**Out of the closet and happy**

 When I was growing up in the North, sexuality was never really something that was spoken about. I would see the occasional gay man on TV shows or in movies, but I never really considered that those kinds of people could actually exist. Well, that was until my seventh grade year when I developed a crush on a girl in my P.E. class. I never realized how confusing the subject of sexuality can be, nor how broad the topic was. There are so many labels and identities that some even have overlapping definitions. Honestly, sexual orientation alone was really confusing for poor ol’ 12 year old Marissa. By the time I realized who, and what, I was, I moved to the South.

Honestly, upon realizing my sexual orientation, I had a lot of anxiety, especially since I’d moved to the South. I expected that certain stigma with people of the LGBTQ+ community. I was truly terrified that if I did come out, that I would be rejected by everyone, and I would be left to defend myself. For quite a while, say months or so, I kept my orientation secret. It wasn’t until around December or January of my sophomore year I decided to be open about myself.

It was to my surprise that either no one really cared, or they didn’t mind. Seriously, I remember when I came out to my then best friend, I had to repeat myself multiple times because I was convinced she wasn’t actually listening to me. Compared to when I tried to come out in the North, this was a piece of cake!

I would like to openly admit that coming out here in the South was so much easier than expected. I can’t truly say that I’ve never experienced my fair share of homophobia because I have, but the people whom I had experienced that from were people I came to realize I didn’t need in my life. With that said, coming out is different for everyone. If, by chance, this gives anyone the courage to come out, safety is so important.

Coming out may not seem dangerous, but there are countless people that have been killed for something they can’t help. Something important to remember is that not everyone has to come out, and no one should feel pressured to either. In my best opinion, the key elements to coming out are comfort, courage, accepting friends, and an accepting adult figure if things do end up going south.

Not a single person existing should fear who and what they are because of inhumane beliefs. There will always be people that support these individuals through this. If it seems no one does, then just know I support these guys 100% of the way.