

A Story of Coming Out... of the Darkness and Into the Light

# I Am a Queer & I Talk to Bees

Introducing  
Witchy Me

ASHLEY W. A. CROWELL

I Am a Queer  
& I Talk to Bees  
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For my Beloved Family

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## Acknowledgements and then some

First off... I have to thank my editor, Amanda. She is the shit. She helped turn my messy yet super interesting story into a book that reads so well... Amanda and I reconnected very recently and we can't even quite figure out exactly how it happened. It was this awesome accident. She is truly a good friend. The universe did me a solid putting our paths back in parallel after having a friendly, yet distant relationship in high school. I am more than lucky to have her in my life.

Next... this is incredibly important. I realize at this point, we hardly know each other. As you get to know me in this book, I want it to be absolutely clear that I am telling these stories from my own point of view. There is stuff in here that shows less than glowing examples of people at their worst. I am speaking about my ex-husbands. I want to make sure that you as the reader understand both of these people went through just as many struggles and trials as me – maybe more so. I ask, respectfully that you leave them the fuck alone. Do not assign anger, do not get offended, do not pursue a quest to obtain their identities. I know it's easy to be an amateur stalker in this world, but these guys don't deserve that. One of them is the father of my kids and we have a great co-parenting relationship. The other... I have zero contact with him on any level including social media. He is probably in a great place in life now. They are both people who experienced some tough days and times. We all fucked up... and we all grew. Please be respectful of their privacy. And save your judgments ... they are not welcome. You will hear me say plenty of choice words, but my words are personal reflections and reactions of some pretty shitty experiences and difficult times... all of which are now in the past. This book is to help propel people forward, so let's extend that courtesy here too.

Please and thank you.

Now... on with the show.

## Chapter 1

# Regarding Me

I WANT TO BEGIN BY SAYING that every single human I know has been through some shit. I think I could safely say that every human ever has been through some shit. We are all on a journey of conquering self, sorting through karma, and growing to the next level. Each beautiful one of us is dealt a hand that we are meant to have and play... and the real test is what one does with that hand.

I've decided to open the doors to my life in these pages because if we could take measure of all the shit, I think it'd be safe to say that I've earned what amounts to a PH. D from the School of Hard Knocks. I also made it out the other side with wisdom, power, and a gratitude for life that I could not be more grateful for... see what I did there? Ha ha!

As I've come along all this way, it's gotten harder and harder to feel close to people. Most who know me or who have known me in the past probably don't know most of this information. Plus, making new friends has become a task I've almost completely abandoned because there's just too much story to tell. It's too much work.

All anyone craves is to be understood. I feel mostly misunderstood by my family and most of the people I know. I understand myself very well. I am about to take you to outer space with me and show you around my world.

Through a series of amazing events, I have been granted an assembly of spectacular guides in spirit and a very precious 'little birdie' in my ear that are driving forces for my practice as a writer, healer and teacher. I know that there is a reason why I've been given these advisors and my birdie... I want to change the world by helping people.

My experiences have given me a superhuman ability to meet anyone halfway from WHEREVER they are coming from. I am just that seasoned. I am proud of that. I am proud that I love talking to bumble bees in my garden and that they respond with kindness to me. I am also extremely proud to be a Queer living out loud. There is so much to say... this book is an introduction. It's my promise to let the flag of Me wave high as a guidepost for anyone who feels repressed or hidden away. For anyone who feels there is magick

looming secretly in their psyche... that needs a voice to explain how to turn it on... how to harness it.

What am I first? A human, I guess, but that is arguable. I Am Me. I've been working for a really long time to uncover and fully step into me. There was so much confusion along the way. I did not always have the right kind of support to help me understand. I am female. I hesitate to stick a label on how I define my 'Queerness', but for educational purposes... I would say that I am a mostly gay man happily parading around in a woman's body. I am a mother because I'm female. I am a parent. I am the Wounded Healer Archetype, having walked the path of pain and suffering in order to receive my gifts. I am a psychic channel. I am a Wiccan Christian magickal yogini monk. I am literally in love with all world religions so I don't like trying to put a label there either. I am an athlete, a singer, a dancer. I love to move and I love to be moved. I find splendor in everything. I converse with all of Creation – including office equipment. I have saved myself so much frustration in my professional life by making lasting friendships with copiers. I have a love / hate relationship with my car because it's really fucking sassy. Most of all? I am so in Love with our Collective Existence. The humans all the way down to those friendly copiers. The plant, animal and insect kingdoms. The mountains, the oceans. The volcanos, the glaciers. The wind and rain. The rainforests and deserts. All I want is to watch our Collective evolve into peace and abundance. I hold this hope so dear that it is my most precious power and toughest burden to bear depending on the day. It is all that matters. It is everything.

