



white like my womb

by Leslie Bull

Dedicated to Jen



White Like My Womb
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white like my womb

centuries of hate cannot be peeled away easily. we are stuck like flies mired in honey, like a breach baby that won't be born, like gunk in a drain, like gum in our hair, like the sorrow piercing our hearts, stuck like chuck on a cold tweek, like your last blood-clotted outfit, like the tears behind your eyes, stuck like the scars my daughter burned into her hands, the genocide on her people, like tmac and magnus (my babies) behind cold prison walls.

centuries of hate cannot be peeled away easily. they must be chipped off like enamel from an old tub, burned off with caustic foam, vomited from the mouths of the kkk, and shit out in a stream of shit so stank it curls a maggots toes. hate must be worried like a pimple, heated like a boil, and squeezed out like puss from an infected wound. it must be scraped away like the roach dirt that floats into a baby's lungs and gives her asthma, like the cum i rinsed from my leg after you raped me, half lives swirling in the drain, like the acid reflux that sears my mother's esophagus, the hate must be neutralized and washed away, it must be douched, and soaked, and leached, and scrubbed, and suctioned, and cleaned like my womb before you cut it out, like blood stains from the carpets, streets, and fields of amerika.

leslie bull 1/03

1.
i grew up mixed.
not what you might think.
not mixed race.
i'm talking about what i call mixed class.
there are so many of us.
how can we categorize people neatly.
categories are never neat!
my father was from
shoeless "dirt farmers"
achieved the dream.
hard work, white skin, and being male
paved his way,
but no one ever acknowledged that,
just scurried around
trying to do his bidding
and avoid his fists.
my mother's middle class family,
slave holder descendants
to the one,
hated my father
for all the wrong reasons,
called him "ignorant dirt farmer"
not good enough for their girl.
my father put me inside her
and took us to the ghetto
where he worked three jobs to
put him and my mom through college.
a woman got raped in our backyard
and my mom couldn't imagine
what kind of "tricks"
our next door neighbor's husband
wanted her to perform.
for my mother
it was an exercise in slumming
that quickly turned to a nightmare
of domestic abuse.
still, the family inevitably rose.

2.
we moved to the sacred burial grounds
of the muckleshoot natives
where i was taught to be racist
by my family, school, and society.
the "mucks" sat at the back of the room
swallowed their tongues,
burnt our town,
but the town didn't look burnt,
just small and white.
i grew up in auburn,

and my uncle taught me the story of
how our town got it's name.
"the indians set the town on fire
and went up on the hill and said,
'ahhh burn'".
the "mucks" are "slow"
disgusting, foreign, other
completely unlike me.
no junked cars in my yard.
just my father's meticulously trimmed lawn.
my father felt the "negroes" (who we never, ever saw)
should have civil rights
and my mother found out about feminism
(while working full time and doing a full time job at home)
my father was determined
me and my brother wouldn't grow up poor
like he did
too bad he didn't focus more
on ending the abuse
he perpetrated on our family.
no one ever said it was wrong
to laugh and make fun
of my muckleshoot classmates
and the big neighborhood scandal
was when my best friend annie
the good girl
married a 6'4" black football player
after she went away to college.
"he's no harry belefonte leslie"
my mother warned me.

3.

at puberty
my right of ritual was to
watch my mother leave my father
at my insistence.
i told her it was him or me
and felt drunk and out of control
when she let it seem
i caused it.
we moved to a low rent apartment
where i dated an eighteen-year-old mixed race boy
and dropped out of school,
soon i was giving away sex
and druggin' it up
like there was no tomorrow,
until i finally found a calling
as a coke whore
at fifteen,
pregnant and on welfare

by sixteen,
three babies by nineteen,
and turned my first trick at twenty.

4.

being mixed means sometimes being able to pass for middle class (and access middle class privileges) but only as long as no one finds out certain things about my life (like i'm a former homeless junkie ho and my sons are in prison). only as long as i can and do "act" the part.

being mixed means being poor and still having a tremendous sense of entitlement, while simultaneously waiting for everything i do get to be taken away. It means marching down to the school knowing they have to listen to me as a parent, yet knowing if i were ever investigated i would be deemed unfit. it means having the resources (mental and material) to visit my sons in prison, yet being unjustly denied visitation for months and months because of my prostitution police record.

—leslie bull 2002

Sometimes the More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same
Dedicated to Grandmother Dora McCrae
From a white girl that came to your hearing

It took the white Portland police officer 71 seconds
from the time he pulled over an Elder Black Grandmother
for supposedly failing to use her turn signal,
until the time he had her unconscious on the pavement,
jerked four feet down out of her van.

The officer said he had to do it,
claims she was trying to drive off,
and while she said she was merely trying to show him her signal worked
(and I, of course, believe her),
let's say for arguments sake that she was attempting to drive off.
My goodness, what would that mean?

Do you mean to say that a sixty-eight year old Grandmother guilty of turn signal
misuse

would be traveling down Alberta street in her van!?!?!?

What will she do next, bake a pie?

Maybe we should call out the national guard
the way they do to spray pepper in the eyes of children.

Knock out our teeth with rubber bullets, gas us.

The question at hand is whether the officer used excessive force.

The police said not guilty.

At a federal trial where the officer snickered when describing
the specific holds he used on Grandmother McCrae
the all white jury said not guilty.

Later, during the final appeal to the all white city council and mayor,
the dignified Grandmother was made to defend herself.

The officer wasn't present,

was never even referred to by name,
became nameless, faceless, protected, white privilege.

A nasty, corrupt, and badly made-up mayor Vera Katz

positively oozed decaying white supremacy,

as she chimed in with her sizist comments,

and thinly concealed racist excitement;

which culminated in (surprise, surprise) another verdict of not guilty.

