

orikalankini presents

SURVIVORS AT THE COFFEE SHOP

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to all the survivors who keep showing up to life everyday- you are in schools, malls, offices, markets ,libraries and coffee shops.

May we tell our stories and may they be heard with love and compassion.



Foreword

Orikalankini is an organization that is changing narratives around menstruation and sexuality in India through art, theatre and dialogue.

We hold art based workshops in prisons and public schools, train the trainers of our organizations in our methodology and set up washable cloth pad making units in the community to help them generate their own livelihood

Yearly once we host 13 week fellowship for teens and adults where they meet 13 different people and learning about menstruation from an intersectional lens and design and implement a project for the community.

This book is the idea born out of two teens Khushi and Tenzin.

They are collection of lived and breathed stories from survivors.

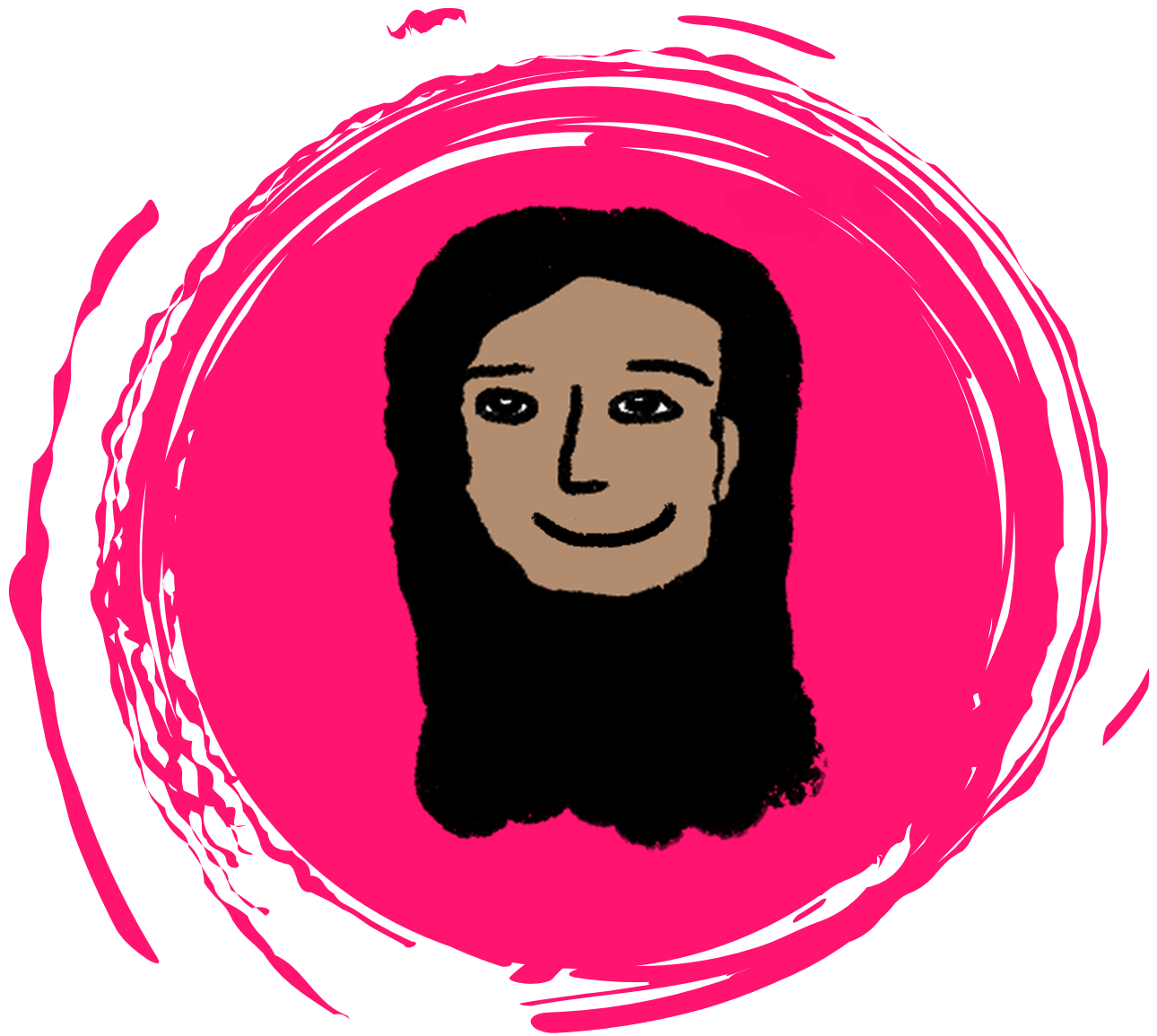
From living without a mother to living through burns to redefine beauty for oneself, from understanding relationships to surviving cancer, these stories will accompany you through lives of people like you and me.

These stories are of truth and transformation. They are not always happy. They are not meant to be a positivity quick fix but they are meant to offer hope and help us to take our demons out for a dinner.

There will always be survivors because life will always go through challenges and there will always be resilience build but lets hope the experiences we survive are better.

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1.

Surviving Being Motherless

CW: cancer, chemotherapy, death of a parent

I lost my mother to cancer when I was 9 years old.



I remember this one time I was visiting her in the hospital for the first time with my father and sister.



She was getting chemotherapy.



The other occupants of the room were a baby and her parents.



The baby's parents and mine got along really well.



They had come all the way from Guwahati.



Seeing them going through the same thing as us made me realize - anyone could get cancer.

I also noticed how my mom was talking to us and laughing with us, while the baby was crying out in pain.

