

Creating Understanding

Category: LGBTQ+

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | July 1, 2019

I was born a Brobdingnagian in a world of Lilliputians. As a child, I towered over my classmates, both female and male, and most of my teachers. Even as an adult, I stand out in a crowd and I hate it. Being tall has contributed to my psychological angst: it has given me a negative self-image; it has made me the victim of teasing (“How’s the weather up there?”); and it has made me feel like an outsider from mainstream society.

Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community may cause its population to feel a similar sense of isolation and depression. Or, it may not. I do not know. What I do know for certain, however, is that being different should be okay—and that no one, especially ourselves, should condemn us for not fitting some predetermined mold.

I was about forty-four when I first saw “Falsettos” on Broadway—a musical about a Jewish family that must redefine itself when the husband leaves his marriage for a man, when that man gets an illness (AIDS) that not even the lesbian doctor from next door can diagnose or cure, and when all involved must search within themselves to discover new ways to love.

In the twenty-eight years since that musical debuted, I have learned from other musicals like “Fun Home,” from dramas like “Angels in America” and “Boys in the Band,” and from books and life that everyone—no matter her or his physical appearance or gender identity—is the same. We all have moments of satisfaction and suffering; we all dream and despair; we all strive for a life of quality—family and friends, health and happiness, a rewarding vocation and fulfilling avocations.

As a writing consultant at my local university, I have many colleagues who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. Some have become close friends, while others remain working acquaintances. My relationship with them, as with all people, depends on their sense of humor, their ability to sympathize and empathize, and their intellectual curiosity—not how they see themselves in terms of gender.

I guess Harper Lee said it best in “To Kill a Mockingbird,” when she wrote the following words of advice for Atticus to give his daughter, Scout: “You’ll never really understand a person until you...climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Our LGBTQ+ neighbors deserve our understanding, not judgment.

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