



## Brief Biographies

**Alia:** Multi-racial and white-passing, Alia is often described by others as a ditsy white girl. She explains that this “ditziness” is bipolar disorder. Misdiagnosed as a child, and told by a doctor that she would amount to nothing, Alia became addicted to drugs when she was younger. She has since turned her life around, in part through the help of daily medications. While she implores parents to not turn to medication for their children unless absolutely necessary, she at the same time explains that for some individuals – like herself – medication is necessary to lead a stable life. She encourages less stigma about mental health, and suggests some of the positives of being bipolar. (*Stones May Rot*)

**Alice:** Alice is a goat farmer. She describes the way in which urban dwellers tend to look down on her, and assume that she is uneducated (something she compares to pecking order among chickens). She is not. In fact, Alice has a Master’s Degree and has written over 20 books. She discusses how state policies to protect wildlife and the environment can negatively impact rural residents. (*Invisible*)

**Amanda:** Amanda was born in Japan and adopted into an American family. They did not treat her as family, however. They treated her as a servant, and Amanda was physically and sexually abused. She did not realize the gravity of her circumstances at the time, and she feels as though she was never really permitted her childhood. As an adult, she decorates her home with Tinker Bell figurines. (*Invisible*)

**Amelia:** This narrative is about one young woman’s recognition of what it means to be Black in America. The darkest skinned member of her family, Amelia did not realize that she was considered by others to be Black until she was a teenager. The realization hit her like a tsunami, and she has become introverted to avoid the hurtful assumptions that people make about her and other darker skinned people. (*Color Lines*)

**Amor:** Amor identifies as a lesbian, an identity that she continues to wrestle with. She was raised with religious beliefs that tell her that her sexuality is a sin. Amor discusses the emotional toll of her mother’s response to her “coming out” and a subsequent relationship, and puts a twist on “gay pride” to suggest that such celebrations provide reassurance to the community that their lifestyle is accepted. (*Invisible*)

**Andree:** A San Bernardino transplant from New Jersey, Andree sees so much beauty in San Bernardino that she can hardly believe when people speak poorly of the place, or express their desires to move away. She encourages others to be kind to the city’s homeless population, and to treat them with humanity and dignity, and reminds us how quickly an individual can fall on hard times. (*Empower*)

**Andrew:** This narrative is provided by the pastor at a church in Yucaipa. He discusses how his faith has been challenged, especially in his youth where he was sexually, verbally, and physically abused by a member of the clergy and a pastor’s son. From these experiences Andrew developed severe anxiety, which he still fights through every day as he pursues what he feels is a calling to work with the church. (*Embodied*)

**Aprale:** A teenaged mother now graduating from college, Aprale recalls the embarrassment and shame she felt when she became pregnant, as a straight-A student, at the age of 15. She provides reassurance that such circumstances do not mean that a person's life is over, and she implores people to act with more kindness and understanding, and less judgment, when encountering others who are leading less conventional lives. *(Stones May Rot)*

**April:** April was raised in a home where talking about sexuality was not allowed. When she was sexually assaulted as an adult, she was too ashamed to tell anyone what had happened – and especially afraid that nobody would believe her. She places her experience since within the “me too” movement, empowered by others coming forward with similar stories to share her own. April further considers her decision to not have children, and how some assume this is an irrational choice. *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Audrey:** Audrey recalls the slow progression toward visual impairment that has left her nearly blind. This has forced her to rely on disability support to lead an independent life. In school to become a forensic accountant, Audrey explains the gadgets that help her to do her homework and to follow along in class. Sometimes classmates feel she is being given an upper hand. Others have called her useless when she is unable to perform work tasks expected of the sighted. To Audrey, it is the sighted who often fail to see, and she calls not only for tolerance of persons like herself with disabilities, but for acceptance. *(Empower)*

**Darby:** Darby identifies as non-cisgender – neither male nor female. But Darby is also reluctant to be defined by gender, in general. There are other elements of identity that are often assumed to be sidelined for gender queer individuals. There are, further, few gender queer persons of color that have been visible in the LGBTQ community. Darby advocates for acceptance for queer persons of color, and unity within the queer community. Darby encourages individuals and organizations that want to be inclusive to reach out to members of their community and to develop sustained relationships with them. *(Empower)*

