliced open.

i'm happy to make myself available to strangers because i can't imagine my life without the support systems i've had. (clearly racial and class privilege are included in this.) the friends who've stuck by my side, the oft-cheesy rhetoric of consent culture, the fringes of the internet where i found forums of anonymous encouragement, and the ideals my anarchism favors propped me up when i could barely think for myself. trauma is dizzying, no matter how deep a wound cuts, and these things gave me the stability to recover. i've carried my shelter in my head and my heart, knowing that someone somewhere understands me. this is a benefit of subcultural association that most people don't have. friendship has been my refuge my entire life, and my beliefs have been like a shield.

it's 4 am and i'm just sitting in the office picking my nose. someone's snoring loudly and i hear a baby crying. the woman i'm shadowing is asleep on the couch and i'm waiting for it to be my turn. i'm nervous about getting a call while she's asleep. i know i can do this job, but it's been so long since i've worked a crisis line that my confidence is shaky. if the overnight hours don't make me depressed, i think this job will be okay. i feel good about it. writing has been a sufficient way to pass time, but i think i'm going to curl up for a nap in a rolling chair and hope i don't hurt myself.

only three more hours to go.

viii. answers

she was 25 when you dated. like i said, i know her relationship with you was bad, but i don't recall how. i talked with her about it today but didn't ask anything specific. i didn't want to pry or dredge up dark memories.

she said that no one believed her and she lost one of her best friends because he didn't trust what she told him. she felt abandoned and started doubting herself, wondering whether or not it had even happened and whether she was making it all up.

she had this really vivid memory of seeing you and me at a party once. she didn't remember whose it was. we came up on the front porch but didn't go inside, and she remembers seeing us through the window and wanting to grab me, tell me everything. she said it made her panic. she was so full of self-doubt, though, and thought i probably wouldn't believe her. she was probably right.

this all happened at a point in her life when she says she was really naive. so was i, and you shattered that for both of us. she felt helpless though, and somehow—i don't remember how—i felt really empowered. so i called for the accountability process, and she was so fucking thankful. she wasn't alone and now everyone believed.

she told me that she remembers sitting together at ACRé, that first night we met to figure out what to do, drinking tea and crying. she remembers me hugging her and telling her that she wasn't wrong. i was glad she was there, and she was too. there was power in numbers and i wondered whether anyone would have believed me if it wasn't for her.

i asked, but she doesn't remember or didn't realize that people talked shit about me behind my back. to her, everything went as well as it could have gone. if we did the same accountability process again, she doesn't think we would do it any differently. in the end, he was kicked out and we won, right? i'd always seen it as a failure. i'm not really sure anymore.

she told me i was brave. i teared up. i've been getting that a lot.

writing this zine, i became curious about how other people remembered everything. i sent an email out to a lot of people asking them what they remember. not everyone responded, but a handful of people did. my favorite tidbit by far was: "Damn that kid was a tool and needed to get out of my house. Wasn't really around for the dealing with him. Ugh. Horrible person." a friend that i dated maybe a year after everything said that he was frustrated that the house didn't deal with you more directly, by kicking you out immediately and supporting me more. and someone else that i wasn't close to told me that it was her first experience with intimate partner violence and community accountability, and that she's passionately involved with work around ipv now. she said she often uses what happened at ACRé as a point of reference for personal incidences she deals with today.

i exchanged a few emails back and forth with one friend in particular. he was the second person i told that i had been raped. he cried. he's eight or nine years older than me, so he would have been 24 or 25 back then. we called him grandpa anarchy and nicknames like that because he was kind of curmudgeonly. he bottom-lined the accountability process for us and was really supportive of me even though it was hard to deal with my anxiety and constant wailing. in one of the emails he sent me recently, he wrote, "I remember telling you that you are one of the bravest people I know after the Day of Truth-telling [this march that happened in Durham on the year anniversary of the Duke Lacrosse rape, and the reason I wrote that "in solidarity" email]. I still believe that. You stood up and created community dialog around an issue that is never talked about. I am sorry that you didn't get the support and healing that you needed, but I think out of all of that came a few better men and a few more empowered women and that's amazing."

