

**This is not a  
real microphone.  
It's a metaphor.**

On October 10, 2019, Amplified Opera hosted its inaugural concert series at Ernest Balmer Studio in what is known as Toronto, Canada, where organizers asked the audience to write down what stories they “live to amplify.” Their written words – or rather, your written words – are featured on the following pages.

**This artistic collaboration in book format between artist Aquil Virani and Amplified Opera represents our commitment to honouring your stories.**

**This will not  
plug into an amp.**

This book was designed in two places: on land we now call Toronto, on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples – governed by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit – and on land we now call Ottawa, located on unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation.

© 2020 Aquil Virani, Amplified Opera, various writers included in the book.

Layout, cover and book design by Aquil Virani.

Paintings by artist Aquil Virani (aquil.ca).

Archival photos, referenced in paintings by Tanja Tiziana.

Visual identity for Amplified Opera by Acme Art & Design.

Co-founders of Amplified Opera: Aria Umezawa,

Asitha Tennekoon, Teiya Kasahara, Marion Newman



AMPLIFIED OPERA

### Amplified Opera

Unit 503–30 Merchants' Wharf  
Toronto, ON, Canada, M5A 0L2  
info@amplifiedopera.com  
www.amplifiedopera.com

Audience submissions were collected at three performances in October 2019 • **The Way I See It:** Laurie Rubin, mezzo-soprano; Liz Upchurch, piano; Aria Umezawa, director • **The Queen In Me:** Teiya Kasahara, creator/performer; Trevor Chartrand, piano; Andrea Donaldson, director • **What's Known To Me Is Endless:** Kenneth Overton, baritone; Rich Coburn, piano; Michael Mohammed, director.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



2020

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# We are Amplified Opera

**Sometimes you just need someone to tell it like it is.** Amplified Opera began over an honest conversation about how we were feeling as artists. We had grown accustomed to not being heard, to bending our identities in ways that didn't resonate with who we are as humans. We started listening to each other's stories and discovered that we shared common ground. By sharing our experiences we discovered that we are not alone, we are powerful.

## **So we decided to take action.**

Amplified Opera is here to listen. We want to hold space for challenging and diverse voices to express themselves and share their experiences in a way that feels authentic and on their own terms. We produce shows that invite conversation and challenge the status quo.

## **It's time to shake things up.**

We invite you to join us in building a stronger and more resilient society.

### **Mandate**

We place artists at the centre of public discourse.

### **Mission**

To inspire audiences to embrace diverse and challenging cultural experiences.

### **Vision**

A vibrant world that can uphold diverse perspectives.

"I reconnected with an old dear friend and it was so pure and beautiful. Present minded and grateful. Peace."

**"Life & light after trauma is possible"** in all the colours. Freedom & power to be - beyond boundaries and restrictions. Authentic, honest and real... Keep shining your inner light for all to see. You are true love, joy & brave. peace. I love you" **W**

"My story is at the intersection of disability + gender. As a woman with a visible but subtle mobility impairment, it is only recently that I've begun to own the way I move through the world. My body works for me. + doesn't need to look like other bodies or make men more comfortable."

"Immigration isn't easy! To leave a home country and take up residence in a new place only to find you belong neither here nor there. Your heart is torn between two places and the people that live there. Embrace and good things."

"So grateful to have the chance of opening a door is for the people with elite snobbishness. I am here because I love you"

"I reconnected with an old dear friend and it was so pure and beautiful. Present minded and grateful. Peace."

most things bring

"I am here because I love you. I became a vocal performer on the mission to see... in the classroom because... it was a vocal performance in an arena. I almost quit because of it. I remember hearing blind singers + singers in wheelchairs could never be in opera. I disagree. But if no one will put us + our stories on stage, I have to take matters into my own hands. So I'm here to meet like-minded folks. Thank you for this."

"the stories of women of colour. The stories of non binary people of colour. I am here because I love you. I am here because I love you. I am here because I love you. I am here because I love you."

"I asked my employer what they expected gender-diverse staff and patrons to do if they needed to use the washroom. They told me to be discrete, and to be mindful that children might be frightened or confused to see someone like me in the washroom. I asked them for reassurance that they wouldn't fire a gender-diverse employee for using the washroom. They didn't answer. Gender-diverse patrons there mostly use the bathroom in the Time Horton's across the street, which makes me very sad. It frustrates me that this is a company that brands itself as diverse and inclusive."

