

LAVENDER Godzilla

Voices of LGBTQ+ Asians and Pacific Islanders

Summer 2023



photo: Adrianna Tan

Wives and Lives

by Adrianna Tan

This past spring, I helped to plan and organize a Lunar New Year dinner for 120 queer and trans Asian people. It's a tradition that has been around for as long as I've been alive: the annual [APIQWTC Banquet](#).

Despite its mouthful of a name (much easier if you read it as API CUTESY Banquet), it was an event that left me feeling extremely raw and emotional at the end of it.

I could not identify why exactly.

Could it be that these events—large format Chinese dinners I've only experienced in the context of societal rejection—were usually events I hated, events that were milestones I can never have because I was gay in a country that had not fully accepted it? I was never going to have the large Chinese wedding dinner. Even if I think those are horrible, it would have been nice to have known that was open to me.

Or they'd be a celebration of some kind of matriarch or patriarch, the sort of thing where your same sex or trans partner was often excluded from, unless things were Very Serious

and they had already graduated into the Don't Ask, Don't Tell territory. At some point, people get old and it becomes possible to welcome same sex partners into these events: when you're old enough that you're thoroughly de-sexualized, is my guess.

But there's more, beyond mere social acceptance and the idea that it's possible to have a good time, I keep coming around to the thought: if I had been to such an event, if I had known these people, when I was a teenager struggling with my feelings and my identity, my life would have been different. Visibility in the media is important, and I already didn't really have that back then; but visibility in the form of knowing

that it's possible to grow old, screw up, fall in love, get divorced, have children, or not, organize community events and be an advocate, or not, all of that would have been powerful visual indicators to me that it's possible to have any kind of life. That you're going to have a life at all.

Instead, growing up mainly among an older generation that was largely forced into the closet—and I do have strong memories of going to gay bars for the first time as a teenager that had just come of age, and seeing police raids rounding up gay men for 'vice,' more than once—where the only people I knew to be gay or queer for sure were the advocates who were willing to put themselves out there to fight for our rights, document our stories, to tell our homophobic society that we exist. Those people served a purpose and they fought bravely. But I did not always want to be an activist. Even though eventually, I guess I sort of did.

By simply refusing to pretend to be straight, at some point I found myself thrust into a position of hypervisibility in the queer community in Singapore. I did not want to be that

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Wives and Lives

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person. I simply wanted to write about the heartbreak I had endured as a teenager: I was just the queer equivalent of a teenager anywhere Live-Journaling her heartbreak. But by not changing the pronouns of the person who had apparently broken my heart, I became, I suppose, a queer activist.

I did not know any queer couples or families until I was well into my early 20s. Other than the women I dated, and let's be frank, we were a mess, with no template or model or idea of what any of this was going to become. Information about queer people came into Singapore like a trickle: there were the gender studies books at Borders bookstore, the 'are they or aren't they' gay-guessing games of trying to figure out which celebrities were queer women (hint: it was mostly Angelina Jolie, at that time), I didn't really know what it meant to be queer. And I think I was already an extremely well-connected teenager for my time. (For a time, I ran a queer DVD lending library; I'd distribute movies and documentaries to other queer teens in my high school and elsewhere.)

I did not know what it meant to be a queer adult.

I had no idea what it meant to be in a committed relationship. Or what it meant to not be in one. I didn't know what my life was going to be. It was all a big blank, other than 'I guess I will have to go live overseas some day.' Even though Singapore has, anecdotally, a fairly large queer population, information about queerness is still suppressed by the state. We are still not allowed to see, for example, a reality TV show of a gay couple having their house revamped. It would be against the rules: you simply can't portray queer people in a non-negative manner.

So when I found myself surrounded by a hundred dancing Asian queer aunties, and a few other peers and younger people, I was mad.

I was mad to not have been exposed to the idea that I too, can some day be a dancing Chinese auntie in my 60s, prancing about on stage singing Teresa Teng songs at a karaoke in Oakland. I was mad that I never got to see people like M and her partner, an older interracial East- and South Asian couple, like Sabrena and I: with their children babbling about in several languages, the way it might look for us if we decided to have children some day.

