

Senior Voices Within the LGBTQ+ Community

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LEAH

What does the LGBT community look like today for the older generation?

I love being a mentor and role model to young LGBT people because I work within the LGBT world - I am able to use my experience, knowledge, and wisdom to support many LGBT people who may be struggling. My orientation is also very much entwined with my passion for social justice. Queer people don't struggle in a vacuum. There are socio-political institutions in this country and all over the world that threaten LGBT youngsters. This awareness informs my mentorship.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Defying labels, queering expectations, and staying connected to what unites us all.

DAWN

Has your orientation affected you in this stage of your life?

No - my orientation is not the thing that has ever affected me - but being a woman and working class has.

What does the LGBTQ community look like today for the younger generation?

I am jealous and at the same time not jealous, because I love what I went through, and I wouldn't change it for the world. It made me who I am. The younger generation have so much more freedom and they are much more diverse in the company they keep which I think is great.

DAVID M

When you were younger did you envision growing up in the LGBT community?

Not in the slightest, because back then we didn't exist. We literally only existed in subterranean areas - you know, in basements of buildings with locked doors... We were not visible at all - there was no reference to us in the media. Personally, I was very worried about being gay, because the only gay men I saw were figures of ridicule.

What does the LGBT community look like today for the older generation?

I suppose it is much more open than it used to be and yet at the same time, because we are of an age, I suppose we are not as in the public eye as LGBT+ people of other generations. We tend to be at home rather than in the clubs. When I walk down the street, I am not aware of that many people of my age - let alone their sexuality - which I think sums it up essentially. We are perhaps not seen as much as we ought

to be.

PETER

What do you make of the younger generations and their activism?

One of the things I dislike about Pride it that as much as it's a nice day out, it's stopped being political and I have a problem with that. I think there is a lot more education that needs to be brought about and to some extent, that's what activism needs to focus on.

Coming out is not something that you do just once, and it is over and done with. Rather, it is something you have to live through your whole life. That is true of being gay, it's true of being bisexual it's true of trans people. It isn't something you can just say 'I joined' and walk away, because there is always a backlash coming. Sadly, in my 68 years of life that is the main thing I have learned really.

How has your orientation affected you at this stage of your life?

I think it forces you to go out more and do more things. You have to stay active and social otherwise you would end up being lonely and miserable.

PAULINE

When you were younger how did you envision growing up LGBTQ?

I was not aware that I was transgendered or LGBTQ, or whatever term you want to use. There was no sex education - I don't mean that there was no sex education about being gay, there was simply no sex education at all. End of story. There was nothing at school, there was nothing at home.

JAMES

When you were younger, how did you envision growing up LGBTQ?

Any gay person on TV was depicted as camp, albeit funny and I think the camp comedians on television were accepted because they were entertaining, whereas the average straight person, who doesn't behave in that way, became a laughing stock. That affected oneself badly. Any comments were always derogatory and detrimental to your thoughts - the LGBT movement changed all that.

When I first went into a gay bar in Edinburgh it was called the Laughing Duck - I thought I'd walk in and be the only normal looking guy in the bar, yet it was packed with people like me. Just normal people trying to meet people and have a good time.

Has your orientation affected you in this stage of your life?

I think I finally came to accept who I was at 38/39. I met my partner of 25 years - Steve - and because I loved him so much, I wanted people to know I was happy so I told 90 percent of the people I knew. There was still 10 percent of people I didn't tell. I wasn't out there shouting loud and proud, but I was no longer afraid to say anything.

STUART

What does the LGBT community look like today for the older generation?

I don't feel as if I am isolated or neglected. I have a partner - although we don't live with one another - whom I see several times a week and we go out together. This is the best time of my life really. It's fabulous but I have no idea how long it is going to last as every day I get a day older.

ELLIE

How do you see yourself in 10 years' time? What would you like for your future?

I wish to be with my current girlfriend in a balanced relationship, healthy and enjoying our lives in a tropical place. I am looking forward to hearing what my granddaughter will think about my relationship. I assume it will be an entirely normal situation to have two grandmothers living together!

What has surprised you about the progress or lack of progress in society today surrounding the LGBT community?

We are still transitioning globally and there is a long way to go. We are still working on women's rights in some countries. In the UK even when society doesn't criticize openly there is still a resistance.

TONY

If you were 20 again today do you think your experience of being LGBT would be different? Would you do anything differently?

If I were 20 again today, I would have more confidence and pride in myself. I met my partner in 1980 and we lived together for 31 years until 2011, when he died suddenly and unexpectedly of pancreatic cancer, aged 54. If I were 20 again, I would have liked to marry him. Marriage wasn't possible until three years after he died.

When you were younger how did you envision growing up LGBT?

I was brought up in a strict Roman Catholic family. I'm sure my parents loved each other, but they never showed any affection in front of me - I never saw them kissing or even holding hands. There was no sex or relationship education at home or school. I went to a local grammar school where most of the teachers were priests. I realised that I had feelings for the same sex and as a teenager I went to see my parish priest for guidance. He advised me to be celibate. I envisioned a life of loneliness.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

I hope to be living in a gay housing complex in Manchester, where you have your own front door, but there is a community room and support on site.

DAVID D

When you were younger how did you envision growing up LGBTQ?'

I didn't. I was determined not to be gay. I was told it was wrong. At my all boys school I was bullied for not being manly enough (I hated sports). My family poked fun at gay people on television. It was clearly wrong, and I didn't want to be wrong. So, I tried to enjoy being straight.

Can you pick a specific event that was meaningful to you and representative of change?

When I came out to my son. He was 18, and I was terrified of telling him. But he simply asked me if I loved the man I had fallen for. When I said yes, he responded "Well that's okay then." It was as easy as that.

How has your orientation affected you in this stage of your life?

This is one of the happiest times of my life. During my forties, I thought I was condemned to forever deny who I was – I had built up so many lies through the years. I was terrified of coming out. I feared being ostracised by my family and friends. It didn't happen. If anything, I am far closer to my lifelong friends than I have ever been. And the relationship with my 96-year-old mother is wonderful.

What do you make of the younger LGBTQ generations and their activism?

I am part of that activism! I stood outside the Houses of Parliament in 2013 and campaigned for equal marriage. I work with the London Gay Men's Chorus on outreach projects in schools and workplaces, supporting young people who feel confused about their sexuality. My experience has been that there can be fewer intergenerational barriers between gay men.