

Date: October 11, 2012

KCOU Topic: Coming Out

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>> -- so genuine and true to who she was. And then I was really just kind of randomly upset one day like homophobia at large. I worked in the women's center on campus as an undergrad. There were things happening, going on on campus. I had this girlfriend, and I was really upset. I'm a big writer. I went down to the Gillette classroom, which doesn't exist anymore, but it was on the main floor, and I was writing in my journal, and I'm mad about this, and trying to figure out my emotions and what was going on with me. It seems so silly, like dear diary, why am I so upset. But kind of that's what it was. And I wrote it for the first time ever. I never thought it before. I just wrote it down. I wrote I'm mad because I am a lesbian. I looked at it and it was like, there it is.

Then I got really excited, which I think is not always everyone's reaction but I just felt so happy. I felt like oh, my goodness, I'm going to get to fall in love, I'm going to get to have butterflies in my stomach, and relationships, and sweaty palms, and we hold hands, all the things I thought I was never going to have because I never realized it was an option.

So when I pictured like marriage, and life and love, I never felt excited because I was always trying to picture it with a man, and that wasn't going to work for me. Once I pictured it with a woman, I was really excited. I had trials and tribulations after that but we can get to those later.

>> Thanks for sharing. That was awesome.

>> Thank you for sharing. Thanks.

>> My coming out story is a little different. I remember being a

freshman in high school, and feeling -- well I guess that's not the first time I felt the feelings, like I'm different, and I don't really have a word to define this. I remember starting in third grade, I had this infatuation with one of my best friends. I was like God, I want to be around you all the time, I don't understand why, but I do. I remember freshman year of high school, I had all my close friends around me. I didn't really come out to them. They all kind of knew. I was an obvious lesbian when I was a freshman. I remember being -- anybody remember AIM like AOL chat?

>> Yeah. The messages.

>> Yeah. You had those profiles. Never mind. That's not important.

But I remember meeting this senior when I was a freshman in high school, and she was really -- you know when you're a freshman, you look up to the older people, I want to be friends with everyone who is a senior, I want to be cool, that time when you have impressions and whatever. I met her and started talking to her on AOL or IM, or whatever. I remember her asking me specifically like I've heard rumors about you. I was like oh, what are you talking about. I was like what have you heard. She was like that you're really interested in girls and you romantically want to be involved with a girl. And I was like well, I mean I guess that's kind of a good word for it, that's a good definition for it. I sat there and I was like you're right. She was like well because of that I would like to invite you to come to my church next week. I was like okay. Well this senior is really interested in me and interested in my story, I'm going to go to church with her and we're going to be best friends, I have feelings for her, whatever. So I go to this sermon next week and I remember sitting there and it was like the pastor knew I was coming, I don't know what it was.

>> They were prepared for you.

>> Yeah. It was really weird. They sat there and they talked about a woman that they knew that came to church, found God, is now living a godly lifestyle and she turned. I'm sitting in the pews, a freshman, 15 years old, and I'm living the wrong way, I have to change. I remember talking to my friend Carly, she was totally cool, and I was like you need to help me -- hey, Carly. You're doing cool music stuff in Tennessee.

Anyway, she was like I can help you, like we will pray together, we will be friends, and we will come every Sunday, and we'll try to get you to repent

from this. I was like if that's what I was supposed to do, I'm going to do it.

So I lived that Christian lifestyle, believing that I was sinning for about, I don't know, two years, ever since I was a freshman. I went on the mission trips, that was part of my testimony. I was on the 700 Club for one of the students who would text the gospel to about 100 people every morning. I would send out -- what do they call it, devotions? I forget. I should probably remember. But I remember sending out like maybe eight page text messages to hundreds of people in the morning.

>> And you were running up people's data.

>> Basically. I was that person that everyone is like that so and so texted me in the morning.

I remember junior year of high school, I'm still really involved in church. But I went to France that summer, and I remember being in a different country and seeing different cultures, going into churches, meeting different religious people. It was kind of an eye opener. I wasn't ready yet, but I remember coming into junior of high school with different beliefs and just being open to anything.

There was a new girl at school, who was a senior, and she really caught my eye, and she was interested in me and I was overwhelmed. I was basically hiding and this girl had feelings for me where I had all of my Christian friends who were watching me all the time and knew me as this person who was reborn and not sinning anymore.

I remember on my birthday, the girl I was interested in, she made me a blanket, like sewed me a blanket and left it in my car, like happy birthday, I hope this keeps you warm at night. I remember getting all these little butterflies and being like how cute is that. I remember wait, like I'm not supposed to be feeling this, this is the girl that gave it to me.

My friends were like who gave you that blanket. I was like some creepy girl that's interested in me. I remember totally putting all the blame on her. But still I would be sneaking out at night to have long car ride conversations with her and hanging out.

So I remember one night, we were hanging out and she got the courage

to kiss me. And I was just like completely blown away, but I was so happy at the same time. I didn't really think I was going to have to come out. I just hid it from everyone. I was like I'm enjoying my time with this girl, nobody else has to know. One of my best friends asked me about it, who is not involved with the church, one of my best friends since I was young. She asked me what's going on with you and this girl. It was like in a note in class, and she was like I saw your car parked at so and so last night, what were you doing. I was like well, I was hanging out with Trish. And she was like.