Sixty or so of us came to witness the kangaroo court

and a good forty of us stayed through the whole sordid affair

until the end when we heard Katz's verdict and, as planned,

all stood at once

turning our backs to her in a body.

I could hear her stuttered filth falter.

And as she tried to recover, we walked out on her

left her with her mouth gaping open (I think a fly flew in).

Leslie Bull copyright April 2001

transgender community

Hello, my name is M and i am currently a student at Portland State University. I am currently in a freshman inquiry class here at PSU and am doing research on the transgender community here in Portland. I got your name from a student in your class and was wondering if i could ask you a few questions about transgender and the community. I know this is kind of random, so if you feel awkward about this, just be honest. I know this is also on short notice, but if you could reply as soon as possible, hopefully by the end of this weekend, that would be great. Thank you so much for your time and effort.

M

hi m, are you trying to reach leslie? i mentor a 101 women's studies class, or are you trying to reach my husband boosey, also a student at psu. anyway, if you are trying to reach leslie that is me.

leslie bull

Leslie, I am just trying to learn more about the transgender community so if you could answer these questions that would be great. If you could elaborate as much as possible for these questions, that would be great, just so i can get your full view and thoughts. Also, if any of these questions are at all offensive, feel free to not answer them.

okay m, boosey and i will both answer your questions.

First of all, what are your experiences with the transgender community?

leslie i don't know of a transgender community. i am married to a person who sometimes identifies as a trans man and have some trans friends and acquaintances.

boosey truthfully, i'm not sure i really know what the trans community is. i sometimes see some trans women hanging together, but it has been my experience that most trans guys tend not to. i deal with my own internalized transphobia everyday, and for me its an issue of passing. i mean just now i typed transphobia and once again spell check told me it doesn't exist. i don't exist.

Can you just tell me a little bit about yourself and your husband?

I we met five years ago and fell in love. i left my x-husband for boosey and we are still deeply in love. we got married twice, once on our own and once legally, on new years eve. i am white and boosey is half jewish and half white. boosey comes from poor working class and foster system, me from mixed middle class and homeless/welfare/working poor class. boosey likes to play chess. i'm a writer and used to be a street prostitute. we have five kids and a grandson.

What are some of the positive and negative effects you've encountered while supporting this community?

I i don't know which community you mean. i support my family and friends. while living with my husband i have noticed a lot about the prevalence of transphobia. boosey is legally a man yet doesn't take hormones. his gender is often seen as ambiguous or confusing and therefore threatening. people react in all kinds of fucked up ways. all the time. every day. boosey would like to break all the people's teeth out but he doesn't want to go to prison and be away from our family.

b fact is, i would love to violently wipe the seething grin from every ignorant asshole that gives me shit, and everyday some other yahoo just sets another fuse....tic...tic...tic. supporting the trans-community? is that what we're talking about? does that mean just all the trans people put all together? or does that mean me because i'm a trans man, and then my wife, my kids, our extended families, our friends, our neighbors, our neighborhood, then downtown and out?

How do you think others, not in the transgender community, feel about this issue?

I which issue? transphobia sucks. it hurts and kills. suicide and murder. transphobia gets you down when you deal with it day in and day out.

b great again this issue. what does that mean? you mean about being trans? or having a community? i'm not trying to be funny or obtuse here, but what issue? like what do non-trans people think of trans people? is that the question? come on now. type in transgender. we don't exist. there is no place no us. we are one of the most acceptable people to hate.

Are there adequate resources available for the transgender community here in portland?

I not that i know of. at times they seem almost nonexistent.

b truthfully i haven't sought out too much, due to poor past experiences. a few years ago when i was having trouble dealing with others reaction to me i sought therapy. i was quickly whisked into "portland's best program" then called the forum. none of the counselors were trans, nor did they have adequate diversity training to be able to effectively treat those dealing with society's inability to deal with trans people. the professionals and staff that i interacted with in the program never even got the pronouns right. we deal enough with that on the outside everyday. in fact it is my opinion that indeed they were doing harm.

What are some of the current issues facing the transgender community, and what are most important?

I some of the issues my husband faces are poverty, transphobia, lack of medical care, and mental health.

b some other issues are that we are still listed in the DSM-III as a disorder, yet many programs including oregon health plan will not pay for treatment. patriarchy, poverty, and the twisted necessity in which our society insists on connecting gender to biological sex. we are still not accepted into mainstream society, and it is still lawful to discriminate against us. few care when we are

brutally murdered, and our deaths are not important enough to investigate.

What are the needs of this community and are any of them currently being met?

l the needs of the “community” are as diverse as the “community”. we need to end racism, poverty, woman hating, whore stigma, ableism, transphobia, ageism, capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, bush’s presidency, homophobia, prison system, and so much more.

b i agree with my wife. hmmm, currently met? i think we’ve met our quota for hate crimes committed against us.

Does portland offer good support for the transgender community?

l not that i know of.

b not in my opinion. i read somewhere this was the mecca for trans people, but i don’t see it. if the psychiatric community is any indication of acceptance portland’s got a hell of a ways to go. you used to be able to get a decent surgery here, but i heard meltzer moved to arizona.