This book is not your typical I was born, blah blah blah... these are pivotal moments, stories and experiences that have created me. They brought me here to you, the reader, in this moment so that we may all grow together. I hope you enjoy.

## When I asked the Right Question

I HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED MYSELF a graceful person. I've been a dancer for many years, an athlete for most of my life, and a musical theater performer. All of these things require light feet. Now, I regularly have what I like to call 'clumsy days'. These are the days where I cannot for the life of me perform basic functions like walking or talking properly, keeping track of where my keys/phone/glasses are, retaining and remembering basic daily information, etc. Many years ago, I noticed a pattern that the universe kept presenting to me. There was this constant test to my patience that I often made worse by having a tendency to not be on time for things. Now that karmic lesson is another story for another day. But this patience thing happened everywhere. In the car, in line at the store, with my electronic devices... literally everywhere. It always seemed like the crappier the day, the more severe the delay.

Eventually, I took this constant frustration to meditation to try and find some understanding. An amazing revelation was presented to me in this space. The Divine Voice told me that the most important thing to remember when being tested is to ask myself one thing:

*“What am I supposed to be learning right now?”*

This revelation literally solved every frustrating, impatient mood I ever had... ever again. It taught me to plan ahead better, to roll with the punches... It taught me to be aware and accepting of synchronicity. It also occurred to me that this question was applicable to literally everything inexplicable that happens in life – especially tragedy.

Now it's important to remember as I begin to dive into the meat here... I will often circle back around to this extremely important point. Why? Because this is what I hope every reader takes away: We can be presented with anything... absolutely ANYTHING in this life. Unspeakable violence, sickness, loss, joyous triumph, lucky happenstance, accidental life altering turns for the better.... Whatever the event, bad OR good... You can still ask this question and more than likely find some wisdom and personal growth in the answer...

*“What is the lesson in all of this?”*

### Chapter 3

## My Mommy Dearest

MY MOM IS A PILLAR IN MY STORY... She's been dead for more than half my life, and I have already outlived her by a few years, but her influence on me has been and will continue to be a major contributor to who I Am and why I have turned out this way.

My Mother was a severe abuse survivor. She was sexually and physically abused by her stepfather as a child. I am unsure if my grandma had an awareness of this to be honest, but all parties have passed away so I'll never know that answer. She was also addicted to downers and alcohol for pretty much all of the years I can remember her well.

When Mom was in high school, she was an average student, but an above average reader. I've been told by more than one of my family members and her friends that she always had her nose in a book. She and my Dad met in the 8th grade. They dated late in high school – I am unaware of a lot of the details because I just choose not to ask. My Dad has shared that what he really loved about her was that she didn't throw herself all over him. He was a popular kid and had lots of girls with interest, but my Mom caught his eye. If you've ever seen that movie *Dazed and Confused*, that's a pretty close depiction of the culture they lived in during these years... a really beautiful moment in history.

Well they ended up pregnant pretty much right out of high school. After a sweet shotgun wedding for the young lovers, I arrived in mid-April the next year. My Dad said that he felt overjoyed to get to have a family – to be in love and have a baby. My birth story was pretty good considering her young age. She chose to have me naturally – but obviously had some fear because she was in labor for almost an entire day. The doctors insisted that I would arrive before 9:30pm – easily – on the second day. I was born just minutes before.

Fast forward three years, my Dad moved the family to Los Angeles. We stayed back in Missouri until he saved enough money to get us out there. We were reunited in our tiny North Hollywood apartment about six months later. Here was where some of my happiest childhood memories were created,

mixed with a healthy dose of why Dad left Mom. Here I experienced my first go ‘rounds with police activity because her tendency to become overtly loud and even violent when she and my Dad fought. Once, my Dad spent a night in jail because he punched her. Why you ask? Because she full force hit him over the head with a wine bottle and he punched her back in an angry knee jerk reaction. She was not arrested for starting it despite the head injury he sustained.

