

BURSTINGthrough® Connections

for the Queer Community and Allies

issue 2- june 2022

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A MEMBER SUPPORTED, GRASSROOTS STORYTELLING
MOVEMENT BUILDING THE WORLD'S LARGEST
LIBRARY OF STORIES CELEBRATING THE
QUEER-STRAIGHT RELATIONSHIP.

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From Steve

Welcome to Bursting Through Connections. This issue is filled with powerful stories of love of family and self from Bursting Through Members, people just like you.

Each storyteller had various reasons to share their story, but there were common denominators also, like courage and compassion. They all live their values and put their beliefs into action each day. Aligning our beliefs and actions is how we make sustainable change.

A distinctive feature of Connections is KNOWLEDGE and POWER at the end of each story. This feature allows you to learn more about the topic of the story and encourages you to take action. This is what Bursting Through calls "easy activism."

I know that Bursting Through Members are compassionate, empathetic and open-hearted people who want to be more involved. I also know they have hectic lives, experience information overload and may need help cutting through the noise to action.

Connections helps you cut through the noise. It is about you, from you and FOR YOU. It is a combination of entertainment, emotional connection and easy activism.

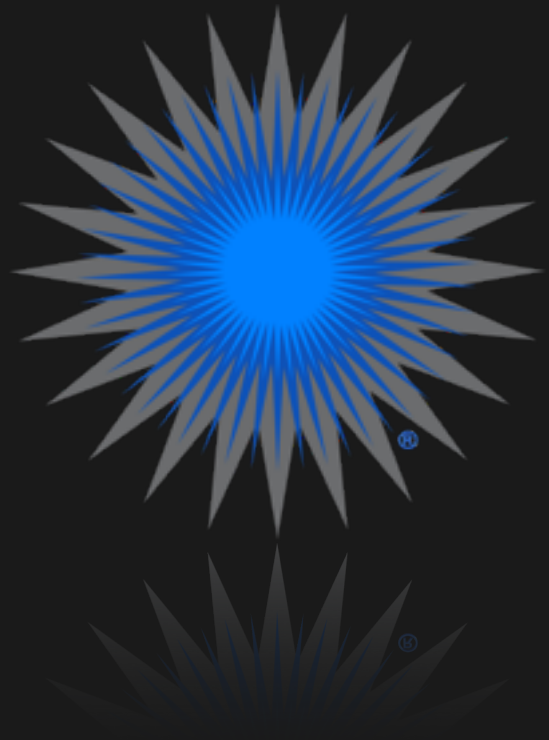
Please enjoy this issue and share with a like-minded friend who you feel would want to know about Bursting Through, its members, their stories and how to take action.

Take care, Stay Safe and Speak out.



Steve Petersen
Founder, Bursting Through
and Connections Editor

[Email Steve](#)



Billy's Blues

by WILLIAM SQUIRE



*My signature collection
created just for you.*

William Squire



*BLUE is the
new BLACK.*

Hollywood's Most Sought-After Cosmetics

Billy's Blues Cosmetics was created by international makeup artist and Hollywood stylist William Squire.

Having been in the cosmetics and fashion industries for over thirty years, William wanted to create a cosmetics collection that was easy to use, universal in color, long-wearing, affordable, and USA made with no animal testing.

Billy's Blues Cosmetics is designed for women of all ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles.

William wants each and every woman to feel chic, confident and irresistible wearing Billy's Blues.

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Order by July 10 to receive a complimentary Billy's Brilliance Lip Gloss.


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& Inclusion
Group**



We are a global nonprofit organization committed to equity and social justice for all.

We are empowered by professionals who are operating on the frontier of diversity and inclusion.

SDIG experts are professionals with the ability and experience to help clients address all their diversity and inclusion needs.

[**CLICK TO LEARN ABOUT SDIG**](#)

Two Dads, Their Daughter and **A Promise**

story from Michael & Bart



Michael and Bart

“Two Dads, Their Daughter and A Promise ” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring queer families.

Being a parent and creating a family can be hard work. Building a solid foundation in the form of a loving relationship is typically the first step before adding the child.

But what is building a family and having a much desired child like when you are two gay men? What is the path to fatherhood? How does being two men add to the complexity of parenting? What is it like being gay and raising a child in the current political climate?

To find out, I asked Michael and Bart.

Michael and Bart met in Vegas in 2001. At the time, Bart lived in LA and Michael in Las Vegas and they both worked in the entertainment industry as performers.

The connection was immediate and rooted in the desire to become parents but it took some time to build their relationship and get to the same city.

They’ve been together living in Vegas for 22 years. Bart is still in the entertainment industry as a producer/choreographer and Michael is now a teacher.

NOTE: In this interview, Micheal is speaking for the family. He and Bart reviewed Bursting Through’s questions prior to the interview so they could, as a couple, provide the answers you see here.



Michael and Bart

Q. This is a story about family. Tell us about your path to parenthood.

A. The first night we both knew we wanted to be a family and parents but getting there is like looking at a timeline of the gay rights movement. Due to laws at the time, we had a Commitment Ceremony and Civil Union Ceremony in April 2003, a Domestic Partnership Declaration in 2009, and a legal wedding in April 2015 after marriage equality passed.



2003 Commitment Ceremony



2015 Wedding

We had a single parent adoption in 2006 and a second parent adoption and family name change in 2013. Our daughter was 10 years old when we were allowed to get legally married.

We had **A LOT** of conversation around the timing of starting our family and I had begun the adoption process before we met so I told Bart to let me know when he was ready but warned him the process would go fast because I had already started it.

On my birthday in 2005, Bart presented me with a card that said, **"I'm ready."** That was my gift. Of course I cried and the process began that night as I stayed up all night restarting the process I had begun before we met.

The path to private adoption for anyone includes an intense screening process, adoption paperwork and creating an electronic “My Family Page.” The private adoption paperwork requires you to answer 30-40 pages of parenting questions.

The paperwork has questions about every detail of your life, your expectations, your thoughts and how you are going to approach every imaginable parenting situation from religion to philosophy on behavior and punishment. We looked at each other while doing the paperwork and thought how every parent should have to do this because it forces the needed difficult conversations.

The actual adoption process was quick for us but in 2004-05 we could not legally adopt together so we decided that I would adopt her because Bart traveled for work and it would create less complications and be easier for follow up meetings and home visits.

Most people don’t realize that for the first 6 months the baby is not yours, it is legally the state’s and there are series of regular home visits and follow up checks. If you pass all of those the adoption then becomes legal and the child is legally yours, but not until after that 6 months.

Q. Tell us about your daughter and becoming parents.

A. The only thing that has ever been easy ... was her. From the adoption process on, she has been easy and it is clear this was meant to be. She even slept through the night during her first month.



The first day

Part of the process is like public relations when you create your “My Family” book that has the answers to all the questions we answered and setting up your Family Page Website page. They then put you online for potential birth mothers or parents to see. The birth parents have also been screened through their process.

**Our information went live on a Monday.
They told us it would take 2-3 years to find a
match and they called us **THAT THURSDAY**
to say there was a couple in North Carolina
that wanted to meet us both.**

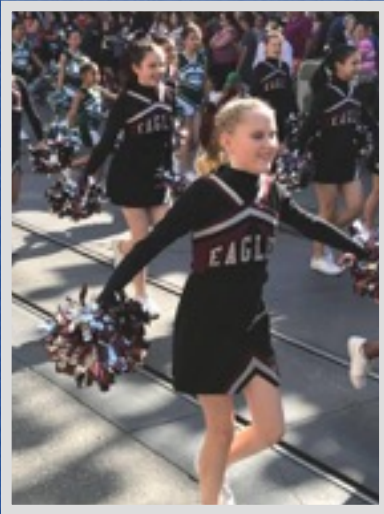
What was strange is that even though I was the one legally adopting, we were still allowed to advertise ourselves as a couple and family. We found out through conversation with the birth parents that they had specifically selected us because we were a gay couple.

Within 11 days we were matched and she was born 3 months later. The downside is that at that time Bart was booked to be traveling for work so for the first 6 months I was by myself which was challenging to say the least.



Our girl

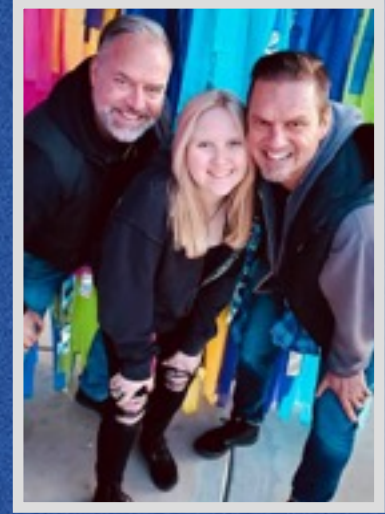
Today our daughter is a Junior in high school. She was active in cheer and dance when younger but has decided to devote her attention to academics exclusively now. She is a product of her generation and can be moody like teenagers are. She is very woke and very liberal.