Hi, Trish, what's happening.

I remember her asking me, is there something going on. She asked. I was like I don't know how to describe it but I think I really like her and I want to date her. I talked about how we had kissed, hung out, and talked, and how we had feels for each other.

A few weeks passed by, and this girl and I were dating and I hadn't talked to her about how I was going to come out to my parents. I never really had the change. I remember that after I had written that note with my friend in class, I had it like in the pocket of my jeans, and this is when my parents still did my laundry, because I was the only child, spoiled. My dad was downstairs, I was on the couch, texting Trish, and my dad comes out of the laundry room, and staring at me. I'm like what are you doing, how's the laundry. And he just threw this like little folded piece of paper at me and was looking at me with these angry, confused and just hurt eyes. Once I saw that piece of paper, I was like I know what that is. And my heart dropped into my stomach, and I remember panicking and trying to act nonchalant. I was like did you read that. He said I did and I don't know what to say about it, I don't know how I feel about that and walked up stairs. I remember laying on my couch and was like did I just come out, was that the huge moment that everybody talks about, sitting with their parents, we have something to talk about. I didn't have a choice and didn't know how to prepare for it. I sat on the couch for a good hour watching -- I don't know what I was watching, something that you should remember but I don't, something like 16 and pregnant, I don't know. Sitting there, and walked upstairs. And my mom came out of her room and she was just like crying but she was so happy. My mom's -- used to be a professional opera singer, really cool, she has so many gay friends. She was hugging me. If anyone has met my mom, they know how she is. She's like loud, and boisterous, I'm going to hug

you and squeeze the hell out of you.

Hi, Mom.

She just was like crying and said I accept you, I'm happy that you're happy. My dad has come to the point where he accepts me. At first, it was really hard. It's that father-daughter relationship where he wants to walk me down the aisle, and pass me on to some strapping young man that he's going to love so much and go through the whole -- I'm going to get my gun out when I first meet him, but then learn to love him.

And he was really upset when he can't do that and still makes a joke today, I'm going to get my gun out when you bring so and so home. I'm like don't do that. But that's his way of holding onto his idea of what was going to happen. He's very cool about it. He asks questions. He thinks he's very funny. He's very involved. He's actually coming up for his first drag show next week. So that's going to be awesome.

That was basically my coming out story. I guess the big part I didn't get to was, when I came out, my church found out and they completely turned their backs on me. It was probably a month of the craziest hell I've ever been involved in. Just like hate messages on FaceBook, saying you're going to hell, you need to be who you used to be, you need to come back to church, we can fix this.

I remember specifically when my pastor found out, he said I need to have a meeting with you. And he came in and sat me down. I walked into his office. He had a bible sitting open on the desk, open to Leviticus. And I was like what's going to happen.

>> Leviticus.

>> Catholic school girl there.

>> Shut up to Leviticus. Any time you hear Leviticus in relationship to LGBTQ issues, you're like...

>> So he's sitting there, and he was like can you read that for me, and of course I read it. I don't even remember what it was. I blocked that part out of my mind.

>> That happens.

>> Some people are like yes, let's do this.

>> I was excited about it because I had been preparing for the meeting. He gave me a week to prepare for it. I was like I can read that. And he was like what does that mean to you. I'm like, you know, I know what you think it means but that's not how I view it at all. I was like if we're going to play that game -- this is when I knew the bible really well -- and I flipped a few pages over, and I was like you love football so much and you can't hold a pigskin, I was like what about your daughter, are you going to sell her into slavery, like coming back at him. He was like I can see I'm not going to get through to you. I'm going to give you a week to make your decision. You can either come back and we can embrace this and try to fight this sin off together, or you can turn your back on all of us. That was basically the last time -- I remember calling him after the weekend, and it was like you're going to have to find somebody new to run your stucco, to be at every mission trip, to help with choreography, I was like I am not going to get rid of who I am, I'm not going to try and change that. He was like okay.

It wasn't the last conversation that we had. I wish it would have been. But that was basically the final straw. Not my religious beliefs in general, but that was a very big turning point to have a belief for two and a half years completely just shatter you and turn their back on you. All positive things now. I don't regret it at all.

>> Cool. Thank you for sharing that with us.

>> That was a long one. Sorry.

>> That was great. I loved it.

>> All the good stuff.

>> Very good.

>> All right. Well, my experience was probably similar to yours. Coming out was not easy. It was a big struggle emotionally. I came out a time that was a lot different than it is now. People didn't have e-mail, there wasn't the internet. And you never saw -- there wasn't any gay

characters on television. In fact, I don't think I met another gay person or knew that I met another gay person until I was probably like a junior in college. And so my sexuality was something I pushed way back down inside me and just tried not to address. And I was raised pretty religiously.

I remember actually, when I was like maybe a freshman in college, and this group called Damascus came to our church and played. The lead singer was to die for. And I remember thinking oh, my God that lead singer is so amazing and I was so attracted to the singer. I wanted to buy the album, but I thought to myself this is really crazy and wrong. I can't buy this album, I'm buying it for all the wrong reasons. I'm buying it because I'm attracted to this person, which is wrong. I didn't even really have names for it.

