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What I Wish I Could Have Told My 11-Year-Old Closeted Self

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In honor of Pride Month, HuffPost Young Voices is highlighting the coming out stories of teens and those in their early 20s. Was it a life-changing moment? A bittersweet one? No big deal? Are you “out,” but only to certain people? What does being “out” mean to you? Email youngvoices@huffingtonpost.com to share your story.

By Kelly, 21*

At 11 years old I knew that there was something different about me — something that made me weird or strange or less than. I didn't understand exactly what it was, but I knew it was something. At 11 years old, I had my first crush on a real-life girl and it terrified me. I had the most wonderful parents and siblings , but I would

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so often hear a homophobic slur or derogatory comment come from the mouths of my dad, my mom or my school friends. They were never comments made with the intent to hurt, but they were homophobic nonetheless, and for a kid who was struggling with her identity, they cut deep.

As I grew up, I became really good at hiding my feelings. I internalized every gay thought I had and tried to ignore it. But by the age of 15, these suppressed feelings turned into self-hate. I hated myself and so I made the decision to strive for perfection. If I could never be normal, I would try to be perfect in every other area of my life. It started off simple, small changes here and there, studying harder, working out more and eating better. But no matter how hard I tried, the weight of my sexuality held me down and made all of my perfect “achievements” insignificant and for me, it wasn’t enough. I needed stability, to be really good at something so that this defect that I had been born with could be ignored or overshadowed.

So I stopped eating. I restricted my calorie intake so drastically that I dropped from 10 stone to 6 in the space of three months, doing irreversible damage to my young body and mind. This struggle with food gave me the sense of control I was desperately looking for. If I couldn’t change my sexuality I could change the way I looked, and it lasted for nearly three years. During that time I gradually put on weight and recovered a healthy relationship with food, but my self-loathing only intensified.

At 17 I started using boys as a new form of control. I slept around, threw away my dignity, my virginity and my body in a bid to be considered normal. I got into one really unhealthy relationship and was introduced to drugs. I started getting high after school, doing things that break my heart looking back. I was so, so young and all I had ever wanted was to be loved for everything that I was, but coming out was never an option.

College gave me the chance to start again, and I did. I still had a lot of suppressed emotions but I was getting better at pushing them deeper down. By the end of my first year, however, my anxiety and depression had reached a new high.

I decided that I needed to run away from my problems, so both metaphorically and literally speaking, I ran. I put a hold on my degree and moved abroad. Within the first couple of months I felt better about myself than I had in years. I was given the opportunity to live away from the society that had made me feel so small. That year changed me. I was still very much in the closet but I felt liberated.

While I was abroad, it was announced that Ireland would hold a referendum on marriage equality. This brought with it a whole host of emotions for me and thousands of other LGBT+ Irish citizens. I returned home eight months before the referendum was to take place. As the date came closer, I could feel my suppressed feelings making their way to the surface and so many times I had to leave social situations before they could spill out. I avoided talking about the referendum at all, afraid that my support would give away my “secret gay.” But I

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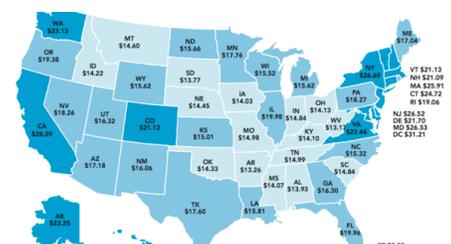
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knew it was only a matter of time. Coming out was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. It literally took me six hours, a lot of tears and the most patient best friend to say two simple words: "I'm gay." It also took a decade to build up the courage to do so, but I don't regret it for a second.

That night had a domino effect and I came out to my parents, siblings and close friends all within the space of a week. My friend was amused by how quickly it was all happening, commenting, "What was in that closet with you that kicked you out so hard?!"

Looking back, there are so many things I wish I could say to 11 year old me. You will get an incredible amount of support from your friends when you come out. You are worth so much more than throwing yourself around and depriving your body of the fuel it needs to thrive. By the time you're 21 years old, you are going to learn to love yourself to the point of narcissism because you're a pretty great person and although it shouldn't be this hard in the first place, it gets better.

Being told you're not good enough, be it directly or indirectly, is damaging to any person, but young people in particular. Every child should be given the opportunity to grow and learn. Every teenager should have the opportunity to study and fall in love and make stupid mistakes. NO young person should be denied any of these things because their society has them so scared of their sexuality that they self destruct.

On May 22, 2015, Ireland became the first country to legalize same sex marriage by popular vote, and the impact of this result has already been incredible. All I can hope is that other countries where LGBT+ citizens do not have the same rights as their straight peers will follow suit and create a society in which their children will never feel less than.

If you are growing up in a place that doesn't recognize you as an equal, just remember that you are good enough, you are equal and you are worth loving.

