

## L.I.F.E. as L.G.B.T.

It was a tradition in my family to sit down watch Glee together every week. But every time I watched a scene with the openly gay characters Kurt and Blaine I felt my heart stop and my body tense up. The cause of this anxiety was rooted in my self-denial. I would sit and watch the reaction of my mother hoping and praying she wouldn't be disgusted or repulsed. And after my "coming out" our family viewings of Glee intensified even further. I recalled watching a scene where Blaine serenades his boyfriend Kurt and suddenly the screen went black. Hitting the power button my mother bluntly stated, "Sorry I can't watch fags anymore." I had never felt so broken before. As I sat sinking into my couch stunned and hurt. I realized that being gay isn't subject to other people's acceptance of you. Perhaps the best part of being gay is the acceptance and love you gain for yourself.

Since I have come out, I am no longer afraid to be me, 100% of the time. A year ago I hated myself for being gay, and I tried to suffocate anything that might be perceived as anything other than heterosexual. Being openly LGBT is more than being open about your sexuality; it's about being comfortable in your own skin. Members of the LGBT community often internally battle who they are for years. This constant conflict between your heart, mind, and body is exhausting both physically and emotionally. But the strength and courage it takes to overcome these trials creates a beautiful and honest version of you. To be quite blunt, if you

can come out to your Mexican-American, Catholic family, nothing else in life seems as scary or intimidating. And contrary to popular belief, my walk with God has only grown stronger since my self-acceptance. Every time I had attended mass I was overwhelmed with guilt and shame. I attempted to hide from the one person who knows me best and could be of greatest assistance in my time of confusion. But I don't need to hide from anyone and especially not Him.

The LGBT community is just that, a *community*. The support and understanding I have received from my lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender friends has been an absolute blessing. No matter what I am facing, I know I have a strong safety net of support and advice. It's rare to find another group of people who can lift each other up like the LGBT community does. It's both inspiring and comforting to know that there are people like me all over the world who understand and accept me for who I am. Heterosexual people don't always have that same acceptance and support from within their community. But I know I can be myself completely free of judgment from my LGBT family. Another amazing aspect of the LGBT family is the diversity that often divides other people only unifies us. We are a multitude of races, religions, and gender identities and yet can come together.

Being a member of the LGBT community is of course difficult, especially when you're young and still discovering things about yourself. But the ability to

be free, and have a guaranteed group of people who support that freedom is one of the greatest things in my life. Yes, I wish my family and society was more accepting of who I am. Yes, I hated myself for a long time before reaching acceptance. And yes, there are times where I think to myself, “Life would be easier if I was straight.” But I succumbed to that way of thinking I wouldn’t love myself as much as I do now.