The truth is I wasn't the most masculine kid in my class. And so I even -- I kind of got teased occasionally growing up, but I was always in denial. So the first part for me coming out was coming to terms with myself. And there was kind of a long, slow process.

And when I was in college, and I had finished my four year degree and starting my master's degree at Northwest Missouri State University, I kind fell in love with a really good friend at the time and his name was Frog. He had a real name, but my nickname for him was Frog. And I fell in love with Frog. About that time, my mother was also diagnosed with breast cancer. So kind of -- your parents are kind of like this foundation. And when all of a sudden you're confronted with something like one of them has cancer, and you don't know what the results are going to be, it shakes your foundation at the very, very roots. So I started questioning everything I believed.

>> Yeah.

>> And it made me start to question, what are these feelings and why do I have these feelings for Frog, what am I going to do about them. Eventually I told -- I got up the guts somehow, after a lot of hemming and hawing, what have you, I finally managed to tell Russ that I had the same kind of feelings for him that most men would have for other women. And I fully expected him really to not want to be my friend. But I kind of was a miraculous thing. He basically said well I don't care, doesn't make any difference to me, you're still my friend.

I was almost 24 at the time, and it was kind of crazy because it was the first time in my life that I felt someone knew how I really felt about myself and the world, and was still willing to be my friend. Up until that point, I had always felt that I had given other people what I thought they wanted, instead of what was real, instead of what was genuine.

And here was this guy named Frog, who I had fallen in love with and I told him how I felt. Even though he said I'm not gay, I'm straight, but I'm still your friend and want to still be your friend, it was so validating that it didn't matter that he was gay but he wanted to be my friend. To be honest, I feel like I couldn't be a friend to myself because, at the time, being gay meant -- you know it meant that you couldn't really be on television, it was never mentioned in newspapers anywhere, it was never -- and so I was confused. I didn't know what to do with these feelings, I didn't know who to talk to.

So I just started going to the library. And I was so scared. I would get a big book, and then I'd find another book that had stuff about gay people on it, I'd put it inside the bigger book so that people didn't see that I was looking at a book on homosexuality while I'm in the library because it was too scary. And I was scared to check it out because then someone would see me checking it out. So I had to read it there, with one inside. If someone would come by, and I would close it, like why is that little book inside the bigger book.

Then before I left Northwest Missouri State, I kind of started coming out, I wound up coming here to Mizzou. I told a couple of close friends, and it turned out that they were all kind of supportive. And I was very lucky that I had such quality friends, that they would be supportive like that.

And then I moved down here. And I wasn't here very long and my parents, my -- opened one -- a letter I had written to a friend, and read it and found out. So my mother called me up, and she was crying. And my dad was upset. He was on the phone, and they were both crying, telling me that, you know, they had read this letter, and that I needed to do something, and get my life back on the straight and narrow, so to speak.

>> Yeah.

>> And literally, every time I talked to my mom for a year, she cried.

And it was really a hard time because she was also fighting cancer. She tried to tell me, well you have to fight this the way I have to fight my cancer. And I was trying to tell her, I said you know what, I fought it for 24 years. By now I was 24, almost 25. I said I fought this for 24 years. I'm tired of fighting something I can't change. I just want to accept it and be honest about it, and stop living my life as a lie. I'm tired of pretending to be somebody that I'm not. I'm tired of lying. And our religious faith also said lying was a sin. So I really felt like if I lied, then it was okay -- then my sexuality was viewed okay by the church. But if I was honest about it, then I was a pervert. So it's like I'm either a liar or a pervert --

>> Both are sins.

>> Yeah. It's like one, which I can choose well, I was tired of lying, and I just wanted to stop lying about it. So I made a commitment to myself that -- my new commitment was basically to stop lying about it. And that's why, when my parents confronted me, I didn't lie about it because I had made that commitment earlier that year.

When then I moved here and didn't know anybody when I moved to Mizzou in 1985. I looked around and didn't see hardly anybody on campus that was open. There weren't very many people at all. In fact there were only two people that I identified on campus that were gay, that were -- not spoken at all. There was a gay group on campus called GALA. The Vice President was Dana and Vice President was Mark Hutchins. But I was too afraid to go down and visit because I was afraid someone would see me. I was a hall coordinator and I thought that I would lose my job, to be real honest. So I was really scared to go down there. And then that was fall of 1985. So then --

>> Historically, you could have. You aren't protected the way we are now. Some people are still surprised by that. That's relatively new. Sorry. Go on.

>> So November of 1985, there was a gay bar at the bottom of the Tiger hotel. My birthday is in November, and I said I'm going down to this gay bar, I'm going to go in.

>> Happy birthday.

>> And there's a -- yeah. There's a parking garage across the street. So I went up on the parking garage, looked up the street, looked down the street, didn't see anybody. Then I walked around the block, still didn't see anybody, and then I chickened out, and went home.

So then the next day --

>> Totally understandable.

>> Then the next day, I decided this time I'm really going to go in. So I looked up and down the street, and then I bolted, ran across the street as fast as I could, so hopefully no one would see me, ducked in the door, got in the Tiger hotel, and walked in. And there was this little bar. There was like one person there, probably the age that I am now. He started talking to me and asked if he could buy me a drink. I said no, I'm just checking the place out. He said you didn't come down from the ball upstairs? I said what ball. He said well there's a Pumpkin Seed Ball upstairs. So I went up there and there were like 250 people, all in Halloween outfits and stuff. And there was -- we had like an annual Pumpkin Seed Ball in the ballroom of the Tiger hotel, and there was all these people. I was like oh, my gosh, I had never seen 200 gay people in one spot before. And it was amazing and validating. And I met some people there and started making gay friends. And that's when I met like Dana and Mark from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance.

