



places like home

edited by ariel gore

jump up, run as if I don't have any pain. I rock my body back and forth. I dream of shutting myself inside my house, writing while subsisting on unemployment, food stamps, and the feel of the wind as I watch it move through the leaves outside the window. Except I remember how impossible it was to access creativity when I was unemployed, how impossible it was to step back from my distraught over my worsening debt and no viable job options. The back pain. The weight gain. The fear of homelessness. Again. The constant fighting with my partner over buying books, buying weed, getting my eyebrows done, contributing to his sister's rehab instead of saving for new tattoos, paying rent with the money we couldn't save for his top surgery. It wasn't romantic.

doing the math

BY JESSICA LAWLESS

Sixty thousand words equal a book. Add up the words you have so far. A simple assignment one month into the manuscript writing workshop that was the key to finally finishing my book. Cool assignment, I thought. Exactly where I am, I thought.

I sorted through all the different folders of writing that contained the pages of my story. I dragged all those words into a single file I titled *Manuscript 6/17*. Later it became *Manuscript 7/17*. Then *Manuscript 2/18*. Then *Manuscript 7/18*. Fucking hell, I thought, as I renamed it *OMG 2019!*

Numbers supposedly have answers to problems. In theory, I like their cleanliness. In reality, I avoid them. Scales, budgets, age.

Numbers always add up to a cavernous unfillable pit in my stomach surrounded by a wall of shame that makes me want to drink. That makes me want to get high on things I can't.

I sit at my writing desk staring into the depths of history on my computer screen. Holding in the tantrum, the tears, the impulse to

In 2009, the degrees I banked on to build a life away from a life-time of violence led me right back into unemployment peppered with intermittent paychecks engulfed by a cavernous shadow of student debt. I was a gay porn editing adjunct professor also working as a home health care aide. A journalist friend and I decided to research and write an article about academia failing queer/women/of color. Instead, we ended up drinking at a bar every time we got together.

In 2010, I started writing a book about MFAs as Ponzi schemes. But really, I was learning to write my way out of grief, loss, depression, a sense of failure, too many deaths and too much violence.

In 2014, my friend Miranda and I interviewed each other about gender, the economy, unions, and being adjunct professors. In 2017, Miranda died from an overdose of heartbreak over a career that never was. And a lack of healthcare. I titled my book *Cultural Capital Doesn't Pay the Rent*. It became about redefining safety and stability while living within that thick fog of grief, loss, depression, a sense of failure, too many deaths and too much violence. I realized it's a queer love story.

In 2019, I have enough distance to understand *Cultural Capital Doesn't Pay the Rent* is a memoir about surviving the Great Recession, fighting for higher education to still have meaning despite dreams becoming nightmares. Each word I've written is a brick pulled from my wall, dissipating my shame.

It's always been a queer love story.

For now, my partner and I are no longer hand to mouth. We made it to paycheck to paycheck, then to having enough in the bank to pay for two months of bills. The other day we had a video call with a fabulously smart femme about how to put together a budget. The numbers that add up to security turn out to be pretty much the same that add up to precarity.

The number of words I have for my book turns out to be somewhere between 50,000 and 300,000.

I'll know more when I have more.

Which is exactly how I budget. 

P

B

L

li

o

h

c

w

c

di

n

tf

te

cl

oi