

BURSTINGthrough® Connections

for the Queer Community and Allies

issue 3- september 2022

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Rob: Advancing Humanity

BURSTINGthrough.gay®

Rob Smith
Photo by Andrew Werner





BURSTING through.gay

CREATING SUSTAINABLE EQUALITY FOR THE QUEER
COMMUNITY THROUGH STORYTELLING, EASY ACTIVISM,
AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN QUEER AND STRAIGHT PEOPLE.

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From Steve

Welcome to the September issue of Bursting Through Connections. This issue is filled with powerful stories of personal journeys and evolution from Bursting Through Members, people just like you.


Each storyteller has something very personal to share that can help all of us on our journeys. It is important now, more than ever, that we lean in, listen and learn from each other. The stories in this issue taught me a lot about how passion and personal growth combine to make us better.

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." It's important to act and when we know what to do, we can.

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.

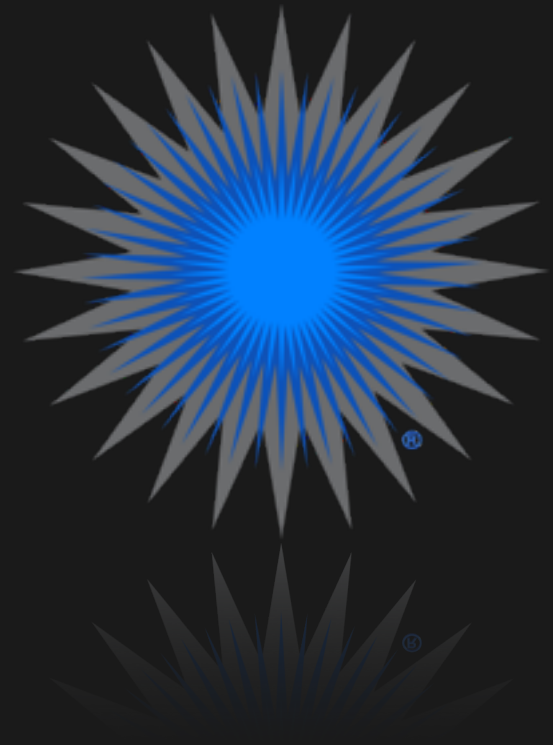
Please enjoy this issue and share with a like-minded friend who you feel would want to know about Bursting Through, its members, their stories and how to take action.

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.

BillysBlues.com

Disabled Not Defeated

A Mother and Son's Journey

story from Wendy and Sean



Sean and Wendy

Wendy and Sean are a mother/son team from Nevada. Wendy gave birth to Sean when she was 15. Sean was 3 months premature. Their inexperienced nurse failed to get Sean breathing at birth. The doctor took over one minute after birth and got him breathing.

Wendy was told Sean would not make it through the night. At two weeks old, Sean was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Wendy was told he would be a living vegetable only able to move his head and blink his eyes.

Sean's specific type of cerebral palsy is spastic diplegia resulting in tight muscles and muscle spasms. Sean is wheelchair bound. His legs are the most affected by his cerebral palsy. At home he crawls on his hands and knees and is able to climb/transfer in and out of most furniture on his own.

Sean and Wendy are a dynamic duo with amazing energy, unstoppable spirits and first hand knowledge of being disabled in the Queer Community. They have a powerful story to share and something to teach us all about love, acceptance and strength.

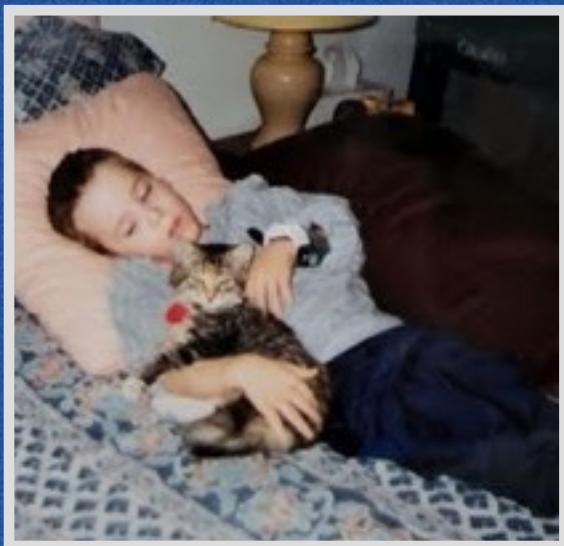
Q. SEAN: What is the first emotion you experienced when you found the courage to say that you were gay?

A. SEAN: I have known I was gay since I was 3 years old, but I didn't know exactly what it was or what it meant at that age. It wasn't until my teenage years that I started to struggle with my sexuality.

I went through a lot of bullying because of both my cerebral palsy, and rumors of me being gay. People of all ages can be freaking horrible to one another! I stayed closeted all throughout school, even though my closet was made out of glass!

For many years I went through sadness and depression, and was afraid of telling my truth, fearing that my family would reject me, or just tolerate me. I didn't want to be just tolerated. If my family wasn't loving and supportive like they are, and if they rejected me when I came out, I would have committed suicide. Because as a disabled person my family is a huge support system.

It wasn't until I was 22 that I officially came out as gay. I came out to my grandmother first, she told me, "I knew you were gay since you were just a few months old."



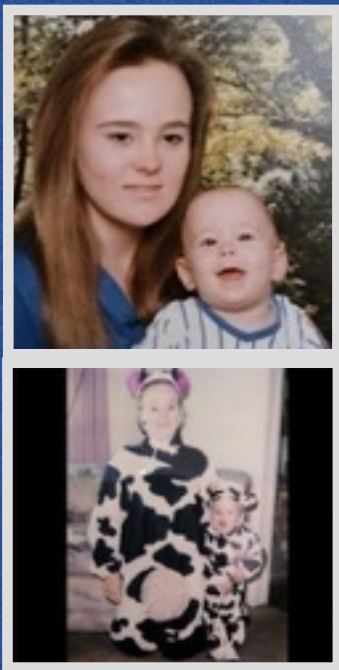
Young Sean



Sean and his Grandmother

I was more worried about my mother's reaction, that was one of the reactions I feared the most. I was born in the early 90's. Back then the idea of being gay was not well received, so that fear and mindset had followed me for many years!

On the day I told my mom, I wasn't really feeling like myself. I felt very uneasy and sad. I knew that day was the day. I couldn't stay in the closet. I needed to finally bloom into the person I was meant to be, I was already different in one way because of my physical disability, I didn't know if the world was ready for me to also be different in another way.



Sean and Wendy

My mom knew there was something up, she's really good at reading me, she knows when something is off even if I don't voice it. I told her I needed to tell her something, but not at the house because I didn't want other people to overhear. We got in the car and took a drive to California and back being that the town of Pahrump is only 6 miles from the California border.

I remember telling her and then breaking down sobbing. She told me "I love you regardless! It doesn't matter. You're still the same person you've always been, and you being gay, it's just part of you."

Surprisingly, as I came out to people the common response was, "It's about time. We're very proud of you, and we still love you regardless! You're still the same person we've always loved, forever and always."

Q. WENDY: What is the first emotion you experienced when you found out Sean was gay?

A. WENDY: Even though I had a good idea Sean was gay when he was about 2 years old, the thought never bothered me. When Sean came out and actually told me he was gay, it was a lot of mixed emotions. I was never disappointed or disgusted.



Sean

I was kind of sad thinking I might never get to see him get married or have any children of his own. Then the feelings moved into how cruel society is and how he is going to be accepted and treated.

Q. SEAN: Being Queer in the current climate of this country is difficult. Being disabled in this country is difficult on a good day. What do we need to know about the combination of being disabled and queer?

A. SEAN: Well for starters, all LGBTQIA+ events and public spaces need to be handicap accessible for all disabilities. We as an overall community need to start thinking of everyone living with disabilities and making spaces inclusive and accessible however we can.

Society in general has many negative ideas and misconceptions/stigmas of what it is to be disabled. For example, when I was a teenager I went to a party my cousin had. I was dancing and having fun like everyone else. When I dance I use my upper body and arms because I am in a wheelchair. Another kid at the party thought I was having a seizure and ran outside to get the adults for help.

The adults rushed in but it turned out I was just dancing. I didn't dance for several years after that because I was mortified that I would scare someone. Disabled people in situations like this are more common than you think, we're just like everybody else. We just do things a little bit differently.

My mom and family had to fight the school districts to keep me in mainstream education. There were a lot of times the school districts kept pushing for me to be in special ed, or special-needs schools, associating me with other disabilities that I had nothing in common with! I was one of the very few disabled people in mainstream education. When I was a freshman and senior in high school, I earned my letterman jacket letters for one of the highest GPAs.

I graduated from high school with a GPA average higher than 4.0 and I took two semesters of college and am learned ASL.

Educators and the educational system need to know that I have dexterity issues but I am capable and my mind is SHARP.



Dating is extremely difficult. Trying to simplify all the information about me and my disability in the overall dating world, let alone the LGBTQIA+ dating world that can be vain and very superficial is difficult at best.

