



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“The Transformative Power to Choose Love”

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Today we are celebrating National Coming Out Day! I'd like to share with you a personal story of love that I have been living out over the past few months. Although I wear many hats in my life, this message is very much centered around my role as a mom of my transgender adult child who came out to me just 9 months ago and the love lessons this experience has taught me.

I'll start with the fact that I have 4 grown children. A first born son, then a daughter, another son and my youngest transgender daughter, male to female.

I have her permission today to talk about her as long as I don't use her birth name. Her chosen name is now Melody and I will respect her wishes.

I feel my response to Melody's coming out was not a normal one. What I mean by that is many times parents will grieve the loss of the child and dreams they thought they knew when that child was born. But I felt the opposite. I felt a tremendous sense of relief.

I think of the image Lee Mokobe talks about of what it truly means to wash someone else's feet? Having a transgender child has taught me how to do this and what it requires of me. What love requires of me is a bending of the knee.

For me during my child's adolescence it was the tears of grief and sadness that fell over the feet of my child as I watched her struggle. This was my child who was painfully shy, who went through adolescence early, would isolate herself, would put her hand up to block any image of her when a picture was taken, wore long sleeves and long pants to cover up body hair, would not go

swimming and she grew her hair long to hide her face. Her coming out answered so many questions and in that moment an opportunity was created to choose love; to choose to wash the feet of my adult child with tears of joy and relief because the freedom of her truth that had been released finally from all the boxes that had tried to contain it.

I saw the light come on in my child for the very first time. Melody's liberation was influencing me. It was changing me. I felt free to love expansively. Melody was teaching me what it was to truly love someone, to be present, accepting of her on her terms and within the context of her authenticity.

Hate is so easy to talk about because it is so pervasive in our society and so out there for public display. Negativity today is like a default button that takes the center of attention. Love is harder to point to because as a matter of the heart it is subversive. But Love is a necessary transformative power and a light that makes hate but a shadow on the ground that has no power of its own. When a family member comes out, why is love so difficult for so many? Because it will transform you. That is what love does.

Melody's coming out has taught me, I am not perfect. I won't always get the pronouns right. Also, that coming out is not a one-time thing. She has the autonomy and the right to decide who she chooses to come out to and when. In the face of her courage, she is teaching me how to live and love more authentically, no masks and no agendas allowed.

Her coming out has given me a second chance as a mom to learn how to love her in a way that grows both of us and draws us into close relationship. We are learning how to be vulnerable with one another. And as a mom, I am all about creating safe space for all of my children. My transgender daughter has taught me that love is not fixed but radically disruptive and life-changing in the most beautiful and soul-healing ways.

Melody's coming out saved me from being a helpless mom. I had a second

chance to learn what to do right. To show up, be present and be who she needed me to be. I chose to be there with her, along-side her and to be a witness to her transformational journey. And in the process, I was being changed. For me it was like striking a match that ignited a love that I didn't realize could expand within me.

This time, I was able to love more authentically rather than with a love that was defined by the standards of pre-existing agendas, social expectations or religious dogmas that had contributed greatly to my child's suffering. This was eye opening and transformative for my own life. I had to look myself in the mirror so that I could courageously look into Melody's eyes and say, I choose to be here differently. I take my cue from you. I choose to learn from you. I've learned that love tears down old belief systems and replaces them with ones that are contextually relevant.

Acknowledging and accepting someone's existence and choosing to do so is one of the most powerful ways to live transformatively as a human being. That is what Coming out is all about.

Love always grows the heart. It changed me. It changes the world. For the Better.

I learned through the coming out of Melody that my opinion didn't matter. It was about asking Melody, what do you want? What do you need?

My acceptance, listening, following through and being present did matter. Celebrating my child mattered. I realize that all my children were here on this Earth to teach me what love truly looks like. Love is not fixed in time and space but like our universe is ever expanding outward to include new worlds. For me it includes embracing in my life the LGBTQIA+ Community as an ally and in service.

I'd like to end by reading a letter I wrote to Melody in response to her coming

out. If you are an individual here today who has come out or has not come out yet and needs a safe space, I have hugs to give, ears to listen and I choose to celebrate you. I choose the transformative power of love like Melody's and so many others in the LGBTQIA+ community to change me and to transform the world.

To my dearest Melody,

As your mom I have a confession to make. When I was young, I knew I wanted to get married and have 4 children. I remember praying to God that I would love to have 2 girls and 2 boys. Here it is 26 years later, and my dream has come true. I love YOU! YOUR light and YOUR essence. I feel privileged to be your mom.

As my daughter, I admire your courage, your tenacity to stand in your truth and embrace who you are. You are loved, loving and lovable. You ARE worth it. You are not alone. I want to be a safe place for you to land. I'm here every step of the way on your journey.

I always said, my children are here to teach me. I've always wanted to stay teachable. I love and accept you no matter how you identify because you are my adult child and I want to honor you in your truth.

When I read your letter, you are probably wondering what my feelings were reading it. To be honest, I felt a lot of relief and I felt very proud that you are my child with all your gloriousness making your way in this thing we all call life. And you are doing it boldly. I stand beside you and will support you in any way you need it.

It is so beautiful this gift you've given of being honest with yourself and sharing your truth in such an open way with me. It doesn't get any more loving than that.

All that said, I will need your help to navigate your journey in a way that feels

comfortable, safe, and authentic for you. I'll take the time to put together another letter with questions, some I am sure you are not even sure how to answer but will reveal themselves as you move forward.

Just know, every step of the way, I am here for you. I am also excited and relieved that your spouse is supportive of your journey in your relationship. This isn't always the case. I am sure that was difficult for you as well.

If things ever get too heavy, too confusing, too unsafe, or too unbearable for any reason, please come to me. I am here for you.

Time to celebrate you. The real you. Let me know how best to do this.

I love you my beautiful loving daughter!

Love, Mom