She must have been in so much pain too, no?

It made me realize just how brave she always was, no matter what she was going through.



When I think about this today, I remember her fondly.



And it makes me happy

I remember her bravery. And I also think about how my dad took care of her and me and my sister too. They never shied away from sharing her difficult days with us.



It helped me see her not as a cancer patient or just a mother, but as a human being



who felt things so deeply.



That is how I remember her today. And the empathy that my experiences taught me to feel - I hold it as dear



as her memory.



2. Surviving Violence and Changing Homophobia in Manipur

CW: conflict in Manipur, Covid -19

The thing about living in a place with so many layers of conflict is that



you never quite know how to bring up yet another problem. But somebody had to do it.

And it just happened



to be me.

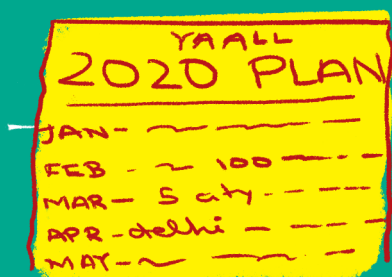
We have come very far in the past 3 years.

From a simple
WhatsApp group



to organizing LGBTQ sports events across North East.

We had so many plans for this year
too. We were excited.



But the the pandemic struck



and we were out of money!

We had all overcome so
much



to be where we were.

I had travelled, and I was one of
the very few who could,



just to know who I was.

I had used up all my fellowship
money for this organization

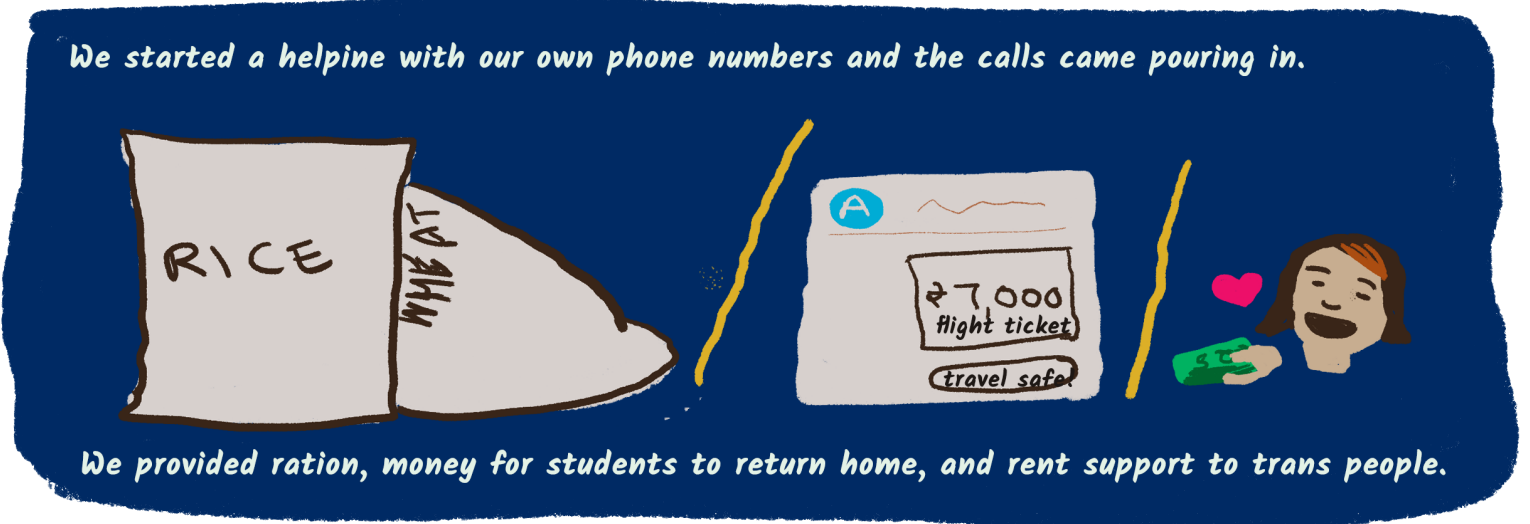


so we could provide support we
never had, to other LGBTQ people
in Manipur.

Because
I knew that

they needed care and
safety too.





