

We are Humans: Why are we not treated as such?

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Greetings, everyone.

I am Zee, born 1997, and I will tell you a story.

As a child I did not know I could be in love with a girl. Since kindergarten I was asked what boy I liked, which boy was I “dating” and told that me and my male friend were such a cute couple. My brother had it the same except he was asked about girls.

In my little country in Central Europe, a famous band called Horkýže Slíže, in 2002, released a song titled “G & L Song/Lesbian Gay Song”. Every kid loved it. The truth is that most of us did not understand what it was about. I sure did not, but a memory of a holiday in Croatia with my family comes to mind. It was just me and my brother with our mom, swimming in the sea enjoying our time. Me and brother started singing it. He sang a part and I sang the part that went ‘I’m sorry baby, I am a lesbian.’ The moment I said it my mom hushed me saying: “you cannot say that!” Did she tell me why? Did I know why? No. After all I was five or six years old.

I was around eleven when I saw an anime on TV called Gravitation, which as I later found out was of the *yaoi* genre. I was beyond confused. I did not know what to think, I had no idea what was happening; all I knew was that it was wrong because boys are supposed to be with girls, not with other boys.

On May 22, 2010, Slovakia had its first Pride in Bratislava. It was, however, cancelled because of attacks by members of the neo-Nazi group “Slovenská Pospolitos”, which was a political party from 2005 to 2006 but had been disbanded by the Supreme Court. They physically attacked participants who were carrying Rainbow Flags, threw tear gas canisters into the crowd as well as eggs. The police failed to secure a safe path for the parade. Given that they had known in advance about the parade. It could be argued it was for lack of trying.

School did nothing to help me understand. My peers were using the words gay and lesbian as insults. Up until I finished primary school in 2012, at the age of 15, those were the most dangerous slurs someone could call you. If the kids repeatedly called you gay or lesbian then you were the laughing stock – the odd one out, the one to be avoided.

June 2012, the Pride took place without any serious incident regarding the safety of the participants, but a member of parliament called homosexuality a sin and praised the Russian ban of Pride Parades. This resulted in the LGBT community taking action to call a ban on hate speech.

My parents did not tell me anything about the LGBT community. I think it maybe because they did not consider it important – it did not concern them after all. Boy, they were in for a surprise in a few years.

As I entered high school, in 2012, I had a classmate who was lesbian. Since we were 22 girls in the class, no boys, it was a problem. I remember everyone looking at her from the corner of their eyes, being overly conscious of her presence. One day she gave another classmate a bracelet which the girl burned it over a toilet with some of her friends saying hateful things about lesbians. As she returned to class, she had the audacity to say she had nothing against gays. This was what pushed me forward to support the LGBTQIA+ community. They were just human, why aren't they treated as such?

I started talking about the LGBTQIA+ community every chance I got. I did some research and the more I knew the angrier I became.

In 2015, the Alliance for Family tried to push for a ban on gay marriages and child adoptions by gay parents. The referendum consisted of 3 questions:

1. *Do you agree that only a bond between a man and a woman can be called marriage?*
2. *Do you agree that same-sex couples or groups should not be allowed to adopt and raise children?*
3. *Do you agree that schools cannot require children to participate in education pertaining to sexual behaviour or euthanasia if the children or their parents object?*

Fortunately, they were unsuccessful. They preached that the LGBTQIA+ was disrespecting the values of family and that such people were what was wrong with society.

If someone was homosexual they were automatically a paedophile. If you were discovered or even considered gay, you were not allowed to work with children. “What if the person looks at my child like that? What if they touch my child?”

“Being gay is a sin!”

“It is unnatural!”

“It is against nature!”

“They will burn in Hell!”

“They are paedophiles!”

“It is a disease!”

The Church is the main source of this irrational hatred. In spite of the fact that homosexuality is no longer recognized as a mental disorder – it was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association in 1987 and from WHO's International Classification of Diseases in 1992 -- many Slovak people have yet to get the message. I mean, we still have conversion therapies, and they are still being used.