Most of all, I was mad to know that this life wasn't possible for me back home. Not by a long stretch. I hardly knew many queer people in my mid 20s, and I definitely did not know that hundreds of queer people above the age of 60 existed. Nor did I have the chance to meet them in a multi-generational setting, the way I did here.

At the event, I met many people who were also immigrants from Southeast Asia like me. The first decade was hard, they said. They had to figure out how to exist in the US, and it was also at a time when the US didn't even have the laws it now does for same sex marriage. Many of them wouldn't have been able to move here or stay on here even if they had American spouses: not until Edith Windsor did us all a favor and defeated the Defense of Marriage Act, and enabled same-sex marriage and other rights at the federal level.

In that regard, I have it a touch easier. I came here for a high paid tech job, I came here when California is already one of the easiest places to live in the world for a queer person, and I was able to bring my spouse with me. But some days are harder than others. Like many of these aunties, I am dealing with my first decade blues: does it ever get better? Why did I give up my life of privileges and comforts in Singapore for... America? Unlike many other

immigrants, I did not come here for economic or material improvements. I came here for far more abstract things, like 'my rights,' but also for very concrete things like, 'my wife and I need a third country that recognizes our marriage so that we can actually live together somewhere, anywhere.'

A few months ago, I saw this image again: it was an image of Singaporean and Malaysian queer elders in what is clearly San Francisco, in 1993. I reached out to a few of them in the photo to ask: What was your life like? What did you struggle with? What's your life like now? Many of them said the same thing: the first couple of years are very, very hard. Some days you wonder if you will ever truly

feel at home here. But, they said, we now have wives and lives, and that's more than we could have expected of our lives in Singapore and Malaysia.

Wives and lives. I have that too, but I also have had far less time than them in California. I still have one foot in the door; I am still not totally removed from existing in a space where I've had to hide myself, and my life. Even the most hyper-visible ways of being queer back home are just standard, everyday ways here.

One of them said, my wife is organizing this banquet, why don't you get involved? And so I did. I still don't have the answers, but I think I am starting to have the inkling of an idea.

I think it looks like dancing on stage at a Chinese restaurant singing a Teresa Teng song. I think it could be carrying an infant babbling in three languages. I think it might be nice to have the ability to work with younger Asian queer immigrants 25 years from now, who will hopefully have an easier time than all of us did. I think it could be fun. I think I have a life ahead of me of queer joy that I can celebrate.

I can be anyone I want to be. I did not always know that.





Google Search History

by Hannah Wastyk

Google search history, how many Vicodin to OD?
19 it says
Rattle, rattle the bottle has 14
I weigh 100 pounds soaking wet
If I crush them up and snort them, I might make it yet.
Google search history, how many floors to die?
At least five it says
Why the fuck is nothing on Stanford campus built that high?
Google search history, reasons to keep on living
I'm spiraling
I've hit rock bottom and just keep on digging
All my life everything needed to be done with perfection
Now I have a PhD and it stands for
 Please hold, depression
 Stop.
You're just faking it.
You know you won't because of you know who
You kill yourself, you'll kill your parents too
My parents
You're their everything
Even when you left the church, their home, and all the
dreams that were not yours
Mom, dad, I think I'm queer
We don't know what that means but we'll always be here
Hannah you're at rock bottom, might as well look around
Actually look up,
So many hands reaching out to catch you before you're lost
and drowned
That's good you're getting up, stretching your legs ready to
grab hold,
But wait before you go,
Make sure you take note of what's not reaching down
All that work you prided yourself on, achievements, and success
That Monopoly money sure makes a pretty crown
The rat race stays exactly where it sounds,
In the sewers, where false veneers and empty hearts compound.

All right, that's enough – your party is here.
They're ready to pull you away
It was such a pleasure to see you again,
Hope that's it and it'll be your last stay.
Now up up up you go, so fast it seems impossible,
Just a week ago happiness seemed like a fantasy
Now you're dancing with your friends, the love is unstoppable.
The battle isn't over but you're already a hero.
Your worth is measured by your people, not capitalism that
will always drop you to zero.
All right that's it, now I'm talking to you. That's right, not me
but you.
I hope you're hanging in there. If things seem dark without
any hope of a light,
Just know it feels hard because it is, but you didn't come
this far not to fight.
Think of the reasons you have to live
If you can only think of one, it's okay, it doesn't have to be
a missive.
Yesterday I survived so that today I can thrive.
Let's create something beautiful together, but not just that,
We have to start planning on being around long enough to
watch it glitter,
Because honey, momma didn't raise no quitter.