and I will always do



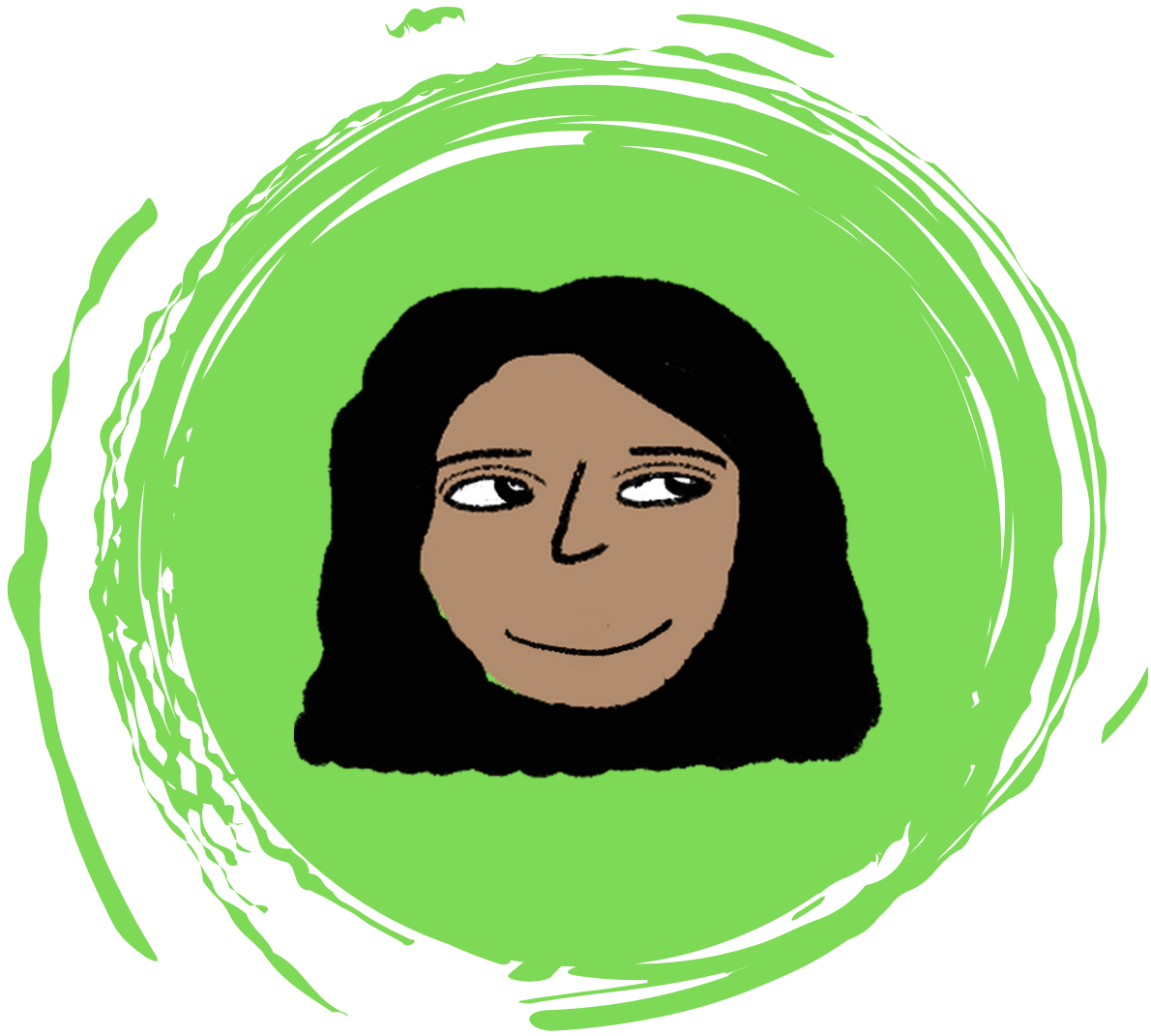
whatever is needed.

Because I know that money is important,



but our people,
they are our
biggest strength.

And they deserve the world.



3.

Surviving Cancer and Finding Kabir

CW: cancer, blood, diagnosis, hospital

After my marriage, I was lost.



I had a rich life, but I succumbed to societal pressure. I became trapped in the roles of daughter-in-law and mother

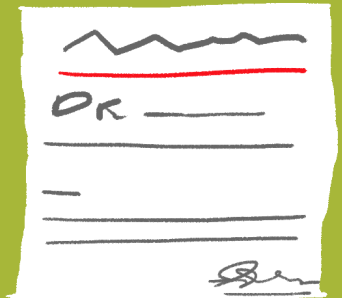
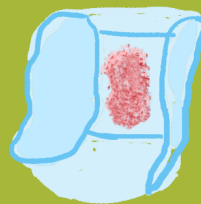


I wasn't sure I wanted children. But I wasn't sure what else I wanted either.

What would I have done if...
I need time..

And so I was pushed to make this 'choice'.

After my second child was born, I began noticing blood in my urine.



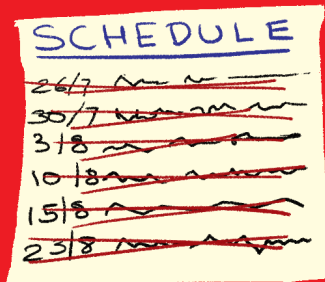
6 months later, I was diagnosed with bladder cancer.

After that, everything stood still.



And I came face to face with my own mortality.

Suddenly,



I had a lot of time to think.

Before marriage, I was always interested in understanding how emotions too

affect our physical health and being.



Now, when I thought about it, I was sure that it was all the ways I had suppressed myself that had manifested in my body in the form of this cancer.



This is not me! This is not making me feel happy or good and I am in pain! I need things to change!!!

I felt like there was a voice inside me trying so hard to tell me my own truth.

With the help of guided meditation experts, I tried to connect to the part inside me that was not sick, the part that was my truth.

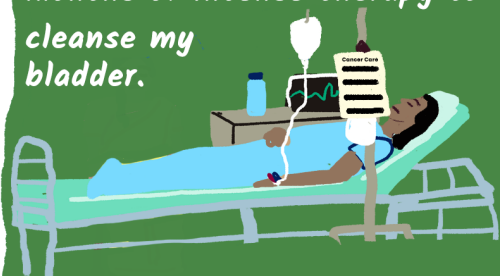


I realized,

Free will exists.
I have it.

My life was going on on autopilot
all this while.

Meanwhile, I went through two
surgeries for my cancer and six
months of intense therapy to
cleanse my
bladder.



I went through it all because it was worth everything I had
reclaimed within myself.



With that, I decided never to lose touch with myself again.

I realized that in order to live
consciously, I need to always be



vigilant towards my own unease.

And whenever I feel any unease, I take a pause, I look
deep inside myself,



and speak directly to the root of the discomfort.

