

*These are the things they took from us,  
They left us bare*

*These are the things they couldn't*

~ Maureen Callihoo Ligtoet

*These Are the Things* is a gentle attempt at navigating intergenerational barriers to grief, tenderness and longing, in the presence of enfranchisement and personal displacement. It gives space to the lingering complexities of what was taken, a gratefulness for what couldn't, and for the things that are still nurtured.

Over the past few years, Kiona and I have slowly and steadily built *ayni* with one another. We first connected as two displaced Indigenous people attempting to navigate the colonial structures of the fine arts and music communities in amiskwaciywâskahikan. Since then, our friendship has flourished. Our kinship is founded in solidarity, care, and deep respect for one another.

The stories shared through Kiona Ligtvoet's work come from memories of living with her moshom and a revolving door of family members on scrip land, as well as the loss that has come with leaving home.

I am honoured and privileged to be contributing to this collaboration with this piece of writing which expresses my grief and longing for the things that were taken from me, as well as a celebration of the things that cannot and will never be.

As you reflect upon and consume my words and Kiona's work, please consider contributing reparations to Kiona's home community, Michel First Nation, for the legal fees required to reclaim their land and status rights. Reparations can be sent as e-transfers to [kionaligtvoet@gmail.com](mailto:kionaligtvoet@gmail.com), which will be forwarded to Michel First Nation.

~ Paxsi

## AYNI

*This is what I understand:*

*Ayni is to live in reciprocity*

*Ayni is what our people called mutual aid*

*Before mutual aid was a trending hashtag*

*It is sharing, visiting, and listening*

*Really listening: with body, heart, mind, and spirit*

*It is living in relationship with all things around us:*

*Father Sun (Tata Inti)*

*Mother Moon (Paxsi Mama)*

*Mother Earth (Pachamama)*

*The water (uma)*

*The mountains & ancestors (achachilanaka)*

*All plants (airunaka)*

*All animals (uywanaka)*

*Our community (ayllu)*

*Our kin (wila masakuna)*

*Our home (uta)*

*And our hearts and spirits (chuymanaka)*

*Ayni is taking care of Pachamama*

*And knowing she will care for you in return*

*Ayni is giving your neighbour food if they have none*

*And knowing they will share with you in return*

*Ayni is listening to your own body's needs*

*And setting boundaries in return*

*Ayni is the intricate law of connectedness*

*Which means that whether we know each other or not,*

*Whether you live 300 or 7000 kilometres away,*

*You are still my brother, and I love you so*



Dear Miguel,

It's been three years since we last saw each other and despite barely knowing you, I miss you.

I am incredibly, profoundly sorry that I had the opportunity to grow up with our dad and you didn't. I understand that we barely know each other and that there is absolutely nothing I could ever say to make it better. I want you to know that I see you. Although I can never understand what it was like to grow up without a dad, I know that your experiences, emotions, and thoughts are entirely valid.

I also want you to know that I think of you often, and I so deeply and genuinely wish that we had a relationship with each other.

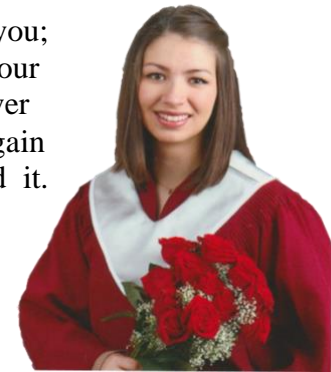
I deleted my Facebook a long time ago, but last night I realized you might be on Instagram, so I searched for your page. I found your wedding photo with your wife commemorating one year of marriage: you both look so sharp! I am overjoyed that you married Hannah. When I met her in Vancouver many years ago, I thought she was so wonderful. The both of you put a smile on my face every time we interacted. The few times we have met have been really special to me. I love your puns and all the teasing—some things just run in the blood. Those stolen moments seem like a lifetime ago.



Growing up, I only knew your first name, and we had a little baby picture of you on a bookshelf that I would sometimes look at and wonder who you were, where you lived, and what you were doing. I had no way of contacting you until I had Facebook, which didn't happen until I was about 11 years old... And then an 11-year old's first thought when joining Facebook for the first time isn't usually "finally, I can talk to my estranged brother!" I didn't even know your last name, and as I'm sure you know, you are far from the only Miguel on the planet.

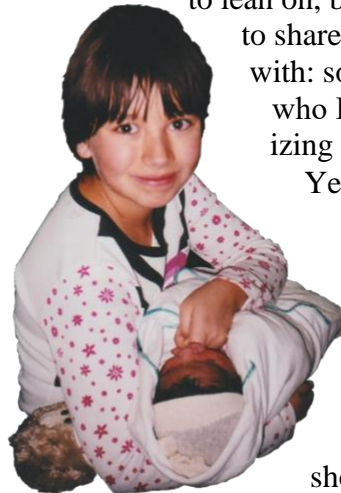
I was very young and impressionable when we first met. I think that was about 2015? I had just graduated from theatre school, and I thought it was so cool that I had an older brother interested in sound production and bubble tea.

