

# Aquí

In Full Color



VENTURA COUNTY

# Aquí

Aquí means being here.

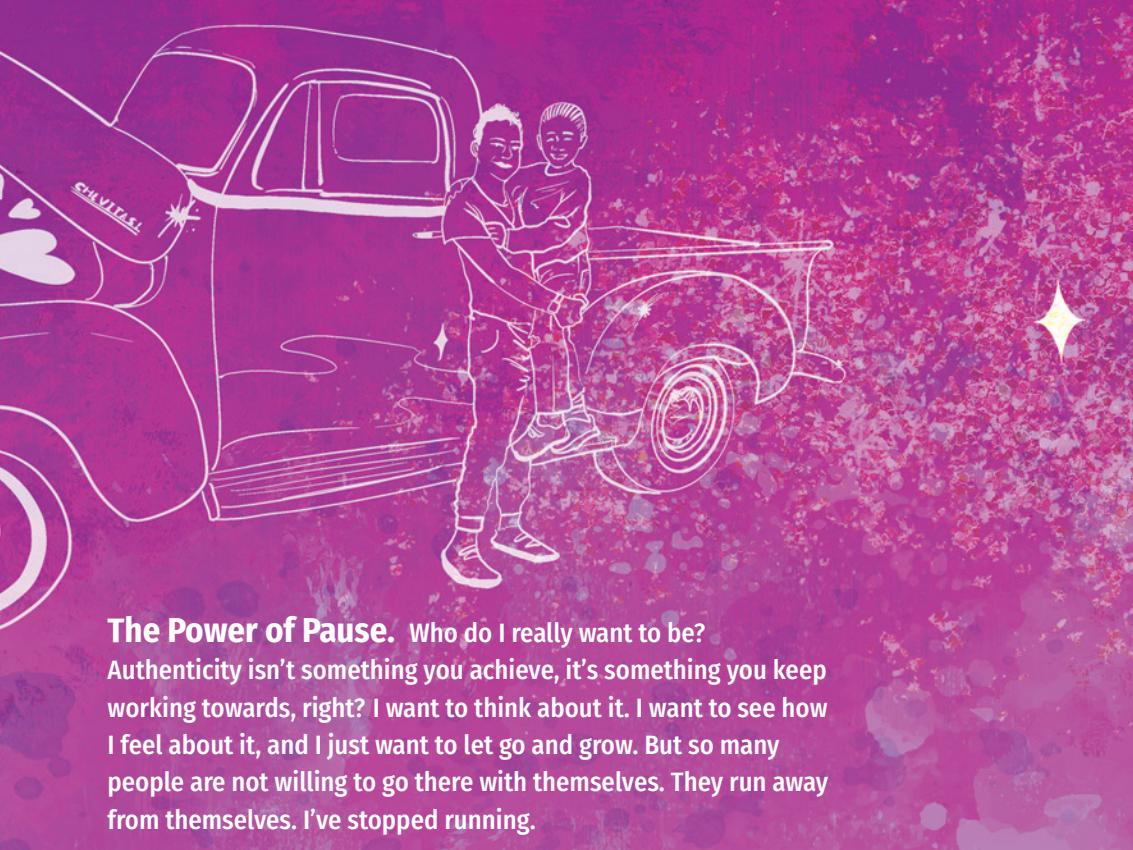
More than a word. It's a statement of presence.  
Here we don't just *survive* – we *thrive* together.

AQUÍ ESTOY.  
AQUÍ ESTAMOS.  
AQUÍ SEGUIMOS.

# Vanessa

Music has the words  
that sometimes I'm  
too scared to say,  
the words I can't  
find – it keeps me  
grounded in who  
I am. We all need  
those anchors, those  
sources of strength  
and connection.





### **The Power of Pause.** Who do I really want to be?

Authenticity isn't something you achieve, it's something you keep working towards, right? I want to think about it. I want to see how I feel about it, and I just want to let go and grow. But so many people are not willing to go there with themselves. They run away from themselves. I've stopped running.

### **People are going to talk. Let them.**

People are going to label me, judge me. Let them. Am I going to allow some person, place, or thing to get me out of this energy?

