

START SOMETHING FIERCE (2ND EDITION)

Edited by Courtney Montour

http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/files/start_something_fierce_zine_2ndedition.pdf

When I sat down to read *Start Something Fierce*, I expected to get riled up. The woman on the cover looks defiant and confident, and the title promises passion will be running through its pages. Plus, it's a zine! A culture-jamming, rabble-rousing, funny, fun expression of beliefs, opinion and experience. Right?

Well, almost. While this meaty 44-page publication contains great info on how to make an activist campaign happen, it is missing a sense of passion and fire. It reads more like an academic guidebook than a zine. In this way, it might miss the chance to engage with girls who are looking to fuel their ferocity — but it is still a fantastic addition to any activist's library.

The publisher, Girls Action Foundation, is a fabulous Montreal-based organization that works to raise awareness and mobilize action toward the elimination of violence and discrimination. They believe girls should have what they need to participate fully in society and to create a just and peaceful world. In this zine they present the writing of ten women who came together for the Indigenous Young Women's Gathering in Saskatoon in November 2011, along with content from the ELLE Project 2008, a national leadership training conference, and from Indigenous Young Women: Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths, implemented in partnership with the Native Youth Sexual Health Network.

These are world-changing groups, and the gathering itself sounds really exciting. These women challenge the status quo, raise compel-

ling questions, and turn regular people into activists. So it makes sense that they would use the rabble-rousing potential of a zine format to help inform others.

Zines tend to tackle subjects that are out of the mainstream, and in keeping with this tradition the strongest part of this zine is the how-to section. Toward the end there is a series of guidelines and tips for grassroots organizing, where the authors bring in their own experience to help demystify the basics of fundraising, media relations, communications, campaign strategizing, evaluation and even self-care to avoid burnout. These sections are warm and energizing, clean and straightforward. The tips will help anyone take a campaign from vague idea to real-world action.

Another time-tested function of a zine is to challenge convention. The authors do this by introducing cutting-edge tools and concepts that can help in campaigning: "grow-gan-izing," art therapy, the importance of an anti-oppression framework, and economic empowerment, all important considerations for activists who don't want to reinforce the structures they are trying to fight.

The messy, DIY style of zines means that anyone can make one with stuff found around the house, and when you read one you expect to hear the personal views of real people, not someone with a corporate agenda. *Start Something Fierce* does this by including personal stories written by Indigenous women. Two of the stories are particularly engaging. In "Healing Holistically," Tala Tootoosis, a Cree woman, writes about returning to her family and to traditional practices in order to heal from addiction. Brittany Jones tells the story of her peers' reactions to her Aboriginal identity when she went to university, in "Cultural Revitalization and Anti-Racist Education."

One of the best, most refreshing aspects of zines is that they embrace emotion, opinion, freedom and fun. While *Start Something Fierce* touches on all of these elements, it doesn't quite add up to a full zine experience. Several sections come across as textbook snippets. This creates an emotional distance between the reader and the writer, and also makes it difficult to understand unless you have experience in that realm. If the DIY look of the zine is supposed to attract a beginner grassroots activist, the tone might push them away.

It's a zine because the publishers call it one, and it certainly looks like one: it gives us a collection of perspectives rather than one voice of authority; it includes personal anecdotes; it challenges authority; and it uses grungy copy-paste and doodle design. This mix tells us "I'm a DIY publication, by girls for girls!" And while *Start Something Fierce* will definitely be a useful resource for many activists, it will do so by providing the fuel. You'll need to bring the spark yourself. **ERIN ELLIOTT**

BOOKS

MOTHER/DAUGHTER SEX ADVICE

Susie and Aretha Bright

[Bright Stuff]