Start planning on being around to enjoy it,
Because if you build it and then are off
We have to be there to enjoy it, because if
If we aren't there to enjoy it,
Then what was it all for anyway?



Perpetual Spring

by Christopher Kim

Born to immigrants in the heart of Missouri
Under the constellation Sagittarius in the year of the Pig
Surrounded by military on a base
In the midst of disorientation in a new land
I am the second generation
With the intelligence of my father, the wanderlust of my mother
A bridge between generations and cultures and countries
Hopes and dreams incarnate

Have I accepted myself?
Have I learned to love myself?
Have I forgiven those who hurt me?
Have I moved on from my past?
Have I lived the life I wanted?
Have I become my authentic self?

There was a raging fire in my mother's eyes, in her screams
Each look, a flaming arrow piercing my identity
Each word, an ember burning my voice
My soul was trapped in the hell of my mother's rage
And I was silenced
Fear being my only companion

I still hear your screams
Nightmarish echoes
At a young child
Who was me

I began to believe
That your screaming
Was because of me
Something I did

So I became perfect
Didn't speak unless spoken to
Didn't emote
Didn't express
I did all the right things

Deadened
Because I was deathly afraid
Of you
And your screams

I lost myself
Not knowing who I was
What I liked
What my desires were
What I thought and felt
They were driven away
By terror

I still hear your screams
Reverberating through space and time
As an adult
Years later
Haunting me
Your pain birthed my pain

I sense something different about my father
He is standing in the bathroom and he pulls up his shirt
I see a plastic bag attached to his stomach
The flames of cancer ravaged my father's body

I'm 7 years old
I tell my father that I'm not going to church
My father pushes me out of the front door of my house
Wearing only my underwear
I look back at the burning building
That I call home

My parents divorced
We moved every few years
From one burning building to another
The flames of divorce destroying my family

My father disappeared
His family with him
His absence was a blizzard
 Unanswered calls were ice chilling my self-worth
 Unsatisfactory excuses were winds freezing my confidence
My soul was paralyzed by my father's neglect
And my heart frostbitten

I lived in a world where blistering winter and burning summer existed
at the same time

Christopher, take my hand and squeeze as tight as you need
Cry, until your eyes are dry
Scream until you are breathless
I am here

Like water, so free and flowing
Powerful
Curing ailments of the body and soul

Saehyun, take my hand
Tell me where you want to go
I will take you there and let you be free
To be yourself authentically
To Laugh, play
And feel the joy that you deserve

I am strong like a wave
Boiling, bubbling, and rising
Transforming into a higher state

Kimmy, take my hand
Tell me your story
What are your dreams?
I will make them come true

Breaking free of my old form
My past was too heavy, my burdens are being lifted
By the power of hope

Chris, take my hand
Every time you fall
I will lift you back up
You have nothing to fear

As the fiery steam of my new self emanates and soars
Like a butterfly from a cocoon
The pressure of traumas forged my diamond soul

Take my hand
Rest your head on my shoulder
Let go of your pain
Give me your darkness
So that your light can shine

The weight of my former self is let go
And I have become free
The flames of my past extinguished
I flourish in perpetual Spring



SAVE THE DATE

RUNWAY 2023

**INTO THE
LOOKING GLASS**

August 19th, 2023
7pm
Herbst Theatre,
San Francisco, CA



Joy in the face of pain

by Vince Zabala

“We get benefits?”
“For therapy? Sign me up!”
You love a discount!
You get that *killig* feeling,
Oblivious to your pain.

Therapy starts with joy.
A bit slow to open up,
Trust happens with time.
Your heart pours out like fresh wine.
Hoping one day to come out.

If you only knew...
A part of me that withdrew.
Curious of men.
A quiet, compliant kid.
Deep in thoughts is where I hid.

“Open your eyes chink!”
“Don’t be a little faggot!”
Phrases you believed.
Phrases that kept you silent.
Alone. Cornered in your own room.

That’s what anxiety is.
A rush of adrenaline.
Piercing sharp needles
Like hundreds of tiny pricks.
Paralyzing limb by limb.

