

BURSTINGthrough® Connections

for the Queer Community and Allies

issue 5- march 2023

THE RELATIONSHIP ISSUE

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Wesley Mills aka Jol D. Principle

Photo courtesy of Sugar Cube Entertainment



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**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 March issue of Bursting Through Connections. In 2023 each issue of Connections will focus on central themes. This first issue of the year is focused on relationships.

Relationships are at the core of all our daily experiences. It's our relationship with money that decides if we pack a lunch or buy lunch, our relationship with our colleagues that informs what the work day may be like and our relationship with those we love that helps shape how we see the world around us.

Putting together this issue opened my heart and mind in unexpected ways and made me think differently about the relationships I have. I learned so much about the power of love, the power of family and the power we all have within us when our relationships are healthy.

Bursting Through is about us as a community and our stories. That relationship is incredibly important to me and is unfolding to be one of the most important relationships in my life. I am excited to watch it grow and see where it takes us all.

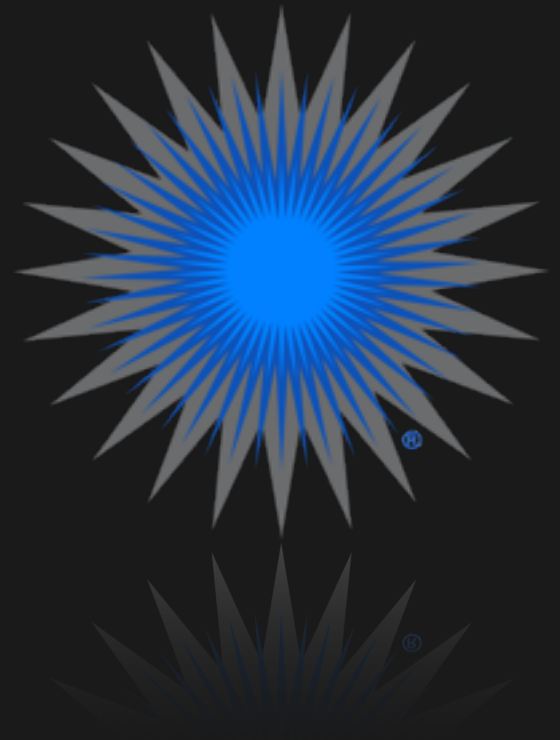
Please enjoy our first relationship issue and share with a like-minded friend who you feel would want to know about Bursting Through, its members, their stories and how to take action.

Take care, Stay Safe and Speak out.



Steve Petersen (he/him)
Founder, Bursting Through
and Connections Editor

[Email Steve](#)



Billy's Blues

by WILLIAM SQUIRE



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

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FAMILY ACTIVISM

Quiet Little Protests

story from Wes



Wes and his wife, Sheri

“Family Activism: Quiet Little Protests” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/ Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring topics important to the Queer community and Allies.

Wes grew up in “the outskirts of the middle of nowhere” - 13 miles from a town of 2,000 people and currently lives in the Chicago suburbs where he works selling packaging to big companies in the healthcare sector. Wes loves connecting with people, both professionally and personally and hearing their stories.

Wes and his wife Sheri have launched three young adult children into the world. They have navigated the conventional challenges of family and parenthood with an additional layer—their second son being openly gay.

In this Important Interview, Wes talks about his family and how they are maneuvering through this time when the Queer community is under attack.

Q. Tell us about being a Dad.

A. Being a dad is weird because I can close my eyes and see a 24 year old as a 3 year old, my 21 year old as a little guy and my 20 year old as an infant. All my kids are grown, but I still remember and time travel back to when they were little. I can see very specific things about the past but I know it's not that time anymore.

If you want to know what makes life go fast, it's kids. The time is just gone. I had dinner with my oldest son the other night and he is talking about getting married and buying a house. He's got a great job with a great company and I'm like, "Where's the little kid that just took his first steps and was bald until he was four?"

I realized it was me as a parent that got to help shape my kids and that's the best thing in life. It's such a cliché but it really is an honor to be a parent to my kids.

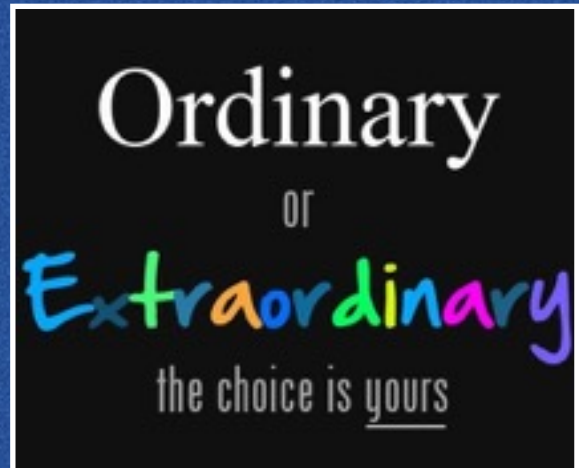


Wes and his family

Q. How would you describe your relationship with each of your kids?
What are the similarities in each relationship and where do they differ?

A. Wonderful, but also hard. I had to let them be who they are and parent them accordingly but also balance how their actions affected us as a family. The hard part is letting them grow and letting them succeed and fail on their own.

One of the things I read before I was a parent was if you want to have extraordinary children, you have to let them be extraordinary and that has influenced my parenting. Should I squash a really annoying habit of one of my kids or is that the thing that is going to make them the next Steve Jobs?



I had to let them be who, what and how they are and try not to tell them who, what and how they are. I tried to not limit them based on my expectations as a dad and let them experiment, play and live in the real world and to think for themselves.

How that surfaced in each child was different because they are different but the foundation we laid as parents was the same for each. One of my kids said the other day, "Hey, one of the things you and Mom did for us was made us think for ourselves and that shaped everything I think about."

We had a rule that carried through every level of their upbringing. We would give our opinion so they would know what we thought, but taught them they needed to think for themselves.

We believe that free thinkers and free spirits kind of rule the world and we wanted to create that in our kids. It's been an interesting ride.

Q. Tell us a bit about your feelings and responsibilities being a Dad to a gay son.

A. Again, I needed to let him be who he is. I did that with all my kids and felt a responsibility to pave the way for each of them. We chose a parenting style that created an environment and family culture that allowed our children to express who they are.

Our parenting style had nothing to do with one child being gay, we were doing that before he came out. My gay son and I talk about why he has to be the gay son, why he just can't be the son. My gay son is no more special than my straight son or daughter.



Wes's kids

There is a story that comes to mind from when he was going through confirmation. I was raised Presbyterian and my wife was raised Catholic. At the time we were practicing Catholics and that was important to my wife's family and us to a degree. As he was going through confirmation in 7th and 8th grade he was already out.

He came to me and said, "Do you know what they say about gay people at our church? I'm not going to sit there and say yes sir to bad things they say about me and people like me when I know it's not true. I'm not going to continue with the classes or get confirmed." My wife and I accepted that.

Around this time, my mother-in-law came to visit. In general conversation she asked about confirmation and we let her know our son would not be getting

confirmed. She asked why. About the same time my son appeared. At that time, he always wore a pink ID bracelet with HOMO beads that a friend had made for him.

His grandma noticed the bracelet and said, “Oh, what’s that?” and he showed her. She read the word homo and you could almost see her mind working and her processing what she had just seen. That is how my son came out to his grandma and also let her know he wasn’t getting confirmed.



We were all naturally worried about what she, a 72 year old very Catholic grandma, was going to think, feel or even say. To her credit she took it well and simply said, “That’s great. You be who you are.”

We didn’t make him hide who he was from his grandma to make it easier for her. In that instance and always we let him be who he is.

**The family culture we had created
allowed my son to have that
uncomfortable but necessary moment
with his grandma instead of cutting her
off or making him hide himself while
she visited.**

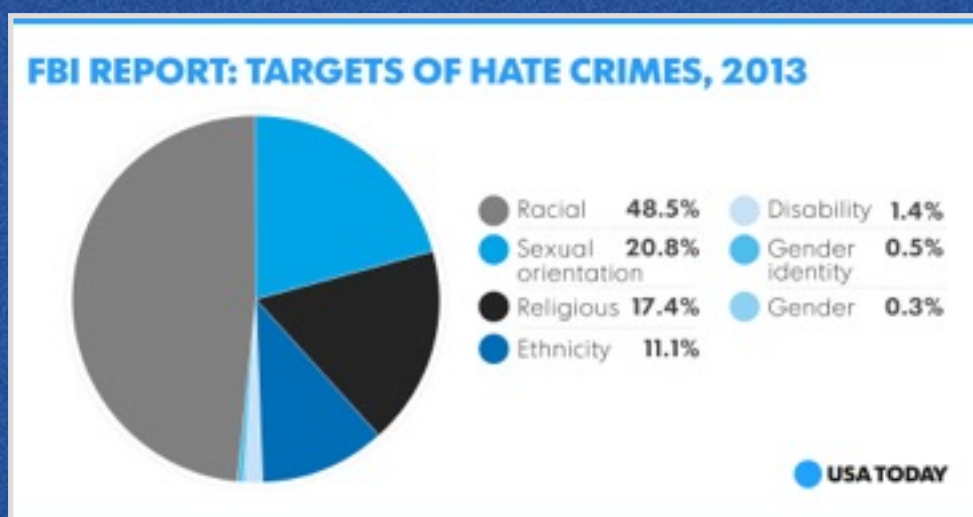
Q. Current social and political issues make it a difficult and complex time for everyone and being a member of the Queer community adds another layer to that. There are many well-documented statistics that support that such as:

- 40% of LGBTQ+ youth have considered suicide in the previous year.
- 16% of gay and lesbian youth and 11% of bisexual youth have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, compared to 7% of straight youth.
- 29% of gay or lesbian youth and 31% of bisexual youth have been bullied on school property, compared to 17% of straight youth.