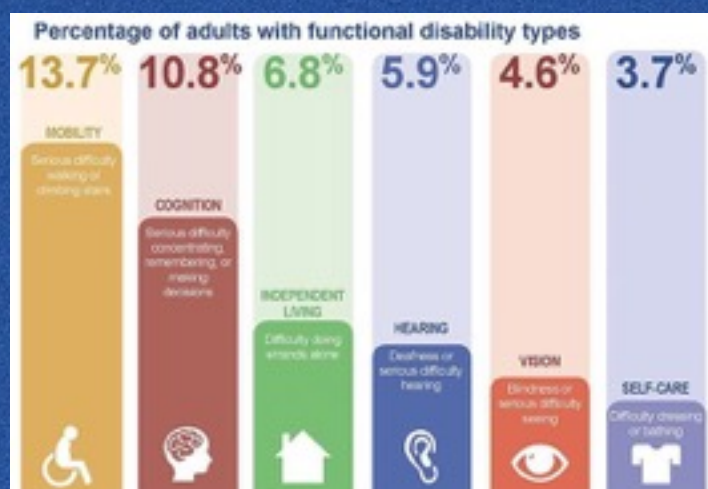
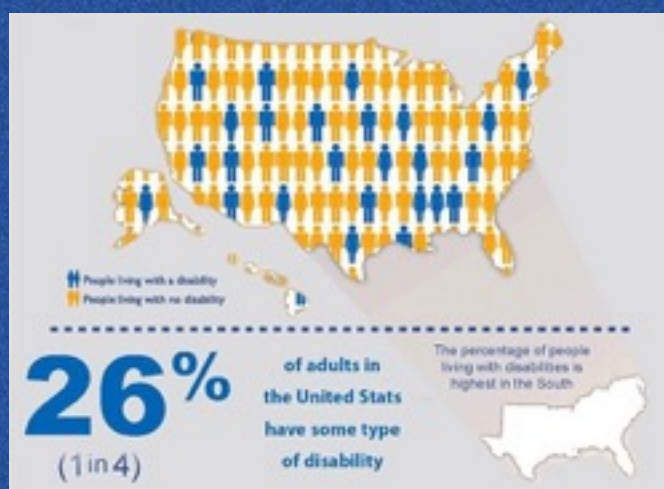
Sean ready for a recent date

I hope to god I do not scare off a potential romantic/sexual partner because all I want is somebody to understand me, and at some point unconditionally love me. I want a companion to share my life with like most people.

This also brings up another point for me. When it comes to sexual education, we need to improve our overall sexual education for everybody, especially the LGBTQIA+ youth. And we need inclusive sexual education for the disabled youth as well. We need to start normalizing disability and sex and/or sexualities and identities.

In doing so we'll be educating straight people, LGBTQIA+ people, and disabled people alike, breaking down all the unnecessary barriers and misconceptions and negative stigmas surrounding sex and disability. The end result will be a more inclusive and safer future for all. Knowledge is power, and it's knowledge everybody has the right too, along with equal and inclusive medical sexual care when dealing with STDs etc.

Also, a friend gave me the gay sex talk and made me aware of people out in the world who view disabled people as a fetish. She said I needed to be aware of them because not all of their intentions are good. I found out there's a term for this: devotee. This is something all disabled people need to know about!



SOURCE: Center for Disease Control and Prevention- 2020

Q. WENDY: Being Queer in the current climate of this country is difficult. Being disabled in this country is difficult on a good day. What do we need to know about the combination of being disabled and queer?

A. WENDY: The way Sean is treated most of the time and the ignorant remarks people have said really make me look down on a huge part of the human race. Most of the time people will look at me when they are talking to Sean as if just because he's in a wheelchair he can't think, hear or speak for himself.

I tell people, " You should be talking to Sean—he knows better than I do." And I see the look of confusion or maybe just plain embarrassment come across their faces.



Sean and Wendy

I do have to say it's a little priceless and both Sean and I get a good laugh at people sometimes. I've seen the looks Sean gets when people find out he's gay and obviously in a wheelchair, it's heartbreaking to me. I can only imagine how it makes him feel. He is still a very functional human being who has feelings, needs, wants and desires.

Q. SEAN and WENDY: When we met, Bursting Through was asking people what being a queer ally meant to them. Wendy responded to that question as a straight woman and mother of a gay disabled son.



She wrote, "I'm his voice when no one listens. I stand up for his rights with both gay rights and disability rights. I hope to protect him from the cruelties of society due to lack of knowledge and understanding. I hope this message reaches others and their families so they know they are not alone."

Wendy's Message

This is such a powerful statement of compassion, protection and pure love. When you hear these words again what are you feeling? Is there anything else you want to add to it?

A. SEAN: My mom is constantly spreading awareness of accessibility and/or accommodations that I may need, because a lot of times in this very able-bodied world people don't stop to think of these kinds of things. Also people can be very inconsiderate and rude-very narrow minded and ablest with their overall ignorance about disabled people and the overall disabled world.

All my life Mom has been battling negative stigmas and misconceptions about the disabled world to make sure I get what I need and that I am safe. I hate when people think they know what I'm able to do and they try to tell me what I can and can't do. Instead of that, society has to learn to let disabled people show what we're capable of.

Deciding what I can and can't do is my decision alone, nobody else's. When people try to tell me what I can and can't do, it makes me want to do whatever it is even more! When people doubt me, and I prove them wrong it's one of the best feelings in the world!

The words "I can't" are not in my vocabulary, until I know for sure that I am not able to do whatever it is. Before that point the phrase is, "I can try!"

I am often accused of having an aggressive and authoritative tone, but it's because I have to in order to be heard and seen and taken seriously.

Most able bodied people don't get it because they don't live our life.

A. WENDY: Reading my statement made me tear up. It's a very powerful statement and I hope that others who have a disability and are LGBTQIA+ know they are not alone in this world and know they have hidden allies. I know there are people out there still fighting for accessibility and special accommodations. I believe because we are all human beings that every person no matter gender, race, sexual preferences, identity and disability (physical, mental, verbal and emotional) should all be treated the same and have the same rights.

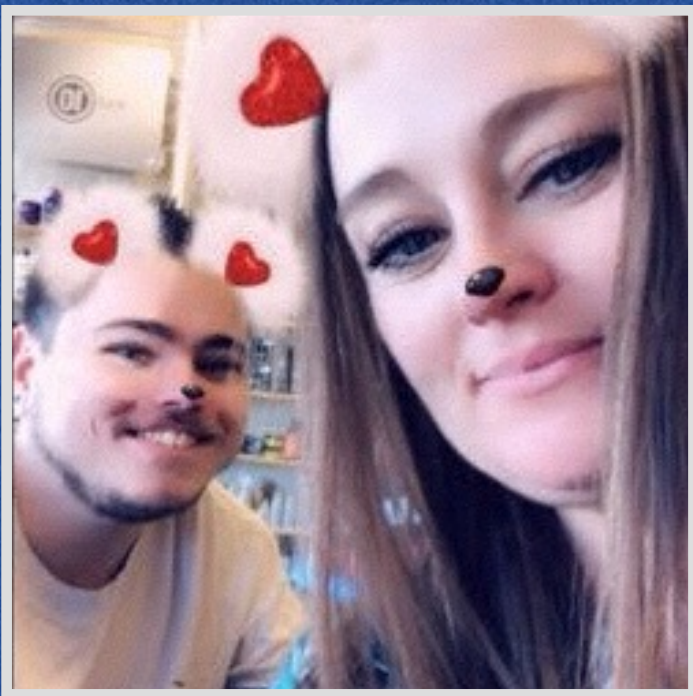


Sean, AKA, Miss NessaRay at Pahrump Proud

Q. SEAN and WENDY: What do you hope and dream for each other?

A. SEAN: Well, when it comes to my mom specifically, I wish her all the love and happiness that the world has to offer. And I hope no matter where life may take us, we can still work as a team making the world a better place for LGBTQIA+ individuals and disabled individuals alike!

A. WENDY: I hope and dream that Sean finds a loving, caring and devoted partner for life. Someone who will love him unconditionally and have the utmost respect for him. I hope he finds a partner who is willing to slow down in life and take the time to help Sean with what he needs such as getting ready for a night out, party, event, home life activities-especially on the days/nights that are tougher for Sean due to his cerebral palsy.



Sean and Wendy

I dream he meets someone who wants to share life with him and be by his side no matter what. Someone to give Sean the best quality of life he could ever imagine.

Q. SEAN and WENDY: When you look back on your relationship, the highs and lows, the victories and the defeats, what has surprised you the most about your journey and relationship?

A. SEAN: Before I continue, I have to state: Dad, no matter how bumpy the beginning of our relationship may have been, I'm glad over the years we were able to work things out. I will always love you with all of my heart.

It is still mind-boggling to me how my parents were only teenagers when I was conceived. My mother was 15 years old, and my father 17 years old! Thinking about it is really weird for me, because I can't imagine having kids when you're still a kid yourself.



In a lot of ways I grew up with my parents! For the majority of my childhood my dad was MIA! I'm glad my mother had the support of her family when she needed it most.

Sean and his parents

That also explains why I'm very close with my mother and a lot of people on her side of the family. I'll never forget those times after the long sessions of physical therapy-mom would cuddle with me and watch TV with me.

Sometimes she would even massage my little body because it would be riddled with muscle spasms that were excruciatingly painful. Also she took care of me when I was struggling with dealing with the secondary conditions associated with my cerebral palsy. Looking back on it I greatly appreciate her tender love and care

through all the times that I was really sick even the times that I was hospitalized because of being so sick.

My mom was and is always one of my biggest cheerleaders, during all the medical setbacks and/or surgeries, especially the surgeries that almost took my life. And I have had many surgeries! Even as an adult I'm sure somewhere in the future I will face the possibility of needing to have surgeries.

I think what surprises me the most was her strength and endurance facing all of the challenges and navigations and learning about cerebral palsy along the way and everything that it entails. Not only that, a lot of the time she did it as a single parent, starting at age 15!

My mother is definitely one of the many heroes in my life, and I admire her more than you'll ever know! I am very proud of my mom, and she continues to be a graceful fighter and advocate for people living with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community.