I know now that I have the power
to choose the direction of my own
life.



And I know that the most important purpose of my life is
to be myself and own everything I am!





4.

Surviving Incest and Finding Courage

CW: incest, CSA, slutshaming, domestic violence, death of a parent

I survived a 12 year long incestuous relationship with my brother.

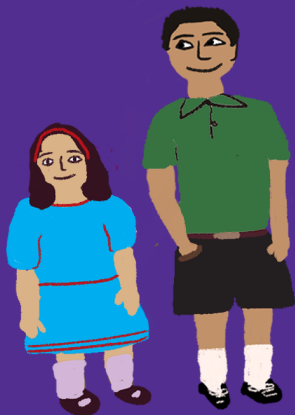


My childhood was unusual since the beginning.



I lived with my grandparents till I was 5. My father had remarried my aunt who was to raise us. I moved back 'home' after their marriage.

It began when I was 5 and he was 11. The situation at home at that time was very bad. There was a lot of violence.



I could never tell anyone about us and as years passed, I became more comfortable with him. We could bond because of our shared trauma.



It continued till he was engaged to be married and I saw him being affectionate with his fiancée.

That was also the year I gave my medical entrance exams. My grades were not great, but I got in.



My whole life, I had dreamt of getting away from all this and going to college.

Because of all this, I could not do as well as I wanted. It was so unfair to me.

During college, I was able to go to therapy and unburden myself.

And then I took my parents with me.



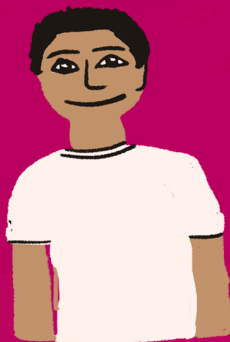
But they only blamed each other. They were filled with guilt and shame, but could not stop fighting or pay attention to me. I felt horrible and decided to leave home and start living in my hostel. Nobody even tried to speak to my brother or to get his perspective.

After that, I lost touch with my brother for two years. In all that time, I began to know and love myself as a person for the first time.



I did think a lot about my brother and what he was like outside of his behaviour or relationship with me...

He was loving, thoughtful, compassionate and respected. He too had lost his mother, same as me. He too had undergone the same trauma.



But all that is cancelled by the fact that he never apologized. Not even once. Not even to this day.



Because of that, I still feel very angry.

Once, I asked my father to talk to my brother and to stand up for me. He refused and it led to a terrible fight. He almost hit me. I stopped speaking to him then.



Only now that he has been diagnosed with a heart ailment, have we started speaking again.

During college, I also had a wonderful relationship with someone who was good to me. But it has been really difficult to trust people.



Some people had held me responsible for what happened. Even my mother slut-shamed me.

It's your fault.



I know that once I began talking about what I went through, everyone's image of me as a good, quiet girl shattered.

