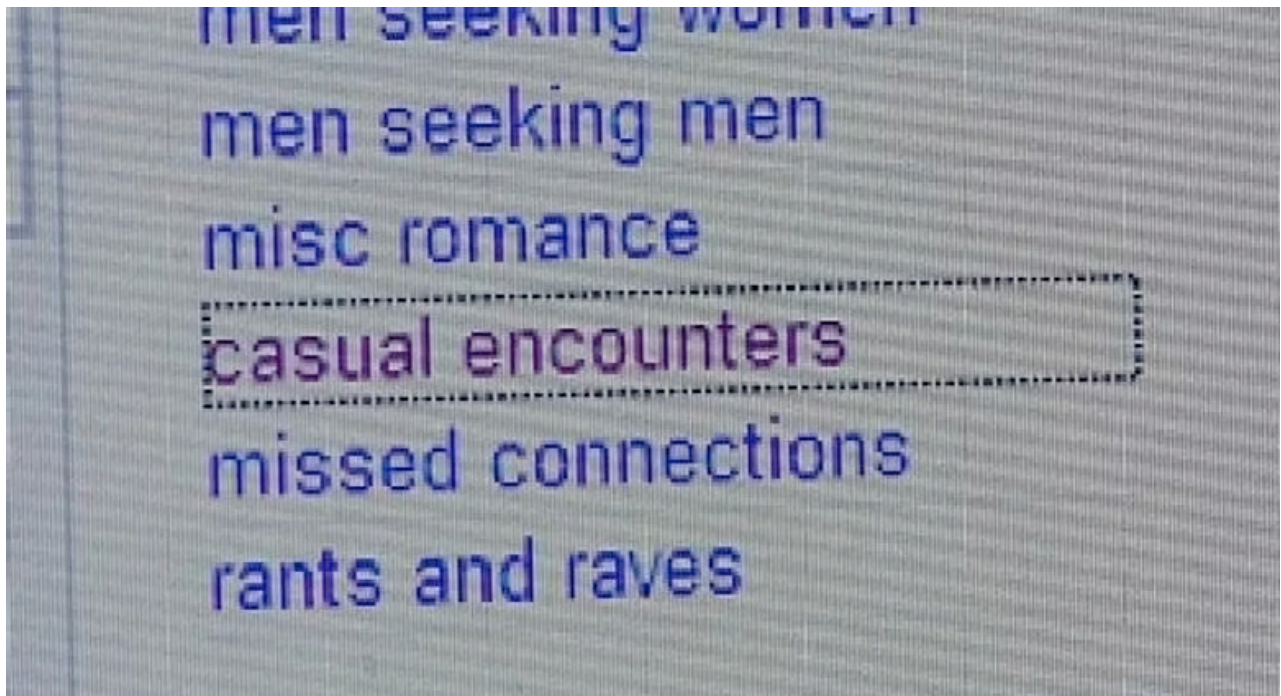




## Get to know the people of Casual Encountersz: the underground literary scene of LA

Eva Jones | 28 February 2025



All images by Eva Jones

Casual Encounters: an online source to find a romantic experience on Craigslist; Casual Encountersz: A meeting place for people of literature to share and explore their art.

Casual Encountersz is a community. The meetings welcome anyone and everyone who would like to learn more about the lives and methods of other writers. People come together from around the world to see, hear, and experience what Casual Encountersz has to offer.

Firstly, Sammy Loren, the founder, CEO, CFO, and assistant of Casual Encountersz. Sammy Loren is an entrepreneur, writer, video producer, journalist, poet, and almost every other creative position there ever was. He is a visionary, with a dream to build a community of clever literary artists. While Sammy loves to go out with friends, peruse around the internet, and read, his true passion is Casual Encountersz. To Sammy, Casual Encountersz is an escape from Los Angeles, a city he once thought very dull and boring.



Sammy Loren

“I always thought that the city kinda sucked and wasn't very fun, until I started this reading series.”

Each reading is a social party, where artists can network and show people their work. Sammy, among many others, has met lifelong friends and made strong connections through each gathering.

