

Living Bridges Project Transcript

Standing Her Ground Excerpt: Gender Journey

[Music]

VOICEOVER: The following audio is part of the Living Bridges Project, an anonymous story-collecting project documenting responses to child sexual abuse. For more, please visit LivingBridgesProject.com.

[Music]

STORYTELLER: I also want to share my journey in exploring gender and how I grew up identifying more as a tomboy. Everybody knew me as the tomboy and I didn't want anything to do with girls because I just thought they were weak. And deep down I am like, "y'all have no idea what I've been through." So, all girls were weak to me and so I dressed up as a tomboy and only did boy things like I played sports. I wanted hot wheels instead of Barbie dolls [laughs]. I didn't want anything that dealt with being a girl.

And I didn't realize it until a 9 year old birthday party that I went to where it was all the girls and—and by the way, I went to Christian school, even though I was raised Buddhist only because the Christian school close to where I grew up offered childcare whereas the public school didn't. So I was always the first one to get dropped off and the last one to get picked up. And my parents were strong Buddhists, yet my teachers told me that my parents are going to hell [laughs]. So I grew up indoctrinated with that. So it probably informs my journey in spirituality and how I love exploring different spiritual practices now.

I remember getting invited to a birthday party with one of the Christian girls and they invited all the girls. And all the girls got goodie bags with these porcelain puppy dolls and when it came to me, I got a fucking dinosaur and I was like, "what is this?" in my head and they were like, "oh, it's because we know you like boy things." And so that was my moment where I realized, wow that's how they see me, therefore, I'm going to embody that because even though I really wanted to cry, I was like, "no, I'm going to make this something that is of strength and of power. I was really hurt [laughing] as a kid, like, they don't see me as a girl. And I feel like a lot of that is from that trauma, having that sensuality taken from me as a child. And over 20 years later, I am interning at a pole-dancing studio and I'm realizing how much power there is in women to be able to feel their bodies and not be ashamed of it. And it just makes me really sad how this is seen as something that's to be ashamed of and is associated with stripping and something that is solely meant for male gaze, but it is such a spiritual process. And I have been so blessed to meet so many women in this studio who have been able to leave their abusive partners because they have been able to get in touch with their bodies again and also have the support of other sisters who will not shame them. And so, that's where I'm at right now is interning here, I really suck at it, but it's not about that. It's about us celebrating each other's bodies and being comfortable with

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our sexuality, our sensuality and recognizing that despite our body shape and size and despite our occupation, whether you are a stripper or you are a doctor, in that space it doesn't matter. Because we're all just there to uplift one another and just heal as women, instead of tear each other down. So, now any woman who is in a rut, I encourage them to try pole-dancing [laughs]. And maybe one day I'll get my sister to do it I don't know that would be really interesting.

[Music]

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