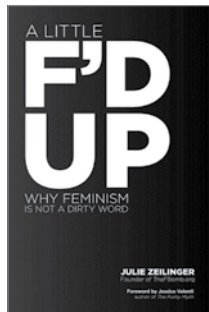
Reading this mother/daughter tag team's compilation of sex advice columns for Jezebel.com is like sitting in on their blunt, reassuring and often hilarious banter. Susie Bright, a renowned feminist sex writer, and her daughter Aretha both bring their own unique knowledge and opinions to the table when addressing topics like open relationships, body pride, masturbation, inability to orgasm and sexual fantasies, to name a few. These women say it like it is and encourage those that write them to find empowerment in their sexual identities and relationships by challenging stereotypes, exploring their desires and communicating with partners. The Kindle book also includes insightful links to pop culture references, anatomical diagrams and sexual health resources. Refreshing, unapologetic and sex-positive, this pair offers readers no-nonsense guidance to take charge of their sexual well-being. **ADRIANA ROLSTON**

A LITTLE F'D UP: WHY FEMINISM IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

Julie Zeilinger

[Seal Press]

"I'm not a feminist, but..." is no longer a valid phrase for readers who have finished this book. Julie Zeilinger's *A Little F'd Up* constructs not only a convincing defense of feminism but, incidentally, a persuasive sell. Zeilinger, the 19-year-old creator of The FBomb blog, offers a sharp sense of humour and serious passion, interwoven with her colloquial, accessible language. The result: an enjoyable and easy read. Even crammed full of info, *F'd Up* still doesn't read like a textbook. That said, a lot of ideas could have been expanded upon, and the author still has much to learn — but Zeilinger never claims to have all the answers. What she does possess, however, is a contagious passion for social justice and feminism that will take her and her readers far. **R.J. VANDRISH**



FIRST SPRING GRASS FIRE

Rae Spoon

[Arsenal Pulp Press]

Rae Spoon's first book, *First Spring Grass Fire*, (FSGF) is a series of vignettes about coming of age and coming out in the Canadian prairies. Told from the perspective of Rae, a fictional character sharing the same name as the author, FSGF describes life for a young person growing up queer in a conservative Pentecostal family. It's a genre that, perhaps unluckily for Spoon, has birthed some of the finest queer writing, from *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* to *Stone Butch Blues*. FSGF lacks both Jeanette Winterson's searing wit and Leslie Feinberg's brutal powers of description. It doesn't even attain the magnetic pull and simple beauty of Rae's own songs, like "My Heart is a Piece of Garbage. Fight Seagulls! Fight!" However uneven it may be, FSGF has powerful moments, revealing a talented poet reaching for their prose voice. **MICHELLE SCHWARTZ**



IN TOO DEEP

Amanda Grace

[Flux]

In Too Deep dives into the consequences of a rumour gone too far and examines the blurry lines between a mistake and a cruel lie within the complex world of teenage relationships. Sam is a high school student who unsuccessfully tries to seduce the popular Carter, in an attempt to stir jealousy in her best-friend-turned-love-interest Nick. When her peers whisper that she has been raped, Sam does nothing to disprove the lie and allows Carter to face the wrath of the classmates who rush to her defense. While the message of *In Too Deep* is honourable, and the tone explores both sides well, the character development is where the novel falls flat. Despite its obvious intention to show the students as shades of grey rather than good versus evil, with the exception of the principled and well-meaning Nick, the personalities within this book do little to incite either sympathy or disgust, instead igniting feelings of indifference. **EMILY ABRAHAMS**

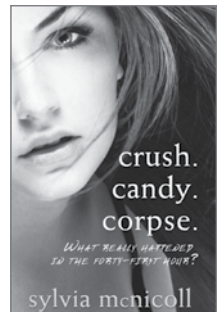


CRUSH. CANDY. CORPSE

Sylvia McNicoll

[Lorimer]

The crush of Sylvia McNicoll's novel represents an accident. The candy is contraband to the elderly patients on the Alzheimer's ward at Paradise Manor nursing home, where 16-year-old Sonja "Sunny" Ehret volunteers in order to fulfill her school's community service requirement. The corpse is the reason she's on trial for manslaughter: Sunny is accused of deliberately giving candy to a patient, and then failing to summon life-saving assistance when the woman chokes to death. Sunny initially appears to be somewhat shallow and callous, but, as the story progresses, her empathy and desire to restore dignity to the Paradise Manor seniors become apparent. The narrative is brisk and engaging and presents an intriguing debate on assisted suicide, quality versus quantity of life, and the treatment of seniors with Alzheimer's. **DENISE REICH**

