

Dear mum and dad

I am writing because I want you to understand. I know you both have a lot of fears, a lot of questions. You wish it weren't so. You feel overwhelmed. You are not alone. You have each other. You have me. It is of paramount importance that you know who I am. This is important. This is a letter of understanding. A letter written out of love and respect. Take a deep breath, all I ask is that you read. Just simply read. Question, judge, debate later. For now, just clear your mind and read. Thank you so much.

I was 11 years old when I first had a strong indication of what my 'challenge' in life would be. I remember so vividly standing before the lamp and wondering what is it, what lesson was I put here to learn. I had everything-a loving family, food, shelter, intelligence, support, encouragement to dream. Then, it struck me so powerfully, my challenge was to live honestly. And part of living honestly was acknowledging firstly to self and then to others my sexuality. I knew then the feelings I felt were different to those of my peers, my sister. I had not the name nor understanding to term it yet. But I know what I felt.

Upon reflection, I now realise why I felt angry/acted so impulsively/resorted to unhealthy outlets and friendships, particularly in High School. I was trying to hide who I really was. From myself and others. I tried to bury it deeper and deeper yet also becoming so frustrated with that, that I would also boldly pursue that relationship with that girl in high school. Because it was the only time I felt like me in my entirety. I am very good at compartmentalising hence it was possible to put on the appearance of being fulfilled and complete and to lie because I was hiding this part of my identity from everyone including myself.

Through doing that I have hurt so many people. I hurt my true friends who always just wanted me to be me. I hurt the boys I have dated for the sake of trying to fit into something I am not, dating them because they were Indian or studying respectable professions or simply because they were male. The last boy I dated was really my whole hearted attempt to be 'straight'. I did have genuine feelings for him but those feelings were never as deep nor complete as I have felt for women. I hurt you both and the family by pretending to be something I am not for so long, for giving you 'hope' in a way. I hurt myself. I hurt myself so deeply. I am tired and exhausted and so ready to stop hurting me. You have some inclination of the grief I have experienced. There have been moments when you have seen the depth of that pain in my face-Dad you recall when we drove past each other years ago outside school when you were dropping my brother off at primary school and I was on my way to uni, how anguished and old I looked, you commented. Mum you are so connected to me, you know how dark I have felt last year. Nana has even come to help you Ma in this process. You said I have two paths, I now realise which one is the dark path and it is not the one I originally thought because as soon as I started living honestly and filled myself with light, you have stopped having those dreams and intense feelings. I feel so light now. I can pray peacefully again. Last year I was consumed with fear and darkness. It is time to stop hurting you. Stop hurting the family. I have wasted so much time and energy on trying to be something else. SO much. I am bigger than this. You are bigger than this.

I have no idea what you are thinking as you're reading this, what thoughts might be running through your head: *why is she hurting us? She is deluded/confused/risk-loving. She doesn't know what is best for her, how hard this 'decision' is, she is misguided, she is too young and uninformed to know, why is this happening to us, what have we done wrong, why did we move to Australia?* I need you take take off your doctor hats and just put on you parents hats, as my mum and dad. The first thing I need you to know is that as I am born with brown-eyes, so too am I born with a same-sex sexual orientation. I have **always** been this way. This was never a phase. It was never something I chose or decided. This is not a result of risk-taking behaviour. My only choice was whether to be honest and open about it. I have made that choice. I choose honesty. The question of telling you has been the longest continuous steady thought on my mind for the last 10 years, ever since I first tried to tell you (admittedly after being confronted by you) when I was 17. I tried again at 22 and last year, each time, desperate to let you both in, never knowing how, hoping to be

discovered as I still pursued my true feelings. This is it. I am doing this via letter as in person has not worked for either of us in the past. I want to give you time and space to process everything. I want to make sure I don't miss anything.

This not your fault. **This is not your fault.** Nothing you could have done or not done can change this. Just as you can not possibly have changed the colour of my eyes or the length of my toes, so too, you nor I can not change this. So what do we do?

