

The Feeling

Category: LGBTQ+

written by Fae Kayarian | July 2, 2019

So, this is what it feels like to belong.

I found myself crying as I danced through the streets of downtown Boston, celebrating my first Pride parade since coming out. While Lady Gaga songs and rainbow costumes provided a backdrop for my ecstasy, my joy arose from the feeling of belonging, a sense of connection bringing me closer to myself and to every person within that crowd of thousands. That was the feeling of my first Pride.

Although I officially “went live” as an uncloseted lesbian that June, I still wasn’t entirely committed to coming out in other areas of my life. That summer, I was working and volunteering at Harvard Medical School and was hellbent on maintaining the “straight girl façade” I had mastered for the past twenty years. I couldn’t stand the idea of someone looking past my work and using my sexuality to measure my caliber. *Over my dead, gay body!* I would tell myself. I’d worked too hard, for too long, to be labeled as the “gay neuroscientist” instead of the “great neuroscientist.” While it wasn’t an ideal situation, I came to accept this shameful compromise, relieved to keep my work self and my actual self out of each other’s business.

One day, while volunteering with patients on an inpatient neurology unit, I visited a patient who had been admitted for neuropathy. We got to talking, and he began sharing stories about his husband and their loving marriage. I kept quiet, trying to keep the conversation focused on his courageous spirit instead of my meekness. Then he threw me a Boston Red Sox-caliber curve ball by asking, “Have you ever felt that feeling—the feeling of belonging?” He looked at me, and in his eyes was the same glow I felt during Pride just weeks before.

“I have,” I declared. “It was after coming out, and I’ll never forget that feeling.”

He smiled. “I knew you knew that feeling, too.”

Since then, I have been out and proud in all aspects of my life, including at my various positions at the hospital. I never need to announce my queerness to colleagues or patients, but I find it comes out in small, intimate interactions, through love and listening. Just like in my encounter with the neuropathic patient, it softly bubbles up and brings people together through a healing, human sense of connection. That is the feeling belonging—the feeling of medicine.

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