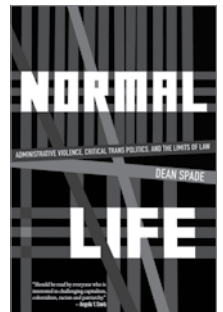


NORMAL LIFE: ADMINISTRATIVE VIOLENCE, CRITICAL TRANS POLITICS AND THE LIMITS OF LAW

Dean Spade

[South End Press]

Dean Spade's *Normal Life* explains the failure of the North American gay and lesbian rights movement and its move towards legality, marriage, military and hate crime laws by exploring how these are only invested in keeping those already privileged (white, cisgendered, affluent) in relative safety, while those already left behind by our current system become even more vulnerable to criminalization and marginalization at the hands of law enforcement. Spade shares many people's personal experiences with state structures, highlighting how important it is to understand that racism, classism, ableism and xenophobia are institutionalized to further marginalize queer and trans people of colour, the poor, and queer/trans



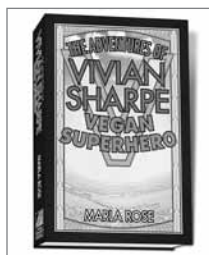
people with disabilities. Spade offers some tangible solutions to the problems of state-funded discrimination and the gay and lesbian rights movement, like decentralizing non-profits by building community-led power and leadership. All of this with a clear anti-colonial, anti-capitalist analysis that centres around the lives of those most affected. **RO VELASQUEZ GUZMAN**

THE ADVENTURES OF VIVIAN SHARPE, VEGAN SUPERHERO

Marla Rose

[Createspace]

For 15-year-old Vivian Sharpe, life in Center City, USA, takes a dramatic twist when she eats a ham sandwich and is later visited by the spirit of its now-deceased, factory-farmed pig. As her perceptions sharpen, Vivian — now a committed vegan — embarks on a highly personal coming-of-age journey fuelled by deep connections to, and awareness of, the animals that surround her, from poultry to squirrels to pigs, all while navigating high school cliques and frustrating parents. While the detailed narrative can at times be cumbersome, Rose paints a vivid portrait of a seemingly normal town filled with a colourful cast of characters. *Vivian Sharpe, Vegan Superhero* has much to teach about empathy between species. With numerous non-fiction classics on this subject (think Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*), it was refreshing to become immersed in Vivian’s imaginative, but no less poignant, fictional world of Center City, USA. **MEG PIRIE**



and Sean Brown, the sassy undertones of “Oooo!” make listeners want to get up and dance. The slower tracks are reminiscent of Sarah McLachlan, while Murphy’s textured voice also resembles that of Sheryl Crow. Overall, the EP is soulful and reflective – the perfect complement to a lazy Sunday. **VANESSA CICCONE**

A CHARMING GUT

Heidi Barton Stink

[Independent] www.myspace.com/bartons-tink

Heidi Barton Stink, a transgender activist and MC from Minneapolis, exposes issues such as trans rights, gender, feminism, and patriarchy on her album *A Charming Gut*. In the title track, Stink samples “the tightest elevator music” and this trend is carried through the rest of the album, lending many songs a cool, retro feel. “The Bad Sleep Well,” featuring Corey Lawson, is an anti-establishment track highlighting the complexities of perceived “invisible” privilege, while “Celebrity Skin” explores body image and imposed constructions of the female body. As an outsider inside these bodies today/ I can’t tell you what to think, but these standards are fak,” Stink raps. The retro aesthetic combined with the content of Stink’s lyrics will get you dancing — and thinking. **ERICA BEATSON**



