

Title: re-gifted
Author: Jesse Star

Digital printing on paper, staple bound
20 pages, 8.5 inches by 11 inches
2020

Texture: This zine is glossy and smooth like a magazine. The cover pages are stiffer and make a snapping sound when they're moved. The inside pages are softer and more flexible.

General Description: This zine is a collage of newspaper clippings, photographs and digital illustrations with text. Some of the content (bullying, homicide, homophobia) may be distressing. As describers, we invoked a practice of care. Multiple people worked on this description over several weeks. We invite our readers to care for themselves, too.

Title page: The background of this page is lined paper, as if taken from a school notebook. A puzzling math formula is written across the top: a plus sign, a symbol for woman, an equals sign, and a backwards capital E with a slash through it. The title re-gifted is in the centre of the page. Small text at the bottom reads, Trigger Warning.

Page 1:

A blurred photograph of The Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) fills the page. Layered on top, text reads: Just for boys 1980-2000. Below is a blue digitally retouched image of a small boy kneeling on the ground, alone. He is looking down at something not visible to the zine's beholder on the ground in front of him. He has ear-length hair and appears to be white.

Page 2:

Large faded text at the top of this page reads 1980. Black text over top reads: It was decided early on that I was gifted. Below this is a blurry photograph of a brown brick school with two red arrows pointing to different places in the schoolyard. A caption reads: places I got beaten up. Another red arrow points to a second-floor classroom window. A caption reads: gifted class. Narrated text continues: Because of how I spoke, my keen interest in the sciences, and the way I intuited math.

Page 3:

Large text at the top of this page reads: Unsurprisingly. The text continues in the shape of a spiral: this made me extremely unpopular with my peers, who thought my pets, hobbies and vocab made me too weird to befriend.

In the background is a faded drawing: three people sit in a canoe along a river, casting their fishing rods toward giant insects in the air. One of them holds a giant, human-sized green beetle. A dog-like creature swims in the water.

Page 4:

Faded text in the background of this page reads 1984 and 1985. Over top, the narrator tells us: I changed schools for a year, and then back, which left me even more isolated than before.

The visual for this page is a screenshot from Super Mario Bros., a 1990s video game. Mario is running along the ground on a clear day. A mushroom slides along some blocks floating overhead. If Mario catches the mushroom when it falls, he will get a boost of power. A red arrow with the word Escapism points to the mushroom. Another arrow with the word bullies points off the page.

Page 5:

Over a background photo of library shelves with books is a large yellow star. The text on the page reads: when I was targeted by the older kids again, our librarian told me I could hang out in the library and encouraged me to read whatever I found interesting.

Page 6:

Overlayed on top of a blurry photo of a stack of books, text reads: One day in June 1985 Mr. Zeller slid me a slip of paper: a list of books to return, a list of authors I might like, the last date of classes, a reminder that I was always welcome in the library. Below is a bright green thought bubble that states, Remember!

Page 7:

This page is a haphazardly organized collage of text and classroom writing aids and activities: a colourful photograph of triangular pencil grips, the hand of a child who appears to be white practicing the letter a using a pencil with a grip, and various red arrows around the page. Text on the page reads: Forbidden Stimming. So Chewy. Teeth marks. Denied the biro. Shame pencil. I struggled a lot with writing organization too. Dermatophagia, and BFRB.

A note from the describers: In our understanding, Biro is British slang for ballpoint pen. BFRB stands for Body Focused Repetitive Behaviour. Dermatophagia is a medical term meaning repeatedly biting your own skin.

Page 8:

On this page is a newspaper clipping of a man who appears to be white with short hair, a moustache, and a short beard. The caption under the photo reads: Kenneth Zeller, 40-year-old died in unprovoked brutal assault in High Park.

In the background is a black-and-white photo of the same school and a colour photo of an empty playground. In overlapping, jagged lines, rainbow coloured text reads: On Monday, the library was closed. On Tuesday, the library was closed. On Wednesday, the library was closed. This text continues for all the days of the week.

Page 9:

This page is a photograph of the same school with snow in the foreground, and blue sky with white clouds above. There is no text.

Page 10:

On top of an abstract background of swirling pink liquid, text reads: The systemic changes that followed addressed long standing issues of discrimination based on sexual orientation and paved the way for the LGBT community to be recognized by the TDSB.

The single word, Eventually, captions a photograph of the partial demolition of a building.

Page 11:

On the top half of the page is a bright digital image of white text reading: Good Things Take Time. Slanted rainbow lines, bright and cheery, emerge from the text. Just below and to the left, a grey metal tag with engravings spliced with grey digital text collectively reads: Holy shit! It took 11 years.

The bottom half of the page is a famous mural by graffiti artist Banksy painted on a red brick building. The bricks are painted white, and, as if the whiteness were a rug or a curtain, a painted maid holding a dustpan pulls up a fabric-like spot of white at the bottom of the building, revealing old, unpainted, red brick. The Toronto District School Board's apple logo is layered over the photo of the mural, and an arrow points from the logo to the maid. Rainbow text reading LGBT is layered over top of the red brick that the maid reveals. TDSB, this page suggests, sweeps LGBT people under the rug, or perhaps TDSB is finally revealing the LGBT problem they've hidden for years.

Page 12:

The background of this page is a psychedelic, swirling rainbow of colours. Several paintings laid on top depict human figures who appear male and ready to attack—one target is fleeing from a man in the forest; another is climbing out of a car; and another is turning away from an attacker, whose hands are held up in fists. Text in different fonts, sizes and colours spanning the entire page reads: Lezzie. Just stop Talking about it. Fag. Queer. Dyke. You'll catch gay. It. Bisexual. Tomboy. AIDS. Are you a boy or a girl? Bashing. What's wrong with you?

Page 13:

The background of this page is an illustration of a brick wall and faded rainbow pride flag. The text reads, Grade 6. I'm not allowed to talk about the pride parade. Mr. Zeller. The books I read. The words I use. The questions I ask. The clothes I wear. The people I meet. Stamped across the entire page is the word problematic in red.

Page 14:

Over a background photo of a mossy brick wall text reads: Junior high I enter the alternative school system rather than stream with my classmates. I'm told it's for safety. Not sure whose.

Below the text is a photo of a blue t-shirt with white lettering that reads: Question authority.

Page 15:

In the background is a horizon of mountains stretching across the page, softly coloured in rainbow pastels. The text reads: Burnt out and unsupported, I dropped out of high school. Take my GED, good enough diploma, and gtfo.

Page 16:

On this page is an acrylic painting of a rainbow over an abstract blue and green background scene. The brushstrokes are thick and textured, and splotches, splashes, and lines of various colours create a sense of movement on the canvas.

Small black text on the page reads: And for a long time, formal education and I parted ways. I worked interesting, tedious, and challenging jobs. I was a scuba dive master, and an advocate, a community leader, an artist, a support to others, and a community builder. I returned to school in my 30s. I started under a government program and ended up with a STEM diploma that was rendered somewhat useless because of my disability needs and accommodation realities. And so it goes. COVID-19 and 2020 gave me a lot of time for contemplation. Lots of things to think about. We didn't always have rights. And we didn't always have recognition. We didn't always have safe havens. And 35 years ago isn't that long ago. I hope one day that the Toronto District School Board and Gay Pride Toronto acknowledges Kenneth Zeller for his place in LGBTQ2SIA History.

Page 17:

A blank, lined piece of notebook paper.