A. WENDY: It's been a very long journey. All the surgeries-especially Sean's hip surgery. During that surgery Sean bled out twice and flatlined, we almost lost him. It really makes you think about life and how fragile it is. All the years of therapy sessions and special equipment we had to try to help him be able to walk. All the years in school going through all the bullying Sean had to endure was excruciating. Having a great relationship with my son and being able to be open and honest with one another brings a lot of joy to my life.

I know there have been times Sean didn't like me or even want me around but I think that's a normal thing between parents and children. We overcame a lot of obstacles in life together, we kind of grew up together. With only 15 years age difference it was hard at times for Sean to see me as a grownup so he did turn to my mom a lot growing up.



Sean and Wendy

Now he tells me I'm an old lady and I laugh and tell him he's right behind me. We even made a pact: when we get old I'll change your diapers again if you'll change mine! I'm grateful we have always had humor. We have always been able to laugh and joke about what life has given us and thrown our way. Our whole family always makes the best out of the situation.

Most people think we shouldn't joke about Sean's Cerebral Palsy or even being gay, but we enjoy how we can make light of our situations. Sean and I have both grown so much and I think as we get older, we get closer.

He brings so much love and happiness to my life, I wouldn't change a thing about him.

Q. SEAN and WENDY: What are the three things you want people to know about being queer and disabled?

A. SEAN:

1. Please be mindful of your language use, try and stay away from negative language use! Don't expect a disabled person to just hand you a list of the do's and don'ts, they'll be able to give you some right off the bat, depending on the conversation or whatever the circumstances may be, but most of it you're probably going to learn over time as you get to know that individual. You don't know how somebody living with a disability may feel about certain words! It varies from individual to individual because of their life experiences. When you are getting to know someone living with a disability, you should always ask them what their language use preferences are, it's the same concept, as if you asked someone in the LGBTQIA+ community what their preferred pronouns are.

Personally, I don't like when people say that I'm "suffering" from cerebral palsy. I am NOT suffering! I'm simply living with cerebral palsy! In addition to that, patience and communication are key to success, be patient and supportive with your disabled partner's every day to day needs! If you and your disabled partner have concerns, you should always consult a medical professional!



QUEER AND DISABLED PEOPLE SHOWING THEIR PRIDE

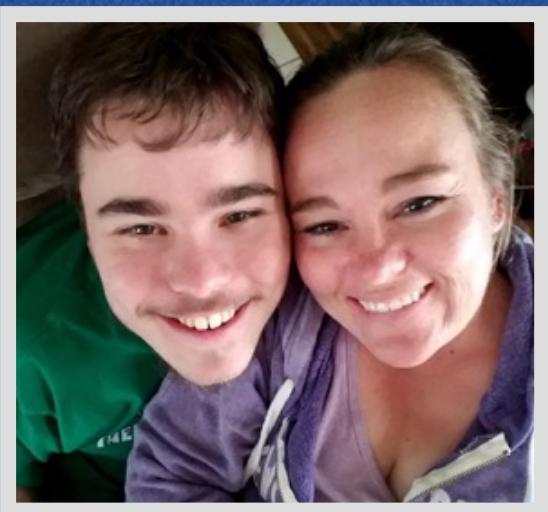
2. There's a misconception that disabled people only date other disabled people or would be better off doing so. That is false. People with disabilities ALSO date able-bodied people. **The term is interabled couples.**

3. Whether you are able-bodied, disabled, straight, or LGBTQIA+, you should always follow the internet's golden rule: your safety should come above all else! Never give out your address, never meet somebody alone, always meet up in a public place and with another person until, you know for sure the person you are meeting is trustworthy and genuine. You should also never give out things like your email or phone number on public forums! Over the years I've seen so many people do this and it scares me!

A. WENDY:

1. One of the most common questions I have been asked about Sean is: “Can he have sex and does his ‘downstairs’ work?” It makes me feel a little awkward however I answered honestly and say, “Yes it works and yes he can have sex.”
2. You can’t “catch” someone’s disability. It’s not contagious. That goes for being gay also. Gay people are born gay.
3. Patience and empathy play a huge role in interacting with an individual with a disability. When a person with a disability opens up to you with specific personal needs like toileting or hygiene needs it’s very important to not embarrass them or judge them. It is a very sensitive topic and is already humiliating for the disabled. No one deserves to feel ashamed or like a burden. Human kindness is a very powerful thing!!

Thank you Sean and Wendy for sharing your relationship and your emotional courage, compassion and strength. Your Mother/Son bond is incredibly inspiring.



Sean and Wendy

SEAN AND WENDY:
Loving Family,
Dynamic Duo,
Beautiful Human Beings
and
Bursting Through Members

Knowledge

People with disabilities constitute the nation's largest minority group.

Disabled people don't just have sex, they have sexualities.

The disability community is the only group any of us can become a member of at any time.

Interabled partners can live exciting and fulfilling lives, enjoy intimacy and have children.

Interabled relationships/marriages can be as normal as any other relationships/marriages.

Power

Cerebral palsy support groups and organizations

EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS



Rob, (he/they)

Rob: ADVANCING HUMANITY



ThePhluidProject.com

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.

Rob is a former retail executive, futurist, and the Founder and CEO of The Phluid Project, a gender-free brand selling clothing, accessories and beauty for the LGBTQIA+ community. He is also a challenger of boundaries. His mission is advancing humanity.

Rob grew up in Michigan in a traditional family with two parents, a brother and a sister. He realized he was different at an early age but likely realized he was queer when the family got their JCPenny's catalog and he would flip past the women's underwear section to go directly to the men's underwear section. Those catalogs helped him understand that he was fascinated by the male physique.



Michigan

“My dad was a former Pittsburgh Steeler and my brother was very athletic. My dad and brother shared a love of sports and my dad coached many of my brother's sports teams. Meanwhile, I liked to play with dolls, I liked theater, I liked art and my sister was my best friend. My world was super small but I knew at some point it was important to be secretive about what I was doing and who I was. I remember my dad once watching me play with Barbies and the look on his face of confusion and disappointment was enough to push me further into the closet.”

Rob met his first boyfriend, a fellow theater student, at age 15 but he knew he needed to hide the relationship as his boyfriend was more open than Rob. He suppressed his sexuality for another 8 years and then came out officially.

“My friends told me I didn’t walk out of the closet, I came running and screaming out,” he recalls.



Rob (he/they)

During his early 20's Rob also began an impressive and successful career in fashion leading multi-billion dollar brands from Macy's, Levi's, Nike and Victoria's Secret.

Rob understands and acknowledges that in addition to being really good at his jobs, he was able to advance in his career because he was straight acting and straight passing. Even though he “passed” as straight, Rob was always very open about who he was in all of his professional settings.

“I found that whatever I wanted to achieve was done through building relationships and finding accomplices in life. People who are willing to and interested in taking an interesting idea and pushing it through bureaucracy.

To me the secret in life has always been finding people who are like-minded, open-minded, curious, creative and believe in opportunities that don't exist, who believe in creating new spaces through business, human rights or social justice.

I always like to say that Martin Luther King, Jr. never got across the Selma Bridge alone the first time with just his community. It wasn't until the second time when advocates and accomplices showed up that he was able to cross.



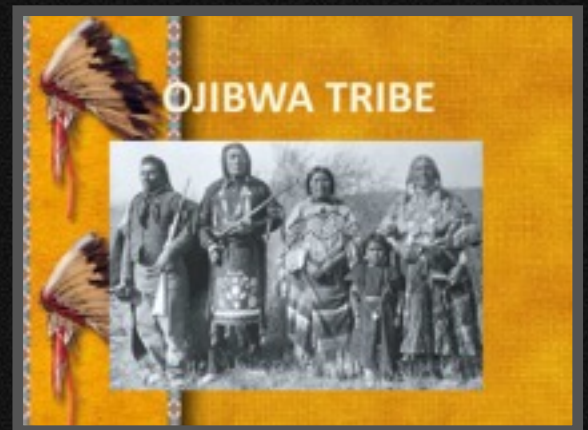
Martin Luther King, Jr Selma Bridge March

I think about this hypothetical bridge that we—the queer community—try to cross which is the arc of freedom and justice and the only way to do it is to bring people along.

If we just try to do it with the 7.1% of the Queer community we are never going to achieve rights. We need our advocates and accomplices. It is only then, with all of us together that we start to understand what justice and human rights look like for all of us.”

While his career was very successful and fulfilling, it wasn't fulfilling enough. Rob decided to undertake a deeply personal journey in search of living a more honest, authentic, altruistic life. He wanted to find a way to merge his professional career with his greatest passion: advancing humanity.

"I actually thought I was going to go into politics but I ended up going through Central America, South America and into India, Nepal and Tibet on my pilgrimage. There was a moment in an ayahuasca ceremony in Peru that I started to understand my heritage and my indigenous side. I knew my mom's grandma, my great-grandma was born on an Ojibwa reservation."



The Ojibwa ("oh-jib-wah") are a woodland people of northeastern North America. In the mid-seventeenth century there were approximately 35,000 Ojibwa on the continent.

When he returned to the States, he took his mom to the Ojibwa reservation where his great-grandmother had been born to learn more about his heritage. In the process he learned about his ancestors and that Chief Buffalo is his great-great-great grandfather. It was here that Rob also learned about Two-Spirits.

Traditionally, Native American two-spirit people were male, female, and sometimes intersexed individuals who combined activities of both men and women with traits unique to their status as two-spirit people. In most tribes, they were considered neither men nor women; they occupied a distinct, alternative gender status.

“Visiting the reservation and learning about my heritage, I was like **WOW**. Phluid had already come to me but it made it not only universal but also very personal.