**I never knew that I could exist how I exist now.**  
**It amazes me every single day. It's a beautiful thing.**  
**I can do whatever I put my mind to, because I truly believe in myself now, because I'm free of being afraid.**



I struggled with my identity – it wasn't something my younger self could understand or accept. I was constantly fighting the emotions I felt. Now, being true to who I am is my greatest strength.

# **Rochelle**

Every symbol and marking – it means something. It's beautiful.



## Pamilya (family)

Seeing the support that we have for each other is important for me. I know that it's there and it exists. But – there can be pressure to conform, to distance yourself from parts of your identity that are seen as less desirable.

**Who am I safe to be?** People assume all Asians are the same. During COVID, violence towards Asian Americans was high, including Filipinos. My mom looks "Asian enough" to have been a target. It was a scary time.

**Tag-lish.** Language was another **balancing act** between generations. Growing up I didn't know what my Tita was saying – they didn't really speak the language to us. My mom knew multiple dialects, and I couldn't tell which one was which. My parents wanted us to be "American" as quickly as possible.

**Feeling depressed? Ay nako (oh my).**

**"What do you have to be depressed about? You have food and a roof over your head."** You shouldn't talk about it. Family reputation is everything. You gotta keep up appearances, right?

But that silence? It can really hurt people. **When our struggles remain unspoken, so do our stories.**

There's always more to learn, more stories to hear, and more ways to get involved. It really makes you think, doesn't it?

Masculinity can be defined in many ways. I've always just been a boy who has too much style, too many ideas. I want to express myself in many different **other** ways, to **live**, my way, not in someone else's box.

# Felipe





People's path to sobriety doesn't follow a map. I've witnessed what drugs can do. No one is waking up wanting to die of fentanyl. But if it's going to be around? Then we better figure out how to keep each other alive. At the end of day, we NEED TO PROTECT each other. No judgment. No shame.

I'm a free spirit. I'm Mexican. He, she, they, 'lo que sea.' I love being a 'jota.' I love being a 'maricón.' I'm out here living and being seen.

Some of us are just performers – I love to perform. I get to sing at night. I inspire. Sometimes that's beautiful, sometimes it's heavy. The younger ones say, "We've never seen someone like you IRL."

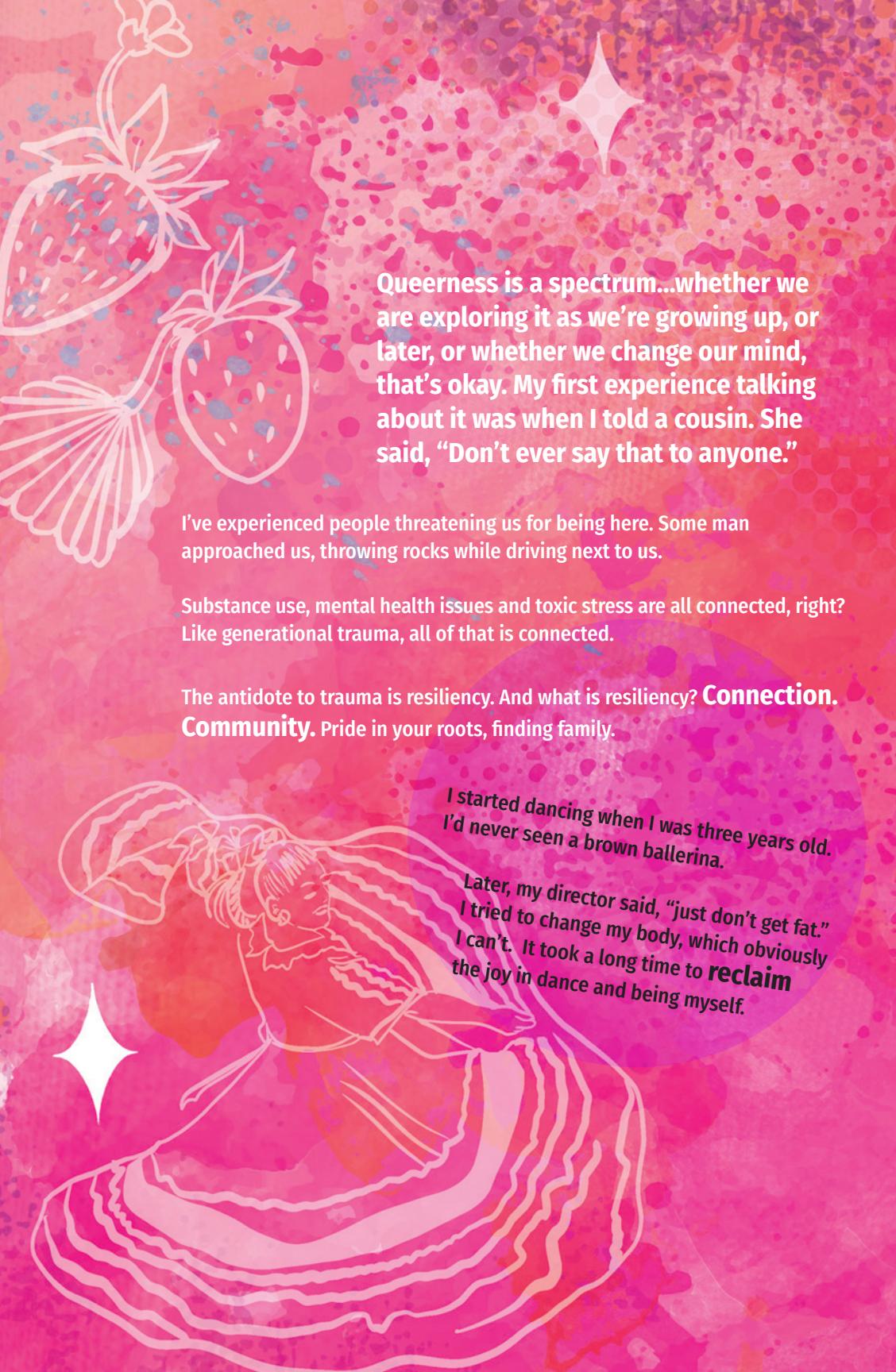
**But being seen can come with risks.** I think about the Pulse nightclub shooting. That could have been me. To think about it is wild.