I would love to say that only the Catholics are the source of this discrimination and absurdity, however, they are not.

After World War II, we became a socialist country. Despite the fact that that era ended 30 years ago, many elderly Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers still accept the socialist view that homosexuality is a mistake.

I became a part of LGBTQIA+ community at sixteen. I only grew louder and became more furious.

Our parliament considers the issues of the LGBTQIA+ community as unimportant. The leader of the strongest political party, Robert Fico, said: “absolutely unimportant issue, non-

essential. I wouldn't even bother with it." In 2016, the reality of having elected a Neo-Nazi political party, led by Marian Kotleba - the former leader of the civil society group "Slovenská Pospolitost", into our parliament was terrifying. The people that carried the symbol of the Hlinka Guard, which was a Slovak fascist militia in existence from 1938 until 1945, were now in power preaching traditional family values, racism towards immigrants and hatred of the Roma people. These were the same people who terrorized the participants of Prides.

Last year, 2019, we had Pride in 3 cities in Slovakia for the first time. Last year we elected our first female president whose campaign did not suffer when she expressed her support for the LGBTQIA+ community. Last year, our female president attended an LGBTQIA+ event.

You want to know what our current situation is?

To this day I have not seen a same sex couple holding hands in public. Out of my 3 close male Slovak friends, two are gay. One is completely out and the other doesn't want to tell his parents for fear of things getting complicated. Two gay acquaintances of mine are also in different situations – with one telling his mother at 15 and being taken to a psychiatrist, who thankfully, explained to his mother that being gay, is absolutely natural, however, his father does not know about his sexuality because he fears his reaction. The second one moved away from his prejudiced family from a small town to a city, where he found support. My female friend hides the existence of her girlfriend from her parents, for she is afraid of what could happen.

Every person, that I know, who is LGBTQIA+ has had it or still has it hard – even when the family is loving and supporting, it still took courage to tell the truth and time to mend the relationships.

It is 2020 and we, the LGBTQIA+ community, are facing the impossible in parliamentary elections. There is only one political party running that speaks directly about the LGBTQIA+ problems and is promoting our rights and one that shows us support. Every other party is either homophobic or does not consider the issue important.

In 2020, the most famous and respected director, who most of us feel like we are finally being represented, went to a ball in the Slovak opera with his partner. In an interview with the SME he was asked various questions about the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as to why does he think the neo-Nazi is so popular. His answer was simple.

"Before they were shamed to voice their opinions. Now, they are represented and can give free vent to their hate."

*The important part of this interview was not the civilized conversation, the politics or the analysis of the situation – it was the blocked comment section. The news SME covers includes murders, scams, politics and many other controversial topics. This video, however, was the **first** one for which the comment section was blocked. Messages of hate towards us were brutal, some going as far as saying "homos should be sent to the gas chambers."*

The politicians in the foreseeable future will only use us as a tool for hate to get votes. We cannot count on them. Our president supports us, but she does not have much power.

Who can we count on?

The Millennials. The educators. The Gen Z-ers. The doctors. The part of Gen X that has progressed.

I am a Millennial, a teacher and a youth coach. It is my duty to spread love and understanding. It is my job to correct the misinformed. It is I who can make a difference.

The change is here, even though, we do not really see it in the politics. It is in the young ones that do not use words such as gay or lesbian as a slur. The young ones that correct their peers when they are being homophobic. It is my team asking me the difference between homosexuality and paedophilia and listening to the explanation and nodding in understanding. It is in the kids I met that are face-palming at the discrimination of same sex couples. It is in the teenagers, who wear the Pride flag as an accessory in broad daylight. It is in my girls, who said they are not blind when one of them came out as pansexual.

The situation on the outside seems hopeless, but we are here and we are fighting by educating. And once we are larger in numbers, once the kids grow up, that is when things will change.

We will finally be treated as humans and be ready to talk about the TQIA+ part of our community.

SOURCE

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