

■
FRIENDS
AND
COMRADES:

Odie
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■



BEFORE WE SEE


Not a lot of us are still close friends with the people we played with on our street as a kid. Just like not many of us still like our best friends from first or fourth grade (Hi Shayla and Ayo – you are absolutely the exceptions). Sure, a decent amount of people still hang with their high school friends into their 20's and beyond, but it's less likely you do if you left your hometown – or strayed away from any kind of cultural or societal norms. You know, like if your entire name and gender were a lie forced upon you like mine were, and you now share a name with a cartoon dog and give yourself weekly hormone injections. Even if you still do have these original cast members in your life – if you have grown and changed a lot over the years, it's not likely they have grown and changed in the same directions as you. This is what we often simply refer to as *g r o w i n g a p a r t*.


As a child, like most kids, I didn't really choose my friends. I was friends with other kids of similar age that I had access to; whoever lived on my street and my siblings. Though lots of kids play with their

parent's friend's children, that wasn't an option for me, as my dad was only really friends with childless stoners, and my mom didn't really get to have friends.

When you enter school age you start to choose friends based on arbitrary crap, but still within the limits of who you have access to. Who of the kids you share a class with or see on the playground. Who likes the same type of fun activities as you, who is maturing at a similar rate as you. Who do you think is cute or cool?

Come middle school and high school we are mostly all shallow little assholes, and choose our friends based on fashion trends, and who listens to the same niche yet popular music as we do. I was the kid in the giant KoRn t-shirt with racoon eyeliner, and in my group of friends we all had a different favorite nu-metal or alternative band. Jaclyn loved Deftones and Chezronda loved Marilyn Manson, while my sister was stuck on Sublime and Nirvana. I guess maybe these days friends are chosen based on follower counts or the similarities of their Tik Tok "For You" feeds. I quit Tik Tok long ago as I







cannot dance and I haven't purchased an air fryer. I cannot imagine, as a 35-year-old human, choosing my friends because they also listen to \$uicide-boy\$ or Ghostemane, lmao. I'd honestly rather do like a 4-year-old and just be friends with my neighbors than with a bunch of agro sadbois who wear the same merch as me. I guess I am friends with a bunch of other leftist hyper online memers though, so maybe it's not much different.

I grew up white and poor in a mostly black neighborhood, which came with some immense privileges – I was taught about racism from a young age by my mother. She would educate me on classism and sexism (which I would later experience), these discussions extended to my friends and their parents. I knew before my first trip to juvie to never trust a pig. A belief that I have consistently looked for in those I call my community. My father was incarcerated before I was born, and instilled a deep mistrust for police and the system in me and my siblings. I remember getting my first tattoos at age 15, and my dad being pissed that I had “identifying marks” – now I get what he meant. I wish I had known better. Though I started learning these lessons young, from my own

actions and my parents, I still ultimately know fuck-all in the grand scheme. But what's the point if we aren't ever absorbing, rethinking, and evolving?

In my neighborhood I was blessed to be surrounded by like-minded (or like-hearted) people, who were either unlearning American Propaganda, or who were told by their families to never buy that crap they teach in school in the first place. In my neighborhood you didn't call the police or get in other people's business. When I started reading bell hooks and Marx, around the time I dropped out of high school, I was hyped to start to learn words I hadn't yet been taught. I became able to talk about a lot of the things I had seen, experienced, and knew were wrong with the world. I will say though, it took a while to learn to pay more attention to people's actions, than the politics they spout. I don't care what you've read or what you post on Instagram, how the fuck do you show up to improve the emotional or material conditions for working class people? A lot of the people I've learned the most from, and admire how they show up in community, didn't read theory to get there – their lived experience birthed praxis. Even post hooks and Marx, and





even post Ocalan, same. While it's great to have the academic language and knowledge to engage in political dialogue, my experience and observations are the true lens I use to analyze injustice. And to be fucking honest, if your dialogue isn't accessible to all working people who the fuck is it really for.


PUNKS AND POSERS


When 12-year-old me got kicked out of my house, I stayed with a lot of my friend's parents, and I spent a lot of time riding buses. Riding the 5 into downtown, regularly having grown men ask me for my number or if I suck dick, was where I met my first punk friend. He quickly invited me to a party at a squat – and from then on, I was kinda just absorbed into that scene. These punks were all a lot older than me, mostly in their 20's and 30's – and they taught my clueless little 15-year-old self necessary things, like how to dumpster dive, fly a sign, and how to avoid frostbite.

We partied a lot, and it made the lifestyle fun instead of just scary all the time. I spent years bouncing around. Sometimes renting rooms with money

from my on-and-off corner store job, sometimes staying in the squats or crashing with dudes that showed interest in me. I developed a meth habit, and that helped me not have to sleep as much. Honestly, finding a place to be is easier than finding a place to sleep. The habit made me eat a lot less – which was convenient. As grateful as I am for all I learned and the community I shared, as I grew up I slowly realized the adult men giving me drugs, alcohol, and a place to stay so they could have sex with me weren't my friends- and were in fact the predators myself and all my feminist friends were angry about. I look back and think about all the adult women who were complicit in the sexual abuse of minors their boyfriends and friends committed, and how often they would get angry at the teenagers for their own exploitation. A lot of these predatory men are still staples on the West Bank, and beyond, so it's hard for me to believe too much has changed.