When I learned about the third gender, when I learned about the Trans experience—as we would call it today where someone is equal amounts of male and female—it captured me. Indigenous cultures and most cultures around the world, pre-colonization, celebrated this gift.”

With this knowledge, Rob changed Phluid’s parent company from The Phluid Company, LLC to Two-Spirit LLC. “Two-Spirit reinforces what Phluid’s mission is but also makes it personal for me, as part indigenous, to embrace that- and it means a lot to me.”



Along with being deeply influenced by his ancestry, Rob knows that his drive to activism, action and advocacy is compensation for his younger self, who hid and suppressed his own queerness. Another inspiration is looking at the courage of young people today who come out regardless of the personal consequences.

“Suppressing my authentic younger self and wanting to make up for that has transcended from my professional life to my non-profit life to personal life and sparked a desire to create a world that is better, not just for young queer people, but for all queer people.”

Each day Rob looks to his younger self to see if he is doing something that would make him proud. He works on his younger self's value system and lets that guide him through his journey.

“I think children are perfect. I don't have children of my own to guide me, but I do have my younger self who I want to be proud of me. That is the glue that keeps it all together. All it means is being a good person and a champion for him and people like him.”

Rob's superpower as a gay man is he understands his privilege and position. He feels a deep responsibility to the entire queer community, not just himself and gay men like him.

“The entire queer community includes all of us, that means trans women of color and the most vulnerable in our community.”

Rob deeply values unlearning what isn't right and learning something new. This simple yet profound process truly advances humanity. Here then, are three things Rob says we all need to learn about the queer community:

Understand the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. They both equally exist under the queer umbrella and there are a lot of places in the middle.

**Understand pronouns. It's really not that hard.
It's just a wall that people put up.**

**Lean into the most vulnerable part of the queer community.
That is the intersection of racially diverse and gender diverse members of our community because they need our support the most. Sometimes that just means showing up and listening. Just show up.**



Rob (he/they)

ROB:
**Brilliant Human Being,
Amazing Activist, Generous Soul
and
Bursting Through Member**

Knowledge

The Phluid Project was founded by Rob Smith, a FUTURIST who thrives working at the intersections of Free Enterprise and Humanity.

The Phliud Project joined a movement committed to challenging the ethos of dated traditions that inhibit freedom and self-expression, embarking on a mission to improve humanity through not only fashion, but also community outreach, activism, and education.

The Phliud Project is working to infuse the world with more empathy, equity, and compassion.

Power

PHLIUD RESOURCES



HOLISTIC WELLNESS BAR



20% OFF ANY SERVICE!



- Body Sculpting
- Microcurrent Facials
- Custom Facials
- Teeth Whitening



- Infrared Sauna
- Zero Gravity Massage
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- and more

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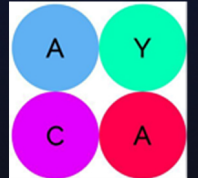
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Don't Ask Don't Tell:

A Soldier's Story

from Eric



Eric in Afghanistan

“Don't Ask Don't Tell: A Soldiers Story” was written by Eric exclusively for Bursting Through Connections. Eric is a Las Vegas resident, veteran, small business owner and community leader who grew up in the Chicago suburbs.

Eric and Bursting Through Founder and Connections Editor, Steve Petersen, connected at a Vegas area Pride event and began discussing the Eric's experiences in the military and both knew there was a powerful story of duty, courage and self acceptance that needed to be told.

Enlisting in the military was probably one of the best decisions I have ever made. It allowed me to really learn, grow, experience, and find out WHO I AM. When I enlisted in 2001, Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) was in effect. I remember part of the enlistment process was signing a document stating I would not engage in homosexual behavior or say that I was homosexual while serving. Of course I signed the dotted line. It wasn't even a question at that time. I was still in denial about myself.

My first duty station was in Northern California. I gained the skills and certification to be an EMT (emergency medical technician) and worked in a military hospital emergency department. During this timeframe, I would find myself.

Growing up I always knew that I was different. I always had feelings or thoughts that were different and perhaps homosexual. These thoughts or feelings would never be acted on and were buried deep within me, because anything "gay" was a bad thing or negative from what I knew or was brought up to know.



Little Eric

Though it wasn't a fast or simple process, eventually, I began exploring my sexuality and accepted that I could be bisexual. Then, I came to know that I am a gay man. It was a number of experiences, good and bad that made up this process. Along the way, I made some very good, close, life-long friends.

I kept my work/military life and private life very separate. I never allowed the two to mingle. This was a time where the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) would still investigate military members for being homosexual. If found out, the service members would be discharged, many times dishonorably.

My career was very important to me, so I was extremely cognizant of keeping my private life PRIVATE. This took a toll emotionally and mentally, it was like living two different lives.

While on duty, I was always watching my back, watching my behavior, mannerisms, words, to ensure I was not outed as gay. I had a small, tight group of gay service member friends. We all respected each other and shared the burden of being closeted for fear of reprisal.



Airman Eric

Having come to the understanding and acceptance of my own sexuality, I looked forward to the day when I would finish my enlistment and be able to live as a civilian and be who I wanted to be. Little did I know I would enjoy the military so much that I would make it a twenty year career!

Thinking back to those early days of my military career and DADT, one incredibly stressful experience stands out. It was a weeknight, I was living in the barracks, watching television in my room. There was a loud knock at my door and I heard alarms going off in the building. I opened the door to find three senior non-commissioned officers (SNCOs) in my doorway. One ordered, "Keep the door open and stand at attention. This is a raid."

My heart sank. Not because I was doing something wrong, but because I knew I could be exposed. These three senior military members worked in the hospital that I also worked at. As I stood there at attention, they sifted through my personal belongings. They left no corner untouched.

One of them went to my closet. I was sweating bullets and knew this would be the end of my career. He opened a shoebox I had on the shelf in my closet. This was where I kept my personal letters from friends, boyfriends, flyers from gay events I had attended and pictures. This was before social media. We took and kept hard copy pictures and wrote letters to each other.

The senior officer brought the other two over to view the contents of the box. They laughed and eventually put the box back in its place. They made their way out of my room and on the way out, one sarcastically said, "Sorry to invade your privacy," while making the limp wrist hand gesture.



In a panic, I called my supervisor who happened to be a lesbian and friend of mine. Following her advice, I got rid of anything and everything related to my private life. She recommended that as long as they didn't take anything and didn't take pictures for proof, to deny, deny, deny in the case that I was questioned. She was looking out for my career.

Time went on, and over the years I gained rank, position, and experience including overseas postings. But, I remained closeted to protect myself.

In 2011, President Obama, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen provided certification required by the Act to Congress and Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) was officially repealed on September 20, 2011.

This was ten years after I enlisted. With the repeal, although policy changed, I wasn't convinced that the discrimination and repercussions would simply disappear. I would remain closeted for years after the repeal. I cautiously waited and watched.



In 2014, while stationed in North Carolina, I met my now husband, Kevin. He was enlisted in the U.S. Army and we were both stationed at Fort Bragg. I had dated many guys before him, but he was special. I was head over heels (and still am).

Eventually Kevin would move in with me and we would begin our lives together. I was in love and this love gave me reason to come out to my family. Yes, I was still in the closet to EVERYONE. I thought coming out to my family would be the worst thing ever. It actually wasn't. It was surprisingly a comforting response from all.



Eric and his husband, Kevin

I had to wonder if culturally, we had changed and become more accepting of homosexuals. Homosexuality was no longer taboo. It was becoming more common. Do I think there were more homosexuals than 10 years prior? No. It's just that the system was changing to allow homosexuals their human rights.

We were not always being depicted in a negative light. More and more, someone knew someone who was gay or lesbian. Someone loved someone who was gay or lesbian. My devout Catholic grandmother gave me a hug when I came out to her and said she was so happy to have another grandson in Kevin! This was shocking to me. My own family, all of them, accepted me. But, I was still deeply in the closet in the military.

In 2016, I received orders for what would be my last Air Force assignment. It would bring me out to Las Vegas, Nevada. Kevin, who is originally from Phoenix, was stoked at the idea of living the desert life again. We made our move to Las Vegas. During this move I had a lot of time to think about my military career, where I had been, the experiences I had and how I wanted to spend my remaining four years. I was exhausted from hiding. I was tired of living two lives. I made the decision to come out **COMPLETELY**.



Eric and Kevin

In January 2017, my first sergeant invited me to his office to greet and get to know me. We had a great talk. Typically, the first sergeant wants to make sure his/her people are always okay, doing well, healthy and happy. This is where I would normally tell the superior that I am a private person, but not to worry, I have friends. This time it was different. I told my first sergeant that I had a boyfriend, Kevin, and that we were very happy together. This was a huge deal. For the first time in my military career, I just came out to a superior. I came out!

The sergeant's response was reassuring. This told me that times really DID change. It was from there on out that I would live and serve the same. No more hiding. No more double life. That year, for the first time ever, I brought my loved one, Kevin, to my squadron Christmas party. I introduced him to my peers, my associates, my superiors as my boyfriend. It was NORMAL. It was great! It was like a weight had been lifted. A weight that I carried for so many years. There would be no going back. Coming out entirely, allowed me to live a happier, more fulfilling life and made a difference in my work life serving in the Air Force.

Fast forward to 2021. My twenty years of U.S. Air Force service comes to a close. What an experience it had been! The skills I picked up, the education I gained, the amazing travels and friends made along the way, just simply amazing. The most amazing thing was that I was honorably retiring from the U.S. Air Force as an openly gay man. I went overboard on my Air Force retirement. I took full control of the agenda and made it a night to remember for all attendees.