“Now, there's all these friends I know, and people I know everywhere. It's this fun party I get to throw once a month.”

Joseph Mosconi, a programmer and poet, also runs a poetry gathering called the Poetic Research Bureau. He puts on poetry readings, book launches, and talks. In his spare time, Joseph loves to write, read, and watch movies. He tries to watch everything that he can get his hands on. He especially loves arthouse movies, classics, and even superhero movies; because he grew up reading comic books.

“Marvel or DC?”

“Marvel. Definitely.”

Joseph is a regular at Casual Encountersz. He has been a die-hard supporter ever since the beginning, and even hosted a Casual Encounters event at the Poetic Research Bureau.

“Why do you go to Casual Encountersz?”

“Sammy is really good at getting new writers and poets and novelists and short story writers that I've never heard of before to read. I like to keep up with everything that's happening in the literary world. It's also just a fun scene; there's lots of friends here.”



Joseph Mosconi

Joseph discovered Casual Encountersz through Sammy Loren. Sammy reached out to him to notify him about the new reading series, and that is how they met. Sammy knew who he was because of his work running literary readings, but also being a part of the scene. There is a sort of connection between the writers of LA, just for being a writer of LA.

Emily Whit, a journalist, and book author, is a regular at Casual Encountersz. She has been go-



*Health and Safety* by Emily Witt

ing since 2020, back when it was “just a handful of people in a park.” The Casual Encountersz party that night was in honor of a book Emily just wrote, titled *Health and Safety*.

“When I first moved out to LA, it was pretty hard to meet people. I came here from New York and New York has tons of writers. There are a lot of writers in LA, but it’s different. More spread out. So, I came to talk to other writers and talk to people about books. It’s always been really fun and had such a fun group of people.”

Emily is a staff writer at the *New Yorker*, and writes a mix of breaking news and politics. For her book however, she is writing a memoir about dance music and her experience from 2016 to 2020.

She discovered Casual Encountersz through her friend Michele, who was connected to Sammy. They went to the poetry reading in the park and Emily loved it, making many friends and a lovely experience drawing her back for many years.

From Hebrew school teachers, to writers from the *New Yorker*, Casual Encountersz is a magnet for every different kind of person. Heather Paige Cohn, A model, actress, and financial worker is a newcomer to Casual Encountersz. She loves to nap, read non fiction books about Japanese history, and laugh with her friends. Heather discovered Casual Encountersz through a friend, with the intent of finding something encouraging and exciting.

“I’m hoping to be inspired. I really want to experience something tonight that re-invigorates me.”

Simcha Howard, another newcomer, is a rabbinical student and Hebrew school teacher. Simcha likes to read Wikipedia, play with his dog, and dance to techno music. He went to Casual Encountersz in the hopes of “being taken out of my tiny little world, and inspired in a way that takes me out of my body. Or my mind.” Simcha is a friend of Sammy’s, as many are, and is yet another creative, interesting person that Casual Encountersz draws in.

Casual Encountersz is hosted at many venues around downtown LA. The specific venue that I attended was a small art gallery, in Chinatown. People were talking on the balcony, overlooking all of Downtown LA. Inside were many contem-



Heather Paige Cohn and Simcha Howard



porary art pieces; and an office, where many were laughing and drinking La Croix.

As said before, Casual Encountersz is a sort of social gathering. People partied in the gallery room before the reading began and shifted to another tinier room, just a couple yards away from the gallery when the reading started. The room was filled with chairs, but since there were so many people, some had to stand.

After a brief introduction of the writer, they would step up and speak. Each writer pulled a unique excerpt from a book, or random piece they wrote, and performed it to the audience. Many talked about past life experiences, or about a loved one, but each was personal, and gave listeners a place in their story or life.

Overall, Casual Encountersz are an inclusive place. It is all about expression, vulnerability, and strength. It takes a lot of guts to step up in front of a crowd of strangers and show your life to them. Casual Encountersz is a community to grow, and a beautiful place to change as a person.

To end things off, a quote from Sammy Loren:

“My favorite part of living in LA is what grew out of this thing.”