The cheer days



The cheer Dads



Family 2021

She chose to go to the number one high school in the state focused on technology and is getting A's and B's in a school that is 65% male. After years of dance and cheer she picked "boy world" with a bunch of technology geeks.

When I asked her if she was sure she wanted to go to that school she said she wanted scholarships and she wanted to go to college on her terms. Right now, she is doing summer school **ON PURPOSE** because she wants to get ahead. This is who this kid is.



Sweet 16



Family 2022

Q. Did you ask the birth parents why they wanted to give a child to a gay couple? Even in 2005 that would not be a common choice, especially in North Carolina. What motivated them to do that?

A. (Michael) Without giving too much away and respecting the legal agreement and wishes of the birth parents I can tell you, they were a young couple and already had children and could not afford anymore. They wanted to make sure their child went to the home they picked.

The way her birth mother explained it was that her cousin had come out and been completely cut off from the family except for her. She saw it as 'paying it forward' and hoped that this would make it easier for her cousin if someday he wanted to adopt.

Q. I'm told it "takes a village" to raise a child. Have both of your families and circles always been supportive of gay men raising a child?

A. **We completely underestimated the Universe and how it would treat us as gay dads and were happily surprised to be 100% wrong.**

When it was time for her to go to preschool and for us to step into the world as parents we prepared for rejection from other parents and that kids may bully her because of what our generation of gay men have experienced, but the hate never came.

When the elementary school found out we were coming as the first gay dads EVER, they were excited and went out of their way to welcome us. The principal happened to be gay, which was a lovely surprise. **There was a kindergarten teacher at the school who coincidentally had a gay brother named Bart.**

She heard we were coming to the school and (allegedly) during a staff meeting she raised her hand and claimed us and our daughter and we were put in her class. This teacher taught our daughter again in first grade and then again in junior high math and was also her junior high cheer coach. We are best friends to this day.

That is the best way to explain how it went. We went to school and we were just parents, we went to PTA and we were just parents. Everyone treated us “extra special” in a way. I expected push back and it was the exact opposite.



The student



The teacher



Bart played “Buddy the Elf” at school every year and continues to today.

We were also very involved parents and used our entertainment backgrounds, jumped on all the committees and used our talents to build haunted houses or whatever needed to be done.

That experience and that school is why I became a teacher.

It was always surprising to me. It shouldn't have been, but it was. From the beginning we have been treated especially well. Even in the hospital after she was born, the nurses made sure we had private space to spend time with our daughter and let us be us.

Every step of the way, the Universe cleared the path for us to have this child we were meant to have. It's like people see us as an example of hope rather than something to be disgusted or offended by.

Q. Queer rights are always a topic of debate in this country, but they are under rapid fire right now. Leading the way is Florida with Don't Say Gay and there are more anti-LGBTQIA bills in the pipeline than can be counted.

Kids are very informed today. It's unlikely your daughter is not aware of what is going on and what it means in Florida. As parents, how do you talk to your daughter about queer rights?

A. Generally speaking we lead by example. I've always been pretty quiet about these things, more so than Bart. I took the lead on this and Bart supported me, my position is that we were just going to live our life and we are going to show up and just be there.

My biggest fear was that she was not going to be able to talk to me especially as she got older with female things but we have always been able to talk. There doesn't need to be a set time for these conversations, they just happen.

Our daughter herself is a strong queer rights advocate and is very much of her generation but I don't think she feels compelled to do that because she has two dads. I think that's just who she is and we have allowed her to be who she is.

Q. As you look back on your journey as parents, what surprised you the most about your experiences?

A. (Michael) How easy it was and how everything fell into place. From the adoption selection only taking 11 days, to her sleeping through the night and being a good student and a good person. The things that I expected to be the most difficult were the easiest and the loveliest and that surprises me still.

As I look back on it and think about the life that we promised this child when we created our family book and page for the adoption agency, this is what her birth parents chose. Her birth parents chose us and the life that we promised and we want to keep that promise.

We did what we promised we were going to do. We gave her a good life, she has traveled the world, she is smart, she is well adjusted, she is loving, she has friends, she's on track to go to college. **It's the promise that we promised.**



Japan 2009



Germany 2011

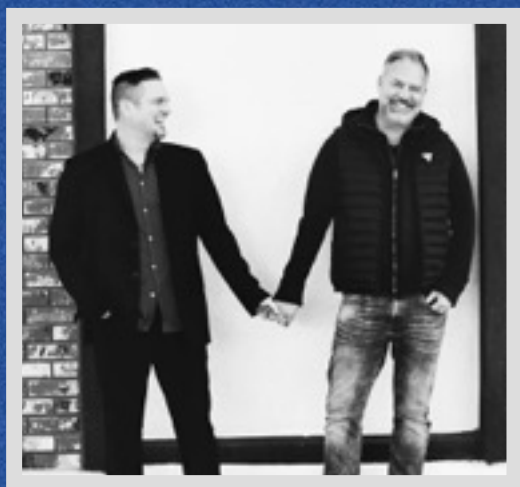


Amsterdam 2021

Q. Parenting is hard work! Give us three tips or pointers you have learned along the way that will be useful to other parents.

Show up for you kid!
No matter who they are or turn out to be!
Listen- HEAR THEM. Don't just listen, HEAR THEM and do for them WHAT THEY NEED.
See your child for who they are not what you want them to be.

Thank you Michael and Bart for sharing your insight and your emotional courage, compassion and authenticity. Your love and the ability to keep the promise is truly inspiring.



Bart and Michael

MICHAEL AND BART:
Lovely Family,
Devoted Dads,
Beautiful Human Beings
and
Bursting Through Members

Knowledge

LGBTQ+ Adoption Laws Today

If you are a married same-sex couple, you have the right to adopt a child jointly just like any heterosexual married couple does.

Whereas prior to 2016, there were states where gay adoption was illegal, now there are none.

Challenges still exist

While it is unconstitutional for married same-sex couples to be denied the right to adopt by a state agency, unfortunately, there are several states which have passed laws against gay adoption based on religious freedom.

These laws are faith-based, meaning that private adoption professionals can refuse to serve LGBT couples - even those who are married - that wish to adopt through them if it conflicts with their religious beliefs.

Power

[CLICK TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SAME SEX ADOPTION LAWS](#)

BURSTING through®

Membership Matters

“My membership is important because I’m still learning how to be the best advocate for the community and learning through Bursting Through is incredibly helpful. Keep up the great work.”

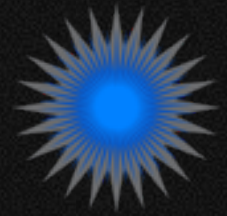


Wes
Straight Man, Husband,
Dad of 3,
including one gay son,
all around good human and
Bursting Through Member

Become a member

Bursting Through

EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS



Martin knocking out homophobia

Martin:
KNOCKING OUT HOMOPHOBIA



WGBC



Martin in action

Bursting Through sees the extraordinary in people, in the ordinary of their everyday lives, even if they don't see it in themselves.

An extraordinary person's story is not a list of accomplishments or akin to a late night talk show interview that is fairly predictable and mostly about promoting something. It is a story about what brought a person to activism, their internal dialogue, struggles and triumphs.

Martin is a Keynote Speaker, Courage Champion, Inclusion Practitioner and LGBTQIA+ Advocate. He is also the Chief Executive Officer of the World Gay Boxing Championships (WGBC). Martin's mission with the WGBC is to showcase the support he found in boxing and its thriving LGBTQIA+ community to the world.

Martin grew up in 1980's and 90's Lincolnshire in the United Kingdom and studied at the University of Sunderland. He realized he was gay at the at of age of 11 but knew at that time the only safe place for him was firmly in the closet.

The 1980's were a period of intensified homophobia with legal discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community entrenched with vindictive laws. There was considerable LGBTQ+ rhetoric from key institutions of society: the government, church, police and tabloids.

This period was also a time when the word queer was a derogatory term; when queers were considered less than and in some circles, beneath contempt.



Lincolnshire, United Kingdom



Martin

Martin explained, "I do not identify or like to be described as queer. I am a proud gay man and member of the LGBTQ+ community. I felt scared and spent decades worrying what others think and would I be rejected. My fears were unfounded as I have a loving and supportive family and friends. I came out to my oldest brother at the age of 27 and was instantly accepted by him and his family. My life definitely improved after coming out."

Martin has always been an activist in some form his whole life. He was involved in the Students Union at University and LGBTQ+ networks in various professional organizations.

“The most defining moment was ramping up my activism by posting content on LinkedIn, writing articles, being interviewed on podcasts and in the media. I had the courage to consistently speak up and take action to help solve discrimination for my community.”