If you only knew...
My life I thought I was through.
Spiraling round, round
Down a dark frigid abyss
A spirit no one would miss.

Mustering courage,
You show your bottle of meds.
“I struggle,” you say
Diagnosed with anxiety.
You freeze and take a big gulp.

You’re greeted with warmth.
Silent embrace so tender.
You hold back emotion,
Feeling seen for the first time.
Yes, you talked about Bruno :)

Mom, if you only knew...
I wished to also say THIS on cue,
“*Ma, bakla din ako.*” (I’m gay.)

How sweet it would be if it were true.
That you’d say, “*Anak, mahal kita no matter what*”
I’m sorry at tinago mo ito ng matagal na panahon
Ang sakit na nararamdaman mo ay hindi mo kasalanan
Hinding-hindi mo ako madidisappoint
Proud na proud ako sa iyo
At sa buong pagkatao mo.

Again, how sweet it would be if it were true.
That you’d say, “I love you no matter what”
That I’m sorry you held this so long
That the pain you felt was not your fault
That you could never disappoint me
That we are proud of all you’ve done
And all you’ve become.

You open your eyes
to a bargain worth much more.
Profound insight.
Knowing that you made progress.
On your own time; in your way.

Your bonds grow stronger.
Your words now speak your own truth.
Your masks slowly fade.
You may not know what to do,
But there is a path forward.

Virginia Please vs GHB

by Jethro Patalinghug

In the aftermath of the 2022 New Year's Eve festivities, a time when the pandemic finally was showing signs of decline, a time of supposed new beginnings, I found myself in the Emergency Room of San Francisco General Hospital. I laid in a bed with its upper part reclined to a 45° angle. My face and body was splattered with a mixture of my own sweat, puke and melted makeup. I was breathing heavily and could barely speak because my tonsils were so swollen that it was blocking my airway passage. I'm telling yah, I was a mess!



Earlier that night I had passed out at the party which I hosted at my place. While unconscious, I remember dreaming so vividly and in that dream I saw my 12 year old self. I was seriously having a conversation with myself like it was a life-or-death situation, saying "You need to act like a man. Adjust your voice so you don't sound like a girl. You need to study basketball and be rough like the other boys. If you don't, they're going to bully you again. You're gonna end up bloody again. You're gonna end up homeless just like what your brother said, because you're bayot! You're gay!"

I could see that my little self was in so much fear from that reckoning. I wanted to hug my beautiful queer little self. But all of a sudden I woke up, alone. My friends had already gone. I puked everywhere in my place for an hour straight, damaging my tonsils, and most importantly damaging my stylish carpet and pink couch. I thought I was going to make it because this was not the first time I've been in that situation. But no, it felt like I was going to die.

So I called my fiancé and asked him to drive me to the hospital. He was, of course, mad because I was being irresponsible again. But he had no choice because he would have been left to take care of a dead drag queen fiancé. Ain't nobody got time for that! So he picked me up and off we went to the hospital. On the way there, I was very, very weak, but I was still able to open the front mirror to check how I look, and my god! It was like looking at a monster from your favorite horror movie. Category is, Zombie Apocalypse! I was so horrified by myself that I passed out again.

This time I saw my mother in my dream, this was a memory from when I was 13 years old. She was putting on makeup. My mom is in no way a glamor girl like me, but she was forced to camouflage herself to hide her identity from the military who was out to kill her. My mother was a political activist against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Come to think of it, this was my first exposure to drag. This was the first time I witnessed the power of makeup and how it can be used as a survival tool. It was like looking at a personification of femininity and womanhood. And this personification was my mom! It was a powerful moment.

I really wanted to try her makeup on and feel that power myself, but before I could even ask her, I was woken up by the nurse. "Hey are you okay?" He asked and proceeded to tell me where I was. I slowly came to my senses and to a realization of what just happened. "How did I end up like this?" I asked myself while the nurse was trying to explain to me that I was experiencing withdrawals from GHB.

Yes, you heard it right, GHB, a drug that makes me forget about everything. The drug that transforms my whole demeanor into a child that has been let out after being imprisoned for years. The drug that elicits carelessness, self-acceptance and euphoria all at the same time. It releases me from the bondage of my past traumas. But also, the drug that kills so many in our community...