Change is happening. It's slow, but Oxnard is shifting. I see it. We need more connection, more support. Because we're all around. We exist.



# Dafne

I'm always giving, giving, giving, but sometimes my safe space is just me. Me with my family, or just me and my dogs, re-grounding myself and bringing back that energy.



Queerness is a spectrum...whether we are exploring it as we're growing up, or later, or whether we change our mind, that's okay. My first experience talking about it was when I told a cousin. She said, "Don't ever say that to anyone."

I've experienced people threatening us for being here. Some man approached us, throwing rocks while driving next to us.

Substance use, mental health issues and toxic stress are all connected, right? Like generational trauma, all of that is connected.

The antidote to trauma is resiliency. And what is resiliency? **Connection. Community.** Pride in your roots, finding family.

*I started dancing when I was three years old. I'd never seen a brown ballerina.*

*Later, my director said, "just don't get fat." I tried to change my body, which obviously I can't. It took a long time to reclaim the joy in dance and being myself.*

This isn't just about where I'm from or how I identify – it's who I am.





Growing up, I saw people trapped in addiction, violence, negativity. We grow up with our parents as role models, but I feel like I grew up with anti-role models, people who I didn't want to be like. They became the path I was determined to avoid.

Every time I saw someone give up, I made a promise to myself: I would be different. Their limitations? My launching pad. **My motivation. Not my destiny.**

