**Being LGBTQ+ in the Aging Population**

Sarah had a fascinating, yet most likely common, story. The day I met her I had no idea that we would sit for hours talking about her life and experiences. I was just helping a neighbor whose aunt was visiting. Sarah was that aunt and she wanted to share her story. As a young girl, she was interested in science and the world around her. Being raised in a strict religious family, she found herself feeling like she was on the outside looking in. She was taught to have a faith in God but for her, she felt drawn to a different path, and came to the realization at a young age that her belief system was atheist. She kept this to herself since the family expected her to stay in their religion and family unit and take on the “proper roles expected of girls of that era.” She joked about how she always had pants on under her skirts and did not feel comfortable on the path that seemed to be chosen for her. As a teen, she realized that she was attracted to other girls. She kept this information hidden from her family. Her teenage years were filled with a lot of sadness as she felt that she had to hide a large part of herself.

She was able to convince her parents to let her try community college after high school and she pursued a degree in a science related field. She moved on to a university and then worked for her master’s and PhD. She became a college professor and led expeditions to study in her field. She stopped participating in the family religion, but she still communicated with her family. She believed that to keep the family relationships that she loved dearly, she needed to keep her sexual orientation secret, so she held the secret, until just recently, at the age of 80 years old, she told her remaining family.

Here she sat before me, immobilized in a wheelchair, gentle tears brimming, telling a story about believing that she had to hide an important part of her life from those she loved. It was a touching moment for her to share that story with a stranger, someone she just met that day. It reminded me of the importance of allowing those we love to live their authentic lives and to feel safe sharing themselves with us.

Later, as I was thinking about Sarah, I was overwhelmed with the thoughts of how so many people feel they need to hide who they truly are. For the elderly, this leads to isolation, depression, and loneliness. It even leads to despair and suicide. Sarah shared that she had considered it many times.

As care managers we are sensitive to and support each individual’s truth. We see our clients for who they are, and we honor their authentic life. We work to help clients engage with peers and find resources based on what fits with their life. There are programs to support elders in the LGBTQ+ community and ways to connect with others who are also lonely and isolated and need social interaction for their mental wellbeing.

As we honor Pride Month, please know that all individuals are honored and cared for with a care manager. Their needs are considered, and each unique story is accepted. They do not have to hide who they are with our professional team. Let us work together to make sure that they have what they need to enjoy their quality life!