I'm still here, I'm still here... I am given a second chance... I live to tell my tragic yet fabulous story... I am one lucky bitch! So many of us carry our past traumas wherever we go... and sometimes we make wrong decisions in an attempt to break free from those traumas. Sometimes we self-medicate... I self-medicated.

After that incident I found myself a therapist, I started taking antidepressants...and I am happy to report that I am feeling better... Through the help of my therapist, I am discovering so many things about myself that I still need to deal with. I learned that I have PTSD, and I am now starting to unlearn survival skills that don't serve me anymore. I'm starting to replace them with better ways of coping.

Looking back, I think my mom showed me how to use makeup to fight your battles, and that's what I'm going to do from now on. Wow! It feels like I am born again! I have a renewed belief, in Makeup! I promise not to mix sweat, puke, makeup and GHB again. Never again! I promise to use more, and more, powder... powder, lip gloss and highlighter!!

In this battle for your life between me, Virginia Please, and GHB... Shantay I stay!
Virginia Please,
Wins!



Thriving Despite HIV

by Hoa Su

According to the latest [HIV Epidemiology Annual Report](#), San Francisco found that the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community represented 9% of 160 newly diagnosed HIV cases in 2021, a small proportion in comparison than other racial groups. However, AAPIs did worse than some racial groups in terms of testing and treatment.

- AAPIs had the highest proportion of late HIV diagnosis which means their condition progressed into the more serious AIDS status within 3 months from testing positive for HIV. These people have had HIV for a long time before they got tested.
- AAPIs had the 2nd lowest proportion of HIV medicine prescription at the time of diagnosis. It is recommended that people be on HIV medicine immediately upon testing positive.
- When AAPIs are on HIV medicine, they have the second lowest proportion of HIV viral suppression at 6 and 12 months from diagnosis. This is a problem because without medicine to control the disease and suppress the HIV virus, the HIV virus could cause other serious health conditions and could still be transmitted to others.

As a person living with HIV for the last 19 years, I am passionate about advocating for HIV programs and educating people about HIV prevention and treatment. I don't want people to contract HIV. And for people living with HIV, I want you to know that there is no shame in having this disease. You can still live a long healthy life with proper treatment and a strong social support network.

In the early years of my HIV diagnosis, I experienced lots of shame — in part a reflection of my upbringing. My family is Chinese from Vietnam. After the fall of Saigon, the communist Vietnamese government made it intolerable and unsafe for Chinese people to continue to live in Vietnam. In 1978, my parents gave up two successful businesses to escape Vietnam with our entire family. We left on a small wooden fishing boat, crammed together with many other families, not knowing what our future holds or if we would survive the open sea or the Thai pirates. We eventually ended up in Hong Kong where we stayed for about a year before we got sponsored to come to America.

Growing up, I was taught not share our personal challenges in public because they would bring shame to our family. As Vietnamese refugees, my parents and older siblings taught me directly and indirectly that we have to outwardly show that we are doing well. The Vietnamese community valued success in work, education and family life and judged others against these standards. We must not exhibit any behaviors or share information about our personal life that would allow others to have a negative perception of us or our family.

When I first came out as a gay man in college over 20 years ago, the thought of having sex and potentially catching sexually transmitted infections including HIV was very scary to me. In sharing this fact with my friend from San Francisco, he invited me to visit him to meet other gay people and to learn how to be more open-minded about sex. At first impression, I was amazed to see so many gay Asian men in one place at the club N' Touch.

There I witnessed the HIV outreach team having so much fun educating people about HIV and being so open in discussing safer sex practices. That was a liberating experience for me. As a public health graduate student at the time, I appreciated seeing the impact and reach of HIV outreach activities in the community. That experience made me want to contribute to this work and become an HIV health educator.

Despite my extensive knowledge about HIV, I still couldn't protect myself from contracting HIV. When I found out my status, I was dazed by the news and I felt ashamed for contracting the virus. I questioned my ability to be credible in speaking about HIV prevention since I couldn't even protect myself. Why would anyone believe what I have to say after I sero-converted? One year at my mom's birthday, my eldest brother said our family is lucky to have 12 kids who are all healthy. Remembering that sentiment, I was afraid to share my HIV status as it would tarnish this image of a perfect healthy family. For years, I only shared my HIV status with a few trusted friends.

