

## SASH REAL STORIES

# Maria's story

To me, grief feels a million different ways. When I heard she was dead, I felt sad, angry, abandoned, betrayed, relieved. I didn't sleep for days after; I'd just walk around. I went to all the places we'd visit together, warehouses, bottle shops, drains.

When I heard how she died, I couldn't get the image out of my head. It made her death even harder to process. Prior to accessing the coroner's report, part of me believed she was coming back. It felt supernatural, that someone could be here, then through a series of actions, disappear forever. It was strange seeing her death affect so many people indirectly, especially trans women. The trajectory of my life and the lives of so many around me have been forever altered by her death.

I met her when I was 16 and homeless. She said we were the same, that we were autoclaves, that we love people until they're a bloody pulp. We had a complicated relationship; with her often playing a pseudo-parental role in my life. I still don't know exactly how she felt about this. When I decided I wanted to go back to high school but didn't know how to fill out the forms, she was the one to help me enrol. She told me to study literature because I loved to write, "Uni isn't just for rich kids," she would say. I never did and I don't write much anymore.

She was one of the first queer people I knew. She ran events for queer people. Abrasive, poor queer people, who were alienated from trendy venues and parties. We'd meet in warehouses and listen to music and dance all night. Through her, I met so many other people in the community and for the first time, met people who were like me. When she transitioned, I felt happy, I thought that maybe some of the pain she felt would be lifted.

Only in the past year have I been able to stop hating her. I felt angry that she'd died before I could understand what had happened. Now, I visit her grave a few times a year and leave her favourite energy drinks. I sit there for hours and usually end up chatting to her until I fall asleep.

It's only recently that I've sought out formal support for my grief. In the past, I felt that I wasn't deserving. She was the one who suffered, not me. But now I understand grief for the complicated, rippling entity that it is. I noticed that when I had tried to discuss her impact on my life with some mental health professionals, they didn't understand the significance of her trans identity, or even what being trans meant. They would exhibit ignorance, confusion, or laugh at 'how complicated' it all was.

Now I exclusively seek out queer-friendly spaces for support and health care. Not only am I queer, but so are most people in my life, and that is entirely thanks to her. I still have issues with the way the mental health system operates, and I appreciate the peer support model as a safer, informed alternative.

**Maria, she/her**