reading these emails, it's become clear to me that i *did* have an impact on several lives. i may even have influenced more, who knows. i worry that some friends still think i was crazy and fucked up—that they still don't believe me. at this point in my life it's enough to know that some folks did, and that people are proud of my proudest moment besides me. it's what my younger self would have wanted, and grown me is grateful to have reached this realization.

retrospectively, i can say that everything worked out, but the only reason anything is fine is because i've been separated from this period in my life by time and geography. distance makes the heart fucking forget and move on. i don't honestly think that the accountability process worked out, but my priorities have changed and now it seems more important that a few people learned from this than the fact that you wouldn't admit your shit. if i could go back, i don't know whether i'd have the courtesy to give you the option to stay in our community at all. i'm happy that i enriched my friends lives and don't give a shit about your absence anymore. the past seven years finally brought me to this conclusion. i don't feel like a failure.

is it strange that it took me this long? that i've waited until 23 to attempt to understand why you dated a 16-year-old? i don't think i could have put myself in your shoes until now, to fully understand the extent to which we will *never* be the same. you set the trajectory of my life to this point, motivating me to fight against the currents of misogyny. you're why i became a feminist as young as i did. you're the reason i became involved with sexual assault crisis support. as much as you stunted

my self-esteem, you helped me find ways to boost my confidence by developing the skills to support others. seven years down the line, i can appreciate how one of the worst experiences of my life shaped who i am for the better in some ways. god, it's embarrassing how much i look on the bright side, but it's what helps me survive my other pessimistic tendencies. if i wasn't hopeful, i wouldn't have called for the accountability process. without hope, i would have dwelled on our relationship forever. hope helped me move on.

my dreams were partially realized. i really made a difference. i barely remember the haters now. those who helped me are who stand out in my mind, and i really helped them in return. my disappointment lingers, but it's not the most important thing. what matters most is that some of us became better people because of this. the call for accountability wasn't a success, but it made a lot of us grow. we'll always remember why our community was important.

ix. hannah

hannah's 16. she hides behind a mane of frizzy bleached hair, peering through side-swept bangs with an air of remote skepticism. last time i saw her, she was wearing tight plaid pants and doc martens. she had on a black beanie, too, that made her look even more despondent as she sat all alone. we were in a lecture hall listening to some brazilians talk about the uprisings in são paulo. i saw her by herself and jumped over the back of my seat to sneak over and sit with her. i liked muttering crap at her during the presentation.

we met at this second annual march downtown against the school-to-prison pipeline. i needed someone to hold the other side of the "EXPECT RESISTANCE" banner and she volunteered with a little more enthusiasm than most people would who get stuck on banner

duty. we started chatting and she mentioned that she goes to shows—a total cool-kid test to see if i was down. i told her i book shows and she said she's in a band. (check this, they have the greatest name: corporate herpes. i could just die.) i promised i'd book them a show and a month later i did, opening for a touring riot grrrl band and some friends. i asked what her band sounds like and she said something like a combination of sonic youth, modest mouse, and the distillers. i'm looking forward to seeing what that means next month.

i was at this march because it was part of my internship with the youth organizing institute, an organization that helps students mobilize primarily against inequality in schools. in the cover letter for my application, i talked about my involvement with ACRe, not knowing that yoi had actually taken over its 501c3 and described itself as “a project of action for community in raleigh.” as far as i know, only one person involved with ACRe is still involved with yoi, although there may have been a couple more at its start. they weren't people that i knew well before. they're some sort of communists.

my life has come full-circle. 23, back at ACRe, with sixteen-year-old friends. just like you, tom. the same but totally opposite.

hannah texted me the other day and said she needed help figuring out how to avoid going to church with her parents. i remember i used to skip church by staying at your parents' house on saturday night. i told hannah we could go to prison books on sunday instead, like how we used to go to sunday food not bombs.

hannah's awesome and cute, but i can't fathom trying to date her. our age difference feels enormous, even though since i've grown i've dated people more than seven years my senior. she's still coming into anarchism and punk and has barely had the independence that i have. i can't speak for her, but i think she looks up to me like a mentor or something, even though i haven't known her long. to infringe on that relationship would be an abuse of my power. i'd be taking advantage of her admiration. it wouldn't be a relationship based on our equality—it'd be rooted in the cred i've accumulated from years in punk and anarchist scenes. maybe this isn't the case for every relationship that a teen has with an adult, but it was definitely that way for me and i don't know how to imagine a relationship where this wouldn't be the case to an extent. perhaps i'm too used to noticing imbalanced power dynamics to imagine relationships without them.