Yes, the ceremony was traditional, but the after party was nothing close to traditional! It consisted of a beautiful venue, lights, camera, talented acts to include one of my favorite Las Vegas drag queen's performances! My thoughts on doing this? I served twenty years. I did it, Uncle Sam's way for twenty, I'm going to go out MY way, with a simply FABULOUS party. And that it was!



Eric's Retirement Party

Today, a year after my military retirement, I am happy and content. I am proud to have served my country honorably. I was closeted for so many years but in the end I was out and comfortable in my own skin. In this next chapter of my life,

I continue to serve, but I vow to serve the
LGBTQIA+ community. It's my way of giving back
after living many years in shame and living a lie.
There will be no shame going forward.
Only pride, happiness, and hope.

Thank you Eric for your service and sharing your story. Your bravery, honesty and strength of character are truly inspirational.



Eric

Eric:
Proud Veteran,
Tireless Activist,
Loving Husband
and
Bursting Through
Member

Knowledge

Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which was put into place by then-President Bill Clinton on Feb. 28, 1994, prevented openly lesbian, gay and bisexual service members from serving in the military. In 2010, then-President Barack Obama signed the repeal of the policy into law, which went into effect on Sept. 20, 2011.

"More than 100,000 American service members have been discharged because of their sexual orientation or gender identity -- including more than 14,000 under Don't Ask Don't Tell," President Joe Biden said in a statement released Monday about the 10 year anniversary of the repeal of the policy.

Power

[California enacts law to help LGBTQ military veterans get benefits back](#)

[LGBTQ Vets Discharged Under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Have New Chance For Full Benefits](#)

Kimi: Living Authentically and Doing Something



Kimi

Kimi has developed profound insights based on viewing the world through the unique lens of actively living while being perceived as male, then later identifying and being perceived as female.

Kimi has experience presenting to educators, medical professionals and community service groups. She works with legislators and advocacy groups, seeking LGBT-positive improvements in areas of fair and equal treatment. Kimi was a featured speaker at the first TEDxCarsonCity event in spring 2016.

Her goal is to proactively continue raising positive awareness of ALL diversity communities, in order that everyone, regardless of their background, can enjoy full equality and the ability to peacefully coexist in society.

Connections is honored to share Kimi's story.

From early in life, before I even knew-or cared-what "unacceptable differences" were, or why they even mattered, I was just a kid growing up, attempting to make friends, and trying to figure out what life was all about.

Sure, I played with the boys in the neighborhood and got along OK, but there was always an "aggressive" energy in the mix that I couldn't really relate to.



Intellectually I understood competition. I knew in baseball the goal was to get more runs than the other team, how runs were scored, and how to keep the other team from accumulating as many runs as my team. I was OK, but certainly not a standout.

When it came to running, jumping, or other competitive types of play, I participated, but never excelled.

Even from an early age, I felt naturally resistant to labeling into any stereotypes. Go figure—that attitude was just a precursor to developing a stubborn resistance to labeling that follows me to this day.



On the other hand, I found a natural acceptance with the neighborhood girls, enjoying basic conversation and playing house. Although I had not yet made any strong internal distinctions between traditionally male and female activities, I was reminded by the boys that some of my activities were “only for sissies”. My father also reminded me on occasion that I should be playing with the boys and not hanging out with the girls.

When the girls’ families moved, and I no longer had female playmates in the neighborhood, I went on about my business and associated with the boys and their activities. Although the activities passed the time, I never felt particularly inspired to pursue higher levels of competitive male activities.

By the end of primary school, social pressures had effectively distinguished activities into male or female, and effectively segregated my activities into participating in traditional “boys’ activities,” likely due to my aversion to being teased by the boys or scolded by my father for doing “girly” things.

But life has a habit of evolving...I learned later in high school, when I had managed to get my own transportation, that I was becoming more socially active and acceptable. I got involved with a partying crowd that really liked to get rowdy on weekends, including notable alcohol consumption. But at least I was getting out of the house and exploring life more. I also discovered that girls found me attractive—a notion I had not considered prior to engaging more socially—and I definitely found girls attractive and enjoyed their company.

Then I discovered something that had
been brewing, but finally came to
the surface in my head:
I didn't want to be WITH a girl as much
as I wanted to BE a girl!

This realization began a chapter of emotional and physical discovery that I had never anticipated—I definitely did not have sufficient psychological understanding to process my feelings effectively. Because of my conditioning growing up, I just felt my feelings were “wrong,” that I was somehow an unacceptable human aberration, and that it was extremely unlikely that anybody else on the planet could possibly understand what I was thinking and feeling.

I kept everything bottled up inside of me, constantly teetering on the brink of potential possibilities and a gut-wrenching feeling that I could never find happiness or be accepted for who I was.

But I wasn't ready to give up on life. I figured that if I did enough of the “acceptable,” it could overcome and bury the “unacceptable” that scared me so, that I felt within.

I had never managed to excel at team sports, usually being one of the smallest, weakest kids in class. To put it simply—I was not a kid who got selected when PE classes got divided into teams. Coaches would invariably “find a place to put me,” so that I didn’t get left out entirely.



Somehow, this seemed like an inevitable, inescapable fate set out before me, and possibly all that life had to offer. (When I grew about six inches between my junior and senior years in high school, at least I no longer felt like a runt—as little guys were called back then—in the class!)

When I was 16, I discovered something I had never before considered. I’d finally persuaded my parents to let me buy a motorcycle for transportation back and forth to school and work. I purchased what was considered a “dual-purpose” motorcycle that was designed to be ridden on or off-road. Several of my friends also had dual-purpose motorcycles and they started inviting me to go riding with them in the hills around our neighborhoods. Something magical began to happen!



Motocross Kimi

I liked to ride fast, and soon discovered I was a pretty decent rider. Next, most of the riders who had originally invited me to join them couldn’t keep up with me! Another acquaintance I had met along the way asked me one day:

“Have you ever thought about racing motocross? You could be very competitive!”

My parents objected and said they would not sign a consent form for me to race, prior to my turning 18. However, they did say once I turned 18, they would not stand in my way. For the next year and a half, I was either in school, working, or riding my motorcycle. The day I turned 18, I submitted a form for my motocross racing license, and soon entered my first race.

For the next two years, I never finished lower than 2nd place, and won a majority of races that I entered. I made a lot of new acquaintances, got a good paying job, enjoyed an active social life, and decided maybe I “had it made.”

Perhaps, life seemingly “coming together” would “cure” me? I wished!

For a period of time, to the outside world I may have appeared to “have it all.” Over the course of 16 plus years, a marriage, and raising three beautiful children, surely all this could “cure” me? And yet...



I simply didn't seem to be able to accomplish enough of what I thought the world expected of me, to feel like I was authentic and whole.

Not to give up, I decided I should pursue counseling. I met with numerous counselors, spiritual and secular, but unfortunately, thorough knowledge of gender identity issues had not yet caught up with psychological, psychiatric, or medical professionals.

The most consistent advice I received sounded like, "Tough it out. You'll get over this." Even worse, however, was the advice from multiple counselors that, "Most people outgrow this "condition" by the time they're 50." I decided to believe them and just kept trying. And the clock continued ticking. And then I turned 50...

There was a question I'd heard repeatedly at motivational seminars—if you found out that your time on this earth was extremely limited, what would you most regret?

What would be my biggest regret if I did not
do—or at least try—to live authentically?

This question had weighed on me so heavily,
for so long!

Sometime shortly after my 50th year of life, I lost three friends, one of them my best friend at the time. Life can end so suddenly and unexpectedly. During that realization it became incredibly clear to me—for whatever time I might still have on this planet, if I didn't at least attempt to find out what living authentically was like, that would doom my spirit for eternity.

Although I had thought about the possibility of gender transition for at least 30 years, considering the notion of undergoing gender transition was no longer just a constant source of anxiety—the fear of not trying to live authentically became exponentially greater to me than the fear of what I might lose if I transitioned.

After speaking at length with my family and closest friends, and undergoing intensive counseling and psychiatric evaluation, I made the tough choice to go through gender transition.



With hindsight, I like to say that “the guy” was the beta version, and Kimi is the “full release!”

Pre-transition 2006

Fortunately, via social media, I had managed to connect with others who had personal experience “navigating the system” to effectively accomplish the various aspects of gender transition: legal name change, and updating information and documents with various entities, such as Social Security, driver’s license, banking records, passport, medical records, etc. I listened to those who had navigated the processes most successfully!

Each entity has their own procedures and documents—finding out what they require, any fees that may be involved, and then honoring their processes, goes a long way toward more successful updates.

I must be very clear about it that there are aspects of life that transition helped resolve tremendously; and there are aspects of life that transition did not affect significantly, or at all.

- I still had to work to earn a living.
- I still occasionally get ill.
- When I crash on my snowboard or skis, it still hurts just as much (or even more) than it did when I was younger.
- My car still needs repairs.
- I still have to clean my living space and wash my clothes.
- I laugh when I hear something funny and cry when I hear something sad.

When asked the question, “What’s it like to be transgender?” my answer is simple:
“I get up in the morning, shower, eat breakfast, and go to work.”

What DID improve significantly was my internal feeling that I was now able to live authentically in my presentation, both to myself, and to the world.



Finding Authenticity

In 2016, I was invited to give a TEDx talk, which I entitled, "Walking in Another's Shoes." During development of that talk, it dawned on me how to explain the profound difference it was making in my life since undergoing transition.



TEDx Talk 2016

For many years I struggled with that false thinking but attempted to embrace that paradigm in order to get through life with less friction (admittedly much of which was of my own internal creation).