**Debora:** Debora never quite fit in as a kid – she was often disciplined for speaking her mind and refusing to follow rules that she found to be unfair or oppressive. She dropped out of school and followed her own path, instead. This led her, among other places, to be the lead singer of a band. Debora was taught as a child to value her Native American heritage. At the same time, however, her mother and father did not approve of her large and growing body. She was put on medication to help her to lose weight, but it did not work. Today Debora is proud to be who she is, and she has conditioned herself to see herself through her own eyes, rather than anyone else's. She encourages use of the word “fat” as an adjective, not as a judgement. *(Stones May Rot)*

**Dominick:** In this narrative Dominick discusses his journey as a transgender man who – though he passes as male with ease – feeds off of the anxieties of others in the transgender community who do not pass as easily. He discusses becoming aware of transgender as an option, and the need to transform his body as being like a kidney transplant. He also discusses different encounters with authorities (police, mainly) as a Black female (experiencing harassment), and then as a Black male (experiencing physicality and incarceration). *(Embodied)*

**D-Skyy:** A rapper and community activist, D-Skyy shares the ways that others have attempted to place limits on her potential because she is Black and because she is a woman. D-Skyy (also known as Latoya) also considers colorism, and the challenges faced by dark-skinned girls like herself. While people expect

her to be an “angry Black woman,” D-Skyy finds that using her words is more effective in making a point than using her fists. *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Ed:** Ed recounts how his life was turned upside-down when an extended hospital stay left him addicted to pain killers and unable to return to work. He lost his homes, his job, and his identity. Living out of his car, Ed began volunteering at a senior center and it was there that he realized that he is only leading his best life when he is helping others. He encourages everyone to be engaged in their communities, and to contribute toward bettering the lives of those who are struggling. *(Empower)*

**Emily:** The daughter of gang members, Emily was determined to do well in school and get to college. When she was applying, she found out that she had Native American ancestry. She has since embarked on a journey to find her Native roots. While she has had some successes, her inability to identify her specific ancestors has led to her rejection by some Native Americans. She continues to learn the dances, songs, and language of the Cahuilla people. *(Invisible)*

**Funmi:** Born in England to Nigerian parents and raised in the US, Funmi discusses her experience as an immigrant of color in the US. She describes how her identities as Black and as female are often pitted against one another, as are Africans and African-Americans. She narrates microaggressions she faced as a Law student, and how her experiences impact her idea of the kind of lawyer she wants to be. *(Color Lines)*

**Glenn:** A successful man with a wife and two children, Glenn reflects on the sacrifices that it took to achieve that dream, and how quickly his entitlement to it can be taken away. Of Pilipino ancestry, Glenn considers the psychological damage that can be inflicted by the “model minority” myth, and “harmless” joking about racial exclusivity and belonging. An illegal immigrant to the US, Glenn asserts his right to citizenship through his father, and his reactions to the process of naturalization. Married to a woman of Latina heritage, he discusses his family’s rejection of their family, and contemplates the irony her perceives in Christian nations promoting bigotry and hate. *(Stones May Rot)*

**Gloria:** The co-founder of local newspaper *Chicano*, Gloria shares her experiences in advocating for various causes – as a Hispanic woman, as an administrator, and as a politician – and how her perspectives have changed over time. She advocates for intergenerational communication, and also activists using their goals to guide their actions. *(Empower)*

**Heather:** An artist by training, Heather recalls a childhood in which she was made to feel that being female made her inferior. As she grew up, Heather entered into relationships she now considers unhealthy, where the same gender hierarchy was reinforced and reproduced. These relationships were abusive, but she tolerated them for years. Heather has since begun to shed her notions of what a woman “should be” in part by cutting off her long hair, held by many as a symbol of femininity. *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Jamal:** A University professor discusses how his Middle Eastern name leads to assumptions he is Muslim. He has faced multiple hate crimes, as well as the ignorance of those who assume he has converted to Christianity. Born in Palestine, Jamal explains how his homeland was taken away from him, and he essentially became a refugee in the United States. *(Petrified)*

