

Don't Ask, Don't Tell as all over the world is one of the strategies of lesbian oriented girls and women when self defending from homophobia. Because during long term Labris psychological counseling for lesbians work most often sought assistance in getting support of parents and other family members for their lesbian identity, the author decided to compile "a (un)sent letter" to parents in the form of an essay, i.e. a diary of "an imaginary girl" within this article. This letter is a contribution as well to the current Labris' campaign targeting parents who have lesbian daughters.

"Don't ask me anything and I won't tell you first", is sometimes the easiest and hardest. If I don't exist, it's easier for you. If I don't exist, in the long run - it's harder for me. And I'm a lesbian. Do you have an idea what I have felt when I understood I liked girls? I know you "do not want to know", but I will tell you that I didn't believe myself that those were love feelings; I told to myself I was imagining things, it was an accident, that everybody sometimes experienced that and that it was just because temporary. I tried to stifle and deny those love feelings, since you'd never told me lesbians were o.k. and that you would love me when I grow up and have a woman for a partner.

The ability to have love and sexual feelings for women have "continued", my world was shaken since I was not able to get rid of them and I started to believe that "it seems I am". And I started to be afraid "it was written all over my face", to start dressing as it was expected and considered "feminine". Then I thought that while it was just in my head, everything was under control. I meet girls who sometimes flirt with being gay, since this is something that makes them more interesting in the (homophobic) group of friends. It's easy for them to joke with that, since they are not lesbians, and they are just taking the attention through this and next day they hang out with a boyfriend. The "one day fashion" would pass. And what to do when you are "for real"? Panic-stricken, fear, angry with oneself, desire to wake up tomorrow and realize it is not true I'm a lesbian.

Shy, insecure, I finally managed to find out where are the places where girls like me gather. This was all strange, dark clubs, oftentimes basements, below ground level, on particular days only (actually nights), as if all of us are "doing something bad", and I can't kiss a girl I like in broad daylight in a Belgrade main street coffee house. And more and more some anxiety and some intolerance toward me grow. I don't know what to do, it seems that this stuffy club is not a place for me; in some contacts that I bravely make it turns out we have nothing in common apart from sexual orientation. As if I don't belong here either.

I only want to live the usual life as other people. Not once or twice a week, hiding, cautious about being seen to enter here or when somebody calls me on the cell phone I tell I'm in a coffee shop (of course, at the ground level, not at all below it) with (of course, heterosexual) group of friends. I'm between worlds, the majority one which is the only one allowed and the other one - the banished one. How many times I just think that the majority is right, this is not all right. Then I look deeply within and remind myself that love cannot be bad and I must believe in myself. Often, I do not have means to find this reminder, it all seems unmanageable, and I even wish I cease to exist. I'm scared to death when this desire returns. And I can't talk to anyone about this.

I always remain loyal to you, my parents, not myself. You haven't taught me that love has its different expressions and that every person is o.k. regardless of whom they love. That I'm good although my life is different from yours. You've thought me it's more important to protect you and I often do that the best I can because I love you, but do I protect you from myself? Well, on numerous occasions I thought that it would upset you, that your health would worsen, "that you are old and it doesn't matter anymore", that you would never accept it, that when I move out "it was not your business anymore" and that if I told sooner - you would throw me out of the home (because I depend on you, then I went to live in another town and I live my life you know nothing about. And I had it also "under your roof", but you didn't want to see it.

I always keep a good act, I pretend. I give up on myself. You expect there is a boyfriend in my life and to have grandchildren someday. Once I avoid to answer, once I say "I have somebody", sometimes I manage to keep you quiet by saying that "it's too early for children" or mention that "I might not even have children", on so many times I want to explode and shout "I have a girlfriend" or "no, I don't like men, I'm sorry, I feel something for women, but I can't mention it, since I know how you would react". Giving in to the pressure, I turn my own clock backwards and say to myself again that this is probably a passing phase and that "in the end everything would be fine, marriage, kids, etc". I wish I was in a bad dream, and I encourage myself (or delude?), that I would wake up for sure.

How is that I know your reactions? Because you are one of those who told me homosexuality is sick, evil, dark, not normal, something awful, and "that God would punish you if you had a homosexual child". You don't even say lesbian, as if I'm not a girl, you don't even think about it, you have pushed me even more deep into the invisible! I've heard when you said that you couldn't handle the thought of having done something wrong (and in my thoughts I already see that I would, caring and stuck into an

unjustifiable guilt, assure you haven't), you've said you couldn't face the broader family, you questioned yourself on what would your Son explain to everyone in school, that you couldn't bear the shame (I would scream from the top of my lungs that I haven't killed anyone, I just love women and I'm certain that I would hear in return that it would have been "better if I had killed you" or that I have "already buried you in this way"). And you make sure I know that the neighbors already can notice "that some girls keep coming to see me". "Friends", I say. Loyal, I help in the creation of neighbors thoughts about you. I'm not important. I'm too scared.

