

# “WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF I WAS GAY?” MY BROTHER SAID HE WOULD DISOWN ME.

ANONYMOUS

*My brother has always been my best friend, so when he said that, it was like being stabbed in the heart.*

I remember the first time I started liking girls. When I was in the second grade there was a girl whom I found attractive. I didn't think anything of it, considering how young I was. When I was in fifth grade, however, my best friend kissed me at a sleepover, and it was like those feelings from second grade came back to me all at once. I was confused about what I was feeling, especially since my family and church always talked about how same sex attractions were wrong. I thought a lot about what I should do. I decided that I would change myself and tell no one.

I dropped all my friends who were girls and got into the group of all guys. It started out as us just being friends, and that's all I wanted. But I noticed that I was still thinking about girls, and I wanted to stop myself, so I decided to flirt with guys. I would go to parties, and I would kiss any guy that wanted me. I never went further than kissing; it just didn't feel right. I also started going online, and if I saw anyone post anything about gay pride, I would bash them and tell them they were gross and wrong for supporting that.

I remember this one time I had a dream about being with a girl, and I woke up so angry at myself. I told myself I was gross and wrong for thinking about girls in that way. I had no one to turn to, and I fell into deep depression. I almost went to my brother. I started out by asking him, “What would you do if I was gay?” Then I added a laugh as if it was just some random thought. He told me he would disown me and never talk to me again. That broke me. My brother has always been my best friend, so when he said that, it was like being stabbed in the heart.

I decided I needed at least one friend that was a girl. I called up my friend Mariah and cried and told her everything. She told me she loved me for who I was and nothing would change that. It was weird. I expected her to lash out and tell me I was gross and unlovable, but she didn't. She was my first step to loving myself. I still didn't love myself when I was at home or at church, and I still felt like puking whenever I thought about my family finding out. That same summer that I told my friend, I went to my aunt's house in San Diego. My cousin and I talked a lot about our views. When she told me she supported the gay community, my heart skipped a beat. I almost told her I was gay, but I didn't. I wasn't ready to tell anyone in my family. I felt like if I admitted it to my family, then I was admitting it to myself.

A year came and went. I was still fighting myself. I went back to visit my cousin, and I kind of told her by accident. We were driving down the road with my aunt, and she said, “This road is so straight and boring,” and I just kind of blurted out, “Unlike me!” My aunt and cousin looked at me and laughed. My cousin later told me she had known for a while, but she never said anything because she wanted me to tell her when I was ready. My cousin's and aunt's acceptance made it possible for me to take a step toward loving myself. Having family love me for who I am was a huge help.

I went back online and looked up the messages I wrote bashing gays. I apologized to as many people as I could. I stopped telling myself I was gross and unlovable. I don't think I will ever tell my family, but that's okay with me now. I'm slowly learning to accept myself. It helps that I am still attracted to guys. Even if I am never with a girl, I can still be with someone I love. I don't think I have won this fight yet considering I still struggle with it, but I also don't think I lost this fight, I am now able to look at that side of myself and smile and not hate myself.

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## DIG DEEPER

How do the author's feelings change over the course of the article? **PULL OUT** examples.

There are two points in the article where the author decides to do something to take care of herself. *What strategies did she try first? Second? What happened each time?*

In the last paragraph, the author says she doesn't think she's “won this fight” and doesn't think she's “lost this fight.” *What do you think “winning” would look like?*

# FIGHT ON 'TIL THE END

ANNETTE BOWEN

*"All my life I've had to fight."*  
— Sofia from *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

I'm the "L" in LGBTQ and, also, I am African-American, or as I like to say, "I am a minority within a minority." Coming to terms with my sexuality was a mind-numbing experience, especially in a world that frowns upon same-sex relationships. For years, I hid my true self from everyone I knew and loved. I even hid my true self from me!

Family and friends knew I was a "tomboy." Playing street football felt comfortable. Sure, modern dance and chorus gave me a way to showcase my talent, but something was amiss. The gleam left my eyes because I was lying to myself, friends, and family. One day, my aunt asked me, "Why do you act so much like a boy?"

Before I knew it, I opened my mouth and these words came out loud and strong, "Because I like girls, and hanging out with my male friends makes me feel good." Why did I blurt that out? She looked at me like I had two heads! After that, she treated me like the town pariah! To appease her, I got a "boyfriend"; I even had a baby, but it still felt WRONG!

I didn't know that there were brave men and women who suffered and died so that I could step out of the shadows and stand in the marvelous light of who I really am. I didn't know that I could be an out and proud lesbian because I could stand on the shoulders of those who came before me:

- The Stonewall Rioters in New York City whose courageous protest turned a flicker of visibility into a full-fledged fire of LGBTQ people coming out all over the United States.



**BAYARD RUSTIN.** Wolfson, Stanley, photographer. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection.



- Bayard Rustin, organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, who endured harsh treatment because of his sexuality, but didn't let that hinder him from being a staunch ally to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person elected to public office in California, who was assassinated by a homophobic colleague.

- And countless dedicated people who fought the AIDS epidemic, who supported each other to be themselves, who set up shelters and staffed hotlines, who wrote and made art that gave visibility to gays and lesbians, who fought for equal protection under the law.