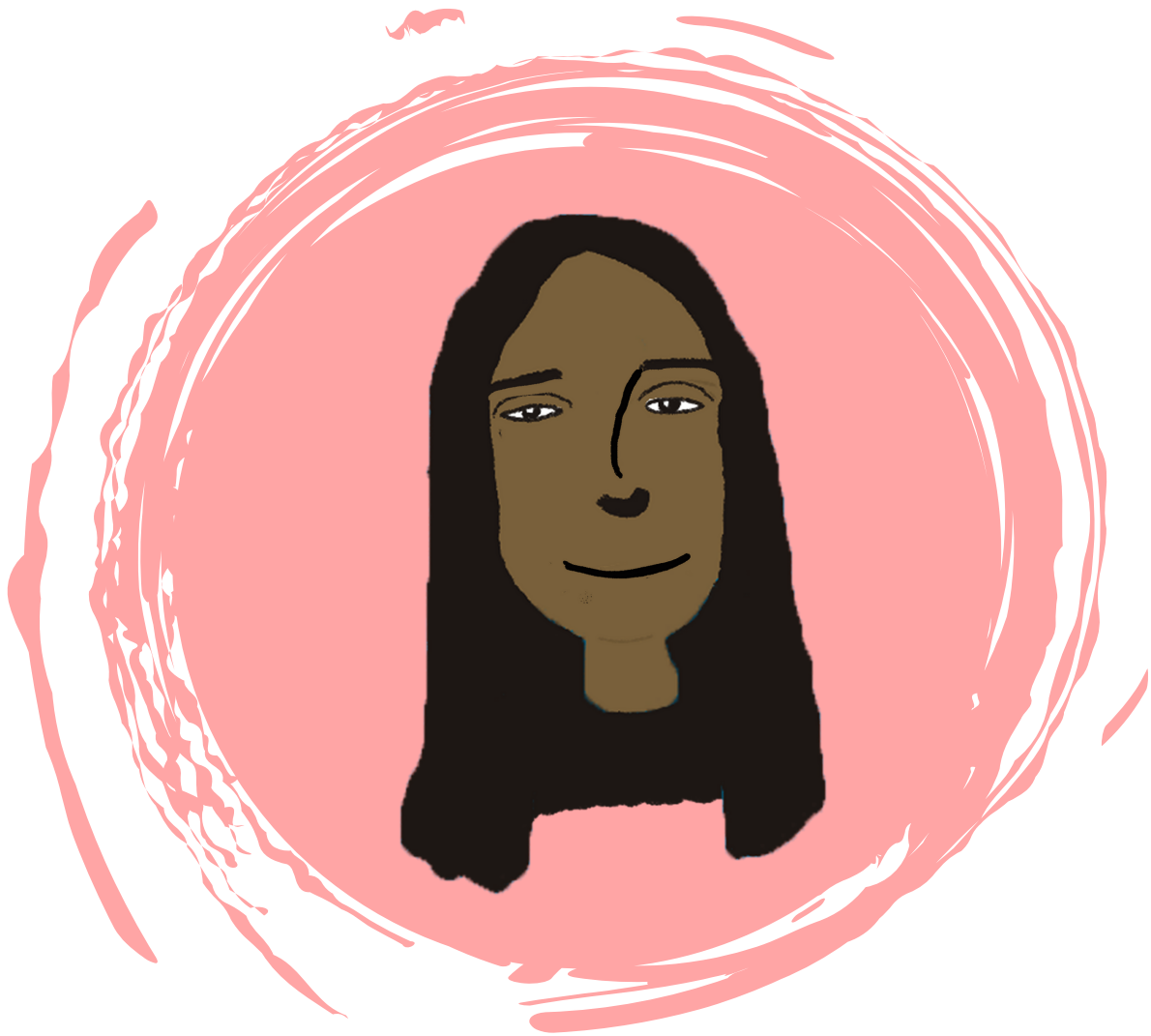


And it feels like I began living my real life only after I turned 18.

And once I had dropped that image of myself as a person whose only story was this, I felt liberated!



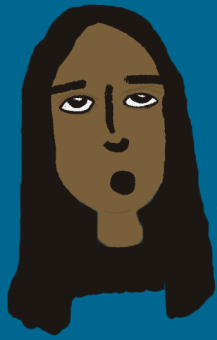
I know today that I have survived, and I continue to survive.



5. Surviving the Suicide of a Brother

CW: death by suicide, death of a sibling, hospital

I lost my brother when I was in the 2nd standard.



Wherever I went, his image never left me. I was never able to talk about it.



and what could I have said?

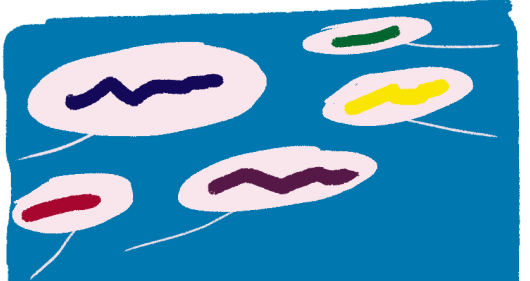
It was an accident.



But to the world, it looked like it was on purpose,



like he had done it to himself...



some people blamed black magic.

Others blamed my father.

Both were wrong.



After it happened, my mother was unwell for a long time.



It affects all of us till today...

For example, when someone shares their achievements with me, I feel really happy at first, but then I get so scared.



And we were all so proud of him!



until this tragedy happened to us.

But that is not the only way I remember him now.



His memory also inspires me.

Once, when I was still little, I was throwing a tantrum for chocolate.



At that time, my mother asked me, "Why can't you be more like your brother?"

She then reminded me of how helpful he always was.



Whenever we were out and he saw a beggar on the road, he would go out of his way to help.



My mother's words struck me and stayed with me for a long time. I decided I wanted to be like him too.



I started working first with orphans and then with homeless children.

