

Somethin' to Talk About

by Lindsey Laney

People are saying she's in a lesbian relationship. That she's not just her best friend. You know they live together...

See, talk doesn't last long before someone feels the need to take action. My Outlook calendar chimed with a new invitation. A calendar invite for a meeting with the pastor, my boss. The youth director and the pastor don't meet one on one so this must have been extra special, or extra terrible. I walked into his office early that morning. Floor to ceiling shelves lined with bible commentaries and church doctrine pamphlets. It smelled of stale coffee and old books. He offered me a seat. I took it, my pale skin fading into the mahogany leather chair, wondering how a chair could be so cold on a hot summer day in Georgia. He was visibly uncomfortable. I wasn't going to save him from the silence. I knew why we were there. I had ears after all. And walls talk. He shifted in his seat, trying unsuccessfully to determine where to put his hands, until finally folding them neatly in his lap.

"Now Lindsey," he said, "I don't mean to make you uncomfortable but it has come to my attention that some of the members of our church are concerned about you."

Here it came, the conversation I knew was happening *around* me but never *with* me, *about* me but never *to* me, until now. The walls of his office edged closer to me, the light from the two heavily-curtained windows disappearing and the air thickening with dread. My heart raced, pounded in my ears, my arms and legs charged with electricity, ready to run but frozen in place.

He said some had anonymously come forward. His words were hazy and seemed far away. I caught phrases and fragments of his monologue. He kept saying 'She'. She noticed you hugging your friend in the parking lot. Her concerns are to protect you and the image of the church. She, her, who were these anonymous concerned women. I had built relationships with women in this church and in this community. Isn't that what you're supposed to do? Join the women's bible study, and women's prayer circle, the women's volunteer group, workout club, cooking class? And now, where were these women? Behind an anonymous letter?

I noticed he'd stopped talking. He was looking at me expectantly, waiting for me to ease his discomfort as if the tension was now my responsibility. But my words were lost somewhere in my body. My breath shallow and insufficient for a response. I managed to mumble something like, no, we're not in a relationship; she's just my best friend. He relaxed noticeably,

sitting back and crossing his ankle over his opposite knee like his job here was done. The damage was done.

I moved away from that town about eight months later. Lost just about everything as we headed out of town, my job, my house, all of my professional contacts and friends, friends who told us we "acted too gay together" and they just "didn't have any space for that" in their lives. I didn't even know, that day in the pastor's office that I was in love. Fear has a way of doing that. Covering over the beauty and the magic with paralyzing distress. You can't look into your best friend's eyes and see that she's falling in love with you too, when you're looking over your shoulder in a small southern town. But the beauty and magic was not lost. We didn't know then, but my love and I were on a journey of knowing, of becoming, of coming out.

What started in me as unspeakable anger soon revealed itself as deep grieving, grieving for the life, the community, and the belonging I once knew. Oh, I wanted to be angry forever. It was strong, and impenetrable which was better than feeling exposed and vulnerable, but grief crept in anyway and had its way with me. See anger is a fine reaction, but a poor companion. So I grieved; I grieved through the unbearable hurt, the betrayal, and the loss, the powerlessness and the forsaking. I grieved.

So, we packed up a UHaul and headed west, like those old country 'n western movies, but without the country music. My girl hates country music. We drove through the tree-lined south, and across the plains of the Midwest. With every church steeple we passed, my chest tightened with emotion, with remembering. But with Georgia in the rear-view mirror, I looked over at the beautiful woman fast asleep in the passenger seat who would become my wife two years later, and loved her freely for the first time. I poured my hopes and dreams over our life mile after mile. Dreams of becoming strong women who lived from courage and not fear, women who didn't sit in men's book lined mahogany clad offices and question themselves, women who embraced their divine feminine nature while loving another divine feminine soul, and women who would pave a kinder, gentler, embracing path for young girls and boys to walk their journeys.

It was eight years ago last May that we drove west into the Mile High city of Denver. UHaul truck, two dogs, and a beautiful woman at my side. Well, I guess I got my country song after all.