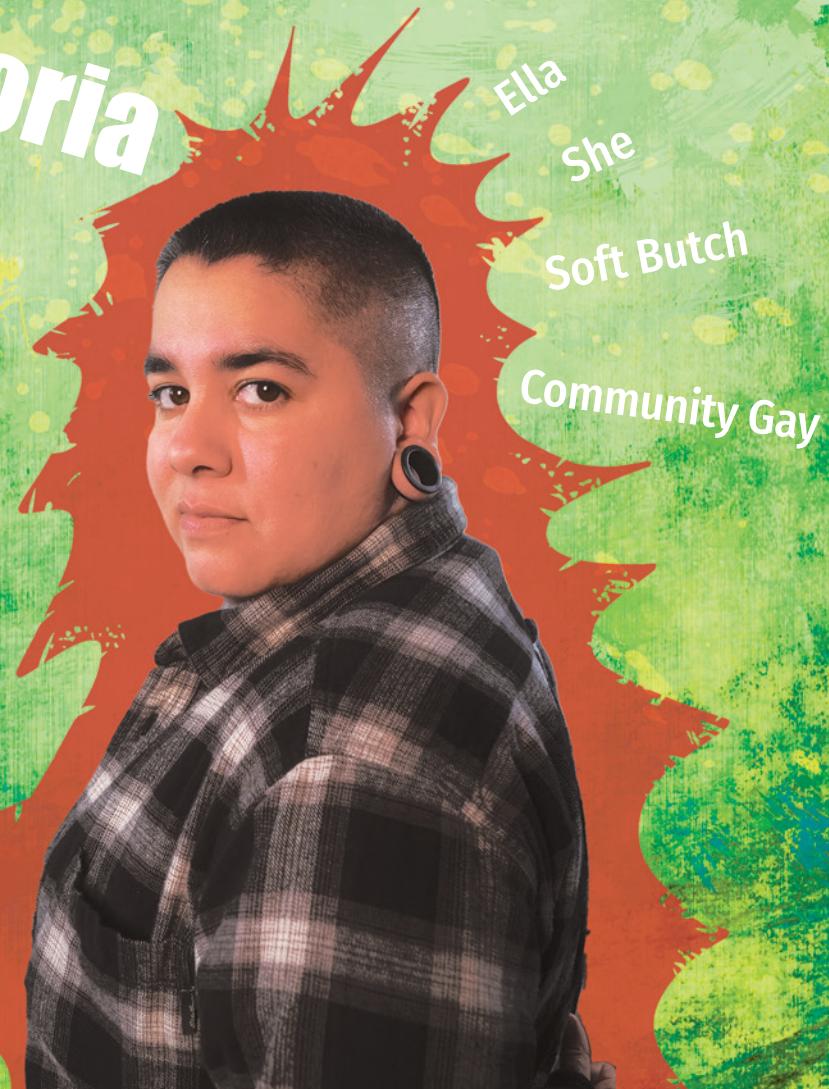
Therapy taught me: unresolved trauma doesn't stay hidden – it shows up in every relationship. I'm learning to close my circle. To be more selective about who I let into my life.

I feel like I have a responsibility to speak out. South Oxnard isn't just about a location. It shaped my identity, my resilience, my social consciousness. South Oxnard has seen this whole generation of disenfranchisement, lack of investment – but we are still here. **We're not giving up.**

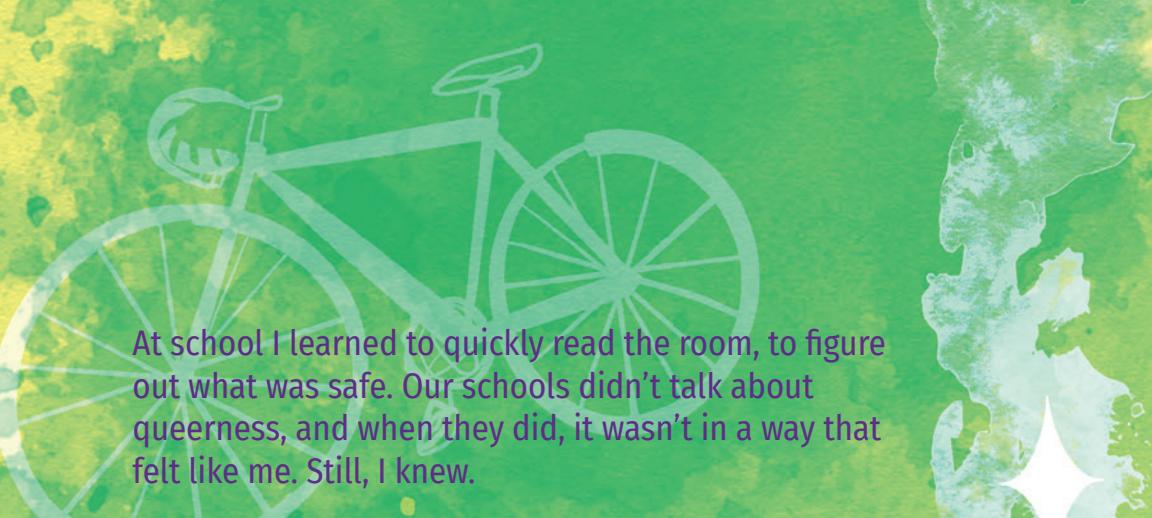


If I could say one thing to my younger self:  
It gets better.  
And even when it doesn't, you get stronger.