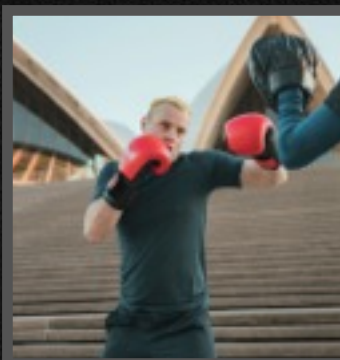
Martin began boxing at the age of 43 and immediately fell in love with it. For those wondering, Martin did not find homophobic attitudes engrained in boxing's DNA.



Martin in action

“It is important not to misjudge or have pre-conceptions about a sport and those involved in that sport. If you walk into an environment thinking the people you meet are homophobic you are unfairly judging them and not being inclusive.”

The World Gay Boxing Championships grew organically from Martin's courage, consistently speaking up and taking action.



Martin in action

“I had a successful corporate career in IT Strategic Sourcing where I gained significant experience and skills. I have negotiated and managed many strategic IT contracts requiring me to influence major corporations and build relationships with senior executives. The largest contract I managed was a \$300 million IT infrastructure outsourcing relationship.

The World Gay Boxing Championships started by using my phone and computer to share my vision and speak with many people. This is something I have done all my career and I am committed to achieving change and making a difference.”

Martin’s decision to follow his passion and become an agent of change has come at a cost, “I have made many personal sacrifices to establish and run the World Gay Boxing Championships.

I am supported by a fantastic Board and many people who are passionate about disrupting homophobia and transphobia. I made the decision to work part time in IT Sourcing and then leave paid work to focus on WGBC and my other business ventures full time.”

Martin is a dynamic and energized person with a soul that presents both kind and fierce. He is without doubt a courage champion.

“Basically, I just do it and get on the job. There is congruence in what I do and my key messages of courage and inclusion. I have the words **Courage** and **Fear Nothing** tattooed on my back. Champions vigorously support and defend other people and communities. A Courage Champion champions others to be courageous.”



Living his values

Martin has been interviewed on ABC, CNN and BBC Sports among other notable media channels. The ONE thing he wanted to say in those interviews that he did not get to say is, "Boxing is for everyone and LGBTQ+ people belong in the ring."

The heart and spirit of boxing is at the grassroots community level where you find passionate coaches, boxers and supporters. We can disrupt homophobia and transphobia through increasing inclusion and participation."

Disrupting homophobia is Martin's mission. Here are three easy acts of activism he suggests that we all can take to disrupt homophobia when we encounter it:

Be proud of who you are and be courageous.

Learn how to report abuse and if you feel confident and the situation is safe, challenge abusive language in a positive, non aggressive way.

Remember homophobia is a reflection of the person being homophobic- not you.



Martin

MARTIN:
Dynamic Human Being,
Fierce Fighter for Equality,
Amazing Activist
and
Bursting Through Member

Knowledge

The WORLD BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP is proud to be an LGBTQ+ ally and support the World Gay Boxing Championships.

Boxing is a sport that anyone can participate in if they have the desire to no matter what race, or gender. Boxing is Boxing.
- Jeff Mayweather 2022.

The inaugural World Gay Boxing Championships will be hosted at the Australia Turf Club's Winx Stand, Royal Randwick from 18th-22nd February 2023.

Power

[CLICK TO SUPPORT THE WGBC](#)

The T and I in LGBTQIA+

story from Dani



Dani

Bursting Through Founder and Connections Editor, Steve Petersen recently sat down with Dani to talk about the T and I in LGBTQIA+. She is a transgender Las Vegas resident who likes to spend her time helping others. Her values are **love, compassion and respect** and her goal is to bring awareness and education to her community and beyond. Bursting Through had to learn more.

Dani is retired from the military. When she first retired, she was going through a lot of emotional and mental struggles trying to figure out where she really fit in. She has always had a lot of feminine mannerisms and traits but had to cover them up in the very hyper masculine world of the military. She admits to not always being successful.

After the military, she spent a lot of time looking inward without self judgment to evaluate what was going on. Dani found her truth and came out as transgender to “God and Country.” This declaration was not met with much surprise to those who knew Dani best.



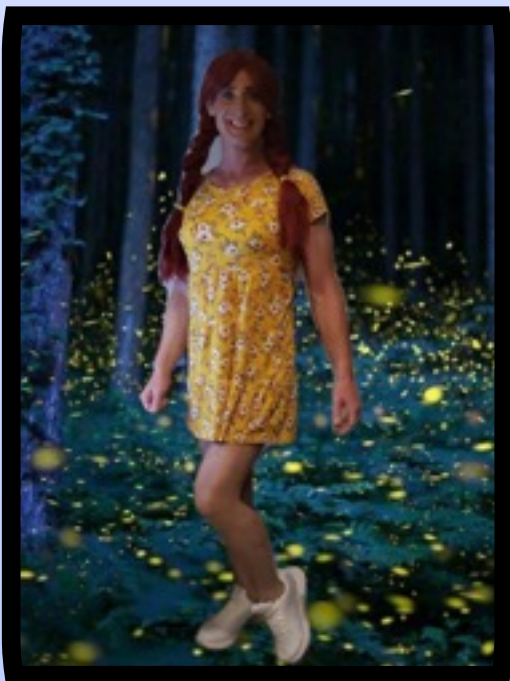
In the military

During this time, she identified as a transgender woman to be able to fit into the trans community and transgender norms. She explained, "The transgender umbrella is a very big umbrella, but if you are not a transgender woman you are almost made to feel 'less than'. If you identify somewhere else like non-binary, society and/or transgender women may look at you differently. Everyone wants to put you in a box."

Dani wants people to look at gender not as a "box" but as phases, "One thing that happens in the transgender realm is there are different phases. One day you are a crossdresser, the next day you might identify as a transgender woman. You are always evolving."

**I think that is why they call it transitionING
and not transitionED."**

The Queer Community is made up of all non-heterosexual people represented by an ever expanding alphabet: LGBTQIA+. Each of these letters represents members of the community, but they are not all the same experience or all about sexual orientation. Dani wants people, both straight and queer, to be educated about T and I.



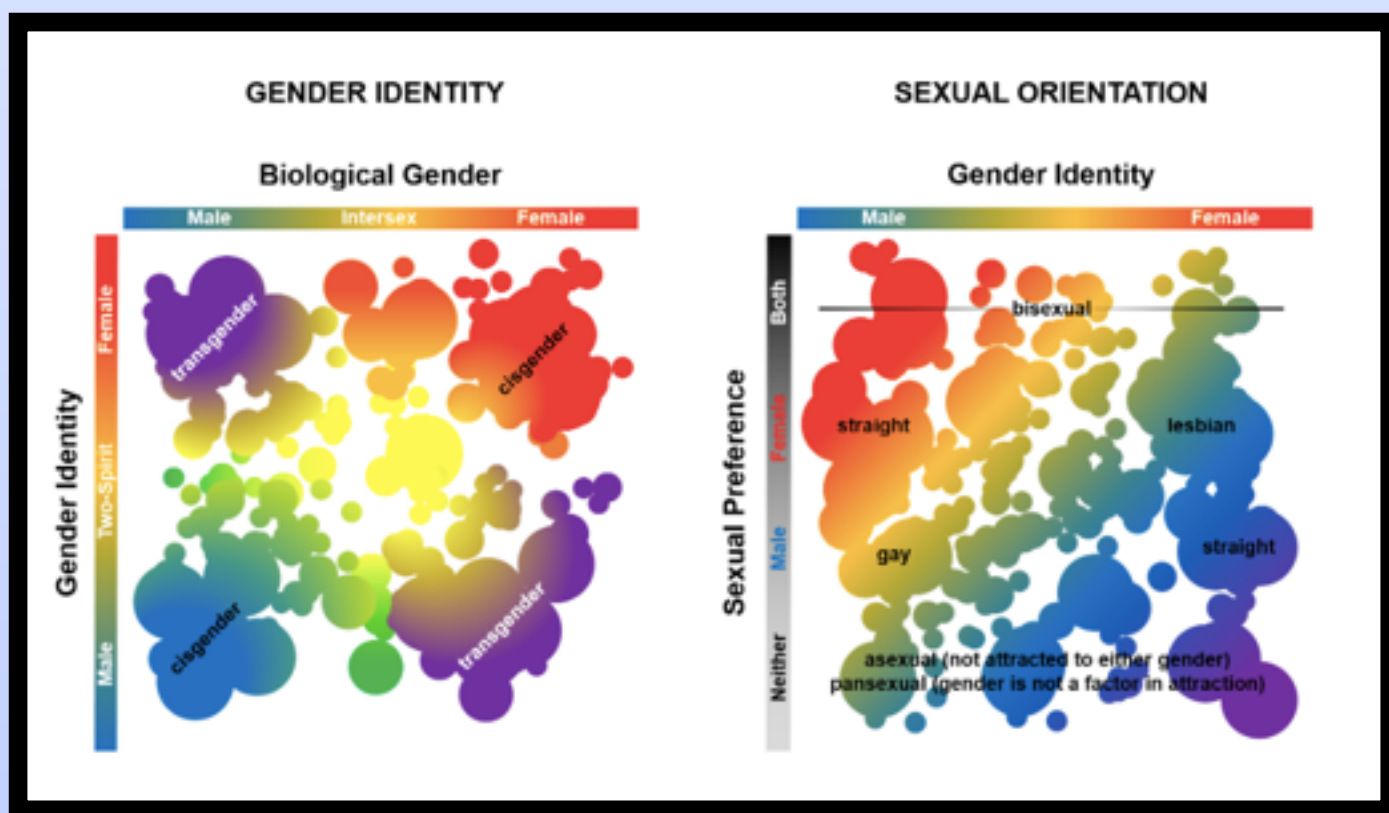
Dani

"Transgender and Intersex are different than every other letter in the queer alphabet," she explained. "Transgender and Intersex are NOT associated with sexual orientation but rather associated with gender identity and expression."