I can’t really think of any other specific questions but anything you have to offer or share with me would be really great and appreciated. Thanks for helping me gain more knowledge about this community and thanks so much for your time and effort.

b you’re welcome.

l i think that understanding there is no one “transgender community” is a great place to start. for example there is transsexual—m to f and f to m, transvestite, transgender, gender queer, drag king or queen, androgynous, etc.

someone may do gender bending at clubs on weekends while someone else may be a post-op transsexual who is part of a white, heterosexual, christian community.

also, within these groups there is infinite variety in relation to race, ethnicity, class, language, sexuality (for example a trans person may be heterosexual, bi, gay, lesbian, etc), religion, etc.

trans people have many different experiences just like other men and women. for example, by not always passing boosey experiences lots of overt hostility.

a friend with top surgery and hormones passes all the time as a man. he recently moved to a new city and none of his new friends know he’s trans. he talks about feeling happy to not have to deal with so much overt transphobia, yet feeling very isolated because no one knows his history or what he went through in life.

another friend, who went from m to f is on hormones, passes all the time, and will soon have surgery. she is married to a trans man and they are heterosexual. she is very private about discussing or sharing trans stuff. finally being accepted as a woman all the time by everyone is her goal and makes her feel happy.

thinking about definitions of “transgender” and “community” is good. i refer you to www.eminism.org and www.confluere.com to read emi koyama, qwo li driskill, and diana courvant. you can also read mine and boosey’s zine *turtle and gorilla* and see our pics there.

leslie bull—2003



Leslie & Stacey aka Boosey

The Bus

The white couple are sitting sideways on the bus. He (she?) is big, 5'9" and about 300 pounds. Scruffy, boy's haircut brushing collar of tan button up shirt stretched over round belly, handsome, square jaw, youthful-looking features, a few scraggly reddish blonde hairs sprouting from pointy chin. She (definitely) is smaller and older, pale-skinned, thick, and compact, with a shapely head and round, piercing, almost maniacal green-grey eyes. They sit in the seats near the back that allow them to look out the bus' large side windows, his arm around her shoulders, squeezing her puffy red winter coat.

Facing them on the other side of the aisle is a single Black guy. He looks like mid forties and used hard. His jeans are neatly ironed and his shoes decent, yet there is an aura of desperation about him. He has two visible scars, one thin and vertical above his left eyebrow, and the other cut deep across the bridge of his flat nose. One front tooth is missing, although it doesn't keep him from smiling. A cold smile that creases up his face but never reaches his eyes.

Along the back of the bus, next to the sideways seats is a long forward facing bench. In the middle is a young, slender white girl with a long face and almond shaped eyes, her straight, sandy brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. She is dressed in a blue fleece pullover and clutches a sheath of papers tightly in her hands. To her right, near the windows (close to the couple) sits a tall, light skinned Black kid of maybe nineteen or twenty, the attractiveness of his regular features set off by a thick mane of loose curls. He is dressed in baggy black jeans and a matching powder blue parka and baseball cap, a thick silver chain glistening around his neck.

The two guys are mackin' on the girl.

"So where ya goin'?" Cold smile inquires.

"I'm goin' to the Lloyd Center to apply for a job," The girl answers.

"Where at?"

"At a hat shop."

A conversation ensues between the three of them about the name of the shop and where it is located within the mall.

"Do they drug test?" Blue parka inquires.

"I don't know and I don't care, 'cause I don't use no drugs, I don't smoke no weed, and I don't drink." The girl chants in a singsong voice. The guys' eyes widen in surprise.

"Hey can I see those papers?" Cold smile says, reaching over to grab at the girl's papers, but she holds them tight, moving them to the side, out of his reach. She thumbs through the papers handing him the pages that give the job

description, and keeping back the rest.

"These here papers are my business," she says quietly, but firmly.

"How old are you?" Cold smile asks, looking The girl up and down hungrily.

"Sixteen." She answers, and both men break up.

"Ughhh. You's young." They reply in a chorus.

"I just turned sixteen on Friday and I'm looking for a job," she says matter-of-factly.

At this point the red coated Crazy eyes who has been dimly following the conversation all along begins to pay particular attention, gazing at the young girl protectively, although it seems clear that so far she is handling herself just fine.

"I'm twenty-three." Cold smile announces.

"You are not." The girl blurts out.

"Whadya mean? Ya sayin' I look old?" He retorts.

"Not old, just older. Older than twenty-three," she replies diplomatically.

"Hey why don't ya tell her your real name, R. Kelley." Blue parka cuts up. The girl laughs and Cold smile groans.

"Man, you's a killer bro, a killer for sure," he says, shaking his head.

"You know why he said that right?" Handsome face whispers to Crazy eyes.

"Ya, ya, I know, R. Kelley supposedly likes young girls," she replies into his ear.

The conversation continues with Cold smile doing most of the mackin'.

"Sounds like it's time for a change in yo life baby," he says to the girl.

"I don't mess with no older guys."

"Listen up baby girl, I'm from the East Coast and we got a different kinda game out there..."

By now Crazy eyes is following the conversation like mad, giving the girl reassuring smiles when she looks her way.

Suddenly Blue parka addresses The girl.

"Do you know her?" He says, gesturing toward Crazy eyes. "'Cause she sure is all up in yo bizness. She sure is into you, she sure do like you." He says rudely.

Handsome face flares up.

"You need to show my wife some respect," he says in a low angry voice.

"Fuck you asshole." Blue parka retorts. "Whaddya doin' getting' all up in our bizness."

Now Crazy eyes gets riled up.

"I'm not up in your bizness, I'm just sitting here while all y'all's talking, I can't help it if I'm sitting right here listening to all this conversation." She shoots back, voice rising and eyes glaring.

"Ya, show some goddamn respect," Handsome face growls.

Blue parka looks incredulous. The situation escalates.

"I'll kick yo fucking ass, bitch. You's a fucking woman and I'm a man. I got a dick and you don't." Blue parka shouts at Handsome face.

"That's right and I got a big ol' fist right here." Handsome face shouts back.

"You's a fat fucking faggot."

"That's right I'm a big ol' fat faggot."

"You's a pussy licking fucking freak."

"That's right, all day long, all day long." Handsome face says smiling and gesturing as if to say, "bring it on."

Blue parka looks around confounded, like, "Can you believe this shit?" He seems utterly confused by the turn things are taking.

"You's a fucking freak," he sputters.

"That's right," Handsome face replies, cheasin'.

"I'm gonna kick yo fucking ass. Let's get off the bus right here and start slugging!" Blue parka rages.

