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There was a sort of mourning that came with acceptance, at least for me.

Everyone and everything around me had made clear the future I was meant to have. My 'happily ever after' would come once the man of my dreams arrived to sweep me off my feet.

Except that there was never a 'man' of my dreams. Instead, a single dream that would keep me up for weeks. One that forced me to face the reality that there was in fact, a person of my dreams, but it was not a man. One in which I kissed my friend and awoke in a panic. I was able to dismiss it, to calm myself down, only to be met by that same panic the second that friend walked into the school building.

The next few weeks were exhausting. I spent countless hours trying to talk myself out of this crush and trying to figure out what these feelings meant for me. What this all meant for who I was. And the scariest part was that it made all too much sense.

I had never been able to partake in the quintessential tween girl experience of giggling with my classmates over which boys we thought were cute. I had never been able to bond with my mom over having a crush in school, the way she did with my sisters. I had never felt butterflies in my stomach or been so keenly aware of how sweaty my hands were. In fact, I had convinced myself that I wasn't even capable of having these feelings.

This was all terrifying because it forced me to confront what had been just below the surface for quite some time. But it also brought me a sense of relief. I wasn't broken. I was just feeling these things a little differently than everyone else around me.

But the relief wasn't enough. After a few weeks of this consuming my mind, it was suddenly my 15th birthday. It was a familiar scene, my family and our neighbors huddled around our small kitchen table. The candles on my birthday cake and the flash of my mom taking photos that would inevitably end up on Facebook were the only things illuminating the room. I remember trying to be present, to put this semi-crisis in the back of my mind. But one question brought it all forward: "What are you gonna wish for?"

At once, I felt every part of myself yearning for the same thing. As difficult as it is for me to admit, I blew out the candles and the minuscule part of me that still believed in the power of birthday wishes hoped for nothing more than for me to be straight.

This desire I had to be straight came from the fear of giving up the life I had been taught to want. I didn't know there were other options, I didn't understand how it was possible to be happy if you didn't follow the exact path that was laid out for you.

It also came from the fear of disappointing my parents. Like me, they had specific hopes for my future, that I would meet a nice (ideally Catholic) boy, and we would have a bunch of kids, fulfilling their dreams of being grandparents/

Even without words, my parents were able to communicate their hopes for me at a volume that was impossible to ignore.

I heard it in the cheeriness that would enter my mom's voice whenever I mentioned hanging out with a male friend (who unbeknownst to her was often also gay)

I also heard it in the way my dad would get automatically overprotective at the mention of a boy's name, assuming I was constantly at risk of getting a boyfriend who would distract me from school or get me pregnant or whatever else dads worry about for their daughters.

I saw it in the happy tears my mom cried upon seeing me all dressed up for my high school prom, in a long elegant gown and full-face of make-up that I couldn't have felt more uncomfortable in.

And I saw it in the excitement my parents held while meeting my older sister's soon-to-be fiance, and the twinge of hope in their eyes that my younger sister and I would one day find a man that made us just as happy.

But this isn't all doom and gloom. I eventually overcame this fear, I found friends who I was comfortable talking about this with. And with the help of countless coming-out videos and low-budget web series on YouTube, I started to be able to picture my future, one where I would eventually find a partner to share my life with.

And although I have still managed to avoid the whole 'coming out' conversation with my parents, I have seen them grow. When I do, my life won't fall apart like I feared when I was young and naive at 15. I'm sure it will be awkward and they might have a million questions, but they won't be going anywhere. Like me, they've learned to grow and shed (nearly) all their expectations for me and my future.

I see the growth in how my dad has come to compliment my wardrobe made up almost entirely of men's clothes. It's not what he saw me wear growing up but I think he's able to see how much more confident I feel.

I see the growth in how my mom has come to use gender-neutral language when asking about my dating life. I'm not ready to tell her just yet about the intricacies of queer hookup culture at Vassar, but I feel a warmth in my chest when she asks me if I have found "anybody" or how my friends' "partners" are doing.

In writing this piece, I found it difficult to transport myself back to high school and remember how all of this felt because I am in a wildly different place now. I'm incredibly proud of my identity as well as the community I have found. The queer people that have allowed me to take pride in this part of myself I once tried so hard to deny, but also those who I was able to help through the same process.

There's one of my best friends from high school, who never hesitated to answer the phone. Through tears, I told her I wished I had tried harder to be straight before she made it clear how ridiculous I sounded, and gave me a much-needed reminder that there actually was nothing wrong with being gay, and that I clearly still had some internalized homophobia and Catholic guilt to work through.

There's my friends who pulled me aside during a TH party or an all-nighter in the library. So many hushed conversations where I was the first person so many of them came out to. Witnessing their journeys has been the best part of my Vassar experience. Whether it was celebrating with them after they kissed a girl for the first time in the corner of the mug or cheering them on silently as they shared their pronouns for the first time, being a part of these journeys, and knowing they weren't doing it alone, made me feel closer to them and made my struggles in high school feel worth it.

The dream I held so tight at 15 has been let go, and replaced by another. I dream that my future combines what for so long have been completely separate spheres of my life. That I can share with my family my now 7-year-long journey with queerness, and all of the people who've come into my life because of it. And that I can share with my found family the people who raised me, the people whose growth inspires me every day. My new dream is that I can bring these two worlds together.