When you hear these facts, how does that make you feel and where do those feelings take you?

A. **WOW! Those statistics bother me. They should bother everyone.**

I remember when we found out on social media that our son was out publicly but he hadn't come out to us. My wife started crying and I asked her why. I said, "Are you crying because he is gay?" She said, "No, I'm crying because I don't want him to have a hate crime against him."



My reaction was different. I reacted with I don't care that he is gay, I just don't want the world to treat him like shit and then I moved on to how I help him live in the world as it is.

How do I let him know he is accepted and loved while also letting him know the world is not always going to be a safe space for him because he is gay?

That was and is my biggest concern.

I know what is happening is real and we have first-hand experiences of things that confirm that reality. It's just part of his and our life.

One of the things my wife and I learned was that we had neighbors and friends that presented as very supportive and open about our son being gay, but when their family member or close friend's kid came out their behavior was very different. They treated it as a tragedy.

Apparently, it was ok for my kid to be Queer, but it wasn't ok for theirs. I wondered if their support all along had been performative? Finding out we had people in our lives who lived an "I'm supportive but..." lifestyle has been really eye opening.

I don't go around telling people I have a gay son but I always let people know I have a gay son. It's like a flag I wave to let people know to not say anything stupid but it doesn't always work, especially at work.

I have a 72 year old co-worker that consistently drops the "F**" bomb on me during team meetings. He uses, "Hey F**" to begin a conversation because he thinks it's funny. I have had two or three conversations telling him it isn't funny, it's inappropriate. He knows I have a gay son and even if I didn't it wouldn't be cool to say that word to me. Nobody in the company will do anything about it because "that's just him."



Long answer short, these statistics scare the shit out of me for many reasons but one is because I don't think my family is done growing. I hope to have grandchildren someday. I could have grandchildren who are gay or trans and who knows what kind of country they will be born into.

Q. How does all the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, violence, political and cultural attacks on the Queer community affect your family as a whole? Is it something you discuss as a family?

A. We actually have discussed this a lot as a family. Some of the most difficult conversations we had as a family were about our values, our actions, how we vote and how that affected someone we love. We started looking at things through a different lens and became a family of activists.

For example, we were always pretty conservative politically but we had a conversation that led us to actually read the Republican Party Platform. In doing so we realized that we actually didn't agree with ANYTHING we read about the Republican Party.

We don't march and carry a flag in the Pride Parade but we have taken the time to educate ourselves. We have learned what companies and organizations DO NOT deserve our support and hard earned money. We decided as a family to not go to Florida or Texas for anything. We used to be three times a week Chick-fil-A people and now we eat at Cane's. We no longer shop at Home Depot.



As a family we have all these quiet little protests and we don't have to announce it to the world. We learned we don't have to be vocal or verbal to be allies, we can just do the right thing and shut up about it.

The biggest impact LGBTQ+ hate has had on our family is that our gay son moved out of the United States. He now goes to college and lives in Montreal, Canada. There are pros and cons to him living in Canada but he doesn't feel like he is going to get hate crimed everyday, he feels safe.

Having a child and a sibling live in a different country so they can feel safe has an impact on a family .



Wes's son at college

Q. As a dad with a gay son, what do straight allies, other parents and Queer kids need to know that they don't?

A. You have to change your behavior if you want to see change elsewhere.

It takes effort to do the right thing and not be concerned about what others think but it's worth it.

Everyone in the Queer Community already has a bumpy road ahead of them, they don't need their parents making it bumpier.

Thank you Wes for sharing your story, your family and teaching us about the importance of approaching activism as a family. We wish health and happiness to you and your family.



Wes and his wife, Sheri

WES :
Loving Dad,
Quiet Activist,
Awesome Human Being
and
Bursting Through Member



Wes and his second son



Wes and Sheri with their kids



Wes and his daughter

Knowledge

9.5% of the population of youth ages 13-17 in the United States self identify as LGBTQ+.

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

Walmart donated at least \$442,000 to 121 politicians who support anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, but at the same time, has a Pride section where you can buy LGBTQ+ themed product.

Activism means helping those without power who are experiencing something harmful that could be stopped by societal action.

Power

[27 Companies Supporting the LGBTQ+ Community Every Day](#)

[A gay man's mass email to his family about activism.](#)

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.

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

UNDER ATTACK

The Show Must Go On!

story from Wesley

“UNDER ATTACK, The Show Must Go On” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring topics important to the Queer community and Allies.



Wesley AKA Jol D. Principal

Wesley is the show director and a male entertainer at the Garden Nightclub in Des Moines, IA. He performs under the stage name Jol D. Principle. Performing as a male in costume, make up and everything that comes with it is a form of drag. The difference is Wesley (Jol) maintains a male presence instead of presenting the more traditional female presence.

Wesley is originally from Minneapolis. He has been performing for 17 years, starting as a backup dancer supporting drag queens before realizing males could perform as male leads. Wesley also got involved in the pageant world, entering and winning competitions throughout the United States. His many titles include Mr. Gay United States 2014, Mr. Gay Iowa USofA 2016, and Mr. Heart of America Continental 2012.

In this important interview, Wesley talks about his relationship with his stage persona and with his audience. He also discussed his responsibility as a show director while the drag community is under attack.

Q. This issue of Connections is about relationships. Tell us about your relationship with Jol D. Principal, your stage persona?

A. My relationship with Jol D. Principle is a close and interesting one. It appears that Jol and Wesley are the same person but in actuality they are two separate people acting as one.

Before performing I was a skinny, awkward kid. I did sports, I was in the band and I did choir. I was a nerd 100%. I really did not know what I wanted to do in life. I was really shy but still outgoing at the same time. Being raised by a single mother with two younger siblings I really could not do what I wanted. I had to be smart and strategic. My mother wanted me to be successful. I came out at age 21 and that is when I discovered drag queens and a whole new world.



Wesley- then and now



Jol



Jol

When I discovered male leads I wanted to do it as well. But, when I started performing I wanted to create someone different from Wesley.

I didn't think Wesley was cool enough or good enough and I wanted to be someone that was cool and someone people would like. I did not like the skin I was in. I wanted to be someone who I never thought I could be—someone to love.

I sat down and wrote out a new personality with characteristics I thought Wesley could never be. I ultimately created an alter ego. All I needed was a name. I talked to someone who in a sense is one of my drag mothers – Bebe Zahara Benet—to help me come up with a name. I wanted something good. Bebe came up with and gave me the name Jol Duvan.

Once I completed all the needed steps, I started performing and I started becoming who I created. Sometimes people could not tell the difference between Wesley and Jol. I literally created a split personality. I carried myself differently. In a sense Jol is a protector of Wesley. Jol is an extrovert and Wesley is an introvert. Over time Wesley and Jol combined to become one but also lived separately. It was easy for me to do because I am a Gemini – I am already two people.

Wesley is there every day but when the weekend comes and I start to get ready for a show, Jol comes out. I start to apply the face and BAM—Jol is here. We are a total Yin and Yang and work in harmony... somewhat.

Over the years I have perfected my stage persona as Jol and discovered who I am on and off stage. I love it all and enjoy it all.



Jol

Q. How would you describe your relationship with the audience and what drives you to get on stage?

A My relationship with the audience is nothing short of love. I love the audience and the spotlight. I love to take people from their world and bring them into mine. I enjoy making people laugh and have a good time. I want them to forget their worries for a moment and feel happiness and love.



Jol and the audience

I believe that having a moment of happiness is better than a lifetime of misery. Getting people to forget their worries for a moment can change their outlook on life and help to conquer their struggles when they leave the club. They can take a step back, evaluate and move forward.

I love bringing something new to the audiences. The world is so used to drag queens and that is what they expect until I come out on stage and their eyes open wide. It's a breath of fresh air when the audience sees Jol for the first time. Once they realize I am an entertainer, not a go-go boy or a stripper, the energy and my relationship with the audience changes.