RUN BODY RUN

Holly McNarland

[Independent] hollymcnarland.net

Oh happy day, Holly is back, and she’s doing it on her own. The Canadian pop-rock singer-songwriter with Metis roots is Juno-winning and platinum-hitting for a reason: her voice is like no other. If this is news to you, *Home Is Where My Feet Are* (2002) and *Stuff* (1997) are required listening. This independent release is a degree or two softer than her previous albums, but it shuffles well just the same. The title track has a rolling, haunting sweep: “Widow’s Pane” brings her signature blend of restraint and raw power, and “You’ll Forget About Me” and “After I’m Gone” are belt-it-out ballads. But what “Only Money” gains in a catchy beat, it loses in a poppy bouncy rhyming chorus more suited to Avril Lavigne. As ever, Holly’s voice is wild, pure, and, like this comeback, under her complete control. **ERIN ELLIOTT**



LUSH

Mitski

[Independent] www.mitski.com

In her press biography, it is noted that multi-instrumentalist and vocalist Mitski has lived on four continents, in countries ranging from Japan to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hints of these diverse cultural influences are scattered throughout Mitski’s debut album, *Lush*. The tracks on *Lush* are reminiscent of Fiona Apple — *Extraordinary Machines*, not *Tidal* — and jazz singers in intimate clubs. It’s not a home run of an album, but it’s certainly a base hit. Some variety of tempo and style may have helped make *Lush* more engaging, as all of the tracks are hypnotically placid, but this is a promising debut. **DENISE REICH**



MUSIC

FLIPSIDE

Abby Holden

[Independent] abbyholden.com

Abby Holden’s versatile voice and upbeat melodies are sure to boost any listener’s spirits. Her latest album, *Flipside*, showcases her incredible vocal range with 11 pop songs. While “Believe in Me,” “I’ll Be With You Now” and “Fly Away” are slower tracks and slightly more melancholy, they are still infused with the bubbly pop-vibe that the London-based, New Zealand-born artist seems to gravitate toward. But don’t let the pop sound and sugar-sweet voice fool you: this guitarist and classically trained pianist released a song in 2011 entitled “Ginger Pubs Are Amazing,” more than hinting at a salty side.

VANESSA CICCONE



EXES & UH OHS

Katie Murphy

[Independent] www.katiemurphy.ca

Katie Murphy’s *Exes & Uh Ohs* will strike a chord with anyone experiencing loss, particularly of the romantic variety. Murphy wrote the EP during a one-year separation from her husband and a yearning sense of “what-if” is felt throughout. Her heartfelt longing is found even when masked in cheerful melodies like that of “I Can’t Wait Much More.” The track that defies this trend is “Oooo! (She’s Got A Lot Going On!),” self-described by Murphy as a confidence-boosting morale builder, and it’s just that. Imbued with the brassy back-up vocals of Lloyd Peterson



WEB

SPARK

www.sparksummit.com

SPARK engages girls in the discussion surrounding the sexualization of female bodies in the media, under the premise that this sexualization has negative effects on girls' attitudes towards their bodies. This "girl-fueled activist movement" fights commodified images of girls within popular marketing campaigns and encourages girls to confront the images that they are bombarded with every day through the blog, which critiques everything from Kanye West's latest tweets to music lyrics, and through campaigns such as SPARKit!, which encourages girls to snap photos of sexist stereotypes in the media and send them in. The website contains riveting information, contemporary critique and a legitimate call to action for girls to take part in the fight against the sexualized commodification of their own bodies. SPARK is an extraordinary resource for girls who are tired of being told how to feel and be sexy and who want to fight back in a tangible way. **LAURA SHAW**

WHO NEEDS FEMINISM?

www.whoneedsfeminism.tumblr.com

Who Needs Feminism looks deceptively simple. And it is. A collection of submissions adorn the site, showing myriad people giving their reasons for why they really do need feminism. It is similar to the "This is What a Feminist Looks Like" awareness campaign — a program to dispel the idea that all feminists are radical, man-hating dykes who don't wear makeup — yet delves slightly deeper into why feminism is so necessary. This is where things get potent. For the feminists and sympathizers among us, stumbling across this site might induce a sense of (re)affirmation for why we believe in feminism, or a sense of how broad its scope can and should be. Whether people need it "because acting 'like a girl' shouldn't be an insult" or "because we need girls' unshaved [sic] armpits," this site proudly proclaims that feminism has something to offer us all. **R.J. VANDRISH**

ZINE

ESCAPE FROM IVORY TOWER: ACADEMIC PAPERS AND REFLECTIONS AND THINGS (EQUITY EDITION)

Liesl A.

