

DIVERSIVE

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NARRATIVE

By Ayushman Harlalka

There is an admittedly tricky but worthwhile idea of overcoming adversity: by changing the narrative. Instead of looking at one's pain as merely suffering, one could look at what they learned from the ordeal. Obstacles often end up being stepping stones in hindsight, and choosing to view them as such makes for a more empowering view of one's story.

Changing perception changes the story. Voicing one's opinion continuously and rigorously for decades together, those who were particularly bold have changed not only how everyone perceived them but how it manifested itself as well. One such story is the way the term 'Black Power' was turned around to be used for equality instead of against it. Another example includes the LGBT community turning the derogatory word 'queer' used for them into a badge of honour instead.

The story begins in the early 20th century, when queer was used as a word against gay men, branding them as 'strange' or 'deviant'. It was used derogatorily, implying that something was wrong with them, and had taken on the meaning of homosexuality alongside its sense of something strange. Before then, the word had not been used sexually but for objects and happenstance.

In the 1980s and '90s, after a century of the word being used derogatorily, the community introduced themselves with it pride-fully. Some attribute the change to the gay rights movement, partly spurred by the AIDS epidemic. Newspapers at the time remarked on how turning the word around had taken power away from the homophobes.

Today, the word 'queer' is seen as a staple for the community, with many proudly proclaiming themselves part of the queer community. Unlike in the past, it is not something limited to homosexuality.



Still, it serves as an umbrella term for the multitude of nuances found in the gender, sexuality, and romantic orientations of the community. The word has travelled a long way from a slur to a place of pride.

What are some things in your life that you overcame to make them your strengths instead?



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A movement to build a generation of thinkers & empaths.

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I GREW UP WITH YOU

By Ayushman Harlalka

I grew up with you
Baking cakes and playing house
Being a doctor, and a wife
To whoever was the head.

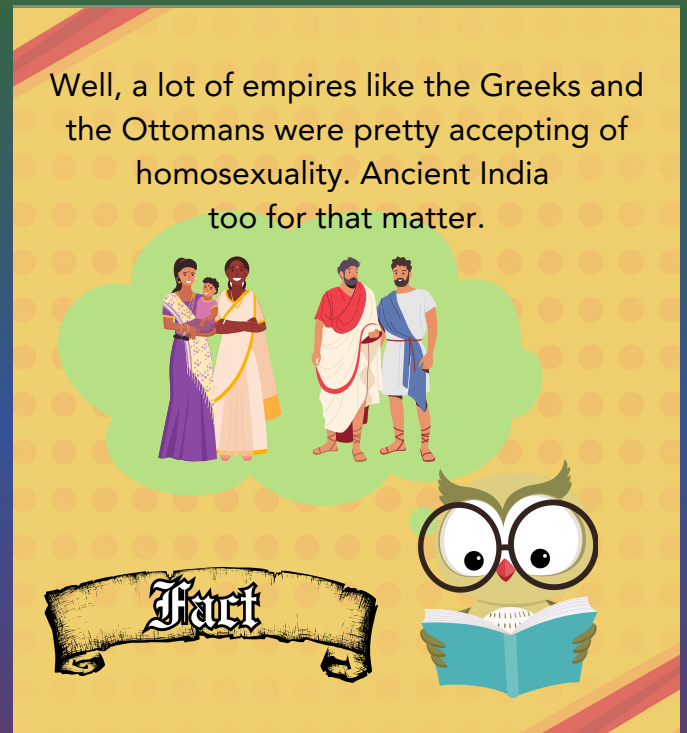
I grew up with you
We watched movies together
And talked about the heroes
I secretly paid attention
to the heroines too.

I grew up with you
And helped you through your crushes
Some were good, some were bad
I always held your back
Even as you asked about mine
And I returned a wry smile.

I grew up with you
But I didn't care much about the world
What I wanted was a woman
I couldn't much help it
It was just who I am.

I grew up with you
And that's why it stung
When you left me
Like I didn't matter...

Hey, tell me,
I grew up with you
What changed
When you learned who I am?



THE BENEVOLENT STATUE

by Dr. Shruti Shankar Gaur

This is the story of Maahira, my eleven year old daughter. We had just visited the Statue of Liberty and were on our way to the Liberty State Parks for a short nap before heading home. Somehow both of us loved lazing underneath the tree shades, and parks always topped our list.

Earlier, along the way, I had been telling her that the Statue of Liberty was France's gift to America to commemorate their friendship. "Mom", she said in her usual inquisitive tone, "What is so special about the Statue of Liberty?" "Well, apart from being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is a symbol of friendship, kindness, and empathy". As we stood there spellbound by the gigantic figure, Maahira ran to read 'The New Colossus' by Emma Lazarus engraved at its base. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Trying to comprehend, she asked, "What does that mean?" "The statue welcomed anyone and everyone that reached its shore. For America was 'The New land', 'The Land of Opportunities', 'The Free Land' during the 1800s and 1900s, when millions thronged its shores," I replied. "Mama, Lady Liberty is definitely kind and empathetic to embrace all under its roof, thus, symbolizing the freedom and democracy America stands for". "Indeed", I smiled.

As we sat in the park, we were still in awe of the wonder we had witnessed. The soft breeze kissed our cheeks and filled our senses. We both revelled in the silence, filled by the occasional chirping of birds and ruffling of leaves. Our state of bliss was disturbed by a group of youngsters. They were abusing, and at their disposal was a poor lad. Suddenly, the bullying turned violent. I was shocked to witness one boy being beaten by a group of five. The poor lad didn't even stand a chance.



Before I could think, Maahira ran towards them. As a mother, I was frightened that she would be harmed. I ran after her. She screamed at the boys that she was calling the cops. The boys dispersed and ran away. I saw my girl talking to the badly bruised boy, and before I knew it, she had brought him to our place. She opened her bag and offered him water, which he reluctantly drank. Then she shared her cupcake, burger, and apple, all of which I had kept in her bag, just in case she felt hungry. The boy's name was Osher. He told us that he is frequently bullied for belonging to a particular religion.

'But before your religious faith, you are a human. Isn't it Ma?' Maahira looked at me. Without expecting an answer, she turned again towards him and reassuringly said, 'My mama has taught me that the only religion we humans need to follow is humanity. All the God's shall be pleased if we become humane beings. I sighed; the world would have been a better place if we hadn't labeled each other based upon ethnicity, race, language, religion, gender, et al. Instead, if we inhabited the universal values of love, brotherhood, peace, truth, kindness, and empathy. I was deep in my thoughts, when both the children merrily chatted. I smiled as I overheard Maahira brag about all she had learned about the Statue of Liberty. The three of us sat there, enjoying the breeze, laughing, and witnessing the most beautiful sunset.

It was my daughter who taught me the most prized lesson that day: 'Courage can be depicted in the most ordinary situations, thus making them extraordinary'. On my way back, I asked Maahira what intuitively led her to the boy. "I was being Lady Liberty, who is kind and empathetic toward all that thron through its shore", her eyes shone. A day well spent, I thought.

**The story is inspired by a true incident. However, necessary changes have been made for the story to take shape. The story was first published in RIEDU'se-magazine, The Marshmallow, Issue 1 November, 2019.*

