



*I just keep fighting. And that means, a lot of times, having to battle people who look at me and say, 'But, you're fine.'*

## K.C.

My name is K.C. I grew up in Valencia, a place that I once heard somebody call a Ralph Lauren zombie commercial, where people are just behaving and acting the same way. They're all dressed in designer clothing, and if you are not White-looking they just don't want to talk to you.

Most people think that I look White. One professor kept referring to me as Hispanic and I just laughed. Like, that's the one thing I don't actually have in me. My heritage is very mixed. I have Dutch, Irish, French, and supposedly there's English in there. And then I'm also Japanese, Native American, and African American, and it's those parts that my family doesn't like to talk about.

I remember bringing it up one time to my mom, saying, "Mom, why is Grandma so dark? Why does she have an afro in this picture?" And my mom said, "If anybody ever asks, just tell them that she's 'Black Irish.' She comes from a long line of people that are just darker for some reason." And I was like, "Okay, so you want me to lie about who we are?"

I do have a doll that I call William - my chocolate baby - and I've had him since I was two. And I remember asking my mom, "Well, why did you guys give me this then, if we're not supposed to identify

like that?" And she said, "Well, we want you to be accepting of everybody. But this isn't who you are."

I struggled with trying to figure out how to make myself "normal." I wore baggy clothes to cover up my body when I developed early. I was held down by a pastor and went through conversion therapy. I just remember feeling trapped. Like I was being strangled.

I attempted suicide a few times. I had issues with anorexia and bulimia, to the point that I was in the hospital for 3 months, literally dying. And I just couldn't, even at that moment, even when my mom kept saying, "Why are you doing this to yourself?" I couldn't even look at her and say, "This is why." I just kept saying, "I don't know." But I couldn't be who I was, and that was very difficult for me to deal with.

There are a lot of people who were very surprised when I told them that I was in a relationship with a woman. And that's a problem. I mean, you're trying to say, then, that gay people only look or act a certain way, and that's just not true. And that's also the case with disability.

I was diagnosed a few years ago with Sjogren's Syndrome, which is an autoimmune disorder where your body mistakenly attacks its own cells and tissues.



“The minute I knew who I was, I also knew I had to keep something a secret. And it was stressful, because as a kid I was bad at keeping secrets. I could not do it. And then, at the same time, I was trying to figure out how to make myself ‘normal.’ It was something I struggled with.”

“William” was given to K.C. to instill an acceptance of other ethnicities, so long as she did not inquire about her own.

It is internal, so most people don't even know when they see me that I am sick. But my body gets so tired that I just collapse. To the point where a couple of weeks ago at a store, the security person at the door looked at us, “Oh, can I help you?” And I said, “We're just looking for a wheelchair, because I need one.” And she said, “I'm sure you're fine.” I just was shocked. And I literally looked at my husband and was like, “Can you pick me up, and just put me in the shopping cart then, and just push me? Because I don't know what to do.”

It happens, I would say, all the time. It's just one of those things where there are some days that I can actually deal with it better than other days. Some days, I'm very capable of just snapping back at the person and saying something, and then there are other days I think it's just, I'm already so beaten down by things that I just cry. And I can't even deal with it.

My husband is transgender – he was a woman when we met and when we married, and he is in the process of transitioning. And we have opened our home to kids who feel like they are trapped – if they're gay, if they're transgender, and they're scared, or if their parents are going to hurt them, and they don't know what to do. We've literally said, “Our home is open. We don't care who you are. You can come be with us. No questions asked.”

I feel like you can tell a kid to be strong and try to just get past it, but sometimes they need a person there to help them. To say, “You can tell me what happened. You don't have to tell me, but no matter what, I'm going to be here. I'm not gonna judge you. I know what you've been through, to an extent, because it can be something totally different, but I get it.” Abuse is abuse. It's still gonna affect you. And I want them to know, “I am here for you. I can help you do this.”