

I have for the best part of my life been a compliant, and serial donator to a variety of causes. My support of organizations has largely been via my hip pocket, rather than my time, or indeed my voice. I've always justified my own lack of motivation, by saying that "everybody helps in their own way".....and until recently I had seen no reason to change this.

I am a gay woman, I am educated, I am a corporate professional. I have often had little to nothing to do with supporting the gay community. I suffered from a form of apathy, bourn out of not ever having suffered discrimination, as either a woman or a gay woman at that. I have gone about my daily life, largely unnoticed and certainly not categorized, and to that end I have been quite happy.

Recently though, things have changed. Not in so much that I am noticed....but now I feel a need to be heard, and to contribute. This was spurred on by a couple of incidents. The first of which has been my family. My family has enabled me to have a largely uneventful coming out, so supportive and proud 10 years ago when I made the decision to tell them, some would say it was almost anti-climatic. My father even told me, "it doesn't matter who you love Natasha. As long as they love you back equally." It is probably the single most important thing he has ever said to me.

Recently however I had a conversation fuelled by emotion, and a glass of red wine with my mother and one of my younger siblings, where it dawned on me that they really didn't understand what it had been like growing up in a rural town and identifying as gay [not that I dared to stand out when I was at the local High School]. My mother told me, that she thought my life was easy. That my being gay was nothing and had not in any way impacted my teenage years.

I was bulimic from the ages of 13 – 19. I suppose all she saw was, all she saw was an eldest daughter, who was reasonably popular, good at school and an athlete. My mother didn't understand my inability to feel close to anybody. My distinct lack of physical warmth toward my family. Within me there was such a deep and encompassing need to fit in, that I would do almost anything to do so. Often trying too hard in the process.

For all my arguing with my mother and sister that night I couldn't explain to them, without letting myself go emotionally that, they would never understand the inner isolation I had harboured, how my desire to fit in predicated almost everything I did. I suspect that it was my sustained efforts to fit in that made my coming out so easy for them. I didn't fit any stereotypical mould of being gay. I was just a girl, like any other girl...

My family are wonderful, they are some of the most welcoming people that anyone could have the pleasure of spending time with. They welcome all my friends into their home, gay or straight with open arms. And like me, they've never to my knowledge, been particularly politically motivated about anything.

I now feel it's time to break that pattern, to become involved and heard, for one very simple cause. To be seen as equal, not only in the eyes of the law, but also to have those around me, who do not understand the levels of inequity myself and other men and women like me face. The fact that my 2 younger sisters have more rights than I do, is a constant source of bemusement to me. I find it hard to reconcile, that I am treated differently, when I contribute to the community in the same ways as any other citizen. Yet my own government chooses to set me apart, for no other reason than; I choose to live with someone I love, who loves me back, who happens to be of the same gender. Sadly it seems that the words my father gave me, and that I have carried with me, do not ring true for those that govern me. Acceptance, not tolerance is what I am after. To be the same, in a very boring way, to have all the rights and privileges and I'm sure hindrances that my two heterosexual sisters have. To be afforded the same respect, they are. I don't want to be treated differently. I never have, I'm not asking for special consideration. What I'm asking for is to be treated like the majority of other Australians in the eyes of the law, in every possible way. A request that seems too simple to grant, and yet we have to request it. We have to convince you, the government that our lives are just as valid as our straight brothers and sisters. Sadly, we wouldn't be at these crossroads, at a tipping point if you thought I was deserving. The ironic thing is, that if I was to pass any one of you on the street, you wouldn't notice me. I'd just be another girl.