After my HIV diagnosis, I knew my plan for a comfortable future was forever altered. In time, however, I grew less

afraid by knowing people living with HIV that exhibited no serious health problems. Being surrounded by friends living with the disease and knowing where I can get HIV services helped me find the support and community I needed. Seeing other healthy Asians living with HIV who were not shy about sharing their status helped me change my perception of HIV. I realized that like them, I can share my story to help educate and support others.

Today, I no longer see my HIV status as something to be ashamed of. Instead, my passion to educate people about HIV has become even stronger. I have turned my status and story as a unique opportunity to be a stronger advocate for HIV prevention and treatment. I want people to know that HIV is not a death sentence. People with HIV can still live a healthy life by starting HIV treatment early and staying compliant with treatment instructions and having a strong social network to support them.

Through the loving support of my husband of 27 years, my family and the AIDS/Lifecycle community (both in person and online), I found my confidence to now speak publicly about my HIV status. As for my family, once they knew about my HIV status, they would ask in general terms how is my health and if I am “doing ok”? It remains customary for my family to not speak directly about taboo health topics, but I know that they love and support me regardless of my HIV status.

I want to take this second chance in life by giving back to my community and to raise awareness of the disproportionate impact of HIV in the BIPOC community, especially the Black and Brown communities. I do this by participating in [AIDS/Lifecycle \(ALC\)](#) every year to raise money for

critical HIV programs of the [San Francisco AIDS Foundation](#) and to volunteer at [Project Open Hand](#) on Sundays to make healthy meals for seniors and people with critical illness including HIV/AIDS.

In particular, AIDS/Lifecycle has been a transformative event that allows me to be my true self without fear of being stigmatized for my HIV status. ALC creates a genuinely loving community year round but especially during the week of the ride where people living with HIV are recognized, loved and elevated for their resilience and

contribution in the fight to end AIDS. This event and the amazing people I have met through it empowers me to share my personal story with HIV to further educate people about HIV and support those living with the disease.

Today, I am a healthy person living with HIV. I know that I am lucky. I am lucky to have access to lifesaving HIV medicines that are not toxic to my body. I am lucky to have a strong social support network and stable housing and income. As a person living with HIV, I

want to contribute to the cause to end AIDS. I want to be visible so people can put an Asian face to HIV so that this health topic is not marginalized within the Asian community and in the general community at large. I want to let other folks living with HIV know that they too can participate in this or other physically demanding activities if they remain healthy. Their life is not short-changed because of their HIV status.

I hope my story encourages people to speak openly about HIV to eliminate HIV stigma and to encourage people to get timely HIV testing and treatment.



One way my family shows their love and support is by donating to my annual AIDS/Lifecycle charity bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles. This video shows how my nieces supported me: youtu.be/K_5vRrdVEde



GAPAMEN'S CHORUS

To join/for scheduled performances:
 Gay-Asian-Pacific-Mens-Chorus
 GAPAchorus



10 Questions

Jade Phoenix Martinez

Jade Phoenix is a performance poet and actress, producer of film and media, and activist that uses her platform and art to shift the conversations and dialogue, around trans women/femme and gender non conforming people of color. She produced and starred (alongside her daughter) in the award-winning film *HOW TO MAKE A RAINBOW*.

In *Lavender Godzilla's* ongoing interview series, she shares details about her background and about *JAMIE*, an inspirational new film inspired by her life experience.

1) What was it like growing up for you?

I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I have immigrant Filipino parents who both worked full-time jobs. My grandparents lived with us and essentially were the ones that raised me in terms of practical time spent. Since my lolo and lola lived with us, I grew very close to them, particularly my lolo, who I considered my "father figure."

2) What kind of challenges did you face, especially with your family?

My lolo passed away when I was nine, and we were like best friends, so losing him suddenly and being the one to have to call 911 was the first trauma that I had to navigate and essentially set the tone for the rest of my childhood. After losing him, my parents converted to evangelical born again Christians and raised me in that environment. That in itself provided its own challenges in shaping my world view, and what I "should" believe in, what my own self-worth is, and what it means to "live a good life."

3) How did you come to realize your identity?