I am an entertainer with all the bells and whistles of a drag queen but bringing sex appeal, humor, love, and enjoyment and masculinity. I am bringing the gift of imagination and wonder. I love getting women to drool and heterosexual men to question their sexuality. It is all out of fun and I do not cross that line or boundary.

I never push or make people feel uncomfortable. As an entertainer that is not my job to do. I think that is rude and disrespectful. If I want respect I must give respect. As an entertainer I am there to make everyone feel loved and supported regardless of their walk of life.

I focus on making sure every single person is seen and respected and most importantly welcomed into any establishment they go into.

Especially if they are heterosexual.
They are our supporters and allies.

Q. Tell us a bit about your responsibilities as a Show Director and how you interact with the permanent cast and guest performers.

A. Being a show director is a 24/7 job. Maintaining a good cast, ensuring they uphold their responsibilities as contracted employees and helping them grow as entertainers is a full-time job. I need to make sure the cast respects the audience members at all times.

We are hosts of a party. We are doing what we love and we are making sure our guests are having a good time. I have two bosses at the club and I make sure their show vision is achieved and I am fulfilling their wants and desires for the bar.



Jol hosting

I try to let my cast know and teach them there is more to drag than just performing. One must perfect their look and know they are always in the spotlight, on and off the stage. They must always be put together in and out of drag. There is no room for a lazy moment. Everyone needs to keep pushing forward and always evolving.

Drag today is completely different from when I started and who I grew up around. I feel the younger generation lacks the dedication and the knowledge to perform for a crowd and to keep them engaged. There is a lot of self-entitlement without working for it. Young entertainers feel they should just be given high dollar to perform and be added to casts without any knowledge of what it takes.

They do not understand how to engage an audience to get them to love them. They demand love and it actually pushes the audience away. I try to open the door for discussion and try to get younger entertainers to see the whole picture and how important it is to dedicate yourself to the craft and what we are doing for people out in the world.



Jol in action

In this field and community, we are the celebrities that everyone wants to be around and be seen with. We are known locally and nationally. We should be nothing but welcoming, approachable, lovable and friendly.

Q. There were AT LEAST 124 incidents of anti-drag protests and significant threats across 48 states in 2022 as represented in this graphic.

When you look at this, what do you feel and where do those feelings take you?



PFLAG graphic

A. Frankly I find it quite disgusting and disappointing. We live in a society where being different is a crime, yet we are in a country that is a melting pot of different people from different places. It is like they want everyone to be the same, look the same, and think the same. I sometimes think to myself that parents choose not to raise or educate their children anymore.

Hate is a learned characteristic that no one is born with. It's disgusting knowing all this hate rhetoric was taught to children by someone else. I was not raised this way. I was raised to respect everyone and all walks of life. My mother raised three boys on her own from the age of 17. She taught us that no matter what happens you must respect everyone.

My mother taught us we will come across people who do not believe in the same thing as us. We might not like what decisions they make or their opinions but we must respect their decisions and how they want to live their lives. I learned you cannot get respect from others without giving respect back. At the end of the day it is ok to agree to disagree. There is nothing wrong with different opinions.

Different opinions open the door to new conversations and learning opportunities. Let's come together to learn something new. And all people want to do is hate and push out what is different. Stop rejecting us like a plate of vegetables on your dinner plate. Learn acceptance and tolerance.

It is absolutely not a crime to be with friends and family in an all-ages-appropriate setting and to dance to good music. If that was the case we wouldn't have theater, concerts, churches, street festivals, and countless other events.

Any attempt by politicians to say that those are different events just further underscores their pure homophobia, transphobia, and complete hatred and disdain toward the LGBTQ+ community!

The real concern and what the public should be concerned about is what the government – Republicans – are hiding or doing. Why target one group? Why reverse laws to fit their narrative and religion? Why target a group of people that are trying to do good in the world and to make a difference?

The problem with all these new laws that people are trying to pass and protesting against the LGBTQIA+ communities, especially drag, is a scapegoat for something else that we don't know about yet. But, all evil comes to the light eventually. Let's really look at what they are trying to do.



Yes, they want to get rid of drag because they think and feel it is damaging to children and that we are 'pedophiles' which is not the case. Living your life to the fullest the way you want to is NOT A CRIME.



We will not stop existing because it makes them uncomfortable. There are other things in the world that are worth more time and energy, such as climate change, earth's resources, energy, pollution, homelessness, cost of living going up and wages are not, healthcare, and so much more.

Most importantly how the government does not follow the constitution and really does not govern for the people. They would rather divide and conquer the people. The People Should Not Fear the Government, The Government Should Fear the People

Q. What change have you noticed in the performers and the audience since all the anti-drag rhetoric began? How does it affect you and your cast personally?

A. There has not been a change in what we do or the audience. We keep on living, working and doing what we love. Most importantly we keep thriving. We do not let anyone dictate how we should live our lives. Sometimes I think that people do things like demonizing drag just to get a reaction. I feel the best reaction is no reaction and keep living your truth.

But, then again, who knows what will happen if these Anti-LGBTQIA+ bills pass! That could change a lot of things on how we live our lives and perform. As a host and show director and entertainer, all I can do is make sure we are using what we do as a platform to get the word out. Letting people know what is going on.

Reaching out to our allies to let them know we need their help. VOTE, VOTE, VOTE. Make your voice heard.

Q. As a gay man who has devoted a large part of his life to entertaining others, what do straight allies, those who love and support the Queer community and get enjoyment from your shows need to know about being an openly queer performer in the current social and political climate?

A. The most important thing to know is regardless of what we do, we are all human and deserve to live our lives just as much as they do. We are no different than the next person. Show compassion and empathy. Give kindness and respect. Their support means the world to us.

At the end of every show I take pride in knowing that the audience had an amazing experience and they cannot wait to come back. I try to talk to everyone and see how they are doing and if they are enjoying themselves. Laughter is the best drug on the entire planet.



Jol

Thank you Wesley for sharing your story, your talents,
having the courage to take the stage and for bringing us
into your imagination. We hope you are performing for
many more years



WESLEY AKA JOL:
Proud Performer
Creative Soul,
Fierce Friend,
Beautiful Human
and
Bursting Through
Member

Jol



Jol

Knowledge

As the first state in the Midwest to legalize gay marriage, Iowa **used to be** a progressive state for LGBTQ+ rights.

The majority of Iowa's LGBTQ+ bills mirror what's being proposed in other red states. **A new bill banning minors from drag shows is similar to legislation in Tennessee.**

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds and Republican lawmakers have proposed a record-breaking 19 bills targeting LGBTQ+ people already this year.

The previous annual record was 15.

The “Don't Say Gay” portion of Reynolds’ bill uses the same language as the one Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law last year.

Power

One Iowa advances, empowers, and improves the lives of LGBTQ Iowans statewide.

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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.



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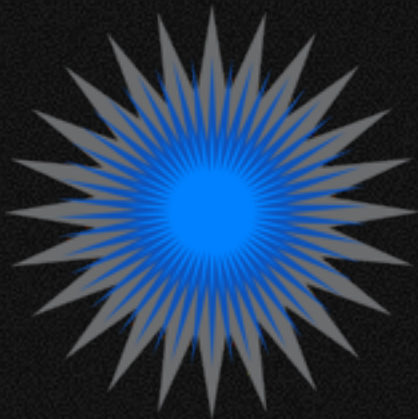
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SILVER STATE EQUALITY

[Silver State Equality](#)



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Cedric and Lindsay

Love in Action

story from Cedric and Lindsay



Lindsay and Cedric



While exploring Stimulating Stories for this Relationship issue, Bursting Through Founder and Connections Editor, Steve Petersen connected with Cedric and Lindsay, a gay interracial couple, with the intention of telling a marriage equality story.

The story that unfolded was quite different. It is about how active love in one relationship can spread and transform many lives for the better.

Cedric and Lindsay live in Carson City, NV. They have been together for over 20 years and entered into a legal domestic partnership on September 30, 2011. Lindsay works for the United States Forest Service and Cedric works for the State of Nevada Division of Welfare and Support Services.

Lindsay grew up in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale, CA with conservative parents. He came out to his family later in life, around 40, and was met with overall acceptance. Cedric grew up in South Central Los Angeles in a “divorced but not broken” home that stressed education. He came out to his family around the age of 30 and faced rejection from both parents that led to a 10 year estrangement.

Cedric and Lindsay met on Love@AOL by Match.Com while living 300 miles apart, separated by the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Cedric's profile received 300 hits in the first days after posting. He explained, "The majority of the messages were the nastiest, most vile racist and sexual comments I have ever encountered. I started to think online dating was not for me but I read on and I saw a message from Lindsay that said:

'I'm here in Bridgeport, CA. I just took a walk around my neighborhood with the dogs and we saw a beaver by the river that runs through our neighborhood.

I also just saw an eagle flying overhead.