"Goddamn right I'll get off here and start slugging." Handsome face says, sounding calm and slightly eager, "I wanna see what happens when this 300 pounds comes down around your neck."

"That's right this is our stop, we're getting' off right here," Crazy eyes interjects, turning to the boy and lecturing in a loud voice, "here we are your elders and you're talking all disrespectful to us. I got kids your age you little punk."

Blue parka's large, thick lashed eyes register disbelief.

"Faggot fucking freaks!"

"You're gonna see just how freakish it gets here in a minute if you keep this

shit up.” Crazy eyes warns, her eyes beginning to roll around in her head like a frightened horse.

The crowded bus comes to a stop. Everyone is turned around in their seats watching the melee.

Handsome face, Crazy eyes, Blue parka and Cold smile get off the bus. The girl stays on, traveling toward her potential job at the mall. Handsome face and Blue parka square off.

“You ready to go little man?” Handsome face says, puffing up his chest and leaning toward Blue parka.

Blue parka, who has been up on his toes since he got off the bus, looks suddenly unsure. Cold smile gets him in a huddle, starts pushing him back, cooling him off.

“I thought you wanted to kick my ass?” Handsome face taunts, clenching his fists.

“Go on now,” Cold smile replies, trying to sound like he’s doing somebody a favor, and all the while guiding Blue parka away from Handsome face and Crazy eyes. “Y’all go on now.”

“Ya, come on baby, let’s go.” Crazy eyes urges Handsome face, who looks loathe to give up the idea of a fight.

Grumbling weakly, Cold smile leads Blue parka away.

It is the next night and I am afraid. My ptsd triggered from the night before. I am imagining the film of my life. Riding the Tri-Met while the phrase “Break yo’self bitch,” reverberates throughout the bus, but only I can hear it. It’s all in my head.

Tonight, for the first time since we moved here, I went out in my neighborhood at night by myself to wait for the bus. To go meet Boosey. I find my behavior puzzling. I mean just yesterday I was giving Boosey what for after them two guys took off.

“How ya gonna start somethin’ with them guys when I gotta ride the bus by myself?”

“I’m sorry baby, I didn’t think.”

“I mean it was sweet of you and all to stick up for me, and I have to admit it was kinda fun loud capping those fools, but I got to ride the bus by myself.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Okay. I mean, don’t get me wrong, you were fantastic! You’s so fucking crazy

baby. Did you see the look on that boy's face when you kept smiling and nodding at all the names he called you? He was so freaked out that you weren't ashamed."

"Yep."

"Then when you agreed to fight him and got off the bus he looked so confused, kept looking all up in the older guy's face, and that guy didn't wanna fuck with you."

"Nope."

"Still, I'm glad nothing happened. That boy was too young, the same age as our boys."

"If he's old enough to talk crazy he's old enough to get his ass whipped!"

"Still, I'm glad nothing happened."

"Me too. I guess. Although it would be such a relief to just go off. I coulda gone to art class feeling all relaxed."

"It was kinda fun. The whole bus was looking and that boy sure didn't think we were gonna start getting all crazy. Maybe we can do it some other time, in another city we don't plan to visit much, 'cause I don't want to feel afraid to ride the bus by myself."

And I am afraid. More afraid than before. Usually I'm hardly ever scared on the bus. Now tonight I'm scanning every face, and by the way, what am I doing out on the street after dark anyways? On the very next day after the incident? Normally if it is night and I am alone I take the truck or wait for Boosey to go with me. Tonight I decide to take the bus up to the school to meet Boosey so we can walk home together.

I don't know why.

Except it feels familiar, the fear. Feels like all those years I spent on the street doping and hoing. All those years I walked worse streets than this mini little bad 'hood has to offer. So long ago, ten years now.

I don't know why, when I arrive at the bus stop fifteen minutes early, I don't take the two minute walk back to the house to wait, and instead stand at the corner stop where there is a lot of drug traffic, and pretty soon three young guys, about the age of the young guy from the bus yesterday come to the stop and surround me, one on each side and one behind as I stand on the curb facing the street. They talk loud, addressing one another around me and over me and through me as if I wasn't there, standing too close.

"Wuz up? Wuz up? Where's the heat?" Their voices whirl, distorted, distant and then booming in my ears. I pretend I don't notice, give no energy to the situation, slip my hand up into my jacket sleeve. I have already turned my diamond ring around so the stones face inward, toward my palm, and I wonder at my own stupidity in wearing it. I really must be slipping. I can see from the

shadow reflected onto the pavement in front of me that the boy behind me is raising his arms up, motioning behind me. I feel hyper alert and calm. A bit player in a played out drama where I passively/actively participate in my own doom. "Wuz up? Wuz up?" They buzz. Come on. This adrenaline junkie is an old hat at getting her fix.

I contemplate walking off, crossing the street, but I don't. Something inside won't let me, insists on her right to wait for the bus, to play her part. Suddenly the bus is there, pulling up, and I get on, pay my fare, receive my transfer. The three boys are standing outside the door.

"Are you getting on?" The bus driver inquires.

"Ya, ya, just a second" one of the boys, the very light skinned, almost white one with the aquiline nose and the mess of tiny braids says, still talking to his friends.

The driver shuts the doors and the boy says, "Hey!" and she opens them again and the boy still doesn't get on, still yammering to his friends, one of whom says, "Tell that bitch to wait." Causing the driver to slam the door shut and drive off.

The boy's face looks surprised and then angry as she pulls away. "Hey! Hey! Let me on!" He shouts running alongside the bus for a moment and then yelling "Bitch!" and slamming his fist against the glass doors.

I sit down near the front of the bus as it glides away from the angry boy, across from a chubby, pink-cheeked blonde guy wearing sweatpants and a ponytail.

"Did you see that? He hit the glass" The man says, shaking his head.

"Yep."

"That's why I would never live in this neighborhood, too dangerous."

I make a noncommittal sound and look off to the side.