They do a lot of good work and are very well respected in the community, but they're pretty awful to trans people. I don't want to disrupt their work. I just want to use the bathroom safely. I wish they didn't see trans inclusion as optional. I wish more people took this matter seriously."

**"TO LEAVE THE WORLD... A BETTER PLACE WHERE LOVE OVER HATE AND EQUALITY AND HOPE ARE ALWAYS PRESENT... SOMETIMES IT IS TOUGH BEING AN OPTIMIST BUT THERE IS MUSIC"**

"I dream of a world where we are all equal for the ~~right~~ people that we are... What's Known To Me Is Endless Kenneth Overton, baritone Rich Coburn, piano Michael Mohammed, director

"I am here because it has become my personal mission to see representation on stage, in the classroom. Literature. In language. In the film. The first time I saw Barack Obama was in a vocal performance + that in my ear, I almost quit because of it. I remember hearing blind singers + singers in wheelchairs could never be in opera. I disagree. But if no one will put us + our stories on stage, I have to take matters into my own hands. So I'm here to meet like-minded folks. Thank you for this."

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Arist Aquil Virani, 2020 aquil@impaired

**"I was a fat kid I EAT"**

I was shy, afraid

The gym was for thin people, not fat ones. I did not know how to take my space for a LONG LONG I still struggle

"I am here because I love you"

I miss the kids, but it's good to have date to out with my love! We are so tired for like 10 years now and count only like 2 of them anybody could since I told everybody I'm like super duper transgender. There's no dem folks can queer with the best of em

"Immigration isn't easy! To leave a country and take up residence in a new place only to find you belong neither here nor there. Your heart is torn between two places and the people that live there. Embrace and good things shall follow."

what my story is yet others quell I can't



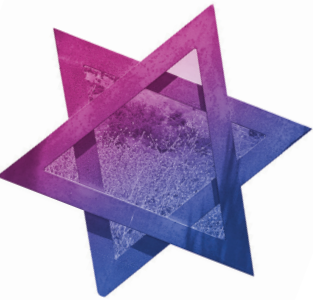
#getloudinthemargins

WE  
BE  
LO  
NG

— “We belong” featuring  
Kenneth Overton. Spray  
paint, acrylic, graphite,  
inkjet ink on paper.  
20 x 28 inches.

**Amplify this.**

I just celebrated Rosh Hashana and I have an annual tradition where I reflect on the past year and write my goals for the coming year. This past year has been one of the hardest in my life and I hit my lowest point. Through the support of my family, friends, my wonderful husband, and some helpful medical professionals, I've emerged stronger and more stable than I've ever been. To the coming year of growth, joy, and inspiration!



**Amplify this.**

I reconnected with an old dear friend and it was so pure and beautiful. Present minded and grateful. Peace.



**Amplify this.**

Life & light after trauma is possible in all the colours. Freedom & power to be – beyond boundaries and restrictions. Authentic, honest and real... Keep shining your inner light for all to see. You are true love, joy & brave. peace. I love you.



**Amplify this.**

My story is at the intersection of disability + gender. As a woman with a visible but subtle mobility impairment, it is only recently that I've begun to own the way I move through the world. My body works for me, + doesn't need to look like other bodies or make men more comfortable.

**Amplify this.**

So grateful to have witnessed the power of opera! Opera is for the people! Down with elitism and snobbery!

WELL BEHAVED WOMEN  
RARELY MAKE HISTORY

**Amplify this.**

This is something I have to write out because it's important to me. It's a story that should be included in fragments.

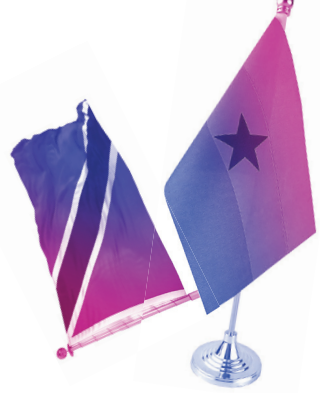
**Amplify this.**

I am here because it has become my personal mission to see representation on stage, in the classroom literature, in the faculty, on tv... The first time I saw Blackface live was in a vocal performance + then in an opera. I almost quite because of it. I remember hearing blind singers + singers in wheelchairs could never be in opera. I disagree. But if no one will put us + our stories on stage, I have to take matters into my own hands!! So I'm here to meet like-minded folk. Thank you for this.