And it still took me a while to get brave enough to go down there. Then what happened was, in the end of January, beginning of February, of 2006, there was a young man who was friends with Mark, and GALA, his name is Kevin Biddle, and his parents found out he was gay. Two weeks after his parents found out -- and they didn't accept it either. Two weeks after his parents found out, he hung himself with his belt in his dorm room. And it just like -- Mark called me up and said, you know -- told me about it. And I was like what. Mark lived over there.

>> Right.

>> And I was like I couldn't believe it. And I was really floored, thinking this guy hung himself because he's dealing with the same feelings I am.

>> Yeah.

>> And -- I'm sorry. I just haven't talked about this for a while. So I said this is crazy, we're killing ourselves because we can't talk to each other, and I'm part of the problem because I'm too afraid to talk to people about how I feel. And so I made a commitment that I wasn't going to stop being afraid. I didn't care if I got fired, I didn't care what happened to me, as far as my job because helping other people is going to be more important than the false protection of a closet.

>> Right.

>> And so I started working with GALA to put together educational panels around campus, to start getting people to talk about what it means to be gay, in this society that didn't want to validate gay people. And so these amazing students, that were so courageous and brave, would come to these panels and speak out. And it was amazing. And people were learning from them. And I felt privileged to help put these panels together. Each time I did -- because I had this forum, since I was hall coordinator, I could get people from the hall involved and staff involved. But I was never exposing myself. And they were kind of taking -- and I was feel kind of guilty because I thought these students are finding the courage to speak out and they need other people -- they need the other people to speak out as well.

So it was a couple of months later, I went and talked to my supervisor at the time was Linda Kaiser, and she was -- kind of oversaw the residence halls. I came out to her and said I'm gay and I really want to start talking about it on these panels because students need to know that there are others out there, and they need to know we're in roll model positions.

>> Definitely.

>> At first, she said you can talk about it, but just don't tell people you're hall coordinator, which was really actually pretty supportive at that time.

>> Oh, definitely.

>> And so I started coming out at some of these panels. And it was really very validating and liberating because once you've kind of start coming out publicly, and in front of other people, then people can't use the threat of the closet to blackmail you anymore and to hold it over you. And each time you told your story and each time you came out, you were

a little stronger than the time before.

>> Yep.

>> And so that's kind of -- it was from there I started getting involved because I had a hard time bringing both my religion and my sexuality into sync with each other. And I joined dignity, which was a gay Catholic group, and there I met some gay priests and realized -- there's a lot of different views within religious organizations about homosexuality. So I started choosing religious affiliations that were very affirming.

>> Uh-huh.

>> Yeah.

>> And then I'll leave it there. We can all talk about coming out stories all day long, I'm sure.

>> Definitely.

>> Thanks for sharing, that was awesome.

>> Thank you very much.

Just to do some quick resources before we move on in our conversation, so we still do those panels like Dean was talking about, called our outreach panels. If you interested in bringing an outreach panel to your class or student organization or workplace or chapterhouse, you go to our website, lgbtq.missouri.edu, under our resources tab or outreach panels, and you can learn how to be a panelist if you want to learn how to be a panelist and get involved and tell your stories about being on campus, or if you'd like to request for a panel to come into your group.

And also just because religion has been touched on in two of these stories, there is a fair amount -- a pretty large amount of welcoming affirming congregations here in Columbia, and church groups and different things. So if you're interesting in that, just stop by our resource center or check out our website. We have a lot of those links and information for you.

So we want to make sure that if you are listening to this Inside Out, Coming Out, and you are not yet out, that you know that that's okay, and

that, you know, all of us took time clearly to get there and it was a struggle, that everybody kind of does it in different ways. DJ Excellence already mentioned, it's a process. You do it over and over again. I think we all touched on, in our initial stories, how we came out to ourselves and had to figure that out and reconciled it and accept it. And once we figured it out, was it okay or something we were going to shove down and not think about, and then coming out individually to different people.

Nowadays there is this added element of social media, how out am I, am I out in FaceBook, am I out in these different arenas in my life, am I out at my work, maybe I'm out at my friendship group but not at my job, and why or why not that might happen. Some places here in Missouri, you still can get fired for that, there are federal regulations on that or state regulations. So there's a lot of that.

One of the things that Mizzou has done, go Tigers, since the beginning, this is our 17th annual Pride photo that we're having today, and we always have on October 11th, which is National Coming Out Day. Dean, you have been in every one. Have you missed any?

>> I missed some. There's a few I've missed, but I've been in some, and I will be in this year's.

>> So would you mind sharing with us a little bit about the history of the photo, kind of how it -- hey, let's take a picture, how did that happen?

>> We were sitting around, one was Pat Gannon, and we were like really should do a photo or something. We thought homecoming would be the great time because everybody's going to see the paper at homecoming. And it was during the time when "Don't ask, don't tell" was still involved. And so our first one, we just did a photo and it was like I think in front of the Columns.