Dani feels this is really important for people to understand because this is where many people both inside and outside of the Queer community have problems understanding and where fear and hate arrive.

When asked to define the difference between sexual orientation and gender expression, without hesitation Dani responded, "I have a really good friend in her PhD program for educational psychology and we actually have this conversation quite often. You can look at identity as a big bubble and within the big bubble there are little tiny bubbles that kind of overlap which are gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

They all encompass your larger identity, but gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation have been scientifically proven to be on a scale. This is even why some cisgender men and women are slightly more masculine or feminine than the established norm because sexuality and gender are all part of a spectrum and in our DNA."



Between the Gender Lines

Dani is very visible in Las Vegas, especially downtown. She has amazing energy and an unstoppable positive spirit. She is often found dancing at local clubs, both straight and queer or just checking out the social happenings. She is a self proclaimed "Dancing Queen" who always has her selfie stick and posts a lot of great pictures to social media.

She is very warm and has an amazing connection to people that allows her to take a personal approach to engaging with and educating the public. This is not common in the queer or trans community and Dani understands her superpower and uses it for good.



Dani- Dancing Queen

Spending so much time one-on-one with people has revealed the biggest misconception about transgender and gender fluid people to Dani, "That transgender is a mental illness. That there must be something mentally wrong with a transgender person. She went on to say, "It's NOT the case. It's scientifically proven to be on a scale. That is why everyone does not express themselves the same way or identify the same way. We all fall somewhere on that scale and this is why some heterosexual women are more masculine and some heterosexual men are more feminine."

Dani is a person of great intelligence and an amazing heart. She lives her values of love, compassion and respect flawlessly. Here are three things she wants everyone to understand:

Transgender is NOT a mental illness.

Transgender people are not all the same.

We are not a fetish.

Thank you Dani for sharing your knowledge and giving us a better understanding of our Transsexual and Intersexual friends and loved ones.



Dani

Dani :
Change Agent,
Fearless Friend,
Kind Soul
and
Bursting Through
Member

Knowledge

Transgender people are individuals whose gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth.

Cisgender people are those whose gender identity is what is assigned when they are born.

The transgender community can experience significant stress moving through a world that treats being cisgender as the norm.

Gender fluid is a term that is embraced by many, but still confusing to some. It can mean many different things to different people and it's important to keep in mind that it's a different experience for each individual.

Power

[Find Transgender Knowledge and Support](#)

[Find Gender Fluid Knowledge and Terminology](#)

BURSTING through® Membership Matters

“Your mission means, not only, that queer people can feel okay for coming out and being who they are meant to be, but “straight” people can also feel okay openly loving and supporting all of their family members, friends, and community peers... regardless of their personal identification.”



Kevin

**Straight Man, Husband,
Dad, Grandpa, Coach,
Loyal Friend and
Bursting Through Member.**

Become a member

Bursting Through



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how you can get your
Burst on?



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Burst T-shirt
and more at the
BURSTING
through
BAZAAR



Pastor Jason:

“Your Identity is Holy”



Pastor Jason

“Pastor Jason: Your identity is Holy” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring religion and the Queer community.

Many members of the LGBTQIA+ community are people of faith but religion and the Queer community tend to have a complicated relationship and many Queer people struggle to find acceptance at their church.

Ensuring everyone is welcomed into a congregation is a complex issue that many church leaders struggle with. From making certain the church is a safe place for everyone, to breaking down stereotypes that might keep the LGBTQIA+ community out of church can be at minimum, a challenge.

How do churches welcome members of the Queer Community? What are the discussions we need to be having around religion and non- heterosexual people? What are the challenges facing a Pastor who wants to build a diverse and inclusive congregation? To find out, I asked Pastor Jason.

Pastor Jason serves the Las Vegas Living Hope Lutheran Church with a Masters of Divinity. He and his wife Ivy have four children ages 6-15. Pastor Jason is a Florida native who has played guitar in a Punk Rock band and has been in the radio business in Florida, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. He is passionate about community and fostering relationships.



Punk Rock Jason

Q. This story is about you as a member of the clergy and religion and the LGBTQIA+ community. Tell us a bit about your path to becoming Pastor Jason.

A. I grew up in a family of Lutherans, with grandparents from Pennsylvania, who became founding members of their church in Boca Raton, FL more than 50 years ago. I attended a Lutheran school until the 3rd grade, and have fond memories of my Sunday School teacher, who shared love and grace (and candy) with us.

As our family grew, getting to church on Sundays became more difficult, but I never lost faith. After going through a divorce, when I felt alone and angry, I prayed. I needed God to show me how to let go of the hurt and anger. I volunteered to read to a kindergarten class in central L.A., and decided I'd find a church.

It took a few years, but by 2007 we finally found a place where we felt welcomed and included. I was working in Las Vegas and selling advertising on the radio, and just knew there was something else that I was supposed to be doing. I prayed every night that God would show me where to go

It was another church member who saw the ways I was serving in the church—assisting in worship, helping with Bible studies, volunteering, playing in the worship band—and invited me to think about going to seminary. I didn't give it much thought. She asked again if I would consider it, and began to do some research, all the time praying that God would show me where I was meant to be.





In the summer of 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (with nearly 4 million members at that time) voted to allow for ordination of people in same-sex relationships. I was proud of my church and knew it was where I wanted to serve.

That fall, my wife and I visited Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque Iowa. I asked all the questions I could think of and met with faculty and talked to students.

My spouse was supportive and gracious, even as she was pregnant with our second child. When I returned home and back to work, I thought, "This is too much. Who quits their job in Las Vegas and sells a home and everything they own and moves to Dubuque, Iowa?"



The Strip- Las Vegas, NV



Wartburg Seminary- Dubuque, IA

I told myself I'd just get back to work and forget about the whole thing. Then, I felt a punch in the gut, my heart dropped to my stomach, and I sat in the car and wept, right there in the parking lot at the office.

I knew God was calling me, and I could not turn away. I was going to seminary. So my prayer changed. Every night after that I prayed, "God, show me the way, because I have no idea how this is going to go."

Q. We connected because I saw you post on Facebook, “I am a PASTOR who loves and advocates for LGBTQIA+ siblings.”
‘ You further commented, “YOU are loved as you are, for all that you are, and I am glad you are here.” Can you tell us about that post?



A. I believe that if we are being the people that faith calls us to be, we get to speak out **boldly about what we believe**. I struggle with that sometimes, because I know not everyone is on the same page, and it’s not about me, but about the whole community I’ve been called to serve with.

Growing up I had friends who were gay and they struggled to accept themselves at times. I also had friends who were bullied for wearing dresses to school. I have 4 siblings, and 4 children who are all very different. I want them all to know they can fully be themselves, be safe, and accepted with me.

I just think it’s a better world when we welcome and affirm one another, create space to learn about ourselves and each other, and grow. Some will say,

“All are welcome!”, but really mean that
you have to assimilate,
or hide a part of your identity
in order to fit in.

That’s just not good enough.

I want people to know that their identity is holy and the gifts they have are meant to be shared (and not just in Pride month). Not all of our churches are like ours, and not all pastors believe the way I do, so I know we still have struggles to overcome, and healing to work toward, but I want to use my voice and my presence to share that with others.

Q. Through your lens as a pastor, what are the biggest challenges/difficulties Queer people of faith face with their churches, church leaders and congregations?

A. There are so many challenges we all face today. This goes for straight- identifying people as well. It's a challenge to show up as yourself, to speak truth to power, to ask for what you need, and to commit to serving together as a community, especially when people are selfish, hurtful, callous, arrogant, hypocrites, or self-righteous (in other words, human).