**We re-frame, we communicate and we continue loving and supporting each other.** I know you both said everything you possibly could have out of fear of losing me last year. I know I even touched your feet and promised to stop hurting you. I thought that by being straight, that was how I could stop hurting you. I don't have that power. Neither do you. Being honest is how I stop hurting you and myself. I know this now.

This is a process. It begins here, now, properly. This will take time. I have had the last 15 years of my life, ever since I was 11 to think, process, question, research, talk, explore, reflect to get to the point I am at today. You are not alone in this process. First and foremost, I am here. Whilst you may initially want to push me away out of fear, I am not going to let you. I love you both too dearly. Secondly, you are not alone. I know the family unity is our biggest support. I know you would feel embarrassed or ashamed to talk to aaji/aaja/nani. You don't have to start there. You don't have to start with older mosi or Mosi or Kaka or Poowa. You can just start with me. You can start with external communities who are easier to talk to. There is a fantastic support network called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). There is a support group in Brisbane. Realise that as I have had to seek support in counsellors, friends and colleagues, so too it is important you seek support. For my sake. For your sake. For our sakes. I have pasted some PFLAG support below.

I know there are many more questions you have and notions in your head you will have to challenge. **Why go through all this?** I am attracted to women-**this is not a choice.** I want a honest whole relationship with you as your daughter -**this is a choice.** We will emerge from this period with a stronger, closer relationship than we have **ever** had before.

To address some questions you had before Dad in relation to this being biologically 'unnatural'. I can pull out examples of same sex relationships within the animal kingdom or even asexual, or even those changing gender (transgender), go even broader than this: by virtue of being born, it is natural. Biology enables, culture forbids. Biology tolerates a wide spectrum of possibilities, it's culture that obliges people to realise some possibilities while forbidding others. Culture tends to argue that it forbids only that which is unnatural. But from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is possible is by definition, also natural. The possibility of being born with a same-sex attraction happened thus is also natural.

Dad, your main concerns were with how hard this would be. This is hard, true, homophobia is still alive and real but fortunately we do live in a society where this is less so. You worried this would impact on my career. As being born a woman impacts on my career so too in the same way does being born gay. I couldn't answer you at the time as I had no experience of starting a career and more importantly nor was I solid in self. I am solid now. I am openly gay at work and people don't blink an eye. I am one of many people who are. I am supported and even celebrated. Being gay is normalised. Sure there will be moments in life when I am marginalised for my sexual orientation as I have been marginalised for my ethnicity and gender. But like my ethnicity and gender, it is simply who I am. And fortunately these moments are not the norm.

Mum, you spoke of sacrifice, you told me how if you would have been in love with a man your parents didn't approve you, you would quell these feelings, however this example is not applicable as the issue is about my identity, regardless of whether I date/marry or not, this is what I identify as. Dad as you have expressed, having feelings for a man just feels intrinsically wrong for you.

Just as it does for me. I can not feel the same as I do for women as I do for men. Trust me I have so desperately tried and tried again. I am 26 now. It is time to face reality.

Mum you spoke of forgetting my dharma, the family I come from. I proudly know of the family I come from, it is such a part of me. You know how heavily invested and involved I am in the family. You know my siblings are my world. You know what you mean to me. You know how much Aaji/Aaja/Nani/my cousins/Mosi/Mosa and family all mean to me. This is not something I am doing to hurt you, to hurt them. It is because of this deep love I have for you all that I have decided to come out. For the last time. Dharma is light. I am filled with light. When I was pretending to be something I was not, I was so angry, I was so dark, I was so angry with God, with living. Before Hinduism, religion, there was light, there has always been light. I have decided from December 2015 to just fill myself with light. It is in this vein, from this place of light that I write this letter of understanding. I feel Nana stronger than I ever have. Because I now have embraced me. I know in time, you both will too.