"I mean the driver was only right to take off. After all, she could've called the police."

His words send a chill through me.

"Those boys are just lucky the driver doesn't call the police right now," he goads, his voice rising a register to make sure the driver hears him.

His words plop into my stomach like glops of wet cement, raising bile.

"What good is it gonna do to call the police?" I snap, "just give 'em an excuse to go jack somebody."

The cherub faced white boy looks shocked and uncomfortable, shifting around in his hard molded plastic seat, pursing his lips prissily.

“Well somebody has to do something about those people, they’re so angry.”

Suddenly I am tired.

“Maybe they got good reason to be angry.” I grumble.

“Maybe. But I’ll tell you one thing, if it were me I’d call the police.”

I stare out the window while his words harden in my gut.

“I hate the police.”

Leslie Bull 2003



bring it together

bring it together son
so who are you now?
stepping into this man's world
you better have more than that
yeah your a big one
we can all see that
but tell us what your goin' to do
'cause i know you know
we're all watching you
so your a man now
is that a fact
got a piece of paper
but we don't follow that
prove it boy
day after day
'cause you won't never be a man
not just on your say

stacey bull

Interview with Jennifer Tahnazanie, 2001
By Leslie Bull

It's Memorial Day. I guess I'd like to talk about you growing up, your family, your life, especially before we met. What do you remember about the reservation?

A lot of red dirt with no trees, a lot of cactuses, and I remember waking up early in the morning before the sun rises and then going out. And like early in the morning it's already hot and so when you wake up you're already sweating, and so I would get up and go out of the hogan and into the house, and I'd drink Lipton tea, and then I'd go out onto the corral and I'd watch the sunrise and I'd feed the horse.

Nice.

It was nice, it was cool.

And so you lived there with your mom?

Ya, my mom and her boyfriend Ben and his aunt. She didn't speak any English at all, all she spoke was Navajo, and so it was really hard for me to like communicate with her.

So what about her, tell me about her.

She was really quiet. I don't know how old she was, she was probably like in her seventies or something, but she was still running around and herding sheep and stuff and it would seem like she never slept either. She would always get up early in the morning, like three o'clock in the morning, and she would go to bed at like twelve o'clock or one o'clock in the morning or something. So it always seemed like she never went to sleep at all. She was always working on a rug or something.

She did weaving?

Ya.

What did her rugs look like, do you remember?

They were like... I don't know like a rug.

(Laughter)

I don't know it was cool. I'd like help her sometimes.

With the sheep?

With the weaving and with the sheep too.

What did you do?

I went with her one time to herd the sheep and we just like went out over the canyon and walked around with the sheep and then brought them back.

Hmmm.

It was cool. I don't know, she was kinda weird though. She'd like walk over there and be singing and when I'd get close to her to try to hear what she was saying she'd always get really quiet and stop singing, and so I'd just be like arrrrrggh! Then she'd walk off and start singing again.

Lately we talked about you traveling around a lot, you and your mom and Ben.

And Ben's son, too?

No.

Ivan wasn't with you then? When did he get with you?

He got with us right before I went and met you, 'cause I was like in seventh grade. Was I in seventh grade? I think I was in like sixth grade when he moved in with us. We were living in Sandy, Utah in the Ski Inn Motel. It was cool, we were like living there for a little while, but like I don't know what happened, my mom just went, she went crazy or something, and Ivan left, he went back to the reservation. I tried to tell him to take me with him, but he wouldn't take me so he left, and then my mom and Ben got drunk, and then we went and just started living in the car again, and then...and then...oh I remember what happened, they took me to the movies and bought my way in. I'd go into the movies and they'd sit outside and get drunk, and like I guess Ben got out of the car and started like peeing by the car, and a cop rolled by when he did that, and so the cop stopped them and was talking to them, and they were like drinking, and they were all really drunk, and there was a whole bunch of like beer cans in the car and stuff, so they gave Ben a ticket for indecent exposure, and they took my mom to jail 'cause she had a warrant, and so when I got out of the movie theater my mom wasn't there, and he was there, and I was like what? You know?

Mmmm.

We drove around for a little while and then we like got...I don't know, it was really early in the morning and we stopped and we got like a motel room or something, and we were in the motel room and I started feeling really weird like he was going to do something, and so I was like all bunched in the corner just like oh fuck you know, and then I don't know if he was like asleep or what was up with him because he'd like crawl, he crawled onto the bed, there were two beds in the room so he crawled onto the one I was sitting on, and I was like oh my god, so he like kept crawling closer and closer, and I was like fuck, and finally I was like fuck it, and I woke him up and packed all the stuff, and I got in the car, and he got in the car, and I drove over to Ruby's 'cause I knew where she lived, and I drove over there, and then we stopped there, and then I took the keys and told him to fuck off.

(Laughter)

Good for you.

And then he left.

And this is when your Aunt Ruby was living at Zion's motel, this is when you and I met?

That's when we met. I had the car and I had all my stuff and everything and I was staying with Ruby and then I guess the cops brought him back and then they said that he knew me or something and I said no I don't know him, I was like I don't know who he is, take him away, and then they just took him away, and then he kept coming back because the car was there, and so finally I was just like take it I don't care.

You'd been trying to save the car for your mom?

Ya, but it wasn't worth it because he kept coming around and I didn't like that, and then that's when we met.

Yep, I remember when we first met. I already knew your cousin Travis.

It was right before Michael's birthday and I think and he was coming down.

That's when you first met Michael [Leslie's oldest son and Jen's boyfriend of eight years]...and we never knew you guys were going to fall in love. Did you guys fall in love at first sight?

I don't know.

I remember Michael saying he wanted you to live with us and I was all unsuspecting and later I found out you guys had a crush on each other—you guys have a long history. We all have a long history together now.