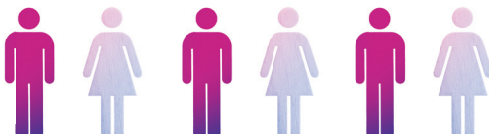
**Amplify this.**

The stories of women of colour. The stories of non binary people of colour. Born + raised in Toronto, to a Trini mother + a Ghanaian father. I come from a legacy of artists on both sides.



**Amplify this.**

I asked my employer what they expected gender-diverse staff and patrons to do if they needed to use the washroom. They told me to be discrete, and to be mindful that children might be frightened or confused to see someone like me in the washroom. I asked them for reassurance that they wouldn't fire a gender-diverse employee for using the washroom. They didn't answer. Gender-diverse patrons there mostly use the bathroom in the Time Horton's across the street, which makes me very sad. It frustrates me that this is a company that brands itself as diverse and inclusive. They do a lot of good work and are very well respected in the community, but they're pretty awful to trans people. I don't want to disrupt their work, I just want to use the bathroom safely. I wish they didn't see trans inclusion as optional. I wish more people took this matter seriously.





**Amplify this.**

I dream of a world where we are all celebrated for the unique people that we are. (Quote)

**Amplify this.**

Immigration isn't easy! To leave a home country and take up residence in a new place only to find you belong neither here nor there. Your heart is torn between two places and the people that live there. Embrace and good things shall follow!

**Amplify this.**

I miss the kids, but it's good to have some date to out with my love!! We are so gay married for like 10 years now and counting but only like 2 of them anybody could tell by ever since I told everybody I'm like super duper transgender. There's no denying these folks can queer with the best of em.

**Amplify this.**

I was a fat kid  
FAT  
I was shy, afraid  
The gym was for thin people,  
not fat ones.  
I did not  
know how  
to take my space  
for a LONG LONG TIME.  
I still struggle with this...



been blessed with in life to be lived sharing

small, white, genre being you is defined - and you're certain town hicks are really change one thing, it even sooner. back there, I'd be

uggle with oppression refugees, I saw the in. It has directed my effort in society, and find."

ism as being some genius and an idiot than anyone else's weaknesses are. Growing up, it were plenty of replace to help people naturally to me, but as I struggled with empathy when they at everyone agreed to the things I found. I thought it was often with people found easy to do the 'easy' thing, wouldn't do anything being seen as stupid, but people weren't as a disability."

the basement at his mother and a million things and be a give self and feel grateful room full of people in such a beautiful art and openness is thankful."

mate. really it

"I'm the pianist's partner. I sat in this seat so he wouldn't see me. I don't want to make him nervous. Although, he's possibly fine because he's incredibly talented. I'm a pianist."

The key to a happy relationship is a cute dog... although lately I'm not sleeping at night. I leave for work at 5:30. I hope Trevor doesn't get into any other way. I do though. I'm blessed with

The Way I See It  
Laurie Rubin, mezzo-soprano  
Liz Upchurch, piano  
Aria Umazawa, director

"Stories of perseverance in the face of adversity  
- Stories of where collaboration help us thrive  
- Stories where I don't have to pass to please

I can live my truth  
I can't hurt everybody!  
I can demonstrate  
I'm full of

Blessed with  
I've lived sharing

white, genre  
I've lived sharing  
I've lived sharing

The Way I See It  
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Stories of difference, acceptance  
- Stories of child development, overcoming trauma, living through learning  
- Stories of global citizens"

"Stories tear down walls"  
a world where we all have access to the basic necessities for a life that thrives & living in poverty is eliminated.

Love is something I have had, blessed with in my life. I would like my life to be lived sharing this love with the world.

Growing up in an extremely poor, white, gender-opservative town where being poor is definitely not okay or accepted, and not to count on to be told that. Real world things are really hard to handle. If I could change one thing, I would like to see the world be a better place. I would like to see the world be a better place. I would like to see the world be a better place.

I'm grateful for  
I'm grateful for  
I'm grateful for



#getloudinthemargins

HEE

ARR

MEE

OUTT

— “Hear me out”  
featuring Laurie Rubin.

Spray paint, acrylic,  
graphite, inkjet ink on  
paper. 20 x 28 inches.

