My Coming Out Story
By Malu Fairley-Collins

When I am asked about my coming out story, my initial thought is always, “which time?” Followed swiftly with, “Came out as what?” I am gender-queer, unapologetically Black, manage fibromyalgia, and am Queer (in both sexual orientation and political stance). I have come out so many times, in so many ways, and as so many parts of my identity. But I know folx are usually asking about the first time. I was 14 years old when I tearfully went to my mom to tell her something really important. “I have a girlfriend,” I said, and then I sobbed. A brief, yet important aside, my mom already knew, and she raised me in a truly open and affirming household. A home where we were deeply Black, in culture and in politics. A home where folx with a wide variety of sexual orientations and gender identities was normal. In other words, she wasn’t concerned. And yet I wept, I mean snotty nose, quick breathing, chin trembling tears. I chuckle a bit when I think back on it now.

The meaning of my 14-year-old tears has changed for me over the years. On the eve of 40, I now know my tears were sacred and prophetic. I wept for the burden, for the pain & sorrow yet to come. I wept for that time about 9 months later when our pastor interrupted his sermon with a long-winded tangent on the sins of homosexuality, and the church offered their “Amens” in support. I wept for the time a seminarian classmate told me she fully believed that I was possessed by the evil spirit of homosexuality, confused and definitely not called by God. I wept for the many times my white colleagues told me how overwhelmed they get thinking about how to end racism, coming to the conclusion that there is not much they can do. I wept for the times that I had to teach my son how
to be in white-space, praying that he would not be seen as a danger. Feeling locked within social, political, health, religious and cultural systems of racism, classism, sexism, cis-genderism, heterosexism, ableism, fat-phobia….I wept.

Yet, mine were not tears of sorrow and rage alone! I wept for beautiful community of Black Queer folx I co-created during my college days in Atlanta. I wept for the church in Charlotte that eagerly ordained me and the denomination that welcomed me and my leadership with open arms. I wept for the joy of marrying my husband (a trans man) and starting our life together. I wept for the melanin-rich community of good friends and family we created in Charlotte. I wept for the love and power I have cultivated within me for just such a time as this.

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