Why don't you come see my neck of the woods?' "

Cedric made the first move by using his resources to find Lindsay's work phone number and call him. They both recall that first phone conversation as brief, that Lindsay was really busy and also a bit nervous, which Cedric found cute. Toward the end of the phone call, Cedric asked Lindsay to send a picture of himself. When the photo arrived, it was Lindsay on a snowmobile with full gear; it did not show his face.



Cedric said, "That kind of defeated the purpose but I already knew I had to meet this wonderful man."

IN PERSON MEETING

Cedric and Lindsay entered into a long distance phone relationship and tried several times to meet before finally making it happen. The day they met Lindsay was driving through Cedric's town on the way home from his mother's funeral.

Lindsay said, "I was really looking forward to meeting Cedric for many reasons and one was I really needed a change from all the grief I was experiencing. We set up a time for me to stop and see him at work as I drove through."

Cedric offered his perspective, "I knew his mom had passed away and I knew he was going to stop and see me at Staples where I worked. During my shift, I had to go to the warehouse to complete an assignment. I was there working and something made me suddenly stop.

I knew it was Lindsay's energy I was feeling despite not having met or seen him yet. I went to the bay doors of the warehouse and I saw this man coming down the aisle. I just knew it was him. Suddenly he turned around and walked out of the store and I thought so much for my intuition."



Cedric learned later that Lindsay had walked out because of some cold feet. He decided to spend some time with his dogs that were in his truck and collect himself before going back into the store to try again.

Lindsay went back into the store and they did meet. Cedric said, "I remember thinking how nice is this? I loved that he made the drive. I love that I had felt his energy before I saw him. I loved meeting a wonderful man."

THE RELATIONSHIP GROWING AND BEING SMART

Cedric and Lindsay's long distance relationship created a strong foundation and they decided to begin a life together in the same city. The merging of their physical spaces also meant the merging of their values, their pasts and their families. They began creating the life, love, home and experience that they would choose together.

Cedric and Lindsay built a relationship based in love, strengthened with consistent, honest communication and grounded with the legal protection that is so important to LGBTQIA+ couples. At that time, neither domestic partnerships nor gay marriage were legal, but they had the knowledge to be legally smart about their relationship and the know how to do so. They used that knowledge and know-how to create a legally binding relationship document that was similar to what would become domestic partnership agreements.



Cedric and Lindsay

The knowledge came from experience. Cedric had lived in Palm Springs when he was younger and knew gay couples with significant differences in income levels and age. These partners had a fully integrated life but had nothing binding them together legally.

When one of them passed away, his birth family would come in and take every asset including the house and the cars leaving the living partner with nothing. This could occur because the gay couple had no legal arrangement. Cedric and Lindsay were not going to let that happen to them.

Taking the needed legal actions to protect their relationship strengthened their bond and allowed their birth families to understand their commitment to one another. They were creating a world that reflected who they are and what they saw in each other. Together they have an amazing way of radiating love and transforming the people and world around them. It began to surface in so many beautiful ways despite being a gay, bi-racial couple.

HOW THEIR LOVE CHANGED THOSE AROUND THEM

The world did not magically stop being prejudiced or homophobic because Cedric and Lindsay got together but somehow their love had transformed each other and the world around them to the point where it was manageable. Cedric and Lindsay's relationship had created a great balance between two people that is rarely achieved.



Cedric and Lindsay

Lindsay is a very open-hearted, kind and innocent person who truly does not see color or a world that is unpleasant. Cedric is a kind, beautiful and spiritual soul with wisdom and depth rarely seen. He is also a gay man of color who is more aware and in tune to the prejudice and homophobia in the world.

They shared many beautiful stories about how their relationship has made life better. One is when Lindsay took Cedric home to meet his very conservative father in suburban white Glendale, CA. Cedric recalled that first meeting,

“His father was expecting him to bring home a female, blond haired, blue-eyed bombshell and I stepped into the house. That must have freaked his father out. After introductions and a little time had passed, Lindsay had to leave the house to run an errand. His father immediately said, ‘I’ll go with you.’ They were going to leave me in their house by myself and I didn’t like that idea.

I said to his father, ‘Can you and I hold a conversation and let Lindsay go on?’ I watched his hesitation. He did not want to be in that house alone with me but he relented and decided to stay with me while Lindsay left the house.

While Lindsay was gone, his dad and I had a conversation that still makes me emotional today.

His dad said, “I’m so sorry I am this way but please understand it is not because you are black.” Then he stopped before continuing with, “Actually it is because you are black but I am trying to make some changes.”

There was something about him being forthright and vulnerable that softened my heart and brought me to tears. I was literally crying. He said, “I know by your emotions that I am hurting you. This is who I am but I am trying to do better and I do not want to hurt you.”

For him to tell me about something going on inside of him and that he was trying to find acceptance was so important. Lindsay's dad and I went on to have a relationship that went beyond hello to nice brief conversations. After a while, he even let us sleep in the same bedroom at his house.

Family reconciliation and acceptance were not limited to Lindsay's father. The active love of Cedric and Lindsay's relationship brought Cedric and his parents together after a 10 year estrangement. Cedric recalled,

"I had taken 10 years to step away from my entire family. After Lindsay and I met, my religious and spiritual side kicked in and I realized I missed my family. I recalled a Bible passage that kept playing in my head that drove me to get in contact with my parents—

**Honour thy father and thy mother:
that thy days may be long upon the
land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.**

I was working one day and I got a call from my Father. He was responding to a message I had recently left for him. I picked up the phone and he said Cedric and I said Dad, how are you and my dad started crying and that is all I could hear.

Just hearing each other's voices was enough and I knew it was time to heal. 10 years is a long time. I had changed, he had changed. I remember saying to him, 'Dad I need to come home but I have someone with me and it's not a female' and my dad said, 'That's ok, I have understood some things while you were gone.'"

Lindsay and I visited my dad and I went back to the home I was brought up in to see my mom. She was ill at the time and I did not realize how ill she was. I got to spend 9 more months with my mother before she passed away.



Google images

*Lindsay coming into
my life had given me
my parents back.*

These two stories exemplify their transformative love, and these are not isolated incidents. Cedric and Lindsay also recently went on a cruise with family and friends that was full of love, joy and the deepening of once fractured relationships. Additionally, Cedric's dad lived with them for the last 15 years of his life and when he passed away, Cedric had no regrets about that relationship.

WHAT THEIR LOVE CAN TEACH US

Cedric and Lindsay are certainly not the first couple to be in love, communicate well or understand the importance of legally protecting a spouse, so what is their magic formula and how do we all get it?

Magical things can't always be explained and captured. However, Cedric and Lindsay personify love in action. They left us with these wisdoms.



Cedric and Lindsay

- They are both open minded and have been exposed to and surround themselves with diversity.
- According to Lindsay, he is the calm one. Cedric agreed.
- According to Cedric, he is activist enough for them both. Lindsay agreed.
- Every Sunday at 5:00 PM the TV goes off, the phones go off, the laptops get put away and they talk. They put everything on the table and they talk about it. When they are done talking, they take what they learned and put it into action.
- Their relationship grew from love, has strengthened with communication and has solid legal protection. They make sure to take care of each other and not let the outside world take away what they built.
- They share that love openly, honestly and without exception.

Cedric and Lindsay's relationship is an example of love being the beginning of something beautiful. The deeper example is that love in action, constant action, is how love can inform and transform the world around us.

Thank you Cedric and Lindsay for sharing your story, your relationship and your love with us. We are all better from taking the journey with you through your powerful story.



Cedric and Lindsay

Cedric and Lindsay

Kind Souls

Beautiful Couple,

and

Bursting Through Members

Knowledge

Thirty-five states ban same-sex marriage in their constitutions, state laws, or both.

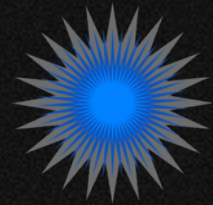
The Respect for Marriage Act of 2022, didn't codify the Supreme Court's 2015 decision that granted LGBTQ+ couples the right to marry. Instead, it forces states without marriage equality laws to recognize LGBTQ+ marriages from other states.

It also means that same sex married couples can now travel without having to worry that a hospital in another state won't recognize their marriage in the event that one spouse has an emergency.

Power

**How Can Same-Sex Couples
Protect Themselves**

EXTRAORDINARY



ACTIONS US!

The Bursting Through Community

At Bursting Through we see the extraordinary in people and in the actions of their daily lives—even if they don't. In Connections Magazine, an Extraordinary Action story is not a list of accomplishments or an opportunity to shower praise on someone for simply being a good human. It's about why a person took action, the action they took, and the results of that action. It is about ordinary actions becoming extraordinary.

This issue of Connections is about relationships. The extraordinary people that surfaced through that lens is us—the Bursting Through Community. Our extraordinary action is when we put our values into action.

Our collective daily actions
can create the world we want
to live in.