**Amplify this.**

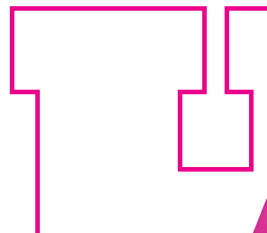
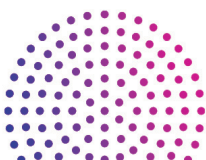
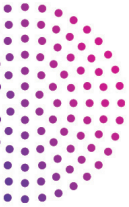
Grew up in an extremely small, white, gender-normative town where being you is definitely not okay or accepted – and you're certain to be told that. Small town hicks are really good 'bulliers'. If I could change one thing, it would be leaving there even sooner. (If I was an opera singer back there, I'd be fucked!)

**Amplify this.**

My story is about a struggle with oppression and stigma. As a child of refugees, I saw the need for humanitarianism. It has directed my choice of career, who I support in society, and the legacy I will leave behind.

**Amplify this.**

I think about having autism as being some sort of cross between a genius and an idiot – so really, no different than anyone else. It's just that my strengths and weaknesses are different than most people's. Growing up, it always seemed like there were plenty of resources and supports in place to help people learn the skills that came naturally to me, but no supports for the things I struggled with. Other people received empathy when they struggled with things that everyone agreed were difficult. Those were the things I found easy, but when I did struggle, it was often with things that most other people found easy. Often, because I couldn't do the 'easy' thing, people assumed that I couldn't do anything. I get self-conscious about being seen as stupid or incompetent. I wish that people weren't so quick to see a difference as a disability.





**Amplify this.**

4th Gen Nikkei. Born in the basement at Huron and Dundas to a wild mother and a midwife. I live to learn new things and be a great friend and challenge myself and feel gratitude. I am so happy to be in a room full of people who were able to share in such a beautiful experience of love and art and openness. My name is Karuna and I am thankful.



**Amplify this.**

FREE HONG KONG  
FREE TIBET  
MY DARMA LIVES  
IN THIS LIFETIME  
AND THE NEXT  
IN THIS REVOLUTION  
AND THE NEXT

**Amplify this.**

This is a fucking nightmare.  
I mean it's not. It's perfectly fine.  
I just wish there was more people in this meeting.



**Amplify this.**

I'm the pianist's partner. I sat in this seat so he wouldn't see me. I don't want to make him nervous. Although, he's possibly fine because he's incredibly talented. I'm a pianist as well. The key to a happy relationship is getting a cute dog... although lately he's been working at night. I leave for a month on Tuesday. I hope Trevor doesn't struggle Tuesday... We are both super, duper gay and I wouldn't have it any other way. Trevor twirls much better than I do though... um well, we are all blessed with different talents.

**Amplify this.**

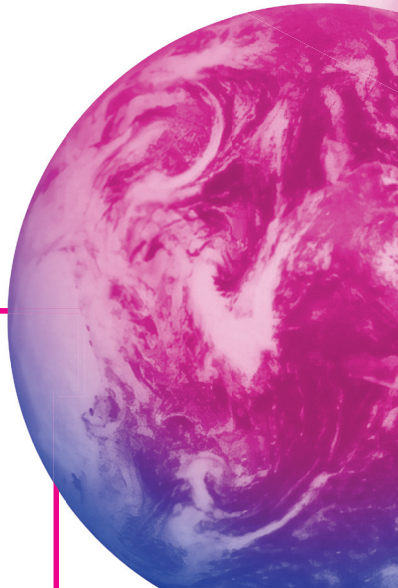
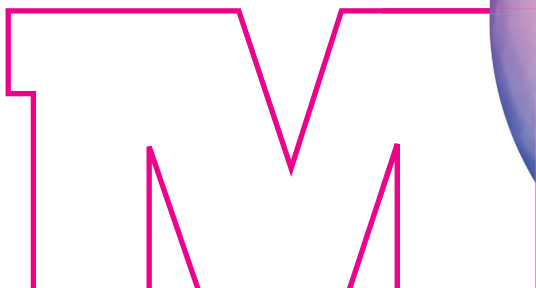
disrespect & apathy hurt everybody  
we need to remember & demonstrate  
that WE are ALL live beings – full of  
life and lives                      worth living

**Amplify this.**

- Stories of perseverance in the face of adversity
- Stories of where collaboration help us thrive
- Stories where I don't have to pass to please others
- Stories where I can live my truth

**Amplify this.**

Stories of difference, acceptance.  
Stories of child development,  
overcoming trauma, living through  
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**Amplify this.**

a world where we all have access to ALL the basic necessities for a life that thrives & living in poverty is eliminated



**Amplify this.**

Stories tear down

walls.

is seeking faraway places that me."

at my story (yet) but I live there until I can find my

thin people, not fat ones.

