

life in-between

constant pushing and pulling from a first-generation american, latinx, non-binary, queer, alcoholic, addict, artist.

a is for alcohol. my first love. my always friend. my worst foe. keeping it within reach was devastating, pushing it away can be alienating. life of the party long ago to hibernating dreams echoed in empty rooms.

b is for body. big, bright, boyish stance moves momentous with the urgency. inertia and friction can't stop — be your best. brace yourself for failure. beat yourself up. repeat.

c is for color. sturdy blue-gray stare through dark white complexion. colorism from each, too dark for the québécoise, too light for the cubanas. would my saphardic north african tribe accept this bodies color?

d is for depression. d is also for drink. one feeds the other the other feeds the one. a vicious cycle of never-ending longing. lust? dry days keep both away, but urges move like pendulum swings. violent. constant. pulse.

e is for erasure. erase gayness and queerness and femme and skin and latinx and socialist. neither here not there, square peg surrounds endless noise — racket to the top of hierarchical prisons all created to keep the riot at bay.

f is for faggot. my worst fear in my youth. my greatest strength these days. hidden memories of "take that faggot!" while they held me down. day dreams still haunt fathoms of forced fear thrown on my back like frowned fortresses built to protect my future self.

g is for genius. mom's cello instilled its c-string madness onto us. no room for error. no time for failure. keep working. be your best. no tv. finish your dinner. go study. you can do better.

g is also for gender. three boys, straight, would marry and have children of their own. circle of life broken in this gender-bending — masculine facing — mellow mushy mixture from within. yellow is for non-masculine and non-feminine; white is for all genders; purple is for masculine and femme genders; black is for non-genders.

h is for husband. i have one. i've been one. i am one. just like dad, how can this word escape its own gender? we re-make and re-classify and re-name all the time. spouse works, but so does husband in a non-gendered way.

i is for in-between. the space i retreat to. both my symptom and my cause. between sadness and joy. negative and positive. life and death. this in-between my shelter from nothing and everything. a land of grey where everything else seems to fall into place.

j is for juan. my namesake. my father. they called him johnny. they called me john-john. the last of three, john would be the jester turned judge. jocular journeys jointed just long enough to face the ancestors' pride. they held us up long enough to be brunt by sun and moon alike, flailing jagged thorns of yesteryears hum.

k is for kindling. as in faggot. as in the jeers from others sounding like early morning alarms awaking from dreamlike sleep, sweet simmering embers of sleepy eyes wandering over shadows and shapes and forms on the wall. i remember this place. like the witches that came before me, burning alive atop the dry, crackling twigs.

l is for lust. like every long late night out on the prowl. revenge fucks and lost time infiltrated from within. disconnect between who i was and who i wanted to be. revealed in the morning stooper back into daytimes watchful gaze.

m is for masculine. long ago wanting nothing more than to present as a male. to hide in myself. my skin cover wasn't sufficient. thin veil to macho queerness poking through, no cover would suffice. no male could penetrate.

n is for nascent. as in memories and dreams anew. like patterned dew drops falling amid smells of green and hope. January's snow melting into mud season and arms moving freely making a new season.

o is for omniscient. like the mourner. the forever sound of loss. a single note hovering like fogs immortal soul stretches over cascading soundscapes of hum. slow ticking pulse through vein reveals more than existence. life looms long like little earthquakes of sand and stone.

p is for painter. the artist i had always wanted to be. songs like saar's. strokes like krasner's. soaks like frankenthaler's. grids like martin's. colors like thomas'. woman epitomized heart beat, lost in the masculine world of drips and color field.

q is for queer. like knowing i never fit it. like telling mom that i wanted to kiss boys at the age of five. like finding love (or at least lust) in many different places. like not fitting into my body. like a fall from grace to so many.

r is for reading. protection from others. whipping tongue of protective veil. harsh. cold. created from necessity. survival. anxiety. stress. reading may be fundamental, but for many of us, it is like breath, like air, like exhale — extinguishing the mediocre flame of dominant cultural push.

s is for sibling. the inbetween of all my trans and queer siblings fighting for survival. my chosen family. my blood siblings fighting for attention. white presenting males. blood may be thick, but it clots. seizes. slips away like drains of fear and hate diluted with water like the blood of christ. holy. just.

t is for truth. always in search as if there is some real truth out there. truth is determined by the storytellers. our truth is determined by the powerful. assuring any reaction erased by death or incarceration. truth is power and only the powerful control the truth.

u is for undermine. like self-sabotage or lessening the value of self in a variety of ways. then compensating for these facts in countless actions and reactions. time lost. energy wasted. value forgotten.

v is for vexillologist. early interests to find who i was by where i was from. only, my ancestors would not be defined by some banner of power — elitist symbol of conquer or ownership. though i still love the possibility, not unlike the catholic ritual, i despise the hate and anguish that associates themselves with these symbols of today.

w is for witness.

x is for xylograph. woodwork like blockwork. reverse meaning in stamp and ink and pressure. paper reveals the sound of chipping away messages for tomorrow's crowd.

y is for yield.

z is for zenith. towering over like moments of feat — silky soft turned solid like fiberglass formed, secured, entombed.