Us! The Bursting Through Community

Before we go further, let's define the Bursting Through Community. Very simply, we are the LGBTQIA+ Community and its Allies. Together we are the Bursting Through Community.

Here at Bursting Through we've been thinking a lot about where we are in our shared journey as opposed to where we want to be. We know that maintaining open hearts and minds plus taking action is how we move forward. And we recognize that moving forward is NOT always easy.

Like many communities, the Bursting Through Community (LGBTQIA+ and Allies) is composed of smaller groups: individuals, families, couples, businesses and non-profits as well as subgroups that identify by gender, sexuality and physiology: lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit, straight and more.

Through our work, Bursting Through engages with these smaller community units. In doing so we've noticed a space growing between them that is creating an unintentional and harmful void. We need to first acknowledge that void. Secondly we need to fill it. That is the Extraordinary Action we are called to quite urgently, today.



Acknowledging the Void

No one here is intentionally causing harm to others by isolating or retreating into their smaller groups but nonetheless it is happening. Everyday life can be challenging under typical circumstances for all of us. There is rarely anything typical about a day in the life of anyone, especially given the fact we are living in unprecedented levels of chaos, fear, and division, but I hope we can all consider this:

What if your difficult daily life was made more difficult by the real and consistent attack on your civil rights and personal safety while those around you chose to ignore or deny that reality?

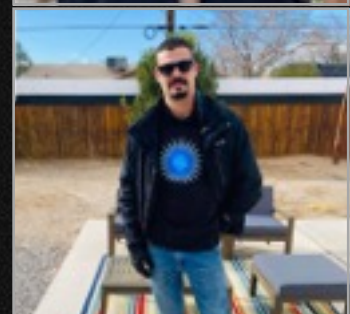
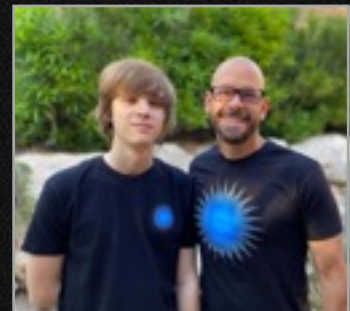
Given the state of the world today, it is more than understandable that we retreat into our safe places with the people we know and trust or isolate ourselves; it's just easier. It's common and frequently people will describe their actions as living in a bubble. It's a very intentional and ordinary choice. The bubble makes us feel safe.

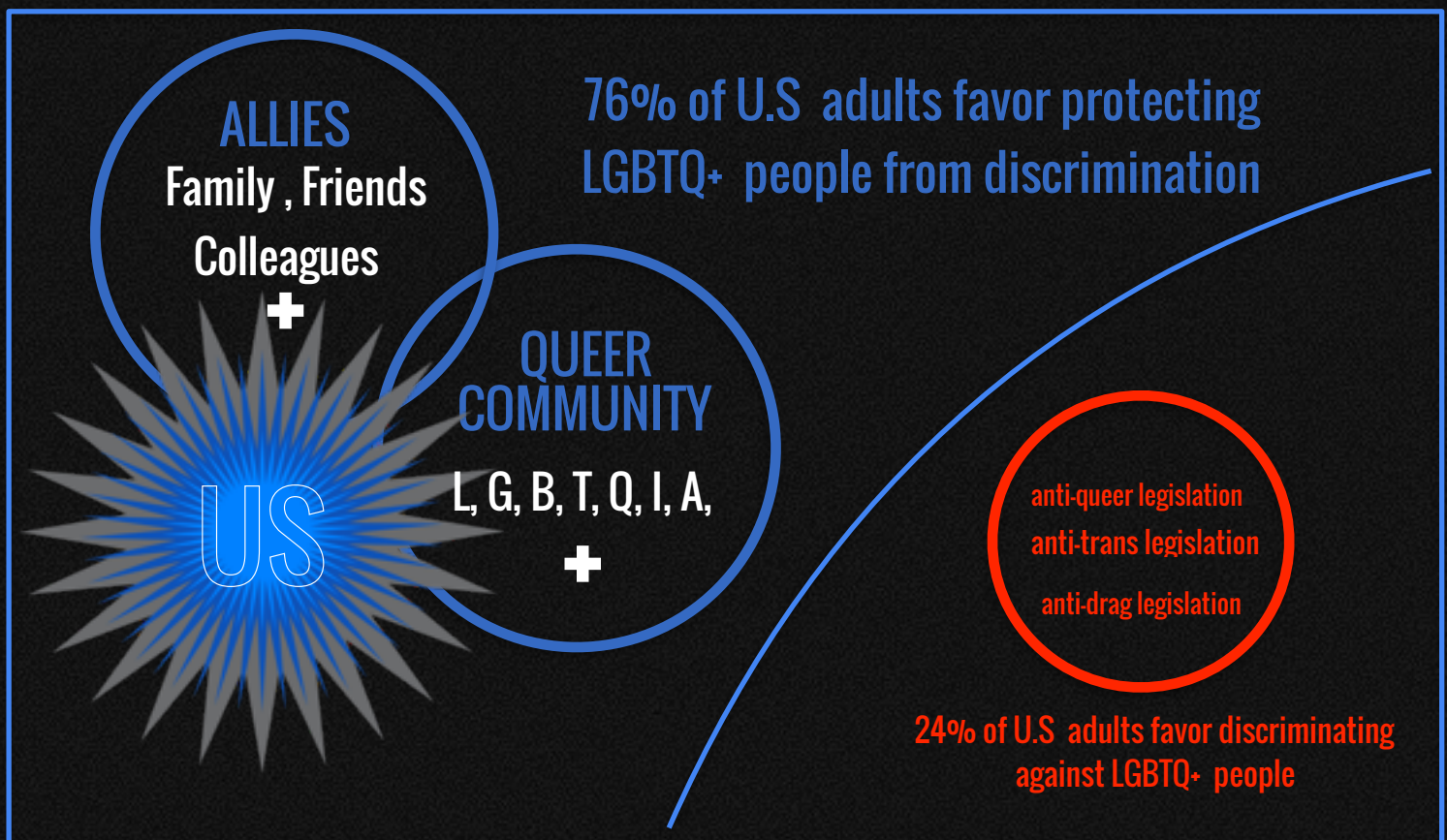
But, when we live our lives in bubbles we are accidentally creating large empty spaces in between the bubbles. These empty spaces are void of human connection. These empty spaces have become dangerous and need to be filled but who fills them and how do they get filled?



Filling the Void: Our Extraordinary Action

We, the Bursting Through Community, lead the way and begin to fill those spaces. We add action to our open hearts and open minds and by doing that we easily transition our actions from ordinary to extraordinary, enhance our relationships and begin to create the world that we want to live in.





Here are some examples of extraordinary actions:

#1 EMBRACE YOUR POWER.

We so often view ourselves as powerless in an overwhelming world but we are all **POWERFUL**.

For example: Every decision we make with our money has power: at home and on vacation. Supporting businesses that align with your values while choosing to not support the ones that do not is using your **POWER**.

Choosing to go to Lowe's rather than Home Depot, Michaels instead of Hobby Lobby and Canes instead of Chick-fil-A can easily become second nature.



Google Image

And yes, your \$5.95 Chick-fil-A Sandwich Combo does add to the money used to attack the LGBTQIA+ community.

Using your power with purpose is
EXTRAORDINARY!

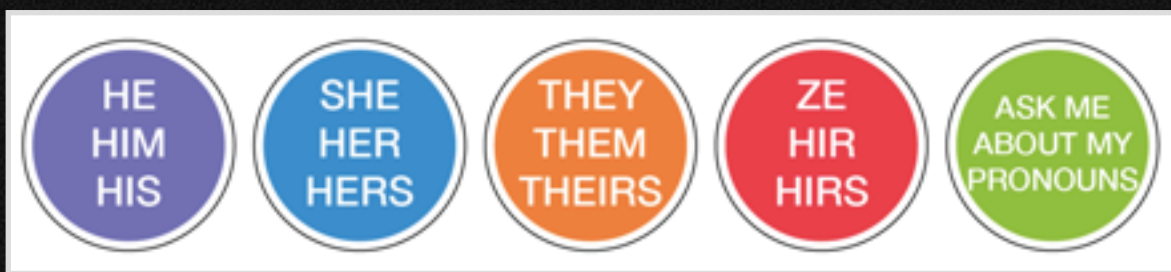
#2 CHANGE YOUR MIND AND CHANGE THE WORLD.

We so often view change as something complicated when a simple shift in thinking or perspective leads to change in actions.

For example: Stop thinking of activism and allyship as difficult and something you only use when you vote. Think of it as something that needs to be done daily and incorporate it into your life and not added to an overflowing list that never

gets checked off. One daily action to consider is understanding, respecting and using pronouns regularly will normalize this for you and others. Stop thinking because your pronouns might be obvious that it's not important. In that instance it is even more important and an extraordinary act for someone who is often misgendered.

