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Proud

As life goes on you as a person are constantly changing and evolving into different levels and versions of yourself. I have seen a lot of different versions of myself throughout the years and continue to find myself and who I really am. I want to talk about my journey to finding and accepting who I am. I grew up in what you might call a broken family and had to tend to myself a lot and take care of myself. This made me start to focus on things I wanted in my life and what I didn't want in my life. Growing up I learned basic stuff about myself like the fact that I love music and feel like I can't live without it. I love movies and television and I want to be able to create my own stories in these formats as a career. But one thing I definitely did struggle on was my sexuality. Now everyone has a different story on what they went through some may be similar and some may be very different.

Growing up I had one older sister and one younger brother and all girl cousins. As a child I was constantly playing with my cousins and because they were all girls, they of course did things you'd considered would be "girl things". Playing with dolls or dress up in princess dresses and things like that. I didn't think anything of it at the time I was just having fun with my cousins, and I enjoyed these things. It wasn't until I was told I needed to start doing boy things that I felt as if it was a problem. I felt as if me having fun wasn't okay and I needed to put that part of me away. As I got older, I started to develop my own personality and interests. Being very into music and listening to it every day I developed a love for certain artist and genres. My first

favorite artist was Selena Gomez, I fell in love with her on her show *Wizards of Waverly Place* and I fell in love with her music. I had posters of her on my wall and would buy all her CDs with birthday money. She was my idol growing up and she was my first ever concert I've ever been too. When I would tell other kids in school that my fav artist was Selena Gomez they would laugh and say, "that's girl music." Again, I didn't understand what I was doing wrong I just loved her music, and I didn't get why people laughed at that. It made me want to hide a lot of things about myself growing up and change who I was. As the years went by started to see some gay representation on tv or movies. Seeing this I was very confused and shocked because I had never seen anything like it before in my life. When I had asked my family what being gay means the answers, I got were not what I was expecting to hear. It was along the lines of "That's not right" "Those people don't see heaven" and you know religious and hateful things like that. So I didn't grow up around any type of gay representation other than tv or movies.

As I entered junior high, this is the start where teens usually find themselves a little bit more. Now I had a girlfriend, and she was nice and pretty. I did feel an attraction to her and thought we would get married and live all that happily ever after stuff people talk about, but that didn't last very long. Well, it wasn't until I met my best friend who was a boy that I started to question my sexuality. Now we did almost everything together we would hang out all the time after school, we tried out for soccer together and go to the places like the movies and the skating rink. He would even come sleep at my house from time to time and we would stay up and watch movies or play games and just talk normal friend stuff. As we got closer and closer, I found myself starting to think about him a lot. When I wake up and when I go to bed. I just figured that I was thinking of him because he was my best friend and that's what best friends do. One night he asked if he could come over to my house and spend the night for the weekend. We had gone

to the movies and later that night he came over and we were just hanging out in my room. He started to tell me about how this girl in our grade had asked him out and wanted to be his girlfriend. This was the first time I felt jealousy because at the time I didn't know I was gay, but I didn't want anyone else hanging out with him that wasn't me. Sounds horrible I know. So, he then told me she wanted to kiss him, but he had never kissed anyone, so he was nervous. We joked around by making him kiss his pillow so he could practice for his new girlfriend a little after this he asked if he could kiss me. I didn't know what to say and I started to get nervous because I was taught that boys don't kiss boys, but something in my gut told me I needed to do this for me. So, we kissed and it gave me a realization moment for me. I started to understand why I was thinking of him every day and what these feelings were. I was catching feelings for him I just didn't understand at the time.

Fast forward to high school I was still "in the closet" and only a few people knew that I was into guys. I was scared of being judged and bullied for being "different" than other kids. When I had to "come out" to my mom it was the scariest thing in my life because I was worried the one person who is most important to me wasn't going to accept me. When I broke the news to her, she told me a lot of things that made me feel calm, but also like I still had to hide myself. Although I was out to my friends at school, and they supported me and always cheered me on.

It wasn't until I attended my first gay pride festival last year, that I finally felt accepted. This might sound cliché but being surrounded by so many open and out and proud gay, lesbian, and bisexual people made me feel like myself for the first time ever in my life. I felt like it was what I had been needing all throughout my life to just get that weight lifted off of my shoulders. Our world now is way more accepting compared to how it was early 2000s. Seeing that everyone can be out and proud and have a community to support them made me vow to myself that I

would never change myself for anyone and that everyone is different, and you have too not be afraid to be yourself. I've been pushing myself more and more to break out of my shell and be myself for me. By not being afraid to share who my favorite artist is like Ariana Grande, or Selena Gomez because it's what I like and that shouldn't bother anyone. The clothes that I wear because it's what makes me feel good. Or who I fall in love with because at the end of the day it's my life and it's my happiness and I can't let anyone get in the way of that. With learning and seeing all of this and getting to experience this feeling any chance I get to encourage someone else to be themselves for their happiness I do it because I didn't have that until recently and I wouldn't want anyone else to feel like they're not accepted.