Ya we do. It's crazy—I never thought I was going to know Amy [Jen's best friend] as long as I did—it's been like six years and it seems like I met her yesterday.

I remember when you graduated from eighth grade and we had that party for you—remember that at your Aunt Ruby's house.

Mmmm, yes she was mad at me.

Mmmm.

She was mad at me for smoking.

Ya I remember that, I remember that now. Ooo, I just realized I think I really acted stupid to you that time too, about smoking.

You know what she told me? I was, it was like early in the morning and I was getting ready for school, and you know how you'd always say like oh I'm the queen of the universe and stuff, you know she stopped me, and I had got caught for smoking, and I had told her about the ticket that I got and I had to go to like some stupid drug thing.

I remember that.

And she stopped me and she was like giving me this big ol' lecture on smoking and how it doesn't make me the queen of the universe it makes me the queen of bullshit or something and then she's like if I ever caught Travis smoking I would make him eat the butts and she just like totally went off about it and I was just like oh god whatever, you know, and she just, oh it just made me so mad because she went off about it.

Ya, I remember, it seems like you guys had a... I don't know. What about your relationship with Ruby?

It wasn't the best. I mean the only reason she took me in every time is because it gave her more money on her taxes, that's the only reason why, but I mean...

Was she nicer to you when you were little?

When I was little she was nicer to me, but I don't know, me and Travis would always fight and Travis was like her baby, and god forbid anything happened to Travis so everyone was always like oh Travis, the baby oh.

Not to mention he was boy.

Exactly, but I don't know, he's gone crazy. I guess he was running some kind of meth lab out of his house, the house I was going to move into with him and Amy, and he was like making crystal meth in there and they found a way to clean it and resell it, like they got some kind of really weird crap for really cheap, and then they cleaned it and then they sold it and they were like making a bunch of money off it, but they didn't really have anything in their house, just that, so Travis or one of them had taken off with a bunch of stuff right before the cops busted in the door, and then it was like ten minutes before the cops came in that they left with all the stuff, and then the cops came in and everybody was just breaking a bunch of stuff, breaking all the evidence and stuff and they couldn't find anything so they just charged him with attempt to sell or something, but they lost the apartment and everything.

What happened to Travis, did he go to jail?

No, he didn't. He went crazy and just packed all his stuff and took off with his mom's car.

Oh.

He went down to like Las Vegas or something. No, no he went to San Francisco. That's where he went for awhile, I don't know why.

With Ruby's car?

Ya.

When did this happen? You just found out?

Ya. Amy told me about this stuff that happened when she lived down in Salt Lake.

Oh, when she lived down there.

And then my cousin Josh, you know how I told you they were all in love with each other and everything

Who?

All the boys were like in love with Amy.

Oh, oh ya.

I guess my cousin Zach got his girlfriend pregnant and they are living in Salem Oregon.

That's close to here.

Ya, and my cousin Josh has totally gone off about Amy, and totally hates Amy, and is I guess convinced that Amy ruined his whole life and turned him into an alcoholic junkie or something.

From breaking his heart?

I guess. Well, she slept with him while he was going out with this other girl so that's why he's all pissed off because he went and he told his girlfriend.

Oh. And now he's pissed at Amy?

And now he's mad at Amy. I mean everything was fine until he went and he told his girlfriend. You know? And now he's convinced that Amy's the reason everything turned into a pile of shit. So now the whole family is just turned

against Amy and doesn't like her

And this is your Aunt Janet's family? Her kids?

Ya, and Ruby.

And Ruby?

Ya, 'cause now Ruby talking because like Travis took her to the hospital when she had a bladder infection and Ruby's trying to say she had a miscarriage or something because Amy thought she was pregnant, but she wasn't because she took the morning after pill or something, and it like makes your body think it's pregnant after you take it, so for like two months she didn't have her period but she wasn't pregnant. So then she was just so stressed out with everything she got a bladder infection and so now like everybody thinks she's like a slut and a whore and so that's when she started getting really, really sick and everything just started going really, really shitty.

That sucks.

Ya. it does.

So what about school?

I don't really remember much about school. I just remember like in elementary I had this principle and she was a Black lady and her name was Miss White and she had these really long nails and she was scary—everybody was afraid of her—everybody—and if you got in trouble she would come up and grab your arm with her long nails and shake you. She was a scary woman. I don't know, I never really had too many problems with her because I was just like really quiet and by myself and stuff, I don't know.

How many schools do you think you went to?

I probably went to like eleven maybe give or take.

Because you guys were traveling around and stuff?

Ya.

Where did you travel and stuff? What was that like day to day?

Well, it just, it was mostly like leisure time for me because I would always just be in the back and like the most problem we ever had was finding a place to park so we could go to sleep, and we'd always like park in truck rest stops, and like I remember we've traveled all up and down the west coast like Texas, Nevada, Arizona, and California. I guess I didn't go to California until later, until me and you went there for the rainbow gathering, but I remember like in Colorado during the summer it is the worst because there are so many mosquitoes, we would get woken up in the middle of the night and have to drive around to get all the mosquitoes out of the car because it was so hot we'd have to leave the window down and all the mosquitoes come in, oh it was hell.

I bet.

But I don't know, I just remember living on McDonald's happy meals for like a long time, and I was always collecting those, like they had those Batman toys that came in with it, and I'd always collect those.

Do you remember what it was like being in school at all, you said you don't remember much about it.

It was, I don't know, I remember getting up early in the morning and like getting ready for school and then like going to school like early in the morning. I never really had that many friends. I remember though in Utah when I went to Benyon Elementary—there was Jimmy and Jennifer and Lucinda and I remember hanging out with Jimmy the most because I would always go over to their house and like spend the night at his house and he'd always come over to our house. I don't really remember much of my mom during that period.

Were you living with your mom then?

Ya, I was, but I'd always be at Jimmy's house.

Oh. So did his mom know your mom?

Ya, they knew each other.