TIME...  
th this..."

WHAT MY BRAIN TELLS ME -  
O!!!

of an abortion. As difficult as is, the worst part was how it's still hard to talk about but I'm at sharing my story, so that my life know that they do not if they face the same decision

#2 here. What to write? I'm at meetings today. Ate a lot they're better than the popcorn yesterday. #casualcutting"

fit the house that I was born, walk through the front door, the see is a bookshelf full of books I'd a log house, because my aunt person to teach her self ok. It was hard for her to buy old owner was trying to rip her send my dad to get a reason parents cleared the land and they and used the truck they had the house to my own. I stole stones from a neighbor's fireplace. The Foundry was ever 30 years ago, and ever

ice of 1800s

"I just celebrated Rosh Hashana and an annual tradition where I reflect on the year and write my goals for the next year. This past year has been one of the most support of my family, friends, and husband, and some helpful professionals. I've emerged and more stable than I've ever been. To the coming year of growth, joy and inspiration?"

"Moved from California to 1985 for love. I served coffee singers. I still love both."

We just drove in from MTL. I ate a lot of popcorn chicken. They don't make it like they used to. The pieces are all uniform and standardized. Way less popcorn than they're supposed to be. I'm alright with the plan.

I miss the kids, but it's good to have some to out with my love.

We are so gay, for like 40 years and accepting like 2 of them anybody's gay, tell by me since I've been everything I'm doing

I'm doing

Arts Music: Opera Productions started 20 yrs ago. Conductor Music Director Colin Mendez - Mom. Is the composer of the opera 'Joshua' a story of a naive... '70 in 1984... in Tallington... was associated with Montague... years had

I miss the kids, but it's good to have some date to out with my love! We are so gay for like 40 years now and counting but only like 2 of them anybody could tell by ever since I told everybody I'm super queer, transgender. There's no denying inside. I can queer with the best of em."

Artist: Aquil Viani, 2020  
#art/kx/amplified

the best of the best...  
the best of the best...





#getloudinthemargins

THIS IS  
MY  
VOICE  
GET

— “This is my voice”  
featuring Teiya Kasahara.

Spray paint, acrylic,  
graphite, inkjet ink on  
paper. 20 x 28 inches.

**Amplify this.**

I don't know what my story is yet, but I live to help amplify others until I can find my own.

**Amplify this.**

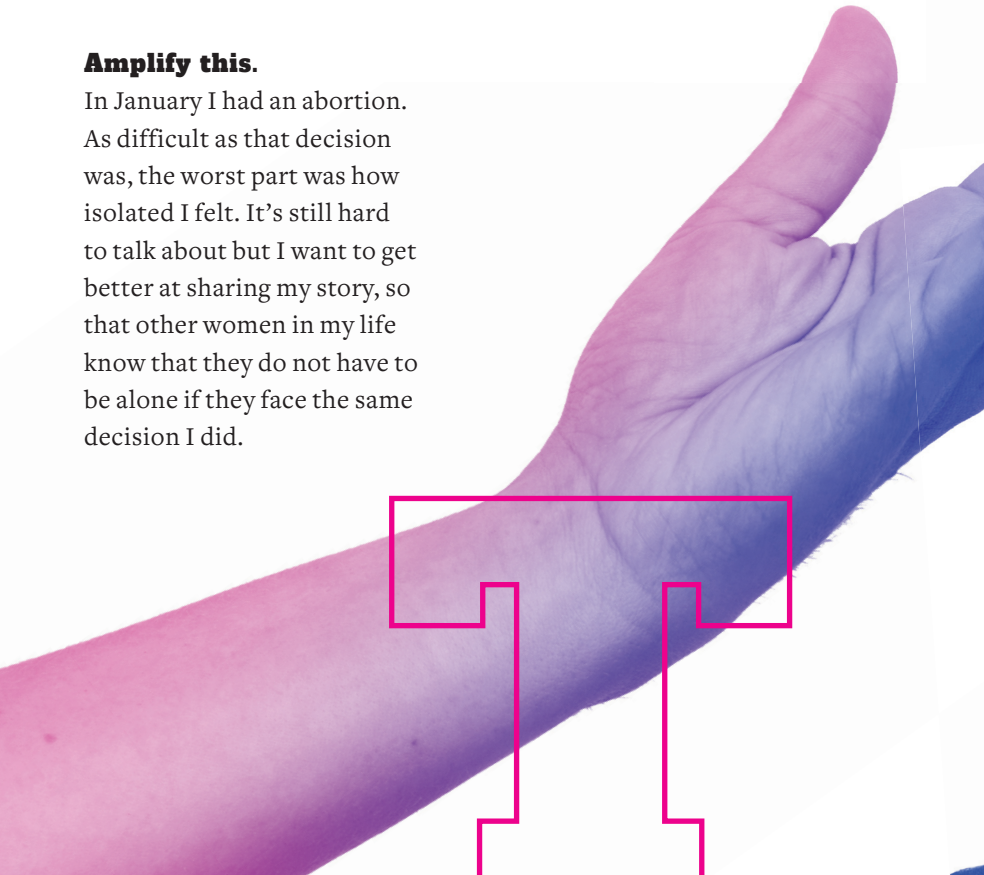
I travel the world seeking faraway places that scare me but free me.

