

## A Rebel with Causes

One can get to know a lot about Natalie from just her car. Georgeanne “the Rolling Thunder” Johnson is the name of Natalie’s infamous and so-proudly-proclaimed “Pride & Joy.” Similar to her own eccentric appearance and personality, with brightly dyed short hair and a quirky sense of humor, Natalie likes for her “probably black at one point, but now mostly dark grey” 1996 Jeep Cherokee to *also* be distinctive in its own looks and contents, from playful decorative trinkets to abstract vagina art. Their idea, Natalie and Georgeanne, is to challenge and to oppose the conventional. Whether those conventionalities are simple and seemingly insignificant, such as appropriate places to eat groceries, or whether they require the full-on battle paraphernalia of a social-justice warrior, such as gender norms, Natalie and Georgeanne are traveling in the same direction, at the same speed.

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“It might not be the best idea to have lighter fluid in the back of my car; however, the pros far outweigh the cons,” Natalie confesses. She’s not worried. Natalie and Georgeanne are willing to take more than a few risks here and there, so long as that means getting to cook up s’mores whenever and wherever the craving strikes. If it’s not s’mores, it’s two granola bars and a bottle of water that sit in the passenger seat, “just in case of emergencies.” Plastic spoons, too, will soon make their way back in Natalie’s car, “for grocery store parking lot ice cream eating purposes.” Who says you have to wait until you’re home?

Two giant, pink dice hang from Georgeanne’s rear-view mirror. Natalie says it makes it “easy to spot in a parking lot.” A small ceramic figurine of a dog Natalie sculpted sits in its own

compartment just above the glovebox. “He brings me good luck,” she says. “He was *supposed* to bring me good luck today for my job interview. Instead, my car didn’t start.”

Three stickers on the back windshield offer further glimpses into Natalie’s life: a sticker for the Spurs basketball team, because San Antonio will always be apart of her identity, a Blueprint Ministries sticker, from when she volunteered as an intern at a non-profit summer camp, and a Human Rights Organization sticker, because wait around and there’s no doubt you’ll see- she’s a real rebel with causes.

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On top of all that, while she’s working properly and not “being a bitch” or “a fucking freeloader,” Georgeanne the Rolling Thunder Johnson is a complete art studio on wheels. Her trunk is stuffed to the ceiling with all types of art that Natalie has made and collected, along with every other Texan’s basic road essentials: the obligatory cowboy hat and well, a set of bow and arrows, of course.

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When asked “how do you see yourself?” Natalie says that she is, first and foremost, an artist. Her Instagram handle, “@natalies\_art\_addiction,” and Tinder bio, “artist,” attest to that too, as well as to the fact that she loves coffee, dogs, and breakfast tacos. Natalie enjoys pursuing her art through a variety of different mediums: painting, sculpting, but mostly photography. While she likes film photography, access can sometimes be expensive, so she is currently using her \$9 disposable Kodak camera to pursue her present artistic vision.

Natalie enjoys fruits as artistic subjects, especially when they “function as metaphors surrounding women’s sexuality.” Evidence of this interest can be found in her car: paintings that

detail the intricate interiors of figs, blood oranges, and pomegranates. While she is currently pursuing Sociology and Communication Studies, she feels that she could have also explored Gender Studies because she is interested in how people interact with each other and how gender and sexuality affect those interactions. She is also “interested in changing people’s minds, giving them another perspective.” In other words, Natalie enjoys more nonconformist approaches to thinking that challenge traditions, institutions, and widely-held ideas, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality.

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“I like to go to brunch with my friends, you know, cause I’m one of those millennial gays,” Natalie laughs. On the weekends, Natalie likes spending time in Austin— brunching or trying new places to eat. She’s a big fan of farmers markets. She likes dancing to weird music at Sig. She doesn’t consider herself outdoorsy, but sometimes has fun rock climbing, going to Zilker Park, and going to lakes. Last year she went to ACL for the first time and it turns out she likes music festivals. She also very much believes in the healing powers of HEB retail therapy.

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Social media allows Natalie to stay connected with other people and she doesn’t mind the performance orientation of its users. In her own way, it allows her to perform as well. Her public Instagram account is a platform where she can unapologetically transmit her individuality and unconventionalities to a world of viewers who might expect to see something very different from Natalie and her quirks.

Perhaps the most telling of her character is Natalie’s particular affinity for people as the subjects in her photography and paintings. “I think that people are the most interesting subjects

in the world,” she reveals. After sharing only couple of moments with Natalie, anyone can see how much she loves people. She likes to make people laugh. She loves having people to talk to. She hates to live alone.

