

White Bear
Unitarian Universalist Church

Sunday 27 June 2010

Pride Sunday

Coming Out 101

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A little over a year ago, I overcame the greatest fleet of butterflies I have ever held in my stomach, when I came out of the closet for the first time. I gathered up all my courage and did the scariest thing in my life. I told the 60 other people at Power of Hope camp that I was gay during a ceremony in which every person has the opportunity to say whatever they need to say in order to bring themselves into greater empowerment. As the community was expected to listen in silence and give their support to the speaker, there was no verbal reaction to my world shattering confession. But the beaming smiles from around the circle proved that I had support. The rest of the week was bliss. For the first time in my life I didn't have to hide a huge part of myself from my entire community.

Returning to "the real world," however, was a bit of a culture shock. I also found that once again I was surrounded by people who knew nothing of a huge chunk of my identity. And from then on it was not going to be so easy. I couldn't just say it once and be done as I had at camp. It would be a long time till I could be completely surrounded by another community of people who knew and supported who I was. I began the slow and unbelievably frightening process of coming out to my friends, family, and peers. After my successful coming out at camp, I could not have imagined all the different--and sometimes challenging--responses I would encounter. Some were good and made me feel safe and validated in myself, but quite a few were not so good and had the opposite effect. At the time I felt surprised by this, feeling like those people should have known how to react. But I've come to realize that nobody ever tried to be hurtful, they just didn't know better, and how could they know better if they themselves had not gone through the experience of having someone come out to them before—or coming out themselves?

This summer at camp was totally different. Having come out a year previously, my focus, in many ways, was on other things, most notably, puppets. I became interested in puppets, specifically Muppet style puppets, after seeing "Avenue Q," The Puppet Broadway musical, live. I was amazed by how real the puppets seemed, even when I could see the puppeteers standing right there next to them. In fact, having the puppeteer next to the puppet acting along with them made the performance all the more interesting and believable. Upon returning home I found out as much as I could about puppets, puppeteering and Muppet history. I learned about Jim Henson, (the Muppets creator,) and Fraggle Rock and Sesame Street. Everything I learned made me want to learn to be a puppeteer myself. For this, I needed a puppet. But I soon found that it's difficult to acquire a puppet without making it yourself. Back to the all-knowing web. I searched far and wide on the net for information on building puppets. I bought reticulated foam, Antron fleece from Georgia, ping-pong balls and yarn. I dyed the fleece, cut the ping-pong balls in half and after a grueling week of work my first puppet was complete. So far I have made two puppets and to the best of my abilities learned to use them and the arm rods that control their arms. At camp and throughout the rest of summer I was amazed by how easily people can connect to puppets and how easily they take people in. Puppets, it turns out, are an easy way to address all kinds of things -- even tough and hard issues.

So with that in mind . . . I'd like to introduce to you Seiji and Emerson as they reenact for you my coming out experiences. Rule number one—and the only rule at that--it's ok to laugh.

Me: Seiji, there's something I have to tell you, only it's really hard.

I don't know how to say it.

Seiji: I think I know what it is. You don't have to say it.

Me: But I have to say it.

Seiji: You're so funny, Sarah. I know what it is.

Me: I'm gay.

Seiji: Oh yeah, I knew that. It was sooo obvious.

How could they have known when I myself did not? And how could anyone make assumptions about someone else's sexuality?

Seiji: Sarah?

ME: Yeah?

Seiji: Are you really?

Me: Uh, yeah.

Seiji: Well, I just want you to know that I love you.

Me: You're ok?

Seiji: Well, I don't think homosexuality is ok, and I believe it is a sin, but it's ok, I still love you.

SO, you love me, but I'm also fundamentally wrong, and will probably go to hell. Huh.

Me: I'm gay.

Seiji: Really? I would never have guessed? You don't look gay . . .

So, how do you spot a gay person? Spots? A yellowish under-belly?

Me: Emerson, there's something I have to tell you. I'm gay.

Emerson: How do you know?

Me: How do you know you're straight?

Emerson: Cuz I chase girls.

Me: Well Emerson, I don't really chase anyone, but if I did it would be a girl.

Emerson: Hmm, well don't make any hasty decisions.

Me: Too late for that.

If it's not a choice, how can I make a decision about it?

Me: Emerson, there's something I have to--

Emerson: OH Sarah, Seiji told me you came out to her.

Me: What!?! She told you?

Emerson: Yeah, you know I don't mind gay people as long as they don't hit on me.

If I'm going to come out to someone, I'd like to do it myself, at a time of my own choosing. And, Is it just me, or do most people not assume every straight person they meet will hit on them?

Emerson (singing): If you were gay! That'd be ok.

Me (singing): I mean cuz hey I'd like you any way!

Emerson: Hey, everyone in this room is straight!

ME: Actually Emerson, that's not true.

Emerson: What do you mean?

ME: I'm not straight.

Emerson (laughs): You're joking, right?

ME: Uh, no.

Emerson: You're not really gay, are you?

ME Uh, yes.

Emerson: Really?

Me: This is awkward.

Emerson: yeah

You just said it would be ok if I were gay. Was that just a song?

Or did you really mean it?

Me: Um, Emerson, can I tell you something?

Emerson: Sure Sarah, what is it?

Me: I'm gay.

Emerson: ok

ME: yeah . . .

Emerson: Thanks for telling me.

ME: You're welcome.

This made me feel pretty good, and reassured that I am accepted

and appreciated for who I am.

Me: Seiji, Emerson, um, I'm gay.

Seiji, Emerson: Congratulations, good for you, I'm proud of you!

(Hug)

And this made me feel great! Completely validated in myself and loved by those around me.

Despite, or maybe because of, all the experiences I've had over the last year I've become more confident and grounded in myself. There are a lot of tough things in life, every person has to face them, and I am not alone. And not only thanks to Emerson and Seiji, but also because of my parents, family, friends and teachers.

So everyone, there's something I'd like to tell you, I'm gay! Thank you.