Victoria



Ella  
She  
Soft Butch  
Community Gay

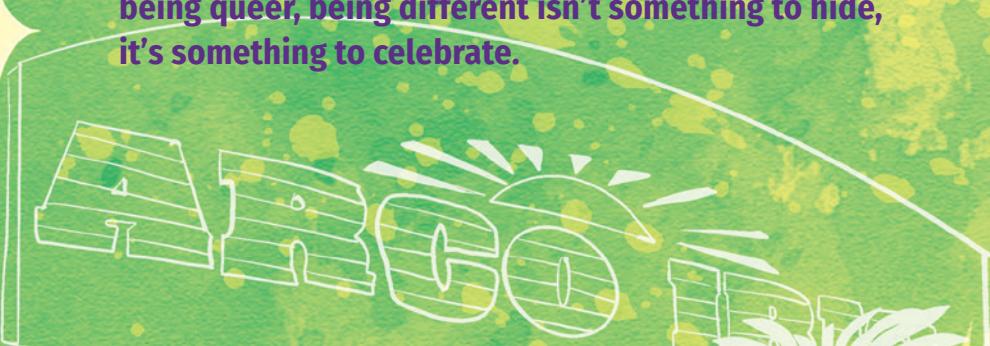


At school I learned to quickly read the room, to figure out what was safe. Our schools didn't talk about queerness, and when they did, it wasn't in a way that felt like me. Still, I knew.

I came out in stages. It wasn't easy, especially with my dad, but it's a journey that taught me a lot about who gets to witness your becoming. Now? I come out all the time. Still. In conversations, in how I show up, in what I wear, in who I hold close.

There is a need for change, and the constant call for it in our community is rooted in the disparities we face, not just as LGBTQ people, but **especially as LGBTQ people of color**. Drug and alcohol use in our community isn't random – it's tied to the gap of mental health care and support, which is a wider gap for LGBTQ, and wider for people of color.

Community saved me. That's why I do what I do. Whether it's tabling at Pride, handing out resources, or just showing up with a flag and a smile. I want people to know they're not alone. **That being soft, being queer, being different isn't something to hide, it's something to celebrate.**



## AQUÍ – Community Resources

### 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Free, confidential crisis support  
Call or text: 988 | 988lifeline.org

### Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH)

Mental health & substance use services  
24/7 Access/Crisis Line: 1-866-998-2243 | bh.venturacounty.gov

### California Peer-Run Warm Line | 1-855-845-7415

Mental health support from peers – not crisis, just care

### Mental Health & Healing Spaces

#### Semillas Counseling & Wellness

Culturally-grounded therapy for Spanish-speaking, immigrant, and BIPOC communities | IG: @semillas\_counseling\_wellness  
semillascounselingandwellness.com

#### InnoPsych

Directory of culturally grounded therapists of color | innopsych.com

### Queer & Trans Care

#### Ventura County Pride Clinic

LGBTQ+ health, gender-affirming care, mental health support | 1-805-229-0200  
hca.venturacounty.gov/health-and-wellness/lgbtqia-pride-clinic

#### QCare+

Free PrEP & STI testing, LGBTQ+ health access  
IG: @getqcareplus | qcareplus.com

### Mutual Aid & Visibility

Mutual Aid Hub | Find local networks for community care  
mutualaidhub.org

#### Oxnard LGBTQ

Oxnard Pride + local LGBTQ+ community | @oxnardlgbtq | oxnardlgbtq.org

#### Queer Magic Podcast

Exploring queer empowerment, healing, and joy  
@queermagicpodcast | Spotify + Apple Podcast

For more community-driven care and programs:

MeAqui.com



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[MeAqui.com](http://MeAqui.com)



**THANK YOU  
TO EVERYONE WHO SHARED YOUR TRUTHS,  
YOUR VULNERABILITY AND YOUR JOY**

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