>> Yep.

>> But then we got the idea, we said you know, we were debating -- we were trying to decide whether or not -- you know, whether gays should be allowed in the military was being discussed because of Bill Clinton. There was a push to allow gays to serve openly. And we decided that one year we would have our picture in front of the hall where ROTC is in. I think it's Stewart hall. I can't remember the name of the hall right now.

>> Crowder.

>> So we were going to get in front of Crowder Hall, so you could read the hall, and people would know it was in front of Crowder Hall. And word got out that that's where we were going to do our picture because we were telling people we're going to do a picture at Crowder Hall, that's the way we would know where to meet. There was these really heavy ashtray urn things. And someone moved them right in front of the stairs where we were going to get our picture taken so it would make it hard. So we got a bunch of us, and just like moved them back.

>> Wow.

>> And got our picture taken there. We took it specifically so you could read the word Crowder above the hall -- above the picture, and we told the Maneater we want this left in there, do not crop it out, we want this in there, because the military is seeing fit to discriminate against us.

>> Right.

>> And we want that juxtaposition there. Well, somehow, I don't know exactly how, but it still got edited out, and cropped out. But the paper actually was so apologetic after we said we didn't want that out and now it's out, why did that happen, that they told us next year we could have the photo free.

>> That was awesome.

>> So we were happy about that.

>> Yeah.

>> The other thing was, right around that time, we also had -- in 1992 we had the very first ever float in homecoming parade. And we organized -- got a bunch of people to put this float together. There was a big American flag, that was kind of -- in it. The red stripes were big fat red letters. From a distance it looked like stripes, but it said where is our right to marry, where is our right to serve, where is our freedom from discrimination, things like that.

We had it pulled by a pickup by this guy who had been homecoming king at Lincoln University. He was African-American but also was kind of a drag Queen. He dressed up as a drag Queen and had a sash on that said Queen on it, and sat on the hood of the pickup that pulled the float, and that's what went around in the homecoming parade in 2002.

>> That's awesome.

>> It was the first time, ever, that we were going to march in the homecoming parade, at least that we knew about. And so it was really -- we had a big meeting -- like we decided we were going to be a presence. We knew people might yell. We weren't going to yell. We weren't going to have dialogue. We were just going to be there in present. We weren't going to yell things.

And so we all showed up and we had our shorts on. And the night before, we were trying to hang up fliers, but people kept turning them down. So one night, Pat Gannon and I, who is still here and works over at -- sciences, we went out with all these -- made all these pink triangles, and we hung them around the parade route and around campus. We had a bike, and we would stand on the bike and would use a broom to hang them like 15 feet up. So high that no one could tear them down. And some of them stayed there for up to a year.

>> That's amazing.

>> We were walking around, looking at all these, proud of what we had done because we kind of felt that we beat them at their own game. I don't know that we did. But the parade that year we felt was an accomplishment. We got some businesses in town to sponsor, and gave tee shirts to everyone that would walk with us, and we got about 40 people to walk with us.

>> That's a great turnout.

>> Yeah. So we were pretty happy.

>> A little plug, speaking of homecoming, next week we have our Black and Gold Drag Show. That's next Wednesday, the 17th, 7 PM, DJ Shane will be performing.

>> Sure thing. There's going to be a duet and solo performance, I think. All of the performers are really awesome this year. It will be quite the sexy drag show, if you ask me.

>> That's in the Shack upstairs in the student center or the main level of the student center next Wednesday, October 17 at 7 PM, and we will have the calendar linked on our website.

Just a quick little bit of history in case people don't know, the pink triangle as Dean was referring to, is a symbol of the LGBTQ community. And it's kind of a reclaim symbol because back in World War II, when Nazis were rounding up different groups of people to put in concentration camps, LGBTQ folks were one of those groups of people that were deemed not worthwhile. So we were rounded up. And the -- each different group had an emblem that they put on their sleeve or their jacket, somewhere on their clothing to mark them, is what they were. And our mark for LGBTQ was a pink triangle. We've reclaimed that. You can tell it's still present. Triangle Coalition is one of our longest standing student organizations. So we hold that pink triangle proudly as a part of our history.

So I think we're going to move on to talk about some of the reactions we've gotten when we've come out because one cool thing about doing the outreach panels that we do is someone will be on the panel and they will be talking -- and this happens when I give panels in classrooms where ever I am -- and someone will say something, and I pipe down from the end of the panel and say, oh yeah, I got that too. And everyone on the panel is like, oh definitely, I've heard that one. So it's just a phase, how many of you all have heard the feedback after you've come out, it's just a phase.

>> Oh, yeah, from my mom especially. My mom was like, I was like that when I was your age. I didn't start dating boys until I was -- I think she said like 20. I was like mom, just let it go. It's not about not wanting to date boys. It's about like never wanting to date boys. And she eventually like got on the train. But it was definitely -- the phase was definitely -- that one.

>> Yeah, I got that one.

>> My dad definitely said that one to me a couple of times. It was like

you're going to meet that man that changes everything. No. Not.

>> Same here. It was more my mother than my father. My father really didn't want to talk about it for like seven years, before we really had a discussion about it. And my mom, after I came out, she died about two years later from her breast cancer. But she came to terms with it by then. I knew that even though I was gay, she loved me. So I think probably we worked through some of it a little faster because her time was not as -- was a little briefer.