Shifting your thinking is
EXTRAORDINARY!



UCSR graphic

#3 GET OUT OF YOUR BUBBLE.

Venturing outside your bubble can be as simple as knowing about current events that may not directly affect you.

For example: It is not difficult to know something about the persistent attacks targeting the LGBTQIA+ Community. It is all over national news (print and video) and social media. You don't have to be a subject matter expert, politician or legal expert to understand that restricting a human being's civil rights is wrong.

Knowledge

When you live in a bubble, surrounded by a world that looks the same in every direction, you become oblivious to the outside world.

When you look beyond your bubble, it's not just problems that you will find, you will also find solutions.

Over 120 bills restricting LGBTQIA+ rights have been introduced nationwide in 2023.

Basic freedoms are missing in 29 states for millions of LGBTQIA+ Americans.

Power

[Why Share Pronouns?](#) video

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My Angry Gay Uncle

Story from Shawn



Shawn

“My Angry Gay Uncle” was written by Shawn exclusively for Bursting Through Connections. Shawn was born and raised in Webster Groves, MO. He is a radio host, author and music lover.

Shawn and Bursting Through Founder and Connections Editor, Steve Petersen, met through a mutual friend in the early 90’s and have been friends ever since. Recently Shawn shared a brief story about his relationship with his gay uncle with Steve. This opened up a fascinating dialogue about family dynamics, allyship and homophobia.

Shawn generously agreed to lend his writing talents to share more about the relationship with his uncle as well as his relationship with the LGBTQ community growing up in the St. Louis inner ring suburb of Webster Groves.



My childhood was in the 1970s and I graduated high school in the mid 1980s. Things were different as it related to being black or homosexual and it seems to me that what was defined as non-normative behavior was beginning to change in the 1980s.



It had not changed so much that the hockey team refrained from putting a large paper mache black penis in the front lawn of a white cheerleader's house, along with adorning her family's yard with toilet paper. The toilet paper was par for the course. The penis had to do with her dating a black man at our school.

Segregation was something very real and it involved black and white areas of town. There never was a homosexual part of town. We had a very popular, effeminate music teacher in elementary school, Dr. B. He often was our recess supervisor. Many children, myself included, held his hand at recess. He was the first openly homosexual man I ever knew, but at the time I did not know what homosexuality was.



I remember in the third grade, a student once called another student a "faggot" and he had to read its definition from a dictionary to the class: "a bundle of sticks left to be burnt." There were a lot of snickers, but nobody would explain to me what was funny, so I had to go home and ask my mother.

She paused from loading laundry and told me, "What you are talking about is being gay and it is when men have sex with other men by putting their penises inside their anuses. You are never to do it because it is evil. Do you understand?" In case you are wondering about the accuracy of that language, that is how she spoke. However, I never felt sexual feelings for a man, so the explanation was more quizzical to me than meaningful.

I do not remember if it was before or after that explanation that my music teacher was invited to a family dinner. I remember there being a discussion with language that I did not understand that seemed to put everyone at ease. My teacher told our whole music class that he had dinner at my house and he would be happy to have dinner with everyone's parents. In retrospect, I think Dr. B was a really great man and teacher and, to this day, I am ashamed to have not learnt what I should have as his student.

My Uncle K was as effeminate as Dr. B, but I had a much different relationship with him. He married and divorced before I was born and he had a son. The explanation was that after his divorce, he went to New Orleans and met Ray. It took a long time for me to learn that Ray had also been married and had a daughter.

Uncle K and Ray became friends and Ray lived with my uncle in St. Louis. My uncle bought a home in Lafayette Square, one of those old dilapidated, thin, four story homes with holes through the floors - but something you could tell was formerly majestic.

When we would go there, my brother, two cousins and I would go through the rooms and play. It did not escape my notice that there were two pairs of slippers at the foot of my uncle's bed and that Ray's room never looked lived in. These inconsistencies disturbed me.

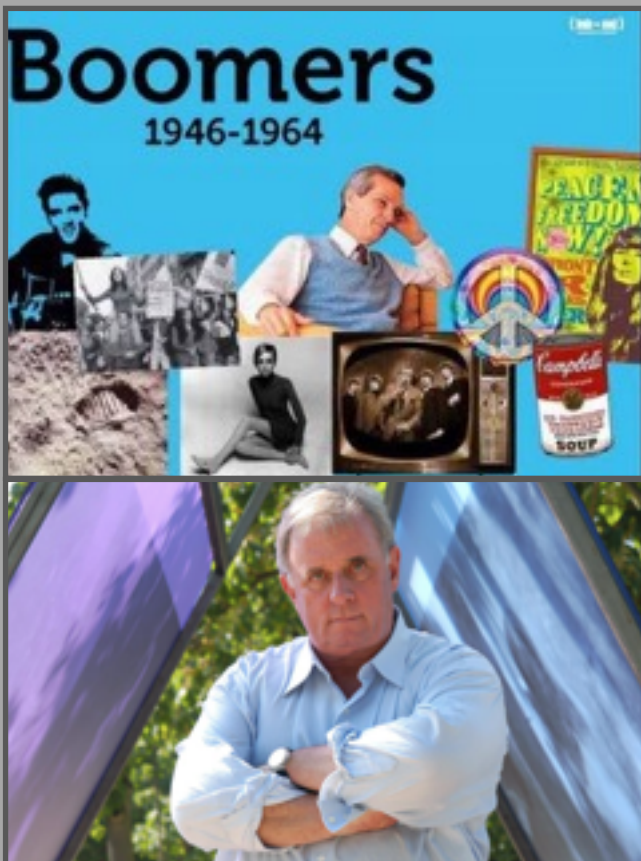


When I became a young adult, I understood homosexuality and the issue simply did not bother me. I had homosexual friends, but it was something we did not discuss. Our friendship was based on humor and conversation, not our sexual interests. I met Steve the future founder of Bursting Through, when I was in college and it took seven years for me to learn he was homosexual.



Steve and Shawn

One must wonder how that could be? What are the qualities that men exhibit that warrant a discussion about their sexual interests? Under what circumstances is a homosexual man to address the issue with a man who is heterosexual?



My Uncle K, on the other hand, seemed to have determined that I was against homosexuality. I do not know by what basis he made that determination. With my homosexual friends, the discussion was inopportune, how was I to have that discussion with a closeted uncle? He came from a generation that did not discuss the matter, much less admit to it openly. Was his behavior towards me an attempt to have that discussion?

In 2013, Wade, my first cousin once-removed and Uncle K's cousin, died. Wade was developmentally delayed, but that did not stop him from marrying and having children. I had been told that Wade's family had left their church because there were some homosexual members in it. That seemed a bit reactionary to me but Wade was legitimately developmentally delayed.

My parents were driving my uncle and me to their house from the funeral, when I asked about a homosexual female couple who had attended the funeral—were they from the old church? No, they were from the new church, which confused me. Wade's family had left a church because of homosexual members to go to a new church . . . with homosexual members.

My uncle began to attack me for my questions and non- acceptance of homosexuality, which caught me by surprise. I knew that my questions were legitimate and my confusion was real.

Demonstrably, I am a friend of homosexual men. Why did my uncle decide to make me his enemy? Was I the avenue for him to discuss homosexuality? Was he expecting me to make denouncements of homosexuality, allowing him to defend it – creating a proxy fight? I will never know because after that funeral, I never again spoke to him.



My uncle died during the pandemic, alone, from a cardiac arrest. I lost no sleep at his death and I have lost no sleep thinking about him. I think our relationship is the perfect example of what happens when you assume who a person is without ever having that discussion.

It is a lesson that all persons who are homosexual and heterosexual should heed - you do not know a person until you can talk to him or her without reservation, and most importantly, without judgement.

Thank you Shawn for sharing your story. It an important example of the challenges of family dynamics and how damaging assumptions can be.



