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also came to realize that nothing changes without vulnerability.

C.E.: *As someone who has grown up in the Portland area, do you find that people are generally accepting of the LGBT community?*

V.K.: I grew up in rural, conservative pockets. I graduated high school in 1996 and went to a high school of 1,200 students and not a single kid was out. To now have high schools with LGBT clubs – that is a different world in the span of 20 years.

C.E.: *Not only people being out, but also people celebrating it.*

V.K.: Celebrating it and making way for it and kids being able to feel like they can. I know that's not everywhere, but it used to be nowhere.

C.E.: *Obviously that's a big change, and the LGBTQ community has seen great progress, but what do you see as the biggest area for improvement?*

V.K.: Lots of places. There are still states that have legal discrimination. There are states where a gay couple can get married and then the next day lose their jobs because federally they can get married but the state doesn't protect them from their employer firing them because they are gay. And we've heard those reports. As far as our country goes – until people are able to live without fear of losing their livelihood – that's a huge deal. And I think the shift is largely turning to trans rights and trans awareness, which I am very in support of. One of the things I've learned through the process is that if you're going to be in the LGBT world, you've got to be an ally to all of the letters. We've come a long ways but we haven't finished yet.

C.E.: *What kind of advice do you wish you had heard as you were struggling with coming out?*

V.K.: A little bit of what helped me come out was when I finally had friends in my life who were straight and were vocal allies. I had a friend who constantly posted on her Facebook about how they should ordain gay people and it caught my attention. It was the first time I had ever seen a straight person really advocating. That *did something to me to see that there are people who care. I would say for people who are allies, make yourself known as an ally so that the people in your life who are LGBT know that they have a safe person.*

As far as advice for someone coming out, it's hard to say because I don't want to promise that you'll come out and your life will be rainbows and unicorns, because you still have to get up and go to work. You still have to brush your teeth. You still have to worry about putting food on the table. You still have a human life to live. But I will say that coming out takes the stress of living your life wondering, and in fear, off of your shoulders.



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