I left the Minneapolis punk scene in my early 20's. I found it to be a cesspool of sexual assault, grooming minors, racism, and substance abuse. I myself spent over a decade in addiction but I knew I didn't want the people I call my community to be so






intently focused on escapism. I was growing tired of the contradiction of people saying, “fuck the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” or “all cops are bastards” and then doing meth with a 30-year-old man who fucks teenagers, and actively gentrifies Northside – all while calling the cops on their black neighbors. I also came to the slow sad realization that a lot of these people weren’t homeless by circumstance like me, but by choice, and a good amount had nice families or trust funds that they called upon in private to get them out of trouble in a pinch. Hop a train to the wrong town and want out fast? Call your mother for a flight home! I understood the appeal of being free, but the lying and posturing as poor, and not sharing resources with your supposed community made my stomach turn. They treated ACAB and Anarchy as an aesthetic while not doing any actual work, opting instead to turn life into one big party. Turns out the Minneapolis punk scene that I grew up in was mostly made up of predators and posers.

GRANT ME THE SERENITY

My exit from the punk scene happened abruptly when I went to rehab at Pride Institute in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, in 2007 – and once again I was convinced I had found my home: the gay recovery/relapse scene.

I call it the recovery/relapse scene, because I was sober with the same people that I spent the next two years getting/doing meth with. I call it “gay” and not LGBTQ very intentionally. Even as a queer person (I was out as being attracted to all genders, but wasn’t out as nonbinary yet – as I wasn’t aware for a few more years that it was a “thing” I could be, and the word queer was still taboo and largely rejected by mainstream gay culture). I was quickly treated like what people in that time referred to as a “fag hag” and it made me livid. The entire community had this way of centering cis gay white men, and treating everyone else like a non-playable character. I foolishly thought this was a place I could feel at home and find community, but I quickly left for the same reasons. I had gay men groping my ass and chest, and getting offended when I would say





to stop because “eww I am gay I’m not into you” – which in their mind meant that they could touch me anyway they wanted. That wasn’t one person, that was the culture. I would learn from gay friends of color that the white dudes had “no blacks, no fats, no Asians” in their Grindr bios. How could I belong to the same community as these racist, fatphobic misogynists? We are NOT family just because you suck (thin white) cock.

I was lucky because around the same time I quit meth, left that culture and the gay clubs for good – I stumbled upon the first place that would hold me like a baby caterpillar.


Madame was the first real family I had since I was booted by my mom. A dark second story walk-up, full of freaks and queerdos right off Powderhorn Park. A place where we could learn to become our truest selves. A place where a lot of us could go to build a better world, at least for a night. I was a drunken shitshow in this community, and even broke my foot while standing still singing “Cameltoe” by Fanny pack – but I also got sober in this community, and I was held and supported. People drinking alcohol

made sure I had a delicious non-alcoholic drink in my hand. They also made it possible for me to stay and become my best self.

Madame eventually ended, because the police wouldn’t stop targeting our parties, and so some of us moved on and got a new space and tried to do it even better. This time it wouldn’t be run by rich white private school queers.

Co-opted identity politics eventually swallowed us whole, people who weren’t trustworthy drained the bank account on personal expenses. As a result, the entire place went under. We all tried our best. And we built connections and community regardless. If that place did anything, it was pull people together and birth new queer family units. Some projects were born in this space that carry on today; like the MN Syringe Exchange Calendar and some people’s DJ careers. Other projects, like West Bank Harm Reduction, and our Queer Recovery meeting lasted as long as they needed to, and died when people no longer needed them.






Queer Recovery was an NA meeting birthed from a need for recovery space that wasn't like the other gay meetings in the Twin Cities. We started it because a lot of us needed community to stay or get sober, but didn't feel safe in the gay recovery scene because of all the transphobia, racism, fatphobia, misogyny, and religion. We weren't an anti-religious space – people could talk about how their beliefs impacted their recovery, but a lot of queers have trauma from religion because they have been told they are gonna burn in hell their whole childhood. We decided to make a meeting with all the gendered and religious language removed from the readings. This meeting went on for over three years, and became a safe-haven and rock of long-term recovery for a lot of queers who didn't feel safe or at home in the other gay meetings. We created our own culture and listened to each other, addressed abuse and made safer spaces for each other to grow and recover. I have never in all my years in and out of the rooms seen so much quality and consistent long-term recovery in a meeting (especially in such young people). I really do credit the culture and relationships we built for that.