I remember once waking up to the noise of their fighting. We had this wooden sliding door that separated our bathroom and bedrooms from the living room and kitchen. I got up out of bed and cracked open the door to a plate crashing against the wall next to my head. SO... I quickly ran back to bed. Mom was a posterchild for someone in suffering. She moved through life like a tornado causing mess, pain and worry to those around her. Those of us nearest to her most of all. My father, Brother and I will forever possess a closeness that cannot be broken because of the shared experience.

When we moved back to St. Louis, my Brother was diagnosed with Leukemia. This was the straw that broke their marriage. My Dad left her, and she never recovered from what went on within their divorce on top of what was happening with my Brother. During the next several years, she bounced around a lot... apartments, family's homes, boyfriend's houses. We did not have a steady place to call home until my Dad bought a house near my school when I was about 12 years old. That's seven years of moving about once a year or more for us kids. We did have a home base at our grandparents' house... that was a safe place for us because it stayed the same, and we spent a lot of time there. They, in fact, still live there today.

The divorce was very messy. Mom was a very unsavory participant. She spoke very badly about my Dad to us, and made us feel both scared and guilty to spend any time with him. She once told me about a dream she had one night,

*“I dreamt that your father and his parents and whole family showed up in our front yard. They were banging on the door and you opened it. They came in and told me they were taking you away, and you and your Brother just went with them. So, after you left, I went to the kitchen sink, grabbed the Draino and started drinking it. Then I woke up.”*

My Mother committed suicide. That certainly taught me what not to do. Being a survivor of suicide has been a life long journey of finding

understanding for someone else's choice. I spent years in a state of anger and guilt trying to understand why. She suffered from Major Depressive Disorder and was probably Bi-Polar. Translation: My mother had very special gifts to offer the world, but she denied them and hid them from the world because she could not figure out how to heal from her childhood trauma. She ran from it by abusing alcohol and drugs and ultimately preferred death to her suffering. I like owning the fact that I am a better version of her that made the right choices to process my trauma.

She also attempted suicide seriously, several times, before she actually succeeded at it. I had to answer the door to police and paramedics more than once because of that. She would get suicidal, call a friend in her horrible state, zonk out on pills and alcohol, then whoever she was talking to would call the cavalry. The 'cavalry' would then come banging down the door to her passed out cold on the couch and my Brother and I sleeping soundly. I remember once feeling terrified because one of the police officers became interrogative to me about what she had taken. He was angry that I didn't know.

He kept asking over and over, and at one point said something to the effect of...

*"How can you not know something about what's been going on here?"*

I cried. I also developed a severe phobia of police officers for years after that. Having to watch paramedics wheel her out of the house unconscious, and being yelled at by a cop was a little much. I'm not even sure how old I was, but I was younger than 12.

Situations like this really wired me to be fearful. I will briefly cover one extremely ridiculous situation shortly.

The devastating truth of it was that she terrorized so many people in her life with this behavior. People like my Dad, her own family, her best and closest friends, and of course my Brother and myself... all because she was in so much pain from her past and could not bear to address it in any way shape or form. She was unable to find a graceful stride.

Bro and I were lucky... we had friends, school and a pretty great extended family to distract us when she was in a bad way. Generally, for me, productive distraction was always my way of processing the pain. I was really involved in extracurriculars. I played softball and danced; tap, ballet, jazz, pointe. Sometimes I was a bully at school... sadly. The desire for

control was not lost on me... and feeling acceptance from others by any means necessary definitely caused me some trouble.

My Mom was a contradiction. The 13 years she was in my life provided me with this insane combination of amazing motherly pearls of wisdom along with scary, depressed, angry and abusive behavior that came from her overwhelming personal suffering.

You know those posters... “Everything I need to know I learned from Kindergarten?” If I made one up about my mother it would be really sad. In all seriousness, she teaches me still every day. I remember because of her that I’ve overcome both her demons and my own with more grace. I remember to be aware that I am capable of going to a dark place. I also remember that I have chosen for years to live in peace beside this darkness. I harness it to help others and be more understanding of sorrow. Because of my mother, I’ve developed a strength to walk within the darkest places of human suffering and walk right back out into the light as the situation requires. Her suffering has given me the ability to spirit walk.

## Chapter 4

### That time I faced my own mortality

AS I MENTIONED, MY MOTHER ATTEMPTED suicide several times before she actually succeeded. It caused me to worry about her a lot. I watched her very closely, and spent some time feeling unsure of my own safety depending on her mood.

