

Anonymous

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Embracing Authenticity: Living as A Lesbian

Sitting at the coffee table, with excitement roaming throughout my veins. This was the day I was going to come out to a friend I had known for years. A friend I have told all my secrets to, who watched me cry and comforted me and who saw me at my worst. When I finally said the words, "I'm gay," the excitement faded quickly, and my heart dropped out of my body. Her response: "You are not gay. You just have not found the right man, trust me" and "Everybody wants to be gay now days." Those words echoed in my mind, leaving me speechless, unable to respond or even challenge her. I felt frozen, but even more than that, I felt invalidated and not taken seriously. I felt like she took out my heart and just kept stomping on it repeatedly. Like my identity as a lesbian was not real at all. Those words planted doubt in my mind, making me believe it might be a phase and there is no way I can be a lesbian. Growing up, before I came out, this was an everyday struggle for me. Being a lesbian in a world where others experience judgement for being their true authentic self. In a world where others are judged for living their truth means choosing authenticity, even when it happens to come at a cost. For me, I was done making myself feel smaller. I was done trying to make others comfortable by making me uncomfortable. I chose to live openly and honestly to myself as an act of self-love. I deserve to live up to my truth.

Friends and family often tell me, "You know you can't have your own family, right?" or "It's just a phase." This assumption is extremely harmful because this assumes our identities are not valid and our existence is temporary rather than being a true part of ourselves. Because of societal norms, there is a misconception that people apart of the LGBTQ+ are "born sick." Once again, this is wrong. I say I was not born sick. My sexuality is not a flaw that needs to be fixed because others are "uncomfortable" with it. Love is something that's powerful and beautiful. No matter who it's between. It is not a disease. This

statement shows stigma and discrimination, and this kind of mindset overlooks the strength and love that LGBTQ+ individuals bring to their families, relationships, and themselves, perpetuating a damaging stereotype that denies us joy, embracing ourselves fully and fulfillment. This ideology leads to rejection, self-isolation and even violence against oneself for those brave enough to live their authentic self.

Despite what others believe, being a part of the LGBTQ+ community is not a phase we will grow out of. Our sexualities do not make us incapable of forming love and connections through relationships or building families. The idea that we are ‘born sick’ throughout society and traditional expectations is simply wrong. I’ve heard this saying before I came out and had hit double digits of age. Our love and lives are just as important, meaningful and valid as anyone else’s. When we embrace who we are by living openly and freely, we challenge harmful misconceptions and replace them with the truth. We prove to them that our sexuality is as natural as they come. And when we do face judgements, we show pride and courage despite what others are saying. Inspiring others to do the same by not showing shame but with pride. We remind them that love is love, no matter who it’s between. Our existence is beautiful and not a rebellious act. It’s a celebration of authenticity.

On Easter Day, my cousin approached me and blurted out “Everybody knows that you’re gay.” My heart dropped because during this time I was just getting comfortable with my sexuality because growing up, I faced internal homophobia within myself that “*This wasn’t right’ and ‘why do I feel this way about a girl and not a boy?’*” I had gone inside, with conversations still roaming around the room. No eye contact was made, but I can tell by the reactions in the room, everyone’s face showed discomfort, awkwardness or a “not sure how to feel about that” kind of reaction. Since that day, it forced me to come out. I did not want any rumors or misconceptions about me that were not true. I wanted them to hear the truth from me and me only, instead of before others defined it for me.

I was developing feelings for a girl during this time. Head over heels over this girl. This was strange to me because I have never felt this way about a girl, and everything finally made sense to me. I was so happy about it and decided to tell a close friend of mine, Maggie. But the excitement died down when I got shut down, once again. When Maggie told me it was a “phase.” Hearing this broke me because

this was my time to shine and show my true authentic self. I didn't want to hide anymore because it got exhausting hiding apart of my identity. I made it clear that "the way I feel about girls, is the way I'm supposed to feel about boys." I was shut down again. She had given me a disappointed look, and my heart dropped. The silence between us was heavy. I could feel the tension through my flesh. But I gave her time to process what I had shared. In this moment, I reminded myself constantly that my truth did not need anyone else's approval to be valid, but my own and that I no longer had to hide. Because of giving her time to process my sexuality, I answered questions when she asked them, I shared my experiences of homophobia. Maggie has also heard about how I felt previously when I had told her about my first experience with homophobia. After all this time, we finally spoke again, the tone was different. She had apologized sincerely, realizing how harmful her reaction had been, telling me that she did not mean to invalidate my feelings but had spoken out of ignorance. She began to ask me questions but not to challenge me. But to better understand me. This felt like a fresh start because her willingness to learn and grow did not only make our bond stronger, but it also showed me that people can change. From this point on, she became one of my biggest supporters, standing by me as I embraced my identity authentically. Her transformation reminded me that education and empathy have power and made me believe in change.

Since coming out, I have felt a sense of lightness and happiness. I have grown to embrace the fact that genuine love is never wrong, gross, or even evil and I cannot change my mind about this regardless of how people view me. I have grown more comfortable in my own skin, finding happiness and peace within myself. Despite the comments others have made about my sexuality, I have used those comments and experiences to live even more courageously and with pride, becoming more confident and prouder of who I am. I came out seven years ago and I am proud of myself. Living authentically and proud of ourselves challenges the forces that try to erase us. By living openly, authentically myself and unapologetically of who you are and regardless of I love, I deserve respect as much as anyone else would. The assumption that 'it's just a phase,' or 'she just hasn't found the right man,' dismisses the validity of our identities. Being able to love, share a connection and the ability to love someone of the same sex is not a crime. We are all surrounded by love. Love is within us and the things we enjoy. Love is universal and it is a force that unites us, regardless of who we choose to love. This journey of self-discovery and

acceptance made me embrace my identity. I have not only found my true self, but my story encouraged and inspired others to do the same. This path was filled with constant challenges, but it was worth every step as it led to life, freedom, the privilege to love and the unshakeable pride that I share today.