**Amplify this.**

NO MATTER WHAT  
MY BRAIN TELLS ME –  
I AM AN ARTIST.

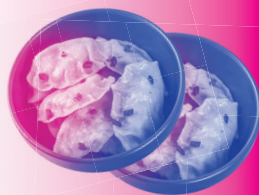
**Amplify this.**

In January I had an abortion. As difficult as that decision was, the worst part was how isolated I felt. It's still hard to talk about but I want to get better at sharing my story, so that other women in my life know that they do not have to be alone if they face the same decision I did.



**Amplify this.**

This is my night #2 here. What to write? I crashed a bunch of meetings today. Ate a lot of dumplings. They're better than the popcorn chicken I had yesterday. #casualcuteing

**Amplify this.**

My mother built the house that I was born in. When you walk through the front door, the first thing you see is a bookshelf full of books on how to build a log house, because my mother is the sort of person to teach herself skills from a book. It was hard for her to buy the land; The old owner was trying to rip her off. She had to send my dad to get a reasonable price. My parents cleared the land with axes and machettes and used the trees they cut down to build the house to my mother's design. They stole stones from a nearby quarry to build the fireplace. The house has been growing for over 30 years now, one extension at a time.



**Amplify this.**

The importance of Listening

Laughter  
and the Kindness of  
strangers.

**Amplify this.**

Moved from California to Canada in 1985 for love.

I served coffee to singers, I still love both.

**Amplify this.**

Ars Musica: Opera Productions started 20 yrs ago: Conductor Music Director Colin Mendez – Mom: is the composer of the opera ‘Joshua’ a story of a salve that came to T.O in 1850 and live in Islington Village and was associated with Montgomery of Montgomery INN. The opera had 6 performances in the Inn and Scarboro town centre. More performances in Long Ireland and Germany.



**Amplify this.**

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A BETTER PLACE  
WHERE LOVE OVER HATE  
AND EQUALITY AND HOPE  
ARE ALWAYS PRESENT.  
SOMETIMES IT IS TOUGH  
BEING AN OPTIMIST  
BUT THERE IS MUSIC



**Amplify this.**

Life is a mixture of joy and pain.  
We must endure pain to fully celebrate  
the joyful times in life.





André Aquil Vignat, 2020  
Original amplified.

Love is something I have  
my life. I would like my life to be lived  
this love with the world.  
grew up in an extremely small, white, gen-  
der-normative town where being you is def-  
initely not okay or accepted - and you're cer-  
tainly to be told that small town hicks are really  
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(I was an opera singer back there, I'd be  
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My story is about a struggle with oppression  
and stigma as a child of refugees. I saw the  
need for humanitarianism has deflected my  
choice of career, who I support in society, and  
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te, gen  
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has deflected my  
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as being some  
us and an idiot  
I anyone else. It's  
walkers are  
s, growing up in  
naturally to me but  
I struggle with  
I'm happy when  
at everyone's  
the things  
large, I can't  
I'm an

**What about you?**  
**What stories do**  
**you think should**  
**be Amplified?**

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Sure, you might not think  
you have something to say.  
You might not think what  
you'd write is insightful.  
But **writing something**  
**is always better than**  
**writing nothing.**

