

Communal Altar to Queer Safety and Home

Elisa, Clau, Rick, Lou, Marti

Group Altar

Our altar project grew from the idea of using the birdcage as a metaphor for home, safety, freedom, and spirituality. We used the question “what do you bring to the altar?” as a guide to build our community altar and shared space. We included narratives and close-up photos of each of our individual contributions to highlight the diversity of each of our stories and interpretations of the prompt.



Marti

I am a farm gal born and raised in the 1950's on an Illinois grain and dairy farm with soils that geologists describe as the most fertile on the planet Earth. It was there on a hot August day that a chance encounter with a flock of angry Redwing Blackbirds framed what for me was as close as I would ever come to what I call a spiritual or religious experience.

The Redwing Blackbird and near relatives is a robin sized bird seven or so inches long and found in most of North America Atlantic to Pacific and mid Canada to mid Mexico. There two very important things to remember about this bird and that is that they are ground feeders of insects and they are very very aggressive.

And so I sat on on a red tractor, on hot sunny August afternoon. Waiting. I was waiting for combine harvester and wagon filled with oats to return to my end of the field and exchange the full wagon for an empty one I pulled behind the red tractor. The only sound came from the distant combine. The only sound until I was dived on by a flock of Red Wing Blackbirds.

There may have been only ten to twelve birds but they dived at me repeatedly because I had disturbed them as they fed on the grain spilled by the combine. I jumped down at found refuge under the red tractor. The birds soon tired of me and left but I remained in the shade of the red tractor as it was much cooler there.

My mind carried me back to a Spring day in March. My father was driving the red tractor with a wagon pulled behind. I was in the wagon. As my father drove, it was by job to shovel oat seed and grass seed into a seeding kind of planter. The ground was rough, there was nowhere to sit so I bumped on the side of the wagon. It was cold. The sky slowly descended first in a fog and at last a steady drizzle. A completely miserable experience.

But no. From Mother Earth comes the whole process. Planting, hoeing of weeds, watching summer skies for thunderstorms to bring timely moisture, to harvest. The Redwing Blackbirds. the red tractor and me.

Marti



Rick

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference. Robert Frost

Ever since I was a child I have always enjoyed the comfort and solitude of taking the time being by myself in the surroundings of nature. Luckily growing up on the outskirts of Chicago at 51st and S. Nagle Ave. There was a lengthy Prairie with woods and two creeks at the end of the block.

I didn't have the opportunity to have a father to connect to with life's challenges and certainly wouldn't talk to my mom or sister. Spending time at the "prairie" gave me the time to figure things out for myself and helped me become the person I am today.

As I grew older, and to this day, I continue to have comfort and solitude with nature, taking walks along the beach and lake front, forest preserves, hikes in the hill country and mountains, and spending time gardening in my church gardens, allowing me the time to pray, meditate, be in tune with myself, and be closer to God.

My altar reflects who I am and what I believe in.

Understand that knowledge is power.

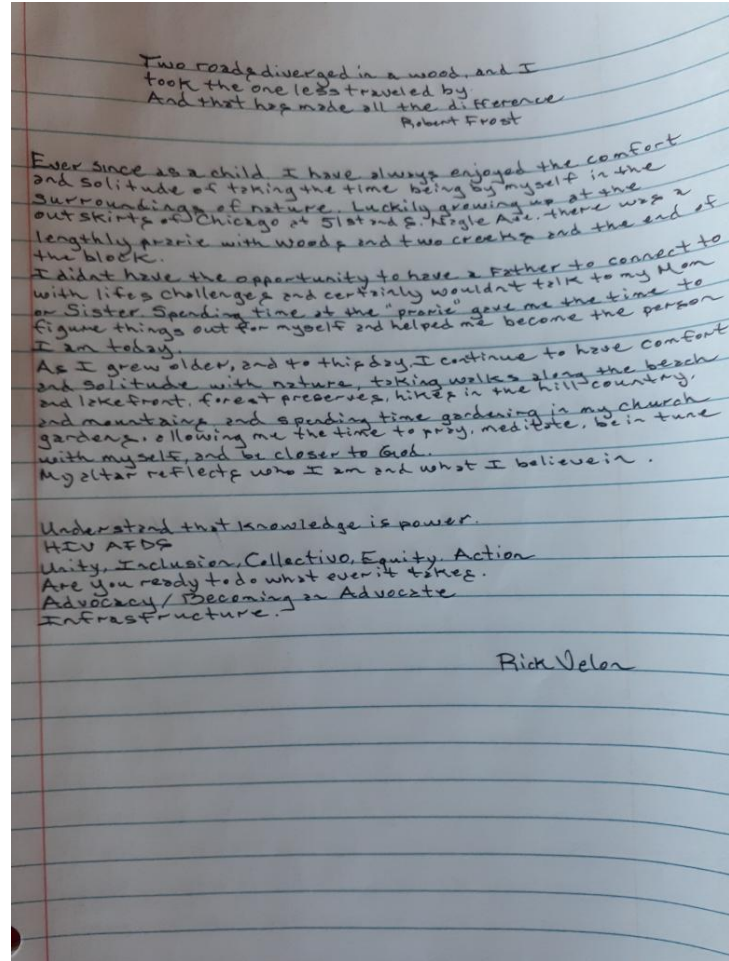
HIV AIDS

Unity, Inclusion, Collective, Equity, Action

Are you ready to do whatever it takes.

Advocacy/Becoming an Advocate

Infrastructure.



Rick



Lou

As the theme for altar objects is home and safety,
these pieces have been symbolic for me.

The Hello Kitty clock was a gift from my wife and is a whimsical, fun
and comforting piece for her and myself. It has been for many years.

Just the opposite of the daily work grind and always means I'm home
and safe.

The candlesticks are sabbath candles. My wife was Jewish (I am
not), but I am glad to have them as a reminder of her religious
customs and again convey a sense of home for me.

Finally the tea candles are lights in the darkness-signs of warmth
and hope.



Clau

In my personal spiritual practice, I utilize burning petitions and placing offerings to a patron god as a means of asking for wishes and needs to be filled.

When thinking about queer safety and home, I immediately thought of my journey with Coyolxauhqui, the Mexica (Aztec) goddess of the moon.

I added marigolds, candles, a petition, ashes, and a porcelain brass knuckle with a portrait of Coyolxauhqui by queer indigenous artist Felix D'eon .

The porcelain brass knuckle balances fragility, violence, and self protection which mirrors my feelings toward queer safety while also mirroring some of what this goddess represents to me.

Coyolxauhqui's story revolves around the body, sacrifice, protection and sexuality, which to me makes her the perfect patron for trans and nonbinary individuals—and the perfect goddess to look to when asking how to make our bodies feel like home.

I just want my body to feel like home.



Elisa

My altar of safety was approached more as what I would want to build. As our group talked about our homes and safety, I've been thinking a lot about how important and necessary it is to have safety within visibility and within homes. I made a small banner for the altar, which holds up small items I've made throughout my transition so far. The rope was knit throughout our virtual dialogues together and holds up two leaves preserved in ceramic, one sourced from the Chicago and the other sourced from my home in Texas; and three metal bells/noisemakers. To me this all quietly represents resiliency, preservation, and affirming safe visibility moving forward. I hope to keep building onto it, adding more creations from myself and my other queer friends and family, extending into a blanket.