You have the sense that your interactions with Natalie are important because in any conversation she makes you feel that way. When talking about some of her favorite professors, she references some of their profound insights that have come to shape her understanding of the world: that we are all in different places, learning about each other. She goes on to explain her adopted philosophy that, while “there are some who are further back than others, everybody is on a walk, each in their own place, to become a better person.”

It is more than evident that these ideologies have come to shape Natalie’s basic interactions with any being, through her constant smiling affirmation, and her overall worldview: When asked “how do you generally see the world?,” she admits “Overwhelmingly good.”

This special affinity for people ultimately fuels her engagement and participation in her community, in whatever role that might be. After seeing herself firstly as an artist, Natalie then sees herself as an active community member, working to leave behind some kind of positive impact. She started as a photographer, then photo editor, and is now the Assistant Editor in Chief for the Megaphone. She is President of the Art Association, a member of Pirates for Pride, and she used to be a Resident Assistant for incoming freshmen. Natalie is able to pursue her passion, of being an impactful, contributing community member, through her various roles in different groups. Natalie’s wide-ranging engagement and commitment allows her to make her difference by planning and organizing protests against on-campus LGBTQ discrimination, photographing

events for non-profit summer camps, and by simply being involved for multiple causes, diverse causes— any cause.

As an actively engaged community member, Natalie says she likes to get herself into “just enough trouble,” that is, *if* she “can get away with it.” Sophomore year, while working as a Resident Assistant at Kurth, she discovered that she was a people-loving extravert; however, she found other aspects of the work to be unreasonable. This was mainly because of a difficult Resident Life staff, who made the job mostly very difficult for her and other RAs. When she noticed this, Natalie and some friends decided to speak out and attempt to solve some of their issues.

One of the biggest problems, they discovered, was the fact that there was not a performance evaluation system for the Residence Life staff. So, in order to ensure a fair system by holding everyone accountable, Natalie created evaluation forms for the RAs so that they could have an opportunity to have their own voice be heard.

She defiantly stood up in front of the staff, at one of their meetings, and passed the evaluation forms out to everybody. When the forms got confiscated by the staff, well, she then created a Google form evaluation.

While this endeavor, along the way, landed her in a few offices and in the middle of some lengthy email battles, she ultimately successfully gave other RAs the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns in regards to the Residence Life office.

Natalie is a part of groups, but she can also stand apart to critique them. She is persistent and committed to what she believes is right. Even if she has to break some rules along the way, Natalie finds a way to get things done.

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It's no secret that Natalie values her own sense of individuality, even if her family might think she's strange for it. She often likes to dye her hair eccentric colors and "wear weird clothes" so that people might say 'oh look at that strange person, I wonder what they're up to.' While her "solidly American, middle class," family with "grandparents from a long line of ranchers," and "both parents who went to college and now do things," likes when her hair is blonde, Natalie's short hair is an ombre of candy apple green and faded florescent pink. "I've been doing box bleaches since I was in middle school. I'm not worried about it at this point," she declares.

She likes to perform her femininity in different ways than others might expect her to: she likes her hair and fingernails short, likes bright colors and florals, but she doesn't like blouses and dresses. Secret fun fact: she has never had her ears pierced.

But Natalie doesn't mind being or looking different. In fact, she welcomes and enjoys the curiosity, the attention, and the people that might take an interest to her because of her eccentric colorful hair or maybe the unusual contents of her car. Natalie wants people to come and get to know her.

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At the moment, Natalie is waiting to hear back about a barista position at Starbucks. She's not pro-corporation, but corporations also provide healthcare "and that's kind of nice." In the future, she can see herself combining her interests in photography and activism to work for a non-profit organization, helping them create a social media presence for fundraising purposes, or maybe pursuing Journalism. "But, in theory," she says she, "could be happy doing anything."

Author's note...

Getting to know Natalie for this article was a pretty great experience. She was very open and sincere about her life, which made the process easy for me. While it was difficult and a bit awkward in the beginning to find the right questions to ask, it became more natural as time went on. I found myself constantly laughing— scrambling to jot down humorous things that Natalie would say, so I wanted to include most of them in this piece. I hope that they have ultimately brought Natalie's own voice and sense of humor alive in her narrative.

While this writing and reporting process has been a more intimidating undertaking, I have found myself really enjoying the challenge. To my surprise, finding a larger idea within Natalie's narrative was pretty straightforward. Natalie is a rebel with causes. She is not afraid to break rules every now and then in order to stand up for something she believes is worth fighting for. And while it might look different than from what other people might expect of her, she unapologetically owns her individuality.