The process of doing what I could to satisfy the world's insistence on viewing me as male, although it often worked outwardly, was very contrary to my inner nature. Living in the male role was akin to constantly trying to engage in a foreign language (male), when my "native tongue" was actually feminine.

Virtually every outward expression of my existence had to be "translated" from my native feminine tongue to the outward expression of living in male mode.

Just like learning a foreign language, most people's brains do an extra translation, at least at first, from hearing a word in a foreign tongue, then internally translating the foreign word into the native tongue, before the mind fully comprehends the word. That led to a lot of anxiety and frustration, which was never-ending, even though I was able to put on a pretty convincing act.

For so many years, even though many of my instincts had been predominantly female, our world that heavily embraces a traditional gender binary had viewed me as male and expected me to conduct myself accordingly.

After transition, that additional translation step disappeared. Now I can simply be myself, true to my spirit, experiencing life as it comes, and live out my responses in my “native tongue.” And it only took me just a little over 55 years! (Snark intended!)



The question, “what would it be like to live authentically” has been answered—it’s been amazing, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything!

When I was first beginning my transition, I still was not completely comfortable with myself in public all the time. In previous situations, while living in a male role, there were many things I could (and did) take for granted. I noticed some major changes—like walking into a previously familiar environment that was no longer “familiar.”

Without actually being vocalized, the looks and thoughts came through loud and clear: Who is this tall blonde with the deep voice? WHAT is this tall blonde with the deep voice? Was I something to fear? Something to loathe? Something to hurt? And it was pretty obvious when someone viewed me as a “something,” rather than “someone.”

Some of these initial experiences kicked
my thinking into overdrive:

Is THIS what it feels like to be singled out for being
“different?” For looking or talking “different?”
Perhaps for having non-white skin, or loving “differently?”

My simple answer to this question was, if so, this totally sucks! It was time to get more engaged, for my life to somehow make a difference, and to apply my developing understanding of how challenging life can be to those who are viewed as “different.” And I know too many who experience life through perspectives that are far more challenging than anything I’ve ever experienced. But I knew I must DO SOMETHING!



I started volunteering every chance I got, whether it was feeding the homeless, staffing needle and unused medication disposal efforts, or sharing my story with any who had an appetite to listen.

At my ripe middle age, it was finally becoming obvious how much the political world can affect our daily lives. I was fortunate to meet some incredible people, who were doing wonderful things to help make the world a better place for so many.

When I attempted to volunteer with various political campaigns, it initially started bringing me back to my school days of never being chosen for the team. My constant pleas to “Pick me! Pick me!” were often met with questioning eyes and unspoken slights.

“Who is this tall blonde with the deeper-than-expected voice?” “I’m not comfortable working with someone I’ve never seen before.” “I’m not comfortable working with someone who has no political experience.” I was really beginning to question whether this was an arena I should even step into!

Then I attended a presentation by a couple sharp young volunteers working with the 2012 Obama campaign. As had happened too many times before, they asked if anyone was interested in volunteering. Again, I raised my hand and pleaded, "Pick me!" And, finally, this time they did!

I learn best by doing, and I was game for anything that needed to be done—Phone banking? Let's see what this is like! Canvassing? Let's give it a try!

The next thing I knew, I was running phone banks and canvassing out of the local central committee office. The lead organizer realized how well I knew the area, and how effectively I was able to organize volunteers. I was suddenly very busy and very involved!



Skip forward a few months...Obama was elected to his second term, and I was elected to my first of four terms as Chair of our local Democratic Central Committee. That led to being elected to the position of Rural Nevada Democratic Caucus Chair, which opened many doors around the state of Nevada.

Most recently I ran for the office on Nevada Lt. Governor. Although my primary campaign was not successful, the people I was able to meet around Nevada, and the experiences I gained were absolutely amazing and humbling. I have no regrets.



Kimi Campaign Image

That leads to the question:
what's next?

My answer: we can often surprise
ourselves and others when we
put our minds to doing something.

Let's find out,
and let's do it
together!

Thank you Kimi for sharing your story, wisdom and personal journey.
Your courage combined with your desire to make the world a better place for
everyone creates an example we all need to follow.



Kimi

Kimi:
Positive Example,
Community Leader,
Champion of Human Rights
and
Bursting Through Member

Knowledge

Gender dysphoria is the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity to be at variance with one's birth sex.

Gender identity and recognition typically begin between the ages of 2-4 years. Given this developmental norm, it makes sense that the recognition of one's internal gender differences would occur during early childhood. In some cases, young children experience gender dysphoria for a short period as part of their development.

Cultural changes in understanding and acceptance of gender identity have allowed recent generations to be more open about gender dysphoria. As acceptance of transgender individuals increases, younger generations feel more able to express aspects of themselves that prior generations felt compelled to hide, including gender dysphoria.

Power

Trans Rights Organizations To Donate
To Right Now



DR SHANNON WONG LERNER

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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.

CONTACT ME AT: [DRSHANNONWL.COM](https://drshannonwl.com) | FOLLOW ME [@DR_SHANNON_WL](https://www.instagram.com/dr_shannon_wl)

It's (Past) Time for Allies to Come Out!

by Steve Petersen

I wrote “It’s Past Time for Allies to Come Out” as a manifesto when Bursting Through launched. It was published as an opinion piece in the Des Moines Register, shared on numerous blogs and created a different conversation that has continued to this day.

Allies read the piece and responded by saying, “I didn’t realize what was happening in the Queer community. I AM an ally, what should I do?”

This led to Bursting Through’s Ten Easy Activism for allies and the creation of National Out Ally Day on November 13 each year. The **FIRST** National Out Ally day is approaching and I thought I would share the manifesto that put us all on this path.

I am both humbled and proud of how Bursting Through members have come together to share their stories, create different conversations and be agents of change but this is just the beginning.

We have shown that we are better together and I hope everyone will come together again on November 13, 2022 and attend National Out Ally Day, live or livestream.



THE day to celebrate, activate and empower everyone who identifies as an LGBTQIA+ ally.

November 13, 2022 6:00-9:00 PM - PST

Attend live or livestream

[Purchase Tickets to National Out Ally Day](#)

I am a gay man, identify as gay and use the word Queer when talking about my community because it is the most inclusive word.

If you are straight, you don't have to know me. You could exclude me from your social group, you could refuse to hire me or keep me in the closet at work. You could not invite me to family functions to ensure no one is uncomfortable. All of these things are simple to do and unless you told someone, they would never know or even think about it.

5.6% of U.S. adults identify as Queer. (This number was updated to 7.1% after the 2020 Census) An average of 55% of heterosexual adults identify themselves as allies, yet Queer people are nearly four times as likely to be victims of violent crimes than the straight community. I am far from good with numbers but I don't think this adds up.

If we are so aligned and evolved why do more than 1.8 million Queer youths in the US seriously consider suicide each year? Why do Queer teens make up 40% of the homeless youth population? Why do one in five Queer adult workers report being told they should dress in a more feminine or masculine manner? Why is leadership apathy the top reason Queer professionals don't report negative workplace comments about Queer people?

I sincerely believe it is because the Queer community's straight allies do not know. I refuse to believe straight allies don't care and are just giving lip service to the issue. I refuse to believe straight allies don't care and are

just giving lip service to the issue. I truly believe this compassionate population wants to do right by their Queer loved ones but simply do not fully realize the challenges those loved ones face or how to actually help. They don't realize that loving someone who is Queer is not enough. The love and acceptance our allies give is great, necessary and appreciated but it is just the beginning. Many allies view it as the end.

Like it or not, this country is fighting a cultural war. The lens I see it through is the Queer/Straight relationship because my life journey has given me a unique perspective of this country and its people. I grew up in rural Iowa, attended Iowa State, and lived all around the Midwest and on both coasts. I am proud to say I have friends who range from those who identify as redneck to identifying as woke and everywhere in between.

I strongly believe the Queer community has more allies than not, that there are more good people than bad, but right now the bad people are better organized and louder.

If you are a straight ally to the Queer community, it's time for you to come OUT. You can no longer be passive. You are either ACTIVELY HOMOPHOBIC, PASSIVELY HOMOPHOBIC or FIGHTING HOMOPHOBIA.

It is not incredibly complex and the choice is yours.

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.



NATIONAL OUT ALLY DAY

CELEBRATE- ACTIVATE- EMPOWER

November 13, 2022

SHOWTIME: 7:00 PM PST

In Person or Livestream

National Out Ally Day is the day to Celebrate, Activate, and Empower all LGBTQIA+ Allies. Created to connect the LGBTQIA+ Community and Allies, this event includes a 3 Act Show during which you'll learn what it means to be an OUT Ally, hear stories of allyship from Queer and Straight experiences, discover Easy Activism steps for Allies and help create sustainable equality for the LGBTQIA+ community.



[Purchase Tickets to National Out Ally Day](#)

NATIONAL OUT ALLY DAY

EMPOWERMENT PANEL



Kara Jenkins

Government Official and
Las Vegas, Nevada
Mayoral Candidate 2024



Rev. Nicholas L. Neubauer, LCSW

Priest at All Saints Todos
Los Santos Episcopal Church
Las Vegas, Nevada



Michael Colby Doerfler

Heart of Education Award
Nominee and CCSD Teacher
Las Vegas, Nevada

Additional Empowerment Panelists will be announced soon. Follow Bursting Through on social media to stay updated.