Human beings are a mess. Well-meaning people will still use your dead-name or wrong pronouns, accuse you of virtue signaling for speaking out on a cause you believe in, or shame you for what you wear. I've seen it, and it sucks. There's no reason for it.

This is not just in the church, I know, but especially as people of faith, I believe we ought to remember to be centered in grace, forgiveness, and mercy. This is supposed to be what we're about.

One challenge is that the language we so often use in church is heteronormative and patriarchal. This is slowly changing in some places, but we need to be more intentional about it. We strive to use expansive names for God, to see ourselves as a part of a diverse community, and to be mindful of those on the margins of our society and those who do not have the same privileges as us. But we all mess it up at times, too. Grace and patience have to go both ways in all our relationships.

Q. An obstacle that many Queer people of faith may face is rejection from their faith if they live a fully out life at their church. Have you witnessed that and how do you take down that obstacle and make Queer people feel welcomed and safe?

A. I love it when people are open enough to share about their sexuality with me. It's not something that I ask about, but it comes up at times as we share our lives together. I try to be grateful for the trust that it implies when someone shares that with me.

I've talked with folks who have had to navigate coming out, and I just try to be as supportive as possible, to let them know that I'm a safe person to talk to. Social media helps in that way, as I think you can get a pretty good idea of where a person stands on some issues, and can help to lower barriers.

One thing we've done as a church is to follow a process of one-to-one conversations about welcome and inclusiveness in the church, working with advocates and allies to become a Reconciling in Christ congregation.

This means that we've had the conversations, and thoughtfully prepared a statement of welcome that guides us on our way to becoming the community that we want to be. It doesn't mean that we've crossed the finish line, but we're on the way.



Q. What are three things you want a Queer person of faith who doesn't feel welcome or safe at their church to know?

If you don't feel safe, you shouldn't stay. But if you'd like to share your gifts, engage in study of scripture, ask the questions on your heart, and grow, it is possible.

**Don't give up looking for a community that is not only safe but affirming, and gives you room to be you.
It might be my church, or it might not.**

Don't give up on gathering with others who can help you to engage in faith and spirituality.

**Thank you Pastor Jason for sharing your faith, wisdom and personal journey.
Your compassion, honesty and love of people comes through with every answer.**



Pastor Jason and family

PASTOR JASON:
Force of Good,
Community Leader,
Inclusive Human Being
and
Bursting Through
Member

Knowledge

Historically many orthodox religions have treated LGBTQ+ people harshly. However, within nearly every religious denomination there are now supportive groups that have adopted different interpretations about LGBTQ+ people.

LGBTQ+ are often quite spiritual - though their relationship with faith may be complicated in the case of non-affirming religious beliefs or potential rejection from spiritual communities- spirituality and religion can still be integral to the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Since 1974, Reconciling Works: Lutherans for Full Participation has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community.

Power

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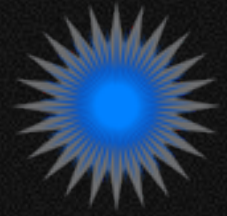


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EXTRAORDINARY



ACTIONS



Ninya

Ninya:

CONSERVATIVE VALUES,
A QUEER CHILD
AND AN OPEN HEART

Bursting Through sees the extraordinary in people, in the ordinary of their everyday lives, even if they don't see it in themselves.

An extraordinary person's story is not a list of accomplishments or akin to a late night talk show interview that is fairly predictable and mostly about promoting something. It is about what brought a person to activism, their internal dialogue, struggles and triumphs.

Ninya is an author who has written five books under the pen name Blair Bryan. Her latest book, When Wren Came Out, launches July 1, 2022.

It is a fictionalized account of her personal experience as a mother raising a queer child in a conservative household.



The real-life mother/author is a brilliant, beautiful soul. Bursting Through wanted to know more about her experience raising a queer child.

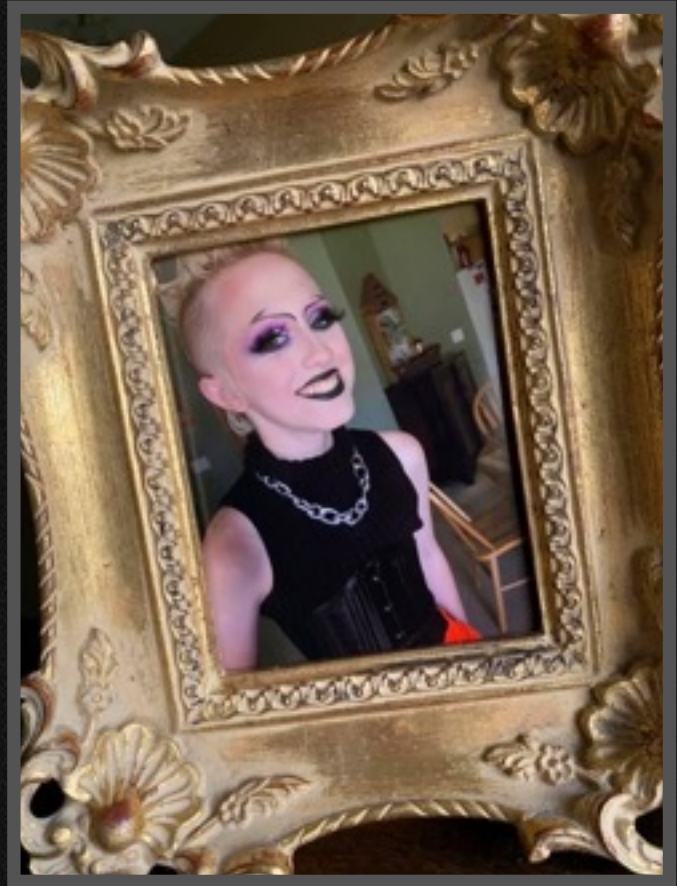
Ninya describes herself as a traditionally minded, straight mother. She classifies herself as open minded but still having very traditional values from her Catholic upbringing and education.

Ninya knew this book would be somewhat polarizing but was not fully prepared for what she encountered. When she ran a promotional advertisement people responded by quoting scripture and calling her out for how she was parenting her child. Ninya was totally shocked.

"I got to see a little bit about the hate my daughter, J, and the community feels on a regular basis and it was very eye-opening for me. There is a real common misconception amongst straight people that we have evolved and everyone is accepting. That discrimination might have been in the past, but not happening now," she said.

She spoke to her daughter J about it and learned that J and friends had experienced things like having food thrown at them and hateful comments screamed out of cars as they walked home from school.

Getting to the heart of the matter she said, “It’s just really frustrating to see your child that you love so much have to struggle through the world’s perception of who they are at their center.” This viewpoint and that struggle are what compelled her to write [When Wren Came Out](#). Ninja knew that the voice of a traditionally minded mother of a queer child was unrepresented and needed to be heard.



J

“There is a struggle for a very traditionally minded mother who has all of these ideas, hopes and dreams for their child thrown out the window by a secret. This mother is trying to navigate that territory, that conflict between I have these values and I believe in God and all those things on one hand and I have this child that I love on the other. Trying to navigate the journey to accept and understand is huge.”

Ninja feels there needs to be more awareness and conversation about the struggle, the confusion and the fear of having and parenting a Queer child. And that there needs to be more dialogue around the persecution of children who have no choice but to be who they are.



J and Ninya

“There is an identity crisis you go through as a mother when you have a child that is queer. You accept and love them, but then you go out into the scary, hateful world and you want to pull that child in tight because you are afraid of what will happen when they go out and experience that.”

As a mother, Ninya is ashamed and embarrassed to admit that she never wanted her child to be anything but heterosexual. She knew how much hate there was in the world and she didn't want her child to be the subject of that hate. Those feelings did not change the reality of the situation. She had a queer child and she now had to learn how to parent and love that child the way her daughter needed and deserved.

Ninya asked herself, “How does the mom learn and become the best version of herself when confronted with parenting a queer child?” There didn't seem to be a roadmap or a place to turn for education or advice. Ninya learned over time that the best source of information and education was right in front of her. It was J, her daughter.

She discovered, “Love is in letting go and not white knuckling it.” Ninya had to let her child tell her who she was and how she needed to be loved. As a self-described helicopter mom this was and continues to be a challenge. Ninya learned that as a parent of a queer child, she had to ask questions she did not know the answers to and that horrified her.

Questions were the key to building a new relationship with a new version of her child that was much different than the version she had imagined. She accepted it was ok to be scared and worried and that it was not going to be easy. “It was about the willingness to learn, the willingness to be open and to give your child the space to truly become who they are.”

Through experience and difficult times she realized, “It’s not my responsibility to put my expectations on J’s shoulders. It’s J’s responsibility to become who they are meant to be and my job is to love them and that’s it.” It was a really humbling mom experience for Ninya to reluctantly get out of the driver's seat and let J drive.