As I began navigating my own truths and breaking away from my family (going off to college), I began to get away from my born again world view and began expanding towards things that felt more true and authentic for me. In this exploration, I began to meet other queer and trans folks. Once I found a different sense of home and belonging in the queer community, I quickly realized that my own gender identity had never properly been revisited, and having that freedom and choice, it just made so much sense to me that I am a transgender woman. So I began the journey of my transition.

4) How did your family react?

As you can imagine, my family as a whole had a hard time early on with my transition. Their born

again Christian beliefs did not account for trans or queer identities and in fact believed them to be "sinful" so the first few years of my transition, I was still misgendered and deadnamed and didn't even know how to ask for those things from them.

5) This conflict provided the seed for *JAMIE*, your new film. How did it inspire your work?

At one point I finally had to make the request that my family stop misgendering and deadnaming me. It was a time when I felt at least safe enough to ask for it, and most of them were willing to comply – minus one of my brothers that had an especially hard time with it. My film *JAMIE* came from this moment, and what it took for us to finally get to a place of understanding.

6) Can you provide a description of the film?

JAMIE is a fictionalized version of my own coming out story. It's set in historic Filipinotown of Los Angeles, on the eve of Filipino boxing legend Manny Pacquiao's final fight. Jamie confronts a lifetime of memories when she sees her boxing-obsessed Filipino-American immigrant family for the first time since coming out to them as trans. She is anxious about how her family will receive her, especially her older brother and long time antagonist, David.

7) What kind of message do you want to send?

I want this film to tell a story about forgiveness and reconciliation and hope. It's a story about the possibilities of healing generational and personal trauma when we allow our hearts to open to each other and our shared humanity. Too often trans narratives are seen as tragic or traumatic, I wanted *JAMIE* to be a film of love and hope and possibilities for trans people and their families.

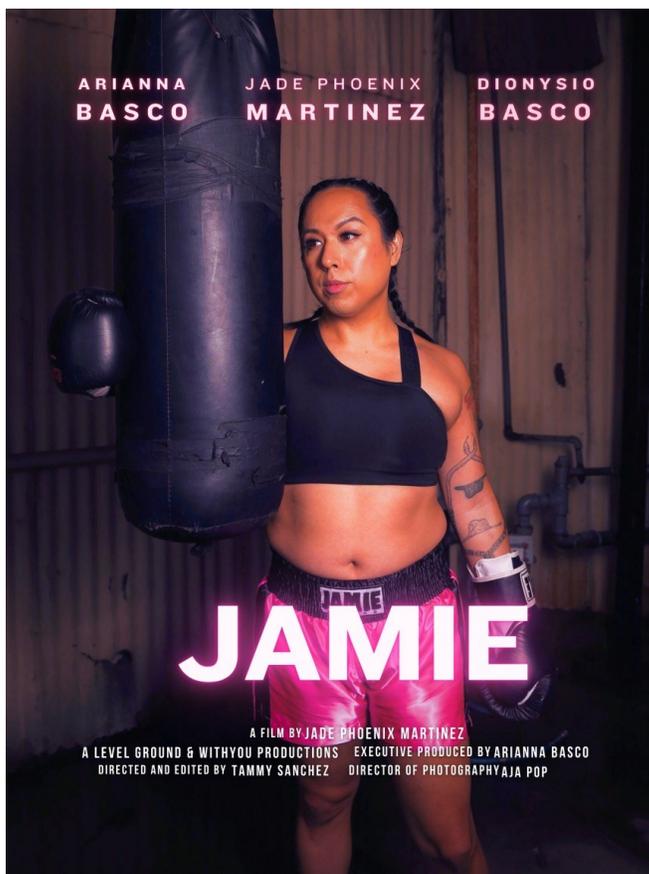
I also want to tell a very Filipino story. We often do not get much representation in film and media and I really want to be able to tell a Filipinx story that can resonate with audiences beyond just queer folks as well.

8) Who is involved with the production?

I am the writer and director and lead actor. The lead cast includes some of my dream-come-true actors: from the First Filipino Family in Entertainment, Dionysio Basco and Arianna Basco, who is also Executive Producer. Directing with me is Tammy Sanchez and my Director of Photography is Aja Pop. This film is being made in partnership with Level Ground (Samantha Curley & Lili Epps) and With You Productions (Kat Evasco), leading an accomplished and talented crew almost entirely made up of queer and trans women of color.