And you guys went to school together?

Ya, and I'd always get up early in the morning and get on my bike and ride it over to his house and then his mom would like do my hair and feed me cereal or something, and we'd go to school. I don't know, his mom was really nice to me. I don't know where he's at now.

So throughout your childhood I know you told me you lived with your Aunt Ruby several times and you lived with your mom and Ben, and just your mom by yourself? How old were you when Ben got in the picture, like as long as you can remember?

No. He wasn't always in the picture. When I was younger my mom was always with a different guy, always, and then finally one day she just met this guy Ben, and I remember he only had one arm, and he'd always wear hats, and he smelt like coffee and onions. He was so gross. He was nasty, he was like older than my mom was, and he just had that I'm the king of this house type attitude you know, so he got my mom into thinking that just because I'm younger I have to do everything in the house. I have to clean and I have to cook. You know? I have to do this and I have to do that. So my mom would get up at like six o'clock in the morning and I'd be up and then I'd have to get ready and go to school, and then school would get out at like three or two-thirty or something. I'd come home and have to clean the house, cook dinner, and have my homework done by six o'clock, by the time Ben and my mom get home so they can eat and have a nice leisurely evening because they've worked so hard to put a roof over my head. So I don't know, I never like knew what it was like to just be a kid, you know, because I always had to do everything around the house, plus if something broke it was my fault, oh it was always my fault. The toilet broke, oh it's Jen's fault. So I was just like whatever. I remember one time, it's really horrible, but I tried to poison him. I didn't do a very good job though, I put hair spray in his beans thinking it would do something, but it didn't do anything, I don't know, it was stupid.

(Laughter)

You really didn't like him.

No I didn't like him at all.

I didn't like him either, when I met him.

He just has that icky presence, its just gross, and you know when he'd get drunk and stuff he'd always be preaching to my mom about how she needed him and she wouldn't be anywhere without him, that's the way it is, and that's the way its written in the bible, you know, just all this crap, you know. I'm just like whatever, religion has always been confusing to me, but I know that just like when I get around my mom and like the reservation and stuff it creeps me out so bad, it always creeps me out because its just like so scary what they talk about, they make it seem so, like its ooooooh.

You mean the Navajo religion?

Ya. Even Amy is creeped out about it. I mean it's just really creepy what they talk about, and he'd like always, when they'd get drunk, I remember staying up late at night and listening to what they'd talk about, and they'd be talking about experiences that have been happening to Ben, and one thing about Ben, he's always been just like really religious, and like not like Christian-wise but like I don't know, he was always praying and using this weird stuff you know, and preaching about skinwalkers and bad medicine men that practice witchcraft, you know, and I don't know it was just really creepy because he'd talk about how they can get into animal's skin and walk around just like an animal, and you would never even know that they're there, and like they take like a piece of your clothing or a piece of your hair, something that belongs to you that has your energy on it, they'll take it from you and they'll like use it in a ritual and try to do bad things to you, and its mostly over jealousy, and like you have more than me so I'm going to hurt you because I don't know, more people have more stuff you know, I don't know.

I'm tripping off how much I don't know about your life, like I know all these people and stuff, but I guess I never knew your day to day life as a kid. I'm curious because before you came to live with our family you were mostly around Navajo people all your life. I mean I know you told me about that one time you lived with a white woman for like a short time, but mostly you were around Navajos.

Except when I was at school, but when I was home my mom was always like it would always be like Navajo or something you know and I don't know, and she'd have people baby-sit me and I guess they really liked me because I behaved or something. I always remember my mom telling me don't touch things that aren't yours, and you know just like all these morals she'd like embed in my head so I guess people that baby-sat me really liked me because I wouldn't do anything. I'd just sit there and color and so, I was too scared to, I was too scared to like even move or something.

So what is it like for you, one half of your life you are around almost all Navajo people all the time, and then another part of your life you're around almost no Navajo people, and are around almost all white people, and people of different races, is that weird, or what's it like?

It is kind of weird because its like two different ways of being you know because when you get around a certain person you act a certain way, and that's how it is for me, and its kind of hard because when I'm around my mom I act like really reserved and just like I don't want to make her think I'm a bad person or

something. I don't know how to explain it, like a lady or something. I don't know how to explain it.

Do you mean like being Navajo, is it attached to that?

It's attached to that, but maybe she was just saying that because she wanted me to clean the house, because sometimes I'd sit there and talk to my cousin Sean and he was raised the same way except he was raised on the reservation, and that's hard because you don't really have anything and it's the same thing with jealousy and everything.

So things are really different on the reservation?

Ya. Because it's like really hard to get water. You have to get water and you have to get nonperishable foods because you live like out in the desert you know, and you live like a few miles away from your neighbor. I mean you're the only one who's out there pretty much, and you live like on your family's land, and even your family can double cross you and hate you for what you have because they don't have it you know, they're not doing good for themselves. I don't know, it's just like really stressful being out there, I think. Anyway, so it stresses your parents out, and so they get like frustrated and start beating on you, or you know because they don't know how to handle what they're doing or whatever, so it's like I'd say ten times harder than what I went through. I would say because there is a certain way you have to be. If you're a girl you have to clean the house. You have to clean the kitchen, you have to cook, you have to know how to make fry bread, you have to know how to do laundry, you have to know how to sew and weave, and you know you have to do all these things, and then they make it seem like men don't have to do shit you know, and I'm just like I don't know, I don't like the reservation. I hate it. It's just I don't know it's gucky down there.

Is there anything you miss? You've told me before you miss the food and the talk and the language.

Ya. Even my uncle Nicky. He's kind of like me actually, he lives in the Navajo world and in the white world, and so he's like in between, and he knows how to like go about each one because he knows how to do certain things like ceremonies and stuff, he knows his religion and his culture and stuff and he knows the culture in the white world too, so he's like you know, I think he's doing pretty good, but also not doing so good. I don't know, he's cool though.