being involved with ACRe again is giving me a funny sense of closure. one of the ways that people heal from trauma is to rewrite their

personal narratives to incorporate a story line of recovery or redemption. here i am, 23, with a story that finally has an end. i needed support when i was 16. now, i share that support with others. i wanted to improve the world. now, i think i do.

hannah said she's been sexually assaulted. i didn't ask any questions—it came up in passing. i hope i can be there when she needs to talk. i hope that her story has a happy ending.

i hope.

epilogue

i turn 25 next week.

my partner broke up with me in august. we tried to keep dating, but i ended things for good in december. he broke my heart, bad, over and over, and i still can't move on. i fucking unfriended him on facebook. it's *that* bad.

one of my friends spoke out publicly this year about being sexually assaulted. i live with her ex who did it. i'm still friends with them both and that might be controversial but i wouldn't know because nobody talks to me about anything. they never really did anyways. i hate it here.

i see all of the usual patterns in this situation even though most of the players are at least ten years older than i was when i went through this. i'm not sure if the phrase "victim blaming" ever meant anything to people here but it certainly seems like a lot of them fail to recognize real life examples of the role-plays they used to enact at the consent workshops nobody does anymore. this shit is incessant. it will never end. i'll be old in some futuristic retirement colony and have elderly cyborgs confide in me that they've been assaulted or abused or harassed, and i guarantee other antique robots will still talk shit. i'll be dead in the

dirt before i stop watching my friends hurt one another, and forgotten before rape culture even loosens its grip on us.

do i need to keep writing? to tell you, dear reader, that we have to stop hurting each other? that we need to learn how to be accountable, and not to cause more harm when we do make attempts? that yes, you will live through this situation in your life, as a friend, witness, victim or survivor? that this shit is relevant to you and you are not above reproach?

the theme of this zine was hope. i had hoped that my partner wouldn't hurt me. i had hoped that my life was looking up. after all, 23 was a dream. but even though i was in love and went on three fucking luxurious vacations around the world this past year, 24 was almost totally horrific. it will live on in my memory as the year my perfect relationship crash landed into a pile of dog shit. plus i spent all of december throwing up.

but i got into an acclaimed graduate program. i'm hanging out with other msw students some, which takes the bite off of not having anarchist friends in town. i still have my friends from raleigh, including some who've stuck with me since i spoke out at 16, and i'm dating wonderful people who are gentle and patient. i quit my job at the shelter i wrote about and am starting one in a rural county nearby. i play guitar in a shitty girl band called no chodes. i started collecting crystals. not everything is bad.

a friend deemed last year, from his birthday in 2014 until last week, the year of renunciation. he renounced things like booze and smoking and probably a few more personal things. i want 2015 to be my year of renunciation, and i want everyone to renounce abuse. i want everyone to renounce intimate partner violence. hell, i want everyone to renounce hurting each other's feelings. i just want all this bullshit to stop.

my main sweetie right now says sometimes i'm mean. i'm not above reproach either. so i want to resolve this story by clarifying that nothing has really been resolved. my tidy happy ending didn't last a year before i started to feel ashamed of how kindly i portrayed my now ex, and i had barely circulated this zine amongst my friends before one of them sexually assaulted another. i'm not saying my ex abused me, or that nobody ever changes, but i want to add a reminder here that even though i can write about all the lessons i've learned, it doesn't mean anyone will read it or take heed. it doesn't mean i can't hurt people, or god forbid traumatize someone i love. so why the fuck did i write this?

writing this helped me to heal some. it helped me reconcile the fact

that i was a survivor, working with survivors, in love with an abuser. it made for a good read and it was my reality, but now it is my past. it may happen to me again and that would be fine because i do believe that people can improve themselves. i want to keep improving, too. as mj so aptly put it: i'm starting with the man in the mirror. i'm asking him to change his ways.

i hope that i stop hurting others and hurting inside. i'm doing all i can and i hope you are too.

first edition 2013
second edition published by Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness in 2015
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