Once, a situation that might not have even phased another child, became a really terrifying moment for me.

She was driving us to school one morning, Hardees hash Browns in hand. She perpetually ran late for life (a side effect of depression). So... normal breakfast at home was replaced by drive through breakfast. She was speeding through morning rush hour traffic to drop us off at my grandparents' house. From there, she went to work and we spent a little time watching morning cartoons before it was time to walk to school.

We were driving on a service road beside the highway and traffic was backed up pretty bad. She was cussing a little under her breath, as usual. We stopped in line behind about two dozen cars waiting our turn at a light. Angrily and swiftly, she veered right and got herself into the far-right lane, which was the right turn only lane. Here, she was the first car in line. I was sitting in the front seat, half paying attention to what she was doing. I figured she was going another way to get us to our destination.

I remember noticing that she seemed a little wound up in that moment. She was watching the intersection lights really closely, with both hands on the wheel. When it turned green, she literally floored the gas pedal, jerking me back into my seat.

I looked up, and saw that we were speeding directly towards one of the huge metal posts that held the traffic lights. My heart sunk. I bore down. Everything went slow motion.

My fear wired brain quickly assessed her actions and my analysis told me that she was running the car into the pole to kill herself, and us too. So many emotions in those seconds came into me. Fear, panic, pain, tears welled... and then at the very last second, she jerked the wheel left almost hopping a curb, veering back into the lane we were traveling for the commute, cutting

off the cars in the front of the line.

She did this to avoid waiting behind some cars so she could shave minutes off of the drive. She had no idea that in that moment, I thought she was killing us all.

My Brother in the back seat had no idea either. He could not see what was happening.

It was just me there... Needless to say, I was really glad that she didn't want to kill us. But it's quite sad to admit it was a thought I had because of her behavioral patterns. So... this was life with Mom some of the time.

## Chapter 5

# My Bro

THE REFLECTIONS I WANT TO SHARE about my Brother are from my point of view. He has been through so much on his journey, and I could never understand it fully. But I was by his side for many years, and I could not be prouder. That being said, there is only so much I am willing to say about my Bro... because he is a private guy. His life is his business. This book is about me.

My Brother and I were atypical siblings from the beginning. We had our moments and years where we would piss each other off, embarrass each other, etc. BUT first and foremost, when it came to ANYTHING important, we had each other's backs. Still do.

Growing up, we went through a lot of change... cities, houses, living situations, parental boyfriends and girlfriends. Things were never really steady for many years.

On top of that, his cancer took a toll on normal childhood – mostly for him but also a bit for me. I saw him go through so much hardship and suffering. I witnessed him get spinal taps. I watched as we were informed every once in a while that children he had become friends with succumbed to their cancer and were now gone. I slept in a bed next to him when he started chemo, and remember waking. He would already be upstairs – he was a better morning person than me as a kid. I would open my eyes to his empty pillow and see all these tufts of his strawberry blonde hair all over the pillow while he was losing it from the treatments. When his hair grew back, it was a completely different color.

It was painful trying to understand why this was happening to him. He seemed fine to me, but then he would be so sick on the bad days. Meanwhile, our parents were falling apart, getting ready to separate.

He had this port that stuck out of his chest. It was where they administered medicine for him. It was a tube that had to just be there, protruding from his body for the duration of his treatment.

I just wanted him to be okay. He and I were close before all this

happened... but once he came out of the woods, and was ready to really be a kid again, we were really close. We were just good playmates. We both loved video games, being outside, riding bikes... we were great buddies. Our birthdays were three years and one day apart – He was born April 11th, me April 12th. It was kind of like having a twin that was three years younger than me. We were both adventurers. We walked to and from school together every day - all the way to adolescence. Then our relationship shifted.

Instead of being playmates, we became comrades. It was us against the world. Our Dad's girlfriend at the time was a major hard case and we did not like her. We were compliant... well I was compliant... he was moderately tolerant. No matter what, we covered for each other. We lied for each other. We always kept each other protected from trouble – which sometimes was probably not a good thing, but what can I say... we were loyalists to one another.

My Brother was the one factor in my life that stayed consistent through all the change, trauma and drama. We were always together as we were passed around, household to household... situation to situation.

We really loved our Dad too – but there were some things that only the two of us really understood.