Shawn

Shawn :
Fantastic Friend
Awesome Ally
and
Bursting Through Member

**"Failure is what creates
success... if you want to be
more successful... Fail more."
Dr. Christopher Salute**

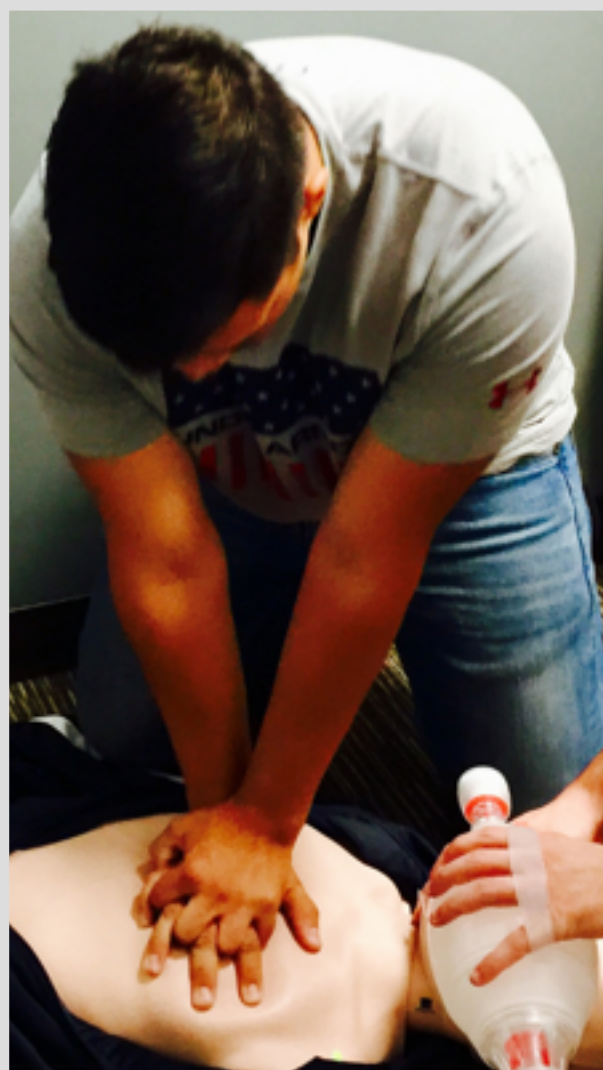


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Ajay: The Ally Nephew

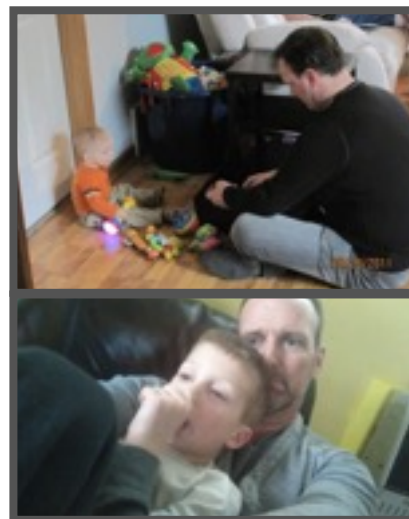
Story told by Connections editor, Steve Petersen

A Bursting Through Moment is a short story with a big impact. I recently had an unexpected but much-needed Moment with my nephew Ajay, which fits this relationships issue perfectly.

I have 14 nieces and nephews. Watching my siblings become parents, my parents become grandparents and myself becoming an uncle has been an important part of my journey.

My nephew Ajay is 12, he will be 13 in July. He is the oldest child of my little sister. When my older siblings first made me an uncle I was 15 and our family lived relatively close together. It was easy and natural to have time with my nieces and nephews.

When my little sister started her family by having Ajay, I was living on the East Coast and knew it would require more effort to get to know this new nephew. I put in that effort and got to know him as a baby and through all the phases of his life. I can honestly say I think of Ajay as a friend and have always enjoyed his company and like spending one-on-one time with him.



Ajay and Steve

Ajay is an individual of distinctiveness and determination. I don't recall him ever doing anything he didn't think was necessary or viewed as important. This made the Bursting Through Moment I had with him that much more significant.



Ajay

A couple of weeks ago I was sitting at my laptop writing stories for this relationship issue of Connections, I got a text from Ajay. It was just an image-like many 12 year old boys, he is a man of few words. It was a screenshot of Crash'n Bash Hobbies website where Ajay goes for his remote control car needs.

Crash'n Bash Hobbies

4.9 ★★★★★ 192 reviews

Hobby store



Directions



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Nearby



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phone



Share



✓ In-store shopping · ✓ Curbside pickup



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THE MOMENT

LGBTQ+ friendly

Recently, he had needed a new servo and battery for his remote control Jeep. That took him to the website and created this Bursting Through Moment for us. Me being gay is normal for him, he doesn't know me any other way. But for him at 12 years old to choose to be an ally and recognize that it's important to me is a powerful example of compassion and empathy connecting and love Bursting Through.

Ajay is a person with great vision, intellect and he will do extraordinary things. A 12 year old with that amount of love and compassion will impact the world in ways that he cannot even imagine. I am looking forward to standing behind and beside him as he creates a future and world for himself that he wants to live in.

If you like these Bursting Through Moments you can watch more on our YouTube channel by using the links below.



[*Bursting Through YouTube*](#)

BURSTING through® Membership Matters

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



Kevin

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

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FAITH, LOVE and AFFIRMATION

Story from Colt



Colt

“Faith, Love and Affirmation” is one of a series of interviews by Connections Editor/ Bursting Through Founder Steve Petersen exploring topics important to the Queer community and Allies.

Dr. Colt, DMA, SPC is gay Christian man, husband and Director of Music at Christ Methodist Church in Lincoln, NE. He grew up in rural Iowa in a town with a population of less than 800 people. Around the age of 15, he found his love of music while performing a solo at a school concert.

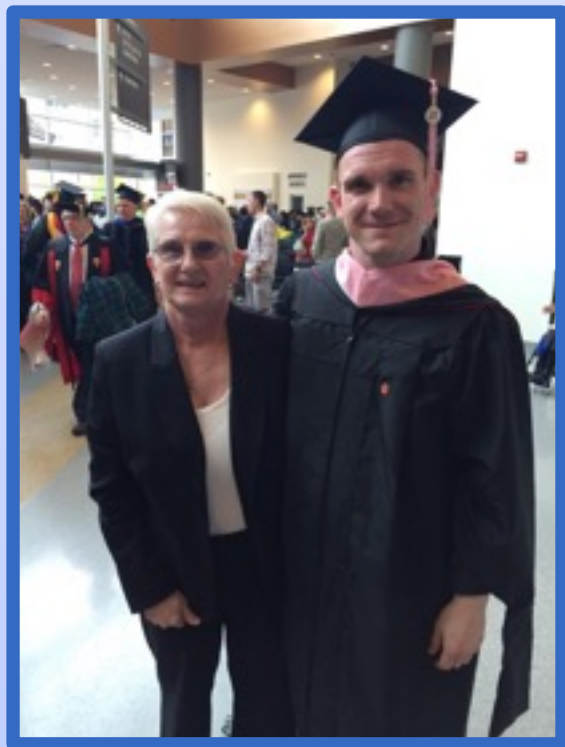
Colt taught music at both public and private schools in Iowa before completing his doctorate and settling into his current role at the church. In this Important Interview, Colt talks about his faith, his talent and how his sexual orientation factors into his choice to use his gifts to serve God.

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

A. I had a girlfriend my freshman year in college but was also having some internal feelings that made me want to explore my sexuality. I started going to counseling and I was just trying to figure me out. I knew I was gay but I tried hard not to be because I didn't want to be different. Counseling helped me be comfortable enough to finally say I was gay.

With the help I got in counseling, I started to gradually come out to friends, which was a nervous experience for me. The funny thing is it took about an hour per friend to convince them I was gay because I am a bit of a prankster. They just thought I was messing with them because that is something I would do-play pranks and mess with them by telling a crazy story. Once we got past that, my friends were very accepting.

When I came out to my mom, I considered myself officially out. I had just gotten back from a music trip to England and Scotland. She picked me up from the airport and was taking me back to school. I finally had the courage and I just said, "Mom. I'm gay." She said, "Are you being serious?" because again, I'm a prankster and she had learned to be skeptical of my stories.



Colt and his Mom

I let her know I was not pulling a prank and she let me know she had always known and would always love and accept me. She then asked if I wanted her to tell the rest of the family or did I want to tell them myself. I was like “Oh, you can do that and thanks for doing that.”

I was very fortunate and I wish everyone could have the coming out experience I did. I did not lose a single friend or family member. I have a very large family so I know how fortunate I am but I also have cousins who came out before me so they have paved the way for that acceptance.

Q. We are all made of many layers. You have combined your faith and music as Director of Music at Christ United Methodist Church. How does being Queer interact with your faith and your involvement in the church?

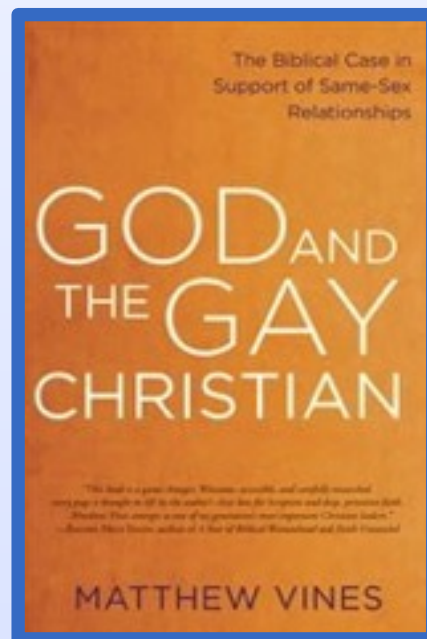
A. Toward the end of grad school I started working part time for the church and I didn't see it as a full time job because I figured they wouldn't be accepting of me being an out employee and that was fine. I had people contacting me for jobs and I knew I didn't need to rely on the church for employment.

