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Bittersweet

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I'm lying on my bed on what's turned out to be a cold and snowy mid-October (!!) Saturday in Minneapolis. I've been working away at my "To Do" list but now feel the need to divert to write about the week that I just experienced.

I must write because yesterday, Oct. 11, was National Coming Out Day. I spoke at a luncheon here in the Cities and the experience made me feel both melancholy and grateful.

On Monday, for my radio show, Ellie 2.0 Radio, I interviewed a man named Benjamin Saulsberry, who is from the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner MS. If you don't know who Emmett Till was—and what his death stands for—just Google his name. The fact that I'd never have such a conversation, or for that matter, even a radio show, but for me becoming Ellie, wasn't lost on me. (The interview with Benjamin will air on October 14.)

Three days later, I stood in front of 3000 people delivering a keynote, "Bravely Being Human: Living as 'Other,'" at a social services conference in Duluth. I came onto the stage briskly waving and intending to remind everyone in the auditorium that with compassion and vulnerability, we can all help each other survive the Human Condition. The crowd was extremely receptive and by the end of my talk, I think it's fair to say there was electricity in the air.

And then yesterday, I was one of several speakers at Quorum's annual Coming Out Day Luncheon. I sat and listened to many people eloquently, and in many cases, humorously, tell their coming out stories. When my turn came, I told everyone not to expect me to be funny, and I shared that that day—my coming out day—was bittersweet because of how it hurt my soul mate, my beloved wife Lydia. I shared that for nearly 40 years until that day, I had erroneously believed that I could choose my gender and sexuality, only to learn that some things in life aren't choices.

Just as everyone was becoming thoroughly depressed, I also shared that wonderful, incredible things come from living authentically—like the fact that I had just spoken in Duluth with a message of compassion and how now, I was standing before the folks at the luncheon. I ended by saying, "I'm grateful that I found the courage and grit to love me, the true me, a woman."

After all the speakers had concluded and the room was emptying, a woman came up to me. She was in her early forties and reminded me that we had talked briefly three years ago when I spoke at her workplace. At that time, we had talked about how her

spouse had just begun to transition from male to female; she had believed then that they would be able to navigate the journey together and preserve their marriage. Unfortunately, as the woman related yesterday, they had recently separated and were headed for divorce.

As the woman said this, I saw her tears. I pulled her onto my shoulder and did all that I could to resist crying myself. I kept saying, "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," and held her tight. I really didn't know what else to say other than to offer to meet with her again to help with her processing.

This morning, I'm reflecting on the woman's pain and loss. It's made me think of how I hurt Lydia (and my two then-teen daughters), which of course adds to the melancholy. I so hope that Lydia found someone (hopefully many someones) to hold her as she cried when things fell apart because of my need to live as the true me.

Yet, as I wrote in my last blog piece and as I said yesterday, I'm grateful that I am living authentically. The alternative—to lay on my deathbed regretting that I wasn't braver—was and remains unfathomable. Even more, this authentic human is doing far more good things than she could ever have hoped to achieve living falsely as a man. It's that reality that always pulls me through.

This Human Condition stuff stinks sometimes. But not always; I think there were many in Duluth who appreciated that Ellie Krug showed up.

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