I never liked bubble tea before I met you; however, ever since you took me to your favourite bubble tea place in Vancouver (and when I made you take me again the very next night), I have adored it. It may seem silly, but when I drink it, I think of you.



Being the oldest sibling in the family was tough. There was a lot of turmoil and violence growing up, and I often felt like I was the only thing holding my mom and our dad together... And more often than not, I felt like I was the reason they were coming apart. Years later, I'm slowly learning that I don't always have to hold everything together.

Sometimes in the process of re-raising myself and re-defining what family means to me, I end up feeling really lost and alone. In times like these, I wish we were closer, not just for a shoulder to lean on, but more because I wish I had someone to share my excitements and accomplishments with: someone who could be proud of me and who I could trust. Maybe I'm just romanticizing what it means to have an older sibling.



Yet, as an older sibling, I gather that I am someone that Tupaj looks up to, as he is always sending me pictures and videos of his most recent projects.

I am keeping my fingers crossed that you are interested in hearing about me. If this is the case, thought I should tell you some things about myself

that have drastically changed since we last met.

In the summer of 2018, I came out as trans non-binary, meaning I use they/them/jupa pronouns, and I no longer identify as a woman, girl, lady, and so on. I also don't identify as a man or boy. When people refer to me as a woman, it is suffocating. I experience body dysmorphia, which sometimes makes me feel like it would be easier to disappear forever than to have to live another day in the body I was born in.

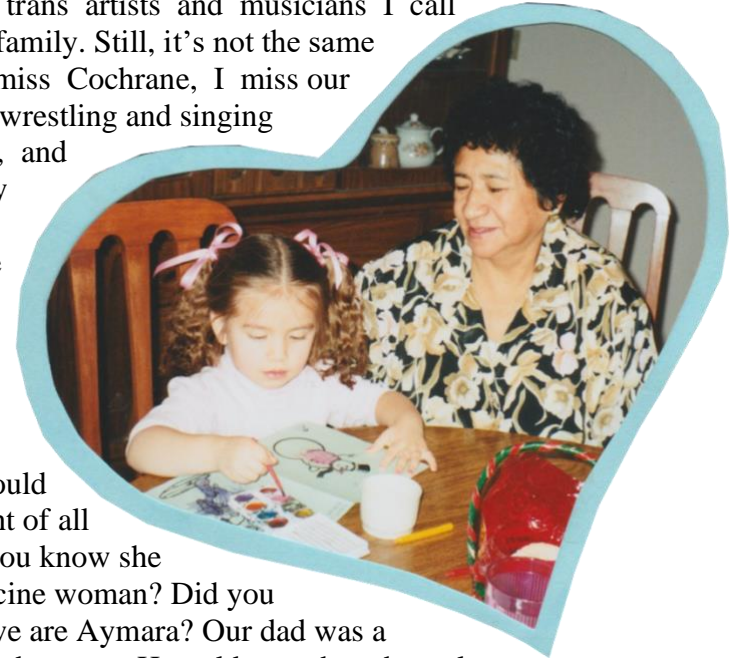
I have been this way my entire life but didn't have the vocabulary to describe what was hurting me until more information about transgender experiences started surfacing on the internet. I had been thinking about changing my pronouns for several years. Still, I was too scared to admit to myself that I was trans because in acknowledging that, I felt like everything would change, and I would never be the same person again. While so much *has* changed, it turns out I am still the same person inside; I just finally became comfortable with my outsides for the first time in my life.

While the terminology may be new, this isn't anything new for our people. I've done quite a bit of research on non-gender-conforming people in Indigenous nations, and I found out that long before colonization, there were people called *quari warmi* who didn't conform to either gender role. *Quari warmi* would often take on significant spiritual and medicinal healing roles in each *ayllu* (community) and were a wholly normalized and sacred part of *ayllu*. In fact, in Aymara, there isn't even a gendered pronoun. He, she, and they are expressed by the personal pronoun *jupa*.

Of course, a lot of this is buried now. I tried talking to my mom and our dad about it, but he didn't react well. He said that being trans was something that the white people made up. My mom feigned ignorance. For this and many other reasons, we don't talk or visit anymore.

Tupaj is really my only family right now. Our connection only really exists through daily Snapchats and the occasional video call. It's hard to think of my mom and our dad thinking of me as a lost cause when really, I am happier than I've ever been in my whole life. I am surrounded by a lovely community of BIPOC, queer, and trans artists and musicians I call my chosen family. Still, it's not the same for me. I miss Cochrane, I miss our dog, I miss wrestling and singing with Tupaj, and I miss my mom and our dad like none other.