When they did approach me about a full time job there were so many employment boxes that needed to be checked. It wasn't just about the responsibility I wanted musically but also I was not going to hide that I was gay. If any potential employer could not accept that and know I was going to be open about that I was moving on.

I went to the church and spoke to the interview panel and then they sent me into the hallway to conference before they would invite me back into the room to continue the interview. While I was in the hallway I noticed they

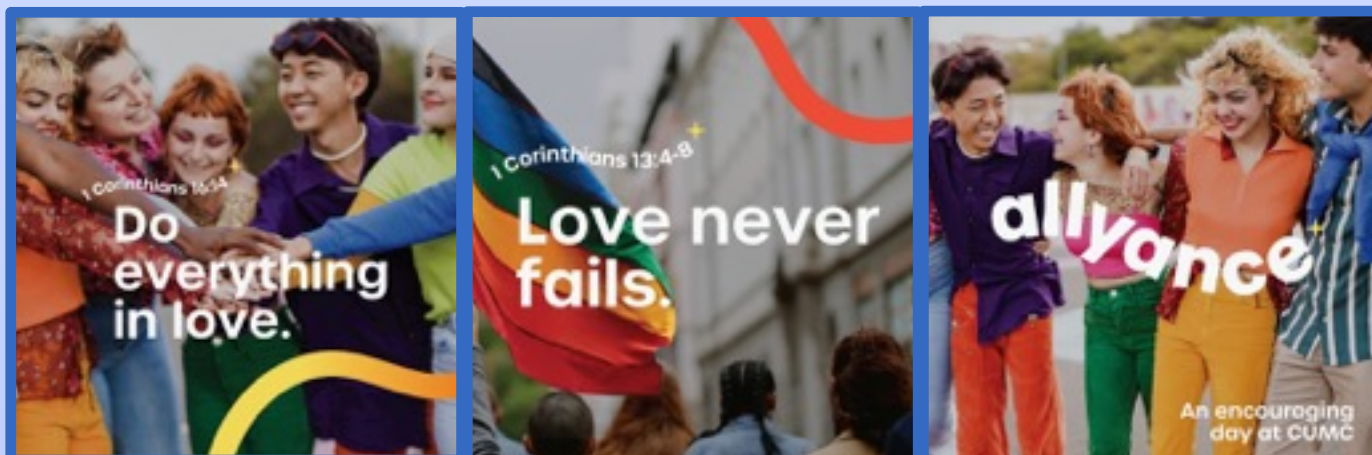
had a welcome station that contained a stack of books to show what the Church was reading and learning about.

**The book that jumped out at me was called
God and the Gay Christian
and I took notice.**



When I returned to the room I was very open about my sexual orientation and shared the experience I had at the welcome station. The interview panel was very excited about what I was saying because the church had a long history of being open, affirming and welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community.

Affirming is the BIG difference. A lot of churches are accepting and that typically means “love the sinner, hate the sin” but affirming means, “this is how God made you.” God made you to be Queer and you and God are happy when you live your true authentic life.



Christ United Methodist Church. Facebook Images

I accepted the job and do more for them than my assigned duties as Music Director because I believe in what they teach and they believe in me and who I am. Their goal is to be the #1 church people think of when someone is looking for a LGBTQ+ welcoming and affirming church. There are other churches that want to be thought of that way too, and I think it's a great race to be in.

My church flies Pride Flags, we hold alliance events for high school students, we have Pride Sundays, we have a Transgender Pastor. This church is not checking boxes-they are living what they believe and preach.



Christ United Methodist Church. Facebook Images

Q. Being Queer in the current climate of this country is difficult despite decades of progress. It's known that traditional religious beliefs have at times added to the difficulties of the Queer community to be accepted.

Through your lens as a person of faith, married gay man and leader in your church, what are the biggest challenges/difficulties Queer people of faith face with their Churches, Church Leaders and congregations?

A. One of the biggest issues is understanding the difference between Christians and Christian Nationalists. Christian Nationalists are not Christians

they are people who believe Jesus loves white people more than black people and America is the best in Jesus's eyes despite the fact that America didn't even remotely exist when Jesus was alive.

Christian Nationalism does not represent Christianity and that is the message that many faith leaders and my church are working to send.

My church has spoken on different topics through sermons that help people accept and live with people who have different beliefs, like being very conservative and the message is always understanding and compassion but when it comes to Christian Nationalism the message the pastor sends is "I can't support this. I consider it heretic."

The challenge for Christians is that Christian Nationalist are loud. My church goes out into the world and does the work to take on Christian Nationalism directly but many churches do not. Many churches fall into the middle ground where they don't want to rock the boat. My church decided to rock the boat in 2005 and there was a big split and most of the conservative members left and the more liberal people stayed in the congregation. That makes it easier for my church to be progressive now.

A lot of churches are afraid to make that full-on stance because you lose members and then money goes down and many things are affected. Churches need to decide if making that stance is worth losing so much congregation that they have to close their doors.

For my church, besides ministering to the LGBTQ+ community, we try to be an example to other churches on how to take steps forward and encourage them to have the courage to join us and take those steps forward.



Christ United Methodist Church. Facebook Image and Google Image

Q. Describe your faith journey as a gay man. Is there anything that has always been true for you?

A. The message I received growing up was, “You love God and you love your neighbor.” My mom was a Sunday School teacher so it wasn’t a message I could escape even if I had wanted to. It was just that simple. Love God. Love your neighbor, no exceptions.

After I was confirmed at 15, I did not attend church regularly and if I did it was tied to music. When I went to college I got exposed to other faiths, as a result, my faith tends to encompass many different beliefs. I believe in a higher power whatever that is. I believe it is much too complex for us as human beings to understand.

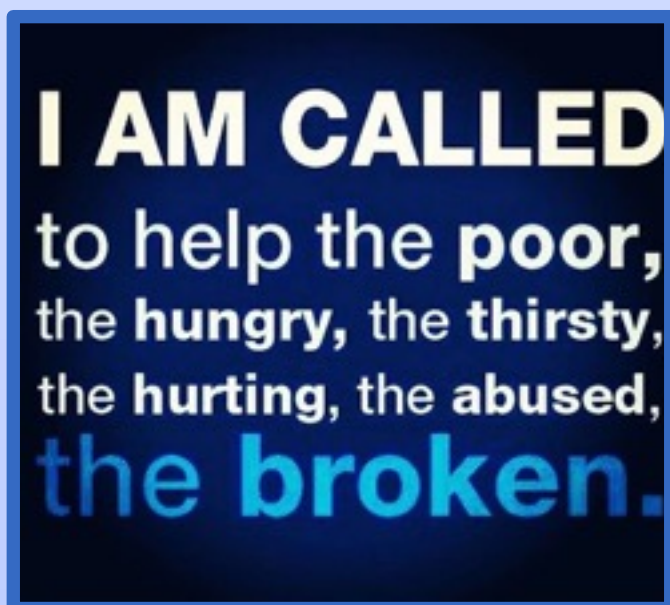
A lot of religion is trying to understand our relationship with that higher power and put a name and a face to the complex relationship. The central themes are compassion, taking care of each other, taking care of the planet

and now taking care of the universe. What responsibility do we have to each other, the planet and to a larger degree the universe?

I personally haven't really struggled with faith and my sexuality because I have always been a very independent person and have understood there are different types of faith and there is a place that I belong. I have also known that if the beliefs of a religion don't align with who I am or what I believe that I could walk away.

In the few times where there has been a struggle or I have questions about faith or myself because of something I was studying or reading, I ultimately look to the Bible. I look at the work that Jesus and his disciples did. They worked with the poor, the disenfranchised and the outliers.

Jesus was never concerned with the rich or the affluent. Jesus was advocating for love-PERIOD.



Q. What are the three most important things that people (both queer and queer allies) need to know about being a Queer person of Faith?

A. There are churches who will love and affirm you exactly as you are. They actively love you and are not seeking to change you.

The churches that affirm and love you are always looking for people to lead change and you can be that change leader.

Christian Nationalists are not Christians and they are taking the Christian message and twisting it to gain power.

Thank you Colt for sharing your story and your beliefs with us. It takes courage, conviction and strength to find power in who you are and your faith.



Colt

Colt

Proud Christian,
Musical Soul,
Faithful Human,
and
Bursting Through
Member.

Knowledge

Methodist churches are divided into two types: the Northern and Southern Methodist churches. The Northern Methodists are more liberal in their beliefs, while the Southern Methodists are more conservative

The Christian Nationalism popular among white evangelicals today was developed over many decades in response to a Christian Globalism advanced by the more liberal, ecumenical wing of American Protestantism.

According to the people of The United Methodist Church: Christian nationalism adheres to “the belief that America is God’s chosen nation and must be defended as such.”

Power

[Learn About Christian Nationalism](#)

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