

My Story of Welcoming at FUSIT

A key component of welcoming – of feeling welcomed – is feeling that you are seen, heard, understood and accepted for who you are. And the key to being seen, heard, understood and accepted is sharing our stories. So I am grateful for the opportunity to share a piece of mine.

I started attending services here at FUSIT late in 2010, and for several years was only marginally involved. I participated in some Sunday services, as well as Small Group Ministry and later, the Men's Group. I generally felt accepted, comfortable and welcomed – but only to a degree. Because hardly anyone really knew who I was inside, I was able to *fit in* – but didn't really have the feeling that I *belonged*. I hadn't yet signed the book, and I even drifted away for a time. I came back when Margaret Weis became our settled minister.

Perhaps it was her energy, her warmth, sense of humor – or her openness as an out and proud lesbian. Most likely, all of the above. But I felt drawn back to this community, as a place that somehow felt a little bit safer and more accepting --- of people like me. You see, I'd known for a long time that I was "not straight". I knew what I WASN'T. But I wasn't really sure *what* I WAS exactly, and I certainly wasn't out to a lot of people.

That changed because of an act of vandalism. Someone entered our church and wrote some homophobic graffiti right here in our sanctuary. I was surprised at how this affected me: yes, I was outraged that our church and community had been targeted. But I also took it PERSONALLY. I felt violated. This was an attack on ME. And people LIKE me.

Reverend Margaret organized a congregational conversation to discuss the vandalism, and how it was affecting us all. I attended that meeting, planning to sit quietly in the back and listen to what *other* people had to say. But after a short introduction, Margaret asked the group to split in two for a break out session: straight people over *there*, queer people over *there*. Suddenly I was no longer an anonymous bystander. I had to make a choice. Which group did I belong with?

Certain that everyone in the room was staring at me and whispering behind my back, I took a deep breath, got up and went with the queer folk, and it changed my life.

For the first time in my life, at age 58, I was out, in a very public way. And I felt welcomed by that diverse group of queer folk. I was accepted for who I was, without having to hide or be ashamed. Having spent most of my life feeling like I wasn't "straight enough" to fit in with the heterosexual world, I'd also felt like I wasn't "gay enough" to fit in with the homosexual world. To some extent, I still feel that way. But that day something clicked into place. Was I gay or was I straight? The answer was, simply, "nope". I was neither. I realized something I'd known all along, but never was able to say out loud, until then: **I am bisexual**. That realization, and that experience there in the FUSIT parlor, gave me the courage to start coming out to more people – the people I was closest to who deserved to know the truth of who I really was. Like my son. And my best friends. And SOME of my family.

But that's not the whole story. Identity is a journey. Coming out is a journey, its not a one and done. But now that I had a label that I felt fit me, I spent a lot of time reading and learning about bisexuality. And I learned something else that I'd already known for a long time: that it is not an easy path. I learned about things like bi-invisibility, bi-erasure, and bi-phobia --- all of which I had experienced in one form or another. I was told by a gay man that bisexuals couldn't be trusted. Some well-meaning straight friends who I told asked me if I was polyamorous, or in an open relationship – in the mistaken belief that

bisexuality means that you are incapable of monogamy. I learned about these and all the other stereotypes and misconceptions about bisexuality, including that bisexuals are

- Indecisive
- Selfish
- Untrustworthy
- Confused
- Really just gay and can't admit it to themselves
- Going through a phase
- Sex-crazed
- Unable to make a commitment

I also learned that bisexuals are the largest group within the LGBTQ+ community. But that they are **also the most likely to remain closeted.** (According to a Pew Research study in 2013)

And that Bisexuals have higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, internalized homophobia, and suicide, than do gays and lesbians, due to both the **absence of a bisexual community** and the **psychological stress of being in the closet.** Activists say bisexuals actually have two closets — a straight one and a gay one. (I can definitely relate to that.) *Those that remain closeted say its in large part because they don't want to deal with all those stereotypes and misconceptions.*

But I've learned some positive things too. I found a definition of bisexuality that I strongly identify with, by bisexual advocate Robyn Ochs: ***"I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree."***

I've also learned to never make assumptions about someone's sexual identity or orientation: you never know what someone is carrying around inside themselves.

And perhaps one of the most meaningful things I have learned about myself, is this:

Bisexuality is not what I DO. It's WHO I AM.

And, of course, its not ALL that I am – just a piece of it. I'm also a father, a brother, a musician, a naturalist, a mentor, and a friend, among other things.

So my journey, and my story, continues – as does all of yours. I am grateful to be part of a loving community that welcomes and accepts me fully as I am, where I feel seen, heard, understood and accepted, a community that accepts and welcomes each and every one of us, as equals –

Whoever we are, whoever we love, and wherever we are on our journey. We are all welcome here.

---Kevin Moss, September 2023