**Jennifer:** Jennifer has always been an artist. She opens with a consideration of her interest in color since she was a little girl, and how being darker-skinned than others in her family made her feel as though she did not fit in. Along with other traumas, Jennifer's struggles and growing anxieties led her to acts of self-injury and substance abuse. Jennifer implores that we not stigmatize individuals who face mental health challenges. This is one reason that she covered her scars with tattoos, because these opportunities for conversations about who she was, and who she has become. *(Color Lines)*

**Jeremy:** A young man who lives with cerebral palsy, an illness that impacts his mobility as well as his speech. He discusses the fear people have in interacting with him, and how he is often treated as a child, or as an "inspiration" simply for living his life in a wheelchair. He wants to be an inspiration instead for his faith and for his graphic design work. Jeremy discusses the power of humor to unite people, but also a danger in people assuming that your whole life is a joke. *(Petrified)*

**Joseph:** A young retiree narrates two interconnected stories – first his military service, and then his experience in the private sector as a chemical blender. In both cases, Joseph faced discrimination for being of Hispanic descent. Joseph came away from his time in the army with diagnosed PTSD, as well as physical injuries, due to the treatment he received from fellow enlisted soldiers, rather than from active combat. Later in life, Joseph was continuously denied advancement in the workplace, despite extensive experience serving as credentials. He was forced to retire due to medical complications from working so closely with chemicals in a room with faulty ceiling panels. *(Embodied)*

**Juzlia:** She knew that she was an undocumented immigrant, and she was aware of the potential ramifications. But she did not expect her dream of going to college to be thwarted by her lack of US citizenship. Juzlia instead joined the work force, but the conditions of her employment became unbearable when her boss discriminated against her because of her sexuality. But Juzlia feared leaving her job, because she lacked papers to find a new one. She invites readers to think about the meaning of family, and the common humanity between immigrants and anyone else. *(Invisible)*

**KC:** Multi-racial and white-passing, and romantically interested in both women and men, KC's narrative considers the toll that it takes when a person feels that they cannot fully be themselves. KC suffered from body dysphoria as a young girl, and she could not manage to express her emotions even with those who were closest to her. As an adult, KC had to abandon a career in dancing when she began to develop a debilitating disease. Today she uses a walker to aid in mobility, and she tires easily. Because her body does not look disabled, people often react to her requests for accommodation with confusion or disdain. KC married a woman who is in the process of changing gender identity, and who she now considers her husband, leading her to wonder if she is still a lesbian. *(Invisible)*

**Lisa:** Growing up, Lisa considered herself White. But because of her physical features this status was denied to her. Lisa discusses expectations that she have "ethnic" heritage to share with others – whether in line for a burrito, or in a cooking class – and that she doesn't speak English as her first language. The racial category she is placed in, however, depends on where she is – she has Black, Native, and Hispanic ancestry, and she is sometimes categorized as all three. Lisa has more recently embraced her multiethnic heritage, represented in part by accepting her naturally curly hair, rather than trying to straighten it. *(Embodied)*

**Mario:** Growing up, Mario learned from his family and friends to shun his Native heritage. He turned to gangs as a way to feel in control of who he was. It was while incarcerated that Mario learned to embrace

his Native roots, and he has since become a leader among his people in the making of traditional rattles. *(Embodied)*

**Mark:** A college student at CSUSB, Mark focuses much of his narrative on his childhood in Connecticut, where he was stigmatized and physically harassed because of his skin color and Native American ancestry. He developed anger issues, and contemplated suicide. He suggests supportive ways for asking questions about those who are different from you, showcasing curiosity rather than ignorance. Mark also relates his education and learning of many languages and skills to his Native roots. *(Color Lines)*

**Maritza:** A young woman who has recently completed her college degree, and opportunity that was denied to her for a long time because she is an undocumented immigrant. She explains how she has had to accept whatever employment opportunities have been available, resulting in mistreatment and underpayment. She advises that many undocumented immigrants are trying their best to “follow the rules” and to contribute to society, but sometimes their options are limited. *(Petrified)*

