

Everybody Loves Somebody in the LGBTQ+ Community

by Liz Jorgensen

We have known for decades that the young people most at risk for dying by suicide are LGBTQ youth who have been rejected and/or completely abandoned by their families and communities for their sexuality. PRIDE is saving lives; teens and young people can see the love and support around them even if their family or faith community has rejected them. Having a voice inside and outside their families is not just an innate right, but life-enhancing, life-saving development. People who are actively and vocally accepting of all genders, sexualities, and identities are helping to heal our society of deep-seated hatred and fear.

A point I make to anyone who still harbors prejudice or resistance to the all-embracing PRIDE banner is this "You know that you most likely love someone who is LGBTQ. They just can't tell you and it is a real loss."

My good friend and colleague Nancy Rappaport MD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School began my thinking on this when I called her, very happy that the US Supreme Court upheld the right for all citizens to marry. I said, "Nancy, with all the prejudice and hate we still have I am happily shocked that we have embraced marriage equality." She made the very wise observation that prejudice can fester when humans have little or no contact with the races, creeds, or colors they fear and then hate, "But everyone knows and loves someone who is LGBTQ."

I believe she is correct, and I believe we have much more work to do to make our culture caring and inclusive of all. When I was a teen and young adult no one that I knew was "out" as gay, lesbian or bisexual, even though I was in a very inclusive group where several friends and professors were gay. It was a completely repressed culture in most areas of America.

Watching 'Rocket Man' the great musical movie about the life of Sir Elton John with two young members of my family reminded me of the time before PRIDE where shame and denial were common. Elton could not express pride, or even discuss his sexuality without fear of real rejection and reprisal professionally, even when he was at the top of the music charts. The movie depicts his suffering and depression, his complete rejection by his father, and terrible treatment by his mother and others because he was "a fairy."

I remember living in that world of deep prejudice- only 35 years ago there was no pride, no rainbows, and less hope for young teens coming into their sexuality that they would be safe and loved. I talked to my young family members about how it was acceptable to bully LGBTQ teens in my Catholic High School and how terrible it was to watch and be almost powerless to help my friends. They were as surprised to hear about this open and accepted hostility towards LGBTQ people as I had been hearing about the recent history of segregation and intense racial hatred from my parents. It seemed to be impossible, and yet, both racial equality and LGBTQ equality are not a given. We all must keep celebrating, calling out inequities, inappropriate language, and 'jokes' to keep our sisters and brothers and gender-fluid friends safe and cared for.

The fact that PRIDE is celebrated for the entire month of June makes me smile and gives me hope that the fear and hatred cannot win. Maybe one day our society will advance to a place where everyone has a right to live authentically without a constant battle for basic human rights. Maybe one day soon?

Until then the Rainbows have it!