>> Yeah. How about hate the sin, love the sinner?

>> I got that one so much. Well, and like the thing about it was is when I came out, I had all of those close friends in the church and they were just like -- a lot of them were very angry about it and there was no way we could ever see past that. But a few of my friends, they were like I don't really understand, I want to learn more about it. For a while, they kind of stood in that borderline of hate the sin, not the sinner. But now most of them, like my really close friends have come to terms with it. The girl, Carly, that I was talking about is one of the most accepting and still one of my closest friends to this day and so accepting of it. It kind of goes along with that theory, if you don't understand something, you don't really know how to accept it. So if you open your eyes and listen.

For quite a while I definitely got that. A couple of my friends were like, we just hate what you're doing, we don't hate you.

>> Right. I think that education piece is such a big part of what you're talking about, like our outreach panels and safe space training. I so often get the feedback, when I do a safe space training, that I didn't know that, I had no idea; or like I now feel comfortable saying that word, I didn't know what it meant, but I wanted to be nice to you guys but I didn't know what to say. I'm like thank you and keep that definitions list. But it makes a huge difference, the education piece, for sure.

>> Yeah. So listeners, if any of you are interested in safe space training, you can go to our website to request one for your group, or we have open safe space trainings. Next one is in November, that you can come to on your own, with your friend, or however you would like to do that.

I definitely got a hate the sin, not the sinner from my best friend who I

was talking about, who was like really. Her mom and dad are really close to me, I'm close to them and their family.

Hi, mom, hi, Steve, hi pets. They have a lot of pets.

The first thing I remember telling her and being so nervous, because this was like telling my family, because it was people that I had were like family. And I knew they were extremely religious. And she's so loud. She was just so loud all the time. So I just didn't know what to expect. I remember sitting in their living room and her extremely loudly saying, we still love ya, hate the sin, love the sinner, kind of like knocked it off. And I remember being so like relieved, like that was such a wonderful thing.

I look back and think not the best reaction ever. But for where they were and -- and that's been kind of an ongoing discussion. Like I remember, I was riding in a car with her and she had on -- I couldn't even tell you, some talk radio where I was like, people really listening to this, and it was her listening to it, it was some radio I would never listen to. And they were saying something about marriage and against equal marriage for us. And I said something about it, and she said saying about how she was opposed to same sex marriage. And I looked at her and I was like, you know that's me, right. And there was this talk like that's me, how is Autumn ever going to be a bride's maid or my best woman at my wedding, and how are you going to -- you and Steve be there if I can't have one. Don't you understand this is me, like you're going to be in the photos, this is me. And I think that that really -- like it's that personal piece, where people see it as this crazy thing out there. It's like no, it's me, it's us, it's your friends.

That's what I like so much about the photo, the tag line of our photo this afternoon is your Professors, your classmates, your staff, your friends, people on your sports teams, it's Mizzou, it's us.

I think a lot of us get things like no, you're not. Wait, are you serious? You're kidding, right?

>> I remember, when I came out to one of my best friend's little sisters, who I went to high school with, like played lacrosse with, and I mean I will say I just teased her like horribly through high school, and like she was always an underclassman. I wasn't mean to her but constantly -- she was one of those people you could tell anything to, and they were like wow, I

didn't know that. You could tell them the most ridiculous thing, and they would believe you.

Anyway I remember I was standing by her car and I was just like, so I'm gay; and then I was like, all right, that's all. And she was just like okay, you've kidding, right, you're joke -- is this a joke? I never know when you're joking. I'm like, no, I'm serious. And then she got it after that. But it was just funny because, other than her, I didn't really get that reaction, but I feel that's more one you get from closer friends, who just had no idea and they just sort of like think you're joking. It's not really that funny. People don't usually joke about it unless they're gay, and then they're not joking.

>> I think it's important to note that I -- just on Dan Savage the other day, that LGBTQ folks, who are disowned by their parents, a lot of times for religious reasons where they come out, are eight times more likely to commit suicide than their non-LGBTQ counterparts.

>> Yeah.

>> And eight times more likely to commit suicide, that's horrendous. I think our religious organizations, there are still some that encourage parents to abandon their children if they find out their children are LGBTQ. Any organization, I don't care if it's religious or not, that teaches you to abandon your children, is probably not an organization you want to belong to. A shout out to anyone who might be thinking of coming out, and if you think your family might not be supportive, make sure you have a support group of friends that you can rely on and fall back on, if your family does walk away from you. Because it happens even today.

I know youth, even now, that you think that things have changed a lot but in some families they haven't, that are having to deal with rejection from their families over religious things.

Myself, I've had the whole gamut. I've had some amazing support from people who are very religious, and I've also had some searing judgment from people who are religious. So it runs the gamut.

>> Absolutely. And you know, part of what we try to do at MU LGBTQ is help to be a resource and connect people with friends. So Triangle Coalition meets every Wednesday at 6 PM in the LGBTQ resource center,

unless like they're having an event like next week at the drag show, and then it's directed at the drag show. But trying to help find those friends. The counseling center is an amazing resource, especially if you're going through coming out issues, dealing with people who aren't taking it very well, or if you're feeling suicidal for any reason, not just coming out issues, family issues, doing that.