“As mothers we are taught we are supposed to white knuckle these kids to adhere to these values that we hold dear and it’s actually a lot more about letting go and that is what we are afraid to do.”

She knows that some people think that a child coming out is the worst thing that can even happen but Ninya’s philosophy is the worst thing that could happen was her child not feeling they can totally be who they truly are.



J and Ninya

Ninya acknowledges that no parent would want their child to be queer because it just makes life harder, but knows that apprehension and fear comes from a place of love. “You want your child to have an easy, carefree, loving, wonderful life and being queer makes it harder. It’s just the reality of the situation. They have more challenges to face.”

It was a journey for Ninya to release the shame she had associated with not wanting J to be queer. On her road to authenticity, she realized those feelings were not bad, it was what she chose to do with them that was important and that it’s a process. She would love to be able to say she’s done, but she’s not.

Ninya knew she had to be willing to ask the questions and to learn. “That is sometimes hard as a straight parent who wants to know more than just that their child is queer. Not asking the questions does not get you to a place where you can truly love them. When you love someone you learn about them, to know what their experiences are like and what their heart really calls them to do.”

She wants other parents of queer children to know that it's okay to be scared, frustrated and worried and it's okay to be consumed by all these feelings associated with your child coming out. "It kinda rocks your foundation but what you can do is build back a much more beautiful house. When you get down to the foundation you can have those harder conversations with an open heart and healthy dose of curiosity. Curiosity serves well in this situation."

Ninya knows there is so much she does not understand about sexuality and gender. Learning and understanding that sexual orientation is a spectrum and that gender can be, and often is, fluid is a lot to process for a straight person who has only experienced a binary and heterosexual world.

She likened it to one of the first things we learn as babies—to sort objects. "From that time on we are constantly sorting things in our world and we continue that as parents. We sort our children into male and female based on what the doctor tells us. We have to get away from all that labeling that we are compelled to do from early on. It's a whole different perspective and it's kind of starting over from scratch and getting to know this person that you love in a whole different way."

She knew that asking the questions to understand J was incredibly important and finding the right questions to ask would be difficult and scary. She wondered as a parent what might happen if she couldn't handle the answers or got too much information, but she knew that fear could not keep her from asking the really hard questions.

The questions and answers were part of love and would lead their relationship to the right place, even though it would likely be uncomfortable. She learned how smart her child was and how much J knew about being themselves. She also learned that it's not one and done, it's an open dialogue you have to have with your child. That desire to understand is a **HUGE ACT OF LOVE!**

Fighting her way through uncomfortable conversations is where the growth happens and has made Ninya an accidental activist. When asked what gave her the drive to accept her new role, she answered, "It's partially fueled by fresh outrage and knowledge. The more you know about the queer community and what they are facing the more you empathize and understand their struggle. It can't do anything but light that fire in your heart."

"Motherhood is an exquisite study in contrast. While pregnant, you are biologically fused together with your child, but every single day outside the warm cocoon of your womb, there is a subtle tearing away. Even though the pull to separate is natural and part of the journey, it still hurts like all get out, this bittersweet symphony of life."

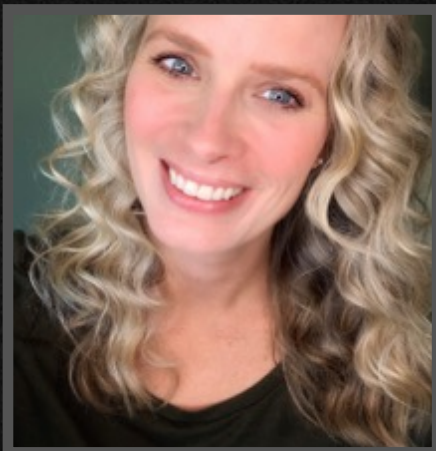
"When Wren Came Out" by Blair Bryan

Ninya's superpower is outrage + action. She believes the ability to love out loud can lead to sustainable change. She left us with these three pieces of wisdom for parents of queer kids who love and accept their child but are not actively engaged in that child's life:

Ask the tough questions. Get to know the things you don't know.

Go into any actions with an open heart and see what comes from it naturally.

Their journey is not our journey and our job is to love them- that's it!



Ninya

50

Ninya:
Accidental Activist,
Courageous Mom,
Compassionate Human and
Bursting Through Member

Knowledge

LGBTQ+ youth are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society.

LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

Transgender and nonbinary youth face elevated risk for depression, thoughts of suicide, and attempting suicide.

Power

BUY WHEN WREN CAME OUT

ARE YOU AN ALLY?

Without doubt, Ninya is a Queer Ally. Not every ally will be called on to show up like Ninya and learn a new way to love but there are easy things you can do to be an ally.

55% of the adult United State population self-identify as Queer Supporters, meaning, that 55% believe that the LGBTQ+ population should be allowed to live their lives the way that they want to, consequence free. They believe that, “Love is Love.”

The Bursting Through Movement and Connections Magazine were created in large part for that 55%. Bursting Through believes in their allyship, their big hearts, their compassion and their empathy.

While Bursting Through wholeheartedly believes that Queer Allies want to be active allies, they often aren't aware of the need or the needed actions.

To help, Bursting Through gives you “Easy Activisms.”

TEN EASY ACTIVISMS

EASY ACTIVISM IS SIMPLY LIVING YOUR VALUES, IN PUBLIC

1. Share a favorite story about your Queer loved one in social settings or on social media. Storytelling connects us on a human level.
2. Display a symbol of safety like the PRIDE Flag or Human Rights Campaign equality sign. Let the Queer community know they are safe with you.
3. Speak up in person and on social media when you hear a fag, dyke or trans joke or disrespectful statement. Voicing your objection helps raise awareness.
4. Stop supporting businesses that actively work against Queer rights. Your money has power and your consumer behavior matters.
5. Support Queer-owned and Queer-friendly businesses or subscribe to a Queer publication like OUT or The Advocate. Your support makes a positive difference.
6. Learn and use the proper language: LGBTQIA. L- Lesbian, G- Gay, B-Bisexual, T-Trans, Q-Queer or Questioning, I- intersex, A- Asexual. Using the proper language shows respect.
7. Understand and respect the importance of pronouns. This is how you can acknowledge a person's identity.
8. Learn about Queer history and share what you learn. Queer history has been marginalized or removed; history is incomplete without it.
9. Don't assume everyone is straight. Queer people find it awkward and tiring to out themselves when the assumption is made they are straight.
10. Know the facts about the struggles of the Queer community and share them. Knowledge is power and this information needs to become mainstream.

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An official national day
of recognition to activate and celebrate the
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Inspired by my child, J

WHEN WREN CAME OUT

"My head cocked to the side as I studied my daughter. My fearless, uncompromising child was boldly claiming her freedom. It was a quality that I admired in others, but as her mother, it scared me to death."

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when the system failed

ST. VERIDIAN



Ellensburg, Washington

Veridian is a queer non-binary artist born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada. They hold a bachelor's in Fine Arts from Central Washington University, primarily working in oil painting and metalsmithing.

Their art centers around surrealism and psychedelia, with the intention of expressing the extreme discomfort of the human experience.

Connections editor, Steve Petersen met St. Veridian at First Friday Downtown Las Vegas and they agreed to contribute this very personal story and original artwork to this edition of Connections.

The year was 2016, right before Trump got elected. I was living in Ellensburg, Washington to attend university, and after growing up in Las Vegas the extreme racism was honestly shocking.

My family owns a small home at the center of town which we had painted lilac purple. I always stuck out like a sore thumb in a conservative majority white town of 10,000, but it wasn't until Trump was a real threat that my ex-fiancé and I saw the true depth of white supremacy in the PNW.

They did not appreciate us taking up such prime real estate.



"Lilac Walls And Blue Hands" oil on canvas 2022

I am of mixed race, but extremely white passing. My fiancé is a brown man, both of us are queer, myself being non-binary and trans-masculine. I had delayed my physical transition because he and I wanted children.

The casual racist and homophobic remarks his friends would make when he wasn't present were disheartening, but much worse than that was the KKK presence in town. Recruitment flyers were frequently put on students' cars, and eventually a dead bird would appear under my windshield wiper regardless of where I parked in town.

I stopped allowing my ex to drive my car, I lost sleep at night worrying the local police would find any excuse to pull him over. I never told him about the birds, he was already struggling with adjusting to living in such a small town, the last thing I wanted was for him to feel unsafe.

I suffer from epilepsy, and have always used medical marijuana to manage my seizures. You would think doctors in Washington State would be more understanding, considering even recreational marijuana had been decriminalized for years at the time.