I know the next few weeks, months will be hard for all of us. please always always remember I am not trying to hurt you, I want to bring you into the part of my life that I have kept hidden from you so long. Let you both know I do currently have a wonderful female partner, a relationship I have kept hidden from you out of fear. The focus is on us-you and me. I will answer all the questions you may have about her in time. For now, just focus on us. Focus on making our relationship as parent and child better than it has ever been. This is not an easy task but one that must be done. I could not bear the thought of travelling to America and Canada having to hide myself again, having to pretend to be someone I am not, having people playfully suggest I find a nice boy, I don't need people to know but I do need you mum and dad to know.

I want you to know I am still the same person today as I was yesterday and years before-I still love being a jokester, taking the kids to the park, listening to rap music, furiously brainstorming, baking, pestering everyone, being moody and grumpy when I'm hungry. We have this tremendous opportunity before us to share a closer relationship than we have ever had before. I still love you and will always love you the same. As I know you still both love me. I would die for you as you would die for me. I am not asking you to die for me, I am asking you to read this letter as my mum and dad and love me for who I am. I have nothing to hide from you anymore.

I am here when you both are ready to chat more over the phone. I will always be here.

Love always,  
Karu/Micky Moo/Mikhara

**Q. Why did they have to tell me?**

It is important to accept and understand your child's sexuality. Some families believe they may have been happier not knowing. They start to recall the time before they knew as 'problem free', remembering an ideal rather than the reality, and failing to account for the often significant distress of the GLB person who is under the pressure of hiding a part of their life from people that they love.

Sometimes we can try to deny what is happening by rejecting what we're hearing ("It's just a phase, you'll get over it"), or by not registering the impact of what we're being told ("That's nice dear, and what do you want for dinner?")

Parents and families may feel resentment towards their child or loved one's sexuality. This feeling is based on the belief that it was a conscious decision to be gay, lesbian or bisexual. It also comes from the parent's fears of pain or discomfort associated with their 'coming out' and the resulting homophobia they too may experience.

The main decision most gays, lesbians and bisexuals have to make when deciding whether to come out to their loved ones is "Will I be honest and talk about who I am, or do I have to hide it?" Hiding it imposes a constant and tremendous burden on the individual. A large part of their life would be kept secret from you and you would never really know the whole person. All young people face the stress involved in adolescence and developing their sense of self. GLB young people also face the challenge of developing a positive self identity in a society that still perpetuates discrimination and homophobia. This challenge is even more difficult if the GLB young person's family and friends do not demonstrate support and love.

Someone who has reached the point of telling a parent or someone close to them that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual is not usually a person who is going through a phase. Generally they have thought long and hard to understand and acknowledge their sexual orientation.

For someone to tell their family or friends that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual often means taking a great risk – the biggest risk is that of rejection. Few people would take that risk lightly or prematurely. This is a crucial risk when GLT people are 'coming out' for the first time and how you react and support them can make it a positive experience.

**Q. What did we do wrong?**

Parents and family members can sometimes experience feelings of guilt when they first learn of their child or loved one's attraction to people of the same gender. Some parents react with shock, denial and anger to the news that their child is lesbian, gay or bisexual. One response is to wonder "How could he/she do this to

me?”. This is not a rational reaction - but it is a human response to pain.

We liken this reaction to a grieving process: here you are grieving over losing an image of your child or loved one and losing what you saw for the future of your child or loved one. While their future may not be what you envisaged, that does not mean your child or loved one will not have a happy and fulfilling life and that your relationship with them will not be a fantastic one.

Some parents feel that they did something “wrong” to raise a child who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. This belief stems from the dominant view in society that labels gays, lesbians and bisexuals as less than heterosexuals. There is no evidence that different parenting styles or family situations have a bearing on sexual orientation.

As you work through your feelings, you can take courage from the fact that the one thing your child has ‘done’ to you is to trust that your relationship will grow as a result of you knowing the truth.

What families can provide is an environment in which a young person can understand themselves and strive to reach their full potential.

#### **Q. Why am I uncomfortable with my child or loved one’s sexuality?**

Our culture and society provides us with messages about a number of issues, including sexuality.