I wonder what our Abuelita would have thought of all this... Did you know she was a medicine woman? Did you know that we are Aymara? Our dad was a spiritual leader, too. He told me that the role will someday be passed down to one of the three of us, but I can't see that it will be me, seeing as I'm the cursed child.



Anyways, I don't know if you're transphobic or not. I'm just hoping you're not and that you will just keep blinking and breathing and continue on living your life thinking of me as your sibling and not your sister, and that this letter and my coming out won't push you further away.

Phew.

Now that I've gotten that out of the way, here are some other exciting developments (minus the really bad things that have happened because I would rather tell you about the good):

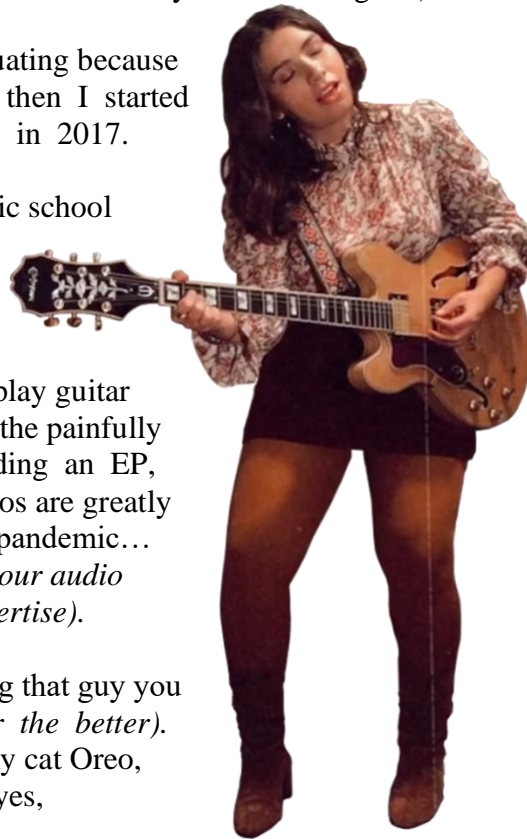
I quit theatre after graduating because it was too racist, and then I started going to music school in 2017.

Now I want to quit music school because it's also racist. I have one part-time year left... Pray for me.

I taught myself how to play guitar better, and now I am in the painfully slow process of recording an EP, DIY style because studios are greatly inaccessible during the pandemic...

*(wishing I had your audio engineering expertise).*

No, I'm no longer dating that guy you met in Vancouver *(for the better)*. I live alone, still with my cat Oreo, and I am single and yes,



it is terribly lonely in the pandemic.

I started pursuing visual art seriously in 2019. Last month, I had my first studio visit and most recently was asked to exhibit my art in Nanaimo in September!



I also own and operate two small businesses:

- (1) A beading business where I make handcrafted jewelry
- (2) A music studio where I teach beginner piano to children and youth

I have at *least* 12 more tattoos since we last visited, I got my septum pierced on *Machaq Mara* in 2019, I started growing my hair long again, and I wear two braids every day, *cholix* style.

In the last few years, I started reclaiming my identity as an Aymara person Tupaj started reclaiming his roots soon after I did. He is growing his hair long now, too.

Your turn:

How did you know Hannah was *the one*?

Does *the one* even exist?

Who proposed? Will you tell me the story?

Do you want to have kids? AKA, will I be a *Titi*?

*(Titi is a new gender-neutral equivalent for Tía/Tío)*

You live in the UK now! What's it like being far from home?

What do you do for work nowadays?

*(Remember how we were both tour guides?)*

I kind of already hinted at this but...

Do you identify with your Indigenous roots?

Is your mom Aymara or Quechua?

If so, does she speak the language?

Would you ever want to zoom?

Would you want to mend our relationship?

Would you want to be part of my family?

Will you tell me your exciting things?

...

Family is really complicated, and I understand if you never want to answer any of these questions or keep in touch with me. You are special to me even though we barely know each other. I hope one day we can be in *ayni* together.

With love and care,

Your middlest sibling





Paxsi (they/them/jupa) is a two-spirit, Aymara and Welsh-Irish singer-songwriter and multidisciplinary artist based in amiskwaciwâskahikan. Combining elements of folk and rock, Paxsi plays their original music under the stage name WARA WARA. Paxsi's art, poetry, and music offer moments of tenderness and honesty—they hope to nurture queer,

trans, and BIPOC community through a practice that is raw, vulnerable, and charged. You can find their artwork and music on Instagram @paxsi\_\_ and @listentowarawara respectively.



Kiona Ligtvoet (she/her) is a mixed Cree, Métis, and Dutch artist coming from scrip land, and descending from Michel First Nation. Kiona is currently practicing in amiskwaciwâskahikan, where she primarily works in painting and printmaking while exploring stories of grief and tenderness. Her practice uses a non-linear telling of memories through narrative work as a form of

personal archiving. It draws from feelings of loss, displacement, and enfranchisement, but also from moments of deep belly laughter.