Another interesting piece, in my undergrad, my senior thesis was in folklore. I was an English major and I focused on folklore. The folklore I studied was coming out stories. And I studied how and when LGBTQ folks told them to each other. The part I studied was the telling of the coming out story to each other, and how that interaction occurred and what happened. And so in folklore -- I don't really remember the details but I also wouldn't bore you with them. But in folklore, you study these different themes, and traits, and storytelling, and all these different things. What my thesis was all about was how coming out stories, told between members of the LGBTQ community, followed familial histories of coming out.

So the way that we tell each other stories is in a very family community oriented way. And I really liked it because we talked about how we're a family, and how we support one another and like scientifically in the way we studied -- some people would argue folklore isn't quite a science, but in ways we study and understand how humans interact with each other, the way we interact with each other is the way families interact with each other.

You know it is a thing that happens where we lose our family or lose our best friends or we lose our organizations. For those listeners out there, if you're in an organization, if you're in, you know, English majors organization, I wasn't in it, I think we have a great one, so I'm not commenting on them. I think they would probably be accepting. But whatever organizations you're in, if someone were to come out, how would your organization react and how could you, as an ally, as a fellow LGBTQ person, whatever, how could you make a difference to be supportive and be friendly. Because it can be really hard. It can be super hard. I think that's why we're talking personally about how we gave ourselves time and steps to get there, and tried to find positive supportive people. So, yeah.

>> It's definitely a process.

>> Absolutely. So one of the other reactions we've heard some people say is, can you get scholarships for that? So I never got that reaction. But there are some diversity and social justice scholarships available on our campus. And I would recommend that everyone go to financial aid, and talk about all sorts of financial assistance they can get because, you know, college is expensive. News flash, it's expensive out there.

>> What about best reactions, does anybody have like -- when you think about your coming out story, anybody have that was definitely my favorite reaction from a friend or family member or anything?

>> One of my -- well, actually, my boss at the time, she was the second person I ever came out to -- well I guess third if I count myself, but second person I ever told who wasn't me. She said welcome to the club, like she was so excited about it. And then the third person I ever told was also a boss of mine. And they worked together, and as soon as she came in it was like, I was like yeah, I'm a part of the club, and she didn't know what I was talking about because I was talking in code from what the first boss told me and she was trying not to assume that about me. I felt so cool because I thought my bosses were so cool, and that I was like them. I really thought that was great.

>> That's awesome.

>> One I had was kind of funny. I had two different friends that knew each other, but knew each other through me, primarily. And one was going into counseling, and I told him first. I was hemming and hawing. I couldn't get it out. He was trying to guess. He was like did you get so and so pregnant. I was like no. Eventually, I tell him, and he didn't want to believe me at first, and he finally decided he believed me.

Then he worked with people who were mentally challenged, and my other friend worked in homes with people who were mentally challenged. He stopped to work with some of the clients, and he mentioned to my other friend, he said -- I had visited them earlier and he said did you know Dean was by, meaning I had stopped by. And Tim was like yeah, he told me about it the other day and I was shocked, I didn't really believe it at first. They were like what. So they found out, because they said did you know Dean was by, meaning I had stopped by. And he thought -- so then they -- hey, you need to tell us something, why haven't you told us this,

you told Tim.

>> That is so funny.

>> I have two best reactions, one that is like sappy and cute, and then the other one. I guess I'll do the sad one first, get that out of the way.

One of my best friends from high school, we've been together since kindergarten and we use to do wear Dalmation pajamas and cowboy hats, and buy those huge stuffed animals that are like \$2 when we were in kindergarten. I remember telling her -- we were like in high school, it was at like get-together parties and we thought we were cool, and had a bonfire.

We were sitting on my friends steps. She had huge steps. It was a three story house, so many steps. I remember telling her at the beginning of the party I really want to tell you something, but I don't really know how to do it. She was like that's really awkward, why would you tell me about that at the beginning of a party, now I'm going to bother you about it. I'm like trying to come up with a way to tell you.

I remember she like pulled me over to these awkward huge steps that made me feel uncomfortable and really tiny, and she sat on the first one and she said I think I already know what you're going to say. I was like you're taking the stress off of me. She looked at me and said its okay if you're gay. And we were like bawling and hugging each other, and all these other people came around. She was really nice. She was like let us have a moment like we were juniors in high school and blah, blah.

But the funny one was I remember saying in my coming out story in the third grade, I was infatuated with -- that's really young, but infatuated with one of my friends. And she's still very beautiful to this day, one of my dear friends in high school. When I came out, she came up to me at my locker and did this sexy pose, and she said remember when you were attracted to me in third grade. It was so funny. I'm like so honored to be a part of your coming out story. But she was still funny about it. She's really funny about it to this day. She will be like at get-togethers and say, I was the first person that Sarah was ever attracted to. And I'm like...

>> That's awesome. Mine was -- my friend Amanda and I had just

gotten Jimmy John's and she had been having all this bad luck with her car. I don't know what was happening. She got sideswiped on our street, and someone like knocked off her mirror, it was like ridiculous, and then her tire popped for no reason, it was one after the other for like weeks. She was really bummed out about it. I guess that's when I chose to come out to her, when she was complaining about all this car stuff.

