Fearless Authenticity
Exploring the Strength within LGBTQ+ Spirituality

ESR SPIRITUALITY GATHERING

March 2, 2019
Richmond, Indiana

Kaia Jackson
Chosen Family, Beloved Community, Transformative Love: A Queer Reflection

When a child is born, a parent often imagines an entire future for them based on one thing: their gender. Slumber parties, sports, careers, wedding days, and grandchildren take shape in a parent’s mind, even before the baby comes home from the hospital. The child’s name is chosen with great care, sometimes after months of thoughtful debate over meaning and family legacy. So when it is revealed that the child’s authentic gender is different than the parent had planned for, it can feel like a devastating loss. A Parent’s Grief addresses the pain that many parents (even affirming ones) experience when their child comes out as transgender. We will explore how the stages of grief can shake the foundations of a family unit, and how, for many parents it is absolutely critical to the healing process.

With the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen, one can find countless portrayals of “queer love” on Google, Netflix, you name it. The representation of queer bodies, queer stories, and queer romance in popular media certainly marks a significant opening in our cultural consciousness—towards greater awareness, acceptance, and sometimes even understanding—in many areas of the country and world. However, what forms of love continue to be left out of these well-known narratives? What stories go untold? Expressions of love in chosen families and queer friendships are among those that rarely make the headlines, but nevertheless can be heard pulsating at the very heart of many queer communities and lives. This interactive workshop will invite participants to reflect upon their lived experiences of queer friendship, community and love as a foundation for re-imagining Beloved community in our immediate contexts, and beyond. Queer/gay/LGBTQIA+ folks and allies are most welcome! Please feel free to be in touch with Kaia as questions, concerns or accessibility needs arise:kaiajackson180@gmail.com.

Kaia Jackson is in their second year of study in the Writing as Ministry/MDiv program at Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, IN, and the Teacher Training Program at Santosha Yoga School in Indianapolis. They currently serve on the Leadership Team with Survivor Theatre Project, a Boston-based non-profit committed to ending sexual violence through intersectional anti-oppression arts activism, dialogue, and performance. Kaia is passionate about exploring spirituality and community-building through embodied practices and expressive arts. They are called to use poetry, spoken word and ensemble-based theatre collaboration for personal liberation; they are dedicated to creating accessible, expansive, and trauma-informed opportunities for both personal and community healing.

Schedule of Events

8:00 am Registration & Breakfast
8:40 am Optional Waiting Worship
9:00 am Keynote Presentation: Brent Walsh
10:30 am Break
10:45 am Workshop Session I
12:00 pm Lunch
1:30 pm Workshop Session II
2:45 pm Break
3:00 pm Panel Presentation
4:30 pm Closing

ONLINE REGISTRATION:
esr.earlham.edu/news-events/events/spirituality-gathering-2019

Brent Walsh '13
A Parent’s Grief

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When Brent was born, his parents were delighted to welcome their third daughter, Brenda, into the world. But from an early age, Brent knew he was different than his sisters, and every other girl he knew. As he grew, he quickly discovered that his Christian identity would be challenged by questions surrounding his sexuality, and eventually his gender identity.

Brent will introduce you to Brenda, the conservative girl with a passion for ministry, the heartbroken lesbian who thought God had no use for her, and the woman who eventually taught Brent that true strength comes from living a life of fearless authenticity.

You may find that Brent’s story is not that different from your own. Transitions are a part of the human experience, and through them we see that courage and tenacity result from the struggle to live a truly authentic life. With stories of heartbreak and humor from his personal experience, Brent will demonstrate that being LGBTQ+ need not hinder one’s relationship with the Divine or the unique testimony we offer to the world.

Brent Walsh was born and raised female in a strict religious household that held to traditional Christian definitions of gender roles. Coming out as lesbian in a religious household that held to traditional Christian beliefs, he fought the limits of his faith and forced him to grapple with long-held beliefs that contradicted his reality. At the age of thirty-two, Brent transitioned to male, discovering in the process that God’s plan for his life can only flourish in fearless authenticity. Brent’s passion for storytelling through both photography and writing led him to Earlham School of Religion where he earned a Master’s of Divinity degree in 2013. He is currently working on several writing projects and continues to accept guest speaking engagements at faith institutions wanting to better understand and support transgender communities.

Brent’s story shows us that when we find the courage to be our true selves, we gain a way to a clear understanding that being transgender is not a mistake at all. In time, Brent learned that he, too, was fearful and wonderfully made.