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NATIONAL OUT ALLY DAY

TALENT

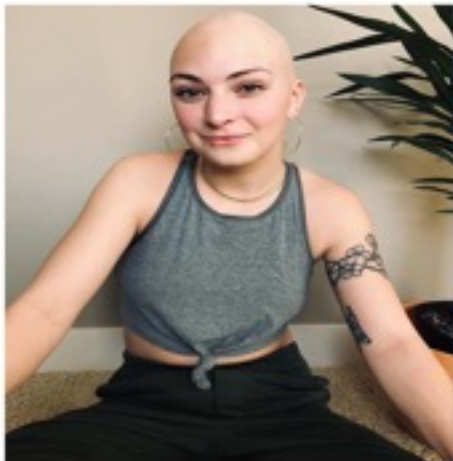


Jason Mann & Lauren Davis

Burnline

Rock/Country/Blues
band renowned for gritty,
honest lyrics and delivery.

[Burnline YouTube Channel](#)



Lily DeTaeye

Lily DeTaeye

Harmonica-wielding
singer/songwriter and
composer of the original
National Out Ally Day Anthem.

[Lili DeTaeye YouTube Channel](#)

Additional Talent will be announced soon.
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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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BURSTING through **MOMENTS** **THE COUSIN** from Ashley



Ashley

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 Cousin” is a moment from Bursting Through Member Ashley told by Connections editor Steve Petersen.

While developing Bursting Through I need some branded items to use as gifts, and for public relations and general brand-building.

It just happened to be in the middle of a global pandemic so I was having problems sourcing the items myself. I realized I needed some help so I Googled “branded stuff” because I have a brand building background and know proper terminology.

I’m a sucker for great company names and logos. The coolest name that came up was “Gorilla Marketing”. I thought AWESOME. I love gorilla marketing tactics and they had a really cool green gorilla in their logo so I was hooked.

I filled out the “contact us” information. I explained that I was a start up and had a pretty good idea of what I wanted but needed help executing and was open to suggestions they had as well. I hit send and went on with my day.

The next day I got a call from a sales rep named Ashley. We breezed through some polite small talk and got down to business.

I began by explaining Bursting Through. I was still in development and hadn’t found all the right words but said something like, “Bursting Through is about celebrating the

gay/straight relationship. I believe there is something pretty extraordinary in the ordinary of these relationships but they are rarely talked about. Bursting through represents the moment where compassion and empathy align and love comes Bursting Through.

Sales rep Ashley said, "Before we go any further I want to stop and tell you that I love your business idea." I was flattered but also a bit skeptical. I mean, she seemed sincere, but she's a sales rep and I've worked with many sales rep who have charmed me into bigger sales orders.

She went on to say, "My kid's godparents or their 'Nina's' is my cousin Raven and her wife Tina. My husband and I choose them because they have taught us so much about love and we wanted our children to experience that too."

In this completely unexpected Bursting Through moment I knew I had found the right company and the right sales rep and that Ashley, her husband and the "Nina's" were putting a little more love into the world just by being a family.

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

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*](#)

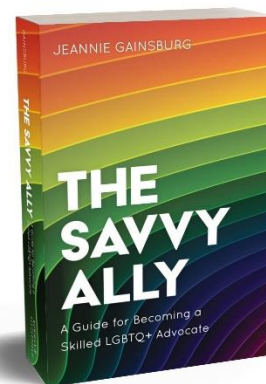


[*Play THE SINGER*](#)

THE SAVVY ALLY:

A GUIDE FOR BECOMING A SKILLED LGBTQ+ ADVOCATE

BY JEANNIE GAINSBURG



Bursting with passion and humor, *The Savvy Ally* is a treasure trove for allies to the LGBTQ+ communities.



Tips for respectfully sharing, gathering, and using pronouns

The most current information on identities and LGBTQ+ language

Tools for navigating difficult conversations

Best practices for creating LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces



LGBTQ+ etiquette, including common language bloopers to avoid

Appropriate actions to take after messing up

**"This is a beautiful book. A necessary book.
An unputdownable book. Please read this book."
—Alison Smith, Lambda Literary Award Winner and
author of *Name All the Animals***

The Savvy Ally

Brady: Gen Z

story from Brady



Brady

“Brady: Gen Z” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/ Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring topics important to the Queer community and Allies.

According the Center for American Progress (CAP), as of 2020, young people between the ages of 18 and 24, also known as Generation Z, comprise around 20 percent of the U.S. adult population. They are digital natives who grew up under the first Black president of the United States, witnessed marriage equality become the law of the land, and were galvanized by the atrocities committed by the Trump administration.

Data from a nationally representative 2020 survey by the Center for American Progress and NORC at the University of Chicago reveal that LGBTQI+ youth face high levels of discrimination in school, work, and housing, which leads to large-scale financial struggles and poor mental health. Overall, 57 percent of Generation Z respondents reported experiencing some form of discrimination in the year prior to the survey, compared with 42 percent of Millennials, 30 percent of Gen X respondents, and 19 percent of Baby Boomers.

Brady is a 21 year old college student studying linguistics and economics at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He grew up in an affluent suburb of Chicago, loves politics and music and is a classically trained pianist. He has an older brother and younger sister who both chose to go to college in the States but Brady, as a member of the Queer Community, made a different decision. Bursting Through Connections wanted to find out more about Brady's journey, his experiences and what the future might hold for him.

Q. What is the first emotion you experienced when you found the courage to tell someone that you're gay?

A. I first told someone I was gay in the 6th grade. I was afraid to tell anybody which in retrospect seems kind of ridiculous because overall the community was pretty supportive, but nevertheless I was afraid because something that felt so private to, me everyone was going to know about.

I just don't like people knowing my business and this secret, my sexuality, was kind of an imaginary friend. How you identify with yourself is a pretty special thing.



Actually, I was outed rather than really coming out. I met a new friend in the 6th grade and we were pretty close and I told her I was gay. We then got into a fight and she outed me.

I would have liked to have kept my sexuality with me, in the closet, a bit longer before it was public. After being outed, I more or less owned it. There wasn't really anything I could do because it was pretty obvious anyway so I owned it but at that moment I felt embarrassed. I was embarrassed because other people would make fun of me and gay people and I didn't want to be judged by something that I could not control.

Q. Being Queer in the current climate of this country is difficult despite decades of progress made by the LGBTQIA+ community. I know there are a lot of people of my generation who think it is so much easier for your generation and in some ways it is but that doesn't make your journey and your learning less significant. What do we need to know about growing up gay through your lens and experience?

A. From a young age it made me happy and gave me comfort when I would see a gay male couple in the media or on TV. That is something that appealed to me since I was 6. I think for sure having that representation has made it more mainstream and that is good. I would also say having visible members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the mainstream helped me shape who I wanted to be as a person and a gay man.



Brady and his Dad

I remember as a kid watching a movie where Neil Patrick Harris kissed a woman and my dad was like, "Oh he's gay" and I remember thinking to myself, "Wow, that's me."

Q. Bursting Through invites the Queer Community and its Allies to have a different conversation. From your experience, what is the conversation the Queer community needs to be having with our straight Allies that we are NOT having? For example, what is that conversation with your family and friends that you are NOT having that would create the best relationship possible and will make you feel constantly emotionally safe?

A. I would say first and foremost that yes, we have our differences in that we love different people or may identify our gender differently than how we were born, but we are the same people that want pretty much the same things deep down.

I think the biggest conversation that's missing is that there seems to be a coordinated, sophisticated, well funded effort in the United States to attack not only LGBTQIA+ rights but our norms in society and the rights of other groups.



For example, my mother. My whole life she has told us she is pro choice, pro marriage equality and pro whatever but she voted Republican up until 2016 and in 2018, I believe she voted for the Republicans in the midterms.

Basically I had to tell her, “You might think you are doing a good thing by voting for a tax cut for the billionaires, stuff that you are not going to benefit from but you think you are. But when you vote for these ‘fiscal policies’ you are voting away my rights, your rights and your daughter's rights by voting for the Republicans.”

During the pandemic I started getting laser focused on politics and was really disgusted with the Trump administration and with the state of politics. I was having dinner conversations with my parents during the pandemic and the thoughts that I was sharing about LGBTQIA+ rights and rights in general became more and more like drawing hard lines in the sand.



This led to conversations where I let them know I do not respect people who don't respect my rights and it was definitely a hard thing to say to my parents that they need to act like they care about my civil rights. I would say I was emboldened by my anger.

Q. In 2021 there were more anti-LGBTQIA+ bills passed in the United States than in any other year in history. 2022 is on track to break that record. You grew up in the Midwest and go to college in Canada. Is there a connection between what is happening in legislation and your decision to leave the States?

A. I grew up being told that I lived in the best place, the best country, the best everything in the world and I bought into that until I was maybe in 6th grade. Then I realized there are a bunch of other places in the world where people's rights are respected, there are higher qualities of life than there are in the States.

The reason I went to university in Canada was to have an international experience. But the biggest guiding factor in my decision to come to Canada for college was that after I graduate I will have the freedom to live in Canada if I choose or other countries abroad because I will have a visa to do so.

After I graduate I really have no desire to go back to the United States as it is. I have a lot of nostalgia for Illinois and I think it's a great place. Places like Illinois, California and New York, the powerhouse States, continue to be bastions of human decency but I don't think that the national dialogue, the country as a whole, can work all of this out in a timely manner and peaceful way.

There are a lot of issues in the United States I want to escape.