Liesl A. presents "a random amalgamation of essays (one essay) and reflections" that borrow from her university work. With critical texts taking on commonplace inequities, *Escape From Ivory Tower* really does seem random. Yet by opening with a working definition of "equity" as being anti-discriminatory while "calling for greater diversity in all avenues of life," the zinester's rather disjointed collection becomes more contextualized. (That said, it definitely could have used a few segues and perhaps a rousing outro.) Liesl A.'s analyses blend the already-marbled political and personal with the academic. She puts "America's Next Top Model" into a political/academic sphere while tackling a psychology superstar in a political/personal critique. (Or rather, she calls out Tyra Banks on exoticizing biracial identities while challenging Jung's colossally colonial "shadow" theory.) Ultimately, the zine offers ideas that are absolutely worth checking out, but overall, it doesn't seem to have any

obvious purpose. It is what the reader will make of it, and in this respect, there is quite meaningful potential. **R.J. VANDRISH**

TOURIST OF THE HEART JANUARY 2012)

Sarah Mangle

Now living in Toronto but originally from Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Sarah Mangle is part of the band Sarah Mangle Buys a Bear (currently undergoing a name change) and was the host of the radio show "These Things People Make." In her latest zine, each page offers snapshots and glimpses of the inner-workings of a friendship. From first encounters to an eventual unravelling, Mangle's account uses stark language to work through raw heartbreak and bitter disappointments. In fact, *Tourist of the Heart* gives the reader a rare account of friendship of the kind more often afforded to romantic relationships. The zine moves from city-to-city, dropping names of those who have moved away, shifting from photographic detail to a few sparse sentences. But isn't that how memory works? With time and distance the layers of memory build upon one another, leaving us with fuzzy recollections that collide with moments of clarity. **MEG PIRIE**

OTHER

THE COMFORT OF QUEER FAMILY WISDOM

Elisha Lim

elishalim.com

Elisha Lim's 2013 calendar, *The Comfort of Queer Family Wisdom*, is exactly that: comfort food.

Like vegan lentil soup for the queer soul, each month sketches out the story of Lim's sojourn in Montreal: artist arrives in new city, artist confronted by unexpected wall of bigotry, artist assembles new radical queer family. Together artist and friends call upon the strength of all those who came before to assemble a kick-ass festival called 2-QTPOC, bringing together Montreal's community of 2-spirited, queer, and trans people of colour for ten days of art, music, and dancing. Lim's calendar is a treasure-trove of references to amazing members of the 2-QTPOC community, each a starting point for an infinite number of journeys into history and the future. Take this calendar with you wherever you go, and you'll never be alone again. **MICHELLE SCHWARTZ**



POWER OF YOUTH: YOUTH AND COMMUNITY-LED ACTIVISM IN CANADA (OUR SCHOOLS/OUR SELVES, SPRING 2012)

Edited by Erika Shaker and Brigitte DePape

[Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives]

We hear it time and time again, a bizarre accusation proclaimed by practically every generation to their younger counterparts: "Youth these days just don't care about the issues." The *Power of Youth: Youth and Community-Led Activism* issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* dispels this constructed notion and highlights some of the tremendous activist efforts of today's young Canadians. The guest co-editor for this issue, Brigitte DePape, could not have been a better fit for this particular topic as she became a household name for being the Senate Page who interrupted the throne speech by raising a sign that read "Stop Harper." The issue covers such topics as feminism and political engagement, race relations, environmental concerns, culture and Indigenous rights, and demonstrates beyond doubt that the youth affected by these topics are engaged in political activism and dedicated to making change in Canada. **ERICA BEATSON**