

My Change Over Time

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Being born and raised mostly in an all-white community, prejudice and bigotry came pretty easily. Having zero exposure to anyone different didn't help. This was pretty much the same for my parents and grandparents. We were not a family that attended church, but my grandfather on my mother's side was strict and as I was told abusive fundamentalist. He was my first experience to a religious person. As I grew up through the years I never really thought about or was concerned about my beliefs or bigotry. I remember the Detroit riots and thought they deserved what was happening. I also had a distain for Martin Luther King.



I finally graduated high school and started my iron worker apprenticeship. I then had my first exposure to men of other races and developed some lifelong friendships. I started to realize my ignorance. That was one prejudice starting to dissolve. I still wouldn't have wanted to live in a mixed neighborhood. Of course a mixed marriage was out of the question! I told myself "I'm not a racist, I have friends in several races". I sure didn't believe anyone should get an opportunity because of their race or where they came from.

I did start attending some fundamentalist churches and believed they had all the truths. Being an iron worker and working with the men I worked with didn't go along with the fundamentalist lifestyle, so I went in and out of church. I never got caught up in the drinking or hard living that many of my friends did though. I can't really tell you the reason I never did. I was able to have great fun and didn't need liquid courage to do so. It had nothing to do with any religious beliefs.

I started traveling to Mexico often and really became exposed to another culture and, after getting off my high horse of being an American, I started to understand how amazing, caring, and hard-working these people are. I even fell in love with a woman there. Though it was short lived due to logistics, it was a wonderful experience. Now I wanted to learn more about other cultures and races. I started taking classes at our community college (Oakland Community College). I had gone to iron workers school and muddled through it like I did in high school. But once I started taking classes in my late twenties I discovered how interesting school can be. I did shed all my negative ideas about different races, and really enjoyed hearing from others about their life experiences and the struggles they have in our white majority society. It was a great time in my life.



Then there were the gay sinners. I absolutely hated them! I liked my fundamentalist church. They went right along with my hatred for the

gay community under the guise of hate the sin not the sinner! That worked well for me. As time went on my iron work career was coming to an end. I had left the church because it was hijacked by a political party and used to divide us. I had been taking classes still through the years and came to the decision I would become a nurse. I loved school until this miserable experience! With no medical experience I really struggled but managed to get through with honors. I met my wife Jackie during this time.

Once I was done and started nursing I started working with so many gay people. At first I avoided them. But then I began to realize how incredibly caring and loving these nurses and doctors are. I felt ashamed of my past and how ignorant I was. I discovered the hate and fear they experienced in their lives. I was shocked at how fearful my lesbian friends are. It's horrible! If only there was a loving environment they could go. If only a church would take up this mantle. Then there I was watching television one day and of all things here's this commercial showing a church with all different races, genders, men next to men, women next to women. Then people start disappearing from the pews and it becomes clear the church is shrinking. Then a voice comes on and says something like "Jesus didn't turn anyone away and neither do we". I said to myself with a tear in my eye "That's the church I need to attend." This was an ad for the United Church of Christ. I had never even heard of UCC. We still lived and worked downstate and went to the Mayo Clinic in Arizona to work. We couldn't find a UCC church anywhere there in Phoenix. We had our place in Alpena to eventually retire to. Then lo and behold in this small town a couple blocks from our home is a UCC church. I cannot tell you how excited I was.

I felt this is perfect! I thought we were all good then I learned the term open and affirming. I just assumed we were. Then one day a couple years ago I noticed a woman pacing in front of the church as I was walking in. I introduced myself and could see how nervous she was. I didn't know at the time she was gay and looking for a church. I invited her in and sat next to her. We talked after and she explained how she was turned away from other churches. She didn't know what to expect from our church. She had researched it, but there was NOTHING saying anything about being open and affirming. This is what the gay community looks for to even think of attending. I felt bad that she couldn't see that in her research and felt so uncomfortable before attending.

She hasn't been attending because we appear to not be able to take this step forward. This is why I believe we need to take this step. For anyone even thinking of finding a church home to not feel uncomfortable walking through our doors.