Learning about these past soldiers on the frontline of the LGBTQ movement made me realize that I couldn't join the fight on the outside until I dealt with the fight on the inside. So much turmoil churned within my being. I was putting all my energy into denying myself.

Once I decided to stop denying my true identity, life became clearer. It's almost as if a light switch was flipped on in my head. I stopped believing the belittling words of my family and so-called friends. I met other LGBTQ people, and they helped me feel more like myself. I decided: No more hiding. It was time to bloom! I pulled my boot laces tight and stepped forward. No more shame, no more shrouds, no more lies. It's time to fight for equality, so LGBTQ youth will see that there's no shame in being themselves — only freedom. I joined a gay affirming church. Through our outreach ministry, we let other members of the LGBTQ community know it's okay to be who you are! I guess you could say church was my saving grace.

June 26, 2015, will go down in the annals of history for the gay community. In a 5-4 vote, the Supreme Court voted for marriage equality for same-sex couples. I'll NEVER forget the overwhelming sense of joy I felt that day. Facebook, Twitter, and every news outlet in the world lauded this monumental decision. But that's just a drop of equality into a gargantuan bucket that will probably never be filled. Are we there yet? NO! Do we have a long way to go? YES! Shall we continue to fight? YES and with immense ferocity. 'TIL THE END OF THE LINE!

*Annette Bowen is a student at Literacy Action, Inc. She's a mother, grandmother and bona fide "Marvel movie nerd!!" Annette believes there's a writer inside everyone. All you have to do is tap into yourself and allow the waters to flow!!*

# DIFFERENT FROM OTHER GIRLS

SUN YOUNG KIM

When I was born, my mom cried because I was not a boy. She thanked my grandparents for not blaming her that I was a girl instead of a boy. The tears of my mom might have triggered my “abnormality.”

*When we fight, we leave traces, such as news of protests, books, poems, articles, songs, and photographs.*

I was different from other girls. I hated pink. I never let my hair grow out long, and I officially refused to wear a skirt. If I played with dolls, I preferred Ken over Barbie. My mom lectured me about my clothes and my preferences. She started telling me, “You are not normal.”

According to the dictionary, normal means “not strange.” Indeed, I was not normal. I felt like I was a stranger. People stared at me when I walked down the street. Sometimes, people asked me, “Are you a boy or a girl?” On holidays, when all the relatives got together, elders greeted me by comment-

ing on my looks in a sarcastic manner. I felt inadequate in my own community and culture. The only way I could feel better about myself was to find a character in the western media that I could identify with. I thought western culture was more diverse and embracing. Eventually, this encouraged me to emigrate, leaving my whole life behind.

What if someone had walked into my life and said, “Honey, you’re okay. You’re just fine the way you are”? What if there had been more diverse characters in Korean books or movies so that people in my culture could be more familiar with LGBT community? It might have not changed everything in my life, but I am sure it would have given me some comfort at least.

I am lucky now that I have found a community that embraces me. But what if I never even had a chance? According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, 90% of people in the majority of Africa and Middle East countries answered “No” to the question “Should society accept homosexuality?” Can you imagine how you would feel if 90% of people in your country – the place you grew up and the only culture you know – rejected you? I can only assume the negative impact is strong enough to destroy a person.

This is why we should fight for our right to express our gender and sexuality in whatever way we choose. When we fight, we make noise. And when we make noise, there is someone out there who could hear this noise, and they will feel less lonely. They will feel a small piece of hope like I did. When we fight, we leave traces, such as news of

protests, books, poems, articles, songs, and photographs. Even if we cannot see a change right away, isn’t it enough that our fight will give comfort to others because they will know they are not alone?

In the RGB spectrum, there are 16,777,216 possible colors. Apparently, you can mix red, green, blue together 16 million different ways and make visibly different colors. Meanwhile, there are roughly 3 billion chemical letters in a human being’s DNA. Can you imagine how many possible DNA combinations there are? We are all unique. That is the way of nature. We all deserve to be respected and embraced regardless of color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality. If it is too hard to accept what you feel uncomfortable with, maybe you could give a little more attention to that?

I am going to search what kind of pink shades there are. Who knows, I might find my kind of pink from hundreds of different shades of pink.

*Sun Young Kim is a student of Borough of Manhattan Community College’s Adult Literacy ESOL Bridge class. She was born and raised in South Korea and came to New York City in her late 20s. She has just started the journey to explore her true self and is fully enjoying it.*

## MORE THAN TWO GENDERS

Throughout history and around the world, cultures have identified more than two genders. For example, in some South Asian countries, the Hijra are assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) people with feminine gender expression. This is a very ancient tradition. Today, Hijra are legally recognized as a gender other than female or male. The Hijra of India alone may number as many as 2,000,000.



SOURCES: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality>; [http://www.rapidtables.com/web/color/RGB\\_Color.htm](http://www.rapidtables.com/web/color/RGB_Color.htm); <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/3307416/Human-code-spelled-out-in-three-billion-DNA-letters.html>

WHEN WE FIGHT, WE WIN!