Our family dynamic was solid for a good four or five years while we were in middle school / high school. Dad had his girlfriend, but the three of us were the core. We had this bond that no one else understood.

Once I went off to college it was hard on all of us. I have very fond memories of phone calls... every once in a while, I would get a random phone call from both of them... on the same day. They would both call, 'just to say hey'. Talk awhile about nothing, and eventually at the end of the conversation,

*"Hey so have you talked to Cory?"*

*"Can you please call Dad; he is being a dick."*

They would call me when they got into it. It was nice to feel needed by them both. I was only a couple of hours away at Mizzou and came home often, but still missed my family.

It also presented me with this pattern that helped me understand them both better. Throughout the years, I've learned that there is a direct correlation: The happier they are, the less I hear from them. When things go wrong, they call. When things are good – it's quiet. So, we continue now decades later

with this interesting ethereal understanding. I don't talk to my Brother as much in adulthood. We've just grown in different directions, and that's okay. Becoming who I am kind of confused the relationship. Plus, marrying and divorcing his friend did not help. He encouraged me to date him, then was against it when it got serious. I wish I would have listened to him, but here I am. Whenever I do see him, it's exactly as it always was. AND... he calls when he really needs me. That's good enough for me. I love my Bro.

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## Chapter 6

### Why I don't like my birthday

THE LAST YEAR MOM WAS around for my birthday, Bro and I had a combined party at a local roller rink. I remember it being one of the best birthday parties ever. We combined our birthday parties a lot, but it never put a damper on things. We were used to it, and it was nice to get to have twice the party goers when we started to get older.

So, for the party, we each sent out a set of invites to our own friends. It was a great turnout. We have pictures from that day of Mom holding my first cousin that had been born since us two older kids. My great-grandmother, Granny, was there along with the whole family. Mom hated having her picture taken, but looked great in the candid photos that were snapped.

Going to the skating rink used to be one of our favorite pastimes as kids. Mom liked it because the rink served beer for the parents and played good music. We liked it because we got to stay for the whole three- or four-hour session and just get lost skating to that music. It was like a gang or a tribe to be out there skating fast, speeding past the younger kids with grace, learning how to master turning foot over foot in reverse, having competitive fun with the games they would play like wipeout and the giant dice game... I was never very good at the limbo, but always still gave it a try.

So, our party was a grand success. We had so much fun being with family and friends. Mom was gone about a month after that.

Now, before I go any further, I want to be clear that all of this chapter happened during the last six weeks of Mom's life. I think. It's hard to remember exactly because number one, it was 22 years ago, and number two, I was traumatized and grief stricken which makes memory fuzzy. So, as I explain, know that all of these events happened between that birthday party, which was probably mid-April, and her actual death on May 31, 1997.

That last month of her life, she was not in good shape. She showed up hammered to one of my softball games. Now don't get me wrong – I was in a CYC summer league, so there were plenty of passionate and jovial beer drinkers in our bleachers. But generally, that came on slowly with a cohesive effort over the course of nine innings. She arrived about halfway through the

game with her aunt... already completely drunk. I did not get a worried sense over it until after the game because I was focused on playing.

Once the game concluded, I observed there was concern over what was going on with her. I am not sure who drove her home, but she came back to my house (the new house my Dad had just purchased with his girlfriend) to check it out.

We had not even moved all the way in yet – my room was still basically empty. I remember standing in this bare room with her... listening to her carry on about how great the game was and so on. Then she got this glassy look and said,

*“Wow you are just all grown-up... I can’t believe you are a teenager and that you are getting boobies now.”*

I was mortified that she called attention to that weird place in life where my breasts were developing, but still not much more than these weird knots underneath my nipples.

I suppose I was also nostalgic with her. It was neat becoming a woman. I was proud of myself for being good at what I did, doing well in school, and developing into a grown woman from a kid.

So, it was an awkward goodbye when she was shooed home. The situation in which we lived was quite cool at the time. We had been in an apartment about five blocks away with my Dad. Mom was living with her boyfriend and didn’t like having us there overnight because we didn’t have our own room. So... once Dad bought the house, he decided to sign the apartment lease over to her which would give her a new space where we already had a room set up for us to spend time with her on a more consistent basis.

Then, at his house, we got new stuff to fill our new rooms. It was a pretty sweet deal... or at least it would have been.

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