How many aunts do you have?

I'm not sure.

I know you got a few.

I got more than a few!

(Laughter)

I remember my mom saying something about how her mom had like twelve kids or something or maybe like eight kids or something and I don't know all my aunts names, and she also had sons too so I also have uncles.

You know some of your uncles though right?

Ya, I know some of them.

What are all the names of your aunts and uncles you know?

Well, there's Janet who is the mother of Sean, Josh, Ezra, and Zach, and then there's Ruby who is the mother of Travis, Becky, and Gina, and there's Maybelle which I don't really know who she is, I've never met her, and then there's MayAnn, and then there's one I forget what her name is, oh Corny, I don't know why her name is Corny, oh Cornelia is her name but they call her Corny, I could never figure that out, but now I just remembered her name is Cornelia—but I don't like her, she's just like a straight up bitch, a straight up bitch. She and her brother Paul, they're from the Claw family, which is Andrew and Roy, they're the Claw boys, and they're just total drunks and like bad asses. I remember one time my mom and Corny got in a fight because my mom and her friend, which was the wife of my Uncle Roy, which was her brother, they both tied up Paul because I guess he was acting really stupid and he was drunk and he was like coming on to them or something. So they tied him up with some phone cords and they were like yelling at him and stuff and I remember me and my cousin... uh what's his name... I forget what his name is its right on the tip of my tongue, oh no I forget what his name is, but I remember he was older than I was, and we were like in the house, they were like living in a motel and we were inside the room and we were sitting in there, and they were like yelling at Paul, and then somehow he got away and he ran to his sister, and he brought his sister over to the house, and we were like oh no, and as stupid as I was, me and my cousin were like let's go get the police, so we jumped on our bikes and rode to the police station, and I guess Corny came in and started hitting people with a pole. I don't know they got in like this big old fight for like tying Paul up. I don't really remember that much about Paul.

Who was that uncle that use to come to the motel and you liked him, he always gave you money.

Andrew?

Oh is that Andrew?

Ya, he lives in Tacoma.

Is that your mom's brother?

Ya. Andrew, he's funny, he smokes weed and he's just like really cool, he listens to Rasta music and everything and he's just really nice and he can joke around. He's not like any of my other uncles or anything, he's not out to hurt people and be a bad person, I mean he drinks and everything but he's not like, I mean if somebody comes and up and tries to threaten him and antagonize him he's gonna do something about it, but he's not gonna do something just because he feels like hitting somebody, but I remember like he would always come around and like give me money, and one time I remember I put out my hand and I meant for him to give me five, and instead he put five dollars in my hand, and I was like okay thank you, but he'd always come around and just give us money, he always had money.

I know Ruby told me the story before about she and your mom Rose getting put in the schools, like boarding schools or something, Indian schools. Ruby told me that one story about a Navajo girl in there that thought her cheeks were too chubby, she took a razor and cut off her own cheeks because she thought it

would make her more acceptable. Ruby said they woke up in the morning and there was blood everywhere. I'm just wondering if your mom ever talked about when she was there.

My mom never said anything about that stuff; she never let me know about what was going on. It was always like she kept me from the family for some reason. I don't know, maybe it was like a feeling where she wanted to keep me safe. I remember being around Ruby a lot because she lived in Salt Lake City, but it wasn't always like oh do you want to go see Ruby, it was always like either I run into her, or I have to go stay with her because my mom is drinking, some fucked up reason I have to go live with her, but I don't really remember much of like my family, or like my family tree. I remember when I went down to Salt Lake this last time she told me some stuff but it wasn't really what I was looking for.

Your mom?

Ya, like I was trying to figure out my clan and like family, and who my family is, and where they live, but she never really told me any of that stuff. She told me that her mom was like, I guess her mom was like a freak or something. I mean her mom died because she was out riding her horse one day and like these guys grabbed her, and they did like really weird stuff to her, and then like they just left her there in the middle of the field, and then some lady came and like saw her, I can't remember who, and like they took her to the hospital and stuff, and it like really messed her up on the inside, and she wasn't supposed to have sex anymore or it would really hurt her, but she did anyway, and she died. She had like internal bleeding or something, I don't know what happened, that's why all the kids got sent to boarding school.

Do you know the circumstances about that crime against your grandma, was she on the reservation?

Ya, it was on the reservation, I don't know why that happened. I wish I knew more about my family and my family tree and stuff but I don't. Amy was talking to my cousin Sean and he knows more than I do, he's been around the family longer than I have. I have cousins I don't even know, but it's not hard to find them. Who else has the name Tahnazanie?



white like my womb, centuries
of hate, cannot be peeled
away easily, we are stuck like
flies mired in honey, like a
breach baby that won't be
born, like gunk in a drain,
like gum in our hair, like the
sorrow piercing our hearts,
stuck like chuck on a cold
tweek, like your last blood-
clotted outfit, like the tears
behind your eyes, stuck like
the scars my daughter burned
into her hands, the genocide
on her people, like tmac and
magnus (my babies) behind
cold prison walls, centuries of
hate cannot be peeled away
easily, they must be chipped off
like enamel from an old tub,
burned off with caustic foam,
vomited from the mouths of the
kkk, and shit out in a stream of
shit so stank it curls a maggots
toes, hate must be worried
like a pimple, heated like a
boil, and squeezed out like
puss from an infected wound,
it must be scraped away like
the roach, dirt that floats into
a baby's lungs and gives her
asthma, like the cum i rinsed
from my leg after you raped
me, half lives swirling in the
drain, like the acid reflux that
sears my mother's esophagus,
the hate must be neutralized
and washed away, it must be
douched, and soaked, and
leached, and scrubbed, and
suctioned, and cleaned like my
womb, before you cut it out, like
blood stains from the carpets,
streets, and fields of amerika.