This was an era in my life where I was finally able to break free of fomo from intoxication culture, and not just embrace – but enjoy sobriety, to enjoy being in control of myself. I started reading (the very few existing non-straight edge) zines on intoxication culture and radical sobriety (I recommend Anarchy and Alcohol: Wasted Indeed: How the Fiend Came to be Civilized). My sobriety changed from an inconvenience that made me miss out on fun – to something that made me able to enjoy *real* fun, while being proud of most of my choices. I was able to treat my comrades, lovers, and community with respect, and it helped me be present and committed to showing up for people and the movement. I am now responsible to my community, and better at OPSEC.

**I'm no longer sober to escape addiction,
I'm sober as a radical act.**

It's a part of my commitment to be my best self, and my dedication to collective liberation. I could not have the quality of long lasting friendships and relationships I now have, or the good standing I have in my community without my recovery. Past me





shuddered if I heard people talking about me. I assumed it was probably about something humiliating I had done. Present me has been doing the next right thing for so long (eight years wtf), that I know when people say they've heard things about me that they will almost certainly be positive. I am a good friend, mentor, and comrade **ONLY** because I choose not to pick up. **I thank every addict I've ever sat in a room with for this gift.**

As someone who is committed to doing my emotional work, and has committed my life to collective liberation, I now choose my friends based on my value system.

People who show up for those they love.

People who intentionally improve the emotional and material conditions of their community.

People who allow themselves to be mistaken, and absorb new ideas and consistently grow.

No theory required, just like-hearted people. I find when you take away the labels of political affiliations


(I intentionally don't label myself with any tendency) you connect with more people, and your beliefs line up a lot more than you would think (if you were comparing who says they are a communist vs an anarchist, and so on). I even have close friends who don't think they are anti-authoritarian, cause they mistakenly believe that means every single decision needs to be made via consensus, and that no one can take lead on projects, lol. Misconceptions alone make people identify in ways that separate us, instead of bringing us together to get free.

FROM THE ASHES OF THE THIRD PRECINCT

The continuous police murders of Black men: George Floyd, Dolal Id, Duante Wright, and Winston Smith this past year in Minnesota, have traumatized and scarred our communities.

That trauma is deepened by the murders of protesters such as Deona Marie, and the continuous destruction of sacred memorial sites such as Wince Marie Garden by the likes of the Minneapolis Police Department and Mayor Jacob Frey. The state





has furthered that trauma by using weapons of war on grieving people, incarcerating people for saying enough is enough, and continuing to bulldoze the belongings of those who live outside. The day of the Chauvin verdict, our failure of a Mayor, Jacob Frey, threatened to shut down George Floyd Square, and the morning after sentencing had city workers remove the barricades keeping George Floyd Square safe from vehicular attacks.

Our city and suburban streets have been militarized.


It has become *normal* to see National Guard soldiers with rifles on our street corners, and Humvees blocking our intersections. It has become *normal* to have grown ass people be told we can't be outside past 8pm, or we are breaking curfew. Riot cops and National Guard lineup and surround a suburban church, threatening to breach private property to arrest those of us seeking refuge inside – for simply standing in the street protesting the police murder of Duante Wright. The church feeds us sugar cookies, but then puts a sign on the locked door the next day saying they can no longer help us. The pigs target shins with their “less lethal” munitions, exposing the

bones of people's legs. They target heads, and people lose their eyes. Medics are targeted while treating wounded patients. Press is tackled and arrested. People are crowded on arrest buses and in cells, and the pigs don't wear masks while we are still in a global pandemic. The remains of the burnt 3rd precinct, with the words “haha you lose” spray painted across the front barricade, **remind us of our strength.**

The people I have chosen to call my friends, my comrades, my *family* based on like-heartedness, are the people I see in the streets- doing supplies runs, and eviction defense. The people I feel affinity with show up in whatever ways they are able. We support each other, let each other rest, check on each other.

Despite COVID, I've made stronger connections with new friends in the past year, than I have the last 5. I've had to decide if I trust people with my freedom, when I have only known them a week.

Of these new comrades I've made, I haven't even met half of them in person – despite certainly being in the same crowds. The ones I have, well, I've





only seen the bottom half of a handful of their faces. The ones I've gotten close to, I've mostly only seen in the streets, outside of the jail, or at meetings.

Sometimes comrades are way cuter than you expected.

Others, they just look way different than you imagined. On occasion they are exactly what you pictured in your head. You find ways to laugh despite everything burning beside you, because when you didn't laugh last summer, things got really dark in your head. You bring each other treats and send reminders to go to the doctor. Sometimes you meet a super dreamy girl who lets you sleepover, rubs your back, and makes you food after a long night at an action.

I feel more solidarity and in-it-together-ness than I ever have. I feel it deeply.

This has been born out of the ashes of the third precinct, and the momentum this city's radicals have kept on our path towards collective liberation. These are the bonds born when you organize with others whose hearts belong to the movement.

This feels like wholeness.

Even through all the unnecessary jitsi calls and organizational in-fighting, I feel it.

