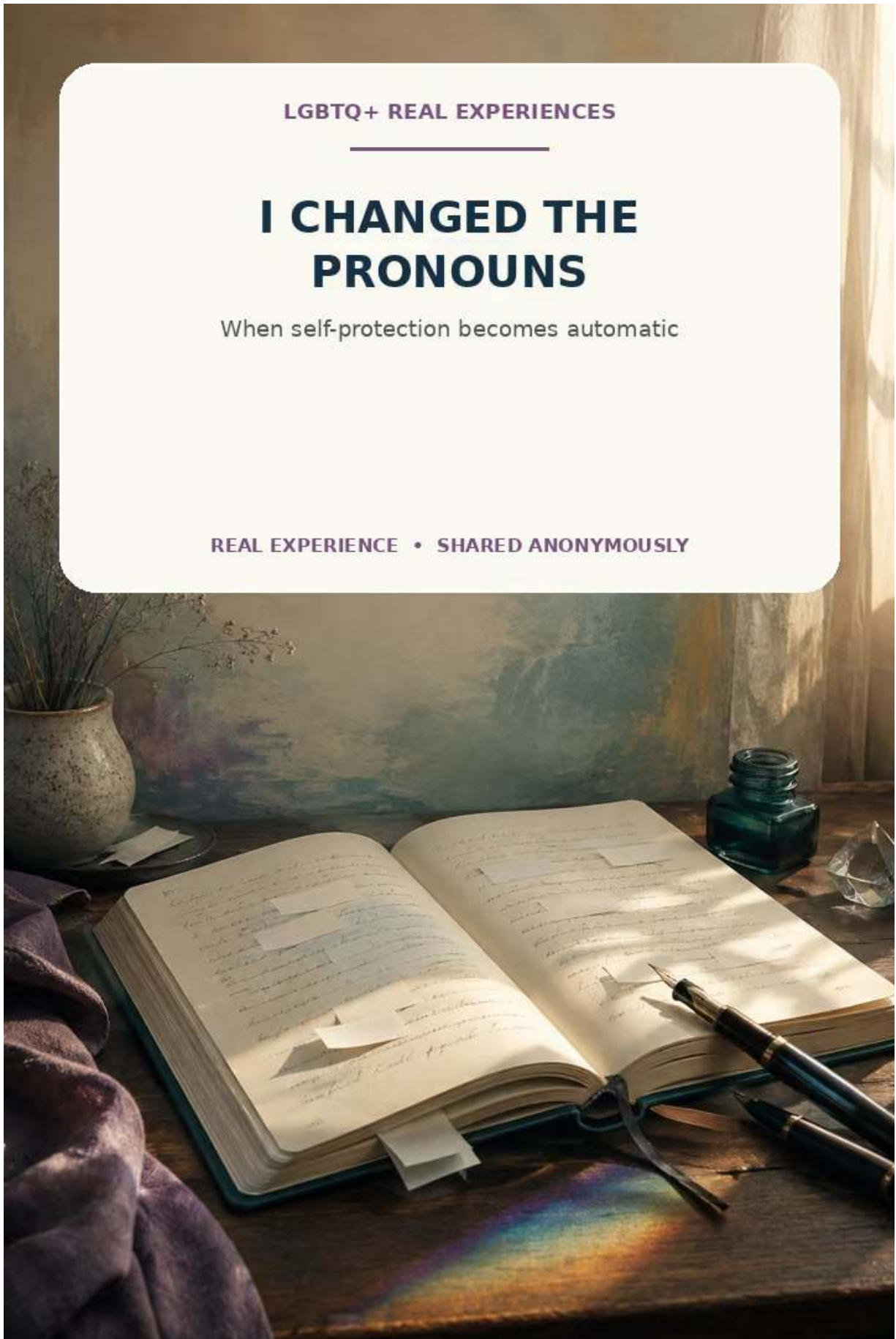


LGBTQ+ REAL EXPERIENCES

I CHANGED THE PRONOUNS

When self-protection becomes automatic

REAL EXPERIENCE • SHARED ANONYMOUSLY



I Changed the Pronouns

When self-protection becomes automatic

I'd been with my boyfriend for nearly three years when a colleague asked what I'd done over the weekend.

Without thinking, I replied,

"My friend and I went to London."

The word came out so naturally that I didn't even notice until I was back at my desk.

Why did I say friend?

Nobody at work had ever made a homophobic comment. In fact, there were several openly LGBTQ+ people in the office.

But growing up, I learned very quickly that talking about liking another boy wasn't safe. So I got into the habit of changing pronouns, changing words and leaving people out of my stories.

After years of doing it, it became automatic.

I realised I wasn't hiding from other people anymore.

I was hiding out of habit.

That was a difficult thing to accept because I'd always told myself I was confident.

The truth was, confidence wasn't the issue.

My brain was still using a strategy it had learned years ago to protect me.

Now, when I catch myself changing a word, I don't beat myself up.

I simply pause and say,

"Actually... it was my boyfriend."

It's a small correction, but each time I make it, it reminds me that I no longer have to edit my life for other people's comfort.

Reflection

Internalised stigma often isn't loud or obvious. Sometimes it's simply the words we change without even realising we're doing it—and learning that we don't have to anymore.

About This Real Experience

This is a real person's lived experience, shared anonymously. It was created collaboratively: the contributor spoke openly about their thoughts and feelings, and Maggie Learoyd wrote the experience in their own words. The contributor wanted their experience to be heard and understood, but has chosen not to be named.