Q. When someone says they are an ally to the LGBTQIA+ community, what do you expect of them?

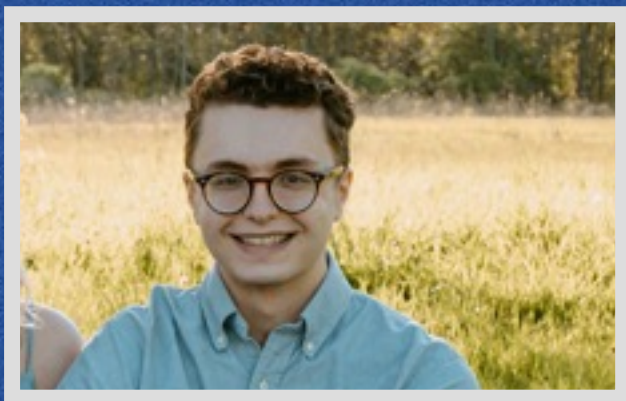
A. I expect they act and they vote. I expect that they will listen to what I have to say and my feelings about my identity. I expect that they are outspoken when they witness homophobia and hatred in their daily lives.

Q. What are the three most important things my generation (both Queer and allies) needs to know about your generation of Queer people?

A.

1. There might not be as much immediate danger for Queer people now but it is still scary to live an open honest life and own your identity.
2. We want the same things other generations do. I want to live long with someone that I love.
3. Vote what you believe.

Thank you Brady for sharing your story, your honesty and having the courage to have the difficult conversations about human rights and equality. I hope you find your way back to the United States in the future because we will be better with you.



Brady

Brady:
Gen ZER,
Independent Thinker,
Brave Human Being
and
Bursting Through Member

Knowledge

Generation Z refers to the generation born between 1997-2012, following millennials.

Generation Z, is the youngest, most ethnically-diverse, and largest generation in American history, comprising 27% of the US population.

They are tech-tethered free spirits who have never known the world without the internet and have endured schooling in the age of COVID. They're also powerful, resilient, and ready to take on the world.

Power

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GEN Z

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

Hospice.

Its True Meaning and Experience

Story from Vivian



Vivian

“Hospice, Its True Meaning and Experience” is one in a series of Important Interviews by Connections Editor/ Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring topics that impact the LGBTQIA+ community and straight allies.

Vivian is a business development and patient service representative at Nathan Adelson Hospice in Nevada. Vivian believes everyone deserves love and care. She truly sees the world through rose colored glasses and her purpose is to make her corner of the world a better place. Working in hospice has given her that opportunity.

Connections editor, Steve Petersen met Vivian at the Pahrump Proud festival. They spoke about the myths around hospice, which Vivian dispelled, and how Nathan Adelson Hospice serves the LGBTIQ+ community—welcoming everyone with love and respect. It was an important, powerful, heartfelt conversation, one that needs to be shared with you.

Q. Words have power and hospice is a word that evokes fear and panic for most people. What can you tell us about the word hospice and the hospice experience to counter that response?

A. Hospice is the Latin for “hospitum” meaning hospitality or place of rest and protection for the ill and weary. The word has been misused or misrepresented by unethical practices that have resulted in unnecessary costs, such as fraud, waste and abuse of the Medicare System and other insurance programs.

Patients who elect hospice care are an especially vulnerable population. They have the right to be safe from abuse, neglect, mistreatment, and theft of their belongings. If a hospice causes harm or fails to prevent suffering caused by others, patients are then denied their basic human rights.

Hospice has a responsibility to provide any and all services associated with the patient’s terminal illness, including making sure the patient’s rights and care are respected.

As a hospice worker my desire is for every patient to receive the best end of life care there is to offer. Our team of hospice workers have the heart of a hospice caregiver. We all have the same goal, which is to provide the best care for our patients.



It is natural to be afraid when we're facing the end of our lives. The lack of knowledge creates fear. There is the fear about when is the right time to make the decision to call hospice. There are "what if" questions. What if there's more that can be done or what if there is a cure I haven't looked into yet.

Education is the key to getting the answers that a patient and family needs to learn about the disease process and what comfort care means for a patient. Getting the information can help prevent the overwhelming emotional, financial, and physical consequences for the patient and family.

Hospice is here to provide comfort and support. Hospice does not speed up the end of life process. Sometimes patients and family fear we are going to give them too much medication and the patient will become overly sedated. Patients and families want to be able to communicate with each other for as long as possible.

Hospice alleviates the fear of how a patient will get the medical equipment and medications needed with a terminal illness. It allows families to be able to take care of their loved one in the comfort of their home.

Hospice educates patients and family about hospice by dispelling any myths or beliefs related to hospice. Hospice is not about dying, it's about the quality of life at the end of life. It's about shifting goals from curative to managing pain and comfort. Time with hospice helps patients finish up with business and be able to let go and feel at peace.



There have been so many times when a family member will stop by our office, or see one of us in a store or at a health fair and tell us how grateful they were to have had our help and wished they had called us sooner. They say they couldn't have taken care of their loved one without our help.

Q. The Nathan Adelson website states, "It's our vision that no one ends the journey of life alone, afraid or in pain." What does that mean to the person at the end of life and how do those words translate into comfort and action?

A. As a team of experts in our field on end of life care, we want our patients to have confidence in what we are able to provide for them. We are the lifeline for our patients and their caregivers. If a patient or caregiver calls at 2:00 AM and needs help there will be someone on the other end to offer assistance. Patients and families can shift the fear of care to our specially trained hospice support team. Our team is made of the following:

- Certified Nursing Assistant to help with the patients' personal care.
- Licensed Practical Nurses to provide triage care in easing the pain and symptoms of the patients and deciding when additional medical measures are necessary.
- Registered Nurse Case Managers to provide direct hospice nursing care to patients in order to maintain the highest level of comfort and quality of life, and regularly assess for patient care needs.
- Trained Hospice Chaplain to honor and nurture spiritual needs.
- Social Worker to advocate for each patient's end of life wishes and help navigate the emotional issues of late stage illnesses. They also help families in accessing other available local services and resources for additional support.
- Physicians and nurse practitioners oversee the patients' hospice care team.

All of us have been present as a patient has taken their last breath. It is an honor and a blessing that we were invited into this person's life. We love to hear about their life and stories. The jobs that they did, where they lived and grew up. We cherish the time we have spent with patients.

As you can see with all of our support there is no reason for anyone to be alone.

Q. Nathan Adelson is quite visible in Queer community. Why does Nathan Adelson consciously include the Queer community, a group that is often excluded, from your company's conversation and mission?

A. Illness does not discriminate.

Our team members are culturally diverse, with different ethnicities, religions, and sensitivities. The patient is encouraged to be open about their identity, including but not limited to sexual orientation and gender identity, without fear of discrimination or inferior treatment.



Part of the hospice experience is supporting the family and loved ones during the final days and the bereavement process. Hospice is here to honor and support loved ones as well as the patient and understand who to include in the decision making process. Being sensitive to a patient's identity is so important in supporting a "good death" or a death that is difficult, and painful with a great deal of unresolved feelings.

If we are not recognizing patients and their loved ones' relationship we can intensify anxieties, and negative emotions felt during such a vulnerable time. As a hospice worker we are here to ease the pain, and make our patient as comfortable as possible. We are here to answer questions, hold a hand, give a hug or just listen.

Patients are struggling with an end of life illness, they needn't have the anxiety of who they are as a person. I read something the other day that said, "Who you are is welcome here." That's a powerful statement. The hospice heart welcomes all.

Our team members look beyond appearance, living conditions, lifestyle, beliefs, race and religions. We truly just see a person needing help. We all believe in the work we do as hospice workers. This is a specialized field and not everyone can do this job. The ones that have the hospice heart calling wear their hearts on their sleeve and give their all to their patients.



Q. Family relationships can be complex under the best of circumstances. How do you create an environment that is safe for both family and the patient as they might deal with conflict or unresolved issues at the end of life?

A. Hospice is very patient-driven care, so we work with the patient to address their needs, concerns, and emotional situations at the end of life and this includes important relationships. For example, if a patient's wishes are for family to not be involved, we honor that wish.

If, on the other hand, a patient desires to reunite, we will work to facilitate a meeting. A patient may want to allow family to know their health status but not see the family and therefore, we will be as emotionally supportive of all involved within the parameters of the patient's wishes.



Q. What are the three biggest misconceptions about hospice that you want to correct?

A. There are many misconceptions and myths surrounding hospice. One of the biggest is that hospice is only for people who are expected to pass away in a few days or weeks. This kind of misunderstanding can discourage people from learning more about hospice services. Choosing hospice care doesn't mean a patient is giving up hope or that death is around the corner. Hospice can help stabilize a patient's medical condition and help manage pain. The reality is that

there are many people in hospice that are receiving care for 6 months or longer. There are patients that have had their condition improve and may be discharged from hospice care.

Hospice is not a place. Hospice is a philosophy. Hospice is care given at a patient's home or any place that is called home. Hospice can be performed in a care facility or adult assisted living place as well as at home.

Another misconception is that hospice is too expensive. This is always a worry with patients. People that are covered under Medicare Part A usually pay nothing. Most insurance plans, HMOs, and managed care plans also include coverage for hospice. Medicaid fee for service covers hospice care.

Patients and family/friends can always contact us to discuss what hospice services can do for them and loved ones. Once questions are answered and how hospice can be there for them, then informed decisions can be made.

Thank you Vivian for sharing this incredibly valuable and enlightening information with us. I now have a much deeper understanding of hospice and how essential it is for all of us.



Vivian

Vivian

Caregiver, Compassionate Soul,
Beautiful Human Being
and
Bursting Through Member.

Knowledge

Hospice is not a place. Hospice is a philosophy.

Of all patients receiving hospice care, 66 percent received care at their own home. Only 27.4 percent received care at an inpatient location.

The majority of adults in need of end of life care have chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases (38.5%), cancer (34%), chronic respiratory diseases (10.3%), AIDS (5.7%) and diabetes (4.6%).

Over 70 percent of families would rate their hospice care for their loved one as excellent.

Power

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