When I had been hospitalized earlier in the year over a grand mal seizure, I was met with intense discrimination. I was accused of being a drug addict, and asked all kinds of demeaning questions. I immediately decided I would never return to the small rural hospital, unless I was on my death bed.

Unfortunately, mid October I was forced back there. I had become pregnant and in a hormonal fit I had reached out to a friend expressing how hopeless I was feeling, and mentioned being suicidal.

My well meaning friend called 911, not knowing the way I had been treated at the local hospital previously, nor the threats my ex-fiancé and I had received. Luckily or unluckily, he was in Seattle at the time and I was on my own. I am thankful he was gone or he might not be alive today.

Two officers, two firefighters, and a volunteer forced me into a stretcher. I had expressed my fear of the local hospital and instead of waiting 20 minutes for the social worker to arrive they got impatient and used brute force. Each of them had one of my limbs and swung me into it, dislocating both my shoulders.

My flight or fight response kicked in and I chose fight. I fought tooth and nail the entire way to the hospital. When one of them tried to cover my mouth to muffle my screams, I bit. Mind you, I lived at the center of town. It was the middle of the day. Everyone saw what was happening, and not a single person intervened.



"Pulled in 500 Directions" oil on canvas 2022

When we arrived at the hospital I was further stripped of my dignity and my rights. They tried to get a urine sample with a room full of men, and wouldn't even use female officers to monitor me. I couldn't pee with an audience, so they ended up forcing a catheter into my urethra.

To this day I have lasting physical damage.

I realized I had no hope of them transferring me to a larger hospital, which was incredulous because they were never equipped to treat a pregnant epileptic experiencing a mental health crisis in the first place.

They didn't have an EEG to monitor for seizures,
nor a neurologist on staff.

I decided to become combative in hopes of motivating them to transfer me out to Yakima, the closest metropolitan area. I started trying to remove my restraints, and even ripped out my own IV.

The poor nurses must have thought I was possessed.

Eventually I became too much trouble for them, they sedated me, put me back into the ambulance and drove me to a mental health facility in Yakima. The sheer relief I felt when I awoke and was told where I was will never leave me.

I was forced to take heavy anti-psychotics, or face criminal charges for being so combative with the police. I was held there for 12 days, and had the strangest dreams of my life.

When I was finally released my ex-fiancé and I decide to abort the baby as there was no way it would be born healthy with the physical and emotional trauma I had experienced.

I was never able to get pregnant again, and had several miscarriages later in life. It was a major contributing factor into why we never got married, despite being together for over 10 years.



“Strange Dreams and Recurring Nightmares” oil on canvas 2022

This moment completely changed the trajectory of my life. I have accepted that I will likely never be able to have children because of what happened to me. Instead I decided to pursue a physical transition, and saw a new side of people since I started hRT. Rather than taking the discrimination I face as an openly transgender person to heart, I use it to fight.



“Adolescence” oil on canvas 2022

It is 2022 and queer people, particularly POC are still having similar experiences with police violence and worse. Now they are trying to take away our bodily autonomy as well.

We have to do more.

Thank you St. Veridian for sharing your very personal story and your expressive artwork. Your courage, strength and honesty are an example for all.



ST. Veridian:
Nonbinary Artist,
Courageous Soul,
Beautiful Human Being
and
Bursting Through
Member.

Knowledge

2020 was the most violent year on record for The Trans Community since records have been kept (2013).

In 2021, lawmakers introduced a record number of anti-transgender bills in state legislatures, seeking to restrict transgender people's access to health care, bathrooms, and sports and recreation.

Only 21 states expressly prohibit gender identity discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations under state law, leaving transgender people in many parts of the country particularly vulnerable to mistreatment.

Power

[CLICK TO SUPPORT THE TRANS PRIDE CENTER](#)

BURSTING through

MOMENTS

THE NEPHEW

from Brett



Max and Uncle Eric

A Bursting Through Moment is a short story from a Bursting Through Member. These short stories recall moments when compassion and empathy align and love comes bursting through. These are the extraordinary moments in our ordinary lives. Moments put a little more love in the world.

“The Nephew” is a moment from Bursting Through Member Brett told by Connections editor Steve Petersen.

The other day, I happily picked up the phone when I saw my friend Brett calling. I barely got out my hello when he said, “I had a Bursting Through Moment!”

I’ve known Brett for nearly 30 years, he is one of my favorite people and a constant in my life. He’s really more like a big brother than a friend, so him having an experience he wanted to share with me was really incredible.

He said, “You know we had Eric’s (his husband’s) family here the other weekend right?” I did.

He went on to explain that he and Eric have a nephew, Max, who is 14. Eric and Brett have been together since 2003 and Max has only ever known them together.

Brett and Eric have a cool art piece hanging in their kitchen that incorporates their wedding date of 12/18/12. Max asked Brett what that date meant.

Brett told him that was the date that him and Eric got married.

Max had a curious reaction. He challenged Brett a bit. It didn't make any sense to him because he is 14 and he knew they have together been together his whole life. He knows because he has seen pictures of him with them as a baby. After all, Brett and Eric have been together for 18 years and Max is 14.

Brett explained that as gay men they were not legally allowed to get married until 2012. This stirred a lot of emotions in Max. He's 14 so he didn't articulate those emotions, but from what Brett told me, it sounded like a combination of confusion, absurdity and anger. He couldn't imagine a world where the Uncles he loves and are such an important part of his family were not allowed to be married.

Seeing Max react that way also made Brett emotional. He realized they were having a moment where love comes bursting through. Brett and Eric's love and relationship was so natural to this 14 year old he couldn't imagine life without it and Brett realized that their example had put a little more love into the world.

Brett, thank you so much for calling and sharing this Moment! Now it can keep putting a little more love in the world every day. You and Eric are a great example of love and commitment to your family and friends.

If you liked this Bursting Through Moment and would like to see the video, you can watch it and other Moments on our YouTube channel by using the links below.



[*Play THE NEPHEW*](#)



[*Play THE COUSIN*](#)



[*Play THE TOWN*](#)



[*Play THE SINGER*](#)

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion PLUS Belonging

story from Dr. Shannon



Dr. Shannon Ph.D

“Diversity, Equity, Inclusion PLUS Belonging” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring workplace equality.

Ensuring equality in the workplace is a complex issue that has been a topic of discussion for decades.

From making certain everyone is compensated equally, to guaranteeing that leadership represents the workforce is challenging and important and progress has been made.

But how do we keep up the momentum and introduce more equality in the workforce? What are the discussions we need to be having and what should we be teaching everyone? What are the challenges facing the Queer workforce today? To find out, I asked Dr. Shannon Ph.D.

Dr. Shannon Ph.D. is a communication coach and consultant, DEI Trainer and thought leader. She gives talks on a wide range of topics including AAPI, LGBTQIA Issues, Work/Life balance and is the host of the podcast The intersection: Diverse Folx Converse.

Q What is your first thought when you hear “Workplace Equality” or “Diversity and Inclusion” at work? Do these phrases have real meaning or are they just buzz/trendy words?

A. I think these things are real efforts that people who work in DEI are focused on. **Rather than equality, I think more so of equity.** If we think about equality, we think more so that everyone needs the same thing to succeed. I don't think that way.

I think each person is unique and we all have different ways that we express ourselves and all of that needs to be considered. So when you think of equality, you think about everyone being the same and equal.

And when we think of equity, we think more so in terms of structural imbalances and ways in which different marginalized people have been treated in the world and the ways in which institutions, legislation, hiring practices and so on, have not included them.

Such as trans people and gender non-conforming people of which I am part of that category and as a queer person of color and queer woman of color. So I think it's really important to think more so about equity.

When we do see the DEI, we think of diversity equity inclusion, and then B for belonging. DEIB.

So how do we help everyone belong?

**In a workplace where there is diversity,
how do we be inclusive of everyone would be
a better question to ask.**



The way it needs to be

Q. Have you had a workplace experience of being treated “less than” as a Queer person?

A. I actually have had my own business since I came out. So it's hard to talk about a workplace situation. But I can talk about in terms of navigating the world as an entrepreneur and solopreneur. I'd say there's a lot of resources out there for lesbian and gay people. As someone now who's gender non-conforming and under the trans umbrella, I have tried to take part in those resources.

But as I step into this new identification as gender nonconforming, that has been the most difficult transition for me. I always have called myself gay, not lesbian and queer. And I have always been an advocate for gender nonconforming and trans people. And then actually becoming gender nonconforming, all of a sudden I'm being treated very differently in those groups that readily accepted me because they thought they understood me as a gay person or as a lesbian.

This has been the most difficult thing for me, my personal experiences around prejudice and being treated differently. And going through some harassment and abuses have been quite a lot just in the last few months, cause I just came out recently.

My examples are about being part of an LGBTQ business group and being talked down to being the only gender nonconforming person. Being talked down to and ridiculed for being neuroqueer, and having a different way of expressing myself than other people in that group was something that I suffered as a humiliation publicly in person.