**Maryam:** A Muslim American woman, Maryam speaks about the ways in which observing hijab (wearing a headscarf) empowers her rather than represses her. She discusses also the assumptions that people make of her because she is markedly different, and the ways in which the character of those assumptions have changed over time. *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Monica:** A young college student, Monica reflects on her upbringing in a Hispanic household where women were told to take care of the men. Watching her mother in the role of breadwinner, and with her sister’s encouragement to join AVID, Monica came to see her potential as a woman in a different way. This changed perspective has led to clashes with her boyfriend. Monica also recalls her experience as an English Language Learner, and how this status impacted the way others saw and interacted with her as a child. *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Nikki:** This nursing student describes her attempt to conform to societal expectations in order to be able to break through to people and let them see that a woman who identifies as a lesbian can be relatable. Nikki discusses being forced to leave the military after being sexually assaulted, her choice to become a mother, and her decision to take her maternal grandfather’s surname rather than her father’s. The overarching message is that being family is both an ascribed and an earned identity. *(Embodied)*

**Paola:** This story is about the judgement that a person feels when they are never “enough” of one thing or another. As a child, Paola’s speech was deemed to “white” for her to be considered Latina, and when she came out as bisexual she was labeled “greedy.” Her story is also finding and practicing Paganism, and the fear and scorn that elicits from people who do not understand the faith. Paola further discusses being a survivor of domestic abuse, and her choice to become homeless to escape that situation. *(Petrified)*

**Samantha:** In this narrative we learn the story of a woman’s drug addiction, and how she justified continued drug use to herself even while she was pregnant and then raising her two children. Tragically, one of those children died in a car accident, and Samantha was charged with parental negligence. It was in prison that she found the strength to turn her life around. However, because of her conviction she has faced difficulties finding employment opportunities. *(Petrified)*

**Sandra:** Growing up, Sandra was made to feel like she was inferior and stupid for being an English Language Learner. She considers the other assumptions that are made of individuals who do not speak English, or who are from Mexico like her family. While she feels these these things did not limit her opportunities, they did impact her self-esteem. When she was charged with translating from English to Spanish for her parents, she grew to resent it. It was only in high school that she was introduced to positive images of Latins and Latinas, and her perspective began to change. Today she is a teacher for English Language Learners herself, where she sees many of the same dynamics at play as when she was a child. *(Stones May Rot)*

**Suzanne:** Growing up, Suzanne's career options were limited by her female gender. When affirmative action gave her the opportunity to become a police officer, she took it. However, some of the other officers did not believe she and the other minority officers should be a part of the force, and they made it difficult for her to do her job. She eventually left the force and became a private investigator, where it is not only her gender but increasingly her age that surprises people and sometimes leads them to treat her disrespectfully. Working also in indignant defense, Suzanne uses her own experiences to advocate for the rites of everyone to equal rights and a fair chance in a system that does not favor them *(I Raise Up My Voice)*

**Sylvia:** A pastor at a church in Ontario, Sylvia shares her journey and the meaning behind "radical welcome" – or, embracing every worshiper, rather than judging them. She refers to particular biblical passages and Christian ideologies to defend the position that churches should support LGBT individuals. *(Color Lines)*

**Terrance:** A leader in the Inland Empire Community as the Founder and CEO of Young Visionaries, Terrance shares his life story, and particularly how he got involved in gangs. He explains that, growing up, gangs took care of the community's youth and they were role models. He suggests that turning his life around was challenging, because he had to learn how to operate under a new rulebook that was different from the neighborhood he grew up in. He offers advice about helping youth today to "see the gorilla" in their lives and find a role model. *(Petriefied)*

**Theresa:** An artist by profession, Theresa reflects on how her art has always been a window into her subconscious. Often, that art explores marginalization. Theresa considers how "Black" is used to describe a diverse group of people – because she does not fit the stereotype of what Black people "do" and what they look like or sound like, people question her heritage. She concludes that you have to stay positive, or things become too overwhelming, and that in every situation there is something to learn. *(Color Lines)*

**Vicki:** An older woman, only three generations removed from slavery, Vicki discusses her life as a minority. Often finding herself one of only a handful of black persons – at work, in the military, in church, and now at her retirement home – Vicki harkens back to her mother's reassurance that she was "special." *(Stones May Rot)*

**Yousuf & Fauzia:** The only co-interview, Yousuf and Fauzia are both involved within the Muslim community in Corona and Norco. They build off one another's observations and insights to draw comparisons between Islam and other world religions, and to advocate for the central values of humanity: love, peace, and justice. *(Empower)*