9) The movie is still in early development. How can folks provide support?

We currently have all cast and crew in place and are right in the middle of a fundraising campaign. People can direct their support here: seedandspark.com/fund/jamie-film#story, and here: donorbox.org/jamieshortfilm. Your support will help us pay equitable rates for our cast and



crew, which is especially important to our mission, as well location/production expenses and equipment rentals. If you can't give monetarily, please consider joining us by following [@jamieshortfilm](https://twitter.com/jamieshortfilm), gifting in-kind donations, emailing for opportunities to volunteer on set, or sharing with your communities.

Our motto is "Isang Bagsak," a Tagalog phrase that was born from the United Farm Workers movement that means "If one falls, we all fall" implying that if "one rises, we all rise." We cannot make this film alone, and we need the support of our communities around us to rally and help us rise together.

10) Where do you see yourself in the future, after JAMIE and in general?

I see myself continuing my work as a director and writer and telling more trans stories and narratives. I hope to make my mark on the industry in a unique and important way that brings attention to the issues that we as queer Asian folks face day to day in our lived realities.

Because everyone has a story to tell

G A P A THEATRE

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Contributors

Christopher Kim is a former juvenile public defender and currently a lawyer and a Trauma Recovery Coach. He loves poetry and storytelling, particularly as modalities to heal from trauma. In 2020, Chris shared a story in OutSpoken, an annual Pride storytelling show by Story District in Washington, DC. Chris is also a burner, Buddhist, yoga teacher, and Reiki master. In his free time, he loves to travel, dance, and perform improv comedy.

Jethro Patalinghug (they, them) is a filmmaker, video producer, visual artist, and queer immigrant activist. You can watch their films 50 Years of Fabulous and My Revolutionary Mother on Amazon and iTunes. They are also known for their drag persona Virginia Please on TikTok where they highlight representation for queer and trans-BIPOC communities. Jethro was Mr. Gay San Francisco 2016 and Mr. GAPA 2012. They have a B.S. in Digital Filmmaking at the Art Institute of California in San Francisco and recently completed an MFA in Studio Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Hoa Su is a public health professional residing in San Francisco with his husband of 27 years and two dogs. He is a strong advocate and philanthropist for HIV services, senior dog rescues and social causes to

advance racial equity and human wellbeing. He can be found most weekends on a bike riding throughout the Bay Area or volunteering at Project Open Hand. Hoa participated in this year's AIDS/Lifecycle taking place June 4-10, 2023 and is actively seeking donations at: tinyurl.com/hoasu2023.

Adrianna Tan is a writer, photographer and product manager. She grew up in Singapore and now lives in San Francisco with her wife and senior pets. (<https://popagandhi.com>)

Hannah Wastyk is a queer, adopted, Asian American woman. I proudly represent all of my intersectional identities in my work as a scientist, entrepreneur, and writer. Storytelling is the common thread in everything I enjoy. Understanding how people and ideas connect with each other to shape our world is my main inspiration.

Vince Zabala works as an educator and coach who champions wellness and strengths-based leadership development. A member of GAPA Theatre's Hearts & Minds cohort, he has seen and been inspired by the power of stories from previous GAPA performances and views storytelling as an act of self-care, connection and liberation. He is also a plant enthusiast who enjoys the beauty and life lessons learned from nature.



GAPA envisions a powerful queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander (QTAPI) community that is seen, heard and celebrated. Our mission is to unite our families and allies to build a community through advocacy, inclusion and love.

UNITY: We connect, organize, and advocate to band together our community identities in the interest of creating a powerful and united QTAPI nation. We are strongest together.

VISIBILITY: We show pride and resilience in everything we do for our community and each other. We are present; we are seen and heard for our diverse individual and collective truths.

ABUNDANCE: We act and react from a place of plenty, strength and hope. We add to and amplify the efforts of allies. We believe that opportunity is limitless, and that yes, we *absolutely* can.

INTEGRITY: We are guided by honest and strong principles. It shows in the accuracy and truthfulness of our work. We set a great example of how to be an active member of the community.

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LAVENDER Godzilla

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