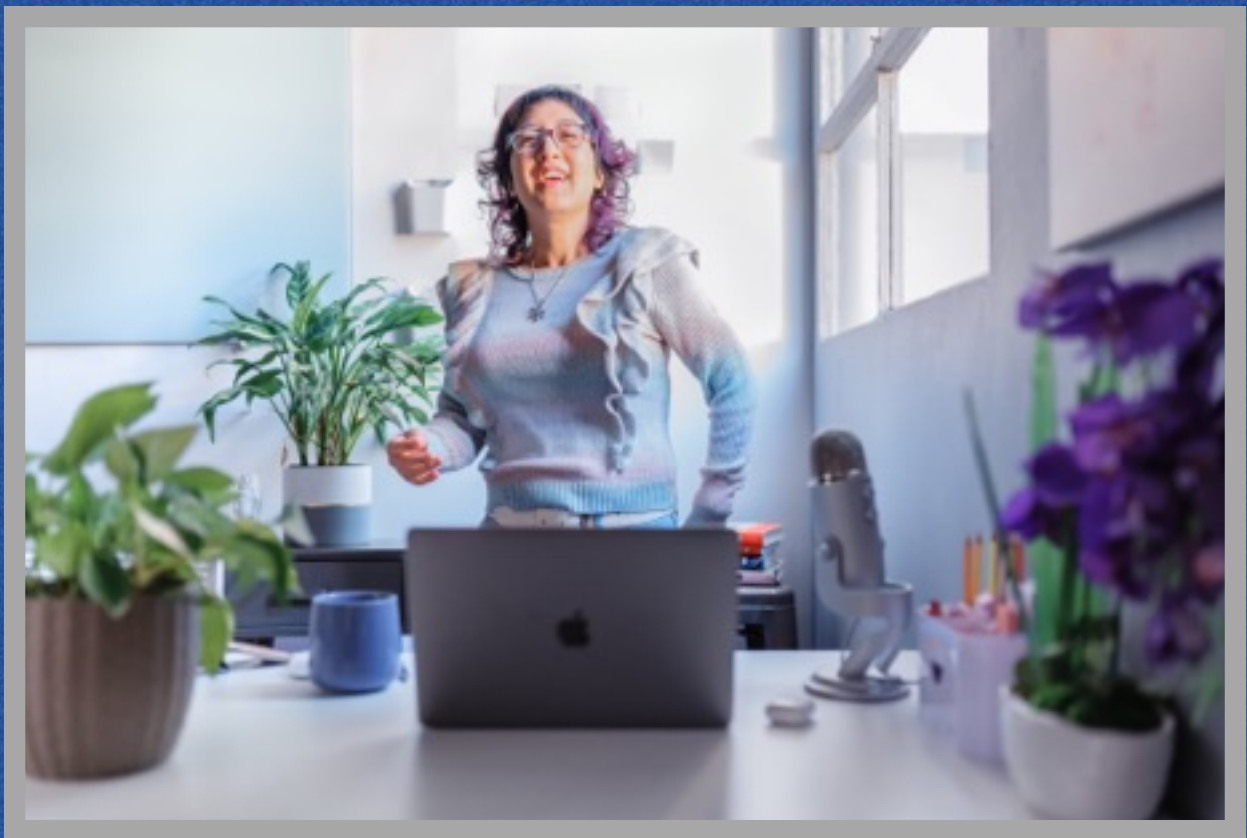
Another experience is a Lesbian Facebook group I've been a part of for the last year or so and have contributed to a lot. I was actually harassed and a victim of hate speech in that group and the group moderators took the side of the person who subjected me to that experience.

There are similar work-related experiences that actually have more to do with me trying to get support and me being rejected from the very groups that I thought I belonged to and then making the space non-safe for me, unfortunately.

Q. Bursting Through is having a different conversation because it believes that we are often not asking the right questions or having the right conversation about the reality of complex issues. What is the right question or conversation starter to have regarding workplace inclusion?

A. Before I agree to partner with a new company or organization, I ask them, "How do I fit in with the efforts that you already have in place?" I think that it's a really important question and I want an honest answer. If they're aren't any, then I know we need to start the conversation there.

My next question is, "How are you going to prepare your staff for the topics that we are going to discuss in my talk?" My talks often have to do with pronouns, gender non-conforming people, trans people, and queer people of color.



Dr. Shannon at work

Since I am talking about my personal experience, I think it's really important for the company to prepare their people and to set me up in a supported and safe space to deliver my talk. They're going to have to do some work to make that happen.

I go on to ask them, "What is your staff like? What are their responses to diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging? Have there been any instances or conflicts that have happened surrounding the topic I'm talking about? What are your concerns? What do you want to hear? What do you want to talk about? What would support you and where are you at?"

When I say that, I don't just mean people who are queer, gender non-conforming, trans or queer people of color I mean, ALL people. For example, if you are an ally or a potential ally, what do you want to hear about to help you in your journey? I think that should be part of it.

I believe those questions and that discussion leads us to the right question or conversation starter for workplace inclusion which is, What is your vision and how are we going to make this happen?"

What are the structural imbalances and policies that already exist that are conducive or have been harmful to people from marginalized groups? I need to know that because my focus and my work are the most marginalized within our community.

I have focused on queer people of color, gender nonconforming, and trans people, but this includes people of color and women of color. When we are talking about marginalized people I need to know what attempts are being made to correct those imbalances.



Dr. Shannon's Vision

A company cannot be just about profits. Companies should also focus on people. How their employees are being treated is really important as well as knowing what their ratio of employees from marginalized groups is.

Q. If you were in charge of workplace culture at every workplace in the US, what three things would you change IMMEDIATELY to make the culture truly inclusive?

A. It is important to say that this is obviously a process because I don't think you can change workplace culture immediately because you have to set a pattern within that workplace.

In terms of coming up with solutions that are about the day-to-day, pass the mic to the people who are the most marginalized in your company and ask them the question, because all the answers are situational and contextual and only they will know. It will be different for every company.

That being said, if this power existed, the main thing I would change is to make sure that the person in charge of diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, actually has enough power within the company to create change. And then enable them to build different ERGs from marginalized groups and don't separate them.

Try to create coalitions between them so that they're working together intersectionally because really, oppression, exploitation and marginalization happens intersectionally—it is race, it is class, it is neurodivergence, it is gender, it is gender identity, it is orientation and age. People cannot feel like they're “less than” or feel like their cultural background is a deterrent to them doing well in their company

Thank you Dr. Shannon for sharing your professional wisdom and personal insights into workplace diversity. Your knowledge, compassion and honesty on this topic comes through with every answer.



Dr. Shannon

Doctor Shannon:

Industry Leader,
Brilliant and Innovative
Thinker,
Fierce Human Being
and
Bursting Through Member

Knowledge

53% of LGBTQ+ workers report hearing jokes about lesbian or gay people at least once in a while.

46% of LGBTQ+ workers said they were closeted at work.

1-in-5 LGBTQ workers report having been told or had coworkers imply that they should dress in a more feminine or masculine manner.

The top reason LGBTQ workers don't report negative comments they hear about LGBTQ people to a supervisor or human resources? They don't think anything would be done about it and they don't want to hurt their relationships with coworkers.

Power

To learn more about workplace diversity, follow an expert

Shannon Wong Lerner, Ph.D



DR SHANNON WONG LERNER

[Click to follow on IG](#)

WHO IS DR. SHANNON? (SHE/THEY)

With 20+ years of academic and industry experience, I help marginalized people and allies discover their authentic voice and talk through difficult DEIB topics. I use a whole-person, holistic approach to include WHO your staff are, WHERE they come from, the WAY they process information and think, and HOW they identify. So they don't sound like copies of other people. But they sound like better versions of themselves.



SERVICES

Do you have a mixed staff who are both familiar and new to DEIB?

- I can create curriculum for a speaker series or trainings hand-tailored to meet the needs of your staff. *From 101, to advanced, to workshop-style.*
- My talks are interactive, experiential, and current. And meet the needs of multiple learning styles. Such as *Introverted, Neurodivergent, & Multitalented.*
- My talks are designed to get folx talking and supporting one another. From where they're at. *I never leave anyone behind and support your DEIB mission.*
- **With my keynotes and trainings,** educate your staff on Intersectionality, LGBTQIA+, Trans, and GNC & QPoC Allyship, Pronoun Usage & Inclusive Language, Emotional Intelligence, Bias, Embodiment, Breath, and Active Listening.
- **With SPEAK YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS 1-1 Executive Coaching** gain tools in Interviewing Strategies, Personal Brand Storytelling, Public Speaking, Intercultural Communication, Rhetoric & Critical Thinking, Speech and Voice.

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