It is still so difficult for all of us

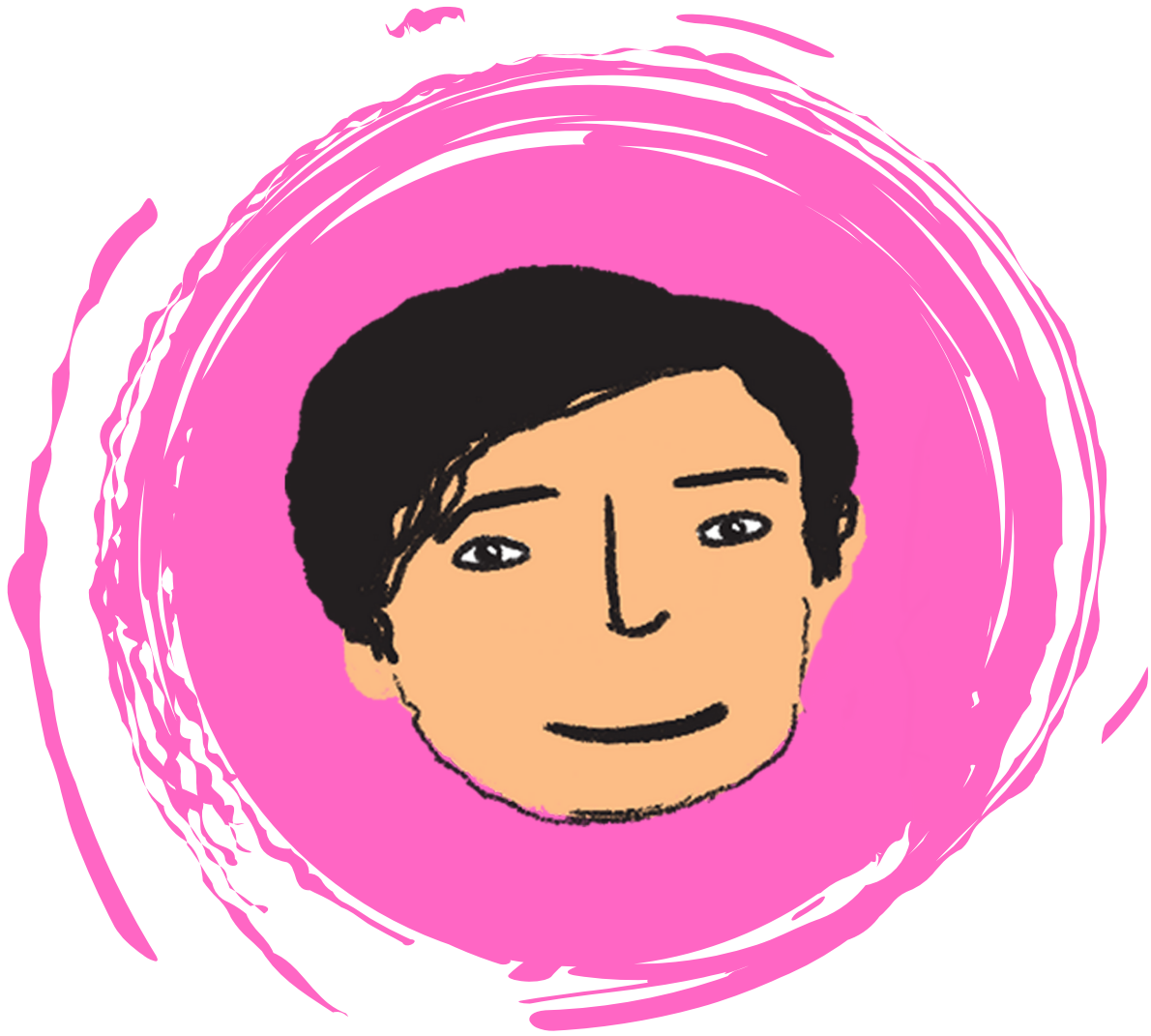


to think about what happened

But even though he is not with us today, I am determined



to keep his memory alive by being kind like him.



6.

Surviving Twisted Aspirations and Rules of the Relationship World

CW: heteronormativity

I knew when I was in school



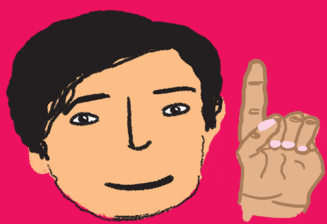
that I was gay.

At that time, I thought that having a boyfriend



was the most important part of my existence as gay.

My ideas of love too were
very heteronormative.



that means...

that even though I was queer, the love I knew to look for



was the one kind they
show everywhere - the
boy and girl kind - where
there has to be one mas-
culine and one feminine
person in a monogamous
relationship.

When I was in college, I had
another boyfriend. Everyone
said he was a catch.



But he left me for someone



more 'manly'.

At the time, I was very sad.
I thought it was because I
was not good enough.



When I moved to Mumbai,
I met a lot of new people, but



I avoided relationships.

At that time, I started think-
ing differently about many
things.



I wondered why people here
thought that being gay is



only about partying.

Isn't being able to ignore politics the biggest sign of privilege?



I started seeing who had this privilege and who didn't. I started understanding queerness as political.



I also realized the importance of queer platonic relationships.



And they started meaning so much more than romantic ones.

In fact the closest relationship I have now is my friendship with another queer person - my future roommate!

I know this much now,



having survived hetero-normativity,

that valuing only monogamous



romantic relationships

perpetuates the same sexism



that harms queer, nonbinary



people like me.

I know that we as queer people are used to uncertain futures. But having our friends - our chosen family - around...



means we never have to go into that future alone.



7.
Surviving Violence for
Being Trans and Finding
My Way to 'Forbes 30
Under 30'

CW: bullying, transphobia, CSA, sexual violence

I grew up as a trans kid.



I used to think that my female-assigned body was responsible for all the bad things that happened to me, for each time



I was touched by someone when I was just a kid.

I used to think it was all a dream



that one day I will wake up



and this would all be over.

Well, that never happened



but I did grow up.

When I was in college, I may not have come across the term 'genderfluid', which is how I identify today



but my fluidity was always apparent

and I was bullied



for being different.

There was a professor who was friendly with all students. He was everybody's favourite.



But he was my bully.

He treated me differently than all my friends. He told them I had no future even though I was good at studies.



Wasn't this bullying?

One day, I was waiting outside the college building for my friend.



He saw me.

And how he screamed...

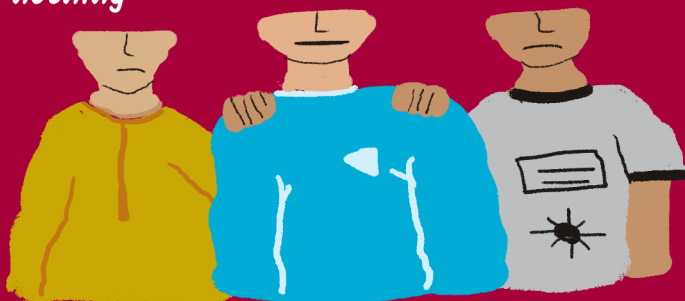


!!?#\$%^&



And how I wept...

All my friends knew he was wrong but they could say nothing



because he was a professor.

I thought endlessly,



"Why me?"

But now... Now I know.

I was bullied because I was a trans teenager.

And I survived it.

A couple of years ago, I received



A national accolade for my work.