The negative messages and myths we have learned from our society about sexuality are very strong and not easy to dismiss. However, developing a better understanding of your child or loved one, and becoming more familiar with the issues will help reduce these uncomfortable feelings.

Some parents may confront another source of guilt. Parents who see themselves as ‘open-minded’ believing they have put sexual prejudice behind them are sometimes stunned to realise they are uncomfortable when they learn it is their child who is lesbian, gay or bisexual.

These parents not only have to grapple with suppressed, deep-rooted personal fears of same-sex attraction but also have the added burden of dealing with their conscious self-image of being ‘open-minded’.

It helps to concentrate on real concerns – what your child needs from you now. Try not to focus on the guilt.

It is baseless and it accomplishes nothing for anyone. Neither you nor your child had or will have any control over the arrival and determination of your child’s sexuality.

#### **Q. Will they be rejected, have trouble finding or keeping a job or be physically attacked?**

Unfortunately individuals and groups in our society can discriminate or be violent towards people who are seen to be different.

Homophobia is still a strong part of our culture. As long as homophobia exists lesbian, gay and bisexual people and their families have some very legitimate fears and concerns.

However, attitudes toward different sexualities have been slowly changing for the better and are more positive in many places. There are a growing number of groups who are working for such a change and who are ready to help those who have difficulties. Most areas in Australia are covered by some form of antidiscrimination laws. Check your state or territory laws for specific information on your area. In NSW it is illegal to discriminate, harass, vilify or victimise a person based on their sexuality or their perceived sexuality. You can contact the Anti-Discrimination Board on (02) 9268 5555 for more information.

It is important to remember that many lesbians, gays and bisexuals have grown to fulfil their dreams and have become very successful and respected people in the community. As a society we may have a long way to go but giving your child or loved one support and love will go far to making his or her life journey easier.

### **Should we tell family, neighbours, friends?**

Just as “coming out” is difficult for gay, lesbian and bisexual people, the coming-out process is equally difficult for parents. Many, upon learning their child is gay, lesbian or bisexual, go right into the closet. As they struggle with accepting their child’s sexual orientation, they often worry about other people finding out. There is the challenge of fielding such questions as, “Has he got a girlfriend?”, and “So when is she going to get married?” You may get some negative or, at the least insensitive comments from relatives, friends or coworkers. But you’ll probably find that those comments are fewer than you now fear.

One parent said,

“I used to go in the bathroom and close the door and practise saying to the mirror, ‘I have a lesbian daughter’ and saying it with pride. And it helped, but you really do have to practise”.

Talk to people who understand your concerns.

Remember your child or loved one has been down this road already. They may even be able to help. PFLAG members may be helpful to you in discussing their own experiences too.

And remember, who you tell about your child’s sexuality should be a decision both of you discuss and reach together, as a matter of respect. After all, it’s their life you’re discussing.

What will the neighbours say?

This could be a very real concern, especially for families who consider themselves part of a close community

One parent said:

“I thought I was the only mother in our community who had a gay son and when I started speaking out on the

issue, other parents started coming forward. Now every time someone says to me 'I need to talk to you', I know exactly what's coming up".

**Some parents share their feelings:**

"I'd say that reading and learning more about sexual orientation is what helped me most...laying to rest some of the myths I had heard...So the more I learned, the angrier I got, and the more I wanted to change society instead of my son."

"I think the turning point for me was when I read more about it, and read that most kids who can accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident. And, of course, that's what I wanted for my child and I sure didn't want to be what was standing in the way of that.

"It's really important to talk about it, to know you're not alone and that there are other people who have had this experience and are dealing with it in a positive way. And the benefit is that you establish a good relationship with your child. Parents want to parent. They don't want to be isolated from their kid."

"I have to tell you, there are so many pluses now. You begin to recognise what an incredible child you have to share this with you, and to want you to be part of their life. The trust that's been placed in your hands, and the guts it took to do that, is amazing."