So we're eating Jimmy John's, and I'm like, you know, like I'm gay, and she's like -- and she just like looked over at me and started squealing, and like hitting her feet on the dashboard, and just squealing in excitement. And I just remember thinking that was the coolest reaction ever. Because also knowing Amanda she's like 5, 1, this tiny little person with a lot of energy. It was like the best response. Because it was like -- unlike some of the other responses, it had like a lot more emotion, they had a lot more emotion. And hers did too, but it wasn't sad, it was like exaltation. I'm like, you're awesome. That's my favorite one, for sure.

>> I remember one of the first people I met last year when I moved into Wolpers, we were like in this awkward -- Wolpers is set up weird because they have long hallways and little end hallways of like seven rooms, and it's like those little hallways become good friends and whatever. We're like hidden in the back.

And I remember coming out of my dorm one day with my girlfriend at the time. She was like oh, my god, dad. I'm like what's going on. She said I have a gay roommate right down the hall from me, dad. I have someone who's gay right down the hall from me. I was sitting there so overwhelmed. It was like, I'm just going to go back into the dorm room --

>> That's hilarious.

>> All right. Well we have about five minutes left. So I want to kind of open it up to final comments, and think about maybe advice that you would give somebody's coming out right now, advice you wish you could give your past self at some point, or advice you would give to people who are -- someone's coming out to them.

I'll start and I'll say, I didn't really get to this part of my coming out story, but my coming out story was halted for a number of years because I was

in a relationship with someone who didn't want to be out. So I kept to myself and our relationship hidden for the entirety of it, which was a long time and kind of sucked.

Then when I did come out when the relationship was over, I had such anger from friends who were mad that I hadn't come out to them and that I hadn't trust them to tell them. In order for me to stay in the relationship that I was in, it was out of my hands. So, you know, it is okay if you are a friend, to have resentment and have some hurt feelings of like wow, I always thought I was so supportive, I'm sad they didn't tell me, I'm sad that they were scared to tell me. Just try to have understanding that it is a really scary thing to do and there are negative consequences. And if your friend isn't coming out to you, they probably have a good reason, and you need to have a best reaction and say thank you, in gratitude if they share it with you. If you have that resentment maybe try and share it with other friends as opposed to the friend who is doing it, because it's a huge emotional process in lots of ways. So just be grateful when someone comes out to you. If you are feeling hurt that they didn't tell you sooner, try not to show that to that friend.

For people who are coming out and/or to my past self, I would just say just be really nice to yourself, just be really nice and caring to yourself. It's hard. You might make mistakes, you might regret things, and wish you did it in a different way, in a different timing. Write yourself a note or say out loud to yourself, I'm doing the best I can, self, you're doing the best you can, and you're great, and keep being strong, keep being nice. Also my advice is to go to therapy. I know I say that a lot but it really helped me an immense, immense amazing amount. I dealt with some of those suicidal thoughts, I dealt with issues. Going to therapy really helped me. Plus, it's free right now when you're a Mizzou student.

>> I would say to like allies out there and just people within the LGBTQ community, allow people to explore their identities, and just be supportive. That's like the best ally, someone like -- when someone's first coming out, like they might identify something and then like, you know, in a year, in two years, maybe like identify as something else. And just be supportive, not like, you know, you always change your mind, you don't even know what you are. It's just like, no, they're just trying to figure themselves out. And be supportive. That would be my advice.

>> Definitely.

>> I kind of touch on what you said, Struby, just about coming out is your own process. And some people will and some people won't come out for whatever decision it may be. I've been in relationships where some people can't come out because of very, very valid reasons and just not judge people for that. You know, I was in the closet for quite some time because I was so scared of what my entire support system, which I had every right to be scared of my support system to do, but I mean everybody finds their own time to do it and fire their own strength and just to be patient.

To my past self, I would just say like be excited about going against the grain, and that being different is actually really, really cool and interesting, and being unique is such a gift. And trying to fit into what everyone else wants you to be isn't always the right way to go and isn't going to put your best interest first.

>> We have such freedom. We can be however and whoever we want to be. Which is fun.

>> Uh-huh.

>> Coming out really, to me, it's an act of self-validation and it's kind of an important step to lead an authentic life. That being said, it is also a choice, and I don't think any of us should out other people. And if you aren't out, give yourself permission to be in. It's okay to be in the closet. It doesn't mean you're less of a person, but when you decide to come out, be okay with that as well, and realize that it's scary. It's scary as hell when you're in the closet. Once you're out, you're kind of like what was I so afraid of.

>> Definitely.

>> -- when you're looking back, and you realize there are a whole world of friends that are willing to be supportive.

>> I definitely agree.

Next week on Inside Out, 3:00 to 4:00 on Thursdays, KCOU 88.1, we will talk about the repeal of "Don't ask, don't tell." And in one hour from now, on the steps of Jesse Hall, facing the Columns on the Quad, we will be

taking our 17th annual Pride photo, Truman will be there, put on your best smiles, and let's go. Let's go be proud. Let's go show who we are, and come out as any identity we choose to come out as.

>> Celebrate your identity.

>> This is Ryan from Portugal, and you're listening to KCOU 88.1.

>> This is John Mare for RAAAADD, recording artists actors and athletes against drunk driving.

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