And I remember I have tried to see what your thought on all this are, I told you about one of my friends who fell in love in a girl, that you asked me "what I'm doing with her". And she told that "as soon somebody knows", she gets invited to their house less or they do not call her up anymore or they ask her "not to mention THAT when she visits". And that she, somehow, managed to tell her parents and "they are o.k. with this, especially since she doesn't live with them anymore, but on holidays and birthdays they never invite her girlfriend to join her". When I give it a second thought, our scenario would perhaps be that we would never discuss my private life, "this is not a topic". Even if I would be sure in such an outcome between us, I dare not to take a risk. Before telling you, I'm still your child, afterwards... it seems you would momentarily forget that fact.

I've already completed "the selection" of my friend. You've almost not noticed, you've only asked about one and why she stopped calling. "She wasn't fair", I said and you were content with such an answer and said that "I don't need such a friend". We were so close, just about to open what it was really about... but, "nothing, nothing - better not now, some other time". Another friend, we were friends since primary school, she keeps asking me when I will find a boyfriend. She thinks "I just haven't found the right one". It seems she didn't hear what I told her. And I spent nights preparing the way I would tell my friends, when I cannot tell you.

One of them asked me whether I had "a bad experience with men" or there was something other "reason", e.g. "tough childhood" (ouch, this would be a sore spot for you!). She reminded me when, in the beginning, I wandered myself if homosexuality was "in the genes, and I was born like that" (and it is not), and I understood how desperately I was trying "to find something", just to feel more at ease in accepting myself. Luckily, it is my experience now that there are always friends who understand and feel joy I'm different from them, happy and proud of themselves I estimated them o.k. with telling them. They have felt I've given them invaluableness by coming out to them, that they were privileged by my trust. And I can see they are proud to have a

lesbian for a friend. I've caught myself justifying myself to the last mentioned friend, and within I know when you love a woman - that's that - the beauty of the feelings is a reason, there's nothing else. It's the same with being heterosexual. I know "you wouldn't allow the comparison". But, that's how it is, I'm sorry that you and many others do not allow yourself to understand this.

When you are a lesbian, you equally desire to see your beloved as often as possible, to smile at her and to be smiled back, to talk what has happened during the day, to make love passionately and gently, to spend time together with friends "that you are out to", that She is next to you when you have difficulties with the exams or at work, to take you to her parents to lunch where everybody would know that you love her, and that she loves you, that your love is talked about as well as a current relationship of her brother with his girlfriend, that your partner "accidentally" gently touches you while you get ready to leave and that her parents invite you to "repeat that afternoon". I wish to, when both of us feel it important, gradually plan joint life and that you, if you can, help us financially to settle. I wish that our neighbors tell us "good afternoon" equally as to the others in the building and see us as their neighbors, working women that have their jobs and go to the market and every Sunday play table tennis and take care of the cat who is also a family member and with no interference freely develop their lesbian existence. And that it is clear that a sexual identity is just one of our identities, that we are the whole of our identities, as everybody else. I wish to share with you, the parents, how it is hard for both of us that it is difficult for a lesbian couple to have children in this country, but that we do not admit the limitations that put us to the place of "the second rate citizens" and that we would think up a our own way to spread our lesbian family and that we, someday when our child goes to school, would need your support to have a teacher respect and accept a child with two moms and to encourage the child and us to endure and tell us we are right.

If you don't understand all this, I've read, and I already know girls and women of lesbian orientation that build independently their own safe alternative families, since they know that their homophobic primary families cannot take away their human right to personal growth and development. Blood relations are something not chosen by me, but I can exchange it for respect and feeling of being a human being, equally valuable as all of you. And as I write this, I already recognize my own regression and that, as a child, I get angry and open my mouth to speak to you that everybody is responsible for their own decisions. I know lesbian in their late 50s' "still haven't come out" and I do not wish to live with that burden, invisible. I have the right to get mad, and this about the responsibility (both yours and mine) is true.

I'm very tired of pretending. I wish to tell you: "I'm sorry, I cannot care about you anymore, now I have to care about myself". Although you would feel betrayed, left out, I would have to do it at one point in order to be free in my own life. It is up to you whether you would support me and show that for love it is enough I am your child and just love me, without any conditions.

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