



# EMBODY

By Sossity Chiricuzio

Perspectives

## **Embody - Family Knots**

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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As in ties that bind, nests that cradle, nets that trap, connections we weave, places to untangle.

Mother's Day and Father's Day are approaching fast - those holidays made up to remind us of obligations and sell us things to acknowledge them. Or, less often, an opportunity to have a special moment of gratitude for a parent we're on good terms with. One more way to gauge the depth of our relations, or the strength of our disguise. It's a complicated thing, family.

Most every queer person I know has lost at least one member of their family of origin for the simple fact of being who they are. That truth of them - their intimate relationships and ways of being in the world. The truth that, were it a heterosexual truth, would be a source of praise and connection, and proof of belonging, but it's not, so instead it is an eviction notice. A judgment day. A long silence. A conversation made up of the weather, and maybe sports, or gardening.

Blood is thicker than water. Family comes first. Respect your elders. Father knows best. I brought you into this world. It's for your own good. How could you do this to me? Not while you're living under my roof. This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.

The world is full of mythology about family. What it means, what is owed, and whether love or guilt or duty is the currency in play. I have seen all manner of ugly interactions between people who are in a family together, seen them fold it into their skins like scar tissue and keep going. Rubbing it quietly at holidays and family gatherings like an ache that lives near the bone. I've also seen great beauty and respect in families, seen honesty and vulnerability and trust and joy.

Like my own family, which has been a combination of DNA and circumstance and choices from the beginning. My mother and I, her mother and siblings, their circle of friends, all the partners any of us has ever taken (unless they opt out, or are abusive), siblings and cousins and neighbors and orphans and outlaws. I count my family as one of my greatest gifts, try to share it with friends whenever possible, work hard to keep lines of communication open, to grow together as adults.

It's not like I make it easy for them. I am a queer loudmouth agitator. I am shameless and strange and a sex educator. I am happily fat and femme and working class and bearded and poly. I look folks right in the eye and talk about hard stuff, point out places that maybe don't align with their highest truth, ask questions they maybe weren't ready to ask themselves. Gently. It's who I am in the world, and it's at least partly how my family raised me. Who they are and how we were and how we are together help shape me, over and over. Give me examples to live up to, and places to push back against. Inspire me to find definitions for words that aren't as universal as we thought. Give us all a chance to grow more.

Despite this, most of them have opted in to a genuine connection with me. When I talk to other queers about my family, I often see unshed tears, a tensing of the skin that I know hides a yearning. A disbelief smoothed into courtesy. The concept of a family that not only accepts, but also respects and

loves me for exactly who I am and what I do is like a fairy tale. I am unbelievably lucky, and it breaks my heart. That this should be an exception of such magnitude. That my people have such a depth of hunger and loneliness and rejection that leaves us fractured like crystal. Shining and sharp edged and fragile to a blow at unexpected angles.

I think this is part of why building family is so important to so many of us. Why we bond with friends and even ex lovers so tightly. Why we join groups and teams and boards and churches and weave them into a net to sieve out the ones who feel familiar and interesting and safe. We are pack animals, alone in our own heads, in a world that wants us to be just like them, or invisible, or dead.

If family is the means by which we tie ourselves together, then knots are inevitable. Our paths cross and diverge and intertwine. We share space and language, memories and resources and names. Debt and gratitude and sorrow and passion. Loss and hope. Anger. Laughter. Love.

If knots are inevitable, then we must learn which ones weave us stronger, and which ones bind our roots. Sometimes those cords, sunk deep into our hearts and navels, need to be cut so we can grow. Sometimes they fray and need tending, careful stitches on intricate patchwork.

I am learning how to recognize family that is not just a noun, but also a verb. I have become unwilling to ignore the contradiction between loving me, but supporting politics or religion that would happily erase me. Diplomacy I will give freely, even kindness, but access is earned, just like respect. A family worth being a part of is worth the time and work, worth being patient and present and honest and kind. I don't want the false safety of shallow waters, I want to dive deep. I want to be seen.

I cannot say what anyone else should do about family, but I do hope we can all find one that treasures us just as we are.

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