*All I wanted was to collect all the articles about me,
all the certificates, all the features, everything...*

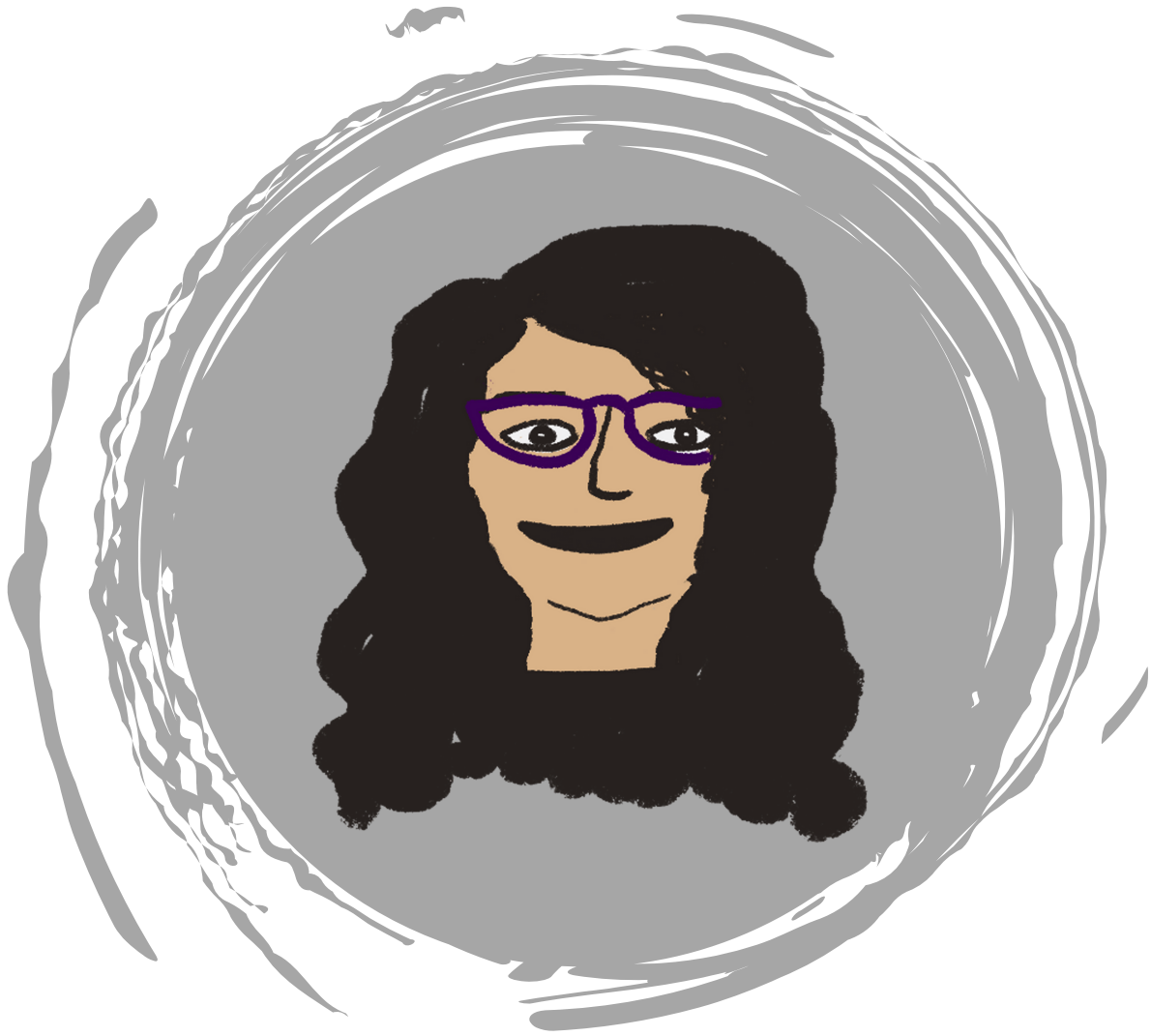


and write to him saying,



"I made it despite you."





8.

Surviving a Misdiagnosis and Redefining Beauty

CW: death of a parent, psychiatric medication, psychiatric misdiagnosis, descriptions of skin and body burns, death of a pet, BPD, hospital, Steven Johnson Syndrome

I love being alive!



I lost my father when I was really young.



I was in so much pain.

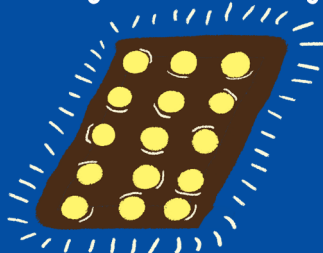


I wanted to seek psychiatric help. I wanted to live.

At that time, I thought that medication was the best way to feel better.



My doctor prescribed a new medicine just as I thought



I was getting better.

But he forgot to tell me



about its side effects.

6 weeks later, all hell started breaking loose. I had fever, my whole body was on fire, I was hallucinating, wanting to run out onto the road.



I stayed in the restroom at my dance school till my mother picked me up.

I was in so much pain and my psychiatrist told me:

It's your fault!!

And at first, nobody took me seriously.

I was burning with fever and rashes

Take me to the hospital now!



Then finally my mom took me.

The drug was burning the mucus membrane that lines the inside of the skin and all the organs. My entire body was burning and bleeding, my skin was peeling, but somehow I pushed through.



Because I wanted to live. I wanted to be alive.

And then I was in recovery for months. My nails and skin would fall off. I was in so much pain.



I went through it because I wanted to live. Many years later, I realized that my psychiatric misdiagnosis had brought me so much pain and stigma.



My mind and body were put through so much without my consent.

I had a dog then who loved me more than anyone else ever had and when



she passed away, it opened up my heart.

For so long before that, I was disconnected with my body and my mind. I was unable to tell what I was feeling or what I wanted. But once I did start feeling, I could not stop.



father
BPD
stigma
pain
misdiagnosis
me
dignity
blood family

Everything started coming back to me.