**Name has been changed*

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NEW YORK, NY - JUNE 29: A general view of atmosphere during the 2014 New York City Pride March on June 29, 2014 in New York City. (Photo by D Dipasupil/Getty Images)



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A group of gay parade participants and party people are having a great time dancing around at Copenhagen Gay Pride Parade. Denmark 2013. . (Photo by: PYMCA/ UIG via Getty Images)



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LONDON, ENGLAND - JULY 04: People take part in the annual Gay Pride street march through central London on July 4, 2009 in London, England. This years parade theme is entitled 'Come Out and Play' and consists of celebrities, floats, and performers celebrating the UK's largest gay and lesbian festival. (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)



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A woman holds the rainbow flag, colors of pride for the gay community during the homosexual, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (HLBT) visibility march, the Gay Pride, on June 29, 2013 in Paris, exactly one month to the day since France celebrated its first gay marriage. AFP PHOTO / MARTIN BUREAU (Photo credit should read MARTIN BUREAU/AFP/Getty Images)



AFP via Getty Images

Youngsters hold a rainbow flag, a symbol for the homosexuals, as they march on the street during their anti-discrimination parade in Changsha, central China's Hunan province on May 17, 2013. About one hundred persons gathered to the anti-discrimination parade on the International Day Against Homophobia, appealing for understanding to homosexuals from the mass people. CHINA OUT AFP PHOTO (Photo credit should read STR/AFP/Getty Images)



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AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS - AUGUST 02: Revelers on a boat parade the Prinsengracht canal participating in the Amsterdam Canal Parade during Amsterdam Gay Pride on August 2, 2014 in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Over 500,000 people from all over the world attend the yearly Gay Pride and the Canal Parade where 79 boats with revelers in fancy costumes parade the Dutch capital from the Prinsengracht canal to the Amstel river. (Photo by Jasper Juinen/Getty Images)



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JERUSALEM, ISRAEL - SEPTEMBER 18: Participants wear rainbow flag take part in the annual Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade 2014 in Israel on September 18, 2014. Over 500 people attended the gay pride parade in Jerusalem and marched to Independence Park from Gan HaPa'amon (Bell Park). (Photo by Salih Zeki Fazlioglu/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)



STR via Getty Images

Participants pose with a rainbow coloured heart shaped placard during a local annual gay pride parade in Hanoi on August 4, 2013. Some two hundred activists waving rainbow flags and carrying hand-painted banners biked in a colourful convoy through central Hanoi on August 4 as part of the communist country's second gay pride parade. AFP PHOTO (Photo credit should read STR/AFP/Getty Images)



YASUYOSHI CHIBA via Getty Images

Revellers march with a giant rainbow flag during the annual Gay Pride Parade at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on November 16, 2014. AFP PHOTO / YASUYOSHI CHIBA (Photo credit should read YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP/Getty Images)



Gonzalo Arroyo Moreno via Getty Images

MADRID, SPAIN - JULY 06: Two gay men calling for freedom kiss during the Madrid Gay Pride Parade 2013 on July 6, 2013 in Madrid, Spain. According to

a new Pew Research Center survey about homosexual acceptance around the world, Spain tops gay-friendly countries with an 88 percent acceptance rate. (Photo by Gonzalo Arroyo/Getty Images)



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Woman waving a 'Born this Way' rainbow flag over the dancing crowd in front of the San Francisco Federal Building, at the Gay Pride Festival.



FILIPPO MONTEFORTE via Getty Images

Rome, ITALY: Demonstrators pass the Colosseum during the gay pride parade in Rome 09 July 2005. AFP PHOTO / Filippo MONTEFORTE (Photo credit should read FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/AFP/Getty Images)



Alberto Buzzola via Getty Images

TAIPEI, TAIWAN - 2012/10/27: Dressed in fancy costumes reminiscent of ancient China, participants at the Taipei Gay Pride Parade celebrate in harmony and fun. (Photo by Alberto Buzzola/LightRocket via Getty Images)



NORBERTO DUARTE via Getty Images

A gay couple kisses during a parade demanding equal rights for the LGBT community, on September 27, 2014 in Asuncion. AFP PHOTO Norberto Duarte (Photo credit should read NORBERTO DUARTE/AFP/Getty Images)



ADALBERTO ROQUE via Getty Images

Locals take part in a gay parade, on May 9, 2015, in Havana. AFP PHOTO/ADALBERTO ROQUE (Photo credit should read ADALBERTO ROQUE/AFP/Getty Images)



Arun Sharma/Hindustan Times via Getty Images

NEW DELHI, INDIA - NOVEMBER 30: Indian members and supporters of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community hold placards and dances during a Gay Pride Parade, on November 30, 2014 in New Delhi, India. Nearly a thousand gay rights activists marched to demand an end to discrimination against gays in India's deeply conservative society. (Photo by Arun Sharma/Hindustan Times via Getty Images)



Brendon Thorne via Getty Images

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA - MARCH 01: Parade goers march during the 2014 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade on March 1, 2014 in Sydney, Australia. The Sydney Mardi Gras parade began in 1978 as a march and commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall Riots of New York. It is an annual event promoting awareness of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues and themes. (Photo by Brendon Thorne/Getty Images)

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