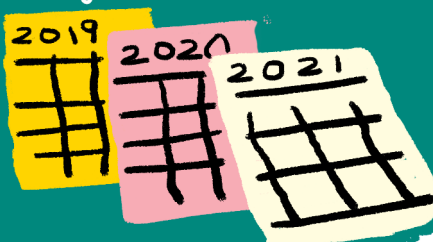
When I cried then, I felt so alive!



I felt like I was finally sure of my own existence.

Today, I know that my best years are yet to come.

I feel privileged just to be growing older.



And no matter what happens, I make sure to remind myself:

I am alive. I am alive.





9. Surviving the Waves of Boundaries and Consent to Find Connection

CW: violation of consent

I first learnt about boundaries



when a friend drew some with me.

At first, I was really sad. But then we talked about it.

It is not ok

but why

It's not you

i don't get it...

It's okay, I love

I get it. It IS okay.

and it made so much sense!

One of the first boundaries I made was when I left a long,



abusive relationship. I felt so free!

Therapy helped me figure it out.



I learnt that I was too accommodating...

at my own expense.



and that was because of past trauma.

I learnt then to express my needs.

I want, I need, I like
I don't want, i don't like, NO

And I also learnt to say no.

Once, I was with a partner who was also a very good friend.



and we were getting close.

and then, he crossed a boundary.



I said nothing the first few times.

But it all made me feel so angry and resentful!
So the next time it happened,

I said a big, resounding

NO!

At first, he was so confused...



But...

He asked me why I had not said anything before.

I told him I had!



I had said how I felt, but not with words.

We then had a long conversation about 'non-verbal cues' -

sometimes...

I can't always

You must be present

I'm sorry

for me, it's

I promise

that is, all the ways in which I and my body communicate when words aren't easy.

I told him,

Everyone's ways of establishing boundaries are different.

You must be attuned to your partner's language.

Do you like this?

I do! Thank you for checking in.

If you're not sure, stop! Ask!

He was so understanding.



He made me feel safe.

I was so relieved that I



could continue being friends with him.

Drawing boundaries is not always easy



but it is so important!

It's important to learn that your consent and comfort matter



And to learn to feel safe and secure



within yourself.



10.

Surviving a Home with Domestic Violence and Discovering Self

CW: domestic violence, anxiety at natal home, BPD

When I was little, I would look at my friends' fathers



and feel so mad that mine wasn't like them.

I felt like
like a
balloon
at
home,
full of
rage
and
hurt.



but they could never see me and i never saw myself



I left it that way when i left for college.

It was in college that I heard
the words 'domestic violence'
for the first time...

And I realized that that is
what I had experienced
in my home.



During those days, it felt like I was looking at myself
for the first time.



and I found wonderful friends who saw me too.

My friends were so good to me.



And therapy helped me too...

In therapy, I unravelled myself slowly...



BPD
Joy ANGER
ACCEPTANCE

and I saw myself differently again.

But whenever I go **home**,



the balloon comes back.

But what is home?
Is it really this house?



Or is it my queer family -
my friends - who found me
and loved me in each place I
ever felt lonely?



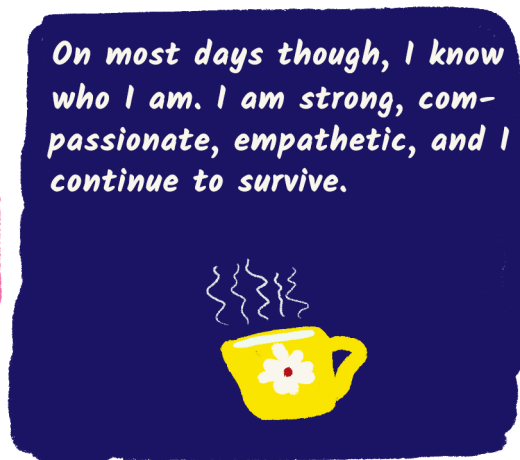
Or is it my beloved solitude?



On some days, when I look in
the mirror, I am afraid...



On most days though, I know
who I am. I am strong, com-
passionate, empathetic, and I
continue to survive.



team



Khushi

I'm Khushi Patel an 18 aged teen. Presently working on myself in respect to understand the world out there a bit better. I shine when I use my deep sense of emotions and calm, gentle way of expression to connect, galvanize, nurture people in order to create a safer place in the world for women and children with awareness about sex education and sexual abuse.



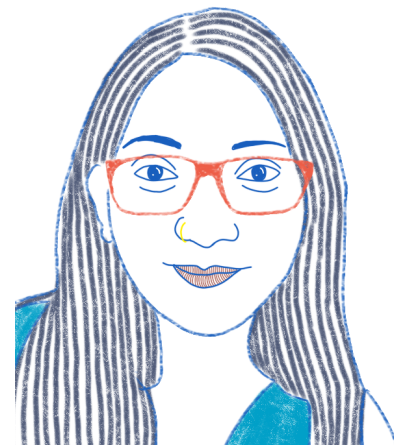
tenzin

I am Tenzin Noryang. I am a Tibetan girl who was born in India. I shine when I use my creativity and hard work to support and motivate people in order to make earth a safe place for everyone.



Sanika

I'm Sanika, an educator, artist, poet, and translator. I believe in the transformative power of radical kindness, empathy, and solidarity. You can reach me at sanidhakephalkar@gmail.com



Sneha

I am Dr. Sneha Rooh, I am a palliative physician, poet, and founder of Orikalankini. My happiest goal is to own a cottage with wooden flooring in the woods and get paid to write and teach in beautiful places.

